LEFT OF CENTER: DISPLACEMENTS AND INTERSECTIONALITIES IN PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICES OF NEW YORK AND LOS ANGELES, 1970-1988

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ABSTRACT

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Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, notions of a "postmodern image," often revolving around the use of photography, emerged within American art world discourses. Building in significant part upon themes of postructuralist theory, art historians and critics gestured to the photograph's inherent status as "copy," implicating notions of authorial originality as contrived and unnatural. My project grapples with questions as to how the scholarly contours of preeminent histories of photographic postmodernism, in their efforts to articulate photographic shifts away from late-modernist tenets, foreclosed the inclusion of artists whose work remained invested in sociopolitical concerns and imbricated politics of cultural identity introduced during the civil rights era.

Three major case studies trace evolutions within the 1970s/80s photographic oeuvres of Patrick Nagatani, Lorraine O'Grady, and the collective Asco. Their work located within strategies of photographic postmodernism intersecting identity-oriented critiques of systemic race, citizenship, and class hierarchies, many of which were fomented amidst political mobilization and protest movements of the 1960s. Each artist's use of the still camera entails a navigation of the diverse socioeconomic geographies of their urban surroundings of New York and Los Angeles. In turn, they consider how the spaces they depict reflect their own relationships to the valuative sociocultural hierarchies structuring these major American art world centers, in which critics, curators, and scholars propped up artist communities more embedded in predominant histories.

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2017, pseudonymous writer Gary Indiana announced in a *New York Times* Style Magazine feature (Fig. 1) that the 1980s work of the New York-based artist group known as "The Pictures Generation" bears "a curious suitability to the present."[1] Within our quotidian sensorium of media-fueled technology, he contended that stimuli perceived as reality has become virtually indistinct from its representation. He credited the loosely affiliated, chiefly New York-based "Pictures" circle with presaging this phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s. While not always materially photographic, the work of these practitioners often derived its aesthetics from photographs, repurposing preexisting image material from printed mass media such as newspapers, magazines, and street advertisements.

At the time of their introduction, these strategies were not without their precedents, owing some clear debts to earlier twentieth-century avant-garde pioneers. Early Cubist collage, or *papier collé*, which was initiated by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso in 1912, for instance, juxtaposed cut out portions of newsprint and other paper materials with drawn forms such as musical instruments, bottles, dishes, and fruit (Fig. 2). This quintessentially Cubist play of figure-ground relationships simultaneously called attention to and undercut two-dimensional signifiers of volume and depth.[2] Within less than a decade, Berlin-based practitioners of Dadaist photomontage such as John Heartfield and Hannah Höch took a patently political approach, recontextualizing mass media content in assaults on powerful Fascist figures and governmental structures. Their frenetic and liberal compositing of found materials engulfed the image field, structurally employing fragments of text to bolster their derisive political critiques (Fig. 3).[3] Concurrently, photomontage techniques developed in the Soviet Union, where artists such as

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[1] Gary Indiana, "These '80s Artists are More Important Than Ever," *The New York Times Style Magazine*, accessed April 2, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/13/t-magazine/pictures-generation-new-york-artists-cindy-sherman-robert-longo.html?rref=collection%2Fissuecollection%2Fwomens-fashion-issue-20170219&action=click&contentCollection=t.magazine®ion=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=collection.

[2] For more on Cubist papier collé, see Lynn Zelevansky, ed., *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992).

[3] For more on Dadaist photomontage, see Hanne Bergius, *Montage und Metamechanik: Dada Berlin* (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann Verlag, 2000).

Gustav Klutsis often implemented photographic reproductions of whole or fragmented figures in service of propagandistic calls for the populace's participation in the Soviet agenda (Fig. 4).[4] Among Pictures-affiliated artists, parallels emerge in the 1980s work of Barbara Kruger, which combined starkly contrasting black and white photographic reproductions with phrases in bold text, sometimes placed in bright red frames (Fig. 5). In their frequent uses of figurative photographic reproductions and direct, assertive addresses to the viewer, Kruger's works echoed Soviet photomontage's interpellative demands for viewers to consider their own relationships to hegemonic political structures.

For the later "Pictures" group, however, the Benjaminian notion of a revolutionary potentiality within photography's aura-less multiplicity was already very familiar territory.[5] They launched their own leftist critiques at the semantic level of the image itself, interrogating conditions of selfhood as built through the reception of imagery. Their appropriative strategies, in other words, could plainly divulge, and thus short-circuit, some of photographic representation's most insidious psychosocial operations, such as myth, illusion, and stereotype. In our current political climate, where attunement to social media and personal devices as sources of unchecked facts has become naturalized and "fake news" is a lamentably constant refrain, Indiana's *New York Times* Style Magazine headline proffered that "these '80s artists are more important than ever."[6]

This article was published about a year after I formulated my dissertation project, which originally grew out of my own longstanding interest in the work of Pictures Generation artists. As for Indiana, a denizen of New York's 1980s downtown scene, his recent insistence on the group's renewed relevance attests to his own embeddedness in their original artistic milieu. He has published, for example, critical texts on Pictures-affiliated artists Aura Rosenberg and Kruger, and even adopted Kruger's signature color-blocked graphic aesthetic for two of his own books (Figs.

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[4] For more on Soviet photomontage, see Margarita Tupitsyn, "Lenin's Death and the Birth of Political Photomontage," in *The Soviet Photograph, 1924-1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 9-34.
[5] See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* Volume 3, 1935-1938, translated by Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006).
[6] Indiana, "These '80s Artists."

6a, 6b).[7] More broadly, however, Indiana's superlative assessment of this network of artists, curators, and scholars reinforces the arguably canonical significance within predominant narratives of 1970s/80s American photographic production that many Pictures artists, including Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman, James Welling, and Laurie Simmons, to name a few, have already attained.

When I encountered Indiana's article, the portrait subjects' homogeneity as white creatives and intellectuals (Fig. 7), all of whom built careers by climbing the ranks of New York's stratified art world following the rise of myriad social movements during the 1960s, struck a chord with me. Nevertheless, he offered a convincing argument as to why our unstable political climate uniquely begs a careful reexamination of American deconstructivist image-based practices from the Pictures Generation era. Likewise, my project would not be possible without previous scholars' foundational assessments of Pictures artists' varied output. However, I also contend that the specifically isolationist, xenophobic, and bigoted rhetorics undergirding current domestic and international policy debates call for a more comprehensive, self-reflexive reassessment beyond the most storied confines of the Pictures group's New York-centric zeitgeist. My dissertation aims to do this, examining the work of late third-generation Japanese American artist Patrick Nagatani, first-generation Caribbean American artist Lorraine O'Grady, and the collective Asco, which included a number of second- and third-generation Mexican American artists. At times straddling and combining tactics of both performance and photography, all of these practitioners' voices bring a host of transnational orientations to predominant discourses around postmodernist photographic practice. In my study of their work, several critical questions arose around this notion of transnationalism, including: whose languages, whether visual or theoretical, constitute a quintessentially American photographic postmodernism? How can photography, particularly as a communicatory device endemic to popular visual culture, signify experiences of

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[7] See Gary Indiana, "The War at Home," in *Barbara Kruger: Thinking of You* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999), 8-23; Aura Rosenberg, *Head Shots* (New York: Stop Over Press, 1995); Gary Indiana, *Do Everything in the Dark* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003); and Gary Indiana, *Schwarzenegger Syndrome: Politics and Celebrity in the Age of Contempt* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

national belonging or reinforce ties to citizenship? How can those signifiers be appropriated and reperformed to examine their stereotype-driven pasts and redirect their futures?

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, notions of a "postmodern image," often revolving around the use of photography, emerged within American art world discourses. These images gestured largely to the photograph's inherent status as "copy," revealing, in Indiana's words, "how contrived, unnatural, and seductive the originals actually were."[8] Art historians and critics built these preeminent discourses in significant part upon themes of poststructuralist theory, looking to newly translated works by Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, and Ferdinand de Saussure, among others. Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum, for instance, suggested that, in a mass media-saturated visual culture, subjects receive and understand the world as mediated representation, rather than immediate reality, and thus pictures or images become internalized as reality such that they ultimately replace what they are meant to represent.[9] Barthes and Foucault's interrogations of volitional authorship imagined a media culture that "contaminates" subjects indiscriminately, rendering any possible creator incapable of originality.[10] Derridean deconstruction and Barthes' semiological reading of images, moreover, dictated that any alleged direct representations of reality would become suspect and mandate their viewers' decoding.[11]

Scholars such as Douglas Crimp and Hal Foster (both of whom posed for the portrait accompanying Indiana's piece), as well as Rosalind Krauss and Craig Owens, all affiliated with the influential *October* journal, championed these lines of inquiry.[12] In turn, these critics and

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[8] Indiana, "These '80s Artists."
[9] See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
[10] See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-148; and Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-138.
[11] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 15-31; and Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 32-51.
[12] Primary texts by Crimp that drew upon these discourses include "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 75-88; "On the Museum's Ruins," *October* 13 (Summer 1980): 41-57; and "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October* 15 (Winter 1980): 91-101. Hal Foster's edited volumes focusing on these discourses include Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, W.A.: Bay Press, 1983); and Foster, ed., *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, and Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, W.A.: Bay Press, 1985). See also volumes of relevant collected essays by Krauss and

scholars buoyed artists whose work echoed their theoretical perspectives, many of whom are now associated with "Pictures" as an exemplary paradigm of photographic postmodernism. Most of these artists were graduates of vanguard university art programs, where they had been initiated into lineages of conceptual art and institutional critique. Their work, demonstrating sophistication with theories of feminism and French poststructuralism, very much appealed to art historians and critics within and around the *October* group. It is precisely the dominant histories of 1970s and 80s photography such as these, tending to focus on Anglo-American artists whose practices critics and scholars saw as developing in lockstep with burgeoning theoretical vernaculars, that my dissertation aims to expand. My project grapples with questions as to how the scholarly contours of these predominant histories, in their efforts to articulate photographic shifts away from late-modernist tenets, foreclosed the inclusion of artists whose work remained invested in sociopolitical concerns and politics of identity introduced during the rise of multiple American civil rights struggles. Organized across three major case studies, my dissertation traces how work by Asco, Nagatani, and O'Grady located within strategies of photographic postmodernism intersecting critiques of systemic race, citizenship, and class hierarchies, many of which were fomented amidst political mobilization and protest movements of the 1960s.

As young artists coming of age during the rise of second-wave feminism, the work of many Pictures-associated artists did, rather indisputably, address structural economies of patriarchy, gesturing to both its role in shaping canonical narratives of western art history and its ubiquitous influence over daily image consumption. In her 1996 tract *Evictions*, Rosalyn Deutsche underscored this argument, heralding the group's work as capable of "open(ing) up the modernist space of pure vision," which typically interpellated images and viewers "as given, rather than produced, spaces…as interiors closed in on themselves."[13] As production "informed by feminist ideas about representation" that disrupts this closure, the photographic work of Pictures-affiliated women artists such as Levine, Sherman, and Kruger, according to Deutsche, "stag(es) vision as

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Owens: Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1985); and Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[13] Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1996), 303.

a process that mutually constitutes image and viewer."[14] For Deutsche, the relational image mechanics of these artists' work activated a deleterious shift in the patriarchal politics governing modernist frameworks of viewership.

Not all prominent critical voices, however, have advocated for the Pictures' group's feminist deconstructions of popular imagery, even at the time of the artists' emergence. In 1979, Lucy Lippard criticized what she saw as the "kitschy, retro style" of noirish femme fatales and miniature domestic tableaux appearing in Sherman and Simmons' work (Figs. 8 and 9), respectively, as nostalgic for a white, middle-class utopia of the 1950s, prior to the formulation of many civil rights discourses.[15] In 2011, art historian Katy Siegel reexamined this thematic in her critical history of postwar American art, *Since '45*, noting that the whiteness in which Pictures artists' work trafficked was overwhelmingly reflected in mainstream media imagery at the time.[16] Some examples of the group's work, such as that of Robert Longo's *Men in the Cities* series (Fig. 10), Siegel reads as self-conscious in its citation of white bodies. Often in professional ensembles such as suits, Longo's men and women served, Siegel surmises, as avatars of "stuffy, soulless business[people]" whose workaday reaffirmations of American capitalism would ultimately be their own cultural downfall.[17] On the other hand, Siegel also nods to Cindy Sherman's early and enduringly controversial 1976 *Bus Riders* series (Fig. 11), for which the artist posed several times in blackface, allegedly imitating individuals whom Sherman had encountered on her local bus as a student in Buffalo, New York. While Sherman has since acknowledged her own naiveté and lack of awareness of her characters' potential offense when they were created, Siegel calls the photographs "bizarre" and questions how it could be that, at the time, "the most extreme transformation that [Sherman] could imagine was into a black person."[18] Other critical voices, such as that of *New York Times* writer Margo Jefferson and recent UPenn MFA graduate E.

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Lucy Lippard, "Retrochic: Looking Back in Anger," *Village Voice* 24, no. 50 (December 10, 1979), 67-69.
[16] Katy Siegel, *Since '45: America and the Making of Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion, 2001), 76-81.
[17] Siegel, *Since '45*, 80-81.
[18] Siegel, *Since '45*, 78. For a discussion of Sherman's retroactive claim that she was unaware of her blackface characters' potential offense in 1976, see Priscilla Frank, "Cindy Sherman's Early Blackface Photos and the Art World's White Gaze," Hyperallergic, accessed April 2, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/cindy-shermans-early-blackface-photos-and-the-art-worlds-white-gaze_us_57b5abb5e4b0fd5a2f415daa.

Jane, have also assessed the clear problematics of these *Bus Riders* images. They both urged the need for continued questioning around Sherman's recycling of this pernicious trope in the mid-1970s, and whether the work suggests an implicit presumption of white audiences.[19]

Keeping these ongoing critical debates in mind, my project approaches preeminent narratives of 1970s and 80s American conceptual photographic practices through an intersectional optic, owing to the pioneering work of critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, and numerous other cultural critics and scholars of black feminism across disciplines. Coined by Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality was first introduced as a rubric addressing how multiple forms of disenfranchisement or discrimination can compound themselves in some individuals' lived civic experiences, creating imbricated legal and social obstacles that must be considered outside social justice advocacy structures that theretofore conventionally delimited forms of identity such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.[20] Nearly ten years later, in her 1998 book *Fighting Words* Patricia Hill Collins expanded on Crenshaw's original theory specifically in regards to the evolution of postmodernism. In predicating American postmodernist discourses on an inherently fractured, or decentered nature of subjectivity, Collins asserts that critics and theorists run the risk of tendencies toward totalization that too easily neglect highly specific, lived experiences of inequity. Ultimately, Collins argues, this paradigm can implicitly reinforce imbricated social and political marginalities, neglecting their structural conditions.[21] In building on these discourses of intersectionality, my dissertation aims to shift focus away from universalist conceptions of gender highlighted by preeminent narratives that presume a white viewing subject. Instead, it

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[19] See Margo Jefferson, "Playing on Black and White: Racial Messages Through a Camera Lens," *New York Times*, Jan. 10, 2005, accessed April 3, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/10/arts/design/playing-on-black-and-white-racial-messages-through-a-camera.html; and Contemptorary, "E-Jane: #cindygate, NOPE (a manifesto), #MoodExercises," Contemptorary Issue #1 (April 2016), accessed April 4, 2018, http://contemptorary.org/e-jane-cindygate-nope-a-manifesto-moodexercises/.

[20] For Crenshaw's introduction of intersectionality, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139-167.

[21] See Patricia Hill Collins, "What's Going On? Black Feminist Thought and the Politics of Postmodernism," in *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 124-154.

fundamentally acknowledges overlapping subject positions amongst racial, class, gender, and sexual orientations.

So as to highlight how certain definitions of photographic postmodernism came to prominence within the field, the following historiographic overview situates the landscape of dominant 1970s and 1980s American photographic discourses. This discussion foregrounds my explicit interventions into these discourses through my case studies' attendant photographic objects, archives, and methodological approaches, which I later enumerate by outlining each of my three chapters.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, the "new social documentary" aesthetics of artists such as Martha Rosler, Fred Lonidier, and Allan Sekula, who initially met each other at UC San Diego, offered an academic reworking of traditional documentary modes. Shot through with Brechtian tones of absurdity, their combinatory image/text works formulated image-making as constitutive of political analysis.[22] (Figs. 12, 13, 14) The opening of "New Topographics," curated by Willaims Jenkins in 1975 at the International Museum of Photography in Rochester, NY, introduced a concurrent paradigmatic benchmark. This exhibition featured stark, black and white post-industrial landscapes by photographers including Lewis Baltz, and John Schott (Figs. 15 and 16).[23] Their works signaled a departure from the sublimity of American landscapes framed by legendary American landscape photographers such as Ansel Adams (Fig. 17) in favor of an almost clinical reflection of contemporary suburban sprawl and its concomitant commercial manufacturing structures.

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[22] For more on this group's watershed conceptual interventions into social documentary traditions, see Grant H. Kester, "Toward a New Social Documentary," *Afterimage* Vol. 14, No. 8 (March 1987): 10-14; Abigail Solomon Godeau, "Photography After Art Photography," in *Photography at the Dock* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 103-123; and Abigail Solomon Godeau, "Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions on Documentary Photography," in *Photography at the Dock* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 169-183. See also writings by the individual artists: Fred Lonidier, "Working with Unions: Photo-text analysis" in Douglas Kahn and Diane Neumaier, eds., *Cultures in Contention* (Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1985), 204-235; Martha Rosler, "In around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambrige, M.A.: The MIT Press, 1989), 303-342; Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation," *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter 1987): 859-883; and Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal* Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 1981): 15-25.

[23] See William Jenkins, ed., *New Topographics* (Rochester, N.Y.: George Eastman House, 1975); as well as two recent reexaminations of the exhibition's legacy: Britt Salvesen and Alison Norström, *New Topographics* (Tucson, AZ: Center for Creative Photography, 2010) and Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach, eds., *Reframing the New Topographics* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College, 2013).

Cecile Whiting's *Pop LA: Art and the City in the 1960s* has enriched the chronological and geographic context for these practices, emphasizing their roots as forming specifically on the west coast. Whiting's analysis covers a range of 1960s photographic practices, including that of Ed Ruscha, whose systematic documentation of apartment buildings, gas stations, and the iconic Sunset Strip (Fig. 18), she argues, contain eruptions of disorder and humor that upset their guise of uniformity and resist a modernist imposition of rationality on the urban landscape. Whiting indicates that this cataloguing of 1960s Los Angeles' uniquely rhizomatic sprawl portends the geographic notion of Los Angeles that scholars across disciplines would identify in the following decades as an archetypally postmodernist, decentralized urbansim.[24]

A slew of recent major museum exhibitions have also established newly complicated narratives around Los Angeles' rise as a major art center during the 1960s and 1970s. Curator Paul Schimmel's *Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, as well as Kellie Jones' *Now Dig This: Art and Black Los Angeles 1960-1980* at the Hammer Museum, both of which opened in 2011 as part of the Getty Foundation's inaugural Pacific Standard Time initiative, are landmark examples.[25] Jones' exhibition is notable not only for its focus on Los Angeles-specific production during the 1970s and 1980s, but for its examination of a pioneering group of local African American artists whose work was specifically animated by the civil rights and Black Power movements. Scarce in this rich presentation, however, was any photographic work outside of performance documentation and artists' portraits. Jones' more recent publication *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* expands in great length on her initial work for the Hammer Museum exhibition, but again, she forgoes concentrated discussion on photography.[26] Schimmel's exhibition, on the other hand, featuring the work of Asco, John Baldessari, and Robert Heinecken (who was Patrick Nagatani's professor at UCLA), among many others, did fold

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[24] See Cecile Whiting, "Cruising Los Angeles," in *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 61-106.
[25] See Kellie Jones, ed., *Now Dig This!: Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2011); and Lisa Gabrielle Mark and Paul Schimmel, ed., *Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011).
[26] See Jones, *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017).

in discussions of photography with those of west coast painting, sculpture, installation, and performance practices. His essay in the exhibition catalogue emphasizes the pluralistic nature of art being made in California during the 1980s, a time during which postmodernism "cohered…in New York."[27]

Indeed, the group that would come to be known as the Pictures Generation played a crucial role in this New York-focused story of postmodernism.[28] One of the major nodes in their origin story came in 1977, when a thirty-three-year old Douglas Crimp mounted the eponymous "Pictures" exhibition at Artists Space (Fig. 19), which featured the work of artists Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith. For the small exhibition catalogue, Crimp penned an essay in which he traced his observations through shared conceptual developments in the practices of several young, New York-based artists using "highly connotative, though non-specific, imagery."[29] These artists' work, he contended, reflected a visual culture so saturated by mass-reproduced images that those images, or pictures, had come to usurp the reality they allegedly depicted, thus trivializing the authority once attributed to firsthand experience.[30]

Crimp's establishing of photography as exemplary of art's postmodernist turn at the dawn of the 1980s augurs how influential his work, as well as that of his *October* cohort, would be in steering and building the legacy for this art historical discourse in the years to come. Indeed, in 2005, philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto proposed 1980s as "the *October* decade."[31] The same year that Crimp opened "Pictures," Rosalind Krauss's "Notes on the Index," published in

[27] See Schimmel, "California Pluralism and the Birth of the Postmodern Era," in *Big Black Sun*, 16.
[28] While several artists who would come to be associated with the Pictures Generation, including John Baldessari, Jack Goldstein, and David Salle, began their art careers in southern California (all met as students at the California Institute of the Arts), most relocated to New York during the 1970s. As Douglas Eklund notes, "The 'CalArts mafia,' as the Pictures Generation artists from California came to be called in New York, have gained an outsized reputation…." See Eklund, "Image Art After Conceptualism: CalArts, Hallwalls, and Artists Space," in *The Pictures Generation: 1974-1984* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009), 26.
[29] Artists Space, Press release for "Pictures," 1977, accessed April 3, 2018, http://artistsspace.org/exhibitions/ pictures.
[30] See Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," in *Pictures* (New York: Artists Space, 1979), 3-28.
[31] Diarmuid Costello, "Overcoming Postmodernism," in James Elkins, ed., *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 85.

October, analogized new, pluralistic currents in 1970s art to a displaced form of photography that disrupts the denotative order of indexicality across an eclectic range of media.[32]

Two years later, in 1979, Crimp published a revision of his initial "Pictures" essay, extrapolating from his original lines of inquiry and increasing focus on photographic works that evinced his original thesis. These include examples from Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* series (Fig. 20), for which Crimp himself, already close with Sherman at this point, actually coined the title.[33] Published in *October* in spring and summer of the following year, Craig Owens' "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,' Parts I and II, allied a new range of practices including "appropriation, site-specificity, impermanence, discursivity, and hybridization" with the work of several artists already discussed by Crimp, who were working with the still camera, including Levine, Longo, and Sherman.[34]

The following year, Crimp's burgeoning explication of linkages between photography and major tenets of postmodernism reached an apotheosis in *October* when he published "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism." In this text, he established photography as a uniquely postmodern medium, owing to the fact that it always encrypts a representational, and thus fictional, status. Accordingly, Crimp suggested, artists such as Sherman, Longo, Levine, and Richard Prince turned to preexisting imagery at this moment, favoring "purloined, confiscated, appropriated," or "stolen" source material that offered a direct challenge to conventional notions of artistic originality.[35] In 2015, historian of postmodernism Matthew Bowman pinpointed the brief period between 1977 and 1980 as "witness(ing) the rise of postmodernism within art-critical discourse" promulgated chiefly by *October*'s renowned roster.[36] According to Bowman, *October*'s marshalling of continental post-structuralist theory, which it specifically deployed through dialogical relationships between critics and artists, was distinctive in this paradigm's development.

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[32] See Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," *October* Vol. 3 (Spring 1977): 68-81.
[33] See Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* Vol. 8 (Spring 1979): 75-88.
[34] See Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part I," in *Beyond Recognition*, 58.
[35] Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October* Vol. 15 (Winter 1980): 98.
[36] Matthew Bowman, "October's Postmodernism," *Visual Resources* Vol. 31, No. 1-2 (2015): 123.

Outside of *October*, evidence of the Pictures group's notoriety as archetypal progenitors of American photographic postmodernism has also been well-documented in major art historical texts and exhibition catalogues. Curator Douglas Fogle's 2003 *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960-1982* traced, for the first time in a single exhibition context, the development of conceptual trends in international postwar photographic practices from their initial stages in the 1960s to their postmodernist "culmination" in the early 1980s.[37] In the accompanying catalogue, writers introduce discussions of postmodernism solely through the work of Douglas Crimp. Following a reprint of his essay "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" are statements only by artists affiliated with the "Pictures" circle, including Levine, Kruger, and Prince. The work of artists practicing outside New York, however, is aligned with conceptual discussions *outside* of postmodernism, as is the work of any artists exploring ideological formations of race (including those practicing in New York parallel to "Pictures" artists, such as Adrian Piper and Ana Mendieta).

The Thames and Hudson textbook *Art Since 1900*, devotes its chapter for the year 1977 to Douglas Crimp's *Pictures* exhibition. This section's subheading describes the exhibition as identifying "a group of young artists whose strategies of appropriation and critiques of originality advance the notion of 'postmodernism' in art."[38] Guggenheim chief curator Nancy Spector further endorsed the aura of prominence around Crimp's 1977 exhibition in her 2007 catalogue for Richard Prince's retrospective exhibition. Her main essay contended that *Pictures* has entered the twentieth century's "pantheon of paradigm-shattering exhibitions" comparable to the first exhibition of Futurism at Berheim-Jeune Galerie in Paris in 1912, the "0.10" exhibition in St. Petersburg in 1915, and Harald Szeemann's 1969 "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form" at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969.[39] Each of these cases demonstrates art historians' steady

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[37] Kathy Halbreich, "Foreword," in Douglas Fogle, ed., *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960-1982* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), 6.
[38] See Hal Foster et. al., "1977," in *Art Since 1900*, Vol. 2 (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 30.
[39] Nancy Spector, "Nowhere Man," in Spector, ed., *Richard Prince: Spiritual America* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2007), 24.

and ardent aligning of Pictures-affiliated artists with photographic postmodernism well into the twenty-first century.

New Yorker art critic Peter Schjeldahl articulated in 2009 a sociohistorical reading of the formation of the Pictures Generation and their established art historical status: "'Postmodernism was the password,' he noted, and "critics—including Crimp, Craig Owens, and Hal Foster…influenced by Rosalind Krauss…vied for prestige with the artists, whom they rather gingerly promoted."[40] In his reading, Schjeldahl points specifically to the symbiotic cultural economies and social alliances operating amongst the Pictures Generation's critic and artist constituents as crucial to each group's mutual cultivation of power and influence in the New York art world at the time.

In studying scholars' and critics' consistent discursive return to the Pictures narrative from the 1980s up to the present, my study argues, the ultimate exclusivity of this so-called "generation" becomes clear. In 2009, Metropolitan Museum of Art Curator of Photographs Douglas Eklund specifically foregrounded the collective nomenclature of this extended group of artists in the title of his exhibition, "The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984." Through this presentation and its accompanying catalogue, Eklund delineated the contours of *October*'s narratives of postmodern photographic praxis around a group of fewer than thirty, predominantly white, predominantly New York-based artists. One of the experiential common denominators uniting this group, according to Eklund, was a shared disillusionment around notions of authorial originality analogous to utopian promises of political transformation, dashed and unfulfilled by 1960s counterculture.[41] This point indicates some significant limitations in predominant debates of postmodernist photographic practice forged out of the legacy of *October*'s scholarship. As a logical outgrowth of *October*-influenced discourse around photographic postmodernism, this model formulates notions of artistic subjecthood necessarily contingent upon passivity amidst a demise of political resistance. This subjecthood could not account for the achievements of the civil rights movement, nor for experiences of those whose livelihoods or whose claims to

[40] Peter Schjeldahl, "Alien Emotions," *New Yorker*, May 4, 2009, 74.
[41] See Eklund, "Introduction," in *Pictures Generation*, 16-21.

citizenship might remain at stake in its aftermath. Nor would it accommodate experiences of individuals who continued to navigate racial and class discrimination, often propagated by mass media, in their everyday lives. It is precisely these gaps in preeminent conceptions of the postmodern subject, forged particularly through discourses around photography, that my dissertation aims to address.

Through each of its case studies, my project seeks to address two major questions: How can preexisting models of photographic postmodernism, which tend to privilege discursive paradigms formulated in and by *October*-affiliated scholarship, be reassessed by incorporating overlapping politics of racial, gender, and class orientations that remained at stake for many artists in the decades following many very public struggles for American civil rights? How might these histories be further nuanced or enriched by considering how artists invested in these identity-oriented politics applied deconstructivist and appropriationist optics to cultural stereotypes promulgated by mass media, while simultaneously critiquing how these stereotypes systemically sustained major art and film world hierarchies?

My project departs from, but, just as significantly, builds on, intellectual precedents set by *October*'s formulations of postmodern photography. This dissertation's case studies articulate an expanded notion of photographic postmodernism, which affords continuities with, rather than a teleological break from, pluralistic leftist social movements led specifically by African American, Latinx American, and Japanese American populations in the 1960s. In structuring this framework, I draw on critical histories of postwar American thought including Marianne DeKoven's *Utopia Limited*, which argues for continuities between the civil rights movements' "development of an 'identity politics' based on race and the simultaneous location of that development in the…subject politics of postmodernity."[42] In its levying of the term "identity politics," my project focuses specifically on axes of identity encompassing race, gender, class, and sexual orientation as ideas forged through experiences of geography and the occupation of space. Throughout my analysis, I direct keen attention to how each artist's approach to articulating their stances on identity

[42] Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited; The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 229.

formation develops necessarily out of acts of creative collaboration, which in each case complicate the highly specific, experiential, contingent, and relational nature of one's experiences of their identity coordinates across multiple social contexts. While DeKoven builds her case around post-1960s works of American literature and philosophy, my project extends the scope of her framework, addressing critical blind spots in art historians' and critics' mobilization of theoretical discourses in histories of photography. I also look to the work of historian Jacqueline Dowd Hall, whose text "The Long Civil Rights Movement" parallels DeKoven's logic in arguing against neoliberal narratives of civil rights that underscore its alleged utopian demise in the immediate aftermath of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts of 1964 and 1965, respectively. This formulation, Hall asserts, perniciously reduces struggles that continued making use of civil rights reforms in the 1970s to a series of dichotomies pitting "so-called identity politics" against economic policy and class structure. Hall recognizes a need for historians to acknowledge these issues as continually and indelibly imbricated, as my project aims to do.[43]

My project's case studies pry open lineages established by previous scholarship's emphasis on the Pictures cohort and *October*'s academic discourses to include artists whose work takes on imbricated stereotypes of not just gender—as artists discussed in *October* did—but also race and class, promulgated by mass media after the initial rise of discourses stemming from civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s. My analysis demonstrates that across my case studies, each artist's use of the still camera entails a navigation of the diverse socioeconomic geographies of their urban surroundings of New York and Los Angeles. In turn, they consider how the spaces they depict reflect their own relationships to the valuative sociocultural hierarchies structuring these major American art world centers, in which critics, curators, and scholars propped up artist communities more embedded in predominant histories.

My first chapter focuses on the photographic series titled "No Movies," begun in the early 1970s, by east Los Angeles-based Chicano art collective Asco. To make these works, the group staged public performances across Los Angeles, positing photographs of these performances as

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[43] Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (March 2005): 1263.

film stills from non-existent films or as (false) documentation of newsworthy local events. My analysis builds heavily on my findings from the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA, which houses the main archival collection for former Asco member Gronk as well as rare copies of local Chicano newspapers and journals that Asco members frequently read and to which they personally contributed in the 1960s and 1970s. My consultation of the collections for former Asco member Harry Gamboa Jr. at Stanford University was also extremely helpful in building my analysis for this chapter. Lastly, I also had an opportunity to interview Gamboa personally about how his early photographic work cultivated the evolution of "No Movies." Foregrounding Asco's coopting of photojournalism aesthetics, I argue that "No Movies" intervened into polemic discourses around Mexican American identity set up between independent Chicano news outlets—which advocated for a collective Latin identity—and mainstream news outlets, which promoted damaging stereotypes. I contend that Asco's No Movies, as performances-cum-photographs, allowed their creators to activate new, radical modes of self-fashioning as young Chicano artists by reappropriating "evidentiary" documentary photographs through ludic optics of fictional cinematic narrative.

My second chapter explores the 1980s work of Patrick Nagatani, with particular focus on his series of large format Polaroids created with collaborator Andrée Tracey. In my research for this chapter, I traveled twice to the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona in Tucson to consult the Nagatani/Tracey Collection, the only existing institutional archive related to the pair's work. In the summer of 2016, just over a year before Nagatani passed away at age seventy-two, I was also able to conduct detailed interviews with Tracey and Nagatani in their hometowns of Minneapolis and Albuquerque, respectively. Los Angeles remained at the heart of the artists' collaborative photographic imagery throughout the 1980s. However, the size and mechanics of the large format Polaroid cameras on which their project relied necessitated constant displacement to Polaroid studios across the country, where they would construct each of their photographic tableaux for the first time. This chapter's analysis builds significantly on Sara Ahmed's formulation of a "politics of disorientation," which constitutes resistive modes that can

disrupt culturally naturalized subjectivities, contending that spaces in the artists' photographs whose gravitational alignments have been disrupted by atomic explosions create opportunities for the rearrangement of coded racial and gender orientations.[44] I also draw on Rey Chow's notion of the "age of the world target," a formulation by which, in the age of post-atomic international warfare, the world can be virtually conceived in its totality via optical tools and military technologies.[45] By assessing how Nagatani and Tracey's practice analogizes camera vision to atomic vision, I argue that they deliberately construct their photographic worlds' concomitant social truths as fallible, constantly subject to annihilation by lines of atomic force.

My third chapter examines how two photographic series by Lorraine O'Grady borrow from American journalistic and documentary photography traditions to critique visual culture that excludes black Americans as agents of their own representation. My in-depth archival research on O'Grady's work, enabled by multiple trips to O'Grady's archives at Wellesley College, was crucial in providing me access to previously unpublished ephemera related to both projects. Moreover, in 2016, I was also fortunate to conduct an in-person interview with the artist in New York City. Beginning in 1980, O'Grady reproduced photographs in magazines of her performance persona "Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire," perpetuating a media-based mythification of herself as a theatricalized "middle class" black woman in order to challenge viewers' complacency with New York art galleries' racial self-segregation. In her 1983 performance entitled "*Art Is…*," O'Grady and fifteen collaborators carried gilded picture frames in Harlem's African American Day Parade. Like indexless cameras, the frames invoked cinema by creating "moving pictures" that ephemerally designated everything viewable through them at a given moment as "art." Drawing on histories of Harlem creative communities and of African American artists' struggles for museum representation, my analysis demonstrates how photographs of O'Grady's performance invoke historic lineages of Harlem performance photography, which celebrated black figures in

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[44] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
[45] Rey Chow, "The Age of the World Target," in Paul Bowman, ed., *Rey Chow Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 7.

spheres of literature and music when they were relatively absent from elite New York art institutions.

By examining histories of 1970s and 1980s photographic practices in continuity with 1960s' social justice movements, my dissertation pushes debates on American photographic postmodernism beyond restrictive rubrics of poststructuralist theory. It situates them instead within more expansive social histories of photography, cinema, and other visual art practices that throw into relief patterns of non-white artists' exclusion from privileged art world spaces, often perpetuated by networks of influential historians, critics, and artists. As a means to negotiate these structural forms of power, each of the artists featured in my case studies position the camera as a generative, resistive hinge between themselves and their hierarchized social worlds. By approaching the photograph intermedially through the parodic staging of subjects and props in both public and private spaces, their work engages concepts remaining at the core of current debates in American photography scholarship—including asymmetrical distributions of sociocultural influence, transnational experiences of American citizenship, and the performativity of cultural identities.[46]

[46] As the terms "performative" and "performativity" come up several times throughout this dissertation, I would like to acknowledge here Judith Butler's positing of the term as "that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains." See Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xii. While Butler has largely deployed the term in her analysis of gender constructions, I draw on more capacious connotations of the term within art history, art criticism, and performance discourses that have derived from the academic dissemination of Butler's ideas over time. In my discussions, these connotations point to self-conscious iterations of cultural signifiers, often with reference to stereotype, which can include, but are not limited to, widely established notions of gender, race, class, and sexual orientations.

CHAPTER 1: “ASCO MAKES THE NEWS: EARLY NO MOVIES PHOTOGRAPHY”

A man lies supine amongst a sea of bluish, nearly undifferentiated urban topography (Fig. 1). Two road flares flank his body while his face and the soles of his feet faintly echo their orange glow. In the background, a sequence of five additional flares runs parallel to the figure, reinforcing his horizontality. A group of telephone poles to the far right and two vehicles to the left glitter with reflections from the flares and the city lights beyond. The blurry outlines of several figures standing in the distance announce that the man is not alone, yet their motionlessness suggests that they will refrain from any active intervention in his circumstances. The faintness of their presence reinforces the absence of any onlookers immediately in the foreground. The perpetrator of this crime scene, and any agents of law enforcement who might mark the event’s entrance into judicial bureaucracy’s prescriptive structures, are conspicuously absent. Instead, the centrally framed dead man is the sole agent and protagonist of this cinematic tableau. An uninitiated viewer of this photograph might surmise that a man has been killed on an East Los Angeles street, but the image was in fact the central component of a premeditated artwork titled *Decoy Gang War Victim*, 1974. This piece has become an iconic example of Asco’s “No Movies” series, executed collaboratively by four young Los Angeles-based artists, Patssi Valdez, Harry Gamboa, Jr., Willie Herrón, and Gluglio “Gronk” Nicandro.

In 1971, the intermedial series known as No Movies began to take shape as an assemblage of artworks, performative interventions, and media hoaxes.[47] The group of four artists, later calling itself “Asco” (Spanish for “nausea”), would implement a wide variety of costumes and props in actualizing their No Movies, which always began as live-action performative tableaux staged across public and private spaces throughout the greater Los Angeles area. These performances were always mediated through a still camera (typically operated by Gamboa, the group’s principal photographer), and thus photographs played

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[47] While the group began performing collaboratively in 1971, they only formally adopted the collective name “Asco” in 1973. See Harry Gamboa, Jr., “In the City of Angels, Chameleons, and Phantoms: Asco, A Case Study of Chicano Art in Urban Tones (or, Asco Was A Four-Member Word),” in Harry Gamboa, *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.*, ed. Chon Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 76-79.

imperative roles in No Movies' production.[48] Asco often reproduced their photographs, allowing No Movies to emerge in a variety of material iterations as mail art pieces, magazine features, interviews, postcards, flyers, and other printed ephemera. In each of these forms, a single photographic image might assume the ontological status of an artwork itself (as a mail art piece, for instance), or it might exist as one node among many in a topology of material and performative production.[49]

Despite their predication upon photographs produced with a still camera, No Movies' compositional frameworks almost always gestured outside of themselves in their invocations of cinematic narrativity. As Gronk stated in a 1976 mock interview with Gamboa for the periodical *Chismearte*, No Movies "project[ed] the real by rejecting the reel."[50] While actively eschewing the use of film cameras and celluloid, these works often contained embedded references to the illusory worlds of classic and contemporary Hollywood pictures, as well as Chicano cinema. Outside of Hollywood's repertoires of big stars and vast financial resources, Chicano cinema was produced from within a much less visible arena of Los Angeles film production that rose out of some filmmakers' dedication to the social reforms demanded by the Chicano civil rights movement. Countering onscreen personas of Hollywood that often relied on recourse to injurious racial and cultural stereotypes, these films constructed and endorsed positive images of Chicano/as, producing a resolutely consistent representational pattern, of which Asco members

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[48] In an interview with Linda Frye Burnham, publisher of *High Performance* magazine in 1983, Gronk identified Gamboa as the photographer responsible for No Movie still images: "Fortunately, we had an ace photographer in Harry Gamboa and a lot of them came out as if they were movies." See Burnham, interview with Gronk, 11 Aug. 1983, audiotape, *High Performance* Collection, *High Performance Magazine* Records 1953-2005, Special Collections Research Library, Getty Research Institute. Quoted in C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez, "Elite of the Obscure," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 22.

[49] Examples of multi-part, or series-based No Movies, which will be addressed later in this chapter, include the 1975 *Slasher* No Movie series, which includes the following discrete photographic works: *Slasher No. 9*, *Ascozilla*, *Capitalismo*, and *Asco Goes to the Universe*; as well as the 1972 guerrilla performance *Spray Paint LACMA*, which Asco artists also retroactively referred to as *Project Pie in De/Face*. See references to the *Slasher* series in C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure* ed. C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 60-67. For specific discussions of *Spray Paint LACMA*, see, for example, Chon Noriega, "Your Art Disgusts Me: Early Asco 1971-75," East of Borneo, accessed Sept. 9, 2017, https://eastofborneo.org/articles/your-art-disgusts-me-early-asco-1971-75/; Jane McFadden, "HERE, HERE, OR THERE: On the Whereabouts of Art in the Seventies," in *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art 1945-1980*, ed. Rebecca Peabody et al. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 269.

[50] Gronk in "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa," *Chismearte* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1976): 32.

quickly grew weary.[51] Gronk acknowledged this point in the *Chismearte* interview, claiming that No Movies arose partly out of a realization that, for him, "Chicano filmmakers were making the same movie over and over again."[52]

This 1976 interview remains seminal among early publications on Asco's work, as Gamboa and Gronk seized it as an opportunity in which to discursively set forth a few loose characterizations of the No Movie. In addition to his commentary expressing frustration with Chicano cinema's redundant endorsement of positive imagery, he also described No Movies as a collective "rebuff to the celluloidic capitalism of contemporary cinema."[53] Indeed, the No Movie's own modesty of means functioned as a key element in its relationship to cinema, as it mockingly emulated the glamour of Hollywood films while denouncing them as hypercapitalist spectacles requiring equipment that the group found prohibitively expensive. Asco's basis of geographic orientation, East Los Angeles, was just miles from one the world's most powerful film industries well as the city's own 1970s avant-garde cinema circles. However, as scholar David James explains, the city's "peculiar structural cultural segregation" left them nevertheless feeling isolated and excluded from these centers of production.[54] Asco may have been aware that these varied practices were unfolding across their own city's topographies, but they lacked any opportunities to genuinely participate in their production.

Gamboa described No Movies in the *Chismearte* interview as "perceiving life within a cinemagraphic context."[55] His assessment gestured to No Movies as works of art that would invoke the fantasy, phantasm, and glamour of Hollywood cinema while simultaneously reveling in and hyperbolizing the relatively dystopic precarity that characterized the group's experiences of

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[51] For more on the history of Chicano cinema, see Chon Noriega, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) as well as Chon Noriega, "No Introduction," in Gamboa, *Urban Exile*, 11-12; and Jones, "Break: 'No Movies'…(No) Bodies, (No) Cities," in *Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 82.
[52] Gronk in "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa," 32.
[53] Ibid., 31.
[54] James notes that this occurred despite Los Angeles's avant-garde cinemas experiencing their "most populist mode" at the time. See David James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real by Rejecting the Reel," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 182. For more discussion on how Asco's No Movies functioned alongside 1970s alternative cinema in Los Angeles, see David E. James, "Minority Cinemas: Film and Identity Politics in the Seventies," in *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 294-377.
[55] Gronk in "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa," 31.

structural and acute violence as residents of East Los Angeles. For all Asco members, many of these experiences both coincided with, and were causally imbricated in, the national political mobilization efforts around civil rights during the late 1960s. Participants in the Chicano Movement, or El Movimiento, publicly voiced claims to social empowerment, equitable civic treatment, and justice for Mexican American populations aggrieved by the perpetration of decades of state-sanctioned systemic subjugation. As public demonstrations and rallies tied to the movement became larger and more frequent, the political platform of El Movimiento, concentrated around major metropolitan hubs throughout the American southwest, gained increasing visibility on mainstream news media stages. Chicano/a individuals were often photographically depicted in mainstream printed media at this moment as participants in public demonstrations or rallies organized around the promotion of Chicano/a rights and empowerment. Los Angeles, hometown to each of Asco's members and the urban backdrop against which they enacted their collaborative artistic enterprise, hosted some of the most heavily documented, and most notoriously violent, of these demonstrations throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Both independent and mainstream print news sources based in Los Angeles deployed photographs from these events and their aftermath as evidence of the "facts" shaping their accompanying news stories. In many instances, mainstream newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, would couch these photographs in rhetoric monolithically portraying Mexican American populations as socially and culturally insubordinate, prone to violence and criminal activity, and/or acting staunchly in opposition to those civic institutions whose duties theoretically included serving and protecting the populace, such as the Los Angeles Police Department. Independent print news outlets such as *Chicano Student News* and *La Raza*, produced within and for Chicano/a communities, deployed photographs of Mexican Americans in support of narratives competing directly with those often articulated by mainstream outlets.[56] These newspapers and magazines often represented Chicano/a subjects as a united

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[56] As scholar Gabriella González explains, while "la raza," or "the race," has become a kind of shorthand for Mexican-origin communities to convey Mexican cultural nationalism, but it also has broader implications. It was used during social movements of the 1960s, particularly, to describe all Spanish-speaking people throughout the western hemisphere whose

front of empowered subjects fiercely defending their human rights. At times, they also printed photographs of these subjects in vulnerable positions, struggling in the face of both acute violence (at the hands of police officers in riot gear, for instance) and pervasive, more abstract forms of oppression (including families living in poverty conditions and civilians under police surveillance) perpetuated by federal and local authorities. The latter platforms galvanized Asco members' early activism and provided formative visual and verbal linguistic contexts for their own evolutions as politically vocal agents. However, in their collective creative endeavors, Asco eschewed the explicit reproduction of these outlets' protest vocabularies focused around a nationalist, "cohesive Chicano identity."[57]

It was within this polarized media context that Asco, all second- and third-generation American citizens of Mexican descent who had become acquainted during their high school years, began collaboratively making artworks. This chapter assesses instances in which Asco's No Movies appropriated and parodied documentary photography practices specific to both independent and mainstream Los Angeles-based print news outlets. These media platforms often leveraged photographs as evidence of links between Mexican American subjectivities and discrete, knowable "truths" that supported positive or negative portrayals of those subjectivities. I argue that Asco's No Movies intervened into the oppositional discourses between these media platforms, undercutting their photographs' evidentiary values by redeploying their documentary modes in ways that revealed the press' own essential biases. The following analysis demonstrates that still photographs produced as part of Asco's No Movies served as a crucial material and conceptual locus for the group's employment of new, radical modes of postmodernist self-fashioning in the early 1970s.

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heritage connects to histories of Spanish conquest, or *mestizaje*, and/or both European and American imperialism. See Gabriella González, *Redeeming La Raza: Transborder Modernity, Race, Respectability, and Rights* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), xvi, 49. The newspaper known as *La Raza* began in Los Angeles in 1967 and ceased production as a magazine in 1977. *Chicano Student News* merged with *La Raza* in 1969. See Colin Gunckel, "'We Were Drawing and Drawn into Each Other': Asco's Collaboration Through *Regeneración*," in in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 166n5.

[57] Gunckel notes Asco's refusal to participate in the "construction of a cohesive Chicano identity" in the context of their collective graphic design contributions to several issues of *Regeneración* between 1971 and 1975. Their initial collaborative work on this journal, mostly through the medium of drawing, incubated their collaborative artistic work as Asco. See Gunckel, "'We Were Drawing," 152.

As will become clear in my analysis, the current body of secondary literature on Asco's "No Movies" extensively addresses how Asco established relationships to histories and cultures of cinema and performance via No Movies' material existence as photographs. C. Ondine Chavoya's foundational scholarship on the group, for instance, established a set of conceptual overlaps between No Movies and preeminent western narratives of avant-garde performance. It also explicated how Asco's work, beginning in the 1970s, critically departed from art practices and cultures associated with the Chicano Movement. Chon Noriega, another major contributor to this discourse, has anthologized the work of Asco member Harry Gamboa, Jr., in addition to illuminating connections between No Movies and histories of Chicano film culture. In 2011, Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez mounted the first comprehensive retrospective of Asco's work, which opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2011 and at the Williams College Museum of Art in 2012. The accompanying exhibition catalogue synthesized much of the extant literature while inviting new avenues for theoretical exploration of No Movies by scholars such as feminist art historian Amelia Jones and cinema historian David E. James.

Work by each of these authors, primarily Chavoya, James, and Jones, has laid key groundwork for investigations of No Movies via their medial existence as photographs. Scholarship by Gonzalez and Chavoya, for instance (particularly that of Chavoya prior to the LACMA retrospective) established crucial ideas around Asco's deployment of photography as "false documentation" of their performances, which issued challenges to predominant notions of photography's role as a reliable index to reality. James' work has investigated the No Movie photograph for its ontological departures from cinema, elaborating on how No Movies took up filmic conventions while fervently pronouncing themselves and cinema as mutually exclusive. Jones' work (as well as that of Chavoya's) has significantly demonstrated how No Movies converged with, and, in some cases, anteceded, critical debates on realism, authenticity, and indexicality within burgeoning discourses of photographic postmodernism of the 1970s and 80s. My chapter, which draws extensively on archival journalistic material and photography theory, builds on this critical scholarship.

In the context of post-1960s disillusionment around notions of authorial originality and the unfulfilled potential of political transformation, predominant scholarly debates around postmodernist visual art often focused on work that positioned the photographic aura as inherently a representation and copy. For instance, *Untitled Film Still #16*, 1978 (Fig. 2), by Cindy Sherman (whose work is often cited as emblematic of these discourses) clearly shares some formal and conceptual concerns with Asco's 1976 No Movie *A la Mode*, 1976 (Fig. 3), staged in a Los Angeles restaurant called Philippe the Original. Both gesture to extra-diegetic narratives in which noirish femme fatales, played by Sherman and Patssi Valdez respectively, strike mimetic poses. This mimesis, Craig Owens argues, "functions in relation to the constitution of the self," that self being a pictorial pastiche of normatively desirable women projected by mass media.[58] Despite their resonant compositions, the works' contexts of production inform divergent readings. Unlike Sherman's protagonists, who overidentify with a surfeit of preexisting popular images (almost unilaterally played by white actresses), Chavoya points out that No Movies constitute "a simulacrum for which there is no original," as any vision of a Chicana ingénue was characterized by its absence, not its presence, in the predominant cultural imaginary.[59] Moreover, Asco set a number of No Movies within specific East Los Angeles geographies that were familiar or significant to them. In so doing, they texturized their images with a dystopic precarity that characterized experiences of structural inequity and violence perpetrated against LA's Chicano inhabitants, especially during periods of social unrest in the 1960s and 70s.

Asco Chavoya and Gonzalez have pointed out, the diffuse, fragmentary nature of the remaining physical traces of Asco's works can frustrate conventional art historical frameworks built around the production and study of discrete objects.[60] Nevertheless, Asco always intended for No Movies' material manifestations to be spatially dispersed and their conceptual implications to be doggedly capacious (the multiple titles assigned to several No Movie works, sometimes

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[58] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part 2," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, et. al., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 83-84.
[59] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Orphans of Modernism: The Performance Art of Asco," in *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (New York: Routledge, 2000), 251.
[60] Chavoya and Gonzalez, "Elite of the Obscure," 22-23.

given well after a work's execution, easily attest to this). They shared tactics with a range of other practices that included Mexican and Chicano/a street theater and mural arts, and employed strategies similar to avant-garde movements that took shape over the century's earlier decades, including Surrealism, Dada, and Fluxus.[61] In their individual works, Asco would often combine, deconstruct, layer, and recombine strategies congruent with those practices at will.

While accounting for No Movies' inherent expansiveness, this chapter locates within the range of photographs produced for the series a number of direct conceptual interventions into the politicized representational dichotomy around Chicano/a subjects erected between Los Angeles-based mainstream and independent print news sources in the early 1970s. My analysis demonstrates how Asco's reappropriation of photojournalistic aesthetics and channels of distribution in No Movies of the 1970s formulated a photographic postmodernism that underscored the necropolitical stakes of corporate media's testimonial uses of photographs to moralistically indict and adjudicate legal culpability of Los Angeles-area Chicano/a populations. This line of inquiry introduces crucial questions around histories, theories, and cultures of the news photograph into preexisting scholarship on Asco, highlighting an understudied arena of their No Movie output.

Incriminating Documents: Photojournalism in Los Angeles Before Asco

As this chapter's analysis of No Movies is structured around examples of mainstream and independent press photographs that helped shape Asco's mass media worlds, the means by which the language of captions and headlines guided and promoted readers' interests around these press photographs remains significant. Roland Barthes directly approached the connotative capabilities of these text/image relationships among newspaper headlines, press photographs,

[61] I am not necessarily arguing here for lines of direct influence between these European avant-garde movements and all of Asco's work that presents affinities with them, as the group's collaborations did not always stem from a desire to re-present established art historical precedents. While Amelia Jones has pointed out that Gronk "developed an extensive knowledge of European modern art and film through library research while growing up in East LA," often aesthetic and conceptual overlaps between Asco's work and paradigms of the European avant-garde were incidental (see Jones, "Lost Bodies," 127). As Chon Noriega is careful to point out, "art history often takes congruence as influence, thereby sustaining its modernist genealogy." Noriega, "No Introduction," 4.

and their captions in "The Photographic Message." In his essay, he traces a twentieth-century shift in the fundamental connotative relationship between a press photograph and its accompanying text, or caption. Whereas historically an image would illustrate or elucidate a text, "today," Barthes wrote in 1961, "the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination."[62] Following this, he argues, connotation no longer occurs as naturally resonant of a denotation structured by the photograph's analogy to its referent. Instead, a newer nexus between image and text collectively produces a "naturalization of the cultural."[63] Barthes acknowledges the vast contingency of this relationship, which can depend on variables such as text size and placement relative to the image. He thus accounts for an array of text-image combinations that can produce "degrees of amalgamation" and even contradiction, at times, in their combined denotation.

About a decade later, just around the moment that Asco began working together creatively, theorist Stuart Hall expanded on Barthes' semiotic discussion in his own examination of contemporaneous newspaper photographs. Hall opens his text by putting pressure on Barthes' distinctions between codes of "denotation," which Hall describes as "precise, literal, and unambiguous" interpretations of referent ontologies (especially object-based ones), and codes of "connotation," which he terms "more open-ended" or interpretive.[64] Hall's arguments around how contemporary audiences tend to interpret printed news imagery ultimately hinge on what he perceives as machinations behind news outlets' presentation of events within a "moral-political discourse."[65] This is predicated, he explains, upon motivated combinations of denotative and connotative codes, guided by editorial decisions, that give an ideological value to a given image so that it may successfully become a news commodity and promote newspaper sales. Hall underscores the importance of news photographs as objects of close study particularly because of their capacities to repress and obscure the ideologies embedded in them by offering

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[62] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 26.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Stuart Hall, "The determinations of news photographs," in *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance, and the Mass Media*, ed. Stanley Cohen and Jock Young (London: Constable, 1981), 226.
[65] Ibid., 231.

themselves primarily as "neutral" indexes of, and witnesses to, actual events.[66] This quality serves to reinforce the alleged "neutrality" of its contextual vessel, the newspaper.

As an example of this phenomenon, he cites a particular image of a civilian kicking a law enforcement officer in the face (Fig. 4), noting that a denotative read of the image would simply indicate that a man's foot made contact with a police officer's face. A given news outlet's decisions about how verbally to contextualize the image, however, would politically and ideologically influence its connotative read along moralistic lines, likely either in universal support or derision of police or demonstrators, each a group of victims or villains.[67] Hall produced his analysis within a British context and it circles predominantly around mainstream, corporate news outlets (without comparative analysis of images from independent or underground news outlets). However, his discussion around newspapers' contextualization of this photograph strikes an uncanny chord with the means by which Los Angeles newspapers and periodicals contextualized similar images of local clashes between law enforcement and civilians (particularly members of the city's Mexican American communities). It was both independent and corporate news outlets' treatment of precisely these types of images that occupied the attentions of Asco members at the very same moment, and, as this chapter argues, to which a number of their No Movies responded.

Barthes' and Hall's discussions lay out imperatives for the semiotic rubrics partly informing this chapter's methodological framework for analyzing newspaper imagery, which focuses significantly on their content, but acknowledges their status as constitutive of newspapers' larger verbal/visual linguistic topologies. I consider these topologies as the result of newspaper editors' efforts to compel readers' apprehension of headlines and captions for connotative guidance in reading photographic imagery, even (and perhaps especially) within a viewer's cursory glance. These verbal signposts can thus provide important clues as to how collaborative editorial processes of selecting photographs and laying out pages might have aimed to guide and promote certain social and political interests amongst readers.

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[66] Ibid., 241.
[67] Ibid., 240.

This chapter also considers the compilation of newspaper pages and spreads as tasks accomplished not by a single authorial voice, but by a staff as a group of agents. Claims for and attributions of authorship—assessed under historic rubrics of connoisseurship—can be traced to early western art historical frameworks beginning in the sixteenth century. Post-Hegelian challenges to the fundamental integrity of authorial notions in the late 1960s like those of Barthes and Michel Foucault, however, ushered in a methodological sea change.[68] By their estimation, authorship, and with it, the modernist mechanics of positioning "pastness" as a hermeneutic object for analytical study, was neither universal nor fixed, but rather subject to contingent slippage.[69] In this postmodernist framework, I acknowledge that press staff members likely contributed a variety of skills to the final printed product—a total "channel of transmission"—that would, in turn, be received by groups of readers who might process it through their own highly particularized experiences.[70] Printed press photographs (with their contextual captions and headlines), therefore, are conceived as the results of aggregated labor in their creation and reception, rather than as isolated products of the photographers' labors alone.[71]

As Ariella Azoulay has argued, just as the camera is dependent on whomever operates it, from the moment the press photographer "takes hold of it, she, too, is no longer sovereign."[72] She rather, for Azoulay, becomes a constituent of a "civil space of photography," a relational network of sociopolitical flux circumscribed by access to and participation (whether willing or unwilling) in the creation of photographs. This space transcends geopolitical determinations of citizenship levied by a state apparatus and comprises "anyone who addresses others through photographs or takes the position of a photograph's addressee."[73] Azoulay's theory of photography positions it

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[68] For more on traditional ties between attribution and connoisseurship as they evolved in western art history from the sixteenth century, see Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, "Connoisseurship," in *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 206), 40-60.
[69] For an overview on Barthes and Foucault's interjections as "postmodernist" takes on authorship in contexts of art historical methodology, see Donald Preziosi, "Modernity and its Discontents," *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. in Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 277-280.
[70] Barthes opens his text with a brief discussion around the compilation of a newspaper as a collaborative task. See Barthes, "The Photographic Message," 15.
[71] As Barthes notes, the articles themselves typically remain at a greater spatial distance from the images than do the images' captions and therefore captions participate more fully in the denotative function of the image. See Barthes, "The Photographic Message," 26.
[72] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 158.
[73] Ibid., 85.

as an apparatus inevitably imbued with the power to negotiate its own ontologies of citizenship. This underscores the significance of considering press photographs selected for analysis here as loci for sets of sociopolitical relations both well before they reached the newspaper's editing table and well after they were assembled into a page layout bound for print.

Years before Gamboa, Gronk, Valdez, and Herrón began making No Movies together as Asco, they were negotiating their own complex social and intellectual relationships to the myriad ways in which documentary photography mediated their impressions of factuality and legality around local political events. Some of these early opportunities, shared amongst Herrón, Valdez, Gamboa, and Gronk, came to pass during the late 1960s, in and around Garfield High School in East Los Angeles, which all four artists attended.[74] At this very moment, political ardor amongst Garfield's Mexican American students, as well as those attending several other East Los Angeles high schools, featured prominently in local and national newspapers as they covered the 1968 East Los Angeles Walkouts, or Blowouts. In March 1968, Roosevelt, Lincoln, Wilson, Belmont, and Garfield High Schools, all located in East Los Angeles, suspended operations for one week after mass student demonstrations and boycotts. These were staged as a challenge to conditions of overcrowding, segregation, outdated and derelict facilities and resources, cultures of violence on school grounds, and inadequate pedagogical environments for fostering even basic learning skills amongst Chicano/a student populations, including reading and writing in English.[75] These demonstrations, particularly activities centered around Garfield High School, would galvanize participants' political commitments and vocal activism in the following years.

Having served a prominent role in organizing Garfield High's participation in the 1968 walkouts, Gamboa earned the nickname "Grand Duke" of the school's political resistance front (Fig. 5). During that year, Gamboa appeared in photographs printed in both mainstream and independent, student-led newspapers that documented the East Los Angeles high school

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[74] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Orphans of Modernism," 241.
[75] Ernesto Chávez, "*¡Mi Raza Primero!" (My People First!): Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 47. According to Gamboa, at the time he graduated Garfield High School, it held the national record for the highest dropout rate, with fifty-nine percent of students failing to graduate. See Gamboa, "Reflections on One School in East L.A.," in *Urban Exile*, 59.

protests. In one image from the March 12, 1968 edition of the *Herald Examiner*, a student named Peter Rodriguez leans into a microphone in the foreground, holding his own draft card aloft in his right hand. Gamboa, one face among many of the "city's restless students" assembled to voice their demands at a "protest meeting," according to the image's caption, appears just inside the photograph's right frame (Fig. 6).[76] In the context of the photograph's creation, a Los Angeles Unified School District Board meeting at which the students gathered to voice their concerns, the language of the photograph's caption takes on particular significance. First, its characterization of the students as "restless" casts the participants in a light of disruptive agitation, yet offers a verbal contradiction to the actual scene depicted, in which dozens of teenagers (as well as some older adults in the back of the crowd) stand together, calmly listening to Rodriguez speak. Secondly, the paper implements the word "evidence" to describe Rodriguez's display of his draft card to support students' assertions that their political actions were not instigated by Communist sympathies. This throws into sharp relief the imbricated visual and verbal rhetorics that printed news outlets employed at this time to shape and direct readers' responses to social unrest in East Los Angeles along political lines. As both witnesses to and participants in these local episodes, Asco (and particularly Gamboa, as both the vice president of the Garfield High School Blowout Committee (Fig. 7) and, later, Asco's photographer), saw themselves and their community members reflected back in these images. As this chapter will demonstrate, they flamboyantly renounced these rhetorics' evidentiary frameworks, mimicking, parodying, and "mis-appropriating" them while usurping their epistemological relationships to forms of Chicano/a identity as demonstrative, knowable entities.

Another image featuring Gamboa prefigures some of the imitative sardonicism with which he and Asco would later approach their photographic practice in No Movies. Printed in the March 15, 1968 issue of *Chicano Student News* (a publication to which Gamboa contributed), the photograph portrays a group of blowout organizers and leaders (Fig. 8).[77] Gamboa, clearly

[76] *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, March 12, 1968.
[77] Gamboa contributed artwork to *Chicano Student* issues 1, no. 2 (25 Apr. 1968); 1, no. 3 (18 May 1968); 1, no. 4 (12 June, 1968); 1, no. 5 (Aug. 1968); and 1, no. 6 (n.d.). All issues sourced from the Chicano Newspaper Collection,

identifiable to the right of the image's center, stands facing the camera, his right hand held up in a peace sign gesture. Immediately adjacent to him is Senator Robert Kennedy, an outspoken advocate at the time for the students involved in the boycotts. The caption, which reads "Bobbie [sic] Joins Blowout Committee: Outside Agitator?" both echoes and pokes fun at mainstream news outlets' eagerness to offer provocative speculation. The "facts" on which that speculation was based would often implicate the photograph's subject(s) in some form of legal and/or ethical wrongdoing based on limited visual information contained therein. Rather than simply articulating opposition to this practice, the student paper exemplifies and reformulates it, slyly pointing an accusatory finger back at the mainstream news' sensationalist tendencies. The lack of verifiability through this photograph of Senator Kennedy's role as an "agitator" of unrest among the Chicano/a students he supported, especially given the group's relaxed, posed stances, underscores the absurdity of the caption's suggestion. While Gamboa endorsed these papers' tactics as effective platform for organized resistance at the time, over the course of his adulthood he would also acknowledge some of their own sensationalist proclivities in their representations of Chicano nationalism. In the years prior to their first No Movie, Asco would come to determine that these outlets often relied culturally essentialist notions of Chicano/a populations, even if they were levied in opposition to those of mainstream news outlets. As this chapter's later analysis will demonstrate, it was precisely this politicized media dichotomy into which Asco's work would intervene.

In the following years, Gamboa's public visibility via news photographs and his named contributions to independent activist publications took on greater personal and legal stakes. His notoriety as a young political leader and activist had reached even a federal level by 1970, at which point he was named in testimony before a United States Senate subcommittee as a militant

University of California Chicano Studies Research Center. *Chicano Student* had several names over the course of its tenure, including *Chicano Students*, *Chicano Student Movement*, and *Chicano Student News*. See Gunckel, "We Were Drawing," 166n5.

subversive “involved in the violent disruption of the establishment.”[78] The same report specifically called attention to the March 15, 1968 issue of *Chicano Student News* mentioned above, a paper it characterized it as “antiestablishment, antiwhite, and militant.”[79] Citing the double-page spread titled “Cops Invade Schools” (Fig. 9), the testimony alleged that the paper “glorified” the actions of thirteen arrestees from the student walkouts who were later indicted for conspiracy.[80] If state or local law enforcement bodies chose to do so, they could have cited the photograph of Gamboa from that issue of the paper as verifiable evidence of his involvement in the walkouts and the Chicano Movement as “dangerous” or “criminal” organizations. Just a few months later, J. Edgar Hoover, then Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, sent a memo requesting that FBI offices nationwide begin compiling an inventory of “New Left-type” publications, which would include their individual staff members.[81] Over the next few years, the massive counterintelligence program COINTELPRO would deploy forged documents and other illegal tactics involving infiltrators and audio surveillance to implicate activists and journalists involved in underground publications.

Correspondences between these federal efforts to suppress young activists and mainstream news media’s employment of protest photography to misrepresent those activists as violent insurrectionaries were not lost on Gamboa and his compatriots. They remained undeterred by looming threats of indictment by the state. Led by the Chicano Moratorium Committee, a coalition of several activist groups (including the Brown Berets), a series of marches was organized in East Los Angeles between 1969 and 1971 around anti-Vietnam War sentiment, frustration with relationships between Mexican American civilians and police, as well as a multitude of other social/economic justice and civil rights issues affecting Chicano/a communities. Mainstream news coverage of these incidents was varied, but combinatory juxtapositions of headlines, photographs from the marches (and/or their aftermaths), and their

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[78] Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, *Extent of the Subversion of the “New Left”; Testimony of Robert J. Thomas [and others]: Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws*, Part 1. 91st Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 23.
[79] Ibid., 15
[80] Ibid.
[81] John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 115-116.

captions often built collective cases against the marches' participants as malicious perpetrators of violence against police officers, business proprietors, and other civilians.

The largest and most publicized of these marches, which occurred on August 29, 1970, has become synonymous with the Chicano Moratorium itself. On that morning, an estimated 20,000 participants marched from Belvedere Park at Third and Fetterly Streets to Laguna Park, where a rally began peacefully in the early afternoon.[82] Later that day, a melee between protestors and police began with a panicked liquor store proprietor, who phoned authorities about his establishment across the street from the rally becoming overcrowded. It ended in the deaths of three individuals (including renowned *Los Angeles Times* journalist Ruben Salazar), the arrests of some four hundred, and an undetermined number of injuries. Angered over police officers' descent upon the park and their violent assault of some peaceful rally attendees, demonstrators vandalized over 150 buildings, all of which they believed to house white-owned businesses.[83] On Monday, August 31, the front-page headline of the *Herald Examiner* read, "Riot 'Plot' Hinted: Police Tell of Mystery Gas Grenade" (Fig. 10). Directly below, a large photograph features a forlorn white male business owner clutching an empty cash drawer while the ground extends behind him, filling the image field with a sea of rubble. The caption deems him a "sad proprietor" whose store (and thus his economic livelihood) was "looted and burned by [a] rampaging mob." The newspaper's editorial decision to so prominently feature this white subject privileges him and his economic welfare as their front-page "face" of the Moratorium's events. Meanwhile, it suggests an effort to elicit fear, anger, and sympathy regarding the widespread damage of property from the paper's white readership while promulgating a sense of social and political alienation between the paper's audience and the rally's participants. The headline's suggestion that the violent altercations between law enforcement officers, including the deployment of tear gas projectiles, were both perpetrated *and* premeditated by demonstrators, reads as no less than conspiratorial as it attempts to absolve the police officers involved of culpability.

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[82] Chávez, *¡Mi Raza Primero!*, 69.
[83] Ibid., 70.

A second-page image from the same day's edition of the *Herald Examiner* depicts a woman seated in front of a store window, to which two signs had been taped (Fig. 11). They read, "Chicano Power" and "Chicano Viva La Raza." Below, the caption states, "Pro-Chicano signs worked for this store in riot area: Violent mob spared many merchants catering to the Mexican-American trade." The paper fails to speculate on whether the store's proprietors may have posted the signs simply to announce their affiliation with and/or support of the Chicano Movement during the rally. Instead, it insinuates that the public pronouncement of these sentiments "worked" as a means of pandering to Chicano/a demonstrators in an effort to deter violence that the store's owners fearfully predicted.

The *Los Angeles Times*' treatment of the day's events demonstrates a similar expectation for their readers' sympathies to lie with the points of view of police officers and white East Los Angeles business owners. As Gamboa put it plainly in 1998, "I saw cops [at the Moratorium] acting like dogs, but the next day in the newspapers the cops were represented as the victims: all the photographs were images of the cops getting hit."[84] On August 30, the day after the Moratorium, the first page of Section B included an image depicting a group of sheriff's deputies ducking for cover behind a line of cars to "avoid a barrage of rocks and bottles," according to the caption (Fig. 12). Below this, another photograph taken from a deputy's point of view (the back of his torso appears just inside the right frame) features an unnamed "youth," at center, preparing to throw a bottle raised in his right arm. He stands alone in a cleared area of the street while a crowd of onlookers stands behind him, facing the camera. Insofar as photographers in both cases stood at a vantage point physically behind the deputies, the images' composition and framing reinforce a reading of each scene directly in line with that of the deputies themselves. The captions, emphasizing violence perpetrated by protestors, even further bolsters engagement with these events specifically through visual and ideological vantage points aligned with law enforcement.

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[84] Gamboa in C. Ondine Chavoya, "Social UnWest: An Interview with Harry Gamboa, Jr.," *Wide Angle* 20, no. 3 (July 1998): 69.

The front page spread in the *Los Angeles Times* on September 1 echoes sentiments undergirding the image-text constellation of the previous day's *Herald Examiner*. Again, the only image on this page centers around physical damage inflicted upon a white-owned business in the vicinity of the demonstration (Fig. 13). This time, it introduces a jewelry store whose inventory had been looted during the previous Saturday's events; a white employee of the store can be seen "reporting for work," according to the caption, as she ducks under a barricade across the door. Capitalized text announces a soundbite from Sheriff Peter J. Pitchess' comments on the Moratorium march: he contends that the "parade was never peaceful." The feature article's own title asserts that he saw the previous weekend's violence as "deliberate."[85] Without even delving into the accompanying articles, one can parse through this rhetorical topology of image and text a sociopolitical and affective dichotomy between Chicano/a rally participants as "plotters" of widespread violence and local white business owners as "victims" of that violence.

Photographs published by alternative press outlets produced amongst East Los Angeles's Mexican American communities, including the widely popular periodical *La Raza*, portrayed that Saturday's events in veritable opposition to these mainstream newspapers' accounts. The first issue of *La Raza* published after the Moratorium dedicated its cover not to images of violent skirmishes with police, nor to flaming storefronts alighted by protestors, nor piles of rubble, but rather to the death of Ruben Salazar.[86] Salazar had made his career as the news director of television station KMEX and a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, for which he wrote a weekly column that profiled concerns and events relevant to Los Angeles' Chicano/a communities. Initial reports suggested that Salazar had potentially been shot by a bullet, but the cause of his death was later confirmed as head trauma from a tear gas projectile. He was hit while sitting in the Silver Dollar Café on Whittier Boulevard, located near Laguna Park.[87]

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[85] Dick Main, "Sees Violence in East L.A. as Deliberate," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1968. In the article, Pitchess claims that "known dissidents" (whom he refused to name) "came to the location to incite and foment trouble." Yet, according to Ernesto Chávez, the FBI, who was also present at Laguna Park on August 29, ultimately offered no support for these claims. See Chávez, 71.
[86] See *La Raza* Vol. 1 No. 2 (1970).
[87] As the result of a unanimous vote just weeks later by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, this park was later renamed Ruben Salazar Park in honor of the journalist's death See "Supervisors Vote to Rename Park in Salazar Honor," *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1970.

A *La Raza* headline screaming, “RUBEN SALAZAR MURDERED” is joined by two photographs (Fig. 14). The first depicts a police officer in a riot helmet holding a shot gun, drawn at shoulder level, as he proceeds toward the entrance of the Silver Dollar while two women follow him, one of whom raises her right hand, possibly in a gesture of pleading or warning. Below, a larger image shows two police officers flanking either side of a Los Angeles County Sheriff’s vehicle. The officers’ stances, leaning with their shoulders pressed into the sides of the car, partly stooped against the backs of the open driver’s side and passenger’s side doors, suggest that they are holding drawn weapons as well. The first image depicts, at an angle, an officer encroaching on a doorway occupied by non-violent civilians. Meanwhile, in the second photograph, the camera’s point of view onto the scene is shared with that of the officers, reflecting the perspectival dynamics of the Moratorium photographs published in the *Herald Examiner* and the *Los Angeles Times*. These images again forge a potential empathy with the officers’ points of view, specifically in opposition to violent protestors. However, each image displays a conspicuous lack of any people, protestors or otherwise, to suggest that these two officers were in imminent danger. This evacuates the images of the same suggestion that the officers, as potential “victims,” were acting in defense of their own physical safety.

Emblazoned with the bilingual headline “The Murder of Ruben Salazar,” a double-page spread inside the issue includes two reproductions of the first image from the cover. In one case, the image has been enlarged and a portion of it has been isolated in a black rectangle (Fig. 15). In conjunction with the image’s caption, this gesture emphasizes in a disclosive fashion that one of the individuals standing in the doorway of the Café had his hands raised as the officer approached, weapon drawn. In amending this image to strategically emphasize this detail, *La Raza* reclaims the binarized, oppositional dynamic between law enforcement and (Mexican American) civilians in which the *LA Times* and the *Herald Examiner* trafficked. In the context of *La Raza*’s editorial treatment, the distribution of power and directionality of force between “victims” and “aggressors” has been flipped.

The assembly of other images in the spread aims to substantiate claims of the deputies having imposed unwarranted lines of violent force upon civilians near Laguna Park that Saturday. The photograph on the left side in the center row features another black rectangle, this time pointing out a figure whose main function seemed to be the use of the tear gas rifle. Yet another image at the center of the spread's bottom row pinpoints the same deputy, but his time he crouches behind the door of a sheriff's vehicle with his riot gun aimed through the open window. The caption for the image above this one alleges that this deputy had been firing tear gas projectiles into the bar. These images have been chosen and underscored undoubtedly to connect them to the weaponry that led to Salazar's death at the hands of a sheriff's deputy. The editors' diagrammatic treatment of this layout, juxtaposing photographs with their captions' elucidatory language, builds in a nearly forensic fashion a case against sheriff's deputies as agents of calculated aggression toward non-violent civilians.

Aside from the tragic drama around Salazar's death, other photographs included in this issue of *La Raza* serve as documents testifying to demonstrators' roles as peacefully assembled individuals whose rights were violated by aggressive police behavior. On the second page, adjacent to a large headline that asks, "Laguna Park Why," a photograph displays a line of uniformed officers, batons in hand, gathered in the middle of Laguna Park (Fig. 16). Few civilians are discernable in the image, save for one gravely outnumbered person kneeling on the ground in the center of the image. Over them, one officer stands at the ready, possibly already having stricken the person to the ground. Another civilian approaches from the right side, perhaps coming to the aid of the befallen figure. In this instance, the juxtaposition of a considerable volume of deputies with weapons in hand with a single, possibly injured, rally attendee quite clearly implicates the deputies as the sole aggressors in an unfairly weighted conflict. The image and caption at the top of page six elaborate on this portrayal, as they zero in on several deputies who appear to be using guns to launch tear gas canisters at "people in the community," according to the caption (Fig. 17). All of these people take on qualities of innocuousness as they become

onlookers to the violation of their own safety, standing at a considerable distance from the officers, who proceed down the street releasing their weapons.

Surveying all of these reportage photographs, their captions, and adjacent headlines in tandem, a journalistic matrix of image/text relationships emerges. Among the pages of the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Herald* Examiner, crestfallen ("innocent") white shop proprietors collect remnants of their wares and livelihoods in the aftermath of senseless violence and destruction wrought by Chicano/a marchers. Law enforcement officers do what they can to keep order on the streets as they defend themselves from projectiles thrown by anonymous youths. In the issue of *La Raza* responding to the same events, Chicano/a demonstrators and community members become victims of senseless violence at the hands of sheriff's deputies. In all cases, the newspapers in question demonstrate an expectation around readers' empathy responses to align with the perceived targets of violence. Their continued focus, through photographs, around those in those positions of victimhood suggests an effort to both maintain and foster this empathy. In any of these cases, whether readers identified with marchers, law enforcement, or shopkeepers, each of these outlets' journalistic strategies demonstrate a reliance on oppositional constructions of reality. These aimed at condemning aggressors and exonerating victims of violence or destruction of any wrongdoing. Each outlet chose specific photographs to accompany their stories and headlines, relaying the Moratorium march's events as evidence validating realities around each of these groups as a cohesive identity.

In the years leading up to the Chicano Moratorium, Harry Gamboa's feelings of being "silenced by the photographs and testimony of the establishment" spurred his own participation in the underground press, including contributions to issues of *La Raza* in addition to his work on *Chicano Student News*.[88] Later, he would term both of these publications "propagandistic newspapers."[89] While they offered a robust platform for voicing resistance to state-enabled structures and acts of violence so extreme that, at times, Gamboa likened life in East Los

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[88] Noriega, "No Introduction," 2. For more on Gamboa's participation in alternative press, see also Gunckel, "We Were Drawing," 153.
[89] Gamboa, "In the City of Angels," 75.

Angeles to “absurdist theater,” his participation with these news outlets was ultimately finite.[90] By the early 1970s, their binarized politics of cultural nationalism alone would not provide a satisfactory antidote to his and the rest of (the future) Asco’s feelings of disgust with mainstream media’s distorted tales of lives, cultures, and events in their own neighborhoods. As Gamboa recalls, his interest in practicing photography grew out of an understanding of symbiotic economies of power circulating between networks of law enforcement who maintained surveillance practices in East Los Angeles and corporate media structures. As he put it, “they had pictures and I didn’t have pictures to prove my point.”[91] In the face of these circumstances, Asco’s aesthetic and conceptual interests veered away from a forthright combatting of mainstream media’s negative images of Chicano/as with positive ones because, as Chon Noriega has explained, “the rules of evidence were stacked against Chicanos in the first place, the first rule being that those in power don’t necessarily need evidence.”[92] Eschewing an adherent investment in the identity politics undergirding the Chicano/a Movement at the time, Asco’s work, particularly their No Movies, would performatively explore articulations of Chicano/a identities that both acknowledged and upended their own imbrications in the visual culture of mass media.

As the following analysis demonstrates, Asco’s conceptual and material uses of photography in No Movies intervened into news outlets’ leveraging of photographs as evidentiary documents supporting assertions of group identities as knowable, singularly unified, and often mutually oppositional. In this sense, Asco’s photographic exploits in the creation of No Movies shed new light on debates surrounding how the social functions of mass media shifted between modernist and postmodernist perspectives. According to scholar Janice Peck, Jurgen Habermas’s notion of the “public sphere,” an imagined space in which “citizens have access to…societal dialogues, which deal with questions of common concern,” typically constitutes the chief theoretical support for most modernist positions.[93] This perspective relies heavily on

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[90] Noriega, “No Introduction,” 2.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere* (London: Sage, 1995), 9; cited in Janice Peck, “Literacy, Seriousness, and the Oprah Winfrey Book Club,” in *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates over Media Standards*, ed. Colin

generalizing frameworks that formulate guiding "truths" and principles allegedly in service of the "necessary regulation of social life" of this virtual public body.[94] Critical postmodernist perspectives view the particularization of public issues and experiences as offering a corrective challenge to generalizing modernist metrics that presume news media information sharing to occur across a field of journalistic neutrality in the spirit of a proverbial march toward a betterment of public welfare.[95] In this context, Asco's personal claims to performative self-representation via No Movies photography could be understood obstinately to defy an early 1970s culture of printed mass media that leveraged photographs as "truth-telling" tools communicating directly with their imagined unitary publics.

"*No Movie* Means No Movie": The Beginnings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.'s Radical Photography

Members of Asco began working collaboratively (and continued working individually) for several years before they gave their group its proper name, rippled through with a reflexive spirit of revulsion at socioeconomic conditions in their surrounding communities and state policies that promulgated them. Despite speculation as to its affinities with a foundational work of French existentialism, Gronk has previously specified that the group's appellation "didn't come from [Jean-Paul] Sartre's *Nausea*. We thought of it as a good title for us because most of our work was disgusting."[96] Indeed, as both former Asco members and scholars of their work have noted over the last decades, despite various resonances among their early 1970s output with that of influential European avant-garde cultural movements and producers, Asco's adaptation of their group's moniker in 1974 was not simply a nod to Sartre's novel, but rather a reflection of their

Sparks and John Tulloch (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 232. See also Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1989).
[94] Jostein Gripsrud, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Melodrama," in *Journalism and Popular Culture*, ed. Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (London: Sage, 1992), 89.
[95] Peck, "Literacy," 233.
[96] Transcription notes from interview with Gronk by Burnham and Durland, 16 Sept. 1986. *High Performance* Collection, *High Performance Magazine* Records 1953-2005, Box 61C, Folder 19, Special Collections Research Library, Getty Research Institute.

own experiences of much more localized and embodied stimuli within their own quotidian cultural and sociogeographic contexts.[97]

Gronk (and other Asco members) have also noted that their local audiences' responses to their earliest performative collaborations, in the streets, in galleries, and in print also elicited feelings synonymous with the translated definition of the Spanish term "asco," or "repulsion with the impulse to vomit."[98] According to Gamboa, this "traditionalist sentiment" was voiced with particular ardor amongst "politically correct' members of the Chicano Movement" (including students, academics, political organizers, and, notably, other artists).[99] Asco felt that these groups' schemas of a utopian, unified Chicano/a subjectivity, often invested in recuperating pre-Columbian histories, could not understand, or refused to tolerate, the young artists' burgeoning phantasmagoric aesthetic.

In 1997, Gronk offered an addendum to his earlier statement about the origins of Asco's name. He likened the sense of nausea that their work embodied to the group's shared sense of revulsion in response to multiple deaths of personal friends. These individuals, namely Chicanos, had passed away serving in the Vietnam War, a conflict whose drafted American front disproportionately relied on, and lost, greater numbers of Mexican Americans than those belonging to other demographics.[100] Indeed, all who had access to national television and newspapers ingested a consistent bombardment of mass media imagery wrought with suffering caused directly by the United States' involvement the war in Vietnam. Scores of American artists, therefore, simultaneously grappled in this moment with their own attempts to rethink problematics

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[97] For a discussion of Gronk's early fascination with history and his voracious reading habits, see Max Benavidez, "Library Boy: Transit in the Inscribed City," in *Gronk* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 2007), 13-19.
[98] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Internal Exiles," in *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, ed. Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 189-190. This phrase originally appeared in conjunction with the group's name in Harry Gamboa, Jr. and Gronk, "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa," *Chismearte* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1976): 33. Gronk also discusses the origin of the group's name as a reflection of audience responses of disgust in an interview with Philip Brookman and Amy Brookman in 1983 in conjunction with the conference *CALIFAS: Chicano Art and Culture in California*. See Chavoya and Gonzalez, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," 37, 81.
[99] Harry Gamboa, Jr. "In the City of Angels," 77. See also Oral history interview with Harry Gamboa, Jr., 1999 Apr. 1-16, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, accessed March 12, 2018, https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-harry-gamboa-jr-13552#how-to-use-this-collection.

[100] Gronk, transcript of oral history interview, Los Angeles, 20 and 23 Jan. 1997, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, accessed November 2, 2017, http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/gronk97.htm. For an historical assessment of the death rates of American recruits of Mexican descent relative to those of other G.I.s, see Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 67-68.

of subjectivity, representation, and spectatorship that broke from modernist tropes of authorial agency and primacy. They were regularly exposed through imagery to what Frederic Jameson has termed “the first terrible postmodern war.”[101]

As Julia Bryan-Wilson has pointed out, a paradigmatic shift occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s in some artists’ and critics’ notions of their own roles as laborers, or “workers,” forged amidst national political and social foment generated by civil rights movements and the Vietnam War. This signified, according to Bryan-Wilson, a desire to initiate cross-class solidarity in revitalizing art institutions as dynamic, socially inflected spaces echoing the urgency of contemporary epistemologies and modes of production.[102] Asco, too, as Chicano/a practicing artists found myriad frustrations with a lack of resonance amongst local art institutions and their own value systems at this time. However, one cannot underestimate the specific significances of their quotidian East Los Angeles context to these expressions of aggravation. While the work of so many artists aligned with the Chicano Movement vocally and visually espoused positive, affirming expressions of Mexican heritage and Mexican American identity, at the same time, Chicano/a artists of any persuasion or political allegiance remained virtually absent from Los Angeles gallery rosters and museum exhibition checklists.[103] Asco’s members rejected what they saw as a “moral certitude” endemic in the nationalist, politically oppositional work of artists associated with El Movimiento. Concurrently, they resented their own alienation and exclusion from mainstream cultural institutions, whose gallery spaces curators reserved mostly for white artists whose work operated in lineages of American and European modernism.[104] Between these dissonant sentiments of active dismissal and ambivalent desire, a miasmic kind of nausea was surely activated: this would remain at the heart of Asco’s collaborative production.

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[101] Michael Bibby, “Introduction,” in *The Vietnam War and Postmodernity*, ed. Michael Bibby (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), xiii.
[102] See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
[103] For a discussion of Chicano/a artists’ historical lack of representation in mainstream art institutions and exhibitions both during and after the Chicano Movement, see Chon Noriega, “The Orphans of Modernism,” in *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2008), 16-45.
[104] Noriega, “No Introduction,” 17.

One significant encounter between Gamboa and a curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1972 quite clearly actuated this range of conflicts and, in turn, catalyzed one of their signature insurgent performance-cum-No Movies. According to Gamboa, in response to his inquiry about including Chicano art in future exhibitions, the curator spurned his suggestion, going so far as to reject the veritable existence of Chicano/as who practice "fine" art, reciting an assumption wrought with clichés: that most Chicano/as were instead likely to be gang members.[105] As a retaliatory response, Gamboa, Gronk, and Herrón returned that same night after the museum had shuttered its doors and, under the cover of night, spray-painted their own names across a pedestrian bridge outside a main entrance to the building. As Gamboa recalls, this retaliation evinced an ephemeral transformation of "the museum itself into the first conceptual work of Chicano art to be exhibited at LACMA" (the same institution would later host the group's retrospective in 2011).[106] This performance work would come to be known as both *Spraypaint LACMA* and *Project Pie in Da/Face*. In executing it, Asco forewent the "longue durée" of traditional, and comparatively static, mural practices venerated within the Chicano art movement and embraced the ephemerality of graffiti, a stereotypical signature of "gang activity" and an object of the LACMA curator's derision.[107] This act became a vector for imposing their names (and thus identities, at least nominally), and their work as Chicano artists into and onto the hegemonic institution's hallowed walls.

As Noriega notes, Gronk, Gamboa, and Herrón insisted that Valdez not join them for their nighttime excursion, citing the ambiguous threat of possible physical danger that would befall her,

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[105] Amelia Jones, "Lost Bodies: early 1970s performance art in art history," in *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California, 1970-1983*, ed. Peggy Phelan (New York: Routledge, 2012), 44. While the sentiment expressed remains consistent across citations of this story, varying accounts recall multiple quotes by the curator, suggesting a possible mythification of the incident. See Chon Noriega, "From Beats to Borders: an alternative history of Chicano art in California," in *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000*, ed. Stephanie Barron et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 361. See also Amelia Jones, "Traitor Prophets: Asco's Art as a Politics of the In-Between," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, ed. Chavoya and Gonzalez, 127, and Nicolas Lampert, "No Apologies: Asco, Performance Art, and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement," in *A People's Art History of the United States* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 250.

[106] Gamboa, "City of Angels," 79.

[107] Asco would more directly approach the No Movie as a kind of kinetic "activation" of the Chicano mural in their well-known pieces *Walking Mural* (1972), for which they dressed as hyperbolic versions of religious icons and other figures common in Chicano murals, and *Instant Mural* (1974), for which Valdez and collaborator Humberto Sandoval were taped to a building exterior on Whittier Boulevard, waiting for a period until they simply broke the tape and walked away. "By developing portable murals, walking murals, and instant murals, they…elevated muralism from a static medium to one of performance." See Harry Gamboa, Jr., "Gronk and Herron: Muralists," in *Neworld* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1976): 28.

as a woman, if the group were to be caught.[108] In regards to this anecdote, Noriega cites the commentary of scholar Mario Ontiveros, who points out that the male Asco members' barring of Valdez from participating in the spray painting raises critical questions about a moment in which Asco reinforced patriarchal ideology.[109] The following day, Gamboa and Valdez returned to document the group's work (Fig. 18) before it was whitewashed later that evening.[110] Through Gamboa's photograph, Valdez's presence on the bridge contributed to the iconic status that *Spraypaint LACMA* would later attain in the group's oeuvre. However, her full participation in the work's creation was relegated to her adept posing for the camera while her three male compatriots designated themselves as the only ones fit to perform the work of nighttime graffiti.

The pair's furtive return to the "scene" of the "crime" of the previous night's tagging evocatively sets the stage for this chapter's examination of Asco's No Movies as a radical photographic practice of self-representation that lampooned the topos of the photograph as evidence. Their impulse to document the work's ludic gesturing to criminality becomes reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's description of French photographer Eugène Atget's turn-of-the-century photographs of empty Paris streetscapes as being "like scenes of crimes" (Fig. 19).[111] Just as Atget's Paris images are, and just as the LACMA entrance had been when Gamboa, Gronk, and Herrón committed the previous night's vengeful acts, Benjamin reminds his readers that "a crime scene, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence."[112] In the case of Atget's photographs, their inherently desolate, unsettling spaces suggest the "pastness" of a criminal act whose setting must be photographically documented for subsequent forensic analysis. However, in the absence of any victimized subjects or conventional

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[108] See Noriega, "Your Art Disgusts Me."

[109] Mario Ontiveros, *Retheorizing Activism: The Aesthetics of Social Responsibility in the work of Asco, Group Material, Gran Fury, and Félix González-Torres*, Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Los Angeles, 2005), 98n138.

[110] The clandestine execution of this work evinces links to "Midnight Art Productions," a pre-Asco project amongst Gronk, Gamboa, and Herrón which merged sentiments of dissent for the Vietnam War, unhealthy living conditions in East Los Angeles barrios, and law enforcement of the white establishment with international language-based strategies of public resistance and localized cultures of associating names and territories through graffiti cultures. For more on Midnight Art Productions' activities, see Gronk in "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa," *Chismearte* 1 (Fall 1976), 33; and Michael Fallon, *Creating the Future: Art and Los Angeles in the 1970s* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2014), 204-205.

[111] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *The Selected Writings of Walter Benjamin*, vol. 3, *1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 108.

[112] Ibid.

indexes of criminal violation (such as a weapon, physical destruction of private property, etc.), Atget's images disclose no immediate narrative, inviting viewers to project their own onto them. In this context, Benjamin asserts a newfound significance for captions as a means of verbal wayfinding to direct interpretation. "Whether these [captions] are right or wrong is irrelevant," he contends.[113] He emphasizes the power latent in their capacity to dictate and endorse a photograph's claim to a kind of documentary truth over an argument simply for or against that truth's perceived facticity. Through this discussion, Benjamin establishes a significant link between a photographic image and its caption in the wake of Atget's documentary images, which evoke a levying of evidence and an indictment of criminality. Within this evidentiary capability lies the "hidden political significance" of such photographs, in conjunction with their captions, to bestow imposed epistemological values.[114]

It was precisely this kind of power that a documentary photograph (in conjunction with captions and headlines) could wield to direct thought and influence beliefs in cultural "truths" that so occupied a young Harry Gamboa, Jr. in the early 1970s, the moment of No Movies' genesis. Scholar John Tagg has termed this power historically ascribed to photography "the kind of violence that surrounds the event of meaning," by which a documentary photograph's violence might stem not necessarily from its act of creation nor its perceived dynamics within subject/object relations, but from the culturally facilitated, contingent ability of the photograph to adjudicate reality, incite convictions, and interpellate its viewers into consent.[115] Through his efforts to process contradictions he perceived between mainstream and independent media's totalizing portrayals of Chicano/a experiences and those experiences that he, his friends, and his family members *actually* lived, Gamboa gained a deeper understanding of the machinations behind media's treatments of photographic imagery. "If I don't capture these images and document the things I see," he stated, "they're going to get lost, and ultimately other people will

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xxiii.

define them for me."[116] At this juncture, Gamboa purchased a camera and began a personal photographic practice. Within a few years, out of a confluence of displaced desires and ambivalences around the kinds of "truth" that photography could communicate about existing and imagined networks of sociopolitical relations and accruals of (cultural) capital, Asco's No Movie was born.

Each iteration of the No Movie, Asco's "signature invented medium," began with a performative tableau staged for a still camera that, in most cases, Gamboa operated.[117] Sometimes these performances' participants moved through space, often on Los Angeles streets or other public areas, while other times they remained in a single location. Just as their costumed subjects would mimic and pose, the resultant still photographs would, too. Asco would later present them across a variety of reproducible media as stills from non-existent feature films. Often, the group would mark their images with a rubber stamp that read "ASCO/Chicano Cinema," always in red ink, a calling card to announce their simulated and duplicated film scenes as "authentic" Asco works (Figs. 20a-b).

Finally, No Movies were predicated on their visibility via the reproduction of original photographs, despite extremely minimal budgets. As Gronk stated (also in the *Chismearte* interview), he was inclined to reject the cinema's celluloid format when he discovered that "a multimillion dollar project could be accomplished for less than ten dollars and have more than 300 copies circulating around the world."[118] Here Gronk counters the cultural value of audience exposure (through photographic reproduction and postal distribution) with a cultural document's perceived value based solely on the volume of financial investment in its production. Through international mail art networks, collectively known as "The Eternal Network," Asco sent multiple versions of No Movie photographs reproduced in a variety of material forms to "individuals, publications, and organizations" in destinations across Europe and the Americas.[119] Gronk had

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[116] Gamboa in Chavoya, "Social UnWest," 69.
[117] C. Ondine Chavoya, "No-Movies: The Art of False Documents," in *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: International Center of Photography/Harry N. Abrams, 2003), 200.
[118] Ibid. (Gronk in "Interview: Gronk and Gamboa"), 32.
[119] Chavoya and Gonzalez, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," 57.

been participating individually in mail art practices before Asco's dissemination of No Movies through the post (Figs. 21a-b) but the group's correspondence art activities increased through the 1970s, as did those of many of their peers and collaborators.[120] The networked qualities of Asco's deployment of No Movies as mail art, an "intimate bureaucratic practice," as Craig Saper termed it, and a "surreptitious avant-gardism," as Chavoya termed it, mirrored the group's own pedestrian navigations of Los Angeles streets while in production mode for No Movies.[121] This itineracy, both of Asco's bodies through the city and their No Movies photographs through reproduction and mail distribution, also paralleled the widespread reach of newspaper photographs, achieved through their own reproduced and distributed multiplicity.

As Gamboa explained to scholar Amelia Jones in 2009, No Movies are for him still closely linked to an idea he had previously discussed in the context of print news: propaganda. To generate a No Movie, he stated, was to "alter sentiment or to provide false information or to augment existing information in a way that might guide the viewer's attention."[122] These strategies bear a striking resemblance to those of news outlets described by Stuart Hall in the early 1970s, as well as those employed at the same moment by the newspapers and periodicals discussed earlier in this chapter. As the context of a newspaper can bestow an aura of neutrality and authenticity upon photographic reproductions contained within it, captions can thus be implemented to guide readers' conclusions of "truth" based on those photographs.

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[120] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Ray Johnson and Asco: Correspondences," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, ed. C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 300. S. Zaneta Kosiba-Vargas, "Harry Gamboa and Asco: The Emergence and Development of a Chicano Art Group, 1971-1987," Ph.D. diss (University of Michigan, 1988), 149.

[121] Craig Saper, "Intimate Bureaucracies," in *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3-70. Chavoya, "Ray Johnson and Asco: Correspondences," 292. For more general discussions of (the difficulties of historicizing) mail art and its intersections with other avant-garde practices such as Fluxus, see Saper, *Networked Art*; John Held, Jr., "The Mail Art Exhibition: Personal Worlds to Cultural Strategies," in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 8-115; John Held, Jr., *Small Scale Subversion: Mail Art & Artistamps* (Breda, Netherlands: TAM Publishing, 2015); and Owen Smith, "Fluxus Praxis: An Exploration of Connections, Creativity, and Community," in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 116-139.

[122] Gamboa, interview with Amelia Jones, 2009, quoted in Jones, "Traitor Prophets," 116-117.

Unlike a newspaper photograph, however, the No Movies discussed in this chapter never provided captions in a didactic, declarative manner.[123] On the contrary, the verbal signposts that Asco gave to these No Movies were at times extremely minimal, obtuse, misleading, or simply non-existent. Gamboa stated in 1983 that these No Movies of the 1970s were “designed to create an impression of factuality, giving the viewer information without any of the footnotes.”[124] Just as Benjamin surmised in the early 1930s that the accuracy of the captions applied to Atget’s Paris photographs by illustrated magazines was negligible, Asco always aimed outside of forthright “authenticity” in their presentation of No Movies. Rather, in their recombinatory layering of aesthetic tropes common to performance, documentary photography, Hollywood cinema, Chicano cinema, muralism, collage, and other practices all at once, the group aimed to produce open-ended patterns of meaning that could be traced to no singular point of origin.[125] No Movies thus carved out an entirely new representational arena within and through this vast matrix of possible signification, a fitting response to news outlets’ deployment of photographs as connotative “evidence” supporting purported “truths” backed by generalized representations of Chicano/as as a singular, imagined community.

Of Gores, Gang Wars, Slashers, and the Universe

A group of three figures dressed gaudily in shiny black and silver garments is “caught” by a photographer as they quickly make their way along a swath of sidewalk on Whittier Boulevard in East Los Angeles (Fig. 22). They turn to face their documentarian while the camera’s shutter remains open; blurred faces and limbs indicate their continued motion as they instantaneously respond to the realization that they are becoming photographic subjects. The leftmost figure (Gronk), clad in a cropped patent leather jacket and knee-high boots, thrusts both arms out to

[123] Several No Movies did also become text pieces, but they will not be discussed in this chapter. For more on Asco’s textually heavier No Movies, see Gamboa, “Autologüe Series,” and “Young Boy in the 50s Series,” in *Urban Exile*, 161-179.
[124] Gamboa in Marsiela Norte, “Harry Gamboa, Jr.: No Movie Maker,” *Revista Literaria de El Tecolote* 4, no. 2 (July 1983): 12.
[125] Chavoya refers to this quality as “a simulacrum for which there is no original.” See Chavoya, “Orphans of Modernism,” 251.

touch the shoulders of the figure beside him, in a gesture of defense or protection from the photographer's gaze. White boa feathers plume out around the central figure's (Valdez) neck as she turns to cast an icy, menacing glare in the photographer's direction. She dons a soft, reflective helmet-like ribbed cap which is framed by a gleaming axe blade. She holds the axe's long silvery handle like a baseball bat, at the ready to swing in the photographer's direction. The sequins that dot her short, sheer cape echo the speckled pattern in the mask-like fabric shrouding the face of the rightmost figure (Herrón), who frantically flails his arms from a partially stooping position, as if warning the photographer of an impending pounce back in the camera's direction. These are the Gore Family, a wicked clan of extraterrestrials descending from 1960s singer Lesley Gore and the stars of Asco's 1974 No Movie eponymously titled *The Gores*.[126] Certainly the star's mutant offspring are looking to conjure a much darker, possibly nefarious, atmosphere than did their ancestor, whose saccharin pop tunes included the 1965 hit "Sunshine, Lollipops, and Rainbows." Indeed, this group projects an air of glittery, bloodthirsty freneticism, and their backward glances, illuminated from above like those of a few alien creatures under the glowing beam of their ascending ship, ominously suggest that this image's photographer may be their first unwitting victim.

In another photographic installment of *The Gores*, the unseen photographer from the first image (Humberto Sandoval) has leapt into the diagetic narrative as a hapless, suited photojournalist or paparazzo (Fig. 23).[127] He appears seated on the ground, backed into the windowed corner of a shoe vendor's storefront with his right leg splayed open and a look of terror on his face. His left arm reaches toward the handle of the locked shop door, whose sign reading "CLOSED" in bright red defiantly confirms that he may have met his end, trapped by the vengeful Gores. His right arm clutches his larger-than-life camera across his torso in an ironic last-ditch effort to shield himself from harm with the recording apparatus that may have helped clinch his doom. Flanked by brightly colored, intermittently hanging "SALE" signs, the trio of Gores strike

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[126] Chavoya and Gonzalez, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," 67.
[127] Chavoya and Gonzalez refer to the photographer as a "paparazzo," implying that his journalistic aims are geared toward publications of the tabloid ilk. See Ibid.

histrionic poses as they loom over the photographer, staring him down as they crowd around his nearly defenseless body. Beyond the display windows on the image's left side, a suspended sign reads "OPEN," boldly contradicting the similar sign hanging in the front door, as if to offer an entreaty to the Gores to come closer and "close in" on their victim, sealing his fate for good.

A third photograph from the *Gores* series offers a climactic glimpse of the photographer's final moments (Fig. 24). Now he lies face up on the tiled ground, his head and left arm held down by the masked Gore, one of whose black platform leather boots has come to rest just inches from his head. His suitcoat lies limply open as his chest heaves upward in his struggle to break free. The leather jacket-clad Gore grasps the victim's wingtipped left foot, almost more absorbed in the stylish shoe than the impending bodily massacre. The female Gore wields her gleaming axe, centrally framed in the image, whose handle reads "ASCO" in red letters. The gender dynamic constructed between Valdez and Sandoval's characters here—a feminine axe murderer chasing down her male victim—hints at some of the performative gender play characteristic of Asco's No Movies. Often, "slasher" horror genre films might rely on the convention of a murderous male antagonist pursuing female subjects who become sexualized in their violent victimhood.[128] Conversely, in this instance, as Valdez raises her axe, the (male) photographer now appears helpless in the face of this overwhelming threat of violence at the hands of the otherworldly Gores. His camera, once an active agent of production, now remains tossed aside in its futility as a potential buffer between him and his executors.

A brief but sensationally lurid narrative plays out across this photographic series, all set against a fragmented background of urban Los Angeles. As an object, the absurdly enlarged camera becomes more than a set prop in this drama; Asco posits it as the narrative's ethical fulcrum. As the Gores' heads turn to meet the lens's intrusive gaze in the first image, so too does the photographer's fortune turn, as ultimately the power dynamic shifts and he inherits the positionality of victimhood at the hands of his would-be photographic subjects. In eradicating the photographer, they ensure that their likenesses will no longer be bound for the printed page of a

[128] For more on this convention, see Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself," in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 21-64.

publication eager to capitalize on, objectify, and inevitably categorize their outlandish otherness. As a would-be mediating force between the photographer and the Gores, the camera constructs a relationality between them that underscores the act of photojournalism as an interpellative force capable of imposing the violence of evidentiary meaning on a subject.

Exacerbating this operative dissonance between the photographer's and the Gores' representational interests is Asco's multifaceted combining of stylistic elements from a variety of cultural arenas, including performative masquerade, camp, science fiction, B-movies, and the burgeoning 1970s genre aesthetic of glamor rock. As the Gores become determined to release themselves from the camera's gaze, they counter its implied violence with a much more literal form. This form lives up to its bearers' name while it exemplifies the hyperbolic camp of low-budget thrillers, which Asco had appreciated since their early youth and whose aesthetics provided a refreshing antidote to the comparatively high-fidelity, elite cinema projects of Hollywood (just as No Movies aimed to do).[129]

As Asco were likely aware at the time, some of the moment's most popular blockbuster Hollywood films were indeed some of the most expensive for studios to generate. Twentieth Century Fox's *The Towering Inferno* (1974), for example, as well as Paramount's *The Godfather, Part II* (1974), were both dramas released the same year that Asco created *The Gores*. These films were some of the most high-cost of their kind, as well, with budgets totaling $15,000,000 each.[130] Moreover, like most highly popular films at the time, they were both based on previously existing novels and featured principal actors, such as Steve McQueen, Paul Newman, Faye Dunaway, Al Pacino, and Robert De Niro, whose performances bolstered the films' high acclaim.[131]

On the other hand, *The Phantom of the Paradise*, another 1974 film produced at a comparatively modest cost—just over $1,000,000—exemplifies the low-budget filmic aesthetic favored by Asco and demonstrates striking resonances with the Gores' campy stylistic nexus of

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[129] Gronk interview in *High Performance* 35, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1986): 57.
[130] "1956-87 Big-Buck Scorecard," *Variety* Vol. 329, Iss. 13 (January 20, 1988): 64.
[131] Sheldon Hall, "Blockbusters of the 1970s," in *Contemporary American Cinema*, ed. Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond, (Berkshire, UK: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 171.

glamor rock and horror.[132] Director Brian De Palma's comedic musical traces the story of Winslow Leach, a composer whose original compositions are pilfered by Swan, a greedy record producer, for the opening of Swan's new music venue, "The Paradise." After an accidental fall into a hot record press, Leach becomes disfigured and thereafter "haunts" the venue, donning a long black cape and a silver helmet-like mask, as the "Phantom of the Paradise" (Fig. 25). While the Phantom's silvery crown, dark lipstick, and black cape echo Valdez's Gore look, his leather body suit bears resemblance to Gronk and Herrón's sleek black costumes. Moreover, the triumvirate structure of the Gore family becomes mirrored in The Undead, a three-part Gothic glam band who appear later in the film's narrative (Fig. 26). Each clad in black with heavy makeup, their modest costumage resonates with Asco's thrift store-sourced looks, as if they could be distant relatives, perhaps hailing from another planet in a parallel low fidelity universe.[133] Scholar M. Keith Booker calls *Phantom of the Paradise* "a complex postmodern intertextual and intergeneric stew," citing the film's appropriative and recombinatory treatment of narrative elements from a range of films and dramas including *Phantom of the Opera*, Goethe's *Faust*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), as well as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962).[134] While the aesthetic overlaps between *Phantom* and *The Gores* remain striking, their fantastical narrative arcs each foment a mélange of cultural signifiers that undergird both projects in critical ways.[135] In the case of *Phantom*, this approach serves the film's parodic take on pervasive nostalgia for cinema cultures of the previous decades, according to Booker.[136] In the case of *The Gores*, this frenzied clashing of performance, film, and music genres serves the project's

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[132] For more on the production budget of *The Phantom of the Paradise*, see Don Kaye, "*Phantom of the Paradise*: Horror's Ultimate Rock Opera?," *Shivers* 89/90 (Spring 2001): np.
[133] See Chavoya and Gonzalez's mention of Asco's practice of sourcing costumes at thrift stores in Chavoya and Gonzalez, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," 63.
[134] M. Keith Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 63.
[135] This experimental appropriating and clashing of Hollywood genre conventions as a rebuff to its hegemonic status in American film culture was a technique shared by other local avant-garde cinema practitioners based in Los Angeles at the time, including individual filmmakers such as Kenneth Anger and movements such as the L.A. Rebellion. However, David E. James points out that, due to their geographic isolation in East Los Angeles and the city's rampant cultural segregation amongst creative communities, Asco was largely excluded from and unaware of Los Angeles' contemporaneous avant-garde cinemas. See James, "Hollywood Extras: One Tradition of 'Avant-Garde' Film in Los Angeles, *October* Vol. 90 (Autumn 1999): 19. For more on relationships between Hollywood and avant-garde or underground movements that preceded Asco's work, see David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
[136] Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood*, 64.

repudiation of the semiotic means by which photography, by its semblance of visual factuality, can serve news media's political and social agendas. Regardless of whether any members of Asco had seen *The Phantom of the Paradise* that year prior to their performances as The Gores, these convergences indicate Asco's keen attunement to aesthetic and pop cultural hybridity as an "of the moment" corrective approach to modernist identitarian paradigms that bombarded them through journalistic photography.[137]

Given the ways in which it encouraged experimentation with performative forms of identity (particularly those at the time associated with gender and sexuality), the glittery, unrelentingly ostentatious theatricality of glamour rock is particularly fitting within Asco's operative cultural constellation. For many, David Bowie's fictional queer performance persona of supposed alien origins, Ziggy Stardust, exemplifies this impulse. As Philip Auslander explains, Stardust "mediated between sexualities and a third term that triangulated the relationship between Bowie and the characters in his songs."[138] In strokes similar to Bowie's erecting of an immersive, interstellar universe around Stardust, the existence of the "conceptual drag rock group" known as Les Petites Bonbons, or simply the Bonbons (Fig. 27), who became friends of Asco in the mid-1970s, was established and maintained on affectation and pretense.[139] As a group of gender non-conforming performers who never actually performed rock shows, their "medium was public exposure and publicity," and their stardom "self-invented and media-disseminated."[140] Glitter rock's queer subjectivities, "unashamed, playful, and decoded for mass consumption," defined the Bonbons' act and inspired their looks.[141] According to Deborah Cullen, David Bowie met Jerry Dreva, a founder of the Bonbons who would become Gronk's longtime friend and an Asco collaborator, in the early 1970s.[142] The Bonbons' presence in Los Angeles' glam rock scene in the early 1970s, combined with Bowie's widespread popularity, likely contributed to Asco's

[137] The Gores actually preceded the renowned *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 1975, which over time catapulted this aesthetic from cult to mainstream cultural awareness.
[138] Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 120.
[139] Benavidez, *Gronk*, 51.
[140] C. Ondine Chavoya, "Art and Life: Dreva/Gronk," in *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, 287.
[141] Van M. Cagle, "Trudging through the Glitter Trenches: The Case of the New York Dolls," in *The Seventies: The Age of Glitter in Popular Culture*, ed. Shelton Waldrep (New York: Routledge, 2000), 126-27.
[142] Deborah Cullen, "A Part and Apart," in *Asco: Elie of the Obscure*, 210.

exuberance for non-normative ontological potentialities embedded in the nexus between glamor rock and science-fiction.[143]

Indeed, one of the most significant and provocative of Stardust's rhizomatic character traits was his affiliation to extraterrestrial ontology. As Ken McLeod puts it, "by employing metaphors of space, alien beings or futurism, metaphors that are by definition unknowable…artists [like Bowie] constantly 'differ' the notion of 'authentic' identity."[144] In Stardust's embrace of artifice, multivalent subjectivity, and nebulous configurations of desire, public awareness of him grew only as a synthetic amalgamation of indeterminate cultural signifiers, while knowability of any "authenticity" around Bowie himself simultaneously diminished. In this context, Asco's conceiving of The Gores as interplanetary beings underscores their (literal) attack on the news photographer as analogous to an attack on his use of his "authenticating" representational instrument, the camera.

The same year that the Gores mercilessly ended the life of an inauspicious photographer in front of a shoe store on Whittier Boulevard, Asco executed another No Movie performance that hinged on the act of murder as a public spectacle. Staged on South Ditman Avenue, immediately adjacent to Ruben Salazar Park (the site of the Chicano Moratorium), *Decoy Gang War Victim* (see Fig. 1) simulated the bloody aftermath of an East Los Angeles gang murder.[145] In documenting, reproducing, and disseminating images of this scene to news outlets in efforts to convince them of its authenticity, Asco would shape their ongoing offensive on evidentiary photography into a media hoax. Their photographic documentation of the performance, coopting

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[143] Though this is not directly reflected in *The Gores*, it should also be noted that another nexus between Asco and Bowie's fashion aesthetics as platforms for the theatrical construction of the otherworldly self emerges in Nicolas Roeg's 1976 film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. In the film, Bowie plays Thomas Jerome Newton, a humanoid extra-terrestrial whose alienness is exacerbated by his gender-neutral garments, which include an oversized formal suit and platform shoes (Fig. 28). In some cases, Bowie's ensembles echo Chicano zoot suits of the 1940s, which many men in the Los Angeles area wore as a confrontational political gesture after the War Production Board regulated the volume of fabric permitted to produced men's suits. When young Mexican American men continued to wear the suits after this injunction, news media painted them as unpatriotic, and eventually American servicemen, police, and even civilians began to attack men wearing the suits in public. For more on the history of zoot suits in Los Angeles, see Anthony Macías, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 62-117.

[144] Ken McLeod, "Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism, and Meaning in Popular Music," *Popular Music* 22 (2003): 339.

[145] Exact location discussed with the artist. Gamboa interview with the author, Los Angeles, September 27, 2017.

photojournalistic and cinematic compositional methods, would later coopt local news media distribution channels, “hacking” their mechanisms and rerouting them toward Asco’s own ends.

Like each image from *The Gores*, the photographic iteration of *Decoy Gang War Victim* projects narrativity, but Asco has embedded this image with greater ambiguity than the previous series. Any information surrounding how exactly he died—and at whose hands—remains elusive. By deliberately withholding any clues illuminating these portions of the tableau’s narrative, Asco ensured the photograph’s potential for misappropriation by its recipients. Without any information identifying it as a premeditated gesture of art-making, members of Asco distributed copies of the photograph by mail to local news publications and television networks.[146] Gamboa, dressed in a suit and carrying mock business cards, also carried reproductions of the photograph with him when he approached a group of local television stations. Endeavoring to play to what he perceived as these news outlets’ zeal for sensationalizing acts of violence in East Los Angeles, he enthusiastically encouraged each television station quickly to report the incident before one of their competitors could scoop them and report the story first.[147] Weeks later, the image was presented in a 1975 live broadcast of KHJ-TV LA Channel 9 News, during which journalists condemned the image as a prime example of endemic gang violence in East Los Angeles.[148]

Though this particular photograph has by now been reproduced in and on the covers of dozens of publications, Asco’s machinations behind the *Decoy* photograph were not relegated to that single incident in 1974.[149] According to Gamboa, around that time, the group would repeatedly set up these decoy scenarios throughout East Los Angeles wherever there had been rumors of violence, hoping to convince locals that a life had already been claimed in the immediate area.[150] These acts could, in turn, curtail continued cycles of violence sensationally covered (and perpetuated) by local news outlets.[151] By repeatedly, breathlessly reporting on

[146] “Asco,” in *Whitney Museum of American Art: Handbook of the Collection*, ed. Dana Miller (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2015), 47.
[147] Gamboa interview with the author.
[148] Gamboa, “In the City of Angels,” 82.
[149] Examples of its reproduction on publication covers include Peggy Phelan, ed., *Live Art in LA*; and *Artforum* Vol. 50, No. 2 (October 2011).
[150] Chavoya, “Orphans of Modernism,” *Corpus Delecti*, 246.
[151] Chavoya and Gonzalez, “Asco and the Politics of Revulsion,” 67.

these types of incidents, Gamboa believed media platforms "were complicit" in the ongoing warfare. They would report victims' personal information, including addresses and names of family members, which would, in Gamboa's words, "basically lay out…the murder plan" for the next victims.[152] While acknowledging his skepticism that Asco's *Decoy* project could genuinely restore peace to East Los Angeles neighborhoods (even if ephemerally), Chavoya notes that part of the piece's efficaciousness lay in its function as a "counter-spectacle" to the media coverage it wished to destabilize.[153] Per Chavoya, Asco created *Decoy* not simply as a spectacle in and of itself, but one that inherently gestured to and undermined the spectacular, violent nature that could characterize everyday life in East Los Angeles, as well as the stereotyped, hyperbolized optic through which that life was so often portrayed by mainstream media.

By simulating a gang member's demise, Gronk positioned himself in the role of the eponymous physical "decoy gang war victim," implicating his own body in the photograph's falsehood. Yet Gamboa's photograph of the performance, reproduced and distributed to news outlets, was just as crucial a decoy, insofar as it furnished the false "proof" necessary for convincing reporters that the violent incident did indeed transpire. In laying out her own definition for "decoy," Martha Rosler describes it as "a lure that attracts attention by posing as something immediately—reassuringly, attractively—known."[154] Rosler's emphasis on these qualities playing to a quick "knowability" align with the characteristics that Gamboa and Asco embedded in their photograph: provocative in its open, undeniable display of death, it served to confirm common assumptions about rampant violence amongst East Los Angeles gangs. While these coordinates of immediacy, reassurance, and attractiveness enabled the photograph to present itself as a believable document of gang homicide, they could also describe a quintessentially eye-catching news photograph, a correlation that offers some insight into how *Decoy Gang War Victim* so easily duped its recipients.

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[152] Harry Gamboa, Jr., radio interview by Gabriel Gutierrez, *Morning Review with Gabriel Gutierrez*, KPFK, 2 Apr. 2008.
[153] Chavoya, "Internal Exiles," 198.
[154] "The disclosure of the decoy's otherness," according to Rosler, "unsettles certainty and disrupts expectations." See Rosler, Preface to *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), ix.

A consideration of Roland Barthes' notion of myth and its power to convey complex meanings to a given social group, which he lays out in *Mythologies*, can help to further elucidate the efficacy of *Decoy Gang War Victim*'s gesture of deception. For Barthes, something (in this case, an image) can take on mythical status when it draws its signifying capabilities both from its own primary order of visual signification (the combination of a material signifier and that which it signifies) *in addition to* another, culturally motivated and imposed, order of signification. This second order of signification, according to Barthes, often becomes assigned because it works in service to those most favored within the structures of power through which the image circulates.[155] For Barthes, the "concept," or signified aspect of the myth that imposes motives and intentions, and thus knowledge itself, onto the "form," or signifier, is a "formless, unstable, nebulous condensation," wrought with contingency, as the shape it takes is entirely situational.[156] In this regard, Barthes argues, the "fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated."[157] In the case of *Decoy Gang War Victim*, the signifier in its primary order of signification acts non-verbally (it signifies via its imagistic properties alone); its raw material as a photograph displays a man's body lying in the middle of an empty residential street with road flares set up around him. In the interest of capturing their audience's attention with spectacular images and stories of violence at the hands of East Los Angeles gang members, they accepted the second order of signification, the details around the event falsely bestowed by Asco, as truth. This additional order of signification, therefore, served local journalists' interests in controlling flows of information to their audiences and mobilizing cultural stereotypes in efforts to retain those audiences' interests. Asco adroitly perceived this process in constructing their gesture, wherein they momentarily isolated the press' own susceptibility to myth-consumption, highlighting it as part and parcel of larger matrix of sociocultural and linguistic factors typically enabling the myth's naturalization, or its ability to be taken for a "system of facts."[158] Asco's keen awareness of the mechanisms of media distribution channels and those channels' vulnerabilities to their own

[155] See Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 109-159.
[156] Ibid., 119.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid. 131.

participation in mythification enabled the artists to appropriate those mechanisms to their own tactical ends. Ultimately, they perpetrated a double exposure: that of media's biases fueled by mythic cultural stereotypes of Los Angeles's Chicano/a communities, and that of the "evidentiary" news photograph as a purveyor of myth in and of itself.

According to Harry Gamboa, "the idea…to create an image that looked so real, it looked…mythically real" was indeed operative in his machinations behind constructing *Decoy Gang War Victim*.[159] In his initial estimation, the image's successful mythification would pivot more around compositional allure and immediate legibility than around the forensic detail of a painstakingly reconstructed crime scene documented by the camera.[160] For Gamboa, this "mythical realness" was closely connected to how frameworks of still photography resonate in one's viewing experience of narrative cinema. Thinking of a film as "a single frame after a single frame, what you really remember is that single frame," he has stated.[161] In his deliberate conjuring of the cinematic, Gamboa borrowed a number of the film industry's technical strategies to achieve his desired compositional effects.[162] A classic cinematic trick was chosen to evoke the spattering of blood all over Gronk's body: his clothes were smeared with ketchup.[163] To pump up the ambient blue glow characterizing the image, Gamboa placed flashlights that he covered in blue cellophane on either side of the camera, which he hoped these would exacerbate the contrastive presence of the red flares.[164] His use of a Vivitar 150 long-focus telephoto lens on his inexpensive Minolta 101 camera contributed to the hazy ethereality that settled in the image's foreground.[165]

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[159] Gamboa, interview with the author.
[160] These aspects of allure and legibility are also resonant with Rosler's characterization of the decoy.
[161] Gamboa, in interview with the author.
[162] While many scholars provide working definitions of the "cinematic" and they continue to evolve in cinema studies and media studies discourses, my usage of it here implies Asco's very deliberate use of lighting and practical special effects techniques to boost the narrative quality of the photographic image. Vivian Sobchack describes the cinematic phenomenologically, as a kind of animating, "coming-into-being" that enacts the "accumulation of experience." Building on this, I would argue that Asco's use of film industry techniques conjure a filmic aesthetic that bolsters the photographs implication of prior extra-diegetic action (a violent gang altercation) that would have a causal relationship to the scene provided to the viewer in the photograph. See Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic 'Presence,'" in *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, ed. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Sussex, UK: Reframe, 2016), 101.
[163] Chavoya, "Internal Exiles," 197.
[164] Gamboa, interview with the author.
[165] Ibid.

Gamboa's thinking between cinematic narrativity and the credibility bestowed on still photography as "evidence" within the metric of naturalized myth resonates with Barthes' assessment of film stills in "The Third Meaning." In this essay, he points to the fact that the photograph, lacking in the "diegetic horizon" of a narrative film, begs analysis wholly unique to that of the film still, which, despite its lack of motion, nevertheless implies a kind of imperceptible movement outside of itself, or what Barthes calls an "armature of a permutational unfolding."[166] In service of its mythic pronouncement of itself as fact, *Decoy Gang War Victim*'s invocation of cinematic narrative gestures to an imbrication of diegetic temporality within photography that inserts itself into a liminal space between Barthes' semiological positioning of the photograph and the film still.

As Gamboa implied, the most striking frame of a film is the one that ultimately lodges itself in the memory—or, for the same reason, it may be chosen by advertising executives to promote a film's run in theaters. Analogously, the most striking image of a newsworthy incident might make its way to the front page of a newspaper or, in the case of *Decoy Gang War Victim*, to a television news program. Following this line of inquiry, the success of *Decoy Gang War Victim*'s mythical subversion could be attributed in part to its ability to oscillate at a nexus of each of these criteria simultaneously. Topical and formal convergences between Gamboa's image of Gronk and a host of other images from both cinematic and news-oriented arenas of mass media at this moment may have contributed to its ability to achieve multivalent resonance with its recipients.

At first, the almost perfectly aligned placement of Gronk's body at the center of the frame contributes to an impression of high photographic composition, not unlike the directorial arrangement of a cinematic frame. Moreover, the fact that Gamboa has flanked Gronk's prone body with lambent flares conjures the aesthetic structure of a sacrificial scene in a science-fiction or horror film. A still from the 1971 *Twins of Evil* (Fig. 29), for instance, displays some structural similarities: the victim, in this case a nude woman covered in a white sheet, lies across an altar as a hazy blue light emanates from an architectural aperture in the background while an orange

[166] Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, 66-67. See also Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, "Introduction," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008): 12.

flame to her right contributes to an ominous air of violent destruction and desire. Insofar as Gamboa and Gronk generated *Decoy Gang War Victim* as a setup photograph of a planned performance, its striking similarities to a glut of contemporaneous news photographs focused on bodies occupying streets, particularly from anti-Vietnam war protests and police clashes, implicate elements of its cinematic qualities within contemporaneous cultures of photojournalism.

While the site where Asco staged *Decoy Gang War Victim* held historical significance due to the violence and death resulting from the Chicano Moratorium, it also carried visceral, personal significance for Gamboa as well, who recalls having multiple friends over the course of his young adult life who lost their lives on the same street.[167] As other Asco members have noted, the firsthand sight of a body in one of their neighborhood's streets was not uncommon for them.[168] However, the quotidian frequency with which violence, both structural and physical, circulated through East Los Angeles street cultures at this moment also meant that this public sight of an injured or deceased body carried a mediated familiarity, as well, as a news image. Just a year before the creation of *Decoy Gang War Victim*, Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta executed a performance, *Untitled (Rape Scene)* (1973), that commented precisely on this phenomenon. Living in Iowa City and attending the intermedia art program at the University of Iowa at the time, Mendieta, like many others across campus, were shocked by an onslaught of reports regarding the rape and murder of a nursing student at the University that occurred in March of that year. The highly publicized incident, covered by many local news outlets, "moved and frightened" Mendieta.[169] Her piece became, in part, a reflection of her personal responses to the incident's media coverage. For the performance, Mendieta staged in her Iowa City apartment a reenactment of the scene as reported by the press (Fig. 30). Leaving her door slightly ajar, viewers could happen upon her space and see her inside, stretched out and bound, the bottom half of her body bare and smeared with blood. More blood and broken dishes surrounded her on

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[167] Gamboa, in interview with the author.
[168] Willie Herrón discusses the stabbing and near killing of his brother in an interview with Jeffrey Rangel. See Herrón, transcript of oral history interview, Los Angeles, 5 Feb. to 17 Mar. 1997, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, accessed March 30, 2017, https://www.aaa.si.edu/ collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-willie-herrn-12847#transcript. Gamboa also references several violent incidents that he witnessed growing up in his interview with Rangel.
[169] Kittredge Cherry, "Mendieta incorporates herself, earth, and art," *Daily Iowan* (December 1977): 7.

the floor.[170] According to the artist, rather than walking past her living quarters upon discovering her, many viewers entered the space and sat down to watch her and discuss the work for an extended period.[171] Like Asco's *Decoy*, Mendieta's *Untitled (Rape Scene)* both responded to and altered the process of inurement that can occur in response to media's repeated coverage of incidents of fatality in a given geographic context. Mendieta forced viewers and herself to ephemerally live in the visceral, gruesome context of the nursing student's rape and murder, an event that was otherwise understood only through new media's mediation. Asco's *Decoy*, on the other hand, simulated not only the aftermath of an anonymous gang homicide, but the means by which that homicide might be reported, thus infringing upon the very mechanisms that determine the means and frequency by which such images are dispersed and consumed.

A close look at several press images focusing on bodies occupying street spaces in the early 1970s demonstrates the range of ways in which *Decoy Gang War Victim* may have reverberated within its milieu of news imagery. These images not only displayed people incapacitated as a result of physical harm, but also bodies that simulated these circumstances, just as Gronk did, as a performative mode of political resistance to global conditions of violence. In this sense, *Decoy Gang War Victim* underscores the potential efficaciousness of "playing dead" for the camera in a media world that leveraged images of the victims of violence to unilaterally condemn their alleged aggressors.

In the aftermath of the March Por Justicia on January 31, 1971, organized by the Chicano Moratorium Committee to protest the death of Ruben Salazar and the acquittal of the officer responsible for it, the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* featured a photograph of a dying man on its front page (Fig. 31). From a high angle standing at the man's feet, the photographer captured him lying face-up, covered by a jacket lain over his torso. He is surrounded by a small group of people, including a priest, who kneels beside him. The caption reads, "Priest administers the last rites to unidentified man shot in East Los Angeles riots. Site is McDonald St. near Whittier Blvd.

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[170] Charles Merewether, "From Inscription to Disolution," in *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (New York: Routledge, 2000), 137.
[171] Cherry, "Mendieta," 7.

where rampaging gangs of young terrorists ran wild for almost five hours." Without mentioning or speculating on the man's shooter, the newspaper nevertheless unequivocally identifies a guilty party in the spate of violence that occurred around the march that day: the "rampaging gangs of young terrorists." Eliding any possible contributions to the violence by police officers and/or their colleagues, even when one may have been responsible for this man's suffering, the newspaper unequivocally deploys the "evidentiary" value of the photograph as an indictment of protestors as violent agitators.

A 1971 issue of *La Raza*, which also included a photograph of the "unidentified" man who passed after the January 31 march, provides an account of the same day's events that staunchly opposes that of the *Herald Examiner* (Fig. 32). Identifying the slain man as Gustav Montag, the *La Raza* image displays his body on the sidewalk covered in a blanket while a man with a camera around his neck kneels at his side and places a Mexican flag atop Montag's torso. The accompanying article relays a narrative of "sheriffs open[ing] fire on the marchers," "without so much as a warning shot."[172] In this case, the directionality of accusation is fully inverted. The photograph of Montag provides verification of law enforcements' unchecked implementation of unjustified deadly force on peaceful marchers.

Amidst the contentious implementation of these photographs featuring physically violated bodies in the aftermath of East Los Angeles demonstrations, photographs of bodies that simulate conditions of injury or death on public streets take on new significance. At this time images of protestors simulating death, common sights at "lie-in" or "die-in" protests against the Vietnam War in the early 1970s, were also appearing in newspapers and periodicals. In practice, demonstrators utilizing these techniques insisted on assuming positions of vulnerability, physically exhibiting their commitment to non-violence, while they simultaneously publicly perform and thus insist on making visible and present the specter of death looming around the United States' participation in widespread violence overseas. The resemblance between these protestors' bodies and those of injured or dead persons in turn recalls news outlets' practices of

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[172] *La Raza* vol. 1, no. 5 (1971): 36.

mobilizing photographs of debilitation or death in efforts to accuse or censure those they perceive to be guilty of inflicting harm on the photographed bodies.

One such image, published in *La Raza*, features demonstrators prone on the ground at the Chicano Moratorium march in August 1970 (Fig. 33). One person lies on their back clutching a sign that reads “NO MORE WAR” while their companion lies face down. In this case, the image corroborates *La Raza*’s insistence on the presence of many peaceful protestors having occupied Laguna Park that day before conflicts with police became violent (which mainstream news outlets denied). Another image showing several demonstrators on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles (Fig. 34), occupied the front page of the May 9, 1972 edition of the *Los Angeles Times*. Like Gronk, these demonstrators lie face up, horizontal to the photograph’s top and bottom frames, and the photographer has aligned them near the center of the image field. Just as Gamboa carefully framed Gronk’s body so as to augment the work’s spectacular nature, the photographer’s framing of the Wilshire Blvd. protesters echoes that tactic, underlining the drama of the scene. One of the figures closest to the photographer holds up a peace sign, his arm protruding from the photograph’s bottom edge. Below, the caption reads “WAR PROTEST --- Demonstrators stage ‘die-in’ in front of Nixon campaign headquarters on Wilshire Blvd. Others picketed.” As these individuals line the sidewalk with their own bodies, they insist on erecting a direct causal chain between casualties of war and domestic political maneuverings. As a reproduced news photograph, the protest’s temporal capacity for viewership stretches beyond that of the finite length of time that the demonstrators originally chose to place their bodies on the sidewalk. In this sense, the “verification” of the action via its photographic reproduction as news also amplifies the intended durational aspect of the “die-in” as form.[173] While the photograph may portray participants in one moment of their action, it also gestures, like Barthes’ film still, to an elongated expanse of time, or “diegetic horizon,” through which the protestors’ bodies remained

[173] Reflecting the aesthetics of a “die-in” event, artist Dorian Wood staged a reenactment of *Decoy Gang War Victim* featuring many performers at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions in 2010. According to Amelia Jones, it resembled “a whole room full of ‘dead’ bodies (representing the members of Asco).” See Jones, “Lost Bodies,” 184n119.

on the ground. In turn, the act of remaining in place, of "waiting" while simulating death, becomes a key component of this act of resistance.

Asco invokes precisely this physical and durational mode in their No Movie *Waiting for Tickets*, performed in 1975 (Fig. 35). In Gamboa's photograph, performers Billy Estrada and Patssi Valdez lie on the steps of the Los Angeles Music Center, what scholar David E. James refers to as "where the city's opera, symphony orchestra, and other haute bourgeois cultural forms intersect with the downtown financial establishment."[174] James interprets the performance as a sequence drawing from both the "Odessa Steps" sequence of *Battleship Potemkin*, in which a group of Cossacks opens fire on unarmed civilians, as well as a nod to Samuel Beckett's treatment of the comic tragedy behind the "endless wait" in *Waiting for Godot*. In the case of Asco's two protagonists, their parodic waiting, laced with lament over their own feelings of exclusion, stands between them and access to an institution housing and promulgating elite culture.[175] In all its performative absurdity, *Waiting for Tickets* both aesthetically and conceptually resonates with physically similar forms of political and social protest, like the "lie-in" and "die-in." In both cases, the insistence on temporal duration and lateral contact with the ground or street mutually reinforce each other in the act's simulated invocation of death.

Photographs of these actions, once reproduced, provide a signifying bridge between a photograph of a dying victim of police violence, like that of Gustav Montag reproduced in *La Raza*, and a photograph of Gronk "playing dead" in *Decoy Gang War Victim*, whose constructed plausibility, abetted by touches of cinematic allure, deceived journalists into belying their own cultural prejudices. Asco adroitly achieved this deception through their own critical awareness of entrenched sociocultural biases lubricating local news outlet's channels of production and distribution of "facts" dependent on photography as evidence. By "hacking" those channels with false evidence, Asco defied news outlets' power as purveyors of naturalized truths. Thus, *Decoy*

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[174] James, "No Movies: Projecting the Real," 184.

[175] Ibid. Resonances emerge here between Asco's citing of Beckett (as per James) and Paul Chan's *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* (2007), for which Chan staged several free public performances of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in the streets of New Orleans. The city had been ravaged by Hurricane Katrina two years prior and its residents continued to wait for effective government assistance to aid recovery and rebuilding. In this context, Chan positioned the performative act of waiting as one of political critique and resistance. For more on Chan's project, see Paul Chan, ed., *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans: A Field Guide* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2011).

Gang War Victim staged two deaths: that of Gronk and that of rhetorics of veracity underpinning visual cultures of the news.

Asco further developed their conceptual assault on mainstream newspapers' perceived authority over disseminating "truth" through photography over the course of the following year, when they produced their *Slasher* series. This 1975 No Movie project encompassed a group of photographs staged in Willie Herrón's East Los Angeles garage and studio.[176] One of the images, individually titled *Slasher No. 9*, features (left to right) Herrón, Valdez, Asco collaborator Humberto Sandoval, Gronk, and Gamboa, posed between to giant pink props shaped like roses in the foreground and a wrinkled and folded backdrop painted in a celestial pattern behind them (Fig. 36). A large, flat board conceals most of Gamboa's body on the right side of the image field. In the upper left-hand corner, a folded copy of the February 1, 1975 edition of the *Los Angeles Times* appears, its top half facing the camera. The headline screeches: "SLASHER: NO. 9: Victim Found Dead in Hollywood." Over the word "Dead," the artists have stamped, in their signature red emblem, the word "ASCO." In the blurry image below the headlines, a figure turns upward, screaming in terror with their open hands surrounding their mouth. Asco had erected here a "mock press event" organized as a surreally construed, unprecedented chance for the undead victim of a still-at-large serial killer to relay his own account and answer questions the incident referenced by the newspaper headline.[177] Gronk, playing the role of that victim (and thus echoing his previous role as a decoy homicide victim the year prior), stands holding a written statement aloft, ready to tell his story. In this scenario, Asco builds and enacts their own fictitious narrative around this local unfolding news story, embedding it in layers of hyperbolic theatricality that mock the pretense of journalistic objectivity and accuracy while mocking news outlets' frequent compromise of those values to sensationalism and stereotype-fueled speculation. Here the artists have constructed a tableau in which the "truth" must come directly from the victim's mouth—even (and especially) if he is already dead. In so doing, they play up the ostentation of the fictive so as to underscore the mythic inevitably contained within the testimonial.

[176] Gamboa identified the location of the photo shoot in an email exchange with the author, 31 Oct. 2017.
[177] Chavoya and Gonzalez, "Asco and the Politics of Revulsion," 65

The "slasher" to which the headline referred, labeled by most press at the time as "The Skid Row Slasher," had in 1975 murdered nine men in downtown Los Angeles over the course of two months before moving on to the Hollywood area.[178] The coverage of this slew of homicides included portrayals of the killer as a gay man who brutally maimed and ritually posed his victims, all other gay men.[179] In this case, *Slasher No. 9* also pinpoints yet another recourse to stereotype on behalf of the mainstream news: that of "pathologiz[ed] queer sexualities."[180] In Asco's interpretative addendum to this story as a gauzy cinematic thriller embedded with pathos and desire, they mock mainstream news outlets' tendencies to appeal to their audiences through building drama and paranoia around multiple forms of otherness under the (mythified) guise of journalistic authenticity.

By implementing alterations to the newspaper's headline and main image, Asco imposes their own authorial agency on the information that the paper conveys, enacting a melancholically ludic visual simulation of the mythification of information reported by newspapers. First, by redirecting the headline to read "Victim Found Asco in Hollywood," Asco linguistically inserts themselves into the narrative of the story that they also visually theatricalize through performance and photography. As Chavoya and Gonzalez suggest, this alteration produces multiple interpretations simultaneously, including the victim (whose identity here becomes fused with Gronk's character) finding Asco the group, or "asco" the nauseated feeling, in Hollywood, a location that could refer to either the geographic neighborhood or the more abstract kingdom of cinematic fantasy.[181] Asco has also substituted the original front page photograph from that day's newspaper (Fig. 37), which depicted a North Hollywood building fire related to a different news story. In its place, they used rubber cement to adhere to the newspaper a photograph that Gamboa had taken of Humberto Sandoval, wearing a mink coat and screaming as if threatened by the notorious slasher.[182] The artists left a hint as to their doctoring of the newspaper by setting

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[178] Ibid., 66.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Jones, *Self/Image*, 104.
[181] Chavoya and Gonzalez, "Asco the Politics of Revulsion," 66.
[182] Gamboa, email exchange with the author, 1 Nov. 2017.

up a visual parallel between Sandoval's pose in the augmented newspaper image and his pose in the background of the color photograph. In that space, he also simulates screaming, again with his face turned upward, but with a prop hand resting on top of it instead of his own hands. With these modifications, Asco performs a "revisionist" act upon the newspaper, mockingly emulating journalistic practices of spinning stories and "dressing up" facts to produce certain kinds of knowledge or to reflect readers' perceived beliefs. Consequently, they deal several sardonic blows to the "authority" culturally bestowed onto news outlets to determine and sway public opinion.

Asco's zeroing in on the front-page photograph as an object for manipulation in this instance gestures to the significant role these images can play for printed news media consumers. As newspapers position some of their most salient, and at times, graphic, imagery on the front page in the hopes of gaining readers' attention and facilitating sales, editors' choices of imagery can offer clues as to some cultural and social values that a given outlet expects its audiences to possess. A group of conceptual photographic works by Sarah Charlesworth, a Pictures-affiliated artist practicing in New York in the years following Asco's production of No Movies, similarly calls attention to front-page newspaper photographs. Charlesworth's *Modern History* series, 1977-1979 (Figs. 38a-b), for instance, presents several suites of black and white prints that reproduce the front pages of various international newspapers. Across each single suite (within which every photograph reproduces a newspaper from the same date of the same year), Charlesworth has occluded text from the front page articles, leaving only the images visible against a ground of bright white. According to Bruno Haas, isolating the images as such produces a visual context that gives rise to an "ineluctable excess," or "structural overdetermination" of meaning in the images.[183] In other words, once released from their surrounding commentary, the images can begin to take on a limitless stream of association and meaning. Readings of them, according to Haas, then become "symptomatic," or incidental.[184] Divorced from verbal signposts

[183] Bruno Haas, "On the Annihilation of Photography," in *Covering the Real: Art and the Press Picture, from Warhol to Tillmans*, ed. Hartwig Fischer (Basel, Switzerland: Kunstmuseum Basel, 2005), 333.
[184] Ibid.

that would typically guide their interpretation, the photographs call attention to these missing texts, which can paradoxically incite viewer's awareness of what kinds of epistemological relationships printed press outlets might attempt to build between photographs and the language surrounding them. Unlike Charlesworth, Asco replaced the *Los Angeles Times* front-page image with one of their own in *Slasher*, embellishing what they saw as the paper's frequent tendencies toward tabloidizing violent news stories. However, an analogue to the "symptomatic" effect that Charlesworth's work achieves can still be found when considering Asco's project. While Asco left the *L.A. Times* articles intact in *Slasher*, their revised headline playfully and performatively evoked an arborescent web of different possible meanings. When considered in conjunction with their glued-on photograph, the headline could signify, vis-à-vis the image, an even larger range of interpretations. A symbiosis is thus constructed between the addended image and headline; it throws into relief myriad editorial machinations behind the construction of a newspaper's front page. For a moment, the cloak of neutrality and indexicality typically shrouding a front page lifts itself.

Beyond Charlesworth, other New York-based artists working conceptually with photography at the time also turned their attentions to printed press outlets' uses of the medium as a mechanism for creating or disseminating beliefs about existing cultural "truths." Adrian Piper, for instance, a black artist who was working at the same time as Pictures-affiliated practitioners but has not been historicized as part of their milieu, claimed *The Village Voice* as a platform for some of her 1970s projects, including *The Mythic Being* (1973-1975). For this performance-based piece, Piper donned a "drag" getup consisting of inconspicuous street clothes, an Afro wig, and a faux mustache. She then interacted with unsuspecting viewers in public places in New York and Cambridge, Massachusetts.[185] In addition to these performances, Piper placed manipulated photographs of herself as her male, "Mythic Being" persona in the Classifieds section of *The Village Voice*. Piper would often embellish these photographs with collaged textual elements, or "thought bubbles," indicating the Mythic Being's internal dialogues (Fig. 39). Further complicating

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[185] This project will be analyzed in much greater depth in Chapter Three in connection to my discussions of Lorraine O'Grady's work.

Piper's critical address of racial and gender stereotypes through her inhabiting of the Mythic Being, she had drawn her persona's verbal passages from her own personal diaries, originally written between September 1961 and December 1972.[186] According to scholar Uri McMillan, by attaching her own previously recorded, highly personal observations and experiences to the Mythic Being's subjectivity rather than her own, and then distributing them in a printed public media forum, Piper hoped that her previous thoughts would "scatter into myth."[187] This act, therefore, was one through which Piper attempted to devitalize her own embodied subjectivity and amplify that of the Mythic Being, distancing herself as much as possible from her own embodied memories by transferring them to the Being as an extrinsic subject. By exploiting the inherently "mythic" quality of the reproduced newspaper photograph, therefore, Piper analogously accentuated the mythic quality of her radical alter ego. Like Piper, Asco's *Slasher* also coopted and mocked the mythic potential of the photograph, underscoring how that potential can covertly transfer and propagate cultural stereotypes.

The indexicality of the "real" associated with black and white newspaper reproductions both clashes and melds with the aesthetics of a seductive, noirish murder mystery in *Asco Goes to the Universe*, another image from the same series that presents the group in black and white (Fig. 40). Gronk's central positioning in the frame in front of a microphone amplifies the scenario's status as a fictive news conference, an event typically staged solely for media consumption. As Gronk glares at the camera with an affectless countenance, his eyebrows are conspicuously missing from his forehead. This eerie, punctive detail at once unsettles both the evidentiary and narrative connotations of the black and white image. Whereas in *Slasher No. 9*, Asco located themselves in Hollywood via the altered newspaper headline, here they locate themselves in "the universe," once again drawing on the science fiction theme of interstellar travel as they did in *The Gores*. In this image, their narrative is no longer anchored to signifiers of "reality" exterior to the frame, like the newspaper in *Slasher No. 9*. Instead, the photograph's closely cropped frame

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[186] Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 131.
[187] Ibid.

surrounds the figures in an unidentified, or unidentifiable, non-place. In his *Non-Places, An Introduction to Supermodernity*, Marc Augé characterizes the "non-place" in contradistinction to the "anthropological place," which is typically collectively identified and agreed upon by "the complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how."[188] A non-place, however, is characterized by one's presence within it being transient, ephemeral, or forward-moving; the non-place serves to propel its occupants onward.[189] While Augé's examples of the non-place include hotels, trains, airports, and other travel hubs, an analogue could be found here in Asco's "Universe." In contrast to other No Movie projects staged in public locations specific to Los Angeles, such as *Spray Paint LACMA*, *The Gores*, and *Decoy Gang War Victim*, all of which conjure a specific geographic orientation, the "Universe," the spatial context of their 1975 black and white photograph, appears abstract and non-specific. Here, they locate themselves in a place that is at once everywhere and nowhere, no longer bound by the lateral, oppositional ideologies governing Earth-bound paradigms of thought. Bolstered in and into this space by a playful "upward mobility" that is both cultural and atmospheric, Asco claims for themselves the power and authority to determine their own relationships to photographic representation.

Conclusion

By playfully alluding to cinematic motifs of glamor and horror, each of the No Movies discussed here dramatizes a homicidal "crime" that emulates and mocks mass media's sensationalist recourse to cultural essentialism. These examples underscore how Asco's 1970s No Movies photography was at once conversant with and deleterious of contemporaneous news platforms' image-based semiologies and epistemological paradigms. These photographic works reconfigured news outlets' own documentary modes, transmuting, twisting, and regurgitating the stereotyped representational schematics often fueling media's universalizing photographic

[188] Marc Augé, *Non-Places, An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), 101.
[189] Ibid., 78.

portrayals of Mexican Americans at the time. In turn, they rejected utopian notions of a monolithic Chicano subjectivity while simultaneously undercutting media's deployment of photography as a tool to legitimate and rally public support around state and culturally sanctioned discriminatory practices perpetrated against Chicano/a communities. These multifaceted strategies reformulated political concerns of the Chicano Movement within a polymorphous, itinerant postmodernist politics of subjectivity that, rather than speaking through theoretical frameworks, spoke directly to particularities of the artists' lived experiences in East Los Angeles. No Movies, I argue, thus offer continuing opportunities for expanding predominant art histories of American conceptual photographic practices of the 1970s, especially beyond those teleologically framed as arising out of the aftermath of a failed 1960s political revolution.

CHAPTER 2: PATRICK NAGATANI AND ANDRÉE TRACEY'S DISORIENTATED POLAROIDS

A bespectacled man dressed in red struggles to keep aloft his handheld Polaroid camera, curiously also colored entirely red, in the face of a strong atmospheric wind-like force (Fig. 1). Against a black ground, this force has upset much of the earthly coordinates around him. Palm trees have uprooted themselves and hurtle, nearly horizontally, in his direction while smaller household objects, including a handbag, a vacuum cleaner, a pair of swim fins, a tennis racquet, bags of groceries, and even a whole pizza have commenced their own lateral trajectories. All of these objects, like the man's camera and his clothing, glow in hues of crimson. Behind this leftward onslaught, architectural signifiers of downtown Los Angeles, including City Hall, remain steadfastly vertical and their facades have assumed a pinkish glow. Several Polaroid photographs, with their distinctive bright white borders, successively discharge from the man's camera apparatus. While most exhibition only monochrome squares of red, the photograph furthest away from him clearly displays the source of the landscape's shifting: the photographer has created an image of a mushroom cloud from a nuclear explosion. In the explosion's immediate aftermath, all his camera registers is a field of red.

The protagonist of this evocative scene is Patrick Nagatani, a third-generation Japanese American photographer born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1945, and the scene is a photographic work titled *Red Piece*, 1983. Comprising the tableau is a diptych of Polaroid photographs, each measuring twenty-by-twenty-four inches, abutting each other on their shorter sides. Nagatani, together with Andrée Tracey, a painter and installation artist based in Los Angeles at the time, created *Red Piece* using a large-format Polaroid camera (Fig. 2) in the galleries of the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego. Given the large camera's fixed longitudinal orientation, each of the photographs in *Red Piece* were shot independently of each other at a ninety-degree orientation to how they appear in their final guise. In front of the camera, the red objects hung downward, suspended by monofilament lines from scaffolding that stood just outside the camera's frame. Nagatani, to create the illusion of his grappling with the force of a sideways blast,

rigged up a makeshift plywood lift for his body, which he wedged in between two steps of a ladder (Fig. 3). With the aid of some spotters, he allowed his shoulders and head to extend past the lift so that he would have to force himself physically to keep them up, resulting in his appropriately strained appearance in the final photograph. In its complex network of film set-worthy optical effects, *Red Piece* was one of the first large-format Polaroid works that Nagatani and Tracey created together. It remains exemplary of the boldly hued, spatially dynamic narrative imagery—nearly always redolent of nuclear crisis—that would characterize their collaborative practice through much of the 1980s.

An extremely talented draftsperson from a very young age, Nagatani shifted to the photograph as a mediating agent when a drawing teacher at Santa Monica Community College in the early 1970s suggested he fulfill the remainder of the class's assignments with a camera. He asked his brother, a Marine stationed in Vietnam at the time, to send him an inexpensive, easily accessible model. Before long, he was the owner of the popular handheld thirty-five millimeter film camera known as the Pentax Spotmatic.[190] After testing the apparatus in various lighting conditions and becoming increasingly comfortable with it, the artist made a firm decision to cultivate an ongoing photographic practice in 1975. He recalls thinking at the time, "I'm just going to learn this history of photography…what's going on in the field…and if I need to learn technique, I'll read up on it."[191]

Each phase of Nagatani's art career cumulatively reflects this eagerness to build skill and knowledge by feverish absorption. Working predominantly in multi-year-long series, Nagatani would for each project implement epistemologies and ways of seeing developed through the previous series. Meanwhile, he was constantly responding to the ebb and flow of contemporaneous aesthetic paradigms and personal discoveries, such as stories of his family's history in both Japan and the United States. From his early fascination with affective and perceptual responses to spatialized experiences of color, to his later interests in histories of

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[190] The Pentax Spotmatic was a model of thirty-five millimeter camera developed by Asahi Optical Co. between 1964 and 1976. For more on the mechanics of these cameras, see *Pentax Spotmatic* (Englewood, C.O.: National Camera Technical Training Division, 1971).
[191] Patrick Nagatani, in conversation with the author, July 2016, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Japanese American internment and cultures of atomic bomb technologies Nagatani's career is marked by several decades of reflexively exploring machinations behind constructing personal, cultural, and art histories. This came to a head between 1983 and 1989 in his photographic collaborations with Tracey. Together the pair created dozens of vibrantly-hued, highly constructed, cinematically evocative, narrative photographs, mostly large format twenty by twenty-four-inch Polaroids. This body of work serves as the primary focal point for this chapter, reflecting a matrix of conceptual and aesthetic interests that include photography history and theory, burgeoning discourses of postmodernism, the ubiquity of mass media and its representational powers, the materiality of filmic mediation, and the social production of the stereotype.

This chapter's first section introduces several of Nagatani's early series-based works, executed both before and during his graduate studies in pursuit of an MFA degree at the University of California between 1978 and 1980. It was during this time, I argue, that the artist developed a richly paradoxical compositional vocabulary that relied on highly premeditated spatial and chromatic relations on the one hand, and, on the other, improvisational gestures and chemical manipulation that embraced chance and contingency. This combinatory approach evolved dramatically in his ensuing projects throughout the 1980s, particularly in his collaborations with Tracey. Beginning with their first collaborative piece, titled *Atomic Café*, 1983, the pair would focus on how multifarious perceptual formations of light and color both contribute to and throw into relief imbrications among the "seen" and the "unseen," analogizing coordinates of visibility and invisibility within the photographic process to those within the social realm.

The pair's first collaborative work, *Atomic Café*, 1983 (Fig. 4), and its correspondences to Japanese American cultural histories of Little Tokyo in Los Angeles (where the actual Atomic Café that inspired the artists' work was located) introduce the chapter's latter sections. This initial discussion lays critical groundwork for the network of relations I construct between the artists' compositional methodologies and the social and ideological structures that their works engage. Following this, an assessment of the material logistics behind the pair's building of their imagery

specifically for large-format Polaroid studio cameras, only a few of which existed in the world during the 1980s, offers critical context for understandings of their material process.

I locate the theoretical framework for my visual analysis at the nexus of Rey Chow's notion of the "age of the world target," Sara Ahmed's concept of a "politics of disorientation," and Akira Mizuta Lippit's work on the optics and aesthetics of atomic light. My discussion of the collaborative works establishes the means by which Nagatani and Tracey's Polaroid-based practice analogizes camera vision to atomic vision, which apprehends the world not as a picture, but as a target. By introducing physical and visual lines of force from atomic blasts into each of their tableaux, I argue, the pair transforms the cityscapes they depict into "disorientated spaces" wherein losses of linear earthly stability become homologous to disruptions in naturally coded dimensions of common cultural stereotypes.

Within the small extant body of secondary literature on Nagatani's oeuvre, substantial scholarly discussions of his later work can be found mostly in exhibition catalogues. *Radioactive Inactives* and *Nuclear Enchantment*, for example, exhibition catalogues published in 1989 and 1991 respectively, profile a single body of work.[192] *Nuclear Enchantment*, a series which Nagatani began in the late 1980s just after relocating from Los Angeles to Albuquerque, New Mexico, features theatrical panoramas in front of large (most measure at least seventeen inches wide by twenty-two inches long) Chromogenic photographic prints of southwestern landscapes (Fig 5).[193] Landmarks in these prints reflect both historic and current episodes in American nuclear history and popular culture, ranging from the Trinity Testing Site in the White Sands National Monument to the "Rocket Lounge," a bar in the city of Alamogordo, both in New Mexico. *Radioactive Inactives*, a Nagatani/Tracey collaboration which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, offers a series of views into fictional living room setups across a variety of American domestic spaces (Fig. 6). As the inhabitants of these spaces stare blankly in front of them, rapt in their

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[192] Stephan Marguiles, ed., *Radioactive Inactives: A Collaboration Between Patrick Nagatani and Andrée Tracey* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 1989) and Eugenia Parry Janis, *Nuclear Enchantment* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991).

[193] A chromogenic print, or C-print, is a silver-based color photograph that can be produced from a negative or slide. For more on this process, see Richard Benson, "Chromogenic or type-C printing," in *The Printed Picture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 200.

alighted televisions, a mushroom cloud visible through a window behind them portends imminent disaster as it rises in the landscape. The essays contained in these publications focus only on these specific series and contain little extended analysis through theoretical optics. *Desire for Magic*, a retrospective catalogue released in 2010, remains the only publication offering a comprehensive look at Nagatani's entire life's work. The catalogue's brief essays each survey one of Nagatani's major series made between 1978 and 2008, including his collaborations with Tracey, a major focus of this chapter.

Outside of exhibition catalogues, photography historian Jasmine Alinder's essential academic contribution to Nagatani's bibliography, *Moving Images: Photography and the Japanese American Incarceration*, traces histories and cultural legacies of photographs made in Japanese American relocation camps throughout World War II. Alinder devoted a portion of one of her study's chapters to profiling Nagatani and his mid-1990s conceptual documentation project that included manipulated landscape photographs of former internment camps. Alinder's interviews with Nagatani provide salient recollections of the artist's conversations with his relatives, including his parents (who were both interned), about their life experiences. It also features Nagatani's own commentary on how these family stories informed his late-career notions of the camera apparatus as a progenitor of inherited memories.

One of the richest scholarly assessments of Nagatani's work in the context of that by his 1980s contemporaries appears in the exhibition catalogue titled *Constructed Realities: The Art of Staged Photography*. The corresponding exhibition placed Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative Polaroids in conversation with other photographers' "narrative tableaux," a category which curator Michael Köhler described as scenes in which "several human actors play out scenes from everyday life, history, myth, or the fantasy of the directing artist."[194] Köhler's text notes how work by Nagatani, along with that by photographers including Joel-Peter Witkin and Sandy Skoglund, effectively set up tensions between illusions of indexical "authenticity" or realism and surreal flourishes that betray their photographs' fictive, fantastical evocations of story.

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[194] Michael Köhler, "Arranged, Constructed and Staged—from Taking to Making Pictures," in *Constructed Realities: The Art of Staged Photography*, ed. Michael Köhler (Münich: Kunstverein München, 1995), 34.

Intervening into these preexisting debates, this chapter performs close visual investigations of Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative work, gesturing specifically to its resonances with and divergences from predominant discourses of photographic postmodernism of the 1980s. It demonstrates ways in which Nagatani and Tracey's work both aligns with major tenets of those discourses (including critical interrogations of authorship and mass media aesthetics) but also exceeds those discourses in its nuanced, self-reflexive deployments of visual codes that invoke racial, class, and gender stereotypes. Moreover, my comparative analysis puts the pair's works in direct conversation with those of their more well-known (and especially New York-affiliated) photo-conceptualist peers. This brings to light ways in which Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative practice at times visually reimagined urban centers of creative production, such as New York and Los Angeles, while their creative legacies have yet to be enfolded into those cities' predominant art histories.

The following analysis posits Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative photographic works as a culmination of both artists' prior creative practices wherein they "try on" conventional frameworks of thought and predominant art world paradigms, like so many thrift store costumes, in order to expose, amplify, and parody these frameworks' and paradigms' inherent absurdities, as well as their physical and ideological limitations. Through their playful engagement of 1970s and 1980s art, photography, and critical theory discourses, Nagatani and Tracey's Polaroids undercut these discourses' universalizing tendencies and construct spaces of their own. In front of the camera, their critique of the very nature of representation necessarily begs persistent referencing to the systemic political, socioeconomic, and racial inequities upon which so many conceptions of "space" have been historically built and imposed on bodies. My analysis demonstrates how not only the artists' finished images, but their working process, too, offer new opportunities for expanding histories and characterizations of American postmodern photographic practices of the 1970s and 80s.

Nagatani's Early Work and MFA Studies at UCLA

If "red" were a mood, what mood would that be? What social or historical factors might influence that mood in a given context? How and why does standing in a room painted red conjure different associations than does viewing that same red room in, or as, a photograph? Nagatani's consideration of questions such as these, which interrogate the roles that color can play in influencing the reception and absorption of visual culture, evolved the course of his four-decade-long career. Beginning with his earliest photographic projects, he embraced chromatic experimentation in both his fastidious arranging of the spaces, objects, and models before his camera, and in his chemical processing of photographs. This demonstrated his keen awareness of how multiple film varieties register the material presence of light in distinct ways, and of how manipulations of that registration process might skew the apprehension of color along affective lines. These early bodies of work often obfuscated distinctions between the colors and objects that remained visible in his photographs and, depending on his manipulation of light in front of the camera or in the development process, colors and objects that remained "unseen." As my later analysis shows, this logic evolved significantly through Nagatani and Tracey's collaboration, through which they redirected these questions toward the social realms in which their work was made and received.

In 1977, Nagatani made up his mind to apply to the University of California, Los Angeles' Master of Fine Arts program to work with Robert Heinecken. Heinecken was by the mid-1970s renowned for his multimedia conceptual photography practice, which often incorporated found imagery into intermedial experiments blending photographic processes with those of printmaking, collage, painting, sculpture, and installation.[195] Taking very seriously the task of creating a strong portfolio for his application, Nagatani embarked on a year-long durational project that would eventually earn Heinecken's attention and Nagatani's official acceptance into the program. The suite of images he included in his application comprised over fifty photographs entitled *Chroma Room*, for which he painted all the walls of a room in his Los Angeles apartment on Western

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[195] For more on Heinecken's practice, see Eva Respini, ed., *Robert Heinecken: Object Matter* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014) and Mark Alice Durant, *Robert Heinecken: A Material History* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, 2003).

Avenue a single color. Over the course of the year, he experimented with black, white, red, yellow, blue, and an array of secondary hues, in the hopes that each one would influence the evolution of his thinking, writing, and even dreaming patterns in unique ways for the duration of his presence in the space. He rarely left this room over the course of that year, seeking as fully immersive an experience as possible, meditating almost constantly on his environs. He fastidiously noted as many of his dreams, conscious thoughts, and affective responses to each wall color as possible in personal journals. Based on his initial range of reactions to a color, he invited friends to bring props and costumes to the space and pose for him in front of dioramas that he constructed, all of which were designed in resonance with his own sensorial feedback. He would then commence making photographs.[196]

Nagatani's creative process behind this early series was a combination of extemporaneous decision-making, invitations of chance, and carefully planned spatial coordination. This hybrid methodology would evolve and expand throughout his career, particularly after interfacing with other artists in the context of his graduate program and larger, city-oriented artist communities. Consistently underlying his unique combinatory approach was his practice of physically assembling three-dimensional tableaux before the camera: whether working with collaborators or alone, the final work was always and only photographic. This insistence on funneling elaborate, performative staging and posing through the camera's lens aligns with what scholars frequently refer to as a "directorial mode" of photography.[197] Writer A.D. Coleman theorized this mode in 1976 with the publication of his essay "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition," in which he posits this methodology as out outgrowth of documentary photography. In the directorial mode, the photographer herself is responsible for the events unfolding before the camera, producing what Coleman terms "falsified documents," rendering

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[196] Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

[197] See A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Towards a Definition," in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 480-91. According to curator Michele Penhall, Nagatani has cited this article in conversations. See Penhall, "His Desire for Magic," in Michelle Penhall, ed., *Patrick Nagatani: Desire for Magic* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Art Museum, 2010), 4; 212.

questions of "authenticity" of any original event only ironically relevant to the final image.[198] Nagatani directly engaged these notions of irony and obvious falsification through the physical construction of his imagery, but he also confronted and critiqued them, head on, through his work's conceptual thematics. Nagatani thus deployed the directorial mode as Coleman describes it, only to simultaneously offer an idiosyncratic meta-commentary on his own use of it.

At the time Nagatani executed *Chroma Room*, an originary moment in the development of his practice, his photographic process was already taking shape around the impulse obsessively to manipulate and organize space. A *Chroma Room* photograph might have begun as a series of exploratory and intuitive trials of arranging and rearranging objects and asking subjects to pose in various places. It would typically only end in a finished image, however, after meticulously and precisely arranging all backdrops', objects', and models' relationships to the camera and to each other. Once subjects were arranged with precision, Nagatani then mediated that three-dimensional space through a still camera in the highly controlled, studio-like setting that he designed. The tableau's final, two-dimensional form as photographic print would yield a complex constellation of specifically desired perspectival relationships. For this imagery, Nagatani set up two cameras in his painted room so that they took up two different perspectives on his subjects, each from what he called the "audience's point of view."[199] As though he were preparing a stage set in which a given viewer's line of sight to the action would be perpetually fixed, everything that might appear in an image was ultimately positioned with precision in relation to both lenses. For Nagatani, acts of revealing just the right angles or portion of an object's or subject's surface (and making sure to conceal others) were key to his approach.

Nagatani credits his initial discovery of the means by which one can exploit the mechanics of lenticular vision and forced field perspective to an interest in building models during his teenage years. A high school friend, Gregory Jein, originally introduced Nagatani to the hobby. As an adult, Jein's longstanding interest and dedication to the craft eventually earned him

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[198] Coleman, "The Directorial Mode," 485.

[199] This information has been culled from the artist's own written statement, published only on his website, as well as and the author's personal conversations with the artist in July 2016. See Patrick Nagatani, "Chroma Room (1977)," accessed August 29, 2017, http://patricknagatani.com/.

chief model maker positions for Hollywood film and television studios, as well as multiple major film award nominations.[200] Jein and Nagatani continued their friendship for decades and after Nagatani turned to photography, he would periodically work in consultation with Jein to test model-making scenarios for his camera. Occasionally, Jein took Nagatani on film television sets. According to Nagatani, experiences of note include his visits to the sets of iconic science fiction film productions *Blade Runner* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, as well as the *Star Trek* television franchise. He recalls enthusiastically observing (and sometimes even participating in) both minute and massive feats of intricately detailed labor necessary for building set models and precisely replicating and fabricating them at large scales. These experiences significantly undergirded Nagatani's inclination to explore and experiment with networks of precise perspectival relationships, each one constructed to achieve specifically planned effects in a photographic image when mediated through a camera's lens. In several of his later photographs, Nagatani would include self-built models, offering (often humorously) obvious homages to this skill's influence on his own art production.

In the case of *Chroma Room (blue)* (Fig. 7), Nagatani integrated within the frame direct visual references to his own process of carefully planning and constructing the composition itself. Rather than attempting to "seal off" evidence of this labor in a seamless image field, Nagatani jumped at the chance to objectivize it in this series.[201] On the left side of *Chroma Room (Blue)*, a camera installed on a tripod has been aimed at a nude model posing on a rug. The open door, seemingly the space's only adjustable architectural feature, reveals the hallway beyond the room. Despite Nagatani's fastidiousness in creating a hermetic, immersive blue space, his decision to leave the door ajar suggests a desire to break that color's illusory planar seamlessness. To the right, a clothed model facing the same direction as the camera holds up a black and white print of

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[200] Jein received two Academy Award nominations in the Visual Effects category his work on *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *1941* (1979). See David Samuelson, *Hands-on Manual for Cinematographers* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2014).

[201] According to Mia Fineman, most early examples of photographic manipulation were efforts to correct what photographers saw as technical flaws or limitations to the new photographic medium, while others combined multiple negatives to achieve a near-seamless composited positive. For more on the history of early photography imagery manipulated to achieve seamless optical effects, see Fineman, "Picture Perfect," in *Faking It: Manipulated Imagery Before Photoshop* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012).

a photograph of the same room in which they stand. The print, in its vacuity of color, also breaks the continuity of the blue walls in the field of the larger image as it simultaneously doubles the motif of the open door.[202] Here Nagatani purposely calls attention to the painstaking process that a photographer might endure to set up a highly composed shot. Both the camera on the tripod and the model holding the print activate direct references to this laborious process of planning and plotting out, in both two and three dimensions, a staged photograph.

Prior to creating a set of photographs for this series, Nagatani would select films whose levels and characters of color saturation and contrast could be exploited, not in an attempt to match the original tone as closely as possible, but to help him create images whose hues most resonated with his own cognitive and somatic responses to the original tone of the painted walls. Using two different cameras in the space also enabled him to experiment with multiple film types simultaneously, including 2 ¼ inch, 2 ¾ inch, and thirty-five millimeter, all of which processed imagery on slightly different color scales and therefore would produce different degrees of chromatic indexicality to the wall paint.[203]

According to the artist, he developed through this project a lifelong investment in the ways in which a viewer's perception of color can influence or provoke a range of psychological responses.[204] Among his influences were works by color theorists including Johannes Itten and Faber Birren. Their early tracts introduced fundamental, contrasting relationships amongst primary chromatic hues and, influenced by psychoanalytic theory, posited causal linkages between those hues and a range of affective states. In the photographic work that Nagatani began shortly after his matriculation at UCLA, he extrapolated his ruminations on these relationships, applying them to spaces that he constructed for the camera.

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[202] The motif of the doubled open door strikes a chord, both aesthetically and conceptually, with Rosalind Krauss' criteria for a surrealist photograph. For Krauss, the insertion of spaces and doublings into the photographic field "register(s) the spacings and doublings of that very reality of which [the] photograph is a faithful trace," which produces "the paradox of reality constituted as sign." See Krauss and Jane Livingston, "Photography in the service of surrealism," in *L'amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985), 15-40.

[203] Patrick Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 23, 2016. See also Patrick Nagatani's artist statement at http://patricknagatani.com/.

[204] See Faber Birren, *Color Psychology and Color Therapy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950) and Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color: The Subjective Experience and Objective Rationale of Color* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1973).

Under Heinecken's advisement, Nagatani began a series in 1978 titled *Chromatherapy*, heavily inspired by his discovery a few years prior of a small, recently published book by self-proclaimed British "color healer" Mary Anderson.[205] Anderson's publication, *Colour Healing: Chromotherapy and How It Works*, described a set of somatic, alternative medicinal practices (dating back to the tenth century CE in its earliest, pre-electric form) whereby lamps containing brightly hued, colored bulbs were directed at ailing organs of the body and applied to the skin at close range.[206] It was believed that different colored lights possessed healing properties for a variety of illnesses and anatomic regions. Given his interests in the physiological and psychological effects of immersing oneself in color-dominated environments, Nagatani readily responded to this historical precedent.

For *Chromatherapy* (Fig. 8), he imagined a series of fictional scenarios in which individuals might seek light-based therapeutic treatments. He methodically constructed and staged setups for each shot. Within the frame of each image, he would intentionally include (at least in part) the semispherical reflector from within which a colored electrical bulb emitted light to be absorbed by a subject's skin. As curator Michelle Penhall has pointed out, while these lamps are designated sources of physical healing in this context, they also, as sources of light, analogize the perceptual mechanics that give rise to the photographic process itself.[207] Extrapolating that logic, the light rays allegedly possessing salvific properties assert a nearly tangible physicality in each image due to their bold, bright hues, as well as the inclusion of those hues' sources, the physical lamps themselves. This, in turn, signals the illusory "absence" that light can have in a photograph if it falls evenly on the surfaces appearing in front of the camera. In these cases, objects or subjects absorbing and reflecting light are much more likely to command

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[205] The *Chromatherapy Project* works begun in 1978 and 1980 were called *Chromotherapy*, a more direct reference to the practice of color healing. Images made between 2001 and 2007 were called *Chromatherapy*, which, according to Nagatani, reflected a move "toward an art interpretation." See Michelle Penhall, "Heal Thy Self," in *Desire for Magic: Patrick Nagatani, 1978-2008*, ed. Michelle Penhall (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Art Museum, 2010), 146.
[206] Mary Anderson, *Colour Healing: Chromotherapy and How It Works* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1975).
[207] Penhall, "Heal," 147.

a viewer's attention than the light itself, which behaves as an "invisible" substrate.[208] Nagatani's *Chromatherapy* imagery quite literally throws this phenomenon into relief, as the lamps and the vividly colored light that their bulbs emit command as palpable a presence as subjects of the image themselves. In this sense, the *Chromatherapy* photographs activate electric illumination as volumetric space, evocative of its own ability to command attention and direct affective response.

Nagatani's critical experimentation with color evolved on several trips to Europe between 1980 and 1983, when he visited famed cathedrals in several cities including Paris, Nimes, Chartres, Strasbourg, Canterbury, and London. At each cathedral, he took nine Polaroid SX-70 photographs of the structure's façade from a very low angle. For each of the nine consecutive photographs of a given site, he precisely positioned the camera so that the frame of the image would be as close to flush as possible with the frame of the previous image. All the photographs' edges would then approach a seamless juncture when viewed in adjacent rows. He arranged all nine images of a given cathedral in a grid to create a montaged, holistic image of the site in situ, often including the street, adjacent structures, and sometimes even other people. These configurations would both trace and transform each building's architecture. The gridded composition of the images echoed the cathedral's own collaged, constitutive sections (its "building blocks," so to speak), sectioning off selected views of the structure's components for comparative study. However, the curvature of the lens combined with the distance from its focal point created what Nagatani refers to as "lenticular problems," or distortions in perspective that imposed a curved appearance on straight edges. By using this method, analogizing the open door's intentional interruption of chromatic seamlessness in *Chroma Room (Blue)*, he inserted deliberate disruptions in the linear continuity of façade edges in *Colorful Cathedrals*, which he had previously so painstakingly arranged.

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[208] Eugenie Brinkema offers an enriching discussion of this phenomenon through Jean Laplanche's reading of Freudian mourning as "that which sheds light, and thus that on which there would be no light to be shed: how could light be illuminated?" See Jean Laplanche, "Time and the Other," in *Essays on Otherness*, trans. Luke Thurston, ed. John Fletcher (New York: Routledge, 1999), 248; quoted in Brinkema, *The Forms of Affects* (Durham, N.C,: Duke University Press, 2014), 59.

He also manipulated color effects within the final images, aiming to create an array of hues across each of the nine individual photographs of a single building. To do so, he would visit a single cathedral at different times of the day and/or allow different amounts of natural light to reach the lens for each photograph. He further experimented with chromatic effects by subjecting some pre-exposed Polaroid film packs to varying temperatures, heating or cooling them to intensify or minimize the vibrancy of hues in the exposed image, which served to exacerbate preexisting inconsistencies in color sensitivity across different packs of Polaroid film. Nagatani would transfer the SX-70 Polaroid photographs to medium format transparency film. From this film, he processed Cibachrome prints, further reducing the images' chromatic indexicality to their referents. The Cibachrome printing technique, known for its ability to produce high color saturation and sharp levels of contrast, amplified the adjustments in tone and sharpness that Nagatani had already inserted at multiple points in his process.[209] Finally, he hand-colored portions of the Cibachrome prints with oil, enamel or watercolor pigments to enhance, deepen, or create new tones or shadows. For the images that line the bottom of each collage, he used masking tape to adhere tissue paper as a frisket around portions of the prints, then he spray-painted the "color card" motifs that his hands originally held in front of the camera (Fig. 9).

According to Nagatani, he included images of his own hands holding those cards as an open gesture acknowledging the many stages of willful material, chemical, and chromatic manipulation that he imposed on both exposed and unexposed film throughout his process of putting together each collaged work. As he stated in 2016, this project "loosened me up from being a straight photographer."[210] As much a material and chemical experimenter as a fastidious planner and arranger, Nagatani did not consider circumstantial contingency and premeditated creative strategy to be mutually exclusive endeavors. Hi decisions to introduce inconsistencies into his work were often as carefully construed as the patterns and sequences into which he introduced them.

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[209] See Robert Hirsch, *Exploring Color Photography* (Oxford, U.K.: Focal Press, 2011), 240-242.
[210] Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

Nagatani's numerous medial alterations in this project echo the photographic enhancement techniques of generations of artists and photographers before him, particularly in his application of paint to his photographs' surfaces. Art historians and media scholars have widely noted the hand-coloring of photographs as a technique dating back to the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, virtually at the origins of photography itself.[211] In some cases at the turn of the twentieth century, artists began experimenting with applying brushwork (sometimes using pigments) directly to the photographic surface so as to infuse their photographs with painterly characteristics. This can be observed in the work of Pictorialists who often engaged in what they referred to as "ennobling processes," utilizing bromoil, glycerin, and carbon printing to manipulate the surface of their photographs with the aim of making them resemble drawings or paintings.[212] Robert Demachy, for instance, introduced color and brushwork into his gum bichromate process photographs to draw out the evocative, dramatic tenor of his portrait subjects' poses and gazes (Fig. 10). In the case of surrealist Hans Bellmer's photographs of disjointed doll figures from the 1930s and 1940s, the artist applied different pigments to copies of the same photographs to achieve multiple affective tones, ranging from softness and tenderness to violence and devastation (Fig. 11).[213] Later practitioners such as Robert Rauschenberg, known for painting over photographs in his *Combine* works, and Gerhard Richter, whose *Overpainted Photographs* infuse landscape and portrait photographs with large swaths of brightly colored paint, experimented with the intricate visual layering of figuration and gestural abstraction on the surface plane of the image.

Nagatani's technique of adding pigment to particular details of his architectural imagery in *Colorful Cathedrals* echoes that of Bellmer's selective and detailed hand-coloring of pre-color film photographs, as they both aimed not to simply enhance hues on the surface of the image, but to

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[211] For more on the early history of painting on photographs, see Heinz K. Henisch, *The Painted Photograph 1839-1914* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).
[212] Mia Fineman, *Faking It*, 81.
[213] Therese Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 79.

create or heighten potential affective engagement.[214] This objective strongly resonates with the lines of inquiry that Nagatani followed throughout his other early photographic series, which explored possible psychological and affective responses to perception of immersive chromatic stimuli. In *Chroma Room*, Nagatani experimented with the transference of color information from painted surface (the wall in his room) to the photographic surface. In *Colorful Cathedrals*, he transposed his material methodology by turning the photographic surface *into* a painted surface as well. Within these efforts, consistencies in how Nagatani structured his material and stylistic interventions into his photographic process emerge: he approached the camera as a mechanical device through very systematic means, precisely gauging his use of linear perspective and framing. At the same time, he introduced elements of chance by means of extemporaneous gestures and chemical experimentation, yielding a variety of visual inconsistencies and randomized modifications across his images. In employing this highly intentional strategy of image manipulation, therefore, Nagatani still sought to exploit photography's contingent nature, locating it not in the "fleeting moments" of visual experience, but in the many material vagaries of the photochemical process.[215]

Nagatani's interests in combining systematic approaches and more exploratory gestures in his photographic experimentation continued to evolve in the years following his graduation from UCLA. Before leaving his graduate program, however, he was already training an increasingly demanding eye on the political underpinnings of this dichotomy of visuality, subtly confronting his images' historical content (e.g., deconstructing sacred Western monuments in *Colorful Cathedrals*). As would become more and more clear, undergirding his focused material and chemical manipulations of the photographic image were reflexive references to predominant historical and aesthetic structures of the photographic process.

These critical impulses were fomented during Nagatani's tenure at UCLA by his increasingly frequent contact with paternal family relatives in Hiroshima, Japan. They had been

[214] A clear discrepancy in this analogy emerges between Bellmer's use of black and white film before color film was generally available, and Nagatani was working with color Polaroid film.
[215] For his discussion of these "fleeting moments," see Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 47-64.

personal witnesses to the devastating effects of the United States' atomic bombing of the city, which instantly killed 70,000 people in August 1945. A "Sansei," or third-generation Japanese American, Nagatani was born less than two weeks after the Enola Gay's release of the bomb known as Little Boy.[216] During the war, his parents had been interned with their families in American concentration camps. His father, John, who was growing up on a farm in Hanford, California, near Fresno, was placed in Jerome, Arkansas.[217] John's father, Nagatani's grandfather, passed away while in camp before interned populations were released. Diane, Nagatani's mother, was about nineteen or twenty years old when she and her brother were relocated to the Manzanar camp in Owens Valley, in central California. Her father, a Japanese army veteran and a single parent, was forcibly removed from his home by government officials, without warning or warrant, on the night after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Leaving his children alone in their own home, he was sent to a Justice Department incarceration camp in Santa Fe, New Mexico.[218]

Sponsored by Quaker humanitarian groups, each of Nagatani's parents were brought to Chicago as young adults upon their release from internment. There, they met and eventually married; within a few years, Nagatani and one of his younger brothers, Nick, were born. The brothers spent their childhood as "the only Asian Americans" in Kedzie, a primarily Polish neighborhood on Chicago's south side.[219] In 1955, when Nagatani was ten years old, his father accepted a job in central California, where they moved with Nagatani's paternal grandmother. Later that year, his family settled in the Crenshaw neighborhood of Los Angeles, where his youngest brother Scott was born. As a child, Nagatani had very little dialogue with his parents about their experiences during World War II. For his parents, he said, "it was all about the future." His parents' encouragement of their children to attend college and establish future professional plans were much more frequent topics of conversation than their own personal experiences and

[216] For a historical discussion of the term "Sansei" to describe third-generation Japanese Americans in the twentieth century, see Jere Takahashi, "Introduction," in *Nisei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 1-14.
[217] Jasmine Alinder, *Moving Images: Photography and the Japanese American Incarceration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 131.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

their family's histories (particularly those around World War II and its aftermath), according to the artist.[220] As an adult, curious to close some gaps in his knowledge of his ancestors' experiences across continents, he initiated dialogues with his father's extended family in Japan.[221]

Though these issues would not candidly manifest themselves in his own photography for a few years, Nagatani's processing of new details surrounding his family history compelled him to pursue historical research on internment camp photography while still in graduate school. This resulted in an exhibition project, "Two Views of Manzanar," which he curated at UCLA's Frederick S. Wight Gallery in 1977 with fellow photography graduate students Scott Rankin and Graham Howe. This presentation put into conversation, for the first time in an exhibition context, black and white World War II-era images of the Manzanar concentration camp (the camp where Nagatani's mother lived) by photographers Ansel Adams and Toyo Miyatake.[222]

Miyatake, born in Japan in 1895, arrived in the United States in 1909. He began practicing photography in about 1920 and over the course of the following decade, he developed a commercial studio in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles. He garnered a reputation as a successful artist specializing in portraits, life events, publicity headshots, performance documentation, and sports photography. He also studied with Edward Weston while Weston was in residence in the Los Angeles area between 1926 and 1937, during and after which Miyatake produced a number of Pictoralist photographs. Miyatake and Weston became close friends and their relationship extended for years beyond Weston's stay in southern California.[223] In 1942, with the enactment of

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[220] Nagatani relayed these claims in a conversation with the author in July 2016. It is corroborated by a conversation that scholar Jasmine Alinder had in 1995 with Nagatani and his parents. Alinder contends that one's reluctance to speak about internment experiences in public or privately, with their families, is common among Nisei, or second-generation Japanese Americans due to a range of intercultural factors and values revolving around shame, trauma, denial, and a lack of general recognition of incarceration by the United States government and predominant American historical narratives. See Alinder, *Moving Images*, 129-131. For more information on research around this phenomenon, see Donna Nagata, *Legacy of Injustice: Exploring the Cross-generational Impact of Japanese American Internment* (New York: Plenum Press, 1996).

[221] Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

[222] Graham Howe, Patrick Nagatani, and Scott Rankin, eds., *Two Views of Manzanar: An Exhibition of Photographs By Ansel Adams/Toyo Miyatake* (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1978), 9.

[223] Gerald H. Robinson, *Elusive Truth: Four Photographers at Manzanar* (Nevada City, CA: Carl Mantz, 2002), 43; Alinder, *Moving Images*, 78; Howe et. al, eds., *Two Views*, 9.

Executive Order 9066, Miyatake, forty-seven at the time, and his family were forced to abandon their homes and were taken to the incarceration camp at Manzanar.[224]

Co-written by Nagatani, Rankin, and Howe, the essay for the "Two Views" publication explains that Miyatake covertly carried a lens and film holder on his person when he entered the confines of Manzanar.[225] At that point, internees were strictly forbidden from possessing cameras or taking photographs inside, as cameras within camps were classified by the United States government as weapons of war (similarly to guns, bombs, and ammunition).[226] Only authorized personnel had permission to use cameras in any internment context. As Nagatani, Rankin, and Howe contended, Miyatake likely felt instinctually compelled to smuggle the camera components in with him, as photography was his primary mode of engagement with the world despite its circumstantial ban at Manzanar.

Shortly after arriving at the camp, Miyatake fashioned a makeshift wooden box camera out of found plumbing fixtures and wooden fragments (Fig. 12). He affixed his single four-by-five-inch sheet film holder to the back of the box and fitted his lens to the front, which he focused by rotating it on the end of a threaded drain pipe. Because he was able to regularly order film to be shipped to Manzanar without violating any camp regulations, he maintained a clandestine operation of documenting life in the camp. According to the curators' essay, "superficially, the camera looked like a lunch pail," and thus Miyatake's practice remained undiscovered for nine months.[227] Upon learning of his in-camp photography practice, rather than imposing any punishment, the camp's director, Ralph Merritt, unexpectedly made a concession to the internee photography ban after listening to Miyatake's argument for the potential posterior value of his historical records. Merritt allegedly permitted Miyatake to continue making photographs under the condition that he personally did not take the final shot; after he composed each frame, an appointed Caucasian camp worker would trigger the camera's shutter.[228] Several months later,

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[224] Alinder, *Two Views*, 9.
[225] Ibid., 10.
[226] Ibid., 79.
[227] Alinder, *Two Views*, 10.
[228] Ibid.

photography policies at the camp relaxed, and Miyatake was allowed more personal freedom to document. By the fall of 1943, a photography studio was even set up on the camp grounds, thanks in large part to his advocacy, and Miyatake continued making photographs at Manzanar until the camp shuttered in 1945.[229] "Two Views" included images spanning the last three years of his activities there.

The curators' authorial tone in their essay for "Two Views" suggests that they aimed to highlight resonant attitudes about life in Manzanar between Adams and Miyatake's photographic corpuses. According to Nagatani, Howe, and Rankin, Adams and Miyatake each hoped that their "pictures might in some way counter…growing prejudice and racial division" in the United States in the wake of Executive Order 9066.[230] Despite these perceived resonances, the two men's markedly different subject positions relative to the camp's quotidian culture—Miyatake being a resident displaced from his Los Angeles home and Adams being a two-time visitor whose work and travel was self-funded—delimits their perspectives and relative degree of embeddedness in the camp's lived realities. While Adams could generate his shots at will, prior to 1943, Miyatake's creative control was relegated to his framing and composition alone. When photography regulations were at their strictest, Miyatake's authorial agency in the eyes of the state was transferred to the camp worker who triggered his shutter. While perhaps not intentionally, Nagatani's own authorial investments in intricate composition would later parallel the emphasis on composition-as-authorship that constrained Miyatake's early camp photography. As my analysis of Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative Polaroids demonstrates, it was the artists' concentrated cognitive and physical labor performed in front of the camera, and even prior to their entrance into the photography studio, that most saliently characterized their stylistic signatures.

Nagatani would not grapple overtly with issues of Japanese internment in his own photography for several years. However, sentiments put forth through the "Two Views" catalogue text and the exhibition's insistently dialectical structure suggest a desire on Nagatani's part to

[229] Ibid., 80-81.
[230] The essay authors draw a contrast to Dorothea Lange's photographic documentation of Manzanar, commissioned by US government's War Relocation Commission, which they argue was overridden with "anger and pathos" and focused solely on "the misery exponent" of internees' living conditions. See Howe et. al., *Two Views*, 11.

confront some the profoundly complex consequences that internment had for generations of Japanese and Japanese American populations, including members of his own family, at this stage in his career. Following his 1980 graduation from UCLA, during the Cold War arms race's late years, his abiding consideration of histories surrounding nuclear technology and nations' deployment of nuclear weapons for political and technological ascendancy gained significant momentum. Struck by a confluence of personal, national, and global issues, his perspective on his work's relationship to intercultural dialogue took a robust sociopolitical turn. This would manifest itself in a major recurring theme in his work with Tracey: the relationality between the act of photographing and atomic bomb detonation.

Rey Chow's discussion of connections between war and visuality vis-à-vis aerial bombing helps to illuminate this recurring trope. In her essay "The Age of the World Target: Atomic Bombs, Alterity, Area Studies," Chow references Martin Heidegger's contention in 1975 that the advent of the atomic bomb as a weapon of international warfare marks the logical conclusion to and fulfillment of an annihilation process initiated by the capability of technology to obscure and alienate its users from its operational intricacies (and in turn, its potential for destruction).[231] In the age of what Heidegger calls "the world picture," Chow attests, this intangibility is further filtered through the ubiquity of representation, creating a world that is "conceived of and grasped as picture," wherein ontologies are sought and found in things' and beings' representedness.[232] In the age of the atomic bomb's deployment as a weapon of war, Chow argues that the "world picture" becomes a "world target," wherein the world is grasped and conceived, via optical tools and technologies, as target.[233] In Nagatani and Tracey's work, as if in resistant recognition of the importance of visuality and perception in conceiving land masses to be destroyed simply as "targets" and not as host and home to millions of civilian lives, cameras appearing in the artists' work frequently train their gazes on the bomb itself.

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[231] Chow, "The Age," 7. Heidegger, "The Thing," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Colophon Books, 1975), 166.
[232] Chow, "The Age," 7. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), 129-30.
[233] Chow, "The Age," 7-8.

Atomic Café: The One and the Many

In 1982, *Atomic Café*, an experimental documentary exploring American responses to the early decades of Cold War atomic culture, hit theaters. Produced over a five-year period of exhaustive research, its creators pored over American newsreels, television footage, government-produced films (including those for military training), advertising, and radio programs. All the included material focused on nuclear history, testing, and events involving the deployment of nuclear technology as weaponry (including the bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima). The film presents intricate montages juxtaposing attitudes and responses to nuclear technology's growing presence in American life from state, military, mass media, and civilian points of view. Interwoven among the film's transfixing mélange of archival excerpts are clips of over two dozen atomic-themed songs, ranging from pop to blues, that comprise its soundtrack and undergird the morose humor with which the film approaches its subject matter. Frequently presented in the film, the cheerfully unassuming, generically instrumental tracks behind clips from didactic midcentury "educational" films produced by civil defense authorities and nuclear technology corporations make particularly striking the lengths to which these entities might go to normalize this imagery and sway public opinion in favor of "the nuclear."

Imagery of an actual restaurant called "The Atomic Café" appears only once in the film. It occupies the screen only very quickly, inserted amongst clips of a scripted interview regarding the atomic annihilation of most of the city of Los Angeles and two women offering a straight-faced inventory of a canned food-laden nuclear "survival kit." From the momentary presence of the Atomic Café sign imagery, the film cuts to a clip of Richard Nixon forcefully espousing American military prowess, backed by atomic explosives, which he promises "*can* and *will* be used on military targets with precision and effectiveness." The sign in the image collaged amongst these two scenes was reportedly an Atomic Café in Arco, Idaho. This Midwestern town notably became,

in 1951, the world's first community to be lit with electricity generated entirely by nuclear power.[234] As it arose in the wake of the town's news-making anteriority in establishing nuclear-generated electricity, the existence of Arco's Atomic Café suggests an impulse to capitalize on the city's historic local claim to fame.

Just one year prior to the release of the eponymous documentary, Andy Warhol approached yet another Atomic Café in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo, the same neighborhood where Toyo Miyatake had been living prior to his forced relocation to Manzanar. *Rolling Stone* had commissioned a photo essay from Warhol that would document the city's downtown punk music scene. For one of his sites, he chose the family-owned Atomic Café, which stood at the corner of First and Alameda Streets, to which he was drawn by the establishment's infamous reputation as a raucous, late-night subcultural sanctuary. In 1946, the restaurant was opened in its first location, also in Little Tokyo, by Ito and Minoru Matoba, a Japanese American couple. They served their first customers just two years after Ito had been released from an internment camp in Northern California.[235]

Though the Matobas opened Little Tokyo's Atomic Café in 1946 under very different circumstances, the shared aesthetic between its original signage and that of the Atomic Café at Arco (Figs. 13a, 13b) suggests a recognition, and perhaps even a strategic celebration, of consumer acceptance and interest around "the atomic" in popular culture, even as early as the year following the bombings of Japan. As Chow has pointed out, in the decades following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the continual imaging of the mushroom cloud in mass media led to an inseparability of cultural epistemologies of the two cities and the image of the cloud, such that the cities would become inextricably known as that particular representation and picture.[236] But what about this phenomenon might have appealed specifically to the Matobas? Their choice to name their postwar, post-internment family business after a technology that bred

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[234] K.S. Shrader-Frechette, *Burying Uncertainty: Risk and the Case Against Geological Disposal of Nuclear Waste* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 19. Incidentally, a replica of this sign appears in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008).
[235] Paige Osburn, "Atomic Punk Scene Hangout Atomic Café to be Demolished," accessed March 15, 2018, http://www.laweekly.com/music/iconic-punk-scene-hangout-atomic-caf-to-be-demolished-4255398.
[236] Chow, "The Age," 3.

weapons of mass destruction, two of which had so recently wrought devastation on the Japanese population, might strike one as counterintuitive. However, Minoru reportedly made the decision quite deliberately. As Nancy recalls, at one point he vehemently claimed, “nobody forgot about the atomic bomb…no one should forget about our food!”[237] The visual motif of “the atomic” was already becoming socially acceptable in American popular culture, even as early as the mid-1940s. For the Matobas, the act of naming their own property and family business as such—and using recognizable “atomic” iconography for its signage—was perhaps not an embrace of the growing popularity of the visual phenomenon, but rather a retaliatory, personal claim to its signifying power in American cultural discourse.

Minoru Matoba was originally from Whitefish, Montana, while Ito hailed from Kemmerer, Wyoming, where her parents owned a diner that catered to local mine workers.[238] By the war’s conclusion, she and Minoru were married and they opened the café in Los Angeles the following year. Twice displaced, the restaurant would not land in its permanent home at the corner of First and Alameda Streets until 1961.[239] In the mid-1970s, Nancy Sekizawa, the couple’s daughter who was then in her early twenties, took over hosting and reception duties.[240] Before this shift, the café had greeted its local clientele in an atmosphere of relatively calm, no-frills service, but Nancy began infusing the restaurant with some of her own cultural and aesthetic tastes, initiating a change in the establishment’s reputation within the local community. At one point during this shift, a few members of the local punk band The Screamers came into the café after an impromptu photo shoot in front of the building’s façade.[241] Thereafter, members of the band began to spread word of the restaurant through the punk community and soon enough, a kind of symbiotic cultural exchange developed between them and Sekizawa. “I just started wearing the

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[237] Josie Huang, “The Atomic and Troy Cafes: Legendary LA punk hangout faces wrecking ball,” accessed August 19, 2017, http://www.scpr.org /blogs/multiamerican/2013/12/06/15327/remembering-la-s-legendary-music-spots-atomic-and/
[238] Yosuke Kitazawa, “Atomic Café and the Old Brick Building in Little Tokyo,” accessed July 26, 2017, https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/atomic-cafe-and-the-old-brick-building-in-little-tokyo.
[239] Nalea J. Ko, “Little Tokyo Braces for the Demolition of Former Japanese American-Owned Atomic Café,” accessed July 26, 2017, http://www.pacificcitizen.org/little-tokyo-braces-for-the-demolition-of-former-japanese-american-owned-atomic-cafe/.
[240] Osburn, “Atomic Punk.”
[241] Kevin Wells, “Interview: Atomic Nancy of Atomic Café, L.A. punk hangout,” accessed July 26, 2017, https://www.commdiginews.com/entertainment/interview-atomic-nancy-of-atomic-cafe-l-a-punk-hangout-9144/.

avant punk stuff," she recalled.[242] In short order, Nancy embraced the influx of musicians, singers, music fans, and visual artists who began to flood the café after local shows and events, often lingering until the late-night eatery shuttered its doors at 4am. As their clientele skewed increasingly young and nocturnal, Nancy lined nearly every inch of the interior walls with punk show posters, announcements, photographs, record covers, and related ephemera (Fig. 14). On some evenings, as "Atomic Nancy," she would DJ from her collection of rare seven-inch records housed in the restaurant's celebrated jukebox.

> At this time, according to Sekizawa, those belonging to Los Angeles's punk community
>
> didn't have really a place to go…but [the Atomic Café] accepted them…it was…a place for us: the misfits, the rebels, the undesirables. I didn't want to work with anyone who looked normal."[243] "That's why…I felt pretty good [there]. I didn't feel like I ever blended in anywhere. But these guys were artists.[244]

For Nancy, actively cultivating a such an accepting community at Atomic Café that endeavored to embrace all, particularly musicians and artists whose appearances may have invited a less welcoming reception elsewhere, was what made the space feel most like a type of home.

According to Zen Sekizawa, Nancy's daughter who came of age at the café in its later years, when Warhol entered the café for his *Rolling Stone* shoot in 1981, his celebrity status gained him no preferential treatment in this egalitarian environment. Upon his arrival, he bypassed the long line of boisterous revelers waiting for entry that stretched around the First Street storefront and breezed through the open door. Nancy, upon discovering that Warhol had exempted himself from waiting his turn to enter, promptly kicked him out of the establishment.[245] Zen's father then incredulously asked Nancy if she knew whom she had just banished from the disorderly café. Her reply was simply, "I don't give a shit. He has to stand in line."[246] Zen recalls that Warhol, having clearly received this unsubtle hint, refrained from reentering. He managed to

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[242] Osburn, "Atomic Punk."
[243] Kitazawa, "Atomic Café."
[244] Mark McNeill, "Remembering the long lost Atomic Cafe, Little Tokyo's punk haven," accessed July 26, 2017, https://www.scpr.org/programs/offramp/2016/05/02/48483/the-long-lost-atomic-cafe-little-tokyo-s-punk-have/.
[245] Zen Sekizawa, interview by Mark McNeill, *Off-Ramp*, SCPR, May 2, 2016 https://www.scpr.org/programs/offramp/2016/05/02/48483/the-long-lost-atomic-cafe-little-tokyo-s-punk-have/.
[246] Ibid.

take at least one photograph inside (Fig. 15) before being ousted, but for the remainder of his shoot he lingered amongst those waiting in the exterior queue.[247]

After meeting in a Culver City studio building in 1983, Nagatani and Tracey became friends and eventually relocated to studios in adjacent buildings at the corner of Traction Avenue and Rose Street in Little Tokyo (Fig.16), just two blocks from the infamous Atomic Café. The restaurant remained a quotidian presence in their lives, both as local artists and neighborhood residents, while its status as an iconic hangout for visual and recording artists flourished for much of the 1980s.

As a painter, Tracey was already drawn to the socioeconomic matrices of Los Angeles' street life as subject matter and at the time, her work took up an aesthetic of manufactured artifice specifically through the lens of the city's variegated landscape.[248] Contributing to the city's topographical dynamism were skyscrapers, hillside homes, palm trees, mountain ranges, sprawling residential neighborhoods, beaches, and ribbon-like matrices of freeway interchanges, all of which, given their proximity to Hollywood, were often converted into elements of temporary film sets, a banal sight for any LA resident. Prior to their collaboration, in her "Smog Series," Tracey was painting what she called "apocalyptic landscapes" featuring a variety of Los Angeles landmarks on wood panels (Fig. 17).[249] Often in a palette of deep greens, greys, mustard yellows or hazy blues, Tracey would depict a geometric downtown skyline against a bleakly minimal, almost sickly, smoggy horizon. To the front of these panels, she attached eight-foot palm trees cut out of Masonite that she had painted in fluorescent tones, including reds and blues. Finally, she would stretch over each panel large strips of dyed cheesecloth so that they extended beyond either side of the frame, acting as shadowy, transparent covers across each skyline—analogues to Los Angeles's infamous blankets of smog. Upon careful study of these works at various stages in their production, several resonances with Nagatani's own thematics and working methods emerge. Like Nagatani, Tracey had experience configuring and assembling two- and three-

[247] See Warhol's published photographs in Andy Warhol, "Pieces of America: Los Angeles, California," *Rolling Stone* 359/360 (December 24, 1981-January 7, 1982): 72-73.
[248] Andrée Tracey, conversation with the author, July 2016, Minneapolis, MN.
[249] Andrée Tracey, email correspondence with the author, May 5, 2017.

dimensional tableaux, arranged to be recorded on film and later screened in the cinema or broadcast on television. In her "Smog Series," she brought to bear some of the strategies involved in translating multidimensional representations. By building upon the conventionally contained, flat surfaces of painted landscapes with sculptural elements, her work problematized the frame as a container of the image. She infused each finished, holistic object with a depth and presence proximal to the viewer's body, amplifying the set-like qualities of her paintings, as though they were almost environments in which the viewer could linger.

This theatrical, staged quality of Tracey's work had evolved in significant part from her prior professional experiences outside the studio. Having spent several years drafting storyboards for television commercials and cinema productions, she brought to her creative practice an expertise in staging arrangements of animate and inanimate subjects to be documented on film. Through her work, she developed a strong familiarity with material and optical strategies for working between two- and three-dimensional iterations of visual concepts, particularly in preparation to be mediated by a camera. At the initial stage of a commercial project (such as a television advertisement), Tracey would conceive of a storyboard, a flat, spatialized representation of a brief narrative containing sequenced frames or scenes with a set of directives for camera positions and angles. She would then observe how producers and designers transferred ideas into three-dimensional space, transforming her drawn scenes to a series of precisely designed and constructed interactions among actors and objects (typically consumer products). Finally, this network of spatial, optical, and dialogic relationships would be both transferred *and* transformed again through the camera and edited into a final time-based sequence.[250] As both a witness to and participant in these processes, she became acquainted with the psychic and affective languages behind producers' efforts to appeal to the economies of desire and capital so pervasively undergirding and determining the aesthetics of their creative enterprises. According to the artist, these experiences compelled her to consider how the

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[250] I would like to acknowledge here the influence of Rosalind Krauss's characterization of Robert Rauschenberg's collaging technique in his work as deploying an image that "is not about an object transformed" but rather "an object transferred." See Rosalind Krauss, "Rauschenberg and the Materialized Image," in *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Branden Joseph, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 50.

strategies of building artifice around an idea or product to be presented to a consumer public could be said to have an aesthetic and a politics in and of themselves.[251] As these sentiments resonated heavily with Nagatani's own, the two were a natural pairing.

In late 1983, Nagatani received an invitation to participate in a group show at the nascent Museum of Photographic Arts (MoPA) in San Diego, which had opened less than a year prior. Photographer Arthur Ollman, the museum's founding director, asked Nagatani if he would be interested in creating new work for an exhibition of photographs created exclusively inside the museum building's gallery space with a large format, twenty by twenty-four-inch Polaroid camera. Nagatani took little time in affirming his interest, knowing almost immediately that he wanted to explore and expand his abiding interests in directorial staging by building a three-dimensional, theatrically illusionistic in-situ tableau befitting the large Polaroid camera's scale. However, as this was something he had not previously attempted, he knew that the work could only reach its potential if he collaborated with someone adept at composing backdrops and building or designing props.[252] Consequently, he asked Tracey if she might be interested in working with him on constructing a scene to be photographed for the San Diego exhibition.

Around the time he was approached by MoPA, Nagatani recalls his attitudes about Los Angeles's urban landscape having been influenced by frequent sightings of temporary film sets around town: "so many films were being shot in my area, where I lived in downtown LA, that LA [was] for me all façade," he recalled in 2016.[253] The constant influx of production studios in various pockets of downtown Los Angeles, which could adeptly erect scores of ephemeral new worlds structured entirely for the camera, changed Nagatani's perspective on his residential environs over time. Eventually, his experience of the landscape became imbricated in his experience of the landscape-as-potential-set. Structures and streets always appeared primed for the camera, "ready for their close up." This likely resonated with his own experiences on television and film sets, having observed Jein's work building three-dimensional models for

[251] Tracey, conversation with the author, July 2016.
[252] Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.
[253] Ibid.

constructions that existed exclusively to be filmed. Tracey's "Smog Series," then, reflecting some of her own responses to the juxtaposition of paradisiacal palm trees and the manmade pollutant haze blanketing downtown Los Angeles at the time, resonated with several of Nagatani's own points of view. Both had been experimenting with recombinatory, multimedia strategies of representing landscape in vivid, highly evocative colors in both two and three dimensions. Both also acknowledged the city's various landscapes as platforms onto which agents whose labor reinforced economies of the entertainment industry would constantly project images laden with consumerist fantasy and desire.[254]

This network of convergences among the formal qualities and aptitudes of each artist's practice helped to shore up a robust foundation for their ensuing collaborations. An additional thematic resonance, however, helped to characterize their co-authored imagery's intellectual and sociopolitical tenor. While the thick, smoggy firmaments of Tracey's skylines conjure a distinctly unsettling urban asphyxia, to claim that they suggest "apocalypse" may be tenuous. However, in her own commentary on the series' popularity amongst Los Angeles collectors in the early 1980s, she has remarked, "people just love a good disaster."[255] Subtly approaching eschatological signification, the Los Angeles of Tracey's disasters is a self-sacrificing city, poisoned at the hands of automotive industries and its own citizenry. Utterly dependent on atmospherically injurious vehicular transportation, Los Angeles residents had little choice but to face each day by getting behind the wheel to navigate the city's freeways and residential streets, a massive circuitry that had failed spectacularly to live up to its original advocates' grandiose utopic promises of freedom and ease of lifestyle.

As if presaging these resonances among the artists' aesthetic and intellectual proclivities, Tracey had made a painting titled *Atomic Café* in 1982, one year prior to Nagatani's invitation to participate in the San Diego exhibition.[256] Like her other paintings around this time, Tracey made

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[254] Nagatani even referred to Tracey's three-dimensional paintings as "sets" during my conversation with him on July 24, 2016.
[255] Tracey, email correspondence with the author, May 5, 2017.
[256] According to my conversation with the artist on July 7, 2016, she recreated this work in 1994 and added to it a new goddess-like figure in the place of the original café server on the right side. She named the new version *Aphrodite in the*

the work in response to some of her quotidian experiences of living and working in Little Tokyo. She composed the original *Atomic Café* painting as an interior scene based on the view that the front window of the famed local restaurant afforded its diners.

This singular work would become a locus for many of the conceptual, sociopolitical, and aesthetic investments that undergirded the artists' seven-year artistic collaboration. The pair decided to use Tracey's *Atomic Café* painting as the backdrop for *Atomic Café* (See Fig. 4), their first collaborative photograph, which they constructed directly in MoPA's galleries for the 1983 exhibition.[257] According to Nagatani, his ongoing research around histories and current trends pertaining to nuclear technology, as well as his quest for better understanding of his family's narratives around internment and the bombings of Japan, were not his only impetuses for working with Tracey's *Atomic Café* painting. Given his prior chromatic experiments for *Chroma Room*, *Chromotherapy*, and *Colorful Cathedrals*, Nagatani had already concluded that red was typically the "strongest color" in a Polaroid photograph, meaning it would register with the most clarity and saturation in exposed film.[258] Given the predominant presence that a range of red hues already had in Tracey's *Atomic Café* painting, Nagatani determined that, to emphasize as dramatically as possible the depth and dimensionality of the tableau they would construct for the camera, they would focus their energies on adding exclusively red elements to the piece's three-dimensional construction.

Red is stridently present in the final photograph. Its pervading evenness, coupled with the contemplative look of repose on the central figure's face, strike a tone of uncanny calm amidst gravitational confusion, uniting the surfaces of the unmoored three-dimensional objects and human figure that appeared before the Polaroid camera. The items around the figures comprise the trappings of an eerily monochromatic, fast food still life. Plates, bottles, cocktail glasses, flatware, napkins, even noodles and French fries all appear (newly) weightless, as if they had just

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Atomic Café (Fig. 18). Unfortunately, no photographs of the original 1982 painting (before it appeared as the backdrop in the artists' collaborative photograph) are available.

[257] Also invited to participate in the exhibition, titled "Polaroid: The Big Picture," were artists including Suda House, Jack Welpott, and Nagatani's former advisor, Robert Heinecken.

[258] Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

begun to levitate above the horizontal surfaces previously anchoring them. Even the chandelier has entered a phase of spontaneous combustion; light bulbs have fractured into sharp fragments floating toward the café ceiling. Their vivid hue nearly matches that of the café banquettes, the sheer curtain, and the hexagonal shape framing the word "ATOMIC" in the window of the photograph's painted backdrop. A couple of diners sit next to the window, which looks onto a semi-abstracted streetscape. Elongated, wispy brushstrokes stretch the hoods of cars on Alameda Street to impossible lengths, conveying a sense of rapid motion momentarily halted. These meet on the horizon with a mass of multicolored strokes bursting forth from the right of the frame. This burst, or blast—an atomic blast—volunteers itself as the source of the picture's gravitational shift, as its leftward directionality echoes that of the lifted fabric on the server's uniform and that of the displaced red objects.[259]

The spatial relationship between the green "Alameda" street sign in the backdrop and the Atomic Café logo on the window gestures toward a spatial verity contradicting the physical impossibility suggested by the red objects' flight paths. Were a patron of the actual Atomic Café to be standing where the photograph places the viewer, that patron would have had a view of the intersection of Alameda and First Streets proximal to the one anchoring the painting. The street sign would have stood in virtually the same place that it appears in painted form. This nod to the spatial realities of the Atomic Café's actual location testifies to the value that each artist placed on mobilizing their art practices as loci for critical reflection on the active sociocultural structures characterizing their surroundings. Be this reflection through the lens of their subject positions as Los Angeles-based artists and participants in art world structures, or even as American citizens, Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative works consistently turned an incisive eye back to their roles as active navigators of social and physical localities. Their repeated inclusion of their own bodies and/or likenesses, along with those of their friends, families, and acquaintances, in their work implies a recognition of these spaces' inextricability from their on-the-ground kinship networks. As

[259] For Nagatani, abstraction and "the atomic" were directly connected. As he stated, "abstraction was somehow connected to idea of radiation, wind. It played against the distinct detail that the camera brought out, photographic realism." Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

several of their photographs acknowledge, economies of power, privilege, and capital often undergird and guide these social matrices. In the case of *Atomic Café*, the plates, cups, and bottles blasted into the air and bathed in red by an incoming nuclear blast pay subtle homage to the utopian spirit of the brick and mortar restaurant the work depicts. Indeed, there, young punks and struggling artists had a home, and stars like Andy Warhol had to wait in line, just like everybody else.

In all of the artists' collaborative works, efforts by subjects to navigate disparate social and physical spaces, from city streets and hubs of public transportation to domestic interiors, would typically take place in the context of either impending or actively unfolding nuclear disaster. While the figures depicted may be at varying levels of awareness or acceptance of their grave circumstances (a theme that Tracey and Nagatani often addressed with irony and sardonic humor), this underlying theme of lurking doom invokes Nagatani's diligent study of nuclear technology's vast implications for human endangerment. Often accompanying an evocation of physical danger in their work is a distinct tone of "unsettledness," highlighted by the palpable physical awkwardness of subjects' awareness (or lack thereof) of their drastically shifting atmosphere and momentary loss of gravity initiated by a nearby nuclear blast. In every instance, the ambiguous ontologies of the objects surrounding a figure never clearly implicate them as "real" or "imaginary," fixed or afloat. These objects are only sometimes recognizable in the narrative lifeworld of the image, reflecting the awkward uncertainty surrounding the subjects' lifeworlds.

The artists' decisions repeatedly to cultivate these motifs of disaster, endangerment, and unsettledness strike a particularly robust chord, given that Nagatani was actively revisiting—both before and during his collaboration with Tracey—his own family's history of firsthand experience with both Japanese internment and nuclear explosions. For generations of Nagatani's family (including Japanese and Japanese American members), schematics of both space and place, and, in turn, the social and kinship ties forged within those schematics, were fraught with experiences of forced displacement and imprisonment. Scholar Sara Ahmed's discussion of

epistemologies and subjectivities formed in contexts of migration and/or forced relocation reminds readers that these orientations are formed through the reconfiguration of space within specific economies of power. These conditions unfold as much within the self, home, or family as within negotiations and confrontations between bodies at contested and policed geographical sites, such as international state borders.[260] Under circumstances like these (whether in the case of internment or war crisis/disaster relief), any external impositions of geographical locatedness or orientation upon subjects by government or military bodies can shift and obfuscate those individuals' relational paradigms relative to the body politic at large.

For Japanese Americans who lived during World War II, any senses of "orientation" within a culture of American nationhood would be inextricably tied to their removal from their homes and lives and forced participation in highly regulated, surveilled, and isolated internment life. Resonant senses of being "unmoored" from domestic or otherwise familiar spaces, emphasized by simulated losses of gravity at the hands of fictional atomic blasts, pervade Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative works. However, for a Japanese American of Nagatani's generation, born after the conclusion of internment, his own experiences of coming of age in the United States were formed within a multitude of urban places that afforded him diverse peer networks. According to the artist himself, his feelings of "otherness" did not permeate his developmental experiences at all times, but were rather highly dependent on social contexts.[261]

One of the social contexts that would retain a consistent presence in and around Nagatani's work after he initiated his creative practice in his early thirties was that of the art world, particularly that focused within and around Los Angeles. At first, especially in his experiences preparing for and completing his MFA at UCLA, his schemas for notions of an art world community were highly focused on art world kinship structures and hierarchies specific to Los Angeles. Nevertheless, over the course of his career (both including and expanding beyond the collaborative series), Nagatani's creative efforts attest to an enduring desire to take up questions

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[260] Sara Ahmed et al., eds., *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 5. See also Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (New York: Routledge,1990), 291-322.
[261] Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

surrounding broader notions of community, nationhood, and citizenship, all of which previous generations of his family necessarily forged under socially and politically fractured, often amorphous conditions.

Nagatani and Tracey's "Politics of Disorientation"

Scholar Isolde Standish has adroitly discussed the dialectical roles that mechanisms of collective memory around the 1945 atomic bombings played amongst multiple generations of twentieth century Japanese families. According to Standish, whereas older generations may have experienced the bombings firsthand, and thus for them the events remained inextricably tied to personal associations and memories, younger generations (to which Nagatani belonged), grew up amidst highly mediated accounts of the bomb(s).[262] For these younger individuals, because of the ubiquity of its media representations, the concept of "the bomb" was more likely to be cloaked in a kind of cultural banality of which older generations could not conceive.[263] While Standish's discussion pertains to Japanese populations specifically, given Nagatani's contact with his remaining relatives outside of Hiroshima, for the purposes of this chapter I extend her logic to the Japanese American descendants of older Japanese individuals.

As Nagatani has remarked, he had been having intimate discussions with his father's relatives outside of Hiroshima before he and Tracey created their *Atomic Café* photograph based on her painting. The insights he gained from those family discussions were therefore on his mind when they initiated preparations for building their collaborative piece. As the café's own backstory and the significant presence of the café's logo in the collaborative work attest, manifestations of "the atomic" in American popular visual culture retained a significant presence, even in the

[262] This would be especially true in the absence of family discussions of these events, which Nagatani has attested were quite seldom in his family while he was growing up. See Alinder, *Moving Images*, 129-131.
[263] Isolde Standish, *Politics, Porn, and Protest: Japanese Avant Garde Cinema in the 1960s and 1970s* (London: Continuum, 2011), 47.

decades leading up to the 1980s. The morbid humor making light of atomic holocaust that pervaded the pair's work throughout the 1980s hints at the banality in Standish's discussion having pervaded both artists' attitudes toward nuclear motifs foregrounded by popular media.

Nagatani and Tracey's work, then, pursues lines of inquiry existing somewhere in between the dichotomy of personal experience and the internalization of second-hand media representations posited by Standish: the collaborative photographic series reflects *both* Nagatani's desire to seek out his relatives' personal recollections as well as his (and Tracey's) own absorption of pervasive atomic-themed representations in mass media. Nagatani's specific relationship to internment history, however, is perhaps slightly more aligned with Standish's dialectic: in the absence of family dialogue around internment experiences, Nagatani researched imagery of internment created by other photographers (evidence in his work on "Two Views of Manzanar"). Given the historically specific regulations barring internees access to photographic documentation, images of Japanese internment quite notably lacked the character of "free" and "unchecked" distribution that marks mass media reproductions. Nagatani's access, therefore, to memories, stories, images, and even evidentiary facts (whether presented visually or verbally) around both the 1945 atomic bombings and Japanese American internment shifted over time across this varied matrix of both open and closed points of access. Reflected in the variety of images that he and Tracey produced is a multifarious and multimedia relationality to these histories via his dialogue with family, his social and professional networks, and an ongoing dialogue with American media culture.

When Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative production of large-format Polaroid works increased, their time spent in itineracy increased proportionally, as they constantly traveled between Los Angeles and Boston, New York, Frankfurt, and San Diego to construct their tableaux in front of different Polaroid cameras, only a few of which existed internationally at the time. The artists' collaborative practice, then, ineludibly became one that operated in an expanded social field untethered to the city that they otherwise called home. Nonetheless, for the

majority of the time that they created works together (until Nagatani relocated to New Mexico in 1987), Los Angeles was their home base and their source of inspiration, models, and materials.

For each collaboratively executed Polaroid image, Nagatani and Tracey amassed every single prop, backdrop, and costume component, as well as all the physical armature necessary to create the desired optical effects of a given photograph, before traveling to the location where the camera designated for a particular shoot was based. If props needed to be painted (often in red to mimic the glow of an atomic blast), they were lain out on a drop cloth and spray-painted, en masse, before the pair would carefully pack them into suitcases and trunks to be loaded on an airplane bound for their destination (Fig. 19). Once the artists arrived at their destination Polaroid studio, they would begin the labor of constructing their set, piece by piece, always for the first time in its totality, directly in front of the camera. As a guide for their constructions' desired aesthetics, they would work from detailed plans, maps, and sketches, often drafted prior to each trip by Tracey (Figs. 20a-c). However, without the exact specifications and dimensions of a given studio, the pair would be unable to replicate that studio's conditions in their Los Angeles studios, and thus they fully embraced a style of working through which careful planning and extemporaneous, intuitive decision-making based on a Polaroid studio's unique conditions symbiotically propelled their practice.

Nagatani and Tracey's collaboration introduced no shortage of challenges to their working relationships with each other and their materials. The uncertainty around the act of building a tableau "unrehearsed," always for the first time in front of the camera that would record its existence, was an aspect of their production that both artists embraced. However, the physical labor required for planning, packing, traveling, carrying, and assembling all of their tableaux to work around the constraints of the large format Polaroid became cumbersome for the artists, even bordering on perverse at times. As Peter Buse explains in his book *The Camera Does the Rest*, a survey of Polaroid's history, a kind of "perversity" was literally built in to Polaroid's very existence in the field of photographic history. The advent of Polaroid apparatuses and their film exposure technology threw one great wrench into the cogs of filmic and camera technological

evolution. At its beginnings, Polaroid cameras and films were intended to cut down the number of steps in the process of starting with an unexposed film negative and ending with a reproducible positive print. As Polaroid films relied on a largely positive-only process, each Polaroid camera was thus “a machine for making unique photo-objects,” which dependably released prints that were always one of a kind, never easily subject to typical processes of photographic reproduction reliant on an indexical relationship between negative and positive.[264] Buse insists on the term “perverse” to describe a photographic technology, released commercially in 1973, “that *cannot* be copied without great difficulty…it is perverse to make work where no work should be necessary.”[265] This perversity also extended to the dimensions of premade Polaroid films, which continued to increase in size as the technology developed, rather than decrease, as did more conventional cameras and films.[266]

The popularity of Polaroid’s large format film and the use of its rarefied, unique cameras among artist photographers remains a testament to its attractiveness despite its inherently demanding requirements of use. This camera technology, first developed in 1976, helped concretize Polaroid’s relationships to dozens of contemporary artists through the corporation’s Artist Support Program, which funded the production of many of Nagatani and Tracey’s collaborative works.[267] Among artists who participated in the Artists Support Program beginning in the early 1980s was Chuck Close, who took to the 20x24 Polaroid Studio in New York run by technician John Reuter to experiment with a series of self-portraits (Fig. 21).[268] For each image, the artist would pose just inches from the camera’s lens, focusing on just a portion of his face, ultimately building, in his characteristic style, a gridded, mosaicked photographic self-portrait of

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[264] Peter Buse, *The Camera Does the Rest: How Polaroid Changed Photography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 53-56.
[265] Ibid., 54.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Polaroid developed the Artists Support Program in the late 1970s as a means of introducing the large-format technology to visual artists. In exchange for works added to Polaroid’s photography collections, artists would have access to Polaroid’s studio and materials. For more on the history of the program, see Christopher Bonanos, *Instant: The Story of Polaroid* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), 80.
[268] John Reuter was appointed principal technician for the 20x24 camera that resided in Polaroid’s New York studio in 1980. He facilitated all Artists Support Program projects executed at that studio, and worked with Nagatani and Tracey several times. For more on Reuter’s involvement in the program, see Buse, *The Camera*, 191-193.

extreme sharpness and detail.[269] William Wegman, who had begun his career as a painter, also turned to the medium of large format Polaroid photography around the same moment, in the late 1970s. In a celebratory embrace of high American kitsch, Wegman posed his pet Weimaraner dogs in anthropomorphic, semi-narrative situations, reveling in the uncanny ways his dogs could resemble people engaging in the same activities (Fig. 22). Both Nagatani and Tracey can recall crossing paths with both William Wegman and his dogs in the hallways of the Polaroid studio building, but as non-New Yorkers, they were unknown to Wegman and their exchange was limited to brief greetings.[270] Despite the number of other artists working with the same Polaroid format around the same time, because of the necessarily itinerant paths Nagatani and Tracey followed to cameras around the world, their intermingling with these other artists was extremely limited.

While they incorporated some stylistic elements of the portraiture process in their work, including the staging and posing of very particularly fashioned bodies, Nagatani and Tracey were not, like Wegman and Close, photographic portraitists. Rather, they were dedicated to the physical and conceptual building of highly constructed, narrative tableaux. These were consistently rife with morosely deployed ironies and other humorous gestures, almost always amidst a very complex spatialized topology of furniture, painted backdrops, and props, both resting on the ground and hanging from metal scaffolding by monofilament threads. The prop-based elements tethered to these threads, always left highly visible in the final photograph and always meant to convey a phenomenology of upward movement or flotation in response to a gravitational schism incited by the force of an atomic blast, remains one of the pair's most striking aesthetic conventions.

These objects' positions relative to various stationary horizontal surfaces and/or the implied ground of each image provoke a sense of flotation or unmooredness. Yet, their placement within the field of each image was highly orchestrated and carefully executed, as the artists' insistence on retaining the strings' visibility makes clear. In this juxtaposition, the artists approach

[269] Bonanos, *Instant*, 80.
[270] Tracey, conversations with the author, May 2016, and Nagatani, conversation with the author, June 2016.

a cinematic, illusory effect of gravitational loss, but do so while deliberately belying that effect's visual and physical mechanics, embracing its ontology as manufactured perceptual illusion. By leaving the monofilament threads—indexes of their physical and cognitive labor and testaments to their knowledge of lenticular perspective—visible to their photographs' viewers, Nagatani and Tracey offer hints as to the high degree of self-awareness with which they assemble the material and conceptual elements of their multi-part tableaux. In their worlds, while some objects may forgo their gravitational foundations and evoke a loss of control, the appearance of that loss of control was preplanned and painstakingly executed, deviating from plans and adjusting to unexpected conditions when necessary. The juxtaposition, therefore, of control levied simultaneous to its slippage in the artists' collaborative aesthetic resonates with the principles guiding their entire working process.

The artists' playfully ambivalent approach to control can be analogized to the ways in which objects' and figures' positions often signal spatial instability in their photographs. Michel de Certeau's discussion of distinguishing "spaces" from "places" in *The Practice of Everyday Life* can help clarify the phenomenological implications of this trope. De Certeau describes a "place" as "an instantaneous configuration of positions" that "implies an indication of stability," whereas a "space," "actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it," is a "practiced place," "situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts."[271] For de Certeau, then, a place can defined by the distinctiveness and relative permanence or consistency of its location. His notion of space is far more elastic, suggesting a configuration of conditions continually subject to change via the phenomenological flux of one's experience and perspective, as well as the vectors of movement employed by any being or thing entering, traversing, or exiting the space at a given time. The three-dimensional depth in which Nagatani and Tracey build and configure their scenes before the camera therefore comprises both competing and complementary elements of "space" and "place." While they often engage idiosyncratic features of a particular locality through signifying references such as street

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[271] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

signs and recognizable city buildings, they do so only to infuse those "place" with an overwhelming "spaceness," connoted by implicit movement (often this movement manifests itself as an index of implied vectors of atomic force entering the picture from outside the frame) and active engagement between figures and the camera.

De Certeau follows his establishing discussion of "space" and "place" by further refining ways in which slippage can occur between the two designations. For instance, he notes that the "awakening of inert objects" can catalyze such a slippage: "emerging from their stability, [these objects] transform the place where they lay motionless into the foreignness of their own space."[272] While the "floating" objects in Tracey and Nagatani's Polaroid works can be easily aligned with this description, as the artists always take care to clearly indicate the objects' former, gravitationally stable, positions clear, the transformative capacity for shifting the space/place dichotomy that de Certeau suggests retains significance in the context of their collaborations. In shifting from "place" to "space," a designated area must be subject to and incorporate into its ontology the unpredictable flux of unstable, capricious lines of force and vectors of will, imposed both from within and without. New epistemologies, available only in and through this transformative operation, lie at the heart of Nagatani and Tracey's imagery, in which large-scale disaster, while typically portrayed with a wry, humorous smile, creates a unique phenomenological arena in which any logical distinctions between "space" and "place" necessarily fail.

Within this uncertain and unstable zone, that of the paradigm-rupturing calamity, Nagatani and Tracey locate and nurture seeds of potentiality. Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* provides a useful framework for this operation. In explicating her notion of a queer "politics of disorientation," Ahmed builds on conventional connotations of "orientatedness," whose roots lie in early phenomenological constructs. She invokes Edmund Husserl's first volume of *Ideas*, in which he focuses on the writing table, the object on which his own phenomenological writing itself was developed, as an orientating device. It is from Husserl's awareness of his own

[272] De Certeau, *The Practice*, 118.

writing table's presence that he proceeds to observe the constellation of objects beyond the table directly in front of him—as Ahmed notes, the table functions as the "natural standpoint" from which the world of Husserl's writing unfolds.[273] Ahmed builds her arguments as questions and challenges to this notion of a "natural standpoint," a starting point coded as white, male, and heterosexual, by and through and response to which differing and divergent standpoints are coded as "other." In her explanation of a "politics of disorientation," Ahmed argues for forms of rebellion in the face of social and political constructs built from this "natural standpoint," that can "gather over time to create new impressions…on the skin of the social."[274] Thus by continually embracing and following inclinations arising from spaces and experiences of "disorientation," the normative powers of conventional orientations can be literally "overwritten" and recoded.

Nagatani and Tracey's work mobilizes a "politics of disorientation" in multiple ways. While the worlds in the artists' Polaroids are often under duress, vulnerable to eradication by a large-scale disaster, their work draws an analogy between the prospect of that large-scale destruction and the possible reorientation of cultural and social truths. Their figures express awareness of their utter powerlessness in the face of their world's impending annihilation, and yet few of the figures indicate any dismay at this fate. Rather, many openly welcome the moment, however bemusedly, of the "place" surrounding them becoming the "space" of atomic reordering. Within these topologies of disorientation, while the landscape may face its own imminent levelling, social and cultural hierarchies are no more stable themselves, and they become ripe for rearrangement and reorientation.

The artists' opportunities and abilities for precisely placing their constellations of props and set pieces in each of their works remain a testament to their engagement with this politics of disorientation. However, for all of the "placing" of objects and scenarios that the artists performed and over which they retained a degree of control, their constant obligation to travel between Los Angeles, where their homes and studios were located, and the various cities that hosted large

[273] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 28; see also Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), 101.
[274] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 18.

format Polaroid cameras, led to the frequent displacement of their practices, their materials, and their own bodies. Given Nagatani's focus on his family's history over the course of his career, this forced relocation inevitably resonates with that of his relatives into internment camps on United States soil during World War II. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's proposal in *Multitude* bears relevance here: the deployment of strategies such as carnival and mimicry as "new weapons" of political activism can be efficacious in the face of sovereign operations of threat so dispersed and inculcated in operative society that they are virtually invisible.[275] Likewise, Nagatani and Tracey's work features characters who embody the linguistics of cultural stereotypes and other taboos so as to readily dismantle them from within. Just as the artists embraced a flexibility in their practice that incorporated elements of chance and idiosyncratic features of a given Polaroid studio context into each of their works, the Japanese and Japanese-American figures who appear in their work also respond to a given context (typically that of a nuclear explosion) in ways that indicate an active participation in restructuring asymmetrical relations within suddenly unstable economies of power.

Collaborative Polaroids

In the analysis that follows, Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative photographs are discussed through the combinatory lens of their references to both personal experiences and experiences mediated by mass media. In a close perusal of the artists' entire collaborative body of work, a distinct pattern emerges: while an atomic blast threatens the lives of figures in nearly every case, just as often, something in the image field provides those figures some distraction from their impending demise. In examples where a protagonist focuses on an object, that object is often a media object that happens to be mediating, in "real time" within the world of the image, the very atomic blast erupting around them. In these instances, figures might show a preference

[275] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 346-347.

for attending to the mediated version of the disaster, as reported in a newspaper or on television, rather than the actual blast itself. In other images, very self-conscious references to the photographic process mediate a figure's experience of the blast. Subjects across multiple works excitedly take as many photographs (usually Polaroids) of a nuclear blast as quickly as they can. In yet other examples, advertising imagery compels figures' gazes. Signs and posters evoke urban spaces' most common means of conveyance and the most likely context in which one might encounter public advertising: in the case of Los Angeles, the motor vehicle, and its New York analogue: the subway. Nagatani and Tracey's references to the public's mass media creation and consumption habits—via physical iterations of that media itself—echo Crimp's notion of "pictures" in how they emphasize mediated imagery's exceedingly influential power over consumers' firsthand experiences of events. Departing from Crimp's logic, however, my analysis parses Nagatani and Tracey's engagement with this concept through the lens of how those habits contribute to the construction and/or deconstruction of notions of community, locatedness, and nationhood under atomic duress.

In his concise tract *War and Cinema*, originally published in 1984 and translated from the French five years later, Paul Virilio theorized an "imaging" of war, parsing the vast interconnectedness among strategies, desires, and perceptual modes within the operative functions of cameras and military weaponry. In his discussion, he reveals multiple symbiotic dependencies and benefits existing between military strategy and strategies of producing filmic recordings, such as the use of handheld cameras as sighting devices aboard an aircraft, meant to complement those attached to a pre-deployed weapon of mass destruction.[276] Indeed, an early scene in the 1982 *Atomic Café* film features Paul Tibbets, the Air Force general who piloted the Enola Gay (which dropped the atomic bomb known as "Little Boy" on the city of Hiroshima, Japan), explaining their use of this very strategy. This corroborates Virilio's contention that because the field of battle has always been tantamount to a field of perception, "the war machine appears to the military commander as an instrument of representation…the pilot's hand

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[276] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989), 1.

automatically trips the camera shutter with the same gesture that releases his weapon."[277] In this sense, echoing Susan Sontag's insistence in 1977 on conceptualizing the camera as "the sublimation of a gun," the intended target of a weapon's destructive powers becomes analogous to the subject of a photograph at the same time a camera becomes discursively weaponized.[278]

Bolstering and extrapolating this relational logic, Virilio's discussion also draws out the camera-like attributes and aftereffects of the atomic bomb itself, particularly those released on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Noting that while the flash of the detonation itself only lasted one fifteen-millionth of a second, its unimaginable brightness had the ability to alter the color of uncovered stone walls and to virtually "tattoo" patterns on flesh of those wearing decorative clothing within the flash's reaches.[279] He thus likens the bomb's subsequent "shadows," or the various indexical registers it left on surfaces registering its blinding flash, to photography, contending that the flash from Little Boy's explosion "literally photographed the shadow cast by beings and things, so that every surface immediately became war's recording surface, its film."[280]

Akira Lippit analogizes this phenomenon to the photogram, an actually camera-*less* process wherein images negatively indexical to their referent form on a photosensitive surface in response to direct exposure to light.[281] Any attempt to "authentically" produce photography of atomic war, therefore, is rendered impossible by the totality of the photography activated by the bombs, which both exceeded human economies of representation and threw into question basic understandings of visuality and visibility.[282] He invokes Jacques Derrida's emphasis on the potentiality of "total destruction" latent in the violence of nuclear war, distinguished principally by the irreversibility of its obliteration of not only human lives and human habitats, but human records.[283] Derrida thus designates the atomic bomb the "absolute referent," as its ability to enact a complete and total erasure of the archive, the basis of history and literature themselves,

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[277] Ibid., 26.
[278] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), 14-15.
[279] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 101.
[280] Ibid., 85
[281] Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis, M.N.: 2005), 93-94.
[282] Ibid., 95.
[283] Ibid., 25.

supersedes the ability of anything or anyone to take on or bestow referential status in its aftermath.[284]

With this network of correlations in mind, the parodic endeavors of Nagatani and Tracey's protagonists to photograph the detonation of an atomic bomb using "instant" Polaroid film take on new significance. While the spate of monochromatic red photographs their subjects create suggests a certain futility in attempts to document or "fix" an image of the bomb as though it were a live performance, this enterprise nevertheless flies directly in the face of comparing the victim of a blast's violence to an unwitting photographic subject. If one considers the atomic bomb epitomical in its ability to inflict both physical and visual forms of photographic violence, then attempting to photograph or document its detonation constitutes a form of in-kind resistance to that violent force. As is true in so much of Nagatani and Tracey's work, the absurdity of that logic is not lost on the artists, and their penchant for humor ultimately overrides the potential for symbolic opposition enacted in the gesture.

Of all the examples of consumable mediated imagery that represent and/or distract from immanent disaster in Nagatani and Tracey's work, the newspaper is one of the most present. As Todd Gitlin has pointed out in his analysis of news sources during periods of American social unrest in the 1960s, despite television's rise to omnipresence in homes throughout the United States over the previous decades, newspapers retained an air of credibility for evincing investigative depth that television was not structured to deliver. Despite this phenomenon, Gitlin contends, newspapers did see a decline in their circulation in the 1960s, which news agencies ascribed to the conditioning of suburban consumers to turn to television as their primary news source at that point.[285] In times of national struggle, danger, or large scale disaster, printed news outlets' decisions to tailor their front page stories and headlines to feed and capitalize on readers' heightened anxieties and desires for a given situation's latest updates become particularly telling.

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[284] Jacques Derrida "NO APOCALYPSE, NOT NOW (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives)," trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, *Diacritics* 14.2 (1984): 28; quoted in Lippit, *Atomic*, 25.
[285] Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 301-302.

The photograph featuring the most prominently positioned newspaper, *Unlikely Earthquake*, 1984 (Fig. 23), was produced by Nagatani and Tracey with a twenty by twenty-four-inch Polaroid camera at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. This image's clearly legible newspaper headline, "L.A. Earthquake Unlikely," echoes the work's title. In a midcentury style home kitchen, accented by a starburst-shaped wall clock and floral motifs on the walls and vinyl tablecloth, a female figure holds a copy of the *Los Angeles Times* on her lap as she clutches a coffee cup in her left hand.[286] She dons a robe and several large rollers appear threaded through her platinum blonde hair, perhaps a self-conscious reference to clichéd 1950s and '60s film and television tropes of archetypal American housewives' morning attire, worn to serve their husbands and children at the breakfast table. Outside the woman's window, several gaping cracks stretch across the ground outside the visible landscape, just to the left of the figure's head. The palm tree, collapsing Hollywood sign, and fractured freeway overpass (with just a hint of a Hollywood Boulevard street sign, or possibly a freeway exit sign, discernible in the upper right corner of the window frame) appear. This assembly of iconic cultural signifiers, typically invested with associations to Los Angeles as beachy, playful, carefree idyll, become immediate casualties of an ensuing natural disaster. This juxtaposition effectively reinforces the primary contradiction structuring the image's mise en scène: despite the predictive seismic science that led the *Los Angeles Times* to conclude that readers need not worry about an impending earthquake, their headline could not be more wrong.[287]

In their construction of this photograph, Nagatani and Tracey offer viewers a voyeuristic look into an initial moment of a disaster narrative: unfolding here is a woman's private experience of her home and her city becoming certain wreckage. As she witnesses the demise of a constructed Hollywood landscape outside her window, her position at her kitchen table foregrounds the active destruction of a Hollywood-inspired scene *inside* her apartment as well.

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[286] The newspaper in the image is dated April 24, 1984. There was actually an earthquake in California that day, called the "Morgan Hill earthquake," but it was centered in the Santa Clara Valley in the northern part of the state and was not felt in the Los Angeles area.

[287] Nagatani speculated on the choice to use black and white, rather than color, film for this image: "color was always in the comic section, always fantasy, wasn't the truth. Black and white was the truth. Could be one reason why we shot with this film." Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

Nagatani and Tracey's decision to photograph this scene using black-and-white Polaroid film, rather than color film, emphasizes this kitchen's similarities to those of midcentury Hollywood-produced television and film, as in the epochal domestic space of *I Love Lucy*, produced in Hollywood studios between 1951 and 1957. A comparison of *Unlikely Earthquake* and a photograph taken on the *I Love Lucy* set (Fig. 24) reveals that the two constructed kitchen scenes' similarities are just as important as their differences. Echoed between Nagatani and Tracey's constructed kitchen scene and that inhabited by Lucille Ball's character are classic features of midcentury domestic décor. Each include curtains with conspicuous ruffles and aluminum-plated appliances while the floral patterns on the tablecloth and walls in *Unlikely Earthquake* resonate with that on the chair at Lucy's kitchen table. The visible black electrical cords in each image, however, underscore very different states of order: while the one behind Lucille Ball rests limp alongside her over/stove unit, the one above the figure's head in *Unlikely Earthquake* is attached to an overhead lamp on the precipice of crashing down from a shattering ceiling. While the set kitchen in which Ball stands projects a tone of quotidian calm, that of *Unlikely Earthquake* erupts in chaos, as nearly every visible appliance, dish, tool, or container once affixed to or resting on a surface has been violently shaken from its original place. Even the food and drink once secure inside the fully stocked refrigerator and freezer presently crash to the floor.

Nagatani and Tracey have thus built a tableau wherein the forceful shakes and shocks of an improbable earthquake are the forces responsible for a nostalgic scene of once-tidy domestic Americana gone awry. The paradox emerging from these circumstances is one in which an overwhelmingly dangerous force produced by the earth itself outside infiltrates the interior architecture of the figure's fictitious apartment, a space conventionally connoting security, safety, and stability. This effect connotes Sigmund Freud's theory of the *unheimlich*, or "unhomely" (most commonly known as the "uncanny"), which architectural historian Anthony Vidler describes as the very propensity for a familiar, homely space to literally "turn" on its owner, suddenly becoming

"defamiliarized, derealized, as if in a dream."[288] This notion was of particular cultural significance, Vidler explains, at the time that Freud originally committed it to writing in 1919, when his "homeland" of Europe was in a state of drastic political regression and territorial insecurity in the aftermath of World War I.[289]

An earlier instantiation of Freud's "uncanny," approached via political violence's literal entrance into the American domestic sphere, was famously deployed in artist Martha Rosler's collage series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, 1967-1972 (Fig. 25) several years prior to *Unlikely Earthquake*. A vigorous anti-war activist, Rosler developed her series partly in response to her frustration with the insistent "farawayness" that characterized the reproduced imagery relating to the United States' involvement in military conflict in Vietnam that was distributed to American publics through mass media.[290] Rosler saw an intellectual separation between subjects of documentary images printed in *Life Magazine*, which depicted violence wrought upon both soldiers and civilians, and the advertisements and lifestyle features that flaunted the comforts of American middle-class domestic life in pages of the very same magazine. This distinction, according to Rosler, was an illusory falsehood contrived to uphold the comfort and consumer habits of a wartime capitalist economy.[291] Art historians such as Alexander Alberro have pointed out Rosler's gestures as engaging with the legacy of montage European Marxist critique (enacted by practitioners such as Walter Benjamin, John Heartfield, and Hannah Höch in the 1920s and 1930s), wherein appropriated mass media images would often be inserted into fractured, dismembered visual fields.[292] Meanwhile, Rosler herself has noted that the jarring visual thrust of her juxtapositions relied on the relative rationality and coherence of the spaces in which they were presented, so as to demonstrate that the cultural sphere in which Vietnam war

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[288] Anthony Vidler, *Architectural Uncanny* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 6. Freud originally defined *unheimlich* as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar." See Freud, "The Uncanny," in *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works,* translated by James Strachey, vol. 17 of *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London, Hogarth Press, Ltd., 1955), 220.
[289] Ibid., 7.
[290] Laura Cottingham, interview with Rosler in *The War is Always Home: Martha Rosler* (New York: Simon Watson Gallery, 1991).
[291] Ibid.
[292] Alexander Alberro, "Dialectics of Everyday Life," in *Martha Rosler: Positions in the Life World*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1999), 80.

casualties and highly designed American domestic interiors existed were indeed one and the same.[293]

Nagatani and Tracey also engaged a distinct spatial logic when constructing the interior and exterior parts of *Unlikely Earthquake* before the camera, even while they intended to convey an atmosphere of sudden tumult and gravitational upset. As in each of their collaborative images, deliberately making plain the “constructedness” of their tableau is key to their scene-building strategy. This constructedness of volumetric space announces itself in several key ways in *Unlikely Earthquake*. Tracey has deliberately articulated the landscape outside the window as a painted backdrop, devoid of any illusionistic realism. The interior floral wall of the kitchen contains a series of long, visible seams, the most conspicuous of which, behind the small white table in the center foreground, appears to open as a flap of the wall extends at an angle to the bottom of the frame. Lastly, the “falling” objects, allegedly jolted from the surfaces of tables, counters, and shelves by an earthquake’s shocks, are in fact tethered to armatures outside of the frame by many strings of highly visible monofilament. Tracey and Nagatani employ this material, a film studio staple for achieving perceptual illusions of unanchored, gravity-defying flotation, to achieve the opposite of its intended effect: they embrace, rather than attempt to conceal, its physical presence before the camera. Paramount to their highly constructed image worlds is the pair’s aim to highlight and playfully trouble typically hidden or invisible perceptual mechanics of the construction process itself.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, when the imbrications of postmodernist theory and artists’ production reached a crescendo in art world discourses, other artists practicing photography or using photographic techniques also pressed back against the typical “invisibility” of materials responsible for perceptual tricks and illusions common to advertising, film, and television image-making. This “postmodern demotion…of optical illusion,” as art historian Jenni Sorkin has termed

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[293] Martha Rosler, “Place, Position, Power, Politics,” in *Martha Rosler: Decoys and Disruptions* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 2004), 355.

it,[294] was not simply a means to reexamine or trouble photography's historic claims to truth or authenticity in new ways. It was also a necessarily *material* endeavor, underscoring the fact that staged perceptual illusion, does not exist "in appearance only," but is often necessarily achieved through material and object-based means, themselves worthy of aesthetic scrutiny.[295]

In her iconic work titled *Untitled Film Still* #6, 1977 (Fig. 26), artist Cindy Sherman famously included a deliberate nod to the material mechanics behind processes of staging subjects to be photographed. The artist announces herself as both subject and author of the photograph by deliberately allowing both the camera shutter, which she holds next to her face in her left hand, and the shutter cord, which bows out to the right of her midsection, to remain visible to the viewer. However, oft-cited as emblematic of American artists engaging postmodern impulses in the 1970s and 1980s, Sherman's work is rarely discussed in terms of the materiality represented therein, lauded rather for its conceptual feats of deconstructing received mass-media representations through acts of self-conscious mimesis.[296]

On the other hand, contemporaneous artist Barbara Kasten's participation in aesthetic discourses of postmodernism has in some cases been characterized by critics and scholars precisely for its attention to the materiality of objects appearing within the frame. The object configurations populating many of Kasten's *Construct* series often included materials and tools specific to the film industry (readily available in southern California, where Kasten resided through the 1970s to the early 1980s) like scrims, scaffolding, weight-bearing tension cords, and readymade props (Fig. 27). As curator Alex Klein has noted, Kasten's reappropriation of these materials referenced "the sheen and finish of commercial images even as they destabilized them and revealed their fragility."[297] Klein takes care to note, however, that unlike Sherman and the

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[294] Jenni Sorkin, "Tactile Beginnings," in *Barbara Kasten: Stages*, ed. Alex Klein (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2015), 156.
[295] Michael Köhler also discusses this "period aesthetic" of visually revealing the mechanics of illusion, but he discusses it specifically through image-based construction of narrative and stops short of discussing the materiality of tools used to achieve optical illusion within those narrative images. See Köhler, "Arranged, Constructed, and Staged—From Taking to Making Pictures," in *Constructed Realities*, 38.
[296] For a discussion of Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* vis-à-vis conceits of postmodernism by one of the paradigm's foundational theorists, see Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism, Part 2," in *Beyond Recognition*, 83-85.
[297] Alex Klein, "Pictures and Props," in *Barbara Kasten: Stages*, 109.

rest of the artists often referred to as part of the "Pictures Generation," for Kasten, the "picture" announced itself precisely as a site of artistic production and labor, whereas for "Pictures" artists, the concept of the mass-reproduced media image was always the starting point for their critiques of representation.

Nagatani and Tracey's imagery, frequently laden with "suspended" objects tethered to visible monofilament strands that fly in the face of photographic illusion, resonates with the theatrical materiality of Kasten's *Construct* works. Meanwhile, Tracey and Nagatani's references to the social and cultural influences of media imagery anchor much of the narrative relationships between their subjects and the objects surrounding them, putting them in conversation with Sherman and the "Pictures" cohort. The critique of representation via aesthetic tropes of mass media necessarily goes hand in hand with a critique of Hollywood and advertising industry illusionism via its tools and materials in Nagatani and Tracey's imagery, owing in part to both artists' own personal experiences on film and television sets. In *Constructed Realities: The Art of Staged Photography*, which offered a survey-esque look at artists' strategies of staging and constructing scenes to be photographed during the 1980s, Michael Köhler assigned Nagatani and Tracey's imagery to the category of "narrative tableaux," noting the artists' tendency to invoke storytelling by positioning their subjects as characters or protagonists in the configuration of their photographic mise-en-scènes. However, on account of the artists' playful inclusions and revelations of materials behind perceptual illusion and artifice, their images also become narratives about the process of their own construction. The "building of narrative," then, becomes a process of both physical and intellectual or conceptual labor, and a dynamic platform on which self-reflexively to engage the myriad ways in which meaning itself, like narrative, is constructed and simulated.

In *Shangri-LA*, 1984 (Fig. 28), a photographic triptych which Nagatani and Tracey staged and produced in at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the artists continue their practice of juxtaposing two-dimensional painted landscapes with three-dimensional figures and props so as to allow a dynamic perceptual flux that problematizes distinctions between the two. In

the center panel, where the most visual information is concentrated and thus where the viewer's gaze is first directed, the artists present a birds-eye view of urban Los Angeles. Below the famed Griffith Observatory, which sits atop one of the highest peaks in the city's Griffith Park, most of the Hollywood sign appears. Several freeway overpasses, impossible in their palm-tree dotted junctures along the panel's horizon line to the left of the central panel, stretch across the sky to the right, extending over the shoreline and out over the ocean as if they were infinite bridges. A freeway exit sign to the right directs traffic to Malibu while a cluster of buildings behind the roadway to that sign's left suggest Los Angeles's downtown neighborhood. In front of these painted passageways, several pairs of sunglasses, Frisbees, tennis balls and racquet, an orange, a figurine of a soldier on a horse, and a small toy car, all hang suspended by monofilament threads. Gesturing toward the complementarity of Los Angeles lives lived anonymously behind the wheel and those lived in very public pursuit of leisure activities, these inertly dangling objects appear both volumetrically distinct from, yet insistently imbricated in, the dizzying flux of urban seashore behind them.

A blue freight truck situated on an overpass above Hollywood Boulevard overlooks a bustling tourist district, including the famed Grauman's Chinese Theater. Its marquees bear the names of two films: *King of Hearts*, a 1966 French comedy about a small town where German forces planted a bomb during World War I, and *Atomic Café*, the 1982 experimental documentary about Cold War era atomic fear discussed earlier in this chapter. The inclusion of the film title here self-referentially signals Nagatani and Tracey's eponymous, first collaborative work. But together, both film titles suggest a continued interest between the two artists in the proliferative infusion of deadly wartime bomb narratives into popular culture. In the context of this tableau, these films have become entertainment as easy and attractive to Hollywood tourists as laying on the beach or roller skating.

As the sidewalk arches up into a sharp hill-like curve, the unmistakable stars from the Hollywood Walk of Fame extend out in front of the theater to meet the lower left corner of the central panel. Mirroring these stars is their reflective, three-dimensional gold analog, hanging

above and in front of the theater's painted façade. Across the street, two film studio buildings stand adjacent to a health spa with a red roof. Massive posters advertising films and/or their film stars line the outer wall of one of the studio buildings, perfectly positioned to catch the glances of drivers and passengers on the busy roadway. A painted representation of the legendary exemplar of novelty architecture, Tail O' the Pup, asserts itself in the lower right quadrant of the panel. Originally built at the corner of La Cienega and Beverly Boulevards in 1946, the stand appears here accented by a copy of its original sign, as well as a smattering of adjacent billboards and advertisements. Around the stand, both two and three-dimensional beachgoers, a cyclist, and a quintessential fun-seeker donning a Hawaiian-print shirt comingle with an actual pair of roller skates, semi-crushed cans of Coca-Cola, and a group of sculptural hot dogs hanging by monofilament threads in front of the panels.

The city depicted here is one awash with cartoonish, hyperbolic symbols evoking commodity-based pleasures, found both within and "floating" before a disconnected array of archetypal Los Angeles-based places. Objects like the sunglasses, frisbees, tennis equipment, and sunbather dolls exert themselves as signifiers of the personal vacation, whether claimed as a reward for labor exerted or simply as an adopted lifestyle. Neither the destinations, such as the theater or the hot dog stand, nor the asphalt passageways intersecting them, actually connect in representational volumetric space bound by illusionistic realism or perspective. Instead, Nagatani and Tracey present viewers of this photograph with a simulacrum of Los Angeles, a fractured matrix of freeways to nowhere, oversized tourist traps, and Hollywood stars (both terrazzo and human) as seductively presented as soft drink advertisements.

This notion of the simulacrum is often associated with Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations*, first translated into English just a year before the creation of *Shangri-LA*. In it, Baudrillard folds a discussion of Los Angeles and its surrounding areas into his theorization of what he terms "hyperreality." For him, Disneyland and the surrounding Los Angeles area, Disneyland's home and progenitor, are "no longer real" on account of the great lengths to which they go to present themselves as alluring phantasmagoria of the "imaginary," falsely sealed off from the "real," or

that which exists outside of them.[298] In these efforts, however, Baudrillard contends that Los Angeles and Disneyland in fact fail to conceal their true natures as the undeniable "real," just as prisons exist, Baudrillard contends, to conceal the carceral nature of the social matrix at large.[299] In effect, he terms these spaces, subsisting on the degree to which they present reality as simulation, as "hyperreal," as they do not actually falsely represent any kind of reality, but rather their primary aim of existence is to obscure the fact that the "real" is no longer real at all, but indistinguishably subsumed by sweeping sociocultural and political simulation.

For Baudrillard, the simulacrum in late capitalism can only ever be a representation or imitation of the real, yet it is not itself unreal, asserting its own status as what he calls a "deterrence machine" constantly rejuvenating the fiction of the real. The operative visual and cultural economies in which simulacra circulate are wholly entrenched within a simulated real so expansive that it "envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum."[300] Within this framework of ceaseless generation of the representational, definitive ties to any origins or reality break down. Simulation of this order becomes the hyperreal.[301]

Nagatani and Tracey approach this hyperreality through their composition of the Los Angeles centrally anchoring their *Shangri-LA* triptych. Three-dimensional objects (in some cases, representations in their own right of other, preexistent things or ideas), map the viewer's gaze across a scene dotted with these objects' two-dimensional counterparts, themselves painted representations of yet other places and cultural conventions. All of these elements crowd the dense field of an image of a Los Angeles that is not so much a city, but an unapologetic, humorous gesture embracing the innumerable ways in which the city's primary commercial networks have worked to perpetuate its own vast cultural entwinings of "authenticity" and "inauthenticity." In this matrix, the industrial culture of Hollywood film production and a leisure

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[298] Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1983), 23-26.
[299] Ibid., 25.
[300] Ibid., 11.
[301] Ibid., 2, 25.

culture of sun-drenched, beachy indulgences are inextricably bound by a network of stereotypical associations to the city, its denizens and visitors, and its major economies.

In his 1991 tract *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, critic Frederic Jameson cited downtown Los Angeles's noted tubular cluster of mirrored structures, the Westin Bonaventure Hotel as an example of architectural postmodernism par excellence. Unlike high modernism's austere fortresses aimed at inserting "a new utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign system of the surrounding city," the Bonaventure struck a more populist tone, reflecting the language of the city around it. For Jameson, the hotel's echo chamber of dizzying, dislocated interior and exterior passageways, escalators, and elevators functioned as a hyperspace, sensorially impossible to grasp in its totality from any singular vantage point, yet always inducing a sense of full immersion, whether the viewer is stationary or in constant motion.[302] Nagatani and Tracey's visual nod to downtown Los Angeles in *Shangri-LA*'s central panel does not include an obvious reference to the hotel. Yet, similarly to Jameson's Bonaventure, the Los Angeles in this work is "content to let the fallen city be in its being."[303] Nagatani and Tracey's exaggerated, tongue-in-cheek imagery depicts a fractured Los Angeles whose factional lived environments have become buffooned by the sheer magnitude of its own cultural idealization, perpetuated in large sum by Hollywood itself.

The litany of potential ironies embedded in this Los Angeles-centric dialectic of pervasive cultural myths and actual lived experiences was likely at the forefront of the artists' minds. This is particularly apparent given their decision to title their work as a portmanteau referencing both the city's name and "Shangri La," an idiom that has come to connote mythical utopias originally a fictional place described in British novelist James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*.[304] Far from an earthly paradise, this city insistently articulates its own systemic constructions of difference. At first blush, the townscape is one awash with hyper-saturated scenarios connoting capitalist desire and its

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[302] Fredric Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 39-43.
[303] Ibid., 40.
[304] For a recent explanation of the place of *Lost Horizon* in traditions of western Orientalism, see Lawrence Normand, "Shangri-La and Buddhism in James Hilton's Lost Horizon and W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6*," in Lawrence Normand and Alison Winch, eds., *Encountering Buddhism in Twentieth-Century British and American Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 37-52.

carefree gratifications. But to what demographics of potential consumers might these film and product advertisements, signs denoting commercial destinations, and theater marquees specifically appeal? Who is represented as a characteristic occupant of these spaces?

While tourists might typically flock to Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame, landmark theaters, and backlot studios for guided tours, wealthy Los Angeles residents might be more likely to frequent a beachside health spa or the skyscrapers of downtown, home to the city's financial district. The work's various beachgoers, whether in painted or figurine form, are nearly universally blonde and white, and they find their ultimate human analogue in Tracey, posing as the figure seated in the lower foreground. As if one of the prostrate Barbie dolls dangling before the central panel suddenly leapt down to the floor, anthropomorphized, here Tracey exaggeratedly plays the role of what could be a stereotypical Los Angeles resident. Her platinum blonde hair, very clearly a wig, is tucked under a visor while she sunbathes, her tanning oil hanging resolutely by her side, and chats on the phone while glancing at a copy of *Variety* with a beach ball at her feet. Nagatani, on the other hand, poses as something of Tracey's character's foil: the Japanese tourist, donning a "Japan Air Lines" messenger bag and multiple cameras strapped around his arm and neck. At the ready for that decisive moment, he clutches his camera at eye level, though he directs his glance toward the larger, life-size Polaroid camera producing the photograph for which he poses. Tracey glances downward, myopically absorbed in her own activity in the middle of the bottom frame, Nagatani stands at that image field's edge with his camera pointed towards its center, his presence simultaneously connoting "otherness" or "outsiderness," a visitor to this metropolis who traverses its sociocultural margins in the name of spectatorship and photographic documentation.

A platinum blonde wig, and intimations of other kinds of Los Angeles-specific cultural stereotyping, reappear in *Meet Market*, 1984 (Fig. 29), created in Boston. Here, despite the similar hairpieces, any direct allusions to the self-involved Angeleno who Tracey embodied in *Shangri-LA* that same year begin to break down as one notices that the agent playing this 1980s femme fatale is Nagatani himself, in cocktail party drag. This time, the blonde wears both a stylish, structural black frock and facial stubble as she casually, and even seductively, grasps a

cigarette between her index and middle fingers and a martini glass, resting on the table in front of her, in her right hand. Dozens of colorful pairs of sunglasses, echoing those accenting the central scene in *Shangri-LA*, hover around and above her, suspended by the artists' typical, intentionally visible, monofilament strands. The figure's own rose-colored glasses, from behind which she gazes directly at the camera, are wide enough to allow for several reflections of the light-diffusing umbrellas (into which strobe lights were directed) that were present in the Polaroid photography studio.

In this image, Nagatani, a cisgender Japanese American male, slips effortlessly into posing as a blonde, presumably white, female socialite nursing a drink at a Los Angeles bar or restaurant. The comfort with which she confronts the camera testifies to a distinct awareness of her own "to-be-looked-at-ness" in a social context where, as the title of the work and presence of painted and sculpted cows and pigs imply, physical attractiveness is as much a commodity as designer sunglasses, or, say, livestock.[305] The clear parody with which Nagatani approaches this persona amplifies the artifice inherent in traversing this social economy.

As has been noted by Rey Chow in her essay "The Inevitability of Stereotypes in Cross-Ethnic Representation," Fredric Jameson is relatively singular among contemporary cultural critics in his explicit stance on stereotyping as an act of cultural exchange.[306] Chow's reading of Jameson's "On Cultural Studies" understands his argument of stereotypes as, at their core, inevitable "encounters between surfaces rather than interiors," as they constitute "the outer edge of one group brushing against that of another."[307] This "outer edge" might refer to boundaries of any kind of self-defined group, whether racial, ethnic, political, cultural, religious, geographic, etc. In as much as the most resolute critics of stereotypes will always unequivocally dismiss and attack their usage, Chow contends, these critics by default must acknowledge said stereotypes

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[305] I reference here Laura Mulvey's eponymous concept, first discussed in 1975 as women's coding of their appearances for "strong visual and erotic impact" under the determining male gaze. See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 14-27.
[306] Rey Chow, "The Inevitability of Stereotypes in Cross-Ethnic Representation," in *The Rey Chow Reader*, ed. Paul Bowman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 49.
[307] Chow, "Inevitability," 52

as possessing a uniform and distinguishing set of traits, or a "unit of truth."[308] Within their refusal of that set of traits, these stereotype aggressors must ultimately "inhabit or become what they are criticizing."[309] Here Chow argues not for a comprehensive elimination of stereotypes from all linguistic and creative acts, which she likens to "a kind of (boundary and thus ethnicity) cleansing," but a reexamination of *why* stereotypes often cause such explosive controversy. They often reveal larger anxieties over a culturally-inculcated purity of language, speech, and representation, which can lend to stereotypes some of their most dangerous power: the capability of engendering otherwise non-existent realities.

Chow suggests, therefore, not a blanket refusal of the stereotype itself, which can serve to undergird its truth claim, but rather an acceptance of its inevitability. Extrapolating her logic, only an initial acceptance, as opposed to an immediate refusal, can incite a stringent examination of the language employed in a stereotype's formation, however generalized, simplistic, or formulaic. Throughout their collaborative series, both Tracey's and Nagatani's appreciation for and understanding of visual and verbal languages of humor contribute layers of complexity to the means by which they approach social constructions of identity. A rigorous assessment of the degree of obviousness and exaggeration with which they deploy stereotypes in their work, therefore, can help to illuminate their intentions to destabilize them.

In *Shangri-LA*, the artists' implementation of cultural stereotypes is rooted in their strongly dualistic construction of visual and ideational relationality, one of the most striking aspects of *Shangri-LA*'s three-part composition. This structure emerges in the dynamic among the human (and sculpted) models: Nagatani as "Japanese tourist," situated at the edge of the city's border, prepared to photographically document the city's particular allures, Tracey as "self-absorbed flaxen sunbather," poised, twirling her phone cord around her finger right in the center of the city action, and finally, John Reuter, the Polaroid studio manager and technician, as ambivalent, possibly even disgruntled, farmer donning overalls and holding a long-handled hoe. Lastly, two

[308] Ibid., 51. Chow quotes Mireille Rosello's work on stereotypes in France here. See Mireille Rosello, *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1998), 38.
[309] Chow, "Inevitability," 51.

papier-mâché pigs, their bodies mostly outside of the frame, poke their heads into the space of the image, surveying the scene, as if to expel only enough effort to ensure their disapproving glances would register in the space of the image. Though five total figures appear in the piece (counting each pig individually), each one's presence undergirds the same dichotomy of "inside" or "outside" a particular cultural and/or geographic space. Tracey, literally at the center of the "inside," directs her gaze inwardly and draws further attention to that space, while the other figures, whether directing their gazes inward, toward Tracey, or towards the camera, respond in some way to her presence "in the middle of the action." John's "discontented farmer" glowers at the camera, a clearly posed grimace on his face, paralleling those of the pigs on the other side of the piece. As "outsiders" to the bustle of the big city, presumably residents of the pastoral farm landscape flanking the central panel, the farmer and his pigs assert themselves disapprovingly as distinctly separated from the goings on inside the hyperspatialized, commodified fantasy factory that is Los Angeles in the central image.

The significance behind Nagatani's positioning at the edge of two polarized scenes lies in its gesturing to the artists' strategic exploitation of a structure of contrast: they set it up to strategically undermine it. Occupant of neither city nor country, neither entirely on the right side nor in the middle of the work, Nagatani is truly a tourist, a visitor from a place that is "other," very much outside of the simplistic opposition set up by the backdrops in front of which he stands. His messenger bag pointed directly at the camera's lens, he literally wears this "otherness" on his body, and his "otherness" is his body, that of a Japanese traveler in the United States, belonging in neither geographic category presented here. While the central panel's commercial sprawl invokes Baudrillard's simulacra, an overstimulating Disney-esque fantasy whose own density hermetically seals it off from the "real" day-to-day world of laborers such as the farmer's, Nagatani's presence as "other" at the imperfect edge of that divide both undermines the divide's polarizing power and throws a wrench in the proverbial cogs of the city as "deterrence machine." Existing in neither the city nor the farmland, Nagatani's Japanese tourist is the one figure who has

perceptual access to the "real" and the "imaginary" simultaneously, and thus singular epistemological access to this world's "hyperreality" as such.

The artists' self-conscious insertion of doubled image effects in their construction of the edge at which Nagatani stands (as well as its corresponding edge on the left) neutralize the distinction between the central panel and the ones on either side of it, thus materially activating the effect of hyperreality "revealing itself." In the upper left corner of the central image, the first "H" and "O" of the Hollywood sign are doubled across overlapping sections of the backdrop that fail to match up, thus creating a seam across which much of the imagery along both edges of the center panel is doubled. This recalls the doubled open door in Nagatani's *Chroma Room (Blue)*, which broke the space's chromatic continuity both as reproduced image in a black-and-white photograph and as that photograph's referent, an object in the room itself. In the case of *Shangri-LA*, this doubling effect is the result of an intentional decision by Tracey and Nagatani to playfully poke fun at the ways in which filmic and photographic backdrops are conventionally deployed, as allegedly "seamless" visual fields whose material edges remain hidden from the viewer. In this case, not only do the sides of the center panel reveal their doubled edges, but Nagatani also chose to include the bottom and side edges of the two exterior panels of the triptych in the frame of the photograph as well.

At the triptych's double-edged junctures, visual play between two and three dimensions is at its most physically and conceptually exacerbated, though the trompe l'oeil effect is virtually omnipresent throughout the piece. In the Polaroid studio where the work was originally constructed, *Shangri-LA* began as three individually painted panels, including the city scene and two rural scenes.[310] These canvases were affixed to the studio wall, where Tracey touched them up onsite (Fig. 30). Tracey, Reuter, and Nagatani (and the three-quarter pigs) each posed in costume front of these backdrops. As the Polaroid film's dimensions were fixed at twenty by twenty-four inches, however, the artists were obliged to work within these dimensional constraints. What resulted were three twenty by twenty-four inch Polaroid photographs, taken

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[310] While the edges of the rural scenes suggest they were once continuous, this was an illusion conjured by Tracey's painted forms in each panel.

consecutively, parallel to the wall, from three vantage points. As the dimensions of each panel did not align exactly with those of the film, what resulted were three Polaroid photographs whose interiors included some of the same imagery from the central painted panel. Therefore, what might appear to be literal overlapping edges of the photographs themselves are two distinct photographs, whose edges are hung flush on the wall, which include repeated visual information. The illusion produced, that of physically overlapping photographs, indirectly invokes the materiality of the two-dimensional photographs themselves just as it invokes the materiality of all the three-dimensional elements whose volumes, held in place by visible monofilament threads, float adamantly in their separateness from the painted backdrops behind them, only to be subsumed back into the two-dimensionality of the exposed Polaroid film. Nevertheless, subtle shadows bolster the stark relief in which the models and props stand from the flat backgrounds, continually differentiating their three-dimensional forms. In this sense, the physical presences of the backdrops, props, and models contributes to the same effect as the materiality of the visible lines of monofilament holding from which the props dangle. Holistically, this piece exists as three photographic images whose features gesture to its status as "built," both literally, by hand and physical labor, and visually, by combining disparate visual components into a single compositional space.

Resolutely at the edge, and thus at the heart, of this constant optical push and pull remains Nagatani, the photographer and overseer. His tightly gripped camera retains significance; it connotes not only his access to ways of seeing unavailable to (or unsought by) the other figures, but it signifies his role in this piece as "tourist." His decision to take on this position points, as does his own gaze, outside the frame of these photographs and into the social realm in which they were produced. As their collaborative practice was reliant on the preexisting network of geographic locations in which the small number of extant large-format Polaroid cameras were based, their practice was necessarily peripatetic. As artists, Tracey and Nagatani were, in a sense, tourists by default, led from one center of artistic production to the next by the physical requirements and constraints of their own production. In these travels, particularly in their stays in

New York City, they would become observers and intermittent participants in the financial and social markets of a city's art world.

With a lighthearted nod, Nagatani and Tracey offer rather subtle insight into their perspectives on the peculiar economies of 1980s New York City's art world in *Cornflakes, Sherman Tank*, 1984 (Fig. 31), which they shot in the Polaroid studio at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. By the time this image was created, seven years had passed since Cindy Sherman shot her first *Untitled Film Still*, the same year that Douglas Crimp penned the first version of his paradigmatic "Pictures" essay for the eponymous exhibition at Soho's Artists Space. While Sherman's work was not included in that exhibition, nor mentioned in its catalogue essay, Crimp focused heavily on her *Untitled Film Stills* series in his reprisal of the essay, published two years later in *October*. By 1984, when Nagatani and Tracey created their work, Sherman was already enjoying acclaim not only in the New York scene, but internationally, having been invited to participate in documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany, two years prior. As in her fashion horror-themed work, *Untitled #122*, 1983 (Fig. 32), she had also employed countless blonde wigs similar to the one in *Cornflakes* in her iconic self-portraits.

Cornflakes provides one of the only examples among Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative works wherein they have included motion-based photographic abstraction. Recalling the abstract brushstrokes implying brute lines of forced air resulting from an atomic blast in *Atomic Café*, here clumps of flakes affixed to parts of the backdrop are interspersed with downward vectors of quickly falling ones, forcefully thrusting the visual effect of nuclear fallout into the quotidian spaces and the objects of the home. The blonde wig at once recalls Tracey's "beach babe" persona in *Shangri-LA*, Nagatani's enigmatic cocktail drinker in drag, as well as the unlikely victim of *Unlikely Earthquake*, while it simultaneously draws an instant connection between the figure of Cindy Sherman and American Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman, who named the "Sherman tank" after himself during World War II.[311] In this image, each of these references find their nexus in a domestic space infiltrated by the political violence of

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[311] According to Nagatani, he built the model of this tank appearing on the ironing board in the Polaroid.

an atomic blast. For an artist like Cindy Sherman, already a "household name" at this point in her career, a blonde wig such as the one suspended in front of this painted backdrop might indeed serve as an everyday tool, as a paintbrush might for a painter. As in a domestic still life interrupted, fallout-as-cornflakes assumes its own humorously melancholic air of ordinariness.

Like Nagatani and Tracey, Martha Rosler, too, in her *House Beautiful* series underscored the comfortable suburban home as a sociospatial nexus for dialectics of awareness and willful denial about the United States' participation in foreign wars and unspeakable violence. As scholar Silvia Eiblmayr has pointed out, in one case, Rosler included a subtle acknowledgment of how the intermingling of wealth and the art world can be embedded in this topology as well.[312] In *House Beautiful: Giacometti*, c. 1967-72 (see Fig. 25), an upright, characteristically gaunt and dark Giacometti sculpture is positioned as if in mid-stride, departing an ornately decorated living room to survey the corpses of war casualties outside the house.

In 2016, when asked about his thoughts on Cindy Sherman around the time he created *Cornflakes* in Boston, Nagatani recalled visiting the Metro Pictures Gallery, Sherman's longtime dealer, in the year before *Cornflakes* was created. Sherman herself was at the gallery that day, conducting an interview about her work. "I'm just this nobody, and there's Cindy Sherman," Nagatani remembered thinking.[313] From Nagatani and Tracey's perspectives, artists in the "Pictures" orbit, like Sherman, were not as much peers as art world celebrities and influencers. As their visits to New York, whether for an exhibition of their work or to work at the Polaroid 20x24 Studio, were only occasional, Nagatani and Tracey felt as much like tourists exploring the art circuit there as they did navigating the streets and subways. Whereas in Rosler's work, she pointed out the interconnectedness of wealth, power, the art world, and the psychological distancing of wartime atrocities, in the comparatively modest realm of *Cornflakes*, the power of invoking Sherman as subject is derived more from a connection between the renown of her persona and the everydayness that kind of renown can acquire. At that point, her persona had become as ripe for appropriation as the starlets and fashion models who influenced her own

[312] Silvia Eiblmayr, "Martha Rosler's Characters," in *Martha Rosler: Positions in the Life World*, 158.
[313] Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

portraits. However distanced from that kind of repute and the spaces that nourished it Nagatani and Tracey might have felt, as *Cornflakes* suggests, the magnitude of an atomic blast's potentiality for destruction is enough to level any hierarchy, be it social, geographic, monetary, or otherwise.

This referential constellation, pivoting around positionalities of "Pictures" artists as art world luminaries and Nagatani and Tracey as art world "tourists," reappears in their 1986 work *34th & Chambers* (Fig. 33), which they executed at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.[314] This time, however, Nagatani and Tracey depict themselves as but single members of a thronging public sphere, characterized by an impossibly compressed swarm of New York straphangers (many of which appear as cut out mural prints, originally photographed by Nagatani) (Fig. 34). As dozens of objects emerge from gravitational matrices and levitate toward the ceiling, the crowd's diverse expressions of personality compete with the atomic blast, whose increasing pervasiveness bathes all in its path in a deep red glow. Nearly hidden, one of the only fields of almost entirely white space in the image bears a familiarly graphic and minimal composition, a bold stripe of text placed cleanly over a black and white photographic image of what are presumably a woman's hands lifting or replacing a drain stopper in a tub of water. "Now you see us," the text reads, "Now you don't." According to Tracey, this original collage work by artist Barbara Kruger, created around 1985, was reproduced as a poster and hung in multiple New York City subway stations at the time that she at Nagatani were visiting New York that year, researching and photographing in preparation for building their *34th & Chambers* piece. Tracey recalls that this poster appeared in one of her preliminary photos taken during this research phase of planning their work.[315]

While perhaps originally intended as a commentary on the vagaries of women's (in)visibility in a society that places stringent demands on their bodies' appearances but so

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[314] Tracey and Nagatani made two versions of this piece. The one discussed here is the triptych of twenty by twenty-four-inch Polaroid photographs, while the other version is a polyptych comprising four panels, each on forty-by-eighty-inch Polaroid film. While configuration of the two works, via the placement of figures and props, differs, the backdrop remains largely consistent.
[315] Tracey, email exchange with the author, May 5, 2017.

frequently banishes those bodies from spaces of power, here Kruger's message takes on a host of new connotations. It recalls Nagatani and Tracey's artist tourism, frequently embarking on travels to Polaroid camera studios that their work required. It also recalls, aided by the blanket of heavy red light creeping in from the right side, the notion of invisibility suddenly imposed by the blinding flash of an atomic explosion. This invisibility, of course, only gives way to an immediate, penetrating visibility: that of the devastating effects, imprinted on minds, bodies, and landscapes, that a blast can leave in its wake.

The interstitial, fleeting temporal zone between an atomic bomb's detonation and consequent epistemology of the "disaster" is arguably the space in which many of Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative works function. Their works stretch open this moment, offering viewers a glimpse of glowing red insides. An interest in imaging the time-space of an atomic blast is certainly not limited to Nagatani and Tracey's photographic proclivities, however, as is evidenced by the countless film and photographic recordings of the infamous "mushroom cloud" formation that populates the international postwar cultural imaginary. The pair of artists also seek to problematize the impulse literally to capture this moment, to make consumable and reproducible that which has the capacity to destroy all visuality, and thus the cultural and intellectual value ascribed to the archive.

In the rightmost photograph of the *34th & Chambers* triptych, one can find Nagatani, his face in profile, painted red, facing the right side of the image. Directly in front of his nose hangs a Polaroid camera, also spray-painted red, around which an array of four Polaroid photographs fans out. The photograph closest to the camera displays an image of a mushroom cloud, awash in red. Moving away from that picture, the following three images show only an increasingly dark, deepened tone of red. The fourth image is nearly black, with only faint crimson undertones. To examine each of these Polaroid photographs is to witness a successive ironizing of the anticipation and desire for photographically recording, and thus mediating, the spectacle of an atomic blast. Whatever claims to truth one could hypothetically impute to these photographs, the totalizing devastation wrought by the blast would unfailingly render their mediating value moot.

In 1986, Nagatani and Tracey further amplified their parody of bomb documentation in *Alamogordo Blues*, 1986 (Fig. 35), which they photographed at Photography Forum Frankfurt, Germany. Prior to this photograph's construction, in his research on nuclear history Nagatani had discovered a black and white archival photograph, (Fig. 36) dated to the mid-1940s. The photograph featured a small assembly of audience members, each wearing large goggles, seated in rows of Adirondack chairs on a barren landscape. What they were viewing, however, is outside the frame of the image. Nagatani would later have this image published alongside *Alamogordo Blues* in the 1987 catalogue published by Tokyo's Gallery Min, dedicated to his and Tracey's collaboration. While the photograph's origins were unknown to Nagatani at the time, according to National Geographic, the original image dates to 1951 and was created by the United States Air Force. It features a group of "V.I.P." observers, invited by the United States military, to witness a nuclear bomb test on the Enewetak Atoll, a coral atoll roughly 2,000 miles southwest of Hawaii in the Marshall Islands, part of the larger Pacific Ocean island group of Micronesia.[316]

From 1946 to 1962, during the Cold War's earlier years, the United States tested sixty-seven nuclear weapons at Pacific Proving Grounds, a cluster of sites in the Marshalls. Rather than referring to them as "testing grounds," the diction of "proving" implied an effort to "show" and "display," to make other nations, particularly those under Communist control at the time, aware of the weapons of deadly force at the United States' disposal.[317] Between 1919 and 1945, the Marshall Islands were under the governance of Japan, who ceded control of the territory to the United States at the end of World War II. At that point in the Marshalls' history, inhabitants of Japanese descent in the area outnumbered native Micronesians by two to one.[318] In 1951, as part of the military campaign named "Operation Greenhouse," four weapons were detonated on

[316] Keith M. Parsons and Robert A. Zaballa, *Bombing the Marshall Islands: A Cold War Tragedy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 34.
[317] Mark D. Merlin and Ricardo M. Gonzalez, "Environmental Impacts of Nuclear Testing in Remote Oceania, 1946-1996," in *Environmental Histories of the Cold War*, ed. J.R. McNeill and Corinna R. Unger (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 170.
[318] Irene J. Taafaki, Caleb McClennen, Frank R. Thomas, and John Bugitak, "Majuro Atoll, Marshall Islands," in *Extreme Heritage Management: The Practices and Policies of Densely Populated Islands*, ed. Godfrey Bladacchino (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 177.

the Enewetak Atoll, one of which the crowd in the black and white photograph had gathered to witness.

Nagatani and Tracey recreate the scene from this Air Force photograph in *Alamogordo Blues*, altering several key features. The artists assembled the makeshift theater in front of a painted backdrop depicting the New Mexican desert near the city of Alamogordo. This city is significant for its proximity to the Trinity Site, just miles away from Alamogordo in the Northern Chihuahuan Desert, which served as the location of the world's first atomic detonation test on July 16, 1945. Each of the photograph's subjects, whose skin has been painted blue and whose ties are being blown back by the force of an atomic explosion, are of Japanese descent, and each one, seated in a blue Adirondack chair, holds a Polaroid camera. According to Nagatani, the models who originally posed for him included his brother, Scott, near the left side of the frame, his other brother, Nick, in the middle, and on the right, his longtime dentist. Their likenesses were printed as black and white mural prints, which were then hand-colored. These were placed in front of the painted background for the final Polaroid).[319] These men, who history suggests could be victims or the descendants of victims of nuclear violence, here appear eager to attain as many shots of the action unfolding before them as possible. Similarly to how Nagatani and Tracey treated the subject of Polaroids in *Red Piece* and *34th & Chambers*, here a few photographs of the mushroom cloud itself are followed by other photographs registering only shades of pure red. In a forlorn play on the conceit of the "theater of war," these theatergoers fruitlessly fulfill their need to mediate the show, but after the blast the show is only an overwhelming monochromatic color field, yielding exposure after exposure of nothingness.

Nagatani, posing as photographer in the face of a nuclear blast, as well as the Japanese men seated their Adirondack chairs calmly snapping Polaroids of a mushroom cloud and its blinding, virtually invisible afterglow, may very well be aware of the futility of their actions. However, in their efforts to photograph one of the most destructive and violent forces ever crafted by humans, terrifying in its capability to render (via photographic means, no less) their cultural

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[319] Nagatani, conversation with the author, July 2016.

archive null, their own archival impulses remain steadfast and strong. In their refusal to simply accept fates as indexical casualties to the bomb's destructive potential, they insist, however fruitlessly, on their investment in another entity, also totalizing in its power: the mediated image.

This "blind," overenthusiastic attachment to the mediated image resurfaces in a photographic series by Nagatani and Tracey that they titled *Radioactive Inactives*, executed in the artists' Los Angeles studios between 1987 and 1988. In these works, however, they turn their critical, analytical, and camera lenses onto the television, instead of the film camera itself, as subject and mediator of experience. As in several of the previously discussed works, the private domestic space serves in *Radioactive Inactives* as the predominant arena in which socially produced and maintained beliefs, desires, and subject positions are catalyzed and performed via the television as a source of engagement with the world.

Each image in the series presents a tightly-framed view of its subjects, all of whom present themselves as television viewers, seated facing the camera with their eyes locked on the screen in front of them. The televisions they watch are always framed from behind so that just the top of the set remains visible, often with an antenna protruding into the image field. While the longitudinal orientation of the frames and central placement of each subject suggest reminiscences of photographic portraiture, the objective intrusion of the television set in the foreground of each image disrupts those associations. Unlike more conventional photographic portraits, wherein subjects demonstrate some awareness of the camera's presence, each of these human subjects appear to have been photographed in a candid, uncannily private moment. In *Radioactive Inactives*, the relational, hypnotic act (or, in these cases, inaction) that unfolds between each individual and the television they watch, becomes the subject of each photograph.

The title of each work informs the viewer of the photograph of the geographic location in which the subject lives and thus receives television programming. Within each frame, the artists have included a variety of decorative, domestic signifiers alluding to the subject's fictional lifestyle, often playing to common American stereotypes around inhabitants of a given city or part of the country. Without fail, just behind subjects' heads, a window offers a view out onto what

would typically be a landscape evocative of the city or state in which they live. However, in each case, this landscape has taken on the cherry-red tinge of so much of Nagatani and Tracey's atomic blast imagery, and somewhere within the frame-within-the-frame of their window is an iconic mushroom cloud. Inactivity, therefore, is these subjects' deadly vice: their transfixion as television viewers has rendered them so inert that even an atomic blast could not jolt them from their favorite chairs.

In *Apartment 22C, New York*, 1987-88 (Fig. 37), a young man and woman fix their gazes on their television screen, whose antennae jut out into the visual field of the photograph, in a dark, minimally appointed room. Their dark clothing echoes the hues of their surroundings and a camera, installed on a tripod lending it an air of photographic professionalism, leans to the left side of the frame. Implying that one or both subjects is an artist or photographer, and thus possessor of a creative gaze, the camera's awkward diagonally-tipped orientation renders it as inactive as its potential owners. Behind them, their uncovered window displays the Empire State Building, bathed in scarlet, as a mammoth mushroom cloud rises to its right. *Sioux City, Iowa*, 1987-88 (Fig. 38), offers a very different scene, occupied by a young woman in a ruffled, floral print dress holding an open cosmetic compact and lipstick, indicating that the bomb detonation, clearly visible in her own neighborhood, has caught her in the middle of applying her makeup. The ruffles of the sheer curtains adorning the window echo that of the woman's dress as they sway with the force of the blast; a telephone of robin's egg blue and a lamp with a mauve-colored shade have both just begun to lift from the surface where they originally sat. A small collection of additional cosmetics line the same table and an open issue of *Self* magazine, lying face down, adorns the woman's white television set. Behind her, the window perfectly frames the familiar cloud, which rises just behind the modestly designed ranch-style house across the street.

When viewing several of the works from this series together as a group, one can easily imagine that each of the subjects, glued to their television screens, experiences the blast visible from their windows simultaneously. Given the variety of their individual locations, simultaneously viewing the same mushroom-shaped cloud with such clarity would undoubtedly be impossible,

yet the consistency with which they are portrayed interpellates them into a temporal construction of simultaneity. However misleading that assumption may be, it echoes the falsity underscoring the singular constituency, holding a consistent set of beliefs and values, into which any viewer of television may be interpellated given the simultaneity in which vast numbers of viewers receive the same exact information, channeled through the same medial vector. As scholar Stephen Heath contends in his essay "Representing Television," in the era during which broadcast networks maintained the televisual lingua franca, a majority discourse was always guaranteed among networks' viewership and their instantaneous mass.[320] In an unconventional reversal of this perceptual chain, Nagatani and Tracey eschew the aesthetics of televisual content itself in *Radioactive Inactives* and instead, beginning with television viewers themselves, endeavor to complicate an aesthetics of the act of television viewing itself.[321]

As they do in many other works, Nagatani and Tracey's subjects embody stereotypes in order to subvert some of the means by which they are created. Their subjects' complete engrossment in their television displays, despite a catastrophe of world-annihilating proportions unfolding just outside their windows, hints at an element of identification, fueled by attention, with that which they see on screen. As long as their televisions continue to broadcast images and sounds and viewer can internalize those images and sounds, then the viewer's correlative ontological integrity is also maintained. The stereotypes deployed in each piece are clear: the pair of New Yorkers are artists/photographers whose appearances and domestic lives are minimally aestheticized; the young woman from a lower-middle class Midwestern neighborhood looks to a nationally-circulated beauty and fitness magazine for directives on achieving studio-designed aspirational looks. While they may evoke divergent personas, in both cases they circulate around commodities: a camera, makeup, a magazine, and of course, the television, constant purveyor of advertisements for commercial products.

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[320] Stephen Heath, "Representing Television," in *Logics in Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 277.

[321] Resonances along this line of inquiry emerge in Dan Graham and Dara Birnbaum's collaborative 1980 video titled *Local TV News Analysis* (Fig. 39). Footage of a tv station control room is interspersed with that of a living room in which a family watches the footage being broadcast by that same station. Like Nagatani and Tracey's *Radioactive Inactives*, this project conceives of an aesthetics of tv production, but simultaneously juxtaposes it with that of its consumption via the same media stream.

This commodity schema is imperative to David Joselit's argument around the televisual system's evolution beyond the twentieth century in *Feedback*. As a series of interrelated image ecologies, Joselit posits this system as a rational and irrational platform and progenitor of public discourse via both verbal and visually-based languages in a constant feedback loop of distributed objectivity and subjectivity. Central to this circuitry is television's channeled motion as an "infinite repetition of the commodity's primal scene as the foundation of American sociality."[322] The commodity lies at the heart of televisual audiences' experiences: networks narrowly channel their viewing so as to extract as much profit as possible from them. Even the networks themselves are functions of this matrix, enabling profits by the electronics corporations who produce television sets.[323] The construction of *Radioactive Inactives* hyperbolically imagines one of the most dangerous aspects of this unbroken circular chain of commodity-based desire and identification: despite impending demise, each viewer remains devoted to their screens, where strategic placements of consumer goods appeal to their desires to identify and align themselves with the lifestyles that advertisements promote. As Mary Ann Doane has contended, "television is the preeminent machine of decontextualization."[324] Its bites of content (commercials, serial programs, newsflashes) are decontextualized from one another, while viewers, in their identification with scenarios built into these disparate bites, become decontextualized from their immediate socialities. While an atomic blast could endanger a desired "lifestyle" of any kind, as long as the television continues to transmit pleasurable imagery appealing to those desires, the viewers, surrounded by the purchases designed and advertised to propagate their lifestyles, loyally fulfill their roles.

By the time the pair initiated *Radioactive Inactives*, Nagatani had left Los Angeles for Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he started an assistant professorship in the Art Department at the University of New Mexico in 1987. They would continue to plan, pack, build, and photograph work until 1989, when the distance between their respective homes and studios as well as the

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[322] David Joselit, *Feedback* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 2007), 40.
[323] Ibid., 17.
[324] Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," in *Logics in Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 225.

advancement of each artists' personal careers made their collaborations too logistically difficult to continue.

Conclusion

In 1951, painter Willem de Kooning offered his own assessment of a radical visuality afforded by the atomic bomb, stating that "…the light of the atom bomb will change the concept of painting once and for all…for one instant, everybody was the same color."[325] For de Kooning, fundamental to the atomic spectacle and its future implications for the nature of representation was not based on how the explosion itself unfolded before the eyes of onlookers, but how its blinding flash momentarily evacuated populations of their superficial differences, rendering them raceless.[326] A retrospective look at Patrick Nagatani's career up to his collaborations with Andrée Tracey reveals a consistent refusal, always in good humor, of this universalizing impulse, which seeped even from western modernist discourses into those of its "post-" formations. In his early career, Nagatani engaged perceptual and affective registers of color in order to examine phenomenologies of light within, around, and between bodies, forged through notions of individuated subjectivity and difference. His collaborations with Tracey highlighted experiences of Japanese and Japanese Americans in histories of atomic warfare and testing in order to engage a radical visuality that would undercut the universalizing impulse inherent in both postmodernist discourses of and the wartime imaginary's "world target."

[325] Willem de Kooning, "What Abstract Art Means to Me," in *Collected Writings*, ed. George Scrivani (New York: Hanuman, 1988), 60.
[326] Lippit's assessment of this quote was helpful here; see Lippit, *Atomic Light*, 82.

Always committed to problematizing the constructedness of space, these works invoke a "politics of disorientation." They reveal a complex set of connections between the physicality of the artists' erected tableaux, their navigation of multi-city travels from large format Polaroid camera to large format Polaroid camera, and the means by which social and cultural distributions of power organize bodies in sociographic zones. Whereas forced relocation and imprisonment were means to levy control over Nagatani's Japanese American ancestry during World War II and atomic bombings and tests forced the mass displacement of populations from Japan to Micronesia, in Nagatani and Tracey's collaborative efforts, displacement becomes a mode of resistance. In their eschewal of Henri Cartier-Bresson's photographic "decisive moment," which undergirded so many theorizations of twentieth-century documentary photographic practice as that of a roving photographer scouring the world for his subjects, Nagatani and Tracey embraced itinerancy of another kind.[327] Their cameras remained inert and the artists, with their work stuffed into suitcases and boxes, became necessarily mobile. In so doing, their practices refused to adhere to predominant art world power structures and economies, opening possibilities for new kinds of relational modes and ties of kinship between "centers" and "peripheries."

[327] Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952).

CHAPTER 3: TAKING THE STAGE: LORRAINE O'GRADY'S PERFORMATIVE PHOTOGRAPHIES

On the evening of June 5, 1980, a tall, slender woman in a floor-length gown adorned with 180 pairs of white leather opera gloves (Fig. 1) burst into a dense but otherwise polite New York City art gathering.[328] The crowd had assembled for an exhibition opening reception at Just Above Midtown gallery (JAM), an alternative art space on Franklin Street in the neighborhood of Tribeca, established and directed by filmmaker, artist, and educator Linda Goode Bryant. The exhibition, titled "Outlaw Aesthetics," featured "installations and performances created by artists and often requiring viewer participation to be complete," according to the brochure.[329] Yet, the presence of the woman in a glove-laden dress was a neither a sanctioned portion of the evening's events nor of the exhibition's official roster. This majestic party crasher was in fact Boston-born, New York-based, first-generation Caribbean American artist Lorraine O'Grady, performing as her persona "Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire" (which O'Grady translates to "Miss Black Middle Class").[330] For several months prior to this event, O'Grady had been volunteering at JAM, assisting with gallery operations, and had become enmeshed in its community of artists, collectors, curators, and directors.[331] She had not yet, however, shown her work there in any official capacity.[332] Her unexpected, fully-costumed intervention into JAM's festivities that evening would serve as a watershed moment, marking her public debut not only as an artist within a gallery space, but as an iconoclastic 1980s New York art world figure.

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[328] Andil Gosine, "Sex in the Clearing," *Alternatives* Vol 36, No. 6 (2010): 34. The gloves were all sourced at Manhattan thrift shops, according to O'Grady. See Linda M. Montano, "Lorraine O'Grady," in *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 404. The gloves averaged ninety-nine cents per pair, according to the artist's project records. See O'Grady, "Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire," Hand written project notes, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 1. (Fig. 2)
[329] "Experience Outlaw Aesthetics," Exhibition brochure, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 1.
[330] James Voorhies, "Where Margins Become Centers," in "Lorraine O'Grady: Where Margins Become Centers," Exhibition brochure, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Oct. 29, 2015-Jan. 10, 2016.
[331] O'Grady notes that she worked on public relations materials for the gallery. See Lorraine O'Grady, "This Will Have Been: My 1980s," *Art Journal* (Summer 2012): 10.
[332] Franklin Sirmans, "No Safety Net: Lorraine O'Grady and Performing in Public without Sanction," in Valerie Cassel Oliver, ed., *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2013), 34.

Goode Bryant originally founded Just Above Midtown in 1974 amidst a palpable dearth of opportunities for black artists to obtain gallery representation within New York's commercial art circuit.[333] Formerly a Metropolitan Museum of Art Rockefeller Foundation fellow, Goode Bryant had cultivated far-reaching influence and social networks among New York's black art communities over the course of the early 1970s.[334] When JAM opened its doors, it became the first gallery to exhibit African American artists' work in any major New York gallery district.[335] According to Goode Bryant, it was imperative for her at the time that artists of color working in New York have more opportunities for exhibiting their work, and that discourses around work by those artists expand beyond common recourse to sociocultural, identitarian optics. Through JAM, Goode Bryant sought to engage the work of non-white artists whose experimentation with disparate materials, time-based media, and performance could both eschew and exceed these recursive frameworks. She hoped JAM's programming would instigate conversations placing these artist subjects within contexts of the contemporary art world at large, as peers of their white artist counterparts (whose success dominated that world at the time).[336] Goode Bryant began building a stable of practitioners whose work she saw as aligned with these aims. By 1979, artists associated with JAM included David Hammons, Senga Nengudi, Howardena Pindell, Betye Saar, and Lorraine O'Grady, whose 1980s work is the focus of this chapter.[337]

Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's disorderly appearance at Just Above Midtown's "Outlaw Aesthetics" opening would be the first of two such art opening invasions.[338] O'Grady had conceived of her character over the course of several weeks preceding its inaugural manifestation. She developed it partly in response to what she felt was an overly cautious

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[333] Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley, "Just Above Midtown," in Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley, eds., *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (London: Tate, 2017), 128.
[334] Aruna D'Souza, *Whitewalling* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2018), 69.
[335] Linda Goode Bryant, "Recollection," in *Soul of a Nation*, 236.
[336] Ibid.
[337] All of these artists were included in the 1978 publication for the unrealized JAM exhibition "Contextures." See Linda Goode-Bryant and Marcy S. Philips, *Contextures* (New York: Just Above Midtown, 1978). For more on artists associated with the gallery in the late 1970s, see also Godfrey and Whitley, "Just Above Midtown," 128-129, and Rujeko Hockley, "Just Above Midtown Gallery," in Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley, eds., *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-85: A Sourcebook* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 2017), 135-138.
[338] The second performance, at the opening of "Persona" at New York's New Museum in September 1981, will be discussed later in this chapter. For more on the "Persona" exhibition, see the exhibition catalogue: Lynn Gumpert and Ned Rifkin, *Persona* (New York: The New Museum, 1981).

approach to art-making, often with recourse to established tropes of abstract painting, taken by many of her black artist peers in New York at the time.[339] Deeming this type of work "art with white gloves on," she envisioned Mlle. as a literal embodiment of that critique: "a satirical international beauty pageant winner with a gown and cape."[340] Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire was a charming, yet sharp-tongued critic of her own social ecologies, a recalcitrant glamour girl whose keen social commentary, articulated through poems that she recited aloud during each performance, zeroed in on divisive racial dynamics inflecting economies of privilege and access across New York's art world networks.[341]

In addition to her own elbow-length white gloves, she donned a sparkling tiara and a sash that read "Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire, 1955" (the year that O'Grady completed her undergraduate degree at Wellesley College).[342] As she sashayed among the crowd, she acerbically delivered poetry, distributed thirty-six white chrysanthemums to bemused spectators, and flagellated herself with a white cat-o'-nine-tails.[343] Accompanying her was an entourage comprised of an escort dressed in a full tuxedo, whom O'Grady called her "Master of Ceremonies," as well as "photographers, video cameramen, a disco band, and guests," who played the roles of, according to the artist's written account of the performance, Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's "court and subjects."[344] "Photographers and videomen are having a field day," O'Grady's

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[339] O'Grady described this feeling in response to seeing the exhibition "African American Abstraction," on view at P.S.1 in New York between February 17 and April 6, 1980, which she deemed "art with white gloves on." See Montano, "Lorraine O'Grady," 404. I would like to acknowledge here Kellie Jones' exhibition and publication *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964-1980*, which establishes and elaborates upon key contributions made to histories of abstraction by black American artists. Jones acknowledges critiques like O'Grady's, often levied by other black critics, who saw these artists as attempting to make "white art." Jones argues that this serves to double down on the exclusion of black artists already performed by white critics and curators. As my chapter is focused on O'Grady and O'Grady's perspectives, however, my logic follows O'Grady's impressions of the "African American Abstraction" exhibition specifically in terms of how they catalyzed her own work. Jones' overview of black abstraction indeed offers a salient counterpoint to O'Grady's assessments at the time. See Kellie Jones, ed., *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction* (New York: Studio Museum, 2006). It should be additionally noted that the P.S.1 exhibition has also been referred to as "Afro American Abstraction" in other sources. See Uri McMillan, "Introduction," in *Embodied Avatars* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 2.

[340] Montano, "Lorraine O'Grady," 403/401.

[341] The poems that O'Grady recited during her performances at Just Above Midtown and The New Museum will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

[342] In her own discussions of her avatar, O'Grady analogizes her graduation from Wellesley to Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's coronation "in Cayenne, French Guiana, the other side of nowhere." See Lorraine O'Grady, "This Will Have Been," 13.

[343] The specific poems that Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire recited at each event will be discussed later in this chapter. See Lorraine O'Grady, "This Will Have Been: My 1980s," 13.

[344] Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire 1955: Just Above Midtown/Downtown, New York City, New York." Performance notes, June 5, 1980. Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 1. These fictitiously embellished notes of O'Grady's performance at JAM were later published as an "artist's chronicle" piece

notes read, "Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire…is very photogenic. Unreluctantly, she obliges them."[345] The bombastic collective presence of these actors and agents in the gallery space indubitably reinforced the performance's spectacular nature. However, O'Grady's very specific gestures to the act of documenting the performance on film suggest that photography occupied a place of fundamental significance in Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's oeuvre. O'Grady portrays her accompanying documentarians' frenzied vying for choice shots of her beauty queen, as well as her unabashed embrace of being caught in their camera flashes, as part and parcel of the performance itself. The camera, in turn, is positioned as a fulcrum in this relational matrix amongst each of these agents. By foregrounding the camera apparatus, these descriptive flourishes assert a specifically *photographic* performativity, by which the acts of photographing and being photographed campily signal epistemologies of desirability and notoriety commonly accorded to celebrities and/or art stars. This photographic performativity, I argue, emerges as saliently as the performance's live visual and aural components, such as the actors' costumes and accessories, Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's poetic oration, and her direct encounters with spectators, all of which are much more frequently discussed by scholars and critics than the extant photographs.

While building on preexisting literature, this chapter tackles crucial scholarly omissions around the role of the photograph in O'Grady's 1980s performance oeuvre. My analysis demonstrates how two of the artist's performances, *Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire* (1980-81) and *Art Is…* (1983), implement a capacious notion of photography that simultaneously occupies ontologies of live performance, documentation, and the art object, thereby destabilizing oppositions between the performance and its reproduction.[346] Through these overlapping

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in *High Performance* the following year. See Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire 1955," *High Performance* Vol. 4, No. 2 (Summer 1981): 56.

[345] Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire 1955," *High Performance*, 56.

[346] I borrow here from Fred Moten's discussion of this phenomenon of destabilization between performance and its reproduction, which he sees as prefaced by an assumption that "the critical-mimetic experience of the photograph takes place most properly within a field structured by theories of (black) spectatorship, audition, and performance." See Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 197-198. Azoulay's "civil space of photography," as described in Chapter 1, is also useful for considering this notion of ontological overlap among photography, performance, and reproduction. For Azoulay, photography's "civil space" is comprised of a relational network of sociopolitical flux circumscribed by access to and participation in the creation of photographs, regardless of geopolitical circumscriptions of citizenship status. Considering Moten in the context of Azoulay, O'Grady's use of photography as assessed in this chapter could be said to claim new modes of art world civic participation for black creatives and spectators.

photographic modes, O'Grady and her collaborators appropriate conventions of (both artistic and photojournalistic) documentary image-making. In turn, I argue, their performances animate spaces wherein photography can yield new notions of blackness extrinsic to regulation by normative art world socialities. The following analysis positions the still camera and other framing devices utilized in these performance works as loci for resistive interventions into art world cultures whose predominant theoretical debates (including those propagated by Pictures-affiliated critics) have historically excluded black Americans has agents of their own representation.

O'Grady's practice was predicated in large part on the artist's own life experiences and frequently responded to the socioeconomic frameworks that structured her geographic environments. In turn, *Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire* and *Art Is…* confront cultures of New York art world racism head on. They raise challenging questions around how these cultures were not just socially, but spatially, propagated, both by agents of race-based oppression and by those subject to disenfranchisement. As Katherine McKittrick has contended, post-1492, the mutual construction of identity and place has spatialized blackness as a "human Other category" that necessarily exists, or lives in, "what has previously been conceptualized as unlivable and unimaginable" by a paradigmatically normative white, western, heterosexual worldview.[347] O'Grady's performances, intervening into primarily white and primarily black art world spaces, throw into relief how these sociohistorical processes undergirded systemic practices of art world segregation. This chapter locates the spaces in and through which oppression, disenfranchisement, and resistance operated not only in physical localities, such as Just Above Midtown and Artists Space, but also in discursive platforms, such as the preeminent *October* journal and the radical feminist publication *Heresies*. O'Grady's performances, which directly intervened into these spaces, were analogously physical and discursive themselves.

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[347] Kathleen McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 130. McKittrick extrapolates Sylvia Wynter's reassessment of post-Enlightenment paradigms of humanness formulated through constructions of racial alterity along geographic lines. See Wynter, "1492: A New World View," in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 5–57. For recent commentary that synthesizes both authors' work in the context of urban development trends specific to post-Katrina New Orleans, see Bench Ansfield, "Still Submerged: The Uninhabitability of Urban Redevelopment," in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015), 124-141.

Within the relatively small body of extant secondary literature on O'Grady's performance corpus of the 1980s, authors largely assess her work within late-twentieth century lineages of performance and discourses of institutional critique. Art historian Judith Wilson, for instance, published one of the first "extended and incisive pieces on O'Grady's oeuvre," according to the artist, in the publication accompanying O'Grady's first solo exhibition in New York. The exhibition, "Lorraine O'Grady: Photomontages," on view at INTAR Gallery between January and February of 1991, actually featured only "photodocumentation and photomontages" culled from prior performance works.[348] Despite the physical presence of O'Grady's work in the galleries as photography, Wilson's discussions namely meditate on the ontologies of O'Grady's projects as performances.[349] O'Grady identifies the second major article on her work as "The Poem Will Resemble You," published in 2009 in *Artforum* by artist Nick Mauss.[350] While noting the "hybridity" and "multidisciplinary mode of disruption and criticality" characterizing so much of O'Grady's practice, Mauss (similarly to Wilson) relies on photographic documents of the work as loci for analysis without specifically acknowledging the photographs as works themselves.[351] In 2015, scholar Uri McMillan opened his introduction to *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* with a brief account of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's performances at JAM and The New Museum. He devotes no in-depth discussion, however, to O'Grady's work beyond these pages.[352] O'Grady declares Stephanie Sparling Williams' 2016 assessment of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire and 1983's *Art Is…* (the same two performances on which this chapter focuses) as the first major academic article on her work.[353] Williams' treatment of the photographic objects

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[348] "Book & Catalogue Essays," Lorraine O'Grady artist website, accessed Sept. 18, 2018, http://lorraineogrady.com/category/press/book-catalogue-essays/.
[349] See Judith Wilson, "Lorraine O'Grady: Critical Interventions," in *Lorraine O'Grady: Photomontages* (New York: INTAR Gallery, 1991).
[350] "Journal Articles," Lorraine O'Grady artist website, accessed Sept. 18, 2018, http://lorraineogrady.com/category/press/journal-articles/.
[351] Nick Mauss, "The Poem Will Resemble You," *Artforum* Vol. 47, No. 9 (May 2009): 185.
[352] McMillan focuses his chapters on the work of Joice Heth, Ellen Craft, Adrian Piper, and Howardena Pindell.
[353] "Journal Articles," Lorraine O'Grady artist website, accessed Sept. 18, 2018, http://lorraineogrady.com/category/press/journal-articles/.

themselves remains quite brief; her argument focuses rather on forms of alienness and alienation evinced in O'Grady's performers' live actions.[354]

Moreover, in recent years, curators have included O'Grady's work in a host of major, internationally traveling museum exhibitions. Their corresponding catalogues feature mostly succinct discussions of her work. "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution," which opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in 2007; "Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art," which opened in 2013 at Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; and "We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85," which opened at the Brooklyn Museum in 2017, all position O'Grady's performances as touchstones. Each cite her as a figure whose work critically demarginalized women artists of color and their subjective experiences of racial and class inequities within histories of American radical feminist practices originating in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[355] Arguments levied around O'Grady's work in the catalogue accompanying "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power," which opened at Tate Modern, London, in 2017, echo these perspectives while pushing their arguments further. In her essay "American Skin: Artists on Black Figuration," Zoé Whitley cites O'Grady as a progenitor of a new "Janus-faced" institutional critique, which married engagement with systemic racism in the mainstream art world to critical perspectives on cultures of praxis within New York's black artist circles.[356] Though each of these texts offer significant insight into the critical reception of O'Grady's performance work, virtually none of their authors offer in-depth analysis of her multifaceted uses of photography. Correspondingly, they do not situate discussions of her performances, and their corresponding photographs, within histories and theoretical precedents of photography specifically. This chapter's lines of inquiry introduce crucial questions around histories, theories, and ontologies of

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[354] See Stephanie Sparling Williams, "'Frame Me': Speaking Out of Turn and Lorraine O'Grady's Alien Avant-Garde," *Stedelijk Studies 3: The Place of Performance* (2016): 1-13.
[355] In addition to Sirmans, "No Safety Net," and Hockely and Morris, eds., *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85: A Sourcebook*; see Linda Theung, "Lorraine O'Grady," in Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, eds., *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 274-275; and Rujeko Hockley and Catherine Morris, eds., *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85: New Perspectives* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2018).
[356] Zoé Whitley, "American Skin: Artists on Black Figuration," in Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley, eds., *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (London: Tate, 2017), 221. Lucy Lippard also uses the phrase "Janus-faced" to describe O'Grady's *Art Is…* (1983). See Lippard, "Sniper's Nest," *Zeta Magazine* Vol. 1, No. 7-8 (July/August 1988): 102.

photography—not simply as material reproduction but as a performative mode of occupying space and directing spectator vision—into preexisting scholarship on O'Grady's *Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire* and *Art Is…* projects, contributing to a heretofore seldom debated arena of O'Grady's performance oeuvre.

Siting, Worlding, *Esprit*: Just Above Midtown & Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire

Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire's exuberant interruption of Just Above Midtown's 1980 summer reception confronted its audience with some infrequently discussed New York art world taboos around race and representation. This formulation of an artwork around a series of orchestrated demands for social accountability among elite institutions and their privileged denizens, however, was not without its precedents. In the years leading up to Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's first production, several artist and activist-led protests objected to gestures perceived as perpetuating race-based stereotypes and/or racially motivated discrimination across several highly visible corners of the New York art scene. One such clash unfolded largely between a group associated with both Artists Space and *October* on one hand, and several artists and critics affiliated with Just Above Midtown (to which O'Grady already had close ties) on the other. My analysis of this melee maps a set of relations at this moment amongst influential poststructuralist voices in the New York art world, such as those of Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens, and Helene Winer, and the extended group of predominantly black curators, artists, and other creatives associated with Just Above Midtown. This series of events offers illuminating context for O'Grady's initial public foray as an artist, "setting the stage" as it were, for her performative intervention the following year.

In his defense of the titling of an exhibition at Artists Space, "The Nigger Drawings," which had opened to little initial fanfare on February 19, 1979, critic Craig Owens took a definitive stance. "The cry went up, 'Racism!'—as if the mere use of a word," he wrote, "and not the context

in which it occurs, determines meaning."[357] Credited to the mononymous "Donald," a white male artist, the show consisted of a suite of seven multimedia triptychs combining photographic processes and semi-abstract charcoal drawing.[358] The venue, the widely renowned Artists Space, had hosted Douglas Crimp's breakout "Pictures" exhibition just two years prior.

Owens published this statement in response to an increasingly heated public debate swirling around Artists Space's decision to proceed with the offending title, originally chosen by Donald and agreed upon by Ragland Watkins, the gallery's assistant director at the time.[359] A group of notable artists and other art workers, many of whom were associated with the radical political group the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC), catalyzed the outcry, releasing an open letter to Artists Space on March 5.[360] Artist and BECC member Howardena Pindell and writer Lucy Lippard (then a friend of Helene Winer, the director of Artists Space), had initiated the statement's composition. It referred to the use of Donald's exhibition title as "a racist gesture," "a slap in the face" to black artists and audiences, and "an abuse of the aesthetic freedom artists allegedly enjoy in this society."[361]

By the end of the same day on which the open letter was dispatched, The New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), one of Artists Space's primary funders, remitted a telegram directly to Winer at the gallery. It openly broadcast the Council's "distress" at the naming of the exhibition, owing especially to the fact that the title was "unrelated to the content of the work."[362] NYSCA's observation plainly accords an arbitrariness to the offending slur relative to what they

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[357] Craig Owens, "Black and White," *Skyline* (April 1979): 16.
[358] The round of exhibitions that included the "Nigger Drawings" also included presentations by artists Dennis Adams, James Casebere, and Barbara Levy. See "The Nigger Drawings, Donald, February 17-March 10, 1979," Artists Space, accessed August 10, 2018, http://artistsspace.org/exhibitions/the-nigger-drawings. Detailed accounts of this controversy and the letter-writing protest campaign around it can be found in D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 65-103; Jeff Chang, *Who We Be: The Colorization of America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2014), 79-97; Brian Wallis, "Coming to Voice: Howardena Pindell's *Free, White, and 21*," in Naomi Beckwith and Valerie Cassel Oliver, eds., *Howardena Pindell: What Remains To Be Seen* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2018), 169-192; and Howardena Pindell, "Action Against Racism in the Arts," *Heresies* Vol. 2, No. 4 (1979): 108-111. According to D'Souza, Donald's full name, Donald Newman, did not circulate publicly at the time of the opening. See D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 75. Jeff Chang notes that Newman expressed to Artists Space staff that he wished to omit his last name from the press release a month before the exhibition opened. See Chang, *Who We Be*, 82.
[359] Chang, *Who We Be*, 82.
[360] For more on the formation and early activities of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, see Susan E. Cahan, "*Electronic Refractions II* at the Studio Museum in Harlem," in *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 13-30.
[361] "Open Letter to Artists' Space," March 5, 1979. Signatories of the letter included artists Carl Andre, Howardena Pindell, Faith Ringgold, and writers Ingrid Sischy and Lucy Lippard. Hatch Billops Collection, New York.
[362] New York State Council on the Arts, Western Union Mailgram to Helene Winer, Hatch Billops Collection, New York.

saw in the actual aesthetic content of Donald's work. This frustrates Owens' later reading, which implores audiences to consider not just the title itself, but the exhibition as offering explanatory context to its title. Though Owens implied that a denotative read of the title cannot and should not signify meaning alone, NYSCA identifies the title's lack of connotative coherence with the work itself as a simple matter of fact.

Aruna D'Souza minced no words in her observations on this historic episode: "there may be a case to be made that a white artist could use the N-word in some sort of critical, antiracist way, but that's not what's happening here."[363] Owens and NYSCA's semantic points of contention underscore the lines along which many subjective interpretations of the exhibition's racially-charged language diverged at the time. Critical reactions by some of the debate's most outspoken voices, such as Howardena Pindell, cited deep understandings of and individual encounters with acute and systemic forms of art world racism.[364] For signatories of the open letter who were black figures in New York's rampantly segregated 1970s art world, therefore, the statement's accusations of racist effrontery resonated with their own professional and social experiences. Owens, on the other hand, by then a member of the New York art world's white-dominated critical and scholarly elite, spoke from a set of bodily and social coordinates that likely provided him little to no firsthand experience with this widespread art world racism. While the open letter cosigners saw "The Nigger Drawings" as immediately and viscerally pernicious, Owens maintained a relatively privileged positionality, informed by poststructuralist schools of thought. He concluded that the title was rather a matter of the capacious, unfixed capacities of language.

On March 6, Janet Henry, a young New York-based black artist, sent her own letter objecting to the use of the slur in Donald's exhibition title to Jim Reinish, a program associate for visual arts at NYSCA. Henry vehemently described the distress that her visit to the show had

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[363] D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 71.
[364] In 1987, Pindell compiled a document on the occasion of the Agendas for Survival Conference at Hunter College, in which she collected comprehensive statistics on the racial demographics of artists shown by major New York City museum institutions and galleries, her own personal testimony and recollections of art world racism, and documentation of letters sent in response to the "Nigger Drawings" controversy. See Howardena Pindell, "Art (World) & Racism: Testimony, Documentation and Statistics," report presented at Agendas for Survival Conference, Hunter College, June 27-28, 1987. Published in *Third Text* 4, no. 3-4 (1988): 157-90.

conjured. She had first assumed, she explained, that Donald was likely a black artist, self-consciously deploying the title as a mode of critique. Shock overtook her, however, upon learning that the artist who chose to emblazon the N-word across the gallery wall was indeed a white man.[365] Reeling from this discovery, Henry immediately boarded a subway train and made her way to JAM to speak with Goode Bryant about the situation.

After Henry arrived at JAM and shared her experience of viewing Donald's show with Goode Bryant, Goode Bryant reached out to a number of her contacts, expressing her own disgust at how the situation at Artists Space could come to pass.[366] Together, Henry and Goode Bryant began organizing a letter-writing campaign to Reinisch in the hopes of inundating NYSCA with testimonials decrying the title's racial epithet. In the ensuing weeks, many letters of censure arrived. Letters penned by Donald in his own defense, as well of letters of support for him and Artists Space, were distributed widely as well.[367] Douglas Crimp, auguring Owens' theoretically undergirded sentiments, drew upon his own intellectual dexterousness with the art historical canon in a demand to the protesters themselves that they explain the exhibition title's racist connotations: "…it has been the lesson of an entire century of aesthetic endeavor," he stated, "that both language and imagery function at a level of ambiguity that must suspend the imputation of an absolute and specific meaning to any word…"[368] He continued, "it is…the context of words and images that determines their meaning…I would like to ask the protestors to explain in what way Newman's drawings might provide…context that could be construed as racist…"[369] As D'Souza points out, underlying formalist threads are woven through Crimp's statements. He suggests that because the actual aesthetic content of Donald's work could not be construed as overtly racist, his use of the N-word in the exhibition title, analogously, could not be racist either.

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[365] D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 69.
[366] Goode Bryant stated that the word "nigger" was "simply the reminder of a childhood marked by 'the stench of southern jails, cocked guns, dog bites, and the ever present red screaming cries of 'nigger.'" Linda Goode Bryant, letter to Kitty Carlisle Hart, Chairperson, NYSCA, March 14, 1979, Hatch Billops Collection, New York, quoted in Chang, *Who We Be*, 82.
[367] In a letter dated March 8, 1979, Donald intimated that removing or changing the title of the exhibition in response to protests would be tantamount to censorship, an act which an alternative gallery such as Artists Space was not in the business of doing. He also referred to any considerations of the title as an inherently racist gesture as "presumptuous." Donald Newman, Letter to May Stevens, March 8, 1979, Hatch Billops Collection, New York.
[368] D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 85.
[369] Ibid.

Crimp's assessment, selective in its historical references, reveals a significant aporia in the New York art world elite's notions of how identity can be (or cannot be) constructed through language. In its derivation of meaning for the exhibition title methodologically, through a particular academically-informed, art historical perspective, Crimp's statement represses the context inevitably hinging upon any utterance of the slur in question: its longstanding sociocultural function as a means to subjugate black bodies. Judith Butler, discussing this precise historicity underlying injurious speech in *Excitable Speech*, notes that even when intention does not govern a speech act, it can nonetheless "accumulate the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices."[370] Though Crimp's reasoning insists upon an inherent interpretive openness to any creative and/or linguistic gesture, it does not account for those gestures' citational qualities. He paradoxically implies that the protesters' interpretations of the title's language inappropriately exceed Donald's deployment of the word specifically in relation to his compositions themselves. Crimp's perspective, therefore, throws into relief its own limits vis-à-vis language's contributions to the identity-oriented politics he argues against. In all the linguistic openness that his sentiments advocate, they fail to accommodate specific experiences of non-white art world interlocutors. Signing on to Crimp's letter, and thus this angle on the controversy, were fellow (white) New York art world luminaries and *October* journal affiliates Rosalind Krauss, artist Laurie Anderson, and critic Roberta Smith.[371]

D'Souza notes that this group's sentiments were met with frustration and suspicion by the protesters, who understood them as "a disingenuous smoke screen" that aimed to "normalize not just the word but the whole racist history it represented.[372] As many of the protesters made clear, they refused to accept that the employment of the N-word (particularly by a white subject in a

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[370] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 51. Butler also notes that because of the culturally pervasive ways in which racial slurs propagate "linguistic communities" through their repetition of use, locating final accountability in a single subject (e.g., Donald) for the injury caused becomes even more difficult. See Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 52.
[371] Hockley, "Just Above Midtown Gallery," 253.
[372] D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 87. Helene Winer echoed Crimp's points of view, noting to *Village Voice* reporter Richard Goldstein, "people are neutralizing language. These words don't have quite the power they used to." See Goldstein, "Romance of Racism," *The Village Voice*, Apr. 2, 1979, 25. A close read of Winer's words might beg the questions, however, "which people" are committing this alleged neutralizing? For whom do the words no longer have this historical power? There is no acknowledgment that this effect could be felt asymmetrically (or not at all) across multiple (racial/gender/class) demographics.

New York City art gallery context) could only conditionally—and not implicitly—carry associations to the word's inarguably oppressive history in the United States. Several letter-writers doubled down on this point of view. They explicitly contended that Donald's exhibition title was a direct indicator of how systemic forms of racially-motivated violence were not only alive and well within, but endemic to, economies of power by which the New York art world structured itself. Art historians Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, each of whom taught in New Jersey universities at this moment, lent their voices to the protesters' causes through letters to NYSCA. They directly referenced the mainstream art world's covert forms of racism and its inhospitable reception of non-white audiences.[373] Notable in this context is each scholar's geographic location in New Jersey—proximal to, yet not directly participatory in—New York art world circuits, which likely afforded them simultaneous access to and critical distance from the city as a cultural center. Given Crimp et. al.'s direct embeddedness in its circuits, their points of view cannot be considered, I contend, without regard to their positions of (white) privilege and influence at the apex of New York art world pyramid at the time.

No major written accounts or primary documents from the "Nigger Drawings" controversy cite Lorraine O'Grady as a direct participant in the letter-writing campaign. However, prefacing the following discussions of her 1980s work with this narrative paints a picture of the racially divided, and ideologically divisive, New York art world in (and in spite of) which she would boisterously establish herself as an artist, in the guise of "Miss Black Middle Class," less than a year later. In this art world, academic discourses of poststructuralism highly informed Crimp et. al.'s assessments of the Artists Space exhibition title's validity, and, consequently, their indignance at the protesters' accusations of racism. Meanwhile, systemic awareness of race-based exclusion—and subjective experiences of it by artists, cultural workers, and art audience members—fueled the protesters' ardor and disbelief that such an exhibition title could possibly be valid or socially acceptable. These epistemological contradictions metonymically signal a more pervasive

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[373] D'Souza quotes Wallach: "the art world has had very little room for non-white artists and almost no room at all for a non-white audience," and Duncan: "in elegant quarters like the art world, [racism] usually works covertly. This doctrine of aesthetic neutrality pretends that your judgments have no social or moral implications. With an ideology like that, you don't have to be a conscious racist: your aesthetic beliefs do the work for you." See D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 80-82.

disjunction in predominant discourses of postmodernism at the time. In their teleological assertions of a paradigmatic break with 1960s-era race politics, these postmodernist discourses, however subconsciously or unintentionally, enact a refusal to accommodate artist and viewing subjects of color.[374] As Judith Wilson stated in the early 1990s, "postmodernism has been especially problematic for artists of color…these artists'…ambiguous status with respect to that discourse can be seen as the simple consequence of a long history of denial, insult, and exclusion."[375] Wilson, to whom O'Grady referred as an art historian "in potentia" at Just Above Midtown in the early 1980s, noted that same year how she specifically saw JAM as creating a spatial and communal redress for these lingering problematics of postmodernism's influential hold over the New York art world.[376]

In O'Grady's mind, JAM was at the time "a complete world…an *esprit* formed in exclusion…a kind of isolation that brings strength, brings weakness, brings freedom to explore and to fail."[377] She perceived the gallery, therefore, as a site at which artists were grappling with and contesting both its advantages of community-based support and its potential disadvantages of fostering artistic myopia. In all its complexities and contradictions, O'Grady determined JAM would be a perfect location for her first intervention as Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire. The physical displacements, recitations, props, costumes—and most especially, photographs—through O'Grady built Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's world interpellated her audiences into these debates and compelled a reflexiveness around their own participation in them.

When O'Grady walked through JAM's doors around 9 p.m. on the evening of June 5, 1980, clutching a cat-o-nine-tails festooned with chrysanthemums and clad in a dress adorned with white leather gloves, few audience members undoubtedly failed to take notice. Like the photographs for which she posed that evening, every aspect of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's being,

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[374] See previous discussion of this argument in Introduction.
[375] Judith Wilson, "A Postmortem on Postmodernism?" Unpublished slide lecture, Lorraine O'Grady artist website, accessed Sept. 18, 2018, http://lorraineogrady.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Judith-Wilson_Unpublished_A-Postmortem-On-Postmodernism.pdf.
[376] Judith Wilson, "Lorraine O'Grady: Critical Interventions," 5. For O'Grady's mention of Wilson, see Lorraine O'Grady, "Rivers and Just Above Midtown," in *Lorraine O'Grady* (New York: Alexander Gray Associates, 2015), 4.
[377] Lorraine O'Grady, "Rivers and Just Above Midtown," 4.

including her accoutrements and her declamatory script, were carefully planned by O'Grady prior to the performance itself.

Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire had initially adorned her cat-o'-nine-tails with white flowers in a manner that concealed its material objecthood. As she slowly distributed flowers amongst the crowd, she entreated, "won't you help me lighten my heavy bouquet?"[378] As all the flowers were distributed, the whip beneath the floral arrangement was incrementally revealed. When it was fully denuded of chrysanthemums, O'Grady paced amongst the (predominantly black) audience and lashed herself, deliberately and ceremoniously, with the cat-o'-nine-tails.[379] While researching this portion of her project prior to the performance, she had typed multiple dictionary and encyclopedia definitions for cat-o'-nine-tails verbatim on an index card (Fig. 3). They read, "one of the most brutal [flogging instruments] is the cat-o'-nine-tails;" "consisting of nine pieces of cord, each with three knots, attached to a thick rope handle…used for flogging;" "so called from a comparison of its blows to the scratches of a cat."[380] Each of these offers some general hints as to the object's historical connotations of disciplinary force that she aimed to conjure while demonstrating this instrument on her own body before a live audience at JAM.

Recently, some writers have acknowledged a more specific range of possible readings of O'Grady's simulation of self-harm in this instance. Franklin Sirmans, for example, cites potential references to eroticism and sadomasochism, as well as histories of slave whippings.[381] Uri McMillan and Stephanie Sparling Williams discern in O'Grady's whipping actions undercurrents of the impulse to issue a "wake-up call" to black artists, many of whom populated her audience that evening.[382] For O'Grady herself, this pronouncement was meant to cut through superficial notions of "black authenticity" that compelled black artists and cultural participants to either adhere to or

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[378] Williams, "Frame Me," 2.

[379] Williams specifies the racial demographics of the audience as predominantly black. See Williams, "Frame Me," 1. I also borrow descriptions here from Judith Wilson's 1991 account of O'Grady's performance, one of the only available firsthand accounts written by an audience member present at JAM in June of 1980. See Wilson, "Lorraine O'Grady: Critical Interventions," 4-6.

[380] Lorraine O'Grady, "Cat O' Nine Tails," Research document, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 1.

[381] Sirmans, "No Safety Net," 33.

[382] McMillan, "Introduction," 2.

eschew its standards.[383] Overly aware of the pervasiveness of white audience members as cultural gatekeepers, she felt that black artists would either enact a façade of "authenticity" that analogized cultural stereotypes of black populations as underserved and economically disadvantaged, or, like the artists whose work O'Grady had observed in "African American Abstraction" at P.S. 1, would perform a blackness that might be perceived through their work as acceptably attuned to white-dominated contemporary art discourse. Mlle. Bourgeois Noire, with her whip in her hand and intermittently wrapped around her hips, deemed these rather one-dimensional constructions of blackness to be intolerable, which she communicated ironically by tolerating her own performative inflictions of physical suffering.

One of the most forceful thrusts of Mlle. Bourgeois Noire's address to her audience was likely to have come through her verbal recitation of poetry. By uttering this declamation, O'Grady offered a verbal contextualization for her performance's physical and aesthetic trappings. After whipping herself several times, Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire bellowed,

> THAT'S ENOUGH!
> No more boot-licking…
> No more ass-kissing…
> No more buttering up…
> No more pos…turing
> of super-ass…imilates…
> BLACK ART MUST TAKE MORE RISKS!!![384]

Almost immediately after this oration, O'Grady and her accompanying interlocutors swiftly exited the premises. In its introductory line and its repeated iterations of "no more," streaks of exasperation with and intolerance of artists' adherence to notions of an "authentic blackness" run through this brief statement, just as they ran through O'Grady's mock-whipping. O'Grady directly contrasts efforts to assimilate into a given art community (whether that community be predominantly white or black) with the notion of "risk," which she levies as a political imperative for black artists.

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[383] Williams, "Frame Me," 3-4.
[384] O'Grady, "Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire 1955," Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 1. O'Grady later notes that this was an adaptation of a poem by Leon Gontran Damas, a black poet from French Guiana. See O'Grady, interview with Linda M. Montano in *Performance Artists Talking*, 404.

Her references to acts of supplication ("boot-licking," "ass-kissing," "ass…imilates," etc.) imply aspirational motivations typically behind such efforts, which, in turn, implicate art world participants' seeking of upward socioeconomic mobility through their artwork and/or social affiliations. Moreover, while not blatantly addressed by O'Grady, denotative readings of these activities can also hint at queer sexual practices. Considered in the context of O'Grady's performative self-flagellation, they connote links between racial subordination and the pathologizing of non-normative sexual practices, historically constructed in order to validate structural forms of violence imposed on racialized bodies. As Kobena Mercer has noted in his work on portraits of black male nudes by Robert Mapplethorpe, what he originally observed as the photographer's instantiation of a fetishistic and objectivized gaze of the black male body he later viewed as a deconstructive strategy which "la[id] bare psychic and social relations of ambivalence in the representation of race and sexuality."[385] In Mercer's view, once he more fully took into account Mapplethorpe's own subject position as a queer artist, he began to see aesthetic ironies in Mapplethorpe's work (referencing classical tropes of western art history through black models, for instance) not as reinscribing racism's ideological fixity but as subversive traces that could actually disrupt the stability of oppositional codes reinforcing notions of (sexual and/or racial) difference.[386] In O'Grady's case, her performative gestures traffic in their own matrix of similarly ambivalent references: while her incorporation of whipping acts into her performance may invoke political and social histories of positioning black American subjects as subaltern, O'Grady's performance effectively makes these histories visible and visceral, doubly exposing them as inherited and incorporated into art world structures. While a total disparagement of the art market's embeddedness in the asymmetrical distribution of power under late capitalism may exceed these particular statements, O'Grady's derision clearly lies with black artists' deliberate enactment of signifiers of blackness perceived as widely palatable or accepted expressly in service of advancing their social stations.

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[385] Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing," *New Formations* 16 (Spring 1992): 11.
[386] Ibid., 6-11.

As a black pageant winner, “Miss Black Middle Class” zestfully burlesques these desires by accenting her costume with a sash, tiara, and layers of white opera gloves.[387] Though she sourced the gloves in Manhattan thrift shops and thus their acquisition required minimal means, O’Grady notes that “it was very important to me that the gloves should have been worn by women who actually believed in them.”[388] By outfitting herself entirely in these objects and donning her own white gloves as well, O’Grady embodies this “belief,” which ascribes to the gloves signifiers of wealth and status that are specifically coded as feminine.

Unfortunately, few photographs from this first iteration of O’Grady’s performance remain (though many from her second performance at The New Museum, which will be discussed later in this chapter, have been preserved and reproduced). From the small group of available photocopied archival images taken by photographer Freda Leinwand, one can gain valuable insight into the aesthetics of Mlle.’s physical navigation of the gallery space that evening.[389] In one image (Figs. 4 and 5), O’Grady stands facing the right side of the frame, grasping her whip by both hands. Her tiara surrounds her hair gathered up into a bun and she gazes wide-eyed, with teeth clenched and neck muscles taught, at an installation of flashlights suspended from the ceiling (presumably part of a work included in the “Outlaw Aesthetics” exhibition). This overperformed antagonism radiating from her face toward the artwork in front of her is contrasted by a mood of composed serenity that she strikes in another image (Fig. 6). Here, she sits relaxed before the camera, posing with her face in profile as if for a portrait, while lights from above fall across her face and chest in a flattering chiaroscuro. In contrast to the “middle class” elegance that her costume and pose assert, behind her a figure with exposed breasts and an “X” scrawled on their chest balances inside a configuration of ropes descending from above. A white sheet is secured to the figure’s lower half, while additional ropes and a hood of similar material conceals the figure’s face and neck. In yet a third image later reproduced in *High Performance* (Fig. 7),

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[387] Nick Mauss also refers to them as “debutante’s gloves.” See Mauss, “The Poem,” 185.
[388] O’Grady, interview with Linda M. Montano in *Performance Artists Talking*, 404.
[389] A contract between O’Grady and Leinwand for photography of the Just Above Midtown performance indicates that at least twenty black and white prints were made in July of 1980. See Papers of Lorraine O’Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 1.

Leinwand has photographed O'Grady from behind, in "mid-whip," as the ropes from the cat-o'-nine-tails wrap around her left bicep and across her bare back.[390]

An archival index card labeled "Shots: Mlle Bourgeoise Noire 1955" (Fig. 8) reveals the degree to which O'Grady choreographed both of these photographs prior to the performance, even down to the side of her face that she wished the photographer to capture.[391] O'Grady describes the first shot on the list as "Miss America style," with a "right front view." An accompanying caption reads, "SHE SMILES, SHE SMILES, SHE SMILES." This directive presumably corresponds to the photograph of O'Grady seated before the bare-chested figure, wherein her elegant pose is highly structured. Her face is exactly perpendicular to the camera and her shoulders are in perfect parallel with the top and bottom of the frame. The shot labeled "BACK AND FORTH SHE PACES, LIKE A CAGED LION AND TRAINER ALL IN ONE. SHE BEATS HERSELF WITH THE WHIP," easily corresponds to the photograph reproduced in *High Performance*. The fourth shot on the list, captioned "THAT'S ENOUGH," specifies "showing a snarling face," could certainly apply to the horizontal photograph of O'Grady grimacing toward the installation of flashlights. These notes, therefore, serve as evidence that O'Grady carefully designed the composition of each photograph ahead of the performance itself. In so doing, they align her photographic approach with that of several better-known practitioners of postmodern photography operating in a "directorial mode," including Cindy Sherman, James Casebere, and Barbara Kasten, as well as Nagatani and Asco. In the two latter cases, like O'Grady, these artists' multifaceted use of photography pervades their practice, becoming a prismatic creative act wherein distinctions among performance, documentation, and photographic objects are no longer delimited.

Considered in the context of one another, O'Grady's written directives and the photographs themselves accentuate the significance of the photographic image field as a locus for the artist's negotiation of how specific aspects of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's extravagant

[390] Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire," *High Performance*, 56.
[391] See O'Grady, "Shots: Mlle Bourgeoise Noire 1955," Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 1.

aesthetic would be performed. As a racially-coded sendup of aspirational art world participants' vacuous plays at recognition and acceptance, Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire formulates a notion of blackness akin to that which Fred Moten articulates in *In the Break*: a continual performance of encounter characterized by "rupture," "collision," and "passionate response."[392] By embedding these characteristics into Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's first performance and further negotiating them those characteristics through photography, O'Grady set out to personify the absurdity of any notion of blackness predicated on predetermined attributes of authenticity.

This notion of the ludicrousness of attempting to inhabit a racial authenticity had been percolating for O'Grady since the year before Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's debut. According to the artist, when she saw Eleanor Antin perform in blackface as her ballerina persona "Eleanora Antinova" (Fig. 9) at Langton Street, an alternative space in San Francisco, Antin's "out-of-kilter vision of the black character's experience [could] not compute" for O'Grady.[393] For this project, Antin assumed the guise of a retired black ballerina who had previously danced with Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. At the time O'Grady saw her, Antin's persona was still in its early stages of development. She would later produce a body of work around the character that included performance, photography, films, and publications, including her 1983 *Being Antinova*, a fictional memoirish compendium of Antin's recollections of her immersive performances as Antinova as well as her musings on the imagined ballerina's life experiences.[394] Scholar Cherise Smith's assessment of Antin's project points definitively to its access of stereotypes—of both blackness and Jewishness—when performing Antinova in ways that serve her own "personal transformation and identity making" as an artist.[395] According to Smith, Antin's writings suggest that she understood identity, including blackness, Jewishness, and femininity, to be "a set of stereotypical signs and narratives that were open to manipulation."[396] Key here is Smith's inclusion of the term "stereotypical" to describe the signs that she believes Antin saw as

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[392] Fred Moten, *In the Break*, 14-26.
[393] O'Grady, "My 1980s," 10.
[394] See Eleanor Antin, *Being Antinova* (Los Angeles: Astro Artz, 1983).
[395] Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deveare Smith* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 104. Antin, who identified personally as Jewish, described herself using Jewish stereotypes in her book. See Antin, *Being Antinova*, 9.
[396] Smith, *Enacting Others*, 109.

transposable. In assuming these clichés and superficialities into a performative persona, Antin arguably deployed them "as a vehicle for…ethnic mobility."[397] Doing so in the name of an immersive study—and thus, a methodology for approaching a type of "authentic" experience—of a black woman is perhaps an aspect of Antin's project that frustrated O'Grady. At the conclusion of Antin's performance, O'Grady thought, "I decided I had to speak for myself."[398] Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire was born not long after.

Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire Goes to the New Museum

Eleanor Antin's work, along with that of eight other white artists, resurfaced as a partial impetus for Mlle. Bourgeois Noire's reprisal at The New Museum in 1981, the much more heavily documented and more frequently cited performance of the two. On the evening of September 18, 1981, an exhibition titled "Persona" opened at The New Museum in New York. According to the curators, it was organized in response to a recently growing trend of artists using "specific characters and alter egos" in their work, and artists who sustained an interest in this theme by "integrating themselves directly into their personae" were included.[399] All nine of the featured artists, who included Antin; Bruce Charlesworth, who assumed the role of "Eddie Glove" in photographs and videos; and Lynn Hershman, who masqueraded as a character known as "Roberta Breitmore," were white.[400] O'Grady was frustrated by what she called "the same old bullshit" on behalf of the museum, characterized by their "not feeling the need to look beyond a

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[397] Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 148.

[398] O'Grady, "My 1980s," 10.

[399] Lynn Gumpert and Ned Rifkin, *Persona*, 3. Scholar Moira Roth has characterized these practices, contemporaneous to and in some thematic ways in resonance with O'Grady's, as "persona-play" performances, which incorporated "equal parts autobiography and mythology" and "characters that were thought to represent or embody…types." See Smith, *Enacting Others*, 37.

[400] Lynn Gumpert and Ned Rifkin, *Persona*, 8-23. O'Grady referred to the exhibition as the "Nine-White-Personae show" in her description for the New Museum performance. See Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Goes to the New Museum," performance description, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 5.

'small circle of friends'" in terms of which artists to include.[401] She began organizing a Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire intervention for the opening. In an article later written by Lucy Lippard for *Village Voice*, it was revealed that O'Grady had in fact been invited by the museum to participate in the exhibition, but not as an artist on the official checklist. Rather, she was asked to conduct school workshops related to the exhibition for students. After her performative intervention at the opening, Lippard notes, the museum revoked O'Grady's invitation.[402]

At the New Museum event, Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire wore the same costume she had constructed for the JAM intervention, and she outfitted herself with the same accessories. O'Grady's description (Fig. 10) of the sequence of events—entering the gallery, distributing flowers, beating herself with her whip, then reciting a poem—mirror those of the JAM performance. Again, her poetic message took an urgent tone:

> WAIT
> wait in your alternate/alternate spaces
> spitted on fish hooks of hope
> be polite
> wait to be discovered [. . .]
> THAT'S ENOUGH!
> don't you know
> sleeping beauty needs more than a kiss to awake
> now is the time for an INVASION![403]

Infiltrating a predominantly white, major museum in this iteration of her project, O'Grady identifies herself as an "invader," urging other marginalized artists to adopt a similarly aggressive attitude toward gaining entrance to elite institutions. Now was not the time, Mlle. insisted, for politesse and self-sequestering in insular art world spaces. In a letter to *Soho News* correspondent John Perrault two months after this performance, O'Grady claimed that more forcefully self-advocating behavior on behalf of emerging artists would need to be a means to an end "if they want to be accepted without condescension."[404] Whereas artists such as Eleanor Antin (whose performance work at the time sought identitarian verisimilitude with the experiences of a black woman) were

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[401] Lorraine O'Grady, letter to John Perrault, November 2, 1981, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 3.
[402] Lucy Lippard, "Open Season," *Village Voice*, October 7-13, 1981, 91.
[403] Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Goes to the New Museum," September 18, 1981, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 3.
[404] O'Grady, letter to John Perrault, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 3.

welcomed and celebrated in these spaces, O'Grady suggests that if artists who were working on these spaces' margins wished not to be tokenized, they needed to insert themselves as "space invaders." Scholar Nirmal Puwar grapples with this precise notion, which she defines as "dissonant bodies [that] take up space in positions that have not been 'reserved' for them."[405] Typically, for Puwar, these bodies are gendered female and/or racialized. This invasion can therefore be observed by those occupying spaces of privilege as "incursions" into a proprietary domain, but the invasion can also be enacted as a claim to power. O'Grady invaded the space not simply to occupy it, but to occupy it on her own terms, and pressed other artists of color to do the same.

Just as in the JAM performance, O'Grady pursued her invasion of the New Museum with agents of reinforcement in tow. Her "cast" for this manifestation of the project included a Master of Ceremonies, played by actor Jeffrey Scott (Fig. 11), an Art Critic, played by Richard De Gussi, and a "Paparazza" played by photographer Coreen Simpson.[406] Many of photographs of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's New Museum performance that have been reproduced and installed in exhibitions were created by Simpson, a New York-based photographer in her own right (Fig. 12) whom O'Grady had met through JAM.[407] In addition to Simpson, another photographer, Salima Ali, was present that evening, ensuring that a number of photographs produced at the performance would include Simpson, with her camera held aloft, playing her "paparazza" role (Fig. 13).[408]

Relative to the few available photocopies of images from O'Grady's JAM performance, an extensive collection of images, many in the form of contact sheets (Figs. 14 a-e) remain from the New Museum performance. These chronicle Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's evening of September 18,

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[405] Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender, and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford, U.K.: Berg, 2004), 11.
[406] Lorraine O'Grady, "Cast," Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 5.
[407] O'Grady mentions Simpson as one of the "photographers documenting others' work and doing their own" who were associated with Just Above Midtown in the early 1980s. See O'Grady, "Rivers and Just Above Midtown," 4. A contract between Simpson and O'Grady for the photography of Mlle. Bourgeois Noire at the New Museum, dated Nov. 5, 1981, was sourced in the Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 3.
[408] Ali is credited as a photographer, alongside Simpson, of black and white photographs from Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's New Museum event in O'Grady's *Art Journal* article as well as on O'Grady's personal website. See O'Grady, "This Will Have Been," 12; and "Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire Gallery," Lorraine O'Grady artist website, accessed Sept. 18, 2018, http://lorraineogrady.com/slideshow/mlle-bourgeoise-noire/.

beginning with the cab ride from her home studio at the Westbeth complex in the West Village, then to the New Museum, and lastly and to her celebratory afterparty. Of the over 120 photographs included on these sheets, nearly two dozen, presumably taken by Ali, feature Simpson as "paparazza" (Fig. 15). She wears a dark iridescent jacket and appears either in the process of fixing a shot (Fig. 16), or clutching her camera at the ready (Fig. 17). Simpson's dual roles as performance documentarian and "paparazza," directed by O'Grady to gather as many photographs as possible of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire as the evening's uninvited "guest of honor," centrally orients photography as a nexus for meaning creation within the space of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's performance itself. By including Simpson as a photojournalist in her core "cast," O'Grady demonstrated that not just photography of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's actions alone, but the aesthetics of the photographer in the act of producing those photographs, were fundamental to her project. As extrinsic "invaders" of the New Museum that evening, Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire and her crew arrived as interlopers from its social margins, yet Simpson's eager "paparazza" buttressed the redirection of viewers' focus from the "Persona" exhibition onto O'Grady herself.

O'Grady's constructing of her piece through this performative "metaphotography" echoes some of the roughly contemporaneous photographic work of Andy Warhol, whose images of celebrities and New York City nightlife conveyed a voyeurism as ebullient as his often-flamboyant subjects (Figs. 18 and 19). As Kristen Hope Bigelow observed, as an observer "psychologically inhabiting the margins of society…Warhol paradoxically worked and lived at the cultural center of the social orders and practices [he] seemed to objectively observe."[409] Warhol's psychic "outsiderness," for Bigelow, was contradictory to, yet not incommensurate with, his lived social ties and means of access to powerful networks of entertainers and other public figures. This use of the camera as a "disidentificatory" object, through which he situated himself simultaneously in dissonance and in resonance with behavioral codes of New York's elite spaces, served to render

[409] Kristen Hope Bigelow, "Warhol's Weegee," *New Art Examiner* (October 1994): 21.

farcical any prospect of "objectivity" in his role as a photographic documentarian.[410] Warhol was, after all, quite an embedded subject who appeared in nightlife photography himself, often by "notorious paparazzo" Ron Galella (Fig. 20), to whom Warhol referred as "his favorite photographer."[411]

O'Grady's use of multiple cameras at the New Museum, ensuring that the paparazza would be included in photographs herself, enacts its own kind of disidentification. This performance of iterative photographing locates O'Grady, a photographic subject decked out in overly theatrical signifiers of wealth and feminine glamor, as a parodic site of publicity and desire. In enacting this triangulation among Simpson, Ali, and her own black body, O'Grady mockingly "disidentifies" with an archetypal "bourgeois" beauty queen figure, implicitly (stereotypically) coded as white and feminine, so as to reveal and intervene in these codes, restructuring them along her own bodily coordinates.

After the New Museum performance, O'Grady compiled a detailed list (Fig. 21) of thirty-four select shots by Simpson and Ali. A study of this document reveals the nearly mathematical precision with which O'Grady retroactively schematized the performance specifically through its photographs. The language she uses to captions the images disclose aspects of the performance that, when observed in the corresponding photographs, register as most salient to her. Several words and phrases, including "handing flower," "face turned," "smiling," "arm crooked, beating self with whip," and "pulling on left glove halfway" focus specifically on O'Grady's bodily motion and facial expressions. These indicate her vested attention in ontological imbrications between her body's live movements, its material engagement with her costume and props, and the resulting photographs.[412]

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[410] I borrow here from José Esteban Muñoz's concept of "disidentification," a process which "scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications." See Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.
[411] Glenn O'Brien, *Warhol by Galella: That's Great!* (New York: Monacelli, 2008), 8.
[412] Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire Goes to the New Museum," Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 3.

Laura Marks' formulations of the screen as skin in her book *The Skin of the Film* offer a productive rubric for analyzing how the photographs themselves actuate O'Grady's captions, which describe both social and haptic displacement and encounter. Marks elucidates how the experience of viewing cinematically rendered bodies can activate a relation between the material, "foldable" nature of (film) screens and the ways in which "[a]ll of us hold knowledge in our bodies and memory in our senses."[413] For the purposes of my analysis, I analogize Marks' film screen to the photograph, a container of material knowledge, whose correspondences to O'Grady's live, corporeal encounters enact a chiasmic relation that diminishes distinctions between the performance and the photographs themselves.

The image (Fig. 22) corresponding to the caption labeled "[7]" on O'Grady's list, which reads, "L handing flower to man in leather jacket, man watching," offers a glimpse of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire engaging directly with one of her audience members. O'Grady and the (white) man both smile heartily as they extend their arms toward each other. As O'Grady offers him a chrysanthemum, their hands touch within the open space framed by their bodies. As a central focal point, their overlapping hands offer a particularly poignant parallel to the many overlapping "hands," or gloves, that make up Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's gown. Just as O'Grady imagined that these thrift store gloves carried echoes of their former owners' investment in a power to signify social status, echoes of O'Grady's command of the space she occupied reverberate through this photograph. The man indicates his enthusiasm in receiving the flower, a material trace of that command, through his smile and his touch. These cues also hint at the affective range that O'Grady's performance solicited in the museum space that evening. Though she deemed herself an "invader," connoting her presence as an oppositional force, this photograph conveys a much more complex matrix of encounters. Catalyzed by touch, these encounters interpellated

[413] Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), xiii. Quoted in Amelia Jones, *Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 64. Jones also analogizes photography to skin, claiming that the photograph "is like the *skin* that envelops our corporeality in that it indicates or presupposes interiority, but also opens to sociality." See Jones, *Self/Image*, 64.

individuals amongst the audience into not just bemusement or resistance, but also receptiveness, in her presence.

The caption that reads, "L front, whip swinging, woman behind," likely corresponds to a photograph (Fig. 23) in which O'Grady stands facing the right side of the frame with her right arm bent across her torso. Her cat-o'-nine-tails, devoid of flowers, swings widely out to her left side. Her glove-laden dress surrounds her body like a glowing white cocoon as she grimaces with her mouth closed and gazes toward the floor. To O'Grady's left, a sculpture titled *Retnec* (1981) (Fig. 24) by artist Redd Ekks, stands on a platform with wide light and dark stripes.[414] In the dark background behind O'Grady and the sculpture, a white woman stands looking on, smiling as O'Grady lashes herself. O'Grady conspicuously leaves Ekks' sculpture out of her caption, though it commands a significant presence in the field of the image. Rather, she focuses only on her own action of swinging the whip and the presence of the bystander much further behind her. O'Grady implicitly identifies these ocular and haptic dynamics between herself and the audience member, then, as the photograph's primary set of relations. Given that the woman enthusiastically fixes her gaze on O'Grady, and not the sculpture, the photograph corroborates this designation.

The photographers' choice of black and white film stock registers everything that appeared before their cameras on a chromatic spectrum of whites, greys, and blacks. Inevitably, this color scheme emphasizes disparities between light and dark: O'Grady's bright white costume and whip within the darkened space of her surroundings, for instance, set off a series of atmospheric contrasts that characterize each photograph in the series. As per Marks, these specifically photographic color contrasts can be analogized to contrasts between O'Grady's skin and the lighter skin of many of the openings' attendees. This was likely not lost on O'Grady, who was photographed primarily in the company of white people at the New Museum opening. Superficially, this might serve to emphasize O'Grady's positionality of "outsiderness" relative to the space, but, it also reflexively emplaces her in the space, underscoring her physical, willful

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[414] While the exhibition catalogue for "Persona" names this artist as Redd Ekks, a letter to the editor of *The Village Voice* from New Museum staff member Ed Jones dated October 12, 1981, names the artist as Robert Rasmussen. See Ed Jones, Letter to Editor, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 3.

presentness amongst the mainly white crowd. In this sense, the photographs conjure a "haptic visuality" that mitigates their distinction from the live performance itself.[415]

This haptic visuality exceeded the initial audience of Ali and Simpson's printed photographs, which was likely small, as they were first sent to O'Grady directly. However, O'Grady's attempt to mount her performance as a kind of "media event" by way of Simpson's paparazza was ultimately fulfilled by the printed reproduction and distribution of Simpson's imagery by several press outlets. Once in circulation, these photographs could be seen, and Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's presence could be felt, by a range of audiences outside those who happened to be at the "Persona" opening or within O'Grady's immediate circle. One of the most iconic of those reproductions is the full-page photocollage (Fig. 25) that O'Grady compiled for a 1982 issue radical feminist publication *Heresies*.[416] The photograph, taken by Simpson, shows O'Grady facing the camera in a fully frontal stance with her mouth agape. Her sash is clearly displayed across her body, its draping curve paralleling the stripes behind her on the floor, and her whip rests to the right of her feet. Below, large black type announces O'Grady's impetus for her performance. In the image, between her body and the left side of the frame she has inserted lines of white text comprising the poem that she recited aloud on the evening of the opening. Echoing the political urgency in the graphic flourishes of Alexander Rodchenko's iconic propaganda posters (Fig. 26), O'Grady places the first lines of her poem in a spoke-like pattern emanating from her open mouth. In compiling the collage this way (which she did by hand, see Fig. 27), O'Grady linked it to her performance by summoning a visuality that engaged not just a haptic sensibility, but an aural one as well, implicating the viewer in the sights, sounds, and feel of her live performance and its political rationale.

In an issue of *American Arts* from September of 1982, the same photograph was reproduced, but its relatively ambiguous design treatment offers viewers a very different glimpse

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[415] I borrow again from Laura Marks here; see Marks, *Skin of the Film*, xi.
[416] Lorraine O'Grady, "Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire Goes to the New Museum to Remedy Being Omitted from the Nine-White-Personae Show," *Heresies* Vol. 4, No. 2, Issue 14 (1982): 21. O'Grady later published an article titled "Black Dreams" in the magazine as a member of the *Heresies* feminist collective. See Lorraine O'Grady, "Black Dreams," *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* Vol. 4, No. 3, Issue 15 (1982): 42-43. For more on struggles regarding diversity within the *Heresies* collective, see Catherine Morris, "Struggling for Diversity in *Heresies*," in Morris and Rujeko Hockley, eds., *We Wanted a Revolution, Black Radical Women 1965-85: A Sourcebook*, 185-87.

of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire (Fig. 28). In an article profiling six black photographers, Dawoud Bey (also formerly a fixture at JAM, according to O'Grady) discusses the photographic work for which Coreen Simpson was known as an artist.[417] Recalling this chapter's earlier discussion of Warhol vis-à-vis Simpson, Bey refers to one of Simpson's projects as "dealing with nightlife of the most adventurous kind…decadence at its most glorious."[418] To the right of that statement, an image featuring Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire reveals that Simpson had splattered and smeared the photographic print with white paint prior to its reproduction. As Bey explains, "giving rein to her most outlandish impulses," Simpson at times splashes glitter, paint, and other materials onto her photographs' surfaces.[419] While Bey interprets Simpson's manipulation of the image as an improvisational gesture akin to Rosenbergian "action painting," none of his commentary mentions Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire.[420] Rather, this manipulated photograph is published as an artwork that happens to feature Lorraine O'Grady, as the caption identifies her. In this instance, the visuality of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's physical and auditory presentness becomes imbricated in the paint splotches—material indexes of Simpson's own physical presentness. The two women's impressions on the photograph thus comingle in the media reproduction. Bereft of any information on the performance event depicted, the photograph becomes performative itself, adopting a continual chiasmic openness to mythification in its reception by a range of audiences.

Over twenty years after these reproductions were published, Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's opera glove gown, along with her sash, tiara, cat-o'-nine-tails, and an elbow-length glove, reappeared in New York City (Fig. 29).[421] They, as well as thirteen accompanying photographs by Simpson and Ali, were included in the watershed exhibition "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution," which opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and eventually traveled to P.S.1 in Long Island City, the very same institution where O'Grady had viewed the

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[417] Dawoud Bey, "Images: Six Black Photographers," *American Arts* Vol. 13, No. 5 (September 1982): 10-15.
[418] Bey, "Images," 13.
[419] Ibid. (Bey, "Images," 13.)
[420] For more on Harold Rosenberg's well-known assessment of abstract "action painting" as an event or moment in the artist's biography, see Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51, no. 8 (December 1952): 22-23, 48-50.
[421] O'Grady's dress and its accoutrements entered the collection of Eileen Harris Norton in the mid-1990s, according to the artist. See "Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire," Lorraine O'Grady artist website, accessed Sept. 9, 2018, http://lorraineogrady.com/art/mlle-bourgeoise-noire/.

"African American Abstraction" exhibition that catalyzed the creation of her iconoclastic persona in 1980. In this exhibition, and in major exhibitions following it, the photographs included are credited to O'Grady.[422] She thus asserts authorship of the works and presents them as analogous to the performance itself. Conceived originally as an obstreperous critique of what she saw as "political passivity in the face of curatorial and critical apartheid" in early 1980s New York, the ecstatic presentness of Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's performance, impressing itself upon audiences through photographs, remains ever-ecstatic and ever-present.[423]

Art Is… in Harlem

On a large platform whose gold surfaces shimmer in the sunlight, a group of about thirteen individuals dressed in white have assembled in two rows. The front row, all seated, hold a number of empty picture frames in front of them. The frames, also brightly reflecting natural light, have been painted in a gold hue matching the platform itself. Some in the group peer through the frames, smiling at their onlookers as if posing for a portrait, while others hold their frames up with their feet or off to their sides. The back row, all standing shoulder to shoulder, collectively hold their frames at eye level. Some of the frames overlap, partially framing each other and sharing their fields of vision. Behind the congregation, an enormous gold frame, appearing architectural in its scale and Art Deco in its ornamental embellishments, playfully signifies art's hallowed historic canons as barometers of cultural taste and worth. It also serves as an open backdrop to the group's activities while framing their movements from behind. This frame's heavily structured design echoes that of the apartment buildings behind it, their own edifices lined with rows of frames that surround windows onto private spaces. In the very public space of the street, these frames, or paneless windows, invite an endlessly reverberating set of ocular relations wherein

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[422] Ali and Simpson are credited on O'Grady's artist website as well as in articles published about O'Grady's work. See "Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire," Lorraine O'Grady artist website, accessed Sept. 9, 2018, http://lorraineogrady.com/art/mlle-bourgeoise-noire/; and O'Grady, "This Will Have Been," 12. They are not credited in the checklist in the WACK! exhibition. See "Checklist of the Exhibition," *WACK!*, 505.
[423] Wilson, "Lorraine O'Grady: Critical Interventions," 8.

their continual motion lends a nearly limitless contingency to their conventional functions as directors of vision. On the leftmost end of the group, a woman wears a white t-shirt and slacks. Her head turns to her left side, revealing two white gloves affixed to her shirt, forming an ersatz collar. With this subtle reference to Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire, O'Grady presides over *Art Is…*, her collaborative performance featuring a parade float that she developed for the African American Day Parade on September 11, 1983 in Harlem, New York City.[424]

O'Grady's original proposal for the project earned her a $6000 Visual Artists Sponsored Project grant from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA).[425] In the proposal, written in the early stages of the project's conception, she explained her intentions for the project to put "advanced black art before the eyes of people who normally never see it." She imagined it would "allow the art to participate in the black community" on the occasion of the parade.[426] From the outset, therefore O'Grady imagined that, like Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire, *Art Is…* would be making a live, physical intervention into a charged social geography, a historically predominantly black neighborhood wherein more than sixty percent of buildings were abandoned or in severe disrepair throughout the decade prior.[427] It was precisely because of this insular sequestering of the New York art world outside of Harlem and other predominantly black neighborhoods, as well as major museum institutions' historic exclusion of black artists, that in O'Grady's eyes the over one million residents of Harlem estimated to attend the parade were likely to have had few opportunities to view contemporary art by black artists.[428] By predicating the project on audience participation, she envisioned these audiences as asserting agency in its execution, both as creative collaborators and subjects of the work itself.

O'Grady enlisted the help of artists Richard De Gussi and George Mingo (who she met through JAM), to erect the float and its gold skirt, on which "ART IS…" had been painted in large

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[424] O'Grady refers to *Art Is…* as a "Mlle Bourgeoise Noire event" in her own writing. See O'Grady, "This Will Have Been," 113-114.

[425] Carlos Butierrez-Solana, award letter to Lorraine O'Grady, Sept. 3, 1982, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 5.

[426] Lorraine O'Grady, "Art on Parade: A Proposal for a Parade Float Celebrating Advanced Black Art," 1982, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 5.

[427] Jordan Troeller, "Lorraine O'Grady, *Art Is…*, 1983/2009, in Helen Molesworth, ed., *This Will Have Been: Art Love, and Politics in the 1980s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 213.

[428] O'Grady, "This Will Have Been," 15.

black letters. They built its large, nine-by-fifteen feet sculptural frame, using basic construction materials including Styrofoam, Masonite, plumbing pipes, paint, and lumber.[429] O'Grady also placed advertisements in the Classifieds sections of New York-based "dailies and weeklies" among other casting calls for actors and dancers, ultimately hiring fifteen men and women to accompany her on the day of the performance.[430] When that day came, each of these performers, outfitted in white clothing and holding their gold-painted picture frames of varying sizes, began to bond with each other as they waited patiently with O'Grady on the float for two hours before their time to enter to parade route arrived.[431] Eventually, the float carried its cadre to Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard and commenced its route. As the float passed along the Boulevard, it became a nexus for capricious, performative experimentation. The float's continuous movement, as well as that of the performers, rendered the frame a continuously open, multidirectional device for simultaneously claiming authorship, viewership, and statuses as both subjects and objects of art, all contingent on the whims and wills of their audience members. [432]

Along its journey, both the large sculptural frame and the individual frames carried by the performers momentarily outlined views of their surroundings. Some resembled portraits when they lingered around smiling faces and others resembled the documentary tradition of street photography as they caught bodies in motion in front of rows of storefronts. Still others briefly delineated views of the apartment building facades lining the sidewalk, their windows sometimes populated by faces and other times appearing sparsely inhabited. Amidst cries from the sidewalks—"Frame me! Frame me! Make me art! That's right! That's what art is! We're the art!"—epistemological boundaries between performers and spectators diminished. In O'Grady's mind,

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[429] For O'Grady's discussion of Mingo's participation in JAM, see O'Grady, "Rivers and Just Above Midtown," 3. Richard De Gussi is also credited as having participated in O'Grady's *Rivers, First Draft*, a performance in Central Park executed in 1982. See Ibid. According to Kellie Jones, George Mingo was Coreen Simpson's partner. See Jones, *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 4. O'Grady's budget and material list for the parade float were sourced in the Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 5.
[430] Amanda Hunt, "*Art Is…* Interview with Lorraine O'Grady," *Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine* (Summer/Fall 2015): 24.
[431] O'Grady, "This Will Have Been," 14.
[432] By virtue of the frames' continual shifting along the parade route, they also created constantly "moving pictures," thus invoking cinema, further supporting the assessment that the performance exists in an interstitial ontological zone between live action and photographic reproduction. For more on performative convergences between still and moving images, or between photography and film, see Louis Kaplan, "*Aleph* Beat: Wallace Berman between Photography and Film," in *Still Moving: Between Photography and Cinema*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 196-225.

the sentiments shouted by audience members confirmed "that the majority of them understood that the piece, and their participation in it, was art."[433] As a mobile, participatory, self-reflexive art experience, *Art Is…* unyoked the Duchampian readymade from its conventional art institutional context and released it back into the open field of variables from whence it arguably came: the public sphere.

For color photography of the performance, O'Grady commissioned Coreen Simpson, as well as a photographer named Whitfield Lovell. They each later provided O'Grady with thirty-five millimeter slides.[434] On the occasion of the exhibition of forty photographs from the performance at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2015 and 2016, O'Grady conducted an interview about her process for the project. She actually collected additional photography, outside of that commissioned from Simpson and Lovell: "…whenever I saw people taking photos, I got their phone numbers…when I met them, they gave me slides that they didn't want…a couple of people gave me slide rolls that I processed."[435] In the Studio Museum presentation, unlike in the case of *Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire*, these photographers remain anonymous. While O'Grady credits herself with conceiving of the piece, in keeping with her original concept of inviting audience members to participate as creators, subjects, and constituent components of the work itself, she applies a rubric of dispersed authorship to the photographs. This upholds the boundless extemporaneity characterizing the live performance itself, wherein the ontology of "art" was subject to constant slippage, the moving frame was undermined as a heuristic delimiter of the space from which art's meaning could be derived, and points of access to conceptual avant-gardism became permeable to Harlem-based publics. In continuance with my analysis of the relationship between Mlle. Bourgeoise Noire's performance and the remaining photographs, I argue that in the case of *Art Is…*, too, the space of the performance and the image fields of the photographs occupy overlapping ontologies. However, I also contend that the geographies of 1980s Harlem into which O'Grady introduced the open sociality of *Art Is*… inflects the photographs of the performance in

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[433] O'Grady, "This Will Have Been," 15.
[434] See Lorraine O'Grady, letter to float actors, Dec. 29, 1983; and Coreen Simpson, invoice, Sept. 26, 1983, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 10, Folder 5.
[435] Hunt, "*Art Is…* Interview with Lorraine O'Grady," 23.

specific historical and cultural ways. Drawing on histories of Harlem creative communities and of African American artists' struggles for museum representation in New York, the following analysis demonstrates how photographs from *Art Is…*invoke historic lineages of photographic practices specific to Harlem, which often celebrated black figures in spheres of literature and music when they were relatively absent from elite New York art institutions.

Many art and photography historians have chronicled the richness of twentieth-century narratives of photography produced in Harlem. As a reflection of the area's incredibly dense history as a locus for producers and consumers of culture, photography from Harlem has also served to propagate public discourse about the neighborhood and its inhabitants. As film scholar Paula J. Massood has pointed out, from the earliest twentieth century reaching into the period known as the Harlem Renaissance, portrait photography in particular was used by those documenting Harlem life as a means to "allay demeaning stereotypes of black people inherited from other media and scientific sources."[436] As literary, musical, and artistic production in the neighborhood increasingly flourished, a number of Harlem-based photographers set up and maintained successful portrait studios, where they photographed some of the area's cultural luminaries. James Latimer Allen, for instance, adopted an evocative, contemplative "character study" style (Fig. 30), in which he shot portraits of local citizens, including writers Alain Locke and Langston Hughes.[437] Other photographers working in the portraiture mode at the time included Carl Van Vechten—who photographed figures such as Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Zora Neale Hurston (Fig. 31)—and James Van Der Zee, arguably the most well-known Harlem studio photographer of the early twentieth-century.[438] While his earlier images possess resonances with the romanticism of Pictorialist imagery (Fig. 32), his later photographs moved on to street photography, portraying Harlem's black middle class public life (Fig. 33). These

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[436] Paula J. Massood, *Making a Promised Land: Harlem in Twentieth-Century Photography and Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 10. For more on intimate creative engagement between Harlem-based writers and photographers during the Harlem Renaissance period, see also Sara Blair, *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[437] Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1940 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 44.

[438] For more on Carl Van Vechten's biography and body of work, see Emily Bernard, *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Portrait in Black and White* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

photographs, according to scholar Deborah Willis, actively promoted successes of postwar black migration from the South to northern metropolises, including New York.[439]

Between the 1930s and 1940s, a transition took place in much Harlem-based photography. Stationary, formal portraits offering intimate studies of their subjects gave way to scenes that, sharing techniques of photojournalism, characterized the neighborhood's street life. Thanks to advances in camera technologies in the 1930s (particularly the release of Leica thirty-five millimeter cameras), equipment was more portable than ever.[440] African American Harlem-based brothers Morgan and Marvin Smith, for example, are credited with "virtually invent[ing] a modern photojournalist practice through their photographs taken for the black press."[441] Many Harlem photographers would continue to foster offshoots of this documentary style over the next few decades. Farm Security Administration photographer Gordon Parks, for instance, published a photo essay project for *Life* in November 1948 titled "Harlem Gang Leader," (Fig. 34) for which he spent about four weeks shadowing a local named Red Jackson, recording his gang's various activities. The accompanying (unattributed) text refers to Harlem as a "cluttered, dreary" place where "schools, like housing, are crowded and run-down," setting the tone for readers to read the images as documents of an inner-city criminality unique to Harlem's gang culture at the time.[442]

One of Harlem's most well-known photo-text projects of the 1950s, Roy DeCarava's *Sweet Flypaper of Life*, interspersed portraiture with street and domestic scenes, accompanied by fictional text written by Langston Hughes (Fig. 35). Unlike Parks' take on the neighborhood for *Life*, *Sweet Flypaper* portrays the neighborhood through an optic of familiarity. Both Hughes and DeCarava were locals who rendered their surroundings not as a geography of destitution, but as a quiet, contemplative place that was home to thousands of working-class black families.

Less than a decade later, a very different version of Harlem street scenes filled the pages of printed news outlets when a series of violent demonstrations besieged the neighborhood

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[439] Willis, *Reflections*, 43.
[440] Massood, *Making a Promised Land*, 84.
[441] Melissa Rachleff, "Photojournalism in Harlem: Morgan and Marvin Smith and the Construction of Power, 1934-1943," in *Visual Journal: Harlem and D.C. in the Thirties and the Forties*, ed. Deborah Willis and Jane Lusaka (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1996), 15-16.
[442] Gordon Parks, "Harlem Gang Leader," *Life* (Nov. 1, 1948): 97.

during the height of national civil rights struggles. In 1964, when a young black man from the Bronx named James Powell was shot and killed by an off-duty New York City police officer, an initially peaceful gathering of protesters in Harlem became violent after police started marching on demonstrators. After six days of chaotic unrest that spread to multiple New York boroughs, one person was dead, hundreds were arrested and injured, and swaths of Harlem property suffered damages.[443] News photographs of the uprising depict the neighborhood in chaos (Fig. 36). Bodies fill the streets as individuals clash directly with law enforcement officers in riot gear. Often, police are depicted beating civilians with nightsticks, or they brandish their weapons as civilians scatter, running out of the frame as the officers approach.

In each of the above examples, portraiture and (social) documentary photography emerge as key platforms for discursive negotiations of how Harlem's "iconographic status as an African American place" shifted over several decades.[444] In 1969, hundreds of images from preceding decades, all created by white photographers, would be assembled for the "Harlem on My Mind" exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, famously catalyzing widespread debate over the identity-oriented politics of photographically representing Harlem populations' lived experiences. The exhibition (fully titled "Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968") was organized chronologically across six major sections, each devoted to a single decade.[445] Its aims, according to scholar Susan Cahan, were chiefly self-motivated, in that the institution wished to demonstrate its commitments to a diverse range of cultural values and to redirect prevalent opinion around its public role "from connoisseur of precious objects to participant in contemporary cultural debate."[446] The presentation predominantly featured documentary photographs (as reproductions only) and newspaper texts in the forms of slide projections and enlarged photographic prints, as well as audio recordings, text panels, and video. According to the exhibition's organizer, Allan Schoener, his decision to focus so heavily on

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[443] Massood, *Making a Promised Land*, 127.
[444] Ibid., 1.
[445] For a detailed look at the exhibition's organizing rubrics, see Allon Schoener, ed., *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1968).
[446] Cahan, *Mounting Frustration*, 31.

photographic reproductions was motivated by his view of this media as innately democratic, a creative mode that mitigated the exclusive aura surrounding the art object.[447] In his foreword to the exhibition catalogue, Schoener noted that he had conceived of the exhibition as a "communications environment…documentary in character…" that recreated the history of Harlem "as it happened."[448] This, Cahan surmises, was intended to transfer acts of meaning-creation to the viewers, who would experience the exhibition as a mosaic of image and text-based stimuli, rather than a didactic, narrative path.[449]

Skepticism and critique around Schoener's organizing strategies for the exhibition came to light well before it even opened. Several members of Harlem's creative communities, including both artists and members of the Harlem Cultural Council, expressed concern over the exclusion of black Harlem-based artists (working outside of photography) in an exhibition allegedly dedicated to Harlem's cultural and social history.[450] Within weeks before the opening, after a failed meeting between top members of the Metropolitan Museum's administration and a group of leading Harlem cultural figures, artist Benny Andrews hosted a meeting at his loft. Several of said leading cultural figures attended, including artists Romare Bearden, Cliff Joseph, and Norman Lewis, as well as curator Henri Ghent, among others. They intended to form a plan of (re)action to their frustrations with the Metropolitan Museum leadership. It was at this meeting that the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC), which would later catalyze protests around *The Nigger Drawings* show at Artists Space, was formed.[451]

Larger waves of critical response swiftly followed, including dozens of protestors who gathered outside the Metropolitan Museum on January 12, 1969. This crowd included members

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[447] Ibid., 33.
[448] Allon Schoener, Foreword, *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1968), n.p.
[449] Cahan, *Mounting Frustration*, 58.
[450] Schoener employed the counsel of an advisory board in organizing the exhibition, two members of which, Reginald McGhee and Donald Harper, were black, but they were not residents of Harlem. Consultants from Harlem communities were also approached, but, according to D'Souza, their suggestions were largely neglected. See D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 118-121.
[451] According to D'Souza, the BECC had three explicit objections to "Harlem on My Mind": the lack of black curators at the Met; the museum's failure to meaningfully respond to the input of the exhibition's black advisers; and "the fact that a show about black culture would not include the work of black painters and sculptors." See D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 125.

of the black arts groups Spiral, Weusi, and the BECC.[452] The demonstrations grew over the ensuing days to include multiple other groups, as well, such as the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Congress.[453] Unfavorable reviews of the exhibition, some directly in line with the BECC's major concerns, followed. According to D'Souza, the Met's more pernicious machinations for "Harlem on My Mind," to use "the idea of black outreach…as a means to an end—to retain the integrity of the Met in the face of pressures to open itself to those it had long kept out," backfired immensely.[454] What protestors saw in the exhibition as a major offense of misrepresentation consequently served to galvanize predominantly African American cultural and arts groups. In the coming years, they turned their attention to major institutions like the Whitney Museum of American Art and Artists Space, demanding considered recognition of both black artists and audiences.

The "Harlem on My Mind" controversy throws into relief a historical matrix of fraught ties among photographic practices in and of Harlem, black audiences' relationships to major New York art institutions, and black Harlem-based artists' struggles for representation in those institutions. By the time O'Grady was to conceive of *Art Is…* in the early 1980s, historical patterns of exclusion of black artists from major museums and other spaces had contributed to pervasive stereotypes placing black audiences and artists in a relation to elite avant-gardism characterized by alterity and alienation. As O'Grady recalls, a major motivator for the development of *Art Is…* arose in a *Heresies* Magazine collective meeting, where one of her peers proffered, "avant-garde art doesn't have anything to do with black people."[455] Incensed and disturbed by this comment, particularly as it was uttered in the presence of feminist artists of color involved with *Heresies*, O'Grady vowed to prove the speaker wrong. *Art Is…* offered a dynamic counterpoint to her presupposition, giving rise to a body of photography depicting black audiences' participation in,

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[452] Ibid., 125, 127.
[453] The Jewish groups present mostly raised points of contention around the exhibition catalogue (rather than the exhibition itself), which included what they saw as offensive and anti-Semitic statements in the exhibition catalogue. See Cahan, *Mounting Frustration*, 74.
[454] D'Souza, *Whitewalling*, 109.
[455] Lorraine O'Grady, Unpublished email exchange with Moira Roth, April 29, 2007, accessed Sept. 14, 2018, http://lorraineogrady.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Lorraine-OGrady_Statement-for-Moira-Roth-re-Art-Is_Unpublished.pdf.

and direction of, their own representation in the creation of conceptual public art on the streets of Harlem. Questioning the ontological status of the artwork as performance, photography, encounter, and/or otherwise, *Art Is…* intervened directly into discourses around Harlem cultural life and history perpetuated by "Harlem on My Mind," which historicized photography of the neighborhood as "evidentiary" of its social truths while excluding black artists as major contributors to its cultural fabric.

New Frameworks on Parade

The immense gilded frame built by De Gussi and Mingo protrudes into *Cross Street* (Fig. 37), doubly framing the streetscape that appeared before the camera. The photographer's composition of the scene leaves the gold frame's left and right sides just out of view, while its top and bottom cut across the photograph at an angle to the photograph's edges. Beyond the gold frame, a street view perpendicular to the parade route stretches out to a vanishing point in the horizon. Two several-story apartment buildings on either side of the intersection function as yet additional framing devices for this view, offering glimpses of trees, streetlamps, and additional residential and commercial structures between them in the distance. Just above the lower edge of the gold frame, a line of faces appears, including both adults and children, some calmly observing O'Grady's float and peering through its frame, and others expectantly glancing to the right, awaiting the next float in the procession. Nearly commensurate with the frame of the photograph, yet intrusively off-kilter in its image field, the large gold frame and its fan-shaped floral design features enter a symbiotic ocular relationship with one another. They each constantly call attention to each other's presence as delineators of vision.

The construction of an iterative framing reemerges in *Unisex Barber Shop* (Fig. 38), wherein the photographer has similarly positioned the camera relative to the massive gold frame. Its top and bottom appear in full view, mimicking the framing of the photograph, while its left and right sides remain nearly entirely outside the frame of the image. Beyond the gold frame, a row of

local storefronts, including that of a thrift shop and a unisex barber shop, temper the architectural anonymity of the previous image. Just in front of these businesses, a crowd of standing people lines the edge of the sidewalk, their faces again appearing just above the bottom of the gold frame. Some stand against the handrail of a stairway leading to one of the buildings, reminding viewers that while the buildings lining Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard became photographic subjects that day, they also served as frameworks for viewing themselves, as many spectators viewed the parade from windows, doorways, and stoops like the one in this image. Smiles can be discerned on some of the faces visible among the audience. They are at once framed by the gold frame, and therefore interpellated momentarily as “art,” and simultaneously they also peer through it, conversely viewing the scene on opposite side of the street as “art,” too. Immediately adjacent to the lower edge of the gold frame, seated on either side of it, are several of the performers that O’Grady hired for the day. Most of them hold smaller gold frames in front of their faces, ephemerally invoking portraiture, only to shift positions moments later. With them, they shift the object and/or subject of their frames’ investigations as well.

In each of these images, the material construction of the neighborhood itself—historic apartment buildings, shops, hotdog stands and umbrellas, occupy a double subjecthood that sets the tone for my analysis of this body of work. Momentarily framed by the sculpture atop O’Grady’s float, components of Harlem’s physical landscape, and therefore its “placehood,” becomes art. Framed once again by the camera, this placehood-becoming-art then becomes the subject of a photograph. This dynamism of continual, contingent “becoming” directly undercuts didactic impulses behind “Harlem on My Mind,” which presented Harlem through a photographic framework that was meant to render it and its cultural history as legible and knowable.

Photographs such as *Guys in a Crowd* (Fig. 39) and *Man with a Camera* (Fig. 40) demonstrate how the smaller gold frames acted as interlocutory objects in exchanges between the performers and spectators. In *Guys in a Crowd*, two of the performers clad in white exuberantly hold up gold frames in front a crowd of onlookers assembled behind blue police barricades at the edge of the street. The photographer’s “catching” of these spectators

momentarily in this photograph elicits a range of responses. While some look away or decline to engage with the performers, most at least acknowledge the presence of the camera, some smiling in its direction. Of those appearing inside the handheld frames, some people exhibit an ambivalence or hesitance. One man dressed in blue, on the contrary, holds up a flag in one hand and a folded newspaper in the other, embracing his fleeting moment of framing. He leans over the blue partition so that he might be photographed framed in gold. In *Man with a Camera*, a performer holds a small frame up to a man's face so that barely more than his head can be seen through it. He peers through reflective glasses and smiles at the camera, holding out his left hand in a gesture of recognition of the photographer's presence. In his right hand, he holds a camera. In this instance, not only does the man himself become "art," framed by the performer, but he, as a photographer himself, also becomes a subject of the photograph. This reciprocal spectatorship, mediated by cameras, invokes a range of relational complexities embedded in the photographic enterprise. In this instance, it reminds viewers of the limitlessness of photographic perspectives that can characterize a place and its history, especially one as densely populated as Harlem.

Some photographs, such as *Girlfriends Times Two* (Fig. 41) and *Caught in the Art* (Fig. 42), present acts of framing by spectators themselves. *Girlfriends Times Two* presents a scene of rather unbridled pleasure and affection, wherein two pairs of young girls each frame themselves. On the left side, girls offer the camera joyful smiles while they hold a gold frame around their faces. On the right, one girl smiles widely while the one next to her plants a kiss on the smiling girl's right cheek. Behind them, a performer keeps two hands on the frame but crouches behind the girls so as to keep her face out of view. *Caught in the Art*, meanwhile, conjures a divergent affective tone. A spectator in a black shirt with a silver chain around his neck directly confronts the camera, his mouth agape and his brow furrowed into a look of consternation. He wraps his left hand around one edge of a gold frame while, to his left, a male performer in white holds up a corner of the frame with his right hand. The large gold frame standing on top of the float juts out behind them at a sharp angle, providing a partial backdrop to the men's interaction. The ambiguous expression on the man in black's face is not immediately legible—is he angry?

Confused? Resistant to being framed? His look certainly contrasts that of the girls in the previous image, as well as that of most other audience members appearing in this series. The reference in the image's title to the man's being "caught" invokes the political stakes of consent embedded in any creative act of portrayal, but particularly in photography. It signifies photography as a medium whose historical associations to visual "truth" can, depending on the context in which a photograph is deployed, heavily inflect viewers' impressions of and beliefs about a given photographic subject.

These "evidentiary" associations of the photograph become particularly poignant in shots from *Art Is…* that portray police officers. In *Framing Cop* (Fig. 43), a white police officer stands in profile, facing the right side of the frame, with his hands on his hips. He wears a smirk on his face. As a young black boy beside him looks on, a female performer from O'Grady's project directly approaches the officer, holding up a gold frame close to her own face with which she likely intends, as implied by the title, to frame the officer. Through the frame, the two subjects' gazes confront each other. While the performer bears an expression of determination (perhaps even defiance), the police officer, hinting at his comfort with the power dynamics automatically constructed between them, appears amused and uncombative. Another exchange between a performer and a police officer, mediated by a frame, occurs in *Cop Framed* (Fig. 44). Here a female performer stands close to a white police officer while she holds a gold frame directly up to his face. He also takes a wide stance, perpendicular to her own, planting his right foot between her feet. He keeps his hands folded in front of him as he turns to his right, gazing at the performer with a conspicuous grin on his face. Even less confrontational than in the previous image, the pair's communication appears friendly and humorous.

Considering these two examples in the context of the previously discussed photographs from the 1964 Harlem demonstrations, the lightheartedness characterizing the scenes from O'Grady's project adopts additional shades of meaning. While virtually all of the bodies in O'Grady's photographs are brown and black, those of the police officers pictured in the series are white, which largely echoes the demographic ratios appearing in the riot photographs as well.

Moreover, the multiple valences of the verb “frame” in each title signal the critical connections between evidentiary uses of the photograph and law enforcement’s reliance on economies of quantifiable and verifiable “truth.” As was discussed in Chapter One, these signifying codes were often bendable in favor of subjects with social power and/or administrative rank. “Frame” simultaneously connotes the physical frames as well as the wrongful production of false evidence against a party to manufacture a verifiable appearance of criminality. Though photographs of violent clashes between police and demonstrators were so often historically deployed in the 1960s and 1970s by news outlets and law enforcement to suggest, and even “prove” protestors’ culpability, in these photographs from *Art Is…*, those dynamics are inverted. In these photographs, the white officers in Harlem become the ones framed.

Art Is… prompts an exploration of how racial stereotypes encode encounters in public streets, with particular regard to how the affective charge of these encounters can be mediated through photographs. Considering O’Grady’s photographs of exchanges between black performers and white police officers in the context of the Harlem riot photographs, questions arise around how stereotypes could be projected onto photographs of O’Grady’s piece, were they to be reproduced and disseminated. This interweaving of ideas strikes a chord with dynamics at play in Adrian Piper’s *The Mythic Being* project. Piper also enacted her project in public places, including many streets and sidewalks of New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts, between 1973 and 1975.

For this work, Piper dressed in a “drag” ensemble of what she called “working-class” clothes and dark glasses, as well as an Afro wig, a faux mustache, and at times, a cigar dangling from her mouth (Fig. 45).[456] She executed some parts of the performance in her private living quarters, and other parts included her enacting of daily activities in the public realm, such as wandering city streets, riding the subway, and attending public events like concerts and film screenings. The artist had still photographs of the performance made, some prints of which she addended with collage elements and text (Fig. 46), and others of which she submitted as

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[456] Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight* Vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 102, 147.

advertisements in the *Village Voice* (Fig. 47).[457] In these photographs, Piper's svelte physical frame and fair-toned black skin undercut and complicate constructed, essentialized distinctions among racial and gender categories. As John Bowles contends, Piper "portrays the Mythic Being specifically to fail at embodying him...[she] endeavors to denaturalize the images she might desire to identify with and those images against which she is judged."[458] Piper wears her costume so as to disguise herself, but not to entirely obfuscate bodily signifiers that might code her as feminine, therefore performatively embodying blackness, femininity, and masculinity at once. Piper's manipulation of some photographs of her performance included drawing on them with oil crayon, which exaggerated contrasts of light and dark already in the black and white photographs. On many of these altered images, Piper scrawled text representing the Mythic Being's speech or thought. These phrases at times included quotes from Piper's personal diaries (See Fig. 45). Others included fabricated dialogue that hyperbolized uninitiated public viewers' potential affective responses to encountering the Mythic Being (Fig. 48), informed by stereotypes of black men as aggressive, hyper-sexualized, and prone to violent criminality.

Piper herself described the Mythic Being avatar in 1976 as "an abstract, generalized, faintly unholy embodiment of expressed hostility, fear, anxiety, [and] estrange-ment…the personification of our subliminal hatreds and dissatisfactions, which blind and enslave us by being subliminal."[459] By inhabiting the form of the Mythic Being, Piper physically and verbally displays and ventriloquizes these qualities, forcing them out of an otherwise subliminal, silently operational zone. Through her photographs, both unaltered and manipulated, Piper undergirds the visual thrust of the transference—from subliminal thought to conscious, embodied action—that her performance evinces. Piper thus engineers her written articulation of the Being's thoughts and speech on these photographs as a means to visually substantiate racial and gender prejudices informing viewers' potential impressions of the Being as a threatening and/or alien entity. In so doing, I argue, she mocks the alleged "truth-telling" capacity of the photograph, forcing a

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[457] Smith, *Enacting Others*, 28.
[458] John Bowles, *Adrian Piper: Race, Gender, and Embodiment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 239.
[459] Adrian Piper, "From *Notes on the Mythic Being, III*," typed manuscript, January 1976, Lucy Lippard Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Quoted in Bowles, *Adrian Piper*, 241.

recognition of the pervasiveness and perniciousness of stereotypes as subconsciously learned and internalized "truths" in and of themselves.

O'Grady's photographic enterprise in *Art Is…* parallels Piper's in its positioning of photography as a locus for examining how systemically operational stereotypes and prejudices against blackness play out between subjects, particularly in the public arena of the street. Unlike Piper's Mythic Being, which focuses on interactions with white subjects, O'Grady's piece (save for the photographs featuring police) primarily showcases black bodies interacting through a reclamation to black art-making modes outside of a white-dominated art world. O'Grady's orchestrating of her piece, deconstructing predominant valuative modes of producing and looking at art, enacts what bell hooks has termed "critical black female spectatorship." hooks states, "as critical spectators, black women participate in a broad range of looking relations, contest, resist, revise, interrogate, and invent on multiple levels."[460] In this case, O'Grady transforms her own critical observations of segregationist art world structures into a relational, self-refelxive network of performative and ocular encounters, which inherently undermines art history's own patriarchal grip over current institutional practices and power dynamics. By claiming a Harlem street as a proving ground for art's ontologies vis-à-vis black subjects' participation and direction, it also problematizes otherwise covert social and historical conditions that have led to current, pervasive feelings of alienation between "avant-garde" art cultures and black audiences.[461]

With these analyses in mind, the mammoth gilded frame structure atop O'Grady's float, particularly in the moments where it nearly, but not completely, aligns with the photographic frame, becomes a fitting analogue for the underlying political stakes of the performative and photographic interventions made by *Art Is…*. The enormous gold aperture materially enacts the

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[460] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectatorship," in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 260.

[461] O'Grady and Piper corresponded through the 1980s and 90s on topics ranging from race relations in the art world and mainstream art writing to their own practices. In one letter dated April 11, 1980, O'Grady shares that she became aware of and began admiring Piper's work through her essay titled "Political Self Portrait #2," published in *Heresies*, in which she relayed an autobiographical take on her becoming aware of her own racialized subjectivity, as well as the portion of an ongoing essay published in Lucy Lippard's *Six Years* wherein she lays out her work's philosophical underpinnings. Lorraine O'Grady, letter to Adrian Piper, April 11, 1980, Papers of Lorraine O'Grady, MSS.3, Wellesley College Archives, Box 2. See Piper, "Political Self Portrait #2," *Heresies* 2, No. 4, Iss. 8 (1979): 37-38; and Piper, "section of an ongoing essay, January 1971," in *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, ed. Lucy Lippard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 234-235.

palindromic, exchange-based framework of vision and mutuality that the performance extemporaneously enacts in real time amongst human agents. In this rubric, the creation of the artwork is a relational negotiation in which the audience and the performers themselves play a mutually constitutive role. This questioning of authorial will as a unilateral force aligns *Art Is…* with the photography-based investigations of not just Piper but many of O'Grady's peers more typically associated with postmodernism, particularly among the "Pictures Generation." Like Richard Prince's and Sherrie Levine's photographs of preexisting photographs, which challenged artistic production and reception's mutual exclusivity, *Art Is*… also defiantly asks "what art is." What differentiates O'Grady's enterprise, however, is its specificity in placing itself within Harlem geographies and inviting Harlem residents to join in navigating its lines of inquiry. As Lucy Lippard stated in 1988, *Art Is*… "opens up the field of art to include what has until now been peripheral vision, rarely projected on the centralized screens of galleries and museums."[462] "Harlem on My Mind" allegedly aimed to do this, too, yet its institutional recourses to photography ultimately attempted to reckon with these historical practices by problematically rehearsing some of the same patterns of exclusion it claimed to rebuff. *Art Is…*, on the other hand, reflexively mobilizes photography as a participatory force in enacting its own live, unpredictable, democratization of art. By predicating its existence on the participation of black and brown bodies in Harlem as agents of their own representation, it takes an intersectional approach to its critique of 1980s art world power structures, revealing exclusionary undercurrents to those power structures and their own predominant theoretical debates.

Conclusion

My analysis here has demonstrated how O'Grady's *Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire*, 1980-81, and *Art Is…*, 1983, simultaneously locate photography in live performance, documentation, and within the art object itself, effectively destabilizing mutual opposition between

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[462] Lippard, "Sniper's Nest," 102.

performance and its filmic reproduction. Through the artist's (and her collaborators') reappropriation of documentary image-making conventions, their performances confront cultures of New York art world racism, animating spaces wherein photography can produce notions of blackness extrinsic to that world's normative ideologies.

Both projects demonstrate how these standards were not just socially, but spatially and discursively propagated. Coming on the heels of the heated controversy surrounding artist Donald's 1979 exhibition at Artists Space, Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire burst onto the New York art scene, mobilizing her own body, recitations, props, and costumes in her imploring of audiences to examine their own modes of participation in black artists' exclusion and dismissal from elite art world spaces. Through her very deliberate, directorial approach to planning, participating in, and cataloguing the creation of photography during her interventional performances, she left her indelible mark on Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire's performative legacy, which continues to circulate through black and white images as analogues of the performance itself. O'Grady's notions of performative authorship expanded and evolved in her execution of *Art Is*…, which called on hundreds of Harlem residents and parade-goers to collaborate on O'Grady's own work. Implicitly, they also collaborated on a collective questioning around how, why, and when the status of art is bestowed on an object or act, and, even more importantly, who may assert the authority to make those determinations, and what space(s) enable that assertion. In the space of O'Grady's project, photography was deployed as a means to keep those questions continually, and joyously, open in the face of exclusionary structures that had theretofore governed Harlem's photographic representation within public discourse. In both cases, O'Grady positions the still camera and other framing devices as powerful loci for forms of resistance to art world cultures whose predominant theoretical debates have historically repressed black Americans has agents of their own representation.

CONCLUSION

As Michelle Wallace contends in *Invisibility Blues*, predominant (white) voices of the 1960s and 70s New Left exhibited numerous tendencies to marginalize, trivialize, and decenter black subjects, even as these narratives' "specific historical object[s] may involve an apparent focus upon issues of ethnicity or racism."[463] From Sherman's *Bus Riders* to *October*-affiliated defenses of Donald's 1979 Artists Space exhibition title, 1970s/80s creative practices inflected by poststructuralist frameworks yielded critical spaces neglectful, and, at times, exclusionary, of non-white artists and art audiences, even in moments of attention to issues of race itself. While these particular discourses of postmodernism took aim at patriarchy's powerful hold over cultural ideology, they often failed to acknowledge how other vectors of identity, particularly race, class, and sexual orientation, can conditionally intersect across spaces and timescales. My case studies' analysis offers a mode of redress to these art historical blind spots. It examines the stakes of intersectional identity-oriented critiques *within* predominant narratives of photographic postmodernism, highlighting the work of artists whose sendups of clichéd stereotypes inevitably revealed those stereotypes' pervasiveness within the New York and Los Angeles art worlds' own institutional structures.

In Chapter One, my analysis of Asco's No Movies revealed an iterative recourse to the dramatization of criminality, amplified by aesthetics of glamor and horror. In deploying these motifs, the group drew on their own personal experiences with lived cultures of violence in East Los Angeles, emulating and acerbically mocking mass media's sensationalist tendencies toward essentialist representations of Mexican American populations. By reconfiguring both independent and mainstream news outlets' own journalistic modes, Asco undermined and redirected their image-based semiologies and epistemological paradigms. All the while, the group rejected utopian notions of a monolithic Chicano subjectivity (often embraced by key Chicano Movement artists), resisting cultures of documentary photography that positioned it as a tool to legally sanction violence and other discriminatory practices. These multifaceted strategies reformulated

[463] Michelle Wallace, "Reading 1968: The Great American Whitewash," in *Invisibility Blues* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2016), 522.

political concerns of the Chicano Movement within a polymorphous, itinerant postmodernist politics of subjectivity, formulating new, intersecting articulations of Chicanx experiences specifically in and through the still photograph.

Chapter Two demonstrated how Patrick Nagatani's early career experimentation with , perceptual and affective registers of color forged notions of individuated subjectivity and difference by examining phenomenological play between light and bodies. This thinking evolved significantly in Nagatani's Polaroid collaborations with Andrée Tracey, which brought attention to Japanese and Japanese American experiences—both direct and indirect—of international atomic warfare and testing. Building on Rey Chow's discourses, my analysis parsed the photographs' radical engagement with visualities that unravel both universalizing impulses of postmodernism and militaristic notions of a "world target." Sara Ahmed's "politics of disorientation" proved a fitting optic through which to assess the artists' photographic problematizing of constructed spaces, allowing a network of connections to emerge amongst the artists' labor-intensive tableaux, their navigation of multi-city travels from large format Polaroid camera to large format Polaroid camera, and the means by which social and cultural distributions of power organize bodies across space. Mobilizing displacement as a resistive methodology, their practice elided predominant art world power structures, embracing new and alternative forms of visual, professional, and spatial kinship.

My discussions of Lorraine O'Grady's *Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire*, 1980-81, and *Art Is…*, 1983, in Chapter Three explicated the artist's construction of a photography that transcended ontological boundaries between live performance, documentation, the art object, thus destabilizing mutual opposition between performance and its reproduction. The artist's (and her collaborators') reappropriation of documentary image-making conventions tackled New York art world racism, rampant but seldom discussed, animating spaces wherein photography can produce notions of blackness extrinsic to that world's normative ideologies. For both projects, O'Grady positions the still camera and other framing devices as powerful loci for forms of resistance to art world cultures whose predominant theoretical debates have historically

repressed black Americans has agents of their own representation, animating spaces wherein photography can produce notions of blackness extrinsic to that world's normative ideologies.

In my preparation of this last chapter, my considerations of Adrian Piper's multifaceted uses of photography for *The Mythic Being* (and across her 1970s/80s oeuvre) prompted me to imagine how her work and that of other contemporaneous artists might fit within the lineaments of my dissertation, were I to extend its scope beyond my three principal case studies. Over the last many months of writing, I continually returned to the work of Tseng Kwong Chi, a Hong Kong-born photographer and denizen of New York's 1980s East Village art scene. A close confidante of Keith Haring, Tseng became Haring's "official photographer," amassing an enormous archive of his work, and executed portraits of other renowned artists including Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Julian Schnabel. One of his most well-known photographic series, titled *Expeditionary Self-Portraits*, or *East Meets West*, included black and white self-portraits of Tseng dressed in what he called a "Mao-style" suit at cliched western tourist sites, such as the Statue of Liberty, the Colosseum, and Disneyland (Fig. 1). With aesthetic echoes of Sherman's Film Stills, his images embark on tongue-in-cheek investigations of global cultural tourism and the performative stereotype, enabled, disseminated, and complicated through the photograph.

In considering which other artists might contribute to my project's objectives, and in seeking out firsthand accounts from the artists populating my case studies, it has become clear to me that commitments to expanding preeminent narratives through studies of underrepresented and underrecognized artists has shaped my work in significant ways. Inevitably, this entails a reconciliation of my own intentions with those of previous scholars whose work has generated those preeminent narratives. Even Crimp himself has plainly stated in his recent memoir that "in the years since 1977, Pictures has taken on a life of its own…retrospectively, it has assumed an overblown importance."[464] In studying scholars' and critics' consistent discursive return to the Pictures narrative from the 1980s up to the present, my project asks what other practices of

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[464] Douglas Crimp, *Before Pictures* (Brooklyn, NY: Dancing Foxes Press, 2016), 278.

artistic coalition, association, and kinship become possible when this dialogue of the "generation" is mapped onto the exceedingly capacious and thorny notion of "Americanness" itself.

While in many respects, my dissertation corroborates Crimp's skepticism of Pictures' epitomic importance, it would be an oversight not to acknowledge my project simultaneously as a work of intergenerational scholarly dialogue. Frames of reference asserted by the *October* group have inevitably evolved since the late-1970s, and meanwhile, my perspective on their work from that time is indelibly informed by my own contemporary scholarly optic. Likewise, cultural identity categories and the language that institutes them also see inexorable shifts and transformations over time. With these points in mind, as my dissertation's lines of inquiry continue to resurface in various future guises in publications and exhibitions, I intend for my relationality to my intellectual forbearers to remain similarly generative, variable, and evolving.

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