University of New Orleans

ScholarWorks@UNO

Spring 5-14-2014

Peripheral Recognition

Jason C. Childers
The University of New Orleans, jchilder@uno.edu

Recommended Citation

Peripheral Recognition

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Fine Arts

by

Jason Christopher Childers

B.F.A. School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009
M.Ed. University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011

May, 2014

Dedication

This text is dedicated to my wife, Christa, to my parents, David and Naomi, and to my siblings, David and Shelly, for all of their support, home cooked meals, and shared experiences. They are always cheering me on when the game gets tough.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Aaron McNamee, Tony Campbell, and Rebecca Reynolds, for always challenging me and my beliefs, and for supporting my growth as an artist. The UNO Fine Arts faculty and my peers also have my gratitude for providing a critical educational environment. I must also thank the influential mentors in my past; Mark Kelly, who taught me that my weird questions are worthwhile—making me want to become a teacher; Jason Dunda, who walked me down the path of becoming an artist; and Rico Gutstein, who helped open my eyes to a new political awareness and shared with me a critical consciousness that is grounded in love. And thank you to everyone else who has supported my growth in this world—I would not be where I am otherwise.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Abstract

Perception greatly affects the way we experience and understand the world. Using self-reflective research processes and data collection, I explore how art can subjectively re-present data and what this means for research and knowledge. The artworks through which I discuss these notions are *Self Checkout 2013*, *Bibliography of Virtual Consciousness: Uniform Resource Locator Volumes 1-12* (*BOVC:URL 1-12*), and *Observation Box*. *Self Checkout 2013* is composed of all of my receipts from 2013. They not only record my transactions, but also re-present data from which one can make inferences regarding my life—my consumer identity, my needs, my desires, etc. *BOVC:URL 1-12* re-presents my web history and suggests a reflection on the relationships between physical realities, virtual realities, and the consciousness that mediates experience between them. These forms of data are analyzed by me and through audience participation in *Observation Box* in an attempt to construct multi-perspectival knowledges from art.

Contemporary Art, Conceptual Art, Art and Perception, Readymade, The Virtual, Art and Research, Art as Knowledge, Peripheral Recognition

Introduction

The text that follows is a survey of my artwork that explores perception, politics, and the production and consumption of knowledge. It acts as an explanation of my work and my practice–mediated through a description of my interests, beliefs, and supported assumptions. I claim no universal truth; however, I do claim informed conjecture as situated in a particular, place, time, and perspective amidst a fluid stream of understanding that continues to flow. This is just a moment in time. What I now state in confidence is subject to change.

I hope to supplement each artwork discussed with its conceptual basis. Conceptual art has greatly influenced the nature of my practice. I speak of conceptual art as not merely concepts existing in an artwork, but an artwork in which concepts take precedence over form and greatly influence, if not dictate, the process, production, and presentation of the work. This is the sort of ideological, systematic, and emotionally dry conceptual art that Sol Lewitt speaks of in "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art."[1] The explanation of such conceptual underpinnings can provide a sense of clarity to the deeper intentions of the work. I can give contextual clues and suggest certain understandings of the work, but then it is left to the interpretation of the viewer. An artist cannot transplant concepts into the minds of the audience, but must provide a situation in which reflection upon a particular concept can occur. The audience can then translate the issue into their own language—interpreting the information to their own understanding. Thus, this text can provide a dialogue between interpretation and intent, in turn opening new avenues of viewing and understanding the artwork.

There are multiple perspectives, multiple understandings, and multiple realities. I believe that the reality that is given is constructed with many facades that covertly imbue an object-idea with import and authority. The quotidian, routinized existence of contemporary society acts to create an unquestioning acceptance of these facades—yielding a state of normalcy that is political in nature due to its constructedness. In the state of normalcy, what we perceive and understand to be normal can be and is shaped by particular people with particular powers or privileges.[2]

My notions of the virtual and of facades are integral to understanding how we perceive on an everyday basis and how I engage with issues of our perception. How we perceive a given reality greatly

---

[1] Sol Lewitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art (1967)," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, Ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), 822-26.
[2] I.e. Race, class, gender, etc...

influences our understandings of that reality and the actions that we create within it. I perceive my world through a lens of criticality and malleability. I attempt to find the things in my life that carry within them some sort of existential import that may be hidden, overlooked, or taken for granted. The process involves deconstructing and dissecting my life, my experiences, and the world around me. It involves constant exploring, questioning, negating, and understanding from multiple perspectives. It involves understanding that which is beneath the surface, the real behind the virtual, the book inside the cover. These are the things in life that go unquestioned, that are taken as normal or "just the way it is"—veiled by tradition and normalcy.

Beneath this virtual facade lies a dynamic, absurd, and sometimes terrifying reality. This reality that lies beneath the virtual is at the heart of my interest in peripheral recognition. In *The Reality of the Virtual*, Slavoj Zizek talks about the idea that when we encounter other people,

> we erase—abstract from the image of the other person or partner—certain features which are simply too embarrassing to be kept in mind all the time. Like, I talk to you—of course rationally I know you are defecating, you are sweating, not to mention other things—but quite literally when I interact with you this is not part of the image I have of you. So when I deal with you I am basically not dealing with the real you, I am dealing with the virtual image of you. And this image has reality in the sense that it nonetheless structures the way that I am dealing with you.[3]

These "features" aren't just embarrassing; sometimes they don't matter, are irrelevant, or are even too difficult to deal with. This "real you" that Zizek speaks of is placed in the peripheral, as the "virtual you" becomes perceptually focal. In a sense, the virtual becomes what we consider to be the real. This example brings to light an important distinction between empirical and ideological perception as well as a distinction between the perception of the real and the perception of the virtual. What we see is the virtual and this informs our understanding—a virtual understanding. By shifting our empirical perception, it follows that ideological perception shifts, thus creating a situation for new relationships with reality and new understandings of that same reality.

In my practice and work I impose a facade of authority on the everyday, commonplace thing— things that are seemingly insignificant—in order to re-present and reveal their importance. Such an authoritative facade can help 1) deconstruct the thing's position as unimportant, neglected, and in the peripheral; 2) foreground it to observe, analyze, and question—forming new relationships with the

---

[3] EducateKnowledge, "The Reality of the Virtual - Slavoj Zizek," *YouTube* video, 1:14:37, July 07, 2013, Accessed March 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GahnBiQJay8.

neglected; and 3) suggest a critical perceptual framework to be carried over into the lives of the viewers. A critical consciousness and political awareness *requires* this perceptual framework and *yields* the freedom to transform the world based upon these new understandings. This critical perceptual framework that I offer is a process that can lead to what I call peripheral recognition—a new awareness and understanding of that which exists in the peripheral of our consciousness. The notion of "the peripheral" that I speak of is a place or an area that exists outside of our immediate perception and consciousness. This is where socio-culturally insignificant object-ideas exist in a state of neglect. We know it is there yet we *choose* not to recognize it.

Peripheral recognition is seeing something that you normally don't look at and understanding something you don't normally question. At heart it is a process that involves the willingness to be open and to expand; to be fluid, malleable, and vulnerable; going out on a limb, falling, and picking yourself up to learn from a new mistake. Look around yourself and find something that you never care about or think about. Such things are everywhere. Maybe it's an object, an action, a feeling, an idea, etc… Buttons, rocking, light, shame, corners. Corners... what do they *mean*? I can represent or embed the work with peripheral recognition, but I cannot create it within a viewer. Peripheral recognition is a choice. I can offer some tools for the viewer to carve their own paths in an often deterministic and oppressive reality. In short I am looking for avenues of freedom from control (often covert control). This process has greatly affected my life and I strive to share my experience with others.

Throughout the text I explain my artistic explorations in the philosophy and politics of perception and knowledge as it pertains to our contemporary context. Each work deals with issues of what we perceive, how we perceive it, and the meanings we make of such perceptions. Particularly in the chapter titled "Shadows of Perception" I take issue with the state of normalcy and the detrimental constraints it puts on our everyday perception. Normalcy can be a political mechanism of control when norms are unquestioningly accepted. Thus, fractures in normalcy provide opportunities for seeing and understanding that which is beneath the surface.

In the "Self Checkout" and "Virtual Consciousness" sections, I focus on the conditions of our perception, how we are not seeing the things in our everyday lives that re-present major political and psychological issues in contemporary existence—the cult of consumption that is capitalism, and virtual existence. The receipts in *Self Checkout 2013* not only record my transactions, but also re-present data from which one can make inferences regarding my life—my consumer identity, my class status, my needs, my desires, etc. *Bibliography of Virtual Consciousness: Uniform Resource Locator Volumes 1-12*

re-presents my web history and suggests a reflection on the relationships between physical realities, virtual realities, and the consciousness that mediates experience between them.

In the section, "The Production and Consumption of Knowledge," my previous research-oriented data collection merges with *Observation Box* to create a holistic research project. Here I question what role art can play in the production and consumption of understanding and knowledge. I survey some academic research ideologies that are arguing for more subjective ways of representing a given reality and the understandings thereof. Through art we are able to see and experience the notion of data in different ways and we are able to analyze it as a community. *Observation Box* suggests such a framework for compiling subjective and multi-perspectival understandings. In the end, the question may shift from *what* we understand to *how* we are understanding—in turn effecting what we consider to be knowledge.

Shadows of Perception

Some time ago, I once stopped and stared at a fire hydrant in an attempt to deconstruct my reality. I was thinking about negation as a potentially deconstructive process and thought about perceiving my reality in that manner. I asked myself, "What am I not seeing when I am looking? What am I looking at but not seeing?" After some fire hydrant meditation, one thing I noticed that I was looking at but not really seeing was the shadows. At that moment all of the shadows in my field of perception became clear and focused. They momentarily took precedence over the objects they represented. This led to the creation of *Dinner for Two* (**Figure 1**). The image is of a still life that ponders absence. Only the shadows of the objects exist, but from a distance where the image in its entirety is in clear view, the mind fills in the objects. *We think we see* the entire reality, but all that we are given of that reality are the two-dimensional projections of the three-dimensional object—the shadows. Without a closer, more intimate inspection, what we perceive is neither true nor accurate.
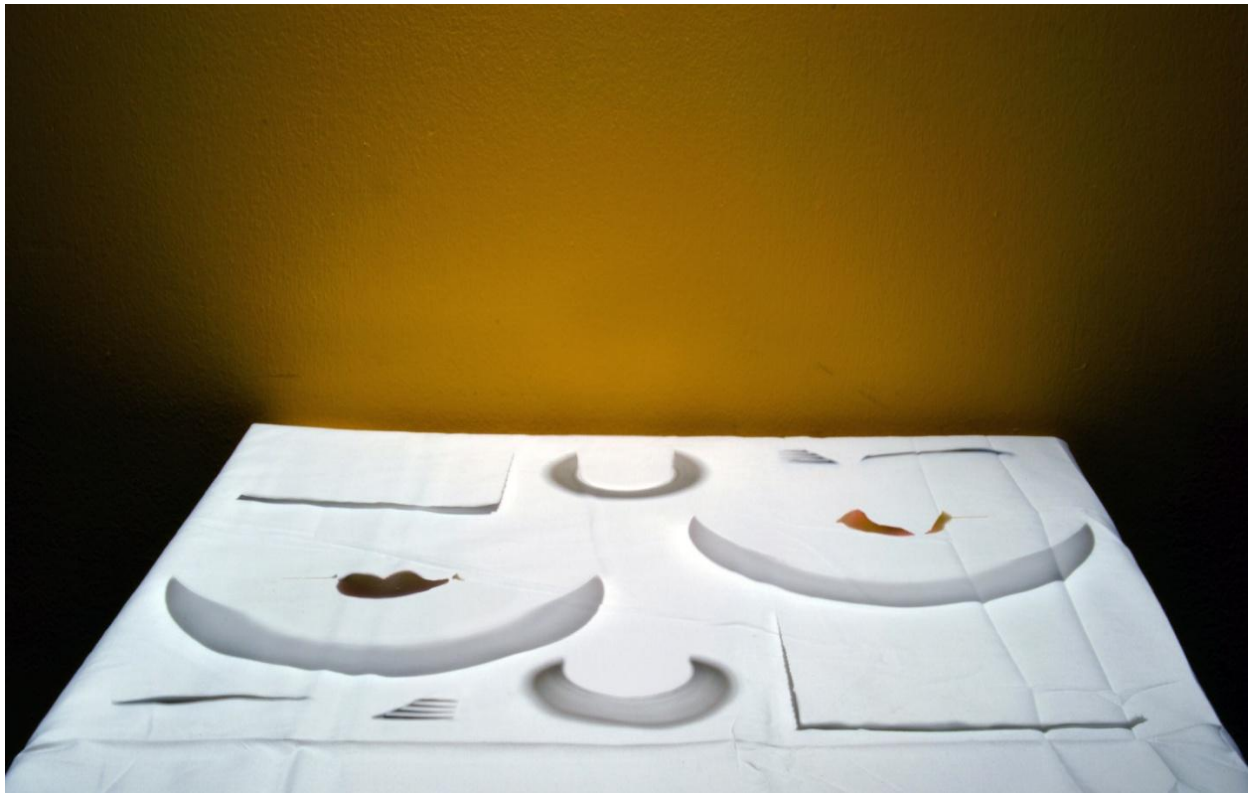

Figure 1. *Dinner for Two*, 2012, digital print

What does a shadow mean? As if we are strapped in Plato's Cave, our quotidian, everyday perception is that of a world of shadows. I get home from work, eat some barely legal food product after seconds of preparation, sit on the couch without moving for hours, while eating and absorbing media. The next day I discuss with people what I learned and what I thought about the news, movies, internet videos, etc. We share dialogue on the subject and pride ourselves in our good taste and how much we know about such things. But this media is a mere shadow of the reality that it represents. As Glaucon suggests in Plato's *Simile of the Cave*, "How could they see anything else if they were prevented from moving their heads all their lives? ...would they not assume that the shadows they saw were the real things? ...And so in every way they would believe that the shadows of the objects we mentioned were the whole truth.'"[4] All sorts of media that we consume and take to reflect the truth are constructed, edited, and calculated 2-d productions of 3-d/4-d experiential realities. They are constructed by certain people with certain motives for public entertainment, public consumption, and private profit. Everything is shaped and greatly distorted, yet taken as truth, as normal. Reality tv is real. This is the conceptual relationship I formed with shadows, their meaning, and how this meaning conceptually informs my perception of reality. Just as in *Dinner for Two*, without closer inspection we take the given reality as true and accurate.

We most often trust that our empirical perception reveals physical truth, but empirical observation is neither singular nor definitive. It's pretty good at keeping us alive and allowing us to control ourselves and our environments, but once the perspective shifts we realize that the world is other than that which we knew, understood, and took to be true—seeing the world as it could be otherwise. Multiple meanings and truths are discovered and in reflection we see that our perception, as it pertains to that beyond survival, is relative, fluid, and malleable. As social beings that communicate and learn, multiple perspectives and multiple realities exist and are available to our existence. We learn and grow from challenging and shifting our perception.

---

[4] Plato, "The Simile of the Cave," in *Plato: The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 2003), 240.

Perception and Normalcy

Then I read some Hegel and some Marx, so I made some dialectical sculptures. *Forms of Tension* (**Figure 2**) is a body of work exploring the dialectical nature of tensegrity. Each sculpture is typically constructed with only the use of the Spanish windlass mechanism. The Spanish windlass mechanism acts as joinery to provide structural integrity. The structural integrity is achieved through the synthesis of tension and compression, hence tensegrity and dialectics. The sculptures were a way for me to perceive and experience dialectical tension. I wanted to be able to make my physical reality as malleable as my perceptual reality had become: not just being able to see, experience, and understand the world differently, but to be able to actively, physically, and concretely change the reality that I am perceiving. In tensegrity dialectical tension creates structure; dialectical tension holds the world together.

Figure 2. *Forms of Tension - XY, ZX, YZ*, 2011, polypropylene and pine, 8' x 8' x 8'

Viewing the world dialectically is not easily accomplished. It requires the ability to consciously be yourself and not yourself at the same time—seeing your reflection in the mirror and your reflection seeing you. It requires perceptual shifting to see and experience the world from multiple perspectives (both physically and ideologically). "Who cares?" one might ask. To which I might respond, "Well, those who seek empathy over sympathy, those who seek to embrace diversity and multi-cultural solidarity, or those who have to stop the flow of heavy rain water through a hole in the collapsed pitch of a tarp tent

that you are sitting in." In the latter case I used a shoe (**Figure 3**). It was chaos. It was an emergency, but in an instant a shoe became an architectural material. It pitched the tent and plugged the waterfall—otherwise it would have been a cold wet night. My world was malleable; the shoe was transformed from something I put on my foot to a key component of the structure of my tarp tent. It has since maintained that function and maintains its new meaning.
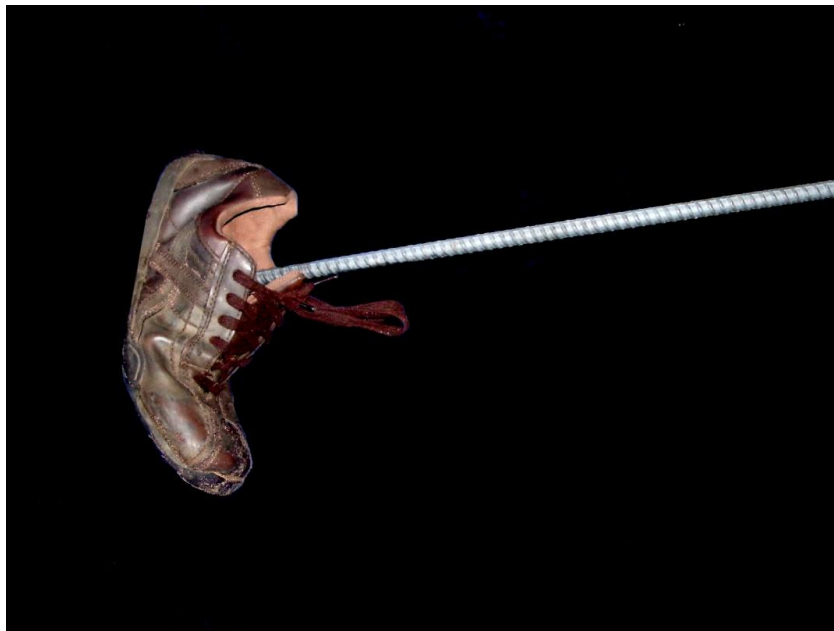
Figure 3. *Sometimes It Happens - The Shoe that Plugged the Rainwater in the Tarp Tent*, 2013, digital image

Shifting the meaning of an object or idea is often in conflict with the construct of normalcy. If I start calling "trees" "steak sandwiches," I gather that most people I talk to would have no idea what I'm talking about. I point at a tree and say "steak sandwich," and they think that I am on drugs or that I have a mental disorder.[5]   If I shift my perception of poles in the subway to dancing poles, and begin pole dancing, that will not be readily accepted by people in a normative environment (much like Klara Lidén's performance, *Paralyzed* [**Figure 4]**, in which she began dancing and flinging herself around the inside of a train car). I will be judged accordingly. Normalcy is conforming to and not deviating from socio-political rules and standards.[6] These rules and standards are routinized and can lead to a static state of being that unquestioningly accepts what it is given. It can follow that normalcy yields comfort, passivity, and stagnance. The Dada movement, particularly in Zurich, attacked this very structure of normalcy

---

[5] In the Merriam Webster Dictionary one of the definitions of normal is "free from mental disorder."
"Normal," *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, Accessed March 24, 2014, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/normal.
[6] Ibid.

through their absurd and chaotic interventions. They acted to fracture the normalcy of an oppressive

reality. Lifting the veil of normalcy requires questioning, a critical consciousness, and shifting

perception. Lifting the veil of normalcy can yield new and expanded ways of seeing and understanding

the world.

Figure 4. Klara Lidén, *Paralyzed*, 2003, 3 min. video

Quotidian routine everydayness causes us to not be aware or conscious of many things. It

causes us to not notice anything on our drive to work. You arrive in the parking lot and have no idea

how you just got there. In *Art in a Democratic Society*, Dave Hickey describes an experience where the

routine everyday has been disrupted—creating a new awareness of things.

> I drive to work roughly the same way every morning, whenever I go to work... Stop at the same
> stop signs, drive over the same little bumps, stop at the same stop lights. I'm totally unaware of
> this trip... And then, this crazy lady in the Honda. She comes streaking out. I turn quickly,
> bounce up over the curb and land on the sidewalk. At this *moment* I become alive to the world.
> I feel the warm breeze on my cheek, I see the blue sky, I smell the air, I taste my spit. I am
> awake. And this is what the experience of art, as physical experience, is. A cultural
> approximation of this experience. ...Do ya understand.[7]

Sometimes It Happens (**Figures 3 & 5**) is a body of work that requires keeping a keen and critical eye for

the ruptures of routine everydayness that create a general awareness of things. The photographs

document the fractures of reality in my lived experience—the absurdities of existence revealing

themselves—where routine everyday normalcy is disrupted by the abnormal. The images aim to

---

[7] Dave Hickey, "Art in a Democratic Society," *YouTube* video, 1:06:15, Last modified April, 23 2011, Accessed March 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pa4SJ7GvDk8.

document and represent an aesthetic experience; a moment of spontaneous curiosity and reflection. This fracture of reality is documented with a photograph. In representation I recontextualize the abnormality into a black space, a void—the mind. The black space represents what it looks like when we close our eyes and *see* inward. The abnormality is thus isolated and brought to the forefront. This new context is a moment of reflection. Reality was fractured and I formed a new focus, a new perspective, a new consideration for the thing (see *Shifting Perception Chart* [**Figure 7**]).

Figure 5. *Sometimes It Happens - The Mattress in the Woods Down the River Bend*, 2013, digital image

I believe the following: dialectically, the world is in constant contradiction; and existentially, we are thrown into a world of absurdity. As we can see in *Sometimes It Happens*, the absurd fractures in reality that I stumble upon reveal contradictions in socially constructed normalcy and in psychologically constructed cognitive-perceptual frameworks. For example, I am confused when I am walking deep into the woods and happen upon a mattress set up for action. I don't know if I am in a place of nature, love, or hate—or just teenagers. Richard Wentworth explores similar notions of everyday reflection and moments of awareness in his ongoing series *Making Do and Getting By* (**Figure 6**). As the write-up for

Wentworth's exhibition on the Tate website suggests, " Wentworth teases us into a new awareness of the everyday. Objects as much as ways of mind are disrupted and subverted, allowing the thousands of tiny gestures and things that constitute the world around us to be read in new and unexpected ways."[8] Beneath the surface of our structured, stratified, rationalized, and routinized world is contradiction and absurdity. Contradictions and absurdities are not "normal"; they are the abnormalities that disrupt routine-normal-rational reality. They create moments of reflection through *cognitive conflict* that in turn shape the way we think and the way that we act. Cognitive conflict can be understood as a discrepancy between what we see and what we understand, or a conflict between two simultaneously held ideas. It follows that we resolve cognitive conflict through either changing the way that we think about something (assimilation) in order for it to fit within our pre-existing cognitive structures, or we might change the way that we act or behave (accommodation) in order to reduce the conflict. Moments of cognitive conflict change how we think and act. Cognitive conflict is the source of cognitive development; it is learning.

Figure 6. Richard Wentworth, from the ongoing series *Making Do and Getting By*, 1980-, photographs

How do we integrate what we perceive as part of our being? How do ideas shape what we perceive, how we perceive, and how we make sense of such perceptions? If I am told that all sorts of Middle-Eastern people are terrorists and I dislike terror, then I might reduce the conflict by either reducing the Middle-Eastern people that cause the terrorism or I might rationalize their terrorist behavior.   If I am told that young black males are aggressive and violent, then I might change my

---

[8] "Richard Wentworth," Tate, Accessed March 24, 2014, http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/richard-wentworth.

behavior towards young black males or I might rationalize their supposed aggressive and violent behavior (it's their parent's fault, there's no structure, etc...). The point here is that perception is also socially constructed, political in nature, and is mediated by cultural norms and ideals.

Perceptual Shifting

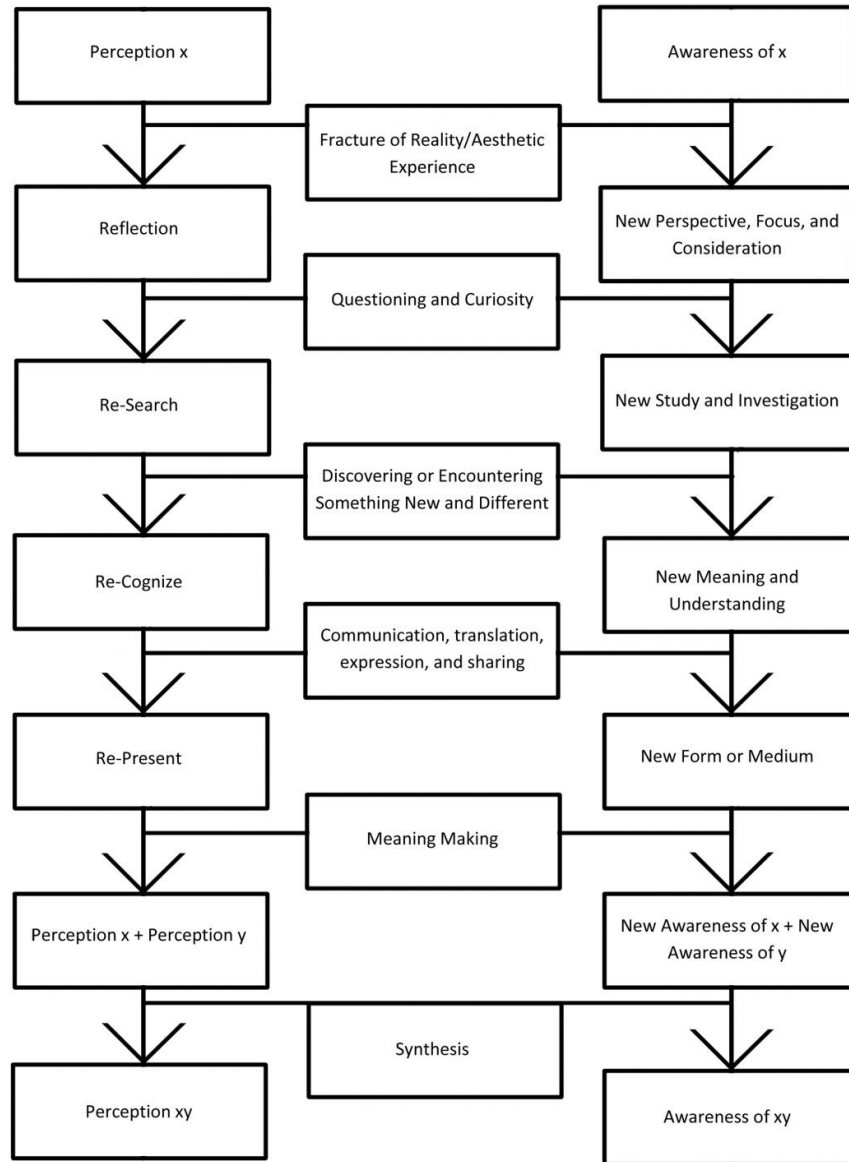| Perception x		Awareness of x
↓	Fracture of Reality/Aesthetic Experience	↓
Reflection		New Perspective, Focus, and Consideration
↓	Questioning and Curiosity	↓
Re-Search		New Study and Investigation
↓	Discovering or Encountering Something New and Different	↓
Re-Cognize		New Meaning and Understanding
↓	Communication, translation, expression, and sharing	↓
Re-Present		New Form or Medium
↓	Meaning Making	↓
Perception x + Perception y		New Awareness of x + New Awareness of y
↓	Synthesis	↓
Perception xy		Awareness of xy

Figure 7. *Shifting Perception Chart*, Jason Christopher Childers™, 2014, digital chart

Self Checkout

      The conditions in which we exist affect our perception and the meanings we make. Socially speaking, all of these conditions are constructed and politically oriented. Thus some shifts in perception that we experience may be unconscious and unwarranted.   On this topic Joe Kincheloe suggests that, "Action to correct what may be viewed as harmful construction can be negotiated once reflection reveals the psychological, ethical, moral and political foundations of the pathology."[9] In our contemporary context neoliberal, laissez-faire capitalism greatly shapes our world and can play a major role in creating what can be seen as "harmful construction." For example, the cult of competitive individualism that is nurtured by capitalism is grounded upon an ethics of the market that strives for profit, at the cost of a human-based ethic that strives for justice. This is exemplified in the notion of "acceptable risk," in which corporations can put the lives of workers and their communities at risk in order to gain profits. This unjust ideology permeates our everyday lived realities and affects who we are.

      The politics of perception began to interest me because of the way power structures and dominant ideologies can covertly shape what we perceive, how we perceive, and the understandings we make of such perceptions. Yet, as Kincheloe suggests, this particular political construction of the self and of the given reality can be transgressed, beginning with the process of reflection. I wondered what I could explore that represented perception and power relations. I grabbed a book on Marx's selected writings and I looked at the book inside the cover. I happened upon a section in which Marx was talking about commodities, value, and the process of exchange. Marx explains that, "Exchange-value is a definite social manner of expressing the labour bestowed on a thing."[10] I bookmarked the page with a receipt from my pocket. In a moment of reflection I began to perceive and understand the receipt as a transaction that is an abstract exchange of labor.

      I had been collecting receipts for a while because they are capitalist garbage. They represent so much but are so neglected. In *Self Checkout 2013* (**Figures 8 & 9**) I collected, recorded, and framed every receipt that I received in 2013.   I framed the neglected refuse in a facade of authority; a trope of

---

[9] Joe L. Kincheloe, "From Constructivism to Critical Constructivism," in *Critical Constructivism: Primer*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2005), 11.

[10] Karl Marx, "Economic Writings: Capital, Volume One," in *Selected Writings,* ed. Lawrence Hugh Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 242.

validity. Money also plays a role as a facade of authority and a trope of validity. This spoke of power relations, a tension between the juxtaposed objects (receipt and frame). A frame typically signifies the importance of the meaning of its contents and a receipt is typically perceived as meaningless. In opposition, I perceive frames to be meaningless and receipts to be meaningful.

Figure 8. *Self Checkout 2013*, 2014, Complete collection of artist's receipts from 2013, mdf, and masonite

I was thinking of a title for the receipts project, and when I was at self checkout, the electronic lady told me, "Please remember to take your receipt." I was thinking the same thing because that's exactly what I do. I started reflecting on the meaning of a "self checkout" and decided that it directly referred to the event that birthed the existence of the receipts and to the self-reflective research process of the artwork. The title also alludes to the automation and autonomy of consumption; overwhelming consumption. The receipts are parts of a whole (a system: i.e. labor, profit, economics, politics, me, etc...), so they have a level of individual documentation and a level that speaks of the systems in which they exist; consumptive systems in consumptive realities; consumptive games with consumptive rules. Beneath the surface of an economic transaction is the web of social relations that it represents. In his economic writings, Marx suggests what is beneath this surface. He states, "The money-form of the thing is external to the thing itself, being simply the form of appearance of human relations hidden behind it. In this sense every commodity is a symbol, since, as value, it is only the

14

material shell of the human labour expended on it."[11] Money is an abstract representation of labor and thus a transaction is an exchange of power relations.

Figure 9. *Self Checkout 2013* (detail), 2014, Complete collection of artist's receipts from 2013, mdf, and masonite

Money is also physical. The owner wields its power and can easily create concrete effects in the world. How much of it I have determines many things for me. It determines my present and my future. Actually, it strongly conditions my reality, but there are definite effects. For example, if I only have $100 and I need a drink, I'll probably buy an $8 bottle of *Castillo* rum and not the $18 bottle of *Jim Beam*. *Jack Daniels* is almost always out of the question at $24 a bottle; only on a special occasion (at the sacrifice of something else, probably food). If I'm going out and don't have the money to spend at a bar, I'll bring some *Castillo* in a flask and sip water. If I'm almost broke I'll very non-preferably have the water bottle filled with some sort of clear liquor. If I have plenty of money, I'd buy the Jack Daniels and buy my drinks at the bar. Either way I'm still buying things, but the *quality* of the purchase goes downhill without the capital. The same goes for everything else; i.e. quality of food, quality of gas,

---

[11] Karl Marx, "Economic Writings: Capital, Volume One," in *Selected Writings,* ed. Lawrence Hugh Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 250.

quality of apartment, quality of insurance and medical care, etc. Money has concrete effect. I don't want this sort of dependence, or I at least want to lessen it. This self-reflective project has revealed the overwhelming immensity of my consumption. I am confronted with it and perceive it to be an unwarranted and harmful construct. I want to have more independence in the affect of my own reality.

The receipts are physical things that are rooted in an exchange of labor. The receipts hold this physical quality. They are weathered. Their fragile bodies have been crumpled and ever so normally shoved into my pocket to suffocate and be drenched in ass sweat—much like working in a cubicle or factory. Some get by with a fold and a nice crease, but only if that's convenient. I still don't care about them, only enough to collect them. When I study and represent them I begin to care. There is a moment where I transform them from their destitute state of garbage to the holiness of art. This is similar to the acts of selection and choice that were argued to legitimize the notion of the readymade as an artistic framework. But particular to *Self Checkout 2013*, in freezing that moment I have captured the index of normal, routine carelessness, neglect, and ignorance. *It is the moment an object-idea enters the peripheral of our consciousness*.

The practice of everyday reflection creates a direct relationship between my artwork and my life. Art permeates my life and my life permeates my art. They are intertwined in infinite dialogue. Most of the components of the art in this text are pulled directly from everyday life, from commonplace objects and ideas—much like a readymade. The notion of the "readymade" is one of the most important ideological shifts in art (a paradigm shift), but it is also a trope of validity. The readymade flipped the *idea* of art inside-out. An artistic framework of perception can shift from the gallery, from the "artwork," to the objects in our everyday lives.[12] The readymade also points to the fact that a gallery is a facade of authority that can grant validation to an artwork. At first, Duchamp's *Fountain* was invalid as determined by the jury who would supposedly accept any artwork for the "unjuried" exhibition of the Society of Independent artists in 1917.[13] It was validated afterwards by putting it in his friend's gallery, documenting it, and printing it in a magazine.[14] The same form of validation can be seen on curricula vitae and resumes. Your value as an artist and your work (as

---

[12] One of seemingly infinite interpretations of the artwork and intentions of the cryptic Marcel Duchamp. This interpretation increases in validity when the notions of the "readymade" and the "reciprocal readymade" are seen as two parts in a dialectical system of exchange; from world of life to the world of art (the readymade) and from the world of art to the world of life (the reciprocal readymade).

[13] University Libraries, "Blindman No. 2 (New York, May 1917) ("The Blind Man")," Accessed March 24, 2014, http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/blindman/2/.

[14] Documentation of *Fountain* was taken by Alfred Stieglitz and printed in the magazine, *The Blind Man*. Ibid.

determined by academic institutions) is not validated by the work you intend to do or show. Your value is heavily validated by both the quantity and the quality of an exhibition record.

These forms of validation are a part of the socio-political norms in the art world.[15] You would get into a lot of trouble if you peed into Duchamp's *Fountain*.[16] (You would get into far less trouble if you peed on my receipts.) The urinal has been validated and embedded with the quality of artness and no longer maintains its original purpose or meaning. The gallery has this power and it is to be taken advantage of. All fine art market criticism aside, museums and galleries maintain the cultural power to bestow validity and artness upon an object-idea. It follows that an artistic framework of perception—a perceptual curiosity and exploration for meaning—is typically how the audience is expected to view and experience an exhibition. As viewers, it is the cultural norm that if something is in an art gallery, we should inspect it and think about it. For me, exploiting this privilege can create new grounds for what we consider knowledge. Just as the notion of the readymade suggests, art is a framework for creating new understandings in our everyday realities.

Figure 10. Cai Yuan and Jian Jun Xi**,** *Two Artists Piss on Duchamp's Urinal*, 2000, performance

---

[15] Obviously alternative spaces and post studio practices exist in contemporary art, but the money is in the market and not in public funding. So, unfortunately the format of the white cube (and the many off-white cubes) still prevail. The cube is a machine that determines various levels of validity. Validity levels vary upon the authoritative prowess of the particular institution.

[16] Unless your pee is validated as art (**Figure 10**).

Everyday reflection does not merely consist of questioning my perception of my external reality: it also looks inward to self reflection. The receipts that I collect are intentionally collected all the time and for an entire year. Since they present documentation of my consumption, they provide information regarding my tastes, habits, and behaviors. The receipts are intentionally gathered as a data set to be subjected to self-reflection and public analysis. I confront the data that represents me. I record, measure, and create the custom frames myself so I can confront, reflect upon, and understand each receipt and this particular construct of the self. I become an object of reflection, my own reflection. When I see that most of my receipts are comprised of beer, cigarettes, and energy drinks, I begin to see my life as one that is trying to cope—through drug use—and trying to get ahead within a cult of competition—through energy drink use. The subsequent interpretation and analysis creates a conceptual network that relates the parts to the whole in which they, and I, exist. Through the receipts I am a case study that speaks of the general through the specific. My own peripheral recognition has led me to understand the broader conditions that may be shaping my consumption and my construct of the self—as in the aforementioned cult of competition. At the cost of my own health I have to do all that I can to succeed. If I must consume to succeed, then what is success?

I must be responsible for the enormity of my own consumption and lack of restraint. Unlicensed consumption propels oppressive labor conditions and ecological rape.[17] It can very well nurture a psychology of individualism, competition, selfishness, and entitlement. My immediate response is that I want to stop buying things: the receipts show so much dependence and so much money—so much labor spent: labor for things. I depend on companies to give me money and then I depend on companies to take my money. I want to stop buying—I'm trying, but I can't stop. This self-reflective research process has shown me a deconstructed portion of my-self in such a way that I am more aware and critically conscious of my strengths and weaknesses as a consumer. If I plan ahead, invest in storage, and buy in bulk, I save money and I take less trips to the store. If I make my own cigarettes, I save money and I don't have to go to the store every other day. With these two shifts I have diminished my amount of spending and my amount of visits to the store. In turn, I have diminished all of the impulse purchases that I would have made.[18] I no longer buy the "three for five" Red Bull Sugarfree nor the Starbucks energy drinks on clearance. When doesn't a working person feel like they could use a little extra

---

[17] Industrial and technological outsourcing exploits the workers' rights to earn a living wage (particularly in countries that do not have the labor rights that Americans do). The materials and energy for these commodities and services come from harvesting natural resources. But we do not farm these resources. We are the locusts plaguing the field.

[18] I apparently do not have the self control to battle the psychological enchantments of the market.

energy? Normally, without energy potions dangling in front of my face, I deal with it and move on. This is of little consequence to the greater issues at hand, but there are few alternatives to a consumptive existence for many American citizens. I began to wonder, where is the line between what I want and what I need? We all *want* something—something else, something more— but we all essentially *need* the same things.

What we want and what we desire is greatly influenced by the capitalist market and its campaigns of consumption—advertising. Advertising helps to create the demand for the supply. It tells us that we have voids in our lives, and in our hearts, that are only filled with commodities. In exploiting the visual powers of art, advertisement creates the need to consume. *Self Checkout 2013* is in part a self-portrait through my consumption in revealing a construct of my identity through commodities. The receipts reflect the kind of data—patterns of behavior and spending habits—that corporations use to target particular audiences. Knowing this information they can exploit the weaknesses and desires of a particular target audience in order to create the need to consume. This consumptive game with consumptive rules is rigged through exploitation and deceit.

The element of commonality and familiarity in the receipts allows for a critical perceptual framework that can be taken home by the viewer of the artwork. The experiences we have with common and familiar things, by nature, can be shared due to an agreed upon knowledge or understanding of the thing. I utilize this to my advantage in my work in order to create a segue between this critical perceptual framework and the lived experience of the viewer. I realized the impact that commonality and familiarity can have on everyday perception when I saw and experienced the exhibition "Lifelike."[19] Experiencing "Lifelike" brought this childlike naivety, wonderment, and confusion of the real. The exhibition accurately reproduced reality, as any good simulacra does, but only in facade. Everything looked real, but most of the artworks were created out of unexpected materials. They were unexpected alchemic illusions—magically transforming materials into states that are not normally of their nature. One particular example was *Hefty 2-Ply* (**Figure 11**), by Jud Nelson. This piece appeared to be a stretched and saggy garbage sack that has about reached its limit. It feels as though it is about to collapse under its own weight. This particular garbage sack is in fact heavy, as it is composed of marble. A facade of everyday reality was constructed through unexpected and typically precious materials. The precious and valuable materials have taken on a form of refuse. This created a perceptual framework that did the reverse for me. Instead of looking at art objects as "the real" I started seeing "the real" as art objects. For example, when I left I thought I was looking at a barometer print (with the same

---

[19] *Lifelike*, New Orleans Museum of Art. 1 Collins Diboll Cir New Orleans, LA 70124, December 2012.

investigative intrigue and ponderance as I would looking at art) but in fact it was just an ordinary functional vent. This is relevant to the shifting of perception and expansion of a critical consciousness that I intend to be taken home by the viewer of *Self Checkout 2013*.

Figure 11. Jud Nelson**, *Hefty 2-Ply*, 1979-1981, marble

Peripheral Perception

Peripheral perception is not only a shifting of perception, but also giving particular attention to the peripheral—shifting the focus of perception to the peripheral and seeing what we are not looking at. In *A Separate Reality*, Carlos Castaneda supposedly studied different ways of seeing, experiencing, and understanding reality with a Yaqui brujo, Don Juan. [20] Here Castaneda explains an important perceptual distinction between "looking" and "seeing":

> Don Juan's particular interest in his second cycle of apprenticeship was to teach me to "see." Apparently in his system of knowledge there was the possibility of making a semantic difference between "seeing" and "looking" as two distinct manners of perceiving. "Looking" referred to the ordinary way in which we are accustomed to perceive the world, while "seeing" entailed a very complex process by virtue of which a man of knowledge allegedly perceives the "essence" of the things of the world. [21]

"Looking" is perceiving virtual facades and structures, which often neglects an awareness of "seeing" the real meanings beneath the surface. My work deals with empirical perception, in the sense of virtual facades (looking), but I very much think about ideological perception and the perception of power— seeing the meaning behind authoritative, virtual facades. Facades of authority are that which is deceptively imbued or embedded with importance, validity, and authority. Merely replicating the tropes of validity and facades of authority, it is possible that I could make nearly anything, such as receipt garbage, obtain a certain level of power, importance, and stature.

I see things all over various media—framed in a monitor—that have been validated and given a certain level of authority (through ratings and money), that I would consider to fit the definition of garbage. My actual, real garbage that is in my garbage can is less garbage than some of these things that are viewed (and sometimes eaten) on a daily basis by millions of people. [22] Reductio ad absurdum, but true. In *Babbel* (**Figure 12**) I point to facades of authority in the second presidential debate in 2012. [23] *Babbel* is an edited video in which the image of the debate is cropped to just below the center

---

[20] My copy of *A Separate Reality* by Carlos Castaneda is classified as non-fiction. It was later discovered that the books he wrote, documenting his apprenticeship with Don Juan (a Yaqui brujo), were in fact works of fiction. This shift from fact to fiction results in a shift of perception that effects the validity of the work and the knowledge it represents. True Lies.

[21] Carlos Castaneda, *A Separate Reality; Further Conversations with Don Juan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 8.

[22] I do not really want to give examples because I'm sure that somewhere, someone can shift my perception of its validity. But these are from the recent TLC (formerly an abbreviation for The Learning Channel) line up: *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, 19 Kids and Counting*, *Extreme Cougar Wives*, etc.. My father would probably say, "It'll put holes in your brain."

[23] This is the same debate where two of the Green Party members were arrested for trying to participate.

of the screen—right below their faces, in the peripheral—showing just the ties, microphones, and hand gestures of the presidential candidates. The audio has also been edited to consist of mostly vowels, turning their speech into babble. I don't create a facade of authority: I point to existing facades of authority. The ties, microphones, hand gestures, and rhythms of speech are all tropes that signify authority and control. Every now and then the footage spans the feet of the crowd, their folded hands, or an empty stage with a water bottle on a stool. The whole thing now feels so fake and staged. Re-presenting the debate in this manner felt more like how I actually experienced viewing the debate. When I was tuned in I could not believe the absurd theatre before my eyes. I was watching these prestigious figures on a stage, broadcast live for millions of American viewers, who were speaking but not really saying anything. I felt like stuff was just coming out of their mouths. It was absent of meaning.
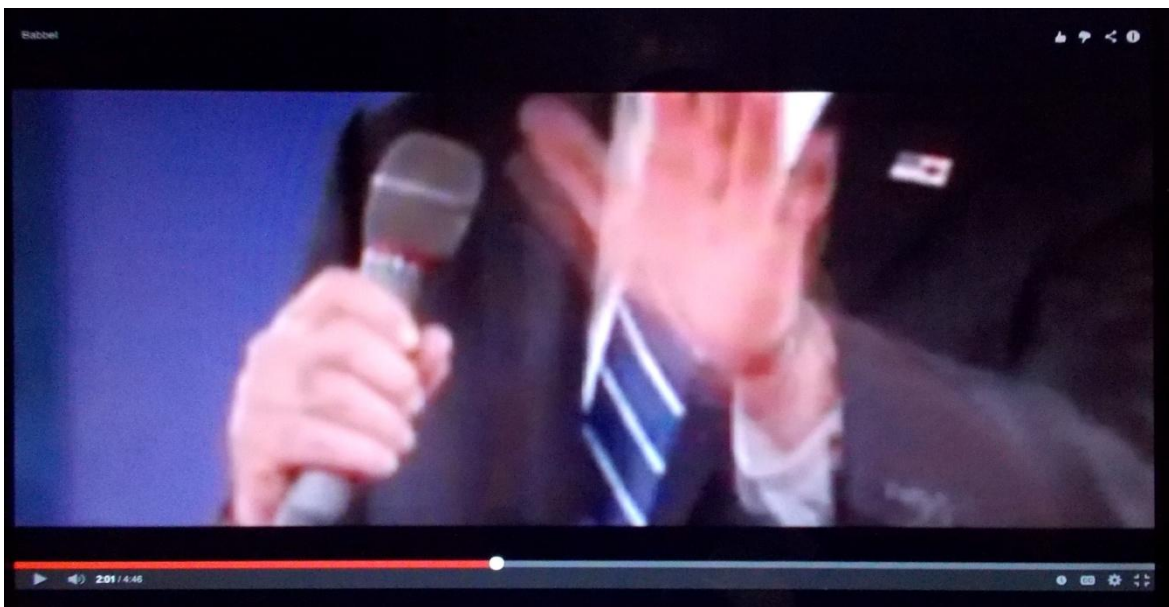

Figure 12. *Babbel*, 2013, digital video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAXm4Wz4O1c

When I empirically perceive a facade of authority (as in the frames or political ties) it follows that I ideologically perceive importance, power, and privilege. When I empirically perceive a facade of refuse, as in the receipt, it follows that I ideologically perceive unimportance, powerlessness, and disenfranchisement. There is a tension between refuse and authority—between garbage and power. The dialectical synthesis of this contradiction is reality, the common experience and familiarity we have with these objects on an everyday basis.

In a state of normalcy, perception neglects the meanings behind authoritative facades and that which exists in the peripheral. It is normal that the receipts and the meaning behind authoritative

facades exist in the peripheral of our perception. Normalcy is normal until you perceive it to be abnormal. From this point of view, normalcy starts to look like an authoritarian set of rules and guidelines amongst a world of possibility. Authority implies control. I do not respond very well to control, when given the freedom to choose, but at a job I must accept control in order to get paid. At a job there is structure and routinization, and there typically is not the choice to break the norm. I am paid to do what I am paid to do. If I want the money I must accept the control. Money plays a major factor in normalcy and control. Half of the average worker's conscious day (9-5) is a reality of normalcy and control. This is accommodated—shaping one's actions and behaviors—and is increasingly embedded in cognitive and perceptual frameworks.

Normalcy is a major political mechanism of control when it is unquestionably accepted. If an idea is politically or economically advantageous and is taken as normal, then it is not an issue on the front of people's minds. The idea is pushed to the back of the mind—in the shadows, in the periphery— and is no longer a malleable thing to be transformed. It is just the way it is—fatalism. It has achieved normalcy and we are comfortable with its position amongst the routine everyday. Normalcy elicits comfort and passivity, yielding a status quo of conformity and control. Normalcy is taking things for granted and unquestioningly accepting what is given as reality. Thus normalcy is political. It seems as though the veil of normalcy is a guiding set of rules, authoritarian in nature, that control and hide the unwanted, the dismissed, the abject, and the contradictory. This is the very nature of socio-cultural norms. But in this facade of normalcy the book doesn't change, just its cover.

Self Checkout 2013 began with a peripheral perception and is aimed towards a peripheral recognition. In reflecting on refuse I came upon a conceptual network of relationships that revealed its political nature. The things that I discover in quotidian, everyday reflection reveal abnormalities and power relations. In qualitative observation, when nothing seems to be happening, that's when everything is happening.[24] Here, "everything" is the (often invisible) subtleties and relationships that tie things together. That's when you encounter the things you did not expect to see because you did not know to look for them. Such discoveries and new understandings of the everyday can nurture the growth of a critical consciousness, or an awareness and understanding of multiple meanings and their political natures. In *Self Checkout 2013* I intend to share this peripheral, perceptual framework so that the audience may stop and look a little closer when they get their next receipt at the checkout counter.

---

[24] The act of observation in qualitative research is very similar to the way we learn to observe in the traditional mediums of art, i.e. drawing, painting, sculpture, etc... They maintain a common goal of accurately (or mechanically) recording reality.

It is wishful thinking, but I hope that someone might see the process at work and re-cognize that which

is in the peripheral of her or his consciousness.

Virtual Consciousness

Autoethnography is a research framework that I utilize for the process and representation of *Self Checkout 2013* (and other research oriented projects). It aims to produce multiple knowledges and multiple forms of understanding through subjective representations. Integrating this research model creates an ideological segue between the different worlds of art and research. It is a common ground through which they can communicate with one another and cross-pollinate. There is much dissensus on a particular definition of autoethnography, but this excerpt from *Autoethnography: An Overview*, should provide a good idea of its basic tenets. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner suggest that,

> Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*) (ELLIS, 2004; HOLMAN JONES, 2005). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (SPRY, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (ADAMS & HOLMAN JONES, 2008). A researcher uses tenets of *autobiography* and *ethnography* to *do* and *write* autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.[25]

This quote well defines my art-research practice and most importantly points to the fact that "autoethnography is both process *and* product" (emphasis added). The "art" not only lies in the re-presentation of the receipts but also in the self-reflective research process. The intimate relationship I had with each receipt at that moment of neglect, that moment of peripheral recognition, is embodied within each frame that I constructed. They shall now be protected until the sun erases their ink.

A common practice in autoethnography is to record the self rather than attempt to objectively reproduce the given experience or reality.[26] The documentation exists through the perception of the self rather than spewing forth generalizable and universal truths about others. My self is what I truly know best, and what I know and understand comes from and through this self. I began to think of my introversion, my deep connection and personal relationship with myself as a way of talking about the general (the world, politics, society) through the specific (me). Through this approach, who I am can be more consciously merged with my practice and I can create works—encompassing my beleifs, assumptions, and concerns—that are not dogmatic, but are able to be interpreted and translated. I can

---

[25] Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12 (2011): Accessed March 24, 2014, http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095.

[26] I.e. thoughts, assumptions, emotions, sensorial and ideological experience, etc...

say what I want to say and others can understand it as it pertains to their reality. It is research and knowledge that is to be explored, questioned, reflected upon, and translated (re-cognized)–not presenting an answer or a truth.

        Bibliography of Virtual Consciousness: Uniform Resource Locator Volumes 1-12 (*BOVC:URL 1-12*, **Figure 13**) is another autoethnographic art-research project with the same conceptual underpinnings as *Self Checkout*, yet it differs in content and trajectory. A bibliography of virtual consciousness (an academically organized web history) can be loosely defined as the subjective history of a virtual mind. *BOVC:URL 1-12* is a data set that consists of my entire, uncensored web history from 2013, organized into a Chicago Style bibliography format. This bibliography is at the same time the content and its references. This data is then printed into a twelve volume book set that mimics a dissertation—re-presenting virtual consciousness in a contemplative, academic research context. This project is another instance where I impose a facade of authority on the everyday, commonplace thing. I am utilizing existing power structures, such as academic tropes of validity, to once again make seemingly unimportant things important.[27] Utilizing tropes of validity assists in creating a signified importance of the thing.   This creates a situation where the viewer can rethink or re-cognize the significance of the object-idea, such as the receipts and web history. These indices are personal to me, but everyone can reflect upon their own website history and experience a virtual re-cognition—seeing and understanding their web experience in a new way.

---

[27] I.e. the published book, the gold lettered dissertation, a volumed book set, the absurd complexity of the title, etc...
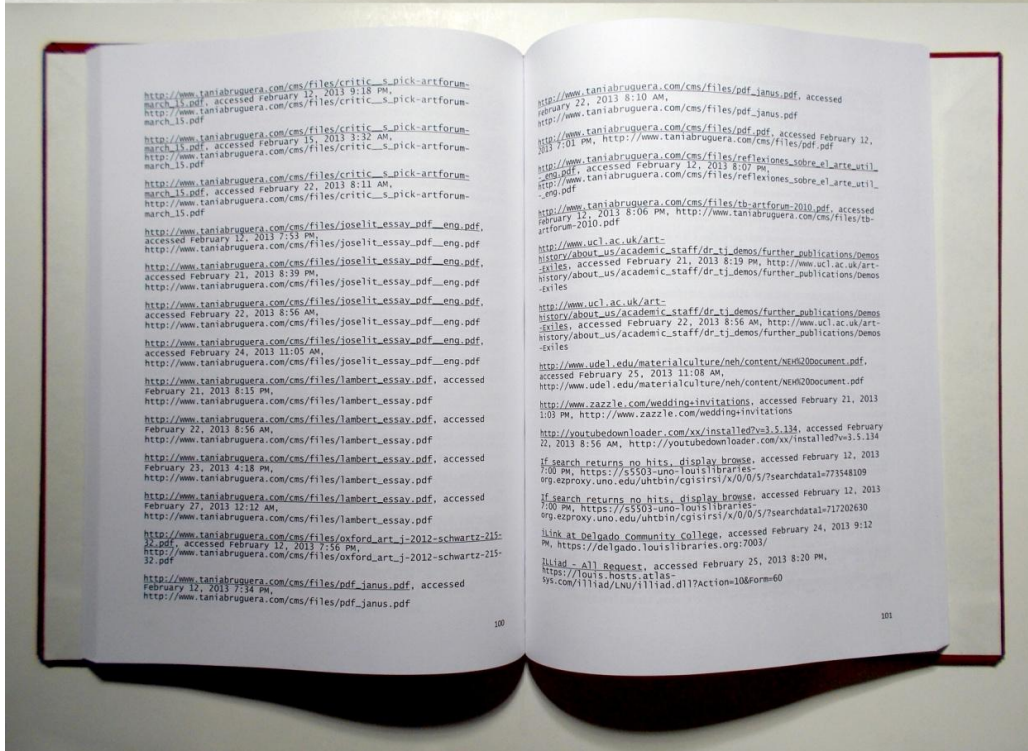
Figure 13. *Bibliography of Virtual Consciousness: Uniform Resource Locator Volumes 1-12* (and detail), 2014,
Archival 8 ½" x 11" White Vellum 60# Paper, Group F Buckram, Complete Uncensored Collection of the Artist's
Web History from 2013.

When I first began reflecting upon my relationship to the internet, I was taking screenshots of my computer and compiling images of the tabs that were open. Sometimes I'll have well over a hundred tabs open and maybe ten to twenty programs running. I don't even really like computers, and I hate sitting at a computer for any extended period of time. I need a Thomas Kinkade mousepad (**Figure 14**) so I can escape to my golden cottage in the woods every half an hour. After so many screenshots I realized how invested I was in this technology and the world that it creates. I began to further explore my relationship to the virtual.
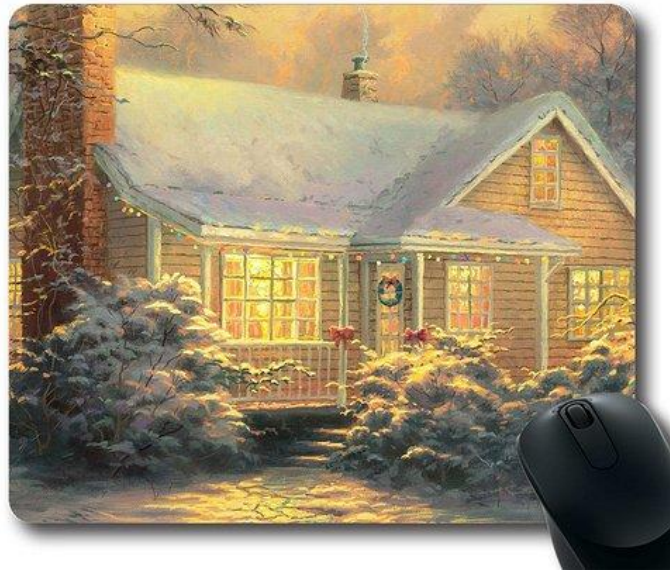

Figure 14. Thomas Kinkade mouse pad

Before, I spoke of the "virtual" as the surface or facade of a thing. Now the "virtual" takes on two meanings at the same time. In regard to *BOVC:URL 1-12*, the term "virtual", as defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, is both "being something in effect even if not in reality, *and* simulated by a computer."[28] Through computers, the virtual world digitally imitates the physical world. The "virtual" in "virtual consciousness" alludes to a psychological melding of both corporeal and digital reality or a confusion of the mind and awareness between the corporeal and the digital. The duck-rabbit (**Figure 15**) made famous by Wittgenstein provides a perfect example for our perception of these multiple realities. "The reality is" that there, in fact, is a duck-rabbit, yet we can only either perceive it as a duck or as a rabbit. We cannot perceive the duck-rabbit although we know it is there.

---

[28] "Virtual," *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, Accessed March 24, 2014, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virtual.
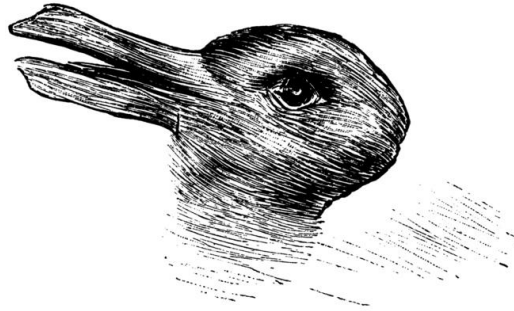
Figure 15. *Rabbit and Duck*, from the 23 October 1892 issue of *Fliegende Blätter.*

When you are in the corporeal world, that is real. When you are in the virtual world, that is real. Like with the duck-rabbit, each time one shifts perception, that becomes the reality. The digital-virtual reality is its own reality, but at the same time it is still mediated through empirical perception—or sensorial experience. It is fully intertwined and reliant upon the existence of the physical. Thus, we do have a virtual existence in the same manner as we do a corporeal existence, yet they are difficult to understand as a single entity.   Just as in the notion of a "surreality" that Breton argued—melding dreams and reality, or the subconscious and the conscious, into one surreality—the corporeal and the virtual are two sides of the same coin, the synthesis of which formulates an augmented reality. Expanding our perception of realities allows for broader and deeper understandings, and understanding this relationship between the physical and the virtual can reveal the oscillation of power relations between the two.

The genesis of this project was also in part a response to a question that Claire Bishop posed in her article "Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media." In this article Claire Bishop accuses contemporary art of being unresponsive to the digital revolution, which exists in a context of its own accessibility, affordability, and transformational possibilities. Specifically in regard to artists who *use* digital technology, Bishop questions, "how many really *confront* the question of what it means to think, see, and filter affect through the digital?"[29] (emphasis added) The answer is, not many, and that is a problem. She introduces the work of Ryan Trecartin as an example of art that exemplifies this confrontation of the digital.[30] For Bishop this confrontation consists of artwork in which "Each suggests the endlessly disposable, rapidly mutable ephemera of the virtual age and its impact on our consumption of relations, images and communication; each articulates something of the troubling

---

[29] Claire Bishop, "Digital Divide: Claire Bishop on Contemporary Art and New Media," *Artforum* 51, no. 1 (September 2012): 436.

[30] Bishop is particularly speaking about Ryan Trecartin's work, *K-COrea INC.K (Section A)*, 2009; Ibid.

oscillation between intimacy and distance that characterizes our new technological regime, and proposes an incommensurability between our doggedly physiological lives and the screens to which we are glued."[31] This virtual experience is something that we almost all have but never see through a critical eye. In contemporary society there is increasingly a *need* to have a virtual existence. As with my perceptual, cognitive, and political interests in the kind of physical existence that we all are thrown into, I became interested in how we perceive and cognize virtual existence through the internet.

BOVC:URL 1-12 is a project through which I can confront and represent the construction of my virtual self and of my socio-virtual relations. Through this process I can investigate this notion of "incommensurability." The physiological and the virtual are distinctly different aspects of the same reality—as in the aforementioned duck-rabbit—yet there is a common thread that permeates these realities: consciousness. In "The Brain Does Not Create Consciousness," Martin Higgins suggests such a common thread in that, "This virtual reality (VR) is nothing but information, much like a multiplayer VR computer game. There is no physical reality, and no physical brain – both are virtual – just information. The larger consciousness system is the only thing that is fundamental – all else is virtual."[32] Consciousness is the pivot point, or segue, between these realities. Through my consciousness, the internet is a second brain in which I surf the virtual synapses. My web history is a record of those synapses. In the process of constructing the artwork I can see data that informs me of my self-construction and social relations within a virtual existence. When I look up a recorded URL, I can look at the virtual memory. Both computers and brains store, process, and exchange information. Both grow, decay, and are susceptible to viruses.

We often think of the virtual as an abstract reality, but it is at the same time also physical. As I mentioned earlier, the ideological effects the physical and this is the same for the virtual effecting the physical. The physical effects of the virtual world are very recently being revealed and problematized. Kids were sent to a for-profit juvenile detention for posts on myspace in the "Kids for Cash" scandal; Edward Snowden is revealing the NSA's unconstitutional invasion of American privacy; Julian Assange is facing prosecution for publications in *Wikileaks*; *Anonymous* stole corporate credit card numbers and donated money to charities; *Anonymous* also made the *Time* list of *The World's Most Influential People: 2012*; and trained North Korean personnel attacked South Korea in cyberwarfare. Also, in an article in The Guardian, "From Second Life to second-degree murder," it is reported that a man killed another

---

[31] Ibid.

[32] TWCJR, "The Brain Does Not Create Consciousness," Moderated by Martin Higgins in *Cheating the Ferryman, Is There Life After Death, The Daemon,* Last modified October 1, 2010, Accessed March 24, 2014, http://www.anthonypeake.co.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=1716.

man—in the real world—over a digital love triangle in the online virtual world Second Life. In the article,

Niall Stanage suggests that, "Though the case is exceptional, it can also be seen as a uniquely violent

detail within a bigger picture - one in which the division between the real world and the virtual world is

becoming increasingly porous, and the seepage between the two can have damaging consequences."[33]

Although the two realities may not be the same, they do strongly effect one another.

     BOVC:URL 1-12 is a self-portrait, much like *Self Checkout 2013*, but one that is a reflection of my

virtual identity through the places that I visit online. This collection of data reveals patterns of behavior

and habits of virtual consumption. It tells where I've been, how many times I've been there, and for

how long. Just as was explained in regard to *Self Checkout 2013*, this information is used by

corporations to create the demand for the supply and to create the need to consume. But this is not the

only issue regarding web data and our virtual existences. When I go onto certain websites I typically

agree to allow access to this information or I have the ability to turn off this collection. The real issue is

when I do not have this awareness of data collection nor the ability to stop it. The NSA operates in this

manner; invading the privacy and infringing upon the constitutional rights of millions of Americans. A

cult of fear from the vague notion of "terrorism" has been exploited to invade the lives of the American

people.[34] Under the guise of preemptively preventing terrorism—which has never proven to work—the

NSA creates an understanding of surveillance that suggests if you have nothing to hide then you have

nothing to worry about. This greatly distorts the real issue; that this is illegal and disregards our

constitutional rights. The acceptance of surveillance may not have great impact for the time being, but

once it has achieved a level of normalcy then there are great implications for its impact. With this

expansive level of surveillance it may follow that more minor infractions become targeted and acted

upon. What occurred in the "Kids for Cash" scandal could become a broader practice. Also, if the

American people felt the need to start a revolution—which the people essentially have the right to do—

the government could dismantle this opposition before it even begins to gain momentum. Surveillance

helps to *maintain* the existing power structure—as can be seen with any political movement in

---

[33] Niall Stanage, "From Second Life to Second-degree Murder," *Theguardian.com*. Guardian News and Media, Last modified January 16, 2007, Accessed March 24, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/jan/16/fromsecondlifetoseconddegr.

[34] "Terrorism" frames any violent or subversive act against the government or the people as though the goal is to create terror—as if there are no other reasons behind such actions. This notion keeps the meaning behind such actions hidden behind a veil of fear.

America.[35] Any major infractions that threaten the stability of this structure are eradicated and the government can continue to pull the strings from behind the curtain.

My work does not intend to achieve the level of physical effect that these examples do, but in stripping the data of the technology and the spectacle, then it is left with its physicality and allows us to peer beneath the facade. The data in the bibliography is composed of indices that capture and communicate a moment, an event, a temporal object—something physical and something fleeting. One viewer saw a section in the bibliography in which I was looking at College Art Association job listings. She said that it brought her back to a place in time when she had to hunt for jobs and all the other little things in *her life* lost importance during that time. The familiarity with the everydayness of these entries and the perceptual framework that I have embedded within the work allowed for the viewer to see her reflection in my data, and through my experience.

In this sense there is a virtual re-cognition that perceives the connectivity of the real and the virtual. She understood the virtual experience I had and the psychological state of mind that accompanied it. In this manner the audience is allowed to engage with important data, to create their own relationships and analyses, and to take this experience home with them while they generate their own website history (and get receipts for their own purchases). These things that exist in the peripheral of our everyday lives are now brought front and center and are thus able to be reflected upon. That which exists in the margins of our daily lives is now highlighted.

---

[35] I.e. surveillance played a major role in controlling communism during the "Red Scare" as well as controlling the civil rights movements (Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Panthers were under a great deal of surveillance).

The Production and Consumption of Knowledge

At the heart of my interests in perceptual shifting, re-cognition, and the relationship between art and research is an interest in the process of understanding and the production and consumption of knowledge. What role can art play in the production and consumption of both understanding and knowledge? *Observation Box* (**Figures 16 & 17**) addresses these notions of producing and consuming both knowledge and understanding. Making it research-oriented suggests its potential for knowledge. *Observation Box* is an interactive public research station that invites people to participate in creating multi-perspectival analyses of the subject at hand and thusly contribute to research. Note cards and custom pens that read "Re-Search, Re-Flect, Re-Cognize" (**Figure 18**) are provided for participants to express their insights, experiences, and observations regarding the subject at hand (**Figure 19**). As the instructional signage explains, "The analyses will be compiled into an artwork-research-document that will be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal." This, in effect, frames the project as an artwork and as research. Submitting to peer-reviewed journals is an attempt to directly place this work in an academic research context. *Observation Box* is also a mobile situation (it has folding table legs) that can be translated into multiple contexts in order to address a multitude of subjects through restructuring the written instructions. It provides an extroverted counter-balance to the introverted nature of the autoethnographic approach. Here knowledge and understanding is constructed through a process of participatory and multi-perspectival analyses. The subsequent publication of the analyses is not an issue as the import lies in actively constructing and sharing such knowledges and understandings.

Research is an investigation in order to discover and represent knowledge and understanding. Art is research, although it may have no *need* to claim itself as such. But a need arises from the crisis of representation. This crisis involves understanding how to deal with subjective forms of questioning, understanding, and the representations thereof.   Not all that we know, question, understand, feel, experience, etc... can be expressed through the conventions of language. Having an interest in this, I integrated contemporary critical research processes into my practice in order to explore what worlds of art and research have to offer one another. How do they relate? Can various processes of representing knowledge and understanding be translated between the two? Are these translations worthwhile? As Michael Polanyi stated in *The Tacit Dimension* on the idea of tacit knowledge, "I shall reconsider human

knowledge by starting from the fact that we can know more than we can tell."[36] Thus, what is the role of art in the production and consumption of knowledge? What is the role of art in research and vice versa?

Figure 16. *Observation Box* (at *Peripheral Recognition*, thesis exhibition), 2014, Blondewood, folding table legs, MASTER LOCK®, brass hinge and clasp, beeswax, orange oil, index cards, custom pens, assorted acrylic, social collaboration and democracy

---

[36] Michael Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension* (London: Routledge & Kega, 1967), 4.

Contribute to Research*

*Free pen

1.) Please feel free to share your insights, experiences, and observations in relation to the artwork of "Peripheral Recognition."

2.) Place your input in the slot marked "observations" at the end of the table-box.

Your input will help create multi-perspectival analyses of the artwork-research-data presented in the exhibition.

The analyses will be compiled into an artwork-research-document that will be submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

You may provide your name and/or contact info if you wish to be credited and updated on the status of the art-research-work.

Or, you may remain anonymous.

Jason Christopher Childers[TM]

Figure 17. *Observation Box* (at *Peripheral Recognition*, instructional text detail), 2014, paper

Figure 18. *Observation Box* (pen detail), 2014, pens

This work, being presented as research, attempts to investigate the political role that art can play in the world of academia—a role that challenges the barrier between art and the world of knowledge. Art is considered by a vast majority of the world of academia as far too interpretive and subjective to be considered as a form of truth or knowledge, yet researchers (and people in general) often run into a linguistic barrier of saying that which cannot be said through the conventions of language. The notion of tacit knowledge once again becomes important for understanding the barriers of language. For instance, one does not learn to ride a bicycle, hit a baseball, or speak different languages through merely reading books and research journals. There is an inherent form of knowing that cannot be expressed through written language. This knowledge is communicated through action, practice, and shared experience.

Regarding this issue, Elliot Eisner states that "the limits of our comprehension, it seems, exceed the limits of our language. Or, as Nelson Goodman (1978) has suggested, there are as many worlds as there are ways to describe them."[37] As we increase our ability in sensual differentiation, we can further understand subtle and complex relationships and meanings within a domain of knowledge. With such insight, an artist for instance, would choose their representational form depending upon the relationship of the concept to the medium. Thus through multiple forms of representation, multiple realities can be described. Eisner explains the influence that these representations and realities can have on the production and consumption of knowledge. He suggests that, "Since forms of representation differ, the kinds of experiences they make possible also differ. Different kinds of experience lead to different meanings, which, in turn, make different forms of understanding possible."[38] Eisner is arguing to validate multiple forms of representation in academic research to allow for multiple forms of understanding.

---

[37] Eisner is an advocate of Art Based Educational Research (ABER) and utilizing the arts and their qualities in knowledge, understanding, and representation. Elliot W. Eisner, "Forms of Understanding and the Future of Educational Research," *Educational Researcher* 22, no. 7 (1993): 6.
[38] Ibid

When *Observation Box* was placed in my thesis exhibition, "Peripheral Recognition," the audience was called to "Contribute to Research." The situation was provided for them to share their understandings and experiences of the exhibited work—*Self Checkout 2013* and *BOVC:URL 1-12*. As discussed before, this work re-presented data through an artistic framework. In effect, the input of the audience can be compiled to create a multi-perspectival analysis of the research data. Through art we are able to see and experience the notion of data in different ways—through re-presentation—and as a community we can provide multi-perspectival understandings and analyses of such investigations. *Observation Box* thus suggests a framework in which art can be translated into multiple communicable knowledges. The responses from the *Observation Box* at "Peripheral Recognition" were minimal and fairly absurd, yet they all contain their own form of knowledge. There is something to be learned from each one. When the response data is compiled into an analysis it is to be submitted to peer reviewed journals and calls for papers in the academic community. This can further instigate a dialogue between art and broader academia. But how do we understand it? Are some of the contributions made by the public true and some of them false? What evaluative framework would one utilize to determine such validity? Do we need a new form or way of understanding?
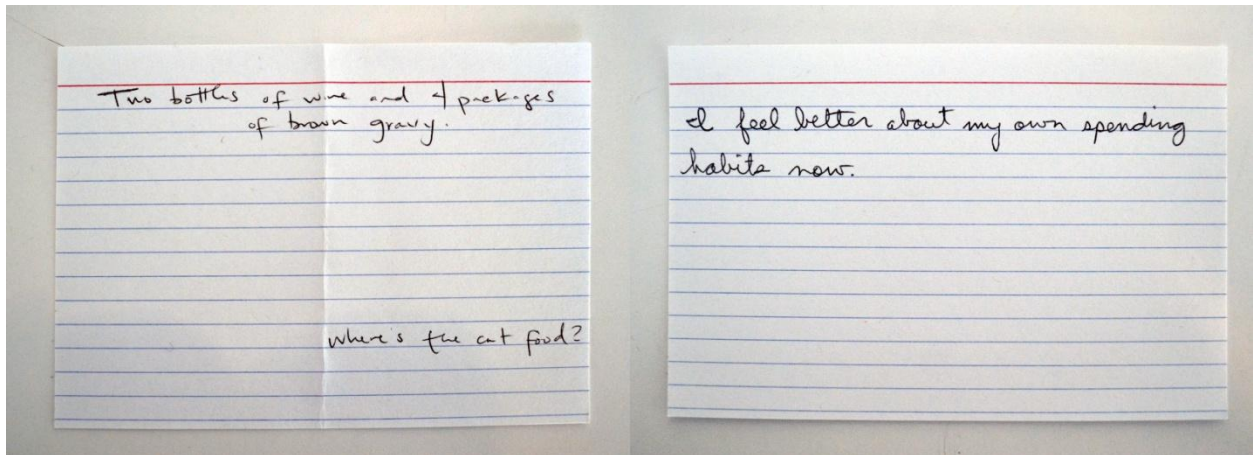

Figure 19. *Observation Box Responses* (at *Peripheral Recognition*), 2014, paper

Observation Box, as a research process, is based on a belief that knowledge and understanding are contingent upon a reality that is composed of multiple perspectives and multiple truths— contextually situated truths. Truth is socially constructed, and given this, there are multiple truths of any given state of affairs—depending upon the culture and the context. In explaining the notion of truth through a framework of critical constructivism, Joe Kincheloe states that,

> …truth is not relative (i.e., all world views embraced by different researchers, cultures and individuals are of equal worth), but is relational (constructions considered true are contingent

upon the power relations and historical context in which they are formulated and acted upon).
…This is why developing a system of emancipatory meaning is so important.[39]

This "system of emancipatory meaning" aims to validate various forms of formal, informal, and cultural knowledges, in turn challenging the hegemony of a singular, true, and objective knowledge. If the subjective world is dynamic, fluid, and in flux, then multiple forms of questioning, knowing, understanding, and the representations thereof are necessary. In essence, art directly explores the relationship between form and meaning. Language is one form of communicating meaning, art is another.

Not all that we know, question, understand, feel, experience, can be expressed through the conventions of language. Language is for clearly communicating ideas. What if the ideas are not clear? What if they are not to be clearly communicated? If you want to say something clearly, you should write it down, or hire a writer to clearly express your ideas. Otherwise, art is the perfect place for being open, ambiguous, expansive, etc. Art recognizes its ability to provide a viewer with an unclear experience— inviting subjective interpretations and multi-perspectival understanding. And there, in part, lies its power—the power of uncertainty, the power of a journey or exploration, and the power to see and think about things differently. Thus, a problem arises. If art and research merge, on what can we agree and how? What is the new criteria for evaluating validity? Where does the knowledge lie and how is it shared? These are difficult questions to answer, but Elliot Eisner reminds us that there is always more to know: "To restrict truth to what one can claim is to claim much too little for what we are able to know (Polanyi, 1966)."[40] There is a conflict here that is to be embraced or resolved. Embracing the conflict requires that we shift our perception of the meaning of knowledge and understanding.

---

[39] Joe L. Kincheloe, "From Constructivism to Critical Constructivism," in *Critical Constructivism: Primer*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2005), 11.
[40] Elliot W. Eisner, "Forms of Understanding and the Future of Educational Research." *Educational Researcher* 22, no. 7 (1993): 7.

Conclusion

At this point in my practice I am interested in a pragmatic function of art: A function of art that can facilitate a critical consciousness and a function of art that can more actively play a role in the general production and consumption of knowledge. Contemporary social practices in art are grappling with notions of pragmatism and efficacy in art in a physical and relational way. I am personally more interested in an ideological approach to creating effect through an artistic practice that explores the relationship between art and knowledge. Rather than actively shaping reality, I provide moments and frameworks of reflection that in turn can affect the way people shape their own realities. As has been explained throughout the body of this thesis, the ideological greatly effects the physical. When we shift our perception of how we see the world, it follows that our understanding of that world shifts, and it follows that our actions are thusly shaped by these understandings.

At the center of this interest is the question, "What role can art play in the production and consumption of knowledge?" There is so much uncharted territory in this exploration, but I do know that academic research plays the dominant role in this market of knowledge. The production of knowledge requires intimate investigation and perceptual shifting in order to see beneath the surface of authoritative facades and to create new meanings. The consumption of knowledge requires that these new meanings are shared through some form of representation. Art is practiced through a multitude of mediums and processes and thus can greatly expand the way that we perceive, experience, and understand a given reality. This new multi-stable reality can challenge oppressive normative structures and enhance the freedom of our existence—facilitating critical consciousness and a politically oriented perceptual awareness. This critical consciousness can create a new awareness of the self and the reality in which it exists—in turn explicating oppressive conditions and harmful constructs of the self that may be unwarranted. This is a hopeful idealism that is never purely obtainable, yet we can always strive towards the ideal and get as close as we can. I believe that the powers and possibilities of art have yet to reach their full potential. There is much more to explore.

Bibliography

Bishop, Claire. "Digital Divide: Claire Bishop on Contemporary Art and New Media." *Artforum* 51, no. 1 (September 2012): 435-41.

Castaneda, Carlos. *A Separate Reality; Further Conversations with Don Juan*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971.

EducateKnowledge. "The Reality of the Virtual - Slavoj Zizek." *YouTube* video, 1:14:37. Last modified July 07, 2013. Accessed March 24, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GahnBiQJay8.

Eisner, Elliot W. "Forms of Understanding and the Future of Educational Research." *Educational Researcher* 22, no. 7 (1993): 5-11.

Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12 (2011): Accessed March 24, 2014. http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095.

Hickey, Dave. "Art in a Democratic Society." *YouTube* video, 1:06:15. Last modified April, 23 2011. Accessed March 24, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pa4SJ7GvDk8.

Kincheloe, Joe L. "From Constructivism to Critical Constructivism." In *Critical Constructivism: Primer*, 1-40. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2005.

Lewitt, Sol. "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art (1967)." in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*. Ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz. Berkeley: University of California, 1996. 822-26.

Lifelike. New Orleans Museum of Art. 1 Collins Diboll Cir New Orleans, LA 70124. December 2012.

Marx, Karl. "Economic Writings: Capital, Volume One." In *Selected Writings*, edited by Lawrence Hugh Simon, 214-300. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.

"Normal." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster. Accessed March 24, 2014. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/normal.

Plato. "The Simile of the Cave." in *Plato: The Republic*. Translated by Desmond Lee. London: Penguin, 2003. 240-248.

Polanyi, Michael. *Tacit Dimension*. London: Routledge & Kega, 1967.

"Richard Wentworth." Tate. Accessed March 24, 2014. http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/richard-wentworth.

Stanage, Niall. "From Second Life to Second-degree Murder." *Theguardian.com*. Guardian News and Media. Last modified January 16, 2007. Accessed March 24, 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/jan/16/fromsecondlifetoseconddegr.

TWCJR. "The Brain Does Not Create Consciousness." Moderated by Martin Higgins in *Cheating the Ferryman, Is There Life After Death, The Daemon*. Last modified October 1, 2010. Accessed March 24, 2014. http://www.anthonypeake.co.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=1716.

University Libraries. "Blindman No. 2 (New York, May 1917) ("The Blind Man")." Accessed March 24, 2014. http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/blindman/2/.

"Virtual." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster. Accessed March 24, 2014. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virtual.

Vita

Jason Christopher Childers was born in Kankakee, Illinois where as a child he aspired to own a garbage truck business with his friend Abraham. His father would come home with bruises on his shoulders from lugging beef during his vacation time from the truck stop. When he was three his father was disabled from an accident at the truck stop and his mother was working full time, going to college full time, and raising three teenagers and a toddler. This set the stage for his life. He is determined to make his parents proud and to give in the same way that his community gave to him and his family.

He moved into the country (Beecher, Illinois) during his teenage years, where his chores consisted of taking care of the farm animals, shooting opossums, and shoveling dead shrews out of the driveway. Afterwards he moved to Chicago to pursue his B.F.A. at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. His aspirations rose to becoming an artist and an educator. Having been taught by great artists who are terrible teachers and terrible artists who are great teachers, he was compelled to also study education at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). At UIC he received his M.Ed. and became aware of the political nature of social relations, ideology, and knowledge.

In visiting prospective graduate schools for his M.F.A. studies, he landed in New Orleans and was drawn to the chaotic and absurd nature of the city and its various communities. He is currently at the University of New Orleans, reaching out to grab his M.F.A.