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Conversations with the Oregon Trail and the Silent Generation

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CONVERSATIONS WITH THE OREGON TRAIL

AND THE SILENT GENERATION

By

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CONVERSATIONS WITH THE OREGON TRAIL

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Thesis Advisor: Sheridan Adams

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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The aim of this thesis is to explain the reason behind my art practise and process as it stands in August 2020, its context and relation to my life and experience as an outsider in the American culture. This process culminates in the documentation of experiences through the use and preparation of *displays* of personal artifacts as physical evidence and mechanisms of my transformation to my american persona through a continuing acculturation process and drift from the american generational archetype.

It is important to outline my current work state diverges from my past work since it no longer serves a creative outlet purpose but rather a conceptual analysis process; my work is no longer in search of catharsis and should not be seen as Art Therapy. In my work I use the collecting and archiving of popular culture and classic computing as my medium of choice to create displays presenting personal *artifacts*. I refer to these objects as *artifacts* since their use and presentation is tied to my personal context and narrative, and represent tipping points in my acculturation process and generational drift.

The research process begins with the analysis of the relationship between Generational Theory and Social Psychology from the lens of immigrantion, it reflects on the sequels and evidence left behind

by the cultural adjustment process such as cultural shock, cultural bereavement and social marginalization. From this analysis, what follows is an understanding of generational identity and development displaying key generational formative aspects such as parenting style, economic environment, technology, among others, and how they get affected by psychosocial stressors such as inmigration, and personal experience and context.

Next, the researcher addresses the process and relation between Nostalgia, Behavioral Psychology and Trauma, this is meant to understand the application of Nostalgia and external triggers used in trauma treatment in the acculturation process as tools and coping mechanisms to deal with psychosocial stressors. This is then referenced as oversights in past work.

Later on, the creative thesis work shows the evolutive process of analysis of my personal context and conceptual development. This process focuses mainly on using the *displays* to show who I was and the person I have become due to my acculturation process. This part of the research process also addresses the limitations and unexpected developments caused by the global pandemic of COVID-19.

Finally, the research concludes with the understanding of the *artifacts* created in the creative work not only as evidence of a transformation process but also aqa mechanisms to reach out and find a sense of community and belonging in the american culture, at the same time, even that I was able to show this artifacts and exhibits about myself as evidence and credentials of my american persona, the sociocultural and political climate in the United States caused by the COVID-19 epidemic constantly outlined and reminded me that I still exist as an outsider on paper, showing the effects of the pursuit to fit in, and the defense mechanisms I developed to cope with the invalidation present in my social context.

DEDICATION

To the outcasts and collectors, the ones looking to fit in and survive.

It will get better!

You are built to create.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I can argue that my research started way long before my MFA thesis. My first interaction with the gaming scene was in my early years of primary school in Mexico. My school was a 40 minutes drive from my hometown, it was a private school where my parents had cashed in some favours in order for me and my brother to attend. I remember some of my classmates bringing their name branded handhelds to school and felt like I couldn't really fit in because we (my family) didn't have enough money to prioritize an expensive video game machine. Nevertheless, I wanted to be part of the crowd so bad!

I used to go to the town farmers market (el mercado) with my mom on the weekends, and I remember there used to be this guy with a white pop-up wagon, not bigger than a single seat couch, with a red awning, where he sold watch batteries, clocks and cheap electronic alarm clocks. That weekend, the guy brought a new thing in his wagon that caught my attention, the little machine wasn't like anything he sold before and it was definitely not clock or watch related. I sneaked away from my mom while she was buying some fruit and went to this guy's wagon. He told me it was a TETRIS, and I immediately thought "like the ones my friends have!". I asked him how much it was, he was asking 11 pesos (about 50 cents US), I asked my mom to let me borrow some money but she said no… we needed to buy food. I spent the next week going around the house, looking in every corner for coins and discarded tostones (50 cents coins), I even remember jumping into the washing machine to see if I could find some change at the bottom of the spin barrel. By the next Saturday, I had 9.20 pesos in my pocket, which meant I'd probably have to wait another week for my mom to take me to the market with her, but that didn't stop me from visiting the wagon guy again to glance at the TETRIS! Eventually, he noticed that I had been standing there for a while, and asked me If i wanted to buy a TETRIS, I told him I only had 9.20 pesos and the thing was 11 so I couldn't really buy it yet… He said "9.20 will do! What color do you want?", I was so happy! I emptied my pocket filled with random coins that miraculously made 9.20 pesos

and grabbed my TETRIS. I finally had my own handheld machine! As I became older I found out that they were very common to find in the city and they were quite cheap to buy wholesale, but at the time, that chunk of clear blue plastic running on 3 AA batteries meant the world to me.

Currently, a few things have changed. For starters, I moved to the United States about 8 years ago, I'm 27 years old, happily married and own quite an extensive collection of video games and game related memorabilia. In the beginning, I found these old devices and games as an aid to fit in every time I got to a new place in my travels, but eventually, It became more about the ability to be me and sharing that with people I cared about; it was an easy way to show what I was all about, and made it easier for me to be accepted when I moved to the USA. I began working on my thesis almost exactly a year ago with the creation of The Bestseller (2019), I'm completing and defending my thesis in the midst of a pandemic (COVID-19) and a huge national manifestation in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. At the same time, my wife and I got a delay notification from the USCIS saying our green card application and interview would be postponed until further notice. This delay limits the jobs I can work at and left me stuck on a F-1 visa until further notice, and on top of that, there was a threat of deportation or removal of all F-1 visa students if their schools were to hold classes online. If I were to be removed from the country, it could void both my F-1 visa and green card application. Nevertheless, I was able to further expand and share my research by teaching a World Culture and language class this summer.

Yes, these all make my thesis feel a bit anticlimactic compared to what is happening around me and the world, but I can't help to think that a lot of the topics and discussion contained in this paper are yet relevant to some parts of the current situation, they show that integrating into a society is not a simple process but it is worth talking and teaching about it.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

2.1. Food for Thought (Another Introduction)

Generational segregation and factioning are some of the biggest current issues threatening

social cohesiveness. These have rapidly built barriers in intergenerational communication, causing a lack

of interest in participation and dialogue between several age sectors of our society, and both will slowly

become toxic for social progress. The root of the problem started with generation categorizing, which

tagged social sectors and generalized age groups by popularly posting time as the main shaper of a

generation instead of other important developmental factors such as parenting style, access to

technology, economic environment, and historical and cultural background. Also, given the globalized

and heavily interconnected environment we currently live in, multiculturality and immigration become

added variables into the previously mentioned precursors. Disregarding these, not only truncates an

individual's interest in intergenerational dialog but also can promote cultural and generational identity

crisis in said individual. Disregarding these aspects is problematic in the current generational model

since it imposes specific expectations and characteristics based on assumptions and generalization.

The current generational model originally posted by Strauss and Howe, disregards aspects such

as cultural background, economic environment, parenting styles, shared and specific life experience such

as historical events and tradition, exposure to technology, and social development. For an immigrant, the

radical change of location, culture, society and economic development, can be a prominent barrier in

one's ability to assimilate into the host culture. Psychological repercussions such as cultural shock and

cultural bereavement, can manifest as cultural identity crisis in the short term, and as transgenerational

trauma in the long term. Nevertheless, finding access points based on transcultural elements such as

popular culture, community and common interests, can allow an individual's smoother transition into successful acculturation processes in a host culture.

2.2. Thesis Statement

As one deals with trauma, conflict and stress from social acceptance, it is normal to develop mechanisms to adapt to the source of these struggles. Given the nature and length of these mechanisms and processes one develops to fit in, they become part of one's personality and identity, which at the same time, can push an individual away from their roots and original expectations as they transition into a new individual. These series of transformations can become more apparent in individuals dealing with substantial life changes such as migration and its psychosocial sequels towards acculturation. Taking these ideas in mind, evidence of the coping mechanisms used by an individual, both physical and abstract, in the transformation experience during the acculturation process can manifest as artifacts of key points of said process, and will show the a drift from the individual original persona to one capable of fitting in towards the search of community.

My work is physical evidence of who I was and who I have become, where the physical objects are artifacts of my identity in context to my transformation towards my american persona.

2.3. Generational Theory

Strauss and Howe (1991) define generations as people moving through time with slight changes in their life cycle pattern but with similar human drama. In other words, The Strauss-Howe generational theory suggests that a generation can be defined in a cyclical manner which makes them predictable on a general spectrum (Strauss & Howe, 1991). It's worth noting that there is research that posts that a generation can develop sub-sectors that drift from its major group due to a life changing event, historical events and sociological causes such as classism, marginalisation and transgenerational grief (Wilson and Gerber ,2008) (Hemlin et al, 2016) , it is important to mention that these life changing events are

understood in a different perspective from what Strauss and Howe (1991) define as a coming of age event or peer personality since it embraces a larger scope. Even more, companies such as the Center for Generational Kinetics, which focuses on marketing consultation based on generational studies and trends, suggests that the three main aspects that can shape a generation are economical status, access to technology and parenting style, all which open the generational drift to different possibilities (Hemlin et al, 2016)(Mortimer et al, 2003)(Markert, 2004). These aspects connect to the ideas of what is called a generational cohort.

Generational cohort theory introduces the idea of how members of a generation relate or differentiate based on the specific time period and place in which they were born and developed, and how this time period and history shaped their generation (Hemlin et al, 2016) (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Nevertheless, a generational cohort exists inside a major generation and should not be confused with so. A cohort only refers to the formative aspects of a group of individuals, and their specific elements in common (Mortimer et al, 2003)(Markert, 2004). This posts the trend for generational cohorts as one of a kind since they happen under unique circumstances despite the generation's general characteristics (Fukuyama & Inglehart, 1997)

2.4. Generational Identity and Cultural Assimilation.

Generational identity is defined as an individual's sense of belonging to a generational group, this can be self-imposed to keep a social environment in order, and give people a better sense of who they are as individuals (Urick, 2012). Melissa Taylor (2018) shows a key aspect of generational identity in her research, Her study discovered that given the indistinctive transitioning between generational time blocks, the start and finish years between generation blocks can be debatable, showing the existence of a period of transition and change between major generations. This unclear transition period can manifest in Micro Generations/Cusp Generations and their members who are popularly referred to as Cuspers. Because these generations happen during a time of transition between two major groups,

cuspers become ostracized even if they share some characteristics between both major generations they exist between(past and upcoming), since they don't completely fit any of both major generation's archetypes. It is also important to mention that, on a global scale, generation identity and generational groups can be shortened or prolonged due to political, economic, social, technological and environmental changes (Buheji, 2018).

Cultural assimilation refers to the process of acculturation in which an individual is introduced and prompted to mimic the values and characteristics of a predominant culture (Spielberger, 2004). Assimilation can be seen as a gray area in the acculturation process, due to some negative outcomes and sequels that can worsen the social order of both the host culture and the assimilated culture (Grigorenko, 2013). When Assimilation happens, both the immigrant and host culture are subject to change, these changes can manifest in family values, social connections and generational status, although one culture will remain prominent over time (Bhugra, 2004). It is important to mention that this cultural prominence process can cause transgenerational problems in the less dominant culture if the members of said culture get rejected or become marginalized (loss of connections with origin culture and host culture) (Grigorenko, 2013). Also, successful cultural assimilation is not homogeneous, one of the prominent outcomes of cultural assimilation is additive acculturation, where cultures involved in the process do not lose their past cultural characteristics but add new ones; this does not mean that members of said cultures develop a dual or common identity, although cultures involved in the assimilation process would become tolerant of each other (Yinger, 1994).

I began exploring the ideas of generational identity with the development of Kokone (2018) as a way to reconnect with the toys and experiences present in my childhood in Mexico. With Kokone (2018), I was hoping to find relations between my personal experience then and the experience of the culture I was navigating now, unfortunately, it was too specific to my childhood in Mexico. I then searched to adapt to a set of objects with a similar value (context wise) in the american culture, which lead to the

Video Game Photo Booth (2018). In this piece I was hoping to reach out to other members of the generational group who had a relationship with the hardware used in the booth and reminiscent about the type of childhood we had, although, at the end the concept focused more in growth and play, and the hardware's novelty qualities took an instigative place. Nevertheless, it showed the basis of my creative process and behaviours towards assimilation to the host culture.

2.5. Trauma, Cultural Bereavement and Transgenerational Grief.

Psychological trauma, is a psychological disorder caused by exposure to traumatic events and stressors (Ford et al, 2015); the body goes into a state of emergency as it prepares to survive commonly referred to as fight-flight-freeze. This state starts a load of stress hormones that cause a homeostatic imbalance triggering a series of changes in the mind and the body in order to prepare to defend itself in a burst of aggressive behaviour in survival mode (Freud, 1962) , escape or remain immobile to confuse the enemy. These states of despair can last a few days after the original episode until the level of stress hormones stabilizes, but in some cases, the state continues for months or even years causing physical, neurological and psychological complications such as insomnia, night terrors, dissociation, depression, vanishment of consciousness, and other negative and reactive symptoms, better known as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD (Ford et al, 2015) (Maletis, 2018). PTSD treatment ranges from medication to recover the homeostatic balance (brain and body chemical balance), behavioral therapy, regressive therapy and desensitization therapy; all of them with variable results and in some cases further complications due to the still unknown affected areas of the brain, and undiscovered neurotransmitters (Ford et al, 2015)(Rizzolo, 2018)(Shapiro, 2001). Another important aspect about psychological trauma in relation to community is its capability to be inherited, this can occur when negative external or internal impulses become such as social conflict, war and social exclusion become recurrent (Martz, 2010). When these aspects are specific to a social sector or group, it manifests as transgenerational grief/historical trauma and Cultural bereavement (Cacciatore, 2017)(Eisenbruch, 1991).

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Transgenerational grief or trauma alludes to the passing of grief from a powerful traumatic event to the next generation (Cacciatore, 2017)(Wolynn, 2017), different from Cultural Bereavement where an individual has been left without social or cultural ground due to migration (Eisenbruch, 1991), but both can manifest psychologically in ways such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, among others (Wolynn, 2017) and, in the case of Cultural Bereavement, guilt of migrating (Eisenbruch, 1991). Transgenerational grief can be caused by heavy traumatic events such as social conflict and war, and almost any other impulses strong enough to cause emotional imbalance in a social sector (Wolynn, 2017), and it can worsen due to denial towards improvement of dealing with the trauma itself (Martz, 2010)(Cacciatore, 2017), not only that, but research shows that relatives of a family member dealing with chronic psychological trauma problems such as PTSD and depression, are more prone to develop sead psychological issues (Wolynn, 2017). This kind of trauma can be treated individually with psychotherapy but also shares the same possible complications as any other psychological trauma (Wolynn, 2017)(Ford et al, 2015)(Rizzolo, 2018)(Shapiro, 2001).

I tried to talk about trauma in my work for quite some time even before my MFA research. Most of the work I produced from the end of my BFA leading to the pursuit of my MFA, incorporated ideas of trauma and the dark side of the mind in an allegorical way. As I passed through my MFA, I tried to display ideas of trauma in a very literal way. This approach lead to the creation of photographic work such as Common Fears (2019) and Plastic Dolls (2019), but I was confusing showing the effects of trauma, with showing my creative outlets to deal with trauma; I wanted my viewers to understand the effects and roots of trauma but was having a hard time finding ways to do so. Eventually, as I opened up more about doing work about my background, I came up with the Appropriation Boxes (2019), which not only work as an outlet for me to deal with cultural issues but also gave me a good idea of how to inform people about the specific effects of heavy topics, in this case, appropriation.

2.6. Desensitization, Nostalgia and Regressions

      Desensitization therapy is a psychological technique used to deal with phobias and trauma, it relies on a constant exposure to the element that triggers the phobia to reprocess such element in a positive change on emotional, somatic and cognitive levels (Shapiro, 2001). Desensitization as a psychological process, can also happen at random in everyday life situations such as, a constant exposure or/and introduction to the same environment, people (social learning), other external impulses like routine (imitation). Imitation in psychology, refers to the act of reproducing an action or behaviour seen in others (Hurley, 2005). Imitation goes further than just general behaviour since it can define social elements such as cultural learning and social behavior, these two aspects can remain present in a community and be maintained across generations (Hurley, 2005) (Tomasello, 2003). In a similar manner, social learning refers to certain behaviour dependent on environmental influences similar to desensitization and imitation but without including internal impulses (Laland and Hoppitt, 2013). Desensitization has been a recurrent topic in my research findings and in computing and popular culture given the constant evolution of digital interfaces in toys and entertainment, which help understand the hidden context in some of the objects I was cataloging for later use in my work.

      Nostalgia is a mental condition that triggers strong memories through sensory associations, It can manifest by intense sensory and physical responses that evoke long-lasting memories, and continue to be present in a way similar to depression and PTSD (Ford et al, 2015) (Routledge, 2016), it is considered a pleasant experience and even a resource to strengthen self esteem (Routledge, 2016). Paula Harris (2017) studied the relationship of nostalgia to memory and found that nostalgia can trigger strong and emotionally charged memories entwined with external elements such as place and time, and can be used as a powerful psychological support tool to build self esteem, although, in the study, Harris found that during the memory recalling, the memories were subject of exaggerated elements, a disconnection in the relation of the memory in subject, and the actual timescale, and negative

attributions towards other external elements at the time (Harris, 2017). These reactions suggest a strong

relation between nostalgia, regressive therapy and behavior modification therapy, since it can rewire the

mind to think and reminiscent differently towards a place, an object and others (Strean, 1976).

Nevertheless, this quality allows Nostalgia to be used to enhance self esteem and positive behaviour

(Routledge, 2016) and it can be a strong tool to create a relation between generations and help social

stability (Harris, 2017). These approaches are valuable in my creative work since they offer the chance to

judge objects such as toys and ephemera as nostalgia driven keys.

Regressive behaviour is a psychological state where an individual reacts with child-like behaviour

towards conflict and trauma, it manifests itself as a wish to return to one's fetal state or age of avoidance

or lack of common sense (Rizzolo, 2018). Regressive behavior is commonly seen as the mind's way to

ignore conflict since it shows a strong rooting to the same developmental stage and/or timeframe that

leads to immature aggressive responses or self-defeating patterns (Rizzolo, 2018) (Ford et al, 2015).

Regressive behaviour is not to be confused with regressive therapy; where, the patient is subject to

hypnosis and a series of open ended questions to access and process repressed memories through the

subconscious and superconscious mind (Hunter and Eimer, 2012). Although, if done incorrectly, the

patient can develop further complications like false memories or PTSD and even go into survival mode

during the session as there isn't a strong conscious filter during the hipnotic process to process the

traumatic impulse (Hunter and Eimer, 2012)(Freud, 1962)(Strean, 1976).

Based on the information and research on desensitization, regression and nostalgia, nostalgia

can be considered a middle ground between the reactions of regressive behaviour and regressive

therapy, it is strongly rooted to a certain age stage and it can manifest as both a positive rise in

self-esteem and as false memories, with possible negative attributions towards the remembered

elements (Harris, 2017)(Routledge, 2016). This became highly relevant in my creative work since I was

already analysing the relation between strong memories and objects, and the paths these could open.

This approach can be better seen in the piece Born From Redundancy (2019). The main focus of the piece was to elevate such an objects as a videogame cartridge and a blue plastic light gun to a certain level of social importance at the same level of importance I saw in them, I attempted this by changing the presentation environment of the object by showing it as an artifact with casing and historical wall text rather than a toy. The toy itself was a symbol of violence during the 90's congressional hearings but for those who play with it, it was a toy; by placing it in a different environment it allowed the item to recall its context as a toy with a nostalgic lens, for then to be reintroduce as an artifact of heavy political context.

2.7. Artists, Generational Aesthetics and Play

With the beginning of my formal thesis research, I found a recurrent tendency in my work on the use of play/user interface and time based context, this approach meaning, there was a big focus on what the materials used in my exhibits said about their presence in the current time, their weight during their own time, and their relation to my personal experience in context to both time frames; as an example, during the production of The Archive (2019), I aimed to point out the processes each object went through to be on The Archive (2019). This involved repairs, upgrades, and involvement in the makerspace and hackerspace communities, but unconsciously, I was selecting objects that not only meant something to me but also, through their repair and upgrading processes, helped me pick up skills and relate to said communities through processes I understood. This was helpful to identify since it pointed out the presence of a self-reflective process in which I observed and outlined my generational traits through aesthetics, my place in the world, and any recurrent gimmicks. With this in mind, it became easier for me to find contemporary artists whose work facilitated the understanding of their concepts, by the introduction of approachable activities and aids such as play and basic user interfaces. At the same time, it became an opportunity for me to better understand the reason behind my medium of choice and my work's execution.

I began my search by looking for artists following social trends and gimmicks, and I was hoping to find someone navigating a similar approach as I was intending (self-reflective), this search brought me to Matt Benedetto. Benedetto is a product designer based in Burlington Vermont whose current work focuses on what he calls Unnecessary Inventions. Matt's Unnecessary Inventions is a series of Chindogu multiples that comment on american consumerism, and popular trends and gimmicks that speak to his generation (late Millennial, Cuspers). These pieces or "products'' are editorial and put off for sale on Benedetto's website. Benedetto's approach to generational gimmicks is through comedy and popular trends, an example of this was his Rugged plastic carrying case for your favorite metal straw. Death to plastic straws! (2019)(Figure 2.1.), which, as its name points out, was an oversized solid plastic casing for a metal straw. This was made as a comment on the polemic surrounding plastic waste and the Death to plastic straws! trend of early 2019. In this case, Benedetto's product not only addressed the commercialisation caused by the Death to plastic straws! trend which at the time flooded the consumer market with "solution products" that ended up generating more waste and contaminants, but also his marketing methods follow key aspects that fit the current generational guimick by being shared on as many social media platforms and clickbait websites.

Figure 2.1.: Matt Benedetto, *Rugged plastic carrying case for your favorite metal straw!*, 2019

Another aspect of Benedetto's work is that the critical undertones of his products are open for different interpretations across generations due to Benedetto's focus on his generation; these can be problematic since they can spark confrontation between generational groups due to the open channels of communication in which his work is shown and contrasting values. An example of this can be seen on Bennedetto's Pizza Fanny Pack (2019) (Figure 2.2.) which was a fanny pack designed to carry two slices of pizza with a rainbow strap, this product was not only commenting on the fanny pack fashion trend of the time, but it was also posted during LGBTQ Pride month in June 2019. Bennedetto's use of the rainbow strap and its correlation with LGBTQ Pride was subject of discord in his social media posts from every side of the topic, with some users even commenting "it is just a fanny pack…" in protest towards the introduction of political arguments into a discussion that was usually seen as entertainment. Even though Bennedetto's work relies on absurdity and exaggeration at times, it shows his understanding of his current social environment and generational context through satirical commentary and humor. Bennedetto's process proved to be valuable in my research since it showed advantages of understanding one's place and community. Also, the process introduced the understanding of generational gimmicks and relation to object aesthetics, which became prominent in the development of later work, nevertheless, there was still a need for a solution to the cross-generational conflict that came with using specific gimmicks just as I saw in bennedetto's later piece.

Figure 2.2.: Matt Benedetto, *Pizza Fanny Pack*, 2019

After gathering the information about generational gimmicks and their relation to aesthetics from Benedetto's work, I wanted to address the cross-generational connection problem found on the gimmick approach which was narrowed down to a communication issue between different groups/communities. Also, I was interested in finding artists and work that addressed the rooted research on cultural trauma and community search in my research. During this search I came across Ronald Rael, he is an applied architectural researcher, popularly known for his 3D printed architectural work and bio sustainable structures. In 2019, in conjunction with art collective Colectivo Chopeke, Rael installed a piece called Teeter Totter Wall (Figure 2.3.) which consisted of a set of hot pink seesaws installed on the US-Mexican border wall with a seesaw seat being in each country. The piece attracted people from both sides of the wall to play at the makeshift playground separated by a border wall. Teeter Totter Wall (2019) not only commented on the at the time American immigration policy but also on the cross-cultural aspects of child play and its use as a powerful tool to counteract transgenerational

grief. Rael's approach was valuable to my research and work since it expanded my research's search for a medium not necessarily universal but enabled, which allowed communication across different groups of people (in this case cultures). Also, the use of child play in Rael's work got me thinking about how the concept of child play changes across generations due to the constant technological advances and availability. These ideas prompted my research to find a new enabled medium in child play.

Figure 2.3.: Ronald Rael and Colectivo Chopeke, *Teeter Totter Wall*, 2019

As it probably became apparent in this document, part of my life's work and fondness focuses on collecting and cataloguing early video game systems, peripherals and memorabilia; as I became more involved in the collecting community, the recurrent presence of specific objects and brand recognition, made me wonder about its potential use as an enabled medium and prompted me to find artists working with similar peripherals, which brought me to Cory Arcangel. Cory is an intermedial artist based in Brookly, NY. His work embraces a number of mediums from traditional media to creative coding and modding.

Figure 2.4.: Cory Arcangel and Paperrad, *Super Mario Movie*, 2005

One of Cory's mediums of interest in my research is video game modding, in which the artist will modify a game's code to then use the code and game content as his medium. Most of Cory's videogame art revolves around using the source code and graphic sprites of Nintendo Entertainment System games, this is done not only to take advantage of the sound voices that the NES has (similar to the commodore 64 which is also a recurrent system used for video game art) but also to use that aesthetic to appropriate a generational scheme. Super Mario Movie (2005) (Figures 2.4. and 2.5.) is a videogame hack piece done in collaboration with art group Paperrad, the piece was made with a non distinctive narrative and uses the digital contents of the Super Mario Brothers game for the NES (1985) as the medium. The piece showed a series of psychedelic animations with an introductory statement talking about the

deterioration of the game itself giving it a sense of narrative and agency. Due to the nostalgic value given

by the source material and the cross generational aspect of it, it gives the viewer a path to relate to the

animation and the narrative. The piece ends suggesting it as a prequel to the original Super Mario

Brothers game. This and other similar pieces by Cory, reinforced my research's approach for video game

peripherals as an enabled medium since Cory's use of this game (Super Mario Brothers) makes his work

more approachable and almost universal given the Super Mario franchise and Nintendo brand

recognition across the world.
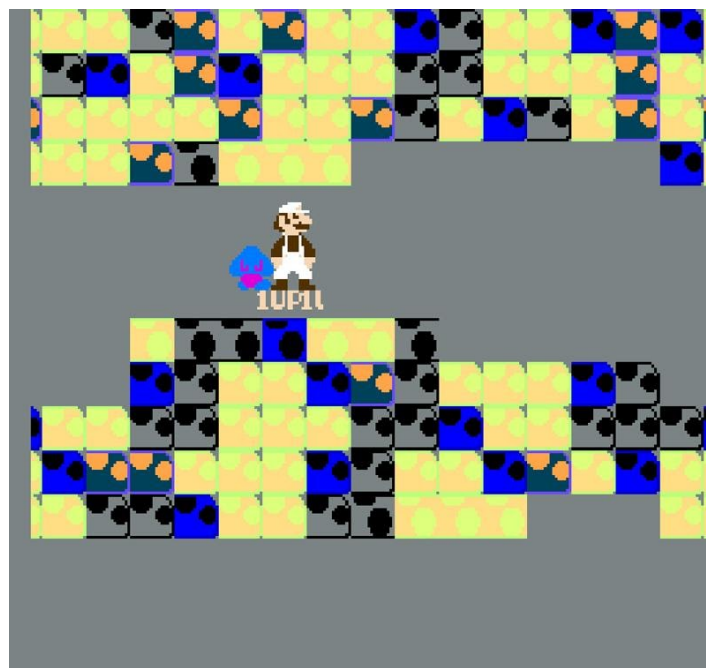
Figure 2.5: Cory Arcangel and Paperrad, *Super Mario Movie* (screen capture), 2005

Overall, my research found value in the work of these artists since they addressed the barriers

that concerned my work, and showed approaches and solutions to the specific concerts about my

intended thesis work and experiments. These discoveries allowed my research to come up with a

structure focused on using aesthetics tied to generational gimmicks and schemes in my work that will

allow a cross-community communication with the help of my research's newly established enabled

media.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

2.1. Methods

My research is based on the areas of Sociology, Psychology through Autoethnography, and popular early video computing systems and popular culture. This allows me to better understand what type of objects I could use and their context through a self-reflective process.

Sociology provided the basis for two major areas of interest in my research, generational studies, and acculturation processes. Generational studies allows me to better understand the current state of generational research and theories, become more familiar with generational traits, understand where my personal experience fits in the schemes proposed by said research, how it affects my generational identity and lead me to where I currently stand and fit in the social model. This area in combination with research based on acculturation through assimilation will help delineate changes in generational trends due to cultural background and values.

On the Psychology side, my research focuses on behavioral psychology, transgenerational trauma and social psychology. These topics help me identify and differentiate between more common psychological traits and issues such as mental health disorders and conditions, from sector specific ones like the ones present in the social processes of acculturation and generational development. These also help me understand the relation between behaviour, trauma, life experience, historical events, and social environments. These areas then will further expand into cultural psychology related topics such as transgenerational grief, social and cultural marginality, nostalgia and cultural bereavement. In the end, just like in Sociology research, these areas help establish connections between my life experience and my generational traits and trends.

In the area of early video computing systems and popular culture, my research focuses on video game and computer systems as artifacts. Approaching these objects as artifacts, not only changes the way the object will be displayed from a stand alone piece to an exhibition post, but also helps me navigate through the relation between the objects' historical and social context and their relation to mine. Also, the area of early video computing systems and popular culture is one I dominate quite well, and it has been present since before I moved to the United States, all throughout my acculturation process and up to this point in my life. This is important because it shows that the collecting and cataloging of these objects have been consistently present in the portion of my life my research observes and recalls.

Finally, the research is curated through autoethnography since it offers a selective lens based on my own experience. This is done to navigate my personal background as an immigrant, and the experiences I encountered during the acculturation process, its cultural and generational repercussions in my assimilated persona, such as cultural psychology related traumas and conditions, generational identity crisis and drift, and adult development.

2.2. Methodologies

My process begins with the gathering of objects and visual qualities, and the research and archiving of both. During this stage, I search for specific items that speak to my curiosity, sensibilities or personal interest area. This process begins digitally, usually on online forums and communities. This allows me to localize points of entry, common views and experiences by others, to then later be narrowed down to one or two interfaces or objects. A good example of this process can be seen in the piece Videogame Photo Booth (2018). In this work, the decision to use a Super Nintendo Entertainment System and peripherals was based on finding an approachable platform in the early video computing system pool. Not only was The Super Nintendo powerful enough to handle the photo hardware, but it

also had a simple user and controller interface subject to public domain. It is important to mention that this step of searching, gathering and observing, is recurrent in my process.

The next step in my process is to evaluate the possible application of the final selection of objects or interfaces in my work by identifying the area of research pertinent to the object or interface selection. In other words, to identify the reasons why the final selection is valuable to use later on in my research and creative process, and in which area of research it fits. After this analysis, the work execution begins. My work manifests in different media such as graphic design, packaging and product design, sculpture, electronics, object hacking and programming. My preliminary analysis of concept dictates my subject matter's needs in terms of media; the creation of the electronic piece The Bestseller (2019) speaks to this part of my process. The Bestseller (2019) preliminary research began with the relation between objects and emotionally loaded memories, and this led me to further research of emotional triggers. My findings on the topic showed that triggers relied heavily on sensory experiences, the most common ones being visual and tactile (Ford et al, 2015)(Harris, 2017). With this information, I aimed to create a phantom that recalled a specific time period physically and visually, making it real in the time context it recalled . This dictated the use of a CRT-TV, a Pong console and repurposed materials contemporary to Pong video games. This stage of my research was key in the creation of The Bestseller (2019) since it allowed the piece to have credibility and also found the best fitting media to represent the research.

Finally, the last stage of my research process is what makes it iterative. After presenting or testing the work, I gather information about the work's reception and, if needed, rework the concept, deliverance, and repeat the observation and development process. This stage has been a recurrent process in the development of the Plastic Dolls Series (ongoing). The series has been revisited several times following gathered information about every iteration that I found to be prominent or interesting in the process of it, this continues today.

CHAPTER 4

PORTFOLIO

When I began my MFA, I came in with a plan to just focus on studio photography since it was something I was avid at given my professional background, I slowly started developing an interest for behavioral psychology, trauma and the dark side of the brain; which can be seen in some of the work present my portfolio. Eventually, I noticed that the work I was producing during this period was mainly serving as a creative outlet, and it was causing me to ignore the bigger picture behind it. This behaviour was based on my efforts not to make work about myself, meaning my cultural, ethnic and personal background, I believed that making work about these topics was unwise of me since I felt like I didn't represent the section of my culture with struggles and neglection due to my family background and opportunities available to me, that said, this behavior itself displayed the bigger issue that I was overseeing in my work which was my cultural detachment, and my experience as an outcast in my generation. I was able to identify this trend in my creative work as I approached it more like conceptual work rather than a creative outlet for my internal conflict. I slowly turn the focus and materials of my research leading into my thesis work to pick and explore my internal conflict and the reasonses behind my aforementioned cultural detachment and generational drift as i developed a new persona in the american culture, this change can be seen in later work in my portfolio as I address and used mechanisms to present this issues.

4.1. The Bestseller

electronics and repurposed materials, 2019

The Bestseller is an exploration of nostalgia in concrete form. Built out of original Pong arcade materials from the 1970's, it retains some of the original graphic and hardware interface elements. The goal was to create a phantom object that is newly constructed but gives the impression of being from a previous time.

Figure 4.1.: Arturo Camacho, *The Bestseller,* 2019

4.2. Common Fears

Break Down, Digital Photography, 2019
Aftermad, Digital Photography, 2019

Common Fears is an ongoing series of photographs exploring fragility and discomfort through an intrusive lens. The photographs are meant to be shown on a life-size scale to give it an unintentional voyeurism.

Figure 4.2.: Arturo Camacho, *Break Down*, 2019

Figure 4.3.: Arturo Camacho, *Aftermad*, 2019

4.3. The Appropriation Boxes

Artist multiple, 2019

The Appropriation Boxes were a set of artist multiples with the goal of showing the effects and characteristics of appropriation without using a cultural approach. The receivers of the boxes will get a disclaimer of the nature of the box if opened without giving away what its contents were. Once open, the user would be encountered with a tiny pinhole camera, tape, paper film and instructions. The instructions asked the user to take pictures and then return the camera to the artist and established the artist's ownership of their pictures since the photographic paper was already signed.

Figure 4.4.: Arturo Camacho, *The Appropriation Boxes,* 2019

APPROPRIATION
BY ARTURO CAMACHO
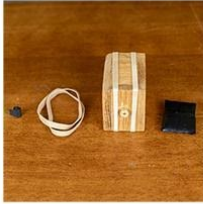
WELCOME TO APPROPRIATION!
THIS ARTIST MULTIPLE CONTAINS A PINHOLE PHOTOGRAPHY SET DESIGNED AND CONSTRUCTED BY ARTURO CAMACHO, THE SET INCLUDES A ROLL OF LIGHT-TIGHT TAPE, RUBBER BANDS, A PINHOLE CAMERA AND A LIGHT TIGHT ENVELOPE WITH FILM INSIDE (DO NOT OPEN THIS ENVELOPE!). THIS SET AND THE PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN WITH IT ARE NOT YOURS TO KEEP, IN FACT, ALL THE PIECES OF FILM ARE ALREADY SIGNED BY THE ARTIST. ONCE YOU'VE FINISHED THE 7 SHEETS OF FILM INSIDE, YOU HAVE TO RETURN THE SET TO THE ARTIST SO THEY CAN BE DEVELOPED.

TO LOAD THE CAMERA WITH ONE SHOT, FOLLOW THE NEXT VISUAL INSTRUCTIONS:

#1 - REMOVE THE RUBBER BANDS FROM THE CAMERA AND OPEN IT.

#2 - UNDER A RED SAFETY LIGHT OR COMPLETE DARKNESS, OPEN THE LIGHT-TIGHT ENVELOPE, TAKE A SHEET OF FILM OUT AND SLIDE IT INTO THE FILM HOLDER. TO MAKE LOADING ACCURATE, THE FILM SHEETS HAVE A NOTCH THAT MATCHES THE FILM-HOLDER'S CURVED CORNER.
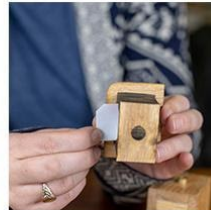
#3 - INSERT THE FILM-HOLDER INTO THE CAMERA MATCHING THE CURVED CORNERS. TIGHTEN THE RUBBER BANDS AROUND THE CAMERA TO AVOID IT OPENING. FINALLY TAKE A PIECE OF TAPE AND COVER THE LENS; THIS WILL BE THE CAMERA SHUTTER.

#4 - TO TAKE A PICTURE SIMPLY POINT THE CAMERA AT YOUR SUBJECT, REMOVE THE TAPE TO START THE EXPOSURE, TO END THE EXPOSURE, COVER THE LENS WITH TAPE.

Figure 4.5.: Arturo Camacho, *The Appropriation Boxes* (instruction manual)*, 2019

4.4. Light

projection system, 2018

Light is an installation of projection mapping units reflecting on the stages of life. the viewer will witness a figure using expressive dance, jump between a sequence of 3 stages symbolizing birth, maturity and end of life. The piece had the purpose of making complex topics such as human condition and mortality approachable.

Figure 4.6.: Arturo Camacho, *Light,* 2019

4.5. ONE SHOT

Brandon (from ONE SHOT), film photography, 2018
Jean (from ONE SHOT), film photography, 2018

ONE SHOT is an instant film photography series exploring the idea of permanence and existential duel.

I found myself limited creatively by the flexibility of my digital photography, causing my work to become mundane and stagnant. After some research I found out that Polaroid 8x10 BW film is very peculiar and it requires a lot of care for the print to develop, and remain intact and visible after time.

I limited myself to one exposure per person to make sure there was a lot of time and effort invested on each shot. The developing process needs people to be successful, so the model will be asked to help develop their portrait. At the end, the result made the shared moment of anticipation and effort with the model more meaningful than the print itself, this experience helped reflect on my work and skillset, and my existencial position.

Figure 4.7.: Arturo Camacho, *Brandon* (from ONE SHOT), 2018
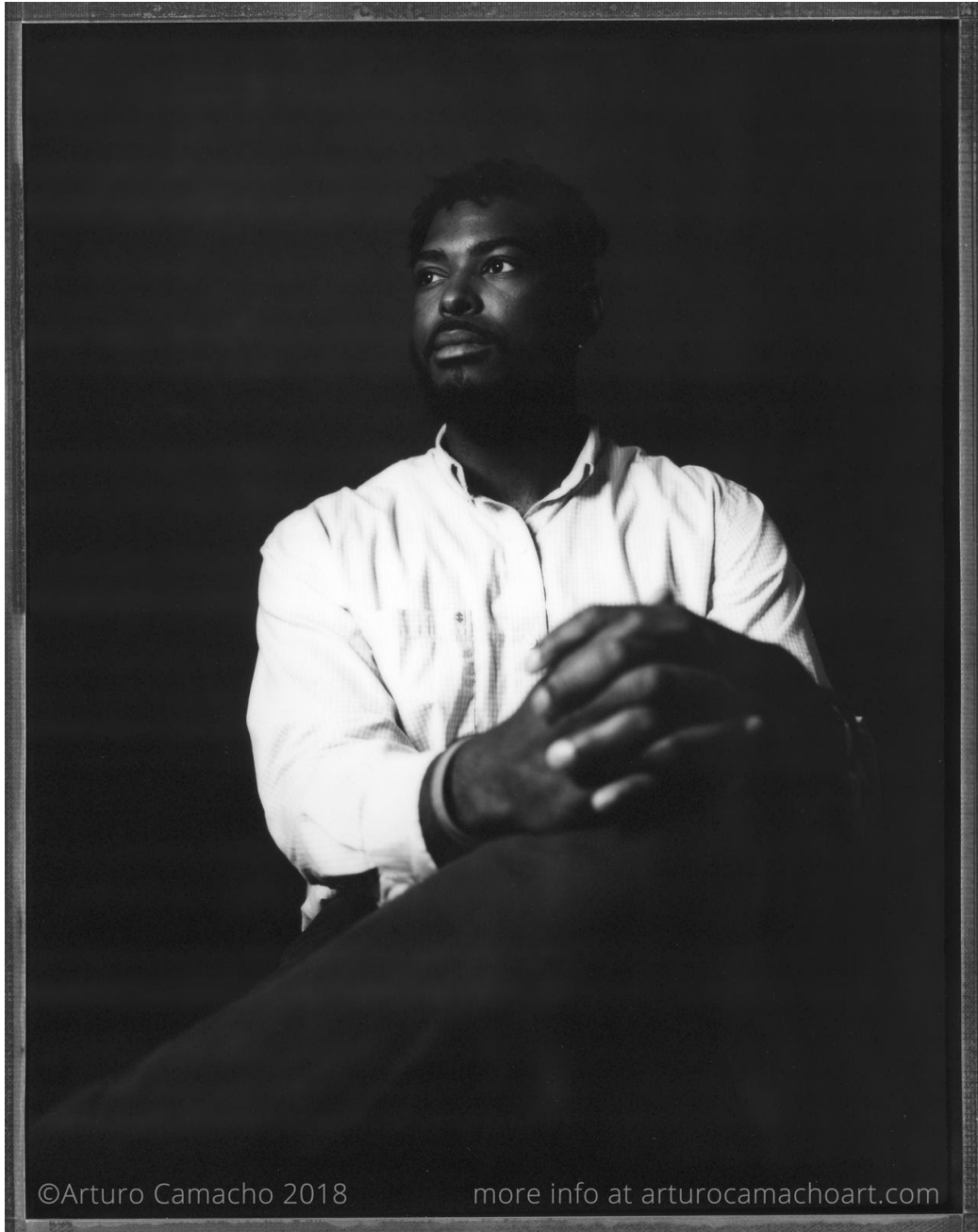
Figure 4.8.: Arturo Camacho, *Jean* (from ONE SHOT), 2018

4.6. Oculo

wood and repurposed materials, 2018

Oculo is an oversized wind-up toy; when activated using its winding key, Oculo will look around its peripheral view for a few seconds. Oculo came to exist as a way of research and experimentation with basic machines and mechanics through play.
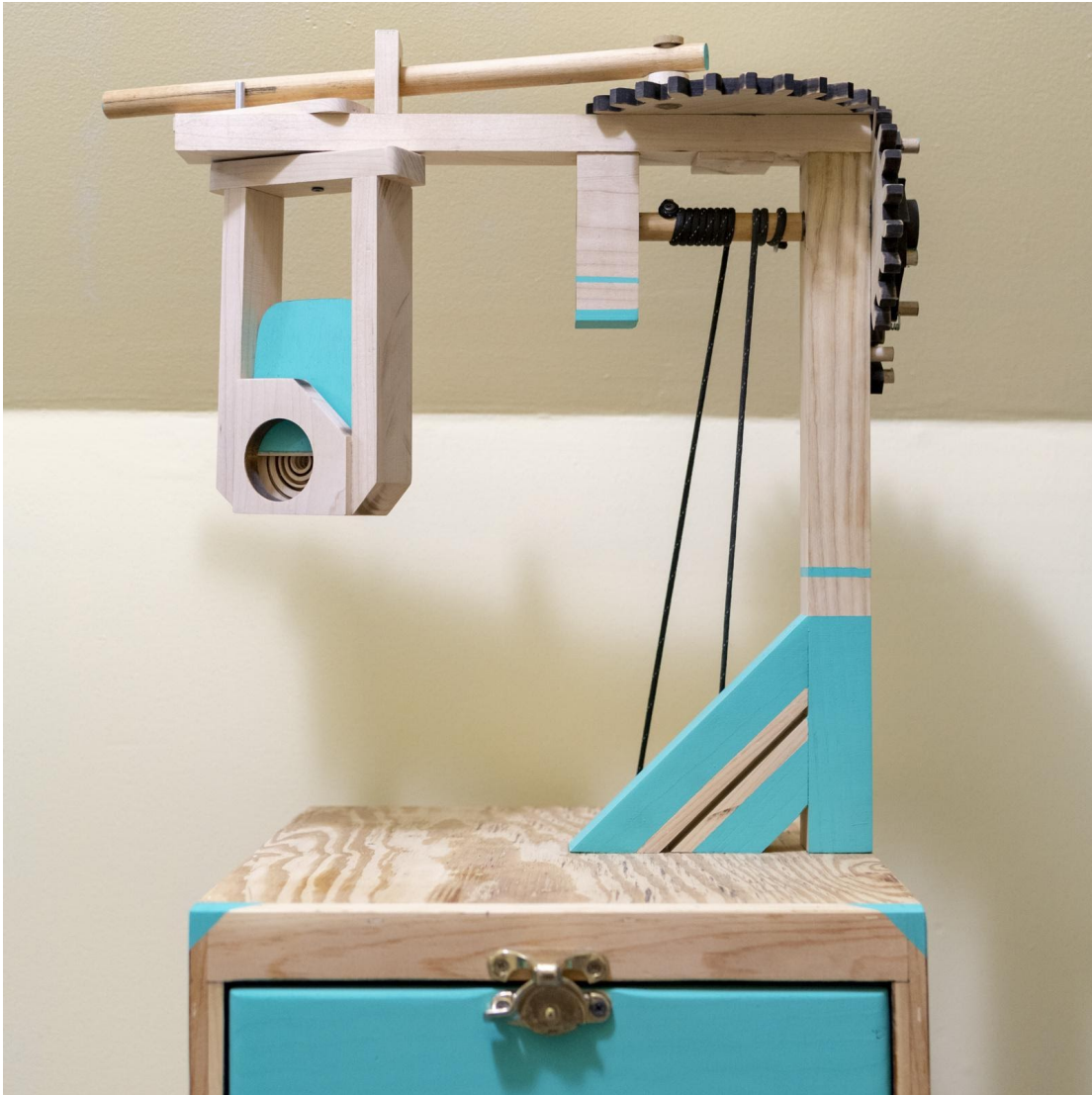
Figure 4.9.: Arturo Camacho, *Oculo*, 2018

4.7. Plastic Dolls

Digital Photography, 2018

Plastic Dolls is a series of dystopian fashion portraits; the posture and overall atmosphere evokes a feeling of discomfort and awkwardness, juxtaposing with the sharpness, geometry and symmetry of the headset, implying an expectation of perfection.

Figure 4.10.: Arturo Camacho, *Untitled (cyan)* , 2018

Figure 4.11.: Arturo Camacho, *Untitled* (magenta), 2018

4.8. Kokone

installation, 2018

Kokone was an interactive installation exploring the sound properties of objects by inviting the viewer to play with the machines conforming the installation.

The machines' aesthetic was inspired by the basic design of traditional Mexican wooden toys. The viewer will encounter the first piece (the pedal) helped the viewer acknowledge the installation and served as an invite to play with it; the rest of the pieces forced the viewer to get to ground level (as a child would do) in order to play with the different machines.

Figure 4.12.: Arturo Camacho, *Kokone* (trebuchet), 2018

4.9. The Video Game Photo Booth

Performance, 2018

The Video Game Photo Booth is a participatory performance piece exploring ideas of coming of age and mortality.

This Project consisted of a Super Nintendo Entertainment System, a CRT TV and a GameBoy camera and printer system. It was targeted towards any generation that came in contact with a SNES console in their childhood.

The viewer will sit in front of the Photo booth and take a picture of themselves, during this interaction the viewers expressed a feeling of nostalgia and contrast of their childhood with their current age. The picture will be printed by the artist on heat-transfer paper (receipt paper) and glued to a card explaining the nature of the picture. The picture was a documentation of the viewers' emotional experience and given its material it will start to fade and eventually disappear, creating a relation of the viewers' life being as permanent as the image they got from the Photo Booth.
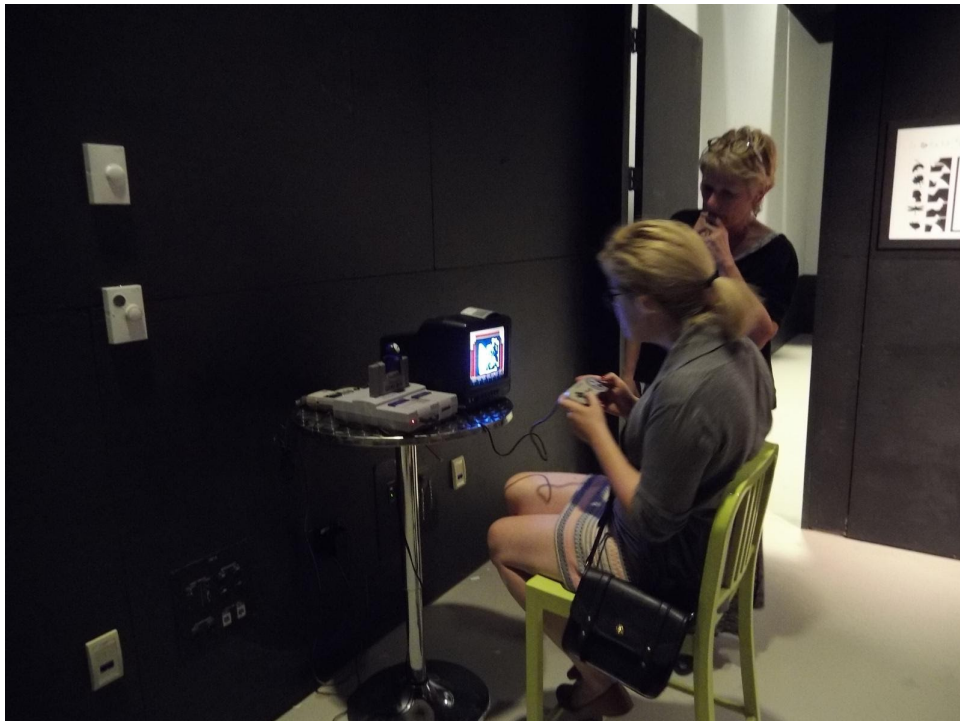
Figure 4.13.: Arturo Camacho, *The Video Game Photo Booth*, 2018

Figure 4.14.: Arturo Camacho, *The Video Game Photo Booth (printout)*, 2018

4.10. Cultus

Digital Photography, 2017

Cultus is a series of visual representations in false narrative mimicking the environment of a cult or religious ceremony worshiping light.

This project attempted to evoke environments with a sense of mysticism by portraying a mixture of ritual like visual elements using photography, videography, performance and projection mapping onto models and their space.
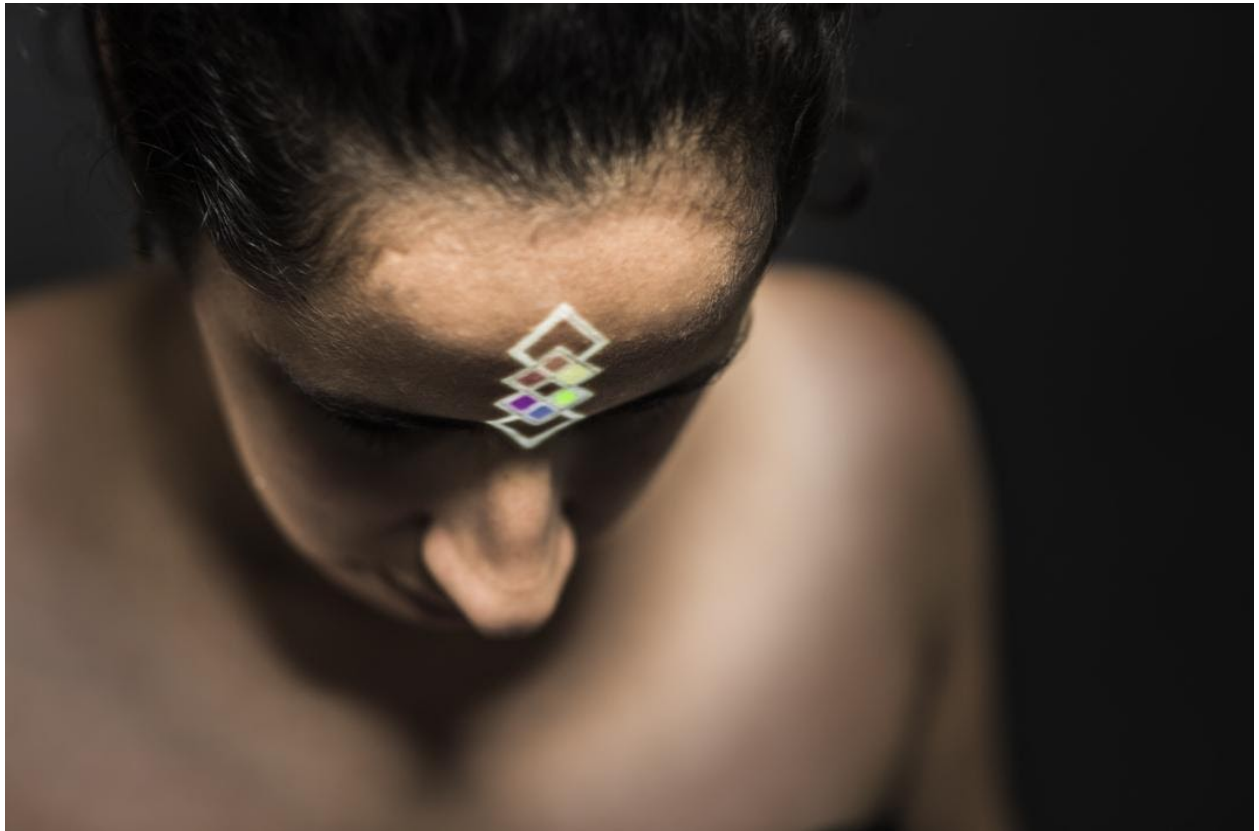
Figure 4.15.: Arturo Camacho, *Cultus (prayer)*, 2017

Figure 4.16.: Arturo Camacho, *Cultus (ritual)*, 2017

CHAPTER 5

THESIS WORK

As I transitioned from my past work into my thesis work, I was slowly consolidating the

justification of my media of choosing (electronics and classic computing); it is important to mention that

I started the observation of my personal background and its relation to collecting and cataloguing with

The Bestseller (2019), but the focus on the later self-reflective process began after I came across the

concept of *artifacts*. This concept is important in my research since it has helped me redefine my work as

the creation of *exhibits* rather than objects, meaning that everything that composes the installation

display of the work (pedestal, wall text, casing, supporting images and materials) is the work itself. In

context, this proved to be difficult to accomplish once the *stay at home* mandated order hit the country

during the COVID-19 outbreak. Nevertheless, I was able to show my wok in some shape or form digitally,

but I am hoping to physically show my displays once things are better.

5.1. Born from Redundancy

This piece was based on the preliminary explorations related to the concept of artifacts and

narrative as instigators for discussion across generations; these would later become part of my primary

thesis work. During this process, I aimed to find objects with historical, cultural narrative in a field that I

was knowledgeable in and present them as artifacts of historical relevance. This was done with the

purpose of suggesting the viewer to see these objects at a similar level of importance as I did and find a

middle ground for discussion.

 In the beginning, I was tempted to use analog cameras for this process given my background in

photography, but the access to some of these objects proved to be complicated due to prices and

scarcity. Also, a lot of these objects already had a very intricate narrative that could distract the viewer

from my concept. On top of that, I needed an area that had enough of a precedence and general

understanding in the public domain which would reach a general audience and all current generations. Eventually, I turned to classic electronics and gaming because they were easy to work with, easy to find, easy to repair, very engraved in popular culture and I had a vast amount of knowledge in the field.

The piece included a *KONAMI Ⓡ THE JUSTIFIER* light gun controller and a copy of the game *Lethal Enforcers* encased in a black reliquary gun case. The gun controller and the game were individually suspended in a clear 1/4in acrylic base similar to the set up used in museums. Also, the piece included wall text with a black and white picture pulled from public records of former U.S. senator Joe Lieberman holding *THE JUSTIFIER* gun during the *1993 Video Game Congressional hearings.* The actual text was an impartially written statement mainly to avoid bias and allow the piece to be approached from both sides of the discussion. The text gave an explanation of the events leading towards these hearings, the impact on video game rating systems and gun control law shortly after the congressional hearings, and the current state of both the gaming industry and gun law.

In context, *The Justifier* gun and *Lethal Enforcers* are considered important precursors towards the creation of the *Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)* in 1993 due to the strong suggestions of the correlation between video games and rise in gun violence, at the same time, these objects cause enough uproar in american society that the United States Senate also approved a assault weapon ban that lasted from 1994 until 2004. The mounting hardware used to display and prop the gun and game were based on mounting hardware used at firearms museums across the nation. This was done with the purpose of elevating the object's aesthetic hierarchy and separating it from its toy context. The black wooden glass case in combination with the black and white picture and wall text, were based on display setups used for historically relevant firearms, where in most cases the set will include a relic-like case design with the firearm on the center, a portrait of its owner or maker, and written credentials. All these elements helped outline the visual presence of the piece and the hierarchical weight of the objects on display. These, in combination with the wall text, displayed the piece as a way of memorializing the

historical narrative and allowed the viewer to make its own conclusions and shifted my work to the use

of exhibition, display and focus on artifacts that became a key part of my work.

After gathering some information from the first showing of this piece, I realized that even

though piece accomplished the level of engagement I was hoping for, it oversaw an important aspect of

the object which was its functionality; it was becoming more of a relic than an artifact since the overall

set up presented the piece as an object to be preserved and glorify (a relic) rather than an object to be

explored and understood in its contextual narrative (an artifact). This distinction was very important to

clarify since my goal was not to glorify, or preserve, or have the viewer focus solely on the physical

object, but to instigate interest in the object's context and make the story behind it approachable.

Figure 5.1.: Arturo Camacho, *Born from Redundancy, 2019*

5.2. The Archive

The Archive is a guided, interactive exhibit based on video game history. The show consisted of a

number of stations that people could interact with in any order. At each station, the viewer could

experience the functionality of an object and learn its contextual background. The purpose of this

project was to deal with the experiential barriers present in *Born from Redundancy* and communicate these ideas more effectively. Also, to instigate conversations between the viewers about their personal experience and context with the objects on display.

The show presented Pong machines, an Atari 2600 with a period accurate TV, a full running version of *Lethal Enforcers* running on a RCA SecureView Prison TV, a Vectrex with open source software and hardware, a full Commodore 64 running *demos*, Gameboys and modified consoles. Each station had a spokesperson between the ages of 20 to 26 years old trained on the operation and management of their object. This was done for the purpose of creating a cross-generational environment when talking about gimmicks and experiences that were not stereotypically present in that generational group. The viewers will be invited to interact with the objects as part of the narration experience provided by each spokesperson.

Initially, *The Archive* was designed as the next step towards developing the idea of the artifact and ways of showing its functions leading up to the final show, but after the show passed, I ended up realizing a key aspect that would begin to shift the focus of my later work. The objects I showed in *The Archive* were subconsciously selected by me due to their personal, sentimental and contextual value, *Lethal Enforces* made it to the line up by de facto, the Atari 2600 was a gift from my parents and it was the first video game I got my parents to play with me (they were heavily against video games), the Pong consoles and Vectrex were my introduction to working with electronics and a way to meet other collectors, the gameboys shown were fixed by me so I could play Tetris with my younger brother, and the Commodore 64 was originally owned by a fellow game collector in Maine who passed away and left it behind; they meant something to me so I invested my efforts and research into making the objects mean something to someone else. It was no longer only about the viewer's experience but also about my own and how I passed it forward to my staff and by consequence the viewers.

At the end, *The Archive* caused a tipping point in my thesis research, I realized that the work I was doing was still based on experience and generational identity but it was becoming more biographic and self-reflective; I needed to understand my place in this process before I could share and find others with similar experiences. This led me to pursuit and structure work and mechanisms that will allow me to *call home* and reach out to others dealing with a similar interest or context.

Figure 5.2.: Arturo Camacho, *The Archive* (Vectrex Station)*, 2019*

Figure 5.3.: Arturo Camacho, *The Archive* (Atari Station)*, 2019

5.3. Co-op

This was the first piece I planned based on my personal struggles in assimilation, to be more precise, verbal communication. It consisted of a two person cooperative gaming setup that would require verbal communication between both players to complete a level.

When I arrived in this country, I had a hard time talking to people, not because I wasn't able to communicate or speak the language, but because the american culture is not that open to small talk as mexican culture. With this piece, I wanted to create an environment where two people were forced out of their comfort zone. They had to talk to each other in order to successfully complete a task.

The setup used a 30" CRT television, a copy of Super Mario Bros. running on the original hardware, a custom made split controller where one player would control the character's direction and the other would control the jump and action buttons, and a sitting area for the two players. Originally, I had two chairs in front of the tv, but as I revisited some of the research done on child play, I came across some relevant information that would help the experience if I were to remove the chairs and switch

them to a floor sitting area. By instructing the participants to sit at ground level, it would help their

ability to feel comfortable and communicate since it was the closest to the fetal position, and it allowed

each participant to be at a similar level of sight no matter their height; behaviorally speaking, this

positioning of the viewer will give a sense of personal security and relatability, and it is a constant recall

in child play behaviour (Harris, 2017), and social learning and imitation in desensitisation therapy

(Hurley, 2005). In terms of the game itself, I chose an 8-bit game because of its simplicity controlwise and

its familiarity. Finally, to make the set up feel more "homey", added an ornamented carpet and arranged

the set around the tv.

      During the exhibition of the piece, I noticed that participants were having a hard time

completing the videogame level but the communication happening in the process was way above small

talk, even between total strangers. One of the most successful interactions was between two

participants with polar personality types (extrovert and introvert). The introvert participant was pushed

to partake in the experiment by the other participant, which caused some hesitation from them. After

the first run, not only had the introvert participant communicated easily but they were eager to try

again. After seeing this, I started thinking about other ways to encourage this kind of inclusion and

communication, and how my work related to community building, which led to the Genesis Trooper

project.

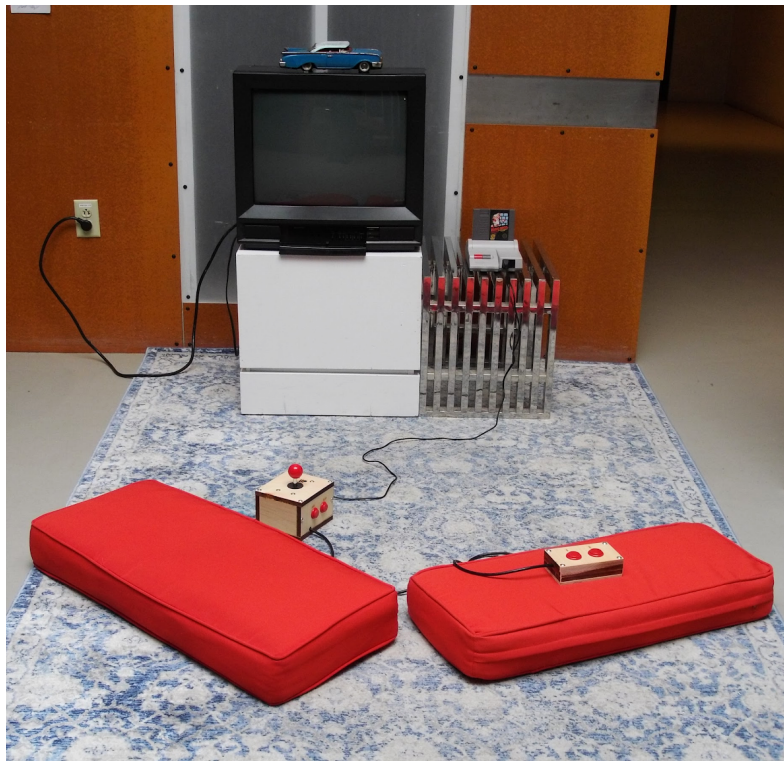Figure 5.4.: Arturo Camacho, *CO-OP,* 2019

Figure 5.5.: Arturo Camacho, *CO-OP* (setup)*,* 2019

5.4. Genesis Trooper

The genesis trooper is a piece reflecting on childhood wishes on the non existent. The idea was to ask people about a toy or game they wanted or wished for but never got because it wasn't real or imaginary. This was the first piece I developed from other people's input. I wanted to find a common ground with others and figure out a way to use my expertise as a maker to communicate common interests and ideas.

The trooper helmet is a fully functional, arcade graphics compatible Sega Genesis. The making of it started with some discussion about my experience with childhood wished objects in relation to others here in the United States. I was hoping to find out if there were certain similarities and instigate discussion about the matter. At the beginning I was planning on creating a set of multiples illustrating my first experience with hand-held video games creating professional packaging for *bootleg* games, but moved on from the idea since it was speaking towards other areas rather than childhood. After talking to several fellow gamers and collectors, the topic of the *white elephant* of childhood came up and we all agreed that the biggest objects in this classification were the ones that we imagined and asked for when kids but never got because they did not exist. This discussion prompted me to find a common ground object that I could recreate using my skills as a maker. I decided to pursue a Star Wars themed object due to the franchise's universality, the next step was to decide what it was going to be. I went back and discussed a bit more with others and ended up going for a Sega Genesis since it had some popularity but it wasn't as commercially overwhelming currently as any Nintendo product. I gathered parts from the local Goodwill since I wanted the final object to show some wear, I also took advantage of the existing infrastructure on both the console and the helmet to add small details like lighting and video control.

Once finished, I shared the object with people from different backgrounds and ages. Unfortunately, the responses were very inconsistent from each other and showed no context patterns which was very discouraging from what I was hoping to accomplish. Although, I was able to reflect on

what went wrong with the Genesis Trooper communal approach, and came to the conclusion that the

way that i gathered and discussed input towards the creation of the object, made it more about the

physical object than the initial concept. This did a disservice to my research since it was pushing my

project towards a tangent ground but also disregarded any conceptual context because the object's

purpose was to fill in a nostalgic hole and nothing more. In theory, the object did what it was meant to

do but once it did, the piece was over. I concluded that I needed to step back and revisit what made the

other pieces successful, and how to go about the ideas of community.

Figure 5.6.: Arturo Camacho, *Genesis Trooper,* 2020

5.5. Alan's Apple

Alan's Apple is an Apple Macintosh SE computer restoration project. Originally, Alan's Apple was a side project independent of my thesis, but the process and experience ended up answering a lot of questions brought up during the Co-Op and Genesis Trooper observation process, and became a documenting process of object agency and nostalgia.

I was looking for a Macintosh SE or similar model for a long period of time and I would frequently look for one in good condition online; Nowadays, Macintosh SE's are usually priced at 250 to 300 USD in working condition and 150 to 200 USD broken or for parts, but I didn't want to spend that much money on a system that I knew very little about in terms of repairs and parts' costs. A few months later, I came across Alan's listing online, he was selling his old college computer for really cheap ($100) so I contacted him. I found out that Alan was moving to his new house and needed to get rid of some things from his basement, among these things was his old college computer. The computer was not booting correctly and Alan had no idea how to fix it. On top of that, Alan didn't feel 100% comfortable with the faster options available for his computer to be gone which were dumping it or having it recycled at an electronics graveyard. He was also unsure about selling the computer because it held personal value to him since his parents got it for him for college.

When we met in person to see the computer, Alan asked what I was planning to do with the computer if I were to buy it. I told him that I was planning to restore it, do a couple minor *future-proof* modifications, and show it in subsequent installments of *The Archive;* so the computer would become a teaching tool. Alan was curious about the process that the computer would undergo so I described it more in detail. At the end, Alan let me take the computer for $50; he said something that stuck in my head before we packed the computer back in its case, he placed his hand on top of it while looking at it with smile and said "If this little guy had a soul, I think it is happy…". Alan stayed in contact with me during the restoration process and was happy to see the computer running again.

The biggest takeaway from this was what ultimately made me add this restoration to my thesis research. Alan had this emotionally charged object that symbolized a significant period in his life, and he felt a responsibility to treat said object with the same value as he valued those memories. These gave the object agency since Alan saw his computer having life beyond its usable time when he was younger but the overall social norm would say the computer was obsolete and just waste. I was able to give closure and rest to this dilemma by offering the computer another option and serving as passage. Even though the computer is technically mine now, I still see it as Alan's.

Figure 5.7.: Arturo Camacho, *Alan's Apple,* 2020

5.6. Crystal Apple

This computer is an ongoing project that evolved from the aesthetic and functional application of Cusp generational gimmicks into exploring an object's purpose in the creative process. It is currently being used as my main recording machine in my home's recording studio to continue this exploration.

In the early stages of the creation of this object, the idea of Cusp generational gimmicks was applied in the choice of hardware and software used to build the machine with the purpose of creating a "*cusp object*" (an object sharing gimmicks and elements between two generations). First, I looked into the stereotypical specs behind the popular idea of a *super computer* or *gaming computer* from the consumer point of view of the late 1980's and currently. I found that the current popular trend was to upgrade a machine's GPU and memory (RAM) to run visually astounding games. Also, to improve the information transfer in the computer, it is recommended to use a Solid State Drive (SSD) over a Hard Disk Drive (HDD). With this information in hand, I looked into finding the equivalent parts for a Macintosh SE FDHD. For the GPU and RAM, I found a Gemini Integra graphics card that also allowed me to expand the computer's RAM. As for the SSD replacement, I was able to find an open source device called SCSI2SD that allowed me to replace the SCSI disk drive with a SD card.

The next step was to look into the aesthetics that this "gaming computer" needed. One of the most common trends in aesthetics for current gaming computers is the use of color shifting LED lighting (RGB LEDs), and clear cases. Both of these are very popular since they show off the internals of the computer. These elements were of interest to me since clear cases or *clear ware* were very popular and commun in the late 1980s to the mid 1990s, and because of these, clearware became a generational staple in xennial and millennial popular culture. The only issue was that the only clear cases ever recorded for Macintosh computers were used in prototypes which would make finding one impossible. Although, through sharing some updates on this build, I came across a project focusing on remaking cases for the Macintosh computers, I contacted the founder of this project, who after learning about my plans for this computer, allowed me to have one of the early prototypes of his project and a mouse too. Personally, having the computer be *clear ware* held a pretty strong memory, since a lot of the electronics I would have as a kid would be clear so I wouldn't feel the need of taking them apart.

Once the computer was finished, I shared it on different online communities since the COVID-19 stay at home order was still in effect at the time. I got positive responses towards the object, and overall, people were able to pick up the reason behind specific aesthetics and gimmicks present in the object. After the computer's "hype" went down at the online communities and forums, I started wondering about the computer's purpose since it was shown and somewhat interacted with during a show and tell via zoom . Luckily, I got a lot of comments about the computer's technical capabilities, I ended up adding audio production softwares and MIDI drivers to the computer taking advantage of its modifications and currently use it as the main tower for a recording studio setup, in hopes of creating audio based work with it.
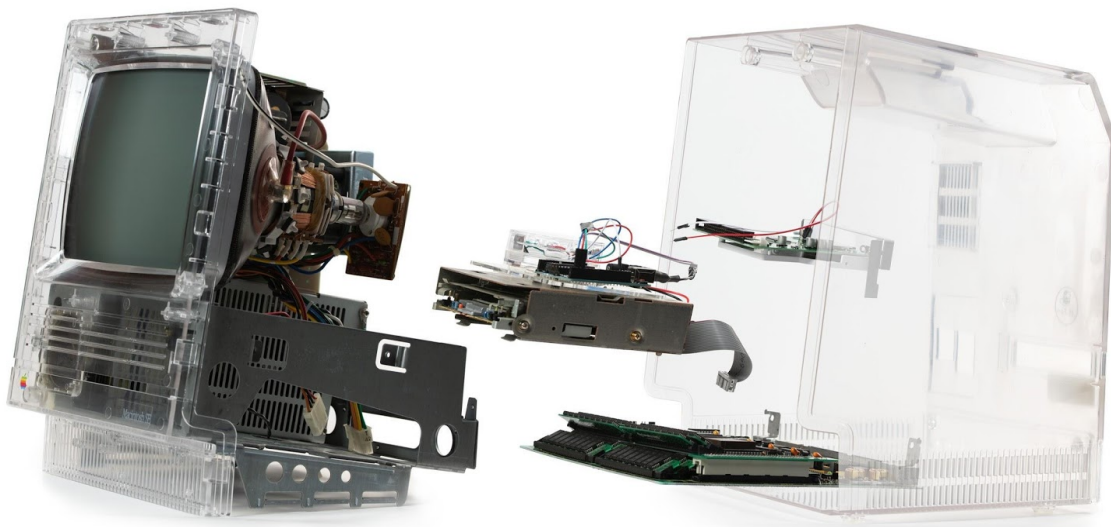

Figure 5.8.: Arturo Camacho, *Crystal Apple,* 2020

I would like to add that I considered the Crystal Apple a great way to finish my creative thesis work, as it almost served as a love letter to my clear TETRIS machine from childhood.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, as I developed my work during my MFA, I was trying to ignore the cultural and psychological baggage I unconsciously carried on my research as I constantly tried not to talk about my cultural and personal background. Nevertheless, this affliction to look at myself as an outsider in both my origin culture and the host culture, strongly implied the sequels left behind by the cultural bereavement and acculturation processes I experienced. As I began to focus on my thesis research, I was able to see that a lot of the work I created before, was referencing this internal duel between my cultural background, my assimilated persona, and my disconnection with my generation, which in itself was caused by my particular life experience.

As I mentioned before, I tried not to do work about my cultural background and personal experience since I felt I did not fully represent the section of my culture that lacked and needed attention, and this old approach bottled frustration that would manifest in the dark side of the mind, and show in my work, turning it into an outlet for these internal conflict. Afterwards, I realized that my assimilated persona had a reason to exist since it showed that I went through a transformation process, and I had to accept that I went through this process of change to survive and therefore my cultural experience was just as important to acknowledge as anyone else's. Once this transformation process became apparent, It was easy for me to focus on its need for research and prompted me to revisit important points in my life marked by this process, and use a medium that remained consistent from the person I was before to the person I have become .

For the time being, I am fully aware that the work, displays and exhibits produced as part of my thesis might come across as vanilla in comparison to the research, but in context, it shows my involvement, effort and success to fit in the american society through the communities that now I am part of; these physical objects were indeed serving the purpose of a personal *artifact* in the context of

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my transformation process, and further explaining my drift towards a different cohort from the one established by the american archetype. In contrast, even though I am able to show these artifacts and exhibits about myself as evidence and credentials of my american persona, I am still seen and exist as an outsider in my current cultural environment *on paper*; a sociopolitical factor that seems to invalidate my identity and place in the community.

      In conclusion, my work and research apart from serving as evidence in context to my psychosocial and generational identity transformation, they also show the effects of the pursuit to fit in, the longing for community, and the defense mechanisms I developed to cope with the invalidation present in my social context. In a way, I relate to these objects because I too would like a second chance.

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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Arturo Camacho was born and lived the majority of his early life in Mexico State, Mexico. He left home for the U.S. at the age of 19, abandoning a pursuit for an engineering degree. Subsequently earned a BFA in Intermedia and a minor in Photography from Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts.

After graduating Arturo remained in the United States and struggled in work as a visual artist. His nomadic lifestyle in combination with his decision to stay in the United States further shaped Arturo's search for a sense of belonging, this search led him to find shelter in collecting and cataloging popular culture. Arturo is a candidate for the Masters in Fine Arts in intermedial art from the University of Maine in August 2020.