

memory bank

By

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What does it mean to remember in the digital age? As digital culture continues to flourish, people seldom take notice of the ways in which they interact with memory. With advancements in technologies, the once laborious tendencies associated with the process of memory have become a thing of the past. Though not completely forgotten these processes are utilized with new intent, and in doing so take on a different meaning. Social media, and access to information have allowed individuals to share, market, and revisit memories; once private information is no longer, and is thrust into a nostalgic contemporary setting. Through artistic expression we gain the ability to convey the dichotomy of digital culture and collective memory. In doing so, we intentionally or not contribute to these systems at large, and gain the ability to revisit and recontextualize once captive memories.

Prior to the digital revolution, individuals interacted with memory in vastly different circumstances. Objects, such as photographs, films or antiques were highly valued as memory evoking effigies, and required an elaborated intentional process in order to guarantee longevity. They enabled the individual to have ownership over their information and take great pride in their nostalgic tendencies. Moreover, the idea of a collective memory, information shared by the numerous cultural groups, was far from established, and if in its infancy only applied to a small portion of the “collective”. Libraries and other memory banks were accessible, but only by the elite. Still today the issues surrounding the internet's accessibility inhibits many people from taking part in its plethora of information, seemingly left in the past, or left out of a digital collective. Nevertheless, the process of remembering has always been sought after. Whether it be

through biblical paintings or scriptures, this form of information was only accessible by clergy and other elites at great cost. More importantly, we must take time to acknowledge the transition period we are currently experiencing, and how it reflects our personal identities through mnemonic memory works, mnemonic memory being a technique used to remember. One's memory is something highly valued, not only by the individual, but by the digital orifices we use to help store, interoperate, and label them. Our memories not only shape the world around us but contribute to the ways in which we see ourselves and interact with other. In social settings we discuss memories as a quasi-transactional currency, used to help establish a relatable background, creating common connections in tune strengthening relationships. Whether they place you in a specific social group, class, or location, what you remember ends up being a determining factor in one's trajectory of life.¹

Revisiting memories.

Memory is not something set in stone, in fact it is understood to be a perception of the past which continuously undergoes transformation due to its dependency on present circumstantial conditions. Media, such as films and video, strongly encourage us to evoke memory through their ability to bring forth forgotten and or repressed account of time, within an already linear structure. However, the very essence of the moving image is rooted in its ability to capture a moment in time, and convey that moment creating a cinematic memory. A home video for instance, is a relatively new phenomenon. Parents feel obligated or encouraged to film a baby's first steps,

¹Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor. 2009. Delete : The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age. Princeton : Princeton University Press, c2009.

documenting that mark in a child's upbringing, elongating its precious relevance in time. However, what both the early moving image and its evolution into the other forms such as the home movie contribute to the visual artist is their materiality, their ability to exist past the moment experienced. The transient contextual relevance of early film equipment, and the more modern technologies introduced equally add to the artist's ability to convey memories. Interacting with these objects alone captivate the viewer and in part hold their own as memory objects. That being said, memory work isn't confined to film or video, and is more than prevalent in other mediums such as sculpture, painting, photography as well as digital work.²

According to Domingo Martinez Rosario the artists has three main strategies in incorporating memory into their work:

“The first one is the appropriation of found and discarded objects or films. Artists use amateur photographs, home movies, old films and other objects due to their power to trigger emotions, nostalgia and melancholy, engage the viewers' attention and involve them in the artwork. The second strategy is a critical reconsideration of the past, i.e. history. Memory is understood not as fixed accounts of the past, but as something that is influenced by contemporary circumstances and emotions. In this way, memory becomes a tool for revising past and historical events and also for helping to understand the present. The third strategy draws on the representation of temporality and time in the artwork. Artists generally employ images and films that embody different times in the

² Martinez Rosario Domingo. 2017. “Film and Media as a Site for Memory in Contemporary Art.” *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Film and Media Studies*, Vol 14, Iss 1, Pp 157-173 (2017), no. 1: 157. doi:10.1515/ausfm-2017-0007.

past. By doing this, artists echo the way in which memory works; it evokes different events in the past in a non-linear sequence.”³

These guidelines help create a framework aiding in the navigation and critique of memory-based projects. Through incorporating “found and discarded objects or films”, “critical reconsideration(s) of the past”, or “temporality and time” in one's work they are conceptually acting upon memory as a constructive element. With that being said this will be the criteria for determining whether or not a work successfully contributes to a collective cultural memory, further impacting a moment in time.

Desensitized culture

As seen throughout history, constant exposure to violence or trauma has the ability to desensitize its viewers. Whether it be through video games, movies, images, or active duty, the interaction between violence and the human eye has only heightened. With access to information reaching a wider variety of cultures, eventually obtaining a global range, we see a trend in the depiction of violence in our day to day lives. This is not saying that the desensitized eye is one of inferiority, however its potency is most definitely a result of the digital age and how it has worked its way into our collective memory. Movies, such as Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* are seldom examined with scrutiny and gets a “pass” as it's just entertainment, however without calling for censorship it's important to acknowledge the rewriting of history and how it may be

³ Martinez Rosario Domingo. 2017. “Film and Media as a Site for Memory in Contemporary Art.” Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Film and Media Studies, Vol 14, Iss 1, Pp 157-173 (2017), no. 1: 157. doi:10.1515/ausfm-2017-0007.

perceived. In *Inglorious Basterds* the Jews were shown carving a swastika on the heads of a Nazi when in reality it was the Nazis who were carving the Star of David onto the chests of Rabbis; the sequence effectively turning the Jews into Nazis. This approach of “rewriting” history may be seen as a satire to some, however in appropriating depictions of historical collective memories the viewer is not left with an accurate recollection of the past, but a misguided interpretation of our desensitized present. In moments like these we must tread lightly not to lightly recollect falsehoods, but construct progressive areas for discussion.⁴

Another example of the way we interact with violence in the modern era is Thomas Hirschhorn's *Touching Reality*. Viewers are confronted with extremely graphic images consisting of mutilated bodies whilst watching fingertips casually scrolling, examining, enlarging, and continuing to the next image, as if mindlessly going through an Instagram feed. Though not encountered with the actual bodies or involved with the individuals in any way, this work has the ability to provoke trauma, in the sense that it calls upon the individual viewer to assess their own experiences and gauge their own analysis on how they interact with graphic violence. Whilst the images are stagnant the figure navigating them is not. By juxtaposing the temporal activity of navigating a digital space with the petrified images of corpses and carnage, Hirschhorn navigates our collective memory by forcing us to acknowledge the impact media has had on our cognitive development. Our memory digitized and thrown into a vast pool of anything

⁴ Wareham, Jack. 2018. “Quentin Tarantino and Desensitization to Violence.” UWIRE Text. <http://ezproxy.purchase.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.527167935&site=eds-live>.

from family photos to terrorist demands, all collectively archived and deemed equally valid in cyberspace. ⁵

Retrieving ownership over personal memory

In the digital age it is easier to remember than it is to forget.⁶ We are faced with the option to either be left behind or take part in digital tendencies. We use our phones to capture images, sounds, video, all of which compose memories. However, in doing so we retract our ownership over the nature of our memories. No longer private and personal, but public, systematic archived, and harvested for capitalist gain. Though varying intensities, micro to macro, our memories are what give us a sense of identity and individuality. Though once coerced and, in part, used to deem information flow, who we are begins to be determined by algorithms and synapses. This process holds the ability to force new thoughts into one's psyche that wouldn't otherwise remain locked in the intentions of big business. Small fragments of information do not define us, it is the whole and as a collective that we fearfully approach the era of one's whole being integrated into cyberspace, therefore giving the ability to fabricate our own memories to people other than ourselves. We've already entered a state where reversing preexisting technologies in motion is impossible, the auxiliary and ports in general are slowly disappearing, akin to the uselessness of the pinky toe and its slow evolutionary demise. Though in the case of technology we have the ability to speed up this process.

⁵ "Thomas Hirschhorn: Touching Reality." Institute of Modern Art. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://ima.org.au/thomas-hirschhorn-touching-reality/>.

⁶ Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor. 2009. Delete : The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age. Princeton : Princeton University Press, c2009.

The freedoms which seemingly encompass the world wide web, sometimes referred to as web 2.0, depict a world of radical freedom. However, in its infancy specific designs were established, such as the file, and midi, that were up for debate, but now, so entwined within the framework of the internet, we cannot function without them, yet alone try and change them, for that would require reconstructing the internet as a whole. The same irreversibility that files and music notes -midi- have endured is something not to take for granted, that is as we continuously integrate technologies into our biological makeup. At a certain point we may not be able to reverse the effects that tech has on our physical makeup, and face the same issues the file and midi formats have come into.⁷

For now, we are still capable of putting away our phones, not watching TV and interacting with the world around us, but the more we integrate cybernetic technologies into our everyday practices the more difficult this will become. Artist discussing cybernetics and memory may be touching on a very important cultural phenomenon, the memory of digital beings and their connection biologically sound organisms. How are we to understand what hasn't been fully implemented? In hypothesizing a cybernetic dreamscape artists and theorists contribute to the material future individuals will be able to reinterpret creating a better understanding of the way in which we remember what hasn't occurred. Artist Juliana Huxtable's performance work often references the cyborg as a mode of performance and is reflected in a collaboration with Frank Benson in the 2015 New Museum Triennial. Though the binary was a polarizing aspect of the work, its inner essence touched upon topics such as race, social class, and collective memory.

⁷ Lanier, Jaron. *You Are Not a Gadget : A Manifesto*. New York : Vintage Books, c2011., 2011.

Through juxtaposing a cultural shift alongside a physical one, Huxtable laid still in a contemporary gallery setting -emphasizing the leniency of the now, in contrary to the past- taking ownership and establishing her ideologies in a cultural collective memory.⁸

Trauma, Repression, Amnesia

For many the act of exploring one's memories is a relatively casual process. They relax as they ponder upon mundane recollections of past times, reinterpreting, remembering or recounting events that have made their way into long-term memory. However, at times the process of remembering is one that brings you face to face with traumatic experiences. Some left untouched in hopes of they'd eventually dissipate, and some strategically forgotten or reinterpreted to a point of dissolution. This occurrence directly affects the collective memory in so far as the failure to discuss said memories continues to render these topics taboo or unapproachable.⁹ Fortunately, due to the process of discussing traumatic experiences, whether it be through artwork or any catalyst for that matter, we as a western society, are becoming more equipped with the tools to combat these issues. Artists Tani Ikeda, Jess X. Snow, Layqa Nuna Yasar and myself have been recently working on a string of murals aimed at bringing awareness to forgotten or private memories associated with sexual trauma. Focused on interacting with the local communities surrounding the location of the murals themselves, participants are encouraged to take part in the writing of a love letter, which they can then decide to share with the larger group. This process is designed to help the

⁸ Gronlund, Melissa. *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture*. London: Routledge, 2017.

⁹ Ince, Gökçen Başaran. "Digital Culture, New Media and The Transformation of Collective Memory." *Galatasaray Üniversitesi İletişim Dergisi*, 0, no. 21 (2014): 9. doi:10.16878/gsuilet.96673.

individual revisit the past while being surrounded by a community of people, with lived shared experiences, eager to listen and aid in the coping process that follows. In doing so not only do the individuals haunted by their experience have a chance to cope and discuss through a combination of writing poetry, or writing a love letter to their past selves, but make those once private memories public. By introducing these experiences in to the public realm and eventually painting excerpts of their love letters onto the mural itself these murals lay the ground for a more accepting community and overall bring awareness to the memories so often kept secret.¹⁰

Whether it's sculpture, video, painting, digital work, or performance, the act of expression alongside its inherent contribution and collaboration with collective memory takes many subjective circumstances into play. We see issues or happenings in our current sociopolitical situation and act upon them with tools passed down through memory, archives, and lived experiences, which are all constantly evolving. The relationship that digital culture and collective memory have not only help achieve a more accurate representation of the past but help build upon a progressive future.

¹⁰ Harvey-Jenner, Catriona. "Sexual Assault Survivors Write Moving Love Letters to Themselves." *Cosmopolitan*. March 27, 2018. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/reports/a33606/survivor-love-letter-sexual-assault-survivors/>.

Part 2

The process of remembering is one that takes a toll. Whether its passive or deliberate, we navigate thought, experience, and action with notions of longevity. At times, without intention we archive or set aside parts to a whole. These memory objects are held dear to us and aid in the overall self-image we construct, however we trust that these moments will last and when this fails, we experience great loss. As an artist I feel as if this documentation, and or archival urge is seen as a necessity, almost more of an obligation than a leisure, and that isn't necessarily detrimental. However, as artists we cannot lose grip of how we interact with our own memory, and how that information navigates public space. I intend to create objects, images, or files that can stand the test of time, and interact with individuals in the way I intend. Leaving some room for speculation, but the majority of that space left to come to a greater understanding of myself and my actions at that specific moment in my life.

Discussing memory within an art piece is something I find myself doing regularly. My most recent work "memory bank" serves as the tentative final form of a lifelong study which incorporates much more than meets the eye. From its inception, I saw my thesis as an opportunity to look back at who I was and what I've become. Not knowing exactly how this project would end up I decided to start from the very beginning with my childhood drawings, which resonated with me and with others. These drawings brought me back to a time of ignorance, yet also of great malleability. I have vague memories of my world view at the time, but key moments stuck out to me; my interest in violent

imagery, masculine clichés, and Catholicism, all of which I felt were discussed within childhood images. My main concern at the time was the way in which I'd convey this to the viewer, but had fears of over complicating or misinterpreting things. I stepped back and felt the need to work with material before making any concrete decisions.



Figure 1 - Untitled - Clothing installation

This brought me to my first study involving a silk screen, clothing, and an eventual installation. After choosing a select few drawings, I began to recreate them with the intentions of building a new foundation that communicated a more current perspective, attempting to conjoin my two very distant mental states, an early outlook on life, and a current one. Using my childhood drawings, I revisited them with the intentions of bringing life back into my once stagnant pieces. Once these recreations were complete, I went on to silk screen them on to upwards of 20 shirts all of which would be sold or given away at a show curated by Jennifer Buchner. This served as an opportunity to see this work in a gallery setting and to spark ideas on a variety of ways I could further develop this project.

Stemming from the previous work, I took my next study as another opportunity to explore new ideas which came forth during my deinstallation. The next stage in this process was to approach this study from yet another angle, through costume design, performance and video. I decided that I wanted to immerse myself within the drawings themselves, and come up with a world that I'd be physically entering, one that would bring me closer to my work and in tune strengthen my relationship with my former self. I constructed a story line that I felt would communicate a more radical point of view ideally resonating with some.

“In a gender conflicted dystopia, we stand in solitude amongst this chaotic earth. Little do we know, yet more do we wish to obtain, a constant battle between constructed languages holds its grip tight. We crave answers for yet another 13 months, and on the dawn of [lunar equilibrium](#), our spiritual leader Bowl, a name we see fit due to its irrelevance, delivers parts to a whole, a new being, a new light. Contemplation of a world where notions of synchronicity and happiness run rampant, where men and women destroy the binarian systems established by ancient predecessors, we contact this force, we contact Bone, Flesh, a Viscous thought and construct new genders with new ideals

We wear masks, for they are protection.

We deliver creativity, regardless of its unlawfulness.

Expression has been criminalized, whilst repression glorified.

The state of humanity has reached a crucial point where deconstruction has been accomplished, however we stand without the proper assets for reconstruction, forgotten they fall. We face a higher power in need. Held under water, we breath, growing gills, learning what has been destroyed in order to make room for a new order, disorder. Bowl no longer feels the obligation to deliver beauty, we are the deliverers. Without a restoration of balance between Sun and Moon we will fall into an eternity of disgust and constructed pleasure deemed by fabricated virtuosity.”

This short description was printed and distributed by myself in full costume. I remained silent, ignoring questions and sitting completely still until pressing play to start the video which went on to explain how “I was made”, and how the birth of a new humanity would ensue. This study helped me come to the understanding that I wanted my final project to have some specific key elements; it needed to exist in a physical and virtual space, needed to incorporate some kind of interesting and immersive technology, and most definitely needed audio.



Figure 2 - Bowl - Video still

My overall ideas were becoming more put together and I was stuck between creating a whole new virtual space utilizing virtual reality or using augmented reality in order to bring my drawings to life. I knew that I wanted to work with the composer Cole Kibel on an ambient track akin to the works of Brian Eno and Aphex Twin, but also felt as if it'd be a great opportunity to incorporate a kind of biblical reference by utilizing a choir patch. Over the course of two or three weeks, Cole and I collaborated on the final audio track which not only achieved an ambient dissonance, but also helped shape the overall emotional state that I was experience whilst creating this work. Virtual reality was

soon off the table due to my urge to have the viewer interact with the piece, alongside my vision of the overall aesthetic being solidified. I was limited at this point, however intentionally so. This left me with some key elements to flesh out, including how I was going to present augmented reality in a gallery setting, and how exactly I was going to augment the images presented. Being an avid user of virtual reality, I've been infatuated with the intuitiveness of VR sculpting. I went on to try every existing application out there, including Quill, Gravity Sketch, Tilt Brush, A-Painter, and eventually came upon Oculus Medium which I found to be the most advanced application of them all. I began getting accustomed to the interface until I was confident enough to start my final study, the study of the body. Every day for about a two or so months I would use Oculus Medium to sculpt different body parts with a similar theme to the drawings I did back in 1999. Once finished I'd export a select few as object files and upload them to SketchFab, a website meant to share/archive 3D models. This allowed me to not only have my work already interacting with the public, and gain feedback, but speaks the to open source nature that I feel is important for all to take part in alongside an amazing way to archive my process. Over time I built a large collection of models and felt comfortable doing actual recreations of the drawings themselves. However, what still remained important was the minute details I'd alter in each rendition. I saw this as an opportunity to discuss how I've changed over the years, and in part, discussing polarized issues within our current sociopolitical climate. No sculpture has a definite gender, race, or story. Each model took something from every part of life I've observed over the years. I began to carefully use this juxtaposition of early and later life as a tool for discussing issues within myself and my peers: body dysmorphia, gender fluidity, and

moral codes. Knowing that this would be a lot to unpack for an unexpected viewer, I didn't find it necessary for it all to be easily cohesive. The creation of these models served more as a way for myself to cope with my ever-changing perspectives, and in archiving, sharing, documenting, and publishing them my journey through the years 1999-2019 became clearer than ever before. I felt as if I was coming to terms and resolving inner struggles.

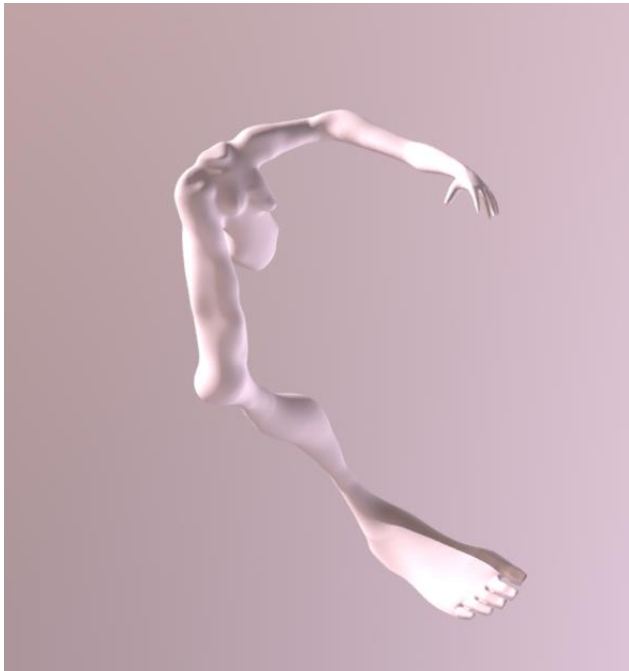


Figure 3 - Arm Foot - 3D Sculpture

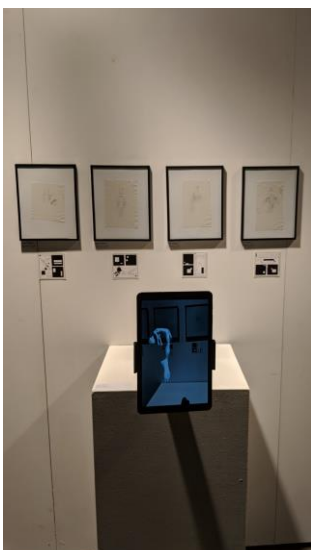
Once all the models were finished, I knew animating them would only strengthen the work. Out of all the models created, I chose four that I felt best represented myself. Using Maya, I rigged skeletons into each model and began the process of animation, making sure each model was seemingly alive. Following this, I exported individual animations as .FBX files and imported them into

Unity. Using the Vuforia augmented reality asset, I was able to attach my animations to abstract QR codes I designed in order to have a tablet later activate the animation when pointed at the QR code. After I set the audio to start upon the image recognition, the application was finished and was uploaded to the tablet. This left me with one more step, installation, which proved to be more of a struggle than intended.

Upon entering the gallery, I knew that I wanted each piece to exist separately, however be easily and intuitively manipulated by the viewer in order to view everything in its entirety. I hung each framed drawing approximately 5 feet from the ground with their corresponding QR codes beneath them. Under each drawing a didactic titled “untitled 1, untitled 2, untitled 3, untitled 4” all dated 1999 was placed. At the front of the drawings was a lone pedestal from which a flexible mechanical arm stemmed, holding a tablet with my application running. Atop the pedestal was yet another didactic reading “memory bank” dated 2019. I found this to be an important distinction, and more a part of the artwork than informational aid. These two different dates held so much information, yet it was up to the viewer discover the relationship between them. Though it wasn’t my intention for every viewer to make the right connections, I feel as if art thrives in limbo and I was prepared for some to miss the meaning. The unknown often drives individuals to ask themselves questions or create works of their own addressing new or previously realized ideologies, so I seldom worry if the viewers hit the nail on head. Nevertheless, this piece functioned as intended and after minor changes to lighting and spacing the installation process was complete.

Amongst the obvious gallery opening chaos, many stood in front of the tablet and seemed weary, yet very intrigued. I feel that interactivity in a gallery setting is so rare that at times some seemed excited about, holding, bending or stretching the tablet. However, over time, more and more people began interacting with the work and my intentions became clear. I watched happily as time went on and was enthralled with

how many saw what I gave them the tools to see. This may have been the final project of the semester, and very well exists as a finished work, however the project is far from finished. I tend to think of most of my work as one large study, one that will continue to culminate as years go on, taking bits and pieces from each to create the next, archiving and later remembering through numerous media outlets. The idea of a finished work will forever be one I struggle with. It's easy for one to say that they're their own worst critic, however the idea of something being finished is more of a philosophical dilemma than an answerable question to me. This work will never be finished, because my perspective on life is ever changing. The same way that my childhood drawings were built upon to finish this work, the next iteration very well might take this project and further build upon it. I feel as if one day I'll revisit this work and interact with it as if I'm revisiting a previous version of myself, a fresh graduate, and laugh at the way things have changed, being able to use my evolved worldview to create something deeper, and more memorable.



*Figure 4 - memory bank -
Augmented reality installation*

I like to think that my means of creations is easily depicted in cohesive steps, and able to be understood by the masses, but when it comes to making work, I tend to just throw myself in a pit and find what I need by climbing out. Numerous artists, whether their concentrations are in sculpture, video, painting, photography, or new media all have a huge impact on my creative process. However, it's not as simple as me picking and choosing specific pieces that obviously relate to my work, but more of an emotional

relationship to the creators if anything. Artists such as Leonardo Avo, Rosalind Schneider, Devin Blake, Sara Magenheimer, Erinn McKenna, Joe Mckay, Victoria Estok, Steve Lambert, Raphael Zollinger all had and have such a huge impact on the way my final project turned out, however their work doesn't all necessarily have a clear relationship to mine. What's most important is that I'm able to find something within myself after either discussing my ideas with them, or seeing the way they apply theirs. I take the time to look at artwork as much as I can, however this can feel overwhelming at times, and being so detached from the artists who inspire you the most can be detrimental. More often than not, I find myself looking to the people around me for inspiration, and seeing the contemporary art world as a kind of dictionary or short story that I reference at times. Nevertheless, I'm not saying that the professional and or contemporary art world is more important than the inspiration one finds within their own social circle, but truly feel as if it's necessary to not solely look for inspiration in the elite, when so many great minds constantly surround us, especially in an art focused institution. With that being said, I didn't find myself thinking about the numerous artists mentions in the first half of this paper. Once mentioned and researched they functioned more as individuals than as the objects, videos, or paintings they created. At times I have the fear that I'd find myself taking ideas from others and though I understand that it's an inevitable part of art making, I also take pride in actively trying to detach myself from that and entering things blindly. This process does not always yield the best results, but in doing so I feel as if it brings me closer to who I am and in tune strengthens the connection between me and my art.

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