Otherance, Self-Representation and the Commodity Other

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Digital Arts and Sciences

Submitted to the College of Fine Arts
School of Art and Art History,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Digital Arts and Sciences at the
University of Florida
May 2005

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Abstract

Otherance is a two-part digital art installation that acts as a simulacrum of culture by juxtaposing our desire for otherness with the everyday routine. How we define our culture, our differences, and ourselves is represented here through an ideological construction of difference as a commodity. The work consists of painted and sculptural components mixed with digital and video media. Public artist Dave Kinsey delivers provocative social commentary through his vibrant and haunting portrayal of characters from the city streets. Analogous to Kinsey’s characterization process, this installation creates a portrait of the American white-male as the mundane (routine). This is juxtaposed with a very stylized, commercialized form of the exotic Other—contextualizing the experience of Otherness into what I summarize as an adventure. Furthermore, the adventure reassures our own representation, while moralizing against those nasty systems that don’t cause any surprise.

Otherness is a desire made profitable by culturally-themed attractions, services, and consumer goods. In this installation, difference is bottled and packaged as a product using the pseudo-brand name Otherance. It is appropriated and altered through political, social, and economic filters. As a result, the representation received by the consumer is a myth. Parallel to Roland Barthes’ Mythologies, this installation produces a satirical, stylized commentary that deconstructs the myths surrounding our daily lives. The myth serves as a “safe” way to fill the void of desire, helping to define that consumer’s own representation. As this project is from the perception of the artist, these filters reflect that of an American white-male. This perception suggests a mythological representation of the white-male without origin, culture, or ideology.

The differences sold and consumed simultaneously represent our own perception of what we are and what we are not. The installation suggests that we represent our own desires—it is our own culture that represents Otherness, not Otherness that represents itself or us.
Acknowledgements

Many thanks go to the people who have helped me during studies in the University of Florida Digital Arts and Sciences, Graphic Design, and the Computer Science areas. Also thanks to the team at the Digital Worlds Institute and those who helped in preparation of this thesis.

My thesis committee Brian Slawson, Scott Nygren and Tresa Asselin for their valuable insights and historical knowledge. Connie Hwang for the continual pursuit of purpose and cultural influence. Arturo Sinclair for influential craftsmanship and superior experience in the field of digital arts.

Professor Brian Slawson, for your consistency of vision. Thanks for teaching me so much, I am forever indebted.

Finally, my wife Connie: for supporting us both and living the struggle. My mother and family, for their everlasting encouragement. I hope to make you proud.
# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction**  
   Motivation/Antecedents 05  
   Influences 06

2. **Installation**  
   Melancholy Cow & the Butterfly 09  
   The Montage 10  
   Raising Tables 12  
   Otherance 14

3. **Background**  
   Myth, Art, Culture 17  
   Binary Oppositions, the Orient and Me 20

4. **Concluding Remarks**  
   Analysis 22  
   A Digital Ideology

5. **Appendix**  
   Brand—Motion Graphics 23  
   Sherman—Commodity Other 24  
   Discourse—Medium or Message 26

References 28
Introduction

Motivation/Antecedents

My formative years were spent in a small east-coast town in Florida where the majority of the residents where white-American, talked the same, and dressed as if they either shopped at JC-Penny or the local surf shop. At the time (being a child), the place was very comfortable, fulfilling, and unquestionably natural—where difference was nothing more than a fairytale. I can no longer relate to this memory of innocence. This self-history seems far from natural. It is mundane, boring and melancholy. This process of maturation happened relatively quickly through my early college years. Inward "gaze" (upon myself) spawns very interesting comments on identity and the myth of childhood. Furthermore, the change sparked a desire for all that is different—questioning my monotone childhood understanding of culture. The desire drives me to define difference, and seek it out.

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Cartwright, 2001) puts "the gaze" at the center of how individuals deal with their desire. For example, Lacan saw the mirror phase – the moment when a child recognizes and idealizes itself in reflection – as a meaningful visual act that is key to an individuals’ psychological development. According to Lacan, the mirror phase is a stage of development in which the infant first experiences a sense of alienation in its realization of separateness from other human beings. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright in Practices of Looking define Lacan’s theory as:

There is much debate over this theory, yet according to Lacan infants establish egos at about 18 months. This is achieved through the process of looking at a mirror body-image. In theory this mirror body-image does not necessarily have to be a literal mirror image of their own body and may be an image of their mother or another figure. This split recognition forms the basis of their alienation at the same time that it pushes them to grow. (Cartwright, 2001, p. 360)

The mirror phase is a useful framework to understand the emo-
tion and power invested by viewers in images as a kind of ideal. Not only does this impact my understanding of perception as a child, it also questions my role as a visual artist and image maker. Understanding this ideal (the way in which the viewer engages an image) is an ongoing study in psychoanalytic and visual theory. Using these theoretical references, influences, and my own personal experiences, I intend to do two things:

1. Deconstruct the installation, foregrounding assumptions embedded in an ideal (as the mirror-phase framework suggests) for the work. This ideal will represent what the viewer may invest in the work, and ultimately leave with.
2. Through the process of creating the visual artifact, I intend to explore a personal pilgrimage for representation. A journey for an exalted purpose or moral significance seems simultaneously a search for one’s own representation.

Influences

One of the most exciting elements of Digital Arts and Sciences is the incredible range of interdisciplinary influences that become a part of the everyday process. Many artists, designers, engineers, anthropologists, historians, scientists, musicians, and performers have provided a very synergetic learning environment. Looking back upon my earlier years of graduate studies, the melting pot of influences caused extreme confusion in regards to personal goals and conceptual direction. Although I claim to have narrowed my influences to only a few in this project in lieu of thesis, I have kept many others in mind. For example, it is possible to name a dozen strong influences in the field of performance art. For simplification purposes I will discuss only the one that is most closely related to this particular study.

Conceptually, the greatest influence to date is Designer and Performance artist Elliott Earls. Elliott is currently the Designer-in Residence and Head of the 2-D Design Department at Cranbrook
 academy of art and design in michigan. upon graduation from cranbrook in 1993, earl’s experimentation with nonlinear digital video, spoken word poetry, music composition and design led him to form the widely recognized apollo program. as a typographer, the type foundry emigre distributes his original type design worldwide. for me, elliott has been the foremost example of an inter-disciplinary methodology that focuses on originality as the truest form of visual communication. rarely working in collaboration, elliott “creates” everything himself—from the typefaces in his posters to the musical score in his performances. although there are cases of content appropriation in my own work (typeface, drum machine, and paisley patterns), it has been a personal challenge to work with a similar philosophy whereas everything you see and hear is an original creation of the artist. elliott also questions theoretically the definition of originality, as it exists in contemporary society. can an artist declare a work to be original without disregarding all of those who have come before? for example, the tool in which i use to animate my ideas is a creation of another (group of others) and therefore inflicts a degree of constraints (constructs) that are not of my own intention and have limited or no control over.

artist, illustrator, and designer dave kinsey is influential on many levels. his vibrant use of color and design executed in large-scale public and museum environments engage the audience with an epic presence. the message behind kinsey’s art reminds us that within the struggles of life and a multi-cultural society we are not alone. kinsey’s work asks audiences to change their perspective. to survive is to evolve with the environment—to unlearn. kinsey is most widely known for his provocative social commentary delivered through his vibrant and haunting portrayals of characters from the city streets. the urban landscape as a canvas remains a constant while he continues to exhibit his fine art in galleries locally and internationally.

as a growing artist in the field of digital art, the issues of traditional vs. non-traditional art practices constantly confront me. al-
though my work is not as strongly urban-influenced, Kinsey’s process has allowed me to see important elements of my surroundings and represent them in my own visual language. In 1996, Kinsey founded the creative agency BLK/MRKT after observing the widening gap between corporate marketing techniques and the youth culture that advertisers were trying to reach. The company immediately made an impact producing work for the X-Games, Mountain Dew, DC shoes, and many other trend-setting brand campaigns. Kinsey is part of a growing dimension of urban-influenced designers changing the scene of traditional and non-traditional art and visual media.

"The objective of the Unlearn message is to push people into seeing a perspective other than their own—and to question the origin of what is considered normal and tolerable.” – Dave Kinsey
Installation

Melancholy Cow & the Butterfly

The installation is about an interaction between two subjects. The first subject is a characterized self-portrait. The other subject is an identity (or brand) defined by everything that is NOT me. The subjects are developed through one perspective (myself), maintaining the representation of Otherness from a white-male perspective. The Melancholy Cow paintings in this installation are an extension of an earlier self-portraiture series. The original series focused on an individual caricature. This installation places the individual into a herd of its peers. Exaggerating the lifestyle of a domesticated cow while juxtaposing it with the self-image of my childhood, I derived a very static, mundane, and melancholy creature.

The repetitive daily behavior of the cow made it easy to make a relationship between it and myself. The appropriation of the cow’s lack of individuality amongst the herd is an important element to this installation, suggesting that the white-male is non-unique amongst its peers, following the “crowd of similarity,” compliant to a set routine generation after generation. Within the white-dominant social environment of my childhood it was the herd that got noticed—supporting the idea of power in numbers and the American ideology of white dominance. Yet within this, rarely did the individual receive unique attention. This lack of individuality casts a melancholy shadow onto the portraiture, supporting a controlled but aggressive brushwork. The knotted, low-quality plywood gives the character a course and unclean feel. A conventional canvas gives the impression of high art status—which is greater than the character deserves.

Opposed to using a photograph, the cow is illustrated to allow for an anamorphic characterization process. The character has cow-like features while maintaining a human posture. This is a subversive
process—exaggerating the portrait by merging myself (reality) with a metaphorical representation (the cow). This is commonly used in graphic novels, animation, and illustrated narratives as means to make the subject more emotive, breaking down features and exaggerating points of interest. The draping eye cavity and sagging snout adds a greater weight to the character and the duotone color scheme projects the mundane quality of this subject.

The Butterfly in contrast is everything that the Melancholy Cow is not capable of. The Butterfly signifies the exotic. With the ability to change color, and to move fluidly in an out of alternate environments, the Butterfly offers potentiality, individuality, and difference. Since it is my own perception of “self and otherness” that feeds the development of these characters it is obvious why the Butterfly takes on a branded identity. This perception of the Other (see Binary Oppositions – Orient and Me) is experienced through mediated filters—constructs of the institutional gaze, commercialism, cultural appropriation, etc. A large part of this installation suggests that representation of other cultures (different ideologies) is channeled through institutional mechanisms often set forth by one’s own culture. In other words, Otherness is manipulated prior to being consumed and therefore can never experienced in its original form—regardless of weather or not origin is obtainable as this thesis suggests that origin itself is a myth. Furthermore, the Butterfly is used as a commercial icon for the pseudo-band Otherance. Therefore, in this definition, the Other is presented as a consumable good.

Montage

The Other is represented in each piece as the product. The entire installation is titled Otherance, highlighting the subject of highest interest. Within the whole, there are two separate yet intertwined installations: Otherance (left) and Raising Tables (right). As there is a duality between the mundane and the exotic there is a relationship between each component of this installation. In favor of
the Montage, each individual piece works together to formulate a richer meaning. On the left side of the installation, Otherance reflects the result of consumption on an individual. On the right, Raising Tables justifies the act of consumption through a social/historical reference point. The interaction of the audio between both pieces is a good example of how the separate works “perform” with one another. The audio track for Raising Tables is non-linear and very experiential – a continuous, uninterrupted experience. The Otherance installation in contrast has an intermission, pausing for a few seconds prior to the narrative repeating. This suggests how the commodity comes and goes while the routine remains continuous.
Raising Tables

The desire pushes us towards a process of reification; where we become things and things become us. In *Hollywood Flatlands*, Esther Leslie describes Karl Marx’s use of the table to explain this process of reification:

Marx’s footnote to this point reminds the reader of how the tables began to dance in China, as the rest of the world stood still: pour encourager les autres, he adds. This cryptic reference, according to an annotated edition of Capital, suggest that Marx is referencing the anti-feudal liberation revolts in China, which occurred at the same time as the European bourgeoisie succumbed to a spiritualist fad for table-raising in the fallow period after the defeat of the 1848/49 revolutions. In the absence of political progress, European citizens turn mystical—it was indeed the case that the modern worldwide spiritualist movement was inaugurated in a ‘haunted house’ with table-rapping in Hydesville, New York, on 31 March 1848—while at the same time in China struggle breaks out, indicated in the phrase ‘dancing tables’, a synonym for revolution. (Leslie, 2002, pg. 7)

I further this notion by appropriating the table as visual metaphor for social reification. This metaphor connects the table with the human action of revolution. Specific to this installation, the act of raising tables signifies a rage against the normative system. The table stands not only with its feet on the ground; it moves upward to reveal a change in perception, re-birth, or a political/spiritual movement. The table also exists on a social level to signify the object of interaction within an American family. The table is a place of proper behavior, where one sits daily to discuss their routine with another person of social significance. The act of tipping the table suggests and outrage against traditional family structures exposing the conventional social environment to notions of potentiality and difference.

As a means of subverting the medium, forcing the viewer to focus on the table, the television is encased in a box to hide most of its visual indicators such as knobs, volume settings, brand logo, etc. The video object serves as a container for the work that is shown on and around it. This neutrality is strongly juxtaposed with the *Otherance* component of the installation where the material and object quality
are made vivid by using a 21” Apple Digital Flat Panel Display.

As if frozen in time, the installation shows a table penetrating up through the video object. The table itself is being raised. On the screen is a split-animated montage portraying a visual representation of the Cow and the pseudo-product Otherance. Split horizontally by the table, the audience must interact with the installation to read and view both sequences. What is experienced on the lower portion is a sense of release, what is above is the mundane. The up-turned table exists as a metaphor for revolution or rage against the system – the beginning of an adventure away from the routine. The mundane (Melancholy Cow) is a self-performance, mirroring the cows of the adjacent installation. In this instance, the difference in interpretation is specific to the myself. Hence the cow is individualized, as opposed to the idealized, characterization of the cow paintings. This is intended to connect the cow to myself, as a white male. The motion of drinking milk is a metaphor for consumption—suggesting that what is being consumed is a re-consumption of one’s own product (the cow drinking milk).

The juxtaposition in motion exaggerates the differences between each experience. The bottom portion of the split panel is an adapted excerpt from the commercial featuring Otherance. This sequence is very liquid containing exotic blends of color and movement. The top sequence is rigidly animated with a stop-motion feel as to exaggerate a mechanical movement. The Raising Tables installation is an experiential piece and therefore does not project a linear narrative. There is no beginning or end as the animated sequence loops continuously. The sculptural element of the piece (table) is designed to capture a moment in time, highlighting the instance of change, allowing the audience to continuously focus on the moment. There is a spatial interplay between the art object and the animation experience follows the theme of Montage, where two individual “images” work together to form a greater meaning.

Analogous to Marx using the table to explore the act of revolution across several cultures simultaneously, I am extending this
metaphor to discuss the "absent other." The table is an artifact where people of mutual social significance congregate to discuss their mundane lives and daily routine. The act of tipping the table suggests and outrage against this conventional process, exposing the social order to notions of potentiality and difference. The desire for Otherness is the desire for a personal encounter with another person who may seem to be from the other side of the planet. The positioning of the table in this installation is tilted with one side more towards the ground. In the situation two people where sitting on opposite sides of the table—one would seem more "grounded" in the raising process and the other more "altered." The side of the table with an exaggerated tilt/elevation exposes the person situated there to Otherance. Since there are no chairs or people in this installation, it is intended for the audience to fill those roles. By walking in and around the piece, the perspective of changes and how much information from the split-animation changes.

**Otherance**

Commodity surrounds our everyday actions. It is the magazine you read while in the bathroom, or the logo on the toilet seat. It tells you what to wear, how to speak, what to eat. Commodity exists when you chat, when you’ve got mail, or when you “Google.” In *Capital* Karl Marx writes:

> The existence of things qua commodities, and the value relation between the products of labor which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between people, which assumes for them the phantasmagoric from of a relation between things. (Marx, 1904, pg. 83)

As soon as an object or idea becomes a commodity, it is transformed into a sensuous—non-sensuous thing. As I try to define the Other I find myself unavoidably representing people/culture as objects. This process of objectification creates what I call the Commodity Other. The Butterfly objectifies exoticism, using it to sell...
Within this installation there is a narrative interplay between the painted panels and the *Otherance* commercial. Starting from the bottom panel, the Melancholy cow is presented within the herd. Their expressions are similar and the mesh of graphic lines and mono-tone colors create an overall impression of a unified identity. As the panels progress upward, they decrease in size, creating motion out of static planes driving the narrative into the center focal point. Each panel is cut into hard graphic shapes with converging angles leading the viewer inward, visually portraying desire and exemplifying a kinetic relationship between the mundane and the exotic. In the second and third panel, the composition focuses on an individual amongst the herd being selected to “experience otherness.”

The commercial for *Otherance* is a filter for which the selected individual progresses through. Presented on a 21” widescreen Apple DVI Flat Panel Display, the commercial (signifying the Commodity Other) is shown with a sleek and savvy craft. The use of technology, clear presence of the medium, re-enforces the “sale” of the commodity object and the mediation of Otherness. This also suggests how commodification can exoticize something that may not be exotic by origin. The *Otherance* commercial pulls from the motion graphic medium the strong advertisement component of the industry. This presentation is more poetic and experiential than most commercial work but still includes appropriated signifiers such as a product name, logo, and energetic audio cues.

Additional text was cut from the commercial as to focus on image manipulation in order to convey different “flavors” of *Otherance*. The text was directly related to a specific exotic human-quality: (movement, cosmetic) (eyes, piercing) (virtue, silent) (lips, ravishing) (accent, vintage) (honor, valiant) (romance, warm) (wisdom, aged) (skin, bold). The omission was done so that the commercial would be less specific to my own perception of Otherness by not focusing on features of the human body in which “I” feel are exotic. Idealizing Otherness to “flavors” of color and movement allows the
work to relate to a more universal audience.

Adventure
to moralize against
those nasty patterns
which don’t cause
any surprise

what heredity,
what fatality,
what ROUTINE

"To be represented, our universal myth" is the pseudo-marketing slogan for Otherance. This expresses the notion that within Otherance there is "our" ideology: to be surrounded in magical décor, to be cultured, and to be represented.

Above the flat panel display the panels inversely repeat the perception of the cow; staring with the individual, the composition "zooms" out to portray the cow once again amongst the herd. This overall component of the exhibit sets up a narrative of transformation (a before and after) where the character’s identity is branded by the product Otherance. This branding process alters the state of the individual setting it apart from its peers. I used transparency as a metaphor for loss of origin, suggesting that once the individual experience the myth of Otherness, their own representation becomes less opaque—broken down and less defined in regards to an established origin. This also suggests that the Commodity Product waters down the representation of the consumer.
Background

Myth, Art, Culture

Looking back at my childhood brings about questions of validity in regards to origin and culture. The fairytale fragments of my memory conflict with my current understanding of social structures and cultural representations. The most important thing that history has taught me is that history itself is written by those of power. Unfortunately, this further complicates my ability to define representation, origin, and culture and supports Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1972) explanation of myth—where myth becomes a process to how we understand history. This suggests that myth and history are interchangeable. Since history is a politically established term, it is validated and taken as pure fiction. The same establishment conflict occurs when comparing mythology to religion. Here again I am suggesting they are one in the same. According to Barthes, myth is the hidden set of rules, codes and convention through which meanings, which are specific to certain groups, are rendered universal and given for a whole society. (Barthes, 1972) Myth thus allows the connotative meaning of a particular thing or image to appear to be denotative, hence literal or natural.

To discuss this further I will use the Chinese Dynastic culture as an historical framework for politics, culture, myth, and historical representation. De-emphasizing traditional disciplinary barriers of historical study, K.C. Chang’s book *Art, Myth, and Ritual* (Chang, 1983) implements a fundamental perspective for viewing the nature and structure of ancient Chinese civilization as having a strong political orientation. To support this Chang begins in the first by presenting supportive data in the developing political landscape of the clan based Dynasties; Hsia, Shang, and Chou. The importance of the clan, and subsequent lineage, is reflective in the rise and fall of Dynasties being directly related to the rise and fall of fortunes of the individual clans in the political arena of the time. Studying
archeological town layouts revealed much about dynastic rule, but as Chang’s claims, they are much more important than their walls. Towns represented hierarchical systems of administrative control, wealth distribution, cross-clan interactions, trade, war, and even marriages.

Secondly, Chang goes on to discuss that authority (kingship) and is more than just lineage suggesting that the kinship system could not maintain the hierarchical status. For example, the early leaders of Hsia Dynasty did not need moral justification in “earning” a position over another, since there were no former leaders to compete with. In contrast, later dynastic leaders had to accomplish specific deeds in order to maintain or take over power. This required a system of moral authority or coercive power. Military, rules of behavior in ritual, ancestral temples, treasures, ancestral myths of accomplishment, formation of heroes, were all tools used to maintain and establish hierarchical power.

Chang re-enforces this notion of how culture is formed by those in power. Because we are looking back on this culture from an archeological perspective, it is important to note that our understanding of Dynastic culture (its history) is written by making assumptions from observations of cultural artifacts. This is important to note as this project comments heavily on how the artifact (commodity good) defines a culture. Furthermore, it is important to note that rituals, heroes, treasures, and trade where a large part of Chinese Dynastic culture. Largely due to travel on the Silk Road, “culture” traveled and traded. Many archeologists claim that China was one of the first true melting pot civilizations, where multiple cultures and religions flourished within one set of imperial walls.

Expanding on this example, the Imperial Courts of the Sui and Tang Dynasty, 7th century CE (Thorpe, 2001) were made profitable by trade and travel. Elite artifacts worn by Emperors where often comprise of several valuable trinkets. Archeological findings have suggested that in some instances, these trinkets found in Imperial Burial site of China had other cultural origins, suggested to have
been traded and sold along the Silk Road from Western lands. In trying to interpret culture, history, and representation it is important to grasp the semiotics of an image (connotative/denotative meanings). Each individual artifact, in their original context outside of China, had significant cultural meaning. Re-contextualized as apart of the Emperors wardrobe, those artifacts became void of their original meaning and represented (for the Emperor) as a social symbol. It now represented power, status, showing the Emperors ability to own other rare cultural artifacts. This supports the concept of myth and its semiotic framework. Myth is a term used by French theorist Roland Barthes to refer to the meaning of a sign that is expressed through connotation. The sign, a semiotic term, defines the relationship between a vehicle of meaning such as a word, image, or object and its specific meaning in a particular context. It is important in semiotics, especially within the discourse of Otherness, to note that images have different meanings in different contexts. For example a cigarette might signify friendship or romance in a Hollywood film, but in an antismoking ad it would signify disease and death.

Rosalind Krauss’s modernist approach to this notion of semiotics, there is a prevalent dependency on perception. (Krauss, 1986) Krauss brings up interesting debates on the existence of originality, or lack there of. Origin falls into an infinite pattern of looking back onto previous systems. In other words, the myth is a derivation of yet and earlier myth, of which is proceed by an even earlier system, and so on.

From our perceptive, the one from which we see that the signifier cannot be reified; that its objecthood, its quiddity, is only a fiction; that every signifier is itself the transparent signified of an already–given decision to carve it out as the vehicle of a sign – from this perspective there is no opacity, but only a transparency that opens onto a dizzying fall into a bottomless system of reduplication. (Krauss, 1986)

Myth, Art, and culture are difficult terms to work with, especially when using them as tools to understand history and representation.
Myth is the only means in which I can define my own culture and my perception of Other cultures, and therefore it is imperative to discuss the semiotics of historical association.

**Binary Oppositions, the Orient and Me**

The notion of duality is strongly portrayed in this installation, representing opposing experiences—the mundane and the exotic. It is common in the visual arts to use binary oppositions such as nature/culture, male/female, us/them, etc., through which reality has been traditionally represented. The historical reliance on binary oppositions points to the way that difference is essential to meaning and how we understand things. In binary oppositions, the first category is understood to be unmarked (hence the "norm") and the second category as marked, hence "other." In the conventional opposition male/female, for instance, the category male is unmarked, thus normal while the female is marked (the Other), or not the norm. These categories of marked and unmarked are most noticeable when the norm is departed from. In my experience with commercial practice, certain quotas must be met in order to establish a politically correct message. Those subjects that would be categorized as norm need to be excluded and those that are marked would be intentionally sought after. Government and public systems work in this manner in order to promote culture diversity within the United States commercial market. Therefore race (black in opposition to white) suppresses the dominant and features the marked category. I have grown up in a time where my "Gaze" (on the marked) is mediated. This mediation is a filtration process controlled by specific manipulative institutions. Theme-park attractions, Hollywood, MTV, and even Google have all provided me with the myth of Otherness.

There are ways in which we can think about institutional gazes, which result in the ability to establish relationships of power. This now brings us to the notion of the Other. The other is a term used to refer to the category of subjectivity that is set up in binary op-
position to dominant subjectivity. The Other refers to that which is understood as the symbolic opposite to the normative category, such as the slave to the master, the woman to the man, the black person to the white person, etc. In contemporary theories that question the functions of binary oppositions in understanding society and social relations, the Other is that which defines the opposite of the dominant pole of the binary opposition (black being defined as non-white) and which can be understood as disempowered through this opposition. The concept of the Other has been used by theorists including Edward Said to describe the psychological dynamic of power that allows those who identity within a position of Western dominance to imagine a racial or ethnic Other, against which he or she may more clearly elaborate his or her own dominant self. Going back to the discussion of the mirror-image, Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the mother is the original mirror-like Other through whom the child comes to understand his or her self as an autonomous individual.

Orientalism is a term defined most recently by cultural theorist Edward Said that refers to the ways that Western cultures conceive of Eastern and Middle-Eastern cultures as other. (Said, 1979) Said goes as far as to attribute to these Other cultures qualities of exoticism and barbarism. Orientalism is thus used to set up a binary opposition between the West (the Occident) and the East (the Orient) in which negative and/or exotic qualities are attributed to the latter. For Said, Orientalism is a practice that can be found in cultural representations, education, social science, and political policy. For example, referencing current situations in "America’s War on Terror," the stereotype of Middle Eastern people as fanatic terrorists is an example of Orientalism. Similar analogy can be made with Soviets and the Nazi regime. The act of looking commonly thought of as awarding more power to the person who is looking than to the person who is object of the look. Karl Marx boldly stated in reference to the Other that "They can not represent themselves, therefore they must be represented."
Concluding Remarks

Analysis

1. Personal: An animated self-portrait resulting from an inward Gaze. The act is looking upon myself. The result is a re-assurance of my inability to reach beyond the myth of Otherness.
2. Universal: White-male and the Commodity Other.

The irony apparent in this process is the encounter of another (the other). This installation states that the only way to encounter Otherness is through commodification. The irony is that in this experience/consumption of the Other, the result is finding someone who exceeds commodification. Thus, the process falls into an infinite loop of re-representation and defines the concept of Absent Other. The desire for Otherness attempts to fill a universal void, driven by an absence in the existence Otherness.

A Digital Ideology

Although I relate strongly to Design, I am interested in further examining the lines between science, production, and design practices as they relate to the fine art context. Traditional disciplines and conventional art making practices create an overwhelming constraint for new ways of working and thinking about fine art. This is especially true when working in the digital medium. First, there a subjective understanding of what “fine art,” differentiating between disciplines. Second, technology (the medium) instinctive implies a misconception on both the artist and the viewer. New technologies bring new forms of visual communication, making digital art obscure and somewhat unpredictable. In reference to the medium, this trend hides the underlying content in layers in an effort to bring an aspect of mystery or sophistication. This is easy and seductive, misusing the computer’s tendency to conceal the message, or lack thereof, by making the oblique or unreadable.
Appendix

Brand—Motion Graphics

The ProMax and BDA (Broadcast Design Association) show in San Francisco features dozens of talks from well-known designers and studios on subjects from HDTV to the Web, editing to directing, and marketing your business to marketing evening news programs. The BDA is dedicated to professionals who create graphics intensive imagery such as station identities, openers, and commercials as well as print, Web, and set designs. ProMax (the company that absorbed BDA) is dedicated to the art of selling, in the form of promotional and related efforts. For the most part, it is the designers that set the tone of discussion at these conferences, even though the medium is based in film and television. The reason typography has become the bedrock of most motion graphics is that the best motion/time-based artists come from type and print worlds. At the same time, I have found it very surprising how many video artists are uncomfortable at manipulating type especially when it comes to integrating it successfully into other elements of the production.

Digital Kitchen, Digital Cinema Sound—Sony

www.d-kitchen.com
Cindy Sherman: Commodity Other

The use of Gaze within photo-artist Cindy Sherman’s work is discussed here as a mechanism for further understanding discourse of the commodity Other. Appropriating visual culture of Hollywood during the 60s and 70s, Cindy Sherman takes a feminist approach to confronting the portrayal of gender roles in mass media. With subtle aggression, Sherman questions varying representational tropes by experimenting with the many ways in which women and the female body are depicted by mass media. Furthermore, Sherman imitates and confronts historical portrayals of women in fairy tales, portraiture and surrealist photography. Sherman tries to present a new objective context by impersonating various character types from old B movies and film noir spoke to a generation of baby boomer women who were absorbed in the roles and drama of glamour portrayed by television.

Gaze, voyeurism, and the process of representation are mechanism for establishing the myth as a fairytale. Representation is often the act of exaggerating what is being looked at. In traditional psychoanalytic theory, the gaze is intimately linked to fantasy.

Cindy Sherman is a good example of this. In works such as Untitled Film Still #15 and Untitled Film Still #34, Sherman appears as a seductress. Speaking of one such image, she has said, “to pick a character like that was about my own ambivalence about sexuality—growing up with the women role models that I had, and a lot of them in films, that were like that character, and yet you were supposed to be a good girl. This image affirms woman role models at the level of myth. Similarly, myth roughly relates to the notion of Ideology, whereas an ideology is the shared set of values and beliefs that exist within a given society and through which individuals live out their relations to social institutions and structures. (Hirsch, 2000)

Therefore she confronts these issues of the objectified woman as it is presented within the discourse of mass media. This objective definition suggests that women are portrayed unbiased and based on facts, whereas referring to scientific fact or ways of seeing and understanding the world that involve a mechanical process rather than human opinion. This objective view is an establishment that

Cindy Sherman. Untitled Film Stills
has been accepted as fact but to Sherman’s suggestion is no more that the subjective male view.

In visual arts, film theory and art history Gaze is a term used to describe acts of looking as it is related to the human dynamics of desire. Cindy Sherman encourages our participation by suggesting, through the deliberate nature of her poses, that she is the object of someone’s gaze. The perfect example of this is in the situation where the gaze is triggered by a desire for control over its object. This act of looking is not to be confused with John Berger’s (Berger, 1977) discussion on the *Ways of Seeing*. Although the notion of the Other is linked to Berger’s statement of relationships whereas the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Gaze includes the element of desire concatenated with the notion that the act of seeing is what establishes our place in the surrounding world – again as Berger suggests. This establishment of place and belonging is where the notion of power comes into play, as it is human desire to be in a place of greater existence or of higher power. Theories of the gaze have explored the complex power relations that are a part of the acts of looking and being looked at.

Applying Freud’s and Lacan’s theories to film, 1970s psychoanalytic film theory posited that in cinema, the gaze of the spectator upon the image was an implicitly male one that objectified the women on screen. (Cartwright, 2001) And so it makes for a good target reference (or myth) to confront in position of a feminist such as Sherman. Contemporary theories of the gaze have complicated this original model, and now discuss a variety of different kinds of gazes, for example gazes distinguished by sex, gender, race, and class, that can be deployed by different kinds of spectators. The gaze thus helps to establish relationships of power.

Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1965) uses the term “gaze” to describe the relationship of subjects within a network of power – and the mechanism of vision as a means of negotiating and conveying power within that network – in a given institutional context. For Foucault, social institutions enact an inspecting or normalizing gaze upon
their subjects, to keep track of their activities and thereby to discipline them. In this formulation, the gaze is not something one has or uses, rather, it is a spatial and institutionally bound relationship into which one enters. This makes the relationship between the gaze and its influence in the fabrication of the Other.

Discourse – Medium or Message

In the world of motion graphics and time-based media, it’s easy to become seduced by technology. New releases of software and hardware bring with them promises of acquiring previously impossible process at the touch of a button. In the world of art practice, we don’t deliver a spec sheet to the audience or the museum curator; we deliver art. In this traditional sense, when the job is done well, the medium become transparent and the message is reflective. Made popular by Marshall McLuhan, the phrase The Medium is the Massage (McLuhan, 1968) refers to the ways that media affect viewers regardless of their messages. McLuhan stated that a medium affects content, since it is an extension of our individual bodies, and that one cannot understand and evaluate a message unless one first takes account of the medium through which one receives it. Hence, McLuhan felt that a medium such as television has the power to impose "its structural character and assumptions upon all levels of our private and social lives."

Photo-artist Cindy Sherman suggests that objectivity of gender is subjective, and is linked to the understanding/perception of the spectator. To further complicate Sherman’s message would be to make apparent the objectivity of photographs – in other words, the Medium. The camera plays an every-changing role in perception and is the ultimate commodity filter. It is a tool used so commonly for representation (re-representation) that its presence has become invisible. For example, consider whether a photographic image is objective because it was taken mechanically by a camera or is subjective because it was framed and shot by a human subject. The objective/subjective position of the spectator is separately defined

Installation Components (The Medium)

In reference of the installation and its discussion of the medium, all components and tools for the build and design of the project are listed as follows:

Hardware:
- Apple G5 2.5 GHz Desktop, Sony TRV27 Mini DV Camera

Software:
- Maxon Cinema 4D, Adobe Photoshop CS, Adobe After Effects 5.5, Apple Garage Band, Audacity, Final Cut Pro HD, Adobe Illustrator CS, QuickTime Pro 6, Apple iDVD

Technical Details:
- Video texturing via multi-layered compositing, Live-action rotoscoping, null object keyframe parenting for camera movement

Additional Materials:
- Installation components (acrylic on wood, pvc pipe, mounting equipment), 21” Apple DV Flat Panel Display, Sony 22” TV, Apex DVD Player, 2 sets of stereo speakers with subwoofer, misc cables and extensions
in the discourse of Gaze, yet they become blurred within the notion the Other. Within the fantasy of the Other, take a specific culture for instance, people are viewed objectively. The conscious of the spectator, or the unmarked as defined later, view the Other as truth, believing in a manifestation that may or may not be based on scientific fact. The concept of the gaze, as well as the Other, is not restricted to question of objectivity, the subject’s role, or the spectator. Thus, the notion of gaze is used here as a portal into the discourse of the Other.

As an extension to discussion the Medium, is also important to mention the notion of discourse. As this paper is a discourse on the Other in relation to the white-male, it is important to discuss how the discourse in which I am practicing effects how the work is made and received. In general, a discourse is the socially organized process of talking about a particular subject matter. According to Michel Foucault, discourse is a body of knowledge that both defines and limits what can be said about something. (Foucault, 1965) While there is no set list of discourses of economics, the law, medicine, politics, sexuality, technology, etc. Discourses are specific to particular social and historical contexts, and they change over time. In this installation, I have appropriated an established discourse and re-contextualized it within the fine art discourse. In doing this, the notion Other becomes the subject—either an accepted as a re-enforced myth, or a signifier to a new myth. It is fundamental to Foucault’s theory that discourses produce certain kinds of subjects and knowledge, and that we occupy to varying degrees the subject positions defined within a broad array of discourses.
References


