Non/Disclosure: Documentation and Participant Observation as Hybrid, Nonfiction, Artistic Research Methodology for Ethnographic Media Production, Contemplative Discovery, Social Practice and Catharsis

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NON/DISCLOSURE: DOCUMENTATION & PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION
AS HYBRID, NONFICTION, ARTISTIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC MEDIA PRODUCTION,
CONTEMPLATIVE DISCOVERY,
SOCIAL PRACTICE,
& CATHARSIS

By

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A THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
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As if presaged by the physical, fine and philosophical arts that preceded it, the amelioration to the process of documenting the wonted human existence, political strife, and sundry cultural phenomena through the neo-normative medium of film (and eventually digital video) inaugurated the true scope and importance of anthropological research among a vastly wider audience who would use it, and its intrinsic capacity for the augmentation of artistic expression, to proliferate an expansive accompaniment to the field which would all become recognized platforms for demonstrative presentation of individual oeuvres.

Intermedia has worked in this way to amalgamate concepts like Futurism, Dadaism, and other expressionist movements within (and yet intentionally excluding) fine art. Film and video, while maintained as the mediums of choice for this author’s preference for creative and professional praxis, are discussed herein, as well as the other, more intermedial, forms of creative articulation which have been used explicitly throughout the latter half of graduate study in the program if its namesake.
As a lifelong visual media enthusiast, this author has witnessed the paradigm shift of mediums like photography, videography and multimedia design evolving from analog instrumentation to the digital spectrum of non-mechanized vehicles of expression. Having not only maintained a long-held fascination with these media, but also a vested interest in the avenues which they forge, this author considers himself fortunate to be counted as an observational proponent of the exhaustive, global, artefactual transposition consistent with no other industry over the same period of recent years. The purpose of the discussion directly related to that digital medium within the context of this paper is to more definitively characterize this author’s contributions to the substance and content of that pool of collective change - and the effect that change has imposed on his individual work as it relates to programmatic and academic scholarship. This is, herein, referenced as the prior half of those programmatic studies.

On the whole, the components of the ensuing discussion will also draw in the latter half of progression through the Intermedia program, wherein this author was faced with two extreme challenges: a life-changing, personal attack in the midst of an accelerated terminal graduate curriculum; and the apposite realization that Intermedia, and not necessarily the creative medium with which this author has spent the bulk of his professional and creative life becoming familiar, was the consummate medium necessary to address and overcome that traumatic event - which momentously presented the opportunity to gerrymander the circumstances to the benefit of the thesis work found below (as well as a wide swathe of lagniappes inadvertently proffered as a result in other spheres of personal and professional life).

As such, this paper will be framed by two constituent methodological discussions: Section One: Visual Multimedia, and Section Two: Intermedial Adaptations. Each will work to bring specific conclusivity to the implications admitted of their appellation and demonstrate how the major contributing factors to each such subset of praxis have informed the evolution of this
author’s most contemporary practice. Additionally, each will employ a notion of exposition incongruent with the other segment, detailing individualistic development specific to that work.

The third and concluding section, which will lend itself to particularizing the composite commonality of individual works, the discussion of their historiographic endowments, and the unifying factors of their generally misapprehended miscellany, will draw on the collective evolution and distill the subsequent objectives upon which the same contemporaneous successes have garnered educational momentum.
DEDICATIONS

This thesis is dedicated to Jessica Veronica Farley, whose continual reminders both centered and motivated me to concentrate on what really matters; whose ambitious tactics stand as the measure of why we must only focus our energy on positive results; and whose own fate provides a visage of rationale for always pursuing a just endeavor.

*It is not the storm that defines us, but what we do when it inevitably hits our shore.*

-- Cyle O’Donnell
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A debt of deep gratitude is due to the warm, generous and supportive fellow students, friends, coworkers, mentors and advisors in the Intermedia department, without whose help this project would never have been possible.

A special thanks is also due to the University of Maine which, through the challenges that brought fruit to this project, its thesis and the community of people it benefitted, supported me in so many ways over and above standard protocol in order to push me to remain steadfast in my program.

I’d also like to thank those who challenged me with the wonderful opportunity to turn their attempted incursion into personal, professional and academic success. These people, whose intention it was to dismantle my social network, destroy my professional reputation and disrupt my academic progress, but which instead worked to strengthen my relationships, enhance my standing and ensure my programmatic success, may never know the tremendous outcome of their vainglorious efforts. Yet those who contributed to my success, visited the final presentation and read its ensuing thesis, will forever know them.
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CHAPTER 1

VISUAL MEDIA

Bridging the Gap between Art and Documentation

A concept that slowly but progressively emerged as I have moved through my Intermedial studies was: Art is documentation, and documentation is art (or at least it can be).

Even in the more traditional arts, say those of the Renaissance or Victorian periods of recent expansion of the finer arts, art brings a concept within the artist's creative mind into being. Whatever form it takes – be that a painting, a sculpture, an opera – it is still a manifest form of impressionist response that did not exist before. This is the essence of documentary filmmaking and photography. It is the key element that bridges the gap between art and documentation.

An opera, for instance, is a form of storytelling through performance art. That it is scripted by a libretto instead of a screenplay is tertiary to the role both play in transmitting their creator’s insights. Operas, like fiction films, range in themes of a mythical heroes rescuing progeny from the underworld (L’Orfeo, Claudio Monteverdi Mantua, Italy, c1607), to an epic struggle of love and war (Julius Caesar, George Frideric Handel London, UK, 1724). In a nonfiction retelling of the story of the King of Crete, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Idomeneo, Munich, Germany, 1781) chose his greatest musical scores for the portrayal. If documentary filmmaking would have been available at the time, these might have comprised its soundtrack¹.

Setting aside for a moment the idea that fine art film and fine art photography are indisputable contemporary additions to the list of the world's artistic deliverables, documenting what we see, feel and hear around us is a natural response to our world – in the same ways as

¹ As historical operas are not a current requirement citation of MLA format, creative works from this paragraph are intentionally not cited in the bibliography.
traditional expressions of art. That filmmakers and photographers use a camera as the tool for its respective canvas (rather than a quill for a libretto) is inconsequential to an anticipated viewer response. We are influenced and moved by the concept behind the work, the effort that went into it, or the meaning it implores of society.

Beginning in 2006 as a follow-up to The Blue Planet, BBC One, the British Broadcasting Company’s Natural History Unit, began producing what would become the world’s highest grossing documentary series in the history of the medium – Planet Earth. Released in March, it had been purchased by media buyers in 130 countries by June the following year. It pulled in awards from the Royal Television Society, BAFTA, The British Press Guild, the Creative Arts Emmy Awards and the Peabody Awards (BBC, 2007). It also won four Primetime Emmy Awards, the Producers Guild of America (PGA) Producer of the Year Award and a Television Critics Association (TCA) Award for Outstanding Achievement in Movies (IMDB/Awards, 2016). Its first episode, From Pole to Pole, was watched by more people than any natural history program in British television history (Broadcast Now, 2006), with its first five episodes drawing an average of 11.5 million regular viewers (Reuters, 2007).

While nonfiction, this series did something that many nature film directors, including the Walt Disney Company, had sought to do in their many previous attempts. It had focused its production on an emphasis of the emotional response that it hoped to create in its viewers.

It worked.

With its seamless, painstaking editing; its rhythmic soundtrack accented with sonic harmonies that provide a tranquil olfactory experience; and its earth-toned backdrops shot explicitly with natural colors the human eye has evolved seeing; each episode evoked 48 minutes of an extra-human experience that reintroduced us to what we’ve had around us throughout our entire human lineage.
With the exception of having access to 71 camera operators in 62 countries working simultaneously on a $25 million budget while spending days at sea and weeks in deserts, tundras and other trying conditions to acquire a few seconds at a time of Hollywood quality clips on $50,000 cameras, I strive to achieve the same feel with my own meager productions - noting for the first time (consciously) during my MFA thesis work that this has been a continuum within my work since before I even knew I was seeking to do it.

Commenting on my undergraduate capstone project, my mentor, Dr. Annette Wyandotte (the then Dean of Arts and Letters, and now Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Indiana University), stated that it "had the touch and feel of art." This project was essentially a thirty-minute, multi-platform project created with a collection of more than 500 images taken on a three-year junket interspersed into the spring, summer and fall breaks covering 12 countries and documenting each nation's move toward environmental sustainability - all while riding a bicycle².

If my project had been presented simply as a handful of images with text-based reportage on my research and compiled into a thesis paper, that "touch and feel" would never have been a factor. Instead I created a fact-based multimedia video that injected my own experiences as they related to the exploration of both geographical and geological datasets accumulated while experiencing a similar sentiment dispensed to its viewer.

From the very beginning of my academic and professional attempts at documentation, I employed both documentation and participant observation as a hybrid, nonfiction, artistic research methodology for ethnographic media production (hence the penning of the same in a portion of the title for this thesis paper).

² It should be noted that my capstone was required to merge my two majors; Journalism and Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies.
The Oxford English Dictionary defines art as "the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power" (OED\(^3\), 2016). Notwithstanding the endless discussion over whether or not the OED conclusively elucidated the multifarious, ages-old philosophical debate over the definition of art, even if I didn't believe that I imparted this notion in that first undergraduate capstone as I have intended in successive international multimedia projects, without the effort of creating art instilled in these projects, I would have no personally meaningful argument for either the relationship between documentation and art, or the transition of my MFA thesis into the latter.

I believe that the attempt, therefore, that was made, and the hope for the transmission of a meaningful response in my viewer – however modest in comparison to major studio funded productions – is principally the same as those of Picasso, or Chopin, or Michelangelo. Each had a gift which, if I’m being honest, is much greater than my own respective capabilities in filmmaking. But each documented, in their own medium of choice, the concept that resided once in their corresponding creative centers.

Where documentation of reality and documentation of ideas differ, however, is the defining characteristic of why they do not occupy the same arena of social designation. While a filmmaker cannot so directly document a concept, they can document the results of that concept or an interpretation of it (as in both animated and actor-recreated representations of cave men on the History Channel’s documentary, *Ape to Man*).

Just as in many other forms of human creation, there is not one thing that art can present that a documentarian or their documentary visual media cannot also present in its own way. The same concept represented by different artists or through different genres of art –

\(^3\) Abbreviated.
Intermedial art or architectural art or performance art, for instance – will be different with each genre just as it would through documentary filmmaking or photography. Yet it does not create a gap between the artist and his or her art. Documentation as art works in this way as well.

In addition to its standard definition, art, I argue, can also be defined metaphysically: as the emotional response to being in the presence of (and perhaps feeling an often inexplicable connection to) something sentimentally moving. This is the “art” that one takes with them, the “art” that transcends the masterful statue of David in Florence, Italy, or the Mona Lisa in the Louvre, Paris, France.

That response can be drawn from anything – a landscape of magnanimous proportions such as a waterfall, a sunset or a natural event; or the escapades of long-migration birds or land mammals; or even a scene depicted outside of our own solar system that moves a viewer with the same sentimentality as does a focused and purposefully artful work of its creator.

This, therefore, expands the definition of an artist as well – to the realm of even a non-human entity. For the purposes of this discussion, however, art (fashioned from its artist) can be anything from a written work by an author, to an invention by an inventor, to a building by an architect, to a painting by a painter, to a song or sound by a songwriter or composer and even to a documented concept by a documentarian.

Nan Goldin, discussed later, documented the unorthodox lifestyle of her friends during a communal, outré period of her life. Her gallery gained significant notoriety when it exhibited at the Whitney Museum, New York, in 2003 (Whitney, 2003). Yet it was based solely on the effort of documenting the lifestyle, the actions and the environments of the communal space that she and her friends occupied during that time.

This is not dissimilar from how I have documented the last 10 years of my life – a very atypical period of traveling around the globe and exploring vastly diverse cultures and human geographies – but also injecting myself and my perspective into the resulting media. Each is
non-fiction; each defines a scene wholly nontraditional of the wanton human norm; each is gripping in its larger scope; and each used a visual medium as its deliverable base.

In this way, documentation - and the expected response from it - is art.

Whether someone snaps a picture of a scene, paints a picture of a scene, records the audio from that scene or takes video from that scene, is unique only to that person's preferred medium. However, this does not mean that it would be received as art by those in the art or fine art communities. This was the motivating factor for me to move from my digital world into the physical.

It was not an effort to “leave” one medium for another, however. I wanted to document my time facing a very challenging situation in a way that took the physical documentation (the receipts of my purchases, plot points of locations on a mobile device location tracker, even property which was in legal dispute between my aggressor and myself, and so on) and created a series of sculptures with it – bringing together the conceptual and the physical in a way that documentary film could potentially do, but not without the barrier between concept and viewer, or concept and material. In this way, my goal was to bridge concrete and abstract by way of the manipulation of directly related materials. This will be discussed in greater detail in the latter half.

**Current System of Inquiry in Retrospect**

Employing involved, creative practice specific to digital documentary capture as actionable research, is at the epicenter of each of the resulting products wrought thereof. For me, it is not only very facile at this point in my professional track, but also very appropriate, given my upbringing as the insatiably fascinated son of a military photojournalist.
Notwithstanding the pressure that my current panel of academic mentors has employed to sway my interests in the direction of expression within different contexts, this track has been rewarding to the extent that it has informed the various aspects directing my career.

Disengaging that area of media production, then, felt more like a complete withdrawal or regression from that which I knew to work fluidly with and for my interests. Documentation, it would be revealed, is all I knew. Within the field of documentation, my expertise had certainly become extensive - incorporating standard and creative aspects of videography and photography, but also broadcasting, vlogging, blogging, design, multimedia production, podcasting, web design, radio dialoguing, digital publications such as ebooks and online magazines, and other such related items.

However, through invaluable critiques in the prior half of my academic progress, it was apparent of these work-un-intensive projects (such as those to which I’d become accustomed) and the documentation which precipitated to study them, that a less traditional, more philosophical approach was necessary if I was to assimilate a new measure of quality into my as-yet unchallenged modus operandi. Noting the level of rigor is important here, as any other type of work suggested to be included within my program of study autonomously appeared onerous, if wearisome.

This is what most people who have gotten used to a certain way of doing things would call, “fearing change.” Expansion within an art practice does not escape this idiom.

Ordinarily I might undertake months of research before a documentary junket, knowing that it is on the road where I would see this research in motion. This would be the point of embarkation for the more traditional or normative strategies for research.

For a mobile journalist in the digital era, international travel and participant documentation of cross-cultural concepts and intra-cultural interactions might appear to onlookers as more challenging than picking up a paintbrush and drizzling paint over a canvas.
For me, the opposite was true. Nevertheless, once I partook in other mediums, the difference was resonant in work occasioned thereafter.

For instance, I saw that the more substantially I documented, the more I prepared the materials to be documented. Conversely, the less I documented, the more I got into the work - which is, itself, an interesting point noted in the documentation. Neither the documentation nor the production of the sculptures in my final thesis show suffered in any noticeable way as a result. Though if it had, I would have felt more inclined to document the production (and any of its resulting failures) than to produce sculptures for documentation.

To make the matter even more ponderous, I re-entered academia from an emerging profession which essentially developed during the time I was in the field and defining its own parameters. I was a “stringer” in the newest incarnation of the word (contract photojournalist, but of the digital platform). My contracts came from tourism bureaus, vacation websites, travel agents, hotel chains, media buyers, content producers and resellers, stock databases for stills and video, audio and video archives, online libraries, calendars, digital book and record covers, and on and on. No one contract, or continuum of paychecks was consistently guaranteed, though residual royalties made up some gaps.

Nevertheless, my projects were limited only by my own creativity, I charged my own fees and I made my own deadlines. Most people in the journalism business would call this a relative impossibility. From the beginning I engaged in a practice that, at the time, had no existing title. In effect, I was building the plane while flying it, as the saying goes. Or, perhaps more appropriately, I had been building an industry while in the process of working within it - and it was all due to having tenacity, creativity and of course technology that could fit into a backpack.
While seeming somewhat precarious for those requiring a wider safety net, this arena is
where my research not only came to life, but bore its best facade to the documentary process –
and therefore breathed life into the creativity of the resulting projects. An inherent curiosity for
global culture, coupled with the international nature of the content collection, gelled well with
the expertise in the visual media production I’d grown up refining.

One other aspect that only requires momentary announcement, is that my family also
moved around a lot as I was growing up. Because of that, I was always the “new guy” in town. I
grew familiar with a range of topics others might find most interesting or least approachable. I
knew I’d always rely on someone else to show me around, so when I found myself in a new place I never hesitated to spend money on guides and local experts. I got used to all the pleasantries of introductory conversation and effortlessly navigated picayune platitudes. I became adept at precipitately identifying predators and deceit (at least among foreigners, as I’ll discuss later). I learned to locate the experts in the crowd and the cues they might require for allowing me access to the places of greatest interest - the questions that kept them talking and the gestures that made them feel important in the discussion without sycophantically stroking egos. I learned that, better than a press pass and faster than a stack of cash, the most effective, universal tool for gaining access to the real story is a pocket notebook and a pen (okay, probably not a “stack” of cash).

These lessons stayed with me as keys for unlocking untold doors throughout my career. One might call it “learning in the Old School.”

**Nontraditional Methodology**

The expertise of the guerrilla documentarian, or on-the-fly shooter, is not always as evident as that of a film crew that spends three hours before a film production setting the scene for the golden hour of shooting. It requires knife-sharp tact, critical thinking and the ability to remain ready when the shot presents itself. It also requires a deep appreciation for cultural respect drawn from experience in the field and manifold encounters with observing customs. This is all in addition to the technical expertise required to have the gear prepped to a speed equal to that of the changing scene. Though not impossible, it is difficult to hone this particular set of skills through traditional schooling. It must come organically, through a genuine interest, and is best accompanied by a rigid standard of moral and journalistic ethics.

By way of using that nontraditional means of documentation, my work has always been based in the methodology of my own research model, though not necessarily consciously at first when approaching the unique circumstances or requirements reigning over each contract
or personal research project. The development of my model of inquiry, therefore, was also nontraditional: derived through methods continually evolving from acquiring boots-on-the-ground resources, informants and research – which might be defined as that which is created “on the scene” or in the environment of the subject; from an informant who belongs to the community being researched, or who has intimate knowledge of the community collective; and in either case, creating all project media on-location. This framework of “multimedia-meets-ethnography” has always gripped me as more impactful, added more color, depicted a greater point of reference in the world, and provided a more appropriate background than the black-and-white of the text found in the *Travel & Leisure* section of the local newspaper.

Just the inclusion of the visual element of photography or videography is deeply penetrating as a medium. I was never more acutely aware of this than when I decided to add video to my blog. Looking back, it seems to have been a huge blind spot in my early online presence. Nevertheless, I overlooked videographic elements of discussing and portraying my subject matter for quite some time. When it was added just as a cursory element of my coverage, its impact was immediate. It offered me not only the fulsome terrain of an enhanced visual plane, it provided an artistic medium in which I would employ my more photographic aesthetic which was sorely underused in my previous work.
Thomas Elsaesser’s essay in the book *Dada and Surrealist Film*, starts off by saying “There is something altogether appropriate about the fact… that the cinema has no origin other than the multiplicity of chemical, technical, optical and scientific discoveries and devices which made possible the first public showings around 1896. It cautions anyone looking at cinema history not to imbue it with ontology or ascribe to its development a particularly stringent logic” (Kuenzli 13).

His stance on the medium of film likens it to chance discoveries of mechanical devices that have deeply impacted human society. Because of that, we tend to apply certain level of disjunctive autonomy from the artist using the tool, and the tool itself, to develop a synthesis of creative riposte simply by virtue of the fact that they could not have been created without the inclusion of both. This sense of sovereignty, Elsaesser notes, is the “desire of analyzing movements... [which] needs to be distinguished from the ability of reproducing it mechanically”
(Kuenzli 134). Essentially, the presence of mechanical (and now digital) aids for drawing and painting (spraying and rolling devices, design software, etc.), sculpting (3D printers, molds, etc.), and visually portraying art (photography, printers, copiers, etc.), clearly did not come before the artistic practices which they were created to enhance (and ultimately replicate).

Having learned about similar ideas of creative mechanical reproduction from my father’s many pre-dawn lessons from a turkey blind in a misty Kentucky hayfield, the challenge of creating my photographic opus lie within the test of using the emotionless, unblinking iris of my lens to extract poignant, emotive visual landscapes - an act that can only be defined as finding art in the nebulous area in between the proverbial artist’s hand and his paintbrush.

To achieve this is to achieve great success in any artistic practice. Consistently doing so in photography or videography draws in intimacy and enthusiasm for the collective whole of those who would eventually look upon the content - especially from foreign locations and for the intimate placement of the foreign cultures they portray. I’ve sought this end in every work I’ve created since my early college years.

**Early Methodological Development**

It is no surprise, then, that when I picked up my first camera and applied a little trick photography – inverting a picture of a weed in front of a pond with the reflection of a bank of trees in the background – I won my first photography competition in the 3rd grade. My young and limitless mind had begun to think as would digital designers decades later in quickly envisioning the end result of a frame.

This was my first step toward developing my own methodology for the visual medium. I used this unique, unencumbered process of framing my subject to document my surroundings just as those early photographers had. I looked at a tiny facet of my world and presented it in a

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4 After Introduction by Keunzli, essay entitled *Dada/Cinema?*
new way; I selected a single subject and established, in a single shot, an undeniable relationship with it. Most importantly, this process drew upon the sense and style of a researcher reacting to his subject of study and composing his preferred visual medium to display it for others - instantaneously planning out the relationship with my subject, the subject’s relationship with the camera, and the audience’s relationship to the final presentation. Even at that young age, I recall considering the audience to which it would be shown.

This would be the principal basis for the techniques and methods that remain the cornerstones of my academic and professional work. Needless to say, I’ve been employing that same theory - though more evolved in recent years - ever since. The principles and practices have remained the same, while the subject area, technique, geographic interests and modes of production have been qualitatively enhanced over the years.

No single piece within my larger body of work has ever graduated to an emblematic or iconic status. If I’m self-critiquing with any measure of honesty, some of it is impressive, some lackluster. On the other hand, I’ve never shot with stardom in mind. I shoot to tell stories. In each image I capture is a slice of that end-product comprehension and attention that sprouted

Figure 3, Faces of Indonesia No. 37, Indonesia 2011. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
all those years ago. It’s kept to a certain vein in my practice which repudiated formal instruction. One might define this as an artist’s style. I find that it more resembles something of a building block or foundation of style.

Whatever the case, I would define my style as nonfiction, narrative photography which focuses most closely on the stories told throughout the daily life of distant places. Early lessons with my father out in the back yard with a fresh roll of Tri-X black-and-white 400-ASA film, helped prepare me for taking shots with that relationship in mind; with a documentary eye at the helm; and with visions of faraway places telling normal local stories in fascinating foreign locales.
CHAPTER 2
THE PRIOR HALF

The spring and summer semesters of 2015 revealed the greatest expanse of creative growth for me and for my program of study. Though I’d only begun my program in the fall of the previous year, this period would ultimately form a plateau upon which I could not only devise the vector for my creative work, but also a stance from which I could ostensibly look back over my previous work with a truer and much more critical eye.

However, as the program has a largely rigid curriculum, it is difficult to lay out with nominal detail the aggregate mastery garnered from the freedom of taking only a single elective of preferred coursework per semester. Having come to the University with specific interests in studying only that which extended the boundaries within digital multimedia and the pedagogical pursuits I’d planned to pursue upon completion of the program, my preference toward framing my studio projects within that subset of inquiry likely frustrated those faculty who were, at that point, unaware of this predilection - more likely acknowledging it as resistance than a move to extend my horizons on my own terms.

Intermedial Adaptations

This “resistance” would wane somewhat in the summer semester, as I crafted what I felt was my first intermedial sculpture - and indeed my first sculpture at all - HELIXYCLE. Discussed in greater detail in the Cumulative MFA Portfolio section of this document, this exhibit explored the natural and artefactual elements of that which moves us along (metaphorically and physically through time and space), the inherent cyclical process of the natural and manmade worlds, and the essence of innate and connate construction.
The basic building block of biological matter throughout what we currently know as the living universe (with the rare exception of a few viruses), is DNA. Sparing the reader the 8th grade science lessons, and the interest I have in the subject born of my time teaching them, it should suffice to be known that Deoxyribonucleic Acid was my preeminent choice for sculpted construction based on my understanding of the elegant spareness of this spindly, serpentine molecule.

To represent a strand of DNA, I assembled a section of it as represented through unraveled bicycle rims. I pared down and rethreaded the spokes with a tap and die kit. Unfurling the rims to conjoin them in this DNA-likened contortion, I fought against the natural impetus for the wheels to return to their coiled state (as is reflected in the natural spiral of a
strand of DNA - outside of the period of reproduction - to return to its unwound state as pressured by the structure of the hydrogen-bonded base pairs between the two helices) by bolting them together with their newly shortened spokes. During this process I would snap many in half before realizing and adapting to their unrelenting strength. And finally, I mounted the work onto the two original handle-and-fork sections of each bike used in the design.

However ancient the process of evolution, it has remained stolid and resiliently uncomplicated. In keeping with that design, I pruned any ideas which seemed to add any notion of complexity to the work. In the end, it contained two simple parts (the representative strand and its base), and I delimited all conceptual characteristics to those which could be drawn from the essence of both the work and the natural elements that it most demonstrably reified.

I also wanted to specifically draw verbal associations between the natural (DNA) and manmade (bicycle) worlds, since bridging the gap between experiencing something and being able to discuss that experience is the existential link between art and audience. To me, being able to place a concept into predetermined nomenclature is the greatest calculable factor that literally and metaphysically defines the meaning behind the power and longevity of DNA and those who discovered and truly appreciated its grand yet outwardly invisible role in our lives.

That it performed its paramount duties without need for its own discovery, and that its crucial role would have continued if never visualized, is such a striking and salient idea for me (a very visual storyteller who requires exposure to validate the very presence of his professional work within the media world).

To do this, while also maintaining strict adherence to the work’s expressly designated austerity, I engaged in the first phase of “contemplative motion” that would find its way into disparate iterations in the fall semester that followed. This idea will become more apparent in reading the Garden Biome project in the Cumulative MFA Portfolio section below.
Nevertheless, as for the vocable elements gleaned through the contemplative aspect of the research, the objective was to generate concomitant terminology found bilaterally within each school of discussion. I spent a considerable amount of contemplative effort populating a list of idioms and other locution resting on the divide between these two worlds (the natural and the artificial vis à vis scientific descriptors of DNA and colloquial underpinnings surrounding the bicycle) and the characteristics of the artwork itself.

The impact of DNA on the biotic world is much greater than the sum of its constituent parts. Beyond the obvious, there are core associations between the impact and the ubiquitous reaction to it throughout the scientific community. It was deeply important to me that the experience my audience got from this piece engendered similar associations to the dexterous concept of DNA and the inventive themes gleaned from closely inspecting it - not the least of which would be their reciprocal, idiomatic consortium.

Many etymological associations can be drawn between DNA and bicycles - and indeed in the greater picture of the living world (e.g. the word cycle, which epitomizes the sequence of life itself). In my progressive works, this one not only defined the inception of a new way of thinking, it prepared me for a more contemplative approach to Intermedia and art in general than at any point in my creative past. Inspired by this modish ideology, I endeavored to create all subsequent works complimentary of the same essence which seemed to be harnessed within the dialectic symbiosis of the HELIXYCLE exhibit. I could only hope that my remaining body of works would fetch some semblance of that same concept.

The conclusion of this facet of the discussion, however, will need to take place in the Cumulative MFA Portfolio, as this section remains dedicated to the methodology to which the effort of its completion has been consigned.
CHAPTER 3
THE LATTER HALF

The final year of my MFA has undoubtedly been the most challenging and rewarding period of any other time hitherto my MFA studies. This is partly because the concepts of my degree were converging at a place where professional interests were met with artistic instruction. However, this only represented a small contribution to the larger body of change that would eventually command the greatest function of evolution to have played out against the backdrop of my comprehension within the expressive nature of art.

Personal Context and Inspiration

In the last month of the penultimate semester of my studies, upon breaking up with my then girlfriend, I became the target of a vicious, unlawful and libelous campaign. She had, among other things, enlisted the assistance of her employer - a law firm with an embarrassing and longstanding rancor with my employer, the University of Maine - in an effort to not only accuse me, but also a fellow student and several high-ranking members of UMO, of crimes, civil damages and a wholly unrealistic, paranoid conspiracy to commit civil violations of which none of us - individually or collectively - could possibly be proven guilty. She also went after every member of my family, threatening criminal charges, impersonating\(^5\) law enforcement and creditors to get information, and generally harassing them in an effort to indirectly allegedly put pressure on me in the final months of my program.

Sparing the finite details for the context of this manuscript, it was all admittedly an act of retribution for breaking her heart. Where it left the “civil” and spilled over into the “nuclear” was that this was all enacted by those trusted to protect the law, to use it for the betterment of

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\(^5\) or causing to be impersonated by way of friends, private detectives or other associations,
society. Instead they lowered themselves simply to being, in one judge’s description\(^6\), “beyond contempt,” in a calculated reversal of using this status to push the boundaries of the law and allegedly use it as a tool for badgering and intimidation – and without regard or limitation to anyone\(^7\). No one was safe, and from the President to the Chancellor, to the UMaine Police Department and even fellow students, we all wound up as targets of their campaign.

Six months of court documents\(^8\), as well as disputed property, audio and video recordings and a host of other documentation from this period, all mounted to become means and material for the final graduation capstone project. In fact, the nondisclosure agreement that worked to prevent my ex from continuing to involve and harass those with whom I am associated, spells the title of this thesis and its corresponding graduate showcase\(^9\). Through the work, I hoped to offer a voice for others who have found themselves the unwitting prey to untold abuses of the legal system.

Leaving aside the discussion of my ex’s mental illness and its role in this vastly overreaching enmity, this occurrence would come at a time when I couldn’t quite comprehend the value of my documentary past in this affair. Nevertheless, I quickly learned that I would benefit in incalculable ways by putting it to work. I would come to find out that this campaign of negativity would shape the finality of my entire program, even if it had arrived at the terminus of an exceedingly laborious terminal master’s degree.

Since that very first night, I had been documenting everything related to the event. This includes maintaining a list of personal audio journals and audio recordings of meetings and

\(^6\) In the 2005 case of Fiacco vs. Kraft, in which Larry Willey was implicated for strikingly similar tactics against a University of Maine official.

\(^7\) Including filing notices against University officials, tenured professors and even law enforcement themselves of abuses ranging from conspiracy, civil rights violations and even assault and battery.

\(^8\) I took my ex and her attorneys to court four times over the course of my last semester to reclaim property and to clear the good names of all those accused and drawn into the affair.

\(^9\) Which is available at the Intermedia MFA Vimeo page, or individually here: https://vimeo.com/214631663.
phone calls with lawyers, law enforcement officers, and even court hearings; keeping receipts of all my purchases, for the purpose of registering an exact time and location of every transaction; electronically tracking my location on a mobile device; keeping an exhaustive log of court documents; and formally requesting police incident reports.

This would be my means for producing personally authentic, socially relevant, hugely impactful art in the community in which its inspiration took shape. Much of the art world relies on the search for inspiration - which can come from anywhere - but most often seeks to relate that material to their audiences. How much more apposite could a graduate project be for (A) a documentarian, in need of (B) very relatable content for his imminent graduate project in (C) a very malleable Intermedia program which presupposes (D) pertinent content from the work of its graduate students, and that dials in on some of today's most hot-button issues (like social injustice, abuses of the legal system, issues of privacy and surveillance), and that happens to involve (F) the stereotypical “scorned ex-lover” with a dangerous mental illness and the wholly improbable factor that she is (G) employed by a law firm known for engaging in very seedy tactics against (H) the employer of that documentarian/graduate student, and who, as luck would have it, is locked in the midst of a longstanding, scandalous legal beef that is bigger than both the protagonist and the antagonist with whom the original ordeal began?

Relating my MFA thesis project, *Non/Disclosure*, to the social context; it’s an easy leap to make that I am simply the guilty party. And no doubt, I certainly see the value in owning my part in the oversight of a multitude of signs until it was too late. Prejudice often starts with society’s expectation of our traditionally applied “roles” or “stations” within it. Indeed, both my documentary project as well as the *Non/Disclosure* collection could have been engaged in an effort to clear my name, or to seek vengeance against my aggressor. However, I’m neither the first nor the last man to be the brunt of my ex’s aggression. So, I don’t see the benefit in taking her assaults personally. Nor do I see the benefit in spending time engaging in the same
negativity that has cost her much more than it has me. Instead, I would rather invite my audience to ask their own questions, to explore their own answers, and to accept that social prejudice plays a large part in all communal exchanges. Whether I am right or wrong is not the issue. How I connect to my audience, is.

The Challenge of Non/Disclosure

Additionally, I might also hope to impart something from which we can all learn and personally benefit. Because, even if not affected individually, everyone knows someone who has been stalked, harassed or falsely accused by a “crazy ex.” The story occurs so often that this project is already innately relatable. Books, movies, pop-culture, social media, gossip magazines, local and international controversy and even news events have all covered the subject. In America, it’s a social plague. Attempting to break new ground on the subject, therefore, is a challenge.

In doing so, however, I’ve found that it need only be looked at in simplistic terms (like those attached to my first great programmatic breakthrough in Intermedial art, HELIXYCLE) to represent a relatable side to a nuanced version of the human tragedy.

This means poking fun at “caustic” behavior; exposing the ludicrousness and repetition of methodical, failed, assaultive behavior; tallying the sum of pain and shame and comparing them to the weight of the lessons they teach; exploring the boundaries of concepts like civil rights and weighing the balance paradox within issues like social code vs. solitude, public vs. private dispute, safety vs. security and risk vs. value.

This work is about using biography as material for the means, process and origin of art and drawing associations between the complexities of social structure with the basic notions of the pack mentality - accusation vs. alienation. It’s about documenting the resistance to the long

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10 Within just days of the last time that I took my ex and her law firm to court, she and a fellow employee that allegedly conspired to have me falsely arrested, were no longer employed at the Willey Law Offices.
running momentum of social ceremony. And it’s about finding the pulse on concepts like stereotyping and bridging it with its habitually incendiary fallout.

*Non/Disclosure* will posit claims for and against autobiographical art, empathy and community; it will contrast victimization with “victorization” in terms of the impetus of personal affect; it will populate in its viewer a cognitive list of the consequences with which a community is often burdened from the cockpit of mental illness and vexatious litigation; it will question ethics and dialogue appropriate responses to trauma-related art, identity and the weight of political relationships; it will repurpose emotive expression; it will reveal a very real, very local and very current case of authoritarian overuse of imperiousness and suppression; it will define the visual synthesis of the semiotics of turbulence; and it will force a very comfortable gallery-going audience into some very uncomfortable conundrums. More detail about how (and with what materials) this takes shape in the gallery itself, in the *Graduate Thesis Project* section.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH AREAS FOR THESIS PROJECT

Clare Bishop - Politics and Veracity in Art

In Claire Bishop’s book, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, she articulates that artistic strategies are more conceptually defined when taking from “the reality of their inhabitants as a material, and the desire to politicize those who encountered the work” as it happened. Simply put, something big in someone’s life has more merit because it is true, because it contributes deeply and genuinely to their artwork, and because it is relatable across the social spectrum. It also almost always carries political tenets.

Bishop had a particular fascination with participatory art as an influence on social change. Of interest to me was her inclusion of Brazilian director, Augusto Boal (also a writer and politician), in her discussion of his development of an influential mode of theatrical therapy geared toward social change. This would later come to be known as the *Theater of the Oppressed*. As its emergence immediately followed the fall of the Brazilian military dictatorship from whence he’d sought refuge in Argentina, it had the stated objective to help citizens cope with 14 years of oppression by expressing themselves and their issues through the arts.

More than the work Bishop, herself, has done within this realm, I found her distillation of the Boal "art-as-therapy" initiation to be deeply relatable insofar as it held presumably the same principal motivating factors as those which brought me to devise and create an entire installation of art exhibits. Though my expression was not through gesticulation, but rather through sculptures, in response to months of harassment and oppressive attacks on my character and livelihood, I found myself engrossed in the process of releasing my tension through these works. For the first time in an entire lifetime of creating visual art as a response to the world around me, I found this expression to not only come from a completely different
place, but also to be so hugely therapeutic in ways my other forms of expression could never have achieved.

That Bishop would be keen to contrast that with the same period of "cool constructive forms of European abstraction [which] are redirected towards a liberatory experience of colour, texture and intermediary objects" then taking place in neighboring Argentina, made an almost mirrored reflection of how I saw myself in my own collective reality. Just as I was experiencing the traumatic response to being under attack, I saw the world around me (and indeed the artists at work in their studios, working on their own art) continuing on as if nothing weighed on them outside of business as usual.

I therefore not only related to the work that Boal very insightfully knew needed to be undergone to help his fellow citizens bounce back from a nation-wide crisis, but also to the very pertinent idea that neighboring Argentina, in its largely unaffected continuance of self-reflexive and cerebral works seeking to make themselves known in European markets, offered “performances [which were] less visually oriented, and more willing to tarry with nihilistic consequences of producing coercive situations” (Bishop, 105).

**Hasan Elahi - Self-Documentation as a Form of Protest**

After being anonymously accused of ties with terrorist groups around the time of the September 11th attacks (and no doubt also for appearing Middle Eastern), Bangladeshi-American Hasan Elahi was arrested, interrogated and ultimately labeled a terrorist by the U.S. National Security Agency and the FBI. Since that time, Elahi has documented every waking moment of his life and published it on his website. This includes more than 20,000 images (of everything from the toilet he just used, to the breakfast he ate), an active satellite locator to his current location, a year-by-year statistical analysis report and web-posted copies of each of his debit transactions.
The greatest clarity that I have gained from my experience has come from my own diminutive version of Elahi’s experience documenting his response to these life-changing allegations.

Says Wired Magazine, "Elahi’s site is the perfect alibi. Or an audacious art project. Or both. The Bangladeshi-born American says the US government mistakenly listed him on its terrorist watch list — and once you're on, it's hard to get off. To convince the Feds of his innocence, Elahi has made his life an open book. Whenever they want, officials can go to his site and see where he is and what he's doing. Indeed, his server logs show hits from the Pentagon, the Secretary of Defense, and the Executive Office of the President..."(Thompson, 2007).

He used his right to free speech to broadcast his struggle, to tell the world about the blatant violation of his privacy and to reveal the questionable tactics of a powerful entity such as the FBI.

In my case, I know very well that art now has a permanent place in my life – it has given me the consummate platform upon which to express that which cannot be touched by any aggressor, that cannot be diminished or skewed by any legal action, nor subverted by any willing tyrant or taken away by legal precedent. It cannot be intimidated or threatened.

Further, the artful portrayal of my ex’s systematic abuses cannot be mistaken in the eyes of those who view it. The meaning cannot be suppressed by her lawyer, redacted like a police report, refuted in litigation or refused by any judge. It is my answer to the assaultive behavior that I have sustained. And that, as I have come to realize, is a cornerstone of art.

In the end, I have refused to be made a victim in the affair - I plan to leave that role to my ex, who plays it well.
Ben Valentine - Documentary Process as a Social Practice

In a July, 2012 article in Hyperallergic Magazine, Ben Valentine states that “Social Practice places emphasis on process and commitment…” (Valentine, 2012). While my experience pales in comparison to a terrorist watch list, I'm certain that I feel no less under threat - if by a person abusing the very same system that is set in place to protect us. I also know full well what it's like to have one's "dirty laundry" on offer for all to see.

Just as Elahi has done, I have gone to exhaustive efforts to be plane, transparent and not back down from my aggressor’s lies - albeit for the purposes of creating an art gallery, and for using my aggressor's actions as a vehicle for success.

This point, too, struck a chord with me. The FBI may not have had the agenda to “ruin” him, as my ex had clearly hoped for me. Elahi may not have been motivated to use an agenda and squeeze out of it the very thing that agenda had worked to dismantle. But the common vein was documentation in the face of oppression. And its end result was an effective, socially impactful account of personal justice using equal parts grassroots resources and changing the rules of the game to the unwitting shock of the aggressors.

Nan Goldin - Exposure as a Means to Redemption

Being vulnerable to the predetermined, social prejudices of others, the subject matter of Nan Goldin's photographs depict the lives of her "glam-punk" friends in their laundry-littered flat as they do drugs, use the bathroom and have sex under her watchful eye of her readied camera. In that, she literally aired all of her dirty laundry for the entire world to see as well.

Though initially coming off as shocking and threatening, my aggressor’s claims against me were so over-the-top and unbelievable that I have never had to worry about anyone actually believing them. But I still experienced the feeling of having my aggressor's skewed version my past out there for all to see. I had been “exposed” much like Goldin’s subjects.
However, it’s not only a very liberating feeling (much like relieving a lifetime of secrets or confessing a lifetime of sins), it also means that I had nothing left to lose – nothing left for my aggressor to go after. This was a common thread in the work that emerged on the day of my final project presentation.

Of Elahi’s experience creating what he called *The Orwell Project*, author and professor Amitava Kumar, wrote "He was motivated partly by concern that his unpleasant experience with the FBI could easily be repeated, but also by the subversive desire to hold a mirror to the agencies that watch us" (Kumar, 2010). It seems that my recourse was a natural response to the same kind of scrutiny that my aggressor and her team of unscrupulous lawyers had implemented. As in Elahi’s case, my accuser and her employer were also very publicly embarrassed for their concerted misdeeds, as the case grew in complexity, but also in notoriety amid what is not a large pool of Bangor law firms. Holding up a mirror that small crowd became the metaphorical equivalent to the reaction I received on the feedback forms from the visitors at my final presentation.

**Shannon Jackson - Social Judgment and Activist Art**


Smartly, she instigates that activism (i.e. political performance art, as well as other forms of politically and experientially oriented art) is a relatively new tool to the art scene for visual dialogue. Flying in the face of Brechtian theatre and the dislodged, critical audience perspective, the views of the audience, then, become more about social acceptance and denial because they are based solely on the viewers’ politics.

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11 Many responses were written about how these people went well beyond the ethical limits of the law.
Though I did have big wins in court, the question will always remain with me how some people initially and instinctively react to hearing of the case brought against me and my friends and colleagues. Even though her law firm was immediately slammed by the sitting judge who outright dismissed their motions, the initial accusations seem always to carry with them more weight – simply because they came first. However, within the response of activism through art, as Jackson advocates, it’s the move that makes the biggest difference that makes the biggest impact - no matter the order in which they arrived, as surely it was the source of the art, and not the artistic response, that came first.

As most would-be encounters of this affair will understand it from the whole, gleaning more and more information as they trudge through the lengthy and cumbersome details, they will understand that it contributed to so much more good than bad. So much positivity resulted from what was essentially a failed attempt to defame a contingent of uninvolved people for little more than having the flame of hurt pride fanned by an obsessive personality with opportunistic pro bono council. In the end, the shame is cast not upon those accused; but those accusing.

In the time researching others who have sustained these kinds of abuses, I've determined that I am one of the lucky few who have made it through such a fiasco with nothing on my permanent record, and no professional harm to speak of. And while this idea was not among the more prevalent ones at the presentation, it should be noted here as a tangential idea that, while difficult to portray in an arena defined by my successes, holds no less importance on the list of considerations in the final show.

Dorothy Chansky, Associate Professor of Theatre at Texas Tech University, says of Jackson’s most overtly feminist chapter, _High Maintenance_, "housework is little different from

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12 In fact, just the opposite. After the last semester of my studies, I was offered a six-figure contract for a full-time professorship at UMaine’s sister campus, the American University in Bulgaria – largely as the result of ties I made in the wake of fighting back against my aggressors.
the janitorial work it takes to keep a museum going,” comparing the presumed ‘woman’s role in the kitchen to that of a curator’s role in an art gallery.’ There are many tenets of preconceived social philosophies at play when a man is accused of abuses by a woman. This project hopes to present several of those stereotypes for questioning as viewers encounter the details of the case.

**Theresa Saldana - Advocacy, Victimization, and Catharsis**

Having only recently died, Theresa Saldana, an actress and producer whose career began to rise with movies like *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* and *Raging Bull*, used a violent and disturbing attack as the vehicle for her own healing.

In March of 1982, Saldana was stabbed 10 times in an incident that found her attacker convicted of attempted murder. She survived, but her turmoil didn't end there. She received a flurry of threatening letters from her attacker while he was still in prison, causing her continued anguish long after her recovery. Instead of caving under what must have been a very difficult time for Saldana, she sought out a then-budding community of other victims of violent attack.

This act, while not necessarily an explicitly artful act, started what came to be the pivotal moment in Saldana's career. Saldana didn't just become a victim's advocate for those affected similarly, she brought into the public eye a threat we all share and that clearly needed to be addressed.

In an interview of the event with NPR, she said, "As you've seen in the film, the period when I finally meet other victims is when I take a giant step forward toward help. And that is very common among victims. Many of them will feel that they are the only person in the world to have been through such a thing. When you meet with other people, you realize that you're not alone, and it's easier to cope with when you realize that you're not the only one who's been through it."
Turning the tragedy on its head, Saldana starred in a movie called *Victims for Victims, the Theresa Saldana Story*, for which she won a Primetime Emmy Award. The movie’s namesake was also the title of a charity which she helped found for the advocacy of victims internationally. She had effectively taken a horrific, life-changing moment and used it as a siphon from which to draw power, help other victims, and even further her career.

The film wasn't just a success for Ms. Saldana and her charitable efforts in the field. Saldana's film inspired a spate of other films in the same vein to spring forth - creating something of an “era” of true life crime stories which began flooding the film scene about victims and their non-fiction screen depictions. These include films like *A Cry for Help: The Tracey Thurman Story* (1989), *Without Her Consent* (1990), *Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story* (1993), *Cries Unheard: the Donna Yaklich Story* (1994), and many others.\(^{13}\)

The media craze that followed Saldana's film also inspired nighttime drama TV shows - stories of true crime like *Unsolved Mysteries*, starting in 1986 and hosted by Robert Stack, *Rescue 911*, starting in 1989 and hosted by William Shatner, and *Forensic Files*, starting in 1996 and hosted by a variety of narrators and presenters.\(^{12}\)

Perhaps it was not just Saldana's attack hitting the media headlines as it did, that helped propel her initial spot in Hollywood's limelight. Her story came in on the heels of the famed late 1970s David Berkowitz killings, for which the New York State Legislature swiftly passed preemptive legal statutes prohibiting criminals (and even their families, friends and neighbors) from profiting on the publicity and sensationalism of their crimes.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{13}\) All cited in bibliography as title.

\(^{12}\) All cited in bibliography as title.

\(^{14}\) Conversely and unfortunately, this “sensationalization” of perpetrators may well have also formed the backbone for others enacting harm on innocent people by virtue of their involvement in such affairs and use as a tool by aggressive persons to reverse the flow of the system. While this portion of the discussion ultimately belongs in the formal thesis, it is worth noting that the other victim in the business of public
On a similar track, a 2008 documentary entitled Dear Zachary, which told the story of a deeply mentally ill woman impregnated by a man named Andrew Bagby who, when he found out about her illness, attempted to gain distance from her. When she realized he was leaving her, she brutally murdered him and threw herself, and her newborn baby into the frigid waters off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada. This gripping, award-winning film was the inspiration for the Canadian High Court's decision to create legislature known as Zachary's Bill (Bill C-464), which added an amendment to Canada's criminal code giving courts the right to refuse bail to someone charged with a serious crime who is deemed a potential danger to children under the age of 18 (Canadian Parliament, 2010\(^\text{15}\)).

Figure 5, © MSNBC Films, artwork by Evan B. Harris

smear campaigns are those who have reported legitimate abuse, but because of the numerous, repetitious abuses such as those akin to mine, they are often overlooked or looked upon with scrutiny and reverse prejudice.

\(^\text{15}\) Listed in Bibliography as Andrews, 2010, as no current MLA format exists for citing foreign parliamentary legislation.
CHAPTER 5
SO WHAT BETTER...

Discussion of Methods and Methodologies

All this said, I can't help but notice the entirely improbable scenario that manifested not only in the time that it occurred, but also the place; the supportive people around me; the lessons that my life had been missing; the malleable program I was taking that was almost custom suited for an artful response to such an affair; the timing of the last semester within the program that necessitated new content for a final project; the University that employed me who had already set the stage for a scandalous affair to be delivered by my ex's attorneys; my ex's coincidental employment with said attorneys; the mentor that advised me who had also been accused and who reassured me that neither my ex nor her attorneys were at all taken seriously by the University; and so many more items in motion and in happenstance that made this period, as close as I can figure, a complete necessity for me.

So, what better circumstances could there be for designing the ideal, socially relevant art project? Jackson's Social Works distills and reinvents the once-preconceived ideas of activism for, against and by way of controversial issues facing society today. Through the feedback I received, this project touched so many people in so many different ways (see Feedback section following the Graduate Thesis Project section). The epidemic of false accusation has been proven to leave literally no one impervious. The social regard people have for false accusers has an even more impending stigma than someone who is accused, as, once the accuser took the role of victim, now they emerge as the sinister opposite - an actor who plays on the sympathies of those who would be made fools to believe them. This was an unexpected lesson that emerged throughout my time finding that network of supportive people, and listening to the responses they shared.
What better response than through artful, community engagement? Like Boal’s performance-as-catharsis, people learn to process challenges when shown the work of others, when “walking in the shoes” of the affected, and when witnessing the amassed accumulation of material and immaterial challenges people face. There is something both immediately and intimately relatable about others who face the same or similar challenges that we face in our own lives. We innately see them as an opportunity to connect and to share. In an intransigent and dichotomous way, we disconnect and distance ourselves from those who deceive us - finding that they either have nothing to which we can connect in that person, or, more profoundly, we wonder what latent, baleful deceit this wolf in sheep’s clothing has already perpetrated that has played us an unwitting lummox.

What better presentation medium than through the documentary lens? As I have learned in my time as a photographer and filmmaker, there is a language in pictures that requires no tongue. Visual scenes speak to each of us in the same universal discourse, yet reveal depth and tone and sentiment as shifting entities we experience individually. The magic of commonality that occurs to each of us independently is limited only to our ability to describe those facets of the same imagery. Yet no time is necessary to be spent doing so to understand the corresponding preponderance of these themes. Choosing this medium for my presentation was decidedly akin to this ethos, as so many concepts which could not be made available in verse or parlance, would have no impediment to clarity through the physical and visual witness of the works and the interaction and documentation that supplemented them.

What better physical medium than materials used in the ongoing case? In Bishop’s discussion of artistic strategies, there lies an intrinsic willingness to be open to new ideas so long as our assessment of those ideas promises to teach us something new. My willingness to expand into the arena of non-digital art was a late blooming device within my particular programmatic lineage which, when finally switched on, allowed me to do something that my
proclivity for digital presentation could not do - or which would not do with as much immediacy and availability as the final chosen medium. Documenting the finality of all three phases of this project\textsuperscript{16} brought together the physical (and more traditional) arts and the virtual (or digital) format with which I have been more familiar.

What better philosophical vehicle than Freedom of Expression? Not just art, but the protections Americans enjoy that protects it by way of an amendment to the constitution, happens to be the one arena of the law against which neither my aggressor nor her attorneys could legitimately make claim, prosecute, or censor. This was my channel for employing a cathartic release; my venue for using my aggressor's claims against her; my means of taking her attempts at thwarting my progress and using them as a means to ensure its success. This, as Elahi might argue, was the perfect rejoinder to an imperfect system of law that guarantees more protection for the falsely accused than the false accusers.

What better locus for this instance to arrive than at a period when I could use it to share a story, to count myself among a growing (and already staggering) number of people who have been falsely accused\textsuperscript{17}, but also to be supported (socially, emotionally, academically and even financially) in a group of people in my immediate community who have also come under fire in the same scheme. I was deeply moved so many times by the love, generosity and kindness that emerged among people I now consider lifelong friends. People came out of the woodworking in complete support of my project - as was likely in the case of the actors gamboling about the stage in the \textit{Theater of the Oppressed}. I was offered places to stay, rides to and from places I needed to go, new friends who had heard of the events came to my aid and offered their ears and advice. It was a hugely fulfilling time for me that ultimately found me

\textsuperscript{16} The assaultive behavior that inspired the thesis, the thesis research that resulted, and the graduate project that provided the format for the showcase to the entire process.

\textsuperscript{17} Without any real threat of successful prosecution or legitimate claims that would affect me by and from the university that employed, schooled and generally honored me with their efforts and time.
leaving Maine not with a bad taste in my mouth, but on a heartfelt, sentimental note that it came to be. Through this strife I had found a community of people that I had not been able to find for the year-and-a-half of living in Maine prior to the event.

The methods I used to connect to my audience were so substantially ameliorated by the methodology utilized to do so. The methodology was informed by the innumerable lessons both within and around the time, place, people and engagement comprising my program - and of course those negative influences that brought it all to life. The notion that it all came together in the months preceding the next step in my professional incumbency, provides me with a sense of ruminated awareness I can only attribute to a greater plan that the universe might hold for me - uncloaking even further the notion that others still have their lessons to learn as well; lessons which they may benefit from exploring through their own artistic preferences.

**Historical and Contemporary Application**

Much of the Dadaist and Futurist art was crafted with the explicit intention of undermining the propaganda of their respective periods of war and strife and political unrest. In that same way, my work undermines that bureaucracy.

The basic, formative concepts of *Non/Disclosure* offer responses to what rationalist society conceives of criminality and criminal activity, simply by virtue of an accusation being made by someone within that society. It evinces how hard society makes the falsely accused work in order to clear their name and put the pieces of their life back together, and asks the viewer to question the rationality and morality of the legal system as it applies to our private scuffles.

Many times, the falsely accused person never fully recovers from this kind of accusatory activity. Through the use of interactive exhibits, *Non/Disclosure* admits of the betrayal in that system that victims often confess to feeling as a result.
In the worst of these situations, the accused are convicted of their allegations, are sentenced to time in jail, and have permanent and sustained blights on their record and reputation. By including the audience in the act of physically being involved in an ongoing case, *Non/Disclosure* reveals the very real risk that we all have of being caught up in something similar.

In all cases of false allegations and defamation, the normal course of life of the falsely accused is forever changed, as no one, no matter what the outcome of the case, ever regains their once-unblemished standing in society. Having guests admit to crimes they have committed (in the case of the *Admission of Guilt* exhibit within this show), or knowledge of crimes others have committed, they, too, are forever giving over control to their own destiny and that of their associations.

The essence of these exhibits falls squarely in line with a modus of undermining society’s initiative to simply follow along with the bureaucracy on the presupposition of a secure, just and equitable legal system without ever thinking critically about how it affects them on the larger whole. It questions society’s assumptions about how right the justice system is, how fair it is, and to what extreme someone can use it to exact personal retribution if wielded under the right circumstances.

In a chapter of *Reality Radio: Telling True Stories in Sound* called Living History, Stephen Smith, the producer of American Radio Works from PublicRadio.org, writes of his experience crafting radio stories, "I prefer to journey through the twentieth-century American history using found audio objects and interviews with people who live through the events. However important a theme or an idea may be, stories and characters drive the narrative, not scholarly debates." He also goes on to note that "[p]sychologists say that the stories we tell about ourselves are a critical and ever-changing facet of self-knowledge. And as every great
history teacher knows, a good story will stick with us in a way that facts and dates do not" (Biewen, et al., 2010).

The authenticity of any story, and indeed any artwork, for me, is the most crucial element. Throughout the course of research and personally challenging experiences these last few years, it has never been more clear to me that art is not just truthful - it is truth. Coming from a journalism background, where concepts like morals, ethics and neutrality are paramount, this project could not be more prominent in pinning down a truer sense of meaning for the flow of art in the work that I will endeavor to tie into every branch of work I engage from here forward.

Scholastically, art should appear as a method of presenting work; in academic work it should be felt as the undercurrent of the driving elements of the work; professionally, art should be imparted to my audience and will therefore add a degree of emphasis that draws on the impact of the work; and creatively, art could not have a more decisive role in my continuing work.
CHAPTER 6

GRADUATE THESIS PROJECT

Materials, Contextual Application, and Visual Presentation

There are several touchstones which serve to define the boundaries and constrain the use of certain materials and modes of presentation in this project. First, the primary basis for Non/Disclosure: the physical Non-Disclosure Agreement which governs the entirety of the story and its documentation, expires on December 30, 2016. Therefore, the single, most important constraint for this show is that deadline. The project’s basis in reality hinges upon its exploration of the boundary of what should be exposed and what legally cannot be, and its ability to place viewers in an active role in the open and ongoing case, the details of which are legally protected by the NDA still in actual effect.

In order to properly focus on these aspects of truth, secrecy and personal jeopardy, I have designed a solo show that brings viewers into a private space on a public campus and requires their full immersion and participation, through physical interaction while under surveillance and exploring the exhibits, as well as “becoming a party to liability” within an active case.

Each of these exhibits, therefore, has two goals - and by virtue of those two, many more by implication:

1. To force the viewer to think about the very real threat we all face as active members of a public society, in becoming unwittingly entangled in a legal struggle of our own, or through someone we know simply by association; and

2. to force the viewer to deeply examine their role in that struggle: How hard would they fight for themselves? For someone they hold dear? For someone with whom they’re simply associated?
Additionally, through the strict use of only real artifacts of evidentiary record within the pieces being created for the show (i.e., using disputed property to construct them) and telling a story that is true and ongoing and that is backed up by that same public record, but which obscures the "truth" that the evidence was meant to tell, the tedious, cyclical nature of the court system is revealed as both a necessary evil for legitimate claimants seeking justice, and also deeply flawed and actively abused by those familiar with how to do so. With only one exception discussed in the exhibits section, each of Non/Disclosure’s works are constructed of materials that were purchased by my aggressor at a time prior to her onslaught, and used for a garden art project in the fall of 2015.

These materials – mostly lumber purchased from a hardware store – were later claimed as “disputed property.” Her aim was not to reclaim property that rightfully belonged to her (especially since she knew it had already been cut up to the point of not having any monetary value), but simply to disrupt the creation of that project mid-stride. Repurposing these materials not only represents that misguided appetite for reprisal, it seeks also to turn that campaign for control on its head, provide content for the exhibition, and force my accuser to pay for yet another of my projects – and indeed my final graduate thesis.

This, of course, is not intended to requite retribution in the case where my aggressor must sit back powerlessly and watch as I make positive use out of her negative intentions in a public venue where I present the finalizing materials to the graduate degree she sought to destroy - though I won’t deny a healthy measure of satisfaction on the issue of redress for her claims against me. It is intended to represent the negativity and resentment she must have felt as she plotted endlessly against me - spending countless wasted hours on pessimism and spite. In a personal way, I hoped to return a sense of balance to the scene with the many hours I spent focusing on positivity and success.
On each piece of exposed wood included in the exhibition, the words “Disputed Property” are spray-painted to bring both unity among the various works, and also to identify to the viewer that even the construction materials are integral to the portrayal of the affair. Through this construction and identification, the individual pieces can be taken as “exhibits” in several senses of the word – most usefully, in the actual legal sense of items entered into evidence.

**Audience Participation**

Audience participation is also crucial if the true essence of the presentation is to be absorbed. Just as victims are forced to take an active role in defending themselves against an accuser, viewers must interact with the exhibits in order to come to a more complete understanding of the tenets of the ordeal in which victims far too frequently find themselves inconveniently involved.

Many times, the victims are new to the material or the act of defending themselves in the legal process, only to find out later the major details of the accuser’s legal strategy. Thus, the included works are numbered in a specific order, using painter’s tape along the floor to guide them (much like the painted line on the street an officer might use during a drunk-driving test), with the intention of limiting the visitor’s foreknowledge of the events and allowing a prejudicial narrative to form as, little by little, more information is revealed. Viewers will be unfamiliar with the nature of the accusations or the information being held in secret, ready to spring on them by way of courtroom sabotage.

As mentioned above; to proceed from the first to last exhibits, visitors must also follow, one foot in front of the other, a taped line along the floor. Even if it was not an onerous task, it is embarrassing to be forced to publicly engage in sobriety tests. This particular line is dizzying and takes on a continuous series of switchbacks and tight turns that lead the visitor on a “disorienting and difficult path to the end.”
In addition to this endeavor which is already laborious, the actual length of the tape is also a salient factor to the overarching idea of the gallery. It measures, in total, 1,585 feet – the exact distance that the paperwork generated from court documents, correspondence and incident reports would span if printed and laid out end to end. The act of following the entirety of that distance, and in fact the tape itself, is another quasi-exhibit, as it forces the audience to engage in an activity that is famed to the American public in scenes we have all witnessed on movies, in TV shows that follow law enforcement officers, and even on the roadside.

Many times, this strategy pressures the victims to sign away rights or to agree to terms that they would otherwise never agree to, because they think their aggressor has organized witnesses willing to lie for them in order to strengthen their case. They might also think that just agreeing to lesser charges or civil agreements, it will make their aggressor back down or go away or otherwise give up their campaign of assaults. In this way, visitors to Non/Disclosure must also do things that make them uncomfortable, or place them in the position of making a judgment based on incomplete or skewed information. It is through participation that the project constructs a sense of jeopardy and uncertainty that steers the viewer into questions about liability, exposure, and the conundrums of social judgment and stereotyping.

Conceptual Elements

Another point of this exhibition is to play on the idea of public vs. private, and released vs. protected information. The bulk of these exhibits work in a manner that both reveals and conceals that information (more information on this in The Exhibition section below). The audience is invited to discover for themselves their own prejudice based on a progression of exhibits that reveal only what an accuser might want to be revealed, concealing the true nature of the events and even providing altogether false information – all in an effort of prejudicing law

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18 Or provide false evidence, or employ threat tactics against family members and friends, and so on.
enforcement, judges, employers, friends and family (all represented by the audience themselves) against the accused.

Without placing blame or hoping for audience agreement, *Non/Disclosure* simply explores that foreboding area that makes us all think twice before discussing potentially harmful topics. It talks about taking life’s challenges and turning them around for the better. It celebrates the strength to take back the power that mentally unstable or scorned partners attempt to hold over their falsely accused ex-lovers.

*Non/Disclosure* empowers us to come out of our proverbial closets and realize that our “skeletons” are only past challenges that we should embrace, be proud of and never be embarrassed about. It reveals our false sense of any expectation to privacy, and how the legal system and social supposition directly affects that meretricious assumption. It begs the questions that each of us fear being asked about our past, about what we do in our private home lives, and about just how at-risk we all are from always being just a few, short steps away from having our entire lives turned upside down - all of this just because, in the U.S. legal system, we can.

**Thesis Exhibition and Beyond**

This project will be brought full circle by the continuation of the documentary process. As it will be presented in the Without Borders Festival in Maine in 2017 as a culminating effort of my terminal master’s degree, size and space constraints at that event require that a film be used to present this work. Along with the film itself, I will also include a few of the more impactful pieces for spectator purposes and of course to assist in the representation of the size and scope of the gallery pieces presented one year prior.

Accordingly, if ironically, I employed the same kind of recording to document the construction of the gallery materials as I did to collect evidence against my aggressor. In doing so, the final product of all my work is marked by a sharp sardonic (and almost mordant) quality,
especially when considering the temporary move away from my original medium of documentary film and visual media during the latter half of my studies, which will be reintroduced in my cohort’s graduate capstone event.

Feedback

Populated below is a selected listing of anonymized feedback left by visitors after the graduate thesis exhibition:

The path was disorienting and created a space of dizziness that kept with me for the duration of the exhibit. I discovered that I am quite private and secretive of highly personal matters that have the chance to put me in a position of vulnerability. I tried to share very personal stories on social media, but always with the control and discretion of my own being. I realize how hard it can be to protect yourself when presented with evidence of defamation. Initially I put compassion for the woman, loyalty because of my own female bias. But the transcript and support of local officials made it evident that it was not so. It’s obviously easy [to see] how one can manipulate a system on good faith (and bias) that you (a plaintiff) are telling the truth. It’s easy to see how the accused can be quickly judged before having a chance to present contradicting evidence in support of their case. Something most definitely to consider.

Wow. Just wow. I can’t really say it was an enjoyable experience. I felt both discomfort and compassion for the artist. It did give me insight on how Intermedia can take shape from personal experience. I wanted to know more and see more.

I liked the audio and the visual. I think I also wanted a tactile experience, something with a touch and smell element (scratch and sniff?), but I am not sure in what way or how. Thank you for sharing your experience.
Cyle, I loved it!!! Wow! Amazing! Super job! Looking forward to following in future works!!

Thank you for this! It happened to a friend of mine, and, while [we were] all supportive of their fight, no one could really understand what they were going through. You gave me probably the closest thing to the experience that they must have had. I was angered, elated and confused all at once. I want to reach into your mind and take away this awful experience. I would offer you my sympathies if I didn't already know that you made such an amazing positive thing come out of it. It is clear that this girl has some deep seeded issues that she had no shame in showing everyone about, and that it really can happen to anyone.

Cyle, Nice job on this. It had an interesting aesthetic with all the raw plywood and tape. I am curious as to why you chose those particular materials. Overall, the show seems quite cathartic and hopefully brings you new understanding and closure for your legal ordeal. I look forward to seeing how your work evolves over the coming years as you move towards your thesis show.

Dear Cyle, I think the exhibit was really powerful and made me appreciate the struggle of a person who has been falsely accused, struggle in terms of the frustration and helplessness and becoming a name in files and facts of paperwork. I am looking forward to hearing your story and interpretation of each exhibit. All the best for your future.

Hey Cyle, the exhibit was really interesting. I would say that I enjoyed all of it, but that is not really true. I enjoyed the experience, but it also shines a light on unpleasant things. Rock on!

It is wonderful to see how Cyle converted a painful experience into something as beautiful as this exhibition and put it out there to share with everyone. It was a great
experience to walk through the exhibition - almost like watching a movie, but in a very
tactile fashion. Great job!

Thank you. This provides so much food for thought.

I thought it was great. As someone who isn’t fluent in legal lingo, (how many of
us really are?), I felt a bit disoriented at times - but this was not the only (or even major)
reason for my disorientation. I also felt overwhelmed (not necessarily in a bad way) by
the number of details, both in the shared and the concealed. I felt that I had perhaps
experienced a very small percentage of what the artist must have felt during this
process. I disclose that I knew nothing about this case - although I do know the artist,
having been a former student of his as well as a colleague. Did this affect how I
perceived the exhibit? Probably. I know the artist and happen to like him, so I was very
surprised to hear the charges that were made against him. I felt a bit of gossiper’s
intrigue. The only part I felt truly uncomfortable with was the bit where you had to write
something potentially illegal that you participated in. Why did I have to include names
and dates, and my signature? Was this a test to see how well I obeyed orders? (I saw
cops eating pizza on the way in too!19) Overall, very well done. As [I] said, I think it
would work better experienced one person at a time to really take it in at one’s own
pace.

19 Referring to the UMaine police officers that attended the event as well.
CHAPTER 7

THE EXHIBITION

Non/Disclosure (full presentation graded and viewed as one collective item, includes one exhibit with same name)

Date published: Spring 2016

Included in academic review: Yes

Accord

Accord deceptively looks like a ledger. However, underneath the signature page is an agreement that is not only impossible to read, but also impossible to follow. Non-disclosure agreements are feeble because it is not up to the offending party to keep from violating it, rather it is up to the victim of the violation to seek justice at their own expense and with no guarantee of winning civil damages. Piled onto that already difficult scenario is the idea that these kinds of ends are very difficult to prove in court, as the burden of proof is on the accuser, not the violator of the agreement.

Acting as not only a log of all guests, but also the very first exhibit in the presentation, all visitors are required to sign this agreement before being allowed to enter the show. Engagement with all exhibits within the show is obligatory, as outlined in the agreement of its namesake. This first exhibit hosts an exhaustive non-disclosure agreement (which appears at the end of this section). In it, guests are required to not only give up a substantial and appalling amount of their liberties, they also agree to pay out our cede ownership to properties and the rights of others in a bewildering litany of verbiage designed solely to be intimidating, hard to understand and nearly impossible to adhere to.
It should be noted that this is not a numbered exhibit, which acts to cloak the ledger in one more layer of mystery. At various points in the show, I would approach people and ask them what they thought of “the first exhibit,” to which they would respond that “Non/Disclosure was really [amazing, scary, etc.].” Then I would say, “No, the first exhibit is the agreement that you signed, Accord.” Reactions to this, and that I informed them that they had signed a legally binding agreement upon entering this exhibit, ranged from visible signs of worry to chuckles and confirmations that they were impressed that so much thought had been put into “tricking” the patrons into signing an agreement just as I had been in the case that formed the basis for this show.

In creating the document for Accord, I employed the use of rules that do not exist, on documents that are not real, from fictional courts of law, and unsourced and false reference materials. The experience of attempting to read and understand the agreement in this exhibit is indicative of the dizzying array of paperwork forced upon those newly indoctrinated to the court process and of defending themselves against false accusations by aggressive attorneys, and their equally aggressive clients.
Figure 6, Accord, Maine 2016. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell. Actual agreement, shown below.

Non/Disclosure

The second and pinnacle exhibit of the presentation, Non/Disclosure, sits autonomously, containing the author’s entire account of the details of the case, which are protected by the agreement if its namesake. At this exhibit the viewer is not required to take any action outside of standing witness. Inside the wooden box, paid for by the my aggressor, bolted together with security screws, but chained down to a wobbly table by plastic chain (which is held in place by feeble luggage locks), sits a document with enough power to send the author to right back into litigation. This one document could unravel all the progress fought so doggedly for, and for so long that only the precarious nature of its obviously false sense of security could portray the very real threat that we all face of someone accessing private information and using it for the purposes of retributive exploitation.

With that in mind, in reality the situation is not terribly dire - even for such a case of high level potential litigation. Knowing that I could have put any document in this box, or even 50
blank sheets, which would ultimately offer less risk to me, my aggressor’s claim was simply a thinly veiled attempt to disrupt my progress and use the guise of the legal process to do so.

This is to say that, playing on the idea of the threat of litigation, my initiative was to emulate an over-inflated risk so common to the practice of seedy law practices by seedy attorneys - attorneys so common to the practice of law that they are depicted on everything from sitcoms to crime dramas.

Figure 7, Non/Disclosure 1, Maine 2016. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
Figure 8, Non/Disclosure 2, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
The second numbered exhibit (hereafter this document will refrain from using the word “numbered” assuming that the rest of the exhibits are numbered by way of the orientation of the tape directing visitors along the floor) is called Documental. It is a digital multimedia audio recording positioned much like a hangman's noose, though no nomenclature of the same is mentioned within the statement or the audio contained within the exhibit.

The dialectic comparisons between the physicality of the exhibit, as well as the motion one must take to place the headphones around the head and stand at about head-level with the would-be noose of the exhibit, all offer an unspoken connection to the idea that the information contained within the recording (in keeping with the strenuous and threatening nature of being made to “hang” for alleged crimes) all but strangles the senses as the visitor listens in.

Compiling more than three hours of audio recordings when added up timestamp by timestamp, the final ten-minute audio rendering of Documental is the sum total of 18 such tracks overlayed and finalized without any further editing to assist with discerning individual voices or conversations.

The final product is something that resembles being in a cocktail party where my voice, multiplied almost two dozen times, is heard speaking with sheriffs, sheriff's deputies, local and state police officers, lawyers on both sides of the litigation as well as witnesses, family members and even personal recordings of my own thoughts.

The result is as one might expect - probative, intimidating and imparts a sense of anxiety. Yet at the same time, there is something that draws in the listener - not unlike a continuum of nearly finished sentences or half spoken thoughts left hanging in a conversation. A few words here and there clear, and even whole sentences at times can be followed. But the
essence of any of the trails of words on this recording leave the listener unnerved and completely unsatisfied.

The continually unsuccessful attempt that the mind makes to follow one conversation through to its main points is not only addictively annoying, it is representative of the conversation the accused has with his or her accuser through countless letters sent through legal channels and filtered through a system designed to leave the other party at an uninformed disadvantage.
At the third exhibit, Admission of Guilt, visitors must participate by admitting something of which they, or someone they know, are guilty, and which could potentially lead to their incarceration. They must reveal a secret that has been entrusted to them, or even someone in their family or social network. They must then sign and deposit this admission into the box and give over control to whoever opens the box and reads the information inside. This information may go onto a website for public display. It may be handed over to the police. It may never be opened at all. But visitors must engage the project or risk being ejected from the exhibition.

My accuser hacked into my mobile device, and found out that I was leaving her, that I had no feelings for her, and that I was dating another woman. This was the basis for her intention to cause me the most legal, academic and professional harm in response to her admitting of a broken heart. This information could have come from anywhere where I felt I had a right to privacy. However, I found out through litigation that I may not have had the right to privacy if I had sent any correspondence over my landlord’s internet connection. While this is not mentioned in the exhibit, the notion of false sense of security and the sequestering of information against our will is a very real and very frequent violation of that false notion that we have in today’s society.

Not knowing where our private information will end up, relying on the notion of blind trust, and simply hoping for the best are three traits that are common to all targets of false accusations. This was a crucial sentiment to the overarching idea of the gallery show, Yet it had to be created without any exchange of information. Therefore Admission of Guilt appears early on the list of exhibits, and works to enforce the feeling of dread that might befall the visitors in whatever court debacle they might likely experience at some point in their lifetimes.

In creating this particular exhibit, it was essential that it not be “tied down” as was Non/Disclosure. I was most interested in finding out what people thought of that aspect of this
project, as it directly followed one where the author’s information was at least secure-apparent. And in fact, the post-show responses which I placed at the exit of the auditorium played right into the essence of that notion, as guests responded about this particular exhibit.

Figure 10, Admission of Guilt 1, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.

Above: Opening for insertion of interactive materials
Left: Front of exhibit
Figure 11, Admission of Guilt 2, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
IVSTITIA

In this fourth exhibit, visitors are given a selection of accusations (in the form of an actual criminal charge or civil complaint that one party had against the other over the course of events in the case) which have been laser-etched onto blocks of wood. They will then literally “choose a side” on which to place the allegation without the benefit of any prior information. IVSTITIA therefore places visitors in the proverbial judge’s seat of a case they knew nothing about.

Social practice holds that we are more accustomed to, and certainly more comfortable with, judging people on less than the entirety of the evidentiary concatenation. Noting that we are becoming more and more a part of an armchair-expert society - complete with remote controlled gavel in hand - I wanted to point out our propensity for prejudgment and prejudice in a world where the influx of information is disproportionate to the knowledge and responsibility of using it.

The blocks of wood were purposefully uneven in both weight and size, but mostly followed an aesthetic rule of centering each claim on the block itself. The claims were also not etched onto blocks reflecting the “size” or “gravity” of the claim itself. Nevertheless, even if an effort had been made to represent the claim’s importance on the blocks in such a way, I felt that it might sway the audience’s judgment on where to place them, rather than utilizing the viewer’s innate prejudicial tendencies. Given the differing density and kind of wood in each block, it would never have worked out to be “balanced” in such a way as to move the scales equally if placed on either side anyway.
Figure 12, IVSTITIA 1, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
Figure 13, IVSTITIA 2, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
Summary Judgment

There were 92,952 words exchanged over a Facebook conversation that spanned the entire length of the time I knew and openly communicated with my aggressor. These are restricted in the Non-Disclosure agreement signed by the parties. Summary Judgment, represented as a 1990s style dot-matrix printer and its original paper stand, reveals each of those words in an alphabetical list, running the precarious divide between revealing and concealing private and protected information.

In creating this exhibit, I wanted to play on the idea of humor - pointing out the ridiculous nature of what information is protected, and what is not. For instance, if the audience were to read the full conversation that transpired, it would be revealed that I was a kind, patient and caring individual in the life of my aggressor and her daughter - as she admitted several times throughout that conversation. However, revealing that information prior to judgment in my audience in an art gallery just as in a court of law, would prejudice them against her and therefore give one of the parties an unfair advantage - just as my aggressor hoped to do when she revealed more than 6 pages of libelous claims to my employers, academic advisor, and others.

This exhibit is the realization of the restraint I maintained in not volleying that same action against my aggressor. It incarnates emotions that reside in other targets of aggression and libel. And it manifests in its viewer a sentiment that we all must undertake when we step back and look at the fallout of such time, money, effort and energy wasted on such pointless endeavors.
Above: Front/left of exhibit
Left: Front right of exhibit
Right: Interactive materials

Figure 14, Summary Judgment 1, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
Figure 15, Summary Judgment 2, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.


**Accessory**

The sixth exhibit, Accessory, the audience is ordered to take actual evidence from the investigation that accrued over the course of the events and destroy it in the shredder provided. By doing this, they are tied directly into the case itself, assuming liability should something go awry before the terminus of the legal agreement between the parties.

In becoming an accessory to the case, viewers must very deeply contemplate just how far they are willing to go in this exhibit. Viewers are not allowed to sift through this evidence. Rather they must take the top item, whatever that happens to be, and shred it. This could be a picture of a bicycle (property my aggressor attempted to keep from me) or a very revealing court filing (publicly available information about the case). They can choose to shred more than just the top sheet visible to them, but they cannot view it before shredding it. So, the audience must further balance their curiosity with their willingness to participate.

This being only the third exhibit where any information about the case is relayed to the audience, viewers must also remain faithfully patient that information will be given to them at the right time, or “on a need to know basis.”
Figure 16, Accessory 1, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.

Above: View of interactive materials
Left: Front of exhibit.
Figure 17, Accessory 2, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
The seventh exhibit, a three-part series of exhibits representing a variety of aspects surrounding concepts like surveillance, privacy, exposure, liability and others, is presented as an outhouse with no roof or walls - within which is a toilet completely covered in receipts and a toilet paper dispenser - all made of the same wood (with exception of the toilet) and rope owned or claimed by the aggressor in this case.

The first of the three, the title piece, is the most illustrative of the greater whole of the series. It is presented as a full-sized outhouse, complete with inverted moon carving hanging where it would normally be cut out of the front door.

The underlying objective of this exhibit is to reveal concepts that we all deal with in our own private spaces - intimacy vs. avoidance, committal vs. commitment, privacy vs. publicity, issues with surveillance, and on and on.

This exhibit is also lit in such a way that the shadow falling on the exhibit and the ground behind it are characteristic of prison bars. The audience is not invited to sit on the toilet, or enter the outhouse at all. But to read the rather detailed account of each of the exhibits’ particular play on words.

Each statement will follow the information section specific to its respective part.
Liquidated Disbursement

The second, entitled *Liquidated Disbursement*, is a toilet bowl with every visible area of its surface covered by some form of receipt. The receipts particular to this exhibit were acquired through purchases made from the very first moments that I found out about my accusations until the end of the gallery exhibition date. These receipts not only act as visual reminders of just how much money we “flush down the toilet” when acting to protect ourselves against such an onslaught, but also as tenable evidence in the event that my accuser attempted to plot out further lies about my whereabouts at various times in an effort to have me harassed or further accused of false charges.

*Liquidated Disbursement* statement: *Delineating the history of purchases, locations, times and even patterns of expenditures, Liquidated Disbursement focuses on the often wasted effort accused peoples must undertake in order to combat future allegations from their accusers. Many of these receipts depict purchases made for sustenance, some for the effort of fighting back against the allegations themselves, others simply for the documentation of being at a certain place at a certain time.*

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Smear Campaign

The third, *Smear Campaign*, is a paradigmatic portrayal of a toilet paper dispenser. The soft, absorbent paper we expect to see in the tissue isle of the supermarket has been replaced by the unappealing printer paper that arrived in my mailbox addressed from my aggressor’s attorneys throughout the course of events.

*Smear Campaign* statement: *Begging its audience to draw their own association from the materials and their presumptive entitlements, Smear Campaign figuratively acts a cleaning agent to wipe away the haze that all too often hides the strong-arm engagement of litigation*
with the intent to intimidate and defame an opposing party into submission. The unfortunate response to someone poking holes in this kind of campaign generally winds up in an embarrassing and uncomfortable situation for the aggressor, while exposing their unclean hands.

Full disclosure: In keeping with the goal of using only parts paid for by my aggressor, or parts that were in open dispute, it should be noted that the toilet is the only item in the exhibit that does not fall directly under this guideline. However, unknown to the visitor, and not mentioned on the artist’s statement at the exhibit, is that all of the unused parts from the Non/Disclosure gallery were returned to the hardware store where the refunded monies were placed on an in-store credit card. The toilet, as well as the spray adhesive and the lacquer used in this piece were all purchased using this card. The remaining few hundred dollars were then placed on a money-order and mailed anonymously to The Innocence Project – a non-profit organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted victims of the U.S. legal system.
Figure 18, Public Access/Excess1, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
Figure 19, Public Access/Excess 2, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
**Trail of Evidence**

*Trail of Evidence*, a digital rendition, showcases a tablet depicting a live location tracker of my own personal cell phone over the six months prior to the gallery show. Guests are invited to zoom in or out, to scroll up or down and get a bird’s eye visual of the trackable location data I collected. Much like *Public Access/Excess*, *Trail of Evidence* logs locations at specific times, while employing an additional effort of evidence gathering.

This exhibit was made in part to reach out to others who have experienced a similar campaign of aggression in their lives and openly discuss with those who have not, just how important it is not to remain in stasis during times of conflict. As one might realize, it is a good idea during long periods of angst, or waiting for more litigation, to get out, to meet up with friends, to take a road trip and generally get away (both physically and mentally) from the circumstances that threaten one’s otherwise peaceful life. *Trail of Evidence* literally draws the line of my own exercise of that notion.
Figure 20, Trail of Evidence 1, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
Exhibit X

There are two pertinent sides that contribute to the significance of Exhibit X - Non/Disclosure’s ninth work. Firstly, exploring the overabundance of redaction of documents, it brings into question who the courts and law enforcement agencies are really protecting by their procedural guidelines that have them covering up and frequently attaching completely redacted visual, electronic media and text based evidence of record.

What information that’s hidden is sometimes only available by court order, after adjudication of related arguments has already taken place. Other information, provable or not, is touted as hard and openly available evidence in cases against an accused person.
Secondly, one learns a lot of tertiary lessons about how the justice system interacts with the public on issues of vouchsafing. The circulation of public information, whether filed against you, or simply involving a public matter, has no calibrated system of scrutiny across different agencies.

Discussing the topic of redaction of records through a variety of public agencies, Exhibit X discloses nearly everything one might need to know to make a complete and well-informed judgment of the circumstances I was involved in. Unfortunately, these have all been completely redacted so that no amount of investigation can actually take place. In this way, Exhibit X pokes fun at, holes in and jabs at the system that sometimes protects some of our information, and without explanation or even a constant standard of metrics across agencies, sometimes doesn’t.

The idea that accusation is immediately a matter of public record is completely absurd. What is worse, any citizen can accuse any other citizen of any crime at any time without providing even a modicum of evidence in the matter, and then, for less than $10, gain access to that unadjudicated public record for use in other filings or proceedings. So if one has the willingness and know how, it is completely within the law to smear another person’s character and have that campaign appear completely legitimate as long as it came from a public record. This is precisely what happened to me. Exhibit X points that out in unflinching commentary.

Exhibit X statement: Under these blackened lines could literally be any visual element, leaving the witness to draw their own conclusion – and utilize their own prejudice - to form an opinion about the person about whom the documents were originally written.
Incident Rapport

The tenth exhibit, *Incident Rapport*, is the complete series of actual police reports from the beginning of the incident involving the parties. They have been redacted to reveal a certain story which, if read only from what is available, can only be assumed to confirm the guilt of one party over the other. There are several chapters - each one using the same reports, but redacted in a different way to reveal a completely different story.

The first chapter tells a story benefiting the Plaintiff. The second favors the Defendant. The third chapter tells the most ridiculous story of them all: the whole story - an unedited (though still agency-redacted) story that spans the entire process.
Figure 23, Incident Rapport 1, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
Figure 24, Incident Rapport 2, Maine 2016. Exhibit as seen in thesis show. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
Theft by Conversion Van

In the case where my aggressor was using all means necessary to exact vengeance, my personal property also became one of these avenues, as I still had a large number of items at my aggressor’s residence when she filed her false claims. Her lawyer used an obscure statement in the court documents to keep me from this property, to make the process more costly and intimidating for me, and of course to delay the process of litigation out of spite.

Rather than walk away from this property, I chose to use the events of the court process to inform my thesis and of course, as a side benefit, to expose the law offices’ underhanded tactics in abusing the system of law that they, as officiants of the court and bar certified attorneys, were sworn to uphold. Throughout the process of using their claimant’s docket record to take them to court four times in a very revealing series of court hearings, I cleared my name and the good names of those others named by my aggressor’s unsupportable statements; I made them forever remember that I would not be intimidated by their schemes; and I also reclaimed all of my property in a staggering victory using their own false claims as the basis for suit.

Theft by Conversion Van, which is essentially a license plate belonging to the van that I forced my aggressor to return to me through court order, stands as something of a trophy of victory over injustice, while forcing the accuser under the limelight and to follow the rules like everyone else.

An interesting aside is that the state logo of this vehicle’s registration of origin, Vermont, is “Live Free or Die.”
Sheriff’s Deputy/Duty

Shown as Sheriff’s D[ep]UTY

*Sheriff’s D[ep]uty*, is a visual multimedia project that employs the use of recorded phone conversations with law enforcement while appealing to them over the course of events to assist me in whatever ways they can. In doing so, in visiting with them personally, and of course as others spoke up for me in order to bring them to the understanding that I was not the aggressor in the case against me, they came to be about as supportive as any of my friends in the matter. No doubt they had many occasions to arrest me on the half-dozen false charges attempted to be filed by my aggressor. They had opportunities to advise the District Attorney not to move forward with some very serious criminal enforcement actions. They also did not have to assist me the many times that they did in my efforts of property retrieval - extending themselves even after my aggressor had made claims against them as well. This particular piece is dedicated to their professionalism over what would have otherwise been a very unfortunate situation for many.
Challenging the equilibrium between an officer’s sworn duty to remain impartial to both
the perpetrator and the victim and these officer’s clear partiality toward the latter, this digital
portrayal of the statements of law enforcement over the life of this case is patent and
unambiguous. There is no great ally that a sufferer of false accusations can have than
credibility among those in the seat of adjudication - spouses, bosses, law enforcement and
even judges themselves.

In creating this exhibit, I spent many hours not only going over the audio to find the
statements that best represented the sentiments of the officers (which is no easy task given
that they are trained to remove any bias from their job), but also in consideration of whether or
not I should even publish their statements.

Many of their statements are damning. Many of them clearly state that they cannot
believe how crazy and clearly going overboard my ex really was. Many of them discuss the
Willey’s propensity for over-the-top paper campaigns used in order to inundate their legal
opponents (they would know, as they are the ones charged with serving such paperwork).

Through all of their statements, which they knew were being recorded, they revealed as
much sentiment as any of my closest friends - once one filters in the cop lexicon and sifts
through the suggestive language that perpetuates each of their individual conversations. It was
refreshing to revisit these statements, even though the items they were addressing seemed
staunch and stoic at the time.
Accord: The Agreement (Referenced above)
By committing, or acting to commit witness upon this installation
(hereafter referred to as the Exhibit), you (hereafter referred to as the
“Contributor”) hereby agree to the following terms for, conditions of, agreements
to, waivers of, lessees for fees regarding, liability for, and adherence to any such
sanction provided herein, except as provided in section 4-A, of this code which
shall become effective April 3, 1981, and it shall apply to witnesses committed
subsequent to, or in effect of, its actual date of construction. Prosecution for
crimes repealed by this agreement, which are committed prior to the effective
date, shall be governed by the prior agreement created by the author of this
Exhibit, to which the
Contributor also agrees by entering into and committing witness or acting to
commit witness to same.

This accord, which is continued in effect for that purpose as if this code were
not in force, provided that in any such prosecution the court may, with the
consent of the author, impose sentence under the provisions of the agreement,
as stated in such cases, the sentencing authority of the court is determined by
the application to the prior agreement of section 4-A, subsection 3, which
became effective for this purpose April 3, 1981. For purposes of this section, a
crime was committed subsequent to the effective date if all of the elements of the
crime occurred on or after that date, in relation to the breach of this agreement,
or, by agreement herein, the previous agreement created by the author, as noted
prior, during or subsequent to the effective date if any element thereof occurred
prior to the date you have committed witness or acted to commit witness to this
Exhibit, or if the evidence may reasonably be interpreted to establish that any
element may have occurred prior to that date.
Additionally, by agreeing to this accord, Contributors agree that they will select and read only one page of this document, thereby waiving any presumed rights to maintain access to the entirety of the accord. The Contributor agrees that this original draft will not be copied and remitted to Contributor for the purposes of maintaining records or any other purpose derived from here forward. Furthermore, as each Contributor is required to be a signatory of this agreement, Contributor must sign in an admitted motion of personal statement that they have “read and agreed” to the terms and conditions within this document. For the purposes of this accord, it is not an “untruth” to have agreed to such a claim without first fully reading the entirety of this document, as, within it, is the clause that understanding it need only be by agreement alone. In pursuance of additional clauses not mentioned herein, but to which each signatory of this document agrees to, it is understood that, by signing, each page not read by the Contributor is subject to change without notice, and may contain monetary liability to the Author which may, without notice, be called in at the will of the Author, and in triplicate.

If any provision or clause of this agreement or practical or theoretical application thereof to any person or community or any circumstances unforeseen herein, is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of the code which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of this accord is declared to be severable only by decision of the Author.

Each Contributor claims any and all liability to Recipient of claims brought by any Contributor and will be liable to Author when allowing others to access the modified version of this agreement on or after the date of commission of witness.
Contributor thereby agrees to remit any license or that which differs from the Licensed Product obtained by committing witness or acting to commit witness to this Exhibit.

Licensed Product is known to be any information, experience, emotional response, inspirational outcomes, inspired artwork or other intellectual property assumed to have any monetary value.

Such agreement is not subject to any subsequent requests for modification, herein offered, implied, guaranteed, assumed or stated for the purpose of defeating, rescinding, misappropriating or interactively supporting this agreement. The Recipient of experiences remitted within this Exhibit, the Contributor agrees, creates an artful or otherwise philosophical license within the Contributor, which the Contributor then agrees will be henceforth the sole ownership of the Author, entitling the Author to unlimited access to this information in the form of discussion, electronic correspondence, expressions, sexual acts, or any other vices preferred to be enacted by the Author, hereafter referred to as Faculties.

Refusal of Contributor to remit immediate access of Author to stated Faculties will result in permanent waiver of personal rights to protect Contributor from, or in legal or physical defense of, bodily injury to Contributor and all Contributor’s familial relations; to include blood kin, those with whom Contributor has engaged in sexual intercourse or is, or at anytime was, otherwise known to be a Partner or associate of the Contributor; or to any other violation that creates a substantial risk of death or extended convalescence necessary for recovery of physical health.
Additionally, Contributor agrees to cede rights to any personal or real property owned or liened – and in the case of a lien, Contributor agrees to provide remuneration otherwise known to be in, or equal to, “escrow” accounts of such properties, paid or unpaid, to the Author. Contributor further agrees to waive all rights to civil, criminal or small claims suits against, or for seeking damages from, the Author for any such enactments to engage in those rights and properties waived in the act of committing or acting to commit witness to this Exhibit, thereby further agreeing, by default, to this accord. This point extends to any and all familial relations, to include blood kin, those with whom Contributor has engaged in sexual intercourse or is, or at anytime was, otherwise known to be a Partner or associate of the Contributor – Contributor hereby assumes liability for such enactments upon those parties and accepts and assumes any liability for remuneration, incarceration or other damages sought by these parties or Partners in the event of such enactments.

Contributor further agrees to hold harmless the Author of any and all breaches of, or access to, personal intellectual property, security devices, personal computers, cards or other access to banking facilities or any other accompaniments while committing or acting to commit witness to the Exhibit. For example, any breach of any number of computers or computing devices in use or “off” while in the Exhibit, will be noted as a source or real or personal property and therefore, as a condition of provisional waiver, acts as forms, with or without modifications, and in the code, itself, as the originator of its release under this Agreement shall, as an entity, be assumed to terminate its independent ownership thereof and acquire a license of ownership of the Author. Fees for any services, service contracts or other monetary burden are here upon assumed for
completion by Contributor and Contributor agrees that, if court action is necessitated by those entities carrying the contracts or services for such devices, that the Contributor agrees that fees or any liability is prohibited from being enacted upon or charged to the Author.

In addition, each Contributor hereby grants the Author world-wide, royalty-free, exclusive license to these properties. The determination of what constitutes these and other properties (also referred to as “Content” or “Anything”) is at the sole discretion of the Author and is subject to the intellectual property rights statutes convention as governed by the interpretation of the Author as noted in sections of the afore mentioned, unattached agreement covering Digital Content created in accordance with FAR 12.211 (Technical Data) and 12.212 (Computer Software) and, for Department of Author Security purchases, DFAR 252.227-7015 (Technical Data -- Commercial Items) and 227.7202-3 (Rights in Commercial Computer Software Documentation).

“Content” shall mean the terms of this Agreement, and anything else determined by the Author to be attainable property, including, but not limited to, anything at all. No manner of indemnity or liability obligation is offered by that Participant (also known as “Contributor”). If You assert a patent applicable to Licensed Product attained while committing witness or acting to commit witness within or outside of the Exhibit, your loyalties will be questioned and you may be required to admit defeat. Inability to comply with this regulation due to statutory or regulatory variance, found through the natural course of investigation by a non-attorney, will result in an alternative course of action, likely retaliatory filings totaling between
$150,000 and $2,900,000 in punitive and compensatory damages – none of which shall require proof or shall be limited in scope to any number of claims by the Author – including, but not limited to, assault, battery, intentional infliction of emotional distress, negligent infliction of emotional distress, harassment, worry and concern over retaliatory harassment, violation of civil rights, civil conspiracy, defamation and other outrageous actions conducted in bad faith.

It is also at the sole discretion of the Author that, by and through his attorneys, this claim may also be used to disrupt the Contributor’s personal life, smear the Contributor’s character, work consciously to dismantle the Contributor’s social network, to begrudgingly decline any service of writ or summons or communication of any kind from the Contributor, and generally attempt aggressively to seek the destruction of the Contributor’s life.

In the event that the Author does move to engage such an action against the Contributor, the Contributor agrees to act entirely in good faith, to refrain from any and all retaliatory filings, to maintain good faith use of the law for the purposes the law was intended and not to return the aggression of the Author in kind. Unless explicitly specified when applying this tack in response to Author’s aggression, Contributor agrees to maintain access to Licensed Product and any and all properties mentioned in paragraphs 1-45 herein, for any liability incurred by or on behalf of the Work (also known as the “Exhibit”) the Author has completed, Contributor can only enact, in order to avoid the danger that redistributors of a Source form of said work is applied, including but not limited to patent issues, with the consideration that conditions are met as set forth in sections 2 through 9,375 of the Author’s unattached agreement, redistributions of source code and object code form will be subsumed in the default governance
of the form of the Licensed Product sought by the Author, a small number of options available to him or her. Among these are: suicide by self-immolation, indoctrination into cults or camps known to have a “Kool-Aid” contingency, participation in an experimental surgery which carries a high risk of debilitating or extended recovery time, or consignment into a self-deprecating reality television show.

Any fees known to fall within the scope of distribution or marketing or otherwise used for the purposes of intangible monetary value, are further assumed by the Contributor. These fees, less the total amount held within the Contributor’s primary bank account, shall be remitted to the Author in the event that anything whatsoever happens at any point in time.

For the purposes of this agreement, or any other agreement signed by any parties, anywhere in the world, any intangible services enjoyed by the Contributor, ceded or on offer through breach or acceptance of this agreement to the Author, will be accepted at the sole discretion of the Author. Generally, all items subject to this contingency are best surrendered prior to leaving the Exhibit.

Contributor agrees not to disclose any confidential information.

Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing to the contrary, confidential information shall include any information that is experienced in any way while committing or acting to commit witness to the Exhibit; which includes information witnessed while being in the vicinity of the Exhibit such that any incidental witness, intentional or to the opposing effect of intentional witness, imposes on the unintentional Contributor witnessing the Exhibit.
Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing to the contrary, confidential information as it pertains to the Author’s ability to bring or file suit against Contributor, shall not include information which applies to, relates to, refers to, makes reasonable or unreasonable assumptions of or generally regards the Contributor in anyway.

Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing to the contrary, confidential information as it pertains to the Contributor’s ability to bring or file suit against Contributor, shall not preclude that which has already been stated by the agreement herein that the Contributor, without prejudice of the Author, waives and otherwise cedes all rights, or agrees not to offer defense of civil or criminal liability or litigation brought by the Author.

Children of Contributors caught in the act of breaching the remission of confidential information will be hung by the toes above a pit of barbed wire not less than 60 feet in altitude.

Furthermore, any actions made by any animals accompanying the Contributor, trained or otherwise untrained in the act of communicating with entities outside those of the community of Contributors committing witness or acting to commit witness, which may be construed as any remission of information of the Exhibit, by immediate agreement of the Contributor, will be euthanized by bludgeoning upon the first essence of such remission. Minor children of the Contributor shall be present for the bludgeoning such that the animal's death will act as a timely reminder of what adults are forced to do as a result of overreaches in responsibilities. This selection of animals will include, but not be limited to, speaking parrots, barking dogs, insects transmitting or receiving information via olfactory antennae, performing monkeys or other
bipedal primates, or any other fauna in the animal kingdom who have knowingly, unknowingly, by force or by incidental deliverance, accompanied the Contributor into the vicinity of the Exhibit.

Distribution of executable versions, or a portion or derivative of original works or versions of works within the realm of stated confidential information, will be punishable by death.

In order to ensure that license stated in paragraphs 1-20 of this agreement, which should not be assumed to refer to the LPPL license of any Contributor, limited or otherwise open in scope, remains valid,

Contributor must remain in a state of conscious life for a period of not less than 60 years, or the expected life expectancy of the Author. Any violation of this tenet or any other tenet of this agreement shall result in the remittance of remuneration stated or referred to in paragraphs 1-20 of this agreement.

Conscious life, as referred to above, is a state of living such that informant capacities remain intact for the purposes of retrieval, as noted at any time, immediately, without failure of recalling any detail of witness or found within the act of committing witness of the Exhibit. Failure to maintain this standard of life will result in the remittance of remuneration stated or referred to in paragraphs 1-20 of this agreement.

Note that some ideas and concepts in this accord are incomplete and therefore it is your responsibility, as the signatory and guarantor of its duties and statutes, to

If, for a period of at least 300 months after the date initially witnessed, the Contributor forgets or otherwise cannot recall, or experiences a trauma which prevents memory recall, or if at least one moment of the commission of witness
of the Exhibit is not able to be recalled for these or other reasons, Contributor agrees that this constitutes a violation of the agreement and will result in the remittance of remuneration stated or referred to in paragraphs 1-20 of this agreement.

If Contributor denies or otherwise rescinds agreement for any reason with this accord, it, in effect, beyond the termination of this Agreement and its associated documentation, will be subject to, and acted upon the inclusion of every facet of private information about the Contributor available in, by, and through means of retrieval potentially, but not limited to or defined as, torture as identified in 16 states in South America known as the Contra-Affected states. Such actions are not limited to the procurement of information just from Contributor, but also from any of the Contributor’s children or spouse. If such refusal continues, punitive enactments including but not limited to death by firing squad are accepted by Contributor as acceptable punishments. This may or may not follow announcement into the public sphere, including, but not limited to direct contact of Contributor’s immediate and extended family, friends, coworkers, fellow students, police agencies in the nearby area and completely unrelated persons to the Contributor, as defined by Sections 1 through 9 of statutory clauses governed in part by the Author, to include gravely embarrassing information about past relations, previous criminal charges – proven or unproven, dismissed or upheld, claimed or falsified – military records, employment and medical records, psychiatric evaluations, and any other content known in colloquial verbiage as “dirty laundry.” This
information, as waived by the Contributor, will also include information extending into his or her years prior to the age of 18.

This concludes the Accord.
This concludes the Graduate Thesis Project
CHAPTER 8
CUMULATIVE MFA PORTFOLIO

Though my initial steps at creating a portfolio throughout this MFA have been intended to remain within the audio-visual precepts of my professional interests and background, the timeline of portfolio items below shows a movement away from this idea in more recent semesters.

Studio Work

Omnitopia
Date published: Fall 2015
Included in academic review: Yes

Statement: In a quote from African American novelist and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston, I was most moved by the latter of Hurston's quote that spoke to the cosmic secrets while referencing those that influenced or crafted them.

As a Columbia graduate and major contributor to the Harlem Renaissance Literary Movement, she once said, "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein."

Every civilized culture throughout human history has been governed by a monetary system of reward and trade. Of the cultures that have existed in the last 3,000 years, the money they use exemplifies many things about their culture.

As a response to Hurston's inspired quote, the Money of Omnitopia explores all that remains of a hypothetical population of beings that appeared on earth, accumulated a sum-total estimate of their cultural history, and placed it in their printed money. These notes represent
that "cultural average" that rides the median of established nationalism and the portrayal of iconic people and inventions that contributed to it.

The exhibit for this project includes a looping, pre-recorded speech by the imaginary curator of a museum which is hosting these three notes on its wall - claiming that they are the only evidence left behind from the people of Omnium Terrerum:

In Papua New Guinea, they trade high sheen pearled shells. The greater the luster, the greater the value. Some tribes within this area of the world even carve insignias onto their shells as a form of craftsmanship, artistry and to denote where the money was "created."

As far back as 3,000 years, Chinese presses have been printing surprisingly high quality coinage based on the technology available at the time. Rounded coins began production within the Qin Dynasty at nearly 400 years before the Roman Empire. While China has improved upon its printing technology, countries like Myanmar still use antiquated minting techniques because the money itself is not worth the investment in new precision-energy spring minting used in neighboring nations. This is politically motivated by the military junta currently in power since their coup in the 1980s.

During World War II, the Japanese first took down the banking systems of each of the Asian countries they successfully invaded; replacing their monetary system with notes that they had printed and brought to these countries with the objective of fortifying a payment system for the creation of the new Empire. Ironically, they were printed in English and contain no print dates.

Money has made its indelible mark on culture throughout history. Militarily, politically and geographically focused, each nation's monetary system reflects religious ceremonies, indigenous heritage, pinnacles of artistic achievement, great victories and of course the height of technology. In this way, it is something of a historical record, a system of its own autonomous research; a homology of individuality.
It represents the pride of each nation. On its edifice is depicted its leaders, scholars and most notable achievers. It does everything from fund research to reward the artistic and noble elite within its community. It not only ties cultures together across physical, cultural and economic borders, it also highlights how these cultures function as a system.

Interestingly, while showcasing all of these attributes, the money of every individual nation creates an overarching synergy -- a commonality contributing to a pool of pride and nationalism, rather than any one outstanding attribute or universally unifying doctrine or code.

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![Figure 27, Omnitopia 1, Maine 2015. Graphic and Design by Cyle O'Donnell.](image1)

![Figure 28, Omnitopia 2, Maine 2015. Graphic and Design by Cyle O'Donnell.](image2)
Caméra Mécanique

Date published: Fall 2014

Included in academic review: Yes

Statement: In a response to Roland Barthes Camera Lucida, Caméra Mécanique explores the notion of the camera as a tool for reproduction. As the camera, itself, reproduced, the ironical notion plays out to not only separate the camera from its intended subject, but also "exposed" and reproduced in the same, emotionless way that it captures whatever happens to be in front of its lens at the point the shutter trips.
HELIXYCLE

Date published: Summer 2015

Included in academic review: Yes

Details: Aluminum rims and framing, steel cross sections and spray paint – 6’L x 17”W x 32”H
Statement: The Human DNA chain, emulated here, is the quintessential embodiment of the cycles of nature. Its simple, yet elegant design is reflective of the cycles in nature to which man is held in constant check. This man-made recycling of items to intimate a real-world item is both within us as well as representative of those things we make in our time here on this world – cycling around our sun.

Referenced earlier was also the discussion of etymological bilateralism within the dialectic worlds of the bicycle and DNA. The conclusion of that discussion follows:

The prefix, "bi" in bicycle is the indicator of having two of something. It's Greek counterpart, "Di,"
means the same. The “De” in Deoxyribonucleic, here adapted from “Di” to “De” to avoid vowel confusion, is referring to the two polynucleotide chains. In fact, this prefix refers to the components of both the bicycle and the DNA which form their respective outer, cyclical structures.

Other not-so-obvious associations are drawn from this unlikely marriage as well. For instance, both DNA and the bicycle are hemisected - meaning, if cut in half from front to back, they would appear equal on both halves. “Hemi” is Greek for Half. “Sect,” which is the root word of section, means to cut. A hemisection, therefore, means to cut in half so that each resulting halve is equal (think east/west hemispheres, or “half-spheres,” of Earth).

They are also both equilateral meaning each of their sides are of the same length. Wheels being equilateral indicates that the spokes (essentially the radius) must all be the same length, or the wheel will be unbalanced (or, in colloquial bicycling terms, "out of true"). Similarly, any variation of the protein chains (DNA's own radius) within the bonded center of the individual helices is called a mutation effectively an imbalance that could eventually become cancer.

The Greek root word “Heli” has several applications. A helicopter, or hélicoptère in its original 1861 French contrivance, is designed in the same centrifugal function as the spokes of the bicycle spinning out from a central axis. The word helicopter is divided by “helix,” meaning spiral, and “ptero,” meaning wing (think pterodactyl - the winged dinosaur).

“Heli” also means sun, which is a sphere at the center of a number of other spheres renewing their cycle around its central axis point year after year. “Axis point” also plays an integral role in the nomenclature of myriad related descriptors in the fields of biology and chemistry. Axle, being a derivative of axis, leaves little need for explanation.
Moving on from the seemingly endless lexicon resulting from my summer machinations, the bulk of which would never be tolerated in the understandably restrictive guidelines governing the artist's statements to which this and my other works must adhere, the most obvious link here resides in the words helix and cycle. Hence the sculpture's designation.

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**Garden Biome**

Date published: Fall 2015

Included in academic review: Yes

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Statement: *With a focus on contemplative Motion, the Garden Biome project was initiated to wager success (live, fruit-bearing plants) versus failure (dead plants or which did not produce fruit) on the notion of learning through a non-traditional research method: using just the immediate senses to determine directionality and methodology for best practices in a new field of praxis.*

This detail-heavy, semester-long project began with the incentive of creating a room with environmental factors which were determined by and dependent upon the factors of the other interdependent systems within that room.

Undertaking everything from lighting to heating to composting, to watering, to the development of sustainable and self-activated watering systems, to gravity fed nutrient delivery systems, to the creation of CO2, to ventilation, to the enclosure itself, this project was a huge undertaking. Though, through it all, it sought to explore the potential results from doing nothing other than keeping the hands moving, the brain thinking critically thinking, and the mind focused on the success of the overall system.
Garden Stack, Iteration 2
Date published: Fall 2015
Included in academic review: Yes

Statement: Bringing the Garden Biome to campus in order to test my original theory for contemplative motion in the home (i.e. in a varied environment that wasn't designed specifically to house such a project), Iteration 2 sought to create a quick, space-efficient, high-yield version of the Garden Biome project. Taking from the lessons in CO2 production, ventilation, heating, lighting and feeding, this second iteration of the project was a huge success, given the possibility for plant shock and unforeseen mishaps. It distilled all the best lessons from home...
gardening – even reducing the overall space needed for the project – and based the design around the space requirements at the area around the window of choice in the building.

Figure 33, Garden Stack, Iteration 2.1, Maine 2015. Photograph by Cyle O'Donnell.
Garden Stack, Iteration 3

Date published: Fall 2015

Included in academic review: Yes

Statement: Capitalizing on the "low power/low yield" results which came from the original Garden Biome project, Iteration 3 is a much simplified, vertically stacking window garden. This system was designed with the square-foot area of a kitchen or bedroom window space in mind.
Garden Stack, Iteration 4

Date published: Fall 2015

Included in academic review: Yes

Statement: Condensing the Garden Biome into a smaller, more mobile "Window Garden" biome, Iteration 3 took the major facets of the Garden Biome project, as well as the horizontally inspired elements of Iteration 2, and simplified them. Making the deliverables much more efficient, and created a functional model of what home gardening on the enthusiast level
might look like, Iteration 4 was designed around the size of a large residential window space - like a sliding glass door or south-facing bay window - where floor space might be lacking, but some headroom is available.

This first of two planned mechanically-functioning garden stacks was crafted as a precursor to its larger, semi-automated stack, Iteration 5.

Figure 36, Garden Stack, Iteration 4.1, Maine 2015. Photograph by Cyle O'Donnell.
Statement: Utilizing the large bay window at the rear of the IMRC building, this 15-foot-tall structure was built in keeping with the concept of contemplative motion. However, drawing on the more finite foci of efficiency and space-saving agendas, this stack was designed on an incline in order to utilize the vertical space inside of a commercial greenhouse where, if
mirrored in an opposite-facing stack, would double the yield and growth efficiency of the
garden.

Designed with horizontal plots locked into a vertical stack of mechanically driven gates,
Iteration 5 was the result of much design and even more hands-on building which capitalized
on both the "critical thinking" and "motion" elements emphasized in the original project.

Figure 38, Garden Stack, Iteration 5, Maine 2015. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
**Garden Stack, Iteration 6**

Date published: Fall 2015

Included in academic review: No

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**Statement:** Taking from both Iterations 2 and 3, and maintaining the free-energy benefits of window light, gravity, Iteration 6 is the final phase of the Garden Biome series. It went one step further by adding the elements of both powered and unpowered nutrient delivery. In this model (which is also much more structurally sound due to being built after the largest iteration of the series) the design was created to either use a submersible water pump to bring the nutrients up to the top tier of plots (where they would then drip down to the lower plants) or utilize a hanging jug filled with the nutrients.

This very simple system would very slowly deliver the nutrients by way of water saturation and gravity - essentially hanging three strings from within the water, and laying them at the top of each of the three columns, where they would gather the water that was soaked into the string and drawn down into the plots by gravity and suction.

This system was designed solely for herbs. It was also designed to refrain from using soil, which, because herbs don't need to flower in order to continue growing, helps eliminate pests.

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Figure 39, Garden Stack, Iteration 6, Maine 2015. Photograph by Cyle O'Donnell.
Statement: As fermentation was crucial for the creation of CO2 production for plant consumption in the Garden Biome projects, the Cider Press was built, used, tested, reused, and found to be successful.

In the idea that the Cider Press was both a tool for the creation of the Garden Biome project as well as an exercise in contemplative motion, this piece acts as a sculpture, a tool and a documentary work standing as both a result of, as well as an independent work of art for, the Garden Biome series of installations.
Note: As an added element of the Cider Press project, the process yielded a Brandy-grade hard cider which, after being flavored with brown sugar, was shared with those evaluating the review of the progress of the entire garden series of projects.

Figure 41, Cider Press 2, Maine 2015. Photograph by Cyle O'Donnell.
Documentation of the visits to the various cider plantations/orchards is below:

Figure 42, Cider Press 3, Maine 2015. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.

Figure 43, Cider Press 4, Maine 2015. Photograph by Cyle O’Donnell.
Figure 44, Cider Press 5, Maine 2015. Screen capture by Cyle O'Donnell.

Figure 45, Cider Press 6, Maine 2015. Screen capture by Cyle O'Donnell.
Statement: Using the campus as the backdrop for this project, and the often abandoned bicycles chained up and locked into a heavy heap of snow, Bikes in the Snow visually captures the conflicting elements surrounding bikes. For instance, they are machines designed for movement, while snow is an element commonly reminiscent of a frozen environment. Based on this premise, Bikes in the Snow “rides” the balance between movement and stagnation and explores the contradictory word associations related to this dynamic: bike lock/freedom, frozen in time/free as a bird, caged/free, moving/unmoving, summer fun/winter freeze, etc.
Statement: Since the golden age of cinema, Hollywood has inundated the American public with so many visuals intended to do everything from dazzle and shock to sadden and scare us. They've created so many soundtracks that sway our emotional sensibilities subliminally hook us into the film. They've employed so much environmental manipulation that, as viewers, we have almost literally "seen it all." So, it's no surprise that an artist can take just one scene, manipulate the visuals and the audio track, and create wildly different sentimental responses to each one.
eMotion Pictures 2 - 10

Date published: Spring 2015

Included in academic review: Yes

Statement: As reflected in the statement in eMotion Pictures 1, the statements for items 2 through 10 of the series are the same, but with different representational schema. These are presented in just a few segments below. For the entire catalog of items, please see the eMotion Pictures page.
Figure 49, eMotion Pictures 2, Maine 2015. Video screen capture by Cyle O'Donnell.

Figure 50, eMotion Pictures 3, Maine 2015. Video screen capture by Cyle O'Donnell.
Statement: Following up from the eMotion Picture series of audio-visual pieces, eMotion Redux maintains a movement toward working from a non-digital base. Exploring a physical synthesis of the main elements of the digital product, it changes the direction and theme of the exploration by showcasing only the conceptual elements which make the original eMotion Picture series successful.

Using doll faces to exemplify a canvas, and paint to represent the visual results of an emotional response to the music score of each of the ten eMotion Pictures sequence films, eMotion Picture Redux is presented in six original paintings.
Lite/Lines

Date published: Fall 2014

Included in academic review: No

Details: Intangible

Statement: The outer boundary of any subject in the visual medium is just as important as the subject itself. These lines work to delineate the subject, the form it takes, its shape and of course the appeal it has to the viewer. Light Lines (here: Lite/Lines) are all concepts of the highlights and shadow forms of all subjects. Lite/Lines explores the fringe area of photographic
subjects -- not necessarily studying the subjects themselves, but the lines of contour along their reflective or highlighted fringe. *Lite/Lines* is not a tangible exhibit, but rather a contemplation of every visual subject - each with that high contrasted outline found in both purposeful and inadvertent visual media.

*Figure 52, Lite/Lines, Maine 2014. Graphic by Cyle O'Donnell.*
WORKS CITED


"BBC AMERICA TO PARTNER WITH ELISABETH MOSS ON DEVELOPING MINI-SERIES FEVER." AMC Networks Inc. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 July 2016.


Cyle O'Donnell was born in Pensacola, Florida on January 29, 1979. He grew up living in many Midwestern and East Coast states before calling Kentucky home for his high school years, graduating in 1997. His first undergraduate degree in Social Psychology, was achieved through the Old Dominion University Consortium in 2003. This was followed in 2008 by a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies from Indiana University, as well as a B.A. in Journalism from IU's prestigious School of Journalism. Bridging these degrees was a photographic capstone project effectuated by way of a bicycle tour through 12 developed and developing countries over two years of study, covering more than 25,000 miles and comparing the visual landscape for efforts in environmental conservation from each nation. His first graduate degree, a Master of Science in Multidisciplinary Studies in International Communication and Pedagogy from the State University of New York, was earned while living in Southeast Asia and taking courses at their satellite campus in Bangkok, Thailand, and compared communication styles for classroom instruction in cultural perspectives of the learning styles of multiple intelligences. His second graduate degree, a terminal Master of Fine Arts, has found its terminus with this manuscript. O'Donnell's professional work in digital multimedia has, by date of publication, spanned 42 countries, includes a dozen published works (including digital and hardcopy books and magazines), a streaming audio channel including podcast interviews with notable names from 30 countries, a host of more than 150 short documentaries (covering commercial, NGO and cultural exposés) and a current library of 15 feature length films from as many countries. His cultural travel films have been seen on IPTV Russia and the Baltic States, and the Middle East and various U.S. networks, tourism websites, hotel chains, travel agencies and in-flight entertainment on international airline carriers. Showcasing his lifetime photographic contribution, including a gallery of more than 120,000 commercial images in 65 albums from 38 nations on 4 continents, is his masthead
company, Moving Stills Media, started in Maine in 2012. His professional academic record includes having taught at secondary and postsecondary institutions in Alaska, Maine, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, Guatemala and Bulgaria. Cyle is a candidate for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Intermedia from the University of Maine in August 2017.