AN INTERPRETIVIST STUDY OF KNOWLEDGE PROVIDED BY SEAMLESS DIGITAL-SYNTHESIZED PHOTOGRAPHS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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By

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to better understand digital photography by focusing on seven artists who produce seamless digital-synthesized photographs. Data was collected from interviews, artist statements, artists’ publications, and critics’ reviews of their work. Questions asked of the data include: “Do these artists’ photographs provide knowledge?” “What kinds of knowledge do their photographs provide?” Auxiliary yet more approachable questions include: “What are their views on reality?” “What notions of reality do they represent in their photographs?” “How do they visualize reality?” “What do their images expect of viewers?”

This study presents seven artists. The cross-artist analysis shows that seamless digital photography can be defined as a new medium with attributes of photography, painting, and cinema. In terms of the knowledge and styles this new medium creates, seamless digital photography is not new, but a revivification of the old. Digital photographs do not generate uniquely new knowledge, but combined knowledge that can already be found in history, including knowledge based in theories of realism, expressionist cognitivism, formalism, and postmodernism. Digital photographs do not invent a new style, but re-introduce and revise past artistic movements, such as realism, romanticism, and surrealism.
This study suggests that in order to appreciate and teach about the variety of knowledge provided by seamless digital photographs, art educators need to incorporate both the old and new paradigms—the appreciation of fine arts as old, and the critiques of visual culture as new—so as to pay attention to both the aesthetic features of artworks and a deepened understanding of their contexts.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is an empirical investigation of the types of knowledge provided by seven artists’ seamless digital-synthesized photographs, which are combinations of different pieces of images but with a realistic appearance. Artists’ choices of media and styles are not carefree, but are laden with scrupulous thoughts including their ideas and beliefs through which they interpret the world and interact in it. A new style of seamless digital photographs is a site where one can observe artists’ frameworks for generating, sustaining, and applying knowledge. In order to explain this research project more in-depth, this chapter is divided into eight segments: background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, methodology, significance of the study, limitations, and overview of the dissertation.

Background to the Study

After one hundred and fifty years’ prevalence of analog, or chemical-based darkroom photography, a brand new way of making photographs has joined photographic options: digital photography. The technical advancement of digital photography has, on one hand, been very convenient for photo shooting, editing, and storage; on the other hand, it has caused vigorous debates about the use of analog or digital photography (Kasai & Sparkman, 1997; Widhalm, 2004), the credibility of photographs (Henning,
1995; Savedoff, 1995, 1997; Batchen, 1999; Skopik, 2003), photographic education
(Lantz, 1996; Garner, 2004; Barrett, 2006), and the status of photography in general
(Robins, 1995; Orvell, 2001). Some signs show that while the analog is withering, the
digital is prospering. Germany company AgfaPhoto, manufacturing analog photographic
paper, film, and chemicals, filed for insolvency and ended operations at the end of 2005;
Kodak ceased manufacturing photographic paper for the darkroom in 2007; Konica
Minolta, Sony, Canon, Panasonic, and Nikon stopped producing most film cameras in
2006, and since then have been introducing newer and newer series of digital cameras
(www.dpreview.com). These developments have led some critics to assert that the era of
“post-photography” has arrived (Batchen, 1994; Robin, 1995; Orvell, 2001; Lister, 2002).

In this “post-photography” era, according to digital media analyst William J.
Mitchell (1992), the style of digital-synthesized photographs is often associated with
of digital imaging are felicitously adapted to the diverse projects of our postmodern era”
(p. 46). Mitchell argues that since “the digital medium privileges fragmentation,
indeterminacy, and heterogeneity, and emphasizes process of performance” (p. 316), it is
perfectly tuned to what postmodern theorists Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1991)
call “postmodern patterns of thought.” For Best and Kellner (1991), these patterns deny
“modern assumptions of social coherence and notions of causality,” and embrace
“multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy” (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 4;
Lister, 2004, p. 316). In other words, the digital-synthesized style of photographs
exemplifies postmodernism in those shared “patterns of thought” that it invokes, in
which everything is at play, ironic, and by chance. In addition, British cultural analyst Martin Lister (2004) associates digital photography with Derridian poststructuralist deconstruction due to digital images’ openness to continuous modification and hence never reaching a fixed final meaning. In this vein, in Lister’s (2004) view, digital imaging deconstructs the traditional idea of the singular objectivity and single closed meanings in photographs.

**Statement of the Problem**

Mitchell (1992) and Lister (2004) propose that whoever uses digital tool thinks postmodernly. Their diagnosing the human mind solely based on the tool one uses presents a problem. Take myself for example. My MFA capstone presentation, *Two Parallel Timelines*, met almost every technical requirement to be a postmodernist artwork: I digitally synthesized bits and pieces to form each photograph (Owens, 1980; Lister, 2004); I appropriated images from others’ (Owens, 1980); I ghostly presented snapshots that evoked the notion that presence is composed by absence (Crimp, 1980); every image of this project could be endlessly re-modified. However, I do not have a postmodern thought or impulse to express the instability, openness, and the multiplicity of the self (Crimp, 1980). Rather, I was depicting a major spiritual and emotional conflict within myself caused by different views from different religions among my family members concerning the post-life. I tried to visualize the memory my family members and I have shared, and to express my sad feeling about the disharmony brought by our different beliefs. I digitally combined 3 or 4 snapshots into one image, and hence each image illustrates a certain time range that I have spent with each of my family members.
The two parallel timelines stand for two separate lives, and the photograph itself witnesses the memory we have shared. In other words, with the digital tool I was simply expressing my emotion, and thus presented Expressionist knowledge rather than the postmodernist thought suggested by Mitchell (1992) and Lister (2004) due to the digital tool.

Therefore, Mitchell (1992) and Lister (2004) fail to thoroughly theorize digital photography itself, and their problem resides in the subject of their analysis. Art historian Norman Peterson (1984) rejects the machine-centered medium analysis, and proposes a human-centered one. In Peterson’s (1984) view, being more concerned with the character traits of the medium than with the particular work of particular artists leaves out the meaning and the significance of each work, and thus fails to understand the medium as a whole: “one must begin with the work of art and work back to the nature of the work-

Beyond Mitchell and Lister, who mistakenly assert that all digital photographers think postmodernly, other theorists, individually, identify the “new” type(s) of knowledge provided by digital-synthesized photographs. The types of knowledge they identify present a problem, too. Digital media analyst Sarah Kember (2003) argues that from analog to digital, there is an epistemological shift from the position that the object (a photograph) itself gives knowledge, to that of a subject’s (a photographer’s) intrusion in the causal process of the camera. In other words, Kember (2003) asserts that knowledge in all analog photographs comes from photographs themselves due to one-to-one photographic objectivity, whereas knowledge in the digital stems from the cooperation between subjects (photographers) and objects (photographs) caused by the need of a photographer’s mind to fabricate images. According to Kember, such a shift has posed a threat to the realism with which photography has been long invested, and which gained strength from Euclidean geometry (cone of vision), perspective, and positivism (Kember, 2003). However, Kember’s statement seems to be over-simplified in two ways. On the one hand, not all analog photographs are realist (Rosler, 1989; Manovich, 1996; Lister, 2004); hence, the object (a photograph) is not the only knowledge originator. In addition, what Kember (2003) describes as the digital technology that “reveal[s] the presence of
the subject behind the rhetoric of objectivity” (p. 206) happened a long time ago in, for example, Pictorialists’ idealized landscapes achieved by the scratches on the surfaces of negatives and Man Ray’s surrealist Rayograms. On the other hand, Kember’s statement remains unclear as to what kind(s) of knowledge derives from the collaboration of a subject and an object. Kember (2003) neglects the diverse styles in analog photography, and mistakenly identifies a sudden epistemological shift brought about by the new digital imaging. Kember’s so-called new shift is not new at all, but had already happened in styles that she has neglected in the history of analog photography.

In contrast to Kimber’s assertion about the ‘back-to-the-ancient’ knowledge brought by the new digital tool, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard claimed that all images in the present postmodern society are simulacra; that is to say, Baudrillard claimed an ‘advanced’ postmodernity-type source of knowledge in all images, certainly including those that had been digitally-synthesized. Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum celebrates the triumph of objects and the catastrophe of subjects. A simulacrum is an ectasizing object, or a sign, which forms a hyperreality to shape subjects’ thoughts and behavior. According to Baudrillard, simulation is the force from which knowledge originates and postmodern societies are organized. In the society of simulation, identities are constructed by the appropriation of images; codes and models determine how individuals perceive themselves and relate to other people. In addition, in the hyperreal mode, entertainment, information, and communication technologies provide experiences more intense and involving than the scenes of banal everyday life. Media simulations of reality, Disneyland, TV sports, and virtual reality games show that
since the real is no longer possible, these sites, with charming seduction, become the only source of knowledge—simulacra. An artwork of a simulacrum presents a type of knowledge that combines the realist view that knowledge comes from the outside world and the postmodernist view that we encounter signs only. Theorizing a unique type of knowledge, however, Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum assumes that by living in the high-tech commodity society of today, every image-maker and message-receiver think similarly, and thus have one single type of knowledge to provide.

In sum, without looking at any particular artist or artwork, Mitchell (1992) and Lister (2004) only examine the medium of digital photography and jump to a conclusion that all digital photographers think ‘photoshoppedly.’ I believe that if we remain at the level of the skill of fabrication when we investigate synthesized images, we lose the biggest picture of what kind of world view or intent makes an artist choose digital synthesis instead of, say, straight photography, and therefore we are unable to further understand the digital-synthesized photographs themselves. Kember (2003) looks into the knowledge provided by digital photographs, but her scope is so over-generalized in drawing a clearly-cut line distinguishing ‘objective analog’ from ‘subjective digital photography,’ that she is unable to discover the diverse knowledge presented by digital photography. Baudrillard, too, biasedly assumes that everyone in postmodern society thinks identically and possesses equal world views. Therefore, we need research on the knowledge given by digital photographs in order to better understand digital photography itself—if the execution of the new digital tool indicates a change in knowledge, and what type(s) of knowledge can be learned from digital photographs.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to deeply understand digital-synthesized photographs by investigating the types of knowledge provided by various digital artists through their photographs. By identifying the knowledge of their photographs, I attempt to explain if people who use the digital tool to produce artwork necessarily possess ‘Postmodernist pattern of thought.’ I also suggest an empirical foundation to theorize the digital medium, as well as a style of seamless digital-synthesized photographs, and whether this style presents an epistemological revolution, or simply a tool change.

Contemporary architectural theorist Mark Gelernter (1995) demonstrates the vital role of one’s epistemology in understanding his artwork. He critically illustrates the history of Western architecture theory from the ancient to the present time, and identifies an important relationship between theories of knowledge and theories of design, and explains the fundamental role of architects’ epistemologies in their artistic creation. Gelernter (1995) suggests that by investigating the conceptual problem of the individual and his relationship to the world, one may reveal the answers to questions such as: “From what is the intention derived?” “How is this idea generated?” “What influences its shape?” “What principles guide activities?” (p. 27). According to Gelernter (1995), the relation between one’s knowledge and creation could be illustrated as below (Figure 1.2):
Gelernter (1995) proposes that by looking into the subject-object problem, which later evolved into an epistemological system in Western philosophical history, one finds that with different views of the relation between subject and object, individuals have different sources of ideas, and thus create various styles of artwork. For example, if the designer [artist] is thought to be an autonomous subject who initiates his own actions on the world, it follows that he must somehow create his own idea from internal sources, and then give them to the outside world. [This is a romanticist]. Yet if he is thought to be an integral part of the outside world and subject to external concern, it follows that he must passively receive information which originates outside himself. [This is a realist] (Gelernter, 1995, p. 28).

Art historian Charles Cramer (1997) confirms Gelernter’s assertion that by understanding artists’ epistemologies it will help us better understand the scaffolding of their artworks. Cramer’s (1997) research on the paintings of British painter Alexander
Conzens (1717-1786) explores Conzens’s epistemology, and finds that Cozens’s method of blotting in landscape paintings (Figure 3) came from his rationalist epistemology which generalizes principles of nature through rational judgments. Such a finding is revolutionary because it challenges the commonplace statement that “there is something singularly romantic about Cozens” (Twitchell, quoted in Cramer, 1997, p. 113). Cramer’s finding suggests that while the form may be served as skin, philosophy functions as the bone of an artwork. If we want to better understand an artwork, understanding the artist’s world view is crucial.

Figure 1.3: Alexander Cozens, *The New Method, plate 1: A Blot of the first kind of composition of landscape*, 1785
In conclusion, I wonder if digital artists have similar sources of knowledge when using the same tool (PhotoShop), and presenting in the same style (digital-synthesized photography). Therefore, by identifying and investigating digital artists’ epistemologies, it helps us understand the knowledge provided by their digital photographs, and offers a possible path to theorize the style of seamless digital-synthesized photographs and the digital medium itself.

**Definition of Terms**

In order to clarify the important concepts of this study, the terms I use for ‘epistemology,’ ‘knowledge,’ ‘reality,’ and ‘seamless digital-synthesized photographs’ are defined here.

**Epistemology, knowledge, and reality**

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with knowledge and what can be known. When we want to know what kinds of knowledge are provided by artworks, we need to inquire how artists obtain knowledge. Contemporary philosophy educators William P. Alston (2006) and Louis P. Pojman (1991) illustrate a process of how knowledge is formed. They contend that we start from acquiring a truth, which then needs to be justified and proved warranted, and when the truth has sufficient firmness, it becomes knowledge. Pojman (1991) states: “Knowledge involves processing the truth . . . Knowledge differs from mere true belief in that the knower has an adequate justification for claiming truth” (Pojman, 1991, p. 33). People have different substances for adequate justifications, ranging from their senses, their intellects, to feelings (Pojman, 1991).

Alston (2006) continues to explain the necessity of exploring one’s metaphysical
stance when investigating one’s epistemology. He maintains that we must already have some knowledge before we can reflect on, or judge, what it is to know something. That is to say, in Alston’s (2006) opinion, epistemology cannot be pursued without employing various pieces of knowledge that we already possess; this belief falls under the range of metaphysics. We need to have existing factual (metaphysical) beliefs before we reach warranted beliefs (knowledge). Alston (2006) cites contemporary philosopher Alvin Plantinga’s argument: “A positive answer to the epistemological question depends on a positive answer to the metaphysical question” (Alston, 2006, p. 83). Since metaphysics stands for reality, and epistemology for knowledge (Burke, 2006), Platinga’s argument could be deciphered as ‘what is knowledge depends on what is reality.’ In other words, in order to know what qualifies as one’s knowledge, we need to know what one thinks of as real.

In this study, I rely on questions of reality to inquire into artists’ knowledge. Through interview questions on reality, I obtain their views on multiple layers of reality, the deepest of which I call their knowledge. The relationship between metaphysics and epistemology, as well as reality and knowledge is illustrated in Figure 1.4:
Seamless digital-synthesized photographs

In this study, *seamless digital-synthesized photographs* mean virtual photographs done on a computer by appropriating and combining elements or fragments from other images, and “obvious evidence of revision and alteration are attempted to be effaced” (Skopik, 2003, p. 268). Seamless digital-synthesized photographs follow photographic perspective and draw a seemingly close relationship to conventional photographic truth caused by light written on the surface of the film, and thus still “remain essentially photographic” (Green, 1994, quoted in Skopik, 2003, p. 268). Examples of seamless digital-synthesized style of digital photographs are Jeff Wall’s *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* (Figure 1.5), and Pedro Meyer’s *Desert Shower* (Figure 1.6), where it is extremely difficult to tell whether it is synthesized in a computer, or a one-shot traditional photograph. Non-examples of seamless digital-synthesized photographs include, for example, Eva Sutton’s ‘fantasized’ digital-constructed photograph *Hybrids*.
(Figure 1.7), which lacks a realistic look, Jerry Uelsmann’s photo collage physically done in darkrooms instead of digitally, for example, *Untitled* (Figure 1.8), and Martina Lopez’s synthesized photographs cut and glued by hand, for example, *Bearing in Mind* (Figure 1.9).

![Figure 1.5: An example of seamless digital-synthesized photograph Jeff Wall. *A Sudden Gust of Wind* (after Hokusai), 1993.](image-url)
Figure 1.6: An example of seamless digital-synthesized photograph

Figure 1.7: A non-example of seamless digital-synthesized photograph
It is “fantasized” and does not follow visual perspective.
Figure 1.8: A non-example of seamless digital-synthesized photograph. The image is synthesized in darkroom. Jerry Uelsmann. *Untitled*, 1965.

Figure 1.9: A non-example of seamless digital-synthesized photograph done by handy cut and paste. Martina Lopez. *Bearing in Mind 1*, 1998.
Research Questions

In order to better understand digital photography, I focus on digital artists who produce synthesized photographs with a realistic appearance. The central question of my research is: “Do seamless digital-synthesized photographs provide knowledge?” “What types of knowledge does this style of photographs provide?” Auxiliary yet more approachable questions include: “What are these artists’ views on reality?” “What notions of reality do they represent in their photographs?” “How do they visualize reality?” “And what do their images expect of viewers?”

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model with which I analyze and interpret the kinds of knowledge provided by digital photographs is adopted from art critic and educator Terry Barrett’s (2008) Why is That Art? This model comprises four theories of art, namely realism, expressionist cognitivism, formalism, and postmodernism. The four theories, philosophers, and photographic examples can be summarized in the following table:
### Theories of Art

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories of Art</th>
<th>Aestheticians &amp; Philosophers</th>
<th>Photographic Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REALISM</td>
<td>Aristotele</td>
<td>19th-century photography, Edward Weston, Documentary in 1930s</td>
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<tr>
<td>FORMALISM</td>
<td>Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Clive Bell, Clement Greenberg, Rosalind Krauss (structuralism)</td>
<td>Straight photography (Modernism), Group F.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>POSTMODERNISM</td>
<td>Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault</td>
<td>Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Summary of the survey on theories of art, aestheticians or philosophers, and photographic examples.

### Methodology

**Design and Methods of Data Collection**

The purpose of this research is to understand digital-synthesized photographs by investigating the type(s) of knowledge provided by various digital artists through their photographs. This study employs an interpretivist methodology with which I aim to investigate artists’ intentions, meanings, and world views behind their actions of producing seamless digital-synthesized photographs. In order to do so, one-on-one interview was selected as the main method for data collection. The interviewed artists are Jaime Kennedy, Tom Bamberger, Kelli Connell, Tom Chambers, Matt Siber, Nathan Baker, and Harri Kallio. To have an in-depth understanding of their work, I also collected
their artist statements, publications, and critics’ reviews of their work.

Methods of Data Analysis

The data analysis is divided into two major parts. The first stage is to present individual artists and to use the most suitable theory or theories to explain the knowledge embedded in their work, whether it is based in realism, expressionist cognitivism, formalism, postmodernism, or combinations of them. At the second stage, the seven artists are compared according to themes, such as their choices of subject matters, views on reality, and their perspectives on the digital tool, in order to find similarities and differences among them.

Significance of the Study

My study will add to the body of knowledge about the theorization of digital photography, history of photography, photography aesthetics, and the relationship between epistemology and practice. Researchers interested in photographic history, theory, and philosophy will be able to draw upon this study to better understand digital photography. These areas overlap into art education and will have implications as to how synthesized digital images can be taught and studied.

Limitation of the Study

This study is not intended to provide a full or generalized account of the epistemologies of all the artists who produce seamless digital-synthesized photographs. Rather, the number of artists is confined to seven due to the breadth a dissertation could reasonably cover. Moreover, this research presents those artists’ perspectives on reality and knowledge at the present time (O’Donoghue, 2007), which may change in the future.
with gaining more experience on using the digital tool.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter two is a literature review, which consists of a survey on four theories of art, accounts of major philosophers of these theories, and corresponding photographic movements or photographers. Chapter three presents the methodology, in which an overview of the methodological framework, an explanation of the design of this study, and a discussion of trustworthiness and limitations of this study are provided. Chapter four is the first part of data analysis, where artists are introduced and interpreted individually. Chapter five is the second part of data analysis, and comprises findings of this study. Finally, chapter six covers conclusions of this study and implications for art education.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter surveys different types of Western aesthetic criteria with which I analyze and interpret my own research on the kinds of knowledge digital photographers provide in their artwork. This methodological model, adopted from art educator Terry Barrett’s (2008) *Why is That Art?*, comprises four theories of art, namely realism, expressionism, formalism, and postmodernism. For each theory, I begin with an articulation of its general concept, proceed to its historical or contemporary major advocates, and present photographic examples that meet particular theoretical criteria. Although certain photographers or styles of photographs are cited under a particular theory, they cannot necessarily be explained only by that theory. On the contrary, as photography writer and curator John Szarkowski (1978) states, it is difficult to categorize any photograph into any single theoretical sphere, as photographs exist to various degrees along the continuum of theories and can be interpreted through multiple lenses. Therefore, some of the photographic examples in this chapter are discussed through many theories, while others are interpreted through one theory, but not the only possible theory. I discuss the relevance of these reviews to my research. The four theories, aestheticians, photographers, and photographic examples are summarized in the
following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories of Art</th>
<th>Philosophers</th>
<th>Photographic Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Aristotle</td>
<td>19th-century photography</td>
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<td>Edward Weston</td>
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<td>Documentary in 1930s</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXPRESSIONISM</td>
<td>R. G. Collingwood</td>
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<td>&amp; COGNITIVISM</td>
<td>John Dewey</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nelson Goodman</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Psychoanalytic theory</td>
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<td>FORMALISM</td>
<td>Immanuel Kant</td>
<td>Straight photography</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Group F.64</td>
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<td>(structuralism)</td>
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<td>Michel Foucault</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Summary of the survey on theories of art, aestheticians, photographers, and photographic examples.

REALISM

According to aesthetician Jonathan Gilmore (1998), there are three ways to justify pictorial realism. The first account stresses the resemblance of the representation in painting to what is represented in the real world. A realist painting gives viewers a vivid sensation of seeing particular people or items in everyday life. In this account, the essential characteristic of realism is the verisimilitude of its depiction: “a painting is realistic in virtue of looking like what it is a painting of” (Gilmore, 1998, p. 109). Such belief in resemblance is supported by historian Richard Wollheim’s claim that one can
actually see the real object in the world in its counterpart in the representational picture. Such “see in” indicates a “reciprocity between the configuration of the marked surface of the picture and the object it represents” (Sartwell, 1995, p. 355). It is due to resemblance that we see, for example, a flower in the picture of a real flower.

Goodman (1976) distinctly disagrees with this account of resemblance. In his view, the reason we consider one image realistic is that it looks similar to the pictorial convention that we have been ingrained in. As he comments: “a realistic painting resembles another realistic painting more than it resembles what it depicts” (Goodman, 1976, quoted in Gilmore, 1998, p. 109). Goodman gives an example of an Egyptian wall painting, which may have looked realistic to ancient Egyptians due to their familiarity with the style of representation, but which looks unrealistic to Egyptians at the present time.

A second view of pictorial realism is illusionism, which asserts that a painting is so realistic that viewers will very possibly mistake the representation of the objects in the painting for real objects. In other words, realist painting has the potential to trick, delude, and deceive viewers, as painter and theorist Federico Zuccari stated in the seventeenth century: “Here is the true, proper, and universal aim of painting: to be an imitation of Nature and of all artifacts, so that it deludes and tricks the eye of men, even the greatest expert” (Zuccari, 1960, quoted in Sartwell, 1995, p. 355). However, such view is challenged by Wollheim (1974) who argues that typical viewers do not have the tendency to react to a picture. For instance, when we look at Manet’s painting, we do not “wish to stretch out a hand and join in the picnic, or to assume dark glasses against the glare of the
A third view of pictorial realism contends that a painting looks realistic because it carries true information about what it depicts. For example, in a painting of a basket of apples, one sees facts, such as red colors, round shapes, and the size of the apples. It seems that the more true information one painting contains, the more realistic the painting is. Nevertheless, this view is disputed by the opinion that different information can be delivered by different paintings in different ways. For example, one painting illustrates the color, shape, and size of the apples; while the other painting shows the x-rayed apples, in which only the cores and the outlines of the apples are visible. These two paintings both contain information, but only one of them, the former, fulfills the realist criteria discussed here. In addition, when one accidentally projects a reversed slide of a landscape painting on the wall, the right to the left and vice versa, innocent viewers still consider this painting realistic even though all the information has been distorted. In rejecting the claim that paintings contain true information, Gilmore comments: “the truth or falsity of the information one could derive from a painting is of little consequence in whether the painting appears realistic” (Gilmore, 1998, p. 110).

Although there is no agreement upon how pictorial realism is achieved, realist painters create artwork according to exactly what they see without prejudging or idealizing. Art historian John Canaday summarizes the spirit of realism: “Show me an angel and I’ll paint one” (1959, p. 103). Realist painters’ aims are to give truthful, objective and impartial representations of the real world, based on careful observation of contemporary life (Nochlin, 1978). The realists insist that only the contemporary world is
a suitable subject for the artist because, for them, art can only consist of the representation of objects visible and tangible for the artist, and the artists of one century are therefore “basically incapable of reproducing the aspects of a past or future century” (Nochlin, 1978, p. 22). It is the demand for contemporaneity which separates realists from other schools of artists. Realists place a positive value on the depiction of the low, the humble and the commonplace, the socially dispossessed or marginal as well as the more prosperous sectors of contemporary life.

Aristotle

Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) provides the philosophical cornerstone for realism. He maintained that empirical observation gives certain and clear knowledge of the real (Trusted, 1981). He highlighted the uses of senses and contemplation of the physical realm, through which we perceive real things, or “substances,” as Aristotle called them, in the world around us. In art, Aristotle contends that the natural source of art is mimesis, which involves two important concepts: that human beings have a natural inclination from our childhood to imitate, and that we gain pleasure from viewing mimesis in artwork.

In Aristotle’s view, mimesis is not simply representing particulars, but is a human activity that creates artwork with intelligible structures well-planned for a certain end, such as giving pleasure (Belfiore, 1998). Therefore, mimetic art is capable of representing not only actual reality, but also concepts about the world and normative ideas of “what ought to be” (Halliwell, 1995). Mimesis presents a form of complete and lucid intelligibility acquired from the world.
Aristotle argues that while it is natural for us to imitate and to obtain pleasure from viewing mimesis, producing a mimetic artifact is not a natural process, but an artful one. Focusing on tragedy, Aristotle articulates the three stages of the artful process. First of all, tragedy is the expression of the nature of the poet. Although the poet does not speak in his own voice, he remains hidden behind the characters and expresses himself. Aesthetician Ronna Burger describes the mimetic chain: the poet expresses himself through dramatic characters to reach spectators (Burger, 1998).

The second stage involves the characteristics and criteria to make a good mimetic work of art: universality, probability, and unity. For Aristotle, art is not abstract, and neither is it a representation of particulars in history, but it is an imagined particular which carries significance encompassing the universal structure of human experience and understanding. Tragedy is the representation of an action, and what makes this representation “one, complete, and a whole” (Burger, 1998, p. 100) is the arrangement of the incidents.

The internal principles guiding the plot of a tragedy are necessity and probability, both of which “serve to transform the contingency of life into the teleological design of the mimetic work” (Burger, 1998, p. 100). Necessity presents the coherence of the representation, where no part could be substituted or removed, while probability fulfills the range of spectators’ expectations. Derived from conventions and particular contexts, probability is drawn from the notion of what the world is really like. Therefore, under the guidance of necessity and probability, a tragedy should deviate too much from what is normal despite its imaginary nature.
Aristotle maintains that the form of an artifact helps reach its perfection in unity. For Aristotle, form, different from the notion of it possessed by modernist formalists, could not be separated from content: “Form does not have its specific function, but it is intrinsic to how the artwork is interpreted” (Halliwell, 1998, p. 101). Form is an intelligible design, comprised of an organization of parts, which generate meaning conceived by human experiences. In tragedy, form is the plot structure, which is the design of the depicted actions. When following the rule of sequence, that is, the sequence of beginning, middle, and the end, as well as the guidance of necessity and probability, form reaches its completeness and perfection: unity.

Aristotle’s last stage of artful process is viewers contemplating pleasure from viewing the unitarily-plotted drama. Aristotle states that our aesthetic response is close to the ways in which we react to people and events in the real world. Such similar responses explain that in viewing artwork we have similar cognitive and affective components to what structures our everyday experiences. Aesthetician Stephen Halliwell (1995) comments that we gain those pleasures because of our active recognition of the nature of the realities dramatized by the artwork, and such pleasure fully depends on the understanding of the meanings embodied in art. Therefore, such pleasure is cognitive and objectivist. The function of pleasure, according to Aristotle, is to lead souls.

**Realism in Photography**

Akin to the debate on the account of pictorial realism, in photography the approach to externally given reality has a few different starting points (Price & Wells, 2004): first, the photograph itself as an accurate resemblance of the world; second, the context in
which the image is produced determines photographic realism.

The first approach, the photograph as a faithful record of the things viewed, is the narrowest definition of photographic realism (Sontag, 1977). Theorists who hold this view include Andre Bazin (1960), Rudolf Arnheim (1974), Susan Sontag (1977); John Berger (1980), Roland Barthes (1982), Roger Scruton (1983), and Kendall Walton (1984). Bazin (1960) argued that photographs are objects themselves formed automatically without the intervention of men: “Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of [the] transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction” (Bazin, 1960, p. 8). Arnheim (1974) asserted the special connection between photographs and the objects they represent by stating that a photograph is made due to the fact that “the physical objects themselves print their image by means of the optical and chemical action of light” (Arnheim, 1974, p. 155). In On Photography, Sontag (1977) viewed photographs as an means of freezing a moment in time, and defined photographs as “a trace directly stenciled off reality, like a footprint or a death mask” (Price & Wells, 2004, p. 27). However, critic and theorist Max Kozoloff (1987) argued against Sontag’s view by declaring that although photographs could be witnesses, they simultaneously carried all kinds of possibilities of “misunderstanding, partial information, or false treatment” (Price & Wells, 2004, p. 28). In Understanding A Photograph, Berger (1980) claimed that photographs are records of things seen (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 139): “Every photograph is in fact a means of testing, confirming and constructing a total view of reality” (Berger, 1980, p. 294). Barthes (1982), in Camera Lucida, claimed that what appeared in photographs must have existed in front of the camera, or what “has been
there” (Barthes, 1982, p. 76). In other words, photographs actualize the past existence that they represent. Also, in Photographic Message, Barthes called the photograph “a perfect absolute analogue, derived from the physical object by reduction, but not by transformation” (Barthes, cited in Arnheim, 1974, p. 156). Here Barthes emphasized the scrupulous relationship between photographs and the thing depicted. Scruton (1983) argued that photography is not a representational art because it is the objective causal relation between a subject and the photograph of it, where the photographer’s intention is not involved: “The ideal photograph…yields an appearance, but the appearance is not interesting as the realization of an intention but rather as a record of how an actual object looked” (Scruton, 1983, p. 103). Lastly, Walton (1984) affirms that photographs are transparent. When we look at a photograph, we not only see the photograph itself, but we also actually “see” the subjects photographed. We see the world through photographs: “we see, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them” (Walton, 1984, p. 252).

The second approach, that the context in which the image is produced determines photographic realism, includes claims from Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen (1975), Linda Nochlin (1978), John Tagg (1982), and Geoffrey Batchen (1997). Snyder and Allen (1975) argue that a photograph does not show us what we would have seen had we been there ourselves: “A photograph shows us ‘what we would have seen’ at a certain moment in time, from a certain vantage point if we kept our head immobile and closed one eye and if we saw with the equivalent of a 150-mm or 24-mm lens and if we saw things in Agfacolor or in Tri-X developed in D76 and printed on Kodabromide #3 paper”
(Snyder & Allen, 1975, p. 152). Snyder and Allen believe that transforming a scene into an image is full of the photographer’s choices: whether it is camera angle, lens, composition, printing equipment, chemicals, printing papers, etc. More importantly, Snyder and Allen contend that photographers negotiate between following the conventional formulas or standardized procedures of representation from painting and expanding people’s normal visual experience to accept whatever cameras record as real, due to the differences of human vision and the way cameras see.

Meanwhile, Nochlin (1978) strongly opposes the idea that realism is merely a style of mirroring reality. Central to her point is the assertion that one’s observation is culturally conditioned:

The commonplace notion that Realism is a ‘styleless’ or transparent style, a mere simulacrum or mirror image of visual reality, is another barrier to its understanding as an historical and stylistic phenomenon. This is a gross simplification, for Realism was no more a mere mirror of reality than any other style and its relation qua style to phenomenal data…is as complex and difficult as that of Romanticism, the Baroque, or Mannerism. So far as Realism is concerned, however, the issue is greatly confused by the assertions of both its supporters and opponents, that Realists were doing no more than mirroring everyday reality. These statements derived from the belief that perception could be ‘pure’ and unconditioned by time or place. But is pure perception ever possible? (Nochlin, 1978, p. 14).

Art historian John Tagg (1982) asserts that a realist work of art is produced under the combined influences from nature, history, and the artist’s personality. What we consider as real involves the familiar techniques used by the photographer, recognizable forms and styles of the past, as well as the skills and motivations of a particular type of intellect at a certain moment. Therefore, according to Tagg (1982), the elements of realism are located in “the existing social formation and its constituent forces” (Tagg,
where typicality best describes the origin of realism: “the dominant and
typical traits of socially conflicted life in a particular place and time” (Tagg, 1982, p.
135).

Lastly, Batchen (1997) argues that what nineteenth-century photographers said
about scientific recording in their photographs is no more than following conventional
aesthetic concerns to improve photographs and to make them “picturesque.” In Batchen’s
view, photographers are not objective reality recorders, but artists who think
“paintingly.” Thus, photographic realism is a “conventional way of seeing” (Barrett,
2006, p. 167), following traditional aesthetic rules to make photographs more like
paintings.

In the following section, some schools or individual photographers in history who
exemplify realism are discussed: That 19th-century photography presents outright
objectiveness is accepted by some, and challenged by others; Edward Weston achieved
Aristotelian realism, which presents essence instead of appearance, by focusing on
formal qualities. Lastly, Walker Evans exhibits the coexistence of realism and
romanticism in his documentary photographs.

19th-Century Photography

Photography was almost simultaneously invented by different people in different
countries. In 1837 in France, Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre and Joseph Nicephore
Niepce created the daguerreotype, a positive picture on a plate with mirror-like surface.
However, they were unable to reproduce multiple prints. Shortly after Daguerre and
Niepce’s discovery, in 1841, William Henry Fox Talbot, an Englishman, patented a new
type of prints he called calotypes, a system from which many prints in paper could be made from one single negative. Daguerre, Niepce, and Talbot all believed that photography “originated in nature and was disclosed by nature” (Marien, 2002, p. 23). Daguerre wrote that “the Daguerreotype is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; on the contrary it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself” (Daguerre, 1980, p. 13). Niepce described his accomplishment as “automatic reproduction, by the action of light” (Niepce, 1980, p. 5). Talbot regarded photographs as “photogenic drawing impressed by Nature’s hand” (Talbot, 1981, p. 36).

As Berger and Mohr (1982) point out, the camera and positivism “grew up together” (Berger and Mohr, 1982, quoted in Lister, 2004, p. 306). The view that photographs faithfully and scientifically record the world has been reinforced by, and has been an experimental tool for, positivism. Positivism, a branch of philosophy created by philosopher Auguste Comte in the nineteenth century, holds that “science constitutes the ideal form of knowledge” (Grady, 1982, p. 146). To be more specific, positivism rejects the uncertainties and the suspicious constructions of metaphysics, and only relies on what we perceive through scientific methods. Photography has contributed to the positivist view by evidencing that what one sees in a photograph is really in front of the camera, and thus by examining photographs, one gains knowledge. Two examples prove this notion: 1) 19th-century photographer Eadweard Muybridge, whose sequent photographs of animal locomotion confirmed that all four legs of the horse leave the ground when it gallops; and 2) Photographer J. T. Zealy, commissioned by naturalist Louis Agassiz in
1850, produced daguerreotypes of front, back, and side views of slaves from a North Carolina plantation supported, as visual evidence of Agassiz’s theory that races were created in different times and places in the world. Muybridge and Zealy’s photographs suggest an absence of personal points of view due to the fact that they consider themselves more as scientists who undertook the task to document the phenomenal world (Rogers, 1978).

Obsessed with scientific recording, the knowledge shown in nineteenth-century photographs was “accurate verisimilitude, a detailed likeness of the scene viewed” (Thompson, 2003, p. 45). Some contemporary critics and writers confirmed such a view. Poet and critic Charles Baudelaire (1859) declared that photography’s only value resides in its ability to verify actual sights and scientific facts, and therefore is very far away from the category of art: “let [photography] be the secretary and clerk of whoever needs an absolute factual exactitude in his profession—up to that point nothing could be better” (Baudelaire, 1981, p. 125). Unlike Baudelaire, who slighted photography’s status as art, Edgar Allen Poe (1840) praised the invention of photography as “the most important, and perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of modern science” (Poe, 1980, p. 37). He believed that photographs revealed a more accurate truth: “the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented” (Poe, 1980, p. 38).

However, present critics and historians think that it is naïve to view those nineteenth-century photographs as totally objective products which contain no touches of the photographer’s subjectivity. Art historian Catherine Rogers (2002) took a photograph
of one building at Queen’s College from a similar angle and position to those of Talbot’s photograph, *Part of Queen’s College Oxford*. By comparing her own photograph to Talbot’s, Rogers (2002) argues that although Talbot recorded a detailed and tonal image from nature, Talbot himself is not a passive observer, but an active mediator of those elements that must be considered when photographing: focus, aperture, depth of field, angle of the view of the camera, exposure, lens length, and camera location (Rogers, 2002). Similarly, from a careful examination of Talbot’s series of window pictures taken from 1835 to 1841, Batchen (2002) concluded that Talbot’s role is more of that of an artist than a scientist who merely recorded a scene. Batchen (2002) states: “[Talbot’s window] images articulate photography’s way of seeing, not as some sort of simply transparent window onto the real but as a complex form of palimpsest” (Batchen, 2002, p. 109).

Thus, fascinated with the new tool being able to jot down “infinitely more accurate” (Poe, 1980, p. 37) details than drawing and painting can do, nineteenth-century photographers and critics were satisfied with, and even proud that the knowledge brought by photographs is merely the likeness, or the re-presentation of the things we see with our eyes. Even though questioned by some present writers, nineteenth-century photographers exhibited their realities, the objective verisimilitude of the scenes viewed, in the beginning era of photographic history.

Edward Weston

Weston’s photographs not only objectively show the world as it is but he also subjectively selected and showed a heightened sense of reality, which was what he called
the vital essences of things (Weston, 1966). In Weston’s view, an abstract idea already existed in nature, and could be revealed through the camera’s objective recording. Although Weston himself stated that he “[had] no theories which conditioned [his] work” (Weston, 1966, p. 8), one finds Aristotelian influences in his theory—“forms and essences are available to perception, concealed within nature but discovered by wisdom” (Wollen, 1978, p. 18). Weston’s aim is to “record the quintessence of the object or element” in front of his camera, and “to photograph a rock, have it look like a rock, but be more than a rock” (Eisinger, 1995, p. 67). Weston’s idea of quintessence seemed to have fulfilled Aristotle’s stress on imitation of essences. Aristotle posited that art should not be merely literal copy of nature, but should present the essence of the object portrayed, and “the underlying geometric forms in nature have served to recall the essence of some forms” (Jones, 1989, p. 33). Weston’s reality dwelt in the essence of the object—something more than a tree, more than a shell, and more than a rock. Weston explained that to make something more than itself was not to make it look different from itself, but “simply to intensify form and texture” (Eisinger, 1995, p. 68), a feat which could be acquired only by geometrical compositions, a camera’s sharp focus, and clear details.

In addition to the Aristotelian realism, Weston’s photographs also exemplify formalism. Weston chose his subject matter for its formal qualities. Still life, landscape, and nude portrait were among his preferred genres. For example, *Nautilus Shell (half)* 1927 demonstrates the geometric pattern of the shell’s repeated curves with a tonal gradation from bright shell to dark background. Some critics saw the “foundation shapes
and structures of nature” or the “elemental necessity” (Eisinger, 1995, p. 65) in his work. In addition, Weston’s super realism (Weston, 1939), brought by “the sharpness, the sense of hardness, the clarity of detail and texture” (Eisinger, 1995, p. 65), was frequently associated with aesthetician Clive Bell’s “significant form” (Jones, 1989).

Documentary Photography in 1930s

Documentary, in a broad sense, means non-fictional representation. However, documentary photography in the 1930s not only provides objective information as a historical document, but also carries human emotions. Therefore documentary in 1930s was located in the continuum between two poles of realism and romanticism (Szarkowski, 1979). In other words, realism and romanticism coexist in documentary photography in 1930s. As Newhall (1964) observed, the importance of documentary photographs “lies in their power not only to inform us, but to move us” (Newhall, 1964, p. 142). Later, Stott (1973) stated when viewing documentary photographs, “feeling comes first” (Stott, 1973, p. 8). The trend of combining facts and expression is also confirmed by Sekula (1982), who declares that documentary photographers “stretch a continuous tradition of expressionism in the realm of fact” (Skula, 1982, p. 108). The subject matter of documentary photography in the 1930s was photographers’ varied responses to the social and political hardships or injustice of the Great Depression (Marian, 2002). The Farm Security Administration sent out photographers, such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Russell Lee, who strove to present ordinary “human subjects as people like us, who were temporarily down on their luck, hoping that viewers would make the imaginative leap to apply the message to themselves” (Marian, 2002, p. 36).
These photographers subscribed to a theory of documentary realism that truth was not only found, but also was created by selection and expression (Eisinger, 1995). Their photographs functioned not simply as raw reality but as symbols capable of delivering and shaping feeling (Eisinger, 1995).

Walker Evans, attracting most attention from critics with his “styleless style” (Eisnger, 1995, p. 98), once mentioned that he admired Flaubert’s approach: “realism and naturalism both, and his objectivity of treatment; the non-appearance of the author, the non-subjectivity” (Evans, quoted in Katz, 1971, p. 84). However, the “objectivity of treatment,” “non-subjectivity,” or what Evans strove for was not preciseness or exactness, but instead, the projection of his own person (Thompson, 2003, 36). He wrote about Atget’s work, and at the same time he revealed his own vision:

[Atget’s] general note is lyrical understanding of the street, trained observation of it, special feeling for patina, eye for revealing detail, over all of which is thrown a poetry which is not “the poetry of the street” or “the poetry of Paris,” but the projection of Atget’s person (Evans, 1931, quoted in Thompson, 2003, p. 36)

Evans projects his own person by giving oblique hints from the exact scene in front of his camera. He projects himself by selecting and seizing a view—not by physically moving the things around, but by “placing himself in relation to the everyday things the pictures show” (Thompson, 2003, p. 36). For example, he did not abruptly show spectacles such as Bud Wood’s skin cancer, and the horde of flies on tenants’ food and their children’s faces. Rather, he showed the bandanna on Wood’s shoulder covering his painful area, and an infant asleep under a flour sack to avoid flies (Stott, 1973). As A. D. Coleman’s review on Evans’s retrospective states, “we have not seen our land and its
people in the same way since Evans turned his camera on it” (Coleman, 1971, p. 38). This statement corresponds to Evans’s aim in his photographic book: “My book…aims at actuality in depth, and at contemporary truth and reality” (Evans, quoted in Thompson, 2003, p. 37). Such contemporary truth and reality is his projection of his own person in the things viewed, which is why he brings viewers a fresh look even though the photographed subjects are not new to viewers at all.

Thompson (2003) discusses how Evans frames truth with his camera:

> When [Evans] saw the cross in St. Michael’s Cemetery, the steel mills in the distance, and the workers’ houses just across the street, between the cemetery and the mills, he recognized “truth.” He had learned enough photographic technique to know to use a long-focus lens to flatten perspective, so that the foreground cross and background steel mills would look pressed close together, squeezing the workers’ houses in between. He saw this photographable scene as truth—a visible truth related to an understandable truth derived from economics and history he may have learned and talked about (Thompson, 2003, p. 38).

In conclusion, in Evans’s documentary photographs, one observes surface appearances of things, facts, objective structures, as well as sensibilities. The presence of Evans himself peacefully exists together in his photographs. Both realism and romanticism are presented. What Walker Evans viewed as real may be “a version of the scene, the projection of the artist’s own person” (Thompson, 2003, p. 45), with an emphasis on contemporaneity, in a mixture of factual recording and artistic expression.

**EXPRESSIONISM & COGNITIVISM**

Although its historical construct is imprecise, expressionism is normally associated with the anti-naturalistic art and literature of Germany and Austria from 1905 to 1920. Expressionist art is characterized by the emphasis on the individuality and subjectivity of
the artist. Expressionists reject the notion of art as a faithful imitation of nature, and regard artworks as a subjective and spiritual entity; they consider artwork as a series of compositional practices rather than a harmonious unity. As philosopher Kasimir Edschmid (1919) observes: “the German Expressionist artist does not see, he has visions; he does not depict, he experiences; he does not reproduce, he creates forms… Objects are significant only insofar as they make it possible for the artist’s deeply searching hand to grasp the existence behind them” (quote in Heller, 1998, p. 137). Not restricted to certain countries or time period, expressionism still lives today.

Cognitivism is closely associated with expressionism in its emphasis on the emotion aroused by artwork, but cognitivism goes further to assert that emotion functions cognitively. Cognitivism holds that art provides us with knowledge as do other fields, such as philosophy and physics. For cognitivists, viewing artwork allows us to gain deeper insights and fresh awareness; in addition, art grants us different and new ways to understand the world. For an idea to be called knowledge, it needs cognitive activities, rather than impulses working in our minds. Therefore, in saying that art provides knowledge, cognitivism asserts that art prompts our cognitive responses.

Expression Theories of Art

Expression theory inherits its legacy from Romanticism of the eighteenth century. Loathing science’s claim to correctly represent nature, ourselves, and the relation between them, questioning the ancient world’s pursuit of naturalness and obedience, and dissatisfied with Kant’s rational knowledge and empiricist philosophy, Romanticism is concerned with humanity. Romanticist artists share a common feature of stressing their
individualism and personal authenticity by expressing their creative imaginations, emotions, and spontaneity, and uniting spirit and matter, in their work. For Romanticists, the power of imagination from the inner life is not only a superior source of knowledge for science to probe into an invisible realm, but also a prime agent that animates the whole world. Romanticism brought a new role for the artist and a new interest in artistic creation.

For expression theorists and practitioners, art is the expression of the mind of the artist. Aesthetician Gordon Graham (2001) gives a succinct definition of expression theory: “Artists are people inspired by emotional experiences, who use their skill with words, paint, music, marble, movement and so on to embody their emotions in a work of art, with a view to stimulating the same emotion in an audience” (Graham, p. 119). However, another aesthetician, Ronald Hepburn (1995), reminds us that emotion is not the only entity expressed in artwork, but that artwork also contains self-reflections from artists’ world views: “it is not only sensations, feelings, moods and emotions that may be expressed, but also attitudes, evaluations, atmospheric qualities, expectation, disappointment, frustration, relief, tensings and relaxing… not only brief bursts of lyrical feeling evoked by specific, intensely felt events, but also the inner quality of a whole life-world” (Hepburn, 1995, quoted in Barrett, 2008, p. 58). To express is an activity of self-exploration and self-understanding.

Regarding emotion, imitation theory claims that art is the representation of the artist’s mental state, and focuses on the relation between the artwork and what it imitates. The focal point of imitation theory’s discussion of art is the faithfulness of the
representation. However, expression theory insists that artists express their emotions through artwork. It is the relation between the artwork and the artist that is emphasized, and in consequence the authenticity of feeling and expression is highlighted (Spackman, 1998).

Aesthetician John Spackman (1998) sketches two distinct branches of expression theory: a traditional one seeing art as expression, which considers artwork as what artists make to express their feelings; and a revised one seeing art as expressive, which underscores the symbolizing feature of the artwork itself independently of the artist’s emotion. The latter theory has caused numerous debates, and practitioners eventually resorted to the former theory (Spackman, 1998). The following discussion will focus on the former view only, which considers art as expression, and the major figure of this view is R. G. Collingwood.

R. G. Collingwood

In Principles of Art, aesthetician R. G. Collingwood (1938) maintains that there is an essential connection between the expression of emotion and art. More specifically, Collingwood believes that art is imaginative expression. In the process of creating a work of art, the artist actively and consciously clarifies and refines an unidentified psychic disturbance. Through imaginative construction, an inchoate emotion is embodied in the artwork. Collingwood describes this process:

At first, he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is. All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement. While in this state, all he can say about his emotion is “I feel… I don’t know what I feel.” From this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by doing something which we call expressing himself (Collingwood, p. 109-110).
In other words, the artist does not know ahead of time what specific emotion will be expressed.

It is also important to understand the notions of ‘express’ and ‘imagine’ in Collinwood’s theory. Collingwood (1938) explained that when someone says: “You are an evil man!,” it is an expression of his anger. However, when he says “I am angry!” he lacks an imaginative construct, in that he is denoting his anger rather than expressing it. Furthermore, when expressing emotion through art, the activity is under control and is conceived by the artist, and is different from uncontrollable responses, or, as Collingwood called them, “betraying emotions,” such as turning pale or stammering to signify fear. Collingwood explains that such self-awareness, controlled thinking, and active pursuit are the features of the act of imagining. Therefore Collingwood likened imagining to language: “he expresses himself by speaking…” and “the act of imagining, which is the act of uttering language, is not embroidering of a pre-existent thought, it is the birth of thought itself” (Collingwood, p. 196). Thus, for Collingwood, art is a consciously controlled expression of emotion.

Collingwood (1938) identified what art is by defining what art is not. Craft, embodied from a preconceived emotion and with a directed end result or purpose, is not art. Objects for amusement, propaganda, exhortation, instruction, and practical value are not art (Anderson, 1998). Crafts are made to evoke emotion, whereas art is made to express emotion. In addition, the difference between good art and bad art lies in whether the expressed emotion comes across: “A bad work of art is an activity in which the agent
tries to express a given emotion, but fails” (p. 282). Bad art should be distinguished from craft: in craft there is no failure to express because craft has other functions to serve.

Finally Collingwood (1938) emphasized art’s role in initiating knowledge, which is a shared emotion. Although an artist expresses his own emotional state, the emotion is shared by a community: “(the artist) undertakes his artistic labour not as a personal effort on his own private behalf, but as a public labour on behalf of the community to which he belongs” (Collingwood, 1938, p. 314-315). The emotions the artist tries to express are not particular to him, but shared by his audience.

Collingwood’s (1938) theory of art has been criticized and challenged. Contemporary aesthetician Stephen Davis (1998) holds that Collingwood overemphasized the private dimension of emotions, and ignored the appearance of the art object itself. Aesthetician George Dickie (1971) questions Collinwood’s assertion that art necessarily has something to do with emotion. Dickie cites examples to support his argument that art could exist without the expression of emotion. In addition, Dickie (1971) criticizes Collingwood for bigotedly categorizing standard paradigms of art as entertainment, such as the plays of Shakespeare. Dickie therefore comes to the conclusion that “instead of a theory of art, Collinwood has a theory of an aspect of art” (Dickie, 1971, p. 95).

**Cognitivist Theories of Art**

Concerning the degree of how much we learn from art, philosopher Noel Carroll (1998) insists that radical modification of understanding is exceptional. Rather, as philosopher Matthew Kieran (2001) argues, art mainly revivifies impressions or deepens
our already-held presumptions.

Kieran (2001) suggests that the view on how distinctive art is as a channel for us to learn varies among cognitivists. Philosopher Bernard Harrison (1991) holds that art teaches us partially. He claims that, in responding to the criticism of Bacon’s portrayal of humanity as wicked, art’s main concern is not to tell the truth, but instead to introduce us to “interesting, complex and expand(ed)…imaginative horizons” (quoted in Kieran, 2001, p. 224). Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1990) takes an extreme position. She claims that art offers a unique kind of knowledge unattainable from other disciplines. Unlike abstract principled reason, the kind of knowledge involved in philosophy and history which affords us rational and practical erudition, art tells us how it feels like to have certain emotions towards others. She claims that art has an indispensable role. Philosopher Berys Gaut (1998) takes a more modest stance. He states that there are many ways to acquire knowledge, although art is a valuable way to “invoke and prescribe a peculiarly cognitive-affective response” (Gaut, 1998, quoted in Kieran, 2001, p. 223). In Gaut’s view, art not only conveys truth, but does this particularly well in an affective way.

Gaut (1998) articulates the aim of aesthetic Cognitivism in Art and Cognition, where he argues that art can teach us, and thanks to this teaching ability sometimes art obtains its aesthetic value. In Gaut’s (1998) view, art can teach us because it provides opportunities for us to imagine, and we imagine cognitively. Imagination not only gives us knowledge about what one should choose, knowledge about oneself, knowledge about other people, and moral knowledge, but also allows one to discover truth about the world by applying imaginatively fictional worlds to the real world. When these cognitive values
are concretized in a particular painting or novel, they are valued artistically because we learn about the real world from the portrayal of a specific character or object. Gaut (1998) defends the cognitive power of imagination and its artistic value in his aesthetic cognitivism.

In conclusion, philosopher Cynthia Freeland (1997) illustrates the central statement of cognitivism:

(1) Artworks stimulate cognitive activity that may teach us about the world… (2) The cognitive activity they stimulate is part and parcel of their functioning as artworks. (3) As a result of this stimulation, we learn from artworks: we acquire fresh knowledge, our beliefs are refined, and our understanding is deepened. (4) What we learn in this manner constitutes one of the main reasons why enjoy and value artworks in the first place (Freeland, 1997, quoted in Barrett, 2008, p. 59).

In order for us to appreciate a work of art, we need to understand it, and understanding requires cognitive activities. In addition, there is a motivation of pleasure-seeking involved in viewing artwork, as philosopher Eileen John (2001) states: “we often develop ideas in response to art, moving cognitively from point A to point B, because of the fun or interest or satisfying quality of making that move” (John, 2001, p. 332)

**John Dewey’s Pragmatism**

Centralized in the cognitive function of the mind as well as the verification from practical experiments, American philosopher John Dewey’s (1859-1952) pragmatism is discussed here along with cognitivism. Pragmatism does not tell people where knowledge resides, but provides a means for people to acquire knowledge. Different from traditional metaphysics, which claims that an immutable cognitive object serves as the foundation of knowledge, pragmatists argue that knowledge has to correspond with
fact. That is, knowledge must have a practical instrumentality (Browne, 1930; Menand, 1997; Hamlyn, 1987). Rejecting dualism, Dewey asserted that ‘warranted belief,’ a term he preferred over ‘knowledge,’ comes from the interaction between the organism and the environment: “if thought constitutes a domain that stands apart from the world, how can its accuracy as an account of the world ever be established?” (Dewey, 1903, quoted in Field, 2006, internet article). In Dewey’s view, human beings interact with the world actively through self-guided activities directed to fulfill their own purposes.

According to Dewey, the inquiry of finding a ‘warranted belief,’ like a problem-solving process performed in a laboratory, involves four stages: confrontation of a problematic situation, reconstruction of the initial situation, a cognitively reflective phase, and the subsequent inquiry in action (Morton, 2004). To past the test, the hypothesis must conform with experiences and also have practical applicability. If the hypothesis is consistent and applicable, then it could be called knowledge. During this process, active restructuring of conditions is necessarily involved.

Dewey illustrated his belief that knowledge comes from the ways in which our practical experience interrelates with the world. In his example, a noise is heard in a dark room and is experienced as fearsome. A subsequent inquiry follows (maybe someone turns on the light and looks around), and the person finds that the noise was caused by a blind tapping against a window, and thus was harmless. In Dewey’s terms, the first reality was the fearsomeness, and the second reality was the harmlessness. The second reality is initiated due to a problematic uncertainty followed by a subsequent inquiry, which does not uncover the second reality underlying the first reality (its fearsomeness),
but instead changes the organism-environment relationship of the initial situation because in fact it was experienced as fearsome. The second reality comes from the urge to solve the problem, and ultimately the human-environment relationship of the initial situation was changed (there was no discovery of an underlying reality beneath a mere appearance) (Garrison, 2000).

Dewey’s aesthetics come from his own pragmatism. Philosopher Casey Haskins (1998) observes the instrumentality in Dewey’s aesthetics, as is emphasized in pragmatism, in two senses. One is that art is not fixed, but leads to a variety of further ends. Because art is such an eminent example to teach us about the interrelation between intelligence (his term for the mind) and environment, art is indispensable from life. The other sense that Haskins emphasizes is that Dewey’s aesthetics presents a form of inquiry, which starts from a desire to resolve a tension among the artist, the medium, and the world.

Dewey explicitly states that art is experience, as his book title on aesthetics suggests. Experience, for Dewey, means an ongoing interaction between intelligence and the world (Seiple, 1998). Art exemplifies such experience. A work of art does not mean the physical artifact itself, but is the artifact working to make our experience as complete and meaningful as possible.

In Dewey’s expression theory, emotion is integral to art expression; however, art does not express emotion, but emotionalized meanings. It is not the artist’s internal and personal life that art expressed, but instead the emotionalized meaning which is social, ongoing, and contextualized. When the artist receives a response from the world, he
obtains emotions, which are then objectified in a medium whereby the meaning is organized and refined as communicative. Guided by an intention, the emotion is fused with intelligence and finally the initial situation is transformed. Dewey believes that form is defined through the means of organization of experience, rather than the mere presentation of lines, shapes, and colors.

Dewey’s expression theory is different from Collingwood’s in some ways. First of all, Dewey rejects the idealist tradition of separating form from content, aesthetic value from instrumental value, and fine art from crafts. Dewey insists that art, or experience, is both means and end, and it arises from the process of life. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, art does not express emotion, but the meaning behind it. Dewey questions whether art has to be self-exploration and self-expression as Collingwood suggests, since the motivation to make art, the process of making it, and the communication of the expression cannot be separated from the social and cultural context. For Dewey, it is not about the self; it is about the community (Alexander, 1995). Although he questions expression theory in the traditional sense, Dewey does not repudiate all of expression theory (Haskins, 1998). Rather, he brings it to another level by expanding the scope of expression: from high art to everyday experience, and from the self to the community (Alexander, 1995).

Nelson Goodman

Philosopher Nelson Goodman (1976) developed a form of cognitivism, in which meaning is delivered through symbols. Whether this cognitivism happens in science or art, it requires our interpretation of various symbols involved. Understanding the worlds
of science is no different from understanding the worlds of art. Therefore, for Goodman, 
the knowledge provided by art is a branch of epistemology.

Goodman’s cognitivism theorizes the ‘rules’ within the symbol system. Like 
understanding a word or a sound, understanding a work of art requires a correct 
interpretation of the symbols, which involves knowing how and what a certain object 
symbolizes, and how such symbolization affects our own world views. In other words, a 
correct interpretation consists of understanding what those symbols refer to. Goodman 
(1976) recognizes two basic models of references: denotation and exemplification. 
Denotation is the relationship between a label and what it labels. For example, a painting 
of a lion denotes a real lion. Exemplification means that the symbol refers back to the 
label, where a selective feature is “exhibited, typified, shown forth” (Goodman, 1976, p. 
86). For example, a bald eagle exemplifies being “daring, free, and in command” 
(Margalit, 1998, p. 321). Denotation and exemplification do not function exclusively; the 
‘routes’ or ‘paths’ of reference can be overlapping, and a single symbol can 
simultaneously perform a variety of referential functions. Habit decides whether 
denotation and exemplification operate either literally or metaphorically because, for 
example, an old metaphor can become literal within a cultural community.

Expression is a sort of metaphorical exemplification. A painting expresses 
happiness not in the sense that the canvases feel happy, nor in the sense that we 
necessarily feel happy, nor in the sense that the painter must have been happy. That the 
painting express happiness indicates that it exemplifies happiness metaphorically.

When comparing scientific symbols and artistic symbols, Goodman (1976) found
that aesthetic symbols are relatively abundant in the sense of multiplicity of referents through a variety of routes. Goodman (1976) also identified the symptoms of a work of art by distinguishing artistic symbols from scientific ones: exemplification, relative repleteness, complex and indirect reference, as well as syntactic and semantic density (Elgin, 2001). In interpreting an artwork, Goodman (1976) maintains that variant interpretations may be correct, but not every interpretation is correct. Only those following the reference rules can be accepted.

In Goodman’s (1976) view, the feelings evoked by artworks are sources of knowledge and help us understand the world better. Emotional sensitivity enables us to be aware of minute features which are different from those of scientific domains. Equally with reason in science, in Goodman’s view, emotions function cognitively.

**Psychoanalytic Theory**

Psychoanalysis, first developed by Austrian physician Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), is a field of inquiry about the human mind, especially the unconscious, and has a goal of providing therapy for mental disorders. Freud contends that unconscious motives are fundamental drives for human behavior. Psychoanalysis seeks to unearth those unconscious messages to explain mental disorders manifested outward in everyday human activities. In aesthetics, however, psychoanalytic theory is concerned with the expression of the unconscious. An art product is viewed as an encoded object awaiting deciphering; it is also considered a site that provides viewers with pleasure.

Freud identifies several components to the human psyche. The *id* is the unconscious and instinctual part of the mind; the *ego* is in charge of one’s identity and
reconciles the demands from the instinct to those from the world; and the superego, a branch of the ego, internalizes social values and parental rules, and serves as a self-controller and internal censor.

Mental disorders arise from the conflicts between the id and the superego: that is, between instinctive needs and the requirement to conform to the social norm. Normally the ego’s ability to keep the balance between the id and the superego grows with one’s age. However, that means that with age, more of one’s instinctive demands are brought under the control of the ego or superego. During this process, numerous desires are repressed and are pushed into the category of the unconscious. When the repressed desires are not properly resolved, mental disorders happen. According to Freud, mental disorders could be cured by uncovering and deciphering those repressed desires, which often manifest in the form of dreams and other external behaviors, such as disturbing repetitions and striking omissions in patients’ narratives (Emerling, 2005).

Freud interprets artwork as he analyzes dreams because he believes that artwork conveys artists’ expressions: “the [art] product itself after all must admit of such an analysis if it really is an effective expression of the intentions and emotional activities of the artist” (Freud, quoted in Higgins, 1995, p. 348). In decoding a work of art, as in analyzing a dream, Freud focuses on an artist’s psychobiology and its relation to his artwork. Freud also pays attention to the characteristic of camouflage, which covers a hidden message, on the surface of the artwork, and the formal qualities of the artwork, which may correspond to the artist’s personal biography. In Freud’s analysis, artists are considered as children or immature adults, who relentlessly pursue their own (sexual)
pleasure, disregard the strict control of reason, and persist in exhibiting their narcissistic fantasies. For Freud, giving sexual desire an indirect outlet is a form of ‘sublimation,’ which includes all kinds of cultural achievements, even a simple expression of beauty and an appreciation of it. As he states: “There is to my mind no doubt that the concept of ‘beautiful’ has its roots in sexual attraction and that its original meaning was ‘sexually stimulating’” (Freud, quoted in Higgins, 1995, p. 349).

Freud articulates the formal principles at work when our unconscious rises in dreams: condensation, displacement, pictorial arrangement and secondary revision. Condensation is a combination of events or elements composited into one image; displacement, to the contrary, is the process that a single object could be associated with other events; pictorial arrangement and secondary revision are the ways in which the final presentation of a ‘movie’ is displayed in dreams. The mental movie is closely related to the unconscious; it releases hints, or little threads, that, once pulled, can uncover the entire story.

In addition to Freud’s contribution to psychoanalytic theory, theorist Carl G. Jung explicitly associates psychoanalytic theory to art by distinguishing between two types of artistic creation: the psychological and the visionary (D’Souza, 1998). The psychological type of art presupposes well-calculated and plotted schemes drawn from the artist’s conscience and deals with the artist’s psyche. Artists usually select materials they are familiar with, and using symbols is one of their common strategies. On the other hand, visionary art is spontaneous and rich in imagination. However, the experience underlying such work is not personal, but a collective unconscious.
Expressionist Cognitivism in Photography

Pictorialism, Alfred Stieglitz, Minor White, and Surrealist photography are discussed in this section because they represent a similar type of knowledge—the expression of emotion, feeling, or the unconscious. For pictorialists, the emotional response to a scene is central to the purpose of artmaking, which in their view characterizes post-production manipulation. Alfred Stieglitz, too, emphasizes his inner emotion, but resorted to a modernist style of sharp, straight, and untouched photographs. Minor White conveys his feeling as well as evokes viewers’ in his metaphoric and sequential photographs. Lastly, surrealist photographers account for the unconscious mind as their prime source of knowledge.

Pictorialism

Pictorialism flourished at the end of the nineteenth century and lasted until the first decade of the twentieth century. There are many branches of pictorialism, such as naturalism, impressionism, aestheticism, and symbolism (Eisinger, 1995). Here, only two main figures of pictorialism are discussed: Henry Peach Robinson, the dominant British theorist of pictorialism, and Peter Henry Emerson, an advocate of naturalistic photography in the end of the nineteenth century.

Robinson (1887) emphasized the photographer’s individual impression of the subject. In his first book, Pictorial Effect in Photography, he first stated that the essence of a photograph is situated in its pictorial effect: “The aim and end of the artist is not truth exactly, much less fact; it is effect” (p. 81), which “satisfies the eye without reference to the meaning or intention of the picture” (Robinson, 1869, p. 156). Effect
means idealization, poetry, personal emotion and expression (Robinson, 1887). Using combination printing—a process by which a print was made from different negatives, Robinson expressed that effects could be achieved by following rules of composition: “the same laws of balance, contrast, unity, repetition, repose, and harmony are to be found in all good works…the arrangement of the general form of nearly all pictures… is based on the diagram line and the pyramid” (Robinson, 1869, p. 156).

In his later book *The Elements of a Pictorial Photograph*, he listed several crucial ingredients of a pictorial photograph. First of all, there must be a man behind the machine (the camera). This indicated that photographer’s subjective view determined what a photograph looked like. Secondly, although the faithful recording of the world is its foundation, a pictorial photograph must not merely imitate nature; it has to go beyond it by expressing what was “mentally and intellectually conceived” (1887, p. 67). Lastly, in order to acquire the status of art, photographs must be in accord with the “stylistic and technical conventions of academic realism” (Trachtenberg, 1980, p. 99), which is painting. The techniques may include studio settings, retouching or etching on negatives, and composite printing. What Robinson (1887) considered as knowledge in a photograph was the expression of poetry, mystery, and sentiment obtained through compositional techniques, as he pointed out: “if we can add untruth we can idealize, [b]ut we go further and contend that we can add truth to bare facts” (Robinson, 1877, p. 65).

Trained as a physician, Emerson’s benchmark of artistic knowledge was science, as he stated: “All good art has its scientific basis” (Emerson, 1889, p. 195). His scientific ideals came from Helmholtz’s theory of perception, which states that one sees clearly
only the area one looks at directly, while all other areas seem blurred. Also, humans’
eyesight is not perfect. Therefore, in terms of focusing, Emerson believed that one should
“focus for the principal object of the picture, but all else must not be sharp; and even that
principal object must not be as perfectly sharp as the optical lens will make it” (Emerson,
1889, p. 195). By obeying one’s vision to render soft-focus photographs, according to
Emerson, photography achieved the status of art, in contrast to the sharp and detailed
qualities of science. In addition to the soft focus of the object, Emerson highlighted the
tone and atmosphere in naturalistic photography. More specifically, he believed that only
“true tone” resulted in atmosphere. For example, if a picture was taken under bright
sunlight, its brilliancy was its true quality. However, if the photographer printed the
photograph with an overall dim tone, like that shot on cloudy days, the sense of
atmosphere was destroyed. Emerson’s naturalism values nature above all else (Eisinger,
1995), as Nancy Newhall (1989) later put it: “Nature is the scientific first principle of
art” (Newhall, 1989, p. 53). In other words, it is the “true impression” of nature that
Emerson considered as knowledge in Naturalistic photography. “True” indicates true to
human’s vision; while “impression” suggests subjective interpretation. Herein lies the
contradiction pointed out by art historian Joel Eisinger (1995) “between visual truth and
imaginative interpretation” (p. 21). Also, photographer Nathan Lyons (1966) criticized
Emerson for acknowledging a personal point of view but limiting its significance to the
true appearance of nature.

Robinson and Emerson’s photographic theories shared some similarities and
demonstrated differences. They were similar in laying stress on personal emotion as
central knowledge and poetic atmosphere in the quality of the print. In addition, both of them had influences from painting: Robinson fiercely advocated for photography to be more like painting in terms of its composition, while Emerson’s Naturalistic photography was established on the principle of vision similar to that developed by impressionist painters in the nineteenth century. Finally, both men fought for photography as a fine art.

However, their theories are different in some ways. First of all, manipulation was fundamental for Robinson to arrive at a perfect effect, while Emerson encouraged photographers to catch the moment: “Remember there is one moment in the year when each particular landscape looks at its best, try and secure it at the moment” (Emerson, 1980, p. 101). In addition, Robinson’s combined prints were opened to various subject matters, including indoor settings and outdoor landscapes, while Emerson considered nature to be the only source of truth. They criticized each other concerning their differences: Robinson attacked naturalists because they “pretend to represent what they see but healthy human eyes never saw any part of a scene out of focus” (Robinson, cited in Newhall, 1989, p. 56). Emerson counterattacked by claiming: “Retouching is the process by which a good, bad, or indifferent photograph is converted into a bad drawing or painting” (Emerson, 1889, cited in Eisinger, 1995, p. 23). Eventually, combining Robinson’s manipulation and imitations of painting, and Emerson’s soft focus, as well as the similarities between them, the movement of pictorialism prevailed in both America and Europe in the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

The notion of artistic expression in pictorialism is a romanticist idea. The knowledge that pictorialists tried to present is the “artist’s experience of the scene and his
emotional response” (Thompson, 2003, p. 45). They wanted the mood of the scene, the feeling of the light, the restrained tonalities, and the beautiful, which is a quality that dwells in the viewer but not in the object viewed. Members of photographic societies, such as Linked Ring founded by Henry Peach Robinson in Britain, and Alfred Stieglitz’s Photo-Secession in the United States, were the main performers of pictorialism. Stieglitz gave pictorialism the stable institutional support, and thus shaped and energized the movement (Eisinger, 1995). Nevertheless, Stieglitz was one of the first photographers to combine detailed, clear photographic pictures and artistic self expression, and thus pioneered to erect another major movement—straight photography. Stieglitz will be individually discussed in the following section.

In conclusion, the knowledge presented in pictorialism is the artist’s emotional response to the world. It is very different from the nineteenth-century photography in which accurate representation of the objects seen was the main concern. Pictorialists not only advanced the debate over the aesthetic nature of photography and increased awareness of the specific qualities of the medium, but also encouraged self-reflection of the modern world.

Alfred Stieglitz

Stieglitz’s style encompassed pictorialism and straight photography; he expressed personal emotion, the major concern of Romanticism, in the form of modernism—straight, sharp, and untouched. His scientific leanings are apparent in both his emphasis on details in prints, and his description of his galleries as laboratories for artists’ ideas. Also, it was a scientific proof for him that art could be understood like a written language
when people from different walks of lives intuitively comprehend similar things in his photographs (Eisinger, 1995). Stieglitz also insisted that “the visible aspects of the material world are linked to a deeper and truer reality that only can be felt” (Eisinger, 1995, p. 60), and photographs are connections of the material world and inner feelings. His perspective reflected Henri Bergson’s and Wassily Kandinsky’s philosophy (Eisinger, 1995). Central to Bergson’s theory is the differentiation between intellect and intuition: “The intellect evolved for purposes of action…The intuition is concerned only with pure knowledge, by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible about it” (Bergson, 1967, quoted in Eisinger, p. 60). Kandinsky, however, maintained the capacity of art to circumvent the intellect and touch on souls directly. Stieglitz accepted both of their viewpoints and printed their thoughts in Camera Work.

Stieglitz believed that a photograph, with clear details, expressed one’s feeling more than the mere appearance of the object depicted. He stated: “what you see—is not an apple tree nor raindrops nor a barn. It is shapes in relationship, the imagination playing within the surface. Perhaps the raindrops are tears. And perhaps that dark entrance that seems to you mysterious is the womb” (Stieglitz, quoted in Eisinger, p. 61). Thus Equivalent, a series of photographs of clouds Stieglitz made in the 1930s, was not about the actual clouds, but Stieglitz’s inner being, emotion, or “a projection of what is inside—what has already been established by experience—back out onto the world as if the world were reacting to the observer” (Travis, 2003, p. 127). Such projection exemplified a function of “cut” suggested by theorists and critics Hal Foster, Rosalind
Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin Buchloh, coauthors of *Art since 1900* (2004). The cut or crop not only indicated that the photograph was a tiny part of the vast sky, or moving the subject of clouds from one context to another, but that it presented a transposition of reality—Stieglitz’s state of mind.

**Minor White**

After realist documentary photography prospered in the 1930s, American photography in the 1940s and 1950s was dominated by anonymous mass-media photography and photojournalism, so strongly as to cause “the imminent death of individualistic photography” (Agha, quoted in Eisinger, 1995, p. 138). However, the desire for individual expression was never extinguished. In the late 1950s and 1960, some signs indicated a move back to personal expression in photography. For example, photography was gradually established as a fine art at the mainstream art institutes, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago (Eisinger, 1995). Another example of this trend was Minor White’s founding of *Aperture*, a magazine “dedicated to publishing the finest in creative photography” (*Aperture* DM), his teaching photography as a fine art in universities, and his own metaphorical photographs.

White’s metaphorical photographs moved away from realism by means of what Peter Bunnell (1975) termed the “syntactical structure of the language of photography” (quoted by Pultz, 1980, p. 29). This method, although developed from Stieglitz’s idea, was somewhat different from Stieglitz’s. Stieglitz wanted his cloud pictures to arouse viewers’ experiences matching Stieglitz’s own meditative experience of the cloud
(Leighten, 1978), while White’s equivalence highlighted the individual spectator’s “mental image” (White, 1963/1966, p. 171), which could be very different from that of the photographer and other viewers. Pultz (1980) states: “White’s equivalence…occurs in the viewer’s response to the photograph, not in the camera’s response to the original scene” (p. 38). White gave an account of the three levels of equivalence. The first level refers to the photograph itself; the second relates to what is on the viewer’s mind when he looks at the photograph; and the third is “the inner experience a person has while he is remembering his mental image after the photograph in question is not in sight” (White, 1963/1966, p. 169).

For White, when a photograph functions as an equivalent, it simultaneously serves as a record and a symbol. On one hand, he took the idea from straight photography that photographs have to be un-manipulated “perfect print” (Leighten, 1978, p. 315), and thus serve as faithful documents of the world. On the other hand, however, as White (1963) declared, “(photography) records superbly; it transforms better” (White, 1963/1966, p. 172). A photograph of an Equivalent tells viewers that the photographer “had a feeling about something and here is my metaphor of that feeling” (White, 1963/1966, p. 169). The power of Equivalence is to convey and evoke feelings. When asked why not take a photograph of a woman directly when one photographed something else to stand for women’s femininity, White explained that the purpose of an Equivalence is to “establish a certain aesthetic distance between one’s direct feeling and his outward manifestation of it via the photograph” (White, 1963/1966, p. 170). White arranged multiple images to form a sequence in order to control the context of images, form a story, and thus
“augment the complexity and impact of the images” (Pultz, 1980, p. 30).

Influenced by and interested in Zen, Tarot, astrology, Gestalt psychology, hypnotism, and Gurdjieff’s mysticism, White focused on spirituality in his photographs. What he considered real may include personal emotions, personal psyche, desire, intuition, imagination, mystery, and spirits (White, 1958). In other words, what he thought valid was much more inclusive than intellect.

White’s romanticist knowledge makes him an expressionist; however, his beliefs and unique methodology separates him from other expressionist schools of photography discussed earlier. White could be regarded as a romantic pictorialist, as Marien (2002) suggests, due to White’s emphasis on emotions; however, White condemned techniques such as sketching on negatives, which blurred the boundary between photography and painting, and which accordingly separates him from pictorialists in the early twentieth century. White could also be labeled a surrealist, as Buerger (1976) and Bunnell (1989) indicate, because of his exploration of the human psyche; however, White’s modest style of using metaphor was quite different from the obvious distortions or odd juxtapositions in surrealist photographs.

White’s thought seems to overlap with poststructuralism. Central to White’s Equivalence is the idea that the photograph is not an end product, but a step in a process, and it needs a viewer’s response for completion (Pultz, 1980). It is not that photographers encode a message in the Equivalence, waiting for the viewers to decode it; rather, viewers have their own reading of the photograph, as White (1957) stated after carefully viewing Aaron Siskind’s photographs: “In such a process one meets one’s self so often
that I am still wondering what happened to Siskind. I don’t think that I met him once. Consequently I ask myself, seriously, whose pictures are they now, Siskind’s or mine?” (White, quoted in Smith, 1957, p. 121). Like Barthes’s “death of the author” (1977, p. 142), White’s theory of reading photographs seemed to suggest “the birth of the reader” (Walker, 1997). White had come to a conclusion that “the meaning of photographs is entirely indeterminate” (Eisinger, 1995, p. 161).

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to categorize White as an early poststructuralist because there are penetrating differences between White’s point of view and poststructuralism (Eisinger, 1995). First of all, White presumed that there is an essential self, which produces individual subjectivity and a personal psyche, and which results in different readings of photographs. However, poststructuralists turn down the notion of inherent meaning based on the artist’s intention to undermine the concept of the coherent, subjective individual (Eisinger, 1995). Also, poststructuralists hold the view that knowledge is always contextual. Individuals’ knowledge comes from what culture they are from, what and where they previously happened to have learned. Hence there is no unmediated experience that is not culturally or socially conditioned. This point of view contradicts White’s view that one’s reading of photographs comes from his spirit or soul.

White’s central idea of spirituality and his teaching of philosophy raised some criticism. In his photographic book Octave of Prayer (1973), White compiled sequences by using other people’s photographs, both his students’ and other well-known photographers’. White’s criterion for selecting photographs was that they be “radiant to the heart” (Coleman, p. 147). A. D. Coleman (1998) criticized White’s gesture as “anti-

In conclusion, White built his own style through his source of knowledge and his methodology. In his photographs, he strove for spirituality, feelings, mystery, psyche, and his covert homo sexuality. He used abstract symbols as metaphors to prompt viewers’ individual experiences. By sequencing photographs, he directed viewers to a certain spectrum of interpretation. Parts of his style are associated with pictorialism, surrealism, and poststructuralism, but he cannot be totally classified into any of them. His unique manner of metaphor and sequencing has been an important influence in the history of photography.

Surrealist Photography

Surrealism was officially initiated as a movement by Andre Breton’s First Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, which declared the primacy of the irrational and faith in a reality beyond realism. For the surrealists, the new territory they were fascinated with was the unconscious mind, which was the valid source of knowledge for surrealists. It was the spontaneous, the mysterious, the imaginative, the primitive, the sleepless, and the
desirous that led the way to the unconscious. In order to realize one’s unconsciousness, the surrealists drew some methods from Sigmund Freud. They learned that one’s automatic writing or drawing could show one’s psyche; found objects oddly juxtaposed to simulate a dream could express hidden desires. Simultaneously having different methods, automatism or neat portrayal of dreams, to navigate the unconscious within one movement, surrealism was not a style, but had many forms. What tied the various forms together was “the cry of a mind turning back on itself” (Bradley, 1997, p. 7), or as Balakian (1979) wrote, surrealism was “a metaphysical approach to reality, translatable in as many ways as there are individuals” (Balakian, 1970, quoted in Hall-Duncan, 1979, p. 8).

Those various forms or approaches lead to critiques of surrealism’s fundamental definition. In 1924, Breton defined surrealism as “SURREALISM, n., Psychic automatism in its pure state… dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (Breton, 1924, quoted in Foster, Krauss, Bois, & Buchloh, 2004). Krauss (1981) objected that Breton’s definition is biased, in that automatism was too overweighed while dream description was totally neglected. Art historian William Rubin (1966) also saw this problem, and deliberately gave a new definition that clearly stated the two poles of surrealist endeavor—the abstract and the illusionist—both of which corresponded to the “Freudian twin props of Surrealist theory, automatism (free association) and dreams” (Rubin, 1966, p. 36). The representatives of the former pole, the abstract, were Joan Miro and Andre Masson; while those for the latter, the illusionist, were Salvador Dali and Rene Magritte.
Rubin (1966) concluded his definition with the statement that these two poles could be joined by the concepts of the irrationally created metaphoric image. Rubin’s (1966) dissatisfaction with Breton’s idea about the relation of surrealism to the plastic arts did not stop there. He criticized the fact that Breton could not distinguish surrealist art from fantasy art. For example, in Breton’s list of names of surrealist painters, Picasso, Matisse, and Braque were surprisingly included.

Bradley (1997) and Hall-Duncan (1979) accepted Rubin’s (1966) definition to elaborate the two poles of Surrealist painting and photography. On the one hand, automatism meant “placing their trust in the creative power of a purely visual image” (Bradley, 1997, p. 21). In drawing, such a method could catch the “first images which come to mind” (Bradley, 1997, p. 21). However, in painting, it is more difficult to create a painting spontaneously due to required laborious efforts. Thus painters sought the route initiated beyond the artist’s preference, such as starting a painting from a fallen blob of ink. In photography, many techniques met in this category: double and triple exposure, solarization, rayography, photomontage, and photo collage (Hall-Duncan, 1979).

On the other hand, dream paintings are consciously decided upon, and realistically painted with minute details. In other words, painters are to “photograph images of concrete irrationality suggestive of the dream state” (Bradley, 1997, p. 33). The scenes of these dream paintings could be drawn from memories of childhood or simulations of dreams. They look both familiar and unfamiliar; familiar because viewers could recognize the objects depicted, and unfamiliar because the odd juxtapositions cause a strange, dream-like content. In photography, Surrealist photographers look for usual
objects with a potential for new meaning, as Balakian (1970) stated:

One must look for the latent for forgotten significance. This does not imply the pursuit of rare objects; often the simplest ones are the most enigmatic, the most charged with possible contact with our mental activity... [they] become the subjects of our spiritual environment... endowing objects with new functions and new relationships (Balakian, 1970, quoted in Hall-Duncan, 1979, p. 9).

Magritte’s photographs and Cartier-Bresson’s early work exemplify this dream-state style. Looking at normal objects beyond the objects themselves is what Hall-Duncan (1979) called transmutation. Krauss (1981) explains that the purpose of transmutation is to tell viewers “we are not looking at reality, [but] reducing to an experience of reality transformed into representation” (Krauss, 1981, p. 29). Thus reality is constituted as signs, as representations. Transmutation happens on the intersection of two causal chains, the one subjective human psyche, and the other the objective function of real world events (Foster et al, 2004). In psychoanalysis, they also call this crossing point “objective chance,” “the Marvelous,” and “Convulsive Beauty” (Krauss, 1985, p. 31).

The photographic methods to document convulsive beauty are doubling and spacing (Krauss, 1981). Doubling, like a child saying Ma-Ma instead of Ma, indicates the intentional meanings carried by the repeated one. Drawn from Freudian theory that our unconscious is structured like a language, surrealists believe that doubling is the formal condition of the unconscious drive. Hence by repeating certain objects within one photograph, doubling becomes the “signifier of significance” (Krauss, 1981, p. 26). Some photographers practice this method, such as Man Ray in his double pairs of
women’s breasts in *Untitled*, 1924, Hans Bellmer’s double pairs of human legs in *Doll*, 1935, and the double guitars in Maurice Tabard’s *Solarized Guitar*, 1934. Spacing, applying techniques such as photomontage, solarization, or framing with a found shape, aims to “interrupt or displace segments of reality,” and to “rob an image of sense of presence” (Krauss, 1981, p. 31). By purposefully de-realizing or de-familiarizing the objects in photographs, viewers compulsively read the transmutation of the real as a sign. A sign connotes the unconscious. Man Ray’s *Lilies*, 1930, and *Monument to de Sade*, 1933 demonstrate the spacing method.

The relation between surrealist theory extracted from psychoanalysis and its artistic practice has an inherent problem (Foster et al, 2004). When the psyche and the art connect too directly, such as in automatic drawing, the artwork loses its specificity; viewers only see unrestrained lines without enough hints of their content. Likewise, when the psyche and the art are posited too far apart, such as in the detailed depiction of a dream state, one wonders whether it is the conscious or the unconscious that dictates the calculating work of designing the whole picture. The first and the foremost critique of this inborn problem came from Freud. In Freud’s view, the unconscious was not as free as surrealists supposed. To the contrary, it was intertwined with wishes and repressions. To say that an artwork represents the artist’s unconscious was either to risk psychopathology, or to pretend to do so in the name of a psychoanalytic art. Freud used to call the surrealists “absolute cranks” (quoted in Foster et al, 2004, p. 17). Freud continued to state that surrealists were merely producing pictures with a look of the unconscious by borrowing methods and motifs from psychoanalysis, and that they added
too many artificial efforts to make it artistic. When Dali showed his painting
*Metamorphosis of Narcissus* to Freud in 1939, Freud responded: “It is not the
unconscious I seek in your pictures but the conscious” (Freud, quoted in Bradley, 1997, p. 32).

In conclusion, surrealists consider what is in their unconscious as valid knowledge
and express it in their artwork. Surrealists have explored many methods of art making to
cleanse the representation of their unconscious from the conscious, and this has been the
point that has caused numerous critiques concerning the question of mediation and
causation (Bradley, 1997). Nevertheless, surrealism has opened another dimension of
reality for artists and writers to investigate.

**FORMALISM**

The form of a work of art indicates its perceptual constituents, which are present in
any piece of art. However, formalism is an aesthetic theory that directly emphasizes a
work’s formal elements, such as line, shape, and color, rather than other elements, such
as meaning, utility, or reference (Krukowski, 1998; Davis, 1998). In formalism the
appreciative attention is focused on the work itself.

Also called organic unity theory, formalism stresses that although a work of art is a
combination of isolated unites, it is the perceivable quality of the interrelationship
between these units that makes up the organic whole (Helburn, 1995). Emerging in the
advent of modernism, formalism gathers ideas from philosophers Kant and Hegel, and
therefore, according to aesthetician Lucian Krukowski, formalism has more than one
version (Krukowski, 1998). One version comes from Kant and believes that formal
properties are the only criteria through which artwork should be valued, while the other version adopts the Hegelian view that artwork is most valuable when it is primarily concerned with formal qualities, which is the result of historical progress. In the second half of the twentieth century, theorists are divided into camps according to which view they follow. Clive Bell adopts Kant’s view and proposes a theory of significant form, in which form is considered the sole important quality in a work of art. According to Bell, the form is especially arranged as to arouse viewers’ aesthetic emotions. On the other hand, Clement Greenberg adopts the Hegelian view, and by highlighting the manifestation of collective sensibility, or the spirit of the time, in high art, he incorporates historical awareness into formalism. Alternatively, contemporary critic Rosalind Krauss gives another reading of formalism through a structuralist lens, and proposes an ideological structure beneath aesthetic form. The aesthetics of Kant, Hegel, Clive Bell, Clement Greenberg, and Rosalind Krauss are individually discussed in the following sections.

Immanuel Kant

Philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) combined rationalism and empiricism to create his own transcendental idealism, in which he identified distinct types of knowledge and the principles of the mind’s order (Hamlyn, 1987). In his account, Kant specified two indispensable sources of knowledge: the mind’s receptive ability (sensibility) and the mind’s conceptual ability (understanding). Kant stated that our consciousness first apprehends external objects by putting them in certain regions of space for some duration of time. Thus ideas are the products of experiences. However,
ideas are not sufficient to explain the difference between what is common and what is universal. Kant proposed that there exist rules for thought, which he called categories, which are innate and necessary for understanding all of the concepts to transform the incoming perceptions into logical conceptions. The sources of knowledge for Kant could be summarized in his own statement: “Without sensibility no object would be given to us; and without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind” (Kant, quoted in Lagodzinski, 2001).

Similar to his combination of empiricism and rationalism to formulate his epistemology, Kant’s aesthetics reconciles the debate over whether the judgment of beauty is subjective or objective. It is both. Kant illustrates the distinctive features of aesthetic judgment, where he identifies four moments (Whewell, 1995; Kemal, 1998; Guyer, 1998).

Firstly, to judge something as beautiful is based on subjective feelings or pleasure gained from the aesthetic experience, which is different from cognitive judgment based on perception. The aesthetic judgment is disinterested, which means that the pleasure does not result from one’s desire for the object, or the object’s potentiality for other functions, such as ceremonial function or commodity, but from the pure beauty of the object itself.

Secondly, when claiming that something is beautiful, it implies that objectively people would find pleasure in it too. It is the universality of aesthetic judgment. People’s agreement is not based on a concept, but on their feeling or pleasure, which cannot be proved, and there is no rule to compel anyone to judge something as beautiful.
Thirdly, the form of an artwork is the result of a purposive activity of an artist, and the form of nature is from the purpose of God. We come to recognize the formal purposiveness which evokes the aesthetic experience, rather than acknowledging the functional purposes the artwork itself might have (Dickie, 1971). Kant contends that we perceive the purposive form in the activity of free play between imagination and understanding, which helps us realize “the structure of elements, their order, complexity, and unity, their coherence, meaning, and expression, and balance between the elements of the presentation, and the features that make up these items” (Kemal, 1998, p. 32).

Lastly, similar to the universality of the judgment of beauty, Kant fortifies this claim by adding the feature of necessity; he states that it is not that people who perceive the object will share one’s pleasure, but that people ought to do so (Guyer, 1998). One’s appreciation of beauty is merely an example of how everyone ought to judge.

In conclusion, aesthetician George Dickie (1971) summarizes Kant’s aesthetic judgment: “a judgment of beauty is disinterested, universal, and necessary judgment concerning the pleasure which everyone ought to derive from the experience of form” (Dickie, 1971, p. 27). Formal qualities of artworks not only stimulate aesthetic experiences, but also resolve inconsistencies over the nature of judgments—it subscribes to personal pleasure; while at the same time ought to be universally agreed upon by every person.

**Georg W. F. Hegel**

For Idealists, knowledge is not only to be found in the mind, but it must also originate in the mind. Idealists claim that reality is fundamentally mental, and deny the
existence of an independent external reality. German Idealist Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-
1831) declared that the ultimate reality lies in “world-spirit” (what he called *Geist*),
which is both the force that guides the development of history, and something that
animates human thinking or reasoning (Crane, 2004).

Hegel explains how the world-spirit is formed; it starts from the development of an
individual’s mind (Inwood, 2001). With the goal of better understanding itself, the
developmental process of a mind begins when it draws a boundary between itself and
what is not itself. However, the mind is not totally cut off from the other. The mind also
learns about itself by seeing its own reflections in the world or from the interaction
between itself and others, such as in responses from people. When a mind periodically
gains new awareness of itself, it knows itself step-by-step. When a mind acquires
knowledge in concord with other minds through cultural networks, such as educational
systems, a shared ‘spirit,’ or *Geist* in Hegel’s terms, is formed within that society and
period of time. *Geist* develops over history and varies among different populations.

Artwork, according to Hegel, is an important embodiment of *Geist*. Human beings
express their understanding of themselves and the world by painting pictures, composing
music, and writing poems. Therefore, the purpose of making artwork is not to arouse
emotions in viewers, nor merely to give pleasure, but to further comprehend ourselves
and our world (Houlgate, 1998). For Hegel, the main value of art lies in its capability to
reveal truth, which is about human beings’ freedom and the notion of self-determinacy
that derives from absolute reason (Houlgate, 1998). In order to be conceived of as
genuine art, artwork must present this specific content. This rules out imitation art, which
has a limited emphasis on skill and fails to address the issue of human freedom.

In addition, for Hegel, genuine art is distinguished from other means of truth revealing, such as religion and philosophy (Houlgate, 1998). Art is characterized by its ability to externally present an abstract idea in a sensuous and material form, such as lines or colors. Therefore, to thoroughly exemplify the feature of art is not using symbols to metaphorize. Rather, it is to stress formal qualities, combination of lines and arrangement of colors, to address spiritualities or freedom. Hegel provides the criterion for the best art:

Art achieves its perfection when the content expressed is indeed harmoniously fused with the material (and mode) of expression. This perfect harmony of human or divine freedom with the sensuous material of expression is what Hegel understands by beauty. Beauty is thus, as Hegel puts it, the “sensuous shining of the idea” (Houlgate, 1998, p. 363).

To fully explain his view on beauty, Hegel gives a historical account of the development of art. He divides this development into three periods: symbolic art, classical Greek, and romantic art (Shapiro, 1995; Houlgate, 1998; Inwood, 2001). Among them, Hegel asserts that the second period, the classical Greek, reaches art’s perfection, where freedom is fully expressed in the harmony of the spirit and the body, as he states: “[the form of classical Greece] is the free and adequate embodiment of the idea in the shape peculiarly appropriate to the idea itself in its essential nature” (Hegel, 1975, quoted in Shapiro, 1995, p. 185). Prior to classical Greek art, symbolic art, such as Indian and Egyptian artwork, presents a disharmony between the idea the artist wanted to express and the chosen form. The message is always too thin or too elusive to be expressed adequately through its form. For Hegel, in this paradigm of art, “there is a
restless search for the appropriate form for the gods, or a series of hints and approximations that are never fully adequate to their objects” (Shapiro, 1995, p. 185). Aesthetician Michael Inwood (2001) explains that such weakness is not caused by technical incompetence, but by the conceptual insufficiency of understanding selves and the world (Inwood, 2001). In the third period, romantic art, another discrepancy between idea and form happens, of which medieval Christian art is an example. Contrasted to symbolic art where there is too little to express, romantic art has too much to convey. The spirituality of Christianity is fully developed as religious devotion and faith in this era. However, the deep inwardness does not find its perfect expression in the external form in artwork.

In conclusion, it is in the context of the deficiency of form in Christian art and contemporary romantic art, as well as to highlight art’s unique ability to embody the abstract, that Hegel stresses the formal quality in works of art, and thus is linked with formalism. However, rather than emphasizing forms for beauty’s sake, Hegel accentuates the harmony between form and idea in artwork so as to display and reflect on the contemporary Geist.

Clive Bell

Following Kant’s emphasis on form in judging beauty, British art critic and aesthetician Clive Bell (1881-1964) considers ‘significant form’ as the defining element of an aesthetic object. The notion of significant form in artwork can be understood intuitively when one sees the lines, colors, and shapes, and focuses on “the relations and combinations of lines and colors” (Bell, 1914, quoted in Hepburn, 1995, p. 51). Through
an “unknown and mysterious law” (Bell, 1914, quoted in Hepburn, 1995, p. 51), these particular forms constitute a significant form, which then gives rise to aesthetic emotion. In Bell’s view, the ability to discern the significant form of an artwork is universal because “everyone in his heart believes that there is a real distinction between works of art and all other objects” (Bell, 1914, quoted in Gould, 1998, p. 252).

Contemporary aesthetician Carol Gould (1998) articulates the three basic beliefs in Bell’s theory of significant form. First, people generally have a unique experience when viewing artwork. Second, such experience comes from the essence of artwork; that is, aesthetic emotion derives from the form of the artwork itself, but not from anything else. Thirdly, the form of an artwork is distinct from its content. The aesthetic value of an artwork resides solely in its significant form; historical, cultural, biological, or psychological knowledge of the artist is irrelevant. In addition, the individual viewer’s background does not have an affect on universal aesthetic experience.

Bell claims that significant form signifies realities. One version of reality is associated with his so-called “aesthetic realism” (Gould, 1998, p. 253), in which a visual reality in form evokes aesthetic responses. Bell’s other version of reality “lies behind the appearance of all things” (Gould, 1998, p. 253), and ultimately resorts to God.

Criticism toward Bell’s theory of significant form is mainly twofold. One is the lack of solid metaphysical foundation to support his aesthetic theory. When addressing the realities behind the form, Bell’s inchoate and hasty construction of argument is critiqued (Gould, 1998). The second criticism draws from the non-testability of his theory. Aesthetcian Noel Carroll (2001) argues that when one has a visual experience of red, it
is possible to confirm that a certain object has caused that experience. However, when one has aesthetic emotion, it is difficult to prove that significant form has generated the experience. Despite these weaknesses, Bell’s ‘more ardent and less rigorous’ (Gould, 1998) theory remains important in the twentieth-century formalism for its consideration of the “very nature of the artistic enterprise” (Gould, 1998, p. 253).

Clement Greenberg

American critic Clement Greenberg (1905-1994) combines the Kantian methodology of self-criticism and the Hegelian notion of progress to formulate his own formalism. Like Bell, Greenberg places the main value on form, but the value is not achieved by looking at the representational aspects of artwork’s formal structures, but by stressing the uniqueness of the medium which is an inevitable result of historical evolution.

Self-criticism is a scientific notion inherited from Kantian philosophy. It means that the solution to a problem within one discipline lies in the very discipline itself. For example, “a problem in physiology is solved in terms of physiology, not in those of psychology” (Greenberg, 1998, p.16). In art, self-criticism relies on the realization of the uniqueness of the medium, which usually turns out to be the limits of the medium. In the case of painting, the flat surface, the shape of the support, and the properties of pigment are simultaneously its uniqueness and its limitations. While pre-modernist artists tried various ways to compensate for these limitations, modernist artists treat them openly. Therefore, the realist verisimilitude is abandoned for a better design to fit the rectangular shape of the canvas, and the rigorous depiction of the three-dimensional object is
surrendered to the emphasis of flatness. Flatness, as Greenberg contends, is the most unique feature of painting: “Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else” (Greenberg, 1998, p. 14).

Greenberg explains that it is the influence of sculptural shading and modeling that urges pre-modernist painting to represent three dimensions. However, modernist painting, under self-criticism, started to suppress and dispel the sculptural in order to gain its own autonomy. Greenberg summarizes the difference between sculptural and flat pictures: “where the Old Masters created an illusion of space into which one could imagine oneself walking, the illusion created by a modernist is one into which one can only look, can travel through only with the eye” (Greenberg, 1998, p. 16). Greenberg states that the necessary strategy is to go abstract. Abstractness is the means by which modernist painting searches for accounts of radical simplification and complication. Such anti-sculptural abstractness began in the nineteenth century when impressionists, Cezanne, and Cubists flattened everything reducing recognizable objects in pictures. In consequence, in Greenberg’s view, resorting to abstractness and subservience to the rectangular frame makes modernist painting more traditional in the sense of color usage.

Another claim of Greenbergian formalism is that modernist art is an ineluctable consequence of artistic evolution, which echoes Hegel’s assertion that artwork exhibits the historical progress of spirit. modernist art continues from the past; it only maintains past standards of excellence. There is no rupture or break between modernist art and the past. Hence even when modernist art ends, the continuity of art will never stop.
Contemporary critic Rosalind Krauss identifies the close relationship between formalism and structuralism: formalism provides a conceptual nursing base for early Structuralists, such as Roland Barthes, and conversely structuralism gives rise to another reading of formalism with its linguistic methodology (Foster et al, 2004). Therefore Krauss observes that there exist two kinds of formalism: form-as-shape, a superficial level of formalism whose main interest is formal arrangement, and form-as-structural, a ‘deeper’ sense of form which indicates the ideological machines operating behind the formally aesthetic appearance. Bell’s theory of significant form exemplifies the former; while Greenberg shifts from the latter to the former (Foster et al, 2004).

In order to understand structuralist formalism, it is necessary to have a clear picture of structuralism. Structuralism asserts that meaning comes from the structure, or the underlying pattern, such as the grammar of a language, and that meaning is structured by a set of oppositions. The meaning derived from the structure is independent of any individual consciousness. Thus the individuality of the text vanishes in favor of looking at patterns. In this sense, the author is canceled out: meaning comes from the structure, but not the individual. Hence “language speaks us—we do not originate language; we inhabit a structure that enables us to speak; what we (mis)perceive as our originality is simply our recombination of some of the elements in the pre-existing system” (Klages, 1997). On the other hand, Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) argues for the arbitrariness of linguistic signs, not only in the relation between a sign and its referent, but also in that between a signifier and its concept. Within the system of language, all
signs are interdependent in the sense that the meaning of each sign is determined by what it is not.

Structuralists intended to show how human knowledge and human behavior result from interactions between information from the outside world (objective) and the active structuring and organizing process of the mind (subjective). The mind provides the form while the world provides the content (Lye, 1996). Some Structuralists believed that the deep structures are innately built in human brains since every mind imposes the same structure onto sense experiences, and that such universal structures guide all personal and collective human behaviors, including languages (Crotty, 2005). Meanwhile, other Structuralists, such as the Swiss psychologist and philosopher Jean Piaget, did not agree that mental structures are given at birth. Piaget proposed that sensory data and the mind’s categories—he called them schemata—mutually construct each other. In Piaget’s view, we do not use our innate reason to conceptualize raw data gained through the senses, but we scan our previous schemata built from previous experiences for a concept that gives sense to new data. Thus, while sense experiences provide the content of knowledge, as Kant stated, the form imposed by the mind to gain new knowledge is the culmination of adjustments and tests against previously enormous sense experiences (Gelernter, 1995).

Borrowing from Barthes, Krauss (2004) explains artists’ Structuralist activities involved in making artwork. It is about the substitution and combination of signs within the pictorial system (Sim, 1998). Picasso metaphorically transforms a head into a guitar, and combines the signs of a bicycle handlebar and seat to stand for a bull’s head. He also incorporates space as a new sculptural material to exemplify the notion of difference, the
opposition between presence and absence, as well as mass and void, in Saussure’s theory.

A structural reading of Piet Mondrian’s (1872-1944) painting, where his pictorial elements are reduced to a few color planes, is to understand the ideology that governs his arrangement of forms—an “epistemological nihilism” urged by his “political views of anarchism” (Foster et al, 2004, p. 38-39). Krauss explains two features of Mondrian’s work which make it suitable for the Structuralist reading: the number of pictorial elements in his artwork is small, and his work could be easily organized into series. However, disregarding of the scale of the projects, whether it is a single piece of artwork, a single artist, or a whole field, the method remains the same: “discrete ‘units’ have to be distinguished so that their interrelationship can be understood, and their oppositional significance emerge” (Foster et al, 2004, p. 39).

The biggest similarity between formalism and structuralism is anti-humanism, or the ignorance of the human agent, whether it is the author or the viewers. The form of an artwork speaks for itself, and the meaning of the artwork resides in the interrelation of signs. Structuralism and formalism flourished hand-in-hand in the modernist era, and still remain important today.

**Formalism in Photography**

Straight photography and the photography of Group f/64 in the highest modernist era exemplify formalism. With the camera’s ability to provide sharp focus and detailed tonality, formalist photographers strove for the distinguished feature of photography—objectivity. They also placed a great weight on formal design, which is, as Greenberg theorizes, going flat and abstract.
Straight Photography

Straight photography was initiated in the beginning of the twentieth century, when people were confronted with the new value of the industrial world, where machines were viewed as a new God (Strand, 1922/1980), and science was considered the only hope for human progress. The mysticism of pictorialism was replaced by concerns over technology, machines, and the structures of an advancing industrial society (Rosenblum, 1992). Besides, due to the influence of the European avant-garde, especially Picasso’s cubism, American photography experienced a formal transformation. Hazy painting-like pictorialist photographs that stressed atmospheric effects were superseded by “geometrical compositions, machine forms, hard-edge design, and clear delineation of detail” (Wollen, 1978, p. 17), which were considered the unique features of the medium of photography and were greatly emphasized by straight photographers. Forms are inspired by pleasure in material qualities of the portrayed object, in sharp focus for every possible detail, and in visual design. Conventional perspective was abandoned, and through the selection of high vantage points, the picture plane was flattened (Rosenblum, 1992). Straight photographers also brought the lens close to the object, disregarding its surroundings. Sometimes the pictures were framed in an unusual way, and sometimes only a portion of the subject was shown.

Paul Strand is one of the representatives of straight photography. His subject matter was mostly the modern city: geometric street scenes, abstract still lives, and working-class portraits. It was also said that he wanted to achieve “life” in his photographs: the life of a wheel, the life of a white fence, and the life of a blind woman (Schjeldahl, 2004).
He stated that “Photography is only a new road from a different direction but moving toward the common goal, which is Life” (Strand, 1980, p. 142). He seemed to suggest that to see through a lens is to know, and to know is to master essential reality (Schjeldahl, 2004). In other words, it was the identity of the subject that Strand tried to preserve, and considered his reality, through realistic portrayal and pure design (Trachtenberg, 1980, p. 141).

Strand called for a reunion of machine (science) and expression (art). Believing that science had brought too much materialism into the modern world, Strand asserted that only art could rescue people’s spirits. Thus photography’s mission, according to Strand, was to “heal the breach between science and art, concept and intuition” (Wollen, 1978, p. 17). On one hand, photography itself was the perfect prototype of science, as Strand pointed out: “objectivity is of the very essence of photography” (Strand, 1922, p. 142). On the other hand, he still thought of photography as expression, guided by the artist, “the intuitive seeker after knowledge” (Strand, 1980, p. 151). Strand reconciled science and art by showing expression in objective photographs through formal structure: “it is in the organization of this objectivity that the photographer’s point of view enters in… The object may be organized to express of which they are the effects, or they may be used as abstract forms, to create an emotion unrelated to the objectivity as such” (Strand, 1922, p. 12). The abstract form that Strand used stemmed from cubism, in which objects are solidified, structure is simplified, contour is defined, vision is clarified, forms are reduced, space is flattened, shadow is emboldened, and tonalities are transformed (Grundberg, 1981; Foster et al, 2004). For example, in Strand’s photograph Roof Tops,
critic Donald D. Keyes pointed out:

[T]he geometric pattern of objects and forms, accentuated by the camera angle and frame, seems flattened, yet the pattern fits around a central, unifying point within the picture, and never completely loses touch with the three-dimensional world. Strand develops tension, both in the composition and in the content, by making us aware both of the abstract forms as well as the actual place (Keyes, 1978, p. 189).

In Strand’s view, abstraction was the manifestation of artistic expression. Whether it was a close-up, a fragment of an object, or a rhyming of lines, the abstraction did not make the object totally unrecognizable to viewers, but it was a “hyper-vision—vision ratcheted into a focus beyond any normal type of seeing” (Foster et al, 2004, p. 145).

Group F.64

Breaking with the soft-focus and painterly style of Pictorialist photography, modernist straight photography extended its influence in the third decade of the twentieth century in California. Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, Sonya Noskowiak, and other photographers formed a group to show their belief that photography should develop within its own limitations and distinguished features, where there exists a great potentiality for photography to be an art form (Heyman, 1992). Group F.64, the name of this group, derived from a diaphragm number of the photographic lens, and signifies the prominence of the qualities of clearness and definition to this group’s photographs.

The subject matter of the work of Group F.64 encompasses various commonly-found objects and organic matter, such as plants, rocks, deserts, human bodies, and rural still life (Alinder, 1992). The members of the group use a sharply-focused lens, which
they place directly before the subject under natural light, render a great depth of field, and print a full range of tones on glossy paper. Therefore most of their work are realist. In terms of formal design, they pay attention to patterning, contouring, and cropping, the play of light, and the absence of background information to render both realist and abstract photographs. Historian Naomi Rosenblum (1992) also observes that they reinforce their design principles by scrutinizing the rhythm within natural objects, such as a pepper, as she states: “‘the thing itself’ was exactly that; the resonances were for the most part contained by the emphasis on aesthetics” (Rosenblum, 1992, p. 40). Although Group F.64 was short-lived, its influential formalist aesthetics last today.

**POSTMODERNISM**

Postmodernism is generally considered to be an assault on modernism. In aesthetics, postmodernism disagrees with modernism in three major concepts (Novitz, 2001): identification, interpretation, and evaluation of artwork.

First, in terms of identification, postmodernists contend that there is no boundary between art and non-art or high art and popular art. Art is a cultural and social phenomenon which contingently happens, and is history, culture-, region-, and value-specific, rather than a natural occurrence produced by geniuses.

Secondly, postmodernists argue that one single true interpretation of a work of art does not exist because the meaning of an artwork is not stably hidden behind the picture as modernists insist. Rather, as Derrida asserts, meaning comes from the play of signs, which renders different yet plausible interpretations. Besides, readers can always construct and discern other meanings not only from their own cultural backgrounds, but
also from the “blindness” of the author, in the sense that, as Derrida argues, signs escape
from authors’ intentions.

Finally, postmodernists state that people ought not judge artwork based on its
intrinsic formal qualities; rather, the evaluation depends on historically derived values
and contentions that characterize a certain period of time and culture. Postmodernists
reject the notion of neutral and trans-historical values that attach to a particular work of
art; therefore, postmodernist critics need to acquaint themselves with the relevant culture
inhabited in the work in order to judge it. Critics are not going to discern the universal
value, but they will make a statement about the art embedded in a certain context, such as
“This, by classical lights, is an extremely beautiful building” (Novitz, 2001, p. 162).

Postmodernist artists have developed different strategies to attack the modernist
concept of artwork. For example, postmodernist text-based practices critique the
modernist notion of the institutional machinery of the art world, and the postmodernist
activity of appropriation questions the modernist idea of the uniqueness of the art object.
Cultural theorist Colin Trodd (1999) articulates the purposes of these moves. First of all,
postmodernists interrogate the supposed purity of the system that frames, manages, and
organizes the art world. For example, artist Hans Haacke (1936- ) incorporates
photographs, maps, and diagrams to develop a visual plan of the interaction between
cultural industry and economic power. Second, postmodernists call into question the
expressive and communicative entities of painting, as well as the idea of beauty as truth.
For example, German painter and sculptor Anselm Kiefer (1945- ) presents a mystic
union of self and world in his artwork to invalidate the universalism of high modernism.
Lastly, postmodernists appropriate modernist icons to address the power flow within modern capitalism. For example, Sherrie Levin and Cindy Sherman produce photographs to assert that our experience is composed of pictures circulated in a capitalist society, and to defy the idea of individual authority and artistic creativity.

In the following section, three postmodernist precursors are discussed: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard. In addition, Sherrie Levin and Cindy Sherman’s photographs of appropriation are examined as examples of postmodernist art activities.

**Jacques Derrida**

According to Derrida, the consequences and effects of metaphysical thinking are limited. Derrida (1981) describes western metaphysics as a science. In an interview with Julia Kristeva in *Positions*, Derrida asserts that his purpose is to “inscribe and delimit science” (Derrida, 1981, p. 36), and to “go beyond metaphysical positivism and scientism” (p. 35). As Derrida observes, metaphysical thinking presents the limits of scientific thought. Literally, the term ‘metaphysics’ is supposed to mean something beyond science; however, it only reinserts itself back into the very spaces in which science prevails (Silverman, 1983). The consequence and effect of metaphysical thinking is to give a space for scientific thinking to operate. Derrida states that he is going to ‘debug’ scientism: “grammatology must deconstruct everything that ties the concept and norms of scientificity to ontotheology, logocentrism, phonologism” (Derrida, 1981, p. 35).

In addition, Derrida insists that the history of western philosophy is a continual
substitution of one centered system for other centered systems. Sometimes the center is God, sometimes rationality, irrationality, unconsciousness or desire (Klages, 1997). In Derrida’s view, the center limits ‘play’ of the elements within the structure; it wants everything to be fixed, stable, and become fully present. Moreover, the center itself is an odd part of the structure; it is part of it, but not part of it. It is paradoxically both within the structure and outside it. The concept of the centered structure is, as Derrida states, “contraditorily coherent” (Derrida, 1972, p.252). These systems do not generate absolute truth for Derrida, but they are constructed structures. In addition to the troublesome idea of the center in each structure, Derrida maintains that Western thought has always been structured in terms of polarities, such as presence vs. absence, good vs. evil, and being vs. nothingness. The two terms are arranged in a hierarchical order, with priority given to the first term. Such hierarchical oppositions “privilege unity, identity, immediacy, and temporal and spatial presentness over distance, difference, dissimulation, and deferment” (Johnson, 1981, p. viii).

In order to “shake up the whole structure,” and “put the elements into play” (Klages, 1997), Derrida develops the technique of deconstruction to assess the marks, traces, limits, edges, and boundaries of metaphysical thinking as they appear. In Deconstruction in a Nutshell, contemporary philosopher John Caputo (1997) states the very meaning and mission of deconstruction:

[deconstruction] is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meaning and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come (Caputo, 1997, p. 31).
Philosopher Richard Rorty also describes the unstable meaning within texts: “deconstruction refers to the way in which the ‘accidental’ features of a text can be seen as betraying, subverting, its purported ‘essential’ message” (Rorty, 1995, internet article). Deconstruction does not entail the end of philosophy, but the limit of it, as Derrida declares: “I am attempting to stay at the limit of philosophical discourse, I say limit and not death because I do not believe at all in what is currently called the death of philosophy” (Derrida, 1981, p. 14). Deconstruction is neither destruction nor construction. It is neither an attack upon established, written, advocated systems nor a building of such systems. Deconstruction is a way of reading texts; it aims to identify the frameworks of the scope, critiquing the privilege of the first term in a binary over the other. In sum, deconstruction is not to point out the flaw or the stupidities of the text, but it is an analysis to “trace the ground of the system’s possibility” (Johnson, 1981, p. xv), and to point out “the necessity with which what he (the author) does see is systematically related to what he does not see” (Johnson, 1981, p. xv).

Deconstruction could be explained more clearly in terms of deconstructive reading and deconstructive writing, even though some of their strategies are similar and overlapping. But no matter if the activity is reading or writing, deconstruction is an activity of appropriation. The author of deconstruction inscribes the deconstructive practice in a text which is itself the writing of a reading of another text. Therefore, the repeatability of the deconstructive practice is evident (Silverman, 1983).

Deconstructive reading, in Derrida’s perspective, intends to show the conflict or
ambivalence between author’s expressed intentions and what the text actually describes. In a roundtable discussion, Derrida explicitly explains his deconstructive reading of classical philosophy:

The way I tried to read Plato, Aristotle, and others is not a way of commanding, repeating, or conserving this heritage. It is an analysis which tries to find out how their thinking works or does not work, to find the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity within their own corpus (Derrida, 1997, p. 9).

Take Derrida’s reading of eighteenth-century French writer Rousseau’s *Confessions*, for example (Johnson, 1981). In *Confessions*, Rousseau uses the term ‘supplement’ to describe both writing and masturbation; writing is the supplement of speech, and masturbation is the supplement of sex. Since in French, *supplement* has two meanings: an addition (superfluous) and a substitute (necessary), Derrida points out that “the logic of the supplement wrenches apart the neatness of the metaphysical binary opposition. Instead of ‘A is opposed to B’ we have ‘B is both added to A and replaces A.’ A and B are no longer opposed, nor are they equivalent” (Derrida, quoted in Johnson, 1981, p. xiii).

By pointing out the ‘hidden extra message’ behind the text that Rousseau used, Derrida’s deconstructive reading shows that Rousseau’s text ‘betrays’ its own explicit assertion, and consequently collapses the binary opposition inherent in his thinking system.

Another way of reading deconstructively is to question the idea of purity or origin, which is a “phantom ideal” for Derrida. Contemporary philosophy educator Penelope Deutscher (2005) gives an example of something from the outside ‘threatening’ the inside ideal purity. New technologies concerning the surrogate mother are sometimes considered to have troubled maternity. The direct maternal bond seems to have been
disrupted by allowing a baby born from a non-biological mother. The ‘natural’ maternity is perverted by the ‘other,’ the modern technology. In Derrida’s view, the nostalgia for an ideally natural motherhood and the belief that natural motherhood has been hurt by new technologies stop us from thinking critically. Therefore, in this case, to read deconstructively is to ask whether the threatened maternity has ever been pure, as Derrida states: “the mother has always been a matter of interpretation, of social construction” (Derrida, 1997, quoted in Deutscher, 2005, p. 5). Rather than trapping ourselves in the opposition between maternity and new technologies, we need to acknowledge, as suggested by Derrida and Deutscher (2005), the complexity of maternity by discerning the different ways maternity has been interpreted and constructed.

Deconstructive writing, or what Derrida calls *grammatology*, involves three phases: (1) to identify the conceptual binaries and overturn the implicit hierarchy; (2) to demonstrate the places of ‘undecidables’ by writing about their differential function; (3) to account for deferral and differential meaning, that is, *differance*.

The first phase of deconstruction reverses the hierarchical binaries. Derrida emphasizes this reversal in *Positions* and *Dissemination*: “To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment” (Derrida, 1972, p. 41), and “deconstruction involves an indispensable phase of reversal” (Derrida, 1981, p. 6). For example, in Platonism, essence is more valuable than appearance. To deconstruct this binary, one needs to subvert the opposition by showing that the line between essence and appearance is blurred, and that the appearance is more valuable than essence. One may
instead argue that “essence is found in appearance,” and “essence is mixed into appearance” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2006).

The second phase of deconstruction is to identify undecidables within the text that indicates ambivalences. An undecidable is a term invented by Derrida, which stands for what does not fit comfortably into either of the two poles of a binary opposition. Derrida offers something like a definition of undecidables: “unities of simulacrum, ‘false’ verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it…” (Derrida, 1971, p. 43). Undecidables operate where philosophical oppositions arise. They are not elements of the opposition, yet they mark the oppositions and relate different oppositions to one another. Undecidables seem to have double characters. On the one hand, “they seem to raise the possibility of turning in either direction within a whole variety of philosophical oppositions; yet on the other, they do not assume the position of either side of such opposition” (Silverman, 1983, p. 107). The term supplement mentioned earlier is one example of an undecideable. Other examples, explained by Derrida, include that “the pharmakon is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside… the hymen is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside…” (Derrida, 1971, p. 43). By identifying undecidables, one can address the conflicting relationship between an author’s expressed intentions and what the text actually describes, and brings to light suppressed textual conflicts concerning what is originally considered ideal, primary, or
original and what is considered degradation or insufficiency.

The third task of the deconstructive strategies is to account for differance.

Differance refers to a differentiation, which prevents any sign from having a self-enclosed identity. Therefore, more precisely, a sign means “what others (signs) are not” (Saussure, 1974, quoted in Deutscher, 2005, p. 30), as Derrida states:

> The signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself… every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences (Derrida, 1982, quoted in Deutscher, 2005, p. 30).

For example, when one looks in the dictionary for a certain term or sign, it directs him to other signs, and from those he will be similarly re-directed. Hence the definition is deferred. In addition, the dictionary always indicates many ideas with which the certain sign is associated. The meaning of the sign is consequently suspended differentially across those associations, and never quite settles. The deferral and difference of the meaning of the sign explains differance, which, according to Caputo (1997) indicates the “condition of possibility and impossibility” (p. 102). In sum, differance is “the nameless name of this open-ended, uncontainable, generalizable play of traces” (Caputo, 1997, p. 105). An entirely fixed meaning for a particular sign never definitively arrives: “Meaning endlessly ‘differs,’ and any original presence of meaning is endlessly ‘deferred’” (Deutscher, 2005, p. 31). In Derrida’s view, since the effects of this differance have been systematically repressed in metaphysics in its search for self-present truth, what Derrida attempts to demonstrate is that “this differance inhabits the very core of what appears to be immediate and present… The illusion of the self-presence of meaning or of
consciousness is produced by the repression of the differential structures” (Johnson, 1981, p. ix).

The thrust of Derrida’s thought is to challenge the idea of an impersonal, abstract, indefinable being that grounds knowledge, meaning, and language. However, he is not trying to dispel all claims or belief in truth, as Caputo (1997) points out:

Derrida is not denying that we have “principle” and “truth”… He is just reinscribing our truths and principles within the an-arche of differance, attaching to them a co-efficient of “contingency.” For the only “necessity” he acknowledge is the necessity that precedes all oppositions, including that between the principles and what is based upon the principle, the necessity, the requirement, always to forge truths and principles slowly from below, inscribing them in a vast and meaning-less receptacle called differance (Caputo, 1997, p. 102).

The translator of Derrida’s book Dissemination, Barbara Johnson, also indicates Derrida’s dilemma that although attempting to prove that metaphysics is wrong, he not only employs strategies derived from metaphysics, but also needs to believe in a certain notion in the first place in order to banish that notion:

As Derrida himself admits, the very notion of a perfectly adequate science or –logy belongs to logocentric discourse which the science of writing (grammatology) would try, precisely, to put in question. Derrida thus finds himself in the uncomfortable position of attempting to account for an error by means of tools derived from the very error. For it is not possible to show that the belief in truth is an error without implicitly believing in the notion of truth (Johnson, 1981, p. x).

Even though Derrida does not deny the truth is somewhere, he necessarily sees a distance between the intended object of knowledge and its representation embodied in language (Hale, 2006). Therefore, though a structure of truth is possible, truth is beyond our finite abilities to conceive it, and hence it plays little or no role in the formation of
signs and their meaning. In other words, due to the distance between truth and signs, meaning is not grounded in a *logos* or a *presence*, but in other signs.

Within this inter-linguistic world of meaning that functions without metaphysical foundations, words have no fixed meaning, but have given meanings that are decided constantly by the interpreting subject, such as what culture he comes from, and what previous knowledge he happens to have. Differently put, it is this constant play of signs perceived, and the active re-making of signs that constitute our local knowledge, which is necessarily contextualized.

In aesthetics, instead of giving another criterion to judge beauty, Derrida interrogates the fundamental concepts of aesthetics. Central to Derrida’s inquiry is the basic question, ‘what is a work of art?’ (Emerling, 2005). He criticizes Kant’s separation of the intrinsic value of a work of art, such as beauty and meaning, from any extrinsically social and collective activities. In Derrida’s view, Kant’s imaginative intrinsic qualities of artwork are framed by *parergon*, which define and enclose an inside while creating an outside (Foster et al, 2004). *Parergon*, such as the framing of a painting, the drapery on statues, and the columns of a palace, are ornamental and supplemental to the intrinsic beauty of an artwork, but at the same time are not part of, and thus subsidiary to, the artwork. The concept of *parergon* not only questions the applicability of the division between the intrinsic and the extrinsic, but also paradoxically reinforces the polarity between subject and object, inside and outside, as well as mind and nature, which Kant wished to reduce the distance between. Therefore in Derrida’s view, the contradictory *parergon* needs to be addressed when discussing an artwork; that is to say, the extrinsic
factors, or the context, of a work of art needs to be considered.

In conclusion, Derrida rejects metaphysical systems which rely on centers and binary oppositions to generate knowledge. Rather, Derrida looks into the interplay of signs which eternally separate from, and have no access to, the so-called truth. In Derrida’s view, our knowledge comes from the model of *differance*, from absence, from difference. It always changes over time and space in the network of sign making.

**Michel Foucault**

French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) analyzes the complex forces that determine the formation of knowledge. His discerning question is not ‘What is knowledge?’, but “What are the structures and procedures by which a given body of knowledge is produced and circulated?” (Rawlinson, 1998, p. 226). For Foucault, knowledge is not found, but is produced in accordance with regular procedures that deicide in a particular historical context who has the authority to speak, what part of the inquiry is to be highlighted and oppressed, and how knowledge is to be examined, accumulated, and disseminated. Therefore, Foucault’s aim is, by investigating the human science, to “disrupt the operation of normalizing practices” (Rawlinson, 1998, p. 226). This section focuses on Foucault’s central theses on the archaeology of knowledge, genealogy of power, and art.

Resembling Kant’s project that describes how human experiences are shaped by human nature, Foucault’s task is to analyze, when rejecting Kant’s assumption of universally internal human nature, how externally historical contexts operate to limit the formation of certain concepts. According to Foucault, we are constantly imposed on by
norms and standards, are measured and diagnosed according to these standards, and are
given regulations and taught what is normal and abnormal. In other words, we are
molded by rules and conventions, and what we take for granted is actually the product of
social practices of a certain time and place. In tracing the archaeology of knowledge,
Foucault desires to uncover the structures and rules that construct knowledge, and to
point out that the development of knowledge in history is one result among many
possibilities, rather than a single truth. Foucault also rejects the notion that history is a
continuity comprised of causes and effects. Rather, historical narrative is constituted by
many discontinuities and fragments. History is not like an object existing prior to us
waiting for our discovery of its origin or truth, but to the contrary, our present concerns
and interests shape what is worth investigation in history (Emerling, 2005). Therefore,
Foucault looks for political and ideological investments in historical narratives and
concentrates on minor elements, accidents, and discontinuities that are often omitted
from the so-called objective history.

Foucault applies method of genealogy to explore the history of power, and
investigates how power functions to shape our sense of self. In Foucault’s view, self is
not a singular or transcendental entity, but is disciplined and molded by numerous
approved patterns of behavior, such as sexual, political, legal, educational, and religious
canons. These canons are determined by power, the genealogy of which in Foucault’s
view is not a single-direction force, but is a web-like field consisting of forces of
repression as well as resistance (Rawlinson, 1998). Such networks of power relations
operating within a field turn this very field into a discourse, which is Foucault’s
distinctive form of analysis of power. From Foucault’s examination of the archaeology of knowledge and the genealogy of power, we learn that power and knowledge are intertwined, as Foucault states, “We should admit that power produces knowledge that power and knowledge directly imply one another . . . it is power-knowledge . . . that determines the possible forms of knowledge” (Foucault, 1977, quoted in Canning, 2001, p. 133).

Foucault’s discussion on art could be summarized in two themes (Wicks, 2001). First of all, Foucault asserts that unreasoned expression of art reveals the limitation of logically-structured thinking in a particular historical epoch, and stimulates new awareness. Foucault analyzes Spanish painter Diego Velazquez’s masterpiece *Las Meninas* (1656), in which the subject is Velazquez’s act of depicting King Philip IV and Queen Mariana Teresa, who themselves only appear as reflected in a distant mirror. Foucault claims that this painting’s compositional structure displays the disinterested mode of representation that dominated the classical age, in which people believed that representation happens naturally and objectively. This painting radically challenges this dominant view by purposely showing the absence of the king and the queen, who are simultaneously the subjects and the observers of the painting, in a twice-removed reflection. By representing representation itself, Velazquez was obviously aware of the apparatus of representation, and this painting serves as a critical from which Foucault can challenge the then-assumed purity of the notion of representation.

Another example Foucault uses is twentieth-century painter Rene Magritte’s *This is not a Pipe*, in which a realistic image of pipe is painted along with a sentence “This is not
a pipe” directly below the pipe image. According to Foucault, this painting reveals and
defies the general mentality in the beginning of the twentieth century that “words tended
to be subordinated to images within paintings, and painted images themselves tended to
be subordinated to the actual objects they represented” (Wicks, 2001, p. 146). In
Foucault’s view, works of art are capable of interrupting the norm, interrogating the
sameness of individual identity, and escaping from the forces of conventionalization and
normalization.

Foucault’s second theme in terms of art concentrates on the concept of authorship,
which in his view is a historical fabrication and is subject to question and even
dissolution. In his essay, What Is an Author?, Foucault discusses issues on the degrees of
authenticity, use of copyright, and the borders of the concepts of author and work. He
holds that the concept of the author should be minimized because it carries an oppressive
power. Therefore he expects himself to write “in order to have no face” (Foucault, quoted
in Rawlinson, 1998, p. 228). In the same vein, the value of art does not lie in the genius
who discloses the pristine truth of madness, but in its violence of transgression.

In conclusion, by explaining the world in a tolerant and multifaceted manner,
Foucault’s thought embodies liberating values. He not only abandons old assumptions
and advocates an understanding of the limit of the previous system, but also provides
alternative forms of thinking.

Jean Baudrillard

Although participating in the Poststructuralist critique on metaphysics and on the
concept of reality, Baudrillard’s thinking presents an ironic return to metaphysics
(Kellner, 1989), which is characterized by the striving for an ultimate truth and binary thinking. In an interview entitled “Forget Baudrillard,” Baudrillard (1984/1993) admitted the metaphysical roots of his thinking: “Well, let’s be frank here. If I ever dabbled in anything in my theoretical infancy, it was philosophy more than sociology… My point of view is completely metaphysical. If anything, I’m a metaphysician, perhaps a moralist, but certainly not a sociologist” (p. 106). His metaphysical thinking could be observed from his sharp separation between subject (people) and object (commodities, technologies, media, information, etc).

In his book *Fatal Strategy*, Baudrillard (1983/1990) articulates the triumph of objects over subjects within the obscene proliferation of an object world so completely out of control that it surpasses all attempts to understand, conceptualize and control it (Kellner, 2007). The theme is the growing supremacy of objects over subjects, and the eventual triumph of the object. In his discussion in *Ecstasy and Inertia*, ecstasy indicates objects’ proliferation, expansion, and surpassing themselves; it is a quality that “spins until all sense is lost, and then shines forth in its pure and empty form” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 9). Thus “the beautiful as more beautiful than beautiful in fashion, the real more real than the real in television, sex more sexual than sex in pornography” (Kellner, 2007). Ecstasy connotes a state of excess, a surpassing of rational ends and boundaries. Baudrillard (1983) explains that such excess, instead of coming to an end in obscurity and silence, becomes more visible than visible, so saturated in every minute aspect of everyday life that one hardly senses it. Such ‘more visible than visible’ is the essence of the object’s ecstasy, or what Baudrillard calls the obscenity of objects. For example,
obesity in the U.S., a more visible than visible proliferation of bodies out of control, and surpassing its previous boundaries and rules, demonstrates a revolt of objects against their intended and supposed purposes and limits. Other examples, such as excrescence, electronic media, and information that circulates everywhere at the speed of light, explain obscenity in objects’ ecstasy.

What accompanies objects’ ecstasy is subjects’ inertia. Baudrillard explains that behind the acceleration, something is beginning to slow down. The proliferating objects come to dominate the exhausted subject, whose fascination with the play of object turns to apathy and stupefaction. Inertia is the subject’s suspension, and such suspension leads to the subject’s catastrophe.

Baudrillard (1983) continues to illustrate the object’s evil genie, which lies in the ability to invert the supremacy from the subject to the object. Baudrillard gives an example in science to show the analyzed object’s victorious ruse, as well as the subject’s fall into the prey of appearance:

The rat tells about how he ended up by perfectly conditioning the psychologist to give him a piece of bread every time he lifted the gate of his cage… On the level of scientific observation, the experiment would have been faked—not involuntarily altered by the observer, but faked by the object, with the purpose of amusement or vengeance, or better yet: that the object only pretends to obey the laws of physics because it gives so much pleasure to the observer. (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 84).

In Baudrillard’s view, due to the object’s ability to resist observation, to pretend, to simulate, and dissimulate, it forms a degraded form, which eternally blocks the truth of the social and its analysis, just as we would never obtain a true analysis from the simulated forms of polls and the information from the media.
For Baudrillard, only the subject desires, and only the object seduces. In the past, we celebrated the splendor of subjects; a subject indicated freedom, creation, imagination; it was also the subject that made history, totalized the world, dominated the nature, and served as the foundation and generator of knowledge, whereas the object suggests dead matters, inert things, the intelligible, the alienated, the accursed part of the subject, the shamed, the passive, and the slave (Baudrillard, p. 111). In Baudrillard’s opinion, there is and always will be a major difficulty in analyzing media and the sphere of information through the traditional categories of the philosophy of the subject. Hence, he considers himself to be the first to intuit and conceptualize the “sovereign power of the object” (p. 112): it is no longer the subject that desires; it is the object that seduces: “everything comes from the object and everything returns to it, just as everything starts with seduction, not with desire” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 111). The privilege of the subject is overturned because the subject is vulnerable and can only desire, while the object, due to its indifference, gets on very well even when the desire is absent. The object is revenging, as Baudrillard asserts: “the position of the subject has become simply untenable” (p. 113). The examples of the seductive objects Baudrillard has been witnessing include commodities, capital, fashion, the sexual object, media, politics, information, codes, and models. In a word, objects’ fatal strategies, as the title of his book suggests, reside in the object’s capability to fascinate, challenge, seduce, and ultimately overpower the subject.

Baudrillard’s constant theme of the growing power of objects over subjects can be observed in his earlier writings (Kellner, 2007). When he talks about the consumer society, commodities are the seductive objects that fascinate individuals with the sign
value, instead of the production value. When he reflects on the media, TV is the object that erases the distinction between the private and the public, inside and outside, as well as media and reality, and hence creates hyperrealities. Other examples include computer cyberspace and virtual reality.

Totally embracing objects’ power of ecstasy and seductiveness, Baudrillard’s knowledge comes from the world in the form of signs, which denotes ecstasizing objects. Baudrillard’s theory of knowledge is a unique one. On the one hand, it seems to resemble empiricism, which states that knowledge originates in and refers to the external world. Empiricists gain direct experiences, meaning, and hence realities from the world, while Baudrillard claims that in the media and consumer society, people are caught up in the play of images, spectacles, and simulacra, which have an increasingly less direct relationship to an outside, external “reality,” to such an extent that the very concept of the social, political, and even “reality” no longer seem to have any meaning. In Baudrillard’s view, the sign is the only channel, and hyperreality is the only thing we can acquire.

On the other hand, Baudrillard’s epistemology seems to parallel postmodernism’s contention that thought and discourse can no longer be surely anchored in a priori or privileged structures of “the real,” but can only be referred to in the play of textuality, or signs. However, in the view of postmodernists, it is impossible to separate subjects from objects as Baudrillard has done. For postmodernists, a world of objects could not be envisaged without human subjectivity, because it is impossible to gain access to objects or to perceive them apart from our subjective modes of perception and cognition (Kellner, 1989). Baudrillard not only separates subjects from objects, but also proclaims the
supremacy of the object and diminishes the positivity of the subject. Featuring Empiricism’s idea that knowledge comes from the outside world, and at the same time adopting the postmodernist play of signs, Baudrillard’s epistemology could be summed up as a combination of partial empiricism and partial postmodernism.

Baudrillard’s denial of the real event of the Gulf War could be a site from which to discern his view on the subject-object relationship. In his book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, the first essay, “The Gulf War Will Not Take Place,” was originally published a few days before the actual outbreak of the war. The fact of the war did not deter him from publishing the second essay, “The Gulf War: Is It Really Taking Place?”, and after the war, the third essay, “The Gulf War Did Not Take Place.” The underlying argument Baudrillard (1991) makes in his first episode “The Gulf War Will Not Take Place” is that the nature of deterrence has transformed the nature of war. For Baudrillard, the traditional sense of deterrence, dominating or conquering, has been internalized and become a form of self-deterrence for Western powers, which eventually prevents the powers from being realized into actual forces. Thus Baudrillard maintains that “the virtual has overtaken the actual, it functions to deter the real event and leaves only the simulacrum of war which will never advance to use of force” (Patton, 1995, p. 8). This also mirrors Baudrillard’s statement: “we are no longer in a logic of the passage from virtual to actual but in a hyperrealist logic of the deterrence of the real by the virtual” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 27). Hence in his essay, “it is not a question of being for or against the war. It is a question of being for or against the reality of war… It must be entirely directed against reality, against the evidence; here, against the evidence of this war”
In the second essay, “Is It Really Taking Place?”, Baudrillard questions the nature of the war and argues that it is a media spectacle, a simulacrum of war, but not a genuine war. When the real-time information from CNN, the selective images from the war, stands in for the real events, the real events lose their identity. The result is a new kind of entity which is different from ‘real’ or ‘imaginary’ events: virtual media events, as Baudrillard asserts: “So war, when it has been turned into information, ceases to be a realistic war and becomes a virtual war… So everything which is turned into information becomes the object of endless speculation” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 41).

Finally, The Gulf war did not take place because, in Baudrillard’s view, it is not a war in the traditional sense: the two opponents never confronted each other: “the enemy only appears as a computerized target… When the Americans finally appeared behind the curtain of bombs, the Iraqis had already disappeared behind their curtain of smoke” (p. 62). Also, everything goes underground: “planes are hidden, tanks are buried, Israel plays dead, the images are censored, and all information is blockaded in the desert; only TV functions as a medium without a message, giving at least the image of pure television” (p. 63). In a word, based on notions of war involved in deterrence and media simulation, as well as the military deployment of simulation technology as distinct from traditional technology, the Gulf War was a virtual war, and it never really happened.

Singling out the media spectacle of the Gulf War, Baudrillard reflects his empiricist-postmodernist epistemology. In this case, instead of the real event of the war, his knowledge comes from signs, which is the Gulf War movie on TV relayed live from
the battlefront. That is to say, the Gulf War movie is more real than the War itself in the Middle East. The war information presented by the media is the seductive object, to which the audiences around the world fall prey. The 24-hour headline news on CNN, the “Nick at Nite will keep you posted on details” (Dixon, 1997, p. 54), all indicate the proliferation and expansion of the information: it is more visible than visible in the sense of permeating through every corner, every second in people’s lives. Baudrillard describes the overflow of information: “Information is like an unintelligent missile which never finds its target, and therefore crashes anywhere or gets lost in space on an unpredictable orbit which it eternally revolves as junk” (1995, p. 42). In this sense, the virtual war on screens provides a degraded form of war, which eternally blocks the real war. In Baudrillard’s view, the ecstasy of the information on TV fascinates audiences, and eventually causes their apathy. When the media blackmail and the illusion of the war has happened ten times on TV, no one would care less whether the war would take place because the real event has already been left behind.

Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum celebrates the triumph of objects and the catastrophe of subjects. A simulacrum is an ectasizing object, or a sign, which forms a hyperreality to shape subjects’ thoughts and behavior. According to Baudrillard, simulation is the force from which knowledge originates and postmodern societies are organized. In the society of simulation, identities are constructed by the appropriation of images; codes and models determine how individuals perceive themselves and relate to other people. In addition, in the hyperreal mode, entertainment, information, and communication technologies provide experiences more intense and involving than the
scenes of banal everyday life. Media simulations of reality, Disneyland, TV sports, and virtual reality games show that since the real is no longer possible, these sites, with charming seduction, become the only source of knowledge—simulacra.

Artwork, along with those floating signifiers we encounter one after another, cannot avoid becoming flat images proliferating within their own circuits: “the work of art creates its own space; it inverts itself; it takes its inspiration from itself; it has a quite unique reality; it becomes itself an object on the screen; it is transmitted by the screen” (Baudrillard cited in Gane, 1993, p. 147). The screen is superficial; it only communicates depthless images continuously without stopping. Even though the work of art is made for capturing one’s gaze and contemplation so as to interrupt this endless image-flow, art has failed due to the consumption of media: “[Artwork’s] own time and place, its uniqueness, is effectively removed” (Baudrillard cited in Gane, 1993, p. 147). Baudrillard explains this by writing that when the line to see the original Mona Lisa painting is so long that each person has only five seconds to look at it, there seems to be no difference between a work of art and a mass-media image. In addition, the meaning of a work of art exists only at the moment when it is created, and only to the artist who made it. As soon as the artwork enters the pool of the proliferation of signifiers, it looses its meaning because “no one has the time any longer to look, judge, and discuss” (Baudrillard, cited in Strand, 1990, p. 56). Baudrillard remarked that artwork is the artist’s vain effort, and no one cares about art except for artists themselves: “What is for certain, what cannot be ignored, is the fact that each artist is doing his own thing and even though it is objectively worthless it has to be referred to as art, as a game. Beyond that soap bubble lies
indifference” (Baudrillard, cited in Strand, 1990, p. 56). In Baudrillard’s view, art has disappeared in this postmodern era because we are entering a period when “art no longer does anything else than stimulate its own disappearance” (p. 194). Art is dead. Artwork has already become simulacra in this simulated world. Consequently, artwork has less and less meaning, let alone reality.

Postmodernist Photography

I begin this section by discussing the theories of postmodernist photography offered in the 1980s by critics Douglas Crimp (1979) and Craig Owens (1980). I then analyze the photographs of Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman as examples. After giving an account of postmodernist photography two decades ago, I turn to present so-called postmodernist digital photography, where I discuss perspectives from contemporary theorists and critics William J. Mitchell (1992), Martin Lister (2004), and Sarah Kember (2003). In addition, problems and doubts from their points of view are raised.

The first essays theorizing postmodernist photography were Crimp’s exhibition catalog Pictures (1979), published along with the exhibit Pictures, and another essay the next year, The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism (1980). In Pictures, Crimp (1979) proposed a new sense of images as pictures—they transcend any particular medium; they are appropriated from pages of magazines, TV, books, billboards, and movies, and thus are hardly original or unique. Crimp (1979) asserts that this new sensibility was happening among a contemporary generation of young artists who sought radical innovation, such as Troy Brauntuch, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman, and Philip Smith.
Postmodernism led to the radical innovations of those artists. Postmodernism, as Crimp (1979, 1980) stresses, does not mean pluralism, which implies the fantasy that artwork is unique and original, and that art is free of other discourses, institutions and history. Postmodernism is not only a chronicle term after modernism, but more importantly, an attack on modernism. Therefore, according to Crimp (1979), radically new approaches are needed, such as quotation, excerption, framing, and staging. Those artists were determined to express the indeterminacy, instability, openness, and multiplicity of the self, and their artwork emphasizes eclecticism, individuality, pastiche, incongruity, difference, and irony.

In particular, Crimp (1980) explains the central tenet of a postmodernist photograph—a ghostly presence of artists caused by their very absence. Prior to the postmodernist activity in the 1970s, the aesthetic mode was exemplified in performance, where the theatricality constituted in a specific place and for a specific duration required that the viewers “had to be there” (Crimp, 1980, p. 92). The presence of spectators – the being there, the being in front of – transforms into a presence of not there of the artist. Crimp (1980) explains that when we say Laurie Anderson is performing with presence, her “particular presence is effected through the use of reproductive technologies which really make her quite absent” (p. 92). For example, in a hologram, the images of objects are vivid, detailed and present, but at the same time the hologram indicates the ghostly absence of the real objects. Consequently, as Crimp (1980) states, the mode of representation in postmodernist photography is built upon the presence that is oddly possible only through its own absence, which results in reproductions, in copies, and
copies of copies. The notion of copy signals the disappearance of aura, and the nonexistence of the uniqueness and the authenticity of the artwork inevitably due to its mechanical reproduction (Benjamin, 1969). In Crimp’s (1980) view, postmodernist photography may have the appearance of realist or expressionist aesthetics; however, postmodern artists disguise their work as photography-as-art only in order to subvert its long-held art status, and to show that the photograph itself has displaced the aura and is a copy, not the original. As critic Robert A. Smith (2001) observes, those who work with cameras do not consider themselves photographers. They use the camera against itself, “photographing or stimulating existing images as a way of examining the pervasiveness and social role of photographs” (Smith, 2001).

Modeled on Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, critic Craig Owens (1980) argues that allegory, condemned by modernists as aesthetic aberration, can be used to identify and define a distinctive category of postmodernist art. Postmodern allegory, according to Owens (1980), replaces the purified and organic concept of form with textuality which occurs “whenever one text is doubled by another” (p. 68). Allegory is a mode of reading the already-existing fragments rather than emerging from an original totality:

In allegorical structure, then, one text is read through another . . . the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest . . . Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other . . . He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement (Owens, 1980, p. 69).
Owens (1980) thus identifies four features shared by allegory and postmodernist artwork. First of all, artists generate images by appropriating or reproducing other images, thereby invalidating the significance and authoritative claim to the meaning of the appropriated. Secondly, allegorical artwork is impermanent and site-specific, and is frequently preserved by photographs, which in turn affirms the contingency of the artwork. Thirdly, the strategy of accumulation, in which fragments are endlessly piled up in artwork is common in allegorical work, such as photomontage. Fourthly, implicating metaphor and metonymy, allegory is discursive in the sense of being “capable of transforming the most objective naturalism into the most subjective expressionism, or the most determined realism into the most surrealistically ornamental baroque” (Fineman, quoted in Owens, 1980, p. 74). Allegory’s discursiveness is also shown in the reciprocity between the visual and the text, where “the image is a hieroglyph; writing [is] composed of concrete images” (p. 74).

In addition, Owens (1980) explains that allegory is conceived as a supplement, a frame, “an expression eternally added to another expression” (p. 83), or a part of an artwork yet not part of it. It is precisely this paragon character that causes modernists’ rejection of allegory, for allegory “challenges the security of the foundations upon which formalist aesthetics is erected” (p. 84).

Postmodernism is exemplified in Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman’s photographic activities. In her series Untitled, After Edward Weston (1980), Levine simply re-shoots Weston’s photographs of his son taken in nude in 1925, and fuses her status as an author with that of Weston’s. However, Levine is not challenging Weston’s
legal status as the creator, but is questioning Weston’s claim of his own originality, the origin of his own images (Foster et al., 2004). Going further from Weston’s own famous statement: “The photograph must be visualized in full before the exposure is made,” Levine argues that the image in mind does not derive from self, but is from the world (Crimp, 1979); that is, Weston can visualize this image in his mind only because he has collected information about this image from historical and contemporary culture, and therefore Weston is definitely not the origin of his own photographs. In fact, the style of artwork with nude torsos can be traced back to the male nudes of Greek art which were later copied by Roman and Renaissance cultures. Foster et al. (2004) unreservedly list the possible multiple authors prior to Weston: “from the nameless antique sculptors who trafficked in copies, to the teams of archaeologists who excavated ruins, to the museum curators who put these bodies on display, to the modern advertisers who use versions of such images to promote their products” (p. 580-581). Therefore, Barthes’s famous saying “have been there” is newly interpreted by Levine as the origin of an artwork must have been in the world (Crimp, 1980). Levine makes use of the medium of photography, which possesses the convenience to “purloin, confiscate, appropriate, and steal” (Crimp, 1980, p. 98), to mock the idea of author as origin, and to dispel the modernist myth of originality.

Opposite to Levine’s ‘realist’ approach, in which she merely re-takes the photograph and does not manipulate it in any way, Sherman’s self-portraits, Untitled Film Stills (1977-1980), present a directorial mode of self-consciously composed, manipulated, and fictionalized images. Sherman’s images look realistic, but in fact are
against realism (Crimp, 1980). Her works reveal the fiction of self, as Crimp (1980) observes: “Her photographs show that the supposed autonomous and unitary self out of which those other “directors” would create their fictions is itself nothing other than a discontinuous series of representation, copies, fakes” (Crimp, 1980, p. 99). Sherman’s film stills are all self-portraits, but they appear disguised—she costumes and photographs herself to be “gun moll, battered wife, or heiress” (Foster et al, 2004, p. 582) in settings resembling cinematic culture of the 1950s and 1960s. The characters, played by herself, often anxiously glimpse at a distance outside the frame to imply a concealed plot going on. Such ambiguity of narrative corresponds to the obscurity of the self that is both the actor and the creator of the images. Sherman literally creates herself, but her creation is built upon images of feminine stereotypes circulated in popular cultures, rather than upon her inner impulse. Therefore these fabricated images do not aim to show the artist’s true self, or real Cindy Sherman, but to reveal that the self is an imaginary construct, and in consequence banishes the notion of authorship.

Owens (1980) offers a reading of Sherman’s film stills through a Barthesian lens. The third meaning, in addition to the literal and the symbolic, according to Barthes, lies in the disguise, or the fictional characters in Sherman’s images. Such mimesis of cinematic stills prevents us from mistaking Sherman’s women for particular human subjects in those settings. Rather, the imaginary construction invites a generalization that “Sherman’s women are not women but images of women, specular models of femininity projected by the media to encourage identification” (Owens, 1981, p. 77). In addition, Sherman employs the strategy of mimesis to denounce mimicry. Such a site-specific
requirement characterizes allegory due to the need that in order to deconstruct a modernist ‘error,’ that very error has to be reconstructed first. In other words, that Sherman builds representations of women only problematizes the activity of reference to ‘a true woman.’ As quoted by Owens (1980), Barthes succinctly describes the tenet of postmodernism, and adequately reveals the main theme of Sherman’s activity:

> It is no longer the myths which need to be unmasked, it is the sign itself which must be shaken; the problem is not to reveal the (latent) meaning of an utterance, of a trait, of a narrative, but to fissure the very representation of meaning, is not to change or purify the symbols, but to challenge the symbolic itself (Barthes, 1977, quoted in Owens, 1980, p. 80).

**Postmodernist Digital Photography**

Digital photographs, either thoroughly generated from or constructed piece by piece by computers, are often associated with postmodernism (Mitchell, 1992; Lister, 2004). Mitchell (1992) argues that since “the digital medium privileges fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity, and emphasizes process of performance” (p. 316), it is perfectly tuned to what postmodern theorists Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1991) call “postmodern patterns of thought,” which embraces “multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy” (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 4; Lister, 2004, p. 316). Also, British cultural analyst Martin Lister (2004) associates Derridian poststructuralist deconstruction with digital photography, which is open to continuous modification and thus never reaches a fixed final meaning. In his view, digital imaging deconstructs the idea of a singular objectivity and a single closed meaning. Interestingly, both Mitchell (1992) and Lister (2004) do not cite any digital artwork to explain their application of postmodernism or poststructuralism to theorizing digital photography. It seems that what
they have in their minds is the digital tool only, and they assume that the worldviews of
digital artists are in accordance with the operation of the digital tool.

Alternatively, digital media analyst Sarah Kember (2003) argues that from analog
to digital, there is an epistemological shift from the position that the object (a photograph)
itself gives knowledge, to that of a subject (a photographer) intruding in the causal
process of the camera. Kember (2003) asserts that knowledge in all analog photographs
comes from photographs themselves due to one-to-one photographic objectivity, whereas
knowledge in all digital photographs stems from the cooperation between subjects
(photographers) and objects (photographs) caused by the need of a photographer’s mind
to fabricate images. In other words, and once again without any empirical proof, Kember
(2003) asserts that digital photography, and thus all digital artwork, presents one new,
single subjective type of knowledge.

Relevance to My Research

I have outlined four categories of aesthetic theories, namely realism, expressionist
cognitivism, formalism, and postmodernism, with which I analyze and interpret my own
research. Bearing in mind that a photographic artwork can be explained with multiple
theories, and thus in various degrees provides manifold types of knowledge, I will
examine my research through these many lenses.

In this chapter I have also found a problem residing in the view that considers
digital photography as a single postmodernist style and thus as providing postmodernist
knowledge. Due to my own doubt of this assertion from critics and theorists that digital
photographs exemplify postmodernism, in my own research, in addition to specifying
types of knowledge digital photographs yield, I will pay attention to in which aspects, such as technical, formal, conceptual, theoretical, or epistemological, digital photographs do or do not serve as an example of postmodernism.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to understand digital-synthesized photographs by investigating the type(s) of knowledge provided by various digital artists through their photographs. I situate myself, as a researcher, in the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, which serves as the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological foundations of my study. The assumption about the nature of reality and knowledge that underlies my research paradigm is that meaning is contingent upon human practices and is built on the interaction between human beings and their world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). All human action is meaningful and hence “has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 28). Methodologically speaking, as research studies educator Michael Crotty (2003) suggests, a researcher does not create meaning; rather, he constructs meaning. He has something to work with, and what he works with is the world and objects in the world. In other words, knowledge is created in the interaction between the researcher, or me, and the research participants in this study. In conducting interpretivist research, I am interested in (1) how these artists interpret their experiences in photographs, (2) how these artists construct their worlds in photographs, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their photographic experiences (Meriam, 2002).
According to contemporary research methodologist Thomas Schwandt (2000), interpretivists maintain that participants’ subjective meanings of action could be acquired by the researcher. In addition, interpretivists assume that “the meaning of human action is inherent in the action, and that the task of the inquirer is to unearth that meaning” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 134). In other words, my purpose is to find the intentions and meanings behind these artists’ actions of producing seamless digital-synthesized photographs. In order to do so, I employed a one-on-one interview method; I interviewed seven digital photographers regarding their construction of seamless digital-synthesized photographs.

Participants

The participants of this study are artists who have experience producing seamless digital-synthesized photographs, currently or in the past, who live and work in the United States, and who volunteered to participate in this research. Artists are those who express their ideas freely in their artwork, and make a living, at least partially, by selling their art pieces. Therefore, commercial photographers, who undertake projects from other agencies, are not qualified to be participants in this study.

In January 2006, I started a search for photographers who produce seamlessly synthesized artwork. In addition to gathering recommendations from OSU faculty and friends, I explored various channels related to artistic digital photography, including photographic associations, art journals, museums, galleries, art magazines, educational institutes, and digital photography awards. The specific sources are as follows:

1. SPE (Society for Photographic Education) member directory, and members’
personal websites;

2. Photographic journals, such as Aperture and Exposure;

3. Art magazines, such as ARTnews, Leonardo, Artforum, and Image;

4. Photography museums websites, such as Contemporary Museum of Photography, Center for Creative Photography, International Center for Photography, Griffin Museum of Photography, The American Museum of Photography, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, George Eastman House, Minnesota Center for Photography, and Center for Photography at Woodstock;

5. Gallery websites; such as Yossi Milo Gallery, Stephen Daiter Gallery…

6. University Art Department websites, such as Houston University, Indiana University, and Boston University

7. Recipients of major digital art awards, such as Jeannie Pearce Award, Crystal Apple Award, and The Stephen Swirling Award for Digital Arts.

My initial search for digital photographers worked well. I identified eighteen photographers, nationwide, producing realistic synthesized artwork, although some are better known than others. In June 2006, I sent out an email to each of the eighteen photographers explaining the purpose of my research and asking for participating. Thirteen of them replied, with seven being willing to participate and six declining the invitation. Here is the list of the final participants:

1. Jaime Kennedy (Columbus, OH)

2. Tom Bamberger (Milwaukee, WI)
3. Kelli Connell (Youngstown, OH)
4. Tom Chambers (Richmond, VA)
5. Matt Siber (Chicago, IL)
6. Nathan Baker (Chicago, IL)
7. Harri Kallio (New York City, NY)

All of these artists happened to be located in the upper Midwest or north-eastern part of the United States. All of them are Caucasian American. Among them, only one is female. Four are full-time instructors in photography at the college level, while others are full-time artists or have art-related careers.

**Phases of the Study and Timeline**

I started my dissertation proposal and literature review in the spring of 2006. The process of developing the proposal took me more than nine months and involved numerous meetings with my advisor and committee members. While writing my proposal, I started soliciting potential participants, which lasted from March to July of 2006. The data collection phase took place between July 2006 and June 2007, when I traveled to five different states to meet with the seven participants. I transcribed interview tapes immediately after each interview. In addition, I kept analytic notes in my journal. Thus starting in the fall of 2007, I began to write up each artist and compose my dissertation.

**Data Collection**

I collected data from a variety of sources: (1) artists’ photographs and written documents, such as artist statements and publications, (2) critiques from critics, and (3)
in-person interviews with the photographers. First of all, during the interviews, artists used their photographs to explain how they synthesized an image. Three reproductions of discussed photographs for each photographer are included in the dissertation. The dissertation studies both artists’ present and past work in order to track the consistency of their views on knowledge. In addition, artists’ organized writings, such as artist statements or published articles, helped me understand their ideas quickly, and served as a means to test if what they said was in accordance with what they wrote and photographed. Secondly, critics sometimes raised important issues that both artists and I had neglected. Reading critics’ interpretations of the artists’ work before interviews helped me form focused conversations with artists.

The one-on-one, in-depth interviews were the most primary means of data collection in my study. As research methodologist Silvia Kvale (1996) suggests: “If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?” (Kvale, 1996, p. 98). The duration of the structured interviews was three to four hours. The interviews took place at locations decided by the artists, but normally occurred at artists’ studios, homes, or their favorite coffee shops. Along with looking at their photographs as we talked, interviews focused on participants’ multiple layers of reality, and how they presented their knowledge in their photographs. The interview questions consisted of three major parts: (1) motivations and ideas about the artists’ work, (2) their artmaking processes, and (3) artists’ conceptions of reality.

In the beginning of the interview, artists were free to talk about themselves, their motivations and major ideas in their work. As each artist spoke, I asked questions to
make sure that I understood what they said. The purpose of this first part of the interviews was to let me thoroughly comprehend what they thought their work was about.

The second part of the interview, about their artmaking processes, was based on art educator Elliot W. Eisner’s articulation of three cognitive processes. According to Eisner (2002), the three cognitive processes involved in representation are inscribing, editing, and communicating. Inscribing means conserving an idea; editing is making the transition from an idea to a work gracefully; and communicating is making work meaningful to viewers.

The third part of the interview focused on artists’ views on reality and their history of working in this particular medium and style. The interview questions are as follows:

**Part I: About the artists’ work**

1. Could you tell me about yourself, including your biological, educational, and artistic development?

2. Could you tell me what your work is about, and your initial feelings, motivations, and major ideas of the work?

3. What is the meaning of your artwork, personal meaning and social?

4. Who or what are your major artistic influences?

5. Do you call what you convey in your photographs “reality”?

**Part II: Representation: Inscribing: selecting an appropriate medium, and style.**

6. What are the reasons you chose this particular medium and style, that is, digital, synthesized, and seamless photographs?
7. Why do you use the digital tool? Why not analog, video, or sculpture?

8. What were your previous styles? Were they successful?

9. What are your strategies to visualize something “unseeable,” such as a dream, or an imagination?

Editing: a way of removing rough edges from one’s work.

10. What are the basic components within one of your images? Where do these components come from?

11. What are the basic patterns, or strategies with which you arrange those elements?

12. What are your criteria in making these arrangements satisfactory?

13. What kind of outcome, or effect do you intend to achieve in your photographs?

14. Do you think you are representing realities in your photographs, and if so, why?

Part III: Layers of reality

15. What is your definition of reality? Could you give me an example, and a non-example of what is real?

History (The consistency of their epistemologies)

16. What is your history of producing analog and digital photographs?

17. What is your past work about? What is its meaning?

18. What is the major difference between analog and the digital photography concerning your art making process?

19. Why do your digital photos look analog?

20. Going from analog to digital (or both analog and digital), has your perspective
Communicating: the context, and how viewers make sense of the work.

21. How do you present your photographs to viewers? Why?

22. Do you think seamless manipulation of your photographs prevents viewers from interpreting them?

23. How do you expect viewers to notice in your work?

24. What is your response to questing comments like, “It is fake?”

The purpose of these interview questions is to investigate artists’ multiple layers of reality so that I could identify the deepest layers as their sources of knowledge later in data analysis, as well as how their knowledge is shown in their photographs. I also paid attention to the following subordinate but important questions: (1) Do the artists’ photographs correspond to their thinking systems? (2) Do they have a ‘firm’ definition of reality? That is, do they contradict themselves? Follow-up questions via emails asked the artists to further explain or clarify what they had said during the interviews.

I conducted a pilot study during spring quarter of 2006 to improve my research process, interview questions, and observation techniques (Glesne, 2006). From the pilot study, I reshaped my research questions and strengthened my confidence in conducting interviews. The pilot study helped me rearrange the order of my interview questions. Although it is a structured interview with twenty-five questions, it is important that the flow of the conversation is naturally formed from the ideas in the artists’ minds to the work presented to viewers, from their present work to the past or the future, from the history of techniques that they have used to their present digital tools, and from their
views on realities to the representation of those realities in their work. Also, the pilot study made me aware of the necessity to understand “what is behind the words…and at the same time to maintain enough distance” (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005, p. 130) to objectively interpret my participants’ answers. I have learned better ways to present myself in terms of finding a balance between what to say and what not to say to avoid affecting their answers, as well as to build my own confidence in conducting interviews in a language that is not my native tongue.

**Data Analysis**

According to Kvale (1996), “analysis is not an isolated stage, but permeates an entire interview inquiry” (Kvale, 1996, p. 205). Since the beginning of the interview process, I have created a data base of notes (handwritten and computer files) of hunches, initial judgments, analysis, and related literature that might provide me with new insights. These notes also serve as a mirror for me to reflect with a critical eye on my beliefs, decisions, hypotheses refinement, biases, subjectivity, and assumptions in relation to my research.

The process of data analysis helped me generate and test my research assertions (Erickson, 1992), which arose from my personal beliefs, my review of literature, and the data I collected in the field. These assertions also reflect my assumptions prior to the research:

1. There are different intentions for artists to produce the identical style of seamless synthesized photographs.

2. In the present time, people have different views of reality.
3. Photography is a site that reflects one’s worldview; different worldviews provide different knowledge in photographs.

The categories of data analysis emerged from the data itself and were not speculatively imposed prior to data collection, nor were they connected to a prior theory (Greene, 1990). For each artist, data is presented in two different interpretational contexts: (1) the photographer’s self-understanding, and (2) the photographer’s theoretical understanding (Kvale, 1996). In (1) their self-understanding, I tried to formulate “what the subjects themselves understand to be the meaning of their statement” (Kvale, 1996, p. 214). In other words, I rephrased artist’s points of view in my own words. The description of what they said about their views on layers of reality and their photographs is arranged according to themes, which I relate to the sub-categories of my research questions:

1. About the artist: the biological, educational, and artistic background.

2. About the artist’s digital-synthesized photographs: major ideas, initial feelings, meanings, artistic influences, production process, image sources, pattern, the making, size, and the content of the photographs.

3. History: experiences of darkroom and digital photography, past or later work, the significance of the digital tool.

4. Views on reality: the artist’s definition of reality in his work, reflections of his view of reality in his photographs, his strategies to visualize realities.

5. Expectations from viewers: personal, cultural, and social responses.

In (2) theoretical understanding, I have situated data analysis in the context of major Western philosophical theories on knowledge. I identified the artist’s different layers of
reality, considered the deepest layer of reality as his knowledge, and concretized his epistemology by discussing his idea about the work and his fabrication of the images. Then I moved to the significance of the digital tool and concluded with the artist’s expectations of what they wanted viewers to experience in the photographs.

It was common for each artist to have mixed epistemologies, and their photographs could be explained by different aesthetical theories. Therefore, instead of trying to find a single fittest epistemological school for each artist, I identified various characteristics that belonged to different epistemologies, even though they might reveal tensions with each other, such as a combination of Realism and Expressionism. During data analysis, I drew upon insights from research literature, which included theories, other researchers’ findings, and past photographers’ statements, to discover things that I had not noticed before or had taken for granted in my initial data collection.

After describing and interpreting the seven artists individually, I did a cross-artist analysis: I compared their subject matters, their layers of reality, notions of reality they represent, their strategies to visualize their reality, the knowledge their photographs contribute to viewers, their perspectives on the digital tool, and their expectations of viewers. Then I concluded with answers to question about digital photography in general: Do people who use the digital medium to make artwork necessarily possess the so-called “Postmodernist pattern of thought” (Mitchell, 1992; Lister, 2004)? What is the significance of digital photography? Does this new medium suggest an epistemological innovation, or merely a tool change? Does the style of seamless digital-synthesized photographs provide similar or diverse knowledge? And how can this style be best
described?

**Trustworthiness and Triangulation**

According to educator Patti Lather (1991), the development of self-awareness in a research study can increase its validity. Another educator, Valerie J. Janesick (2000), further suggests that in order to enhance trustworthiness in research, researchers should clarify their own biases and “articulate the ideology or conceptual frame for the study” (p. 385) in the early stages of the research. Moreover, researchers should evaluate their studies by keeping “a critical reflective journal on the entire research process and the particular role of the researcher” (Janesick, 2000, p. 385).

For my study, I articulated that my research is situated in interpretivist paradigm, where meaning is constructed by the interaction between humans and the world. Involving my own judgment in interpretation, this research inevitably brought forth my own subjectivity and biases from my cultural, ethnical, and educational background. To compensate for this limitation, I shared interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and drafts of my final reports with my research participants to make sure that I was representing them and their ideas accurately. In addition, I kept a critical reflective journal from the very beginning of the research, which included questions I asked myself for further contemplation and clarification, new ideas from the literature, and raised challenges that I needed to resolve. In this journal, I was able to trace how I made each decision, as well as what factors I took into consideration when I made those decisions regarding my research. I was also able to see how I grew by learning from others, and to know more about myself, especially my prejudices and inclinations.
Trustworthiness is also enhanced by triangulation. In order to increase the probability of high credibility, educator Bruce L. Berg (1998) recommends triangulation with “multiple data collection technologies, multiple theories, multiple researchers, multiple methodologies” (p.5). I understood that relying too much on one particular research method has its disadvantages. For example, in an interview, researchers have first-hand information from research participants, but in solely relying on this strategy, researchers cannot distinguish whether a participant’s answer is an ideally transient response or a practiced philosophy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, in addition to interviews, I acquired artists’ photographs, artist statements, and articles about them written by others in order to frame meaningful accounts of their actions of producing realistic digital-synthesized photographs.

**Limitation of the Method**

The volunteering sampling strategy that I chose helped me locate seven digital artists who produce seamlessly synthesized photographs, but at the same time, it had its limitations. One limitation arose due to my process of contacting them first and waiting for them to respond to my invitation. It is possible that less-active artists whose names never appeared on the channels that I searched will never be identified, and thus be left out of this research. It is also possible that volunteering artists are more vocal than those artists who declined, and thus may only present a partial diversity of knowledge provided in seamless digital-synthesized photographs.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents seven artists; namely, Jaime Kennedy, Tom Bamberger, Kelli Connell, Tom Chambers, Matt Siber, Nathan Baker, and Harri Kallio, in the order of the their interview dates. For each artist, data is presented in two different interpretational contexts: (1) the artist’s self-understanding, and (2) the artist’s theoretical understanding (Kvale, 1996). In (1) self-understanding, I rephrased the artist’s points of view in my own words. The description of what they said about their views on layers of reality and their photographs is arranged according to themes:

6. About the artists: their biological, educational, and artistic backgrounds.

7. About the artists’ digital-synthesized photographs: the making, size, and the content of the photographs, production process, image sources, pattern, major ideas, initial feelings, meanings, and artistic influences.

8. History: experiences with the darkroom and digital photography, past or later work, the significance of the digital tool.

9. View on reality: the artists’ definitions, notions of reality in their work, reflections of their views of reality on photographs, strategies to visualize
realities.


In (2) theoretical understanding, I situated data analysis in the context of major Western aesthetical theories on knowledge; namely realism, expressionist cognitivism, formalism, and postmodernism. I first of all identify the artist’s different layers of reality, consider the deepest layer of reality as his knowledge, and according to his knowledge I cite the most suitable theories to explicate his work. It was common for each artist to have mixed epistemologies, and thereby their photographs could be explained by different aesthetical theories. In this respect, instead of trying to find a single epistemological school for each artist, I identify various characteristics that belong to different epistemologies, even though they might contradict each other, such as a combination of realism and expressionism. Then I concretize his knowledge by discussing his idea of the work and his fabrication of the images. Finally I move to the significance of the digital tool and conclude with the artist’s contribution of knowledge to and expectation of viewers.

**Artist 1: Jaime Kennedy**

**Part 1: Kennedy’s self understanding**

Jaime Kennedy, Assistant Professor of Visual Communication and Design at Kent State University, questions humans’ intention of progress in his latest photographic project, *Down the Garden Path*. In this body of work, which consists of four images so far, two 26-by-26-inch, and the other two 26-by-60-inch silver gelatin prints, Kennedy addresses four aspects of human progress in history, which ironically lead to the present
unfair world: capitalism, power relations through the use of machines, religion, and the self-awareness which transforms a self into a performer. Kennedy’s attitude is sarcastic in that he uses animals as a metaphor to tell human history. He builds flying apparatuses, which are wooden suits to be worn by birds in order to make them fly better, to caricature how human beings have intruded into the natural system of the world by controlling, modifying, and “improving,” as Kennedy stated: “just like people before the agricultural revolution, for a million years human beings existed well, but all of a sudden with the idea of technology, people started to feel they have to make progress” (Personal communication, April 28, 2006).

In the first image, *Steal a March*, seven birds, including the leading one with a flying apparatus standing on top of a nest of eggs, and five mice, including the biggest-sized occupying another nest of eggs, are in opposition and in competition. According to Kennedy, the color, the position, and the size of these figures suggest that the birds are aggressive while the mice are innocent. The bodies of the birds are smaller and darker in color, and are located in a lower position; while those mice are bigger and lighter in color,
and are situated in a higher place. With not many eggs left on the ground, the birds and mice are contesting for more in order to survive. Kennedy explains that this image can be about many issues: “It is like the political relation between them, trying to tell who could be the good guys, and who are the bad guys…it could be about the US and Iraq, or capitalism” (Personal communication, April 28, 2006). Kennedy regrets that the real motive behind political, economic, or military growth is always self-profit and the control of resources, which eventually widens the gap between the rich and the poor.

Figure 4.2: Jaime Kennedy. *The Edge of the Mechanical Garden*, 2006. 20×100 inches. Silver gelatin print. Courtesy of the artist.

The second image, *The Edge of the Mechanical Garden*, is about the power relations between three ruling-class birds wearing flying apparatuses and five working-class birds. The ruling-class birds stand on tree trunks, keeping those lower birds under surveillance, while the five working-class birds are situated lower in the picture, on the farm gathering worms and putting them in piles. According to Kennedy, this power relation results from the progress made in the agricultural revolution, which endowed human beings with a sense of holding a relationship to the land and thus ended the nomadic human lifestyle. What followed this belongingness to the land were a vision of labor, a notion of possession, and a classification among kings, managers, and workers.
Kennedy questions whether the “more advanced” social structure brought by mechanical enhancement has “advanced the well being of all people on the planet” (Personal communication, May 3, 2006).

Figure 4.3: Jaime Kennedy. The back of Beyond, 2006. 26×26 inches. Silver gelatin print. Courtesy of the artist.

In the third image, The Back of Beyond, a large-sized main figure, wearing a big flying apparatus standing in the center of the image with holy light behind him, looks back at ‘ordinary’ birds situated in the lower foreground. As stated by Kennedy, this
image resembles old religious paintings, where there is always one chief figure with a
halo or rays of light behind him. In this image, Kennedy talks about how religion
functions from a social standpoint. As Kennedy observes, in the history of religion,
especially Christianity, Islamism, and Judaism, the shift from paganism to these religions
caused human beings’ ideological change from their own existence in the world to a
position of power to control the world. In Kennedy’s view, believing in God, or the
progress human beings have made in religion, only makes human beings aware that they
are superior to anything else on earth, and thus initiates the idea to control. Such control
only results in the imbalance between the natural system and human system.

In the last image, *The End of the Beginning*, Kennedy creates a stage for the
central figure, while many other birds are seated outside the stage and looking at the play
of the central figure on the stage. Contrasted to the natural setting on the looking hill,
Kennedy intends to make what is on the stage “unreal.” For example, “the bird on the
stage is almost like a cut-out; the landscape in the back looks like wall paper; what’s
floating in the sky are wooden clouds; there is also a picture of the bird” (Personal
communication, April 28, 2006). Kennedy refers to Baudrillard when he talks about the
picture of the bird: the picture is a replacement of the bird for audiences when it is not
performing. As maintained by Kennedy, the bird now becomes self-aware that people are
watching him. When this happens, he starts to perform for others. In fact, in human
society, people do not need a stage to perform; they are performing any time and any
place. In this image, Kennedy suspects the concept of progress in “a general trend of
interdependence of individuals upon a system that prevents self sustainability” (Personal
In a word, Kennedy’s project of *Down the Garden Path* “questions the Western idea of progress, examines the cause and effect relationships, as well as the underlying factors behind the conflict” (Kennedy, 2006) between nature and human. Witnessing many systems in the world that work against the benefit of each individual, Kennedy resorts to history in the hope of finding the source of these systems. Kennedy states:
I have become fascinated with the logic and development of these systems. If it doesn’t benefit the individual then how did these things begin? What is their history and how have they developed? Why do people participate in something that works against the individual? Are these ideas of participation and obedience buried in our psyche? In our religions? Is it our human nature to follow? If these systems are causing damage and threaten our sustainability, why are they continued? (Personal communication, March 23, 2007).

For Kennedy, investigating the history of biased systems of society, arouses people’s better understanding of the present world: how do they function today, why are they this way now, and how do we change them? The four images also demonstrate that all systems within a society affect each other: that the religion influences the social structure, that the agriculture changes the notion of possession, and that the tendency of self performing promotes the competitive relationship between individuals.

Kennedy’s interest in political and social issues can be traced to his past work, *Small Catastrophe*, where he addressed the social problem of the poor, the marginalized, and the unfree. Once living in a low-income neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio, where people have very little resources and support to raise their living standard, improve education, and lower the crime rate, Kennedy recorded the spirit of “trapped escape” in images. In this series of images, Kennedy illustrates that a central character tries to escape from a tiny room. However, from one image to another, he encounters different difficulties in each room, which eventually force him to disappear from the room, and enter into another space. The title *Small Catastrophe* indicates, as Kennedy declares, “something tragic yet unnoticed and seemingly insignificant” (Personal communication, March 23, 2007).

Kennedy’s upbringing contributed to his beliefs in freedom, independence, and
individuality. Kennedy came from a lower middle-class family in Bellefontaine, Ohio. His parents’ busy work schedule left Kennedy plenty of room and time to explore freely by himself. Kennedy describes the freedom and the imagination he possessed in his childhood:

My parents had a large yard, five acres to be exact, and woods that backed up to the edge of the house. Within this world, there was a stream, the remains of an old railroad track, and an abandoned root cellar that became my secret clubhouse. I was young enough to still believe and old enough to pitch a tent. On many of these nights, I created my own world where I was free to do and imagine whatever I wanted. I could be it all: an explorer who buried his treasure and made maps to his fortunes, a boy who could fly through those trees at will, or a soldier who made his way past enemy lines. These were the places where I could let my imagination live (Kennedy, 2006).

The spirit of freedom and independence continued through his youth. At the age of 14, Kennedy became fascinated with the sport of skateboarding. As skateboarding was considered outside of the norm at that time, the only way to retrieve information about it was through skateboarders’ homemade magazines. Kennedy began looking at those magazines, and then he started to take pictures or make videos of his friends. By making their own magazines, the ideology of “Do it yourself” was rooted in Kennedy’s and his friends’ mentalities. Today, many of his friends structure their own businesses to reflect this belief. Skateboarding has not only given Kennedy a sense of individuality and independence, but has also been his starting point in the profession of photography.

Kennedy’s involvement with social work began in childhood and further developed in his college years. His interest in social and political issues was cultivated by his parents’ beliefs in fairness, equality, and justice. This profound influence urged him to major in social work at the Ohio State University, from which he received a
bachelor’s degree. Kennedy also mentioned many writers and books that strengthened his faith in an unbiased world, such as Noam Chomsky’s idea that individuals have the responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of government, Eric Fromn’s uncommon theory on individuals’ shyness from freedom, as well as three scientists’ predictions regarding the world’s dim future of environmental, social, and economic sustainability in *Limits to Growth: A 30-Year Update*.

Kennedy’s experiences in photography encompass the commercial and artistic, as well as the analog and digital. Starting from photographing skateboarding activities, Kennedy obtained another bachelor’s degree in photography from the Rochester Institute of Technology. After working for Eastman Kodak Company for two years, and being a freelance commercial photographer for another three years in Cleveland, Ohio, Kennedy finished his Master of Fine Arts study in photography at OSU in 2006. Kennedy produced work in a traditional darkroom in the pre-digital era. At Rochester Institute of Technology, the digital tool was taught, but Kennedy did not embrace it wholeheartedly. By now, “it’s all digital.” Kennedy firmly stated that once he started working on computers it was hard for him to go back to analog.

Kennedy explained why: it is the freedom to control each element in photographs. For Kennedy, since straight photographs merely record the world we see and command photographers to accept whatever is in front of the camera. It is difficult for him to continue with this trend of being straight. He found that he spent more time looking for something corresponding to what was in his mind, but eventually the effort was always in vain: “I try to match what I’m imagining to the real world, but it doesn’t exist”
(Personal communication, April 28, 2006). Thus instead of documenting, Kennedy illustrates preconceived ideas through constructed and narrative forms. He constructs scenes, puts people in costumes, builds environments, room sets, and props and uses the digital tool to combine elements gathered from various sources. In addition, Kennedy expressed his innate drive to alter images. For example, he mentioned that when looking at other MFA co-students’ documentary photographs, “every time I look at them, I want to change it. Such as the environment, they have a desk, and I don’t like the color of the desk. I feel like changing the color of it” (Personal communication, April 28, 2006). For Kennedy, the digital tool offers freedom, effectiveness, and the convenience to visualize his pre-existing ideas.

In *Down the Garden Path*, Kennedy relies on the digital tool to combine components of images from various sources to construct each print. First of all, he builds and photographs the flying apparatuses and nests in studios. Secondly, he photographs the sky and the landscape in the field. Thirdly, he incorporates drawings of animals from 1800-1900’s scientific studies of the natural world done by John James Audubon and other painters from the Hudson River School. Finally, he retrieves images of flowers and the tree trunks from botany books. The digital tool has offered Kennedy tremendous freedom to control his pieces of images in order to fabricate a whole.

The arrangement of these elements in each print follows a similar pattern: the landscape and the environment are accorded to perspective, which makes objects in the foreground larger and objects in the distant background smaller; whereas the leading roles, such as birds with flying apparatuses, exist in an extraordinarily big size no matter
whether or not they are closest to the viewers. This pattern comes from Kennedy’s unique aesthetics, as he states, “I just work on something until it feels right,” although it is hard for him to explain what is right. However, Kennedy mentioned that he is influenced by some photographers who create fabricated photographs and art that is social and political in nature: Simen Johan, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Vik Muniz, Gregory Crewdson, Kelli Connell, Jeff Wall, Lorri Nix, Camille Rose Garcia, Odd Nerdrum, Walton Ford, etc.

Kennedy mentions that constructing images in a computer is more like painting on a canvas because of the digital ability to let artists correct any previously unsatisfying parts or mistakes. Kennedy tries to make his images appear naturalistic, “less-photoshopped” (Personal communication, April 28, 2006), in order to have viewers concentrate on the meaning of the images instead of the techniques used to build them.

In terms of his view on reality, Kennedy gave a distinct definition:

My definition of reality is what is taken from information, whether it is visual, written, heard, or touched. I organize it and make sense of it, or understand it. Since we get all the sense information, and we construct from those… My view of reality is what I think is happening (Personal communication, April 28, 2006).

In other words, Kennedy receives sensory data first (“taken from information…”), and processes these data with his own mind (“I organize it, and make sense of it”). However, this processing in his mind is not imagination, as he stated: “It is based on the information that I gathered, I also do not include information that I haven’t gathered. So the more information you get, it might change your perception of it. So imagination is a different reality. For me, reality is something that it doesn’t change, if it can change, it is
not real.” (Personal communication, April 28, 2006). When asked to give an example of reality, Kennedy could not think of any: “There is always something lost in the translation between reality and representation. A kind of filtering comes in” (Personal communication, March 23, 2007). However, Kennedy affirmed that *Down the Garden Path* is a reality for him: “If someone asks me if my image is reality for me, I would probably say yes… my work is a representation of a collective of ideas of what reality is” (Personal communication, April 28, 2006). The notion of reality Kennedy thinks he is representing is a collective cultural reality, including social norms and social beliefs, that we all to some extent subscribe to. Learning from his own previous experiences, different writers, various philosophical, anthropological, scientific, and religious writings, Kennedy assembles them, judges them, and comes up with his own version of reality in his photographs.

Working from analog to digital, Kennedy finds that his view on reality has not dramatically changed, but the digital tool has impressed upon him the need to think. He becomes more wary of the images he sees, and more questioning of the motivation behind all images. After all, those images he sees are merely information that can be called real only after it has been processed in his mind.

What Kennedy expects of viewers is a better understanding of this world: “Through an air of playfulness and sense of mystery, the images rely on the viewer to finish the meaning. They become an image constructed as a proposal for a new way of thinking and a different way of seeing” (Kennedy, 2006). Unlike artwork in 1980s, which was very heavy-handed, like Barbara Kruger’s, animals are actors to play out the human
script in these images. In Kennedy’s view, using animals is less confrontational and people automatically project themselves into animals. It invites viewers to better understand the world, no matter what class, gender, or culture the viewer comes from.

Part 2: Kennedy’s theoretical understanding

Although Kennedy provides a distinct definition of reality, his usage of the term ‘reality’ is not constant, and refers to a number of different things. In his statement that “sensibility is my reality,” reality means his sensory experiences, such as touching, hearing, seeing, and smelling; in “imagination is a different reality,” Kennedy did not specify how different it is, and still labels it reality; when comparing his assertion that “nothing represents reality accurately” with the definition of reality he offers, that is, information organized by the mind, one finds that Kennedy only scans the territory of sensory experiences before he gives his no-reality assertion, and totally excludes the mind from his definition. Kennedy also casually calls the world from which we gain sensory experiences the “real world,” in contrast to the world he creates in his photographs.

This changeable use of the term suggests Kennedy’s multiple layers of reality. Although simultaneously connoting imagination, sensory experiences, and mind-processed information, Kennedy explicitly rejects imagination as reality: “If it can change, it is not real” (Personal communication, April 28, 2006). Omitting imagination, the two categories that are left, sensory experiences and mental process of understanding, constitute Kennedy’s first and second layer of reality, which corresponds to his definition: “My definition of reality is what is taken from information, whether it is visual, written,
heard, or touched. I organize it and make sense of it, or understand it” (Personal communication, April 28, 2006). However, the relationship between these two layers is not an equal one: he considers the first much less important than the second: “since we get all the sense information and we construct from those. . . my view of reality is what I think is happening, so what I present is what I think of people is happening” (Personal communication, April 28, 2007). Alternatively put, the sensory experiences, the raw information from the world, cannot stand on its own as a reality, but is dependent on the second layer, Kennedy’s cognition, to be processed and constructed as a reality.

In *Down the Garden Path*, Kennedy depicts his two layers of reality with an emphasis on his cognition, which indicates that he is not entirely subject to outside force or influence, but he actively guides himself. On the one hand, Kennedy gathers information about human history from philosophical, religious, scientific, and anthropological writings, and his personal observations. Kennedy’s view on political and social issues are also formed by internalizing how his parents taught him, how his friends and the sport of skateboarding influenced him, the books he read, the education he received, and events he witnessed. As a result, he forms his own view on political and social issues: individuals must have their own freedom to choose the way they want to live, and keep or overthrow the government which is responsible for every person’s wellfare; the world has to be fair so that every being benefits equally from the resources, and that there should be a balance between the natural system and the human system. In consequence, Kennedy generalizes and yields a collective statement of human history in religion, the notion of possession, competition, and self-awareness. In addition, Kennedy
adds ‘something new’ to reflect the processing of his mind; that is, the sarcastic flying apparatuses. Kennedy illustrates the world as it is, but the world functions against his beliefs in freedom and the sense of individuality. By adding flying apparatuses, the notion of reality Kennedy represents in *Down the Garden Path* is the underlying motive that leads to this unfair world. It is human beings’ greed and their hegemony over other people and nature that contributes to a selfish, profit-seeking world. Condemning such greed and hegemony, Kennedy is compelled to reveal and visualize it: “if these systems are causing damage and threaten to our sustainability, why are they continued?” (Personal communication, March 23, 2007). Kennedy questions these notions of progress, which in his view are as ridiculous as letting a bird wear a flying apparatus to fly even better.

Using metaphor in his photographs is Kennedy’s strategy to visualize human beings’ greed and desire to control. Metaphors soften the sharp criticism. Instead of pointing at viewers’ noses and saying “you, you, you,” the animal casting has helped the message permeate into viewers asking for introspection. As curator Jim Healy (2006) observes, stories enacted by animals in motion pictures, including Walt Disney’s and numerous nature documentaries on the Discovery Channel, are enthusiastically received by people, and their purpose is not to promote our understanding of animals’ environment, but to help us better understand our own and ourselves (Healy, 2006). One can easily understand the message from the competition for eggs between mice and birds, and laugh at or denounce those sneaks. Almost at the same time, people start to realize that real sneaks are human beings, and it is we who should be laughed at and denounced.
Therefore, from *Down the Garden Path*, viewers acquire cognitivist knowledge. Kennedy provides insight into and criticism of human development in capitalism, the use of technology, religion, and self identity through metaphors, believing that his viewers discover truth about the world by applying the imaginatively fictional world of birds and mice to the human world. Our cognitive activity is stimulated, our beliefs are refined, and our understanding is deepened. To use theoretician and curator John Szarkowski’s term, Kenney presents a “hortatory posture” (Szarkowski, 1979) by proposing a comprehensive or authoritative view of the world. Viewers are invited to ponder what human beings have done, cognitively modify their thoughts, and see the world anew. As philosopher Eileen John (2001) states: “we often develop ideas in response to art, moving cognitively from point A to point B, because of the fun or interest or satisfying quality of making the move” (John, 2001, p. 332). Viewers not only attain humor from the drama played out by animals in the four allegories Kennedy presents, but also receive Kennedy’s discernment by cognitively associating and introspecting about the real acts committed by human beings.

Kennedy’s techniques of constructing photographs also mirror his trust in his own judgment on the information that he gathers. He implements ready-made images, and after he digests them, he presents his own. Apparently the reason why Kennedy does not resort to straight photographs is that, for him, it does not qualify as valid knowledge. Straight photographs reflect one way of communication of the information from the world to the mind, whereas for Kennedy it requires two-way communication between them. Straight photographs do not satisfy his ideas, as he claims: “I try to match what
I’m imagining to the real world, but it doesn’t exist” (04-28-2006). Thus Kennedy collects various kinds of images: birds and rats from nature-study drawings, flowers from botany books, flying apparatuses and landscapes photographs of his own. Arranged according to his unique aesthetics, as he states, those fragments of raw images have been neatly laid out in his well-composed photographs, as is evident in the well-calculated size, position, and the seamless combination of the whole.

This seamless combination presents a paradox between Kennedy’s practice and his intention. It is a tension about media. Kennedy mentions that constructing these photographs using a computer is more like painting on a canvas. Several art critics have succinctly pointed out major differences between photography and painting. Roger Scruton (1983) and Helmut Gernsheim (1984) state that it is the notion of time that distinguishes them: “photography is an art of the momentary” (Scruton, 1983, p. 110), and “the camera intercepts images, the paintbrush reconstructs them” (Gernsheim, quoted in Walton, 1984, p. 269). John Berger (1980) and Bob Rogers (1978) emphasize the artist’s different degrees of control of details and the arrangement within an image. Max Kozloff (1987) and Kendall Walton (1984) call attention to the intimate relationship of a photographed object and its counterpart in the real world: “the painting alludes to its content, whereas the photograph summons it, from wherever and whenever, to us” (Kozloff, 1987, p. 236).

Thus Kennedy works in a painterly fashion. His constructed photographs seem to have erased the boundary between photography and painting, and put his photographs in the category of painting. His photographs do not present a decisive moment, but a
collective view spanning the whole history of human beings; he can always go back and correct any previously unsatisfying outcome; he has full control over any detail and the arrangement; he does not directly present what he sees, but what he thinks.

The tension lies in that although Kennedy works painterly, he wants viewers to look at his images photographically. The seemingly-never-been-retouched seamlessness of the synthesis reveals Kennedy’s intention to have his images look photographic. Art critic Rosalind Krauss (1981) explains why most surrealist photographers refuse to employ seamed photomontage, which characterizes spacing between elements: “Their interest was the seamless unity of the print… By preserving the body of the print intact, they could make it read photographically, that is to say, in direct contact with reality” (Krauss, 1981, p. 25). By keeping his photographs seamless, Kennedy seems eager to convince viewers that what he is thinking in his head is really happening out there. A collective notion of history has become a scene, an example, or an event to support this general notion. It also suggests that although Kennedy abandons straight photography and adopts digital synthesis to fully present his reality, he still adheres to the old ideology that a picture could be called a photograph only when it is straight, and only when it is straight, it is more real. This old ideology is the heart of Greenberg’s formalism, where one should defend the true character of a medium. In photography, automation is regarded as the uniqueness of the photographic art form (Peterson, 1984), and Kennedy holds fast to the naturalness of the synthesis to maintain the appearance of automation. Therefore, the style of seamlessly constructed photographs, for Kennedy, simultaneously possesses essences of the two media—painting and photography. Kennedy also expects that
viewers not frivolously chat about the technical skill but focus on the meaning of his photographs, which is to call for scrutiny of the world and ourselves.

In conclusion, Kennedy depends on his mental activities to ruminate, organize, and judge the sensory experiences gained from the external world. For Kennedy, the result of assessment is knowledge. His production of *Down the Garden Path* corresponds to his epistemology, in terms of the development of the idea, and the technical skills of how the images are constructed. The knowledge this project contributes to viewers is cognitivist, presenting Kennedy’s view on, and visualization of, human beings’ greed and desire to control the world, based on a collective view of history. Viewers are thus given the opportunity to learn about the real world from the fictional portrayal of four aspects of human life. Kennedy considers the digital tool convenient and effective due to its ability to utilize the advantages of both photography and painting. By keeping his photographs seamless, Kennedy urges viewers to “think” more about our world than to “see” the technical skills on the surface.

Artist 2: Tom Bamberger

Part 1: Bamberger’s self understanding

Tom Bamberger, a photographer in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for 30 years, produces idealized landscape photographs to show his constant inquiry into beauty, reality, knowledge, and truth. In *Cultured Landscapes*, a work in progress over the last decade, he incorporates scientific ideas in the formation of his panoramas, in which the horizontal line of the landscape could be endlessly extended.

Bamberger explains the scientific means that he uses: he takes a little portion of a
straight photograph and repeats it many times in a digitally constructed photograph; it is like, as he states, the process in which a bacterium multiplies in a culture: “Bamberger seamlessly extends these landscapes by drawing and repeating information from single negatives. He likens the process to cultivating a virus, explaining that in either a computer or a Petri dish, something reproduces itself until it reaches a critical mass where you can see it with greater clarity” (LeBrun, 2003).

In the images of Cultured Landscapes, such as Brown Grass, Windmills, and Wires, Bamberger explains that the result of employing his scientific method is stark beauty. Labeled a minimalist, Bamberger shows “laconic and terse” composition with very few factual objects (personal communication, July 7, 2006). As he explains, “Even when it is factual, it has a conceptually transformative power (into art)”: organized living grass itself shows its pattern and rhythm; numerous windmills with different arm positions form a dynamic sequence on the plain; countless rows of horizontal wires and vertical wire holders present geometrical forms. Thus in these cultured landscapes Bamberger
achieves beauty, manifested through appearance and inspired by science.


Figure 4.7: Tom Bamberger. *Wires*, 2002. 22.5×108 inches. Inkjet pigment print mounted on aluminum. Courtesy of the artist.

Bamberger’s belief in science stems from his education in philosophy and mathematical logic, which he studied at Boston University and at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. He is particularly interested in and admires the work of Darwin, whose theory on evolution he believes has helped us understand how the systems of both the natural and social worlds function. Darwinism has also persuaded him that, instead of relying on God, we can rely on science to best explain our universe and the living creatures on earth. In Bamberger’s view, the world is not created by God, but is the product of the interaction between human beings and the environment. For him, there is no distinction between the man-made world and the so-called God-made world because,
like Darwin and Dewey, Bamberger calls human beings ‘species’ or ‘organisms’: “human beings are a species, just like bees are a species, bees make the little hives, and humans make places like New York City. They are all the same” (Personal communication, July 7, 2006).

In Bamberger’s view, science, either Darwin’s or Einstein’s, brings truth. In art, however, things are not that easy. Bamberger confesses that the question he has been asking and searching for the answer to for most of his life is the truth in photography. Since he considers science as truth and applies scientific ideas in his latest photographic project, he still wonders about his answers. For him, the solution has not yet been found; instead, his latest photographs merely pose the same old question in a novel way: “I don’t know if I solve it. I guess in art if you solve the problem, you are done. This helps me to understand the question: What is a photograph? How do photographs relate to the world? What is knowledge? What is truth? And what is beauty?” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). Bamberger cites an early experience in which he finds a problem with photographic truth:

When I was a kid, I was on a camping trip. I was smoking marijuana, and I was with some friends. There was a beautiful mountain in the Canadian Rockies. So I took out the camera, took this very sweet little picture of the light coming down between the mountains. When I got the picture back, I was very disappointed because it was not at all like the thing I imagined. It was 3’ by 3’ piece of paper. If I would have thought “Oh, my God, that’s great!” I never would have become a photographer. It is only when people realize that it is not so great and struggle, that they become photographers. People that think that photographs look like their kids, they are not going to be photographers (Personal communication, July 7, 2006).

According to Bamberger, a photograph needs to be beautiful in order to tell the truth. The
more beautiful it is, the truer it is. Bamberger defines beauty as: “... not in God ... not in sublime ... but a particular kind of form that human beings find pleasure in” such as John Stewart’s humor in his comedy (personal communication, July 7, 2006). In addition, Bamberger explicitly states that the judgment of beauty relies on intuition. He takes Paul Strand’s fence photograph as an example. The beauty of that photograph does not lie in the subject matter of the fence itself, but in its abstracted form. The fence in the photograph is not a fence anymore, but has been transformed into a work of art. Bamberger follows this principle to ‘beautify’ the subject matter in order to reveal its truth: “I love the idea of something being not the thing itself” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). After all, Bamberger echoes Plato: if a picture of a tree merely mimics the real tree, the picture cannot be more beautiful than the tree itself.

Bamberger’s search for photographic beauty beyond the subject matter itself began in his pre-digital era. Creating black and white analog photographs for several decades before going digital, Bamberger has always generated highly-manipulated pictures by, for example, using very unusual films, which resulted in extraordinarily sharp prints. He explains that before doing something successful, he has to try out all possibilities, which always involves learning from one possibility or another. As he said during his interview, “To do something good, you have to go down all of these dead ends ... When you do art, you are really trying to fail in some ways. You want to succeed, but the way to succeed is to be able to fail” (personal communication, July 7, 2006).

In Bamberger’s view, art has been a means to help him better understand the truth. Monet’s hay stacks, John Coltrane’s and Eric Satie’s music, with the configuration of
beauty, all invite him to see the world clearly. Since childhood, art has always had the power to change his perspectives. It has had such a profound impact on him that he declared, “I don’t think there is anything more real than art” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). In terms of making artwork, instead of representing his experiences, Bamberger insists that he only experiences art. For him, the term ‘art’ is not a noun, but a verb: “I never had this experience until I made the art”; it also indicates a sense of mission, as he echoes Wittgenstein: “I don’t know why we are here, but I’m pretty sure that it’s not to enjoy ourselves” (personal communication, July 7, 2006).

Thus, art is not about Bamberger’s self expression; it is not subjective; it is not a representation of his own experience. Rather, art is collective; it presents a cumulative view of everything he sees; it is also propounded to a community for testing. Bamberger explains that truth in art is based on common concern instead of his own fondness:

I’m more interested in things that are real for other people, but not for me. So I can say imagination and dreams are really real for me, and it affects me, but I am not interested in what’s real for me. I’m interested in what’s real for not me, what’s real for you, or what’s real for anybody, or what’s real about the world that has nothing to do with me. I’m not interested in me. I’m boring. I don’t think that my little mind is real to me, or real to other people, or real to any larger sense. But if I could use my little mind, with all my fantasy, and all my memory floating around, including that garbage jar, and see something clearly, that will be real for someone else, then I will do something (Personal communication, July 7, 2006).

When mentioning that he is more interested in truth than in reality, Bamberger differentiates truth from reality: truth is an abstract notion upon which people agree, such as two plus two equals four, whereas reality is solid, and may be experienced with one’s senses, such as punches in the stomach. Meanwhile, insisting that his own idealized landscape is reality, Bamberger explicitly states that “reality is reality, and reality is what
you make of it” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). Bamberger continues to explain that the way he constructs his landscape resembles how our brains function:

In the brain we construct, it is not a direct picture projected in the brain. It is dissected in many pieces and evaluated and then constructed. So it is the process of construction that goes on in our perception. So I would say that this (my work) is actually more like perception than the other model (Personal communication, July 7, 2006).

In other words, since science presents an undoubted truth, Bamberger resorts to science to prove what he does is truth: the brain’s constructing process, as well as Darwin’s and Einstein’s constructed theory all exhibit truth, and thus his constructed landscape has hopes of arriving at a reasonable truth.

In *Cultured Landscapes*, Bamberger shows the reality constructed by his mind, but not the reality seen with his eyes. In terms of the production of the landscape, for Bamberger, there is no difference between the one physically built by a constructor, and the one created in his computer: “He makes one mile and the idea of making the next mile is just like what happens in the computer” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). In terms of the production of the landscape photographs, there is no difference between shooting and combining three or four different photographs into one and his way of duplicating and cloning to a massive amount from a single shot. Bamberger boasts that he is a better reality maker than landscape constructors and image combiners because of his newly-invented language to create beauty through photography.

All images in Bamberger’s *Cultured Landscapes* follow his newly invented language: propagated grass, windmills, or wires, with no reference to the real world. It is irrelevant to ask the question of where he took the picture. For Bamberger, none of his
photographs is close to a natural world, but they represent a possibly true world. However, this process does not mean turning fiction into reality, because for him, there is not a clear distinction between fiction and reality: “fiction can be more real than non-fiction, and there is a lot of time when non-fiction is less real than fiction” (personal communication, July 7, 2006).

Having worked with a digital tool for eight years, Bamberger finds that this new technology has not only aroused his interest in color photography, but has also totally changed his focus in the production process. Unsatisfied with the false “Kodak color” in analog color printing, Bamberger uses the computer’s ability to control and explore every possibility until he reaches a “right color,” whether by making it look like it exists under an idealized light (such as Brown Grass), or by de-saturating it to make the combination of multiple colors within it, such as brown, more apparent. Bamberger believes that all color comes from the huge amount of data he scanned for each print. All of the color is already there, and thus it is not necessary to import any color. For Bamberger, the logic for changing color in Photoshop is not adding something preferred, but “taking out the other.” The guiding light for these explorations is a point of “artistic rightness.” The digital tool has also changed his focus to produce a ‘right’ photograph. In doing analog, his focus is in shooting. The important way for Bamberger to verify what he considers a ‘good’ picture is to take a hundred or so pictures of the subject and pick the ‘most right’ one. However, in doing digital, the gravity is in the post-production. After he has scanned the negatives, the retouching process determines the end result:

It starts out very unformed, and you start forming it. At the beginning you make big reaps, make big differences and then pretty soon, you get to the
point where there are small differences, and you say “That’s it!” Also it is about knowing what an artwork is. Theoretically, I can take the information here in the computer, and make things I want it to be. It ends up having a personality, and ends up being something (Personal communication, July 7, 2006).

Normally, it takes several weeks to clone, flip, crop, merge, erase, and adjust color before Bamberger can tell whether it will be successful. Even though it reaches the ‘right’ point, it is never perfect in his opinion. Sometimes it is more important for him to know that it is time to move on.

Given a long history in doing highly manipulated photographs, either analog or digital, Bamberger does not see any change in his perspective on truth. For him, direct seeing or straight printing has never guaranteed truth; rather, truth is constructed. Such artificial construction has always been a major part of Bamberger’s artistic career. The only difference, however, is the various experiments to make photographs more real, more beautiful, and truer. For example, he has tried extremely sharp photographs, combining several negatives into one with the latest cloning manner. As mentioned above, each trial presupposes learning: “there is no way to get from one picture to another without learning” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). For Bamberger, finding photographic truth is an endless investigation.

Bamberger has certain expectations of viewers. Observing that people are always fascinated with photographs that evoke interesting discussion about the relationship between a photograph and its subject in the real world, Bamberger resolutely makes his photographs seamless. He states: “I want them to look like photographs. I want them to be photographic. I never would put my picture on canvas. I like the slick photographic”
look (personal communication, July 7, 2006). Bamberger also suggests that viewers create their own meaning of the artwork by simply looking at it: “It really doesn’t matter how I did it, or where I took it. The idea behind the picture is just by looking . . . just by actually experiencing the artwork” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). Indeed, for Bamberger, it is beauty in his photographs that serves as his best answer to the truth.

Part 2: Bamberger’s theoretical understanding

This section will clarify Bamberger’s terms ‘reality’ and ‘truth,’ as well as the relationship between them. For reality, Bamberger gives a distinct definition: “reality is reality; reality is what you make of it” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). He gives examples: punches in the stomach are reality, and his constructed photographs are reality, too. In other words, there are two layers of reality for him: his sensory experiences, and his own construction of his sensory experiences. As for Bamberger’s truth, it connotes a people-agreed-upon, accurate representation of the world, which in his view is achieved by science only, such as two plus two equals four, as well as Darwin and Einstein’s scientific theories. The relationship between truth and Bamberger’s two layers of reality is that sensory experiences gained from the outside world pose problems; in order to solve the problems, Bamberger undergoes various experiments by constructing his second-layer reality in hopes that he will reach the goal of truth. Thus for Bamberger, first reality indicates a problem, second reality means experiments, while truth is his goal. For example, when he states that “you don’t make art unless you have a problem with ‘reality’,” the reality in quotation marks means first reality, and the art that Bamberger makes from the first reality is his secondary reality. Besides, when Bamberger states that
he is more interested in things that are real for other people rather than himself, it presents a goal for him. Like Einstein’s relativity, Bamberger is seeking the truth that presents universal beauty.

Bamberger’s view on the subject-object problem could be observed from his perspective on the inseparability between the human mind and the environment. For Bamberger, the environment has never been ‘natural’ in the sense of being created by God, but has always been shaped by the interrelationship between human beings and the land. In other words, organisms have always been in an active position in the restructuring of the conditions. However, the power of organisms to alter their environment is not unlimitedly within their own power, but the alteration needs to have practical instrumentality to guide and control the interaction. In this vein, human minds and the world are inseparable; minds offer a hypothesis, and the world is the laboratory for testing.

Bamberger’s *Cultured Landscapes* corresponds with his system of thought that the second reality comes from the mutual forces of hypothesizing and testing. From the act of creating his idealized landscape, photographs from cloning from a single negative. Bamberger presents his active attitude in negotiating what a real landscape should look like. Responding to what he has learned from previous hypotheses and tests, this latest move is a part within the hypothesis-test chain. For him, his beautified landscape is more real than the actual environment it represents. This is due to his view that while road constructors’ building each mile of road presents Bamberger’s first layer of reality, the methods of combining different sections of road into one photograph and his cloning
process show his second layer of reality, which is a better one for him.

Some characteristics in Bamberger’s system of thought seemingly parallel different theories of knowledge. Bamberger’s newly invented cloning manner to create landscapes seems to resonate with the emphasis of structuralism on finding the underlying structure of how things function. However, Bamberger’s underlying cloning rule is far away from the structure that a structuralist looks for, because his rule is temporary; it is only a provisional solution within his long-term investigation. In addition, although Bamberger agrees with Plato that the beauty of a subject lies beyond the subject itself, Bamberger explicitly denies God. For him, truth comes from science, which is created by human beings, not God. Lastly, although Bamberger intuitively judges beauty, he is not a romanticist. A romanticist creates the world out of his mind and disregards anything from the external world. In contrast, Bamberger turns away from self expression and embraces experiences of finding a problematic situation in the world and trying to fix this problem through art: “I experience the art… I never had this experience until I made the art” (personal communication, July 7, 2006).

Bamberger can be identified as a pragmatist who justifies his thought in the realm of action. Fundamentally, he has a doubt that has guided him in past decades to experiment, test, and try to find a solution. Resulting from the problematic situation he experienced a long time ago, which is that his photograph of the Rocky Mountain did not resemble the scene he saw, and that the photograph of the baby did not look like the baby itself, he doubts the truth in photography: straight photographs do not tell the truth.

Art theorists Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen (1975) explain our presupposition
of a photograph which inevitably differs from ‘truth’: “A photograph is the end result of a series of cause-and-effect operations performed upon ‘physical reality’ that inclines us to impute a special sort of veracity to photographs” (1975, p. 152). This doubt of truth urges Bamberger to question meditatively and reflectively: “What is the relationship between a photograph and the world?” “What is truth?” Learning from science and mathematics that “beauty has led toward truth” (personal communication, July 7, 2006), Bamberger determines to find beauty in art. Beauty, as he defines it, is “self-consciously being manufactured to give pleasure to human beings” (personal communication, July 7, 2006), like the humor in John Stewart’s comedy, which allows people to absorb ideas with smiles even when the toughest issues are addressed. Thus how to beautify photographs has become Bamberger’s inquiry. He has started a series of experiments trying to find a “richer and more satisfying experience” (Shusterman, p. 101): artificial lighting, unusually high contrast films, combination printing, and cloning. These experiments have been guided by the doubt of and the goal to find truth.

Each time Bamberger makes a photograph, he questions what a true photograph is, and each experiment is built on the culmination of what he previously has learned. This long-term experiment is what historian Suzanne Hudson calls “an act of faith in light of doubt” (2007, p. 137). Bamberger believes that photography can tell the truth, but he is besieged by doubt. His assumption of the viability of photography keeps this investigation an open inquiry. Therefore, he sees no reason why this experiment cannot keep going because he has not found the answer. As he states, “I don’t know if I solve it. I guess in art if you solve the problem, you are done . . . (In Cultured Landscapes), I am
only rephrasing the question in an interesting way” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). Bamberger’s pragmatism has been his instrument; it does not provide him with answers, but a program for more work.

Different from traditional epistemological models where one’s theory of creating is the manifestation of one’s theory of knowledge, Bamberger’s pragmatism shows no distinction between knowing and doing. In other words, his source of knowledge cannot be isolated from practical experiences. Bamberger’s doubt produces insights based not on metaphysical verification but human fallibility (Dewey, 1903; Hudson, 2007). His knowledge does not come from any immutable cognitive object, such as innate reason or schemata, but from each experiment. In other words, he learns by doing. Decades ago when he was doing high-contrast black and white photography, he might have thought he had found an accepted answer to his doubt. He directly or indirectly learned from prior investigation, and is now doing cloned landscapes, which is a better solution to suit his needs. Similarly, he may continue to find another one in the next ten years. For Bamberger, each experiment is a piece of knowledge, but is contingent upon its adequacy in providing a coherent understanding of his doubt. Thus the notion of reality Bamberger realizes in his photographs is his second-layer reality, which is an experiment on beauty in photography, and also serves as a possible access to photographic truth. Beautiful brown grass, windmills, and wires carry on his continuous doubt, accumulate his numerous previous experiments on beauty, and will serve as an insight for his later experiments.

Bamberger can also be explained as a formalist in three senses. First of all, his
definition of formal beauty echoes Kant’s theory on aesthetic judgment. Bamberger defines beauty as “a particular kind of form that human beings find pleasure in” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). For Bamberger, form is the primary substance in which beauty lies, and a beautiful arrangement of formal elements gives rise to pleasure, which is determined by personal intuition rather than reason. Also, the beauty Bamberger is searching for is not only a personal vision, but also a common one as pervasive as scientific truth agreed upon by all viewers who simply need to look at and actually experience the artwork. Therefore, aesthetician George Dickie (1971) summarizes not only Kant’s but also Bamberger’s view of judging or producing beauty: “[it] is disinterested, universal, and necessary judgment concerning the pleasure which everyone ought to derive from the experience of form” (Dickie, 1971, p. 27).

Secondly, beauty for Bamberger appears in an abstracted form rather than in a representation of any particular real object, as Bamberger states: “I love the idea of something being not the thing itself” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). Paul Strand’s fence transcends itself and becomes a work of art; Bamberger’s brown grass exceeds real grass and has achieved beauty. Here the realist verisimilitude is abandoned for a better design to fit the rectangular shape of the photograph, even though the horizontal line can be endlessly extended. The notion of flatness articulated by Greenberg, in contrast to the three dimensions of sculpture, is rigorously exemplified in the relations and combinations of lines, colors, and shapes in organized grass, dynamic windmills, and geometrical wires.

Lastly, although verisimilitude is relinquished for formal design of the pictorial
surface, the visual perspective and the recognizable shape of grass, windmills, and wires are maintained in order to make the work seamless and hence photographic, as Bamberger says: “I want them to look like photographs. I want them to be photographic. I like the photographic slick look” (personal communication, July 7, 2006). This act of going back and being true to the medium is what Greenberg calls self criticism in art, where the uniqueness of, and thereby the limitation of, the medium is realized. The uniqueness of the medium of photography, as theorized by the old medium analysis paradigm (Peterson, 1984), is the “automation characteristic of the photographic process” (p. 21), where photographic images are formed by means of automatic, machine operation, and hence present a faithful record of the external world without the intervention of men (Bazin, 1982; Arnheim, 1974; Sontag, 1977; Berger, 1980; Barthes, 1982; Scruton, 1983; Waton, 1984). That Bamberger purposely preserves the appearance of automation in order to invoke a dialogue from viewers about the inherent controversy over the issue of reality and truth in photography is another formalist trait.

The digital tool for Bamberger means the increase of technical possibilities in his experiments in search of beauty and truth in photography, as well as the effectiveness in achieving his “artistic rightness” (personal communication, July 7, 2006), such as selecting a right color. The digital tool also reflects Bamberger’s firm sense of what he considers to be real. Constantly doing highly manipulated photographs, Bamberger insists on his second layer of reality: reality has to be subjectively constructed by consulting with practical utilities.

In conclusion, Bamberger employs pragmatism in his long-term investigation
guided by the doubt of what constitutes photographic truth. His *Cultured Landscapes* is the latest experiment in this inquiry. Bamberger’s first layer of reality, sensory, poses a problem for him, and thus urges him to produce his second layer of reality out of his subjective construction. Furthermore, believing that beauty leads to truth, Bamberger actively pursues beauty in photography, which characterizes him as a formalist who values formal quality as the main criteria for beauty, who seeks abstracted configuration over faithful representation, and who maintains the realistic appearance of photographs in order to be true to the medium. Instead of having a metaphysical foundation for knowledge, Bamberger’s knowledge directly comes from each of his experiments in the search for common beauty. He learns from his previous research, which also paves the way for his next research. The knowledge that *Cultured Landscapes* communicates to viewers is Bamberger’s realization of one of the experiments on beauty, as well as his faith in his doubt. He makes his constructed landscape photographs look like “real” landscape photographs, with the purpose to stimulate discussion on sensory, idealized, and universal beauty.

**Artist 3: Kelli Connell**

**Part 1: Connell’s self understanding**

Kellie Connell, Assistant Professor of photography at Columbia College Chicago, explores multiple sides of the self in her photographic project *Double Life*, where the same model plays the both roles in each setting. Connell starts with an initial uncertainty concerning her sexual orientation, follows this with a questioning of the nature and appearance of traditional male and female roles, and concludes with her personal
decisions guided by her desires. Connell exemplifies these uncertainties, doubts, and desires in terms of the dichotomy of self between male and female, rational and irrational, as well as interior and exterior, in a narrative of a relationship between a couple, or between two aspects of her self. Connell succinctly describes her work as “an honest representation of the duality and multiplicity of the self in regard to decisions about intimate relationships, family, belief systems, and lifestyle options” (Connell, Artist Statement).

Connell’s personality and her journey of the exploration of her own sexuality incite and direct this project. Formerly married to a man, divorced, and attracted to and now in a stable relationship with a woman, Connell explains that she was not converted from straight to lesbian, but has had parts of both of them: “When I was married I did not feel like I was straight. Now when I see women I do not feel like it is one hundred percent that way, either” (Personal communication, July 11, 2006). Having both male and female characters in her, and being open to relationships with men and women, Connell has an elusive answer concerning her sexual identity as well as the conventional definitions of gender roles. Being a quiet person who likes to watch people in restaurants, on the street, or at movies, Connell observes all kinds of emotion emanating from the interaction between a couple from their facial expressions and bodily gestures, whether it is acceptance, joy, denial, ignorance, or isolation, and finds that she can usually relate to both sides of the relationship. From the subtlety and nuance Connell detects in those public scenes, the feeling that she has sympathy with is the most important inspiration for her work. For example, The Space Between is loosely based on the French movie Blue.
where a male character wants to be with a woman whose husband has just passed away. Connell tries to make images that speak a lot to her as both characters. Even though it was *Blue* that inspired her, *The Space Between* is not about the movie, but the feeling and emotion Connell has compassion for.

![Figure 4.8: Kelli Connell. *The Space Between*, 2002. 30×20 inches. Chromogenic color print. Courtesy of the artist.](image)

Connell comments that her self is also inevitably shaped by social or cultural factors. Important among these factors, for Connell, is religion. As a child, Connell was so involved in the Baptist church that she went to church not only on Sunday mornings, but also on Sunday and Wednesday nights. As a result, some morals were ingrained in her, such as no sex before marriage and once married no divorce. Even though Connell later
transgressed these norms by divorcing her husband and being a lesbian, Connell still believes in God. Insisting that she was deeply influenced by religion as she grew up, now Connell defines God in a broader sense—more than the Baptist God that she used to worship, but even an Eastern God, as long as his church welcomes lesbian and gay couples.

Connell explains how she uses the same model to portray a relationship in photographs. Kiba Jacobson, a best friend of Connell’s in college, acts out both roles within the relationship in *Double Life*. Connell takes at least a roll of film of Jacobson in one role. Quickly changing hair and dresses, Jacobson comes back to the scene as the other role. Having not moved the camera, Connell shoots another roll of film. Then Connell has the film developed and printed on small photographic paper. The next phase – cut-and-paste by hand to search for the best combination of the two roles – has become Connell’s favorite part in the whole process. Usually Connell narrows down the number of semi-final candidate images to four. Connell scans the four negatives and then chooses one from each role and synthesizes them in the computer. To have more accurate eye contact and physical touching between the two roles, Connell sometimes needs to sit in for the other figure during shooting, once in a while leaving her own arm in the final montage as a result. Connell remarks that she and Jacobson have an interesting reciprocal reliance on each other because while Connell functions as a position marker to guide Jacobson’s eyesight and gestures, Jacobson acts out Connell’s quiet personality, which is well-contrasted to Jacobson’s own outgoing one.
In *Double Life*, there are two tendencies of visual presentation that exemplify Connell’s interior double selves and the exterior relationship of the self to others (Grant, 2006). One is that the two characters seem to be each other’s double with the exact same shirt and hair, such as *Giggle*, where it seems the model is laughing with herself, and the other is that they appear to be a couple, one butch and the other femme, contrasting in dress, hair, and attitudes between confident and lame, aggressive and submissive (Slemmons, 2006), such as in *Convertible Kiss*. 

Observing similar scenes from movies, books, real people on the streets, or her own experiences, and naturalizing these artificial settings in terms of body gestures, facial expressions, and choices of clothing, Connell aims to portray her chosen lifestyle and the desire in a relationship, whether it is sexual, emotional, or maternal, to viewers: “Just with the light, the color, the time of the day, the propping can evoke emotionally” (Personal communication, July 11, 2006). Having the same model not only depicts the multiple aspects of Connell’s inner world, but also seems to present a virtual relationship in contrast to a specific one that happens with two distinct people.

Connell’s past work explores the self on a more general scale. In an analog project,
Connell took a photograph of a face, put it in water, projected another face on top of it, and created a face which does not exist, even by doubling a single model’s face. Connell intends to show the unfamiliar, double-layered, and psychological face. Another small project Connell did was a surreal one done digitally where she inserted many of the same figures in one landscape, resembling Rene Magritte’s *Golconda* (1953), in an attempt to show that one has multiple mental scenery even when situated in one physical surrounding. Comparing her analog and digital projects, Connell comments that it is paradoxically interesting that her analog work looks imaginative while the digital looks natural: “my old work looks very digital, and now digital looks real” (Personal communication, July 11, 2006).

For her definition of reality, Connell gives examples included in the boundary that she calls real, which for her is something physical and objective: “Reality to me is like I am a daughter, I have a brother, I have two parents, I have a pet fish, I live on the second floor, things that are really concrete. . . Real means physical documentary; things in mind are not real” (Personal communication, July 11, 2006). Following this criteria, therefore, her *Double Life* is not real because “it never happened; there was never two of them at the same time, so it is never real” (Personal communication, July 11, 2006). For Connell, the only thing that is real in her project is the physical object of the photographs themselves. Other than this, since her model does not have a twin sitting next to her in the same place and time, this project does not represent a reality for her. Connell also notes that people have different opinions of a concrete reality, such as a wall, and hence have different descriptions of the wall. As for dreams, since they come directly from the
mind, they are not real.

Connell later divides her view of reality into objective and subjective categories, and hence has different explanations about her work in regard to its representation of reality. In some way, Connell remarks, *Double Life* is even more real to her than other photographs she has taken because it is the most honest representation of the questions she has inside. Even though the cast and the settings are not real, the emotion and feeling is highly charged and has successfully depicted Connell’s inner world. Therefore, Connell concludes, at the objective level, *Double Life* is not real because of the imaginary setting. But at the subjective level, it is very real in reflecting Connell’s emotion. Comparing her old work with the present *Double Life*, both of which depict her own psyche, Connell contends that the former, the melted double faces and the multiple figures in one setting similar to Magritte’s painting, is less real because they are not conveying specific feeling, while the latter is more honest in portraying her feeling, and thus is more real to her.

Even while they are depicting emotions, Connell wants her photographs to remain realistic. On the one hand, Connell does not want her work to be ‘Photoshoppy,’ and seamless combination successfully prevents viewers’ discussion of PhotoShop techniques. On the other, Connell insists that since photographs have been conventionally considered truthful, if viewers tell the digitally-synthesizing nature of her work, they would not think it is true. In consequence, the digital tool has helped her work look believable and natural: “to get closer to the truth, I want it to look like real color photographs” (Personal communication, July 11, 2006).
Moving from analog to digital is merely a tool change for Connell. Now working with both media, shooting with film and manipulating in computer, Connell’s view of reality remains unchanged. PhotoShop is only a more convenient tool to make her surreal artwork look realistic. Her students’ work, analog or digital, is evaluated with similar criteria— their personal concept through creativity, where technology is never an issue.

Connell expects viewers to look at the concept of her work instead of her synthesis techniques, and to see themselves in her work, whether they read the photographs as an imaginary diary of a lesbian couple, or a psychological autobiography showing different aspects of the self (Grant, 2006). When hanging the show, Connell has these images arranged as if the two figures are first meeting, getting closer physically, going through a hard time, and making up. Connell notes that no matter what the order is, viewers are able to make a story along with the wall. Also, no specific gender will enjoy these images any more than another. Even though she portrays a lesbian story, Connell feels even more gratified when male viewers express their connection to the work.

**Part 2: Connell’s theoretical understanding**

Connell’s several layers of reality can be observed from her own definition of it and from her artwork. Her first layer lies at the objective level—something solid, physical, concrete, and factually exists or occurs, such as her having a pet fish and living on the second floor. Photographically, the representation of these tangible facts is real to her, such as in her view that documentary photography carries truth. Following this vein, therefore, since her *Double Life* presents fictional scenario, it is not a reality. When the concrete certainty is mediated by human agency, Connell’s second layer of reality is
formed. It is her personal interpretation of the first layer of reality. For example, the same wall is read differently by different people. Such mental cognition not only suggests a departure from Connell’s first layer of physical reality and indicates her personal perspective at work, but also bridges Connell’s first layer of reality with the third. Contrasted to her first layer objectively in the outer world, Connell’s third layer situates subjectively in the inner domain; that is, her emotion, feeling, and psyche. When seeing Double Life from this respect, the work becomes a reality for Connell because it is an honest representation of her inner state. Investigating further, however, there are different degrees of sincerity in expressing her emotion when comparing her past with present work, all of which are addressing Connell’s inner world. Connell explains that her past work, the melted face and the same figure wandering in one landscape, is less real to her because it did not get to her as close as Double Life does. Equally addressing psyche in all these works with one more real than the other suggests a deeper being in charge of her psyche—her desire. Connell points out the major difference between her less-real past work and the more-real Double Life—the latter particularly portrays her own desires, from sexual, to emotional, to maternal in the form of two selves. In other words, desire in the unconscious dominates Connell’s psyche, dictates her emotion, and hence constitutes her fourth layer of reality.

Connell’s desire can firstly and partially be explained with Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. Connell’s bisexuality originates in her instinct, or her id, where she not only has both male and female characters in her, but also is open to romantic relationships with men and women; while the norms and values she learned from church, such as no
divorce once married, is internalized as superego and serves as self-controller and internal censor. When demands from the instinctual bisexuality confront the regulations from the societal and parental rules, Connell’s ego is in charge of reconciling the conflict, which also is the place where her identity is formed. Before Connell’s divorce, it seems that her homosexual side was brought under the control of the ego or superego, and as a consequence she appeared straight. However, as Freud states, the dominance of superego indicates the repression of numerous desires into the category of the unconscious, and these repressed desires manifest only in dreams or other external behaviors, such as repetitions. That is to say, Connell’s desire of being bisexual was never quenched, but was compressed in the very bottom of her mind, once in a while giving out hints in her behavior.

Although Connell explicitly denies the integrity of dreams, the repetition manifested in the double selves in her work is obvious, which seems to fulfill the Surrealist doubling strategy drawn from Freud to record Convulsive Beauty, or the transmutation that happens at the intersection of two causal chains, one the subjective human psyche and the other the objective function of real world events (Foster et al, 2004). Krauss (1981) explains that the purpose of transmutation is to tell viewers “we are not looking at reality, [but] reducing to an experience of reality transformed into representation” (Krauss, 1981, p. 29). Doubling, evident in Surrealist photography, such as Man Ray’s double pairs of women’s breasts in Untitled, 1924, Han Bellmer’s double pairs of human legs in Doll, 1935, and the double guitars in Maurice Tabard’s Solarized Guitar, 1934, is the formal condition of the unconscious drive, and has become the “signifier of the significance”
Like a child saying Ma-Ma instead of Ma, Surrealists believe that doubling reinforces the intentional meanings carried by the repeated idea. Being a good director rather than an actor herself, Connell has Jacobson act out both sides of Connell; that is to say, *Double Life* is in fact Connell’s self portrait, even though the face is not hers. Following the two tendencies of visual presentation, the method of doubling exists in nearly every image. On the one hand, such as in *Giggle*, Connell literally repeats herself in the same hair and white shirt. The repetition of a familiar object of her self not only creates *Convulsive Beauty*, an intersection between a real world event and human unconscious (Foster et al, 2004), but also endows the repeated self with a new meaning, as curator Rod Slemmons (2006) observes “the narcissistic possibilities for illuminating, qualifying, or extending self” (Slemmons, 2006, p. 51). This comment could just as well have been explaining the multiple mental scenery suggested by Connell’s past work. On the other hand, the method of doubling manifests in showing a couple, one male and one female, where it once again functions as Connell’s self portrait. It depicts Connell’s bisexuality—the confident and aggressive male side as well as the lame and submissive female side. By illustrating a relationship between two sexes of herself in different situations, Connell reveals her desire to be part of both sides.

Seen through the Freudian lens, *Double Life* is the culmination of different forces from the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*, or a battle between conscious and the unconscious, as well as between the outer rules and the inner drive. However, since the ultimate goal of Freudian psychoanalytic theory is to strengthen the *ego*, or the conscious and rational self, in order to be more powerful than, and hence have control over, the unconscious, it
seems that this aim is opposite to Connell’s overall goal. Instead of succumbing to reason, Connell tries to show that her desire that centers and grounds all her work. Therefore, in order to explain Connell’s desire further, it is necessary to investigate her lack via the route of Lacanian psychoanalytic explorations.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the identity of self is a fantasy, an illusion, or a misconception. According to Lacan, in the mirror stage, a baby sees an image in a mirror and mistakes this image as itself. But in fact it is not the baby; it is an image. Demanding for fullness and completeness which has been lost due to the separation from its mother, the baby misrecognizes itself in the image of the mirror and calls it “I,” which is actually an other, or a better other. In other words, the idea of the self is created through an imaginary identification with an other, or an “ideal ego,” a perfect whole self without insufficiency. When this ideal ego becomes internalized, one’s sense of “self” is built. This is why for Lacan the idea of identity is an illusion—the concept of self relies on one’s misidentification with the mirror image of an other. As a consequence of this misconception, the better other creates and sustains a never-ending lack, or a never-satisfied desire to be the other. Such desire can never be fulfilled because it has become the center to dictate everything, including one’s outer behavior, consciousness, and language.

Following Lacan’s theory, therefore, Connell’s identification of dual or multiple selves is a fantasy, which is the product of her lack and desire. *Double Life* can be seen as the mirror image, the other, or Connell’s ideal ego, which on the one hand is misrecognized as her self identity or her self portrait, and on the other, presents a
desirable bisexual mixture achievable only in her mental state. Connell’s ideal bisexual identity indicates her lack—the lack of masculinity. Being a quiet girl constrained by religious norms which may have suppressed her masculine for long, Connell found that feminine alone is incomplete, and thus recollected the totality and completeness of both sexes in her, and visualizes them in her images, being both a male and a female. Connell’s desire of being both a man and a woman constitutes the idea of the other, and formulates what Connell thinks she is, or a notion of self. Connell’s desire to be the other, the perfect harmony of bisexuality, is demonstrated by the images of various emotionally-charged conditions in a relationship with Connell as a male in T-shirts, shorts, and baseball caps, and a female in skirts, blouses, and hairpins, describing first-sight passion, intimacy, relaxation, distance, and comfort. Compensating for Connell’s lack of being a male, portraying both sides of her sexual identity, *Double Life* works not only as a false, idealized image mistaken for her ‘self,’ but also as a comforter for her unconscious desire.

Parallel with Freud and Lacan, *Double Life* can be seen as an unconscious movie. In Freud’s view, our unconscious rises in dreams in different forms. Condensation is a combination of events or elements into one image, and displacement, to the contrary, is the process that a single object can be associated with other events. Connell observes relationships of people in public, from TV, or experiences personally. Reorganizing these witnesses in terms of body gestures, facial expressions, background details, and choices of clothing (Slemmons, 2006), Connell condenses various elements in and formulates a series of dream-like movie stills. Like Cindy Shirman’s movie stills which
simultaneously are and are not her self portraits because of the omnipresent influences from the media culture, *Double Life* is and is not Connell’s self portrait due to the idealization of the mirror image. In addition, Connell replaces all characters from her observation with herself, which is connected with masculine and feminine, as well as all different associations with these two gender roles. In Lacan’s remark of Freud’s theory, our unconscious is structured like a language, where a signifier, such as a dream, connotes certain meaning, or signified. However, unlike Freud, Lacan insists that elements in the unconscious, such as desires, are signifiers without signifieds. Therefore one signifier only leads to another signifier, and never to a signified. To this end, *Double Life* can be read as a continually circulating chain of signifiers of desires. For Connell, the process of trying to fix, to stabilize, or to stop the chain of signifiers in photographs is a part of how her identity of bisexuality becomes possible.

Connell’s decentering of the self adds a postmodernist characteristic to her worldview. Her claimed self is not a stable one, but is a fantasy as suggested by Lacanian psychoanalysis. This view of illusive self corresponds to postmodernist tenets where the determinacy and stability of self is overturned. In addition, Connell questions the dichotomy between male and female in her lesbian portraits acted out by the same person, where a woman can be a man, and a man can be a woman. Connell successfully identifies the gray area which does not fit in both sides of the binary of male and female, and thus invalidates the segregation between the male and female. In other words, Connell deconstructs the male and female roles in societal norm, and such Derridian deconstruction is a manifestation of postmodernism.
In Connell’s view, the digital tool is not a brand new medium, but is a convenient replacement of the darkroom process. Following this vein, the synthesis of her photographs has to be corrected into a realistic appearance in order to return to the true nature of analog photography. Therefore her seamless combination is a formalist or modernist idea to stress the uniqueness of the medium of photography—automation, or at least the look of automation, which has a causal relationship, and believability of the photographed objects. Connell expects viewers to consider her work as traditional analog photographs and neglect the PhotoShop techniques. In addition, Connell encourages viewers to investigate their own identities and social constructs. This tendency corresponds to Lacan’s suggestion for viewers: “please give more attention to text rather than to the psychology of the author” (Lacan, quoted in Barrett, 2008, p. 157).

In conclusion, Double Life exemplifies Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories and photographic Surrealism. The knowledge it provides is Connell’s expressive desire from the unconscious, shown as an ideal bisexual self portrait. Her strategy to visualize this desire is Surrealist doubling, presenting herself both in a male and a female role. The digital tool for Connell is a refined darkroom facility, more hands-on, but the images processed by it should revert to the conventional analog. By presenting her own desire to viewers, what Connell awaits from them is their exploration of themselves.

Artist 4: Tom Chambers

Part 1: Chambers’s self understanding

Tom Chambers is a digital artist and an art director for a kitchen appliance
manufacturer in Richmond, Virginia. After high school, he joined the navy and stayed in Vietnam for four years during the Vietnam War. After his discharge in 1970 and some work as a mechanic, Chambers decided to go to art school at the Ringling School of Art and Design. Since then, Chambers has worked in the field of graphic design.

Chambers’s work mainly deals with the mystery created by the interaction between vulnerable children and enigmatic animals: Chambers believes that they can communicate at some level. With its sympathy for children and the wonder of animals’ unknown intelligence, Chambers’s work arouses an overall tone of emotion in viewers. In general, Chambers wants the viewer to come away from his work with a sense of mystery or a wonder of what is happening. He wants this initial sense of wonder to be followed by a more in-depth conjecture and imagining of the descriptive story presented on the surface of the image. Strongly disagreeing with one critic who sees a story first in Chambers’s work and then tries to decipher it, Chambers stresses that explanation destroys art: “In my photography, I give viewers a straight key in emotion. So emotionally they are touched right away. I want them to feel the emotion before they start to figure out the story behind the images, and then they can interpret the photograph whatever they like” (Personal communication, September 10, 2006).

Chambers has worked on this series for more than a decade with a similar direction of the combination of children and animals, but has not given it an overall title. These images are not documentaries of what was actually happening in the physical world, but are depictions of Chambers’s whim or imagination, as he states: “I have created photomontages to reveal a personal vision about the nature of children, animals, and their
interaction. These images illustrate the fleeting moods that cannot be captured by a traditional camera or seen by the naked eye” (Tom Chambers, Artist Statement).

Chambers’s interest in creating a sense of mystery in his photographs comes from two major influences. One of them is Mexican traditional Ex votos paintings. During a trip to Mexico, Chambers was fascinated with the folk art normally painted on tin, copper, or wood. Chambers explains Ex votos:

Ex votos are done by ordinary people who have had some miracles happened to them, or they are giving thanks for something to a certain saint. For instance, maybe someone was in an accident and they lived and so to give thanks to the saint. They would do the painting on the tin about the accident, and they would write on the bottom: on certain day, I was riding my horse and fell off. I broke my feet, and was dragged ten miles that now I live to tell the story and thank saint saved me. So he painted a picture of horse dragging someone alone (Personal communication, September 10, 2006).

Some of Chambers’s photographs resemble Ex votos with no explanation at the bottom. However, Chambers notes that instead of dedicating the images to religious power, he celebrates the unstrained imagination.

The other main influence on Chambers’s attitude toward life is the Vietnam War. Chambers mentions that when serving on a patrol boat base in Vietnam, he mostly lived inside himself, more attached to the inner world than to the physical world. During those four years, he spent most of his time picturing his future life. After his boat base was attacked one night, he decided to go back home. His experience in the Vietnam War gave Chambers an anti-war sentiment, and made him realize that nothing is permanent. He demonstrates this sense of insecurity in his photographs where children are insecure to a degree. When transmitted to viewers, the insecurity of the defenceless children adds a
feeling of mystery which makes viewers wonder what is happening in the photograph.

What Chambers wants to create most is a sense of mystery. Mystery for him is something that he does not understand, such as spirituality in the Mexican Ex votos, and hence he is interested in knowing what viewers feel. In Chambers’s view, a sense of mystery serves as a kind of bait to entice viewers to look further into his images. When viewers are uncertain as to what is taking place in the pictures, they are attracted by them and eager to find a way to explain to them. As Chambers suggests, it is similar to listening to music. One hears the music or tune first, and after he decides that he likes the music, he begins to listen to the lyrics.


For example, Way out West shows a boy in a car and a horse outside the car
window. Chambers receives comments from viewers that indicates that they identify with the shock because of a childhood trip they took in the back of a car. This sense of identification with the childhood memory and the ambiguity of the relationship between the boy and the running horse outside the window guides them to read the images further. They are usually initially touched by the emotion and then compose a possible story in their mind.

Chambers bases his photographs on his own imagination, and builds the images in one of two ways. He either starts with an idea and works from that, or has a great image at hand and adds to it. Chambers’s ideas come from the free association among several shots that fall together easily, as a critic describes: “All these elements are around him, yet nothing would be expected to work together except for the instinct and desire to express a new expression” (Tanguay, 2005, p. 20).
For example, in *Plymouth Rock*, the combination of a vacation photo of a whirlpool in a lake, a classic car that belonged to Chambers’s brother, some fish to add to the texture, and the daughter of Chambers’s neighbor create an atmosphere of strangeness. Inspired by fiction novels, especially those addressing family politics, Chambers set his imagination off in different directions during his leisure time listening to music. Chambers mentions that his photographs are suitable for fiction covers, and has created some for publishers.

Chambers maintains that his reality is more defined by emotion than other senses. He succinctly gives his definition of reality: “My definition of reality is a combination of things, your five senses including emotions. Each person perceives reality differently.
For some people, sense or emotion is more important for their perception of reality than others. Mine is emotion, more important than others” (Personal communication, September 10, 2006). However, Chambers also states that reality is his everyday life, and hence does not believe that his work illustrates a reality: “I just represent an imagination, not a reality” (Personal communication, September 10, 2006). For him, his photographs are close to reality but have something skewed, such as an odd combination of images, and are not applicable to reality: “My work does not represent reality; it represents moods or fleeting moments that are disconnected from reality” (Personal communication, December 18, 2006). Later Chambers decided to include imagination in his boundary of reality because it is part of his everyday life; he spends lots of time imagining during the day.

For Chambers, the seamless combination of pieces of photographs makes them look as if the event was really happening and helps create shock value. It grasps viewers’ attention much more quickly and effectively delivers the emotion. Chambers also states that PhotoShop tricks have to be concealed because otherwise the focus of the photographs becomes more about the techniques than the photographs themselves.
Chambers considers digital photography a new art form: “it really has to be a unique image; it has to be very exciting; otherwise what is the point going digital. It has to jump out at you” (Personal communication, September 10, 2006). The digital tool has also given him the flexibility to adjust the images at any point in the entire production process. Chambers used to do stained glass art, where one designs the artwork at the very
beginning and no deviation from the initial design is permitted. Chambers finds that digital artwork, like painting, allows the artist more freedom to modify the picture until he is satisfied with the outcome.

Chambers expects viewers to be captured by the mood of the photograph and to feel the emotion, which may be associated with their personal experiences: “this emotion may in turn be connected with something tangible that happened to the viewer but not with me” (Personal communication, December 18, 2006). For Chambers, emotion comes first, and later the story is constructed by viewers. Chambers also wants viewers to spend time with each photograph and think about what it means to them on a personal level.

**Part 2: Chambers’s theoretical understanding**

Chambers has two layers of reality. The first one is those perceived by his five senses, which includes everyday experiences that actually happen. Photographically, pieces of the shots before the final image is done are real, including the landscape, the sky, a human figure, an animal, or an object. Following this criteria, since Chambers’s final images represent moods or emotions which are not tangible with the senses, they are not physical reality. As for his second layer of reality, Chambers considers emotion more important than anything else: “My definition of reality is more to have to do with my emotion” (Personal communication, September 10, 2006). Therefore, his “five senses plus emotion” (Personal communication, September 10, 2006) each belong to a different sphere of reality, with the latter being more important than the former; these two entities constitute Chambers’s first and second layers of reality.

Chambers’s expression of his emotion in photographs can be examined through
the lens of Collingwood’s expression theory of art. In Chambers’s case, Collingwood’s theory on the process of how an emotion is formed and how it is expressed to viewers can be roughly divided into four stages, namely, psychic disturbance, imaginative discovery, emotion expression, and effect on viewers. In the first stage, psychic disturbance, Chambers may only be conscious of a perturbation, an excitement, or a certain feeling, but may not be sure exactly what it is. This may explain why, as an art director in graphic design, Chambers still needs an artistic outlet for his emotion. Chambers’s initial psychic disturbance may partly derive from his interest in reading mystery novels, where he imaginatively enters into the concrete circumstances of the characters’ lives, and has the felt responses to them that one can have to real people. The impulse to visualize his felt responses moves Chambers to the second stage of expression, where he relies on imagination to consciously clarify and refine the initially unidentified emotion. According to Collingwood, the imaginative discovery is not to make something internal externally, but is a process of imaginative construction. Chambers may try out different ideas by forming mental images in his head; he may also physically make a thorough search to gather pieces of images in order to add to a good photograph. Chambers depends on his whim prompted by a sudden impulse to consciously construct the scene. This self-aware activity of using free association to connect unrelated images together reflects Collingwood’s assertion that imagination is a controlled action, here at least limited to the kind of rough images Chambers can possibly acquire.

The third stage involves Chambers’s expression of emotion by speaking—Collingwood describes the emanating of emotion from a work of art as speaking a
language. In this stage, Chambers has explicit knowledge of the emotion he wants to express. It is not a broad range of mystery, but mystery created by the interaction between children and animals influenced by Mexican Ex votos. Chambers agrees with Collingwood that the intention to create mystery can exist only in the expression but does not predate the expression. He also is of the same opinion with Collingwood that what is more valuable in his artwork is the expressive power rather than the descriptive story. Such a view makes him dispute one of his critics’ beliefs that one sees the stories first in his photographs and tries to explicate them. In Collingwood or Chambers’s view, the rational reconstruction of the conscious problem situation of the creator contradicts the theory of expression where emotion always comes first. Thereby Chambers believes unreservedly that explanation destroys art.

Collingwood’s theory of art as language, exemplified as Chambers’s relationship to his viewers, paves the way for entering stage four. Chambers has always seemed to be concerned with viewers’ responses to his work. Therefore, the emotion Chambers has tried to express is not peculiar to himself, but shared by his viewers. For example, *Way out West* creates identification among people who share the childhood memory of sitting in the back of car during a vacation. By invoking similar memories, Chambers’s work easily arouses viewers’ curiosity to look at what is happening to the boy in the photograph, and has successfully delivered the emotion of mystery. Therefore, the knowledge Chambers’s photographs provide to viewers is a shared emotion made possible through the mysterious relation between children and animals.

For Chambers, digital photography is a new art form. Because of the ability of
computer to synthesize pieces from various images and to modify them throughout the
production, the images created with the digital tool have to be unique and exciting
enough to get a viewer’s attention. Instead of depending on luck to capture happy
accidents in the traditional sense of documentary, Chambers uses digital synthesis to
achieve shock value more easily. In other words, in order to create the feeling of mystery,
to make it as shocking and unique as possible, Chambers’s choices of different shots
have to be unusual. However, as unrestrained and vigorous as the mixture of shots may
be, the fact that these images are created with a computer has to be eliminated from the
surface of the photographs. Pictorialist Henry Peach Robinson explains that even though
the emotion is the principle, the natural appearance is emphasized in the technique of
combination printing: “a photograph produced by combination printing must be deeply
studied in every particular, so that no departure from the truth of nature shall be
discovered by the closest scrutiny” (Robinson, in Goldberg, p. 162). For Chambers, the
seamless combination reinforces the shock value and keeps viewers’ discussion focused
on the images themselves rather than the PhotoShop techniques used to combine them.
This view of putting less weight on techniques corresponds with Collingwood’s sharp
distinction between the artist and the craftsman: the perfection of mechanics is the
priority in craft, but it is not the primary in artistic endeavor.

Viewers are expected to look at the images and feel the mystery. While artist
Bruce Nauman states that a true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths, and
Robinson complained that a photograph should not only tell us everything about the facts
of nature and leave out the mystery, Chambers’s photographs furnish the emotion of
mystery in viewers and open new worlds of understanding.

In conclusion, Chambers’s emotion constitutes the majority of his knowledge. His photographs exemplify Collingwood’s expression theory of art and provide expressionist knowledge, where the feeling of mystery is created from the unknown communication between children and animals. Chambers considers the digital tool as a new medium, which must be used to render a certain look of images with stunning content. Chambers keeps his photographs realistic in order to invite viewers to be more engaged in the emotion expressed in his artwork.

**Artist 5: Matt Siber**

**Part 1: Siber’s self understanding**

Matt Siber, a Chicago-based artist and an instructor in digital photography at Columbia College, invokes an awareness of power, controls, forces, and influences executed among people by advertising, news agencies, corporate branding, and government propaganda through the omnipresent signage in public spaces, in order to counteract “the hegemony of a money-driven, consumer culture” (Siber, quoted in McDermott, 2007). Siber photographs tall corporate logos frequently seen in the Midwest in *Floating Logos*, and familiar urban scenes in *The Untitled Project*, and uses different techniques with the digital tool to defy the power of capitalism.
In *Floating Logos*, Siber humorously exaggerates the nature of signage by exalting it to a godly state. By digitally eliminating the tall poles or stanchions supporting those signs from the images, corporate logos such as McDonald’s, Shell, or Jack-in-the-box are shown literally floating above the earth and thus gaining a supernatural quality. Those signs, seeming to forever maintain perfection and hover over us, “refer to
something that can profoundly affect our lives yet is just beyond our control and comprehension” (Siber, artist statement).

In The Untitled Project, Siber separates the text from the images of urban settings that he photographs, and reintroduces that texts in an adjacent graphical layout, which remains true to the original photographs in terms of size, font, location, and orientation. Originating from Siber’s interest in the nature of power and how it manifests between large groups of people, these photographs highlight the hegemony of multiple forms of mass communication including not only text, but also colors, graphic design, photographs, logos, symbols, and architecture.

For example, in Untitled #13 the gold color of the Christian Dior advertisement signifies luxury, wealth and high rank. With repeated exposure to golden Dior advertisements, viewers are trained to recognize the brand identity even when the brand title itself is stripped from the image. In the same vein, we can recognize a certain style
of TV commercial when the brand name Target, or even the red target icon, is not shown; we have been so educated by traffic signs that we do not need the word ‘stop’ in stop signs to tell us to stop, but we know what it means by its being red and octagonal.

Siber explains that his initial approach to The Untitled Project was different from the present one. Before he realized that the power of communication is exemplified in both literal and visual forms, he removed the text from public spaces without representing it in another layout, in the hopes of “free[ing] the modern citizen from the onslaught of language that is ubiquitous in our environment” (Siber, 2005, p. 5). However, simply silencing the literal part of communication does little to diminish its power, and therefore by co-presenting the literal and the visual in separated panels, Siber “turn[ed] the project into a study through deconstruction rather than an attempted liberation” (Siber, 2005, p. 5). In other words, The Untitled Project examines the power relationships between message givers and receivers in public spaces by deconstructing text-based communication. As suggested by the title of The Untitled Project, eliminating
text from the space untitles the space, which returns the hegemony to the public. Siber states:

The untitled idea is the idea of space. A public space being titled by the companies that put their work out there, put their advertisements. The space is our space; it is public space, and should be our space, but only the people with a lot of money can put up their work and their message up into the space. So by taking [text] out of there, you can say ‘untitling the space’ by giving it back to people (M. Siber, personal communication, December, 20, 2006).

Being a commercial photographer for years, Siber’s past work taken in-studio was very different from his present work. The work he did in this pre-digital stage reflected his search for an emotional outlet in the wake of 9/11:

I started a reaction to that (911) making a series of photographs in my house. What I was doing was stacking household objects in the home. So I took everything out from my refrigerator, and stacked them on the chair in front of my open refrigerator. There was a tall tower, a very precarious tower like it is going to fall over. And my bathroom products set with my medicine cabinet stacked on the edge of bathtub. It was a very precarious sculpture and I photographed it. I photographed the space, so the idea of the domestic danger, and the metaphor of the towers. The meaning of it is the reaction of feeling unsafe, and try to create a precarious situation which was not particular disaster, but something more metaphorical taking the actual building blocks of our domestic life and stacking up to point out “will it fall over like that?” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006).

Siber cites many factors as leading to his decision to step out of the studio to photograph scenes from the world and to present the world in a new way to urge people to think. First of all, he reads a lot about Foucault’s idea of power flow in many different institutions, such as hospitals, schools, prison, and interpersonal. In Foucault’s view, power is never single-direction from the hegemony to the ruled, but there must exist a resisting power, no matter how weak, to fight the dominating power. Siber strives to
arouse the public’s awareness that we are heavily controlled by commercial power and should change our ways of seeing those power-laden signs. Secondly, an art criticism class in graduate school focusing on the postmodernist thought of Adorno, Sekula, Baudrillard, and Derrida opened Siber’s mind and helped him pinpoint the power relation on a larger scale in public spaces. This allowed him to extend his thinking from the specific interpersonal relationships on which he used to focus, and to create work that invites more viewer interaction.

Thirdly, Siber identifies himself as a “happy postmodern cynic” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006), who holds a critical lens to see everything in terms of power relationships, which not only helps him cope with all the lying of people or the government on a daily basis, but also pulls him through traumatic incidents (such as 9/11 or his parents’ recent divorce) which result in his feeling uncertain and unsafe, and which cause him to remodel his own set of values. Siber thus learned to avoid asking for clear-cut answers to everything because they simply do not exist. For him, the unrest, strikes, and conflicts in the world are a result of people’s binary thinking, their striving for a clear division between one and zero, yes and no, as well as good and bad. This gray-area attitude toward life has helped him feel comfortable with this messy world.

Some artistic and philosophical influences have grounded and sharpened his critique on power relationships in public spaces with the approach of manipulating propaganda by separating text from anything else in images. Historically, Walker Evans’ interest in language in landscape and sign collections, William Eggleston’s usage of text in a chunked way (by using the edges of frame to cut out most of the words so there are only
a couple of letters left), and Richard Prince’s appropriation of someone else’s images are all significant to Siber’s work. Contemporarily, his close friends, photographers Brian Ulrich and Jonathan Gitelson, who give honest responses to each other’s ideas and work, and work together as a team to promote Chicago art, influence him directly. Siber also stresses the previous knowledge that he has learned as influencing the ways in which he produces his art. Foucault, Baudrillard, Adorno, Allen Sekula, Derrida, and Roland Barthes lay great conceptual foundations for Siber’s work. In his view, it is highly suspect for anyone to develop artwork from a vacuum. In other words, it is quite impossible to “lock oneself away and be original” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006), and it is important to know where one’s ideas come from, and hopefully creatively add something to people’s work.

Siber’s photographic experiences include commercial, artistic, analog, and digital. Majoring in history and geography as an undergraduate at the University of Vermont, Siber found that his interest was definitely not in science. All his part-time jobs and later stage in his career were related to photography: photo lab printing, newspaper photo columnist, university photographer, and commercial photographer. Even since his time in graduate school at Columbia College, Siber has concentrated on artistic photography. In terms of photographic tools, Siber learned and did black and white and color printing in his undergraduate years and during his first year of graduate work. Floating Logos and The Untitled Project are the first projects he does digitally, where he still shoots with medium or large view cameras with film, has them developed, scans them into computers, and digitally edits them. Siber mentions that as long as the digital tool can offer the
desired quality, he has no hesitation to work digitally because “you have a lot more control of the computer” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006). Spending time developing and printing in the darkroom is not a way of working he prefers. “It is too dark. You spend eight hours in there and come out, your reality is all messed up. I have not been in darkroom since 2001” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006). For Siber, computer manipulation has become a necessary process, especially in contrast correction, color adjustment, and bringing in details in the shadow area even when he is only making straight photographs. In Siber’s view, because we have such specific control over things like brightness and dark contrast, color, and detail, which we do not easily have in the darkroom, digital images are carefully manipulated and painstakingly adjusted in the computer. Therefore, a new digital aesthetics, according to Siber, is blooming, where perfection is the name of the game. No mistake or imperfection is allowed so that images are corrected to look cleaner and cleaner, such as the style in German school photographers Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Thomas Ruff, and Thomas Demand.

Siber explains his aesthetic criteria in image selection and production. First of all, the photograph has to be pleasing, interesting, and well-composed. After photographing pictures in the world, Siber makes a stack of eight by ten digital prints. Hanging them on the wall and constantly looking at them for a while, Siber starts with few good ones that immediately jump out to him. Others would take longer in editing, where deciding the composition is the crucial part. What Siber is looking for is the sophisticated relationship between everything going on in the image: “The signage relates to people and relates to
landscape, and relates to each other” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006).

Sometimes, as in the case of The Untitled Project, a composite of images is necessary even though it is not as obvious as the separation of elements:

There are times I like elements in two different images, so I put them together. I do not have problem with this. . . What I want is to show people what I want them to see. That means if I have to put two or three images together to get it to work, that is great (personal communication, December, 20, 2006).

Siber cites an example of a good picture, Untitled #32, which meets his aesthetic standard and is his personal favorite:

This woman walks into the frame, with the same color shirt with the background. She stands on the corner, and she throws her hip to the side, and she put her hand across her body to answer her cell phone, and her hair blows in a breeze. As a female form, she is perfect and beautiful, so I snapped the shot. The gentleman on the left has a French bread in his hand and he is eating. He is walking in from the left side. There is a woman in the shadow, and she is walking in the other direction. So both of the people are walking toward her, and all the focus and attention is going toward her. Nothing is directing out of the picture. Then in the background, that guy in the background in the sunlight, as you can see, he is sort of small, but he is an important element because he put the human element in the back street. He becomes very important because otherwise that whole space is very dark, and there is no reason to look back there. So everything seems to fall right in the place. When I first looked at it I did not think too much of it because it was small. When I went back with a signifier, I thought, woo, this is a good one. And the text element, the sign is for fireworks, it is a firework store, which is interesting to have a firework store on the street corner. The sign right behind her is a sign for AIDS, an ad for AIDS medication for treatment. It is also interesting for some reason. There are a number of elements fit with the grouping: the architecture, the street sign. The more I look at it, the more I like it. There is a lot going in each shot. Why I chose this one over the other, the first line is the photograph, and the text piece is the secondary (personal communication, December, 20, 2006).
Siber continues to explain his approach in the text piece. When photographing urban scenes, Siber paid a lot of attention to what the signs said and pre-visualized how the text would look on a white piece of paper. However, this process became problematic when he thought about extending the project to Europe and Japan, where the text and signs would become less obviously comprehensible to him. He decided not to think about the textual composition too much while photographing and concentrated on basic picture making, and says he has better pictures as a result. As for his presentation strategies, all the text in the text piece is black, true to the original font type face, position, and graphic design, whether it is arched, circular, or vertical. However, the photographic perspective is discarded; that is to say, it is a flattened map of text, which could be an influence from his geography major that developed from his interest in producing huge maps.

Reality for Siber is an absurd idea, and thus he asks to put all ‘reality’ in quotation, and will not give a definition of ‘reality.’ In Siber’s view, all ‘realities’ are subject to an individual’s background and relate to an individual’s perception, and hence
are all filtered and subjective. As he explains:

All ‘realities,’ or experience is filtered through our head in the way we approach things. The only reality is the present, right here, right this way. As long as it passed into history, which is continuous, it becomes only relatable by you and me to our experiences. You’re sitting there; I am sitting here; you come from a different place, from a different world with different experiences, and the same thing with me. If we retell the same story, it would be different. At that point, you can never go back to the present, and see it again for sure. And even if you did, you still see it differently (personal communication, December, 20, 2006).

Even though the present is real to Siber, its fleeting contingency makes any efforts to define or even look at it twice impossible. According to Siber, another thing real to him is himself, which he has total control over. However, since one’s perception changes drastically with what one reads and learns on a daily basis, Siber’s other ‘reality’ once again changes all the time. Physical ‘realities,’ such as something he can touch or feel, are there, but they are not of his interest, and thus there is no need to discuss them. What he is more interested in is conceptual ‘realities.’ In addition, Siber admits that objective ‘realities’ exist, such as time and space, but as soon as we start to perceive them and process them in our brain, they become subjective. Since it is impossible for us to climb out of our heads to perceive things, all the objective becomes subjective, and hence objective ‘reality’ becomes irrelevant. Therefore, either the present, or Siber himself, is constantly changing and totally beyond his control.

Echoing Baudrillard, the only reality Siber accepts wholeheartedly is hyperreality: “TV is enormous reality; it is such a reality in terms of the significance to the culture, and how it influences the culture and the people in the world” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006). In addition, fashion advertising photography has repeatedly
produced so idealized and heightened a ‘reality’ as to tell people what they should strive for that such ‘reality’ of perfection has been ingrained in people’s psyches. Siber cites an example from Naomi Klein’s book *No Logo* of how the idea of perfection has been rooted in elementary students’ ideology when they see faultlessness and purity everywhere in this culture:

They were sixth graders, and they were in an art class. I forgot what the assignment was, but they were supposed to put pieces together. The students were frantically looking for a picture of dolphin that they can use on their pieces. The teacher asked them why they don’t just draw a dolphin. They answer: “we cannot draw a dolphin; we want it to look good, we want it to look perfect.” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006).

Instead of representing ‘reality,’ Siber prefers referencing ‘reality’ to describe his photographic projects. According to Siber, since hyperreality has become part of people’s mentality, it falls under the category of subjective ‘reality,’ or personal perception. Siber’s *Floating Logos* reflects not only Siber’s own ‘reality,’ personal experience and idea, but also refers to people’s shared perception of perfect beautiful logos in the sky.

Truth in photography is another traditional view against which Siber argues. Working from constructing scenes in the studio to finding scenes in the world, Siber calls his recent work “a document of a sort, but not in the traditional sense” (personal communication, December, 2006). In Siber’s view, his new document abandons the modernist notion of ‘truth’ inherited from traditional straight photographs, and makes use of the digital tool to present his subjective perception about the human condition with non-straight techniques. For Siber, the purpose of the new documentary photographer as social commentator (Siber, quoted in McDermont, 2007) is to raise people’s awareness of
the world around them and to polish their skepticism. The difference between modernist and postmodernist documentary can be seen from an assignment, ‘The New Photographic Document,’ given by Siber to his students in an Introduction to Digital Photography class:

Due Nov.1: The New Photographic Document

Traditional documentary photography places enormous importance on the ‘truth’ of the unmanipulated photograph. Photograph what you see with no influence from the photographer and no creative interpretation in the darkroom. Over the past thirty years, Post-modern cynicism has caused us to question the veracity of the ‘truth’ ideal in photography.

With the recent emergence of digital photography as the current industry standard, some photographers and artists have attempted to redefine the notion of the photographic document by presenting us with manipulated, or highly subjective imagery that still bears witness to the human condition.

For this assignment, I want you to make images that go beyond the traditional modernist notion of the photographic document. This could involve digital manipulation, unusual presentation or some other techniques that varies from the straight darkroom print. Conceptually, the images should allow the viewer to see the world around them in a different way, as a result of your non-traditional treatment of the images, but there should still be a clear enough connection to reality to consider it as a form of document. Six prints due (Siber, class syllabi, 2007).

Despite of the manipulation or any other non-traditional techniques to set the new document apart from the old type of document, Siber insists that the appearance should remain seamless; otherwise, it would be “like a Photo 1 student trying to piece things together” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006). Siber wants the viewer to look at his images instead of his Photoshop techniques, which indicates the requirement of a certain level of technical professionalism in the seamless combination in lighting, sharpness, scale, camera lens, and perspective. According to Siber, the purpose is to let the photograph look ‘right.’ Since we have been taught that a photograph should bear an
indexical link to the physical world and thus should look believable, in Siber’s view, photography’s ability to record detail and its close relationship to the world have become its beauty and strength. In other words, Siber rejects the notion of truth in photography while embracing the seemingly truthful look of photographs.

Working from analog to digital, Siber’s view on ‘reality’ has not changed—the ‘reality’ is subjective and constantly changing, and photographs never tell the truth because they have always been manipulated, such as those photographs manipulated by Mao or Stalin, for political purposes. The digital tool just brings the issue of manipulation to the forefront. It also makes him more skeptical of what he sees, reads, and everything he encounters due to the changeability and the purposefulness behind every sign. The digital tool has also made photographers more like painters in the sense that with a tool that is convenient to manipulate, photographers are able to show what they want to show without waiting for the exact moment to occur.

Siber denies the idea of the artist as a genius who dictates meaning in his own artwork. Although Siber’s work reflects his personal perception, it does not matter if viewers receive his original meaning; rather, according to Siber, viewers should relate the artwork to their own experiences and create their own interpretations. By offering social and political criticism in his photographs, Siber intends to change viewers’ normal ways of seeing the world. Although not expecting to elicit major social changes, what he hopes for is that “a portion of the people who do view my work are affected by it, thereby making it a small part of the greater cultural discourse” (Siber, quoted in McDermott, 2007).
Part 2: Siber’s theoretical understanding

“Right lane must exit.” This “must exit” has always struck me as a sign of destiny.

Jean Baudrillard, America

Siber states his view on reality quite firmly. Sensory, the most superficial layer of reality, is real to him, but is not interesting to him as a topic of discussion. For Siber, ‘reality’ is personal perception which is not only subject to each person’s background and knowledge, but also is contingent upon the new information and insights one gains everyday. Due to the distance between personal perception and the so-called truth, as well as the mutability of self, ‘reality’ is only referable, but not representable. In particular, Siber points out that the influence from popular culture, where TV commercials and photographic advertisements are the main force, is so strong that the idea of perfection has become part of our ideology. This sense of perfection which shapes our desire occupies part of our personal perception and has become a portion of our subjective reality. Therefore, according to Siber’s criteria for a deeper-layer of ‘reality’ which depends on ever-changing perceptions, his knowledge comes from his subjective interpretation of signs and active re-making of them, and can be explained as postmodernist.

Siber’s lexicon of certain terms and concepts, such as binary, deconstruct, cynical, power, and hyperreality, indicates his familiarity with postmodernism. Indeed, his thought and ideas are constantly related to Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard’s theories, which can be used in turn to frame his mind and to account for his photographic projects.

Siber describes his The Untitled Project as “a study through deconstruction”
(Siber, 2005, p. 5), which fits well in Derrida’s theory of deconstruction. According to Derrida, deconstruction involves three phases: (1) to identify the conceptual binaries and overturn the implicit hierarchy; (2) to demonstrate the places of ‘undecidables,’ which do not fit comfortably into either of the two poles of a binary opposition; (3) to account for deferral and differential meaning, that is, differance. (Derrida, 1971, 1972, 1981; Johnson, 1981; Silverman, 1983, Caputo, 1997; Deutscher, 2005). In The Untitled Project, Siber deconstructs the way of communication in public spaces. Initially, by simply eliminating text from public spaces, Siber attempted to put an end to the high volume of corporate signage. The presumed binary is the distinction between the literal and the visual form of communication. Text was traditionally favored as a better form to deliver messages. However, removing the text does not completely eradicate the information. Siber found that from colors, the graphic design, photographs, logos, symbols, and architecture, one still receives the complete message, especially now that the advertising industry is mature and sophisticated enough in training consumers to recognize particular products with minimal messages. Therefore, by juxtaposing the visual and the literal in adjacent panels, Siber has successfully proved that any alternative form of communication does as well as, or even better than, the textual form, and hence reverses the hierarchy of the binary of the text over the visual.

The second phase of deconstruction requires the identification of the undecidables. When Siber photographed some European countries where the language is not as familiar to him as English, written text in signs lost its signified meaning and functions just as graphics or pictures do. Here foreign text cannot be easily categorized
into any pole of the binary between the visual and the literal, and hence questions the legitimacy of the binary. Although being unable to read alien text impeded Siber’s usual habit of previsualizing the text piece, it did help Siber concentrate on basic picture-taking and resulted in better photographs.

Lastly, the third phase of deconstruction is to seek *differance*, the under-presented meaning repressed by the illusion of the self-enclosed identity. Various signs, whether they are commercial, municipal, propaganda, or news, not only give us the surface information about products, directions toward certain places, and the government, but also enforce power through seducing advertisements or licensing documents to control our thought and behavior. Siber recognizes the power as the *differance* of signs. To see the function of signs through power relationships is a possible yet generally overlooked way of reading them.

By identifying the power flow, Siber’s effort can also be considered a Foucaultian project. Foucault’s genealogy of power shows that power is not a single-direction force, but is a web-like field consisting of forces of repression as well as resistance. By representing commercial signs which occupy a large portion of Siber’s photographs, and by overstating and glorifying the nature of signs in *Floating Logos*, Siber emphasizes the great intensity of power coming from the message givers and regulators. To make the power field complete, Siber produces a counter force, or a critical voice from the oppressed side of message receiver, the controlled, and the desiring subject, in order to “counteract the hegemony of a money-driven, consumer culture” (personal communication, December, 20, 2006), which at the same time fulfills the aim of
Foucault’s tracing the genealogy of power to “disrupt the operation of normalizing practices” (Rawlinson, 1998, p. 226). Although Siber considers his work more of a deconstructing study than an attempted liberation, following Foucault’s thought by producing a counter force and exposing the mechanisms of social constructions, Siber’s project embodies liberating values (Wicks, 1998).

The result of being affected by the power from the signs is the reshaping of the self, which is the main concept of Baudrillard’s hyperreality. In Baudrillard’s view, what makes hyperreality firmly fixed in people’s mind is the growing supremacy of objects (commodities, capital, fashion, media, and information) over subjects (people), and the eventual triumph of the object. Due to objects’ obscene ecstasy in proliferation, expansion, and surpassing themselves, subjects’ fascination with the play of object turns to apathy and stupefaction. Therefore, as stated by Baudrillard, the sovereign power of the seductive object, or the commodities on TV and advertisements that fascinate individuals with the sign value, is affirmed. Siber certainly agrees with Baudrillard that in the media and consumer society, people are caught up in the play of images and spectacles to the extent that the traditional concept of reality or truth does not matter any more; the sign is the only channel, and hyperreality is the only thing we can acquire.

Embracing a wide spectrum of postmodernism from various thinkers, such as Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard, some of Siber’s postmodernist thought inevitably contradicts itself. For example, Siber mentions that binary thinking which asks for an either/or clear answer is popular among people, and should be eradicated because it has resulted in so much discord and turmoil in the world. However, there exist many binaries
in Siber’s ideas in producing *The Untitled Project*, such as message givers versus 
message receivers, controllers versus the controlled, and the seducing object versus the 
desiring subject. Although Siber’s purpose is to arouse awareness of the invasion of 
power from signs, he does not succeed in deconstructing the situation by reversing the 
hierarchical order within these binaries. In other words, for Siber, these implicit binaries 
are unwanted yet irremediable areas in his thought. Also, explaining his ‘reality’ as 
personal subjective perceptions, it remains unclear as to how Siber determines the 
segregation between subjective perception and the collective influence from the 
hyperreality of spectacles in the popular culture. If every person gains different 
perceptions from everyday life and gives different interpretations according to his own 
background, how can every person inevitably be controlled by hyperreality and embrace 
it as the only available ‘reality’ to the same degree? It seems that Siber ironically stresses 
individuality while admitting conformity.

Despite these conceptual ambiguities, Siber’s photographic ideas and projects 
remain postmodernist. First of all, his text-removing strategy deconstructs the 
conventional way of communication, and the act of appropriating of images from popular 
culture troubles the line between high art and the popular culture, both of which 
characterize postmodernist activities of photography (Crimp, 1980; Trodd, 1999).

Secondly, Siber’s linkage of photographs themselves and social and political 
conditions, as well as the aim toward “considerations of concrete social transformation” 
(Sekula, 1978, p. 56) fulfill photographer, writer, and critic Allen Sekula’s proposal of 
New Social Documentary, which challenges the modernist notion of transcendental status.
of documentary photographs as fine art discarding any contextual meaning of it, and which critically refers to social truth using a strategy beyond conventional convincing documentary style presenting surface of social realm (Sekula, 1978). As foreshadowed by Sekula, Siber poses penetrating questions to reflect his social concern in his photographic projects: “How do we invent our lives out of a limited range of possibilities, and how are our lives invented for us by those in power?” (Sekula, 1978, p. 56).

Thirdly, as an artist Siber clearly articulates the conceptual grounding of his work, and the forerunning photographic styles that he has learned from, both of which support his belief that artists do not possess thorough originality when creating new work, and are not geniuses as supposed by modernists. Rather, recalling Foucault, for Siber the importance of authorship should be minimized because the degree of authenticity and the border of the concepts of the author within an artwork have been questioned. In addition, in Siber’s view, artwork should address issues that viewers can easily relate to so as to give rise to different interpretations. Siber also disputes the modernist notion that artists dictate meaning to their artwork. For Siber, artwork should not solely be about the artist’s self-expression unless the artist himself is interesting enough, which unfortunately is usually not the case.

The abstract idea Siber tries to visualize in his photographs is the power among groups of people, and his strategies to visualize it correspond to his validation of hyperreality. Siber mentions that he observes people and things happening in the world in terms of power relationships, where the event of 9/11 and his parent’s divorce have strengthened this part of his personality. Finding a linkage between the manifestation of
power and the function of signs exercised in public spaces, Siber focuses on the language of communication. By separating text from signs, or eliminating supporting poles to let logos drift on the air, Siber does little tricks to let signs and landscapes that we have taken for granted look somewhat different to call our attention and further pondering on the influence from signs. With glamorous color and immovable existence, floating logos reaching a perfect state exemplify Siber’s view on the reality that corporate signs have shaped our thoughts, desires, and behavior, and have become a form of hyperreality that no one can deny. By highlighting signage, Siber offers his ‘reality,’ or his personal reflection, on the power flow between corporations and people. Although he negates that his photographs represent reality, they certainly refer to his perception, part of which is ingrained by the hyperreality provided by signs.

Siber mentions that digital photographers are more like painters when constructing images in computers. However, unlike a painter who can produce paintings of any unrealistic kind, Siber insists on seamlessness and perfection in his photographs, where perspective, sharpness of grains, lighting, and scale should be painstakingly maintained and harmonized, as well as clean aesthetics definitely pursued. By keeping his photographs documentary-like, Siber emphasizes photographs’ “indexical link to the physical world” (Siber, quoted in McDermott, 2007), or the appearance of automation in Peterson’s term, which in his view is the beauty and the strength of photographs, and is a firm way we have been taught how to look at photographs. In the New Photographic Document assignment given to his students, Siber gives the class complete freedom to do any manipulation they like to the photographs, but the bottom line is that “there should
still be a clear enough connection to reality to consider it as a form of document” (Siber, 2007). Apparently, Siber’s insistence on the documentary look is not only a stylistic choice, but a moral imperative. Following Sekula’s postmodernism and the idea of the New Social Documentary, but choosing not to accept Sekula’s proposed style of “theatrical and overtly contrived” (Sekula, 1978, p. 56) artwork like John Heartfield’s, Siber’s intention to keep the non-traditional photographs photographic is ambiguous and may contradict his postmodernist position. Demanding automation, the uniqueness yet the limitation of the photographic medium, is a feature of what Greenberg argued as formalism, which adds a modernist aspect to Siber and his artwork.

In conclusion, Siber’s personal perception, contingent upon his previous background and acquaintance, decides his contextualized pieces of knowledge. His *Floating Logos* and *The Untitled Project* demonstrate postmodernism, where Derrida’s idea of deconstruction, Foucault’s analysis of power, and Baudrillard’s hyperreality are mutually involved. The knowledge Siber’s photographs provide is a postmodernist critique on the ways of communication where power is tremendously conveyed yet seldom noticed. Siber’s usage of the digital tool entails postmodernist commentary on power-driven consumer society by manipulating the surface appearance of landscape in photographs, as well as modernist adherence to the solitary characteristic of the medium of photography by keeping the images seamless. What Siber expects of viewers is the open interpretation of their own lives and developing a critical eye toward the world.

**Artist 6: Nathan Baker**

**Part 1: Baker’s self understanding**
Nathan Baker is a Chicago-based artist, the technical director of the Visual Art Department at University of Chicago, an instructor in video art, and one of the owners of a scanning and printing business. His digitally composite artwork, *Occupation*, addresses the tension between the depraved and dignified natures of the labor one puts into his work. By condensing various tasks of individual workers into a single frame, Baker evokes “the frenzied tedium of a wide variety of occupations and the intensity of effort that people put into them” (Nathan Baker, Artist Statement). Often compared with Bosch’s painting, Baker’s *Occupation* exhibits a playful, carnivalesque manipulation of repeatedly identical human figures and esteemed humanity.


Baker’s *Occupation* consists of twenty photographs, each presenting different tasks associated with one particular job at a workplace, and hence describing twenty occupations, ranging from scooter repairer, house painter, wheel manufacturer, record
distributor, to hotel housekeeper. Before taking pictures of the subjects, Baker spends time asking about their jobs and watching them work. Those performed tasks in the photographs were acted out by the same person who actually works there, and who was directed to recreate the process. In other words, the settings were totally constructed.


Baker explains that his initial idea to produce *Occupation* was from a negative perspective. Coming from a lower-income, working-class family where money was always an issue, Baker learned that jobs have occupied most people's lives, where they devote incredible amounts of energy, effort, and time only to benefit other people, even though they receive money to support their own living. In turn from those people who they benefit, what they gain is mostly contempt or mocking of their circus-like bodily
performances. It was later, from viewers’ responses concerning the humanity shown in
the photographs, that Baker started to look at the occupations positively. Therefore, what
Baker emphasizes is the tension of having the skills for a particular job. For the worker
himself, skills earn him money, but at the same time he commits his life to it; while for
the benefited people, the skills deserve respect but at the same time provoke teasing.
Baker explains this tension between esteem and humor: “There are certain tensions
where you can go either way. If you invest time and really try to understand somebody
else, it can be a really fruitful thing, but if you just look at it as something different and
not equal, this is an awkward humor” (Personal communication, December 21, 2006).
Unlike and against such working-for-others nature of jobs possessed by most people,
Baker feels fortunate that his careers as a photographer, a teacher, and a photographic
business owner all directly relate to his interest in photography, where he gains personal
accomplishment and pride. He asserts that there is no way he can work for someone else,
and neither can he understand why there are so many MBA graduates desiring to enter
big corporations to obtain job security.

Baker articulates his choices and the production of these images. All of the twenty
occupations follow his perspective on the working class environment, which contains a
lot of labor and specific manual skills. His criterion for selecting an occupation was
availability, which he acquired from friends’ friends knowing of people. Before
photographing, it was important for Baker to talk with them about their jobs and the use
of the work space in order to decide the constellation of figures at work in the final
images. The space of the working area not only determines the size of the final print,
whether it is a taller one or a wider panorama, but it also ordains the number of photographs taken to aesthetically fill the space, normally ranging from thirty to seventy. The stationary camera is usually positioned higher so as to render a full view of the whole space as well as the detail of every task. The criterion for Baker in arranging different shots in computer is to achieve a good composition, which “creates an image that promotes movement through the space” (Personal communication, December 21, 2006). In addition, the faces of the workers are intentionally sheltered or side-viewed to avoid viewers’ quick recognition of the fact that it is the same person at work in the final images. For Baker, this strategy prevents his digital composites from being immediately read as PhotoShop pictures. In his view, once viewers find that the photographs are an unrealistically seamed collage, they read his work totally differently. However, although Baker does not want the same person to be instantly recognized, this idea of the identical person remains important to illustrate one’s occupation. Baker provides an ideal move for viewers to look at his photographs:

When people walk up to the pictures, they kind of laugh a little bit about the composition and the scene: “Ha! 30 the same person in a picture.” And at the same time, another part of them wants to know more about what was happening in the picture. They can recognize in fact they are laughing and interested in it at the same time (Personal communication, December 21, 2006).

To make his photographs documentary-like is the ultimate purpose of Baker’s de-emphasization of the PhotoShop techniques: “The more of that digitalness and the more of that Photoshop is emphasized, the harder it is for viewers to see it as document” (Personal communication, December 21, 2006). Baker explains the documentary that he tries to retain in his photographs as “a real representation of the job” (Personal
communication, December 21, 2006). By taking all the figures from the same accurate
environment, and by bringing in more information than a traditional documentary can
offer, Baker thinks his documentary has surpassed the traditional one.

Figure 4.20: Nathan Baker. *Casino Boat Engine Room – Michigan City, IN*, 2004. 40×50
inches. Inkjet print. Courtesy of the artist.

Baker’s pursuit for believability in documentary can be retraced to his interest in
and influence from Robert Frank’s street photography. One thing Baker really likes about
Frank, which he implements in his own work, is the filmic style of photography, which
manifests evidently in Frank’s *The Americans*. According to Baker, filminess is a
frequent style used by filmmakers in the thirties and forties to bring viewers more into
the frame, or to make viewers feel like they are present in the situation where the photographs were taken. By composing the image in a seemingly casual way, and by purposefully leaving some part of the photograph out-of-focus, filmic strategy imitates the visual habit of glimpsing and plays with the visual depth as if one is looking at the actual scene. In Baker’s view, the more viewers can bring themselves to the scenario, the more the photograph is believable. Consequently, Baker incorporates a blurred arm in the left side of the frame in *Casino Boat Engine Room*. Even though it is imperfect, it makes viewers feel that this space and these people actually exist and hence enhances its trustworthiness.

Even though embracing Frank’s strategy of filmic documentary to achieve believability, Baker’s previous analog documentary projects were not always successful, which eventually led him to develop his own language to express ideas. He planned to document *Fermilab*, a particle plant outside of Chicago, but this scheme was aborted because Baker found that he just could not shoot documentary pictures—a single shot is not sufficient for him to explain anything thoroughly. Due to this reason, he gave up the *Fermilab* plan. Later in his sketch for *Occupation* before he had the clear idea of compacting duplicate figures in one image, Baker had planned to take more pictures. He then realized that when digitally putting all these single shots of the same person together, he was able to give more facts about the job so as to achieve “a real representation” of it. Because the space is all in one, final images are still documentary. However, they are more than traditional documentary; they are comprehensive documentary, in Baker’s terminology. In his view, he has described each occupation in his photographs as fully as
he can within the framework of the medium of photography. Since he directs people to perform the tasks of their job, Baker also calls his project “directorial documentary” (Personal communication, December 21, 2006).

Baker tries to illustrate a person through the objects around him. In his previous project *Tangible Mediation*, Baker showed an individual and an object of his own choice in each photograph. By closing the eyes of each subject, according to Baker, viewers are directed to see the objects first, and then ponder the relationship between the object and the subject in order to sketch the personal identity of the subject. For Baker, objects are “mediators that provide both personal and societal representations of individual identity, along with an outlet for expression and emotion” (Nathan Baker, Artist Statement). In other words, in Baker’s view, a tangible object from the outer world serves as an important clue to understand a person’s mind.

Baker succinctly defines his view on reality: “My definition of reality is one’s experience, which is composed of a physical component and an intellectual component. Those two things compose one reality” (Personal communication, December 21, 2006). According to Baker, the physical component comes from his five senses, and the intellectual component indicates his thought or idea from the sensory stimulation. Dreams and the unconscious are not reality for him. Baker’s photographs are real to him for two reasons. On the one hand, they are his experience of actually taking pictures of people with various occupations and the manifestation of his ideas of presenting them. On the other, they are a sort of documentary which contains more information than straight photographs can convey. For Baker, these digital photographs document the
whole process of doing one’s job as completely as a short film does.

Baker continues to articulate the four layers of reality carried by his photographs to viewers. The first is the physical reality of the pictures itself. The subject matter of the picture is simultaneously presented by the second layer where the figure does things in the real space and was documented by photographs, as well as the third layer where the multitude of figures within the space can exist but in the context of photography does not. For Baker, the second layer is real in the sense of real time and real space, while the third is even more real since it contains fuller information than the second layer. The last layer of reality conveyed in Baker’s photographs is the metaphoric references or visual connotation that makes viewers think about the ideas behind the pictures, or different mental places viewers go individually. Baker summarizes the four layers of reality presented, represented, and referred in his photographs, as well as the interdependent relationship among them:

The first one is the photo itself. The second is the figure in the space that can possibly exist. The third is the multiple figures as a unique form of reality. The fourth is the viewers themselves, what the photograph leads them to think, which is essentially the combination of the first three forms. The fourth one is totally reliant on the first three. None of these can exist if the photo does not exist. The thirst could not exist if the second does not exist.

Working from analog to digital, Baker found that the digital tool has changed his art production process. First of all, when composing images, instead of viewing it as a two-dimensional object, the digital tool helps him to identify different layers of depth within the picture. Such mental separation of images is a direct influence from the layering function of PhotoShop. In addition, rather than investing time on shooting for a precise
picture, Baker relies more on the digital post production to perfect his work. For him, taking pictures, or gathering components, is just the beginning of the whole process. Benefiting from both the quality of the traditional film and the digital tool’s ability to change color or specific area in order to successfully convey his idea, Baker finds that both analog and digital are indispensable in his artmaking process (Baker quoted in Hirsch, 2008).

Baker’s expectation of viewers is to ignore the PhotoShop skills executed in his photographs, and to focus on the idea of tension between esteem and dark humor when viewing an unfamiliar occupation. Baker is not annoyed by the comment like ‘it is a fake photo,’ but he understands that such comment comes from the obsession with computer techniques and the carelessness about the central idea, which for Baker is also not the main concern.

**Part 2: Baker’s theoretical understanding**

From Baker’s definition of reality: “one’s experience, which is composed of a physical component and an intellectual component. Those two things compose one reality” (Personal communication, December 21, 2006), Baker’s view on reality is two-layered. The first layer of reality comes from the five senses, and the second is the idea or thought provoked by the sensory. Thus for Baker, knowledge is contained in simple ideas based on and derived from experiences. This source of knowledge categorizes Baker as a realist.

According to British realist philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), objects exist in the eternal world independent of the mind. In some circumstances, when these objects act
upon the senses, a stimulus then is transmitted from the sense through the nervous system, and eventually gives rise to a mental process—the conscious perception of the object (Sayers, 1985). The idea of the object thus derives from the faculty of understanding which abstracts, systematizes, orders, and abbreviates the data of sense. Locke also explains that the mind is like a camera; when it is passively acted upon by external objects and receives stimulation, the mind registers ideas that reflect and resemble these objects. Therefore, instead of finding Baker’s deepest layer of reality as his source of knowledge, both of the layers, the sensory and ideas, rely on each other and are indispensable components in the formation of his knowledge.

Baker’s ordainment of the four layers of reality given by his photographs corresponds to his realist epistemology. The first and the second, respectively the physical reality of the picture itself and the fact that each figure exists in front of the camera in real time and space, are physical realities where viewers can touch and see their existence. While the third, where multiple figures coexist in an impossible plane, comes from Baker’s idea, which is a result of solving the problem of how to bring more information into photographs than a documentary can normally carry. Finally, the fourth is viewers’ mental states or individual interpretations of images. In other words, echoing Kendall Walton’s assertion of transparent photographs, in Baker’s view, when viewers look at his photographs, they see the pictures themselves and by seeing through photographs, they also literally see figures photographed. In addition, viewers capture Baker’s creative idea of putting figures all together, as well as giving rise to their own meaning about Baker’s photographs.
Baker’s *Occupation* fulfills Aristotle’s description of mimetic artwork. First of all, *Occupation* does not simply represent the particular event of a person at work, but illustrates occupations in general, such as scooter repairers, house painters, or short order diners. Baker presents a normative idea of what an occupation ought to be from his own point of view.

Secondly, the basic components within the one final image are acquired from the world; they are all what one can observe with eyes. It meets Aristotle’s emphasis on the use of the senses, and on the empirical observation yielding certain and clear knowledge of the world. In addition, Baker’s attitude toward the subject matter is not fantasizing, disdaining, or criticizing, but is fairly and objectively displaying what a job consists of. Also, his way of presentation is not prejudiced, distorted, or idealized, but is impartially describing what he sees about a job from his own perspective. In other words, the subject matter of people at work is the primary concern, while his emotional expression is secondary (Barrett, 2008).

Thirdly, an important criterion for Aristotle in art is the dispensability of form and content. Baker’s strategy of repetition of identical people at work does not derive from a formal concern, but is crucial to the articulation of his idea—the tension between the complex skills an occupation can involve and the entertaining bodily performances an occupation requires. In Baker’s view, his strategy also serves to describe an occupation fully by bringing in more information. This information does not come from Baker’s subjective inner world, but is from his experience interacting with the world. Alternatively put, for Baker, to describe something fully is to provide all that he can
sense, and what an occupation means to Baker is comprised of what he can experience visually. Consequently, for example, a job is depicted by using thirty-six decisive moments, which are simultaneous form and content.

Lastly, similar to Aristotle’s articulation that mimetic drama’s intent is to give pleasure, Baker stresses viewers contemplating pleasure from viewing his well-planned photographs. By keeping his photographs realistic, Baker expects that viewers’ aesthetic responses are close to the ways in which they react to people and events in the real world. This pleasure requires viewers’ cognitive operation of the mind. Baker condenses various bodily performances at work in order to make more visible the circus-like amusement of people’s jeering and sneering. People can understand this black humor as long as in the real world they have ever teased others or seen others teasing in similar situations.

Baker’s work is also subject to realist explorations in general, and hence provides realist knowledge. His comprehensive documentary stresses the resemblance of the representation in synthesized photographs to what, in his view, is actually happening in the real world. The verisimilitude of his depictions gives a vivid sensation of seeing those workers in everyday life. By arranging them realistically so as to make use of the believability of documentary photographs which dictate a real time and a real place, Baker’s viewers tend to consider the workers as, indeed, being in front of camera. However, what makes Occupation different from normal documentary is its more-than-usual amount of true information about what it depicts. This motivation of adding more factual and pertinent information has made Occupation realist (Sartwell, 1995), along with Baker’s seamless synthesis which yields a realistic appearance has added another
aspect to his realist artwork. Consequently, Baker’s realist knowledge provided by his photographs dwell in the window on the world, which presents the likeness of what occupations really are. By including more data and keeping the combination seamless, Baker has polished up the window itself so as to let it contain a richer view.

Baker’s strategies to visualize occupations correspond to his realist world view. It is a realist intention to illustrate a person through objects around him or tasks he encounters, whether it is in *Tangible Mediation* or *Occupation*. Differently put, in Baker’s view, what accounts for a person or an occupation is situated in the outer world. To understand a person, Baker resorts to an object the person picks; to know more about a job, Baker compacts a variety of tasks in photographs. In the same vein, *Occupation* is composed of a culmination of multiple documentary photographs, which no doubt originated from the world. After gathering components from the outer world in the form of documentary, it was Baker’s faculty of understanding at work to systematize, abstract, and abbreviate data, and then generate the idea of multiple figures in one image. The final result is the comprehensive documentary, which surpasses documentary’s limitations but preserves documentary’s nature. Influenced by but different from Robert Frank’s filmic style, in which “the image seems boundless, not contained within the rectangle of the frame, but stretching beyond it” (Newhall, 1994, p. 292), Baker’s composite photograph is literally a film, which stretches beyond one single decisive moment and records the whole process of time and tasks associated with the job.

The directorial ingredients in *Occupation* do not interfere with its realist essence. In theorizing the directorial mode in photography, critic A.D. Coleman (1998) asserts that
the directorial elements have played a part in a large number of documentary or straight photographs, including those of photographic image-makers who title themselves documentary champions (Coleman, 1998). In *Occupation*, the authenticity of the original event is not an issue; rather, it is the general idea of what an occupation consists of that anchors the subject matter. Therefore, no matter how the scenes were constructed, how workers were directed to perform their skills, or how many pictures were condensed in a final image, Baker’s realist perspective remains the same, where he acquires knowledge about occupations through his experiences and presents what he has observed with his senses to viewers, who then gain the same knowledge. All the directorial efforts were made only to describe the given object or event fully, rather than to impose Baker’s emotional impulse from his inner to alter or manipulate the given knowledge from the outer world.

Baker is ambivalent concerning his use of the digital tool. Baker relies heavily on computers to conveniently change colors and specific areas, and to seamlessly combine multiple shots into one. As he states, the digital tool has been vital to his artmaking process in that it allows him to convey his creative ideas more easily. However, despite his abundant usage of the digital, he intends to hide the ‘photoshoppedness’ in his photographs from viewers by keeping them seamlessly realistic.

The intention to keep his photographs seamless is another manifestation of Baker’s realism. According to Baker, seamlessness made *Occupation* documentary-like so as to render believability. Therefore it is Baker’s purpose to make viewers believe that multiple figures performing various tasks do exist in front of the camera. Such
trustworthiness corresponds to Sontag’s definition of photographs: “a trace directly stenciled off reality, like a footprint or a death mask” (Price & Wells, 2004, p. 7), Berger’s (1980) claim that photographs are records of the things seen, and Barthes’s (1982) assertion that what appear in photographs must have existed in front of the camera, or what ‘has been there.’ Therefore, what Baker pursues is “accurate verisimilitude, a detailed likeness of the scene viewed” (Thompson, 2003, p. 45). Baker illustrates occupations as closely as what he can see with eyes, to the extent that people believe what is presented in seamlessly synthesized photographs truly happened in a real place and time.

What Baker expects of viewers is to believe his photographs, and by considering them as ‘normal’ documentary, to explore the tension in the double nature of possessing skills for a job. Baker wants viewers to ignore the PhotoShop techniques because PhotoShop tricks only direct viewers to read his synthesized images as collage, which contradicts his epistemology, intention, and practice.

In conclusion, Baker’s experience, comprised of sensory stimulation and ideas, is his source of knowledge. His *Occupation* exemplifies realism, and the knowledge it provides is his perspective of a detailed, true-information-laden, and believable representation of those occupations in the real world. Baker’s usage of the digital tool matches his realist tenet to make his synthesized photographs seamless and realistic. In contrast to his employment of the computer techniques, he expects from viewers a total unawareness of the digital tool. By making his photographs resemble the world, Baker urges viewers to look into the drama screened in paper film, and to contemplate the
dignity and the humor that transpires from the human figures at work.

**Artist 7: Harri Kallio**

**Part 1: Kallio’s self understanding**

Harri Kallio, a Finnish photographer living and working in New York City, reconstructs extinct dodo birds in sculpture and photography to explore the mysterious history of dodos that live today only in people’s memory, and to arouse concern for the hierarchical relationship between humans and other species. Kallio’s project, *The Dodo and Mauritius Island: Imaginary Encounters*, visualizes innocent and naïve dodos frolicking and running about before their extinction and the moment they encountered human beings for the first time in Mauritius Island.

Kallio’s deep interest in the dodo motivated him to begin this project. It was in *Alice in Wonderland* that Kallio first became acquainted with the dodo, a wild bird with a kind heart. Amazed at the fact that the dodo did exist on the earth once upon a time, and curious about why the memory of the dodo is so ingrained in people’s collective consciousness today that it occasionally appears in popular culture, Kallio began researching the dodo. The dodo, pigeon- and duck-like, slightly bigger than a swan, lived only on Mauritius Island, situated in the middle of Indian Ocean, and was exterminated due to human invasion of the island between 1662 and 1693. The extinct dodos live again as they once did in Kallio’s project, where he reconstructed two life-size models of the dodo, one male and one female, brought them to Mauritius Island, and photographed them in various natural settings.
To rebuild the dodo, which was extinct before the camera was invented, Kallio relied on two different categories of historical data—scientific and artistic. Actual dodo remains are scarce, incomplete, and exist in collections in different European countries: an actual dodo head in Oxford University Natural History Museum, a skull at Copenhagen University’s Zoological Museum, a dodo’s foot at Natural History Museum, London, some bones at Narodny Museum, Prague, and reconstructed dodo fossil skeletons at Cambridge University and Natural History Museum, London. Kallio visited
these sites and photographed bones and fossils as part of this photographic project. In addition, he acquired scientific information about the proportion of mechanical bones, the difference between a male and a female dodo, and the bone structure linking the head and the body from Bradley Livezey’s Ph.D. research in morphology at the University of Kansas.

Figure 4.22: Harri Kallio. Lion Mountain #5, 2005. 40×50 inches. Archival pigment print. Courtesy of the artist.

This accurate, scientific data makes Kallio’s constructed dodos “extremely close to actual dodos” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007); however, as he states, accurateness is not his primary concern. Rather, what is more important to him is that his dodos are recognizable as the one in Alice in Wonderland. Therefore, despite his extensive research on bones and fossils to obtain a probable sketch of the dodo’s looks, Kallio puts an emphasis on artistically historical resources. The most important pictorial reference among them is Rolandt Savery’s Edward Dodo (1626), which inspired John Tenniel’s drawing of the dodo in Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland (1865), and which
gives a direct hint about the feathers, plumage, wings, tail, and coloration of real dodos. Kallio explains the relative weight he gave to the scientific vs. the artistic sources: “My idea was not so much to carry out a scientific reconstruction, but rather to place back into the landscape of Mauritius the dodo of *Alice in Wonderland*—a character faithful to its appearance in art history, a character that is part myth and part real” (Kallio, 2004, p. 12). Nevertheless, although modeling his dodos from Savery’s artistic *Edward Dodo*, Kallio is very concerned with the evidence that Savery used a live dodo as a model instead of basing his image on either other artistic reproductions or his imagination. Kallio explicitly states: “I am not a scientist, but I do not mind my work is based on actual scientific information” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). The negotiation between the scientific and artistic influences has a direct effect on what kind of dodo is to be formed—whether it is fat and dumb, as is the dodo that exists in most people’s memory guided by Savery’s painting, or it is an agile and athletic bird, as described by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witness accounts. Kallio finally decided to depict the dodo in most people’s memory.

Kallio’s process of building two dodos involved different media, materials, and working sites. First of all, the mechanical skeleton of the dodo was made of aluminium and steel with adjustable joints in the legs, wings, necks, and jaws so as to make possible various facial expressions and bodily postures. The second stage was a long process to sculpt the heads and feet with clay: “I did not stop sculpting the heads until I had a feeling that they are staring at me” (Kallio, 2004, p. 57). Also involved were taxidermy, which denaturalized skins and feathers from a swan and goose, and a dying procedure to
match the colors in Savery’s *Edward Dodo*.

The third stage was to carry the two dodo sculptures to the dodo’s original habitat—Mauritius Island. Kallio tried to construct the scene as it was in the seventeenth century when dodos were abundant and free before their encounter with human beings, either in a forest, near a river, or by the sea. These moments of encounter were based on his imagination but not on facts. His concern was not illustrating certain behaviors or activities, as a scientist does, but demonstrating the connection between characters and the land. However, Kallio identifies a mismatch between his imagination and reality. Kallio expresses his disappointment with the modern scene on Mauritius: “I expected it to be lush, mysterious, charming, but what I found was something like urban Florida” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). Because of urban development and numerous imported vegetation, “the original Mauritius Island is just as extinct as the dodo” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007).
Finally, the computer enables Kallio to composite many single shots of one or two dodos into one image so as to yield a big group of dodos in a landscape. Kallio explains that he needs the digital tool in one way to compensate for the inaffordibility of producing a hundred dodos to be scattered in the land, and in another, to fit the idea that the dodo is actually not alive anymore and hence “does not exist one single time in front of the lens-light traditional photography” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007).

Kallio continues to explain his twofold purpose in reinventing the past of the dodo. One is to work with the popular dodo character from *Alice in Wonderland* as mentioned above; while the other is to explore human hegemony over other species. In Kallio’s view, there is an imbalance between people and the rest of the world. Human beings are arrogant enough to place themselves on a higher position over other species by not only occupying and destroying the living environment, but also interrupting and even exterminating other species. In Kallio’s opinion, like dinosaurs that used to dominate on the earth and became extinct as a result, human beings will have the same fate, leaving the rest of the world back to normal as if they had never existed. Having a long history of interest in other species—collecting butterflies since he was twelve years old and doing editorial photography on animals as a part-time job when he was a student—Kallio has had a desire to understand more about the weirdness and mystery of animals. For example, due to the climate change, millions of bees suddenly disappeared from their beehives, leaving no clue about the exact cause of their evacuation and where they might go. Kallio is especially intrigued by those even scientists cannot explain.

As a general theme in all his work, Kallio examines the “strange relationship
between people and nature” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007), which is a reciprocal perspective-exchange between people and other species to see the world, either projecting the human view onto animal behaviors, or imagining the world from other species’ perspectives.

In *Lepidoptera Portrait*, Kallio photographs moths and butterflies in the way we make human portraits. By anthropomorphizing moths and butterflies, Kallio seeks to “interpret the expressions in these portraits using the scale and approach of human emotions” (Kallio, Artist Statement). Kallio provides a definition of the portrait: “A portrait is an artistic representation of a person or object, and occasionally some artistic insight into his or her personality” (Kallio, Artist Statement). In another project, *Innerscape*, Kallio presents microscopic and macroscopic landscapes seen through bacteria’s eyes. Kallio investigates an odd yet familiar domain parallel to our everyday environment from the viewpoints of other species.

Kallio’s work, present or past, demonstrates a combination of probing serious issues and comical approaches. While revealing human beings’ wicked conduct in the dodo project, Kallio mentions that he was constantly laughing at his project when carrying the two models and searching for good places to photograph in Mauritius Island. This mixture of seriousness and humor is an influence from artist Joan Fontocberta, who has a similar tendency in his artwork.

Kallio further articulates the differences among his reconstruction of dodos in the actual landscape, other people’s dodo sculptures, dinosaurs of diorama in science museum, sculptures of dragons, and unicorns in fairy tales. According to Kallio, while
there is a whole history of dodo sculptures spreading in museums around the world, his dodos are unique because he uses *Alice in Wonderland* as a reference, and because his dodos are adjustable and can be moved into various postures. It is also the individual interpretation of the incomplete information on dodos that set each dodo sculpture apart: “this is my interpretation, and my own concern is that the character is recognizable as a dodo, and recognizable for someone who knows it is from *Alice in Wonderland*” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). Compared with dinosaurs of diorama, Kallio once again insists that his biggest concern is not exact and scientific duplication, even though he contends that his landscape is real, and is the exact location where the dodo existed. Kallio remarks that giving his dodo reconstruction a real surrounding is more upright and honest for him than situating them in studio and rendering a virtual space. Also, the face of his dodo is much more detailed than dinosaurs in museums so as to have vivid looks in different shots. He says that dragons and unicorns are absolutely different from his dodo because “there is no fossil” of them; they are imaginary creatures, while the dodo actually existed.

Kallio gives a definition of reality, but soon indicates that such a view is not of his concern and interest: “Think of yourself as an organism. It is responding to all kinds of stimulus around you. Basically your reality can be seen as electrical impulses in your brain” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). Rather than mechanism, what is more important to Kallio is human perspective: “How you look at people around you is your reality, your human perspective” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007).

Kallio unequivocally states that his dodo project presents his reality: “I am creating
my own reality and express it in my work” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). Although scientific information is important to him, he considers *Alice in Wonderland* as his most important reference. However, rather than totally duplicating the dodo in *Alice in Wonderland*, Kallio resorts to actual remains and witness accounts, and forms his own interpretation of what the dodo should look like. Therefore, according to Kallio, it is his own interpretation that makes the dodo project a reality for him: “The final project is my interpretation; that is just important” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). Besides, in showing his project in exhibits, along with his final prints where the dodos were photographed in Mauritius Island, Kallio gives tools for viewers to understand how his reality is constructed by showing two dodo reconstructions and photographs of actual dodo bones and fossils, as well as visually explaining the several stages of production. Kallio’s reality resides in his human perspective toward the accurate data and the shared memory in children’s books, which results in the blend of fabricated dodos and the real landscape.

In the same vein, Kallio thinks that every person has his own reality because each one sees things differently and has different interpretations of the same event. For him, retouched magazine covers presenting perfect models are not real, such as those that shrunk cover models to look thinner, because “they are not real people; they do not look like that “(Personal communication, June 13, 2007). In this case, the only thing Kallio can be certain of is the fact that models were actually in front of the camera. Furthermore, idealized landscapes constructed in a computer is not real either because “it loses the link to anything that is out there; it is just like a drawing with pixels” (Personal
communication, June 13, 2007). As for dragons and unicorns, they are too romantic to be real, as he asserts: “I like to keep things real. I am interested in things that are real. I would not be interested in creating super romantic, fake, fantasized world, such as unicorn or monster. I am interested in reality and real thing” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007).

Kallio also states that the knowledge his photographs provide includes perception, memory, consciousness, and reason. According to Kallio, perception indicates his own interpretation of all the information about the dodo; memory is the collected memory of the dodo; consciousness connotes his view of the world that he wants to share; and reason constitutes the educational function of the work. Within the photographic spectrum with the realistic window on the world in one end, and the romantic projection of self on the other, Kallio situates himself in the middle: half faithful representation of the world and half subjective expression of self.

Kallio keeps his final photographs realistic in order to have them read in the traditional sense of documentary photography, as one critic says: “it is a kind of documentary about a memory” (McCormick, 2005, p. 70). In Kallio’s view, if the seam or fault is detected, it becomes part of viewers’ reading of images, which is not interesting and not part of his intention. For Kallio, the digital tool does not cause as much as the change of his perspective in reality, but brings forth a requisite look of digital artwork. Kallio sets a higher expectation on the sophistication of visual presentation of digital photographs, and in turn, for Kallio, the digital medium is best used by and suitable for only those images requiring delicate and subtle synthesis. For
example, montage, unique in seeing its actual cut and paste, does not need any advantage of a computer, and hence is not fitting to be made with the digital tool. In addition, the decisive-moment mode of seeing is interesting in traditional documentary photography, but it makes no sense for him to imitate a decisive-moment type of photograph in computer. The digital medium deserves a new method of image production and a new style, which is seamless and sophisticated fabrication of images. Like a movie condensed in one frame, working with the digital tool is not only more convenient than working with the traditional tool, but it also offers more options to convey and to achieve one’s wishful ideas. In Kallio’s view, digital construction is closer to what one does in painting because images can be modified and changed at the beginning, middle, and end of the process.

Kallio’s expectation of viewers is to understand the concept and to enjoy the interesting pictures. If viewers comment on them as fake photographs, Kallio would defend them by explaining that the landscape is real, the dodo did exist hundreds of years ago, and the digital duplication of dodos in the photographs is only to overcome practical limitations. However, since Kallio cannot control viewers and they have their own interpretations, all he wants to express is that he never intends to fool viewers; to the contrary, he honestly gives details on how and where his ‘fake’ photographs were fabricated and originated.

**Part 2: Kallio’s theoretical understanding**

Kallio provides two definitions of reality. The first one is the basic reaction to stimulations from the world: “Think of yourself as an organism. It is responding to all
kinds of stimulus around you. Basically your reality can be seen as electrical impulses in your brain” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). Kallio then rejects this view and turns to the second one: “How you look at people around you is your reality, your human perspective” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). The difference between these two views is the extent to which the human mind is involved in processing the data from the world. Although Kallio refuses the first mechanical view which necessitates the least cognition, he does not deny that he needs sensory experiences as raw material for later mental processing. His reliance on the actual information from the world can be observed from his assertion that dodos and dinosaurs are real, while dragons and unicorns are not. The former actually existed and left bones and fossils behind, whereas the latter are imaginative creatures from human minds. In addition, the idealized landscape retouched in a computer and models on magazine covers are not real because “they lose the link to anything that is out there; they are not real people; they do not look like that” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). Here, the only reality comes from the assurance that cover models did exist in front of the camera. This assertion accords to Sontag (1977), Berger (1980), and Barthes’s (1982) realism that there is a close relationship between a photograph and what the photograph represents. Therefore, for Kallio, the prerequisite for something to be real is its actual existence that can be sensed, which also forms his first layer of reality.

Certainly, this basic level of reality does not satisfy Kallio. He continues to set a second criterion to filter what he gains from sensory experiences—the human perspective, which indicates his point of view to see the world. This emphasis on personal
interpretation is shown in his opinion that his own dodo reconstruction is more real than the dodo sculptures of others: “it is my interpretation; that is just important” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). Consequently, Kallio’s second layer of reality can be summed up as his personal version of the world.

Having two distinct sources of knowledge, one from the world and the other form his mind, Kallio seems to have mixed epistemologies; as he states, his window on the world and mirror of himself are “half and half” in his work. Such a unique combination of realist and romanticist characteristics seems to parallel with the epistemology of Nobel Prize winner Erwin Schrödinger (1887-1961), a physicist, biologist and philosopher. As a scientist well-known for his contributions to quantum mechanics, Schrödinger opposed the commonly-held view that for scientists knowledge must only come from nature and reason. Rather, his world view has been theorized as “rational mysticism” (Gotschl, 1992, p. 12), which stresses the two stages of knowledge production—sensory experiences from the external world and inner mental construction, as he states:

First, we are physically connected with the external world through our sensations . . . Second, since only single data, individual information, enter via our sense organs, our consciousness, the full inner picture has to be constructed and synthesized by my cognitive, mental functions. These perceptions, sensations, and memories can only be connected and ordered through our imagination and our memory: this is our inner world view. It makes no difference whether we do this with the help of scientific knowledge, mystical insights or even prescientific beliefs, as long as we verify and confirm our inner picture through empirical reality (Gotschl, 1992, p. 13).

Kallio’s two sources of knowledge manifest in the deliberation between readymade images of dodos from scientific data and artistic pictures, as well as his own imagination of it based on collected memory. The information about the dodo that he obtains includes
actual remains of the dodo head, skull, and bones, drawings and paintings of dodos, general memory from *Alice in Wonderland*, and witness accounts. Even though Kallio took into consideration of all of these sources, he did not solely rely on any of them. He created a dodo out of his estimation which looks “extremely close to actual dodos” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007), while equally fulfills the image of mysterious dodos living in collective consciousness. For him, his interpretation is the benchmark of how a dodo should look, although what constitutes or affects his multiple sources of knowledge is hard to pin down, vacillating between science and mystery, as if echoing Schrödinger’s view from “scientific knowledge, mystical insights or even prescientific beliefs” (Gotschl, 1992, p. 13). In this dodo project, Kallio resorts to the dodo in *Alice in Wonderland*, but when tracing the origin of the dodo in *Alice*, it is still important for Kallio that the painter based his subject on a real dodo. In other words, Kallio highlights his self-interpretation which is composed of nostalgic memory and accurate origin. These complicated sources in his mind suggests Kallio’s cognition at work, which is supported by his imagination and memory of dodos through scientific and artistic data. In addition, the dodo project is in fact a dodo’s portrait—the portrait not only shows the basic appearance of the dodo, but also reveals Kallio’s artistic insight into his personality. Therefore, the knowledge provided by the dodo project is a combination of the realism of the faithful appearance of dodos, the expressionism of exploring the mystery and memory of dodos, and the cognitivism of Kallio’s insight about what dodos should look like, and the meaning brought by the reconstruction of the extinct dodo. This wide range of knowledge is proved by Kallio’s own claim that his work provides perception,
memory, consciousness, and reason.

Realism can be used to explain Kallio’s approach to reconstruct dodos. His interpretation is based on bones, fossils, and accurate statistical information, which lead to the resemblance to the real dodo. With a hint of his imagination and the haunting impression, Kallio depicts the dodo from his point of view. Echoing Aristotle, Kallio depends on the use of his senses as evidence and contemplation of the physical realm. Kallio’s mimetic dodo reconstruction does not just represent two particulars, but visualizes what a dodo ought to be. His dodos are not ideal, but are acquired from the world; they are imagined items which carry significance encompassing the pattern underlying human understanding and memory. The subject matter of dodo reinvention is the dominant theme of this project. No matter how scientific, artistic, or imaginary the ingredients of the final products are, showing the extinct dodo to people is one of Kallio’s most important objectives.

Expressionism, though not intense, can be detected from Kallio’s motivation to make dodos alive in his pictures. As he utters: “as a human being, I would like to see dodos alive today” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007), his humanity and pity toward the fate of extinct dodo saturates the innocent faces of dodos and their carefree wandering on Mauritius Island. The other expressionism manifests in Kallio’s passion for mystery. Akin to romanticists in the eighteenth century, who emphasized intuition and imagination to explore everything irrational, Kallio cannot resist the temptation to explore the enigma of other species: what is the charm of dodos that they still live in people’s hearts even though they have been extinct for so long? Why do bees suddenly
disappear without leaving any hint? And what are the facial expressions of moths and butterflies? Kallio also implies a longing for a mysterious Eastern island from the perspective of a Western man: “I expected it (Mauritius) to be lush, mysterious, and charming” (Personal communication, June 13, 2007). Such exoticism shows that Kallio desires not only a distant past, but also a distant place, which comprises of simple stereotypes of the East in his craving. Kallio’s theme of volition motivated by mystery while also acknowledging the objective appearance of dodo seems to correspond to philosopher Ayn Rand’s romantic realism, which was defined as: “a portrayal of things and people as they might and ought to be. ‘Might be’ implied realism, as contrasted with mere fantasy. ‘Ought to be’ implies a moral vision and a standard of beauty and virtue” (Wikipedia, 2006).

Cognitivism can also articulate the impact of Kallio’s project on viewers. From Kallio’s own insight and ideas about dodos in his photographs, viewers gain the opportunity to imagine the real dodos running up and down on Mauritius. According to philosopher Berys Gaut (1998), we imagine cognitively. The cognitive activity in our mind resulting from the dodo project deepens our understanding about dodo’s appearance and habitat, and refines our belief concerning the overall image of dodos in our consciousness. We develop our own ideas in response to the dodo reconstruction, and thus “mov[e] cognitively from point A to point B” (John, 2001, p. 332). Furthermore, the meaning of the dodo project is delivered through the dodo character itself, which has become a symbol for all extinct species. According to Goodman (1976), as long as we acquire a correct interpretation of the symbol, we understand a work of art. From looking
at dodos alive, we realize how cruel, intrusive, and dominant human beings were to kill
dodos, to rob them of their living spaces, and to carry them to Europe for entertainment
which resulted in the permanent change of their body figure. Introspecting further,
according to Kallio, human beings have unworthily awarded themselves license to
wantonly control other organisms and the environment. We think we have the authority
because we think, we reason, and thus are smarter; while other species are dumb because
they cannot even speak. However, the only result from our unscrupulous behavior is the
total destruction of all.

For Kallio, the seamless combination of different shots of dodos in final prints is a
unique and necessary characteristic of digital photography. His return to the appearance
of documentary photography is not as much as a modernist intent to stay true to the
medium of photography. Rather, he regards the digital as a new medium presenting a
matchless style where the decisive moment is not the way of producing and seeing
photographs, where different shots are sophisticatedly modified and synthesized so as to
render no faults, where multiple pictures are condensed like a one-frame movie, and
where artists work more like painters able to adjust the image in any stage of production.
To this end, viewers are not expected to look at Kallio’s photographs from a decisive-
moment standpoint. More appropriately, viewers are invited to understand the whole
production process, enjoy the humorous dodo portraiture, and ponder the meaning behind
it.

In conclusion, Kallio has mixed sources of knowledge—one from the world and
the other from the mind—and hence exemplifies Schrödinger’s rational mysticism, or
Rand’s romantic realism. His dodo project involves a romantic incentive to concretize the memory and mystery of dodos, a realist approach based on scientific and artist information, and a contribution to viewers’ cognitive contemplation on the issue of extinct species. Kallio considers the digital tool as a brand new medium exhibiting an unparallelled style of skillful manipulation. From looking at this new style of images, viewers are encouraged to adjust their old definition of a truthful photograph and experience the mixture of seriousness and light-heartedness in Kallio’s artwork.
In my study, I set out to find answers to a number of questions by looking at seven artists who produce seamless digital-synthesized photographs. My questions include: Who are some artists who make seamless digital-synthesized photographs? What are the artists’ subject matters? What are their views on digital technology? Why do they keep their photographs seamless? What do they expect of viewers? What are their views on reality? Do their photographs provide knowledge? If so, what knowledge do their photographs provide? In this chapter, I will discuss and reflect upon my findings related to the above questions. To begin with, the table below provides a glance at the seven artists, their artwork, and knowledge:
Who are these artists?

It is difficult to create a general profile of artists who produce seamless digital-synthesized photographs. Nevertheless, the seven artists sampled in my study share some common features, but also depart from each other in significant ways. Firstly, all are Caucasian Americans living in the upper-east region of the United States (six are male and one is female). In terms of education, all except for Tom Bamberger received degrees in fine arts, mostly at the Master’s level. Kennedy, Connell, Siber, Baker, and Kallio are recent graduates in photography, graduating in 2003 or later and learning digital technology at school. These five artists are currently junior faculty teaching digital
photography in colleges, while Bamberger and Chambers are senior artists who learned computer technologies by themselves.

Secondly, all seven artists started with analog photographs, and produced bodies of analog work before they went digital. Their firm analog foundation may partly explain why these seven artists resolutely keep their digital synthesis seamless, or more like analog photographs. Also, that all of the seven artists have had the opportunity to experience both analog and digital photography indicates the coexistence of, or transition between, these two practices at the present time. The short history (less than ten years) of working with digital technology has brought forth the recently blooming trend of using computers as a major part of the individual’s artmaking process. For example, photography professor Rod Slemmons at Columbia College Chicago once disclosed that Kelli Connell, one of the seven participants in this study who employs sophisticated synthesis skills to produce lesbian portraits, has become photography students’ idol (Woodward, 2006).

Finally, all of the artists’ current productions combine analog and digital practices. They shoot with film cameras, have photographs developed and scanned, and edit them with a computer. Majorly due to the lower cost and the higher quality of the medium of large format film, analog film is still an indispensable component of their production process. They plan the theatrical scenario before they take photographs, which serve as raw materials for later digital synthesis, rather than taking independent and finished photographs as pieces of artwork. The raw photographs, for example, include Kennedy’s black and white photographs of birds with flying apparatuses, Bamberger’s original
imperfect landscape photographs, Connell’s one-sided figures in relationships, Chambers’s vacation photographs, Siber’s urban scenes, Baker’s one-figure shots performing a single task related to a job, and Kallio’s two dodos situated in a natural landscape on Mauritius Island.

**What are the seven artists’ subject matters?**

The seven artists’ work encompass a variety of subject matters and have different purposes. Firstly, Kennedy, Bamberger, Chambers, and Kallio address landscape in a broad sense. Kennedy’s *Down the Garden Path* illustrates four aspects of historical social landscape in order to question human’s intention of progress. Bamberger presents an idealized landscape where the horizontal line can be endlessly extended, and where beauty is pursued as the ultimate truth in photography. Chambers shows the mysterious inner landscape created by the interaction between children and animals, with an aim to express his own and arouse viewers’ emotions. Kallio also produces enchanted landscapes, where dodo avatars are manufactured based on scientific and artistic information, to explore the mystery of dodos and the strange relationship between humans and other species.

Secondly, Connell and Baker deal with portraits. Connell explores multiple sides of herself through the use of the same model to portray her chosen lifestyle and convey her desire in relationships. Baker illustrates occupations to analyze the tension between the depraved and dignified natures of the labor one puts into his or her work. Finally, Siber offers a postmodernist critique, invoking an awareness of and defying the power, forces, and influences among people through signage in public spaces.
The finding that the seven artists’ work addresses multiple subject matters and intentions corresponds to John Szarkowski’s (1978) claim that synthetic photographs, like straight photographs, are also concerned with either self-expression or analysis, and therefore have the potential to explore a wide range of ideas. For example, Jerry Uelsmann’s manipulated camera images seem closely akin to Minor White’s romanticism, while Ray Metzker’s synthetic work, driven by “the operation of an elegant principle” (1978, p. 22), investigates the world with reason.

What are the seven artists’ views on digital technology?

For the seven artists in my study, digital technology means either advancement of a part of analog production or the use of a new medium. For some, such as Kennedy, Connell, and Baker, digital technology means using a more advanced tool to bring in convenience and effectiveness and to add to the original characteristics of analog photography. For these three artists, even though digital technology increases artistic possibilities and options, it functions within the traditional mode of photography; that is, the end result from this efficient tool still needs to be photographic.

For others, such as Chambers, Siber, and Kallio, digital technology is viewed as a new medium, which requires a new method of production and renders a matchless style—a sophisticated fabrication, a perfect and clean aesthetics, a maximum color saturation, a multiple-point perspective, and stunning or newfangled content—which is often referred to as the “digital sublime” (Marien, 2002; Ohlin, 2002; Foster et al, 2004; Lipkin, 2005). In these three artists’ views, digital photography has abandoned the nature of analog photography, the decisive-moment mode of seeing and creating, and has
dissolved the boundary that once set photography apart from other media (Lipkin, 2005). Digital photography permits users to modify and control images at any stage of production (Edwards, 2007), a freedom that used to belong to painters (Rogers, 1978: Berger, 1980). Also, being able to combine several photographs into one, digital photograph allows more information than a traditional photograph can normally carry, a time-compacting ability that characterizes film. Combining advantageous features from painting and film, digital photographs have become non-photographic because they have transcended the nature of photographs outlined by Szarkowski (1966): the thing itself, the detail, the frame, time, and vantage point. Digital photographs deal with more than the actual; the canvas of digital photographs can be endlessly extended and surpasses the limitation of the frame; digital photographs can record not only decisive moment but also multiple parcels of time. Furthermore, art critic Whitney Davis (2006) proposes that the analogs of digital photographs are, in fact, paintings, rather than old-fashioned darkroom photographs. In her view, digital photography is more about painting pictures than taking photographs. Therefore, painting as an art form can gauge the depth and direction of the digital technology of image production (Davis, 2006). In the same vein, Foster et al. (2004) express a similar perspective that digital photographs are aligned with figure painting or cinema more closely than with straight photography (2004).

**Why do the seven artists keep their photographs seamless?**

These seven digital photographers decidedly keep their images seamless, or realistic, naturalistic, and believable. By hiding the seams, by Photoshop techniques, their digitally synthesized photographs look like analog photographs. According to the seven artists,
there are three driving forces for this return to the analog look. First of all, as mentioned above, analog photography is the place where they first became acquainted with photography. These artists may have had the idea of what photographs should look like. As a result of this firm way of looking at and producing photographs, these artists resist the fantastically-combined style of photographs that show discrepancies in perspective, sharpness, and angle (Lipkin, 2005), such as those by Eva Sutton, whose *Hybrids*, 2000 is “fantasized” and does not follow visual perspective.

Secondly, some of these artists’ embracing a realistic look in their photographs can be explained as a formalist or modernist faith in Greenberg’s term to seek the strength and limitation within the photographic medium, which is automation in Peterson’s lexicon (1984), indicating an indexical link between a photograph and what is photographed of in the physical world. Alternatively put, seamless digital synthesis for the seven artists is not, and does not intend to be read as collage, which “breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse. . . represents the intersection of multiple discourses. . . and opens the path of postmodernism” (Brockelman, 2001, p. 3), but is a formalist or modernist strategy to terminate multiple possible readings of each piece within the synthesis in order to reach the linearity and simplicity of one-shot photography. Lastly, for the other artists, seamlessness is one of the criteria for a new aesthetics of digital photography. As such, seamlessness means professionalization and sophistication of synthetic skills. In conclusion, the realistic appearance of the seven artists’ photographs simultaneously signifies either a return to analog photography or a new criterion in digital photography.
What are the seven artists’ expectations of viewers?

These seven artists would like their viewers to ignore the synthesis techniques, and to concentrate on the meanings and concepts of their work. Those artists, such as Kennedy, Connell, and Baker, who insist on the modernist belief of keeping their photographs realistic, avoid ‘photoshoppiedness’ and want viewers to see their images as documentary. On the other hand, Siber and Kallio, who consider digital photography as a new medium, provide background information to let viewers understand the whole production process so that viewers can find personal meanings in the photographs on their own. For example, Siber reintroduces the text piece in an adjacent panel, and Kallio shows the dodo skeletons of sculptures in exhibits.

What are the seven artists’ layers of reality?

In my study, most of the seven artists believe in multiple layers of reality, and consider sensory as their starting layer. Afterward, each artist values different substances as their deeper reality. For example, Kennedy relies on his cognition as his second layer of reality to process the information he gains with his five senses, and hence what he thinks is happening is more important than what he sees or hears in this world. For Bamberger, the sensory data that he gathers presents a problem because what is solid and out there, such as a landscape, is not beautiful enough. Therefore, he initiates a series of experiments trying to find beauty, and what is truly real for Bamberger is each of his experiments in pursuit of universal beauty. Baker depends on the idea or thought provoked by the sensory, which derives from the faculty of understanding that abstracts,
orders, systematizes, and abbreviates sense data.

Separately, Kallio, Chambers, and Connell have two distinct categories of reality—one objective from sensory data, and the other subjective from their inner worlds—and the subjective level is considered more valuable than the objective one. Kallio praises his personal version of the world, where a hint of romance from memory and mystery is part of his interpretation of received information. Chambers turns to his emotions, and values his imagination to create a sense of mystery more important than his experience everyday life. Connell has personal interpretations and emotions as part of her reality, but she goes even further into desire from the unconscious that grounds her reality, which eventually propels her chosen lifestyle and intimate relationships. For Siber, there is no such lexicon as reality. Siber admits that sensory reality exists, but it is not in his interest and concern. What he values is his personal perception which is contingent upon new information he gains every day, and a sense of perfection or hyperreality that everyone is ineluctably influenced by popular culture.

All of the seven artists stress that incorporating digital technology into their art production does not change their perspectives on reality; that is to say, the deepest layer of reality of the seven artists remains the same no matter if it is expressed in analog or digital photographs. Kennedy’s cognition, Bamberger’s experiments on beauty, Connell’s desire, Chambers’s emotion, Siber’s subjective perception and hyperreality, Baker’s conceptual ideas, and Kallio’s personal interpretations stay consistent in their analog and digital work, and are not affected by their differences in their working processes.

**What are the seven artists’ strategies to visualize reality?**
In my study, the seven artists have different strategies to visualize their senses of realities in their photographs. Kennedy uses animals as a metaphor to concretize his critical thoughts on human beings’ greed and desire to control the world. Bamberger employs a cloning method to create an experimental reality on photographic beauty in landscape. Connell applies Surrealist doubling, presenting herself in both a male and a female role, to create an ideal bisexual self portrait and to express the reality of her desires. Chambers utilizes an odd combination of several snap shots to create shock value in order to produce a sense of the mystery of reality. Siber creates a sense of hyperreality by utilizing a text-removing and then reintroducing approach to defy the power executed among groups of people. Baker condenses various tasks of individual workers into a single frame to illustrate the reality of his ideas of each occupation. Kallio physically creates dodo sculptures, photographs them in the actual habitat of dodos from the reality of his own interpretation of factual and artistic data, and manipulates the number of dodos to re-present dodos from collected memory.

What knowledge do their photographs provide to viewers?

The photographs of the seven artists in my study provide different knowledge. Kennedy’s *Down the Garden Path* renders cognitivist knowledge about Kennedy’s insight into and criticism of human development in capitalism, the use of technology, religion, and identity. Viewers’ beliefs are refined, and their understanding about the world is deepened. Justifying his thought in the realm of action, Bamberger’s *Cultured Landscape* presents viewers with a piece of pragmatist knowledge and formalist knowledge, which is an experiment on the search for beauty in photographs. Connell’s
Double Life expresses her desires from her psyche, and exemplifies Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic knowledge and postmodernism. Chambers’s work gives expressionist knowledge, a shared emotion made possible through the mysterious relation between children and animals. Siber references subjective perception in his Untitled and Floating Logo projects and shows postmodernist knowledge, which is a critique of communication where power is tremendously conveyed yet seldom noticed. Siber’s photographs address Derrida’s idea of deconstruction, Foucault’s analysis of power, and Baudrillard’s hyperreality. Baker’s Occupation delivers realist knowledge, which is verisimilitude of what a job looks like. Occupation is also a concrete example of Aristotelian aesthetics, which emphasizes the illustration of a general rather than a specific subject, and the indispensability of form and content. Kallio’s The Dodo and Mauritius Island: Imaginary Encounters contributes a mixture of realist knowledge, the faithful appearance of dodos, expressionist knowledge, the exploration of the mystery and memory of dodos, and cognitivist knowledge, Kallio’s insight about what dodos should look like and the issue about the relationship between human beings and extinct animals.

In addition, another type of knowledge shared by those artists who view digital technology as a partial replacement of analog photography, namely Kennedy, Bamberger, Connell, Siber, and Baker, is a modernist formalism, in the sense of adhering to the solitary characteristic of the photographic medium. By keeping their photographs seamless, these modernist artists preserve the uniqueness and embrace the limitation of the medium of photography.
Discussion

From the multiple knowledge provided by the seven artists’ seamless digital-synthesized photographs, I find that seamless digital photography is not a carrier of postmodernism only, but is a combinational presentation of various types of knowledge: realism, expressionist cognitivism, pragmativism, formalism, modernism, and postmodernism. This finding challenges several critics’ and theorists’ assertions about digital photography.

First of all, it challenges Mitchell’s (1992) and Lister’s (2004) assertion that digital photography is perfectly tuned to “postmodern patterns of thought” (Best & Keller, 1991, p. 4). Only one of the seven artists in this study claims postmodernist thinking, and the rest of them privilege a variety of other types of knowledge. Therefore, it is wrong that whoever uses digital technology techniques to make art think as postmodernists. Also, there is no meaningful segregation between a modernist medium and a postmodernist medium, as Peterson (1984) suggests when he asserts that looking at the techniques of practitioners is not sufficient to theorize a medium. Therefore, focusing on the character traits of the digital medium only, and ignoring any particular work of any artists, Mitchell (1992) and Lister (2004) have theorized digital photography in too limiting and restrictive ways.

Secondly, this finding of multiple knowledges delivered by digital photographs questions Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum, which asserts that by living in a high-tech commodity society, every image-maker thinks similarly and every image provides to viewers a single type knowledge of hyperreality. Postmodernist hyperreality convinces
and interests one of the seven artists only. The other six artists value their own concepts or inner feelings more than the impact of consumerism. By omitting the individual’s background and over-valuing the influence of commodities on people, Baudrillard has partially theorized the relationship between viewers and every-day images. To summarize the findings of this study that dispute Mitchell, Lister, and Baudrillard’s perspectives, postmodernism is not the only knowledge provided by digital photographs; rather, digital photographs contribute to a variety of types of knowledge, encompassing modernism and postmodernism.

Thirdly, the seven artists mention that their views on reality did not change with their shift from analog to digital. The unchanged view on reality indicates the fixed sources of knowledge no matter if the products are analog or digital photographs. In this regard, for example, Kennedy’s cognitivist knowledge exists in both Small Catastrophe and Down the Garden path; Connell’s psychoanalytic knowledge occurs in both the melted faces project and Double Life; Baker’s realist knowledge endures in both Tangible Mediation and Occupation. This discovery opposes Kember’s (2003) assertion that the movement from analog to digital entails an epistemological shift from objective to subjective knowledge due to the involvement of photographers’ minds in fabricating digital photographs (Kember, 2003). Connell’s epistemology remains subjective when producing the melted faces project in a darkroom and creating Double Life with a computer; Baker’s epistemology stays objective when either developing Tangible Mediation with chemicals or digitally combining fifty snapshots in Occupation. This study suggests that there is no apparent epistemological change from analog to digital.
photography among these seven artists.

Corresponding to the multiple knowledge brought by digital photographs of the seven artists, seamless digital photography presents various historical schools of style in art and photography. Historical styles include Baker and Kallio’s realism, Chamber, Connell, and Kallio’s romanticism, Bamberger’s formalism, Connell’s surrealism, and Siber’s postmodernism.

There is also a seemingly blooming aesthetics, or the “digital sublime,” suggested by Chambers, Siber and Kallio. In fact, however, as can be observed from the multiple types of knowledge provided by the “digital sublime” in Chambers, Siber and Kallio’s work, this seemingly new aesthetic carries combinations of old knowledge subject to each photographer, rather than one brand new type of knowledge. Unlike pictorialist photography presenting singular expressionism, or straight photography rendering formalism, the “digital sublime” is a style with no consistent single knowledge. For example, Kallio pursues a new aesthetics in his artwork, but what he provides to viewers is a combination of old types of knowledge, including realism, expressionism, and cognitivism. Chambers also creates a new aesthetic mode but contributes to expressionism. This once again ‘back-to-history’ aesthetic of digital photography is supported by some historians’ and critics’ observations on prominent digital photographers’ work. Art historian Steven Skopik (2003) argues that Gregory Crewdson is devoted to advocating a resumed concern for beauty—“to make the most technically, formally, aesthetically beautiful photographs” (Crewdson, quoted in Skopik, 2003, p. 6); Jeff Wall is said to reinvent modernist avant-garde art and creates a reformed formalism.
(Michel, 2007); Foster et al. (2004) note that pictorialism returns triumphant in digital photography (2004). It seems that the so-called “new aesthetic” in fact not only re-introduces old knowledge but also re-presents old aesthetics; that is to say, it is a technical enhancement without a consistent epistemological anchor.

“Digital sublime” photography is not necessarily a postmodernist style, either. For a style to be postmodernist, the central tenet of that style has to be a challenge to modernism (Crimp, 1979, 1980), such as appropriating other images to invalidate the notion of originality and authority of the author of an artwork. However, in this study, even though the seven artists work with fragmented pieces of images with endless possible results of synthesis, most of them, except for Siber and Connell, do not have a tendency to question the determinacy, stability, closeness, and uniqueness of the modernist self. Rather, these five artists are more inclined to the modernist side, expressing relatively old-fashioned concerns such as beauty, emotions and personal insights. As for Siber and Connell, the only two postmodernist artists in this study, rather than being ‘pure’ postmodernist, they provide an ironic mixture of postmodernism and modernist formalism, which indicates that modernism and postmodernism are not a dichotomy, but can happen simultaneously in one person’s work. The digital sublime is a way to fully exploit the potential of the digital in order to reach a professional look of digital photography; there is no specifically new epistemology created, nor is it postmodernist art. Consequently, seamless digital photography can be said to be a new medium combining aspects from photography, painting, and cinema. However, in terms of styles and knowledge created by this new medium, seamless digital photographs are
not new, but merely revive the old, carrying history from the past to the present.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview of the study

Digital photography has been labeled as postmodernist, which implies that whoever uses digital technology to create artwork thinks postmodernistically (Mitchell, 1992; Lister, 2004). However, to question and to clarify this myth, this study investigates the thinking of individual artists, and their artwork, to further understand uses of digital photography, including the digital technological style of seamless synthesis, and knowledge provided by digital photographs.

In my study, I focus on a series of questions posed to seven artists who produce seamless digital-synthesized photographs. I ask these questions of the artists and their work: What are these artists’ views on digital technology? Why do they keep their photographs seamless? What do they expect of viewers? What are their views about reality? Do photographers think their photographs provide knowledge? What knowledge do they think their photographs provide?

Methodologically, I situate myself within an interpretivist paradigm and employ interview methods. I gathered data from interviews, artists’ photographs and written documents, and critiques from critics.
Summary of the findings

The following is a summary of the findings drawn from my research.

1. Currently, analog film is still an indispensable component in seven digital artists’ art production.

2. Digital photographers can address a variety of subject matter, from landscape, to portraits, to postmodernist critiques.

3. For the seven artists, some consider digital technology as an advancement of a part of analog production; others see it as a new medium that can be more closely aligned with figure painting or cinema than with analog photography.

4. The seamlessness of these artists’ digital photographs is intended to deemphasize PhotoShop techniques. For some of the seven artists, seamless synthesis is a modernist faith to resume the look of documentary photographs; while for others, seamlessness is the technical criterion for the style of “digital sublime.”

5. Digital artists expect viewers to ignore their synthesis techniques, and to concentrate on the meaning and concepts of their work. These seven artists want their work to be read as photographs, rather than as collages.

6. Most of the seven artists believe in multiple layers of reality, and consider the sensory as their starting layer. Each artist values different substances as their deeper realities, such as cognition, inquiry experiments, personal versions of the world, emotions, desires, and versions of hyperreality. They use several different strategies to express their abstract ideas, such as metaphor, cloning methods,
surrealist doubling, novel combinations and separations.

7. Seamless digital-synthesized photographs can provide various types of knowledge. Not all artists who produce this type of work are postmodernist. Some are realist, some are expressionist cognitivist, some are formalist, and some are a combination of any of the above. In other words, seamless digital-synthesized photographs provide a variety of knowledge encompassing modernism and postmodernism.

8. There is no abrupt epistemological change from objective to subjective when artists change their production from analog to digital.

9. Seamless digital photography can be defined as a new medium featuring photography, painting, and cinema. However, in terms of the styles and knowledge this new medium creates, seamless digital photography does not produce new knowledge, but offers revisions of the old—digital photographs re-introduce past artistic movements, such as realism, romanticism, and surrealism. They do not generate unique new knowledge, but provide new combinations of prior knowledge that can be found in history.

**Reflection**

This research was initiated partly because of my dissatisfaction with critics’ and theorists’ less than scrupulous theorization of digital photography. By providing concrete examples of digital artists and their artwork, this study fulfills my assumption that artists have different intentions in producing seamless synthesized photographs, and that artists have different views on reality in this postmodern era. Also, from investigating seven
artists’ knowledge and their artwork, I found that good artwork does not come from a sudden impulse or a momentary interest, but the root of it can be traced back to an important event or incident, big or small, in artists’ lives. By ruminating on that particular event, and adding later life experience into it, these artists created deeply meaningful work. The long cultivating process happens in artists’ worldviews, too. For earnest artists, their artwork harmonizes with their views on reality. All of the seven artists in this study have firm definitions of reality, which are constant both in what they say and in their artwork. In conclusion, these seven artists’ knowledge and work mutually closely relate to each other: their knowledge can be inferred from the work, and the work serves as a best concretization of that knowledge.

Implications

The implications of this study lie in how seamless digital photographs can be studied and taught. To fully gain, appreciate, and teach the knowledge provided by seamless digital photographs, the curriculum split between fine art and popular culture in art education needs to be mended. There is a paradigm shift in art education from Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE), which centers in aesthetic experiences from studying exemplary works of art, to Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE), which values postmodern visual culture (Mirzoeff, 1998; Eisenhauer, 2006) in everyday experiences as an important part of the curriculum (Duncum, 2002).

However, from the findings of this study, it becomes apparent that every image maker thinks differently and thus renders different knowledge. Art educators following either side of the two paradigms will not sufficiently convey all the knowledge and
meaning of seamless digital photographs to students.

Furthermore, it is inadequate for educators to assume that every student thinks identically, and it is doing the student a disservice to only teach an approach that is personally pleasing to the art teacher in a class where some students are postmodernist, while others are more inclined to appreciate beauty or emotion that emanates from fine art masterpieces. In order to compensate for the extremeness of both paradigms, art educator Arthur Efland (2004) proposes a middle ground between DBAE and VCAE, emphasizing the “discursive practices found in the fine arts community and in the criticism of popular culture” (p. 234). According to Efland (2004), the educational purpose of this middle ground is to enhance the freedom to explore multiple forms of visual culture, including fine arts and popular culture, to enable students to understand cultural and social influences affecting their lives. Utilizing this middle position to teach seamless digital photography, which offers a variety of realism, expressionist cognitivism, formalism, and postmodernism, and which expresses old and new concerns including emotions, desires, beauty, personal insights, and critiques, art educators can pay balanced attention both to the aesthetic features of each artwork as well as a deepened understanding of its context.

**Concluding thoughts**

This dissertation writing process that I have undertaken has helped me clarify my own thoughts about the nature of digital photography. From the various types of knowledge viewers can acquire from seamless digital photographs, one needs to rethink whether seeing is truly believing. Digital photographs can give us more than what we can
see, and in turn we need more than just seeing to gain what their photographs can communicate to us. I believe that the more we think and talk about digital photography at technical, aesthetic, and epistemological levels, the closer we will come to a better understanding of it, and thus make wiser decisions about studying and teaching seamless digital-synthesized photographs.
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