Impulse 101

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Preface for the Printed Edition

The annoying part about printed books is that they haven't all been digitalized. Physical books are stuck in one font that can't be resized. When reading a hard copy you can't click on the footnotes and see the original source or copy paste phrases of interest into Google. Highlighting has to be done manually and it remains where it is on the page, left to be found through the use of place-markers and adhesive notes. The sheer weight of a book is another problem, carrying more than four or five at a time can become inconvenient. Books are sculptural, their storage requires space; a personal library can occupy a wall or sometimes an entire room.

Typewriting and handwriting have similar constraints; each draft is the only copy unless using carbon papers. Spelling corrections require a physical alteration of the page by forcibly erasing the print medium or covering it up with correctional fluid. A copy cannot be edited in place, so adding a paragraph in the middle means starting over. Unlike their digital counterparts, books and print copies aren't self-replicating. Each edition of my Grandfather's doctoral dissertation was hand typed; he had to hire a secretary in order to make copies. Revisions and updates came in the form of a whole new book, which meant those without may have to suffer through an outdated edition. Admittedly I've never written on a typewriter and dealt with these issues and I probably never will; in April 2011, the last typewriter factory in the world closed.

The ideal form of this thesis would be something interactive like augmented reality software where you could experience digital sculpture firsthand, or on a website where pictures could be blown up to poster size and the referenced videos could be embedded. If money were no object I'd pass out iPads containing this essay in place of each bound copy.

Nevertheless, there is no doubting that the digital format of this essay will outlive any print copy, but for those wishing to embrace the tactile qualities of puréed wood pulp sprayed in dye, it's only ever going to be a Ctrl-P away.

Navigation

Introduction

I have discovered the existence of time travelling bandits who steal your original thoughts. They download your files and images, sift through your newest ideas and return with them to the past. They spend years developing and articulating these ideas, using them to give lectures and to write books and essays. Decades, sometimes centuries, later you will discover your ideas in these books and realize what has transpired. At least that is how I like to imagine it happens.

When discovering your writings and artworks have already been done, often in better and more developed versions than your own, it is easy to become discouraged. Instead of feeling like a bad photocopy, I have decided to treat this experience as validating, as being on the right track.

Impulse 101 is a story about art, the internet and everything.

This story is a bus ride from cave painting to post-internet art; along the way it stops to pick up important passengers such as perfectionism, science fiction, minimalism, technology, interactivity, and generational theory. It is a relatively chronological narrative beginning with the evolution of art institutions, the development of the contemporary gallery, and conflicts regarding audience. The story ends with the unification of the preceding topics and the transition from artistic contemplation to erudition which ultimately manifests in a specific approach to art making.

This essay was written with a degree of user-friendliness in consideration of a broad readership.

Chapter 0

Impulse 101
Impulse 101 is the simultaneity of skill and concept, abstract and concrete, digital and analog. It is fueled by urges and propelled by instincts. It is the demand of mastery; it is innovation resulting from accumulation. It is born in the afterlife; it is the development of awareness post-progress.

Impulse 101 is the cheat code in the game Half Life 2 that gives you every weapon.

Impulse 101 is everything, all at once.

Back to the Basics
It is important for me to kick away the theoretical from the impulses. I approach art making through my own innate columns of interest and release myself from the burden of having to answer why my particular starting point is where it is. I did not choose to like strawberries; I did not choose my artistic urges.

Impulses and flow are intrinsic, they are passion: here lies no volition. The anticipation of reception, the manipulation of the deliverable product, the application of reason: these are the extrinsic qualifiers. We are not here to question how artist impulses manifest themselves. When discussing an Olympic runner, we discuss their speed, form, and stamina; we don't begin by discussing why they chose to be a runner instead of pole vaulter.

The earliest evidence of painting exists in the Chauvet Cave, dated 30–40,000 years old or Upper Paleolithic.[1] Art *making* doesn't need the exhibition, it doesn't need art history, and it doesn't need us to intervene. Art making doesn't need the box, the label, or the critique in order to be created; it needs it to be received, it needs it once we introduce the reception of artwork beyond its inception, beyond the creative and imaginative processes which bore it. The box is a delivery method, a means of disseminating, to allow interaction with the results of a process: it allows communication and knowledge sharing. The box helps artworks remain relevant; it provides the shoulders for successive artists to stand on.

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[1] Chauvet, Jean-Marie, Eliette Brunel, and Christian Hillaire. *Chauvet Cave : the discovery of the world's oldest paintings*. 1996. Print.

Chapter 1: From the Cave to the Cube

"It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore"[2]
Theodor W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory

Requiem for the Salon Gallery
The model for the contemporary art gallery is the white cube. The white cube is dimensionless space, limbo, the afterworld; it is the construct in the Matrix or the final scene of Lost. The white cube is for artwork what the mind is for reading; it is the space necessary for experiencing an artwork away from the burdens and distraction of the outside world. In it there is no time or place: just pure white space for experiencing a work of art.[3] But it wasn't always this way.
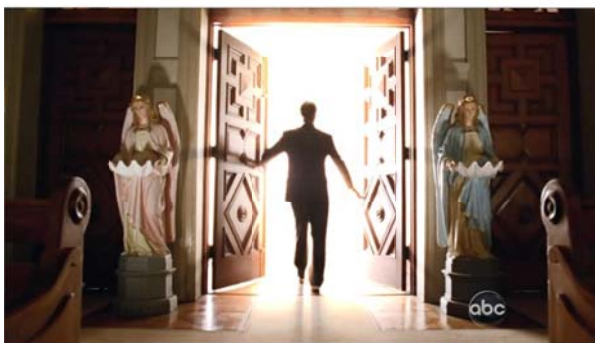

Figure 1: (Top) Photograph of the White Cube Gallery, London; (middle) video still, the construct scene in the Matrix; (bottom) video still, the white light in Lost

In understanding how our contemporary art institutions evolved I first turned to John Dewey. Dewey saw art as the enhancement of the process of everyday life. He explained that many art forms are situated flawlessly within society such as film, music, and dance; meanwhile those classified as fine art have become compartmentalized and placed outside the public in galleries and museums. In the west, the rise of these institutions can be attributed to a historical by-product of nationalism and imperialism, where national collections housed the accumulation of conquered spoils and collected works; these historic collections were intended to be an elitist display of an empire's superior cultural status. Fine arts, having once be part of the process of everyday life is now isolated from the condition of its origin. [4] The subsequent opening of these collections to the public resulted in archetypal model of the art museum and gallery.

It was troubling to discover the way that early art galleries functioned, especially salon galleries, roughly before the 1900's. Paintings were hung to cover all wall space; they fit together like Tetris pieces with the smallest at

the bottom ever increasing in size all the way to the ceiling. Each painting was a neatly wrapped parcel of space, isolated from its

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[2] Adorno, Theodor W., Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann, and Robert Hullot-Kentor. *Aesthetic Theory.* London: Continuum, 2002. 1. Print.

[3] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space.* Santa Monica: Lapis, 1986. 15. Print.

[4] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience.* New York: Capricorn, 1959. 4-9. Print.

surrounding.[5] Paintings were portable windows—illusions where the frame was a necessary limit to ground the viewer.[6] It is hard to imagine how it was for an artist to experience art making with the limits and traditions which burdened easel painting. Easel paintings and classical formulations were necessary restrictions, which had grown to bind together the advancements since the Chauvet Cave. It is difficult to imagine the routes toward artistic communication were not always as malleable and free as they are today. At this point in time, it would be nearly another century before the obstacles were overcome. In my studies I have come across these problems and the arduous, once contemporary, dialogues circling them.

Throughout the 1900's artists played with this abruptness of the canvases edge; challenges arose and painters approached the craft from all angles to break free from these constraints. The illusion of space gave way to the flatness of the object container then to the literalization of the picture plane.[7] The canvas edge was no longer a burden; illusion was no longer a prerequisite. Modernism brought us the self-aware painting with its physical space and dimensions articulated. The painting was now an object, having already learned what it is; soon it will learn where it is. The gallery itself had become a transforming force which contextualized objects placed within its walls.[8] Minimalism tested the limits, literalizing the object. With the gallery acting as the condition for sustaining the art context, soon objects of art began giving way to concepts of art; conceptualism replaced seeing with thinking.[9] Then concepts could be abandoned in place of a series of gestures which eluded to them, gestures literalize gallery space.[10] Next happenings developed, then situations, interactivity, and eventually the whole spectrum of simultaneity seen in the Hegel/Danto pluralism of today.

These developments didn't happen in a firestorm, each change was methodic, conservatively received, building slowly, being careful to show the work, to back it up with evidence and stand for harsh critique and criticism. Apart from the work shown by the past generation, we now have the availability of a more sophisticated multisensory audience. Without these advantages of the past century many contemporary painters would probably be avoiding the medium altogether. As an artist arriving into the situation where these problems had arisen and are now decades solved, I often take for granted the shoulders on which I have the benefit of standing.

Art and Culture, and Art Culture
Kant, Hegel, Adorno, McLuhan, and Dewey, all have demonstrated one way or another that art has its crux in society and culture. Adorno put it most plainly: "It is easy to imagine that art's autonomous realm has nothing in common with the external world other than borrowed elements that have entered into a fully changed context. Nevertheless, there is no contesting the cliché of which cultural history is so fond, that the development of artistic processes, usually classed under the heading of style, corresponds to social development." [11]

Yet, contemporary artwork is often received in a manner which conflicts with its intended reception. If someone were to walk into the Weimar MFPA, a materials research and testing institute, he would likely encounter a number of complex experiments, computations, mathematical equations and complexities which may supersede his level of comprehension. He would probably recognize that something is happening, something complex, even if he is not able to grasp at the specifics. We can imagine that this person, upon leaving the institute, would be unlikely to declare that he had not seen scientific research

[5] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica: Lapis, 1986. 16. Print.

[6] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica: Lapis, 1986. 18. Print.

[7] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica: Lapis, 1986. 28. Print.

[8] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica: Lapis, 1986. 45. Print.

[9] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica: Lapis, 1986. 64. Print.

[10] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica: Lapis, 1986. 72. Print.

[11] Adorno, Theodor W., Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann, and Robert Hullot-Kentor. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: Continuum, 2002. 5. Print.

taking place. Yet, this same person, armed with an equal literacy of contemporary art, could walk into an art exhibition, see artworks which are complex beyond his art education, and walk out declaring that what he had seen was not art, or could concede it was art, but that it was bad art. This scenario is hardly hypothetical, situations similar to this have occurred throughout recent art history. Art critic James Elkins hypothesizes: "Behind this assumption is the idea that what artists do is different in kind from what electrical engineers or physicists do: in theory everyone can understand art, but only some people can understand engineering or physics."[12]

Let's first evaluate a common misperception: the fault of an artwork's inaccessibility lies with the viewer. Shouldn't the audience be burdened with the responsibility of educating themselves about art? [13] In *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space* Brian O'Doherty's hypothesizes that art is often made in the image of the artworld which supports it, which has effectively resulted in an estrangement of art and audience.[14] O'Doherty ended his analysis with a suggestion: "A good piece could be written on the art audience and the educational fallacy. We seem to have ended up with the wrong audience."[15] So where did this divergence between artworld and the audience first begin? Art critic James Elkins demonstrated that the phenomenal divergence between artworld and audience first began over two hundred years ago in early Romanticism and has been slowly widening ever since.[16] "What gets made in art school and afterwards may only express the minority community of artists, teachers, students, gallery directors, critics, and consumers. In that case art could no longer be said to express our culture. Even the word "our" would be suspect."[17] He claims the retreat into the ivory tower is the result of artists being trained in isolation from other professions and being educated separately from society. Elkins's deduction— which pulls heavily from the writings of Walter Gropius—throws cold water to the face: fault doesn't lie with the audience, it lies squarely on the artist and the artworld to become re-educated on the life of the community. This is a call to end the insider/non-inclusive self-referential cliques and otherwise groups which are only referring to each other.[18] The challenge presented to the artist is to produce work with some degree of accessibility so as not to isolate the intended audience. This shouldn't be confused with a call for populist art, we can't negate the broader notion that art is a field of increasing complexity; there will be works which in their complexity will inevitably detach from the casual and require a stronger degree of literacy from the audience. Borrowing from McLuhan, the artist must move from the ivory tower to the control tower.[19]

So how can artwork be introduced to a non-art audience, can it be done in a manner which allows some degree of initial access? And if it is a complex piece, in doing so can the audience be made aware that something more profound is occurring, even if they do not yet possess the tools necessary to decipher? There are many ways to allow an audience access to a work—that first rung of a ladder. There are artworks which will undoubtedly invite the audience in on the vehicle of aesthetics, curiosity, or perhaps humor. Certain audiences may be limited to, and satisfied by, these most simple and accessible aspects of an artwork. Dewey has presented an analogy where aesthetics and complexity occur simultaneously: "It is quite possible to enjoy flowers in their colored form and delicate fragrance without knowing anything about plants theoretically. But if one sets out to understand the flowering plants, he is committed to

[12] Elkins, James. *Why art cannot be taught: a handbook for art students*. Univ of Illinois Pr, 2001. 63. Print

[13] Elkins, James. *Why art cannot be taught: a handbook for art students*. Univ of Illinois Pr, 2001. 62. Print

[14] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica: Lapis, 1986. 80. Print.

[15] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica: Lapis, 1986. 82. Print.

[16] Elkins, James. *Why art cannot be taught: a handbook for art students*. Univ of Illinois Pr, 2001. 62. Print

[17] Elkins, James. *Why art cannot be taught: a handbook for art students*. Univ of Illinois Pr, 2001. 64. Print

[18] Alvarez, Camilo. Telephone interview. 01 June 2011.

[19] McLuhan, Marshall, and W. Terrence Gordon. *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. Corte Madera, CA: Gingko, 2003. 96. Print.

finding out something about the interactions of soil, air, water and sunlight that condition the growth of plants."[20]

Dewey believed the artworld must be resituated in a human context, [21] and many practitioners of *new public art* follow this parameter in order to access larger audiences. In her essay *An Unfashionable Audience* Mary Jane Jacobs wrote that traditional institutions are no longer the obvious starting point: "An artist choosing to step outside the domain of the museum, intentionally or by virtue of his or her interest, gains a bittersweet freedom from the hierarchies and definitions imposed by traditional art institutions."[22] In stepping outside traditional settings, both metaphorically and literally, artists have begun expanding the boundaries of convention. Though I don't believe we should abandon the white cube in pursuit of the reunion of art and audience.

Even with its faults we must recognize the benefits and success of our current institutional models. The white cube has evolved from a physical room to a psychological construct; it acts as an institution for the promotion and dissemination of an art context. As mentioned, sometimes the misunderstanding of artwork comes from the failure of the context in which it was received. We now have art institutions which have responded by focusing on specific demographics either by their mission statements or exhibitions curated to a theme; for instance museums geared towards African-American art such as the Studio Museum in Harlem, or sub-specializations like the Museum of Arts & Design in Manhattan which focuses on contemporary hand-made crafts. These approaches help situate artworks with the audience, and provide cultural points of saturation or meeting places for an exchange; this is especially true with art fairs and biennials which have themselves become cultural events.[23]

[20] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Capricorn, 1959. 4. Print.

[21] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Capricorn, 1959. 19. Print.

[22] Jacobs, Mary Jane. "An Unfashionable Audience." *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. By Suzanne Lacy. Seattle, WA: Bay, 1995. 52. Print.

[23] Alvarez, Camilo. Telephone interview. 01 June 2011.

Chapter 2: The Cumulative World of Contemporary Art

"When you're in your little room
and you're working on something good
but if it is really good
You're gonna need a bigger room
and when you're in the bigger room
You might not know what to do
You might have to think of
How you got started sittin' in your little room"[24]
Little Room, The White Stripes

Letting Go

I take a deep breathe in — a long slow exhale.

During the collapse of reality, in the moments before entering sleep, I sometimes experience hypnagogia[25] and observe exceptional visual phenomenon set against Eigengrau nothingness. Some nights I see a slideshow of rapid-fire form constants, geometric objects or intricate sculptures. The shapes are usually complex and interwoven with ideas, existing abstractly and in more dimensions than could be drawn. Psychologists studying this phenomenon call it the most traveled but least charted territory of consciousness. This occurrence eases the transition between here, the real world, and there, the imaginative.

It's interesting that in my dreams the world is usually a better and more interesting place. It is often a deeply layered and complex utopia; the closest approximation in the real world exists in aspects of video games and in science fiction. I've been to a number of gallery openings in my sleep life, and seen some fantastic work. As an adolescent I struggled with accepting real world authorship for artworks which in the dream world were produced by other artists. I've spoken to a number of artists who have experienced with this same phenomenon of visiting art in one's imagination. Though ethereal concepts which were well understood in the sleep world dissipate upon waking, there are times where the more defined and concrete ideas are left intact. More profound are those ideas which come to full formation in a dream—experiencing a eureka moment—that leaves you utterly redefined upon waking. Maybe there is something to letting go of the *solidity of the real* which comes with dreaming that allows the mind the freedom to create and witness true and unadulterated inspiration. There must be, the 2010 Hollywood film *Inception* earned $827 million in less than a year just talking about it.

Recently I have had a sense of general disconnect coupled with anxiety and expressive numbness. It is directly related to the uncertainties in challenging my artistic status quo. I'm experiencing what feels like a lessening of gravity, I'm slightly hovering—a few centimeters from solid earth, and drifting ever so slightly upward—*detachment*. This sensation has been providing a feeling of raw and intense sensitivity to outside stimuli which can easily influence my theoretical objectivity, almost as if I must endure a heightened emotional innocence. Anxiety has a way of manifesting as existentialism which can be crippling for an artist, especially when applied through critical self-assessment. For me it has set in motion an unshakeable stream of consciousness with sometimes counter-productive inward thinking which will define the repetitive nature and contemplative *"I"* tone and of this chapter.

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[24] The White Stripes. "Little Room." *White Blood Cells.* Sympathy for the Record Industry, 2001. MP3.

[25] Hypnagogia: sensory phenomena experienced during the transition between wakefulness and sleep, e.g. Tetris effect

I will present a list of premises established in continuity with the previous chapter; these premises will plot the trajectory from my previous works to my thesis work. More importantly, I will position my work relative to the challenges in contemporary art and with contemporary art practices. I feel that this very sense of anxiety, loss of gravity, and detachment which I have been experiencing is also being experienced across the artworld; or at the very least, it occurs in the artworld and I am discovering it insomuch as I am looking for it.

Describing Art
Many theorists have defined art only to have that definition made obsolete by the next generation. Adorno tells us that each definition of art is simply a recollection of what art once was, the measure having been legitimized insomuch as art is a quantitative process of transfiguration.[26] *Describing* what art is may be a better approach than *defining* it. For McLuhan, art is a mere tangible model of another situation that is less accessible; it is a translator of experience, presenting us with what we have already felt or seen but in a more concrete form.[27]

Chutes and Ladders
A question which crops up a lot is whether or not something is art. Learning from Adorno, I prefer an open definition of what constitutes art and reserve a more narrow definition regarding whether an artwork is good or successful. Approaching art, I find it necessary to recognize that art has an undeniable hierarchy, if not several competing hierarchies. Different artworks serve different purposes and not all work should conform to some universal standard of accessibility. In the same way that one practice of scientific scholarship produced self-adhesive stamps while another produced fuel cells for the Mars rovers, some artworks are produced to serve an elementary purpose and other works are created for a compound purpose; neither of these routes signifies quality. I use the term *quality* to designate whether or not a work of art is good or effective at achieving its purpose, independent of the measure of that purpose. To depict this as a rudimentary scale, on one hand we measure quality, transitioning from bad to good, and on the other hand we measure purpose, from ordinary to compound.

Since art appreciation is abstract, I'll first chart the hierarchy on the tangible nature of a ladder. Let's take two ladders: one ladder is designed to save people from a burning building, the other is designed to fetch a book from a high shelf. The measure of quality is objective and independent of its placement in the more subjective measure of purposefulness, which is situationally determined. In determining the purpose, one ladder has a more complex position in the ladder hierarchy than the other. When measuring quality, either ladder may have been well crafted or poorly crafted for its task. Applying this model to works of art requires an amount of aesthetic judgment where in Kantian philosophy this might be regarded as the distinction between taste and the sublime. At one end of artistic complexity we can place artworks which are one notch above ornamental, they are easily understood, and contain little to no communicated message or encoded meaning. At the opposite end is the complex artwork which has a high capacity to communicate or may include an encoded message or degree of specificity which requires an audience to be armed with the necessary tools for deciphering or utilization.

I began thinking about this topic during a conversation with fellow artist Ben Craig. We were walking down the street and passed an electrical transformer box, one which the city had commissioned an artist to paint. Witnessing a poorly executed painting we began discussing whether or not it was art. I explained my position about artwork hierarchies and defended the ability of a commissioned painting on an electrical box to be art, though one of the lower hierarchal manifestations. A commissioned electrical transformer box painting was not predestined to be reduced to mere decoration. Not all artwork is good;

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[26] Adorno, Theodor W., Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann, and Robert Hullot-Kentor. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: Continuum, 2002. 2-3. Print.

[27] McLuhan, Marshall, and W. Terrence Gordon. *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. Corte Madera, CA: Gingko, 2003. 324-25. Print.

sometimes this is the fault of poor execution, other times simply the naïveté of the producer or a failure of the context by which it is presented. The question we debated was whether this box had in fact become artwork over ornament; Ben Craig put forth that it had, but that it was an incredibly bad piece of art, poorly executed, and entirely unsuccessful. At face value, this electrical box fell into the lower end of each scale, low quality and ordinary purpose. My conclusion, to which we both agreed, was that it is still better that someone was trying to make art, even bad art, then having no attempt at it at all; it is better that an artwork exist than not exist.

This hierarchal scale broadly defines what is considered high art and low art, which is ultimately subjective since no measure of purpose is shared by all audiences or situations.

The Witching Hour
When I was a child my father used to call twelve-midnight by an old term *the witching hour.* He said at twelve-midnight witches would come from the forest and fly around to steal children who were still awake; the only protection was for the children to be asleep. For me, the witches have become real in the dream world as symbol for anxiety; I often had nightmares of them circling around in my room on their broomsticks; the only escape was to hide under the covers and to try to fall asleep again inside the dream. Today my anxiety dreams resemble something closer to the nothingness from the *Never-ending Story.* The fear isn't of something but of the nothingness that comes from deer-in-the-headlights paralysis when confronted with an enormous task. I fear the nothing that comes from stagnation, the nothing that results from burning out, rusting out, or bowing out. Failure is better than nothing; nothing is a zero, a placeless place, limbo. As per the conversation with Ben Craig, even bad art is better than nothing.

As an emerging artist it seems overwhelming to enter the artworld without a substantiated body of work. It's very difficult to know where you stand in the artworld and with an audience; the first steps are a walk in the dark. I sometimes want to bow out and think—fuck art be a carpenter, the work is tactile and steady and at least there is an immediate sense of accomplishment. Part of being an artist is always looking, questioning, having process oriented discovery, finding something new, and following an idea through to the end. Defining forms and space is an exercise in imposition. I want my works to create the feeling that something is happening, maybe you aren't a part of it, but you wish you were.

Concept Based Artwork
Sifting through essays in art theory is like tossing a jigsaw-puzzle in the air, I am continuously discovering I don't yet have all the pieces. I will begin with writings theorist Arthur Danto.

Danto uses dreams versus reality as a metaphor for the concepts of art and non-art; the difference between the dream world and reality is momentous but is unperceivable until something happens such as waking up. He exemplifies this in art with the differences between the commercial Brillo box designed by James Harvey and the artwork reproduction of the same Brillo box created by Andy Warhol. Both can be the same physical object, one a work of art, the other a mere thing. Danto's key concept is that in contemporary art you can no longer tell in advance whether or not you are in the presence of a work of art.[28]

Though conceptual art is built on the shoulders of Dada, it is important to separate the two at one point: dada tended towards using new artistic practices for anti-art or simply for the sake of using new artistic practices where in conceptual artists are more often interested in the effective transmission of an idea than with the creation of that idea as an object.

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[28] Danto, Arthur Coleman. *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: a Philosophy of Art.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981. Print.

Painting is to a book as conceptual art is to journalism.[29] In contemporary art, a painting can be the work of art, but it is increasingly more likely that a painting is the delivery device of another concept, such as On Kawara's *Today* series or Sol LeWitt's wall drawings. Where the painting was once the art object, the act of painting can now be received as the medium and the concept replaces the importance of the object. Pigment was once the medium delivering the painting as artwork, now the practice of painting can be used as the medium delivering a concept.

Frank Stella wasn't producing stripe paintings he was executing the path of a brushstroke on a canvas, the results of which were lines that formed an image.[30] This approach left the fundamentals of fine art object making intact. The use of a painted canvas in an artwork can be integral, but not always a means in itself. The principles and elements of design certainly still apply to the resultant art objects used as medium for transmission of the art concept.

The emphasis on craftsmanship espoused by the original Bauhaus remain ever relevant. Without diverging too deeply into Elkins's pedagogical nature of modern art education, it is sufficient to say that crafts remain integral to training, and that formal training of the artist in materials and techniques provides the necessary tools and language through which an artwork can be spoken.

Whatever Happened, Happened
These social and artistic advances throughout the century before I was born seem like massive sea change and chaos, magma and volcanoes. Even now, while the earth is still cooling, you can tell something big just happened. Recent advancements in art practices were taught to me like sermons on the mount. In my earliest art history lectures both modernism and postmodernism still had that new car smell; it was taught as a prided accomplishment who's significance my generation could not truly appreciate having been born after the fact. What were once radical developments were now the established. Painting had already been declared dead and resurrected many times; I don't have to approach painting as a process of illusion, painting need not be just a surface, it can be object, and it can be sculptural: color field painting happened, shaped canvases happened, the literalization of the surface happened; paintings literally became unframed. Marshall McLuhan declared that the medium is the message, and compared the obsolescent asking of what a painting was *about*, to asking what a melody was about, or what a house was about.[31] The medium is the message, it has been said, it exists, and I can wear that statement as a crown, or more often as a helmet. In regards to the aforementioned time traveling bandits, everything that has already been done is done, and thank god for that.

Stuck on Moving Forward
The next generation of artists no longer needs to start where the previous started; there is no mandate to revisit the past and re-state the established. I am confused why so many are still grasping at the ornamental, and ignoring rudimentary developments laid out over the last hundred years of art making. The prevalence of interactive, post-conceptual and new genre public art make classical manifestations appear more and more anachronistic. A few years back at a BFA student exhibition I heard a professor say, "It's like they aren't aware the 60's ever happened."

Concept based aspects of art can be outright threatening to some, both artists and audience. Some artists are afraid of becoming irrelevant if not adopting this philosophy, others simply hate it, or wish for a return to classical concepts. The Stuckist movement in London was born out of disdain for the direction of art being exhibited from Charles Saatchi's artists. In a proclamation that "a dead shark isn't art," the Stuckists protested conceptualism in favor of a return to figurative painting. They held protests and

[29] Alberro, Alexander, and Blake Stimson. *Conceptual Art: a Critical Anthology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000. Print.

[30] Andre, Carle. "Preface to Stripe Painting." *Art in Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. 820. Print.

[31] McLuhan, Marshall, and W. Terrence Gordon. *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. Corte Madera, CA: Gingko, 2003. 25. Print.

carried coffins in a mock funeral for the death of conceptual art. I don't know if the Stuckist's see the outright irony of performances associated with Stuckism, or that the traditionalist train has left the station. Stuckism reminds me of when the music recording industry was filing lawsuits during the swan-song of physical media and the advent of MP3 technology. It leaves Stuckism feeling like its pushing cassette tapes on iTunes.

For the purpose of transmitting a concept, artists are always looking for new and more effective methods of art making; the museum and gallery construct can be expanded. Stuckism misunderstands the divergence between audience and art; when we internalize the problem, it becomes obvious we have to move forward not backward, the way out is through.

Synthetic Shapes

In 2010 a classmate of mine, Juan Guillermo Caicedo Diaz del Castillo, prepared a performance piece inside an empty storefront where he would beat an arm-chair with a baseball bat. Various bureaucratic problems prevented him from ever securing the storefront for the performance; instead he wrote a description of the event as it would have occurred and wheat pasted that text in poster form around the location of the storefront. While the medium of the work was significantly altered, and no doubt it reception, the concept remained intact. It can be argued that the signified event remained unhindered. The performance, though never seen, is as real or not real as any other performance. I have not seen Joseph Beuys wrapped in felt with a coyote, I have not seen Juan Guillermo Caicedo Diaz del Castillo beating a chair with a baseball bat in a storefront, I know each of these works as intimately as the other; one has occurred as a performance, one has not.

I can draw some of this analysis through my recent work titled *Wappen*. *Wappen* was conceived as a concept for an exterior installation on a building which houses the art space Weltecho in Chemnitz. I approached the work as an exercise in semiotics in an attempt to create a symbol which would signify the artworld in the same manner in which at picnic bench signifies a park. *Wappen*, German for coat of arms, identifies Weltecho as a citadel of the artworld. In place of a shield, this coat of arms holds a four-dimensional icon which takes form only after an act by the observer. The installation would have been a 10 x 10 meter sign mounted on the northern façade; the shape of the sign forming a white cube. The *Wappen* white cube is depicted as a three-dimensional representation of a tesseract, or hypercube. Its contours are defined by retroreflective sheeting; the image becomes revealed or obscured contingent on ambient light.

Figure 2: *Wappen*, proposed installation on Weltecho

Like a flag driven into a mountain top, the Wappen emblem brands Weltecho as an art space and brands it as a white cube. Where the depiction of this white cube is shown as a hypercube it extends the metaphor of into four-dimensional space. As we are bound to three-dimensional space we cannot directly experience the fourth dimension, and like the arts the abstract concept of the fourth-dimension cannot be held or touched and is only made material when imagined—this imagining is the act of the observer.

For the purpose of the proposal a scale model was crafted since the actual fabrication and execution of the work would cost in excess of 20.000 euros. The work remains unexecuted, but the concept alone was developed during my semester study at university. I discussed the project with my professors, other artists, and then presented the concept at the Weltecho gallery space. The concept was discussed and juried, the semester ended and I was graded and received feedback on this work. Since then this form has manifested in other works and paintings, *Wappen* remains a tangible concept, but it has no one singular fabricated existence. Each instance of the shape is an illustrated form constant, an embodiment of the concept, but not the work itself. *Wappen* as a concept can never be produced or executed as a single physical finale; it has a truer nature when imagined than produced.
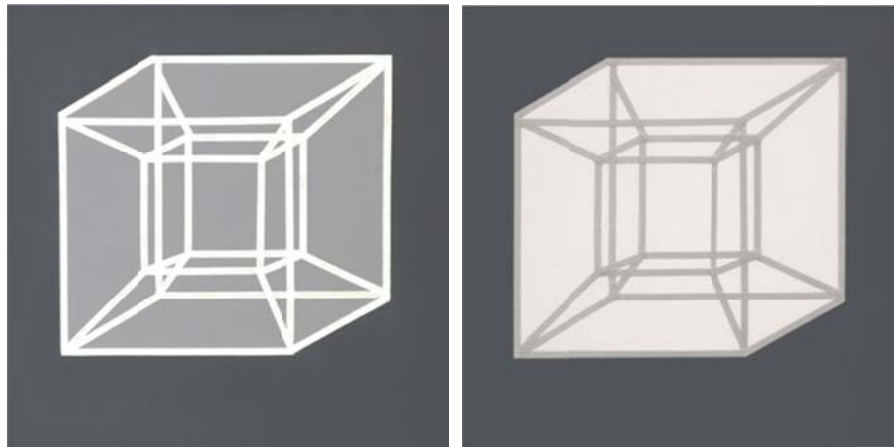

Figure 3: *Wappen* (left photo showing reflected light), 45 x 45 cm, enamel and reflective tape on aluminum, 2011

Chapter 3: From Aristotle to Sci-Fi Robots and How I Came to Paint Squares in a Tunnel

"The disaster is boringness ... nothing is really better than the emptiness that was in that space before an artist came along; and that is always the problem with public art, it's always the problem with installation art and conceptual art. That the nonsense that goes on in the artists heads that were corrupted by the decades of what goes on in art schools is going to be manifested out in the street for the public to see." [32]
Matthew Collings

Shaping Up
In detailing my approach to recent works, I could speak to the higher influences and go on in youthful admiration about how they are the backbone of my work and the ground I walk on. I try to remember that while chasing these fascinating new approaches to art making, that I also approached the purity of the square form based on the layers of thought built upon Malevich's Suprematist manifesto *The Non-Objective World* and evaluation of the signifier and the signified via Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*. I spent a great deal of time digging deep into directions of study that could be valuable, chasing after pure forms and shapes, studying artworks from Éric Duyckaerts to Shepard Fairey. I wrote a short impulsive essay on mimesis, the Platonic forms and the concept of a square. These blocks, though solid and important, end up being the basement of a very large mansion. And at this point in recalling the process of how I arrived at this new world where I stand now, I'm currently more interested in the architecture and interior design than the substantial engineering that holds it all up. To use one more metaphor, these influences are like your ancestors or relatives, though super interesting and hugely important, they can also be obstructions to clear unrestrained imaginative childlike exploration of the world. And with that, I'd like to redirect my attention to that pure childlike interest and the perpetual fiery wonder that comes with it and leads you down fascinating rabbit holes. This particular rabbit hole being filled with works of science fiction, obsessive information gathering, and graffiti subculture.

In the beginning I had a big bang of ideas: pop culture, Greeks, shape shifting river maidens, pure forms, sci-fi robots, perfectionism, burdens of the human condition, rebooting, and geometric shapes.

With these pieces it was possible to organize them a bit into smaller sequential piles and plot a useable trajectory from one to the other.

At the start we have the fundamentals, perfectionism and Greek philosophy. In the middle we have the concepts relating to the application of concepts based on these fundamentals, leading primarily into the realm of science fiction; and finally, and the resultant derivatives, tangents and discernable relationships to my installation *Shapeshifters.*

Perfection Chronologically
Sitting alone in my room holding an invisible small white flash card in my head, on it the single inscription "Perfection", I remained as contemplative as possible before succumbing to the urge to use the internet. After checking Facebook I consulted my internet Professor, Dr. Google, and his colleague Mr. Wikipedia. I found what is called the oldest definition of perfection. In book Delta of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* he describes that which is 'complete' as fulfilling three criteria, which I have simplified as:

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[32] Dale, Peter, and Henrietta Conrad, prods. "Episode 2." School of Saatchi. BBC Two. 30 Nov. 2009. Television.

Aristotle's Requirements for Perfection:[33]

> 1 – that which contains all of its necessary parts
>
> 2 – that which cannot be made more excellent
>
> 3 – that which has attained its end.

For me, the most striking part of this definition is the third requirement. Aristotle describes destruction, or ending, as necessary for the completion of perfection: the ultimate purpose is to end, to have attained a purpose.

Artistically, or otherwise, it is a strong burden to hold the intention to create perfection or even to aim for damn near it. I had the opportunity to proofread artist and self-proclaimed perfectionist Sanela Jahic's essay on her *Fire Painting* apparatus which detailed her struggle and burden to create the perfect. She walks us through historic artistic attempts at attaining perfectionism and outlines what seems like a simple process, but one whose execution is quite difficult. In her characterization she details the near machinelike qualities one must possess in order to achieve perfection while simultaneously being constrained by the limitations of the human body.

Not long after reading Jahic's take on perfectionism, as it related to the body, I came across a poorly written albeit interesting article in the spirituality section of the Huffington Post. The article discussed contemporary religious views of the human body and detailed which parts of being human are disfavored by which religion. For example: Christianity finds the spectrum of human sexuality to be of consequence, Islam includes ritual cleansing and avoidance of bodily fluids, and it can be argued that Buddhism finds it problematic that the totality of the human body exists in the first place. The disfavored 'humanness' also exists outside the physical body; human behaviors are also scrutinized and divided up into the religious *like* and *dislike* piles. This left me wondering why it is that the totality of the human cannot be reconciled without the dichotomy. At this point in my reflection of perfectionism, having no immediate further interest in the outcome of these religious ideologies or how they influence contemporary life, I began watching some sci-fi show that had finished downloading.

Fortunately for me and other fans, science fiction's golden age rose right alongside the commercial introduction of television. As soon as Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics had been put into print they were sucked-up into the plot lines of sci-fi movies and TV shows.

Whether intentional or not, science fiction writers have appropriated age old interpretations of perfection into their work. Isaac Asimov is famous for the Three Laws of Robotics which I will mention in a moment; but more fundamental is his establishment of the rules necessary for the use and function of a tool.

Asimov's Three Requirements of Tools:[34]

> 1 – A tool must be safe to use.
>
> 2 – A tool must perform its function efficiently unless this would harm the user.
>
> 3 – A tool must remain intact during its use unless its destruction is required for its use or for safety

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[33] Aristotle. "Metaphysics by Aristotle." *The Internet Classics Archive: 441 Searchable Works of Classical Literature.* Trans. W. D. Ross. Web. 30 May 2011.

[34] Asimov, Isaac. *Robot Visions.* London: Gollancz, 2001. Print.

I see crossover between this list and Aristotle's list of the requirements for perfection. Regarding the Laws of Robotics I see connections to the burdens of humanity in relation to the pursuit of perfection, whether it be religious perfection, artistic perfection, or of course mechanical.

Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics:[35]

> 1 – A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

> 2 – A robot must obey any orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

> 3 – A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

These three laws touched upon the sci-fi robot's struggle to exist alongside humans. People feared the Frankenstein-like domination of indiscriminately harmful emotionless machines, or even worse, robots with human feelings that happened to use those feelings to not like us.

Asimov's three laws were used to create the sense of order that was presumed to not otherwise exist, or would have naturally existed in opposition. These were the three commandments, the undeniable laws which needed to be obeyed by artificial intelligence, laws set down by their human creators. In sci-fi comics, novels, movies and shows, without these laws robots naturally turn on their creators and show fits of defiance or disobedience, often murderous rampages or hell bent on total domination. For the plot of most science fiction stories the robots seem to go about doing this with no respect to the laws even when they have them.

I could speak in great detail about how religious fables interconnect with science fiction stories in any number of ways, but it is sufficient to say that the same soap-opera plotlines seen in Greek mythological stories of the Titans battling with their children the Twelve Olympians, and then the Twelve Olympian Gods battling with their children mankind, can be seen in science fiction between humans and robots. That is not to say the parallels exist solely between ancient Greece and pulp sci-fi stories, these parallels also appear in the two-plus millennia gap in other forms such as the legend of Faust, in the Old Testament between the Abrahamic God and defiant kings, and any number of copy/paste didactic prose.

Perfection and Sci-Fi Robots

I recently watched an episode of the original Star Trek series; in it the Enterprise encountered a space probe that introduced itself as Nomad. Nomad was once a simple data gathering probe that had been struck by a meteor and altered. Afterward it believed it was perfect and that its purpose was to create perfection by eliminating anything it found imperfect. After analyzing humans it determined humans were imperfect and wanted to *sanitize* the Enterprise by eliminating the crew. After Nomad killed several men, Captain Kirk was able to stop it by telling it that it was created by a human, and that it too was imperfect, and that by not destroying itself it was even more imperfect.

Nomad: "I am Nomad, I am perfect."
Kirk: "You are in error, you did not discover your mistake; you have made two errors. You are flawed, and imperfect, and you have not corrected by sterilization; you have made three errors."
Nomad: "Error! Error!"[36]

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[35] Asimov, Isaac. "Runaround." *Astounding Science Fiction* Mar. 1942. Print.

[36] Lucas, John Meredyth. "The Changeling." *Star Trek: The Original Series*. 29 Sept. 1967. Television.

This then caused Nomad to go crazy and explode. Had Nomad studied Aristotle, it could be interpreted that this act of self-destruction could possibly be the coup de grâce which finally permitted Nomad to be complete and legitimized it as having been perfect.

Kirk continued to do this at least five more times throughout the TV series; leaving dead, but perfect, robots scattered across the universe. In these instances the robots were created so perfectly and obediently followed the rules of their operational programming to a fault. There is a certain damned if you do, damned if you don't, type of storytelling at work. On the one hand, a disobedient robot tries to kill you, and on the other hand an overly obedient robot tries to kill you. We can see this with HAL *in 2001: A Space Odyssey* who kills men in order to protect them, or repeatedly in Asimov's book series*, I, Robot* where in one case a mind reading robot is forced to lie in order to protect humans, causing an unresolvable conflict of logic which then causes it to break down.

Perfection and Sci-Fi Humans
Moving away from these non-human dealings with the liar paradox we arrive at the sci-fi world's treatment of the burden of human imperfection. We can bridge this topic in yet another mention of Asimov's work in his story *Bicentennial Man,* specifically my interest in the 1999 movie adaptation. The story focuses on one robot's unending quest to become more human to the point of total societal recognition as human, or as 'an individual'; where at the same time humans are extending their lives by replacing failed organs with robotic organ tissue. The events occur over the course of two hundred years resultant in the robot only achieving his status as human once he allows himself to become mortal and ultimately dies. His death marks a fulfilled and measurable purpose and thus marking Aristotle's third requirement of perfection.

In films such as *Blade Runner*, *AI: Artificial Intelligence*, and similarly in the reimagined TV series *Battlestar Galactica*, the story arcs involve conflicts between organic humans, and their inorganic counterpart robotic creations. In these particular instances the robots are nearly identical to humans in every single way except that they aren't human. These plots focuses heavily on that same tense and resentful relationship between creators and created, not dissimilar to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, or the aforementioned Greek mythology, Abrahamic religions, etcetera.

In the 1997 film *Gattaca*, one devoid of robots altogether, the question of human imperfection was addressed at the genetic level. Through a society of total human eugenics and selective birth, human imperfection was in the process of being bred out, leaving the natural birth or children of un-manipulated DNA to an automatic lower class life. The story's protagonist being one of these natural births ended up entering a life of deceit and mimicry of a higher genetic class, ultimately awarding him more freedom, mobility and ability to challenge the concept of human perfection as a static and measurable notion. In the 1976 film *Logan's Run*, a childhood favorite of mine, the futuristic utopic society takes place in an enclosed biosphere city located outside of Washington, D.C. The domed city contains enough resources for a finite population, meaning one death must equal one birth. The civilization was designed to maintain indefinitely so long as all citizens were terminated upon their thirtieth birthday. The conflict in this film arises from systemic imposition of a previous generation's definition of perfection onto an unwilling present, and the subsequent uprising and rebellion against that definition/system.

Ornament and the Perfection Paradox
With these plotted points of interest I began to contemplate the next evolutionary step of my work. In order to avoid the burdens of chasing mechanical perfection as described by Jahic, the self-destruction experienced by the space probe Nomad, or strict contemporary societal ideals of perfection, I would have to reevaluate my own definition of perfection.

In my work the elimination of ornament is not only a matter choice; its absence serves a purpose. Minimalism has similarities to perfectionism; the simplicity of form allows the clarity of experience.[37] Ornament is unnecessary, and its presence can confuse, impede or diminish the intensity of other functions, there is clarity in its omission. Dewey talks about artworks which are created without any aesthetic consideration, only to have the aesthetic crudely affixed as an afterthought to appease some standard of conformity; this application reduces the aesthetics to ornament. "If the attempt to express does not succeed—and, of course, it does not always—then the decorative quality stands out by itself and is oppressive—like too much sugar."[38]

Minimalism is visceral and common, there is a reason that minimalism finds its way into many public memorials. Where minimal is foundational, the public can all agree on it; the same cannot be said of ornament. Beauty is not ornament. Beauty does not arrive from a characteristic of a particular form, but from the composition, interaction and relationship of forms.[39] Most of what is regarded as ornament in nature serves a structural purpose. That which is referred to as biological ornament in fact serves its purpose during sexual selection; to put it bluntly, ornament is not found in nature.

Ornament in architecture is used to pacify the uneasiness which comes from the introduction of new technology; it attempts to familiarize the new objects. In this sense, ornament is the antithesis of sci-fi.

Austrian modernist architect Adolf Loos wrote unapologetically about his opinions on the ornamental. In his essay *Ornament and Crime* he claims the ornamental damages a nation's economy calling it a waste of manpower and a waste of wealth; ornament is the byproduct of an un-advanced culture. Sifting through this writing, if one can read between his xenophobic colonialist and racist smears, he manages to explain his position as it applies to art: "The artist always stood at the center of humanity, full of power and health. The modern producer of ornament is, however, left behind or a pathological phenomenon."[40]

I began assessing my past works and the conscious choice to capture forms, shapes, and surfaces that I found perfect; and then to paint those perfect shapes on perfect canvases, in clean and perfect ways, and in doing so I have excluded and eliminated the shapes, textures, and definitions which disrupted the absolute image. I cropped out parts that challenged the purity of a solid shape in order to satisfy the minimal uninterrupted composition. In progressing beyond this, I would like to stop seeing the imperfection as a burden. By using only the clean lines, eliminating the blemishes, how could it be possible to include the imperfection as a new requisite part of the whole? To not do so would mean I am not meeting that first requirement of Aristotle's philosophy of that which is complete.

Using that base definition of Aristotle I would have to stop viewing the imperfect as a burden, and incorporate the imperfect back into my work; but this seems like a Catch-22. If perfection were to include imperfection, perfection would become unattainable, and the pursuit of perfection would be frivolous. In Jahic's essay she touches on this phenomenon and mentions the Greek myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus was punished in the afterlife by being compelled to push a boulder up a mountain, once reaching the top the boulder would roll back down and he would have to start again, continuing this loop for eternity. This is the origin of the phrase Sisyphean task, and as described by Jahic, I am discovering the pursuit of perfection itself a Sisyphean task.

Reading deeper into philosophical theory on the paradox of perfection I stumbled across an interesting usage of the imperfect. In instances where irregularity is a necessary variable for operation, the imperfect

[37] Morris, Robert. "Notes on Sculpture 1-3." *Art in Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. 828-835. Print.

[38] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Capricorn, 1959. 19. Print.

[39] Mondrian, Piet. "Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art." *Art in Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. 388. Print.

[40] Gorman, Carma. *The industrial design reader*. Allworth Pr, 2003. 78. Print.

becomes a necessary component of the perfect; I have been outright accepting of this paradox and its usefulness. If a work can be improved through the utilization of the imperfect then perhaps making the perfect imperfect will allow for it to become complete. For my own conclusion I must create the perfect while anticipating the failure of imperfection, and where I cannot create flaw, I must call out for it, lure it and await it.

This led me to the development of a series of installations in which I would create *perfect* objects with surfaces screaming to be tagged/marked/scratched or otherwise made imperfect. In order to trigger the process I would need to slipstream the work into a preexisting active cultural phenomenon, this was achieved by placing them in highly graffitied areas. In a world where pop will eat itself, graffiti can be said to be perpetually eating itself. In the forms of social and artistic appropriation, graffiti stands alone in its capacity to claim, reclaim, steal, and assimilate. I would be exploiting this effort for my own gain; the act of graffiti would conclude the shapes, allowing them to be complete. I like to think of the placement of the shapes into these environments as evil sponges or Venus flytraps. Since the taggers would freely give their marking, the marks would become mine, and the taggers would be unknowing participants.

The shapes would be like the Greek Sirens or the Lorelei, calling out for others to come close; providing tempting surfaces to be marked, tagged, or otherwise made imperfect. In doing so the shape absorbs the marks, it becomes complete. It becomes absorbed into its environment and accepted; it becomes perfect.

These objects are what I call *Shapeshifters.*

Figure 4: *Shapeshifters*, two of the squares photographed at 3-month intervals

Shapeshifters

I found the perfect spot for my experiments in a subterranean pedestrian tunnel near a train station. The experiments took place over the course of several weeks. At first I began painting carefully off to the side, not disrupting the existing graffiti; eventually I painted over tags and some larger works, and ultimately I sought aggressively to cover the existing works. I painted solid 1 x 1 meter neon or white squares, each

week the previous were destroyed by new tags. The more tags I received, the more squares I painted, letting the old shapes, that were squares, become reabsorbed into the walls, returning the conceptual real form square back to its existence in the non-material world.

I realized through these shaped works that it became heavily about the process. The interaction with the other artists, the absorption wasn't just with the squares, I was being sucked into the world of graffiti artists. Through I came in as a mimic, only feigning graffiti, I became fascinated by it. The mark-making wasn't a finale—I wouldn't get the last say—it was just the beginning of a dialogue between other artists, or vandals depending on your perspective. There was a fine line before me, one where you either did graffiti or you didn't, there is no half way, and I crossed, I was accepted to witness the inside of a genre new to me and I didn't want to turn down the invitation. This new horizon made me drop the works I had in plan for future projects. I became fascinated with the idea of appropriating other subcultures, of imposing my work into new situations which by virtue of the process, imposed me into them as well.

From the perfect shaped squares in the tunnel I carried the process into a new medium: stickers. My aim was to go after skateboarders, replicate the process of graffiti in the method of skateboard stickers. Where the graffiti in the tunnel slowly becomes reabsorbed under newer graffiti, the stickers would become scratched and deteriorated onto the bottom of the skateboard, or covered up by subsequent stickers. I had highly adhesive neon stickers produced by the thousand, replicating the same neon square from the tunnel experiments. The neon carried over the visual language and established identity for the project. Unlike the tunnel, I would be directly interacting with the subjects of my imposition. It brought me to skate parks, skate spots, and into conversations with another new world.

Figure 5: (left) *#DFFF00*, installation view at Bétonsalon; (right images) sticker tagged skateboarders in Paris

In deviations I could not have predicted, the work was becoming very satisfying to produce. The anxiety of painting graffiti in broad daylight in public and the interaction with skateboarders in places I would never normally step foot was a good rush. Moreover I became fascinated with automatic usurpation of belonging to the worlds I collided with.

I harmonized my chase for perfection with the accepting that perfection is not in the process but in the response. Dewey describes: "Perfection in execution cannot be measured or defined in terms of executions; it implies those who perceive and enjoy the product that is executed."[41] Perfection in this

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[41] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Capricorn, 1959. 47. Print.

work was legitimized in *Shapeshifters* by creating neon-square Nomads and waiting for the graffiti artist and skateboarding Kirks to come along and make them self-destruct.

A Fabricated Interview

Figure 6: *Shapeshifters*, (top) three squares after one week; (bottom) three squares after 6 months

How important is it that no taggers see you doing your work?
At the start I thought it was entirely important to be stealth. But after meeting a few of the taggers that frequent the tunnel, I realized the notions I had about graffiti artists were entirely imaginative.

How considerate are you of what is being overwritten?
Completely indiscriminate, I moved squares wall to wall in order to be the most imposing, covering the largest pieces pre-existing in the tunnel.

To what degree do you consider these finished or perfect?
They are finished in process, but in results they are organic and forever ongoing. Regarding perfection, they are entirely perfect; I simply had to redefine perfect and then work within that new definition. This work has done that.

To what degree do you claim ownership?
I think its bollocks to imagine this in terms of authorship. The work in its physicality was surrendered to the public at its inception. I have never owned these squares, nor could I. It's like pouring a glass of water in a river and then trying to find it.

When does it end?
The shapes have already ended, they practically ended the moment the paint touched the wall, the rest has been just more results.

How important is legal permission to the work?
For this artwork it's totally unimportant. For me, in order to have executed it the permissions provided the courage to get out there and do it. I wouldn't declare openly that I'd do similar projects without permission, but unlike how I came into this piece I now have no fear doing so.

Would not having permission change the piece?
I might like it better without permission, but it's neither here nor there. I suppose it can't fit the definition of graffiti when it's permitted, however what it's called is unimportant.

How does the role of public space play a part?
This piece wouldn't have been possible if it hadn't been in the public realm. The interaction with other artists/taggers/graffiti or street artists was paramount to its realization. Without the manipulation awarded by this audience, from having been placed in public, I don't think it could have happened. For instance I couldn't reproduce this process in a gallery or museum setting.

What can be learned from the various colors?
I approached the colors as a form of experiments to see which were most reactive. In the end I

disregarded the results and focused on colors that had the strongest visual impact, and were the most aggressive and imposing.

Why these colors, why not fewer, or more colors?
The colors were meant to lure in the taggers, make them notice a change, or new element in the tunnel. The white acted as a near clean space, blank tablet for them to rework in the overcrowded hall. More colors would have lessened the impact, dulled the imposition. I ended up focusing solely on neon colors to both restrict the palette and enhance visibility.

Do you consider these experimenting or finished works?
These were a first step, rather than leading to where I expected, they took me into the skateboarding piece. The concept deepened rather than widened, or maybe vice versa, but not both.

Is this several piece or one whole piece?
I don't see the need to divide up as such. Possibly each square is its own work, and each skateboarder sticker is its own piece. But in terms of documentation, I put them all under umbrella of called *Shapeshifters*.

How important is time, would you go back months later and still consider this part of the work?
Time is a very strong player in this piece. From the process of adding squares, to the process of losing squares back to the taggers. Ultimately they will be gone under loads of paint, and ultimately chipped away and eventually demolished when the tunnel is renovated someday.

Chapter 4: Deus Ex Internet Machina

"There's no earthly way of knowing
Which direction they are going!
There's no knowing where they're rowing,
Or which way the river's flowing!
Not a speck of light is showing,
So the danger must be growing,
For the rowers keep on rowing,
And they're certainly not showing
Any signs that they are slowing . . ."[42]
Willy Wonka, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

The Cabin in the Woods

Prior to the industrial age, people could live their whole lives in a relatively static technological state. It was reasonable to assume that the world which you were born into would look technologically similar upon your departure. The dynamism that came with the industrial age changed everything; there was no longer an expectation that technology wouldn't advance during your lifetime.

Changes first came in waves the size of centuries, then decades, years, months, and eventually to the point where the near continuously spinning wheel of technological progress became the new constant. For our generation, a period of relative technological stagnation would be unusual.

Unfortunately progress doesn't occur in all aspects of civilization simultaneously. This developmental lag can create disturbing circumstances where technology and culture are misaligned. McLuhan reminds us of the indigenous Australians whose culture collapsed after the introduction of steel axes by missionaries. Similar problems crop up in the arts; we can see the fear and anxiety that came with the transition from rural to city life manifested in expressionism. In the early 1900's the situation was grim, Dewey describes the conditions of his era: "Industry has been mechanized and an artist cannot work mechanically for mass production. He is less integrated than formerly in the normal flow of social services."[43] He claims it lead to the withdrawn introspective artist, and individualism.

When I think about the past century of art making, with its stresses on individualism, I see this as a cabin in the woods. The artist was alone in the cabin, and created his work there. The impulse was there, but art is not yet part of a social relationship, the binding concepts which have pushed us to network and interact hadn't yet begun. By the end of millennium, the situation had inverted; the cabin was no a longer a suitable studio place for the artist. With the ease of travel, accessibility of information, and the advent of the digital age, we have seen a complete reversal of that isolation: a renaissance of interaction. By leaving the cabin, arts role transformed from Gesellschaft to Gemeinschaft, with the artist now practicing within the *relational world.*

Kunstwerk: Interaktivität

Interaction is the defining characteristic of every living being; interaction is exploratory, survival depends on it, that which does not interact, dies. [44]

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[42] Dahl, Roald. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973. Print.

[43] Dewey, John. *Art as Experience.* New York: Capricorn, 1959. 9. Print.

[44] Brouwer, Joke, Arjen Mulder, Brian Massumi, Detlef Mertins, Lars Spuybroek, Moortje Marres, and Christian Hubler. *Interact or Die.* Rotterdam: V2 Pub./NAi, 2007. Print.

Bourriaud coined *relational aesthetics* simply by reading from the barometer of contemporary art, he defined it as: "Aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt."[45] He describes art a state of encounter; artwork is a linking element, having left its material form to become part of a trajectory: a dot on a line.[46]

There was a lot of wonderment surrounding the advancements and rise of computer networking in the late eighties. From Roy Ascott in 1989: "Networking provides the metaphor for late twentieth century culture: it speaks of interactivity, decentralisation, the layering of ideas from a multiplicity of sources. Networking is the provenance of far-reaching connectivity and, mediated, accelerated, and intensified by the computer, it leads to the amplification of thought, enrichment of the imagination, both broader and deeper memory, and the extension of our human senses."[47] Ascott witnessed the development of what he called *dispersed authorship* and layering: "Since reciprocity and interaction are of its essence, such work cannot differentiate between "artist" and "viewer," producer and consumer."[48] This, as Stephen Wright would later describe, is the transformation from authorship to usership.

In the opening scenes of *2001: A Space Odyssey* early man is shown banging away at a pile of bones until the realization that a bone could be used as a tool. Unlike this pile of bones, the possibility of networking through technology didn't show up first and then we found a use for it; it exists insomuch as we wanted it to exist and eventually technology enabled it to exist. Technology closely mimics an advanced form of preexisting human processes, conversely it can be the introduction of a process which a human alone cannot achieve; in both these senses we see technology as a tool or extension.

The technology of the original Star Trek series was imagined during a time of analog computers; we can see the desire to communicate wirelessly came long before the technological possibility. To put this into perspective, Star Trek aired during the three years prior to the Apollo 11 moon landing in which space travel was aided by slide rulers. Save for Enterprise itself, teleporters and warp engines, many of the tools and technology from the original Star Trek now exist: computer databases, video chat, language translators, wireless communication, tablet computers, stun guns, and automatic doors. [49][50] So it isn't hard to imagine some of the future applications of technology, we simply look to our pre-existing processes, practical needs, and technological desires, and eventually we will see part of the spectrum of future development. This will then be supplemented by the unforeseen possibilities that come out of those advancements: even Star Trek couldn't predict the internet.

The predictive relationship of sci-fi to technology is comparable to that of art and society. As McLuhan put it: "The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenges decades before its transforming impact occurs."[51] […] "[Artists] are engaged in making live models of situations that have not yet matured in the society at large. In their artistic play, they discovered what is actually happening, and thus appear to be "ahead of their time."[52] In his this characterization, artists are less like societal psychics and more like cold-readers, though futurists might be a nicer word.

Old Internet, New Internet
In the early days of the internet, each website was a destination off a long road. Though it was a network,

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[45] Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Leses Du Réel, 2002. 18. Print.

[46] Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Leses Du Réel, 2002. 20. Print.

[47] *Electronica: Facing the Future*. Comp. Timothy Druckrey. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1989. 86. Print.

[48] *Electronica: Facing the Future*. Comp. Timothy Druckrey. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1989. 89. Print.

[49] Batchelor, David Allen. "NASA - The Science of Star Trek." *NASA - Home*. NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, 5 Mar. 2009. Web. 01 June 2011.

[50] "Science Fact: the Tech Predicted by Star Trek." *Guardian.co.uk*. The Guardian, 15 May 2009. Web. 01 June 2011.

[51] McLuhan, Marshall, and W. Terrence Gordon. *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. Corte Madera, CA: Gingko, 2003. 95. Print.

[52] McLuhan, Marshall, and W. Terrence Gordon. *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. Corte Madera, CA: Gingko, 2003. 325. Print.

everything was awfully static; there were far more cul-de-sacs than communities. The old internet, Web 1.0, was like a filing cabinet, it was about specificity of content, not interoperability. Content wasn't yet presented in a unified manner, each function was separate: information content was in the browser, video and music were downloaded, and communication was relegated to email or chat software. Code rendering was made variable by proprietary software, competing web standards, and the unavoidable bugs/glitches that resulted from the first browser war. This is the *cabin in the woods* era of the internet.

This was later remedied in the transition to Web 2.0 with the emphasis on information sharing, link backs, blogging, and the social experience. It became less like a filing cabinet and more like us. Content began to unify: information in wikis, music and video could be streamed, and interactivity was introduced through social bookmarking and social networking. We saw the advent of commenting, tagging, content-management-systems and the introduction of WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get)[53] editing which allowed users to create content without having to create code. We also saw the perfecting of technologies: Voice-over-IP, video conferencing, the peer-to-peer file sharing of Napster gave way to torrents, and data moved from personal drives to cloud computing. Web 2.0 is the collective experience; perhaps it's the internet equivalent of *relational aesthetics*, leaving the cabin in the woods.

Plausible White Cubes
If we think of the contextualizing white cube as a construct, how can we further extend this model? I see the internet as one post-physical realization of the white cube; it is truly the abstract, timeless, and dimensionless construct where content can be experienced free from the outside world, void of the presence of the human body. Of course it can be argued that the physicality of a concrete gallery or museum place isn't ready to be transcended by the internet in its current form, but neither makes the other obsolete, they can perform simultaneously. The digital or meta-white cube should not be regarded as a successor, but as an extension.

As it stands, many artworks are temporal and created with the express understanding that they will live on, or fully blossom, in documentation. More and more often documentation will outlive the actual, and with the internet, documentation is preserved in the continuum. Artworks, whether or not originally intended for this destination, have already cropped up in countless news feeds, curated blogs, bouncing from the walls of artist and gallery websites to social networking sites. With awareness of this realm as a plausible white cube, artists have begun creating artworks anticipating this digital reception; some works have been created to exist and be documented digitally and cannot exist more in the real world than they do online. There is a more advanced approach I will discuss in the next chapter. In a most literal sense, online can be a place for exhibition.

On this topic, I spoke with the artist Peter Huestis.[54] Huestis works at the National Gallery Art, Washington, D.C, in the rights and reproductions department and has unparalleled real-world access to the collection and archive. What I find most interesting is his daily work, which is documenting material art objects in the collection, contrasted with his series of artwork called *Ugly Tour Bus Photoblogging*. The works in the series—which are exhibited wholly on his blog *Princess Sparkle Pony*[55]—expresses profundity through shallowness, and as the name suggests they are explorations of the otherwise banal and garishly decorated tour buses parked in the nation's capital. These images filter and frame reality as a formalist investigation of composition; he details reflections, shadows, and shapes in a manner that resembles the minimalistic photographs of Lewis Baltz. Huestis had his start as a painter and exhibited in galleries. He explained that his work was limited mainly to exhibitions that saw, at most, a few thousand gallery

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[53] WYSIWYG is an acronym for What You See Is What You Get, which is used to describe a computing method where the content entered on screen corresponds directly with the display manner in which it will be outputted.

[54] Huestis, Peter. Telephone interview. 12 May 2011.

[55] *Princess Sparkle Pony's Photo Blog*. Web. 03 June 2011. <http://sparklepony.blogspot.com/>.

patrons over the course of several years; compare this with his tour bus series which received between 600–4000 unique visitors a day. These works exist digitally; the viewer isn't seeing a reproduction. He places the works directly to the audience without a gallery, from which he gains a satisfying control over the presentation.
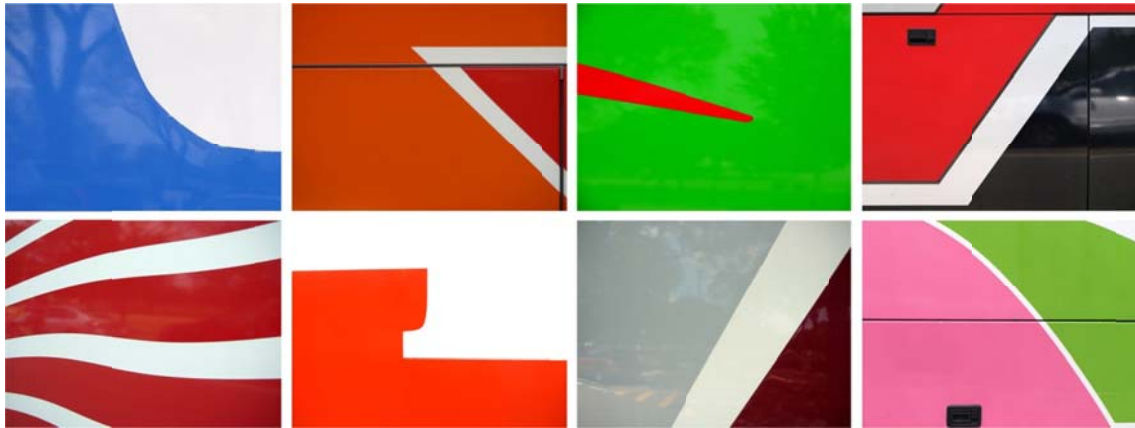

Figure 7: Photographs by Peter Huestis, eight images from the series *Ugly Tour Bus Photoblogging,*

This scenario parallels so many online works such as digitally delivered temporary work, certain conceptual works, complex image memes, interactive audio sites, and video pieces. One other example which comes to mind is the street artist Blu. He produces street art which take the form of painted animations which are produced into stop-motion videos and uploaded on Vimeo. The real-world artwork is perpetually overwritten in each frame of the animation and can only be witnessed after the video is compiled and uploaded.

The Death of the Author is the Birth of the User
Writer and art theorist Stephen Wright has explored today's new stage for art making. He calls art a *productivist* undertaking where the notion of authorship is being contested in preference of co-authorship, and spectatorship replaced by usership. In his collaborative project Plausible Artworlds[56], Wright introduces artworlds which are not geared toward audiences or publics, but instead toward an expansive usership. [57]

To better understand this concept of usership, if we imagine artistic impulses as naturally occurring springs, than art history and culture are formed by combing those waters into rivers which go on to fill an ocean from which each generation can both benefit and contribute. Though we have created an ocean, there are still barriers which restrict the usage and taking of the water. The freedom to explore new artworld territories has been somewhat hindered by the rules and definitions which sustained the old artworld. Wright articulates: "Although we still use the same artworld terms of the past centuries, they have an awkward fit and it's a fit that does a great deal of violence to emerging practices."[58] In the same way that the words and institutions as they are described by Wright can negatively influence emerging practices, so can their accompanying copyright laws which squander creativity; laws which protected values nearly all of which are nearing obsolescence.

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[56] Plausible Artworlds: a project to collect and share knowledge about alternative models of creative practice, organized by Basekamp and Stephen Wright

[57] *Plausible Art Worlds - Introduction by Nato Thompson and Keynote by Basekamp and Stephen Wright. Livestream - Be There :: Broadcast LIVE Streaming Video.* CREATIVE TIME, 10 Oct. 2010.

[58] *Plausible Art Worlds - Introduction by Nato Thompson and Keynote by Basekamp and Stephen Wright. Livestream - Be There :: Broadcast LIVE Streaming Video.* CREATIVE TIME, 10 Oct. 2010.

There is an archaic ideology which is still espoused that insists on viewing and coddling originality as if it were a unique singularity born of spontaneous generation and not built on the shoulders of the amassed knowledge. Originality is the successful addition to a cumulative process, building off of what was there before. Strict application of copyright law is being used not only to seize credit for all cumulative processes which culminated in the production of a new work, but also to legally create an end cap from which no other progress can be added. This outmoded application can become the death of the remix, the remake, the reboot and has culminated in the marginalization of those who disregard these creative restrictions, labeling them outlaws or pirates. Part of the solution has been introduced with the usage of copyleft, Creative Commons, and the Free Art License, the rest is still *under construction*.

Arthur C. Clarke and Arthur C. Danto
In Arthur C. Clarke's transhumanist sci-fi novel *Childhood's End* there is an elaborate dramatization of the disconnection experienced between human generations. In the book, the last generation of human children was utterly incompatible with the previous. They became non-verbal and communicated telepathically with each other, they had no interest in communication with adults; their minds were flooded by combined knowledge, they didn't sleep and hardly moved. They were linked together rocking back and forth in a pattern spanning continents as they slowly entered into the next phase of human evolution as a collective consciousness.[59]

In a non-fiction study, the authors of the book *Generations*, William Strauss and Neil Howe, separated Anglo-European generations into two distinct eras: crises and awakening. Crises are periods of extroverted upheaval and reorganization of the institutional structures, while awakenings are more introverted marked by emphasis on individualism and personal values. [60] Their model of generational theory carries over nicely into the world of modern art; the difference is a generation in the art world advances at a different rate than a human generation.

Arthur Danto's *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* was published in 1981, the year I was born. Danto differentiates between works of art and mere things; I grew up in an environment in which it was a given that any object could become *activated* as art, and art can manifest in nearly everything and anything. Artists in my generation did not experience firsthand the shift from the art object to art concept; we grew up with the art world resolved to this newer understanding. New media is everywhere; everything is in a common state of flux.[61] Apart from the plot, the children of *Childhood's End* look a lot like today's version of anyone who's online.

Talkin' 'Bout My Generation
In 2009 I attended an exhibition at the New Museum in New York called *Younger Than Jesus* which was the first of its kind to showcase the artwork of Generation-Y, or Millennial, artists. Not surprisingly, the exhibition was built in part on the research of Strauss and Howe who also contributed an essay to the *Younger Than Jesus* exhibition reader.[62] The exhibit introduced art goers to the attitudes and values of younger artists; it demonstrated the products of living in a world of instant communication and the importance of conceptual and new artistic practices to young artists. Social media sprouted around the Millenials, user generated content bleeds over into user generated artwork with an increased interest by this generation's artists in more interactive art practices. The past decade has been increasingly validating of the concepts framed by Bourriaud. With each Facebook status update we draw that much closer to the

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[59] Clarke, Arthur C. *Childhood's End*. New York: Ballantine, 1993. Print.

[60] Strauss, William, and Neil Howe. *Generations: the History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. New York: Morrow, 1991. Print.

[61] Cornell, Lauren. "New Age Thinking." *Younger than Jesus: the Generation Book*. New York: New Museum, 2009. 19-29. Print.

[62] Strauss, William, Neil Howe, and Pete Markiewicz. "A New Generation of Americans." *Younger than Jesus: the Generation Book*. By Lauren Cornell. New York: New Museum, 2009. 237-53. Print.

birth of a world-wide urban culture[63]—which hopefully looks a little more promising than the one in *Childhood's End.*

But all of this is what journalists call the situation on the ground. These fundamentals, givens, or artworld-truths merely outline the world where contemporary artists live; the artistic existentialist crisis begins with deciding what to say, and what to do. I'd like to think the age of the monumental *be-all and end-all* artwork—the artistic singularities and momentous object making—has drifted away and been replaced with the emphasis on something akin to a conversation.

Social media and contemporary art have many similarities; both currently look like a free-for-all playground for experimentation. Pop culture is used as a communicative currency, but unlike pop culture where celebrity status can be gifted to someone plucked from obscurity, today's social generation gears more toward recognition and merit based on contribution. The talent of establishing a meaningful exchange can be showcased, but not forged. There is no genuine way to skip the line; as with a conversation, interrupting may give you the floor, but it is by no means a method of maintaining that position in the long term. All in all, in social media and modern life, the *immediacy of now* is becoming more and more intense.

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[63] Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics.* Dijon: Leses Du Réel, 2002. Print.

Chapter 5: Gesamt[~~kunstwerk~~]datenwerk

"If they aren't online they need to get a life. The universe is flipping. People on the internet have a life, and those not on the internet don't have a life."
Alma Alloro

Memes and Mere Real Things
In my childhood I liked collecting flowers in the neighborhood. My sisters and I collected dandelions, buttercups, and daisies which we called skunk flowers because of their sharp odor. Each of these three flowers is classified as a weed, evidently flowers we aren't supposed to like. Of these my favorite is still the dandelion; for a child they are a one of the most interactive flowers: you can easily kick the head off the stem, when picked they bleed milk, and when mature you can blow on the seeds and watch them float away. Dandelions are fascinating plants, they grow nearly everywhere, each is genetically identical, and they are notorious masters as propagation. The flower head has short life, the petals drop off as it matures; after which the inner the parachute ball of seeds is exposed and released upon disturbance, dispersing and colonizing new areas. In less than a week they can transition green fields to cadmium yellow then to cotton white. The self-replicating dandelion is a wilderness copy-paster.

In his book *The Selfish Gene*, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins posited that similar to genes and DNA, cultural information was also transferred from one person to another, generation to generation. He termed the unit of cultural transmission a *meme*, and much like a dandelion replicates genetically, culture replicates memetically. Suggesting parallels to Darwinian evolution, Dawkins theorized that memes generally spread in a stable form with brief spurts of mutation and progressive change.

"Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it onto his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain." [64]

Figure 8: (left) Ancient Egyptian statue of Ramses II; (right) Ancient Greek statue Kroisos Kouros

Like the proliferation of dandelions, I am fascinated by the theory by which memes spread and colonize the abstract wilderness. Since imitation is how a meme replicates, the more prolific a meme the more effectively it copy-pastes. Memes can exist in sets, called a meme-complex, and evolve together. Meme studies, or memetics, have crossovers into many fields such as semiotics, collective consciousness, and chaos theory. Meme behaviors can be purposefully exploited, engineered memes can be used for viral marketing and their subsequent opposition, culture jamming, can be used to disrupt.

Visual meme transfers are present in all walks of art history, notably in the form of appropriation. In ancient Egyptian sculpture, a subject's power or divinity was depicted by the placement of a standing figure's left foot forward. Later civilizations such as the ancient Greeks

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[64] Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene.* New York City: Oxford University Press, 1976. 169-179. Print.

assimilated the left foot pose from the sculptural advancements of the Egyptians; however, this stance was duplicated absent of any implications of divinity. This is an example of an artistic meme transferring where the techniques and aesthetics are borrowed but not their original encoded meanings.

For the past few years I have been collecting the crash cards from each airline I fly with. By international requirements these cards depict the exact same story: passengers enter a plane, learn how to fasten their belt, are informed which devices they can use, and are taught how to behave in an emergency water or ground landing. I like to relate the crash card to a contemporary retelling of the story of the flood. Each card contains the same essential story arc, but the imagery and specific details vary by airline and aircraft. These cards are an example of an informational meme transfer where only the underlying meaning is conveyed.

Figure 9: (left) Robert Morris, *Untitled (Mirrored Cubes)*, 1965; (right) streets of Weimar, 2011

The perpetuation and sometimes intentional manipulation of a meme has been used in a wide range of emerging artistic and creative practices such as remixes in music, film and television series reboots, painting reproductions, and internet memes. A nice example of painting as a meme was demonstrated in the exhibition project *Fabiola* by Francis Alÿs. Over the course of twenty years he collected over 300 reproductions of Jean-Jacques Henner's portrait of Saint Fabiola. Each piece was an attempt to produce a replica of the original which resulted in varying degrees of deviation, alteration, and interpretation.

Figure 10: *Fabiola* , images from the collection of Francis Alÿs

Many memes have been transitioning fluidly between the analog and digital world. Memes which are distributed through the internet and utilize new media spread very quickly; as such, internet memes are often subjected to rapid progressive mutation.

Computer Art to Post-Internet Art
Early computer art was only about the medium, with the exploration of algorithm based fractals computer painting was computer-generated. This artwork, which falls mainly under the classification of new media art, was fixated on talking about technology rather than with it, technology was the subject and not yet the medium. [65] "There is no aesthetic refraction without something being refracted; no imagination without something imagined."[66]

Technology soon became a medium alongside the amalgamation of technology and society. We can talk about the oddity of what it is to be *online*; the computer has become a well-integrated human extension.

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[65] Elkins, James. *Art History and the Criticism of Computer–Generated Images.* Leonardo 27 No. 4 (1994): 335–42 and Color Plate, 1994. PDF.

[66] Adorno, Theodor W., Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann, and Robert Hullot-Kentor. *Aesthetic Theory.* London: Continuum, 2002. 4. Print.

To let someone borrow your computer feels like letting someone borrow your body. Modern technology attaches so successfully that we pass directly through it, it becomes nothingness. The internet has worked its way into our productive environment; its contemporary usage in art making can be everything, and nothing. In the way that same way artwork became aware of the gallery space, it has now become aware of the internet. Internet aware art is a new terrain currently in the process of colonization, very little is written about it and most of what is comes directly from artists working with it. Internet aware is much more than the artwork equivalent of the little "Internet Ready" stickers that were attached to computers in the 90's. What if digital documentation isn't the limit, but part of a larger anticipated afterlife, a place where the rules of the corporeal world no longer apply? When the artwork becomes digital, it can have a transformation, its second life. Artist Artie Vierkant most clearly articulates the concept of internet aware—or post-internet art:

""Post-Internet Art" is a term coined by artist Marisa Olson and developed further by writer Gene McHugh in the critical blog Post Internet. […] Post-Internet is defined as a result of the contemporary moment: inherently informed by ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials. Post-Internet also serves as an important semantic distinction from the two historical artistic modes with which it is most often associated: New Media Art and Conceptualism."[67]

Regardless of the name Internet Art/Post-Internet Art/Internet Aware Art, these works pass back and forth between analog and digital—the real world artwork absorbing computer aesthetics and the internet absorbing artistic processes. An exemplary work is *OMG Obelisk* by artist duo Aids-3D; this work pulled online aesthetics and cultural references into the gallery, and in return the documentation of the work became a widely shared animated GIF. Most who saw the GIF meme before the physical piece didn't know which had come first.

Internet is the new photography; it's the new kid on the block whose artworld status is being questioned. But with the introduction of a new medium, everything old feels new again. Ultimately the internet will become just another spoke for consideration in Gesamtkunstwerk.

Figure 11: *OMG Obelisk*, 2007, by AIDS-3D, (left) still from animated GIF version; (right) Installation view at the New Museum, New York

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[67] Vierkant, Artie. "The Image Object Post-Internet." *Artie Vierkant // Info.* 2010. Web. 01 June 2011.
<http://www.artievierkant.info/writing.html>.

Chapter 6: WYSIWYG

"Good luck out there, buddy. You're gonna need it."[68]
Barney Calhoun, Half Life 2

See You Online is the New Goodbye
In *A Brief History of Time*, Stephen Hawking demonstrated that if the universe is infinite, than any particular point could potentially be designated the center. Of course, any other competing point could also be declared the center and therefore every place in the universe could simultaneously be the center. I like to think that in our contemporary pluralist artworld any point of entry could be a starting point, and a starting point derived from the strongest artistic impulse would be the most obvious. For me this impulse is a return to painting, to the painted object, and to craftsmanship. Painting has been the first developmental starting point for each series of my work.

With Impulse 101, my challenge is to place objects in public space in a method that first defines a context for their reception, and then communicates their content through a painted medium. Painting is a loaded artistic practice; as a medium it carries a historic weight, one which contains the capacity to be a burden or a resource. Through the utilization of painting it is possible that the work will be more readily understood as a work of art; however, as with other forms of public art, if it is not successfully executed there is the possibility that an audience may come to understand it as ornamental, commercial advertisement, or vandalism. I enter into this series with recognition of these obstacles.

Not all these works will need to first establish themselves as art before being experienced; for some works, the communiqué or the transfiguration often precedes the audience's awareness that what they are experiencing is art. At times the event may pass without an audience ever achieving this awareness. For those in which the work does need the context alongside its reception, this places a special challenge on the work to perform at a higher awareness of its location than a similar object in the contextualizing walled cube.

Situating these works in public is less about public art and more about site specific installation. The artwork will occur as part of metamorphic cycle; its states changes can be analogize as dandelion/seeds/field, ice/water/gas, or in the Lost universe: John Locke/Jeremy Bentham/Smoke Monster.

Throughout this metamorphosis these works will experience the tension between *wanting to be online* and *being in the real world*. These paintings may wish they were digital but they don't mimic being digital; they are merely what the modern day internet-familiar eye accepts. Compare this to the same awkwardness in the ecotone[69] where human society edges up against nature: canyons outlined with railings, large map boards on hiking trails, and signposts popping out of ponds warning not to feed the ducks; these absurdities have become normalized to the modern eye.

The first state of the work is dynamic: it reacts and interacts with its environment; this is a highly contextual and cerebral state. The visual information of the surrounding area will be filtered, reduced and reframed; this will diminish the relative distance between the painting and its subject matter. The work begins to vibrate between availability and non-availability; it will be viewable during a limited duration, maintaining the format of exhibition. The second state is static, the object moves to the white cube where it is exhibited as a trophy, artifact, or curiosity. Here the art object can serve as commodity; commodity

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[68] Valve Corporation. *Half-Life 2*. Valve Corporation 2004

[69] Ecotone: the zone between two major ecological communities

being a necessary parameter for self-replication. The third state is the post-material rebirth where the artwork moves online. If it survives intact at this level it will exceed mere documentation and attain its digital reincarnation as reusable information. Like the dandelion, with the death of the author it can begin its transmission and proliferation as a meme.

The first two iterations of this approach take their namesake from this essay: *Impulse 101* and *WYSIWYG*. I'll begin by discussing the origins, formation, manifestations and transformations of *Impulse 101*.
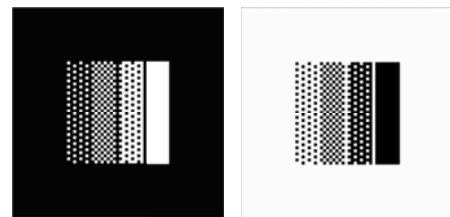

Figure 14: Code Page 437 from the original IBM PC

Impulse 101 is a conceptual work which begins with the 4 foundational font characters of 8-bit Block ASCII, ░ ▒ ▓ █. These shapes were originally found in the 1979 character set Code Page 437, or CP437, of the original IBM PC.

ASCII art has its origins in 7-bit ASCII which originated in the 1960's. My first encounters with ASCII art were with 8-bit CP437 on Bulletin Board Systems in the 1990's, just a few years before the internet caught on in the consumer sector. The CP437 character set has a total of 256 glyphs; in *Impulse 101* I put the parentheses around ░ ▒ ▓ █, the foundational forms which can be seen as the triangle-square-circle of Block ASCII.

The first principle was to appropriate these shapes as my own, using them as 4 small robots whose purpose is to self-replicate and take on new forms. Being symbols, they can slip through the analog and digital world without needing a physical form, they exist as meme nanites[70], replicating, infesting and building upon themselves.

...ersion,
Black

I began by spreading these symbols in various online locations: embedded in HTML code, in emails, Facebook, YouTube, and on dump.fm[71]. I watched as the symbols were picked up and remixed into new shapes by other users. The symbols bounced around the internet, copy-pasted, blogged and reblogged. In a chance coincidence the *Written Images* exhibition at LEAP gallery in Berlin had an experimental project taking place on July 1, 2011. The project enabled users to submitted JavaScript code online which would be rendered as 8-bit ASCII and printed as a continuous feed in the gallery. The event was live streamed over the internet, a camera captured each printout, and the printed simultaneous acts as the exhibition catalog. The robots of Impulse 101 got to work mass producing images which poured into the gallery by the thousand.

Figure 15: *Impulse 101* printed out in LEAP Berlin as part of the Written Images exhibition

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[70] A nanite is a single microscopic robot, from Wikipedia: Nanorobotics is the emerging technology field of creating machines or robots whose components are at or close to the microscopic scale of a nanometer.

[71] Dump.fm is website for real-time image communication developed by Ryder Ripps in collaboration with Scott Ostler of MIT Exhibit.
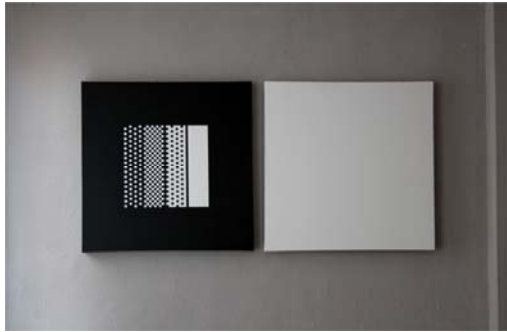
Figure 17: *Impulse 101*, 1 x 1 meter, acrylic on canvas, deactivated installation view, Eigenheim Gallery, Weimar

I formed the symbols into a cube configuration in homage to Malevich. From the JPG's I dragged these cubes half-way into the real world in a painting diptych. The diptych installation is half-digital, half-painted, half in the real world, half on the internet via a projection. In the video half the symbols are ever changing forms, evolving and morphing via newer videos. The video projection is temporal, activating and deactivating the diptych, fluctuating between analog and digital. The online version/digital version of the work allows new videos to be loaded, and remixes to be entered by users into the video screen.

In a symbiotic cross-over, the *Impulse 101* diptych was curated into the thesis performance *Extend.fm* by Alma Alloro. The work provided video movement to the performance, and in return the symbols were presented to her audience replicating in the physicality of the space and reproduced in every layer of the video and photo documentation.

The story of these shapes has only just begun; the concept spins and spins on an abstract plane, touching down in different tactile forms, the manifestations of which can never be fully quantified or documented.

The second work, *WYSIWYG*, is a site specific installation in Weimar. If *Impulse 101* is the younger, faster, Pepsi artwork, then *WYSIWYG* is a more formal, classic Coca-Cola artwork. Where in *Shapeshifters* the paintings were slipped between the wall and the graffiti, in *WYSIWYG* the painting is slipped between the reflection and the reflected. Where the *Shapeshifters* squares were ultimately self-updating paintings, *WYSIWYG* is a self-updating reflected remix.
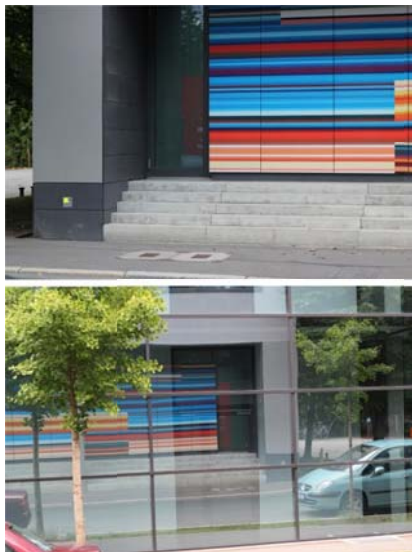

Figure 18: (top) MFPA and Nerlich's artwork; (bottom) CIB and reflection

On Coudraystrasse in Weimar there are two modern buildings across from each other, the MFPA building and the CIB building. On the front of the MFPA is a large vector-like graphic artwork by local artist Klaus Nerlich; on the opposite side of the street the mirror-tinted glass of the CIB façade reflects back the MFPA building and Nerdlich's image. I placed a painting directly behind one of the window panes of the CIB building; the content of the painting is the exact image of the reflection on that particular pane of glass. The image solidifies as single reflected perspective; as a painting, the work first remixes a sample of Nerlich's work, and then is presented in a way which causes another direct interaction based on the new reflection. The glass overlay on the painting causes visual distortion which changes depending on the distance and direction from the painting, the obstacles

obstructing the view, and the changes in daylight. Ultimately the work is constantly remixing that pane of glass. It simultaneously duplicated and remixes, stabilizes and distorts a reflection where each photograph or video of results in a different image of the work.

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