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Washington University in St Louis
Graduate School of Art

Of Ghosts and Garage Sales: The painted realizations of
reflective nostalgia

Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld

A thesis presented to the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
In partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Fine Arts

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*"My father and uncle lift his chair
onto the porch, arrange his things*

*near the place his feet would be.
He poses our only portrait – my father
sitting, Mama beside him, and me
in between. I watch him bother*

*the space for his knees, shins, scratching air
as-years later- I'd itch for what's not there."*¹

Abstract

Painted from the lost snapshot photograph collections of strangers, the *Testimonial* paintings represent both the mythical potential of earlier times and the maddening reality that no matter what details are revealed, they can only ever be ghosts of the glories and tragedies that preceded our own. In the search for their stories, for their truths, for their absent memories, everything and everyone that we could have known lies dormant. The ghosts, the legion of “selves” arise from the questions asked of the paintings, and through the invented answers that activate the fractured past. In order to do this, I analyze the concepts of postmemory and reflective nostalgia, exploring how they manifest as paintings.

Chapter 1 | Introduction

In the *Testimonial* paintings, these amicable, displaced ghosts, are painted to unite lost histories and provoke the viewer to recall their own past. At heart, they are like a picture-postcard from a beach house in the *Twilight Zone*, pushing us to create our own version of the past and be the victors of own narrative.

The stories that appear in the *Testimonial* paintings (Figures 1, 2, and 3) are not mine to tell. Instead, they reflect the lives of those who I will never meet, but who live on through family photographs since discarded. These paintings are my effort to imagine and connect with all that might have existed had their history taken a different course. In making the *Testimonial* paintings, I address the intersections of postmemory, history, and nostalgia and demonstrate why they are inherently problematic. These paintings reflect a collage of worlds that once existed, but never intersected. By placing these images together, the viewer is given the opportunity to write an inexhaustible number of fictions, giving them a sense of energy and potential. Their primary function is to make a visual manifestation of that flawed, variable family history that is unavailable to so many. It bypasses the grand fantasies favored by the history textbooks in favor of the mythological ordinary.

As the third-generation product of survivors of bigotry in Europe, history holds a unique meaning in my life. The stories of my generations past are not so clear. In my life, and the lives of so many children of diaspora and the pogroms of eastern Europe, those in our family who know who we are and where we come from are silent. Thus, in my own effort to articulate the absences, I perpetually seek out secondary sources – writings,

photographs, paintings – to attempt to connect to the past while respecting the silence. For many who view the *Testimonial* paintings, they will be reminded of their own family's history. Fortunately, for them, they know what they will see when they look back.

Chapter 2 | Everything looks worse in black-and-white: Tenets of snapshot photography

When people visit my studio and see the binder clips stuffed with photographs, they rarely fail to ask me what exactly about *these* photographs (color snapshots from the mid- to late-20th century) I find so magnetic. My most common answer is that I am working with the kind of photographs that my father's family failed to take.² Of course, my answer is not an entirely honest one. Some snapshots exist of my father and uncles as children, but there is virtually nothing from before.

I am interested in collecting and studying strangers' photographs from those peculiar post-war years because they don't bear the same sense of foreboding as those that my family might have made. The act of collecting photographs that are not Jewish or European, or even from the war years allows me to explore a safer history, to build on a past where images of corpses and stars and graffiti are not waiting. The images in my paintings come from the life in America desired by those who didn't escape, the life that my Baba and Zeyde got.

Snapshot photography was an astronomically popular means of interacting with the world during the 20th century. In America specifically, the average family snapshot collection contains more than 3,000 photographs, usually kept in albums, frames, and shoeboxes.³ These collections engage in the "home mode" of communication (as opposed to the more public means of transmitting information).⁴ Scholars have found that, in spite

of the creative potential inherent in the act of visual representation, most amateur photographic production adheres with surprising regularity to the following formula:

They are made at eye level, from the front and center, from the middle distance, and generally in bright, outdoor light. Yet, because snapshotters are almost totally concerned with centering the subject, the forms at the edges are accidental, unexpected, unstructured, and-by any traditional standards of pictorial rightness-incorrect.⁵

Further, certain aspects of family life were almost universally accepted as being indispensable within the family collection, while other motifs were kept from these collections with equal constancy. In general, the family is photographed in the act of vehemently adhering to the societal ideals of unity and happiness. Rather than showing the “reality” of the family’s existence, snapshots tend to construct new realities made up of “[...] idealized memory stories [...]”⁶

Certain events are more vital to the family’s idealized narrative history than others. Some of the most heavily photographed periods in a person’s life occur within the first few weeks of their lives, with the single most common photo (in one particular survey of family albums) being a multigenerational shot of a baby being held by a parent (or other relative) who stands in front of the home with their face turned toward the camera (Figures 4 and 5). This particular trope encompasses many of the most important relational motifs that the family hopes will define the new baby’s life: an intergenerational bond of kinship, an accumulation of material goods, ties with the land, and attractive aesthetic preferences.⁷ It is culturally accepted that snapshots and home movies are made to celebrate certain relationships, and to document the achievements and milestones of people who are precious to the taker and viewers of the collection. As a whole, each family’s individual snapshot collection “[...] bear[s] symbolic witness to the

juxtaposition of significant people and significant places, and to commemorate the acquisition of certain important pieces of material culture.”⁸

Snapshot collections are by no means all encompassing, meaning that it is just as important to note the types of events that are intentionally left out of (or removed from) the collection. Such exclusions are just as important to the family’s motives as those pictures that are included. . Some photographs are removed from the album after being developed, while others are intentionally not snapped in the first place. Rarely do photos record anything that might hint that the family is in turmoil or conflict. According to certain “cultural codes” it is inappropriate to show any moments of discordant family interaction, such as instances of teen-angst or youthful disobedience.⁹ Alternately, in the event that a photograph does get snapped that shows the family acting against the established norms, or that features someone that the family doesn’t wish to include, an “editing event” might take place.¹⁰ The fact that certain people or events might be so forcefully removed from albums after previously being included in them speaks to the fact that the family snapshot collection is meant to display a constructed past reality that serves the goals of its current and future members.

Even though these photograph collections often feature people who are not members of the nuclear family the collections are customarily private. While most houses will have a few snaps framed and hung on a wall or placed on a piano lid, the vast majority of the collection spends most of its time safe between the covers of albums or in shoe boxes underneath beds. The stereotypical privacy enacted by the familial bodies can only be understood by the family that made (and features in) them: “The spectator of the family gaze is the family itself. [...] Thus, the family is the producer, performer, and

audience of snapshot photography.”¹¹ Much of the reason behind the desire for privacy lies in the reality that, for the most part, the photographs are quite meaningless when deprived of their narrative contexts. Quite simply, “[we] surround the pictures with our stories.”¹²

Overall, family snapshot collections are intended to serve as records of the family’s history of togetherness, with the purpose that the ancestral unity will provide a stable platform for a similar unity in the future. In reality, however, the historical unity is only a construction of fragmented moments, arranged to mimic the appearances of societal conventions. In the hands of older members, each snapshot in the collection has the potential to instill continuity in the ancestral narrative by inspiring dialogue between older and younger members, inspiring new photographic activity. This kind of intergenerational contact also revives memories that serve to “[...] reify a sense of belonging, social affiliation, and of personal existence.” Even though people seem to habitually replace the word “photograph” with the word “memory”, the two are by no means interchangeable. Photographs can only be documents of memory when possessed by those for whom they can trigger the retrieval of a certain remembrance. Without the verbal context “[...] photography appears as a jumble that consists partly of garbage.”¹³ The link between the photographs and their adjoining memories can be severed naturally by the progression of time or when the snapshot collections are removed from their intended contexts. Such breaches in the “evidentiary” abilities of the photograph can cause problematic ruptures in the family’s narrative (Figures 6 and 7).

Without the web of ancestral memory and legend that surrounds a photographic collection in its proper setting, photographs can quickly become meaningless or banal.

Outside of the domestic context, the photographs can be subject to manipulation. Sometimes, snapshots enter the public sphere with the family's permission (such as when they are published in newspaper obituaries or articles about a deceased family member).¹⁴ Other times, snapshots enter the public sphere under politically charged circumstances, whether the family consented to their use or not. Because their context within the home is so easily recognized, they are often used to encourage viewers to identify with the people in the images. For example, newspapers published snapshots (rather than "passport" type images) following the detonation of a bomb in central London as a ploy to imbibe the deaths with a poignant and personal sense of witness.¹⁵ In these politically-motivated circumstances, the actual activities taking place in the snapshot matter less than the ability of the image to be identified as a product of home mode communication. The audience doesn't need to be able to discern the specific narrative inherent in the snapshot, only that the snapshot refers to people like the reader, and that whatever calamity has befallen the subject could just as easily have befallen the reader. In less politicized atmospheres, the family snapshot is of little concern to viewers outside of the family's social circle. In general, strangers lack the ability to connect with those they cannot identify.

Perhaps, people are generally uninterested in photographs outside of their own familial orbits because they do not understand the repercussions of the loss of such documents. On the whole, snapshots are very rarely dislodged from their domestic hiding places, making them less likely to be lost than other pieces of material culture of high value.¹⁶ Even outside of the family, snapshots can potentially acquire a different value within the context of an archive. In an ontological sense, a given photograph can

simultaneously exist as a documentary component of an archive and as a self-contained archive. Every photograph is, at its core, an index of the space that was in front of it. Without the classifications imposed on the snapshot by a family album or an archive, all that any given photograph can do is reproduce a set of particularities with equal weight. Without the attending memories, “[...] the external decoration [becomes] autonomous.”¹⁷ Some family snapshots are capable of re-gaining some of their lost context by being included in an external archive. Due to their ability to reinforce historical narratives, snapshots are often dealt with as “[...] pictorial testimonies of the existence of recorded facts.”¹⁸

While archivists’ recognition of the problematic malleability of displaced snapshots has led to a decrease in their roles in archives, their pliant nature has been an intriguing complication for museums and artists. The tension between the snapshot-as-domestic-archetype and the snapshot-as-individual-record is rich, and has informed the work of such influential contemporary artists as Christian Boltanski (Figure 8) and Gerhard Richter (Figure 9), and in the displays of many historical museums. One manifestation of this tension can be found at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. The “Tower of Faces” (Figure 10) rises from the very center of the museum, intersecting the chronology of visitors’ journey at multiple points. The Tower, which is reminiscent of the interior structure of a chimney, is crowded with sepia-toned photographs. Removed from their historical moorings, visitors often miss the haunting nature of the images. Even without knowing the haunting story behind the relocation of the images from their original locale, their similarity to contemporary photographic tropes makes them relatable to visitors, in the hopes that their individuality

will humanize the abstract numbers that characterize *Shoah* education.¹⁹ Just like the faces of the bombing victims in the British newspapers, the likenesses in the “Tower of Faces” have been dislodged from their ancestral narratives for the purpose of humanizing tragedy. While this is certainly a worthy goal, the complexity of each person is lost in the process; they simply become a platform for visitors to project themselves onto.

There is another angle from which one should look at the disconnect between snapshot albums and ancestral contexts. Earlier in this section, I noted Chalfen’s estimate on the size of the average family snapshot collection. What happens when the opposite is true, when the families survive but their photographs do not? What sort of familial moorings are lost without the historically significant documentation of memory, heritage, and togetherness? It is not altogether uncommon for refugees to forsake their possessions when they are forced to leave their homes under duress. It seems that whenever possible, photographs are smuggled out, even when doing so poses a risk to the family. For example, the images displayed in the “Tower of Faces” are not of random Jews in pre-war Europe, as one might assume. In reality, they were all taken in Ejszyzski, a *shtetl* in Lithuania, where Yaffa Eliach, one of few residents to survive the war, saved them.²⁰ Roman Vishniac’s shots of the Vilna Jewish community survived the war by being smuggled to Cuba by a friend of the photographer, who transported them in spite of great personal danger (Figure 11).²¹ In spite of the determination with which many refugees preserved their ancestral histories and identities, many, if not most survivors of the *Shoah* have nothing left to document their identities before the war.²²

To arrive in a new country with no trace of the old must have been a singularly disconcerting experience. According to Susan Stewart “We do not need or desire

souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of the narrative.”²³ Within the context of the *Shoah* specifically, the historical facts of one’s ancestry are vital because of the ability of ancestral fate to shape current sensibilities.²⁴ For many second and third generation American Jews, what is lacking is not the meta-narrative, but the smaller, less universal narratives and material traces that our parents and grandparents kept hidden from us. Without the photographs confirming the existence of the family in pre-war Europe, it begins to seem as if the family had its genesis in 1945. The lack of familial context gives the term “pre-war” an almost mythological sensibility.²⁵

According to Marianne Hirsch, archives of amateur photographs that survived the *Shoah* cause photography to be “[...] precisely the medium connecting memory and postmemory. According to Marianne Hirsch, archives of amateur photographs that survived the *Shoah* cause photography to be “[...] precisely the medium connecting memory and postmemory. As traces, photographs record both life (the rays connecting the body to the eye) and death (the moment they record becomes fixed with the very act of recording).”²⁶ While I agree with Hirsch that photographs can be simultaneous reflections of both lives and deaths, I disagree that they are somehow the most fitting medium to describe the phenomenon of postmemory.

Chapter 3 | This comes from far away: A tripartite appraisal of temporal distance

The *Testimonial* paintings are, at the foundational level, representations of representations. The viewer experiences them at a distance that is doubly-mediated. Unlike paintings made “from life”, these should be read as not primary, or even secondary, but tertiary expressions of visual and historical phenomena. The separation from the authentic experience of the primary event memorialized within the painted borders is meaningful because they serve not as accounts of my observations from life, nor as souvenirs of my own personal recollections. Rather, their perceptual separation from their referents causes them to be tokens of postmemory. In order to better demonstrate this distance, I have created a system to define each level of separation between the actual, lived experience that can be seen *through* the photographs, and which are re-created in the final painted iterations. The three levels to be discussed are called the “primary event”, the “secondary document” (or documentation), and the “tertiary representation”. Each specific level has different attributes and implications, and each is significant in the final process of creating the painting.

The situation that I have titled the “primary event” might best be described as the first-hand experience of an event that was photographed. To borrow from Barthes: if one accepts that “[...] the photograph is invisible: it is not what we see [,]” then the primary event is the referent that is seen through the photograph, and which by “adhering” to the surface renders the photograph invisible.²⁷ Even though the photographer encountered or

participated in the event personally, their knowledge of the exact instant recorded is invariably mediated by the camera itself. In many of the photographs, the “snapshooter” was made into a momentary outsider because they (for any number of reasons) stepped ceased their participation to take the photograph.²⁸ Thus, their point of view on (or experiences or memories of) that event can never be exactly the same as that of those people who appear in the photograph. The secondary documents that they produce “[...] do not present us with things as they really [were] but rather with the photographer’s conception or interpretation of them, that which we get from a photograph is not our own view of the world but his.”²⁹ The history that one looks into when viewing a photograph could only be experienced primarily and sensorially once, and the histories that are depicted in the secondary and tertiary representations can only be perceived and interpreted through the fragments left by those who were present.

If the eventuality recorded in the photographs constitutes the “primary” event, then the photograph itself is the result of that event. Objects occupying this particular degree of distance from the primary event itself are called “secondary documents”. I opted for this title because it’s existence is the consequence of a causal relationship with the primary event itself (in which the photographer serves as a catalyst). Kendall L. Walton, in his theory of causation posited that “[...] to see something is to have visual experiences which are caused, in a certain manner, by what is seen.”³⁰ The photograph’s ability to exist is dependent on the event itself actually happening.

According to Barthes “[the] photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both [...]”³¹ The family photographs do have retain the transparent quality alleged by both Walton and Barthes,

but this transparency should not be mistaken for intimacy. The world in the secondary document cannot be touched or re-experienced by the viewer. The only experience that it is capable of bestowing on those who see it is the experience of seeing snapshot itself, which generally carries with it very little gravity. This is especially true when one encounters snapshots outside of their intended exhibition spaces: the homes of the families they show. In general, family photographs are taken as tokens of experiences meant to help participants remember some episode later. Unlike snapshots taken for artistic or journalistic purposes “the spectator of the photographic ‘family gaze’ is the family itself.”³² Once the photograph is dislodged from its intended context in the family narrative, the subjective reality within its frame is made increasingly fragmentary. Once the memories that the family projected onto it have been dislodged, its situational legibility is diminished. Photographs may, quite literally allow us to see that which was photographed, but alone our acutely limited understanding of its significance widens our metaphorical distance from any “reality” that it might convey.³³

The third degree of distance outlined in this model is the paintings that are made from the collection of found photographs. These paintings constitute what I have designated as the “tertiary representations”. The primary event is made up of firsthand, immediate experiences from which a photograph was made; the secondary document is the photographic representation of the event itself, so the tertiary representations, the paintings, are actually representations of representations. This convoluted remoteness makes any “truth” that one could claim to glean from the paintings decidedly suspect. The images have lost any controversial claim to documentary weight, their plausibility. This skepticism that exists between the paintings and the viewer (that is perhaps unlike

the presumptive trust that might exist between a viewer and a family photograph) is not meant to be insidious or secretive. Metaphorically, the intense degree of mediation between the painting's viewers and the primary events is symbolic of the degree of mediation between those who experience postmemory, and the events that precipitated their predicament. The viewer understands that they are not seeing the thing itself, just like the children of exilic and diasporic populations understand that they do not endure the event itself.³⁴

The speculative realities represented are personified by my attention to the secondary documents, the tenor of their painterly abstraction and by the façade-like “incursions” that intervene between the viewer and any forms that may have been located at a corresponding point in the secondary document. The geometric abstraction evident in the paintings is one byproduct of the translation that takes place when a small photographic print is filtered through my mind, eyes, and hands. Despite this level of abstraction, the paintings are made to be close likenesses of the secondary documents that they are reliant on. Analog home-mode photographs are often blurred, damaged or confusingly cropped in ways that make identifying various structures difficult. Many were taken quickly, without the kind of intentional lighting and mechanical stabilizers that imbue professional photographs with such cutting clarity.³⁵ The resultant imprecision requires (or allows) me to compensate for the ambiguities, to take certain visual liberties in my translation. An object which, in front of the photographer's lens might have actually been a transparent plastic sleeve housing a stale loaf of Wonderbread (as in the picnic still-life in *In Lieu of Testimony 4* (Figure 12) or a ticket stub from the Met (as in

In Lieu of Testimony: 1 (Figure 1)) is broken down to its component shapes and hues in an effort to visually define matter whose identity is irrecoverable.

The nebulous areas that occurred even in the secondary document (which later required such arduous painterly definition at the tertiary level) prove Sontag's assertion that any insight gained from a photograph is "[...] knowledge at bargain prices—a semblance of knowledge [...]." ³⁶ At the tertiary distance, we can see only the skin of the reality in the primary event. Yes, that event *might* have looked something like it does in the painting, but the heavily mediated state of the image deems any assumptions illusory at best. The surface of the painting guarantees that it, unlike its subject, is opaque. ³⁷

In reality, no photograph (and certainly no badly handled Kodachrome print) can reliably restate visual conditions as they would have been seen first-hand, so, as with much historical evidence, the records from which the *Testimonial* paintings are made is faulty. Here is where the alert viewer can unveil my personal prejudices, presumptions, and even memories. When an obviously flawed photograph is selected for painted reproduction, a series of decisions are made: should the flaw be reproduced with equal conviction as the straightforward sections of the photo? Should it be excised from the scene, replaced or covered with alternate imagery? Can it (or should it) be manipulated into a more intelligible structure? That the flaws should be dealt with at all speaks to my use of the photograph as source material (Figure 13).

The impact of this blurring of the documented "truth" is, at first glance, virtually negligible. What difference does it make for a flowered dress to become a plain one? What difference is there between a liquor bottle branded with a recognizable insignia, and one whose insignia is subtly camouflaged as part of the bottle that it adorns? Ostensibly,

there isn't one. The significance is more pronounced when one thinks about how the individuals whose bodies, actions, and possessions have been represented might have defined and announced aspects of their individuality by the materials with which they surrounded themselves. To alter the perceptual essences of these objects and appearances would be to represent them as the abstracted tropes that one might presume that they signify. If one aim of the *Testimonial* paintings is to present a fragmentary understanding that each figure was an individual (in spite of their current state of anonymity), it is vital that I focus not only on the "[...] significant external aspects of a person, such as physiognomy," but also that I put equal effort into my portrayal of "[...] features such as status and class through the use of props, clothing, pose and stance [...]."»³⁸ In such an anonymous painting, I have found that as much can be learned or guessed at about a figure based on their surroundings as from their facial features.

To wantonly generalize in paint the tenuous contextual scraps that have endured in the secondary documents would cheapen the individuality of the moments that they represent. While the compositional and conceptual betterment of the painting and its mission take precedence over those of the secondary documents, the information provided by the secondary documents must either bear some kinship to its source, or must quite conspicuously declare any departure from it. The operative word governing the extent to which the painting mimics the photograph is *some*. Unlike a photograph, there is nothing empirical or mechanical about a painting (or a painter, such as myself). Perception and representation are far more complex than simply "painting things how one sees them." Rather, to borrow from Michael Baxandall's explanation of Chardin's *A Lady Taking Tea* (Figure 14):

What we have in *A Lady Taking Tea* is an enacted record of attention which we ourselves, directed by distinctness and other things, summarily re-enact, and that narrative of attention is heavily loaded: it has foci, privileged points of fixation, failures, characteristic modes of relaxation, awareness of contrasts, and curiosity in what it does not succeed in knowing.³⁹

Just as with Chardin's *Lady*, the figures, objects and atmospheres in the *Testimonial* paintings (and arguably in all other paintings) are records of my limited capacity for attention, action, exploration and accuracy. Not all aspects of my paintings have been given equal attention; to do so would be functionally impossible. The aspects detailed by Baxandall speak to the fact that a painting, even one of a static photograph, is more of a record of the painter's attention to a visual phenomenon, than it is a record of the phenomenon (or even the appearance of the phenomenon) itself. In this way, the painting as observed by the viewer is distant from everything that caused the painting to exist.

. The paintings do not carry any claims of objectivity, nor do they actually replicate their photographic references. Although I try to paint "honestly", my work is most closely made in a mode that Edwin Dickinson (Figure 15) would call "working creatively from nature": a means by which a painter takes aspects from their observations of "nature" (in my paintings one could equate nature to the photograph) but also deviates from it.⁴⁰ They are, quite unconditionally, not photorealistic. Nothing is communicated on the painted surface that the human eye could not have taken account of had it been privy to the primary event as it unfolded. Precisely realized areas are often juxtaposed with flatly abstracted ones, evidence that not all photographs contain the same amount of observable information. This seemingly contrary departure from 20th century photorealism is not a matter of taste. It is simply my assertion that these are not photographs.

In absconding from the goals of photographic actuation, and embracing the limits and realities involved in making paintings in the circuitous manner described above, the paintings symbolize a break with the unknowable historical narratives pictured in the secondary documents.⁴¹ The feeling of historical impenetrability is enhanced by the “incursions” (Figure 15), where fragments based on other photographs have been painted over sections of the base image, often in violation of the perspectival rules of the original picture plane. These slices of pictorial discontinuity are painted so as to obscure any visual information that was painted underneath them. These discontinuities are meant to cause the viewer to question the nature of what they are seeing.

According to Barthes, a given photograph “[...] does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*.”⁴² With the added distance inherent in the paintings, a new factor joins that which “has been” and that which is no longer: the vivid potential of that which *could* have been. The connection of disparate histories creates a speculative reality that could only materialize in a tertiary representation. If the secondary document, the snapshot, documents the circumstance to which it is inherently tied, then at virtually no point could it come into contact with any embodiment of a reality other than the one from which it came.⁴³

By virtue of its distance from the linear primary event of the on which it is based, the tertiary document gains the ability to become a platform for the representational conflation of dissimilar histories. People who could not possibly have ever met can now stand side by side, perhaps inspiring viewers to weave a tale in which the two unrelated characters coexist. Of course, this kind of introduction can manifest with endless presentations in almost any media. At this distance, the tactile media (painting, collage,

sculpture, etc.) present a parallel prospect: that once again this now-fragmentary evidence can be reintroduced to interactive human contact.

By virtue of its temporal distance from the primary event of the on which it is based, the tertiary document gains the ability to become a platform for the representational conflation of dissimilar histories. People who could not possibly have ever met can now stand side by side, perhaps inspiring viewers to weave a tale in which the two unrelated characters coexist. Of course, this kind of introduction can manifest with endless presentations in almost any media. At this distance, the tactile media (painting, collage, sculpture, etc.) present a parallel prospect: that once again this now-fragmentary evidence can be reintroduced to interactive human contact. Through the process of sketching, painting, manipulating, and superimposing, events that had been photographically placed in suspended animation come into contact with impossible eventualities. The impossibility (or rather extreme improbability) of this type of contact holds endless artistic outcomes. It is ironic that, by putting images near one another (or overlapping one another), viewers gain the ability to fashion for themselves any number of tales to explain the proximity and visual similarity of figures and habitats that most likely were never acquainted with one another.

In Steven Spielberg's critically acclaimed film *Schindler's List*, the inclusion of one transient camera-pass over prop-piles of confiscated possessions allowed his audience to glimpse something that many of them had spent their lives missing: relics of their ancestral narratives in the "old country". Among the piles, the camera briefly shows a small hoard of stolen black-and-white photographs. For me, this moment was tantalizing. If I could only reach through the camera, I could save them. Candlesticks,

clothing, even the painstakingly transcribed Torah scrolls could be replaced, but the photographs were unique evidence, *proof* that our lost world actually existed. The potential lost when family snapshot collections are destroyed is unknowable. The snapshots that incorporate the secondary documentation partially retain this potential. They are able to, despite their anonymity, act as “proof of presence,” allowing the snapshot the unique ability to “[...] [bring] a person there into actual contact with the [beholder].”⁴⁴ Two particular questions should be asked with regards to the viability of “proof of presence”: First, do the paintings retain this evidentiary ability? And second, what kind of implications does the possibility of “contact” between viewer and anonymous stranger contain?

With regards to the first question, the paintings do not (due to their tertiary position) hold the same testimonial weight that the secondary documents might. According to Freeland, images that prove the (past) presence of a given individual do so by showing that a person existed, “[...] that he or she is or was *there*,” and that the form that is shown is actually a person, “that there is [or was] a *person* there.”⁴⁵ The fact that the paintings depicts manipulated, collage-like spaces nullifies their ability to prove that the figures (each of which is a likeness of an image taken of someone present at the primary event) were ever in a given place, or in any given company.⁴⁶ Even in their artistically mediated forms, however, the paintings retain their ability to allude to the existence (or historical existence) of the individual pictured. Of course, this tempts the standard argument that photographs have an everlasting tie to their referents, due to the fact that, at the time they were recorded, they came into direct contact with the subject. Essentially, Freeland’s affirmation that paintings are capable of being “proof” that their

subject existed is not unlike Walton's argument affirming the causal relationship between a referent and a photograph. While paintings have never held such empirical ties to the realities they seek to represent, the thesis paintings show that an image of an individual existed (whether or not the viewer then assumes that an individual with a comparable countenance must have existed in order for the photograph to exist is, of course, the viewer's prerogative). After all, Walton admitted that certain paintings also shared a degree of causality with their long-dead subjects.⁴⁷

The idea that a spectator can, by looking at either a painted or a photographic image of another person, achieve some sort of "magical" contact with them is one of the most intriguing reasons for making a picture.⁴⁸ Of course, in any image, painted or photographic, there is information to be found. Historically, portraiture and genre scenes (two of the most significant influences in the thesis paintings) were meant to communicate much more about their subjects than could be appraised at first glance. They afforded onlookers the opportunity to perceptually traverse time and space in order to commune with the figures and forms represented in the picture in front of them. So, by translating the family photographs of strangers into a similar medium, the viewer has the ability to achieve a nostalgic (but ultimately fictional) contact with a series of approachable banalities.

Still, I do not deny that these images themselves are nothing if not pedestrian. Even with the conspicuous fictionalization of the incursions, where images plainly disparate ages, chromatic ranges, and subjects share a single picture plane, nothing overtly disturbing or magnificent takes place in these scenes. Rather, they afford the viewer a privileged moment of contact with the gloriously absurd familiarities to which

so many people lack. By problematizing certain areas, the viewer has license to fill in the gaps and apply their own reason to the logical incongruities. Intentionally congenial, the unpretentious interiors are meant to play the same role as the ubiquitous American welcome-mat. Metaphorically, they are an invitation for the viewers to come in, to make themselves at home. The contact they are afforded is certainly of a different tenor than that of a viewer whose personal and familial histories are secure in the archival record, indeed such paintings might not be as attractive to a viewer who is accustomed to seeing their forbears smiling out at them from the old neighborhood.

Chapter 4 | Rendering the ersatz archive: Processes and rules

According to Kracauer: “In a photograph, a person’s history is buried as if under a layer of snow.”⁴⁹ The history of a painting is, if possible, even more enigmatic. The *Testimonial* paintings are massively secretive: they hide not only their photographic histories, but also the elaborate process by which they were made. Even though it is invisible to viewers in the traditional settings of the gallery and the museum, their mechanisms (and the rules governing those mechanisms) have a subtle impact on the immediate associations and impacts that the viewer might be able to register. Rather than beginning at the easel or out in the landscape like most traditional painting practices, these pieces begin with a series of searches on the Internet.⁵⁰

While the original set of found photographs was the direct product of an insomnia-inspired pilgrimage to the Roanoke Star Antique Mall in Vinton, Virginia, the rest of the archival documents have been purchased in varying quantities from online consignment forums, namely Etsy and Ebay. Sellers on these sites very rarely provide any information on how they came to possess such large quantities of photographs, so the documents truly are divorced from their contexts.⁵¹ One of the first rules governing my practice is that I never purchase individual photographs, because that would make me feel obligated to give that image a more prominent spot in a painted composition. I also never purchase lots that have been pre-sorted into categories.⁵² Images that have been sorted for their content tend to be so similar to one another as to be redundant, and the addition of yet another curator complicates that background against which the paintings are made.

Instead, I select lots that appear to have been indiscriminately compiled (Figure 17). Many times, these will include image sets that are ostensibly from multiple families, allowing their timelines and narratives to be varied. I have found that the more that I know about any specific photograph, the less willing I am to put it through the process of translation, obscuration, and fragmentation that is integral to the painting process. Basically, if I begin to feel like I know the subjects (in a historical, rather than visual sense) I feel an increased responsibility to present them in a flattering light, and in a way that they would be easily recognizable.⁵³

After receiving the packages in the mail, I sort through the photographs. I make piles of images that are more likely to appear in a painting based on their chromatic complexity, compositional involvement and clarity (the most fascinating subject matter would not appear in a painting if it was not of a high enough quality because the painting is privileged over the photographs). All of the photos are then stacked in a set of boxes and tins containing the rest of the collection. I make no effort to keep them in any specific order, or even to keep them in the same sets that they were in when they arrived.

At the genesis of a new painting, all of the boxes are pulled out and sifted through yet again. This time, photos that correlate with one another in interesting ways are binder-clipped together (Figure 18), and then placed in piles with other images that share a given affect. This “affect” serves as a curatorial prompt, usually inspired by a historical archetype or a perceived irony. Often times, the photographs themselves inspire these prompts. To the best of my ability I try not to let photos from any one family set make it into any given painting, as that would undermine the mission of the creation of a complex and ultimately false history.

After the panels have been appropriately prepared, the actual painting begins. In the case of the *Testimonial* paintings, the substrates are 24 inch X 24 inch cradled birch panels. The square shape provides some formal consistency to the images as a body, and complicates the question of how the different panels relate to one another by allowing room for the assumption that they are somehow all part of a unified image set. This assumption is fueled by the use of home-mode imagery which, up until the late 1970's (in my experience) occupied a very specific value range, whose general appearance many people associate with family photographs, and more specifically snapshots. One fairly complex image is chosen as the "base image". Normally this image incorporates both figures and built environments with a fairly wide range of colors, and an unbalanced composition that can readily be shifted and/or altered by the addition of "incursions".

It is important to reiterate that while the imagery in the paintings is based on that in the photos, the process is by no means one of absolute photorealistic mimesis. Its simultaneous relation to and resistance to photorealism is intentional. As is evident in the paintings of Robert Bechtle (Figure 19), the level of "realism" that can be coaxed out of this particular breed of photograph is limited.⁵⁴ While it is important to note that Bechtle's means of transferring photographic information from printed (rather than slide-based) snapshot to substrate is very different from that used in the *Testimonial* paintings, the source documents (and the amount of detail available in said documents) is similar.⁵⁵ On the one hand, Bechtle's association with Photorealism likely comes from the fact that rather than making works such as '56 *Cadillac* (Figure 20) from life, or even from imagination, Bechtle chose to use a photographic source as the basis for the painting's foundational set of decisions. When looking at the finished painting of '56 *Cadillac* and

the slide from which it was referenced (Figure 21), a rift between Bechtle and other photorealists immediately becomes apparent. While pieces such as Charles Bell's *Gumball No. 10: "Sugar Daddy"* (Figure 22) ostensibly render every tiny, extraneous detail, Bechtle edits and abstracts his images, even to the point of idealizing them.

Without the benefit of a side-by-side comparison of the original slide of '56 *Cadillac* and the finished painting, it would be easy to assume that Bechtle's painting was a fairly successful example of the "[...] near-microscopic... degree of representational verisimilitude[...]" which was the crowning glory of the photorealist production. Upon further observation, Bechtle's finished painting departs radically from the original slide, most notably in its reduction of detail and specificity. The slide offers a fairly limited amount of information that was pared down even further when Bechtle made his painting. This painterly decision shows that Bechtle's relationship with "reality" was completely divergent from that embodied by his contemporary (and fellow photorealist) Charles Bell, as well as from more "perceptual/observational" paintings such as those discussed here.

While I would argue that Bechtle's paintings are neither "photographic" nor "realist" in character, that is an issue for another time. The *Testimonial* paintings are perhaps more in line with realism as defined (and problematized) by Linda Nochlin as a painterly form whose goal was to "[...] give a truthful, objective, and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of real life."⁵⁶ One complexity that plays profoundly into virtually every step of the creation of the *Testimonial* paintings (that they share with works by the 19th century Realists) is their "[...] ambiguous relationship to the highly problematical concept of reality."⁵⁷ Many of the 19th century paintings that Nochlin outlined in her text were made, in the most

traditional sense, from life. According to Courbet (Figure 23), painting “[was] an essentially *concrete* art and [could] only consist of the presentation of *real and existing things*.”⁵⁸ Further, Courbet insisted that abstract things (in this case, those which could not be seen) were not within the purview of painting. Courbet’s (and subsequently Nochlin’s) claims that painting was suitable only for things that could be seen at the time the painting was being made call the nature of the *Testimonial* paintings into question. Are the things in any given painting (tabletop objects, figures, built environments, etc.) actually able to be seen with the help of the secondary documents?

The number of decisions that Robert Bechtle eliminated when he decided to project a slide onto the surface of *'56 Cadillac* was undoubtedly significant. While the projection might seem to be an efficient move at first glance, it certainly has its pitfalls. Many critics claim that painting from a photographic source is a betrayal of observational truth. Allegedly, there is a “deadness” inherent in photographic paintings (specifically with regards to Gerhard Richter’s “Household Icons” (Figure 24) and Chuck Close’s photo-portraits (Figures 25 and 26)) that can be attributed to their “[...] their dependency on the photograph[, and] their inability to make anything on their own.”⁵⁹ In spite of this particularly acerbic appraisal, there are complications inherent to painting from photographs that do not arise when painting from life. Among these factors are issues of the size of the document from which one is working (an issue that is lessened when working from a digital photograph), clarity (or lack thereof), the tendency to over-define objects, etc.

Foremost among the concerns that arise when painting from a photograph are the complex relationships that pieces like the *Testimonial* paintings have to “reality”. It has

already been established that the reality of the primary event is, on the whole, unknowable and unreachable, so while we can assume that camera flares and double-exposures were not a part of the original experience, it is not completely outside of the realm of possibility. Additionally, the painter cannot possibly know the state of the scene without the aforementioned occurrences. We cannot “unsee” anything. If an inexplicable steam occupies a portion of a photograph in such a way that it partially obscures an apple, and I have chosen to include said apple in the painting, then I have a set of decisions to make (decisions that neither a realist like Courbet nor a slide-painter like Bechtle would have ever been faced with). I can always include the miasma in the painting (and a number of small such nebulosities have certainly been included in the paintings). This option speaks to the impulse for pure, Courbet-esque observation: paint it like you see it.

Another option is to make a set of assumptions about the things that you cannot see (what shape does that side of the apple take, how does the light react on that side, are there any dark spots over there, etc.). This option is a slippery slope, considering the care taken in the paintings for specificity and purposeful non-inclusion of idealized forms. Do you just assume that the apple was symmetrical? If so, the apple departs even further than the one that existed in the “first frame”. The painting overall becomes less specific, less faithful to the fragment of “reality” that it stands for. There are also significant conceptual repercussions for these types of assumptions. While it has been solidly established that the secondary documents are only representative of a tangential sort of “truth”, that they are the only a fragment of this “truth” available means necessitates a level of loyalty to the image. Of course, all observational and representational painting involves a level of illusionism, but by working with the explicit intention of certainly,

many small assumptions must be made over the course of any painting, but whenever possible, scrutiny has been favored over blatant assumption.

The third option speaks to the negotiability of the past, of reality, and of past-realities (in this example the past-realities of an enshrouded apple). The third option is the addition of an “incursion”. In some cases where part of a heavily damaged photograph is particularly intriguing (Figure 13), a set of incursions and redactions has been devised as a means of revealing the more-intelligible areas of imagery, while allowing other images to interact with it in such a way as to screen the otherwise unusable section.⁶⁰ Of course, the majority of the incursions seen in the paintings serve other purposes, as most of the photographs used had not sustained enough wear or damage to necessitate such a strategy.

Yet another question at this point in the making process is one regarding whether or not the paintings are being made from life, and what sorts of connotations the answers to that question might have. Because my practice is based on direct observations of the secondary documents, the structures in the *Testimonial* paintings are not wholly “unrealistic”. A certain level of illusionism is inherent to any observational painting, but my practice’s claim to realism employs illusionistic techniques with the following aim: “[...] to create an image that makes a story believable [and] to express the emotional resonance an individual subject has for [me], we have the meeting of accuracy and sincerity.”⁶¹ It depends on how one sees the image that is being painted. Do they see it as Walton might have, as an image painted by looking *through* a photographic print?⁶² That would make them into observations of some sort of bizarre anachronistic spectral-diorama, which would certainly negate the fact that the documents do, in fact, exist in the

present world. Or might the images be viewed as having been painted looking very closely at the detailed surface of a truly unique inhabitant of a still-life prop closet? This would increase their contemporaneity, as I have already established that the paintings are made from photographic prints, not from the scene that was their referent.

I see the *Testimonial* paintings as occupying a sort of middle ground between these two options. Their physical and observational natures do not discredit their conceptual content. They are paintings that come from documents that do exist in the present, but their concerns are primarily for the multivalent histories that are not objectively visible. By refusing the temptation to indiscriminately speculate on that which is not visible in the documentary evidence, I treat them (at least with regards to this question) as if their “photographic transparency” is limited. I reference the prints themselves, not just the supposed histories to which they refer.⁶³ On the other hand, no direct reference is made within the borders of the paintings to the fact that these scenes are anachronistic. They are not (to give an example that would make a truly awful painting) objects in a still life with iPhones and power-cords that might make a statement (or an overstatement) of their age.

Of course, paintings like Audrey Flack’s massive *World War II (Vanitas)* (Figure 27) utilize the archival photograph as one of multiple still-life objects, which state the fact that the painted photograph does not belong to the era in which it was pictured. Flack clarified this most notably through her use of color. The black-and-white print depicts Margaret Bourke-White’s *Liberation of Buchenwald* (Figure 28), which Flack placed at the top-half of the painting. She then surrounded the print with nauseatingly high-chroma still life objects that the artist felt represented the juxtaposition of “pure evil” and

“beautiful humanity” present during World War Two.⁶⁴ The lively chromatic scheme (as well as the dizzying birds-eye-view perspective) surrounding the photo makes it quite clear to the viewer that it and its surroundings do not occupy the same temporal space. In addition, unlike the *Testimonial* paintings, the Margaret Bourke-White print in Flack’s painting exists as just that: a print. Its wrinkled and wax-laden surface proves that it sits underneath the objects that claim to represent its “humanity”. There is no question as to its relationship to reality or photographic transparency.⁶⁵

One of the more prominent differences between the *Testimonial* paintings and similar paintings that inspired them is the addition of the “incursions”. In paintings such as those in Catherine Kehoe’s *Direct Descent* series (Figure 29) and Kim Cogan’s photo-based works such as *Candyland* (Figure 30) and *Dollhouse* (Figure 31), photographic imagery appears to have been appropriated directly from an archival image.⁶⁶

While both Kehoe’s and Cogan’s forays into photographic observation have played substantial and varied roles in the evolution of the *Testimonial* paintings, the original idea for the incursions came from a postcard of Sangram Majumdar’s 2013 painting *Tilt* (Figure 32). Allegedly inspired by a spinning postcard rack in a tourist-trap, the complex amalgamation of linear-perspectives and discordant subject matter made for a fixating work. Each rectangle appeared to be flat and unyielding, while simultaneously piercing the atmospheric pink space that surrounded them, each acting as a sort of window into a near-intelligible (but not quite).

Formally, the fragmented images are placed in areas that will improve the compositions implicit in the base images. Unbalanced base images are not hard to come by, due to the amateur status of the original photographers. While these awkward set-ups

may not have made for exemplary family-photos, they certainly make for exciting paintings. The square panels upon which these schemes are depicted present an interesting set of problems to solve, since (like Renaissance *tondo* paintings) the center of the piece must be a locus of “dynamic tension”, lest the eye’s movement come to a stop there.⁶⁷ This goal has been particularly challenging given that a great deal of photographers chose to adhere to the visual code of placing the subject of their picture in the center foreground of the photo, forcing them to occupy a compositional dead zone.⁶⁸ This problem has been circumnavigated with liberal cropping and covering.

This collage-like act of cropping and covering the faces of the figures (especially those whose gazes might directly interact with the viewers’) has previously been explored by a number of artists. John Baldessari is particularly well renowned for “dot paintings” such as *Studio (C.H. 41)* (Figure 33) where primary-colored circular stickers adamantly eclipse the faces of figures in found photographs. Using this simple formula, Baldessari questions how viewers prioritize their vision, and forces them to look to other visible patches in order to gauge narrative and emotion.⁶⁹ Baldessari is certainly not unique in his forceful diversion of the viewer’s gaze from the face of a representational subject.

Even more interesting considering the roots of the project at issue is the work of London-based Israeli artist Gideon Rubin (Figure 34). Rubin, originally a Slade-trained realist painter dramatically altered his practice after witnessing the September 11th terrorist attacks while on a trip to New York City in 2001.⁷⁰ Like the figures in the *Testimonial* paintings whose faces are eclipsed or whose gazes are averted, Rubin’s subjects too lack the ability to connect visually with the observer. Rather than concealing the faces in his portraits, Rubin eliminates them entirely, claiming that he was “[...]”

drawn to the idea that we are defined by our mannerisms... as much as by our facial features.”⁷¹

A similar method has been used to complicate the identities of those figures found in the *Testimonial* paintings. Some of them are hidden behind incursions and others are made to be transparent or downcast (those whose eyes are turned away from the viewer’s were presented that way in the original document). While Rubin has steadily been eliminating peripheral context clues from around his esoteric figures, I have made a point of highlighting these telling contexts with as much clarity as possible. Again, I would like to reiterate that this clarity may not always be fully “accurate”, but often it is recognizable, and it allows the viewer to draw associations about the strangers whose lives have been put on display.

Chapter 5 | Painted detritus: Stylistic intentions, influences, and implications

If I chose to treat the painting as if it were a part of a realist-style still life as in Tim Kennedy's *Kaufmann Bride* (Figure 35) and *Baby Cup* (Figure 36), the flaws would certainly be included, because the photograph would be dealt with in the same manner as all of the other objects in the still life. In such paintings, the implications of the object itself are subordinate to their perceptual relationships with the objects surrounding them. Paintings like Kennedy's seem to be a peculiar denial of photography's claims to a superior level of "realism". By processing the photograph with the same mark and level of attention as the surrounding flowers and dishes, *Kaufmann Bride* and *Baby Cup* seem to rely quite heavily on Charles Hawthorne's (Figure 37) opinion that everything visible in nature can exist as pairs of relationships between spots of color.⁷² His treatment of the edges of the photographs in both paintings is also telling. By varying the weights of the edges of the frame and photographic print in the same manner as with the wallpaper and shadows that recede behind them, Kennedy democratizes his picture plane. No single object is prioritized. Like Cézanne's legendary demand that his wife "be an apple", Kennedy states that no object is any more worthy of his attention than those around it.

The other end of this particular Hawthorne-centric perceptual spectrum will be occupied by the Kehoe's *Direct Descent* paintings. Unlike Kennedy's interpretation of the "representation of a representation", Kehoe handles the photographs (whose conceptual and stylistic implications will be discussed in a different chapter) more in line with Walton's or Barthes' assertions of photographic transparency. Kehoe eschews any

conversation about the physical surroundings of the photograph by eliminating them. The primary event is undoubtedly being viewed through the “transparent” surface of the photograph, and nothing disrupts our view. Nor are we looking *at* an opaque photographic surface. Unlike in Kennedy’s still lives, no shadows betray the physical qualities that keep us from mistaking photographs for reality: their flatness, shininess, their slightly softened edges.⁷³ Kehoe explores every face, cloth fold, and flower with uncompromising intensity. Just like in Kehoe’s myriad of self-portraits (Figure 38), her observational intensity acts as an agent of democratization, leaving very little room for sentimentality.⁷⁴ Kehoe looks through the photographs to search out the planar volumes of her subjects in space, treating their colors with a surprising directness. She does not reinvigorate the flesh tones, but rather lets them exist in the same range that they occupied in the photographs: clearly *Direct Descent* re-presents the reality of Kehoe’s present, not her imagination of her ancestors’ past

I would situate myself (with regards to my treatment of the *Testimonial* paintings) between Kennedy and Kehoe. Like Kehoe, I treated the secondary documents as if their edges were boundaries of window into elapsed time: they can only account for the photographically recorded past. While other versions of the past may intrude upon the *Testimonials*, the painted narratives are impervious to the existence of the viewers’ presents or presences. Where Kennedy has elevated the “thing-ness” of his photographs, both Kehoe’s *Direct Descent*, and my *Testimonials* focus more closely on the observable structures beneath the filmy surface of the prints. In doing so, both sets of paintings accept the traditional assumption that oil paintings are “[...] not so much a framed

window open on to the world as a safe let into the wall, a safe in which the visible has been deposited.”⁷⁵

Like both painters, I aimed for a certain democratization of the painted surfaces (although, my efforts were, admittedly, imperfect).⁷⁶ Ideally, all of the painted structures have been given equal attention, whether they are described with one simple tonal shift or with a multitude of chromatic mixes. The evidence of this effort is observable in the rough, layered textures present in some of the “flat” walls found in *In lieu of testimony* numbers two (Figure 2) and three (Figure 3). Additionally, while many of the figures’ faces and clothing were given extensive attention, quite a few of them were painted *alla prima*, paying close attention to the interactions between the color spots in the prints, so as to preserve the legibility of the source material (as per the observational ideas of Edwin Dickinson, Figure 40).

The *Testimonial* paintings also diverge from Kennedy’s and Kehoe’s pieces by fluctuating in their recognition of the exterior layer of any given secondary photograph. While Kehoe’s pieces are comprised of neatly-observed, singularly-rich sepia tones, she does not acknowledge any photographic idiosyncrasies. She also avoids addressing the innate flatness that allegedly keeps humans from mistaking photographs for reality. Instead, she opts to strike out into the depths of her spaces.⁷⁷ Kennedy appears to operate under an opposing assumption. By placing each photograph in the midst of a different still life (each rife with diverse organic and domestic shapes and textures), he emphasizes the planar exterior surface of each photograph. Strangely, this emphasized flatness increases the oddity of the photographs.

I manipulate the tension between the illusion of photographic transparency (as Kehoe does) and the democratizing materiality of unapologetic paint (as Kennedy does). By treating the incursions as if they are both flat and expansive, I can once again address the absurdity of the notion of historical, memorial, or nostalgic authority. The formal conditions apprised in the paintings act as annotations which divert interpretations which might relate them to scenes observed in the present.

The *Testimonial* paintings are rife with formal devices hinting at the fallibility of what might otherwise be presumed to be reliable imagery. They are not, however, vague in their structural rendering. A whole slew of painters have come to rely heavily on loose, unintelligible marks to communicate a psychological link to memory and the past. Such reliable tropes are dangerous because they keep the viewers from questioning the content of the work in front of them.

Ever since the camera freed painting from its responsibility to communicate the epics of earlier generations to the masses, some painters have increasingly portrayed their motifs as if they existed in a perpetual haze or movement. Gerhard Richter can easily be seen as one of the initiators of this stylistic crutch (which he, of course, leaned on comparatively rarely and with a great measure of success). Such wispy marks were employed with great impact in Richter's *Onkl Rudi* (known in English as *Uncle Rudi*) (Figure 5), which was painted based on a snapshot of the artist's uncle smiling benevolently whilst outfitted in full *Wehrmacht* attire.⁷⁸ Rather than imitating the presumable clarity of the original photographic document, Richter chose to utilize an obfuscous mark, which conveniently eradicates all Nazi insignia from Rudi's person,

leaving only the design of the uniform to clue viewer's in on his identity. Richter vehemently asserted that his paintings were not "blurry", saying:

"When I dissolve demarcations and create transitions, this is not in order to destroy the representation, or to make it more artistic or less precise. The flowing transitions, the smooth, equalizing surface, clarify the content and make the representation credible [...] I blur things to make everything equally important and equally unimportant."⁷⁹

The purposeful elimination of Nazi symbols on the costume of the figure in Richter's *Uncle Rudi* could be read as "[...] the very image of the repression of fathers in Germany after [World War two] and the willed amnesia of horror. It is this *and* it is the smiling family member innocently posing for a picture."⁸⁰ The mark-making techniques apparent in *Uncle Rudi* add a level of complexity to the painting by forcing viewers to simultaneously confront both the congeniality of the subject and his National Socialist associations without the immediate vilification that the inclusion of such symbols likely would have inspired in many western audiences. In Richter's case, the use of such an inexact mark allows effectively creates an appropriate metaphor for postwar German "amnesia", it does not accurately reflect the nature of visualizations of memory or postmemory.

Psychological studies have shown that humans have to capacity to remember past experiences with varying levels of "accuracy".⁸¹ These studies have found that each time a memory is retrieved for consideration, that memory must be reconstructed based on the mind's previous construction. So, the more often the memory is retrieved, the more opportunities the mind is given to alter that construction. So, while a certain level of correspondence between the reconstructed memory and the past event is possible, any directly objective correspondence is highly unlikely. Just because most memories, after a

protracted amount of time will bear a progressively diminished relationship to past events should not be taken to mean that such memories are not conclusive. Simply, a person can be absolutely sure that an event unfolded in a specific way, but that person is often incorrect in spite of their specificity and certitude.⁸² Basically, a memory, even an inaccurately recalled one, often seems definitive to the person recalling it. It is appropriate, then, to ask why artists (especially those utilizing photographic sources) see fit to jettison the conviction of rendering in favor of indiscernible, abstract marks.

This looser style employs open forms, whose edges are unstable, often to the point of crumbling into one another.⁸³ Certainly, this style has its uses and merits, especially when the setting in question is in motion, such as those in Carole Benzaken's striking paintings and pastels depicting Princess Diana's funeral (Figure 41). The vibrating and incoherent borders between the forms in the *Diana's Funeral* series are appropriate because they reference television broadcasts, rather than photographs or unadulterated memories. Open form is particularly problematic in paintings involving found or appropriated imagery such as Joushua Flint's intriguing *Carousel* (Figure 42), and in those which claim to portray forgetting, such as Linda Anderson's *Ghost* (Figure 43). Perhaps the most problematic are Kim Cogan's pieces, because unlike Flint and Anderson, Cogan claims to be a photorealist.⁸⁴

Kim Cogan's paintings exemplify the weak link between messy marks (in a representational practice) and claims to "memory" as a motif (Figures 30 and 31). Allegedly, Cogan's series *The Other Side* employs an "expressionistic" mark as a way to "[...] deal with emotions brought about by reflecting on the past and why these emotions occur and even how these emotions can change our memories."⁸⁵ While the claim that

reflection upon past events can arouse emotions that are then capable of coloring our memories is unquestionably true, the assertion that this emotion is somehow embodied by an indiscriminately unruly mark is debatable. This is not to say that Cogan's brush-work is stylistically invalid, only that it bears no ties to the emotional reception of his paintings, because neither memory nor emotion are reconstructed abstractly in the mind's eye.⁸⁶ It is more likely that the recalled imagery would simply be imagined incorrectly in full, crystalline detail.

The distinction between "expressionistic" marks in service of heightened emotion, and the same mark made in service of a more painterly descriptive technique is certainly lost on artists who claim to understand the mechanics of human memory. Painters who renounce such turbulent rendering while retaining other means of instilling complexity in their pieces tend to make work that problematizes memory and history in even more comprehensive and insightful ways.

The aforementioned *Direct Descent* paintings problematize the connection between photography and memory, while resisting the "open form" trope. Kehoe's motif easily could have "[...] [descended] into a misty treacle [...]" is rendered instead with an aggressive, inaccessible crispness.⁸⁷ Because she has no memory of the ancestors who appear in her work, her perceptual investigation was paramount. In art that seeks to interrogate evidence, imprecision is useless. Where Cogan uses paint to express, Kehoe uses it to interrogate. By giving such precise and vigilant attention to the snapshot-worlds of her long lost family, Kehoe proves just how much history can withhold.

Denying the viewer access to an image is powerful precisely because painting have historically been tools of revelation and presentation:

“Images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked- and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people. [...] An image became a record of how X had seen Y.”⁸⁸

Sangram Majumdar’s *Reconstructed Photograph* (Figure 44) is eloquently antithetical to the notion that absent bodies retain their presence in paintings and photographs. The painting is full of “closed” forms, whose edges can easily be traced across the picture plane. This clarity dissolves when one fails to immediately locate the painted photograph. In addition, the only apparent body in *Reconstructed Photograph* is a disembodied face hovering near the right edge of the picture plane. Majumdar’s virtuosic piece tells the viewer that even where visual documents exist, they can be silent, even repellant.

More so than the aforementioned observational painters, Majumdar engages with the contemporary painterly inclination towards the aesthetic of collage. Painters have been rupturing visual logic in service of deeper meanings for centuries, but a wide swath of contemporary realist (or perhaps pseudo-realist) painters have embraced assemblage as a means of marrying “overt figuration” with complex historical subject matter.⁸⁹

Different painters working in this fashion naturally display varied levels of perceptible entanglement but each draws on images from unassociated (often, but not always photographic) sources, then incorporates them into a painted form that alter’s the viewers expectations of them.

Adrian Ghenie’s *Dada is Dead* (Figure 45) is one example of a painting that appears to have “collaged” together unexpected imagery in order to creates a particularly

uncanny scene. The forms depicted on the canvas would never logically occupy the same space: a wolf, mirrors that seem to reflect nothing, and a uniform-clad figure (who seems to float against the ceiling like a helium balloon), all in a decaying wooden interior. The astute viewer might recognize that Ghenie has actually drawn from fewer sources than one might imagine. Essentially, he inserted the wolf into a slightly-abstracted painted version of a famous photograph from the 1920 International Dada Exhibition (Figure 46). Rather than painting an exact copy of the photograph, Ghenie opted to utilize his considerable painterly muscle to transport the works of John Heartfield and Kazimir Malevich into an abandoned (and likely imagined) gallery somewhere in the bleak future. Not only did Ghenie draw on disparate 20th century imagery to make the space seen in *Dada is Dead*, he also subtly engaged with such anachronistic facets of art history as Gerhard Richter's squeegee-smears and Italian Baroque coloration.⁹⁰

Whether or not the viewer is aware of Ghenie's foxy Dadaist references, the discontinuities in the painting (namely the soldier on the ceiling) might well draw viewers to question the veracity of the scene being presented to them. While Ghenie (like Majumdar) is famous for his interest in using handmade collages to plan out his paintings, other painters interact with the collage aesthetic without using physical collages as references.⁹¹ Ghenie's fellow Cluj-based painter Marius Bercea skillfully deploys a more intertwined take on the collage aesthetic in his 2011 exhibition *Remains of Tomorrow* at Blain Southern Gallery.

Unlike Ghenie's paintings (which tend to maintain continuity of space), Bercea favors labyrinthine conglomerations of fragmentary, post-perestroika Soviet built environments. Often, the paintings appear to be overgrown with massive flora and

populated with figures whose varied scales seem to bear little resemblance to their positions within their given picture plane. Works such as *Truths with Multiple Masks* (Figure 47), *The Hierarchy of Democracy* (Figure 48), and *Monuments, Monuments* (Figure 49) are almost overwhelming in their entanglement. Each of these three pieces appears to be set outdoors, where slivers of sky are barely visible between the behemoth remnants of Soviet architecture. Bercea inundates the viewer with both ideological and spatial inconsistencies, placing capitalist (and even monarchist) symbolism in the midst of the USSR's ruins. It would be almost impossible to find an unquestionable narrative or motivation in these pieces which speaks so clearly to the sociopolitical climate of Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Bercea's ironically bright paintings are like dioramas of "[a] fractured society, depicted here as a broken heap of images."⁹²

The use of complex networks of painted photographic imagery seems to be one of the defining features of the paintings being made by members of both the New Leipzig school and the Cluj schools, both of which have risen to prominence since the eradication of communism in Eastern Europe. This is perhaps attributable, at least in part to Neo Rauch (Figure 50), who is the most celebrated product of the area's representational schools. By following in Rauch's footsteps, the younger painters of Eastern Europe are carrying their interpretations of his "mash-up" style in innumerable new directions. The use of a collage aesthetic as a means of problematizing history and historical documentation is by no means limited to artists from the former Soviet Union.

London-based Israeli painter Gideon Rubin has taken on the marriage of representational paintings and collage from a very different vantage point than the continental painters discussed above. Rubin questions history by interrogating the

permanence of identity within historical documents. Originally a realist painter, Rubin abandoned his practice of working from life after witnessing the September 11th terrorist attacks while on a trip to New York City in 2001. His current method of art-making has a “negotiation style.”⁹³ While Rubin does not make his paintings from compilations of explicit historical or political imagery, he is tied to collage by his distinct systems of either altering found documents (Figure 51), or making paintings based on appropriated portraits (Figure 52).

In both bodies of work, Rubin uses paint as a vehicle to eliminate the facial features of the figures, leaving the viewer to surmise what they can about that person from the clues scattered around the rest of the picture (some of which are heavily abstracted or left unpainted, to expose text or other images). Essentially, the paintings establish the argument that a viewer can learn surprisingly little from the faces in strangers’ photographs. By covering their faces, clues that might otherwise have gone unnoticed are allowed to have the same visual weight as the now-veiled countenances. It is important to note that: “Rubin’s paintings live and breathe amidst this double knowledge: that a face can be filled in if everything around it speaks, and that it will fill subjectively according to the viewer’s sensibilities and needs.”⁹⁴

Generally, Rubin treats the fragmentary artifacts of lost histories with a strikingly similar (albeit more optimistic) philosophy of history to those held by the other painters discussed in this chapter. They share the strategy of combining, compiling, and altering historical ephemera in paint. Clearly, this is a legitimate means of questioning given or accepted historical visual record. The documents manipulated by Rubin, Bercea, Ghenie, and legions of other artists are assumed to have a mechanically causal relationship with

their subjects.⁹⁵ Because of their traditional (and undeniably problematic) ability to serve as evidence of past events, to reproduce them in paint undermines that ability, revealing the malleability of history.

Paint is a particularly appropriate vehicle for such artistic rebuttal because painting is the pinnacle of the very type of subjective image production that photography was invented to eliminate. Painters are incapable of portraying anything by accident: “[...] their effects are always intentional.”⁹⁶ By making a painting of something that bears a resemblance to documentation they show that a single scene or structure used by multiple factions can speak to opposing narratives. If any single document can be pressed into the service of contradictory historical suppositions, then so can all of the others, and history is once again proved to be just as subjective as the paintings which mimic it.

A whole slew of painters have used paint’s inescapable subjectivity to make politically charged art. Like Rubin, my work bypasses grand political critiques in favor of a more genial approach to the past (or at least an approach that leaves space for the genial). Appropriated images can be mobilized in service of postmemory and reflective nostalgia’s “[...] orientation towards individual narrative that savors detail and memorial signs [...]” to create a transformable historical potentiality for those viewers who do not know (or who do not want to know) what their personal histories might have revealed in photographs.

Chapter 6 | Secondhand Souvenirs: Paintings as embodiments of reflective nostalgia

The *Testimonial* paintings are designed to embody the sentimental condition of *reflective nostalgia*. The opposite of *restorative nostalgia*, reflective nostalgia is an individualized [but never absolute] longing: “[Reflective nostalgia] is more oriented towards an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs[.] [It] cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space.”⁹⁷ Unlike nostalgia of the restorative variety, which tends to take on a nationalistic spirit, reflective nostalgia is highly negotiable and pluralistic. Boym’s definition implies an understanding of the gaps between experience and memory, between memory and identity, and between reality and perception. The *Testimonial* paintings collectively realize the temperament of the reflective nostalgic, a temperament with which I am intimately familiar. I made these paintings knowing that the stories and scenes whose absences I feel so keenly never actually existed, and that the extended family that I imagined as a child had a very different story than the one that I created.

More than any other aspect of the paintings, the ‘incursions’ (façade-like segments which appear to mask various parts of the dominant image) function as expressions of reflective nostalgia. Because the photographs lack the ability to fulfill their original purpose of displaying an historical account of familial togetherness, they have the potential to stand for the myriad of stories which *could* have happened, indeed which *might* have happened, but which most likely never came to pass.⁹⁸ By placing images from markedly disparate sources adjacent to one another, I encourage the viewer to

envision ties between the images, to enact imaginary plays acted out by characters who almost certainly never met. The temporal distance between them and the primary events that they are speculating on ultimately renders any anecdotal conclusions that the viewers might come to historically false. This attribute of perpetual fictitiousness is an indication that reflective nostalgia is at play. Like the soviet immigrants who fill their American apartments with postcard collections bought at garage sales, the purpose of presenting such dubious likenesses is to satisfy a nostalgic longing, not to recreate the longed-for familial climate itself.⁹⁹

Originally called “redactions”, these disrupted spaces challenge the way that the paintings function by suggesting to the viewer that certain structures are purposefully being kept out of sight.¹⁰⁰ In earlier pieces such as *Redacted Narrative No. 1* (Figure 53) and *Redacted Narrative No. 2* (Figure 54) these aluminum-leafed areas represent all of the material that is deliberately withheld. These paintings were my statement of the fact that, if the photograph represented the photographer’s momentary version of “truth”, that it had become a hidden truth. Resistant to modern excavation, this “truth” will forever be unavailable to onlookers. As paintings, they emphasized the predicament that they shared with the original documents, that they could only “[...] stand as testimony to what had been forgotten.”¹⁰¹ More precisely, they stand as testimony that something has been forgotten, but neither I, nor the viewers can ever be clear as to what.

The physical immediacy of the redactions’ reflective surfaces anchors the paintings in a present that is contiguous with that of the viewers. The same device that integrates the viewer with the picture plane simultaneously ejects them from it. By blatantly withholding visual information, they embodied the amnesiac quality that is

ingrained in the photographs themselves. When one is faced with a displaced photograph, they can only make assumptions based on their culturally ingrained knowledge of snapshots and those narrative cues that happened to appear within the borders of the print. The process of trying to rebuild from such reticent fragments is often likened to a puzzle: “We piece them together hoping for an understanding of their lives, but its like putting together the pieces of a puzzle that will never be finished, because so many of the pieces are lost.”¹⁰² These contextual vacancies are not overtly stated in the *Testimonial* paintings like they were in the *Redacted Narratives*. The act of assessing and translating such images in 21st century terms, followed by a process of conspicuously and intentionally obliterating wide swaths of information meant that the *Redacted Narrative* paintings symbolized the latent sense of absence inherent in the documents from which they were drawn.

Deliberately frustrating, the aluminum leaf is utterly impenetrable, metaphorically echoing the disposition of history itself. The past is, in its entirety, dim: “...along with the relative light of history and the relative darkness of memory, we must acknowledge a vast domain of historical unknowability.”¹⁰³ By severely cropping the images (using the silver as a sort of aperture) the viewer is allowed just enough visual latitude to be tempted by the scene. Additionally, the subtle tonal-hierarchical shift that occurs when someone stands before either *Redacted Narrative* painting is emblematic of the fact that our perception of history changes every time that we attempt to analyze it. It is impossible to remember “correctly”.¹⁰⁴ The *Redacted Narrative* paintings, then, present the viewer with this acknowledgement. These earlier pieces were focused on the bittersweet acceptance of the fact the inherited familial memoirs prized by many are, for a myriad of

reasons, permanently unreachable for others. In spite of their literal reflectiveness they were not as intensely nostalgic as the *Testimonial* paintings.

The former “redactions” have evolved into superimpositions, incursions, transparencies, obscurations and façades. Each of these is composed of a representation of an additional secondary document. Like the redactions, they are generally painted as if they are opaque. It is important that the paintings lack the “transparency” of a photograph: the viewer can look *at* them, but not *through* them. Unlike looking at a primary event or a secondary document resulting from that event, the viewer must make their assumptions based on the tertiary representation that I have created for them. Like the family stories told (or in many cases, pointedly *not* told) by the “survivor generation” to their children and grandchildren, the viewers will never see any evidence of the primary event except what I choose to show them.¹⁰⁵ People who retain possession of their family’s snapshot collections have the ability to “see” their relatives, even after their deaths.¹⁰⁶ When these collections have been lost or stolen, any perceptual access to familial history can only exist as a fiction of that which can never be found or proven. This “perceptual opacity” makes the paintings akin to the kind of word-of-mouth tales that stand in for demonstrable family histories in exilic and diasporic cultures.

If, as Walton claims, we do see *through* photographs, then the paintings are their opposite because we cannot see through them. This reliance on the reversal of photographic transparency (which Walton alleges is one of painting’s shortcomings) is intentional. If one accepts Walton’s assertion that in looking at archaic photographs the viewer actually sees into the past, then I value the *Testimonial* paintings for their ability to disguise this “sight”.¹⁰⁷ In the literal sense, the thickness and impasto of the marks on

the surfaces of the *Testimonial* paintings obscure the steps that came before them. Effectively, the sequential painted strata take on the role of hiding surfaces that had originally been exposed: “The hidden is contained in the visible, the forgotten often resurrected through the process of painting.”¹⁰⁸ Other areas in the paintings are intended to create the illusion that one image within the picture plane hovers above another.

Viewers are unable, quite literally, to see the whole picture. Even if they are curious as to the anatomy of any single fragment in its presumable entirety, they can only speculate on them. This departs from many of my earlier paintings (namely those featured in *Fake Tales from Forest Park*), whose purpose was to reveal in paint that which might have been overlooked in a found photograph (Figure 55). The hidden niches and indistinct formal shifts in the *Testimonial* paintings epitomize reflective nostalgia, because within them the viewer can partake in a past that [...] opens up a multitude of potentialities, of nonteleological possibilities of historic development.”¹⁰⁹ Further, neither I nor the viewers “[...] need a computer to get access to the virtualities of our imagination[s]: reflective nostalgia has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness.”¹¹⁰

According to Megill, nostalgia is best defined as “attraction to or –a homesickness for- a real or imagined past[.]”¹¹¹ In the *Testimonial* paintings, I attempt to create a nostalgic image that is simultaneously real *and* imagined (not to mention manipulated, scrutinized, translated and occasionally longed for). The painted imagery can easily be associated with the so-called Kodak-aesthetic (square shape, “vintage” imagery/fashion, dull colors). The stylistic elements of “vintage” photography have come back into vogue by such 21st century phenomena as the Instagram application and *Impossible Project*

film. Digital filters meant to make a photograph appear old (Figures 56 and 57) and newly-released film for outdated analog cameras have given users means to imbibe their digital images with the semblance of age, but it does not necessarily engender the kind of nostalgia that comes from the collective masses of snapshots inherited from one's family. The images generated on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Flickr serve a similar (but not identical) purpose for their presenters' as 20th century snapshots served for those who initially captured them. It is significant that 1950's-era Kodak advertisements always promised:

[a] brighter past in the future, if we only seize the chance today to consume the raw materials of our tomorrow's memories. This past-in-the-future, this nostalgia-in-prospect, always hooks into, seeks to produce, desires hinging on a particular kind of story- a family story with its own forms of plenitude.¹¹²

Kodak's explosive popularity in the decades before and after World War two are a fair indication of how incredibly appealing the American public found the company's proposal of forthcoming-nostalgia. Even with the profusion of photographic devices (and the resultant profusion of photographs) the sociopolitical upheavals of the 20th century guaranteed that countless populations were deprived of such ancestral treasure troves.

Ideally, the digitization of the family album will prevent the kind of loss that is felt by the victims of such personal losses. As the Internet has evolved, social media platforms have replaced the standard shoeboxes and alums that once housed family snapshot collections. The digitization of the familial archive has both increased its security and accessibility and negated its tangibility, causing some people to feel that their histories (both personal and familial) have become less substantial.¹¹³

More than ever before, many people's personal information, their various means of describing and sharing their realities has become altogether intangible.¹¹⁴ During the 19th and 20th centuries, when analog photography was still considered to be superior technology, the "taking" of a photograph resulted in a photographic negative and a photographic print. While such prints are often referred to as "ephemeral" due to the fragility of photo-paper, the notion of the impermanent image has been intensified by the speed of the digital age.

What was once an ephemeral trace of "past-presence" has become an unending report of immediate presence.¹¹⁵ No longer the sole dominion of printed documentation, the digital photograph now:

[...] functions as a message in the present ("Hey, I'm here *right now*, looking at this") rather than only as a record of some past moment. This kind of photograph is meant primarily as a means of communication, and the images that are being sent are as ephemeral as speech, so rarely are they printed and made physical.¹¹⁶

Of course it is notoriously difficult to truly get rid of any information once it has made its way into cyberspace, but over time newer images progressively crowd older ones from view.

As a nostalgic living within the electronic visual bombardment of the 21st century, I am fascinated by physical traces of the past that continually surface in the thrift shops, flea markets, and antique auctions of the present. The paintings are not constructed solely from traces left by others; they are also the product of my efforts. My generation will likely not leave many photographs for the artists of the future to sift through, but by making paintings (which are less likely to end up in a landfill) I am developing traces of my own. Additionally, the rigidity and weightiness of the panels attains a physical presence that is impossible to achieve with either electronic or paper media. They are

able to share space with viewers in ways that paper and on-screen media cannot, meaning that one must engage with them differently than they might an online or printed artwork.

Paintings based on analog photographs (in particular the *Fake Tales from Forest Park* (Figures 55 and 58), the *Redacted Narrative* paintings (Figures 53 and 54), and the *Testimonial* paintings (Figures 1, 2 and 3) hark back to the decades when millennials' parents were young, when communication moved at a more measured pace, and when personal history and experience were defined by amassed collections of letters and photographs. Unlike the endless sequence of social media notifications, the tangible "ephemera" which defined the experiences of previous generations was just as apt to be found as it was to be lost. Unlike images which have only ever existed electronically, the *Testimonial* paintings mark the imaginary confluences of strangers' lives in ways that are diametrically opposed to the way that is distinctly not-modern. In a sense, they are like other souvenirs because their creation requires that "[t]ime must be seen as concomitant with a loss of understanding, a loss which can be relived through the awakening of objects and, thereby a reawakening of narrative."¹¹⁷

The use of "closed-form" structures is my way of "re-living" (or more accurately re-exploring) the secondary photographs from which I designed the *Testimonial* paintings. Like their characteristic affectation of permanence, their ambiguity originates from their formal structures. By forgoing the "feathery" marks that have become the painterly trope for other motifs linked to memory), I emphasized the dis-integration of each discrete incursion and fragment. The ambiguity has little to do with distinguishing between individual objects or figures, the majority of which are clearly rendered. Rather, it is the scenes themselves that are only intermittently legible. The nature of the

interactions between standard, logical linear perspective of the base image and the antithetical perspective of each overlapping space that questions the reliability of each painting. By juxtaposing conflicting spaces, I create a problematic space that corresponds to the problematic histories savored by reflective nostalgia, which: “[...] cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space.”¹¹⁸

Like so many semi-recalled or fully fabricated remembrances, the counterfactual “incursions” lay scattered (albeit carefully) across the *Testimonial* paintings’ surfaces, each tempting the viewer to believe their individual constructions of distance. There is a sense of irony in utilizing such steadfast formal means in service of ambiguity: in taking the time to sort out the various smithereen-like spaces, the viewer is invited to navigate the additional elements that I rendered into each fragment. The architectural and dimensional impossibilities are subtle reminders that the *Testimonial* scenes could never actually exist. Each depiction is dependent upon and inextricable from those surrounding it. The *Testimonial* paintings are fantastical domestic pictures which defy historical acumen, transforming displaced banalities into figments of reflective nostalgia. By making the “authentic” referents unreachable, they exist as my assertion that communion with that which was lost was, perhaps, never the ultimate goal. Maybe a more pertinent objective resides within the “fugue” forms of metaphorical postmemory in place (or denial) of the actual return home.

Chapter 7 | Solid as a Mirage in a Snowglobe: An imperfect postmemorial proposition

In much of western culture where “[...] remembrance is aligned with redemption and forgetting is the process of consigning to oblivion, there exists a strong moral imperative to remember.”¹¹⁹ When such an act becomes compulsory, it can make those to whom remembrance is traumatic or unavailable feel the sting of its absence all the more keenly. While it is impossible to give these people the kind of “perceptual contact” which is the privilege of those whose roots have been untouched by diaspora and exile, the *Testimonial* paintings offer them an opportunity to engage with a past that is populated by the ghosts of friendlier histories.

If society as a whole is obligated to remember the people whose photographs are in their albums, then certainly there must be a provision for both the people lacking in memory and for the images that have nobody left to remember them. I propose that the *Testimonial* paintings have the ability to fill the void left by the inherited traumas and absences of postmemorial existence. “Postmemory” is defined as:

[...] the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can never be fully understood nor re-created.¹²⁰

Generally used to describe the experiences of the children of those who survived the *Shoah*, it is a condition common to a great deal of the Jewish community, as well as other exilic, diasporic, and persecuted populations.

By using painting to negotiate with my ruptured cultural history, I partake in an a particular diasporic aesthetic system which paradoxically seeks to both mourn and rebuild.¹²¹ Unlike some of the artists mentioned earlier (such as Boltanski and Richter), I insist on avoiding re-creating images of trauma, because I have no desire to reinforce the pain inherent in *Shoah* narratives. Instead, I have sought a more empathetic and sentimental approach to the cultural desire to replace our conspicuously absent family histories.

During the process of creating the *Testimonial* paintings, the nameless people who appear in the, slowly began to seem less remote, less like strangers. In spite of their unequivocal anonymity, they became profoundly familiar to me. This familiarity is a direct product of the act of painting: the various divisions and articulations of their bodies and vicinities required careful contemplation. I spent a great deal of time scrutinizing and gently abstracting the contours of their faces, sketching and fussing over them with religious regularity. The sheer number of times that my hands traversed their features virtually guarantees an intimate awareness of that single instant captured by the camera. I deliberated over their photographed forms with such devotion that perhaps I was able to bridge a small length of the chasm between them and myself. The practice of protracted observation and depiction is, in itself, an act of memory. According to observational painter Ruth Miller (Figure 59), when a painter lingers over a subject: “[...] memory builds up and the thing you’re painting is not what it first seemed [...]. Some things may give themselves up quickly and some take awhile to reveal their character.”¹²²

The lengthy investigation into the visual characteristics of people whose identities are unknown embodies a peculiar duality: in one sense, the photographed subject is fully

alien to me (as well as to the viewer), but I know the look of them like a family member might. Just as any skilled figurative artist could accurately draw the face of a parent, sibling, lover, or child from memory, so too could I make reasonable likenesses of these so-called strangers without a reference. This is, of course, quite different from the experiences of casual viewers who are not likely to be given any chance for tactile involvement with a painting. The *Testimonial* paintings offer a vastly different quality of involvement to the unconcerned viewer than they do to me. I created them by “wandering” through pictures that were never intended for my visual consumption, but with which I was able to engage profoundly nonetheless.¹²³ The viewer is offered the culmination of this varied set of gazes and intentions.

Even though I can only speculate on the specific motivations behind any given snapshot in my collection, the fact that each one was likely incredibly important to its original owner has become an important factor in my practice.¹²⁴ It manifests most obviously in the fact that I have never thrown a photograph away. When asked by a teacher to make collages from them, I was nearly overcome with guilt. I can't help but hope that one day, someone will see one of the paintings in a gallery and request that I return them to their original owners. While I admit that this is highly improbable, artist Jeff Phillips 2011 exhibit *Lost and Found: The Search for Harry and Edna* (Figure 60) used a Facebook page entitled “Is This Your Mother” to identify the subjects of a snapshot collection from a thrift shop near St. Louis. Posting one photograph per day, Phillips had enough material to continue for three years. His online community, however, unearthed Harry and Edna Grossman's family in just less than three weeks.¹²⁵

While finding the families of the people whose likenesses populate the *Testimonial* paintings, I refuse to destroy the photographs and risk depriving someone else of their familial documents. After all, it is not impossible that my family's photographs are safely couched in unknown *yizker bikher*, untouched by the upheavals of the 20th century.¹²⁶ It is only reasonable that I treat others' lost treasures with as much respect as I hope that they would treat mine. Just because a photograph has been lost does not mean that it cannot be found.

Images of our own families have the unique ability to “[...] provide some sense of immortality of bloodlines[.]”¹²⁷ This statement is also true when inverted: without images of our own families we lack a sense of immortality of our bloodlines. For the generations who inherit this lack of familial inheritance, the urge to go looking for any evidence left by their would-be loved ones can be incredibly strong. In her article “The Photographs Near my Father’s Bed”, Arlene Stein details her search for her family’s history following the death of her father, who immigrated to America after surviving the *Shoah*. Upon discovering some letters written by her grandfather, Dawid Szlifersztejn, Stein writes:

I fantasize about Dawid knowing that many years after his death three of us, including his son’s daughter and his youngest brother’s granddaughter, would be sitting three-thousand miles away from Warsaw, in a museum dedicated to the memory of the Shoah, transcribing his words. I ask myself: Is he my grandfather if I never had a relationship with him?¹²⁸

In her story, Stein and her cousins are able to fulfill the mission at which so many children and grandchildren of the survivor generation have failed: she finds her family’s story in a shoebox full of documents. But in doing so, she also comes to understand the reasons why her father hid the evidence of his parents’ and siblings’ years in the Warsaw Ghetto from her.

The final words of Stein's essay describe the postmemorial condition quite eloquently: "What my father never understood was that in my own way I too live with these losses, with all of the secrets and stories he never revealed. Finally, I am getting to know my ghosts".¹²⁹ The experience that described above is incredibly rare. In general, those who survive calamities like the *Shoah* are left with no mementos of their pre-war lineages. This lack of familial evidence certainly has not kept people from looking for their lost histories. Far from being unique to Jewish families, absent familial ephemera factors into the accounts of many people living in diaspora and exile.

By bringing together artifacts made by families who are (or might have been) culturally, chronologically, or ethnically disparate, I aimed to metaphorically weave anew those beloved moments which pure fictions could never match. Viewer's will not be acquainted with the misplaced ghosts who inhabit the *Testimonial* paintings, and that is fine. But for those lost in the postmemorial "emanations" of history's discomposure, they are a skeleton of specificity upon which viewers are welcome to construct whatever tales they wish, for themselves or for the people they see.¹³⁰

The fact that the secondary photographs in my studio have been severed from their original familial moorings is tragic, but their wayward reality also instills them with potential. By losing their ability to stand for their "actual" circumstances, they gain the capacity to become, in a small and imaginary way, a sort of patchwork history in the minds of those whose pasts have left no evidence.

The imagery that collectively constitutes the *Testimonial* paintings acts as a sort of personal and phenomenological substitute for the bounty of familial "souvenirs" which other households might use to evoke a sense of continuity, togetherness, and belonging.

In making and possessing the paintings, I have invented a fictitious avenue towards the type of connection sought by postmemory. This connection, however, can never be realized in a postmemorial community. The absent narratives and the absent families are inextricable from the paintings because their past actions and current absences comprise the framework for the nostalgic and teleological inventions inspired in the beholders' minds.

My paintings elicit their post-memorial and reflective-nostalgic spirit from their simultaneous permanence and ambiguity. The elusive worlds abandoned by our parents and grandparents can no longer exist in the "real world". Instead, their ghosts are actualized in the *Testimonial's* picture-planes as illustrated speculations on structures that may not have ever existed. Akin to the piecemeal "memory museums" constructed by Soviet refugees, the *Testimonial* paintings are more evocative of the condition of homesickness than they are of any one dwelling.¹³¹ While they do derive their visual qualities from singular photographs, they lack the context to say anything about the homes they represent. They are ambiguous because they cannot possibly describe the home itself, because neither I, nor the viewers have ever seen it. The pictorial descriptions that I derive from the secondary documents show my efforts to see, interpret, and communicate as they were communicated to me. These are not pictures of memories; they are pictures of the souvenirs by which the home was *supposed* to be remembered.

The fractured spaces within the *Testimonial* paintings are my assertion that if memory is fallible, then postmemory is necessarily doubly so. The homes and reminisces described to us likely came to pass, but never exactly in the way that we imagine. The memory-mirages have the uncanny habit of shifting ever so slightly.¹³² Rather than being

completely static, the painted homes realize the reflective-nostalgic desire for the longed-for home to hold still just long enough to really be seen. But where the photographic documents are fixed seemingly to the point of deadness, the act of painterly exploration (and the resultant inability to ever fully define the ambiguities) imbibes the painted spaces with active engagement in a way that a photograph never could.¹³³

Chapter 8 | Conclusion

The previous chapters outline the processes, artistic influences, personal intentions, and cultural realities which ultimately led me to make the *Testimonial* paintings. Individually, each panel's is titled with the words *In lieu of testimony*, followed by a number. I called them this because the culturally-mandated silence surrounding my family's histories means that I have no stories to tell. So, the paintings exist as a collective stand-in for the stories, photographs, and documents that we might have possessed had the course of history proceeded differently. The mission to provide crowded, unresolved pictures of pseudo-historical "memory-mirages" is the product of my own experiences growing up at a time when graphic documentaries and books of liberator's photographs were becoming more prominent in the secular American public sphere. Seeing movies like *Europa, Europa, Life is Beautiful (La vita è bella)*, and *The Pianist* gave my Sunday-school classmates and I more than enough gruesome imagery to fill the gaps that our parents had intentionally left in our own war stories. It was almost as hard to imagine that our families had ever lived as anything other than victims of genocides and *pogroms*.¹³⁴ By the time I made the trip to Yad Vashem, the cinematic and literary atrocities had become substitutions for the stories that my Baba and Zeyde withheld from us. When, after completing our tour of the museum and we found the bank of computers housing the Names Database, I walked away.¹³⁵

Chapter 10 | Illustrations



(Figure 1) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, *In lieu of testimony No. 1*. 2015, oil and marble dust on panel, 70 cm X 70 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, <http://www.rachelahavarosenfeld.com> (accessed April 15, 2016).



(Figure 3) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, *In lieu of testimony No. 2*. 2016, oil and marble dust on panel, 70 cm X 70 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, <http://www.rachelahavarosenfeld.com> (accessed April 29, 2016).



(Figure 3) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, *In lieu of testimony No.3*. 2016, oil and marble dust on panel, 70 cm X 70 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, <http://www.rachelahavarosenfeld.com> (accessed April 29, 2016).



(Figure 4) Anonymous, *Untitled Snapshot*. Circa 1960, Kodachrome print, 6.4 cm X 6.4 cm. Collection of Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, Saint Louis, USA.



(Figure 5) Anonymous, *Untitled Snapshot*. Circa 1960, Kodachrome print, 6.4 cm X 6.4 cm. Collection of Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, Saint Louis, USA.



(Figure 6) Anonymous, *Untitled Snapshot*. Circa 1960, Kodachrome print, 8.9 cm X 11.4 cm. Collection of Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, Saint Louis, USA.



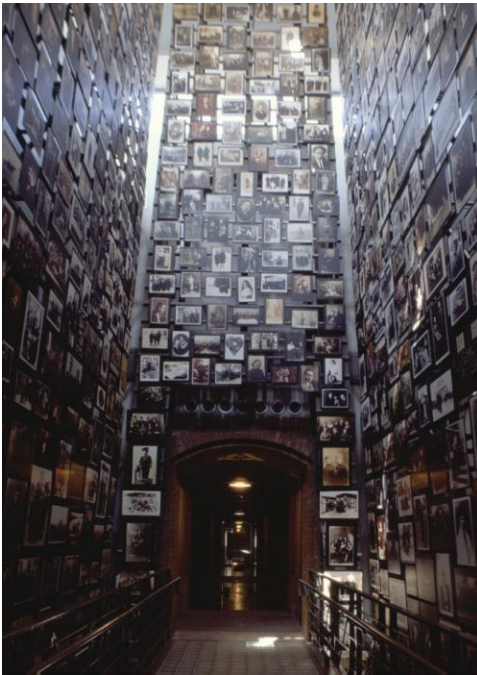
(Figure 7) Anonymous, *Untitled Snapshot* (reverse of Figure 2). Circa 1960, Kodachrome print with green and red ink, 8.9 cm X 11.4 cm. Collection of Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, Saint Louis, USA.



(Figure 8) Christian Boltanski, *Odessa Monument*. 1988-1991, gelatin silver prints, wires, and light bulbs, 243.84 cm X 152.4 cm X 7.6 cm. Available from: Artstor, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed April 14, 2016).



(Figure 9) Gerhard Richter, *Uncle Rudi (Onkl Rudi)*. 1965, oil on canvas, 87 cm X 50 cm. Lidice Gallery, Lidice, Czech Republic. Available from: Khan Academy, <http://www.khanacademy.org> (accessed April 15, 2016).



(Figure 10) Yaffa Eliach Shtetl Collection Photographs, *The Tower of Faces*. 1993, installation of photographs. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C., USA. Available from: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: <https://ushmm.org> (accessed April 15, 2016).



(Figure 11) Roman Vishniac, *Recalcitrance*. 1926, gelatin silver print, 35.6 cm X 27.6 cm. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA. Available from: Artstor, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed April 15, 2015).



(Figure 12) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, *In lieu of testimony No. 4*. 2016, oil and marble dust on panel, 70 cm X 70 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, <http://rachelahavarosenfeld.com> (accessed April 15, 2016).



(Figure 13) Anonymous, *Untitled Snapshot*. Circa 1960, Kodachrome print, 6.4 cm X 6.4 cm. Collection of Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, Saint Louis, USA.



(Figure 14) Jean Baptiste Simeon Chardin, *A Lady Taking Tea*. 1735, oil on canvas, 81 cm X 99 cm. The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery (University of Glasgow), Glasgow, Scotland. Available from: The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, <http://www.huntsearch.gla.ac.uk> (accessed April 15, 2016).



(Figure 15) Edwin Dickinson, *Composition with Still Life*. 1933-1937, oil on canvas, 246.4 cm X 197.5 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York City, USA. Available from: The Museum of Modern Art, <http://www.moma.org> (accessed April 15, 2016).



(Figure 16) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld *In lieu of testimony No. 1* (detail of an "incursion"). 2015, oil and marble dust on panel, 70 cm X 70 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, <http://www.rachelahavarosenfeld.com> (accessed April 15, 2016).



(Figure 17) Etsy, example of a snapshot lot. Available from: Etsy, https://www.etsy.com/listing/267710595/27-vintage-color-snapshots-vintage-color?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=vintage&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=color%20photo%20lot&ref=sr_gallery_2 (accessed May 1, 2016).



(Figure 18) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, process photograph of secondary documents for the *Testimonial* paintings. 2016, found photographs, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.



(Figure 19) Robert Bechtle, *'61 Pontiac*. 1968-1969, oil on canvas, 151.8 cm X 214 cm. The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, USA. Available from: The Whitney Museum of American Art, <http://www.whitney.org> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 20) Robert Bechtle, *'56 Cadillac*. 1966, oil on canvas, 55.9 cm X 61 cm. Private collection, France. From: Jonathan Weinberg et al. *Robert Bechtle: A Retrospective*. Berkely, Los Angeles, and London: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and University of California Press, 2005. Plate 12.



(Figure 21) Robert Bechtle, source slide for '56 Cadillac. From: Jonathan Weinberg et al. *Robert Bechtle: A Retrospective*. Berkely, Los Angeles, and London: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and University of California Press, 2005. Figure 29 (page 47).



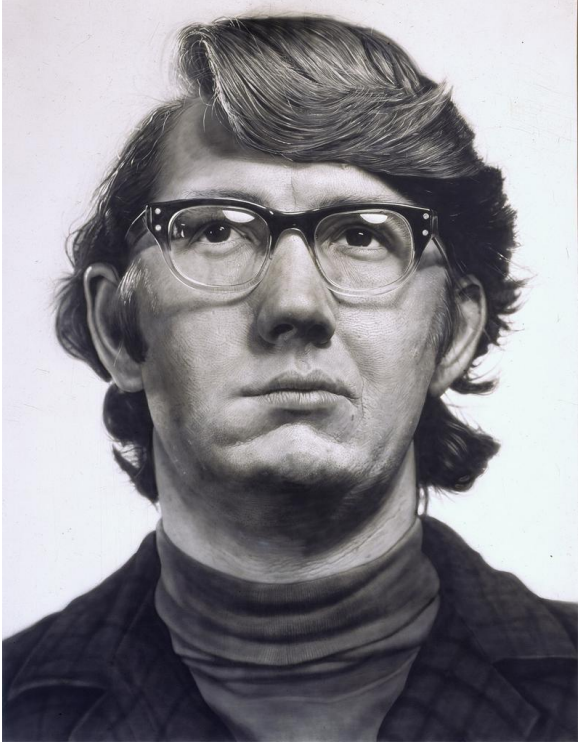
(Figure 22) Charles Bell, *Gum Ball No. 10: "Sugar Daddy"*. 1975, oil on canvas, 167.6 cm X 167.6 cm. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York City, USA. Available from: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, <http://www.guggenheim.org> (accessed April 19, 2016).



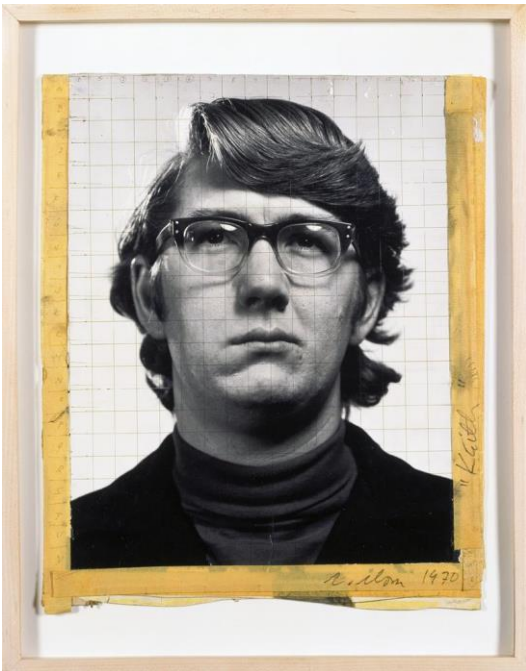
(Figure 23) Gustave Courbet, *Still Life with Apples and a Pear*. 1871, oil on canvas, 24.1 cm X 31.3 cm. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA. Available from: Artstor, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 24) Gerhard Richter, *Klorolle (Toilet Paper)*. 1965, oil on paper, 68 cm X 65 cm. Private Collection. Available from: Gerhard Richter, <http://www.gerhard-richter.com> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 25) Chuck Close, *Keith*. 1970, acrylic on canvas, 275 cm X 213.4 cm. The Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, USA. Available from: Artstor, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 26) Chuck Close, *Keith*. 1970, gelatin silver print with ink and tape additions, 34.9 cm X 27.1 cm. Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, USA. Available from: Artstor, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed April 19, 2016).





(Figure 29) Catherine Kehoe, *Helen*. 2007, 25.4 cm X 20.3 cm. Miller Yezerki Gallery, Boston, USA. Available from: Catherine Kehoe, <http://www.catherinekehoe.com> (accessed April 19, 2016).



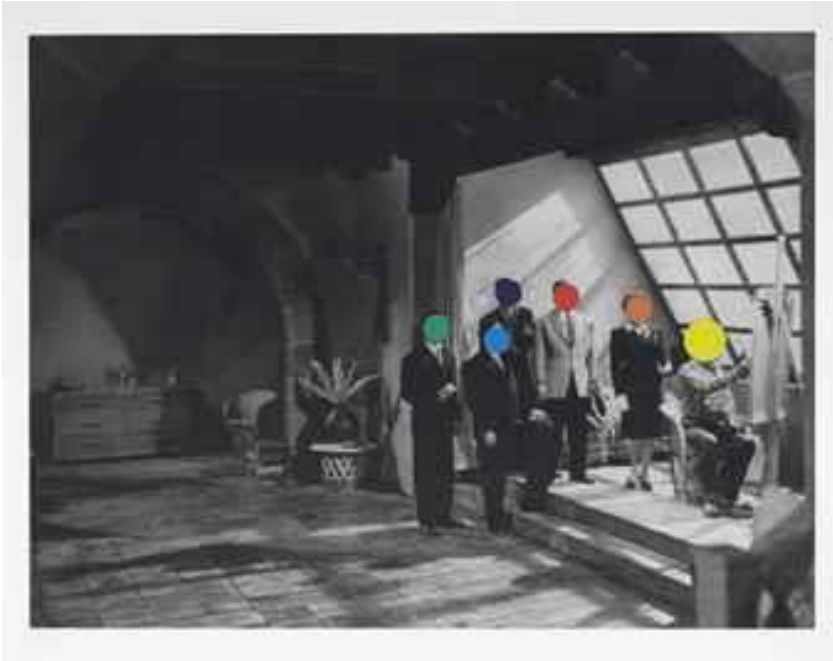
(Figure 30) Kim Cogan, *Candyland*. 2015, oil on canvas, 70 cm X 76.2 cm. Arcadia Contemporary, Santa Monica, USA. Available from: Kim Cogan, <http://www.kimcogan.com> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 31) Kim Cogan, *Dollhouse*. 2015, oil on canvas, 121.9 cm X 121.9 cm. Private collection. Available from: Arcadia Contemporary (Flickr Commons), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/101380971@N06/20570425214> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 32) Sangram Majumdar, *Tilt*. 2013, oil on linen, 167.6 cm X 121.9 cm. Steven Harvey Fine Arts Projects, New York City, USA. Available from: Hyperallergic, <http://www.hyperallergic.com> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 33) John Baldessari, *Studio (C. H. 41)*. 1988, offset lithograph with screenprint colors on Somerset, 64.8 cm X 86 cm. Private collection. Available from: Christie's, <http://www.christies.com> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 34) Gideon Rubin, *Gas Masks*. 2015, oil on linen, 102 cm X 107 cm. Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, Germany. Available from: Galerie Karsten Greve, <http://www.galerie-karsten-greve.com> (accessed April 19, 2016).



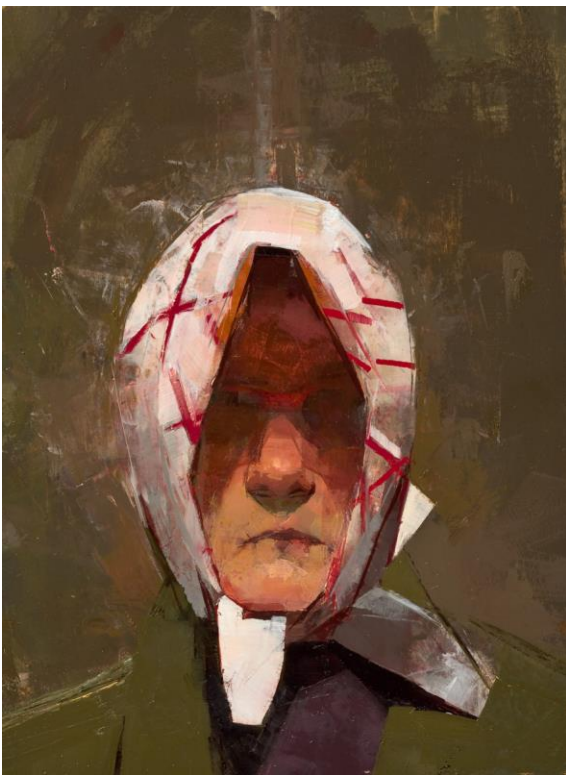
(Figure 35) Tim Kennedy, *Kaufmann Bride*. 2012. Available from: Tim Kennedy, <http://www.timkennedypaintings.com> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 36) Tim Kennedy, *Baby Cup*. 2012. Available from: Tim Kennedy, <http://www.timkennedypaintings.com> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 37) Charles Webster Hawthorne, *Refining Oil*. 1914-1915, oil on canvas, 101.6 cm X 101.6 cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, USA. Available from: Artstor, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 38) Catherine Kehoe, *Babushka*. 2009, oil on panel, 20.3 cm X 15.2 cm. Available from: Catherine Kehoe, <http://www.catherinekehoe.com> (accessed April 21, 2016).



(Figure 39) Catherine Kehoe, *Helena, Franciszek, and Anna*. 2006, oil on panel, 35.6 cm X 27.9 cm. Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston, USA. Available from: Catherine Kehoe, <http://www.catherinekehoe.com> (accessed April 19, 2016).



(Figure 40) Edwin Dickinson, *Shirley*. 1945, oil on canvas, 40.6 cm X 35.2 cm. Driscoll Babcock Galleries, New York, USA. Available from: Driscoll Babcock Galleries, <http://www.driscollbabcock.com> (accessed May 1, 2016).



(Figure 41) Carole Benzaken, *Diana's Funeral*. 2000, pastel on paper, 76.2 cm X 55.9 cm. Available from Carole Benzaken: <http://www.carolebenzaken.com> (accessed April 21, 2016).



(Figure 42) Joshua Flint, *Carousel*. 2016, oil on panel, 91.4 cm X 121.9 cm. Available from: Joshua Flint, <http://joshuaflint.com> (accessed April 21, 2016).



(Figure 43) Linda Anderson, *Ghost*. 2013, oil on panel, 20.3 cm X 25.4 cm. Available from: Linda Anderson, <http://www.lindaeanderson.com> (accessed April 21, 2016).



(Figure 44) Sangram Majumdar, *Reconstructed Photograph*. 2011, oil on linen, 106.7 cm X 116.8 cm. Available from: Sangram Majumdar, <http://www.sangrammajumdar.com> (accessed April 21, 2016).



(Figure 45) Adrian Ghenie, *Dada is Dead*. 2009, oil on canvas, 220 cm X 200 cm. Nicodim Gallery, Bucharest, Romania. Available from: Pace Gallery, <http://www.pacegallery.com/> (accessed April 30, 2016).



(Figure 46) Anonymous, *First International Dada Exhibition, Berlin*. 1920, reference slide. Artstor Slide Gallery, University of California, San Diego, USA. Available from: Artstor, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed April 30, 2016).



(Figure 47) Marius Bercea, *Truths with Multiple Masks*. 2011, oil on canvas, 280 cm X 385 cm. Blain Southern Gallery, London, United Kingdom. Available from: Blain Southern Gallery, <http://www.blainsouthern.com/> (accessed April 30, 2016).



(Figure 48) Marius Bercea, *The Hierarchy of Democracy*. 2011, oil on canvas, 280 cm X 400 cm. Blain Southern Gallery, London, United Kingdom. Available from: Blain Southern Gallery, <http://www.blainsouthern.com/> (accessed April 30, 2016).



(Figure 49) Marius Bercea, *Monuments, Monuments*. 2011, oil on canvas, 124 cm X 129 cm. Blain Southern Gallery, London, United Kingdom. Available from: Blain Southern Gallery, <http://www.blainsouthern.com/> (accessed April 30, 2016).



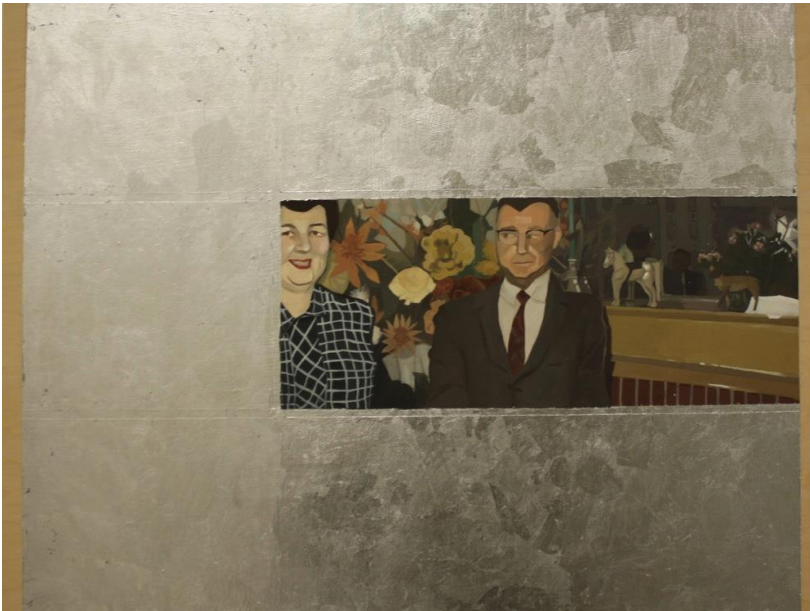
(Figure 50) Neo Rauch, *Die Müllerin*. 2013, oil on canvas, 250 cm X 300 cm. Galerie Eigen+Art, Leipzig, Germany. Available from: Galerie Eigen+Art, <http://www.eigen-art.com/> (accessed April 30, 2016).



(Figure 51) Gideon Rubin, *Memory goes as far as this morning*. 2015, acrylic on found paper, dimensions variable. Herzaliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Herzaliya, Israel. Available from: Outset Magazine, <http://www.outset.org.uk/> (accessed April 30, 2016).



(Figure 52) Gideon Rubin, *Class of 1947 Prom*. 2012, installation of 12 paintings (oil on linen), dimensions variable (25 cm X 20 cm each). Rokeby Gallery, London, United Kingdom. Available from: Gideon Rubin, <http://gideonrubin.com/> (accessed April 30, 2015).



(Figure 53) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, *Redacted Narrative No.1: In which Edith says Grace at the funeral luncheon*. 2015, oil, aluminum leaf, and marble dust on panel, 45.7 cm X 70 cm. Collection of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, <http://www.rachelahavarosenfeld.com> (accessed April 29, 2016).



(Figure 54) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, *Redacted Narrative No.2: In which Joanna eats her heart out*. 2015, oil, aluminum leaf, and marble dust on panel, 50.8 cm X 50.8 cm. Collection of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, <http://www.rachelahavarosenfeld.com> (accessed April 29, 2016).



(Figure 55) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, *Fake Tales from Forest Park: From Rosemary's lips to God's ears*. 2014, oil and marble dust on canvas, 93.9 cm X 124.5 cm. Collection of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, <http://www.rachelahavarosenfeld.com> (accessed April 29, 2016).



(Figure 56) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, *The Sweeney Family Christmas Tree* (original image). 2015, digital iPhone photograph, sizes variable. Collection of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld (accessed April 29, 2016).



(Figure 57) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, *The Sweeney Family Christmas Tree* (Instagram). 2015, digital photograph (as viewed from a computer), dimensions variable. Available from: Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/_x1DS3rjVf/?taken-by=rachelahava01&hl=en (accessed April 29, 2016).



(Figure 58) Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, installation of *Fake Tales from Forest Park: Alice's Race to the Altar, Maxwell on his Mohair Throne, From Rosemary's Lips to God's Ears* (Eleanor D. Wilson Museum, Roanoke, VA). 2014, oil and marble dust on canvas, installed dimensions variable. Collection of the artist. Available from: Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld, <http://www.rachelahavarosenfeld.com> (accessed April 29, 2016).



(Figure 59) Ruth Miller Forge, *Enamel Jug Still Life*. 2001 (reworked 2013), oil on linen. Courtesy of the artist and the New York Studio School. Available from: Tilted Arc, <http://www.tilted-arc.com> (accessed April 30, 2016).



(Figure 60) Jeff Phillips, *Is This Your Mother?*. 2011, digital promotional image (Facebook), dimensions vary. Available from: Jeff Phillips, <http://harryandedna.com> (accessed April 30, 2016).

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Chapter 11 | Endnotes

¹ Natasha Trethewey, "Family Portrait" in *Domestic Work* (Saint Paul: Grey Wolf Press, 2000), 30.

² My father once told me that our lack of contact with extended family was a symptom common to Eastern European Jewish immigrants: they would rather cut ties than risk being able to reveal the whereabouts of their loved ones under torture.

³ Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987), 97.

⁴ Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987), 8.

Chalfen defines the "home mode" of communication as "[...] a pattern of interpersonal and small group communication centered around the home." He goes on to describe that the defining factor of this symbolic system is its specific audience: the family (rather than the public).

⁵ Jonathan Green, "Photography as Popular Culture" in *Journal of the University Film Association* 30, no. 4 (1978), 15, accessed March 22, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20687447>.

⁶ Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen, "The Family Gaze" in *Tourist Studies* 3, no. 1 (2003), 27.

⁷ Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987), 97.

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⁹ Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen, "The Family Gaze," *Tourist Studies* 3, no. 1 (2003): 33.

¹⁰ Robert Fanelli "The Practice of Popular Still Photography: An Ethnography of the Home Mode of Visual Communication" Unpublished senior honors thesis, Department of Anthropology, Temple University (1976) quoted in Richard Chalfen *Snapshot Versions of Life* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987), 25.

These "editing events" comprise six different means by which photographs in family albums in Fanelli's study had been physically altered or manipulated in order to change the apparent narrative. Techniques ranged from cutting certain figures out of photos to drawing on the surfaces of the photos.

¹¹ Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen, "The Family Gaze," *Tourist Studies* 3, no. 1 (2003): 38.

¹² Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking: Essays* (New York: Picador, 2012), 256.

¹³ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995): 51.

¹⁴ Gillian Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, The Public, and the Politics of Sentiment* (Burlington and Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 57-106.

Rose elaborates on the complex ways that some news sources have historically encouraged their readers to engage personally with the snapshots of victims of various tragedies. Essentially, the papers were trying to get readers to ask "What if that had been my loved one?" This move is not so different from those made by artists and museums, and can absolutely contrive fairly inconsequential family snaps into highly-charged political tools.

¹⁶ Richard Chalfen "Redundant Imagery: Some Observations on the Use of Snapshots in American Culture," *Journal of American Culture* 4, no. 1 (1981) 107.

¹⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 49.

¹⁸ Ernst van Alphen, *Staging the Archive: Art and Photography in the Age of New Media* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2014), 29.

¹⁹ Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemory in Exile," *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996): 669.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

- ²¹ *Roman Vishniac: Children of a Vanished World*, ed. Mara Vishniac Kohn and Miriam Hartman Flacks (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), ix-xii.
- ²² Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemory in Exile," *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996): 668.
- ²³ Susan Stewart *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 135.
- ²⁴ Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 18.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemory in Exile," *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996): 669.
- ²⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 6.
- ²⁸ Jonathan Green, "Photography as Popular Culture" *Journal of the University Film Association* 30, No. 4 (1978): 15, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20687447.pdf?acceptTC=true>.
- Green is credited here for coining the particularly interesting term "snapshooters" to define amateur snapshot photographers.
- ²⁹ Kendall L. Walton *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 6.
- ³² Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen "The Family Gaze", *Tourist Studies* 3, No. 1 (2003), accessed January 28, 2016, <http://tou.sagepub.com/content/3/1/23.short>.
- ³³ Kendall L. Walton *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 86.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Marianne Hirsch "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile", *Poetics Today* 17, No. 4 (1996): 659-686, accessed February 14, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1773218>.
- ³⁵ Of course, it is impossible to tell with any amount of certainty which aspects of a snapshot were mistakes and which were not, but often they render various forms strangely, meaning that what may, at the primary event have been an apple, is translated as a red smudge in the secondary document, and thus cannot possibly be an apple in the tertiary representation (painting).
- ³⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc, 1977), 24.
- ³⁷ Kendall L. Walton, *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88-89.
- ³⁸ Cynthia Freeland "Portraits in Painting and Photography", *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 135, No. 1 (2007), 95-109, accessed January 29, 2016, <http://www.jstor.or/stable/40208798>.
- ³⁹ Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 102.
- ⁴⁰ Mary Ellen Abell, "Seeing Everything for the First Time: The Teaching and Aesthetic Philosophy of Edwin Dickinson" in *Edwin Dickinson: Dreams and Realities*, ed. Douglas Dreishpoon (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2002), 79.
- ⁴¹ This break with history (whose opposite, according to Megill is memory) exists even though the progress of the legitimate narrative is impossible to assess. No matter how little of it is available, that which is shown in the pictures advanced in a particular manner and sequence that is statistically unlikely to bear any semblance to that implied in the paintings.
- ⁴² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 85.
- ⁴³ The possibility that contradicts this, of course, is if the company that processed and printed the snapshot in question made a mistake and somehow exposed negatives from different photographers.
- ⁴⁴ Cynthia Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography", *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 135, no. 1 (2007), 101.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ In the essay cited in notes 6 and 7, Freeland uses the example of a photograph of somebody's great-grandmother at the Chicago World's Fair. The photograph proves that the great-grandmother was

“there”, that she both existed, and attended the Fair (this remains true even if the likeness in the photograph is not ideal). If Freeland’s example had been woven into one of the paintings (whether as a base image or an incursion) it’s ability to corroborate the great-grandmother’s existence would remain, albeit in a problematized form. The painting intentionally could not evince her presence at the World’s Fair because it would likely have been woven into other painted spaces: the great-grandmother might be standing in an incursion over a mid-century kitchen table, the context of the Fair called into question, if not eliminated entirely.

⁴⁷ Kendall L. Walton, *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97.

⁴⁸ Cynthia Freeland, “Portraits in Painting and Photography”, *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 135, no. 1 (2007): 101.

⁴⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 51.

⁵⁰ In a sense, the process of compiling the imagery can be traced back to the point when the photo itself was taken, although the original photographer couldn’t possibly have been aware that the image that they had snapped with their family camera would eventually be the foundation for a work of art.

⁵¹ I suspect that the photographs are acquired at estate sales and flea markets inside of vintage photo albums, which are fashionable and can be bought second-hand from these same sellers. Since the sellers are running small-businesses, the photographs are put up for sale as well.

⁵² This phenomena of “pre-sorted lots” takes on a life of its own specifically on Ebay, where lots often have absurd titles such as : “vintage color photo lot of 54 kodak instamatic? boats family rainbow people” or “Lot of 4 Unusual Vintage Color Photos Man & Woman Hays Headstone Cemetery 564572”.

⁵³ For a long time I was unwilling to obscure the faces of the figures in the paintings for fear that someone who that person had known might walk into the gallery and miss out on an opportunity to come face-to-face with a loved one.

⁵⁴ I am hesitant to even use the word “realism” to describe the teasing of every little detail from a photograph because that would reinforce the idea the reality and verisimilitude are interchangeable, which would be an erroneous claim. I will go into this further later on in this text, but for now, suffice it to say that the definition of “realism” that applies most fully to the paintings in question is more closely aligned with Linda Nochlin’s concept of it that with that provided by the Guggenheim.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Weinberg “Photographic Guilt: The Painter and the Camera” in *Robert Bechtle: A Retrospective* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005): 46-61.

⁵⁶ Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), 13.

⁵⁷ Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), 13.

⁵⁸ Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), 23.

⁵⁹ Jed Perl, “Saint Gerhard of the Sorrows of Painting” *The New Republic*, April 1-8 2002, 29.

⁶⁰ This strategy has been particularly useful in photographs that have physically been damaged because to render surface damage in the painting might cause the piece to stray into the realm of a bizarrely framed still life, rather than the conflation of tertiary images that are embodied by the resultant paintings.

⁶¹ Michael Lierly, “Creating Truth: The Continuing Value of Accuracy and Sincerity in the Arts” in *Kitsch & Beauty: The Proceedings of the Representational Art Conference* [FINISH CITATION]

⁶² Kendall L. Walton, *Marvelous Images: On Values in the Arts* etc.

⁶³ The references made to individual prints and their marred imagery can be found in the sharp flashbulb shadows and varying levels of detail in different sections of paintings.

⁶⁴ “Audrey Flack (b. 1931), World War II (Vanitas)”, *Christies.com*, last modified May 9, 2012.

<http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/audrey-flack-world-war-ii-5559596-details.aspx>

⁶⁵ The differences between Flack’s use of the photograph and that embodied by the thesis paintings are legion, but her overall treatment of the photo (as well as her utilization of an incredibly saccharine iteration of photorealism) solidifies that difference. In a painterly sense, the photo hardly looks “photographic”. Despite the amount of detail, and presumably accuracy, with which everything

else is painted, the figures in Bourke-White's *Liberation* appear to be almost cartoonish in their proportions.

⁶⁶ Exceptions to the apparent direct appropriation of photographic imagery are Kim Cogan's *Dollhouse*, and possibly Catherine Kehoe's *Helen*. These ostensibly import imagery from multiple photographs, although they do so in a moderately subtle manner.

⁶⁷ Rudolf Arnheim, *The Power of the Center: A Study of Composition in the Visual Arts* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), PAGE. **CHANGE CITATION TO FIT YOUR EDITION OF TEXT, INCLUDE PAGE NUMBER.**

⁶⁸ Jonathan Green, "Photography as Popular Culture" *Journal of the University Film Association* 30, no. 4 (1978), 15.

⁶⁹ Oliver Godsell, "John Baldessari: Connecting Dots", *ArtWrite* 49 (blog).

<https://artwrite49.wordpress.com/john-baldessari-connecting-dots/comment-page-1/#comment-1277>

⁷⁰ Gideon Rubin, "Imagined Faces", *Jewish Quarterly* 62, no. 3. (2015): 30-35.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 30.

⁷² Charles Webster Hawthorne, *Hawthorne on Painting* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1960), 26.

⁷³ Kendall L. Walton, *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 83.

⁷⁴ William Corbett, "A Little Nuance," *Catherine Kehoe*, accessed January 27, 2015,

<http://www.catherinekehoe.com/essay-william-corbett>.

⁷⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London and New York: The British Broadcasting Corporation and the Penguin Books, 1988), 109.

⁷⁶ It is difficult for me to properly discuss the surfaces of Kennedy's or Kehoe's paintings as the pieces are not readily available for viewing.

⁷⁷ One notable exception to Kehoe's treatment of photographic space can be found in her 2006 piece *Helena, Franciszek, and Anna* (Figure 31), where the leaves and *putti* that frame the stoic figures establish the presence of a decoration applied to the surface of the secondary document.

Interestingly, Kehoe chose to include this peculiar device. The uniform exteriority of the leaves acts as a perspectival tip-off that the decoration isn't an integrated feature of the picture plane, instead implying that it floats on top of it.

⁷⁸The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *Wehrmacht* as the vernacular term for the military forces of the German Third Reich between 1935 and 1945.

⁷⁹ Gerhard Richter, "Notes 1964-1965" in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Philadelphia: Blackwell Publishing: 2003), 758.

⁸⁰ Siri Hustvedt, "Gerhard Richter: Why Paint?" in *Mysteries of the Rectangle: Essays on Painting*, ed. Scott Tennent (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 154.

⁸¹ Winograd defines accuracy as the correspondence between the thing that is being remembered and an earlier state of affairs (Winograd, 243).

⁸² Eugene Winograd, "The Authenticity and Utility of Memory" in *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, ed. Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 245.

⁸³ Elana Hagler, "Apollo and Dionysus in the Representational Painting Family Feud" in *Kistch and Beauty: The Proceedings of the Representational Art Conference 2014* (Thousand Oaks: California Lutheran University, 2014), 63.

⁸⁴ Daniel Gauss, "The Other Side: Kim Cogan at Arcadia Contemporary, Manhattan, USA", *Wall Street International*, September 30, 2015 (accessed March 18, 2016). <http://wsimag.com/art/17641-the-other-side>.

⁸⁵ Daniel Gauss, "The Other Side: Kim Cogan at Arcadia Contemporary, Manhattan, USA", *Wall Street International*, September 30, 2015 (accessed March 18, 2016). <http://wsimag.com/art/17641-the-other-side>.

⁸⁶ I would like to propose another question regarding Gauss's use of the term "expressionistic" to describe Kim Cogan's manner of making marks: If such a feathery, turbulent mark is considered to be "expressive", then what exactly does it express?

⁸⁷ Cate McQuaid, "Drawing on Lost Memories: Artist paints relatives she never met", *The Boston Globe*, March 1, 2007 (accessed March 21, 2016).

⁸⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London and New York: The British Broadcasting Corporation and the Penguin Books, 1988), 10.

⁸⁹ Patrick Neal, "Rough Collages and Finished Works Cut from the Same Cloth", *Hyperallergic*, January 30, 2015 (accessed March 18, 2016), <http://hyperallergic.com/175029/rough-collages-and-finished-works-cut-from-the-same-cloth/>.

⁹⁰ Ben Street, "Letter from London: Dead as a Dada", *Art21* (blog), June 30, 2009.

⁹¹ Juerg Judin et al., *Adrian Ghenie* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009).

⁹² Jane Neal, "Marius Bercea: Remains of Tomorrow (press release)", *Blain Southern Gallery* (accessed March 18, 2016).

⁹³ Martin Herbert, "On Reflection" in *Gideon Rubin* (London: Art Books Publishing, Ltd., 2015), 13.

⁹⁴ Martin Herbert, "On Reflection" in *Gideon Rubin* (London: Art Books Publishing, Ltd., 2015), 13.

⁹⁵ Kendall L. Walton, *Marvelous Images: On values and the Arts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97.

⁹⁶ Peter Schjeldahl, *Let's See: Writings on Art from The New Yorker* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 43.

⁹⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 50.

⁹⁸ The only reason I allow that some similar situation *might* possibly have transpired is because to completely rule out the possibility that one of the implied narratives might somehow have taken place seems statistically irresponsible.

⁹⁹ Svetlana Boym, "Immigrant Souvenirs" in *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 327-333.

¹⁰⁰ The word "redactions" was also important to me because redacted letters sent home by soldiers during wartime inspired the structure of said spaces. Like the words marked out by the military, the reflective spaces were statements that there was information to be had, but that the viewer isn't allowed access.

¹⁰¹ Catherine Keenan, "On the relationship between personal photographs and individual memory", *History of Photography* 22, no. 1 (1998), 60.

¹⁰² Arlene Stein "The Photographs Near my Father's Bed", *Bridges* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 39.

¹⁰³ Allan Megill, "History, Memory, and Identity" in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 196.

¹⁰⁴ Eugene Winograd, "The authenticity and utility of memories" in *The Remembering Self: Construction and accuracy in the self-narrative*, ed. Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 247.

¹⁰⁵ The term "survivor generation" refers (at least in Jewish culture) to the generation of European Jews who were alive during the Shoah.

¹⁰⁶ Kendall L. Walton, *Marvelous Images: On values and the Arts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ Kendall L. Walton, *Marvelous Images: On values and the Arts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 89.

¹⁰⁸ Jane Neal, "What Lies Beneath: Painting and the Archeology of Invisibility" in *Flash Art Magazine* 285, July-September 2012, <http://www.flashartonline.com/article/what-lies-beneath/>.

¹⁰⁹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 50.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

- 111 Allan Megill, "History, Memory, and Identity" in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 195.
- 112 Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 23.
- 113 Geoffrey Batchen, "Observing by Watching: Joachim Schmid and the Art of Exchange", *Aperture* 210 (2013), 46.
- 114 Not only have users of social media made the present currency of their existence intangible by putting it online, but they have absolved themselves of the souvenirs and artifacts that their forerunners used to evince their experiences. While digital information is often seen as readily available and accessible, it is also easier to alter or delete. Conversely, functions such as Facebook's "memorial profiles" of users who have passed away allow their "friends" to retain access to online interactions, even after death. This duality calls into question the evolving role that the concept of permanence will play in the digital age.
- 115 Sharon MacDonald, *Memorylands: History and Identity in Europe Today* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 52.
In the third chapter of *Memorylands*, MacDonald defines "past-presencing" as: "the empirical phenomenon of how people variously experience, understand, and produce the past in the present[.]"
- 116 Geoffrey Batchen, "Observing by Watching: Joachim Schmid and the Art of Exchange", *Aperture* 210 (2013), 46.
- 117 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 142.
- 118 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 49.
- 119 Catherine Keenan, "On the Relationship Between Personal Photographs and Individual Memory", *History of Photography* 22, no. 1 (1998): 63.
- 120 Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile" in *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996), 662.
- 121 Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile" in *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996), 664.
- 122 Emily Snyder, "Re-building Memory: Ruth Miller learns by looking" *The Dartmouth*, October 4, 1999, <http://thedartmouth.com/1999/10/04/re-building-memory-ruth-miller-learns-by-looking/>.
- 123 Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile" in *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996), 664.
I use the word wander here because of the passage written by Nadine Fresco and translated by Hirsch: "[...] as those who were born after could do nothing but wander, prey to a longing forever disenfranchised."
- 124 Jonathan Green, "Photography as Popular Culture" *Journal of the University Film Association* 30, No. 4 (1978): 15, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20687447.pdf?acceptTC=true>.
- 125 Kate Sierzputowski, "Unraveling the mystery of a couple's life in photographs", *Hyperallergic*, August 15, 2014 (accessed April 30, 2016), <http://hyperallergic.com/143839/unraveling-the-mystery-of-a-couples-life-in-photographs/>.
- 126 Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile" in *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996), 664-665.
"Yizker bikher" or "Yizkhor books" are memorial books prepared by the exiled survivors of the pogroms which plagued the Jews of Eastern Europe. Their purpose (which was later expanded upon by survivors of the *Shoah*) is to preserve the memory of the makers' destroyed culture. They often include historical accounts of community life, detailed records of discrimination and violence, and photographs that show life during the elusive "before".
- 127 Katherine Hoffman, *Concepts of Identity: Historical and Contemporary Images and Portraits of Self and Family* (New York: IconEditions, 1996), 1.
- 128 Arlene Stein, "The Photographs Near my Father's Bed", *Bridges* 14, no. 1 (2009), 38.
- 129 Arlene Stein, "The Photographs Near my Father's Bed", *Bridges* 14, no. 1 (2009), 38.
- 130 Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: memory, history, and the legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 9.

¹³¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 328.

¹³² Eugene Winograd, "The authenticity and utility of memories" in *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, ed. Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 136-157.

¹³³ This impulse, to physically and visually define the form of an object that we can see but not understand is key to the perceptual painters' ideal of using painting as a means to "search out" forms. Israel Hershberg discussed this impulse (and the challenge that it presents when painting from life) in an informal lecture to his Jerusalem Studio School Master Class in Civita Castellana, Italy, in the summer of 2013. He asserted that some spaces, especially those viewed from a great distance tend to resist definition. At that point, it behooves the perplexed painter to render the space just as they see it (regardless of what they think that the thing "is"), so that the viewer understands not "what was there", but "what was perceived to be there". I have found this lecture particularly useful in completing the *Testimonial* paintings, whose miniscule reference materials often require extensive scrutiny and guess-work regarding the interpretation of various structures.

¹³⁴ Merriam-Webster defines "pogrom" as Yiddish (from Russian), literally meaning "devastation." Since 1903 it has been used to describe the organized massacres of European Jews before the rise of the Third Reich.

¹³⁵ Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, is located just outside of Jerusalem. It houses some of the most extensive archives in the world from the years of the *Shoah*, including: The Central Database of *Shoah* Victims Names, The Online Photo Archive, The Documents Archive, The Yad Vashem Library, The Center Film Database, The *Shoah* Related Lists Database, and the Righteous Database. While I have never used any of these resources to learn more about the fates of my father's family members, my mother conducted a cursory search at Yad Vashem in 1989, and found nothing.

¹³⁶ Originally published by the British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books Ltd. in 1972.

¹³⁷ Essay was unpublished during Benjamin's lifetime, and was likely written in 1932.

¹³⁸ Originally published by Pitman Publishing Corporation in 1938.

¹³⁹ Gallery publication by Steven Harvey Fine Arts Projects on the occasion of Sangram Majumdar's two-part exhibition *Peel*, which ran from November 20, 2013 – December 22, 2013. Included was Humphrey's essay "Unbuilt to Suit".