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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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Robert Heinecken's *TV/Time Environment*

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

by

Zachary Austin Pfahler

June 2012

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Susan Laxton, Chairperson

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2012

The Thesis of Zachary Austin Pfahler is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Robert Heinecken's *TV/Time Environment*

by

Zachary Austin Pfahler

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Art History
University of California, Riverside, June 2012
Dr. Susan Laxton, Chairperson

Robert Heinecken's early works represent an artist in the liminal space between well-known and well-worn modern art practices and the beginnings of a burgeoning postmodern art movement. Heinecken's own practice, emanating from his photography laboratory at UCLA, acted as a clarion call for a new generation of artists to repudiate outmoded photographic practices based on Group f/64 aesthetics and Clement Greenberg's notion of medium specificity. Thus Heinecken was in the vanguard of the movement now known as postmodernism. Unfortunately, Heinecken has not been given due consideration in art historical scholarship for his influential corpus of concept-driven work. Only in recent years—due in part to the Getty's *Pacific Standard Time* initiative, which established Los Angeles as a central source of postwar artistic innovation—has scholarship critically approached Heinecken's *oeuvre*. I suggest that a more thorough understanding of Heinecken's objectives would reveal the debt that postmodern art practices owe to him.

My thesis, “Robert Heinecken’s *TV/Time Environment*,” investigates Heinecken’s engagement with emergent aesthetic and theoretical concerns of the 1960s and 1970s. I employ Heinecken’s *TV/Time Environment*, (1970), as a case study because it is an installation which exemplifies the aesthetic and theoretical objectives of Heinecken’s early work. With *TV/Time Environment*, Heinecken fully realized a critique the pervasiveness and persuasiveness of mass media imagery. I argue that Heinecken’s innovative installation piece acted as a nodal point for three critical frameworks—semiotic theory, surrealist art practices, and media criticism—all of which informed *TV/Time Environment*, and which were subsequently redeveloped in the post-photographic work of other artists that appeared in Heinecken’s wake. My analysis of *TV/Time Environment* reinforces the installation’s impact in both the 1970s and the present. My thesis is not a comparative project, but an examination of the effect of modernist theories upon a critical early postmodern work.

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Introduction

Robert Heinecken's *TV/Time Environment*

Writing Heinecken in the Post *Pacific Standard Time* Era

Pacific Standard Time (PST), the Getty initiative which brought together over sixty cultural institutions throughout Southern California in order to commemorate mid-twentieth-century Los Angeles art, showed decisively that Robert Heinecken's impact on the Los Angeles art scene has been vastly underappreciated by prior art historical work.¹ Most survey texts do not mention him or, worse, dismiss him as a sensationalist because of his sexually-charged images.² The best-known writings on Heinecken come from museum catalogs and retrospectives. Many of these texts do not effectively analyze the themes within Heinecken's work, opting instead to merely summarize his four-decade career, which began in the early sixties.

Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976, a *PST* exhibition at the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena, provided an opportunity to view a significant portion of Heinecken's magazine and television manipulations. The exhibition and its catalog eschewed the usual monographic approach and developed a reading of one of the most significant themes within Heinecken's work: the issue of covert meaning within mass media imagery. The exhibition also reinscribed Heinecken as an artist working in the interstitial space between an already codified modern art movement and emergent postmodern trends. Subsequently, Heinecken propelled the Los

Angeles art scene into the burgeoning postmodern art movement. While Ed Ruscha (whose *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, figure I.1, was the centerpiece of much of the Getty's promotional materials for *PST*) used the automobile as a new apparatus to develop his artwork, Heinecken used a parallel, but arguably more persuasive technical support, using mass media forms such as magazines and the television in order to deliver his message.³

Heinecken referred to himself as a “paraphotographer”—he rarely shot his own photographs. Instead he concerned himself with extant photography, with particular emphasis on photographs found in the mass media. During a lecture for the Society of Photographic Educators in April, 1988, Heinecken advised viewers not to compare his photographic works with traditional “straight” photography. He lifted images from other sources in order to dissect their hidden meanings and he educated his viewers to do the same. During his tenure at UCLA, Heinecken theorized that photographs were not pictures of things, but *objects about things*.⁴ Heinecken's photographic works were thus forerunners to the appropriation arts of the seventies and eighties and accelerated the use of mixed-media techniques within photography practices.⁵

The biographical approach of much of the writing on Heinecken undercuts his complex critique of mass media. With a set of unprecedented strategies, Heinecken's work establishes agency for the viewer to defend his or herself against the deafening roar of the mass media machine. This thesis contributes to the existing literature on Heinecken with an in-depth examination of a single work, Heinecken's *TV/Time Environment* installation from 1970 (Figure I.2; see also figures 1.4, 1.6, and 3.5 for different

installation sites), in order to develop its themes of sex, power, and (visual) violence.⁶ *TV/Time Environment* was first displayed in 1970 for *California Photographers 1970* at the Pasadena Art Museum (now the Norton Simon Museum).^{*} *TV/Time Environment* followed Heinecken's early magazine work, including his best-known series, *Are You Rea* (see chapter one, figure 1.3), and his *Time* magazine manipulations beginning in 1969 (Figure I.3). In the latter works, Heinecken "superimposed a lithographic print of a recently published photograph showing a smiling soldier holding the decapitated heads of two unknown Vietnamese youths" to the inside pages of ordinary copies of *Time* magazine.⁷ The compromised issues would then be placed on magazine racks or in waiting rooms for unsuspecting readers, challenging the complacency of our media-saturated reality.⁸

TV/Time Environment Explained

TV/Time Environment elaborates on Heinecken's early magazine works. The piece was installed at least six times.⁹ Each installation had common elements: viewers were invited to enter an environment reminiscent of a sixties/seventies-style suburban living room. There the viewer would sit in a chair and watch television through a manipulated set. Heinecken had removed the front of the television set, put a high-contrast film positive, or photolithograph, of a pornographic image inside the set over the cathode ray tube, and put the face of the set back on.¹⁰ The resulting superimposition created a believable image in which broadcast television was viewed through the pornographic photolithograph. As Heinecken described it, "You're sitting in the chair

watching [and] whatever happens to be on television becomes the anatomy of this figure, or the clothing of this figure, or the viscera of this figure, or certainly joins into that figure.”¹¹

There were six photolithographs in total and each one featured a nude female figure cut-off at her neck and upper thighs. The photolithograph thus displayed only the female’s torso, complete with breasts and genitalia displayed, with the contours of her body framing the televisual image. Unfortunately a studio fire destroyed five out of six photolithographs.¹² The only remaining photolithograph can be seen in documentation from the Santa Barbara Museum of Art’s *Attitudes* show, from 1979, as well as the Armory show’s installation (see figures I.2 and 1.4).

In an April, 1988 lecture for the Society of Photographic Educators, Heinecken presented video footage within the manipulated television set of *TV/Time Environment*. This same video footage appeared at the Armory Center for the Arts’ *Speaking in Tongues* exhibition, held from October, 2011 to January, 2012. As a result, much of this project’s content analysis derives from Heinecken’s video footage. The video features a series of commercials from the sixties and seventies intercut with war footage. Unlike earlier *TV/Time Environment* installations, which featured live broadcast television, the assembled footage does not feature any television programs whatsoever. This change was in part intended to recreate the installation as it would have been seen in the early- to mid-seventies—the video footage demonstrates for a contemporary viewer how the manipulated television set operated in its original context. More importantly, however, the change from broadcast television to video reveals Heinecken’s ever-changing

understanding of the televisual experience, and thus allowed Heinecken to fine tune his critique of mass media. In essence, the introduction of commercial-only assembled footage was Heinecken's way of stating that all aspects of the televisual experience targeted the consumer; in effect, there is no difference between a television program and the commercials which interrupt it—they are both intended to sell to the viewer. Commercials, however, condense the calculating patterns of mass media into much shorter time spans, making them much more significant tools for Heinecken's assault against the televisual experience.

Other elements of *TV/Time Environment* depended on the exhibition space. The piece in *California Photographers 1970* featured an overstuffed chair supplied by the show's curator, Fred Parker, as well as wallpaper, plastic poinsettias, and an altered magazine featuring an image of then-Vice President Spiro Agnew in addition to an Agnew mask (see chapter one, figure 1.6).¹³ Other settings used elements of the exhibition space, such as air conditioning systems, which believably fit in with the décor of the average suburban living room (see figure 3.5) and/or featured Heinecken's photographic works on the wall space.¹⁴

Methodology

Loosely structured around Roland Barthes' *S/Z*—published the same year as the first exhibition of *TV/Time Environment*—my thesis examines the installation using three separate models and in doing so suggests that *TV/Time Environment* acted as a nodal point within an emergent postmodern discourse. In other words, while my analysis of

TV/Time Environment uses three modernist theoretical models, I argue that Heinecken reinvigorates them and propagates their use-value for future artists and historians alike within the postmodern era.

Chapter One argues that the structural underpinnings of *TV/Time Environment* can be understood within a semiological framework from Ferdinand de Saussure to Roland Barthes. I employ texts by the two aforementioned authors in order to define the signification processes behind both the televisual image and the installation itself.

Chapter Two examines *TV/Time Environment* within the surrealist framework of André Breton's writings. In this chapter I explore Heinecken's understanding of Bretonian Surrealism and in particular the ways he believes the unconscious mind builds an image. A peripheral goal in using Surrealism in Chapter Two is to reinscribe Heinecken within an already established art historical discourse which is only now recognizing his work

If Chapter One disassembles the image of *TV/Time Environment* into its syntactical structures, and Chapter Two analyzes the image using the aesthetic and theoretical support of Surrealism (through which Heinecken transmits the image), then Chapter Three closes my reading of the image, drawing upon a then-emergent field that Heinecken personally studied. In Chapter Three, then, I will examine media theory contemporaneous to *TV/Time Environment*. In using textual evidence from Marshall McLuhan, Daniel J. Boorstin, and others, I argue that Heinecken's *TV/Time Environment* appears as a visual analogue to the radical media theorization that took shape in the sixties.

Each chapter employs extensive content analysis in order to render a complete image of the environment and Heinecken's corresponding attack against the prevalent mass media forms of our time. To that end, my content analysis includes the "compromised" televisual image, the installation setting, and the suite of lithographs made in the wake of *TV/Time Environment*. The goal of this project is to create a dialogue about an under-examined artist. Therefore it is important to note that this project does not close Robert Heinecken's work to other interpretations, but instead decodes three aspects behind one of Heinecken's most intriguing, yet cryptic and incongruous, pieces.¹⁵

¹ *Pacific Standard Time* homepage, The J. Paul Getty Trust, accessed March 20, 2012, <http://www.pacificstandardtime.org/>.

² Jonathan Green, *American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1984): 157.

³ Rosalind Krauss, *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011): 20.

⁴ See Heinecken, Robert. *The Photograph: Not a picture of, but an object about something*. s.n., 1987.

⁵ Robert Fitzpatrick, Foreword, in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): vi.

⁶ A.D. Coleman, "I Call It Teaching': Robert Heinecken's Analytical Facture," in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 3.

* *TV/Time Environment* was also known as *T.V. Time* or *TV/Time Entertainment*.

⁷ David Pagel, "Pictures Turned Inside Out: Robert Heinecken's Homemade Magazines," in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁹ Philip Martin, e-mail message to author, January 31, 2012. We can deduce the minimum number of installations given the number of photolithographs made for the piece.

¹⁰ Robert Heinecken, from *Untitled 7/8*, in *Robert Heinecken*, ed. James Enyeart (Carmel: Friends of Photography, 1980 [1974]): 97. Heinecken gave new meaning to the phrase "boob tube."

¹¹ Robert Heinecken, in "Heinecken Explains Heinecken," for the Society of Photographic Educators, April 1988, on Youtube.com, accessed March 21, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rzHwzZDgOw.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Robert Heinecken, in *Robert Heinecken*, 98.

¹⁴ The minimal décor used in the Armory Center for the Arts' installation setting, however, was solely a curatorial decision and will not be a part of my content analysis, although it is meant to represent a more modern living space. It should also be noted that some installations of *TV/Time Environment* employed the television's sound, while other installations were mute; some used a black-and-white television set, and still others used color. The Armory show's piece was mute, but used color. See Enyeart, James, ed. *Robert Heinecken*. Carmel: Friends of Photography, 1980.

¹⁵ "Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976," wall text, at The Armory Center for the Arts, 145 N. Raymond Ave., Pasadena, CA 91103. 12 October 2011.

Figures



Figure I.1. Ed Ruscha, *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 64 ½ x 121 ¾ in. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. Gift of James Meeker.

Source: Ed Ruscha's home page, accessed March 21, 2012, <http://www.edruscha.com/site/workView.cfm?pk=28>. Used with permission.



Figure I.2. Robert Heinecken, *TV/Time Environment* (installation view), [1970] 1979. Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; related magazine, life-size. From *Attitudes: Photography in the 1970's*, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, May 12 – August 5, 1979, Santa Barbara, CA.

Source: Fred Parker, installation view, *Attitudes: Photography in the 1970's* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1979).



Figure I.3. Robert Heinecken, *Untitled*, n.d. Offset lithograph, 11.1 x 7.9 in. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. Robert Heinecken Archive/Gift of the Artist.

Source: Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976* (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011): plate xiii.

Chapter One

The Paraphotographic Conditions of *TV/Time Environment*

Introduction

Robert Heinecken's early works helped to set a new direction for conceptual art, one with photography at its center.¹ Driven by an interest in signification processes, principally within mass media imagery, Heinecken specifically took aim at Group f/64 aesthetics (which had determined the trajectory of photographic practices for decades), "challeng[ing]," in the words of Nathan Lyons, "the postulate that the visual disposition of the photographic image rest[ed] solely on its merits to picture experiences drawn directly from nature."² This attitude, fashioned on the idealistic belief that the photograph presented an unaltered view of reality, had already been challenged by critics like Roland Barthes, who, in "The Photographic Message," (1961), asserted: "[o]f all the structures of information, the photograph appears as the only one that is exclusively constituted and occupied by a 'denoted' message," and followed that by drawing attention to the "phenomena which occur at the levels of the production and reception of the [photographic] message," particularly how the image is "treated" at production and how it is "read" at reception.³

Heinecken's cynical view of modernist photographic aesthetics led to a body of work obsessed with mass media forms, facilitating a shift in West Coast art away from the "natural" and toward the cultural.⁴ He repudiated the notion that the photographic

image was merely a representation, implicitly accepting Barthes' position in "The Photographic Message" that connotative procedures are integrated into every photographic image, whether at the point of production or reception. As a culturally bounded photographic practitioner, Heinecken drew inspiration from a variety of mediums, and in particular from the writings of French author Alain Robbe-Grillet, who, according to Carolyn Peter, "challenged the traditional idea of the novel and developed his storylines by describing objects from multiple points of view."⁵ In both literal (e.g. *Figure in Six Sections*, 1963, figure 1.1; and *Refractive Hexagon*, 1965, figure 1.2) and metaphoric ways (e.g. *Are You Rea* series, 1964-1968, figure 1.3; and *TV/Time Environment*, 1970, figure 1.4), Heinecken followed Robbe-Grillet's model, making art which looked at things from multiple viewpoints, asking viewers to put the parts together differently.⁶

Heinecken created a repertoire of images *about* experience rather than *of* experience.⁷ This approach, formulated in his 1965 "soft" manifesto on photography, posited a new way of thinking about the medium, one in which "meaning is probably not on the surface or necessarily associated with the subject matter [of a photograph]," but that the photograph is "an object about something."⁸ *Figure in Six Sections* (Figure 1.1), for example, can be understood as a conceptual iteration of dimension. In the words of Peter Bunnell, it "presse[s] toward a concept of photography which encompasses an alternative formal perspective [...], one in which the previously illusionistic qualities of space and scale are transformed into actual space and dimension, thereby shifting photography into sculpture."⁹ With a work like *Figure in Six Sections*, Heinecken

demonstrates the photograph's plurality; this position is particularly acerbic considering the numerous proponents of medium specificity in other artistic fields around the same time. Likewise, *Refractive Hexagon* (Figure 1.2), a puzzle in which a photograph of a female figure has been cut into twenty-four equilateral triangles, further explicates Heinecken's position: despite all twenty-four pieces fitting into a hexagonal shape, the photographic assemblage never communicates a coherent image. *Refractive Hexagon* asserts the objecthood of the photograph rather than the "natural" bodily image which is portrayed on each puzzle piece. Linguistically speaking, Heinecken's approach reflects Ferdinand de Saussure's study of the linguistic sign, first introduced in *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) in order to examine the underlying structures of meaning.

In the posthumously published *Course in General Linguistics*, the foundational text for semiotic studies, Saussure "conceive[d] of a science *which studies the role of signs as part of social life*. [...] It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them."¹⁰ In conceiving what he called "semiology," Saussure ushered in a revolution, "[f]or instead of men's words being seen as peripheral to men's understanding of reality, men's understanding of reality came to be seen as revolving about their social use of verbal signs."¹¹ Saussure's text was central in the formation of a broader intellectual movement in the mid-twentieth century known as "structuralism,"¹² wherein social phenomena, such as language, are described on the basis of underlying structures rather than individual manifestations of meaning.¹³ The structural approach, particularly as it was practiced by Roland Barthes (with specific attention to photography), is useful in understanding Robert Heinecken because works like *TV/Time Environment* examine

the underlying structures of broadcast television and the messages it transmits to the viewer.

Barthes' *Elements of Semiology* appeared concurrently with his essay "Rhetoric of the Image" in the journal *Communications* in 1964.¹⁴ "With *Elements of Semiology* Barthes had recommended that descriptive models from structural linguistics be tentatively generalised to signifying systems other than natural language."¹⁵ "Rhetoric of the Image" could be seen as an extension of *Elements of Semiology*: it provided an analysis of an advertising image following the framework set forth in *Elements*. Heinecken's and Barthes' practices came out of the same set of historical conditions. The early sixties saw an explosion of mass media theory: Marshall McLuhan's pioneering study, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, from 1964, was one of the first texts to argue that mass media forms bear the mark of language—each new medium has its own underlying structure drawn from the internal language of older media forms (See Chapter Three). Barthes' earlier collection of essays on mass-culture, *Mythologies*, from 1957, semiologically examined the underlying mechanics of mass media forms from wrestling to stage plays.

Heinecken's seminal *Are You Rea* series (1964-1968), coterminous with Barthes' *Communications* entries, assumed a similar ideological position to Barthes, exploring "[t]he contradictory impulses of man to semanticise objects and to camouflage his communicative intention."¹⁶ In an essay for the exhibition *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976*, curator Claudia Bohn-Spector describes Heinecken's strategy behind *Are You Rea*:

Are You Rea [Figure 1.3] was made by passing light onto photographic paper through the pages of an illustrated magazine [...] The resulting pictures showed both sides of the printed page simultaneously, creating unexpected juxtapositions that exposed the subliminal workings of modern mass media and disrupted the flow of its unquestioned consumption.¹⁷

TV/Time Environment (Figure 1.4) elaborates on the Barthesian underpinnings of *Are You Rea*: the transparency of the female nude placed in contact with the picture tube of the television created unexpected juxtapositions throughout the installation's approximate seven minute running time, explicitly pointing out the subliminal workings of the commercial advertisements.¹⁸ This chapter argues that Heinecken's theoretical underpinnings for *TV/Time Environment* can be understood within a semiological framework. I will strategize my argument according to the organization of Barthes' *Elements of Semiology*, which is divided into four headings: *Language (Langue) and Speech, Signifier and Signified*, and *Syntagm and System*, all of which map onto the structure of *TV/Time Environment*.*

Firstly, it should be observed that with each commercial Heinecken appropriated for use in *TV/Time Environment*, media representations of women were central, and were therefore the object of his critique. However, given the often pornographic context of his *oeuvre*—*TV/Time Environment* being no exception—Heinecken was often read by feminists as a purveyor of the male gaze, employing erotic imagery at the expense of women.¹⁹ Criticism of Heinecken along gender lines followed a renewed interest in identity-based critiques, which became popular in the 1980s.²⁰ In that decade Heinecken was virtually deleted from historical memory. Feminist art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau, for example, does not mention Heinecken's media-based approach in her essay

“Photography After Art Photography.” Nor does Heinecken’s name appear in the influential anthology on postmodernism, *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, except in Martha Rosler’s essay “Lookers, Buyers, Dealers and Makers: Thoughts On Audience,” in which she casually dismisses Heinecken’s work as “pussy porn.”²¹ In her essay Rosler rightly pointed out, however, that Heinecken’s photographic practices follow the new theory-inspired approach of structuralism, which in an earlier epoch “could never have entered the photo galleries.”²² The consequences of Heinecken’s contemporary reception haunts his output to this day, and are perhaps understandable given the feminist polemics of the time. But I would argue that works like *TV/Time Environment* destabilize the male gaze (and other hegemonies, visual and otherwise), placing Heinecken’s earlier output ahead of its time.

Signifier and Signified

In the *TV/Time Environment*, disruptive processes act upon viewers as they watch commercial advertisements through Heinecken’s photolithographic “intervention.” Through this erotic screen, Heinecken makes explicit not only the hidden meanings of the nine advertisements (which play on a continuous loop) featured in the Armory show installation, but the rhetorical strategies that manufacture— and in fact naturalize—each advertisement’s message. Recognizing Heinecken’s critique of Madison Avenue tactics and developing *TV/Time Environment* within a semiological framework are two interrelated activities. According to photography theorist Victor Burgin, advertisements *in situ* demonstrate how an unreflecting person may mistakenly identify a signifier (an

object's physical entity) as sign (the union of signifier and signified).²³ For example, the character of Josephine the Plumber (Comet's 1960's mascot), in a commercial for Comet brand cleanser, signifies the cleansing power of the product. The unreflecting viewer might not be able to separate the character from the product, always expecting the product to work as effectively as the service woman using it in the commercial. The commercial sets up false expectations, and the viewer is expected not to recognize them.

In perhaps the most famous passage in *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure clarifies the nature of the linguistic sign: "A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept [signified] and a sound pattern [signifier]."²⁴ Saussure explains his position with a diagram, in which the sound pattern, or signifier, "arbor" is linked with the concept, or signified, "tree," forming a linguistic sign (Figure 1.5).

Supplementing Saussure's explanation, Barthes categorizes the signifier on a plane of expression and the signified on a plane of content.²⁵ Each of these planes then contains the dichotomous concepts of form and substance: form can be described comprehensively within a linguistic model whereas substance must adopt extra linguistic models as a means to describe.²⁶ A commercial advertisement's forms of expression can be described through simple, if comprehensive, visual analysis, yet a description of its substances of content require formidable understanding of sociological knowledge. For example, to describe the Barbie commercial in *TV/Time Environment* is simple enough: two young girls call each other on the phone while admiring their Barbie dolls. The commercial then cuts to the girls playing with the Barbie dolls and their various accessories (including Ken), demonstrating for the viewer Barbie's "abilities."

The viewer is meant to identify Barbie as a character with a set of personality traits (which inflect toward Barbie's target demographic, young girls) rather than view Barbie as simply a physical entity, i.e. a doll. Thus, to mistake signifier for sign in a commercial advertisement can be seen as a carefully calculated agglutination of extrinsic value to the physical entity: it is not simply an object on view on television, but a set of connotative (usually ideological) values subtly written into the product. Umberto Eco identifies the type of sign seen in commercial advertisements as an iconic sign, "*possessing some properties of the object represented.*"²⁷ Here, however, Eco produces the same methodological slippage that Burgin's "unreflecting person" commits when misidentifying signifier for sign: for example, Barbie as an object cannot possess human properties. To rectify the situation, Eco suggests that the iconic sign reproduces some conditions of reception: in the commercial advertisement, Eco argues, a sensation is transmitted, "buil[t] up [of] determinative configurations, either iconic or iconological, stylistic or rhetorical."²⁸ While there is indication, then, that the misidentification of signifier and sign occurs at the level of reception, it should be noted that it is only through strategies at the level of production that this misidentification can be installed. These strategies—particularly prevalent in commercial advertisements—produce complex culturalized images, which in turn determine aspects of our cultural ideology.²⁹

Syntagm and System

To expose the commercial advertisement's manufactured experiences with *TV/Time Environment*, Heineken attached a photolithographic "frame" to the television

tube, filtering each advertisement through a pornographic lens. As a result, Heinecken generated visual congruencies between the static image and the television picture, suggesting a photo-filmic paradigm within segments of the reconstruction's montage. In order to demonstrate linguistic congruencies, it is important to recognize that in a linguistic system "everything depends on relations."³⁰ The same will true for an understanding of *TV/Time Environment*. These relations take two forms: paradigmatic and syntagmatic. In the sentence "I will pour you a cup of water," the word "cup" and the rest of the sentence forms a syntagmatic relationship: removing the word "cup" alters the meaning of the sentence (rendering the sentence incomprehensible). Syntagmatic relationships, then, are associations between words in a spoken or written chain.³¹ Victor Burgin calls "the plane of the syntagm [...] that of *addition*."³² Conversely, paradigmatic relationships allow for *substitution*. I can replace the word "cup" with "glass" or "bottle" or another word synonymous with "cup" and still maintain comprehensibility.³³

Heinecken's framing device allows for the development of revelatory paradigmatic relationships. Saussure describes two different kinds of paradigmatic, or associative links, and both are active in *TV/Time Environment*: "sometimes there is a double associative link based on form and meaning, but in other cases just one associative link based on form or meaning alone."³⁴ As one example, in a commercial for Safeguard soap featured in the installation, a family, inexplicably outfitted with musical instruments, stands in a sterile environment wearing nothing but towels (which cover the parts of the body that are bared in the superimposed photolithograph). As the commercial progresses, the camera zooms in on the matriarch who displays the product in her left

hand. At this point there exists a visual homology between the photolithograph and commercial image: the matriarch is displayed from the waist, drawing attention to the product much as the woman's pose in the pornographic image emphasizes her erogenous zones. There is thus a double associative link in the re-presentation of the Safeguard advertisement: both form and meaning align in Heinecken's superimposition.

There are other double associative links which crystallize during the montage. Close-ups permeate several commercials:[†] Barbie's visage envelops the screen, as do the girls' faces; here Heinecken foregrounds the cultural construction of femininity, which begins at a young age with Barbie dolls and crescendos with the proliferation of pornographic material aimed at men. An advertisement for Comet dedicated fifteen seconds to a close-up of a drain being scrubbed clean by Josephine the Plumber. In Heinecken's configuration the drain is juxtaposed against the photolithograph's superimposed genitalia—the implied vaginal imagery of the drain becomes an explicit masturbatory act as the once-hidden signification process is rendered a replete sign by Heinecken. Similarly, the implied sexual titillation in advertisements for Genesee beer and Winston cigarettes are made overt; the phallic-shaped beer glasses of the former and cigarettes of the latter seemingly penetrate the figure of the photolithograph just as they enter and satisfy the user in their respective commercials. This list is by no means exhaustive. In the face of *TV/Time Environment*, the viewer, as one critic observed, “begins to watch with a sense of expectancy and a willingness to make associational closures forming chance gestalts.”³⁵ Heinecken intends for these gestalt formations to expose the subliminal messages that underlie mass media imagery.

Heinecken's rearrangement of seemingly disparate commercials in later iterations of *TV/Time Environment* introduces a new narrative element, again obviating the complexities of the commercial advertising system. This narrative element constitutes one aspect of the installation's syntagmatic plane. With the new set-up Heinecken elicits the image of a culturally constructed female. The rearrangement of commercials in *TV/Time Environment* establishes a role for women from childhood through adulthood. Beginning at nearly any point during the video montage, the viewer can expect to see a "demonstration" on how women should behave—that every commercial features women working in some capacity is no accident; nor is it coincidence that the majority of commercials feature household settings with a focus on personal or domestic cleanliness. In its approximately seven minute running time, Heinecken's video montage makes explicit how advertisements mediate the viewer. The superimposed photolithograph also produces a great leveling effect for the commercial sequence: with every advertisement overtly sexualized, the viewer can recognize the institutional sexism at work, and the extent to which mass media images objectify women.

The installation's syntagmatic plane also includes the interspersed clips of aerial bombings. A simultaneous indictment of the Vietnam War's destructive capacity, the War's refracted view through a televisual lens, and the mass media's bombardments on the public—and particularly female—psyche, these images of destruction fold into Heinecken's narrative. Inserted sporadically throughout the sequence, these clips do not disrupt the flow of the advertisements; rather, the clips build upon the sequence, reinforcing Heinecken's message. Read at first glance, the aerial bombing clips are

naturalized alongside the commercial advertisements and thus their socio-political implications are overlooked. At first view, these wartime clips appear to belong to a commercial advertisement's diegesis: their solid, bright colors flash on screen, capturing the viewer's attention; the strafing planes fly across the screen, carrying with them the sharp imagery of many of the advertisements featured in the installation. With these clips, Heinecken suggests that wartime documentaries are used to "sell" war to the public much like advertisements sell a product to a consumer. Furthermore, "[t]he source of each image [...] raises the potential [...] reality of each [commercial advertisement] to the second power;" but paradoxically attenuates the reality of the clips themselves.³⁶ In other words, as the viewer accepts the fictional commercial's representations as having an analogue to reality, they simultaneously reject the documentary footage depicting destruction as being a part of reality. This transmogrification of reality occurs because of the repeated use of aerial bombing clips: "the signifier of connotation is then no longer to be found at the level of any one of the fragments of the sequence but at the level the linguists would call "suprasegmental," in this case, the level of concatenation."³⁷ This orientation produces an uncanny, exaggerated effect but it does not break the syntagmatic chain; in other words, the repetition of the bombings desensitizes the viewer, reorienting the clips so that they seemingly belong within their commercial advertisement surroundings. Through the photolithographic treatment, however, Heinecken reveals how wartime efforts are semanticized in a manner analogous to consumer consumption. The propagandistic functions of the clips are only made explicit through a frame which levels the sequence and consequently likens each explosion to an object for consumption.

Finally, another syntagmatic chain develops around the room built for the television (Figure 1.6). Described by Heinecken as “a small living room with funky wallpaper and plastic poinsettias,”³⁸ the set-up satirizes the suburban living room. As a stock of stereotypical signs, however, the room provides the viewer with a manufactured living experience. As a part (the room) which stands for the whole (the suburban house), the room belongs to the metonymic order, an operation which constitutes a form of synecdochic expression:³⁹ the room’s figurative elements elaborate upon the house’s “spatial element[s] in order to make [the room] play the role of [a totality] and take its place [...]. Synecdoche makes more dense: it amplifies the detail and miniaturizes the whole.”⁴⁰ The room reflects Heinecken’s strategy for the video montage, wherein details are amplified by the interpolative frame in order to emphasize the actuality of the commercial-viewing experience and extend that actuality to the experience of life in the age of mass media.

Language (*Langue*) and Speech (*Parole*)

Saussure’s central dichotomy, *langue/parole* (language/speech), can also be assimilated into a semiological framework for *TV/Time Environment*. Barthes defines *langue* as the social part of language, “it is essentially a social contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate.”⁴¹ It is the form that written texts take. *Parole*, or speech, on the other hand, is the individualization of language—the speaking subject can create his or her own code with a view to personal expression.⁴² Language in broadcast television is “elaborated not by the ‘speaking mass’ but by [what

Barthes calls] a deciding group.”⁴³ A deciding group in television consists of the writers, artists, directors, producers, and studio executives in charge of creating content; in other words, the “idea men.” Within a televised broadcast, some facets language would be the script, props, direction, and other constitutive elements which are elaborated on by the deciding group. One facet of speech, which is evidently much narrower in scope, would be the things that enter the broadcast outside of the control of the deciding group, like the minute individual articulations generated by the actors (e.g. blinking). The commercial thus provides a semi-formalized synecdoche of the advertising system. The characters, played by real people chosen for their stereotypical generality, deliver the language of advertisement.⁴⁴ Their words, their gestures, and even their images emanate from a deciding group in an emphatic fashion, opening up a (one-way) communicative channel between the advertisement and viewer, one in which the viewer is expected to empathize with the character portrayed.

TV/Time Environment refracts the one-way communicative channel between advertisement and viewer. The language of the commercial, which is internalized by the viewer as speech, is in fact a reiteration of language masquerading as speech. The set of social norms (for example) which pervade each advertisement are often repeated at the level of “speech.” For example, the young girls who play with Barbie dolls have already begun to mimic Barbie’s style in their own clothing and make-up choices. But in *TV/Time Environment* Heinecken proposes that viewers themselves can initiate “speech acts” in order to destabilize the language of the advertising system (just as *TV/Time Environment* is in and of itself a speech act). By speech acts, I mean the viewer’s reading

of the environment's aesthetic system in order to develop a relationship between mass media and Heinecken's viewpoint relative to it. According to Michel de Certeau, the three characteristics of the speech act are: the present, the discrete, and the phatic.⁴⁵ In the first, or "present" phase, the viewer develops ideas about the covert meaning of mass media using Heinecken's photolithographic intervention of the television image; the order of Heinecken's installation "organizes an ensemble of possibilities [...] and interdictions."⁴⁶ In other words, certain ideas open onto the viewer—seizing upon their consciousness almost immediately—while other ideas are closed off from the viewer until the viewer acquires a critical capacity for understanding them. In the second, or "discrete" phase, the viewer separates the information according to its importance, determining which readings will prove the most significant (for example, the issues of socialization and institutional sexism within mass media that initially piqued my interest). In the third, or "phatic" phase, the viewer can choose to engage these readings or condemn them to inertia.⁴⁷ *TV/Time Environment* is thus an active agent in the production of meaning, a position in contrast to the passive broadcast television viewer. *TV/Time Environment* as a "speech act" thus allows one to use a semi-formalized structure (the advertising system) in fluid, even arbitrary ways. The installation's chance operations permit, for example, the readings made throughout this chapter and in chapter two.

Conclusion

In "Rhetoric of the Image" Barthes analyzed a Panzani advertisement, yielding three messages: a linguistic message, a coded iconic (symbolic) message, and a non-

coded iconic (literal) message. However, Barthes noted that the two latter messages cannot be separated (just as the signified and signifier of a sign cannot be separated): “the viewer of the image receives *at one and the same time* the perceptual message and the cultural message, and it will be seen [...] that this confusion in reading corresponds to the function of the mass image.”⁴⁸ The literal (or perceptual) message (i.e., the denoted image), “which corresponds in short to the first degree of intelligibility,” is the scene represented.⁴⁹ “[T]he denoted image naturalizes the symbolic message, it innocents the semantic artifice of connotation, which is extremely dense, especially in advertising.”⁵⁰ Barthes’ “Rhetoric of the Image” bares the dense figurative layers of the advertising image to arrive at its ideological component. Jacques Durand’s “Rhetoric and the Advertising Image” followed suit, inventorying rhetorical figures “on the basis of a corpus of several thousand advertisements.”⁵¹ For Durand, the use of rhetoric represents the “satisfaction of a repressed desire, a satisfaction which, precisely because it is feigned, can be enjoyed with impunity.”⁵² These are the rhetorical strategies that Robert Heinecken’s *TV/Time Environment* exposes, particularly as they relate to the commercial advertisements featured in *TV/Time Environment*. Heinecken opined a negative view of these strategies. Rather than view rhetoric as shorthand “so that the hurried [viewer] may be spared the boredom of verbal ‘descriptions,’”⁵³ Heinecken viewed rhetoric as a strategy by which advertisers created “ideological shorthand,” short-circuiting cultural perceptions. Advertising rhetoric, according to Durand, inhibits the creative process and saturates society with a series of stock ideologies.

The rhetoricized image [...] is heir to the fantastic, the dream, hallucinations: Metaphor becomes metamorphosis, repetition, seeing-

double, hyperbole, gigantism, ellipsis, levitation, etc. On the occasions when a realistic ‘justification’ is given for the image ‘unreality is not eliminated, but only displaced.’⁵⁴

Advertising rhetoric “diminishes the projective power of the image,”⁵⁵ effacing symbolism to produce a “naturalized” message, one that Heineken’s *TV/Time Environment* successfully “denaturalizes,” rejuvenating the viewer’s productive role through the installation’s complex semiotic structure.

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- ¹ “Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976,” wall text, at The Armory Center for the Arts, 145 N. Raymond Ave., Pasadena, CA 91103. 12 October 2011.
- ² Nathan Lyons, *The Persistence of Vision* (Rochester: The George Eastman House of Photography, 1967): 5.
- ³ Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, [1967] 1977): 18-19.
- ⁴ Mark Alice Durant, “Robert Heinecken: A Material History,” in *Robert Heinecken: A Material History* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, 2003): 8.
- ⁵ Carolyn Peter, “Wordsmithing: Mixing the Verbal and the Visual in the Art of Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken,” in *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976*, by Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011): 33.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ John Upton, *Minor White, Robert Heinecken, Robert Cumming: Photograph as metaphor, Photograph as object, Photograph as document of concept* (Long Beach: Fine Arts Gallery, California State University, 1973): 18.
- ⁸ Robert Heinecken, *The Photograph: Not a picture of, but an object about something* (s.n., [1965] 1987): 7.
- ⁹ Peter C. Bunnell, “Photography into Sculpture,” *Members Newsletter* (The Museum of Modern Art), no. 8 (Spring, 1970): 11.
- ¹⁰ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye with Albert Riedlinger and trans. Roy Harris (La Salle, Ill: Open Court Publishing Company, [1916] 1986): 15. Original emphasis.
- ¹¹ Roy Harris, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Saussure, ix.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Victor Burgin, “Photographic Practice and Art Theory,” in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1982): 48.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49-50.
- ¹⁶ Burgin, “Photographic Practice and Art Theory,” 47.
- ¹⁷ Claudia Bohn-Spector, “Rearguard Revolutionaries: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken,” in *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976*, 10.

¹⁸ Fred R. Parker, "Robert Heinecken," in *Four Exhibitions*, by Friends of Photography, special issue, *Untitled 5* (1973): n.p.

* There is a fourth heading, *Denotation and Connotation*, which comes from the writings of Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev (Burgin, *Photographic Practice and Art Theory*, 50). I will omit a heading entitled *Denotation and Connotation* in this chapter. The respective heading in *Elements of Semiology* bears the theoretical undertaking seen in "Rhetoric of the Image," which will be the focus of my last heading. I have also restructured Barthes' (and therefore Saussure's) original order to build upon *Elements of Semiology* and thus strengthen the relationship between *Elements of Semiology* and *TV/Time Environment*.

¹⁹ Lynne Warren, "Revised for Your Consideration: The Art of Robert Heinecken," in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 17-18.

²⁰ Durant, 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Martha Rosler, "Lookers, Buyers, Dealers and Makers: Thoughts On Audience," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New York Museum of Contemporary Art, [1979] 1984): 331.

²³ Burgin, "Photographic Practice and Art Theory," 53.

²⁴ Saussure, 66.

²⁵ Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, [1964] 1977): 39.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40. Barthes articulation of the two strata of form and substance follows Hjelmslev's own distinction between the two. Given that each plane contains both strata, there is then a form of expression, a form of content, a substance of expression, and a substance of content.

²⁷ Umberto Eco, "Critique of the Image," in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., [1970] 1982): 32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁰ Saussure, 121.

³¹ Victor Burgin, "Photographic Practice and Art Theory" (1974), in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1982): 55.

³² *Ibid.*, 56. Original emphasis.

³³ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁴ Saussure, 124.

† According to Barthes, close-ups belong to a metonymic order (and therefore the syntagmatic plane) (Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 60). However, at the end of *Syntagm and System*, Barthes states that

“rhetoric as a whole will no doubt prove to be the domain of creative transgressions” (87-88). Thus, contiguity between the close-up and its actual—in whatever manifestation—will become instead a field of associations to select from. In this heading I explore how Heinecken exposes rhetoric’s “creative transgressions.”

³⁵ Upton, 22.

³⁶ Susan E. Cohen, “Robert Heinecken’s Photography: Confrontation and Assessment,” in *Food, Sex and TV: Fast, easy and fun* (Kassel, Germany: Fotoforum Kassel, 1983): n.p.

³⁷ Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” 24.

³⁸ Robert Heinecken, from *Untitled 7/8*, in *Robert Heinecken*, ed. James Enyeart (Carmel: Friends of Photography, [1974] 1970): 98.

³⁹ Jacques Durand, “Rhetoric and the Advertising Image,” trans. Theo van Leeuwen, from Jacques Durand’s personal webpage, <http://jacques.durand.pagesperso-orange.fr/Site/anglais/texte%20%20ang.htm> (accessed 19 October 2011). Originally published as “Rhétorique et image publicitaire,” in *Communications*, no. 15 (1970): 72.

⁴⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 101.

⁴¹ Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 14.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁴³ Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 31.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁵ Certeau, 98.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

⁴⁸ Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” 272-273.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁵¹ Durand, 70.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵³ Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” 276.

⁵⁴ Durand, cited in Burgin, “Photographic Practice and Art Theory,” 71.

⁵⁵ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 278.

Figures

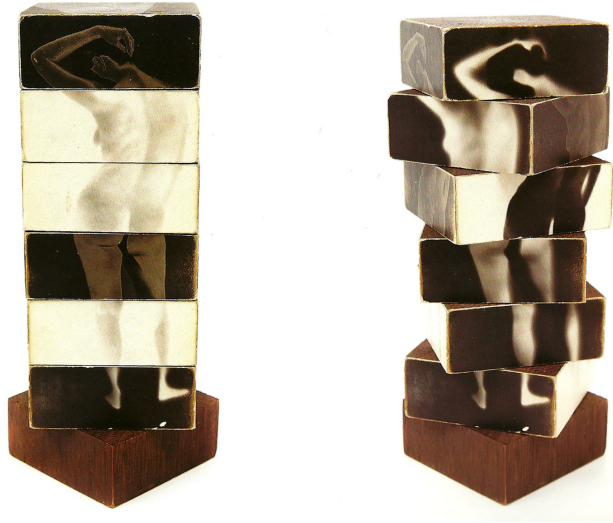


Figure 1.1. Robert Heinecken, *Figure in Six Sections*, 1963. Gelatin silver prints on masonite, 3 x 3 x 8.5 inches. Courtesy of Robert Heinecken Trust, Chicago.
Source: Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976* (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011): plate i.

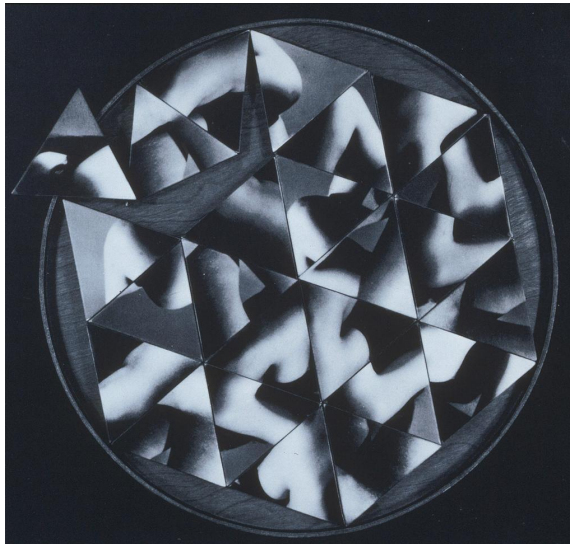


Figure 1.2. Robert Heinecken, *Refractive Hexagon*, 1965. Gelatin silver prints adhered to masonite, wooden base. 1 x 14.3 x 14.3 inches. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. Robert Heinecken Archive/Purchase.
Source: ARTstor: ARTSTOR_103_41822001258993 (accessed 5 December 2011).



Figure 1.3. Robert Heinecken, *Are You Rea (Title Page)*, 1964-1968. Offset lithograph, 8.7 x 6.3 inches. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. Source: ARTstor: ARTSTOR_103_41822001259033 (accessed 5 December 2011).



Figure 1.4. Robert Heinecken, *TV/Time Environment* (installation view), [2011] 1970. Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; life-size. From *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976*, The Armory Center for the Arts, October 2, 2011 – January 22, 2012, Pasadena, CA.

Source: Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, installation view, *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976* (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011). Photo courtesy of the author.

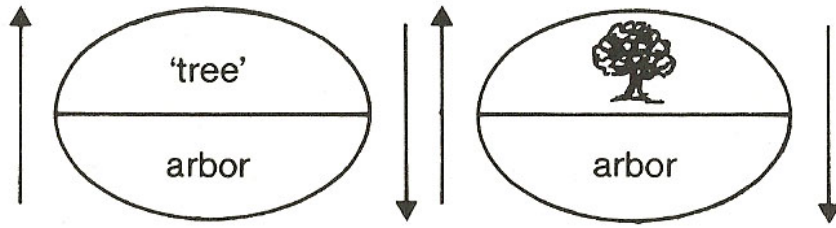


Figure 1.5. Ferdinand de Saussure's diagram for the linguistic sign.

Source: Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye with Albert Riedlinger and trans. Roy Harris (La Salle, Ill: Open Court Publishing Company, [1916] 1986): 67.



Figure 1.6. Robert Heinecken, *TV/Time Environment* (original installation view), 1970.

Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; related magazine, life-size.

Source: ARTstor: ARTSTOR_103_41822001191699 (accessed 5 December 2011).

Chapter Two

Television as a “Communicating Vessel”

Introduction

In *Robert Heinecken: A Material History*, scholar Mark Alice Durant examines Robert Heinecken’s legacy using materials found in his archive at the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona. Durant correctly identifies Heinecken’s practice—especially in *Are You Rea* and subsequent works featuring superimposed imagery—as “surrealist.” Durant, however, reverts to a popular definition of Surrealism, noting the “trippy transformations” of much of Heinecken’s 1960s and 70s output.¹ As Maurice Nadeau observed, Durant’s use of the term “‘surrealist’ to designate something crazy, dreamlike, [or] funny,” while not completely inaccurate, lacks rigor.² Nadeau’s reappraisal of Surrealism in 1944—at a time of catastrophic social and cultural upheaval—returns the movement to its literary and artistic center in Paris in the twenties, where a group of intellectuals tried to rationalize an increasingly fragmentary experience. A significant issue within current Heinecken scholarship is that it rarely moves beyond superficial comparisons between his *oeuvre* and its precedents, surrealist or otherwise. Consequently, his work is often viewed as an adherent to some vague notion of surrealist practice, and rarely brought into close conversation with Surrealism’s theorization of art and experience. Elsewhere, too, his work is simply likened to an unclear notion of

Duchampian ideology or the dada-style rebuses of Robert Rauschenberg, yet this scholarship also lacks a solid methodological foundation.³

This chapter seeks, conversely, to reorient *TV/Time Environment* within Surrealism's thematic orbit by tracing Heinecken's ideas in the installation to surrealist theory, particularly as they relate to André Breton's writings in the twenties and thirties. In a tangible way, Heinecken's debt to Breton's Surrealism manifested itself in the 1966 work, *Are You Rea*, the aesthetic and theoretical precursor to *TV/Time Environment*, which contains as its frontispiece an excerpt from André Breton's 1932 text *Les Vases Communicants*:

It will in the end, be admitted that everything, in effect *is an image* and that the least object which has no symbolic role assigned to it is capable of standing for absolutely anything. The mind has a marvelous facility in seizing the slightest rapport that exists between two objects taken at random: and poets know that they can, without fear of deception, always say of one, that it is like the other.⁴

Heinecken's use of Breton's text serves to align the paraphotographic images of *Are You Rea* with the revolutionary disruptions of surrealist juxtaposition. Like *Are You Rea*, *TV/Time Environment* explores the compromised image, illuminating the television's power to create false representations specifically constructed to sell products. Heinecken rightly believes that his installation reveals the modes of deception behind mass media imagery. As an American inheritor of Surrealism, Heinecken navigates through the movement in order to cleave the mass media image—which, in the words of one critic, “litter[s] the world and our minds with unlimited examples of every conceivable image of truth, beauty, banality, eroticism, brutality, pornography, consumerism, political idea,

personality, idol, and ideal”—from reality.⁵ In doing so, Heinecken shakes us from the waking dream perpetuated by the televisual communicating vessel.

Surrealism Manifests Itself

Examining *TV/Time Environment* and its relationship to Surrealism is especially apt given that Surrealism was much in the foreground in the mid-sixties: Yale French Studies had come out with their special issue on Surrealism in 1964; Nadeau's *The History of Surrealism* received an English translation in 1965, followed only a year later by Breton's death (at the time Heinecken was midway through *Are You Rea*), which at once signaled the end of surrealism and spurred a number of public tributes.⁶ This chapter explores *TV/Time Environment* in conjunction with several of André Breton's influential texts, the conceptual centers of surrealist theory, in order to define the installation's conceptual center. The texts under examination include Breton's foundational "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924) and the aforementioned *Les Vases Communicants* (*Communicating Vessels*). This procedure will reveal in a rigorous fashion Robert Heinecken's surrealist strategies.

The "Manifesto of Surrealism" is Breton's argument for the "reenchantment [...] of a capitalist society made ruthlessly rational."⁷ In 1924 Breton published his manifesto and within its pages he outlined the goals and challenges of Surrealism.⁸ The manifesto—"begin[ning] with a defense of the rights of the imagination (even as far as the limits of madness) as being the only rights capable of helping the individual avoid a 'fate without light'"—resists positivism, a philosophy that drove society to a dependence on absolute

rationalism.⁹ Breton thus establishes a relationship between the imagination and intellectual or moral freedom, compelling the reader to assert her imaginative faculty against the deadening absolute rationalism of the times; he wanted the whole of society to seize the marvelous in a stand against the realistic attitudes which prevailed in the early-twentieth-century.¹⁰ In “La Peinture au défi,” of 1930, Louis Aragon’s polemic advocating alternative artistic strategies, establishes a similar relationship, asserting that “the marvelous is the [...] image of human liberty.”¹¹ For Aragon, the fullest expression of human liberty manifests itself in the many marvelous stories—among them Cornelius Agrippa, Arthur, Perrault, Swift, Armida, and the Cagliostros—standing at the threshold against absolute rationalism.¹² Vis-à-vis these stories, Breton and Aragon define the marvelous as a negation of reality; like Hal Foster they define the marvelous as “a rupture in the natural order.”¹³ Aragon suggests that what is at stake in these stories is the fantastical reenchantment of a world mediated and degraded by instrumental reason.

In the “Manifesto of Surrealism,” Breton declares that the resolution between the rational waking state and the imaginative dream state constitutes a new kind of absolute reality, or surreality.¹⁴ Breton credits Sigmund Freud for helping the individual navigate this surreal space, for it is his discoveries—particularly in *The Interpretation of Dreams*—which allowed the surrealist group to develop their theoretical apparatus and thus plumb the depths of (sur)reality.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Breton’s space of surreality operates in the liminal openings between the dreaming and waking states—itsself a site of contradiction—where the marvelous erupts in the real and the real intrudes on the marvelous.

TV/Time Environment breaks apart the union of these two states within broadcast television's imagery. Heinecken's installation is thus a critique of mass media's co-optation of surrealist strategy, which often relied on the movement's hypnagogic imagery in order to orchestrate reality and create false representations. The photolithograph placed in the television set cleaves the image world from our world, making apparent the deception behind the televisual image. Heinecken is aligning himself with surrealist art practices—primarily through his use of superimposition—in order to critique reality as it is constructed by the impinging forces of mass media. Television, for example, confounds its viewer, who now, in Breton's words, "has trouble assessing the objects [s]he has been led to use. [...] because [s]he henceforth belongs body and soul to an imperative practical necessity which demands [her] constant attention."¹⁶

Heinecken wants to break us from mass media's creation of a "waking dream" and reenchant our world. Thus, instead of the image relaying its message to the viewer without delay, *TV/Time Environment* filters the message through the pornographic image. Meaning defers instead to Heinecken's apparatus, which posits a critical television viewing experience. The installation thus operates under Breton's definition of "surreal": *TV/Time Environment* is a site of contradiction where the photolithograph—acting as a marvelous object much like Aragon's books—injects a new image in the "real" space of the viewer, forcing the viewer to reconcile the televisual image against the pornographic image. In doing so, the hegemonic forms of television reveal itself. Simultaneously, the real intrudes on the marvelous; for in the moments in front of *TV/Time Environment*

when the surreal appears in the piece's juxtapositions, we begin to see how we have fashioned ourselves according to a televisual ideology.

One of the commercial advertisements, featured in the Armory show's *TV/Time Environment*, shows a mother saying goodbye to her children as they head off to school. As she hugs her children, the viewer notices the mother examining their clothes. Immediately after they leave, the camera cuts to the mother's face, who, with an exasperated look on her face, seems to acknowledge her inability to properly clean clothes. Fortunately for her, a man from the future appears in her laundry room; his entrance is marked by flashing lights and televisual distortion—the latter filling the contour of his body—suggesting that he teleported there (Figure 2.1). As the man's physical appearance forms in front of us, this science-fiction specter doubles the form of the female figure in the photolithograph placed over the television set, whose own contours fill the screen with a distorted televisual image.

The commercial employs intertextuality (with the television show *Star Trek*) to suggest that its household setting belongs to a higher plane of reality than *Star Trek's* science-fiction setting. In other words, the commercial's reference to the fictional show *Star Trek* creates an additional layer of obfuscation over reality. A hierarchy develops with the Cheer commercial appearing more real to the viewer than its sc-fi imagery initially leads one to believe.

Throughout the commercial's runtime, the figure of the photolithograph plots onto the figure of the man, delineating his true function within the commercial. The man, then, is a *deus ex machina* device, designed to inform the mother about the benefits of

Cheer laundry detergent (Figure 2.2). The doubling of the televisual image by the photolithograph represents the usurpation of a doubly-mediated reality by surreality, where doubling “elicits the notion that an original has been added to its copy.”¹⁷ The product he pushes, like the photolithograph before him, suggests an improbable fantasy of desire and fulfillment. Cheer will not come to the rescue. The commercial convinces its audience through science-fiction tropes that the sudden introduction of a new product in their lives will positively and profoundly impact them. This conviction, however, belongs to the commercial’s image world. We see how Heinecken’s photolithographic intervention frames the male figure as a product of our own expectations, when, in truth, Cheer cannot provide the emotional payoff that its commercial suggests.

TV/Time Environment thus combats the passive television viewing experience, offering “some intimation of what *can be*.”¹⁸ When the televisual image synchronizes with the pornographic image, remarkable coincidences of visual congruency form associational closure: here, then, Heinecken expects the viewer “to expose,” as A.D. Coleman has observed, “the pixellated insanity of media culture.”¹⁹ Heinecken compels the viewer to be an active entity, to thoughtfully examine the chance gestalts which form between the photolithograph and televisual component. For Breton, it is “the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two [planes] that a particular light has sprung, *the light of the image*, to which we are infinitely sensitive. The value of the image depends on the beauty of the spark obtained.”²⁰ These “images,” Breton argues, “appear like the only guideposts of the mind,” pointing to a supreme reality established within the surreal image world. Heinecken operates in this surreality; his installation affects the viewer’s perception in

such a way that “[t]he mind becomes aware of the limitless expanses wherein its desires are made manifest.”²¹ Simply put, Heinecken’s installation reveals the constructed motivations of broadcast television.

Communicating Vessels

With *Communicating Vessels* (1932), Breton “attempted to set up a line of communication between the over-disassociated world of sleep and wakefulness.”²² To that end, Breton’s text isolates the two worlds “to make a purely subjective question of the subordination of one to the other.”²³ Breton critically examined Sigmund Freud’s theorization of the dream-work from the seminal text of 1899, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in order to facilitate an account of his own dreams. In particular, Breton examined Freud’s theory of condensation in the dream-work, which marked surrealist art practices, and which, in turn, emerge in Heinecken’s *TV/Time Environment*.

In his investigation of dream-work, Freud determined that dreams belong to two stratified orders: dream-content and dream-thought. Dream-content will manifest in our waking state as a succession of signs.²⁴ For that reason, dream-content exists at the mind’s conscious level. Dream-thought, however, is the dream’s latent content—it does not manifest in the succession of signs that we (sometimes) recall in the morning. Dream-thought is a coded language at the mind’s unconscious level that converts to dream-content at a site of translation.²⁵ Dream-content is “scant, paltry, [and] laconic” (filling up half a page written down).²⁶ Dream-thought, however, requires considerably more

interpretation (Freud says it will require “six, eight, twelve times as much space”).²⁷ The dream we remember—if we remember it—is just a fraction of the total dream-work.²⁸

According to Freud, the work of condensation takes place at the dream-thought’s site of translation. Condensation takes many forms, but Freud argues that “[t]he production of collective and composite figures is one of the main methods of condensation in dreams.”²⁹ For example, as related by Breton in *Communicating Vessels*, many of the women appearing within one of his first recorded dreams are in fact composite figures of past associations. Breton’s dream of August 26, 1931 opens with an image of an old woman at a subway station, intent on harming one of Breton’s former girlfriends. Breton believes that this old woman is a composite image of Nadja, a muse from his past who, early on in the surrealist movement, led him to formulate his notions of the chance encounter (a form of juxtaposition of casual chains), and an aged person he saw on the day of his dream. In the dream, condensation produces a new unity (of collective figures or composite structures) in which the images are linked by common factors. The composite image of the old woman in Breton’s dream, for example, might represent a repressed anxiety about how Breton perceives himself and his relationship with Nadja and the old woman. This repression does not manifest itself in the dream-content, it only comes to light after interpretation.

In *TV/Time Environment*, condensation is likewise defined by the production of collective and composite figures. These figures take form in the televisual image, but never show themselves at the consciously perceived level of the commercial image’s production of meaning. In the aforementioned Cheer commercial, for example, the *Star*

Trek character represents both the product itself and its means of delivery. The commercial suggests that the stay-at-home mother could not have solved her laundry dilemmas without the man's aid and in doing so reinscribes institutional sexism within a domestic setting. In most of the environment's commercials, a focal figure talks directly to the viewer. This authoritarian figure, like Josephine the Plumber in the Comet commercial (Figure 2.3), presents a composite of a familiar character from our lives (plumber, family figure, etc.) and an instructor of sorts—their didactic approach bears the mark of expert testimonial. Their presence—uninterrupted by explanatory marks regarding their dual function (which would rupture the commercial's narrative)—“rivets our attention and thereby orients us as consumers.”³⁰

The condensation of the figures in commercial-work is an attending process of sublimation within the commercial-work. In *Compulsive Beauty*, Hal Foster's reexamination of Bretonian Surrealism through Freudian theory, the author notes that “sublimation concerns the diversion of sexual drives to civilizational ends (art, science) in a way that purifies them, that both integrates the object (beauty, truth) and refines the subject (the artist, scientist).”³¹ The commercials featured in *TV/Time Environment* present sexually suggestive material sublimated into socially-acceptable forms. For example, the Safeguard soap commercial features a family wearing nothing but towels (Figure 2.4). The family's attire, usually worn after the private act of bathing, presents them as nearly nude. The family's image is not read as overtly sexual, however, because the commercial legitimizes their appearance: the product for sale necessitates their skimpy attire (to show how clean Safeguard soap makes them; a similar strategy is

employed in the use of the sterile commercial environment, which reflects the sterilizing element of the product). Similarly, the environment's two Camay commercials feature women using the product *in situ* and as such they are only wearing bathroom garments (Figure 2.5). The sexual suggestiveness of these women is sublimated to commercial ends because of their appearance in an advertisement with, ostensibly, a legitimate goal: to sell soap. The viewer's voyeurism would be inappropriate in reality—it is only seen as appropriate in this context because the commercials' structures are intended to make the product more appealing.

TV/Time Environment engages the viewer in a process of desublimation. Where sublimation binds the content of the commercial image to its message, Heinecken's photolithographic intervention loosens the binding. Sexuality erupts in the viewer's consciousness. Heinecken upends what Hal Foster calls "the normative reconciliation of contrary modes of experience."³² For Heinecken, "life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable"—categories which Breton sought to reconcile—erupt as contradictions in mass media.³³ *TV/Time Environment*, then, represents the formation of a new unity derived from the juxtaposition of the photolithograph and televisual image—the environment reconciles Breton's categories by confronting the contradictions of the mass media image, translating them into a legible image.

Heinecken's photolithograph acts as the site of translation for the succession of moving images underneath it. The commercial forms, both aesthetic and ideological, are translated—by means of juxtaposition—into a lucid language revealing subliminal

content. Heinecken's photolithographic frame renders a juxtaposition that flips back and forth between distinction and resemblance with itself and the commercial advertisements, and unconscious motivations reach the conscious level. The screen is thus read "photographically, that is to say, in direct contact with [the viewer's 'reality.']"³⁴

Heinecken's framework allows for pictorial puns (e.g. doubling, see figure 2.1), a form of condensation. When forms overlap, the viewer can begin to comprehend the hidden meanings of the televisual image. The pun—part of the language of *TV/Time Environment*—translates mass media symbolism into a decipherable image. The puns which intervene in the spaces of the compromised televisual image alter the meaning of mass media forms.

A Room with a View

Freud argues that that "dream is *centred differently*; its content is ordered around a centre made up of elements other than the dream-thoughts."³⁵ The commercial advertisement is also centered differently: it focuses on a product, yet its real concern is to impose a set of anxieties and desires. For example, the Genesee beer commercial (Figure 2.6), while clearly selling a product, in fact constructs an image of woman trying to fit in with a group of men (this tactic is designed to sell the product to both genders at once). The Puffs commercial constructs the image of a mother whose life revolves around child-rearing and housecleaning; Puffs-brand tissue are intended to facilitate her duties (again this tactic is designed to target the mother who might want the product, and the husband, who might purchase the product to "aid" his spouse). These implicit cultural

constructions, to name but two, are, in Freud's words, "dealt with as if they were of little value."³⁶ These elements, to which I attribute psychic value, given the degree to which they inform the individual of their social responsibilities, are stripped of their intensity in the commercial. Instead, as Freud points out vis-à-vis the dream-work, other elements of low psychic value are brought to the fore (of the dream, of the commercial). A displacement of the psychological intensity of the commercial's constitutive elements has taken place.³⁷ The implications distort the viewer's reality. The viewer recognizes the product's use-value, for it has been brought to the commercial's fore, but the viewer misrecognizes the cultural constructions enacted in the commercial's diegesis. This leads to a symbolic acting out of form, where the viewer begins to use the product like the actor's in a commercial.

The viewing space of the installation also invokes Freud's theorization in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The room follows the stereotypical layout of a sixties/seventies-style living room. Every element was arranged to suggest an actual living space. The original installation setting, for example, features an overstuffed chair, a side table, funky wallpaper, plastic poinsettias—a pastiche of contemporaneous suburban interior design with the intent of making the viewing space more "real." *TV/Time Environment* bears some of the marks of the living room's own psychic power, again driving at the heart of Freud's theory of dream-displacement. The environment positions the viewer in a simulation. The viewer implicitly accepts the construction as real because the room resembles elements of the viewer's reality. This is just as true in the 1970 setting as it is in subsequent iterations of the installation, including the Armory show's

recreation, for the abstracted forms of the recreation not only suggest the original design, but they also point to the increasingly abstracted forms of modern living spaces. This manner of viewing lends itself to Heinecken's deliberate deconstruction of the broadcast television and its viewing environment because it forces the viewer to acknowledge the installation space as (a realistic) simulation, altering his or her own home viewing reality in the process. Heinecken's refraction of broadcast television through the photolithographic intervention bears the burden of responsibility of reconciling contradictory modes of experience. The photolithograph displaces displacement. Cultural constructions are brought to the foreground, the product sits in the background.

Beyond Surrealism

Heinecken's surrealist practices continued after *TV/Time Environment*. His *1984: A Case Study in Finding an Appropriate TV Newswoman (A CBS Docudrama in Words and Pictures)* purports to show how CBS brought Heinecken in as an independent consultant to assist in the project of finding a new newswoman (Figure 2.7).³⁸ The installation and subsequent artist's book, however, are clever ruses. Heinecken's deadpan style nonetheless convinced several viewers of the study's veracity.³⁹ It is the array of combinations and arrangements of the case study—along with its straightforward presentation—that lends the work credibility.⁴⁰ In the work, Freud's notion of the dream-work as condensation assumes a central position. Heinecken projects two broadcast television images of news anchors onto each other in order to produce a composite figure in which common features (for an "appropriate" newswoman) emerge prominently,

creating a general image. The work investigates the absurdity of crafting a reality for the benefit of viewership. In doing so, it also commented on the double standard experienced by female news anchors: the male viewer had to be able to fantasize about the female news anchor—her attractiveness more than her knowledge affected ratings—but the male news anchor could be anyone so long as they properly conveyed knowledge.⁴¹

The politicization of the surrealist movement, explicated in Walter Benjamin's "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," was founded on the belief that "mankind's struggle for liberation in its simplest revolutionary form [...] remains the only cause worth serving."⁴² This chapter only implicitly enacted a political reading on Heinecken's *TV/Time Environment*. Heinecken's critique through Breton's Surrealism "reveled in the terrors and pleasures of image consumption."⁴³ Through his understanding of Breton's writings, and his deployment of Breton's argument in earlier works like *Are You Rea*, Heinecken was aware of mass media's effect on the unconscious mind, so he raised its effect to our conscious mind, and there he opposed its form and message through the revolutionary sensibility of Breton's program. Like the surrealists, Heinecken's teachings were often cryptic, "directing the questioner (and his reader) toward the source of further information [...] but leaving the discovery of its meaning up to us."⁴⁴ His pedagogy reflected the surrealist belief that everyone can practice its magical art; that "Surrealism is within the compass of every unconscious."⁴⁵ Heinecken believed in the imaginative capabilities of his viewers, insisting that each of them follow their own path to unconscious realization rather than try to see another's. Heinecken was a surrealist *après la lettre*.

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- ¹ Mark Alice Durant, "Robert Heinecken: A Material History," in *Robert Heinecken: A Material History* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, 2003): 50.
- ² Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Macmillan Company, [1944] 1965): 12.
- ³ Lynne Warren, "Revised for Your Consideration: The Art of Robert Heinecken," in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five Year Retrospective* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 13. See also Jonathan Green, *American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1984): 157.
- ⁴ André Breton, quoted in Robert Heinecken, *Are You Rea* [portfolio], 1964-68. Original emphasis. See André Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, [1932] 1990): 108-109.
- ⁵ Carl Chiarenza, from an unpublished article, in *Robert Heinecken*, ed. James Enyeart (Carmel: Friends of Photography, [1976] 1980): 29.
- ⁶ See Joseph H. McMahon, ed., *Yale French Studies 31: Surrealism* (New Haven: Yale French Studies, 1964). See also "André Breton et le mouvement surréaliste," in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, no. 172 (April, 1967); and Annette Michelson, "Breton's Surrealism: The Peripeties of a Metaphor, or a Journey Through Impossibility," *Artforum* 11 (September, 1966), both published on Breton's death.
- ⁷ Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993): 19.
- ⁸ Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1997] 2002): 67.
- ⁹ *Ibid.* See also André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," in *André Breton: Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, [1924] 1972): 6.
- ¹⁰ Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 10.
- ¹¹ Louis Aragon, "La Peinture au défi," in *The Surrealists Look at Art: Eluard, Aragon, Soupault, Breton, Tzara*, ed. Pontus Hulten (Los Angeles: The Lapis Press, 1990): 49. Original emphasis.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Foster, 19.
- ¹⁴ Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 14.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ¹⁶ Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 3-4.
- ¹⁷ Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," in *October* 19 (Winter, 1981): 25.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹ A.D. Coleman, “‘I Call It Teaching’: Robert Heinecken’s Analytical Facture,” in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 6.

²⁰ Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” 37. Original emphasis.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Breton, quoted in Michel Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, trans. Maura Prendergast (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, [1950] 1974): 13.

²³ André Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, [1932] 1990): 4.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Joyce Crick (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1999 [1899]): 211.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Freud, 212.

²⁷ Ibid., 212.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 225.

³⁰ Sally A. Stein, “The Composite Photographic Image and the Composition of Consumer Ideology,” *Art Journal* 41, no. 1, Photography and the Scholar/Critic (Spring, 1981): 43.

³¹ Foster, 110.

³² Ibid., 111.

³³ Breton, “Second Manifesto of Surrealism,” *André Breton: Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, [1930] 1972): 123.

³⁴ Rosalind Krauss, “The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism,” 23-25.

³⁵ Freud, 232. Original emphasis.

³⁶ Ibid., 233.

³⁷ Ibid., 235.

³⁸ Robert Heinecken, *1984: A Case Study in Finding an Appropriate TV Newswoman (A CBS Docudrama in Words and Pictures)* (Los Angeles: Robert Heinecken self-publication, 1985): 2.

³⁹ Coleman, 6. Note, for example, the bibliographic information in the artist's book: "All rights reserved/All rights questionable." Even in what easily could have been an overlooked snippet of text, Heinecken pushes his surrealist program.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Heinecken, *1984: A Case Study in Finding an Appropriate TV Newswoman (A CBS Docudrama in Words and Pictures)*, 2.

⁴² Quoted in Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," in *New Left Review* 1 108 (March-April, 1978).

⁴³ Durant, 10.

⁴⁴ Coleman, 8.

⁴⁵ Breton, quoted in Nadeau, 90.

Figures



Figure 2.1. Robert Heinecken, “*Star Trek* actor for Cheer,” shot from *TV/Time Environment*, [2011] 1970. Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; life-size.

Source: Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, installation view, *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976* (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011). Photo courtesy of the author.

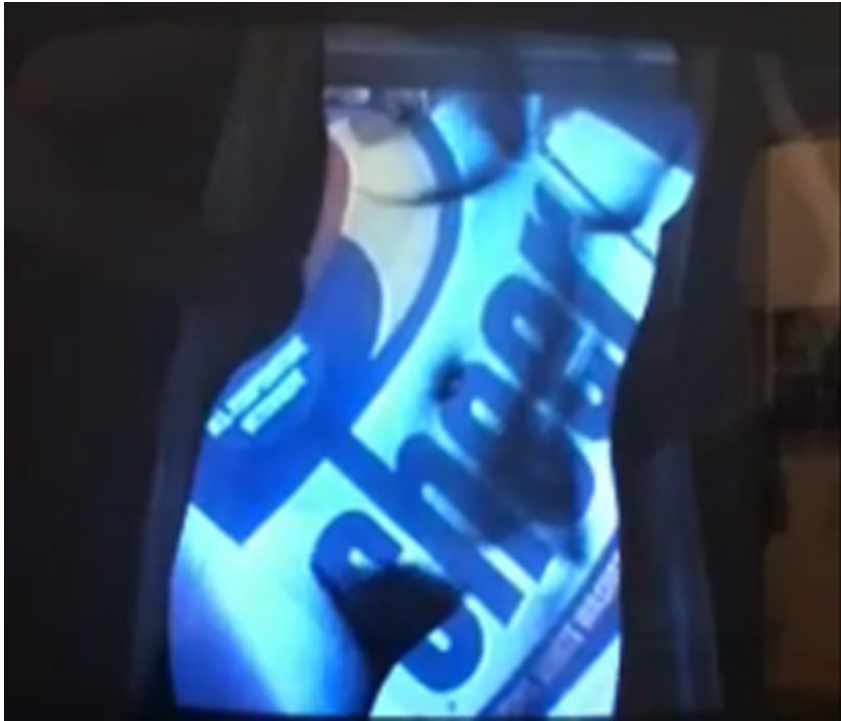


Figure 2.2. Robert Heinecken, “Cheer laundry detergent,” shot from *TV/Time Environment*, [2011] 1970. Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; life-size.

Source: Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, installation view, *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976* (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011). Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 2.3. Robert Heinecken, “Josephine the Plumber for Comet,” shot from *TV/Time Environment*, [2011] 1970. Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; life-size.

Source: Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, installation view, *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976* (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011). Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 2.4. Robert Heinecken, “Safeguard soap commercial,” shot from *TV/Time Environment*, [2011] 1970. Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; life-size.

Source: Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, installation view, *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976* (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011). Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 2.5. Robert Heinecken, “Camay soap commercial,” shot from *TV/Time Environment*, [2011] 1970. Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; life-size.

Source: Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, installation view, *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976* (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011). Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 2.6. Robert Heinecken, “Genesee beer commercial,” shot from *TV/Time Environment*, [2011] 1970. Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; life-size.

Source: Claudia Bohn-Spector and Sam Mellon, installation view, *Speaking in Tongues: Wallace Berman and Robert Heinecken, 1961-1976* (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2011). Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 2.7. Robert Heinecken, *1984: A Case Study in Finding an Appropriate TV Newswoman (A CBS Docudrama in Words and Pictures)*, 1985. Color photographs; text; overall 48 x 48 in. Phyllis George and Bill Kurtis.

Source: Matthew Biro, "Reality Effects: Matthew Biro on the Art of Robert Heinecken," *Artforum.com* (October, 2011), accessed March 23, 2012, <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201108&id=29044>.

Chapter Three

Revelations of the Spectacle: Robert Heinecken and Mass Media Theory

Introduction

In *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective*, photography critic A.D. Coleman notes Marshall McLuhan's "aphoristic" writing style, a poetic writing form "often driven by an 'associative' rather than synthetic logic."¹ The quotation, written by Marshall McLuhan's son, Eric McLuhan, reads in part, "'the aphoristic style gives you the opportunity to get a dialogue going, to engage people in the process of discovery.'"² Coleman correctly develops a homology between prominent twentieth-century media theorist Marshall McLuhan's instructional method and Robert Heinecken's working method. Heinecken described his own approach to art as an analytical facture: in essence, an artwork's form should develop from the artist's goals rather than develop from a predetermined set of "medium-specific" rules or a recurrent approach used in one's *oeuvre*.³ Heinecken declined nomological movement from project to project (a modernist tendency to "work with what you know"), instead strategically matching new ideas to different forms, with a view to developing both idea and form. Oftentimes a work's purpose is a function of its facture. *TV/Time Environment*, for example, exploits the televisual medium in order to extend the idea of televisual exploitation. Looking back on his career for the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art's retrospective, Heinecken said, "[c]ontent can be built on the facture of a picture—not on

subject matter or anything else. I want to be identified by the attitude of a picture, not its stylistic appearance.”⁴ Heinecken thus guides his audience toward the message behind his work rather than make a comprehensive statement that restricts meaning.⁵

Heinecken’s approach diverges from the “brute positivism” of Clement Greenberg’s late modern theorization on the nature of the medium, in which Greenberg stresses the notion that painting should be flat, sculpture should be three-dimensional, and drawing should be a linear—rather than painterly—form.⁶ There is thus no defining “look” to Heinecken’s *oeuvre* as there is for artists such as Jackson Pollock—Greenberg’s champion—or many other late modernists. Given the lack of prevailing style from project to project, it becomes even more evident why Heinecken has received insufficient critical treatment until now: even A.D. Coleman’s essay—which ventures toward theorization—reads as a broad rendering of Heinecken’s then-thirty-five-year career.⁷ The breadth of Heinecken’s *oeuvre* requires deeper exploration.

Despite the diversity of Heinecken’s works, there are cultural concerns tying all of them together. Heinecken, like McLuhan before him, advocated media education and thus examined the culture industry with a critical eye, contrary to the views of his detractors, like Martha Rosler, who thought Heinecken’s work merely celebrated its “pussy porn” subject matter.⁸ If, as McLuhan wrote, “man is [...] numb and vague in the presence of [mass media],” then Heinecken’s work restructures our perception of mass media, acting as defense against its stultifying aesthetical and ideological components.⁹ Heinecken’s work, and *TV/Time Environment* in particular, demonstrates the considerable influence that Marshall McLuhan’s seminal 1964 text *Understanding*

Media: The Extensions of Man and Daniel J. Boorstin's 1961 *The Image or, What Happened to the American Dream* had on the moment. McLuhan's central thesis in *Understanding Media*—that “the medium is the message”—supports the theoretical infrastructure of Heinecken's *TV/Time Environment* (see below), which reveals yet again the complex signification processes of the televisual medium—this time by considering its strategies of facture.

This chapter explores *TV/Time Environment* in conjunction with McLuhan's and Boorstin's aforementioned texts, both of which Heinecken cites as influences.¹⁰ I intend to highlight the environment's multifaceted structure by illuminating Heinecken's acute understanding of McLuhan's and Boorstin's relatively new theoretical texts, both of which targeted emergent televisual “spectacle” and detailed its global implications. I will interconnect McLuhan's and Boorstin's earlier works with later, more sociologically-driven analyses of television, with particular emphasis on Lynn Spigel's genre-defining writings of the 1990s, and David Joselit's art historical reading of the televisual topography of mid-twentieth-century America. Subsequently, I will recover Heinecken's work from a bygone era, demonstrating not only its relatability to an interdisciplinary viewpoint, but its formidable opposition to—and not its complicity with—the hegemony of the mass media's message. I will then explore in brief the French viewpoint on mass media, using the philosophy of Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord's 1967 treatise, *Society of the Spectacle* (still untranslated by 1970), as my examples. In doing so, I will demonstrate Heinecken's prescience of mind; his ability to encapsulate—and even

predict—a considerable body of postmodern theory and art practice with *TV/Time Environment*.¹¹

“The Medium is the Message:” The Aesthetics of *TV/Time Environment*

It took Marshall McLuhan two books (*The Gutenberg Galaxy*, from 1962, and the aforementioned *Understanding Media*) to develop the argument behind his now iconic phrase “the medium is the message.” In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan suggests “that the predominant medium or media defined *the nature of knowledge in any given epoch*, and that these mediatically determined cultures in turn dictated the form that ‘man’ would take within them.”¹² For example, preliterate culture used mouth and ear as their medium for communication. Given the reciprocal nature of the oral/aural medium, preliterate culture’s ‘man’ could not individuate his or herself from the collective; the space between the individual and society was minimal.¹³ However, the advent of writing—which would experience global dissemination due to Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of the movable type in the fifteenth-century (hence McLuhan’s book title)—“translate[d] man from the magical world of the ear to the neutral visual world.”¹⁴ McLuhan’s use of the words “translates” and “neutral” in the preceding sentence is purposeful: literate societies translated oral language to a new medium—the written word—which resulted in a self-sufficient individual (no longer required to engage with the collective) now forced to resign the multi-sensory interplay of oral/aural culture for the narrow and resolute world of the written visual. The written word’s negation of multi-sensory interplay had implications for both subjective and objective communication; the complexity of oral

communication would now generally be conveyed through the written word, which paradoxically communicates less information despite the greater level of input (the oral/aural medium in addition to the new idiographic medium) it receives.¹⁵ Subjective language-use had been mapped onto an objective medium, and became neutralized of its importance as a result.

At the end of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan warns that trauma and tension are normal consequences of the injection of new media into any society (e.g. the introduction of writing to a preliterate society and its fundamental restructuring of human relations).¹⁶ McLuhan suggests turning to *Understanding Media* in order to combat the new media of the last several centuries. McLuhan then begins *Understanding Media* where *The Gutenberg Galaxy* left off, and it is there that he introduced readers to his famous phrase, “the medium is the message,” which means “that the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph [and so on].”¹⁷ New media, as McLuhan argues in *Understanding Media*, “shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.”¹⁸ By the time of television’s advent, we were already rapidly approaching a moment when both time and space were collapsing around us; a moment when humanity could not extend itself any further. The photograph, for example, gave the impression that one could be everywhere at once, experiencing a simultaneity of experience across time (looking at old photographs) or across space (to use McLuhan’s example from a 1953 issue of *Vogue*: men and women now can have global fashions of their own choosing without ever having to leave their own neighborhood because of the

dissemination of images—and thus the dissemination of style—worldwide).¹⁹ The photograph accelerated the process of flattening space-time, and consequently it subjected the individual's lived experience to intellectual and moral passivity—in other words, why leave your house to see the world when the world can simply come to you? For McLuhan, in the same way that the prior mediums of drawing and writing (given its so-called “objective” exactitude) operate, the photograph (literally meaning “drawing with light”) tends to turn photographed people into objects to be admired for their formal qualities.²⁰

The photolithograph jammed in front of the television set in Heineken's *TV/Time Environment* reverses this effect. The female body that is the subject of the photolithographs, usually cut-off at her neck and upper thighs, only displays her most basic sexual attributes. The environment's set-up, however, never lets the figure become the object of desire that the original pornographic context ensured. Instead, the pornographic figure doubles the broadcast television image, amplifying the latter's once-hidden significations; in other words, Heineken designed the photolithograph to implicate the broadcast television image in the crime of objectification. Within this system, even text is complicit. The photolithograph reveals how even seemingly innocuous text passages becomes titillating within a new visual frame: the “furnished prizes,” whatever they may be, of the game show still shot shown in figure 3.1 take on a new dimension within Heineken's framework. Now the very concept of the “furnished prize” is viewed not simply as spoils of the game show's victor, but objects of desire

prized by the home viewing audience. Heinecken develops a substitute for the pornographic image through his reframing of the game show prize.

In *Feedback: Television Against Democracy*, art historian David Joselit describes a parallel strategy used by “radical” activist groups of the 1960s and 70s to break through the mediated viewing experience. When the television arm of the culture industry prohibits these activist groups from sharing their opinions and experiences on air, their only recourse is to bring their repressed messages to light through the use of guerilla tactics. Joselit refers to these tactics as an indication of figure-ground reversal. Typically the figure (the viewer) cannot see the mediated structure of the ground (the culture industry) because the ground controls the means of conveying information. The figure-ground reversal, however, sees an unmediated message emerge after the figure (in Joselit’s example, the 60s and 70s activists groups) disrupts the structure of the ground (e.g. culture industry players such as news reporters and their message), who can no longer control “the condition of informational blockage.”²¹ Just as activist groups take control of the situation “by producing outrageous events that would parasitically capture time on the network news,” so, too, does Heinecken’s photolithographic intervention provide the viewer with an unmediated experience of the television broadcast.²²

TV Time

Television, the “timid giant,” stands at the apex of McLuhan’s comprehensive rundown of new media.²³ It also stands aesthetically and ideologically against all prior mediums—even its closest counterpart at the time, film. McLuhan suggests that the

movie “carried us from the world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configuration and structure,” or, according to McLuhan, from the global and experiential connections offered by photography and earlier print mediums to a new world of illusions and dreams.²⁴ Sixties TV images are comprised of about three million dots per second, formed upon “a screen made out of a mosaic of photoemissive cells,” thus creating a recognizable pattern.²⁵ “Early TV images are visually low in data when compared to film, which offers many more millions of dots per second.²⁶ Thus, given the early television’s technical capabilities, the TV viewer accepted less data per second than the film viewer. According to McLuhan, the split between the filmic picture and televisual image engendered a superior form of audience participation: “[t]elevision by presenting an audio-visual image that is marked by its modulation ‘the ceaselessly forming contour of things’ replicates the interplay of the senses.”²⁷ Put another way, where film did not require the audience to “fill in the blanks,” early television viewing—given the TV’s display capabilities—involved a greater degree of participation, and thus resulted in a greater degree of understanding. TV executives learned from this mistake and thus sought to create a television image that diminished audience participation and created a more passive audience. For the TV executive, the viewer’s adjustment from the visually replete medium of film to the mosaic patterns of television required the televisual forms to be reconfigured so that instead of being understood, they simply relayed information to be passively consumed. McLuhan described this epistemic shift—which occurred around the time of his writing—by postulating the “evolved” TV image as having “the quality of sculpture and icon, rather than of picture.”²⁸

McLuhan's identification of the sculptural or iconic turn in television broadcast imagery was instrumental in forming important ideas about the construction of public persona and the handling of the televisual impression. Richard Nixon's disastrous appearances in the 1960 television debates with John F. Kennedy forced his campaign staff to rectify his television image for his 1969 presidential bid. Quotations from *Understanding Media* were distributed to Nixon's campaign staff.²⁹ In *Feedback*, David Joselit quotes a particularly incisive passage from *Understanding Media* distributed among Nixon's campaign staff:

With TV came the end of bloc voting politics, a form of specialism and fragmentation that won't work since TV. Instead of the voting bloc, we have the icon, the inclusive image. Instead of a political viewpoint of platform, the inclusive political posture or stance.³⁰

The quotation continues in McLuhan:

Instead of the product, the process. [...] In the TV image we have the supremacy of the blurred outline, itself the maximal incentive to growth and new "closure" or completion, especially for a consumer culture long related to the *sharp visual values* that had become separated from the other senses.³¹

Television networks reworked the television experience so that it revolved around the iconic, or "inclusive image."³² Given the television's transmission of low visual data, each and every image on TV had to carry with it as much information as possible.

McLuhan noted the change that every enterprise—"from Madison Avenue and General Motors to Hollywood and General Foods"—underwent in this new age.³³ Companies were now forced to create a TV image that fostered an intrapersonal relationship with the viewing audience, who had to be able to relate to every spoken sentence. Every physical gesture had to be exaggerated to the point where it could be instantly legible to a drop-in

viewer. The era of the cult of personality ostensibly began with the televised political campaigns of the 1960s and has since affected every person to appear on television. The subject in this new television era has become an avatar, a character for the benefit of a spellbound audience.

In *TV/Time Environment* Heinecken conveys his understanding of the changes that television underwent in the wake of *Understanding Media*. Heinecken's goal with the installation was to uncover the hidden signification processes behind the televisual spectacle. Many of the photographs taken by Heinecken of his photolithographic intervention, the high-contrast film positives he entitled *Daytime Color TV Fantasy* or simply *Daytime TV Fantasy*, demonstrate Heinecken's ability to repurpose the TV image for his own ends. Figure 3.2, *Daytime Color TV Fantasy 12A*, shows an image of a man extending his head out from behind a shadowy obstruction toward the right side of the television screen. With his posture and expression exaggerated, the figure's personality can be seemingly surmised even in the brief moment in which Heinecken has captured him on-screen. The man is an avatar, designed to convey as much information as possible through the sharp visual values of his severe pose (with mouth agape) so as to relate in some way to his television audience's predisposition toward a visually replete image. Heinecken's intervention not only obviates the need to understand the man's viewpoint, but reveals the primary function of the televisual spectacle following McLuhan's theorization of the medium. In effect, Heinecken suggests the figure of the man is as naked and disclosing as the superimposed woman depicted in the photolithograph in *12A* engaging in autoerotic pleasure.

Figure 3.3, *Daytime Color TV Fantasy/Arm and Hammer*, from 1976, shows a box of Arm and Hammer baking soda aligned with the torso of the female figure in the work's photolithographic component. The visual homology demonstrated in Heinecken's still shot shows the manner in which advertisements are made in the post-McLuhan era. The treatment of the box of Arm and Hammer in the commercial advertisement corresponds to the ways that pornographic imagery is used in its respective industry. The Arm and Hammer box asserts itself with monumental-like frontality and solid, bright colors. Its logo seduces from the center of the television screen. The product is designed to appeal to the consumer, though the advertiser simply seduces the viewer for the sole purpose of generating capital for the company, Arm and Hammer. It does not matter whether the product will benefit the consumer, but the ad has convinced its viewer that the product is an important part of the intrapersonal experience. According to Heinecken's construction, where pornography promises feigned intimacy, giving its viewer instead a brief and primal sense of satisfaction, the Arm and Hammer advertisement offers the viewer a quixotic experience—promising to integrate them into the fold of “large social purposes and processes”—even if the reality of the situation will never exceed one's expectations (the Michelangelesque arm illustrated on the front of the box likewise suggests a romantic user experience, promising a deodorizing product with the strength of the gods).³⁴ Heinecken's *TV/Time Environment* fragments the context of the original advertisement, revealing its false promises and manufactured experience—it is the end result of a group of commercial artists working with a large advertising budget,

culminating in an iconic image used to the present day, but not necessarily a satisfying user experience.

Unlike the pornographic image, however, the Arm and Hammer ad was most likely directed at a female audience (interestingly, the female figure in the photolithograph appears to be holding the box, suggesting the product's target audience). Daytime programming heavily depended on a domestic body for viewership. This domestic body was largely comprised of housewives, whose television viewing time was shown to be coterminous with their work time, according to sociologist Lynn Spigel, who cites foundational research on television and female viewership in *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*.³⁵ During daytime hours, “media producers had one primary job—teaching [housewives] how to buy products.”³⁶ Given the housewife's situation, in which her simultaneous housework schedule prevented her from ever paying full attention to the television screen, the TV producer had to take special measures to draw the housewife's attention. Large, bright imagery—like the box of Arm and Hammer—could focus the viewer's attention to the television. Furthermore, as Lynn Spigel suggests, there was a “theory [...] that the housewife will be more likely to take time from her household duties if she feels that her television viewing will make her household keeping more efficient.”³⁷ Appropriately, then, commercials for products like Arm and Hammer baking soda promised an efficiently maintained household (securing more time to watch television).

Heineken's *TV/Time Environment* interrupts the smooth exchange between the viewer and the ad. The installation restricts the commercial's effectiveness by

superimposing an image that targets men and alienates women, simultaneously indicting the idea behind “conspicuous consumption” by drawing parallels between commercial advertisements and pornography and illustrating a significant bias in the target of the commercial advertisement. Indeed many of the commercials in the *TV/Time Environment* reconstruction speak to a female audience.

The TV Environment

Daniel J. Boorstin’s *The Image or, What Happened to the American Dream*, written in 1961, also articulated a critical response to society’s newest mass medium, the television, and its impact on American culture.³⁸ Unlike *Understanding Media*—essentially an aesthetic consideration of media and its tautological forms—Boorstin’s *The Image* provokes an ideologically-driven reading of new media. This is apparent from the outset of the book, when Boorstin prefaces his argument by claiming that “[t]his is a ‘how-not-to-do-it’ book [...] about our arts of self-deception, how we hide reality from ourselves.”³⁹ To that end, Boorstin’s text outlines what he calls the pseudo-event, “the thicket of unreality which stands between us and the facts of life.”⁴⁰

According to Boorstin, the circumstances that led to our current perception of reality—or unreality—began about one hundred years prior, with the advent of modern communication systems. McLuhan, of course, argued that current media conditions began with the rise of print culture, but I would argue that these historical forces only coalesced with the rise of television mid-twentieth-century. Boorstin’s “pseudo-event” nonetheless arose from what he characterizes as American society’s need for news-

entertainment. With the mid-nineteenth-century news reporter's newfound ability to receive information from afar (the telegraph appearing the same year as the daguerreotype) and transmit it to the public, came the demise of the "slow news day."⁴¹ As the distance around the "global village" shrunk, American attitudes about the news and its composition changed. There was an increased demand for information, and, if information was unavailable, then the American public demanded the illusion of information was provided, with "synthetic happenings to make up for the lack of spontaneous events."⁴²

This, then, is Boorstin's "pseudo-event." It has four primary characteristics: first, as a man-made event, the pseudo-event is not spontaneous, but planned, like an interview.⁴³ Second, given its planned nature, the pseudo-event is necessitated upon its "newsworthiness." Nothing will circulate unless it will draw in viewers. Third—as an elaboration of the first and second—the pseudo-event's "relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous."⁴⁴ The pseudo-event interview, for example, is not intended to be about the speaker's relationship to the event—or their presentation of the facts—but their impression of it: what it means or why it happened rather than how it happened or who was involved.⁴⁵ Finally, the pseudo-event "is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy."⁴⁶ By its sheer appearance in the news context, the interview makes the event as "newsworthy," regardless of its appeal to the underlying reality of the situation. Boorstin believes that more and more, the news event has become a dramaturgical exercise, an act whose purpose is simply to increase spectatorship.

Advertisements in the television era concretize our reliance upon the pseudo-event; unreality is now a coping mechanism for the truth. A pizza advertisement featured in Heinecken's *Daytime Color TV Fantasy 34A* (figure 3.4), from 1975, dovetails effortlessly into Boorstin's definition of the pseudo-event. The commercial—which one assumes uses filmic effects like montage to facilitate a time lapse between frozen/uncooked pizza and the final product that we see in Heinecken's photograph (fortuitously aligned with the genitalia)—presents a stylized version of reality. The ad conducts itself like a pseudo-event. As a planned event, the commercial advertisement is “noteworthy” because its function is realized in the symbolic exchange of capital which it represents: the company behind the product purchased airtime from the network with intent to generate a profit. Given the television's capacity to disseminate an advertisement, the commercial “can be repeated at will, and thus [its] impression can be re-enforced.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, the ad assaults the viewer with vivid, dramatic images of an otherwise banal product. The viewer is thus given the shorthand to success: pizza is a delicious and convenient dinner option. The advertisement likely appeared during the day when the housewife decides what to prepare for dinner, or perhaps in the evening, close to dinnertime, to provide the viewer with a quick-fix solution to dinner. Boorstin writes, “[a]dvertising befuddles our experience [...]. Advertising fogs our daily lives less from its peculiar lies than from its peculiar truths.”⁴⁸ The truth is this: the pizza product on display in Heinecken's photograph is nearly identical to other pizza products on the market. It is made of dough, sauce, and cheese like every other pizza, but it has been marketed effectively.

Heinecken's *TV/Time Environment* upends the mediated experience created by advertising and broadcast television as a whole: the installation frames the TV image in order to reveal it as the generation of false needs and desires. The photolithograph destabilizes the structure of the commercial advertisement. The pizza advertisement's polish is stripped bare; Heinecken's display demystifies an overstuffed technical apparatus. The convenience of the pizza product is shown through the photolithographic intervention to be a mechanism for instant gratification (drawing further resemblance to the pornographic image). Heinecken disambiguates the pseudo-event, instead asserting viewer agency.

Advertisements are not the only feature on television that could be referred to as a pseudo-event. In an intervention against television, critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno notes, "[t]he pseudo-realism provided by [the diegetic schema of the television show] infuses empirical life with a false meaning, the duplicity of which viewers can scarcely see through because the [environment] looks exactly like the ones they know."⁴⁹ Adorno's case study against German broadcast television, "Television as Ideology," illustrates the hidden ideological messages behind scripted television. These messages—which subconsciously sell the audience on an ideological viewpoint so that they in turn adopt that viewpoint in their everyday lives—extend the parameters of the pseudo-event. We are now programmed to believe that the hero will prevail or the villain will be hoisted by their own petard. But the implications, as Adorno elucidates, could be even more catastrophic: an entire generation of viewers might grow up believing that they should accept their social position because the good-natured character in their favorite TV show

accepts their social position. Similarly, the titular suggestion of Boorstin's text, *The Image or, What Happened to the American Dream*, is that the so-called American dream can only be viewed in the image world. Heinecken responds to Boorstin by destroying the media narrative (developed now around images rather than history); Heinecken believes that the media narrative fallaciously shapes the viewer's belief about the American dream. Media theorist Margaret Morse, writing about the television's realms of non-space, simultaneously comments on the non-space of the American dream: "Nor is the past [like the American dream] so much remembered via narrative as it is rerun or embedded as archival images within contemporary, discursive presentation."⁵⁰ *TV/Time Environment* renders the narrative behind the culture industry's motives: the installation depicts televisual images overlaid with the image of another America, an America in which an entire gender is exploited for the benefit of the other—a darker side of America which suggests, in the context of the television commercial, that the American dream can be bought if the price is right.

The Spectacle Revisited: Final Thoughts with Baudrillard and Debord

Heinecken's *détournement* did not end with the manipulated television set. Upon entering the installation setting, one glimpses Heinecken's program already at work. In some installations of *TV/Time Environment*, for example its first appearance in Pasadena at the *California Photographers 1970* show (see figure 1.6), the viewer is invited to embrace an environment typical of a 1960s or 70s home. From the overstuffed chair, side table, and lamp to the wallpaper, rug, and floral arrangements, the room displays a

“hyperreality,” a term popularized by philosopher Jean Baudrillard to describe one’s inability to distinguish reality from its simulations. In the *Continuum* show, also of 1970, the installation uses gallery fixtures, such as the A/C system seen on the left side in figure 3.5, to increase the reality effect of the environment, bringing it closer to home.

Jean Baudrillard describes Disneyland as the “perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation.”⁵¹ Rather than represent the imaginary world—the phantasmagoric images found in Disney films—the park instead reveals a social microcosm that can be extrapolated to represent an “ideal” America.⁵² The physical make-up of the United States’ population can be gleaned in a single visit to the park: “[a]ll of [America’s] values are exalted here, in miniature and comic[-like] form.”⁵³ Disneyland is presented as an escape from the ordinary. Its overly sanitized and heavily policed streets—often viewed in stark contrast to the neighborhoods surrounding it—reinforces the park’s image as imaginary. Baudrillard argues, however, that this image exists only to make us believe in a “real” America, when, in fact, every town now exists on “the order of the hyperreal and of simulation.”⁵⁴ In other words, America is now the lived-in pseudo-event.

The *TV/Time Environment* installation likewise reveals a microcosm of the “ideal” America. Here we see an overly sanitized living room set-up; a “white cube” space which transmogrifies the suburban living room into an institutional setting where “[n]othing ‘extraneous is to enter—nothing political, ideological, [or] sacred.”⁵⁵ The environment forces the viewer to reconcile their own reality with its apparent fictions. Television fragments experience, mapping the viewing experience on an unstable spectrum between individual wants and institutional needs: local opposition and mass

acceptance and the difference between the fictional spaces television presents its audience and the non-space it actually represents.⁵⁶ But as one sits down and begins to experience an unmediated television viewing experience in the setting of the installation, mass media discourse crystallizes into shape. Where Disneyland mediates the experience—never revealing the man behind the curtain—*TV/Time Environment* dissolves the fictions before our very eyes, offering a glimpse of the unreality of our own living situations.

Reflecting upon the 1967 publication of *Society of the Spectacle*, author Guy Debord said that at that time of publication the spectacle itself “was barely forty years old.”⁵⁷ Debord thus dates the beginning of the society of the spectacle at or around 1927, the same year that “saw technological perfection of television.”⁵⁸ Upon revisiting *Society of the Spectacle*, we see now how Debord’s critique of late-stage capitalism presents itself in Heineken’s *TV/Time Environment*. Debord writes, “[t]he spectacle [is] a world view transformed into an objective force.”⁵⁹ We could just as well say that the spectacle is in part a culture industry whose objective force is a series of smoke and mirrors designed solely to sustain itself.⁶⁰ The problem is that society accepts the situation. We passively accept the spectacle—of which television is only one part—because the culture industry has asserted itself as an enormous positivity.⁶¹

For Debord, like Boorstin before him and Baudrillard after, “reality unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation.”⁶² Instead of mass media aiding us—relieving us from the stresses of our world—we are now aiding the mass media and its perpetuation. As a result, we remain unrelieved, resigned instead

to live in a dream world. In this state of being, Debord claims, dreaming has become a social necessity.⁶³ Heinecken wants to break us from our dream. He wants us to no longer passively accept the images which spew forth from the television. We are to combat the experiences of the televisual medium. Heinecken's deliberate distortion of the televisual spectacle delivers a blow to the culture industry. With *TV/Time Environment* Heinecken emphatically reminds us that what we see are merely advertisements, they should not substitute for actual experience.

¹ Paul A. Taylor and Jane Ll. Harris, *Critical Theories of Mass Media: Then and Now* (New York: Open University Press, 2008): 85.

² Eric McLuhan, "Aphorisms," in Paul Benedetti and Nancy DeHart, eds., *Forward Through the Rearview Mirror: Reflections on and by Marshall McLuhan* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1996): 45, quoted in A.D. Coleman, "'I Call It Teaching': Robert Heinecken's Analytical Facture," in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 9.

³ A.D. Coleman, "'I Call It Teaching': Robert Heinecken's Analytical Facture," in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 5.

⁴ Robert Heinecken, conversation with A.D. Coleman, December 3-5, 1998, quoted in A.D. Coleman, "'I Call It Teaching': Robert Heinecken's Analytical Facture," in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 5.

⁵ Coleman, 8.

⁶ Rosalind Krauss, *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011): 7.

⁷ There is thus another connection between Robert Heinecken and Marshall McLuhan. Prior to about 1990, McLuhan's work was dismissed because of its "mosaic" or "field" approach. Even Jean Baudrillard (whose own media theories will be discussed in this chapter) fundamentally misunderstood McLuhan's goals, characterizing McLuhan's project in *Understanding Media* as generally supportive of the culture industry. See Taylor, Paul A. and Jane Ll. Harris. *Critical Theories of Mass Media: Then and Now*. New York: Open University Press, 2008. See also Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Mark Poster. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1988.

⁸ Coleman, 5-9. See chapter one. See also Rosler's essay in Wallis, Brian, ed. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*. New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

⁹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964): 195.

¹⁰ Coleman, 8. In other words, the two aforementioned texts exerted a direct influence on Heinecken—they were not simply "in the ethereal."

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Taylor and Harris, 88. Original emphasis.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1962): 18.

¹⁵ Taylor and Harris, 90-91.

¹⁶ McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 279.

¹⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹⁹ Quoted in McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 189.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007): 112-113.

²² Ibid., 111.

²³ McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 308-309. According to a 1963 *TV Guide* article quoted in *Understanding Media* (p. 309), television—despite its ubiquity—was labeled a “timid giant” because it was seen as an unsuitable medium for controversial topics. McLuhan states that TV “introduced a kind of *rigor mortis* into the body politic.” It should also be noted that McLuhan’s television section is the longest section in *Understanding Media*.

²⁴ Ibid., 12.

²⁵ Ibid., 313. See also Jonathan Crary, “Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory,” *October* 50 (Autumn, 1989): 100, from which the embedded quotation derives.

²⁶ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 313.

²⁷ Taylor and Harris, 104.

²⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 313.

²⁹ Joselit, 142.

³⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 321. Quoted in Joselit, 142.

³¹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 321. Emphasis added.

³² Joselit, 142.

³³ McLuhan, 321-22.

³⁴ Ibid., 226.

³⁵ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992): 75.

³⁶ Ibid., 83.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Boorstin’s *The Image* is also noteworthy for being his only work on media. See Taylor and Harris, 116.

³⁹ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image or, What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Atheneum, [1961] 1962): vii.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁴¹ Ibid., 8-9.

⁴² Ibid., 9.

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 213.

⁴⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Television as Ideology," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, [1963] 1998): 62.

⁵⁰ Margaret Morse, "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction" in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 202.

⁵¹ Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1988): 171.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁵ Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, 64.

⁵⁶ Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001): 11.

⁵⁷ Guy Debord, *Commentaries sur la société du spectacle* (Paris: Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1988): 13, quoted in Jonathan Crary, "Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory," *October* 50 (Autumn, 1989): 100.

⁵⁸ Crary, "Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory," 100.

⁵⁹ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, [1967] 1995): 12-13.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁶¹ Ibid., 15.

⁶² Ibid., 12.

⁶³ Ibid., 18.

Figures



Figure 3.1. Robert Heinecken, *Daytime Color TV Fantasy 22A*, 1974-1976. 3M color-in-color dye sublimation print. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. Source: Philip Martin, e-mail message to author, January 31, 2012.



Figure 3.2. Robert Heinecken, *Daytime Color TV Fantasy 12A*, 1974-1976. 3M color-in-color dye sublimation print. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. Source: Philip Martin, e-mail message to author, January 31, 2012.



Figure 3.3. Robert Heinecken, *Daytime Color TV Fantasy/Arm and Hammer*, 1976. Four-color photolithograph, 34.4 x 44.5 cm.

Source: ARTstor: ARTSTOR_103_41822001259397 (accessed March 18, 2012).



Figure 3.4. Robert Heinecken, *Daytime Color TV Fantasy 34A*, 1975. 3M color-in-color dye sublimation print. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.

Source: Philip Martin, e-mail message to author, January 31, 2012.



Figure 3.5. Robert Heinecken, *TV/Time Environment* (installation view), 1970. Functioning commercial television; positive transparency; related magazine, life-size. From *Continuum*, Downey Museum of Art, April 12 – May 17, 1970, Downey, CA. Source: Philip Martin, e-mail message to author, January 31, 2012.

Conclusion

The Legacy of Robert Heinecken

Robert Heinecken's assault on mass media did not end with *TV/Time Environment*. Later projects, such as his *Shiva* series which began in the late eighties, appropriated magazine advertisements in order to make life-size relief collages (Figure C.1). The resulting configurations formed nightmarish images of Shiva using the different body parts of celebrities, models, and other media figures.¹ Heinecken's many-limbed eastern deity holds the vestiges of an all-consuming western culture in its hands. The hybridized figures confront the viewer's gaze, displaying for them the excess of their society, thereby "rupturing the viewer's comfort with [the advertisement's] predictable presence in the visual field by commenting on the image they are used to project."² Heinecken's vast media critique became more and more extravagant as time wore on in an effort to keep up with the ever-evolving mass media advertisement.

Heinecken's death on May 19, 2006 did not shock the nation or perhaps even the art world. His inclusion in the *PST* collaboration *Speaking in Tongues* represents his largest posthumous exhibition—and even that was a two-man show. Heinecken always remained on the periphery of photographic practices because he never closely identified with the medium.³ His career ran counter to that of other mid-century Los Angeles artists who used the photographic medium to develop their art; artists like Ed Ruscha or John Baldessari, who have gone on to receive considerable national and international acclaim

(as well as noteworthy spots in the *PST* narrative). Yet in many ways Heinecken's approach and themes developed contemporaneously with his more well-known counterparts. For example, Heinecken, like Baldessari, "refrain[ed] from imposing definite meaning on his work and remove[d] some responsibility from his authorial shoulders to those of the viewer."⁴ Much of Heinecken's work—*TV/Time Environment* in particular—appeared as a multifaceted structure without a myopic reading: Heinecken does not forfeit the complex viewing experience to promote a narrow vision. Furthermore, Heinecken, like Baldessari, "enlists [the photograph] to communicate the complexity, fluidity, and indeterminacy of meaning [of reality]."⁵ Heinecken's use of techniques like appropriation, superimposition, and juxtaposition within *TV/Time Environment* and throughout his *oeuvre* are meant to undermine the image world's deceptions.

The three interrelated analyses of *TV/Time Environment* herein represent the complexity of an artist at the height of his development. Heinecken carefully navigates through a complex body of theory in order to effectively deliver his message to an unprejudiced audience. His fragmentation of the televisual image recalls the development of conceptual art in the mid-sixties, when artists like Joseph Kosuth revealed the production of signification in language. Similarly, *TV/Time Environment* presents then-unparalleled revelations about the production of signification in mass media advertisements. Heinecken also foretold the revival of surrealism beginning in the late seventies (at a time when the narrative in the art world moved beyond the early-twentieth-century), when critics like Rosalind Krauss brought movement into close conversation with later artistic developments. He read into surrealism something beyond

its “trippy transformations,” engaging Breton’s program in order to critically examine the unconscious motivations behind consumerism.⁶ Finally, Heineken’s knowledge of media theory predicted an increased scrutiny toward the culture industry. His efforts have inflicted irreparable damage to the industry’s mass media arm, whose tactics have since changed and adapted to the growing consciousness toward the advertisement and its prerogatives.

Disengage the Simulator

From late 1961 through early 1962, Claes Oldenburg rented a shop in New York City, which he named The Ray Gun Manufacturing Company.⁷ The back room of The Ray Gun Manufacturing Company operated as the studio for the shop’s storefront, named *The Store*, where Oldenburg displayed and sold his small-scale sculptures.⁸ *The Store* invited the public to look at and buy art outside of the conventional art gallery setting, which was filled with its own psychological perceptions and economic systems: in a more conventional setting, “the viewing of art was too inhibited by ingrained responses” of what art should be and what it should cost.⁹ *The Store*, then, offered an immersive, almost theatrical experience about the world of commodities. Following closely on the heels of Allan Kaprow’s happenings, Oldenburg’s *Store* assisted in the meteoric rise of installation art in the 1960s.¹⁰ As art historian Ellen H. Johnson noted, however, *The Store* “did not bring Everyman in from the street, [though] it did bring artists and a small group of advanced collectors and critics who realized that it was *about* Everyman.”¹¹ For Johnson, “*The Store* was about art and about fact and fantasy, ambiguity, eroticism, and

materialism. It was about idealism and freedom, mobility and change, and about life and death in life”— many of these ideas would reverberate in Heinecken’s *TV/Time Environment* nearly a decade later.¹²

Heinecken’s installation was in many ways just as immersive as Oldenburg’s *Store*. Like *The Store*, *TV/Time Environment* invited viewers to experience “the already once-removed, artificial ‘reality’ of advertisements and other popular American images” through a tableau: Oldenburg’s installation simultaneously impersonated and operated as a storefront wherein economic exchange took place; Heinecken’s *TV/Time Environment* impersonated and operated as a typical American living room, where a very different kind of exchange took place.¹³ In both works meaning is generated through viewer interaction with the installation as a whole. However, Heinecken’s installation was set within the more conventional setting of the art gallery, appearing alongside other photographic and postphotographic artworks. Viewers who entered the space of Heinecken’s installation amid the larger space of the exhibition experienced the familiar objects of their living room—chairs, lamps, wallpapers, et cetera—within the unfamiliar space of the gallery. As the viewer trespasses on Heinecken’s installation, going from the public realm of the gallery to the private (or private-like) realm of Heinecken’s living room facsimile, they begin to recognize the trespass that occurs within their own homes: their personal living room space is frequently invaded by public images—those of companies intent on selling them products. It is through their participation with Heinecken’s intervention—the pornographic image inserted in front of the television

screen—that the viewer recognizes this trespass, for the image denaturalizes their experience, revealing the nature of the televisual spectacle.

One of the closest televisual critiques to *TV/Time Environment* is Richard Serra's *Television Delivers People*, from 1973. In an art historical eclipse similar to Heinecken's, *Television Delivers People* did not receive an audience until later in its life. The piece shows scrolling text against a blue background. In the background canned "Muzak" plays, reminiscent of early television game shows. The text begins, "The Product of Television, Commercial Television, is the Audience. Television delivers people to an advertiser. There is no such thing as mass media in the United States except for television..."¹⁴ For nearly seven minutes Serra's piece assaults the viewer with his denunciation of the culture industry's power players. Picture distortion—which appears throughout the video's runtime—reveals the arbitrary nature of the televisual image, but ultimately Serra's piece is too blunt. *Television Delivers People* closes the investigation into mass media critique; there is no opportunity to analyze the content of the video because Serra is candid about the issue and uses a straightforward presentation to present his position, using text and text alone. Heinecken, on the other hand was a master-educator both in and out of the classroom. He guided his students and viewers through a complex body of work without ever establishing his goals as blatantly as in Serra's polemic. As in a Frank Stella painting, with Serra's *Television Delivers People*, "What you see is what you see."¹⁵

Heinecken was one of the first of a generation of artists who would use mass media forms to critique a landscape defined by the conspicuous consumption of mass

media images and the social inequities that evolve from such mindless consumption.

Heinecken challenged the ways in which art was made; he challenged the definitions of art history, and, most importantly, he challenged the ever-expanding mass media colossus that has so thoroughly embedded itself into our lives.

¹ A.D. Coleman, “‘I Call It Teaching’: Robert Heinecken’s Analytical Facture,” in *Robert Heinecken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 7.

² Ibid.

³ Andy Grundberg, “Robert Heinecken, Artist Who Juxtaposed Photographs, Is Dead at 74,” *New York Times*, May 22, 2006, Section B: The Arts/Cultural Desk: 6.

⁴ Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2001): 134.

⁵ Ibid., 135.

⁶ Mark Alice Durant, “Robert Heinecken: A Material History,” in *Robert Heinecken: A Material History* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, 2003): 50.

⁷ Ellen H. Johnson, *Penguin New Art 4: Claes Oldenburg* (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1971): 17-19.

⁸ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 26.

⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹¹ Johnson, 19.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 20. See also Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986): 49.

¹⁴ Richard Serra (with Carlotta Schoolman), *Television Delivers People*, 1973. On UbuWeb.com, accessed March 21, 2012, http://www.ubu.com/film/serra_television.html.

¹⁵ Frank Stella, quoted. in Rorimer, 15.

Figures



Figure C.1. Robert Heineken, *Shiva Manifesting as a Single Mother*, 1989. Relief collage of magazine advertisements, 96 x 48 in. (243.8 x 121.9 cm).

Source: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, *Robert Heineken: Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective*, (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999): 98.

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