The Apparition of Transference

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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Graduate Program in Art

The Ohio State University

2015

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2015
Abstract

This paper investigates my development of theoretical and philosophical ideas that have manifested into works of art dealing with perception. The work annunciates a direction of thought stemming from the inclusion of advanced technology and how that carries a metaphoric impulse into my studio practice. This sets up a larger conversation on how filters and framing mediate an experience. My interest lies with the spectator and testing his experience within the boundaries of reality and illusion. These motives helped developed my ongoing research and work leading up to the 2015 Department of art thesis show.
Dedication

This document is dedicated to my grandmother, Betty Morgan and to the memory of my grandfather, Frank Morgan, whose love and hard work have been a model for my own life.
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee, Sergio Soave, George Rush and Laura Lisbon for their encouragement, belief in my efforts and for challenging me these past three years. Thank you, Laura for giving me the permission to act on my mental conquests. Without that simple, kind encouragement I would have never taken the chances that I did. Thank you, George for further breaking down the defining limits of my quality. You are truly giving. Thank you, Sergio for the strength and wisdom that has kept me confident in trying times.

I am indebted to my wife, Ava and the world of wisdom she brings. You have lifted me. To my brothers and their wealth of comedy, thank you for breaking me out of my serious spells.
Vita

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Introduction

With the many mediations and monitors to which one witnesses life, through the heralding filters at which improvements have been made upon being, nothing is without negotiation of one’s witness or perception. Proximity to the discoverable landscape, the virtual world, has placed man to the margins as the operator of surfaces; the purveyor of the downloadable, the re-presenter, surveying the pool of what is virtually real to solely display and receive. This interconnectedness is purely perception. In the way one demonstrates oneself as a theoretical personality (in terms of presentation on social media), to the amount at which the unknown is presented as a hypothetical known, all is perception. On those terms a shallow depthless contingency follows. Engagement happens in remote spaces.

I consider the technological inflection that obstructs and guides one’s view to be nothing specific but more appropriately blank. Accepting the next bit of information, and always awaiting what could potentially be novel and upgradeable, the architecture and viewpoint is what is contemporarily being demanded and lost. Perception is altered and changed, both with the tools and inventions that are current and because of the uses of these gadgets, the synapses and structure of the brain change. What seems limitless to knowing
and understanding has placed a filter to the cognizance of retention and meaning. What happens is the projection of interest surpasses where the attention should be, to beyond it, to the next emerging moment.

Within my practice and a specific set of works, I engage with a sense of nostalgia and dictate a set of circumstances that ask the viewer to slow down, to look with intention, and actualize a set of situations that have the potential to be read incorrectly. By suggesting a dialogue with what is digital information and what can be misconstrued as a technological interface, I merit the conventions of analog interaction to potentially misinform the initial observation. In some instances, simple material and light mimic a television screen. In other pieces, video projection comes into contact with form and material to restructure the reception and illicit questions of perception. In part I am playing off the fidelities that inform the brain as to what the eyes actually receive. Cognitively, we receive and interpret. Each piece has its way of becoming separated into form and action or reconstructed to potentially create a filter for the eye and mind.

The conversation I am creating with the viewer and my work starts fundamentally at a visual, perceptive level. How has human perception changed by way of simple interaction with technological devices? Questions arise from this sense of viewership and capture; to capture and to “post” (post as in posting an image to social media) are ways of owning acquired knowledge and events. How has this changed perception? The availability of knowledge is fast, efficient, and always at arms length. The chance to elucidate and define leaves little room
for interaction. The journey of a question (to quest) does not develop into other thoughts or lateral routes but is quickly defined in a straight line. Exactitude will define a course without forgiveness. Built into the human condition is the need to discover and to seek answers; this manifests into the aspiration to clarify. The initiative to travel is halted when clarity presents itself before the quest has started.

The development of *High Definition* (HD) prompts in its very title, that its defining properties allow for a higher clarification. Yet, somehow through this course of producing an image with such potent assertion, the image or video does not come close to life’s accuracy, it surpasses it and a hyper reality sets in. The HD monitor or surface draws a blurry line between what is reality and what is illusion. As our human faculties only allow us to see a certain degree of clarity, this mediation of high quality describes the world with higher clarity than one could ever witness. As a measure of ingenuity and strength as a race, we have challenged limitations of our own capacity to see and have clarified the surrounding world. Thanks to megapixels and programed software, professional image capture is made easy for the layperson. Along with an abundance of memory and quick return of viewing, the average person develops a catalog of multiple shots, multiple moments. Whether or not one returns to view the excess of pictures, the experience occurs and is made legitimate first through the apparatus of the lens. In part, the image has taken place of being with the event.
Most importantly, this technology has erased the experience only to be represented first. The subject is replaced by the object of an image.

I began to question, *which do people prefer, the actual object or the heightened quality of the redefined HD standard?* The perfectly lit, luscious color and dynamics of clarity is the allure of new technology. The camera lens becomes a filter for how one sees, or wants to see. Even as its central properties are to offer clarification, it still becomes a veil over the reality of our own experience. Why deny the amplification of color and clarity to enhance a moment and propel it to a grander state of being. In this way, the memory that returns to the image is influenced and altered to rest fantastical as the experience.

Creating an experience that cannot be fully captured through image, I strive to restore interaction between person and a work of art through perceptual engagement. My practice takes on questions of dimensional confusion as a way of framing an event. Research in the area of tableau and framing resulted in championing the efforts of contemporary artist Stan Douglas and classic movie producer, director Charlie Chaplin. In one example from each of their works, I found a connection between transitioning moments in history. In the sense that technology has quickly shifted our interaction with the world, I examine its participation as the current transition. This has enriched many facets of my video work that explore: observation, examination, and nuance.

Questions of framing in terms of filter and analog drew my attention to create a specific set of object-oriented works that tested dimensional readability.
Historical art movements such as Abstract Expressionism and Group Zero (1950’s-60’s) excluded representation from painting, returning viewership to an optical engagement. Perception, opticality and the filter are very important to my practice. However, my work is not just about optics, it is about misreading what is an assumed optical response. Relating qualities of materiality, surface and light, how do I create a filtered perception to cause confusion between what is reality and illusion? How do I create interaction between my work and the viewer that is experienced through investigation? Ultimately, the experience is the experience. Whether it is an illusionary experience or reality, perception is an interpretation of the mind and emotion.
Chapter 1: The Tableau

Beyond the Partition

Representation, as cut and staged from the world, is a notion of fictional reproduction to analyze, to define, and to position oneself in historical context. Architecturally, the surface (real or pictorial) where representation is displayed has a structure and a language to prevent ambiguity. The autonomy within such a structure displays the evidence of human existence in a self-sufficient, suspended moment. The Tableau emerges as an idea, at times, that completes itself through the figurative gears of visual reference to history as well as its displacement for examination by the viewer. The immersive-field is determined by the setting: the staging and the allowance of absorption through the liminal trajectory of gaze. If handled with a sense of unity, the parts of the whole fold and unfold into a structure of completeness. Two examples of video and film artists that articulate the aspect of Tableau are Stan Douglas and Charlie Chaplin. Contemporary artist Stan Douglas gives distinct moments in his work that parallel my intensions of keeping the viewer caught in the middle ground, the in-between, the space outside the frame and the suspended space of the inward and outward gaze. A great deal of influence comes from Charlie Chaplin’s City Lights, and his play with literal and metaphorical examinations of perception with sight
and knowing. Both present the depth at which a façade can represent, in its unveiling, its removal and its re-representation.

Stan Douglas: Hors-champs

Stan Douglas’s use of ‘Postproduction’ to employ historical limitations and cultural forms, cause the viewer to question the fidelity of the work’s context. The staging of certain interactive video falls to the choice of the spectator and forms a relationship to timing and edit. Whether intentional or not, decisions made by the spectator become a moment of “cut,” and they emerge as a producer to that which is being displayed. Artists such as Stan Douglas, and his piece Hors Champs, place the viewer in a new context of interaction. The viewer becomes the final edit of his video work and forms a distinction between staging and improvisation.

Stan Douglas began filming Hors-Champs in April of 1992. Hors-champs acts as supplement to racism of the past and focuses on the cultural exchange during the 1960’s between Europeans and African Americans. The work presents a quartet: George Lewis (trombone), Douglas Ewart (saxophone), Kent Carter (bass), and Oliver Johnson (drums) as they perform Albert Ayler’s 1965 composition, Spirits Rejoice. Using a video format derived from the mid-sixties, French television music productions of Jean-Christophe Averty, Hors-champs
recalls the relationship between European audiences and expatriate jazz musicians in the 1960s. The reconstruction asks the viewer for careful examination of the past. The 1960’s was a crucial moment for television and its mediated coverage of culture. Douglas centers his content directly through the lens of this era as a way to describe the television’s visual sensation and its effect on the viewer. *Hors-Champs*, invites the viewer to factor in a new unbiased perspective of what he witnesses. This is not a reenactment, but rather a fictional moment that could have happened during a certain time period.

“*Hors-Champs,*” (a French cinematographic term meaning, ‘off-camera’ or ‘out of view’) is displayed in a way that requires the viewer to physically shift and abandon one side of a partition for the opposite side engaging with another video stream; consequently becoming the edit.

Douglas filmed *Hors-Champs* in a French television studio with video production equipment of the 1960’s. There is an element of fidelity to something that never took place. Perhaps the void of unrecorded televised broadcasting offers a fictitious place. Typically, with postproduction work, the artist is using prerecorded footage. However, Douglas creates his narrative experience, borrowing the form and look of a specific era. Stanley Cavell writes:

> When people say they miss television as it was when it was produced live, what they may be missing is the sense of the improvisatory. And it may be that the diminished role of improvisation on television is an instance of a familiar process in
certain phases of the history of performance, during which the scope of improvisation is progressively diminished in favor, let us say, of the literary; in which, for example, it is no longer open to the performer to fill in the continuo part or to work out his or her cadenza, for these are instead written out, fixed (Cavell 84).

*Hors-Champs* can easily be mistaken for something taped in the past. Attachment to the visual reference creates the illusion of watching old, live streaming footage. There is no further information given to make the viewer think otherwise. Upon realizing the information is recorded (perhaps on an information plaque or by a gallery docent) the viewer must return to a middle ground between production and reception. He must become detached from the general seam of time and realize Douglas’ creation of an artificial documentary.

Typically, a course of time is construed and manipulated during edit or video montage. A single, long take places the viewer in the present due to its pacing which connects to real time. Douglas sets up two forms of video stream for *Hors-Champs*, simultaneously running back to back on one screen. A single screen hangs within the center of the gallery space as video projections from opposing ends of the room meet on either side. One side shows a finalized or montaged version of the performance, while the other displays the un-edited footage. The space becomes the editing room for the viewer to move in-between the distanciation of shots. *Hors-Champs’* format and structure are composed of two separate modes of witness. A transitory interpretation immediately happens
for the viewer as he abandons one side of the screen for the other. This structure of edit asks the viewer to be a part of the space that is outside the edge of the frame or tableau. Contained in this notion of the *in-between*, the viewer creates the relationship between moments of the refined edited version and the loose raw footage. Interpretation happens in a comparative, perpetual folding and unfolding. The viewers are gathered, in a Brechtian process of inclusion, being pulled from their fixity.

In a way, Douglas has created a threshold in limitation: The threshold being a constant state of present. However the “limit,” is not held as an idea of boundary or the placement of an end. The “limit,” we witness is one that defines and offers stability. In Douglas’ *Hors-Champs*, the separation begs to be brought together through the production of spectator and his gaze. The reproduction or postproduction of the world finds itself in these ‘limits,’ or threshold. Determining associations out of segmented tableaus happens out of the edge-relationships of multiple images and information, which in turn defines the gestalt.

**Chaplin: City Lights**

Looking back through the history of film and cinema, a notable comparison to *Hors-Champs* would be that of Charlie Chaplin’s *City Lights*
(1931). The impact of video and television on culture in the 1960’s is reminiscent of a similar cultural impact with movies around 1927. Syncopation with sound to image entered the world, a turning point in history for silent films that were maturing into talkies (The Jazz Singer, 1927). This was a moment in history when the voice outside the frame was making its entrance.

Charlie Chaplin’s silent film *City Lights*, explores the character of the tramp’s mistaken identity as a millionaire by a blind woman selling flowers. The tramp goes to great lengths to live up to her blind admiration by putting himself into unfavorable situations to raise the money for an eye operation. Eventually, after repeated failed attempts, a millionaire that the tramp saves from committing suicide rewards him the money he needs. The money will fund the operation for the blind flower girl to regain her sight. However, the tramp is accused of stealing the money and is put in jail, but not without first ensuring she received the money. Nine months later, he is released and inadvertently wanders to the blind girl’s flower shop. After a comedic battle with some young bullies, he picks a rose up off the ground that has been swept into the street. As he turns his gaze to the storefront window, he freezes at the sight of the blind flower girl. He is unaware of her operation and she has never seen him before. The glass holds the two framed and still portraits; both a tableau to the other. The thin membrane of glass constitutes an in-between moment of unknown and at the same time, awareness. In that moment, it is sight, not sound, that holds them separate and together. Both are reduced to gesture without any other way to
communicate. The simple pause and gaze holds the tramp and the flower girl suspended and embarrassed. He tries to flee at the moment he realizes she has her sight restored. At the doorway to the shop, she makes a gesture to give him a healthy rose and some money. Her hand reaches for his and she realizes who he is by way of touch and memory. The moment traverses back and forth through what is not there (outside the frame) to what is now visible; realization becoming autonomous. She tells him, “I can see now,” which voices the literal and the figurative. Kenneth Calhoon, who wrote extensively on City Lights, states, “The absorption that constitutes her as tableau and assures the spectator the autonomy of being unseen precludes such movements as make the blind appear uncanny and stigmatize them as ‘seers’” (391). The structure is divided there between ‘being’ and ‘semblance.’ Gaze and witness are completely different things in contemporary times. Current culture is accustomed to watching without being seen. Chaplin’s world bids a different kind of embarrassment to the lack of self-awareness.

**Unknown Becoming Known**

Misinterpretation puts the mind in a state of displacement. Reality is tested to a degree of reevaluating the structure of one’s faithfulness in a grounding reality. A sense of embarrassment seeps into what seems like a very
direct and defined moment. In my earlier work, I looked for ways to pull a viewer out of their controlled interpretation. This was not necessarily a game to make a fool out of someone; this was an attempt to disrupt faithfulness, to tip the ground and to pose a question.

Embarrass: the parts of the unknown becoming known. The moment of suspension (for the person who is embarrassed) is a notion of the in-between of folding events becoming realized, suspending or preventing the person from moving beyond that moment, if only momentarily. The embarrassment becoming realized halts any intended progress. The person must engage in the realization of their unknown becoming known. To be embarrassed is a formulation of a tableau. First, to be embarrassed one must have an audience. Second, one inadvertently becomes the audience; retracing his own actions and becoming momentarily halted from initial intention: suspended or removed. Thirdly, in turn, the subject realizes they were the actor (unknowing) and becomes presented autonomously. Etymologically, the word ‘embarrass’ diverges from any specific unified meaning into different translations. Depending on its reception by different cultures at specific time periods, language/culture tries to describe the nature of living and the need for such a word alters the definition. ‘Embarazado’ translates from Spanish to English as “impregnated.” ‘Embarrasser’ translates from French to English as, “to block or obstruct” or “to put one in a difficult situation.” The translations of the word ‘embarrass’ parallel very closely to the tableau’s translations from French to
British diction. Defining cultural relevance and spirit is an attempt to define a new idea through different cultural refractions. It is an attempt to be aware of the presence of the describable as it emerges. Ultimately, ‘embarrass’ or ‘tableau,’ whether as an outward or inward moment of witness, are concepts and relationships with the gaze.

“Gaze” is a psychoanalytic term brought into popular usage by Jacques Lacan to describe the anxious state that comes with the awareness that one can be viewed. The psychological effect...is that the subject loses a degree of autonomy upon realizing that he or she is a visible object. This concept is bound with his theory of the mirror stage, in which a child encountering a mirror realizes that he or she has an external appearance. The awareness of any object can induce an awareness of also being an object (Calhoon 386).

The mimicry of reflection creates an arrest and blind spot. The child holds what is faithful and present, to his actions. ‘Embarazado:’ as pregnancy describes it in the moment of containment (something held within) and unknown, becoming known as an object; perhaps a notion to something autonomous and self-aware. The pregnant moment, holds the unseen yet the obvious shape of the one who carries it. Martin Heidegger states, "Explanation is always twofold. It accounts for an unknown by means of a known, and at the same time it verifies that known by means of that unknown. Explanation takes place in investigation"
The gaze, emerges through the surface of the twofold: the thin membrane of the middle or in-between and the temporality of perspectives. The audience is not just aware of their gaze but of their participation and formulation of continuity. “Everyone occupies this position (betweenness); to be human is to reside within the interval...have the possibility of coming from...and going toward.” (Silverman 188). What is this place of gaze and audience? The edge of the theatre stage, the frontal plane of an upright canvas or the darkness of the movie theatre, in turn, places the viewer in an implied mirrored-middle-ground to that which they view (representation). The gaze must happen from outside that space of representation - cut from the world.

With an ever-abundant influx of visuals, video montages, and computer stored factual evidence of the world and human existence, what is the role of the spectator? Michael Foucault states:

Thus between the already ‘encoded’ eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself: it is here that it appears, according to the culture and the age in question, continuous and piecemeal, linked to space or constituted anew at each instant by the driving force of time, related to a series of variables or defined by a separate system of coherences, composed of resemblances which are either successive or corresponding, organized around increasing differences, etc. This middle region, then, in so far as it makes manifest the modes of
being of order, can be posited as the most fundamental of all:

anterior to words, perceptions and gestures (Foucault xxi).

The in-between, the space outside the frame, and the suspended space of the inward and outward gaze, suggest the middle ground of relation to the multiple moments of tableau. For video and cinema, the viewer, as subject, becomes the bridge to the relatable past and present as information blurs from fiction to nonfiction.

Each time period of art develops such dialogues to challenge traditional concepts of the frame. Fundamentally, Douglas’ use of the 1960’s television era, Chaplin’s response to the talkies era, and even the concept of ‘embarrassment,’ motivate thoughts of the fulcrum of change, the tipping moment out of one structure into that of another. If looking at a contemporary example, one only needs to put their hand in their pocket and realize the gadgetry that has completely altered traditional communication for a new epoch. This places one always in front of a screen. Progression happens in response to the way fiction is represented, how life is represented. However, the clearest and richest moments are within transitioning moments of comparison. In painting terms, light becomes its brightest at the moment it reaches shadow, so too does shadow become its darkest when reaching light. Flesh carries more strength in color at this intersection. In cinematic terms, Silverman speaks about this dynamic in reference to Goddard, “Rather, it is ‘in’ relationships. We access the sublime at those moments when the ordering principle of the binary is defeated: when
contraries meet, either in time or space” (175-176). Our natural reaction to history is a dance with present-ness; the fullest states are those just beyond the partition.
Chapter 2: Figure-Ground-Plane

Collaged-Cut-Capsule

The liminal moment is the combination of two moments, a single situation meeting a second situation, resting at a precipice of interaction and folding. The meeting edges annunciate both the separateness and the gaining marriage. This attraction and resistance, the fata morgana that exists at the horizon, has the invitation and the potential to be the instantiated “both” and “nothing.” In my Figure-Ground videos, the collaged moments suggest their separateness through the edge relations of each component. Similar to a collage that pulls from separate sources to create a composition, the form is built-up within the separateness of information. The framing holds the accumulation of moments as cuts (“cuts” taken from the genre of moving image, to construct a montage or to separate scenes). It is within the frame of the captured video and the display on a monitor or screen that initiates the understanding of how the framing contributes to the overall structure and form of the scene. The stage and frame, the tableau for the video field’s resting progress, allows for an otherwise impossible composition. The framing creates a barrier and an architectural capture. My video work postulates the sense of cut at the same time the staged video is shot and recorded. Everything is held within a single take without
interruption. Durations of each of the videos range from two minutes, up to an hour and a half. There is no set time to reach a point of completion, but duration offers an opportunity to challenge conventional moving image scenarios by challenging the cut and perspective shifts.

Detached timing between each of the components gathers in a totality of space, time, and frame. Each video creates a landscape/scene-scape to address the figure in space. To construct a typical scene, mirrors, walls, windows and projected video, segment the space of the room; more directly, the scene is a congested collage. (insert image) Among the assembled elements, edges crudely align as a discourse and suggestion of continuity (or discontinuity). It is very easy to continue a line from edge to edge as a way of recognizing its “ideal” action, or course of completion. However, there is a human aspect to the crudeness of the collage in the elements that do not completely align. There is also a human aspect to the viewer’s desire for the elements to align. In part, these qualities might be truer to something human than the figure within the piece. Because of the separate parts, viewers understand that the space was staged and the architectonics model components merging together. Ultimately, the space collapses, in part because the camera procures a single examination of the space. The camera converts the video into a defined composition. The lens/shot is uninterrupted by the mind and the human capacity to engage with objects; the brain composites what one sees by involving memory and points of view, reconstructing what the lenses of our eyes relay. What I try to form in
these tableaus is a fragmented space giving the uninterrupted interpretation, all while becoming congested, fractured and flat. The figure and ground have a tendency to flatten together in gestalt capsulation. Space is no longer a thing to be penetrated, especially in terms of technology, it has been flattened and concentrated into monocular fixity and at the same time exaggerated.

As I work through each staging of the tableau videos, I am aware of the technological advantage at which I could easily and affectively constitute the makeups of a piece. However, the limitations that present themselves in analog production generate the obstructions that occur in real (three dimensional) space and collapse (two dimensionally) by the lens. Orchestrating analog shots is challenging and surprising in that it forces me to compromise how the scene will look; maintaining the limitations in its pairing. I not only face restriction in the construction of objects, architecture and figure, but also with lighting. The lighting of space and the projected light of the video fight for the camera’s attention, each demanding specific lighting apertures. I try not to hide these low-fi definitions of assemblies. Instead I embrace these humbling moments of real interaction. There is an integrity and relationship to real life that I am proposing, which reveals the stage and the mechanism of the camera. It is not the human eye or mind that focuses. The mechanics of the apparatus make themselves known to the operation and the conveyance of imperfection, which again is displayed as a reality instead of fiction or illusion.
Positioned-Frame-Poised

Limitation is present with any situation of framing. Part of the framing is to separate the representation from the real world (i.e. a square painting on the wall). However, the framing also acts as the catalyst for illusion, not in the sense of holding the illusion centered in the picture field. Rather, the illusion is controlled with what is beyond the frame, the imagined space that is continued. What are the limits and agencies of framing? The scenes of my video tableaus are made to examine the edge relationships between each framed element that is collaged. A typical scene is staged to connect parts of space, moving elements and figure. Either turned toward or away from the audience, the figure holds still for the duration of the time recorded.

Figure 1. screen-capture from the video, *There resounds in this work*, 2014
Artists and painters throughout history, stemming back to Pieter Janssens Elinga, Jan Vermeer and Casper David Friedrich have used a similar motif. The pictorial space and figure do not evoke identification for the viewer. The viewer is intentionally shut out and is left as a mere observer. Ultimately, the figure is withdrawn and reinforced by isolation. I push this idea of isolation in my own work by not having sound present in any of the videos. Sound or noise instead comes from the observer’s space and their own spatial consciousness. Isolation, as in the case with Friedrich’s figure gazing out at sea, the figure is not mere staffage but a symbolic element. The painting is no longer an illusion but alludes to the reality of distance between the depicted figure and viewer. In this encounter, the distance is momentarily suspended. Rather than identifying with the figure, the spectator has a sensibility to the environment that the depicted figure withdraws into. Modern philosopher, Martin Heidegger evokes a language of withdrawal in his essay, “The Task of Thinking:”

The reason is never exclusively or primarily that we human beings do not sufficiently reach out and turn toward what properly gives food for thought; the reason is that this most thought provoking thing turns away from us, in fact has long since turned away from man.

And what withdraws in such a manner keeps and develops its own incomparable nearness.
Once we are so related and drawn into what withdraws, we are
drawing into what withdraws, into enigmatic and therefore
mutable nearness of its appeal...When man is drawing into what
withdraws, he points into what withdraws. As we are drawing that
way we are a sign, a pointer. But we are pointing then at
something that has not, not yet, been transposed into language
that we speak. It remains uncomprehended. We are an
uninterrupted sign” (381-382).

The sign, the signifier, brings attention to the action of observation and drawing
near or drawing out. In my videos, at first the figure seems like a guide. His or
her gaze is directional and provokes a sense of following or caution. “Spector’s
view is frequently focalized and guided through the astonishing gaze of spectors
within the text, so inviting our own presence at the visual feast of the poem”
(Ovid 173). Although Ovid is referring to poetry, my video tableaus act similarly
as they guide and ask the viewer to focalize. The state of being and observation is
transposed.

Similarly, the body language or gesture the figure holds suggests the start
of a narrative. However, the viewer is quickly abandoned by the figure. In the
piece Litigation, the main figure has his palms reading out and towards the
viewer. This is a tactic of political form to convey to an audience, “I have nothing
to hide.”
This gesture of innocence is studied by body language experts and became common knowledge. In turn, the information becomes scripted and held as form to lead a viewer’s interpretation. Body language experts understand the tactic of holding one’s hands (palms out) is common knowledge and they in turn watch for revealing gestures after the “performance” is over. The touching of the back of the neck by the figure in my video at the end of Litigation, demonstrates the stiffness in holding the muscles for such a long duration and is also the signifier of protecting one’s own neck. This brings up questions of performance inside the frame and outside the frame. The real gesture that body language experts will watch for is the transition from acting, to nervous reality, end cut.
The non-figure properties in my work elicit movement in subtle shifts, presenting clues or distractions around the motionless figure. The structure of the video questions moments of fixedness versus change, rigidity versus malleability, and object versus subject. The fixedness of form becomes factual, consultable. It also represents the nature of change in its absence. This relates the purview to the structure of parts controlled within the piece. The viewer has but what is in the scene to arrange meaning, and to place himself there.

**Stage-Form-Witness**

Characteristically, in my video tableaus, a projected video demonstrates movement and pace within the composed video, as if video is holding within
itself the representation of itself. Video in its essence examines moments.

Whether sped-up or slowed down, the apparatus and convention of witness through video is typically to convey time. The unfolding time-based medium holds within its invention the ability for time to be controlled, edited and performed. Perception is then free to work past the limitations of human observation. It is with this reason that the projected video shows itself manifested and integral to the scene and structure of my videos.

The scene can be viewed as human observation, witnessing time, space and examination. A great deal returns back to the idea of projection both literal and visceral; the experience of selfhood through the sense of sight. The figure in the video observes as the spectator does.
All the individual components are creating the cuts and edits; every separate part is an individual frame. The capacity to amass the duration of moments, talks about current technology and its ability to digitally collect information for as long as the memory card and battery last. More memory produces limitations on a much grander scale. Limitation points at what is not being captured. By comparison, the thing that is asking us to constantly capture, limits the interaction; true interaction without distraction to reality.

An irreducible form cannot be broken down to further parts and actions. I am stripping things bare in my video so that it appears less indulgent. The central human figure in my video work is motionless. His form is and has no parts. The figure becomes form by stilling himself for the reception of a view or a thought. A similar event happens when one inadvertently encounters a mirror. Out of embarrassment or the transference of inward attention directed outward, the mirror pauses or halts further action. Human form is then investigated. The spectator while watching the video in a gallery becomes a form receiving the video information. The viewer mirrors the stillness of the figure in the video. By being still, everything else moves to him, on him, by way of the senses and awareness. Moments around the figure move, change, and build a sense of nuance. The composed figure is in a state of being in the world, not action.

The absence of action is the tension. Ultimately what stands, is the erasure of spectacle. Spectacle is a heightened moment of remarkable resonance; a compounding, fostered release. There is no real mounting force in my work
that proceeds to embellish a specific moment. Instead a level of nuance takes
over. It was here that I realized the sense of wonder developed not out of a novel
moment but from the absence of change. Eyes begin to wonder and investigate
shifts within the frame or interactions between objects and movement. Nuance
persuades involvement and discovery. No longer is the engagement passive but
rather charged with the act of looking, observing and determining a personal
response, versus one that was directed and given.

Waiting and witness develop a state of being in place of narrative logic.
The linear bridge between events is absent and the viewer holds one constant
visual manifestation, that which is staged. The analog¹ (analog is present in the
sense that all information is given at once) structure of shot and suspension
resists the traditional vehicle of cinema or video, transporting the viewer from
different perspectives or jumping from cut to cut. In this structure, viewership is
not indoctrinated to a typical format of leaping through space as a character
involved with the story. I resist the urge to propel the viewer into action and
diving extremes. The video is not edited or broken down into parts but simulates
real time. I balance the economy of action with the viewer’s awareness of the
present moment of his watching. His gaze is in one direction, onto the surface of
the monitor and onto the surface of represented space and time.

¹ The word analog can be taken from something such as an analog clock or an analog signal. A
constant signal that relays without breaks; it is a constant signal without interruption. Analog is
often used as reference the opposite of computer technology.
The unreality or the surreal manifestation of the scene is read like a theatrical stage, in which the design has a single direction, aimed toward the viewer. The gaze is in front of the viewer. If sitting in the audience, the middle ground divides the mirrored direction of action from the actors to the reception of the viewer (the two directions are towards each other). In a theatrical play, both parties are governed by the awareness of each other yet resist the crossing over into the other’s space. The audience member knows the border or edge to which reality faces fiction. Never to be crossed or interrupted, the line where acting represents life is marginalized – taken and removed from life only to represent it, to add emphasis, to declare a point of awareness, of specificity, of politics, of witness.

**Illusion-Mirror-Truth**

Illusion needs truth and truth needs illusion as a gauge at which to understand the one from the other. The video pieces were an attempt to pose a genuine question about perception. In dealing with perception, a pretense seemed important. In my video tableaus, the reality became the guise and pressed close against the edge of the stage and perhaps stepped into the audience. I was not interested in showcasing how surreal I could potentially make the scenes, nor was I very interested in covering the factual evidence of
how the elements existed in the space. I struggled with how much of the material handling (what could demonstrate an illusion) was given information to a viewer. I wanted low-fi construction. Better yet, the magician’s trick revealed. In this way the collage of the scene still had its rough edges, the frayed remnants of the page it was metaphorically torn from. The viewer slowly deduces that these moments were taken from different sources and ultimately sees the illusion of the constructed reality.

Encompassed in my tableau work, the mise-en-scene, is the staging of forms and settings to reproduce the illusion of space and time for the viewer. The props are evident as a suggestive motif towards the imaginary. At times the nakedness of the built scenario within the shot is an obvious attempt to imply the illusory world of video space.

Figure 5. screen-capture from the video, Untitled, 2013
The artifice seems broken or inconsistent, failing to uphold its duties as an illusion. What then becomes its counterpart of represented truth? What becomes truer to the viewer? Contemporaneously, the projection of videos within the video becomes the subjective enunciation of the enunciated. Ultimately, it was already the representation of the represented. It becomes a symbol of itself and I use this mode of understanding to communicate the middle ground between illusion and reality. Like language, to convey an idea or a set of ideas, the ideas fall within a standardization of symbols that are, at base level, universal for communication, or in the case of my videos, to what a setting or a stage needs to define a scene. This begins to speak of the language of its making as content.

The world of underlying form is an unusual object of discussion because it is actually a mode of discussion of discussion itself. You discuss things in terms of their immediate appearance or you discuss them in terms of their underlying form, and when you try to discuss these modes of discussion you get involved in what could be called a platform problem. You have no platform from which to discuss them other than the modes themselves (Pirsig).

The mirroring of confluent elements attempt to reproduce the same conditions they describe. At best, the heroics of my tableau videos are the unchanging demonstrative fragments of assimilation that speak with the language they are
made with. Ultimately, a description of what it is by how it is made deflects a linear sum of clarification.

**The Abyss**

The trope of what represents a representation, as a visual cue, becomes in my video tableaus, the form of a mirror. And the mirror in turn can represent what the camera is doing. It may not reflect an actual observer, however it is more the act of reflecting something and the guide at which it signifies a doubling of form. It seems like an obvious direction to question perception within the framework of a type of consciousness. Awareness of self through reflection implies a doubling of two types of knowledge, an interior structure witnessing its exterior structure. The network of relations and the internal elements of my video work incorporate projection (a prerecorded video recording) with the components of the mirror. This establishes a complex play between something that happened before the video was constructed with the actual recording of the video. The mirror functions not only to reflect the subject but metaphorically calls attention to the camera acting in the same fashion. The positioning of the mirror, informs the viewer of a different perspective that exists in the space of its staging. The subjects in the piece are not necessarily doubled; however, the video itself is doubled, first by reflection and second by
the camera. The reading becomes deconstructive as with any representation with working parts. Craig Owen discusses this concept in *En Abyme* in relation to Husserl’s philosophy:

Every representation of representations ‘present themselves as the modification of something, which apart from this modification would be there in its corporeal or represented selfhood.’ In the case of infinite reduplication, Husserl claims that we can penetrate through the series of levels until we arrive at a final one, at which the seemingly infinite play of reduplications is arrested: ‘the glance penetrates through the noemata of the series of levels, reaching the object of the last level, and there holding it steady, whilst no longer penetrating through and beyond it.’ It is this ‘last level’ that classical theories of representation attempt to locate. They ground the representation in its object; multiple reduplications are simply a smoke screen which may blur the outlines of the object, but can never obliterate it entirely (Owen 76).

And these parts that seem to be stepping in for the actual part, is the confluent slip into what Derrida defines as the abyss:

An entire theory of the structural necessity of the abyss will be gradually constituted in our reading: the indefinite process of
supplementarity has already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self. Representation in the abyss of presence is not an accident of presence; the desire of presence is, on contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation (76).

The relocation of origin and presence-formulates itself as a trace, of something rooted with a beginning form. The duplicate or reduplication is an acknowledgement of itself first being represented, second as a sign or vestige of what signifies. The sign points to the proto-real.
Chapter 3: Analogy of the Anagolous

The question of reality and illusion, of depth and surface, of interface and transition are not separate components to the other. Instead, each is the catalyst for the other. Much like Chaplin’s glass membrane, the ability to be separate and yet have access to relates back to my initial interest with the filter. The middle ground or the in-between is connected to early thoughts on what the eyes see and what the mind interprets. The purposeful twitch between extremes of the intangible optic art, establishes compositions on removing the gradation. In this way, the viewer’s discernment is translated by the mind. Each structure presented itself with a gap. Within this threshold both voices spoke.

After working with surface and depth in my videos, I realized how gray the area between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space is. So much of what I was trying to accomplish was the ambiguity of those two spatial qualities; pushing the boundaries of opticality. I was flattening space, but really I was taking possession of the surface. Surface demonstrated a façade, a trace veneer.

One persistent account of modernism in the visual arts asserts an increasing reliance on opticality, ranging chronologically from the work of Édouard Manet to the post–painterly abstraction of the 1960s. Modernism, as Clement Greenberg explained it, was a
matter "of purely optical experience against optical experience as revised or modified by tactile associations."(n30) Facing a work of art, in his account, the modernist viewer experiences an aesthetic response from the vantage point of a disembodied eye: a singular perceiving entity that remained unencumbered by any attachment to the human body within which it was located (Koss).

The ‘optical experience’ or the ‘disembodied eye’ embraced a condition of seeing and accounted for a material flatness, a surface. The quality of framing and surface was a mark of the finished or polished illusion. Oil painting, pre-modernity, was crafted to hide the marks and moments that comprised the finished result and hid the surface (the finished illusion). This process was abandoned during mid-century abstract expressionism.

The conceptual opposition of bodily and optical perception paralleled another distinction between traditional representational painting and those works Greenberg described as modernist: "The Old Masters created an illusion of space in depth that one could imagine oneself walking into," he argued, "but the analogous illusion created by the Modernist painter can only be seen into; can be traveled through...only with the eye."(n31) The spatial concerns of traditional representational painting provided the spectator with an opportunity for an embodied perceptual
experience. By contrast, modernist painting was posited as essentially flat, optical, and monocular (Koss).

For the modernist painter, the tactical perception was erasing a dimensional reference. The forced relevance to move toward not the illusory pictorial art but the object of paint and actual depth of canvas annunciated the medium and the surface.

Another example of a paradigm shift from representation to abstraction is the work of Group Zero. The German based group from 1950-60's founded by Otto Pienne and Heinz Mack, directed their attention to regenerate what had been lost at this point in history. Post World War II Germany had little in the way of art critiques, historians and teachers; Hitler eradicated the ownership, connection and bond with the art world. At that time, Tachisme and Art Informal, made its way into Germany from France and Europe, and conveyed destruction and post war emotional abstraction. As a reaction to the guilt and the circularity that perpetuated the structure of this kind of art, Group Zero looked for new growth that would run counter to the expressive platform. The name ‘Group Zero,’ taken from the space age launching (counting down to zero) into the unknown, new territory also connoted the trajectory into what was at the present moment. The present moment gave rise to the elimination of certain qualities in art not just for Mack and Pienne, but from similar minded artist from all over the world. A common interest in light, monochrome painting, motion, seriality and viewer activation were dominant motivations.
Light, that which makes all things visible, affects the painted surface of the canvas and the interpretation of colors. However, light spoke of the present moment as well and illustrated that specific instance of interplay. For Group Zero, real time and participation fundamentally was the launching pad to the exploration of surface and the demarcation from traditional painting. The shows and catalogs generated a network of artists that bridged what was separated by war and facilitated the emergence of a new worldview. Geographically separated, artists were doing very similar things, and because of Group Zero they were becoming familiar with those same aspirations. Influenced by Yves Klein, who was one of the brethren that was amassing as Group Zero, brought with him his monochromatic dried pigment panels. The surface of Klein’s work created reliefs that demonstrated the role of light and brought its presence to the foreground. Pienne produced monochromatic stencil paintings that tested the surface and interplay of light. Sculptural forms by Gunther Uecker, built a surface of nails onto a wall (painted white), again utilized light and shadow. Puncturing, embossing or raising the canvas tested new ventures and brought sway to mirror and reflective surfaces. Quickly thereafter, apparatuses moved and controlled light as the medium, sending it onto the surface of the walls in the gallery. Pushing abstraction through light and form, of material, surface and shape, become as much about the unknown as it was about the known. The word ‘Zero’ is a marking point. It reveals a moment as nothing, as no significance. However, like a blank surface of a canvas or an empty stage, it has the possibility
to be anything and everything. Counting down to zero is a migratory procession, to work backwards toward a beginning, to blast off in a new direction.
Chapter 4: Dueling Surfaces

While looking through the history of painting and artists that challenged the conventions of surface, my response was to discuss the ideas involved with surface in a more contemporary artistic language. It was only shortly after the MFA show went up, that I learned about Group Zero and the kinship I have with them.

Some of the aspects that I was working with in my figure-ground videos traversed into my more sculptural, material-based works. The facets of the video work were mimetic in their essence, and I wanted to lean toward abstraction to see if those same qualities could be identifiable.

Reprise, Suspended, made up of a reflective mylar back panel and a white spandex front covering, prompts a single flat read. However, there is a five-inch gap between the white spandex (which is stretched over the entire surface and frame) and the mylar. This allows enough space to misinterpret where the surface begins and where the volume ends. With the aspects and character of light interacting with a reflective surface, the back mylar panel has been manipulated into non distinct wave-like patterns. The disruption of the flat mylar material becomes activated as light enters through the spandex, refracts
and bounces shaped light onto the back side of the spandex. The light becomes trapped or at least objectified upon interacting with the materials.

Figure 6. Reprise, Suspended, 2015, reflective mylar, wood framing, white lycra

While a viewer looks at the work, at first glance the two separate surfaces read as one. From an angle it looks as if just the top surface is painted. The surface becomes misrepresented. Upon further inspection, the back panel slowly emerges for the viewer. As one commits to the back panel and acquires its sense of depth, the reflection of spandex and light that is refracted onto the back of the spandex, confuses the retinal picture. The depth and the surface are visually re-measured. The gap between the two surfaces lends me enough space to play with the back panel’s proximity to the front material.
As I was propositioned to hang *Reprise, Suspended* in the hallway leading up to the gallery for the MFA show, I knew that people would be walking through that space to the main event. It was a white hallway that was going to house the four, 4’x6’ panels (hung horizontally). The panels became directional in the way that people would encounter them. I purposely angled the back panel closer to the right side of the frame, where a person would first encounter the piece. This allowed a strange discernibility at the level at which the back panel and front panel interacted. While experimenting in the studio, I discovered that the spandex would allow for more or less translucency depending on how tightly I stretched the material. This, coupled with the interaction of reflection, gave way to a lenticular mode of operation.

![Image of hallway with installation](image-url)

*Figure 7. Reprise, Suspended, 2015, installation image of hallway*
While standing directly in front of Reprise, one could only see through that specific spot on the panel. To the left and right of that position, while looking at an angle, the back mylar was completely hidden. My idea was to have the hallway’s procession lend itself to the constant masking and revealing as a person walked passed them (almost like walking passed a yard’s slatted fence). This was the filter and the interaction I sought from the very beginning. However, the whiteness of the piece and the whiteness of the wall in the hallway it hung dissolved the interaction. It was cloaked. I had experimented with light in the studio and realized that having direct light would facilitate more of a presence than mere ambient light. This gave more noticeable optically swayed reads. In turn, Reprise, Suspended included the light that was reading as if it were coming from within (much like a monitor or T.V.). Although the amount of light exposed the back mylar panel more directly, Reprise had a superficial read that seemed very direct at first. It was only in passing that the spandex challenged the initial belief.
Figure 8. Reprise, Suspended, 2015, images to compare the slight change at different angles of investigation.

The spandex created a flat two-dimensional surface and disrupted earlier fidelities of what was believed to be a folded material with obvious volume. As a third element, the light now glimmered on the reflective mylar and also onto the back side of the spandex. Elements camouflaged themselves. It housed an elegance of soft quiet poetics with very loud and demanding optical ambiguity. Ultimately, it drew a confluence of disingenuous parts that teetered between two-dimension and three-dimension. The idea of fooling the viewer was not my first intention. However, this precludes a directness that is often deviated by embarrassment. The directness of an answer, point A to point B, is challenged. Although nothing was hidden, time needed to be invested by the viewer to slow
down and take part in its hiccup, collapse their understanding and become aware of the space between eye and mind.

The discussion is between the ephemeral qualities of light and refraction and observation. To disrupt the exactitude of reflection and form, *Reprise, Suspended*, contains the interaction within the panel. Ostensibly, this kind of interaction is not just developed in optical perception but with a mode of device and multidirectional light. The interface between the layers keeps it from being a direct single connotation. The complexity stays ambiguous and the experience is a temporal and spatial embodiment of perception.
Conclusion

The demonstration of analog structures assume that everything is revealed, and for the most part *everything* is revealed. And because of that situation I created for the viewer, the ‘instantly-absolute’ is assumed even faster. It is the known parts involved that generate a pre-conclusion. For *Reprise, Suspended*, the optical exchange between surfaces from the space in front to beyond allows for travel; passed the one structure to the next. By introducing light and reflection, the assumed components and visual reasoning are tested. This moment of interaction is my attempt at slowing down engagement: creating an experience and placing the viewer as the element that plays across the exchange.

A heterotopia, in Michel Foucault terminology, is to “designate places where several sites that are in themselves incompatible are juxtaposed” (qtd. in Burgin 199). Part of this readability has to do with the condition of viewing and the automatism of video and film. Having multiple views of the world, looking out behind the self, are in part the fetishes of video or film that are acceptable by perception and memory. Michel Deguy, a contemporary French philosopher writes, “The Threshold: not an object, but a thing: a ‘real’ thing as the spoken language would have it, that our bodies have to transgress. A thought thing, the
experience of the threshold, and the poem of the threshold (its composition) grow together, ‘concretely’” (58). One can witness this both in the tableau videos and in my more object-oriented work. The layers of sustained ambiguity are showcased very directly, framed. Deguy continues:

The affinity of things brought together, composed: an image which puts into play a difference between here (what is inside the frame) and there (what is all around). A threshold that differentiates, yet a threshold: in the tight (concentrated, verdichtet) place of bringing together, of the rapprochement in that density, the meeting takes place (on the dissecting table), the figure detaches itself inside; summoned, it appears (59).

Within the threshold of my work, a yearning to place the parts fixed and resolved, retreats. The middle ground, for the viewer, puts them in the space of the audience member and also the actor, acting between received information.

Each generation and turning point with new technology, throughout history, rouses new interaction not just with life but how one represents it. Contemporarily, sorting through the onslaught of information that one receives and delivers through the flat surfaces of one’s device, goes beyond the media that first entered the homes of America in the 50-60’s with television. It can no longer be passive engagement. The amount of information forces quicker reception and delivery; the constant editing keeps thoughts only in the shallows; and we consume without consumption. This marginal area that Stan Douglas
placed us in with *Hors-champ* and Chaplin’s playful demonstration of giving sight to the blind perpetuates the understanding of outside looking in. This folding and unfolding carries with it the diaphanous membrane of emerging parts. Perhaps the truth comes out only as it is framed in the past and even then it is demonstratively fiction.

A firm belief in my practice is to expose the artifice within the workings of the illusion. This creates an edge relationship for both sides of the coin to be exposed at once - there is no coin trick. When both sides are exposed, viewers are brought to a moment of *awe* and *wonder* in which the sensation of being fooled exists when all parts are visible. Conversely, perhaps the foundation of magic is not that the illusion is real but rather how well reality is concealed, this is what amazes the viewer. To me, states of reality and illusion are both real and they exist in opposition to each other. In their confrontation, man is placed centered as a reflection. However, reflection, like shadow and light, is without dimension. Perception therefore exists not on the opaque surface but projected through the lens of the eye to the audience of the brain.
References


