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**MANIPULATING THE HYPE:
Contemporary Art's Response to Media Clichés**

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degree of
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Abstract

Manipulating the Hype: Contemporary Art's Response to Media Clichés addresses art's reaction to the barrage of signs produced by the media. The paper researches contemporary art's response to clichéd media stereotypes and elucidates artists' multifaceted perspective on overtly obvious yet widely embraced paradigms marketed by the media. Contemporary art's strategic reconfiguration of media stereotypes is a valuable introspection upon the superficiality and impracticability of advertising and entertainment industry constructs. By reconsidering the mediated image, art has the ability to inspire reevaluation of cultural values. The thesis additionally attempts to ascertain the reinterpretation of media stereotypes as a common thread linking principal art movements and historically significant artworks from around the world since 1960. How does contemporary art respond to the extensive cultural influence of the media? Is a reaction to mass media a thematic commonality linking contemporary artists in the age of globalization?

Manipulating the Hype is a dual outcome investigation comprised of written thesis and studio practice. The written thesis combines experience from a lengthy professional practice with historical and theoretical research. The visual thesis consists of twelve photographic works taken at on the Big Island of Hawaii. The images juxtapose artificial icons of power from popular culture with the natural force of the active lava flow. Exhibition of the works will take place from June 26, 2013 through July 3, 2013 at Sydney College of the Arts.

The process of research discloses how the advertising and entertainment industries capitalize upon innate human desires through the manipulative proliferation of archetypal imagery. Furthermore, the thesis establishes the widespread retort to media clichés as a palpable commonality in studio practices worldwide. The findings in *Manipulating the Hype* make evident that although contemporary art does not have sufficient influence to reform the media, it can heighten public awareness of media tactics.

INTRODUCTION

From billboards to the Internet, media transmissions permeate popular culture. In the age of globalization, media exposure worldwide affects the psyche of every member of consumer society. *Manipulating the Hype: Contemporary Art's Response to Media Clichés* researches how contemporary art responds to the monumental cultural influence of the media.

My motivation for this investigation began over two decades ago. Soon after completing my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting at the San Francisco Art Institute, I developed a strong interest in conceptual art as a means of social critique. My compelling desire to voice a retort to the corporate sovereignty of mass culture inspired me to integrate stereotypical images from advertising onto my canvases. Through both gallery connections and institutional visits, the opportunity to travel professionally offered exposure to a global network of artists. Although their formal and conceptual approaches varied dramatically, many of the artworks I encountered embodied a response to the advertising and entertainment industries. Questions began to arise from involvement with and exposure to artists from around the world. It is these questions that instigate the inquiry within *Manipulating the Hype*.

The investigation in *Manipulating the Hype* comprises a lengthy professional practice involving international involvement with the art world. Members of a broad community of artists, working both locally and internationally, have been included in my research. Decisively, the reaction to media paradigms is a global development in contemporary art. The research presents a widespread response to media stereotypes by artists from diverse cultures. Thus, it is imperative to examine a wide range of artists, rather than provide a detailed analysis of a small subsection. It is also important to document the longevity of this phenomenon, which appeared in art more than fifty years ago and is still visible today. *Manipulating the Hype* substantiates a consistency

manifest in numerous historically relevant art movements: the reinterpretation of media clichés. Accordingly, a broad survey of contemporary artists since 1960 is presented in this thesis.

The importance of this artistic phenomenon cannot be understated. Media stereotyping is a capitalist device, which instills insecurities in the population by promoting superficial, homogenous ideals. The underlying pressure to aspire to those conformist ideals deprecates the value of individuality. Furthermore, in marketing those exemplars, the advertising and entertainment industries exploit innate human desires of dominance, sexuality and aggression. As the predominant means of cultural stimulation in the age of globalization, the media has the power to profoundly influence the psyche of the masses. Hence, the dehumanizing iconography of media transmissions has extensive psychological and sociopolitical consequences. In producing imagery independent of corporate interests, artists make a substantial contribution to counterculture. Artists have the power to contravene cultural conventions by instigating questioning of societal acquiescence to values promoted by the media establishment.

The media encompasses advertising, journalistic broadcasting and the entertainment industry, which includes film, television and video game entertainment. In examining the vast phenomenon of art's reaction to media constructs, it is essential to understand the role of photography. The advent of photography in the nineteenth century contributed to the formation of today's media. Media transmissions are founded upon the manipulation of the photographic image. The expansion of media industries accompanied the development of film and broadcasting technologies in the twentieth century. The pervasive influence of the media upon mass culture resulted from those developments.

Acclaimed American art critic, filmmaker and writer, Susan Sontag, in 1973 wrote the seminal text *On Photography*. The book provides an analysis of how the development of photography influenced society's perception of the world. In the text, Sontag asserts, "in teaching us a new visual code, photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right

to observe.”¹ Sontag saw photography as deceptive. From her perspective, although the photo presents itself as truth, only a facet of actuality is visible in the photographic image. Sontag further proposes that photography “democratizes all experiences by translating them into images.”² Sontag postulates that the propagation of images in popular culture transmits a confused notion of what is real. She professes that the consumer’s view of the world through the photographic image removes the public from real experiences.

Sontag deduces that photography is a seductive tool of commercialism that contaminates the psyche of the populace. Her analysis of photography stems from a Marxist standpoint. “A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex,”³ Sontag concludes. Sontag’s views on photography are not entirely critical in the text—she does credit photography for liberating painting from the drudgery of faithful representation⁴ in the early twentieth century.

After the invention of the camera liberated art from its historical documentary function, art developed newfound significance. In the early twentieth century, art’s liberation manifested itself as an exploration of form and color. Beginning in the 1960s, the objective of many artists evolved into more conceptually grounded investigations of socioeconomic and political developments. Hence, a dialogue between contemporary art and the commercial media arose as a result of the media’s extensive impact on society.

Later, the twentieth century saw rapid advancements in film technology and with it rose an image conscious entertainment industry. By the mid-twentieth century, representations of these operations slowly pervaded everyday life. Eventually the market became saturated with this readily recognizable cultural iconography. This pervasive media iconography came to be identified as the banal

¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1979). P. 3.

² *Ibid.* P. 7.

³ *Ibid.* P. 178.

⁴ *Ibid.* P. 145.

antithesis of cultural value. Ultimately, the media's disseminated imagery developed into stereotypes. Over the years, the media promoted recycled and re-packaged stereotypical imagery in its commercial ventures.

Media exposure affects humanity on a profound level in global consumer society. In their agenda to encourage mass consumption, the advertising and entertainment industries propagate unrealistic stereotypes. These opportunistic tactics convey that commercialism is of supreme importance to society, superseding intellectual and spiritual endeavors. The pervasive global media advocates capitalistic values and obscures cultural and ethical concerns. Therefore, the subject of media typecasting and formulaic propagation of stereotypes is highly significant. Only those members of society living in isolation—lacking television, the Internet and radio—can avoid ingesting the media's virtually inescapable output. In the form of elected entertainment, background noise and billboards, media constructed images pervade our waking consciousness.

Regardless of social divisions, the mediated image can be regarded as a primary component unifying contemporary global culture. Various forms of media are among the largest exports of the western first world to developing nations. Stereotyping has undeniably existed long before the inception of the global media. However, advancements in technology and broadcasting have facilitated increased proliferation of these paradigms.

Dada was the first art movement to distinguish and react to the propagation of advertising and entertainment industry iconography. Dada appropriated both the media's devices and its imagery, reframing them as art. Dada also repositioned products designated for mass consumption into the gallery space, thereby redefining those objects as art. Much has been written on the Dada movement. Will Hill is a U.K. critic who wrote the essay *The Schwitters Legacy on Dada* for the publication *Art and Text* in 2009. Hill attests: "Advertisements and billboards function as a signifier of modernity and the machine age across

early twentieth century painting.”⁵ Hill’s statement affirms newfound relevance of commercial media symbolism in the age of Dada.

Dada, a radical group that originated in Switzerland during the First World War, emerged as a response to political conditions of the era as well as the industrial revolution and its accompanying influx of media images. In *The Dada Painters and Poets: an Anthology*, American artist Robert Motherwell describes the movement: “The activity of Dada was a permanent revolt of the individual against art. Against, against morality, against society.”⁶ Fueled by political activism, Dada’s participants attracted attention for their reaction to living in a society with ethics that tolerated the atrocities of war by engaging in shocking performances and extreme behavior.

Dada is widely considered to be the earliest art movement that emphasized conceptual content. Tony Godfrey, author of the thorough chronological text, *Conceptual Art*, affirms the importance of Dada’s role in the introduction of conceptuality into contemporary art. He declares: “The critique of its extended and certain ‘conceptual’ strategies are established in the advent of the monochrome painting and the ‘anti-painting’ of Francis Picabia; in the deployment of outrage; in the desire to fuse media; in the analysis of the relationship, or lack of it, between word and image; and in the exploration of the exhibition as a spectacle.”⁷ Dadaists were a renegade group who produced groundbreaking art, combining the bold presentation of multi-media art, the induction of politics and lifestyle into the art-making process and an anti-establishment attitude. The Dada period served as a catalyst for future developments in art. These developments would transcend modernism. Dada therefore established itself as the forerunner of postmodernism. French artist Marcel Duchamp was a founding member of the Dada movement. Duchamp’s work has influenced the history of art until the present day.

⁵ Aimee Selby, ed. *Art and Text* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009). P. 12.

⁶ *The Dada Painters and Poets: an Anthology*, Edited by Robert Motherwell (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989). P. 102.

⁷ Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998). P. 37.

John Alford, a British art historian and painter who wrote several academic articles on Dada, observed that as a Dadaist, Duchamp “embarked on an experimental study of a personality disengaged from the normal contingencies of human life’ and ‘flung himself into orgies of drunkenness and every other excess.”⁸ Duchamp repositioned readymade, manufactured objects from mass culture into the gallery context, exhibiting them as art.

U.S. art historian and gallerist Janis Mink, author of *Marcel Duchamp: Art as Anti-Art*, asserts, “It was Duchamp who responded most radically to the changes brought about in the art world by the industrial age.”⁹ Therefore, Marcel Duchamp is credited with initiating art’s response to the newfound banality of the mass media. Duchamp’s work is seen as a landmark of art’s progression beyond modernism’s realm of sensual pleasure and enabling art’s advancement into a more cerebral sphere. The impact of Duchamp’s precedent is particularly evident in the appropriation of advertising and entertainment industry imagery of the *Pop* movement in the 1960s.



Marcel Duchamp, *Bottle Rack*, 1914, Galvanized iron bottle dryer. 59 x 36.8 cm.

⁸ Alford, J. *The Prophet and the Playboy*, “Dada was not a Farce.” *College Art Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Summer, 1952). PP. 272. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/773461>.

⁹ Janis Mink, *Marcel Duchamp 1887-1968: Art as Anti-Art* (Koln: Taschen, 2004). P. 7.

Not all theorists celebrate Duchamp's endeavors. French postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard lamented Duchamp's work in his 2004 essay, *Integral Reality*. "The ready-made as archetype is...now overwhelming not only the artworld, but our whole life, as the only magic left to us -- that is a sort of radical fetishism. Just as Duchamp disinvolves himself as subject from the fountain as object, depriving it from any usage, any reference and any illusion, so we could say that God has withdrawn from the world, abandoning it to its destiny as a readymade,"¹⁰ bemoans Baudrillard. Boris Groys is a German art critic and media theorist who wrote the text *Art Power* on the subject of art as a commodity in 2008. Groys's views concur with Baudrillard's perspective. "It is by no means accidental that the recent discourses proclaiming the end of art point to the advent of the readymade as the endpoint of art history,"¹¹ Groys states. If agreement with Baudrillard and Groys's views is warranted, art must pursue the modernist quests for 'retinal' pleasure and authenticity. Yet I believe art also has the ability to serve as an intellectual avenue for social inquiry.

Art must adapt to its environment if it is to fulfill its historical function of reflecting the era and social conditions in which it is produced. In 1997, American art critic Arthur Danto wrote the philosophical text, *After the End of Art*. Danto theorizes that prioritization of concept over aesthetic concerns was art's demise. Danto observes: "with the philosophical coming of age of art, visibility drops away, as little relevant to the essence of art as beauty proved to have been. For art to exist there does not even have to be an object to look at, and if there are objects in a gallery, they can look like anything at all."¹² There is validity in Danto's opinion. However, Duchamp's sensational use of the readymade can be viewed as a launching pad into a new realm of cerebral art, rather than art's conclusion. The introduction of the readymade was pivotal in eliciting art's transition from visual aesthetics to critical discourse. Duchamp's use of appropriation instigated a legacy of cultural analysis in art.

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, "Integral Reality," *Jean Baudrillard = Baudrillardiana*(2008), <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/integral-reality/>.

¹¹ Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2008). P. 35.

¹² Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). P. 11.

While a plethora of art movements seeking vastly different objectives were inspired by Duchamp's endeavors, the investigation in *Manipulating the Hype* stems from Duchamp's influence in relation to Pop art and its lineage. The incorporation of everyday imagery into works of art is one of the defining characteristics of Pop. This paper examines how Pop and its derivatives employ methods of recontextualization initiated by Duchamp. Artists discussed in this thesis are connected to Duchamp through their appropriation of imagery from popular culture.

Manipulating the Hype addresses art's reaction to the barrage of signs produced by the media. The paper researches contemporary art's response to clichéd media stereotypes and elucidates contemporary art's multifaceted perspective on overtly obvious yet widely embraced paradigms marketed by the advertising and entertainment industries. The investigation furthermore attempts to ascertain the reinterpretation of media stereotypes as a common thread linking principal art movements and significant artworks after 1960.

There is a profusion of references to media stereotyping in art since 1960. It is vast subject matter. Therefore, three prevalent, internationally disseminated stereotypes have been selected for examination. Thus, the paper is divided into three chapters, each of which explores key stereotypes. The research within this text has been approached from a historical perspective. However, the organization of the inquiry does not adhere strictly to the chronological realization of the artworks within, but the interrelationship between the works' content. Each chapter is divided into thematically related sections.

The first chapter, *Sexual Stereotypes*, questions contemporary art's response to the advertising and entertainment industries' propagation of clichéd sexual archetypes. The inquiry analyzes the development and diversity of art's discourse with sexual clichés from mass culture.

The chapter first considers Pop's precedent in appropriating sexual clichés for artistic content. *Sexual Stereotypes* is then divided into sections according to the visual style and devices of expression in the artworks. The sections pinpoint

gender paradigms in the media beginning in the 1950s and proceed to identify retorts to these stereotypes beginning with Pop. The chapter frames gender stereotypes and sexual content in the media through the theoretical lens of Jean Baudrillard's 1979 text, *Seduction*. The artworks included in *Sexual Stereotypes* frequently do not ideologically coincide with Baudrillard's conjectures on the nature of femininity and pornography. Nonetheless, Baudrillard's hypotheses elucidate media stereotypes confronted by contemporary art.

The second chapter of *Manipulating the Hype*, entitled *The Symbology of Status Clichés*, considers contemporary art's retort to the commercial media's constructs of celebrity and societal status. The analysis seeks to determine how status symbols from mass culture are reflected in art. The chapter also surveys the development of diversity in art's answers to stereotypical representations of status from popular culture.

The Symbology of Status Clichés introduces Pop art's reiteration of familiar symbols of fame and wealth. Pop's recontextualization of commercial status symbols is first examined. Subsequent sections of the chapter compare artists' contrasting methods of confronting media glorification of celebrity and brand notoriety. The ideas in this chapter are correlated to Baudrillard's theories on the media's agenda seeking to diminish culture to product branding in *Simulacra and Simulation*. The concepts within *The Symbology of Status Clichés* do not fully coincide with the theoretical propositions in *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard's models do, however, concisely define the intangible notion of status marketed by the media.

Factitious Violence is the third chapter of *Manipulating the Hype*. Contemporary art's reconstruction of violent imagery from the entertainment industry is considered within. The chapter examines how the overload of dramatized violence in the media has resulted in a culture that complacently accepts violent imagery. *Factitious Violence* questions how contemporary art reinterprets mediated spectacles of violence.

Pop's inaugural reflection of media violence is established as a point of departure in *Factitious Violence*. Ensuing sections of the chapter elicit a dialogue between artworks according to their conceptual strategies. Each section delineates specific works employing allied tactical responses to broadcasted violence. George Bataille's perspective on human fascination with atrocity in *The Cruel Practice of Art* contributes a theoretical point of reference throughout the chapter.

Philosophical assertions from cultural theorists other than Jean Baudrillard and Georges Bataille further substantiate the research in *Manipulating the Hype*. Although concepts discussed in this paper have obvious Marxist origins and numerous artworks surveyed convey Marxist undertones, Marxism is not the central focus of the inquiry. Nevertheless, Marxist references are acknowledged when warranted. Marxism in contemporary art is an expansive enough topic to merit a distinct, extensive investigation independent of *Manipulating the Hype*.

Contemporary art has a demonstrable relationship to media iconography and its ubiquity in globalized capitalist society. The research examines the diverse methodologies artists employ in reactions to media clichés. Artists appropriate and recontextualize images from the advertising and entertainment industries, inciting reconsideration of familiar models. The objective of artistic reinterpretation deviates from the media's commercial ambitions. Distinct methods contemporary artists utilize in repositioning media clichés, such as irony, parody, humour, caricature, embellishment and illusion, are explored in *Manipulating the Hype*. It is important to survey a wide range of practical approaches to the subject, firstly to illustrate the magnitude of the media's influence on visual culture and secondly to encompass the varied reactions artists have to media clichés. Although artists from different backgrounds and ideologies display disparate responses to those images, a common tension between the consumption and criticism of media paradigms is evident in contemporary art.

Baudrillard's theories play a key role in contextualizing the artworks in *Manipulating the Hype*. Baudrillard theorizes that Pop denotes the "end of the

subversion and malediction of the world through art.”¹³ This viewpoint is questioned in this thesis. Although Baudrillard’s theories have been explored at length in connection to contemporary art, his relevance as a critic of the Pop movement and its ideological descendants remains authoritative.

Artists who are vitally relevant to the query of *Manipulating the Hype* will be examined along with self-produced works of art. Many highly publicized artists are included in *Manipulating the Hype*. Some of those artists enjoy so much exposure in their careers that their work has begun to lose impact. The reasoning behind the inclusion of highly acclaimed artists is the common regard for media hype in their work. Why have these artists enjoyed great commercial success? Is their success a result of their willingness to address familiar subject matter that regularly confronts viewing public?

Artworks included in this paper attract the viewer’s attention by reinventing images from popular culture. Echoing the images they reflect, renderings of stereotypical iconography in famous works also evolve into clichés. Some aspects of the artwork and the cultural conditions they reflect have become inseparable; artists aspire to become “art stars” and works of art are strategically marketed with an ardor comparable to the advertising and entertainment industries.

Previously, critical analyses of individual artists’ reinterpretation of media contrivances have been published. However, an investigation of art’s collective response to media stereotypes has surprisingly not yet been consolidated into a single volume. *Manipulating the Hype* investigates the cohesion of this phenomenon.

My own studio practice shares thematic and technical similarities with the selection of artworks constituting the written component of *Manipulating the Hype*. Many of the works included have inspired my past studio practice.

¹³ Steve Redhead, ed. *The Jean Baudrillard Reader, European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). P. 16.

However, in some cases, I had no previous knowledge of artworks included in this paper, which were discovered through the process of research.

The studio component of this thesis applies a Pop aesthetic to the strategies of Conceptualism in deconstructing media clichés. The work is comprised of the mediums of photography, installation and video; the recontextualization of media clichés creates consistency within the diversity of the studio practice. The studio component elicits a social commentary akin to other artists' works included in the written element of the thesis. Irony, humor and appropriation of cultural iconography are likewise crucial attributes of the artworks.

The visual narrative is a key method of conveying the premise of the studio component of this thesis. Some of the visual narratives are self-executed, while others document recruited participants' actions under my direction. Moreover, in some instances, inanimate representations of media icons are substituted for live performers to evoke an animated quality. Advertising and entertainment industry symbolism and strategies are reconfigured to reinforce the artworks' intentions as reactionary critiques of the pandemic of images disseminated by the media.

Clearly, the ubiquitous influence of stereotypical media iconography has devitalizing cultural ramifications. Artists are undoubtedly aware of the dramatic impact of commercial imagery on recent culture. The manner in which they reflect advertising and entertainment stereotypes in their artworks confirms that awareness. What are the different tactical approaches taken by contemporary art in response to the media's inundative propagation of predictable clichés? How has the response of artists to those clichés created a common thread in the international history of art since 1960? These are the central questions I will explore in *Manipulating the Hype: Contemporary Art's Response to Media Clichés*.

CHAPTER ONE: Sexual Stereotypes

By the mid-twentieth century, technological advancements in photography and broadcasting expanded the cultural presence of the mass media, now known as “the media.” The evolution of the media ushered in the circulation of commercial imagery featuring actors and models with idealized sexualized appearances performing prescribed gender roles. Media constructed representations conveyed sexual typecasts that eventually developed into sexual stereotypes.

Since the advent of advertising, the mass media has been transmitting affirmations of sexual stereotypes that permeate the public psyche. One aspect of the media that markedly promotes gender stereotyping is the pornography industry, initiated by the launching of the first publication of Playboy magazine in 1953.¹⁴ Pornography sexualizes and stereotypes women while presenting an idealized physicality of femininity. Pornography also reinforces the stereotype of the male as sexual aggressor. Likewise, observable sexual stereotyping can be found in other facets of the media, targeting diverse sectors of society.

The influence of sexual stereotyping in the media upon public consciousness has been confirmed through scientific studies. A 2008 study conducted by the European Union Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee found that “stereotypes in advertising can ‘straitjacket women, men, girls and boys by restricting individuals to predetermined and artificial roles that are often degrading, humiliating and dumbed down for both sexes.’”¹⁵ Another study performed in 2010 at Utrecht University in the Netherlands proved that increased media consumption increased the likelihood of gender and sexual stereotyping in adolescents. In the survey, teens were asked to verify the validity

¹⁴ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, ed. *Pornography, Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007). PP. 1177-1178.

¹⁵ Doreen Carvajal, "Eu Riled over Sexual Stereotypes on Advertising," *International Herald Tribune*, September 8 2008. P. 11.

of such notions as “men are tough” and “women as objects.”¹⁶ Those teens with higher daily exposure to media transmissions were more likely to agree with the statements indicating gender stereotypes. Therefore, the media’s role in forming limiting perceptions of sexual identity is a significant societal concern.

The Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s was an international social movement that challenged gender stereotypes frequently seen in the media. The Sexual Revolution supported gender equality and contested conventional codes of monogamy and sexual modesty. Accompanying this cultural phenomenon, depictions of nudity and sexuality became more prevalent and accepted in the media. In British Commonwealth nations, for example, censorship laws were slackened in favor of classification ratings in 1970.¹⁷

As a corporate entity, the media saw an opportunity to capitalize on the progressive cultural developments of the Sexual Revolution by sensationalizing the movement. According to feminist author Erica Jong, the Sexual Revolution was a time of honest experimentation and challenging social structures. Jong alleges that the media construed the Sexual Revolution as an orgy of indulgence that “commercialized and exploited the search for truth.”¹⁸ The media sensationalized the Sexual Revolution by broadcasting graphic sexual depictions of culture surrounding the movement. Additionally, the media continued to propagate conventional sexual roles, heedless of the progressive gender reforms the Sexual Revolution aimed to promote.

¹⁶ Tom F. M. ter Bogt et al., ““Shake It Baby, Shake It”: Media Preferences, Sexual Attitudes and Gender Stereotypes Among Adolescents,” *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* (2010), <http://www.springerlink.com.ezproxy2.library.usyd.edu.au/content/v73845011563140g/fulltext.html#CR59>.

¹⁷ An example of these changes in censorship in Australia occurred in June 1970. The then Minister for Customs and Excise, the Hon. Don Chipp MP, commenced a new debate on censorship in a major parliamentary statement. Mr Chipp called for as little censorship as possible (within the limits set by community standards), greater public scrutiny, and community responsibility (in particular parental responsibility). The Hon. Don Chipp MP, Minister for Customs and Excise, House of Representatives Hansard, 11 June 1970. PP. 3372–3376.

¹⁸ Jong, Erica in Jeffrey Escoffier, ed. *Sexual Revolution* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003). P. xxxix.

Jean Baudrillard's philosophical text *Seduction* was written in 1979 as a critique of the Sexual Revolution and media developments surrounding it. In the text, Baudrillard pronounced:

Any movement that believes it can subvert a system by its infrastructure is naive. Seduction is more intelligent, and seemingly spontaneously so. Immediately obvious—seduction need not be demonstrated, nor justified—it is there all at once, in the reversal of all the alleged depth of the real, of all psychology, anatomy, truth, or power. It knows (this is its secret) that there is no anatomy, nor psychology, that all signs are reversible.¹⁹

Baudrillard admonished the objectives of gender equality and reform sought by the Sexual Revolution and viewed those objectives as detrimental to the potency of human desire. He decried, “the state of sex's liberation is also that of its indetermination. No more want, no more prohibitions, and no more limits: it is the loss of every referential principle.”²⁰ Baudrillard disparaged the recent loss of structure and formalities associated with society's sexual conventions.

Additionally, Baudrillard cited a vulgar disclosure and loss of mystery in media representations of sexual relationships as a repercussion of the Sexual Revolution. “Nothing is less certain today than sex, behind the liberation of its discourse. And nothing today is less certain than desire, behind the proliferation of its images.”²¹ Baudrillard furthermore perceived that this disclosure was particularly evident in pornography.

Seduction is grounded in the principle that the media constructs public perception of sex and gender identity. Hence, stereotypical media depictions of sexual activity are delineated in *Seduction*, where he deems the confrontational nature and lack of mystery in pornography as the decimation of sexual intrigue and allure. *Seduction* concurrently critiques and embodies sexual stereotypes purveyed by the media.

¹⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer, Culture Texts Series (Montreal: C Theory Books, 2001). P. 10.

²⁰ Ibid. P. 5.

²¹ Ibid.

In *Seduction*, Baudrillard presents a femininity composed of an artificial web of appearances, a superficial existence that is validated by the male. Moreover, Baudrillard assigns the act of seduction as the singularly signifying role of the feminine. He purports that the feminine is not defined by the existence of biological female organs, but by the construct of signs and symbols that enable seductive power. Baudrillard claims that the Sexual Revolution, in its attempts to free femininity from the confines of its traditional roles, earmarked femininity to a history of oppression. He thereby accused the Sexual Revolution of repressing femininity's true nature and strength, which he considered the illusive manipulation of desire. Baudrillard states "seduction and femininity are ineluctable as the reverse side of sex, meaning and power."²² This statement demonstrates a correlation between Baudrillard's stance on femininity and stereotypical representations of submissive femininity in the media.

In *Seduction*, Baudrillard delineates a phallogentric masculinity characterized by strength and aggression. Baudrillard concurs with Sigmund Freud's timeworn conclusion that "there is but one sexuality, one libido – and it is masculine."²³ Baudrillard also hypothesizes that masculinity is dominant and productive, confirming his perpetuation of stereotypical gender classification. Baudrillard's assertion of the hegemony of masculinity is elucidated in his statement that "all masculine power is a power to produce."²⁴ These elements of Baudrillard's position on masculinity resonate with the media's stereotypical representations of masculinity.

Baudrillard perceives a mass consciousness dominated by the media, claiming there is "no other reality than that secreted by the simulative models."²⁵ *Seduction* is a response to media representations of sexuality, wherein Baudrillard renders the mass media as a fabricator of "the theoretical hallucination of desire, with its diffuse libidinal psychology, (serving) as a backdrop to that simulacrum of

²² Ibid. P. 2.

²³ Ibid. P. 6.

²⁴ Ibid. P. 15.

²⁵ Ibid. P. 11.

seduction which one now finds everywhere.”²⁶ Therefore, *Seduction* uses sexuality as a metaphor for consumerism. Additionally, the text serves as a critique of the media as a corporate entity that manipulates the mass psyche.

Since the advent of the advertising and entertainment industries, artists have embodied a reaction to sexual stereotyping in the media and the way those stereotypes shape society’s attitudes towards gender and sexuality. There has been an abundance of critical discourse written on the subject of art’s response to transmissions of sexual stereotypes and how they influence society. Korean academic and curator Henna Joo examined sexual stereotyping in the advertising and entertainment industries for the exhibition, *Her Bodies: Cindy Sherman and Vanessa Beecroft*. In the exhibition catalogue Joo imparts, “Beginning in the 1950s, cultural criticisms were voiced against the growing popular imagery in media such as TV, movies, magazines, and so on. One major target in particular was caricatured and idealized media images.”²⁷ Joo’s statement attests to the media’s influence upon the social conditions surrounding contemporary art’s response to sexual stereotypes.

Artists of the twentieth century could not help but respond to commonplace images of stereotypical sexuality that were humorous to some and offensive to others. In reaction to the media’s dissemination of sexual stereotypes, artists recontextualize images of these stereotypes in their work. Artists recognize the pervasiveness and overuse of these stereotypical media images—identifying them as clichés and treating them as such in their studio practice.

²⁶ Ibid. P. 175.

²⁷ Henna Joo, *Her Bodies: Cindy Sherman & Vanessa Beecroft*, ed. Arario Gallery (Chunghan, Korea: Arario, 2004). P. 1.



Burger King advertisement, 2009. ©Bon-Food Pte. Ltd.

A 2009 Burger King advertisement reads, “Fill your desire for something long, juicy and flame-grilled with the NEW BK SUPER SEVEN INCHER.”²⁸ A photo of an oblong sandwich before an expectantly gaping model accompanies the text. The advertisement exemplifies advertising industry efforts to capitalize upon inherent human desire through exploiting suggestive material. From phallic shapes hidden in the ice cubes of a *Coca Cola* ad to the heavy breasted image of Scarlett Johansson popping open an exploding bottle of *Moet* champagne, the phrase “sex sells” conjures associations with the advertising industry.

The media saturates its transmissions with sexual imagery in efforts to seduce the masses. Baudrillard proclaims, “All of production, and truth itself, are directed towards disclosure, the unbearable ‘truth’ of sex being but the most recent consequence.”²⁹ Baudrillard’s statement articulates how media representations of sexuality have evolved into a state of vulgarity. Hence, as

²⁸ Paul Joannides, "As You Like It/The Latest on Sex " *Psychology Today*, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/you-it/200906/burger-kings-seven-incher-vs-calvin-kleins-threesome>.

²⁹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 181.

sexual transmissions become progressively more blatant, they grow increasingly devoid of mysteriously seductive subtleties.

Artists of the twentieth century seized the opportunity to respond to the improbably unblemished, overstated aesthetic marketed by the advertising and entertainment industries. In historical times, religious and social institutions prescribed sexual roles within society. According to cultural theorist Angela McRobbie in contemporary society, “the media has become the key site for defining codes of sexual conduct. It casts judgment and establishes the rules of play.”³⁰ Media entities employ, with the aid of professional lighting, computerized effects, highly skilled aestheticians and expensive personal trainers to create an image. Consumer culture succumbs to media tactics and spends vast amounts of capital in an attempt to emulate the unrealistic aesthetic standards portrayed in the advertising and entertainment industries. Longing to conform to sexual exemplars, yet lacking access to media resources, the public creates pastiche imitations of idealized mediated illusions.



Escobar Marisol, *Love*, 1962, plaster and glass. 15.8 x 10.5 x 20.6 cm.

In the 1960s, Pop artists responded to advertisements by amplifying their sexual references. Venezuelan artist Escobar Marisol is an example of a Pop artist

³⁰ Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004). PP. 258.

who exposes the media's penchant for sexualization of product image. Marisol's 1962 sculpture, *Love*, shows an anonymous open mouth swallowing the neck of a *Coca-Cola* bottle. Here is a clear response to the same clichés of femininity that Henna Joo articulates as "the rapid development of commercialized mass culture in which capitalism, desire, and sexuality are tied together to stimulate the consumption, transformed women's bodies into a spectacle, and, consequently, reinforced existing sexist values."³¹ Likewise, German art historian Tilman Osterwold identifies Pop's application of simulated advertisements as using "the sexual cliché which is normally supposed to establish the consumer's identification with it."³²

Although gender stereotyping existed before the 1960s, the Pop art movement's unabashed appropriation of media icons instigated contemporary art's retort to sexual stereotyping in the media. Pop employed familiarity and models borrowed from advertising and the commercial media—by means of its production, its form of execution and its imagery. Andy Warhol responded to media images by striving to reflect and reproduce the iconography of popular culture without imposing any sort of critique on the media's dissemination of sexual stereotypes. Warhol perceived artistic merit in the commercial image. Through presenting the commercial image in the gallery context, he demarcated its value.

Beginning in 1962 and continuing throughout the 1960s, Warhol produced several works in homage to media sex symbol, Marilyn Monroe. The works, entitled *Marilyn*, reveal only the artifice of Marilyn Monroe's media persona. The viewer is entitled access to only the superficiality of *Marilyn*'s constructed sexuality. Warhol's *Marilyn* is testament to what Baudrillard cites as the existence of "no other reality than that secreted by the simulative models."³³ In *Marilyn*, Warhol heralded Baudrillard's hypotheses on media constructs in *Seduction*. Warhol emphasized the artificial embellishments to the actress's appearance in the graphic quality of *Marilyn*'s make-up and hair, thereby highlighting *Marilyn*'s

³¹ Joo, "Her Bodies: Cindy Sherman & Vanessa Beecroft." P. 1.

³² Tilman Osterwold, *Pop Art* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003). P. 48.

³³ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 11.

superficiality. Years before Baudrillard's claim in 1979 that "there is no other femininity than that of—appearances,"³⁴ Warhol set a precedent in characterizing idealized femininity as a media façade.

It is no coincidence that Warhol chose Marilyn Monroe—possibly the most iconic media seductress of all time³⁵—as a subject. In *Marilyn*, Warhol highlighted pervasive, familiar media iconography that exemplified the contrivances of seductive femininity. Warhol's recontextualization of the iconic seductress' image provokes the audience to "rethink" the seductive role of femininity. Nonetheless, Baudrillard claims the role of the feminine is to seduce.³⁶ *Seduction's* allusions to stereotypical media depictions of sexual iconography echo Warhol's embodiment of clichéd sexualization of femininity in *Marilyn*.

Through repeated exposure, Warhol's images have become recognizable cultural icons in their own right. Warhol's repositioning of such commercial sexual archetypes as Marilyn Monroe underscores sexual stereotypes in the media that have become commonplace in mass culture.

Warhol's objective was neither to express his personal creativity or opinions beyond his sense of taste in his artworks. Warhol maintained, "I don't change the media, nor do I distinguish between my art and the media. I just repeat the media by utilizing the media for my work. I believe the media is art."³⁷ Therefore, Warhol purported to merely reproduce and highlight the intrinsic visual appeal of popular images from the commercial media.

Much has been written on the intentions of Warhol's work. In 1996, Thomas Crow published the critical work, "*Modern Art and the Common Culture*" which included an analysis of fine art's role as a form of mass

³⁴ Ibid. P. 11.

³⁵ For example, Holly Brubach of the *New York Times* declared Monroe "the object of more men's fantasies than any other woman in history."

Holly Brubach, "Hello Again, Norma Jeane," *The New York Times Style Magazine*, March 1 2011. <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/hello-again-norma-jeane/>.

³⁶ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 7.

³⁷ Kenneth Goldsmith, ed. *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews* (New York: Carroll and Graf 2004). P. 194.

communication. In the text, Crow evaluates Warhol's work in depth. He discusses three possible theories on the subject of Warhol's art: "(1) it fosters critical or subversive apprehension of mass culture and the power of image as commodity; (2) it succumbs in an innocent but telling way to that numbing power; (3) it cynically exploits an endemic confusion between art and marketing."³⁸ It is apparent that Warhol's work encourages both the analytical apprehension of mainstream culture and the marketing power of the image. It also seems virtually impossible for Warhol to have been naïve to the power of consumerism. Furthermore, while Warhol did eventually exploit the parallels between art and advertising, there is no evidence of audacity or cynicism in his stated objective. Warhol's proclaimed ambivalence on sexual stereotyping in the media is the only recorded indication of his stance on the subject and therefore remains authoritative.

Stemming from Warhol's blatant appropriation of commercialized applications of sexuality, artists from as far afield as Tokyo and London have ensued to record and react to the formulated representations of virility and femininity relentlessly disseminated by the media.



Andy Warhol, *Marilyn*, 1967, screenprint. 91.5 x 91.5 cm.

³⁸ Thomas Crow, *Modern Art and the Common Culture* (Washington DC Library of Congress Cataloging - in Publication Data, 1996). P. 49.

Sexual Stereotypes traces the historical development of contemporary art's interconnected reaction to sexual stereotypes in the mass media since the 1960s. The chapter will investigate key works by artists who have gained international notoriety for their exploration of media clichés along with the efforts of some locally known counterparts. Is the reinterpretation of sexual clichés a commonality unifying artists from different continents including Australia, Asia, Europe and both North and South America? Furthermore, how does the displacement of sexual stereotypes from predictable contexts and transferal to the gallery space corner the viewer into deciphering the media's pictorial coding of sexual identity?

Baudrillard's formulaic postulations on the sexual characteristics of symbols and rituals in *Seduction* substantiate the clichéd media gender portrayals addressed in this chapter. The focus of *Sexual Stereotypes* correlates to *Seduction* in its revelation of contemporary art's response to stereotypical sexual representations in the media. Conception of the chapter's premise preceded familiarity with *Seduction*, which was selected for its extensive analysis of sexuality in the media.

Artworks contained within do not necessarily concur with Baudrillard's views in *Seduction*. Likewise, relevant critical assertions from supplementary critics and theorists will be included as support of the claims in the chapter, some rejecting Baudrillard's models.

Several artworks in *Sexual Stereotypes* repudiate Baudrillard's phallogocentric interpretation of masculinity. Similarly, numerous artworks within contradict Baudrillard's definition of femininity as submissive yet manipulative and seductive. Resonating with Warhol, some of the artists surveyed in *Sexual Stereotypes* recontextualize gender stereotypes to encourage viewer contemplation, yet lack a delineated stance on those stereotypes.

There are also artworks included that reference pornography. Those artworks elicit dialog with Baudrillard's perspective on that sector of the media. Some artworks coincide with Baudrillard's disparagement of pornography's unrelenting disclosure of the intricacies of sex, while others reject his stance.

Clichéd sexual stereotypes are trite media constructs from my perspective. My irreverent views thus negate Baudrillard's position. However, *Seduction* is a pivotal text. Baudrillard's definitions of masculinity and femininity are characteristic of stereotypical sexual representations in the media. Baudrillard's views in *Seduction* delineate the mass media as an authority responsible for shaping society's perceptions of sexuality. That perspective corresponds to the fundamental objective of the research in this chapter. Furthermore, *Sexual Stereotypes* parallels Baudrillard's vision of pornography's monotonous predictability as erotically ineffective. However, in my research pornography is presented as a genre filled with absurd banality fit for parody, rather than a genre capable of decimating sexual intrigue and allure.

Sexual Stereotypes is divided into six sections, each of which examines the differing ways that artists choose to confront and explore media clichés.

The first section of the chapter establishes a departure from Warhol's preliminary reflection of the commercial image. *Performance and Politics* examines artists who confront idealized media paradigms. A response to sexual clichés from the 1970s and 1980s media is presented in the artwork of Robert Morris, Lynda Benglis, Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman. Additionally, the utilization of photography in creating the visual narrative is introduced in this segment.

Part two, *Irony, Contortion and Embellishment*, provides an overview of contemporary artists who manipulate the device of humor in response to the media's proliferation of formulaic sexualized aesthetics. These artists employ satire and paradox in their reinterpretations of sexual stereotypes from the media. Moreover, the section illuminates irony as a device of retort to the vulgarity of

media representations of sexuality. Works by Paul McCarthy, Marc Quinn and Jeff Koons are discussed in this section.

The third section of this chapter, *Pioneering a Raw Aesthetic*, focuses on four members of the Young British Artists movement. The work of Sarah Lucas, Sam Taylor-Wood and Jake and Dinos Chapman are addressed as an answer to the media's proliferation of signs promoting gender stereotypes. The methodological use of an unpolished aesthetic as a manifestation of an anti-establishment attitude towards the media and the vanguards of artistic convention are investigated in this part of the chapter. Cynicism and wit as a strategic means of captivating the audience are also discussed.

Part four, *Hentai and Love Hotels*, explores reactions to sexual media stereotypes by two members of the Japanese Tokyo Pop movement: Takashi Murakami and Mariko Mori. These artists incorporate cute, cartoon-like imagery in their work as a reflection of the clichés in the media generated sexuality of Japan. Moreover, a discourse between globalized consumption of mediated sexualized imagery and the polite strictures of Japanese society is revealed in the works of Murakami and Mori.

The fifth section, *Glamour Gone Awry*, looks at the work of three female artists who confront ideals of fashion and sex appeal capitalized upon by the western media. Julie Rrap, Andrea Behm and Vanessa Beecroft manipulate documentation of figurative photography to create visual narratives. These artists defile feminine ideals from the media by reconstructing those ideals in a way that emphasizes their mythical characteristics.

The final section of this chapter, *Manifestations of Indulgence* considers two artworks from the studio component of the thesis. The device of humor as a means of addressing consumption of stereotypical media images of sexuality is examined. The pieces are presented within the context of the studio practice of other artists included in *Sexual Stereotypes*.

How do contemporary artists around the globe respond to the media's propagation of archetypes of clichéd sexual roles? Is art's reaction to the sexual images in the media a commonality in global contemporary art since Warhol? The investigation in *Sexual Stereotypes* seeks to answer these queries.

i. Performance and Politics

As a result of Warhol's widespread influence, appropriation eventually became an accepted practice in contemporary art. The media continued to perpetuate sexual clichés after the 1960s, while Conceptualism and performance art superseded Pop as the dominant art movements. This next generation of artists confronted stereotypical sexual imagery utilizing photography and the visual narrative in a departure from Warhol's precedential reflection of the mediated image. How did key artists of the 1970s and 1980s respond to the sexual politics of the era in their work? *Performance and Politics* investigates their multifarious approaches.



Robert Morris, *Self-Portrait*, 1974, black and white print. 90.5 x 60.5 cm.

In 1974, Robert Morris and Lynda Benglis executed a tactical retort to sexual truisms in the media. The 1970s ushered in a political climate charged with gender equality issues that challenged sexual stereotyping, and this was reflected in the performance-based art of the times. Morris and Benglis's photographic self-portraits published in *Artforum* demonstrate artistic manipulation of gender clichés in their respective publicity campaigns.

Both Morris and Benglis exploited the esteemed art magazine, *Artforum*, as a platform for self-promotion, yet their strategies of sexual depiction were in direct opposition to one another. In his self-portrait, Morris amplifies a macho image by baring his chest and donning a military helmet, shackles and heavy chains. The Canadian Media Awareness Network explains the image as “a play on what it means to be a real man in our society. In most media portrayals, male characters are rewarded for self-control and the control of others, aggression and violence, financial independence, and physical desirability.”³⁹ Morris' display of flexed muscularity implies his intention to exude testosterone—his physique and posturing conveying embellished virility.

However, an ironic critique of the conventions of masculine iconography is visible in the contrivances of the advertisement's visual coding. Firstly, the costuming Morris chooses overtly alludes to bondage paraphernalia visible primarily in gay culture.⁴⁰ In his dichotomous display of virility and appropriation of gay signifiers, Morris creates a satirical commentary on exemplars of heterosexual manhood portrayed in the media. Secondly, Morris offers his oversized shackles and directs his gaze towards the viewer—the caricature of male sexuality coyly offers himself in submission. Therefore, in amalgamating overstated virility and submissive gay references, Morris presents us with a sardonic paradox of stereotypical masculinity in popular culture.

³⁹ http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/corporate/about_us/index.cfm.

⁴⁰ By the 1970s, leather culture was a highly visible element of the gay scene. On his website, U.S. gay historian, editor and writer, Jack Fritscher, PhD. discusses the leather-themed gay men's magazine *Drummer* (first published in 1975). Fritscher describes the magazine as "The American Journal of Gay Popular Culture....for masculine-identified gay men to be able to read about themselves." Jack Fritscher, PhD., "GAY SAN FRANCISCO: EYEWITNESS DRUMMER," <http://jackfritscher.com/>.



Lynda Benglis, two-page *Artforum* advertisement, November 1974.

On the other hand, Lynda Benglis elected to aggressively oppose accepted standards of femininity in her *Artforum* ad. In the photographic self-portrait, Benglis defiantly poses stark naked with a giant dildo. Her posture conveys an intention to confront the viewer. She directly faces the audience, acknowledging the spectacularity of the exhibitionist act. Furthermore, Benglis brandishes the phallus at her groin at an ascending angle to suggest erection, its anatomical details clearly displayed.

The content of the image echoes pornography, the sole sector of media culture to produce such graphic depictions of sexuality. However, Benglis contradicts the customary feminine objectification in pornography. Breasts exposed, her aggressive posturing suggests preparation to initiate dominant penetration.

The mediated feminine image is articulated by Baudrillard as not of “the order of nature, but that of artifice - never to the order of energy, but that of signs

and rituals.”⁴¹ Benglis adopts androgyny in her appearance and demonstratively lacks the conformist tropes of cosmetic embellishment of femininity. She thereby negates both Baudrillard’s definition of femininity and undermines the code of femininity deployed by the media. Therefore, Benglis embodies the spirit of the Sexual Revolution by breaking the code of accepted sexual conventions in her advertisement.

Electronic Arts Intermix observed, “Benglis not only confronted conventions of sexuality, feminism, and female representation, but also questioned commercial promotion, the art-star system, and the way artists use themselves to sell their works.”⁴² The media manipulates its sexualized transmissions to coax the masses into expenditure. The advertising and entertainment industries opportunistically profit upon the collective longing to imitate media paradigms. Benglis utilizes advertising tropes to mock advertising industry depictions of stereotypical femininity. Through her brash use of shock value and direct opposition of media clichés, Benglis debases their significance.

⁴¹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 2.

⁴² Quoted from *Electronic Arts Intermix*, New York. <http://www.eai.org/artistBio.htm?id=6878>.

A groundbreaking reaction to male sexual clichés is also evident in the work of Richard Prince. In the 1970s and early 1980s Prince utilized the conceptual tactic of recontextualization to reconfigure recognizable representations of manhood from the advertising and the film industries. Owing to the brawny male protagonists in highly circulated *Western* movies, the entertainment industry had by the 1960s ingrained a machismo image, synonymous with the *Western* genre, upon cinema audiences around the world. Representations of high-profile leading actors—John Wayne, Charles Bronson, Clint Eastwood and James Dean—were circulated in movie posters advertising the motion pictures. Both “out on the range” and in their private lives, the heroes of these films represented independence, strength, confidence and potency; all were excellent marksmen and horsemen who could handle a drink, prevail in a brawl and seduce feminine protagonists.



Richard Prince, *Untitled (Cowboy)*, 1989, chromogenic print. 127 x 177.8 cm.

Prince presented the rugged cowboys from *Marlboro* cigarette advertisements as vehicles of a code of masculinity. Omitting the text from the original ads, Prince directly appropriates the image of the *Marlboro Man* riding horseback across the range. In comparison to the brash confrontation of male archetypes by Morris, Prince's reinterpretation of a media stereotype seems understated. Nonetheless, his recontextualization of the *Marlboro Man* incites the audience to "rethink" the cliché.

According to Baudrillard, advertising images are created from "artifice - never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals."⁴³ Prince presents the iconic *Marlboro* cowboy's established position as the desirable exemplification of manhood in America. Furthermore, in peeling away the advertisement's text, he demonstrates how the media formulates a pictorial language of idealized sexual paradigms. Thus, Prince reveals the advertising industry's commercialization of definitive sexual stereotypes.

New York art critic and academic, Brian Appel of *Art Critical*, states, "Prince, of course, is really commenting on the machinery of America, the Madison Avenue advertising myth-making machinery that we export around the world and whose underlying meaning is all about what America needs to see reflected in its mirror."⁴⁴ Appel offers insight into how the media capitalizes upon the cultural desire to conform to cultural models of sexuality. In portraying the cowboy image, Prince illustrates a masculine ideal that is inaccessible to the urban masses. Prince provokes contemplation of the stereotyped masculinity ingrained in western culture through exposing and reframing that common typecasting. He moreover incites inquiry into motives behind the mass dissemination of sexual archetypes by commercial entities.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Brian Appel, "For Your Eyes Only," *Art Critical* (2005). <http://artcritical.com/2005/12/01/for-your-eyes-only/>.



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #6*, 1978, Gelatin silver print. 24.1 x 19.2 cm.

Echoing Prince, Cindy Sherman reconfigures familiar gender representations from the media in her work. Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* are direct commentaries on female sexual clichés portrayed in Hollywood entertainment. In the photographic series, Sherman poses as various caricatures of womanhood mimicking common female film roles. Sherman's characters are reminiscent of actual typecasts prevalent on the silver screen in the 1950s and 1960s such as the runaway, the vamp, the charming nurse, and the pin-up girl. Sherman's portrayals clearly emphasize the hyper-feminine traits of the characters. The images reproduce what United States postmodern theorist Craig Owens calls "specular models of femininity projected by the media to encourage imitation, identification."⁴⁵ Accordingly, Sherman punctuates the social implications of the images she produces.

⁴⁵ Craig Owens, Johanna Burton, ed. "Cindy Sherman," *October Files* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006). P. 18.

As in Warhol's *Marilyn*, Sherman emphasizes the embellished signs of femininity visible in media archetypes. However, Sherman's execution of those media tropes is both more subtle and literal than Warhol's graphic color manipulation. Whereas Warhol's colorful adornment of *Marilyn* conveys a decorative quality to her image, Sherman's impersonations of media exemplars are believable. Thus, questions of authenticity arise upon viewing the *Untitled Film Stills*. In Sherman's artificial, black and white realities, leading ladies are adorned in padded bras, glamorous hairstyles, complicated makeup and other costuming signifying media-propagated female archetypes. In presenting simulations that highlight the artifice of the media image, Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* debase the credibility of sexual iconography in mass culture.

Sherman places herself in sexually provocative or vulnerable situations in her photographs. In *Untitled Film Still #6*, she reclines on a bed in a state of partial undress, while in *Untitled Film Still #7* her skirt is hiked up, intentionally displaying her garters for the benefit of an anonymous spectator. Although Sherman does not reenact specific moments on film, the series recalls iconic scenes by celebrated directors Federico Fellini, Orson Welles, Michelangelo Antonioni and Alfred Hitchcock. While a narrative is implied through appropriation of familiar background imagery, Sherman's images nonetheless maintain a sense of anonymity that evades referencing a specific narrative. In this manner, Sherman accentuates the gender stereotype rather than chronicling cinematographic spectacle.

Like Morris and Benglis before her, Sherman used herself as a model in the *Untitled Film Stills*, thereby applying a conceptual approach to the medium of photography. In formulating a photographic narrative, these artists set a precedent later embraced by generations of artists. Sherman's use of costuming and make-up parallel the tropes of mass communication that Baudrillard calls the artifice of "signs and rituals."⁴⁶ Building upon her chameleon-like adoption of different identities, a myriad of younger artists have followed in Sherman's footsteps.

⁴⁶ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 2.

Several of these artists, who address mediated stereotypes presented in the form of the photographic narrative, will be discussed later in *Sexual Stereotypes*.

ii. Irony, Contortion and Embellishment

In addition to the confrontational reconstruction of sexual truisms, contemporary artists also take less straightforward tactical retorts to media stereotypes. How do artworks parodying advertising and entertainment industries transmissions that sublimate sexual innuendoes strategically engage the viewer? *Irony, Contortion and Embellishment* examines how Paul McCarthy, Marc Quinn and Jeff Koons employ satire and paradox in their response to clichéd sexual iconography.

Contemporary art has responded to the force-feeding of commercial iconography and the corporate takeover of popular culture for profit. Baudrillard declares, “All of production, and truth itself, are directed towards disclosure, the unbearable ‘truth’ of sex being but the most recent consequence.”⁴⁷ Artists employ humor and irony as a methodology of critiquing the kitsch, sensationalist and excessive nature of the media.



Jeff Koons, *Woman in Tub*, 1988, porcelain. 60.3 x 91.4 x 68.6 cm.

⁴⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 181.

Rather than assert a didactic critique of media transmissions, Jeff Koons employs satire and paradox as a reaction to stereotypical sexual iconography. Koons combines a keen sense of humor and kitsch aesthetic in his work. He sculpturally reinvents commonplace, trivialized imagery from popular culture in his studio practice. Koons procures elite craftspeople and premium materials to realize his work, thereby elevating and fetishizing clichéd imagery.

Koons's sculpture, *Woman in Tub* is a stylistic fusion of *Rococo* and *Pop*—the work aesthetically resembles a refined reproduction of cheap ceramic collectables. Koons explains the piece as a satire on corny, adult joke paraphernalia, inspired by a childhood memory of an ashtray belonging to his grandfather.⁴⁸ In *Woman in Tub*, we are presented with an apparently startled bathing woman. Mouth agape, she cups her breasts as she peers downwards at a snorkel emerging from between her legs. A comical sexual encounter is insinuated in the scene.

In dramatic contrast to the banal subject matter, the sculpture is exquisitely fabricated out of fine porcelain. Koons incites reevaluation of established signifiers of taste within contemporary culture in creating such a drastic incongruence between form and content. Furthermore, *Woman in Tub*'s placement within the gallery context instigates questioning of the definition of high and low culture

Gary Watson articulates Koons's process in stating, "the ironic language of kitsch provides a means by which the tradition of beauty may be invoked in a way that remains ambiguous, simultaneously citing its visual power and negating its potential for embarrassment by flirting with its subversion, countering good taste with bad."⁴⁹ The skillful juxtaposition of the banal and the seductive by Koons creates a dynamic sense of wit and paradox: he makes you "rethink" clichés.

⁴⁸ Nina Metz, "Jeff Koons's Manhattan home is mixture of beautiful and mundane," *The Chicago Tribune* (2008). http://www.chicagotribune.com/classified/realestate/chi-0525snoop_koonsmay25,0,337259.story.

⁴⁹ Gray Watson, *Art & Sex* (London: I.B Taurus & Co. Ltd, 2008). P. 119.

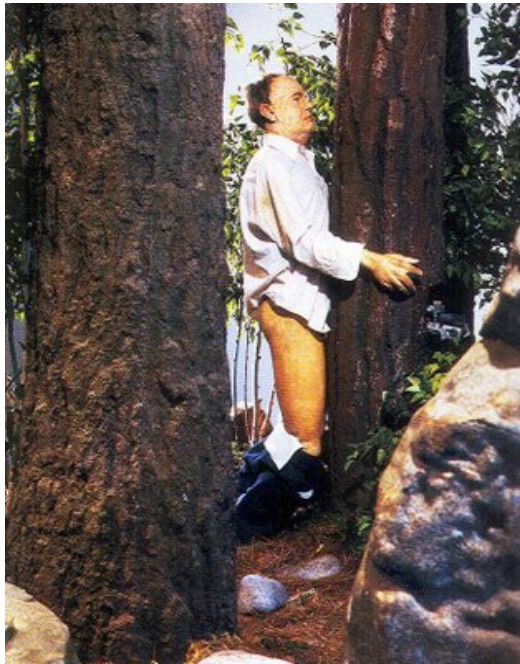
Baudrillard claims that “the attraction of the void lies at the basis of seduction: not the accumulation of signs, nor the messages of desire, but an esoteric complicity with the absorption of signs.”⁵⁰ *Woman in Tub* alludes to stereotypical celluloid beauty in the anonymous subject. With full breasts and a toned physique, the anatomy of the subject mimics the stereotypical lingerie or pornographic model. Likewise, the cropping of the *Woman in Tub*'s head implies a lack of identity, suggesting that the artist is depicting—and possibly commenting on—the disregard for individuality in media exemplars. Thus, Koons conveys a generic “sexy” female body image propagated by the media.

Koons intentionally creates faux pas both in the stylistic rendering of the sculpture and the depicted visual narrative. Koons provides the audience an awkward glimpse of the sort of precarious sexual encounter culturally deemed private. *Woman in Tub* conjures a sense of discomfort in the viewer akin to witnessing a clandestine scene, such as a child secretly looking at their father's private magazine collection. However, the anonymity and satirical improbability of the work renders *Woman in Tub* devoid of shock value.

In addition to the implied pornographic content, a sense of inappropriateness also lies in Koons's veneration of such a blatantly farcical sexual scenario. *Woman in Tub* repositions such trivialized sexual iconography into the gallery context, and thereby fetishizes the cliché. Therefore, Koons utilizes the Pop device of recontextualization to encourage audience contemplation of the trivialization of intimacy by the entertainment industry. Moreover, Koons's humorous choice of imagery questions elitist cultural views on portrayals of sexuality in popular culture.

⁵⁰ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. PP. 77-78.

Southern California artist Paul McCarthy uses irony to reinterpret televised sexual stereotypes in his multimedia work. McCarthy creates work with a darker perspective on the Pop aesthetic and the depiction of masculinity in popular culture. As a Los Angeles-based artist, McCarthy has a vantage point for observing the overwhelming influence of the entertainment industry's artificiality and excess on the public consciousness. McCarthy undermines and amplifies the visual language of the commercial media: cartoonish imagery, emulating the visual style of *Walt Disney*, the emblem and perpetuator of über-conservative, puritanical, family entertainment.



Paul McCarthy, *The Garden (detail)*, 1991-2, mixed media. 853 x 200 x 671 cm.

In the 1990s, McCarthy began producing figurative sculptural works in which the alter-egos of Hollywood clichés participate in incriminating activities. McCarthy depicts male media heroes of his childhood engaging in distasteful acts of exhibitionism. McCarthy's 1991-1992 kinetic installation, *The Garden*, consists of two life-sized, motorized figures in a replicated, amusement-park setting. The pastoral scene is made from *Astroturf*, fake foliage and tree trunks acquired from the set of the iconic western TV series, *Bonanza*. U.S. critic Jennie Klein wrote

the critical essay *Paul McCarthy: Rites of Masculinity* as a critique of *The Garden*. Klein asserts, “One almost expects the pirates of the Caribbean or the children from *It’s a Small World* to emerge from behind the trees, overjoyed at the prospect of greeting another paying visitor.”⁵¹ Through reinforcement of television stereotypes in series like *Leave it to Beaver* and *The Brady Bunch*, the audience is conditioned to assume that a man and his son enjoying the wilderness equivocates respectable male bonding rituals such as fishing, hiking, hunting or camping. However, though the two white male figures in *The Garden* signify a typical suburban youth and his father, these guys are putting a new and disturbing spin on becoming at one with nature. McCarthy’s figures engage in what could be considered acts against nature.

Upon close inspection, an absurdly bizarre scene unfolds in *The Garden*. Both men are undressed from the waist down, mechanically fornicating with the fake flora. The mature male mates with a tree trunk as the adolescent thrusts the forest floor. A humorous and crucial aspect of the piece is the remarkable seriousness of the motorized perpetrators’ facial expressions—a palpable retort to the mechanical repetitiveness of hardcore pornography.

Of the masculine role in pornographic media, Baudrillard states, “the male is no longer interesting because too determined, too marked - the phallus as canonical signifier.”⁵² The seriousness of the figures’ gaze suggests both sincerity and dark psychological implications in McCarthy’s work. In amplifying the unsavory consequences of unfulfilled male reproductive instincts, *The Garden* critiques stereotypical masculinity and furthermore reflects the absurdly smoothed-over notion of carefree consumerist suburbia perpetuated by Hollywood.

Dan Cameron, senior curator of the New Museum in New York, perceives McCarthy’s reinterpretations of male stereotypes as “restaged childhood myths within built environments to explore the vast gap between the saccharine

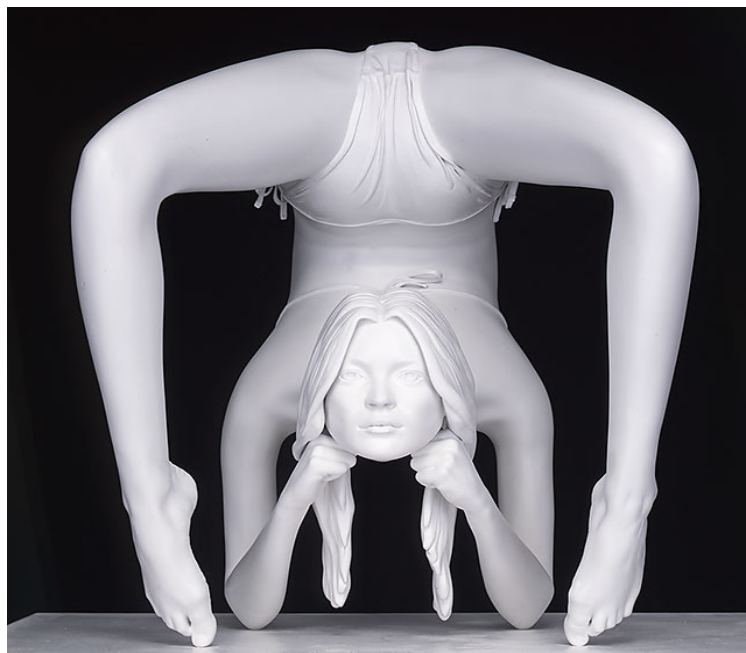
⁵¹ Jennie Klein, "Paul McCarthy: Rites of Masculinity," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23, no. 2 (May, 2001). P. 10.

⁵² Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 27.

Disneyfied view of the world promoted by a consumerist society, and the inner turmoil that is an unfortunate reality for a great many people.”⁵³ Thus, Cameron views the significance of McCarthy’s interpretation of masculine archetypes as a profound social commentary. Furthermore Cameron’s comment confirms the drastic difference between idealized entertainment industry role models and the unpleasant actualities inherent to human nature strategically omitted from media depictions.

⁵³ Joannides, "As You Like It/The Latest on Sex."

British artist Marc Quinn takes a different approach to McCarthy in his paradoxical reconfiguration of sexual paradigms from the media. Quinn uses supermodel Kate Moss as a subject in his work. Like *Disney*, Kate Moss is a household ('a' removed) media fixture identifiable through her image and name. Moss's superficial, fabricated identity is again consistent with Baudrillard's hypothesis that the reality purveyed by the global media is constructed of "simulative models."⁵⁴ Moss's image has been replicated in thousands of advertisements over the years.



Marc Quinn, *Sphinx (Fortuna)*, painted bronze, 2006. 75.4 x 64 x 67cm.

Some of the illustrious ads in which Moss is featured are highly suggestive photographs involving nudity. These include her 1992 *Calvin Klein* underwear pictorial with Mark Wahlberg and more recent campaigns for *Longchamp* and David *Yurman*. Quinn's 2007 New York exhibition *Sphinx* at Mary Boone gallery is a direct reaction to the reality reflected in Moss's image. The sublimely smooth, classically styled sculptures depict the supermodel in a variety of highly

⁵⁴ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 11.

suggestive yoga poses. In one piece, both of the model's legs are behind her head, while in another, she has her feet in front of her head with her legs open and crotch in the air. If a viewer was not familiar with yoga, one could easily confuse these contorted postures with extreme sex positions.

In *Sphinx*, the audience is presented with an identity constructed from an image—an image synonymous with desirability, fashion and sex appeal. In his artist's statement, Quinn articulates: "in a world without Gods and Goddesses, celebrity has replaced divinity. Do we create images or do images form us? What is interesting to me about Kate Moss is that she is someone whose image has completely separated from her real self and this image has a life of its own. Our problem is: How do we measure ourselves against the impossible infinite virtual world of perfect images?"⁵⁵ Quinn's works simultaneously portray elements of both of sex and celebrity. Quinn refers to Moss as a "knotted Venus of our age,"⁵⁶ and defines the revered state of celebrity as the "archetypal image" of sexuality in mass culture.

Quinn does not address the blatant sexual connotations of Moss's contorted postures. Perhaps the suggestive nature of the work is insignificant in contrast to other concerns Quinn was targeting. Possibly Quinn eschews the self-evident salability of sex in a world where, according to Baudrillard, "all of production, and truth itself, are directed towards disclosure."⁵⁷ Has it become redundant to expound upon the blatant sexual connotations of a woman's pelvis presented like a tabletop or her legs spread open and conveniently tucked behind her shoulders in relationship to the explicitness of the mediated image?

⁵⁵ Marc Quinn, "Artist's Exhibition Statement," in *Sphinx*, ed. Mary Boone Gallery (New York, 2007).

⁵⁶ Charlotte Higgins, "Meet Kate Moss-Contorted," *The Guardian* (April 12, 2006), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2006/apr/12/2>.

⁵⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 181.



Marc Quinn, *The Ecstatic Autogenesis of Pamela*, 2010, lacquered bronze.
163 x 103 x 78 cm.

In more recent works, Quinn presents us with the concept of image as a manifestation of a celebrity's sexuality. On his website, Quinn's biography states, "Quinn's sculpture, paintings and drawings often deal with the distanced relationship we have with our bodies, highlighting how the conflict between the 'natural' and 'cultural' has a grip on the contemporary psyche."⁵⁸ Quinn selects subjects who attribute their fame entirely to the media images they create through voluntary physical alterations and enhancements.

⁵⁸ <http://www.marcquinn.com/biography/>



Marc Quinn, *Chelsea Charms*, 2010, marble. 169.5 x 59 x 52 cm.

In 2010, Quinn exhibited life-sized sculptural works of actress Pamela Anderson. Anderson is recognized for flaunting her alleged surgically enhanced physique on the U.S. television series, *Baywatch*.⁵⁹ In the exhibition, Quinn contrasted prime-time sex symbol Anderson's celebrated figure with sculptures of another woman known for her fabricated physique: pornographic model Chelsea Charms. Charms's notoriety is based on her claims to have the most substantial mammaries in the adult industry. Her election to undergo repeated breast implant surgery included dangerous, controversial polypropylene string implants that cause the body to produce fluid in the breasts, making them continue to grow over time.⁶⁰ The model's chest is so ample that her five foot-three inch frame appears dwarfed by her immense bosom.

Anderson and Charms demonstrate varying degrees of artificially enhanced, superficial femininity. This superficiality of signs and symbols is

⁵⁹ Much evidence of Pamela Anderson's breast augmentation is visible online. Multiple photographic documentations exist. One example is: <http://www.antesydespues.com.ar/en/20-famosas-que-se-operaron-los-senos/#&panel1-9>.

⁶⁰ Taken from Chelsea Charms' official website FAQs. <http://www.chelseacharms.com/newsfaq.html>.

expressed by Baudrillard as “no other femininity than that of appearances.”⁶¹ Quinn chose to depict Charms in a classical Greco-Roman style, archiving and documenting the cultural significance of her physical alterations for posterity. *Chelsea Charms (lifesize)* recalls the *Venus de Milo*, where the model is sculpted in marble and is modestly draped from the waist down. Contrastingly, the *Ecstatic Autogenesis of Pamela*, is clad in contemporary lingerie and cast in lacquered bronze. In manipulating Anderson’s image, Quinn chose to depict the actress as a pair of identical twins, thereby alluding to the clichéd male fantasy of a sexual encounter with a pair of twin sisters. Hence, Quinn’s acknowledgement of the artifice of contemporary mediated constructs is referenced in the work.

In the same exhibition at *White Cube* in 2010, Quinn exhibited a sculpture that reinvents a biblically canonized couple: Adam and Eve.⁶² Stylistically influenced by the Italian Renaissance, Quinn’s 2009 bronze, *Buck and Allanah* depicts what initially appears to be a conventional nude couple emulating renaissance depictions of the *Garden of Eden*. However, “Adam” is no standard “son of God:” he has a vagina and is covered in tattoos. Likewise, male genitalia dangle from “Eve’s” groin.

Using transgendered porno actors as models, Quinn challenges preconceived, media-influenced perceptions of beauty, gender and cultural identity. Tristan Taormino of the *Village Voice* testifies, “The ‘she’ of ‘her penis’ is well-known adult starlet and New York social fixture Allanah Starr, while the ‘he’ of ‘his vagina’ is Buck Angel, the self-proclaimed ‘dude with a pussy’ and ‘world’s only’ FTM porn star.”⁶³ In *Seduction*, Baudrillard proposes, “in the feminine the very distinction between authenticity and artifice is without foundation.”⁶⁴ Paradoxically, *Buck and Allanah* demonstrates the validity of Baudrillard’s postulation on the irrelevance of authenticity in the feminine. Paradoxically however, *Buck and Allanah* also conveys an artificial sexuality of appearances in both sexes.

⁶¹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 11.

⁶² Ben Luke, "Marc Quinn's Freak Show," *Evening Standard*, no. 06, May 2010. <http://www.standard.co.uk/arts/marc-quinns-freak-show-7419735.html>.

⁶³ Tristan Taormino, "Havin' Buck for Breakfast," *The Village Voice*, September 9 2005.

⁶⁴ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 11.



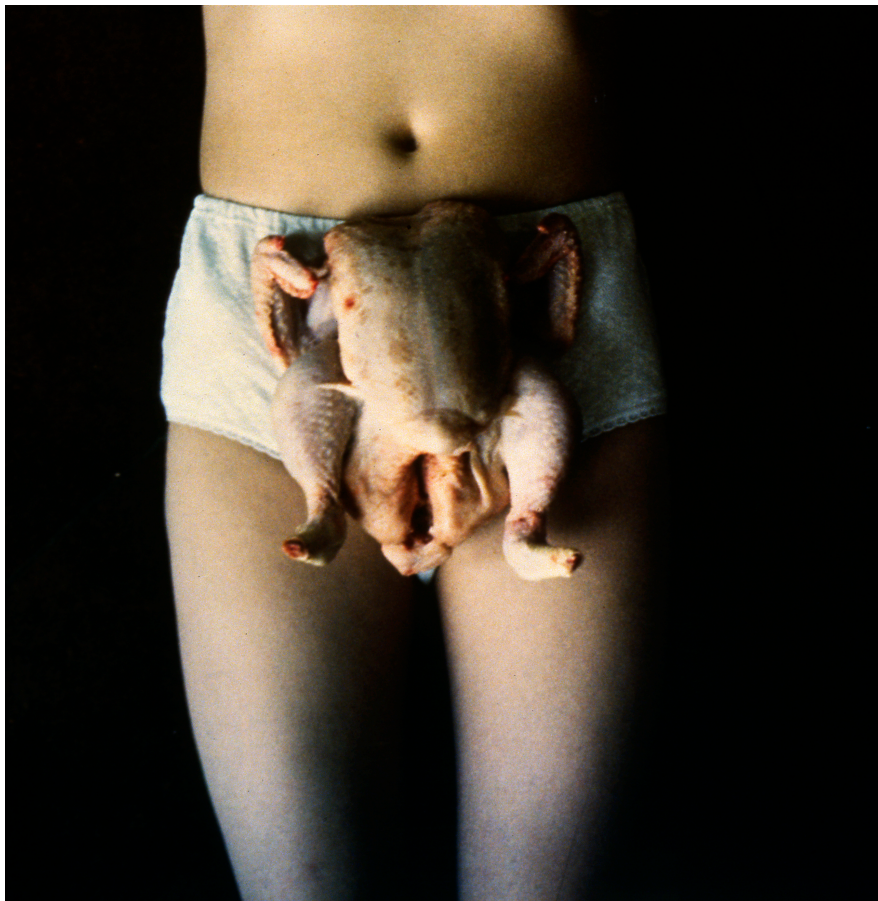
Marc Quinn, *Buck & Allannah (lifesize)*, 2009, lacquered bronze. 167 x 105 x 45 cm.

With her full lips, curvy figure and long, wavy hair, Starr exemplifies a media fabrication of a femme fatale, while Angel's muscular, tattooed body, shaved head and chiseled facial features typify what we have been conditioned to identify in an alpha male. Quinn has successfully subverted these common clichés by presenting us with a couple that quintessentially fits the mold of stereotypical gender representation with opposing reproductive organs—demonstrating that also in the masculine, the “distinction between authenticity and artifice is without foundation.”⁶⁵ Therefore, Quinn's work encourages the viewer to ponder the lack of legitimacy in both the masculine and feminine image.

⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 11.

iii. Pioneering a Raw Aesthetic

Taking cues from contemporaries like Koons and McCarthy, the Young British Artists tested the boundaries of taste in their exploration of humor and philistine adult content. How did these artists defy the institutional conventions to maintain the gritty integrity of their subject matter in their aesthetic? Four members of the Young British Artists' reaction to both the media's unabashed proliferation of sexual typecasting and the pretensions of the art world are examined in *Pioneering a Raw Aesthetic*.



Sarah Lucas, *Chicken Knickers*, 1997, R-type print. 42.5 x 42.5 cm.

Sarah Lucas is a multimedia artist who produces visual narratives in the form of photography, sculpture and video. She documents herself performing acts which reinterpret sexual clichés for the camera. Combining humor and a tough, anti-establishment visual sensibility, Lucas satirically uses commonplace substitutions of food and mundane objects for human sex organs in her art practice. Her interactions with the edibles replace typical scenarios and gender roles from both pornography and the mainstream media, thereby challenging sexual stereotypes. The metaphors are at times obvious, overused evocations of juvenile puns, such as bananas or sausages replacing phalluses and melons or fried eggs replacing female breasts. Lucas's androgynous appearance contrasts stereotypical feminine images in the media.

In the 1997 photographic work, *Chicken Knickers*, stretched chicken meat is displayed spread open across Lucas's groin, replacing her vagina. Lucas employs the devices of wit and irony to ease the confrontational nature of having a dead bird's orifice on a woman's pelvis. The image is cheekily evocative of pornography's customary positioning of models with their legs open and labia spread apart, expectantly prepared for penetration.

In reviewing *Chicken Knickers*, British art critic Elizabeth Manchester was not amused. Manchester proclaimed, "The juxtaposition of a raw plucked bird likely to be stuffed and put in the oven with a body which appears immature, if not sexually uncertain, is disturbing. This is emphasized by the formal qualities of the image: the lower half of the body has been cut off from its upper part (including most importantly face and head)."⁶⁶ The photograph confronts the viewing audience with a gritty contrast to stereotypical transmissions of sexuality. Baudrillard declares, "the total triumph in pornography of the obscene body, to the point where the face is effaced."⁶⁷ The cropping of the figure and omission of identity of the subject indicates a clear reference to pornography's compositional manipulation of images.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Manchester, "SARAH LUCAS," *Food in the Arts* (August 2000), <http://www.londonfoodfilmfiesta.co.uk/Artmai~1/Sarah%20Lucas.htm>.

⁶⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 33.

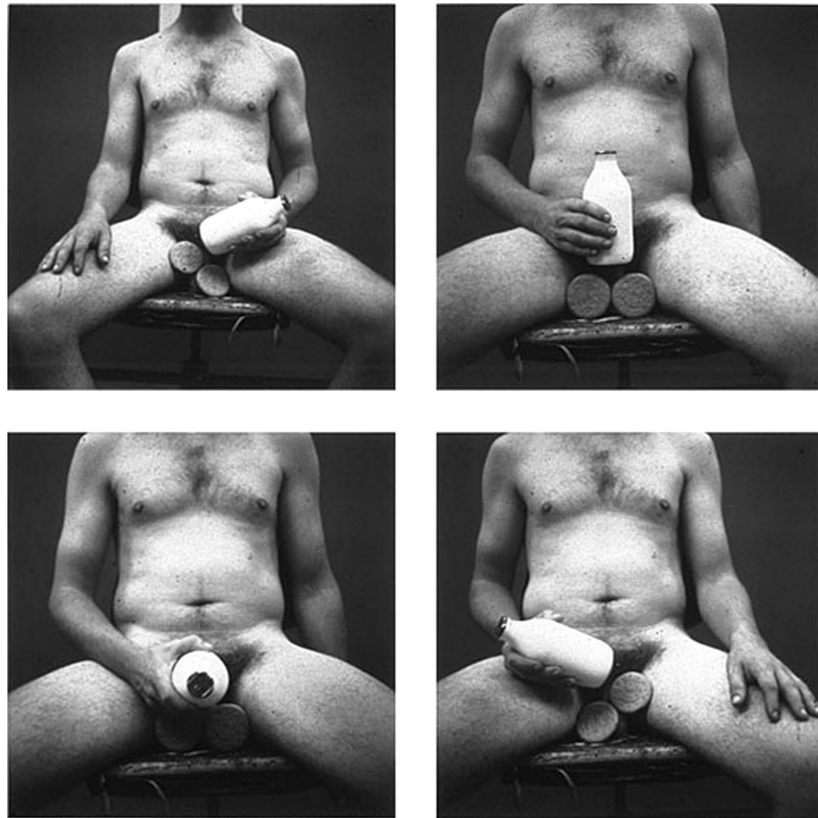
Manchester's analogy also pertains to one of Lucas's earlier works. In her 1990 video, *Sausage Film*, Lucas precariously peeled away the skin of a sausage and then a banana with cutlery then methodically consumed the phallic foodstuffs. Lucas hereby confronts the implicit associations frequently made between the consumption of elongated edibles and their implications of fellatio. Rather than perform the clichéd mannerisms of licking, sucking and eventually swallowing the penile surrogates, Lucas robotically consumes the items staring deadpan into the camera. Therefore, Lucas does not play up the expected role of simulated oral gratification. U.K. critic A.C. Grayling of *Tate Etc* magazine reviewed *Sausage Film* and explains, "the view she is examining is not so much an adult male sexist objectification of women, as a nervous male adolescent smuttiness. She makes us see a portrait of female sexuality drawn by the ignorance and desire of testosterone-plagued teenage boys, protecting themselves against the alarming, fascinating, disgusting, hungered-for female sex by attacking and denigrating it, calling it dirty names."⁶⁸

Lucas not only exposes familiar stereotypes and parallels of femininity, she also toys with generalizations and innuendos associated with manhood. Her 1995 photographic series *Get off your Horse and Drink your Milk* provides an example of this objective. Baudrillard declared, "Sexuality has a strong, discriminative structure centered on the phallus."⁶⁹ Hence, Lucas parodies male roles of dominant sexuality, termed by Baudrillard as "the phallus as canonical signifier."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ A. C. Grayling, "An Uncooked Perspective on the Nature of Sex," *Tate Etc*. Autumn 2005, no. 5 (2005). <http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue5/encounters5.html>.

⁶⁹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* P. 27.



Sarah Lucas, *Get off your Horse and Drink your Milk*, 1995, Cibachrome prints.
122 x 122 cm each.

In the four photos, an anonymous nude male figure holds a full milk bottle between his legs—each image positioning the bottle in a different way, though never downwards to suggest flaccidity. In every composition, the male genitals remain obscured by the strategically placed container and a pair of circular biscuits; in one image, the prosthetic substitute is aimed straight ahead, as if he intends to spray the viewer with the contents of the bottle. *Get off your Horse and Drink your Milk* mocks the axiom that men always have their hands in their pants. Additionally, Lucas confronts another media truism, the inference that male identity revolves around the size and potency of their penises.

Sam Taylor-Wood is another British contemporary of Lucas who confronts sexual stereotypes in the media. Taylor-Wood began her career as a brazen conceptual artist known for scorning sexual conventions. In her cheekily titled photograph, *Slut* (1993), the artist unabashedly displays a neck covered with hickeys. Taylor-Wood's facial expression conveys that she is unashamed of her impious markings, informing the viewer of her election to ignore the passé feminine stereotype conveying an image of chastity or fidelity. Furthermore, she is not concerned about concealing her love bites in an attempt to uphold social standing.



Sam Taylor-Wood, *Slut*, 1993, C-print. 48 x 33.3cm.

Photographed the same year, *Fuck Suck Spank Wank* again features Taylor-Wood, pants pulled down to her ankles sporting a T-shirt bearing the piece's title in bold text. Dutch art critic Joost de Bloois claims, "The image and the subject it captures remain suspended between a kind of blokeish assertiveness and matching crude humour, and the unintended exposure of vulnerability (as that

of Botticelli's rising Venus).”⁷¹ Joost de Bloois defines Taylor-Wood’s work as an autobiographical visual narrative that embodies a spirit of rebellion against formulaic paradigms of femininity.



Sam Taylor-Wood, *Fuck, Suck, Spank, Wank*, 1993, C-type print. 145 x 106 cm.

Taylor-Wood’s photos mirror the attitude and media developments of the era in which they were produced. The 1990s were a time when rebellious youth culture made huge waves in rebuking the conventions of mainstream society. Performance artists like Karen Finley and musicians like Courtney Love aggressively asserted their sexuality and were highly visible in the press. It was common for girls of that decade to embody a hard-hitting punk attitude, flaunt their flawed bodies and unapologetically take the same sexual liberties men enjoyed. Reflecting that cultural phenomenon, Taylor-Wood is reversing the long-standing, predictable norm of male photographers objectifying young women in both art and advertising by taking control of—and manipulating—her own sexual image. In *Slut*, Taylor-Wood manipulates what Baudrillard calls “the sign of a

⁷¹ Joost de Bloois, "On Autohagiography: Sam Taylor-Wood's Self Portrait as a Tree," *Image & Narrative*, no. 22 (2008).
<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/autofiction2/debloois.html>.

monster called desire.”⁷²In the self-empowering act of brazenly displaying her flesh, Taylor-Wood reverses the camera’s conventional objectification of nudity, or the media’s “spectacularity of sex,”⁷³ and applies it for self-promotion.



Sam Taylor-Wood, *Laurence Fishburne*, 2002, C-print. 135.6 x 162.8 cm.

Taylor-Wood’s later *Crying Men* series explores clichéd concepts of masculinity in the media. The artist photographed twenty-seven Hollywood actors in a state of mourning. Taylor-Wood situated the actors, many of whom are recognized for their roles as action heroes and brutes, in settings reminiscent of lauded European masters’ paintings from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries. The recontextualization of these actors’ celluloid images into traditional, iconic compositions indicates the artist’s intention of addressing cultural stereotypes.

⁷² Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 33.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Formally, the photographs echo historic religious paintings of weeping saints. Taylor-Wood adroitly uses her models' celebrity status to invite inquiry into their display of emotion. Simon Power of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney affirms that contradicting male stoicism, "the *Crying Men* series inverts the traditional depiction of male portraiture in our culture. Instead of the strong, heroic and powerful depictions of men in art history, we are presented with men who appear emotional, collapsed and vulnerable."⁷⁴ By exploiting models that personify the tough, virile image, the audience is encouraged to question why a man's tears signify weakness in society.



Sam Taylor-Wood, *David*, 2004, video Installation.

Taylor-Wood overturns the age-old cliché of the eroticised female muse and male artist as voyeur in *David*. The influence of Warhol's lengthy 1963 endurance film, *Sleep*, cannot be ignored: the video portrays an unedited 67 minute shot of slumbering sports star and sex-symbol David Beckham.⁷⁵ However, as opposed to Warhol's tedious theatre screening, *David* is mercifully hung in a gallery to be enjoyed at the viewer's leisure.

⁷⁴ Simon Power, "Sam Taylor-Wood," ed. Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney Ltd., 2006).

⁷⁵ Richard Dorment, "Beckham, the sleeping beauty," (2004).

Taylor-Wood documents a personality portrayed countless times in the media for his athletic bravado in an undoubtedly vulnerable and passive state. Furthermore, Richard Dormant of the Telegraph articulates that Taylor-Wood is capitalizing on the fact that Beckham “is one of the most beautiful men in the world. Taylor-Wood ignores the football star and focuses on the hunk, seeing him through the eyes not of a sports fan but of a woman.”⁷⁶ Taylor-Wood is objectifying a model carefully chosen for his legendary good looks and desirability, in a way that men are not commonly represented, reversing the long-held convention of the “male gaze” in art and the mass media.

Baudrillard proposes that the signs of the masculine and feminine—rather than the physicality of gender—facilitate the act of seduction. He states, “Seduction supposes a ritual order, sex and desire a natural order. It is these two fundamental forms that confront each other in the male and female, and not some biological difference or some naive rivalry of power.”⁷⁷ Hence, according to Baudrillard’s inferences, Taylor-Wood is adopting the masculine role in *David*, while her subject is assuming the feminine. Viewing *David* incites inquiry into conventional gender-specific sexual roles.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 21.

The fraternal collaborative duo Jake and Dinos Chapman rebuke marketing tactics seen in the advertising and entertainment industries by visually distorting and perverting sexual clichés. Also members of the Young British Artist movement, Jake and Dinos Chapman undermine commonplace sexual innuendos from media propaganda by mockingly reconfiguring those stereotypes into physical deformities. In some sculptures, the facial features of sculptural figures have been mutated into genitals. In retort to idealized transmissions of sexuality, the team challenges consumer culture's concurrent fixation on youth and condemnation of pedophilia.



Jake and Dino Chapman, *Cunt Chops* (part of *Tragic Anatomies*), 1996, fiberglass, resin, paint. Dimensions variable.

Jake and Dinos Chapman's work confronts the audience with imagery deemed by society as inappropriate. The figures in their 1996 *Tragic Anatomies* installation resemble products of a genetic experiment gone awry who are modeling for an extreme fetish pornography shoot. Their prepubescent mutants engage in orgies and other sexual acts. Some characters have vaginal or anal orifices in place of mouths; in one sculpture a youth literally has its head up its ass—and out the other side.

Director of the Tate Liverpool, Christoph Grunenberg sees ('the' deleted) their anti-establishment approach as a "direct attack on an insipid and mediocre culture through an apparent suspension of critical discourse and the rule of excess, frenzy and shock."⁷⁸ Christopher Turner, of *Tate, Etc.* magazine, sees their work from a more Marxist perspective. Turner emphasizes Jake and Dinos Chapman's strategy "to wake us from the dream state of a commodity culture by, as Jake puts it, 'shocking the viewer from the edifice of comfort.'"⁷⁹ Both perspectives are valid, however neither acknowledges the team's overt confrontation of the public's inundation of idealized sexual stereotypes by the media. Yet the underlying cultural commentary in the subversion of media stereotypes is a significant conceptual component of the duo's work.

The 1995 film *Bring Me the Head of...* provides an example of a reinterpretation of one of the most standardized clichés of the global entertainment industry: the pornographic movie. Two professional adult film actresses perform in the film, which carefully emulates the porno aesthetic. Jake and Dinos Chapman produced a sculpture of a severed male head with a phallic nose as a film prop. The actresses utilize the sculpture to perform sexual acts of pleasuring themselves on camera.

⁷⁸ Christoph and Barson Grunenberg, Tanya, ed. Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Bad Art for Bad People* (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2006). P. 27.

⁷⁹ Ibid. P. 42. (See Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1984, p. 80).

Bring Me the Head of... counters what Baudrillard describes as “the masses' desire for complicity”⁸⁰ by challenging what is possibly the media’s most hackneyed genre—pornography. The film defies media convention in two ways. The dynamic between the characters contradicts expected stereotypes of female objectification by men in pornography. Furthermore, the cultural taboo of implied necrophilia is presented in stereotypical glossy visuals echoing porn.



Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Bring Me the Head of...*, 1995, film still.

Frieze magazine critic James Roberts articulates the production of *Bring Me the Head of...* in a review of the film. Roberts describes the scene as “erotic, in the sense that any porn film is erotic, and it carries the attributes that mark it out as belonging to the genre. It immediately proclaims that it’s a classy production, think Gucci loafers, think fat gold signet ring, think Paco Rabanne...”⁸¹ Hence, Jake and Dinos Chapman intelligently employ shock value, daring the audience to ‘rethink’ the preconceived notions of beauty, youth and sexuality disseminated by the commercial media.

⁸⁰ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 45.

⁸¹ James Roberts, "Jake and Dinos Chapman," *Frieze.com* (16 October 2010). http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/jake_and_dinos_chapman1/.



Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Death II*, 2004, painted bronze. 73 x 218 x 95 cm.

In Jake and Dinos Chapman's 2004 sculpture, *Death II*, a pair of inflatable sex dolls are arranged to simulate simultaneous cunnilingus and fellatio. Although the work appears to consist of manufactured plastic inflatables, it is ironically crafted out of bronze and then meticulously painted, its materiality echoing classical sculpture. The fabrication *Death II* recalls the paradoxical juxtaposition of fine craftsmanship and banal imagery Jeff Koons employs. Furthermore, the production method of the work defies mass culture's conditioning to the artifice of the cheap, manufactured image.

Baudrillard asserts, "The indistinction of face and body in a total culture of appearances - the distinction between face and body in a culture of meaning (the body here becomes monstrously visible, it becomes the sign of a monster called desire) - then the total triumph in pornography of the obscene body, to the point where the face is effaced."⁸² Jake and Dinos Chapman's selection of anonymous dolls to engage in the sexual act serves as an allusion to the manner in

⁸² Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 33.

which the pornography industry obscures the identity of its celluloid participants to create anonymous images for masturbatory aid. Consequently, the use of blow-up dolls in *Death II* reads as a both a farcical nod to pornography devices and a critique of sexual paradigms in celluloid media culture.

iv. Hentai and Love Hotels

Contrasting the confrontationally graphic imagery of Western pornography, sexually explicit material in Japanese society is packaged in tidy restraint. In Japan, the media shrouds adult content by presenting it in an ultramodern yet inoffensive format. The Tokyo Pop movement emerged as a response to Japanese consumer culture in the late twentieth century.⁸³ Two Tokyo Pop artists, Takashi Murakami and Mariko Mori challenge sexual stereotyping in the media in *Hentai and Love Hotels*. How do these artists reinvent the Japanese media's innocent and futuristic aesthetic in their critique of popular culture?

The focus of Takashi Murakami's studio practice is sculpture and painting. His work is visible both in commercial products marketed for mass culture and the art world, rendering him a quintessential Pop artist in the Warhol lineage.⁸⁴ In his work, Murakami exposes the physical stereotypes portrayed in x-rated animated entertainment, a popular genre of entertainment known as *Hentai* in Japan. Murakami creates smooth, doll-like sculptural figures inspired by *Hentai* characters.

According to U.K. arts academic and writer, Gary Watson, Murakami investigates how "in recent times, globalization has taken sexual experience beyond the realm of the city to other man-made environments, real and visual."⁸⁵ Murakami's life-sized sculptural pieces arouse contemplation of the formulaic tactics of the media complex by taking the already exaggerated physical features of animated manga figures to extreme proportions. His 1997 work, *Hiropon*,

⁸³According to Japanese art critic and co-author of *Takashi Murakami: The Meaning of the Nonsense of the Meaning*, Midori Matsui, "In the 1990s, the Japanese were really looking at their own culture, trying to make meaning out of that. So artists started to be critical of Japanese pop culture and capitalist culture." Kalia Brooks and Jessica Martin, "Kalia Brooks and Jessica Martin in conversation with Midori Matsui," *Curating Now* 05, 2005.

⁸⁴ In *Takashi Murakami: Company Man*, Scott Rothkopf elucidates Murakami's position in the Pop art lineage, comparing Murakami to both Warhol and Koons, amongst others. Rothkopf furthermore provides evidence of Murakami's commercial ventures. Scott Rothkopf, "Takashi Murakami: Company Man," in *@Murakami*, ed. Paul Schimmel (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2007).

⁸⁵ Watson, *Art & Sex*. P. 52.

amplifies the cute, sexy characteristics typical of an animé heroine, her overwhelmingly large breasts spill out of her tiny bikini top. Yet this cartoon nymphet rebukes media conventions; the viewer is confronted with a stream of milk spurting from her distended nipples.



Takashi Murakami, *Hiropon* (left), 1997, painted fiberglass. 108 x 104 x 122 cm.
My Lonesome Cowboy (right), 1998, resin, fiberglass, steel and acrylic paint.
229 x 144 x 103 cm.

In Japan, “hiropon” is street slang for methamphetamine, which was given to soldiers as a performance enhancing drug during the Second World War. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the pharmaceutical stimulant flooded the civilian market following the war, causing an epidemic of addiction amongst the general population.⁸⁶ *Hiropon* is a metaphorical title, implying that the consumer’s unhealthy consumption of the addictive mediated image represents an addiction analogous to drug abuse. Baudrillard envisions a

⁸⁶ M. Tamura, "Japan: stimulant epidemics past and present," (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 1989). PP. 83-93.

“ludic realm where one encounters a cold seduction- the ‘narcissistic’ spell of electronic and information systems, the cold attraction of the terminals and mediums that we have become, surrounded as we are by consoles, isolated and seduced by their manipulation.”⁸⁷ *Hiropon* alludes to the realm Baudrillard describes.

Murakami further utilizes disquieting animé imagery in his 1998 sculpture, *My Lonesome Cowboy*. The work’s title is inspired by Andy Warhol’s gay slanted 1968 film, *Lonesome Cowboys*.⁸⁸ Amada Cruz is a U.S. curator who co-curated the exhibition *Takashi Murakami: The Meaning of the Nonsense of Meaning*. Cruz observes: “His work so perfectly mimics consumer obsessions that it embodies all the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in those tropes.”⁸⁹ *My Lonesome Cowboy* confronts the viewer with an explicit representation of male sexuality while maintaining a clichéd animé aesthetic.

Simultaneously polished, captivating and grotesque, the sculpture depicts a nude adolescent conveying a maniacal look in his multi-colored eyes. Although the subject’s facial features, physique and hairstyle epitomize a customary animé protagonist, the implied state of psychosis and intoxication revealed in his gaze rebuke Japanese social standards. Likewise, Murakami’s graphic illustration of male genitals breaks a cultural taboo. Japanese obscenity laws forbid the illustration of sex organs, even in animated *hentai*.⁹⁰

My Lonesome Cowboy is depicted masturbating, the youth defiantly brandishing his penis as it launches a profusion of semen in the shape of a lasso. The autoerotic act ironically points to obsessive, single male animé enthusiasts—

⁸⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, P. 162.

⁸⁸ Jerry Saltz, "Imitation Warhol," artnet.com (1999), <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/saltz/saltz8-26-99.asp>.

⁸⁹ Amanda Cruz, Midori Matsui, and Dana Friis-Hansen, *Takashi Murakami: The Meaning of the Nonsense of the Meaning*, ed. Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies Museum (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999). P. 14.

⁹⁰ In his paper on Japanese obscenity laws, University of Johnstown academic, James R. Alexander observes, “most displays of the genital area or pubic hair of either sex in film were considered automatic violations of decorum and subject to local indictment.” Alexander sees censorship as a government means of controlling the populace through the suppression of individuality. James R. Alexander, "Obscenity, Pornography, and the Law in Japan: Reconsidering Oshima’s In the Realm of the Senses," *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal* 4, winter 2003. P. 156.

known as *otaku*. The *otaku* exist immersed in the commercial media genre of animé, or “the ludic realm”⁹¹ described by Baudrillard. In the sculpture, Murakami elicits a commentary on the mass consumption of sexual clichés and on the social relevance of the *otaku* subculture’s veneration of media archetypes.

My Lonesome Cowboy’s graphic phallic display provokes the audience to “rethink” the confrontational nature of male nudity. In the juxtaposition of socially acceptable packaging of explicit content, Murakami incites inquiry into distorted media stereotypes. The female form in *Hiropon* lacks genitals, yet *My Lonesome Cowboy* includes shockingly huge, ejaculating erection in full detail.

Both works allude to Japanese censorship laws. Whereas *Hiropon*’s unmistakable lack of a vagina is a nod to conformity, *My Lonesome Cowboy* dares to challenge the establishment by defiantly opposing censorship. British writer and Japanese cultural expert Nicholas Bornoff writes about Murakami’s work in *Sex and Consumerism: the Japanese State of the Arts*. He asserts. “Murakami has inadvertently created a reassuringly sterile Adam and Eve for the *otaku*; while Adam masturbates, Eve, safely devoid of genitalia, becomes an icon for Mummy.”⁹² Bornoff articulates Murakami’s reflection of a media inundated culture restricted by censorship that marginalizes human sexuality.

Mariko Mori, creates photographic visual narratives in response to commonplace media representations through mutating her own physical form, echoing Cindy Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills*. In her 1994 photographic series, Mori emulates cyborg versions of stereotypical female animé roles. She documents herself in elaborate costumes amalgamating alien, cyborg and human components. In *Play with Me*, Mori is positioned next to a video game wearing silver video vixen regalia and pigtails. In the image, Mori embodies a manga heroine. However, the *otaku* gaming patrons in the scene ignore Mori in favor of their customary mediated entertainment. Like Murakami’s *Hiropon*, *Play with Me*

⁹¹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, P. 162.

⁹² Fran Lloyd, ed. *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002). P. 66.

suggests a sexually dysfunctional culture with an entertainment industry abounding with inaccessible clichéd representations of female sexuality.



Mori Mariko, *Play with me*, 1994, Fuji Super Gloss print, wood, pewter frame.
305 x 366 x 7.6 cm.

In *Love Hotel*, another work from the same series, Mori kneels on the round bed of the hotel room costumed as futuristic alien schoolgirl. The image is suggestive of science fiction themed *hentai*. Mori asserts there is a substantial faction of men in Japan “with Lolita complexes”⁹³ who perceive young girls as status symbols. According to Mori, those men “hope to arrange a date, to meet for a coffee or dinner and, occasionally, paid sex with a girl.”⁹⁴ In *Love Hotel*, Mori responds to the cultural phenomenon of “play-dates” between mature men and adolescent girls.

⁹³ Mori interviewed by Dike Blair in 1995. Dike Blair, "We've got Twenty-Five Years, Interview with Mariko Mori," in *Purple Prose* (New York: 1995). P. 98.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*



Mori Mariko, *Love Hotel*, 1994, Duraflex print, wood, pewter frame.
121.9 x 152.4 x 5.1 cm.

Emphasizing both her “alien” status and the traditional stereotype of the submissive Japanese woman, the female roles in both *Love Hotel* and *Play with me* are both that of a passive bystander and disenfranchised outsider. In *Love Hotel*, the protagonist expectantly lounges solo on the bed. Likewise, Mori poses without soliciting interaction with any of the video patrons in *Play with me*. In both works, Mori’s character is available, submissive and innocently demure, hence emulating the prescribed sexual stereotype of Japanese femininity.



Mariko Mori, *Warrior*, 1994, Fuji Supergloss Duraflex print. 121.9 x 152.4 cm.

Mori attempts in vain to play a more interactive role in her surroundings in *Warrior*, another piece from the same series. *Warrior* presents the audience with a gun-toting vixen resembling a sexed-up plastic action figure. In *Warrior*, Mori crouches down inside a video arcade, prepared for a live action adventure. However, gamers in Mori's vicinity focus on the screens in front of them, ignoring the nearby materialization of the gaming fantasy. In *Seduction*, Baudrillard elaborates upon the human obsession with media exemplars. Baudrillard declares that those constructs have "nothing to do with play as a dual or agonistic relation; it is the cold seduction that governs the spheres of information and communication. And it is in this cold seduction that the social and its representations are now wearing themselves thin."⁹⁵ Accordingly, despite the materialization of a live fantasy archetype, arcade patrons in *Warrior* prefer interaction with an unobtainable media simulation. In the photograph, Mori reflects a society that rejects human relationships in favor of exaggerated sexual clichés generated by the media.

⁹⁵ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 163.

Canadian Kristen Lambertson contextualizes Mori's work within Japanese culture in her 2008 Masters of Arts thesis at the University of British Columbia: "Assuming the role of a *kawaii* (cute) plaything, Mori alludes to the marginal world that young women occupy in traditional Japanese culture. She shows that *shōjo* (independent, working) women are simultaneously infantilised and eroticised by male spectatorship."⁹⁶ According to Lambertson, Mori critiques the relationship between media iconography and the sense of sexual alienation within Japanese society from a female perspective.

Baudrillard elucidates contemporary culture's envelopment by the technological transmission of signs as a "ludic realm where one encounters a cold seduction."⁹⁷ Mori and Murakami congruently mirror the realm Baudrillard perceives. From their respective angles, both artists reflect the sovereignty of mediated sexual paradigms in Japanese consumer culture.

⁹⁶ Gray Watson, *Art & Sex* (London: I.B. Taurus & Co., 2008).

⁹⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 162.

v. **Glamour Gone Awry**

In contrast to Japanese renderings of women as cute, demure playthings, the western media depicts women as vehicles of sex appeal and fashionable sophistication. *Glamour Gone Awry* investigates how Julie Rrap, Anthea Behm and Vanessa Beecroft challenge stereotypical female roles and western media conventions in their studio practices. A subversion of mediated clichés through the photographic narrative, similar to that of Mariko Mori and Cindy Sherman, is visible in their work. These artists reconstruct media ideals in a way that undermines the improbability of their images. The question arises: How do artists reconfigure and distort the believable, yet unachievable feminine archetypes generated by the western media to undermine their integrity?



Julie Rrap, *Camouflage #2 (Raquel)*, 2000, C-type photograph on lexcen. 195 × 122cm.

Established Australian artist Julie Rrap's images negate an archetypal body image through humorous bodily mutations. In 2000, Rrap produced the surreal, digitally altered conceptual photo series *Camouflage (A-R-MOUR)*. In one image, hooves bizarrely replace the hands and feet of an affluent, poised equestrian (modeled after Elizabeth Taylor). Grotesque, ape-like hair covers the body of a skin-clad cavewoman (modeled after Raquel Welsh) in another photograph. Australian curator and writer, Blair French observes that Rrap is "fragmenting, distorting and reassembling bodies... to debunk concepts of visual truth and order."⁹⁸ Facilitated by digital manipulation, Rrap makes the viewer "rethink" the sexualized female image we are conditioned to expect in the commercial image.

Throughout *Camouflage (A-R-MOUR)*, Rrap serves as the model. French furthers, "We are always conscious of Rrap, the artist, as a performer and author, undermining the 'otherness' of these female types."⁹⁹ Unlike the photographs of Cindy Sherman, Rrap demonstrates no pretense of masquerading as someone else and makes no effort to disguise her age or identity. Rrap's mature face is clearly discernable in each images of the sequence, reminding the viewer that these body doubles are intended to be a farce. In addition to the peculiar physical mutations in *Camouflage (A-R-MOUR)* Rrap creates tension through sardonically challenging media culture's unspoken conjecture that images of youth equivocate marketability.

In another 2000 work, *Window Dresser #1*, Rrap reinvents the media icon of feminine mystique, Marilyn Monroe. Rrap recreates Monroe's revealing white dress scene in *The Seven Year Itch* and substitutes a transparent glass frock for the original fabric in the image. Rrap affirms her intention to identify and break down the clichés associated with the famous scene. "The coy sexuality of the pose is cut down because you can see straight through the dress to her knickers. I am

⁹⁸ Blair French, and Palmer, Daniel, *Twelve Australian Photo Artists* (Sydney: Piper Press, 2009). P. 157.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

reminding you of that stereotype and then deconstructing it,”¹⁰⁰ states Rrap in a 2008 interview with Australian artist and curator, Laura Castagnini.



Julie Rrap, *Window Dresser #1 (Marilyn)*, 2000, C-type photograph on lexcen.
195 × 122cm.

Baudrillard defined advertising and entertainment industry renderings of femininity as “the strategy of appearances - that is, the terms of seduction.”¹⁰¹ The clothing in *Window Dresser #1* is pure artifice formed by manipulation of media tropes. In reality, Rrap was not even wearing formed glass in the photograph: a pattern of the actual dress was digitally engineered to create an illusion of the costume. Thus Rrap employed the same technology that creates media fantasies marketed in mass culture to critique the artifice of media illusions.

¹⁰⁰ Castagnini, Laura, “Julie Rrap: an Interview by Laura Castagnini,” April 28 2008.
<http://lauracastagnini.wordpress.com/2008/04/24/julie-rrap-an-interview-with-laura-castagnini/>

¹⁰¹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 7.

The following year, Rrap exhibited the highly publicized digital image, *Overstepping*. Formally elegant in composition, *Overstepping* is a seductive and surprisingly palatable image of a woman's bare feet disturbingly contorted into the shape of high-heeled shoes. Australian critic George Alexander of *Artlink* divulges his subjective reaction to the piece: "For several kinked part-seconds I find the beautiful-ugliness punishingly sexy."¹⁰² Like *Tragic Anatomies* by Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Overstepping* fetishizes physical deformity. Yet, whereas the Chapmans' sexually explicit work serves as an assault on mass complacency to media clichés, Rrap's photograph confronts the fetishization of feminine beauty by the advertising and entertainment industries.



Julie Rrap, *Overstepping*, 2001, digital print. 120 × 120cm.

Overstepping confronts societal pressure to emulate media stereotypes. The gross bodily modifications in *Overstepping* that allude to extreme plastic surgery provoke contemplation of the cultural acceptability of enduring invasive bodily transformations. Australian curator Victoria Lynn states, "We live in an era

¹⁰² George Alexander, "Sex in the Cyborg: Julie Rrap's *Overstepping*," *Artlink* 2002. P. 27.

of transplantation medicine, prosthetic devices, genetic modification and stem-cell research...The body today, then, is not a singular contained entity...but one that can both give and receive parts.”¹⁰³ *Overstepping* astutely reflects life in an age of lunchtime face-lifts, where hair extensions, veneered teeth and silicone breasts have practically become the status quo of sexual allure.

In *Overstepping*, Rrap forms what Alexander describes as a “polished maxim about the body as a way-station to the new electronic flesh.”¹⁰⁴ The deformity of Rrap’s feet suggests the type of ritualistic mutilation documented in ancient and tribal cultures. Baudrillard explicates, “Rituals, ceremonies, raiments, masks, designs, mutilations and torture - all in order to seduce... the gods, the spirits, or the dead.”¹⁰⁵ The disfiguration of Rrap’s body underscores the veneration of distorted female sexual archetypes in popular culture. In *Overstepping*, Rrap illustrates the pervasiveness of bodily modification performed in contemporary society as an emulation of media paradigms.

¹⁰³ Victoria Lynn, *Julie Rrap: Body Double* (Sydney: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2007). P. 97.

¹⁰⁴ Alexander, "Sex in the Cyborg: Julie Rrap’s Overstepping." P. 29.

¹⁰⁵ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 90.

Emerging Australian artist, Anthea Behm, employs subtlety in recontextualizing stereotypes of femininity. In her four-channel video piece, *The Chrissie Diaries*, Behm plays clichéd feminine paradigms from the media—a bikini model, an airline hostess, a cheerleader and a pageant contestant. All of the archetypes Behm depicts are highly visible in the entertainment industry, their occupations coveted by young girls who aspire to someday secure such positions.¹⁰⁶ In the videos, Behm’s role-playing echoes the aforementioned works by Sherman and Mori. Behm is appropriately costumed for the parts she plays, carefully repeating actions specific to her “profession.”



Anthea Behm, *The Bikini Model*, from *The Chrissy Diaries*, 2005, stills from synchronized four channel video installation, 36 minute loop.

The Chrissie Diaries are shot on locations inspired by media sets. However, each background looks slightly off kilter; the settings do not exhibit the glossy postcard appeal of genuine film locations. Moreover, an uncomfortable tension is discernable in Behm’s acting. Behm researched her selected roles from 2001-2008 through participation in her chosen fields. Therefore, the awkwardness of Behm’s execution is assumed to be intentional rather than due to lack of

¹⁰⁶Anthea Behm in an interview by Justin Huntsdale, “Bikinis and cheerleading - challenging stereotypes,” (Dubbo: ABC Australia, 2010).

experience. Behm's uninspiring portrayals display an absence of enthusiasm that results in disappointing archetypes.

Behm's personal appearance remains unembellished throughout the videos. Women who actually work in those competitive industries take great pains to look and conduct themselves in a way that convincingly duplicates the artifice of their media counterparts. Although Behm displays a fit, youthful physique, she does not extensively alter her appearance to conform to industry standards. It is routine for actual models, cheerleaders, pageant contestants and airline hostesses on some airlines¹⁰⁷ to allocate large portions of their incomes on time-consuming beauty rituals including cosmetic surgery, hair color and extensions, elaborate make-up and artificial tanning. Those superficial media devices reinforce clichéd sexuality, resonating with Baudrillard's claim that "there is no other femininity than that of appearances."¹⁰⁸ In *The Chrissie Diaries*, Behm dismisses just enough of the media-inspired façade of femininity idealized in mass culture to reveal her charade.

Australian curator and writer, Timothy Morrell analyzes Behm's cheerleading video for the Samstag International Arts Scholarship. "Without the supporting context of other cheerleaders and the roar of a crowd, all the choreographed exuberance seems a bit silly and sad. Incongruous elements infiltrate the *The Chrissy Diaries*. As happens in dreams, there's always something wrong with the picture."¹⁰⁹ In addition to her unaltered physical appearance, Behm refuses to radiate the intense, contrived enthusiasm ingrained in passionate partakers of her selected pursuits. Behm's depiction of the girl-next-door is poignant. However, evidence of that girl-next-door's painstaking metamorphosis into a media archetype is missing along with her heartfelt enthusiasm.

¹⁰⁷ For example, on Etihad Airways states on its website: "To become one of our award winning Cabin Crew you will need to meet the following criteria and qualifications: Excellent personal presentation, style and image." <http://careers.etihadairways.com/ehire/English/CabinCrew.aspx>.

¹⁰⁸ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 11.

¹⁰⁹ Timothy Morrell, "Loose Connections," in the 2007 Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarships Catalogue (Adelaide: Samstag Program, 2007).

Cindy Sherman's influence is markedly visible in the work of Italian artist Vanessa Beecroft. Beecroft's work consists of women in various stages of undress installed in the gallery space as living artworks. Photographic documentation survives the installations as evidence of the works. New York Times art critic, Roberta Smith wrote a review of Beecroft's 1996 exhibition, *vb16*, where she described the piece as "performers wearing demure flesh-colored underwear, pantyhose, strappy heels, short blond wigs and almost no makeup resembled a gang of Cindy Shermans getting ready to suit up for one role or another."¹¹⁰ Beecroft employs professional models to pose in groups without speaking or otherwise engaging the art audience. The performers stare vacantly into space, eventually appearing bored and resentful. The women are directed to initially stand in formation, however once they get tired, they are permitted sit or eventually lie on the floor.¹¹¹



Vanessa Beecroft, *vb16*, C-print, 1996. 49.5 x 69.5 cm.

¹¹⁰ Roberta Smith, "Critic's Notebook; Standing and Staring, Yet Aiming for Empowerment," *The New York Times*, 1998. P. 5.

¹¹¹ Taken from an interview with Vanessa Beecroft. Marcella Beccaria, ed. *Vanessa Beecroft Performances 1993-2003* (Milan: Skira Editore, 2003). PP. 18-19.

Smith correlates Beecroft's work "to the girl-power approach to feminism that has all kinds of younger female artists asserting their autonomy by adopting behaviour once considered exploitative and demeaning to women."¹¹² Beecroft highlights advertising industry stereotypes by selecting models that conform to the strictures of fashion conventions. Furthermore, her choreographed performative installations convey a disquieting tension that challenge media fabrications of female sexual identity.

Beecroft's employment of a high-fashion aesthetic reflects the advertising industry cliché that a woman must be thin, sexy and stylish to succeed. Judith Thurman of the *New Yorker* magazine supports Beecroft's exploration of fashion due to its high visibility in media culture. Thurman explains, "It occupies too great a place in the culture. It's a language, a drama, an arena. Clothes speak about power, beauty, pleasure, sex, money, class, desire, gender, age—the aspirations and desperations of millions of people. So it's a subject worthy of serious thought."¹¹³ In addition to fashion, the sense of serialism in Beecroft's uniform body-types, hairstyles, make-up and costuming accentuate the homogeneity of media stereotyping. In an effort to emphasize that uniformity, Beecroft applies body make-up to her models, enhancing their uniformity through diminishing any perceptible imperfections.

Baudrillard's postulates that "nudity is never anything but an extra sign. Nudity veiled by clothing functions as a secret, ambivalent referent. Unveiled, it surfaces as a sign and returns to the circulation of signs: nudity design."¹¹⁴ In *vb45*, a legion of unclothed performers is starkly composed within an empty room. Here, Beecroft refers to the psychological tyranny perpetuated by the fashion industry's advertising campaigns through rigidly formalistic compositions. The formalism of the works lies in the relationship between the figures' nakedness, their indifferent demeanour and the austerity of their circumstances. Although not directly pornographic in their content, Beecroft manipulates the audience into

¹¹² Smith, "Critic's Notebook; Standing and Staring, Yet Aiming for Empowerment." P. 4.

¹¹³ Judith Thurman, "RECKLESS PERFECTIONISM: Judith Thurman discusses Vanessa Beecroft, art and illness," *The New Yorker*, March 17, 2003 (2003). P. 4.

¹¹⁴ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 32.

viewing the models as sexual beings through the impropriety of their nudity within the institutional context.



Vanessa Beecroft, *vb45.9014.ALI*, 2001, computer print. 101 x 218 cm.

The nearly identical Aryan blondes in *vb45* stage a militaristic formation wearing only thigh-high black boots. Both compositionally and in her subjects' physical conformity, Beecroft signifies popular culture's fascistic propagation of bodily ideals that instill inferiority complexes in women and girls incapable of replicating media standards. Furthermore, the models' robotic stance implies their programmed roles as replicators of the mediated image. Poignantly, Beecroft places a lone, barefoot model slumped on the floor before the legion of fashion clones' feet, as if marginalized for her conspicuous failure to conform.

Baudrillard declares, "Whatever the face, it remains inappropriate, for it breaks the obscenity and reintroduces meaning where everything aspires to abolish it in sexual excess."¹¹⁵ Baudrillard's statement was intended as a critique of pornography. However, his observation also pertains to the advertising industry's disregard for individuality in its proliferation of idealized physical similitudes as exemplars. The marketing of the desirable, yet anonymous image is equally visible in both

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* P. 34.

advertising and pornography. Beecroft therefore addresses the dehumanizing mentality of media stereotyping in *vb47*.



Vanessa Beecroft, *vb47 (vb47.378.DR)*, 2001, Digital C-print. 101.6 x 152.4cm.

In *vb47*, Beecroft's fashion drones are staged at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice against a backdrop of Italian master's paintings, punctuating the work's allusion to the exclusivity and fetishism of fashion iconography. In the piece, Beecroft enshrouds a cluster of Caucasian models' heads in mask-like "head hats," their heads faceless. All identifying qualities of the identical women have been eradicated. Likewise, their nearly indistinguishable bodies have been stripped and shaved bare. Consequently, Beecroft's models are transformed into fashion drones. In eliminating the face in *vb47*, Beecroft critiques a commercial culture where congruency of the image vanquishes individuality.

vi. Manifestations of Indulgence

As in Beecroft's work, the reconfiguration of advertising industry standards is also a crucial element in the studio component of this thesis. Subjects of the works are ironic responses to the sexual clichés that pervade popular culture. In the two selected photographs, paradigms of stereotypical femininity have been intentionally replaced by visual puns. These artworks address formulaic representations of sexuality in the advertising and entertainment industries.



Liz Miller, *Dragonfruit*, 2009-2012, archival ink jet print. 66 x 96cm.

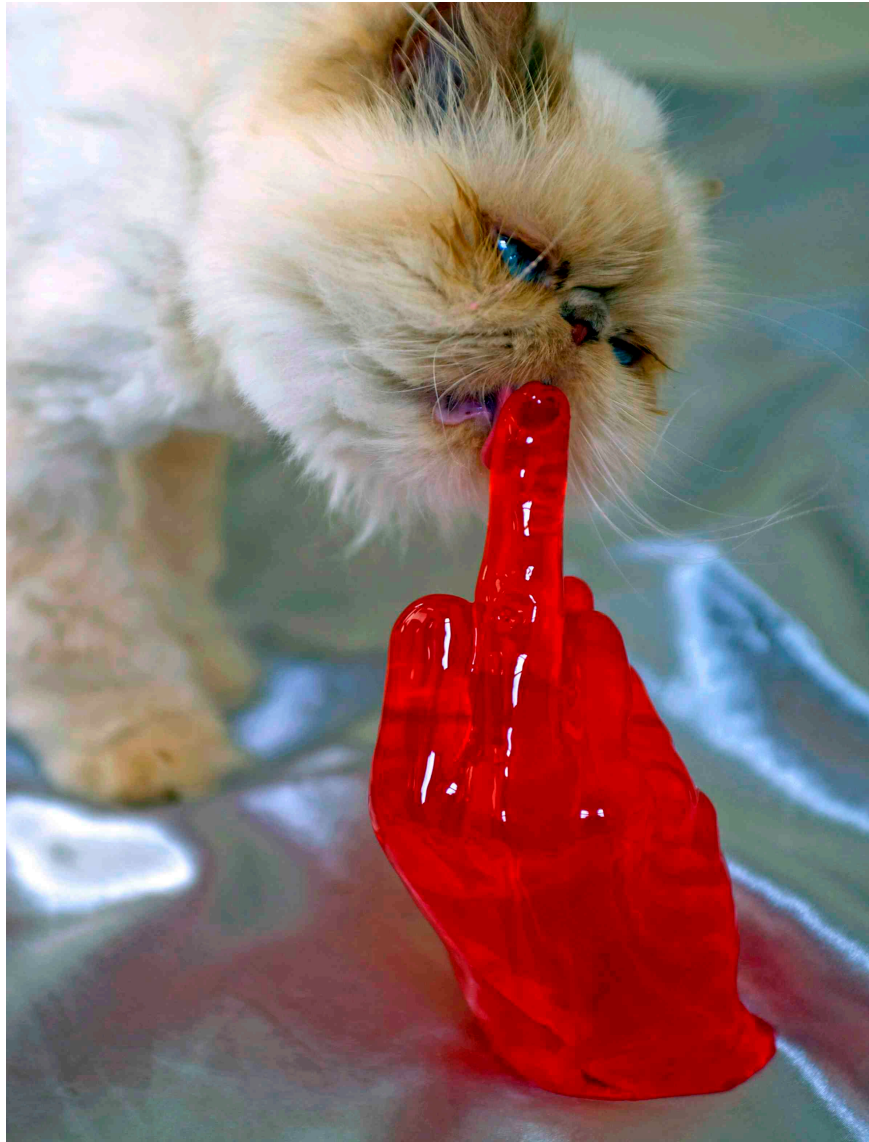
In *Dragonfruit*, the composition of the photograph deletes the subject's identity through cropping. Only the model's mouth—the sole organ required to convey the image's intention—is included in the picture plane. *Dragonfruit* confronts the anonymity of archetypical media renderings of sexuality. Visually, *Dragonfruit* is derivative of sex industry rather than fashion aesthetics. Yet, a critique of standardized feminine sex appeal in advertising akin to Beecroft's *vb47* exists in the work. The omission of distinct individual features in both *Dragonfruit* and *vb47* present the audience with anonymous marketing vehicles of the female anatomy.

Georges Bataille articulated ingestion as “the elementary form of appropriation...considered as communion (participation, identification, incorporation, or assimilation).”¹¹⁶ *Dragonfruit* illustrates Bataille’s notion of oral consumption. The audience is witnessing a fundamental act of human survival in *Dragonfruit*. Although sexual activity is another possible function of the orifice, the oral cavity is performing the perfunctory act of ingesting sustenance. The mouth is stuffed full of moist, glistening fruit, the lips spread wide. The activity in the image is an intentionally vague spoof on erotica—the glossy, pink lips connote female sexuality in the image. *Dragonfruit* is correlative to Sarah Lucas’s *Sausage Film* in confronting the stereotypical subliminal associations between food consumption and oral sex. However, the two works display divergent methodologies of addressing the sexual cliché. Whereas *Sausage Film* negates media contrivances, *Dragonfruit* parodies those contrivances in an attempt to provoke ‘rethinking’ of the cliché.

Dragonfruit was deliberately realized as a humorous commentary on the clichés of the porno industry. Baudrillard describes pornographic films as “no more than visceral sound-effects of a coital close-up; even the body disappears, dispersed amongst oversize, partial objects. Whatever the face, it remains inappropriate, for it breaks the obscenity and reintroduces meaning where everything aspires to abolish it in sexual excess and a nihilistic vertigo.”¹¹⁷ *Dragonfruit* formally echoes the close-up scenes common to pornographic videos where shiny flesh fills the screen with the detailed penetration of an orifice. *Dragonfruit* was shot with a macro lens and the picture plane is tightly zoomed, almost to the point of abstraction. At first glance it is difficult to distinguish exactly what bodily organ is being presented and what activity is unfolding, yet after momentary contemplation, *Dragonfruit*’s depiction of overzealous dining is revealed. Both in *Dragonfruit*’s stylistic and compositional elements, a backhanded visual commentary on the sexual clichés of the porno industry unfolds.

¹¹⁶ Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan with Lovitt Stoekl, Carl R. and Leslie, Jr., Donald M. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

¹¹⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. PP. 33-34.



Liz Miller, *Lick*, 2008-2009, digital image.

Lick is an earlier photographic work dealing with sexual clichés. *Lick* documents a fluffy white cat interacting with a sculpture composed of hard-candy. The sculpture represents a hand displaying the culturally obscene gesture of a middle finger salute. The image shares commonalities with an international artistic lineage of tongue-in-cheek social commentary. The concurrently kitsch and Rococo stylistic elements of *Lick* recall the work of Jeff Koons, while the cute or *kawaii*¹¹⁸ appeal of the photo is reminiscent of Tokyo Pop.

¹¹⁸ The Oxford Dictionary defines *kawaii* as “the quality of being cute, or items that are cute.”, in *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. Richard Holden (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, Third edition, December 2007; online version June 2012).

Double meanings and sexual innuendos are at play in *Lick*. For instance, the hand's materiality is that of an inviting childhood indulgence, while its profane gesture aggressively communicates to "fuck off." Moreover, in licking the tip of a phallic object, the cat appears to be simulating fellatio, a stereotypical element of pornography. Encircled by satin sheets—a classic boudoir fixture—the euphemism of "pussy" creates a flagrant double entendre. In actuality, however, the furry feline is innocently enjoying nothing more than a tasty snack. Visually lacking in perversion or graphic sexuality—bestial or otherwise—the only suggestive elements of the work lie within its semantic associations. Furthermore, although the inference of "fuck" indicates the latent sexual content of the piece, the picture distinctly lacks the hostility the gesticulation implies.

The feline performer in *Lick* was recruited for its docile disposition and exaggerated physical characteristics including its luxurious coat, snub nose and protruding tongue. Baudrillard claims that feminine allure is animal-like in nature, that animals "do not evoke a nostalgia for the savage state, but a feline, theatrical nostalgia for finery."¹¹⁹ Hence, Baudrillard describes a superficial, animal femininity. *Lick* opposes Baudrillard's vision and satirically ridicules the notion that femininity is delineated by the display of feline attributes. Hence, the metaphor of the cat for clichéd femininity in the artwork demonstrates an ironic reaction to Baudrillard's viewpoint.

The selection of a pussycat to play a conventionally female role in *Lick* was a conscious effort to humorously explore the semiotics of vulgarity in relation to mediated gender clichés. Though still considered impolite language today, the application of *pussy* in referring to the female genitalia has been documented in literature since the seventeenth century.¹²⁰ The hand gesture is widely recognized in western culture as a vulgar phallic expression of hateful communication. "It is one of the most ancient insult gestures known,"¹²¹ according to anthropologist Desmond Morris for *BBC News*

¹¹⁹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 90.

¹²⁰ The *Online Etymology Dictionary* documents "The word pussie is now used of a woman" by Philip Stubbes's 1583 in "The Anatomy of Abuses." http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=pussy&searchmode. Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, (Lancaster, PA, 2012).

¹²¹ Quoted by D. Nasaw in Daniel Nasaw, "When did the middle finger become offensive?" *BBC News Magazine*, 2012.

Magazine.

It is now clear that the reinterpretation of sexual clichés from the advertising and entertainment industries is a significant phenomenon in contemporary art. Baudrillard describes a feminine existence revolving around the act of seduction, proposing, “There is no other femininity than that of appearances.”¹²² He furthermore delineates a dominant masculinity exemplifying sexual aggression, proclaiming, “there is but one sexuality, one libido – and it is masculine.”¹²³ Models of sexual identity in *Seduction* indeed corroborate stereotypical portrayals of sexuality, yet artworks presented in *Sexual Stereotypes* challenge those clichéd media renderings.

Sexual Stereotypes has demonstrated the global proportions of contemporary art’s reaction to the formulated representations of virility and femininity disseminated by media. Diverse methodologies of recontextualizing clichéd images of sexuality have been exposed. In removing stereotypical media representations from their predictable contexts and transferring them to the gallery space, the viewer is offered a fresh perspective on the pictorial language of sexual identity. Confronted by media iconography, the art audience is cornered into “rethinking” visuals that often go unnoticed in daily life.

The process of research has revealed that despite the Sexual Revolution’s efforts to bring awareness and acceptance of individualized, non-conventional sexuality, sexual stereotyping remains visible in the media. An abundance of sexual truisms continue to be perpetuated in popular culture. Since the Sexual Revolution that began in the 1960s, artists have continued to implement semantic devices in their rebuke and exposure of sexual clichés.

In researching *Sexual Stereotypes*, three strategic devices have been identified in contemporary art’s strategic retort to clichéd media transmissions.

¹²² Baudrillard, *Seduction*. P. 11.

¹²³ *Ibid.* P. 6.

Those devices are parody, shock value and eroticism. Parodied portrayals of sexual stereotypes strategically veil cultural commentary in sexual puns, thereby forming a critique that is invitational to the audience. For example, in substituting poultry for her vulva, Sarah Lucas's *Chicken Knickers* satirizes the display of female genitalia in pornography. Shock value in art elicits an emotional response by rebuking social standards of decency, thus ingraining a profound impact on the viewer. Murakami uses shock value to confront sexual conventions in *My Lonesome Cowboy* by displaying an erect, ejaculating penis. Eroticism in art captivates the audience through potent seductive sexualized imagery that is unique from media stereotypes, hence underscoring the formulaic nature of ubiquitous archetypes in mass culture. The erotic recontextualization of David Beckham as an objectified artist's muse in Sam Taylor Wood's *David* provokes contemplation of clichéd roles of masculinity in the media.

The mass media's propagation of stereotypes is not limited to formulaic representations of sexuality. Since the 1960s, two other widespread media clichés, status and violence, have evoked a rebuttal from contemporary artists. These clichés will be examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO: The Symbology of Status Clichés

In addition to sexual stereotypes, another prominent iconographic code exists in the advertising and entertainment industries. That code is product branding and its supporting cast, celebrity, which combine forces to create an illusory nexus of unobtainable material success and desirability—neatly packaged and devoured by an audience. Consumers eager to find fulfilment in material acquisitions devour status iconography from the media.

It may seem questionable to interchange brand labelling for celebrity. Nonetheless, *The Symbology of Status Clichés*, intends to illustrate how the advertising and entertainment industries unify celebrity image and product branding as marketing codes. This chapter will present how the media capitalizes on the implied status of both celebrity and branding, seamlessly substituting one for the other.

Media manipulation of celebrity image and mercantile branding conveys a cultural symbology of status. This phenomenon has existed since the advent of television, its incidence increasing with the expansion of the media. Canadian author and political activist Naomi Klein wrote the book, *No Logo*, in 1999, as a critique of corporate branding. According to Klein, global corporations' manipulation of brand identity's psychological impact supersedes the production of quality merchandise. She asserts: "The astronomical growth in the wealth and cultural influence of multinational corporations over the last fifteen years can arguably be traced back to a single, seemingly innocuous idea developed by management theorists in the mid-1980s: that successful corporations must primarily produce brands, as opposed to products."¹²⁴ In other words, the profitability of image outweighs substance in the age of globalization.

Over the past two decades, consumerism has become such a dominant element of global society that image often overshadows narrative in entertainment

¹²⁴ Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (New York: Picador, 1999).

modules as well as advertising. Status and fame have become the focus of some commercial entertainment. Reality television shows like *MTV Cribs*, and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* are exemplary models of the plethora of entertainment programming demonstrating the unapologetic promotion of celebrity branding.

In 1994, U.S. sociologist Joshua Gamson wrote the pivotal text *Claims to Fame* deciphering the iconography of celebrity in mass culture. Gamson professes, “surface has overwhelmed substance, image has overtaken reality, truth is ‘submerged in a sea of irrelevance,’ imitation and copying have displaced originality and imagination. Passivity has replaced involvement; the values of ‘life-style’ and consumption have pushed aside those of work and production. Commercial culture is a system-preserving distraction, an ‘opiate,’ and ideological tool, its satisfactions illusory.”¹²⁵ Gamson’s statement articulates the inflated value consumer society places on the superficiality of fame. Media images of celebrity convey beauty, talent, popularity and affluence, desirable traits to which the populace aspires. In addition to the embodiment of covetable qualities, celebrity imagery is familiar. The imitability and familiarity of celebrity image helps market media entertainment and consumer goods.

Similar to the celebrity image, fashion logos also serve as status signifiers. Logos are status symbols used as marketing tools by the advertising industry, implying prestige and conformity. The media fabricates illusions to create a code of value for the images it produces for mass consumption.

The social esteem upscale branding bestows has been scientifically proven. In a 2010 research paper, Tilburg University behavioural psychologists, Rob Nelissen and Marijin Meijers verified the entitlement conferred upon consumers of luxury logos. The researchers conducted four studies involving hundreds of subjects. Upon completion of the studies, the psychologists found that “conspicuous consumption by means of displaying luxury-brand labels on clothing increases perceived status and produces benefits in social interactions that are apparently associated with higher status perceptions of a person wearing

¹²⁵ Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

brand-labelled clothes compared to a person wearing non-labelled clothes.”¹²⁶ The subjects wearing luxury logos were considered more capable, attractive and trustworthy than those not brandishing labels. The logo bearers also gained financial advantages including higher salaries.¹²⁷ These findings elucidate why a demand for expensive labels exists in consumer culture. The findings furthermore offer an explanation for advertising industry success in the relentlessly marketing of status signifiers.

Postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard’s seminal 1981 work, *Simulacra and Simulation* articulates the evolution of the media’s construction of images that influence mass culture. The text considers the media’s formation of an artificial reality. *Simulacra and Simulation* is a lengthy volume addressing the effects of media cultural domination upon numerous issues. Nevertheless, specific concepts within are relevant to the inquiry presented in this chapter. Baudrillard laments the absence of truth in contemporary culture. He discusses a death of originality and divergence from reality as symptoms of the image in the age of information technology. He professes that all originality has been lost and replaced by copies, or *simulacra*.

Baudrillard states that in contemporary media culture, *simulacra* precede reality and generate our environment. He further proposes that artificial intelligence and the media have facilitated the construction of an existence entirely composed of *simulacra*. Baudrillard asserts, “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes.”¹²⁸ Therefore, Baudrillard envisions a reality consisting of a dialogue between hierarchical images distanced from their original point of reference.

¹²⁶ Marijn H.C. Meijers and Rob M.A. Nelissen, "Social Benefits of Luxury Brands as Costly Signals of Wealth and Status," in *Evolution and Human Behavior* (Tilburg, The Netherlands: Department of Social Psychology, Tilburg University, 2010).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). P. 167.

Simulacra and Simulation also presents the reader with the idea of the *simulation*. In media culture, *simulations* emulate the *simulacra*, and are therefore devoid of a tangible connection to actuality. He theorizes that “simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.”¹²⁹ Hence, *hyperreality* is defined by Baudrillard as “a real without origins in reality.”¹³⁰

According to Baudrillard, rather than the *simulation* copying reality, reality is now modeled after *simulations*. The *simulation* “presents an absence as a presence, the imaginary as the real, it also undermines any contrast to the real, absorbing the real within itself.”¹³¹ Baudrillard maintains that the manipulation of information technology by the media has created an “age of simulation”¹³² where evidence of truth has been eliminated.

Later in *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard outlines the media’s progressive nullification of the image’s validity:

- 1 It is the reflection of a basic reality.
- 2 It masks and perverts a basic reality.
- 3 It masks the *absence* of a basic reality.
- 4 It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.¹³³

Therefore, Baudrillard perceives a degeneration of authenticity in contemporary culture via the mediated image. The iconic family theme park, *Disneyland* is offered as an example of an illusory fantasy realm illustrating the orders of simulation. Baudrillard stipulates that *Disneyland*’s lack of basis in reality disguises the fact that the world outside the parameters of *Disneyland* is equally composed of layers of *simulations*.

¹²⁹ Ibid. P. 166.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ M. Poster in *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writing*. P. 6.

¹³² Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*, P. 167.

¹³³ Ibid. P. 170.

Baudrillard sees *hyperreality* from a Marxist perspective, regarding capitalism as the motive behind the media's tactical fabrication of *hyperreality*. He proclaims:

For, finally, it was capital which was the first to feed throughout its history on the destruction of every referential, of every human goal, which shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power. It was the first to practice deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialization, etc.; and if it was capital which fostered reality, the reality principle, it was also the first to liquidate it in omnipotence.¹³⁴

Hence, according to Baudrillard's hypothesis, *hyperreality* is a construct opportunistically produced and marketed by capitalist entities.

A great deal has been written in response to *Simulacra and Simulation*. American media studies academic Mark Poster is the editor of *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writing*. In the introduction of the text, Poster condenses and critiques Baudrillard's concepts. Poster summarizes the premise of *Simulacra and Simulation* in his statement, "No longer does the code take priority over or even precede the consumer object. The distinctions between object and representation, thing and idea are no longer valid."¹³⁵ Poster interprets *Simulacra and Simulation* as the elucidation of a contemporary existence enveloped in a matrix of recursive signs.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard surmises that the media markets unsubstantiated images on the basis of inferred status. Therefore, the functional value of commercial products has been rendered irrelevant, and is overshadowed by exemplars modeled out of interminable layers of signs. Poster clarifies, "Instead of a 'real' economy of commodities that is somehow bypassed by an "unreal" myriad of advertising images, Baudrillard now discerns only a *hyperreality*, a world of self-referential signs."¹³⁶ Poster's reading of Baudrillard's views illuminates the media's promotion of sign over substance—or image's displacement of use value.

¹³⁴ Ibid. pp. 179-180.

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 5.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 6.

As Baudrillard delineates in his theories, the advertising industry repetitively produces signs marketing images signifying status. Images portraying consumers bearing those signs display entitlement and privilege. Such advertising industry signs have been proliferated so extensively that they have become stereotypical.

Media domination of popular culture surged in the 1960s with the growth of the advertising industry. In the 1960s, Pop surfaced as a reaction to the cultural development of superficial, materialistic media culture. Pop emerged as a celebration of the very kitsch embellishments previously shunned by the art world. By highlighting the kitsch aspects of stereotypical brand labels and celebrity iconography alike, Pop serves to illuminate them as clichés.

In the 1960s, Pop set a precedent by incorporating the iconography of product branding into art. In 2003, American art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto wrote the theoretical text, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concepts of Art*. Danto purports that “the success of Pop Art as a world movement was that its practitioners appropriated the achievements of often nameless designers, initially made in order to lend products a certain edge in the ruthless struggle for market advantage.”¹³⁷ Therefore, Danto establishes Pop’s revolutionary manipulation of aesthetics in contemporary art.

Pop reveled in celebrity notoriety and the unquenchable preoccupation with mimicking celebrity lifestyles and accouterments by the populace. Pop also recorded the ensuing uniformity in consumer spending, which materialized as mainstream fashion trends. Pop responded to these developments through the appropriation and recontextualization of archetypical commercial signs.

Warhol introduced art’s reflection of advertising industry branding and the status it sold. He embraced consumerism and all of its accompanying superficialities. Warhol’s work underscores the significance of celebrity image and product branding.

¹³⁷ Arthur C. Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 2003). P. 6.

Before his success as a gallery artist, Warhol worked as a commercial artist and window dresser. His displays donned the vitrines of New York's upscale *Bonwit Teller* department store.¹³⁸ He also produced illustrations for *Harper's Bazaar* magazine.¹³⁹ Throughout his career as a studio artist, Warhol set himself apart from his contemporaries through his acceptance of being labeled a commercial artist. For instance, Pop artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns produced window displays under the covert pseudonym "Matson Jones." Rauschenberg and Johns made a concerted effort to separate their commercial productions from their "real" fine art practices.¹⁴⁰ The refusal to segregate his creative process from quotidian life like his Pop compatriots indicates Warhol's affiliation with consumer culture.

Warhol's reproduction of commercial imagery echoes his early employment in print and display. Throughout the duration of Warhol's career an obsession with both celebrity figures and branded merchandise is manifest. He produced numerous works representing the consumption of image. His illustrious replicated images of *Campbell's Soup Cans* provide one example of those works.

Whether replicating name-brand supermarket staples or celluloid personalities, Warhol presented the audience with universally recognizable signs from mass culture. The thematic replication of consumerism in his work establishes its underlying conceptualism. Warhol's mechanical production methods echo the profusion necessary for supplying a capitalist society's mass-consumption, reinforcing that conceptualism.

¹³⁸ Urban Studies Team Ghent, *The Urban Condition: Space, Community, and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis* (Rotterdam: O10 Publishers, 1999).

¹³⁹ An article by Tama Janowitz for *Harper's Bazaar* claims "Warhol launched his career with illustration for magazines like *Harper's Bazaar*." Tama Janowitz, "Warhol's Bazaar Years," *Harper's Bazaar* (2007), <http://www.harpersbazaar.com/magazine/140-years/warhol-years-140-0207>.

¹⁴⁰ The Ghent Urban Studies Team discussed Warhol, Johns and Rauschenberg's backgrounds as window dressers in *The Urban Condition: Space, Community, and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis*. The team proposes, "the Pop art of the 1960s ostentatiously drew a link between commerce and art." Ghent Urban Studies Team, *The Urban Condition: Space, Community, and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis* (Rotterdam: O10 Publishers, 1999). P. 318.



Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962, Synthetic polymer paint.
Each canvas 50.8 x 40.6 cm.

Fredric Jameson is a Marxist cultural theorist from the United States. In the essay *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson deconstructs Warhol's work from a Marxist perspective. Jameson asserts that while Warhol's visuals highlight "the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capitalism," the work fails to make a "powerful and critical political statement."¹⁴¹ Jameson partially owes this to what he defines as the "waning effect" or an extreme ornamental trivialization of an object or person to the point that their identity is transformed into a fabricated image.¹⁴² Jameson criticizes the superficiality in Warhol's renderings of commercial culture, indicating that his work lacks passion and point of view, leaving the audience with only questions. Indeed Warhol grants us neither interpretation nor critique of consumer society. However, his work is open to interpretation and the "rethinking" of an image. The lack of didacticism in Warhol's images forces the audience to ponder his intentions, forming their own conclusions regarding his intentions. The lack of

¹⁴¹ Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146, July-August (1984). PP. 60-61.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

transparency in Warhol's views does not render his work devoid of insight on capitalism.

Warhol did not differentiate between branding and celebrity and used the same production methods to depict both consumer products and to reflect celebrity image. Furthermore, Warhol's celebrities and branded products share a similar graphic quality. Warhol was clearly aware of the marketing power of branding and celebrity, and used his own fame to generate propaganda.

Kerrigan, Brownie, Hewer and Daza-LeTouze are a group of British academics that study the rationale behind celebrity branding in commercial culture. In 2011, they wrote the paper '*Spinning' Warhol: celebrity brand theoretics and the logic of the celebrity brand*. The research team asserts that Warhol was his "own Celebrity Brand as a *pop art strategist*...As a celebrity product, he was the medium that transmitted and extended the awareness of his brand form and function, not only to the American public but also to global audiences, in life and death."¹⁴³ A 1968 advertisement placed by Warhol in the *Village Voice* demonstrates his awareness of branding. In the advertisement, Warhol publicized his willingness to endorse 'anything' with his name. Warhol's advertisement was a concise declaration of his awareness of his name's influence as a brand label.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore his outright manipulation of celebrity branding demonstrates his recognition of its inferred status. Warhol's career asserted the cultural significance of the celebrity brand.

A 1975 quote by Warhol further substantiates self-awareness of his status as a celebrity brand and its potency:

Some company recently was interested in buying my "aura." They didn't want my product. They kept saying, "We want your aura." I never figured out what they wanted. But they were willing to pay a lot

¹⁴³ Finola Kerrigan et al., "'Spinning' Warhol: Celebrity Brand Theoretics and the Logic of the Celebrity Brand," *Journal of Marketing Management* 27, (2011). PP. 13-14.

¹⁴⁴ Ruth La Ferla, "20 Years on, the Branding of Warhol," *New York Times*, October 27 2006.

for it. So then I thought that if somebody was willing to pay that much for it, I should try to figure out what it is.¹⁴⁵

The offer to purchase Warhol's intangible 'aura,' is a clear example of the marketability of celebrity image.



Andy Warhol, Liz #5, 1963, Acrylic and silkscreen on linen. 101.6 x 101.6 cm.

Though Warhol's public image eventually became a profitable status symbol, he initially gained critical acclaim by exploiting images of known media personalities. Beginning the early 1960s, Warhol produced numerous celebrity portraits, including his mixed media likenesses of Marilyn Monroe and Liz Taylor. The portraits of the starlets convey a flat, graphic quality, suggesting the seriality of consumer packaging. The images of iconic actresses highlight the fact that their media personas had evolved into clichés.

Warhol's celebrity repertoire encompasses successful athletes, socialites, political figures and musicians. Warhol offered the viewing public replicated images of sensationalized personas constructed by every facet of the mass media.

¹⁴⁵ Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from a to B and Back Again)* (Orlando, Florida: First Harvest, 1975). P. 75.

Warhol selected subjects with highly marketable images who shared the commonality of fame. Warhol's famous subjects mutually share commercialized media identities.

In 1998, Arthur Danto wrote *Beyond the Brillo Box: the Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective*. In the text, Danto summarizes Warhol's fascination with the plurality of celebrity, its relationship to branding and the significance of this duality within society. Danto declares:

Movie Stars, the stars of the supermarket shelf, the stars of the sports world, the stars of the comic pages, even, in the case of Warhol himself, the stars of the art world, were instantly recognizable to whoever lived the life of the common culture. The art redeemed the signs that meant enormously much to everyone, defining their daily lives.¹⁴⁶

In other words, Warhol presented media constructs of celebrity in a way that simultaneously embraced and targeted consumer culture.

Thus, decades prior to the publication of *Simulacra and Simulation*, Warhol identified and adopted the mass media's application of branding. Baudrillard alludes to branding as "elements of the code and the technical manipulation of the medium."¹⁴⁷ Warhol manipulated the semiotic signs of the advertising and entertainment industries in his work.

Warhol claimed to support the advertising industry's promotion of celebrity iconography and shallow materialism. He therefore foreshadowed Baudrillard's theoretical stance on the artificiality of postmodern celluloid culture as a *hyperreality* of simulations—or "world of self-referential signs" that is "both referent and reality for many viewers."¹⁴⁸ Warhol reflected the media's constructed artifice of unsubstantiated imagery and celebrated its consumption. When asked who his favorite movie stars were in a 1977 interview *for High Times*

¹⁴⁶ Arthur C. Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998). P. 41.

¹⁴⁷ Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 175.

¹⁴⁸ M. Poster in *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 6.

magazine, Warhol replied, “I like them all—I mean anyone who is in a movie.”¹⁴⁹ Warhol’s statement articulates his admiration for celebrity imagery and brand iconography.

Conversely, Baudrillard disparages public consumption and assimilation of the mediated image. Baudrillard postulates that Warhol’s reiteration of media signs initiated a terminal event in the history of visual culture. Baudrillard takes an apocalyptic perspective on the subject of Pop art’s exaltation of contemporary media constructs in his 1983 article, *Pop: an Art of Consumption?* Baudrillard proclaims, “Pop signifies the end of perspective, the end of evocation, the end of witnessing, the end of the creative gesture and, not least of all, the end of the subversion of the world and the malediction of art.”¹⁵⁰ Pessimism aside, Baudrillard’s statement concedes Pop’s precedential documentation of the commercial media’s precession of simulated status emblems in mass culture.

Hal Foster expresses a different interpretation of Warhol’s representation of media status symbols in the 1996 critical text, *Return of the Real*. In the text, Foster concurs with Baudrillard’s stance that Warhol’s work embraced “the simulacral commodity-sign.”¹⁵¹ However, Foster also adopts American art critic Thomas Crow’s vision of Warhol’s work as an exposé of ‘complacent consumption.’¹⁵² Foster finds validity in both Baudrillard and Crow’s theories, discerning the coexistence of critique and acceptance of consumer culture in Warhol’s work.

Foster perceives Warhol’s work as supportive of commodity culture and the mass consumption it promotes. Foster surmises Warhol’s intentions as, “If you can’t beat it join it. More, if you enter it totally, you might expose it; that is, you might reveal its automatism, even its own autism, through your own excessive example.”¹⁵³ Thus, Foster sees Warhol’s overstated embodiment of mass culture’s

¹⁴⁹ Kenneth Goldsmith, ed. *I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2004).

¹⁵⁰ Jean Baudrillard, “Pop: An Art of Consumption?,” *Tension* September/October, 1983. P. 33.

¹⁵¹ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, October Books (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996). P. 130.

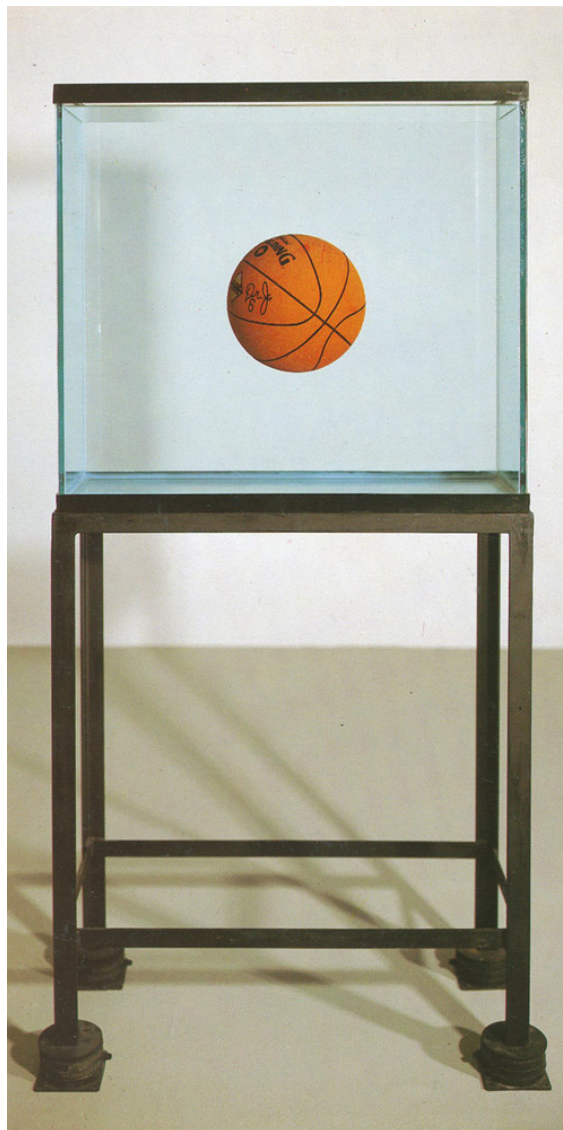
¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* P. 131.

symbolology as a calculated maneuver. By altering the context of imagery from the advertising and entertainment industries, Foster argues, Pop critiques the iconography of consumer culture by inviting “us to re-think”¹⁵⁴ commercial iconography. By inviting the viewer to “re-think” status signifiers, did Warhol initiate a significant art historical phenomenon?

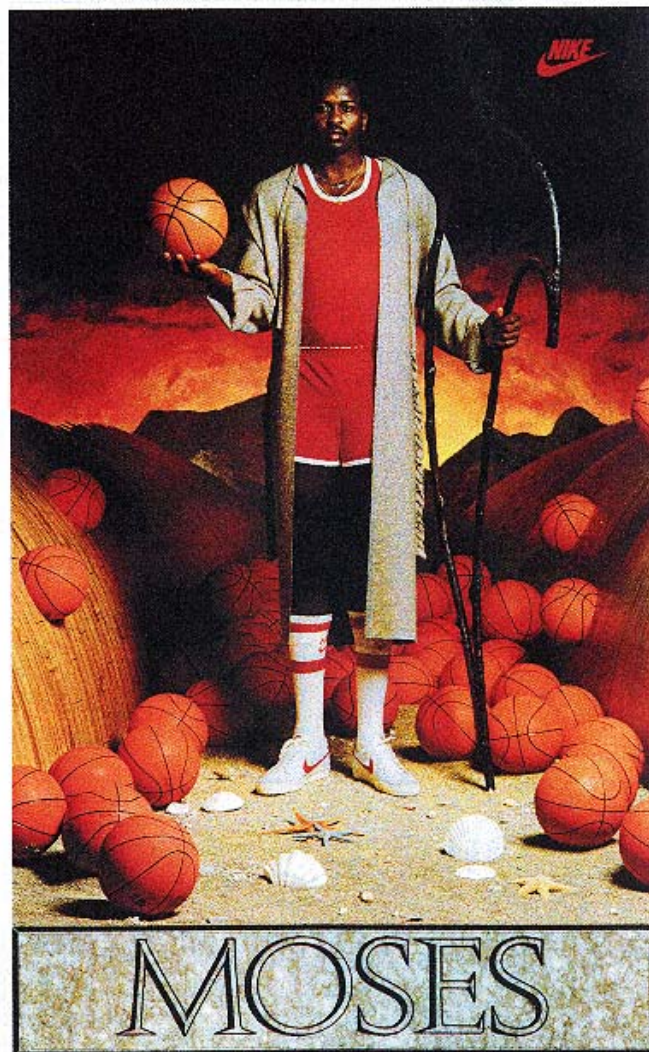
¹⁵⁴ Ibid. P. 136.

The stereotypical iconography of status and celebrity has persisted as a mass media marketing tool. Following Pop, the Postmodernist movement proceeded to reinterpret the influence of status symbols upon consumer identity. It is vital to examine how Jeff Koons reconfigures and appropriates status clichés from the media in addition to Warhol's precedent reflection of commercial culture.



Jeff Koons, *One Ball Total Equilibrium Tank*, 1985, mixed media. 164.5 x 78.1 x 33.6 cm.

Koons utilizes celluloid imagery and product placement in his art practice. Koons takes a literal approach in his manipulation of media iconography. The logos featured in his 1985 *Equilibrium* exhibition provide an early example of his appropriation of advertising industry status stereotypes. The exhibition included *Spaulding* brand basketballs, suspended in tanks alongside *Nike* posters. The prominent logos imprinted on the artworks proclaim the status implied by affiliation with name-brand labels.



Jeff Koons, *Moses*, 1985, Poster. 105.5 x 83cm.

The posters included in *Equilibrium* feature famous basketball stars posed in farcical scenarios. Koons “borrowed” legitimate *Nike* ads for the project.¹⁵⁵ The posters highlight the athletes’ athletic prowess, nicknames and playing positions. The images and texts in the artworks exalt the athletes while suggesting visual puns. In *Equilibrium*, sports stars are pictorially transformed into everything from biblical figures (*Moses*) to heads of state (*Secretary of Defense*). Koons demonstrates the symbiotic interchangeability of celebrity image and brand logos in *Equilibrium*.

Klaus Ottmann is a German curator, art theorist and academic. In 1986, Ottmann interviewed Koons for *The Journal of Contemporary Art*. In the interview, Koons reveals why his art practice is rooted in the advertising industry. “It’s basically the medium that defines people’s perceptions of the world, of life itself, how to interact with others. The media defines reality.”¹⁵⁶ Koons’s statement acknowledges the direct connection between celebrity and product branding. Furthermore, in signifying the universality of signs created by the media, Koons is expanding upon Pop’s precedential reflection of the amalgamation of celebrity and branding.



Jeff Koons, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, 1988, ceramic. 106.7 x 179.1 x 82.5 cm.

¹⁵⁵ According to Christies’ Auction House, Koons sought permission to reproduce the “Nike ads showing basketball players in various poses and guises.” *Christies’ Auction House* <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/sculptures-statues-figures/jeff-koons-two-ball-total-equilibrium-tank-5496717-details.aspx>.

¹⁵⁶ Klaus Ottmann, “Jeff Koons,” *Journal of Contemporary Art* (1986).

A subsequent work of Koons, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, is a life-sized gold and porcelain homage to the now-deceased musical legend and his primate companion. The piece conveys a kitsch aesthetic evocative of collectable figurines. The fine and costly craftsmanship devoted to fabricating a life-sized sculpture with such an aesthetic create a paradox, provoking inquiry into the definition of taste.

In 2008, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* was displayed amongst the Baroque finery in the Salon du Venus at the Palace of Versailles. The work was emphatically protected in a vitrine to ensure its elevated commodity value. The context of the work's placement amidst treasured royal French antiquities emphasizes observations on taste and status conveyed in *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*.

Michael Jackson and Bubbles sensationalizes Michael Jackson, a celebrity already subjected to derogatory media portrayals.¹⁵⁷ Yet Koons refuses to apologize for exploiting his subjects. Koons proclaims, "I'll use sexuality, spirituality, materialism, the media—anything—to seduce the viewer, to get the bourgeoisie to exploit themselves, embrace banality and move forward."¹⁵⁸ This declaration of Koons once again echoes Foster's interpretation of Pop's strategic approach to media symbology: "If you enter it totally, you might expose it...."¹⁵⁹ The brash aesthetic and meticulous production of *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* present a contradiction, as does the coexisting of objectification and deification of the highly scrutinized pop star.

A series of art books entitled *The Conversation Series* is the result of the collaborative efforts of Dutch architect and intellectual, Rem Koolhaas and Dutch art critic and curator, Hans Ulrich Obrist. *The Conversation Series* contains an

¹⁵⁷ In a 1997 interview with Barbara Walters, Jackson discusses the how the media assigned him the nickname *Wacko Jacko*. Jackson, Michael (September 12 1997). Interview with Barbara Walters. 20/20. ABC.

¹⁵⁸ James Hall, "They Call It Puppy Love: Jeff Koons Made Millions 'Sculpting' Giant Baby Animals. But His Notoriety Is Waning," *The Guardian*, Oct 29 1992.

¹⁵⁹ Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. P. 131.

interview with Koons in which he decrees, “in the *Banalities* show the Michael Jackson sculpture was there as a kind of contemporary Christ-like figure showing how people put celebrities in such a high, cult-like celebrity status.”¹⁶⁰ This statement on the religious reverence of celebrity in mass culture correlates to Baudrillard’s views in *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard stipulates that the progression of “the successive phases of the image”¹⁶¹ negate the ideology of a higher power in favor of the enchanted and irreferential image. Baudrillard furthermore claims that we have entered “an age of simulacra and simulation, in which there is no longer any God to recognize his own, nor any last judgment to separate truth from false, the real from its artificial resurrection.”¹⁶² In comparing celebrity to religion in his conceptual application of Pop, Koons validates the semantic connotations of status in the celebrity image.

The reaction to product branding and celebrity by Warhol and Koons has inspired artists around the world to reinvent status clichés in their work. How have contemporary artists proceeded to address this pervasive media phenomenon?

Employing a variety of methodologies, artists address status symbols transmitted in advertising, on television and in the music industry in their work. *The Symbolology of Status Clichés* researches contemporary art’s reaction to media marketing of idealized status symbols. Celebrity image and product branding are considered as synergetic manifestations of status in *The Symbolology of Status Clichés*. Art’s recontextualization of advertising industry promotion of logos as social signifiers is examined alongside artist’s reconfiguration of media transmissions of celebrity image in this chapter. Contemporary art’s response to the elitist connotations of branding and celebrity in the media is also investigated. Is there a conceptual commonality behind contemporary art’s global response to status archetypes in the media?

¹⁶⁰ Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Conversation Series: Jeff Koons*, ed. Karen Marta, vol. 22 (Köln: Walther König, 2010). P. 68.

¹⁶¹ Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 170.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* P. 171.

The Symbology of Status Clichés is divided into four segments, which provide an overview of the different approaches contemporary art takes in challenging status constructs in the media.

The inquiry in the first section of *The Symbology of Status Clichés*, *Redefining Celebrity*, investigates contemporary art's response to *hyperreal* media fabrications of celebrity. The adulation of the celebrity image as a contemporary cultural phenomenon is investigated in this part of the chapter. Works by Marc Quinn and David LaChapelle as response to mass culture's fascination with fame and its inherent connotations of status are discussed in *Redefining Celebrity*.

The Cult of Commodity is the second portion of *The Symbology of Status Clichés*. Artists critiquing the elitist implications of luxury brand marketing are discussed in *The Cult of Commodity*. Works by Wim Delvoe, Sylvie Fleury and Tom Sachs displaying upscale logos are investigated in relationship to capitalism in this part of the chapter. Artists' differing methods of repositioning logos to alter their readings are examined in *The Cult of Commodity*.

An overview of artists' reactions to media status clichés in non-European cultures is provided in *Crafting Credibility*, the third part of *The Symbology of Status Clichés*. The metamorphosis of stereotypical status symbols into works of art using the craft mediums of body paint, crocheting and collage is illustrated in *Crafting Credibility*. Kim Joon, Stephanie Syjuco and Rashaad Newsome undermine the preciousness of luxury icons in their works in this section of the chapter.

More is More is the fourth part of *The Symbology of Status Clichés*. The studio component of the thesis is discussed in relationship to the media's dissemination of stereotypical status representations in this section. Furthermore, a reaction to the vulgarity and overabundance of status symbols in the media is examined in *More is More*. This part of the chapter furthermore establishes the connection between the studio component of the thesis and other works discussed in *The Symbology of Status Clichés*.

The lack of substance in *hyperreal* consumer society as theorized by Baudrillard support the clichéd media archetypes of status in *The Symbology of Status Clichés*. The idea of a “world constructed out of models or simulacra which have no referent or ground in any ‘reality’ except their own”¹⁶³ presented in *Simulacra and Simulation* correlates to the media’s proliferation of status symbols discussed in this chapter. Additionally, Baudrillard’s hypothesis that commodity status symbols exist as capitalist marketing devices devoid of practical use value is examined in relationship to artworks discussed.

While some artworks included in *The Symbology of Status Clichés* coincide with Baudrillard’s pessimistic perspective on commercial culture, others negate his stance. Nonetheless, the model of hyperreality in *Simulacra and Simulation* serves as a distinct point of reference. Theoretical concepts from other critics and philosophers contrasting Baudrillard’s stance are also referenced at appropriate junctures.

A variety of approaches to status in the media are revealed in *The Symbology of Status Clichés*. A Marxist critique of the entertainment and advertising industries’ promotion and exemplification of status is visible in multiple artworks included in this chapter. Ironic works conveying an ambiguous attitude towards status clichés are likewise considered. Furthermore, artworks exhibiting a fascination with the artifice of celebrity and displaying a fondness for the illusory status constructs of product branding are investigated.

My views lack the nihilism of Baudrillard’s stance towards stereotypical status symbols in mass culture. From my perspective, status clichés are transparent media marketing tactics. Media ploys demand exposure through caricature and satire to provoke public awareness of their superficiality.

Nevertheless, the validity in Baudrillard’s proposition on the replacement of product quality by the non-referential idealized image cannot be ignored in relation to the premise of *The Symbology of Status Clichés*. *Simulacra and Simulation* ascertains the media’s role in defining the visual codes of status in

¹⁶³ Mark Poster in *ibid.* P. 6.

contemporary society. Baudrillard conceives of a consumer realm that is a “gigantic simulacrum: not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.”¹⁶⁴ This hypothesis correlates to the fundamental characteristics of media status symbology described in this chapter. How does art react to the consumer realm Baudrillard describes?

¹⁶⁴ Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 170.

i. Redefining Celebrity

The perpetuation of status clichés is apparent in media fabrications of the celebrity image. Since Warhol's seminal reflection of celebrity in the 1960s, contemporary artists have utilized a diversity of methodologies in response to celebrity iconography. *Redefining Celebrity* looks at the widespread phenomenon of reverence for celebrity archetypes in contemporary society. How do Marc Quinn and David LaChapelle approach the adulation of fame in popular culture and its inherent connotations of status in their work?



Marc Quinn, *Sphinx (Road to Enlightenment)*, 2007, bronze. 86.4 x 86.4 x 55.9 cm.

Quinn's depiction of Kate Moss as a sexual archetype was discussed in *Sexual Stereotypes*. However, Quinn also utilizes Moss's image as a metaphor for a status symbol. Over the years, Moss has been featured in promotional campaigns ranging from luxury cosmetics to elite fashion, representing a profusion of high-end labels including *Yves Saint Laurent*, *Versace* and *Dior*. Her exalted media identity has evolved to such an extent that her image is recognized as a vehicle of fashionable credibility. In his exhibition statement, Quinn discloses his reasons for selecting Moss as his model. He explains, "In a world without gods and goddesses, celebrity has replaced divinity. Do we create images or do images create us? What is interesting about Kate Moss is that she is someone whose image has completely separated from her real self and this image has a life of its own."¹⁶⁵ Neither actress nor pop star, Moss is famous solely as vessel of marketability. As a supermodel, her image as an endorsement of a product's chic, she exists as a media-generated sign of style in the collective consciousness of the viewing public.

Quinn applies the image of supermodel Moss to symbolize the status of celebrity in his sculptural *Sphinx* series. Quinn's likenesses of Moss are evocative of classical sculpture, formalistically installed on white plinths reminiscent of Greco-Roman statuary. Quinn's installation strategy suggests that through media exposure, Moss has attained a deified standing paralleling that of ancient gods. The fine materials used in *Sphinx* help define the sculptures as opulent status symbols. The bulk of the *Sphinx* series is cast in costly materials—bronze and 18-carat gold—¹⁶⁶ a choice signifying the exaltation of Moss's precious celebrity image. The polished surfaces of the works echo the airbrushed perfection visible in advertising images.

Quinn selected Moss as a modern surrogate for the enigmatic Egyptian Sphinx because her media presence is dominated by her superficial attributes. Charlotte Higgins of the UK Guardian imparts: "Quinn was drawn to Moss

¹⁶⁵ Marc Quinn, "Artist's Exhibition Statement," in *Sphinx*, ed. Mary Boone Gallery (New York, 2007).

¹⁶⁶ The bulk of the *Sphinx* series on Quinn's website are cast in bronze. However, the 2008 sculpture *Siren* was cast in 18-carat gold.
<http://www.marcquinn.com/work/view/subject/sphinx/#/3533>.

because of her ambiguous place in our culture: a creature who is admired and observed obsessively, but about whom we have little real knowledge."¹⁶⁷ Moss's interests and personality are not disclosed in media depictions. The fabricated image of Moss is deified by the advertising industry, rather than who she is as a person.

In his sculptures, Quinn utilizes Moss as a signifier illustrating how media developments affect our perceptions of reality. Baudrillard declares, "No longer does the code take priority over or even precede the consumer object. The distinctions between object and representation, thing and idea, are no longer valid."¹⁶⁸ Quinn's choice of Moss as a subject whose "image has a life of its own"¹⁶⁹ substantiates Baudrillard's vision of a hyperreal existence where image no longer refers to reality.

Sphinx also reflects Gamson's concepts in *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*. Gamson claims the consumption of commercial culture serves as a "system-preserving distraction, an 'opiate,' and ideological tool, its satisfactions illusory."¹⁷⁰ Quinn's employment of Moss's image illustrates Gamson's theory of image's usurpation of substance in mass culture. The exclusive portrayal of the superficial aspects of Moss's persona corroborates Gamson's perspective.

Quinn describes *Sphinx* as "a portrait of an image, and the way that image is sculpted and twisted by our collective desire. She is a mirror of ourselves, a knotted Venus of our age."¹⁷¹ Quinn's orchestration of Moss's revered physique engaging in the spiritual discipline of yoga contributes to the reading of the work as a deification of her celebrity status. Lacking the image of Moss as a celebrity signifier, *Sphinx* would be reduced to a series of bronze effigies to the yogic arts.

¹⁶⁷ Charlotte Higgins, "Meet Kate Moss-Contorted," *The Guardian* (April 12 2006), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2006/apr/12/2>.

¹⁶⁸ M. Poster in *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 6.

¹⁶⁹ Quinn, "Artist's Exhibition Statement."

¹⁷⁰ Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*.

¹⁷¹ Higgins, "Meet Kate Moss-Contorted."

Likewise, *Sphinx*'s title reinforces the religious connotations of the piece in its suggestion of ancient Egyptian artifacts.

Along with the deification of celebrity status, the artifice of *Sphinx* emphasizes the celebrity image's separation from reality in media culture. Moss's lithe body appears capable of contorting into the extreme yoga positions in the sculptures. There is no evidence to the contrary, since the public is not privy to information about Moss's personal interests. However, Quinn concedes that Moss did not perform the difficult poses depicted in *Sphinx*. Quinn therefore presents the viewer with a constructed reality, which echoes media devices.

Sphinx's artifice parallels the manipulated advertising images from which Quinn derives inspiration. *Sphinx* furthermore bestows veneration and commercial credibility transcendent of the human condition upon a celebrity image. In his manipulation of Moss's image, Quinn thereby "invites us to re-think"¹⁷² the sovereignty of celebrity branding in consumer culture.

¹⁷² Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. P. 136.

Contrasting Quinn's equivocation of celebrity with mythological deity, David LaChapelle utilizes the celebrity image to compose farcical scenarios. Media personalities such as actors, pop stars, models and athletes are marketed as role models for the populace in contemporary society. In reaction to this phenomenon, LaChapelle amplifies entertainment industry stars' archetypical roles in his photographs, thereby exposing media clichés.

LaChapelle gained experience researching pop culture as Andy Warhol's protégé in the 1980s while working at *Interview* magazine. LaChapelle then spent years working as a successful commercial photographer.¹⁷³ Like Warhol his mentor, LaChapelle eventually transitioned from commercial art to a career as a gallery artist. His photographic images maintain an accessible celluloid aesthetic that retain a Pop sensibility in keeping with his commercial roots.



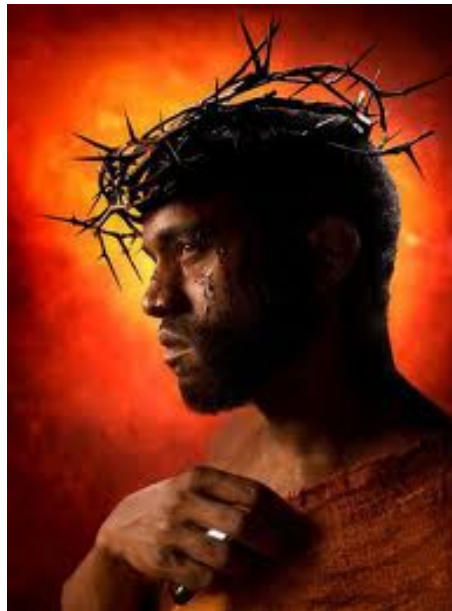
David LaChapelle, *Sean "Puffy" Combs: Mississippi Goddam*, 1999, digital color print.
111.1 x 151.1 cm.

In his work, LaChapelle responds to the celebrity archetypes generated by the media. He demonstrates an acute awareness of the commonplace clichés

¹⁷³ The article "David LaChapelle Claims the Pop Art Throne" by Caitlin A. Johnson discusses LaChapelle's career. Johnson writes, "In the mid-'80s, just out of high school and looking for work, LaChapelle brashly approached Warhol with his portfolio." The article also describes LaChapelle's success as a commercial photographer. Caitlin A. Johnson, "David LaChapelle Claims Pop-Art Throne," *cbsnews.com* (2009), http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-3445_162-2529341.html.

associated with his famous models in his glossy photographs. LaChapelle utilizes elaborate props to orchestrate visual narratives. As in Quinn's work, celebrities are exalted, yet there is a sense of irony in LaChapelle's narratives. Resonating with Foster's surmise of Pop, "If you can't beat it join it,"¹⁷⁴ LaChapelle's photographs simultaneously underscore and contradict the contrived media identities of his subjects.

The fantastical nature of LaChapelle's imagery correlates to the hyperreality in which his subjects exist as media-generated characters. LaChapelle highlights the contrivances of celebrity image in the media through embellishment. For example, Hip Hop star Sean Puffy Combs's media persona is an icon of style and machismo showmanship. LaChapelle highlights Combs's image, portraying the rapper as a greased-up, shirtless idol of masculine carnality in *Sean Puffy Combs: Mississippi Goddam*. LaChapelle photographs Combs in the act of licking an inanimate gilded female torso, laid out before the rapper on a carpeted floor like a sacrifice to the gods.



David LaChapelle, *The Passion of the Christ*, 2008, Mixed Media. 251.1 x 175.3 x 53.3 cm.

¹⁷⁴ Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. P. 131.

In other works, LaChapelle uses humor as a device of engagement to depict sanctified religious scenes. Sacred narratives are reinvented using entertainers as stand-ins for venerated Christian holy figures. For instance, an immaculate, winged Michael Jackson impersonates the biblical Archangel Michael in *Michael Jackson* (2009). Likewise, in *The Passion of the Christ* (2008) LaChapelle reinterprets a pious scene in which rapper Kanye West impersonates the martyred Jesus. In the photo, the media star wears a crown of thorns and is surrounded by a halo of heavenly light. Through the skillful application of stage make-up, West appears to have been flagellated.

Celebrities serve as exemplars in contemporary society. By utilizing celebrity image in parodying religious iconography, LaChapelle creates a commentary on the magnitude of this phenomenon. Furthermore, he incites reflection upon the extent of media simulations' significance of status in consumer culture.



David LaChapelle, *Amanda Lepore as Andy Warhol's Marilyn (Blue)*, 2007, digital C print.
127 x 127 cm.

In addition to sacred iconography, LaChapelle draws inspiration from Warhol's groundbreaking Pop portraits. In 2007, LaChapelle photographically reinterpreted Warhol's legendary portrait, *Liz*. Compositionally and chromatically, LaChapelle's updated version of the famous work mirrors the original. At first glance LaChapelle's image resembles a cartoonish plagiarism of Warhol's painting. Upon close inspection, however, one notices that something is awry in the updated rendition of *Liz*. The facial features LaChapelle's *Liz* are highly exaggerated—the starlet possesses immense, over-inflated lips.

The title of the portrait, *Amanda Lepore as Andy Warhol's Liz*, discloses LaChapelle's ironic subversion of the status image. Amanda Lepore is a transsexual performer and socialite in New York, who is known to have undergone extreme plastic surgery. LaChapelle recruited the famous she-male to serve as a replacement for the idolized 1960s starlet in his portraits.

Poignantly, Lepore makes a surprisingly passable substitute for the actress. The transgender model clearly has adopted the painstaking beauty rituals employed by female entertainers to accentuate their femininity. By substituting Lepore for femme fatales of the silver screen, LaChapelle firstly addresses the concept of hyperreal celebrity identity, thus revealing the artifice of media devices. Secondly, he confronts the notion of inflated artistic value acquired through acclaimed authorship. LaChapelle's manipulation of celebrity iconography produces approachable imagery that exposes the glorified status of celebrity promoted by the media.

Jeffrey Deitch is an influential art dealer and director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles who has curated exhibitions of LaChapelle's work. "David exists in this new territory, in the collapse between vanguard and pop culture, and it's a very interesting space," explains Deitch, "...you see that he's really an important part of image making in our time."¹⁷⁵ Deitch not only elucidates the accessibility of LaChapelle's work, he also conveys its significance in relationship to mass culture.

¹⁷⁵ Guy Trebay, "David LaChapelle: An Unexpected Life," *The New York Times*, May 27 2011.

LaChapelle's images echo Baudrillard's vision of a "world constructed out of models or simulacra which have no referent or ground in any 'reality' except their own."¹⁷⁶ The photographs were exhibited in the 2010 exhibition *Post on Pop* at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, curated by Israeli curator, Nili Goren, who considers LaChapelle's work a "criticism of some of the values consecrated in contemporary society—the addiction to fast food, the worship of anorexic models of beauty, and their destructive encounter—are conveyed via references to Pop..."¹⁷⁷ Hence, Goren's views expand upon Baudrillard's vision.

In recreating Warhol's landmark works, LaChapelle uses irony to expose the *hypperreal* media fabrication of the idolized celebrity image. Utilized as marketing vehicles, truisms pervade mass culture in the form of celebrity archetypes. The intentionally contrived narratives in LaChapelle's portraits reflect the plethora of formulated truisms and façades manifest in the media's marketing of status.

¹⁷⁶ M. Poster in *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 6.

¹⁷⁷ Nili Goren, *Post on Pop*, ed. Tel Aviv Museum (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum, 2010).

ii. The Cult of Commodity

Along with celebrity image, branding is another device employed to market status in the media, which has elicited a response by contemporary art. Artists expanding upon methodologies from the pivotal Conceptual and Postmodern movements, reinvent brand logos touted by the advertising industry. *The Cult of Commodity* examines the recontextualization of logos in the work of Wim Delvoye, Sylvie Fleury and Tom Sachs. How do contemporary artists respond to the capitalist motives of branding?



Wim Delvoye, *Art Farm*, 1997-present, live tattooed pigs. Dimensions variable.

Belgian artist Wim Delvoye expands upon Pop's precedent of repositioning of brand labels. Using them as a metaphor for capitalism, Delvoye undermines the esteem of brand logos in his work. Delvoye's ongoing *Art Farm* project features live pigs. Delvoye employs tattooing as a medium to brand living,

breathing animals in *Art Farm*.¹⁷⁸ Delvoye began the project in 1992 by tattooing inanimate pigskins, but later focusing his efforts upon livestock. He subsequently leased a farm in China for use as his makeshift studio—a site designated for tattooing and housing the swine.¹⁷⁹

Some of the pigs in *Art Farm* are covered with elitist designer *Louis Vuitton* emblems. In the supplanting his artwork from the gallery institution, Delvoye utilized the Pop strategy of challenging the pomp of the art world along with luxury branding. By placing product labels on pigs rather than canvas, Delvoye innovatively pushes the boundaries of recontextualization beyond Pop's established practice.

Instead of elevating an everyday, decorative object to highbrow status in the tradition of Warhol, Delvoye exhibits humble farmyard hogs as contemporary art.¹⁸⁰ As a vocation, farming maintains its connotations of a low class, manual occupation historically reserved for peasants. Delvoye selected the “dé classé” subject matter of the common swine to occupy dignified institutional gallery spaces, metaphorically defiling elitism.

Anthony Grudin is a U.S. art historian and academic who wrote the essay ‘*A Sign of Good Taste*’: *Andy Warhol and the Rise of Brand Image Advertising* for the *Oxford Art Journal*. In the text, Grudin interprets Pop's recontextualization of the escalating proliferation of status symbols in the media. Grudin argues that consumerist strategies of the 1960s promised “consumers that social mobility was a matter of acquiring properly branded commodities... But where consumerism and the promise of participation functioned mostly in the realm of mass culture, pop art (and in a different way, minimalism) took up the challenge in the realm of fine art, giving ever more de classé voices a chance to achieve cultural

¹⁷⁸ A plethora of criticism of *Art Farm* exists on the Internet claiming the tattooing of live pigs is an act of animal cruelty. Delvoye claims that the pigs are well cared for and are sedated during the tattooing process. Although this topic is highly debatable and worthy of lengthy discussion, inclusion of *Art Farm* in this thesis is based upon Delvoye's critique of corporate branding. Therefore, *Art Farm*'s position in relationship to animal rights omitted from the research. Paul Laster, "Bringing Home the Bacon: Wim Delvoye," *ArtAsiaPacific* 2007.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. P. 154.

¹⁸⁰ Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*.. P. 174.

prominence.”¹⁸¹ Accordingly, Grudin views Pop’s utilization of branding from the media mass culture as a reaction to the media’s promotion of class ascendancy. Delvoe’s placement of precious *LV* logos on farm animals grants common livestock cultural prominence. Therefore, *Art Farm*’s statement on branding reinforces—and ironically amplifies— Grudin’s assertion.

Baudrillard describes capital as “*a challenge to society* and should be responded to as such. It is not a scandal to be denounced according to moral and economic rationality, but a challenge to take up according to symbolic law.”¹⁸² In *Art Farm*’s application of *Louis Vuitton* logos, Delvoe challenges the symbolism of capitalism, affirming Baudrillard’s assertion. On the other hand, *Art Farm*’s tangibility presents the viewer with a contradiction. How does Delvoe’s use of barnyard hogs negate Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality while the *LV* signs labeling their hides support the theory?

Delvoe cites that *Louis Vuitton* took offense to his use of their trademark. *Louis Vuitton* officials attempted to confiscate works adorned with *LV* logos as far afield as China and Switzerland. Corporate efforts to seize pigs from *Art Farm* were justified as a breach of copyright. However, according to Delvoe’s speculation, the attempt to impound his work was partially due to the brand’s ambition to protect its upscale public image.¹⁸³

Delvoe’s altercation with the *Louis Vuitton* officials illustrates the phenomenon of sign over substance in global mass culture. In the case of *LV*, the emblem of status designates the value, rather than any actual physically present object. The value of a product’s logo supersedes the worth of its commodity materials. In fact, legitimate *Louis Vuitton* insignia *LV* handbags are made of vinyl-coated canvas and only trimmed with leather.¹⁸⁴ Ironically, the commodity

¹⁸¹ Anthony E. Grudin, “‘A Sign of Good Taste’: Andy Warhol and the Rise of Brand Image Advertising,” *Oxford Art Journal* 33, no. 2 (2010). P. 231.

¹⁸² Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*. P. 174.

¹⁸³ Kisa Lala, “The Audacious Exploits of Wim Delvoe: An Interview with the Artist,” *The Huffington Post*, April 20 2011.

¹⁸⁴ I have personally inspected a *VL* logo *Louis Vuitton* handbag.

value of high-quality pigskin is higher than an equivalent sized piece of vinyl-coated canvas.¹⁸⁵

Akin to other luxury brands, *Louis Vuitton* profits from a lengthy legacy of self-generated propaganda, where a brand is promoted as a form of “cultural currency.” Delvoye debases the famous *LV* emblem by placing it in a pigpen. Perhaps the disgruntled directors of the French fashion label felt discomfort in a conceptual artist’s smug critique of their iconic logo. Loss of sales could be triggered if the brand image were to be deprecated in an anti-establishment artist’s prank.

In opposition to Delvoye’s approach, neither Warhol nor Koons critiqued product branding. Warhol claimed indifferent reflection of branding in his art practice, while Koons celebrates branding—embracing it as a cultural phenomenon. Conversely, Delvoye’s work confronts corporate sovereignty by deconstructing and opposing status symbols. “There should be a counter-attack,” Delvoye says, “for visual pollution... People on the way to work see all these brands, bags, shoes. Brands attacking their collective memory.”¹⁸⁶ Delvoye voices disapproval of the pretentious implications of status branding and how it infiltrates public consciousness. Furthermore, he makes his intention to destabilize the materialist mentality of branding clear. Delvoye disempowers brand image and subverts the elitist implications of branding in his recontextualization of logos on swine.

¹⁸⁵ After searching Internet shopping sites in the United States, I found that vinyl coated canvas was consistently priced at less than USD \$1.00 a square foot, whereas Tandy Leather® priced pigskin at USD \$3.99 a square foot.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Swiss artist Sylvie Fleury demonstrates a contrasting perspective to Delvoye in her appropriation of high fashion branding. The relationship between shopper and merchandise stimulates a dynamic of desire and seduction. Fleury's work addresses that dynamic. Since 1991, Fleury has created various sculptural assemblages using readymade shopping bags imprinted with such exclusive logos as *Chanel*, *Prada* and *Kenzo*. These works include her 2007 piece, *Insolence*, in which shopping bags are composed on the gallery floor to create an installation of readymades.



Sylvie Fleury, *Insolence*, 2007, mixed media. Dimensions variable.

Insolence consists of new items purchased from expensive designer boutiques. The luxury goods remain pristinely enshrouded in tissue paper within their logo-embossed shopping totes. The designer merchandise in *Insolence* is presented like precious yet forbidden fruit. If the packages were disturbed by inspection, the sculptures would lose their integrity and no longer represent the artist's intentions. Fleury's designer installations continually evolve—the work is updated according to shifting fashion trends. Fleury's work therefore echoes

advertising industry pressure to expend capital on acquiring status through fashion branding.

Cues from Warhol are evident in Fleury's stark appropriation—she “invites us to re-think”¹⁸⁷ consumption of brand image. In 2002, New York artist Peter Halley interviewed Fleury for *Index* magazine. When asked about her reinterpretation of fashion labels, Fleury granted that she is one of numerous artists, including Warhol, who has utilized designer labels in her work.¹⁸⁸ However, the secret obscurity and sense of taboo in Fleury's application of the readymade is a departure from Warhol's propensity for branding.

The lack of didacticism in *Insolence* leaves the artist's intentions open to viewer interpretation. In recontextualizing branded shopping bags as art, Fleury employs an accessible symbolism of materialistic desire. Nonetheless, *Insolence* presents a conundrum. We are strictly denied indulgence in the concealed delights contained within *Insolence*'s polished wrapping. Hence, *Fleury* presents the viewer with an inaccessible exclusivity, an unobtainable form of “retail therapy.”

The temptation to open and reveal the merchandise in *Insolence* parallels the sense of unobtainability provoked by materialism. The appetite of the customer is insatiable—the hunger for status symbols never ends. If a collector were to succumb to curiosity and disturb the concealed purchases within, the artwork would be physically and conceptually violated, losing its value. The purchases in *Insolence* would then return to their original state of manufactured functionality—that of designer goods. Fleury intentionally forbids the viewer entitlement to indulge in *Insolence*'s capitalist pleasures.

Fleury's use of brand notoriety can be regarded from a Marxist perspective in accordance with *The Fetish of Commodities and the Secret Thereof*. In the text, Marx deconstructs the origins of material worth and its social implications. He speculates the intrinsic link between skillful human labor and the value of

¹⁸⁷ Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. P. 136.

¹⁸⁸ Peter Halley, "Sylvie Fleury," *Index Magazine* (2002), http://www.indexmagazine.com/interviews/sylvie_fleury.shtml.

commodities. Furthermore, Marx scrutinizes the lack of practical value in commodities such as precious metals and gemstones, which are gauged by their scarcity or prized as “natural objects with strange social properties.”¹⁸⁹ Marx provides the “illusions of the monetary systems”¹⁹⁰ as an example of this phenomenon. Like gemstones, the elite luxury goods in *Insolence* are also valued as finery, rather than practicality.

British curator and art historian, Julian Stallabrass critiques contemporary art from a Marxist context. Stallabrass breaks down Marxist discourse in his interpretation of *The Fetish of Commodities and the Secret Thereof*. Stallabrass perceives all commodities, regardless of their niche, existing in a hierarchy: being valued and therefore communicating to each other and the consumer solely in terms of price.¹⁹¹ Stallabrass establishes the relevance of Marxist theories today. Marx views the fetishization of commodities as a vulgar exhibition of the bourgeois’ longing for status. From a Marxist viewpoint, the upscale labels in *Insolence* create an easily deciphered hieroglyphic code of elite commodity’s role in mass culture.

Baudrillard’s theories on the decimation of reality in media culture are likewise derived from Marxism. According to Baudrillard, signs and simulation have replaced commodities as the fetish object in contemporary consumer culture. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard stipulates that a “‘real’ economy of commodities that is somehow bypassed by an ‘unreal’ myriad of advertising images”¹⁹² exists in the hyperreality of the advertising and entertainment industries. The value of *Insolence* exists purely in the signs of designer labels on the shopping bags. Only Fleury knows what—if any—commodities lie concealed within the wrappings. Through the inference of status communicated by its logos, *Insolence* substantiates Baudrillard’s theory.

¹⁸⁹ Karl Marx, "The Process of Production of Capital," in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, First published 1867, this edition 1887).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. P. 51.

¹⁹¹ Julian Stallabrass, "Fetishism, Youth and Violence in the Work of Tom Sachs," in *Tom Sachs: Survey. America-Modernism-Fashion*, ed. Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst (Oslo, 2006). P. 13.

¹⁹² Mark Poster in *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 6.

Francesca Gavin is a U.K. writer and curator who profiled Fleury's work in the 2004 article, *All that Glitters* in *Contemporary* magazine. Gavin observes, "the removal between the viewer and Fleury's art object is more acute than the distance between shopper and commodity in the shopping environment. We are not supposed to touch the installations, making the moment of 'buying' even more distant, the labels even less attainable. It's a tension that Fleury exaggerates and exploits."¹⁹³ Fleury presents the frivolity and excess of materialistic status icons without judgment, provoking contemplation of the fetishization of capitalist indulgence.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Francesca Gavin, "All That Glitters," *Contemporary* 63, May 2004. <http://www.contemporary-magazines.com/profile63.htm>.

¹⁹⁴ Fleury expressed the sentiment that she views the consumer's desire for material indulgence as a fetish in a 2009 interview for *Frieze* magazine. Felicity Lunn, "Sylvie Fleury," *Frieze*, April, no. 122 (2009).

Sharing a commonality of materials with Fleury, Tom Sachs's sculptures are fabricated out of brand name packaging. However, unlike Fleury's fascination with the fetishization of consumerism, Sachs recontextualizes branding in critique of consumerism. Sachs incorporates shock value into his work—ascribing to brand labels a seductive and repulsive duality. He gives his works nihilistic titles, such as *Hermes Hand Grenade* (1995) that convey a cynical view of luxury items.



Tom Sachs, *Hermes Hand Grenade*, 1995, Hermes boxes, tissue paper and glue grenade.
10.5 x 17.1 x 13 cm.

In *Hermes Hand Grenade*, Sachs constructs a scale-model grenade out of authentic Hermes packaging. The small sculpture is identical to a grenade, yet covered in logos. The luxury item of destruction comes neatly packaged in ('an' removed) actual boutique packaging. The designer weapon is neatly centered on tissues paper in a signature orange Hermes box.

In his analysis, *Fetishism, Youth and Violence in the Work of Tom Sachs*, Julian Stallabrass deconstructs the dialogue in Sachs's sculptures. Stallabrass discusses the tension between distinguished cultural logos and ominous

instruments of destruction in Sachs's work. Stallabrass conceives that Sachs is illuminating the sordid realities of globalization through his repositioning of brand logos. Stallabrass explicates, "What gets blind-sided in our view of commodities is the social relations between the people who make them and bring them to market, which encompass legal arrangements, political structures and workplace rules but also the entire spectrum of oppression and force."¹⁹⁵ Thus, Stallabrass sees Sachs's work as a retort to globalized corporations' ruthless conquest of commodity wealth and status.

Furthermore, Stallabrass articulates Sachs's metaphoric depiction of the intrinsic connection between violent events and wealth necessary to indulge in an "innocent" shopping spree. According to Stallabrass, the more expensive the product, the more destructively wrought currency is necessary for its purchase.¹⁹⁶ Sachs's repositioning of expensive labels implicates the consumer who purchases designer status symbols in this chain of events.

My perspective is in accordance with Stallabrass's stance. Nonetheless, Sachs's work can also be considered reflective of Bataille's Marxist notion of excess as outlined in the first volume of *The Accursed Share*. Bataille defines excess as any expenditure of energy beyond eating, procreating or dying.¹⁹⁷ Bataille professes that increased standard of living and leisure time resulting from the industrial revolution led to excessive consumption.

According to Bataille, the industrial revolution was accompanied by augmented population density, creating pressure amongst an increasingly idle society. Bataille conceives, "at a certain point the advantage of extension is neutralized by the contrary advantage, that of luxury; the former remains operative, but in a disappointing – uncertain, often powerless – way."¹⁹⁸ Therefore, excessive idle time instigated mankind's libertine indulgences in both materialism and brutality.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. P. 20.

¹⁹⁶ Stallabrass, *Tom Sachs: Survey. America-Modernism-Fashion*. P. 22.

¹⁹⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1: Consumption (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. P. 37.

According to Bataille, the boredom arising from surplus leisure time can lead to mischief. Concepts within *The Accursed Share* are observable in the combination of frivolity and morbidity in Sachs's objects and in the decadence of his fabrication methods. For the man who has everything, why not indulge him in the prestige that a *Hermes Hand Grenade* embodies, constructed from authentic *Hermes* packaging?



Tom Sachs, *Chanel Guillotine*, 2000, painted wood, chains, screw, bolts, rope and metal.
125 cm x 106 cm x 103.5cm.

In *Chanel Guillotine* (1998), Sachs takes irreverence to the next level. *Chanel Guillotine* wraps a full-scale functioning tool of human execution in elegant designer logos. Sachs's sculpture conceptually transforms the identities of the slaughter implement and its adorning status symbols, creating a paradox. The ominous guillotine is converted into a designer accessory while the elite Chanel labeling is recontextualized to signify persecution.

Baudrillard postulates that it was capital “which shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power.”¹⁹⁹ The blurring of boundaries between persecution and the status symbology of capitalism in *Chanel Guillotine* parallels Baudrillard’s assertion. By adorning implements of destruction with luxury Sachs exudes pessimistic views of elitist commercialism akin to Baudrillard’s perspective.

Sachs proclaims, “Fashion, like fascism, is about loss of identity.”²⁰⁰ In implicating fascism, Sachs is suggesting the potentially detrimental consequences of refusal to partake in the consumption of status signifiers. Sachs further delineates his intention to denounce cultural pressure to conform to consumerist ideals by purchasing the appropriate status symbols.

¹⁹⁹ Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. PP. 179-180.

²⁰⁰ Deborah Solomon, "Questions for Tom Sachs: Designer Death Xamp," *New York Times Magazine*, March 10 2002.

iii. Crafting Credibility

Along with signifying commodity fetishization and elevated social status, brand identification is also used to communicate social assimilation and flaunt success. Evidence of this phenomenon is visible in diverse cultures around the globe. *Crafting Credibility* investigates how three non-European artists employ craft mediums such as collage, crochet and body-paint as part of their strategy to subvert the preciousness of the status symbol. How does this global development manifest in contemporary art outside of predominantly European cultures?

Australian consumer behavior researchers, Aron O’Cass and Hmily McEwen completed a lengthy study evaluating the connection between “status consumption” and “conspicuous consumption” in 2004. In the study O’Cass and McEwen confirm, “increasingly, brands are seen as important in creating an identity, a sense of achievement and identification for consumers.”²⁰¹ This statement is valid outside of Australia. In Asia, for instance, status brands serve the purpose of communicating an individual’s identity including respectable social status and cultural assimilation. The consumption of designer logos is so prevalent on that continent that a substantial industry of counterfeit designer goods exists, supplying those who cannot afford costly merchandise. Counterfeiting repositions the semiotic code of elite logos onto more financially accessible items.

Filipino artist Stephanie Syjuco incorporates prestigious brand iconography into her art practice. San Francisco-based Syjuco eliminates commodity value from the status object. Syjuco enlists a legion of craft enthusiasts to copy designer handbags and accessories in *The Counterfeit Crochet Project*. Syjuco and her accomplices employ the medium of crochet to re-create luxury goods bearing labels like *Chanel*, *Burberry* and *Fendi*, which are displayed in the gallery space.

²⁰¹ Aron O’Cass and Hmily McEwen, "Exploring Consumer Status and Conspicuous Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 4, no. 1 (2004). P. 25.

The imitation goods in *The Counterfeit Crochet Project* are hand-made as craft projects. Therefore, the project opposes the manufactured output of corporate entities. Nonetheless, the project's luxury goods include logo designs, specialty clasps and elaborate detailing replicating the original designer embellishments. *The Counterfeit Crochet Project* is an impressive display of time-consuming labor and honed technique. In opposition to the homogeny of mass-production, each counterfeit accessory is unique.



Stephanie Syjuco, *The Counterfeit Crochet Project*, 2006-present, dimensions varied.
Mixed media.

The ongoing *Counterfeit Crochet Project* critiques both capitalism and the media. The counterfeit items have been extensively exhibited internationally but are not for sale, nor are participants in the project compensated for their labor. In their lack of material value, works exhibited in the project are reduced to unadulterated status signifiers. Thus, Syjuco's intentional replacement of commodity with sign resonates with Baudrillard's theory of the "substitution of the sign for the real"²⁰² in *Simulacra and Simulation*. The application of brand image on items liberated from commodity value creates a paradox in *The*

²⁰² Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). P. 169.

Counterfeit Crochet Project. Syjuco and her colleagues aspire to display the iconography of status without participating in the capitalist system

The Counterfeit Crochet Project website conveys an anti-capitalist stance, proclaiming the project as “a critique of a political economy.”²⁰³ Syjuco states her intention of “debas[ing] and defil[ing] designer items one step at a time,”²⁰⁴ a declaration exuding Marxism. By eliminating resale value from the labor-intensive accessories, the project takes an updated perspective on the views expressed on the “illusions of the monetary systems” in *The Fetish of Commodities and the Secret Thereof*.²⁰⁵ In Syjuco’s work, the commodity value has been invalidated, yet the use-value and elitist fetish of brand labeling remain.

Syjuco attempts to enlist additional accomplices in the project on *The Counterfeit Crochet Project* website, encouraging members of the public to join her movement. Syjuco thereby promotes self-empowered pirating by soliciting the audience to learn to crochet. The opportunity to attain a status symbol without the financial expenditure involved in purchasing a genuine designer product is furthermore implied in Syjuco’s statement:

Most of us ‘ordinary people’ can’t afford such things, and some even knowingly buy knock-off products to sublimate our desires. If you take the logic one step further, and actually make the item yourself, you are in a sense taking the situation into your own hands without giving a single penny to the company brand. They have excluded you anyway, by keeping their prices astronomically high.²⁰⁶

Syjuco enables prospective bootleggers by providing them with logo pattern grids, designer logo clip-art and step-by step instructions on bootlegging a *Chanel* bag.

New York-based artist and academic Otto Von Busch curated *Hackers and Haute Couture Heretics: Subconstructive Strategies in the Fashion System*,

²⁰³ Stephanie Syjuco, “Counterfeit Crochet Project,” <http://www.counterfeitcrochet.org/index.html>.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. P. 51.

²⁰⁶ Syjuco, “Counterfeit Crochet Project.”

an exhibition that included *The Counterfeit Crochet Project*. Von Busch expresses how the project addresses “forces larger than oneself—politics, global economics, capitalism, and the corporate culture machine—all the while maintaining that there is a way to mutate a given set of laws, icons, or imagery, and place them at a new and different service.”²⁰⁷ Von Busch’s statement articulates *The Counterfeit Crochet Project* as a means of subverting capitalism and inspiring the viewer to “rethink” status symbols marketed by the global media.

From my perspective, the crocheted interpretations of status objects in *The Counterfeit Crochet Project* are more arresting than the originals upon which they are based. In losing their slick elegance and cookie-cutter predictability, the counterfeits gain a sense of chic individuality while questioning the sovereignty of globalized consumerism. Furthermore, in decoding the semantics of status, Syjuco’s project challenges the conformist and elitist associations of luxury labels. The time, skill and creativity required to fabricate the *Counterfeit Crochet Project*’s distinctive items rejects advertising industry greed and affirms independence from the capitalist system. The handcrafting and originality promoted by the project counter the homogeneity and automation that accompany global corporations’ capitalist agenda.

²⁰⁷ Otto Von Busch, *Hackers and Haute Couture Heretics: Subconstructive Strategies in the Fashion System*, ed. Garanti Galeri, Exhibition Catalog Essay (Istanbul, 2007).

Working in class-conscious South Korea, artist Kim Joon takes a different approach to Syjuco in his recontextualization of product identity. Joon uses live human figures as canvases to disclose the cultural significance of internationally recognized luxury logos. He applies emblematic company designs from such manufacturers as *BMW*, *Dior* and *Hermes* in body paint on the bare skin of his subjects, coating multiple intertwined models' bodies in logos. This methodology creates a metaphorical veil of body armor of designer labels. Joon then orchestrates compositions of the intertwined figures and then photographs his subjects. The vulnerable nude figures are strategically positioned in entangled groups, creating a metaphor for the unified brand consumption in mass culture.



Kim Joon, *We-BMW*, 2005, digital print, 3DMax. 240 × 150 cm.

Joon's subjects are categorized solely through the visual code communicated by the logo designs on their skin. Safety is implied in the models' numbers and also in their anonymity. In the photographs, the participants' only perceptible identity is their categorization by brand loyalty.

The body paint of Joon's figures is so extensive that hardly any human skin is left bare and resembles tattoos. Joon affirms his artwork's correlation to tattooing. He considers his use of the patterns "as a metaphor for hidden desire or a kind of compulsion engraved into human consciousness. Tattoos can reflect individual and collective reality or displaced desire."²⁰⁸ Hence, Joon's "corporate tattoos" function as urban camouflage—the coding inferred by the familiar branding icons grants the bearer acceptable hierarchical standing in consumer culture.

An incongruity lies in Joon's application of tattooing as branding. Tattoos are outlawed and considered taboo in many sectors of Korean society where Joon was born and raised.²⁰⁹ In Asia, marginalized mafia members cover their entire bodies in intricate gang tattoos.²¹⁰ On the other hand, in South Korea brand labels are considered a highly desirable form of cultural currency. Therefore, Joon transfers socially acceptable emblems and motifs into a context associated with marginalization.

Joon undertook production of the photographic series, *We* in 2005. In *We*, subjects are covered with logo patterns representing global mega-corporations like *Adidas*, *Starbucks*, *Heineken* and *Gucci*. For the series, Joon selected brands embodying an established level of status trusted by consumers around the world.

²⁰⁸ Homa Nasab, "Korean Artist Kim Joon @ Sundaram Tagore Nyc," *Art Info* Museum Views(2010), <http://blogs.artinfo.com/museumviews/2010/11/08/korean-artist-kim-joon-on-fragility-sundaram-tagore/>.2010.

²⁰⁹ "There is still a lot of resistance to tattooing in Korea. It is still illegal to have tattoos done in tattoo parlors." According to Joon in a 2009 interview with Erin Wooters for *Art Radar Asia* on artradarjournal.com.

²¹⁰ For example, Canadian journalist, John Rider wrote the article *Tattoos taboo in today's Japan; Linked to much feared gangsters, the Yakuza*. In the article he states that in Japan tattoos are taboo. "Today, however, tattoos are automatically linked with one word that can instantly hush a noisy bar and perfume the air with angst: Yakuza. Yakuza are much-feared gangsters who follow a samurai-like code of honour, which includes losing fingertips for disobedience and, as a sign of loyalty and toughness, wearing full-body, traditionally themed tattoos," Rider claims. David Rider, "Tattoos Taboo in Today's Japan; Linked to Much Feared Gangsters, the Yakuza," *Toronto Star*, January 29 2001.

We addresses the mass appeal of heavyweight global branding. In *We*, brands represent a collective yearning to “fit in” to the mainstream, or included in a widespread clique of conventionality. Affiliation with this clan of conformity is visually transmitted through a language of recognizable signs. The key to acceptance lies in the correct implementation of a code composed of sanctified merchandise. In *We*, assimilation is facilitated by brandishing recognizable branded status symbols.

Joon’s work updates Warhol’s vision of a society culturally dominated by consumerism. Baudrillard expounds upon and critiques this perspective in *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard views the dominance of commercial globalization as the cultural colonization of humanity. “We are simulators, we are simulacra...we are concave mirrors radiated by the social,”²¹¹ Baudrillard declares. Joon’s logoed models symbolize the epidemic cultural phenomenon of brand consumption and the conformity it communicates.

We conveys the corporate sovereignty and homogeneity embodied by the media, its figures serving as living, breathing advertisements for branding. While the transmission of compliance with conformity is one function of designer goods, another is the establishment of social position. However, akin to Syjuco’s counterfeit merchandise, Joon’s models serve as the illicit conductors of status emblems. Joon’s models bear product logos without expending the capital required for their purchase.

In *Party*, a subsequent photographic series, Joon adopts signature motifs from the high fashion ateliers of *Dior*, *Hermes*, *Prada* and *Armani*. Patterns from the luxury labels are superimposed upon the flesh of Joon’s figures. Miami curator and writer Bryan Barcena describes *Party* in *Kim Joon: Body Ads* in ARTPULSE magazine. Barcena explicates: “The intricate patterns, coupled with the dismembered and disenfranchised bodies, create what can be described as an orgiastic scene, free from narrative and individuality. The characters are

²¹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1994). P. 100.

interchangeable and superficial.”²¹² Like human billboards, Joon’s faceless subjects serve the sole purpose of conveying the motifs of elite designers.



Kim Joon, *Party-Prada*, 2007, C-print. 120 x 120cm.

Party maintains a sense of conformity and superficiality, yet *Party*'s product references confront luxury branding rather than the plurality of globalized consumerism in *We*. As opposed to *We*'s globally recognizable logos, sophisticated knowledge of fashion is necessary to identify the origins of the designer motifs in *Party*. Unless the audience is privy to latest designer trends, the meaning of *Party* is lost. To those ignorant of upscale designer fashions, *Party* is reduced to a succession of painstakingly produced, decorative photographs. In displaying less familiar brand identity, Joon transitions to imagery connoting the exclusivity of affluence.

Hence, *Party* represents a progression towards questioning of elitism in capitalist society. *Party*'s allusion to the privilege associated with owning luxury

²¹² Brian Barcena, "Kim Joon: Body Ads," *Art Pulse* (2008), <http://artpulsemagazine.com/kim-joon-body-ads/>.

wares confronts classism as well as cultural conformity. While the paradoxical exhibition of cultural credibility expressed in *We* remains, *Party* additionally responds to the pretentiousness associated with elevated social status.

Another example of status display is the ostentatious exhibition of expensive branding and other forms of costly plumage integral to Hip Hop. In Hip Hop culture, the term *bling* originated in African American culture as evidence of a rapper's notoriety. *Bling* has been used since the 1980s to describe the flaunting of designer goods and flashy jewelry.²¹³ *Bling* has developed into a code of communication in its own right.

Elizabeth F. Purinton is a United States academic who researches consumer aesthetics and the cultural significance of jewelry consumption. In her 2009 conference paper, *Compensatory or Conspicuous Consumption: Bling It On*, Purinton concludes that *bling* presents a "potential connection between conspicuous and compensatory consumption."²¹⁴ Purinton furthermore explicates *bling*'s evolution from an entertainment industry code of credibility into a multi-racial phenomenon pervading multiple class levels.

In 2009, Hip Hop industry journalist and writer, Minya Oh, wrote *Bling Bling: Hip Hop's Crown Jewels* as an analysis of *bling*. In the book, influential rapper Ludacris gives an account of *bling*'s meaning in Hip Hop culture as an expression of a performer's identity and measurement of their achievements. Ludacris explains, "because for us, it is all about making that impression... showing off success... even before you have any. When you sign that first deal or record that first record, you get that first *bling*."²¹⁵ Ludacris and Purinton's perspectives concur: *bling* simultaneously flaunts status and offsets the hardships of urban life. Nonetheless, *bling* has become so abundantly represented in the media and mimicked in popular culture that it has developed into a cliché.

²¹³ According to jewelry researcher Elizabeth Purinton, "While casual observers often date the emergence of bling to the late 1990s and the spread of hip-hop into mainstream, it can be traced to the mid 1980s, much earlier for gold teeth." Elizabeth F. Purinton, "Compensatory or Conspicuous Consumption?: Bling It On" (paper presented at the ASBBS Annual Conference, Las Vegas, 2009). P. 2.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Minya Oh, *Bling Bling: Hip Hop's Crown Jewels* (New York: Wenner Books, 2005). P. ix.



Rashaad Newsome, *Status Symbol #20*, 2009, collage on paper. 76.2 x 56.2 cm.

Rashaad Newsome is an African American artist who responds to the cultural development of *bling* by repositioning appropriated images and objects into his collage and assemblage works. From ostentatious jewelry to flashy cars and scantily clad women, Newsome recontextualizes a diversity of status signifiers to create compositions that reflect the unabashed excess of popular culture.

Newsome equivocates his amalgamations of luxury goods to modern-day coats of arms. Newsome states, “A coat of arms is really a collage of objects that represent social status and economic status and status as a warrior.”²¹⁶ Melena

²¹⁶ Melena Ryzik, "Blending Hip-Hop and Heraldry," *New York Times* (2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/23/arts/design/rashaad-newsome-blending-hip-hop-and-heraldry.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

Ryzik of the *New York Times* summarizes Newsome's work as "history applied to the juxtaposition of high and pop art; symbols isolated, mixed and re-appropriated; the exploration of African-American culture."²¹⁷ Imagery from mass culture inspires Newsome's translations of historic European iconography. He utilizes the adornments of today's Hip Hop echelons to create updated interpretations of family crests of ancient nobility.

Over the past several years, Newsome has been producing the collage series *Status Symbols*. Works from the series are composed of photographic representations taken from advertising. The collages include images of pavé jewelry, which is known as *ice* in urban slang. Newsome also incorporates other material indulgences visible in Hip Hop music videos into his compositions, including champagne bottles, headphones and swimming pools.



Rashaad Newsome, *Fess (The World is Yours)*, 2010, mixed media. 59.3 x 40.9 x 2.5 cm.

Newsome further reflects noble heraldry in his wall-mounted sculptural assemblages. The three-dimensional works resemble knightly shields. Two of

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

these works, *Fess (The World is Yours)* and *Bend* (2010), are composed of fake fur and gaudy costume jewelry amongst other adornments. Newsome exhibits neither restraint nor subtlety in his execution of the two pieces. *Fess (The World is Yours)* highlights a *Louis Vuitton* monogram band down its center and has two royal scepters as appendages. Likewise, *Bend* is crowned with a baseball cap, accented by dangling bejeweled product iconography including Kellogg's *Tony the Tiger* and a pink *iPod*.



Rashaad Newsome, *Bend*, 2010, mixed media. Dimensions variable.

Newsome recognizes birthright and nobility as ('the' deleted) signifiers of rank and credibility in feudal societies. Newsome views right of passage and celebrity as the modern counterparts of those ancient signifiers. In a 2010 interview for *Art in America*, Newsome elucidated his use of status symbols. Newsome declares: "The pre-modern knight showcased himself using griffins, dragons and coronets; the impresario shows his status through his cars, his cribs, his diamonds and his video girls. The hip-hop culture mirrors the knight culture. The pageantry, the theater of that whole culture (of heraldry) is mirrored in

contemporary black youth culture."²¹⁸ As part of their public image, rappers commonly promote themselves as gangsters—a type of “urban warriors.” Newsome perceives the venerated and feared knights of centuries past as rappers’ ancient counterparts.

A sense of social commentary is evident in Newsome’s reconfigurations of *bling*. Newsome’s appropriated status symbols reflect the “myriad of advertising images”²¹⁹ Baudrillard identifies in the hyperreal “world of self-referential signs.”²²⁰ Elements of Newsome’s compositions are packed together and repetitively arranged, formally resembling wallpaper. The amalgamations of *bling* serve as observations on the relentless display of decadence promoted in the media. In both his collage and assemblage works, Newsome highlights how the image of *bling* attracts attention and implies status, regardless of commodity value. Newsome’s utilization of *bling* illustrates how signs and simulations signify status in media derived culture.

Hip Hop culture aside, the portrayal of excess in Newsome’s work correlates to popular culture’s overzealous attitude towards consumption. Depictions of indulgent lifestyles in the media contribute to the attitude of the consumer culture. Juliet Schor is a U.S. professor of sociology who has studied consumption in depth. In her book, *The Overspent American* (1998), Schor investigates the development of superfluous consumption. Schor asserts, “TV mainly shows people in the top 20 percent of the income distribution. A family that is supposed to be an ordinary middle-class family on TV has a six-figure lifestyle.”²²¹ The exaltation of *bling* and indulgence in Newsome’s work echoes Schor’s description of a society with a sense of entitlement to excess.

In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille theorizes that carnal indulgence and a disregard for ethics ensue in an economy that allows surplus wealth and leisure time. Bataille claims, “Changing from the perspectives of *restrictive* economy to

²¹⁸ Brienne Walsh, "Rashaad Newsome: A Bling Thing," *Art in America*, October 12 2010.

<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/rashaad-newsome/>

²¹⁹ M. Poster in *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 6.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Juliet Schor, "The Overspent American," *Multinational Monitor* (1998). P. 21.

those of *general* economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation a reversal of thinking—and of ethics.”²²² Therefore, according to Bataille’s perspective, the spectacle of excess examined by Newsome and Schor is an inevitable consequence of an unrestricted general economy.

Newsome recontextualizes both the flamboyant signifiers of Hip Hop and the coding of noble crests into the contemporary gallery space. His work juxtaposes the status associations of *bling* and the ornate heraldry of centuries past. The references to privilege and elitism in Newsome’s work present a reaction to the media’s inundation of images of conspicuous consumption. Newsome’s decoding of the hierarchical semantics of today’s decadent imagery incites commentary on consumerism. By creating a dialogue between flashy content and mass-produced materials, Newsome provokes the audience to “rethink” the media’s reinforcement of materialistic exhibitionism.

²²² Bataille, *The Accursed Share*. P. 25.

v. **More is More**

A reaction to status symbols from the media is also visible in the studio component of the thesis. *More is More* examines two examples of those visual responses to stereotypical status constructs in the advertising and entertainment industries. The work recontextualizes recognizable symbolism of material wealth and status from mass culture. Although there are no direct references to individual celebrities within the artwork, the coding inherent to transmissions of celebrity culture is apparent.



2010 paparazzi photograph of rapper Lil' Wayne's diamond *grill*.

Grills are decorative tooth coverings fabricated from precious metals and gemstones associated with the phenomenon of *bling*. Worn by rappers to attract attention, *grills* gained notoriety as status ornaments in the media from the 1980s onward.²²³ Flava Flav, Nellie and Lil' Wayne are a few examples of rappers who

²²³ In her 2009 paper, *Compensory or Conspicuous Consumption?: Bling it On*, Elizabeth Puriton clarifies the origins of *grills*. She cites "Gold teeth or *grills* have a long history, first in the Gold Coast of Africa, then Jamaica, and then during the 1920s Jazz Age. In the 1970s, Barry White and Isaac Hayes brought the fashion back. Lately, many performers and many not in hip-hop, such as

have accessorized their smiles with jewels to attract attention. Originally, *grills* were made of yellow gold. *Grills* eventually became more elaborate and fabricated out of more costly materials such as diamonds and platinum. *Grills*' progressive evolution towards overstatement is a clear manifestation of social competition for broadcasted semblances of heightened status. By the early twenty-first century, public adornment of *grills* mimicking those worn by hip-hop icons became commonplace. Thus the *grill* evolved into media cliché.

The 2010 photograph, *Fixation 1* is an intentional exaggeration of a diamond pavé mouth *grill*. The image of the overinflated *grill* in *Fixation 1* alludes to the media's emphasis upon its iconography of status. Furthermore, *Fixation 1* references the absurdity of the transmitted illusions of prestige and power purveyed in media status clichés. The image is an absurdist reaction to the vulgarity and overabundance of depictions of status in the media.



Liz Miller, *Fixation #1*, Archival ink jet print in light box, 2009. 68.6 x 101.6 cm.

Fixation 1 is a reflection of a procession of mediated models, or *simulations* characterizing contemporary capitalism. Baudrillard describes this

Madonna and Johnny Depp, have been seen sporting grills.”
(<http://asbbs.org/files/2009/PDF/P/PurintonE.pdf>).

process as “the discourse of desire” that exists in “a nonreferential world.”²²⁴ *Fixation 1* is a visual interpretation of the media-generated world where “referentials intermingle their discourses in a circular, Moebian²²⁵ compulsion.”²²⁶ The mouth in *Fixation 1* simulates the social phenomenon of the cultural trend of wearing *grills*. The cultural phenomenon of *grills* simulates the status symbols worn by images of celebrities seen in the media’s hyperreality. Therefore, *Fixation 1* represents a sequence of simulations.

The reinvention of a *grill* in *Fixation 1* intentionally amplifies a status stereotype. Rather than encrust the teeth with jewels like an actual *grill*, in *Fixation 1* the entire oral cavity is literally crammed with gems. The mouth overflowing with *bling* intentionally exaggerates status display seen in the media. The tension of the physical discomfort ensuing from stuffing one’s mouth full of metal and jewels in *Fixation 1* is deliberately conveyed in the image. Therefore, *Fixation 1* suggests the extremity of the imitation of media status symbols in consumer culture.

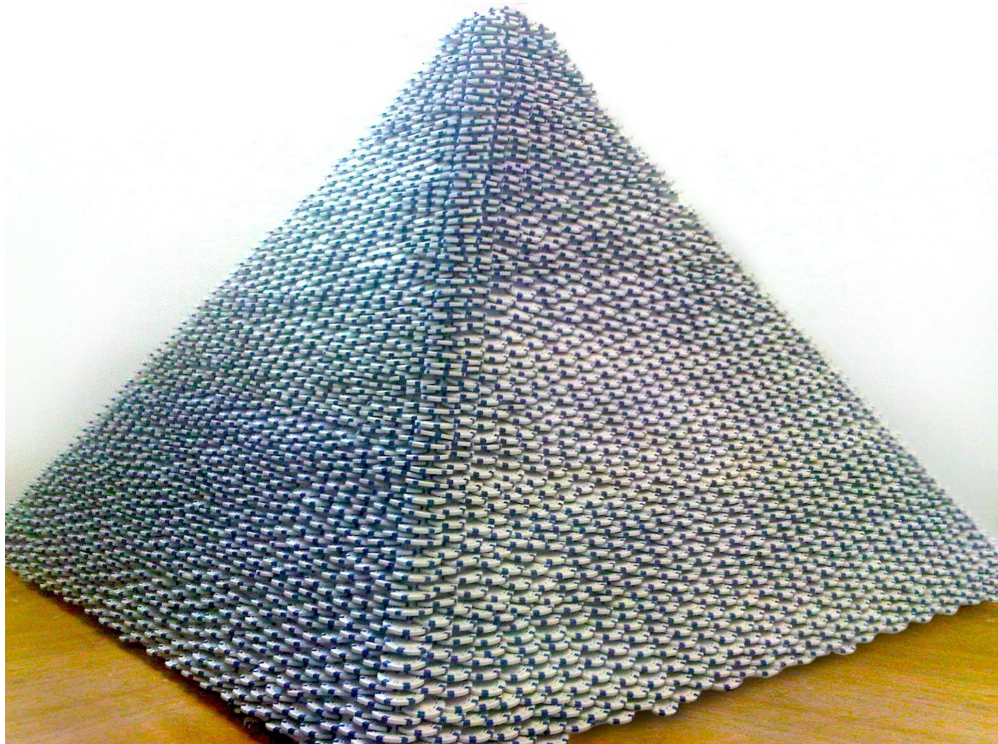
Elements of *Fixation 1* parallel Newsome’s appropriation of media-generated *bling*. Both *Fixation 1* and Newsome’s collages employ status signifiers of blatant excess originating in Hip Hop culture. However, stylistically the two pieces diverge. The formal complexity of Newsome’s work contrasts the simplicity of *Fixation 1*. Newsome’s intricate collages amalgamate repetitive, disembodied portions of conglomerated images. The density of Newsome’s compositions denotes the inundation of status signs produced by the media. On the other hand, in *Fixation 1*, a single giant mouth brimming with *bling* fills the entire the picture plane. The exclusion of additional compositional elements in

²²⁴ Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 179.

²²⁵ According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the term “Moebian” refers to a Möbius strip, a one-sided surface that is constructed from a rectangle by holding one end fixed, rotating the opposite end through 180 degrees, and joining it to the first end. The Möbius strip was invented by the German mathematician, August Möbius. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/möbius%20strip>).

²²⁶ Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 176.

Fixation I emphasizes the media's potent influence over mass culture's pursuit of status.



Liz Miller, *Pyramid*, Poker chips, 2011, wood and adhesive, 110 x110 x 110 cm.

The media's promotion of status icons is also evident in another work for the studio component of the thesis: the sculptural work *Pyramid*. *Pyramid* reinvents the pyramid illustration imprinted on the US dollar bill. Although reinforced by a wooden frame, the piece is constructed to create the illusion of being entirely composed of poker chips. *Pyramid* is a monumental piece composed of thousands of chips, its form and content eliciting a dialogue on the display of excess and its implication of status.

Pyramid invokes a conceptual commentary on the immateriality of media status symbols. Viewing stacks of poker chips conjures televised images of

gambling wins and glamorous casinos. However, though the chips evoke associations of monetary gain, poker chips lack any innate commodity value. The chips are devoid of use-value and exist solely as signs of status and excess. *Pyramid* “invites us to re-think”²²⁷ and reevaluate status iconography. While ancient pyramids were built as monuments to religious power, images of pyramids today convey allusions to the purchasing power of the dollar bill. The implied value of the poker chips suggests power without substance akin to modern currency. *Pyramid* serves as a metaphor for those constructs of luxury and status marketed by the media. Baudrillard defines the media’s commercialization of upscale lifestyle as “vicissitudes of profitability.”²²⁸ A monument to materialism, *Pyramid* is a testament to a cultural condition in which status is marketed to suggest an enhanced “quality of life.”

Baudrillard claims that capital liquidated reality “in the extermination of every use value, of every real equivalence, of production and wealth, in the very sensation we have of the unreality of the stakes and the omnipotence of manipulation.”²²⁹ The pyramid connotes the potent influence of capitalism’s symbology. According to Baudrillard, that potency is unfounded, “it only multiplies the *signs* and accelerates the play of simulation.”²³⁰ Lacking in use value yet representing signs of wealth and status, the poker chips in *Pyramid* reflect the *hyperreal* commodification of signs.

Commonalities exist between *Pyramid* and Stephanie Syjuco’s *Counterfeit Crochet Project*. Both works critique the clichéd signs of capitalist status prevalent in the advertising and entertainment industries. However, the production methods of the works deviate. *Pyramid* repositions and reconfigures a multitude of status icons from mass culture. This tactic emphasizes the media’s deluge of status signifiers and the cold serialization of those symbols. Like a monument, the sculpture is iconic in scale, yet lacks practicality. In contrast, *The Counterfeit Crochet Project* consists of functional goods, intended for practical use as fashion

²²⁷ Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. P. 136.

²²⁸ Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 131.

²²⁹ ———, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 180.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

accessories. The logos and designs of Syjuco's counterfeit items simulate the original designer pieces. Nonetheless, *The Counterfeit Crochet Project* defies the conventions of globalized commerce—the imitation designer accessories in Syjuco's project are discernably hand-made. The crocheted materials of the reinvented goods indicate Syjuco's intention to challenge the conventions of consumer culture. However, despite disparate production methods, *Pyramid* and the *Counterfeit Crochet Project* both address what Syjuco describes as the “opposition to the macro capitalism of the transnational corporation.”²³¹ *Pyramid* and the *Counterfeit Crochet Project* originate from different cultural perspectives and accordingly employ distinct strategies to expose the universal consumption of status symbols in globalized society. However, the methodologies of both works undermine the capitalistic value placed on status symbols by the media.

It is now evident that the symbiotic relationship between celebrity and branding creates the cultural code of status symbology. The media promotes branded status products alongside celebrity image as a representation of privileged lifestyle. Baudrillard illuminates the significance of media status symbols in *The Symbolology of Status Clichés*. According to Baudrillard, constructs of unsubstantiated status images are increasingly valued in popular culture.²³² Furthermore, the media's dissemination of stereotypical status images has escalated due to globalization, resulting in an inundation of idealized, clichéd notions of status within mass culture.

The process of researching *The Symbolology of Status Clichés* has determined that the response to status clichés is a pivotal theme in contemporary art. Additionally, the inquiry in this chapter has ascertained art's reaction to media propagation of celebrity likenesses and luxury logos to be a global phenomenon. The investigation has exposed contemporary art's diverse retorts to media status symbols.

²³¹ Stephanie Syjuco, *Unsolicited Collaborations and Undercover Agents: Notes from a Local Underground*, (Stanford, 2005). PP. 16-17.

²³² Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*. PP. 176-180.

As a result of the research, three primary conceptual devices employed in response to status symbols have become apparent. Those devices are exaltation, satire and counterfeiting. Exaltation of the status signifier repositions media images in a way that highlights the cultural implications of their elevated social position. For instance, *Sphinx* by Marc Quinn recontextualizes supermodel Kate Moss's image in a way that conjures Greek and Egyptian mythologies, giving the work religious connotations.

Satire is employed as a tactic to provoke humorous deliberation of the integrity of status symbols in mass culture. Delvoye's smug transferal of the familiar elitist *LV* logo from luxury items to common swine in *Art Farm* provides an example of satire. The display of counterfeiting in art reveals the lack of intrinsic value in the status icon. *The Counterfeit Crochet Project* invalidates the commodity value of the status symbol while retaining the identity and use-value of the object through counterfeiting, thus revealing the elitist façade of luxury branding.

Evidence suggests that artworks discussed in *The Symbology of Status Clichés* mutually address the status interchangeably marketed through celebrity and branding as repercussions of late capitalism. *The Fetish of Commodities and the Secret Thereof* cultivates the theory that the superior purchasing power of the upper classes entitles them indulgence in exclusive liberties and fetishes.²³³ This chapter has shown how the advertising industry capitalizes upon the implied privilege signified by both celebrity and luxury logos elitist significations. Julian Stallabrass expands upon the Marxist theory, stating that all commodities are valued through a hierarchical dialogue within a culture.²³⁴ Stallabrass furthermore asserts that a critique of that hierarchical dialogue in mass culture is manifest in contemporary art—an observation that is validated in this chapter.

Thus, *The Symbology of Status Clichés* has established the pervasiveness of status symbols in the media as signifiers of elitism. Varied methodologies of

²³³ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*.

²³⁴ Stallabrass, *Tom Sachs: Survey. America-Modernism-Fashion*.

responding to status iconography from the media have been revealed both as a means of 'rethinking' and subverting the symbiotic relationship between celebrity and branding. Through repositioning the status symbol, and therefore exposing its lack of inherent value, art reveals the media's exploitation of the popular culture's aspirations of privilege.

CHAPTER THREE: Factitious Violence

Art has portrayed acts of violence throughout recorded history. Artistic portrayals of brutality are diverse in content. Depictions of violence include criminal cruelties, mortal combat, divine destruction and the perils of war. Artists are clearly not immune to humanity's penchant for violence. Definitions of violence range from physical to emotional.²³⁵

Violence is promoted differently in the media from stereotypical representations of sex and status. Whereas idealized portrayals of sex and status frequent the advertising industry as marketing tools for consumer products, violent imagery rarely serves that purpose. Violence is primarily sensationalized in the entertainment sector of the media. (The entertainment industry include... deleted)

In the 1960s, Pop artists latched on to entertainment industry violence in their obsessive regurgitation of popular culture. Violence in entertainment clearly offers the consumer thrilling excitement. What does entertainment industry violence offer the consumer beyond exhilaration?

In 1949, French philosopher Georges Bataille wrote the theoretical essay *The Cruel Practice of Art* articulating the purpose of violent renderings in the context of human existence. *The Cruel Practice of Art* elucidates the human fascination with violence. Bataille proposes that the purpose of brutal portrayals is neither to repulse nor admonish, but to allow the viewer momentary diversion from life's constraints. Bataille maintains art has license to depict acts of cruelty

²³⁵ The Merriam-Webster dictionary provides a diversity of definitions of violence. For use in this paper, violence is defined as: 1. Exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse. 2. An instance of violent treatment or procedure. 3. Injury by or as if by distortion, infringement, or profanation. 4. Intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action or force.

without casting judgement.²³⁶ How do Bataille's theories pertain to contemporary globalized culture?

In *The Cruel Practice of Art*, Bataille delineates society as a composition of fabrications—a construct. He chronicles mankind's fascination with violence within the construct of society. According to Bataille, the practice of "sacrifice" lies deep within the composition of western society and is one of humanity's great obsessions. Bataille defines "sacrifice" as human suffering, violent destruction and explosive annihilation.²³⁷

The Cruel Practice of Art also compares art to a carnival. Bataille views the carnival as an enigma of entertainment wherein allusions to terror and suffering exist concealed in the shadows. Bataille described this pageant of horror transformed and contextualized through art as an intense pleasure.²³⁸ Bataille claims "art may have finally liberated itself from the service of religion, but it maintains its servitude with regards to horror. It remains open to the representation of that which repulses."²³⁹

Bataille states that an artist is compelled to render violent imagery due to an attraction to violent spectacle.²⁴⁰ Pondering that spectacle temporarily allows him escape from the restrictions of mortal existence. According to Bataille, This phenomenon "does not differ fundamentally from what the Aztec crowd came to see at the base of a pyramid where a victim's heart was to be torn out. In either case the flash of destruction is anticipated."²⁴¹

Bataille asks why humankind is enticed by forces that could injure or kill us. Bataille considers human life to be a "trap."²⁴² His hypothesis then is that the appeal of brutal display lies in its ability to subvert our perceptions from the mortal world—allowing us temporarily escape from the "trap." He suggests that

²³⁶ Georges Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art," in *Georges Bataille, Oeuvres Completes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

²³⁷ Ibid. P. 2.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid. P. 3.

²⁴² Ibid.

this “fascination may enable us to discover what we are and to discover a higher world whose perspectives exceed the ‘trap.’”²⁴³ Therefore, according to Bataille, witnessing violence provokes inquiry into the boundaries of existence.

Bataille contends that viewing violent spectacle allows the audience to temporarily experience the mysterious realm of death. He proclaims art’s power is its ability to transport the viewer to a state where they can revel in the thrill of dangerous circumstances without enduring bodily harm.²⁴⁴ Bataille surmises, “these irruptions—which are only seemingly promises of resolution, which in the end promise us nothing but to be caught in the trap—contain all the truth of emotion in the instant of ravishment.”²⁴⁵ Hence, Bataille reveres art’s capacity to engulf the spectator in the exhilaration of violence.

The Cruel Practice of Art was written more than six decades ago as a response to Surrealist art. However, Bataille’s theories remain relevant to contemporary forms of art and entertainment. In the *Cruel Practice of Art*, Bataille defines violent spectacle and establishes humanity’s urge to witness violence. He furthermore examines the human desire to view and produce brutal imagery. His conclusions on the subject are relevant to both contemporary art’s representations of violence and violence in the global media. Violence has permeated the entertainment industry since the 1960s, and Bataille’s theory of escapist violence plausibly provides a rationale for this phenomenon.

The entertainment industry produces a variety of violent transmissions. In Australia, one example of violence in the media is the brutal killings depicted in the 2005 horror film, *Wolf Creek*.²⁴⁶ On Australian television, sensationalized

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 5.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. PP. 5-6.

²⁴⁶ In a 2005 interview with Australian Screen Editors, *Wolf Creek* director, Greg McClean states, “The movie does contain explicit and intense scenes, they are disturbing. However the film does explore the dull, mundane nature of violence, as the film is in some ways a voyeuristic journey into a world of pure evil. I believe it’s the artist’s job in some form to ‘not look away’ from our world and the human experience: both in its blackest elements of suffering and it’s brightest moments of joy. And while it may be confronting at times, I feel it is important to expand the audience beyond what they would experience in their everyday lives. And cinema is a great medium in which to do that, as the audience is never actually in danger. We get to look into the horror with the reassurance in the end that, ‘it’s only a movie’.”
http://www.screeneditors.com/news_&_events/archive154.htm.

brutality can be seen in the ongoing gangster television series, *Underbelly*.²⁴⁷ The perilous destruction in the 1978 disaster movie, *Avalanche* is also an instance of media violence.²⁴⁸ Additionally, fight scenes between superheroes and villains in the *Batman* movies exemplify entertainment industry violence.²⁴⁹

Accompanying the growth of the global media, the prevalence of vehement action scenes increased in the entertainment industry. The mass media was eager to profit from the human fascination with violence. Hence, a profusion of exaggerated mediated depictions of brutality emerged in mass culture. Motivated by monetary gain, the media has taken advantage of humanity's attraction to violence.

A plethora has been written on the subject of violence in the media. There are many different angles on the media's proliferation of violence, some of which contradict Bataille's notion of violence's appeal. Susan Sontag's views in *On Photography* are one example. Sontag claims that the overload of media depictions of violence give "everybody a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem ordinary—making it appear familiar."²⁵⁰ Therefore, over years of repetitive transmission, media representations of brutality lost their impact, becoming stereotypical.

Similarly, U.S. media scholar Susan Moeller wrote *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*, as a critique of journalistic

²⁴⁷ The series debuted in 2008 on the Nine Network, based on Melbourne's gangland war spanning 1995 to 2004. Since 2008, the *Underbelly* series has aired annually, each time based upon a different landmark Australian gang war. According to The Herald Sun, The Australian Family Association (AFA) has criticized the series for sensationalizing graphic violence. <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/entertainment/tv-radio/underbelly-sparks-outrage/story-e6frf9ho-1111115532622>.

²⁴⁸ The publicity poster for *Avalanche* proclaimed "A Winter Wonderland Becomes A Nightmare Of Destruction." <http://www.news.com.au/top-stories/gallery-e6frf9p9-1225796061906?page=25>

²⁴⁹ Joseph Cramer, M.D. of *The Deseret News* attests, "I saw the latest Batman spectacle. I got my fix of violence....it is valid to comment on our national devotion to cinema that graphically depicts killings, shootings, fights, explosions and generalized death and viciousness. The bodies become 'TNTC' — too numerous to count. The human imagination is boundless in portraying the good and the bad, destroying one another..." <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865559827/Batman-and-Americas-addiction-to-violence.html?pg=all>.

²⁵⁰ Sontag, *On Photography*. P. 21.

broadcasting in 1999. In the book, Moeller claims televised journalism is a form of entertainment. Moeller describes the term “compassion fatigue” as a reduction in shock and empathy in the responses of those confronted with depictions of violence. Moeller’s ideas are also applicable to other areas of the entertainment industry.

In *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*, Moeller states that the media’s inundative propagation of violent imagery is responsible for public insensitivity to images of cruelty and destruction. Moeller asserts that the media’s “sensationalized treatment of crises makes us feel that only the most extreme situations merit attention.”²⁵¹ According to Moeller’s theories, repetitive exposure to sensational media images of violence elicits “compassion fatigue” in the audience.

Moeller’s theory of “compassion fatigue” corresponds to Sontag’s assertion that the media enables a “certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem ordinary.”²⁵² The notion of “compassion fatigue” is applicable to the progression of violent imagery in the entertainment industry. When violent imagery ceases to elicit intrigue, amplification of the imagery is necessitated to elicit a response. Therefore, the concept of “compassion fatigue” is key to the evolution of sensationalism of violence in the media. Years of repetitive propagation of spectacular violence renders that violence stereotypical.

Media violence is also the focus of Indiana University Film Studies professor Margaret Ervin Bruder’s 1998 doctoral thesis, *Aestheticizing Violence, or How to do Things With Style*. Bruder sees scenes of brutality in the media from a different angle than Sontag or Moeller. Bruder argues that an aesthetic of beauty exists in the excessive amplification of violence in action films. She claims this is a result of the artistic license taken in slick editing and stunning special effects.

Bruder further postulates that present-day cinema’s entertainment value lies in superficial visual elements rather than a narrative, which “often only

²⁵¹ Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999). P. 6.

²⁵² Sontag, *On Photography*. P. 21.

support other, more interesting aspects of Hollywood film—stars and spectacles—which can constantly be used and recycled to serve individual desires.”²⁵³

However, Bruder does voice a corresponding perspective to Sontag and Moeller on the familiarity of media violence. Bruder proposes, “the image abundance of the present provides for a participatory method of viewing resulting both from the overwhelming plenitude and the ordinariness of those images.”²⁵⁴

In reaction to public familiarity with brutality, the violent transmissions necessitate amplification to incite the audience. Through manipulation of the image, media violence becomes increasingly punctuated and intense, forming a stimulating spectacle. The spectacle, produced solely for entertainment purposes, is not intended to reform or educate the audience on the negative repercussions of violence and is therefore gratuitous. Gratuitous violence has become so prevalent in the media that it has evolved into a commonplace form of entertainment.

In purveying sensationalized violence, the media’s entertainment sector capitalizes on the human race’s inherent fascination with violence as described in *The Cruel Practice of Art*.²⁵⁵ The opportunistic nature of the entertainment industry’s manipulation of primal human instincts is therefore ascertained. Rather than exploit sexual archetypes and status symbols to market consumer goods, the media financially benefits from the box office sales and television ratings violent iconography.

Much has been written on the subject of sensationalized violence in the media. However, surprisingly little has been written on contemporary art’s response to sensationalized brutality. Cultural theorists who have investigated the subject express uncertainty on the purpose of portrayals of media violence in contemporary art.

U. S. based Dan Rubey is a critic who has pondered the subject of violence in art. Rubey deliberates on his confoundment of art’s motives in depicting

²⁵³ Margaret Evin Bruder, "Aestheticizing Violence, or How to Do Things with Style" (Indiana University, 1998).

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Georges Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art," in *Georges Bataille, Oeuvres Completes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949). P. 2.

sensationalized violence in his 1996 essay *Art's Obsession with Violence*. Rubey states that “in the past, art like Goya's horrifying series of etchings *The Disasters of War* (1810), with its images of dismembered bodies impaled on trees, or Picasso's more stylized *Guernica* (1937) protested the violence of war. Christian art sanctified the suffering of Christ and his saints. But contemporary art often lacks clear meanings and it raises questions for journalists trying to find approaches to disturbing material.”²⁵⁶

In *Art's Obsession with Violence*, Rubey also concedes that violent depictions in art historical works convey a sense of curiosity about gore and death. Therefore, Rubey's perspective on art's (and humanity's) historical fascination with violence contains similarities to Bataille's views in *The Cruel Practice of Art*. Rubey cites examples of graphically gory depictions of violence in European art in centuries past. He claims that “our own age is more squeamish, and we hide these kinds of things away in prisons and hospitals.”²⁵⁷

In its production of glossy, marketable spectacles of violence, the media is also culpable of concealing the gruesome actualities of brutality. Rubey further declares, “Artists produce the visual iconography and symbolism a society uses to think about itself.”²⁵⁸ My interpretation of Rubey's observations is that art responds to convenient concealment of the lurid details of violent acts visible in entertainment industry transmissions. One of the ways art counters contemporary media conventions is by showcasing forthright portrayals of brutality.

British author and cultural analyst John Fraser is another critic who has written about violence in art. In his 1974 book, *Violence in the Arts*, Fraser discusses the coevolution of violence in the media and the visual arts. He focuses on the 1960s, when violence began to flood the media. Fraser states “the 1960s witnessed not only an intensification of those violences in violent works, but a change in the attitudes of intellectuals towards them.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Daniel Rubey, "Art's Obsession with Violence," *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 50, Issue 4. (Winter 1996).

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ John Fraser, *Violence in the Arts* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974). P. 2

Fraser cites media propagation of stereotypical media violence in *Violence in the Arts*. For instance, Fraser provides the James Bond movies of the 1960s as an example of the media's packaging "fun" violence for consumption. He also discusses Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* as early cases of excessive violence. Fraser also describes the mass appeal of superheroes as vehicles of violence in the media. He uses media hero, Superman, as an illustration of this phenomenon, because he is "simply invulnerable from the start, and, being infallibly on the side of right, can use whatever violences he wishes."²⁶⁰ In these examples, violence is the spectacle—or draw—according to Fraser. Therefore, Fraser elucidates the entertainment industry's capitalization upon the spectacle of violence as phenomenon. Pop art initiated a response to that spectacle.

Pop set a precedent in its response to violence in the media. The powerful subject matter created an acute reflection of modern times.

Andy Warhol assimilated this sensational mediated imagery into his work starting with the *Death and Disaster* series. In the series, he depicted spectacular scenes as ambulance crashes, electric chairs and even a suicidal man plummeting to his death from a high-rise building. Warhol appropriated documentation of cruelty and destruction captured by media employed photojournalists. Although Warhol never indicated any knowledge of Bataille's position in the *Cruel Practice of Art*, the content of his work attests to his acknowledgement of the media's incessant sensationalization of violent imagery.

In a 1963 interview with art critic Gene Swenson of *ARTnews* magazine, Warhol announced his ambition to title his 1964 Paris exhibition *Death in America*. The reason for the title was that "every time you turned on the radio they said something like, '4 million are going to die.'"²⁶¹ Thus, Warhol's awareness of the media's capitalization on violent spectacle is implied in both his artwork and his verbal statements.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. P. 38.

²⁶¹ Gene Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Interviews with Eight Painters," *ARTnews*, November 1963. P. 27.

From 1962 through 1965, Warhol created an entire series of works about media catastrophes and fatalities entitled *Death and Disaster*. The series sourced subject matter from widely publicized media photos of fatal incidents, often displaying the images in multiples and tinting them in bright, decorative colors. In this manner, Warhol was matter-of-factly presenting brutality as art to the 1960s audience, which was conditioned to readily receive and identify with broadcasted spectacles of violence.



Andy Warhol, *Ambulance Disaster*, 1963, Silkscreen ink on paper. 101.6 x 76.2 cm.

In the same 1963 interview, Warhol stated that he realized that all of his recent works were related to brutality.²⁶² In the dialogue, Warhol also referred to the way we become desensitized to graphic images of violent and acts, which represent horrible suffering and extreme destruction through constant inundation of these sensationalized images. Warhol remarked, “When you see a gruesome

²⁶² Ibid. P. 26.

picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect.”²⁶³ Warhol’s claim reflects the concept of “compassion fatigue” outlined by Sontag and Moeller.

In *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster elaborates upon the notion of compassion fatigue in Warhol’s portrayal of violence—describing Warhol’s work as *traumatic realism*. Foster sees Warhol’s method of repetitiously depicting violence as “both a draining of significance and a defending against affect.”²⁶⁴ He furthermore perceives Warhol’s repetition of brutal scenes as a simultaneous “warding away of traumatic significance and an opening out to it.”²⁶⁵ Therefore, Warhol’s imagery demonstrates the fixation upon violent spectacle described by Bataille in *The Cruel Practice of Art* along with “compassion fatigue.”

Thomas Crow’s analysis of Warhol’s work exhibits parallels to Foster’s views, but incorporates a Marxist perspective. In the historical text, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent*, Crow contextualizes art of the 1960s to the social climate of that era. In the book, Crow discusses the *Death and Disaster* series. He describes the psychological implications of this period of Warhol’s career as “dramatizing the hollowness of the consumer icon.”²⁶⁶ In his statement, Crow indicates that Warhol was recording the media’s insensitive capitalization upon horrific and brutal events. Crow also suggest Warhol’s intention to reveal the condition of a society habituated to accept and endure a traumatized existence.

Crow devoted the essay *Saturday Disasters: Trace and Refer in Early Warhol* entirely to Warhol’s exploration of violence. In the essay, Crow cites a critique of commercialism in both Warhol’s work and public persona. Crow states that “though he grounded his art in the ubiquity of the packaged commodity, (he) produced his most powerful work by dramatizing the breakdown of commodity exchange. These were instances in which the mass-produced image as the bearer

²⁶³ Ibid. P. 27.

²⁶⁴ Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. P. 131.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 132.

²⁶⁶ Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 1996). P 51.

of desires was exposed in its inadequacy by the reality of suffering.”²⁶⁷ In *Saturday Disasters: Trace and Refer in Early Warhol*, Crow deduces that Warhol’s *Death and Disaster* series was a critique of societal acquiescence to the media’s sensationalization of brutality.

Two decades after *the Death and Disaster* series, Warhol again referenced violence by using weaponry as subject matter in his 1981-1982 *Gun* series. This time he exhibited colourful images of guns realized in a decorative style. In rendering the armaments as ornamental, Warhol made a palpable statement about the firearms’ status as objects of mere entertainment. In the *Gun* series, Warhol astutely implied that images of weapons had saturated the entertainment industry to such an extent that they had lost the power frighten the viewer.



Andy Warhol, *Guns*, 1981-1982, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas.
40.6 x 50.8 cm.

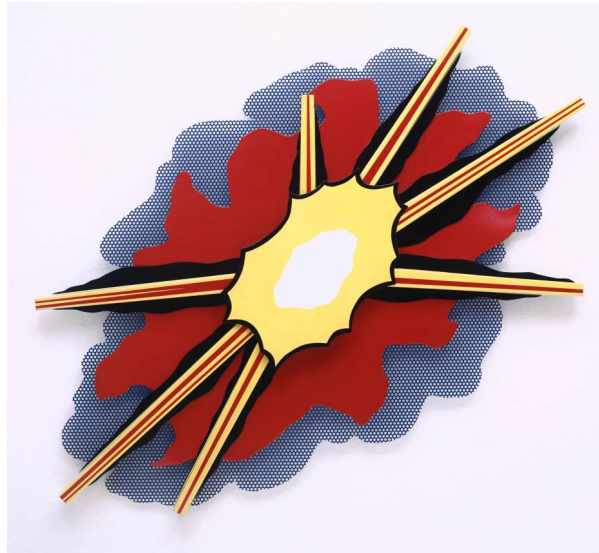
²⁶⁷ ———, *Modern Art and the Common Culture* (Washington, DC Library of Congress Cataloging - in Publication Data, 1996). P. 61.

Warhol also painted knives. Robert Rosenblum was an American art historian and curator who contributed essays to Warhol's 1998 exhibition catalogue, *KNIVES: Paintings, Polaroids and Drawings by Andy Warhol*. "These ordinary instruments of murder were singled out for the same isolated scrutiny with which he had earlier transformed such a supermarket product as a soup can into a disembodied emblem of American culture,"²⁶⁸ observed Rosenblum in regard to Warhol's images. Warhol presented simplistic images of knives and guns in the same commonplace manner as banal consumer goods. Therefore, Warhol connoted the loss of emotional impact in the implements of violence, revealing their newfound status as stereotypical media devices promoting the spectacle of violence.

In contrast to Warhol's repetition, Roy Lichtenstein reflected images of spectacularized media violence in signature comic book style. Between 1963 and 1967, Lichtenstein executed several simplified caricatures of explosions seen in the entertainment industry. The detonations were realized as paintings, sculptures and prints.

Lichtenstein's renderings of violent acts and weaponry are so stylized and so clichéd that they almost cease to register as ominous or unsettling similes of actual blasts. One of Lichtenstein's most ironic and far-fetched works is *Wall Explosion II*, a three-dimensional piece fabricated of metal and enamel paint. Rather than apply his signature Ben-Day printing dots in *Wall Explosion II*, the artist used steel-mesh to suggest dust clouds surrounding the explosions. In creating a tangible object, Lichtenstein emphasized the viewer's removal from the fleeting intangibility of an actual spectacle of violence in *Wall Explosion II*.

²⁶⁸ Robert and Fremont Rosenblum, Vincent, *Andy Warhol Knives : Paintings, Polaroids, and Drawings*, ed. Jablonka Galerie (Cologne: Salon Verlag, 1998).



Roy Lichtenstein, *Wall Explosion II*, 1965, Enamel on steel. 170 x 188 x 10 cm.

Along with its stylistic absurdity, the humorous connotation of *Wall Explosion II* inhibits the viewer from reading the piece as a reference to real occurrences of violent events. Furthermore, Lichtenstein has completely eliminated the sense of threat one would have witnessing a genuine detonation. *Wall Explosion II* is doubtless an observation on the high proliferation of spectacular synthetic violence in Hollywood.

Although preceding *Aestheticizing Violence, or How to do Things with Style* by several decades, Lichtenstein's sculpture correlates to Bruder's assertion in her dissertation that the appeal of violence lies in dazzling superficial elements, the "interesting aspects of Hollywood film—stars and spectacles."²⁶⁹ In *Wall Explosion II*, Lichtenstein alludes to the type of stereotypical action seen in the media—violence intended to entertain rather than elicit a distressed emotional response.

In a 1969 interview for *Vogue* magazine, Lichtenstein admitted to employing clichéd media imagery. "Sometimes I try to make it appear to be more

²⁶⁹ Bruder, "Aestheticizing Violence, or How to Do Things with Style."

of a cliché, to emphasise the cliché aspect of it,"²⁷⁰ he conceded. In affirming his use of cliché subject matter, Lichtenstein acknowledged his intentional exploration of trivialized, commonplace imagery repetitiously sensationalized by the media.

Lichtenstein's intentions parallel Warhol's proclamation that repeated exposure to brutal imagery numbs the viewer. Therefore, Lichtenstein and Warhol's work provided social commentary on the entertainment industry's overprovision of violent spectacles. The excess of violence in the media engenders "compassion fatigue" in the audience. Lichtenstein and Warhol underscore "compassion fatigue" by recontextualizing overexposed violent imagery employing parody and distortion as models of critique.

Parallels are visible in Warhol and Lichtenstein's application of violent subject matter. Both artists treated media images of spectacular violence as formulated graphic imagery. Through the formulaic treatment of brutal imagery, Warhol and Lichtenstein exposed the mass media's capitalization on society's fascination with violence.

In their works, Warhol and Lichtenstein embraced media devices by intentionally removing any evidence of emotional human expression. In 1963, Warhol claimed, "the reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine and I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do."²⁷¹ Warhol's statement confirms his objective to rid his art practice of any feeling.

Similar to Warhol, Lichtenstein never publically expressed any knowledge of Bataille's theories in the *Cruel Practice of Art*. Nonetheless, Lichtenstein's regurgitation of media clichés of gratuitous violence confirms his contemplation of the media's proliferation of brutal imagery. Clearly, Lichtenstein reinterpreted imagery intended to capitalize on humanity's penchant for violent spectacle.

²⁷⁰ David Sylvester, "The Ironic Lichtenstein Who Takes Soulful Subjects and Paints Them with Cool," *American Vogue*, September 1969.

²⁷¹ Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Interviews with Eight Painters." P. 26.

Bataille's premise on mankind's fascination with violent display as an escape from the monotony of life is therefore apparent in Lichtenstein's work.

Departing from Pop's mechanical replication of broadcasted violence, artists from diverse locations and backgrounds have proceeded to reinterpret sensationalized images of cruelty and carnage portrayed in the entertainment industry.

The media has sensationalized the human fascination with violence for financial gain. *Factitious Violence* investigates contemporary art's response to the mass media's output of gratuitous portrayals of brutality. This chapter explores the correlation between contemporary art and the development of a symbology of violence in the mass media from the mid- twentieth century until present. Art's tactical reconfiguration and negation of clichéd violent spectacle is considered in *Factitious Violence*.

Art's reaction to media illusions of violence, edited and visually manipulated by the media in post-production to maximize our viewing excitement, is examined in this chapter. Furthermore, the media's escalating dissemination of sensationalized images of brutality as a motivation for contemporary works of art is discussed. *Factitious Violence* delineates the reflection of formulaic transmissions of violent spectacle as a thematic link in art worldwide since the 1960s. Hence, *Factitious Violence* seeks to establish the response to stereotypical media amplifications of violence as an important commonality in contemporary art.

Factitious Violence is divided into five segments, each demarcating distinct methodologies of approaching mediated violence in art.

The first section of *Factitious Violence* is *The Theatrics of Assault*. This section introduces contemporary art's "rethinking" tolerance for the opportunistic sensationalism of violence. The divergent methodologies of Chris Burden and Cindy Sherman in tackling the subject of media violence are presented in *The*

Theatrics of Assault. Burden's stark live performance is contrasted to Sherman's reconfiguration of media tropes in the visual narrative.

Brutal Realism is the second part of the chapter. *Brutal Realism* examines Gerhard Richter and Andres Serrano's methods of confronting the viewer with graphic carnage in retort to the synthetic media violence. Artists in this segment employ blunt representations of violent demise. Works in *Brutal Realism* juxtapose the harsh realities of life and death to glossy entertainment industry spectacles.

The third section of *Factitious Violence*, *The Spectacularization of War*, discusses work by Cai Guo-Quiang, AES+F and Marina Abramovic'. Artists in this section produce spectacular, sensational imagery echoing visuals from the media. Works included in *The Spectacularization of War* demonstrate an aestheticization of violence. However, the artworks' recontextualization of media images provokes contemplation of the seductive tactical tropes of commercial entertainment.

An overview of satirical responses to media violence is provided in *The Travesty of Compassion Fatigue*, the fourth segment of *Factitious Violence*. *The Travesty of Compassion Fatigue* discusses works by Jake and Dinos Chapman, Miguel Calderon and Makoto Aida. The artists in this section share a camp aesthetic and a darkly humorous sensibility in responding to clichéd media violence. Furthermore, parallels are drawn between the drunkenly indulgent portrayals of violence included in *The Travesty of Compassion Fatigue* and the onslaught of overstated violence marketed by the media.

In *Fallen Icons*, the final section of the chapter, two photographic images from the studio component of this thesis are considered as a reaction to sensationalized entertainment industry violence. References to the spectacularization of violence in iconic Hollywood action scenes contained in my work are discussed. The photographs' satirical responses to farcical media spectacles of brutality are also examined in this part of the chapter. Additionally, the works are examined in relationship to the other artists included in *Factitious Violence*.

Concepts within *The Cruel Practice of Art* delineate the notion of the human fascination in *Factitious Violence*. Bataille's proposition that art serves to satisfy humanity's innate curiosity towards violence concurs with the concepts in *Factitious Violence*. Bataille's disclosure that "the flash of destruction is, in the trap of life, the bait which does not fail to entice us"²⁷² explains public interest in images of bloodshed and destruction both in the media and in art. Additionally, the illumination of art's function in illustrating the appeal of violent imagery described by Bataille pertains to the dialogue within *Factitious Violence*.

Artworks in *Factitious Violence* provide clear examples of Bataille's conclusion that humanity is fascinated by displays of cruelty. *Factitious Violence* investigates contemporary art's reaction to the media's strategic capitalization upon the innate human fascination with violence. Artists included in this chapter demonstrate varied responses to the sensationalization of violence in the media.

Bataille's observations on humanity's enduring fascination with violent spectacle corroborate with my standpoint. My view is that art has the ability to provoke contemplation of brutality, thereby exposing the banality of media spectacles. The sensationalization of violence by the entertainment industry is a tired, predictable marketing gimmick from my perspective. In attempt to capitalize on the allure of brutal display, the media has oversaturated mass culture with sensationalized violence. Thus, the media has diminished the impact of violent imagery, rendering it cliché. From my standpoint, one of the responsibilities of art is to expose the redundant banality and predictability in the profuse transmission of violent representations.

How do contemporary artists around the globe respond to the entertainment industry's capitalization upon mankind's fascination with violence? Is art's reaction to clichéd media violence a unifying factor in contemporary art worldwide since the Pop movement? *Factitious Violence* investigates these inquiries.

²⁷² Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 4.

i. The Theatrics of Assault

By the end of the 1960s, the reiterations of violent imagery from Warhol and Lichtenstein had gained institutional credibility and public recognition. The departure from Pop in the 1970s and 1980s, as this section shows, involved a more self-conscious approach to viewer engagement. *The Theatrics of Assault* examines the divergent methodologies of Chris Burden and Cindy Sherman. Both artists address the subject of violence in the media with confrontational performance and photographic works. Their strategies implicitly shift the more passive engagement of the viewer to one where the audience becomes witness to and consequently complicit to shocking acts of violence. Burden and Sherman counter complacency through heightening the viewer's consciousness of the brutal realities of violence.



Chris Burden, *Shoot*, 1971. Performance documentation. Video Still.

A correlation is visible between the audience's acquiescent viewing of *Shoot* and Bataille's postulation that mankind is "generally fascinated by any

destruction.”²⁷³ Realized in 1971, *Shoot* was a ground-breaking live performance in which Burden orchestrated an act of brutality upon himself. Burden produced a live violent spectacle, presented for an attentive audience who witnessed *Shoot*’s proceedings from the sidelines. Bataille professes that violent display offers the audience an escape from routine existence, which “suspends us there for a time, offers us ravishment without death.”²⁷⁴ In Burden’s artwork the viewer is provided with a titillating glimpse of actual bloodshed.

In *Shoot*, Burden made a more literal retort to spectacular media violence than his Pop predecessors. *Shoot* was a stark and brief performance work consisting of Burden and a colleague positioned facing each other in a white room. Burden proceeded to be shot in the arm by a colleague. A small audience witnessed the unembellished performance. The injury that Burden sustained as a result of the shooting added to the shock value of the piece. The explicit brutality of *Shoot* makes an impact, however it was not a sensationalist spectacle. *Shoot* served as a metaphorical wake up call to an audience acclimatised to clichéd Hollywood brutality.

Video documentation of *Shoot* survives along with Burden’s commentary, “At 7:45 p.m. I was shot in the left arm by a friend. The bullet was a copper jacket 22 long rifle. My friend was standing about fifteen feet from me.”²⁷⁵ *Shoot* was illegal and dangerous—Burden or a bystander could have been killed if the gunman had missed his target. Apart from the danger, the complicity of human nature towards violence was revealed in the piece. The complicit spectators watched the performance that inflicted injury upon Burden.

Frazer Ward is an Australian art historian who has extensively researched performance art of the 1960s and 1970s. Ward wrote the essay, *Gray Zone: Watching Shoot* in response to Burden’s 1971 piece. Ward’s conclusions are similar to Bataille’s theories on society’s fascination with displays of brutality.

²⁷³ Ibid. P. 4.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. P. 5.

²⁷⁵ Chris Burden, "Ronald Feldman Fine Arts," <http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhbur74.html>.

Ward contends, “*Shoot* refused to exempt its public from its acquiescence in spectacular representations of violence.”²⁷⁶ In addition to resonating with Bataille’s perspective, Ward’s statement implies audience accountability for its compliance to violence.

In 1973, New York artist and curator Willoughby Sharp interrogated Burden about the reasoning behind *Shoot*. Burden made clear references to voluntary public engagement with spectacularized media violence as the motivation for the performance:

Burden: How do you know what it feels like to be shot if you don’t experience it? It seems interesting enough to be worth doing.

Sharp: Most people don’t want to be shot.

Burden: Yeah, but everybody watches it on TV every day.²⁷⁷

Burden’s statement elucidates his intention to implicate the audience in its participation in the consumption of violence in mass culture. Furthermore, in gaining media exposure, Burden succeeded in a calculated effort to confront the perpetrator of sensationalized violence: the media.

Dan Rubey accredits *Shoot* with initiating a trend of violence-obsessed contemporary art in *Art’s Obsession with Violence*.²⁷⁸ Rubey views the explicit violence in *Shoot* as a reaction to the sensational violence marketed by the media. He declares, “This obsession seems like a cultural return of the repressed, a resurfacing of material banned from the public eye.”²⁷⁹ He contends that *Shoot*’s return to the sort of graphic renderings of brutality produced by European artists in centuries past is a reaction to stylized media violence.

Shoot was presented as a straightforward act, set in an empty space. *Shoot*’s presentation drastically contrasts the dramatic editing and staging of sensationalized transmissions of violence. In committing a deadpan act of

²⁷⁶ Frazer Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching Shoot,” *October* 2001. P. 129.

²⁷⁷ Willoughby Sharp and Liza Bear, “Chris Burden: The Church of Human Energy,” *Avalanche*, no. 8 (1973). P. 54.

²⁷⁸ Rubey, “Art’s Obsession with Violence.”

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

violence, Burden confronted the attitude of a culture where spectacular violence is not only acceptable, but a common entertainment industry attraction.

It is essential to recognize that *Shoot* was realized during the Vietnam War—a conflict that was officially “uncensored,” yet information about the war and graphic details of the violence were minimized. While edited footage of the war inspired protests around the globe, many viewers acquiescently viewed documentation of the violence.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, the conflict was ultimately capitalized upon by the entertainment industry. Hence, in *Shoot*, Burden purposefully created a heightened awareness of a culture’s amenability to broadcasted spectacles of brutality. Ward asserts, “The subconscious that his work calls upon operates in relation to ‘tradition’ and ‘folklore,’ but these are tied to mass media, and hence to generic forms of gun violence, fictional or otherwise; westerns, war movies, crime genres, and also, in 1971, during the Vietnam War, the television news.”²⁸¹ Ward’s statement articulates *Shoot* as an allusion to stereotypical violence marketed by the entertainment industry. Furthermore, he implicates the viewing audience in partaking in media spectacles of brutality.

²⁸⁰ In the book researching the media’s influence upon public opinion during the Vietnam War era, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*, Daniel C. Hallin attests that televised depictions of actual combat were minimal. Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989). Furthermore, Hallin states that media renderings of the Vietnam War were “composed of dramatic images of war that could be pulled off the shelf to make this confusing conflict more familiar.” *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching Shoot.” P. 123.

Contrasting Burden's stark performance, Cindy Sherman's theatrical work references the contrivance of entertainment industry brutality. In the early eighties Sherman produced several photographs specifically addressing clichéd representations of violence in consumer culture. Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #92* is reminiscent of stereotypical entertainment industry brutality. As in *Shoot*, *Untitled Film Still #92* addresses the complicity of the viewer in witnessing violent spectacle.



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #92*, 1981, chromogenic color print. 61 x 121.9 cm.

In *Untitled Film Still #92*, the viewer's gaze is directed downwards towards a crouching schoolgirl appearing to be in a state of fearful distress. The scene is evocative of stereotypical sensationalized scenarios of malicious assailants terrorizing teenage²⁸² prey in horror movies. The composition and gaze in the photograph confront the viewer with a familiar cinematic scene of brutality. However, unlike in media depictions, the dynamic Sherman creates infers audience involvement in the terror at hand.

The allusion to witnessing a victim is clear in *Untitled Film Still #92*. However, the absence of an aggressor from the picture presents a conundrum. It

²⁸² The 1996 horror movie, *Scream* by director Wes Craven is one example this thematic occurrence. In the film, a serial killer named Ghostface pursues and kills numerous teenagers in a fictitious town.

is not clear whether the viewer is implicated as a passive bystander or perpetrator of an attack. Regardless, the viewer is complicit in *Untitled Film Still #92*. As in *Shoot*, the audience is presented with the issue of consumer culture's culpability in supporting the entertainment industry's opportunistic propagation of violence.

Untitled Film Still #92 confronts the relationship between society and an entertainment industry consumed by brutal spectacle. Mark Seltzer is a U.S. academic and writer who in 1997 wrote the essay *Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere* about the masses' fascination with transmissions of violence. Seltzer's theories echo Bataille's delineation of humanity's fascination with brutality. Seltzer describes a symbiotic relationship between "the exhibition and witnessing, the endlessly reproducible display"²⁸³ in mass culture. *Wound Culture* describes "a public culture in which addictive violence has become not merely a collective spectacle but one of the crucial sites where private desire and public space cross."²⁸⁴ Seltzer's perspective is apparent in Sherman's indication of audience guilt in *Untitled Film Still #92*. Sherman also provokes inquiry into media capitalization upon the desire to witness and the fantasy of possibly participating in an act of brutality.



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #153*, 1985, chromogenic color print. 170.8 x 125.7 cm.

²⁸³ Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October* 1997.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.* P. 3.

Sherman's *Untitled #153* again references formulaic violence promoted by the entertainment industry. However, the photographic narrative in *Untitled #153* focuses on the aftermath of cruelty. Resonant with gruesome scenes in low-budget horror films, the image masquerades as the sordid residue of a cinematic serial killing. Once again, Sherman has created an uncomfortable tension in the composition. The viewer looks down at the picture plane as if having discovered a dead body.

The artistic license taken in staging the sordid decay in *Untitled #153* echoes Bataille's proposition that art "remains open to the representation of that which repulses."²⁸⁵ Sherman orchestrates a grossly disturbing scene in her depiction of revolting debris and filth. The tightly cropped photo presents the spectator with the head of a female corpse discarded on nondescript dirt and grass. Eyes open, the face of what appears to be the stiff victim of a death by beating stares vacantly away. The decaying cadaver's skin is covered with cuts and bruises. *Untitled #153* is both a nauseating and confrontational image.

The complicity of the audience in observing the victim's degrading, barbaric demise is implicit in the photograph, as is the media's opportunistic capitalization upon the shock value of harsh brutality. Viewing *Untitled #153* conjures scenes from violent films such as *Wolf Creek* or *American Psycho*—entertainment that profits from sensationalizing the atrocity of serial killings. Sherman's image is directed at an audience culpable of the willing consumption and enjoyment of such brutal cinematic spectacles.

Untitled #153 is an obvious reference to entertainment industry devices, a deliberate reaction to media-generated spectacles of brutality. In a 1997 interview, Sherman acknowledged her intention to imitate recognizable media tropes used in spectacular scenarios of media violence. She attests, "it's very important for me to show the artificiality of it all, because the real horrors of the world are

²⁸⁵ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 2.

unmatchable, and they're too profound. It's much easier to absorb—to be entertained by it..."²⁸⁶ In her statement, Sherman is furthermore signifying that she is addressing a public not only conditioned to sensationalized violence, but one who indulges in its entertainment value. In *Untitled #153*, Sherman confronts a society guilty of consuming the bloodshed opportunistically marketed by the media.

²⁸⁶ Amanda Cruz, "Movies, Monstrosities and Masks: Twenty Years of Cindy Sherman," in *Cindy Sherman Retrospective*, ed. Amanda and Smith Cruz, Elizabeth (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

ii. Brutal Realism

After confronting audience complicity in entertainment industry violence, contemporary art challenged media renderings of brutality. Artists ventured to address both public assent to the amplification of stereotypical violence and the media's manipulation of violent imagery. As this sub-chapter illustrates, macabre answers to mass culture's portrayal of ambiguous, dramatized violence emerged in contemporary art. *Brutal Realism* investigates the distinct ways Gerhard Richter and Andres Serrano address the harsh realities of life and death in their reaction to clichéd broadcasts of violent spectacle.

Correlating to Bataille's notion of the carnival in *The Cruel Practice of Art*, Gerhard Richter encourages the audience to "rethink" the mass media's calculated methods of transmission. "It is with a sort of mute, inevitable, inexplicable determination, like that in dreams, that the fascinating specters of misery and pain have always lurked among the background figures in this carnival of a world,"²⁸⁷ states Bataille. In the 1988 painting series, *October 18, 1977*, Richter exposes an industry that profits from the human fascination with violence. Furthermore, Richter brings to light the media's alteration and editing of brutality imagery marketed for mass consumption.

Richter's 1988 painting series, *October 18, 1977*, depicts the tragic events surrounding the sensationalized German Marxist terrorist group the "Baader-Meinhof Gang" (or RAF). Though a great deal has been written about Richter's series, my research concentrates on those canvases that illustrate the terrorists' deaths. Rather than show graphic details of the controversial organization leaders' fatalities, Richter's renderings leave plenty to the imagination.

²⁸⁷ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 2.



Gerhard Richter, *Erschossener 1 (Man Shot Down 1)*, 1988, oil on canvas. 100 x 140 cm.

During the era of the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the media capitalized upon reports of the group's activities. The media created a spectacle out of the aftermath of the RAF's political brutality. The insurgents were portrayed as ruthless, indiscriminate communist terrorists, their activities sensationalized. It pigeonholed the RAF as a stereotypical terrorist group—a radical, blood thirsty, menace to society. Publicized as a planned joint suicide, the dubious circumstances surrounding the deaths of RAF leaders Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof stirred considerable debate and spurred further dramatic transmissions.²⁸⁸

Richter executed the paintings in grey tones rather than the full color spectrum, thereby addressing how the media manipulates photography to control our perception of the circumstances in the Baader-Meinhof deaths. In *On Photography*, Sontag states “photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe.”²⁸⁹ The choice to limit his palette serves as a metaphor for media regulation of information. However curious we may be, we are not allowed to see beyond the limited angle of the sensationalized media image.

²⁸⁸ Gregorio Magnani, "Interview with Gregorio Magnani, 1989," in *Gerhard Richter - Text Writings, Interviews and Letters 1961-2007*, ed. Dietmar and Obrist Elger, Hans Ulrich (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009).

²⁸⁹ Sontag, *On Photography*. P. 3.

Furthermore, the stylistic blurring of Richter's subjects makes it impossible to detect details of the injuries of the deceased. The blurring forces the viewer to move away from the picture plane in order to distinguish the corpse, intentionally distancing the viewer from the media depictions. The soft focus effect in the paintings is evocative of the notorious Hollywood method of putting petroleum jelly on the camera lens to camouflage physical flaws,²⁹⁰ reminding us of the media's penchant for image manipulation. Richter's style of execution conveys the uncertainty of the media reports, exposing the deaths as a media spectacle.

The media opportunistically generated typecast identities of the RAF and conveyed a limited picture of their spectacularized deaths. In *October 18, 1977*, Richter stripped away the media spectacle constructed around the RAF, distancing the viewer to reveal the restrictions of the media's perspective. Richter's reinterpretation of the spectacles of RAF fatalities provide an example of what Dan Rubey defines as art's production of "the visual iconography and symbolism a society uses to think about itself."²⁹¹ Richter reveals the stereotyping in media depictions of brutality and furthermore examines the media's calculative methods of sensationalizing violence.

²⁹⁰ In *The Digital Photographer's Guide to Filters: The Complete Guide to Hardware* Ross Hoddinott writes, "Smearing petroleum jelly (e.g. Vaseline) over a clear filter is probable the best-known way to mimic the soft-focus effect." Hoddinott further states that in Hollywood, camera lenses were covered with nylon stockings to make actresses look flawless since the 1940's. Ross Hoddinott, *The Digital Photographer's Guide to Filters: The Complete Guide to Hardware* (Cincinnati, Ohio: David & Charles Limited, 2007). P. 62.

²⁹¹ Rubey, "Art's Obsession with Violence."

Both Richter and Andres Serrano present images of violent death in their work. Whereas Richter distances the viewer from mortal incidents, Serrano zooms in on the aftermath of violence. Hence, Serrano demonstrates a more confrontational approach to violent subject matter. In the 1992 photographic series, *The Morgue*, Serrano captures details of the morbid aftermath of fatal brutality. There is a great disparity between the sensational violence marketed in the media and *The Morgue*. Whereas the entertainment industry edits out explicit details of brutality, Serrano focuses on the corpses' most disturbing mutilations.



Andres Serrano, *Knifed to Death I*, 1992, Cibachrome, silicone, plexiglass.
125.7 x 152.4 cm.

Serrano's images capture the aftermath of the brutal release from Bataille's concept of the "trap" of life. A fascination that "may enable us to discover what we are and to discover a higher world whose perspectives exceed the 'trap.'"²⁹² In confronting the intrigue *The Morgue* illuminates the gruesome actualities that the media removes from entertainment modules.

²⁹² Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 3.

In *The Morgue*, “it is possible for us to experience the emotion (sacrifice) aroused, for the myths of sacrifice are like the themes of tragedy,”²⁹³ expressed by Bataille. Serrano’s images are reminiscent of portrayals of religious sacrifice in Mannerist and Baroque painting. Serrano’s highly saturated colours and treatment of chiaroscuro lighting cast upon outstretched hands and partially draped bodies create a familiar, yet dramatic effect.

The majority of the fatalities in *The Morgue* are the result of homicide and suicide, conveying a cold sense of cruelty. As in *Knifed to Death II*, works are titled by the specific cause of death. Serrano’s use of titles render the images more disturbing and captivating. Furthermore, since the entertainment industry censors portrayals of violent death, Serrano’s frank documentation of the repercussions of brutality has a profound impact.

The cropped figures in *The Morgue* concentrate on lacerations and expressive body parts where rigor mortis has set in. In the photos, both wounds and signs of decomposition are clear and magnified. Serrano focuses on the morbid details in the minimalist compositions to ensure maximum impact. In 1993, U.S. critic Michael Kimmelman wrote a review of *The Morgue* for the *New York Times* entitled *Serrano focuses on Death*. In the article, Kimmelman asserts, “One is put in mind here of the simple graphic pizzazz of some of the ads that adorn bus stops.”²⁹⁴ Serrano employs advertising industry devices to capture the gaze and lure the audience, underscoring the spectacularity of his subject matter.

English writer Geoff Dyer of *The Guardian* conducted an interview with Serrano about *The Morgue* series in 1995. “Looking at these photographs is probably as close as one can ever come to seeing what it is like to be dead,”²⁹⁵ summarized Dwyer about the photographs. Dwyer’s statement parallels Bataille’s

²⁹³ Ibid. P. 3.

²⁹⁴ Michael Kimmelman, "Serrano Focuses on Death " *The New York Times*, February 5 1993.

²⁹⁵ Geoff Dyer, "Mortis with Rigour 'Looking at These Photographs Is Probably as Close as One Can Ever Come to Seeing What It Is Like to Be Dead.' Geoff Dyer Talks to Andres Serrano About His Images from the Morgue," *The Guardian*, August 16 1995.

surmise that mankind is drawn to violent “irruptions—which are only seemingly promises of resolution, which in the end promise us nothing but to be caught in the trap.”²⁹⁶ Dwyer’s statement conveys how *The Morgue* imparts a candid glimpse of the aftermath of brutality withheld by the entertainment industry.

Serrano was highly criticized for *The Morgue*; reviews of the exhibition accused the work of being purely lurid and disrespectful to the dead. For instance, Canadian art critic Andrea D. Fitzpatrick of *Review d’Art Canadienne*, accused Serrano of producing images “which transform(s) the identities of the deceased into specters, if not also specimens, immortalized by the lens of pathological violence.”²⁹⁷ However, Serrano’s detractors overlook the perspective that these works serve as commentary on a culture overloaded by edited fabrications of vivid yet ambiguous media violence. Serrano’s confrontational approach in *The Morgue* challenge one to “rethink” familiar entertainment industry violence—imagery opportunistically produced to capitalize upon the mass appeal of brutality.

Serrano portrays the harsh realities and unpleasantries hygienically omitted from mass culture. Politely edited media images of violent death offer metaphors such as funeral parlours caskets and dark silhouettes on the pavement; *The Morgue*’s candid realities counter media portrayals. Serrano presents that which is hidden away by the entertainment industry in an effort to produce marketable images for mass consumption.

²⁹⁶ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." PP. 5-6.

²⁹⁷ Andrea D. Fitzpatrick, "Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano’s the Morgue: Identity, Agency, Subjectivity," *Review d’Art Canadienne* 33 (2008). P. 40.

iii. The Spectacularization of War

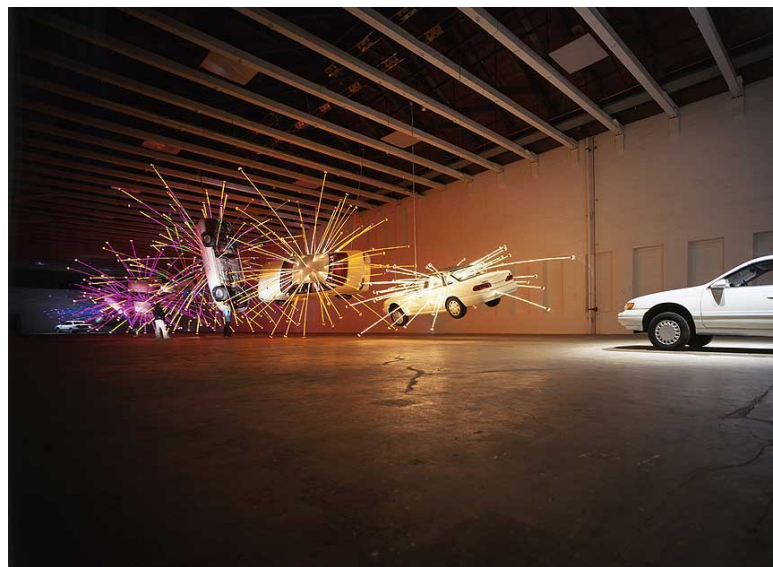
Contrasting art's confrontation of the harsh realities of life and death discussed in *Brutal Realism*, the recontextualization of media tropes is an alternative strategic artistic response to depictions of clichéd brutality. Aestheticized violence is marketed as spectacle in Hollywood films, interactive video games and on the evening news. *The Spectacularization of War* investigates artists who reconfigure and aestheticize media fabrications of spectacular violence, exposing their facades and thereby encouraging the audience to contemplate entertainment industry renderings.



Cai Guo-Qiang, *Tornado*, 2005, explosion project for The Festival of China.
Dimensions variable.

Internationally recognized Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang has used violent themes in his work since the 1990s, manipulating explosives to create his monumental compositions. Rather than shock the viewer with images of indiscriminate carnage, Cai emphasizes the dialogue between form and content. In his work, he composes stereotypical scenes of violence correlating to sensationalized media depictions. Cai's work provokes "rethinking" of the media's ever-augmenting circulation of visually enticing brutal spectacle.

An element of Cai's works reflects Bataille's concept of the carnival, wherein "the fascinating specters of misery and pain have always lurked among the background figures."²⁹⁸ Cai uses the skyline as his backdrop for sculptures, detonating explosives to recreate naturally occurring atmospheric conditions. While awe-inspiring to behold, a sense of paradox is undeniable when viewing these simulated "weather patterns." Residue of the multiple glowing discharges in the choreographed fireworks displays is poignantly toxic.



Cai Guo-Qiang, *Inopportune: Stage One*, 2004, Cars, sequenced multi-channel light tubes, Dimensions variable.

In terms of extravagance, Cai's explosive spectacles rival even the overstated special effects employed by Hollywood to create outlandish scenes of violence. For example, in his 2005 *Tornado* project for the Kennedy Center, Cai emulated a life-sized twister composed of a multitude of twinkling blasts. Upon witnessing these dazzling displays of man-made force, one is compelled to ponder the motivation behind the entertainment industry's opportunistic spectacularization of violence.

²⁹⁸ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 2.

In addition to devastating forces of nature, Cai delivers an unmistakable commentary on the entertainment industry's sensationalism of terrorist violence in his studio practice. He has produced numerous works alluding to the profusion of media portrayals of bombings. Although referencing transmissions of warfare, Cai's spectacular displays dually evoke images of festive cultural celebrations like Chinese New Year. Therefore, Cai's creations dually reflect media iconography and the long held Chinese tradition of celebratory pyrotechnic display.²⁹⁹

Cai's 2004 installation *Inopportune: Stage One* reinterprets a different type of media violence. The piece is comprised of Ford Taurus sedans, standard government cars in the United States, suspended from the museum ceiling at various angles. Each vehicle is impaled with multiple glowing light-rods, evoking the illusion of being explosively catapulted into the air. The automobiles appear frozen in a state of suspended animation.

The influence of Pop is evident in the stylized caricature of explosion in *Inopportune: Stage One*. The animated quality of Cai's sculpture is reminiscent of Lichtenstein's *Explosion II*. Both three-dimensional works utilize metal construction in depicting the intangibility of an explosive blast, emphasizing the distance between actual destruction and fabricated renderings. Departing from Lichtenstein's wall-mounted presentation, Cai creates actual physical distance from the viewer by installing *Inopportune: Stage One* at an elevation out of audience reach. Nevertheless, the reference to media depictions intended to entertain rather than distress is manifest in the work of both Cai and his Pop predecessor.

Illusion, a looped ninety-second video installation depicting a Ford rolling through Times Square in New York City, accompanies the sculptural works. Partially through the video, explosive starbursts begin spouting from the vehicle. The bursts increase steadily until the car blows up. The charred remains of the

²⁹⁹ "One thing most fireworks experts agree on - the birthplace of fireworks is China, about 15 centuries ago." Neil Gussman, "A Blast from the Past: The History of Fireworks," *Chemical Engineering Progress* 100, no. 10 (2004).

destroyed Taurus remain displayed in the gallery space as evidence of the event—its interior littered with fireworks casings left over from the detonation.



Cai Guo-Qiang, *Illusion*, 2004, 3 channel video installation (still).

Destruction of the car was actually staged far from the streets of Manhattan, then later composited into the frame in post-production. This production method provides an acknowledgement of the entertainment industry devices used in the fabrication of violent spectacle. Thus *Illusion*, like *Wall Explosion II*, parallels Bruder's concept of 'the aestheticization of violence' "which can constantly be used and recycled to serve individual desires."³⁰⁰ Scenes of exploding vehicles are commonplace attractions both on film and television.³⁰¹

The realization of *Illusion* congruously mimics Hollywood production methods, thereby alluding to media sensationalization of terrorist violence. Art critic Peter Schjeldahl of *The New Yorker* magazine reviewed Cai's 2008 exhibition at The Guggenheim Museum. Schjeldahl describes Cai's work as

³⁰⁰ Bruder, "Aestheticizing Violence, or How to Do Things with Style".

³⁰¹ After completing an Internet search for "car crash scenes" a plethora of top 10 lists appeared. However, the movies *Thelma and Louise* by Ridley Scott (1991) and *Death Proof* by Quentin Tarantino (2007) were consistently included in the lists.

“aesthetically contemplative viewpoints on terrorism—as in producing a fun spectacle about car bombs.”³⁰² Cai’s interpretation of the car bomb is clearly embellished for our viewing pleasure.

Additional critics affirmed the connection between the content of Cai’s work and the artifice of entertainment industry violence. In reviewing his 2005 Mass MoCa exhibition, Grace Glueck of *The New York Times* imparts: “What we have here is a frozen-action film, packed with arresting visual ideas. Like many current Chinese movies, it marries ancient tales to the pyrotechnics of our contemporary world.”³⁰³ While recognizing the relationship between Cai’s subject matter and the media, David Carrier of *Artforum International* has a less favourable opinion of Cai’s efforts. Carrier asserts, “*Stage One* followed by *Illusion* is like visiting the set of a James Bond production and then watching the movie...*Inopportune: Stage One* seems merely an exercise in the aesthetics of violence, little more than a vacuous spectacle.”³⁰⁴ Thus, Carrier alleges that Cai’s work lacks depth and fails to critique the entertainment industry.

In Cai’s defense, the act of presenting exaggerated illusions of sensationalized transmissions of clichéd violence in an institutional context encourages reflection upon its pervasiveness in mass culture. Furthermore, *Illusion* references infamous car bombings exploited as sensationalized highlights of media transmissions. *Illusion* reveals the farcical fabrication of both broadcast journalism and narrative entertainment, blurring the boundaries of the media’s capitalization on violence. *Illusion* illuminates the entertainment industry’s capitalistic production of violent spectacle as a consumer indulgence. The recontextualization of the entertainment spectacle into the institutional setting critiques the mediated image by exposing its contrivances.

Both Cai and Russian art collective, AES+F reconfigure spectacular entertainment industry constructs of brutality. Rather than detonate explosives,

³⁰² Peter Schjeldahl, "Gunpowder Plots: Cai Guo-Qiang at the Guggenheim," *The New Yorker* (2008).

³⁰³ Grace Gueck, "The Cars Aren't Really Exploding, but the Terrorist Metaphor Is," *The New York Times*, February 18 2005.

³⁰⁴ David Carrier, "Cai Guo-Qiang: Mass Moca," *Artforum International* 2005.

AES+F reconfigure the spectacle of violence through the depiction of combatant soldiers. The title of their 2003-2005 body of work, *Action Half Life*, is taken from a 3D video game inspired by action scenes in director John Woo's dynamic action films.³⁰⁵ *Action Half Life* encompasses sculptures, drawings and a series of large-scale colour photographs. The photos focus on the capacity of stereotypical heroic roles in media depictions of combat, demonstrating a clear response to clichéd media violence.



AES+F, *Action Half Life: Episode 3, Image #4*, 2003, computer print. 50 x 62.5 cm.

The collective handpicked professional child models on the brink of puberty to play the “actors” in the photo series. In the obviously staged images, multi-ethnic youths glowing with vitality reflect the global omniscience of AES+F’s “virtual show” of aestheticized violence. The visual narrative in the photographs presents expressionless, mannequinesque models armed with

³⁰⁵ Yenni Kwok, "End of Innocence," *South China Morning Post* (2007).

futuristic sci-fi weapons. The flawless youths engage in a battle set in an expansive desert, creating an aestheticized visual narrative.

AES+F's rendering of child warriors in destruction's path correlates to Bataille's model of the carnival. In *Action Half Life*, the viewer is privy to witness "the paradox of the carnival—which in the most general sense is the paradox of emotion, but in the most specific sense is the paradox of sacrifice."³⁰⁶ Furthermore, the choice of juvenile combatants in *Action Half Life* implies society's willing sacrifice of innocence in satisfying its penchant for violent spectacle.



Advertisement for the "Napoleonic" line by Dolce & Gabanna, 2006-2007

The composition and lighting in *Action Half Life* is reminiscent of a Neoclassical painting. Yet, the young models are posed in passive stances while holding large weapons—a combination evocative of the concurrent passivity and aggression in Dolce and Gabbana's provocative advertising campaigns.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 2.

³⁰⁷ According to S. Greave and J. Mercado of the department of Anthropology at Reed College, "Dolce and Stefano Gabbana have gained a reputation for their highly controversial advertising

Although lacking the blatant sexual overtones and nudity of Dolce and Gabbana's ads, AES+F's models hold their weapons like props for a fashion shoot. The scene obviously orchestrated for visual appeal, and violence only a suggestion—the image is devoid of both action and casualties.

Fighter planes, helicopters and various spacecraft fill the skies above the protagonists in *Action Half Life*. The landscape is littered with nondescript, streamlined metallic structures, similar to those seen in science fiction spectacles like *Star Wars*. However, *Action Half Life* represents a video game, a viewer-interactive mode of entertainment. Therefore AES+F are signifying that the contemporary audience is no longer content to merely watch these fantastic scenarios: now they want to participate.

However, participation is not an option in AES+F's work. Satirically proving our culture's fascination with outlandish illusion, *Action Half Life* is four times removed from authenticity: its images are based on a video game that is based on Woo's films.³⁰⁸ Those films profit from sensationalized depictions of combat. Strategically incorporating the tropes of both art history and the advertising industry into their portrayals of violence, AES+F do not use restraint in trying to capture our attention.

Action Half Life is set in the Sinai Desert, arousing recollections of such violent cinematic epics as *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Total Recall*. AES+F admits their attraction to the exotic appeal of the foreign setting. In an interview with Canadian art writer and editor Genevieve Paiement, the group articulates their intention to reinvent an entertainment industry spectacle. AES+F claims *Action Half Life* "is about the west's outlook on illusions,"³⁰⁹ rather than the politics of

campaigns. Two major themes in their ads is the playing with gender and defying stereotypical gender roles, as well as the interplay between violence and passivity." Sophie Greaves and Jessica Mercado, "Passivity and Violence," Reed College, http://academic.reed.edu/anthro/adprojects/2011/greaves_mercado/PassivityAndViolence.html

³⁰⁸ Kwok, "End of Innocence." <http://www.yennikwok.com/arts/aes+f.pdf>.

³⁰⁹ Paiement, G. (2004). War Games. *REM*. Auckland. P. 14. From http://genpaiement.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/AES_F_BW.

the Middle East. Furthermore, the choice of a media charged location like the Middle East inevitably provokes “rethinking” of the sensationalism of violence stereotypically associated with specific regions of the world.

The implied violence in *Action Half Life* delineates a reflection of commercial spectacle, procured for mass-consumption, reiterating Bruder’s notion of “aestheticized violence.”³¹⁰ AES+F proclaim on the “concept” page of their website: “What is heroism in our times, when war, exploits, and pathos are just a part of a virtual show endlessly dissipating into mass circulation? Our show is total – starting from its well-structured 3D computer games, its powerful Hollywood effects so wonderfully spent on saving private Ryan.”³¹¹ The group’s assertion articulates their intention to expose how accustomed the world has become to the media-generated artifice of stylized violence.

“The artworks speak about our world,” explains AES+F member Lev Evzovich, in an interview for the *South China Morning Post*. “It looks glossy and beautiful on the outside, but it has a bitter, traumatic meaning inside.”³¹² Evzovich’s statement asserts his acknowledgement of the media’s manipulative fabrication of artifice disseminated to the masses. In their embodiment of aestheticized violence, AES+F unveil the media’s construction of alluring facades that obscure unpleasant truths and the incongruity of values in consumer culture.

³¹⁰ Bruder, “Aestheticizing Violence, or How to Do Things with Style.”

³¹¹ AES+F, “Concept,” <http://www.aes-group.org/hl3.asp>.

³¹² Kwok, “End of Innocence.”

Like AES +F, Serbian-born artist Marina Abramovic' also employs a "visual narrative" in her reinterpretation of aestheticized entertainment industry violence. A celebrated performance artist, Abramovic has been addressing the approval of "violence as spectacle" within society since the 1970s. Abramovic's previous works have included responses to political offences against humanity and injustices towards women. However, her 2008 body of work, *8 Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End* which includes a video installation and the photographic sequence, *The Family*, focuses on the ramifications of the global media's ubiquitous proliferation of violence.



Marina Abramovic', *The Family III*, 2008, Chromogenic print mounted on dibond, 180 x 225 cm.

In *The Cruel Practice of Art*, Bataille states, "Art never takes on itself the work of the judge."³¹³ Without passing judgement, *8 Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End* examines the universal appeal of brutality—that even children and distant cultures are not immune to the human fascination with violence. Any

³¹³ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 2.

judgement upon the encouragement of children to simulate violence is left in the hands of the viewer. Bataille furthermore declares, “The child would not be surprised to wake up as God, who for a time would put himself to the test, so that the imposture of his small position would be suddenly revealed.”³¹⁴ Upon viewing Abramovic’s series, humanity’s inborn attraction to violence is revealed as a desire for power and control.

The Family features machine-gun toting Laotian child soldiers. In some photos, the kids simulate scenes of violent combat in their competition for dominance, while in others they are more docile, clasping the firearms like surrogate teddy bears. *The Family* is a forthright observation on the far-reaching effects of the media’s ever- increasing circulation of violent imagery.

The Family III captures seven girl soldiers sound asleep tucked into dainty pink quilt, tenderly clutching their respective guns. Formally, Abramovic’ has employed painterly tropes that contribute to the image’s impact. There is a striking contrast between the softness and colours of the bedding and the utilitarian quality of the children’s fatigues and weapons, attracting the viewer’s gaze. Furthermore, the image is photographed from above, creating distance from the subjects. Installed vertically, the angle of the picture plane becomes skewed, creating a cinematic effect. Like fictitious scenarios produced by entertainment industry devices, the composition of the physically impossible image defies gravity.

The Family III presents a clever and moving substitute for the conventional comfort and security of a doll or stuffed animal. The replacement of toys with guns suggests that the youth of today are being nurtured by the sensationalized violence on TV. In the piece, Abramovic’ contrasts childhood innocence to cruel behaviour influenced by exposure to televised violence. In the photograph, young, impressionable children are clutching weapons of destruction for security.

³¹⁴ Ibid. P. 5.

Furthermore, Abramovic' addresses several stereotypes opportunistically capitalized upon by the media in disseminating violent spectacle. The enlistment of child soldiers in the so-called Third-world and the exotification of guerrilla warfare in remote, rustic locations are two examples of this phenomenon. Paradoxically, these children lived through neither the Vietnam War, nor the Laotian Civil war, both of which ended in 1975.



Marina Abramovic, *The Family VI*, 2008, C-print. 180 x 294 cm.

The exhibition catalogue for *8 Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End*'s opens quoting Susan Sontag's views on the media's overabundant transmissions of violence: "Flooded with images of the sort that once used to shock and arouse indignation, we are losing our capacity to react. Compassion, stretched to its limits, is going numb."³¹⁵ Sontag's statement regarding *8 Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End* parallels Moeller's definition of "compassion fatigue." In her recontextualization of the media paradigms that promote violent spectacles, Abramovic' exposes those paradigms as sensationalist devices. Aspiring to expose the social assimilation of media artifice, Abramovic knowingly directs the children to play recognizable archetypes seen in video games and movies—"the

³¹⁵ Susan Sontag, "Looking at War: Photography's View of Devastation and Death," *New Yorker*, December 9 2002. P. 97.

Viet Cong female guerilla, the machine-gun wielding vigilante, the sadistic executioner.”³¹⁶

Upon viewing the series, the audience could presume that the privileged European artist—like the corporate powers of the global mass media—is guilty of profiting from the exploitation of economically disadvantaged children of a previously colonized nation.³¹⁷ However, when interviewed regarding the intention of the installation, Abramovic claims that she was inspired by the contrast of Lao youths imitating the fierce media spectacle juxtaposed against tranquil Buddhist traditions of Laos. Abramovic maintained, “The themes are not specific to Laos. I just happened to make the piece there, but it could just as well apply to Middle America. Any kid in the world today plays these incredibly violent video games that could easily become a reality.”³¹⁸ Hence, Abramovic chose the Lao youths as models of globalized media consumption.

Abramovic’s references to commodified brutality illuminate the formulaic contrivances of sensationalized portrayals of combat. *8 Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End* mimics the stereotypical apprehensive anticipation of attack, simulated skirmishes and stillness of mocked death of fabricated media conflict. Opposing entertainment industry clichés, in Abramovic’s narrative, neither of the opposing factions of juvenile combatants emerge in victory. Nonetheless, in true media style, there is a moral to *8 Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End*. At the end of the video piece, Abramovic orchestrates a cooperative burning of mock artillery in a collective bonfire—thereby reproaching violence for the camera.

³¹⁶ France Morin, *Marina Abramovic: 8 Lessons on Emptiness with a Happy End*, ed. In the Quiet Land (New York: In the Quiet Land, 2008).

³¹⁷ These concepts were discussed by Abramovic in an interview with David Ebony for *Art in America*. David Ebony, “Marina Abramovic: An Interview,” *Art in America* (2009), <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/-marina-abramovic-david-ebony/>.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

iv. The Travesty of Compassion Fatigue

The device of irony is also employed by contemporary artists in reaction to entertainment industry brutality, as a contrasting methodology from the aestheticization of violence. Taking a more confrontational approach to media renderings, the artists examined in *The Travesty of Compassion Fatigue* intentionally overstate and satirize iconic broadcasts in their reinvention of media violence. The sarcasm in these works is a reaction to the waning effect of repetitive exposure to broadcasts of atrocity. Inspired by violent imagery from low-budget movies and mass culture, artists discussed in *The Travesty of Compassion Fatigue* sarcastically reposition media exemplars in their work.



Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Rivers of Blood*, 2007, mixed media. Dimensions varied.

British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman orchestrate a scene “which penetrates the opacity of the world with those gratuitously cruel flashes in which seduction is tied to massacre, torture and horror.”³¹⁹ Jake and Dinos Chapman’s references to Bataille are visible in their representations of human sacrifice and moral transgression. Furthermore, their vision supports Bataille’s postulation that

³¹⁹ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art."

even the most frightening artwork is capable of seducing the audience. Upon entering the Jake and Dinos Chapman realm of destruction and demise, viewers are privileged to an exhilarating yet horrifying glimpse of what it would be like to escape the trap of life.

Jake and Dinos Chapman provoke audience inquiry by amplifying atrocity in their appropriation of repulsive media-generated imagery. They credit much of their inspiration to historical figures Francisco Goya and Georges Bataille.³²⁰ However, a direct response to the decadent proliferation of violent spectacle in the entertainment industry is visible in their depictions of carnage.

Formal elements of Jake and Dinos Chapman's dioramas are inspired by Goya's romanticist paintings.³²¹ *Rivers of Blood* is composed of models akin to miniatures used for special effects in film and television production. Jake and Dinos Chapman represent the horrors of combat in a familiar context that echoes sensational scenes capitalized upon by the media. They use figures akin to those portrayed in cult zombie films like *Dawn of the Dead* to create their works. Their sculptures depict disorderly insurrections analogous to the illustrious mutiny scene in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.³²²

Jake and Dinos Chapman exaggerate media clichés to create a sense of irony. In *Rivers of Blood* frenzied zombie soldiers impale and dismember humans, tossing their bloody remains off a dilapidated bridge. Similarly, skeletal Gestapo mutants revel in tossing oil barrels from a decrepit oil tanker into a slick black sea in *Ship of Fools* (2009). In an earlier diorama piece, *Arbeit McFries* (2001), orgiastic sexual violence takes place between the mutilated survivors surrounding

³²⁰ Jake and Baker Chapman, Simon, "Jake Chapman on Georges Bataille: An Interview with Simon Baker," *Papers of Surrealism*, no. 1 (2003), http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal1/acrobat_files/chapman_12.pdf.

³²¹ According to Simon Baker, "The Chapmans describe their relationship with Goya as one of 'collaboration.'" Simon Baker, "The Cruel Practice of Art," in *Jake & Dinos Chapman: Like a Dog Returns to its Vomit*, ed. White Cube (London: Jay Jopling, 2005).

³²² Influences for *Rivers of Blood* was researched on the Chapman's page for the collection of the Museo D'Arte Contemporanea Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. <http://www.museomadre.it/opere.cfm?id=1018>.

a bombed McDonald's franchise. The gruesome mayhem ('and' deleted) embellished to the point of satire.



Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Ship of Fools*, 2009, mixed Media. Dimensions variable.

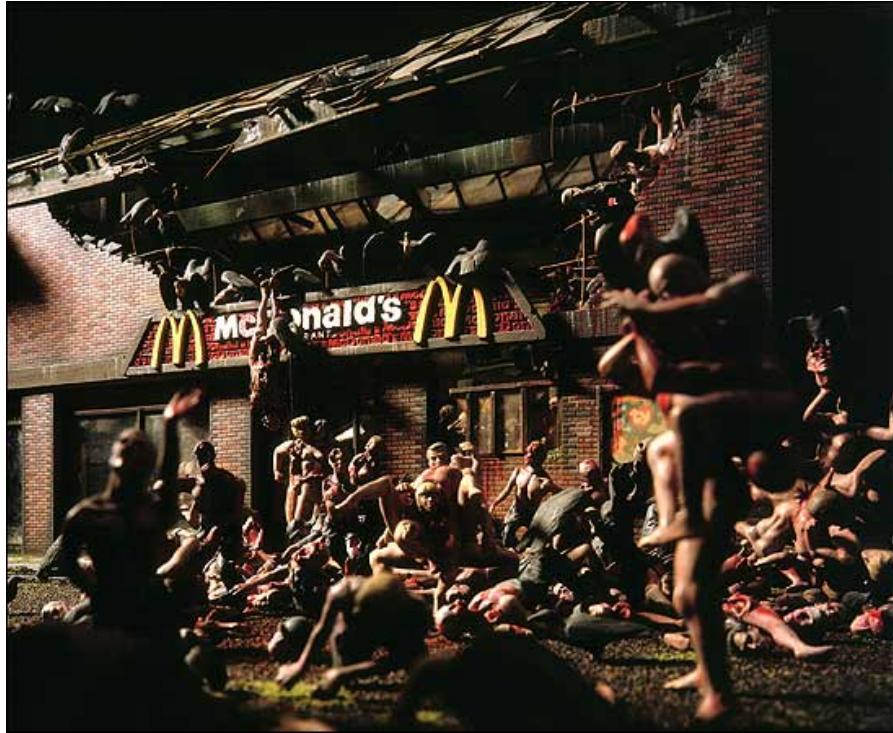
The miniature scale, complex compositions and obsessive detailing in the dioramas demand close inspection. Unlike media violence, which is absorbed into the subconscious, the viewer is coaxed to inspect the tumultuous brutality in Jake and Dinos Chapman's works. These portrayals of mortality and sadism induce introspection on the anesthetization of a culture continually inundated with sensationalized transmissions of brutality.

Jake and Dinos Chapman's depiction of excessive cruelty parodies the cultural iconography of decadence proliferated by the advertising and entertainment industries. British art historian Simon Baker has done extensive research on Bataille's influence on art.³²³ In an interview with Baker, Jake Chapman expounds upon the relationship between he and Dinos's iconography and the excess of cruelty in Bataille's texts. Chapman asserts, "The thing about Bataille is that ultimately, his work is about intensity. The thing about our work is that it's logically tied into the melodramas that allow it to be morally useful."³²⁴ Thus, the collaborative duo apply Bataille's philosophical analysis of excess in

³²³ Baker co-authored the book *Undercover Surrealism: George Bataille and DOCUMENTS* in 2006.

³²⁴ Chapman, "Jake Chapman on Georges Bataille: An Interview with Simon Baker." P. 10.

exposing the capitalistic intentions of the global media complex through recontextualizing media clichés.



Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Arbeit McFries* (detail), 2001, Mixed media.
Dimensions variable.

In 2007, The Tate Liverpool presented a retrospective of Jake and Dinos Chapman's work. Tate's database includes an online exhibition guide for the retrospective. The exhibition guide concisely describes the impact of the duo's work as a response to the "spectacle of violence that characterised the last century. They also address the idea of 'compassion fatigue' that is experienced following over-exposure to images of excess violence or suffering."³²⁵ The exhibition statement draws a parallel between their work and Moeller's theoretical stance. Furthermore, a connection is established between Jake and Dinos Chapman's

³²⁵ Tate Liverpool Exhibition Guide,
<http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/exhibitions/jakeanddinoschapman/guide/room5.shtm>.

imagery and Warhol's observation on the diminishing effect of repetitive exposure to brutality.³²⁶

The duo engender "the consumption of art within a culture dependent on a 'pathos habit,' which demands ever more violent images to feed it for the same compassionate catharsis."³²⁷ Thus, Jake and Dinos Chapman's satirical depictions serve as a retort to the media's dissemination of increasingly extreme manifestations of brutality in its opportunistic capitalization upon the innate human attraction to violence. Moreover, their work examines the historical context of humanity's age-old fascination with horrific violence.

³²⁶ Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Interviews with Eight Painters." P. 27.

³²⁷ Tate Liverpool Exhibition Guide.

Although lacking Jake and Dinos Chapman's discernable moralistic nuances, Mexican artist Miguel Calderon also references amplified media brutality in his work. Rather than appropriate gruesome media iconography, Calderon incorporates a humorous sense of absurdity into his work, thereby lampooning entertainment industry paradigms. In an interview for VBS TV, Calderon revealed that he too is an admirer of Goya—³²⁸a commonality he shares with Jake and Dinos Chapman.

In *The Cruel Practice of Art*, Bataille identified the indulgence in graphic violence as “a pleasure, an intense pleasure, but a pleasure all the same.”³²⁹ In Mexican society, synthetic violence as entertainment enjoys immense popularity. From sensationalized crime depictions³³⁰ to blatantly contrived wrestling matches, overstated depictions of brutality pervade Mexican television. There is a visible connection between Calderon's work and the high profusion of sensationalized media violence in Mexico. Calderon reacts to a culture with a taste for spectacles of excessive media brutality.

Calderon is recognized for application of an artificial, low-budget aesthetic in his satirical response to media violence. An early example of Calderon's violent imagery is his 1995 photographic series *Artificial History*. In the series, Calderon documents himself portraying a crazed, bloodthirsty villain. The visual narrative in the photos recalls the sensationalized hype of the violence in films of the 1990s, such as *Natural Born Killers* and *Pulp Fiction*. Calderon immobilizes instances of gun-wielding and karate-kicking action in his photos. However, Calderon's images contain an element of absurdity lacking in violent films. Rather than the customary human victims, Calderon targets big game animals, including tigers,

³²⁸ Bernardo Loyola, "Miguel Calderon," in *Art Talk*, ed. VBS TV (Vice, 2008).

³²⁹ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 2.

³³⁰ In *Tabloid Tales*, Colin S. Sparks and John Turloch describe what is known as “*Tabloid Television*” in Mexico, which depicts embellished dramatizations of sensationalized street crime. The television programs *Ciudad Desnuda* and *Duro y Directo* serve two examples of this phenomenon. Colin S. Sparks and John Turloch, *Tabloid Tales* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000). P. 268.

lions and zebras—the animals appear awkwardly frozen in a state of suspended animation.



Miguel Calderon, *Artificial History*, 1995, C-print. 127 x 176.5 cm.

The images in *Artificial History* convey a crass sense of farcicality. Donning an afro-styled wig and an imposing stance, Calderon captures himself in what resembles freeze-frames of action movies. However his targets ironically pose no threat whatsoever. Upon close inspection, the true identity of the beasts in *Artificial History* is revealed: they are taxidermied museum exhibits.

Further references to entertainment industry spectacles are contained in *Artificial History*. Calderon portrays a stereotypically belligerent, arrogant Latino gang-banger engaging in destructive, violent behaviour. Calderon's choice of costuming, his contrived posturing and even his hand gestures calculatedly personify the cliché media villain.

Conjuring the artificial quality of Paul McCarthy's installations, the backgrounds of Calderon's images resemble something out of a theme park. Calderon's dramatic coloured lighting exudes a B-movie effect. Use of a fish-eye lens further amplifies the sense of parody in *Artificial History*. Both the implied action and the production method of *Artificial History* invite us to “rethink” perpetuation of the deranged, dehumanized criminal stereotype in the media.

Calderon subsequently produced a series of paintings entitled *Aggressively Mediocre Mentally Challenged Fantasy Island* (circle one of the above). The series simultaneously pushes the boundaries of taste and demonstrates how media constructs distance the audience from actual incidents of violence. Works in the sequence are based upon media photos of a fraternal criminal band sensationalized by the media. According to Calderon, the gang would abduct and torture unwitting couples visiting the Los Dinamos recreation area outside of Mexico City.³³¹ In Calderon's depictions, the alleged gang members embark upon a sadistic rampage in the pastoral environment. Members of the group melodramatically engage in brutish behaviour donning monster masks.



Miguel Calderon, *Attack from Aggressively Mediocre Mentally Challenged Fantasy Island* (circle one of the above), 1998, oil on canvas. 140 x 210 cm.

In rendering bizarre escapades of tabloid violence, Calderon utilizes a production process that creates several degrees of detachment from actuality. Firstly, Calderon staged a photo shoot inspired by low-quality press images. Next, in an effort to achieve his desired aesthetic, he hired a painter-by-trade to realize the paintings. Calderon's decision to employ a non-classically trained artist

³³¹ Loyola, "Miguel Calderon."

ensured *Aggressively Mediocre Mentally Challenged Fantasy Island* (circle one of the above) a naïve, absurdist quality. Thus, the awkward execution of the series is consistent with the precarious media fabrication to which they refer.

In both the readymade approach and the banal aesthetic of *Aggressively Mediocre Mentally Challenged Fantasy Island* (circle one of the above), Calderon negates the pretensions of high-art. Calderon furthermore underscores the entertainment industry's capitalization upon human intrigue with violent spectacle. Therefore, the series dually undermines mass and elitist culture.



Miguel Calderon, *Chapultepec # 10*, 2003, C-Print. 68 x 101.5 cm

Calderon's 2003 photographic series, *Chapultepec*, takes compositional cues from Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra*.³³² *Chapultepec* recalls Bataille's conceptualization of the appeal of artistic representations of atrocity that "art may finally have liberated itself from the service of religion, but it maintains its

³³² Ibid.

servitude with regard to horror.”³³³ *Chapultepec* addresses the human impulse to observe the aftermath of brutality. The images furthermore instigate inquiry into why an artist would want to depict such a scene.

Substituting local families for professional actors, Calderon captures several compositional variations of his subjects sprawled out in Chapultepec Park, feigning death. The narrative behind the images is left open to interpretation. The mysterious catastrophe could hypothetically be the result of a toxic gas leak, a neutron bomb or a mass suicide. The amateur models’ interpretation of death is stiff and overly theatrical. *Chapultepec*’s aesthetic mimics that of a low-budget movie or tabloid image, adding a farcical quality to the artwork.

Martha Schwendener is a critic who reviewed *Chapultepec* for *Artforum* magazine in New York. Schwendener declared that the photos “merge B-movie horror tableaux, images of Jonestown, and *Le Dejeuner sur l’herbe*.”³³⁴ Schwendener’s statement confirms the sense of satire on consumer culture in Calderon’s re-enactments of disaster and death. Furthermore, Schwendener’s allusion to *Le Dejeuner sur l’herbe* infers Calderon’s intention to ironically subvert the art institution through placing *Chapultepec* in a pristine gallery context.

A manifest absence of pretention is conveyed in the banal aesthetic of *Chapultepec*. Calderon’s lack of pretense and his choice of performers reveals an agenda to demonstrate the masses’ gullibility to the media’s sensationalist devices. Furthermore, in trivializing violence, Calderon illuminates how media brutality has become commonplace enough to become banal. Sontag professes that the entertainment industry transmissions facilitate a “certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem ordinary.”³³⁵ In blatantly mocking entertainment industry contrivances, Calderon is exposing how oversaturation diminishes the potency of media violence. Additionally, Calderon is charging the

³³³ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 2.

³³⁴ Martha Schwendener, "Miguel Calderon: Andrea Rosen Gallery," *Artforum International* 42, no. 4. December 2003. P. 148.

³³⁵ Sontag, *On Photography*. P. 21.

viewing public with the thoughtless consumption of predictable violence that the commercial media calculatedly transmits for mass consumptions.

Similar to Calderon, Japanese artist Makoto Aida employs satire in his reinvention of entertainment industry violence. Rather than respond to the banality of commonplace media depictions, Aida reinterprets manifestations of brutality emphatically and repetitiously sensationalized by the media. Aida has explored themes of violent excess specific to Japanese consumer culture since the late 1980s. Historically, Aida has addressed a wide range of media transmissions ranging from eroticized animé sadomasochism to highly publicized incidents of mass suicide. Aida avoids didacticism through caricature in his reinventions of hyped media violence.



Makoto Aida, *The Video of a Man Calling Himself Bin Laden Staying in Japan*, 2005, video still.

Aida's use of satire exposes the paradox between Japan's peaceful image propagated by the media and the culture's voracious appetite for violent imagery. In his work, Aida affirms post-World War II Japanese society is not immune to the inherent human penchant for violence. Bataille describes art's warrant to freely depict precarious subjects, claiming, "its movement puts art without harm at the height of the worst."³³⁶ Aida's portrayal of publicized atrocity reinforces Bataille's theory—Aida is able to confront controversial violence without serious repercussions through realizing an ironic work.

³³⁶ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 6.

Aida's 2005 video, *The Video of a Man Calling Himself Bin Laden Staying in Japan* is a comical work. The piece features a monologue by Aida masquerading as the infamous Al Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden. Aida is costumed in a long beard, turban and army fatigue jacket and surrounded by empty sake bottles. The video reveals how even matters of state security, such as terrorism, become laughable clichés due to conflicting, biased and false media transmissions. The deadpan acting in *The Video of a Man Calling Himself Bin Laden Staying in Japan* furthermore denotes the onslaught of entertainment industry dramatizations that follow media coverage of political violence.

While Aida does not include any footage of military activities in the piece, the suggestion of repetitious media imagery of warfare is evident. The media publicizes stereotyped, often unsubstantiated images of terrorists, thereby creating hype. The media publicizes an iconography of terror that pervades the consciousness of society, profiting from the exploitation of that iconography. By 2005 when *The Video of a Man Calling Himself Bin Laden Staying in Japan* was produced, a variety of differently embellished Bin Laden sightings had circulated the media.³³⁷ Due to such an abundance of diverse transmissions, virtually any aging bearded man in traditional Afghani Muslim attire could be mistaken for Bin Laden. The mere image of a Muslim conservative equivocated media terrorism.

Aida's absurdist video is a palpable reaction to years of exposure to dissemination of hypothetical reports of the terrorist's escapades and whereabouts accompanied the by numerous false sightings and reports of his death.³³⁸ The

³³⁷ In 2011, Emanuelle Degli Esposti of *The Telegraph* published the online article, *The Top ten Osama Bin Laden sightings*. The article provides some amusing examples since his political flight in 2001. Examples include a sighting at a Colorado Springs Rotary Club event and a Tecapulco, Mexico carnival, accompanied by Michael Jackson. Emanuelle Degli Esposti, "Top Ten Osama Bin Laden Sightings," *The Telegraph* (2011). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/8427040/Top-ten-Osama-Bin-Laden-sightings.html>.

³³⁸ Justin Elliot of the U.S. online political magazine, *Salon*, wrote an entire online article on the subject after Bin Laden's "confirmed" death in 2011. Elliot asserts, "The false reports of Osama bin Laden's death began almost immediately after September 11 2001, and persisted at a rate of at least once or twice a year, every year. The reports — generated by (usually anonymous) statements by American officials and a dizzying array of foreign sources — often generated

copiousness of those reports jeopardized the credibility of Bin Laden's mere existence and turned his persona into a cliché. Fittingly, mysterious Arabic text is scrawled on the wall in *The Video of a Man Calling Himself Bin Laden Staying in Japan*, adding to the sense of formulaic reiteration of the illustrious jihadist's fabricated identity.

In his work, Aida humorously counters the plethora of sensationalized media portrayals of Bin Laden's malevolent character. Aida's caricature of a Muslim fundamentalist delivers an amusingly drunken speech. Aida's "Bin Laden" declares he is no longer interested in violence and to stop searching for him. He furthers that his leisurely time in Japan has fostered in him a newfound passion for pacifism and also contributed to a recent gain weight.³³⁹ "Everyone gets the joke in the Bin Laden video because he takes a figure widely identified with fear, hatred and extremism, and inserts him into an incongruously banal scenario,"³⁴⁰ muses Andrew Mearkle of *Asia Art Pacific* in his critique of the video. In his lackadaisical caricature of such an infamous figure of brutality, Aida encourages scrutiny of opportunistic entertainment industry stereotyping.

Aida's camp reiteration of media spectacle resonates with Pop. However, unlike Warhol, Aida draws attention to how the media's proliferation of sensational imagery results in its trivialization. Although the media marketed Bin Laden as an archetypical warmonger, incessant coverage of his pursuit resulted in "compassion fatigue." Like Calderon, Aida cheekily discloses how the media's proliferation of propaganda "makes the horrible seem ordinary—making it appear familiar."³⁴¹ Aida's employment of humor eases the audience's confrontation with an icon of terror while encouraging us to "rethink" the repercussions of incessant media exposure.

international headlines." Justin Elliott, "The Many Deaths of Osama Bin Laden," *Salon*, May 2 (2011), http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2011/05/01/bin_laden_false_reports.

³³⁹ Johnson, "David LaChapelle Claims Pop-Art Throne."; Andrew Maerkle, "No More War; Save Water; Don't Pollute the Sea. Makoto Aida," *ArtAsiaPacific* 2008.

³⁴⁰ ———, "No More War; Save Water; Don't Pollute the Sea. Makoto Aida."

³⁴¹ Sontag, *On Photography*. P. 21.

v. **Fallen Icons**

Fallen Icons examines the visual component of the thesis in relationship to the premise of *Factitious Violence*. Analogous to Aida and Caldron's content, the absurdity of media representations of violence is also apparent in the studio component of this thesis. Parody is a significant element of my artistic practice and is employed to avoid dogmatic readings of the images. In *Fallen Icons*, the humorous reinterpretation of sensationalized media violence is examined within the visual narrative through two of my own visual works. Those works will furthermore be considered within the context of other artworks discussed in *Factitious Violence*.



Liz Miller, *Riot #4*, 2011, digital image.

In the *Cruel Practice of Art*, Bataille elucidates the human desire to be captivated and seized by violence without succumbing to death. Bataille proclaims “art, which puts us on the path of complete destruction and suspends us there for a time, offers us ravishment without death.”³⁴² In the media, scenes of vampires engaging in violence are both sexualized and contextualized against

³⁴² Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 5.

religion.³⁴³ In some scenes, being targeted as the victim of vampiric violence is portrayed as a euphoric experience.³⁴⁴ Entertainment industry vampire tales romanticize brutality thus paralleling Bataille's perspective. *Riot #4* offers the viewer an escapist glimpse of violence without endangerment. However in its amplification of violent imagery, *Riot #4* reminds the audience of the decadent nature of indulgence in violent spectacle.

Riot #4 is part of a photographic series inspired by clichéd entertainment industry vampire tales. The spectacularized vampire genre has recently enjoyed popularity in mass culture.³⁴⁵ The photographic image takes thematic cues from the advertisements for *True Blood*, a television series currently circulating on the HBO network. The show receives strong viewer ratings; therefore its sensationalist advertisements must be effective. Clearly, the entertainment industry is capitalizing upon humanity's fascination with brutality in the case of *True Blood*.



True Blood advertisement by HBO®

³⁴³ For example, in *True Blood*, the church wages war against the vampires, viewing them as unholy beings.

³⁴⁴ An example of euphoria caused by a vampire bite can be seen in the U.S. television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in the final episode of Season 3 (1999) "Graduation Day" (part 2). In the episode, Buffy allows the vampire, Angel, to feed from her. In the scene Buffy becomes ecstatic.

³⁴⁵ Other than *True Blood*, *The Twilight Saga* films are another example of popular vampire-themed entertainment.

The advertisement for *True Blood* displays a woman's face and neck with the eyes cropped out, concealing the subject's identity. In the image, the woman's tongue is suggestively licking a drip of blood from a corner of her painted lips. Echoing Pop's methodologies, *Riot #4* mimics the advertisement. Both images feature female lips dripping with blood. However, rather than one dainty droplet, in *Riot #4* a profusion of the crimson fluid flows over the lower lip. The picture plane in *Riot #4* is so tightly zoomed that only the model's mouth is included in the frame. In the artwork, the model's sensual tongue is omitted and bloodstains are visible in her teeth.

A relationship to Calderon's aesthetic in *Chapultepec* is discernable in *Riot #4*. Allusions to camp Horror film visuals exist in both artworks. However, whereas Calderon's composition suggests a stereotypical massacre, *Riot #4* echoes the poster for the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Both photographs share a sense of humour in their smug critique of sensationalized media clichés. In its reiteration of advertising tropes, *Riot #4* exhibits indisputable Pop influences. However, in its tactical reformulation of violent clichés targeted for mass consumption, *Riot #4* represents a departure from Pop's replication of media imagery.

The reinvention of stereotypically aestheticized media violence in *Riot #4* reflects Margaret Bruder's premise that superficial visuals and spectacular brutality has become Hollywood's main attraction. *Riot #4* illustrates those media "spectacles—which can constantly be used and recycled to serve individual desires."³⁴⁶ Both the composition and the intensely scarlet hue of the blood in *Riot #4* emphasize the overstated references to eroticized media violence.

The stylized excess of blood and implied violence in *Riot #4* intentionally fail to disturb the viewer. The objective of the palatable image is the recontextualization of the marketable spectacles produced by the entertainment

³⁴⁶ Bruder, "Aestheticizing Violence, or How to Do Things with Style".

industry. The image is intended to capture the viewer's gaze, thus instigating deliberation upon the motives behind employment of such imagery by the media.



Liz Miller, *Humvee #2*, 2012, digital image.

Humvee #2 is another photographic work that reinvents sensationalized media violence. The subject of the image is a miniature replica of an all-terrain Humvee vehicle specifically designed to withstand the bombardment of combat and tough road conditions. Humvees are commonly seen in entertainment industry depictions of warfare.³⁴⁷ In the image, the Humvee is a metaphor for militaristic force in media depictions. The use of the standard army vehicle as a subject in *Humvee #2* reflects glorification of militaristic violence on film and television.

In *Humvee #2* the brute force of nature subjugates military might and the media's capitalization upon the violence it represents. In the photograph, an active

³⁴⁷ The movie, *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003) and the U.S. Television series, *Seaquest DSV* (1993-1996) are two examples of Humvees portrayed in the entertainment industry.

molten lava flow consumes the combat vehicle. In the photo, a glowing blob of magma overpowers the doomed Hummer, toppling the automobile and lighting it on fire. Hence, the sovereignty of nature's power over mankind's technology is symbolized in the image.

Nevertheless, a sense of humour is evident in *Humvee #2*. The photograph is evocative of the type of sensationalized violence seen in legendary 1970s disaster films like *Avalanche* and *Earthquake*. In the disaster movies, contrived concoctions of special effects and editing attempt to reproduce the force of nature's destruction. The fabrication of phony catastrophes in kitsch films belittles nature's potency.

Although fictitious scenes of destruction in 1970s movies seem far from realistic in comparison with the computer-animated effects of today, excessive violence is nonetheless a draw of the disaster film genre. Watching constructed media portrayals of natural disasters enables the public to witness the excitement of destruction and suffering without endangering their own lives. This phenomenon correlates to the premise of the *Cruel Practice of Art* that mankind is drawn to the spectacle of brutality. Bataille contends that viewing renderings of devastation in art allows the viewer momentarily to exist suspended between life and death. "We gravitate to the negation of that limit of death, which fascinates like light,"³⁴⁸ he proposes. *Humvee #2*'s reinvention of a catastrophic scenario can be read as a testament to Bataille's theory. However, the intention in the artwork deviates from the intention of disaster films. *Humvee #2* conscientiously addresses the human fascination with brutality, while entertainment industry depictions calculatedly profit from the appeal of violent display.

In parodying a natural catastrophe, *Humvee #2* demonstrates the influence of Warhol's *Death and Disaster Series*. However, the critique of the entertainment industry in *Humvee #2* illustrates a pronounced departure from Warhol's professed indifference. The humorous connotations of *Humvee #2* are also not evident in Warhol's traumatized reiteration of violent transmissions.

³⁴⁸ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 5.

Although referencing different film genres, the coexisting emulation and deconstruction of a clichéd movie aesthetic in *Humvee #2* displays similarities to Sherman's *Untitled #153*. Like Sherman's work, *Humvee #2*, documents the relationship between society and an entertainment industry consumed by what Mark Seltzer termed "the exhibition and witnessing, the endlessly reproducible display"³⁴⁹ of violence. Yet *Humvee #2* provides a less theatrical interpretation of commercial transmissions of brutality than Sherman's work. Furthermore, *Humvee #2* refrains from implicating audience complicity in the consumption of violent spectacle. Therefore, *Humvee #2* contrasts *Untitled #153* by offering a subtle, witty critique of media brutality.

Humvee #2 is a satirical reflection of familiar stereotypes common to military action films and disaster movies. Through humor and familiarity, *Humvee #2* encourages audience scrutiny of tired media tropes. As with out-dated special effects, the vehicle in the image is easily identifiable as a phony model. The obvious falsification of the Hummer adds to the humorous quality of the work. However, a sincere critique of entertainment industry motives exists in *Humvee #2*. The image of the Hummer being engulfed by the lava aims to provoke inquiry into the media's opportunistic marketing of brutality. Additionally, *Humvee #2* questions the vast public consumption of sensational violent spectacles, so repetitive and monotonous that they have become cliché.

³⁴⁹ Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere."

It is now evident that the response to sensationalized media violence is a central theme in art since 1960. Contemporary artists employ multivalent methodologies in their reaction to the entertainment industry's capitalization upon humanity's penchant for violence through the propagation of violent spectacle. In *The Cruel Practice of Art*, Bataille's proposes that one of art's purposes is to indulge in the horrors of existence. Bataille describes this phenomenon as "that which seems to be the very opposite of pleasure and amusement."³⁵⁰ This statement substantiates both the human inclination to portray violence and the elucidated readings of media transmissions in *Factitious Violence*.

The process of research in *Factitious Violence* reveals that artists employ a combination of three primary conceptual and formal devices to engage the viewer and create proximity to media portrayals of brutality. Those devices are confrontation, aesthetics and irony. Confrontational depictions of violence are employed to enflame and disturb the viewer, transmitting moralistic messages. For instance, Burden employed confrontation to communicate didacticism in *Shoot*. Artists aestheticize violence as a tactical manoeuvre to captivate the viewing audience into "rethinking" the spectacularization of brutality in mass culture. AES+F's spectacular visual tropes simulate entertainment industry visuals stimulating a dialogue between *Action Half-Life* and media iconography. Irony is utilized in artworks to indicate the familiarity and impotence of the commercial media's repetitious over-proliferation of sensationalized violence. *The Video on a Man Calling Himself Bin Laden Staying in Japan* illustrates the farcicality of the media's widespread dissemination of warmongering propaganda.

It has become apparent that individual artworks distance the audience in varying amounts, depending upon their intended effect. The closer proximity of harsh, realistic images intensifies their impact, facilitating shock value. For example, the composition allows very little distance between image and viewer in Serrano's provocative series, *The Morgue*. On the other hand, artworks that create greater physical and psychological distance from the viewer contain less aggressive references to the artifice of media spectacle. The audience is forced to

³⁵⁰ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art."

view Cai Guo-Qiang's *Tornado* from afar, thereby promoting contemplation of its underlying meaning.

Margaret Bruder's philosophy regarding the cinematic stylization of violence explains the phenomenon of violence as spectacle. "Guns, gore and explosions, exploiting mise-en-scene not so much to provide narrative environment as to create the appearance of a "movie" atmosphere against which specifically cinematic spectacle can unfold,"³⁵¹ asserts Bruder. Thus, the media has calculatedly cashed in on the allure of brutal imagery, amplifying and aestheticizing violence as a marketing strategy.

There is validity in both Bataille and Bruder's postulations in regards to art's retort to commercial transmissions of brutality. Moreover there are specific, constantly identifiable undertones in contemporary art's reflection of media violence. The consistency lies in the collective acknowledgement of media capitalization upon an innate part of human nature, the inquisitive fascination with manifestations of brutality. This capitalization endures to such an extent that scenes of extreme violence have become so commonplace they no longer incite audience reaction. Consequently, televised violence has become trivialized and stereotypical. Through manipulation and repositioning of violent clichés, art restores significance in brutal imagery that is lost in the media's seemingly endless transmission of sensational images.

³⁵¹ Bruder, "Aestheticizing Violence, or How to Do Things with Style."

CONCLUSION

Paradigms such as typecast sexuality, exalted social status and gratuitous violence are relentlessly disseminated by the advertising and entertainment industries to the point of becoming cliché. The research in *Manipulating the Hype* exposes contemporary art's considerable response to these dehumanizing media stereotypes. Furthermore, this widespread retort to media clichés is now established as a palpable commonality in studio practices worldwide.

The inquiry in *Manipulating the Hype* encompasses the study of art historical and theoretical texts, researching electronic databases, viewing gallery exhibitions and practical studio research. Previous art historical study along with recent research facilitated my awareness of the artists in this paper. Additionally, there are artists included in *Manipulating the Hype* who are personal academic and gallery colleagues.

Artists discussed in this thesis react to the selected archetypes of sexuality, status and violence. The paper has shown Pop's precedential recontextualization of those media clichés to be a catalyst for successive generations of artists. Andy Warhol is determined as a seminal artist to respond to media iconography in *Manipulating the Hype*. The pervasiveness of artists' reflection of media imagery in their work elucidates the advertising and entertainment industries' authoritative influence upon mass culture.

The process of research has revealed a reaction to media stereotypes by a myriad of artists using multitudinous approaches. Many poignant artistic responses are excluded from this paper due to constraints of breadth, yet merit further investigation. After careful consideration, only those works deemed crucial to the premise of the thesis are included in *Manipulating the Hype*.

Nonetheless, works by artists from diverse backgrounds and nationalities are included in the examination. The investigation has ascertained that the reaction to media paradigms is not limited to known works by internationally celebrated artists. The response to stereotyping in mass culture is also evident in the efforts of locally acknowledged artists. The accessibility of their content has contributed to those artists' recognition. Thus, the investigation demonstrates that familiar media imagery is approachable artistic material with mass appeal.

Years of professional practice and the process of research brought art's phenomenal worldwide response to media clichés to my attention. The identification of contemporary art's collective answer to media archetypes is significant in distinguishing thematic solidarity amongst otherwise diverse art movements since 1960. The research in *Manipulating the Hype* nevertheless originated as a quest for cohesion within the diversity of my own multifaceted artistic output.

The identification of the reinterpretation of media clichés as a pattern in major contemporary art movements demonstrates an original contribution to knowledge.

The first chapter of the paper, *Sexual Stereotypes*, examines contemporary art's reinterpretation of clichéd gender and sexual representations. The chapter implicates both the advertising and entertainment industries in the manipulative marketing of clichéd sexual imagery. The chapter illustrates the diversity of methodologies artists use to address sexual stereotyping in the media, which steadfastly remains despite the efforts of the Sexual Revolution. The investigation makes evident that at this juncture contemporary art may not be capable of reforming the media, but can aid in illuminating the continuing prevalence of these clichés in media transmissions. Jean Baudrillard's philosophical text, *Seduction*, is examined in connection with the investigation of media portrayals in *Sexual Stereotypes*. The validity of Baudrillard's perspective on the marketing of sexuality in advertising and

entertainment as a “hallucination of desire, with its diffuse libidinal psychology”³⁵² is manifest in artworks throughout the chapter. *Seduction* paradoxically critiques media methodologies while coinciding with outdated Freudian views of masculinity and femininity similar to those roles perpetuated in media clichés. In its recontextualization and negation of sexual stereotypes, art counters society’s complacent acceptance of media clichés as exemplars. The media profits from consumer culture’s aspirations to conform to media archetypes, yet art reinforces the validity of a manifold of sexual identities, including those divergent from media models. Contemporary art’s reaction to media stereotypes offers hope of greater cultural appreciation and acceptance of sexual identities other than those exalted by the media.

The Symbolology of Status Clichés, the second chapter of *Manipulating the Hype*, investigates the media’s propagation of status stereotypes through the interchangeable use of product branding and celebrity affiliation. The advertising industry is ascertained as the primary purveyor of status symbols, which are employed as marketing devices. Contemporary art’s strategic reconfiguration of the celebrity image and luxury logos is important because it reveals the superficiality of revered constructs within consumer culture. Art has the ability to instigate change in society’s attitude towards materialistic values by providing the audience with insight into the shallowness of media fabrications. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard articulates the evolution of the media’s fabrication of marketable imagery that is ungrounded in reality where “the distinctions between object and representation, thing and idea are no longer valid.”³⁵³ (‘.’ deleted) Hence, Baudrillard defines status as a code existing in a hyperreal state. Art responds to the media constructs defined in *Simulacra and Simulation* as a way of provoking the public to question the capitalist motives of the media. In this manner, art has the possibility of serving as a catalyst for changing the priorities of a society that covets luxury and celebrity image over the pursuit of happiness.

The final chapter of this thesis, *Factitious Violence*, explores

³⁵² Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer, Culturetexts Series (Montreal: CTheory Books, 2001).

³⁵³ — — —, *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*. P. 5.

contemporary artists' retort to sensationalist portrayals of brutality in the media. The entertainment industry is identified as the principal sector of the media to exploit the human fascination with violence in *Factitious Violence*. The chapter explores various methodologies of encouraging the audience to 'rethink' the media's opportunistic capitalization upon violent spectacle. By continuing to heighten public awareness, art has the potential to foster a society that is more conscious in its consumption of media violence. Bataille delineates humanity's inherent fascination with violence and theorizes that renderings of violence function to satisfy this inclination. He asserts, "The flash of destruction is, in the trap of life, the bait which does not fail to entice us."³⁵⁴ Evidence suggests that a fascination with violence is innate to human nature, and artworks in *Factitious Violence* reinforce Bataille's postulations on the mass appeal of brutal spectacle. However, the media's exploitation of the appeal of brutality abates the traumatic reality of violent acts and makes those acts seem acceptable.

The investigation for *Factitious Violence* demanded daily scrutiny of both fabricated and documented violence. When I began to research the chapter, I expected to become increasingly desensitized to the sight of violent imagery, mindful of Warhol's statement, "When you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect."³⁵⁵ However, my "compassion fatigue" never developed as anticipated. To the contrary, the process of researching *Factitious Violence* surprisingly "re-sensitized" me to violence. While researching artworks in *Factitious Violence*, I experienced increased feelings of fear, and shock when horror confronted with true brutality. How could I become more sensitized to violence through viewing violent imagery?

After months of comparing stylized media portrayals of violence to actual brutality, I developed an acute ability to distinguish documentation of factual violence from fictitious renderings. The media visually amplifies its spectacles while omitting unpleasant actualities of true violence, rendering violent imagery predictable. Media illusions of violence began to read as mere fantasy while

³⁵⁴ Bataille, "The Cruel Practice of Art." P. 4.

³⁵⁵ Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Interviews with Eight Painters." P. 27.

reality seemed increasingly tangible and disturbing. The contrast between media fabrications and the harsh actualities of true violence became strikingly clear. Eventually, fictional violence in media entertainment appeared as pure façade, while the devastation and pain incurred by violent acts became increasingly palpable. The profound schism between reality and fantasy triggered an acute awareness of how real violence has the ability to disturb the viewer. Unlike formulaic media production methods Actual violent acts lack predictability and present gruesome unpleasantries.

The juxtaposition of fabricated and documented images of violence in my research challenged my passive acquiescence to mediated brutality. Thus, in recontextualizing images from the media, art encouraged me to “rethink” society’s acquiescence towards violence. Art’s retort to media violence will potentially promote less trivialization of brutality within our culture. Furthermore, by encouraging the audience to look beyond media archetypes and confronting the mass dissemination of violent spectacle, art fosters a more informed public outlook on viewing media violence.

The process of research has disclosed how each stereotype is presented and marketed differently by the media. Nevertheless, the advertising and entertainment industries promote each of these stereotypes for the universal objective of financial profit. That profit is attained through the opportunistic capitalization upon innate human instincts that drive humanity to seek sex, social ascendancy and violence.

Manipulating the Hype examines the three predominant stereotypes addressed in my own studio practice. The inquiry into the dialogue between contemporary art and the vast cultural influence of the media in *Manipulating the Hype* is valuable in evaluating the relationship between art and popular culture today. Art’s reinvention of advertising and entertainment industry portrayals of sex, status and violence is a substantial enough subject to warrant additional investigation. Furthermore, media clichés are numerous. Due to restrictions of scope, *Manipulating the Hype* examines only a portion of those clichés. For example racial stereotyping has great impact upon society and remains in the

advertising and entertainment industries in epic proportions. Art's response to racial typecasting in the media merits considerable research.

Marxist critique of the media and globalized consumer society is another significant international commonality in contemporary art that the process of inquiry has brought to my attention. Although Marxism is referenced in *Manipulating the Hype*, it is a momentous subject worthy of more thorough consideration. The advertising and entertainment industries mass-produce culture for profit, disregarding cultural enrichment and artistic merit. Therefore, the topic of contemporary art's critique of global capitalism warrants extensive separate research.

As a result of the investigative process in *Manipulating the Hype*, cohesion within my varied creative output is now defined. The course of study has furthermore given me a deeper understanding of the underlying motives behind the consistent response to media stereotypes in my work. Consequently, production of this thesis has inspired new developments in my studio practice.

Immersive contemplation of gratuitous violence and archetypal power structures in the media has inspired commencement of a new body of photographic work. The photographs document clichéd media icons of power and violence being consumed by the active lava flow from the Pu'u 'Ō'ō crater of the Kilauea volcano on the Big Island of Hawai'i. Vehicles representing the global sociopolitical establishment are destroyed in the process of creating the works. These vehicles include *Humvee #2*, which was discussed in *Factitious Violence*. Fictitious entertainment industry superheroes also succumb to the might of the volcanic activity in the photographs. *Ironman* is one example of an iconic media superhero being devoured by molten lava.



Liz Miller, *Ironman*, Digital image, 2012.

Volcanic activity is an immensely powerful force of nature. The juxtaposition of natural forces against entertainment industry clichés exposes the absurd impotence of media fabrications. Furthermore, real physical danger present in the magma deprecates the impact of simulated violence produced by special effects. Although photographing molten lava firsthand presents considerable logistic difficulties, the results reward the effort. Hence, the photographic series capturing the volcanic incineration of media archetypes remains in progress.

The dialogue between nature and culture inspired by the investigation of media iconography in *Manipulating the Hype* is far from exhausted. Vast possibilities remain in exploring the dynamic between consumer society and natural forces. Although beyond the scope of this paper, artists' responses to the impact of consumer culture on the environment are substantial and worthy of investigation. Additional questions have arisen as a result of my research. For instance, how has our own humanity become so removed from our culture in the

age of the global media? Have the artworld and the media evolved into recursive entities that alienate the public?

A conundrum within my art practice has also come to my attention as a result of my research. Neither Spartan nor spendthrift, I am a willing participant in consumer culture. I am enticed by the very same media clichés I critique in my work. Furthermore, I patronize those clichés. For example: I eagerly anticipate the release of the new Hollywood films. I refuse to wear certain clothing brands because they do not convey a stylish image, and I wear cosmetics and lingerie in attempt to achieve a stereotypical ideal of femininity. Likewise, I am visually intrigued and seduced by sensational media iconography. Through my financial support of these constructs, I am complicit in the perpetuation of media clichés.

This indulgent fascination with media iconography portraying sex, status and violence is evident in my artistic output. Likewise, a concurrent awareness of the culturally devitalizing effects media clichés and the capitalist motives behind their propagation drives a sense of critique in my work. Both the findings of my research and logic support a critical view of media clichés. It is therefore hypocritical not to decry those images and boycott the producers of those paradigms. How can such philosophical hypocrisy exist in both my artwork and my lifestyle?

Media imagery permeates the technology of contemporary global society. As an active participant in that society, mediated images designed to lure innate human desire doubtlessly influence my consciousness. Although informed intellect rejects such iconography, the sensuality of sex, the power of status and the thrill of violence do not fail to entice. A tension lies in the coexisting attraction and aversion to these familiar elements of media culture. Through coinciding reinterpretation and repositioning of familiar clichés and tactics from the advertising and entertainment industries, my work deconstructs the tension between the consumption and rejection of authoritative media imagery. Additionally, the appropriation of media devices and aesthetics in my work confronts the audience with the preponderance of the media in consumer culture. Hence, my work presents a dilemma that is relatively universal amongst

conscientious participants in globalized consumer society.

Manipulating the Hype illuminates the response to media clichés as a global phenomenon in contemporary art. Due to its limitations, this paper illustrates a fraction of a widespread occurrence. Therefore, further examination of art's reflection of media stereotypes is necessitated to facilitate a more comprehensive analysis of the subject. Nonetheless, evidence compiled in this thesis establishes a common thread in contemporary art history that has remained previously undocumented. Although questions remain, the paper succeeds in exposing art's multifaceted reinterpretation of common paradigms proliferated by the mass media.

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