

# Free thesis on creature of cluture

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Never judge culture by one man and never judge a man by popular culture.

- Anonymous

## **Abstract**

In "The Death of the Author," structuralist thinker Roland Barthes suggested the notion of the author as a distinct identity in the creation and interpretation of a text was a thing of the past. Instead, he preferred the use of the word "scriptor" to refer to the person writing or typing a work for the first time. The ideas in the scriptor's mind would have to travel through his or her semiotic filters to make it to the paper - those filters take the ideas and shape them - for example, the inspiration to write about fathers and their role in a child's life would be shaped by the scriptor's experiences with his or her own father before making it to the paper. Similarly, a text's reader must take the words on the page and run them through their own semiotic filters before interpretation can begin.

The focus of this thesis is my attempt to show that the mass media and the mass culture can and does shape a person's thoughts and ideas. Using several of my own works, I intend to show you the cultural context from which they emerged, and to show you that the cultural context in which I grew up was and is a crucial element, not just in those works of art, but in my entire creative process.

Using seven plates, each of which shows one of my works of art, I intend to connect each work to its roots in my set of experiences with the mass culture, to show you the particular path each work took through my own semiotic filter to make it to exhibition.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

As I began research for my thesis, I realized that this paper would act as a legend to my work, which has made manifest my wishes, dreams and thoughts. In recent years, I have grown both as a person and as an artist. Conceptually, my work has taken a great leap forward; by providing a biography of personal information, I feel questions about the work can be answered. My life experiences comprise the subject matter within my work, as well as a theoretical framework that comes from a wide array of psychologists and sociologists. By knowing more about my influences, stories, childhood, and artistic process, I hope to provide a lasting link to my work, and link it to existing theory that is present within the canon of sociological discourse. It is my intention to discuss how culture can shape a person's thoughts and ideas.

Ruth Benedict once said: "From the moment of his birth, the customs into which an individual is born shape his experience and behavior. By the time he can talk, he is the little creature of his culture." (Benedict, p. 3) I found this quote a few years ago, and I consider it to be one of the best quotes I have ever read; it sums up not only my work, but my entire worldview. Culture can be defined as "a contested and conflictual set of practices of representation bound up with the processes of formation and reformation of social groups" (Driscoll, p. 173). I build upon all aspects of the culture around me. I do not limit my cultural influences to art, but many types of different media. I am a collector of thoughts, dreams, images, and material objects.

My interests lie in many fields, which I hope to discuss and explain. Among the topics of this paper, you may find my ruminations on acting, appropriation, music, storytelling, loss of youth, heroes and desires. Ultimately, I hope my life's events will provide for a better understanding of the way culture can shape a persons thoughts.

A project of exhibited photographs, serigraphs and video establishing this project was held on April xxxx. Slides taken from the exhibition can be accessed from the slide library in the xxxx School of Art, Design, and Art History.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **A WORLD WITHOUT HEROES**

Each semester I give a questionnaire to my beginning art students in order to know and understand them a little better. Among the questions I ask are: " Who is your hero?" I am constantly surprised by the overwhelming response. The top two answers I usually see on my student's papers include their mother and father. This doesn't apply to me; each semester, I verbally answer the questions on the questionnaire as they apply to me. Depending on the day, my list might include Reggie Jackson or Ozzy Osbourne. Why? Well, when I think of heroes, I think of fictional heroes. My students usually laugh when they hear these answers, but you would be surprised how close these figures are to my heart.

I have made a large number of friends over the years, and not one of those friends has ever wanted to be in their parents' shoes. We learn from our

parents' shortcomings and mistakes, as our children will learn from ours. I look at my parents as role models, not heroes. My parents taught me what was right and what was wrong. My parents instilled their beliefs and opinions in me, and left it to me to sort them out on my own. They made sure I was always fed, clothed and cared for, and they guaranteed that I received a sensible and effective education. The provision that my parents offered remains an important part of my development - I want to follow their examples, and use the lessons that they have taught me. My parents did keep me from danger and fought for my rights; in that sense they have heroic qualities, but I do not consider them my heroes. All the things I have mentioned about parenthood should go without saying. It is a parent's duty to protect and provide for their children; with that in mind, it is hard for me to call my parents heroes, although it is a title that they deserve.

My life is shaped by the fantasy of the hero. Heroes have shaped our culture, and our lives. They are the people we want to emulate and model ourselves after. I have many heroes, all of whom offer their influences for me to draw upon. When I look for heroes, I do not look for a role model's guidance; I know that they will never provide for me the way my role models did. My heroes give me something to push towards.

Heroes influence the lives that role models provide; they shape our goals, attitude, entertainment, culture and dreams, and are themselves a product of that culture. In my everyday life, I have a list of 100 heroes that I draw from. I could list those heroes and tell what each of them means to me, but the list is long, complicated and distinguished. Lead singer of KISS, Gene

Simmons, sang, " A world without heroes is no place for me, and it's no place to be" (Stanley, Simmons, Ezrin & Reed, 1981).

The idea of the hero is firmly ingrained in our culture, and has been shown to dramatically influence the way in which people behave and interact with each other. The sense of self is particularly endangered from a male point of view; in contemporary popular culture, there is thought to be a 'crisis of masculinity' taking place, where there are no male role models to look up to. This is typically a neoconservative view of media, as they see the outside influence of media as the villain, leaving religion in the role of the hero (Hoover & Coats, 2011, p. 877). Depending on which religion one follows, Jesus Christ, Mohammed or Buddha are just three examples of the possible identity of this ultimate hero - someone whom every adherent of that religion should strive to emulate.

The media line of the male identity allows for men to understand the gender narrative. Through the men around them, from fathers to relatives in their own neighborhood to movie characters like John McClane and Dirty Harry, a distinctly rigid set of masculine traits is established and developed within young minds: men are supposed to be tough, gritty, determined, and competitive, among other traits (Hoover & Coats, 2011, p. 885). These media examples allow young boys to have a template for behavior, for better or worse - they serve to provide a sense of self for men who experience these aspects of culture. When Dirty Harry says, " Go ahead, make my day," (cite this source Sudden Impact) while staring down someone who opposes him, it

presents a media message to someone watching it that men are meant to be tough in the face of danger.

Of course, the incredible power of mass media and popular culture can shape these emulated traits in negative or deconstructive ways as well.

While there are positive attributes linked to many popular male figures, as previously mentioned, there is an increasing mass media perception of men as 'mediocre' (Palmer-Mehta, 2009). Evidenced by shows like *The Man Show*, where juvenile male behavior (scatological humor, misogyny, irresponsibility and alcoholism) is exalted, blind machismo is emphasized over temperance, sensitivity and intelligence.

These types of shows emphasize a culture of hegemonic masculinity, which refers to "a culture's general consensus regarding the ideal performance of manliness" (Palmer-Mehta, p. 1055). Images in popular media blend together to create an amalgam of what is thought to be 'manly,' and therefore comprise a model for how people feel they should behave. This can have positive and negative effects on individuals, especially with regards to portrayals of masculinity; these create a cultural ideal that may be impossible to reach, thereby creating unrealistic expectations of what men should do with their lives (e. g. sleep with many women, excel at sports, be in impeccable physical shape). At the same time, this marginalizes women as sex objects for men, and can heighten uniquely feminine traits - women in male-centered media tend to be either a)overly sexualized as young girls, or b)overly maternalized as older women, a concept known as 'emphasized femininity' (Palmer-Mehta, p. 1056).

Much of this cultural influence has been extended to the Internet, where a convergence culture is increasing. The idea of the convergence culture involves " the opportunities for participation by the audience and the flow of information across multiple media platforms" (Williams, p. 25). The Internet provides greater connectivity across the world than ever before; producer, audience and media are now extremely intertwined, as virtually anyone can post media in a place that can be viewed by millions upon millions of people. The phenomenon of the viral video turns ordinary people into their own brand of celebrity, merely by posting something that millions of people later find and share with each other. It is no longer the responsibility of movie studios and fashion magazines to tell people what to buy or like; people are doing that themselves, creating their own consumer and celebrity culture. The lines between celebrity and civilian blur more and more each day.

With this unique aspect of culture arising, it is no longer the purview of celebrities alone to shape culture; the advent of the Internet created a vast array of media, all of which have their own smaller-tier celebrities. The reality show boom grants long-forgotten celebrities who have spent decades out of the limelight a chance to find a new audience, though often at the expense of their dignity.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **APPROPRIATION**

I am from a generation of latchkey children who grew up with two working parents. As a result, many of my thoughts and ideas are born from a fascination with television. For children of the 1970's and 1980's, the



television became a babysitter. I would never consider this to be a fault of my parents, because in hindsight, they were trying to raise their children with luxuries they lacked in adolescence. For better or worse, I represent a large majority of America's youth, given my age and general background. We were brought up in a fast paced society, which brought about a revolution in visual technology.

I, like many others, became affixed to swiftly moving images that could hold my attention for short spans of time. The television took away our sense of reality and replaced it with idealized images that pervaded advertising. For this reason, I and many others within the television generation make certain associations between certain images and certain times or feelings. Indeed, these images from television inform much of my semiotic filter, or the collection of images, phrases and experiences that affect the way I interpret the world around me. Ask yourself: how much of your daily learning is from nature? How much of it is manmade? The last time you learned something new - was it from a physical nature experience, like a natural disaster or meteorological occurrence, or was that experience gathered from a book, television or the Internet? This is the essence of appropriation: taking these cultural memes and acquiring them for later consumption.

The reason I appropriate is because of my ability to merge the images that formulate my semiotic filter with present-day context. Had I been raised without a television, things might be different, but they are not; I remain a product of my immediate culture and surroundings. On the other side of this argument is painter David Salle. According to Salle, he "took images

because it was easier than making them up” (Salle & Schjeldahl, p. 37).

Subsequently, Salle found the photographs that he was using in paintings at a magazine where he once worked. He thought that discovery was a coincidence, saying, “ Why those images were recognizable as material was because the themes were already there in me” (Salle & Schjeldahl, p. 42).

Childhood in a mass-media generation is increasingly affected by televised images and popular culture. However, this is not a theory that is often explored, and one that is not considered by many to be that significant. The theory of 'doubtful legitimacy' states that the culture of inferior groups can often be thought to be trivial, and not worthy of analysis by the greater, majority culture (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 6). In the case of children, their lower state on the totem pole of cultural respect and social status leaves serious adult scholarship on the subject of this group somewhat lacking. It also leads to a marginalization of the influence of media on children, a group that arguably has a substantial number of external factors that influence emergent personalities, such as influences from parents and other significant adults, interactions with peers, and initial experiences. These can lead to the kind of appropriation Salle was talking about.

The adults who provide the cultural context in which children grow often do not give that context enough attention. Children's books are often influenced by the books those adult authors read as children, and the cycle then continues by people who think they know what children 'should' be reading. This leads to a 'cumulative cultural text' wherein the same bits and pieces of culture are recycled over and over again, or reappropriated for future

generations; this way, intergenerational sharing takes place (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 8). This can leave the changing of social queues and external influences on children through media somewhat limited, given the continued expectations of what children are meant to see and absorb.

German critic Walter Benjamin argued that photographs and photographic reproductions destroyed the sense of uniqueness and special value that had always surrounded art objects. With the coming of photography, artwork of all kinds could be viewed anywhere at any time, at least in reproduction; as a result, they were effectively stripped of what Benjamin described as their aura. Artists in recent times have done all that is necessary to prove this theory wrong. While I do agree that a Van Gogh will lose some appeal when translated to a slide, it is not the slide that is trying to be passed off as original artwork. The idea by Benjamin is obviously dated, but with the invention and prevalence of photography, it is a relevant subject.

I have studied much of the available literature concerning the ideas and issues of appropriation within our society. The simple fact is that appropriation is a larger topic than this Master's project would ever sufficiently cover. With the popularity of the Internet and other technology, one wonders how far the use of appropriated images will go. As far back as 1991 a group of artists, among them artist Barbara Krueger, faxed images to Tokyo for a group show. Their faxes were then turned into a high resolution negative on acetate, and printed as photographs. It seems as though that was just a beginning of technology that would become more and more widespread as time would go on.

There is a difference between appropriation and plagiarism. Plagiarism involves the complete appropriation of a person's total work and attempting to pass it off as your own work. Appropriation, on the other hand, is free and open to the re-use of ideas and cultural expressions. This plays into the idea of the collective unconscious, the Jungian idea that there are shared experiences that everyone experiences and absorbs. There is information surrounding us everywhere; it is in the public domain and images are ours for the taking. Should we limit our creativity because images might be owned by others? Are our thoughts memories and ideas copyrighted? No, they are not; ideas and information are free in our society. One should not steal and try to pass work off as one's own; instead, they should borrow from their culture and use it for their own creative expression, giving credit to one's sources when necessary.

This speaks to the idea of mass culture; this is a notion of a 'way of life' that is indicative of an entire area, and as such the people living in it. People take from each other aspects of culture that are to be emulated and followed, leading to a canon of media that people appropriate as being uniquely 'theirs.' " By definition, mass culture is transmitted to individuals and views the individual as a consumer of both products and ideas, and popular interest is measured by sales or, in the case of radio and television, audience share" (Cox, 2009, p. 1). For example, the South has its own mass culture; there are films and television shows, as well as types of sports and music that have become uniquely Southern; NASCAR, country music, and more are all indicative of a generalized, blanket cultural view of the South that has been appropriated by them.

The South did not manufacture this culture; marketers and advertisers in the coastal cities (New York and LA) created these things. They carry the lion's share of responsibility for linking these things to the South, especially in the eyes of non-southerners (Cox, 2009, p. 1). The idea of an entire region that has its own stereotypical ideas, notions and conceptions is the primary definition of mass culture; these are things that define the South, mostly for non-southerners but for many actually living there as well.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SHUCK AND JIVE

I am an actor. I play through emotions in my life. I can portray the character of someone who is happy, even though I'm severely depressed. There are very few emotions I experience during life that are genuine. I have the ability to cover up tears, and hide shock. Andy Warhol said, "'Good Performers,' I think, are all inclusive recorders because they can mimic emotions as well as speech and looks and atmosphere--they are more inclusive than tape recordings or videos or novels. Good performers can somehow record complete experiences and people and situations and then pull out these recordings when they need them." (Warhol, p. 82) My life is based on being someone that is not truly me. What am I trying to hide?

During my first year at San Diego State, it was acting that I began to focus on, spending most of my adolescence studying the movements and characteristics of actors. I was known for my imitations of various celebrities and my football coaches during high school, but these acts were simply imitations of people I had mostly seen portrayed on Saturday Night Live.

There was no substance to my performances; I was repeating material with a similar voice. The crucial component of my act was sheer imitation. When I began photographing myself as an action hero, I borrowed from every male I had seen in an action film - Clint Eastwood, Bruce Willis, and Sylvester Stallone.

What I didn't understand, however, was the story. There was no story to my work; it was just an imitation. I find my early work visually and conceptually fascinating, but the story is lost.

Sheer fascination and friendly encouragement pushed me toward acting. It seemed inevitable that if I were to act within my photographs, then I should train. My photography work had advanced as far as it could without instruction, so I made the leap to acting. I was confident that my transition to acting would not be a struggle. I went to my acting classes, completely prepared to act; however, the class began with a series of meditation and observation tests. From the first of the semester, we simply read plays, which was something I had not truly done since high school.

It was during these readings that I would learn about story development; I began to see the way a story or plot could twist and turn. As an actor, it was my duty to give the story a picture the audience can follow. It was during my acting, that I first began to think of stories, which would lend themselves to my artwork. I was never worried about the visual components of my artwork, but I was looking for ways to strengthen the content. I did not want to abandon all the ideas I had been fighting for, during my action hero period, but I saw room for positive change.

Other aspects of my life, however, were not moving forward in the same positive way. I decided to ask my mother to commit some of my childhood stories to paper. I immediately began work on imagery which would accompany the tales. The stories arrived, and I included the unedited versions in the work. What followed were three pieces that changed my work, and reaffirmed my youth. They somehow explained the reason I am drawn to these various memories, and images. I simply followed my mother's storyline, and created images to accompany the tale. While I had achieved something new and exciting, my journey was far from over.

Entering the photography program, I heard about legendary trips to the desert. I would laugh at the stories of how some artists found their meaning in the desert, but was also curious to know what secrets the desert held, despite my skepticism. Despite the clichéd nature of finding the meaning of life out in the desert, I was still amazed at just how intriguing, inspirational, and isolated that setting could be.

I have spent my life telling the 'one up' story. The 'one up' story originates in locker rooms and dugouts across America. I came prepared to the campfire that night, and we had some good laughs. Upon our return from the desert, I was given the confidence and support needed to begin arranging and visualizing my own stories. I saw my own inspiration looking back at me, away from the influence of the outside world and media.

One of the other lessons I took from acting was the importance of the director, who controls the way an audience views a story. While the director is not always a writer, the director's vision is the ultimate screen translation.

I saw the opportunity to direct and edit my stories as a challenge, trying to determine how much twisting and distorting my stories would require. To date, my written work has never been better than the first that I produced. While some of my stories might have been far-fetched, they were all true. As I progressed as a storyteller, I continued to base my work on actual life events, focusing on the surreal events in my life and including them in the visual context of my work. What followed was work that was compelling on two different levels. I felt the text was a large part of the work, but the visual remained my passion.

I tried many different ways to display text within my work. Some of my stories worked with my images, while others did not. A large part of my story work dealt with people around me, very few of my stories dealt with the personal. Constantin Stanislavski wrote, " If you want to exchange your thoughts and feelings with someone, you must offer something you have experienced yourself." (Stanislavski, p. 205) When I began to write about my personal life, I was horrified. It is hard to live up to things that you know you cannot accomplish, the baseball career that you will never have, or the car wreck that almost ended your life. For these stories, I knew they needed to be glorified through visuals and text, which displayed the truth of these tales. According to Stanislavsky, " Everything must be real in the imaginary life of the actor" (Stanislavski, p. 157).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE STORIES, BEHIND STORIES, BEHIND THE WORK**

**I'VE BEEN TOLD I LOOK LIKE SOMEBODY (Plate 1)**



I have been told that I look like many people over the course of my life. My grandma is constantly changing her mind on which relative I most resemble. Over my life, I have heard some relatively famous names as well. What followed was a list of eight actors and musicians I wrote down one day while brainstorming. In an attempt to analyze these various “lookalike” suggestions, I began posing in front of a mirror – after all, what better way to appropriate from the mass culture than to show how I resemble its icons in plate 1?

### **Description: Framed large format digital prints**

Text appearing on the artwork:

“I’ve been told I look like somebody famous”

#### SWINGIN' FOR THE FENCE (Plate 2)

During 1985, I began to follow the sport of baseball. It was during this time that Pete Rose was about to break Ty Cobb’s all time hit mark. I followed the season intently, and collected Pete Rose baseball cards religiously. It was also during this time that I saw a motion picture that would change the direction of my childhood dreams. The movie was *The Natural*, where Robert Redford portrayed fictional baseball player Roy Hobbs. I credit these two events with the beginning of my baseball career. I knew very little about playing the sport of baseball, but I asked my father if I could join Little League. My father agreed on the basis that I would work on my baseball skills after school with him.

As my love for the game grew, I collected more and more memorabilia of my favorite players, as well as different quotes from my icons of the game. This

work seeks to connect the visual images of some of my baseball icons with their wisdom; the lessons I learned from following these players (and other athletes) are just a part of the precepts I have absorbed from the mass culture, see plate 2.

Description: Mixed Media - B&W photography mounted to MDF and hinged to a separate window. Screen printed on each hinge door are famous baseball quotes. Seven framed baseballs with hand written baseball memories.

### **Text appearing on the artwork:**

“ He was strong as a rock behind home plate. Enemy runners had to find away around him rather than through him.”

- Joe Morgan (about Johnny Bench)

“ Cobb is a prick. But he sure can hit. God Almighty, that man can hit.”

- Babe Ruth (about Ty Cobb)

“ A ball player has got to be kept hungry. That’s why no boy from a rich family ever made it to the big leagues.”

- Joe Dimaggio

“ Fan’s don’t boo nobody’s”

- Reggie Jackson

“ I’d walk through hell in a gasoline suit to keep playing baseball.”

- Pete Rose

“ Hitters aren’t stupid, but sometimes they think they are smarter than they really are.”

- Bob Gibson

“ I don’t compare em’. I just catch em’.

- Willie Mays

“ George is everything that’s right about baseball, and not just because he’s a good hitter.”

- Charley Lau (about George Brett)

“ I’ve always said when I broke in I was an average player. I had an average arm arm, average speed and definitely an average bat. I’m still average in all of those.

- Brooks Robinson

#### THE CHAMP, THE SPECTATOR, THE UPSET (Plate 3)

Although it has faded from prominence in recent years, the “ sweet science” of boxing has become a central part of American culture, dating from the realist paintings of pugilists by George Bellows to more modern films like “ Raging Bull.” Whether it's the unlikely victory of James J. Braddock over Max Baer, to cap an amazing comeback career, or the unbelievably long career of Rocky Balboa, boxing holds a special fascination for those who see it.

For many, it is the determination that goes along with training that draws them to boxing. For others, it's the bravado that goes into the days leading

up to the confrontation: the gamesmanship of the confrontation at the weigh-in, the suspense of the crosstalk at press conferences. For me, though, it is the primal aggression that goes into committing violence against another person. In most of our daily lives, this sort of aggression is not only frowned upon - it is illegal. In the boxing ring, though, the champions have to call upon that inner rage that broods within all of us, waiting to be summoned when combat is necessary. The images in plate 3, and the stories with them, are a part of the mass culture that I appropriated through my relationship with fighting - which continues to inform my work.

Description: Three screen printed mirrors matted and framed.

Text appearing on the artwork:

Cox and I were coming home from a long Thursday night. We were still living in the dorms, and probably a little drunk and rowdy. A guy whom was much bigger than I stepped onto the elevator with a plaster cast on his wrist. There were some looks back and forth, and finally words were exchanged for whatever reason. He told us he could kick both of our asses, and wanted to prove it. The elevator passes his floor and continued toward mine. We stepped from the elevator and I started swingin'. He couldn't get in a punch because I was swingin' so hard. Seeing that I was taking the best of this guy, I told Cox to jump in. I figured if the guy thought he could fight with both of us, then we would show him what we had. Unfortunately Cox got into a wrestling match with the guy which led to the carpeted section of the dorm. I ran after them and kept falling down because my boots had no traction on the carpet. Finally people began coming out of their rooms to see the event,

and we were all being separated. Right as this began to take place, the guy swung that wrist cast around and caught me right in the nose. I had a black eye from the punch. As things were cooling down, I began to notice the damage done to the guys face. I split his eye and he was off to the hospital. The Police later asked if I would like to press any charges, I told them that guy had enough trouble for the night.

Text appearing on the artwork:

Before we could go to bars, we gambled. We would drink, roll dice, play domino's, cards or whatever. One night this guy from school brought over a few of his friends. The three of them walked in, lost all of their money, and walked out. Cox was looking for trouble, and probably a little pissed about loosing his money. He walked through the living room and said he was going to beat the shit out of one of those guys. By the time I walked out the apartment, the fight was on. Cox was on top when I saw the two of them, but that didn't last long. Seeing that Cox was getting his ass kicked, we separated the two of them for round 2. They were yelling in each other's face when I doubled my fist and knocked the guy Cox was fighting down. Once again, Cox was on top, and it didn't last long. Keith and I then decided to separate the two of them for good before Cox was hurt. The only problem was this guy wasn't letting cox up. I pulled on him and he would not let go, so I went to punching. Keith too was pulling and trying, but he too came to blows. Keith and I were trading punches on either side of this guys face when I hear a pop. It was so loud, Keith and I just moved back. I hear, " Get off my property!" I look up and Scott is holding a wooden bat. The guy fighting Cox

did not flinch, he just kept going. Scott raised the bat again, pop! “ Get off my property!” This time, the guy took note. The three guys ran to the car shouting. I feared that we would all pay with our lives for that event.

Text appearing on the artwork:

We had been drinking all day. We were at the bar, and the night was getting interesting. There was a fight between a few guys that I don't care for, and I started to kick them while they were on the floor. My adrenaline was really running at this point. I told Comer and Slim that I was going to pick a fight. I slapped a guy in the back of the head that I figured I could take. What I didn't expect was the punch I never saw. The guy came up swingin'. It knocked me out cold, plus a beer bottle hit me. I came to on the floor, my wrist was split open, and my tooth was chipped. I drug myself to the bathroom and cleaned up. Harbin came in and found me and was dead set on finding the guy. We found him, and his friends stepped forward to protect him. Harbin jawed with them for a while, and I stood in the shadows. The guy I fought was focusing on Harbin, and didn't even know I was there. I came back with a right hand and that just laid him down. He was falling, and I was punching. As he fell, he was still swinging at me. I think two more of his punches landed. My face was a magnet for this guy's fists. Physical defeat is a bad feeling, and I still have the scars to remind me.

10TH ANNIVERSARY (Plate 4)

At the time of the accident, my life was great. I had just turned sixteen, and was staring to reap the benefits of independence. My parents were going

through a nasty divorce. I was popular, content with my life, but everything was about to fall apart – not just for my family, but for me. The video and photographs came from my impulse to record my own sorrow and display it for others – an impulse that I absorbed from the mass culture's emphasis on personal confession, even to the point of self-absorption. I had seen multiple TV specials where people like me told their terrible stories; I absorbed this impulse and wanted to be the next one, see plate 4.

Description: Video projection surrounded by mounted color photographs that have the following text screen printed on the surface. Video and photographs are show aftermath of my car accident.

Text appearing on the artwork:

A Dr. can numb a person skin, but not their insides. My lung was punctured and filling with fluid. This was one of the reasons I thought I had broken my collar bone. My ribs were actually broken, and that was the cause of my punctured lung. When they told me they were going to put a tube in my side, I had no idea the pain that awaited. I felt so much pressure, I couldn't breathe. I could feel my insides tearing as they inserted the chest tube. They stitched it up with a thick rope, and it remains my only visible scar from the accident.

I thought my face was mangled. I had a mouth of broken teeth, and my ear was torn in two. Blood was all over my face, and my vision was blurred. I was feeling all over my face to try and realize the damage. I've always been self

conscious of my looks, and really wanted a mirror. I was screaming at the sheriff for a mirror. The cut above my eye was the least of my troubles.

I had never been high on any sort of drug. The hospital's drug of choice was morphine. They really pumped that stuff in me to make my stay more comfortable. I had a button that I could push which pumped morphine into my IV when I needed it. I also found out that I was allergic to many pain medications, and I would break out in hives.

They would not let me leave the hospital until the chest tube was out. There was a good chance that I might catch pneumonia outside the hospital. I had all my other tubes out and could walk normally. But that chest tube kept me around the hospital a few extra days. I asked my mom to bring my baseball shorts and football shirt for me to wear. I was tired of wearing a gown.

My mom was perfect. I think our relationship was damaged from the divorce. I really hurt her that I chose to live with my dad rather than her. She really came to my rescue, because I didn't want the nurses to touch me. I went to live with her and Duston after that, and I have called her house home ever since.

Dad was great the night of the accident. He was as cool as I have ever seen him. He made some really great decisions in the heat of the moment. He had no work at the time, and was toying with the idea of moving to California. The day I left the hospital, dad jumped a plane to the coast. I had no choice but to stay with my mother. Over the next four years, dad and I didn't spend much time together.



My favorite hat is a California Angels hat. I still have it, but it can't be worn everyday. I was wearing it the night of the wreck. I'm rarely seen without a ball cap of some sort, and at that time, it was an Angels hat. I somehow lost the hat in the wreck. I was given a new Angels hat in the hospital. Three days later, Teddy's stepfather was nosing around the junkyard. He looked in the cab of the car that hit us, and there sat my Angels hat.

I was not allowed to eat anything, I could only have ice chips. When I finally could eat, I could only eat Jell-O. I had to soak my face so that the stitches might come out a little easier. I couldn't wash my hair, so I constantly wore a ball cap. When they finally let me wash my hair, my hair was filled with so much dried blood that the bath tub was red.

Rehabilitation is more work than anyone could ever expect. I glamorize things a bit, but I really could run well before the punctured lung. It took me a month to run a full mile after the wreck. I still become very short of breath anytime I run. Luckily for me, football was a game of short sprints. It was the conditioning leading up to the game that killed me.

They say that the second day after surgery is the worst. I was so sick on that day, I just drifted in and out of consciousness. So many people would visit, I barely remember their name. That night Gina Chambers came to see me. She felt so sorry for me that she kissed me on the forehead. Gina looked so sad as she kissed me, I must have looked worse than expected. At that moment, I realized I was in worse shape than I knew.

We were two boys in the middle of a divorce. Duston has chosen to live with mom, and I chose dad. The wreck brought me and Duston together again. We had no idea the effect the divorce would have on us. I'm not saying our parents divorce was a bad thing. I'm just saying it changed the way I look at relationships.

There was a girl, at school, named Rebekah. We were immediately crazy about each other. Rebekah had a church trip scheduled for the weekend. It was one of those trips where the group traveled down south to build a house for the poor. I went to see her off, and we shared our first kiss. When Rebekah returned from the trip, I was filled with tubes and all stitched up. I was so worried that she might lose interest in me. Instead, we dated for another four months following the accident. Ten years later, that relationship remains my longest to date. Last time I saw Rebekah she was divorced, had a kid and a Crystal Meth problem.

We were just on our way home to make curfew. It was cold and snowy, but the roads were not slick. There was a good amount of traffic due to other kids trying to get home. At an intersection ahead, you could see cars stopping before crossing the highway. As we approached the intersection, I told Teddy I didn't think the car ahead was going to stop.

Most of my face was numb. I thought my ears were just burning because they were cold. I thought I was all wet from the snow I dug myself through on the ground. When I finally became conscious enough to notice blood on my hands, I immediately began to feel my face. I then felt a lump of skin hanging from my ear.

They were trying to tell if I was internally bleeding. They had to stick a metal rod into my gut to test for clotting. They brought three off duty cops in to hold my legs down. I didn't know why they had asked for cops until they stuck the rod in the first time. They jammed the rod in my stomach two more times before deciding to wheel me off to surgery.

I had a tube coming out of every hole in my body. I had tubes that dropped, drained and pumped. I was a pin cushion, and the nurses would come in before dawn and take blood every morning. I am not a huge fan of needles, but I became immune to the feeling. I had been through so much pain, that a small needle prick seemed so minimal.

I out smarted death. I wore a seat belt and lived. If I could live through such a terrible experience, then everyday life would be easy. I stopped worrying about others, only about myself. I had faced the best curve life had thrown at me, and won. From then on out, there was nothing that could hold me back except myself. I was paid well for that accident, and by sixteen year old standards, I was rich too.

I think Teddy really blamed himself for that wreck. We were inseparable before the wreck, and barely spoke afterwards. My lawyers really went after Ted's insurance company, and won. Teddy had his car replaced, and that was about it. Ted escaped the wreck with a scratched nose and a sprained arm. I remember riding in the ambulance and having to ask Ted to answer the paramedics questions for me. Our school friends were stopping by the accident site on their way home, because they recognized the car. I felt like I

was at a press conference, answering questions with lights flashing everywhere.

I couldn't drive down Hollywood Road for a year after that accident. In all reality, that wreck was my first Hollywood experience. The wreck was the stepping stone to the rest of my life. I stood on Hollywood Road that night with a mouth full of broken teeth, and I had beat death. That wreck gave me money and power, something that Hollywood dreams are made of.

I have made no secret of my desires to live a life of total excess. I'm obsessed with the lives of those in the music industry. There is something that seems obtainable, but irrational among the behavior of musicians. Sex, drugs and rock n' roll are more than a cliché', but a way of life. Dave Hickey says, " Rock n' roll works because were all a bunch of flakes. That's something you can depend on, a good thing too, because in the twentieth century, that's all there is: jazz and rock n' roll. The rest is term papers and advertising." (Hickey, p. 101) In plate 5, I appropriated my inner desires to live the life of license that has long served the Keith Richards of the world and turned it into my own shrine to that way of life.

Description: Digital print mounted in a custom light box and backlit.

Text appearing on the artwork:

I WANT

big hair

eye make-up

more Jack Daniels

a reason to avoid small airplanes

a police record

a reunion tour

a sand box in my living room

a carefree sex life

expensive cars

and rock them all.

I WANT

a Rock Against Drugs commercial

a bowl of M&M's, no brown one's

a psycho groupie girlfriend

a sex tape to surface

an acoustic set at CBGB's

my own Behind The Music

sleeves of tattoo's

get fat and wear a jumpsuit

I want to burn out

THOSE THAT HAVE BEEN DOWN, AND THOSE WHO ARE GOING DOWN (Plate 6)

One of the most popular television characters during my youth was Arthur Fonzarelli, also known as "The Fonz." I was one of millions of children who wanted to be The Fonz when I grew up. The Fonz wore a cool leather coat, he

was the most feared person in Milwaukee; he was popular with every woman who came on the show, and most importantly, he rode a motorcycle. As a result, the idea of having a motorcycle was a seed implanted early in my life. Of course, none of the risks of motorcycling ever showed up on "Happy Days." Accidents in motocross and motorcycle racing, that I saw in the news, showed me the more dangerous side of the sport - a side that drew me to it. I appropriated the interest in motorcycling that swelled in the decades of my youth combined with the accident that I personally witnessed to create this work, evidenced in plate 6.

Text appearing on the artwork:

We were racing up and down the dirt road. Mark was on my team, and Matt was on Duston's. I can't remember why Dust couldn't stop his bike, but he had to lay it down before he hit Max's truck. Everybody was standing there watching him when he crashed. Dust got up and began to cry, his bike was leaking some sort of fluid, so we moved Max's truck to avoid an explosion. As kids, the movies always taught you that any fluid leaking from a vehicle, or around a vehicle could ignite. Duston was carrying on about his leg, and I began to tell him to get hold of himself and stop being a baby, The wreck was his fault, and I already knew our bikes were in jeopardy. Duston had his pants rolled very tightly around the cuffs, and one leg of his pants was black. We assumed that he had oil or one of the bike fluids on his leg. There were no tears in his jeans, but Duston was still crying about this leg. Finally Mark leaned down to unroll his pants, and blood consumed his ankle. I didn't say a word, I threw Dust on the back of my bike and drove home. I drove right through the front yard of the neighbors, probably tearing it to hell. Mom was

getting ready for some sort of event or dinner that her and dad were to attend. I ran in screaming that Duston had cut his leg. At this point, we had not seen the wound. Mom was mad, but she told me to get him undressed and get him in the tub. I began to get Duston's pants off, having no idea what to expect. When I pulled his jeans from the wound, I was in total shock. Duston was asking if the cut was bad, but I just ran out of the room. I told mom it was really bad, as she was getting a tub ready. She acted pissed that I couldn't handle this on my own and came to see what was so horrible. She too was in shock seeing Duston's leg, but told dust to lay down and told me to get towels. I then told mom I was calling John Taylor, an asthma Dr. who lived across the street. John had sewn up my finger a few years earlier, and was always prepared with so many boys in the neighborhood. We lived 30 minutes from the hospital, so it was always easier to call John. John told me he was on hi way, to put pressure on the wound. Duston's leg was split so bad, we had no idea how to put pressure on it. I called John 3 times before he finally left the house. John too was amazed when he saw the wound, and the dilemma began on whether or not to take Dust to the hospital. John decided to sew him up at the house, and by this time the neighborhood had arrived. John's wife came over to talk Duston through it, and Max told us to get a camera. Max had shot of his toe in a hunting accident when he was a teen, and wished he had a picture of it before they sewed him up. So we got the camera, and the documentation of the leg began. Max claims, to this day, that he had a tube of Chapstick in his pocket before he held Duston's leg to get sewed. Max is convinced they sewed that Chapstick up in Duston's leg. Mom had only a few words after that, no more motorcycles.

Brody Cannon is a character that I created out of my fantasy. I don't mind saying that Brody is my alter ego. Brody was formed out of my love for action genre films, and a era of filmmaking with which I am most familiar. I was raised on a good helping of Dirty Harry, with a slice of Taxi Driver on the side. Like much of my other work, a theme of masculinity is obvious in the Brody Cannon work. Masculinity became a major theme in the rebel male figures of the 1950s; actors like Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift and James Dean popularized the rebel male. In the 1970s, actors like Clint Eastwood, Robert DeNiro and Al Pacino took the genre one step further. My Brody Cannon work binds together many different influences I have discussed within this writing project. The Brody project encompasses all the process of making a motion picture, without actually shooting the film. This work was also heavily influenced by the film stills of Cindy Sherman, whose retrospective I viewed while working on the project. The Brody work is an idea which I never fully realized, being unaware of the time and process this production would take.

In examining the reasons behind why Brody Cannon was so fascinating to me, I believe it speaks to the idea of popular culture exposing to me ideas that are fundamentally different and alien from what I have seen before, or from what exists in real life. In the world of the film, these dashing, tough figures could get away with anything they wanted; they got the girl, they killed bad men and walked away clean. While these things may not have been morally righteous, they presented a spectacle that I allowed myself to enjoy (Horrocks, p. 23).



Thinking back, the purpose of Brody was to attempt to blur the lines between the Hollywood 'tough guy' and my own persona, carrying over the charisma and attitude, while sensibly leaving the violence and truly troublesome behavior on the far side of the screen, see plate 7.

Description: Mixed Media: Color photography, B&W photography, screen prints, lithography and digital prints. Mannequin with men's suit used throughout the printed instillation.

Text appearing on the artwork:

THE METHOD BEHIND THE MADNESS

The purpose, or the life's blood of my work stems from the cultural influences that have shaped who I am, and the ideas behind my work. My particular influence is not an entirely singular experience; through research and contemplation, it has become clear that my story is echoed in the lives of many. Throughout my life, my misplaced and abandoned desires stem from the expectations that I received from the culture around me. The influence of culture on our behavior is evident, due to the outstanding influence media plays on behavior and attitude towards one's life.

Adolescents are one of the most frequently targeted demographics from a marketing and media standpoint, as they are often the most impressionable age group. External influences leave the biggest mark on people aged 13-17, and so mass marketers and the media target this demographic in order to shape behavior and expose them to brands and products. According to Erikson's personal identity theories, adolescence is the time when people

search for an adult identity; many different factors go into the shaping of a personality (Irving, 2008, p. 5 also needs to be cited). These factors can include everything from encouragement (or bullying) on the first day of school to a father-son or father-daughter relationship. Adolescent girls, like many other demographics, receive substantial influence from the media to act a certain way, eat certain things, and pressure themselves into other behaviors. Many of the factors in girls' lives that are affected by media include body image, body confidence, sense of self, identity development and self esteem (Irving, 2008 also needs to be cited 2008, p. 30).

Regardless of gender, fashion and popular culture go hand in hand with children and adolescence, demonstrating just how much of an impact culture has on these vulnerable groups. This is not to say that adults are not just as susceptible to influence, but the particular emphasis on youth culture and the vulnerable nature of children's minds in terms of cultural imprinting leave more room for mass media to establish patterns of behavior. Image is presented as a very important part of one's personality and identity; the saying "the clothes make the man" is one borne of one's obsession with first impressions and appearances. It is possible that, through the proper use of media and influence, the needs and wants of children are shaped by what they see on television, in magazines, and on the Internet (Boden, 2006, p. 289). When I learned these things, it became clear just how much the television, media and my own interpretations of both shaped my expectations of what I could do, and who I could be - I, like many people, wanted to be somebody that people recognized and admired. I wanted to be a celebrity.

The obsession with celebrity stems all the way to basic sociology and psychology; " celebrities are cultural fabrications that embody social types and provide role models" (Boden, 2006, p. 290). There are a number of means by which one can become a celebrity - most are in the entertainment industry, acting as actors or directors. Others can be known for an event on the news; some can join a reality TV show, and some can be famous for being a relative of someone famous. Either way, the cult of celebrity stems from a pathological need for commonalities within culture; celebrities have identities that most people know, and this can serve as both a model for behavior and a common ground with which people can relate to each other (Boden, 2006, p. 294).

The desire to emulate these idols comes from the celebrity culture that has been ingrained in the minds of people all over the world. In today's postmodern society, the need to be loved and stand out is much more prevalent than before; the celebrity culture that is present today sees everyone attempting to become a rock star on their own. As everyone sees the same chase for fame, to gain their fifteen minutes, they join in on that race as well.

This race for fame mirrors the human race for wealth and prosperity; both of them fuel our competitive nature, and often pit us against each other to insane extremes. Given the materialism in which American culture has immersed itself, it is no wonder that one of the driving forces its people have is the acquisition of things. No matter what you do, no matter who you are, there is always that large priority to get the newest gadget, to have the best

car, the best house. However, we are merely molding ourselves after the behavior we learned as children, and continue to do as adults, from popular culture. We gain textual knowledge from books, movies, and television, among other media forms; by absorbing the actions and principles of what is seen there, we then model our behavior after the characters that we emulate; our heroes.

The idea of embodying a hero is fascinating to me. Often, heroes are associated with nationalism; just as being a hero can help to shape individual identity, an entire culture can have a hero that shapes their identity. We take from our culture many things in order to create our heroes; Captain America, for example, is a perfect way to exemplify the geopolitical atmosphere in America as it changes. Before Vietnam, Captain America was an authentic champion of truth and justice, sticking up for America, as it was the greatest country on Earth. After Vietnam, however, the comic books in which he starred took the narrative of that superhero and twisted it into a grittier, more contemplative tale, as he (like America) was second-guessing his decisions and strategies (Dittmer, 2005, p. 632).

Just as the American people were questioning the quasi-imperialism of America after Vietnam, Captain America attempted to examine these sorts of issues as well. It is through these uses of media that individuals can shape their identity through the culture of their environment; in this example, it is their geopolitical identity that is being weighed. The hero helps all of America to assume a common identity, one fictional man speaking for millions of real men and women all across the country. In those times, we

needed a hero, and the culture of the comic book is one way to examine ourselves from a common perspective (Dittmer, 2005, p. 634).

### I'M A SMALL TOWN WHITE BOY

Knowing where one comes from and how that affects their culture is equally as important as knowing who they are. Cultural anthropology is a vital component of identity, as each society is a distinctive part of what makes its people who they are as individuals, and what shapes their interests and desires. I grew up in a rural area, which comparatively minimized my exposure to a lot of mass media. It also prevented me from experiencing as many brushes with diversity as those who would live in larger cities. Cultural difference is based on division of space; there is only so much room on this planet, and certain types of people tend to inhabit certain spaces (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 7). As a result, it took me longer to appreciate the various forms of expression that it might have if I had grown up in a more urban setting.

With this cultural dimorphism, it becomes difficult to differentiate between people existing in the same society. In this post-colonial world, a number of hybrid cultures have arisen; the entirety of America is one hybrid culture, with pieces taken from all manner of European and Asian countries, as well as those who were geographically native to the Americas. Subcultures are one way to address these 'cultures within a culture,' but it can be hard to delineate these lines, especially as they do not fall within typical norms of ethnicity and gender (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 7).

Rural America, despite the overall multicultural nature of the United States, is fairly homogenous. More often than not, lower to middle class whites dominate the Midwest and rural areas; this was certainly my experience as well (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 10). With this small subset of people, and not a lot of diversity within that group, cultural difference was at a minimum. This can leave people less equipped to handle diversity when they are thrown out of their element and into new sociological and geographical conditions. This was certainly the case for me; every time I switched from one pursuit to the next, I often felt overwhelmed, but I persisted anyway.

I have been good at things, but never the best. I have too many interests to devote my time to one particular thing; a jack of all trades, master of none. I have stretched my talent thin to encompass all of my interests. Rather than being the best at something, I have focused on never being bad. I have given myself to many different causes during my art education, whether that cause be family, friendships, employment, football, acting or music. All of my outside interests have left me wandering through the path of life. I know that art will always be a part of my life; exactly how it will remain to be seen.

I consider my thesis work to be the middle chapter of a lengthy novel. It is a middle chapter of a story that has no written ending. Although I'm still working on the ending, I'm positive the plot is about to twist. I want to explore careers, ideas and fantasies that I have never had time for. I want to give myself an opportunity to find that one thing that I should be great at. Maybe I will go off to Hollywood and work in the film industry? Maybe I will go back to Texas and coach a high school football or baseball team? Maybe

someday I will send slides to New York galleries in hope of a solo show?  
Maybe one day I will be working toward a tenured faculty position? I don't know the hand that life will deal me. So, just in case the rock star thing doesn't work out

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DIRTY HARRY QUOTE???