Every inch of the way

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EVERY INCH OF THE WAY

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I, Justin Myer Staller, hereby grant permission to the Wallace Memorial Library of RIT to reproduce my thesis in whole or in part. Any reproductions will not be for commercial use or profit.
The purpose of my thesis is to document the elements present in travel specific to a touring band. It is an intense exercise in self-reflection as I move through pivotal experiences in my life and make attempts to properly document my remembrance of specific moments. This thesis combines my experiences with touring, traveling, punk rock, and impermanence: documenting my "youth" playing music across the country and the love hate relationship that is caught up in the bi-products of creating music.

All elements of the punk rock subculture can be found while on tour. A touring punk rock band sleeps on floors because of low paying performances, travels by van, makes their own merchandise, and plays music that is filled with an independent spirit. The ideas of touring are filled with romanticized hardships and difficulties. The more unsuccessful the trip is, the more substance it holds as legend. The reality of hardship is seen only in the events surrounding performance, and here it becomes difficult to separate the personal moment from the historical one. My work deals with documenting my singular take on legendary images, ideals, and subjects of the punk rock legacy. It is in these moments that I see legend in the first person and it is my personal experience that brings truth to myth.

My concept is deeply based on the power multiple image composite photography has on the artist's ability to recreate a unique visual memory. When more than one photograph is used to represent a single scene the artist creates a relationship with the viewer that forces them to deal with each frame singularly to see the whole. Hockney said, "If you put six pictures together, you look six times, which is more what it is like to look at someone." The large size and the manner in which the image is re-represented is much more in line with the recollection of the scene than the reality. The spontaneous act of photographing is matched by allowing the memory of the scene to control its' reconstruction.

Punk rock music has been my one chance to live a life devoted to art. It presents a set of ideals surrounded by individuality, creativity, and freedom. While documenting my travels, the only constant influence was that of performing, listening to, and living music. Punk rock music is so abstract in meaning and content that it has the ability to capture the totality of tone and mood. On tour,
the country is seen through the sounds coming out of the van speakers and the landscape outside the windows. Highways, grungy clubs and even more dilapidated punk houses bombard the senses just as the signs for Walmart, strip malls and restaurants do. Especially on tour I realize that punk rock culture is as empty as the scene it is working against; big business and consumer culture. It is possible to be disappointed with the status of the punk rock scene while still remaining a firm believer in the music because it's message is internalized, personal, and sacred.

I began my investigation into the connections between my work and other visual artists by reexamining my own personal library. Jem Cohen, David Hockney and Cynthia Connelly all work in ways similar to my process and concept. Both Jem Cohen’s and Cynthia Connelly’s close connection to the world of punk rock, photographing and filming the individuals, performances, and daily life of the scene, had a great affect on my visual take on punk rock. Their images are visually presented as a backstage pass. Cynthia’s photograph of Ian MacKaye (Fig. 1) in a hospital bed is a combination of an iconic punk rock participant documented using photographic composites. The photograph’s flush composition helped shape the way I put images together. Connolly states that, "photography is all about building a stockpile of footage that can be used later together in groupings."² Being allowed to follow her instincts insures that she does not become overwhelmed by photography. She is more interested in how a space will play in future thought. This type of working method is very evident in my body of work and is why over sixty such scenes were shot and then narrowed down to eight.
The film “Instrument” by the New York based artist Jem Cohen is another major work in my collection. The majority of his work deals with similar aspects of "place." The more he traveled around the world the easier it was to find places in one city that could be interchanged with another. "Instrument", a film collaboration with the Washington D.C. band Fugazi, became the real core of my conceptual findings and explores his relationship to transient place. “I documented the band because I document things that are important to me,” says Cohen. Both Connelly and Cohen document punk rock from the inside and have the ability to show visual truth without an agenda. “Instrument’s” visuals capture the world of Fugazi. Their life is present in my own through the music and ideas that they have put forth in the past fifteen years. Though the scale of Fugazi is much larger, visual elements from their experiences on the road translate down to a smaller scale. Hotels, gas stations, rehearsal spaces, studios (Fig. 2), and clubs are all a part of the film, which helped to solidify the iconic imagery of the movement.

The photographic work of David Hockney is essential to the form that my work takes. The central ideas behind his "joiner" images reflect the motions of the eye as they move through time. His images are taken in the first person and reflect, a certain behind the scenes outlook on Hockney's personal life. His attention and ability to document mundane subjects and make them extraordinary through manipulation of space is a particularly strong influence on my work. While most of his 35mm prints are arranged in a non-grid format, creating flowing edges, his Polaroid works fit edge to edge. The joiner technique is what allows this thesis show to transform the snapshots from my travels into memory inducing landscapes.

After the photography is finished the work goes through another step. Taking an image through the four color intaglio type process is complicated and reliant on different technologies to work properly. The images are assembled and then scanned on a flat bed scanner. Once imported into Photoshop, cosmetic adjustments to color and
form are made. The levels are adjusted to attain the proper dot structure, separated into CMYK process, and formatted for printing on the Epson 7600. The images are printed out onto Azon brand 787n transparency film in four sets of transparencies, one for each of the represented colors. Four plates are then laminated with ImagOn Ultra film. Three of the four plates are PETG plastic while the forth plates is made of copper which is set aside for the yellow plate.

One innovation I employed while printing was using plastic plates whose transparency allowed me to see through the plate and to the paper. The yellow layer attached to a copper plate is printed face up, traditionally. The magenta, cyan, and black plates are attached to PETG then printed with the paper face up and the plates on top. Using this method of registration, that did not rely on precision exposure, made it possible for me to achieve near perfect registration of each print. With out it, the act of printing would have reduced my output considerably.

The first print that stood out to me as a thesis print was The Drawing Board (Fig. 3). This image represents the beginning stages of art making, the space in which music is created, and how that space contributes to the musical product. The grid system here is very straightforward, allowing the viewer to enter into the space with ease. The color and mood match the content contained within the space, which is filled with trash and musical equipment mirrored by the industrial light. The ugly aspects of this space are important to the continuity of the thesis as a whole because they highlight the voluntary filth that goes along with punk rock.

Jem Cohen deals with the practice space in “Instrument” and helps shape the relationship between my reality and
The blown out quality of the faces of the bassists' in the images are quite similar (Fig. 4). The graffiti and posters on the wall of \textit{The Drawing Board} work with the figures vertically, completing the forms. This image focuses on the details and inanimate objects of music that become a part of the creative process. The scrawled words in the top right corner read, “Fueled by,” and this sentiment comes back to the title, \textit{The Drawing Board}, the place where things are banged out and reworked in the space that fuels it.

\textbf{The Green Glow of Tin Soldiers} (Fig. 5) is a moment of realized beauty and confrontational stillness. The lights of refineries and processing plants are common sites when traveling at night on raised highways. The green glow that resonates creates an alien setting that mystifies the intention of the structure and creates an ugly beauty. The footprints resemble ghosts and help show movement within the scene. This image was taken in Kent Ohio, a few blocks from where students were shot down by the National Guard. This fact was on my mind the whole time I was in the town. The Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young song "Ohio" seemed to take on another meaning in the town and the tin soldiers in the title reference the first verse of the song.
As the viewer moves from the bottom left to the top right the eye also moves in and out of the plane. This is particularly noticeable in the focal depth used in snow-covered windows. The idea of ghosts and documenting movement through remnants was key to the movement within the construction of the photograph and resembles the David Hockney photograph “Photographing Annie Leibovitz While She’s Photographing Me, Mojave Desert Feb 1983 (Fig. 6).” Here Hockney uses the footprints in the snow to document the movement of the visible figures. Without the figures, the implied movement of the footprints would still be great.

Mohawk (Fig. 7) is an image that deals with reflection and anticipation of a band as it finishes the last show of a tour and is waiting to head home. The light coming from the street lights and parking garage continue the concurrent mood while the shadows from the figures help add to the pacing quality. The sky in the top right corner of the print is a burned out fire red, which represents the growing anticipation of the figures and the city space. The strong red tone throughout the right side of the image is a great example of how the print enhances the initial photograph.

Hotel, State College (Fig. 8) documents the morning after and the transition from sleep to reflection. The
facial expressions of the figures more than any other component in the print show the slow sadness of another day. By starting the image with a strong bottom right corner the eye moves out on a left diagonal through the scene where it can follow the figures. Hotels are a huge institution in rock and roll myth and this piece does its’ job to expose how much that myth has nothing to do with the reality of punk rock. The components of the hotel draw a close connection to the venues we play which are small, shoddy, and cramped. This scene in Cohen’s “Instrument” documents a similar moment, as Brendan Canty, drummer of Fugazi, lays out on the hotel room bed singing the lyrics to “Oh What a Night (Fig. 9).” The scene before is a close up TV screen playing a soap opera. We here the dialogue, “I think you making a mistake, one you will regret for the rest of your life.” The conflict between the dreams of rock and roll and realities of the life one must lead to pursue such dreams never leaves the faces of the participants.

To Tape (Fig. 10) moves music off the road into the studio. Equally as cold and stressful, the recording process is as labor intensive as the writing, the performing, and touring music. The importance of playing songs flawlessly creates a high-tension environment that leaves most participants exhausted. The figures are hunched over and impatient focusing on the console. This print
separates the sections of the photographs into distinct areas of depth, the light areas reading as internal and dark as external.

Last Gas In PA (Fig. 11) is an image that uses the tire tracks and footprints in the slush to show movement in a still place. Rest stops and gas stations are staples while traveling. Henry Rollins of the band Black Flag once said, “On tour all you see are, stages, fans, and rest stops.”5 The overall content of the image is made up of empty space. This helps state the remote qualities of the location and the removed status of the band from the community. Jem Cohen uses this scene in “Instrument” of Ian MacKaye filling up the van as away to separate punk rock from the rest of society by flashing footage from a live performance in with the footage of the gas station (Fig 12). The quality of brown that makes up the mud in the bottom center and right of the print almost rolls smoothly with the blue coming out of the top left corner. These colors create a rich, cool cast over the image. The Shell tower sits above the landscape like a skyscraper creating a specific scene with a continuous meaning.

Erie WallMart Parking Lot (Fig. 13) shows a one hundred and eighty degree view from left to right. The image is broken up into two horizontal columns and five vertical.
The camera pivots from the center and moves out to the left and right side at different angles, which creates an interesting interaction between repeated imagery. The image is dominated by artificial light. The lights illuminating the parking lot create a blue, cool glow and the interior lights of the van resonate a warm glow. Joe Cole writes in the intro to *Get in the Van* “It’s the endless hours of nothing that can crush you harder than the rigors of playing.” In this scene we follow the movement of individuals stuck in a parking lot pacing around the van. The repetition of the figures on the left and right ends of the print helps show the differing attitudes to those individuals who wait out things comfortably inside the van or pace outside. This image is the counter image to *Mohawk* emotionally and sequentially. Though the expressions are the same, the force behind them comes from complete opposite ends. The figures here are restlessly anticipating the beginning of tour, which has been stalled by car trouble; time is holding them back from the playing.

There is a strong relationship that exists between a band and their van. *In The Van* (Fig. 14) explores this relationship by visualizing the relationship that people have to their corresponding space within the van. The photograph begins in the bottom left and works its way to the bottom right by navigating the five vertical and two horizontal columns. From the passenger seat, the camera looks back into the van and makes its way to the lap of the seat in the bottom right corner. The interior lights of the van highlight the space and how it is occupied. The people inside fit together just like the equipment that fits tightly and snug in the way back. For weeks while traveling this space is the only place that the musicians have control over, and each person clings to their space within the van for a sense of comfort and seclusion. Vans represent and serve as the means to perform music and become a moving home. It is possible for the van, empty of people, to encompass the band as a whole as well as the individuals that make it up.
My intent was to create a body of work that evoked a feeling of memory through a combination of photo construction and full color images, while researching parallel contemporary artistic and musical philosophies. The transition of the Four Color Process to large format imaging made this work successful. The new use of PETG for printing four-color prints allowed my prints to push the previous successes of the technique. The internal edges, color, and composition fit my concept. These images work best as a group but stand-alone individually. The images are a pathway to my past and the events, people, and places that make it up, each piece bringing a distinct and important memory back to the surface. I feel that as long as I keep making music and documenting the things associated with it, I will be interested in working with these images in four color process.
(Fig 1) Cynthia Connelly, Untitled, from Monozine, issue #6, pp. 26-27, 1999

(Fig 2) Jem Cohen, film still from Instrument, Dischord Records DVD 2001

(Fig 3) Justin Staller, “The Drawing Board.” Four Color Type-type. 48”x38”, 2005

(Fig 4) Jem Cohen, film still from Instrument, Dischord Records DVD 2001

(Fig 5) Justin Staller, “The Green Glow of Tin Soldiers.” Four Color Intaglio-type, 48”x38”, 2005

(Fig 6) David Hockney, “Photographing Annie Leibovitz While She’s Photographing Me, Mojave Desert Feb 1983”, Hockney’s People. Pp. 32-33. Boston. Bulfrich Press, 2003

(Fig 7) Justin Staller, “Mohawk.” Four Color Type-type, 48”x38”, 2005

(Fig 8) Justin Staller, “Hotel State College” Four Color Type-type, 48”x38”, 2005

(Fig 9) Jem Cohen, film still from Instrument, Dischord Records DVD 2001

(Fig 10) Justin Staller, “To Tape.” Four Color Type-type, 48”x38”, 2005

(Fig 11) Justin Staller, “Last Gas in PA.” Four Color Type-type, 48”x38”, 2005

(Fig 12) Jem Cohen, film still from Instrument, Dischord Records DVD 2001

(Fig 13) Justin Staller, “Erie Wal Mart Parking Lot” Four Color Type-type, 38”x 90’, 2005

(Fig 14) Justin Staller, “In the Van” Four Color Intaglio-type, 48”x38”, 2005
1 Tuchman, Maurice. David Hockney – A Retrospective. NY. LA County Museum of Art. pp. 55, 1988


