University of Kentucky Master's Theses   Graduate School

2011

CONSTRUCTING THE REAL: THE NEW PHOTOGRAPHY OF CREWDSON, GURSKY AND WALL

Melissa A. Schwartz
University of Kentucky, themelissas@gmail.com

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

CONSTRUCTING THE REAL:
THE NEW PHOTOGRAPHY OF CREWDSON, GURSKY AND WALL

A new class of photographs that relies on digital processes, best exemplified by the works of Gregory Crewdson, Andreas Gursky and Jeff Wall all exhibit a 'not quite right' quality that calls into question some of the most closely held truisms of photographic thought. Through novel technological processes combined with the elements of the new photography—new scale, fabulist imagery, and implied narrative—these images challenge the nature of photography as a documentary process and, beyond that, the nature of what we understand to be 'the real' that is supposedly documented. A visual analysis of these images through the lens of Roland Barthes' and Susan Stewart's scholarship reveals truths about these images and about photography as a medium. What these elements, this 'lack of rightness', can tell us about photography and its position as documentary medium can help us better understand the nature of contemporary photography as a truly creative medium rather than a documentation of the real. These artists are engaging in a discourse of artifice, questioning the position of photographs as documents of *how it was*, revealing that not only is their work not a documentation of the world as it is, but that photography never was.

KEYWORDS: Digital Photography, Roland Barthes, Gregory Crewdson, Andreas Gursky, Jeff Wall

Multimedia Elements Used: JPEG (jpg)

Melissa A. Schwartz

March 08, 2011

Constructing the Real:
The New Photography of Crewdson, Gursky and Wall

By

Melissa A. Schwartz

 Robert Jensen
Director of Thesis

 Dennis Carpenter
Director of Graduate Studies

 March 08, 2011

RULES FOR THE USE OF THESES

Unpublished theses submitted for the Master's degree and deposited in the University of Kentucky Library are as a rule open for inspection, but are to be used only with due regard to the rights of the authors. Bibliographical references may be noted, but quotations or summaries of parts may be published only with the permission of the author, and with the usual scholarly acknowledgements.

Extensive copying or publication of the thesis in whole or in part also requires the consent of the Dean of the Graduate School of the University of Kentucky.

A library that borrows this thesis for use by its patrons is expected to secure the signature of each user.

Name   Date

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THESIS

Melissa A. Schwartz

The Graduate School

University of Kentucky

2011

CONSTRUCTING THE REAL:
THE NEW PHOTOGRAPHY OF CREWDSON, GURSKY AND WALL

_____

THESIS
_____

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Fine Arts at the University of Kentucky

By

Melissa A. Schwartz

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Robert Jensen, Professor of Art History

Lexington, Kentucky

2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

I. Introduction

The trouble with some photographs

"[P]rove to me that this image *is not* a photograph."[1]

While looking over some photographs by Gregory Crewdson, Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky, my five-year-old nephew Milo (who I could have sworn was watching his favorite Power Rangers DVD) exclaimed as he pointed a mac and cheese covered finger at one of the Crewdsons, "It's just not right." When I asked, "What's not right, Milo?" Obviously agitated, he just shook his head and more emphatically pointed also at a Wall and Gursky and replied, "I don't know what…. But it's just not right. Something is wrong." Although Milo may be a little savvier about photography than most five year olds I know (he has been a dedicated shooter with his Kodak 5mp 'point and shoot' since he was three), he has yet to explore or even become aware of the world of digital manipulation software such as Adobe Photoshop. So, what is it about these photos that is "not right" or what in the end makes them, in Roland Barthes' terms, 'not a photograph'?

I will claim in this essay that a new class of photographs that relies on digital processes, best exemplified by the works of Crewdson, Gursky and Wall all exhibit this 'not quite right' quality my nephew observed and in the process call into question some of the most closely held truisms of photographic thought. I will try to explain what this lack of rightness is in these photographers' work and offer some explanations for why their work possesses this quality and comparable features. Ultimately, I am interested in what these features, this lack of rightness, can tell us about photography and its position as documentary medium.

---

[1] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections On Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 107. Emphasis original.

To begin to understand this not rightness, we must start with Barthes'
understanding of the photograph as a medium that captures reality and also a medium that
has an implicit 'madness' and the tension that lies between these two concepts. I'll begin
with Barthes description of what photography does:

> What does the photograph transmit? By definition, the scene itself, the
> literal reality. From the object to its image there is of course a reduction –
> in proportion, perspective, colour – but at no time is this reduction a
> *transformation* (in the mathematical sense of the term). In order to move
> from the reality to its photograph it is in no way necessary to divide up this
> reality into units and to constitute these units as signs, substantially
> different from the object they communicate; there is no necessity to set up
> a relay, that is to say a code, between the object and its image. Certainly
> the image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it is
> exactly this analogical perfection, which, to common sense, defines the
> photograph.[2]

For Barthes, this capture or creation of the 'perfect analogon', the perfect replication of

the event, leads to a particular kind of madness, which he describes in *Camera Lucida*:

> Here is where the madness is, for until this day no representation could
> assure me of the past of a thing except by intermediaries; but with the
> Photograph, my certainty is immediate: no one in the world can undeceive
> me. The Photograph then becomes a bizarre *medium*, a new form of
> hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a
> temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, *shared* hallucination (on the
> one hand 'it is not there,' on the other 'but it has indeed been'): a mad
> image, chafed by reality.[3]

It is this feeling of uneasiness, this tension between 'it is not there' and 'but it has

indeed been' that will lead us to a new understanding of photography. I have selected the

work of Crewdson, Wall, and Gursky due to their respective processes that ultimately

depend upon digital manipulation rather than 'straight' or traditional methods of

mechanical photographic reproduction. Their images are dependent on and exist within

---

[2] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen
Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 17.
[3] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 115.

photography's long-standing (however controversial) position as a recorder of reality, an impartial witness that documents the real, that produces a 'perfect analogon' of the object, yet their processes create images that call into question the 'but it has indeed been' thereness of the objects in the images. Through a complicated process that includes staging and extensive digital image manipulation, these artists are ultimately circumventing the 'real' to arrive at something different. In effect, they are replacing the 'real' with the 'almost real' and are creating a new mythology, a self-reflexive exploration of the tropes of cinema and photography that generate our cultural consciousness. And, more importantly, their methods call into question Barthes' analysis and beg the question: was there ever a real behind the photograph? Were all photographs 'not photographs'?

Current literature

The literature on Crewdson, Gursky and Wall is notable for at least one interesting, if odd, fact, that not one article, essay or book (at least, not that I was able to find) has included all three of these artists in comparison to each other. As I will explore through a summary discussion of a number of texts, it is quite common for a Wall essay to include the mention of Gursky and the converse is equally true. But only in two instances did I find the mention of either artist (specifically Jeff Wall) in respect to the work of Gregory Crewdson. What this means is that these authors insist on the special character of the particular practices of each photographer without apparently realizing that there are larger, and ultimately more interesting trends at stake that can only be fully understood by studying all three photographers together.

I'll begin my summary with Michael Fried's ambitious *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, which brings together a great many different photographers and their images to take up, in relation to photography, the arguments he advanced in his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood" and later works. That is to say, Fried uses his dichotomy of 'absorption' and 'theatricality' to discuss contemporary photography, or rather, one particular version of contemporary photography: post-1970, large in scale, and embraced by the gallery and museum systems. Aided by the writings of Diderot, Fried contends that a work must be deemed theatrical if the picture 'performs' for the viewer and, in essence, is completed by the viewer's/audience's reaction to the piece. Conversely, anti-theatricality embodies the idea that "the beholder be treated as if he were not there, standing before a painted or seated before a staged *tableau*. Or to put this slightly differently, that nothing in a painted or staged *tableau* be felt by the beholder to be there *for him*."[4] Fried's theatricality argument is problematic because of his reliance upon the author's intent to determine a viewer's reaction to the piece, which is related to his understanding of the 'beholder' as someone outside the piece. In other words, Fried is relying on static notions of subject/object opposition. Fried's argument depends upon a third, omniscient viewer who can determine whether the piece matches the criteria for theatricality rather than the highly subjective position of each viewer (and the artists themselves) whose position may shift over time and space.

Most important to my investigation, is Fried's assertion that digital processes have significant ramifications for Barthes' notion of the *punctum*:

---

[4] Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, (Yale University Press, 2008), 100.

In the first place, the advent of digitization, with its implication that the contents of the photograph have been significantly altered or even created out of whole cloth by its maker, threatens to dissolve the 'adherence' of the referent to the photograph that undergirds the claim, basic to the *punctum* of the detail, that 'the photographer could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object'. (A partial object in the photograph that might otherwise prick or wound me might never have been part of a total object, which itself might be a digital construction).[5]

According to Fried 'digital construction' negates Barthes' reading of the photographic image by calling into question the referent. This is because, for Fried, the objects in the image have no referent; they are created 'out of whole cloth'. There is nothing in these constructed images that captures or refers to something 'real', something out there, something in its entirety (in Barthes' terms) 'that-has-been'.

Against Fried, however, one could argue that these images, while constructed, 'adhere' to specific objects. There is nothing in them that is unrecognizable, nothing that has no basis in reality. But, most important for my investigation, Fried and Barthes' 'total object' is a 'thing' that exists only in some past to which no one has access. We are and have always been reliant on the 'operator' to tell us that this image and the scene it purports to document is/was 'real' and understood in the way we choose/chose to understand it. In other words, we must agree with the image that it is real, that this partial object was, in fact, a part of something real that happened then and there and only then and there. The image is a story that we take as fact, only when we agree with the photographer, only then can it be 'real'. The digital construction forces us to face the fact that photographic images were never 'that-has-been' but always 'may-have-been'. The 'total object' is an internal and mutual construction that becomes visible only through

---

[5] Ibid., 107.

digital manipulation of images and the 'not rightness' that they expose. Fried is right to say that digitization threatens the adherence of the referent, but he did not go far enough.

Russell Banks' essay "Gregory Crewdson: Beneath the Roses" is one of the essays that links Crewdson to Wall (but not to Gursky). Even then, Banks mentions Wall's work only to emphasize differences rather than acknowledge any close correlations between the two photographers. He begins by noting Crewdson's work and its resemblance to movie stills. Banks then attempts to position Crewdson's work somewhere between movies and literary fiction in a space that is informed by and speaks to both, but lives in its own perfect "incompleteness." He contends that Wall's work, as well as Cindy Sherman's, although produced via similar staging processes, is "complete" in comparison to that of Crewdson although all three used similar staging processes. This 'completeness', according to Banks, owes to the fact that the photographs of Wall and Sherman "purport to tell the whole story." He continues, "Whatever's left out of the picture is ipso facto rendered insignificant." By extending the quote of Vladimir Nabokov to relate it to the images of Wall and Sherman, Banks argues, "…as the novel is to reality and movies are to the novel, photographs are to movies."[6] This does not hold true for the images of Crewdson. According to Banks, his images are 'antinarratives' whose "beginning, middle and end lie elsewhere outside the frame."[7]

But what is true of Crewdson's images is also true of the work of Wall, Gursky, and even Sherman (although her work is beyond the scope of my investigation due to the

---

[6] Russell Banks, "Gregory Crewdson: Beneath the Roses," *Beneath The Roses* (New York: Abrams, 2008), 7.
[7] Ibid. 8.

lack of digital manipulation in her practice[8]). I believe we can locate that elusive beginning, middle, and end as residing not merely outside the frame but more specifically in the mind of the viewer and the cultural discourse by and through which the narratives are constantly produced. Contrary to Banks, who represents the views of many media scholars, the experience of movie watching is not a passive act/performance happening in front of the viewer. At the very least, by way of the protagonist (usually the white male protagonist) we are allowed a way into the fiction. With our mirror neurons firing away, we project ourselves into the space of film through the main character. In addition, the very nature of film, the fragmented space the medium demands via its cuts and framing, ensures that we as viewers become active participants by filling in the blanks between the fade outs and fade ups, close-ups and long, establishing shots. We gladly accept the hints and breadcrumbs offered and connect the dots—imagining the scenes between as we jump from one locale to the next virtually instantaneously like some kind of Sci-Fi Channel time traveler. We do this on the fly as we experience the film, otherwise the story would be unreadable. We create the text through the visual cues and grammar we've absorbed through years of cultural immersion.

While these images are similar to movie stills, if we consider Crewdson's processes (shooting on a sound stage, building the sets, hiring actors, digital post-production, etc.), we have to acknowledge that these images *are* movie stills for which the

---

[8] While Sherman's work shares many of the features of Wall, Gursky, and Crewdson's work, hers is a self-conscious commentary on cinematic iconography. Sherman's staging is meant to reference and evoke cultural myths based on cinematic iconography. Her staging, her real, cannot be located because it exists somewhere in cinematic iconography, while the work of these artists, while staged and heavily reliant on cinematic vocabulary, is meant to evoke something 'real' in time and space. Sherman's process centers on pre-production, focusing on staging and documenting her performance, rather than on reconstructing the object(s) in post-production.

actual physical reels may be nonexistent. They are stills for a movie that is written and rewritten only in the mind of viewer(s) who draws upon an extensive cultural knowledge of iconic film images. Wall's work also assumes that the viewer possesses a particular narrative grammar (particular to Western European traditions) in order to complete it. Of my photographers perhaps only Gursky lacks this feature; but even Gursky's work is largely dependent upon showing us things in the world that we already know, but now rendered in a radically panoptic form. It is that enlargement of what is already familiar that links Gursky to Crewdson and Wall.

Joshua Chuang's essay "It's Complicated" explores issues closely related to our three photographers without actually using any of the three as examples.[9] Chuang opens his essay by quoting Jean-Louis Comolli: "The Photograph stands as at once the triumph and the grave of the eye…Decentered, in panic, thrown into confusion by all the new magic of the visible, the human eye finds itself affected with a series of limits and doubts."[10] Based on Comolli's observation, Chuang lays out a history of photography or rather a history of visual literacy as it relates to the reading of the presentation of three-dimensional space within the two-dimensional surface of the photograph. Citing such authorities as Joel Snyder, William Ivins and Allen Chasanoff, Chuang demonstrates how the reception of photography by the masses has moved from that of acceptance of the image as recorded objective fact "as standard visual currency in the legal, medical, and journalistic professions"[11] to the current state of skepticism regarding the photograph and

---

[9] Joshua Chuang, "It's Complicated," in *First doubt: Optical Confusion in Modern Photography: Selections from the Allan Chasanoff Collection,* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery: Distributed by Yale University Press, 2008).
[10] Ibid., 11.
[11] Ibid., 12.

all of its digital and analogue incarnations. According to Chuang we now understand "what photographers and picture editors have known all along: photographs can obfuscate and mislead as much as they reveal."[12]

I would assert however that, through the inherent nature of the medium, photographs always have only been able to "obfuscate and mislead." If the viewer attaches to the image the misconception that it offers a true picture of reality, then by extension the photographer would have to be held responsible for any misleading or manipulation. Since Crewdson, Gursky and Wall all work with digital processes to conceive and produce their imagery, Chuang's paraphrase of a conversation regarding darkroom manipulation of the image with Allen Chasanoff may shed some light on my subjects' common practices: "…this synthesis [manipulation of the image in the darkroom] produced *something other than a photograph*. Lost in the sleight of hand was a certain photographic integrity—a spatial and temporal continuity from which a photograph derives and asserts its factual authority."[13] Investigating this "*something other than a photograph*" that is produced via the *synthesis (*whether through traditional darkroom manipulation of the image or through more contemporary software-enabled methods of today) will aid my quest to isolate what exactly accounts for the 'something wrong' with these images. By producing the sort of photograph that is manipulated and manipulative, these artists call our attention to the doubt and disconnection that has always accompanied photography, even when photographic images were held up as documents of the real.

---

[12] Ibid., 15.
[13] Ibid., 13. Emphasis mine.

Peter Galassi's essay on Jeff Wall examines the photographer's evolution as an artist beginning with his teen years as a painter through his foray into minimalism and ultimately arriving in the 1990s when Wall, faced with the technological innovation of digital software techniques, began working with digital montage.[14] Galassi's essay is concerned primarily with the ideas behind Wall's methods of image making—his reinterpretation of art historical themes and, in essence, the remaking of the artworks (not only paintings but also literary fiction) of the past to conform to the social moirés within a contemporary socio/cultural context/framing. According to Galassi, Wall's re-creations within the history of modernism are those that satisfy "modern" sensibilities. Galassi presents "A Sudden Gust of Wind" and "The Pine on the Corner" among many others as examples of art historical quotation and revision. The author contends that the former is based on Katsushika Hokusai's Nishike-e print "A High Wind in Yeijiri, Suruga Province" (1831-33) and the latter on Emily Carr's oil on canvas "Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky" (1935) as well as the stories these two images illustrate. Wall's refashioning/staging works are multi-layered in that "the viewer needn't have read the stories to enjoy a rewarding experience of the pictures."[15] Nor do they need to view the original painted/printed works to glean a hint at an implied albeit nebulous narrative. But there is an underlying (fictive) narrative to which Wall's images refer. Galassi speaks often throughout his essay of the tableau nature of Wall's work as it relates to the absorptive nature of the subjects depicted within the frame of his pictures.

---

[14] Peter Galassi, "Unorthodox," in *Jeff Wall*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 52.

[15] Ibid., 53.

Referencing Michael Fried, Walter Benjamin, and Svetlana Alpers among numerous others, Galassi compares Wall's images to the paintings he (and others) have identified as their sources. Galassi notes (and this is of the most interest to my argument) that although the scholarship devoted to Wall's work teems with comparisons to well-known paintings, it remains "strangely incurious about the artistic implications of the plain fact that his pictures are not paintings but photographs."[16] Galassi notes that although "photographs do not possess the physicality of paint on canvas" it's necessary to consider that the comparison of Wall's very large images to some of the paintings on which they were based is at best only effective when the comparison takes place within the pages of a text: a place where Wall's work and the work he has 'referenced' can be shrunk to co-exist on the same page.[17] In fact, it is a bit like comparing apples to oranges (both very satisfying fruits within the same produce department of the art grocery store) with the apple representing the flat texture-less photograph and the mottle-skinned orange representing the painting. Or to be more accurate, it is like comparing a modestly sized orange to a gigantic apple, which, thanks to Wall's display method of light boxes, is illuminated from within and teeming with minute detail even when viewed from close up. Although both the apple and the orange can be visually interesting, ultimately the comparison breaks down.

Galassi points out that the ultimate goal of Jeff Wall is not to "elevate the status of photography" (like many of his predecessors within the history of photography) but rather to "radically enlarge photography's scope." In Wall's work, "erudition thus has spawned experiment" and "he has made more and more room within the guarded precinct of the

---

[16] Ibid., 45.
[17] Ibid.

tableau for the rascally warp of photographic description—for its beautiful but maddeningly slippery way of remaking the world in a picture."[18]

Galassi writes about Wall without mentioning Gursky, so it is puzzling that Galassi has also written about Gursky using a very similar approach and methodology. Here, too in his essay "Gursky's World," the author traces the artist's development from commercial photographer (born into the family business) who "had always thought of photography as a way of making a living"[19] to the artist who creates fictions/worlds within his photographs which "accommodate(s) a wealth of apparent polarities."[20] Gursky entered the Kunstakademie in 1980 and studied under Bernd and Hilla Becher, who became famous for their 'topology' pieces and for their demanding typological teaching methods. The Bechers, believed that the only way to successfully know a subject was to rigorously photograph many variants of the same type frontally (e.g. their water towers, steel industrial structures, etc.) and present the resulting images within a grid-like system. Not surprisingly, Gursky's early work reflected this discipline. While at the school he was surrounded/influenced by his aspiring classmates among which were Candida Höfer and Thomas Ruff as well as recent alum Thomas Struth, who also tended to share this rigorous frontality in their work.[21] In the words of Galassi, "Photography was Gursky's inheritance, if you will; under the Bechers he was learning to make art."[22] Gursky met Jeff Wall in 1981 and viewed his back-illuminated pieces (speaking to commercial display),

---

[18] Ibid., 57.
[19] Peter Galassi. "Gursky's World," in *Andreas Gursky*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2001), 15.
[20] Ibid., 41.
[21] Ibid., 16-17.
[22] Ibid., 19.

which affected Gursky's presentation of his work for a short time, but ultimately the artist returned to paper as his method of output rather than transparencies.[23]

Galassi notes that Gursky's images (and those of his contemporaries: Struth, Ruff, Wall, etc.) gradually began to grow in size beginning with the mid-eighties and this expansion in scale was only restricted by the available technology (the size of the paper), which limited his pieces to 6 feet (the width of the widest available roll) on the shortest dimension.[24] These huge images display immense detail within panoramic views in that they allow the viewer to experience the pieces from multiple viewing differences. This insistence on capturing multiple views reflects Gursky's training with the Bechers and their method of exhaustive typological studies. Gursky has, in effect, found a way to capture the multiplicity of the Becher's system within singular images.

Ultimately Galassi contends that the power of Gursky's pictures "lies in the vividness with which he has distilled compelling images from the plenitude of this commercialized image-world" and that his subject matter of the banal images of "globalization" are brought to life not through planning, but rather, through the artist's self-proclaimed spontaneous approach to each new subject.[25] As in his discussion of Wall's work, Galassi compares photography to painting. Galassi observes that Gursky's work speaks to the paintings of the German romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich in the sense of providing the viewer with a view from an elevated fixed vantage point so as to loom over the scene as a "God-like presence."[26] In doing so, the artist is perhaps unconsciously referencing the work of Caspar David Friedrich, Pieter Bruegel the Elder,

---

[23] Ibid., 20.
[24] Ibid., 28.
[25] Ibid., 29-30.
[26] Ibid., 25.

Albrecht Altdorfer, etc. by offering within his images a fractal unfolding vista that expands outward from the perspective of one small, specific body in space. Gursky, Galassi claims, does not imagine himself to be an art historian but rather solely an artist and as such "he attributes any affinities to the persistence of certain essential pictorial types that have rooted themselves in our collective visual imagination and so reappear unbidden."[27] The artist does not attempt to dissuade the viewer from comparing his photographs to such painted images of the sublime as Friedrich's, but he does intend us to "approach his pictures as photographs" since the medium is integral to his working method.[28]

The fact that Galassi is so invested in anchoring Wall and Gursky's work (and I would argue Crewdson's as well, although Galassi does not mention him in his argument and all three are never mentioned in the same essay) to painting points to a fundamental problem. Their work calls into question the still pervasive notion that photographs capture reality while paintings 'depict' reality, which makes the work of artists like Gursky, Crewdson, and Wall difficult to place in such rigidly defined disciplines. Is it still possible for us as viewers to approach Gursky's (or Crewdson's or Wall's) work as 'photographs' or should we approach their images as something else, something new, produced through the digital processes of augmentation and manipulation, or at the very least, a new hybrid medium?

---

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 39.

Nostalgia

> Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience…. *This point of desire which the nostalgia seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of desire… …*the realization of re-union imagined by the nostalgic is a narrative utopia that works only by virtue of its partiality, its lack of fixity and closure: nostalgia is the desire for desire….[29]

In trying to understand how these photographers address the Barthian madness of the photograph, I found a useful model in the work of Susan Stewart. Stewart's observations on narrative explain better than the writers cited above the odd qualities of this class of photographs and the implications for photography.

In her book *On Longing*, Stewart investigates the "relation of narrative to its objects,"[30] an investigation that will have serious implications for Barthes' 'shared hallucination'. Her examination focuses on the four narratives: the 'miniature,' the 'gigantic,' the 'souvenir,' and the 'collection'. These conflate to produce longing/desire in the individual through "the social disease of nostalgia."[31] According to Stewart, longing manifests in different ways, ways which can be applied not only to the understanding of the images of Crewdson, Gursky and Wall but through them to a more comprehensive understanding of the medium of photography. In particular, Stewart's understanding of longing can be usefully connected to Roland Barthes' famous discussion of the photograph as a recorder of the real—the "perfect analogon" and "the literal reality." [32]

---

[29] Susan Stewart, *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection,* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984). 23. Emphasis added.
[30] Ibid., ix.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 17.

Through Stewart, we can see how the work of Crewdson, Gursky and Wall call attention to the essential narrative enacted between the object and viewer, the code necessary to the completion of the image. In Stewart's examination, narrative is essential to the production of meaning and is inevitable in an examination of any work of art. It is inherent to 'viewing' because it is necessary to the production of meaning: how we understand an object and how that object helps us to understand ourselves. The viewer's reliance on narrative and the gap it produces that we can only understand through longing seems appropriate to an understanding of these artists' work.

The work of Gursky, Wall and Crewdson, as viewed through Stewart, demonstrates that this narrative is necessary to the production of meaning within (ourselves) and without (the surrounding culture in which we are co-produced) and makes clear that this narrative can only be experienced through metaphor, the "gap between the signifier and signified" remains, the gap that is the source of my nephew Milo's feeling of wrongness. It is this gap that calls into question Barthes' 'but it has indeed been'[33] about the photograph. It causes the individual to long for the authentic, original object[34] that may never have been.

This compelling feeling of 'non-rightness' in their work is produced through categories I borrow from Stewart. These elements are: *new scale* (from the large scale of the finished work to the detailed minutia contained within), *fabulist imagery* (based in spectacle which speaks to the cinematic and echoes the banal) and *implied narrative* (hints at a narrative that can only be constructed in the mind of the viewer). These photographic strategies are designed to overcome Barthes' description of the inherent 'madness' of the

---

[33] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 115
[34] Stewart, ix.

photograph, to make something look like a document when it is, instead, art. These images look like something other than what they seem to represent. Their referent is available only through the narrative created. The construction of these images through digital and directorial processes ultimately calls into question the photographic image's 'adherence' to reality. Barthes' 'perfect analogon' is still an analogon.

I have more to say about these features derived from Stewart's terminology below, but here I want to emphasize the role they play in the construction of the sense of nostalgia, especially in the context of these three photographers. One might ask: Are these artists, through their work, reflecting our collective/universal memory with the form of souvenirs of the cinema back to us in lieu of nature? Or has the artifice of Hollywood aesthetics, its ubiquitous iconography, become our image of nature? Has the retouched, dramatically lit, highly detailed tableau of Hollywood and advertising popular imagery led us to desire what cannot possibly exist in nature? Are these 'almost reals' our 'real' invoking Jean Baudrillard's *simulacra*? If, as Jacques Lacan professes, we can never reach the 'Real' (because it is co-constituted by/with the Symbolic and Imaginary) then perhaps these imagined re-presentations are all we can perceive, are as close as we can ever get to reality. Through novel technological processes combined with the elements of which these images are comprised—new scale, fabulist imagery, and implied narrative—these images call into question the nature of photography as a documentary process and beyond that, the nature of what we understand to be 'the real' that is supposedly documented.

Stewart's arguments about the manifestations of narrative (and their necessary references to 'nostalgia') as created by the 'miniature' and the 'gigantic' (new scale) and the objects generated by the narratives of the 'collection' and the 'souvenir' (fabulist

17

imagery and implied narrative) in combination are helpful when locating and negotiating the relational interplay between viewer, object and artist that combine to create these works. Through Stewart's lens the images by Crewdson, Gursky, and Wall reveal themselves to be the artists' construction of 'nostalgia' and longing in the mind of the viewer: the construction of a "narrative utopia that works only by virtue of its partiality, its lack of fixity and closure: nostalgia is the desire for desire."[35]

Nostalgia is being put to use by these image-makers and is essential in the interplay between artist, image and viewer. Nostalgia is also part of or essential to the 'not-quite-rightness' that my nephew Milo recognized. This quality that Stewart calls 'lack of fixity' makes it necessary for the viewer to create their own narrative, to substitute their own desire and memories for those the image pointedly excludes or hints at. It's the 'seam', the intersection that lacks 'closure', that reveals the artist's hand in this construction. These are images that 'never were' and yet 'they are'. The only certainty we have is the object itself: the photographic image. It was always the only certainty we had, propped up by 'shared hallucination', which amounts to shared/agreed upon narrative to constitute the image's 'truth'.

The elements of these images, which co-produce their materiality through narrative, are directly linked to the directorial processes utilized by these artists to construct their work and in essence to create this new model of artist as conceptual creator. These processes call into question when and what is the moment of 'capture' in these photographs and therefore what exactly 'has indeed been'. Is it the moment the artist envisions (and often sketches and/or storyboards) the image he desires to create? Is it

---

[35] Stewart, 23.

when the photo is 'snapped'? If we take into account Crewdson's own statement, "I don't even like holding the camera,"[36] the question becomes even more complicated. Does 'capture' mean when the original analogue negative is scanned? Or when the image is digitally re-created via software? Or when the image is printed? Or is it only when the image is re-imagined with a personal narrative within the mind of the viewer?

Have these artists returned, via novel production processes, to the subject? Crewdson, Gursky, and Wall command complete control over the medium and process of photography through their constructions of artifice. The magic lies in their recognition of their inability to control the viewer who creates a personal narrative of the "collection" presented by way of the photographic 'print'. Ultimately, it is the viewer who, as Duchamp declared over a half a century ago, creates the photograph: "It's not what you see that is art, art is the gap."[37]

Visual analysis of the images of these artists and with the use of Barthes' and Stewart's scholarship, illuminates the many levels on which these images work and the narrative spaces that are created by and within these inauthentic reproductions or 'captures' of reality. Perhaps, their work operates and exploits Duchamp's 'gap'. They certainly operate in the gap between what we have so long imagined to be documentation of truth and artifice.

All three of these artists, of course, are well aware of Barthes' arguments about photography and this knowledge mediates their respective imaginings of their own perfect

---

[36] Gregory Crewdson speaking in "Snap Judgements." *The Genius of Photography,* episode 6. Producer: Tim Kirby and Debbie Lee; Director: Debbie Lee. BBC 2 / BBC 4. Outright Distribution. Dec. 2006. TV.

[37] Marcel Duchamp as quoted by Arturo Schwarz. The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Abrams, 1970), 197.

realities within their images. In order to counteract the perceived nature of photography as a medium of capture that documents the real, the "pure contingency"[38] of the photo, these artists have chosen to make the unreal behind the photograph – the analogon – obvious (through manipulation of images and staging). The fabulist nature of a Crewdson; the seamless conflation of moments into one singularity of Wall; the impossible beauty, visual fluidity and grace of a Gursky—all these very different worlds present to the viewer a real that is never reachable—a real that is perhaps the hyper-real of Baudrillard and one that we can never expect to reach. The 'real' that these images portray is not the captured 'real' of Barthes but rather the created 'real' of the artists that ultimately calls into question Barthes' 'real' that supposedly lies behind the image. Together they represent nostalgia for the concreteness of a shared 'reality', which seems to be a widening cultural position of contemporary society.

---

[38] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 28.

II. <u>This image is not a photograph</u>

Crewdson, Gursky, and Wall thereby distinguish themselves from other photographers working within 'straight photography' in the sense that their final product/ object is a singular composite image of their construction; their creation of Barthes' "*This*" and the "Real" (Lacan's "*Tuché"*)[39] an image of 'real' un-reality that is the result of a four-step process directed, designed, and controlled by the artist: the pre-processing (the creation/planning of the set, cast, etc.), the actual taking of the picture by analogue or digital means, the post-processing of digitizing the image & its' manipulation with a software program, and finally, printing/producing the image for display. These artists are truly working in hybrid spaces combining the digital & traditional to create their work and to create events 'behind' and around the space depicted -- the scene that 'never was'.

The working methods of these artists as well as the characteristics of the images themselves also distinguish them from other 'traditionalist' analogue and digital photographers working today who are quite comfortable with merely color correcting their images and making typical 'darkroom adjustments' such as cropping, dodging and burning prior to final printing. There appear to be three characteristics that the work of Crewdson, Gursky, and Wall share to varying degrees:

1. New scale – large in presentation and in part a market driven device enabling photographs to monetarily compete with paintings in the global art market (e.g., Gursky's *99 Cent II Diptych* (2001) sold for $3.3 million at Sotheby's (London) in

---

[39] Ibid., 4.

2007[40]). These images are looming/confronting objects that demand spectatorship not simply due to sheer size but also to the intricacy of its detail found within the collected miniatures contained within the looming whole of the gigantic;

2. Fantastical / fabulist imagery – scenes of the banal with a movie magic aesthetic due largely in part to digital post-processing of the image;

3. Implied narrative – never overtly stated but rather the artists give only hints at meaning, which then must be entirely deduced/constructed by the viewer.

New scale

These images are shot with 4x5 or larger 8x10 analog view cameras that due to their large negative sizes (4"x5" and 8"x10" respectively) create a highly detailed image (and soon will be taken with digital cameras with digital imaging mega-pixel capacities rising exponentially every year), which when combined with the high resolution technological advances in printing made over the last few decades allows for highly detailed conveyance of information. In other words, the image quality and size enables a panoramic vision that necessitates close examination, a close reading of the image. The minutia presented as elements of the whole enable a new kind of visual clarity previously inaccessible to the limits of human vision, perhaps playing in to a 'visual fetishization'. When looking, we always desire to see more. Not unlike our need to know more, to access, to consume more information. Who hasn't witnessed a child trying to look sideways into a TV screen trying to see beyond the frame? The popularity and ubiquitous-ness of the Internet is a perfect example of this phenomenon. At our fingertips it often

---

[40] Jerry Saltz. "It's Boring at the Top: Is Andreas Gursky the highest-priced photographer alive—running out of ideas?" Pub. May 13, 2007 *New York Magazine*. http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/31785/, 1.

seems we have more answers than we could possibly have questions. It is not just a happy

coincidence that the world wide web has evolved from a text based system to an image

haven with ever increasing bandwidths to accommodate the distribution of larger

resolution files/images. When faced with so much information, we as viewers are almost

obsessed with accessing even more. These images, brimming with an almost infinite

amount of information, allow and almost demand for us to do just that. Average viewing

distances (usually that of ~3x the diagonal of the rectangle of the image) instructs us that

we should view a 10'w x 15'h image from approximately a little over 52 feet. These

images, so highly detailed, entice/demand the viewer to come closer in order to experience

those incredibly intricate units of the small that combine to create greatness of the whole

yet simultaneously push us back in order to take in the image in its entirety.

Why are we fascinated by this wealth of information? Perhaps it is the conflation

of the miniature (the minute detail in each element) and the gigantism of the whole (the

collection which is the entirety of the image). Or as Stewart tells us, the "collection

represents the total aestheticization of use value."[41] With this in mind we can view the

image as collection in which the elements (in the language of Stewart, the individual

souvenirs), collected have been reframed and re-contextualized by the photographer to

create a "hermetic world" possessing "both the minimum and the complete number of

elements necessary for an autonomous world."[42]

> While the point of the souvenir may be remembering, or at least the
> invention of memory, the point of the collection is forgetting—starting
> again in such a way that a finite number of elements create, by virtue of
> their combination, an infinite reverie… Each element within the collection
> is representative and works in combination toward the creation of a new

---

[41] Stewart, 154.
[42] Ibid.

whole that is the collection itself. The spatial whole of the collection supersedes the individual narratives that 'lie behind it'…. The collection's space must move between the public and the private, between display and hiding. Thus the miniature is suitable as an item of collection because it is sized for individual consumption at the same time that its surplus of detail connotes infinity and distance. While we can "see" the entire collection, we cannot possibly "see" each of its elements.[43]

In light of the collapse/expansion of the viewing distances inherent to the viewing of these photographs due to the elements of individual minutia which are combined by the artist to create the whole, we can see that through deliberate choice and privileging of some elements over others by the artist and within our own viewing capabilities that the photograph has become in essence a collection. We can never see the whole of these images. When we step back we are oblivious to the minute details that insist upon closer inspection, the miniature within the large scale of the piece. And, despite their larger scale relative to traditional photographs, these pieces are still miniatures of the 'real' event, the larger world depicted.

The metaphor of the 'miniature' becomes manifest in objects such as dollhouses, performances of "Tom Thumb weddings," miniature golf, etc. The miniature is the object that we hold as a replacement for that which we cannot relive/replace or that which we covet. In order to assuage our longing for the object that we cannot possess or which is not attainable to us, we keep and hold fast to a miniature version of that thing as substitute— as the surrogate that sublimates our desire for the real. The miniature is the "situation within situation, world within world."[44] It is the reduction in scale that carries the emotional weight of the original and captures (or at least attempts to) Barthes' 'perfect analogon'. Although the author is speaking in terms of textual tableaus when she states,

---

[43] Ibid., 154-55.
[44] Stewart, 45.

"Each fictive sign is aligned to a sign from the physical world in gesture which makes the fictive sign both remarkable and realistic"[45] she could very well be referring to the photographs of Crewdson, Gursky and Wall.

Photography's evolving practices and the new scale

Staging has always been a commonplace necessity in the process of producing photographs. Exposures times lasting as long as 5 to 10 minutes (or longer) per capture were the expected standard until the mid 19th century. In order for a photographer to effectively stop the action, subjects had to maintain their position, and essentially pose or perform for the duration of the exposure. Of course, toward the end of the 19th century, the development of the gelatin process significantly expedited exposure time, enabling photographers the ability to successfully 'freeze' the action within the photograph and free the subject when active from being rendered as a fleeting ghost. Photography was then free to capture 'reality', pieces of life as it was happening and it rapidly replaced, for the most part, illustration as the medium of documentation. This also created the illusion that subjects were not performing, but were captured in frozen moments of reality as it was happening.

The conceptual turn in contemporary art in the 1960s-70s allowed for photography's inclusion as a medium into the world of high art while also establishing the rules/conventions for its production. The move away from the issues of craft (or for the purpose of this essay, the question of how an art object was made) and the subject (the question of the object depicted) evolved into the discourse of the artificial. The origins of

---

[45] Ibid., 46.

this movement (the 'discourse of artifice') can be seen in the work of Francesca Woodman, Tina Barney and perhaps most importantly, Cindy Sherman (identity as artifice). The work of these artists involved extensive pre-production set-ups in order to set the scene to be photographed calling into question photography's role as documenter of reality while returning it to its performative roots.

Sherman's "Film Stills," a series comprised of 69 small 8x10 black and white prints produced between 1977 and 1980 explored the construction of identity through the re-presentation of stereotypical roles for women as culled from the vast iconography of Hollywood cinema. Placing herself within the role of the 'stereotype' and within the space of a particularly evocative set of types, Sherman forces viewers to engage with the subject as something that exists beyond the frame, the original setting and narrative, inevitably causing the viewer to question the artifice of subjecthood while inviting the viewer to read the images with the grammar and vocabulary particular to cinema. In addition, Sherman was performing identity before her lens. Once the floodgates were open, many other artists used photographic images to document performance, installation and environmental work—immediately, the performances of Vito Acconci, the photographs of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* and later the documentation of work by Christo and Wurm come to mind. Although these artists did not consider this photographic documentation to be part of the original 'artwork', as the work itself became extinct/defunct, the photographic object subsumed the original into what was considered the surrogate stand-in for the work and has come to be seen as the work itself and not merely a representation indicating the original performance, event or structure. However, the narrative of the original event still informs the photographic image.

Contemporary with the newly flourishing global art markets and the economic expansion of global burgeoning stock markets as well as numerous technological innovations (both hardware and software), we see the rise of large-scale photography immediately reminiscent of the large-scale history paintings of the Salon although the purpose of these works differs. These large prints are the final products and not the advertisement/billboard for the artists' smaller more accessible (in terms of financial value and scale) works. Just as many painters sold the reproduction rights to their paintings (e.g. Ingres), the rarity of the original becomes more sacred and valuable when reflected in the copy. The totemic object of the souvenir intensifies the 'aura' of the original. These large-scale photographs are readily mass consumable in pocket-sized form on the Internet, in the form of coffee table books, postcards, etc. These objects act as the 'advertisement' for the large-scale 'original' in a reverse of the Salon process.

Produced in small series, these large-scale images can also be viewed as souvenirs of themselves. The sheer size of these works also conjures the heroic images of the abstract expressionists, not unlike the work produced by the other disciplines of contemporary Fine Art. Although a great number of contemporary artists are engaging in spectacle in order to produce an event, the spectacle they produce projects into, through and out of the gallery space (e.g., video artist Pippilotta Rist's recent MOMA show, Christo's "Gates," Takashi Murakami's cartoon transformations, Mueck's giant sized figural sculptures, etc.); the work of Crewdson, Gursky, and Wall keeps the spectacle and implied narratives neatly constrained within their respective, yet very large frames. But in a sense these artists are working within both the Art as "event" and Henri Cartier-Bresson's singular "decisive moment" within their closed frames; both the performance

and the 'documented' still image are represented and the invisible seam (created self-consciously by the artists) that joins the two creates the unease, the not-rightness that is so evocative.

These photographers by way of production, process, and presentation have truly repressed the mechanical 'essence' of photography. They have adeptly co-opted the 'real', or our ideal of it as 'documented' in photographs, and made it malleable through combination and augmentation. These photographers are directing and creating an event using the familiar tools of sets, lights and casts to be photographed as one possible moment in what we imagine to be a larger narrative event or story within a film. Just as we can read each of Cindy Sherman's "Film Stills" and her identity in each by reading each as a moment within a larger cinematic narrative we too can sense the possible before and after implied by the immediacy of the still image.

Technology – evolution of process as integral to the new scale

Current technology, both software and hardware, is integral to the work of these artists. This work could not have been produced before the technological innovations of the last three decades. It is mind-boggling to think of the far-reaching technological developments in printing and digital processing of the last thirty years. Initially printing from computer to paper was limited to basic impact printers, essentially automated typewriters that with each keystroke of the printer struck the page to print one letter at a time in one determined font. In the 1960s, dot matrix printers were introduced with the efficiency of simultaneous, multiple imprints of text characters thereby expediting the printing process. These printers, although an innovation in impact printer technology,

were still based on the same typewriter-like mechanics reliant on striking/impacting the paper although now with equipped with inked pins that when combined in various arrangements were able to create different characters by way of different dot patterns. Unfortunately, the printers were still loud and not very fast compared to today's equipment and they still did not have the capacity to print detailed representations of a photographic nature, limiting their use to textual content.[46] The exception to this limitation would be the printing of ASCII (text) images. During the late 1970s, as an option to the common place photo-booth, a popular attraction at amusement parks and Jersey Shore boardwalks were stalls offering 'portraits' printed using dot-matrix technology which would then be transferred to t-shirts or simply printed to paper and matted with a piece of cheap white cardboard. Although perhaps a novel method of portraiture, the outputted object of this process offered little to no descriptive information of the subject portrayed. The resemblance to the 'sitter' was merely implied and lacking in any detail aside from the varying weight of the typography used in the printing process. Certainly a Gursky, Wall or Crewdson would be virtually unrecognizable in the ASCII translation (Fig. II.1).

This dot-matrix technology with its noisy, less than letter perfect output (which remains still in limited use today) was soon replaced by laser printers which accurately reproduce more fonts at 300 dpi (a resolution 3x higher than dot-matrix).[47] Laser printers are still the most economic choice for businesses that only require black and white text documents or if they do require color they do not require accurate color proofing or the

---

[46] Thomas Kraemer, "Printing Enters the Jet Age: How today's computer printers came to eject microscopic dots with amazing precision," *Invention & Technology Magazine*, 16:4 (2001), http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/it/2001/4/2001_4_18.shtml.
[47] Ibid.

highest photographic image quality and archival print longevity. Of course, when the laser printer was initially introduced it was only capable of producing black and white prints. Color laser printers were to follow but their high cost was prohibitive and by the early 1990s, laser technology was successfully supplanted by inkjet printers. Although it is debatable as to which company invented the first inkjet printer (completely dependent on the brand loyalty of the author of the technology article you choose to believe), the mid-eighties saw the printer with the first disposable 'printhead', which sprayed ink from separate chambers, the Hewlett-Packard ThinkJet® which retailed for $495 in 1984.[48] Unfortunately, the image quality/resolution at less than 100 dpi was disappointing to those hoping for 'realistic' photographic reproduction.

Until the late-1990s/early 2000s, as the resolution in inkjet technology gradually increased to an acceptable photographic standard and Epson released its wide format line of printers, artists who wished to produce large-scale images, remained reliant on sending their images out to large labs for traditional photographic C-print production; a pricey and time devouring endeavor, which left the artist virtually with little to no control of a vital part of the image-making process. Typically in C-print lab production smaller proofs are made and sent to the artist/client for approval requiring the artist to sign off on the color, clarity, saturation, density, etc. before the final print can be made. This process can be time consuming and circuitous as the small prints can be refused by the artist/client and sent back numerous times to the lab to try another test print before ultimately (hopefully) landing on the "perfect" image. Removing the outside sourcing of print production allows the digital image-maker the freedom of a solitary studio practice and ultimate control of

---

[48] Gareth Marples, "The History of Printers – Developing an Image," The History Of. http://www.thehistoryof.net/history-of-printers.html.

their work, once reserved for only those who practice the traditional analogue arts (painting, sculpture, drawing, etc.).

> Though technology is only the means through which a photographer's vision is revealed, it has dramatically changed what an individual artist can do,' he said. 'I am absolutely thrilled to know that I can now make all my final prints in my studio while maintaining control over the entire process.[49]

The late 80s and early 90s saw the introduction of photo editing software that Crewdson (or rather his hired Photoshop expert uses), Gursky and Wall use to create their final images—Adobe Photoshop. The first incarnation was released in 1990 as Version 1.0 that allowed photographers initially only rudimentary image manipulation (type creation, color adjustments and basic painting into the image). Over the last twenty years and over 10 version updates, Adobe Photoshop has become *the* software program for not only image manipulation but, when in the right skilled hands, of image creation. With an almost infinite number of choices involved in the "tool box" artists can begin with a blank canvas and create from nothing or begin with an image without the limits of adhering to what the original image dictates and granting the artist complete control over the resulting output.

In keeping with this desire for control within his artistic practice, Crewdson explained why he chose to use the Epson Stylus® Pro 11880 printer to print his "Beneath the Roses" series of 59" x 90" prints, which were ultimately shown at the Gagosian Gallery in Los Angeles, the Luhring Augustine Gallery in New York and White Cube in London amongst others:

---

[49] Gregory Crewdson as quoted in an interview for Epson, Inc.. "Epson.com." Beneath The Roses/Epson. Available from http://epson.ipressroom.com/pr/epson/Beneath_the_Roses.aspx Internet; accessed 20 January 2010.

> Being able to create these sharper, large-sized prints in-house at faster speeds changed my whole approach toward photographic printmaking and has brought a whole new level of creative freedom to my work.[50]

The Epson 11880 wide-format printer is capable of printing media up to 64" wide by a virtually limitless length of roll feed (based on the specific media, the length could be anywhere from 10' to 100') limited only by the processing power of the CPU spooling the image to the printer. Due to ink and paper technological developments since the introduction of the first black and white inkjet printers, the prints that are produced on Epson printers using pigment based inks (more stable in regard to UV and air quality issues than previous dye based inks) rival traditional prints in terms of print longevity and image stability.[51]

Crewdson, Wall, and Gursky have used the resulting expansive scale as a means to compete with paintings. At the minimum, in a spatial sense these large images compete for the valuable white walled real estate of the gallery and museum spaces but also, in the economic sense. These large prints are more spectacular and impressive than smaller incarnations: they require very expensive equipment to create and reproduce; they necessitate more delicate handling; they cost more to display. Therefore, when produced in limited numbers within a small series (thus producing a scarcity in the market and optimistically ultimately a demand) these prints, which are time, energy, and capital intensive can justifiably be sold for large sums in the competitive art market. Perhaps more importantly, the explosion of large-scale prints in contemporary photography can be

---

[50] Ibid.

[51] For more information on ink/paper stability and permanence data on print longevity please see the industry standard archive ratings at the Wilhelm Imaging Research, Inc. http://www.wilhelm-research.com/

linked to the artists' desire to protect the originality of the art object. The process of reproduction is not readily available to consumers, thereby protecting the image.

The immense amount of detailed information contained in each of the pictures of Gursky, Crewdson and Wall not only creates the images but also ensures the authenticity of the objects. Quite contrary to what the dramatizations on television procedurals show us and would have us believe as we watch in amazement as the computer genius hits a button, speaks the word 'enhance' and magically transforms the tiny pixilated image garnered from a digital surveillance camera to an enlarged (hundreds of times its original size) image brimming with detail that is crisp and readable, this technology simply does not exist. Just as a 72dpi 4"x6" web image cannot be 'blown up' to poster size without 'jaggies' and visual artifacts overwhelming the image as a result of the up-'res'ing (increasing the resolution and size of the image without an increase in the actual amount of information contained within the original image causes a software program such as Photoshop to attempt to fill in that missing information, interpolating/guessing what that information was supposed to look like); a large-scale, high resolution (extremely detailed) image of Crewdson, Gursky or Wall cannot be miniaturized (scaled down) to the size of a coffee table book or made to reside comfortably on a web page (requiring a mere 72 dots per inch) without sacrificing a great amount of information and losing the integrity of the image. For example, In the case of a Crewdson and Gursky respectively; the small print on the signs that nearly cover the storefront windows in "Untitled" (Fig. II.3) and the individual distinct products that populate the shelves in "99 Cent" (Figure II.6).

With smaller prints the creation of the non-authentic copy (by which I mean the print that was not created/printed, nor ever intended to exist by the original photographer)

is an easy feat to accomplish. By simply photographing the object (an original print produced by the original maker) that one wishes to copy via analogue methods (e.g. shoot with film by means of a traditional film camera), the copyist would produce a negative which then could be printed in the darkroom using conventional methods. The same end could be achieved by way of digital techniques by taking a high-resolution digital photograph of the original, inputting it into a basic image-editing software and outputting by way of a high resolution inkjet printer onto a transparency (e.g., Pictorico OHP Transparency Film). This would produce a digital negative that would contain all of the information of the original (grain, etc.) that then could be traditionally printed in the darkroom with the same chemicals and on the identical paper as the original. Either process, whether originating in the analogue or digital realm, would result in a print not easily discernable as counterfeit from the original artist's made print.

Not unlike the process of producing a forgery of a painting where one must be privy to the visual information (brush strokes, precise colors, patina, etc.) in order to replicate the art object convincingly, a digital copyist of a large-scale print must gain access to all of the information in the original picture. Unlike master works which have been expertly scanned and are readily available online in virtual display on museum sites (granted, these museums usually present the files in bits and pieces so that the complete picture cannot be easily downloaded in one quick step but the savvy virtual 'collector' can seamlessly reassemble the bits with the aid of basic photo editing software), versions of Wall's, Crewdson's and Gursky's work online is presented as very small images reflected in their inadequate 72dpi file sizes, limited in order to prevent all visual information from being conveyed and reproduced. Ultimately the would-be copyist would have to obtain the

original high dpi, large megabyte file created by the artist or take up the daunting task to photograph the print as displayed in situ. For the most part these prints are displayed under glass or plexi-glass, thus making the photographing difficult due to glare, reflections, etc.—difficult but not impossible.

The large scale of the prints confounds the copyist's dilemma. The print would need to be photographed either via digital or analogue methods in smaller blocks/units requiring a great deal of solitary time in the gallery or museum in which the print is displayed. Once the negatives or digital files have been acquired, they would have to be stitched/reassembled through the use of manipulation software or traditional darkroom processes. Simultaneously the copyist would need to remove any seams, residual glare and any other incidental extraneous information (such as color casts or shadows left by ambient room lighting, etc.) that was inadvertently recorded at the time of photographic capture. Ultimately, the print would need to be signed (forged), printed on identical paper and displayed in a method characteristic of the original artist. This arduous method of copying would prove too time-consuming for a casual undertaking. The many steps required would need to be executed perfectly and it is my belief they could not be completed without the knowledge of the artist or at the very least the knowledge of the staff of the venue where the piece is displayed. Thus, the large scale of work protects the image from duplication and ultimately the authenticity of the picture from unauthorized reproduction. Also, the size of the work protects the value of the piece, since any small-scale reproduction simply cannot capture the detail and overall presence of the original.

<u>Fantastical / fabulist imagery</u>

Our photographers all engage in spectacle. Just as the Cottingley Fairies of the early 1900s must have transfixed their viewers, beholders of these contemporary works cannot help but be absorbed by the fantastical/fabulist imagery presented in such large detailed splendor. But this is spectacle, which exists with the residue of the banal – they must be juxtaposed with or inclusive of the everyday for resonance. These are at their base deadpan images endowed with movie magic aesthetic and the cinematic grammar that comprises it. Simple scenes of everyday life processed through a cinematic lens are thus imbued with dramatic atmosphere that oozes the melodramatic. It is this melodrama that produces the sense of the hyper or uber 'real'. Although subtle, there is a recognizable artificial construct located within the almost 'real'. The scenes depicted could be factual and in fact they were built to exist for the brief time in order to photograph them but it is that construction and the augmentation of digital processing and manipulation that produces an image where something feels 'off' to the viewer. There is an otherworldly moodiness, almost dark and sinister in essence and a heightened reality thanks to digital augmentation in regard to lighting/saturated colors/retouching effects.

These images thrive on the melodramatic, an artful manifestation of the atmospheric Hollywood production values set upon the 'real', to evoke a cinematic experience in the mind of the viewer. They indirectly reference cinema, particularly the works of Spielberg and Lynch, as much as they reference art. By evoking Hollywood tropes without directly referencing them, they are elements culled from a sort of cinematic memory, a new kind of memory with no direct referent or original. Reflecting this cinematic memory that reflects not the 'real' but rather the pretense of the 'almost real',

the 'possible impossible' and the spectacular, seems to deny and dis-claim the photograph's historic position as the esteemed the recorder of evidentiary fact.

In different respects and to varying degrees for each person, the viewer can locate each of these images within our collective cinematic memory. Steven Spielberg's films, in particular "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" of 1977 inform the aesthetic of Crewdson's work. Wall's pieces speak to the re-enactment; the dramatization/"docu-drama" genre of film e.g., "Everyday People" comes to mind. The overhead establishing shot evidenced in Gursky's images is more difficult to specifically locate because it is so prevalent and ubiquitous in film, albeit fleeting lasting only 2 to 3 seconds at most. The 'establishing shot' inserted into the narrative when changing locations and scenes and thus, indicating a move from one city or place to another locale, the establishing shot (often an aerial) alerts us to a change of venue. Perhaps, the aerial shots of the market place in Cairo from "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" are quite reminiscent and best exemplify the look and view of the type found in Gursky's crowd images and pictures of stock exchanges (which invoke "Wall Street").

We're only after one single perfect moment.[52]

Crewdson's images (Fig. II.2 and Fig. II.3) that I have chosen as representative of his particular fabulist style are both simply called *Untitled*, and are taken from his 1998-2002 "Twilight" Series and his more recent 2003-2005 "Beneath the Roses" Series. Although they belong to differing series, both images are large-scale works; the older (which I will refer to as the "Twilight" print) is just shy of 4' x 5' and the more recent

---

[52] Gregory Crewdson speaking in "Snap Judgements," *The Genius of Photography,* episode 6, 2006.

(which I will refer to as the "Beneath the Roses" print) measures nearly 5' x 7.5'. Both images evoke the atmosphere and ambiance of big budget cinema production values.

We see in the "Twilight" print the image of 'Anytown, USA', a suburban tableau. The commonplace 'salt box' houses are bathed, almost caressed by darkness. Their windows illuminated with that yellowish glow that alerts us to the presence of people inside these dwellings, even if they themselves are not visible. In front of the driveway belonging to the house on the left a figure looks to the sky, bathed in a shaft of light. His almost pained expression shows us how bright the light is. From his right hand dangles the four remaining beers from a six-pack still attached by their plastic containment. Perhaps, he was on his way over to the neighbors' when the light found him. More plausibly, because we see the circularly lit indicators in front of the next five drive ways (diagonally down the street and out of the frame), we might be inclined to think that the figure has willingly arrived at this spot to be 'picked up', beer in hand, perhaps by way of alien abduction.

Crewdson's lighting, or should I say, Crewdson's team's lighting (the artist acts as the director of the production and employs a crew in the tradition of big budget block busters consisting of: 1st Assistant Director to Director of Photography, Cinematographer, Art Director, as well as a Digital Imaging Artist amongst many others, all of whom are credited in his books much like the credits that roll at the end of a movie) creates an image teeming with expectation.[53] We are given a wide vantage point to view the scene in front of us and despite the darkness everything in the scene is in focus and detailed. Is this a scene of benevolence or malevolence? It is difficult to decipher but there is a familiarity to

---

[53] Gregory Crewdson speaking in "Snap Judgements," *The Genius of Photography,* episode 6, 2006.

this scene, which could only come from movies or perhaps, dreams (which I would assert are also influenced by film). It is this uncertain nature of the tone of the image and the ambiguity of the time of our arrival that Crewdson wishes to cultivate, as well as the 'almost rightness' of something vaguely familiar. As Crewdson put it in an interview with Ovation TV, "I'm always interested in tensions. A primary one is that collision between the familiar and the strange. I think that exists in all of my pictures—an unexpected mystery or strangeness or beauty." He continues to perhaps give us some indication of his vision, "The picture's residing on this thing that *almost doesn't exist*. Like this moment in between moments."[54]

Certainly Crewdson's "Beneath the Roses" print seems to exist as a "moment in between moments" that relies on cinematic grammar and atmospheric Hollywood effects to establish its fabulist narrative. Here, as in the "Twilight" print, we see a lone male figure although more centrally located within the scene and dressed in a suit. We can presume that the briefcase standing upright in the street belongs to him as well as the large American made automobile with the driver's side door wide open. It seems he recently emerged from the vehicle only to be deluged by the torrential downpour of rain. The scene poses a mystery. We as viewers can only guess at the turn of events and where this scene will progress within this perfectly framed image. The narrative is left open-ended leaving holes that only the viewer can fill with his own experiences/interpretations. By way of the setting and constructed image the artist creates limits. As to what is actually real within the constructed photo and what has been removed thanks to that Digital Imaging Artist whom I referred to earlier as being in Crewdson's employ, we can never be sure.

---

[54] Gregory Crewdson, Ovation TV, 2008. Emphasis added.

Although we know what we are seeing, we can never be completely certain that what we're seeing actually existed. We can never be sure that it is 'right' or 'real'. There may have been much less or much more in this shot when the image was captured and perhaps, Crewdson added to the scene or in case of an element that didn't fit the totality of the collection of the photograph "took it out in post."[55]

The criticality lies in the 'almost sameness', the 'almost real,' the lack of Barthes' 'certainty' in the contemplation of the artificial, the fabulist. In full recognition of the postmodernist suspicion of authorial control, it is impossible for the artist to impose 'intent' onto the viewer. This theatrical art is predicated on the indecipherability of the message of the image, its indirect and oblique references. The reading/text isn't clear in these images (or most of successful contemporary art for that matter). This illegibility allows space for subjectivity. The narrative of the image is malleable, free to be maneuvered and ultimately re-constructed in the mind of the viewer within certain parameters created and invoked by the artist. It is almost as if the success of the image can be measured by the number and collection of possible meanings. Perhaps this preconceived nebulous 'almost reality' could be just the 'look' that Barthes desires in *Camera Lucida*: "Oh, if there were only a look, a subject's look, if only someone in the photographs were looking at me!"[56] If the person looking at 'me' from the photograph is, in the end, myself found in the 'gap' these artists invoke, what does that say about the 'subject'? I know I was never there and yet I am or might have been.

---

[55] Gregory Crewdson speaking in "Snap Judgements," *The Genius of Photography,* episode 6, 2006.
[56] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 111.

As an undergraduate Theatre student in the late 80s, I studied with a wonderfully eccentric professor who would (while drinking bourbon from a teacup) pontificate on the necessity of entrancing the audience as well as yourself as an actor into suspending your disbelief. It wasn't until many years later that I understood these to be the words of Coleridge and even still more years until, while looking at the pictures of Wall, Gursky, and Crewdson, I could see that these artists are in fact utilizing this very premise, this suspension of disbelief in their images for both viewer and subject.

Jeff Wall's images, like Crewdson's are also a mystery to the viewer. Despite the snapshot quality of many of his shots, they also evoke that uneasiness invoked by the not-quite real. The artist readily admits casting his shoots (also like Crewdson) and combining multiple shots together as well as using digital manipulation in order to create his final singular pictures. The two Wall examples, "A View from an Apartment" 2004-2005 (Fig. II.4) and "In Front of a Nightclub" 2009 (Fig. II.5) are once again very large prints—just under 5½' x 8' and 7½' x 12' respectively. If Crewdson's images are saturated with the big budget cinema aesthetic then these produced by Wall are obviously much more subdued and yet they exude the *feeling* of the narrative of film, albeit a different genre of film – more naturalistic in presentation. It is almost as if these are stills from 'indie' movies on much lower budgets than Crewdson's -- quiet sleeper films not glossed in the slickness of big-budget Hollywood.

Wall's images are engineered to appear more 'real', but they are still in fact engineered. Both of these images have a spontaneous quality reminiscent of 'snap shots.' His actors are cast to play roles much like themselves. The young people who appear to be waiting in front the 'nightclub' are actually young people playing young people. In the

case of "A View from an Apartment," Wall cast a young female student to act as the young woman. Wall employed what I would deem almost an improvisational technique in the pre-production of this picture. As told to Michael Fried in a communiqué regarding the image, Wall asked his hired actor to spend as much time as possible within the rented apartment, furnish it to her own taste and even to have a friend join her and in essence, live in it as if it were her own.[57] Wall did provide the actor with a basic task/scripted action, the folding of napkins, but other than that the artist states that did not provide much in the way of direction. He merely shot many exposures so that he could combine them to his liking later in post-production (digital manipulation). The perfect view of the harbor one can see through the window is one piece of obvious evidence of such manipulation. The light outside and the light inside would not happily coexist in a real situation. It would have been impossible for Wall to make the image in one single exposure—either the exterior or the interior would be too light or too dark. His vision necessitated multiple shots/views combined to produce a very convincing, 'real' view of what is in reality impossible to capture in a single exposure on film, a single photographic image.

As for the narrative element in Jeff Wall's images he offers no clues as to how we are to interpret them. As the artist stated in a 2007 interview printed in "db Artmag" issue 45:

> People say my pictures are very narrative. …But I think they're no more narrative than anybody else's pictures. Because I think all pictures have that quality. You know, what a picture really is that phenomenon that renders the moment before and the moment after invisible. With a picture, it is decisively that thing; nothing else will ever be seen of it. And what's beautiful about that is that it erases everything else; it cancels everything

---

[57] Fried, 57.

else out. Everything is gone; the picture alone remains. So what's wonderful about that is that the viewer is totally free to write a novel in his or her own mind about what the picture means. That's what pictures are.[58]

In allowing the viewer to "write a novel in his or her own mind" I believe we can say that the viewer is also free to imagine the movie in which the still resides. The photograph is the catalyst that conjures a narrative in the mind of the viewer. Wall's images of seeming banality manage to do just that within a single pictorial space that never in any singular sense existed despite its apparent 'realness', achieved through its apparent banality.

These constructions, composed of elaborate production values and staging in the case of Crewdson, the seamless integration of multiple shots in the case of Wall, and the deliberate set selection in the case of Gursky, all augmented and ultimately produced with extensive digital manipulation/post-processing, produce a 'conceit' in the literary sense. The images that are directorially produced/constructed by each artist are conflations of the 'real' and the imaginary/theatrical/cinematic. These are the moments, events that never happened. These are plausible fictions presented/documented through the medium of photography, a medium inherently read as documentary. The viewer can perceive/ experience the image as 'real' for as long as s/he 'suspends disbelief'.

The controlled artfulness of the image-makers does not allow us as viewers to be completely unaware of the construction for long, the invisible seam between what is captured and what is made. We are made aware of the artifice as if the artist, like Puck of "A Midsummer's Night Dream," was speaking to us directly with a nudge and a wink indicating his efforts in the picture's making and the story's telling/making. We are allowed to peer into and behind the construction and we can sense the directorial

---

[58] Jeff Wall, "Pictures Like Novels An Interview with Jeff Wall," 2007. http://www.db-artmag.com/archiv/2007/e/5/1/561.html, 2.

management of the artist, the almost curatorial collections created within the frame—the conceptual vision and the collaborative executions required to create these alternate representations of the world. What allows these images to be so successful is the respective picture's ability to cause us to believe them as accurate depictions if only for a brief moment in time, but we are left with Milo's gap, his not-rightness. The knowing 'wink' of the photographer letting you know what s/he's up to—quietly announcing the artifice. With this announcement we are allowed into the construction. We are allowed into what the artist/photographer has always known: there is no certainty behind the photograph.

Implied narrative

In the "Rhetoric of the Image" essay, Barthes argued

> …The photograph is never experienced as illusion, is in no way a *presence* (claims as to the magical character of the photographic image must be deflated): its reality that of the *having-been-there*, for in every photograph there is the always stupefying evidence of *this is how it was*, giving us, by a precious miracle, a reality from which we are sheltered.[59]

As I've already shown, Barthes' assertion that the photograph is evidence that 'this is how it was' is problematic. Narrative is essential to the photo to place it in time and space -- a time and space that may or may not 'have indeed been'. We have only the photographer's description of events, the narrative s/he creates, that accompanies the photograph to locate and create the 'shared hallucination', which has always ever been an 'illusion' made real through co-produced narrative. The creation of this 'shared hallucination' that the photograph depicts something real depends a great deal on cultural

---

[59] Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 44. Emphasis original.

iconography – that shared narrative that ties so much of our reality together. In Western, particularly American culture, this iconography is deeply entangled with media, specifically cinema.

A cinematic atmosphere leads the viewer to read the photograph with the temporal lens of film. But the temporality is vague and compressed; the present, past and future of the image remains in question but answers are not clear. The individual artists hint at meaning drenched in atmosphere. As viewers we are aware through the dramatic presence of the photo that something may have just happened, be happening at the time of the shutter's click or that we have arrived at the image at the precipice of the moment when something is just about to happen. Each work exudes an implied yet ambiguous narrative cloaked in just enough of the real to seem almost a memory…a flash of a past vaguely memorable – a deja vu? Or perhaps a flash of the projector illuminating a cell of a film in the theatre? Burned into our collective retinas just long enough to vaguely recollect but not to perceive as 'real' experience. A vague sense of recognition?

Unlike Crewdson and Wall who set the stage and photograph paid actors whose performances are directed for the camera, Gursky's stage is the world as he finds it. Acting more in the mode of the traditional photographer as hunter of the elusive image, Gursky lies in wait for his prey, for the moment to present itself. If Wall's images are the product of constructed, controlled spontaneity then Gursky's images would be the construction of spaces/places that appear too real and too perfect to be true. In an interview with Veit Gorner, Gursky speaks of not being able to find the shots he was after while traveling and in essence why he has opted for digital manipulation in the production of his images:

> Most of them had a socio-romantic air I hadn't expected. I was looking for visual proof of what I thought would be antiseptic industrial zones. If these companies had been systematically documented one would have had the feeling one was back in the days of the Industrial Revolution. After this experience I realized that photography is no longer credible, and therefore found it that much easier to legitimize digital picture processing.[60]

Because the visual truth that Gursky found in reality did not coincide with the visual truth that he had in mind and which he 'knew' to be true, he decided to alter the image via digital manipulation in order to create a more truthful representation than the "no longer credible" 'reality' that the camera could mechanically reproduce alone. In other words, if what we see is not what we perceive to be truthful then how could we expect the camera's blind machinations to present reality truthfully? The referent, the 'has indeed been', could only be reached through manipulation of the image.

The overhead establishing shots evidenced in Gursky's images, specifically *99 Cent* created in 1999 (Fig. II.6) and *Kuwait Stock Exchange* produced in 2007 (Fig. II.7) immediately demand attention. Their sizes of 6.79' x 11' and 9.68' x 7.28' are truly impressive but it is their subject matter that ultimately arrests the viewer due to their strong, almost forced, formalist structuring and their Pop-like sensibility. In the picture *99 Cent* the colors buzz with such brightness and intensity, we can almost hear the loud mechanical hum of the fluorescent lights illuminating the vast array of candies, cookies, and other low priced novelties/products. Both of these pictures are images of essentially performance spaces in the sense that we as humans are always performing in one way or another. A store is where people act as consumers with products displayed / laid out in front of them as inanimate actors themselves waiting to be selected. Similarly, the stock

---

[60] Gursky, Andreas, An Interview with Veit Gorner. Translated excerpt posted online: http://www.postmedia.net/999/gursky.htm Internet; accessed 20 January 2010.

exchange is a display—albeit a display of the fervor of capitalism—where men (in the case of Kuwait) trade invisible commodities. The palette of black and red is an interesting ground for the sea of white clad hustling workers, blurred and bustling in frenzied activity. (If we only had a little green we would have the Kuwait flag colors.) The homogenous uniforms worn by the figures make their individualities hard to discern but for close inspection. Even then, it would be possible to speculate knowing what we do about Gursky's manipulations that this could be only one person photographed multiple times in a time-lapse sequence. But that is not likely. Clothed from head-to-toe in the same garb, one could view these men as buzzing drones, anonymous worker bees keeping the hive of capitalism alive.

In regard to cinema, shots like these facilitate the narrative by showing us where the action will take place allowing us to see the overhead, God's eye view. The next logical shot would dive into the scene landing on perhaps one specific character who has been effectively 'placed' in time and space by the former image. Gursky's image does place this bevy of drones initially but it our job as viewer to decide where the story goes next. The artist leaves us hovering in the moment between—between the establishing shot with all of its potential but also its emptiness and the rest of the story—all we are left with is the clues Gursky leaves us and our own desire, our own memory. As for what manipulations have been enacted upon the image by Gursky, we as viewers cannot know for certain. Possibly the symmetry has been overly emphasized. Perhaps individuals have been digitally replicated. Perhaps something or things that we can't even imagine have been removed from view. Or perhaps like Wall, Gursky has photographed the scene multiple times to combine exposures to create his one perfect world.

If we think again of the arguments Barthes's notion of the automatism of the photograph, that of the image documenting as evidence the existence of the thing represented as existing in reality, we can see that these photographers through digital processes have negated the validity of that evidence in their search for a 'credible' representation of an always subjective experience. The works constructed by Crewdson, Gursky and Wall wholly depend on the "'magical' fictional consciousness"[61] Barthes speaks of below:

> …The photograph must be related to a pure spectatorial consciousness and not to the more projective, more 'magical' fictional consciousness on which film by and large depends. This would lend authority to the view that the distinction between film and photograph is not a simple difference of degree but a radical opposition. Film can no longer be seen as animated photographs: the *having-been-there* gives way before a *being-there* of the thing; which omission would explain how there can be a history of the cinema, without any real break with the previous arts of fiction, whereas the photograph can in some sense elude history (despite the evolution of the techniques and ambitions of the photographic art) and represent a 'flat' anthropological fact, at once absolutely new and definitively unsurpassable, humanity encountering for the first time in its history *messages without a code.*[62]

If, as Barthes purports, film can no longer be viewed as "animated photographs" as evidence of the "this is how it was" then how, when we knowingly are conscious of the photographers' constructions and manipulations, can we view the photograph as anything other than dependent on a "magical fictional consciousness?" How can we still view Barthes' stance that this image is *"how it was"* as valid when faced with the digitally created fictions of Crewdson, Gursky, and Wall?

No longer limited to capturing *"how it was"* or is, these images are entirely dependant on the individual viewer (and their cultural grammar) to establish their

---

[61] Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 45.
[62] Ibid.

meaning. Despite separating the photograph from 'reality', these image-makers don't leave us in un-reality. Their makers utilize Hollywood iconography to depict popular cultural archetypes both not entirely unfamiliar and yet not quite place-able, with their own, recognizable grammar. In other words, this Hollywood iconography operates as souvenirs within the work of these artists to co-produce the narrative that gives the photo its context and resonance:

> The souvenir must be removed from its context in order to serve as a trace of it, but it must be restored through narrative and/or reverie. What it is restored to is not an "authentic," that is, a native, context of origin but an imaginary context of origin whose chief subject is a projection of the possessor's childhood…. …the restoration of the souvenir is a conservative idealization of the past and the distanced for the purposes of a present ideology. We thus might say that all souvenirs are souvenirs of a nature which has been invented by ideology. This conclusion speaks…to the broader tendency to place all things natural at one degree of removal from the present flow of events and thereby to objectify them.[63]

In fact, we can see the literal borrowing and reconfiguration of the iconography of the cinema as a borrowing of the souvenirs of our collective un-past—pasts un-lived and not fully experienced but for looking. These bits of our cultural memories that we cannot fully remember, that we cannot fully access for the brief time that they flitted across our visual cortex, was not perhaps not quite long enough to imprint on our consciousnesses, but enough to embed them in our unconscious. They are the letters and words of our visual grammar, our collective cultural language through which we see the world, reality.

These bits of iconic imagery—a shaft of light, a woman looking toward the sky, a house in suburbia, could they be the souvenirs we are left to interpret? Each element removed from its original 'place' within our universal cuturality and used within the context of the collection of the photograph to create the image, which we must re-create

---

[63] Stewart, *On Longing,* 150.

and individually narrate according to our own personal ideologies. And which these artists manipulate to create, with the viewer, new understandings of the 'real' as viewed through the medium of photography. The narrative, built through shared iconography and cultural memory as well as the artist's description of 'what has been', has always been 'the code' embedded within and without the photograph.
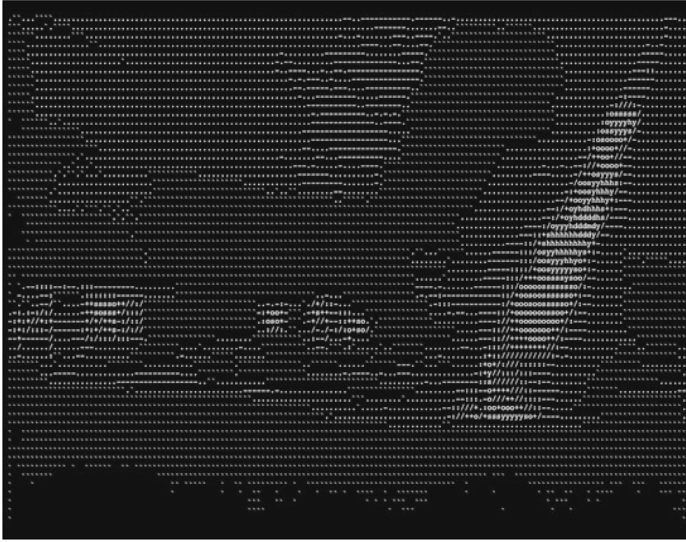
Figures

Figure II.1 Gregory Crewdson,
 Untitled, (Figure II.2) 1998-2002,
'Twilight' Series,
Shown as processed through an ASCII filter (http://www.glassgiant.com/ascii/).
http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_lJX6gvbjS-
0/TKqZeEo7f6I/AAAAAAAAAHA/SfMoFpXiw_A/s1600/Gregory+Crewdson+2.jpg

Figure II.2 Gregory Crewdson,
Untitled, 1998-2002,
'Twilight' Series,
121x 152.4 cm Digital C-print.
http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_lJX6gvbjS-
0/TKqZeEo7f6I/AAAAAAAAAHA/SfMoFpXiw_A/s1600/Gregory+Crewdson+2.jpg

Figure II.3 Gregory Crewdson,
Untitled, 2003-2005,
'Beneath the Roses' Series,
144.8 x 223.5 cm, Digital C-print.
http://www.fotomuseum.ch/presse/0606_GC/04.BeneathTheRoses,300dpi.jpg

Figure II.4 Jeff Wall,
*A View from an Apartment***,** 2004-2005,
167 x 244 cm, Transparency in lightbox.
http://www.tate.org.uk/images/cms/12851w_wall1.jpg

Figure II.5 Jeff Wall,
In Front of a Nightclub, 2006,
226 x 360.8 cm, Transparency in lightbox.
http://db-artmag.com/archiv/assets/images/561/34.jpg
Collection of the Pilara Family Foundation.

Figure II.6 Andreas Gursky,
99 Cent., 1999,
207 x 337 cm.
http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2001/gursky/images/99cent_pop.jpg

Figure II.7 Andreas Gursky,
Kuwait Stock Exchange, 2007,
295.1 x 222 cm.
http://static.royalacademy.org.uk/images/width270/screen-shot-2010-11-09-at-12-39-32-11561.png

III. Conclusion

In the images of Crewdson, Gursky, and Wall we are seeing the new mythology, the new cultural narrative, a self-reflexive look at the images that create our cultural consciousness. Although not immediately identifiable to all who view these three artists' work, anyone who experienced cinema in the late 1970s through today will sense at least sub-consciously, if not intellectually, then on some visceral level be made at least semi-aware of the similarities and the feelings of similitude in the experiencing of these images.

With these pictures, these artists are reflecting our collective/universal memory with the form of souvenirs stirring the desire of nostalgia of the cinema back to us in lieu of natural representations of scenes that never were. Or perhaps the artifice of Hollywood aesthetics has become our image of our world. Has the retouched, dramatically lit, highly detailed tableau of Hollywood and advertising popular imagery led us to desire what cannot possibly exist in nature? It is possible that these 'almost reals' have become our 'real?' At the very least we have to long for these 'reals' and to covet them to be our own.

More importantly these photographers have answered the question of 'Art' vs. the mechanical operations of the operator in photography. These artists are engaging in a discourse of artifice, questioning the position of photographs as documents of *how it was*. They have returned, via novel production processes, to the subject and to the discourse of the artifice, of subjecthood. Through the work of these artists—Crewdson, Gursky, and Wall—the narrative, however nebulous and elusive in its current presentation, has returned to Fine Art. In doing so they have created their own perfect worlds that we can believe could actually exist or could not.

My final question then is why do scholars continue the comparison of the new photography to painting. If what Galassi states still rings true that "In our cultural hierarchy, to draw a relationship between the works of any photographer and any painter is inherently to flatter the former"[64] then the answer is clear—to elevate the art of the photographer and the medium of photography. Through the use of digital processes these artists have moved beyond the constraints, the limits of photography, and in fact the Barthian accusation of merely depicting the real. Their work forces us to re-examine the medium of photography as a documentarian of the real and ultimately calls for a new understanding of the medium. Photographs were never documents of what has been, but were always 'shared hallucinations' dependent on shared cultural iconography to produce their narratives of what might have been.

---

[64] Galassi, "Unorthodox," 31.

Bibliography

Apter, Emily. "The Aesthetics of Critical Habitats," *October,* vol. 99, (Winter, 2002), 21-
 44. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/779123 Web. 1 October 2010.

Banks, Russell. "Gregory Crewdson: Beneath the Roses," *Beneath The Roses*.
 Photographs by Gregory Crewdson. Essay by Russell Banks. New York: Abrams,
 2008. Print.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections On Photography*. Translated by Richard
 Howard. New York : Hill and Wang, 1981. Print.

_____ "Rhetoric of the Image." *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New
 York: Hill and Wang, 1977. Print.

_____ "The Photographic Message." *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath.
 New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. Print.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. The Body, in Theory. Translated by Sheila
 Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. Print.

Chuang, Joshua. "It's Complicated," in *First doubt: Optical Confusion in Modern
 Photography:Selections from the Allan Chasanoff Collection.* New Haven: Yale
 University Art Gallery: Distributed by Yale University Press, 2008. Print.

Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle.* Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. New
 York: Zone Books, 1994. Print.

Cadeau, Charmaine. "Revisiting Autonomies in the Wake of Postmodernism," *Journal of
 Modern Literature*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Fall, 2007), 177-183 JSTOR.
 http://www.jstor.org/stable/30053260 Web. 7 October 2010.

Carroll, Noël. "Art and Globalization: Then and Now," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art
 Criticism*, vol. 65, no. 1, Special Issue: Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics
 (Winter, 2007), 131-143. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4622217 Web. 7
 October 2010.

Clover, Joshua. "Marx and Coca-Cola: Cinema for a New Grand Game," *Film Quarterly,*
 vol. 62, no. 4 (Summer, 2009), 6-9. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40301349
 Web. 15 October 2010.

Costello, Diarmuid. "On the Very Idea of a 'Specific' Medium: Michael Fried and Stanley
 Cavell on Painting and Photography as Arts," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 34, no. 2
 (Winter, 2008), 274-312. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20184384 Web. 17
 September 2010.

Crewdson, Gregory. "Interview With Gregory Crewdson." Outtakes from the show *Close
 Up: Photographers at Work*. Producer: Susannah Ludwig. Director: Rebecca
 Dreyfus. Ovation TV. Maysles Films, New York : 2008.
 http://community.ovationtv.com/_Interview-With-Gregory
 Crewdson/video/178577/16878.html Web. 14 November 2009.

db artmag, "Pictures Like Novels An Interview with Jeff Wall," 2007.
 http://www.db-artmag.com/archiv/2007/e/5/1/561.html,Web. 14 November 2009.

Diers, Michael. "Bilder nach (Film-)Bildern oder Andreas Gursky und die Interferenzen
 von Fotografie und Film," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 66 Bd., H. 3 (2003),
 393-408. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20055350 Web. 1 October 2010.

Duttlinger, Carolin. "Imaginary Encounters: Walter Benjamin and the Aura of
        Photography," *Poetics Today,* vol. 29, no. 1, Photography in Fiction (Spring,
        2008), 79-101. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40280816 Web. 20 October
        2010.

Epson, Inc. "Epson.com." Beneath The Roses/Epson. Available from
        http://epson.ipressroom.com/pr/epson/Beneath_the_Roses.aspx Web. 20 January
        2010.

Fried, Michael. *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*. Yale University Press,
        2008. Print.

Galassi, Peter. "Unorthodox," in *Jeff Wall*, exhibition. catalogue (New York: Museum of
        Modern Art, 2007). Print.

_____"Gursky's World," in *Andreas Gursky*, exhibition catalogue (New York:
        Museum of Modern Art, 2001). Print.

Gregory Crewdson 1985-2005. Photographs by Gregory Crewdson. Edited by Stephan
        Berg. Essays by Martin Hentschel, Martin Hochleitner, Urs Stahel and Stephan
        Berg. Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2005. Print.

Gursky, Andreas, An Interview with Veit Gorner. Translated excerpt posted online:
        http://www.postmedia.net/999/gursky.htm Web. 20 January 2010.

Gursky, Andreas and Veit Görner and Annelie Lütgens, *Andreas Gursky: Fotografien
        1994-1998*, exhibition catalogue (Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 1998). Print.

Jensen, Robert. "Against Photography. Reading Barthes on the Photograph," in *Writing
        Places and Mapping Words*, eds. David Jarrett, Tadeusz Rachwal, and Tadeusz
        Slawek. (Wydawnictwo: University of Silesia Press, 1996). Print.

_____"The Photographic Grotesque," *exposure*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2003): 43-52.
        Print.

Koepnick, Lutz. "Photographs and Memories," *South Central Review,* vol. 21, No. 1
        (Spring, 2004), 94-129. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40039828 Web. 18
        October 2010.

Kraemer, Thomas. "Printing Enters the Jet Age: How today's computer printers came to
        eject microscopic dots with amazing precision" *Invention & Technology
        Magazine* 16: 4 (2001).
        http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/it/2001/4/2001_4_18.shtml.
        Web. 17 February 2010.

Lubow, Arthur. "The Luminist." *New York Times*, Feb. 25 2007.
        http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/25/magazine/25Wall.t.html?pagewanted=all
        Web. 2 April 2010.

_____"Photographic Expressionism." Rev. of the photography of Andreas
        Gursky (MOMA 3/4/2001-5/15/2001). *The Threepenny Review* No. 88 (Winter,
        2002), 28. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4385100 Web. 2 April 2010.

Marples, Gareth. "The History of Printers – Developing an Image." The History Of.
        Available from http://www.thehistoryof.net/history-of-printers.html. Web. 15
        March 2010.

Martin, Stewart. "Wall's Tableau Mort," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1, Jeff Wall
        Special Issue (2007), 119-133. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4500049 Web.
        18 October 2010.

Newman, Michael. *Jeff Wall : Works and Collected Writings*. (Barcelona: Poligrafa Ediciones Sa, 2007). Print.

Ohlin, Alix. "Andreas Gursky and the Contemporary Sublime." *Art Journal* 61, no. 4 (Winter, 2002): 22-35. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 November 2009. http://www.jstor.org/stable/778148

Olin, Margaret "Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes's "Mistaken" Identification." *Representations*, 80 (Autumn, 2002), 99-118. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176056 Web. 18 October 2010.

"Photography." Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2010. Merriam-Webster Online. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/photography Web. 11 February 2010.

Saltz, Jerry. "It's Boring at the Top: Is Andreas Gursky the highest-priced photographer alive—running out of ideas?" Pub. May 13, 2007 *New York Magazine*. http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/31785/ Web. 14 November 2009.

Schwarz, Arturo. The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, 2nd revised edition. New York: Abrams, 1970. Print.

"Snap Judgements." *The Genius of Photography,* episode 6. Producer: Tim Kirby and Debbie Lee; Director: Debbie Lee. BBC 2 / BBC 4. Outright Distribution. Dec. 2006. TV.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. 1st Anchor Books ed. New York: Anchor Books, 1990. Print.

Srivatsan, R. "Photography and Society: Icon Building in Action," *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 26, No. 11/12, Annual Number (Mar., 1991), 771-773+775-777+779-781+783-788. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4397434 Web. 20 October 2010.

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984. Print.

Wall, Jeff. *Jeff Wall : Photographs 1978-2004*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2005. Print.

VITA

Melissa A. Schwartz   October 28, 1968, Trenton, New Jersey

Education

MFA in Studio Art   2005-2008
University of Kentucky

B.A. in Theatre/Film   1986-1990
Vassar College

Experience

Instructor – Digital Media   2008-2011
University of Kentucky

Teaching Assistant (Instructor of Record)   2006-2008
University of Kentucky

President – Art Graduate Student Association, (AGSA).   2006-2007
University of Kentucky

Assistant Gallery Director – Tuska Center for Contemporary Art.   2005-2006
University of Kentucky

Assistant to the Visual Resources Curator   2005
University of Kentucky

Honors

Graduate Teaching Assistantship/Tuition Scholarship   2006-2008
University of Kentucky

Melissa A. Schwartz