Armchair Tourist

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Armchair Tourist

A Thesis

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in partial fulfillment of the
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in
Fine Arts

by

Brad Stire

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# Table of Contents

List of Figures...................................................................................................................... v

Abstract................................................................................................................................ vi

Introduction........................................................................................................................... 1

Observing the Observer ................................................................................................. 2

Memory Neighborhoods/Nostalgia Tapes ................................................................. 3

Composite Landscapes............................................................................................... 6

Voice of the Narrator ................................................................................................. 12

Comfort in Distance .................................................................................................. 20

An Engagement with New Media ............................................................................. 24

Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 26

Bibliography ............................................................................................................... 27

Vita.............................................................................................................................. 28
List of Figures

Figure 1. Denham Springs .................................................................3
Figure 2. TV ...................................................................................4
Figure 3. Somewhere near Monument Valley ......................................7
Figure 4. Florida 2 ...........................................................................10
Figure 5. Richard Prince, Untitled (cowboy) ......................................11
Figure 6. Interview II ......................................................................13
Figure 7. Interview I .........................................................................14
Figure 8. Chuck’s Bday ’94 / Chuck & Liz Christmas 1993 ..............16
Figure 9. Trace ................................................................................19
Figure 10. Jack Goldstein, The Pull ..................................................22
Figure 11. Caspar David Friedrich, The Monk by the Sea ..................22
Figure 12. Comedian ........................................................................23
Figure 13. Motovlogger .....................................................................24
Figure 14. Jon Rafman .......................................................................26
Abstract

The contemporary experience is profoundly rooted in the processes of remembering and recalling, recording and playing back. My work employs image and installation to speak of memory, nostalgia, and the integration of media and representation into experience. The rapid advancement of media technologies provides new immersive opportunities for the armchair traveler. Viewers may now be effortlessly transported across distances of time and space.
A single pang of nostalgia may be prompted by the smell of burning leaves. For me, it’s the scratchy political slogan printed on a nail file, tossed in a bowl on my grandmother’s coffee table. The sensation plays out in my mind like a film, a sentimental montage of an idealized past. The nostalgic experience is fleeting; memory degrades upon continuous playback. Thankfully, new technologies come to aid by acting to reinforce memory, to create a reliable backup. In a contemporary experience grounded in spectacle and saturated with high-definition content, it becomes easier for the nostalgia buff to seamlessly construct such bittersweet longings – only to become immersed in them later on as vicarious voyages. Reality and experience yield memory, while nostalgia is a complex longing - a crude, composite picture of memory, representation, and emotion.

My work is a meditation on memory, nostalgia, and the integration of media and representation into experience. I often appropriate or reference images of mass visual culture. In doing so, I examine the codes and clichés of advertising, constructs of cinema, and symbols of Americana. Some works are based solely on my own childhood memories, while others present more fictitious narratives.

Media technologies aggressively integrate themselves deeper into our understanding of reality. I seek to scrutinize the consequences of this assimilation. I will support my thesis by examining the motivations behind my artwork, inspecting the constructs of memory and nostalgia, and discerning the codes and strategies of mass media.
**Observing the Observer**

Before graduate school, I was working in forms of documentary photography. I made portraits of people and place - thrift store owners and muscle car aficionados. The content often referenced Americana, an element that also drew me to the works of Alec Soth, Stephen Shore, and Walker Evans. Upon entering graduate school, I began to shy away from this practice. Instead, I examined the content of my past photographs. I began questioning my unconscious motivations, rather than shrugging them off as a matter of aesthetic intuition.

I concluded that my intentions had been largely determined by my personal upbringing, with a recurring attraction to faces and environments that felt familiar. These vignettes included various family outings: small-town festivals, car and boat shows, antique stores, and craft fairs. As a child, I vented boredom and distress as I was reluctantly dragged to the happenings. However, the thought of these activities later developed into pleasant memories. As I revisited these events, I sensed that my childhood memories were progressively diminishing. Attempting to immortalize these fleeting accounts in the form of a photograph, there was certainly some desperation to my actions. Although these places and experiences were new to me, the photographs felt a bit like souvenirs of past family outings.

*Denham Springs* (2009) portrays the proprietor of a South Louisiana thrift store. Around this time, I was enchanted by Walker Evans’ deadpan style of portraiture, directly influencing the composition and direction of this image. I gave the subject little instruction, focusing more attention to the cluttered shelves and pinned-up photographs. I felt that the image was potent with awkward engagement and a drab color palette.
At first, appropriating the content of these subcultures felt validating. I felt as though I had done my time as a participant, through my innocent childhood visits. I felt as though I had once played a part in these happenings, rather than attending predominantly as a spectator. However, the process eventually began to feel exploitative; the interactions felt both insincere and unrewarding to the people I photographed. Upon making the portraits, I would often leave without even knowing the subjects’ first names. This led me to direct my practice elsewhere.

*Memory Neighborhoods/Nostalgia Tapes*

Within my first semester of graduate school, questions surrounding memory and nostalgia led me to probe the collection of videotapes I had possessed as a child. I was particularly drawn to blank VHS tapes that had been continuously overdubbed with various programming. I scoured the tapes, making note of segments that summoned vague memories.
These clips included several 1990’s television commercials and their archaic advertising strategies; their mushy narrators were the source of sound for a video piece titled, *TV* (2012). The work depicts a small TV, situated between the seats of a moving vehicle, projecting a montage of video clips. The passages were edited from footage whose visual or sonic qualities, dialogue, or overall aesthetic stirred up a nostalgic sentiment. A sunscreen PSA. Sweeping pans of wilderness in a pickup truck ad. The shaded front steps of a sitcom home.

The vignettes were appropriated, presenting them as they may have been within a particular childhood memory. I recalled watching videos in the backseat of the family minivan, a tactic carried out by my parents to keep me quiet and entertained on extended vacation drives. For *TV*, I re-enacted this scene, driving around town, switching tapes, as a camera fixed to the backseat recorded the action. The video cuts quickly between segments with a runtime of 45 seconds, intended to mimic the pace and duration of a TV advertisement. In an effort to render
the picture on the TV/VCR, with dramatic shifts in lighting, the image was consequently overexposed. This emphasized the fiery, white reflections of the sun. I was reminded of the glare and reflection of passing scenery that I once perceived as a nuisance. The glare burns into the rounded screen of the cathode ray TV/VCR, positioned in the center of the frame, between two car seats. I considered my childhood disdain for such a distraction, struggling to watch the obscured TV picture.

Looking back, the television I watched on these drives far overshadows my family’s destination or any worthwhile occurrence within the passing scenery. As an adult, I would admit many vacation memories to be of far less consequence than the television pictures. Sigmund Freud speaks of how childhood memory favors the mundane moments to the more significant. In “Screen Memories” (1899), he expresses his concerns with the observation that, “the essential elements of an experience are represented in memory by the inessential elements of the same experience.” He presumes this to be, “…a case of repression accompanied by the substitution of something in the neighborhood (whether in space or time).”¹ I consider packets of memories that occur within some close proximity or timeframe. These memory collections may also be rewritten, as memories are repressed and replaced with more pleasant or idealized reports of the past (Freud refers to these as “screen memories”).² In TV (2012), I worked with television content from a particular “neighborhood,” from an era in which I was seated before this very same television set, as the minivan slowly crept towards our destination.

I see these memory functions as integral to the understanding of nostalgia. If nostalgia could be contained upon a videocassette, home video segments would be recurrently overdubbed with

² Freud, 202.
codes of advertising, TV, & cinema. Here occurs a marriage of reality and representation, in an unconscious effort to create more idealized memories.

I see the TV in alignment with the Freudian understanding of screen memories. I see the work, as well as the process surrounding it, as mimicking this remembering process. Rather than simply recalling a past experience, I’ve reconstructed and replayed a neighborhood of past events. This time spent travelling in the family minivan is so prominent in my mind, signaling the tendency of childhood memory to favor the more mundane happenings. As an adult, I understand car rides as monotonous and tiring. However, as a child, I favored any opportunity to sit in an air-conditioned environment, amidst a glaring screen. I have trouble recalling where these travels took me. The experience of riding and watching was far more pleasant than trudging through the heat of summer, observing hot rods. Perhaps there is some slight repression occurring here. Those unpleasant memories diminish far more quickly, screened out by those more enjoyable moments. Perhaps this explains my previous attempts to preserve these experiences by revisiting and photographing them.

I continue to carry memories of the content broadcasted before me through my childhood: films, television series, cartoons, commercials, local and national news. These memories operate within a certain place in my mind, recorded within some proximity to experiences from the same period. Recalling one will often summon others.

*Composite Landscapes*

Media integrates itself into our understanding of reality, including our perception of place. This was my consideration upon making a series of panoramic photographs about cinema’s capability to illustrate and illuminate a region in the mind. The first of these images
depicts Monument Valley, Utah, an iconic collection of valleys and bluffs that have provided backdrop for a multitude of Hollywood productions. The photograph was constructed from stills from the film *Easy Rider* (1969). Static fragments from a long cinematic sweep of the landscape were stitched together with image editing software and then finalized as a 74 by 24-inch print. Composition was pre-determined by the film’s cinematographer, as well as the diagonal form of the frame, which was simply caused by an incline in terrain. I initially took an interest in the film as it examines symbols of Americana (which is an inherently nostalgic subject): motorcycles, leather jackets, and Rock & Roll. These icons were once perceived as elements of the counter-culture, ironically becoming engrained in American mass culture, perhaps due in part to *Easy Rider*. These artifacts are now empty signs of rebellion, no longer signifying any real rebellious or deviant behavior.

Figure 3: *Somewhere near Monument Valley, 2013*

I contemplated my relationship to this particular landscape, as it’s depicted in *Easy Rider*, as well as in my mind. Having visited the region, vacationing around the American southwest in my twenties, my understanding of place is now a composite of reality and representation - while stitching the photographs together creates a composite itself (much like the workings of memory). At times, as I call to mind the deserts of the Southwestern United States, I see the
grainy, Technicolor sun setting between sandy buttes, rather than a memory of my time spent there. Representation outweighs reality in this case, as I unconsciously edit an idealized memory of place.

In *The Language of New Media*, media theorist Lev Manovich speaks of cinema and its rivalry with reality. In the chapter, “Archaeology of Compositing: Cinema”, Manovich states, “…if the older simulation technologies were limited by the materiality of a viewer’s body, existing in a particular point in space and time, film overcomes this spatial and temporal limitation. It achieves this by substituting recorded images for unmediated human sight and by editing those images together.” 3 This text suggests the motion picture screen may provide an opportunity for vicarious travel. The codes and constructs of film are capable of giving viewers a sense of presence in the place depicted. As simulation technology advances, cinema becomes a bit outmoded, though its influence on our understanding of reality is unmistakable. Certain qualities of cinema - the language, the tools and techniques (which once advanced the medium), are the reason for this influence. Manovich explains, “…set design, deep focus cinematography, lighting, and camera movement, the viewer is situated at the optimum viewpoint of each shot. The viewer is ‘present’ inside a space that does not really exist.” 4 When you’re positioned at the optimum viewpoint, the view is unbeatable. As I recall my vacation to the Grand Canyon, views along the way seem diminished. In my mind, I see the frame of car window, the outside landscapes shrunken by distance. Cinema eliminates this frame, zooming in on the action, providing a front-row seat. As media evolves beyond cinema, a more immersive viewing experience leads to a more seamless amalgamation with memory and experience.

A later photograph, *Florida 2* (2014), came as a result of wandering through a beachfront event in Pensacola, Florida. The image depicts a woman in red, placed in the center of the frame, appearing to examine a seascape horizon. However, far edges of the composition reveal that the seascape is actually a representation: a large photograph, stretched and suspended by an aluminum backdrop system. The subject gazes into a view of Florida that is fantastical. Screening any unfavorable representations of the region (such as the mundane, landlocked sceneries of small-town Florida), the banner represents an faultless vacation view. *Florida 2* is presented as a 40 x 60-inch print, a large image, as a reference to the tendency of media to become mesmeric, or even hypnotic. I feel that *Florida 2*, along with much of my other work, was very much driven by an interest in the “Pictures Generation” artists of the 1980’s. These works considered the abundance of images in popular culture - turning the camera on the pre-existing picture, rather than attempting to represent reality. These ideas are highlighted in Douglas Crimp’s “Pictures” essay, written to accompany the work for an exhibition of the same name. “[the artists see] representation as an inescapable part of our ability to grasp the world around us.”

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He continues, “For their pictures, these artists have turned to the available images in the culture around them. But they subvert the standard signifying function of those pictures, tied to their captions, their commentaries, their narrative sequences…” 6 I feel an alignment to this postmodern strategy of appropriation – primarily as a statement regarding an overabundance of images within the contemporary experience. The subject in Florida 2 peers into a false horizon, suggesting this false sense of place or presence that media may permit. At the same time, there is a bit of artifice infused within the photograph – the trickery of the photograph is intended to subvert the intentions of such a backdrop. The stretched image presents an oversaturated, flawless horizon, rivaling a physical beach horizon that is just one hundred yards away.

My initial introduction to the Pictures Generation was the work of Richard Prince. Prince’s most well known work entails the appropriation of advertisements, more specifically,

Marlboro’s massively successful “Marlboro Man” advertising campaign. In the series, Prince rephotographs the ads, cropping out any logo or text, leaving only a figure and fragmented landscape. The work is subversive in that it deconstructs the codes of the advertisement, leaving an atmosphere fitting of a Hollywood picture.

![Figure 5: Richard Prince, Untitled (cowboy), 1999, Ektacolor photograph](image)

The distant figures trek among sandstone buttes. The herdsmen don yellow trench coats and white cowboy hats. In an effort to appeal to male demographics, the advertisers have presented the viewer with the rugged, mystic cowboy. Quintessential of 20th century TV and cinema, this archetype exists as a signifier of machismo. Much of Prince’s work demonstrates the repeated codes and subliminal appeal that the image may encompass. This recontextualization of the image stands as an important strategy of postmodern art.
Much of my work investigates the signifying functions of photography, film, and advertising. Images in *Easy Rider* and The Marlboro Man carry signifiers of machismo, freedom, and a mysticism of the West. By removing these images from their context, these social constructs become apparent.

*Voice of the Narrator*

As I became more involved with my video work, I felt the need to demonstrate concepts surrounding memory and nostalgia more accurately. The solution came in the form of written and spoken dialogue, presented in the style of an interview. This technique was established with the work *Interview II*, 2014. The video installation includes: a looping image of Elvis’ grave, recorded at Graceland, an amplified microphone, and a small television, displaying text in the style of a karaoke monitor. As an instrumental rendition of “Are You Lonesome Tonight?” is broadcasted, the monitor displays a written anecdote, the tale of an Elvis fan encountering his idol. The text states, “I sat up on my elbows and saw his face. Then all of a sudden my eyes sort of started playing tricks on me… my brain just couldn’t seem to make sense of it… Instead, I saw all of the postcards, the album covers, the television broadcasts…”
This work also circles the concept of memory, how the mind archives images and applies them to an understanding of reality. Once the protagonist faces his idol in the flesh, having mistakenly wandered into his house, he can’t help but project every picture of Elvis stored within his memory. The images obscure his view of the real thing; the pictures project like a film on the silver screen. Elvis, the cultural icon, exists in his mind as a composite of representation, rather than a person.

In regards to specific content within the work, why present Elvis as the subject? This detail surfaced primarily due to personal nostalgic sentiment. Presley’s voice and image echo throughout memories of my childhood. I pursued this idea by traveling to Graceland, capturing images that would be integrated into my work. Variables in the work are largely determined by involuntary pangs of nostalgia. I hope this layering of content, reflecting memory and nostalgia both in process and concept, to more accurately direct my message regarding the matter.
I’ve also taken an interest in Elvis as a symbol of the late 1950’s and early 60’s, a period perceived by some in following generations as the embodiment of an idealized, prosperous past. I recall watching *Happy Days* as a child. The 1970’s production paints a naïve picture of 50’s suburbia, jam-packed with one-liners and laugh tracks. In “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, Frederic Jameson speaks of the film *American Graffiti* (1973), set in 1962, labeling the work as a “nostalgia film.” Jameson goes on to state, “…one tends to feel, that for Americans at least, the 1950’s remain the privileged lost object of desire – not merely the stability and prosperity of a pax Americana but also the first naïve innocence of the countercultural impulses of early rock and roll and youth gangs…”7 In the case of *American Graffiti* and *Happy Days*, the past is screened and romanticized. Viewers may reminisce over the “good old days,” as the memory of this era has become enhanced with the distance of time.

![Figure 7: Interview I, 2014, Video detail](image)

Another video installation to employ the use of written narrative is *Interview I*, 2014. However, this written account is presented in audio form. The text is read and recorded as if the interview is taking place in a moving vehicle. Corresponding with the audio is video footage appropriated from YouTube, which portrays a first-person drive down the Las Vegas Strip. The interviewer states, “Tell us your story.” The interviewee proceeds to describe his upbringing, a sheltered childhood where he was forbidden by his mother to watch TV or films. On weeknight drives from church, the character passes a neon cowboy sign. Having been secretly introduced to Western films by his grandparents, the sight of the cowboy sign summons images of the films in his mind, as the character projects the pictures on and around the signage. As an adult, the subject tells his story, suggesting an association between image and thing, signifier and signified. Along with the clip captured in Las Vegas, a second video channel displays a cinematic sweep sourced from *Easy Rider*, framed with a black mat in the shape of a car window. The video ends abruptly, as the narrator excitedly announces, “It’s like I was really, really there,” (as he projects the images in his mind). His tone suggests desperation, seeking to escape reality by way of cinema; to be *there*, rather than here.
A third work to utilize fictional narrative is *Chuck’s Bday ’94 / Chuck & Liz Christmas 1993* (2014). The work was constructed of one white bookcase (assembled – particle board, paper lamination), twenty-two white VHS clamshell cases (new – empty), and a single-channel video projection. The narrator of the work speaks of his father, the proprietor of a local video rental store. He recalls unruly children taking the tapes and overdubbing them with various content (pornographic film, television series, the Olympics). This element stands as another reference to the mechanics of the mind, screening memories and replacing them with representation. Most of the video footage in the installation was appropriated from a single VHS tape titled, “Chuck’s Bday ’94 / Chuck & Liz Christmas 1993” – found at a local thrift store. The footage was converted in its entirety to a digital file, and then manipulated in various ways.
(trimmed and re-sequenced). The reconstructed footage was projected above the bookcase; on the shelf, real and fictional film titles are projected on the spines of the VHS cases, alternating regularly.

I felt inclined to include some more mundane moments of “Chuck’s Bday ’94” in the work, documents that were likely motivated by the excitement of using a camcorder (video recording being far less ubiquitous than it is today, with the availability of smartphones). These moments include: filming the pets, placing the camera on a tripod and recording Christmas dinner in its entirety. The characters (Chuck, Liz, Phil, and Karen), two twenty-something couples living in Los Angeles, operate the camera with a child-like eagerness. This type of looking is characterized in Charles Baudelaire’s “Painter of Modern Life.” Baudelaire compares the flâneur, the observer of modern life, to a child or convalescent. He states, “The convalescent, like the child, enjoys to the highest degree the faculty of taking a lively interest in things, even the most trivial in appearance… The child sees everything as a novelty; the child is always ‘drunk’…”

This idea of the flâneur, a wanderer of sorts, has certainly been present within the tradition of street photography. As I closely examined the dialogue, environments, and gestures of the characters, piecing together the vignettes began to feel reminiscent of compiling and sequencing a body of photographs. Though I haven’t captured the images myself, I have assumed authorship through the editing process. I traveled the perimeters of the tape, fast-forwarding, rewinding – searching for moments, gestures, or micro-gestures, as defined by Jeff Wall. Within an interview in Michael Fried’s Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before, Wall states, “Within my pictures, there is a lot of non-gesturing, or very small, compulsive

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gesturing, what I call ‘micro-gesture’… gestures which seem automatic, mechanical, or compulsive.”
I view this process, scouring through volumes of found footage, as similar to editing photographs in order to build a body of work.

Between sequences of “Chuck’s Bday ’94,” I inserted a handful of clips and sounds taken from true cinema - films produced within the realm of the film industry (converted from analog to digital as well, in order to produce seamless transitions in and out of “Chuck’s Bday ’94”). These include the Paramount Pictures opening mountain sequence and brief sequences from The Buttercream Gang - a 1992 morally didactic Family Drama that includes an exaggerated depiction of schoolyard bullying, a trope of the American Family Drama. Film titles appear briefly on the spines of the VHS cassettes by way of projection mapping. The titles, often cliché – The Big Lie, Do the Bright Thing, were selected to reinforce a questioning of moralistic television and film. This genre resonated strongly with me, as I recalled visiting the church media library as a child. I contemplated children who were restricted from viewing or reading secular media, an idea I also considered while writing the dialogue in Interview I. Joining the dramatic tropes of cinema with the banalities of consumer video recording - I hoped to question the nature of personal image making within one specific medium: the videocassette – where content of all kinds are held within countless libraries of magnetic tape.

This looking back to my past continues to subtly inform content within my work. Several of my video works have employed the voice of a narrator to illustrate the concepts surrounding representation and immersion in the image. The narrator of Trace, 2014, tells of a boy who watches James Bond films on the beach as his family swims and sunbathes. The boy, Trace, is so immersed in the films that he unconsciously mouths the dialogue, with his eyes glued to the

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television set. I can recall childhood friends being so involved in the experience of watching television that I would need to shake them to get their attention, this idea providing a basis for the character.

Figure 9: *Trace*, 2014

I presented the work on a cathode ray tube television (the precursor of newer display technologies like LCD or plasma) with a large glass screen. The screen displays driving footage appropriated from YouTube (“Elliot Rd to Power Road south to Ray Rd, Mesa Arizona, 30 July 2013” by user Robert Trudell) with recorded dialogue overdubbed. On the glass screen, I attached a retractable auto sunshade. The glass screen references a passenger-side car window. The sunshade reflects an idea of the screen being obstructed, a distraction – as in the work *TV*, where the obstruction exists as the glare of the sun. I see the screen and sunshade as interchangeable symbols, media being a distraction from reality and reality distracting viewers
from becoming immersed in media. While viewers often turn to media as a form of escape, they choose to distract themselves from reality.

Comfort in Distance

I find the concept of distance continually surfacing in my work, whether it is physical distance or distance caused by the passing of time. Media is capable of giving its viewers, listeners, or readers, the sensation of pulling things closer. A photograph or home movie brings its viewer back, or brings the past closer. There is a comfort or pleasure associated with this pulling inwards, that being nostalgia when we are speaking of the past.

In his essay, “The Work of Art in the Mechanical Age of Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin speaks of this desire to be close. He views this aspiration as analogous to another symptom of society: the gradual acceptance of representation over reality. Benjamin also perceives these motivations as a combined movement that will eliminate aura, an essence once attributed to uniqueness, occurring in works of art as well as in the natural world. In speaking of the, “social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura,” he states, “It rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Everyday the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.”

As the viewer seems to be pulled closer, they are in fact placing distance between themselves and an objective understanding of reality, relying on representation as a truthful account. Philosophical notions of the sublime may be applied to how distant places become present by way of media. Authors have often directed their reader or viewer to places of danger or discomfort. The reader, viewer, or participant may experience the sublime, observing vast, dangerous, overpowering concepts from a safe distance. While nostalgia brings fleeting, mundane moments closer to incite pleasure, in contrast, the sublime puts the viewer at a distance, also provoking feelings of pleasure. Jean-Francois Lyotard defines the sublime in “The Sublime and Avant-Garde,” contrasting it to the idea of beauty. He states, “Beauty gives a positive pleasure. But there is another kind of pleasure that is bound to a passion stronger than satisfaction, and that is pain and impending death.”

I’ve also been interested in references to the sublime throughout art history, encountering a repeated motif in pictorial representations of the idea. In a series of photographs by Jack Goldstein and a particular painting by Caspar David Friedrich, both artists portray a lone, distant figure engulfed by vast, negative space: the void. In Goldstein’s series of three large photographs (30 by 40-inches each), titled The Pull (1976), we see a tiny black figure, arms outstretched, falling amongst a bright blue backdrop. The image was achieved by Goldstein tossing action figures up towards the sky, quickly photographing them before they return to the earth. The scale of the image and dominance of negative space lends to a strong engagement with the viewer, as one’s vision becomes enveloped by the nothingness. Similarly, in Friedrich’s The Monk by the Sea (1810), a small figure stands on a shoreline, surveying the rough, grey sea ahead. Friedrich

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also utilizes the effects of scale, with a large canvas of 43 by 67-inches. Making Florida 2 led me to reconsider Friedrich’s *Monk by the Sea*, while also referencing concepts of simulation.


Having been introduced to the work of Friedrich and others engaging with an Existentialist understanding of the sublime, I was incited to create a video work, titled *Comedian* (2013). Around this time, I had taken an interest in stand-up comedy, particularly performers who candidly address death and existence, such as Louis C.K. and George Carlin. I understood these statements as connected to the sublime, these performers use comedy in order to distance themselves from death, resulting in pleasure.

In *Comedian*, I literalize these notions of the sublime with image composition and spoken dialogue. In viewing videos of these performances, I observed the black of the large stage, only the figure illuminated by stage lights. The figure is small, engulfed by the large stage, a visual motif referencing Friedrich’s painting. I noted the standard comedian costume: a black t-shirt. The work presents a comedian (performed by myself), stepping on stage to deliver a single line through the microphone, and to then be heavily applauded: “You know you’re all going to die one day, right?” Upon delivering the line, the comedian quickly departs the stage, only to return seconds later, as the video is a continuous loop. In the image, the figure is found in a spotlight,
placed in the bottom right corner of a tremendous “stage” (the frame of the image). The work was presented as a video projection, an installation within a darkened room. The stage was suggested by painting a large black box on the wall, then projecting onto the surface.

Figure 12: Comedian, 2013.

In the paintings of Friedrich lies a Romantic interpretation of the sublime. A viewing of the work may reflect Benjamin’s philosophies on representation and its rivalry with reality. Though reception of the painted image differs greatly from the photograph, viewers could still use The Monk by the Sea to experience the simulated sensation of being within some proximity of the intimidating forces of nature; a desolate mass of land stretched along a white-capped sea. In viewing artworks that engage with the sublime, the viewer is provided a false sense of presence. The viewer may feel as if they’ve traveled to a distant place. Much like the sublime, the sensation of nostalgia may bring the viewer, or rememberer, beyond their present location.
An Engagement with New Media

New technologies, including wearable/mountable cameras and Google Street View, provide firsthand, immersive opportunities for the armchair traveler. The source material for the work *Motovlogger* (2015) was content published to YouTube by user “dat1dominicankid16”, as, “My First Motorcycle Accident unedited RAW footage.” The crash itself was only briefly referenced in *Motovlogger*. I was more interested in the moments leading up to the crash – a routine cruise through the Bronx. I see this as another reference to the mechanics of memory, screening out the crash to leave only the mundane moments.

![Figure 13: Motovlogger, 2015](image)

With the aid of Google Maps and Google Street View, I mapped the driver’s route, using this information to inform the voice of a narrator – who at first appears to be the driver himself. It is revealed, however (as the narrator begins scrubbing ahead through the footage), that the voice is of a homesick spectator – visiting the Bronx vicariously through dat1dominicankid16.
The narrator points out changes to the landscape, businesses that appeared and disappeared since he has left town. In this instance, the narrator utilizes technology in order to bring the past closer, inciting the pleasure of nostalgia.

I am interested in the work of artists Jon Rafman and Doug Rickard, particularly their use of Google Street View. The image below, published by Jon Rafman, depicts a fight taking place in the middle of the street, the image clearly appropriated from Google Maps. While the image was captured using an automated process, Rafman has managed to locate an image with formal success, having a particularly strong composition. Both artists scan the virtual streets and capture still images (by way of screenshot), seeking candid moments that are reminiscent of street photography. While the tradition of street photography is heavily rooted in Modernism, Rafman and Rickard bring the conversation into the Postmodern spectrum, using the Postmodern strategy of appropriation. The work also seems to question the motivations behind this sort of documentation. How may a society benefit from gaining access to this sort of visual data? I feel that it is imperative of artists to take part in the critical engagement of new media technologies, such as Street View.
Conclusion

The focus of my work has gradually centered on the integration of media and representation into real experience. I feel that the world, as we understand it, is built through our involvement with media. While society still places a distinction between reality and representation, a merging is imminent. These changes are evident in observing technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality. By addressing the way we engage with technologies, new and old, as well as questioning our motives, I hope to observe the consequences of this insistent integration. The threat in this assimilation lies in the motives of mass media.

The influence of media is nearly inescapable. Through critical observation and the utilization of new media, technology, and the Internet, the artist may illuminate the consequences of these changes.
Bibliography


Vita

The author was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in June 1988. Having received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Louisiana State University in 2010. He relocated to New Orleans in 2011. He began studies at the University of New Orleans in 2012, receiving a Graduate Assistantship.