THE POWER AND INFLUENCE OF MOVIES

MASTER OF FINE ARTS THESIS

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By

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ABSTRACT

Films, movies, even overly exorbitant, big budget Hollywood films can hold a place in the mind of an artist that is as significant as some of the other sources that artists often use to fuel their work. Movies are sometimes questioned in their validity or place in the studio of an artist, and I believe that for certain reasons, Hollywood films and associated ideas of fame and celebrity can provide a fruitful a place of exploration. Hollywood films, in the minds of certain individuals, myself included, provide a place for the imagination to wander, to escape from daily activities and revel in the nostalgia of childhood or memory: a place to explore the desire associated with dreams, the fame that often comes with being a celebrity, and the endurance behind the idea of work ethic that can fuel such explorations.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to my mom, my supportive family, my loving fiancée, my friends, and the art of cinema.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Power of Movies (for an artist)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escapism</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nostalgia</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. The Work</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic – Endurance</td>
<td>7-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity – Fame</td>
<td>13-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire – Dreams</td>
<td>17-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. The Narrative</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The Double Feature</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Conclusion</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Referenced Figures</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Watching *Jurassic Park* ................................................................. 35
Figure 2. *Jurassic Park* Projection ................................................................. 36
Figure 3. Touching Hollywood ................................................................. 36
Figure 4. Chris Burden *Through the Night Softly* ........................................... 37
Figure 5. Marina Abramović *Rhythm 0* ......................................................... 38
Figure 6. Hollywood Red Carpet Project ....................................................... 39
Figure 7. Freelance Paparazzi Event Contract ............................................... 40
Figure 8. Chris Burden *Honest Labor* .......................................................... 41
Figure 9. Performance Documentation ........................................................ 42
Figure 10. Vacationing with Daniel Day-Lewis .............................................. 43
Figure 11. Vacationing with Michael J. Fox .................................................... 44
Figure 12. Vacationing with Bill Murray ...................................................... 45
Figure 13. Vacationing with Leonardo DiCaprio ........................................... 45
Figure 14. *Back To The Future Part II* Greenscreen Still ............................. 46
Figure 15. *Ambience* ............................................................................. 47
Films, movies, even overly exorbitant, big budget Hollywood films can hold a place in the mind of an artist that is as significant as some of the other sources that artists often use to fuel their work. Movies are sometimes questioned in their validity or place in the studio of an artist, and I believe that for certain reasons, Hollywood films and associated ideas of fame and celebrity can provide a fruitful a place of exploration. Hollywood films, in the minds of certain individuals, myself included, provide a place for the imagination to wander, to escape from daily activities and revel in the nostalgia of childhood or memory: a place to explore the desire associated with dreams, the fame that often comes with being a celebrity, and the endurance behind the idea of work ethic that can fuel such explorations.
CHAPTER II

THE POWER OF MOVIES (FOR AN ARTIST)

ESCAPISM

Movies and the experience of viewing them can serve the purpose of being a tool of escape. I have strived to make it clear in the discussion of my work that I use the term escapism not to define an escape from something bad, or negative, but rather an escape to something pleasant. Some people firmly believe that in today’s society, this escapist mentality is even more prevalent than in the past. We have entire industries built upon the business of buying and selling escapism as a product: fiction literature, sporting events, music, television, video games, extravagant vacations, and the movie theater – the act of going to the movies. I am not inferring that the act of escapism is a “new” thing. We know that the ancient Greeks began perfecting the art of the theater, developing strict definitions of comedy and tragedy and being credited as among the first to develop concepts of dramatic criticism and the thought of acting being a career choice. And they weren’t the first; we can trace the first known theatrical event to a performance of the sacred plays of the myth of Osiris and Isis in 2500 BC in
Egypt. In the broader sense of theater, the act of “storytelling” has been around since the dawn of man (Stanton 241).

My point is this, while we all can agree that escapism is a common, long established goal of entertainment, never has the market for the movie industry grown (to more than just a “theatrical event”) as much as it has in the last century. It has flourished into a multi-billion dollar a year industry (9.78 billion dollars in 2008 for the U.S. and Canada – and that is just box office revenue. This figure doesn’t include revenue from the advertising and merchandising associated with today’s films, based solely on the premise of selling escapism.

The questions then remain: How and why does one distinguish between escape from a painful, negative existence, and simply an escape to something more pleasurable? I am certainly not the first to consider that escape does not necessarily have to have negative connotations. J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the famed The Lord of The Rings series, wrote his 1939 essay “On Fairy-Stories” concerning the ideas of escapism. He expresses that the term “escapism” is not about an escape from the reality or responsibilities of life, but “it is freeing and beneficial to those who cling too tightly to the timid dimensions of ‘the world as it is’, or who have been too long habituated to the disenchanted domain of ‘real life’” (Tolkien 53-59). Therefore, escapism has an element of release in its attempt to figure a different reality. Gerard Jones expresses similar ideas in his book Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes, and Make-Believe Violence (compared frequently to Bruno Bettelheim’s The Uses of Enchantment, which similarly exploded many of the myths surrounding fairy
tales’ dark themes and violence), maintaining the belief that the sort of escapism expressed through fantasy, even if violent, is a means of releasing the stress associated with normal life, especially in children. One of the powers of cinema is that it takes the everyday, the “mundane” and transforms it into two of the primary principles of cinema itself – realism and fantasy. In the words of Colin McGinn, author of *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact*, “cinema takes the everyday and bathes it in fantasy, so that the viewer is made to see the world anew: imagining with the eyes, as you might say” (McGinn 119).

If such is true, which I believe it is, then the escapist nature of Hollywood films serves as an important conceptual ideal that can be explored, and is indeed relevant to, the art making process. As McGinn says, “the viewer is made to see the world anew”, something I believe is one of the key driving forces behind why artists create.

NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia is another powerful conceptual force behind my interest in films. Movies have played an important role in my life for a very long time. It is important here to distinguish the kind of nostalgia I am referring to. Nostalgia was originally a term coined in 1688 by a Swiss doctor named Johannes Hofer. It is specifically in reference to *mal du Suisse* or Swiss homesickness, an “illness” experienced by many Swiss mercenaries who were living in the lowlands of France primarily in the 1700’s. In the 1850’s the illness became more a diagnosis
of a form of melancholia and by the 1870’s, its place in the medical world had mostly disappeared. I am not necessarily referring to this kind of nostalgia, but rather the nostalgia typically associated with “a wistful desire to return in thought or in fact to a former time in one’s life, to one’s home or homeland, or to one’s family and friends; a sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place or time, or a bittersweet longing for things, persons, or situations of the past” (Random House Dictionary). This kind of nostalgia is much more rooted in the ideas of memory, a very powerful concept that has influenced many artists over the ages.

The earliest memories I have of movies are going to stay at my Grandmother’s house on weekends while my mom was working and being put to bed with my brothers and cousins on a giant bed upstairs in one of the bedrooms. There, movies would be turned on for us to fall asleep to. Some of the earlier films I remember watching in that room are King Kong (the 1976 version), Lady and the Tramp, Sleeping Beauty, and The Labyrinth. This experience has stuck with me and has been influencing my artistic practice for quite some time.

Other early memories I have of movies are of constantly renting films from the library (they were free, and as a young I rented Robin Hood hundreds of times), going to see films at the theater with my mom, and asking my mom for a dollar on the weekend so that I could ride my bike a few blocks to the local video store and pick out a new rental (she usually obliged).

The next specific memories I have of movies come from my teenage years. I remember watching a movie just about every night while lying in my
bedroom before going to sleep. I bought movies (new ones and used ones from the video store), I rented movies, and I went to the theater almost every weekend with friends. During this time I watched many new movies as well as re-discovered movies I had seen during my younger childhood. I started to form better opinions on the movies I was watching and developed tastes for certain kinds of movies. I began reading books about films and began creating mental maps making connections of actors with other actors, actors with directors, directors with their visual style and so forth. This method of actively viewing film has continued into my college years and is now fueling my creative process in ways that I can now see began at a very young age.

Many of the films that I have spent countless hours watching are so influential to my work because they evoke some sort of a sense of nostalgia. Whether this be for remembering the carefree times of watching the film, the reenactments taking place in the back yard, or the sense of wanderlust that some of these films can evoke, they all share some sort of nostalgic connection to a time now passed.
CHAPTER III
THE WORK

I have separated my work into some of the key ideas that I use in my practice. It is important to note that these boundaries are not clearly defined and simply serve as a structure with which to explain some of the elements at play within my work. In some examples, the work could be placed into multiple categories. I have chosen to place descriptions of the work under the category that I believe is of the most significance in explaining the concepts or processes behind the pieces.

WORK ETHIC – ENDURANCE

I began to explore the ideas of work ethic through endurance in my work out of a necessity to challenge some of the actions I was interested in to become something more substantial.
LA DOLCE VITA PERFORMANCE TRILOGY (PART I)

This trilogy of performances began as a response to my previous studio work which created a desire to stop making objects and to begin making work that is much more performative in nature. My interest in using performance for my work became greater during a class that I had taken during the summer of 2008. In this class we had a reading, *One Place After Another* by Miwon Kwon, that provided me with the insight to understand that my idea of the site existed less in the physical location, but in the “sequence of events and actions through spaces, that is, a nomadic narrative whose path is articulated by the passage of the artist” (Kwon 29). So it is in this “space” that I began to examine my work by continuing the work of artists before me who were examining the idea of the function of an artist’s space and what happens between the studio and the public forum. Alan Kaprow, an American painter and pioneer in establishing the core concepts of performance art, is responsible for developing “Happenings” or “Activities”, which are intimately-scaled, often public, pieces for one or several players and devoted to the examination of everyday behaviors and habits in a way nearly indistinguishable from ordinary life. By examining these alternative modes of production and the artists who used them, I allowed myself to become fully immersed in the conceptual stage of the creation process. My performative work develops out of an interest in the similarity between celebrity culture associated with Hollywood films and fame associated with artistic practice.
I began this trilogy in October of 2008 with a performance entitled La Dolce Vita I (Endurance Viewing). In this performance I challenged myself to repeatedly view the film *Jurassic Park*, as part of a group exhibition, until my body, due to fatigue would not let me continue any longer (Fig. 1 p. 35). As part of this performance, a camera was set up pointed toward the couch where I sat watching the film. This camera was sent a live feed of its image to a separate wall with another couch set up (Fig. 2 p. 36). This allowed viewers to either watch the film with me, or to see me watching the film, myself being oblivious to their viewing and reactions. This performance took a somewhat mundane action (that of watching a movie, something that almost everyone can related to) and added a certain level of significance and importance to the action using endurance and its placement in a gallery. It also elevated my status into a higher position. I became somewhat of a celebrity and people were eager to know how long I would last and why I would do something like this. Bruce Nauman once said, as quoted in Tony Godfrey's *Conceptual Art*, “If you see yourself as an artist and you function in the studio…you sit in a chair or pace around. And then the question goes back to what is art? And art is what an artist does, just sitting around the studio” (Godfrey 127). By questioning how a simple action such as watching a movie can become a more significant piece of art, I hoped to explore the boundaries of what makes art, art.

Alan Kaprow says in his essay titled “Just Doing”, “Play, of course, is at the heart of experimentation…Playing has no stated purpose other than more playing. Experimentation also involves attention to the normally unnoticed.”
(Kaprow 250). Through experimentation (in this case connected to “play”), a thing at constant play in my work, I was able to take an ordinary action and point out the unnoticed elements of such an action – How long can I watch the same film? Are others as enthusiastic about this repeat viewing as I am? What is it like to watch someone who is absorbed in watching? By pointing out things that are not necessarily evident during a “regular” viewing of a film, I had hoped to add some level of significance to this everyday action.

LA DOLCE VITA PERFORMANCE TRILOGY (PART III)

I later did another performance (the third performance of the trilogy) focused more on the idea of endurance, while also calling to notion ideas of celebrity and fame. This performance involved me taking a trip to Los Angeles to hike up Mt. Lee to touch the Hollywood sign (Fig. 3 p. 36). Likening this trip to a spiritual pilgrimage, and the Hollywood sign to my Mecca, I wanted to examine the desire of being a part of Hollywood. What I found was that this action became as much a test of endurance as it was an exercise on desire. I ended up having to scale a rather difficult side of the mountain to reach a ledge that led to the top. This action not only caused me to become physically exhausted (which can be heard through the shortness of breath present in the audio piece accompanying the work), but I also became physically injured. Once reaching the top, my hands and legs were cut and scratched. While nowhere near the physical pain associated with some other artists’ work (Chris Burden’s Through the Night Softly
(Fig. 4 p. 37) or Marina Abramović’s *Rhythm 0* (Fig. 5 p. 38)), the piece still became somewhat guided by the question of “How much would I be willing to go through in order to accomplish the task at hand?” (I had previously stated that I was willing to face whatever legal consequences might occur because of this illegal action).

From this concept of endurance, a second question emerged. The question of whether or not such an action would change my perception of Hollywood. Would this act cheapen the elevated statute that I had given Hollywood and its iconic sign? Or would this act only serve to reinforce my desire to be a part of that “world”? By choosing to examine the nature of desire and imagination, I was responding to an idea put forth by Colin McGinn in his book *The Power of Movies*. McGinn says, “Secondly, there is the pleasure of imaginative seeing. We like to look at things that allow or encourage this kind of imaginative exercise (of course, imagining itself is often pleasurable).” By exploring the idea of imagination or desire to become part of Hollywood by treating it as something that can be touched - an object - I strengthened my idea of desire, a concept present in much of my work.

**HOLLYWOOD RED CARPET PROJECT**

Another piece that helped to bridge the gap between “work” and “desire” that I completed is titled *Hollywood Red Carpet Project*. For this project I chose to purchase a red carpet; the same kind used at Hollywood events. I decided I
would cut out shoeprints to secure to the bottoms of my shoes, red carpet side up. From that point on, wherever I would go, I am on red carpet (Fig. 6 p. 39).

One of the more important aspects of this piece is the length of the “activity”. I did not set a specific length but rather an “assumed” length. A problem I ran into early on with this project was that I had originally wanted to replace the carpet once a month. I wanted it to be a specific length of time so that it served more as an experimental action. The carpet barely lasted one week before holes started to wear through the bottom. I now had to decide whether to replace them once a week or think of a new solution. I had wanted to coat the bottom of the shoe with resin to protect it longer but decided against this because I did not want to simply interfere with the process and make the project about finding a way to have the carpet last longer. I was left with two options. The first was to let the shoes tell me how long they would last. If I continued to wear the carpet until it began to wear through, it would be possible that certain pairs may last longer because I wore them less, or did fewer activities in them, or due to changes in weather conditions. The second option was to replace them once a week no matter what the wear and tear so that there would be consistency to the action. I decided to opt for the second plan. If I replaced the carpet on a regular basis, the action would become more of an example in documentation and less of a test to see how long they last. While the endurance of the carpet becomes less of an issue, the work that goes in to replacing the carpet on a regular schedule becomes part of the importance. In this respect, the piece directly relates to this quote from Helen Molesworth’s essay *Work Ethic*: “Artists who assigned
themselves tasks and then performed them rejected traditional artistic media and their attendant skills and turned instead to a presentation of the work of art in the language of "a thing done," a task performed. In doing so, many developed an obsessive reliance upon documentation."

The fact that the piece is left as documentation helps to bridge the gap between the questions surrounding the endurance aspect of the work and the questions of desire, allowing the activity to be also about the conceptual act of being "famous" wherever I go. One thing that happens when this event is taking place is I become more aware of the situations I choose to enter in light of fame and celebrity. For example, as noted in my sketchbook on November 15th, 2008:

“This morning, I went to another audition for a small film shooting here in Columbus. As I drove my car to the audition, and after I got there and stood on the white tape markers on the floor in front of the casting crew and camera, ready to read my lines, I couldn’t help but to think about the red carpet already underneath my feet. I thought it was humorous that I had set up this scenario in which I was auditioning for a piece of fame (albeit a small piece) and yet only known to me was the fact that in my own little situation, I was already imitating the fame of the celebrity world."

CELEBRITY – FAME

My interest in celebrity and fame, just as my interest in escapism and nostalgia, comes through my experience with movies. Wanting to temporarily be
someone else, as an actor does when performing in a movie or on stage is what fuels this work. As someone who grew up firmly rooted in an acting practice (I was in many school plays and theatrical performances from grade-school through high-school, performed countless acts of “theater” in backyards and basements for my parents and my friends parents, and countless more unwatched performances through the imaginative action of re-enacting films in my backyard), I have always been drawn to the seductive power of temporarily taking on another character and doing things that would otherwise have been viewed as ridiculous. According to McGinnis, “Acting is in its very nature a play with the mind-body relation. What does an actor do? He/she pretends to be someone they are not, the character he/she is playing. He pretends that someone else’s mind is in his body. He doesn’t pretend that his body is someone else’s: that would be a hollow pretense, since it so obviously is his body” (McGinnis 94). Therefore, it is through this mind-body relationship that I have begun to explore this idea of taking on another persona.

LA DOLCE VITA PERFORMANCE TRILOGY (PART II)

In response to previous performances, I took the foundation of ideas laid down in the first performance – endurance, desire, and celebrity - and pushed those ideas even further. For the second performance, La Dolce Vita II (Freelance Paparazzi Event), I wrote up contracts that were issued to anyone willing to partake that hired participants as paparazzi for the evening (Fig. 7 p.
The requirements were simple - to take photos of me throughout the entire event (another gallery opening), turn in the photos, and the best paparazzi photo of the evening would receive payment of one hundred dollars after evaluation. As John Walker states in his book *Art and Celebrity*, “Another characteristic of art stars is that their lives and personalities become as important (or even more important) as their work.” By accepting this notion and putting myself in that level of importance, I was able to place myself, at least temporarily, into the position of a celebrity, allowing me to challenge people’s perception of celebrity and fame and to be able to explore and reflect on my own thoughts of desire when it comes to being in the position of a celebrity.

Upon reflection, I first came to fully believe what Barry Divola states in *Fanclub: It’s a Fan World, Popstars Just Live In It* by saying: “it is the fans who exercise power rather than the celebrities.” Truly, if the participants had not been willing to “play along” this work would not have existed. The final result of a project like this is akin to what exists today as tabloids; however, it is important to note that, “The tabloid is our version of the ancient Greek myths – and are no doubt just a mythical” (McGinnis 82). Propelling a seemingly “regular guy” into the realm of the mythical is exactly the mental exercise of mind-body relationship I had mentioned before, and as such, for the duration of a performance of this nature, the mind enters a different zone of reality from that of a regular existence. Things that are deemed normal can at once be abandoned, or given a higher significance. The way in which Chris Burdens work is presented, (often as a document explaining the event and an object that is a remnant of the
performance and specifically in his work *Honest Labor*), the documentation of the performances is equally important as the performance itself. In his work *Honest Labor* (in which the artist dug a ditch over the course of three days while acting as a visiting artist at an art school), the end “product” or result was “useless”: a ditch without a purpose, but what is valued is the *process* and/or the performance of the artist (Fig. 8 p. 41). This idea is equally important in my work.

I have chosen to display my work in a similar fashion by emphasizing the *process* of the work. I am displaying it as a document that explains the action that took place, and other pieces (remnants) that serve as evidence of the action: a photograph, a photocopy of a check, and an audio recording (Fig. 9 p. 42).

**AUTOGRAPHED PHOTOS**

Another example of my work that engages this idea of celebrity and fame are stacks of photos that are images of me, on vacation with different celebrities (Daniel Day-Lewis, Michael J. Fox, Bill Murray, and Leonardo DiCaprio) (Figs. 10 p. 43, 11 p. 44, 12 p. 45, and 13 p. 45). While seemingly presenting an image that is just a fantasy to see what it is like to have a vacation with these people, the lines become blurred by the fact that there are hundreds of these photos, all of which have been signed by me. On the surface the images seem to be a simple autographed photo, given out by a celebrity to a fan who will cherish this image, but because *I* have signed them, and not the celebrity, one hopefully begins to question the role of fame in these images. “Signing an autograph has
often been described as ‘the definition of being a famous person’” (Walker 29), is a quote that holds much weight in response to this piece. Signing an autograph is something that everyone can do, and most people have done, but the real question remains; What about that signing signifies to someone that you are famous?” This piece is not simply about challenging the ideas of fame and celebrity, but also about desire, (Is there more to these photos than a desperate attempt at fulfilling a desire?) a theme that is more apparent in some of my other work.

**DESIRE – DREAMS**

Dreams are a powerful thing, the content and biological purpose of, is not even fully understood by today’s science world. But one thing is certain; dreams often go hand in hand with the theme of desire. This is, after all, why such an expression as this exists - “One day, I dream to do this”. “We know very little, if anything, about the function of dreams, but it does seem clear that they can provide emotional catharsis – release, purging. This is obvious when the dream is of the wish-fulfillment kind, but even an anxiety dream can be seen as releasing pent-up fears. Emotions are inherently energetic, even explosive, and they seek an outlet” (McGinn 107). The outlet, or avenue for the exploration of my “dreams” is through creating work that emphasizes the embodiment of these desires.
Much of the work here is about exploring what some of my dreams and desires are in relation to the nostalgia and escapism of Hollywood films. The autographed photos mentioned earlier are a physical way for me to see, or imagine what that situation would be like. The idea of “insertion” into these dreams is not a new idea. It is present in many Hollywood films dating as far back as early Buster Keaton films. In the film *Sherlock Junior*, he plays a projectionist, who when falling asleep, dreams he is in the very film he is projecting. His body departs from this plane of existence and enters into the screen on which the film is being projected. A similar event takes place in Wood Allen’s *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, in which Cecilia, a waitress in Depression Era New Jersey frequents the theater to escape her daily life. After seeing the film many times, and becoming fascinated with the character Tom Baxter, an archaeologist, Tom decides to come down from the screen and pay Cecilia a visit. Tom however, isn’t real, and Hollywood is left in a craze as everyone is wondering if Tom will ever return to the theater to finish the movie or if he will remain a part of our world forever.

It is no wonder that dreams are a frequent topic in the world of cinema, “When we describe something as dreamlike we often mean that it bears little or no relation to reality- that it is entirely a product of imagination. Thus we distinguish imagination from perception and locate dreaming in the imagination. To be dreamlike is then taken to mean being fantastic, in the sense of a mental product that is divorced from the mundane world” (McGinn 114). A dream experience is just that, a fantasy, but what it often does is *elaborate* on familiar
things from our world. It takes our world experience as a starting point and begins to weave a fantastical narrative around them. As a response to this, some of my work is simply about the expression of these fantasy, or dream, elements.

BACK TO THE FUTURE PART II GREENSCREEN TRAILER

During one summer, I decided to take this concept very literally and insert myself into one of my favorite films *Back To The Future Part II* taking place of the title character Marty McFly (Fig. 14 p. 46). The idea behind this project came out of a desire to see myself in the place of one of my favorite roles, and also out of a response to a passage in Colin McGinn’s *The Power of Movies*. McGinn says, “Namely, that dreams are always about you, the dreamer, while movies are never about you (unless you are the kind of person to have films made about you). You always crop up in your dreams like a bad penny, but unless you are a screen actor, you don’t crop up in the movies you watch.” I thought to myself, “What if I *did* crop up in the movies I watched? And more importantly, What if I was embodying something that was a dream, or fantasy of mine in the process?”

After teaching myself the basics of green-screen technology, I was able to, over the course of 3 days, film every action of Marty McFly’s in front of the green-screen that takes place in the trailer to the film, and digitally remove the background in post production. I then placed my image over the image of Marty as best that I could to eliminate the evidence of him being there. I then re-edited
the trailer back together. A few things became apparent after finishing this project.

First, I realized that it was not necessary for the final result to be perfect, to completely erase the traces of Michael J. Fox's Marty McFly. I only had to get the footage to a point where upon viewing I was able to become more captivated by the idea taking place that my mind would essentially block out any unnecessary information to complete the image. The second significant thing I realized about this project was that the final product, while achieving it's purpose may not have been as interesting as the process that took place to create the image. Throughout the course of those 3 days, I had memorized, through careful viewing and reviewing the footage of the trailer. I had made a point to recreate Marty's movements as closely as possible. I watched a clip, less than a half a second to a second long. I then memorized the movements, practiced the movements, taped the floor, stepped forward, pushed record on my camera, stepped back, and repeated the action three times to be sure I had it. I would then review what I had done and compare it to the original trailer to see if it was accurate enough to fit. In certain circumstances, being a one-man crew presented its problems. I could not zoom or pan the camera. The camera had to remain stationary. Even with these restrictions, for some reason it was deeply important to me that I recreate these actions as faithfully as I possibly could. I now realize that it is this two-fold reason that drives much of my work: a combination of the desire, drive, and passion to create a realization of a fantasy
or memory, and a love for the source material that enables me to complete these tasks.

**AMBIENCE – LIGHT PROJECTION**

Related to desire and dreams, but not illustrated in the same fashion is another work I completed titled *Ambience*. This piece is more about the realization of a memory than it is about the realization of a desire. A clear memory that I have of my youth is of the glowing light of my bedroom when, every night, I would go to bed and watch a movie. The ambient light from the glow of the television bouncing of the walls of my basement bedroom became a staple of almost every evening. For this installation, a television is placed close to the wall, the light from the films playing (five of the most influential movies to my work over the past two years: *The Beach, Jurassic Park, Hook, Back To The Future Part I*, and *Ghostbusters*), bounces off of the wall. A video camera is set up to record this reflected light, which is then sent to a projector that is filling the corner of the space with the environment of the ambient light (Fig. 15 p. 47).

A result is that this piece becomes an interesting “space”. To some it is a performance space, to some a mental space, and to others an experiment in real space (the distance light travels from one point to another). I am not sure what to make of the space that this piece inhabits when installed in a gallery, but I like to think that the “space” that it inhabits for me is the space of dreams and memory.
CHAPTER IV
THE NARRATIVE

Upstairs – I believe the carpet on the stairs was red. If not, I’d like to think so.

The bed was a large one, probably not as large now. It fit at least 5 of us (3 of us I’m certain) comfortably.

The lights were turned off and the television screen went bright white.

What follows next might be frightening to young children.

Fire, Jawbones ripped at their seams, Blood that strangely resembled the texture of a strawberry milkshake.

Lets follow it up with something lighter. Something that always worked to put me to SLEEP.

I distinctly remember how loud it was. The loudest ever made at the time.

Gripping the edge of my seat the whole time. Best experience ever. I saw it multiple times, and I assure you, it got better each time.

Plastic eggs with candy and plastic dinosaurs – I got a Dilophosaurus.
Already I was dreaming up scenarios. Everything at that age was a game.
Usually the kid who lived upstairs got to be Snake. Not the animal, the one eyed convict. He also had the best toy guns. Surfing the lawn, surviving a game of deadly basketball, something about an earthquake, usually simulated by shaking around like we were having a seizure.
Hiding in the bushes was also key.
As a side note, the soundtrack to that childhood fantasy was equally good.

At a friend’s house, the subject matter turned from convicts and the government to pirates. Taking the plotline liberally since no one wanted to be an aged man in green tights, this sequence mostly involved epic swordfights (handcrafted wooden swords), tree house forts, and armor made out of sticks and bones.
Everyone wanted to be Rufio, even though that always meant you had to die.
When we weren’t busting ghosts, we were riding our bikes on the trails and playing loosely based army games in the woods. We were even “attacked” by a coyote once. Whether it was real or not still remains in question, but I remember the glowing eyes staring back at me.

When we played roller hockey in the streets we were usually the “Bash Brothers”.
Countless hours spent.
Perfecting the “knuckle puck”.
Found out today that it traveled in a “sine curve”. I wasn’t entirely sure what that was. I was never too good at math.
Years later, these sorts of activities stopped. But the interest became even stronger. Like a heroin addict, my money was quickly spent to fuel this addiction.

Theater on weekends.
Rentals during the week.
Buying new VHS when money allowed.
Buying used VHS from the local video store when money was tight.

In my bedroom, at night.

1. Watch, fall asleep.
2. Watch, Repeat, Watch, Repeat, Watch, Repeat, Watch, Repeat, Watch, Repeat.

Some nights I barely slept.
When I did, it was nice to fall asleep to that calming blue glow that echoed throughout the room – somewhere between the harsh rain of a Twister and the melting pie from the fridge this lucid state existed.
Lucid.

I once compared our breakup to Romeo and Juliet in a letter I wrote to her. It was her favorite movie. Now it’s one of mine.

Amateur Mistake

Movies were still important now, but often used as prelude and soundtrack to a make-out session. Maybe more.
Choose wisely, or you might regret it.

Movies also became a subject to talk about. I shared some of my favorites, amazed that they had not been viewed.

In return I gained some new favorites, adding to my ever-increasing mental trophy room of First Place, Second Place, and Third Place trophies, Ribbons of equal value, and a pile of participation certificates.

The theater, a favorite “date”.

Amateur Mistake, but this time I didn’t mind.
On May 7th, 2009, I presented a Double Feature Film screening as part of the MFA Exhibition under the title of *Double Feature: An Exploration of Mind Memory, and Dream*. The idea for this piece comes from an interest in the presentation of film throughout history. In the 1920’s before The Depression and the addition of sound to cinema, going to the movies was often referred to as “an evening at the cinema”. This evening often consisted of more than just the feature film to be shown that evening. Often the presentation included live acts, an animated cartoon, a live-action comedy short, musical numbers, travelogues, newsreels, and then the feature film of the evening. In the 1930’s, the “double bill” began consisting of a B-movie (a low budget “extra” film) and an A-movie (the feature) as a way to attract more customers, and out of a studio practice that became known as block-booking. Block booking was a practice among major Hollywood studios that allowed for a studio to attach one of their B-movies to an A-movie so that both had to be purchased as a sort of package deal. This practice was outlawed in 1948 under a Supreme Court ruling. In the 1960’s the
double feature was mostly only left in the form of the drive-in, and “grindhouse” cinema theaters.

For this piece, I chose to show two films simultaneously on separate screens on separate sides of the space, both visible simply by turning your chair. The two films that I selected were *Burden of Dreams* by Les Blank, and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Michel Gondry. This presentation, along with the films chosen, brings together many of the ideas present in my other work. By presenting two films simultaneously, viewers were given the opportunity to reflect on the way in which we view movies. How will one film impact the narrative of the other? And can new meaning arise out of the simultaneous viewing of two separate films? These are two questions that I had hoped viewers would be able to spend some time grappling with after experiencing this piece, in what may be the first time that many have had a chance to experience film in such a fashion.

As a result, some interesting things happened. At one point, noticeable maybe only to myself, there was a scene in *Burden of Dreams* in which natives are carrying blocks of ice up the side of the mountain. Juxtaposed immediately on the other screen across from this was Joel and Clementine (Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet respectively) lying together on a frozen lake. It is moments like this, happenstance occurrences of scenes, or music, or dialogue that are what makes this piece of interest. The fact that I may be the only person who noticed such an occurrence made it even more delightful, akin to a “lightbulb moment” – that
moment when you realize or understand something that you have been searching for.

This piece, conceptually, speaks to the power of cinema. Movies possess a remarkable power that can engage a viewers attention at a level not often experienced. When a movie is playing, it is not uncommon for the viewer to become completely lost or absorbed into the experience. As McGinn states about the power of absorption, “First, never underestimate the power of absorption. Particularly with children, but also with adults, there can be deep immersion in what appears on the screen, so that the rest of the world is forgotten, and no thought of being in a movie theater spoils the flow of the film into the viewer’s consciousness. For the duration, you are in a different zone of reality entirely, where all the normal rules seem suspended” (McGinn 80). My hopes is that the viewers not only become lost in the narrative of the films, but also in the questions presented by simultaneous viewing about the power of dreams, the power of memory, and the weight of these concepts.

This piece also speaks to the element of my work involving the audience. In some of my work it has been important that the audience be a part of the piece, specifically in conjunction with the idea of “play”. In a form similar to Gilbert and George’s Smashed, and Tom Marioni’s The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends Is the Highest Form of Art, the “non-art” activity of drinking can be easily replaced with the everyday action of watching a movie, and suddenly the distinctions between art and life, work and play, become blurred. And similarly,
as in Marioni’s piece, the artwork is not even complete until there are people to experience the work with the artist.
I consider myself not only a “consumer, watcher, recipient, and victim [of mass media and pop culture]. But also a user of that media and culture: I am a chooser, interpreter, shaper, fellow player, participant, and storyteller” (Jones 18). As such, I think it is my duty to fully understand questions such as, “Why? How? And to what extent?” am I a user of that media and culture and as a “fellow player, participant, and storyteller”. These are some of the questions I gained more insight into through these performances. As a result of the research and making that has gone into the past two years, I have posed more questions than I have answered (something as an artist I want to always be the case). Now, more than ever I am interested in exploring what it takes to “be famous”, exploring my memories of movies, and continuing to “play”. I am interested in storytelling, in special effects and theatrics, and in my willingness to “act” and the bodily experiments involved. So as I take on the role of actor, director, and artist, I am still left unable to answer the hardest question asked of me while in grad school: “If you could wake up tomorrow and be a director and face the challenges of making sure everyone is ready to perform, whether it be actors, or behind the
scenes workers, making sure every shot is exactly how you imagine, or if you could wake up tomorrow and be an actor and face the physical and emotional challenges of performing on set and getting into character, memorizing lines and long hours, or if you could wake up tomorrow and be an artist and face the challenges that await you in the studio of solving problems, exhausting yourself physically and mentally over creating and thinking – all never knowing what the next step may lead to – which would you choose? While I don’t have an answer to the question necessarily, I can attempt an answer by posing another question. “Why can’t I choose all of them?”


APPENDIX A: REFERENCED IMAGES
FIGURE 1: Watching *Jurassic Park*
FIGURE 2: *Jurassic Park* Projection

FIGURE 3: Touching Hollywood
FIGURE 4: Chris Burden *Through The Night Softly*
FIGURE 5: Marina Abramović *Rhythm 0*
FIGURE 6: Hollywood Red Carpet Project
LA DOLCE VITA II – FREELANCE PAPARAZZI
EVENT CONTRACT

THIS AGREEMENT is entered into this ______ day of ________ 20____ between Scott Aigner, (hereinafter referred to as "Artist") and _______ (hereinafter referred to as "Hire")

It is mutually agreed upon between the aforementioned parties as follows:

The ARTIST hereby engages the HIRE to provide a performance and the HIRE hereby agrees to perform the engagement upon all of the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth:

1. PLACE OF ENGAGEMENT: SKYLAB GALLERY - "Do"
   Exact Address: 157 E. Gay St. (5th Floor) Columbus, Oh

2. DATE(S) OF ENGAGEMENT: SATURDAY FEBRUARY 21ST 2009
   DURATION: HIRE shall provide services for APPROX. 8:00 PM - END OF EVENT

3. FULL PRICE AGREED UPON: ARTIST shall pay a Performance Fee to HIRE in the amount of $100.00 paid as follows:
   a. If delivered photograph is chosen to be the "best" candid photo of ARTIST during the course of the evening, "best" is as to be decided by ARTIST after judging ALL received photographs from EACH HIRE
   b. Balance of $100.00 in CASH immediately following the evaluation of ALL photographs
   c. If HIRE'S photograph is NOT chosen, NO FEE SHALL BE PAID.

4. ACCOMMODATIONS: HIRE shall provide ARTIST with:
   a. Photographs taken throughout the course of the event date in the form of:
      - finished disposable camera
      - roll of film
      - CD with images burned onto it
   b. Photographs shall be delivered to ARTIST within 1 week time from date of engagement.

5. CANCELLATION: If HIRE cancels the Engagement less than ________ week(s) before the Date of Engagement, HIRE shall forfeit the right to participate in further performances/events hosted by ARTIST. In addition, if Artist commences entertainment and the Engagement is subsequently halted by circumstances beyond Artist's control (i.e. inclement weather, complete power outages, accidents or any other legitimate adverse condition), ARTIST is not obligated to pay full agreed upon amount or other suitable negotiated compensation.

6. ADDITIONAL TERMS: FLASH IS TO BE USED AT ALL TIMES IF POSSIBLE, ALL PHOTOS ARE TO CONTAIN ARTIST – IF FILM IS DELIVERED WITH NON-ARTIST PHOTOS, HIRE IS IN BREACH OF CONTRACT AND FORFEITS RIGHT TO POSSIBLE PAYMENT. IF HIRE DOES NOT OWN HIS/HER OWN CAMERA, A (1) DISPOSABLE CAMERA WILL BE PROVIDED.

Agent for Purchaser: __________________________________________
Address: ___________________________________________________
Phone #:__________________________

I have read and agree to all terms as written in this Agreement.

PURCHASER: __________________________ (Sign)  ARTIST: __________________________
Date _______________ Date ________________

FIGURE 7: Freelance Paparazzi Event Contract
FIGURE 8: Chris Burden *Honest Labor*
FIGURE 9: Performance Documentation
FIGURE 10: Vacationing With Daniel Day-Lewis
FIGURE 11: Vacationing With Michael J. Fox
FIGURE 12: Vacationing With Bill Murray

FIGURE 13: Vacationing With Leonardo DiCaprio
FIGURE 14: *Back to the Future Part II* Greenscreen Still
FIGURE 15: Ambience