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Plausible Expositions with Possible Expeditions

Nikolaus D. James

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PLAUSIBLE EXPOSITIONS
WITH POSSIBLE EXPEDITIONS

by

NIKOLAUS JAMES

(Under the Direction of Jeff Garland)

ABSTRACT

Influenced by video games and cinema, in this body of work, *Plausible Expositions with Possible Expeditions*, I use objects to create scenarios that suggest a narrative. The scenes are then photographed and displayed through cathode-ray tube televisions and viewers use their own knowledge and ideas about the objects to create that narrative. Each of these objects has its own data set, and the most common have a universal data set—information surrounding the object that is widely recognized, much like how a crowbar is commonly associated with crime. Similar to playing a video game, an algorithm is used when viewing my work (data) + their knowledge (data sets) = narrative (new data). When this algorithm is applied, my work promotes active viewing as opposed to passive observation.

INDEX WORDS: Photography, Video games, Narrative, Scenarios, Universal data sets, Data sets, Common objects, Active viewing, Algorithm, Cathode-ray tube televisions (CRT TV)

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WITH POSSIBLE EXPEDITIONS

by

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B.F.A., University of North Florida, 2015

M.F.A., Georgia Southern University, 2020

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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WITH POSSIBLE EXPEDITIONS

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NIKOLAUS JAMES

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A perfectly level shovel stands firmly in pierced earth neighboring a blue tarp that conceals a large, flat, rectilinear structure. This curious combination of objects is framed between two towering trees and illuminated from behind by a mysterious light source. Engulfed by foliage kissed by a tungsten glow, the setting seems domestic. The faint sound of a dog barking over a symphony of crickets solidifies this assumption. Who do these items belong to? What were they doing? Were they stopped before completing a task? What is under the tarp? Why is it important that it's covered? What is the light coming from? As the data creator, I am prompting these questions but it's the viewer's answers that help make up a unique story. These answers are formed when their personal knowledge of and experiences with specific objects are applied to the clues presented to conjure a narrative.

My work explores narrative through objects and settings as well as challenges how viewers perceive information that is presented to them. Influenced by video games and cinema, I create scenarios—fabricated scenes made before the camera at specific locations using found and created objects that propose a narrative. After an image has been made, I format it to an aspect ratio of 4:3 to properly fit on a standard definition television. Along with the image, I also create an audio track, which is played through the TV's speakers that acts as another element of the scene and further creates a sense of immersion.

Each viewer has their own personal and unique associations with specific objects. These associations I will refer to as data sets and I define as a collection of information that relates to a particular subject. What someone thinks, knows, and feels about the subject of a data set is created by life experiences and, when seen, prompts them to think about their own life experiences with those objects. I choose specific objects and locations with a story in mind to lead viewer in the direction of a narrative. Viewers “fill in the blanks” of my narratives by using their own personal data sets with the specific objects and locations making their version of my story unique to the viewer.



Figure 1. Still from *Control*, Remedy Entertainment, 2019

Much of my work is influenced by specific moments and common objects in video games and in cinema. Each of these objects has its own data set, and the most common have a universal data set—information surrounding the object that is widely recognized. For example, a crowbar is a tool typically used in demolition to remove nails or force apart objects, such as crates, using leverage. However, the crowbar has gained other associations through movies, games, and news

stories as a violent weapon or a tool used for breaking and entering. One can search news articles for the word “crowbar” and a majority of the articles that are found showcase the crowbar being used as a weapon—like this article published on October 13, 2020 by CBS-affiliated website, ClickOrlando.com “Burglar attacks homeowner with crowbar, takes car after stealing keys from pants” which reports a homeowner interrupting a burglary and getting attacked by the culprit with a crowbar.

The scenarios I create are a cross between real life and gaming worlds—something that might seem abnormal in reality would be perfectly plausible and expected in a video game. Through cathode-ray tube televisions (CRT TVs), I invite and encourage my audience to be active viewers in order to have a unique and immersive experience. Actor, writer, and producer, Wil Wheaton, states, “I love video games, because I have the same experience that I have when I watch a movie that I love or read a book that captures my imagination. But, I’m an active participant instead of a passive observer.”

CHAPTER 2

HUNTING AND GATHERING

My creative process may seem a little tedious and unconventional but has been, in this past year, a successful practice for me when making work. Influence is where it all begins whether it be from video games, TV shows, movies, and even objects like an old flashlight or a shovel. Although many find these forms of entertainment to be strictly recreational, I use them as resources—an essential component to my making process. Much of my work, in fact, is a direct product from scenes and objects I come across while playing video games.

While playing, watching, or *in the hunt*, I typically make digital sketches, photographs, with my cellular device of objects that I see commonly in games, that are peculiar, and that can easily be modified or identified as an indicator to direct a narrative. These objects function as indicators through a specific universal data set that contributes to the perception of the story. To refer back to an earlier example, if I intend to suggest something may have been broken into, I might include a crowbar instead of a scene literally showing a break in. This allows space for viewers to ponder, and strays from a definite answer.

Having these potential ideas, I begin my search for different settings for an installation. After a suitable location has been found, I take what objects I have selected for the specific narrative, place them, and photograph the scene. While photographing it is important that I keep in mind that the 3:2 frame of the camera will be edited down to 4:3 to fit a standard definition television screen, not unlike movies and broadcasting that had to be edited before widescreen

televisions were the norm. After the image has been made, I edit and, using a high definition audio recorder, create an audio track that plays along with the displayed photograph through a thoughtfully chosen CRT televisions.

Displaying my work through cathode-ray tube televisions was literally an “Aha!” moment. With my experience and love for CRTs, I don't know why it didn't seem like an obvious direction for my work to turn. Stated by Liz Kotz in her article, “Video Projection: The Space Between Screens”:

“monitors are awkward, badly designed, and a constant reminder of the mediums links to broadcast television, domestic furniture, and all the degraded industrial uses of video technology. Mounted on the ubiquitous grey utility cart in institutional settings, monitors disrupt the museum or gallery space. Is it any wonder video is so often confined to the basement or stairwell? Who among us would not prefer the luminous image freed from its ungainly technical support?”

My work and how it is displayed is purposeful and my use of CRT televisions and embracing their beautiful quirks is a deliberate choice. Displayed images on a CRT bring viewers to those locations where playing video games, and watching movies and television are typically experienced and calls those experiences to mind. The connection to me and my work is also greater displayed through CRT TVs. Being an avid video game lover as well as enjoying other analog media formats like VHS tapes and Laserdiscs, owning a CRT is imperative especially for retro gaming. Technologies from the past were not meant to be displayed through shiny, new, high definition televisions. I believe in having appropriate CRTs for the appropriate media. It

looks better and feels better.

Through the influence of video games and cinema, I create scenarios using found objects and photograph the scene from a determined vantage point. Beginning at the basic level, viewers are presented with an image on a CRT TV. Even with minimal understanding of photographic technology and photoshop, we believe in the truth of the image. Much like photographic evidence—proof that the photographed subject or scenario exists or happened or is happening, this evidence leads the viewer predisposed to believing the physical instance or scenario ever existed.

Interestingly enough, this belief leads us to memories—an often discredited source of information—as they can soften truths or even prove unreliable. But with our memories we form associations with and understandings of the objects presented to the viewers and use these to form conclusions that further develop the narrative. This personal truth or story created becomes its own separate narrative, different from anyone else's yet influenced from the same source—the photographic evidence. Again, these personal associations are part of the individual's data sets that pertain to the objects. Much like solving a crime, viewers fill the blanks but with no real danger, leaving them free to believe whatever they wish.

I'd like to consider the existence of objects within video games. These also come with their own inherent believability within themselves—we know what's there was put by someone and intended to be there. This fact leads us not to question the typical “stuff,” rubble or breakable objects—crates, boxes, barrels, etc. are all common objects found in games, yet rarely do we see them in typical everyday environments.



Figure 2. Still from *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time*, Konami, 1992

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time, featured in the arcade in 1991 and later, at home, to the Super Nintendo in 1992, includes both crates and barrels that explode upon being struck by the player as well as crates and barrels that are simply environmental decorations and cannot be interacted with by the player at all. Although, arguably, the most famous barrels of all could be the barrels included in some stages of the original *Donkey Kong* arcade game released in 1981. These infamous barrels were hurled by the giant ape, Donkey Kong, at the player, Jumpman or later Mario. As Mario, the player, must traverse inclines while avoiding the rolling barrels by jumping over them or smashing them with the Invincible Hammer, a time limited item acquired throughout levels. In addition to the barrels rolling towards you, you must also be careful to avoid the personified Fireballs that excrete from oil drum barrels. These barrels exist in some levels and are ignited after Donkey Kong's thrown barrels reach them and sets

them aflame. From that point on, Fireballs may be produced from the fiery barrels and could make their way to the player and kill them. I am a grown man of 30 years and have seen crates and barrels an immeasurable amount of times in video games but can count on my two hands the amount of times I've seen crates and barrels in the real world.

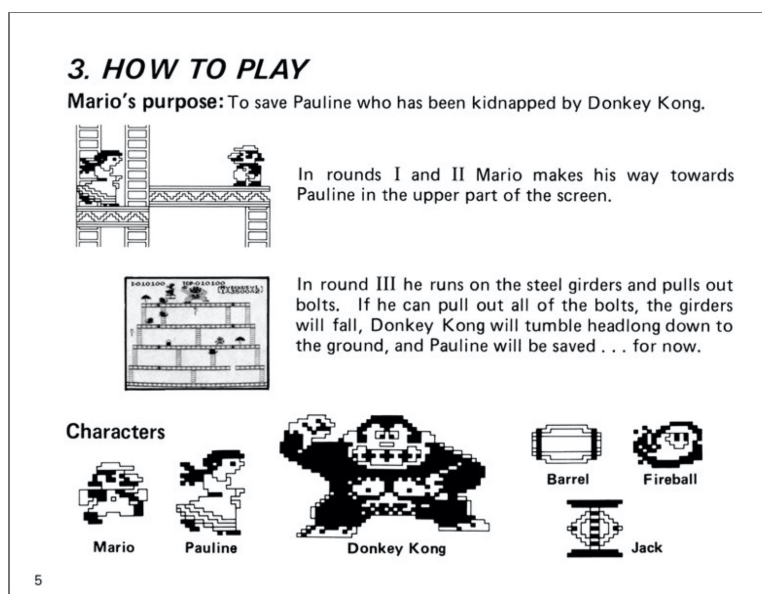


Figure 3. Page 5 of *Donkey Kong* Instruction Booklet, Nintendo, 1986

Common objects, like barrels and crates, can be seen as universal data sets—objects that have information surrounding them that is widely recognized. Referring back to my previous example, the crowbar is a common object that is widely recognized because of its associations through movies, TV, video games, news stories, etc. Because of these mediums and how it's portrayed, the universal associations attached to the crowbar are typically violent in nature. For example, a burglar depicted in a movie might be equipped with a crowbar and use it to break into a house or use it as a weapon. Breaking and entering as well as physically hurting someone is recognized as being bad therefore the crowbar is commonly recognized as being a tool for

wrongdoing. Having been used for those reasons influences its portrayal in media which influences its perception which becomes part of its universal data set.

It is important for me to have complete control when making an image. I create my scenarios to seem as though they belong in reality. It is important for the viewer's experience with my data sets to be fluid in order for them to be immersed in the scenario. The level of craft and believability plays a considerably large role in this part of my work. If the objects and locations don't seem real or plausible, then the scenario might seem unbelievable which could cause the viewer to not want to participate and play my game.



Figure 4. Nikolaus James, *There's two ways to deal with mystery:*

uncover it, or eliminate it., 2020

My piece, *There's two ways to deal with mystery: uncover it, or eliminate it.*, is an image of the inside of a crawlspace that is lined with wooden crates and illuminated by a kerosene lantern. Because a lantern was the light source, darkness was required when capturing the image. The crawlspace is low to the ground, so I photographed from low angle to resemble bending down and looking into the crawlspace. Though I built the crates using old pallet wood, the fact that they are actually crates that are placed in a space literally used for storage, increases the plausibility of the scene.

Using the tool of photographic evidence, I take these less than common, common objects out of their game reality and put them into our own reality and photograph them. Viewers then come to a depiction of a scenario displayed on a CRT TV and formulate an answer to a question they were not even aware they were being asked. What do you believe happened? Seamlessly skipping over the question of truth, reinforcing the idea that something actually did happen or is happening. The answers the viewers come up with directly relate to the associations with my data sets in which they have for the specific objects and locations. The process by which the viewers complete the narrative is the algorithm.

In video games, algorithms—processes or sets of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem-solving operations—define the way players participate. For example, In the game series Resident Evil, players solve puzzles and gather information to formulate conclusions about what may have happened in order to safely escape an apocalyptic scenario. Similarly, my work prompts viewers to gather information and form conclusions—stories—about what happened, yet presents no real danger (although some may elicit fear). This way of creating is not dissimilar

to that of a game designer, yet is atypical to a narrative. “In contrast to most games, most narratives do not require algorithm-like behavior from their readers. However, narratives and games are similar in that the user must uncover their underlying logic while proceeding through them — their algorithm.” (Manovich 440) My work differs in that it does prompt algorithm-like behavior from the viewers as they access universal data sets to continue the narrative. Although the rules are not explicit, it is the spark of curiosity from hinted information paired with commonly accepted information from the data sets that leads viewers to this experience.

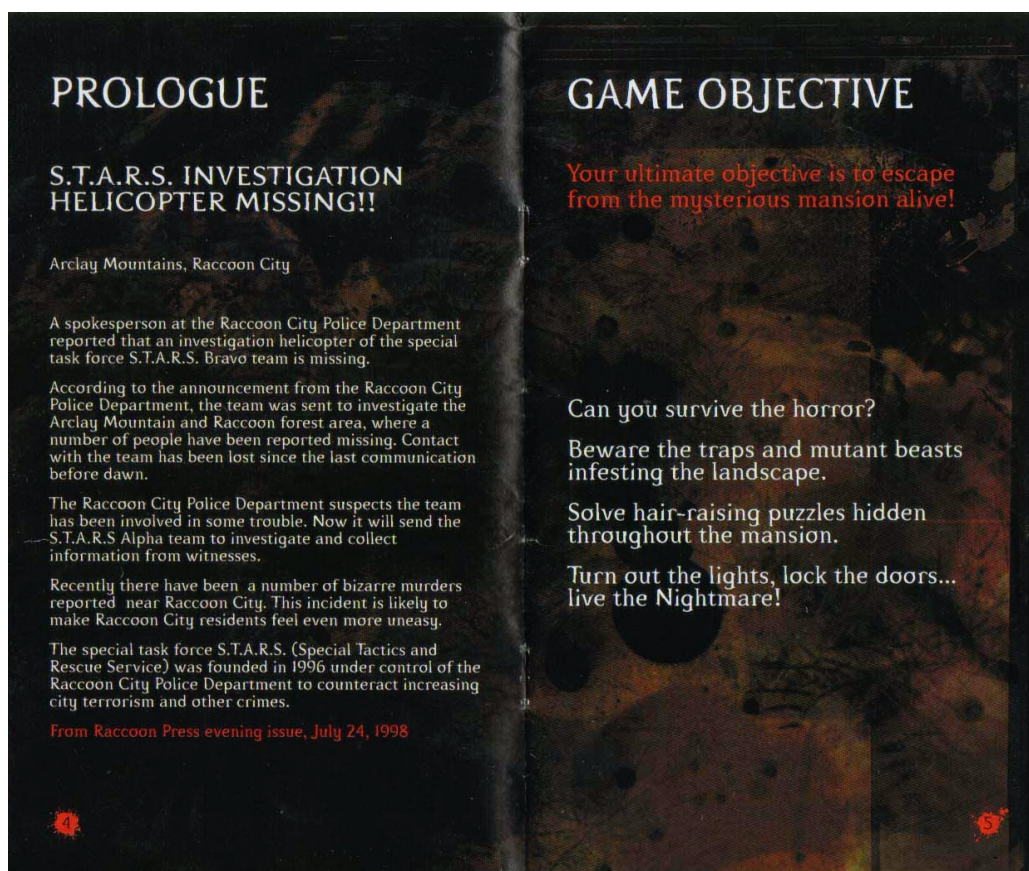


Figure 5. Page 4-5 of *Resident Evil* Instruction Booklet, Capcom, 2002

The algorithm within video games is what helps guide an active experience as opposed to a passive one. I, too, am using an algorithm within my work for the same reason. The active

personal data, which informs my presented data, which creates entirely new data. This new data is the narrative conjured by the viewer. Without this algorithm-like behavior, the story would be stagnant and unfinished. In a traditional narrative, there is no algorithm present, allowing passive consumption. Additionally, traditional narratives are typically completed by the author and tell the reader exactly what happens. Unlike a traditional narrative, my work is filled with unanswered questions. These questions are to be answered by the active viewer using my algorithm to inform their version of my story.

CHAPTER 3

BACKLOG

This particular practice of making work was a direct product of when I began my time as a graduate student at Georgia Southern University. My first notable work at GSU was a series I referred to as *Little Fork*. This series was heavily influenced by a game entitled *Until Dawn* which I compare to teen thrasher films of the 80s and 90s sprinkled with a twist of the Algonquin mythological creature the wendigo. For these works, I took what I knew from video game story telling: finding and reading notes and articles, listening to recordings, and examining evidence that would educate the player as well as advanced the story.



Figure 6. Nikolaus James, *Little Fork* Installation, 2019

In this series I created and curated objects, or data sets: detective notes, newspaper articles, answering machine messages, a thrashed mailbox, etc. and displayed them in a museological manner on pedestals and under vitrines. The objects were presented alongside elaborately detailed labels that helped push the viewer towards a narrative, allowing the viewer to piece together a story similar to game-like algorithm behavior. Much like finding objects in a video game, information; people's names, dates, times, or locations would be learned from the objects which would help the viewer in piecing together the narrative. The ultimate goal of this work was tell a story through objects and readings to promote active viewing in a gallery setting. Vitrines and glass cases were not used just to give the feeling of a strange museum exhibit, but also to show the importance of an item, as well as to entice the viewer with curiosity. A transparent mystery box.



Figure 7. Joan Fontcuberta, *Fauna* Installation, 2008

Influencing this way of storytelling and displaying work, I must give credit to Joan Fontcuberta. Since the 1980s, Fontcuberta has been dealing with the truthfulness of photography while using other mediums to present “discoveries” to the public. He states, “I’m interested in creating ambiguity. In my work, I’ve been always debating the nature of truth in photography. Because of some historical reasons, photographs have been conveying the idea of evidence but this is just a convention, just a belief. Images are just constructions as any other human product.” Most of his work, when displayed, is unbelievable in the sense that it is believable. He tells a total fabricated story and backs it up with evidence of his creation. Fontcuberta states, “the idea is to challenge disciplines that claim to represent the real - botany, topology, any scientific discourse, the media, even religion.” One series in particular, “Fauna”, is the story of the rediscovery the long-lost archives of German zoologist Dr. Peter Ameisenhaufen who catalogued “unusual animals.” The story is told through a “detailed museological display” which includes “vitrines, stuffed animals, bird-song recordings, x-rays, photographs, field sketches—everything you expect from a natural-history display” (Jeffries). This type of thoughtfulness and believability is what I wanted to personally achieve when making work.

The objects featured in *Little Fork* were selected by a combination of deliberateness, chance, and luck. Not to say that the objects were random, but a good portion of the objects were found and selected while on my thrifting rounds. When making work for the series, I had a very good idea of what I wanted to illustrate next in order to progress the story. With limited local resources, my chances of finding exactly what I wanted were usually slim to none so I relied on finding something neat that would fit into the story as well as not straying away from what I

wanted to say. Not only was it exciting for me to work this way, but it was also challenging to create a story that was almost based on the roll of a dice.

After my thirty hour review, I was proposed to create vignettes rather than one long, drawn out story. Something less intimidating and more reasonable for a viewer to invest time into. This was perfect because, as a photographer, that is what I was used to doing. The images I made were brief moments in time where something happened, was documented, then left open to interpretation. With this mindset, I created work like my photographs but instead of existing only in a print, the scene existed as an installation in a physical space.



Figure 8. Nikolaus James, *Would you like to save?*, 2019

In the beginning, the objects I created seemed to force themselves into our reality with the lack of a specified location. This forced the viewer to create that space internally using what was known to them: the objects. *Would you like to save?* is one of these short stories that consists of a free standing door in a frame, a rotary telephone in an open wooden box, and a seemingly discarded notepad with a mysterious doodle drawn inside. Though a specific location isn't required for this piece to exist, it does need to be placed strategically in the corner of a room. Using their personal accessible knowledge of the presented objects, or data sets, viewers formulated answers that were informed by the installation and completed a unique narrative.

After making a few pieces that didn't seem to belong anywhere, I soon realized that I should, in fact, be more deliberate with where I set up my installations. This would give the viewer a defined setting and allow them to be directly in the scene. The interaction between the viewer and setting as well as the fact that they can literally walk in and through the scene encourages them to become a more active viewer. Not only are they actively walking throughout the piece, but they can also investigate the space and identify important objects then take what information they know and conjure a unique narrative based on that known information. My algorithm works similarly to data processing in the computer field, "A program reads in data, executes an algorithm, and writes new data" (Manovich 439). Program being the viewer, data being the setting and objects in the installation, and new data being the story created by said viewer.

My corpse will serve as a warning for others, do not enter this evil place without the right equipment. is another piece I created that, unlike *Would you like to save?* has a site specific

location. Down in the depths of the graduate studio hub, in the dankest of closets known to the department, bound and hung with rusty chains and countless padlocks, an antiquated suitcase timidly sways to and fro. Just beside it, another object, a wrecking ball of barbed wired encapsulating a collection of keys hangs just as gently. Both illuminated by a warm, utility light

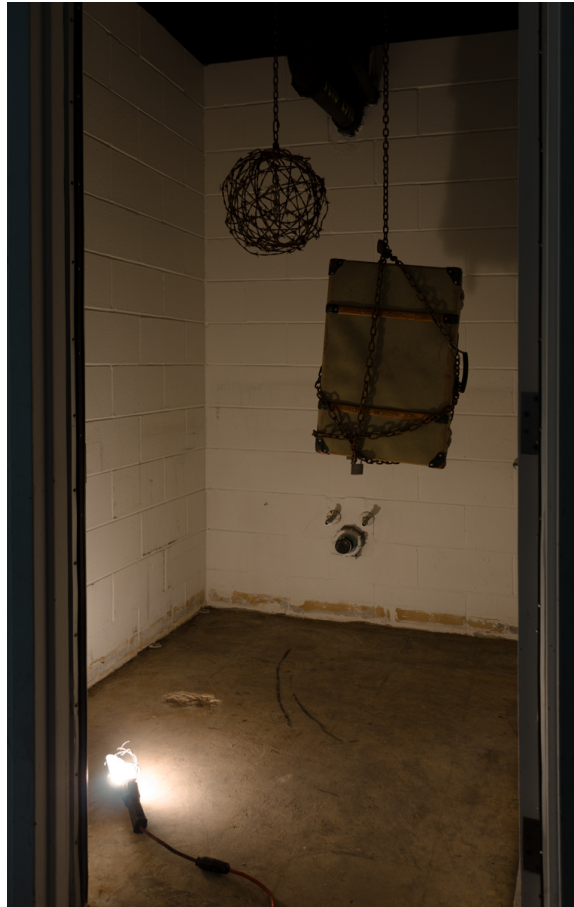


Figure 9. Nikolaus James, *My corpse will serve as a warning for others, do not enter this evil place without the right equipment.*, 2019

from a forgotten past, powered by a younger, less experienced, orange cord that slithers from the resplendent closet down the dark hall to a room pulsing, slow, cool flashes. Following the cord to its source, on the floor adjacent to the outlet, an image of bolt cutters scrolls rhythmically on a

small CRT television almost in time with the constant thumping sound from above. Mesmerized by the flicker and uneasy from the rapping, the lonely bolt cutters duct taped to the wall almost get lost in the shuffle. Thankfully, the TV mirroring the object from across the room, beckons the tool with its glorious light.

The objects are data sets and were carefully selected and crafted. Influenced by just about every major survival horror game series; Resident Evil, Silent Hill, Outlast, etc. the objects in this piece could have been plucked straight from any one of these franchises. The goal in using this inspiration is to unsettle the viewer just enough to promote curiosity and action. This, again, encourages being a more active viewer. The environment helps create an experience which prompts further investigation as opposed to just passively looking at a framed photograph hung on a wall.

CHAPTER 4

THE MIGHTY CRT

The next development of my work was including the use of CRT televisions to display stills of the scenarios that I create. The cathode-ray tube TV's inclusion brings, at first, a reaction of curiosity. The obsolete technology is the first thing that is seen when entering the gallery. The CRT disrupts the gallery space and carries with it associations of technology from the past: tangled wires, static screens, and the obnoxious aria of an exhausted VHS tape and, of course, the domestic setting where media, like video games, movies, and television are typically experienced.



Figure 10. Nikolaus James, *Fox shrine honored, ordinary people see nothing remarkable.*, 2020

Because my main source of inspiration comes from media observed through screens, my intention is to present my images through this method of display. I am using CRT TVs as a reference to the source. Through TV sets is how I see my influences so I feel it is appropriate for my work to be seen through the same format. Referring back to the drum barrel, I can count on my hands how many times I've seen them out in the wild. In games, movies, and television, however, the amount of barrels I've seen is easily in the thousands.

Fox shrine honored, ordinary people see nothing remarkable., is a piece I created that was inspired by the many barrels I have encountered while gaming as well as an iconic historical image by photography pioneer, William Henry Fox Talbot. Following the same algorithm as previously mentioned, viewers read the data I have provided, process the information by making connections with their personal data sets, and conjure a narrative based on their knowledge of setting and objects within the image as well as the physical CRT itself. Applying this algorithm, viewers engage in active participation as opposed to passive viewing. The CRT presented on a white pedestal also entices the viewer to participate actively. Seeing a chunky TV in the gallery reminds the viewer of all the associations connected to that TV and applies those associations to the image displayed. The white pedestal it sits on reminds viewers that they're in a gallery, rendering the pedestal and TV in a visible battle for attention.

Another piece, *It was the first time I had left the safety of my home station.* includes a total of five CRTs that stand in a quarter circle taking up an entire corner of the gallery. A medium size screen sits in the middle of four other screens, two monitors on either side. Looking at the piece from a distance, the screens can be seen simultaneously. When viewed closer, it is

impossible to see all the screens at once, causing the viewer to actively travel between each CRT. The four outermost TVs stand on narrow pedestals. So narrow that the TVs seem to be spilling off of them creating a tension. The middle screen, still seemingly too big for the pedestal, appears more secure.

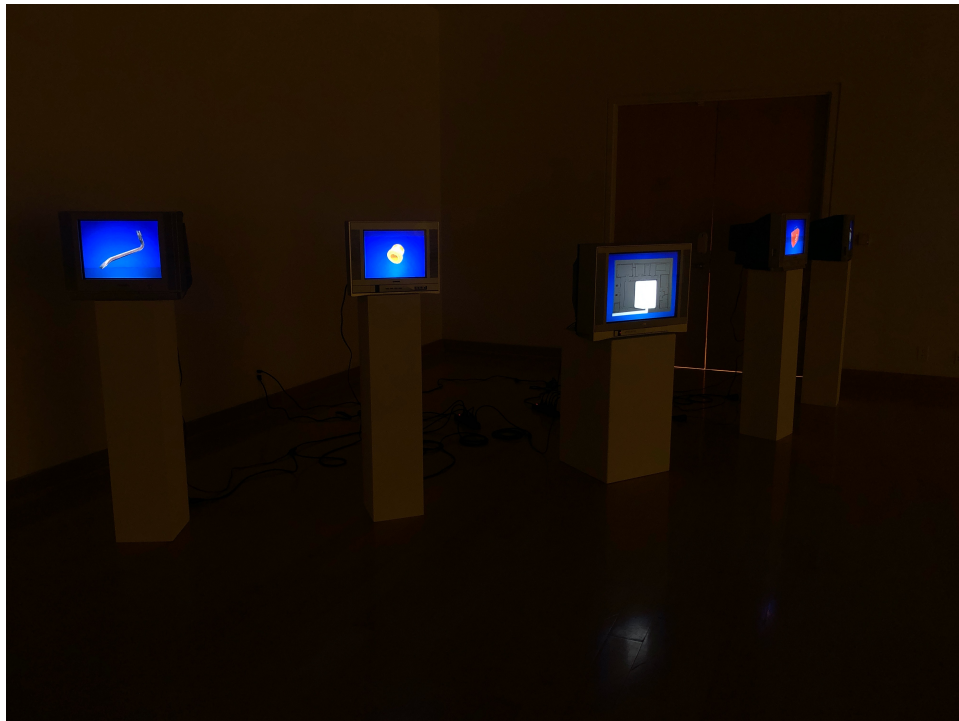


Figure 11. Nikolaus James, *It was the first time I had left the safety of my home station.*, 2020

Unlike other works, the images on the CRTs are a neutral documentation of universal data sets: a crowbar, a plug fuse, a first aid kit, a swipe access card, and a map positioned in the middle. Each object floating centered in a familiar blue screen of nothingness, separated from everything but the viewers personal data sets. This decision was made with the intent to simplify the algorithm of viewing my work and giving the viewer more control over the narrative based on the selected objects and where they, the viewer, were (the map). The blue of the screens resemble as seen on TV product commercials of the 90s, the input screen of media devices, and

inventory screens that of like early Resident Evil and Castlevania games. Both highlighting importance and necessity of the items as well as a strange middle world or an in-between where virtual experiences seem to take place.

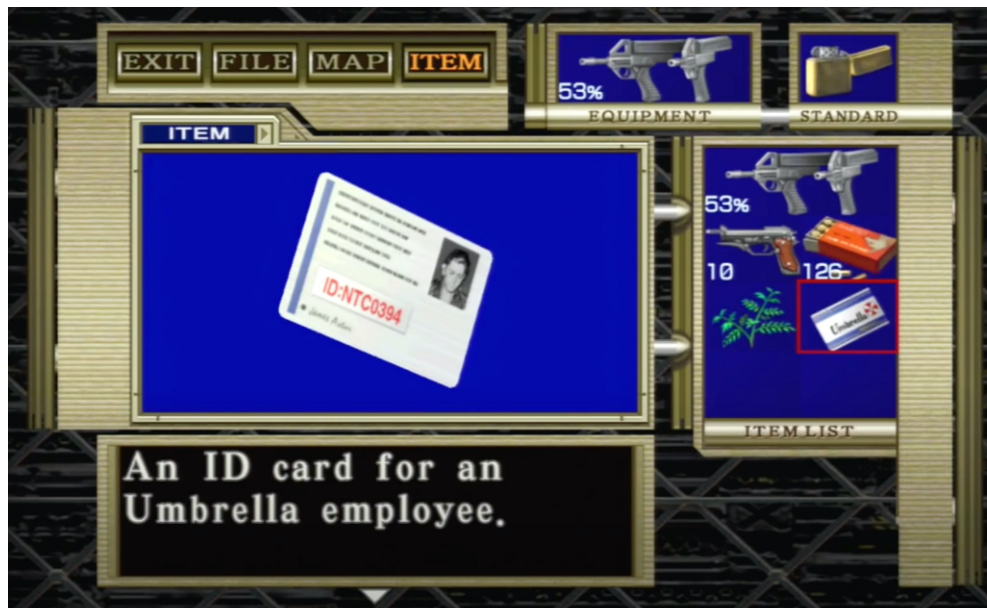


Figure 12. Still from *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*, 2000

CRTs hold a special place in my heart and act as a strong connection to me and my work. I grew up with them still being the norm, they basically raised me. As kids, my brother and I always had a CRT in our bedroom and could always use it to enter different worlds like Neverland, Isla Nublar, and the Mushroom Kingdom. Still to this day do I become engulfed by the welcoming luminance of the ever faithful, mighty CRT.

CHAPTER 5

PROBABLE EXHIBITION

Before even entering the exhibition, visitors are stricken with curiosity. Shrouded in mystery, blackness covers the wall of gallery windows and double door entrance. A faint light spills from under the doorway curtains which eerily draws guests in. Upon entering the gallery space, the strange light's source is revealed as well as a symphony of peculiar noises from flies buzzing to announcement chimes. The brilliant, shimmering luminance is coming from an armada of fourteen CRT TVs varying in sizes and shapes. Centered, a hanging TV faces the wall which creates a spotlight that illuminates, abnormally high for a wall sign, "Plausible Expositions" and upside down, "with Possible Expeditions" and so low it almost touches the floor, "Nikolaus James." Even the show's title and artist name promote active viewing.

The first piece to the right from the entrance, *There's two ways to deal with mystery: uncover it, or eliminate it*. A piece from the past revitalized on a CRT TV. In the gallery, it is displayed practically on the floor on just a sheet of a pedestal. This gives the viewer a sense of immersion. By squatting down to view the screen, the viewer enacts just as if they were at the physical location peering through the door into the crawlspace. The TV itself also closely resembles the actual size of the door of the crawlspace giving the scene an almost real life but virtual experience. While squatting, a hollow, echoing whisper of an ambient cave-like environment repeats through the speakers as well as the crackling of a wick burning. These elements plus the data sets of the viewer promote an entire active viewing experience.



Figure 13. Nikolaus James, *There's two ways to deal with mystery:
uncover it, or eliminate it.* 2020

Following the previously mentioned piece is a tall white pedestal holding a cube of electronics with a waterfall of cords and cables hanging off and connecting to a black power strip on the floor. The electronic cube is four, small Professional Video Monitors (PVMs) sitting on a pedestal that stands over five feet tall and facing the wall. *DH Industries: It's not the right choice, it's America's choice.* is a collection of PVM monitors that are viewed at a height that lords over the visitors. PVMs are typically used in broadcasting, the medical field, and surveillance. The repeating chime that is heard throughout the gallery can be traced to this piece and after the pleasant jingle a voice warns the employees of *DH Industries* of a possible security breach. Just like the other scenarios, viewers make connections to how this piece is

displayed, the monitors the scenes are displayed on, and the alarming audio with their data sets to further inform their narrative.

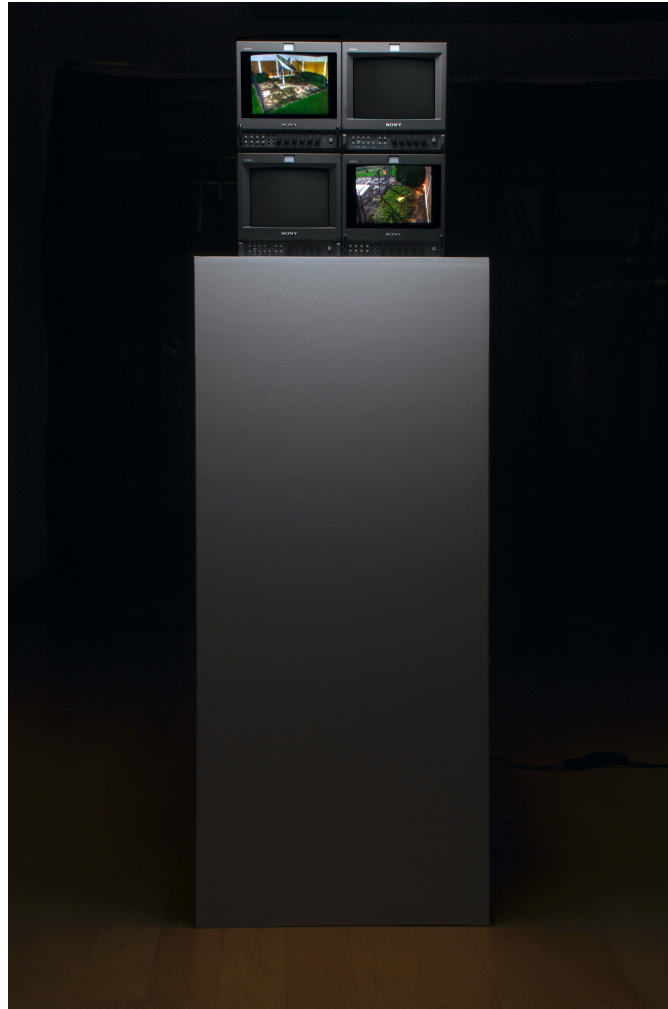


Figure 14. Nikolaus James, *DH Industries: It's not the right choice, it's America's choice.*, 2020

Selecting the TVs for each scenario was almost as important as selecting the objects in the scenes themselves. Sometimes it was a difficult task, other times it was easy. *I've done enough nightshift loner jobs to know it makes us come off weird.* was an easy case. The scene was taken in my back yard and the TV it's displayed on reflects a domestic feeling unlike many other monitors. Out of all the CRT TVs in my exhibition, this one inspired the most connections.

Countless people came up to me and stated they had almost this exact TV in their household when they were younger. Which immediately brings them back to that time period and mindset while thinking and building the narrative of the scene. Being a Zenith from the 80s, it is built to look like a piece of furniture, which honestly always baffles me seeing electronics encased in wood. Even the Atari 2600 is guilty of this. This type of CRT is, without a doubt, a consumer monitor. You wouldn't see a TV like this outside of a store or home. Being furniture TV console, it has no need for an entertainment center, it sits right on the ground. So naturally I constructed a pedestal for it to sit on which takes the viewer back and fourth from where the TV took them back to the gallery space. This unexpected display decision creates an active viewing experience the viewer has to fight with while viewing this piece.



Figure 15. Nikolaus James, *I've done enough nightshift loner jobs to know it makes us come off weird.*, 2020

Though viewing the scenarios in my exhibition, *Plausible Expositions with Possible Expeditions*, through CRT TVs trigger an immersive active viewing experience when applying an algorithm, active viewing also occurs when physically viewing the work. From squatting in front of a TV to having to look up to a collection of monitors, to even the darkness I created with curtains in the gallery space, viewers actively engage in my work. CRT TVs also give another data set for the viewer to access. When viewing work like *I've done enough nightshift loner jobs to know it makes us come off weird.*, the old Zenith TV that the scene is displayed on can bring the viewer back to a time period in their lives they can access while viewing the work which, in turn, influences the narrative they create. The added audio of each scenario also gives the viewer another data set to access when viewing a scene. The collection of sounds heard throughout the gallery is surprisingly not abrasive but adds curiosity that could drive the viewer to investigate which sound is coming from where which also promotes active viewing.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

My works are game scenarios captured in reality that suggest a narrative and allow the viewer to investigate visually and input their own life experiences and associations in order to formulate conclusions using my algorithm with their data-sets. Much like *Fox shrine honored*, *ordinary people see nothing remarkable*, and *It was the first time I had left the safety of my home station* where viewers read the data I present, process it by making personal connections to the settings and objects, and create new data by conjuring a narrative based on the presented data.

Staging specific objects is a challenging way to tell a story. Objects and the way they are placed ultimately have a relationship with the viewer. These relationships are generated because each object and its staged environment relates back to a viewer's previous experiences. I consider these experiences as a set of data used by the viewer to actively engage in my work. Everyone has their own personal and unique data-set with specific objects and environments that activate their associations. These associations are created by life experiences and, when seen, inherently make the viewer call to mind and think about their own life experiences with those objects. Much of my work is influenced by specific moments and common objects in video game environments and cinema, universal data sets. It is a cross between real life and video game life—something that might seem abnormal in the real world would be perfectly plausible and expected in a video game.

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