Title
Flaming Hot Mountain Dew – Art Post-Prefix (After, Inside, and Alongside Post-Internet) v1.0

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4cq2t12v

Author
Bandy, Brandon

Publication Date
2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Flaming Hot Mountain Dew – Art Post-Prefix
(After, Inside, and Alongside Post-Internet) v1.0

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Art

by

Brandon Bandy

June 2023

Thesis Committee:
      Prof. Lynne Marsh, Chairperson
      Prof. Brandon Lattu
      Prof. John Divola
      Prof. Anna Betbeze

The Thesis of Brandon Bandy is approved:

_____

_____

_____

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Dedicated to Rachel Jackson, my partner and collaborator

For the endless conversations navigating these problems and constant support

and assistance through the production of this work.

Table of Contents:

List of Figures:

Introduction

"The means of reproduction are used politically and commercially to disguise or deny what their existence makes possible. But sometimes individuals use them differently." John Berger, *Ways Of Seeing*

We find ourselves within seemingly perpetual and increasingly complex crises. Neoliberal ideology has overtaken us, infecting every area of our lives; politics, economics, corporations, online platforms, and our social fabric, down to the level of interpersonal interactions. With the simultaneous rise of digital technologies we are entering an increasingly virtual world, the hyperreal, a real beyond real. A condition where images have overtaken objects, sign value has undermined material value, and distortions of the lens have colonized our vision. Within online platforms information has become flattened due to algorithmic domination and profit motives have excised any liberatory potential. Conspiracy and its theories run rampant as old narratives are abandoned and austerity breeds alienation. Corporate entities resort to more desperate and obscene forms of marketing logic to compete for the attention of an increasingly precarious consumer class.

Within the hyperreal is the hypernormal, a geopolitical and economic stasis which leads to a facade—a synthesized consensus generated by those in

power and adopted by citizens. This consensus implies that in the face of ever more complex geopolitical crises and economic stasis, changing things is impossible.

If one looked to the history of radicalism within visual art to find some kind of alternative narrative fostered within its contemporary counterparts, one would be left disappointed. Art is in a crisis as well. After the widespread adoption of neoliberal ideals and digital technologies, questions of production, distribution, reception, and what art *even is* are up for debate. If one looks to many of the artists, galleries, institutions, markets, or any part of the Contemporary Art System, what one seems to find more broadly is stagnation and inert radicalism, a widespread refusal to grapple with the realities of the current moment. This stasis is multifaceted, largely brought about by the rise of art as a financial instrument after the 2008 recession, the decay of collective politics, and the rise of individualism, fetishizing gestures of the hand and reflections on the interior of the artist as a moral good. This stasis has been imminent since the birth of the global art market, and while there have been radical breakaways that seem to promise to change things and disprove this thesis, yet they rarely take hold. This text will outline how art has failed to contend with the present, and the approaches one might take to resolve this shortcoming.

We begin with the idea that politics is downstream from culture, attributed to Andrew Breitbart, the late founder of Breitbart News, the conservative media website. At the core of this idea is the notion that to change politics, one must change culture. One must also consider a variation of this idea, "all culture is downstream from reactionary incels" (term for involuntarily celibate). In this vein I will argue that contemporary culture is downstream from the 2016 political shift, and this in turn, is downstream from the last 40 years of economics.

Figure 1- Christopher Williams, K-Line Matt Dulling Spray…cont, 2014

Figure 2- Balenciaga Spring 23 Show at New York Stock Exchange
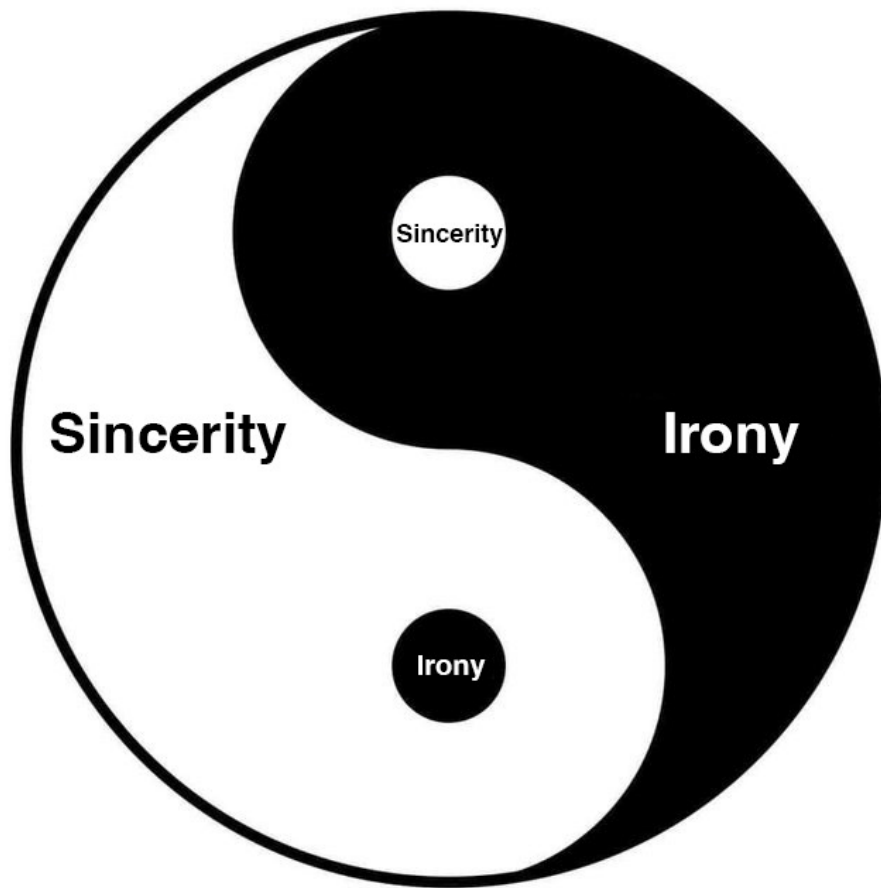
Figure 3- Sincerity/Irony Meme, 2022

Procession Into The Virtual

My intentions here are not to retell an often recounted history, it is not my

area of expertise. I'd like to look towards specific developments in visual art,

economics, and information technology for the past 100+ years to draw lines

towards the present as a way of charting certain projects and reexamining them

for further use. This lineage of visual art is built on contradictions and bold

assertions, as anything worth investigating usually is. I begin with the

readymade as a starting point, and perhaps one of the less discussed aspects

of Fountain is what I find most compelling.

"The power of the readymade is that no one needs to make the pilgrimage to see Fountain. As with Graham's magazine pieces, few people saw the original Fountain in 1917. Never exhibited, and lost or destroyed almost immediately, it was actually created through Duchamp's media manipulations—the Stieglitz photograph (a guarantee, a shortcut to history), the Blind Man magazine article —rather than through the creation-myth of his finger selecting it in the showroom, the status-conferring gesture to which the readymades are often reduced. In Fountain's elegant model, the artwork does not occupy a single position in space and time; rather, it is a palimpsest of gestures, presentations, and positions. Distribution is a circuit of reading, and there is huge potential for subversion when dealing with the institutions that control definitions of cultural meaning. Duchamp distributed the notion of the fountain in such a way that it became one of art's primal scenes; it transubstantiated from a provocative objet d'art into, as Broodthaers defined his Musée des Aigles: "a situation, a system defined by objects, by inscriptions, by various activities…""

Seth Price, Dispersion, 2002

Photography and Conceptualism are kindred spirits with specific histories

which remain somewhat marginalized within the field of visual art. Developed

within close range of one another, both were crucial developments which

subsequently broadened definitions and approaches. As photographic and

technological reproduction freed art from a singular existence, so the readymade

liberated art from the necessity of the artists hand. These developments are

aptly summarized in a quote from *The Conquest of Ubiquity 1928* by Paul Valéry

which appears at the beginning of Benjamin's The Work of Art in the Age of

Mechanical Reproduction.

"Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art."

Figure 4- Bottega Veneta 2023 Trompe L'oeil Demin Print Leather Pants

Figure 5- The Art Happens Here Meme, 2022

These developments would be investigated throughout the decades but would become particularity critical in the lineage that has been coined "Conceptual Art". This moniker is often disputed and loosely groups a variety of approaches and philosophies based on their common ground. This late-mid-century movement would take the progress made by both the invention of the photograph and the readymade, and synthesize it into a new approach. An early example, Kosuth's One and Three Chairs is the next logical step in this trajectory, engaging with both the tactics of the readymade and photographic mediation. In many cases works of this oeuvre aspired towards dematerialization, aside from a document of their existence. These investigations would call into question art's object-hood as well as its subject matter and distribution. In Kosuth's 1969 essay "Art After Philosophy" he states

"The "value" of particular artists after Duchamp can be weighed according to how much they questioned the nature of art; which is another way of saying "what they added to the conception of art" or what wasn't there before they started. Artists question the nature of art by presenting new propositions as to art's nature. And to do this one cannot concern oneself with the handed-down "language" of traditional art, as this activity is based on the assumption that there is only one way of framing art propositions. But the very stuff of art is indeed greatly related to "creating" new propositions."

Figure 6- Marcel Duchamp, In Advance of the Broken Arm, 1915

Figure 7- Joseph Kosuth, One and Three Shovels, 1965

While conceptualism was dematerializing the art object, the project of

dematerializing economics was well underway, both moving towards a

production of value through shared belief. (If gold backed currency and painting

share a reliance on rarity, fiat currency and reproducible or immaterial works rely

on a kind of sign value.) Several years earlier computer systems were adopted in

the financial sector. In 1968 the first networked ATM began operation in Malmo,

Sweden. In 1971 the Nasdaq began as the first electronic stock market. That

same year Richard Nixon officially ended the US Dollar's convertibility into gold.

While the death of the gold standard cannot be entirely attributed to this

moment in time, it plots a point where value becomes untethered from physical

manifestation with the simultaneous introduction of digital financial systems. In

the United Kingdom and United States, stagflation, a combination of inflation

and economic stagnation with increasing unemployment, was underway. This

would lead to the greatest shift in culture and economic theory since the

adoption of a free market economy, Neoliberalism. This new political and

economic paradigm in tandem with information technology set us down a path

into the hyperreal and subsequently the hypernormal. Neoliberalism at its core is

an economic program, predicated on the developments and failures of liberalism

(in the traditional sense) and free market capitalism. Its aims are relatively

simple, increase profit margins through deregulation, privatization, globalization,

and austerity. This would later manifest in the United States as a flurry of

bipartisan legislation sometimes known as "Supply Side Economics" which

deregulated banks, lowered taxes, and increased global trade. Many of the most

consequential crises of the 21st century can be tied to these decisions, such as

the 2008 recession, the opioid epidemic in Appalachia, and seemingly endless

conflict in West Asia and North Africa. With austerity as the new program and

the consumer boom of the 1980's in full effect, the next stage of sign value took

hold and new economic logic developed. This can be seen in moments such as

the shift from the use of cane sugar to corn syrup or the outsourcing of

manufacturing to other countries. These cost saving measures declined the

quality of a commodity, ensuring a healthier profit for the corporate class. To

compensate for this degradation of material goods marketing became the

differentiating factor between consumers' choices. Also in the 1980's the soon

burgeoning Silicon Valley would have its roots fully tangled within this ideology,

developing its own technocratic strain, "The Californian Ideology." Blackrock, an

investment firm founded in 1988, would grow to become the world's largest

asset management company with the development of their risk management

system Aladdin (Asset, Liability and Debt and Derivative Investment Network).

Primarily located within a server farm in Northern Washington state, Aladdin

analyzes past and current world events as a means of making sound investment

decisions. Developments such as this have lead us to a global economic system

that is entirely predicated upon the virtual, fully enveloped within speculative

value and immaterial goods.

Figure 8- Fort Knox Gold Mine

Figure 9- Sabey Data Center East Wenatchee, Washington,
host of Blackrock's Aladdin

Similarly, the virtual began to overtake the economy, as businesses flocked to tax havens using specialized corporations for the creation of shell companies and virtual legal headquarters in states such as Delaware. These corporate facades provide a means of siphoning increasing amounts of wealth upwards and out of the locales they operate within. Property investment operates in a similar fashion, as written by Jak Ritger in *On Devirtualization*, "these domiciles were not and are not built for housing humans, but instead to house investments. In a practice known as "parking money" wealthy investors buy property in rapidly gentrifying or post-gentrified developing areas and then wait for the investment to accrue value before selling it off at a profit. The only humans to enter the luxury condos are a cleaning staff who come by to vacuum up dust from space and replenish flower displays for no one. The virtual system of corporate debt, stocks, and futures markets is extracted into private equity which then finds physicality in the interiors of skyscrapers." This is definition one of devirtualization, the manifestations of virtuality in physical space, or "how the physical contorts to satisfy the virtual".

This birth of this new economy alongside the outsourcing fostered by Neoliberal policy makes way for the next industrial revolution—the transformation from Industrial to Post-Industrial economy. As networked culture developed so did this new economy. With the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, privatization ensued and any dreams of a

utopian free web were made null. This potential of autonomy would become a

marketing tactic as social networking platforms began to change the landscape

of online space. Prior to Facebook's opening to the public in 2006 this new

mode of communication had already undergone a major shift. With the

introduction of Facebook algorithm based "newsfeed" on September 5, 2006

the way we received information was forever altered, and linear media's slow

death began.

Figure 10- Richard Nixon Presidential Library Oval Office Replica, 18001 Yorba Linda Blvd, Yorba Linda, CA 92886, 2023

Figure 13- Trace of the True Self Meme (Candy Corn), 2022

Figure 14- Trace of the True Self Meme (Doritos Locos Taco), 2022

Figure 11- CT Corporation, 1209 Orange St, Wilmington, DE 19801, 2023

Figure 12- Bill Clinton signing the Telecommunications Act of 1996

By the 2010's with the use of a now, highly networked population, platform capitalism had realized the dream of Neoliberal economics in ways which were never before possible. As venture capital flowed into Silicon Valley, hyper austere business models would arise. With the introduction of the gig-economy, the individual was now able to earn multiple streams of micro-income, becoming a taxi and food delivery service, a hotel, dog walker, etc, all while the corporate structure that oversaw these services were freed from the traditional overhead of running these businesses, even the overhead of having actual employees. By the middle of the decade we encountered two primary phenomena. First, the project of globalization became complete. With the adoption of the Internet as the primary mode of distribution and communication, we entered the apex of the post-industrial mode, which primed us for the second phenomena. This second phenomena is the growing skepticism in the project of neoliberal ideology, most visible through rise of both left and right wing politicians with populist rhetoric that included many anti-neoliberal talking points. With the political shift that ensued, the contradictions of liberalism made clear, and a new set of contradictions would be embraced.

After, Inside, and Alongside Post-Internet

"Historical objectification ought to be sped up while there is still a collective experience and memory which can assist in the clarity of an analysis while, simultaneously, opening up a space to ask fundamental questions regarding history-making." Michael Asher, L'Art conceptuel, une perspective, 1989

As stated by Thomas Crow in his essay *Unwritten Histories of Conceptual*

Art: Against Visual Culture

"Almost every work of serious contemporary art recapitulates, on some explicit or implicit level, the historical sequence of objects to which it belongs. Consciousness of precedent has become very nearly the condition and definition of major artistic ambition. For that reason artists have become avid, if unpredictable, consumers of art history. Yet the organized discipline of the history of art remains largely blind to the products of this interest and entirely sheltered from the lessons that might accrue from them."

While derided by many for a vast quantity of reasons, Post-Internet is the work

to which I owe the credit for most influencing my own. Coined amidst the 2008

financial crisis the term addresses several modes of thought much like the

contested and varied use of "Conceptual Art." To understand Post-Internet one

must look back several years to what had been deemed Net Art. Net Art could

be defined as a largely countercultural movement which was built upon early

optimism about the power of networked culture and information technology as a

tool for liberatory means of dispersion. Much of this work existed outside of the

Contemporary Art System and has links to institutional critique and would

further realize Conceptualism's interest in information and dematerialization. This

work was largely done in a moment prior to widespread consumer adoption of

networked technologies and the domination of profit seeking Web 2.0 platforms.

Seth Price's Dispersion is a critical text that would emerge at this time.

Questioning old modes of art's distribution, Price would question what new

modes of "public art" might look like in a newly networked society.

"The problem is that situating the work at a singular point in space and time turns it, a priori, into a monument. What if it is instead dispersed and reproduced, its value approaching zero as its accessibility rises? We should recognize that collective experience is now based on simultaneous private experiences, distributed across the field of media culture, knit together by ongoing debate, publicity, promotion, and discussion. Publicness today has as much to do with sites of production and reproduction as it does with any supposed physical commons, so a popular album or website could be regarded as a more successful instance of public art than a monument tucked away in an urban plaza."

Simple Net Art Diagram

The art happens here

MTAA ca. 1997
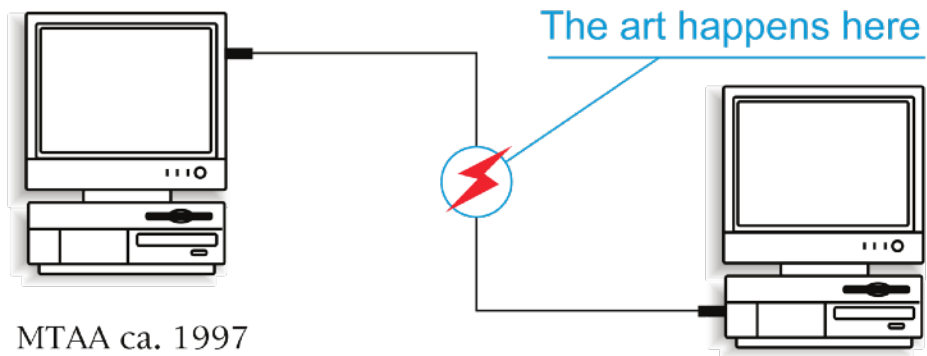
Figure 15- Net Art Diagram

Figure 16- Micael Asher, Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2008

Figure 17- Christopher Williams, Installation View of Wall from the exhibition Mathias Poledna/Christopher Williams, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, 2009, exhibited in *The Production Line of Happiness*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2015, 2017

Simultaneously alongside Net Art, a new folk art was beginning to emerge. With a new set of tools at their hands, young people across the world began to create and distribute images. Templates and formats began to solidify as popularity grew and the language of the meme would develop. The definition of meme dates back to Richard Dawkins' "The Selfish Gene" 1976 and while its definition is not specific to images, that has become its common usage. At its core the meme is "an idea, behavior, or style that spreads by means of imitation from person to person within a culture and often carries symbolic meaning representing a particular phenomenon or theme." This new language would eventually become a primary communication method amongst young people, expressing their humor as well as their values, politics, and innermost feelings. A communal project, memes are built and evolve at the hands of many, revised, iterated, expanded, deconstructed, a new art for a new age. As subculture once relied on signifiers and code that indicated in-group/out-group status, a meme often begins within an online subculture carrying content that reflects their ideology to some degree. These niche references are often lost on a wider audience which identify with some portion of the idea being conveyed and memetic reproduction ensues. A prime example of this phenomena is the Yes Chad and Trad Wife images which have circulated widely in past years. Both originating on 4Chan in 2019 as shorthand for "traditional/conservative/white/ western values" but proliferating into a multiplicity of versions created by a wide variety of individuals. Through its lifecycle it would rapidly transform from a

symbol of right wing values to shorthand for having the right opinion. This is the

democratic power of the meme, through its decentralized form a consensus can

shape its future, once hateful origins can be neutered, and it can evolve into a

tool for general self expression. A meme's creation and distribution have all

barriers removed. In some ways the rise of this new language is one of the few

surviving utopian aspects of online space. The widespread use of this new

language would become an important theoretical framework within Post-

Internet. There is no clear delineation between Net Art and Post-Internet, much

in the way conceptualism and institutional critique bleed into one another. The

first definition of Post-Internet, from artist Marissa Olson, was simply art made

after spending time online. This leads to the next definition which is art made

after the widespread ubiquity of consumer oriented internet, the third and most

broad definition is Post-Internet as a condition of looking or experiencing. This

extends to all of culture, beyond just visual art. Within visual art we can think

about this as a condition where works become increasingly mediated and

further decontextualized. This is addressed in Brad Troemel's seminal 2013

essay "The Accidental Audience." With the simultaneous rise of digital imaging

and the global art market, digital images of artworks became increasingly

necessary and common. One of the defining characteristics of this Post-Internet

milieu was an emphasis on this digital representation as a key factor in the

work's creation and existence. Early meditations on this phenomena manifested

as platform based projects and dual site galleries. In Michael Sanchez's 2013

article for Artforum he parses the moments that lead to this phenomena, the invention of the iPhone, the growth of sites such as Contemporary Art Daily, as well as a myriad of other developments which would challenge the established Contemporary Art System. One of the most crucial points to consider are the architectural consequences of this new mode of viewing, traditional spot lighting was largely abandoned for diffuse high-wattage fluorescent fixtures, paired with stark white walls the gallery could seamlessly be transmuted into the void of digital space. Paired with the decentralized ideal of abolishing gatekeepers coming out of Silicon Valley, this would have lasting consequences for the increasingly arcane Contemporary Art System.
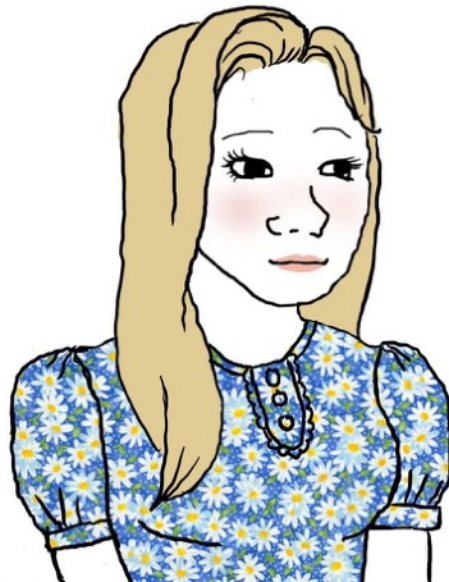
Figure 18- Trad Wife Wojak, 2019

Figure 19- iPhone 4 Retina Display Advertisement, 2010

Dual Sites and platform based projects grew out of this new system of distribution, imagining the new potential methods of subverting the traditional gallery system. The Jogging, a Tumblr based collective founded by Brad Troemel and Lauren Christiansen created disposable sculptures, their fleeting physical existence lived out in front of the camera, to then be transmuted into a digital existence. This project developed at a crucial moment, the early stages of our transformation into the post-industrial attention economy. Coined by Troemel, "athletic aesthetics" is a new mode of art production in which rather than spending large amounts of time on a single masterwork, the artist shifts their practice in alignment with the attention economy to produce fast and temporary works on a regular basis to grow and maintain a following amongst an increasingly expedient flow of information. Alongside The Jogging, the Etsy based UV Production House was developed in collaboration between Troemel and Joshua Citarella as a way of turning this new mode of art making into a commercially viable practice. Eliminating traditional overhead such as a studio, materials, and fabrication costs, as well as the now-outdated gallery model, UV Production House was a drop shipping approach to art sales. Works were often created as digital composites, listed for sale on the e-commerce platform, and if purchased, materials for the construction of the artwork were sent directly to the collector. In Amalia Ulman's 2014 *Excellences and Perfections*, a several month long Instagram performance, the artist mimicked the then burgeoning tropes

and typologies of the platform. Alongside these projects were other developments such as DIS Images, a stock photography website run by artists which created works in which any doubts of market-orientation and the possibility of generating secondary value were theoretically cast aside. DIS's images contradicted typical stock photography ideals by synthesizing images so specific and absurd their possibilities for commercial use were laughable. Other practices of this time took shape in more traditional forms and spaces. Making objects that perform for the lens Timur Si-Qin and Katja Novitskova, Aids 3D (Daniel Keller and Nik Kosmas) dealt in the traditional system of galleries and museums, making objects which expected their own documentation. Artie Vierkant's 2014 Image Objects is particularly notable project of this time. Confronting the legacy of conceptual art and Seth Price's "Dispersion", Vierkant proposed that the work of art was now a multiplicity of forms within our newly networked culture. These works were unfixed, beginning with a digital file, then printed and hung, then photographed in space, then digitally altered, an endless cycle of shifting forms and mediation.

Post-Internet entered the conversation within a moment of financial crisis and would largely exist within that crisis' aftermath. Many of its artists would graduate from academic institutions amidst this recession, experiencing the increasingly false promises of opportunities (still today) promised by the educational sector of the Contemporary Art System laid bare. However, new

developments would lead to a market boom, propelling many of these artists into short-lived commercial success. After 2008 investors increasingly looked to visual art as a financial instrument which could weather market fluctuations due its cult value, leading us to the moment we find ourselves within presently. The new modes of expedited distribution made possible by digital photography and the iPhone would lead us to a wave of painting disparagingly known as "Zombie Formalism", photogenic abstract compositions which dominated the market in the early 2010's. Works from this milieu would change hands rapidly accruing worth in record time, selling for many times their initial value on the secondary market. This expedited cycle can be attributed to the early stages of art media's death, or at least its growing irrelevance. As social platforms took over communication and Contemporary Art Daily literalized the attention economy through its pass/fail approach to coverage, the perfect storm for an increasingly fast paced market would arrive. Similarly but to a lesser extent Post-Internet works (largely photography and sculpture) would go through this boom and bust. Due to the early adopter benefits of social platforms, artists from this milieu would be offered solo exhibitions in galleries, encouraging them to make concessions and develop more commercially oriented works which could exist in physical space. After initial market excitement dissipated many of these artists would see their short term success evaporate, leaving them to turn back to the platforms where their success began, only now with increasingly strict terms of service and evermore opaque algorithms, their initial strategies for

success outside of the Contemporary Art System were no longer viable. Around this time we see the introduction of Web 2.5 platforms such as Patreon and the resurgence of podcasts as a medium.

Figure 20- Image from Contemporary Art Daily

Figure 21- Brad Troemel For The Jogging, DORITOSLOCOS taco MASTER LOCKED shut (Key Sold Separately), 2013

Figure 22- Andrea Bowers, Families Belong Together, 2018

Figure 23- Berlin Biennale 9 curated by DIS promo image, 2016

Figure 24- Joshua Citarella, Compression Artifacts, 2013

Figure 25- Katja Novitskova–DIS, Future Growth Approximations, 2012

Now we rewind to 2016, to consider the political and social shift's impact on art. While the early 2010's saw the center Left championing of online social platforms, this cultural shift would temporarily dissolve this goodwill. As the project of Silicon Valley and globalization reached its logical conclusion, progressive values began to dominate media and culture starting in the mid 2010's, and their cooption by Neoliberal aims was imminent. With a new fully networked populace, activity on these platforms would see a dramatic increase at the beginning of the 2016 election cycle. This period has been dubbed the "Great Meme War", and describes the culture war between the terminally online factions of the Post-Tumblr left and the Post-4Chan right. Many alienated young people (predominately men) found themselves with increasingly dire prospects leading to various factions from moderates to extremists. Issues ranged from legitimate concerns such as neoliberal politics to reactionary hatred of cultural liberalization and white nationalism. Naturally the new incentives of platform capitalism would fuel the worst segments of this group. While YouTube evolved into their primary territory, their presence rapidly spread across online space. Artists within Post-Internet grew interested in this phenomena taking place on their home turf and many began to critically incorporate aspects of this into their practice, insisting that these events should be taken seriously and discussed in a more nuanced fashion. After all, this phenomena was built around images, memes were becoming a new populist visual language and Instagram dominated online space. At this point however a myriad of critics within the

Contemporary Art System would arise and accusations of fascism were made. These criticisms ranged from the formal tactics often employed by Post-Internet and any association with memes or online culture. The removal of the hand would come to be seen as an immoral act, decried as a mimicry of commercial aesthetics and therefore perpetuating capitalism, and therefore fascism. Mimicry as a tactic would be off the table, likened to platforming and therefore elevating. This would lead to a resurgence in ceramics, painting, and other more tactile media, along with a shift in subject matter, often towards the artist themselves throughout the late 2010's and into our present moment. Ironically this moralistic return to unique objects and artist as subject would feed the market it claimed to be against, launching a wave of zombie figuration.

With the introduction of Instagram stories in 2016 and multi-image posts in 2017 online space began to shrink and attention spans became further shortened. This next step in Instagram's lifecycle was aimed at keeping users on the app, and with these new features they would accomplish that goal. Dying legacy media outlets would be incentivized to further condense information through its translation into stories and multi-posts, further relying on inflammatory language to drive traffic. With this increase in clickbait headlines and partisan tactics, we would enter a new stage of the hypernormal in which algorithmic information dispersion would propel individuals into their own unique pseudoreality through the customized information they were fed. Finally we

arrive at the present, a moment somehow both very similar to and very disparate from the end of the 2010's. As algorithmic information dispersion has only accelerated the future feels increasingly uncertain. Contradicting narratives, quiet retractions of formerly groundbreaking stories, constant impending doom, we have entered Psyop-Realism. Combining the term psychological operation and capitalist realism, this term refers to a growing feeling of uncertainty or contradiction about what is true. If this is the case, how does one move forward?

Art, Post-Prefix

Upon entering this masters program my concerns were primarily focused on charting cultural shifts and subcultural appropriation within online space. This would often manifest as a search for cultural residue in real space, and as culture has became increasingly immaterial, this search became difficult. This led me to a search for sites of cultural significance, often making a sort of pilgrimage to various locations to photograph them. This transformed into an interest in contemporary mythologies, new folklore with online origins. My participation within Joshua Citarella's Do Not Research community fostered this interest, its central focus being the conspiracy theory folklore which has become prevalent the past 10 years with the development of online platforms. One of the primary texts to come out of this community is Jak Ritger's "On

Devirtualization." As a digital native, my conception of virtual was entirely predicated upon digital space, and as this text broadened my understating of the virtual, it spurred a new way of thinking in my practice. The work in this exhibition considers this history through its material residue, brand collaborations, memetic objects, conspiratorial artifacts, and sites of occurrence.

Using the concept of devirtualization I began producing physical manifestations of virtual objects. The first of which is the Political Compass Chair. Drawing upon the way information has become increasingly flattened, I created a meme of two disparate ideas linked by their formal elements. The first is the Political Compass Test, this test circulated widely within online spheres as young people became increasingly radicalized during the last two election cycles. This test analyzed answers of standardized questions from the participant to chart their political ideology on a four quadrant graph. The colors of these four quadrants happened to correspond with a 1994 Ikea chair by designer Verner Panton which surged in popularity during a resurgence of postmodern design in 2020. These two phenomena circulated in entirely different groups, likely to never intersect. Sourcing an image of the original chair, I placed the text "WTF Political Compass Chair" over top. This was stage one. Several months after the creation of this image it occurred to me that the next stage in the process might be to create physical manifestation of this object. In

this next stage I faithfully reproduced the chair, with the addition of the gray

gridded pattern from the political compass test. Now that I had devirtualized this

object it was time to revirtualize it through the camera as a way of distributing it

online. I set the chair on a white backdrop, and lit it in the way one might light a

product photograph. This unlocked the next stage. The photograph was nearly

indistinguishable from a rendering, bringing into question whether I had ever

devirtualized this object at all. This manner of photographing objects let to the

next stage, the creation of a facsimile. In this stage I would take the photograph

of the object and turn it into a two-dimensional version of itself, printing the

image of the object on vinyl and applying it to a sheet of PVC cut in the

silhouette of the object. Further down the line this would lead to the next logical

step in the process which is the creation of an exhibition which is entirely

mediated. In this stage I install objects in the gallery, photograph the installation

from a point of view which is dictated by the camera and the architecture,

remove the objects and replace it with a false wall, vinyl wrapped in a printed
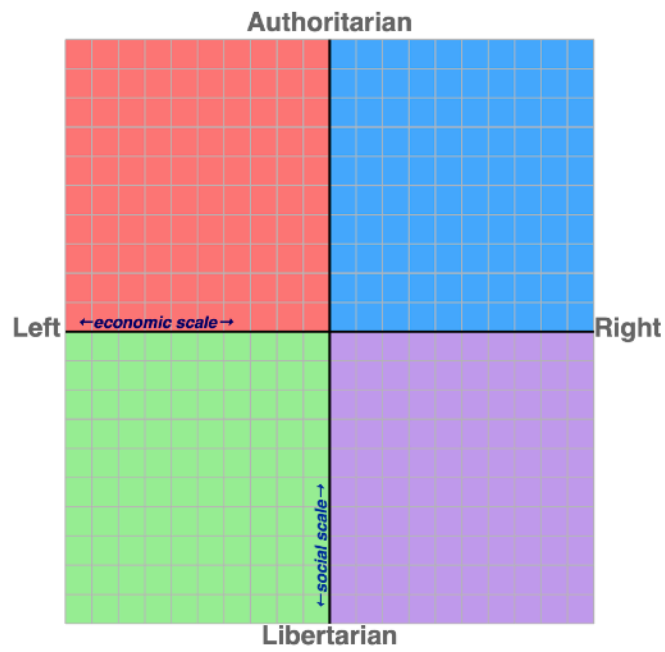
image of the installation.

Figure 26- Political Compass Test
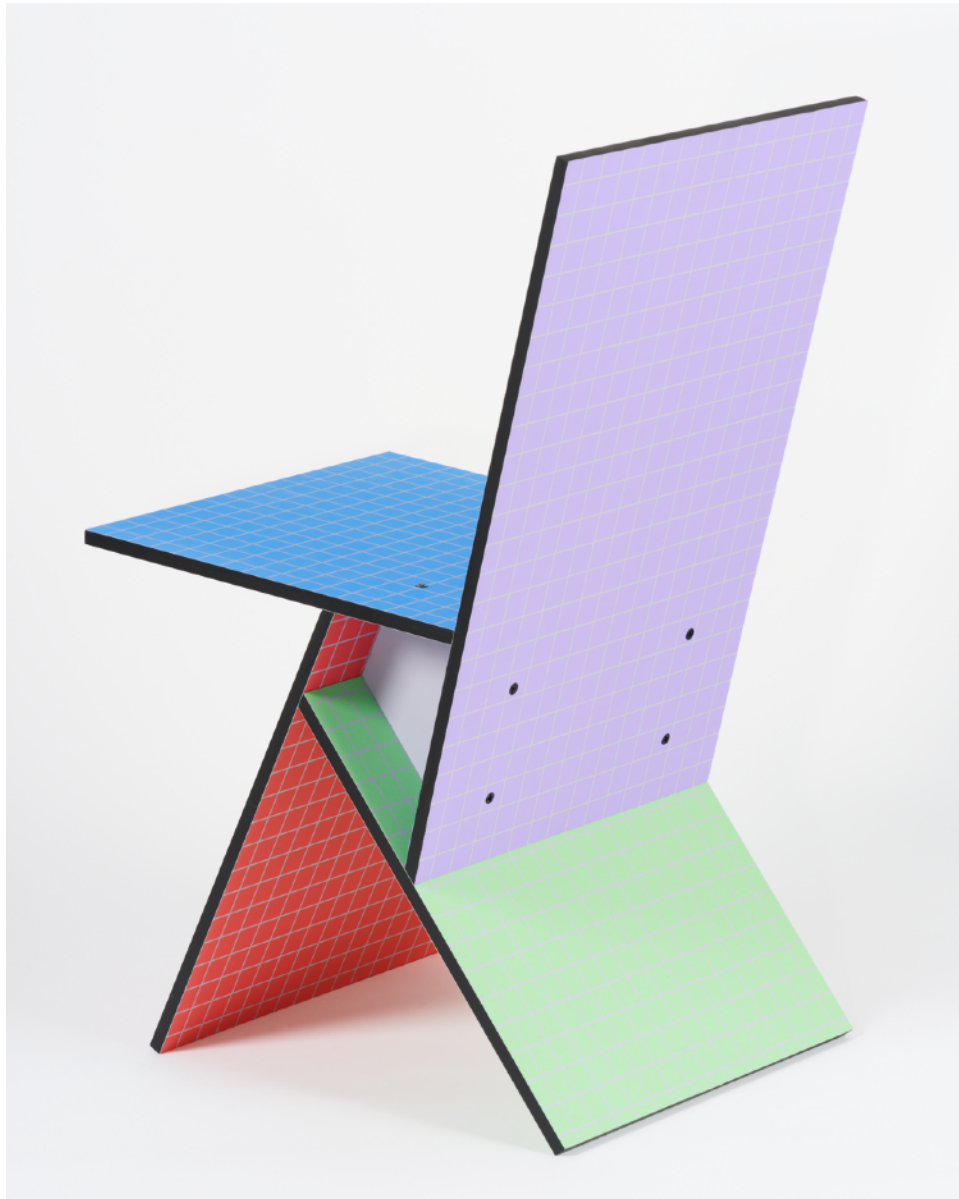
Figure 27- Political Compass Chair Meme, 2020

Figure 28- Political Compass Chair, devirtualized, (Rear View)
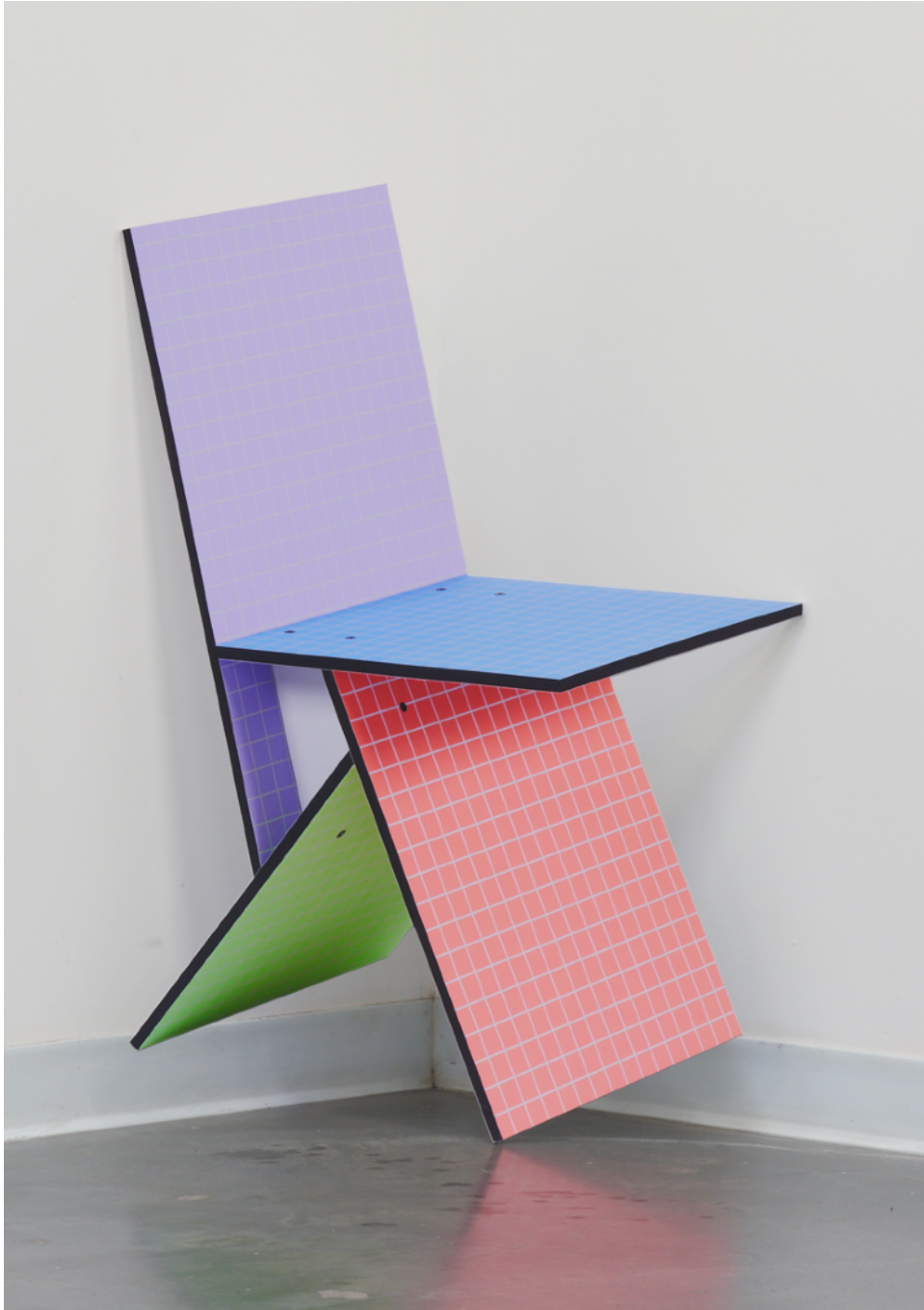2021, Transmedium

Figure 29- Political Compass Chair, devirtualized, (Facsimile)
2021, Transmedium

Another way of approaching the virtual is through sites where the virtual scrapes against the real. This has taken shape in more literal approaches such as photographing the often forgotten infrastructure which supports our digital networks, or expanding to more complex ways of understanding virtual space as discussed in Ritger's writing. This includes metaphorical manifestations such as "Richard Nixon Presidential Library Oval Office Replica, 18001 Yorba Linda Blvd, Yorba Linda, CA 92886" pointing not just towards the facsimile as a form of the virtual, but considering the relationship Nixon himself had with the virtual through the abolition of the gold standard. Similarly, "CT Corporation, 1209 Orange St, Wilmington, DE 19801" points towards a fully virtual system of finance and business. This site is the headquarters (on paper) to thousands of US Corporations as a means of attaining favorable business advantages regardless of where the corporate entity is physically located. More straightforward manifestations include "One Wilshire Building, 624 South Grand Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90017", a network hub where Asia and North America's networks are linked by undersea cables, a "carrier agnostic" space where the limits of privatization become obvious as cross communications between networks is a necessity.

An additional manner of addressing this is through the creation of facsimiles. As a means of forcing mediation upon the viewer and inverting the role of the gallery experience, I have taken to never exhibiting the initial stage of the object within the space. These facsimiles engage with trompe l'oeil and skeuomorphs as a means of further working through ideas of the virtual. Object facsimiles range in their reality, some a convincing illusion and others obviously flatfooted. Through shifting perspectives and approaches one is encouraged to consider the relations of human vision and lens vision. Exhibition view facsimiles are the logical conclusion of recent art history, if formal decisions, lighting, and architecture have contorted to satisfy the virtual, these works come full circle, placing the installation image within the gallery, forcing the viewer to not only encounter the works themselves through mediation, but the space as well.

"Title, Date, Medium" the first and largest work in my thesis exhibition is comprised of the title, date, and medium of every work in the show applied to the baseboard in bold black sans serif type. Using reference as pure material, this work provides a repository of information which unlock the references which are used elsewhere throughout the show. A distillation of each work into the code which comprises the backbone of the "technical image."

Figure 30- Richard Nixon Presidential Library Oval Office Replica,
18001 Yorba Linda Blvd, Yorba Linda, CA 92886, 2023

Figure 31- One Wilshire Building, 624 South Grand Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90017, 2023

As profit motives heighten within both physical and online space, where can one turn? This question has led me to my current approach. The insistence on a simultaneous digital and physical presence in the work is a means of expressing the present moment of stagnation within both realms. Engaging with memetic image culture, my works are often unfixed, denoted by the use of transmedium within the materials list. I adopted this term as a way of implying that there is no singular form for the works. Each work consists of versions: the title, the object, the photograph, the facsimile, each demonstrating a different stage of mediation between the referent, the real, and the virtual. As online platforms are increasingly dominated by profit motives and algorithms, the digital tactics of a movement such as post-internet have become outmoded. Counterintuitively, the gallery now seems to be the liberatory space, a space which has the potential to exist outside of capital's influence.

As John Berger stated in, *Ways Of Seeing,* initially mentioned at the beginning of this text, "the means of reproduction are used politically and commercially to disguise or deny what their existence makes possible. But sometimes individuals use them differently." Revisiting this quote through the writing of Villem Flusser, if the apparatus is programmed to hide what it makes possible, pointing the apparatus towards itself or other apparatus, one might begin to expose the latent potential Berger implies. This means pointing towards the power of digital networks, algorithmic information dispersion, and digital imaging technologies, the program of which is to camouflage itself, to colonize the real with a never-ending multiplicity of facsimiles.

Figure 32- Exhibition View (Doorway) and Title, Date, Medium
(Installation View), 2023

Figure 33- Exhibition View (Doorway) and Title, Date, Medium
(Installation View), 2023

Figure 34- Title, Date, Medium (Installation View), 2023

THREE

Figure 35- Louise Lawler, Three, 1984

Figure 36- John Knight, The Artist's Museum: MMX, a work in situ, The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 2010

Figure 37- American Apparel Ads (Vice Magazine 2007-2015…cont
(Installation View), 2023

Figure 38- Flaming Hot Mountain Dew (Installation View), 2023

Figure 39- Flaming Hot Mountain Dew (Installation View), 2023

Figure 40- Flaming Hot Mountain Dew (Installation View), 2023

Figure 41- Shipment 2, Devirtualized (Container Number:
CXRU1281588, Vessel…cont (Installation View), 2023

Figure 42- Shipment 1, Devirtualized (Bill of Lading: UFSC100349…
cont (Installation View), 2023

Figure 43- 256 GB Flash Storage Module, Devirtualized…cont
(Installation View), 2023

References

The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Walter Benjamin, 1935

Art After Philosophy, Joseph Kosuth, 1969

Ways Of Seeing, John Berger, 1972

Towards A Philosophy On Photography, Villém Flusser, 1984

Into The Universe Of Technical Images, Villém Flusser, 1985

Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975, MOCA LA, Ann Goldstein, 1995

Unwritten Histories of Conceptual Art, Thomas Crow, 1996

Undressing the Institutional Wound, Timothy Martin, 1997

Dispersion, Seth Price, 2002

Versions, Oliver Laric, 2009-2012

The Image Object Post-Internet, Artie Vierkant, 2010

Peer Pressure, Brad Troemel, 2011

All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace, Adam Curtis, 2011

Athletic Aesthetics, The New Inquiry, Brad Troemel, 2013

https://thenewinquiry.com/athletic-aesthetics/

2011: Art and Transmission, Artforum, Michael Sanchez, 2013

https://www.artforum.com/print/201306/2011-art-and-transmission-41241

Post Internet Reader, Haley Mellin, 2014

The Present In Drag, 9th Berlin Biennale, DIS, 2016

Hypernormalization, Adam Curtis, 2016

The Basilisk, Daniel Keller, 2017

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=721XhxAHoUI

Coherence and Complicity : On the Wholeness of Post-Internet Aesthetics, Larne Abse Gogarty, 2018 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UaJyokkC6g&t=1876s

Art In The Age Of The Internet: 1989 To Today, ICA Boston, Eva Respini, 2018

I was raised on the Internet, MCA Chicago, Omar Kholeif, 2018

On Devirtualization, Jak Ritger, 2020

https://www.punctr.art/on-devirtualization/

The internet didn't kill counterculture—you just won't find it on Instagram, Carly Busta, 2021 - https://www.documentjournal.com/2021/01/the-internet-didnt-kill-counterculture-you-just-wont-find-it-on-instagram/

Art In The After Culture, Ben Davis, 2022

Stuck on the Platform: Reclaiming the Internet, Geert Lovink, 2022