NEW RESEARCH ON ART AND ITS HISTORY

MAY 2023

THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE

Photography

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Landscape as grid in Stephen Shore's 'American surfaces'

Stephen Shore's road-trip series 'American surfaces' (1972–73) was first displayed at LIGHT Gallery, New York, but critics have tended to discuss only the book of the photographs, first published in 1999, and so have imagined the series to be a critical view of the landscapes of post-war America as sequences of undifferentiated surfaces. An examination of its original gridded installation suggests that the work might in fact have resisted narratives lamenting the flattening of daily experience.

by **TOM CORNELIUS**

THE AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER Stephen Shore (b.1947) has been the Director of the Photography Program at Bard College, Annandale-On-Hudson, since 1982, the same year that Aperture published his first and now canonical photobook, *Uncommon Places*. In his recent memoir, *Modern Instances: The Craft of Photography* (2022), Shore reflected on how he negotiates the two disciplines, writing 'I see myself as much a teacher as a photographer'.[1] The duality has proven to be a productive one; pedagogical exigencies have done little to stem his artistic practice over the past four decades. In February 2023 he published a new body of work, *Topographies: Aerial Surveys of the American Landscape*.[2] The series, made using a drone-mounted digital camera, picked up a thread that reached back through the artist's work to the 1970s. Here was the same attention to the overlooked (now with a new verticality) and the same play with authorial distance that has marked Shore's treatment of the landscape ever since he began to photograph it. As if counteracting the logic of the drone, the panoramic colour images in *Topographies* tether themselves to the body of work through which Shore earned his reputation. In the month of the project's publication, an interview with Shore in the *New Yorker* by the late Peter Schjeldahl declared him to be 'America's most cherished photographer'.[3]

The story of how Shore could come to be so labelled is intimately bound up in a broader narrative of photography's institutionalisation. Shore first imagined dedicating himself to photography in the 1960s, a time when the medium was generating increasing popular and critical interest in the United States. From 1972 he was represented by LIGHT Gallery, New York, one of several commercial spaces that opened into a burgeoning market for contemporary photography. In 1976–77 Shore was given a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA), by John Szarkowski, whose influential curatorial programme was staging a campaign to promote photography's inherent qualities and artistic value.[4] Shore's large-format landscape images, made with an Arca-Swiss 8x10 view camera, had also appeared in William Jenkins's pivotal exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* at the George Eastman Museum, Rochester NY, in 1975.[5] The photographs Shore exhibited in the mid-1970s had already resolved many of the aesthetic decisions concerning form, colour and composition for which his work is now perhaps most familiar. But early in the decade, before he started using a view camera, other formal questions had pressed upon him. Something more reactive was then at stake. In 1972 Shore began the last in a string of experimental photo-conceptual projects, designed to investigate the vernacular potentialities of the snapshot.

1. ***Paraphernalia Opening. Rene Ricard, Susan Bottomly, Eric Emerson, Mary Woronov, Andy Warhol, Ronnie Cutrone, Paul Morrissey, Pepper Davis*****, by Stephen Shore. 1965–67. Gelatin silver print, 32.4 by 48.3 cm. (© Stephen Shore; courtesy 303 Gallery, New York).**

This article examines the result of that project, the series *American surfaces* (1972–73), a collection of some 350 photographs taken on a road

1 S. Shore: *Modern Instances: The Craft of Photography*, London 2022, p.12.
2 S. Shore: *Topographies: Aerial Surveys of the American Landscape*, London 2023.
3 P. Schjeldahl: 'How America's most cherished photographer learned to see', *The New Yorker*, 17th February 2023, available at www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/how-americas-most-cherished-photographer-learned-to-see, accessed 3rd April 2023.
4 *Photographs by Stephen Shore* was at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from 8th October 1976 to 2nd January 1977.

2. *Amarillo, Texas*, from the series *American surfaces* (1972–73), by Stephen Shore. July 1972. Chromogenic print, 8.9 by 12.7 cm. (© Stephen Shore; courtesy 303 Gallery, New York).

trip with a Rollei 35mm viewfinder camera, and addresses the ways that the work has been presented and re-presented in the years since it was made. It will be suggested that *American surfaces* has been misunderstood by critics who have read it on the page, in the context of its translation into a photobook. If instead the photographs are studied in the context of their first exhibition, at LIGHT Gallery, it becomes possible to excavate important social and historical connections with the contemporary North American landscape. Attending to the work's original installation not only enriches the critical understanding of Shore's early work, but also opens a fresh perspective onto the history of photography's cultural movement into the space of exhibition.

In the summer of 1972 Shore visited Amarillo, the largest city in the Texas Panhandle. He had come to know of the place from an acquaintance at Andy Warhol's Factory in New York City, where from 1965 to 1967 he photographed Warhol's studio work and attendant social milieu (Fig.1). Those were the years that the young artist – only seventeen when he met Warhol – began assembling the components of a burgeoning photographic practice within Pop art's place of manufacture and mass production. Now twenty-four years old, Shore, who was born in New York, was drawn to the 'car culture' of the Texan city (Fig.2), 'the way people hung out – the pace of the life [. . .] the barbecue joints'.[6] The sprawling continent that lay beyond his native city to the west felt unfamiliar in part because Shore had never had a vehicle of his own. In fact, he was so accustomed to travelling abroad on childhood holidays with his family that he would later claim, 'when I began to photograph America, I was also in many ways a foreigner'.[7] Opportune for the way it hugs Texas's portion of US Route 66, Amarillo thus became for Shore the terminus of a long and circuitous road trip through the Southern United States. Begun in June 1972 and completed in August, the journey would take him from Manhattan to Texas and back, in a rented sedan, via nineteen states and the District of Columbia.[8]

The impetus of exploring the Southern United States dovetailed with the unfolding of *American surfaces*, a photographic project that Shore conceived and named in the spring. Previous sojourns in Amarillo, between 1969 and 1971, had impressed upon him the 'clarity' of the Southwestern light, prompting a renewed consideration of the technological conditions of the photographic process.[9] Shore remembered assessing there the relation of foreground to background – the fact that 'three-dimensional space is being collapsed on a picture plane'.[10] The title *American surfaces* therefore represented a proposal; the coming together of the two words was to be an interrogation of the idea that photography, like the clear

5 See B. Salvesen and A. Nordström, eds: exh. cat. *New Topographics*, Tucson (Center for Creative Photography) and Rochester (George Eastman Museum) 2009.
6 Stephen Shore, quoted in D. Campany *et al.*, eds: exh. cat. *Stephen Shore: Survey*, Madrid (Fundación MAPFRE), Arles (Rencontres d'Arles), Berlin (C/O Berlin) and Amsterdam (Huis Marseille) 2014–16, p.29.
7 *Ibid.*
8 T. Cole: 'Palette of the age', in S. Shore: *American Surfaces*, London 2020, p.6.
9 Campany, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.30.
10 *Ibid.*

3. *Amarillo, Texas*, from the series *American surfaces* (1972–73), by Stephen Shore. 2nd July 1972. Chromogenic print, 8.9 by 12.7 cm. (© Stephen Shore; courtesy 303 Gallery, New York).

4. *Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*, from the series *American surfaces* (1972–73), by Stephen Shore. 9th July 1972. Chromogenic print, 8.9 by 12.7 cm. (© Stephen Shore; courtesy 303 Gallery, New York).

Amarillo light, flattens. This was something he had briefly explored in 1971 in an informal series made with a novelty 'Mick-a-Matic', a large camera in the shape of Mickey Mouse's head. Shore liked 'the cheap, sudden quality of this non-professional camera, and the way in which it dramatically flattened surfaces', as one critic put it.[11] Newly in possession of the more precise and less zoomorphic Rollei (a precursor to the modern point-and-shoot camera), Shore planned to develop the concept over the course of a summer spent on the road, for here were the landscapes in which an investigation into photography's spatiality could unfold.

American surfaces is an expansive visual diary of colour photographs that depict shop fronts, gas stations, city intersections, friends, acquaintances and labourers, food-laden plates (Fig.3) and public lavatories. The series includes photographs taken either side of the trip, but while on the road a basic rubric permitted Shore to travel only on the US Highway System, returning east via Route 66. And although his subjects might seem arbitrary, there is uniformity in the work's visual language. The images are all shot in landscape format, and each is named for the location in which it was taken, for example, *Amarillo, Texas*, or *Kanab, Utah*. The centring of visual information, slabs of blue sky – although there is one photograph taken in the rain, in Lubbock, Texas – architectural vernacular and patterned interiors are recurrent motifs.

In the way it systematically catalogues the signs and sites of the American road, Shore's series positions itself alongside work by such conceptual artists as John Baldessari, Douglas Huebler and Ed Ruscha. Given that Shore's intention for *American surfaces* was to 'record every person I met, and every meal, and every bed',[12] it recalls Huebler's impossibly ambitious *Variable piece #70: (in process) global* (1971–97). In a letter included as part of that work Huebler set out his intention to 'photographically document [. . .] the existence of everyone alive'.

Beginning in the 1960s, photography illustrated an evolving discourse on the sameness and repetitiveness of post-war America's topographies using a newly technologised 'amateurish' aesthetic.[13] Ruscha's books, with such titles as *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) and *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), rerouted photographic representations of the road to form an anaesthetic inventory, or concertinaed them into unwieldy monotony (Fig.5).[14] Subsequently, grappling with the flattening homogeneity that was transforming the culture of the United States became a hallmark of the post-modernist critique. Frederic Jameson memorably saw in Warhol 'the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense'.[15] Pop art had ostensibly re-flattened the flattening of landscapes, culture and bodies for the art market. Warhol's *Death and disaster* series, begun in 1962, repeatedly compresses the crushing homogenisation of the social contract onto the surface of the work. His *Car crash* paintings, made between 1962 and 1964, depict the dangers posed by the newly levelled terrains of asphalt and concrete, and their notional parallelisms in the mass media. Talking to a reporter in 1967, Warhol quipped, 'if you want to know about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it'.[16]

Critics looked to this context to explain *American surfaces* after the series was published as a photobook in 1999. The book was not produced in the United States but in Germany and the publisher, Schirmer/Mosel, added a historicising subtitle: *1972*. It included just seventy-seven images. Phaidon later published two expanded editions, one in 2005 that included 320 photographs, and another in 2020, which included 350. Of the latter, one critic wrote simply that Shore 'stays on the surface of things, understanding the inexhaustibility of surfaces'.[17] Elsewhere, Christy Lange has asked: 'What can America's surfaces tell us, and, in turn, what can a superficial image tell us about those surfaces?'. The faces and expressions of Shore's subjects, Lange continued, 'are treated like textured surfaces. A young man's sweaty pores tell us as much about him as his green polyester shirt and the tiled wall of the public toilet behind him' (Fig.4).[18]

Lange and others have identified Shore's concern with the visual relationships of 1970s America. And certainly, the materiality of the landscape, of interiors, even of the human subject, is described by Shore's searching camera. The photographs' 'natural' aesthetic, as he would come to call it, seems ambivalently to register the glistening, artless food, the commercial language of signs and billboards divorced from meaning, and the hopeless nostalgia of kitsch.[19] But it could be argued that this reading fails to account for a latent purpose in the series. Less a treatise on the artificiality of post-war culture or on America as a Baudrillardian 'extravaganza of undifferentiated surfaces', Shore's work imagines deeper systems of meaning operating on the landscape.[20] To see them necessitates looking past the work in its book form and examining it as originally conceived for exhibition. This requires a move back through time from the horizontality of the page to the verticality of the gallery wall.

When *American surfaces* was installed at LIGHT Gallery in September 1972, the newly opened space at 1018 Madison Avenue was blazing a trail. Led by the curator Harold Jones, LIGHT was the first gallery dealing only in work by contemporary photographers. For three months Shore's series stretched across three walls of its back room. No visual record of the installation survives, but it is known to have numbered over two hundred photographs, which were displayed in a wide rectilinear grid: three neat rows of images each measuring 3.5 by 5 inches. Developed and printed commercially as 'drugstore prints', the high-gloss photographs, each enclosed by a narrow white border, were unframed and hung using double-sided tape.[21] Their colours richly saturated, the prints would have refracted the light and textured the wall.

5. ***Ed Ruscha holding his book 'Every Building on the Sunset Strip' (1966)*****, by Jerry McMillan. 1967. (© Ed Ruscha and Jerry McMillan; courtesy Craig Krull Gallery, Santa Monica).**

Fewer images were exhibited in 1972 than now make up the completed series because Shore would go on to take photographs for *American surfaces* after the LIGHT exhibition, into the next year. It now includes photographs taken on his travels outside North America, in London and the US Virgin Islands, something that destabilises the work's title at the level of geography. Because the project continued, the series has included changing selections of images when exhibited in the years after 1972, most recently as part of Shore's retrospective at MoMA in 2017 (Fig.6).[22] The grid, too, has been reconstituted with varying degrees of fidelity to the LIGHT installation: the size of the photographs has been adjusted and individual prints framed, as when the work was shown at MoMA PS1 in 2005.[23]

No text accompanied the photographs when they were exhibited at LIGHT, and so visitors could have known only that the images professed to depict – or somehow themselves were – a multiplying of surfaces in America. This immediately raises a number of questions. Does 'surfaces' refer to how the tactile, glossy photographs met the gallery wall, which was visible between the prints, or to the images' subjects: a plenitude of people, places and things? What did it mean for the institution of photography that these opaquely intimate snapshots could be framed – in the metaphorical sense – as a work of art? And how is the logic of their ordering in the serialised and geometricised pattern of the grid to be understood?

The reassembling of the series for publication as a book replaced the LIGHT Gallery grid with the layout of the paginal spread. The photographs were printed at a larger scale, one or two to a page, and

11 C. Lange: 'Survey: nothing overlooked', in *idem*, M. Fried and J. Sternfeld: *Stephen Shore*, London 2007, p.52.
12 *Ibid.*, p.59.
13 J. Wall: '"Marks of indifference": aspects of photography in, or as, conceptual art', in A. Goldstein and A.Rorimer, eds: exh. cat. *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, Los Angeles (Museum of Contemporary Art) 1995–96, pp.247–67.
14 J. Mansoor: 'Ed Ruscha's one-way street', *October* 111 (2005), pp.127–42.
15 F. Jameson: *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham NC 1990, p.9.
16 G. Berg: 'Andy: my true story', *Los Angeles Free Press* (17th March 1967), p.3.
17 Cole, *op. cit.* (note 8), p.5.
18 Lange, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp.61–67.
19 Campany, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp.28–30.
20 J. Baudrillard: *America*, London 2010, p.135.
21 Campany, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.30.
22 Q. Bajac: exh. cat. *Stephen Shore*, New York (Museum of Modern Art) 2017–18.
23 Campany, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.32. The exhibition was at MoMA PS1 from 23rd October 2005 to 23rd January 2006.

the drug-store print border was removed. Perhaps paradoxically, a failure to attend to the LIGHT Gallery exhibition, which runs through the limited critical attention *American surfaces* has received, means that the series has been taken at its word and understood as concerning itself only with surfaces. To understand more accurately how the work dramatises surface in the communities and terrains of the late twentieth century, it must be understood that the grid is its organising schema. Revisiting and recontextualising the LIGHT Gallery exhibition allows for an interrogation of the ways Shore theorised the grid as a conceptual device and opens out the serial logic of the photographs. It might be imagined that he visualised the pattern as diaristic, and that, while navigating and imaging the landscape, he played ideas about the private off against the hegemony of what is alleged to be the pattern's Procrustean repetitiveness. And yet as a mirror of the infrastructural systems ordering the landscape, the grid also emerges as a kind of map. In a convoluted sequence, the landscape structures the grid on the gallery wall – it determines the visual relationships of its coordinates – as the grid, too, orders the real landscape and its inhabitants. One only had to look at a map of Amarillo, the place to which Shore pointed his car in 1972, to see how the pattern's rhizomatic uniformity could systematise the arrangement of a city's streets and avenues.

Shore brings the work's schematic tensions into individual images in the way he frequently positions human subjects against gridded patterns. The Rollei, loaded with mass-market Kodacolor film, had a mounted flash attached at the base, which throws sharp, fantastical shadows upwards (Fig.7). The dark shapes become a sign for the way technologies mediate our experience of landscape, as the camera attaches its subjects to the grid and yet simultaneously cleaves them apart in a lighted burst. It is details like these that, when seen on the page in their relative isolation, have meant the series has been read as visualising the effects of an inescapable experiential flattening. But when presented as the repeated material coordinates of a grid, Shore's photographs begin to function differently.

Shore has explained that at LIGHT Gallery he used the rectilinear pattern as a corollary to the photographs' non-chronological organisation: a way of circumventing a linear reading.[24] But it is by being dis or reordered that the gridded photographs begin to reimagine the commercialised topographies they represent. On the gallery wall, repetition opens onto diverging temporalities.[25] Seen all at once, the images come to signify the lived sociality of a citizenry. The photographs' accumulation registers the disparateness of a landscape that, as Hal Foster put it in 1979, had become 'more and more cityscape and our vista a heterogenous zone that is neither one nor the other'.[26] In other words, liminality can be a place where meaning is produced, where the relations between images communicate as forcefully, or more so, than the individual pictures themselves.[27] Operating as a kind of diary, the grid becomes a battleground on which Shore's subjects pitch themselves against the mode of homogeneity it represents. Perhaps, to re-use Lange's description, 'a young man's sweaty pores' or his 'green polyester shirt' are better understood not as interchangeable superficial details but as residues of the bodily agency still available within those systems of standardisation that the work wants to dismantle.

Of the roughly two hundred gridded photographs at LIGHT Gallery, a little over thirty were portraits. As a sample of 'every person' he met and photographed for the series, the images mostly show their unidentified subjects tightly framed, with arms pared above the elbow. The mechanics of the camera mark the individuals as being in relation to the land because

6. Installation view of *Stephen Shore* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2017–18, showing the series *American surfaces* (1972–73). (Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York; photograph Robert Gerhardt).

7. ***Dallas, Texas*****, from the series** ***American surfaces*** **(1972–73), by Stephen Shore. June 1972. Chromogenic print, 8.9 by 12.7 cm. (© Stephen Shore; courtesy 303 Gallery, New York).**

8. ***Stone*****, by Agnes Martin. 1964. Ink on paper, 27.7 by 27.7 cm. (Museum of Modern Art, New York; © DACS, London).**

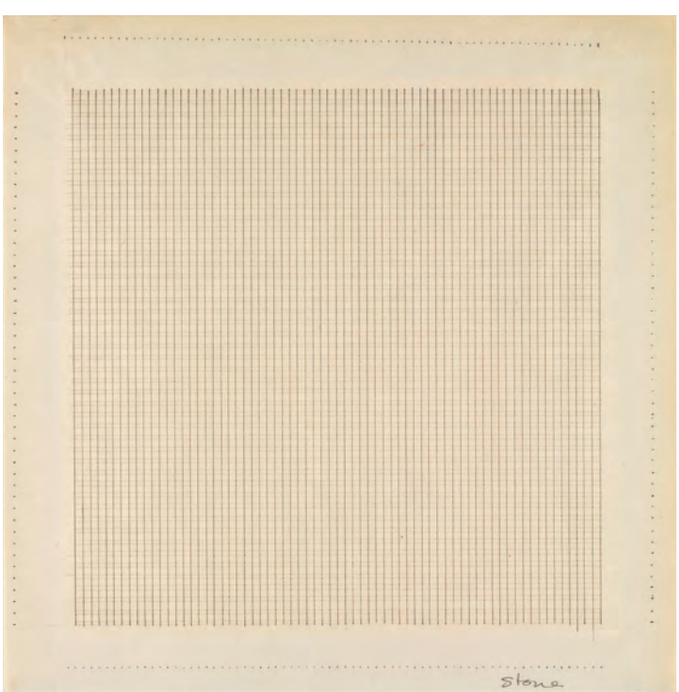
the subjects are formally 'made landscape' by the snapshot, an ambivalent agent conflating figure and ground. As mentioned above, Lange used the portraits as an example of where Shore's camera seemed most unflinchingly to have flattened his subjects, making them unknown or unknowable.[28] Shore's memory of the 1972 exhibition and its public reception would seem to echo Lange's words when he recalls that viewers 'had a hard time looking at it', or that they saw the work as 'a kind of coloured wallpaper'.[29] And *American surfaces* was, without doubt, unpopular with critics. A.D. Coleman wrote a review for the *Village Voice* in which he described the series as 'an endless game of visual solitaire designed to while away the eons in limbo'.[30] As far as Coleman was concerned, Shore's designs on a non-linear reading had given birth to something modular – the endless, ungrounded interchangeability of deferred engagement.

It is possible, therefore, that the grid had the potential to multiply photography's optical closures to infinity, constricting a phenomenological encounter with the work by rendering the photographs somehow impenetrably uniform, empty or flat. This is, after all, the effect that the grid was thought to be having on the aesthetics of landscape outside of the gallery space. Briony Fer, writing about art at the end of Modernism, identified the potentially disruptive implications of the moment a series or sequence is 'viewed simultaneously by a spectator immersed in the whole installation'.[31] The experience of the work of art can itself be 'serial', she argued, a 'series of disconnections'. Foregrounding these disconnections or cognitive 'cuts' felt by viewers at LIGHT Gallery might allow for the work's combative register, its 'wallpaper' planarity, to be reframed. That is, by imagining that repetition can unravel in art as difference rather than sameness.[32] Taking the example of Agnes Martin's grid drawings from the 1960s (Fig.8), Fer goes on to say that 'rather than constraining difference, repetition allows for maximum difference, exacerbating, even, the multiplication of variables'.[33] It seems likely, therefore, that however much the camera frustrated or foreclosed the particularities of the figures in the photographs, it is their interactivity within the landscape of the grid that controls the work's presence on the gallery wall.

24 Email from Stephen Shore to the present author, Friday 4th March 2022.
25 B. Fer: *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art After Modernism*, London 2004, pp.1–4.
26 H. Foster: 'Michael Bishop: Light Gallery', *Artforum* 17 (1979), p.59.
27 B. Stimson: *The Pivot of the World: Photography and Its Nation*, London 2006, p.30.
28 Lange, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp.61–67.
29 Shore quoted in 'Michael Fried in conversation with Stephen Shore', in Lange *op. cit.* (note 11), p.9; and Campany, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.32.
30 A.D. Coleman, 'Latent image: American yawn, Irish wail', *Village Voice* (5th October 1972), p.31.
31 Fer, *op. cit.* (note 25), p.4.
32 Stimson, *op. cit.* (note 27), p.55.
33 Fer, *op. cit.* (note 25), p. 56.
34 B. Nickas: 'Introduction', in S. Shore: *American Surfaces*, London 2005, p.7.
35 Stimson, *op. cit.* (note 27), pp.114–26.

Take the man in the green polyester shirt, for example, in the photograph titled *Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*. Processes of subjective self-definition are plainly acted out here. A man stands at the seam of two radiating grids of tiles on the walls of a bus station bathroom.[34] Leaning in close, perhaps mirroring the comportment of the unseen photographer, his head and shoulders fill the centre of the frame such that he obscures the meeting of planar surfaces behind him. He is simultaneously located there by the camera, and, in its unsparing flash, separated from the repeated squares with a dark and fantastical severity. The photograph's ground defines the figure, even throws him forward, and yet he remains in the interstitial space created by the image. As he shimmers at the intersection of the various grids that Shore has put to work, the subject is emboldened to renegotiate the curtailments imposed by the photographic act. That is, despite the photographs' drug-store print borders, which neatly isolated each unit of the series, the bus station bathroom included, every image is connected to its neighbours by the symbolic conceit of the road. Blake Stimson has described how in Robert Frank's touchstone series *The Americans* (1959) the road 'ties together each picture to the next in a single phenomenal and analytical thread that creates the sense of grasping the nation in sum'.[35] With a similar claim on something national, *American surfaces* produced its own, expanded 'becoming-social moment', to quote Stimson, on the wall in the routes between the gridded photographs, where boundaries were everywhere invoked only to be transcended.

Another photograph, *Kanab, Utah* (Fig.11), registers human presence only – but no less assertively – in its material indices: in real estate, infrastructure and manufactured products. It recapitulates a discourse of nature versus culture, or the paradox of the so-called 'fortunate Fall' into technological development that occupied certain nineteenth-



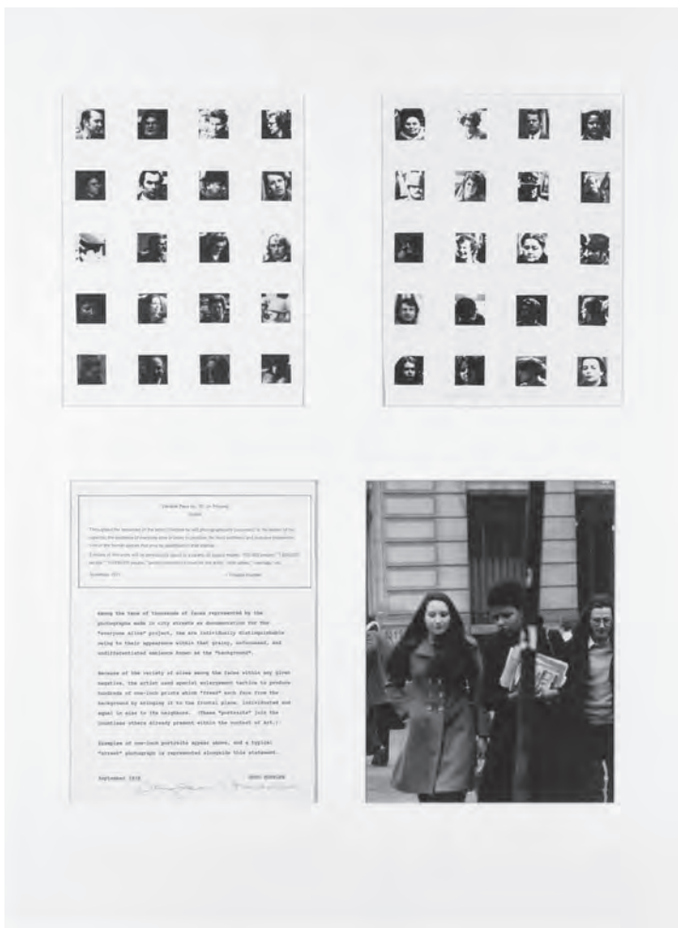
9. *Kanab, Utah*, from the series *American surfaces* (1972–73), by Stephen Shore. 25th June 1972. Chromogenic print, 8.9 by 12.7 cm. (© Stephen Shore; courtesy 303 Gallery, New York).

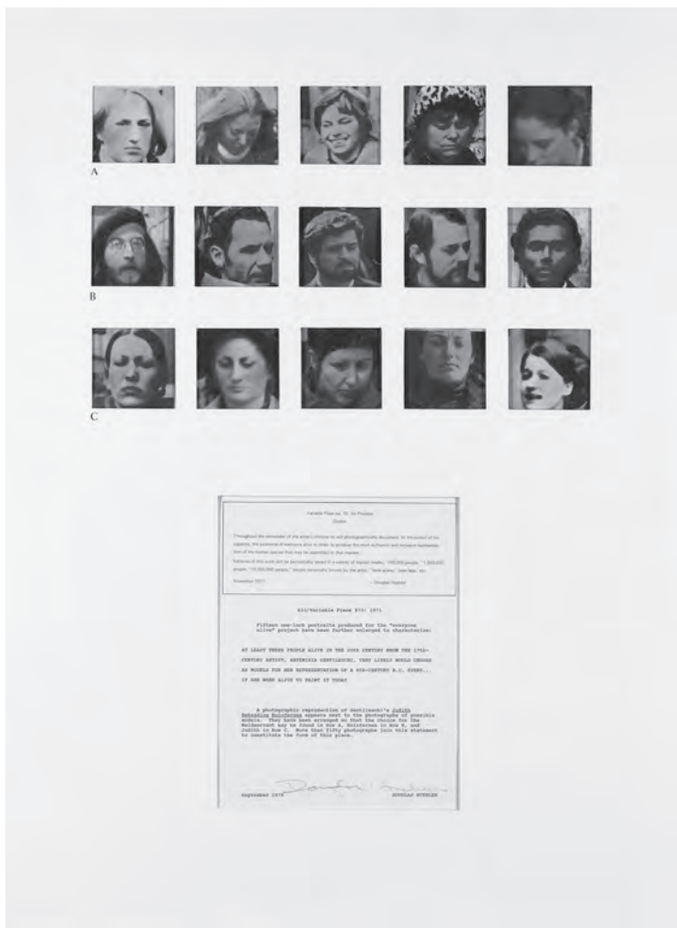
10. Detail from *Variable piece #70: 1971 (in process) global 633*, by Douglas Huebler. 1978. Gelatin silver prints and chromogenic prints. (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; © DACS, London).

century American landscape painters.[36] Claudian framing techniques guide the viewer from the red Buick Skylark and adjacent sapling in the bottom left corner to the tapering pole in the centre, which bears the letters of the company name like a series of ciphered flags. In its soft, reverent light, the image reimagines that awkward juncture in the nation's past at which diverging ideas of America, nature and God had to be reconciled. If the landscape was God's nature – and might even be God – it could also necessarily be a pastoral ideal, an Eden, where fallen man might recover culture from the wilderness.[37]

In Shore's photograph, the American landscape as holy text has come to be inseparable from the human systems of industry and commerce that shape and order it.

A third image in the series, also titled *Kanab, Utah* (Fig.9), interprets landscape as a complicated means of individuation that pivots on the idea of the nation through historical time. The photograph makes literal the structures that mediate the modern consumer's relationship to the land. A close-up view shows a framed painting of a rural scene hanging askew on an interior wall, papered with a repeating motif representing the Native American: an embroidered quiver, arrowheads, a figure dressed in a feathered war bonnet. We are shown the layering of histories through which the idea of landscape evolves and has itself variously been called on to sustain or supplant, by means of artistic modes as apparently diverse as painting, gardening and photography. If less literally than in the portrait of the green-shirted man, the grid is represented here no less forcefully in the way landscape is translated into historiography and culture. As metaphor, it describes the various tangible means of land ownership and settler power controlling the westward expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century.[38] Residual in the structuring of the framed painting, the grid's geometry seems here to stand in for the





11. ***Kanab, Utah*****, from the series** ***American surfaces*** **(1972–73), by Stephen Shore. 25th June 1972. Chromogenic print, 8.9 by 12.7 cm. (© Stephen Shore; courtesy 303 Gallery, New York).**

legacies of its ideological underpinnings, the violence on which was built the economies of a capitalist superstructure. The photograph might be read as upending what Rosalind Krauss has described as landscape's historical development, by way of Modernism, into a depiction of its own space of exhibition: the gallery wall. The papered interior space of the image, an unequivocal departure from the white cube of the modern gallery, uses ideas about landscape's 'exhibitionality' to display the legacies of the grid in the social realm.[39]

Taped to LIGHT Gallery's walls, *American surfaces* internalised and made inescapable the aesthetic systems of a late twentieth-century landscape. That is why it had necessarily to be the logic of the grid that vitalised the subjects of Shore's photographs, even if they remained within the shallow depths of the pattern's homogenising affect. Huebler was at the same time theorising the flattening that his own photography produced. Describing his series *Variable piece #70*, he outlined in the letter included in the piece the 'special enlargement tactics' that he used to 'free' his subjects from 'that grainy, unfocused, and undifferentiated ambience known as the "background"'. 'These "portraits"', Huebler wrote as part of *Variable piece #70: 1971 (in process) global 633* (Fig.10), 'join the countless others already present within the context of Art'. Creating grids of one-inch square prints, Huebler liberated and made equal his photographed figures by placing them in relation to the landscape of aesthetic discourse.

Taking us from the gallery wall to the individual images and back again, the structural grid of *American surfaces* is similarly energised by openings instead of closures. One important and yet unaccounted for association was realised at LIGHT Gallery in 1972 and modified thereafter in the work-as-book and in the subsequent rehangs of the series. Shore's grid, mobilising its flattening dialectic, would there press his photographs into a final ground and so connect them interminably. This ground we might describe as the 'surface of the museum' – or what Krauss called 'the capacity of the gallery to constitute the objects it selects for inclusion as *art*'.[40] In the moment of their exhibition, Shore's photographs insisted upon broadening that capacity. Understanding the work to have posed a new relation of viewer to gallery wall, one advertising the potential for divergence within monotonous, flattening seriality, enables us to understand why the work was first belittled or ignored and later, in its other guises, reclaimed for art history. Put differently, that viewers might have been unable to see the work for the wall, so to speak, evidences the strain the series placed upon its relation to the genre of landscape. But *American surfaces* remains a work grounded by the patterns of a national topography, for it was from there that Shore appropriated the cartographic grid and turned its logic against itself.

36 B. Novak: *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting: 1825–1875*, Oxford 2007, pp.5–6.
37 *Ibid.*, p.136.
38 W. Boelhower: 'Inventing America: a model of cartographic semiosis', *Word & Image* 4 (1988), pp.475–96.
39 R. Krauss: 'Photography's discursive spaces: landscape/view', *Art Journal* 42 (1982), pp.311–19.
40 Krauss, *op. cit.* (note 39), p.313. Emphasis in original.