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Modulus

Sarah Kankiewicz-Arkins

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Modulus

Graduate Thesis
Master of Fine Arts in the
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology

by
Sarah Kankiewicz-Arkins

June 2003

Thesis Board Members:

Angela Kelly, Thesis Chair, Associate Professor, School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
date 6/25/03

Elliott Rubenstein, Professor, School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
date 06/25/03

Timothy Engström, Professor, College of Liberal Arts, Department of Philosophy
date 06/25/03
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Date: June 25, 2003

Signature of Author: ________________________________
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Linus gathers his breath and looks out at the volcano.
He sighs, then says, “Jared, tell me something: Is time over?”
“Huh? Meaning what?”
“I’ve been thinking about this so much. When I say time I mean history, or ... I think it’s human to confuse history with time.”
“That’s for sure.”
“No, listen. Other animals don’t have time- they’re simply part of the universe. But people- we get time and history. What if the world had continued on? Try to imagine a Nobel Peace Prize winner of the year 3056, or postage stamps with spatulas on them because we ran out of anything else to put on stamps. Imagine the Miss Universe winner in the year 22,788. You can’t. Your brain can’t do it. And now there aren’t any people, the universe is simply the universe. Time doesn’t matter.”

-Douglas Coupland

*Girlfriend in a Coma*
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documentation of modulus
sarah kankiewicz-arkins 2003
Photography knows how to authenticate its misrepresentations.

-Mason Cooley
The Incredible Misadventures of a Future Gen-X Superstar

by

SK Arkins
to my mother
and
for all the only-children
inventing worlds in their minds
Taste is the residue of our previous experience, and if we are presented with something that doesn’t fit, we immediately try to reject it. I think that’s good. Taste keeps us from being wowed by absolutely everything all the time; without it, we wouldn’t get to work in the morning…

…Installations can be very entertaining, but they tend to be very quickly forgotten. The last Whitney Biennial was full of things that are very close to things that one, if one has been around for years, has seen many times before. The artists aren’t copying; they have no idea of these precedents.

It’s an art without memory.

-Peter Schjeldahl
In general, I seem to have grandiose illusions as to my existence. Growing up I was told that I was going to be famous. I don’t remember ever telling anyone that I thought that they would be famous, so I never quite understood how it was that people thought that I was going to be, especially considering the fact that I had very little aspiration for the program of fame itself. Nevertheless, when someone tells you this you can’t help but question how and what would make one famous. I began to concoct various scenarios from which my fame would mount itself. I decided that I did not want fleeting fame, but more lasting and enduring fame.

_But how do you become famous?

Was I going to be noble and try to make some sort of medical advancement, or scientific achievement? It was a possibility, but it’s not the type of fame that’s well known throughout the global community, and hell—I’m no Einstein. Would I become a great athlete? That was out of the question—I am not what would be described as athletic by any definition of the word. I
could be a famous author, or an actor or musician—these seemed most logical so I began my work.

At 10, I began writing my autobiography. It was almost two and a half pages. I decided that I would wait a while before attempting it again, and there went my career as an author. I studied music for 15 years, and realized that it just wasn’t that much fun, and that Morrissey was so much more profound than Bach. I pretty much just quit one day. Tried acting, in high school and college, and I realized that life is acting, and that putting acting into practice was what acting truly was.

Therefore, I became an artist.
There is a Time and a Place for Everything:
A Preface to Modulus¹

When I was eighteen months old, someone took my picture in front of a historical monument. To be more specific, the photo was of my cousin holding me wrapped in an afghan, across the street from the White House, standing under a tree and in front of a fence. I have no memory of the event. Nevertheless, I have a photographic record of its occurrence.

This phenomena of recollection through the image and not the primary occurrence is well documented and researched by many academics in a variety of fields, they collectively call it post-memory. It is as if the addition of “post” to anything demands it to be taken seriously in our time. How is memory not “post”? Memory is an action of

¹ modulus¹ is an installation in three parts; this book being one of those modules.
recovery, whether we have constructed that memory or it exists as a document, all memory has occurred; it is an ephemeral record—ex post facto.

Because we conflate events and images in our synapses, we have to explain this as a phenomenon of our historical time. Why not explain it as a condition of our technologic post-photographic time? The transcendence of the image is a result of its likeness and its capacity as a recording device. Isn’t this a logical predicament?

When I woke up this morning I did what I have done most mornings of my life; peed, ate, washed, and dressed. There is no specific order, other than the initial peeing, to the morning’s events. I have no photographic record of these daily events, I have no written document, and I have no memory other than the collection of nearly thirty years of these simple events that prepare me for each day.

For instance, it’s nearly noon now and I have not competed these tasks. In general, when I am writing I go right into it without thinking about the fact that I haven’t brushed my teeth yet. It’s inconsequential to my typing, my thoughts. Yet, tomorrow I will have no specific recollection to the fact that I hadn’t yet brushed my teeth at 11:08 a.m. today. However, I will be able to say tomorrow that I brushed my teeth today—
and every other day for that matter, because I do that. I suppose that it’s an ontological awareness of self, rather than a memory action. This understanding operates at a level of unawareness—I am not able to nor do I ever attempt to recollect the event of brushing my teeth on February 2nd 1982. Nevertheless, I know that I brushed my teeth that day.

Maybe tomorrow I won’t brush my teeth. Maybe I will make a photograph of this event, that way I will remember its anomalous existence.

It seems strange to me that artists and philosophers spend so much time pondering thoughts that have little to no impact on life. I now they think that they do; but do they really? Historically we see definite paths that lead us to where we are—but historians and philosophers drew those paths. Read any post-colonial or feminist text and they will immediately dispel those paths. The paths that were not “drawn” by these thinkers are the paths that interest me. I am just one person, but many paths lead to me. I am interested in creating a language that reflects these paths. I am curious to see that in 100 years from now what history really looks like. How can we tell global history from a single perspective anymore? WE CAN’T! (I love to answer my own rhetorical questions). It’s impossible to think that in the year 2084, we will view history with the same outlook that we have today. And, it is unlikely that anything significant will
have precedence over the insignificant. For example—my birth will not be celebrated, nor will the birth of any presidents or visionaries. For example—we have already compounded the holiday “President’s Day” rather than celebrating both Washington and Lincoln’s birthdays. This was done so that we could have Martin Luther King Day. A reasonable compromise to acknowledge legendary achievements in the African American Community; but why a single person I ask. Now we have black history month, and women’s history month. Are we going to have presidential history month soon? Isn’t this too specific? Do we have these demarcated months because every other month is white male month? How in the next century and beyond are we going to continue to classify what and who is important enough to remember?

Why not let us decide for ourselves, and have a “Historical Remembrance Day?” Kids could come to school, dressed in costume, and act out their favorite historical figures. Whether it be Julius Caesar, Mary Queen of Scots, Immanuel Kant, Oscar Wilde, Neil Armstrong, Rosa Parks, John Hinckley Jr., Marilyn Monroe, Chairman Mao or their great-grandmother—you would decide who you want to celebrate, who made an impact on you—and your perceptions of historical importance. Why let someone else make a decision about who is important and who isn’t?
Up until now, we tended to view history as a straight line with many parallel tangents. What if there is no longer a singular history, but rather many histories crossing and doubling back to create individual ones? What if we were all to design our own history by choosing the appropriate events that would map our progress: as a race, as a religion, as a sex, etc. Rather than place ourselves in a period, we are content to be categorically present—caught in a limbo between past and future, unaware that the actions that we take now create the epicenter of centuries of aftershocks in which what we have done are still felt. We can create legends. What would happen if the telephone wires were crossed along the way, and the record of these shock waves no longer existed? We no longer accept history as a pure record—but rather an account close to the source its at best secondary and always an interpretation. What if the resulting form of “history” in a thousand years is a record encoded with layers of selective compound histories? What would the artifacts from this heterogeneous jumble look like, and what would they signify about this perpetual present that we are placed in right now? I believe that I am creating one of these artifacts right now...but why?

Why would I embark on a project that seems both strange and useless? What is the cause for such examination and why would I take more than a year out of my life to try to bring these strange symbols into a new language that is of complete contrivance? It’s as though I am creating a game for only myself to play—why make jargon when it already exists independent of myself?
The implications and questions that arise from creating artifacts, such as this book, are what become interesting. In this game, I have created a very specific language. It uses vernacular objects but turns them into codes, both of visual language and of aural language. It is really a simple code, but it is only recognizable by me. With this book, you have a foretaste of what I am creating. It can act as a secret decoder ring into my little world of post-historical writing and art making.

As I have whined about it before, I really am a fairly useless human being, as most artists are. Anyone with any insecurities about their own art making would disagree, but deep down they know how truly useless they are as well. So I’m selfishly creating a language to explain what it is I am thinking—this is possibly so uninteresting to the rest of humanity, but uselessness has never stopped me before, why should it stop me this time?

I’ve made a set of daguerreotypes, which in the realm of photography are both coveted and highly impractical. No one has really made daguerreotypes since the 1860’s and why would they? They are toxic and unpredictable, unstable, and required very long exposures. However, they have what we are missing from photography, art, and hell, life today—and that’s aura.
In order to categorize these objects as having "aura" we must first consider the nature and the characteristics of this earliest form of the modern photograph—with regard to size, its singularity, and its antiquity. With regard to the use of antiquated processes for image production, I believe that there are inborn characteristics present in daguerreotypes that connote both a time as well as preciousness—two elements that I am duty-bound to exploit. The size and decorative quality of a daguerreotype by its fundamental nature makes it a precious object; it is an image, which fits into the palm of your hand. There are ornamentations such as the metal filigree that encases it and the plush velvet that serves as both a reminder of the parlor where it may have been made as well as protect the fragile image from any harm. It is an object of both adornment and adoration. The daguerreotype represents the beginnings of photographic media, and the original daguerreotypes are emblematic of capturing and preserving the image, particularly capturing one’s own image in the form of one’s own face. There is an implicit notion of immortality associated with the daguerreotype.

Another characteristic of the daguerreotype that is inborn is the singularity of the process. There is no duplicating a daguerreotype. By the nature of the process itself, each photograph is a unique object in and of itself. I feel as though the idea of a cherished object is something that we no longer have at this day and age. Other than antiques, historical artifacts and art, and family histories, we no longer create cherishable objects. Nothing is unique. The closest our society comes to cherishing something is collecting, and most objects collected are mass-
produced—-toothbrushes, toasters, teacups, pencils—just like the images in my daguerreotypes.

In Benjaminian terms, the loss of “aura” to the art object is a direct result of multiplicity. The premise of “aura” is both inherently intriguing and much debated. I will argue that although made through mechanical process, the daguerreotype has a sense of “aura”, of the aforementioned nature of the process (as irreproducible and singular) and the product (as cherishable, unique and desired).

This in many ways becomes the basis of the project itself, juxtaposition of technology (or the results thereof) and its own history and theory, with relationship to art. The manifestations being: something precious that is a commodity; a mass produced object imaged by way of an authentic antiquated process. The contradiction/counter-contradiction of the masses versus the individual, paired against its own history is the very embodiment of this work, and of this book.
I never thought that I would be telling stories “officially”. I guess that it was inevitable—unavoidable. I’ve tried every other slacker career—painter, sculptor, photographer, and quasi-philosopher—why not writer? Life is just going on around me like I’m stuck in this limbo, and the outcome is defiantly uncertain. It’s kinda like when Han Solo is put in carbon freeze, he’s being kept alive in suspended animation as the world goes on around him. He’s unaware that Luke has been trained by Yoda and has become a Jedi Knight, and that Leia has built up the Rebel Force. These are only facts that surround him, as he stands in stasis—un-conscious. Jabba is not going to release him.

I’m Han Solo. My friend Ryan, he works. And he’s trying to build something. Ryan works in movies—really making something for himself, while I’m stuck in carbonium. I tread water—or carbon, whatever. I’m not looking for some shortcut, or trying to work my way up. I have paid many dues and it never seems to do anything.
I just want to remain happy. I've always known what it was that I wanted to do and I guess that the job of resident sophist just doesn't exist anymore. So making art and writing, talking, traveling—these things I do well. I guess that I wash dishes pretty well too, I'm good at window washing, and I can Spackle with the best of them—but it doesn't make me happy.

So, what do you do if when nothing you do well lets you be happy and nothing that makes you happy lets you eat?

You dream of fame and eat a lot of toast.

---

I'm meeting Ryan today for coffee at the place on Broome, it's right around the corner from his production office and my studio. Ryan produces independent shorts and he makes enough money from location stuff or he meets someone who'll fund a film—he really does what he wants to do. Ryan knows the game—at least he's a player. He stands outside of the crap that goes on in larger production stuff, and he really wants to make every movie that he makes—hell, he makes things, not for other people but for himself. Ryan has evolved in his twenties into something that I admire, I'm jealous of—really. He still has his convictions. Hell, he produced an off-off-Broadway play in this tiny theater because he really loved it, and he wanted to work with his friends. He's still real, and in all that he has learned
within the industry, he has retained a small thread through his body that is not cynical—he still has some innocence.

It’s a typical daily event. Jen’s working today and is her typically authentic spirited self.

“Hey Shell, the usual?”

“Yeah—hey what’s going on?”

“I’ve got puppy pictures today.”

“Excellent—let me see.” I live vicariously though other people’s dogs. My cat, Ophelia, will not allow me to get any other pets. She already has one pet, our first cat, Odysseus. That’s enough for her. She’s exceptionally jealous, the kind of personality that if she was human she would have no friends. She’s a cold-blooded cat.

“Very cute, she poses well. Maybe you should take her for some auditions?”

Always I say this more out of my own sick curiosity with the advertising industry.

“Yeah maybe. Have a good one.”

“Thanks—you too.”

As I add the correct proportion of sugar to a triple shot cappuccino, I think about how unusual Jen is, she still has a particular purity to her, there is a cynicism that hasn’t invaded her entire being, the core is still untainted. I like starting my day with Jen and Ryan—before I go mess things up with my muddy disparagement, I should stop thinking so much. I worked in a coffee shop the first summer that I moved to New York. It was awful. I turned into this monster within hour two of my shift. I was just too stung-out on Joe. She must have figured out what I never could.
I would walk home the 40+ blocks from 33rd, and would stop shaking somewhere around Washington Square Park, at which point I would be near passing out. I’d get home and crash just long enough to never be able to go to sleep on time. I’d have to get up at 4 a.m. every morning to open the place at 5:30. There were times that I would actually think about getting a different café job only 20 or 30 blocks away so that I could avoid the crash. That was an unpleasant experience made doubly worse by coffee addiction.

I’m down to one coffee a day with three shots, served up by Jen without prompting. It feels good to connect with someone instinctually, casually. It’s like having a super-cool drug dealer.

“Hey, what’s going on”, Ryan says, as I plunk myself down into one of the cushy chairs littering the back of the coffee shop.

“Sorry I’m late.”

“Did you really think that I expected you to be here at 1? I just got here 5 minutes ago, I know how to gauge a Shell-1o’clock. It translates to anywhere from 1:25 to 2. Do you actually know what time it is?"

“Of course not; I just assume that I’m late where ever I go—it’s Pavlovian, learned conditioning, to say ‘sorry I’m late’ whenever I arrive. Anyway…what’s going on?"

“Working on something with Miramax right now, big meeting in the a.m. They might bring me in to work under contract for awhile.” There’s a certain hesitance in Ryan’s voice.
“Awesome—this is great, right?”

“I don’t know, it feels very noose-like. I’m not sure I’m going to sign.”

“I’m contemplating a career as world traveler, maybe you could join me instead?” I say, trying to put things into a comic perspective.

“Maybe.”

“Okay—well I think that you should consider that you are in a position right now where you can do something like this and it may make your career. If you don’t at least attempt it and the rest of your life is shit, you’ll be doing the Sisyphusian shuffle.”
Why didn’t I take that Miramax contract, why—why—why?” I get a bit over-dramatic, and play the best Jimmy Stewart I can with the whys.

“That really doesn’t help.”

“I know; but it does.”

“How’s Brian?”

“In his usual state of non-commitment. My lease renewal came last Tuesday, and I brought up the big move question. As soon as it came out of my mouth I thought—what are you doing? Why ruin something that doesn’t need to be ruined? I’m such an ass—ya know. I don’t really want to move in together, things work fine the way they are now. I’m being self-destructive.” I’m getting all flustered and start doing this thing where my eyes just go nuts, I start looking around at everything, like I’m trying to memorize where all of the light switches are or something. Its mildly out-of-body. It drives Ryan crazy—always has.

“Stop with the eyes… You know that you want the traditional family somewhere deep inside.”

“Easy for you Mr. Sixth Anniversary—baby on the way.”

Ryan was the first of my friends to get married and it was pretty quick too. He broke up with Katie, who he dated all though college, and then went through the six week ‘whoa is me period’, then kind of disappeared. Four months later when he resurfaced, he was
engaged, and almost a year from the date of break up, he was married. *This* is my greatest fear—that I’m a Katie—that I’m good girlfriend material but not good marriage material and that all of this anxiety is irrational and created by women’s magazines, and *The Rules* idiots—god I hate them.

We are going through a second wave of the *feminine mystique* I think. Why are we such sheep? Advertising and marketing still plays to the insecurity of the female psyche—every woman I know has it, it has different shapes and colors but the ad people know them all. Too thin? Too fat? Too short? Too tall? Too hairy? Breasts too small? Dating trouble? Man trouble? Child trouble? Commitment problems? Cheating problems? Smothering problems? Basic widespread insecurity?

Whatever it might be there is always someone who will tell you why you are that way and what you need to buy in order to stop it. Why, when I can see this intellectually, do I still let my deepest fears control my rational thoughts? I want to be married, I want to have someone there because I have been conditioned to think that that will make me happier—what I don’t see is that I am happy with the way things are right now.

“Just because I have a conventional relationship doesn’t mean that you have to too. Who says that a relationship has to be one way?”

“Cosmo, Redbook, Marie Claire, Glamour, Vogue”
He stops me “Yeah—I get it, when was the last time you read any of those rags anyway?”

“Ten-twelve years ago—but I know what is in them, I don’t have to read them, all you need is one issue to question all of your deepest fears and insecurities as a woman until you die. It’s little known fact, that Helen Gurley Brown was actually a very petit transvestite—working as a covert operative for a group of conspirators that believe that the blowjob is the answer to all the world’s problems.” I use my most authoritarian voice to try to convince Ryan of this crap.

“You’re so full of shit. And, you know that you don’t have to worry about Brian. He’s as happy with your little arrangement as—though you won’t admit it to yourself—you are.”

“See—that’s exactly what I’m talking about—‘my little arrangement’? Even you think its crazy…”

“Not crazy—just unique, but so are you—why is this suddenly such a big deal?” the honest voice is played here mainly to get off the Helen Gurley Brown track I’m sure.

“I think that I want to have a baby.”

“Really?” He says without any filter, it’s a visceral response.

“Yeah—I think so. And things are starting to look different with that as a possibility, I don’t think I want to have a child without some sort of commitment, like the real thing—legal and all.” This is the first time I’ve said this aloud, I never though that I would be saying this—hell I’m not marriage material, neither is Brian. What am I thinking? Everything is fine just the way it is.
Missing A-10 Thunderbolt Air Force plane

Wing span 57 ft. 6 in.
Length overall 53 ft. 4 in.
Height overall 14 ft. 8 in.

Weight (basic design) 30,044 lbs.
Max. combat speed 449 mph

* This made included four 500-lb. bombs

Approx. route of missing plane

Route of plane
1. Plane departed Tucson, April 2
2. Refueled
3. Headed for bombing range
4. Seen at Young, Ariz.
5. Tracked by radar about 1 p.m.
April 1st, 1997. Craig Button answers the phone. “Hello.” A conversation continues. Craig’s roommate in the other room is alarmed by Craig’s behavior after he hangs up the phone.

“You okay, man?”

“Yeah, yeah everything’s okay. I have maneuvers in the morning. I’ve got to get some sleep.”

April 2nd 1997. The Associated Press reports that a military plane crashed into the side of a mountain in Colorado. The search for the missing fighter plane is suspended until July because of weather conditions.
The A-10 jet was carrying four bombs and one ton of 30mm cannon ammunition made from depleted uranium. The plane just fell off the radar. There was no seismic activity in the area, which would have registered if there were an explosion or crash. The plane and pilot disappeared. A few months later, the military concludes that the pilot committed suicide.

Craig Button went to work one day and we never found the bombs.

The top news stories in 1997—Princess Diana is killed in a car accident, Timothy McVeigh is convicted and sentenced to death, a sheep named Dolly is cloned, McCaughey septuplets born, and in response to the Hale Bopp Comet cult members of “Heaven’s Gate” commit suicide. The missing plane fell out of the public consciousness almost as unexpectedly as it fell off the radar that April morning.

Today there are four bombs somewhere in the world and a ton of radioactive ammunition somewhere else, not to mention the other 320 tons that were “lost” during the Gulf War.

Once DU (depleted uranium) dust has been inhaled, it becomes an internal radiation source and can reside in the body for seven or more years, affecting all of the body’s organs. Eventually, if not eliminated from the system or causing a hemorrhage, it will be stored in the bone eventually causing leukemia. From 1953-1976 most of this country’s DU ammo was produced in the economically depressed town of Paducah, Kentucky. In 1999, workers from the Paducah plant settled a lawsuit with the
government for 22 million dollars. In the 1980’s, it was found out that the DU used in the manufacture of the ammunition contained other radioactive substances such as plutonium, which is 100,000 times more deadly, in the uranium powder. One pound of finely ground plutonium can kill 42,000,000,000 people when airborne.

How else were they going to explain this?

Greg Burton lives in Thailand. He has a small farm, and a young boyfriend.

The plane that the government “found” was a 1958 DC-8, which crashed during the early testing of that model of aircraft.

Newscasters will report tomorrow about an unexplainable outbreak of radiation sickness in Florida, New Hampshire, and Minnesota.

Don’t leave your house. Don’t eat your food. Don’t drive your car. Don’t live like this.
I'm Incredibly Narcissistic

How is it that my concerns regarding the future of art began to affect how I researched and structured my life? It's not as though I have lofty goals—I'm just trying to make sense of how I see things, how things fit together for me in my own mind. Obviously there must be some sort of outer connection to the world that I swim around in. I breathe air, I drink water—but I also have lived for years in one of the largest cities in the world, I watch television and I have a computer. I am utterly connected every conscious moment to the world around me, the fury of information jetting toward my stream of consciousness is stupefying. I would have it no other way.

The two possible futures of art as I see it: first Past-Postmodernism, or second Re-Modernism. In the past six or so years, I keep hearing the term *post-postmodernism*. This makes absolutely no sense to me; we are beyond that which is beyond? It's just an easy out- a no-brainer. We add post to a condition to accentuate its meaninglessness. What I mean by Past-Postmodernism a representation of both that
which is before us, and that which is beyond us, it is a moment in time where we are categorically present.

The other thought—Re-Modernism—is less likely but possible. As an ideology, Modernism represents a break from tradition, a paradigmatic interrupted shift from everything that came before it. Re-Modernism would be both a second wave of modernism as well as a return to the conventions that created the ferment of modernism itself. It could never be a regaining innocence, but rather a revolutionary upheaval of how we view the world that we live in and how we deal with our surroundings, society, commerce, etc.

Both possibilities rely heavily on post-structuralist assumptions, but only in order to displace them. If we are all created from enlightenment thinking into a social construction that has implicit power over us, then in order to create a new phase of theory would mean to revolt against the very structures that created us. Once we are aware of the structure, we can deconstruct it. We will never escape capitalism and the power it breeds, so we as artists can only use it to our advantage.
“What if art is just comatose—I mean since Duchamp, what is new? Isn’t it possible that there is some embodied “Art” that has been cloned?” I say to Ryan.

“Yeah and since we haven’t seen Art since the late-sixties, we’ve just been getting his clones like Schnabel and Hirst…”

He’s always quick to pick up my witty double entendres.

“This must have been what Duchamp was doing all of those years while he was on hiatus and playing chess—it’s like the Grand Duchampian gambit.”

“Yeah, like Duchamp is Art”

“Maybe he arranged for this sort of covert art police, that is in charge of his posthumous secret and now, the secret is starting to come to the surface, so they are starting to move the corpse to different locations so that no one will find it—very sci-fi like with the cloning and cryogenics to keep Art fresh.” I’m always quick to leap to the most probable conspiracy theory, even within our little fictional construction.
When the End of Time is Never Here

I have no concept of time, other than act of the sun rising and setting creates a “day”. I have no idea of how time works. I’m clueless as to the passage of minutes, and hours, months and years and honestly find this system to be an incredible nuisance. It irritates me when people are conscious of the time; I have very little patience for their logic.

I recently realized the reason for my utter loathing of time comes from my mother’s paranoia of being late to anything. Her neurosis created such anxiety in her that I would always have to be 10 minutes early to everything—swim team, birthday parties, school, doctor’s appointments, flute lessons, etc. Mind you, I have never been able to keep time. This symptom is not a developed psychosomatic reaction to my mother’s psychosis—I just can’t get it, no sensation to time’s passage, I have temporal paralysis. My actual dislike of time, however, stems from having to be constantly rushed in order to arrive at said location early every time, in order to wait, generally alone, until everyone else, whose mother didn’t have this fixation, arrived on time or late.
Oh, how I wanted to be late to something—just once. I fantasized about grand entrances into filled rooms, everyone’s head turning to see who walked in—the dreams of a child who stood in an empty room too many times waiting for someone else to arrive.

The summer after I graduated from college, I moved down to Georgia to live with my Gram for the summer. It was quite a culture shock. I had already spent a lot of time in Georgia before that actually, but I never had to work and live down there—I was always kind of passing through; up until that summer. I got a job at a national chain electronics warehouse and found myself for the first time truly out of place. My New York-Art-School-Existence had no home, no being in The South. In order to pass the time stocking shelves, I would naively try to incite thought provoking conversations with my fellow proles. I would say things like “time is relative you know” or “gravity doesn’t really exist”. My artistic conceptions of temporality and scientific principles were balked at—deeming me weird, and making me quite the pariah of the audio components section.
These experiences with time have made me understand the uselessness of structures. We create structures in order to contain our behaviors, or to demarcate social “norms”. Time becomes just another construction we create in order to judge and classify one another. My mother’s obsession with timeliness was just another symptom of her lack of self-confidence; if she were always on time then no one would be able to judge her.
A Strange Eclecticism

Today there is a young woman somewhere in this country working in a small gift shop. She is straightening shelves and dusting. She came into work two hours ago and she hasn’t had one customer yet. This is a typical day for her. She lives in a one-bedroom apartment, she has a cat and a small dog. She wants to be married someday soon but has trouble meeting men, especially ones that don’t have more baggage than she does. She eats a cheese sandwich everyday for lunch; she likes French’s mustard on the sandwich, not French mustard, but French’s yellow mustard. She likes the label and the small boy eating a hot dog in the print ads in Good Housekeeping. She wants to have a small boy who eats hot dogs with mustard on them too.

A middle-aged woman just walked into the gift shop. “Finally a customer,” she thinks. The shopper looks around strangely and begins sniffing the air that surrounds her; she looks up, as the sales girl is about to speak the words that have no meaning anymore.

“C... [an I help you?]”
Before she can mouth the rest, this strange woman looks up at her, incredulously and wide-eyed, then quickly turns and runs out of the store.

The young woman has worked in a variety of retail shops over her 15-year sales career, and strange people come with the business. When working in a grocery store during college she had one customer when she worked the express lane, an old woman, raisin-like in appearance with the blackest eyes ever made. She wore all white clothes and cotton gloves. The old woman would cautiously hand each of her items to the clerk, as they weren’t allowed to touch the conveyor belt at any point. There was a tacit relationship between the young checkout girl and the eccentric old woman—the girl understood the procedures of the old woman. She would have to punch in the price and then place each item carefully into their assigned bags, as directed through pointing by the raisin-lady. After paying for the items with moneys removed from cellophane packaging, the old woman would remove her gloves place them in a zip-top bag and discard them as she left the store. She was bizarre, but the young woman really liked her, she was inventive and exciting in her oddity, as if she was someone who would stand in the middle of an empty field with tin foil wrapped around her head.
so that she could pick up signals from outer space. She seemed logical in all her strangeness.

It’s two days later and the young woman is continuing to infinitely straighten shelves and dust. Her one-bedroom apartment and her pets are unchanged. She may have a date in the next week. The man who works further down the plaza, at the one-hour photo place, keeps saying hello to her as she gets out of her car in the morning. Two hours later the sniffing woman returns. She just walks in and right up to the woman who is positioned behind the counter.

She says, “I apologize for my behavior the other day. Are you aware of your power?”

The woman thinks: Oh no, it’s another one of those Jesus-Cult people that come around every summer. Boy, she’s early this year.

“I don’t understand?” she responds.

“I know you don’t, you have a very powerful aura, and you see things in your dreams. Don’t you?”

“See what” she asked.

“The future, the past, everything that has happened before you came here, things that will come after you move on.”

“I still don’t think I understand”

“You understand perfectly well, it’s just that no one else has ever seen what you know.”

“I have had a recurring dream all of my life that I have never understood.”
“It’s because it happened at a time that isn’t now, you had a different body. Do you understand now?”

“This is getting weird. What makes you think that you know all about me? Why did you run out of here the other day?”

“I was overwhelmed by the energy that you put off. I just had to leave—it essentially pushed me out the door. These are things that you already know though, this happens to you all of the time, things that you can’t quite explain, things that happen without any of your control over their outcome.”

The sales clerk stands in disbelief, still unconvinced of this strangeness being presented to her. Finally, out of frustration the middle-aged woman blurts out a statement, which solidifies any hanging doubts:

“I know about the street lamps.”

The young woman is floored, and doesn’t really understand what’s going on—suddenly everything turned very Twilight Zone.

“What? What are you doing? Why are you doing this? Maybe you should leave.”

“Don’t be scared, I’m not trying to disturb you, these are things that you should be made aware of, someone had to tell me, someday you will have to tell someone yourself, you’ve already seen that person, in your dreams. Just don’t be afraid of it. It’s a gift.”
The sun set that day, the day ended, she drove home in the spring’s early dusk, and turned off the street lamps as she drove under them, as she did the day before and as she will do everyday. Her date is going to be great.
My Understanding of God &
What if I Were a Teacup or Peanut Butter

I've always understood what the Enlightenment really stood for historically. Moreover, I love that Enlightenment in Buddhist conceptions takes its form in Western Philosophy as paradoxically—a break from God. I think that everyone comes to a point in their life where they have a moment of reckoning, where they may question their being, their existence. It might take place on a Ferris Wheel, in the operating room or like me between the stacks in the library.

As a pre-teen I would go to the city library after school and just pull books and read them. One day while sitting between the shelves, I opened my mind and truly questioned everything that I had ever been taught. This moment is welded in my mind; there is truly a decisive moment in which I came into a new consciousness.
But when the mind opens, and reveals the laws which traverse the universe, and make things what they are, then shrinks the great world at once into a mere illustration and fable of this mind. What am I? And what is? Asks the human spirit with a curiosity new-kindled, but never to be quenched... These works of thought have been the entertainments of the human spirit in all ages.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson
Harvard Divinity School Address 1838

To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men— that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost... Else, to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson
_Self-Reliance 1841_

Emerson created a metaphysical space for me to look onto my beliefs as they had been presented to me. I had an opportunity to look at my life, however little there had been that far, and to see that what I had been taught up until that time no longer fit into my conceptions of what _understanding_ was. Life opened up and I believe that if that moment did not occur, if that book had not fallen off the shelf in front of me I would not be the same person. Emerson’s Naturalist beliefs opened a door for me to reconsider something greater; he raised thinking to the highest level and connected God to the Earth. Since this time I have never had any reason to justify my beliefs to anyone nor have I ever doubted the idea of _thinking_ as the noblest of arts.

Energy connects us all, it connects me to the earth and the table to its base. We are constantly pulling and pushing electric impulses between our environment and ourselves. How different is
my composition to that of a teacup? Ultimately we create these belief systems to reconcile our questions of things we can’t explain—mainly death. What comes next for some people is more important than now. I am here, and I can’t be bothered Waiting for Godot.

It’s intriguing to me that people live so much longer now than they did twenty years ago. My grandmother is almost 88; she’s had cancer and two heart surgeries. Her friends have all died, and she keeps trying to find younger friends so that they outlive her. She has seen her child die. I believe that part of her longevity relies on a fear of death, and partly on her joy of knowledge and learning. She embodies the definition of atheist and the combination of fear and joy seems to keep her in balance. She chalks it up to a daily serving of peanut butter.
Bethany was walking home and forgot to look both ways. She’s dead now.

They were watching *Kids in the Hall*, as they got ready for the Continental. Julia was going to wear the black corset with her well-worn Docs, and some jeans cut off just below the knees to show that dangerous inch of flesh between boot and frayed edge. This was her uniform. Her job was to sleep with men that were more beautiful than she was.

“Can I borrow your Shiseido red?” she asked Beth.

“Yeah—uh, I think it’s on the sink. You almost ready?”

“Umm—yeah I just need to put on my eyes and stuff”

Beth tells her about her earlier conversation on the street

“...I think Jeff wanted us to stop by on our way out, are you up for that?”

“As long as we don’t have to talk to him all night, you know he’s going to want to come out with us—he creeps me out sometimes.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t have fucked him. Then it wouldn’t be so weird.”
“Who says that because you meet someone and have one moment of weakness, or desire or too much to drink—whatever it might be, that you then have to sleep with the guy again? I don’t mean to use the guy but I just don’t want to be tied down to him all night long.”

The girls walk down the block to an old warehouse, they take the elevator to the fourth floor, and there is a sign on Jeff’s door in china marker that simply reads *taking a walk in the clouds*. The girls climb the metal emergency exit ladder out onto the roof and find Jeff there in the faux den, comprised of curb furniture, with a beer in hand and lines in front of him, two removed already. He offers the others to Beth and Julia.

“Beers are in the fridge”

“Thanks”

“Want one Jules?”

“Sure—thanks”

“You Jeff?”

“Abso-fuckin-lutely”

Beth goes to an old fridge across the rooftop and pops open three beers for them. She sits down and snorts up two lines, in opposing nostrils.
“Thanks for stopping by first—I have a few *patrons* coming by soon—then we can leave”

Julia rolls her eyes on the inside, this is exactly what she didn’t want to happen, now they’re stuck there—waiting for Jeff—who she knows she’ll end up sleeping with by the end of the night.

God she hates herself for that—but it’s inevitable. He’ll fill her with coke, then the vodka, then more coke. He wrote her a letter once telling her how extraordinary she was. Beth thinks that he’s attractive, he is hot really, but Julia doesn’t want to *date* anyone, *especially* a coke dealer.

Beth’s pager goes off.

“Phone?” she asks Jeff.

“Downstairs in the kitchen.”

“Thanks.”

Jeff goes and grabs a bottle of vodka from the fridge and two frozen glasses, he sits next to Julia on the couch, pulls a box out from under the couch and gracefully arranges four more lines on the brass tray. Julia does two more lines as if there is a
rules saying that when offered free drugs one has no way of saying no—it’s only polite, right?

“We going to Bar-Bar tonight?” Jeff has no way of saying what he’s thinking so some entry into small talk is the only way to control any overwhelming urges.

“Guess so—whatever…I don’t care really. What did you do today?”

“I got some painting done, and I’ve decided to refinish the floors in my studio and bedroom, so I started moving everything out of the bedroom into the studio, you know, to make room, I started cleaning and stuff. You have to come over when I finish. It should look really great, its all cherry under the green paint and shellac.”

“Yeah, sure”

Moments of deafening silence are interrupted by Beth’s announcement that she needs to go home. They just took her brother to the emergency room because he rode his mountain bike through a glass door. She’s understandably shaken.

“You okay?” Julia asked. “Do you want me to go with you?”

She has her own motives for wanting to exit, and in a typical scenario Beth would have gotten the signal, but because of her obviously traumatized appearance she just answers back flatly, “no, no it’s okay I don’t know how long I’m going to be there…I’m gonna go…see you tomorrow.” She runs down the ladder and out to the street.
Great, now what? Julia thinks to herself. A few moments of continued silence pass and she just races to the unavoidable, and climbs into Jeff’s lap. She never really thinks about the fact that he makes beautiful art, that’s just an accessory to his attractiveness. She never really listens to him—he’s well read and educated, he thinks deeply, but again just another point towards his cuteness factor. When Julia is older, she will realize what she missed. She will be in her early forties, and will see where she went wrong. He obviously had feelings for her, evidenced in that letter he wrote; he saw something in her that she couldn’t yet see herself. All she could think of is how he just wanted what every other guy wanted from her, and that all of the thoughts that she had floating about in her head we’re only there to be stifled in order to remain attractive. Her mother always told her that girls are better seen than heard. It took years of therapy to undo that spell.
My Talents are not a Private Enterprise

“I don’t take organized politics that seriously really, I mean I am grateful for my *rights*, and I know what privileges living in this country affords me; but politics is something different. There are political structures in everything that we do—that’s something to be taken seriously,” she said to him.

“Then why bother to do anything if you have no control over what happens, it’s like you see things as inexorable, or something,” he responds.

“Inexorable? Someone’s been spending a lot of time in the john reading the dictionary.”

He rolls his eyes as she continues in defense of her position.

“I’m not talking about like—predetermination, I just think that there are structures in everything, there is no free will. It’s all just some complete fallacy that we’ve been programmed into believing that as Americans we have some inalienable rights, when in reality the only rights that we can exercise are those that fall under policies and laws. If
we truly had free will then marshalcy would reign. Because we police ourselves does not make us self-governing—I guess is what I’m saying, it’s an inconsistency.”

“I just don’t think that this plays into art, we make art whether there is a political structure or not, this is what philosophers have escaped to for centuries. Its personal nature, its purity. I don’t think that anyone has the same passion about accounting. I’ve never heard my accountant say, ‘I just live for tax season it makes me fell alive, I would give anything to do taxes, if only someone would pay me to do them’.”

“Right, but—how is it that we became artists, we had the choice, we still have the choice to be an accountant. But we’re not.”

“All I know is that I am so naive as to how anything works, especially the political structures of the art world, and I see everyone my age just so completely perplexed by selling art. We’re desperate, and we all think that we are the next big thing, but we’re all so afraid that we’ll never be anything. Its depressing, and all of the musings over the structures of political bindings just weaves in and out of the same larger capitalistic structure—but art isn’t suppose to be about that—its suppose to be free from that. It’s not. The only way you’re ever going to sell art is to make art that people want to buy, or that people that tell people what to buy think is worth buying. It’s a game, a bidding game; where we as artists have no voice. Choices—yeah we have choices, to drop out and work in retail, to write crap, to make crap or to sell crap—it’s like John Cusack in Say Anything…” she is quickly clipped with his enthusiastic interruption.
“Right…the dinning room table scene…

‘I don’t want to sell anything, buy anything, or process anything as a career. I don’t want to sell anything bought or processed, or buy anything sold or processed, or process anything sold, bought, or processed, or repair anything sold, bought, or processed. You know, as a career, I don’t want to do that’…”

“You’re useless knowledge of movie trivia makes me hot.”

“What—ever…”

“When I really think about why I make art, it’s a simple answer really-- I can honestly say that I have failed at most everything, and I’m rather lazy and useless really. I’m not smart enough to be a good philosopher and not really dumb enough to be a good cashier. Therefore, as far as careers go art seems to be a good middle ground between cashier and philosopher. I’m a good artist—but I’m not really a great artist, I mean I make these photographs that some people like, most people just try to figure out what blurry blob a, b, and c are.”

“It’s not like you’re untalented. I mean, wouldn’t it be awful to be useless and untalented,” he says in a reassuring tone, trying to convince her as much as he is himself.

“The world is full of talented people who aren’t able to use their talents. That’s like my greatest fear—it’s everyone’s greatest fear. Its like Kafka-land, you just can’t escape your mind—I just keep making these pictures and printing them, making, printing, soon I’ll have a warehouse of
pictures that I will slowly drown in. I'll die alone in a warehouse suffocated by the product of my own inadequate talents."

“Are you sure you couldn’t be a successful actress? You are such a drama queen about everything...

“I still have hope, but I assume that in five years if nothing happens I’ll probably give up. Art’s a lot of work; people don’t seem to understand that.”
Every year we would go out to my uncle's farm in the spring, and he would have barn cats that just had kittens. Every year I would pick out my kitten and name him and then just as we would be leaving my father would tell me that I couldn't take it home. He hated cats, and loved making comments like "the only cats I enjoy are the ones inside of sacks in 10 feet of water" not very nice for a five year old to hear. One year, after having witnessed this time and again, my grandmother finally let me have a kitten to live at her house, another rural home.

My family is notorious for not naming their animals, and I really wonder how they named any of us humans. They do this thing where the animal's name is a manifestation of their physical appearance coupled with their disposition; essentially a word play like everything else in their weird little world. Various names are Shadow, a black cat that follows my uncle wherever he goes; or Fatso, the explanation is obvious. My favorite was "Orange Cat", who didn't receive his formal name until his retirement.
years when then he became “Ol’ Yeller”. His fur had faded from Orange to Yellow in the twilight of his life.

Considering this aversion to designation, my Grandmother, in contradiction, insisted on naming my cat. It was a fairly generic black cat with white paws, who I aptly wanted to christen “Boots”, however my grandmother insisted on “Pal.” So, “Pal n’ boots,” as he was referred to, lived at my Gram’s and I would visit him on weekends.

This house holds many memories for me, I remember reading The Poetics of Space, and going through my memory house—it couldn’t not be my Gram’s farm house; that is where the world opened to me. I look at it now, and I see it in so many different layers: the baby grand piano at the bottom of the stairs, the fuzzy velveteen wall paper in the extra bedroom with the enormous red cabbage roses, and seeing my Great-Uncle Morley take off his leg in there.

I always slept on the couch in the living room; it was one of those chenille couches with the down cushions that smelled like musty geese and wrapped in mustard colored fuzz. I was the lone person who slept downstairs. One night the house across the street, the only other house within walking distance, burnt to the ground while I slept right through it 20 yards away.
My father was a sporting man, he was a deer hunter and an angler. Every weekend he would always have a list of tasks to perform, given by my grandmother. But at night, he would go fishing in the lake near by. One morning I woke up and went into the downstairs bathroom—I ran out screaming bloody murder, ranting “there’s a monster in the bathtub”. My mother ran down to comfort me, not an unusual happenstance actually—I was prone to both sleepwalking and waking nightmares. This time however was neither of these—my father had put a 12-pound trout in the tub, much to my surprise.

Then there was the drawer closest to the window in my grandmother’s dresser that held a set of jacks and a few old spinning tops. Aside from Scrabble and jigsaw puzzles bought at yard sales, these were the only “toys” in the house. The drawer only held a mystique because it was the drawer next to the drawer that I wasn’t allowed to go into. I was an only child and too innocent or more likely too ignorant to ever disobey orders, so although I wanted to—with an aching desire—I never went into the drawer. Later in my life I found out why I was proscribed; as my grandmother kept aspirin and Ex-Lax in there and once my older twin cousins found the chocolate candied Ex-Lax and ate it all. The rest of the story is self-evident.

One of the many layers to my memory of the farmhouse being, in my view, my father’s karmic retribution for my lack of personal cat ownership. Which was having to mow
Gram’s two acres every weekend of the spring, summer, and fall, which disappointingly in Western New York State is only about 14 weeks.

“Pal n’ boots” bit it one night—hit by the one car that came rambling down the country back-road in the hours of darkness. I remember my father going out to the street with a shovel to pick him up in order to bury him. I still wonder (and wouldn’t put it past him) if he killed the poor, cute, helpless, joyful kitten for pleasure, or for spite. In any case—that summer he had to spend any few free weekend moments (after mowing) working on a new screen porch with my grandmother’s friend Jim.

Jim, then in his late sixties, moved not as slowly as say, peeling paint, but not quite as quickly as a snail. He owned a movie theater, and I remember going to see the Lady and the Tramp there. Jim has Alzheimer’s now, and lives in a nursing home in Florida; they had to put him there after he went through three cars in a six-week period. I think he just kept turning, hit-or-miss, until finally he would hit his own driveway; eventually he hit his house quite literally.

My father is in his mid-seventies now, and has a very simple life. His new wife wants to get a cat.
The Questioning Must Stop

Before I arrived at graduate school, I had to wear glasses sometimes to read—if my eyes got tired. After the first year of grad school my prescription quintupled. I can’t see a damn thing, and I worry about it. My shrink said that most people’s eyesight changes while in graduate school, and again during post-doc, because of the excessive reading that has to be done. But I’m the only one with new glasses.

I went to graduate school after realizing that I wasn’t going to just be discovered on a subway in New York and asked to have a show at Andrea Rosen, just because they liked my shirt that day. So I thought that grad school would be a good way to make some work and to formalize my intentions—I was an artist, no matter how much anyone doubted me, or I doubted myself. I also went so that I could figure out what it was that I knew how to do well.
I went to photo school for no other reason than the art theory school wouldn’t take me, and they would. I thought of this as the first sign as to how I would determine my future talents. I was wrong. I am a horrible photographer. I’m not a bad artist, but I am definitely a bad photographer. I have very little interest in the technology of the camera operations or chemistry of the processes. However, as a device, I think I can use it to do something interesting. Anyhow, my conceptual ideas as to how to make-work were not very well respected as a method of creation. Photographers like to take pictures all the time it seems. I hate taking a camera with me anywhere, I hate photographing, and I hate being photographed, yet I do all of these things to get my work out. For instance, I’ve just finished writing a book about a toaster and a toothbrush—yet I’m in photography school.

I understand why people don’t get my work. I understand the inaccessibility of conceptual work, nevertheless I’m not sure how else to make art. I like to think of myself as a scientist, who sees things only in their abstract conception. In order to share her theory, she must create a formula to represent it concretely. Even though she has made it material, only a few people will ever understand it in both theory and practice.
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The magic of photography is metaphysical. What you see in the photograph isn’t what you saw at the time. The real skill of photography is organized visual lying.

-Terence Donovan
An Argument

We tend to view history as a straight line with many parallel tangents. What if there is no longer a singular history, but rather many histories crossing and doubling back to create individual ones? Conceivably, we would all design our own history by choosing the appropriate events that would map our progress, as a race, as a religion, as a sex. The designing of a unique history is a result of post-modern thought. The themes of mapping and lack of critical distance begin to take form in these new ideas of non-history. Rather than place ourselves in a period, we are content to be categorically present. What would happen if the telephone wires were crossed along the way? What if the resulting form of “history” in a thousand years is a record encoded with layers of selective compound histories? What would the artifacts look like, and what would they signify about this perpetual present? I propose to create these artifacts.
To chose the elements carefully, in order to construct an analysis of what it is that I have done and what my intentions were in the construction of these documents as artifacts, I will try to elaborate on the steps that were taken— from there to here.

I suspect that a philosophical analysis is in order to evaluate the condition that creates a loss of history or the conflation and re-ordering of time and history. I must turn to Baudrillard, in this instance, to be far more illuminative than I could possibly be.

In *The Illusion of the End*, Baudrillard sets us up in a quantum conundrum: if we are to lose history in the fury of a time-space continuum the result will be the simulation of meaning caught inside a web of information and technology (for some the *Matrix*, and at this turn the sci-fi aspects become potentially hazardous).

However, I would rather begin an extraction of how time and its acceleration through the stages of industrialization to computerization took us to land in a time/period (a troublesome indicator by its definition) of phantom history with no end in sight.

The acceleration of (technology, media, economic, political, sexual) exchanges has propelled us into an escape velocity, with the result that we have flown free of the referential sphere of the real and of history. Each event, each narrative, each image gets endowed with the simulation of an infinite trajectory. Every political, historical, cultural fact possesses a kinetic energy which wrenches it from its own space and propels into hyperspace where... it loses all meaning. (Baudrillard 1995, pp.1-2)
The loss of the real through the conflation of image and symbol can be easily and readily made in our time. As Baudrillard likens the process to cosmological concepts, the acceleration of communication alone has thrown us into an unstoppable forward flight. The landmarks of delineation between what is now and what is then have been removed. The temporal space of this instance is all we have perspective of; history no longer marks our way. History has become a victim of temporal failure—caught in the crux of contradictory speed and deceleration of time.

So far as history is concerned, its telling has become impossible because that telling (re-citatum) is, by definition, the possible recurrence of a sequence of meanings. Now, through the impulse of total dissemination and circulation, every fact becomes atomic, nuclear, and pursues its trajectory into the void. In order to be disseminated to infinity, it has to be fragmented like a particle. This is how it is able to achieve a velocity of no-return, which carries it out of history once and for all... (History) is no longer able to transcend itself, to envisage its own finality, to dream of its own end; it is being buried beneath its own immediate effect, worn out in special effects, imploding into current events. (Baudrillard 1995, p.2-4)

The phenomenon of non-history, the loss of the story in the telling of history, or the obliteration of a large overarching narrative is the starting point for this work; if the stage is not set with this elementary concept then the rest of the work is flawed. When the work begins in a time of illusory history, the idea of creating one's own history is a believable progression. In a later Baudrillard article, he writes about Personalization or the Smallest Marginal Difference, where the selling of commodities in the current cultural landscape deals with the disjunction of the “production of differences”, that through marketing toward an individual, we are all looking to be part of being different, and through marginalization and spot-marketing even the most hierarchically complex structures can be catered to all levels, from the ultra-wealthy to the disenfranchised.
So here is my turn, an escape from personalization in the sense that my BMW has fawn leather rather than ebony leather interior: what if common items that could be marketed across this cultural spectrum were turned into personal artifacts that signified very specific things about *me*? Their representations, replicated quite literally, in keepsake images embody rather specific moments of my life, my understanding of self, or my life as an artist. The items themselves however are indistinguishable from millions of others—identical to them in shape, form, and function. Yet, the toothbrush, however disposable, is still a symbol of my ontological awareness, the toaster tells a story about the life of an artist, and my reading glasses still question my place in the academic world.

If Baudrillard surmises that The End is illusory, to which I would agree, then a conclusion seems antithetical. So, let me begin here.
I Thought I Said the Questioning Must Stop: Answering the Questions that were Denied Rhetoric

In trying to figure out the mysteries of the universe, as I know it, and as I see it—I’ve begun to challenge my own perceptions. Conventional wisdom says that we are all part of a time, or to break it down—we exist on a certain level, and reside in both a physical as well as metaphysical space. I don’t mean to imply that my grip on reality is slipping as much as I have just begun to question how these two existences have been presented and represented to me.

I’m quite sure that if I were a carney, things would seem quite different than they do now. Just as if I was a stockbroker, my view of the world would radically differ from what my perceptions of my life, my goals, how I feel, my beliefs are now. These things are not independent of environment. As a manager of a retail-framing store, I realized that who I had been was not what I was supposed to be. There needed to be a dramatic reshaping of
my life in order to fit my perception. Where am I going with this? — I have made changes to become what I believe I am.

My mind begins to hum a song:

And you may find yourself living in a shotgun shack
And you may find yourself in another part of the world
And you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile
And you may find yourself in a beautiful house,
With a beautiful wife
And you may ask yourself—Well...How did I get here?

-Talking Heads, Once in a Lifetime, 1984

I have asked myself these questions repeatedly—in an effort to examine and establish a basis for the clearly unfounded feeling of who I am, what am I doing, and where are these two things to take place? I have come to an understanding of self through a process of denial. I am not a rocket scientist, a machinist, a welder, an elementary school art teacher, a housekeeper, a CEO, an accountant... I am an artist. Although these questions are important—maybe it's important to examine the less substantial issues of existence like fame and money.

That is where I am now.
Seeing how I still struggle with who I am, I may as well struggle with what occupies me as an artist: what makes me an artist? I am an artist because I have no other choice; I believe that it is my only choice actually. My life hasn't prepared me for anything else. I didn't know that I had any other choices really. So, I have deemed myself artist but what is that really? If I make art then I am an artist. Do I make art? It's questionable really—I say its art. I'd lie even if I didn't think it was. So let's say I make things that I say is art.

Am I artistic? Again questionable—by whose measure do I posses talent? There really isn't a manual or job description for “artist”, there aren't any standards or practices for artists, so I don't think that I can reasonably answer that question objectively. I will say though that my mother thought that I was talented, and I would pair talented with artistic, they are imprecisely synonymous. Moreover, I did win an essay contest sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution when I was 11, I believe that I was awarded a $25.00 check; I suppose that could be my first commission. I now have two degrees in fine art but that isn't really a gauge of artistic ability or talent as much as it is a general indication that I am able to cheat the university system out of a sheet of paper in exchange for a whole lot of money.

To recap (over-simplify): as far as artistic ability goes, although traditionally it is a matter of judgment as to the quality of an artist, at this time I believe it is a moot point because of
the lack of objectivity in the field. If it turns out I make a lot of money then that will show a level of success in the field, but it is less a measure of ability than my mother telling me that I am talented.

With that said, I believe I am in the proper position to analyze what it is that I have done in making a project that both mocks what I do as an artist, as well as explores the theses that are of interest to me as an artist (of course one being mockery itself).

As I stated at the head of this document, I see this as an exploration of a perpetually present time. I feel we are caught in the hangover of post-structuralism and post-modernism. As a result, thought, art, and music are on a constant loop—which keeps revolving at an increased speed. The past forty years of stylistic differences has been condensed into an ever-increasing hybridization of what is referred to as “retro”. And now, the increased RPMs on this stylistic loop coupled with an ever increasing lack of perspective to it takes us to “now” which is all there is.

These factors land me here- in now, able to explore history as a phenomena. Post-structuralism has led us to question the program of history in general. The coupling of loss of history with the loss of critical distance in an accelerated culture is what I am referring to as a perpetual present. Within this phenomenon, we can look at this loss of an over-
arching history that would encompass man/woman/person-kind as a condition of a non-
historical time. By non-history I am referring to the lack of an over-arching narrative, as a
result the idea of creating a recording of a personal history seems to me an obvious
conclusion. Which is where this project truly begins—based on the aforementioned
presumptions, one can not only record a personal history, but create artifacts or
representations of that history from within a perpetual present.

I am fascinated by the way, a snapshot can make “a brief or transitory view”
permanent, capturing “mere segments” of life that could be easily forgotten and
freezing them for inspection… I have a love/hate relationship with my family
photographs. They speak to me about the hope, joys, and sufferings of my family,
but I am aware of how much was left out of our documentation… “Family
Collections (of Photographs) are never just memories. Their disconnected points
offer glimpses of many possible pasts, and yet, in our longing narratives, for a way
of telling the past that will make sense in the present we know, we strive to
organize these traces to fill in the gaps.” (Novak from Mavor 1999 p.14)

There seems to be a level of importance given to the documentation of personal
memories. This is a fascinatingly banal inquiry to me through the transformation of the
personal into the universal. When stories and artifacts become representative for
something larger than its object value, this is where the personal becomes profound. I
think that we all have the same stories. Like a sonata with variations, we as humans tell the
same stories, have the same things, and our pictures are interchangeable except for the
minor inconsistencies of human distinction.
Arthur Danto, in *Art, Evolution, and History*, from his collection titled “The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art”, discusses the intersections of not just art or art periods, but the evolution of the artist within history:

Vassari might not have inferred that “education and environment” produce immense effects, since no one who painted at the beginning of the period as he did, were he instead to have been born toward the end, even with the same innate endowment. This would be generally true: it is difficult to suppose Leonardo would have painted the Virgin and Saint Anne were he to have grown up in the East Village—or that Rothko would have painted his vague moody rectangles in the ateliers of Louis XV. (Danto p.198)

I believe that we are as artists, as people caught in the 21st century limbo, are content to be categorically present, caught in a present with no future. This symptomatic disenfranchisement is conditional to our encapsulated period of nothing. Can we go no further? I believe we can and through this project, I have come to an understanding of my history. My answers to my own questions are unique, and I believe that is where time and history intersect—in the personal. How could Rothko make beautifully misty rectangles in the gilt age? How could I make daguerreotypes in the 21st century? Anything is possible at this intersection. The confusion of time and history leads to limitless possibilities, a point of creation—freedom from past and future. I am not alone in this thought.

In speaking about Jennifer Bolande’s photograph *Milk Crown* (1987-1988), a photograph of a sculptural piece, cast porcelain to be exact, that appears to be a drop of milk
splashing back up to form a crow-like shape in its wake, Jeffery Batchen begins to sketch a critique of photography’s position in both time and history.

While the photograph confirms the separation of past and present as a natural fact, Bolande’s multidimensional citation returns time (and with it photography) to artifice and the prospect of change. Neither sculpture nor photograph, more a movement between the two, *Milk Crown* is an equally undecidable staging point between past and future. The distinction between these temporal markers—the difference that makes photography possible—has become a question rather than a statement. If nothing else, the advent of post-photography is an uncomfortable reminder that the present we all embody, the photographic presence that is the very guarantee of our being, is no more than one ephemeral effect within history’s own ongoing and inexorable process of reproduction and erasure. (Batchen p.127)

What I have begun to question through this project and these writings is not just the fiction of history, nor the falsity of document, but rather their meeting point. The fusion of history, time, and fiction has created a unique condition that is called upon in the early twenty-first century. In *now*, we have the opportunity to both realize and fictionalize our history, by cheating time through falsification. I suppose that since photography’s invention this has been true, when we look at the portrait hoax of Hippolyte Bayard’s “self portrait”. Bayard’s “death” marks the birth of truth in falsity within the photograph at the second year of its inception. There is a logic to creating a work that both expresses a personal narrative but is still layered with the universal: early twenty-first sentiment and the exploitation of technology and consumer culture.
Throughout the text, the juxtaposition of technology and history with relation to art is a running theme. The project’s main premise relies on this as a foundation. The connections are obvious in the daguerreotypes—they are visually symbolic manifestations of useful technologies represented in antiquated process photography, framed in an aestheticized context. I have well chronicled this in Misadventures.

However, to speak more connectedly to the whole project, I must explain the representations in the film “Windy Road Film”. In the context of the film, the objects represent their actual use values; they are just typical toasters, glasses, and ladders that people use to toast bread with, read with and climb. However, the film itself was meant to be caught in a space-time gap of the past thirty years. There is no specific reference (well there actually is one—a continuity flaw) that alerts you to the actual date that this is taking place; to where the movie is “set”. The ambiguity of this woman “caught” in past-postmodern limbo is essential to reiterate this relationship of object, use value, and contextually to art.

Through the stories illuminated in Misadventures, we are clued into the parallel personal and symbolic nature of these items—but what I would like to focus on at this time is the implications of creating a timeless moment with relation to a sense of non-history and the confusion of time and history.
In the film, the woman hints to the fact that she is at a place where nothing is the same, but nothing is different—it is a time marked by consumerism and disorientation for her. In the dialogue with her husband about their up-coming vacation, she begins to question her existence. There is a reckoning that begins. This “ship” that she asks about, is representative of her consciousness and truly by questioning its existence starts a chain reaction. It is itself the awakening of her existential being. The answer to where the ship goes—“nowhere it just falls off into nothingness”; she pushes farther “Nothing—ness? Is that even a real word? It seems the ness makes it an oxymoron.”

The term nothingness to explain a state of being was unacceptable to her. To question the ontology of nothing and to use a word game in an order of approach is a reference to Heidegger and the question of being; and paradoxically to nothing.

Every inquiry is a seeking...guided beforehand by what is sought. So the meaning of Being must always be available to us in some way... We do not know what ‘Being’ means. But even if we ask, ‘What is Being?’, we keep within an understanding of the ‘is’, though we are unable to fix conditionally what that ‘is’ signifies. (Heidegger from Kearny/Rainwater p.27)

Man, what a hoot he is; and by is I mean his formerly living state of being—and by mean I mean the signification of the referent state of he.

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2 -ness the suffix most usually attached to adjectives and past participles to form substantives expressing a state or condition; as defined by the Oxford English dictionary.
The condition that causes this woman to have an existential awakening is what I would call "the new problem that has no name"; and quite honestly it does have a name, or a concept which could be considered the "have it all generation" which I belong to. In the hangover of the feminist revolution, we as women have yet to truly be made equals to men—the sort of back firing of the "revolution" is that now, we are not only mothers and housewives, but also executives, senators, teachers and astronauts. We have liberation, we have choices, we can be anything, but now equality in the home is where the new battle is fought. Women are still expected to take on the "traditional" roles within in the walls of the domestic—as well as have successful and rewarding careers, and create and raise a family.

As an educated woman who is heterosexual and married and who does want a family and a career, I am struck by the sheer question of how? How does a woman create a balance between these contradictory roles? We find life compromised when being pulled in five directions at once yet men are held to the same expectations they were five hundred years ago. So here we are, here I am, a woman who is part of a generation of she-women. In many ways, I feel lucky to be part of this time; I have opportunities, and I have possibilities. We define who women are now, which is why it is so quizzical that we still look to men and male structures to create and define ourselves.
I propose that there is an undercurrent of a new revolution brewing, a communication revolution, in all media, and in this film I target women’s magazines, and their relationship to women’s self-esteem. The book *You Just Don’t Understand*, by Deborah Tannen, engages an exploration of communication and linguistic patterns of men and women and how they differ, both structurally and emotionally. One of the most enlightening parts of the book dissects the socio-linguistic urge for men to offer suggestions to women’s problems. When likening a women’s problem or emotional struggle to fixing a “broken bicycle or stalling engine” I was immediately engaged. This is the antithetical point of origin for women’s magazines: isolate the problem then throw material solutions at it. The basis of the women’s magazine is to, on a monthly basis, divide and kvetch about your problems. There are no resolutions, only suggestions. Suggestions meant to infect a woman’s confidence and self-esteem. Many magazines *do* represent a counterculture (?) of real people that are not represented in what would be considered mainstream magazines. Conversely, when I look at the newsstands and see not just YM’s prom edition but *Cosmo Girl* and *Teen Vogue*, it seems the indoctrination of young women into paranoid consumers is happening at a younger and younger age and it is frightening. Moreover, these magazines are actually being cross-promoted and advertised in schools and classrooms for increased revenue that will actually in part be returned to after-school programs. As I said in *Misadventures*, you really don’t have to have much exposure to these magazines,
the information is everywhere—throughout all media, women through their own devices, set in place by men in advertising over a hundred plus years ago, will continue to be their own subjugators.

At what age does a girl child begin to review her assets and count her deficient parts? When does she close the bedroom door and begin to gaze privately into the mirror at contortionist angles to get a view from the rear, the left profile, the right, to check the curve of her calf muscle, the shape of her thighs, to ponder her shoulder blades and wonder if she is going to have a waistline? And pull in her stomach, throw out her chest and pose again in a search for the most flattering angle, making a mental note of what needs to be worked on, what had better develop, stay contained, or else? At what age does this process begin...that will occupy some portion of her waking hours quite possibly for the rest of her life? When is she allowed to forget that her anatomy is being monitored by others, that there is a standard of desirable beauty, of individual parts, that she is measured against by boyfriends, loved ones, strangers? (Brownmiller p. 25)

I suspect that upon reading this chapter and *Action News at 11*, people might be confused as to how these stories fit in with the rest of the chapters. They are written in a different voice and narrative structure than the rest of the chapters. I'm not sure how they evolved that way; they just did. This chapter does chronicle a moment in my life, a collection of real events that are littered with fictions, much like the remainder of the text. I would characterize them as narrative documents, I suppose. This would actually characterize the whole rather than the parts.
Not that this is an unusual stance; I think most will come to the agreement that we are all just personifications of ourselves, even in everyday life. I am hard-pressed to find a better example for this investigation than the documentary *Gimme Shelter*, which chronicles the 1969 summer concert tour of the Rolling Stones, and includes their most infamous concert at Altamont. In *Gimme Shelter*, we not only see the performance of the people we know to be the Rolling Stones, but we see their stage selves, their on-camera selves, their this-is-just-us selves, and quite possibly their truest selves when watching the footage of a man being killed in the audience of the Altamont concert. My point being that there is a transformation from stage to screen from pen to paper, that may hold truth, but only as much as cheesecloth holds water. Just as performance is elevated to art through personae—so is fiction.

I am all of the characters; I am the sales girl, the psychic, and the raisin lady. I have to say that this is my favorite story in the collection for many reasons, mainly because it was difficult structurally to construct an ambiguity between the positions of each of the characters, similar to the balancing act that the Stones shuffled through *Gimme Shelter*, only to crack when life impeded.

The topic of aura itself takes on a different conception through this chapter. I am not indicating some type of wholeness crafted from parts, especially in a sort of Buddhist sense—we are all connected; all of our selves through aura—but rather
we are all of these facades, and that this ambiguity of personification is aura—the fiction of it all. The craft of personification is aura—we all have these many possibilities.
The Defense of Modulus\textsuperscript{1}—In Conclusion

Within this document I believe that I have constructed a set of details—some are fact, some are fiction, most are just my stories. At times, my stories are very personal and sometimes they are universal. I have told my stories through a variety of methods, some more conventional than others. I call myself an artist so that there is a point of origin from which I can begin to subvert my own work. The role of the artist is multifaceted, but if I were forced to describe my own role, I would say that I was part jester, part shaman, part corrupt-politician, a mirror, chaos, and a chronicler. Everything is a lie no matter how true it might be.

My job as an artist is to craft relationships. I convert an object into a symbol. My desire to recode history into a record of my own choice is limited in scope. I do not expect the documents that I have made to stand in place of “authentic artifacts”. With that said, I don’t believe in the authority of classification that would deem such a thing an “authentic
artifact” nor do I believe that I am absent of power or authority any more or less than another being. My desire comes from the challenge to create objects that possess something higher or nobler than that of legitimacy. My desire is to transform the ordinary object into that which holds power once again; that which creates history rather than represents history. My desire is to manufacture aura.

What do I mean by manufacture aura?

My original aspiration was to create objects, rather, manufacture objects that held a transcendental quality. I have come to realize however that the story that connects the object, the design of interpretation, is what will now transform an ordinary object into one that holds aura. For example: Duchamp’s *Paris Air*, air trapped in a vial sent from Paris to New York. The object value is that of a vial, similar to a million other pharmaceutical vials. However, the story or the interpretation of the object becomes the point of the creation of that vial’s aura. The aura is intangible—non-physical, non-replicable, except through thought. By understanding the complexity and the simplicity, essentially the duality of object and idea—that *point of transformation* is how I envision aura.

From the object value alone, this appears to be a very small work, simple—a book, some images, and a very strange film. However, these are our conventional perceptions of the
items that are represented. What I have created intrinsically has immense personal value. I have crafted a thought process. What results is the manufactured material aberration of this practice. Although it is a representation of one, I believe that it is equally a representation of many. Plural currency is in some way a reflection of this process. Let me explain a bit…

All of the objects and stories told have an obvious definition as a book, a photo, a ladder—but they also have compound symbolic referents to that which is not visible from the object alone. These common everyday items, contained within the medium—glasses, a pencil, a teacup—have currency. Quite literally, they are mass-produced and advertised, bought and sold commodities.

But what else do they represent? These are some of the most over thought questions in twentieth century art: Is their use value changed in their new aestheticized transplantation? Now that they have been re-framed or re-positioned, how do we look at them?

I have created a personal narrative associated with each object pictured. I could go on trying to explain how each object manifests itself and what symbolic versus literal value it has, but I would rather leave you with this road map, in order to begin questioning how and why each thing has been transformed. I believe that this is what the project is
ultimately about—not my interpretation of signifier to signified but rather the threads that hold the relationship together. The web that was weaved during the process of making this piece is what was crafted, not the resulting objects. By calling the items relics I have created sanctity and a history for them. They are representatives or placeholders for the process itself. They are not the work.

In the end, this project is about aura, but not necessarily about reconnecting what Walter Benjamin separated from art in 1935. I have no preconceptions that this project has actually been successful in reconnecting art and mechanical reproduction. I do not think that we can go back and put the pieces back together again, nor do I think we should. Conversely and adaptively, I do believe that beauty and aura can now populate objects of mass production. Moreover, in looking toward a future where history has very little distance and a revisionist memory—I believe that the re-induction of aura is an interesting first step into a new process of aura-fying making objects and/or art meaningful again.

Through the redirection and reconstruction of mechanical reproduction, from within a Marxist dictum, we have destroyed the ability to create without questioning the essence of the authenticity of our work.

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony, to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive durations ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. One might subsume the eliminated elements in the
term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. (Benjamin, p.221)

A lack of critical distance has caused a loss of historical perspective, the illusion of an over-arching narrative has dissipated, and the aim of history has become shortsighted. With that said, I believe that art has reconfigured itself—by being displaced in time or period—it is no longer the authority or possession of an object as much as the transforming narrative that recreates and transfigures the object. By taking a vernacular object and injecting a personal narrative into its symbolic nature, this transfigures the object from a manufactured good into what I would call "a relic of a personal nature". The duality of manufactured and personal in this age is emblematic of a perpetual present, a post-history, and subsequently a further step toward dispelling of the myth of The End.
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