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REBOOT

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A Thesis Submitted to the College of Creative Arts
At West Virginia University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

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In
Intermedia

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Abstract

REBOOT

Nick LeJeune

I am an artist that works with technologically obsolete materials in order to elevate them to have purely aesthetic, sublime qualities. Creating my art this way has led me to profile and understand hoarders; those who collect materials that are otherwise socially useless. They collect these objects to the point where the collection act becomes an obsessive psychological disorder. This thesis will prove that while I identify with those who struggle with this disorder, my own collection tendencies lend themselves to being more related to the processes of contemporary artists and their need to reconfigure the original use of objects in multitude.

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Introduction

Through extensive research and experimentation, some contemporary artists have crafted fastidious modus operandi for both their material selection and art making processes. Many of these processes require a myriad of repetitious steps resembling ritualistic execution. It is my opinion that the artists described in this paper are successful because of the way in which they choose, collect and create works of art from specific types of materials.

But could these qualities ever be considered compulsive, even if only mildly? Could their collection tendencies have any link to compulsive hoarding? As artists, if we can discover a connection between art making methods and compulsive behaviors, what kind of benefits might that mean for our overall artistic realization?

All these questions have motivated my research to include a coincidental investigation on both hitherto divergent areas of study. In the following paper, I illustrate connections between my work and the work of contemporary artists who inspire my process, which ultimately results in the culmination of a body of work included in my MFA thesis exhibition REBOOT.

I will begin by defining compulsive hoarding according to psychological studies performed by experts in the field. Second, I will draw connections between my childhood collection tendencies to my current work as an adult artist. From there, I will profile several artists who have inspired me to incorporate these collections into my art making process and end with a detailed description of the pieces included in REBOOT.

Chapter 1 : Hoarding

How many items should one possess? Is someone that collects considered a hoarder? At what point is that boundary between normal hobby collecting and compulsive hoarding crossed? To answer these questions, I have conducted research on the topics of both compulsive hoarding and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). This chapter will describe compulsive hoarding, different types of hoarding and their relationship to OCD.

Hoarding affects millions of people throughout the world. "Recent studies of hoarding put the prevalence rate at somewhere between 2 and 5 percent of the population." [1]   In psychological studies, compulsive hoarding has been characterized under a much larger, well defined psychological disorder known as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or OCD.[2]

> "OCD is characterized by recurrent obsessions or compulsions that provoke distress and often interfere significantly with everyday functioning...'Obsessions' are intrusive thoughts, images or impulses that the individual perceives as senseless. 'Compulsions' or 'rituals' are repetitive intentional behaviors or mental acts performed in response to an obsession. They are specifically designed to suppress or neutralize dis-comfort or to prevent a dreaded event, although this intention may not always be apparent to an observer." [3]

From case to case, compulsive behaviors can vary and no two are exactly alike. However, some are common among all OCD patients, including hand washing, checking, arranging, and hoarding. [4]

Anxiety relief plays a large role in all of these behaviors.[5] Compulsive checking behaviors (e.g. checking stove-top knobs, or door locks) are performed to relieve anxiety caused by fear of danger unless preventative action is taken.[6] Similarly, when OCD patients wash their hands compulsively, (some cases involve their bodies or residences) they relieve anxiety caused by a fear of contamination.[7] Some cases of compulsive hoarding involve anxiety relief over the fear of throwing things out.

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1   Frost, *Stuff : Compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things*, p.9
2   Tolin, *Hoarding among patients seeking treatment for anxiety disorders*, p.1
3   Steketee, *Treatment of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*, p.5
4   Steketee, *Treatment of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*, p. 7-9
5   Steketee, *Treatment of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*, p. 5
6   Jenike, *Obsessive Compulsive Disorders*, Case-Study on Checking Rituals, p.88
7   Jenike*, Obsessive Compulsive Disorders*, Case-Study on Hand washing Rituals p.47-48

> "Compulsive hoarding is characterized by (a) acquisition of and failure to discard a large number of possessions; (b) clutter that precludes activities for which living spaces were designed; and (c) significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding" [8]

Although compulsive hoarding shares similar traits with both checking and washing rituals, there are some differences that distinguish it from officially classified forms of OCD. [9] OCD patients are frequently aware that their compulsive actions exceed far beyond a normal response to typical circumstances.[10] However, compulsive hoarders lack awareness of their problem, deny that one even exists and ultimately resist any intervention.[11] In the book, *Stuff : Compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things,* Dr. Randy Frost clarifies that hoarding might eventually be considered its own disorder.

> "Recent findings have begun to challenge the view that hoarding is part of OCD and suggest that hoarding may be a disorder all in its own, quite separate from OCD though sharing some of its characteristics. Classic OCD symptoms are associated with anxiety. The sequence begins with an unwanted intrusive thought (e.g. 'My hands are contaminated from touching the doorknob'), followed by a compulsive behavior designed to relieve the distress created by the intrusive thought (e.g., extensive hand washing or cleaning). Positive emotions are not part of this OCD picture; compulsive behavior is driven by the need to reduce distress or discomfort. In hoarding, however, we frequently see *positive* emotions propelling acquisition and saving. We see negative emotions in hoarding as well-anxiety, guilt, shame, regret- but these arise almost exclusively from attempts to get rid of possessions and to avoid acquiring new ones."

Frost goes on to explain that in addition to the characterization of compulsive hoarding as one type of OCD, there have been studies that also classify it as a type of Impulse Control Disorder or ICD.[12] Along with the endless need to accumulate things, the hoarder might also suffer from both compulsive shopping or compulsive gambling. [13] These compounding issues generate a vicious cycle of accumulation and loss that spins out of control.[14]

The type of items hoarders collect are widely varied. However, many cases suggest that the items are considered worthless to non-hoarders.[15] Examples include newspapers, junk-mail and

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8   Frost, *A Cognitive-Behavioral Model of Compulsive Hoarding*, p. 341
9   Frost, *Stuff : Compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things*, p.12-13
10   Tolin,David F. , *Family burden of compulsive hoarding: Results of an internet survey*, p. 335
11   Tolin,David F. , *Family burden of compulsive hoarding: Results of an internet survey*, p. 335
12   Frost, *Stuff : Compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things*, p.13
13   Frost, *Stuff : Compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things*, p.13
14   Frost, *Frost, Stuff : Compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things*, p.13
15   Frost and Steketee, *Compulsive Hoarding and Acquiring : Therapists Guide*, p. 3-4

multiple pieces of broken furniture or appliances.[16] In some of the most extreme cases of compulsive

hoarding, hoarders collect pets and other animals beyond their ability to care for them. One particular

case study about animal hoarding was made into a book named *Inside Animal Hoarding, The Case of*

Barbara Erickson and Her 552 Dogs. The following is an excerpt from Erickson's story.

> " ' I love my babies,' Barbara Erickson, the owner, told the deputies,'...I protect them' " [17]

Some hoarders also collect books beyond their capacity to store or even read them. This

condition is known as Bibliomania [18] For the Bibliomanic, technology has provided several avenues

for this type of hoarding to take. One case study illustrates that copy machines have given rise to the

duplication of books.

> Mrs. PG is a 55-year-old woman diagnosed with OCD in her early twenties... Hoarding started in her late twenties. She felt a need to categorize every meaningful experience of her life and to keep a 'hard record' of it...When reading a book, she would feel the need to photocopy most of its pages and archive the copies in their corresponding folders. She spent about 14 hrs a day involved in this endless cycle of photocopying-categorizing archiving, and generally had just one meal a day due to 'lack of time for eating'. Her cottage was literally filled with hundreds of thousands of sheets of paper, and she spent most of her low income on toner cartridges for the copying machine she had at home and on sheets of paper.[19]

More recently, a new type of compulsive hoarding is gaining attention and research. It has come to be

known as digital hoarding. In his article located in the Chattanooga Healthscope Health and Wellness

Magazine, Dr. Thomas Cory defines digital hoarding as, "

> "Collecting computer files that go far beyond the point of usefulness. Digital hoarders often have to buy multiple hard drives to store their collections. Digital hoarders find it extremely difficult to delete items, just as traditional hoarders have extreme difficulty throwing away useless items." [20]

Using the computer as their collection tool, digital hoarders have the ability non-digital hoarders do

not; to make endless duplicates of this information for redundancy purposes.

While I find relationships between the obsessive nature of hoarding and my own need to

organize and have digital material, I find myself turning away from the societal issues related to

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16   Frost, *Stuff : Compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things*, p.2
17   Arluke and Killen, *Inside Animal Hoarding*, p.5
18   Neelon, Francis A., *Osler and Ernulf's curse*, p. 1
19   Pertusa, Frost, and Mataix-Cols, *When hoarding is a symptom of OCD: A case series and implications for DSM-V*
      , p. 1014
20   Cory, Thomas L. Ph.D, *From Clutter to Compulsive Hoarding,*[database online]

hoarding and changing my collections to have an elevated meaning through my art works.

Because of this, the creative processes behind the work I have created in REBOOT is strongly related to the creative processes used by the artists Nam June Paik, Christian Marclay, Cory Arcangel, Tom Friedman and Tara Donovan. In the subsequent chapters, I will analyze my experiences with both physical and digital hoarding and this action's relationship to an artist's need to reconfigure the original use of objects in multitude.

Chapter 2 : My History and Experience

For as long as I can remember, collecting in some form or fashion has been a consistent part of my life. My collections have consisted of both digital and physical elements. As an artist, I have learned to transmute these collections into a cache of art making materials. Although I have not been clinically diagnosed as a compulsive hoarder, it is my opinion that my material collection tendencies are similar to the symptoms related to the disorder. This chapter will examine these tendencies, their origin and development and address how they have influenced the material choices within my work as an adult artist.

When I was ten years old, I asked my father for a computer for my birthday. When the day came, my father had several computer parts arranged on the dining room table accompanied by an instruction manual. He charged that if I wanted a computer, I would have to build it myself using the items provided. In less than six months, I had built a working computer for games and basic programming.

As time progressed my father instructed efficient ways of maintaining computer systems and programming. Throughout this instruction, I learned how to wield system resources to suit my needs, organize and archive files and minimize system degradation. Occasionally, my father would hand down spare upgrade parts for the system I had built. It seemed like an endless production line of unused technology. I learned the purpose and installation procedure for each upgrade that included replacing a defective or outdated hard drive.

Replacing a hard drive required the migration of existing data to the new drive for seamless system function, just as it does today. By today's standards, these early drives had minimal storage capacity; nevertheless, they were able to house all my games and early programming projects. I spent the majority of my spare time experimenting with how I could make the computer work faster and run

my games smoother. As a result, these games and programming projects still hold a lot nostalgic value for me.

When I learned how to transfer files for the first time, I marveled at the idea of having duplicates of my system. This is not only for the reasons of redundancy, but also for the simple fact that what I owned had been doubled. This duplication came at virtually no consequence save the price of time. I recall this memory each time I transfer files from one place to another on a system. In addition to learning the process of data duplication between hard drives, I also learned how to make backups of this data on magnetic tape cartridges.

The process of backing up data to tape involves transferring the data from the hard drive to a magnetic tape backup cartridge. This is done through tape backup software provided along with the tape drive itself. One significant difference between data stored on a hard drive and data stored on a tape cartridge is accessibility.

Data that exists on the hard drive is ready to use as is. Data that exists on a tape cartridge can only be accessed through the tape backup software and must be restored before it has the same accessibility as files on the hard drive. In addition, access to data on tape cartridges is sequential rather than the random access capability of the hard drive.

Along with learning the tape backup device, I discovered a data duplication method called incremental backup. Through this method, the tape software was able to differentiate between previously saved files on the cartridge and newer ones on the hard drive.[21] I could insert these magnetic tapes into my computer and set the hard drive to backup overnight.

My fascination with this process originated in the ability to convert my hard drive (and all the inherent nostalgic value) into a small, portable cartridge. Although my system was small and quick to backup, these tapes now housed just as much nostalgic value as the system itself. Over time, this

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21   Nakamura, *Optimal backup policy for a database system with incremental and full backups*, p. 1374

fascination slowly turned into needless redundancy. While the documentation that accompanied the tape device suggested making backups once or twice a month, I would normally backup and restore my data once or twice a week. After awhile, the tapes began to snap due to my overuse and files would be lost. In response to this, I began making backups on two tapes, twice as frequently.

By the time I completed high school, writable compact-discs (CDs) and CD burning technology was becoming popular with consumers. Anyone who owned a computer had the ability to create mix compilation music CDs or transfer data files to the discs. The antiquated tape backup system of my youth had been rendered obsolete overnight. Much like my captivation with the tape process, I began migrating all my data to compact discs. Unlike the tape backups, which generally required only one cartridge, backups made to compact discs required volumes. I would make sets of backups for all the data on my hard drive.

In contrast to tape cartridges, compact discs lacked the permanence and durability of the tape cartridges; even when stored properly, they were susceptible to scratches and blemishes. This possibility made me anxious and in response, I made copies of these volumes every three months to ensure safekeeping. Generally, I would retain the previous sets for extra redundancy. To prevent hard-drive overuse, I duplicated the compact-discs themselves instead of transferring files from the drive.

This saving of materials has recently shown itself as a cathartic act of solidifying my ongoing relationship with my father. The obsolete materials that I have collected and continue to obtain are transformed and recycled through my art-making process. That is why it was/is important to possess them like a hoarder, who hangs onto useless objects. These materials have become more than what they are. They have become my pathway into art making.

Recognizing their symbolic potential, I have made these collections the material basis of my work as a artist. In addition to collecting, organizing and retaining the files on my computer, I also collect the obsolete technology that houses them. (e.g. floppy disks, VHS and audio cassette tapes)

These two collections force me to adapt to their ever growing size. As these collections grow, I am forced to adopt new systems of organization. I have translated this methodology of collection organization into a viable art creation process. This translation incorporates these collections as my source of raw materials so that I can make compelling and new arrangements with them.

Inspiring my discovery of this process are several influential artists. The next chapter describes how these artists influence the concepts behind my work, my creation process and material choices.

Chapter 3 : Influential Artists

The key artists who have influenced my work span a variety of styles and backgrounds. Their concepts and methods have inspired the way I look at, conceive and create my work. Nam June Paik (b. Seoul, 20 July 1932; d. Miami, 29 Jan 2006) created works of Performance, Installation and New Media Art throughout the latter half of the 20th century.[22] He has been known throughout the art world as the Pioneer of Video Art.[23] Although visual and physical similarities exist between Paik's work and my own, I feel his ideas, concepts and process have inspired me most.

Many of Paik's video pieces involve the dismantling of television sets and other electronic devices only to be reconstructed into sculptures and electronic installations.[24] In doing so, Paik removed the television from its designed purpose and gave it a new function.

> "In Paik's hands, the television became the means to produce a new electronic image, which he did by applying magnets to the surface of the television set and reworking the electronics of its interior. In the spirit of Fluxus, Paik remade the television, exposing its inside, turning it inside out, and disrupting its mechanics in order to create an abstract image." [25]

This destructive method Paik applied in his work inspired the recognition of artistic potential within my own materials. Much of my own work involves both physically destroying items that I am personally attached to and reconstructing them into a new purpose and function. Where Paik is concerned with destroying and disrupting the TV as a form of cultural subversion and as a way of drawing attention to how media controls and dominates people, I am more interested in breaking down equipment and creating new formations and combinations in order to revive this equipment and inspire a nostalgic relationship to it. The following examples of work illustrate Paik's destructive process.

In the installation piece *Random Access*, Paik removed audio cassette tape from its plastic encasing and glued it to the gallery wall. The finished piece invited viewers to play the tape through a

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22   Hartney, Mick. Paik, nam june. Grove Art Online
23   Fineberg, Jonathan David, *Art since 1940 : Strategies of being*, p.352
24   Hartney, Mick. Paik, nam june. *Grove Art Online*
25   Paik, Stooss and Thomas, *Nam june paik : Video time, video space,* p.79

playhead attached to a speaker.[26]
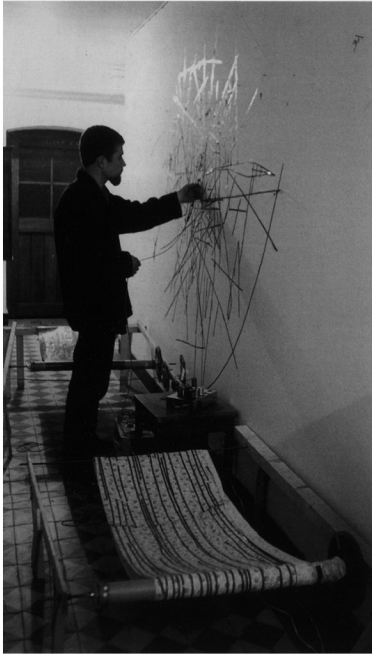
The manipulation of video imagery within Paik's installation pieces involved using a device known as a Degausser.
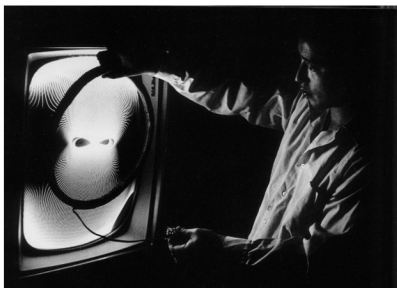
"The Degausser, an instrument utilized by electronics engineers to eliminate electrostatic charges on television, was employed by Paik along with electromagnets and larger magnets to generate wave patterns on the cathode-ray tube and manipulate the received broadcast image. When placed against the surface of the cathode-ray tube, the *Demagnetizer* produced abstract moving electronic patterns. These patterns emerged directly from the unique properties of the cathode-ray tube of the television monitor...The floating and changing three-dimensional patterns of *Demagentizer* were also created on the *Magnet TV* through the changing position and movement of a magnet. In work of this time, Paik also adjusted and manipulated the circuitry and controls of the television to create a distortion and disruption of the videotape or broadcast image. He continued to

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26   Paul, Christiane, *Digital art, p. 15*

deploy interactive media and transform the television set into a performative and sculptural instrument"[27]

Christian Marclay also integrates similar destruction methods into his art. Born in California in 1955, [28] Marclay is best known as one of the pioneers of present day "turntablism" through experimentation with using the phonograph as an instrument.[29] Turntablism involves the artistic manipulation of previously recorded vinyl records in live performance

Fig. 3
Christian Marclay with *Phonoguitar*
c.1981
Courtesy of PAULA MOORE GALLERY
New York, NY

settings.[30] Turntabilists, also known as DJs, spin records on two or more players.[31] Through the use of their hands, DJs disrupt the normal rotation of the records on the players. By doing so, they intentionally alter the linear quality of studio recordings to provide the audience with a unique, live music, listening experience.[32]

Some of Marclay's work has involved the destruction of used vinyl records through various means. (e.g. scratching, denting, cracking, smashing, sanding)

Fig. 4
Record annotated using stickers, tape and markers
c.1990
Courtesy of Douglas Kahn

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27   Hanhardt, Paik, and Solomon R., *The worlds of nam june paik*, p117
28   Grant, Catherine M., *Marclay, Christian,* Grove Art Online
29   Kelly, Caleb, *Cracked media : The sound of malfunction*, pp. 86-88
30   Miyakawa, Felicia M.,*Turntablature: Notation, legitimization, and the art of the hip-hop DJ*, p. 81
31   Miyakawa, Felicia M.,*Turntablature: Notation, legitimization, and the art of the hip-hop DJ*, p. 81
32   Miyakawa, Felicia M.,*Turntablature: Notation, legitimization, and the art of the hip-hop DJ*, p. 81-82

"I destroy, I scratch, I act against the fragility of the record in order to free the music from its captivity"[33]

Christian Marclay

Fig. 5
Christian Marclay at Hallwalls in Buffalo, NY
c.1985
Courtesy of Dan Kassem

In some cases, the smashed record fragments are reconstructed and used on numerous turntables during Marclay's live performances. I am most inspired by Marclay's use of obsolete technology for materials, its destruction, and the recycling process that results in his work.[34] I differ from Marclay because of his intended live performative end for this destructive process. The intended end for my materials is more tangible and environmental; leaning more towards installation and viewer immersion.

Cory Arcangel (b. May 25 1978 in Buffalo)[35] also includes elements of obsolete technology that he has acquired, experimented with and modified into finish pieces.[36]

"The terminology for technological art forms has always been extremely fluid and what is now known as digital art has undergone several name changes since it first emerged: once referred to as 'computer art' (since the 1970s) and then 'multimedia art', 'media art', which at the end of the twentieth century was used mostly for film and video, as well as sound art and other hybrid forms." [37]

I draw inspiration mostly from Arcangel's material selection and his appropriation of outdated, readily available or inexpensive technology. According to Arcangel himself, these materials are not only easy to obtain, they also carry strong visual, cultural references.

"Yes, a lot of my work does deal with obsolete technologies. Let me give you an example

33   Seliger, Jonathan. 1992. Interview with christian marclay. *Journal of Contemporary Art*
34   Kelly, Caleb, *Cracked media : The sound of malfunction*, pp. 150-151
35   Arcangel, Cory. Cory arcangel's curriculum vitae. in team (gallery, inc.) [database online]
36   Whitney Museum of American Art. 1973; 2004. Biennial exhibition, p.150
37   Paul, Christiane, *Digital art, pp. 7*

and I'll try to explain from the example. Recently I bought a pen-plotter on eBay. This is pre-ink jet technology. A penplotter is like an ink jet printer instead of it shooting out ink from a cartridge it has a little pen that goes down on the paper when it wants to write – it's basically like a mechanical arm. I was interested in it mainly cause it was cheap. Since it wasn't such a big investment, I don't feel any pressure when playing around with it. Also it represents an entire era and aesthetic that no longer exists therefore it becomes easy to examine it culturally. Last but not least, it is just fun to me to try to get this old junk working again. Even getting some of this stuff to turn on is a minor feat of research, and I have made many artworks which are basically elaborate 'hello worlds' from old technology. " [38]

While Archangel utilizes recognizable characters and narratives from popular video games, the imagery I display deals with the materials themselves. My work deals with the nostalgic value and historical reference inherent in the original intended use of my materials. The following examples of Arcangel's work focus on his appropriation and modification techniques.

Some of his best known pieces utilize the modifications of 8-bit video game cartridges from the mid 1980s.[39] In *I Shot Andy Warhol* (2002), Arcangel hacked the Nintendo cartridge named Hogan's Alley. This particular cartridge originally contained a game that included anonymous characters for the player to shoot. These characters ranged from unarmed innocents, to armed cops and villains. Game play resembled a firing range format with a time limit placed on the elimination of armed assailants by means of the zapper gun accessory.**[40]**

LEFT

Fig. 6
Cory Arcangel
I Shot Andy Warhol (Game Cartridge)
2002
Courtesy of Cory Arcangel

RIGHT

Fig. 7
Cory Arcangel
I Shot Andy Warhol (Screenshot)
2002
Courtesy of Cory Arcangel

38   Heck, Peter, *Interview Cory Arcangel*, (NIMk Website, Arcangel's Website)
39   Christiane Paul, *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond,* p. 228-229
40   Kelly, Mark. Hogan's alley. in ninDB.com [database online]

Arcangel re-programmed the game-play by substituting these original characters with images of

mass culture including Andy Warhol, Colonel Sanders, Pope John Paul II and Flava Flav (e.g. a

member of the pop music hip-hop group Public Enemy). Following Arcangel's modifications, the

original game objective is changed to the elimination of any targets that resemble Andy Warhol.[41] The

installation in the gallery invites viewers to play the modified game, revised by Arcangel. In doing

these modifications and displaying them in the gallery space, Arcangel has provided preservation for

the otherwise discarded obsolete technology. [42] Not only has he created a new purpose for the obsolete

hardware, he makes the modified software available to viewers online.[43]

> "For me the whole point of the work was the hardware intervention, the fact that I slaved
> over this ridiculous 6502 Nintendo language. If I hadn't been able to make a cartridge
> that ran the original code, I wouldn't have made the work. I tested everything in an
> emulator on a contemporary PC before I made the cartridge. It would have been next to
> impossible to write it without the emulator. But I'm a little wary of emulating it in a
> gallery, because the public doesn't necessarily understand an emulator. The reason I make
> works based on game consoles is that all you have to do is see the cartridge to understand
> what happened. (Of course, I'm influenced by Nam June Paik's experiments with
> magnets and TVs.)"[44]

Another 8-bit cartridge modification piece is *Landscape Study # 4* (2002). Creation of this piece

involved removing the original narrative aspects from a Super Mario Brothers video game cartridge.

This narrative follows the protagonist Mario in his adventures to save the princess from certain doom.

Arcangel substituted the narrative with a 360-degree view of a neighborhood in his home town Buffalo,

New York. Arcangel had taken photographs, scanned and formatted them to resemble the graphics

inherent in the original Super Mario Bros game. He included a program that scrolled through the

graphics.[45]

41   Christiane Paul, *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond,* p. 228-229
42   Paul, Christiane, *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond,* p. 229-230
43   Paul, Christiane, *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond,* p. 229-230
44   Arcangel, Cory, *didactic material for Seeing Double: Emulation in Theory and Practice,* Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, [database online]
45   Paul, Christiane, *Digital Art,* p. 200
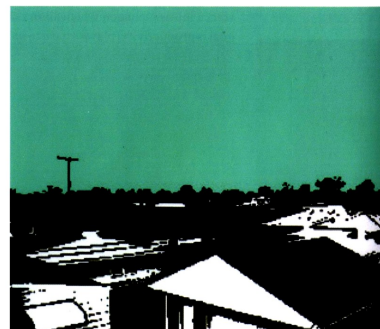
"*Landscape Study # 4* fuses tradition landscape photography with gaming aesthetics, creating a scenery that effectively transcends the media from which it borrows and seems to evolve into a new manifestation of pop art."[46]

Another Super Mario Bros cartridge modification, *Naptime* (2003) also involves removing the narrative aspects of game-play. In this piece, however, Arcangel has replaced it with a minimally animated image of Mario in bed, snoring with a dreaming bubble containing nonsensical, 8-bit mish-mash.[47] In both *Naptime* and *Landscape Study # 4,* Arcangel has denied his viewers interactivity. He has removed the familiar, chronological aspects of the largely recognizable narrative that both Nintendo

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46   Paul, Christiane, *Digital Art,* p. 200
47   Greene, Rachel, *Internet Art,* p. 201

and Super Mario Bros had previously provided their users.[48]

In addition to the electronic artists discussed thus far, my work has been inspired by non-digital artists as well. The artist Tom Friedman (b St Louis, MO, 1965)[49] creates sculptures using prosaic materials including pencils, toothpicks, rubber bands and chewing gum.[50] Critical descriptions of his work include "obsessive", "intimate", "meticulously small and strikingly large in scale."[51] "While many artists struggle with the balance of craft versus concept, Friedman seems to be able to dance effortlessly around the two, producing artwork that is visually intriguing as well as rich with underlying commentary."[52]

I draw particular inspiration from this balance between craft and concept, so evident in Friedman's work, and his ability to transform non-traditonal art-making materials, giving them new meanings and significance. When asked about the commonality of these materials, Friedman stated, "I like to have a foundation in the familiar to depart from and build onto, which is why I start with the ordinary. This idea or assumption of ordinary tends to be in the form of the material or representation." [53]

Although some of Friedman's work culminates into recognizable imagery, I am more attached to his pieces that do not. These abstract pieces result in Friedman's strict adherence to the rules his process dictates. I admire Friedman's blind determination towards project completion and enjoy his attention to detail, adherence to his own established rules and how he focuses viewer attention on the materials, process and concept involved with the piece, rather than mere choreographed aesthetics.

Within my own work, I implement a similar ritualistic process of developing a set of rules for each specific material and follow it through, completely exhausting material resources. Where Friedman and I differ is within the extreme care he takes for his pristine craftsmanship and exactitude

48   Greene, Rachel, *Internet Art,* p. 201
49   Cross, Andrew, *Tom Friedman,* Grove Art Online
50   Cross, Andrew, *Tom Friedman,* Grove Art Online
51   Cross, Andrew, *Tom Friedman,* Grove Art Online
52   Huff, T. J., *Daily impermanence visiting with conceptual artist tom friedman,* ArtsEditor
53   Friedman, Danto and Rugoff, *Tom Friedman, p.8*

in each piece. My work focuses on providing the viewer new and compelling arrangements of the materials I choose, exactitude of execution is not my goal. The following pieces are some of the most inspirational to my efforts as an artist.

Fig. 11
Tom Friedman
Untitled
1992
Approximately three thousand garbage bags

Friedman created *Untitled* (1992) using only black garbage bags. In this piece, Friedman started with one bag and continuously placed another inside another until no more could be added. [54] Through Friedman's own conception, the completion of *Untitled* was determined by the limitations of the materials themselves.[55] *Untitled* was part of a body of work created in the early 1990s that questioned and challenged Modernist reflexivity. [56]

> "Committing the 'sin' of literalism, these works presented sculptures of objects made out
> of the materials of those very same objects"[57]

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54   Hainley, Cooper and Searle, *Tom Friedman*, p. 61
55   Hainley, Cooper and Searle, *Tom Friedman*, p. 61
56   Friedman, Danto and Rugoff, *Tom Friedman*, pp. 23
57   Friedman, Danto and Rugoff, *Tom Friedman*, pp. 23

Fig. 12
Tom Friedman
Untitled
1995
Thirty thousand Toothpicks

Another example of Friedman's work is *Untitled* (1995). Friedman created an explosive form by meticulously gluing thirty-thousand toothpicks together.[58] Starting with one toothpick , he meticulously glued each toothpick in a circular motion until the resulting form materialized. Friedman's intention with *Untitled* (1995) is similar to the use of garbage bags with *Untitled* (1992). It addresses the issue of identity with the materials used.

> "Its how the toothpick sees itself if the toothpick could see itself as anything (things, dumb things, can't 'see' at all, of course); it's simultaneously the supernova star and just toothpicks and somewhere between those two things – and absolutely neither. Perhaps what holds them together is the concept of toothpick, what/toothpick/is, *toothpick* in the abstract."[59]

Fig. 13
Tom Friedman
Untitled
2000
Eraser Shavings

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58   Friedman, Danto and Rugoff, *Tom Friedman*, pp. 10
59   Hainley, Cooper and Searle, *Tom Friedman*, p. 83

In *Untitled* (2000), Friedman collected eraser shavings and placed them into a pile 40 inches in diameter.[60]

> "I don't know quite how he made them-perhaps just by rubbing pink rubber erasers back and forth across a surface of a given roughness and sweeping the resulting shavings into a container of some sort at the end of the session. It was labor intensive, but also a kind of ritual..."[61]

Although they exist on a larger scale, installation artist Tara Donovan (b. 1969 in New York, NY)[62] utilizes similar prosaic materials and repetitive processes to generate experiential environments.

> "Tara Donovan dignifies contemporary disposables, releasing these utilitarian objects from their quotidian tasks. Collecting common industrial products – pencils, paper plates, plastic wrap, sheets of glass – she launches them into a purely aesthetic realm. The sculptures and landscapes that she fashions from these goods deny their original function, further enabling the transcendence of matter. In a minimal yet commanding gesture, she shifts attention away from the cultural and environmental implications of consumer goods, and summons up the sublime."[63]

My own installation art aims for a similar transformation by attempting to transform the materials I use so that they can be read on a purely aesthetic, even sublime level. However, while these similarities between Donovan and myself exist, I differ from her in the types of materials I chose. Donovan utilizes prosaic and mundane materials that provide references to the immensity of everyday consumerism. My materials carry with them a strong symbolism and nostalgic value. They provide imagery more associated with the generational evolution of magnetic recording technology and the nostalgic relationship that connects myself to viewers privy to it's original function. The following figures illustrate this material transformation, typical of Donovan's installations.

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60   Friedman, Danto and Rugoff, *Tom Friedman*, p. 12
61   Friedman, Danto and Rugoff, *Tom Friedman*, p. 12
62   Tara donovan on artnet. in artnet - the art world online
63   Ellegood, Anne, *Vitamin 3-D : New perspectives in sculpture and installation, p.* 98

In *Untitled* (2003), Donovan combines hundreds if not thousands of paper plates to create several pieces that resemble coral reef or other forms of aquatic life.[64]

In *Colony* (2002), Donovan glued together thousands of pencil fragments resulting in a form similar to aerial metropolitan photography.[65]

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64   Ellegood, Anne, *Vitamin 3-D : New perspectives in sculpture and installation, p.* 98
65   Ellegood, Anne, *Vitamin 3-D : New perspectives in sculpture and installation, p.* 98

In a piece placed very similarly in the gallery, Donovan pieced together hundreds if not thousands of scotch tape pieces that resulted in *Nebulous* (2002).

Throughout each of these examples, Donovan's commentary is not political in focus, but more directed towards the immensity of the materials used.[66] This is how I interpret her gallery work; not only as experimentation within the artistic potential of the materials themselves, but also addressing the vast amounts of materials viewers may not see on a regular basis.

In summary, Paik, Marclay and Arcangel provide inspiration through creating new uses for their materials through retooling and subverting. Friedman and Donovan provide inspiration through their use of ordinary objects and their abstraction from original contexts. In the next chapter, I will describe the work I have created for my MFA Thesis Exhibition REBOOT.

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66   Ellegood, Anne, *Vitamin 3-D : New perspectives in sculpture and installation, p.* 98

Chapter 4 : REBOOT

REBOOT : MFA Thesis Exhibition was installed in the Laura Mesaros Gallery located at West Virginia Universities College of Creative Arts, November 29th through December 11th 2010. It consisted of six large-scale, installation art pieces that centered around the use of obsolete technology for is creation. This chapter will describe REBOOT in terms of my material choices, creation process and installation problems and solutions.

Obsolete Technology was used to create every piece included in REBOOT. The materials used to create REBOOT include three different generations of standard floppy disks, audio cassettes, quarter inch reel-to-reel tape and strips of VHS tape. All but one piece implements both physical and electronic elements.

In this work, these materials have been removed from their original function, broken down to their most fundamental components and used as raw materials. In most cases, their original function has been subverted. When these materials were designed, their function had specific parameters and guidelines. These parameters outlined strict limitations on what the material could or could not do. My intention of divorcing these materials from their original function was to transform these limitations into artistic potential. I did this to provide these materials a new purpose and function inside the gallery.

Prior to my material selection, I completed a long term, digitization project that amassed the recorded information stored on the materials themselves. I found myself with a large cache of unused floppy disks and cassette tapes that eventually became the art making materials in REBOOT. I enjoyed the idea of reusing these items because it seemed like a limitless source of material. Most importantly, I have created a new purpose for these materials through creating these works.

I also chose these materials because of their numerous visual and sculptural qualities. These include their symbolism through historical reference, their nostalgic properties and my own personal

attachment to them. Their sculptural qualities include rigidity, flexibility, malleability, reconfiguration and interlocking capabilities.

For each piece in REBOOT, there is a specific process, set of materials, and rules that govern their ultimate outcome. These rules are declared at inception and adhered to throughout the entire process. The physical construction of each follows a linear, step-by-step fashion without deviation. The pieces in REBOOT all have similar elements regarding their individual creation processes. All previously stored information on these devices was digitized and/or collected to a centralized location. All pieces that utilize their plastic enclosures have been bound together using cable ties. However, material selection and process were only two-thirds of the work involved with the creation of REBOOT.

The installation of REBOOT resulted from a series of problems and solutions. In response to the advice from my committee, I anticipated the size of the gallery to visually shrink my pieces. Creating a large portion of the pieces in my studio, I took steps to counter this problem. This involved collecting more materials and designing my pieces to be sectional and site specific.

AUDIO INTERFACE # 1 was created using quarter inch reel-to-reel tape, a latch hook grid and CD player. For this piece, the most important quality of quarter inch reel to reel tape was its flimsy, shiny luminescence. The latch hook grid provided a place to neatly organize the shiny material in equal lengths. Latch hooking is the technique of pulling short pieces of yarn through a canvas or mesh with a tool called a latch hook.

Beyond its physical properties, its historical reference is unavoidable. Quarter inch reel-to-reel tape was used on a device known as a reel-to-reel tape deck. This device was originally known as the Magnetophon.[67] Developed during the 1920's, its title was coined in 1934 by AEG (German General Electric) and BASF (the Ludwigshafen branch of I.G. Farbenindustrie Aktiengesellschaft).[68] Regular production started in June 1936[69] and hit the consumer markets in the 1950s.[70]

Personal attachment also provided a strong influence in my decision to use this material. This stems from my parents' use of these reels for exchanging recorded letters overseas, early in their relationship. When I had reached adolescence, my father gave me the tape recorder as well as his entire

67   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 54
68   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 49-54
69   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 58
70   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 70

collection of reels. During high school, I used some of these reels to record garage band demos with my friends. Because of these events, I learned to physically arrange demo tapes using splicing blocks. The physicality of this manipulation process has since been replaced by digital, non-linear editing software. AUDIO INTERFACE # 1 was constructed through physical means alone. This is because of my intention to show a direct reference to the earlier sound editing process and connect my previous material experiences with others who are privy to quarter-inch tape.

The reels collected for *AUDIO INTERFACE # 1* had their tape removed. Strips of approximately equal length and numbers were cut from each reel and woven into the latch hook grid. Prior to their physical transformation, all reels in my possession were digitized to the computer. The digitized audio files were processed through several programs that I wrote to remove frames from the audio (time compression) and scramble the clips. This processed audio was then recorded to a CD and played through a portable CD player in the Galley, in close proximity to the latchhook grid.

The materials used to create *AUDIO INTERFACE # 1* are the most vintage shown in REBOOT. This piece was placed at the entrance to the gallery due to its age in relation to the other materials. It is also the smallest and I decided to have it as an entrance piece. The entrance to the gallery had separate lighting to allow for more focused and concentrated illumination of the piece. I wanted *AUDIO INTERFACE # 1's* installation to be separate, physically and aesthetically from the other pieces and look more like a piece in a historical museum (i.e. specimen of time).

Fig. 22
Nick LeJeune
AUDIO INTERFACE # 2
2009
Audio Cassette Tapes, Cable Ties
Stereo and Speakers
Courtesy of the Artist

AUDIO INTERFACE # 2 was created using commercially recorded audio cassette albums, computer speakers, cable ties, wire and a stereo. Most of the audio cassette tapes were culled from my personal collection, with the remainder coming from friends and family. The computer speakers had been dismantled and their plastic enclosures removed for other projects. The stereo was chosen so that a CD could play of edited digitized audio on endless loop through the speakers. The significance of the audio playing through the speakers is that it had originally been stored on the cassette tapes out of which the sculptures are created.

I specifically chose audio cassettes for both their rigidity in form and hard plastic structure. Nostalgically, these audio cassettes are symbolic of mix tape culture, which was prevalent between late 1970s to the early 1990s and consisted in creation of amateur cassette compilations made and traded by consumers.[71]

This aesthetic stems from both the names of musical groups on the tapes and from the cassette form itself. Audio cassette tapes, more formally known as the "Philips Compact Cassette"[72] first produced in the Netherlands in the 1950s, rose to popularity during the 1960s and 1970s and peaked in the early 1990s.[73] Prior to beginning the floppy disk pieces, I was eager to investigate all three

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71   Paul, James, *Last night a mix tape saved my life,* [database online]
72   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 102
73   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 13

generations and explore their artistic potential.

For *AUDIO INTERFACE # 2,* each of the cassette tapes were drilled and bound together with black cable ties. I particularly enjoyed how easily these cassettes could be bound together. All the digitized audio information was time-lapsed and randomized (as with *AUDIO INTERFACE # 1* and *VIDEO INTERFACE*) and recorded onto one single audio cassette tape. To provide endless play, this tape was then digitized to a CD. This CD is played using the stereo through speakers that are attached to the new audio cassette sculptures. I recorded the sounds of the floppy drives transferring these files and placed them onto a CD. The headphones provided the viewer with a more personal and solitary experience with the piece.

The first corner after entering the gallery provided the perfect spot for *AUDIO INTERFACE # 2.* Not only did this corner have its own lighting, it allowed for a proximity solution in its relationship to other works in the show. In terms of an innovative historical timeline, the materials within *AUDIO INTERFACE # 1* preceded the materials within *AUDIO INTERFACE # 2.* I intended *AUDIO INTERFACE # 2* to follow *AUDIO INTERFACE # 1* as the next featured piece in the gallery. This is because I wanted to represent both the generational and chronological relationship between these two pieces.

Fig. 23
Nick LeJeune
DATASTREAM
2010
3 1/2 inch Floppy Disks, Cable Ties, Portable CD Player
and headphones.
Courtesy of the Artist

DATASTREAM was created using 3.5" floppy disks, cable ties, CD player and headphones. Although very similar in structure, these disks were smaller and harder than both their predecessors aiding in *DATASTREAM's* construction. These floppy disks hold not only sentimental value for me, but also historical references world wide. This historical reference is important for my work because it provides a connection between myself and others who have had similar experiences using the disks. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, these disks were considered a standard for everyday file storage and transfer.[74] My family, mostly my father, used floppy disks to store files regarding financial, personal and business information. My father bequeathed them with stored information intact.

Fig. 23
Nick LeJeune
DATASTREAM
2010
3 1/2 inch Floppy Disks, Cable Ties, Portable CD Player and headphones.
Courtesy of the Artist

Before setting foot inside the installation space, I fully intended *DATASTREAM* to be draped throughout the gallery. I wanted it to weave in and out of other pieces, but also remain a bit above the viewer. It was to follow the handrail that leads people into the gallery space. As with the chronological elements that influenced the placement of both audio pieces, *DATASTREAM* was meant to be present at the start, throughout and at the end of the show, following *FIREWALL* and *TERMINAL*.

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74   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 310-311
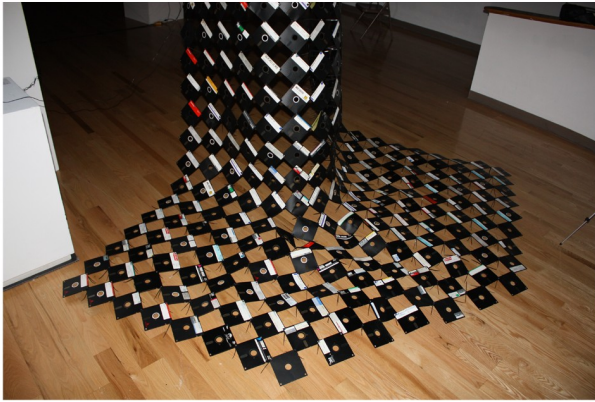
TERMINAL was created using 5.25" floppy disks, a DVD Player, 2" LCD screen and cable ties. I particularly chose these floppy disks due to their strong historical reference because they had been the standard of file storage and transfer in the early to late 1980s.[75]

My first experience with these disks was through personal computer video game playing. Games at that time came in boxes with sets of disks. Gameplay required the constant swapping of disks. As information was loaded from the disks, this physical operation generated distinct patterns of sounds. Over time, I fondly associated these patterns to my video game playing and early programming experimentation. When my father's instruction introduced hard drives, the use of floppy disks was eliminated, along with these sounds I had grown so fond of.

TERMINAL's creation process began with the rule that all disk corners be bound together by cable ties. Other rules included an under-over pattern that was carried out. Initially, it was perceived that this maintained a cylindrical form. However, over many repetitions and rows, the form began to take more of a funnel form. It was expanded with the intention of surrounding the viewer entirely, continuing to the floor. I considered the piece complete when materials were exhausted. In addition to the floppy disk element of the piece, there was also a video element. Located inside *TERMINAL* is a

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75   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 310-311

two inch LCD screen. Displayed on this screen is a video capture of the file consolidation process. As I

copied all the files from these disks to a hard drive, I recorded the monitors output to a dvd recorder.

All data was copied from the floppy disks to the hard drive, into a single folder. This video was

recorded periodically over time. It is relatively six hours long and plays on continuous loop.

The majority of *TERMINAL* was constructed in my studio. However, many of the pieces in

REBOOT were augmented to solve scale problems in the gallery. *TERMINAL's* completion was

determined site specifically to allow for the exhibition of other pieces. Had it been the only piece in the

gallery, it would have filled the entire space.

FIREWALL was created using eight inch floppy disks. These disks were used between the mid

1970s and 1980s when they were surpassed by both the 5.25" and 3.5" models. [76] I chose these

Fig. 26
Nick LeJeune
TERMINAL
2010
5 1/4 inch Floppy Disks, Cable Ties, DVD Player
and 2 inch LCD screen.
Courtesy of the Artist

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76   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 910-911

materials because of their larger size, making more feasible the construction of the ceiling to floor wall I had envisioned. Unlike all other materials in REBOOT, I had no means of getting the files off of the eight inch disks. In early prototype responses to this problem, I had attempted to combine other multimedia elements with FIREWALL. Ultimately, I chose to remove these electronic components, letting the grand scale of *FIREWALL* be its dominant quality.

Fig. 27
Nick LeJeune
FIREWALL
2010
8 inch Floppy Disks, Cable Ties
Courtesy of the Artist

FIREWALL is a fourteen by eleven foot wall made entirely from eight inch disks. This has been hung from the catwalks in the gallery, separating *VIDEO INTERFACE* from the rest of the space. It also served to block light from the other works in the exhibit, leaving one end of the space in relative darkness. Using prototypes of *FIREWALL,* I bound individual disks together to make walls, booths and other installations that surrounded the viewer. Although this type of installation finally culminated through smaller disks in *TERMINAL*, I wanted to capitalize on the size of these disks.

Fig. 28
Nick LeJeune
FIREWALL (DETAIL)
2010
8 inch Floppy Disks, Cable Ties
Courtesy of the Artist

FIREWALL had multiple installation options. One idea was to drape this sheet of eight inch disks on the windows that fed external light into the gallery. In the end, I decided to bisect the gallery space using *FIREWALL.* This solution solved three problems that might have led to the exclusion of the eight inch disks being included in REBOOT. The first problem involved having too much light in the gallery for *Video Interface* to be an effective piece. The second was to isolate the back section of the gallery, reserving it as an isolated viewing area for *VIDEO INTERFACE.* The third was the simple task of including the eight inch disks in the show, and doing so in a large-scale manner.

VIDEO INTERFACE was created using over 100 VHS tapes, black duct tape and video projection. VHS (Video Home System) was introduced in Japan in 1976, competed with both incompatible formats 8mm and BETA for design superiority. Eventually VHS prevailed and became the industry standard between the early to mid 1980s and late 1990s.[77]

The cassettes used in *VIDEO INTERFACE* once belonged to both my mother and grandmother. When my mother was introduced to DVD recording technology in the early 2000s, she no longer had a use for these tapes. Both her and my grandmother had used these tapes to record shows on television (e.g. soap operas, mini series and prime-time dramas) When they had been given to me, I wanted to find some way of reusing them and decided to include them into my material investigation for *VIDEO INTERFACE.*

Fig. 29
Nick LeJeune
VIDEO INTERFACE
2010
Video Projection, VHS Tape, Black Duct Tape
Courtesy of the Artist

77   Daniel, Mee and Clark, *Magnetic recording : The first 100 years,* p. 182-200

The original prototypes for *VIDEO INTERFACE* included the hard plastic cases that the magnetic tape was housed in. Eventually, I chose to remove these casings from the piece altogether after the discovery of the reflective qualities that existed in the magnetic tape. Through investigation, I discovered that light shone through the strands of this tape was transformed into beautifully reflected unpredictable flashes of light on the surrounding walls. I decided to expand on this discovery by mass producing these strands in larger scale and using the projection of the video from the strands themselves. I wanted to have a piece that was similar to *AUDIO INTERFACE # 1,* in terms of using the magnetic tape alone, but focus more on the video element inherent in VHS tape.

The process for *VIDEO INTERFACE* was done very similarly to *AUDIO INTERFACE # 1.* The VHS tapes were digitized and then disassembled. I remove the tape from the disassembled cassettes in strips. The strips were cut into approximately equal lengths, organized in a linear fashion and fastened together with black duct tape. The digitized video was sent through several programs that I wrote to time-lapse and scramble both the audio and visual information. This video is then recorded back onto a single VHS tape.

Fig. 30
Nick LeJeune
VIDEO INTERFACE
2010
Video Projection, VHS Tape, Black Duct Tape
Courtesy of the Artist

Prior to their dismantling, the VHS tapes within *Video Interface* had been digitized to the computer. Each cassette was disassembled to reveal the reels of tape inside. These reels were collected, labeled and stored. The tape was pulled from the reels in strips of equal length and organized in a linear

fashion and fastened together with black duct tape. The digitized video files were processed through several programs that I wrote to remove frames from the video (time compression) and scramble the remaining frames. This processed video was recorded back onto a single DVD to allow for an endless loop projection onto the strands of tape.

The placement of *VIDEO INTERFACE* was planned before stepping foot in the gallery space. It was placed at the rear of the gallery and was intended to fill the dimensions of the rear wall. I wanted *VIDEO INTERFACE* to have its own section of the gallery. The size of *VIDEO INTERFACE* was determined not only by the placement of *FIREWALL*, but also by the placement of the projector. The placement of the projector was determined by the scale of the image projected onto the strands of tape. This projection onto the strands of video tape allowed for hundreds of reflections to appear on the surrounding walls. In the gallery, the image seen in *VIDEO INTERFACE* is a cacophony of the digitized footage from the cassettes which has been projected back onto the strands of tape.

Conclusion

While parallels can be drawn between my artistic methods and procedures on the one hand and the behaviors of compulsive compulsive hoarders on the other, my work for REBOOT demonstrates how these behaviors can become subsumed within the creative process and turned towards a productive end.

For some artists, intrinsic qualities require them to perform the same repetitious tasks to create their work. In learning this about my own methods, I have constructed the profile of a typical digital hoarder that fits my persona and work. However, this work is more related to the landscape that an artist typically traverses to collect their material.

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