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THE OTHER'S OTHER: NEGOTIATING "NORMATIVITY" IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE UNITED STATES

BY

COREY DZENKO

B.F.A., 2D Art, Central Michigan University, 2003

M.A., Art History, University of Alabama, 2007

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Art History

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

July, 2013

In memory of Virginia Dzenko,
who always emphasized education.

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ABSTRACT

Despite all of the recent attention paid to issues of identity in art history, mainstream ideals of normativity have yet to be fully analyzed and reclaimed as subject positions from which artistic examinations begin. As a symptom of larger culture, there often remains a lack of what sociologist Ruth Frankenberg refers to as "cognizance" about the continuing role of normative ideals as they are assumed to be unmarked, or transcendent, positions. While all four of the case studies in this project visually challenge assumptions of normativity, the reception of the work and/or the artist's own descriptions negate some of the criticality offered by their series and demonstrate this lack of cognizance in contemporary U.S. culture. Throughout my project, I offer additional interpretations of the artworks in order to mark the unmarked and to add to the growing body of scholarship that challenges normativity's stronghold in contemporary culture. Case studies in this study about contemporary art photographs include: Suzanne Opton's *Soldier* (2004-2005) and *Citizen* (2007), which imagine and order the (domestic) nation in relation to the foreign amid processes of Empire; Gregory Crewdson's tableaux

Twilight (1998-2002), *Dream House* (2002), and *Beneath the Roses* (2003-2007) that construct normativity by situating the suburbs as an ideal space that thus creates difference between the people who seem to "belong" in the suburbs and those who do not; Nikki S. Lee's *The Ohio Project* (1999) as it replicates dominant narrative constructions about subcultures without doing much to challenge the construction of such narratives in the first place; and Kerry Skarbakka's *The Struggle to Right Oneself* (begun in 2002) that functions as a site to examine how a white male artist must negotiate his own position toward ideals of white masculinity.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"BACK TO BASICS"

[F]*or my dad, that's what it meant to be a man. Like so many of us, that was the measure of his success in life – being able to earn a decent living that allowed him to support his family. And as I got to know Barack, I realized that even though he'd grown up all the way across the country, he'd been brought up just like me.*

—Michelle Obama

There are 47% of the people who will vote for the president [Barack Obama] no matter what. All right, there are 47% who are with him, who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe the government has a responsibility to take care of them, who believe that they are entitled to healthcare, to food, to housing, to you name it.

—Mitt Romney

By employing history as nostalgia, the 2009 television ad for Allstate Insurance "Back to Basics" makes use of contemporary assumptions about mainstream "normative" identity in the United States to sell its protective services.[1] To do so, the ad juxtaposes early- to mid-twentieth-century photographs. The pictorial narrative begins with a photograph of men standing in a Great Depression-era breadline and then cuts to an old photograph of young men fetching water from a fire hydrant to drink—both activities prompted by historical economic hardships. The third image shows a woman sitting on a curb while she holds her head in her hands despairingly. After these representations of the Great Depression, the ad changes tone as it transitions from images of economic hardship to images of happy families amid mid-century prosperity. For instance, family members from three generations gather to smile for a photograph; they pose in their dining room, where the requisite camera flash bulbs used to record domestic celebrations

[1] Kirsten Buick speaks not of identity but of "processes of identification" amid "systems of differentiation," a distinction that has influenced my scholarship greatly. Thus I understand normativity as a constructed concept that is constantly invented and reinvented and I imply quotation marks around normative throughout this project.

like this, the turkey, and the best china all sit on the table. Then a father leans against a convertible car that holds his wife and young son. In the suburbs, two young boys jump into a pool, three others play basketball in a driveway court, and a mother hangs laundry on the clothesline next to a white picket fence. In the ad, the insurance company's spokesman, actor Dennis Haysbert, walks through a hall full of oversized, backlit photographs as other viewers, including a group of school age children led by their teacher or docent, pass through the scene to look at the images. The ad cuts between these scenes in the hall and the historical still photographs.

Through the use of the setting juxtaposed with the historical photographs, the ad is meant to remind viewers of the seminal photography exhibit *Family of Man*.[2] The original exhibit included 503 pictures taken by 273 photographers from sixty-eight countries. Visitors walked through the photographs as though walking through a picture magazine. As the author of the exhibition, Edward Steichen had enlarged, cropped, and organized the numerous photographs into a humanistic narrative about family. The show's layout traversed through themes of lovers, childbirth, mothers and children, as well as fathers and sons. Pictures of agriculture and labor were then followed by images of people eating, drinking, and playing. The narrative continued with displays of death, loneliness, and grief but also dreamers and religion. Toward the end of the exhibition, the narrative turned to man's inhumanity to man, rebels, and youth, whose threat was extinguished by the following pictures of justice. The New York exhibit also included an illuminated transparency of an H-bomb explosion—a contradictory weapon as an ultimate form of man's inhumanity to man but also as a weapon many believe was used

[2] Edward Steichen curated this exhibition, which opened at MoMA in 1955 and traveled internationally for eight years to thirty-seven countries across six continents. In 2003, a permanent installation of the show was constructed at the Château de Clervaux in Luxembourg, the land of Steichen's birth.

to stop a devastating war—followed by the United Nations in the role of patriarchal protector of global justice. The show's familial narrative ended with W. Eugene Smith's *A Walk to Paradise Garden* (1946), a redemptive return to light as children walk optimistically from their position in darkness.

Geoffrey Batchen explains that *The Family of Man* "privilege[d] a humanist style of black and white photography, designed to induce sentiment and empathy in the viewer." He continues, "Steichen himself claimed that his exhibition 'was conceived as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life—as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world.' This claim has attracted its fair share of criticism. But still, the notion that we all share a common oneness—that the words 'human condition' do have some universal meaning—remains a seductive one."[3] In the decades following World War II, the thesis of the exhibition offered a unification of humanity after the disastrous war. But in framing humanity around Western ideals of a bourgeois nuclear family, the exhibition represents, according to Allan Sekula, "merely a smoothly functioning international market economy, in which economic bonds have been translated into spurious sentimental ties, and in which the overt racism appropriate to earlier forms of colonial enterprise has been supplanted by the 'humanism of the other' so central to the discourse of neocolonialism."[4]

Though the exhibition received thorough criticism, such as the statements outlined above, the "seductive" appeal of humanism and a sense of belonging—as well as its counterpart, difference—continue to be extremely effective ordering devices as

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[3] Geoffrey Batchen, "Revenant," in *Taryn Simon: A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters, I-XVIII*, Taryn Simon, Homi K. Bhabha, and Geoffrey Batchen (New York: Gagosian and Mack, 2011), 741.
[4] Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal* 41, No. 1, Photography and the Scholar/Critic (Spring 1981): 21. Also see Roland Barthes, "The Great Family of Man," *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 100-102.

evidenced by First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama's statements during the 2012 campaign season.[5] The First Lady appealed to a sentimental connection to suggest that her husband had grown up "just like" her even though they were raised across the country from each other. In contrast to employing identity as a common bond, Presidential candidate Mitt Romney overtly constructed difference when he criticized the 47% who are "with" President Obama no matter what.[6] Romney's comments show a more cynical sense of community as he used belonging to appeal to constituents who construct themselves *in opposition to* the 47% he imagined as the lazy—and raced—masses. For Romney and his supporters, Obama's followers live off of government assistance and do not work hard work to advance themselves in today's capitalistic society.[7] In both of these rhetorical constructions, the speakers attempt to make use of ideals of likeness, which also constructs difference, in order to win over their audiences. And Allstate utilized a sense of Americanness and familial belonging to sell its product.

I do not mean to suggest that recent humanistic appeals, such as in Allstate's ad, function exactly the same as those used during the Cold War era following World War II and that provide the background for *Family of Man*. The historical era of the original installation of the exhibition was during a "war" understood in the West as liberalism and

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[5] Michelle Obama, "Transcript: Michelle Obama's Convention Speech (4 September 2012) National Public Radio, available at http://www.npr.org/2012/09/04/160578836/transcript-michelle-obamas-convention-speech (accessed 10 September 2012).

[6] Mitt Romney, quoted in David Corn, "Secret Video: Romney Tells Millionaire Donors What He REALLY Thinks of Obama Voters," *Mother Jones* (17 September 2012), available at http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/secret-video-romney-private-fundraiser (accessed 27 September 2012).

[7] Benedict Anderson describes nationalism as an "imagined community." He notes how various cultural developments like the printing press and language lead to forms of nationalism—members do not actually know most of the other members of their community but still feel an affiliation with them. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London and New York: Verso, 2006). Though he was describing community on a national scale, his discussion could also be applied to the smaller scale of sub-communities based on similar ideals and hierarchies of the nation. I will discuss the predominance of the family as one model of organization that offers a sense of belonging on various scales.

freedom against communism. In the contemporary era of global capitalism, political and cultural rhetoric continues to employ humanism but does so in favor of neoliberal free-market policies that emphasize individual accomplishment over group identification. As such, neoliberal rhetoric masks the growing inequality between classes as the financially powerful continue to increase their wealth, while people of middle and lower classes struggle. Cultural beliefs and politics are used to garner support for the economic policies that advance the "1%." For instance, in his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey explains how the Republican Party in the United States most often argues for free market and free trade policies that will utopically allow "all" Americans to succeed as the economy grows through the "trickling down" of capital. Many middle and lower class Americans believe the rhetoric of the American Dream, that their hard work will accumulate a comfortable level of wealth. Against their interests, they vote to advance the 1% even while voting against policies that would benefit them more immediately and directly.[8]

Harvey explains how neoliberal economic policies intersect with various cultural beliefs—such as those about race, gender, class, sexuality, and even religion—toward political gain. For instance, he notes:

> The Republican Party needed… a solid electoral base if it was to colonize power effectively. It was around this time [the late 1970s] that Republicans sought an alliance with the Christian right. The latter had not been politically active in the past, but the foundation of Jerry Falwell's "moral majority" as a political movement in 1978 changed all of that. The Republican Party now had its Christian base. It also appealed to the cultural nationalism of the white working classes and their besieged sense of moral righteousness (besieged because this class lived under conditions of chronic economic insecurity and felt excluded from many of the benefits that were being distributed through affirmative action and other state programmes). This political base could be mobilized through the positives of religion and cultural nationalism and negatively through coded, if not

[8] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2011), 247.

> blatant, racism, homophobia, and anti-feminism. The problem was not capitalism and the neoliberalization of culture, but the "liberals" who had used excessive state power to provide for special groups (blacks, women, environmentalists, etc.).[9]

Neoliberal rhetoric of the ideal individual, as outlined by Harvey, developed during the Thatcher and Reagan eras in the late 1970s and early 1980s and still functions in today's U.S. society. With neoliberalism, according to Harvey, "All forms of social solidarity were to be dissolved in favour of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values."[10] In turn, the pre-Civil Rights Era family—imagined as a white, middle class, and nuclear family who lived in a suburban home they owned surrounded by a lawn and picket fence—became the nostalgic model of the American Dream, even though the majority of Americans never fully attained this model lifestyle. Striving to reach this ideal becomes coded among calls for morality and citizenship. As a "hard fact," such mainstream normative ideals have become a moral perception that sociopolitical rhetoric naturalizes until culture forgets "its own strenuous work" necessary to construct such beliefs in the first place.[11]

Allstate's ad appeals to nostalgic cultural norms and the protective role of the ideal family by suggesting emotional bonds and a sense of belonging. The photographs do not do this work alone. They are presented with additional framing devices that include Haysbert's narration and instrumental music. As Haysbert walks through the hall, his deep voice resounds, "Nineteen thirty-one was not exactly a great year to start a

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[9] Harvey, 49-50. Also see Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

[10] British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared famously that there was "no such thing as society, only individual men and women," but she quickly added that there were their families. Harvey, 23. For a discussion of Reaganite "family values" in the United States, see Lauren Berlant, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency," in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press), 175-220.

[11] For a discussion of "hard facts," see Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

business, but that's when Allstate opened its doors. And through the twelve recessions since, they've noticed that after the fears subside, a funny thing happens. People start enjoying the small things in life." The actor explains that Americans end up "appreciating the things we do have—and the things we can count on," or the "basics." The ad then suggests that viewers should protect their basics and "put them in good hands" by purchasing Allstate insurance.[12]

By using historical photographs from the early- to mid-twentieth century, the ad follows the dominant narrative of twentieth-century U.S. history from the despair of Great Depression breadlines through the postwar prosperity of the family dining room table. It then compares the current economic collapse at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century to the situations represented in the historical photographs from the early- to mid-twentieth century. Allstate uses history as nostalgia, or an apolitical history, to suggest the mid-century, postwar economic boom, as evidenced by the prosperity of families, is something to look forward to for "when" the current economic downfall subsides. It erases the role of contemporary neoliberal economic policies by positioning the hardships experienced by lower and middle class Americans as a temporary struggle—that if they keep working, they too will overcome the current economic collapse, just like the Great Depression gave way to the postwar boom.

In constructing ideals of normativity and the American Dream, the montaged images in Allstate's ad fashion a stereotypical image of America historically as well as in the contemporary moment through the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, and place. Nostalgia erases the complicated systems of differentiation at work in culture. For

[12] Leo Burnett USA, directed by James Gartner (released February 2009). Posted by John1708, "Allstate TV Ad: Back to Basics," available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HNKqffU3Cc (accessed 13 May 2012).

example, when the ad shows families, it only shows white families. Aside from Haysbert, an African American actor, and two children of color who walk through the space with their female teacher—a surrogate mother for the children during daytime hours—the only time the ad represents people of color in a photograph is a snapshot of two African American men standing with an African American woman as they all smile for the camera. In a dark hall, the three pose lit from the front. Both men wear suit coats and hats. Due to their clothing and the dark, unidentifiable background of the scene, they appear stereotypically out at a social space like a jazz club. Within the photographs, the ad does not imagine African Americans, or any people of color for that matter, as part of the historical and nostalgic domestic space that continues to be imagined as white and celebrated as representative of the "real" mainstream America. Even the African American narrator can only walk around the hall and look at the pictures of families; the ad does not include him in such scenes.[13]

The Allstate spot employs Dorthea Lange's most iconic photograph, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* (1936), which *The Family of Man* also featured. The photograph stands as one of the enlarged transparencies in Allstate's hall of images. While working as a government-sponsored Farms Security Administration (FSA) photographer, Lange photographed the "migrant mother," Florence Thompson, in a pea-pickers' camp. Lange recorded the "hungry and desperate mother" and her children, who

[13] Haysbert appears in other Allstate advertisements as the spokesperson or narrator who walks among yet never engaged with the social relations that each ad depicts. But his inclusion in "Back to Basics" comes across as racial tokenism; if criticized for the commercial's lack of people from different races, one could point to Haysbert as a superficial defense against such criticism. As he guides viewers through historical images of Americans, his leadership position also refers to President Obama as the first African American president of the United States, especially because from 2001 to 2006 Haysbert played David Palmer, the senator-turned-president, in the television show *24*, years before President Obama's 2008 election.

had been surviving on frozen crops they could find or birds the children killed.[14] Even though this photograph is currently over seventy years old, it is still used to connote the stoic American individual, one who struggles through adversity and hardship to survive with the "can-do," "bootstrap" spirit. On one hand, the photograph emphasizes the woman as a liberal model of individual strength through the title *Migrant Mother*; it is not referred to as *Migrant Mother and her Children*. Plus, the way the children turn their faces away from viewers leaves only a clear depiction of the mother. On the other hand, the photograph emphasizes a familial bond in its depiction of a woman protecting her children with her embrace. The woman appears impoverished and seems to have struggled to provide for her family. The placement of *Migrant Mother* within Allstate's "Back to Basics" means that this photograph represents both the stoic individual and familial bonds. As such, she functions as a transition from representations of people struggling during the Great Depression, to family photographs that represent times, according to Allstate, "after the fears subside," when people enjoy the "basics" associated with being part of a family: "a home cooked meal" with the family gathered around the table and "time with loved ones" in various forms.

The iconic photograph of Thompson demonstrates the rhetorical constructions and reconstructions necessary to represent "Americans." Sally Stein convincingly describes the rhetorical "whitening" of Thompson's Native American heritage that was necessary for Lange's photograph to become an icon for "American" perseverance and strength in difficult times. According to Stein, this single frame anglicizes Thompson and connects the mother to the Christian iconography of Madonna and child when the

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[14] Dorthea Lange, quoted in Milton Meltzer, *Dorthea Lange: A Photographer's Life* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 133.

other images Lange took of Thompson on the same day do not. Stein suggests that Lange probably did not ask Thompson about her heritage. Likewise, Thompson possibly did not identify herself as Native American and she displayed "no obvious signs of 'Indianness.'"[15] According to Stein, the head of the FSA's photography unit, Roy Stryker, held a well-documented personal bias against Native Americans. Stryker's bias along with the larger program's desire to garner support for government programming during the New Deal era helps to explain the anglicizing of Thompson. Images like *Migrant Mother* emphasized that white Americans also suffered and needed government aid following the Great Depression and Dust Bowl. It was important to anglicize photographic subjects because viewers were used to seeing photographs of people of color and of recent immigrants, who were also racialized as other, living in states of poverty. Times seemed especially desperate because middle class, white people needed government help too. Stein states, "It is reasonable to assume that had Lange recognized her subject as Native American, she might not have bothered to take any photographs. Or if she had discovered from extended conversation that the woman she had photographed was Native American and captioned the picture accordingly, the image's promotion and circulation would have been quite limited. It would have undermined conventional thinking in two ways: it directed attention away from Anglos, and it refused to support the image of Indians as a 'vanishing race.'"[16] In conjunction with all of the photographs in the 2009 Allstate spot, *Migrant Mother* continues to represent the idea of both the

[15] Sally Stein, "Passing Likeness: Dorothea Lange's 'Migrant Mother' and the Paradox of Iconicity," *Only Skin Deep*, Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, eds. (New York: Abrams, 2003), 351.
[16] Stein, 352. Decades later Thompson recalled her interactions with Lange and said she wished Lange had never taken the picture. The image became so iconic, yet Thompson never received direct aid for the use of her likeness. By the time aid arrived at the camp, Thompson and her family had already moved on to their next destination.

perseverance of American individuals and the importance of family, but the recent ad perpetuates the myth of Thompson's whiteness as part of its construction of families and Americans as white, heterosexual, middle class, and suburban. In other words, the narrative and archive of images in the ad erase both historical and contemporary difference.

CASE STUDIES

Who comes to represent Americans in the contemporary United States? And how do images, like Allstate's ad, help to construct this imagined ideal? Richard Dyer argues, "How social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life,… poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination (in housing, jobs, educational opportunity and so on) are shored up and instituted by representation."[17] All of the artists examined in this project—Suzanne Opton, Gregory Crewdson, Nikki S. Lee, and Kerry Skarbakka—create photographic series that visually call assumptions of normativity into question. Upon initial examination, this challenge to normativity seems intentional on behalf of the artists because they do not create "straight" photographs. By using the medium in an "expanded" fashion, they do not go out into the world and frame an image from it.[18] Instead, the artists I have selected direct the construction of their

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[17] Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

[18] George Baker argues that photography after postmodernism is transformed into an "expanded field," a term that he borrows from Rosalind Krauss' earlier explanation of sculpture's expanded field. Baker describes, "For it seems that while the medium of photography has been thoroughly transformed today, and while the object forms of traditional photography are no longer in evidence in much advanced artistic practice, something like a photographic effect still remains – *survives*, perhaps, in a new, altered form." George Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 177.

images to varying extents and control the content of their artwork by overseeing the creation of their series.

Further, my case studies involve the negotiation of normativity on various scales. For her series *Soldier* (2004-2005), Suzanne Opton photographed one of the ultimate symbols of ideal citizenship—the soldier. The photographer directed U.S. soldiers on leave from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to lay their heads down on a table so that she could photograph them individually and up close with a 4x5 camera. The resulting portraits position the usually stoic soldiers in a horizontal and more vulnerable position when compared to conventional military portraits. Using a similar process and pose, she then photographed Iraqi refugees living in Jordan for *Citizen* (2007) to create images that counter the frequent representation of Iraqis in the U.S. media as aggressive terrorists. For numerous photographic tableaux of suburban scenes that he began in the 1990s, Gregory Crewdson worked with a large crew on sound stages and on location to create eerie still photographs that recall David Lynch's and Steven Spielberg's representations of strange occurrences taking place in the space of the suburbs, a space otherwise imagined as a pristine site of family values and morality. Nikki S. Lee "became" a member of numerous subcultural groups through her use of costuming and performance for various *Projects* (1997-2001), and she had her membership recorded through snapshots taken by other people. Her performances seem to draw attention to identity as a performative process rather than an essentialized position as she inserts herself as an Asian woman into a variety of groups including Hispanics, lesbians, skateboarders, and senior citizens. And for his ongoing *The Struggle to Right Oneself* (begun in 2002), Kerry Skarbakka falls from a number of structures and uses mountain climbing gear for

safety as an assistant takes the pictures. Skarbakka then uses digital technology to remove the gear from his final photographs that represent a white man but only as he falls.

Though all of my case studies offer visual challenges to normative beliefs, they do so superficially. Upon closer examination, their series also replicate such beliefs and, thus, show what a stronghold these ideologies continue to have within contemporary U.S. culture. Often this replication of normativity seems unintentional on the artist's behalf. As I gathered my research, which included conducting personal interviews with the artists and attending their public lectures, I kept noticing moments when the artists said something that countered my initial experiences and interpretations of their series. Such a response might liken to a scholar unearthing stacks of papers in an archive only to find an interview or statement that clashes with much of the material previously found. Instead of pushing the contradictory statements aside, I realized that they provide important avenues for analysis. As poststructuralist theories regarding the plurality of meanings suggest, the artist's statement becomes only one interpretation in a network of numerous meanings.[19] An irresponsible (or, dare I say, normative) approach to art history would be to overlook these statements for other interpretations, as very reckless art historians conducting archival research might lose contrary pieces of paper they find. Instead of ignoring the contradictions, I wanted to examine what they tell us about contemporary U.S. culture in addition to the images. The ways the artists frame their projects frequently become the beginning of the dominant understandings of their work.

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[19] See Roland Barthes, "Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-148.

For instance, I did find consistency between a number of the artists' descriptions and the way that galleries and museums describe their work.

My aim is in no way to build a psychological profile of each of the artists based on their statements and images, which would prove to be an unachievable task. For instance, though I refer to Kerry Skarbakka as "normative" based on his body as a sign for white masculinity, in no way do I assume that just because he is a white male, he holds conservative beliefs regarding race, gender, and sexuality. Instead, his excising position gives him certain privileges in contemporary U.S. culture. But even as a white male, he must negotiate his position in relationship to the abstract ideals of cultural norms. What I offer is a critical analysis of the continuing role of normativity to counter the frequent lack of examination of normative ideals of identity.[20] As I will argue, despite all of the recent attention paid to issues of identity in art history, mainstream ideals of normativity have yet to be fully analyzed and reclaimed as subject positions from which artistic examinations begin.

In the first part of this project, I examine photographs by Opton and Crewdson, their directorial positions, and the implicit and explicit ways their work imagines the nation in terms of a familial community. As sociologist Patricia Hill Collins describes,

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[20] The number of studies of normative identity has grown considerably, especially since the 1990s. As a small sample of what has been produced, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction,* Volume I, trans. by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books Edition (New York: Random House, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd Edition (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White—The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); and Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011). Critiques of normative identities, and their ties to economics, have entered public discourse more within the last year due to the Occupy Wall Street Movement and recent public critiques of the xenophobia of the 2012 Republican Party campaigns.

the ideal of family serves as an exemplary site of intersection where beliefs about race, gender, class, and place serve to construct the ideal citizen of the nation.[21] As a seemingly "natural," or biological, social group, the ideal of the individual family expands to function on the national level through appeals to "family values" and the accompanying "moral majority" that began during the Thatcher and Reagan eras. As both an ideology and a form of social organization, the ideal family contains a contradictory relationship between a sense of equality in the family and hierarchies based on difference. Thus, although cultural rhetoric assumes that "all" citizens begin as a member of a family, the family privileges the patriarchal father figure as the head of said family. Ideals of family also serve as eugenic projects toward the imagined racial purity of the nation.

In Chapter 2, I examine Opton's *Soldier* and *Citizen* for which she creates close-up portraits that challenge conventions of military portraiture as well as war photography. Thus her projects would seem to avoid the critiques of the humanistic aspects of documentary images, which T.J. Demos suggests cause "a false proximity between the compassionate viewer and the anguished subject."[22] But even though Opton constructs her photographs rather than taking documentary images of soldiers on duty, she intentionally attempts to "humanize" U.S. soldiers and Iraqis for U.S. audiences by presenting the figures with their heads down in vulnerable poses. While this counters the more typical representations of soldiers as stoic individuals and Iraqis as terrorists,

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[21] Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia* 13, No. 3, Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy (Part 2) (Summer 1998): 62-82.

[22] T.J. Demos, "Photography's (Post)Humanist Interventions: Or, Can Photography Make the World More Liveable?" *4th Fotofestival: Mannheim Ludwigshafen Heidelberg* (Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, and Heidelberg, 2011): 194, available at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/art-history/about_us/academic_staff/dr_tj_demos/Demos-Photography_and_Post-Humanism.pdf (accessed 4 May 2012).

Opton's claims that she created the work from a "mother's point of view" replicates ideals of domesticity and the construction of the United States as a national family with the hierarchical implications that accompany this ideal. Using Amy Kaplan's discussion of "Manifest Domesticity," I will demonstrate how Opton's *Soldier* imagines the United States as a national family of empathetically-bonded individuals based on the ideology of separate spheres; the feminine mother (viewer/artist) emotionally engages with the masculine, yet vulnerable, soldier who leaves home for the protection of the home (nation). And Opton attempts to create a similar emotional bond between her assumed middle class and family-valuing viewing audience and the Iraqi refugees in *Citizen*. This recalls the way *The Family of Man*, according to Allan Sekula, demonstrated how the "humanism of the other" served a role similar to that of earlier colonial practices' overt racism. But Opton's latter project also includes interviews with the Iraqis that mark their difference from U.S. audience members and keep the images from functioning solely as a representation of a universal family. When this happens, the project constructs the domestic in contrast to the foreign as another binary construction in the practices of Manifest Domesticity.

For Chapter 3, I focus on Crewdson's *Twilight* (1998-2002), *Dream House* (2002), and *Beneath the Roses* (2003-2007) that all represent the suburbs—a mythical site constructed in cultural rhetoric as the pristine place for families to raise their children into responsible citizens. With these cinematic series, the photographer evokes a sense of the "uncanny"—what Sigmund Freud describes as the simultaneous experience of the familiar and the strange—by juxtaposing elements of *mise-en-scène*. Alien lights invade the suburbs while suburban citizens participate in strange activities. For instance, a man

saws holes into his living room floor and a mother stands in a pile of dirt in front of her husband and children seated at the family's dining room table. Instead of allowing the affective reception of Crewdson's series as uncanny to remain ahistorical, I employ George Lipsitz' description of the "white spatial imaginary," a term he uses to describe the continuing inequities based on social organization but also on affective appeals to a sense of belonging and the constructed difference between the suburbs and more urban spaces. I do so in order to interrogate the culturally specific meaning of the models, props, and places Crewdson photographs and to challenge the description that his many series merely represent a "timeless anyplace," which only masks the continued construction of a normative ideal within the nation.

In the second half of this project, I analyze photographs that depict Lee and Skarbakka using their own bodies to perform for the camera. Lee and Skarbakka do not take their own photographs. Lee removes herself from her process to position her project as a conceptual endeavor. She claims that she is not a photographer and does not even own a camera. But her *Projects* are very much about Lee's performance. Though she removes herself from taking the actual photograph, the multiple series depend on her chameleonism as she "becomes" a member of the various subcultures she represents. Skarbakka cannot take pictures of himself because of the logistics of his shots. An assistant releases the shutter while Skarbakka is involved in very physical, and at times precarious, situations. Skarbakka then reinserts his artistic "hand" through the digital manipulations he makes to the images to remove any evidence of the gear he used, as he also adjusts formal elements, like color, for more aesthetically pleasing effects. By highlighting individuals, Lee's and Skarbakka's series become sites to analyze the

relationship of these figures to ideals of normativity and the way that they navigate varied positions of identity amid the national family. As Collins argues, the construction of the nation as a family maintains "pure" bloodlines to promote the nation as white, while it also hierarchically privileges the heterosexual father figure's masculinity. I will contextualize Lee's work within the eugenic project of the national family and interrogate Skarbakka's representations of white masculinity.

For Chapter 4, I examine Lee's *The Ohio Project* (1999) in comparison to her other projects. Out all of my case studies, Lee's work has received the largest amount of academic attention, which includes the frequent celebration of the way her images draw attention to the understanding of identity as performative instead of as an essentialized and fixed position. Such performances align with the descriptions of contemporary U.S. culture as one of postidentity, which assumes access to equality for "all." But in her book *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith*, Cherise Smith cogently positions Lee's work against the utopic paradigm of postidentity that Lee's acts of "belonging" to various groups would seem to suggest. Following Smiths' assertion that particular identities do matter in Lee's work, I examine the artist's *The Ohio Project* to see what happens when Lee, as an individual marked as "other," enters into the space of Ohio in the only project that she titles solely by location. Cultural and political rhetoric situate the normative state as both a cross section of the heterogeneity of the United States but also as representative of the "real" small town America, a code that means white, middle class, and heterosexual. Lee constructs her version of Ohio as a place of lower class "white trash." But due to the dialectical stereotypes of Asian Americans as both the "model minority" and the "yellow

peril," she becomes both a submissive and challenging figure to the white Ohioans. Thus, she slips into and out of the ideal position and demonstrates not the role of performance in an era of postidentity, but the navigation of relational differences toward the construction of a national ideal.

And in Chapter 5, I analyze Skarbakka's *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, an ongoing project that represents moments of Skarbakka falling. While his body in this precarious act suggests the potential loss of control of white maleness, his work replicates ideals of manhood across the history of the United States. Ideal masculinity, as outlined by Michael Kimmel, involves similar patterns of physical prowess, exclusion, and escape, though the particularities of these actions change with time.[23] In his artist statement for his project, Skarbakka claims that he selected the act of falling to discuss personal as well as larger cultural instabilities, such as the "falling" reputation of the United States and the instability of gendered relationships. But I find that his repeated demonstrations of his physicality through his extreme performances, the tendency to describe representations of white men as the Everyman, and the idea of escape suggested by the act of intentionally jumping from one position to another all align with Kimmel's characteristics of manhood and reinstate ideals of masculinity as his gesture also serves as a metaphor for the nation. And even though Skarbakka embodies the idealized subject position, his body of work demonstrates the way he too actively positions and repositions himself toward ideals of white masculinity—the most hierarchically privileged position in the national family.

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[23] See Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3rd edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

In attempting to define "normativity" in the contemporary United States, I found scholars often cannot define it outright but instead place it in opposition to an "othered" identity. For instance, Ken Gelder describes subcultures as "groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do, and where they do it."[24] In order for there to be a group marked as a "sub"-culture, there has to be another group understood merely as "culture." In his discussion of early photographic archives of criminals, Allan Sekula describes that for every archive of criminals, there is a shadow archive of the non-criminal implied.[25] Richard Dyer describes how cultural rhetoric constructs whiteness as an unmarked transcendent ideal.[26] Whiteness is constructed as normative, or unmarked, in relationship to the marked other. Similar constructions accompany ideals of gender with maleness serving as the unmarked position. And, as I began to outline above, George Lipsitz demonstrates how cultural beliefs attach difference to place. He describes that dominant groups project their disdain for others—as evidenced by Romney's dismissal of the 47%—"because they fear that humanizing the subordinated group would threaten the dominant group's entitlements, privileges, and prerogatives. Group position cannot be simply affirmed in the abstract, however; it has to be made and remade everyday through institutional actions. Racialized space is one of the important ways in which the idea of superior group position for whites finds tangible expression."[27] Thus place also serves as a site for the construction of normativity.

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[24] Ken Gelder, "Introduction: The Field of Subcultural Studies," *The Subcultural Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.
[25] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 347.
[26] Richard Dyer, *White* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).
[27] Lipsitz, *Racism*, 42.

Because identity formation is a process based on the relationships between positions, normativity cannot be firmly located. There are moments that challenge or confirm normativity as an ideal but the construction of normativity always happens amid negotiations of numerous positions. As my case studies will demonstrate, there are still moments when people seem to believe in cultural norms of the idealized subject position, yet it is not always so easy to attach this position firmly to one site. Slippages occur during the construction of normativity as individuals or groups seem more or less normative depending on their social relationships at a particular moment, thus undermining normativity to a point. Part of the rhetorical power of normativity is that it remains an illusive position for many to reach, but in attempting to do so, individuals construct themselves in opposition to "others" along the way. Instead of only looking at the positions marked as "other," my project turns back around to discuss those assumed to be unmarked, or the "other's other."[28]

In his book *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon*, Alexander Doty offers "queer" readings of "mainstream" films. He does so to counter the culturally-learned assumption that when characters do not make overt statements about their queerness, or if overt queer sexual acts are not shown, then the characters represented are assumed to be heterosexual. He does so not to position his readings as "against-the-grain" but to offer his readings as just as valid possibilities as the straight readings of mainstream texts.[29] In doing so, he challenges mainstream beliefs about normativity as the default position for interpretation. And in *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, Darby English argues that art created by African American artists is too often discussed in terms of identity

[28] I thank Kirsten Buick for helping me frame my project as the "other's other."
[29] Alexander Doty, *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 1-3.

politics. He seeks to open his case studies to additional interpretations beyond the artists' race.[30] I see my project in conversation with Doty's and English's. Doty and English both offer interpretations to challenge the dominant understanding of cultural objects, be they movies in Doty's study or artwork in English's. But in contrast to Doty and English, I seek to challenge dominant assumptions by engaging more specifically with those beliefs. To do so is to help mark every position of identity not toward the role of postidentity and the assumption that difference no longer impacts lived experience in our society. Instead, I seek to mark what remains often unmarked, and to add to the growing scholarship and "cognizance" about the role of difference in art history and larger society.[31] My case studies examine such issues on a variety of scales such as the construction of the domestic nation in contrast to the foreign in Opton's work, the suburban (white, heterosexual, middle class) community as imagined in contrast to "other" communities in Crewdson's suburban tableaux, Lee's negotiations of whiteness in the normative place of Ohio but also the meaning of her Asianness in relationship to the poorer "white trash" people she represents, and Skarbakka's individual negotiation of white masculinity as he attempts to demonstrate his masculinity but also to find his way into the "art world."

Throughout this project, I aim to make normativity more visible rather than allowing it to continue to hold an "unmarked" position. Once made visible, it is more possible to critique cultural beliefs. For example, if racialized difference remains

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[30] Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2007).

[31] For Ruth Frankenberg, "cognizance" is understanding "the importance of recognizing *difference* but with difference understood in historical, political, social, or cultural terms rather than essentialist ones." Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 157.

unmentioned, Maurice Berger warns, "It is precisely this refusal to name whiteness, to assign it meaning, that frees white people from seeing their complicity in the social, cultural, and historical economy of racism."[32] Furthermore, Berger quotes the sociologist Ruth Frankenberg who suggests, "To look at the social construction of whiteness, then, is to look head-on at a site of dominance. (And it may be more difficult for white people to say 'Whiteness has nothing to do with me—I'm not white' than to say 'Race has nothing to do with me—I'm not racist.') To speak of whiteness is… to assign *everyone* a place in the relations of racism."[33] The further I developed my project, the more I noted that when I mentioned that I study identity in constructed contemporary photography from the United States, people often assumed that I was talking about Cindy Sherman, Janine Antoni, or some other female artist. This frequent assumption implies that male artists do not have to deal with issues of identification through their artmaking. Furthermore, and as I have suggested, singular aspects of identity never work alone when constructing an ideal American. Much remains left to examine in the intersections of race with gender, class, sexuality, and place in contemporary constructions of the nation, and I find contemporary constructed photographs to be an exemplary site to conduct such an analysis.

With artwork by Opton, Crewdson, Lee, and Skarbakka, I understand the issues I identify within the field of art history to be symptoms of larger cultural processes. There often remains a lack of cognizance about the continuing role of normative ideals as they are assumed to be unmarked, or transcendent, positions. While all four of my case

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[32] Maurice Berger, "Picturing Whiteness: Nikki S. Lee's *Yuppie Project*," in *Art Journal* 60:4 (Winter, 2001): 55.
[33] Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 6. Emphasis is Frankenberg's.

studies visually challenge assumptions of normativity, the reception of the work and/or the artist's own descriptions negate some of the criticality offered by their series and demonstrate this lack of cognizance in contemporary U.S. culture. Throughout my project, I offer additional interpretations of the artworks in order to mark the unmarked and to add to the growing body of scholarship that challenges normativity's stronghold in contemporary culture.

NOTES ON PERFORMANCE, CITIZENSHIP, AND AFFECT

Discussions of performance and performativity influence my analysis in a number of ways. First, all of the artists in my case studies use performance as a medium whether they direct the activities of other people or perform for the camera themselves. Second, the reception of their work—including their own descriptions and descriptions by critics and scholars—are performative in the sense that they help to construct the work. These constructions are performative because they help to *do* something in their attempt to stabilize normativity as a context for the slipping interpretations of the photographs; the frameworks the artists provide do not always match the visual elements present. And finally, I understand identity not as an essentialized formation or as a static role that one performs. Instead, "identity" is process of continual negotiations between various people and positions, such as those of race, gender, class, sexuality, and locality.[34]

In her article "Citizenship and Political Identity," Chantal Mouffe offers a helpful approach to identity citizenship that also frames identity not as an essentialized or fixed position. She calls her approach the "principle of equivalence" through which "a type of

[34] Due to the scope of this project, I limit much of my study to these five issues while I understand that additional aspects, such as religion, age, and physical ablebodiness, also affect subject formation and lived experience.

commonality is created that does not erase plurality and differences and that respects diverse forms of individuality."[35] In this antiessentialist approach, "The social agent is constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation but a constant movement of overdetermination and displacement."[36] Mouffe argues for a new, or third, concept of the "citizen" different from the existing republican/communitarian and liberal models. She questions how to reconcile the roles of individual and citizen without losing one to the other. The available political models are problematic because they do not maintain both the citizen and the individual, or the group and the specific. She describes the republican/communitarian model as one that sacrifices the rights of the individual in favor of the citizen, while the liberal model sacrifices the citizen to the individual. I reflect these two models in the division of my project. In Chapter 2 and 3, I examine Opton's and Crewdson's artwork that treats the nation as a family within a more republican/communitarian model—as a family in Opton's portraits and as a suburban, timeless "anyplace" in Crewdson's scenes. In Chapters 4 and 5, I focus on the liberal individual as performed by Lee and Skarbakka. Yet all my case studies will show how the individual works amid a larger imagined community, thus recalling Mouffe's third principle.

Mouffe offers a new conceptualization of citizenship beyond previous binary models because "we belong to different communities of values, language, culture, and others compatible with our common belonging to a political community whose rules we have to accept…. [The] experience of a radical and plural democracy should therefore consist in the recognition of the multiplicity of social logics along with the necessity of

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[35] Chantal Mouffe, "Citizenship and Political Identity," *October* 61, The Identity in Question (Summer 1992): 32.
[36] Mouffe: 28.

their articulation."[37] In this model, the political community functions as a discursive space and not an empirical referent. Citizenship becomes "a common political identity of persons who might be engaged in many different communities and who have differing conceptions of the good, but who accept submission to certain authoritative rules of conduct."[38] Mouffe's "principle of equality" maintains the distinctions between public and private, as well as citizen and individual, while acknowledging that they overlap and influence each other. As she suggests, identity formation is a complex process regulated by various cultural and political maneuvers. Representations, including my case studies, help toward the construction and reconstruction of ideals of normativity as though they exist mythically as stable positions, or empirical referents. Yet a closer examination of these projects demonstrates the discursive space of identity formation that takes on cultural, political, and economic consequences.

Finally, while developing my project I kept encountering various implicit and explicit references to theories of affect. While a complete analysis of the numerous definitions and explanations of affectivity is outside of the scope of my current project, there are some aspects that I need to address briefly.[39] My project touches on issues of emotion in terms of the sensations conveyed by the photographs—such as a sense of vulnerability from Opton's photographs of soldiers and citizens, the uncanny from Crewdson's cinematic constructions of suburbia, familiarity from Lee's use of snapshots, and anxiety from Skarbakka's photographs of falling. More than "representing" these

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[37] Mouffe: 32.
[38] Mouffe: 30-31.
[39] For recent readers about a variety of issues regarding affect, see Patricia Ticineto Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007); and Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

sensations, the photographs aim to provoke them in viewers. I regard these sensations as interpretations and note that all viewers may not have exactly the same reaction when looking at a particular photograph or series. As with any responsible interpretation, I seek to situate the sensations I identify, or that the artist or other authors note, within the specific cultural context in which my case studies are created and exhibited.

Additionally, the general belief about photography suggests that the medium differs from other visual forms because it can represent the world more "objectively" and creates images that are less translated by the "hand" of the artist than other media. Thus, photography offers the most direct cultural representation of social groups. Numerous scholars have complicated this belief, but society still holds photography as an exemplary visual documentarian. Though the final order that the chapters in this project took suggest otherwise, my initial introduction to this project began with when I was researching Kerry Skarbakka's *The Struggle to Right Oneself*. Attracted by the scale and visceral response I had to the work, I began an investigation into the collision of various artistic media—photography, digital art, and performance—within his practice, examining how assumptions about the various media impacted the experience of viewing his project. Skarbakka's use of photography makes the extreme actions seem real, but the repetition of dangerous feats across numerous frames hypermediates the series so that I was left to question how he made them. Though he digitally alters his photographs, he does not just construct the frames in his computer but instead travels to the various locations of his images and puts himself into physical danger through his performances.

Thinking about his processes brought me to issues of my corporeal response to his work. The large scales of his photographs can be nauseating to experience, especially in

an image like *Trestle* that places us at a dizzying height during a moment of crisis (Fig. 5.1). Knowing that he digitally manipulated the images took some of the sensation away for me that was then reinstated when I understood that he actually performed very physical stunts for his work. Thus, I found it was not enough to describe his work in terms of the postmodern theories of photography that describe how art photographs privilege image over subject. Nor was it enough to place his images within chains of signification as one text leads to another, which leads to another, and so on. To be sure, his pictures recall numerous tropes of representation such as action films. But to discuss his series only in semiotic terms erased the impact that his performances have on the way his work provokes affect. So I turned to theories of affect and post-postmodern discussions of photography.

More than photography's signifying function, photographs arguably create some of the most direct connections between the viewer and the photographed subject. As recent theories about photography assert, photographs collapse the time and space of the viewer with that of the image. For instance, Tom Gunning uses the recent developments in digital technology as a moment to reexamine the complexities of photography. He claims that with the introduction of new technologies into the practice of image making, scholars often oversimplify what the medium previously involved, such as the fear that digital technology means the overthrow of photography's "truth claim." With digital technology, photographers and scholars lamented the loss of the photographic index as a marker of the medium's truthfulness because the connection between the photographic referent and the photograph was no longer a physical and chemical reaction of light bouncing off an object, passing through the camera lens, and altering the silver salts on

film. Digital photographic technologies convert the light into code, thus processing and transforming its properties into data, which, arguably, breaks the direct, or physical, connection between the photographic referent and its final representation.

Gunning counters lamentations of the loss of the truth of the index by arguing that viewers' continued fascination with photographs is not due to the physical or chemical connection between the referent and image, or knowing if images are produced with either analog or digital technologies.[40] Instead, he suggests that viewers' continued fascination with the medium is due to the pleasure that results from visual illusions. He writes, "But whereas signs reduce their reference to a signification, I would claim the photograph opens up a passageway to its subject, not as a signification but as a world, multiple and complex."[41] The role of the photographic index for Gunning is not about how the image is made—whether a photographer uses analog or digital photographic instruments—but becomes about viewers' engagement with the space of photographs. Likewise, T.J. Demos highlights the negotiations and processes existing between photographs and their audiences as he elevates the experience of viewers in the moment that they are in front of the photograph instead of emphasizing a now historical moment captured by the image. Photographic documents do not just communicate fully-formed

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[40] Working from Charles Sanders Peirce's descriptions of signs, Gunning writes, "Although a photograph combines both types of signs [the icon and the index], the indexical quality of a photograph must not be confused with it iconicity. The fact that rows of numbers do not resemble a photograph, or what the photograph is supposed to represent, does not undermine any indexical claim. An index need not (and frequently does not) resemble the thing it represents. The indexicality of a traditional photograph inheres in the effect of light on chemicals, not in the picture it produces. The rows of numerical data produced by a digital camera and the image of tradition chemical photography are both indexically determined by objects outside the camera. Both photographic chemicals and the digital data must be subjected to elaborate procedures before a pictures will result." Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 25.

[41] Gunning, 35.

referents from the past as signs, but instead become opportunities for sensations to arise in viewers.[42]

Influenced by Gunning's and Demos' analyses, and in order to allude to the collapse of the time and space of the photograph with the time and space of the viewer, I use the present tense throughout my project to describe actions occurring within the images that I investigate. This affective collapse matters because it adds a dimension to Dyer's description of the role of representations in relation to the treatment of social groups. Along with its role as a recording device, photographs offer sites of possibility for viewers to engage, to a point, with people through images. Thus, photographs can offer a corporeal sensation between people like those experienced in our everyday interactions with each other. We do not just engage with photographs as a sign to read but we experience images. I will return to the implications of this type of connection in a moment.

Affect has always accompanied photography but can be overlooked with the use of more semiotic approaches to the medium.[43] I find Jill Bennett's book *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (2005) helpful in elucidating more recent affective approaches to photo theory. Bennett works from the ideas of Gilles Deleuze to discuss art in terms of what it does rather than what it conveys. In other words, she analyzes the ways art "sustains sensation," rather than merely communicates via representation. She describes affect as "a process of 'seeing feeling' where feeling is

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[42] T.J. Demos, "Introduction: The Ends of Photography," *Vitamin Ph* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2006), 6-10.

[43] Roland Barthes described photographs in terms of their signifying functions in his earlier writings. See Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," *Image, Music, Text*, tr. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 32-51. But he examined the affectivity of photographs in his later *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday, 1981).

both imagined and regenerated through an encounter with the artwork."[44] While critics may identify sensations evoked from the photographs I study, they do not take the next step to analyze the relationship of these sensations to the larger body politic or imagined community of the nation. I posit this is because cultural rhetoric constructs many of the subjects in my case studies as normative—they function as unmarked, and, thus, the assumption follows that they have nothing to do with identity based on particularities of race, gender, sexuality, class, and place.[45]

Another way that affectivity became an apparent theme for me to deal with over the course of drafting my project was regarding the sensations between people that can lead to a sense of belonging to social groups and collective humanity. This is where ideas of affect, sentimentalism, and humanism overlap. In this context, Skarbakka's representational series of his white male body provided the springboard to jump into an examination of normativity. I was encouraged to plunge into the deep end by comments directed toward me that Skarbakka's work equated to "testosterone driven stunts" and the assumption that I wrote about female artists when I mentioned that I examined issues of identity in contemporary U.S. photographs.

While documentary photography can appeal to a problematic imagined collective, as Demos argues, a similar erasure of identity politics is present in certain theories of affect. In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg describe Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect" (1995) and Eve

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[44] Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 41; quoted in Sarah Bassnett, "Archive and Affect in Contemporary Photography," *Photography & Culture* 2, No. 3 (November 2009): 242.

[45] This lack of discussion might also be because affect is always constructed as personal—both private and individual—so that feelings are not supposed to matter on the scale of community or nation. George E. Marcus complicates this pervasive idea in his book *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

Sedgwick and Adam Frank's "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins" (1995) as a "watershed moment for the most recent resurgence of interest and intrigue regarding affect and theories of affect."[46] By treating cultural forms as texts, linguistic approaches neglect to consider issues of embodiment, while culturally-based theories are overly negative and pessimistic and scholars may apply them onto cultural forms, rather than analyzing the cultural forms in and of themselves. Advocates of the recent "affective turn" attempt to offer an alternate model to the problems of the previous linguistic and cultural turns in theory. But in her article "Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn," Clare Hemmings critiques Sedgwick and Massumi for omitting the complexities of poststructuralist epistemology and for overemphasizing affect as being "outside social meaning." In other words, she criticizes their lack of criticality of cultural politics as they attempt to offer affect as a "way out" of earlier theoretical dead ends. In doing so, they ignore particularities of experience for a universalized abstraction.[47]

To illustrate the impact of identity on affect, and how some subjects have more "affective freedom" than others, Hemmings cites author and activist Audre Lorde's comments about other people's affective responses to her own blackness. Lorde recalled a moment when as a girl, a white woman sitting next to her on a train reacted in disgust. Lorde remembered, "When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realise that there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. The fur brushes past my face as she stands with

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[46] Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, ed. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.
[47] Clare Hemmings, "Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn." *Cultural Studies* 19, No. 5 (September 2005): 556-561.

a shudder and holds on to a strap in the speeding train…. Something's going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate."[48] Thus, Hemmings elucidates, "Lorde's [narrative testifies] to the argument that some bodies are captured and held by affect's structured precision. Not only, then, is affect itself not random, nor is the ability to choose to imagine affect otherwise."[49] When scholars assume affect is ahistorical or universal, they overlook the complexity of processes of identification. Such an act parallels the seduction of humanism and the political move of U.S. neoliberalism to erase the impact of identity in exchange for an abstracted equality of "all" individuals.

Unfortunately, I have found that the appeals to affect in my case studies—as stated by the artists themselves or by authors addressing their work—serve more toward the conservative maintenance of social hierarchies. With photography as an exemplary visual documentarian, and the affective connection between a viewer and subject in a photograph as well as between people in the actual world, I seek to yoke affectivity with the sociopolitical implications of representation. I turn now to my case studies as sites where there still remains much to say about how artists, viewers, critics, and scholars help to construct and reconstruct the belief of normative identity in the contemporary United States, just as the iconic migrant mother continues to symbolize stoic individual Americans struggling for the good of their families and, by extension, the nation and "man." And Allstate can sell its insurance services by appealing to the appreciation of "the basics" that the ad assumes we "all" know and feel so well.

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[48] Audre Lorde, "Eye to eye: black women, hatred, and anger," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 147-148. Quoted in Hemmings: 561.
[49] Hemmings: 562.

CHAPTER 2

"SOLDIER DOWN": SUZANNE OPTON'S SOLDIERS AND CITIZENS

We, the people, still believe that enduring security and lasting peace do not require perpetual war. Our brave men and women in uniform, tempered by the flames of battle, are unmatched in skill and courage. Our citizens, seared by the memory of those we have lost, know too well the price that is paid for liberty. The knowledge of their sacrifice will keep us forever vigilant against those who would do us harm.

—President Barack Obama, "2013 Inaugural Address"

I don't like what you guys are doing, I know that this is art, and that [it] is also open to interpretation. My interpretation of this is weakness, vulnerability, and [it] seems to go against our nation's pride.

—Dwere, 03/02.2010, 12:38, comment posted to www.soldierface.com

Your train rolls into the D.C. Metro station. This is your stop, so you let the crowd from inside the train sweep you up and carry you out onto the station's platform. As part of the undulating crowd, you funnel up the escalator and around the curve of the hallway toward the city outside. Amid all of the motion of people coming and going to and from the trains, a man stares toward you blankly. But he's fallen. He lies with his head down and lips parted as the veins in his forehead bulge slightly (Fig. 2.1). He remains absolutely still as he looks into the Metro station from the station's billboard, his pale figure contrasting with the dark background of the image. But who is he and why is he in this unexpected pose?

As you stop to stare back at him, you notice the word "soldier" in the top corner of the sign. But the image is not like other billboards that you have seen of soldiers (Fig. 2.2). Soldiers in military advertisements often wear their uniforms and stand with a sense of poise and strength. In contrast, the man in the Metro station looks vacant and the only

clues that he may be the soldier referenced by the billboard's text are the hint of his army green t-shirt and his short haircut.

The image, *Soldier: Claxton-120 Days in Afghanistan*, is part of Suzanne Opton's (b. 1950) photographic series *Soldier* (2004-2005), for which she photographed U.S. soldiers who had served at least 100 days in the wars in Iraq (2003-2011) and/or Afghanistan (begun in 2001 with a projected withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2014), were on leave at Fort Drum in New York, and would return to their duties abroad. After photographing them seated upright (Fig. 2.3) and with their loved ones or fellow soldiers holding their faces (Fig. 2.4), Opton directed them to lay their head on the table in what she describes as a vulnerable pose (Fig. 2.5). From 2008 to 2010 and with aid from various art and social organizations, including the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Fledgling Fund and Cross Currents Foundation, and the Cummings Foundation, Opton displayed a number of frames from *Soldier* as public banners and then billboards in cities including Washington, D.C.—such as the image in the Metro—Syracuse, Columbus, Miami, Atlanta, and Denver.

After photographing the U.S. soldiers, Opton created the series *Citizen* (2007). Funded by a Fledgling Fund Grant, she traveled to Jordan to photograph Iraqi refugees who had fled from their homes due to the most recent Iraq War. As with *Soldier*, she created tightly framed portraits of the subjects. Opton explains that by showing the soldiers with their heads down, she represented them as victims of war. She then questioned who were the victims on the "other side" and began to photograph the Iraqis. In an attempt to put the two series into dialog with each other, she pairs them as diptychs on her website as *Soldier + Citizen*, though they are most often displayed as separate

series. The photographer describes that the Iraqis had to flee their homes when the war uprooted their lives, and thus she sees a connection between the groups but does not know what conclusions to draw. Unlike the more consistent horizontal compositions of the soldier portraits, and though she photographed the Iraqis lying down, she displays the second series in various directions. For instance, Bassim Suliaman lays on his back, almost in profile, and looks up toward the ceiling, while Opton displays Yada Barazanji upside down to suggest that the war disrupted the citizens' lives and turned them "upside down" (Fig. 2.6 and 2.7).[1]

What Opton gives us with these two joined projects are aesthetically striking portraits, but their meaning remains vague at best. On the one hand, she intends to create images that engage with war without telling viewers exactly what to think and I do find the images startling and refreshing in contrast to the ways we are used to seeing images of war. But on the other hand, the ambiguity of the portraits and the poses she uses create a difficulty that becomes apparent in the ways she explains the work. Rather than use soldiers scarred by war or innocent Iraqis damaged by an unjust war, she uses faces seemingly unmarked by war. Then, she expects us to "read" emotively from those faces as if they provide the actual information provided by her texts (which is an impossibility) and so her text becomes authoritative about how meaning should be created.

From Opton's portraits, I seek to examine what her *Soldier* and *Citizen* tell us about the contemporary construction of the United States as her photographs inevitably circulate amid ongoing patriotic rhetoric highlighted in President Barack Obama's

[1] Suzanne Opton, phone interview with author, 27 August 2012.

references to soldiers, citizens, sacrifice, and security in his recent inaugural address.[2] In our era that is so often discussed in terms of the interconnectivity between nations with globalization, how does cultural rhetoric continue to construct the nation in terms of the relations within and beyond our borders? I find that for *Soldier* and *Citizen* Opton defaults to a number of long-held assumptions about physiognomy and the emotive potential of portraits. Through her appeal to what I will call a "humanizing affect," she constructs her assumed audience, and by extension "us" as a nation and as a unified family differentiated from foreigners. She places her soldiers in poses that make them appear vulnerable in order to give the military a "human face."[3] By using similar poses and narrative framings for the Iraqis—including the titles and way she describes the images—Opton attempts to construct the Iraqis so that "we" can relate to "them" as an attempt to overcome the stereotypical construction of all Iraqis as violent aggressors. As Allan Sekula described regarding the 1955 photography exhibition *The Family of Man*, this relational construction of other as self updates colonial projects of racism into acts of "humanizing the other" in the age of Empire. But with the portraits of the Iraqis, Opton includes interviews between the Iraqis and Susan Sachs, former Baghdad bureau chief of the *New York Times*, that help the portraits resist the erasure of difference, to a point, that collapsing "them" into "us" causes.

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[2] President Barack Obama, "2013 Inaugural Address," *The Washington Post*, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/01/21/transcript-president-obama-2013-inaugural-address/ (accessed 21 January 2013).

[3] For a sample of sources that refer to Opton's art "humanizes" her subjects, see: Catherine Fox, "Art Gives Military a Human Face," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 15 June 2009), reposted at http://www.accessatlanta.com/news/entertainment/calendar/art-gives-military-a-human-face/nQxnz/ (accessed 17 September 2012); and Kimberly Nagy and Joy Stocke, "Art Interview—Suzanne Opton and Michael Fay—The Human Face of War," *Wild River Review* (September 2012), available at http://www.wildriverreview.com/interview/art/suzanne-opton-michael-fay/human-faces-of-war/kim%20Nagy/Joy-E-Stocke (accessed 17 September 2012). Light Work describes her project as an examination of the "the humanity of soldiers who have fought in Iraq or Afghanistan." Light Work, "Suzanne Opton," available at http://www.lightwork.org/shop/suzanne-opton/ (accessed 17 September 2012).

The questions raised by Opton's series become ones about visibility and invisibility. What do her portraits show, or fail to show, visually? But also what does the narration around the images—her use of titles and her descriptions, historical precedents, and normative ideals about the United States as a nation—tell us about photographic portraiture and the imagined nation?

OPPOSITIONAL SENTIMENTS

A recipient of a 2009 Guggenheim Fellowship, Opton currently teaches portraiture at the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York City. As a self-trained photographer, she began taking pictures in the 1970s and held her first photographic job as a portraitist in a beauty salon. After customers received their treatments, they could don a black drape and pearls for the photographer to take their close-up beauty shots. But Opton recalls that her boss fired her because she was more interested in representing the salon-goers in activities like sitting under the hairdryers than she was in taking conventional beauty portraits that would add to the salon's income. Opton's recollection situates her approach to her work as oppositional to what was expected from her, and similar narratives of opposition pervade and influence many descriptions of her art.

In order to learn the visual medium more fully, Opton practiced social documentary photography in and around Chelsea, Vermont; for a year, she photographed brothers and sisters from seven families, people who, according to Robert Anderson Gallery, "lived at the end of a dirt road in the house they grew up in. They didn't have a

lot of ambition to live a life different than their parents."[4] Images from this series include *Edith Mason Leaving* and *Walter Hayes at Christmas* (late 1970s, Fig. 2.8 and 2.9). As a New York gallery that makes its income by showcasing "regional" photographs to citygoers, the gallery's comment reduces the photographed Vermonters to unambitious people. By extension, this narrative situates Opton as a temporary guest in these people's lives. It implies that her ambition—as illustrated by her self-directed study of photography—sets her apart from them and helped her earn gallery representation as well as a position at ICP.

While Opton was honing her photographic skills in Vermont, she became interested in performance art. She started self-consciously directing the people she photographed more and, for a brief time, performed for photographs herself.[5] According to the photographer, any portrait she takes is, of course, still about the person in the image, but she is not interested in making "simple portraits." Rather, she began to manipulate the genre by constructing situations that she felt provoked a broader view of who the person was, an approach she employed while photographing her more recent war portraits.[6] Again, her description of her process is an attempt to place herself (as well as her images) in an oppositional position, this time, in contrast to photographers who make more conventional portraits. The connections between her series and performance becomes vital as she composes the images by directing her subjects and then asks viewers to take meaning from their poses. In other words, she uses aspects of performance in her

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[4] Robert Anderson Gallery: Regional Modern and Contemporary Photography, "Photographers: Suzanne Opton," available at http://www.robertandersongallery.com/gallery/suzanne-opton/ (accessed 13 September 2012).
[5] Suzanne Opton, "A Conversation with Suzanne Opton," Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA, October 2012.
[6] Suzanne Opton, phone interview with author, 27 August 2012.

attempt to construct and then direct viewers' connections to her subjects, even when she attempts to create ambiguous portraits.[7]

Indeed, William A. Ewing included Opton's series *Soldier* and *Still Standing* (2001)—photographs of men and women who worked at the New York Stock Exchange in the weeks following the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center—in his book *Face: The New Photographic Portrait*, a collection of portraits by artists working with less traditional approaches to the photographic genre.[8] In portraiture, the sitter is often clearly and heroically represented as they wear their finest garments or uniforms and are surrounded by objects that represent their cultural position or status. Such representations would be "simple portraits" for Opton. In contrast, she creates series of portraits by identifying a group of people linked by a common experience and removes them from many contextual clues that would help to identify them more obviously. But

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[7] In his 1976 essay "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition," A.D. Coleman defined "directorial" photographs in opposition to documentary images. He described, "Such falsified 'documents' may at first glance evoke the same act of faith as those at the opposite end of this scale [documentary photographs], but they don't require the permanent sustaining of it; all they ask for is the suspension of disbelief. This mode I would define as the directorial…. The substantial distinction, then, is between treating the external world as a given, to be altered only through photographic means (point of view, framing, printing, etc.) en route to the final image, or rather as raw material, to be itself manipulated as much as desired prior to the exposure of the negative." A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition," in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 485. He later reflected on his description of the "directorial mode" when he wrote, "[T]he concept (though not new, and hardly original with me, except for its nomenclature; I was not making the new, only reporting it) was controversial, the position it represented in the community of serious photographers was a minority one at best. Now, twelve years later, it had achieved legitimacy within photography and is everywhere in the art world; much of the so-called postmodernist enterprise vis-à-vis photography is unimaginable without it." A.D. Coleman, "The Image in Question: Further Notes on the Directorial Mode," in *Depth of Field: Essays on Photography, Mass Media, and Lens Culture* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 54. Both of his discussions highlight the photographic practice of manipulating the subject of a photograph and not just the final print. As Coleman notes, the directorial mode was not new; photographers have been constructing their photographs from the early uses of the medium, such as in the well-known, nineteenth-century composite images by Oscar Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson. Opton creates her series within this tradition of directorial photographs as a way to create a "conceptual" project that deals with the issue of war in a tangential way rather than working with documentary photography. Such an opposition recalls Coleman's initial definition of the directorial mode as the practice of manipulating the subject beyond "photographic means" that would be used by documentary photographers.

[8] William A. Ewing, *Face: The New Photographic Portrait* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006).

while she sets her series in opposition to "simple portraits," both her approach and more conventional approaches actively construct an identity or narrative for the subject that might not be entirely accurate.

Opton was living and working in New York City during the 9-11 attacks and her series *Still Standing* became her way to respond visually to these events. The photographer's portraits of NYSE employees provide a link from her earlier work to her more politically charged images of soldiers who were sent abroad after 9-11. After calling a number of military bases, officials at Fort Drum in upstate New York granted Opton access to the base in 2004 and 2005. She went there to photograph soldiers who had served at least 100 days in Iraq and/or Afghanistan, were on leave, and would return to their duties overseas. Using a 4x5 camera, Opton photographed soldiers seated in more conventional poses. She then took close-up shots while their girlfriends, wives, or fellow soldiers held their faces to show, according to the artist, that war does not just affect soldiers but also affects people around them. And finally, she asked the soldiers to horizontally lay their heads on a table and she framed their individual faces tightly.[9]

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[9] Based on how Opton descriptively frames and displays these multiple series—*Soldier*, the collection of diptychs *Soldier + Citizen*, and *Citizen*—they slip between working as separate collections of images to functioning as possible subseries within a larger conceptually- and aesthetically-linked project. Her narration suggests that the different groupings of images developed organically one out of the next, although at times she separates the series from each other. For instance, on her website www.suzanneopton.com, Opton showcases the diptychs, which include a portrait of a U.S. soldier with his face held by a loved one or fellow soldier along with a portrait of an Iraqi refugee, as *Soldier + Citizen*. The online presentation of the diptychs also includes a condensed interview between the Iraqi citizen and Susan Sachs, former Baghdad bureau chief of the *New York Times*. Extended interview accompany the publication of some of the images from *Citizen* in Andrea D. Fitzpatrick, "Citizens of Iraq, Portraits of Exile," *One Hour Empire*, No. 1 (2008): 40-54. Opton presents the soldiers with their heads down as *Soldier*, even though these images differ from the representations of soldiers in *Soldier + Citizen*. And although she photographed more conventional solider portraits that have been exhibited and published, she chose not to display them on her website. See Suzanne Opton, "Soldier," *Contact Sheet*, No. 136 (2006); published in conjunction with the exhibition *Suzanne Opton: Soldier* at Light Work, Syracuse, New York, 21 March to 30 June 2006. This publication includes the more conventional portraits, soldiers with their heads held, and soldiers with their heads down. She photographed a number of the soldiers in more than one pose.

Opton's more vulnerable horizontal soldier portraits do not overtly detail the subjects as soldiers. It is the text accompanying the images that fulfills that role and may lead to the contradictory emotions associated with fallen—injured or even dead—soldiers. To title the individual frames, Opton used the somewhat impersonal military convention of referring to soldiers by their last names—in the case of duplicate last names in the series, she provided the soldier's first initial—and the length of their service in Iraq or Afghanistan, if the military shared such information with the photographer. Her titles tell us that at the time she photographed them Claxton had served 120 days in Afghanistan, Neal served 427 days in Iraq, while the length and location of L. Jefferson's service remained undisclosed. The soldiers appear before us stripped of any weaponry, equipment, or bulky uniforms that signifies their position as a soldier rather than a civilian. Although we do not know what each soldier's particular tasks included during their deployment, the series title *Soldier* and the informational data provide the most obvious clues to the occupation of those photographed, while the repeated sliver of an army green t-shirt that appears at some of the soldiers' necklines and the short haircuts on the men provide the only visual hints.

Military training strips new recruits of their individuality a number of ways in an attempt to make the recruits into members of a larger and homogenous troop. In addition to mental and physical preparation, the process of civilians becoming soldiers includes following strict protocols, wearing uniforms, and men receiving buzz cuts—women must wear their hair short or pinned up. Even though the soldiers that Opton photographed have each gone through the transformation from civilian to soldier, the way she photographed them up close with all of their imperfections and stripped of military gear

seems to "humanize" them. It allows viewers to study the individual characteristics of each soldier and to compare them one to another. Shot with a 4x5 film camera, the photographs record every detail and blemish on the surface of the soldiers' (often young) faces—the stubble and razor burn from recent shaves, pimples, and wrinkles that have begun to form, as seen in the shallow lines on Bosiaki's forehead, under his eyes, and around his mouth and the small scabs on White's brow (Fig. 2.10 and 2.11). Kimball's youthful and pudgy face has not yet aged like Bosiaki's (Fig. 2.12). Furthermore, the soldiers interpreted Opton's direction with slight variations. Morris looks down and away, Neal closes his eyes, while L. Jefferson confronts us with her gaze (Fig. 2.13-2.15). Blaskowski holds tension in his neck while Claxton seems to have lost control of supporting his head with his neck as his head angles down slightly toward the tabletop (Fig. 2.16 and 2.5).

Even through Opton was interested in creating a consistent process to photograph the soldiers, she changed the color and texture of the fabric that hangs in the background as well as the color of the background lighting. Cooler blue light highlights Bruno's hair, in contrast to the warmth of the red surface on which he lays his head, while a warmer pink light frames Crumm's light brown hair against a gray table cover and green background (Fig. 2.17 and 2.18). Opton also composes the photographs with minor changes based on the shape of a soldier's head and neck. For example, she found beauty in some of the long necks of soldiers and photographed them from a greater distance to leave room in the frame for more of their figure.[10] This type of distance frames Birkholz, while in the case of Williams' photograph Opton cropped the soldier's chin and right ear out of the portrait (Fig. 2.19 and 2.20). All of these variations across the frames of her

[10] Suzanne Opton, phone interview with author, 27 August 2012.

series seem to humanize the soldiers by highlighting their variability rather than representing them framed as an exactly homogenous group of trained and disciplined fighters. Though framed similarly, *Soldier* begins to hint at the soldier's individuality but stops at that point. While the close-up portraits invite viewers to notice visual differences between the sitters, Opton abstracts individual soldiers to make them stand for a more general sense of vulnerability based on their poses and does not provide more information about the individual except for the numbers of days they served abroad. She leaves viewers to imagine the rest of the soldier's history based on the visual differences between the soldiers and what the viewer knows about soldiers' experiences in general and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan more specifically.

Soldier challenges viewers' expectation of "our" protectors by showing them in a horizontal pose, a position used traditionally in military illustrations to represent the fallen enemy, or, as Susan Sontag notes, "To display the dead, after all, is what the enemy does."[11] For instance, the decapitated opponents in *The Palette of Narmer* (c. 2950 BCE) and Epigonos' *The Dying Gaul*, or *The Dying Gallic Trumpeter*, (c. 220 BCE) provide two of many examples of the use of horizontal positions to suggest wounded or dead soldiers across art history (Fig. 2.21 and 2.22). The wounded and dead represented are typically the opponents to the culture who made the artwork. In the case of *The Palette of Narmer*, though the specific identifications of the enemies are unknown today, the carving represents the power of the ruler through the use of hierarchical scale; he appears much larger than his foes. And *The Dying Gaul* is believed to be part of a sculptural group created to commemorate the victory of Attalos I against the Gauls in 230 BCE. The dying opponent's body extends horizontally as blood drips from a cut in his

[11] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 51.

ribs, and he looks down toward his seemingly imminent demise. Both of these sculptures serve as early examples of the long tradition of military images of dead or dying figures in horizontal poses. In contrast, artists represent soldiers from their own cultures or nations as heroic figures, such as in the numerous equestrian statues of military leaders created across art history.

Because the positions of Opton's soldiers are not how we expect to see them, her series has upset some people who consider the project disrespectful and think that the soldiers look dead. For instance, Opton planned to install billboard images in Minneapolis to coincide with the 2008 Republican National Convention (RNC). A mere week before the scheduled installation of her project, the advertising company CBS Outdoor notified the artist that they had cancelled her contract because people passing by could potentially interpret the images in a negative way. The company's vice president of marketing, Jodi Senese, defended, "When we looked at the images,… the soldiers depicted clearly looked to us like they were representing deceased soldiers…. We don't object to the program or the art…. Our only concern is that people driving on highways at 55 or 60 miles an hour, seeing an image like this popping out of nowhere, it could be disturbing. Gigantic, larger than life,… just heads with blank eyes staring out at you. It's haunting and very provocative in a museum, but on a highway it's consumed differently."[12] When Opton's billboards hung in the Washington, D.C. Metro in 2010, FoxNews reported a "nearly universal first impression" that passersby were reminded of death by the soldiers' unexpected poses. For instance, Arlington resident Lewis Titterton explains that with soldiers, you would expect a figure upright and moving forward rather

[12] Susan Saulny, "Battles Over Billboard Space Precede G.O.P. Gathering," (29 August 2008), available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/30/us/politics/30billboard.html (accessed 13 April 2012).

than the defeated appearance of the soldiers in Opton's portraits.[13] Senese's and Titterton's responses summarize the national imagined soldier as they "should be" based on the long established tropes of military representations as well as the challenge that Opton's direction creates against normative visual traditions.

Zoe Strauss captured the contemporary military's use of the vertical and heroic trope in her photograph *Marines Billboard, Philadelphia, PA* (2001-2006, Fig. 2.2). The billboard represents a white marine from the shoulders of his dress blue uniform to the top of his clean white hat. Centered in the frame against a solid white background, he looks directly into the camera. The billboard's text reads, "the change…is forever" and lists the phone number 1-800-Marines. Inside of Strauss' larger composition, the disciplined marine stands in stark contrast to the environment surrounding the advertisement as the billboard hangs on the side of a decaying brick building. An older African American man, his beard marked with gray, walks by the billboard along the sidewalk. The rectangular space of the gray sidewalk parallels the white rectangle of the billboard, but the African American man does not stand at disciplined attention like the white marine. Instead, he has to lean on his crutches to assist his movement across the frame. In this photograph, Strauss was able to capture the contrast between an imagined ideal American citizen represented by the soldier and the aspects of the nation constructed as less ideal. The advertisement for the military here is directed toward lower class Philadelphians looking for a way out of their daily existence into the disciplined realm of the military—to be presumably changed forever.[14] Opton's *Soldier*

[13] See FoxNews, "Soldier Photos Spark Comments on Metro" (12 March 2010), available at http:// topics.sacbee.com/advertising%20posters/ (accessed 13 May 2012).

[14] The people who join the U.S. military and commit the ultimate sacrifice of their own safety typically come from lower classes, unless a family has a strong military tradition. Military service frequently offers

does not represent upstanding military figures. By extension, the vulnerable pose of the U.S. soldiers would seem to suggest a lack of military might of the nation, not the message that cultural rhetoric typically tells about the United States as a world power.

Likewise, *Citizen* challenges the stereotype in the United States that constructs Iraqis as only Americans' enemies, thus seeming to "humanize" or give a "face" to Iraqis in U.S. visual culture. As Andrea Fitzpatrick remarks, "The humanistic impulses of Opton's projects are intended to blur the initial clarity of many important positions: self-other, America-Iraq, West-East, soldier-citizen, victor-vanquished. Exposed in unexpected areas are the mutual losses, moments of vulnerability and agency, pleasures and pains."[15] And though he was writing about *Soldier*, Phillip Prodger could also be describing *Citizen* when he characterizes Opton's work as "evidence of *evidence*—the photograph records the person, while the person represents things that happened in

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a way for young Americans to leave their homes that lack economic opportunities while upper class American have more non-military opportunities at their disposal. See Amy Lutz, "Who Joins the Military?: A Look at Race, Class, and Immigration Status," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 36, No. 2 (Winter 2008): 167-188. From the inception of the federal draft during the Civil War, the draft seems to have served as an equalizer and could call any male to serve as a solider. But the equalizing potential of the draft is a myth. In the nineteenth-century, Southern draftees could hire a substitute and Northern draftees could pay a fee of $300 to buy their way out of service, options only open to wealthier citizens. During the twentieth century, wealthier draftees could avoid service by attending college or buying off doctors for a medical pass out of their military duties. For a brief outline of the Civil War era drafts, see Jennifer L. Weber, "Service Problems," *New York Times* (8 March 2013), available at http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/08/service-problems/ (accessed 10 March 2013). The U.S. military always has been comprised by a number of lower class Americans when the draft was in place and today when the draft has been abolished. In an attempt to gain fuller access to citizenship that their lack of capital denies them, people from lower classes frequently buy into patriotism and calls to military service as part of their duty as Americans. Thus, the military transforms often lower-class Americans into contradictory figures as mercenaries who fight for ideals of eventual peace and democracy in foreign lands. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri note the contradiction, "[A]lthough the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood, the concept of Empire is always dedicated to peace—a perpetual and universal peace outside of history." Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), xv. Quoted in Fitzpatrick, "Citizens," 40.

[15] Fitzpatrick, "Citizens": 53. To arrive at this conclusion regarding Opton's *Citizen*, Fitzpatrick acknowledges that as a "politically-orientated writer," she must read against the photographer's description of herself as not a "political artist." Fitzpatrick finds, "Despite its restraint, delicacy, and the neutrality of its political perspective, Opton's project is, I propose, bold in its courage to wade into these areas with such directness." Fitzpatrick, "Citizens," 41.

another time and place."[16] The images invite viewers to attempt to read the sitters' faces toward a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Opton uses close-up portraits in an attempt to reveal more than just the surface appearance of the sitters and to create a bond between viewers and those photographed. Thus she relies on the continuing sentimental project of physiognomy identifiable in nineteenth-century works by Julia Margaret Cameron and Thomas Eakins.[17] Beginning in 1864, Julia Margaret Cameron photographed her family and friends—many of them celebrated members of society including Sir John Herschel, Charles Darwin, and Alfred Tennyson—as well as her domestic employees to make her signature soft focus portraits. A number of her compositions contain a close-up head and shoulders shot that fills much of the frame with the sitter's face against a dark background, such as in *Sir John Herschel with Cap* (April 1867, Fig. 2.23). As Cameron described, "When I have had such men before my camera my whole soul has endeavored to do its duty towards them in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man."[18] While her written records do not document that she had an explicit interest in physiognomy and phrenology, Colin Ford argues that photographers from Cameron's era had to be aware of the new "sciences." For instance, Ford cites an anonymous author of

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[16] Phillip Prodger, "Fallen," in Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers. Emphasis is Prodger's.

[17] Developed during the late eighteenth century, physiognomy led practitioners to believe that they could understand a person's character based on their facial features. As a branch of physiognomy, phrenology involved the analysis of twenty-seven bumps on people's heads to determine a wide range of information including a subject's mental capabilities, ideal careers, and even marriage partners. Colin Ford cites Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire, George Eliot, and Karl Marx as subjects who had their head's studied. Queen Elizabeth also had her children analyzed. Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron: A Critical Biography* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 47. For a further discussion of the relationship between photography, physiognomy, and the development of archives of criminal types, see Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 342-389.

[18] Julia Margaret Cameron, "Annals of my Glass House," manuscript notes, 1874 (RPS Collection), quoted in Pam Roberts, "Julia Margaret Cameron: A Triumph over Criticism," in *The Portrait in Photography*, ed. Graham Clarke (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), 64.

the advice section of *Photographic News* who directed photographers to read the work of Johann Kaspar Lavater, one of the originators of physiognomy, in order to understand how to best represent their sitters.[19] Ford explains, "Julia Margaret certainly could not have been ignorant of it—she gave her eldest son Eugene boys' story books by Captain F.S. Marryat, with phrenological scenes in them…. Phrenology could turn anyone into a stereotype, like the commercial studio portraiture which Julia Margaret dismissed as 'mere topographic photography.' She herself may, nevertheless, have hoped to detail something fundamental about her intellectual subjects by defining the very contours of their skulls."[20] In *Sir John Herschel with Cap*, the sitter looks blankly off to his left. Light emphasizes his forehead, presumably as a sign for his intellect, as his face falls into slight shadow that leads to the dark robe he wears and the dark background behind him. By focusing on his head as a sign for Truth or intellect, Cameron and critics believed the photograph revealed her sitter's interiority. While Cameron attempted to create more than "mere topographic photography" in her pictures including those of Herschel, Opton strives to use performance and directs her subjects toward more than "simple portraits."

Using a similar physiognomic approach, Opton's work becomes sentimental by ordering contemporary social relations based on emotion and humanizing her subjects. We presumably relate to and understand the soldiers' and citizens' emotional states even through their expressions tell us very little. Citing Karen Sánchez-Eppler, Martin A. Berger describes sentimental literature as thus,

> [T]he corporeal signs offered by characters—their tears, wounds, and scars—communicate the depth of their feelings and so engender a corresponding physical response on the reader's part. For Sánchez-Eppler, what matters is the physicality involved in reading sentimental texts—the flesh and blood reader's experience of

[19] Ford, 47.
[20] Ford, 48.

> a fictional character's emotions, not clever rhetorical strategies or logical arguments—for this physicality "radically contracts the distance between narrative events and the moment of their reading, as the feelings in the story are made tangibly present in the flesh of the reader." As long as sentimentality retained its associations with authentic feelings, the text's emotionality helped make the narrative seem real.[21]

In sentimental visual images, the viewer sees the tears, wounds, and scars on the body, or if not actual marks on the body, then the emotion of the person represented. To assume that the vulnerable poses of Opton's portraits "humanize" the soldiers strips them from their rational role of an unemotional trained soldier ready to fight for the country and leaves them open for viewers to connect based on their "humanness." This creates a "humanizing affect" that connects viewers and those photographed. Do we see proof in Williams' face that he served 396 days in Iraq to Morris' mere, by comparison, 112 days? Or can we approximate the length of Jefferson's undisclosed number of days served based on his appearance? Of course not, but the possibility remains a sentimental one to bond viewers to the soldiers and also to the citizens who follow in Opton's subsequent series. When looking at the portraits, viewers are meant to feel emotionally-bonded to the people in the photographs.

Much of the emphasis that Opton's portraits place on the sentimental connection between the viewer and the soldier or citizen is due to the formal elements within the scenes. She focuses on the sitters' faces up close so that they fill the frame. Solid colors fill what little space is left in the composition, setting each large-format negative's record of the details of the sitters' faces against a blank background. In doing so, all that Opton

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[21] Martin A. Berger, "Sentimental Realism in Thomas Eakins's Late Portraits," in *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, eds. Mary Chapman and Glenn Handler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 245. Berger cites Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 26-27.

gives us is the soldiers' and citizens' vulnerable poses and vacant looks that remain open to a variety of interpretations. They look like Julia Margaret Cameron's figures who often wore blank expressions to (impossibly) suggest the Truth and Beauty of their interiors.[22]

Similarly, American Realist Thomas Eakins painted numerous portraits later in his career that represented his subjects without contextual details or props so often found in more conventional portraits of the time. All that was left in Eakins' frames, such as his portrait *William H. Macdowell* (c. 1904), was the sitter's visage but as one that featured "worn, haggard faces, many of them misty eyed, and some doubtless on the verge of tears" (Fig. 2.24).[23] Berger explains that during the nineteenth century it was not common for portrait subjects to show outright emotion and a number of Eakins' sitters refused to pick up their portraits or returned them claiming that he "got the expression wrong."[24] But, because it was rare for portraits to portray sitters' expressions as worn or haggard, critics celebrated Eakins' ability to portray the "psychology" of the sitters and, as Berger explains, "Many viewers assumed that his portraits revealed worn and sad individuals because the artist was able to penetrate their public personas, so presenting their true selves."[25] The celebration of Eakins' ability to get to the interiority of his sitters became one of the dominant descriptions of his work as the artist was assumed to be able to represent the "psychology" of the sitters in a way that recalled the "realism" of

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[22] The blank expressions could also be, in part, due to the logistics of Cameron's shots. Exposure times ranged up from three to eight minutes, causing for an uncomfortable experience for the sitters. Roberts, 49.
[23] Berger, "Sentimental Realism," 249. In his earlier paintings, Eakins also showed an awareness of physiognomy. For instance, *The Gross Clinic* (1875) represents Dr. Samuel Gross during a surgery to remove bone from a patient's leg, and the painter highlighted the intellect of the respected doctor by using light to emphasize his brow similar to Julia Margaret Cameron's practices. The doctor's intellect then stood in contrast to the patient's emotional mother who recoiled from the surgery with her arms in front of her face.
[24] Berger, "Sentimental Realism," 249.
[25] Berger, "Sentimental Realism," 253.

his earlier works. Berger summarizes, "Whether they are aware of it or not, viewers of Eakins' portraits, readers of sentimental fiction, and physiognomists share much in common, with each searching expectantly for internal meaning in the external signs of the body."[26]

For *Soldier*, Opton "simply wanted to look into the face of a young person who had seen something unforgettable."[27] But she then displays the images in an attempt to create dialog, and in order to make the work available to a larger public, she displayed *Soldier* as public banners and billboards. These public installations contain minimal text that directs viewers to the website that the artist maintains at www.solidiersface.com, and this second website provides a forum for the public to comment as they see fit. Visitors who decide to leave remarks respond to the portraits but also comment on issues of war and peace and the treatment of soldiers, stimulated to do so by the soldiers unexpected positions and expressions. For instance on April 2, 2012, an online user identified as Ska wrote, "remember that the soul we see in these soldiers' eyes exist in the eyes of the opponent just the same. In the end, we all our [*sic*] victims." Ska alluded to the potential equality of and connection experienced between people through sight, as in seeing "eye-to-eye," or viewing the eyes as the "windows into the soul"—seeing beyond mere surface level. On November 27, 2011, Marroll commented, "AMERICA NEEDS to *SEE into the souls* of our Soldiers and embrace that WE have a responsibility to our Soldiers. I can't stop looking deep into their eyes and want to help!" And on October 18, 2010, Grace interpreted, "Having been around a solider with PTSD, I didn't see a dead pose here. This spoke to me of insomnia and the slightly haunted expression of PTSD sufferers. It's

[26] Berger, "Sentimental Realism," 255. Berger again cites Sánchez-Eppler as his source for the connection between readers of sentimental fiction and phrenologists. See Sánchez-Eppler, 29.
[27] Suzanne Opton, "Portfolio: Soldier," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 14, No. 4 (December 2007): 279.

something many soldiers carry around in their heads and deal with every moment of the day, and I think it's good for civilians to get a sense of what that's like."

Opton's project seems to suggest not just her interest in photographing someone who had seen something unforgettable, as she stated, but because she creates the work for an audience, she seems to assume that her audience will read or interpret the faces beyond surface appearance. Her impetus for her project, thus, recalls Cameron's and Eakins' earlier physiognomic projects that assumed viewers would experience a sentimental connection to the interiority of the subjects represented. Opton invites viewers to read the faces of the soldiers and the citizens, which is a seductive suggestion but also an impossibility. To connect their expressions to a specific interpretation tells us more about the beliefs held by the person describing the expression than about the person wearing it. For instance, Nathalie Herschdorfer describes Opton's *Soldier* thus, "During the Second World War, the US conscripts who left to fight in Europe or in the Pacific posed with calm assurance and even pride, with their families gathered around them, promoting a cause that no one doubted. No such attitude can be seen in Suzanne Opton's soldiers [who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan]. Their eyes seem glazed, as if they are no longer part of this world. Lost in thought, they seem incapable of overcoming their doubts and scruples, the guilt that threatens to overwhelm them."[28] But there is no visual evidence of the glazed eyes of the soldiers who served in Iraq or Afghanistan compared to World War II. This is especially apparent when you see two portraits from an additional series by Opton. For *Many Wars* (2009-2010), she photographed veterans from World War II through the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who were undergoing

[28] Nathalie Herschdorfer, "Introduction," *Afterwards: Contemporary Photography Confronting the Past* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 108.

treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder through the Veterans Administration (VA). Instead of directing the veterans to lay their heads down, she gave them a piece of heavy fabric and directed them to drape over their bodies, albeit as they desired. In the portraits of Jay Wenk and Shea McClure, there is absolutely no visual evidence that Wenk has more pride in his eyes as a veteran of World War II and that McClure feels guilt from his recent service in Iraq (Fig. 2.25). Instead, Herschdorfer's statement only tells us that she believes in the narrative that World War II was just and resulted in proud soldiers in comparison to the recent unjust wars that have resulted in soldiers who can only doubt their cause.

"WE" ARE FAMILY

Because Opton's portraits are so limited in terms of what they actually show to viewers, her titles and descriptions seem to provide an authoritative framing of the series, often along the lines of conservative beliefs about domesticity and family. Though her images challenge wide-held stereotypes of soldiers and Iraqis, the work also reinstates contemporary U.S. norms regarding race and gender. In framing her project as a director, Opton has stated that she created *Soldier* from a "woman's point of view," or even a "mother's point of view," as she explains the portraits' ambiguity and presumes, "These men and women were apparently physically unharmed. In a studio situation, the figures are abstracted. The attitude is gentle, or is frightening? I hate sappy images, but when these photos are life sized, you want to hold the soldiers."[29] The photographer associates the vulnerability and tenderness of her portraits with the position of women, specifically mothers, and she created the series, in part, because she realized her son was of the age

[29] Nagy and Stocke.

that he could be called into service.[30] She finds that the pictures evoke a sense of tenderness because the intimate pose is one in which you only see your lover or your children.[31] With these descriptions, her project recalls the Pieta, as a mother tenderly holds her sacrificial son, and she creates a sentimental tie between her imagined audience and the soldiers by constructing her project as one created from a mother's point of view. This statement replicates a conservative understanding of gender roles in the nation when the nation is understood as a family. It also helps raise Opton above the critiques of her work by positioning her as a loving mother concerned for her son, and by extension the soldiers. Doing so positions her intent as a positive and loving gesture in contrast to the ways that her work can be interpreted as anti-war or disrespectful to soldiers by laying them down in a vulnerable position, as demonstrated by CBS Outdoor's cancellation of her billboard contract.

According to sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, the traditional family ideal operates as a "privileged exemplary of intersectionality" regarding issues of race, gender, class, place, and nation in the United States.[32] The power of the ideal family is due to the way it functions ideologically as well as within the social organization of the country and holds important implications toward the maintenance of cultural hierarchies and citizenship. Collins cites Ann McClintock's observation that the family image in the colonial United States "came to figure *hierarchy within unity* as an organic elements of

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[30] Gerald Mead, "Face to Face: Soldiers and Presidents at CEPA Gallery," *Art Voice* (August 2006): 18.
[31] Suzanne Opton, "Exhibition: Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection," available at http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/burning_down_the_ house/index.php (accessed 19 September 2012). Vince Aletti picks up Opton's description and adds that we also see people lying down if they are laid out on a stretcher. Vince Aletti, "Wartime Portraits," *The New Yorker* (12 February 2007), available at http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/notebook/2007/02/12/ 070212gonb_GOAT_notebook_aletti (accessed 25 September 2012). Aletti's description returns the pose of the soldier to injury or death.
[32] Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All In the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3, Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy (Part 2) (Summer 1998): 62-82.

historical progress, and thus became indispensable for legitimating exclusion and hierarchy within nonfamilial social forms such as nationalism, liberal individualism and imperialism."[33] More recently, the power relationships of this ideal were masked through a call for normative "family values," a term that originated in a 1992 political fundraising speech by U.S. Republican Vice President Dan Quayle and was harnessed by Republicans.

Collins demonstrates how the ideal of family functions on various scales. Ideologically, heterosexual parents of the same race have their own biological children and live in a home that they own. This model also bifurcates and isolates the nuclear family. The male father ranks above the mother hierarchically due to gendered assumptions and the father leaves the home and earns a living to support his family. In turn, the female as mother stays home with the children, which implies her realm is the domestic space, whereas the father's role lies outside the home. Due to this division and gendering of public versus domestic labor, the mother and children take on the same social class status as the working father within a biologically- and emotionally-bonded family unit.[34]

The biological reproduction of children within families makes larger scaled familial models in society seem natural and not the cultural constructions that they are. For instance, through earlier de jure and continuing de facto segregation, neighborhoods create communities of people who are racially and economically like each other, which parallels the "natural" relationships between members of individual families.[35] Collins

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[33] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 45. Quoted in Collins, "Family": 64. Emphasis is McClintock's.
[34] Collins, "Family": 62-63.
[35] Also see George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011).

points to the use of the term "homie" in hip-hop culture to connote a figure from one's own neighborhood—the place of one's larger "family" that replicates the social hierarchies of the ideal family—as the term connects familiar associates with the home as an idealized place of protection.[36] On a larger scale, Collins notes the framing of the United States as a family within a "homeland," while the imagined country privileges white people as "Americans" and positions people of color as second-class citizens just as the parents of a family would rank above the younger children. Furthermore, the "whitening" of the American "family" is policed through social organization and beliefs including the conservative discouragement of premarital sex and interracial marriages. Together, these two taboo practices keep "blood lines" of the larger American family "pure" as a eugenic project.[37] Collins explains,

> If the nation-state is conceptualized as a national family with the traditional family ideal providing ideas about family, then the standards used to assess the contributions of family members in heterosexual, married-couple households with children become foundational for assessing group contributions to overall national well-being. Naturalized hierarchies of the traditional family ideal influence understanding of constructions of first- and second-class citizenship. For example, using a logic of birth order elevates the importance of time of arrival in the country for citizenship entitlements. Claims that early-migrating, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants are entitled to more benefits than more recent arrivals resemble beliefs that "last hired, first fired" rules fairly discriminate among workers. Similarly, notions of naturalized gender hierarchies promulgated by the traditional family ideal—the differential treatment of girls and boys regarding economic autonomy and free-access to public space—parallel practices such as the sex-typing of occupations in the paid labor market and male domination in government, professional sports, the streets, and other public spaces.[38]

Thus, even though *Soldier* is visually ambiguous, Opton's statements follow the conservative binary of separate spheres amid domestic ideals. They begin to suggest that the strong masculine figure (soldier) leaves the private space of the home(land) for the

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[36] Collins, "Family": 78.
[37] Collins, "Family": 69-70.
[38] Collins, "Family": 66.

well-being and protection of his family (nation) while the mother provides the emotional strength associated with domesticity.[39] And such ideals of domesticity continue to police the social organization of difference in contemporary society.

Even though some of the soldiers that Opton photographed at Fort Drum are women, the gendered coding of soldiers' roles throughout the history of the U.S. military, until recently, constructs the ideal solider as male. While a complete history of militarization is beyond the scope of this current study, there are a few key points to highlight that demonstrate the frequent gender coding of soldiers. From the earliest period of warfare in which the United States was involved, women performed various roles and services in support of wartime efforts, but many of their contributions did not garner "official" recognition. For instance, around the time of World War I, a representative for the Army wrote, "No official record has been found in the War Department showing specifically that any woman was ever enlisted in the military service of the United States as a member of any organization of the Regular or Volunteer Army. It is possible, however, that there may have been a few instances of women having served

[39] The Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art displayed two of Opton's photographs *Soldier: Claxton—120 Days in Afghanistan* and *Soldier: Mickelson—Length of Service Unknown* in the 2008-2009 exhibit *Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection*. The show's statement explains, "The exhibition title refers to the idea of the 'master's house' from two perspectives: the museum as the historical domain of male artists and professed masters of art history, and the house as the supposed proper province of women." It continues, "Most of the paintings, sculpture, works on paper, and videos in the exhibition are by self-declared feminists and artists of later generations working within the historic framework of feminist art. The widely diverse forms and ideas on view suggest that feminist art is not limited to a specific look or reading." The co-curators of *Burning Down the House*, Maura Reilly and Nicole Caruth, suggest one of their stated goals was to use the exhibition to engage the "house" of art history's overpopulation with male artists. Such engagement follows one approach to feminism, albeit one that is outdated and now criticized for its essentialism, which is to integrate more female artists into the art historical canon. As a female artist, Opton's work fits this goal and she asserts that she works from a mother's point of view in a video interview posted with the exhibition further constructing her approach as a gendered one. Brooklyn Museum, "Exhibition: Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection," available at http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/burning_down_the_house/index.php (accessed 19 September 2012). Her positioning of the mother as emotional also points to ideologies of separate spheres that associate the emotional mother with the domestic home, and I find her statements do not burn down the house as much as they help to maintain it.

as soldiers for a short time without their sex having been detected, but no record of such cases is known to exist in the official files. Women were often employed as laundresses and as nurses, but they were merely civilians while so engaged and were in no sense in the *military* service of the United States."[40]

Many women worked in female-coded positions including those of laundresses, nurses, cooks, and secretarial clerks during wartime, but historians have recovered numerous cases of women fighting in battles either while dressed as men or alongside their husbands before they were allowed to enlist as soldiers. In one such early instance during the American Revolutionary War, Margaret Corbin helped her husband, John, load ammunition into a cannon and when he was injured, she took his place firing the cannon until she too was seriously wounded. In 1779, the U.S. Congress recognized her service and provided her with a pension for her contributions.[41] Similar stories have surfaced about hundreds of women from the American Civil War, such as those chronicled by De Anne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook in *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the Civil War* and Elizabeth D. Leonard in *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*.[42]

During the twentieth century, women joined the ranks of soldier at varying rates. The U.S. government instated the draft in 1917 but only required (and allowed) that men

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[40] Letter, The Adjutant General to Editor, *Rural New Yorker*, 12 May 1915. War Department Record Adjutant General's Office, Enlisted Br 7275-C, with 3132-C-1884, 2285035 National Archives; quoted in Mattie E. Treadwell, *United States Army in World War II: Special Studies—The Women's Army Corps* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army), 4. Emphasis is Treadwell's.

[41] For a timeline about the history of women in the U.S. Army, including mention of Margaret Corbin's pension, see U.S. Army, "Women in the U.S. Army," available at http://www.army.mil/women/history.html (accessed 25 June 2013). Subsequent references to the Army's timeline are from this source. I plan to examine this line of inquiry in connection to Opton's *Soldier* in the future.

[42] See De Anne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook in *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002); and Elizabeth D. Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

enroll. Congress approved the formation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in 1942 after the attack on Pearl Harbor the year prior. Training for women was limited and they most often "officially" served in female-coded support roles. In 1948, the first women entered the Regular Army but only to serve in non-combat positions. The Army changed to an all-volunteer force in 1973 and needed many, many more recruits. As Beth Bailey argues, the open enrollment came with political implications and saw a large increase in the enlistment of women and African Americans. This was, in part, due to the Army's advertising campaign that shifted the idea of military service from one of "obligation" to "opportunity" and after growing calls for equality of the 1960s and 1970s social movements.[43] In 1977, the Army began to hold mixed-gender combat training and began to require the same enlistment qualifications for men and women in 1979.

Yet it was not until 2013 that the Pentagon lifted the ban on women soldiers serving in combat roles. After years of contributing to and often completing combat tasks, women soldiers were not eligible for promotions and recognitions that required combat status. Part of this recent decision was instigated by a 2012 lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of four servicewomen and the equality-seeking Service Women's Action Network. The various branches of the military have until 2016 to finalize the implementation of the new policy.[44] Opton's soldiers show this mixed-gender composition of the military. Without information regarding specific details about each of the soldier's roles in Iraq and Afghanistan, viewers do not know which of the

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[43] Beth Bailey, "A Political History of the All-Volunteer Army," *The Forum* 9, No. 3 (2011): Article 5.
[44] See Elisabeth Bumiller and Thom Shanker, "Pentagon is Set to Lift Combat Ban for Women," *The New York Times* (23 January 2013), available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/24/us/pentagon-says-it-is-lifting-ban-on-women-in-combat.html?pagewanted=all (accessed 24 January 2013).

photographed soldiers saw combat or not. Yet, when the photographer created her project in 2004 and 2005, the female soldiers were still not recognized as equals because military policies understood the ideal soldier as male based on the long history of gender-coding in U.S. military practices. It is for this reason that I write of the soldiers as "masculine," a characteristic most often imagined in dominant culture in connection with men.[45] Furthermore, Opton often talks about the soldiers in connection to her son, which serves to further gender them vis-à-vis her position as the female, loving mother based on normative ideals.

In addition to constructing the soldiers around the ideal of family, Opton collapses the Iraqis into the U.S. ideal of family in order to make them "relatable." Similar to the titling conventions in *Soldier*, Opton begins with the designation "Citizen" to place the Iraqis in contrast to the soldiers. The pair of terms "*Solder + Citizen*" draws attention to different groups of people affected by the same series of events, in some ways to refuse the binary of U.S. and Iraqi. But, as I mentioned, the two series are often displayed independently. She attempts to overcome the Iraqi's racial and religious differences from the imagined U.S. viewer by highlighting their domestic lives through her descriptions and titles, employing a "humanizing affect" that equates the Iraqis to the ideal U.S. family, which is imagined as white. The titles designate the citizens by their full name, thus giving more personal information than the use of only last names with her soldiers. Across various sources, Opton provides the Iraqis' occupation, age, date they left Iraq, and the number of children they have. For instance, we learn that Yada Barazanji was a thirty-six year old children's magazine writer and mother of three when Opton

[45] For a discussion of masculinity outside of men's bodies, see Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

photographed her.[46] By supplying the Iraqis' statuses as parents, Opton wants to remind U.S. viewers that, in addition to the soldiers and citizens affected by war, the war disrupted whole families. This recalls her decision to have family members hold soldiers' faces, such as the way Wright's wife hold his face and you can see her wedding ring (Fig. 2.4). The artist believes that the Iraqis' status as parents makes them more relatable to middle class Americans, the imagined normative construction of Americans. Thus "they" (Iraqis) are like "us" (Americans). In other words, her descriptions imply that "soldiers" are not "citizens" like "we" are, but "we" should remember that "they" are loved as sons, and fathers, and brothers.[47] Then "we" should identify with the Iraqi citizens, despite the many differences between the groups, because "they" are also members of families.

In some sense, the slippage of the Iraqis into the American family would refuse one of the binaries associated with domesticity, that of the domestic vis-à-vis the foreign. As Amy Kaplan explains, "When we contrast the domestic sphere with the market or political realm, men and women inhabit a divided social terrain, but when we oppose the domestic to the foreign, men and women become national allies against the alien, and the determining division is not gender but racial demarcations of otherness. Thus…part of

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[46] The titles and descriptions of Opton's citizens remain inconsistent across various sources. In Yada's case, Opton's website pairs *Soldier: Wright- 366 Days in Iraq* with *Citizen: Yada Barazanji* and the image caption include an abbreviated interview with Yada. Andrea D. Fitzpatrick's article "Citizens of Iraq, Portraits of Exile" includes a longer interview with Yada and captions the following information: "Yada/ Children's magazine writer/ 36 years old/ Left November 11, 2003." See Fitzpatrick, "Citizens": 51. And the exhibition catalog *Afterwards: Contemporary Photography Confronting the Past* titles the portrait, "Citizen: Yada Barazanji, writer, mother of three" and does not include an interview. See Herschdorfer, 118. Depending on the site in which viewers see Opton's *Citizen*, they will receive varying amounts of information. For my project, I have pieced together the information from a variety of sources to reflect the personal information that Opton gathered and then shared with viewers.

[47] In an interview with FoxNews, Opton describes, "All soldiers are all heroes. But they're also sons and fathers and brothers, and we should keep that in mind when we think about soldiers." Suzanne Opton, "Soldier Photos Spark Comments on Metro," interviewed by John Henrehan of FoxNews, (12 March 2010), available at http://topics.sacbee.com/advertising%20posters/ (accessed 13 May 2012).

the cultural work of domesticity might be to unite men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined as home."[48] On the one hand, by photographing only U.S. soldiers for *Soldier* and only Iraqis for *Citizen*, Opton sets up a binary opposition between domestic and foreign. On the other hand, by attempting to relate U.S. audiences to the Iraqi refugees, she collapses the binary. Yet a shadow archive fills the vacuum created when the refugees become like "us."[49] And the foreign aggressors who caused the Iraqis to flee—often referred to as terrorists in the United States—would fill the void left behind in this binary. But whom you consider as "foreign" and the aggressor, is also difficult to identify exactly as the occupant of this position shifts.

For Kaplan, the binaries of masculine and feminine separate spheres and the domestic in contrast to the foreign do not serve merely as binary oppositions to order society. Through deconstructing these binaries, Kaplan understands "domesticity" as a masculine and feminine enterprise used to extend and expand the borders of empire. In particular she writes about the nineteenth century when the geopolitical borders of the United States were "expanding rapidly through violent confrontations with Indians, Mexicans, and European empires."[50] "Domesticity" became a process through which to order the imagined nation both within its borders and in relationship to those deemed foreign, other, or alien. Kaplan attempts to show how entrenched discussions of domesticity became within discourses of national expansion. Thus,

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[48] Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," in *The Future of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman, New Americanists series, ed. Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 111-112.
[49] For a discussion of the "shadow archive," see Sekula, "The Body and the Archive."
[50] Kaplan, 113.

> Rather than stabilizing the representation of the nation as home, this rhetoric heightened the fraught and contingent nature of the boundary between the domestic and the foreign, a boundary that breaks down around questions of the racial identity of the nation as home. If we begin to rethink woman's sphere in this context, we have to ask how the discourse of domesticity negotiates the borders of an increasingly expanding empire and divided nation. Domestic discourse both redresses and reenacts the contradictions of empire through its own double movement to expand female influence beyond the home and the nation while simultaneously contracting woman's sphere to police domestic boundaries against the foreignness both within and without.[51]

While imperial projects have shifted from the nineteenth century expansion of territorial borders and centralized power that, according to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "was exerted over external foreign territories through a system of channels and barriers that alternately facilitated and obstructed the flows of production and circulation," today Empire "establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global real within its open, expanding frontiers."[52] In other words, the global projects of power are not formed as closely in relationship to national boundaries. While projects of Empire do not place the United States at the center, they certainly privilege the nation within such processes.[53] Within this context, the binaries that Opton creates and describes regarding the separate spheres in *Soldier* and the domestic in contrast to the foreign in *Citizen* serve as projects of Empire. They work to

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[51] Kaplan, 115.
[52] Hardt and Negri, xii.
[53] Hardt and Negri's model of Empire is not without its criticisms, such as if there is not a centralized power like there was with earlier forms of imperialism, then who or what is the agent of expansion and control in the age of Empire? While I plan to investigate such criticisms more in the future, for now Hardt and Negri's model is helpful in suggesting that the expanse of i(E)mperial power continues even though colonial projects and the definitions of borders are arguably over. Such is the case of the nineteenth-century project of Manifest Destiny. In Kaplan's analysis, Manifest Destiny was not just the expansion from one physical coast of the nation to the other. Instead, the discourse of expansion implemented projects of Manifest Domesticity beyond national borders. Hardt and Negri's Empire suggests that similar projects continue today.

collapse the other into the domestic through appeals to "humanizing affect," or whitening only certain Iraqis by placing them into the ideal American family. But they also order difference as the terrorists—those who fill the void left behind with the collapse of the Iraqi refugees into the U.S. family—become the racialized other.

Superficially, it would be easy to identify U.S. soldiers as good and Iraqis as bad, as dominant U.S. narratives so often claim. Upon closer examination—not just of the images, but of the whole project—additional complexities challenge the simple binary between the normative position and the other. Andrea Fitzpatrick claims that the humanizing aspect of Opton's series, or the way they break down the divides of self-other, America-Iraq, West-East, soldier-citizen, victor-vanquished, "results in the various parties implicated by and invested in this conflict looking much more similar and interdependent, which is not to homogenize the cultural specificity of the Iraqis, but to forge some proximity, familiarity, and commonality with them."[54] I find that the interviews with the Iraqis play a very important role in Opton's series because they, to some extent, prevent the complete collapse of the Iraqis into U.S. ideals of family that would erase their specific experiences, or completely homogenize their cultural specificity, in favor of a sentimental bond around ideals of a universal family. The interviews also complicate the idea that it is only the Iraqi terrorists who caused the Iraqi refugees to flee their homes and positions U.S. soldiers as part of the force that disrupted Iraqis' lives.

The interviews presented as part of *Citizen* record specific memories and moments for viewers to imagine what additional pages from the refugees' albums of life

[54] Fitzpatrick, "Citizens": 53.

events would look like. And while the text does not represent the events visually, it also does not render war invisible to the same extent that the vacant faces and lack of more contextual information in *Soldier* does. For instance in *Citizen*, Yada recalls Baathists and Shiites attacking her home and threatening her husband. Eventually, she was kidnapped and tortured by an unidentified group overseen by Sheik Omar. Her captives released her after seventeen days when one of them recognized her as a friend of his mom's and appealed to Sheik Omar on her behalf.[55] And Bassim Suliaman remembers,

> I want my ground. I want to know when I walk, that this is my country, to wake up in the morning and go out in my garden for a cup of coffee. To have the neighbor come and say, Assalamu alaikum, and then you offer him a coffee and then a cat jumps in your lap. I lived that. I was a sociable man. I would open my house to everybody…. I had two or three kidnapping attempts. I had a bomb thrown over my fence. And in June 2005, the American Special Forces invaded my house. They came by helicopter. They blew opens the doors. We were sleeping. There were looking for someone named Karim. They were so stupid. They threw the satellite antenna from the roof to the garden. They took all the linens from the cabinet and walked all over it. What kind of civilization does that? They know I am a Muslim but they brought a dog into my house. For the first time I began to hate them and know they were occupiers, not liberators. They took me to a camp and when they released me, they apologized and gave me a bottle of table wine and $500.[56]

Bassim's recollection not only longs for his previous life that was disrupted by the experience of war but also suggests photographs that would be found in a family album—snapshots of a man sitting in a garden, neighbors enjoying cups of coffee together, and a cat sitting on someone's lap. But these happier snapshot moments give way to documentary moments of war as soldiers invade and aggressively dismantle Bassim's home. His interview also highlights the multiple and contradictory roles of U.S. soldiers in Iraq as occupiers or liberators; at times, they attacked as aggressive warriors but they

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[55] Fitzpatrick, "Citizens": 51.
[56] Fitzpatrick, "Citizens": 43.

also provided protection and developed infrastructure in the rebuilding of a seemingly more democratic nation.

Thus, Opton's sentimental statements around ideals of family oversimplify the cultural work that her series can do, but this oversimplification is further exacerbated by the lack of consistency in the display of *Citizen*. Without the interviews, what remains are close-up portraits, like those in *Soldier*, that provide viewers without any details about the photographed subjects' personal experiences with war. Further, Opton's understanding of the audience of her project problematically situates and constructs middle class families as a "normative" subject position, as if "all" Americans come from or can relate to this position, or that this position accurately describes "us." By contextualizing her series so firmly in ideals of a universal family of man, I find that critiques of documentary photography's frequent appeals to humanism apply to her unconventional portraits. As T.J. Demos explains, documentary photography often "creates a false proximity between the compassionate viewer and the anguished subject."[57] In other words, "they" are like "us" but often "we" are in a position to help "them." To some extent, Opton overcomes this positioning by humanizing the Iraqis through her use of close up portraits that just show their faces, like she did with the soldiers. Yet the interviews also return the Iraqis to the position of victims. All of these slipping positions construct and negotiate normativity as shifting and relative to particular circumstances.

Opton's title *Citizen* warrants further analysis to show what her appeals to a universal family erase. She represents only U.S. soldiers and Iraqi citizens when,

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[57] Demos, "(Post)Humanist Interventions": 194. See the Introduction to this project for an extended discussion of Demos' critique.

obviously, both cultures have people in both of these roles. Therefore her series portray the particular groups that she understands need to be "humanized" in her imagined audience's eyes. In the United States, a "soldier-citizen" refers to a person who serves a military role, albeit not in a professional capacity. For instance, the National Guard is comprised of citizen-soldiers. But Opton does not refer to citizen-soldiers with her titles. Instead, her use of diptychs situates domestic soldiers in opposition to the foreign Iraqi citizens. The term frequently paired in binary opposition to "soldier" is "civilian," yet the multivalent term "citizen" often carries a more politicized meaning than a "civilian," or non-military person. To be a citizen suggests full access to rights provided by the state and also a more active participation in public discourse. For instance, during in his 2013 Inaugural Address, President Obama alluded to the participation of citizens in public culture when he called Americans to action by proclaiming, "You and I, as citizens, have the power to set this country's course. You and I, as citizens, have the obligation to shape the debates of our time—not only with the votes we cast, but with the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideals."[58]

Around the time of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, Iraqis with extra financial capital were the first to leave the country and a number of them fled to Jordan.[59] Upper

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[58] Obama, "2013 Inaugural Address."

[59] See Joseph Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees: The New Crisis in the Middle East* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009). Sassoon explains that Jordan has welcomed a larger number of refugees from Iraq when compared to other host countries. As of 2008, soon after Opton traveled to Jordan for her project, approximately five million Iraqis had become internally and externally displaced due to the continuing violence, sectarian fighting, and deteriorating social services in Iraq. Of the five million displaced Iraqis, 475,000 fled to Jordan and formed the highest percentage of a nation's total population at 8.636%. In comparison, they formed 6.878% of the total population in Syria, 0.120% in Egypt, 1.176% in Lebanon, 0.082% in Iran, 0.444% in Sweden, and only 0.0002% in the United States (172). After tracing the rise in violence and continuing instabilities, the deterioration of the Iraqi economy, health care and education system, and the status of women in the country, Sassoon concludes, "The US occupation of Iraq sought to topple Saddam and create democracy. While it succeeded in the former, its invasion lead to the fleeing of the secular, educated middle class who tend to form the backbone of democratic regimes. The USA wanted to set up a free-market economy but ended up having hundreds of business people and entrepreneurs

class Iraqis planned their moves and sold their homes before doing so. This first wave of people leaving Iraq included businessmen and former government officials, followed by middle class Iraqis. As the violence and the deterioration of social services continued, a number Sunnis and people from other minorities fled, followed eventually by Shia as well. Those "vulnerable and poor" stayed behind without the resources to leave the country.[60] As guest, investors, or residents, more affluent Iraqis had greater access to legal residency in Jordan and could acquire a yearly renewable residency permit that

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leaving the country with their capital and knowledge. The Americans wanted a pluralistic and multi-ethnic society but the result was that the minorities, who had lived and prospered in Iraq for centuries, found themselves a prime target of the religious groups and their militias, and hence a high percentage of them were forced to leave the country. The Americans aspired to make Iraq an example of modernization for the rest of the Arab world, but what took place set Iraq back a long way" (166-167). These issues may keep Iraqis from returning to their homeland for an extended period of time, if ever, and this scenario is what the Jordanian government worked to prevent.

Officials from Jordan did not sign the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines who is considered a refugee and the legal protection and social rights to which they are entitled. According to the UNHCR, the 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who "'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.' Since then, UNHCR has offered protection and assistance to tens of millions of refugees, finding durable solutions for many of them. Global migration patterns have become increasingly complex in modern times, involving not just refugees, but also millions of economic migrants. But refugees and migrants, even if they often travel in the same way, are fundamentally different, and for that reason are treated very differently under modern international law. Migrants, especially economic migrants, choose to move in order to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families. Refugees have to move if they are to save their lives or preserve their freedom. They have no protection from their own state—indeed it is often their own government that is threatening to persecute them. If other countries do not let them in, and do not help them once they are in, then they may be condemning them to death—or to an intolerable life in the shadows, without sustenance and without rights." See UNHCR, "Refugees," available at http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html (accessed 5 February 2013).

Jordan's government treated recent Iraqis who arrived in their country as temporary guests, not as a humanitarian crisis of refugees until international media began to pressure the country to provide more aid for them in 2007—although Sassoon also criticizes nations including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Iraq for not offering enough financial support to Jordan and humanitarian groups, particularly the UNHCR, to provide such services. In 2007, the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior labeled the Iraqis among the categories "guests, investors, residents, and refugees," but rarely used the last term and insisted that only 20,000 of the 475,000 Iraqis in Jordan were indeed refugees with rights to additional support services. Sassoon, 52. I highlight this contextual information in order to set up the unstable relationship of the Iraqis living in Jordan to the position of "citizen."

[60] Sassoon, 5.

required a deposit of approximately $150,000 in a local bank.[61] These details illustrate the connection between economic status and fuller access to citizenship in Jordan with the Iraq War.

Opton photographed Iraqi "citizens" who were professionals, and she notes their professions, which include a formal gallery owner/financial consultant and doctor/radiation oncologist, in the title of the images. This information highlights not only the narrative of who left Iraq but also shows that Opton photographed a particular sample of middle or upper class Iraqis. Once in Jordan, the citizens did not necessarily maintain the same level of cultural, legal, or economic citizenship that they experienced in Iraq.[62] We do not know exact details about the photographed refugees' situations except for what they tell us in their interviews. For instance, the hairdresser Rajah Saheb looks directly at us from her upright position as the large format camera records the appearance of her dark eyes and freckles (Fig. 2.26). In her interview, she describes her experience of second-class citizenship in the changing environments of Iraq and Jordan, which we cannot interpret from her image alone. She recalls:

> Before the war I used to work at a beauty shop. But after the war I didn't work. Those people, the ones who say they are religious, they announced that all coiffeurs had to close. They said it was against religion to put on henna or trim your eyebrows or style your hair. Even the barbers shut down. It was never like that before. Before I didn't fear anything. But those people started raping and kidnapping. Women and girls, especially those living alone, were targeted. I began to hear stories of the Mahdi army entering the houses of Christian girls and saying, either you become a Muslim and marry one of those guys, or else. I'm Muslim, and I know there's nothing in Islam about that. So I came to Jordan. But people in this society look at Iraqi girls, especially those who live alone, and they consider them cheap. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I'd be humiliated

[61] Sassoon, 53.
[62] Herschdorfer states briefly, "Opton describes them as citizens, but they have lost their basic rights." Herschdorfer, 118.

> like this. I've always been independent and had a mind of my own. I just want to leave, to immigrate to any country. Enough is enough.[63]

While the larger population of Iraqi refugees in Jordan would seem to suggest the presence of assistance for those in exile, Rajah's quote shows how the move to Jordan has not been easy for a number of Iraqis as their relationship to citizenship changed drastically. A number of Iraqis' visas have expired but they continue to stay in Jordan illegally and must turn to work in more informal economies.[64] And some Iraqis from the more professional classes experience discriminatory practices and low wages compared to their former positions in Iraq and the roles they perform in Jordan. For instance, Sassoon interviewed an Iraqi neurologist who moved to Jordan in 2005. The doctor worked in various clinics until he was able to find work in a large public hospital. Despite his fourteen years of experience, the hospital paid him only the salary of a junior doctor because the hospital can exploit his status as an Iraqi who is unable to return home.[65] Though this medical specialist lived an upper class life in Iraq, his relocation to

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[63] Suzanne Opton, "Citizen: Rajah Saheb–Hairdresser," caption for *Soldier + Citizen*, available at http:// suzanneopton.com/images/soldier-citizen/ (accessed 5 February 2013).

[64] Part of Sassoon's gauge of the declining status of the Iraqis in Jordan is the lowered status of women as evidenced by the way many of them work in informal economies as domestic servants or prostitutes. Sassoon, 38-40.

[65] Sassoon, 47. The status of Iraqis in Jordan has also been skewed by the difficulty of collecting accurate data, which supports the further denial of the dire situation many refugees in Jordan face. For one, most of the refugees have dispersed into more urban areas instead of residing in more traditional, and centralized, refugee camps, which makes them difficult to count. The Norwegian non-governmental organization (NGO) Fafo conducted the most comprehensive study of the Iraqis in Jordan at the request of the Jordanian Foreign Ministry and Department of Statistics in November 2007. But this study distorts the statistics and creates a more favorable result for the government. In addition to the difficulty of accurately counting the Iraqis, Fafo collected its data in west-Amman where upper class Iraqis reside. For instance, Sassoon cites Fafo's numbers from 2007 that fifty-six percent of Iraqis had legal permits to remain in Jordan, but this percent would translate to 250,000 Iraqis, a number too high at the time of Fafo's publication of its survey. Sassoon also suggests that the lower class' mistrust of official agencies adds to the inaccuracy of this study. He explains, "[T]here is very little upside in answering questions posed to them by organizations that have no power to help them improve their situation." Sassoon, 37. Those without legal status would remain fearful of being found and sent back to Iraq, which not only skews Fafo's study but also keeps a number of Iraqis from even registering for aid through groups like UNHCR.

Jordan lowered his class status and the full access to citizenship that Opton's title suggests.

Joseph Sassoon and Opton both use the term "vulnerable" to describe different populations affected by the Iraq War. Sassoon uses the term to highlight those who cannot leave Iraq or those who fled to countries like Jordan but who do not find themselves experiencing the full benefits of citizenship.[66] Opton describes her soldiers as vulnerably posed and lacking military accouterment. When she wanted to show people on the other side of the soldiers' experiences, she photographed the vulnerable Iraqis, and at times even displayed them upside-down. But her use of the term "citizen" suggests a lack of vulnerability that contrasts with the situations in which Iraqis found themselves once they moved to Jordan and as I outlined above. The title "citizen" can erase the complexities of lived experience that Sassoon highlighted in his study of Iraqi refugees, such as the numbers of Iraqis who must work for extremely low wages in more informal economies. While "citizen" can serve as a term of respect or agency for the Iraqis, when the images are published or displayed without their interviews there is little to keep Opton's imagined American audience from losing the complexity of the Iraqis' situations in favor of understanding the refugees in terms of U.S. ideals of family. And this "humanizing affect" folds the Iraqis into the contradictions of U.S. cultural rhetoric that upholds democracy and equality for all while actually privileging normative citizens above others.

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[66] The "vulnerable" Iraqis also find themselves unable to gather in large groups to help each other when humanitarian aid fails them. This is because the Jordanian government forbids all foreigners from forming societies or clubs, referred to as *Jam'iyya*. Thus, one Iraqi told Sassoon, "[W]e have to thank the dead people. Only in *Majlis Al-'Aza* (gathering for condolences) are we allowed to gather in the hundreds." Sassoon, 53.

Opton's series does not offer a cross section of all Iraqis, or even all Iraqis in Jordan. Though her series works to humanize Iraqis and challenge the frequent representations of them as terrorists in the Western media, her project offers only a limited sample of certain Iraqis, as evidenced by their professions. This limited sampling parallels the Jordanian government's erasure of the presence of a large number of Iraqi refugees. For instance, the hairdresser Rajah Saheb does not wear the more conservative *hijab*, and indeed, none of the Iraqi women that Opton photographed do. In her interview published with *Citizen*, the older Razika Kuba even complains of garment as she recounts,

> I got pessimistic when those people with the turbans won the elections. I knew that would be the end. I was the only one without a veil in my neighborhood. Every girl, even as young as 9 years old, started wearing them. In fear of being killed, they put them on. They want us to go back to the time of our great-great-grandmothers! One shopkeeper told me, "wear something to cover your hair." I said, "I only have four hairs. Let God take care of the women with lots of hair." But I was afraid. I didn't leave my neighborhood where everyone knew me.[67]

That the women Opton photographed do not wear veils illustrates that the photographer represented a sample of more liberal Iraqis. Part of the limitations of Opton's sample could be caused by her access to a particular group of Iraqis, which erases some of the differences between the Iraqis affected by war. If viewers are unaware of specific details about the lived experience of Iraqis in Jordan, as offered by Sassoon, then the only framing device that remains for *Citizen* is Opton's textual representation of them as "like" U.S. middle class families. Thus her appeals to family and her sample of subjects erase the particular and varied experiences of the Iraqis in Jordan as well as the impact of difference on the lived experiences of not only Iraqis but also Americans, who she

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[67] Suzanne Opton, "Citizen: Razika Kuba–Widow," caption for *Soldier + Citizen*, available at http://suzanneopton.com/images/soldier-citizen/ (accessed 5 February 2013).

situates in terms of family. By extension, as Patricia Hill Collins argues, imagining the nation as a family maintains traditional gendered and racialized ideals. Opton's statements do little to challenge these normative beliefs as she positions the viewer/artist as the emotional mother who wants to reach out tenderly to the vulnerable soldiers, or the way that she constructed the national family with *Soldier* and then reached out to the foreign, or alien, group of Iraqis to photograph next.

PURPLE HEARTS AND PURPLE FINGERS

Through the use of a horizontal pose for *Soldier* and using a similar process for *Citizen*, Opton claims she wanted to suggest the way that the same event altered the lives of both U.S. soldiers and Iraqi citizens, who would never be the same again. The photographer did not attempt to make a clear anti- or pro-war or military statement. When her contact at Fort Drum emphasized one question when deliberating her request for access to the base—was she making a "political" project—Opton responded, "No. It's art."[68] Already, it should be clear that Opton's portraits do not function apolitically as art, and I would hesitate to say that art could ever be apolitical. Opton also acknowledges that anytime you broach the subject of war, discussions become political.[69] But the way she presented her initial proposal provides another instance of the oppositions that accompany her series as she frames her projects as art, not politics. How does her art series, thus, relate to the tradition of war photography, a larger category—like portraiture—that she engages in more unexpected ways? In an attempt to make art and not an overtly political statement, Opton's projects suggest varying degrees of

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[68] Suzanne Opton, "Portfolio: Soldier," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 14, No. 4 (December 2007): 279.
[69] Suzanne Opton, phone interview with author, 27 August 2012.

visibility and invisibility of the experience of war. In doing so, her photographs interact with the history of war photography in a number of (sometimes diverging) ways. And because she photographs the faces of soldiers after they have served at least 100 days and Iraqis after they fled to Jordan, her images fall within the recent interest in "aftermath" photography as a way to overcome critiques of previous photojournalistic approaches used to represent war.

The invention of photography in the nineteenth century meant photographers could archive visual evidence of wartime occurrences in an arguably more transparent way. But this does not mean that the use of photography during wartime has always yielded the same type of visual records. Though a complete study of the history of war photography and precedents in other visual media are out of the scope of this current project, I will highlight some key moments in the different uses of the medium from the American Civil War, the Vietnam War, and more recent Gulf Wars in order to more fully engage with how Opton's approach both represents and renders war invisible.[70] During the time of the Civil War, photography was still in its infancy. Due to technical limitations that included long exposure times and bulky equipment, photographers could not take an image in a fraction of a second like they can today. Thus many of the photographs from the Civil War, such as Timothy O'Sullivan's photograph of dead soldiers *Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, PA, 1863* (4 July 1863) or George N. Barnard's cityscape *Ruins of Charleston, South Carolina* (c. 1865), showed moments only after an

[70] For a recent collection of war photographs from the early daguerreotypes of the Crimean and American Civil Wars to digital photographs taken during the Iraq War, see Anne Wilkes Tucker, Will Michels, and Natalie Zelt, *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath* (Houston, TX: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2012). The authors organized this book around topics rather than chronology and include Suzanne Opton's *Soldier Birkholz: 353 Days in Iraq, 205 Days in Afghanistan* (2004) under the heading "Remembrance."

event. Groups of soldiers also posed to have their pictures taken when they were not fighting. With the development of collodion processes and the spread of more affordable portrait studios, be they a temporary shop or more a more permanent fixture in town, a number of soldiers sat to have their portraits taken in uniform. And due to the privilege of the medium in its documentary role, medical professionals used photography to catalog soldiers' injuries and medical procedures. Aided by this documentary tool, military personnel developed the field of military medicine. All of these forms of early war photography tend to show the calm, or aftermath, while the storm, or the height of the action, remains invisible in nineteenth-century war photography.

The twentieth-century saw additional reductions in the exposure times for photography and the development of smaller, hand-held cameras. War photographers could now take pictures closer to military front lines. Images of war reached a new height of immediacy and visibility with the Vietnam War when television sets brought the war's atrocities into family living rooms. According to Liam Kennedy, the Vietnam War is often cited as "photojournalism's last great historical moment of record and relevance."[71] He describes that during the Vietnam War "photojournalists moved into a more adversary relationship with the military, as they questioned the management of the war, and in the work of many photographers the tension held within the conjunction of democratic and imperial impulses in the American worldview began to visually erupt. The visual legacies of the Vietnam War are still being played out within American popular culture and the myth that the imagery of the war contributed to defeat has

[71] Liam Kennedy, "Securing Vision: Photography and US Foreign Policy," *Media, Culture, & Society* 30 (2008): 281.

haunted a generation of military and political leaders."[72] Although the coverage of more recent wars often privileges live television feeds and digital representations, the management of the media is worth noting for what it makes invisible. Coverage of the 1990s Gulf Wars presented images of the dead or bodily violence very infrequently, and Kennedy notes that one of the most graphic images—Kenneth Jarecke's photograph of a burned Iraqi soldier in his tank—was not released until after the war ended.[73] The erasure of bodily violence in the U.S. coverage of the war was further exacerbated by the 1991 ban of images showing the coffins of U.S. soldiers. The Obama administration overturned the Bush-era ban in 2009, and now soldiers' families make the decision if photographers can take pictures of their loved ones' coffins or not.[74]

During the Civil War, photographers had to photograph the aftermath because of technological limitations. Many photographers today, including Opton, intentionally decide to show the ruins or effects of war and other disasters rather than identifying and framing key moments of an event. Photographers have engaged with the growing interest in photographs of the aftermath based on critical evaluations of the roles of iconicity and universal humanism associated with more conventional photojournalism from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For instance, photographer and theorist Allan Sekula calls for photographers to work with an "anti-journalistic" approach. This means, "no flash, no telephoto lens, no gas mask, no auto-focus, no press pass and no pressure to grab at all costs the one defining image of dramatic violence."[75] Sekula objects to the

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[72] Kennedy: 281-282.
[73] Kennedy: 292n3.
[74] See Elisabeth Burmiller, "U.S. Lifts Photo Ban on Military Coffins," *The New York Times* (7 December 2009), available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/27/world/americas/27iht-photos.1.20479953.html?_r=0 (accessed 14 April 2013).
[75] Allan Sekula, "Waiting for Tear Gas," in *5 Days That Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond*, Alexander Cockburn, Jeffrey St. Clair, and Allan Sekula (London and New York: Verso, 2000), no page numbers.

sensationalism of documentary images that reduces complex events into singular frames and the way the art market can thus treat singular, iconic images as commodities. Similarly, art historian and critic T.J. Demos critiques the "heroic positioning of the photographer, the constructions of a singular event and iconic image, the truthful and objective portrayal of reality, and the bearing witness to terrible events and conveying them to faraway audiences" associated with social documentary photography's frequent appeals to universal humanism, thus creating "a false proximity between the compassionate viewer and the anguished subject."[76] Opton situates her series in opposition to documentary war photography when she states, "We are inured to pictures of war…. This [her photographs] may have more power than a documentary picture. It makes you think. It's a conceptual photo based on a documentary situation and that's what I'm interested in."[77] From her statements, it becomes clear that she is interested in constructing her photographs instead of going into the world and taking frames out of it, like a documentary photographer would. She directs her models to act in a certain way for the shot while her subjects' experiences with war only compliment her conceptual or narrative ideas. Even so, making you think instead of telling you exactly what to think is what led her to describe her project as "art" and not "political" to officials at Fort Drum, a binary that is not as clearly delineated as she suggests._Because Opton works with

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[76] T.J. Demos, "Photography's (Post)Humanist Interventions: Or, Can Photography Make the World More Liveable?" *4th Fotofestival: Mannheim Ludwigshafen Heidelberg* (Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, and Heidelberg, 2011): 196, 194, available at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/art-history/about_us/academic_staff/dr_tj_demos/Demos-Photography_and_Post-Humanism.pdf (accessed 4 May 2012).

[77] Paul Moakley, "Soldier Down: The Portraits of Suzanne Opton," *Time: Light Box* (23 November 2011), available at http://lightbox.time.com/2011/11/23/soldier-down-the-portraits-of-suzanne-opton/#ixzz2IFmt7uON (accessed 21 January 2013). Kerry Skarbakka has expressed similar frustrations with documentary photography, but he sees his "art" as a form of personal activism. See Chapter 5 of this project.

portraiture, her process would seem to overcome Sekula's and Demos' critiques of photojournalism, but it is not that simple.

In the *Afterwards: Contemporary Photography Confronting the Past*, which includes Opton's *Soldier* and *Citizen*, curator Nathalie Herschdorfer describes work by photographers who "focus their lens on the consequence of violent events" and includes a number of landscape photographs as examples.[78] In the context of aftermath photographs of battlegrounds—Herschdorfer mentions Roger Fenton's *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855) from the Crimean War as well as the more recent photographs of ruins at Ground Zero after the 9-11 attacks—the faces of Opton's soldiers and citizens seem to become marked terrains and records of horrific events. This assumes we can read their faces for evidence of their experiences in violence-ridden regions of Iraq and Afghanistan, just as the surface of the head was believed to demonstrate the inner character of nineteenth-century physiognomic subjects. Herschdorfer concludes her description by stating, "The tact with which Opton handles a subject as delicate as that of the Iraq war is admirable. Rather than denounce the conflict openly, she has opted for discretion."[79] Such "tact" positions her project in opposition, again, to photojournalistic images. With *Soldier* Opton sought to challenge the normative belief of soldiers as upright and heroic figures by showing them in more vulnerable and horizontal poses, ones in which we typically only see soldiers once they are dying or dead like Narmer's

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[78] Herschdorfer, 17. Due to *Afterwards'* chronological organization, images by other photographers separate Opton's projects and they do not appear in direct dialog with each other. Charlotte Cotton poses a question related to Herschdorfer's description of aftermath photography when she asks, "How do photographers move away from a critique of image-making that implies the loss of the documentary power of photography to a practice that utilizes art strategies to maintain the social relevance of the photograph? Faced with a gap left by the decrease of commissioned documentary projects and the usurping of television and digital media as the most immediate carriers of information, photography's answer has been to make an asset out of the different climates and context that art offers." Charlotte Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 167.

[79] Herschdorfer, 118.

foes or the dying Gaul. And with *Citizen* she wanted to counter stereotypes of Iraqis as they are often represented in U.S. media. I tend to agree with Fitzpatrick's and Herschdorfer's celebration of Opton's portraits as they invite viewers to examine their own beliefs in relationship to cultural beliefs around war and representations of war. In part, this is due to the way Opton's series navigate between the genres of portraiture, war and documentary photography, and conceptual art. Yet, Opton's statements suggest a more limited understanding of the relationship she intends viewers to have with the soldiers and Iraqis as they negate some of the challenges to stereotype that her unexpected aesthetic approaches offer. The "tact" of her process, as suggested by Herschdorfer, means that the photographer does not exhibit atrocity outright. Such tact makes her images recall invisibility of casualties from the Bush-era bans on images of casualties, though the interviews with *Citizen* help the latter series resist some of the erasure of the photographed subjects' specific experiences.[80]

As a project that does not erase bodily violence, such as the erasures that happened during the Bush-era ban and in Opton's use of unmarked faces, Nina Berman's more recent *Marine Wedding* (2006) provides a useful comparison from the Iraq War. The documentary series about twenty-four year old Iraqi veteran and Marine Sergeant Tyler "Ty" Ziegel further highlights some of the questions I have raised about the way Opton's photographs engage the issue of what constitutes "appropriate" visual tropes and how a project can appeal to various, even conflicting, sentiments especially once

[80] Opton also interviewed the veterans that she photographed for *Many Wars*. The interviews are published with the photographs in Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011). Viewers could also listen to the interviews as audio guides when the series was installed in at the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, VA (19 September to 30 December 2012). Military personnel and veterans from the region read the interviews for these audio recordings; viewers did not hear the voice of the veteran represented in the photograph.

contextualized among additional images and texts. As a more conventional documentary project, *Marine Wedding* depicts the impact of war on the personal relationships and daily rituals of American citizens, an intention that Opton suggested led her to include loved ones with some of the soldiers she photographed. During his second tour in Iraq, a suicide car bomb shattered Ziegel's skull and caused brain damage, partial blindness, and severe deformations. The marine's extreme injuries and burns necessitated dozens of reconstructive surgeries and took a large portion of his left arm and right fingers. On assignment for the magazine *People*, Berman photographed the sergeant numerous times including during the days surrounding his October 7, 2006, wedding to his twenty-one year old bride, Renee Kline. Berman photographed Ty doing simple tasks like pouring a bowl of cereal, driving, sitting at the bar, and walking through a candy store, as well as more singular events like dancing with Renee at their wedding.

Marine Wedding includes an iconic photograph from when the documentary photographer accompanied the couple, who divorced a little over a year after their nuptials, to have their studio wedding portrait taken the morning of their marriage ceremony (Fig. 2.27). In this portrait, which won Berman a World Press Photo award, the conventions of commercial wedding portraiture are glaringly apparent. Renee and Ty stand close to each other, he in his dress blues and she in her white wedding gown and veil. She holds a lush bouquet of red roses that pick up the red trim on her strapless gown as well as the red trim, patches, and ribbons on his uniform. His Purple Heart ribbon rests centered above the rest of his ribbons. Standing in front of a traditional gray-blue backdrop, this is where the conventionality of this wedding portrait ends. Ty looks at the floor in front of him while Renee looks toward the camera but with an indecipherable

expression—blank? stern? fearful? overwhelmed? Because Berman knew the sequence of events that contextualized this photograph, she even suggests that the couple was possibly tired and hungover.[81]

The media coverage of Ty and the publications of Berman's photographs framed Ty as someone with the power to persist against the numerous obstacles he faced, almost always with a sense of humor and positive attitude.[82] As such, ideals of American perseverance and familial love replaced the horrors of war suggested by his injuries. Ty "manned up" and "soldiered down"; he became a model example of individual determination in spite of terrible odds. The narrative of his recovery includes his supportive family members and loving fiancée, who also had to overcome the impact of Ty's injuries on their own lives, similar to the people photographed holding Opton's soldiers and citizens. The tagline in *People* describes, "Marine Sgt. Ty Ziegel & Renee Kline Had Vowed to Make a Life Together. Then a Suicide Bomber in Iraq Shattered Ty's Body—And Put Their Bond to the Ultimate Test."[83] After Ty went abroad to protect the nation and was injured, Renee completed numerous tasks of caregiving including "dressing changes, feeding, [and] personal hygiene" during Ty's nineteen-month recovery.[84] Because the couple was engaged before Ty's serious injuries, stayed together through his long treatment, and still decided to still marry, the couple's home

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[81] Lindsay Beyerstein, "The Face of War," *Salon* (10 March 2007), available at http://www.salon.com/2007/03/10/berman_photo/ (accessed 9 February 2013).
[82] Ty would visit other soldiers in the hospital to help them in their recovery and was known for his sense of humor. See Linda Kramer and Richard Jerome, "Coming Home: A Love Story," *People* 66, No. 20 (13 November 2006): 110; and Laura Nightengale, "Hundreds Pay Final Respects to Iraq War Victim Veteran Tyler Ziegel," *Peoria Star* (30 December 2012), available at http://www.pjstar.com/news/x459330231/Hundreds-pay-final-respects-to-Iraq-War-veteran-Tyler-Ziegel (accessed 26 January 2013).
[83] Kramer and Jerome: 104.
[84] Kramer and Jerome: 106.

state of Illinois even claimed the day as a state holiday around the phrase "Love conquers all."

But when confronted with a ritualized event like having a studio portrait taken, the couple's appearance—Ty's disfigurement and Renee's indecipherable expression—suggest the disruption of everyday life by war even once soldiers leave the warzone. The war fragmented Ty, a person imagined as the ultimate citizen because he sacrificed his well-being for that of the nation, as it did many soldiers who return from contemporary military campaigns alive but physically or psychologically injured. This becomes particularly apparent due to the way Ty's scars disrupt conventions of wedding portraiture and the unexpected expression that Renee wears. Though Berman does not photograph the events of the actual war, her images show the aftermath as the war continues to disrupt Ty's everyday experience and the impact his injuries have on his loved ones. Even with so many contextual details, unlike Opton's series, there are still many possible ways for viewers to interpret the images—such as a patriotic sense of heroism and perseverance or as a critique of the U.S. government's failure to protect its soldiers in the Middle East.

Berman exhibited her series in the 2010 Whitney Biennial, even though documentary photographs are not often displayed in this type of "art" exhibition. The inclusion of her series signals two potential developments in the visual arts around the time of the 2010 exhibition—first, a further blurring of categories between media such as documentary photography and art, as more and more "art galleries" exhibit documentary photographs, and, second, an interest in realism in the visual arts. For example, in his review of the biennial, Christian Viveros-Faune laments some of the more "academic"

artwork as yawn-inducing but celebrates the "new realists," including Berman. He writes, "The new realists at the 2010 Whitney Biennial may not yet be tearing down the Berlin Wall of postmodern influence in contemporary art, but it is a sound bitchslap of a beginning."[85] While photography has always had the potential to create affective connections between the viewer and photographed subjects, the move away from more postmodern "academic" work toward "realism" suggests a possible return to emphasizing the sentimental connections felt between viewers and Cameron's and Eakins' portraits, as the renewed interest in realism's affectivity, more than its role as evidence, helps to explain the rare inclusion of Berman's series in the Whitney Biennial.[86] Affectivity is not new, as evidenced by the nineteenth-century examples that I outlined earlier, but it does provide a context for the appeal of the sentimentalism of Opton's contemporary project.

Berman's photographs of Ziegel did not just provide evidence of his life after his injuries. They appealed to viewers' emotions by confronting cultural expectations of conventional visual tropes, such as the way his injuries disrupted his wedding portrait and

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[85] Christian Viveros-Faune, "Welcome to the Mixed-Up, Dialed-Down 2010 Whitney Biennial," *The Village Voice* (2 March 2010), available at http://www.villagevoice.com/2010-03-02/art/welcome-to-the-mixed-up-dialed-down-2010-whitney-biennial/ (accessed 25 September 2012).

[86] Roland Barthes describes photography as a producer of both evidence and affective or emotional responses. For instance, he famously outlined the *studium* and the *punctum* of photography. The former was the more objective visual record keeper while the latter was the unexplainable way that certain photographs could prick individual viewers. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday, 1981).

Regarding the recent interest in the affectivity of photography and the possibility that contemporary photographs function differently than postmodern photographs, David Bate describes, "[P]ostmodern culture was leaving behind 'reality' proper for a mediatized world. That is to say, postmodern culture was characterized as an environment of frenzied inter-textual reference, now epitomised (*sic*) by the *www*, where you can spend days without ever returning to where you started. Where what you experience and see reported there are things that can be as real or as meaningful as you choose (or not) to believe. Whether or not such claims were exaggerated have never been resolved, since the argument over them has long since disappeared along with the notion of postmodernism itself (and optimism about cyberculture)." With the additional complications of digital technology to postmodern ideals of representation, according to Bate, "The turn in contemporary culture away from postmodernism is towards representational rules of certainty and a newer kind of 'neo-realism.'" See David Bate, "After Postmodernism?" *Lens Culture*, available at http://www.lenscultures.com/bate1.html (accessed December 8, 2009). Also see T.J. Demos, "Introduction: The Ends of Photography," *Vitamin Ph* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2006), 6-10.

the heroic appearance of soldiers. Yet the text around Berman's photographs transformed the difficulty of the series to a message that supported U.S. ideals of strength and perseverance. For all of the representations of the Ziegels' strength to overcome the physical and emotional challenges of Ty's injuries, his symbolic role as an exemplary citizen proved to be not enough to fully displace the convention of military strength; newspapers, including his local *The Peoria Star*, used Ziegel's official military portrait as the cover photograph in the announcement of his very sudden December 26, 2012, death and subsequent funeral even through there were plenty of more recent images of a scarred Ziegel published in the media. The media coverage of Ziegel's recovery from 2006 to 2012 suggested that though his injuries knocked him down, his individual sense of perseverance and endurance provided him the strength to get back up, of course supported by a loving family. When he failed to overcome his unexpected fall on a patch of ice late one night, the published announcements of his death stood him back up in public memory by reproducing his soldier portrait (Fig. 2.28).[87] As a representational trope with a long history, stories of his model perseverance and the iconic role of the soldier as the ultimate U.S. citizen replaced the critical questions raised by the representations of his injuries. But Berman provides an abundance of visual clues for viewers to interpret, unlike Opton who limited viewers to attempt to read the interiority of her photographed subjects.[88]

Opton's portraits of soldiers do not give the amount of context about the soldiers that Berman provided by photographing Ziegel over a number of days in his daily

[87] His autopsy found he had an enlarged heart, but at the time of writing this, his exact cause of death remains undetermined.

[88] In Berman's series, it is Renee's vague expression that invites viewers to attempt the impossibility of understanding her interiority from the still image.

activities. Because Opton only provides minimal information about the soldiers and Iraqi refugees along with their tightly framed portraits, the images leave viewers to fill in the meaning of such expressions from their own point of view. She appeals to portraiture's long-established convention of attempting to represent a person beyond their surface appearance, as illustrated by Julia Margaret Cameron's and Thomas Eakins' portraits. The impossibility of being able to know what a person is like or has experienced just from their appearance means that Opton's text becomes the authoritative framing of the portraits. From the series' titles, we may assume that we can find evidence in the terrain of the soldiers' and citizens' faces that match our interpretation. The text that Opton provides serves to lead our interpretation of what we see and then what we assume that what we are able to see helps to construct our understanding of the text. Of course, it is impossible to know a subject's interiority from their appearance, yet such impossibility does provide a moment to reflect on the construction of the nation as the ideal family to which "we" belong and how "we" relate to "them."

Even though working with the topic of war photography, Opton seems to avoid Sekula's critique of documentary photography's "pressure to grab at all costs the one defining image of dramatic violence" by working in series and showing portraits rather than the action. But she suggests the defining image of the Pieta through her descriptions of the humanized soldiers and citizens. The potential critiques of war suggested by the soldiers' vulnerable pose and the Iraqis' position upside-down are replaced by the iconic image of a loving mother holding her sacrificial son. She suggests viewers are supposed to want to hold the vulnerable soldiers. Because *Citizen* grew out of *Soldier*, and because she still works from a mother's point of view to appeal to the sentimental bonds

associated with families, the Iraqi refugees also become the anguished subject to be held. This actually serves to replicate the "false proximity" that T.J. Demos critiques about humanistic documentary photography.

Time will tell how the soldiers Opton photographed will return to civilian life, or if the refugees she photographed in Jordan will return home and practice their citizenship by using their purple ink stained fingers to vote. For now, Opton has began non-military focused projects to move away from the difficult content of her war portraits. As a 2012 resident of the Dora Maar House in Ménerbes, France, Opton created still lives, portraits of farmers and singers, and what she describes as an investigation of empty gestures. And for two summers, she has traveled to India for a series about the modernization of the medical field and the repeated gestures of the employees who work in the factory.[89] Her new work may mark a departure in content, but it seems that she will continue to be influenced by performance in her attempt to create portraits that are not "simple."

[89] Suzanne Opton, phone interview with author, 27 August 2012.

CHAPTER 3

"THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD": GREGORY CREWDSON'S CINEMATIC SUBURBS

She had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness, as vast, as intricate, and shadowy as the untamed forest, amid the gloom of which they were now holding a colloquy that was to decide their fate. Her intellect and heart had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods.
—Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

Looking through windows and doors, interior scenes are created in which anterior rooms display themselves as other places where something significant, some highly charged psychologically traumatic event, might have happened or might be about to happen.
—David Green and Joanna Lowry, "Photography, cinema and medium as social practice"

From the late 1980s until recently, Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962) worked with a large team on sound stages and on location in New England to create hyperreal photographs of middle class suburban and small-town America that seem strange.[1] His series of suburban tableaux include *Twilight* (1998-2002), *Dream House* (2002), and *Beneath the Roses* (2003-2007). While he oversaw all aspects of the creation of his images, including the use of lighting and staging techniques found in cinematic productions, he did not feel the need to take the photographs. Instead, he left this task to his Director of Photography and Camera Operator because, as he explains, "I'm most concerned with an image that's in my mind….[B]y the time we're out on location, I have an idea of where the frame is, where the person's going to be, where the sort-of narrative event is…[O]nce I frame the camera, then I much prefer to have a direct relationship with what's in front of me because it's very much about that—it's about that sense of

[1] Throughout this chapter, I am aware that I oversimplify and collapse small towns and suburbs into an oppositional place versus cities, but for the purposes of talking about the suburbs as imagined in Crewdson's images, this formulation adheres to the understanding of the suburbs referenced most often in interpretations of Crewdson's series. For a critique of setting the suburbs in binary opposition to the city, see James L. Wunsch's review essay "The Suburban Cliche [sic]," *Journal of Social History* 28, No. 3 (Summer 1995): 643-658.

transformation…[and] trying to find the perfect moment in the world and then translate it onto film."[2] The artist cites an interest in the strange that underlies the mundane as the impetus for his single-frame narratives. By inducing tension based on the oppositions of "ordinary life" and something more sinister, fact and fiction, known and unknown, possibility and impossibility, alienation and belonging, as well as intimacy and detachment, Crewdson describes, "My own work comes back again and again to the American Dream and its darker inverse."[3]

Over the past two decades, Crewdson's series have garnered a lot of celebratory attention. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) have all collected his work, while the "blue chip" galleries Gagosian in New York City and White Cube in London represent the artist. The Kulturhuset in Stockholm, Sweden, first displayed Crewdson's 2011 retrospective, *In a Lonely Place*, which traveled internationally to spaces including C/O Berlin—International Forum for Visual Dialogues, The National Museum of Photography in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the Centre for Contemporary Photography in Fitzroy, Australia, a suburb of Melbourne. Furthermore, the photographer has taught in the Yale University School of Art since 1993 and has greatly impacted the contemporary genre of staged, narrative photographs to the point that his followers (students)—including Anna Gaskell, Justine Kurland, and Katy Grannan—are referred to colloquially as the "Yale (or Crewdson) School of Photography."

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[2] Gregory Crewdson, "In A Lonely Place," interview by Estelle Af Malmborg, available at http://vimeo.com/49665029 (accessed 1 October 2012). Published in conjunction with the exhibition *In a Lonely Place*, The National Museum of Photography, Denmark, 23 September 2011 to 28 January 2012.

[3] Gregory Crewdson, "In a Lonely Place," *Aperture* 190 (Spring 2008): 85.

Popular publications, including *Time* and the *New York Times Magazine*, have published articles and interviews about Crewdson's artwork. Additionally, his images have circulated widely in popular sources. For example, he created his series *Dream House*—twelve images of well-known celebrities including Philip Seymour Hoffman, William H. Macy, Julianne Moore, and Gwenyth Paltrow—specifically for publication in the November 10, 2002, *New York Times Magazine*. And in 2001, he photographed the cast of HBO's *Six Feet Under* for an ad campaign and the cover image of the show's third season product packaging.

Yet for all of this commercial success, I find an extreme lack of critical analysis or engagement with Crewdson's work. Despite, or perhaps because of, his presence in popular media, to date only one peer-reviewed article focuses solely on his imagery. In this article, "Photography, cinema and medium as social practice," David Green and Joanna Lowry analyze Crewdson's working process.[4] Additionally, the numerous books dedicated exclusively to his art—*In a Lonely Place* (2011), *Sanctuary* (2010), *Beneath the Roses* (2008), *Dream House* (2008), *Fireflies* (2007), *Twilight* (2002), *Hover* (1998), and *Dream of Life* (1998)—simply catalog his images without more critical analysis about how his images function in contemporary culture. As I will argue, this lack of discussion is problematic because of the ways that his photographs actually reinstate dominant norms regarding identity in the United States. Failing to consider these norms allows them to continue to serve as ideals.

When Crewdson discusses his suburban tableaux, he highlights the way his photographs evoke a sense of unease as the "uncanny." In 1919, Sigmund Freud

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[4] See David Green and Joanna Lowry, "Photography, cinema and medium as social practice," *Visual Studies* 24, no. 2 (September 2009): 132-142. I will discuss this article later in this chapter.

conducted an "aesthetic investigation" about the uncanny and defined the term as the juxtaposition of "what was once well known and had long been familiar" with the strange—a juxtaposition that results in feelings of fear or dread.[5] To explain the semantic construction of the uncanny, Freud analyzes the words *heimlich*, the homely or familiar, and the *unheimlich*, the unhomely or uncanny, or in other words, the familiar and the strange. He shows that the meaning of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* collapsed over time so that the uncanny became an effect of both experiences. Freud then connects uncanniness to deep-rooted, psychoanalytical content as he concludes, "[T]he uncanny element we know from experience arises either when repressed childhood complexes are revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs that have been *surmounted* appear to be once again confirmed."[6]

Crewdson stated that Freud's essay directly influenced his work.[7] Further, the photographer's interest in the strange underlying the mundane stems from his father's career as a psychoanalyst who met with patients in the basement of the family's Park Slope, Brooklyn home. Crewdson thus imagines that he could hear his father's

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[5] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *The Uncanny* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 124.
[6] Freud, "Uncanny," 155. Emphasis is Freud's.
[7] Critics often repeat Crewdson's use of the "uncanny" in describing his series. For instance, *The Observer* art critic Laura Cumming writes that Crewdson's single frames cause imaginary movies to "spool through his mind" and he hopes they "will end up unfurling in yours—tales of the unnatural and uncanny." Laura Cumming, "Hitchcock Meets Hopper," *The Observer* (17 April 2005), available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/apr/17/art1 (accessed 5 July 2011). And in the introduction to *Twilight*, American author Rick Moody cites Freud to describe the uncanny experience of Crewdson's images as "*something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light*." Rick Moody, "On Gregory Crewdson," in Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Abrams, 2002), 6. Emphasis is Moody's. Although he cites Freud, Moody's use of "uncanny" aligns with Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's description of the uncanny more closely. Schelling describes the uncanny as "everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open." Quoted in Freud, "Uncanny," 132. Moody uses Schelling's description of the uncanny because it supports his metaphorical use of light throughout the introduction of *Twilight*. He makes use of various qualities of light—dawn, warm first light of day, the light of midday, magic hour, and twilight—in order to join portions of Crewdson's biography to the photographer's emphasis on light and the title of this series. For additional descriptions of Crewdson's work as "uncanny," see: Gregory Crewdson, interview in *Blindspot*, quoted in Collier Schorr, "Close Encounters," *Frieze* 21 (March-April 1995), available at http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/close_encounters (accessed 7 December 2009); and Peter Hall, "Gardening at Night," *Print* (July/August 2003): 45.

professional sessions through the floorboards in the family's living room.[8] The photographer intended to follow in his father's career footsteps, but claims that an undiagnosed case of dyslexia made academia, such as taking exams, too challenging. In his first introductory photography course, he found that the type of order found within still frames made sense to him in ways that other forms of thinking did not.[9] Thus, he uses his childhood experience of listening through the floorboards of his family's home as a metaphor for his photographic practices and his interest in the uncanny "collision between the familiar and the strange."[10] The strange suburban narratives in Crewdson's work show a man as he saws holes into the floor of his living room (*Twilight*, "Plate 7," Fig. 3.1), another man climbs a stalk of flowers under the cover of night (*Twilight*, "Plate 13," Fig. 3.2), and a woman sits up in bed to look at a swarm of butterflies above her head as her male partner continues to sleep (*Twilight*, "Plate 22," Fig. 3.3).[11] Many unusual light sources further transform the mundane into the strange, such as the unexplained cones of illumination that shine into the frame from above in plates 4, 5, and 40 of *Twilight* and plate 14 of *Beneath the Roses* (Fig. 3.4). But I find that by creating "strangeness," Crewdson's images suggest a threat to the nostalgically idealized place of the suburbs represented in the photographs. This would seem to challenge the

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[8] Richard Dyer, "Close Encounters: Gregory Crewdson and the Suburban Uncanny," *PLUK: Photography in London, the UK, and Europe* (May/June 2005): 27-28; Moody, "On Gregory Crewdson," 6; Gregory Crewdson, "Interview with Gregory Crewdson: Outtakes from Close Up: Photographers at Work," Ovation Video, available at http://community.ovationtv.com/_ Interview-With-GregoryCrewdson/video/178577/16878.html (accessed 4 October 2011); and Gregory Crewdson, "In A Lonely Place," interview.

[9] Crewdson, "In A Lonely Place," interview.

[10] Crewdson, "Outtakes," interview.

[11] In order to keep the meaning of the photographic narratives more open for viewers, Crewdson refers to all of his images as "Untitled," though parenthetical descriptions often follow "Untitled" in order to distinguish the frames from each other. Typically, I have found these parenthetical descriptions when a print is published in an article or as part of a museum collection, but these parenthetical descriptions are not listed in the books *Twilight* or *Beneath the Roses*. Therefore, I have only located some of these descriptions, and, thus, I use the plate numbers as they appear in *Twilight* and *Beneath the Roses* to distinguish between images. When the images are reproduced in other texts, their plate numbers change depending on their placement in each book.

ahistorically constructed suburbs of nostalgia, but as I will show, his directorial choices about the *mise-en-scène* of his photographs and the way he describes them reinstate a number of dominant cultural norms.

Part of the sensorial experience of viewing Crewdson's suburban scenes is due to the affective collapse of the time and space in the photographs with the time and space of the viewer. In other words, viewers can have "real" experiences from the photographs even through the images are representations and not "reality."[12] For instance, in "Plate 22" from *Twilight*, a woman sits upright in a slightly disheveled bed as a man sleeps next to her (Fig. 3.3). Typical bedroom items, including reading material, eyeglasses, and face cream, sit on nightstands near the couple. Warm orange light highlights the woman and contrasts the cool blue tones of the night outside. She gazes up toward seven pale purple butterflies that float above her head. The butterflies can be difficult to see due to their scale and the way their coloring blends into the similarly colored shadows on the patterned wallpaper of the room. The way we may struggle to see the insects, and the time it takes to notice them, parallel how the woman would struggle to make out the forms flying above her at night, thus connecting our experience of the image to the narrative within the frame. The extreme amount of detail requires time to decipher and as we keep looking, we continuously notice additional elements. We become voyeurs by looking into the private, domestic spaces of Crewdson's world.

While I do not deny that Crewdson juxtaposes both familiar and strange elements, I do think his photographs need more in depth analysis that would situate them in the

[12] For a discussion about viewing photographs affectively, see Sarah Bassnett, "Archive and Affect in Contemporary Photography," *Photography & Culture* 2, No. 3 (November 2009): 241-252. For a discussion about affect and art, see Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

culturally and historically specific moments of their making and reception and of the postwar period he tacitly references. Borrowing the term "*mise-en-scène*" from film studies to signify what is in front of the camera—the actors, staging, costumes, props, lighting, and setting—I will examine the selection and placement of Crewdson's models, costuming, props, and the suburban settings in Crewdson's representations of the inverse of the American Dream. I do so in order to be more critical than the frequent superficial references to the affect of his images. Artists and critics tend to repeat certain claims that limit the descriptive approaches to a body of work. The oft-repeated explanations of Crewdson's photographs claim that his images create a sense of unease, such as that of uncanniness, due to the strange threats against suburban ideals. These include the alien lighting, mysterious actions of the characters, and hyperreal amount of details within the scenes. In a *New York Times* review of a 2008 exhibition, Benjamin Genocchio states, "[T]he vision of suburbia as a place of community, new beginnings, friendship, safety and the good life was just that—a vision.… Rather than depicting suburbia as a place of expectation, [Crewdson's] photographs show the suburbs as a shadowy world where strange and even surreal things happen; in one image showing here, a middle-aged man watches absently as clouds of smoke billow from a backyard shed. You sense that some dark truth lies below the scene's otherwise calm surface."[13] In this typical description of Crewdson's photographs, Genocchio does not identify the man beyond his middle age, and the "darkness" in suburbia is only hinted at as something "below the scene's otherwise calm surface." Though Crewdson began photographing suburban tableaux in the late 1980s, Peter Hall similarly describes the unknown invading suburbia when he

[13] Benjamin Genocchio, "The Soul of Suburbia, Captured on Film," *New York Times*, 13 Jan 2008, available at http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/start.do?prodId=AONE&userGroupName= albu78484 (accessed 3 Nov 2009).

writes, "Crewdson has nailed a particularly American, post-9/11 sense that ordinary life is no longer the same. *The everyday is under threat*."[14] But what, or who, threatens the idealized normative subjects in their suburban and often domestic environments? What marks such invaders as "strange" to the "familiarity" that cultural beliefs deem as normal? What implications do Crewdson's photographs suggest in terms of the hierarchical relationships in contemporary U.S. society based on processes of identification? And what does it mean when restrictive social norms are transformed into sensations or feelings rather than historically grounded social divisions? If Opton's *Soldier* and *Citizen*, both series of close up portraits of people wearing ambiguous expressions, worked to imagine and order the (domestic) nation in relation to the foreign amid processes of Empire, Crewdson's tableaux construct difference between the people who seem to "belong" in the ideal space of the suburbs and those who do not. Whereas Opton worked with what A.D. Coleman described as the "directorial mode" by directing her subjects to pose in a certain way, Crewdson's role as an auteur who oversaw every aspect of his imagery positions him in a similar relationship to his photographic subjects.[15] Both photographers create the situations that they photograph and, thus, seem to become the authority on the meaning of the ambiguity of their series. Yet once we get past this assumed authority and the oft-repeated descriptions of their imagery, much

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[14] This post-911 threat is in reference to the 2002 images of *Dream House*. See Peter Hall, "Gardening at Night," *Print* (July / August 2003), 43. Emphasis is mine. The byline to this article's title reads, "Gregory Crewdson's eerie, staged photographs hint at the mystery and tension beneath the surface of middle-class America."

[15] See A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition." In *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 480-491; and "The Image in Question: Further Notes on the Directorial Mode," in *Depth of Field: Essays on Photography, Mass Media, and Lens Culture* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 53-61.

remains to analyze about the role their series serves in the construction and reconstruction of normative beliefs in contemporary U.S. culture.

I could have selected a number of visual texts to analyze the invisibility of normativity, but I find that Crewdson's fame and influence on the trajectory of the photographic medium warrants further analysis. Much ink has been spent to discuss his photographs, but what frequently remains lacking in descriptions of Crewdson's series are critical analyses about how or why his photographs of suburbia result in uneasy sensations with regards to the people and places he photographs. Although critics note how Crewdson's work activates a sense of the uncanny, they often merely detail his working process and/or stress its affectivity to the detriment of further critical analysis of what the uncanniness of his work and its clear appeal to critics and museum-goers tell us about contemporary U.S. culture. The affect of his photographs overtakes the politics of his images, even if the photographer does not intend for his images to communicate more political meanings. The lack of discussion about the way his project relies on and replicates such norms is a symptom of larger culture and "cognizance" regarding the ideals of normativity.[16] Part of the solution is to analyze what frequently remains unmentioned about Crewdson's photographs and other visual representations within the larger field of art history.

Richard Dyer's *White* influences much of my analysis. He argues, "We may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity without (white) hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to—but we aren't there yet, and we won't get there until we see

[16] See the Introduction to this project for a discussion about "cognizance" as the understanding "the importance of recognizing *difference* but with difference understood in historical, political, social, or cultural terms rather than essentialist ones." Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 157.

whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule. This is why studying whiteness matters."[17] In order to engage ideas of whiteness, Dyer discusses this position as an imagined, disembodied ideal. As such, it operates as a floating position that can be applied or denied to varying bodies based on the politics of specific situations. Throughout his study, he recognizes the embodiment of whiteness in both physical bodies as well as in signs that symbolize this position. Following Dyer's study, I will analyze the whiteness of Crewdson's photographs in the bodies of his models and the symbolic function of additional elements found in his use of *mise-en-scène*. I do so to challenge the invisibility of normativity as I seek to "mark" the ideal. Furthermore, because processes of identification do not function autonomously, I will engage with Crewdson's construction of whiteness along with his constructions of gender, sexuality, class, and place.

Whereas Suzanne Opton's series *Soldier* and *Citizen* helped to construct ideals of domesticity in terms of both the binary understanding of the gendered separate spheres in her construction of the vulnerable soldiers and the tender motherly position of viewers/the artist, as well as the United States as represented by the soldiers she photographed in opposition to the foreign Iraqis, Crewdson's suburban tableaux situate the idealized place of the suburbs as threated by outside or foreign entities. As such, his series recalls the beliefs that American Studies scholar George Lipsitz describes as the "white spatial imaginary," or the connection between the privilege white people hold in contemporary U.S. society—along with the feared loss of such privilege—and the place of the suburbs. For Lipsitz, the white spatial imaginary "structures feelings as well as social institutions," and he explains, "The suburb is not only an engine of self-interest,

[17] Dyer, *White*, 4.

but also a place that has come to be imbued with a particular moral value consistent with deeply rooted historical ideals and illusions."[18] Thus, particular people are associated with particular places and the morality, or imagined ideal, that does or does not accompany each place. By appealing to the white spatial imaginary, cultural elites employ ideological beliefs to maintain systems of differentiation for their gain. As Lipsitz details:

> Moral panics about affirmative action, immigration, inner-city drug use, and nonnormative sexuality divert attention away from the progressively declining economic status of ordinary citizens, from the radical redistribution of wealth upward that three decades of neoliberal and neoconservative policies have produced. Thus racism takes place in the United States not because of the irredeemably racist character of whites as individuals, but because the racial project of whiteness is so useful to elites as a mechanism for preserving hierarchy, exploitation, and inequality in society at large. Poor whites with compelling grievances against class exploitation can be mobilized to support their white skin privilege instead of advancing their class interests.[19]

Even though Lipsitz is most interested in the connection between racism and place, with place understood as the physical realities of social organization and the affective beliefs—such as "moral panics"—associated with particular locations, his description makes clear how racism and place intersect with other systems of differentiation, such as sexuality, gender, and particularly class. In his analysis, the construction of racism is not just individuals discriminating against each other based on signs of difference. Instead, the racism of social organization—such as the historical denial of mortgages to black Americans, the continued segregation of neighborhoods and the lack infrastructure where people of color live, and uneven tax policies toward inheritance that keep wealth in white families—continues to privilege whites in terms of access to more upper class experiences. And when white Americans are poor, they still believe in their right and

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[18] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011), 29.
[19] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 42-43.

potential to gain wealth. Thus their affective identification with upper class whites further constructs difference, because they believe themselves to be like their white upper class compatriots and unlike the people of color associated with lower classes. Crewdson unintentionally defaults to such normative assumptions about difference, as described by Lipsitz, in order to make the familiar space of the suburbs strange, thus replicating and confirming contemporary prejudices regarding race, gender, sexuality, class, and place in the United States.

CONSTRUCTING SUBURBIA

To create his uncanny suburban tableaux, Gregory Crewdson oversaw a large crew on location and in sound stages. "Plate 19" from *Twilight*, which is sometimes referred to as "Ophelia," is an example of an image that the photographer composed on a sound stage (Fig. 3.5). A very pale white woman, who wears a white nightgown and has a slight blue tint to her skin, floats in the flooded living room of a middle-class house. Portraits line the wall of the stairway that leads to a second floor, and the stair banister continues past a bookshelf topped with additional portraits and a wedding photo. Although she is alone in the photograph, the photographic portraits in the scene suggest that Ophelia is a member of a family. Ophelia's dark pink robe hangs folded over a rung of the banister, while sunlight highlights her slippers sitting on the stairway. On the coffee table, the book *Inner Harbor* (1999)—a romance novel "full of heartwarming familial moments, tender romance, and a touch of tension" by best-selling author Nora Roberts—rests on top of a library book and beside a decorative glass object, an ashtray,

and a bottle of pills.[20]

Seen together, the pills on the table and the floating dead woman connote the suicide of William Shakespeare's character Ophelia from *Hamlet* (c. 1600). Crewdson borrowed his composition from the well-known painting *Ophelia* (1851-1852) by the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais (Fig. 3.6).[21] In *Hamlet*, Queen Gertrude recounts that Ophelia went to the river and grabbed onto the bough of a tree. The bough broke, sending her into the "weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide; / And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:… / but long it could not be / Till that er garments, heavy with their drink / Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death."[22] Due to Ophelia's previous experiences in the story—her romantic relationship with Hamlet ended and then Hamlet killed her father—readers of *Hamlet* understand that although, according to Queen Gertrude's account, Ophelia seems to have fallen into the river on accident, the young maiden killed herself. In Crewdson's middle-class American version, the moment of Ophelia floating in a domestic space provides a more perplexing scene for viewers when compared to Millais' painted moment that more closely illustrates Shakespeare's text. The photographer leaves us to speculate what caused this house to flood, why this woman killed herself, and the meaning of drowning in one's own home. Looking at this image today—years after its fabrication—brings to mind the devastating floods of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. It also conjures being "underwater" in a

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[20] This description of Roberts' novel is from a review of the book on Amazon.com. See Amazon.com, "Inner Harbor (The Chesapeake Bay Saga, Book 3)," available at http://www.amazon.com/Inner-Harbor-Chesapeake-Saga-Book/dp/0515124214 (accessed 29 July 11).

[21] Johanna Drucker noted the connection between Crewdson's and Millais' pieces. Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3. I will discuss her analysis of the piece in a moment. Peter Hall notes the same connection in his earlier article "Gardening at Night," *Print* (July/August 2003): 45.

[22] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Project Gutenberg, etext prepared by Dianne Bean (November 1998), available at http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1446010&pageno=106 (accessed 11 October 2012).

home mortgage—having a higher balance than the market value of the home—due to the 2008 "subprime crisis."[23] And it highlights the stifling atmosphere of small town life often represented in melodramas.[24]

Joanna Drucker addresses Crewdson's representation of Ophelia to note that the photographer uses formulaic technical sensibilities and repeats long established tropes toward the creation of very consumable images. For Drucker, Crewdson's image of the beautiful and dead Ophelia aligns "with mass culture values—the exploitative voyeurism, the fakery, the sensationalism of a perhaps dead young female displayed for our prurient delectation. We can even imagine that Crewdson's interior life has been colonized by the schlock-in-trade of the cultural mainstream, the stuff of daily dreams and marketed illusions packaged for consumption sources."[25] Drucker explains how the photographer draws from a variety of visual sources to create his compositions, such as his reference to Millais' painting. While critical possibilities arise from the self-reflexive recreation of previous images—such as Douglas Crimp argued with regards to the postmodern artists of the Pictures Generation—Drucker denies that Crewdson works toward any attempt to

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[23] For a collection of critical essays regarding the "subprime crisis," see Paula Chakravartly and Denise Ferreira da Salva, ed., *American Quarterly* 64, No. 3, Special Issue: Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime (September 2012). *American Quarterly* editor Sarah Banet-Weiser prefaces that this collection of essays is a "necessary intervention in the *midst* of crisis, a recognition of the historical legacies that envelop and frame the 2008 global economic crisis, as well as a call to critically acknowledge the varied spaces and homes worldwide that this latest crisis has shaped, destroyed, or irrevocably changed" (v).

[24] David Green and Johanna Lowry describe melodrama in relation to Crewdson's settings and explain, "Small-town America quickly established itself as a dominant site for the playing out of the genre of melodrama. With its iconography of tightly manicured lawns surrounded by picket fences and contrived suburban interior designs, it provided just the right combination of artifice and unreality for the acute semioticisation of visual settings required by stories that focused upon tensions endemic in the nuclear family. These kinds of suburban spaces were already failed representations of themselves, the tacky architecture seeming to imply a kind of utopian vision that constantly had to keep at bay a latent malevolent paranoia." David Green and Joanna Lowry, "Photography, cinema and medium as social practice," *Visual Studies* 24, no. 2 (September 2009): 136. I will return to issues of melodrama later in this chapter.

[25] Drucker, 3.

engage issues of representation critically.[26] She claims, "His images don't have an 'agenda' in the tendentious sense. They don't create a 'to do list' of actions meant to change any particular circumstance or condition."[27] In the few opening pages to her book that Drucker spends on Crewdson, she suggests that Crewdson's images show his audience that the world that he photographs is corrupt but his images do little to change contemporary circumstances. Instead, they show his complicity with mass-culture values as he makes easy-to-consume images; based on the success he has had exhibition and publishing his work, I find he has been successful in doing so. I agree with Drucker that Crewdson does not seem to intend to engage with cultural discourse critically. He treats the suburbs and the strangeness he creates within them ahistorically and without much attention to the cultural impact of his series. Based on Crewdson's descriptions, his images seem to function as aesthetic exercises; he engages with cinematic production practices in an attempt to evoke a sense of uncanniness from viewers. But with Drucker's conclusion in mind, we can see how both the form *and content* of Crewdson's series lead to the sense of the uncanny as the uncanny, through a psychological model, privileges the individual over the social and the felt over the known.

Regarding the process used to create the form, or appearance, of his photographs, the photographer includes production stills in the back of his books to show the staging involved in his process, including the creation of Ophelia. He produced this image on a sound stage and used numerous cinematic lights to illuminate the scene. One of the

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[26] See Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (1979): 75-88, in which he begins to define the postmodern characteristics of artwork from the "Pictures Generation," and his follow-up to essay "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October* 15 (1980): 91-101. Also see the Metropolitan Museum of Art's display of the now historical period published as Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009).
[27] Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*, 5.

production stills shows the model descending the staircase. At least six crewmembers stand and watch while Crewdson surveys the stage from an elevated position on a ladder (Fig. 3.7). Another production still shows the model floating as a makeup technician crouches in the water to touch up her makeup; Crewdson presides over the crew from just beyond the edge of the set (Fig. 3.8). These production stills make apparent the way Crewdson's practices imitate staging and lighting practices in filmmaking—Crewdson will use up to fifty lights for a single scene—and his role parallels that of a film director or even an auteur whose style becomes easy to recognize across a large body of work. He does not take the photographs but instead oversees all aspects of production to arrive at his personal vision.

To further collide fact and fiction, Crewdson used actual residents as his models when he worked on location. In "Plate 10 (Beckoning Bus Driver)" of *Twilight*, a young girl stands on a sidewalk outside of a one-story, brown house (Fig. 3.9). Her blond pigtails just brush her shoulders and pale blue pajamas. She looks toward a yellow school bus parked on the other side of a worn driveway and toward a man descending the bus stairs. Wearing khaki pants and a pale blue shirt that matches the color of the young girl's pajamas, this balding man stands on the bottom step of the bus and holds a shop light in his right hand while the young girl stares at him blankly. The suburban setting, the proximity and ages of the two figures, and the light blue that links them visually imply that the two are father and daughter. A large window opens into the façade of the house and frames a blond woman and another young blond girl watching television, presumably the mother and second daughter of this ideal nuclear family of four. The mother sits on an overstuffed, blue, La-Z-Boy-style reclining chair with her daughter

slightly behind her on an overstuffed blue couch. The color of the furniture helps to connect the two people inside the home to their family members outside. The scene reads as dusk while strange light abounds in the photograph and creates a strong contrast between the warm yellows and oranges of the interior spaces versus the cool blues of outside. Behind the bus, a neighboring one-story house suggests that a similar community extends beyond the bus driver's home. The home and its contents, along with the man's employment as a bus driver, describe this family culturally as middle class. Indeed, the model family lives in the photographed house and the father actually earns a living as the bus driver for the local schools.[28] Though found in a scene where they repeat rituals of everyday life, the stillness and blank expressions of the figures, their isolation from each other, and the attention paid to the color and lighting of the scene transform it from the mundane into the strange.

In addition to using technologies and processes from cinema, Crewdson used digital technologies to juxtapose a number of elements together into each frame. Previously, I referred to Crewdson's photographs as "hyperreal" due to the extreme amount of detail present in each image. To achieve this hyperreality, he oversaw crewmembers who photographed each scene numerous times with an 8x10, large format camera. Months after a shoot, Crewdson returned to the individual shots and digitally combined multiple frames to create photographic images that appear overabundant with

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[28] Gregory Crewdson, "Watch and Listen, Artists: Gregory Crewdson, Untitled (beckoning bus driver), 2001-2002," interview by the Whitney Museum of American Art, available at http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/Artists?context_id=4138&play_id=360 (accessed 11 April 2011). The same house provides the setting for "Plate 27" of *Twilight*, but Crewdson composed this second image from the inside of the living room looking out of the window with a different model. One of the production photographs makes clear that Crewdson used the same house for the two plates. This demonstrates that even though he uses "fact" by photographing people in their homes and professions, he also creates higher level of fictions by reusing and redecorating spaces to make them seem like another place. See Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Abrams, 2002), 98.

minute details. It is not possible to create such detailed images with only one shot. Crewdson oversaw this digital combination of numerous negatives into his final compositions and also had objects removed that he deemed distracting to the composition. Annette Grant describes the type of post-production manipulation involved in creating Crewdson's pictures. In her 2004 *New York Times* article "Lights, Camera, Stand Really Still: On the Set with Gregory Crewdson," she explains that the man and woman from "Plate 7" of *Beneath the Roses* were photographed during different shoots, and:

> One central scan was used for the room and the man on the bed and another for the woman, who was dropped in. The shadows she casts had to be adjusted; a transferred figure never fits perfectly. The ceiling was altered slightly to join the wall seamlessly. Birds that once perched on the grass outside the bedroom door were deemed distracting and excised. The brand name was erased from the lotion bottle on the vanity table to make the image feel more *outside of time*. The curtain on the left was extended slightly for compositional reasons. The telephone, on a table at right, looked too prominent and was toned down. The stem of the lamp behind the phone had nearly disappeared and was highlighted. The floor had too many shadows, a result of using multiple lighting sources, so lighter carpet was morphed into some areas. The effect? To Mr. Crewdson, the difference between good and beautiful (Fig. 3.10).[29]

While the "reality" of Crewdson's scenes depends on the myth of photography as a transparent representation of the real world, he has no problem employing digital technology to achieve his version of the world through digital manipulation, thus adding to the tension between the assumed "fact" of photography and "fiction" of digital manipulation.

The use of digital manipulation adds to the uncanniness evoked by his work; viewers can "believe" the immediacy of the scenes that look photographic, but they may also recognize the hypermediated constructions due to the cinematic staging, the

[29] Grant, "Lights, Camera, Stand Really Still": 21. Emphasis is mine.

melodramatic use of color and lighting, and the hyperreal amount of detail in the images.[30] This use of medium leads back to Freud's analysis of the uncanny. The psychoanalyst describes, "[A]n uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and signification of what it symbolizes and so forth."[31] Thus, the form of Crewdson's frames—created from his directorial position—help to evoke a sense of the uncanny.

With all of the unease and tension caused by the irreconcilable contradictions in Crewdson's frames, such as butterflies fluttering above us in a bedroom, why do we want to keep looking at these images? What has made them so popular that they are even co-opted into mass culture? Winfried Fluck raises a similar question about American realist painter Edward Hopper's (1882-1967) work in his article "The Hopper Paradox" when he asks why viewers want to keep looking at Hopper's art even though it can cause us to feel uneasy. Fluck's analysis of Hopper's work is extremely applicable to Crewdson's tableaux, especially because critics note the similarities between Crewdson's and Hopper's images frequently.[32] Fluck claims that "reception aesthetics," what he describes as "the attempt to explain what constitutes aesthetic experiences," is important in

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[30] See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), which I discuss in more depth in Chapter 5 of this project. Additionally, Green and Lowry describe the use of doors and mirrors as a typical, self-reflexive motif in melodramas. Green and Lowry, 137. See the epigraph of this chapter for Crewdson's use of this motif in his photographs.

[31] Freud, "Uncanny," 150-151.

[32] For example, see Russell Banks, "Gregory Crewdson: Beneath the Roses," in Gregory Crewdson, *Beneath the Roses* (New York: Abrams, 2008), 8; Gregory Crewdson, "Q & A with Gregory Crewdson: Photographic Close Encounters of the Cinematic Kind," interview by Antonio López, SITE Santa Fe, (2001), available at http://www.sitesantafe.org/exhibitions/virtualgalleries/frcrwan/crewdsonqa.html (accessed 19 July 2011), published in conjunction with the exhibition *Gregory Crewdson*, SITE Santa Fe in collaboration with MASS MoCA, 10 February to 27 May 2001; Laura Cumming, "Hitchcock Meets Hopper," *The Observer* (17 April 2005), available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/apr/17/art1 (accessed 5 July 2011); Annette Grant, "Lights, Camera, Stand Really Still: On the Set with Gregory Crewdson," Arts and Leisure Desk, *New York Times* (30 May 2004): 20-21; and the 2007 exhibit *Drawing on Hopper: Gregory Crewdson; Edward Hopper* at the Williams College Museum of Art.

explaining the cultural significance of Hopper's artwork.[33] In contrast to the celebrations of Hopper's paintings, as evidenced by exhibitions of them in institutions of "high-art" including the Ludwig-Museum in Cologne and the Tate Gallery in London, Fluck finds that the continued fascination with Hopper's paintings is due to their "pictorial staging of a drama of subjectivity."[34] He postulates that "the popularity of Hopper's paintings and their acclaimed 'Americanness'" is because, even though they seem "[a]pparently 'simple' and easily accessible on the pictorial surface, Hopper's paintings nevertheless pose a puzzling contradiction: They are realistic but they are not mimetic. Although they are said to provide a critique of the American dream and the American way of life, they actually offer a highly stylized, theatrical version of an imaginary America. This explains the puzzling fact that, although they do not reflect American reality 'truthfully,' they nevertheless depict an America we all seem to know."[35] This account also describes Crewdson's scenes; while we understand their construction, they also suggest situations with which we are familiar. Yet, what we assume to know about the suburbs—as imagined in cultural rhetoric and Crewdson's photographs—is the idealized version of them as a site of normativity in the nation and not the actual makeup of all suburban areas.

Fluck's article proves to be useful in explaining the popularity of Crewdson's photographs, the experience of the uncanny, and the similarities between Crewdson's and Hopper's artwork, such as in Fluck's description of the "Hopper feeling" as one of alienation, lack of social relations, and desertion that is also found in Crewdson's series.

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[33] Winfried Fluck, "The Hopper Paradox," in *Romance with America: Essays on Culture, Literature, and American Studies*, ed. Laura Bieger and Johannes Voelz (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, 2009), 319.
[34] Fluck, "Hopper Paradox," 319, 326.
[35] Fluck, "Hopper Paradox," 332.

Yet, Fluck makes a clear distinction between the experience of viewing a representation and viewing an actual thing, and I take some issue with this point. He states, "A feeling of loneliness and its representation in painting are, of course, two different things, as is a shipwreck and its representation in painting."[36] Of course a shipwreck is a physical thing that is clearly different from its representation, but I argue that the affective response to a representation does not need to be so delineated from affective responses to actual objects. I am concerned with the affective reaction that is often cited when someone views Crewdson's images. Viewers experience anxiety, or the uncanny, and not because Crewdson represents anxiety in pictorial form. If anything, Hopper's and Crewdson's images do not depict anxiety as much as they depict a lack of any emotion, which thus evokes a sense of tension in viewers. For my project, I do not think that such a gulf between aesthetics and affective response is as necessary as Fluck suggests in his example of the shipwreck, though I remain aware that Crewdson's images are highly constructed representations of the suburbs and not the suburbs themselves.

Fluck's description of Hopper's images as being "realistic with out being mimetic" as they "offer a highly stylized, theatrical version of an imaginary America" could also be used to describe Crewdson's photographs. Applying this appropriate description to Crewdson's photographs shows how they provide a sense of realism in the "familiarity" of the uncanny, whether due to knowledge of similar places or the familiar myths of suburbia. But the images are also highly stylized, or "strange," as they depict unexplained events in the familiar space of the suburbs.

Suburbs developed in the United States at a particular historical and ideological moment. Since their founding in the United States in the 1800s, suburban spaces have

[36] Fluck, "Hopper Paradox," 322.

mythically symbolized the ideal space for families as a center of morality in contrast to growing industrial sites. In 1857, the development of Llewellyn Park, New Jersey, offered the middle class garden setting, picturesque, and individually-owned homes that stood removed from the city. The development of this first U.S. suburb was based on theories that extolled the benefit of nature in the wake of developing industry.[37] In the twentieth century, the idealization of the suburbs continued along with the increased availability of personal automobiles and the federal development of highways.[38] Suburban home design maintained the gendering of spaces and constructed the domestic as the space of women and children, while men left the home to work, often in the city, only to return at the end of the day to occupy *their* spaces within the domestic.[39] Legislation and practices of segregation, red-lining and covenants racialized suburban spaces and characterized neighborhoods primarily by who was allowed to live in certain areas. Furthermore during the post-World War II period, large numbers of white middle class people moved out of cities into the suburbs, a cultural process referred to as "white

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[37] Richard Guy Wilson suggests, "Idealism and social experimentation were a part of Llewellyn Park's theoretical basis" as the developers were influenced by the theories of Swedenborgianism, Fourierism, and Transcendentalism. See Richard Guy Wilson, "Idealism and the Origin of the First American Suburbs: Llewellyn Park, New Jersey," *American Art Journal* 11, No. 4 (October 1979): 87. But Wilson concludes that though these ideals were "present conceptually," they "became so diluted as to be unrecognizable." Wilson: 90.

[38] See Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[39] For a description of the democratic possibilities of suburban living due to telecommunication and the automobile, see Frank Lloyd Wright's utopic design of Broadacre City and his Usonian Houses, plans for affordable houses for middle-class home owners. See Doreen Ehrlich, *Usonian Houses* (London: PRC, 2002); Roland Reisley and John Timpane, *Usonia, New York: Building a Community with Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001); John Sergeant, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses: Designs for Moderate Cost One-Family Homes* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1984); Frank Lloyd Wright, "The New Frontier: Broadacre City," *Taliesin Fellowship Publication*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1940); and Frank Lloyd Wright, "Broadacre City: A New Community Plan," *Architectural Record* LXXVII (April 1935), reprinted in Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout, ed., *The City Reader*, 2nd Ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 344-349. Wright's homes were designed as gendered spaces. For instance for his design of the Robie House (1908-1910), he designed garments for Mrs. Robie to wear, which connected her visually to the domestic space. The plans for Wright's Usonian Homes also gendered the domestic space and assumed that the residents would have families. The plans included strategic placements of the kitchen so that the mother of the household could have visual access to her children while she worked domestically.

flight." This process helped to further construct the relational difference with the suburbs as white and urban spaces as places occupied by people of color.

As George Lipsitz has shown, even after laws were enacted to "end" segregation, such as the Fair Housing Act of 1968, inequality continues. According to Lipsitz, this was, and still is, due to factors of economics, opportunity, and the perceived threat posed by nonwhite subjects along with the investment white people had in maintaining their privilege. Lipsitz' "white spatial imaginary" emphasizes privacy and individual ownership while celebrating the suburban setting as the space of family in contrast to the urban, nonwhite space. As such, this white spatial imaginary is not democratic. Lipsitz states:

> [I]nstead of recognizing themselves accurately as recipients of collective public largesse, whites came to see themselves as individuals whose wealth grew out of their personal and individual success in acquiring property on the "free market." At the same time, whites viewed inner-city residents not as fellow citizens denied the subsidies freely offered to whites, but as people whose alleged failures to save, invest, and take care of their homes forces the government to intervene on their behalf, to build housing projects that were then ruined by alleged Black neglect. White suburbanites ignored how the artificially constricted housing market available to Blacks deflated home values, stripped homeowners of equity, reduced tax revenue for city services, created unhealthy conditions, led to overcrowding, and promoted crime. They did not acknowledge how federal funding formulas deprived housing projects of the capital reserves needed for maintenance and upkeep or how discrimination in the private sector made housing projects dwellings of last resort for the poor rather than the mixed-income communities they were initially designed to be. [40]

Lipsitz points out how continued discriminatory practices and public policy often caused urban decay and poverty, but the white spatial imaginary attributed urban decay and poverty to the negligent behavior of Black people. The prosperity of white suburbs thus signified the "moral worth" of white people. He continues, "[White people] fought to keep Black people out of their neighborhoods because they associated them with the

[40] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 27-28.

ghettos that whites created and from which they profited. Concentrated residential segregation enacted in concrete spatial form the core ideology of white supremacy—that Black people 'belonged' somewhere else."[41] Lipsitz intentionally sets a binary between white and black and acknowledges that this is a limited understanding of race, but he uses this construction because it is how race is still often imagined in contemporary U.S. culture.

As part of the white spatial imaginary, the U.S. suburbs came to connote a moral space for normative citizens as represented by white people. Just as racial difference requires the construction of one group of people against another, the ideal of the suburbs means that large cities function as foils to the suburbs or small towns. Cultural rhetoric constructs cities as the place for people of color and not families, because families frequently move to the suburbs to raise their young children.[42] Crewdson's suburban spaces reflect these mainstream assumptions about difference and place. He composes the suburbs as the moral and representative location for the larger nation. More specifically, the photographer constructs the New England suburbs as the imagined ideal

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[41] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 28. The racialized practice of "white flight" is reversing through processes of gentrification, by which wealthier (white) people move back downtown and displace less wealthy (nonwhite) residents out from redeveloped city centers, such as is happening with the redevelopment of Detroit, Michigan. Such practices do not intermingle people of different identities. Instead, such practices maintain boundaries between groups but just shift their geographical locations.

[42] The ideal that connects white, middle class, suburban families with normativity is so pervasive that, according to Hamilton Carroll, after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center, the city had to be reimagined as "an exemplary national space" rather than as the tenuous position the city holds in contrast to the imagined nation. Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity*, New Americanists, ed. Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 60. Carroll argues that the re-presentation of the city happened because the mainstream media and culture at large shifted focus from the variety of victims to the emergency response workers, but with the workers always constructed as white subjects. Thus, he states, "No longer an extranational space onto which the nation's anxieties about multiculturalism, crime, and immigration were projected, New York was reinterpreted as a blue-collar, white ethnic bastion of normative American values of home, fraternity, and patriarchy." Carroll, 61.

space of the nation, though strange things happen in this idealized place.[43] While the setting of his images references a type of site—a suburban domestic scene—the details of the space do not identify an exact location. For example, the bus in "Plate 10" of *Twilight* does not have a visible license plate or name of a school district to identify this community. At estate sales, set director Whitney Delgado "found antique wallpaper, furniture and small items used as 'character dressing' for a given story, things to give it a 'Crewdson look' of being *nowhere* in particular."[44]

Part of Crewdson's repeated use of locations in New England—often Pittsfield and North Adams, Massachusetts—is due to the personal connection he feels to this region but also the convenience that has developed over the course of photographing in the same places for decades. Growing up in Brooklyn, his family vacationed to New England, so he knew the area and says he has a "psychological" connection to the area that makes him feel comfortable. He eventually developed a working relationship with MASS MoCA and photographed on their sound stages and in the area surrounding the art museum. He has worked in the same area for twenty to twenty-five years and has a great deal of community support and backing from the Mayor's Office as well as the Police and Fire Departments.[45] Yet while his viewers may not be able to identify the exact location of his shots, the types of plant life and style of homes do exclude certain regions of the country. Because Crewdson photographs sites in New England exclusively for his

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[43] Though the artist and many critics refer to the scenes of Crewdson's photographs as suburban, many of the towns that he photographs are not exactly suburbs. They are generally small industrial towns—often in western Massachusetts—with no proximity to major cities.

[44] Annette Grant, "Lights, Camera, Stand Really Still: On the Set with Gregory Crewdson," Arts and Leisure Desk, *New York Times* (30 May 2004): 20. Emphasis is mine.

[45] Gregory Crewdson, "Process" and "Untitled (birth), sound stage," interviewed by Melissa Harris, *Aperture* 190 (Spring 2008), available at http://www.aperture.org/crewdson/ (accessed 3 October 2012). These online interviews supplement the standard paper publication of *Aperture*, which features Crewdson as the cover photographer.

series, claiming that his photographs represent the American Dream but as a "timeless anyplace" or "nowhere in particular," as he has suggested, uncritically assumes that New England serves to represent the entire United States. It treats the construction of the United States as New England without addressing that this is a myth. The nation is much more diverse than Crewdson's simplification of it would suggest—as are the towns that he photographs. Treating New England as the nation supports the ideological narrative that the nation is one only of European (white) settlers who came to the northeast and founded the nation before Providence guided them to spread west with Manifest Destiny. This myth erases the various cultures of people who were here, came here through other entries besides New England, and are still here as part of the contemporary nation.

To demonstrate the idealization of suburbia in Crewdson's photographs, it will be helpful to situate them vis-à-vis Larry Sultan's decade long series *Pictures from Home* (1992). For this series, Sultan directed his parents as he photographed them in their suburban California home. His images range from his parents engaging in mundane activities, as in *Fixing the Vacuum* (1991, Fig. 3.11), to more posed images, including *Dad on Bed* (1984, Fig. 3.12). Sultan states that the impetus for his project was because he wanted to stop time and make his parents "live forever."[46] He also wanted to "to subvert the sentimental home movies and snapshots" by showing "more contentious images of suburban daily life."[47] Thus, when strangeness arises in Sultan's photographs, it is due to the actual presence of elements in space and not due to the photographer's complete redressing of the scenes. For example, in *Practicing Golf Swing* (1986, Fig.

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[46] Martin Germann, "Windows, Curtains and Hillsides: Larry Sultan, Works 1984-2009)," in Larry Sultan, *Katherine Avenue* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2010), 9.

[47] Larry Sultan, from an interview with Sheryl Conkelton in *Flintridge Foundation Awards for Visual Arts* 1999/2000. Quoted in Museum of Contemporary Photography, "Larry Sultan," available at http://www.mocp.org/collections/permanent/sultan_larry.php (accessed 28 April 2012).

3.13), Sultan's father practices his golfing technique in the family's living room near the glowing television in the corner. Due to the lush green carpet, the space of the living room visually becomes the space of the golf course. The image suggests a sense of the strange among the familiar as elements from real life appear fantastical. In this case Sultan did not need to manipulate the scene to the extent that Crewdson did in order to create an image that oscillates between reality and fantasy. Furthermore, Sultan does not claim to represent a "timeless" space and group of people that could be "anywhere," like Crewdson suggests and which become a point to critique about his work. Instead, Sultan focuses on a specific group of people—his parents—in a specific location—their home on Katherine Avenue—at a specific time—when his father was forced into early retirement from his position as a vice president of the Schick Safety Razor Company. In contrast, the consistent erasure of historical and cultural specificity in the reception of Crewdson's imagery is, in part, what has allowed his image to garner high levels of praise without much analysis about its role in negotiating cultural norms and ideals.

SINGLE FRAME GENRE SCENES

Crewdson does not offer detailed descriptions of his intended meaning for each frame. Instead, he states that he prefers the limitations of presenting a narrative in a single frame rather than providing an extended narrative through moving-images or sequential photographs, and he cites his undiagnosed dyslexia to account for his enjoyment of the order found in a single frame.[48] In a short review in a 2008 volume of the film journal *Sight and Sound*, an unidentified author addresses Crewdson's use of single frames when he or she remarks, "Cinematic as a term is lazily applied to much

[48] Crewdson, "In A Lonely Place," interview.

large-format glossy photography today, but with Crewdson's 'single frame movies,' it's entirely appropriate."[49] As a "single frame movie," Crewdson's photograph of the aforementioned Ophelia collapses a longer narrative and condenses a variety of moments into one frame. In Crewdson's version of Ophelia's story, water rose ever so slowly and filled the home without disrupting the placement of the objects in the living room. She came down the stairs, removed her robe and placed it on the bannister, and stepped out of her slippers. The woman entered the water calmly, again without creating waves that would have disturbed the household objects, such as those sitting on the coffee table. As she floated, the water began to recede and left behind signs of its previous heights on the sofa and armchair. All the while, the warm orange glow from the home's lamps gave way to the crisper light of daylight. Minute details within Crewdson's single frame movie reference each of these moments.

Though Crewdson's working process and use of narrative draws from cinema, his compositions and the ways he employs narrative also recall the multiple narrative vignettes found in genre paintings such as William Sidney Mount's *Cider Making* (1841, Fig. 3.14). In the foreground of Mount's scene, a woman holds a straw as she waits her turn to drink from a cider barrel while a man looks up from drinking from the barrel to smile at viewers. A younger boy sits with his back against another barrel in the foreground of the scene as a dog rests at his feet. In the middle ground vignette, one man attends to the corking of a barrel, another samples the drink from a jug, and a third pushes against a pole to mill additional cider. Further back, a man raises his top hat to children riding the cider-making equipment around in a circle, men gather at a fence to look over a

[49] "Still Cinema," *Sight and Sound* 18, no. 5 (May 2008): 7, available at http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:iipa:&rft_dat=sri:iipa:article:citation:iipa00471275 (accessed 3 November 2009).

paper document, and the scene extends into the far background with people and farm animals scattered throughout the rural landscape. Likewise, Crewdson's "Plate 10 (Beckoning Bus Driver)" contains numerous vignettes. The father steps down the stairs of the brightly lit school bus. His daughter stands outside in the cool blue night, while his wife and second daughter watch television inside their home. All three groups of figures appear in separate environments from each other as the appearance of the models and the color of their costuming and settings is what links them visually.

Within genre paintings, painters attempted to use a "realist" style in order to suggest that what they depicted served as a form of visual reportage to record everyday occurrences. What this type of painting actually does is serve to construct and replicate cultural norms. Whereas Suzanne Opton attempted to evoke empathy from viewers toward the U.S. soldiers and Iraqi citizens by asserting the interiority of those people she photographed, a practice that recalls the Julia Margaret Cameron's close up and slightly blurred photographic portraits as well as Thomas Eakins' painted portrait heads, Crewdson utilizes practices from genre painting to construct his photographs. In *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Every Day Life*, Elizabeth Johns studies the prominence of genre paintings from the 1830s to the outbreak of the Civil War including Mount's *Cider Making*. She argues, "To characterize genre images as 'scenes of everyday life' not only is inadequate but obscures the social relations that underlie this type of painting."[50] Therefore, Johns studies genre paintings as "a systematic cultural phenomenon that develops in certain economic and social circumstances and meets social

[50] Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1991), xi.

needs peculiar to a specific audience."[51] They serve to reflect cultural beliefs around the time of a rapidly changing society.

Mount's painting is not merely a representation about making cider but instead was a scene addressed to an audience who needed to be reassured of their own position amid changing ideals of social organization, as evidenced by abolitionist and suffragist movements. Johns explains that cider barrels symbolized the Whig political party and this painting represents not just making cider but serves as an allegory for the presidential election of 1840. As she notes, the president of U.S. Bank Nicholas Biddle supported Whig campaigning efforts through his political and financial allies. They used their wealth to "hold parades, barbeques, and rallies, dispensing cider as well as promises of offices and other political plums to those who voted properly. The literal process of cider making, traditionally carried out in October, presented Mount the tools to make a detailed metaphorical reading of the campaign and, by implication, of the political techniques that now characterized election strategies."[52]

Crewdson developed his suburban tableaux starting in the 1990s during a cultural moment that included the nostalgic looking back to the post-World War II suburbs as an idealized time and place of "family values," a phrase introduced by U.S. Republican Vice President Dan Quayle in 1992 during a political fundraiser and then emphasized in the conservative U.S. rhetoric of Republicans. What this nostalgic looking back highlights, though, is an erasure of the role of difference at the time. One of the only scholars to note the role of identity in Crewdson's photographs is the photographer Collier Schorr as her analysis of Crewdson's scenes begins to describe the particular moment of the

[51] Johns, *Genre*, xi.
[52] Johns, *Genre*, 51.

creation of his series. But, like Crewdson, Schorr vastly oversimplifies how identification works in contemporary culture and resorts to nostalgic ideals herself.

In her article "Close Encounters," Schorr discusses Crewdson's earlier series *Natural Wonder* (1992-1997), for which the photographer created dioramas "with insects, animals and body parts in small-town settings both mundane and menacing."[53] Schorr describes, "The world that Crewdson recreates is symbolically close to the lost city of Atlantis. Not yet gone, the suburbia of the 50s, 60s, and 70s—the jewel of the white male heterosexual—is perpetually going, going. The hysteria at the root of Crewdson's work hides coyly beneath the unpopulated, miniaturized surface."[54] Schorr quotes Crewdson as saying, "[I]nstead of domesticating nature, what I want to do is make the domestic mysterious."[55] In response, Schorr emphasizes that Crewdson is a male artist to claim:

> For most men, the domestic has always been a mystery. Conventionally built and owned by men, the house, like the womb, is a part of the feminine. While women are isolated from the world, men are isolated from the home. By investing many of his pictures with a noirish suggestion of danger … he visits a male threat upon the female body. If something odious is going to occur, the Hollywood of Cronenberg, Hitchcock, Carpenter, Raimi (Crewdson's biggest influence), directs that it should be the work of men. Suddenly, Crewdson's concerns shift from ecology (Crewdson as willing victim and preservationist) to a low key misogyny (Crewdson as aggressor and preserver of the status quo).[56]

In her psychoanalytical interpretation, Schorr read Crewdson's maleness as the cause for the misogyny she finds in his series. Additionally, she states, "In real life suburbia, the new populations include African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians and homosexuals. This

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[53] White Cube, "Gregory Crewdson," available at http://www.whitecube.com/artists/crewdson/ (accessed 21 March 2010).
[54] Collier Schorr, "Close Encounters," *Frieze*, Issue 21 (March-April 1995), available at http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/close_encounters (accessed 7 December 2009). Schorr is also quoted in Hall: 45.
[55] Schorr, "Close Encounters."
[56] Schorr, "Close Encounters." When asked about this interpretation, Crewdson responded that he does not see the misogyny in his images. Hall, "Gardening": 46.

'invasion' has shattered the homogeneity of suburban living," thus, for Schorr, Crewdson's images become sites that represent the "crisis of masculinity" and the paranoia of the white heterosexual male's "loss of domain."[57]

But in her attempt to critique Crewdson, Schorr's "real life suburbia" is actually a nostalgic version of this space that erases difference. Schorr's descriptions of the suburbs as homogenous—especially during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—oversimplifies and erases the presence of "other" people to create a nostalgic idea of the past. The nostalgic ideal of the suburbs erases, for instance, the presence of African American laborers who, while they may not live in certain suburbs, would be in this space for their employment. Schorr's description also erased the presence of homosexuality in the suburbs, which Paul Cadmus painted in his 1930s *Aspects of Suburban Life*.[58] Although homosexuality could not be discussed openly, it was still present in suburban society. Schorr also seems to suggest that the "crisis of masculinity" is a new phenomenon in the twentieth century but masculinity has always been in crisis. The crisis becomes the definition of masculinity because masculinity is constantly being negotiated.[59] Crewdson defers to similar assumptions regarding the "loss" of the pristine suburbs and, thus, the "loss" of the position of white masculinity. In order to make the familiar strange, he creates alien threats—with alien as a marker of difference, such as Amy Kaplan used in her article

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[57] Schorr, "Close Encounters."

[58] For a nuanced reading of the references to homosexuality in Cadmus' paintings, see Anthony J. Morris, "The Censored Paintings of Paul Cadmus, 1934-1940: The Body as the Boundary Between the Decent and Obscene" (PhD Diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2010).

[59] See Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3rd edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), in which Kimmel analyzes "the history of the changing 'ideal' version of masculinity and the parallel and competing versions that coexist with it" (4). The former functions as the hegemonic ideal, or norm, and the latter becomes the individual experiences of men striving to negotiate their individual positions toward the norm. Kimmel is interested in offering a history about men, so he focuses only on men's negotiations of masculine ideals. Judith Halberstam adds people of all genders to the negotiation of masculinity in her study of masculinity without men. See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

"Manifest Domesticity" to describe the foreign as alien when in comparison to the normative domestic—against the nostalgically ideal suburbs.[60]

In order to evoke the sense of the lost space of the idealized nostalgic past, Crewdson limits who belongs in his imagined suburbs. Thus, Johns' description of genre paintings is also useful due to the way that she describes the function of "types" in genre paintings. For Johns,

> [T]yping is part of the larger process by which human beings assert, parcel out, and deny power to members of their communities. Typing often occurs from the apex down (that is, when initiated by those who would be at the top), but it is also undertaken by human beings in the middling situations and at the bottom of societies. People variously distinguish those around them by class, gender, age, intelligence, and manners and set up targets for satire or condescension that satisfy their need for superiority.... In virtually every instance, it seems, typing was—and *is*—carried out as a harmless, natural activity. That is, persons doing the typing usually do not recognize the interests behind their constructions and at other times pointedly deny them and see typing as perfectly natural.[61]

Mount's *Cider Making* used type to contrast the political position of men in the Whig party and the male farmers who they addressed in their campaign in contrast to the role of women and their fight for gaining equal rights. The representation of the woman in the foreground waiting her turn to drink cider refers to the abolitionist and women's rights advocate Fanny Wright. Amid the cider-making activities of the Whigs, Johns interprets that Wright "had inserted herself into a political context where she had no rights and would have to 'wait her turn.'"[62] Indeed, Johns summarizes how the Whig newspaper the *New York American* contained a long story that clued viewers into the references in the paintings. Amid numerous details, the newspaper describes how "Caleb Josslin"—the

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[60] See Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," in *The Future of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman, New Americanists series, ed. Donald E. Pease, (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 111. See Chapter 1 of this project for a discussion of "Manifest Domesticity."
[61] Johns, *Genre*, xii-xiii. Emphasis is Johns'.
[62] Johns, *Genre*, 138.

man in the foreground who looks out toward viewers and represents Caleb Cushing, a Whig representative from Massachusetts and biographer of William Henry Harrison's campaign—tells his sister Fanny "she was 'too ugly to suck cider' and that, moreover, she should learn to 'exercise the virtue of patience in *waiting*—as all *ugly faced girls*' would be called on to do."[63] Johns explains that Whig party leaders had constructed Fanny as ugly and aggressive, like they did with most advocates of women's rights. Because the Whigs only agreed to a women's rights platform reluctantly, Fanny held a marginal place in Whigs' party politics. Thus in the painting she waits her turn to drink the cider as she must wait her turn and not be overly forceful in her demand for a better position in U.S. social organization.[64]

American genre painting from the antebellum era helped to order society through the way it reflected and confirmed different types and their relationship to full citizenship at a time of great economic and social change, such as the way Mount's painting suggests that the political advocate Fanny Wright had to wait her turn and not force change too quickly. The "reportage" style of genre scenes works to erase the ways the paintings helped to construct and confirm beliefs about social organization. Likewise, Crewdson's photographs categorize particular types of people in particular places, activities, and relationships. While the photographic appearance of his digitally composited images would seem to add a similar sense of reportage, their cinematic formal qualities and the hyperreal amount of detail point to the fantasy of these tableaux. Because Crewdson does not seem to create photographs that function as genre scenes as deliberately as Mount did, his directorial photographs reflect the ways that there remains a lack of

[63] Johns, *Genre*, 52. Emphasis is from the *New York American's* description of Mount's painting.
[64] Johns, *Genre*, 52.

cognizance about dominant, or normative, understandings of social relationships. When critics describe them as merely uncanny, they erase the social organization that constructs the suburbs as a white and moral place just as the assumed realism of antebellum genre painting and the understanding of genre scenes as representative of "everyday" does.

The white family members in Crewdson's scenes form various types in relation to each other. For instance, he situates the mother vis-à-vis father, children, or even the lone bachelors scattered throughout the series who serve as foils to the families. But the membership of his white models in families contrasts with the way he represents the very few people of color in his series. In the aforementioned "Plate 10," although the family appears together in the scene, their blank expressions and static poses keep them separated and alienated from each other. Yet their appearance and placement marks them as a family, and as a nuclear, middle class, white family of four, they "look like" they "belong" in the suburbs. Very few of Crewdson's models are people of color, and those few who do appear most often function in a way that does not construct them as full members of the suburban communities depicted. All of the people alone, in couples, or in small groups in *Twilight* appear to be white. The only clear visual references to people of color in this series come to light in "Plate 21" and "Plate 29" (Fig. 3.15 and 3.16). In both images, a black man stands in a group scene. Both black men wear uniforms; they are in these suburban spaces due to their employment and not necessarily because they reside, or fully belong, there. In "Plate 21," a black sheriff stands in the street and talks to a white man who is building an ideal suburban home on a small-scale in the middle of the neighborhood street. It is free standing with a rectangular base and pitched triangular roof—like the houses that children often draw. He lays sod in the street to create a lush

carpet of green surrounded by *the* icon of idealized suburban life—the white picket fence.[65] The houses surrounding the small fabrication look different than the ideal home that the man builds; they show that even though this man lives in the "actual" suburbs, he also hold onto an unattainable ideal about this place. Multiple service vehicles, including a fire truck and police cars sit parked in the street and nearby driveways. Firefighters stand in the yards near the building site while white neighbors survey the scene from their front yards and driveways to witness the interaction between the man and the sheriff. The white builder seems to fear that he does not live in the mythically homogenous and idealized suburbs. His realization leads him to construct his own nostalgic version of it for himself and his family, but the black sheriff interferes with the ideal and stops his construction project.

Likewise the black man in "Plate 29" stands near a sedan at the bottom right corner of the frame. He wears a bright yellow jacket like many of the additional workers spread out over a field. A dead cow lies unexpectedly in the neighborhood field near the bottom center of the image, presumably the reason that brought all of these workers to visit this place. In both "Plate 21" and "Plate 29," something strange has occurred so that these large teams of investigators had to visit the suburbs, bringing the only black subjects into the white space of Crewdson's twilight world. Crewdson does not allow the sheriff or investigator to reside in these spaces as full members of suburban, or normative, society. We never see them at home or with their own families. To use Lipsitz' term, the white spatial imaginary keeps them from participating as full citizens in suburbia and imagines that they "belong" elsewhere.

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[65] Crewdson uses sod repeatedly and describes the material as an irrational and dysfunctional search for paradise. Hall, "Gardening," 46.

Most of the people in *Beneath the Roses* appear to be white, with only a few exceptions, and the elements of *mise-en-scène* further reinforce the "purity" of whiteness versus the "impurity" that disrupts whiteness. In "Plate 35," a young white woman lies on a mattress in the gloomy, damp, and gray woods away from town (Fig. 3.17). A young black man sits with his back to viewers between the mattress and a clearing in the forest, near the edge of a body of water. He wears only a pair of gray shorts and bends his knees as he wraps his arms around his shins. She wears only a dark pink tank top and remains nude from her waist down. Both of the figures have discarded the rest of their clothing haphazardly among the debris surrounding the mattress, suggesting that they have engaged in sexual activity in the woods. The physical separation of the couple adds to the unease of the scene, which is further evoked by a variety of elements in the frame including the selection and placement of the models, props, and the setting itself.

The man's position in the scene constructs him as closer to nature and dirt because he sits directly on the earthen ground, while his companion remains raised above him by the mattress. Dirt coats her left leg up to her knee and cakes the floral-print of the discarded furniture as wooden boards and debris lie around the mattress. Thus, the dirt associated with his race dirties her and this site as impure. Most of the women in Crewdson's series, especially the mothers and pregnant women, wear white, or "pure," clothing. But this young woman wears a dark pink garment that, like the dirt on her leg, marks her impurity. When Richard Dyer examines whiteness in various signs of visual culture, he argues for a need to acknowledge iconographic signs of whiteness in addition to human bodies. In one of his case studies, Dyer links the cultural ideas of cleanliness with whiteness through his discussion of white undergarments. He maintains:

> To be white is to have expunged all dirt, faecal or otherwise from oneself: to look white is to look clean. Whiteness, we have come to believe, shows the dirt of the body. This is why it has such a privileged place in relation to things which are kept close to the body—bed sheets and clothes, especially underwear and shirts—and why whiteness is so central to advertising the cleansing power of detergents. Bridal wear is a symbolically explicit case: it bespeaks the absence of sex, a dirt that is at once literal (sweat, semen, secretions and, in fantasies about virgins, blood) and moral; it also bespeaks the cleanliness of wifely endeavour, the sign that the woman does not bring dirt in to the household and that she will ensure its absence in the performance of her role.[66]

With Dyer's analysis of cleanliness, the color of the young woman's clothing and the dirt in the scene suggest an immorality in contrast to the morality often associated with the suburbs, as according to the white spatial imaginary.

Furthermore, the symbolic associations of the black man in "Plate 35" with dirt, and Crewdson's use of it to suggest the disorder within the scene, illustrates the continuing eugenic projects of normativity as "purity." Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins notes how the ideal family serves as an exemplary site to examine the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, class, and place because ideals about families impact ideological beliefs as well as national social organization and legislation. As a national eugenic project, the ideal family maintains purity in order to preserve privilege. Collins traces historical eugenic projects in the U.S.—projects that resulted in "classifying people into mutually exclusive racial groups," "associating diverse racial groups with perceived

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[66] Dyer, *White*, 76. In her seminal book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas traces the meaning of dirt and pollution through various "primitive" and "advanced" societies to show a variety of cultural meanings of purity. She argues that while anthropologists have attempted to set up a dichotomy between advanced cultures' aversions to dirt as a matter of hygiene versus primitive cultures' understandings of dirt as symbolic, pollution plays a symbolic role in advanced cultures as well. She explains, "[D]irt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread or holy terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behaviour in cleaning or avoiding dirt. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment.". Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 2. Dyer's analysis of the symbolism of white and the gendered associations of the wife with cleanliness is one instance of the symbolic role of purity as discussed by Douglas.

national interests," and using various means to control the various racialized groups—and describes how after the 1950s and 1960s social movements and the 1970s and 1980s growth of the nonwhite immigrant population, "One core feature characterizing the rhetoric of social projects of the Right was a return to family values of the traditional U.S. family. By associating the ideal family with U.S. national interests, these movements linked those interests to their own political agendas concerning race and gender. Returning to 'family values' not only invoked racial and gendered meanings, it set the stage for reviving a logic of eugenics that could be applied to adolescent pregnancy, women's poverty, street crime, and other social issues."[67]

Similarly, in her book *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, Lauren Berlant analyzes the way that private concerns of citizens are made public in order for certain figures to be able to represent the nation. Berlant concludes:

> [T]he nationalist ideology of marriage and the couple is now a central vehicle for the privatization of citizenship: first, via moralized issues around privacy, sex, and reproduction that serve as alibis for white racism and patriarchal power; but also in the discourse of a United States that is not an effect of states, institutions, ideologies, and memories, but an effect of the private citizen's acts. The expulsion of embodied public spheres from the national future/present involves a process I have been describing as an orchestrated politics of nostalgia and sentimentality marketed by the official national culture industry, a politics that perfumes its cruelty in its claim to loathe the culture war it is waging, blaming social divisions in the United States on peoples against whom the war is being conducted.[68]

Berlant demonstrates how the private acts of social reproduction become sites policed toward society's well-being, such as the eugenic project of policing marriage to

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[67] Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3, Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy (Part 2) (Summer 1998): 75-77.

[68] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 209.

discourage interracial reproduction. But this well-being of the nation is an imagined and nostalgic one, one longed for through conservative cultural beliefs such as those of "family values." The man in "Plate 35" serves as one of the very few people of color in the series. His role in the community is only to disrupt the purity of the normative woman in an activity hidden away from the community and, thus, suggested to be inappropriate. If this couple were to have a child, the child's interracial makeup would challenge the ideal of a dominant collective identity within the national family.[69] Because this photograph functions within Crewdson's larger series, it becomes one more nostalgic instance to problematically mourn the loss of imagined suburban purity.

"Plate 35" does not provide the only scene of a couple engaging, or recently engaged, in sexual intercourse outside. Two other scenes in *Beneath the Roses* depict white, heterosexual couplings outside. The couple in "Plate 16" lies nude on a mattress in a backyard (Fig. 3.18). Though this activity takes place outside and hidden within a fenced yard, it is within the boundaries of the community because we see the neighborhood homes. The woman lies in front of the man. Her entire nude body is visible to viewers, while her body blocks our visual access to the man's sexual organ. This placement of the models also follows normative assumptions by placing the female figure in a position that allows viewers to gaze upon her entire body and follows the long art historical tradition of representing female nudes.[70] Likewise, in the aforementioned

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[69] Berlant compares *Time* cover articles from 1985 and 1993 that both examine the impact of immigration toward the "new" and "changing" faces of America. She shows that while these covers both represent the melding of races in the United States as optimistically looking toward the future, they also create responses of fear for the loss of normativity. Berlant, *Queen*, 191-209.

[70] For a discussion of the power of the "masculine" viewer's "gaze" toward the "female" body, see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 14-26. Also see her later essay "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 29-38, in which she clarifies that it does not have to be

"Plate 35," the young woman only wears a tank top, so viewers could see the private areas of her body, while the man covers himself with his shorts and his pose. In "Plate 30," another white heterosexual couple engages in intercourse as a nude woman straddles her male partner (Fig. 3.19). Again, viewers have greater visual access to the female body because her body blocks our view of his body. Although this couple has sex under an overpass and not in the complete wilderness, their placement under the man-made bridge marks them as hidden but not completely away from town, unlike the interracial couple from "Plate 35." Due to the inclusion of these two photographs of white couples involved in sexual activity outside, it is not sexual activity that the series deems inappropriate in "Plate 35." Instead, it becomes the man's blackness that challenges ideals of the eugenic project of normativity as evidenced by the interracial couple's placement in the forest away from the more normative space of town. Strange events also occur in town, but this man's blackness marks him as further away from the relative positions of normativity when compared to the white citizens in town. Thus Crewdson places him literally away from the ideal and in the wilderness.

The trope of associating immoral events and people with spaces away from the more "civilized" town is one with a long history in U.S. culture and includes Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). This novel with puritanical Christian undertones remains a frequent part of young adults' literary education in the United States. It overtly connects a Christian sense of morality and righteousness to the civilized town and not to the forest as it tells the story of Hester Prynne. While waiting for her husband to arrive from Europe, Prynne has an affair with the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, with whom

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a male embodied subject who fulfills the masculine position with the "gaze," though Crewdson follows the more conservative binary and only shows full female nudes. Various objects block viewers' visual access to the male nudes in his series.

she conceives a child. For much of the novel, Prynne refuses to disclose the name of her illegitimate child's father, and town officials force her to wear a red "A" to signify her adultery. Even though Hawthorne situates Prynne as the heroine to indicate the close-mindedness of the Puritans, he must punish Prynne's sins. To construct the space of her sins, Hawthorne sets the "wilderness" of the forest in contrast to the "civilization" of the town. Prynne retreats to the forest to meet with Dimmesdale, spends time with her illegitimate daughter in the forest, and Prynne's house sits on the edge between the town and forest, thus using place as a sign of her sin. In one passage, Hawthorne describes Prynne's entry into her "moral wilderness," but Hawthorne further racializes this space as that of the "wild Indian in his woods."[71] This imagined dichotomy between the wilderness as the wild space of people of color and the whiteness and morality of civilization continues in Crewdson's contemporary frames, replicating the white spatial imaginary's association of a particular place with morality and national well-being. Because the male figure in "Plate 35" is one of the very few people of color in the entire series, his nonwhiteness and his assumed closeness to nature adds to the taboo of the couple's sexual romp in the woods, out of view from the residents of Crewdson's normative version of suburban society. This is also one of the very few, if not the only, of Crewdson's scenes that is situated completely in the wilderness without visual evidence of the structures of town.

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[71] For the full quote, see the epigraph to this chapter. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Lindenhurst, NY: Tribeca Books, 2011), 96-97. Discussions of the landscape underlie many analysis of *The Scarlet Letter*, as in the meaning of the forest and the town. Hawthorne also contrasts the wild rose bush and the prison door at the beginning of the novel. The following texts are a small sample of many that include discussions of the meaning of landscape in Hawthorne's work: Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); David Leverenz, "Mrs. Hawthorne's Headache: Reading *The Scarlet Letter*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37, No. 4 (1983): 552-575; Leo B. Levy, "The Landscape Modes of The Scarlet Letter," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 23, No. 4 (March 1969): 377-392; and Hugh N. Maclean, "Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter: 'The Dark Problem of this Life,'" *American Literature* 27, No. 1 (March 1955): 12-24.

The only other clear representation of nonwhite cultural practices in *Beneath the Roses* comes directly before "Plate 35." In "Plate 34," a two-story, brick structure sits behind a row of empty parking spaces and below a gray, overcast sky, which creates a gloomy mood similar to that in "Plate 35" (Fig. 3.20). Six rooms of this motel or apartment building—the space remains ambiguous but has a directional sign with an arrow that points left to the "office"—are visible to viewers. Four of the rooms have their doors and curtains closed tightly. Two of the rooms on the ground floor sit adjacent to each other with their doors open, and these two open doors each frame a solitary figure who—through costuming and props—signify Native American traditions and rituals. Through the left door, a pale man with long red hair sits on a bed. He wears jeans, a pink striped shirt, and sneakers as a number of necklaces with peace signs and a small pouch, like a Native American medicine bag, hang around his neck. He sits in front of a small table that holds ritualistic objects including crystals, sticks, and a feather. A dream catcher hangs in his window. Through the neighboring door, a dark haired woman stands between the door and the bed in her room. She wears khaki pants, a red top—on which hangs a long strand of beads hangs—and brown, moccasin-style boots. A twig lies on the outside of her windowsill next to another twig that projects on an angle across the middle frame of her window. Another circle of twigs hangs from a plastic hanger.

Based on contemporary stereotypes, both occupants of the building suggest Native American cultures to varying degrees. The animal print bedspread in the woman's room marks her as more animalistic when compared to the beige print of her neighbor's bed linens. Additionally, her long dark hair connotes a more stereotypical representation of Native Americanness than the man's red hair. He may be Native

American, but he may also be "playing Indian."[72] Either way, his long hair, jewelry, and peace paraphernalia mark him as a hippie, a subculture that, like Native Americans, is associated frequently with nature. Again, the two people who suggest nonwhite Native American culture do not interact within a larger family or community but rather remain isolated and framed within the doorways of their respective rooms. While a few other prints refer to ritualistic practices in Crewdson's series, "Plate 34" references objects that originate from Native American cultures most overtly. These four plates—21 and 29 of *Twilight* and 34 and 35 of *Beneath the Roses*—serve as the few exceptions from the eighty-nine plates across the two series that represent nonwhite figures or practices most clearly. In each example, the nonwhite subjects do not appear to belong to the suburban community fully and Crewdson does not allow them to participate in normative familial spaces found in so many of the other frames.

Crewdson's photographs further represent cultural norms through his recurrent inclusion of bedroom scenes in *Twilight* of male and female couplings, which helps to suggest the continued reproduction of normative subjects in the intimate and private space of the bedroom. These include plates 9 and 22 of *Twilight*, plate 5 of *Dream House*, as well as plates 7 and 41 of *Beneath the Roses*. The one potential exception to the heterosexual couples is in "Plate 20" of *Beneath the Roses*. Two women of approximately the same age, their late twenties, occupy the scene. One, a blond, white woman dressed in a pale purple nightgown and pink cardigan sits at a large vanity mirror. Various perfume bottles, cases of make up, lotions, powders, vases, and pills spread out on the vanity in front of her. She looks into the mirror at the second woman, a nude

[72] For a discussion of the use of Native American culture by whites to represent Americanness, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998).

white woman with short dark hair, standing in a doorway behind her. The two women are too close in age to read as the typical mother-daughter relationship of Crewdson's photographs, but neither engage each other as a couple overtly, as many of Crewdson's heterosexual couples lie together in the intimate space of a bed. Possibly they are just sisters or roommates.

Peter Hall notes a gay couple in a photograph from *Dream House*, but he does so only to situate the presence of homosexuality as an indication of the decline of masculine ideals, again as an assumed through on cultural norms. He states, "A crisis of masculinity is patently obvious in the images from the recent *Dream House*—of William H. Macy laying sod in his garage (a last-ditch attempt to bring wild nature into the domestic setting?), or sitting in his pajamas with a younger man laying sprawled in his underwear on the bed behind him" (Fig. 3.21).[73] Like the man who built an ideal suburban home in the middle of his neighborhood, Macy attempts to lay sod to reclaim the pristine nature of the imagined suburban yards, in the former image. Thus through this act, he struggles to maintain cultural norms and hierarchies that he feels slipping away. The latter photograph as described by Hall would seem to work in contrast to Crewdson's depictions of normative relationships, whereby couples are heterosexual, unlike Macy and his counterpart. Because Hall notes that the person with Macy is a "younger man," his description suggests that both the age and gender of the person is strange or nonnormative when with Macy. The age and gender of Macy's counterpart becomes the things that suggest an "abnormality" of acts like laying sod inside a garage.

Across American history, cultural rhetoric frequently describes masculinity as being in crisis. As such, ideals of masculinity suggested by the composition of this

[73] Hall, "Gardening," 46.

photograph required that Macy's character negotiates his relationship to manhood, or the ideals of what men "should do," because masculinity is always a process of negotiations. Hall's description shows how the author understands masculinity more than what is actually in the photograph, because he has misidentified the "younger man" on the bed behind Macy. The person in bed behind the actor is actually a middle-aged woman with short hair. She wears white brief underwear and lies with her breasts exposed. Christie's "Lot Condition Report" for an April 8, 2011, sale of *Dream House* identifies the woman as the actress Margot Donovan.[74] Therefore, Hall suggests that Crewdson represented homosexual men, which would counter the normative construction of the suburbs as a site for heterosexual families. But Hall merely reflects the conservative belief that, as a form of difference, homosexuality suggests a crisis of ideals. Upon closer examination, this frame by Crewdson does little more than Hall's description toward challenging normative assumptions. Again, the female appears in a fuller state of disrobing than the male in the frame as Crewdson follows an often-used trope. And though the couple appears distanced by their poses—he sits at the edge of the bed while she lies behind him—the couple's heterosexuality and whiteness has earned them access to the intimate space of the bed in Crewdson's construction of suburbia.

In order to continue to propagate normativity, Crewdson's scenes show numerous references to pregnancy and reproduction, most often with pregnant white women in white garments to suggest purity and the ideal type of woman as mother, similar to the way that Suzanne Opton's series *Soldier* imagined U.S. soldiers as male and viewers as

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[74] Christie's, "Gregory Crewdson, *Dream House*, Lot 419/Sale 2431," available at http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/LotDetailsPrintable.aspx?intObjectID=5420688 (accessed 9 October 2011). This photograph is reproduced as "Plate 60" in the catalog Gregory Crewdson, *Gregory Crewdson: 1985-2005* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005).

loving mothers. In *Twilight*, a white woman in white underwear and bra stands in a street during the night for "Plate 4." A spotlight shines down on her as viewers look voyeuristically from the interior of a living room through a large window to see her partially nude form. In "Plate 18" of *Twilight*, a white woman in a white, knee-length nightgown stands in a blue kiddie pool with sudsy water as a shirtless, pre-adolescent white boy lies in the grassy yard among children's toys. Another, possibly adolescent, blond figure reaches into the pool and scoops cleansing suds, which may wash away nonnormative elements, or impurities. And in "Plate 34" of *Twilight*, a pregnant white woman with light brown hair stands in a backyard surrounded by a wooden fence. She wears dark denim pants, unbuttoned to expose the waistband of her "pure" white underwear and a white sleeveless blouse with pink flowers and pale green trim. She raises her blouse with her right hand to expose her pregnant abdomen, which she touches with her left index finger near her bellybutton. She draws a line of pale green ooze down the center of her stomach with her index finger. Around her, fireflies glow in the air and in two glass jars that sit, one tipped over, on a nearby bench. The fireflies supply the green ooze that the woman used to draw on her extended torso as her action connects her to nature while the glowing green ooze also suggests the alien next to her pale skin. Similar observations can be made regarding the presence of pregnant white women throughout *Beneath the Roses*, who help to continue the eugenic project of the imagined nation.

Crewdson's photographs further construct women as maternal figures by representing women alone with children, such as in plates 18 and 20 of *Twilight* and plates 12, 13, 19, 36 and 39 of *Beneath the Roses*. In contrast, Crewdson represents very

few men alone with children in the role of nurturing caretaker. As a case in point, in "Plate 8" of *Beneath the Roses*, a mother, who looks to be in her forties, sits on a twin bed in her daughter's bedroom (Fig. 3.22). Binders and books that lay scattered on the floor, along with an extreme amount of lighter carnation pink décor in the room, mark this space as one of a school-aged girl. Pink wallpaper with white flowers covers the walls and three pictures of ballerinas hang above the bed's headboard. A pink hairbrush sits on the nightstand next to multiple teenage accouterments including bottles of pink nail polish, books, an alarm clock, a small radio, and a jar of Clearasil face cleanser. The mother sits on the bed with a basket of folded laundry beside her. The bed's pink sheets and blanket lay pulled back to reveal a small stain of menstrual blood on the bed.[75] The maternal figure sees that her daughter has reached an age when she can biologically have her own children. The mother has experienced a similar change in her body that made her able to have children and now her daughter has reached this transitional moment from child- to adulthood. Thus the moment of melodramatic change connotes the imagined loss of innocence normally associated with children.

The attention that Crewdson pays toward light and color to transform everyday scenes into the extraordinary and also helps to tell the narrative recalls Douglas Sirk's (1897-1987) melodramatic films, which include *Magnificent Obsession* (1954), *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), *Written on the Wind* (1956) and *Imitation of Life* (1959).[76] In the case of the Technicolor film *Written on the Wind*, Steven Peacock describes Sirk's use of

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[75] The creation of menstrual blood is an example of the lengths to which Crewdson's production crew goes to in order to arrive at (an oxymoronic) "realistic" simulation. They ended up combining Cocoa Puffs with pig blood and food dye to arrive at the desired color of red. Grant, "Lights, Camera, Stand Really Still": 20.

[76] For discussions of Sirk's work, see Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk: Interviews with Jon Halliday* (New York: Viking Press, 1972); Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994); and Steven Peacock, "*Written on the Wind*," in *Colour* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 59-80.

colors as "a crucial element of mise-en-scène, dazzling colour expresses the impact of ostentation as well as more insidious schemes. In this film, brash displays are subtly revealing."[77] Peacock traces Sirk's symbolic use of color in props and clothing to represent the relationships between characters in the film. For example, Sirk uses blue to symbolize the alcoholic oil tycoon Kyle Hadley (Robert Stack), who woos the virtuous Lucy Moore (Lauren Bacall) away from his best friend Mitch Wayne (Rock Hudson). Melodrama ensues when Kyle learns he may be sterile. Lucy becomes pregnant and Kyle's sister insinuates that Mitch is the father of Lucy's baby, not Kyle. In one instance, Kyle convinces Lucy to fly with him to Miami by claiming, "[O]nce we get up in the *blue* I'm a different fella."[78] In another scene:

> The waters glow blue through the suite's windows, against the wealth of bright [pink, purple, orange, and red] diversions inside. For Lucy, to embrace this opulent lifestyle is to risk turning her back on remote hopes of hidden depths. At the end of the scene, Lucy stands alone on the balcony, on the verge of a decision. Touched with traces of the low blue light, she realises that the "different fella" seen up in the skies is a faint promise, an unattainable idea that she holds dear. She flees the suite. Only when Kyle chases after her to the airport do the blue tones return to hold sway. Once again, Lucy's better judgment clouds over. With remorseful words and on the cusp of romance, the film places the couple in front of a vast blue pane, looking out onto the airstrip. The fable of a happy couple…absorbs the couple (Fig. 3.23).[79]

Crewdson's photographs do not work singularly; the Sirkian attention he pays to color connections the individual frames in an overall narrative of his series. For instance, the pale pink color of the girl's bedroom in "Plate 8" contrasts the darker pink worn by the post-coital and "impure" woman in "Plate 35." And the nostalgic loss of childhood innocence parallels the loss of innocence, or the loss of the imagined ideal of suburbia, in the photographer's larger series as the uncanniness of his melodramatic project signifies

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[77] Peacock, "Colour," 62.
[78] Quoted in Peacock, "Colour," 69. Emphasis is mine.
[79] Peacock, *Colour*, 73-74.

transformations. The strange disrupts the familiar. Additionally in multiple instances, he uses warm, orange lights to illuminate domestic interiors in contrast to the blue light that he uses to mark the space of the shadows outside of the home. Doing so emphasizes the warmth of the home as the space of the family versus the cool unknown of the exterior, foreign world. This color combination is particularly apparent in plates 9, 10, and 38 of *Twilight* and 8, 17, 20, and 37 of *Beneath the Roses* as it recalls Sirk's contrast between Lucy standing inside the warmly lit, domestic space of her virtuousness and the blue exterior space that represents Kyle's life of vice.

The way Crewdson uses the similar processes across numerous frames leads to a very particular "look" of his images. More than a film director, he works as an auteur. While David Green and Joanna Lowry attempt to offer an alternate description of Crewdson's art—not as a photograph by an individual auteur, but instead as a "social practice" involving a number of people—they cannot overcome the distinct style that is apparent across Crewdson's multiple series. Regarding Crewdson's use of *mise-en-scène* and melodrama, the authors note similarities between Crewdson's photographs and Sirk's films and they ways that melodrama relies on *mise-en-scène* to help tell its narrative more so than other film genres.[80] The authors explain that the 1940s and 1950s ascendency of Hollywood melodrama was concurrent with the time that Freudian psychoanalysis gained popularity in the United States. The connections between melodrama, psychoanalysis, and the dramas within suburban families in mid-century films all reemerge in Crewdson's contemporary genre scenes.[81]

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[80] Green and Lowry, "Photography, cinema and medium": 136.

[81] While Crewdson's photographs recall Sirk's films formally, there is also something to be said for the popularity of melodrama as a genre to note a moment of cultural change. Thus, scholars have examined Sirk's films for the ways that although on the surface they seem to represent normative relationships, they

Through their analysis, Green and Lowry aim to move the idea of medium specificity away from the material of artwork. To do so, they employ Raymond Williams' notion of "medium as social practice" and they conclude, "[T]he value of this demonstration of the intrinsic heterogeneity of film and photography, as they are conflated in Crewdson's work, cannot be fully grasped unless it is acknowledged that its significance lies not at the level of the hybridity of the technology, nor at the level of the image, but as an expression of the social organisation of production itself. In other words, what Crewdson's work begins to do is to address Williams's concept of the medium as social practice as that is exemplified in the diversity of technical processes and skills that together comprise cinema."[82] To treat Crewdson's images as cinematic based on their reference to, or mimicry of, film stills is too simplistic according to Green and Lowry. By treating the medium as social practice, Crewdson's photographs reference the technical production, employment of large crews of skilled laborers, and the financial support necessary for such large productions.[83]

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also offer a nuanced examination of queer, female, and racial difference. For instance, see Lauren Berlant, "National Brands, National Bodies: *Imitation of Life*," in *The Female Complaint: Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 107-144; Mary Beth Haralovich, "All that Heaven Allows: Color, Narrative Space, and Melodrama," in *Close Viewings: An Anthology of New Film Criticism*, ed. Pater Lehman (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1990), 57-72; and Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994). This is a point of inquiry that I plan to examine further in the near future. For now, I want to suggest that while Sirk's melodramas provided moments to examine difference, Crewdson's series and the dominant reception of his work needs to be examined for the ways that they erase difference and replicate normative assumptions. This is what I aim to offer in this chapter.

[82] Green and Lowry, "Photography, cinema and medium": 141.

[83] Crewdson's pictures can cost up to six-figures to make a single image. Laura Cumming critiques the content of Crewdson's photographs and his production process when she states, "Gregory Crewdson's uncanny photographs are in danger of drowning under Hollywood overkill…. [J]ust as a vast budget can crush a good movie, so these photographs are flattened by their own over-production." See Laura Cumming, "Hitchcock Meets Hopper," *The Observer* (17 April 2005), available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/apr/17/art1 (accessed 5 July 2011).

Green and Lowry situate Crewdson's practice as a symptom of late capitalism. Citing Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* (1975) and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000), the authors explain that just as "'immaterial labour' (the generation and management of information)" replaced "'productive labor' (the industrial manufacture of goods)" in the Western hemisphere, the practice of artmaking become a practice of managing the production of images rather than artist manufacturing the own work "by hand." In this vein, Crewdson oversees his entire process from a directorial position but does not produce the actual work; he does not take the photographs. His process follows the post-war "professionalisation" and "academicisation" of artmaking as "the practice of making art was one that increasingly came to rely on skills that were managerial and intellectual rather than those which are technical and practical."[84] In acknowledging the "social practice" of Crewdson's crew—one much like those often found in cinema—Lowry and Green attempt to offer an alternative to celebrating Crewdson in his managerial, and thus "intellectual," position. Nevertheless, they admit that their analysis is not without contradiction. They concede, "Crewdson seems to offer an alternative model for an artistic practice based on collective labour. Yet no sooner is the offer made than it is then effectively withdrawn by the reinstatement of a notion of individual authorship, ironically one derived from cinema itself."[85] Crewdson's position in the role of auteur provides another tension, or contradiction, to his work. Even though working with a large crew, the style and constructive processes of his "cinematic" photographs becomes recognized and referred to as the "Crewdson School" of photography, and, as I

[84] Green and Lowry, "Photography, cinema and medium": 140.
[85] Green and Lowry, "Photography, cinema and medium": 141.

quoted above, the photographer emphasizes these images are *his version* of the perfect moment translated onto film.

Following cinematic practices, if you look at Crewdson's suburban scenes as parts of the same narrative, "Plate 9" of *Twilight* could follow the growth of the girl to an adolescent in "Plate 8" of *Beneath the Roses*.[86] In "Plate 9," a conventionally beautiful blond white woman stands nude in the middle of a carpeted room lit by warm lamplights against the cool blue light outside of the window (Fig. 3.24). She stands on a dark brown soiled spot on the otherwise light gray carpet. Looking toward the ground in front of her, she faces a three-paneled mirror on a dresser that frames her reflection and isolates her in the left and middle panels. The right panel of the mirror reflects the image of a dark-haired man asleep on the bed behind her. Again, we have visual access to the female nude's body and not the male's. But something went awry to find this woman standing on the reddish-brown stain on the carpet that recalls the bright red menstrual blood from "Plate 8" but looks a more sickly color of brown. Bottles of prescription pills appear as frequent props throughout Crewdson's series, but in the rare instance of "Plate 9," an open package of birth control pills sits centered on the dresser. Her contraception and the presence of her male partner in bed lead this scene to read as something is wrong with her capability to reproduce, even if it is through her choice to use contraception. In other

[86] I understand that Crewdson photographed "Plate 9" before "Plate 8" because he shot *Twilight* from 1998 to 2002 and *Beneath the Roses* from 2003 to 2007. But I treat his images as part of the same narrative because of his repetition of similar tropes over numerous frames. Film crews do not shoot movies in order. Rather the chronological narrative comes together through editing. And filmmakers do not even necessarily shoot sequels in the order that matches the films' sequence of events. The creation of the various *Star Wars* movies is a good example of this. Thus I take the liberty to read Crewdson's individual frames as moments that are not necessarily published in the order that they occur. He also publishes them in different orders with different plate numbers associated with the frames depending on the format of each publication, which seems to suggest that the flexibility of the order of his imagery.

words, the photograph depicts her lack of reproducing as problematic, causing the scene's strangeness and the discomfort of the photograph.[87]

Once Crewdson's models become of age, they form multiple ideal—heterosexual and nuclear—families, such as the aforementioned family in "Plate 10 (Beckoning Bus Driver)" of *Twilight*. Likewise, "Plate 32" of *Twilight* depicts a nuclear family at home (Fig. 3.25). A middle-aged, dark-haired white woman enters a domestic dining room, but, strangely, she stands naked in a trail of dirt and flower petals that extends from the home's screen door to her position. She holds flower scraps in her dirt-caked hands, which soil her purity just as dirt caked the leg of the young woman in "Plate 35." This mother has tracked dirt inside and disrupts the clean space of her family. By bringing dirt into the house, to use Dyer's words, she has failed at the "cleanliness of wifely endeavour."[88] A blond white man, presumably the father of the family, sits at the head of dining room table. He ignores his wife's strange situation and stays with his back to her. A white teenage boy, with similarly blond colored hair, sits across the table from his father and gazes toward his fully nude mother. A white teenage girl, with dark hair like her mother's, sits with her arms folded on the table as she looks down to her plate as though she is attempting to ignore the presence of the maternal figure framed in the door.

In the foreground of the scene sit an empty place setting and chair, waiting for the mother to rejoin her family, as she should be. The father, son, and daughter have been eating a traditional dinner of meat and potatoes until the woman returned home, causing their various reactions—ignoring her, staring at her, or looking down, possibly in

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[87] For a discussion of the emphasis place on sexual reproduction and the fetus in U.S. citizenship, see Lauren Berlant, "America, 'Fat,' the Fetus," in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 175-220.
[88] Dyer, *White*, 76.

shame—as she poses as the protagonist of this ambiguous narrative. This photograph repeats a number of Crewdson's frequent choices in *mise-en-scène* toward constructing normativity in order to create strange situation that disrupts the familiar. Here, the mother does not perform the ideal role of a mother. Instead, she stands dirtied as a foil to the more ideal woman framed in a picture that hangs on the wall behind the table. While the white man in "Plate 21" of *Twilight* strove to build an ideal suburban house with a picket fence even while he was surrounded by less idealized homes and eventually stopped by the black sheriff, and as William H. Macy attempted to build the ideal with sod and later sat defeated at the edge of his bed, this mother does not live up to the ideal of femininity framed on the wall behind her. But even though the normative ideal is disrupted by her strange actions, Crewdson still imagines the suburbs in this frame, as well as across his series, as the site for only nuclear, white, and middle class families. His photographs help to both construct and confirm the people and places imagined as normative in contemporary U.S. culture and, by extension, implicate others who may disrupt the ideal.

With only a few exceptions of prints that challenge the stereotypes of whiteness, heteronormativity, and stereotypical gender relationships, the consistent selection and placement of Crewdson's various models in recognizable tropes warrants further explanation. As his casting director Juliane Hiam described, Crewdson provides basic instructions such as to find "women that look haunted or somebody who looks like they've lived a hard life."[89] He does not seem to direct her toward selecting people of particular races or ethnicities for his series. Some of the normative subject positions of his models may be due to the demographics of the area in which he photographs and who

[89] Kenneth R. Fletcher, "Gregory Crewdson's Epic Effects," *Smithsonian* 39, no. 3 (June 2008): 75.

chooses to model for the artist.[90] But demographics of the area do not explain why the few people of color in the series are represented in ways that read that they do not belong in the suburban environment. Instead we must return to Crewdson's direction as an auteur to explain the placement of particular models in specific locations. As I quoted him earlier, he takes credit for the overall vision of his frames even though he works with a large crew.

Even if Crewdson does not intend to replicate cultural norms so closely in his images, he does. And this becomes even more apparent in his *Dream House* (2002), a series of twelve suburban tableaux for which he used celebrities as his models and did not have to rely on the demographics of a place to dictate the identities of his models. The celebrities are not members of the middle class suburban community in which they are represented and Crewdson liked the additional sense of the strange that viewers experience when they recognize celebrities in such a mundane space. Again, all of the models are white subjects, commentators do not note the racialized appearance of these actors, and group photographs of families often include an older male and female pair with children. "Plate 11" provides the only exception and represents a middle-aged man (Bruce Perkins) in a bedroom with a teenaged girl (Agnes Bruckner) and a second younger girl. Crewdson could have selected from a variety of celebrity subjects, including actors of color, or posed them in less normative ways, but he did not.

Many of the celebrities he photographed have appeared in films that evoke a similar imagining of the domestic ideal's deterioration. These include *Fargo* (Joel and

[90] One of the towns in which Crewdson works is Lee, Massachusetts. According to City-data.com, the "Races in Lee" include White Non-Hispanic (92.3%), Hispanic (4.5%), Black (1.4%), Other race (1.2%), Two or more races (0.7%), and American Indian (0.7%). See "Lee, Massachusetts," available at http://www.city-data.com/city/Lee-Massachusetts.html (accessed 29 April 2010).

Ethan Coen, 1996), *Happiness* (Todd Solondz, 1998), and *Far From Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002). While these films include visual tropes of suburban whiteness, they also show some of the more complex relationships between people of different identities. For example, *Far From Heaven* reinterprets Douglas Sirk's film *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) and chronicles the growing relationship between a white suburban wife (Julianne Moore) and her black gardener (Dennis Haysbert), who comes to her neighborhood for his work. Set in 1950s Connecticut, Moore's character develops feelings for and confides in her gardener after she catches her husband (Dennis Quaid) kissing another man. The suburban wife, who was assumed to have the "perfect" life, begins to experience social criticism for her taboo relationship with her gardener. Crewdson's selection of actors for *Dream House* erases the complicated issues found in some of the film projects in which these actors performed. Even when working with celebrities, and, by extension, with the film projects in which his models participated, his series work to replicate normative ideals rather than complicate them.

And finally, class-based myths of the suburbs hold onto the normativity of these spaces even as cultural rhetoric describes that these spaces are in marked decline. In Crewdson's photographs, small downtown areas sit decaying past their heyday as aging cars line their streets. In "Plate 5" of *Twilight*, the decay of the suburbs sits juxtaposed with a more idealized version of this place as two neighboring houses narrate the shift from the pristine home on the left to the untidy scene on the right and activate a nostalgic mourning of the loss of the ideal (Fig. 3.26). Though these houses form the background of the main focus of the narrative—a man holding a six-pack of Budweiser beer and looking up into an alien cone of light that descends from the night sky—the contrast

between the houses adds to the feared loss of the mythically pristine suburbs as the image becomes a comment on beliefs about class.[91] The home on the left sits in a well-kept lawn with flowers running along the driveway and sidewalk. A small white car sits parked in the driveway next to the single floor home with its curtains and doors closed tightly. The home on the right appears more disheveled and disorganized, or impure. Five trucks and S.U.V.s parked haphazardly in the yard that is littered with a cooler, chairs, a bike, and empty cans. Numerous people gather inside of the home and we see them through the open front door. While the houses and neighbors could belong economically to a similar class, the state of disorganization of the home on the right and the type of cars in the yard contrasts the more pristine home on the left. When the suburbs were initially built, they were new spaces. As the suburbs age, members of lower classes become part of the invaders that move into the aging spaces as the more

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[91] The photographer acknowledges the close resemblance of his images to films that engage peculiar narratives in the seemingly normative suburbs, such as films by Hal Hartly, who taught at SUNY Purchase when Crewdson attended the school as an undergraduate from 1981-1985, Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch, and Steven Spielberg. As one point of comparison, in Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss)—a white, middle-class, suburban husband and father of four—becomes obsessed with a mountainous formation that he experiences as a vision after seeing UFOs in the sky. Eventually Neary and government agents make contact with extraterrestrial aliens, but only after Neary physically replicates the mountainous form in his living room out of a fifty-gallon trash can and landscaping from his yard. Crewdson directly references this film in his stills by directing characters to fabricate similar conical forms in their domestic spaces. In *Twilight*, multiple figures build conical structures out of flowers in plates numbered 8, 28, and 38; members of the neighborhood stack small appliances and domestic objects in plate 33; various birds stare at a conical structure made of stacked slices of white bread in plate 17; and men work with mounds of sod in plates 24 and 30.

While *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* involves the encounter of suburban families with aliens, a similar narrative occurs in the television show *The X-Files*. FBI special agents Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) investigate various cases of paranormal activity, including alien contact with humans. The 1998 publication *The Art of the X-Files* includes images by Crewdson and quotes the photographer explaining that in his photographs, the "collision between the normal and paranormal produces an uncanny tension that serves to transform the topology of the suburban landscape into a place of wonder and activity." Chris Carter and William Gibson, *The Art of The X-Files* (New York: HarperPrism, 1998), 38. In *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *The X-Files* unpredictable menaces from "outside" threaten to ruin everyday life. Likewise, in order to create a sensation of the uncanny, Crewdson's series include strange elements that threaten to overtake the familiar and ideal suburbs. Extraterrestrials invade Spielberg's suburbia, aliens disrupt everyday life in *The X-Files*, and, as I demonstrate, people of color and from lower classes invade the mythically pristine suburbs imagined in Crewdson's images and make this space strange. The trope of aliens in Crewdson's work is a line of inquiry that I plan to examine in the future.

upper class residents move to newer houses, often further away from the city. The home on the right implies a difference in class-based culture as those identified as "white trash" threaten the well-being of the citizens on the left, who try to upkeep the myth of the pristine nature of the suburbs.[92]

In general, Crewdson describes that his photographs create a "quiet sense of loneliness" but also a desire "to try to make a connection in the world."[93] The tension felt from his series comes, in part, from the alienated and isolated positions of his models along with their blank expressions. Like Edward Hopper's paintings, to which Crewdson's photographs solicit frequent comparison, Crewdson's series evoke a sense anxiety or the uncanny. Many authors have commented on these sensations, but few have asked critically why such sensations arise from viewing Crewdson's work. When frames like "Plate 35" offer one of the few people of color and iconographically represent his relationship with a white woman as impure, it becomes apparent that contemporary ideologies regarding systems of differentiation underlie the sensations caused by viewing Crewdson's images. Additionally, Crewdson's Sirkian use of lighting highlights the whiteness and other forms of normativity of the ideal suburbs, but only to claim these ideals are threatened. In many instances, warm orange light illuminates the interior and safe spaces of maternal protection while the cool blue highlights potential exterior threats to the domestic. If the blue was to invade the orange and the complementary colors mixed, we would lose the brighter palette, such as in the normative transition of "Plate

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[92] Regarding "white trash," see Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006); and Hamilton Carroll, "'My Skin Is It Startin' to Work to My Benefit Now?': Eminem's White Trash Aesthetic," *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity*, New Americanists, ed. Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 104-127.

[93] Gregory Crewdson, "In A Lonely Place," interview by Estelle Af Malmborg, available at http://vimeo.com/49665029 (accessed 1 October 2012). Published in conjunction with the exhibition *In a Lonely Place*, The National Museum of Photography, Denmark, 23 September 2011 to 28 January 2012.

8," and arrive at more dismal gray tones, such as in the inappropriate activity of "Plate 35." Yet discussions remain lacking because most of Crewdson's subjects and the relationships in which he situates them follow normative cultural beliefs. In other words, most of his models are assumed not to have race or sexuality and their gendered relationships and class further creates the sense that they are "normal." Once situated as normal, Crewdson can have an outside and alien "stranger" threaten to upset the "familiar." Like scholars have described in Sirk's melodramas, I looked for ways to read a more progressive interpretations of Crewdson's series. But what I found more often was an extreme sense of redundancy and a symbolic use of *mise-en-scène*, like the color of the models' clothing and the use of dirt, that joined with the visual cues of the model's identities and the tendency in contemporary U.S. art history and larger culture to treat normativity as an unmarked ideal. All of these elements and cultural context leads me to believe that Crewdson's series reflect conservative cultural ideals more than they challenge them.

Crewdson's imagined threats to the suburbs uncritically replicate conservative rhetoric that suggests larger threats to the well-being of the nation as the suburbs, and especially families in the suburbs, serve as the privileged people and place that signifies "real" America. To examine the uncanniness of his scenes ahistorically leads to the problematic replication of the way neoliberal rhetoric constructs the ideal individual. Neoliberal rhetoric privileges the ideal of hardworking individuals who make it on their own without government assistance. Such rhetoric denies the continued social inequities built into contemporary U.S. social organization and cultural beliefs as this ideal then denies the impact of difference on lived experience of many Americans today. A similar

erasure of difference accompanies the dominant reception of Crewdson's aesthetic creations of uncanniness.

The descriptions of Crewdson's series as merely an affective sense of unease, tension, or threat in the "typical" suburban environment of the United States do not engage critically with ideologies surrounding identification, the suburbs, and who continues to represent normative America. The suburban spaces of Crewdson's creations privilege white, heterosexual, and middle class people even as his images show the tension of the decaying suburbs and activities within them, and thus the decline of the "American Dream." But this decline or threat has implications regarding identity in the contemporary United States, which parallels the uncanniness of Crewdson's series. The strange threatens to overtake the familiar. Those outside threaten those privileged and inside. Or, the marked threatens the ideal and unmarked. Lipsitz' notion of the white spatial imaginary is helpful in understanding how Crewdson's images cause this sense of anxiety or fear in viewers as descriptions of Crewdson's images as strange, threatening, or uncanny replicate the white spatial imaginary uncritically. And the affect of Crewdson's photographs helps viewers experience the feelings Lipsitz associates with the white spatial imaginary. Even if unintended on behalf of the photographer, Crewdson's representations of the suburbs draw attention to ideologies about who represents the norm in the United States and the fears associated with—and played upon for political and economic gain—this norm losing its status as such.

My reading is one from an "American" point of view. As with many artworks, Crewdson's images can be interpreted in different ways. He exhibits his images to international audiences that may be less familiar with the history of the suburbs and

systems of differentiation in the United States. Then again, many U.S. citizens take the "normativity" of the suburbs and white, heterosexual, middle-class subjects as facts and not as the naturalized, socially constructed ideologies that they are. Thus, I find it is very important to analyze images of normativity as these positions often remain unacknowledged and unexamined. Rhetorical constructions of normativity maintain privilege and can be promoted by the elite so that distinctions based on identification cause rifts between different cultural groups, instead of citizens questioning the growing economic inequality in our era. Frustration is mounting in recent times, as with the national Occupy movement, but will it make a difference? To cite Lipsitz again regarding the connection of economics and the relational processes of racialization in the United States, "Neither conservative 'free market' policies nor liberal social democratic reforms can solve the 'white problem' in America because both of them reinforce the possessive investment in whiteness. But an explicitly antiracist pan-ethnic movement that acknowledges the existence and power of whiteness might make some important changes."[94]

Acknowledging the power of whiteness is one way to help challenge cultural norms that perpetuate white privilege, such as the belief that the suburbs—as white, heterosexual, and middle class—signify real, moral America. Someday the suburbs as the "norm" may become a historical phenomenon as the suburbs have become historical to Crewdson's *oeuvre*. He has recently left his practice of representing such spaces. In 2010, he began to exhibit a series of forty-one images titled *Sanctuary*. These images differ from *Twilight*, *Dream House*, *Beneath the Roses*, and his other suburban tableaux

[94] George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 47, No. 3 (1995): 384.

most notably in that they are black-and-white images, they do not contain people, and he did not shoot them in the United States. Crewdson gained access to Cinecittà studios in Rome, Italy and photographed the remaining film sets. This series continues to be connected to cinema and Crewdson strives for an affective response in viewers. A press release from Gagosian Gallery describes:

> Crewdson has made the abandoned outdoor film sets the subject of, rather than the mere setting for, his pictures. Moving through the empty streets of "Ancient Rome" at the beginning and end of the day, he has captured the palpable atmospheres of melancholy lurking at every twist and turn, cloaked in shadow or suddenly illuminated by a shaft of daylight. Although the links to the great chroniclers of urban environments such as Eugene Atget and William Eggleston are evident, Crewdson has added a new layer to the genre by searching for his particular form of *verité* within the artificial leftovers of cinematic reality.[95]

This newer series maintains obvious connections to Crewdson's earlier suburban tableaux in terms of his use of cinema, questioning of reality, and affective emphasis on anxiety or, in the new work, melancholy, but as I have shown, Crewdson's suburbs never functioned as "mere settings" for his melodramas. Instead, his use of the suburban settings melds with his control as an auteur over all elements of his *mise-en-scène* in images that both refer to and replicate assumptions of "normative" culture in the contemporary United States. To label Crewdson's series as representative of "anywhere" and "timeless" supports the lack of analysis of how and why Crewdson's melodramatic images result in feelings of the uncanny. By firmly historicizing them, we can enter his *oeuvre* into expanding discussions of the relations between affect and processes of identification in the contemporary United States.

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[95] Gagosian Gallery, "Gregory Crewdson: *Sanctuary*," Press Release 26 July 2010, available at http://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/2011-02-03_gregory-crewdson/ (accessed 18 September 2011).

CHAPTER 4

"FOREVER FOREIGN": NIKKI S. LEE GOES TO OHIO

The stereotype is taken to express a general agreement about a social group, as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype. Yet for the most part it is from *stereotypes that we get our ideas about social groups. The consensus invoked by stereotypes is more apparent than real; rather, stereotypes express particular definitions of reality, with concomitant evaluations, which in turn relate to the disposition of power within society*.

—Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*

I think I have good instincts when it comes to different lifestyles. I just go to the shops that those people go to and check them out. I don't go on the Internet or anything. And I have a good fashion sense. Sometimes if people want to copy a style, they buy the most unusual things from the shops. They don't buy the average things. I never want to pop out. I want to be eighty percent of any person from whichever group.

—Nikki S. Lee, *Projects*

On August 26, 1997, a group of four women smile for a photograph at the entrance of 30 Rockefeller Center in New York City (Fig. 4.1). Centered in the frame, the women pose in front of the plaza's fountain in order to have a memory of this moment recorded. In white tennis shoes, shorts, and t-shirts, they carry their purses and camera bags while some of them wear fanny packs, all of which mark them as tourists visiting this iconic New York site. On June 14, 1998, eight Hispanic women stand in two rows on a city street as they smile for the camera while at the Puerto Rican Day Parade (Fig. 4.2). People wander in the street behind them as a man to the right of the women folds his arms and smiles toward them and the photographer. The informal snapshot catches one of the woman at the right side of the group with her eyes closed, and two of the women in the front row block the view of another woman who stands toward the back of the group. On August 6, 1999, a blond woman sits on a tractor that is parked in a barn in Ohio (Fig. 4.3). A pot-bellied man in a dirty sleeveless t-shirt stands nearby. And on

May 30, 1999, three elderly women wait at a bus stop on Ave A in New York City (Fig. 4.4). The same day, one of these seniors uses a watering can to water a flower garden. She also sits alone on a concrete structure holding her purse and then on a park bench as she poses and smiles for a picture with four other senior women.

All of these photographs include the South Korea-born, New York City-based artist Nikki S. Lee (b. 1970) as she "became" a member of various subcultures and recorded her inclusion in each group with snapshot photography. Lee developed her series *Projects* (1997-2001) from her interest in the ways "other people make me a certain kind of person" and she was interested in making "evidence, as John Berger calls it. I always feel like I have a lot of different characters inside and I was curious to understand these things. I wanted to see some sort of evidence that I could *be* all those different things." [1] For her *Projects*, Lee wore costumes and participated in activities she assumed to be characteristic of the groups of people she joined. Her projects include: *The Punk Project* (1997), *The Tourist Project* (1997), *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project* (1997), *The Lesbian Project* (1997), *The Hispanic Project* (1997-1998), *The Yuppie Project* (1998), *The Swingers Project* (1998-1999), *The Seniors Project* (1999), *The Ohio Project* (1999), *The Exotic Dancers Project* (2000), *The Skateboarders Project* (2000), and *The Schoolgirls Project* (2000). In 2001, Hatje Cantz published a book of the series listed above. Additionally, Lee created *The Drag Queen Project* in 1997 and *The Hip Hop Project* in 2001, but these two groups of images were not included within the published collection of her photographs.

[1] Nikki S. Lee, "Conversation with Nikki S. Lee," interview by Gilbert Vicario, in Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruin: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 100. Emphasis is mine.

Across *Projects*, Lee oversimplified the politics of identity and reduced each group to mere stereotype. To change her appearance, she used costuming that included various articles of clothing, hairstyles, makeup, and fake tattoos. She altered her body by darkening her skin and by gaining or losing weight, as she found necessary. In the unusual case of *The Seniors Project*, she used prosthetics to advance the appearance of her age. To "be" part of each group of people for her photographs, Lee approached a group, told them about her project, and stayed with them for a length of time, up to months.[2] She passed her point-and-shoot camera to a person in the group or to a stranger to document her belonging. Though Lee's success at becoming a member of a group would seem to be a difficult to judge, Russell Ferguson addresses her ability to do so in the introduction to the publication of *Projects*. He states, "One goal of each project is to obtain photographs that are convincing works of art. That goal, however, can be reached only through another kind of success: that of becoming accepted by the chosen group to the extent that the spontaneous, informal photographs become possible."[3] Furthermore, the anecdotes that circulate about this aspect of her work suggest that groups openly accepted Lee into their circles and then, strangely, seemed to forget that she was only pretending to be one of them. For instance, some of the senior citizens in *The Senior Project* would not believe that Lee was an artist, but rather dismissed her explanation as being a case of eccentricity or senility.[4]

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[2] Lee explained the limits of becoming a member of each community she photographs when she stated, "I don't live with the people. I just hang out. I have to have boundaries. What I do is fake documentary." Jessica Kerwin, "Faking It," *W Magazine* (September 2001): 416-418; quoted in Louis Kaplan, "Performing Community: Nikki S. Lee's Photographic Rites of Passing," *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 225n1.
[3] Russell Ferguson, "Let's Be Nikki," in Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruin: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 7-9.
[4] Ferguson, 13.

A friend introduced the artist to the New York gallery director Leslie Tonkonow, who was Lee's exclusive representation from 1998-2007, and Lee held her first solo show at Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects in New York City. This 1998 exhibit was titled *The Cultured Tourist*, which suggested the artist only visited her various identities temporarily before she returned "home." After this exhibition, Lee reached a level of commercial success while enrolled in New York University's graduate school in the late 1990s.[5] Beginning with *Projects*, Lee's work quickly entered into the canon of photographic history as its inclusion in numerous survey texts, exhibitions, and permanent collections early in her career demonstrates.

Lee's *Projects* seem to challenge normativity in the sense that she shows the performativity of identity that would seem to break down social categories of difference and give all people equal access to full citizenship. This would mean that we can become any identity we choose, or at least that our differences that we cannot overcome—such as the color of our skin—no longer matter. In the context of this utopic ideal of a post-identity society, *Projects* is not about the individual Nikki S. Lee. Instead, the images highlight the performativity and negotiations of identity. But there are ways that her project contradicts such utopian social relations.

Cherise Smith provides one of the most successfully nuanced readings of the tensions that accompany Lee's *Projects*. In her book *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith*, Smith discusses what she calls the "slipperiness" of Lee's *Projects* in their relationship to the

[5] In 1993, Lee earned her B.F.A. from Chung-Ang University in South Korea. She moved to New York City and earned her M.A. from New York University in 1998. In addition to creating her own art, she worked as an assistant to the photographer David LaChapelle.

"politics of identity."[6] To begin, Smith traces how various scholars have used Lee's *Projects* to demonstrate "postidentity." Supporters of postidentity ideology argue that identity politics no longer play a part in contemporary culture toward social, material, economic, and political circumstances. Instead, they treat identity as "individually determined, culturally and socially constructed, and, above all, not political."[7] By celebrating individual agency over collective identity, proponents of this ideology blame people associated with "so-called 'particularist' groups for their marginal or disenfranchised positions."[8] Thus, Smith labels Lee as "exemplary of the professional class of artists created by the postidentity ideology. Her movement between groups and by-the-bootstraps success serves to underscore the diminished significance of minoritarian identifications and the politics associated with them."[9] There is a nuanced moment regarding politics in Smith's description here. While she would seem to say that the negotiation of identity is always political, it is the supporters of postidentity ideologies who would disagree and attempt to use Lee's performances as an individual to neutralize the continued politics based on group identification.[10] By arguing that social

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[6] Smith prefers the "politics of identity" to "identity politics" because "[t]he former suggests a larger discursive movement which prioritizes the idea [that 'identity is political' and a 'politics of identity' exists] and addresses the myriad ways that identity is a valid and significant platform from which to motivate political action and to create and consume cultural products." Smith, 5. The former, for Smith, "also skirts the negative associations that have been lodged against the latter as a tactic of neutralization and disempowerment." Cherise Smith, "Nikki S. Lee's *Projects* and the Repackaging of the Politics of Identity," *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 5.

[7] Smith, 217.

[8] Smith, 199.

[9] Smith, 206.

[10] In "Citizenship and Political Identity," Chantal Mouffe describes the liberal model of citizenship, which would include the descriptions Lee's project as one of "postidentity," as one that privileges the individual above the collective group. In contrast, the republican/communitarian model sacrifices the rights of the individual in favor of the collective. Mouffe highlights these two forms to argue that a third possibility is needed, which she calls the "principle of equivalence." Chantal Mouffe, "Citizenship and Political Identity," *October* 61, The Identity in Question (Summer 1992): 28-32. Smith interprets the "slipperiness" of Lee's project as it oscillates between the liberal and republican models to offer a third possibility that includes both, though she does not cite Mouffe or employ Mouffe's terminology. Both of these models

equality has been accomplished in our post-Civil Rights era, appeals to postidentity ignore the continuing ramifications of social beliefs and public policy toward various social inequities, such as the way notions of postidentity replicate the myth of colorblindness found in neoliberal rhetoric. Thus, Smith counters the use of Lee's *Projects* to illustrate postidentity and concludes that Lee's images actually challenge such theories. According to Smith, descriptions of Lee's work that assign postidentity ideology to it:

> overlook how the artist's identifications—as a Korean national residing in New York, as an Asian living in America, an art-world darling, and a middle-class woman of some financial means—intersect to position her perfectly to pursue, engage, and embody such identity performances, preferring instead to celebrate her as a poster child of colorblindness. In other words, critics who charge Lee with chameleonism accord her a certain exceptionalism that, they neglect to realize, is contingent upon her intersectional identifications and that, ironically, does not so much prove postidentity discourse as much as it retrenches the politics of identity.[11]

Lee's series seem to challenge normativity by suggesting that anyone can be considered normative through performance, but in addition to the artist's own subject position as outlined by Smith, Lee's photographs of reductive subcultural types confirm rather than challenge cultural stereotypes and hierarchal privileges based on racial, ethnic, and gendered identifications. Lee's assumed success at her chameleonism places her in an interstitial space as she moves between subject positions, especially due to her status as a "model minority," or a member of a minority group constructed closer in proximity to ideological whiteness. Furthermore, the celebratory label of "chameleon" and Lee's statement that her "intuition" guides her understanding of each group of people become attempts to raise her above critiques of her work. This is similar to the ways that Suzanne

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help to explain how an individual negotiates their identity in relationship to others, but the liberal model erases the impact of difference on lived experience.

[11] Smith, 191.

Opton used her position as a mother and Gregory Crewdson used his slight case of dyslexia in order to provide a sense of authority in their authorial roles and to explain, or justify, the ambiguity that arises from their constructed photographic series.[12]

In order to complicate the easy celebrations or dismissals of Lee's work, I will focus on her *The Ohio Project* in relationship to her other *Projects* because Ohio serves frequently as a place that contemporary U.S. cultural rhetoric imagines as "middle" America and thus a place that contains "real" or normative Americans.[13] One only needs to look at the important role that Ohio plays as a "battleground state" in recent U.S. presidential elections to see the place that the state holds in the contemporary imagined

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[12] Louis Kaplan describes the role of the ambiguity of Lee's images toward Lee's popularity when he states, "There is something incredibly ambivalent about these drag images of race and ethnicity, and perhaps the possibility of reading them in two radically diametrically opposed ways is what offers a key both to Lee's photo-cultural significance and to an explanation of what has helped to catapult her to art stardom in such a short time. This explanation involves the way in which her photographs play out the lure of ethnic voluntarism at the same time that they hint at its impossibility." Kaplan, 183.

[13] Scholars often address Lee's numerous *Projects* together because the larger collection of social groups shows her assumed ability to belong to a diverse range of identities. The series I have found analyzed on its own the most is *The Hip-hop Project* due to the recent interest in studying hip-hop as a cultural phenomenon. See Derek Conrad Murray, "Hip-Hop vs. High Art: Notes on Race as Spectacle," *Art Journal* 63, No. 2 (Summer 2004): 4-19; and Cathy Covell Waegner, "Performing Postmodernist Passing: Nikki S. Lee, Tuff, and Ghost Dog in Yellowface/Blackface," in *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History Politics*, eds. Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 223-242. Also see Lee's inclusion in the traveling exhibition *One Planet Under a Groove: Hip-Hop and Contemporary Art* (2001-2003). For a discussion of whiteness in *The Yuppie Project*, see Maurice Berger, "Picturing Whiteness: Nikki S. Lee's *Yuppie Project*," *Art Journal* 60:4 (Winter 2001): 55-56. The most in depth comment that I have found singling out *The Ohio Project* is *New York Times* Theater Critic Margo Jefferson's description of the relationship between *The Ohio Project 7* and Howard Winant's article "Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race," both of which are published in the exhibition catalog *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: International Center of Photography, 2004). Jefferson merely reviews, "An academic title like Howard Winant's 'Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race' becomes literal—visceral—when we look at the picture on the opposite page. A dark-haired white man sits in an armchair. A big Confederate flag hangs on the wall bearing the words 'I Ain't Coming Down.' A woman perches next to him. Her shorts are pink, her strapless top is white and pink. Her hair is blond and her features are clearly Asian. There must be a lot of conceptual race theory going on in that house." Margo Jefferson, "On Writers and Writing: Photo Dynamics," *New York Times* (15 February 2004), available at http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/15/books/on-writers-and-writing-photodynamics.html?pagewanted=print&src=pm (accessed 10 February 2012). There is much more to be said about what Lee's *The Ohio Project* demonstrates about cultural norms in the United States.

nation, especially because it casts eighteen Electoral College votes as a "swing state."[14] As Lee's only project identified solely by the name of a place, *The Ohio Project* becomes a site to examine how the artist constructs this normative place—who she includes and how she "belongs." Yet she examines "subcultures" in her series, a term that already suggests nonnormativity, and dominant understandings of subcultures in the United States would identify the Ohioans she photographed as "white trash," a group with some but not full access to normativity.[15] So what happens when, as an Asian woman, she enters the white space she constructs as Ohio and how does she position herself there?

By reductively treating people as types, Lee's photographs, like Gregory Crewdson's suburban tableaux, recall genre paintings as they highlight the relational processes involved in constructing whom cultural rhetoric deems as normal. Even through many people believe normativity exists and use it to define themselves and others in relationship to it, normativity functions as a shifting position. The ambiguities or slippages that arises from Lee's series come from her relationship to the people in the subcultural groups that she represents and the ways she does and does not seem to belong. She performs subcultural types but cannot always visually become part of the group. Ohio is where her failed belonging and appearance as an outsider is most obvious due to the narrative construction of both the site of Ohio as an ideal white space, as I mentioned above, and the dominant understanding of race in the United States as white

[14] See Jake Tapper, Devin Dwyer, Mary Bruce, and Sherisse Pham, "Winner Takes All: Ohio is a Must-Win For President Obama and Mitt Romney," *Yahoo! News*, available at http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/power-players-abc-news/winner-takes-ohio-must-win-president-obama-mitt-120641261.html (accessed 5 November 2012); and C-Span | Washington Journal, "Ohio and the 2012 Election," (2 November 2012), available at http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/309021-5 (accessed 5 November 2012).

[15] I imply quotation marks with the designation of "white trash" throughout this project.

versus non-white.[16] As an Asian woman, she does not look like the people who pose with her in the Midwest. In *The Ohio Project*, Lee's Asian facial features and her obvious artificially dyed blond hair—part of her attempt toward whiteness—differentiate the artist from her companions in each frame. It is important that she titles this project after the place to suggest normativity and does not call it *The European American Project* even though she does have other projects based on ethnicity as in her Hispanic and Young Japanese series. She did not attempt to overcome her "failure" to transgress the racialized boundary of white/nonwhite but instead engages with the ways that place helps to construct ideas about race, similar to the way that Gregory Crewdson's series reflected George Lipsitz idea of the "white spatial imaginary."[17] She could have used prosthetics or other costuming that would have allowed her to "pass" in Ohio more successfully, like she wore for *The Seniors Project*.

By examining Lee's narrative constructions in *The Ohio Project*, I will demonstrate how her series function like genre paintings as discussed by Elizabeth Johns. Whereas celebrations of the artist's chameleonism situate her *Projects* as a form of "reality" culled from scenes of everyday life, her photographs—though problematic in ways—demonstrate the negotiation and renegotiation of social differences and hierarchies amid beliefs about race, class, and place. I examine *The Ohio Project*, specifically, due to the tendency in art history and larger culture to treat whiteness as if it

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[16] The binary understanding of race as white/nonwhite leads to the assumption that white is unmarked and not a racialized position. As John Bowles explains, "The situation of whiteness is that of a body historicized and racialized to the point where its material particularity is obscured. Otherness is violently suppressed in order to promote the idea of a universal figure of disembodied, metaphysical transcendence." John P. Bowles, "Blinded by the White: Art and History at the Limits of Whiteness," *Art Journal* 60, No. 4 (Winter, 2001): 39. For another discussion that rightfully complicates this binary, see Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

[17] See Chapter 3 of this project in which I discuss Gregory Crewdson's suburban tableaux along with George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011).

an unmarked position from which "others" deviate. Lee represents herself in relationship to whiteness but she additionally reduces the people in Ohio to the particular subculture of "white trash," which negates the state's role in serving as a sample of the heterogeneity of the nation's composition. Thus this particular subseries demonstrates the intersections of race, class, and place and the ongoing negotiation and renegotiation toward normative ideals as Lee is able to navigate such positions due to her position as the "model minority." Though she relies more on dominant cultural narratives than she complicates them, her photographs do provide sites to analyze processes of identification in the contemporary United States.

SIMULACRUM AND GENRE

The 2001 monograph of Lee's *Projects* includes nine images from *The Ohio Project* in the total ninety images (Fig. 4.5-4.10). In all of the published photographs from *The Ohio Project*, which are dated from August of 1999, Lee wears bleached blond hair and she repeats some of her outfits. She stands alone as she leans in the doorway of a lower-to-middle class house. She then reclines on a porch next to a woman and laughs and hugs another woman who wears a t-shirt with the Disney character Goofy on it. Lee lies on the hood of a yellow car as a man leans against it. She gets caught in the rain with another woman at an amusement park. Then she poses alone in front of a motocross stunt cage, sits on a tractor in a barn next to a male farmer, reclines on the arm of a chair next to another man who holds a rifle, and poses with a group of motocross stunt performers.

Lee documented her conceptual performances with snapshot photography to add to the sense of familiarity and spontaneity, and thus "reality," of her scenes. Dayna McLeod emphasizes the impact of Lee's use of snapshots toward the success and "authenticity" of the series as she commends, "[W]e are attuned to this language of image making because we have experienced it. We also know that it is real because it is devoid of the artifice of studio or fashion photography, and the sincerity of the moment captured emphasizes its truth."[18] Lee's snapshots, although printed large, look like they are taken with late 1990s point-and-shoot cameras. They include the date stamped in orange digital numbers in the corner of each image and informal lighting with shadows and lens flares. Some people in the photographs have their eyes closed or are otherwise blocked from being represented clearly, and the frames of the images dissect people who are not the main focus of the pictures if they happen to enter the scene. In *The Ohio Project (21)* the frame bisects a dog in the lower left corner of the image, and *The Ohio Project (35)* catches the blond woman beside Lee in an awkward gesture with her right arm raised partially. Originally, the artist's friend Soo Hyun Ahn shot the photographs. As Lee continued to make her series, she began to hand her camera off to a stranger passing by or to a member of the subcultural group, and she provided them only with minimal instructions, such as to make sure she was in the frame. Although Lee did not control all

[18] Dayna McLeod, "Stretching Identity to Fit: The Many Faces of Nikki S. Lee," *Ciel Variable* 63, Persona (March 2004), available at http://cielvariablearchives.org/en/component/content/article/393-stretching-identity-to-fit-the-many-faces-of-nikki-s-lee.html (accessed 18 March 2012). Also see Catherine Zuromskis, "Intimate Exposures: The Private and Public Lives of Snapshot Photography," (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2006) in which the author describes the contradictory aspects of snapshots—their seemingly objective recording of reality and the performativity involved in the creation of snapshots—as well as how artists employ or disregard these contradictions. For instance, Zuromskis argues that Nan Goldin "employs an aesthetic strategy that refuses distance, actively erasing any trace of critical photographic consciousness. In doing so she ignores the cultural forces that construct snapshot photography as essential and immediate. Thus while the content of her work is often anti-normative… the form of her snapshot style remains remarkably conventional" (258). Also see Zuromskis' forthcoming *Snapshot Photography: The Lives of Images* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2013).

of the formal elements of the composition, because she did not take the photographs, she did choose her costumes and edited the images into the final selections for her series. As one views her larger series, Lee's conceptual project becomes clearer than it does from viewing a single frame. With varying degrees of ease, viewers are able to spot the artist within each frame.

Lee developed *Projects* for a graduate school assignment based on theories of the simulacrum. In "Simulacra and Simulations," Jean Baudrillard claims that with postmodernism, signs have been substituted for the real itself. This does not mean that the world is now unreal, but rather that it is "hyperreal." Hyperreality characterizes the "generation by models of a real without origin or reality."[19] In other words, signification becomes a chain of signs without a referent. Baudrillard uses Disneyland as an example of this process of signification. The theme park provides guests with an imaginary world of simulation and the hyperreal. Instead of merely serving as a fictional world separate from the "real" United States, Baudrillard claims, "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real."[20]

For her assignment about the simulacrum, Lee was interested in creating fake documentaries so she began to use snapshots to document her inclusion in various groups. If we interpret Lee's performances in the context of Baudrillard's simulacrum, Lee's photographs suggest that identity has no stable basis in the "real," and the

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[19] Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacrum and Simulations," in J*ean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1988), 166.
[20] Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," 172.

conceptual focus of her series leads viewers to read her body, costumes, and poses as signs vis-à-vis the people with whom she poses and who we understand as fuller members of the communities represented. Their membership seems more "real" when situated against Lee's cultural tourism. Because Lee's performances are ones of signification and not "reality," these people are there to suggest "the reality effect," or "authenticating gestures," to Lee's performances even as her performances highlight that people within her photographs also perform their own identities.[21] Furthermore, Lee's photographs function as part of a chain of signification as her performances point to the performances by the other people in her images just as Baudrillard argues that Disneyland theoretically references Los Angeles and America surrounding it.

The idea of the simulacrum parallels imagined ideals of identity—many people believe in and strive for cultural norms even though they are constructions.[22] But to merely talk about the simulacrum or ideal can erase lived experience and this issue draws us to the question of ethics in Lee's series. The "slipperiness" of Lee's work can make it difficult to critique, but those critical of the artist's approach to her subjects call her process superficial as she uses people and lifestyles as mere props without paying attention to the social ramifications experienced day-to-day by the some of the people she

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[21] Kirsten Pai Buick uses the "reality effect" and what she terms "authenticating gestures" to critique the programming surrounding exhibitions of Kara Walker's artwork based on stereotypes of African Americans and antebellum culture. See Kirsten Buick, "L'Effet de Réel: Showing (and Telling) Kara Walker," in *Kara Walker—No, Kara Walker—Yes, Kara Walker—?*, Howardena Pindell (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2009), 17-22. These authenticating gestures include the deployment of Afro-Brazilian tour guides in the 2002 São Paulo Biennial, who were paid to become part of the display and "give credibility to the 'realness' of the work as a whole, to authenticate the total visual field as a simple, artless reflection." Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision* (New York: Icon Editions, 1989), 38; quoted in Buick, 21. Additionally, the difference between Lee's performance and the performativity of everyday identities of the people she photographs comes down to the issue of ethics and the superficial way that Lee borrows signs from each community only to create her art and then leaves to go back to her world. I expand on this idea in a moment.

[22] See Brian Massumi, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 52-70.

photographs. For instance, Kathryn Rosenfeld finds that Lee's *The Lesbian Project* raises "bothersome questions about what makes a subculture or community and what Lee thinks she is doing trying to sidle her way into one after another through what seemingly amounts to mere character acting."[23] But as Rosenfeld begins to question Lee's work, it slips away from her. Rosenfeld continues, "I become increasingly convinced that the artist was no more likely to have listened to the Dead Kennedys [for her *The Punk Project*] than to have kindled a genuine romance with the young woman passionately sucking face with her [for her *The Lesbian Project*]. Then I became confused about whether or not this matters."[24] Part of the difficulty of Lee's work is that her participation in some of the subcultures is more politically charged than others. When reviewers begin to critique Lee's work, such as in Rosenfeld's wavering, the ways Lee's work suggests that all identities are performative can be used to negate the ethical problems of her *Projects*. Lee cannot return to her "real" life if there is no "real" and she claims her performances help her navigate her own being. Previously, I mentioned how she believed she had "a lot of different characters inside" and "was curious to understand these things."[25] But her relationship to many of the subcultures that she visits is not the same lived experience that many of the people she photographs have with their subject positions. After Lee finishes her photographs, she can walk away from the economic status that leads many women to become exotic dancers, or she can kiss a woman as she inhabits the role of a lesbian for a photographic series, but she does not have to deal with the social prejudices experienced across a lifetime of living as homosexual.

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[23] Kathryn Rosenfeld, "Nikki S. Lee," Review: Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College, Chicago, *New Art Examiner* (November-December 2001): 92.
[24] Rosenfeld: 92.
[25] Lee, "Conversation," 100.

While theoretically sound, in practice to say that there is not "real" experience ignores cultural differences and the social beliefs and policies that treat various groups unequally. Even when we acknowledge the poststructural performances of identity, this does not mean that there are not "real" consequences to performances. In practice, applying Baudrillard's simulacrum to the understanding of identity can be used in support of ideologies of postidentity, which I have already suggested is a problematic notion that erases the impact of cultural hierarchies. And just because identity is performative does not mean that we perform our identities freely. As Marvin Carlson notes, there is always an audience for performances.[26] Furthermore, Judith Butler explains that just because identity is performed does not mean that it is necessarily consciously or willingly performed.[27] These statements show that identity performance is not an individual process, but that it is a social practice policed and negotiated in relation to an audience. I will return to this policing in a moment.

Miwon Kwon has situated Lee's series within the "ethnographic turn" in art. Accordingly, Kwon finds the positive reception of Lee's images disturbing because "such work abstracts subcultural communities as fashion tableaux, … reduces the crisis of identity to a game of costume changes, and most importantly, … ultimately *refuses* the

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[26] See Marvin Carlson, "Introduction: What is Performance?" *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 5-6.

[27] In her analysis of the performativity of gender, Judith Butler argues, "As a public action and performative act, gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice, but neither is it imposed or inscribed upon the individual, as some post-structuralist displacements of the subject would contend. The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives." See Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, No. 4 (December 1988): 525.

other."[28] While the images seem to represent subcultural groups with Lee as just one person among many, the images always come back to Lee herself. This return recalls how even through Crewdson worked with a large crew that made his medium social practice more than an art object, the look of his images return the reception of his series back to his individual authorship and position as an auteur.[29]

In her descriptions of *Projects*, Lee describes her personal identity as an amalgamation of numerous characters she has inside of her. And many critics tend to celebrate Lee's ability to shift identities in a post-identity vein while they fix her position as an Asian woman in America, even if they do so in order to discuss her identity as hybrid or diasporic based on her navigation of Korean and American cultures. For instance, Sooran Choi situates Lee's photographs in the context of the artist's own experience of diaspora as a Korean woman living in the United States.[30] Ana Honigman states, "Though transformed by make-up, setting, gestures, and clothes, Lee's identity as a Korean-born woman artist is a consistent presence. Her work embodies the classic immigrant experience of reinventions."[31] The "classic immigrant experience" would describe a process that involves subscribing to cultural norms. And in order to situate Lee's *Projects* as a way for the artist to analyze the boundaries between her own experiences of identities in the United States, many authors point to her adoption of the

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[28] Miwon Kwon, "Experience vs. Interpretation: Traces of Ethnography in the Works of Lan Tuazon and Nikki S. Lee," in *Site Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, ed. Alex Coles (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000), 85. Emphasis is Kwon's. See also Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996), 171-203.

[29] See David Green and Joanna Lowry, "Photography, cinema and medium as social practice," *Visual Studies*, 24, No. 2 (September 2009): 132-142.

[30] Sooran Choi, "Playing with Identity: Tseng Kwong Chi and Nikki S. Lee," *New Aspects of Diaspora and Diaspora Artistic Strategies: With Case Studies of Do-Ho Suh, Tseng Kwong Chi, Nikki S. Lee and Shizuka Yokomizo*, M.A. Thesis (Hunter College, 2009).

[31] Ana Honigman, "Niki [*sic*] S. Lee: Leslie Tonkonow," *Flash Art* (January/February 2002): 94.

name Nikki, even though immigrants take on a new name frequently. The artist selected this name from a list compiled by a friend from the magazine *Vogue*; "Nikki S. Lee" is based on the popular model Niki Taylor. Used in place of her given name Lee Seung-Hee, authors point to Lee's use of "Nikki" as evidence that the artist reconstructs her East Asian identity toward one that is more "American," thus assigning a more fixed construction of "American" than is suggested by the simulacrum.

In her attempt to "be" part of each group she photographs, or "eighty percent of any person from whichever group," Lee relies on stereotypes.[32] By stereotyping each group, her identity as simulacrum allows her to "become" part of each subculture as she defines them. In other words, in order to "become" something, there has to be the thing that you are "becoming," which seems counter to the simulacrum or the idea that there is no fixed reality. To be "eighty percent of any person" suggests that such a "person" has a fixed position of which Lee can occupy part. Richard Dyer explains that stereotypes function as shortcuts to frame our understanding of various social groups, or they help to fix subject positions. The potential insidiousness of stereotypes depends on who controls stereotypical representations and what interests the stereotypes serve.[33] For her performances, Lee employs signs from each group that she joins by selecting costumes and replicating gestures and activities that dominant narratives use to construct each subculture. The artist does not sport her yuppie outfit when she skateboards or when she attends the Puerto Rican Day Parade. And in Ohio, she attempts to look like the ideal

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[32] Nikki S. Lee, "Conversation with Nikki S. Lee," interview by Gilbert Vicario, in Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruin: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 107. For Lee's full quote, see the epigraph of this chapter.
[33] Richard Dyer, "The role of stereotypes," in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 12.

Ohioan, and thus American, by dying her hair blond, a loaded gesture that I will return to later.

Through her use of stereotype and the creation of photographic documentation, Lee transforms her performances into genre scenes. Elizabeth Johns explains that though genre scenes are typically understood as scenes of everyday life, there is nothing everyday about them. Instead, Johns studies the rise of genre paintings in the United States from the 1830s to the outbreak of the Civil War and the ways in which they constructed types to help to order a seemingly disordered collection of people in the nation. She explains,

> Even in the earliest days of the new nation, euphoria about the unique ideals of the Constitution began to be replaced in powerful groups with anxiety about the growing power of the "rest of" the population. In the perceptions of the elites, the spectrum of backgrounds in the body politic—a variety perceived primarily in terms of social class—meant that the social, moral, and religious practices that had unified their leadership in the prerevolutionary society, and that they had assumed would sustain them in the new nation, would not prevail. Moreover, not only was their own dominance threatened, but the process of republican decision-making was severely compromised.[34]

Thus through the use of typing, "citizens ordered the disorder about them, assigned proper blame for the incongruities in the democracy, and above all announced themselves as the moral center of the body politic."[35] The nineteenth-century moment that Johns

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[34] Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 8.

[35] Johns, *Genre*, 21-22. Also see Martin A. Berger, "Genre Painting and Modern Race," *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 11-40, in which the author describes William Sidney Mount's genre painting *Fair Exchange, No Robbery* (1865). The painting represents a white man switching his worn hat with a nicer one that is sitting on a scarecrow's head. Berger claims that the painting is not "*about* white entitlement but that the worldview of European-Americans ensure that the reception of the image was *structured* in racialized terms….For nineteenth-century viewers, the exchange at the heart of the narrative tapped into racialized discourse on property that legitimated fictional confiscations as trivial as that of a scarecrow's hat or, alternatively, real-world appropriations as consequential as those of Native Americans' land. At either extreme, the logic of whiteness rationalizes appropriating what belonged to those unprotected by a designation as 'white'" (26). Like Johns' analysis, Berger suggests that genre paintings were not just scenes of everyday life but instead helped to order social relations based on difference.

examines includes the types of the yeoman, frontiersman, and Yankee—each constructed as normative at some point but against whom women and African Americans were consistently understood as inferior.

Lee's use of snapshots serves to naturalize the typing she does in her scenes because her seemingly informal photographs carry an assumption of truth with them that serve to authenticate her belonging in each group. As Ferguson describes, the artist had to be able to perform as a member of each social group successfully enough that a passerby could take an informal snapshot. Ferguson goes as far as to call the aesthetic of Lee's images as one of artlessness, as if to position art as a construction and the snapshot as reality.[36] Lee gave other people aesthetic control to take and compose her images as her camera automated the artlessness of reality. A similar assumption of artlessness was also an important mechanism employed within genre painting. As Johns describes, "Genre paintings hide the artificiality or the contingency of their subjects with a realist mode. One major effect of realist painting is that as its viewpoint seems to be perfectly natural—that is reportorial—the viewer tends to accept the ideological underpinnings of the painting in the very process of looking at, and coming under the spell of, the picture. The successful painter, therefore, could be said to be an entrepreneur of the viewers' ideologies."[37]

Johns provides William Sidney Mount's *Farmer Nooning* (1836) as one moment to examine how genre paintings circulated amid a system in which ideologies were generated, maintained, and challenged. This piece also highlights the artist in relationship to their audience (Fig. 4.11). In the painting, a group of three white men sit

[36] Ferguson, 10.
[37] Johns, *Genre*, xii.

to the left side of the image under the shade of a tree. The man to the furthest left, who Johns describes as a "model of neatness and prosperity," sands his tools; the second man sits and looks away from us; while the third, who wears tattered clothes, lounges on the ground as the counterpart to the well-kempt worker at the left.[38] Toward the right side of the painting and in the sun, an African American man lays against a pile of hay as a young boy tickles his ears with a piece of straw. Johns argues that more than a representation of everyday life on the farm, nineteenth-century viewers would have understood the painting as an antiabolitionist comment, a position Mount was known to occupy along with his intended audience and patron—a New York grocer who "had much to lose by the projected economic upheaval that doomsayers insisted would follow emancipation."[39] As Johns explains, the 1830s included Britain's "declaration of gradual emancipation" and the slave revolts in the West Indies. Americans warned that similar upheavals could occur in the United States if the nation was to abolish slavery. The young boy's hat, or tam-o'-shanter, in *Farmers Nooning* referenced abolitionism because English and Scottish reformers helped American abolitionists with furthering their cause. Thus the hat became a sign for the foreign-influence on domestic policies.

Johns describes that though Mount painted a range of the white men's attitudes to work, he represented the African American man as "unambiguously lazy, undercutting the beauty of the figure by the social associations of the man's clear enjoyment of his leisure. Moreover, by contrasting the details of the black man's comfortable dress and the ragged clothing of the white man in the foreground, Mount materialized the claims of some antiabolitionists that slaves were so much better cared for than many whites that

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[38] Johns, *Genre*, 33.
[39] Johns, *Genre*, 36.

they did not need emancipation."[40] Johns continues, "[W]ith the ambiguous relationship of the black man and the white child Mount alluded to claims that slaves were so lazy that if freed, they might refuse all work, as had blacks in Jamaica, and that slaves were so naturally prone to violence that they might riot if their 'ears were tickled' with impossible dreams of the future."[41] The young boy, as the foreign influence, is the one to tickle the ear of the African American with impossible dreams. The painting thus orders various types of people in the representation of a range of white men, the young—and thus irresponsible—boy as a foreign influence, and the African American man as naturally lazy. Yet Johns also suggests that Mount painted the image with a light-heartedness. Audiences could understand the piece as a comment against abolitionism. But if they did not understand the colloquialisms, they could still enjoy the painting as a representation of the status quo with a young and happy boy playfully tickling the African American who seems "good-natured and 'safe.'"[42] Lee's *Projects* work in a similar way. Though they are (superficially) entertaining in her chameleon-like performances and it becomes a process to locate her in each of the images, and as genre scenes they reflect and confirm cultural beliefs of our time. In order for her to belong to each group, she exposes the creation of types that mark subcultures one from another as she moves between her various performed identities, defining each group while also highlighting the continued negotiation of identity.

By connecting Lee's *Projects* to genre painting, it becomes apparent that even in her contemporary art practice, she engages very old strategies of art making, just as Suzanne Opton's close up portraits of U.S. soldiers who fought in the wars in Iraq and

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[40] Johns, *Genre*, 34.
[41] Johns, *Genre*, 34-35.
[42] Johns, *Genre*, 35.

Afghanistan and Iraqi refugees in Jordan recalled Thomas Eakins' late-career painted portraits and Julia Margaret Cameron's "beautiful" photographic portraits. Both of these nineteenth-century projects were meant to show the interiority of their sitter beyond surface appearances, an evocative claim that Opton employed to evoke viewers' empathy toward the soldiers and refugees she represented. And like Lee, Gregory Crewdson also created genre scenes, albeit photographic ones, for his uncanny suburban tableaux that reflect social organization. But like both Opton's and Crewdson's images, while Lee's series give viewers a moment to challenge the ideologies of difference both generated and maintained in the genre scenes that she created, I do not think Lee's *Projects* do much to challenge systems of differentiation. Instead, she seems to treat the stereotypes she employs as naturalized characteristics that she joins without question.

When asked if she intended to challenge stereotypes, Lee responded, "I didn't think about that at all. When I started the project, typical images of each social group hadn't been formed in me. I didn't try to analyze or study, I rather relied on my intuition, probably based on the images from movies that I had watched."[43] Lee has also stated that she does not intend to examine race and ethnicity and does not feel a "responsibility to put social issues in [her] art."[44] In her analysis of Lee's series as an ethnographic project, Kwon states, "The seemingly unstudied informality of the photos belie the artist's status

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[43] Nikki S. Lee, "Indefinite 'Nikkis' in a World of Hyperreality: An Interview with Nikki S. Lee," interview by Phil Lee, *Chicago Art Journal* 18 (2008): 87.

[44] Lee, "Conversation with Nikki S. Lee." Quoted in Smith, 230. Smith also cites Lee as stating, "I don't think about race or nationality. I don't need to bring up that issue because other people will." Smith questions, "Despite her recognition that many aspects of her identity intersect to make her the person she is and the personae she becomes, there remains an unwillingness on Lee's part to grapple with the consequences of her differences as well as how difference affects the 'others' with who she temporarily associates. Indeed, it can be difficult to discern whether Lee's reticence to come to terms with her difference is an act of political resistance, a form of naïveté that is a function of her immigrant status, or a complicated mixture of the two" (230). Additionally, Smith explains that Lee has begun to change her descriptions. The artists now acknowledges that after living in the United States for over a decade, she has become more aware of race and nationality and her own position as a "minority." Lee, "Conversation with Nikki S. Lee." Quoted in Smith, 229-230.

as outsider art director and model, who, even in absorbing the identity of the other, will render the other into a prop for the self," and, thus, this absorption of the identity of the other for the self "fall[s] in line with the tried and true technique of modern ethnographic authority—'you are there… because I was there.'"[45] I tend to find Lee's approach to her projects disturbing in their superficiality as she becomes a tourist in other people's lives. In Kwon's words, Lee negates the identity of others in the construction of her own as the artist of the series. Thus she seems more interested in her experience of moving between subcultures than in questioning the construction of subcultures in the first place, an experience open more to those considered the "model minority," like Lee, than people from other minority positions.

The use of "subculture" to describe Lee's *Projects* is pervasive and without much critical reflection about what this term means. Examining this label will help to further connect Lee's photographs to the strategies employed in genre paintings. The back of her Hatje Cantz monograph describes her *Projects* as "snapshot-style color photographs in which she adopts various subcultures."[46] Jennifer Dalton explains, "In series of photographs with titles such as 'The Yuppie Project,' 'The Young Japanese Project,' 'The Drag Queen Project,' and 'The Seniors Project,' the Korean-American Lee visually blends into divergent subcultures, pointing up the constructed nature of identity to amusing, as well as sober, effect."[47] Dalton continues, "Her work argues that even the subcultures one is apparently born into, such as ethnic groups, are more socially fluid and

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[45] Kwon, 86-87.
[46] Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruin: Hatje Cantz, 2001).
[47] Jennifer Dalton, "Look at Me: Self-Portrait Photography after Cindy Sherman," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 22, No. 3 (September 2000): 47. Sooran Choi points out that Lee is not "Korean-American," but rather is Korean and argues that many author misidentify her because her work does not seem "Korean enough." On the other hand, Choi wants to highlight that Lee's negotiation of being "American" is from a more "foreign" position in order to emphasize Lee's work as a "diaspora artistic strategy." See Choi, 50.

self-subscribing than conventionally believed."[48] Shane Waltener characterizes the artist as "[a]cclaimed for her *Projects* series in which she infiltrated American subcultures."[49] And Kwon describes, "Since 1997, Lee has been photographing herself (or has herself photographed by a friend) in various subcultural guises—as senior citizen, swinger, punk rocker, young Japanese tourist, Hispanic, yuppie, lesbian, among others. Insinuating herself into the life of such groups for two or more weeks at a time, she adopts their appearance—the signifiers of their identity in terms of dress, posture, attitude, activities—to such a complete extent that she can easily pass for one of them."[50]

But what does "subculture" mean and how does the idea of subculture help us to understand the construction of normativity? Cultural theorist Ken Gelder describes, "Subcultures are groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do, and where they do it. They may represent *themselves* in this way, since subcultures are usually well aware of their differences, bemoaning them, relishing them, exploiting them, and so on. But they will also be represented like this by others, who in response can bring an entire apparatus of social classification and regulation to bear upon them."[51] The term "subculture" was first used during the 1940s to classify people, though subcultures themselves have existed for a much longer time. Gelder begins his analysis of subcultures with the "vagabond" subculture of sixteenth-century London due to the popularization of the "Elizabethan underworld" through the pamphlet-writing and rogue literature. Even within this early subculture, various types emerged that included

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[48] Dalton, 49.
[49] Shane Waltener, "The Real Nikki," *Modern Painters* 17, No. 1 (Spring 2004): 67.
[50] Kwon, 86-87.
[51] Ken Gelder, "Introduction: The Field of Subcultural Studies," *The Subcultural Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1. Emphasis is Gelder's.

the ruffler, whip-jack, palliard, and swigman.[52] Though Lee represents subcultures in her various projects, she represents a variety of types. For instance, *The Ohio Project* represents white trash subculture that includes a farmer, trailer park resident, mother, and car enthusiast. Unlike documentary photographs that often record names of the photographed subjects, Lee leaves the names of the "real" people she photographed unidentified but viewers can read and interpret their location and accouterment to figure out what type of person they are. The farmer stands in barn with tractors and his clothes are dirty from working. The trailer park resident sits in his easy chair in the living room of his manufactured home. The mother stands in the yard of her home while adult and children's clothing hangs to dry on the clothesline behind her. And the car enthusiast stands next to his yellow Ford Falcon that sits parked in front of a green Ford Maverick, both economical American cars from the 1960s and 1970s. Lee poses with all of these people and we know that her belonging in these genre scenes is part fictional. As one type, she is a New York artist, but in *The Ohio Project* she adjusts her appearance to look like the counterpart to the Ohioans—maybe as the girlfriend, neighbor, or adopted daughter to these people.

As Gelder developed further definitions of subculture, he emphasized various aspects of the construction of subcultures that are helpful in analyzing Lee's series. Subcultures involve, first, narration from both in- and outside of the group and, second, a subcultural geography, or the investment of subcultures in various places. Gelder also identified six ways to account for and define subcultures. These include the understanding and evaluation of subcultures: "in terms of their relation to labour or work," such as in the understanding of some groups as idle, unproductive, at leisure,

[52] Gelder, "Introduction," 1-2.

pleasure-seeking, hedonistic, or self-indulgent; as negatively or ambivalently in relation to class as they deviate from, disavow, or transcend from their class background; as in relation to territory rather than property ownership so that their "modes of belonging and their claims on place find expression"; in terms of non-domestic forms of belonging away from the home, or as social groups "*outside* of the family circle"; in terms of exaggeration or excess that registers the "'deviance' of a subculture through a range of excessive attributes—behaviour, styles and dress, noise, argot or language, consumption, and so on—which are then contrasted with the restraints and moderations of 'normal' populations"; and, finally, as resistant to mass cultural forms so that "subcultural identity is pitched against the conformist pressures of mass society and massification" while at the same time refusing "one of mass society's prevailing 'symptoms,' alienation."[53]

The relationships between the construction of subcultures to narrative and place have particular relevance to Lee's projects. I turn now to the question of subculture and will examine the role of subcultural geography later in this chapter. First, Lee narrates her understanding of a group before she "joins" it in her reduction of the group members to type and thus her relationship to such types. Lee is not the only person to narrate the meaning of white trash culture and her use of stereotypes draws attentions to the way larger cultural rhetoric also constructs and reconstructs, or positions and repositions, people into social groups. Based on these descriptions, Lee began her narration in *The Ohio Project* by purchasing most of her clothing for her Ohio persona in the East Village of New York City.[54] From outside, she used stereotype to dictate the style and

[53] Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 3-4. Emphasis is Gelder's.
[54] Lee, "Conversation," 107.

performance that would help her gain access to the inside of the group, presumably as evidenced by her snapshots.

Dick Hebdige offered a now seminal description of subcultures in connection to style, and he located subcultures as sites of political possibility of Refusal against normalization, such as in his analysis of post-war British subcultures including teddy boys, punks, and mods. Hebdige's definition of subculture would seem to suggest that members of subcultural groups make a conscious decision to challenge cultural norms. Thus, you could argue that senior citizens, such as in Lee's *The Seniors Project*, are not a subculture. They do not have a choice about entering this group because they cannot help but age. For Hebdige, subcultures bring together like-minded people who identify themselves through their use of style, including their mannerisms, clothing, and specialized language. He describes, "Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature', interrupting the process of 'normalization'. As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus. Our task becomes… to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style, to trace them out as 'maps of meaning' which obscurely re-present the very contradictions they are designed to resolve or conceal."[55] But senior citizens do make some choices regarding their performativity and following or deviation from the standard style and activities characteristic of this group. This does align senior citizens as a subculture based on Hebdige's discussion of style.

Gelder built off of Hebdige's synchronic discussion of subcultures and style to identify a more diachronic understanding of subcultures as nonnormative social groups.

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[55] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979), 18.

Gelder's description would also include senior citizens, because dominant national narratives do not construct seniors as active and ideal citizens; the use of "senior" to differentiate them from ideal "citizens" becomes one way that language is used to mark them as other to cultural norms. As dominant narratives recount, senior citizens drive and walk too slowly, go out for early-bird specials, and retire to senior centers where they knit, play bingo, or just sit around idly with other seniors, and, as Gelder notes, one way that subcultures are deemed nonnormative is based on the relationship of a subcultural group to labor. Lee shows this sense of idleness and community in most of *The Seniors Project* as she adopted elements of seniors' style—orthopedic shoes, scarves, cardigans, and long overcoats—and fit in with the social group such as when she sits idly on a park bench with a group of elderly women (Fig. 4.12). So how does Lee construct a subcultural group in the normative national space of Ohio?

IMAGINING OHIO

As an illustration of the belief in the "real" America and Americans, particularly with regards to Ohio, politicians often refer to normative figures and places when campaigning in order to appeal to people's sense of identification and belonging to the privileged position, even if they only imagine they belong. For example, in 2008 John McCain and Sarah Palin's presidential and vice-presidential campaign made "Joe the Plumber," an "average guy" from the swing-state of Ohio, somewhat infamous. On the campaign trail, the white, middle-class Joe asked presidential candidate Barack Obama a

question about raising taxes on small business owners.[56] In the third presidential debate between Obama and McCain that followed shortly thereafter, the candidates mentioned Joe twenty-six times while they referred to the economy sixteen times and the ongoing war in Iraq only six times.[57] After McCain's initial reference to Joe, this new celebrity appeared with McCain and Palin at rallies, including one at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio and another in Sandusky, Ohio. The conservative news bureau FoxNews described Joe, a plumber from Toledo, as "the nation's every man—embodying the American dream and representing the swing voter Barack Obama and John McCain want to reach."[58] Conservative cultural rhetoric conflates figures, such as Joe, with small towns or the suburbs and describes them as "middle" or "real" America, such as the rural sites represented in Lee's *The Ohio Project*. By appearing to be a political candidate who more closely connects to this population of U.S. citizens, politicians claim that they are in a better position to maintain the "proper" values and morals toward the entire nation's well-being. But as white trash, the people Lee represents diverge from the ideal. As Johns explains, incongruities often accompany typing within genre scenes. For instance, Johns cites the ideal type of the yeoman—"an agrarian who farmed his own land" and "was the political and moral bedrock of the republic"—yet urban citizens often spoke ill about actual farmers.[59] And while the populace celebrated the frontiersman as a capable and manly independent figure, because

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[56] AP Press, "Obama Meets 'Joe the Plumber' in Ohio," *Washington Post* (16 October 2008), available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/video/2008/10/16/VI2008101600236.html (accessed 3 October 2011).
[57] Brian Montopoli, "Joe the Plumber's Chat with Couric," 16 October 2008, available at http://www.cbsnews.com/2102-502163_162-4525242.html?tag=contentMain;contentBody (accessed 19 July 2011).
[58] FoxNews.com, "Joe the Plumber Represents Hopes, Dreams and Political Football," available at http://elections.foxnews.com/2008/10/16/joe-plumber-represents-hopes-dreams-political-football (site disconnected). See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for a discussion of the Everyman.
[59] Johns, *Genre*, 12-13.

he left "civilized" society behind, he was known for his "vulgarity, ignorance, and lack of moral standards."[60] The slippage that occurs with the position of Lee's subjects is not new, but instead highlights the slippages between various identities as the relationship of particular individuals or groups to normative ideals approach and then diverge in a continual process of negotiation and renegotiation.

Unlike the direct reference between the senior citizens in *The Seniors Project* and the title of her series, in *The Ohio Project* a more apparent slippage occurs between the idealness that Ohio holds in national narratives as a white space and the subcultural stylistic elements—including the subjects' denim cutoffs and overalls, Confederate flags, and rifles—that Lee uses to represent people considered white trash as well as the artist's relationship to her photographed subjects. The label "white" in white trash suggests normativity to a point, but as soon as "white" is paired with "trash" it marks this group as nonnormative, like "senior" did for the elderly "citizens." Sociologist Matt Wray outlines the stereotype of white trash as "those people down the road with the washing machine and the broken-down truck in the front yard. It conjures images of poor, ignorant, racist whites: trailer parks and wife beaters, too many kids and not enough government cheese."[61]

Here is one instance of the mobility of normativity. If white trash is understood as "racist whites," Lee's Asian traits would mark her as other to their whiteness. In contrast, white trash occupies a more racialized position when compared to ideal whites. Their whiteness suggests privilege but their class constructs them as "other" to normative

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[60] Johns, *Genre*, 18.

[61] Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 1. Wray also suggests, "Scholars of whiteness have become extraordinarily sure-footed and nimble when the word that follows *white* is *supremacy*, *power*, *privilege*, or *pride*, but they tend to stumble badly when it is followed by *trash*." Wray, 3. Emphasis is Wray's.

ideals. As "trash" they are othered to the "purer" imagined whites, such as we saw in Crewdson's construction of the suburbs as a clean and moral place of white suburban families. Crewdson specifically represented the construction of the suburbs as clean and pure and the potential threat of the dirtiness of white trash in his "Plate 5" from *Twilight* (Fig. 3.26).[62] As Wray explains, "Split the phrase in two and read the meanings against each other: *white* and *trash*. Slowly, the term reveals itself as an expression of fundamental tensions and deep structural antimonies: between the sacred and the profane, purity and impurity, morality and immorality, cleanliness and dirt….*White trash* names a people whose very existence seems to threaten the symbolic and social order."[63] In Crewdson's "Plate 5," the trash and havoc in the home and yard of on the right side of the frame may spill over into the pristinely kept (white) yard on the left. Thus even Crewdson used the narratives of white trash subculture as a nonnormative threat upon the idealized place of the suburbs just as he used actual dirt to threaten the purity in other frames as seen in "Plate 32" of *Twilight* and "Plate 35" of *Beneath the Roses* (Fig. 3.25 and 3.17). But Lee's color "marks" her further as different from the whiteness of the Ohioans she photographs. Their status as white trash marks them as nonnormative to idealized whiteness or to normative culture, but her Asianness marks her as nonnormative when compared to the status of whiteness to which they do have (some) claim.

The slippages of the hierarchical positions between normative and nonnormative illustrate how systems of differentiation are not just based on skin color, but that various systems of differentiation together construct normative ideals. But conservative politics mobilize the fear of the racialized "other" to mask the ways that conservative politics

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[62] For a discussion about the symbolic meaning of dirt and disorder see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966).
[63] Wray, 2. Emphasis is Wray's.

actually benefit the upper class. As George Lipsitz explains, "[R]acism takes place in the United States not because of the irredeemably racist character of whites as individuals, but because the racial project of whiteness is so useful to elites as a mechanism for preserving hierarchy, exploitation, and inequality in society at large. Poor whites with compelling grievances against class exploitation can be mobilized to support their white skin privilege instead of advancing their class interests."[64] Though "othered" away from ideal whiteness, those who identify as white trash may hold onto their whiteness as their key identification above class.

Cultural rhetoric racializes the lower class, white trash people, like Lee's Ohioans, and codes them as non-white due to their imagined laziness and their inability to live up to the imagined purity and cleanliness of whiteness. In *The Ohio Project*, though the farmer may be in his barn to work, he is covered in filth—though Lee does not actually show him in the act of working. And the trailer-park resident just sits around in his La-Z-Boy style chair. Wray describes that part of the narrative understanding of white trash as lazy is due to the historical infestation of hookworm—an example of when dirt and disorder interrupted the well being and potential of whiteness—that made people ill and extremely lethargic, particularly in the southern United States. This recalls that one of Gelder's definitions of a subculture is the narration of the group's relationship to work or labor, which in the case of those considered white trash would involve their apparent avoidance of labor and preference for laziness. A 1909-1915 campaign across eleven states aimed to educate poor whites that worms spread through unsanitary outhouses and improper waste disposal. It also aimed to treat those already infected and to break the cycle of infection. Arguably this would return poor whites to their more proper and

[64] Lipsitz, *Place*, 42-43.

prosperous position as workers and citizens. Wray suggests this led to further "legitimization and authorization of the general view that habits and customs of poor rural whites caused infection and disease and that diseases were the *cause* of poverty…. [A]ny thought that perhaps poverty might be a factor in the causation of disease was pushed further and further from view [and] few hookworm campaigners ever seriously considered issues of social inequalities."[65] Hookworm is just one element of the narrative about poor white trash that constructs them as different from the ideal. While the disease was actually suffered by many people, how campaigners discussed and treated the disease showed the bias against poor whites that constructed them as different from their more ideal counterparts. Lee picks up on the stereotypes used to differentiate between groups of people but she replicates them without seeming to understand their historical development or their continued cultural relevance in narrating difference. Instead, she seems to buy into the narratives so that she can match her performance to them in order to belong to each group.

While some of Lee's decisions about her performance, including her costuming and gestures, may develop from her copying stereotypes based on what she sees in the style of the people from each subculture, stereotypes connote more than an individual's fashion choices. As Dyer explains, stereotypes function as "agreements" about social groups, as if the characteristics believed about each group developed prior to and separate from the representation of said group through stereotyping. Thus, stereotypes become

[65] Wray, 104. Hookworm was generally described as a Southern disease. Wray also describes how the term "poor white trash" gained momentum from the 1840s to the end of Reconstruction in the 1870s. Like Johns' description of the types represented in genre paintings to order the seemingly disorder in the changing nation, the term "poor white trash" was used to "make sense of what was, given popular assumptions about the superiority of light-skinned peoples, otherwise difficult to explain: some people of northern European descent, particularly but not exclusively in southern states, were clearly less than superior—were even inferior—to blacks and Indians." Wray, 47. Though the stereotype emphasized the South, it spread to include poor whites across the nation.

part of the narration about groups, including subcultures, and help to construct the "reality" or terms associated with belonging. Society then judges the performance of individuals based on their adherence to or divergence from stereotypes and polices day-to-day performances of identities.[66] Even if we acknowledge the poststructural idea of identity as a collection of performances, there is always an audience for whom one performs and who evaluates each performance, even if it is the performer who polices their own performance.[67] This means that even if we consider the Ohioans as performing their identity, and Lee performs in an attempt to "be" one of them, cultural norms police or evaluate performances of identity. The outcomes of these evaluations complicate postidentity ideologies that suggest that identity is only based in the individual and that identities are no longer political by making them social. Thus, I want to examine two additional stereotypical, and policed, decisions Lee made for *The Ohio Project*—her use of blond hair and the ways in which she appears in submissive positions to the Ohioans based on conservative ideals of race, gender, and even age.

Even though people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds dye their hair artificially blond, blond hair connotes whiteness. Richard Dyer describes bleached blond hair as part of the ideal of "really white whiteness," which is an impossible and unattainable ideal. Through various objects of clothing and alterations to their bodies, people strive to reach this ideal. He notes, "In Shakespeare,… Venus must be 'a whiter shade than white', Cytherea in *Cymbeline* must be 'whiter than the sheets'. The Ku Klux Klan must dress in white sheets, because, as Walter Benn Michaels points out, 'their bodies aren't as white as their souls, because *no* body can be as white as the soul

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[66] Dyer, "Stereotype," 14. See the epigraph of this chapter for Dyer's complete quote.
[67] Carlson, 5-6.

embodied in white sheets'…. The most celebrated blondes (Harlow, Monroe, Bardot) were not true blondes, but peroxided to within an inch of their death."[68] Thus, blondness becomes part of the construction of ideals of whiteness.

During the opening of the 2001 Venice Biennale, Santiago Sierra referenced and employed the meanings associated with blond hair when he created *133 Persons Paid To Have Their Hair Dyed Blond* (Fig. 4.13). For this piece, the artist paid 133 street vendors with naturally dark hair 120,000 lire, approximately 60 USD, to have their hair bleached blond. More than treating bleached blond hair as a popular fashion choice, the artist used the contrast between the bleached blond hair of the project's participants and their natural hair color, along with many of their darker skin tones, to critique the invisibility of those marginalized within capitalism. The act of paying his participants to dye their hair blond drew attention to the large presence of illegal street vendors in Venice, many of them Senegalese, Bangladeshi, or Chinese immigrants, and also Southern Italians.[69] Sierra could have dyed their hair any bright color to make them "visible," but blondness carries connotations of idealized, normative subjects with it. Dominant narratives about Italians construct Northern Italians as more "European," or whiter, and Southern Italians as more "Mediterranean," or darker in skin tone and hair color. Lee's use of blond hair functions similarly because it looks very unnatural on her and draws attention to the modification she made to approach whiteness. Dyer suggests blondness is not about looking "natural" but, like Sierra's employment of blondness, and whether intentional or not, Lee's dye job as a move toward whiteness stands in contrast to her "darker" skin.

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[68] Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 78. Emphasis is Dyer's.
[69] Santiago Sierra, "133 Persons Paid To Have Their Hair Dyed Blond/Arsenale. Venice, Italy. June 2001," available at http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200103_1024.php (accessed 31 October 2012).

Lee also submits herself to many of the white trash Ohioans in the series in ways that often make her seem childlike.[70] Thus, the artist does not seem like a dominant figure hierarchically privileged above the Ohioans she photographs. For instance, in *The Ohio Project (10)*, Lee sits on a tractor, behind and dwarfed by the dirty and sweaty large white farmer who stands between her and the camera (Fig. 4.3). She wears a plaid blouse, denim overalls, and clean white tennis shoes. The image recalls the practice of placing children on animals in petting zoos or on other objects solely for the purpose of taking a photograph. Lee never works on the farm but instead becomes a "tourist" for the sole purpose of making her photographs. Made childlike, she appears submissive and belongs to the scene based on her stereotypical overalls and blond hair but she is not an equal to her counterpart due to her pose, placement in the scene, cleanliness, and her Asian features. In *The Ohio Project (21)*, the artist clings laughingly to a woman who is older than she is as she appears childlike to the older woman due to her gesture (Fig. 4.6). In *The Ohio Project (35)*, she smiles for the camera as she stands near another woman in a rain-drenched amusement park (Fig. 4.7). Once more childlike, Lee looks less concerned with being caught in the rain compared to the other woman's gesture and expression; the snapshot caught the older woman in an action that makes her look like she is giving Lee directions.

In her book chapter "Nikki S. Lee's *Projects* and the Repackaging of the Politics of Identity," Cherise Smith points to the stereotype of Asian American as the "model

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[70] Patricia Hill Collins notes the intersectionality of difference based on the ideal family includes hierarchies based on age. Due to gender, the father ranks as the head of the household and is followed by the mother, but they hold privilege over their children based on differences in age. See Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All In the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3, Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy (Part 2) (Summer 1998): 65. This power dynamic flips when middle age parents become senior citizens and more "childlike" in a number of ways such as they way many senior citizens need help feeding and clothing themselves like children do.

minority" in order to set up the dichotomy between them and those assumed to be "flawed" minorities—those often with darker skin and/or in lower classes. Smith sets up this binary to complicate it in Lee's *The Hip Hop Project* (Fig. 4.14). While Smith assumes that many viewers will interpret Lee's darkened skin in this series as "trying to be black," Smith notes that Lee plays with both blackface and yellow face. The artist darkens her skin but also uses makeup to exaggerate the shape of her eyes with "an 'Orientalist' flourish," which could be Lee's attempt to "become" the "particular urban phenomenon, the Asian American, perhaps Vietnamese American or Filipino American, who is acculturated African American."[71] Thus, Smith describes various cross-cultural Afro-Asian exchanges that Lee's *The Hip Hop Project* engages but, she explains, Lee's "engagement of the equally troubling practices of yellowface and blackface could be chalked up to benign ignorance on the part of the Korean immigrant, but it also suggests that the artist occupies a privileged position within ethnic, national, and class hierarchies."[72] I offer Smith's description due to her use of the "model minority," but she does not engage further with this term in relationship to Lee's *Projects*. Social relations construct and narrate Asian Americans as the "model minority," which Lee's photographs recall because she represents her Asianness next to white Americans throughout *The Ohio Project*. The model minority functions as one more narrative construction about a subcultural group highlighted, though not really complicated, in Lee's images.

Yuko Kawai describes that the stereotype of the model minority positions Asian Americans in opposition to other minorities, especially African Americans, and points to

[71] Smith, 220.
[72] Smith, 219-220.

statistics to argue that Asian Americans have "made it" financially and culturally in the United States without federal support programs.[73] The logic following this stereotype reasons that other minorities should be able to succeed at the same level that Asian Americans have. Thus, conservatives use this model to argue against affirmative action programs. Problematically, this logic does not take into account the different circumstances surrounding race relations between each group and the nation as the stereotype follows the neoliberal emphasis on the individual and the resultant descriptions of cultural processes and institutions as "colorblind."

Submission is important in constructing Asian Americans as the model minority because submission differs from the construction of African Americans as the most visible, "bad," or "real" of racial minorities. Shireen M. Roshanravan describes:

> African Americans serve as the hegemonic representative of this "bad"/"real" minority in large part because they figure prominently as a racial group that has demanded redress from the U.S. government for systematic state abuse and denial of resources to their communities. According to the model-minority narrative, "bad" cultural values substitute for state-sponsored racism as the cause of poverty among non-white peoples. Specifically, the model-minority racial project attributes the economic success of certain Asian immigrant communities to "superior" cultural values of hard work, discipline, and obedience to authorities. The equation of economic success and "superior" cultural values erases differing colonial and imperial histories. This includes the forgetting of U.S., state-manipulated immigration patterns that funneled some populations into middle-class professions while systematically denying others a chance to move beyond survival.[74]

The historical amnesia of the model minority narrative erases discrimination against Asians in the United States, such as the extreme example of the World War II internment camps for Japanese Americans, in favor of the "whitening" of Asian Americans. It

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[73] See Yuko Kawai, "Stereotyping Asian Americans: The Dialectic of the Model Minority and the Yellow Peril," *Howard Journal of Communications* 16, No. 2 (2005): 109-130.
[74] Shireen M. Roshanravan, "Passing-as-if: Model-Minority Subjectivity and Women of Color Identification," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 10, No. 1 (2009): 3.

positions Asian Americans as nonaggressive when compared to the more "visible" African American calls for equality and attributes their "success" to their proximity to ideological whiteness.

There are few exceptions to Lee's nonaggression, or submission, as a model minority and they only occur when she is not with white people. In the only image that intentionally includes nonwhite people in the series, *The Ohio Project (27)*, the artist stands at the center of a group shot as the visiting motocross stunt performers pose around her. She holds the most powerful position in the center of the image. For *The Ohio Project (8)*, she stands alone in a more aggressive, even sexually suggestive, pose as she extends her arms to hold onto a doorframe and leans toward viewers. Throughout her narrative in Ohio, Lee positions herself as submissive when she poses with white people so that she appears as a model minority and only when she poses with nonwhite people or alone does she take more powerful positions. This may or may not be intentional on her behalf through her editing of the series but the final selection of images does frame her visually this way.

The role of the model minority fits within Lee's narrative construction of the white trash Ohioans and their conservative beliefs that dominant narratives assume they hold not only about race, but gender too. For instance, Lee's racialized position intersects with her gender when she uses the long established and conservative trope of the passive and sexually objectified female in *The Ohio Project (7)*. She sits behind a man in the armchair as he keeps her in her place between his rifle and the Confederate flag on the wall—an object that refers to very conservative beliefs about race in the United States and the superiority of whites (Fig. 4.9). And in *The Ohio Project (6)*, Lee

lays on the hood of the car in an objectified pose while a man stands next to the car and closer to the open, driver's side door (Fig. 4.6). In these examples, she constructs her identity in relationship to the Ohioans in a way that merely reflects dominant ideals about cultural hierarchies. Her photographs become sites of more critical work only once we talk about their constructed nature rather than the "reality" that causes her to belong in each of the genre scenes.

Lee's submission to the white Ohioans—at least whiter than she appears to be—becomes clearer when you see images from Ohio in contrast to the more aggressive poses she takes in other projects, such as when she performs as a loud-mouthed Hispanic woman in *The Hispanic Project (18)* (Fig. 4.15). Surrounded by a number of people who relax outside on their porches and on the city sidewalk, Lee leans and gestures toward the Hispanic couple whom she addresses. She "knows" the dominant narratives about the subcultures she joins, or, as she explains questionably, she uses her "intuition" as her guide. In order to seem like she belongs to the groups, she creates images policed by dominant U.S. narratives all the while moving into and out of groups as the model minority would.

But as Kawai argues, the position of Asian Americans in the United States involves simultaneous and contradictory stereotypes of both the "model minority" and the "yellow peril." Kawai uses Homi Bhabha's notion of "ambivalent stereotypes" to demonstrate how these two conflicting stereotypes of Asian Americans work dialectically. As one becomes the "official" stereotype, the other lurks hidden but still influences the official position. This dialectic relationship keeps Asian Americans "forever foreign" as they oscillate between these two positions and are never imagined as

fully "American." The stereotype of the yellow peril implies a threat to hegemony and Kawai traces this stereotype across various historical moments including the medieval threat of Genghis Khan and the Mongolian invasion of Europe, various nineteenth- and twentieth-century wars and Japan's 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, and the economic advance of Japan and the "Asian tigers"—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—in the 1980s.[75] As such, stereotypes of Asian Americans imagine "yellowness" as a threat to the purity of whiteness, just as the white trash threatened to dirty the purer white ideal.[76]

By highlighting Kawai's dialectical stereotypes of Asian Americans, my aim is not to essentialize all Asian Americans to this stereotype, but there is a way that such stereotypes help to construct the dominant narratives of subcultural groups that differentiate such groups from the norm and serve as justification for social inequities that follow. This happens with the understanding of lower class whites as white trash. Cultural rhetoric constructs them as whiter or purer than people of color but they do not have full access to ideal whiteness. Lee's presence as an Asian woman in Ohio is of particular relevance due to the history of companies in the American Rust Belt—including the industrial areas found in Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and other Midwestern and Northeastern states—sending manufacturing jobs overseas and also foreign competition against domestic companies, a process that was heightened in the 1980s and whose effects are still felt today. Many of the rural, working class Ohioans in Lee's *The Ohio Project* could work, or have worked, in manufacturing jobs. Thus, Lee's

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[75] Kawai: 109-130.

[76] Patricia Hill Collins explains the construction of the national family is a eugenic project meant to keep the idealized nation, or family, racially pure. Collins, "Family": 75-77. "Yellowness" and "trash" both threaten the assumed purity of the "white" national family.

presence also suggests the assumed threat of the yellow peril in the industrial Midwestern region of the United States.

In a 2012 Super Bowl ad, Michigan Republican Senate candidate Pete Hoekstra criticized his opponent Democrat Debbie Stabenow by evoking the fears of the yellow peril because, as a Midwestern state, Michigan has also been greatly affected by the outsourcing of industrial jobs. The ad's construction of difference between white Americans who "lose" their jobs and Asians who "take" them distracts the ad's Midwestern audience from the capitalistic practices of the companies who actually made the decision to outsource their labor force and U.S. economic policies that make it advantageous for companies to do so. Hoekstra's ad opens with the sound of a gong as the camera pans across flooded rice paddies. The Chinese American actress Lisa Chan rides her bike along the paddies toward the camera. Smiling and wearing capri pants, a three-quarter length sleeved t-shirt, and a large hat hanging by a string around her neck that recalls a conical paddy hat, Chan represents the yellow peril. She stops and in broken English says to the camera and to viewers, "Thank you, Michigan Senator Debbie 'Spenditnow.' Debbie spends so much American money. You borrow more and more from us. Your economy get very weak. Ours get very good. We take your jobs. Thank you, Debbie 'Spenditnow.'" Chan then peddles off camera, at which time the ad cuts to Hoekstra sitting in front of a fireplace. As the ad cuts back to images of the rice paddies, Hoekstra explains that he thinks this race for senate is between Debbie "Spenditnow" and Pete "Spenditnot" as he "approves this message."[77]

[77] This ad has been pulled from many sources, but I found it online at Awircs, "Pete Hoekstra Racist Ad During Super Bowl" (6 February 2012), available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrbdXUWryXk (accessed 17 March 2012).

After receiving much criticism for the ad, Chan apologized for her participation, but Hoekstra continues to defend the ad. He claims the ad is insensitive only to Stabenow and President Obama, or Democrats, and their spending habits. In defense of Chan's inclusion in this ad, Hoekstra's rationalized that because Chan's parents are "100 percent Chinese," her participation in this role remains acceptable. With this explanation, Hoekstra problematically assumes that the actresses' own biographical background and "authenticity" would overrule criticism of his advertisement for being racist and culturally insensitive. The actress' biography functions in a way similar to the people Lee uses in her photographs to "authenticate" her performances. She only "belongs" in each subculture because the other people in her images seem to accept, and justify, her being there.

Furthermore, to be fully effective, Hoekstra's ad relied on the tendency of Americans to collapse all East Asian nationalities and ethnicities together into one "Asian" culture that then assumes the threat of the "other." The ad employed a Chinese American actress along with images of flooded rice paddies that recall those seen by many Americans in the documentary images from the Vietnam War. The particularities of Asianness collapse into the larger "yellow peril." As another slightly earlier example of this collapsing of Asian identifications, critics of Maya Lin's 1981 winning design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial were upset that a person of Asian heritage—Lin is Chinese American—would design a memorial to honor the deaths of U.S. soldiers in the war fought in Asia.[78] Veterans' groups and other opponents of the memorial attacked Lin personally based on her race, even though she was born and raised in Ohio. Her Asian

[78] Maya Ying Lin, Freida Lee Mock, Terry Sanders, Eileen Harris Norton, and Charles Bernstein, *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision* (Santa Monica, CA: American Film Foundation, 1994).

heritage overrode her residency in Middle America, and the slippage between Asian nationalities was key, because Lin was in no way Vietnamese. These two examples demonstrate that cultural memories still resonate with all of "Asia" as a potential opponent—as the yellow peril—and threat to U.S., or normative, ways of life. Such threats are activated in ways that result in a fear of people deemed different from the assumed norm rather than, for example, questioning the economic polices that lead to the movement of jobs overseas and the decline in American prosperity.

Visually Lee assuages mainstream culture's fear of the yellow peril mostly through her *The Ohio Project* while her presence also disrupts the assumed purity of Ohio as an ideal or white place. This relates to Gelder's second point about subcultures and that is the importance of "subcultural geography," which I have already begun to suggest in my analysis because place functions as part of the narrative understanding of a group of people. Gelder uses "subcultural geography" to describe how each subculture "creates its geography, a set of places or sites (some of which last longer than others) through which it gains cohesion and identity."[79] _Much of Lee's narrative of the white trash she photographs depends on her use of the place of Ohio, the place most overtly labeled in her numerous *Projects*.

Crewdson identified New England and the normative space of the suburbs as "timeless" and "anywhere" as he problematically situated one particular site to represent the nation. Yet his frames also showed the construction of the imagined ideal in the face of more actual conditions, such as in "Plate 21" of *Twilight* that represents a white man building an ideal suburban home complete with a picket fence in contrast to the actual conditions of his neighborhood, even though Crewdson had also dressed the set of the

[79] Gelder, *Subcultures*, 2.

actual neighborhood. Even with the slippages between the idealized notion of the suburbs and the more actual conditions, Crewdson's auteurial oversight of the models, props, and costuming in his scenes reconstructed the suburbs as a site for normative white, heterosexual families, those privileged by U.S. cultural rhetoric and policy toward full citizenship. Unlike Crewdson's attempt to use New England—a particular place—to represent a timeless anywhere, Lee named the place that she photographed thus drawing viewers' attention to what role this particular state has in the understanding of the nation. Like Crewdson's uncanny constructions of the suburbs, Lee's selection of Ohio becomes an important site to discuss the construction and composition of U.S. demographics and the difference between the actual and the imagined. Lee actually went to Ohio to create *The Ohio Project*, but her final series constructs a limited representation of Ohio as a rural place populated by poor white people.

Although cultural rhetoric imagines Middle America as white, Columbus, Ohio, served as the test market capital in the United States for decades, because the city served as a "microcosm of the nation"; for years, it matched national averages regarding median income and racial demographics.[80] Lee greatly reduced the diversity of the actual place in order to match the imagined ideal of Ohio, and thus the nation, as white. The majority of the people with whom she posed in Ohio are white except for *The Ohio Project (27)*, for which she posed with a group of motocross performers that includes Hispanic or

[80] Columbus also drew companies to test their products because it is a college town with many young consumers and major interstates pass through the city, which "broadens the city's consumer base." Karlee Weinmann and Aimee Groth, "New Fast Food Products Get Tested First in Columbus, Ohio," *Business Insider* (2 November 2011), available at http://www.businessinsider.com/how-columbus-ohio-became-the-test-market-capital-of-the-us-2011-11?op=1 (accessed 7 April 2012); Mark Brandau, "Why Chains Pick Columbus, Ohio, as Test-Market Target," *Nation's Restaurant News* (26 August 2011), available at http://nrn.com/article/why-chains-pick-columbus-ohio-test-market-target (accessed 7 April 2012); and Neeli Bandapudi, "Columbus, Ohio: 'Test City, USA,'" interview by Neil Conan (14 October 2009), available at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113795356 (accessed 7 April 2012).

Pacific Islander entertainers (Fig. 4.10). But like Crewdson's representations of black men who entered the suburban scenes only due to their employment, the travelling motocross stunt group visits Ohio for their employment but do not "belong" in this place as residents. Lee attempts to construct Ohio as a white space, toward which she performs toward whiteness as the submissive model minority and her use of blond hair. But in the background of *The Ohio Project (35)*, an African American adolescent walks through the space behind Lee, who poses for a picture next to a white woman in an amusement park. Lee did not include him purposefully in her series because she did not ask him to pose for the image. Instead, he walked through the background of the photograph unintentionally, which points to the diversity of people in this place that Lee's construction of types tends to ignore, a strategy also used in genre painting that reduces subjects to types.

In Lee's *Projects*, locations help to confirm the identity of the types she represents such as the inclusion of the farm, fairgrounds, and trailer home as some of the locations for her white trash Ohioans. For example, we do not expect to see a yuppie in a trailer home and we do not. The place helps to narrate the subcultural group. The representation of numerous domestic spaces in *The Ohio Project* would seem counter to Gulden's definition of subculture as a group identity that is constructed away from the home, but part of the narrative of white trash subculture also includes the organization of lower class whites as kin. Furthermore, the conservative emphasis on "family values" associated with familial space is often associated with this group of people. Five of Lee's nine images published as *The Ohio Project* show domestic spaces and adult and children clothing hangs from the clotheslines in the yard of *The Ohio Project (21)*. The requisite family dog looks toward Lee and a woman posing for the photograph. The image does

not represent the woman's family but alludes to her having children through the objects in the yard. Like Crewdson's suburban tableaux, the elements of *mise-en-scène* help to construct the narrative about who these people are. The difference would be that Crewdson oversaw the meticulous dressing of his sets in order to change the mundane into the strange whereas the "props" in Lee's photographs were presumably already there as part of the Ohioans' everyday lives. These objects, like the actual people from Ohio with whom she poses, serve to authenticate her performance of this subcultural identity. The domestic spaces also help to situate the more rural places in Ohio as "real" America in contrast to the imagined urban space.

Trying to pinpoint the meaning of Lee's body as a sign in her performances in relationship to the Ohioans around her becomes a difficult task. The impossibility of securing the hierarchical positions of the subjects in *The Ohio Project* highlights the way individuals must constantly negotiate their identity as part of a social process based on relationships. Lee commented on the fluidity between her conceptual art performances and the performativity of everyday life when she claimed that she has been creating *The Artist Project*. She states, "There aren't any pictures of it, but it exists."[81] This statement again recalls the reception of genre paintings that was, according to Johns, the viewing of "an everyday life that was someone else's."[82] By typing, or even caricaturizing, members of subcultures, Lee's images invite viewers to identify with the groups she photographs, or laugh off the limited characteristics she visually narrates about each group from a more normative position when compared to the "sub" position of the subcultures she represents. Thus Lee's overall project draws attention to the social construction of

[81] Russell Ferguson, "Let's Be Nikki," in Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruin: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 17.
[82] Johns, *Genre*, 3.

identity as evidenced particularly by the slippages in *The Ohio Project* in a way that is much more complicated than celebrating her work along the ideologies of postidentity or dismissing it for ethical reasons would suggest.

I suppose that her work entered the photo canon so quickly because while it engaged with many buzz words—identity, postidentity, and performance—it does so in a way that replicates stereotypes and ideals of normativity. Lee's "slipperiness" allows for critics, many of them from the New York art world, to celebrate identity politics while not really having to challenge cultural hierarchies.[83] By examining her *Projects*, we see how Lee's work becomes a site where it is difficult to untangle various stereotypes as various positions intersect among systems of differentiation. In *The Ohio Project* this is due to the way her photographs engage with normative whiteness as imagined by the location of "Ohio," the racialized model minority and yellow peril as signified by Lee, and stereotypical representations of the class-based white trash subculture.

After creating *Projects*, Lee continued to examine processes of identity formation. For *Parts* (published in 2006), Lee posed as a part of a heterosexual couple and sliced the photographs to cut her mate out of the image (Fig. 4.16). Through the fragment that remains, Lee attempts to question how being part of a relationship impacts the formation of an individual's identity. And for *Layers* (2007-2008), the artist hired street artists to

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[83] As a "New York artist," Lee works from inside the New York art world just as William Sidney Mount created his genre painting *Farmers Nooning* from inside the group of antiabolitionists. There are numerous ways that Lee's *Projects* connect to the metropolitan city. In addition to living there, she earned her early gallery representation in the city when she was a graduate student at New York University. She also photographed much of her *Projects* in the city and even when she left to go to Ohio, she shopped for her clothing in NYC. This raises the question if she created her work for an assumed New York audience, the way that Suzanne Opton's comments seem to suggest that she created *Soldier* and *Citizen* for a U.S. audience. This is a line of inquiry I plan to investigate further, because I find it curious that Lee did represent people in any of her subcultures viewing artwork. Thus, she does not create self-reflexive images that overtly address the viewer as part of the "art world" and, more specifically, the New York art world to which she holds many direct connections.

draw her (Fig. 4.17). On a light table, she layered the drawings based on the city that she met each street artist—Rome, Madrid, Hanoi, Buenos Aires, and Bangkok—and photographed the resulting composited images. With this process, she questioned if the location of the sketch artist caused him or her to emphasize certain characteristics of her appearance over others. With these projects, Lee aims to engage non-essentialized, or socially constructed, ideas of identity. But to merely treat identity as a costume that you wear and can wholly change feeds too much into neoliberal celebrations of the individual over social organizations. In other words, this approach suffers from historical amnesia as it negates the lived experience and the impact of discriminating practices rooted in social and cultural institutions—an amnesia found frequently in celebrations of Lee's *Projects*.

CHAPTER 5

"FALLING MAN": KERRY SKARBAKKA STRUGGLES TO RIGHT HIMSELF

Nobody dast blame this man. You don't understand: Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat, and you're finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.

—Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

Philosopher Martin Heidegger described human existence as a process of perpetual falling, and it is the responsibility of each individual to catch ourselves from our own uncertainty…. I continually return to questions regarding the nature of control and its effects on this perceived responsibility, since beyond the basic laws that govern and maintain our equilibrium, we live in a world that constantly tests our stability in various other forms.

—Kerry Skarbakka, "The Struggle to Right Oneself"

Surrounded by lush evergreen trees that reach for the sky, a ravine of dizzying heights opens in front of you. To your left, an abandoned train trestle that used to allow trains to cut deep through the forest extends across the ravine until it culminates into the thick green overgrowth. Its faded gray, wooden beams intersect with the rust-colored train track running down the center of the structure. From your vantage point, the metal truss extends down into the deep, deep ravine below. The lines of the trestle lure your eye to a lone man on the edge of the structure. Without clue as to why, he jumps from the bridge. It is too late for the solitary figure to change his mind, or for you to intervene; at the moment that you see him, the toes of his black shoes barely rest on the ledge of the metal frame. He bends his knees, extends his arms, and looks toward the bottom of the ravine—his imminent destination—without noticing or acknowledging you (Fig. 5.1).

Captured by photography, this man will stay in this anxiety-provoking position, giving you time to examine him further. The space of the six-foot tall photograph

envelops you as the lines of the trestle lead your eyes to this man; he is positioned where the wooden surface of the trestle intersects with the vertical beams of the truss as one of the rust-colored beams extends behind him perpendicularly. As he leans over the edge, he flaps his arms and his movement blurs the photographic representation of his body. In contrast, there is an extremely sharp point focal point on the trestle. From this singular point, the angles of the structure emphasize the height of the ravine and the distance that this man is about to fall to a nauseating effect, especially if your eyes follow the lines of the trestle and the trees down to the slight area of water at the bottom of the frame. The photograph solicits a visceral sense of vertigo based on the dizzying height of the bridge and the man's imminent fall. Frightfully, it arrests his action right at the moment that he is past the point of no return. He will fall, though we do not see it happen or how he lands. The man's appearance also constructs a sense of confusion or unease. His white skin contrasts with his dark suit, a sign often associated with middle or upper class businessmen in the contemporary United States. We do not expect to find a businessman jumping from a bridge into a deep forest ravine. He has left the business world to wander through the foreign, forested frontier and leap.

The photograph is from contemporary U.S. "performance-photographer" Kerry Skarbakka's (b. 1970) series *The Struggle to Right Oneself* (begun in 2002).[1] This series of large-scale, color photographic images depicts the artist held in space as he plummets toward the ground or in some cases, possibly, ascends miraculously. He stages each scene and does not depict clear details of his appearance because he turns his face away from the camera or selects final frames that otherwise obscure his features. He also uses

[1] I first came across the term "performance-photographer," and the description of Skarbakka as such, in Neil Steinberg's "A Phony Artist and His Dopey, Insulting Stunt," *New York Daily News*, available at http://www.nydailynews.com/front/v-pfriendly/story/319554p-273189c.html (accessed 14 March 2006).

costuming to alter his look across his series by changing his clothing and facial hair. While his artwork is very much about his physical experiences, these alterations abstract his specific identity somewhat. After performing—falling, tumbling, or otherwise projecting his body—in front of the camera, he intervenes in the final image by digitally erasing all evidence of the climbing gear and other equipment that he may have used to aid his performances. Thus, he mixes the media of photography, digital art, and performance throughout his process.

Skarbakka's personal background, the events of 9-11, and larger contemporary instabilities of global relations and identity politics at the turn of the twenty-first century all influence the artist's examination of anxiety. In a 2010 artist statement, Skarbakka explains, "I continually return to questions regarding the nature of control and its effects on this perceived responsibility, since beyond the basic laws that govern and maintain our equilibrium, we live in a world that constantly tests our stability in various other forms. War and rumors of war, issues of security, effects of globalization, and the politics of identity are external gravities turned inward, serving to further threaten the precarious balance of self, exaggerating negative feelings of control."[2] While he attempts to broaden the relevance of his work to a larger audience through generally felt anxieties in contemporary U.S. culture, and not just those from his personal experience, his performances remain rooted specifically in his identification as a white male artist as the focus on him an "individual" reflects myths of rugged individualism. Due to his use of his body in physically challenging feats, Skarbakka's series provides a site to examine contemporary issues of normative masculinity in the United States. White masculinity

[2] Kerry Skarbakka, "*The Struggle to Right Oneself,* Statement," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/struggle_statement.htm (accessed 30 December 2012).

serves as privileged ideal in contemporary culture as this "normative" position maintains power through public policy and rhetorical maneuvers—which become apparent with Skarbakka's project.[3] After tracing some of Skarbakka's stated intentions and the impact of his combination of performance, photography, and digital art on the meaning of his work, I will show how even though his photographs challenge the ideal notion of masculinity by showing a white man losing stability and falling, the typical reception of his photographs and his own explanations often negate the criticality offered by his images. Thus, his series negotiate cultural norms about identity in unexpected ways.

Masculinity is an idealized position created through processional maneuvers. As R. W. Connell defines, "'Masculinity', to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture."[4] In his book *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Michael Kimmel traces various moments of the construction of manhood—what society teaches men they should do—throughout the history of the United States. He states, "Putting manhood in historical context presents itself differently, as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world. Manhood is neither static nor timeless. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it's socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our

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[3] As a "normative" position, cultural rhetoric imagines white masculinity as an unmarked ideal from which "other," more frequently specified and labeled positions deviate. For examples of recent studies that attempt to counter the "invisibility" of normative positions, see Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); and Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[4] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd Edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 71.

culture."[5] Yet Kimmel limits his study to men because he wants to "write of men *as men*," by documenting how the definition of masculinity changes over time and "how the experience of manhood has shaped the activities of American men."[6]

Both Connell and Kimmel limit their studies of masculinity to men, but as a culturally constructed, idealized position, and not a biological attribute, masculinity is not solely a property of men's bodies. Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* offers a corrective to Connell's and Kimmel's limiting attachment of this ideal to particular figures as she examines various cases of masculinity associated with nonmale bodies.[7] Her study opens up the understanding of masculinity as a cultural construction that people from a variety of biological positions can attempt to occupy. Following Halberstam's corrective, I acknowledge that masculinity is not only yoked to men, but my case study of Skarbakka's series necessitates a closer look at masculinity when it is expressed by a particular man's physical form and his accompanying accouterments and actions.

While Kimmel argues that the specific forms of masculinity change based on historical context, he also identifies three patterns that emerge across various moments of manhood. First, men demonstrate their masculinity through forms of self-control and restraint. Second, cultural rhetoric constructs masculinity in relationship to the fear of "others," which leads to categories of exclusion that control those excluded. And third, when feeling too pressured by culture, men attempt to escape. There is often a physical component the third response as men literally run away. I note all three patterns in

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[5] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3rd Edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.
[6] Kimmel, 1. Emphasis is Kimmel's.
[7] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

Skarbakka's *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, including in Skarbakka's own explanations of his series. Thus, Kimmel's observations of the patterns within manhood help illuminate how Skarbakka's images and statements may stop the critical potential of his chosen act of falling and reinstate hegemonic masculinity. Although he represents failed masculinity by falling, across various frames Skarbakka demonstrates masculine self-control by using his physical prowess to undertake dangerous feats, alludes to the exclusiveness of white masculinity through the use of the "Everyman" to describe the character he plays, and represents escape by retreating and leaping at great peril to his physical well being, or even to his implied death. My aim is by no means to fault the artist for his reconstruction of masculinity. He creates his work within cultural rhetoric and relationships that will, of course, impact his artwork. Instead, even as his series superficially challenges normative assumptions, upon more in-depth analysis it begins to negate its critical potential. Thus *The Struggle to Right Oneself* shows the strength that normativity's hold maintains in contemporary U.S. culture.

In analyzing the white male body as a sign for normative masculinity, I work from Philip Fisher's description of cultural work as "hard facts." Fisher explains that once culture instills a moral perception—in the case of this chapter, that white masculinity serves as a powerful norm and is often not thought of as racialized or gendered—culture forgets "its own strenuous work." Thus, according to Fisher, "Once what had only been a risky and disputable claim has come to seem obvious, the highest work of culture has been done, but because the last step involves forgetting both the process and its very openness to alternatives or to failure, the history of culture has trouble in later remembering what it is socially and psychologically decisive for it to

forget."[8] The hard fact of masculinity leads to its frequent "invisibility" in culture, "forgetting" that all positions of identity are involved in relational processes to each other. For example, Skarbakka and other white male artists cannot or do not self identify as making art from the position of a white male artist.

In Suzanne Opton's *Soldier* and *Citizen*, the hard fact of normativity was the way that domesticity served to imagine the nation as a hierarchically-structured family based on racialized and gendered privilege. This became all the more apparent once Opton's project included photographs of Iraqi refugees and her project served to imagine the nation as unified in order to imagine difference between domesticity and foreignness. Gregory Crewdson's suburban tableaux imagined the suburbs as an idealized and moral space where the purity of the space was being disrupted by alien forces. The hard fact of what George Lipsitz termed the "white spatial imaginary" served to order differences in U.S. culture along normative ideals of race, gender, sexuality, class, and place. In Crewdson's series, this became evident due to the lack of discussion by critics and the artist about how the *mise-en-scène* of his photographs encoded different identities in order to evoke a sense of the uncanny from viewers. And Nikki S. Lee's *Projects* highlighted the problematic assumptions of post-identity ideologies as her particularity as an Asian, New York artist of means became part of her series. This became particularly apparent in her presentation and representation of the normative place of Ohio that she visited temporarily through her cultural tourism. And by demonstrating the way Skarbakka's *The Struggle to Right Oneself* serves as a negotiation of white maleness as a

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[8] Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4. Roland Barthes argues for a similar examination of cultural constructions that have become naturalized. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957).

normative ideal, I will help to mark such a position and not allow it to continue to function as unmarked. Additionally, by examining the nineteenth-century painter Thomas Eakins' negotiations of masculinity as a historical precedent for Skarbakka's representations of contemporary masculinity, I aim to situate Skarbakka's particular negotiation as just one particular moment in the continued construction of masculinity as always being under attack from "others" and, thus, in supposed crisis.

KERRY SKARBAKKA PERFORMS

Once on location, Skarbakka performs his falls multiple times to achieve a single image by combining his knowledge of mountain climbing and martial arts so that he lands safely. The height of a specific fall determines the type and amount of climbing gear that he will utilize. To create *Interstate* (2003), for example, Skarbakka leapt from an overpass, landed on an embankment, and rolled to safety without using gear. But to create *Naked* (2002), he constructed an armature in a bedroom and used lightweight climbing gear to stage his action.[9] And for *Con—mporary* (2005), originally part of the June 14, 2005 performance *Life Goes On*, Skarbakka leapt from the rooftop of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. Due to the taller height of the building, the artist hired the professional theatrical rigging company Chicago Flyhouse to control his fall. The company strung two 2,000-pound wires through a cantilever that they placed on the museum's roof. Harnessed to the wires, Skarbakka fell safely a number of times over the course of the day.[10] Skarbakka's physical involvement in his process requires an assistant—frequently his partner Tracy Kwit—to release the shutter of the camera, which

[9] Kerry Skarbakka, telephone interview with author, 7 February 2007.
[10] Jon Yates, "Being a Fall Guy All Day Long; Relax, It's Only Art," *Chicago Tribune*, 15 June 2005, http://proquest.umi.com/ (accessed 9 February 2006).

Skarbakka positions after storyboarding the images. By repeating his actions numerous times, he produces a variety of options from which to select and create his final compositions.

Skarbakka titles works that he created in the United States according to what he thinks about during the process of creating or after he sees an image. Such titles range from *Trestle* (2003), the image at this chapter's opening, and *Stairs* (2002), which both identify the generic setting of the image, to more referential titles that include *Plato's Cave* (2002), a work that he titled for what he calls the "theoretical members of his audience."[11] Skarbakka titles images that he created outside of the continental United States according to their geographical locations in order to emphasize that he has actually traveled to these places. The images *Sarajevo* (2002) and *Croatia* (2003) illustrate this practice. By using different naming conventions, these latter titles point to the extra effort it took to get to these sites and travel, thus, becomes part of the varying degrees of his performance and physical participation for his series.

As a "performance-photographer," Skarbakka uses his hybrid process to evoke a sense of anxiety and to question uncertainties influenced by both his personal history and contemporary U.S. culture. Raised in the Bible Belt of Tennessee, he grew up according to Pentecostal Christian beliefs while he lived with his mother, stepfather, and brother. The artist spoke in tongues by the age of seven, participated in Bible debate teams, and traveled to Europe for two summers as a teen missionary. He states that his strict

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[11] *Plato's Cave* refers to Plato's allegory involving a group of prisoners in a cave who were chained in place with a fire behind them. They could not turn to look around so they only saw shadows, and not real forms, projected on the wall in front of them by the fire at their backs. Plato used this allegory to illustrate that thinking and speaking about reality can occur without the presence of actual forms. Susan Sontag wrote about photography in "In Plato's Cave" and replaced the shadows of Plato's allegory with photography to illustrate Western culture's use of photographic images to understand reality. See Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973), 3-24.

Christian upbringing did not provide him with any "constructive information about how to deal with life" but instead left him full of fear and anxiety. In contrast, Skarbakka spent many summers with his biological father, whose parenting style differed greatly from that of his mother and stepfather. Skarbakka's father would promote drinking and "getting laid" to the teenage Skarbakka, which undermined the boy's strict Christian indoctrination and led to bouts of depression.[12] He eventually left Tennessee and escaped from his background by joining the United States army, though his mother and stepfather forced him to enlist as part of his duty as an American citizen. This recalls the service of Suzanne Opton's soldiers and the way the military offers many Americans a way out of their current situations. Skarbakka's two years in the military, from 1988 to 1990, resulted in further depression and drug use, which he explained "led to an expansion of [his] mind in a very ungodly way" and then to his final breaking away from years of strict religious teachings. He developed *The Struggle to Right Oneself* partially from a "life of anxiety, worry, and tension [that has] contributed to a certain sense of loss of placement and foundation."[13] And his physical feats become ways for him to engage earnestly with the instabilities of his "placement and foundation" while he develops an understanding of himself. To such personal ends, he stated sincerely, "This is the work that I have to make."[14]

In addition to the personal impetus for this project, Skarbakka's chosen action of falling was inspired by the events of 9-11. He was struck by the fact that if some of the

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[12] Tori Marlan, "Why is this Man Going to Jump off the MCA?" *Chicago Reader* 34, No. 37 (10 June 2005): 28.
[13] Kerry Skarbakka, "Kerry Skarbakka: The Struggle to Right Oneself," interview by Melissa DeWitt, *Hotshoe International* 134 (February/March 2005): 31.
[14] Kerry Skarbakka, "Creative Capital: Risky Business," College Art Association, New York City (9 February 2011).

9-11 victims jumped intentionally—although I note that circumstances forced them to make this decision—they took control of their fate, while at the same time abandoning themselves to a final outcome. *The Struggle to Right Oneself* is his attempt to "respond intelligently" to the events of the day and also to the way the attacks shook many Americans' assumptions about the stability and power of the nation.[15]

The content of Skarbakka's imagery also responds to a more widespread anxiousness in terms of political relationships and contemporary "crisis," as noted by critics and the artist. For example, in the 2005 *Aperture* cover article about Skarbakka's series, Wayne Koestenbaum linked the feeling of anxiousness to the loss of cultural stability and the falling global reputation of the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[16] In a 2005 interview, the artist explained it thus, "[Society is] driven by greed and we have a leader [George W. Bush] who thinks he is ordained by the Western God to bring our ideology to everyone else. This is not right and there is nothing I can really do about it. I am continually stripped of the ability to control what my government does or how the rest of the world views us."[17]

Global relationships and U.S. governmental policies become apparent in Skarbakka's *Border Fence* (2012, Fig. 5.2). In this image, he appears to have leapt over the newly renovated fence between Nogales, Arizona in the United States and Nogales, Sonora in Mexico. The tall rusted brown posts of the fence cast parallel lines of shadows onto the dirt road that runs beside the metal barrier. The photograph suspends the artist, who wears a black t-shirt, blue jeans, a black baseball cap, and a backpack, above the

[15] Marlan: 29. Later in this chapter, I discuss *The Struggle to Right Oneself* in the context of events of 9-11 in more depth.
[16] Wayne Koestenbaum, "Kerry Skarbakka: Falling," *Aperture* 179 (Summer 2005): 63.
[17] Skarbakka, interview by Dewitt: 28.

ground with his arms out and knees bent as he drops toward a small grassy mound. Although he hides his face, when seen in the context of his larger series, you know he is a white American man. This realization challenges the typical narrative told in the United States that border fences are meant to keep (darker) Mexicans out of the (whiter) country to their north. In Skarbakka's photograph, a white man crosses the border illegally, thus engaging the politics of racialized and nationalized identities as heightened by the recent constructions and renovations of border fences, including this stretch that runs through Nogales. The structure's large scale—its height and the way it snakes deep into the background of the photograph—dwarfs the artist's body and displays the state's power visually. The parallel rows of shadows cast by the bars of the renovated national boundary further emphasize the act of caging people to specific places because the shadows create lines that recall prison bars or stripes worn on prison uniforms. *Border Fence* also implicates the viewer in the space of the six-foot tall image. The dirt road running along the fence extends past the bottom of the photographic frame. Led visually into the space of the image by the tapering grassy mound at the base and the top band of the fence that intersects Skarbakka's body, we stand on this road and wait to see the outcome of his fall. But will we rush to aid him? Report him to authorities? Or ignore his transgression of this boundary?

In order to stimulate a sense of anxiety, Skarbakka intentionally places viewers within the scenes, such as the way he placed the lines in *Border Fence* to extend and include us in the space of the image. A similar composition underlies *Trestle* as the use of a strong diagonal of the train trestle leads viewers from the left corner of the image to the artist's body. Additionally, in *Three Pillars* (2003), the ground curves from the

foreground up to the right where a line of three pillars cuts back to the left and into the background (Fig. 5.3). Skarbakka falls next to the second pillar and toward the shallow water's surface. And in *The Hunter* (2010), the branches—in the foreground and slightly out of focus—draw viewers' attention to a ladder resting against a tree on the left side of the frame (Fig. 5.4). At the top of the ladder Skarbakka, in orange hunting gear, falls backward and at a slight angle toward the ground. Through his use of form and content, Skarbakka heightens the affective connection between the space and events represented in his scenes and viewers' vantage point. A similar affective connection occurs with *Stairs* (2002), *Blue Tree* (2002), *Clint* (2002), *Hopkins* (2003), and other images in this series, because they imply that the artist falls directly onto us, again connecting the space and time of the image with that of spectators.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin suggest that the overall characteristic of new media, a category in which I include Skarbakka's digital constructions, is its "remediation"; newer media borrow from older media to establish themselves. For example, computer graphics remediate the appearance of photorealism and video games remediate the appearance of cinema leading to their functioning as "interactive films."[18] Skarbakka's digital constructions, in part, rely on the continued belief in photography's privileged position to record reality. Bolter and Grusin assert that remediation, or the way in which "new media refashion prior media forms," is comprised of two strategies: the desire for transparent "immediacy" and "hypermediation."[19] Both strategies inform the experience of viewing Skarbakka's *The Struggle to Right Oneself*.

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[18] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 28, 47.
[19] Bolter and Grusin, 273.

With immediacy, viewers look through the medium employed to the subject as if the representation is a form of reality. This allows viewers to sense that they occupy the same space as the representation. For much of the history of Western art, immediacy has been a defining characteristic. For instance, Renaissance painters attempted to create the illusion of space in paintings so that the art functioned as a transparent window into the painted space. By employing perspective, which Bolter and Grusin describe as "seeing through," and minimizing the surface appearance of brushstrokes, many Renaissance painters seemed to erase the presence of the artist to create this sense of immediacy. Furthermore, Bolter and Grusin suggest that media such as photography, film, and television automate immediacy by mechanically and chemically reproducing perspectival space and subjects.[20] Skarbakka's digital constructions replicate photographic perspective to extend the space of the image back and forward to include the viewer. They "look" photographic enough that his digital alterations do not deter viewers completely from experiencing the transparent "reality," or immediacy, of his photographic space.

Yet, Skarbakka's compositions engage viewers more affectively than happens with iconic examples of linear perspective. With linear perspective, the illusion of depth occurs most fully once viewers are situated in a specific spot in relationship to the vanishing point of the painted scene. For instance, in the case of Masaccio's *Holy Trinity* (1425), a Renaissance fresco for which it is believed that the architect Fillipo

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[20] Bolter and Grusin, 24-25. Bolter and Grusin's credit their definition of perspective as "seeing through" to the work of Albrecht Dürer and Erwin Panofsky. The immediacy of photography and film is also due to the role of these media as indexical recorders. See Charles Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in *The Philosophy of Peirce: Selected Writings*, ed. Justus Buchler (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1940), 102; André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," trans. Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1960): 4-9; and Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 120-155.

Brunelleschi—whose experiments began to codify linear perspective—assisted Masaccio, there is a particular distance for a viewer to stand centered with the painting to make the orthogonals of the tomb extend out and the barrel vault recede back (Fig. 5.5). Whereas Suzanne Opton employed a "humanizing affect" to connect viewers with the U.S. soldiers and Iraqi refugees she photographed in unconventional and vulnerable poses, Gregory Crewdson engaged viewers by juxtaposing hyperreal amounts of details that take time for viewers to examine, and Nikki S. Lee drew on the familiarity of snapshot photography to authenticate her performed "belonging" in various subcultures, Skarbakka's photographic images engage viewers in a more Baroque-like fashion than occurs with photography's automation of linear perspective. By situating Skarbakka's constructed scenes against those by Crewdson, the Baroque characteristics and affectivity of the former's compositions will become more apparent. And as I will show, the Baroque characteristics of Skarbakka's frames help viewers experience the anxiety of his series' content.

Both Crewdson and Skarbakka photograph their scenes, thus automating linear perspective. Yet their compositions differ with regards to their employment of Classic and Baroque "styles," which Heinrich Wölfflin outlined in his well-known *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*. Crewdson's scenes function as the former and Skarbakka's as the latter, and this distinction has implications for the way the images engage viewers. In Crewdson's cover image for his series *Twilight*, a woman floats dead in the flooded living room of a middle class house. This untitled frame—Crewdson's updated version of Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1851-1852)—contains a multiplicity of details arranged by the

photographer's set designers (Fig. 3.5). These include the dead woman's slippers and robe sitting on the staircase, family portraits that hang on the staircase wall and sit on top of the nearby bookcase, a bottle of aspirin sitting on the coffee table next to a glass of water and a romance novel, while lamps glow warmly and the sun begins to stream through the windows. Crewdson's compositions also frequently include rectangular doorways, windows, rooms, and buildings that highlight photography's automation of linear perspective. In Crewdson's picture of Ophelia, this is most apparent in the angles of the lines that follow where the walls and ceiling meet.

The characteristics found within Crewdson's composition align closely with Wölfflin's description of Classic art. Wölfflin described the development of art as the transition of characteristic "styles." To illustrate his argument, he described Quattrocento Classic, or Renaissance, approaches to composition vis-à-vis those in Cinquecento Baroque works (Fig. 5.6).[21] For Wölfflin, Renaissance paintings suggest depth through a multiplicity of overlapping planes that sit parallel to the surface of the picture. For example, though the orthogonals of the architecture in Raphael's *School of Athens* (1509-1511) lead back in depth with one-point linear perspective, the composition contains many overlapping and parallel planes. Groups of philosophers fill the foreground of the image. Behind them, the stairs climb to a horizontal row of philosophers positioned along the picture's horizon line. Further in the distance sculptures of Apollo and Minerva stand in niches next to the opening of a barrel vault, and this shape repeats in additional planes into the picture's depth. Likewise, Crewdson's Ophelia floats amid a myriad of individual details, which I mentioned previously, but parallel to the picture plane. She

[21] Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. M.D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1950 [1915]). While Wölfflin analyzes the shift from Classic to Baroque styles throughout his book, for a summary of his argument, see page 15.

also remains parallel to the coffee table and couch behind her, the bookshelf that stands against the stairwell, and the back wall of the living room.

In contrast to Crewdson's composition, Wölfflin's description of Classic art, and Bolter and Grusin's description of photography as an automation of linear perspective toward a sense of immediacy like that found in Renaissance paintings, Skarbakka's series engage viewers in more Baroque ways. For Wölfflin, Baroque art extends space through a more unified sense of recession, such as in Peter Paul Rubens' *Raising the Cross* (1610-1611), a central panel of a triptych. Christ's foreshortened body extends back into the space on an angle while muscular men struggle to raise him on the cross. The narrative appears not in a series of overlapping planes, but within a space implied by the angle of the cross and unified by the strong sense of motion as the men struggle together. All of the elements in a Baroque piece function in unity unlike the multiple parts in a Renaissance artwork that maintain their independence and must be read part-to-part in order to arrive at an understanding of the work as a whole. Further, Classic art aimed to appeal to viewers by engaging their intellect with logical compositions and calm narratives. In contrast, Baroque art aimed to appeal to viewers' emotions through implied action of narrative.[22] Thus, Raphael used visual qualities characteristic of Classic art, as outlined by Wölfflin, to represent the philosophers in a more static and calm moment as they stand around the Classical space while Ruben's composition emphasizes motion and the physical struggle underway in the Baroque scene.

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[22] The Catholic Church employed the affectivity of Baroque art and architecture toward its Counter-Reformation aims. A complete analysis of Baroque art in the service of the Counter-Reformation is beyond the scope of this study, but put simply, by overwhelming the viewer with a visceral and emotional response to visual stimuli, the church attempted to encourage piety in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. Church leaders laid out this intent for Baroque art in service of the Counter-Reformation in the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

Like numerous frames from *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, Skarbakka's *Pali Lookout* (2004) demonstrates the Baroque characteristics of his contemporary images (Fig. 5.7). In *Pali Lookout*, the artist falls in front of golden-lit rock uprisings of Oahu's coastline in Hawaii. The image emphasizes Skarbakka due to the way the golden rocks frame his falling body as mountains extend back and curve to the right through the unified space of the image. A patch of grass in the foreground implies a position for viewers to stand to survey the scene. Skarbakka falls through the air as his clothing extends behind and above him. This image suggests depth through a unification of the whole scene as the mountain and grassy section of earth in the foreground curve back and recess into space. Crewdson's pictures invite viewers to explore the multiplicity of elements in his scenes from detail to detail to detail, from floating woman to suburban interior to the various light sources and objects sitting around the room. But Skarbakka's narrative provides a more dramatic moment of action as he falls through the air than does Crewdson's more Classic representation.[23] The actions that led to Ophelia's death have long passed. The water has begun to recede from the flooded home and viewers only see the aftermath of her drowning. Thus, in composition and narrative Skarbakka's imagery function more like Baroque art and Crewdson's like Classic art. Though Skarbakka works with photography, it is not enough to describe his composition as Bolter and

[23] Wölfflin's comparison between Classic and Baroque art includes five points, but some are not as applicable to my discussion of photography. For instance, he situates the linear characteristics and "absolute" clarity of Classic art against the painterly appearance and "relative" clarity of Baroque art. Because Skarbakka and Crewdson both work photographically, these descriptions of linear/painterly and absolute/relative do not apply as much as they do to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century paintings that Wölfflin studied. Wölfflin also describes Renaissance works as "closed" or complete within the image while Baroque works appear "open" as the space seems to extend beyond the frame. By using photography, Crewdson's and Skarbakka's works suggest that they framed and removed a moment from a larger world. Thus, both seem more "open." The landscape and ocean extend miles and miles from Skarbakka's position in *Pali Lookout* while Ophelia's living space seems to continue to additional spaces up the stairs and beyond the room's doorways. These diversions from Wölfflin's categories occur because of the photographers' use of lens-based media.

Grusin's transparent automations of linear perspective; Skarbakka's photographs engage viewers more affectively. By implicating viewers in relationship to the space of the scenes and to his body, he also implicates viewers with the content of his series—the larger, albeit unstable, social processes that challenge an individual and cultural sense of equilibrium and the anxiety evoked by falling.

Because Skarbakka's altered images look like transparent photographs, they seem to serve a documentary function—to visually record his action in various sites. But his images also give clues to their construction through the repetition of his action across the series of more than three-dozen pictures; the attention he paid to the formal elements including line, color, and framing; and the possibility of extreme injury based on the actions depicted in the photographs. The content of his series relies on the understanding of photographs as carriers of visual evidence to "prove" the feat of his performances, yet he does not create "straight" photographs. [24]

Unlike immediacy, hypermediacy calls attention to the medium. Bolter and Grusin point to the technique of photomontage as an example of hypermediacy. Artists construct photomontages by combining elements from various photographs, which draw the viewer's attention to the final work's surface. Even when viewers attempt to view this kind of work as a cohesive pictorial space, their attention will be directed back to the

[24] Even though the "reality" of Skarbakka's frames relies on the immediacy, or transparent appearance, of his images, he must alter his photographs with the use of digital technology to create his illusions. For his earlier photographs in the series, he scanned exposed film, removed any signs of his supports, and adjusted levels of color slightly for effect. Skarbakka trained as a sculptor and a painter and thus explains that his final colors serve toward compositional purposes more than they accurately represent reality. Kerry Skarbakka, interview with author, Pittsburgh, PA, 17 November 2010. After he completed his digital alterations, he had a chromogenic print created from his digital file. Because his printer no longer prints from negatives, and as digital photographic technology has progressed, Skarbakka uses digital photography for more of his process, although his images still look "photographic." For example, he began shooting his performances with digital cameras, as is the case for his image *Snow Mountain* (2010). Kerry Skarbakka, email correspondence with author, 23 February 2011.

construction of the image.[25] In Skarbakka's *Naked* (2002), the naked artist ambiguously falls or ascends above a bed (Fig. 5.8). As he tumbles in the air and struggles against the pull of gravity, a map on the wall curls and begins to fall, spotlighting his motion. Like the photomontage's various pieces, the improbable positioning of Skarbakka's body and accentuated movement gives clue to the construction of the scene and hypermediates it. But the lack of actual evidence to the scene's construction—as I mentioned previously, the artist attached lightweight climbing gear to an armature he built in the bedroom—joins with the viewer's belief in the transparency of the photographic medium, to facilitate the reading of the image as imbued with a sense of immediacy.

Overall, Skarbakka's digital alterations are subtle and not immediately apparent. Thus even through he manipulates his images digitally, viewers may continue to experience his images as they would experience transparent photographs.[26] Bolter and Grusin suggest that both immediacy and hypermediacy are "opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real. They are not striving for the real in any metaphysical sense. Instead, the real is defined in terms of the viewer's experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response."[27] This desire for experience through media is part of the pleasure that viewers encounter when viewing constructed images that suggest

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[25] Bolter and Grusin, 34-39.

[26] Skarbakka's *Stairs* was posted to FailBlog.org on February 8, 2008, without the context of his larger series. This website allows users to post humorous images, often snapshots, labeled with the caption "fail." Some of the online viewers' comments regarding *Stairs* illustrate the believability of Skarbakka's digitally constructed image. One viewer commented, "Ouuchh!!! He surely hurt himself!!!" Another posted, "I think there's also implicit fail in how his friend is photographing this instead of helping him." "Stairs Fail," FailBlog.org, available at http://failblog.org/2008/02/08/stairs-fail/ (accessed 5 February 2009). Though Skarbakka created *Stairs* with digital technology, viewers may experience the image with a sense of immediacy as well as hypermediation. The latter happens more obviously when a viewers sees the numerous frames from the series together, which was not the case when *Stairs* appeared alone on Failblog.

[27] Bolter and Grusin, 53.

a reality. In his article, "What's the Point of An Index? Or, Faking Photographs," Tom Gunning moves away from dismissing digitally-altered photographs because they are not "true" or "authentic." He instead focuses on the reception of digital images that look photographic and the pleasure viewers experience when seeing a version of reality though it did not exist in the world as it appears in the image.[28] Furthermore, he describes that the photographic index functions as more than just semiotic signification and positions the indexicality of photographic images as "passageways" between the space of the viewer and that of the image.[29] Such an experience can arise from viewing Skarbakka's work. Even when a viewer is aware of an image's construction through hypermediacy, the viewer may experience visceral or emotional responses including the sense of anxiety that Skarbakka's pictures foreground through his performances, viewer's familiarity with sensations of falling, and also through the Baroque compositions of his digital images.

But just as Skarbakka's series become hypermediated, it shifts away from the constructed nature of his compositions toward a sense of the "real," or immediate, due to the emphasis his process places on the physicality of his performances. In doing so, he engages with contemporary U.S. ideals of masculinity and, even though he represents the failures of man by falling, he also reinstates normative ideals about gender seemingly unintentionally. When describing his art, Skarbakka often recalls stories of broken ribs or other physical maladies due to his process. Numerous times he suggested the difficulty of doing this work without health insurance.[30] These physical ailments serve as badges

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[28] Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of An Index? Or, Faking Photographs," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 23-40.
[29] Gunning, 35.
[30] At the time of Marlan's 2005 article in *The Chicago Reader*, she notes that Skarbakka was a 34-year-old artist without health insurance. The artist often mentions that his art takes a physical toll from his body and that he continues to make such work even through he was not insured for a period of years, as he recalled

of honor in relationship to his muscular, physical prowess, which cultural rhetoric frequently codes as part of masculinity. Michael Kimmel noted that one pattern in the construction of masculinity across the history of the United States is the notion of masculine self-control or restraint. While the shape and health of women's bodies is always in focus, Kimmel argues that only a few moments in U.S. history—at the turn of the twentieth century and again in the contemporary moment—does this self control manifest in men's focus on their health and diets.[31] The turn of the twentieth century was a time when the urban work force increasingly included clerical and professional occupations. The move to more sedimentary professions resulted in the development of sport and recreational activities as opportunities to participate and construct masculine ideals. The recent focus on men's bodies, Kimmel argues, is due to the increase of women in the workforce and the subsequent "collapse of the workplace as an area in which to test and prove masculinity." He summarizes, "When our real work failed to confirm manhood, we 'worked out.'"[32]

By bring the explanations of his series back to his physical performances, Skarbakka negotiates the focus on the male body within contemporary ideals of masculinity. For instance, Skarbakka recalled how he pushed himself to his bodily limits when creating *Trestle*. He tied a rope around his waist and leaned over the edge of the structure. The rope held him secure, but he would loosen the rope and lean over a little bit further so that his assistant could take another photograph of him in this position.

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during one of my interviews with him when he was 40 years old. Kerry Skarbakka, interview with author, Pittsburgh, PA, 17 November 2010.

[31] For a discussion of the embodiment of masculine prowess in the wake of industrial development near the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century, also see John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body at the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

[32] Kimmel, 225.

They repeated this process to the point when the artist's body began to revolt and shake due to his physical feat. At that point, he knew that he was done with this performance and had gotten the shot he wanted. He had pushed himself just past the edge of comfort and felt that going any further would really put him in harm's way.[33] A viewer who does not know that Skarbakka performs on location for his photographs may assume that he put himself in this position through the use of digital technology due to the way his extreme position hypermediates his image.[34] Yet the sense of immediacy of the photographic appearance of his composition allows viewers to experience an anxious moment as we witness the man about to leap from the bridge. If Skarbakka's interest only involved the final photograph as a constructed image, the creation of the document would not require the time, travel, experience, and/or physical danger involved in his process. Rather than going through the trouble of participating in the physical action and repeating it many times just to arrive at a single image, he could very well create the illusion of falling in various settings by constructing the images completely with digital technology. While he negotiates masculinity through his physical involvement in the creation of the images—his act of falling and his travel to the various locations as highlighted by his titles—the end product is an altered image.

Skarbakka highlights the contemporary masculine focus on self-restraint and physical prowess more overtly by including images of physical sport in his series beyond the physicality required for each frame, albeit in ways that suggest a failed masculinity through the act of falling. These include *Clean and Jerk* (2009), for which Skarbakka

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[33]Kerry Skarbakka, "Constructed Visions & The Aesthetic of Personal Activism," Society for Photographic Education SW Regional Conference, Santa Fe, NM, 11 November 2012.

[34] Skarbakka describes his specific process in some interviews and lectures but does not provide specific details in exhibitions. Without explanation, viewers are left to ponder how he created each photograph.

lifts a large barbell of heavy weights in a cinder-block gym but falls over backwards as he struggles to right himself with weights (Fig. 5.9). And in *Over the Handlebars* (2008), Skarbakka remains midair after he flipped over the handlebars of a bicycle (Fig. 5.10). He holds onto the handlebars with his left hand as he reaches his right hand above his head and in front of him. While his failed attempt at the sport threw him over the bike's frame, the depiction of this exact moment suggests that he has developed the extreme core strength necessary to maintain his position as he hovers parallel to the ground even when the click of the camera's shutter is what actually paused his action. He also represents his nude body in the aforementioned and matter-of-factly titled *Naked* as well as in *Shower* (2005, Fig. 5.11). Through these frames, Skarbakka depicts his able-bodied form but because he is always shown in the act of falling, even in these nude scenes, the images do not read as sexualized as much as they demonstrate his anatomy or physique.

Like Suzanne Opton's work, Skarbakka's projects share something with the early modern painter Thomas Eakins' negotiation of the "crisis of masculinity" at the turn of the twentieth century. While Skarbakka's physical performances lend a sense of authority to his constructed images and a chance to navigate the construction of contemporary masculinity, Eakins too asserted his authority to paint his realist subjects by participating in the acts that he represented. In Eakins' *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, or *The Champion Single Sculls* (1871), the title figure glides past viewers in his scull "Josie" after his rowing victory on the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia (Fig. 5.12). In *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*, Elizabeth Johns explains that Eakins had experience rowing with his family, who lived only a few blocks from the Schuylkill, and

classmates.[35] While Skarbakka shows his knowledge of mountain climbing and martial arts by repeating his physically demanding actions across numerous photographs, Eakins demonstrates the assumed authority that his experiences with rowing bring to his painting by representing himself in a second boat behind Schmitt. The champion holds his oars stationary as he turns around in his boat to look back at the viewer, but Eakins painted himself actively at work rowing his scull as he reaches forward to pull his oars back. By highlighting his action, Eakins emphasizes his own authority with rowing; he was not just a passive spectator but instead framed himself as an active participant even though he did not race in the championship contest that he represented. Furthermore, Eakins chose not to represent Schmitt's first championship in 1867, but instead depicted the October 5, 1870, race that Eakins witnessed personally, again emphasizing the artist's own experience in conjunction with the subject matter he represented.[36] He used the painting to construct his own masculinity rather than merely recording a historical event "realistically."

Likewise, Eakins painted his iconic *The Gross Clinic* (1875) based on his many experiences with the study of anatomy and dissection at Jefferson Medical College from 1864-1965, where the subject of the painting Dr. Samuel D. Gross taught.[37] In *The Gross Clinic*, like *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, Eakins painted himself into the representation. As the first figure in the lower right section of the image, he sits in the audience with pencil and paper in his hands. Though Dr. Gross is the main focus of the painting, Eakins

[35] Elizabeth Johns discusses how Eakins' experiences with rowing, dissection, as well as art- and music-making give him an assumed authority to paint the subject matters in his *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (1871), *The Gross Clinic* (1875), *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (1877), *The Concert Singer* (1892), and *Walt Whitman* (1887). See Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).
[36] Johns, 38.
[37] Eakins became proficient enough in dissecting the human body that he eventually lectured to advanced life class students at the Pennsylvania Academy about the topic.

still places himself as an audience member who does not watch the surgery passively. Instead he actively takes notes or sketches the events unfolding in front of him.

Eakins' reliance on his authority with the subjects of his paintings became opportunities for him to navigate his masculinity during changes in the arenas in which men proved their masculinity, in part caused by the shift in employment from physical to professional forms of labor. While Johns does not note the masculine domination of the sport of rowing, she does discuss it in terms of the morality associated with it during the nineteenth century. This sense of morality was due to the mental and physical discipline demanded by the activity, which recalls Kimmel's description of masculinity as self-control and restraint.[38] And in *The Gross Clinic*, Eakins set the masculinity of surgery, as embodied by Gross' prowess, in contrast to the patient's mother who blocks her face with her arms in an emotional outburst behind Gross.[39] In both paintings, the renowned figure participates in an activity that was coded as masculine and that Eakins had personal experience doing. Eakins connects himself to such activities visually by including self-portraits in *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* and *The Gross Clinic*. Although ideals of masculinity have shifted from Eakins' time to the contemporary "crisis" that Skarbakka's works engage in the post-Civil Rights and neoliberal era, both men felt the need to present and emphasize their personal authority in terms of the experiences they had with the activities that they represented. And like the morality associated with Eakins' version of masculinity, Skarbakka's representation also draw the "fall of man" to mind and issues of sin versus morality that accompany the story as well as Skarbakka's own breaking

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[38] Johns, 28-29.

[39] For a discussion about the recoding of medicine as masculine vis-à-vis the femininity associated with mid-wifery, see Mary Poovey, "Scenes of Indelicate Character: The Medical 'Treatment' of Victorian Women," in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 137-168.

away from the doctrines of his Fundamentalist upbringing.[40] The difference is that Skarbakka's series seems to show viewers his physical activities more transparently because his digital images remediate the appearance of more transparent photographs in contrast to Eakins' painted representations.[41]

To further demonstrate the ways Skarbakka's series highlight his contemporary version of masculinity as connected to his physical body and prowess, it will be helpful to situate *The Struggle to Right Oneself* vis-à-vis contemporary British photographer Paul M. Smith's (b. 1969) series *Action* (2000), *Make My Night* (1998), and *Artist Rifles* (1997). All three series are published in the 2004 monograph *Paul M. Smith: Photographs*.[42] For each series, Smith performed physical feats in various scenes, photographed his participation, and used digital technology to complete the final images. Thus, his process is similar to Skarbakka's. For *Make My Night* and *Artist Rifle*, Smith appears as multiple men who participate simultaneously in homosocial activities (Fig. 5.13-5.14). *Make My Night* depicts groups of guys at the bar, getting late night post-bar snacks, and vomiting after consuming too much to drink. *Artist Rifle* represents groups of male soldiers as they participate in military exercises. In *Action*, Smith performs

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[40] This is a line of interpretation I plan to examine in the future by using Michael Allen Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity* as a theoretical background. While all of the images in Skarbakka's series allude to the fall of man, his *Jesus!* (2003) most overtly engages Christianity and the morality associated with the religion. Skarbakka falls from a billboard representation of Jesus crucified. The billboard proclaims "I love you this much" along with Jesus' outstretched arms and "I DIED for your sins. Trust in me" along the bottom of the sign. Though Skarbakka "falls," as evidenced by the way his coat pulls up above his waist, he still reaches out toward Jesus to maintain a connection to the religious figure. In the context of the series' title, this image suggests that Christianity will allow Skarbakka, or man, to "right" himself. Thus religion becomes part of the construction of identity, as did when Suzanne Opton constructed her series *Soldier* as a relationship between the photographed soldier and viewing mother in terms of the Pieta.

[41] The difference between photographic representations and paintings is often discussed as the translation of a subject by the artist's "hand" in the latter. For instance, Roland Barthes described the transparency of photography as "that-has-been." See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday Press, 1981), 76-81.

[42] See *Paul M. Smith: Photographs* (Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004) that contains an introduction by Director of The Photographers' Gallery, London, Paul Wombell and commentary by Alistair Hayman.

stereotypical roles of male action heroes taken from Hollywood films and comic books. Working within the representational genre of action stories, Smith was physically involved in the events depicted. His process included such extremes as hiring stunt pilots to fly helicopters close to his body as he was suspended from a crane (Fig. 5.15).[43] Additionally, Smith installs *Action* as photographic light boxes on the ceiling of galleries. This display practice forces viewers to look up to add to the illusion of the photographic images—such as when viewers look up to see Smith leap from one building to another above their heads.[44] By forcing the viewer to look up and physically occupy a position similar to the one they would occupy if the event in the photograph occurred in real life, Smith's photographs create a sense of immediacy that is further heightened by the indexical "passageway" from the photographic space to that of viewers.

Even with the aforementioned similarities, the ways that Smith's and Skarbakka's photographs communicate differ. Though both Smith and Skarbakka use their white male bodies in extreme (masculine) physical feats, Skarbakka's series emphasizes his own body in performance whereas Smith's become a postmodern exercise about tropes of representation and the construction of masculinity.[45] According to Hayman, "Paul acts as the unnamed hero for these dramatics, in a die-hard, James Bond style character. Although independently coherent, the images are deliberately montaged to create an overtly fabricated scene. In doing so [he avoids] any documentary overtones and

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[43] I have not been able to locate titles for the individual images in this series. When published in Thames & Hudson's series *World of Art*, they are described as "from the series *Action*." Christiane Paul, *Digital Art*, World of Art, 2nd Edition (London, Thames & Hudson: 2008), 40-41.

[44] Alistair Hayman, "Action," in *Paul M. Smith: Photographs* (Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004), and Paul Wombell, "The Stories of a Young Man," in *Paul M. Smith: Photographs* (Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004), 7.

[45] I do not mean to suggest that the acts of emphasizing one's own body or partaking in postmodern exercises are mutually exclusive. In this comparison between Skarbakka's and Smith's series, I mean to suggest a matter of degree that differs in their approaches.

producing an entirely fantastical environment in which to place the unassailable hero."[46] Hayman's statement highlights how Smith's series engage with an overarching goal of postmodern artists as many of them used photography to examine issues of representation beyond the modernist focus on the art object and formal aesthetics. As T.J. Demos summarizes, postmodern art photographs critically highlight processes of representation over offering a complete representation of a photographic referent. Demos describes this as a privileging of "*image* over *subject*" as postmodern art photographs refer "first and foremost to its own reproduced conditions."[47] Smith's series work in this way as they refer to representations of masculinity that help to construct ideals of manhood. Smith does not show viewers a complete representation of himself, but instead performs a number of masculine tropes in order to engage with issues of representation more overtly than Skarbakka does.

When Smith performs, he exaggerates his poses and expressions while he inhabits the roles of action heroes. One frame shows Smith dangling from the side of a building above a nighttime cityscape (Fig. 5.16). The depth of field throws the parking lot and buildings below Smith out of focus while the wide angle of the lens exaggerates the length of his arms. His bloodied knuckles offer a splash of red at the bottom of the frame that leaps to the bloodied cuts on his face, shoulder, and shirt, and then to the red cars parked below, again emphasizing the distance he may fall. He looks at the camera, and

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[46] Hayman, "Action," 45.

[47] T.J. Demos, "Introduction: The Ends of Photography," *Vitamin Ph* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2006), 6. Also see Abigail Solomon-Godeau's earlier analysis of postmodernism "Photography after Art Photography," in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 103-123. She writes, "[T]he properties of photographic imagery that have made it a privileged medium in postmodern art are precisely those which for generations art photographers have been concerned to disavow" (104). Postmodern artists employed "seriality and repetition, appropriation, intertexutality, simulation [and] pastiche," elements that modern photographers renounced in favor of creating unique, aesthetic, and therefore, art objects (115).

viewers, as he scrunches his face to imply physical strain.[48] His position and hyperbolized facial expression hypermediate the photograph to a greater extent than Skarbakka's photographs. The level of hypermediation of Smith's photographs draws attention back to issues of representation, including the representations of manly action heroes and the construction of masculinity. It may seem obvious to examine masculinity in relationship to Smith's exaggerated representations. Yet Smith, Hayman, and Wombell, do not discuss Smith's own position as a white male artist. To some degree, Skarbakka's photographs offer a seemingly more "natural" and less exaggerated version of masculinity than Smith's. Thus, Skarbakka's images and the descriptions of his physical investment in his work bring the photographs back to Skarbakka and less to the postmodern chain of representational fragments highlighted by the exaggeration and hypermediation of Smith's series.[49] But, as I have stated, to not engage Skarbakka's masculinity would allow it to continue serving as a problematic unmarked ideal. If art historical discourse frequently treats white male artists as unmarked, then what is actually said about their identities? It is to this question that I now turn.

BEING THE EXCLUSIONARY EVERYMAN

Amelia Jones argues, "White men can dream of transcending the body while women (and others) have a harder time doing so."[50] Because cultural rhetoric situates

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[48] This is a strange photograph in the series because it is the only one that situates viewers looking down at Smith. This would not seem to work installed as a lightbox on a gallery's ceiling, but the frame is included with six other pictures from *Action* in the monograph Paul M. Smith and Paul Wombell, *Paul M. Smith: Photographs* (Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004).

[49] I return to the issue of exaggeration as camp later in this chapter.

[50] Amelia Jones, *Self / Image: Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject* (London: Routledge, 2006), 173. Jones pointed to Simone de Beauvoir as the source of this idea in *Self/Image* and in her article "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," she notes that Beauvoir "reworks the dialectic between the self and other outlined by her partner, Jean-Paul Sartre (and more subtly

white masculinity as a disembodied ideal, when art critics address the identity of the white male artist, it is often based on their activities of "doing" rather than their corporeal position of "being."[51] For instance, Skarbakka and critics highlight the ways his training in martial arts and mountain climbing informed his actions for *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, which I find is similar to the ways Thomas Eakins negotiated masculinity through his "doing," or the way that his experiences with activities that included rowing and dissecting human bodies gave credence to his ability to paint these subjects. Due to Skarbakka's previous training with mountain climbing and martial arts, he can use his physical strength and knowledge to fall and land safely. Likewise, Wombell and Hayman chronicle how Smith's five years of army service as a Combat Engineer in England's Royal Engineers led to *Artists Rifles*. Wombell describes the series thus, "Here [Smith] explored the demanding roles of soldiers in training and on the battlefield that he knew intimately, due to his time in the army."[52] Smith also describes how his military service influenced his representation of group nights out for *Make My Night*. He recollects that he "fully embraced lads' culture in the army" and if he had not participated in the social interactions like those represented in *Make My Night*, he would have been ostracized.[53] He may not need this background experience in order to represent macho

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transformed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Lacan), with an awareness of the mapping of power through gender in patriarchy. Beauvoir rereads Sartre's existentialist argument (in *Being and Nothingness*) that the subject has the capacity to project himself into transcendence (the *pour-soi*) out of the fundamental imminence of the *en-soi*, arguing that the *pour-soi* is a privileged potentiality open only to male subjects in patriarchy." Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949), trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), see especially xxviii. Cited in Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* (Winter 1997): 18n16.

[51] For a discussion of doing/being, see Kirsten Pai Buick, *Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.

[52] Wombell, 7.

[53] Hayman, "Night," 29.

culture, but he situates his experiences as impetus for his projects and that is the closest that his statements come to describing his identity. He "forgets" his white maleness.

Because white maleness is such a slippery position, many critics tend to label white male artists as the non-particular, generalized "Everyman." Instead of representing their specific positions of "being" as "white male artists," they become average guys who stand in as the idealized subjects for "all" of masculinity, and sometimes even humanity. For instance, Hayman designates that Smith "becomes the anonymous everyman" through his performances.[54] And although Skarbakka highlights his personal physical endeavors, contradictorily he also attempts to make his images more "universal" by positioning himself as an Everyman type figure.[55] Thus it is important that his series does not represent his face clearly, which would highlight his individuality to a greater degree than the more universal messages of his work. His range of costumes—from a suit and tie to work pants and heavy boots—further suggest a multiplicity of identities rather than a singular, fixed personality.

The Everyman can be traced back to fifteenth-century morality plays, and conflicting origins for this figure exist. It remains unclear if he originates from the English play *Everyman* or from the Flemish play *Elckerlijc*, because it is uncertain which play is a translation of the other.[56] In these plays, God sends Death for Everyman who has focused on too many material objects throughout his life. Everyman searches for a companion to accompany him on his journey to death, but characters such as Fellowship,

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[54] Alistair Hayman, "Make My Night," in *Paul M. Smith: Photographs* (Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004), 29.
[55] Kerry Skarbakka, "Creative Capital: Risky Business," panel presentation, College Arts Association Annual Conference, New York City (9 February 2011).
[56] A.C. Cawley, ed., "The Moral Play of Everyman," in *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 195.

Kindred, and Cousin will not accompany him. Eventually Good Deeds is the only figure who will escort the Everyman beyond the grave.

Skarbakka implies the Everyman through his references to Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison's use of this character type in their series *The Architect's Brother* (2000). More specifically, Skarbakka has said that his suit in *Trestle* serves as direct reference to the ParkeHarrison's use of the ill-fitting suit throughout their photographic project.[57] In *The Architect's Brother*, Robert often finds himself struggling to fix imaginary systems in the environment by using makeshift technology at his disposal. For instance, in *Turning to Spring* (2001), Robert holds an oversized wrench as he bends over in a flat grassy field (Fig. 5.17). A fissure in the ground reveals large gears that lie just beneath the field's grassy surface. Alone in the environment, Robert attempts to turn these gears that will change the seasons as he bends over and braces his legs apart slightly for leverage. His suit serves as a sign of masculinity and anonymity as the Everyman struggles with human limits in this physical situation. In a review titled "Everyman Tries to Save the Earth, One Image at a Time," photo critic Vicki Goldberg describes, "He appears in every picture, in a black suit and white shirt with no tie, a kind of Everyman or a minor

[57] Kerry Skarbakka, interview with author, Brooklyn, NY, 21 March 2006. Skarbakka has also said that this suit references Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void.* In 2006, although Skarbakka did not credit Klein's work as a direct influence, he admitted that Klein's well-known image may have been in his subconscious. When talking about the performance aspect of his work, Skarbakka referenced Danish performance artist Peter Land instead. Kerry Skarbakka, interview with author, Brooklyn, NY, 21 March 2006. Land's *The Staircase* (1998) is a video projection of the artist falling down a flight of stairs set to Muzak circus music. Land's work frequently refers to the theme of failure and *The Staircase* addresses the failure to "negotiate space," resulting in his fall. Jan Estep, "Why Failure is so Funny, or, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Gallery," *New Art Examiner* 26, No. 2 (October 1998): 20-25. But more recently Skarbakka described that his decision to wear a suit in *Trestle* serves, in part, as an homage to Klein's *Leap Into the Void*. Kerry Skarbakka, "Constructed Visions & The Aesthetic of Personal Activism," Society for Photographic Education SW Regional Conference, Santa Fe, NM, 11 November 2012.

employee of the universe, patiently, dutifully doing a job that's too big for him."[58] And photo-historian Therese Mulligan describes Robert's Everyman as an ordinary man who finds himself in extraordinary situations.[59] These descriptions do not position Robert's Everyman as the celebrated "architect" from the series' title. Instead, they highlight that the character is merely the architect's brother; he is more ordinary than his more exceptional "sibling," and he keeps working even when his tasks make him fallible.

Imbued with characteristics of "relateableness" and ordinariness, the Everyman serves as "type," which, according to Philip Fisher, "brings a certain abstractness and blankness into character in order to make the choices and temperaments comprehensible as products of a given society and moment."[60] As a type, the Everyman serves a specific role in contemporary U.S. society. While this type celebrates the continued ideal of individual hard work that began in the United States with the "self-made man," today's ideal of the Everyman masks the maintained power of this character and the white male bodies often attached to it. Thus the notion of the Everyman brings to the fore the problematic issue of trying to represent "every/man." It assumes the white male body represents "every/man," continuing the notion of the white male as the norm against which everyone else is compared as "other." As John Bowles explains, "Unquestioned, whiteness provides the models by which the Western subject judges culture. As the norm, whiteness passes unmarked, perpetuating the canonical conventions and traditions that sustain its privilege; whiteness is assumed, while only otherness is pronounced….

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[58] Vicki Goldberg, "Photography Review: Everyman Tries to Save the Earth, One Image at a Time," *New York Times* (04 February 2000), available at www.newyorktimes.com/2000/02/04/arts/photography-review-everyman-tries-to-save-the-earth-one-image-at-a-time.html (accessed 19 November 2012).
[59] Therese Mulligan, "Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison," lecture at the University of Alabama, 19 April 2006.
[60] Fisher, *Hard Facts*, 15.

All other identities become particular—made *too* particular to be applied universally…. The situation of whiteness is that of a body historicized and racialized to the point where its material particularity is obscured. Otherness is violently suppressed in order to promote the idea of a universal figure of disembodied, metaphysical transcendence."[61] Bowles uses "unmarked" to describe whiteness as ideologically constructed as empty or nothing.[62] The lack of acknowledgement of whiteness, particularly in males, allows only certain subjects to transcend their specific identity more easily, even while—or because—their bodies serve as signs of whiteness.

References to the Everyman in contemporary popular culture signify the man who does not seem *too* exceptional, and even fails, just as Skarbakka's act of falling suggests a failed masculinity. For instance, in the *New York Magazine* article "Just Like Us: The Patently Ridiculous Rise of Clive Owen, Everyman," Logan Hill describes Owen's role in the film *The International* (2009) thus, "Let's just say the film is prescient, since it bears little resemblance to reality, playing like a classic populist revenge fantasy, with Owen as the Everyman hero—an angry, obsessive investigator who teams up with a Manhattan assistant D.A. (Naomi Watts) to take down the bad guys."[63] Hill continues, "Owen belongs to a small clique of rugged actors who can walk the narrow line between too handsome (Brad Pitt) and just plain rough (Ray Winstone), allowing them to masquerade as Everymen while still hawking BMWs in Armani suits or pitching men's cosmetics (Owen is the face of Lancôme's Hypnôse Homme cologne and anti-aging skin-

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[61] John P. Bowles, "Blinded by the White: Art and History at the Limits of Whiteness," *Art Journal* 60, No. 4 (Winter, 2001): 39.
[62] Also see Richard Dyer, "Coloured white, not coloured," *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 41-81.
[63] Logan Hill, "Just Like Us: The Patently Ridiculous Rise of Clive Owen, Everyman," *New York Magazine* (15 February 2009): 1, available at http://nymag.com/movies/profiles/54308/ (accessed 11 December 2009).

care line). Much like fellow Brit Daniel Craig, or this country's Matt Damon (at least since he assumed the role of Jason Bourne), Owen is a hunk with zero pretensions."[64] It is important to note that the Everyman is not a sign of perfection, as Hill's use of the term illustrates. Instead, the Everyman is average, common, and not exceptional or, in the case of the film star, is one with "zero pretensions." Hill further emphasizes the "average guy" nature of the Owen as the Everyman when he quotes Naomi Watts, Owen's co-star in *The International*. She describes the actor as having a "movie-star quality" but one that is "not too cool or too sexy or too good-looking."[65] And the film's director Tom Tykwer explains, "[Owen] can look that good and still be me and you…. He's able to be that common man—and if you combine that with his very impressive physical presence, kind of like Robert Redford, that makes him unique as a star."[66]

Other historical and contemporary examples of characters that function as the Everyman include Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Dagwood Bumstead in the comic strip *Blondie* (begun in 1930), and more recently, Jim Halpert (John Krasinski) in the U.S. version of the television show *The Office* (2005-2013). All of these characters are white, heterosexual, middle class men. As an aging salesman, Loman must adjust from a salaried position to commission-based income. He struggles with his own self-worth and to support his wife and two sons as he has his throughout his working career. Miller does not label this literary character as white in the play's script overtly, but most often white, male actors play the character. Lee J. Cobb starred as Loman in the original run of *Death of a Salesman* on Broadway, Frederic March played Loman in the 1951 movie, directed by Laslo Benedek, and Dustin

[64] Hill: 1.
[65] Hill: 1.
[66] Hill: 2.

Hoffman portrayed him in the 1985 movie, directed by Volker Schlöndorff. Bumstead, playboy and heir to his railroad-tycoon father's billions became the Everyman in the early 1930s when he fell in love with a flapper named Blondie and settled down into his new life. He became the Everyman only after his wealthy family disowned him because they suspected Blondie was a "gold-digger." Bumstead could not be the relatable Everyman when he was exceptionally wealthy. And Halpert is the nice guy around the office who serves as a foil to his zanier coworkers at the fictional Dunder Mifflin Paper Company in small-town Scranton, Pennsylvania. He marries the former-receptionist-turned-sales-representative when she is six-months pregnant with his first baby, and they continue to grow their family over the following seasons of the television series.

But for all of Owen's, Loman's, Bumstead's, and Halpert's attempts to perform masculine ideals, it is their failures that help make them the Everyman. Owen is not the ideally handsome or exceptionally rugged actor. Loman becomes an icon of failed normative masculinity when he grows older and can no longer make a decent living as a salesman. Bumstead's numerous failures include his tendency to fall asleep at his office desk and his frequent denied requests for a raise from his boss. He even has trouble eating his iconic and impossible sandwich, the "Dagwood." And in various episodes of *The Office*, Halpert tries to make things right for his family and coworkers, which frequently places him at odds with the more idiosyncratic characters around the company. All of these examples demonstrate both the normality and failures of the Everyman as well as the exclusionary aspects of this character type, which I will continue to examine below. Thus, these examples help to illustrate how Skarbakka's representations of

himself falling show both a failed version of masculinity but also reinstate normative ideals by labeling the artist as the exclusionary Everyman.

Because white maleness has not been reclaimed as a subject position from which artists work, the use of the Everyman is not unique to Skarbakka's and Smith's projects. For instance, even the 1995 exhibition and catalog *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*—a show dedicated to analyzing the construction of masculinity—erased the particularities of white masculinity. The exhibition and catalog included a sculpture by and of Charles Ray titled *Self-Portrait* (1990, Fig. 5.18). This life-sized white male mannequin stands in a contrapposto pose with his arms bent and hands raised slightly in front of him. Ray outfitted the mannequin with his clothes—a button-down striped shirt, dark blue jacket, dark pants, white sneakers, a khaki bucket hat, and brown-rimmed glasses. The mannequin looks particularly like Ray because the artist used a cast of his face for the sculpture. Helaine Posner labels Ray's representation as an "average Joe." She suggests that when "one begins to scrutinize this replica of Ray in an attempt to elicit some sense of the self, he seems to disappear" as his "persona as the normal male is a form of camouflage."[67] Likewise, in a monograph of Ray's artwork Lisa Phillips describes Ray's work as "self-portraits of a sort, but they are also oddly impersonal and emotionally detached. Although they bear his likeness, his self-portraits stand for everyman—singular, yet utterly commonplace, devoid of expression."[68] These authors cast the white male as the Everyman and disappeared or camouflaged as he becomes, ultimately, difficult to see and to grasp. The difficulty of identifying the white

[67] Posner, 25.
[68] Lisa Phillips, "Charles Ray: Castaway," in Charles Ray, Paul Schimmel, and Lisa Phillips, *Charles Ray* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 97.

male is due to the way that as a "hard fact" he is assumed to have become the ideal, transcendent embodiment who represents the universal, or everyone.

White masculinity should not be merely reduced to this formulaic discourse of transcendence—including Bowles' statements outlined above—which has become the power to mask power. Instead, ideals of white masculinity are always negotiated in relationship to "other" positions. Looking more closely at Wombell's and Hayman's descriptions that frame Smith's work as both an examination of postmodern representations of masculinity and a performance of the Everyman will illustrate this point. To acknowledge that identities are not fixed but multi-faceted, Wombell explains that Smith's process of using his body to play varying masculine roles suggests "that masculinity is fabricated and so can change."[69] But in order to make masculinity more visible and not the unmarked ideal, Smith "queered" it through his exaggerated use of camp. As an aesthetic sensibility, camp provides authors with an approach to constructing texts and viewers with a reading strategy. Alexander Doty describes, "Camp's central interests are taste/style/aesthetics, sexuality, and gender—or, rather, sexuality as related to gender role-playing (via style codes). Camp's mode is excess and exaggeration. Camp's tone is a mixture of irony, affection, seriousness, playfulness, and angry laughter. Camp's politics can be reactionary, liberal, or radical, depending on the example you are considering and your ideological agenda as a reader. But one thing about camp is certain—at least for me: Camp is queer. There is nothing straight about camp."[70] This understanding of camp queers Smith's exaggerated performances of

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[69] Paul Wombell, "The Stories of a Young Man," in *Paul M. Smith: Photographs* (Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004), 7.

[70] Alexander Doty, "Queerness, Comedy, and *The Women*," in *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 82. Before offering his description of camp, Doty suggests that

masculinity, thus marking his masculinity as nonnormative and more visible. As a case in point, Smith's campy performance as he dangles and struggles to hold onto the building's edge hypermediates the image as his exaggeration highlights the performativity of masculine tropes but only once Smith's employment of camp queered his portrayal of masculinity and made it visible.

Judith Halberstam has shown how normativity becomes visible only once it leaves the body type to which the position is assigned. Her insightful analysis challenges essentialized notions of identity, or treating identity as a set meaning based on the biology of a body. For her discussion in *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam addresses the ideology of masculinity in order to analyze masculinity in female bodies, and she demonstrates how gender and race work together as visible markers, but to varying extents. For example, regarding drag king performances, she claims, "[T]he category of butch realness is often occupied by nonwhite drag kings, attesting specifically to the way that masculinity becomes visible as masculinity once it leaves the sphere of normative whiteness."[71] Her discussion of the performance of masculinity shows how masculinity is more often imagined as non-performative, subtle, or natural. It is only once masculinity leaves the normative white male body, in the case of nonwhite drag kings,

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defining camp is an elusive task. To illustrate his point and to help arrive at his interpretation of camp, he cites a number of sources written from the 1970s to the time of the publication of his text. A select few of these sources, in which authors work toward definitions of camp, include: Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1966), 275-292; Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972/1979); Andrew Britton, "For Interpretation: Notes Against Camp," *Gay Left* 7 (1978-1979): 11-14; Jack Babuscio, "Camp and the Gay Sensibility," *Gays and Film*, ed. Richard Dyer (New York: New York Zoetrope: 1984), 40-57; and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 128-149.

[71] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 246-248. Halberstam notes how drag queen performers often employ camp in their exaggerated performances as women, but because cultural rhetoric constructs masculinity as non-performance in opposition to the artificial performative nature of femininity drag kings employ camp much less frequently than the queens do. In other words, drag kings' performances come across as more "natural" representations of maleness versus queens' campy performances of femininity. Halberstam, 234-238.

that it becomes seen as performative and performed. This helps to explain why Smith's work is treated as an examination of masculine tropes, albeit not as an examination of his own subject position. Smith makes masculinity visible through campy exaggeration.

In contrast, the typical reception of Skarbakka's seemingly more "natural," or less campy, performances identifies him based on what he does more than who he (biologically) is. In other words, based on the reception of Skarbakka's series, masculinity would seem to be not as "visible" as it is in Smith's photographs when we compare the photographer's physical acts, such as when Smith clings to the edge of a building and Skarbakka extends his body after flipping over the handlebars of his bicycle. Smith hams it up for the camera in a way that Skarbakka does not as Smith's photographs cause a sense of hypermediation more quickly than Skarbakka's. But even though Smith's performances seem more exaggerated, we cannot overlook the ways that Skarbakka's images also engage with gender as he performs masculinities. To not discuss Skarbakka's representations of masculinity would, problematically, keep representations of masculinity circulating as unmarked.

While Smith portrays the universal Everyman through his engagement with a number of masculine activities, his campy exaggeration could make them queer rather than homosocial. Yet in order to keep Smith as the normative Everyman, Hayman describes *Action* with a maneuver that neutralizes the possibility that Smith represents queerness. Hayman pronounces, "In order to demonstrate his bravery and *elicit female sympathy* it may be necessary for our cinematic hero to acquire cuts and grazes, even the occasional 'flesh wound'. However these are merely an inconvenience to be tolerated

and serve to demonstrate his essential invulnerability."[72] In this statement, Hayman continues to read Smith's characters as strong, invulnerable, and unassailable but only in his heteromasculinity and appeal to women.

Types, such as the Everyman, work in contemporary U.S. culture to help construct social beliefs and cultural hierarchies based on systems of differentiation. For example, in contrast to the universal appeal of the white male Everyman, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins analyzed the role of what she calls "controlling images," or negative stereotypes, that continue to oppress U.S. Black women. These images are deeply embedded in culture and constantly reinforced through the media, schools, and government agencies.[73] According to Collins, the images that control Black U.S. women include the mammy, the Black matriarch, the welfare mother, the Black lady, and the jezebel, whore, or hoochie. For instance, she explains that discourse surrounding the controlling image of the welfare mother "appears tied to working-class Black women's increasing access to U.S. welfare state entitlements. At its core, the image of the welfare mother constitutes a class-specific, controlling image developed for the poor, working-class Black women who make use of social welfare for which they are entitled by law. As long as poor Black women were denied social welfare benefits, there was no need for the stereotype. But when U.S. Black women gained more political power and demanded equity in access to state services, the need arose for this controlling image."[74] The power of these controlling images with regards to social hierarchies, according to Collins, resides in the way that cultural groups define themselves vis-à-vis other groups. By

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[72] Hayman, "Action," 45. Emphasis is mine.
[73] See Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, 2nd Ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 76-106.
[74] Collins, "Controlling Images," 86.

portraying Black women through stereotypes, objectified as "other," they remain marked as not the average or norm. Thus they cannot represent the universal that is symbolized by white men and do not have full access to cultural and economic privileges that accompany ideals of normativity.

Furthermore, cultural rhetoric defines white masculinity, in part, by what it is not. It is not any of the controlling images attached to Black women. The imagined white male does not use welfare and makes it on his own. Therefore, he serves as the ideal neoliberal subject who succeeds in a free-market system with little government assistance. The controlling image of the Everyman functions by exclusion, by who is not allowed to serve as the average, generalized, or universal sign in the contemporary United States. Along with the notion of the transcendent ideal of white masculinity—so that white males are often described by art historical and cultural discourses through their actions of doing rather than their corporeal positions of being—the relatable yet fallible Everyman helps to construct average masculinity. As his second noted pattern of manhood, Michael Kimmel describes the process of constructing masculinity as one of exclusion, or through the fear of "others" whose bodies "mark" them as nonnormative. Therefore, the use of the Everyman uncritically replicates hegemonic masculinity by exclusion. It provides another way that Skarbakka's series reinstates masculine ideals even when *The Struggle to Right Oneself* initially seems to challenge cultural norms.

MASCULINE ESCAPE

For a rare public event on June 14, 2005, Skarbakka fell fifty-two feet repeatedly from the roof of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago while an audience

watched. According to Greg Cameron, Deputy Director and Chief Development Officer of the museum, the one-day performance titled *Life Goes On* was part of the museum's desire to give passerby the opportunity to see art making in process.[75] Skarbakka performed dozens of times while the Chicago Flyhouse used theatrical-rigging to control his falls. Between performances, the artist explained his project to interviewers and answered questions from the audience, who became part of the photographs. For instance, in *Onlookers* (2005), three people look up toward Skarbakka falling with his arms extended and knee bent (Fig. 5.19). He changed his clothes over the course of the day and for this shot, he wears a suit coat, button-down shirt, and blue jeans. The onlookers were actual audience members from the day's public programming.

Life Goes On became one of the most controversial parts of Skarbakka's work based on the way his project recalls the people who fell from the Twin Towers during 9-11.[76] One of the most scathing reviews of *Life Goes On* came from the columnist Neil Steinberg and was published in the *New York Daily News* as "A Phony Artist and His Dopey, Insulting Stunt." Upset by the way Skarbakka maintained control through his artmaking process when the victims of 9-11 were stripped of control over their situation,

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[75] Greg Cameron, interview by Rich Samuels, *Chicago Tonight*, wttw11, 14 June 2005. Skarbakka earned his M.F.A. from Columbia College in Chicago and had previously displayed his work at MCA, including in a 2002 solo exhibition *The Struggle to Right Oneself (Existential Blues)*.

[76] In 2008, Skarbakka's 50-minute video *The Elements of Attraction* also caused controversy and was removed from public display until he reshot sections of it. Funded by the City of Seattle's One Percent for the Arts program and the Mayor's Office of Cultural Arts and Affairs, Skarbakka created a film in which he physically battled the four elements—swam in water, jumped through fire, flew through the air, and tumbled onto the ground. The city installed the piece in the elevator lobby on the 28th floor of the Seattle Municipal Tower, where city employees help residents pay overdue bills and maintain the mailroom for Seattle City Light. Employees became particularly upset by the representation of fire and water in the piece. One employee complained that fire reminded them too much of a recent house fire, while water caused another employee to recall the drowning of a family member. After the complaints continued, the city re-commissioned Skarbakka to shoot different, less challenging, versions of fire and water, which he did. See Jen Graves, "Do-Over on the 28th Floor," *The Stranger* (9 June 2009), available at www.thestranger.com/seattle/do-over-on-the-28th-floor/Content?oid=1670141 (accessed 18 November 2012). Also see Kerry Skarbakka, "Video: Elements of Attraction," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/elements.htm (accessed 12 December 2012).

Steinberg critiques, "It is like putting on pale makeup and a hospital gown and pretending that you've touched upon the essence of being gravely ill. Not only does it not approach the reality of being sick, it misses by so much it ends up mocking those who are. Skarbakka aping something that is all too real for too many would be bad if he did it without any artistic pretense. But by pretending he is capturing a higher truth, he ridicules the fallen. Were he sincere, he'd go off the roof without a harness."[77] Steinberg continues by mocking performance art and volunteers to harm Skarbakka physically. He proposes, "I'm tempted to jump into the performance art world myself. I'm in the conceptual stages of a piece tentatively called 'The Wrath of the Caring Human Being.' It's still sketchy, but I know it will involve a performance artist—I'm holding out for Kerry Skarbakka—stripped to the waist and chained to a ring set in the sidewalk in front of the Daily News on W. 33rd St., while I stand over him with a cat o'nine tails, delivering a suitably symbolic number of lashes."[78] Skarbakka responded to Steinberg's criticism by initially titling the image *Office* from *Life Goes On* as *Office, The Last Flight of Neil Steinberg*. In the image, a woman talks on the telephone as she works at a computer desk in front of a large window. Skarbakka falls through the air outside the window as his body approaches the tops of trees that sit in front of the Chicago skyline.[79] But due to the title, Skarbakka suggests that it is Steinberg who falls to his imminent injury, or even death, thus retaliating against the author's suggestion of violence with his own.

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[77] Steinberg, "Phony Artist."
[78] Steinberg, "Phony Artist."
[79] The original title is posted in various sources, like artnet.com though Skarbakka has since changed the title on his website to just *Office*.

Additionally, the news reported that New York Governor George Pataki pronounced Skarbakka's performance as "an utter disgrace," while New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg chastised the work for being "nauseatingly offensive."[80] Members of the public also criticized Skarbakka, and in early 2006 he did not return to his Brooklyn studio for months because he had received criticism and death threats—recalling Steinberg's threats of violence—addressed to this publically listed location. In 2010 he continued to receive such criticism through vicious emails.[81] It is important to note that the death threats and personal attacks began before Skarbakka completed his final images for *Life Goes On*. Thus, members of the public who were not at the event were actually responding to the media's coverage, like Steinberg's, and not Skarbakka's final images. As the artist defends, "Like my other works, this most recent photo shoot was never intended to mimic the tragic events of September 11th. The images shown in the news coverage are not my images and the quotes attributed to me are either not my words or placed completely out of context. It's all too sad that these misrepresentations have upset so many, however, I believe my work can speak honestly for itself."[82] Nonetheless, there are a number of intentional and conscious associations he makes and the audience may arrive at conclusions against which he feels he must defend his work. Whereas Suzanne Opton attempted to raise herself above the criticism that her series *Soldier* disrespected those in the military by claiming that she worked from a mother's point of view, Skarbakka aims to ascribe the meaning of his works that he wants while denying, to a point, more problematic ones. There is a negation about particular

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[80] Fred Camper, "Is Art Defaming 9/11 Deaths?" *Newsday*, 10 July 2005, http://proquest.umi.com (accessed 9 February 2006).
[81] Kerry Skarbakka, interview with author, Pittsburgh, PA, 17 November 2010.
[82] Kerry Skarbakka, "Statement about Life Goes On," available at www.skarbakka.com/menuframe.html (accessed 1 May 2008).

meanings as if to suggest they are not intended or what he expected, but that is part of the reception of art and he knows that.

Even with Skarbakka's defense, undeniable visual similarities arise when comparing some of Skarbakka's images from his public performance and the memorable images from 9-11, including Richard Drew's iconic and controversial *The Falling Man* (Fig. 5.20). In both *Life Goes On* and *The Falling Man*, a singular figure falls in front of the geometric surface of a city building. In Drew's *The Falling* Man, a man falls headfirst with his arms tightly at his sides and his left leg bent. In Skarbakka's *Onlookers*, the photograph captures the falling man almost parallel to the ground with his arms out and legs bent to varying degrees. The top of the photographic frame cuts across the building so that the mirrored panels extend beyond the picture's edge. One of the mirrored sections reflects approximately twenty stories of a skyscraper that stands across the cityscape. The way that the lines of the museum cut across the likeness of the reflected building suggest that the building soars to great height, and the implied height of the reflected building makes the building that Skarbakka falls in front of seem all the more tall. Because we do not see the position from where he fell, we are left to infer that he has fallen a great distance before he reaches the onlookers, especially if we recall the extreme height of the World Trade Center.

While I do not believe that Skarbakka's work merely exploits or mocks the tragedies of 9-11, as Steinberg would argue, I do understand that Skarbakka's images undeniably circulate in dialog to representations from 9-11. Yet *Onlookers* and *The Falling Man* diverge in terms of photographic genres. As a documentary photographer, Drew photographed people falling to their actual deaths on September 11, 2001, and

Drew has an ethical obligation to fulfill. For instance, the National Press Photographer's Association's "Code of Ethics" suggests that press photographers must "[b]e accurate and comprehensive in the representation of subjects," "[e]diting should maintain the integrity of the photographic images' content and context," and photographers should "not manipulate images … in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects."[83] As an "art" photographer, Skarbakka is free to construct the aesthetic image that he wants. But while reviewers found fault with Skarbakka's artistic and aesthetic response to the events of 9-11, more traditional documentary photographs also involve aestheticization in order to suggest a meaning beyond merely recording the appearance of events in a seemingly "objective" fashion. The vertical position of Drew's falling man—although his left knee is bent—parallels the vertical gradations of the tower behind him. He falls headfirst along a line near the center of the frame where the left half of the building stands in a darker shadow than the lighter right half. Drew selected this photograph out of his sequence of at least a dozen as the one to send out over the Associated Press wire due to the way the "picture just jumped off the screen because of its verticality and symmetry. It just had that look."[84]

As art historian Andrea D. Fitzpatrick describes, "When seen out of context, the aesthetic qualities and symmetry that nuance the seventh frame create a false sense of suspension: a strange buoyancy as if he is floating by a thread."[85] For Fitzpatrick, this false suspension causes a paradox between vulnerability and invulnerability as "[t]he fearlessness and courage implied by the headfirst position in the famous seventh frame of

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[83] National Press Photographers Association, "Code of Ethics," available at https://nppa.org/code_of_ethics (accessed 20 April 2013).
[84] Tom Junod, "The Falling Man," *Esquire* (September, 2003): 178.
[85] Andrea D. Fitzpatrick, "The Movement of Vulnerability: Images of Falling and September 11," *Art Journal* (Winter 2007): 90.

the sequence allay some of the trauma of the other panic-stricken ones."[86] In other words, the aestheticization of the documentary frame moves the image away from a depiction of human vulnerability to one of "fearlessness and courage," but the events of the day and the human causalities return the meaning of the image back to one of vulnerability, especially as the man falls and obviously loses control in the other frames of the sequence (Fig. 5.21). Thus this dichotomy of objective documentary/aesthetic art is not as clear as it would seem initially. Both projects—the narrative suggested by the anonymous *Falling Man* in Drew's photographs and Skarbakka's images that he creates based on his performances—function aesthetically as both help to construct the understanding about 9-11 as a historical event. I will return to the narrative Skarbakka attempts to construct in a moment.

As an artist, Skarbakka creates the illusion that he fell, which can bring about a real experience of anxiety in viewers. But his controlled process was not fatal for him in the same way that Drew's subject experienced. Skarbakka's *Life Goes On* functions as a series and not an ordered sequence like Drew's shots that end with a lamppost signifying the man reached the ground and his death. While the artist's horizontal position and flailing limbs in *Onlookers* makes him seem more fallible and out of control than the man represented in Drew's often reproduced frame, Skarbakka appears more transcendent and in control in other frames, such as in *Con—mporary* (2005, Fig. 5.22). In this image from the same day, he wears a suit and tie as he falls, or ascends, vertically and upright above the entry to the museum as camera operators and onlookers watch. One of the cameramen block the "TE" of the "CONTEMPORARY" above the entrance to the museum, hence the image's title.

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[86] Fitzpatrick: 90.

Skarbakka's work shows him in both vulnerable positions that suggest human fallibility as well as images that show him in more transcendent ways, because his artistic examination alludes to a more general question of control that were spurred by the events of 9-11. In contrast, Drew's photograph *The Falling Man* functioned as an aesthetic object that even while showing an imminent death, counteracts the idea of vulnerability to suggest strength—a message replicated in much of the masculine rhetoric following the events of 9-11 with the immediate attacks on Afghanistan and later Iraq. As Kimmel recalls, "American policy makers strutted like bullies through the halls of the middle school—pushing inferior wimps out of the way, flouting the law, ignoring the fact that no one especially likes them, defying teachers, and daring the administration to do something about it…. The new American unilateralism is pitted against Old Europe's reliance on cooperative institutions and its promotion of social welfare and peace."[87] Directly following 9-11, the form U.S. masculinity took was one of neoconservative aggression, which further exacerbated the call for "manly" men and an exclusionary definition of normativity.[88] Drew's selection of his seventh frame, in which the man's aestheticized gesture suggests a sense of control, acquires political implications because the image mirrors the aggressive action and suggestion of the U.S. government being in-control by quickly attacking the Middle East following the events of 9-11, even under what proved to be false pretenses.

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[87] Kimmel, 279.

[88] For a description of neoconservativism, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81-85. He also describes, "the international adventurism of the neoconservatives, long planned and legitimized after the 9/11 attacks, had as much to do with asserting domestic control over a fractious and much-divided body politic in the US as it did with a geopolitical strategy of maintaining global hegemony through control over oil resources" (195).

While the criticism Skarbakka received for *Life Goes On* draws attention to the question of ethics and what is "appropriate" to represent, which inevitably leads to the unsolvable issue of censorship, I am more concerned with how he narrates the events of 9-11 and the relationship of his narration to the construction of normative ideals in the contemporary United States. Skarbakka began *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, in part, as a way to respond to the events of 9-11 intelligently. As he recounts, he was inspired by the way that some of the people who fell from the towers took control and made the decision to jump. The idea of controlling oneself aligns with Kimmel's first pattern of normative masculinity, which I discussed previously. But while ideals of masculinity celebrate being in control, a falling man would seem to suggest failed masculinity and a loss of control. Skarbakka's projects seem to challenge masculinity by showing failed attempts at it through the act of falling. But through his narration of 9-11 Skarbakka negotiates contemporary ideals of masculinity a number of ways. Because the artist describes the victims of 9-11 as deciding to jump instead of falling, his narration returns to the masculine ideal of self-control as outlined by Kimmel. Yet he must make the decision to jump—or otherwise begin his descent—in order to begin to fall for each of his performances.

The particular version of taking control with regards to 9-11 brings us to Kimmel's third observation about the construction of masculinity and, further, helps to demonstrate how his three noted patterns do not function in mutual exclusion. Kimmel argues that when cultural restraints become too much for men, manhood includes a tendency to escape. Historically men had single-sex colleges, fraternities, fraternal orders, and men's clubs to which to retreat and "be a man." A contemporary version of

masculine escape includes the yearly, two-week long retreat to Bohemian Grove amid the redwoods in Monte Rio, California. Participants in this "overgrown boy-scout camp" include an elite collection of "CEO's of *Fortune* 500 corporations, senators, congressmen, governors, and even presidents, vice-presidents, and ex-presidents"—positions aligned with more contemporary versions of masculinity as imagined as managerial power. [89] The men retreat to Bohemian Grove where they bond as males, drink, and appropriate Native American rituals as they drum, chant, and worship the redwoods around the camp. In the wilderness, and thus seemingly away from social restraints, the "men can be men."[90] Or, as I mentioned previously based on Kimmel's observation that the construction of masculinity includes the celebration of self-control and restraint, when the workspace is no longer solely a masculine domain, men escape to the gym and overcome office dynamics by turning to their bodily health as they focus on "working out."[91] Skarbakka's engagement with 9-11 highlights both Kimmel's masculine ideals of taking control and also the tendency for men to escape from their situations when they feel too pressured. In his simplified narrative of the day's events, some of the people who fell took control and decided to jump to escape the towers. Furthermore, I mentioned previously that Skarbakka described the impetus of his project was that he wanted an intelligent way to respond to the traumatic events of 9-11. If his

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[89] Kimmel, 228.

[90] For a more recent overview of the Bohemian Grove, reporters' attempts to infiltrate the camp (as well as their subsequent arrests), and protests of the secret talks that occur during the camp, see Elizabeth Flock, "Bohemian Grove: Where the Rich and Powerful go to Misbehave," *Washington Post*, 15 June 2011, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/ post/bohemian-grove-where-the-rich-and-powerful-go-to-misbehave/2011/06/15/AGPV1sVH_blog.html (accessed 3 December 2012). For a discussion of the appropriation of Native Americanness toward the construction of whiteness, and thus Americanness—in the case of Bohemian Grove as masculinity—see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 1998).

[91] As an example of the interplay between Kimmel's three tendencies of constructing masculinity, the masculine retreat to Bohemian Grove provides escape but also functions as an act of exclusion. Women are not allowed, and the "grudging admission of a few black men (like Vernon Jordan)" further highlights the construction of masculinity as a process of whiteness. Kimmel, 228.

series did not work, he declared that he would perform his own (masculine) escape and "make an exodus from the world of making art."[92] In this statement, again he highlights his personal sense of manhood, here in relationship to his understanding of the art world, and will escape this world if he feels he cannot navigate it successfully. [93]

Skarbakka's romanticized narrative about 9-11 warrants a further exploration as it simplifies and heroicizes the deaths of those who fell from the World Trade Center. Thus his narration of 9-11 follows binary of the agency of suicide in a way that reinstates ideals of masculinity. Lisa J. Nicoletti traces representations of suicide in visual culture and finds that when discourse links suicide with insanity, such as in Victorian medical texts, such discourse constructs suicide as feminine. [94] She argues that this is because medical discourse and cultural rhetoric imagine that women possess lesser mental capabilities than men, and their lesser capabilities lead to their plethora of suicides even though the numbers of men committing suicide greatly outnumber the women who commit similar acts. When medical discourse treats suicide as a logically-planned, rationalized act, then it constructs suicide as masculine. For instance, Nicoletti cites Louis Everstein, a Fellow of the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California, who argues that in order for people to end their own lives, they must rationalize death's terrors away. He explains, "The logistics of a suicidal plan require careful preparation. For this,

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[92] Skarbakka, quoted in Marlan: 29.

[93] He has worked to make his way into the "art world." In addition to numerous international group exhibitions, Skarbakka has held several solo exhibitions including those at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Lawrimore Project in Seattle; Irvine Contemporary in Washington, D.C.; and The Pittsburgh Filmmakers. His photographs are in numerous private collections and have also been collected by art institutions including Light Work; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

[94] Lisa J. Nicoletti, "Resuscitating Ophelia: Images of Suicide and Suicidal Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England," (PhD diss., University of Madison—Wisconsin, 1999).

the person must be capable of the kind of calculation that relies on lucid thought."[95] For her art historical project, Nicoletti finds that visual culture reflects changes in the gendering of suicide.

According to Nicoletti, during the Victorian era, images of female suicides proliferated—the author highlights the work by numerous artists including John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1851-1852) as well as images in print media—but the more contemporary moment sees the resurgence of representations of male suicides as in visual culture products ranging from the 1997 film *The Full Monty* to advertisements for the financial institution H&R Block. Nicoletti notes that the construction of suicide as feminine characterizes women as incapable of overcoming adversity, thus they "attempt" suicide. In contrast, men are imagined to make rational choices and more actively "kill themselves."[96] Even the methods for ending one's lives are imagined along gender lines; men select more "active" methods while women opt for more "passive" and less disfiguring acts.[97] While Nicoletti's binary description of the masculinity or femininity of suicide oversimplifies the act and issues of agency associated with it—I will return to a critique of this oversimplification in a moment—it does trace the mainstream gendering of suicide and would align the active taking control of one's own escape, which in the case of Skarbakka's photographs becomes the act of him seeming to jump to his death, with Kimmel's third pattern of masculinity. According to Kimmel, when men feel too much pressure, they escape. Suicide becomes one way to do so.

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[95] Louis Everstein, *The Anatomy of Suicide: Silence of the Heart* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1998), 47. Quoted in Nicoletti, 241.
[96] Nicoletti, 255.
[97] D[aniel] Hack Tuke, ed., *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine, Giving the Definition, Etymology and Synonyms of the Terms used in Medical Psychology with the Symptoms, Treatments and Pathology of Insanity and the Law of Lunacy in Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 volumes (Philadelphia, PA: P. Blakiston, 1892), 2, 1229-1230; and David Lester, ed., *Why Women Kill Themselves* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1988), 3, 8. Quoted in Nicoletti, 255.

I have already suggested that the binary of jumping and falling is not as simple as Skarbakka's narrative would lead us to believe. Even if someone decides to jump—a decision some of the 9-11 victims could have made, although they were forced into their decision—once one jumps, they fall. Skarbakka's photographs suggest the idea of jumping in some images more than in others; in *Trestle* he appears to jump from the bridge in contrast to *Studio* in which he falls backwards from a ladder. The images frame his act as falling or jumping, and during the actual process of making each frame, though he did not necessarily jump, he decided the moment to begin his descent. This nuance of falling and jumping complicates the binary of active and passive associated with it. Similarly, Margaret Higonnet complicates the simple binary of active (masculine) taking one's life in contrast to passive (female) suicide attempts, such as the binaries suggested in Nicoletti's discussion. In "Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide," Higonnet describes female suicide as sign, or speech act, and a form of female agency. Thus she finds a gap between "what we know about this act when it is undertaken by women, and its representation and interpretation."[98] Her complication of the binary of suicide does not negate Kimmel's third pattern of masculinity of escape as suggested by Skarbakka's narratives of 9-11 and images that show him about to jump. Instead, Higonnet's argument demonstrates how the construction of feminine agency should not always be placed in an oppositional position to masculinity. While the dominant understanding of gender, as illustrated by Nicoletti's case studies, would seem to suggest otherwise, there is an agency in acts, such as suicide, that cultural rhetoric deems as passive and female.

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[98] Margaret Higonnet, "Speaking Silences, Women's Suicide," *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 70.

Suicide as a form of masculine escape also connects back to the imperfections of the Everyman. For instance in *Death of a Salesman*, the Everyman Willy Loman commits suicide by intentionally crashing his car. He does so as part of his plan to give the money from his life insurance policy to his son Biff, who is starting a business. In recalling Loman's decision this way, he kills himself because a rational reason motivates him to do so; as head of the household, he decides to end his life in order to support his family. In other ways, the story paints Loman as a failure—as an aging salesman who can no longer compete in a younger man's market. But the potential challenge to his masculinity by his suicide is negated due to his hierarchically superior position and duties as the older male figurehead of his family; even while failing at work and ultimately acquiescing to his mortality, he succeeded in a way constructed as the right thing to do as a man—to support one's family. Thus, even as an iconic representation of failure, "Nobody dast blame this man."[99] In negotiating the ideals of masculinity that remain out of reach for many, Miller wrote his character to do what he though he had to do according to ideals of manhood in the United States.

In the context of Skarbakka's *The Struggle to Right Oneself* and the events of 9-11, "suicide" circulates as a contentious term. When Skarbakka narrates the events of 9-11, he does not describe the people who jumped as committing "suicide." Instead, he talks about them as taking control and making the decision to leap to escape their situation. To label the acts of 9-11 victims as jumping or falling has ethical implications. Falling implies passivity to circumstances that caused the person's actions. Jumping implies the conscious choice to leap as suicide. As a well-published case in point, when

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[99] Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem*, 1949 (New York, Penguin Books: 1997), 111. See epigraph of this chapter for an extended quotation.

reporters used various employment records to identify Drew's falling man as Norberto Hernandez, Norberto's sister confirmed that the man in the photograph was her brother. But Norberto's wife, Eulogia Hernandez, refused to confirm it was him. Hernandez' family members denied that it was their family member, in part, due to their Catholicism. Catholic beliefs consider suicide a mortal sin that means if Hernandez jumped, he would suffer eternal damnation. Eulogia also believed that her husband would have tried to make it home to his family and would have never made the decision to jump, which would have imminently ended his life.[100] Skarbakka celebrates some of the 9-11 victims as taking control, thus implying active jumping, which some people would consider suicide.[101] By doing so, his narration masculinizes the events of 9-11 as moments of control and escape, made even more so because of the way his series recall Drew's "fearless" *The Falling Man*.

The trope of masculine escape is apparent in various moments of the larger series *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, in which Skarbakka sometimes places *Life Goes On* as a subseries. In some instances, Skarbakka does not just lose his sense of stability. Instead, he looks like he made a conscious decision to take control and leap. This happens in *Trestle*. As a white man in a business suit, he seems out of place in the woods. But then he walked out onto the train trestle intentionally, turned to face the ravine, and jumped.

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[100] For the identification of the Falling Man as Hernandez, see Peter Cheney, "The Life and Death of Norberto Hernandez," *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto Edition, September 22, 2001: F8. Tom Junod offers other identifications of the man in his article "The Falling Man," *Esquire* (September 2003): 178-181, and 198-199. Junod also follows up with the Hernandez' and their memorials for and mourning of Norberto in Tom Junod, "Surviving the Fall," *Esquire* (9 September 2011), available at http://www.esquire.com/the-side/feature/the-falling-man-10-years-later-6406030 (accessed 30 December 2012). For an additional discussion about the power of language and the ethics of labeling 9-11 victims as falling or jumping, see Fitzpatrick, "Movement of Vulnerability": 92.

[101] It could be argued that this is not suicide, but rather was a fatalistic choice forced by circumstance as the extreme heat and smoke became unbearable. Suicide implies having agency to make the one's own (sane or insane) choice. Being on the upper floors of the burning World Trade Center forced such a decision.

He ventured into the wilderness to escape his situation, and life, by leaping to his imminent death. What else would this man be doing out here as he leaps without any protective gear as we see him at a point of no return? He is not B.A.S.E. or bungee jumping, for he does not wear any visible protective gear on this extremely tall bridge—the Vance Creek Bridge, the second tallest railway bridge ever constructed in the United States. And the larger impetus for his project and selected action of falling was the sense that people who fell from the World Trade Center made the conscious decision to take control and leap to escape their extreme situation.

What I have offered in this chapter is an analysis of the ways *The Struggle to Right Oneself* replicates conventions of masculinity through tropes of self-control, exclusion, and escape. Thus Skarbakka's project demonstrates how a lack of cognizance about normativity remains prevalent in contemporary U.S. culture.[102] It replicates ideals of normativity even though he intends to use the act of falling to examine issues of instability within a variety of topics, including the politics of identity. Because processes of identification function on a variety of levels, Skarbakka's replication of masculine ideals does not just have implications regarding the way individuals negotiate these ideals, as we saw Lee negotiate various facets of normativity in Ohio as an Asian woman in America. Cultural and political rhetoric employs ideals of masculinity found in Skarbakka's projects on larger scales, such as the masculine rhetoric used in support of the aggressive attacks on the Middle East post-911. Ideals of masculinity also relate back

[102] After interviewing a number of white women to study various understandings of race and its role in society, sociologist Ruth Frankenberg described "race cognizance" as "the importance of recognizing *difference* but with difference understood in historical, political, social, or cultural terms rather than essentialist ones" (157). Race cognizance involves the understanding that "race makes a difference in people's lives" and that "racism is a significant factor in shaping contemporary U.S. society" (157). See Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 157-176.

to the nation imagined as a family, as highlighted in Opton's and Crewdson's artwork, with the masculine figure positioned as the figurehead of the national family. In all of these projects—Opton's, Crewdson's, Lee's, and Skarbakka's—there remains a lack of cognizance with regards to the hard facts of normativity. The lack of acknowledgement of Skarbakka's embodied position is a symptom of the much larger lack of cognizance about the position as a white, male, heterosexual artist that remains endemic in art history and larger U.S. cultural rhetoric.

To leave the role of normativity in Skarbakka's work unexamined would replicate the ways that cultural rhetoric assumes white, male, heterosexual subjects—the position privileged in neoliberal systems—to be unmarked and transcendent of their corporeality toward an abstracted ideal. We saw this in the contradictions of the fallible Everyman who comes to represent the average guy. But in order to be average or normal, the Everyman frequently describes white, male, heterosexual men to the exclusion of others. If a person does not seem to be average or normal, cultural rhetoric constructs them as "other" even if their corporeality does not match the construction of them. For instance, Kimmel discusses the ways that Senator John Kerry's and President George W. Bush's 2004 U.S. presidential campaigns had to construct the male candidates as masculine to overcome their "feminine" Ivy-league, New England backgrounds. Bush would escape from politics to his Texas ranch, and even though he only played a "windshield cowboy"—Laura Bush called him this because he surveyed his ranch from a pickup truck and did not ride horses—he came across as more masculine than the constructions of Kerry as a "brie-eating, Chardonnay-sipping, Harvard elitist."[103] Such perceptions

[103] Kimmel, 278, 269.

helped situate Bush as the more masculine leader, further exacerbated by the proliferation of masculine rhetoric and procedures in post-911 politics.

Skarbakka's *The Struggle to Right Oneself* and his statements about the project show how embedded Kimmel's patterns of masculinity are in cultural rhetoric. Even though Skarbakka presumes to examine issues of instability and anxiety, his project does not seem engage with the topic in the way he intended. His series contests the ideals of masculine strength and control by showing a man falling. But if you continue down this line of interpretation, even the trope of the "crisis of masculinity" can be used to reconstruct normative privilege. The media is ripe with reactionary lamentations regarding the supposed "war against men," reverse discrimination, and "injured white masculinity" as the recent "crisis of masculinity" becomes one more moment in history when masculinity becomes defined as being under attack. In the most recent iteration of the supposed crisis, gains toward equality in the Civil Rights Era and 1990s celebrations of multiculturalism seem to leave "men" with less as "others" claim their right to more. Of course, as I also described in terms of the supposed threat to the well-being of families as highlighted by Crewdson's uncanny suburban tableaux, this is part of the myth told by social elites. By believing the "other" serves as a threat to "American" ways of life and well-being, middle class white Americans often identify with the wealthiest Americans and even vote against policies that would bring about more immediate relief for their personal situations. Skarbakka's act of falling and the anxiety his photographs evoke from viewers serves to replicate this loss of control felt about the social status of normative Americans.

As Hamilton Carroll describes, the supposed "crisis of masculinity" is not a decline of hegemonic masculinity. Instead, he finds that white masculinity maintains its privilege by placing itself inside other locations of marked identities—including white trash, queer, blue-collar, and Irish. In doing so, hegemonic masculinity maintains its privilege through flexibility and redefinition as "white masculinity has transformed the universal into the particular as a means of restaging universality."[104] Carroll's discussion shows how the Everyman still works as a transcendent ideal figure, even though he is not perfect. It also highlights how Skarbakka's narration about himself—his non-normative Pentecostal childhood, authoritarian stepfather who raised the family to live off the land, struggle with depression, and drug use—all mark him. But these marked identities do not address the larger identity of Skarbakka as a white male artist. I mean this more as a demonstration of the hegemony of art institutions than as a critique of Skarbakka's narrations. I find the more dire examination needed is the one that I offered above about *The Struggle to Right Oneself* to reveal the continued maintenance of ideal white masculinity in contemporary U.S. art with Skarbakka's project as a model example.

As he continues working on *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, Skarbakka has also performed physical feats for additional series. In 2005, he began *Fluid* based on his experiences with the power of water (Fig. 5.23). A 2002 flood forced him to evacuate Prague and he suffered from a bout of decompression illness after diving in the Adriatic Sea off Croatia. Based on these experiences of "doing," the artist created *Fluid* in order to examine humans' relationship with water and explains, "From famine caused by drought, to tsunamis, and the very question of global warming itself. These are the issues.

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[104] Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity*, New Americanists, ed. Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 7, 10.

Not intending to seek out gratification from the difficult content, the photographs will describe the need for more awareness and … stand as a reminder that nature, in its truest sense of the sublime, does not care who we are."[105] This series functions similarly to his larger series *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, in that nature and water take control and threaten humans, as represented by Skarbakka's own body in the photographs. For his third series that involves extreme physical activities, *Fight Club* (began in 2008), the artist fights against a mixed-martial arts opponent (Fig. 5.24). Again, the possibility of his failure arises as his opponent defeats him in the ring. All three of these recent series—*The Struggle to Right Oneself*, *Fluid*, and *Fight Club*—function similarly, and Skarbakka acknowledges that they stand on their own but could also work as chapters in an overall project.[106] These series foreground the performances and physical feats of this artist while he affectively connects viewers to his physicality. At the same time, his photographs communicate a loss of stability and control to forces outside of the protagonist's body—gravity, nature, and a fighting opponent. But again Skarbakka describes these series in terms of his actions of doing rather than his position of being as they communicate a sense of his masculine physicality.

The success and contemporary relevance of Skarbakka's series, especially *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, arise from the way the series draw attention to identity politics, albeit in ways that the artist does not seem to intend. How we talk about his series becomes part of the solution in an attempt to challenge, or overturn, hierarchical relationships based on positions of "being." To simply label representations of white male artists as "Everyman," or to describe the work by white male artists based on their

[105] Kerry Skarbakka, "Fluid," http://skarbakka.com/menuframe.html (accessed 1 March 2009).
[106] Kerry Skarbakka, interview with author, Pittsburgh, PA, 17 November 2010.

experiences, in ways that suggest the artists transcend their corporeal identity, replicates the neoliberal erasure of structural gendered and racialized inequalities. But to mark Skarbakka's body as a sign of normative masculinity in terms of his employment of self-control, exclusion, and escape opens discussions about the constructions, meanings, and hierarchical implications of normativity in our contemporary historical moment.

CONCLUSION

Despite all the recent attention paid to issues of identity in art history, I argue that mainstream ideals of normativity have been insufficiently analyzed and reclaimed as a subject position from which artistic examinations begin. So often as I was working I was told things like, "Gregory Crewdson's work does not engage with issues of race." But as a symptom of larger cultural processes, normativity functions as a "hard fact," which according to Philip Fisher, "involves forgetting both the process and its very openness to alternatives or to failure, [thus] the history of culture has trouble in later remembering what it is socially and psychologically decisive for it to forget."[1] Once constructed as the unmarked ideal, rhetorical constructions generally operate as undetected processes, and normativity often functions without question. Normative positions provide the position from which "others" deviate. As I have demonstrated throughout this project, although a belief in normativity is wide-held in contemporary U.S. culture, it is a cultural construction renegotiated each and every day. Artwork serves as a site for such (re)negotiations.

There is often a lack of "cognizance" about the way who or what is deemed normative is assumed to serve as a transcendent ideal. Sociologist Ruth Frankenberg describes "race cognizance" as "the importance of recognizing *difference* but with difference understood in historical, political, social, or cultural terms rather than essentialist ones." Thus race cognizance involves the understanding that "race makes a difference in people's lives" and that "racism is a significant factor in shaping

[1] Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

contemporary U.S. society."[2] But because race does not function alone in culture, my project also includes, as it must, the study of gender, class, sexuality, and place toward the construction of national ideals.[3]

My current project is not about "American" art in a traditional sense; I do not seek out characteristics in art that seem uniquely American, and I would be wary of studies that do so.[4] Instead, I analyze the "Other's Other" to see what the study of photographic art tells us about the negotiation of identities in the contemporary United States. In particular, I started with case studies that I thought challenged the privilege or hegemony of normativity. Suzanne Opton directed U.S. soldiers and Iraqi refugees into vulnerable poses. Gregory Crewdson made the moral and pristine site of the suburbs strange through his manipulation of *mise-en-scène*. Nikki S. Lee used performance and subcultural styles to transgress the boundaries of various social groups. And Kerry Skarbakka represented a white man but one who had lost control and fell. Upon more in-depth analysis of these case studies, I found that the affectivity of the work—humanizing the other in Opton's series, evoking the uncanny in Crewdson's, employing familiarity of snapshots and stereotypes toward a sense of reality in Lee's, and the anxiety experienced from losing control in Skarbakka's—can overtake the politics of the images. While their series offer superficial challenges to normativity, there are a number of ways that their images reinstate normative ideals, thus demonstrating the stronghold that normativity continues to have in contemporary U.S. culture.

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[2] Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 157.
[3] Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All In the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3, Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy (Part 2) (Summer 1998): 62-82.
[4] See Meyer Schapiro, "Race, Nationality, and Art," *Art Front* 2, No. 4 (March 1936): 10-12; reprinted in Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 136-139.

For *Soldier* and *Citizen*, Opton attempts to connect viewers to the soldiers and Iraqi refugees that she photographed by employing the sentimental physiognomic projects—the convention of portraiture that assumes viewers can know the interiority of a sitter through their outward appearance—but also through constructing the nation as a family and appealing to a "humanizing affect" to include the Iraqi refugees within this normative construction. In leaving this aspect of her work unexamined, it is easy not to notice how her series shift from one trope to another and replicate the normative beliefs that situate the nation in terms of an ideal family, the nation in contrast to the foreign, and collapses some "others" into "our" family. Her projects create numerous positions of the normative in contrast to the other: the soldiers (as masculine) to the U.S. civilians left behind (as emotional mothers), the U.S. nation as a family in contrast to the Iraqi "citizens," the Iraqi citizens and U.S. audience as a humanized family in contrast to the aggressors, or terrorists, who caused the Iraqi refugees to flee their homes, and also the Iraqi refugees in contrast to the Jordanian citizens who enjoy full access to citizenship in ways that the Iraqis living in Jordan do not. While Opton's photographs are seductive in their invitation for viewers to understand them in the context of a large family, the interviews that accompany *Citizen* offer an additional complication to the construction of difference in her series; they help to record the actual lived experiences of the Iraqis she photographed in a way that close up portraits cannot do. Thus, the interviews also help to situate the U.S. soldiers, as representative of the nation, as some of the agents who disrupted and overturned the lives of the Iraqi citizens.

Frequently critics celebrate the way that Gregory Crewdson's suburban tableaux evoke a sense of the uncanny from viewers. Rarely do they question the way his series

default to, and thus help to recreate, normative assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, and place. In the contemporary context of the "white spatial imaginary," which George Lipsitz describes as the social organization created through historical de jure and more recent de facto segregation, the nation privileges normative families. Crewdson's series depicts normative families by constructing the suburbs as a place of moral purity for white, middle class, heteronormative families. The strangeness is caused by the introduction of foreign or alien elements, and they symbolize the assumed threat of the other on normativity, and thus on the nation's well-being. This very limited narrative often remains invisible in discussions of Crewdson's work because his series are framed through affect and his normative subjects are assumed to "have nothing to do" with identity. They are unmarked. By marking them, we see how his series creates the uncanny only through the relationships of difference. In order to have the "strange," you need the "familiar." Crewdson does not intend to engage critically with issues of identity but because of the extreme redundancies across his numerous series, his suburban tableaux become a fertile site to examine such issues.

Nikki S. Lee earned celebratory acclaim for her *Projects* due to her chameleon-like ability to "become" a member of various subcultures. But, as Cherise Smith notes, celebrations of Lee's chameleonism and cultural tourism erase or obscure the ways her *Projects* actually depend on her particular identity position. Thus, upon closer examination, her *Projects* construct identity not as fragmentary and hyperreal, with identity reduced to only signs and stereotype, but as a continual negotiation between groups deemed ideal or not. Even the term "subculture" suggests a social group narrated as nonnormative according to dominant cultural narratives. In *The Ohio Project*, this

becomes most apparent. Until recently, Ohio served as a cross-section of the heterogeneity in the country. Yet cultural rhetoric constructs it as "real" or "middle" America, which is performed or understood as a code for white, middle class, and heterosexual. Within this contradictory place, Lee photographed the subculture of poor white trash. Her position as an Asian woman in America—a position that Yuko Kawai describes as a dialectic of the "model minority" and "yellow peril"—collided with the normativity of Ohio as suggested by the whiteness of the people she photographed. She approaches whiteness through her use of blond hair, yet she is marked as racially other to the white Ohioans. Additionally their class may mark them as other to the ideal imagined American, while the artist's own class status actually marks her as closer to white. But Lee's use of snapshot photography, and the "reality" associated with the medium, works to construct the subcultures that she photographed as "real." This reality recalls the way that genre paintings were understood as reportorial representations of everyday life when, as Elizabeth Johns demonstrates, they serve to order difference and types in society. Though her series engages with the performativity of identity, she does so only superficially as her series does not challenge normative understandings of difference but merely replicates dominant narratives about the subcultures she photographs.

And while Kerry Skarbakka frames the instability he represents in *The Struggle to Right Oneself* as an examination of numerous moments of the loss of stability, including the negotiations of identity, his series also reinstates normative masculinity. As Michael Kimmel describes, the negotiation of masculinity entails the demonstration of self-control and physical prowess, which Skarbakka does by emphasizing the very physical performances he repeats across his series. The second pattern Kimmel identifies in

relation to masculinity is the definition of it through exclusionary practices. Because dominant cultural rhetoric positions white masculinity as a transcendent, or unmarked, ideal, traditional art history does not describe work by white male artists as being about race or gender. Conversely, art by female artists is often interpreted as being about gender, art by an artist of color as about race, art by a queer artist as about sexuality, et cetera. Thus representations of white men, including Skarbakka, are frequently described as the generalized Everyman—a term defined by exclusion and coded as average white maleness. And, finally, Kimmel points out that when men feel overwhelmed, they tend to escape. Skarbakka represents escape in his images that show a white man leaping, sometimes even to his immanent death. He has also described a personal fantasy of escaping from the "art world" if his series did not bring him the level of success he sought. Overall, his project offers him a site to negotiate his personal sense of masculinity while his representations also engage with larger cultural beliefs about identity.

Contemporary neoliberal rhetoric emphasizes the ideal individual over the collective community, or what Chantal Mouffe would describe as the liberal model in contrast to the republican. Mouffe offers a third model of citizenship, the "principle of equivalence," to suggest a model that does not privilege the individual over the collective or the collective over the individual. Instead, her third model recognizes that:

> The creation of political identities as radical democratic citizens, for instance, depends on a collective form of identification among the democratic demands found in a variety of movements: those of women, workers, blacks, gays, the ecological, as well as against other forms of subordination. This is a conception of citizenship that, through a common identification with a radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and quality, aims at constructing a "we," a chain of equivalence among their demands so as to articulate them through the principle of democratic equivalence. It must be stressed that such a relation of

> equivalence does not eliminate difference-for that would be simple identity. It is only insofar as democratic differences are opposed to forces or discourses that negate all of them that these differences can be substituted for each other. That is, the "we" of the radical democratic forces is created by the delimitation of a frontier, the designation of a "them"; it is not a homogeneous "we," predicated on the identity of its components. Through the principle of equivalence, a type of commonality is created that does not erase plurality and differences and that respects diverse forms of individuality.[5]

Mouffe's proposed understanding of citizenship models citizens in relation to each other. The slippages and impossibility of always locating normativity firmly in my case studies demonstrates how identity is not about the normative in contrast to the other. Instead, all positions are constructed through continuous cultural narratives as well as individual's negotiations with such narratives. To leave normativity unmarked would allow it to continue to serve as the default position—one imagined as stable—from which other positions deviate.

Once marked, acknowledged, and visible, the difficulty of locating normativity becomes a site of possibility to disrupt cultural hegemony. For example, though Patricia Hill Collins finds the belief in the ideal family deeply embedded in U.S. ideologies and social organization, she suggest, "Black nationalist, feminist, and other political movements in the United States dedicated to challenging social inequality might consider recasting intersectional understandings of family in ways that do not reproduce inequality. Instead of engaging in endless criticism, reclaiming the language of family for democratic ends and transforming the very conception of family itself might provide a more useful approach."[6] For Collins, political movements must first recognize the role that family plays in preserving hierarchies in order to reformulate family to challenge

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[5] Chantal Mouffe, "Citizenship and Political Identity," *October* 61, The Identity in Question (Summer 1992): 31-32.
[6] Collins, 78.

hegemony. To leave the unmarked ideal as such replicates the neoliberal and postidentity erasures of difference in a utopic understanding of U.S. culture as a site of freedom and equality for "all." For if we all are still part of a family of man, dad still sits at the head of the family's table.

Though my current project addresses art made by U.S. artists, the analysis that I layout here is not only a study about the United States but instead has implications for the way we understand the nation in relationship to the "global." To treat the United States as not "global" places it as an unmarked ideal to those deemed "other"—global, or non-Western as evidenced by many recent course descriptions and job postings in which "global" is a code that means not the United States or Europe—rather than placing all positions into relational negotiations. Thus we can examine such relationships while also noting how specific contextual information will vary with each case study. (Michael Kimmel noted a similar process in his study of masculinity. While historical specificity dictated the specific forms of masculinity, patterned actions emerged across various historical eras. For instance, the construction of masculinity in the workforce shifted from physical forms of labor during the late industrial era to more managerial positions in our age of global capitalism. But the work place served as a site for "men to be men" in both eras.)

The frameworks I have outlined in my current study of photographs by Opton, Crewdson, Lee, and Skarbakka provide a starting point from which to examine my next project, the artwork by the contemporary Brazilian artist Dora Longo Bahia (b. 1961). Her work addresses similar issues of the construction of identity amid ideals regarding the nation. For her thesis project, Bahia organized an exhibition of artwork by late-

1960s/early-1970s artist Marcelo do Campo (b. 1951). Working under the oppressive rule of the Brazilian dictatorship, do Campo sought to examine symbols of the nation at a time when the government suppressed resistance. For instance, the government forced João Batista Vilanova Artigas—an influential modernist architect and professor at the School of Architecture and Urbanism (FAU) who influenced a number of students to investigate the relationship and boundaries between art and architecture, theater, cinema, philosophy, and life—to resign due to his affiliation with the Communist party. Do Campo studied at the FAU in the architecture program, because, as Bahia explains, he understood architecture as "manifestation of experience" and he believed that he could create socially relevant works more successfully in the architecture department than in the more traditional department of art.

The objects that Bahia re-discovered and presented included fragments of films, theoretical drawings, and photographic documents of do Campo's performances and social interventions. For instance, in a series of Happenings, do Campo shot symbols of Brazilian national pride with a handgun. The photographs of *Happening 1* show the artist circling a Brazilian flag lying on the floor as he takes aim at it and shoots. Bahia also traced how do Campo had an interest in subverting power structures of gender, such as in his films *A Bout de Souffle* (1969), *Ambiência 2* (1971), and *Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe* (1974), which now only exist in fragments. In *Ambiência 2*, a woman sits in a chair as a man walks around her and slaps her face. Bahia explains the gender relations in *Ambiência 2* thus, "In spite of the scoundrel's clothing and the silk stocking on his head, he inflicts a domestic, almost delicate torture on the girl. In spite of her makeup and model's hairdo, she is dressed like a soldier. Her immobility toward the aggressor makes

her strong. Marcelo explores, once more, the ambiguity of the relationship between man and woman, weak and strong, right and wrong, and suspends the observer between opposed situations and judgments."[7] Do Campo quit making art in 1975 and moved to Florianópolis to surf and keep bees, and Bahia suggests that no one has heard from him since.

In 2006, Bahia published a short book that chronicled do Campo's work, but in the book's epilogue she admitted that she fabricated do Campo as a contemporary conceptual project. She intentionally based her heteronym Marcelo do Campo on a male artist—specifically Marcel Duchamp—due to the often biased interpretations of "women's" art. She writes, "Similar characteristics in works by male and female artists generate different interpretations. Many aspects are considered component parts of an abstract women's universe if present in the work made by a female artist, whereas, if inserted in a man's production, they are analyzed according to formal or esthetic criteria."[8] Bahia's "post-medium" project engages photography along with performance, film, and social practice while addressing issues of history, identity, and nation—issues that I examined in my current project.[9] What does Bahia's/do Compo's fictional historic archive tell us about more contemporary art and global exchanges of culture as well as the construction of history? This line of questions relates back to issues of normativity—who does history record as a representative subject and who is written out? And though Bahia explains that she selected Marcel Duchamp as the source for Marcelo do Campo

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[7] Dora Longo Bahia, *Marcelo do Campo: 1969-1975* (São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2006), 73.
[8] Dora Longo Bahia, "Creation & Emancipation of Marcelo do Campo," *Marcelo do Campo: 1969-1975* (São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2006), 90.
[9] "Post-medium" refers to Rosalind Krauss' discussion of contemporary art in which she situates newer post-medium art as working with technical supports. She contrasts this against the "kitsch" of more conceptual art. See Rosalind Krauss, "Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition," *October* 116 (2006): 55-62, and *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999).

because of his maleness, Duchamp was known for his own examinations of gender across his work. He does not just work from the position of a male artist but constructed and negotiated his own artistic identities, such as the gender boundaries he crossed with his pseudonym and performances as Rrose Selevy.[10]

Though she rooted her project in Brazilian history and culture, Bahia drew from a variety of European and American canonical artists, including Édouard Manet, Le Corbusier, and Robert Smithson, as sources for do Campo's work. In the field of art history within the United States, Western art frequently serves as the unmarked position to the non-Western or global studies. Bahia's project helps to draw attention to this conservative binary as her project crosses national boundaries and the divide of Western in contrast to "global," although Brazil often holds a privileged position in the study of art from Latin America and should not be taken as representative of art from the entire continent. The relative position of art from Brazil, thus, also slips like the positions in many of my case studies.

What I have offered in this project is an analysis to add to the growing discussions that address normativity in contemporary culture. Art history as a field becomes a site to examine the lack of cognizance about the continuing role of difference in an era described utopically as post-racial, post-identity, post-subculture, and a number of other posts- that only serve to erase the continued impact of difference on lived experience. Such post- modified descriptions follow postmodern discussions of the performativity and fragmentation of identities. But as a process, identity formation involves continuous negotiations and renegotiations. To describe our era as one in which we are post-identity

[10] See Jennifer Blessing, *Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1997).

serves to draw attention away from the structural inequalities still in place in today's U.S. society and replicates neoliberal celebrations of the normative individual. Through my discussion, I aimed to add to discussions that draw attention to the normative ideal, to not allow it to continue serving as an unmarked position. The ultimate goal is not merely to rearrange everyone's seats around the family table. Instead it is to flip the table over completely.

ILLUSTRATIONS

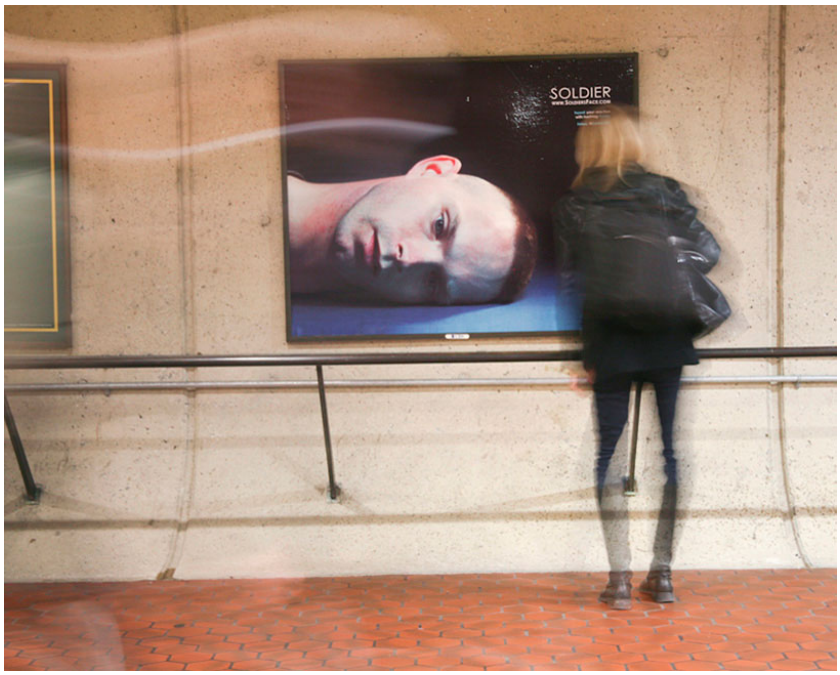

Fig. 2.1. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Claxton 120 Days in Afghanistan*, installed in Washington, D.C. Metro, 2010. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, "Billboards," available at www.suzanneopton.com (accessed 20 April 2013).

Fig. 2.2. Zoe Strauss, *Marines Billboard, Philadelphia, PA*, 2001-2006. Reproduced from Zoe Strauss, *America* (Los Angeles: AMMO Books, 2008), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.3. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier Neal: 427 days in Iraq*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, "Soldier," *Contact Sheet*, No. 136 (2006): 8.

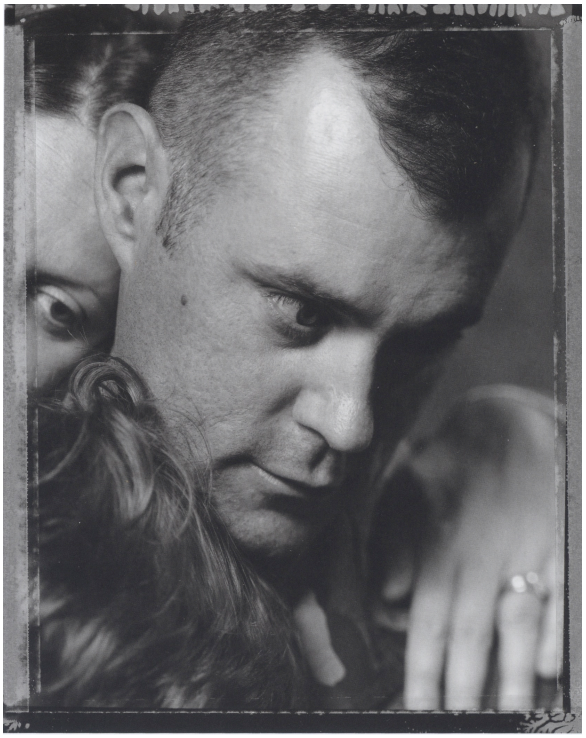

Fig. 2.4. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier Wright: 366 days in Iraq*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, "Soldier," *Contact Sheet*, No. 136 (2006): 16.

Fig. 2.5. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Claxton 120 Days in Afghanistan*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.6. Suzanne Opton, *Citizen: Bassim Suliaman*, 2007. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, "Soldier + Citizen," available at http://suzanneopton.com/images/soldier-citizen/ (accessed 11 February 2013).

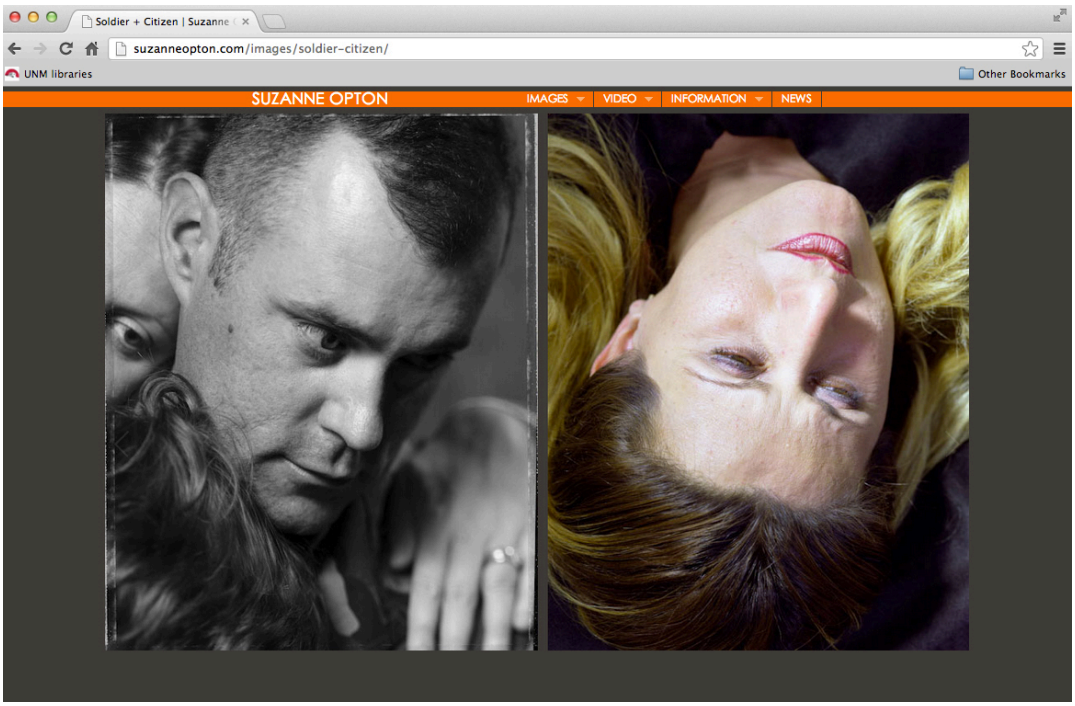

Fig. 2.7. Screen capture of Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Wright 366 days in Iraq | Citizen: Yada Barazanji*, 2007. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, "Soldier + Citizen," available at http://suzanneopton.com/images/soldier-citizen/ (accessed 11 February 2013).

Fig. 2.8. Suzanne Opton, *Edith Mason Leaving*, late 1970s. Reproduced from Robert Anderson Gallery: Regional Modern and Contemporary Photography, "Photographers: Suzanne Opton," available at http://www.robertandersongallery.com/photo/opton-15/ (accessed 5 February 2013).

Fig. 2.9. Suzanne Opton, *Walter Hayes at Christmas*, late 1970s. Reproduced from Robert Anderson Gallery: Regional Modern and Contemporary Photography, "Photographers: Suzanne Opton," available at http://www.robertandersongallery.com/photo/opton-8/ (accessed 5 February 2013).

Fig. 2.10. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Bosiaki 364 days in Iraq*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.11. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: White Length of Service Undisclosed*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.12. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Kimball 287 Days in Afghanistan*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.13. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Morris 112 Days in Iraq*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.14. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Neal 427 Days in Iraq*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.15. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: L. Jefferson Length of Service Undisclosed*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.16. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Blaskowski Length of Service Undisclosed*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier*, available at http://suzanneopton.com/images/soldier/ (accessed 11 February 2013).

Fig. 2.17. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Bruno 355 Days in Iraq*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.18. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Crumm 294 Days in Afghanistan*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.19. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Birkholz 355 Days in Iraq, 205 Days in Afghanistan*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.20. Suzanne Opton, *Soldier: Williams 396 Days in Iraq*, 2004-2005. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

Fig. 2.21. *The Palette of Narmer*, c. 2950 BCE. Carved green schist, height 25 inches. Reproduced from ArtStor, available at http://www.artstor.org (accessed 4 January 2013).

Fig. 2.22. Epigonos, *The Dying Gaul*, c. 220BCE. Marble copy of bronze original, height 36 ½ inches. Reproduced from ArtStor, available at http://www.artstor.org (accessed 4 January 2013).

Fig. 2.23. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Sir John Herschel with Cap*, April 1867. Albumen print, 13 3/8 x 10 3/8". Reproduced from Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron: A Critical Biography* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 100.

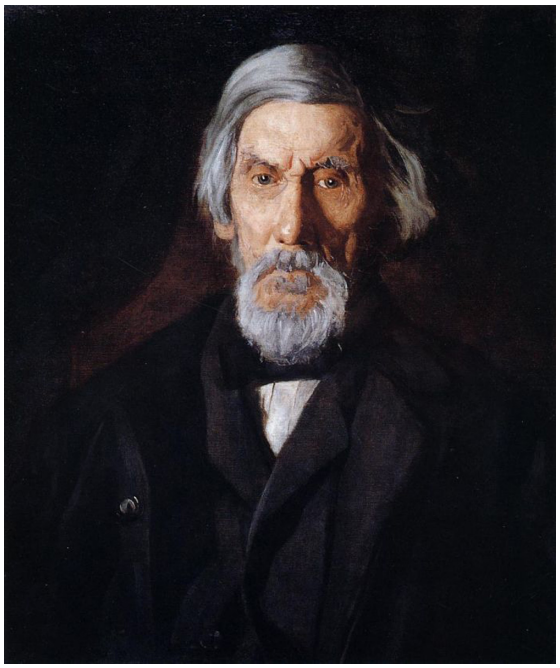

Fig. 2.24. Thomas Eakins, *William H. Macdowell*, c. 1904. Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches. Reproduced from ArtStor, available at http://www.artstor.org (accessed 19 April 2013).

Fig. 2.25. Suzanne Opton, *Jay Wenk—World War II* and *Shea McClure—Iraq*, 2009-2010. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, *Soldier/Many Wars* (Seattle, WA: Decode Books, 2011), no page numbers.

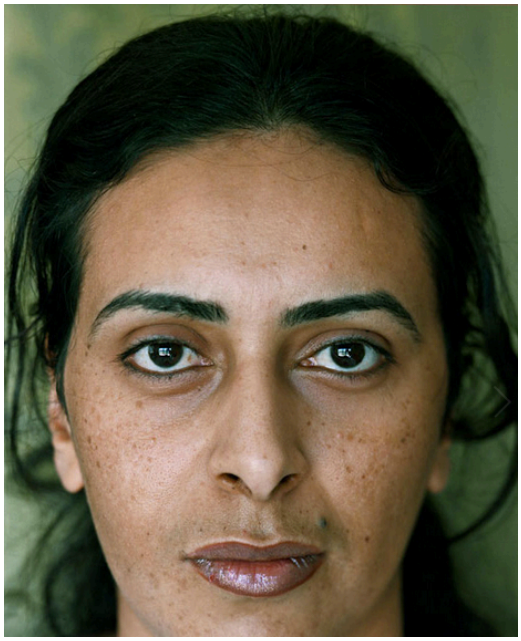

Fig. 2.26. Suzanne Opton, *Citizen: Rajah Saheb*, 2007. Reproduced from Suzanne Opton, "Soldier + Citizen," available at http://suzanneopton.com/images/soldier-citizen/ (accessed 11 February 2013).

Fig. 2.27. Nina Berman, *Marine Wedding*, 2006. Reproduced from The Sanctuary for Independent Media, "Marine Wedding," available at http://www.mediasanctuary.org/node/723?size=_original (accessed 11 February 2013).

Fig. 2.28. Military Portrait of Ty Ziegel. Reproduced from Denise Jackson, "Iraq War Veteran Dies After Falling on Ice," CINewsNow.com (27 December 2012), available at http://www.cinewsnow.com/news/local/Iraq-War-Veteran-Dies-184992881.html (accessed 11 February 2013).

Fig. 3.1. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 7), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

Fig. 3.2. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 13), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

Fig. 3.3. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 22), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

Fig. 3.4. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 14), from *Beneath the Roses*, 2003-2007. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Beneath the Roses* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008).

Fig. 3.5. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 19—"Ophelia"), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

Fig. 3.6. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-1852. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches. Reproduced from ArtStor, available at http://www.artstor.org (accessed 4 January 2013).

Fig. 3.7. Daniel Karp, Kevin Kennefick, and William Wendt, "Production Notes and Credits," *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), no page numbers.

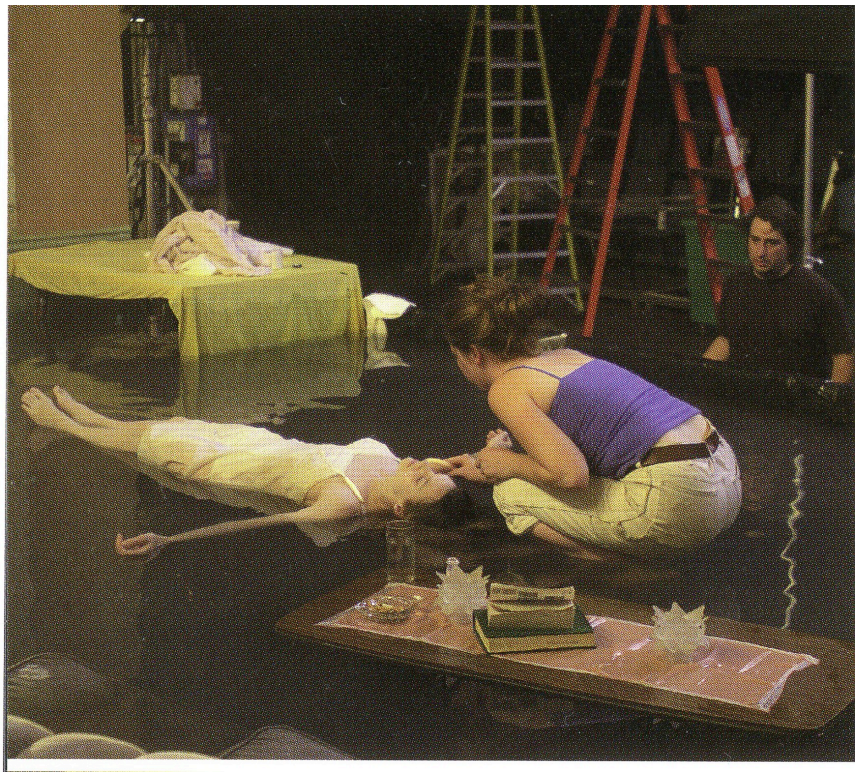

Fig. 3.8. Daniel Karp, Kevin Kennefick, and William Wendt, "Production Notes and Credits," *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), no page numbers.

Fig. 3.9. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 10—"Beckoning Bus Driver"), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

Fig. 3.10. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 7), from *Beneath the Roses*, 2003-2007. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Beneath the Roses* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008).

Fig. 3.11. Larry Sultan, *Fixing the Vacuum*, 1991, from *Pictures from Home*, 1992. Reproduced from Larry Sultan, *Katherine Avenue* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2012), 29.

Fig. 3.12. Larry Sultan, *Dad on Bed*, 1984, from *Pictures from Home*, 1992. Reproduced from Larry Sultan, *Katherine Avenue* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2012), 47.

Fig. 3.13. Larry Sultan, *Practicing Golf Swing*, 1986, from *Pictures from Home*, 1992. Reproduced from Larry Sultan, *Katherine Avenue* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2012), 35.

Fig. 3.14. William Sidney Mount, *Cider Making*, 1841. Oil on canvas, 32 ½ x 39 ¼ inches. Reproduced from Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1991), Plate 5.

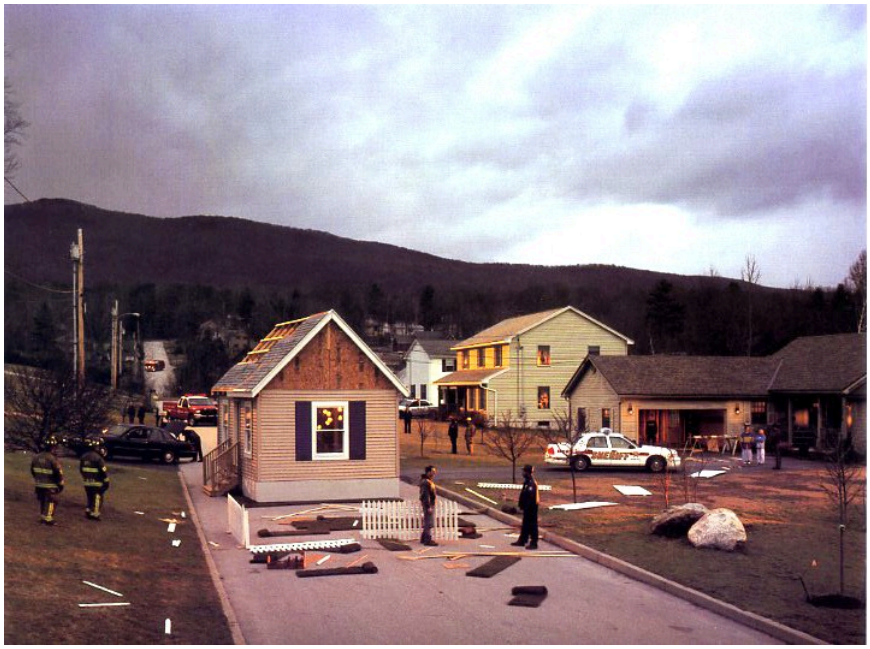

Fig. 3.15. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 21), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

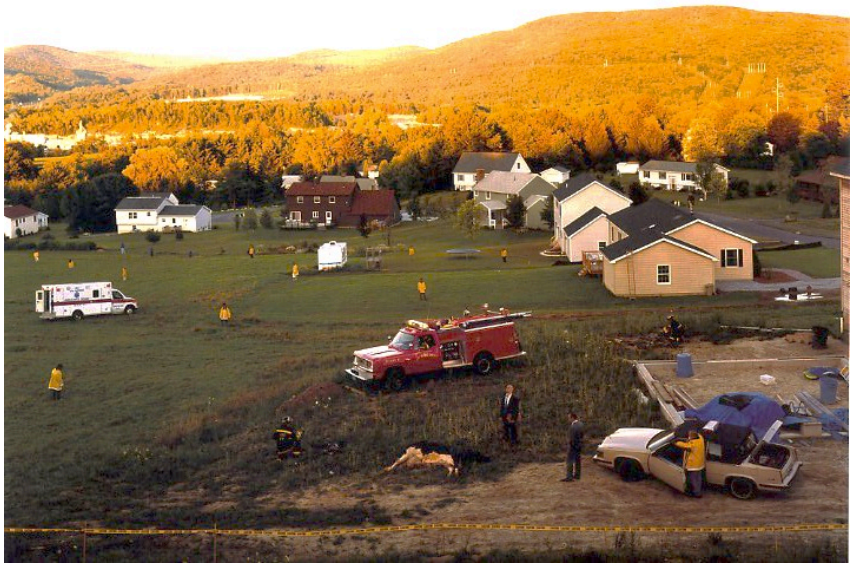

Fig. 3.16. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 29), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

Fig. 3.17. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 35), from *Beneath the Roses*, 2003-2007. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Beneath the Roses* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008).

Fig. 3.18. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 16—"Backyard Romance"), from *Beneath the Roses*, 2003-2007. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Beneath the Roses* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008).

Fig. 3.19. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 30), from *Beneath the Roses*, 2003-2007. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Beneath the Roses* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008).

Fig. 3.20. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 34), from *Beneath the Roses*, 2003-2007. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Beneath the Roses* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008).

Fig. 3.21. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plates 5 and 9), from *Dream House*, 2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Dream House* (Milan: Photology, 2008).

Fig. 3.22. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 8), from *Beneath the Roses*, 2003-2007. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Beneath the Roses* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008).

Fig. 3.23. Douglas Sirk, frame still from *Written on the Wind*, 1956. Reproduced from Steven Peacock, "*Written on the Wind*," in *Colour* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), Plate 27.

Fig. 3.24. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 9), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

Fig. 3.25. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 32), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

Fig. 3.26. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (Plate 5), from *Twilight*, 1998-2002. Reproduced from Gregory Crewdson, *Twilight* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

Fig. 4.1. Nikki S. Lee, *The Tourist Project (9)*, 1997. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 29.

Fig. 4.2. Nikki S. Lee, *The Hispanic Project (1)*, 1998. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 39.

Fig. 4.3. Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (10)*, 1999. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 65.

Fig. 4.4. Nikki S. Lee, *The Seniors Project (28)*, 1998. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 58.

Fig. 4.5. Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (8)*, 1999. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 62.

Fig. 4.6. Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (9)*; *The Ohio Project (21)*; and *The Ohio Project (6)*, 1999. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 63.

Fig. 4.7. Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (35)*, 1999. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 64.

Fig. 4.8. Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (28)*; and *The Ohio Project (10)*, 1999. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 65.

Fig. 4.9. Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (7)*, 1999. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 66.

Fig. 4.10. Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (27)*, 1999. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 67.

Fig. 4.11. William Sidney Mount, *Farmers Nooning*, 1836. Oil on Canvas, 20 ¼ x 24 ¼ inches. Reproduced from Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1991), Plate 4.

Fig. 4.12. Nikki S. Lee, *The Seniors Project (19)*, 1999. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 57.

Fig. 4.13. Santiago Sierra, *133 Persons Paid To Have Their Hair Dyed Blond*, 2001. Reproduced from Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Lima, "Collection, Courtesy of the Artist, Santiago Sierra, Works, 133 Persons Paid to Have their Hair Dyed Blond," available at http://li-mac.org/collections/courtesy-of-the-artist/santiago-sierra/works/133-persons-paid-to-have-their-hair-dyed-blond/ (accessed 15 April 2013).

Fig. 4.14. Nikki S. Lee, *The Hip-Hop Project (1)*, 2001. Reproduced from Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), Plate 16.

Fig. 4.15. Nikki S. Lee, *The Hispanic Project (18)*, 1998. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 43.

Fig. 4.16. Nikki S. Lee, *Part [14]*, from *Parts*, 2002-2003. Reproduced from Nikki S. Lee, *Parts* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005), no page numbers.

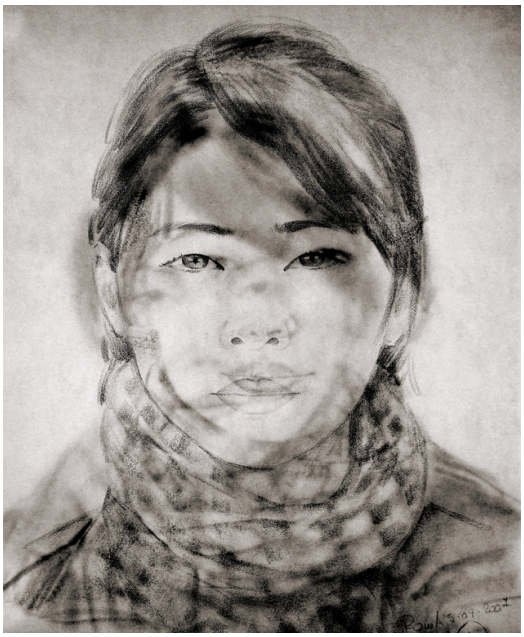

Fig. 4.17. Nikki S. Lee, *Rome 3*, 2007, from *Layers*. Reproduced from The Creators Project, "Nikki S. Lee: Layers," available at http://www.thecreatorsproject.com/videos/nikki-s-lee/media/layers (accessed 11 February 2013).

Fig. 5.1. Kerry Skarbakka, *Trestle*, 2003. Reproduced from Kerry Skarbakka, "Portfolio: *The Struggle to Right Oneself*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/struggle.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

4.2. Kerry Skarbakka, *Border Fence*, 2012. Reproduced from Kerry Skarbakka, "Kerry Skarbakka: Constructed Visions," available at http://skarbakka.com/ (accessed 18 December 2012).

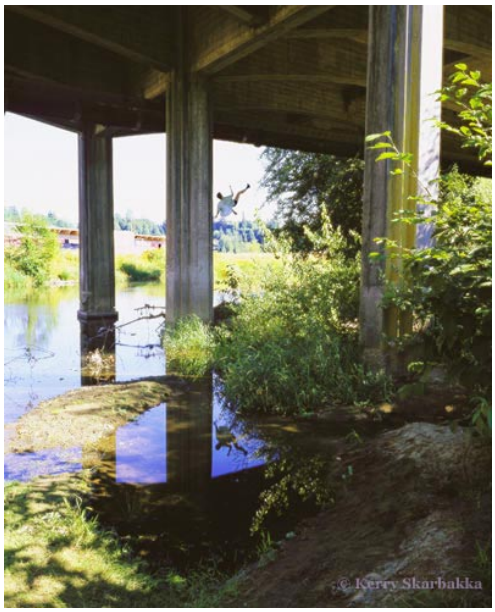

Fig. 5.3. Kerry Skarbakka, *Three Pillars*, 2003. Reproduced from Kerry Skarbakka, "Portfolio: *The Struggle to Right Oneself*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/struggle.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

Fig. 5.4. Kerry Skarbakka, *The Hunter*, 2010. Reproduced from Kerry Skarbakka, "Portfolio: *The Struggle to Right Oneself*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/struggle.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

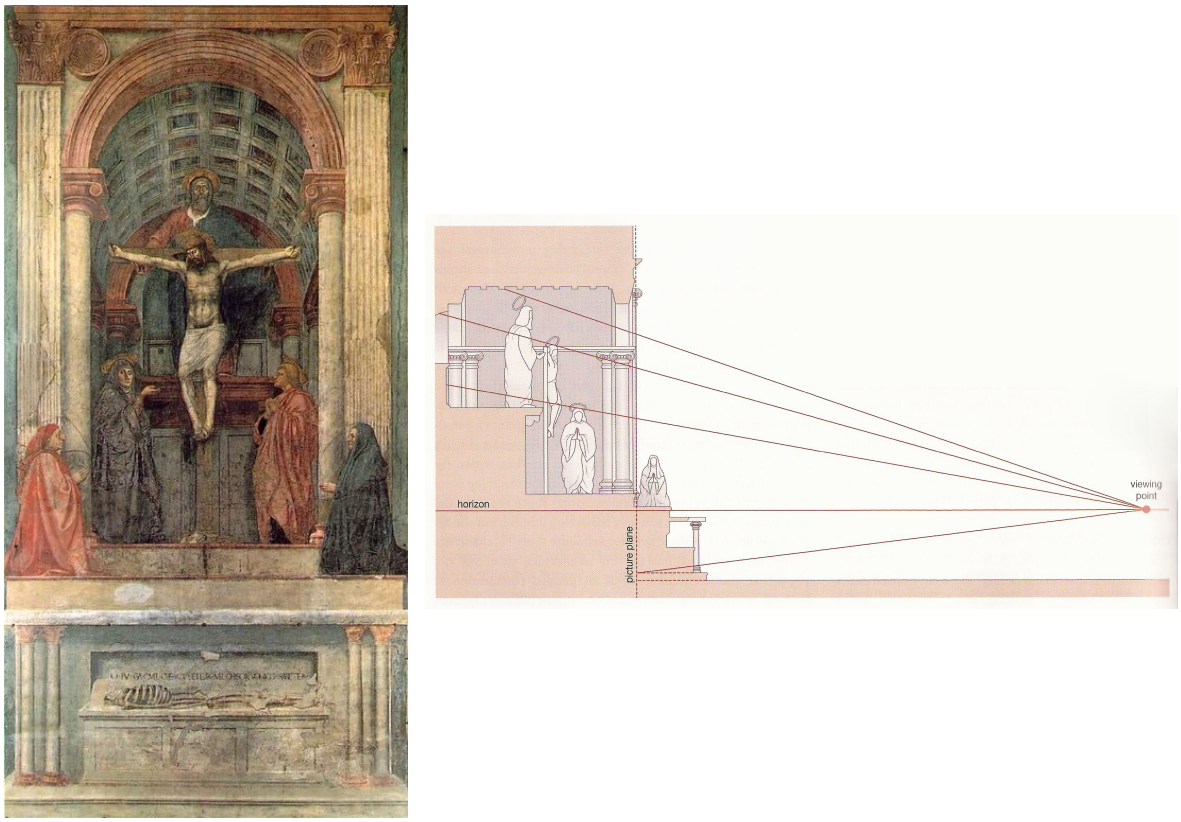

Fig. 5.5. Masaccio, *Trinity with the Virgin, St. John the Evangelist, and Donors*, c. 1425-1427, Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Fresco, 21' x 10'5"; and *Section Diagram of the Illusionistic Spatial World Portrayed in Masaccio's Trinity*. Reproduced from Marilyn Stokstad and Michael W. Cothren, *Art History*, 4th Ed. (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011), 610.

Fig. 5.6. Raphael, *School of Athens*, c. 1510-1511, fresco in the Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican, Rome, 19 x 27'. Reproduced from Stokstad and Cothren, 640. And Peter Paul Rubens, central panel from the triptych *Raising the Cross*, 1610-1611, oil on canvas, center panel 15' 1 7/8" x 11' 1 ½". Reproduced from Stokstad and Cothren, 737.

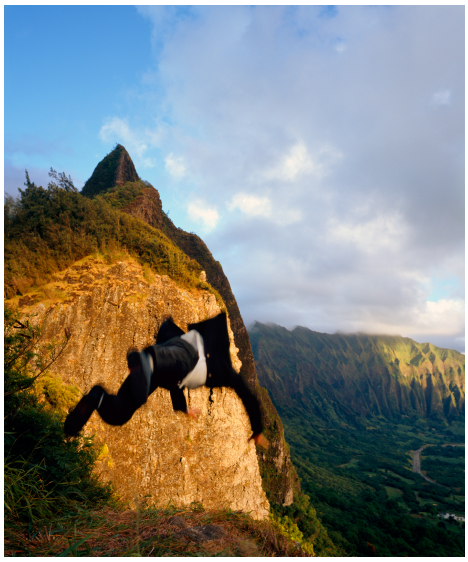

Fig. 5.7. Kerry Skarbakka, *Pali Lookout*, 2004. Reproduced from Kerry Skarbakka, "Portfolio: *The Struggle to Right Oneself*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/struggle.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

Fig. 5.8. Kerry Skarbakka, *Naked*, 2002. Reproduced from Kerry Skarbakka, "Portfolio: *The Struggle to Right Oneself*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/ struggle.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

Fig. 5.9. Kerry Skarbakka, *Clean and Jerk*, 2009. Reproduced from Kerry Skarbakka, "Portfolio: *The Struggle to Right Oneself*," available at http://skarbakka.com/ portfolios/struggle.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

Fig. 5.10. Kerry Skarbakka, *Over the Handlebars*, 2008. Reproduced from Kerry Skarbakka, "Portfolio: *The Struggle to Right Oneself*," available at http:// skarbakka.com/portfolios/struggle.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

Fig. 5.11. Kerry Skarbakka, *Shower*, 2005. Reproduced from Kerry Skarbakka, "Portfolio: *The Struggle to Right Oneself*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/ struggle.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

Fig. 5.12. Thomas Eakins, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, or *The Champion Single Sculls*, 1871, oil on canvas, 32 ¼" x 46 ¼". Reproduced from Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), Plate 1.

Fig. 5.13. Paul M. Smith, from *Make My Night*, 1997. Reproduced from Paul M. Smith, *Photographs* (New York and Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004), 32 and 33.

Fig. 5.14. Paul M. Smith, from *Artist Rifle*, 1998. Reproduced from Paul M. Smith, *Photographs* (New York and Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004), 25 and 27.

Fig. 5.15. Paul M. Smith, from *Action*, 2000. Reproduced from Paul M. Smith, *Photographs* (New York and Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004), 52.

Fig. 5.16. Paul M. Smith, from *Action*, 2000. Reproduced from Paul M. Smith, *Photographs* (New York and Frankfurt: Goliath, 2004), 57.

Fig. 5.17. Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison, *Turning to Spring*, 2001. Reproduced from Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison, *The Architect's Brother*, 7th Edition (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palm Publishers, 2010), no page numbers.

Fig. 5.18. Charles Ray, *Self-Portrait*, 1990, mixed media, 75 x 26 x 20 inches. Reproduced from Andrew Perchuk and Helaine Posner, ed., *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1995), 118.

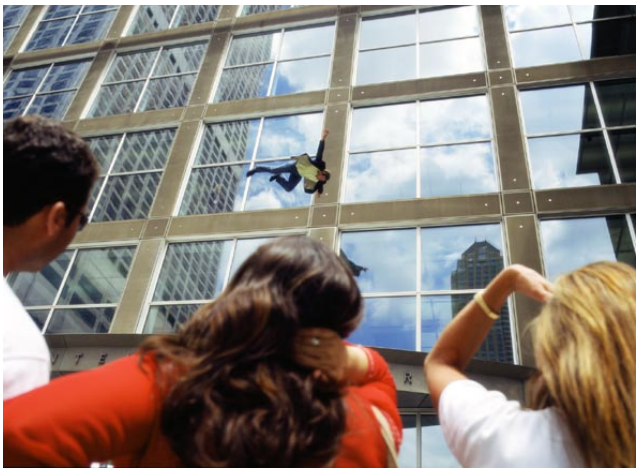

Fig. 5.19. Kerry Skarbakka, *Onlookers*, 2005. Reproduced from "Portfolio: *Life Goes On*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/lifegoeson.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

Fig. 5.20. Richard Drew, *The Falling Man*, 11 September 2001. Reproduced from Tom Junod, "The Falling Man," *Esquire* (September 2003): 176.

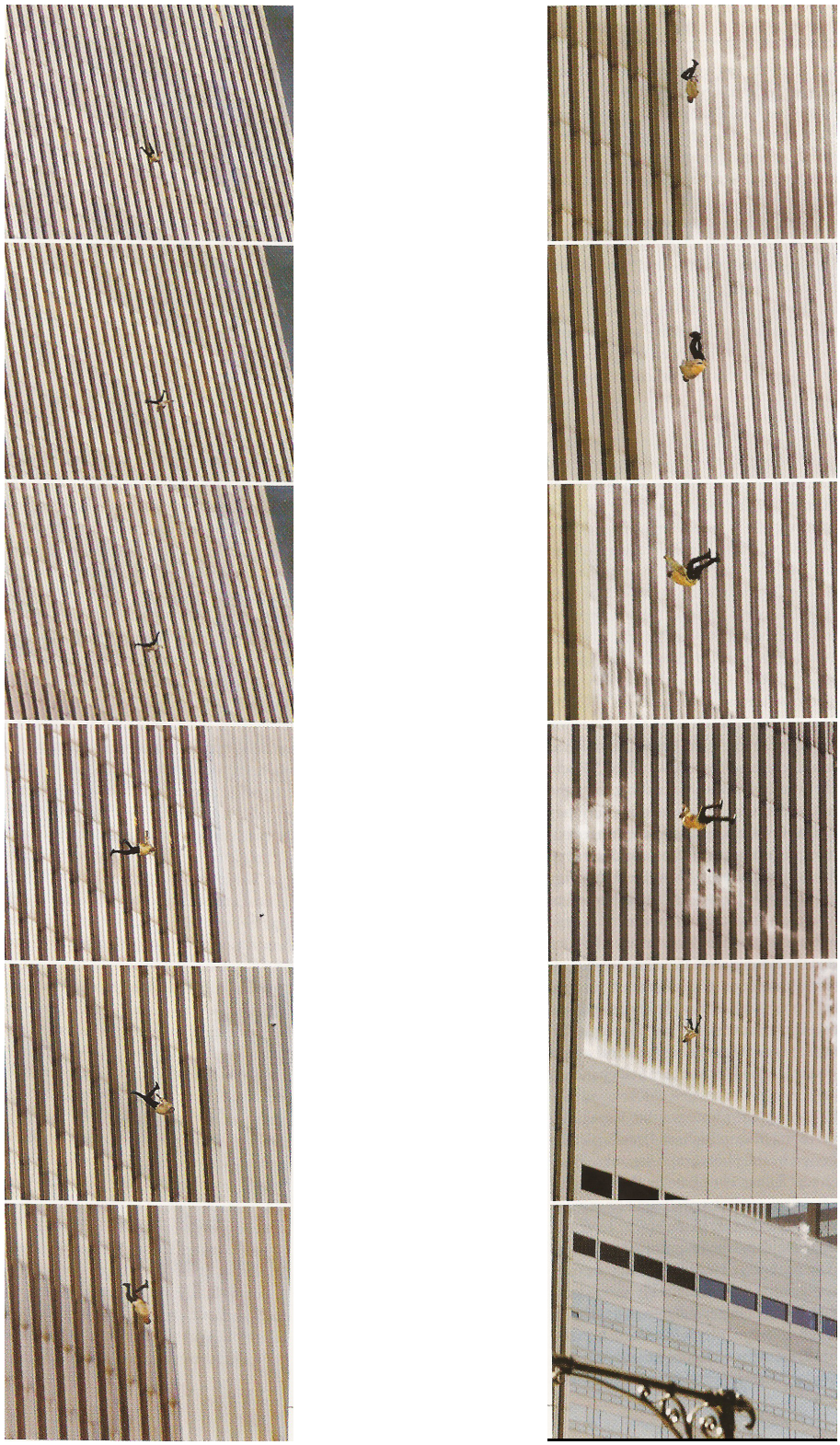

Fig. 5.21. Richard Drew, sequence containing *The Falling Man*, 11 September 2001. Reproduced from Tom Junod, "The Falling Man," *Esquire* (September 2003): 178-179.

Fig. 5.22. Kerry Skarbakka, *Con—mporary*, 2005. Reproduced from "Portfolio: *Life Goes On*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/lifegoeson.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

Fig. 5.23. Kerry Skarbakka, *St. Lawrence River*, 2006. Reproduced from "Portfolio: *Fluid*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/fluid.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

Fig. 5.24. Kerry Skarbakka, *Out of the Ring*, 2008. Reproduced from "Portfolio: *Fight Club*," available at http://skarbakka.com/portfolios/fightclub.htm (accessed 18 December 2012).

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