Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Digital Institutional Repository

5-17-2013

Coup d'oeil

Stephanie Quarto

Recommended Citation

R·I·T

coup d'œil

by
Stephanie Quarto

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
In Imaging Arts

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY
May 17, 2013

Carla Williams, Committee Chair   Date

Jessica Lieberman, Committee Member   Date

Clarence Sheffield Jr., Committee Member   Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

coup d'œil

By

STEPHANIE QUARTO

MFA, Imaging Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2013
BA, Philosophy/Studio Art, SUNY Oneonta, 2003

ABSTRACT

Advertising and the culture industry are merging technically no less than economically. In both, the same thing appears in countless places, and the mechanical repetition of the same culture product is already that of the same propaganda slogan. In both, under the dictate of effectiveness, technique is becoming psychotechnique, a procedure for manipulating human beings. In both, the norms of the striking yet familiar, the easy but catchy, the worldly wise but straightforward hold good; everything is directed at overpowering a customer conceived as distracted or resistant.[1]

coup d'œil translates as "stroke of eye;" it also means a sudden blink or glimpse. It was used as a military term referring to a general's ability to assess with a single glance the advantages and disadvantages of a battlefield. I have titled this thesis *coup d'œil* because it addresses the general lack of strategy and analysis by viewers of popular images. Images are omnipresent; they guide and influence humanity. They are not inherently adversarial, but when they assault both our conscious and unconscious minds, they can be extremely influential and destructive. The images in this thesis are similarly made to manipulate. *coup d'œil* has two main categories of images: the real (images taken of the consumer or viewer) and the simulated (images produced for the consumer or viewer). Through the juxtaposition of images *of* the viewer and *for* the viewer, the thesis installation exposes this relationship between the viewer and the media.

---

[1] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* 1944, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 133.

Never before have generations of people been so absorbed and influenced by images. As a result of this, the image no longer bears a social responsibility outside of its primary role as advertisement and/or publicity, which in itself is a form of advertisement. But the viewer is only more malleable. The ability to influence the viewer increases with the lack of distinction between entertainment and advertisement, which can be seen in viewers' constructed identities on social networking and photo sharing websites. This thesis entreats the viewer not to ignore the transforming power of media. In a capitalist society, images specifically target the viewer in the guise of entertainment. If viewers do not analyze these images, no less than our identities, our lives, and our culture are at stake. This thesis is both a warning against and monument to the influential power of images and their role on our lives.

Images have replaced words as a dominant mode of expression because of their sheer volume and the manner in which they are received. *coup d'œil* addresses images as a dominant mode of expression and reception in our times. It also addresses the nature of interpretation under the illusion of entertainment. It begs the question if we are served signs, and their information, as entertainment, do we ever give these signs and their significations due critical thought and analysis? And if this is a dominant mode of expression, shouldn't we?

INTRODUCTION

The spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a real product of that reality.[2]

coup d'œil is a visual deconstruction of appropriated images from popular media sources that examines the effects of these images on our cultural and individual identities. Seeing the original images in the context of a television show or a commercial, the viewer often overlooks how the images function: the fact that they are trying to solicit, and the results of such solicitations on him or her. Media theorist, Marshall McLuhan refers to the viewer who is constantly confronted by advertising's strategic images as existing in "somnambulistic state," which leaves him or her vulnerable and easily influenced.[3] In turn, the contemporary viewer mimics the media in his or her self-presentation on social networking and photo-sharing websites. *coup d'œil* addresses the alienation of the viewer in the new media world of screens, social media, and devices.

This project started three years ago when I met with a professor to show him some work, and he asked me simply, "why not television?" It seemed so unrelated to anything that I had been doing or had shown him, but the question struck me rather deeply. The role of television in my life is very personal, almost familial: I was the only child of a single mother and spent many of my formative years perched in front of the TV. For the first half of my life, I went to bed every night to its bedtime stories. I woke up and watched it. Before school, I went to a lady's house and watched it there, too. I came home from school and watched it. I watched it over the noise of the children playing outside. I watched it as I waited for dinner. I watched it before bed.

I gave up television when I went to college. Years later, I realized I didn't want or need it. I was more productive, smarter without one. My mind was faster and more analytic. I read more. Yet I had become disconnected. Everyone I spoke with would reference something they saw and

---

[2] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Sussex: Soul Bay Press LTD., 2009) 8
[3] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (1964; repr., Corte Madera: Gingko Press Inc., 2003) 307

suddenly it was as if I were viewing the world from the outside. I was in awe of the power of images to influence not just identity but, to some degree, a person's entire existence. I became distinctly aware of the image on screen as a source of alienation.

In *The Necessity of Art*, Ernst Fischer, a Marxist romantic, warns the reader: "The industrialized, commercialized capitalistic world has become an outside world of impenetrable material connexions and relationships. The man living in the midst of that world is alienated from it and from himself."[4] Fischer's discussion of the evolution of images and their societal roles influenced my new revelations and led me to question the roles of imagery in our contemporary culture.

After college, I was once again confronted by the television. Just prior to moving to New York City, I had spent almost six months living in the woods in an Edenic paradise. I slept in a tepee, bathed in a stream, and made life-sized sculptures out of papier-mâché and chicken wire (Figure 1.1), intending for them to disintegrate so that I could photograph the process. While building the *Paper People*, I would go weeks without seeing a television or any screen. Moving back to the city was a new trauma. Now, I was spending my days in front of computers, digital billboards, televisions, and cellphones. I couldn't watch without analyzing it; it became research. As a child I had trained myself to resist my wants and the

Figure 1.1 *Paper People*, 2003, papier-mâché and chicken wire, Treadwell, NY

[4] Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art* (1971; repr., Brooklyn: Penguin Press, 2010) 221.

images that told me to want. As an adult, I found myself untrained in a city of images telling me that I should feel the need for Manolo Blahniks or a Louis Vuitton bag; I was struggling for subway fare. I began to look at images more critically. I had been obsessed with concepts of alienation since I was an undergraduate, but there was no way to represent the philosophical ideas of alienation without discussing the source, its symptoms, and its victims. This alienation comes from the images' ability to manipulate the desires and identity of the viewer.

My thesis began with a process. I took some time and just shot freely. Visually, I was really interested in commercial items: grocery carts, magazine racks, the bright colors of the candy aisle. I also staked out a McDonalds, a Wal-Mart, and a Wegman's parking lot (Figure 1.2 and 1.3). I sat in my car on a rainy night with the video camera on my dashboard and documented

Figure 1.2 *Lullabye*, 2007, Video Stills, Webster, NY   Figure 1.3 *Lullabye*, 2007, Video Stills, Webster, NY

the routines of commerce. I also began an intense study of our visual culture and the images that impact us most in the sheer quantity of views. For several months, I took screen shots of AOL's top five stories everyday. I photographed everything, yet I really didn't photograph any thing— just the screens they were on.

Theorist Guy Debord wrote in *Society of the Spectacle*:

> *The alienation of the spectator, which reinforces the contemplated objects that result from his own unconscious activity, works like this: The more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominate images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires.*[5]

But it is not that the spectator understands his own life or desire less; rather, it is that his understanding has been imbued by the spectacle and any understanding of his will inevitably reflects the demands of "the dominant images of need."

---

[5] Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, (Sussex: Soul Bay Press LTD., 2009) 30

MAP OF THE COUP' DŒIL INSTALLATION
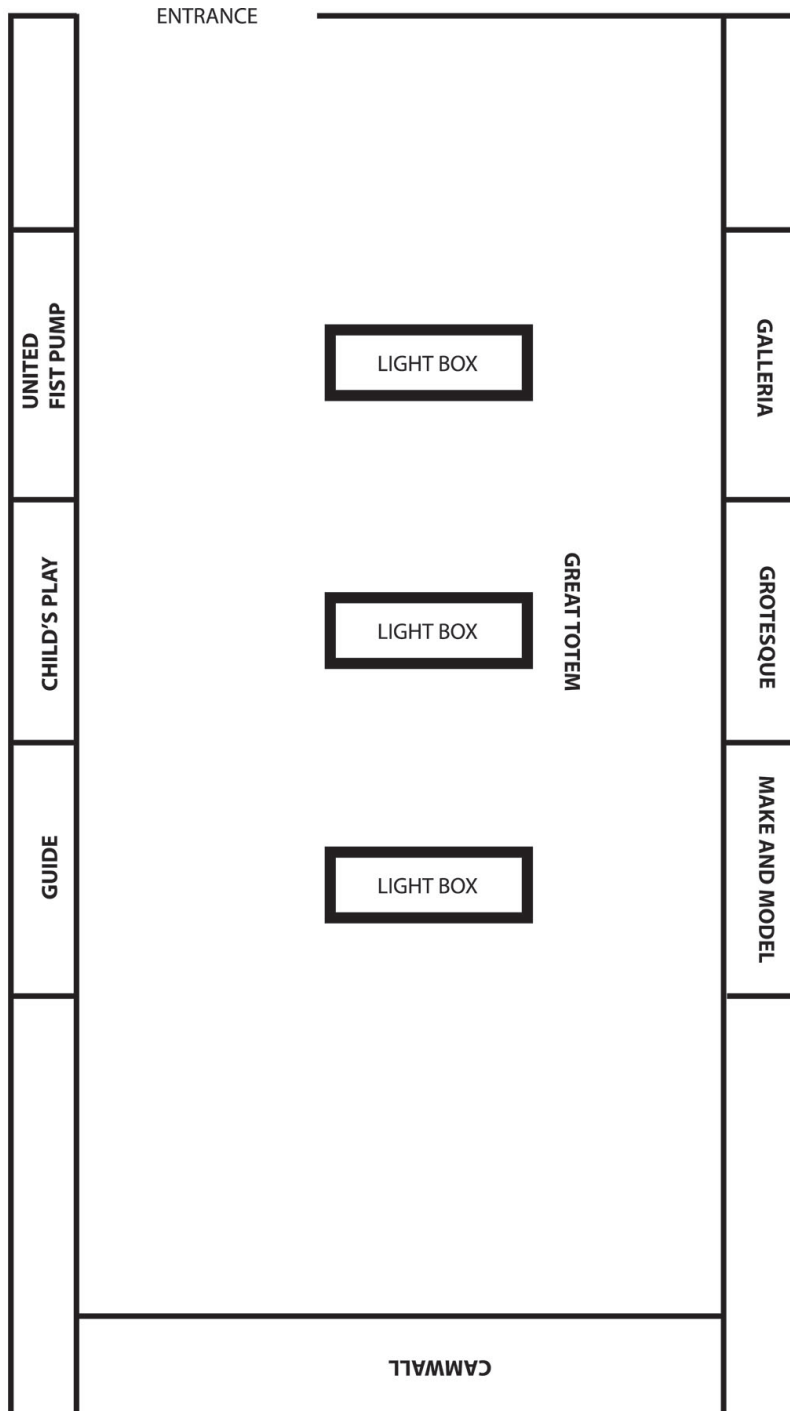
Figure 1.4 Map of *coup d'œil* installation

THE INSTALLATION

The *coup d'œil* installation (Figure 1.5) consisted of more than five hundred images, seven projected videos, three double-sided 8-foot light boxes, and an audio track. Each video projection and the light box images were all from individual series. The installation was set up so that viewers would snake and weave through the *Great Totem* pillars to the next video series. There were three 48" × 60" projections on each wall. At the end of the space, the viewer would come upon the *Camwall*, a gridded series of one hundred webcam models in a loop.

Figure 1.5 View of the *coup d'œil installation*, 2012, Video Projection, Duratrans mounted on Double Sided Light Boxes. In this image. you can see from left to right, *Camwall*, *Great Totem*, and *Guide*.
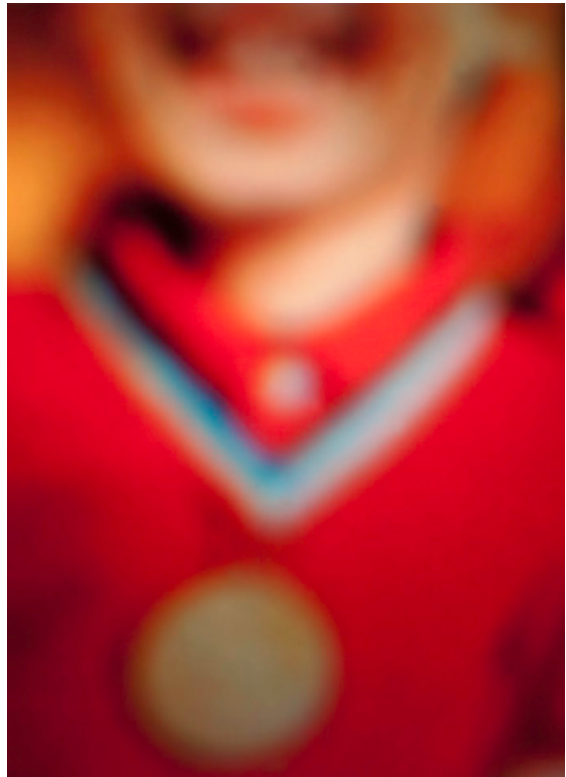
Figure 1.6 Stills from *Child's Play* Video

MERCANTILE MEDIA IMAGES

The three projections consisted of advertising images. In *Child's Play* (Figure 1.6), the images were taken from commercials aimed at children, which came about while I was watching television and paused on a commercial image of a boy with a red shirt and a giant medal on his neck for a child-themed entertainment play area. But what I saw and received was the sign and symbol of a prize, a heavy gold ornament hung by a ribbon around a child's neck. I saw the color red. I saw blond hair. I saw how carefully planned out and even political these aesthetic choices were. Though fleeting, this image was psychologically imposing. This relationship with images and desire begins in youth when the child's wish lists are shaped by the advertisements nestled between their cartoons, and winning, prizes, dread, anxiety, and ambition are the early lessons delineating the haves and have-nots. In his definitive book *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger writes:

> *The purpose of publicity is to make the spectator marginally dissatisfied with his present way of life....All publicity works upon anxiety. The sum of everything is money, to get money is to overcome anxiety. Alternatively, the anxiety on which publicity plays is the fear that having nothing you will be nothing.[6]*

Berger is dealing more with straightforward campaigns, his discussion is relevant to the full gamut of media images, whether from commercials, programs, or web banners. Media images work off of the anxiety of not having, of not being a complete individual unless we possess what is advertised. When I watched the commercials at full speed, the children seemed to be having a blast; however, frame-by-frame, their expressions were grim and anxious. The children's facial expressions meant to denote play and enjoyment exhibited fear, dread, and anxiety. These early moments forge a person's identity and create the earliest relationships between the viewer and image, setting the groundwork for future interpretations, significances, and meanings. They also set a precedent for the viewers' susceptibility to the images' messages.

---

[6] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (1972; repr., Brooklyn: Penguin Press, 1977) 142-143

Figure 1.7 Stills from *Make and Model*

The images in *Make and Model* (Figure 1.7) were appropriated from a slide show of fashion models, disintegrating to glowing and lingering essences that reference the cultural demand for homogeneity. The creative process and reproduction reference Walter Benjamin's concept of the "aura," while the ethereal and aesthetic quality suggests the more colloquial usage of the term. Benjamin discusses the destruction of aura as such:

> *One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.*[7]

The aura has an ethereal place in the mind, in memory. These images with their dictates of beauty, influence our understanding and ultimately our mate selections and even our reproductivity. Make and Model refers to the inorganic and artificiality, "the spell of personality" that is no longer the domain of celebrity but is now cast from the viewer himself or herself. The viewer, in miming the models before them, have made themselves an extension of the models aura; the imitation is that extension. In discussing cinema, Benjamin similarly concludes,

> *The film responds to the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the 'personality' outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity*[8]

Just as the movie star loses their unique aura as a person, so does the viewer. The viewer determines his or her own aesthetic qualities and values based on these cultural images. I set out

---

[7] Walter Benjamin, "*The Work of Art in the of Mechanical Reproduction*" in *Illuminations* (1968; repr., New York: Schoken Books, 2007) 221.
[8] Ibid., 231.

Figure 1.8 Stills from *Guide*

to find the specific images in *Guide* (Figure 1.8) rather then happen upon them. They originated from a slide show of the then-top ten television shows. Images of families or groups of people spaced a foot to a foot and half apart are commonly used for promotional shots and program introductions. This is an inviting image that signifies to the viewer "you are one of us," "this is your group," "this is your family," and "join us." The title references the TV Guide or program listing, as well as an image's ability to guide the viewer. This series was a way to break down some of these codes and instructions that go into our regularly scheduled televised programming.
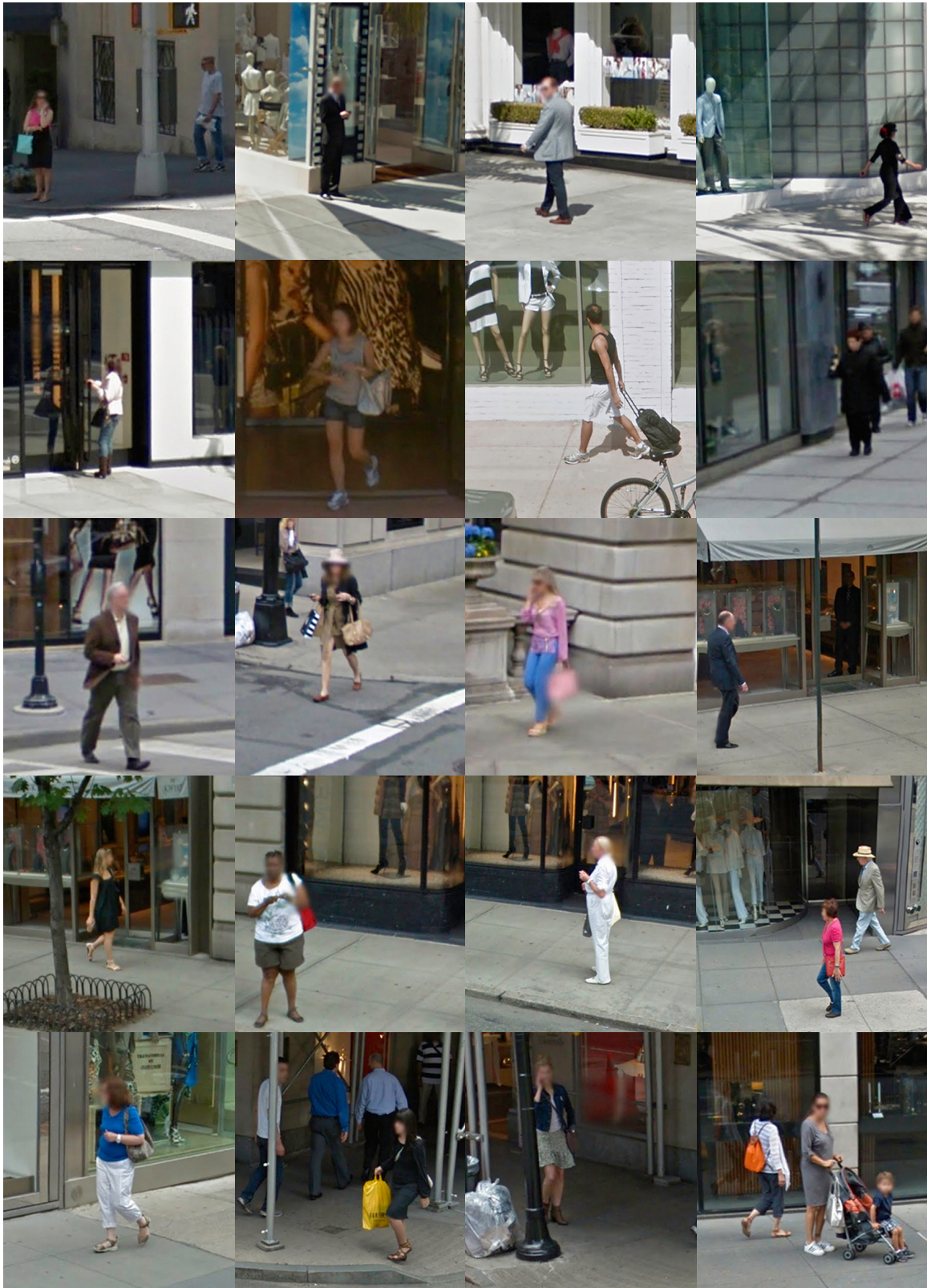
Figure 1.9 Stills from *Galleria*

EVERY DAY PEOPLE

In *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord writes, "Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation."[9] Today we have an almost desperate need to document and photograph EVERYTHING and then post it on social networks or photo sharing websites for a type of existential publicity; to show the world we are living, and we are living well. The viewer, in front of the camera, has lost himself or herself. His or her identity has been shaken by media messages. The viewer, who is now the subject, gestures. This has always been the case with representation. The viewer replicates poses, stances, and gestures in accordance with the representations of his or her time. Such images reflect the viewer's loss of identity; the default to the new generic gestures of the time. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes takes his reader on a psychological journey through a photograph, writing, "Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image....I derive my existence from the photographer."[10] The three series *Galleria*, *United Fist Pump*, and *Grotesque* specifically address this "posing" and these existential dilemmas with images.

The video *Galleria* (Figure 1.9) seemingly randomly presents images of unsuspecting consumers. I specifically sought out areas of commerce such as Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, Collins Avenue, in Miami, and Fifth Avenue in New York.

United Fist Pump (figure 2.0) shows how even in moments of leisure people are compelled to act alike, to duplicate what they have been instructed is a fun way of being. The gesture of power in this context exhibits a type of impotence, specifically with regard to social discomfort and a loss of identity. The viewer, now in front of the camera, replicates and conforms to the gestures associated with going out or partying.

---

[9] Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, (Sussex: Soul Bay Press LTD., 2009) 1.
[10] Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 10.
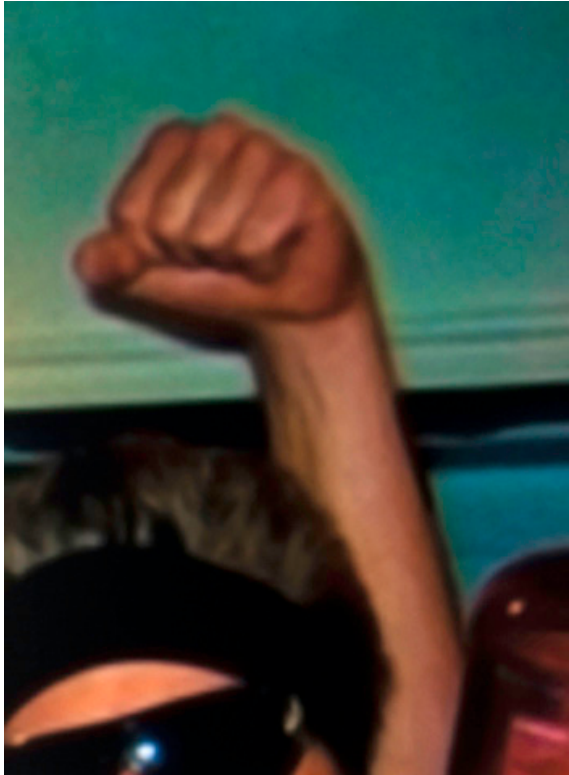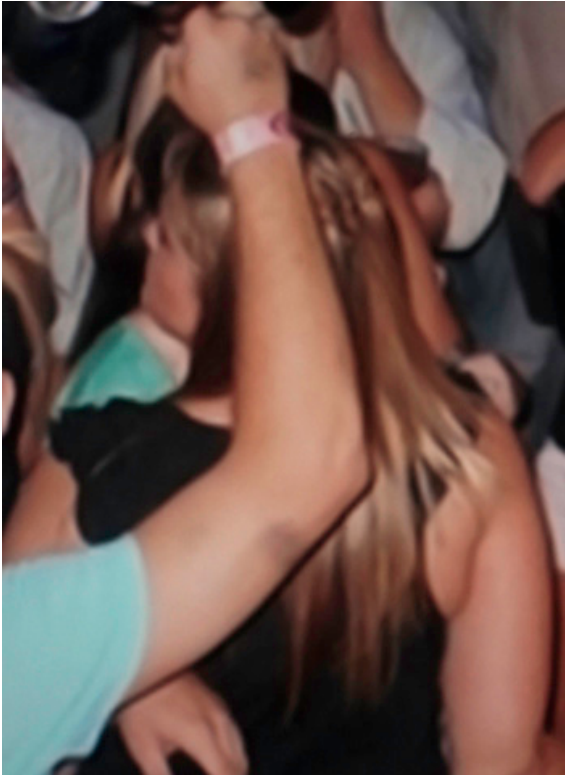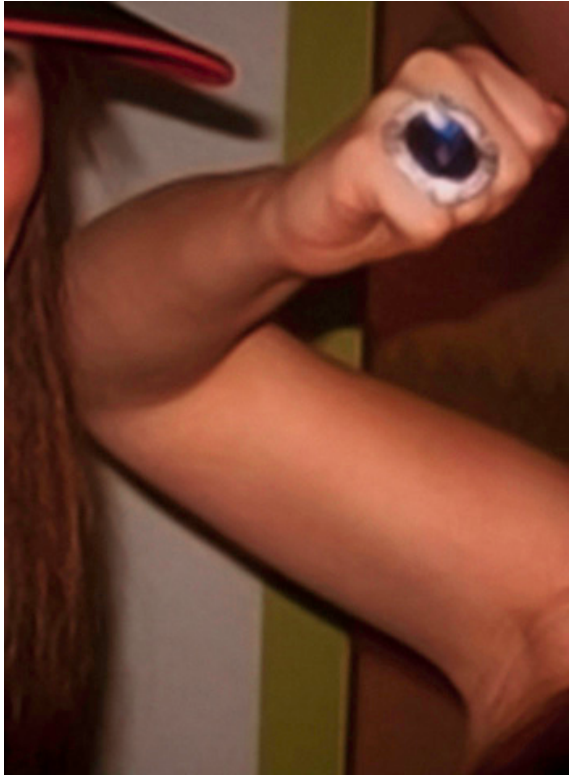
Figure 2.0 Stills from *United Fist Pump*

The consumer clings to the constructs of this artificial pose, a pose he or she was taught through the media. In *Grotesque* (figure 2.1), the images are cropped shots of lips pursed to look ironically or sarcastically sexy. This series exhibits the viewer's discomfort in front of the camera. Now as the subject and insecure in their own self, they pose and purse their lips in a silly, goofy, or an ironic gesture in which there is also the hope of appearing more attractive and desirable. The sucked-in cheeks create bone structure, the lips are subtly plush with desire. The gesture is commonly refereed to as "duck face", "kissy face", or "fishy face".

Figure 2.1 Stills from *Grotesque*

IMAGES OF LIVE WEBCAMS

The webcam is an interesting phenomenon of contemporary culture, where both the everyday person can broadcast himself or herself via any give number of devices and where the everyday person can be monitored and viewed by the mysterious eyes in the sky. Nothing seems to go unseen. At the center of the exhibit stood three double-sided light boxes that were 36" × 96" × 24". *Great Totem* (figure 2.2) is the most abstract work, taken from webcam images of Times Square.

Jean Baudrillard said, "There is no longer a staging of the commodity: there is only its obscene and empty form. And advertising is the illustration of this saturated and empty form."[11] *Great Totem* and *Make and Model* most poignantly and directly address the obscene and empty form of which Baudrillard speaks. W.J.T. Mitchell explains that the literal interpretation of totem means "a relative of mine."[12] Mitchell explains, "They are, rather, 'identity' objects associated with tribes or clans, and individual tribal members occasionally serve as tutelary or guardian spirits."[13] He explains that the totem is associated with destiny, identity, and community.

For Mitchell, the totem is less threatening than the idol or the fetish because of its naturalness and the community's reliance upon them for a sense of individual and communal identity. Mitchell examines how we speak about and think about images as living entities with wills, desires, and demands, as if they "have legs"[14]. In *Great Totem*, the animals on our totems are these images that define our society: the empty forms of the screens in Times Square. In making the distinction between fossils and the totem, Mitchell writes, "The one is a trace of an extinct animal, an image reconstructed by the methods of modern science. The other is the image of a living animal, as constructed within a premodern set of religious or magical rituals."[15] The living

---

[11] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (New York: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 93.
[12] WJT Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) 98.
[13] Ibid., 161.
[14] WJT Mitchell, "What Do Pictures *Really* Want?*" October, Vol. 77 (Summer, 1996) 73.
[15] Ibid., 181.
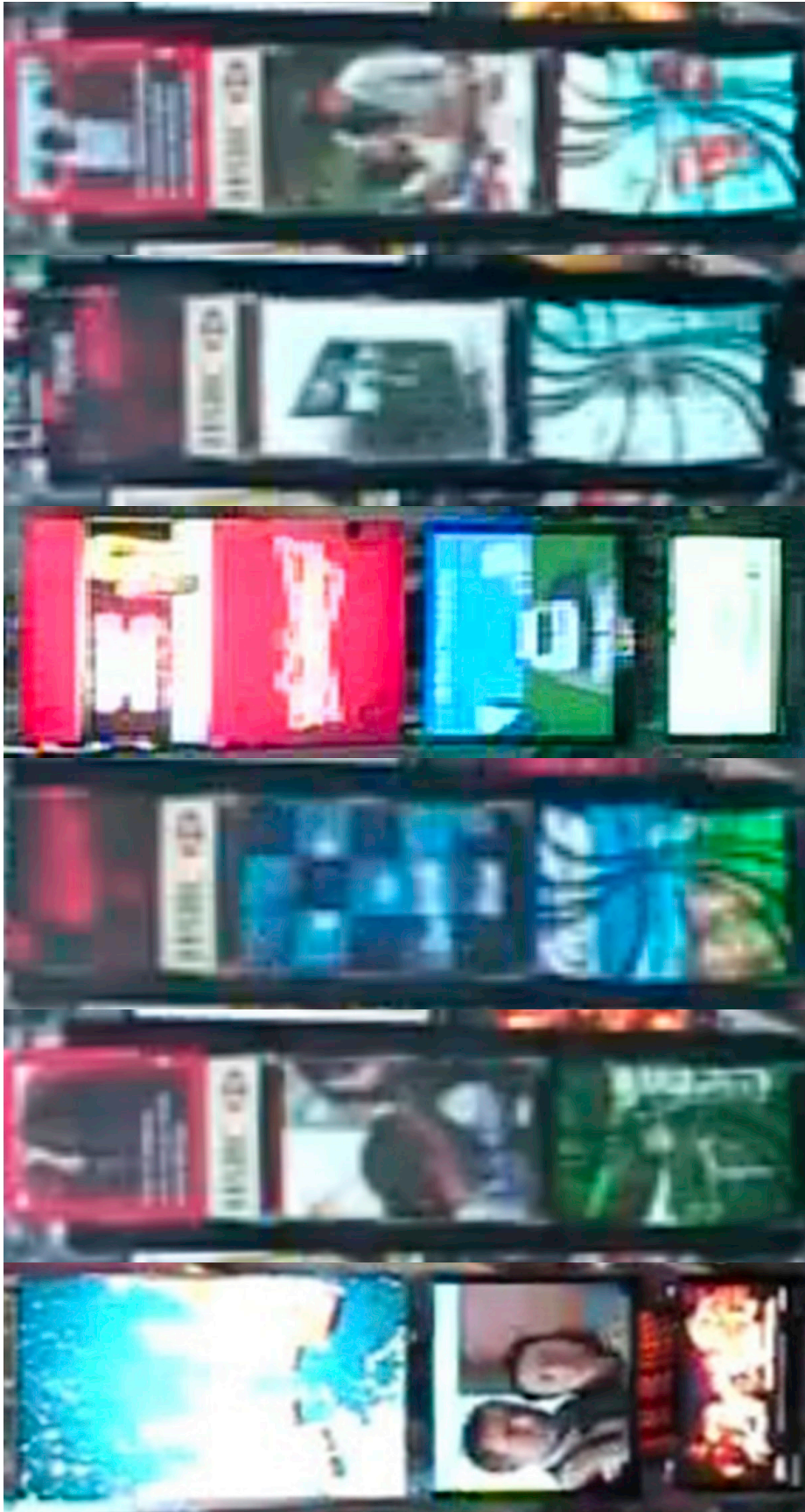
Figure 2.2 *Great Totem*

image still holds in it this "premodern magical ritual."[16] Tourists flock to the lights of Times Square to bask in the screen rays and to be a part of this community where visitors are united by the screen images.

The *Camwall* (Figure 2.3) videos are of webcam models who work in the sex industry. The *Camwall* was an impressive 96" × 168" projection onto a screen on the back wall of the gallery. In *Discipline & Punish*, Michel Foucault discusses the panopticon as a tool for control, separation, and surveillance: "Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so."[17] The reverse panopticon is this idea that we are constantly looking into screens that surround us, and we are constantly reminded that we are being viewed and often captured. As a result, the viewer/viewed exists in a constant state of gesture and posing. The figures in this video represent the oppression of gesture, a type of "disciplinary mechanism" in itself. The figures are trapped in the loop of their own inauthentic posturing.

In discussing the use of surveillance, separation, and plague, Foucault writes:

> *The enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing linked the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among other living beings, the sick and dead—all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism.[18]*

In *Camwall*, individuals separated in their boxes act under the same hierarchy of a "disciplinary mechanism."[19] The grid denotes surveillance and also allows for comparison: The viewer can watch and analyze one hundred gesturing and posing subjects simultaneously and draw his or her

---

[16] Ibid.

[17] Michael Foucault, *Discipline & Punish* (1975; repr., New York: Random House, 1995) 201.

[18] Ibid., 194.

[19] Ibid., 194.
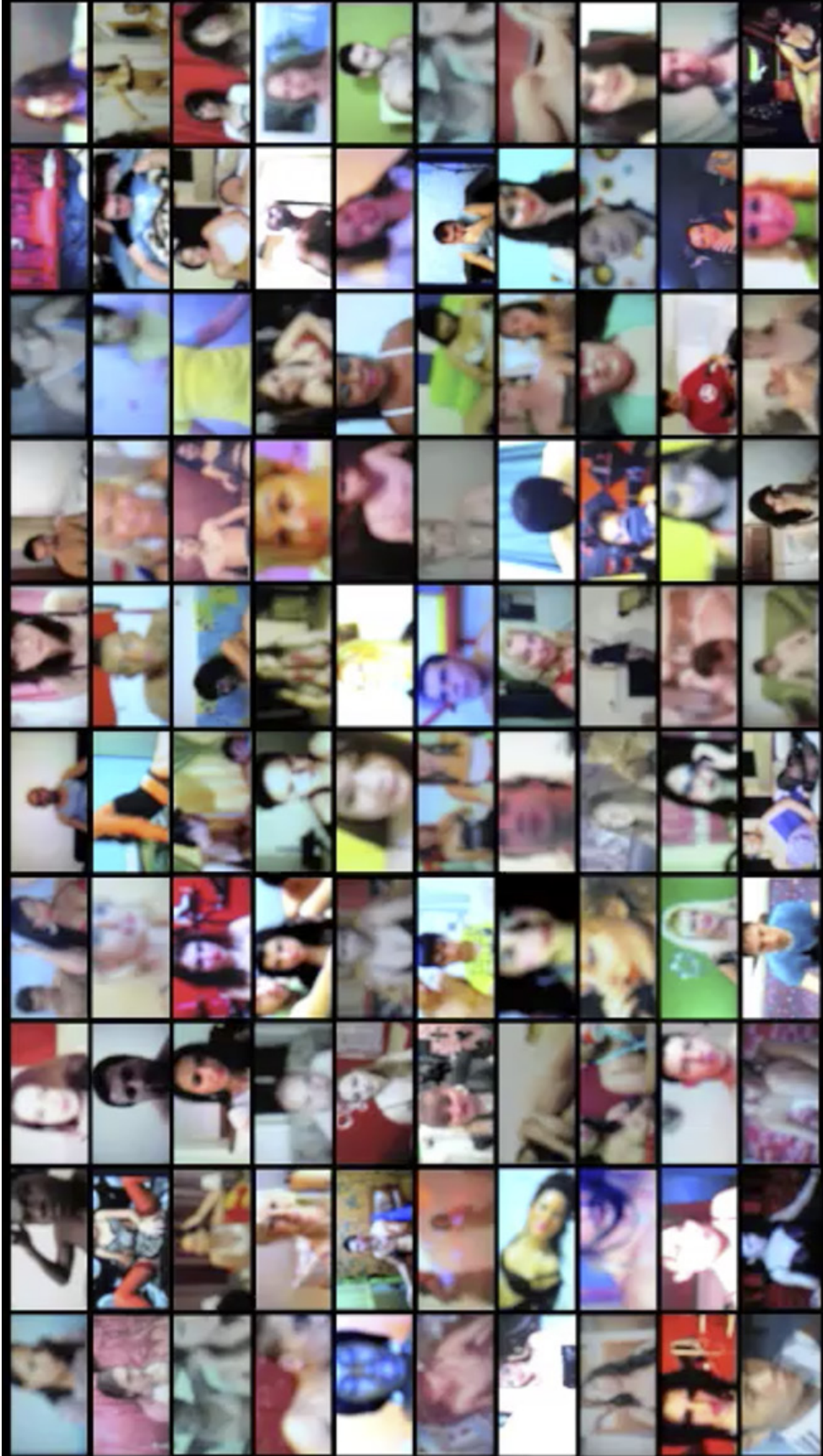
Figure 2.3 Stills from *Camwall*

own conclusions. By re-purposing, editing and looping these videos, I emphasize their mechanical and automated gestures, their redundant attempts to groom , and the poses of the models constantly adjusting themselves and gesturing for an anonymous audience. The models move at similar intervals; adjusting and checking themselves every five seconds or so. How are they gesturing? What are they doing to keep their viewers' attention? How are they miming the media that instructed them in the course of desirability? In "The Photograph: The Brothel-Without-Walls," Marshall McLuhan discusses the image's role in outlining a language of gesture in the human form. "The age of the photograph has become the age of gesture and mime and dance, as no other has ever been,"[20] McLuhan writes. The age of the image has created this gesture paradigm in our culture. The authentic life has been replaced with the gesture caught by a sea of cell phone cameras bearing witness and testimony.

PRIME TIME AUDIO

In a recent advertisement for a cloud storage product, the pitch was something along the lines of, "Use the cloud like a normal, well-adjusted individual in the 21st century," attacking identity by hinging the listener's identity to the products they consume. *Audiotisemented* deconstructs media audio tracks. I had started recording audio toward the end of creating the images for this installation. I had been testing the projections,

and they seemed incomplete without the noise. While recording the videos for *Camwall*, the television remained on with the volume very loud during prime time. The audio was hacked and chopped until all that was left were short dystopic sound bytes of laughing, clapping, advertisements, and key phrases.

---

[20] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964; repr., Corte Madera: Gingko Press Inc., 2003) 262.

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

"[…] in order to have a language, there must be a community of speakers. Contrary to what might appear to be the case, a language never exists even for a moment except as a social fact, for it is a semiological phenomenon. Its social nature is one of its internal characteristics."[21]

For Ferdinand de Saussure, semiology is always bound to the social institution and the community. There is no language without society and probably no society without a language; this idea is central to *coup d'œil*. McLuhan's famous quote, "...the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" is also true for this thesis body of work. Vilém Flusser reminds us that the image has "[…] two intentions: one manifested in the image and the other belonging to the observer."[22] *coup d'œil* illustrates this by disrupting the standard functions of cultural images and reminding the viewer that there are two sides to every image: the transmission, and reception.

This process allows me to outline the signs & signification of imagery. The processes of veiling, blurring, cropping, and abstracting allow me to distill these images down to silhouettes fit for interpretation, like a sort of Rorschach test. A photographic endeavor that acts like a semiotic microscope. Taking an image from one screen to the next, deconstructing it, sending it through generations, and appropriating it speaks to the contemporary dilemma of imaging in our society. The following steps illustrate my process.

1. Selection - The original images were all harvested from the screens in our daily lives. They are appropriated images, but I prefer the word harvest because it connotes a sense of collecting for consumption. I speak of it as harvesting because it implies an organic or living element.

2. Capture - This was done with either a screen shot, cell phone, or point and shoot.

---

[21] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1983; repr., Peru: Open Court Publishing Company, 1997) 77.
[22] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (2000; repr., London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2005, 2006) 8.

3. Re-capture - Most of the series were re-photographed with a medium-format digital camera. The re-photographing allowed me to transform the original image. Sometimes, I would take a screenshot of a thumbnail or the preview image in my finder window, depending on how much information was readable and what I wanted the quality of the image to be.[23]

4. Re-sizing - The images were re-sized to fit the video format of the projectors. The only series that deviated from this was Great Totem. The series consisted of screen shots that were directly re-sized, and not re-photographed[24], for the light boxes.

5. Placement - The images were placed in a video sequence, or timeline. They were later projected and not printed[25]. As an installation of video projections, they remind the viewer that images in our culture are not predominately just solid and in print. They are fleeting flickers arriving as quickly as they depart.

---

[23] Clarence Sheffield referred to this stripping of information as a sculpting technique.

[24] There was no need to re-photograph these images. The enlargement of the low-resolution webcam provided all the wonderful abstraction needed.

[25] The images used in Great Totem were the only prints in the show. This appealed to the fetish nature of the Totem as a pillar of the ideologies and beliefs of a community.

ALLEGORY & APPROPRIATION

When analyzing the spectacle one speaks, to some extent, the language of the spectacular itself in the sense that one moves through the methodological terrain of the very society which expresses itself in the spectacle.[26]

There are certain things that cannot be represented through the creation of new images. In "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," Craig Owens writes, "Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (allos = other + agoreuei = to speak)."[27] By removing the image from its original context, the artist creates a new meaning that for Owens falls under the construct of allegory.

 Artists such as Andy Warhol, Sherry Levine, Richard Prince, Martha Rosler, and Louise Lawler ignited the postmodern trend of appropriation as a tool that could both visually and conceptually explore the signs & allegories inherent in the images of our lives. Andy Warhol's appropriation of images related to the death of John F. Kennedy, Jr., such as *16 Jackies* (1964), as well as Bruce *Conner's Report* (1967),

 exemplify what it was about this particular historical moment that changed everything. It wasn't just the tragic death of a national hero, but a moment that defined how we as a culture process images, how we disseminate them, and more importantly, how we are bombarded and influenced by them. *16 Jackies* shows the gridded repetition of a woman before and after the loss of her husband. There is no private moment for the celebrity; even her husband's assassination is broadcast for the viewer who intently watches. Conner, on the other hand, takes that moment of tragedy and slows it down for the spectator. Frame by frame the motorcade repeats and jolts

---

[26] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, (1967; repr:, Detroit, 2010), 11.
[27] Craig Owens, *"The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism"* October, Vol. 12, (Spring, 1980) 69.

slowly pass, never actually revealing the moment of impact. Where Warhol focuses on the spectacle of celebrity, Conner focuses on the spectacle of the media. This is what Debord refers to as the "methodological terrain of the very society which expresses itself in the spectacle."[28] Appropriationist art emerged as a way to create a new language capable of speaking to the rapidly evolving mass media, and the new modes of communications it brought forth.

While Warhol's work dealt with the printed media of his time, tangible mediums such as film, screen printing, and the printing presses, mine deals with the digital artifact; I am dealing with screens. Even my camera is a screen. Early in the *Make and Model* series, I shot film. The images were beautiful, the blur more authentic. But it covered up the digital artifact of the screen. The subtle details that resulted from the camera not being completely flush with the screen were important. I grew more aware of the importance of the editing and selection process.

The removal of the images or videos from their original sources and placing them with other videos and photographs from other sources creates a precisely nonlinear perception. Many of the early appropriation artists did this through film because it was a medium that was highly stagnant in its new conventions and commercialism. Dara Birnbaum increased her viewers' awareness of the medium by editing, repeating and manipulating the sequences. Martha Rosler's *Bringing the War Home* series implants her subjects in otherwise sterilized and peaceful domestic environments. The amputee in Tron (Amputee) is no longer in the newspaper as a spectacle. She is now eerily displaced in Rosler's montage. Rosler's incorporation of grim war images and commercials conveys a certain lunacy rampant in our cultural representations. Like Rosler I use a similar type of juxtaposition of contrasting media in *coup d'œil*. By juxtaposing the various sets of images I bring the viewer's attention to relationships that would otherwise be overlooked. Like Conner, I am slowing the image for analysis. Like Warhol, I am using production and aesthetic techniques similar to those used to create the source image.

---

[28] Debord, 11.

THE IMAGE - WHO SAID THE SALESMAN WAS DEAD?

Because the ideas which have always sat at the heart of the stories you've told and the content you've sold...whether movies or music or television...are no longer just intellectual property, they're emotional capital.[29]

Who said the salesman was dead? He has just been reincarnated as an image. I am referring to images that serve the end purpose of satisfying a sale and of persuading us indirectly or directly to feel the need to purchase something: the "technical image."[30] This can be a newspaper cover, a magazine article, a direct printed advertisement, a billboard, a product placed in a movie, an actress wearing a dress, a tabloid about that actress…the list goes on. The list is ever expanding and the viewer increasingly can no longer discern an advertisement from entertainment. Retired marketing executive Jay Walker-Smith says, "We've gone from being exposed to about 500 ads a day back in the1970's to as many as 5,000 a day today."[31]

coup d'œil includes video because, more than the still image, the format seduces the viewer into suspending disbelief. The video format may be an hour segment and can expose the viewer to thousands of marketed products unintentionally, and hundreds intentionally. What happens to a culture when the basis of visual representations becomes selling and manipulation? McLuhan might refer to this as Narcissus Trance, where we fail to recognize this technology as an extension of ourselves and fail to detect its messages; it is where we fall numb. McLuhan says of advertisements and advertisers, "Their existence is a testimony, as well as a contribution, to the somnambulistic state

---

[29] Steven J. Heyer, "Keynote Remarks" (Advertising Age, "Madison +Vine Conference", Beverly Hills, California, February 5, 2003)

[30] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (2000; repr., London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2005, 2006) 14 - 21.

[32] Caitlin A. Johnson, 2009 "Cutting Through Advertising Clutter" CBS, February 11. http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-3445_162-2015684.html

of a tired metropolis."[32] The exhaustion stems from the onslaught of imagery and the viewer's inability to discern the real from the unreal. At the end of the day, the average person retreats to his or her computer or television for relief and relaxation. But this relaxation is artificial. While they me be on break from the reality of their lives, the viewers become fully engaged to the dictates of the screen in the activity they truly believe is entertainment or enjoyment, and it may ,in fact, be. The viewer has become comfortably complacent. Entertainment on the screen is a toled version of pleasure, a paradigmatic pay to play structure of our screened world. It is not true enjoyment. It is steeped in anxieties and psychological cruelties that target the viewer's very way of being, yet our culture's primary source of entertainment and down time is forged around this. How does this effect the viewer and, moreover, the culture? These are questions that I want my viewer to consider.

---

[32] McLuhan, 307.

NEW MEDIA: NEW MODES OF CULTURAL CONTROL

This book is about the work–and play–spectators perform in the new media system. The term, participatory culture, contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and the consumers occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands.[33]

New media has taken the spectator from involuntarily watching a sponsored spot to voluntarily inquiring about a product in the middle of their leisure. Part of my process in *coup d'œil* deals with the popular trend, in media, of having the viewer refer to a secondary device or screen. In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich writes:

Similarly, the new media in general can be thought of as consisting of two distinct layers– the 'cultural layer' and the 'computer layer'....The result of this composite is a new computer culture–a blend of human and computer meanings, of traditional ways in which human culture modeled the world and the computer's own means of representing it.[34]

The "computer layer," the mobile layer, the data mining layer, the black box layer, these are all added to the equation of how images influence a culture. New media is shaping the very way in which we function in this world. Manovich goes on to say, "The computerization of culture gradually accomplishes similar transcoding in relation to all cultural categories and concepts....New Media thus acts as a forerunner of this more general process of cultural reconceptualization."[35] It is not just the image that influences the viewer, it is the very devices and screens that present the images at all times.

In *Convergence Culture,* Henry Jenkins addresses how our new media are platforms where

---

[33] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006) 3.

[34] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) 46.

[35] Ibid., 47.

technology and culture converge:

> *Convergence doesn't just involve commercially produced materials and services traveling along well regulated and predictable circuits. It doesn't just involve the mobile companies getting together with the film companies to decide when and where we watch a newly released film. It occurs when people take media into their own hands. Entertainment content isn't the only thing that flows across multiple media platforms. Our lives, relationships, memories, fantasies, desires also flow across media channels.*[36]

Jenkins illustrates how our lives have become braided into our "media platforms." They become environments, and homes. We no longer sit in front of them—we now reside within them.

---

[36] Jenkins, 17.

CONCLUSION

What was private became public. What was unique became mass-produced. What was hidden in an individual's mind became shared....Before, we would read a sentence of a story or a line of a poem and think of other lines, images, memories. Now interactive computer media asks us instead to click on a highlighted sentence to go another sentence. In short we are asked to follow pre-programmed, objectively existing associations. Put differently, in what can be read as an updated version of French philosopher Louis Althusser's concept of 'interpellation,' we are asked to mistake the structure of somebody else's mind for our own.[37]

It is no secret that information is also increasingly becoming less informative. Baudrillard remarked, "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning."[38] For Baudrillard, this had to do with the loss of the referential. Technologies foster and advance civilizations; images define people. "Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication."[39] Dictating and homogenizing traits of identity is a prime tactic. And interestingly enough, overemphasizing the individual character and uniqueness of a person is often used to create the illusion of the viewer's autonomy with regard to their role as a consumer and their autonomy over their own identity. Due to the constant, unceasing, and rapid flux occurring with the distribution of images, the viewer is never given an opportunity to think analytically upon what is presented to them.

coup d'œil attempts to pause and re-present these unreadable moments. In, this installation, the viewer has to catch the image before it rapidly changes to another. What images do we look upon for guidance and understanding? What images are the most repeated? What images are the largest, loudest, or longest? What images reach the

---

[37] Manovich, 61.

[38] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1994) 79.

[39] McLuhan, 8.

most viewers? And furthermore how do we listen? How do we react? How do we see? How

are we changed and affected by these images? This work does not provide the answers, but it

provides a paused moment where the viewer and I can look deeper into the images, and to look

deeper into the meanings broadcast from the screens our or media and our personal lives.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aiken, Doug. <u>Broken Screens: Expanding the Image Breaking the Narrative</u>. Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2006.

Barthes, Roland. <u>Camera Lucida</u>. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.

Barthes, Roland. <u>Elements of Semiology</u>. New York: Hill and Wang, 1973.

Baudrillard, Jean. <u>Simulacra and Simulation</u>. Michigan: University of Michigan, 1994. First published 1981 by Éditions Galilée.

Benjamin, Walter. <u>Illuminations</u>. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. First published 1955 by Suhrkamp Verlag.

Berger, John. <u>Ways of Seeing</u>. London: British Broadcasting Company and Penguin Books, 1990. First published 1972 by the British Broadcasting Company and Penguin Books.

Debord, Guy. <u>Society of the Spectacle</u>. Detroit: Black & Red, 2010. First published 1970 by Black & Red.

De Saussure, Ferdinand. <u>Course in General Linguistics</u>. Peru: Open Court Publishing Company, 1986. First published 1983 by G. Duckworth.

Fischer, Ernst. <u>The Necessity of Art</u>. London: Verso, 2010. First published 1971 by Penguin.

Foucault, Michel. <u>Discipline & Punish</u>. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. First published 1975 by Editions Gallimard.

Flusser, Vilém. <u>Towards a Philosophy of Photography</u>. London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2005, 2006. First published 2000 by Reacktion Books Ltd.

Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W. <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u>. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. First published 1944 by Quierdo.

Jenkins, Henry. <u>Convergence Culture</u>. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

Kruger, Barbara. <u>Remote Control: Power, Cultures, and the World of Appearances</u>. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994.

Manovich, Lev. <u>The Language of New Media</u>. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001.

McLuhan, Marshall. <u>Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man</u>. Corte Madera: Gingko Press Inc., 2003. First published 1964 by McGraw-Hill.

McLuhan, Marshall and Fiore, Quentin. <u>The Medium is the Massage</u>. Corte Madera: Gingko Press Inc., 1996. First published 1967 by Random House.

Mitchell, W.J.T. <u>Picture Theory</u>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Mitchell, W.J.T. <u>what do pictures want?</u>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Mitchell, W.J.T. <u>what do pictures really want?*</u>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Owens, Craig. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October*, Vol. 12, (Spring, 1980) 69-86

Ritchin, Fred. <u>After Photography</u>. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2009.