Jack Goldstein in Los Angeles

by

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Introduction

This paper reexamines Jack Goldstein as one of the key but under recognized figures of what came to be known as the postmodern period in American art. Often described as bridging the gap between conceptualism and pop art, his work explores visual strategies of representation through the lens of art and mass media and how they inform our understanding of the world around us. I argue that the interest in representation is outlined by the cultural practices and aesthetic priorities of Los Angeles (where Goldstein began making art) of the late 1960s and 1970s and by extension, Hollywood.

In order to gain a better grasp of what perhaps is considered his lesser known work, the films, I will examine a selection of them (some better known than others) in relationship to: 1) art historical and theoretical conversations on the topic of representation and modes of signification as discussed in seminal texts such as Douglas Crimp’s essays Pictures, 1977 and “Pictures,” republished in October in 1979; David E. James’ The Most Typical Avant-Garde, 2005, a history and geography of filmmaking in Los Angeles; the exhibition catalogue, The Pictures Generation 1974–1984, 2009, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, curated by Douglas Eklund; and a selection of essays in the exhibition catalogue, Jack Goldstein x 10,000, 2012, at the Orange County Museum of Art, curated by Philipp Kaiser; 2) the work of other Pictures artists such as Sherrie Levine, Matt Mullican and James Welling, as well as that of earlier California based artists; and 3) the cultural conditions of Los Angeles and Hollywood on aesthetic leanings and approaches to art making.

Curated by Douglas Crimp in 1977, Pictures at Artists Space in New York City included the work of Jack Goldstein as well as artists David Salle, Troy Brauntuch, Sherrie Levine, Robert
Longo, and Philip Smith. All but the latter would became (loosely) recognized as members of the Pictures generation. In the exhibition catalogue, Crimp wrote, “to an ever greater extent our experience is governed by pictures, pictures in newspapers and magazines, on television and in the cinema.” The work of these artists “…sees representation as an inescapable part of our ability to grasp the world around us.”¹ In an increasingly image saturated culture, these artists developed new kinds of art that are as distinctive of one another as they are of other genres of art that sought to negotiate with the pervasiveness of mass culture as the guiding principle of visual literacy. Much of this preoccupation with imagery stems from the proliferation of the television in the American home and invention of instant photography in the late 1940s as images became available faster—no doubt playing a much larger role in mediating our everyday existence.²

Marvin Heiferman, in his essay, “Everywhere, All the Time, for Everybody,” written for the exhibition catalogue in *Image World: Art and Media Culture* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1989, writes, “images are the borders of imagination.”³ He further expanded on how the second world war was good for images because it not only bolstered the economy but propagandized an impression of America that raised public support. After the war ended, the economy was redeveloped for the consumer good, which was marketed much in the same way the war had promoted a concept of a strong and moral America. Images kept America “learned” and entertained while the burgeoning popularity of different products satiated newfound desires inspired by the increase in expendable income. The presentness and ubiquity of the mass disseminated image became a new kind of common visual language that flourished no matter


what was the agent of transmission. Likewise, there was little regard for medium specificity of
art in the following decades. Crimp describes in his 1979 reiteration of “Pictures,” published in
the provocative and divisive *October* magazine, “[a]s is typical of what has come to be called
postmodernism, this work is not confined to any particular medium; instead it makes use of
photography, film, performance, as well as traditional modes of painting, drawing and
sculpture.”4 As expressed in his earlier essay, it “became imperative to understand the picture
itself, not in order to uncover a lost reality, but to determine how a picture becomes a signifying
structure of its own accord.”5 Art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss also interprets this
pluralistic shift in her essay, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America,” published in
*October* in 1977 (she was editor and co-founder alongside Annette Michelson). As she writes,
“Unlike the art of the past several decades, its energy does not seem to flow through a single
channel for which a synthetic term, Abstract-Expressionism or Minimalism, might be found. In
defiance of the notion of collective effort that operates behind the very idea of an artistic
‘movement’, 70s art is proud of its own dispersal.” The “Picture Generation” label was perhaps
somewhat ill-defined until 2009 when Douglas Eklund curated the exhibition *The Pictures
Generation: 1975–1984*, in which Goldstein, Troy Brauntuch and Sherrie Levine, among others
are included and consequently associated. In 1977 both Crimp and Krauss attribute this nascent
rebellion against the historical autonomy of style to the recent interest in the nature of ontology
of photography and its modes of signification—the capacity to inform (or reverse) meaning and
establish new symbolisms and avenues for image making. The particular interest in signs and
appropriative seeing characterizes what art historian and curator Paul Schimmel refers to as the

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“dead end” of modernism—framed by the intensifying mediation of everyday experience, and the evolution of photography into a theoretical object, no longer just a means of capturing a slice of nature, as described by Rosalind Krauss. Schimmel also points out the political and economic turbulence of the growing dissention to war, the beginnings of a codified Feminist movement, the devastation brought by the Great Inflation, and the diversity and of vanguardism in creative production and its increasing exchange with industry in 1960s and 1970s Southern California.

Through the lens of Pictures as well as the work of other artists with concentrations in cinema, photography, performance, and theater we can perhaps achieve a greater understanding of Goldstein’s work (and its development in the experimental west) that came before a canonized postmodernist theory.

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Chapter 1 - CalArts

In the *Pictures* exhibition catalogue of 1977, Douglas Crimp wrote that Goldstein and the other artists, “…have turned to the available images in the culture around them….”\(^7\) Although not all of the artists exhibited were from or formally trained in Los Angeles, it is necessary to point out that the openness with which art was approached and the interest in available images as tools for artistic process were central to Goldstein’s education as an art student at Walt Disney’s California Institute of the Arts from 1970 to 1972. As a merger of the Chouinard Institute and the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music in 1961, CalArts stressed the importance of an interdisciplinary curriculum that emphasized learning “by example.”\(^8\) They were accepted as artists in their own right and exposed to the the work of “professional” artists, art theory, criticism and history, and movements and ideas coming out of the more orthodox East (namely New York) and Europe. Published in a CalArts brochure in 1969, Walt Disney describes the increasing importance of the arts, both to business and communications and the urgent need for a professional school that would cultivate and provide the widest possible range for creative expression.\(^9\) CalArts’ faculty, all of whom were film industry and/or art professionals, grappled with the question of whether or not art could actually be taught. Perhaps the most influential to Goldstein and his classmates, artists like James Welling and Matt Mullican, was John Baldessari, a California based conceptual artist who conceived of the groundbreaking post-studio class. In

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7 Crimp, *Pictures*, 5.


an interview published in Thomas Lawson’s archive and online periodical, *East of Borneo*,
Baldessari spoke with critic and writer Christopher Knight:

…what do you do in an art school?...what courses are necessary to teach?....can art be taught at all?...No, it can’t. It can’t be taught. You can set up a situation where art might happen, but I think that’s the closest you get….If art can’t be taught, maybe it would be a good idea to have people that call themselves artists around. And something, some chemistry might happen.10

Goldstein describes Baldessari’s class, “John would have magazines on the floor open to the ads, to the news photos. He was saying, here, all of his stuff you can use in your art. I don’t remember any other instructor who ever treated art that way….I was subsequently heavily influenced by John’s open attitude.”11 Although the “learn by doing” directive was not unique to Baldessari per se, it was perhaps his Southern California roots, his assent to mass cultural forms as creative fodder, and impartiality towards convention and history in favor of individualism, that allowed his approach to have unique and long lasting resonance. The school was thought by some to be modeled after Black Mountain College in North Carolina, which was experimental in nature and committed to the cross-pollination of disciplines and attitudes. There were no grades either. As published in the CalArts Student Handbook of 1971/1972, the decision to eliminate grades was supplanted with constant interaction and critique by faculty members in addition to the “Student Experience Reports” through which each student was responsible for keeping a record of his or her learning experiences. The substance of the student’s activities, observations, or comments was evaluated in order to gauge the seriousness of his/her involvement in the program and therefore serve as an indicator of future professional success. Matt Mullican remembers Baldessari revealing:


When he made new work, he would test it out on us; he wanted our pulse; he wanted our opinions. He still trusts us….If I am articulate about what I do, it is only because I learned how to talk about art through working with John Baldessari; from him I learned how to defend myself and to cope with the social pressure, which was extreme. It taught us a lot.\textsuperscript{12}

According to Nancy Chunn, recruiter for CalArts in its formative years, each of the incoming students the first year were handpicked. Recruiters were looking for weirdness, versatility, and ambition. She said, “You know how artists are made? You give them permission to be artists.”\textsuperscript{13}

In preparation for the merger, Chouinard faculty were given questionnaires on various issues thought to be relevant to the professional and creative achievement of future students. Responses alluded to the need for connections to the commercial industries and contact with outside authorities on art and enterprise. Professor Senter (first name not known) in particular addressed the importance of environment and culture:

I believe a program of association (thru guest speakers and contact) with the basic creative industries and companies in this area would be helpful to the stature of the school. I try to duplicate the working conditions of the studios in my classroom. This gives the school a professional stature which would bring it above the purely academic level. I believe every instructor should keep in mind the prime requisite of striving to have the student think creatively and not merely learn the technicalities of delineation, etc. because of the area in which we find ourselves I feel that it is mandatory that the school takes the initiative in becoming the institution to supply the people to the motion picture and TV industries whose requirements for this type of person will become critical in the time to come. A ‘good’ school exists because it has stimulating ideas….A delight in experimentation….A good school should have interchange of ideas among instructors and a flexible coordination that makes a student realize the power of relationships between one class and another.\textsuperscript{14}

These answers presage the interdisciplinary character of CalArts, its deepening ties to Hollywood and other cultural milieus prominent in Los Angeles, such as advertising and design, as well as its foundation for artistic development vis-à-vis outside artists, institutions, and

\textsuperscript{12} Matt Mullican in Richard Hertz, \textit{Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia} (Ojai, CA: Minneola Press, 2003), 156.

\textsuperscript{13} Nancy Chunn in discussion with Kirby Michelle Woo February 1, 2015.

\textsuperscript{14} Nancy Chunn, cit., 2015, n.p.
systems of thought. Whereas Chouinard was better known for its connections to industry and commercial art production, CalArts would foster a different style of cultivation and teaching, one more in line with the pedagogy and philosophy of East Coast institutions such as Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Allan Kaprow, creator of Happenings, member of the Fluxus movement, and transplant from Rutgers’ prestigious art department, is in great part accountable for facilitating an integrative and collaborative methodology, the blurring of student/teacher hierarchy, and the requisite of constant interaction with the international arts community at CalArts where he was appointed to assistant dean of the School of Art in 1969. At Rutgers, Kaprow, along with artists George Brecht and Robert Watts advocated for the introduction of new media to the art curriculum via the integration of arts and sciences in their collaborative text, “Project in Multiple Dimensions” written in 1957–58, initially for grant funding. As described in Kaprow’s, “Notes on the Creation of A Total Art” published in the exhibition catalogue, *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia, and Rutgers University, 1958–1972*, an increasing need to consider those practices considered in between the individual arts, i.e. performance, happenings, music, theater etc. was necessary for the conception of a more “relevant” art for the time. Janet Sarbanes quotes conceptual artist and original CalArts faculty member Alison Knowles in her article, “A Community of Artists: Radical Pedagogy at CalArts, 1969–1972,” published in East of Borneo, “Kaprow was the thinking behind the school as far as I’m concerned. He had the vision of a school based on what artists wanted to do rather than what the school wanted them to do.”15 The freedom to create in whatever means took precedence over conformity to standardization, granting autonomy to

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instructors like Baldessari to establish classes like the post-studio course, in which investigation outside of the traditional arts as well as continuous exposure to the professional art world on the west coast, in New York, and in Europe was thought vital to the development of the contemporary artist. In a memoir published in Richard Hertz’s controversial book, *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia*, Goldstein talks about Baldessari’s insistence on the availability of information through the invitation of guest lecturers, field trips, and the sharing of souvenirs from his frequent travels that often included magazines, newspapers, and pictures of art and other places. The students’ avid want for more information could not be quelled. “The artists Baldessari brought out really expanded the information available to us,” revealed Goldstein. He elaborated:

> At first artists came and thought they could adlib a talk, but that attitude changed quickly because we would ask tough questions. Word got around that if you came out to give a lecture, you had better be prepared because the students would tear you apart. Students didn’t get very much hands-on education, but we learned a whole new attitude about what art could be— not expression but investigation….\(^{16}\)

Baldessari knew what the students needed, “They needed to talk to other interesting artists. If you had enough good artists around from all over the world, the students would come and they would teach each other.”\(^{17}\) He told Christopher Knight he would do just about anything to get certain artists to come and speak to the students, oftentimes arranging other opportunities, places for them to stay etc. with the hope of luring them to campus.\(^{18}\) In the exhibition catalogue for *Under the Big Black Sun* at the Museum for Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in 2011, Paul Schimmel discusses the receptivity of the Los Angeles art community who, “…favored a much

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\(^{16}\) Goldstein in Hertz, *Jack Goldstein*, cit., 2003, 55.


\(^{18}\) Baldessari in Knight, n.p.
more fluid interactive assimilation of all that they could see, borrow, and steal both from the
world at large and from each other. “The relative disregard for art history and the art market in
support of self-investigation, experimentation and engagement with other artists created a
breeding ground for not only new ways of constructing, but also for new ways of seeing and
presenting. In an interview with conceptual artist Allen Ruppersberg, writer, editor, artist, and
present Dean of CalArts, Thomas Lawson attests to the effects of this new methodology, citing
an openness to artistic innovation and discourse in late 1960s Los Angeles and the draw of the
city for young artists of the time. Ruppersberg and Goldstein both attended Chouinard Institute
but at slightly different times, in 1963–1967 and 1966–1969 respectively. Alexander Dumbadze,
one of the foremost scholars on Goldstein’s oeuvre and professor of art history at George
Washington University, notes that Baldessari took his students to visit his exhibition at the
Pasadena Art Museum in the fall semester of 1970. Ruppersberg initially intended on pursuing
a career as an animator and found the close proximity to Hollywood and Disneyland, as well as
the laid-back stance of “sun and surf” culture appealing. Nancy Chunn described the Los
Angeles she knew as an adult playground. As she said, “Everyone went nuts. It was all that
sunshine. Blondes were walking around with no bras. There were so many divorces that first
year. Everyone from New York got rid of their black clothes and got cowboy boots. It was a
totally different aesthetic. More sexual. More color.” Set against the backdrop of industry
spectacle, Chouinard (and later, CalArts) was believed to profit from such an opportune location.

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County Museum of Art and DelMonico Books, 2012), 17.

22 Chunn, n.p.
In a preliminary outline of long-range plans issued to Chouinard’s planning committee in 1958, the academic sub-committee highlights the benefits, noting that:

The school is an alive functioning unit whose very existence as a professional art school is dependent upon the stimulation it receives from being a part of and in close relation to commercial and industrial activities. For it is this producing business world that absorbs a large percent of all graduating students. Upon leaving the school, the graduate goes to work in the motion picture and television studios, the aircraft plants, in factories, large department stores, in corporate art services, in architectural firms and in the various design centers. Before leaving the school he already has visited many of these potential job outlets.23

Further on, a statement of philosophy from the Academic Sub-Committee to the Chouinard Planning Committee in January 1958 said that the purpose of the school was “to offer the best training that will produce men and women, well-equipped and adaptable to the practical needs and opportunities of contemporary society and prepared to work with others effectively.”24

Conversely, in Walt Disney’s Statement of Purpose (undated in the CalArt’s archives) reissued in 1972 with support from the CalArts' Board of Trustees, the new institute affirmed:

The key to the word ‘professional’ is not primarily that one should be paid, but that once has “professed” – that is, one has declared oneself indivisibly devoted to some calling which is so meaningful that one becomes utterly dedicated. Students at CalArts will be those who are already committed to their art.25

As previously highlighted, this was very different from CalArts in its professionalizing aspect; CalArts was committed to training and preparing artists for careers in the making of fine art—an industry from which a highly specialized and unregulated market took unprecedented form in the early 1980s, creating a kind of explosion of wealth, instant fame and career launching prices. In an article by Peter C.T. Elsworth entitled, “The Art Boom: Is It Over, or Is This Just a


Correction?” published in 1990 in *The New York Times*, the formation of the contemporary art market (as we know it) is revealed. As one reads, “The growth of the art market through the 1980s reflected a money obsessed decade when billionaires replaced millionaires in business magazine pantheons. There seemed to be no limits. Prices went ever higher and the boom offered the once-unimaginable prospect of a $100 million dollar painting.” As film historian, David E. James posits, artistic innovation and production in Los Angeles was fundamentally positioned in opposition, and simultaneously parallel to, the cultures of capitalism. Although he was referring to the history and significance of alternative cinemas in relationship to industry, the role of art and the avant-garde in transforming the cultural landscape in Southern California was duly and repeatedly noted.

Goldstein went to high school in Los Angeles, however his introduction to the art world was through Chouinard, where he would meet the artists who would become his friends and competitors. Although he described the education as lacking (most likely because of its inherent ties to commercial disciplines) he was nonetheless exposed to the complexities of the Los Angeles art community and the work of leading conceptual artists like William Leavitt, Bas Jan Ader, Allen Ruppersberg, Wolfgang Stoerchle and Ger van Elk, all of whom to some extent would have an undeniable impact on his work. Despite the significance of these artists within this specific context, they were not widely known or exhibited at the time. As one of the few students who eventually transitioned into CalArts, Goldstein witnessed the formation of the school’s identity, and perhaps his own to some degree for it was here that he would meet artists

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28 Goldstein in Hertz, 19.
such as Matt Mullican, David Salle, and James Welling, all of whom were considered his peers at one point or another and would grapple with ideas of representation during the 1970s via uses of alternative media. Similarly, Goldstein’s introduction to Fluxus methodology which favored a more flexible, hands-on type of instruction\(^{29}\) that proffered lessons in rethinking the idea of time and space in relationship to art, particularly the subversion of the art object in favor of experience and viewer participation, supported a markedly anti-modernist approach. Critic Michael Fried is well known for exhorting on the subject of time based art as a threat to modernism in his particular criticism of minimalist art. The significance of Fried’s views in connection to Pictures is historicized in Douglas Crimp’s second “Pictures” essay in which he discusses the ambiguity of art’s value system (particularly in the 1970s) due to a lingering concern for maintaining the boundaries of the individual arts:

The work that has aid most serious claim to our attention throughout the seventies has been situated between, or outside the individual arts, with the result that the integrity of the various mediums—those categories the exploration of whose essences and limits constituted the very project of modernism—has dispersed into meaninglessness.”\(^{30}\) Fried argues that minimal or “literalist” art is inherently theatrical. He explains that theatricality is due to the necessity of the viewer as subject in order to give the work presence and meaning. This relationship is made apparent when the work requires the viewer to experience it in real time. The objectness of the work is inherently determined by its shape, scale and wholeness, unlike traditional painting for example, in which its entirety is expressed pictorially as the sum of individual parts or elements.

He argued, “…modernist painting has come to find it imperative that it defeat or suspend its own objecthood and the crucial factor in this undertaking is shape, but shape that must belong to painting—it must be pictorial, not, or not merely, literal.”\(^{31}\)

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\(^{30}\) Crimp, “Pictures,” *cit.*, 1979, 76.

Arguably, Goldstein and his peers were aware of this association to Fried and the anxieties around much of the theoretical and artistic shifts of the 1960s and the 1970s. As explained in Janet Sarbanes’ essay, “A Community of Artists: Radical Pedagogy at CalArts, 1969–72,” the openness with which art was being taught and subsequently made was also established in reaction to a change in the education system in which students demanded more freedom and say about what they learned and how they learned it. Sarbane quotes former CalArts President Robert Corrigan in a memo written in 1970:

> We [have built] educational institutions which are conceived as independent entities, completely cut off from the rest of society…. Today our young people are determined that these walls must come down, and this is one of the reasons why our institutions are in such trouble. [Students] believe that learning must be much more than a preparation for life; it must be an ongoing process that is directly related to life.

Nancy Chunn observed that many of Chouinard’s faculty were replaced by New York imports. The newcomers were more highbrow, more severe. Although the rhetoric of Chouinard and CalArts similarly insisted on opening onto the world, they came to define the professional sphere very differently. While the former looked to the movie studios and commercial industries as a barometer for success, the former lay emphasis on the importation of technique, innovation, and critical thought pervading then in New York and Europe and perhaps more importantly, recognition by one’s peers.

CalArts offered degrees through six schools: art, critical studies, design, film, music, theater, and dance. In the first institute handbook published in October 1970, the deans for each school are listed, along with their qualifications; Paul Brach, Dean of the School of Art; Richard

34 Chunn, n.p.
E. Farson, Dean of the School of Design; Mel Powell, Dean of the School of Music; Alexander MacKendrick, Dean of the School of Film; and lastly, Maurice R. Stein, Dean of the School of Critical Studies.\textsuperscript{35} Goldstein was accepted into the graduate art program in the fall of this year which offered classes in varying subjects such as kinetics and “temporary structures” (for which he was the instructor) as well as happenings, video, and the reputed post-studio class.

Unfortunately, CalArts holds no student records prior to the 1990s, including for example, Goldstein’s class schedules. The course catalogue for Term I of 1972 describes Baldessari’s post-studio art class as:

\begin{quote}
[F]ollowing current attitudes…Pop minimal, ecological, anti-form, anti-illusion, information, language, concept and performance. The investigation of such questions and issues as, is the object necessary, originality in art, must art be visual, what is order, durability, place and process, art as experience, art as time and etc. The student should be familiar with the history of modern art through Duchamp. It will be a lecture/studio course using a problem solving approach. Course activity will consist of the investigation of the works of some artists such as LeWitt, Gilbert and George, Andre, etc…. Much of the work will be realized through video, film and photography. The program will be interlocked with the visiting artists program, especially artists working in performance….\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

It is no wonder that Goldstein’s roots in Minimalism and Los Angeles Conceptualism, his interest in non-traditional media, and concern for representation through diverse approaches to presentation can be, in large part, traced to this formative period under Baldessari’s tutelage.

Initially Goldstein was making minimalist sculpture in the vein of Los Angeles sculptor, Guy Dill. He later recalled of Dill, “[He] built a career for himself using that vocabulary. That’s one reason I stopped doing work like that; I figured a lot of other artists could pick up and run with those ideas.”\textsuperscript{37} Although relatively unknown outside of California, Guy Dill was important

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{35} “Faculty of the School of the Arts, October 1970,” California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles, n.p.
\textsuperscript{36} “Course Catalogue, Term I, 1972,” California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles, California, 4.
\textsuperscript{37} Goldstein in Hertz, 26.
\end{flushright}
in defining sculptural practice in Southern California in the 1970s in which proximity to the arts and crafts/construction skills prevalent in Hollywood and use of prefabricated, readymade materials found in the industrial arts of car and airplane production, in addition to a plenitude of affordable space and an abundance of light (sunshine) set the stage for Goldstein’s early preoccupation with neoplastic forms. In the catalogue for 6 LA Sculptors: Michael Davis, Woods Davy, Guy Dill, George Geyer, Michael Todd, De Wain Valentine an exhibition held at the Federal Reserve Board – Martin Building in Washington D.C., in 1980, the Director, Mary Anne Goley, interviewed Los Angeles based curator, Walter Hopps. Hopps describes Dill’s work “what you see is what you see.” He means that Dill, much like Goldstein’s short stint with sculpture, did not involve altering the character of the material because it was through the nature and quality of the material itself that form could be created. He further clarified that Dill’s “process of combining, adhering is self-evident and simple” as it was more about combining and arranging material forms to see what you could come up with. In a recent conversation with Pictures artist and musician, Paul McMahon, we discussed a couple of these early pieces, which consisted of precut planks of wood or Plexiglas that were propped against the wall or assembled on the floor. With nothing to attach or anchor the pieces to the wall or to each other, it appeared that they were magically adhered. Only gravity held the elements of these works together. The first time McMahon saw them was in early 1971 at the art gallery at the Pomona College of Art where he was an undergraduate student. Helene Winer, founder of Metro Pictures and former director of Artists Space, was the director of the museum at this time (and McMahon’s boss)


39 Hopps in Goley, 6 LA Sculptors, cit., 1980, 2.
until she moved to New York in 1974 with Goldstein. As described by many historical accounts, she was his longtime partner and biggest supporter for much for his early career. Goldstein remembers, “She was the only person who understood and believed in my work. I constantly spoke with her about it; I think I nearly drove her crazy because that is all I wanted to do—talk about my ideas and my work.”\(^{40}\) He also reminisced, “She was the only curator interested in new work in LA; among others, she had shows for Baldessari, as well as Bas Jan Ader, Chris Burden, Ger van Elk, Bill Leavitt, Al Ruppersberg, Wolfgang Stoerchle, and Bill Wegman.”\(^{41}\)

McMahon recounts one relatively well-known installation in which two step ladders were placed side by side. Placed some six feet high, a bucket of water rested precariously on the edge of one of its shelves, while slowly leaking into an empty bucket that sat on the lower shelf of the other. The viewer was unable to see the nearly invisible hole from which the water persistently dripped. It seemingly threatened to come crashing down or overflow at any moment. Goldstein’s early connections to Fluxus via CalArts faculty members Allan Kaprow, John Baldessari, Alison Knowles, and Nam June Paik (in addition to being his teaching assistant for a semester; Goldstein supposedly taught him how to drive a car according to Nancy Chunn) most likely exposed him to such works as *Drip Music* by George Brecht, performed in 1962. This piece, like Goldstein’s, was widely considered as the forerunner to Conceptual art. According to Julia Robinson’s article, “From Abstraction to Model: George Brecht’s Events and the Conceptual Turn in Art of the 1960s,” published in *October* in 2009 the performance was in lieu of the art object and “designed to meditate a moment of the spectator’s experience.”\(^{42}\)

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\(^{40}\) Goldstein in Hertz, 100.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 26.

describe that *Drip Music*, “focuses an audience on the sensual effects discovered in the simple act of releasing water from one vessel into another…”\(^{43}\) Possibly then, the earlier mentioned feeling of unease one experiences with Goldstein’s piece too intervenes as the art object itself for it re-focuses our attention from art to, as Robinson notes, “everyday perceptual experience.”\(^{44}\)

More to Goldstein’s treatment of the everyday as the bases for much of this early work, it is likely that he also knew of work of Los Angeles based artists such as Dewain Valentine who used manufactured articles and industrial processes to make sculptures that highlight the elements of light, color, surface and volume to name a few. Associated with the Light and Space Movement prevalent in 1960s Southern California, the artistic concern for materiality and the capacity of non-traditional materials such as plastic and steel for formal expression, continued into the early 1970s. In 1972, CalArts hosted an exhibition entitled, “The Last Plastics Show,” which was organized by Valentine and artists Judy Chicago and Doug Edge that surveyed artists who were exploring the physical and aesthetic potential of synthetic (and often high-tech) materials.\(^{45}\) Alexander Dumbadze likens Goldstein to a writer who invents with words but doesn’t actually invent the words themselves.\(^{46}\) That is, there was an emphasis on the selection of preexisting things to compose a new kind of whole—a picture that suggests, implicates and incites but doesn’t provide any answers. No matter the medium, Goldstein had a desire for taking recognizable things and re-presenting them in a way that created a new kind of position or experience for the viewer. The tension it yields is familiar to his later work (which will be examined at length in later chapters) in that a situation of uncertainty is established in part


\(^{44}\) Ibid., 77.

\(^{45}\) Advertisement, *The Big News*, September 1972, California Institute of Arts, Los Angeles, California.

\(^{46}\) Alexander Dumbadze in discussion with Kirby Michelle Woo, 2015, n.p..
through the inherent properties of the medium being employed in order to bring to the viewer’s attention, his/her relationship to the object. With regard to the sculptures, it is the structural transparency of the wooden beam assemblage with nothing to hold them together that might fall and cause imminent injury. In the films, it is the slick look of the professional camera that captures the banal or stock image, the obviousness of unsynchronized sound generally unfitting for the completed film, or the unnatural/hyper-saturated palette of the imaginary we are used to seeing in the movies. Although the former derives from a more minimalist tradition (despite its more pictorial inclination) and the latter, conceptualism and even pop art (despite its obvious formalism and negotiation with commercial film), both bodies of work establish the viewer as subject. Dumbaze also notes the purposeful yet passive nature of the artist here, who sits back and waits for something to happen.47 This brings to mind his approach to film too, in which Goldstein takes pride in his lack of technical knowledge and hires professional cameramen to shoot the work. He doesn’t actually make them himself. Although he sets/directs the scene (and sometimes stars in it) both here and in the films, it is the viewer who conceives of the films’ meanings and becomes the counterpart to the image.

McMahon describes Goldstein’s art as the “whole situation.” When you visit a movie theater, you may desire the experience of “going” to the movies as much as you might enjoy the movie itself. Similar to this is looking at a sculpture: you have to walk around it and see the whole thing in order to truly experience it. This experience however, differs from person to person. He explains that this is where Goldstein was locating his art—in the capacity to direct one’s own experience in the world.48 The element of control is a major theme in Goldstein’s


48 Paul McMahon in discussion with Kirby Michelle Woo, February 5, 2015.
work, most prominently in the films. He was meditating on and subverting the strategies of mass media in order to produce a type of image with no origin or history. In an interview with renowned filmmaker, Morgan Fisher titled, “Talking with Jack Goldstein,” published in The Los Angeles Institute for Contemporary Art Journal in 1977, Goldstein speaks of an affinity for control through the evolution of his work. “I want to turn a thought into something tangible—an object—and then back into a thought…minimal sculpture was all about the autonomous object, the fact that a thing existed without your presence. It had its own life, its own energy. That’s very important in my work because I come out of minimal sculpture.”

Douglas Eklund speaks at length about the widespread interest in the power of mass cultural objects over the gaze in the exhibition catalogue, and explains that it was a reaction against consumerism’s progressive marginalization of the individual. Eklund sees a connection between Goldstein’s re-presentation of what is knowable and William Leavitt’s Painted Image, 1972 (Figure 1), for example, that exercises theatrical devices via portraiture to explore the nature of viewer reflexivity. The seeming familiarity of the pose, the intimacy with which the image was apparently captured, the likeness of the dog to other dogs that we might know or have known, etc. are meant to conjure up memories and feelings in the viewer. It appropriates the strategies of Hollywood and other forms of mass culture, such as stereotyping, fetishizing, and/or sensationalising to produce psychological responses in the viewer. More importantly, “[The work] does not achieve signification in relation to what is represented; rather, it is in relation to

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52 Ibid., 72.
other representations.”53 Douglas Crimp describes the viewer’s impulse to relate to the images in Pictures by virtue of the associative nature of images in capitalist culture, despite whether having direct experience with a thing or an event.54

Around the same time he was making sculpture, Goldstein was also engaging in performance. In a well-remembered event entitled Burial Piece, 1972, Goldstein buried himself underground; his presence, just barely detectable was made apparent via a red light that was attached to a gadget that was supposed to convert his heartbeat into light. For every beat, the light would signal. Goldstein was eliciting a certain kind of response in the audience through his bodily absence and simultaneous presence as well as through the irritating effect of the light. The viewer is apprehensive because is he/she is aware of the compromising position of being buried alive. As a transmission of sorts, we witness the heartbeat an indexical sign for the body that records both its presence and absence. It perhaps stirs feelings of fear, anxiety (of mortality), and guilt (for not digging him out) etc.55 Through self-interment, Goldstein relieves himself of the responsibility of constructing the image by once again, allowing the viewer to conjure up the image in his/her mind through experience the situation. As Crimp conveyed in his 1977 essay, “The shift in the conception of illusionism from a representation of something absent to the condition of our apprehension of what is present, and the psychologization of the image, were extended by a number of artists using performance.”56

It is significant to point out that Goldstein was Wolfgang Stoerchle’s teaching assistant in his first year at CalArts whose course description read, “Problems of body in sculptural setting,

53 Crimp, Pictures, 5.
54 Ibid., 8.
56 Crimp, Pictures, 5.
bodyworks, commercials, biodegradable sound, etc. Starring Ultra Violet,” followed by his biography, which quotes art historian David Kunzle: “…for whom the creative act is pursued with teutonic destructiveness. His preferred materials are the four elements of which the human body is composed: Earth, Fire, Air and Water. His points of departure are the Five Senses; he works symmetrically towards the Sixth Sense as far as Nonsense, having reached which he moves asymmetrically in reverse.”

57 We can deduce that Goldstein’s preoccupation with the unseen, in the absence of his body in works like *Burial Piece*, or the experience of his fleeting, idiosyncratic image(s) in the professionally shot films, can be in part linked to time spent with Stoerchle.

We have looked at the ways in which the specific cultural ethos of Los Angeles framed the artistic and educational priorities of Goldstein’s formative years at Chouinard and CalArts. Artists in Los Angeles were, according to Ruppersberg, community oriented but conversely open to ideas and influences that were taking shape in the much larger art circles of New York and Europe. The anti-orthodoxy with which art was “taught” translated into a diversity of styles, techniques and media that centered on the deconstruction of cultural meaning through an emphasis on reclaiming the picture. The preoccupation with pictures was due to many factors, including but not limited to, the commonplacenness of the television set from the late 1940s onward, the increase in disposable income befitting the growing consumer base in post-War America, the ensuing accessibility of images and information via outlets such as billboards, television programs, movies, lifestyle and news magazines, newspapers etc. combined with the relative end of painting’s supremacy and photography’s evolution into a theoretical construct. For artists like Goldstein, it was a matter of redefining the role of the artist (and thus the viewer) in the wake of mass media and corrupting the nature and authority of what was once considered

art. Also pertinent to the discussion of Goldstein’s work is the milieu of Hollywood. As a major determinant of aesthetic taste and image manufacturing, the film industry unquestionably motivated Goldstein’s interest in spectacle and melodrama.
Chapter 2 - Los Angeles and Hollywood

As a continuation of his concentration in the devices of representation, Goldstein transitioned from a postminimalist rhetoric to one that was more clearly aligned with those who would later belong to the Pictures Generation. Douglas Eklund, curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the exhibition, The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984, highlights the importance of Goldstein’s films (and records) and connects them to the fact that they were included in the Douglas Crimp’s seminal exhibition, Pictures, 1977 at Artists Space. The films are widely considered to be the quintessence of the generation’s dealings in the post-conceptual return to representation and eschewment of medium specificity.

The work of CalArts alums, Matt Mullican, David Salle, and James Welling, among others, also laid the foundation for Pictures throughout the decade, however, their work was not included in Crimp’s survey. Eklund attributes this to a couple of factors: the early work of these artists differed greatly from their mature styles and they had previously shown at Artists Space (which defied the gallery’s guidelines for admission). In the previous chapter, it is noted that the formation of this “grouping” as well as the language and theory of postmodernism from which we have come to understand his filmic work was codified some years after they were conceived. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art catalogue essay, Image Art After Conceptualism: CalArts, Hallwalls, and Artists Space, Eklund observes Goldstein’s connections to earlier work by Southern California artists such as Pat O’Neill and William Leavitt (to name a few), whom

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58 Eklund, 66.
Goldstein may have deemed his competition. Nonetheless, their work was left out of Crimp’s historical account, relegating their influence as somewhat peripheral.\(^{59}\)

Goldstein’s education in post-studio studies (then considered radical and cutting-edge), his knowledge and close proximity to the burgeoning commercial industries in Los Angeles, and, eventually, to film, not only persuades a more thorough investigation of his films and their historical and theoretical ties to the return to representation in art. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the work as distinct from previous departures from modernism, and particularly, its close ties with Conceptualism, Minimalism and Pop Art of the previous decade and into the early 1970s. In my evaluation of the films, I will highlight some of the critical and historic conversations on the subject of Pictures as primary concern of the work of Goldstein and his peers.

The historical positioning and the eventual widespread use of the term “postmodern” was debatably cemented in the pages of art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss’ publication, *October*. As she wrote in the Editorial, “The texts and interviews published here actually disclose a single, coherent position: the necessity of coming to terms with, rather than repressing, the ways in which recent work progressively disabuses us of our inherited idea about art. For these artists and critics, art is not a timeless manifestation of the human spirit, but the product of a specific set of temporal, topical, social and political conditions. The investigation of these conditions defines for us the activity of postmodernism.”\(^{60}\) In the spring of 1977, Krauss discussed the standardization and proliferating use of everyday images in the art of this period within the context of photography’s evolution from a mimetic device that captures and re-presents reality, as a “true” representation to an abstract object that democratizes the gaze and

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 66.

subjugates the objective nature of the medium for creative, social, economic, and political means.\textsuperscript{61} Photography’s likeness to reality was a powerful asset not only to a more globalized conception of identity but also to a more universal construal of images. This meant that photography was more easily exploitable both by the cultural producer as well as the consumer of pictures (and ideas). Media outlets diversified as more information became accessible, thereby necessitating the advancement of photographic technology and so the potentiality of the medium as a vehicle for artistic expression and critique. Krauss wrote:

> Every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object. Its separation from true icons is felt through the absoluteness of this physical genesis, one that seems to short-circuit or disallow those processes of schematization or symbolic intervention that operate within graphic representations of most paintings. If the symbolic finds its way into pictorial art through the human consciousness operating behind the forms of representation, forming a connection between objects and their meaning, this is not the case for photography.\textsuperscript{62}

Krauss means that photography’s uniqueness (and subsequent influence) is in its physical resemblance to the image it captures and to the work of artists like Goldstein. Its indexical quality is apparent through the absence of a referent. This lack or removal allows for the viewer to create meaning or narrative through his/her physical and emotional acknowledgment to that which appears recognizable but is re-presented as something not quite familiar. Douglas Crimp’s initial evaluation of the narrative without a narrative\textsuperscript{63} points to our desire to psychologize the image and looks specifically to Sigmund Freud’s notions of representation, particularly his descriptions of memories and dreams in which metaphors such as pictographs (signs) allude to


\textsuperscript{63} Crimp, \textit{Pictures}, 16.
something other than what it seems.\textsuperscript{64} In his catalogue essay, \textit{Pictures}, Crimp describes this as a kind of interior montage—an image comprised of both what you see and the contextual, experiential references of the viewer. The quality of representation contemporaneously finds its basis in photography and relies on the associative nature of images via the media, and thus, the modern day viewer’s experience and understanding of the world through pictures.\textsuperscript{65} His concern however was less about what the images meant and more about the renewed interest in their creative utility, and how they did or did not signify meaning.\textsuperscript{66}

Howard Singerman, in his, \textit{Art History, After Sherrie Levine}, also explains that Crimp first determines this growing return to representation through the works of Goldstein and other Pictures artists such as Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Troy Brauntuch and now Cindy Sherman (who was not included in the 1977 exhibition at Artists Space nor in Crimp’s accompanying essay) by turning to the writings of Freud.\textsuperscript{67} He suggests that the significance and reference to Freud is inferred by a revived interest in the genre of melodrama and the films of Douglas Sirk during the the 1970s. According to Crimp, his writings might have be pragmatic for criticism during a time in which art was arguably diverting from any previous known humanistic project (such as expressionism).

Singerman discusses the work of Sherrie Levine and in particular, her piece, \textit{Two Shoes for Two Dollars}, 1977 (Figure 2), an installation made of 75 pairs of shoes found at a thrift store and displayed in a storefront window. Here he compares Crimp’s assertion that, “inanimate

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 20.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 8.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 16.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Howard Singerman, \textit{Art History After Sherrie Levine} (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 43.
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objects at once spur and stand for the impulse to narrate” with those readymade conditions that create the melodrama - that which produces moral and psychological conflicts of an unresolved yet conventional nature. Furthermore, “Levine herself has pointed to Sirk as a touchstone for the ‘economy of means’ in Jack Goldstein’s and Troy Brauntuch’s photographically based work in *Pictures*, which recalled for her, the way Douglas Sirk dealt with melodrama and iconography in film.” Levine taught a seminar on Sirk at the Hartford Art School in 1979, screening her films and discussing in particular, her technique of “aesthetic distancing” during which time, Goldstein too was teaching (1978–1983). Records at the Hartford school are next to nonexistent prior to the 1990s, therefore the contents of his class syllabi are unknown, yet Singerman notes that Goldstein borrowed the films Levine rented and that the artist Joe Bishop borrowed the title of Sirk’s *Imitation of Life* to name a group exhibition at the school in 1979 that included several Pictures artists, such as David Salle, James Welling and Sherrie Levine.

We can assume that Goldstein was aware of Levine’s preoccupation with Sirk and the activity of distanciation (as evidenced in his own work of the 1970s, i.e. the performances, sculpture and films). In my 2015 interview with Morgan Fisher, he too makes reference to Goldstein’s connection with Levine at Hartford as well as Fassbinder’s fascination with Sirk in the 1970s. Singerman cites film historian Thomas Elsaesser who has stresses Fassbinder’s concern with Sirk and melodrama as well, as it imparted formal and conceptual models “capable

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70 Ibid., 27.

71 Ibid., 28.

72 Morgan Fisher in discussion with Kirby Michelle Woo, March 15, 2015.
of reproduction more directly than other genres,”

no doubt a nod to Hollywood’s proclivity for capitalizing the innovations of the avant-garde as well as the art’s return to representation through the use of recognizable images. What impelled the potency and amplitude of everyday images was their potential to create self-referential situations/spaces relevant to a time in which cultural seeing was commoditized and the device of framing inferred perspective and meaning. As Singerman observes, “representation is, of course, of the most important words in the writings of Freud, and in his descriptions of dreams and memory he constantly uses such metaphors as pictograph, hieroglyph, and rebus.”

Crimp’s consideration of Freud combined with what he initially considered modernist derivations in the works of these artists can perhaps be traced back to Abstract Expressionism and the early works of artists like Jackson Pollock whose use of symbols were, to an extent, deciphered through psychoanalysis. Singerman observes a shift in Crimp’s perspective essay, written and published in October in the spring of 1979. The attention shifts from one that addresses the work through structures of cultural and historical narrative to one that looks more closely at the mechanisms of such (temporality, distance, theatricality and modes and processes of production). He argues that Crimp essentially replaces Freud with Michael Fried, citing “Art and Objecthood” from 1967, in which the corruption of modernism’s directive for medium specificity and purity of form is highlighted in a diatribe of Minimalism and time-based work such as performance and video.

Perhaps one of the most defining characteristics of this postmodern period is the pluralism that flourished on the West Coast. Strangely Crimp does not consider it an important

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73 Thomas Elsaesser quoted in Singerman, Art History After Sherrie Levine, cit., 2011, 28.

74 Crimp, Pictures, 20.

75 Singerman, 133.
factor. At the end of his first Pictures essay he mainly describes the work as a continuation of modernism, notwithstanding the artists’ obvious growing interest in the potential of experimental mediums such as performance and film.  

According to curator Peter Frank’s essay, “Pluralisms: California Art and Artists of the Mid- to Late 1970s,” published in the exhibition catalogue Under the Big Black Sun: California Art, 1974–1981, the geographic distance from a more severe East Coast scene allowed for the cultivation of a uniquely insatiable and unencumbered generation of young innovators who freely adopted the attitudes and styles of older artists to create new kinds of art and ways of thinking. Influenced by the relaxed style of Southern California living and a carefree sensibility, an indifference towards (and as significantly, exclusion from) the newly developing art market began to take shape, which was in large part supported by an explosion of new university art programs and schools that provided both advanced training as well as opportunities to exhibit. This created an environment that was largely self-sustaining in which artists found inventive ways to support each other, whether it was through the development of alternative spaces, advocating for funding policies that directed government money to the arts and/or exchange with the film and commercial industries. David E. James also confirms that a growth in state and federal investment in education and public art programs during the 1960s to the 1980s such as the National Endowment for the Arts (founded in 1965), the American Film Institute (founded 1967), the Artists-in-Schools program (founded 1971) and the Expansion Arts Program (founded 1971), to name a few, energized avant-garde production of art and film. This happened, more specifically, in Los Angeles due to the Hollywood’s dominance and the impact on the

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76 Crimp, Pictures, 28.

formation of local spatialities.\textsuperscript{78} In regard to film practices in particular, he acknowledges that although fine art production in Southern California occupied their own cultural spheres, they would always be fundamentally positioned by and responding to (in some way) the entertainment industry. They (the independent filmmakers) “live both the hegemony of the entertainment industry and the social segregation of cultural alternatives in hyperbolic terms.”\textsuperscript{79} Despite the avant garde’s obvious antithesis to capitalist interests, James believed that film transformed “the entire nature of art” and that “the contradictory possibilities of all attempts to create progressive, emancipatory culture, all attempts to oppose or escape the imperatives of capitalist culture were most crucially engaged in minor cinemas.”\textsuperscript{80} Arguably, the works of Los Angeles based artists working in film such as Jack Goldstein were part of this context. In parallel, the medium’s dominance in popular culture resulted in its increasing use in production, messaging and institutional thought in the 1960s and 1970s.

The heavy influx of New Yorkers who assumed academic positions during the late 1960s and early 1970s also brought a wealth of knowledge, histories and exposure to the region, introducing movements such as Fluxus as well as structuralist films from Europe, counterculture cinemas and vanguard performance art from New York and even San Francisco. These works along with the work of Pictures artists, explored a new kind of conceptualism throughout the 1970s, likewise, submitting this work as a parallel and/or counterpoint to the East Coast establishment.\textsuperscript{81} Examples include artists such as CalArts alum Nam June Paik (who according to CalArts admissions recruiter Nancy Chunn, learned how to drive from Goldstein). Frank

\textsuperscript{78} James, \textit{The Most Typical Avant-Garde}, cit., 2005, 4.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 19.
affirms that this relative independence of the West Coast encouraged residents and newcomers alike to find their own kind of freedom in California, which only seemed to further necessitate the diverse range of thought and practice.\textsuperscript{82}

A key example of the confluence of the Hollywood art and institution parallel to the newly invigorated university system is the LA Independent Film Oasis founded by a group of filmmakers in 1976 (a few months after Pasadena Filmforum), many of whom were employed by the film industry and helped to lay the foundation for younger artists interested in experimental art making. One such filmmaker was Los Angeles native, Pat O’Neill, a founding faculty member of film and video at CalArts (1970-1975). As Goldstein was a member of the inaugural graduate class at CalArts, it is certain that he knew of O’Neill’s work both in the industry as an special effects pioneer (who would go on to work on Hollywood features such as \textit{Return of the Jedi}, 1983) and as a masterful technician of the optical printer. This comprised film projectors mechanically attached to a film camera that could take pictures of pictures. It was initially procured while teaching at UCLA via a government surplus for educational institutions in which materials could be purchased at a large discount. Morgan Fisher explained that one could control the rate at which the film moved through the camera and the projector allowing the artist to do things like superimpositions or create/enhance an image through careful layering. This was also a technique used to create titles and transitions such as dissolves, fade-ins, fade-outs and wipes in which one image or shot is abruptly replaced by another. Fisher further recounted that, back then, editors from film studios would often go to a single business to do both optical printing and

\textsuperscript{82} Frank, “Pluralisms,” cit., 2011, 23.
Goldstein applied post-production processes like the fade in order to create visual progression and give the impression of narrative structure.

O’Neil’s interest in Los Angeles finish-fetish and surrealism is evinced in his early 16mm films, *Runs Good*, 1970 and *Easy Out*, 1971. Greatly inspired by the collage-based films of California artist, Bruce Conner, O’Neill appropriated images and sound from films, artworks, and music that had already been made to create multi-layered, non-linear, episodic narratives that produced a reality the camera could not otherwise capture on its own. He was, according to David E. James, “the one who most persuasively bridged the avant-garde and industry,” once again reinforcing the connection between Hollywood and the avant-garde in Los Angeles. This loosely defined collective, provided the space for artists and filmmakers to see, screen and dialogue about new work. The emphasis was on the contemporary mixed with the occasional viewing of historical works by notable filmmakers, James Whitney and Oskar Fischinger, to name a couple, who were both employed by the film industry at one time or another. James emphasizes that most were from other parts of the US and Europe. Among these were structural filmmakers from England such as Grahame Weinbren. Weinbren and Morgan Fisher also proposed a filmmaking connected to conceptual art, in which a set of compositional procedures were employed in order to create a situation or equation that required the viewer to complete it. (not the other way around as in the case with most conventional art or cinema). Significantly, Fisher would later interview Jack Goldstein about the film works in the spring of 1977 in the *Journal of the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art*. James notes that this procedure of predetermination and repetition allowed the artist to abstract the conventional operations and devices of the medium (and thus explore its potentiality) and propose more varied interpretations.

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83 Morgan Fisher in discussion with Kirby Michelle Woo, November 30, 2017.

84 James, 238.
of the work. This emphasis on reflexivity and the viewer’s subjectivity was achieved through the insistence and reductive use of those elements that comprise basic film production (i.e. the camera angle, light, sound, etc.), with an emphasis on the material nature of the medium itself and production process as content. Exemplary is Fisher’s *Production Stills*, 1970, in which a series of Polaroid pictures act as documentation of the filming process of a production that was never actually made. A sense of progression is instilled via a single hand that pins up each image, one after the other. The film crew depicted in the stills are like characters - they come to life through a soundtrack of background noise and voices pieced together by the viewer. The creation of this fictitious film as subject of the camera and nod to the precepts of structural film can be seen in relationship to Goldstein’s films of the 1970s. James Welling notes that Goldstein presented a program of his films and records at the Oasis in 1977.85

Oasis brought a deluge of divergent theory and approaches to the medium to the Los Angeles art world - what David E. James refers to as a kind of intellectualism to an avant-garde community heavily influenced and often subjugated by Hollywood. He points out a seeming lack of a cohesive and codified cultural sphere during this period despite the avant-garde’s attempts to more fully separate themselves from the commercial industry. This was due in great part to the artists’ professional dependence on it (as a result of the film and manufacturing industries dominance over the Los Angeles socio-economic strata) as well as an absorption with the possibilities that it could afford, both visually and technically. For the most part, prominent civic institutions such as the Los Angeles Museum of Art remained relatively hands off in supporting and cultivating programs around experimental film during the time.86 James wrote:

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86 James, 213.
The urban fragmentation, circular isolation of cultural vanguards in the city, and other conditions plaguing previous avant-garde movements that Oasis confronted were exacerbated by Southern California pandemic anti-intellectualism, especially its antipathy to any sophisticated verbal intelligence. The possibility of Marxist cultures of the kind that informed European structural film has been destroyed by the Blacklist, while the sycophantic dependence on Hollywood dominant in the late 1960s Los Angeles art world preempted support from the very sector that had sustained the initial developments in New York.87

James historicizes New York emigré and filmmaker Paul Arthur’s attempt to survey the relationship between the avant-garde and commercial industry from the 1920s to the 1960s from which he determined that experimental film. As he writes, this,

was framed by the confluence in the region of the film industry and aerospace and other high-tech manufacturing industries, that films made in Los Angeles typically manifested ‘a subtle and plurivocal preoccupation with two paramount entities which serve as meta-themes: the spectre of Hollywood film and the indigenous appeal of high technology’ (the two are not unrelated).88

Conversely, James affirms Hollywood’s penchant for “newness” and thus its acknowledgment of high art during the 1960s and into the 1980s.89 James cites another key independent screening organization, Pasadena Filmforum, a non-profit film society established by Terry Cannon in Pasadena, California, in 1975, and hosting its first screening in 1976. Due to lack of funding and rapid gentrification of the area, the organization bounced from location to location for some time (including Cannon’s home), screening movies, documentaries as well as experimental films. The latter garnered a great deal of enthusiasm and popularity, resulting in eventual support from the National Endowment for Arts and the California Arts Council in 1978.90 According to James, Cannon not only wanted to provide a platform to showcase the work; he also wanted to foster a

87 Ibid., 234-235.
88 Ibid., 237.
89 Ibid., 238.
90 Ibid., 229.
community and forum for local artists and filmmakers to discuss, develop and engage critically with new and relevant ideas. The Pasadena Filmforum was also integral to cultivating the work of many filmmakers who had studied at CalArts, including Beth Block and Betzy Bromberg, as well as artists from the surrounding area who were relatively excluded from the Los Angeles art and film milieu.\(^9\) Although the Filmforum’s program focused on film, it was certainly instrumental in helping codify and bring together a diversity of artistic movements, histories, trends and innovations in avant-garde filmmaking and experimental media such as video art during the late 1970s and onwards.

*It Happened At Pomona: Art At the Edge of Los Angeles, 1969-1973* also discusses the significant cultural shift from a more traditional didactic focus to an embrace of radical programming and experimental art within the university and college art programs in Southern California. Douglas Eklund notes that before CalArts, such schools as Pomona College and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax were central to bringing contemporary art and artists to students and campuses. He confirms that John Baldessari and conceptual artist, Lawrence Weiner both lectured at Pomona in the 1960s.\(^\)\(^2\)

Following a position at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Helene Winer became the Director of Pomona’s Art Gallery in 1970 and worked alongside curator, Hal Glicksman (who was hired the previous year), to promote and cultivate scholarship and support for new post-conceptual activities in the arts. Situational/environment based works such as Michael Asher’s *No Title*, 1970 (Figure 3) were exhibited, in which the gallery was transformed into a temporary, site specific piece by removing its doors and exposing it to the elements 24 hours a

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\(^9\) Ibid., 229.

\(^\)\(^2\) Eklund, 26.
day, i.e. sunlight, noise, dust etc. This was a means of challenging the idea of the institution as an artistic space through a literal opening up of, and in some sense, defilement of the gallery (a pristine white box housing cultural riches) so that viewers could come and go, and do as they wish. After Glicksman left his position in June of that year, Winer continued to focus on a generation engaged in post-minimalist ideas such as time and theatricality, and appropriation through performance art, installation and video etc. Douglas Eklund, among other art historians, emphasizes her influence in bringing the work of Los Angeles area based artists to art historical discourse who was relatively unknown and largely unexplored by the more orthodox East Coast. Many of them would eventually migrate to New York, however, and become widely recognized.  

Although Pomona was a traditional liberal arts college, Winer organized exhibitions and performances that challenged the definition of art, specifically, the role of the education system as a means to complicate the role of the artist. In January 1970, she curated and opened Jack Goldstein’s first exhibition entitled, *Specific Object: Jack Goldstein* (who was then in his first year at CalArts). The show presented Goldstein’s early sculpture (referenced in the previous chapter) such as the wooden stack *Untitled*, 1969–1970 (Figure 4). Howard Singerman suggests that perhaps the title was appropriated from Donald Judd’s 1965 essay, “Specific Objects” and could suggest further evidence that Goldstein was aware of Crimp’s debate of his earlier argument around Pictures and its connection to modernism in the *October* essay. 

In 1972, Winer invited artist, Hiro Kosaka (friend of Goldstein and fellow CalArts graduate student) and Wolfgang Stoerchle (then a teaching assistant in the music department) to organize a performance by conceptual artist, Chris Burden entitled, *Match Piece* (Figure 5). In this performance Burden infamously flicked lit matches at the audience while facing two Sony

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93 Ibid., 26.
television sets (then, the most advanced of its kind). As observed in documentation and affirmed through various accounts (most notably in Paul McMahon’s 1972 review for the college paper and later published in *East of Borneo*), his wife lay naked on the floor in front of him on top of white paper, bearing the brunt of several of the ignited matches while Stoerchle urinated slowly in front of the viewers. Eklund affirms the undeniable influence of this work on Goldstein’s *Burial* of the same year yet, dissimilarly, “There is an aesthetic impulse operative in it that Goldstein would bring to his mature work of three years later: the idea that distance (the objectifying gesture of pointing something out) is the constitutive aspect of all representation…” Goldstein created what Eklund refers to as a “distilled image” through the absence of one, as the flashing red light took the place of what is generally visualized (the feeling of apprehension described in the previous chapter). “In creating an image experienced over time, cut loose from any traditional material support such as canvas or the pedestal….Goldstein recognized the crucial connection between the removal of the self and the creation of the image that would underlie his great leap forward three years later”—no doubt referencing his more mature films such as *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer* and *Shane*, both from 1975 and conceivably two of his most celebrated works of the decade before his switch to painting in the 1980s.

Also concurrent with Goldstein’s post-studio studies at CalArts were such groundbreaking exhibitions at Pomona such as *Bas Jan Ader, Ger Van Elk, William Leavitt: January 18 - February 20, 1972* and *Allen Ruppersberg: October 31 - November 22, 1972*.

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95 Eklund, 27.

96 Ibid., 27.
Drawn to the strategies of Hollywood, artist William Leavitt explored vernacular culture through the filter of the entertainment industry creating, as curator and art historian Ann Goldstein affirmed, a new kind of image production informed by the illusionism of Hollywood.\footnote{Ann Goldstein, “Theater of the Ordinary,” William Leavitt: Theater Objects, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2011), 18.} In drawing on the conventions of narrative cinema, Leavitt, like Goldstein, examined the signs and rituals of cultural seeing. As mentioned previously, he was working as a production assistant in the early 1970s and into the 1980s and was well aware of the kinds of sets and props used in Hollywood in order to devise stories and genres that had wide social appeal. His work comments on the capacity of theater to engage and seduce the viewer.

Leavitt’s piece, California Patio, 1972 (Figure 6), was first exhibited at Montgomery Art Center at Pomona College Art Gallery. California Patio had the look of a movie set. It comprised a single freestanding wall with two sliding glass doors in the center, framed by generic blue curtains that suggested an interior perspective. We know this because beyond the doors lay an outdoor scene marked by the kind of stone path one might find in a typical suburban backyard: grass, foliage, dirt, and in-ground lights, known only through photographic documentation. The transparency of the scene’s structural elements connotes the artifice of the scene. It has the effect of a set, drawing on cultural notions of domesticity, comfort, etc. In the exhibition catalogue for Theater Objects, held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles in 2011, curator Ann Goldstein discusses Leavitt’s interest in the construction of the ideal; the illusion that what we see is the real thing—the right thing. In 1988, the artist wrote:

When I first came to California I visited a lot of movie studios and I loved the deception of going up to one of those perfect houses and opening the door and seeing that there was nothing but canvas and 2 x 4’s holding it up. I thought it was spectacular: all the bricks were made of composition board. It’s built not totally on illusion but something that is
necessarily constructed. Maybe what I’m interested in is the edge between illusion and how it’s supported.\(^98\)

Like Leavitt, Goldstein created just enough of an illusion (the impression of a movie) to fix our attention.

Goldstein’s contemporary artist Allen Ruppersberg was also considering the trappings of representation through performative means. According to art historian and curator Marie B. Shurkus, his well-known piece, *Al’s Café*, 1969 (Figure 7), posits that representation is best understood and developed through cultural exchange rather than through aesthetic objects.\(^99\) The work comprises all the workings of an actual American café, replete with table, chairs, memorabilia, menus and staff. Instead of serving food and drink, it prepared assemblages loaded with pop cultural associations. Artist Allan McCollum describes the work as mediating Ruppersberg’s surroundings into sculpture through a close look at common everyday rituals (such as eating in a café).\(^100\) A typical order might include, “Simulated burned pine needles a la Johnny Cash Served With a Live Fern.” He sees it as a derivative of performance, place-making through occupation or movement, underscoring the pervasiveness of popular and commodity culture like Claes Oldenburg’s *The Store*, of 1961.

A network of artists teaching and studying within the college and university system in Southern California during the mid 1960s and throughout the 1970s had unquestionably taken shape despite Los Angeles’ fragmented and decentralized cultural landscape. This resulted in the historic marginalization of the avant-garde. In particular, artists making films (and artists

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meditating on film) in Los Angeles did not appear to share a common goal or schema nor did they seem ready to align themselves with traditions of other avant-garde filmmakers. Yet collectively, they were “Implicitly positioned as Hollywood extras, they were vulnerable to the allure of the industry and to the dominant industrial conception of the film, against or within which they had in any case been obliged to construct themselves as fine artists.”

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101 James, 277.
Chapter 3 - The Work

Goldstein’s shift to 16mm film can perhaps be seen as a continuity of the post-minimalist sculptural work exhibited at Pomona College Gallery. It aimed to explore how representation constructs meaning by creating a psychosomatic response in the viewer through an inference of tension - whether it be through the speculative yet formalist approach to composition and/or the use and symbolic function of recognizable images (or that which seems familiar but is not quite “right”). David E. James makes a similar observation as both bodies of work center on the “single object, single frame, tension.” As an artist who made films in Los Angeles, he turned to professional cameramen, soundmen, animal trainers and animators, lending the work a temporality undeniably connected to the tools of commercial cinema.

Morgan Fisher argues that Goldstein opposed the model of filmmaking that he himself had come out of - a “do it yourself” process-oriented approach to the medium in which the artist operated his/her own equipment. In a recent interview with James, he also highlights the significance of the shift out of Abstract Expressionism and its penchant for lyrical self-expression and material tactility to a kind of art making more in line with the cerebral via artists such as Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton. Although Goldstein invokes a connection to popular culture through the appropriation of everyday symbols, “their art historical or theoretical self-consciousness [also] links them to conceptualism.” He describes Goldstein’s films as very CalArts - inherently interested in the potential of Hollywood as a kind of anti-intellectual

102 James, 290.
105 James, 290.
playground and “yellow pages” for creative production.\textsuperscript{106} His insistence on the hiring of professionals is integral to his identity as an artist who was making film:

I don’t care about the technology of filmmaking. Most filmmakers come out of film schools. They’ve been taught that they have to be technicians before they can make films. The technology is excess baggage. I’m just interested in my ideas. I hire the technicians. Those things on the set are just things, whether they’re people or chairs or tables…. It doesn’t have any emotional meaning to me, outside of its objectness.\textsuperscript{107}

James’ (as well as Goldstein’s, arguably) insistence on the specularization and codes of the entertainment industry on filmic practices within the arts is examined through a “doubling that makes the city a nostalgic simulacrum of its own imaginings.”\textsuperscript{108} This connotes the sense of possibility in Los Angeles wherein the artist is free to rethink, recreate, and re-present in order to more fully explore visual concerns relevant to a generation that opposed “the assumption of coherent histories of painting and sculpture even in the face of contemporary work that clearly breaches such categories.”\textsuperscript{109} In Morgan Fisher’s 1977 interview with Jack Goldstein, he quotes the artist:

My work has always been very much involved with sculpture in the sense that it’s about defining something in space and time, very much about our relationship to it, our distance to that thing. I still feel I have the same concerns, except that I’ve moved away from abstract form and I’ve moved toward something that is a little more personal. I’m interested in that gap between minimalism and pop art: the objectness and autonomy of minimalism and the subject matter from our culture that’s in pop art. But there’s also a link to conceptual art. It’s more about the content than the form, that it’s the same whether its performance, films, records, etc… and that a lot of the experiences take place in your head. Real time and real space don’t matter.\textsuperscript{110}


\textsuperscript{107} Goldstein in Fisher, “Talking to Jack Goldstein,” cit., 1977, 44.

\textsuperscript{108} James., 9.

\textsuperscript{109} Singerman, 47.

\textsuperscript{110} Goldstein in Fisher, 42–43.
James makes a similar connection in that Goldstein’s primary interest was in the spectacular presence of the medium and the resonances of its productive methods to not only “stake out his place in the aftermath of mass media” but also explore signification itself as a kind of byproduct of a proliferating commodity culture. The emphasis on idea over medium is also exemplified by earlier artists working in various disciplines such as Chris Burden and Bruce Nauman who probed the emotional endurance and consent of viewers through time based exercises, such as the abovementioned, *Match Piece* and the latter’s well known 16mm films, *Black Balls, Bouncing Balls, Gauze, and Pulling Mouth*, all from 1969, In these works filmic properties were used to create bodily performance wherein single actions were executed on his own body in extreme close up, such as painting his testicles black with his fingers or tapping them from underneath to suggest a contorted movement. James argues that the works are about exploiting patterns of tension, “between the body they use and their final distance from the body, between their formalist and analytic components; and between their medium specificity—the temporal and spatial distortion that the film produces and the unique visual presence of its images—and both the bodily performance in which they originate and the speculative abstraction they are made to serve.”

James also confirms the theoretical tie to Nauman in his historic survey of artists working in film in Los Angeles. Goldstein’s work engages iconography (and fetishization) to do something similar—to create a new kind of image free from the object that points to signification as the basis for challenging the viewer’s referential field and relationship to it.

According to Morgan Fisher, Goldstein’s use of the film industry was both unprecedented and unparalleled in its application. It allowed the artist to withdraw completely from any gestural intent and further point to the chargedness of the object or image through distanciation and suspension of narrative.

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111 James, 290.
In the early films, Goldstein assumed the role of director and actor. In one of his earliest pieces entitled *A Glass of Milk*, 1972 (Figure 8), a generic card table takes center frame. The nondescript background alludes to very little of the surrounding environment. Atop of the table is a full glass of what appears to be milk, although as the piece is shot with black and white film, it could, perhaps be a white substance of another sort. From the right, a hand and forearm, presumably of the artist, emerge purposefully. Goldstein’s slams his fist on the table, causing it to shake. The milk stirs violently and splashes, creating stark white splatters across the top. The urgency with which his fist continues to smash up and down intensifies. Through the repeated gesture of the hand a sense of the impending is implored. As tension begins to mount, the fist begins to slow its pace, even stagger its thuds temporarily, salvaging what little bit of liquid is left in the cup. Just when we think the crashing will finally come to a halt, the fist picks up momentum and starts to slam harder than before. The glass is finally knocked off balance and milk spatters across the entire surface of the table. The film then abruptly ends. Goldstein uses the narrative arc (beginning, middle and end) to emphasize the psychological qualification of the image through a preconceived situation. Exhibited at Paul McMahon’s Project Inc. in 1972 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, it was among many experimental works included in the space’s program, and, by Eklund’s account, a “Naumanesque” exercise, no doubt in the study of subconscious states using similar strategies, such as performed actions in real time, the fixed camera, use of the artist’s body etc despite Nauman’s disregard to narrative structure.\(^{112}\)

Made the same year, *A Spotlight* (1972) perhaps better distills Goldstein’s interest in narrative cinema. Here the artist takes the place of the object and for approximately eight minutes, desperately evades a spotlight that chases him in a darkened room. Through bodily

\(^{112}\) Eklund, 54.
perseverance, he gestures, runs, flails and stomps, all the while increasing his movements with speed and seeming intensity, creating a sense of peril. His avoidance suggests a story of pursuit and danger - it assumes the allure of cinematic narrativity but once again dissatisfies our expectations for meaning for the light fails to “capture” nor does Goldstein explain his elusive stance. We are left to make our own assumptions.

The conversion to color film in 1972 was followed by notable works such as, *A Reading*, 1973, included in the retrospective *Jack Goldstein x 10,000* at the Orange County Museum of Art (and subsequently seen at the Jewish Museum in New York City). This opens with a close-up shot of a piece of paper with typewritten text on it. A voice begins reading the words aloud, describing the subject of the document (and of the work) as time. From the top of the screen, a flash occurs signaling the flame of a fire that begins to swallow the page. As the paper starts to crinkle and dissolve into ash from both ends, the voice increases in speed in order to complete the reading. This occurs a few more times/pages, presumably of different text until the paper is completely engulfed into blackness, motioning the end of the film. The encroaching flame is meant to distract us from completing the task (of reading) as well as diverting the message from being clearly delivered. Time as a central theme is echoed in the time it takes for the voice (and the viewer) to recite the text, the time it takes for the fire to consume the page and as importantly, the time it takes for the actual film to move through the projector in order to create a self-contained sense of time in of itself. Although the viewer and the reader engage the scene from the same vantage point, the viewer witnesses, with anticipation, the act from a distance, unable to escape the feeling of tension built in large part by the unseen voice. Goldstein described the dividing line between the earlier work and the color films to Morgan Fisher:

It happened when I moved away from creating a situation, setting up an exercise, setting up a phenomenological situation that I have to act through, and started working with
images that are more self-contained. One transitional film is "a reading". It’s a close-up of typewritten pages that I have to read before they get burned up. It still contains an element of performance, but behind the last page there’s a black backdrop. When the last page burns away there’s nothing there but black. It became visual; that was important. I became very conscious of controlling everything. I realized that I had the freedom to do whatever I wanted. It’s a frame, and why not totally manipulate the space within it? It means I can make my things into pure fiction. The frame became more of a container. It was more like a painting. I began to work with loaded images, personal images that I was infatuated with. Even though it's an older film, “A Glass of Milk” is still important for me just because of the image of a full glass of milk on a table, just because it’s filled to the brim and could spill over. It’s an emotional image.\textsuperscript{113}

In establishing these situations by way of predetermined conditions, i.e. the single frame, the continuous image, the mundane action, a precise duration, Goldstein has also appropriated, in some sense, the cinematic genre of melodrama as a kind of readymade to emphasize how representation is used to ascribe meaning, time, continuity and thus, narrative to a proposed set of circumstances through a conventionally anecdotal medium. In Singerman’s discussion of this usurpation of melodrama in the 1970s, Sherrie Levine’s tempera on graph paper series, 	extit{Sons and Lovers}, 1976–1977 (Figure 9), included in Douglas Crimp’s, 	extit{Pictures}, 1977, and comprised of silhouettes of presidential profiles (distinguishable as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy and others) also plays on the predicted. In this case, the roles and actions of everyday characters and storylines (implied through our shared understanding of history and symbolism, and formally, through the repetition of their configurations and like sizes) are used in order to highlight how reality is both constructed and relatable through representation whether or not it has authentic context for the viewer.

Singerman quotes film theorist and cultural critic, Paul Willeman, who wrote an essay in 	extit{Screen} in 1972. On the tenets of melodrama and the films of Douglas Sirk, Singerman notes, this is “...one of the reasons they talk to me is because the characters become supremely irrelevant.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{113} Goldstein in Fisher, 43.
Characters are totally flattened out, are simply strings of cliches put together...all fictional characters are always concatenations of cliches, which makes them so ‘realistic’.”¹¹⁴

Levine’s sequence of still images coupled with Goldstein’s filmic composition both propose events and moments of crises without specific connection, resolve or origin. In his catalogue essay from 1977, Douglas Crimp observed, “The shift in the conception of illusionism from a representation of something absent to the condition of our apprehension of what is present, and the psychologization of the image, were extended by a number of artists using the medium of performance.”¹¹⁵ The works assume the kind of theatricality of performance in their appropriation of this filmic characterization as well as that of minimal sculpture in their emphasis on distance, anti-illusionism (in their blatant irony) and an objectness that includes the viewer. In Michael Fried’s treatise, *Art and Objecthood*, 1967, he quotes artist Robert Morris, who attests to an interest in the art object as subject to the viewer’s physical and psychic relationship to what is constant (for example in this case, the recognizability of Levine’s profiles or the aforementioned formal, yet fixed elements that comprise Goldstein’s films such as the single frame, the single action, etc.). As Fried writes, “The object, not the beholder, must remain the center or focus of the situation, but the situation itself belongs to the beholder—it is his situation.”¹¹⁶

Included in Douglas Eklund’s, *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, was Matt Mullican’s work, *Essex (Details of an Imaginary Life from Birth until Death)*, 1973 (Figure 10) which supplants images with language by means of generic statements such as, “learning to ride a bike,” “entering the 6th grade,” “going through puberty” to bring an unknown female character


to life. An air of intimacy is suggested through the seeming familiarity and banality of each presumed memory as the viewer follows her development, line by line on the page(s). “During the unfolding of the piece, either silently on the wall or read aloud, it becomes evident that the only way of understanding the work is by the normally overlooked process of projection.”

Much like Goldstein’s early films and Levine’s *Sons and Lovers*, Mullican’s piece seemingly rests on its unspecified nature, making it accessible to all and at the same time, knowable to no one in particular. It is activated by the viewer’s perception/relationship to the object/image. In this case, the sequence and details of each account as experienced through reading. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition was also Mullican’s minimal work on paper, *Concentrating on the Place Where the Wall Meets the Floor, Untitled (Stick Figure)*, 1974 (Figure 11), in which a stick figure character named Glen repeatedly substantiates the make-believe nature of his own existence and the world around him. Similar to *Essex*, the work challenges those elements that validate our sense of an external reality. Their generic nature speaks to the notion of distance, salient in Pictures art, whose primary inquiry is around the basis of representation. According to Eklund, “distance is the constitutive force behind all representation”—pointing to the objectifying nature of cultural representation and symbolism as driven by a commoditizing social agenda.

Palpable distance from the subject through staging, as something discernible but overly generalized and ultimately insubstantial, is instrumental to the quotation of tension (central to melodrama) in Goldstein’s early sculptures as well. For example, in Goldstein’s sculptural piece, *Untitled*, 1970 (Figure 12), he stacked several dozen wooden panels eleven feet high. The base is positioned at an angle, sitting diagonally across the corner of the room. As the eye advances upward, we notice that the boards begin to sit flatter against the wall to the left. Its precarious

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117 Eklund, 56.
arrangement suggests that it could fall at any moment. One can imagine that any movement in
the gallery might be enough to stir the panels loose, thereby discouraging visitors to get too
close. As art historian Alexander Dumbadze from George Washington University observes, “It is
where the piece torques that it seems most vulnerable. Yet its fragility is in the upper reaches of
the ascending column, for if Goldstein had placed one too many beams atop the stack, the entire
form would have come down.” 118 Helene Winer, who exhibited the work at Pomona College
Gallery, recalls that they did in fact fall and would often have to be re-assembled. 119 The fear that
one might feel upon approaching a work that appears structurally unsound is similar to the
anxiety one might feel when watching the glass of milk splash uncontrollably or the flame as it
encroaches on our ability to know what happens at the end of the page.

In 1974, Goldstein moved to New York City with Helene Winer, but he would frequently
return to Los Angeles in his continued preoccupation with film. In an interview with Morgan
Fisher, Goldstein describes the value of this kind of access to the movie industry:

It’s the fact that anybody has access to its resources. I was shocked when I realized that
MGM goes out and rents the same props that I do. I have access to that technology, and
it’s not all that expensive if you just need a wind machine for the day. This is where the
industry is. I can’t get things done anywhere else….I’ve found some people who are
totally sympathetic to what I’m doing. I feel free to say whatever I want to them. If I
wanted to do an inch thick record I would just say, “Listen, I want to do a record that’s an
inch thick,” and they wouldn’t look at me like I was strange. That’s what the industry
gives me: resources, effects, control. I can do or make anything I want. 120

The subsequent six years would mark Goldstein’s better known films such as The Knife, 1975,
and A Ballet Shoe, 1975, among others, that intimated the symbolic operations of recognizable
images through suspension and isolation of the single object and action. In The Knife, a close up

118 Dumbadze, 16.
120 Goldstein in Fisher, 44-45.
image of a typical dining knife assumes center frame against a bluish/purple background. A bright red light falls (from nowhere) onto the handle and begins to slowly make its way up to the tip of the blade until the entire object is illuminated with disquiet. The light remains almost pulsating and then it quickly recedes, leaving the knife as it was - unattached and inert. This surface onslaught continues in the same manner in green, red/orange, blue and then yellow. Between each color variation, the knife always returns to the flattened and monotonous state of the quotidian. Goldstein creates a sense of fake drama through closeness, isolation, a beguiling use of color and the technique of animation in order to convey connotation and meaning where there is none. He explained to Morgan Fisher that working with more contained images rather than situations allowed him to make his things into “pure fiction” and that this accentuated the visual rather than the performative aspect of creating a new kind of object.

In *A Ballet Shoe*, a close up image of a ballerina’s foot en pointe appears on a reddish background with two hands on either side of it, pinching at the ends of slipper’s bow. In under seventeen seconds, the fingers rather conventionally unfasten the ribbon in a slow but single gesture, followed by the slow lowering of the foot onto the ground. Goldstein creates a sense of unease through the slightly protracted action of the untying of the shoe and consequent release of the foot. The narrative is rooted on the relationship between the two actions as a single image in a fixed, controlled space.

According to Eklund, he did not begin showing most of his films until 1976. In *The Portrait of Pere Tanguy*, 1974 (Figure 13), Goldstein traces over a reproduction of Vincent Van Gogh’s second iteration of *Portrait of Père Tanguy* with a black pen. The original painting exists in three versions, reflecting Van Gogh’s artistic progression from Dutch genre painting to a style.

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121 Eklund, 78.
more in keeping with that of French post-impressionism. It is cited that during his time in Paris, his interest and exposure to Japanese woodblock prints intensified, and this was evident in the background of Goldstein’s copy (no doubt taken from a book), which was similar to his previous subjects.\textsuperscript{122} We see Goldstein’s bodiless hand emerge from the right, beginning first with a crude tracing of Père Tanguy’s figure and then onto the outlines of his wall decorations. Upon completing his very rough interpretation, Goldstein lifts the paper in order to unveil the source beneath it. This kind of appropriation is similar to what Levine would do and it also references the animation technique of rotoscoping in which an image is traced over by hand in order to extract it from its original context and create a new visual effect. The origin is presumably a copy of a copy (and so forth) of the original.

The value and relevance of originality and authorship are called into question as this new kind of image that points to nothing other than itself as a basis for retrospection, is introduced. Douglas Crimp aptly describes how Pictures artists such as Goldstein looked to images in the culture around them to understand their place and work within it, while being critical of how their position within the art world was unavoidably mediated and prescribed by mass cultural forms of communication via magazines, postcards, movies, books, etc. In recognition of this cultural dependence on the perceived vs. the actual, and likewise, the value and articulation of illusion and symbolism within the lineage of art history, he writes:

They subvert the standard signifying function of those pictures, tied to their captions, their commentaries, their narrative sequences - tied, that is, to the illusion that they are directly transparent to a signified. Walter Benjamin’s dictum that the caption will become the most important component of the shot is taken as prophetic. Because this ubiquitous captioning is nothing by an insistent attempt to force upon the picture a relation to the signified that it does not intrinsically have, these artists seek the possibility in their work

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 78.
that the picture does not have “to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever.”

David E. James notes the film’s apparent reference to modernist painting. He also acknowledges Goldstein’s suggestion that painting has lost its authority. The artist chooses instead to use whatever medium in order to interrogate the iconography’s presence rather than its constitution and create a legitimate kind of art in the wake of mass media and more precisely, of film’s dominance in popular culture.

Not often studied is Goldstein’s 16mm film Butterflies, 1975 (Figure 14), screened in 2015 at the Museum of the Moving Image. Douglas Eklund reveals that this film was one of a handful actually produced in New York City. The subject of the piece is a close up of a hand with palm facing outwards, trembling slightly as it attempts to hold still. On the tip of each finger rests a single butterfly, with wings expanded in vibrant display. While remaining unnaturally motionless, it appears that the butterflies, rather than the hand, is stabilizing the composition. Further subjected to extremes is the picture’s coloration, having the visual effect of a de-skilled illustration. The viewer is arrested in visual apprehension, undoubtedly, with the expectation of any sudden movement. We imagine that the butterflies will, as they do in nature, fly away or skirt their wings. Yet, in the films finale, it is the hand that moves, unskillfully mimicking the advance of their anticipated flight with its fingers. Then, just as quickly, the unsteady subject grows, still bringing the piece to an end.

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123 Crimp, Pictures, 5.
124 James, 291.
125 Eklund, 73.
Goldstein always intended to show the films in a gallery, rather than a movie theater. The walls become essentially a part of the space of the films as well as object of sorts to possess and organize his images intelligibly:

It’s like hanging a painting on a wall and saying, “it goes there.” Well, my films go there, not just on a screen that you unfold and set up somewhere. It’s because all the films have backdrops. They become specific places. I prefer to show my films in a gallery space….I still want to create a distance between you and the image that you relate to in some way. In a gallery space, those images are still within reach. I’m afraid in a theater space they would take on a different kind of meaning.\(^{126}\)

Goldstein stressed the objectness of the films as art meant for exhibition. What was considered the main core of his work, the films were perhaps his most discernible effort to connect with a world in which the notion of real experience was becoming less and less definable. It was really about consciousness in the face of too many choices and oversaturation. He once told Morgan Fisher where his images come from:

The work is pure Subliminal images. They’re all Freudian in some sense only because they are personal: a knife, dog, door, bird, lion. But, I’m also trying to remove the symbolism from them. It’s a non-symbolic use of imagery. It’s taking loaded images and reducing the symbolism. Then all of sudden they take on new meaning, but you’re still left with some of the old meaning that lingers on in the back of your mind. What interests me is that space between your head and your heart, that is, your throat. It’s like getting some phlegm caught in your throat and you try to clear it but it’s still there.\(^{127}\)

In the following analyses, we can see an increasing attention towards single images in a fixed nondescript space, confirming a growing insistence on the integrity and presence of the work as an object, to be regarded, as mentioned earlier, by standards of beauty, compositional stability and framing.

In a conversation with Morgan Fisher in 2015, he recollected how he became acquainted with Goldstein’s work. He described meeting him through James Welling. Welling was covering

\(^{126}\) Goldstein in Fisher, 44.

\(^{127}\) Ibid., 42.
a show Fisher was organizing with Pat O’Neill at Mount San Antonio College in Walnut, California in 1976. He was living with Jack at the time (albeit, temporarily) in a run down office building in Santa Monica. Welling approached Fisher and said, “There’s this guy named Jack Goldstein who makes films. You might be interested.”

A meeting was arranged and Goldstein, who according to Fisher, was unparalleled in ambition and drive, showed up to the gallery with a projector in hand. His enthusiasm for the work compelled him to assist in the making of the work, Bone China, 1976 (Figure 15). Here, an formal equation similar to Butterflies is exercised in which a colorful bird frantically circles the perimeter of a plate. Taking center frame on a single color background, it begins rather gracefully in a counterclockwise motion, then slowly builds up speed as if it is attempting to escape its circular confines, its seeming desperation crescendo with the sound of flapping wings that increases with intensity. As the bird nearly spirals out of control, its movement suddenly abates, returning to a slower pace. Then, without warning, it changes direction and begins to build speed again, escalating again into a frenzied spiral. A sense of trepidation is felt, only to be appeased once again by the bird’s unexpected deceleration. It continues to circle the outline of the dish until the screen yellows and then fades as the film comes to a close. The heightened saturation as well as the simplicity of the rendered image, further undermines our expectations as viewers.

Another of his 16mm films made during the same year and entitled White Dove, 1975 (Figure 16), creates a similar effect. Here, a white dove is shot in close up against a familiar blue screen, perched on a wooden support, as it anxiously awaits to take flight. From the nondescript bottom of the picture, two hands slowly extend upward from either side, outstretched in their seeming attempt to intern the creature between its palms. Yet the hands cautiously progress,


creating what appears to be a roof-like structure over the agitated subject. Not only the viewer, but the bird as well, pauses in anticipation of the filmic incident. In the few final seconds, the bird realizes its discomfort and pulls away, almost in confusion, yet the hands remain relatively static and unchanged.

“Thwarting the viewer’s sense of autonomy”\textsuperscript{130} and misinterpretation of the readymade (the available image) was also the aim of James Welling’s work, And Should, 1974 (Figure 17), included in The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984. Welling appropriates Winston cigarette ads to create a triptych of collages that pair silhouettes of a couple against a setting sun with the words “should” (“and should” in the largest, right hand image) to purposefully point the viewer to someplace inevitably unknown. Eklund argues that this is Welling’s point - that the viewer is unable to decipher the work due to his/her preconceptions and therefore ends up nowhere. In his examination of the work, he writes, “[w]hat occurs between the viewer and the image is what interests the artist, in a way that is indebted to post minimal and conceptual artists such as Bruce Nauman, who made works that similarly offer no safe haven, no release from the contingency and chaos of the viewer’s own subject position.”\textsuperscript{131} The intention to create something that can’t be explained is precisely the objective. Welling aims to frustrate and interrogate the solutions inherently proffered by visual representation. Once independent from the viewer’s function, the relationship between the artist and the work of art is now conditional to and enmeshed in a battle between mass culture and what was considered high art.

Eklund describes the systematic rejection of authority by Pictures artists and their predecessors, namely conceptual artists, that questioned the nature, role and legitimacy of art and the artist in society. Grappling with this larger concern was Welling’s Men series, in particular,

\textsuperscript{130} Eklund, 48.

\textsuperscript{131} Eklund, 47.
Rothko/Giacometti, 1974, and Pollock/Serra, 1974 (Figure 18). Included in Eklund’s survey exhibition, these also used collage to attenuate the past by distorting well known images of some of those artists that symbolized art’s former prerogatives, rendering them, in a sense, obsolete via the tools of framing, fragmentation and juxtaposition.

Lesser known works by Welling titled, Middle Video, 1973 (also included in Eklund’s anthology) and an alternative Middle Video, 1973 (Figure 19), are single channel films made during his time at CalArts that explore distance—placing a designative object in front of the viewer in order to interrogate his/her ability to possess, see, or at times, recognize it. They comprise close-up shots of everyday objects whose configurations and meaning are betrayed and concealed by bodily touch and devices such as the static camera, extreme artificial lighting, monotonic sound, the single image, and noticeable editing/cutting. The scene opens with a funnel resting on a spiral notebook. A pair of hands move in and begin to carefully turn the object around as if closely examining it. Later the camera cuts to an image of a spoon placed on plaid decorated cloth. The same hand moves into the frame, bringing its fingers together to form a kind of makeshift peep hold that focuses in on and around the object from various angles, both clarifying and obscuring its form simultaneously. This segues into a shot of an unidentifiable patterned object, made indistinct by graininess of the film and impromptu darkness. A sudden deluge of light reveals the shapes to be two notebooks stacked on top of one another atop a different plaid blanket. This cuts to a image of what appears to be a pack of Chesterfield cigarettes, whose label is partially masked by the seemingly arbitrary placement of the outer wrapper. Once again, the hand moves into the center of the frame eclipsing the object from recognition. We hear a noise that sounds like unwrapping. The cigarette pack is once again visible and returned to the blanket. A single cigarette suddenly appears out of nowhere. The film
continues with a different scene of the same if not similar pack of cigarettes whose detail is blurred by the out of focus lens. Seconds later, the viewer notices that the single cigarette from the previous image is lit, as wafts of smoke waver across the screen. The video suddenly ends and we are left to ponder the connotation and concern for these personal effects.

Perhaps Goldstein’s best known example of exploring these mechanisms of representation is his 16mm film, *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*, 1975 (Figure 20), included in Eklund’s exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The work was also part of the artist’s retrospective organized by Philipp Kaiser at the Orange County Museum of Art in 2012, and later at the Jewish Museum in New York in 2013. Set against a bright red background is the animated badge of Hollywood cinema—a lion’s head, framed by curling film strips illustrating the “motion picture” or movies, and accompanied by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s slogan, “ars gratia artis,” or art for art’s sake. The film begins as movies generally do, with the lion’s roar. Instead of the usual fade out and segue to the film feature, the initial roar is followed by a double roar, then a triple roar wherein the image becomes noticeably out of sync with the sound. From here the picture stutters ever so slightly and almost imperceptibly “starts over” from the first double roar. These fixed sets of roars repeat in succession multiple times, finally ending in a triple roar in which the final roar is absurdly out of sync with the lion’s mouth.

Eklund points out that the tilt of the head in the double roar was mechanically produced by reversing the rerunning the found footage.\(^{132}\) He describes Goldstein’s use of the appropriated logo - a copy of a copy of a copy - as a performative study of illusionism in which the signifier (that which points to something) is stripped of its referent (the thing that image or word is supposed to stand for) in order to reveal the structures by which it enacts and speaks. “[Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer] dramatizes it [synchronized sound] as an artifact of the Hollywood film

\(^{132}\) Eklund, 67.
industry, foregrounding it as a witty play between belief and disbelief, yielding pleasure from an oscillation between immersion in illusion and critical distance from it.” He continues, “Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lends itself to Roland Barthes’ concept of myth and the way in which a fully formed sign can be imported, or appropriated, as the signifier for a new signified toward a hijacked and redirected message.” 133 The lion has come to represent all movies, in a sense, through what Eklund refers to as the “unconscious indoctrination of repetition.” 134 The ubiquity of movie-going allows for this trademark to transcend its original designation and concede to Hollywood’s symbolic authority over the film industry. David E. James confirms Goldstein’s intent to articulate signification to its own end. Like Welling’s And Should, the advertisement isn’t selling us anything except the validity of advertising itself as an effective tool for consumption and likewise, the conception of value and meaning.

Eklund also observes Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s connection to the early films of pop artist Andy Warhol, such as Sleep, 1963 a work comprised of footage of his close friend, John Giorno, sleeping in real time. He highlights the uses of similar filmic techniques such as the stationary lens, the concentrated subject, etc. 135 Warhol navigates the mundane through the fetishization of the subject, repeating over and over a multitude of different close-up shots that are spliced together to create an uninterrupted sense of time. The monotonous almost slow-motion effect of the activity of sleep, paired with the graininess of the film, lent the work a dreamlike effect which is perhaps somewhat analogous to the look of Goldstein’s imaginary pictures.

John Baldessari also sought to identify the mechanisms of mass cultural representation and how it informs our understanding and capacity for response to images, text and situations. In

133 Ibid., 67.
134 Ibid., 69.
135 Ibid., 70.
his well known 16mm film, *Script*, 1973–1977 (Figure 21), highlighted in *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, Baldessari appropriated ten pieces of dialogue from the movies and assigned them to seven different pairs of non-professional actors, all of whom were his students at CalArts, including Pictures artists David Salle and James Welling. He instructed them to act out each piece of writing and determine amongst themselves how to effectively stage, light and film their respective segments. Eklund perceives that the work was a kind of experiment for the artist, who was aware that each rendition would no doubt be framed by a lifetime of movie-going, television viewing and most certainly, individual experiences.\(^{136}\)

Baldessari acknowledged the potential impact of these existing relationships to images on the facility and nature of their interpretations. This conceptual schema was paired with a somewhat pre-determined system of arrangement: 1) a textual presentation of each script; 2) shots organized by the performers; 3) shots sorted by script, followed by 4) the top ten shots. It isn’t clear if Baldessari himself went so far as to select the order and sequence of the scripts ahead of time or to resolve what constituted good or bad, best or worst so as to provide further framework for the piece. In David E. James’s explication of Baldessari’s use of the basic elements of film language and a recognition of what he deemed a shared captivation with Hollywood, he wrote, “Baldessari’s concern with the scripted feature film in fact aligns him more with French cine-semiology of the same period than with structural film proper, and inevitably it led him, as it did them, to Hollywood…. [Here] the viewer is cued to practice discrimination….”\(^{137}\) Film was a compelling mode from which to examine how we construct and reinforce, through visual and auditory cues, representational devices such as style, tone, and icon—the pieces necessary to create coherent widely, distributable narratives.

\(^{136}\) Ibid., 48 and 52.

\(^{137}\) James, 287.
Baldessari’s 1973 black and white half-inch analogue film, *The Meaning of Various News Photos to Ed Henderson* (Figure 22), is also an experiment of sorts into the associative quality of pictures and the viewer’s subconscious yet compulsory extension of his/her own subjectivity onto their supposed meaning. Baldessari invites a man called Ed Henderson to his studio and shows him a series of images, ranging in subject matter. Filmed in what appears to be a single shot, we see a hand tack image after image onto the wall. Baldessari asks Ed to describe what he sees in each of the clippings, sparing him any context. No doubt, the artist has considered the arrangement of their sequence, cropping, and scale in order to further bate his subject’s response. We do not see Ed’s facial expression(s) save the very beginning while Baldessari’s introduces the premise of the project. Upon viewing the first image of a beach scene, Ed interprets, “It’s a beach scene and it looks like it’s covered in bugs. And what I think is that they probably came up with the high tide and the inset is showing there were different kind. No no wait, they’re crabs! And it looks like they died and were washed up by the shore…That’s about it - looks like a California Coastline.” Consequent to seeing the third image Ed begins to laugh and exclaims, “This must be Los Angeles. And it looks as if the young man over there has done something wrong and the two policemen are aiming their sidearms at him. He had to do a pretty serious offense because police can’t pull their firearms unless it’s absolutely necessary... It looks like it’s downtown.” Baldessari interjects, “Do you think it could be a staged picture?” Ed pauses for a split second and confirms, “No….I don’t think so. Not the way the policemen are looking around…the one over here looks really tense. The picture has been touched up. There’s a blacklight around his arm. The photographer noticed his arm blending in with the grass.”¹³⁸ Baldessari again, probes his subject, “Is that a normal shooting stance?” to which Ed replies,

“Yes….You can’t tell what nationality or race he is...It’s Los Angeles. Palm trees. Trashy little houses.”

Baldessari emphasizes the absurd resolution of the contemporary gaze, mediated not only by the viewer’s biases but also via the spectacle of news and stories as told through television news and newspaper headlines, framed by quotes and captions that endorse, circulate and thus reinforce notions of truth. The artist’s shrewd line of questioning too anticipatorily plays into, and inspires Ed’s emotions. In Douglas Crimp’s reiteration of *Pictures*, 1979, he points out, “In the past, structures of works were determined by how the surfaces were occupied; now, it has become stratigraphic—layered with strategies and potential for meaning through representation.”

Goldstein’s 16mm film, *Shane*, 1975 (Figure 23), is a work comprised of the subject and viewer’s response to visual and auditory prompts. Taking center frame this time is a German Shepherd reminiscent of William Leavitt’s *Painted Image* of a dog’s portrait. Facing the camera, the dog (presumably Shane) barks three times and pauses. He barks another two times and pauses again, as if anxiously waiting for his next cue. Shane barks again, but this time, somewhat half heartedly. There is another pause and he barks again. As the actor gears up for his next bark, the scene seems to end and “start over”—Goldstein appears to have used an editing technique to piece two separate takes together. The film continues on with a succession of individual barks followed by a short interlude in which Shane looks expectantly at someone just to the left of the camera. He sits quietly (despite unavoidable panting) in anticipation for a few seconds and barks again. This scheme continues until there is another cut in the scene. In film, this would normally appear seamless so as to give the impression of undisrupted time, however this cinematic procedure is made evident.

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140 Crimp, “Pictures,” 87.
fades to black and the film suddenly ends. We learn that Goldstein hired a professionally trained
dog, seasoned in the film and television industry, to play the part of Shane. Its generic
affectation, similar to Goldstein’s other films, only emphasizes the prevailing aesthetic of
Hollywood’s sensibility—triteness and empathetic ideals. Treatment of the dog actor as little
more than surface (a centralized flattened image on a black background) recalls the simplicity
(and popularity) of movies and television shows starring dog protagonists who are always, loyal,
affectionate, cute and oftentimes, heroic. Eklund also compares this work with Leavitt’s *Painted
Image*, “[It] embodies the very kind of theatricality that provided a model for artists trained in
Minimalism, such as Goldstein. *Shane* is representative of one type of film by Goldstein in
which highly symbolic or memory-laden objects are drained of their associations and re-
represented using psychologically hyped-up conventions of Hollywood cinema.”

Goldstein’s last 16mm film, *The Jump*, 1978 (Figure 24), also used animation to abstract
found movie footage to draw out a new kind of image that further highlights our attachment to
and confidence in images to codify our faculties and sense of reality. In Douglas Crimp’s 1977
catalogue essay, he begins his exhibition statement by describing the unfinished work as an
example of how, “we only experience reality through the pictures we make of it.” The
authenticity of first-hand experience becomes null as, “The actual event and the fictional event,
the benign and the horrific, the mundane and the exotic, the possible and the fantastic: all are
fused into the all-embracing similitude of the picture.” Although he confirms Goldstein’s
recording of an actual event, we come to find that the footage is appropriated from Leni

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141 Eklund, 71–72.
142 Crimp, *Pictures*, 3.
143 Ibid., 4.
Riefenstahl’s *Olympia*, 1938, a two-part documentary about the 1936 Olympic Games in Nazi Berlin that propagandized the physical beauty and racial superiority of the German people. A glittering, almost pulsating red figure is suspended against a black background and begins to jump, extinguishing upon impact with the perceived yet invisible foreground. Somewhat recognizable as a diver, it reappears mid screen, contorting its body as it flips forward back into the black abyss. Surfacing for a third time, the action is abbreviated and resembles a bright flash that quickly disappears again. A still glimmering figure flickers twice, the second time during which it appears to radiate more brightly and with green and red bursts of color. The screen remains black thereafter and the film comes to an abrupt end, frustrating our expectations of another glimpse.

Eklund notes that Crimp recounted Goldstein’s use of rotoscoping in this catalogue essay as well—animation produced by tracing over live footage to create the shadowy quality of the figure. He also recalls that the work was further enhanced in exhibition by two black lights pointed at the projection, creating the illusion that the image was foregrounding the wall. In reference to David Salle’s essay for an exhibition at the legendary Hallwalls gallery in Buffalo, NY in November 1978, he wrote, “This coda serves to further objectify the image—like a visual gerund—transforming the action from “to jump” to “jumping” or “the jump.” It is another distancing device, one that pulls us out of our fascination with the moving image and neatly stores it, tomblike, in the mind until the loop begins again.” The distance with which we experience the image allows us to disconnect from our culturally prescribed visual associations. Eklund continues, “[…] his diver is unabashedly indebted to the visual language of Hollywood.

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144 Eklund, 123.

145 Ibid., 123.
glitz (the spangles and sparkles having effaced the Nazi origins of the footage, of which the casual viewer was unaware.)”

Although some might argue that the films could have been made anywhere, it was, arguably, Goldstein’s contact with the film industry and utilization of its commercial studios which allowed him to achieve the distance he was aiming for in developing a new kind conceptual framework for representation. With the help of industry professionals, he rendered his objects with the same depersonalized and embellished look of Hollywood motion pictures.

In my interview with Morgan Fisher in 2015, he noted the importance of the duration of the films, which were all around five minutes or less with the exception of a couple works such as The Knife and Chair, both 1975, which were both created in New York along with Butterflies of the same year. Goldstein insinuated that the length of the films had to do with the time it took to enact a particular situation and/or to simply retain the viewer’s interest. “In film time, there’s a definite point when something becomes boring. At around three minutes you begin to twitch in your chair. Shane is three minutes long. That film was long enough so that you got into the image, but it was short enough so that when it’s pulled away from you, you’re left with this thing in your head afterwards. That’s where duration becomes important. I want the image to become a memory of that object. I want to turn a thought into something tangible—an object—and then back into a thought.” As the films were primarily brief, if not extremely short (sometimes one minute or less), the resonance of Goldstein’s images is further heightened but no more revealing.

146 Ibid., 124.

147 Ibid., 73.

148 Goldstein in Fisher, 44.
The segue to phonograph records in 1976 seemed an instinctive next step in conceiving a new type of image/object that can only be achieved through the notion of distance. Goldstein asserted that there was always a distance between us and the world, denying us a closeness or true understanding of it as our senses, memory, and judgment was primarily shaped through second hand means rather than authentic experience. Just as the film industry granted him a kind of freedom and control, quite aptly, sound allowed him create images he couldn’t be bothered to recreate or didn’t have the ability to recreate, visually. The records were more autonomous than the films because they were meant to be handled and manipulated by the audience. Comprised of self-made and stock film recordings, they were in essence, sound effects that easily stood in for images and ideas familiar to the minds and memories of television viewers and movie-goers:

I wanted to do a film of the wind, for instance, but somehow I just couldn’t seem to realize it...When I wanted to do a green record I went to a stock sound library and looked through their catalogue until I found an effect of some guy chopping down a tree. The colors came first, then I found the images. It’s not the sounds that I’m actually interested in, but the images. Images equal sounds.

Goldstein created the images he wanted to see by choosing the sounds that best realized them. Like the professional cameramen, animators, film editors etc., the sounds were a film industry mainstay/prop. James Welling recounted that Goldstein would go back and forth between New York and LA because:

LA had better labs and technical services...I worked as a cook in a place called “The Feedbag” on Wilshire and Twelfth in Santa Monica. I got Jack a job working with me as a fry cook. Jack made his film Bone China while we were working there....Jack would usually start a conversation saying, Jim, I’ve got this great idea! Then he would describe something that more often than not became a film or a record.

149 Ibid., 45.
150 Ibid., 45.
151 James Welling in Hertz, Jack Goldstein, cit., 2003, 106.
During this period Goldstein made one of his first records, *The Burning Forest*, 1976, a pink and white marbled 45 rpm LP that conjures up an image of thick permeating smoke, black ash raining, burnt gnarled limbs, and bright orange and red flames fanning and hissing noisily against a quiet dark night sky. The audience senses danger and destruction despite probably never having witnessed this type of event. In replaying the piece again, I played with the volume in an attempt to pick up other clues and/or sounds that might further specify or elucidate the meaning or significance of the scene. As the visual here is grounded in the mind of the individual, there is even less resolve than the films as the shape and form of the image is drawn from an endless array of news footage, movie clips, radio segments, television narratives, and perhaps, personal experiences.

An individually released silver LP 33 entitled, *The Quivering Earth*, 1977, is arguably, one of the most filmic of the records. Similar to how the visibility of a scene occurs in a movie, the image becomes apparent as the audio fades in and becomes increasingly loud and chaotic. People are screaming, shouting, and running from all directions against jarring, nearly indeterminant sounds that resemble fire and summon images of death and destruction. Goldstein creates a scene that brings to mind anything and everything ranging from war to natural disaster (suggested in great part by the work’s title). Sometime in the next several minutes, the audience recognizes the artifice of these sounds that are merely repeated over and over again to create an effect of drama and nothing more. “That’s the direction my work is moving in, letting you experience the sense of an extreme situation, but at a distance, so that you can control it. I don’t believe you actually have to experience something in real time and space to know it. You can experience it in your head without having to experience it in your body.”\(^{152}\) Crimp affirms that

\(^{152}\) Goldstein in Fisher, 45.
the obscurity of meaning in the film works in particular (and arguably, in the films as well) allows them to become objects of desire and therefore instigate the formulation of a new architecture of narrative.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{153} Crimp, Pictures, 10.
According to David E. James, *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer* marks the pivotal moment in postmodern American art in which fine artists’ interest in the culture industry solidified and became paramount. He asserts, “The turn to films in the late 1960s and early 1970s reflected the combination of the medium’s hegemony in American popular culture and the incipient erosion of that hegemony that allowed cinematic technology its highly self-conscious usage in the production of art.”\(^\text{154}\) Los Angeles was the most important center for artistic development in film, according to the film historian, due to the inescapable cultural, geographic, political and economic connections to Hollywood and the subsequent formal, aesthetic and conceptual developments that emerged, in large part as a result of local conditions such as sun, space, and distance from the orthodox East. Artists such as Jack Goldstein were reinvesting in the potential of images to their own end by disrupting the role of the artist and what constitutes the object. Pivotal figures such as Douglas Crimp recognized the roots of artists like Goldstein whose beginnings in performance and sculpture seemed to lead quite naturally into the film work:

> The extent to which this (temporal) experience fully pervades their work is not, however, immediately apparent, for its theatrical dimensions have been transformed and, quite unexpectedly reinvested the pictorial image. If many of these artists can be said to have been apprenticed in the field of performance as it issued from minimalism, they have nevertheless begun to reverse its priorities, making of the literal situation and duration of the performed event a tableau whose presence and temporality are utterly psychologized; performance becomes just one of a number of ways of “staging” a picture.\(^\text{155}\)

The interest in performance and other experimental media was no doubt encouraged on the more laid back west coast, imported from New York, Europe and elsewhere via the newly revitalized university and college art programs in the Los Angeles area. Crimp aptly sums up the primary

\(^{154}\) James, 292.

concern around representation during the 1970s as a desire to move away from the restrictive attitudes of the art establishment, namely those based in traditional disciplines such as painting - a purist and historicising stances toward form, medium and content that neglected to deal with the more increasingly predominant forms and images of mass culture.

Next to these pictures firsthand experience begins to retreat, to seem more and more trivial. While it once seems that pictures had the function of interpreting reality, it now seems that they had usurped it. It there became imperative to understand the picture itself, not in order to uncover a lost reality but to determine how a picture becomes a signifying structure of its own accord.156

He continues, “Representation is not born in the imagination; it is a function of the imagination…;” pictures “are determined not by the logic of things but by the logic of representation.”157

\[156\] Crimp, Pictures, 2.

\[157\] Ibid., 24.
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Chunn, Nancy. Interview by Kirby Michelle Woo. February 1, 2015.


James, David E. Interview by Kirby Michelle Woo.


Illustrations

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Figure 2
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Michael Asher, *No Title*, 1970. Installation
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Figure 4
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Photograph of performance at Pomona College Museum of Art. Courtesy of the Orange County Museum of Art
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Photograph of installation at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 2011. Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles
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Allen Ruppersberg, Al's Café, 1969. Menu
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Jack Goldstein, *A Glass of Milk*, 1972. 16mm film
Courtesy of the Orange County Museum of Art
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Matt Mullican, *Concentrating on the Place Where the Wall Meets the Floor, Untitled (Stick Figure)*, 1974. Ink on paper
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Jack Goldstein, *The Portrait of Pere Tanguy*, 1974. 16mm film
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Jack Goldstein, *Butterflies*, 1975. 16mm film
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