

ELEMENTS OF DISSEMINATION

Wiles Collyer



Wino Spirit, Seth Scriver



ManHatMan, Erin Zimmerman



SNAP PIN, Sandy Plotnikoff



Wouldn't it be nice?, Derek Sullivan

The artwork, as "school project", has been arrived at through the process of linear developments in research. This academic process is different than the manner that I am accustomed to working in. The work combines my process of research, as required for the developmental stages of a written thesis, and the physical work, required by the nature of all visual arts.

I have chosen to study and research the artistic practice of five artists, who I have been following for several years. Sandy Plotnikoff, Andrew Reyes, Seth Scriver, Derek Sullivan and Erin Zimmerman are all artists who have been able to make their work readily available to the art community. All five of the artists who I have focused on have worked in a devalued form of artistic practice. Their art employs the use of relatively cheap materials, which can be disseminated to a wider public audience. They include poster prints, mail-art, stickers, graffiti, buttons, wearable art multiples, all produced in editions.

In taped discussions each one spoke about their practice and expressed opinions about various aspects of their experience as a working artist. These five artists were a primary source for my research. Each artist had shown through their work, an astute perception of the contemporary shifts in the means of artistic production. They shared a similar approach in the active dissemination of their work to a wide audience through the means of an alternative form of art practice.

The effectiveness of work produced with these methods is achieved by the ease it reaches an audience, sometimes unaware of its art context. Because the work is inexpensive, if not free, it is easily passed between people or posted in public view. Unlike the fetishized print or canvas original sought by the fine art collector, these works adorn jackets, wrists, cubical walls and city streets.

The formal traditions of presenting work in a gallery can be both uninspired and limiting. The context of the gallery space brings with it a pre-occupation with value and elitism. There is much more opportunity in devalued forms of art to explore the intrinsic quality of materials and their application. There are subtleties in the construction of devalued art objects, like mail-art and art multiples, that can connote other forms and notions, not just the formal methods of fine art display. To produce work that is actually tangible and potentially functional opens up its interpretation and further acts to remove the artist as an intervening factor between the art and its audience.

Works produced by these artists are able to reach viewers otherwise uninterested by contemporary conceptual art. Taken out of the formal context of the gallery or museum, they are received as tangible, sometimes functional, forms. In many cases, the work produced by these artists take on familiar forms, relate-able to everyday

life, but are of interest to the viewer due to their inventive application. The reconfiguration of things that are already familiar is a subversive strategy and inherent in the production of these artist's work.

The materials used by these artists become very intrinsic to the notion of relational familiarity. Inexpensive and everyday materials act in a manner to establish commonality between the artist and the audience. The artists role as expertly trained material craftsman is diminished. He is no longer fetishising the use of his hands to construct artwork from traditional materials such as bronze or oil paint. These artists are making their work from used clothing, cardboard, found paper sources, toys, industrial manufacturing methods, and un-numbered photographic editions produced on photocopiers. They are producing work to be handled, purchased, pocketed, worn, ripped and eventually discarded or forgotten. Because, in some cases, these works are affordable and produced in large editions, collect-ability is also a factor adding to their interest. They be can acquired and desired like a consumable commodity.

"More and more artists are turning to popular media in an effort to examine the effectiveness of their work. Not only in an attempt to reach a larger audience, but also to obtain access to the immediacy of newspapers, magazines, rock

& roll, and of course television itself."

(General Idea, 0min. 36sec.)

Again, the effectiveness of these artists practice is derived from the immediacy of the works viewing, use or acquisition. The work of Derek Sullivan acts in this manner. His piece *Wouldn't it be nice* (2004) is an edition of packing tape inscribed with this phrase. It is functional and collect-able, but not really all that inventive in its construction. Text was simply applied to an existing product. The work can be acquired for several dollars, allowing it to be used freely without hesitation. Sullivan has produced the series in a manner as to encourage its inherent function as packing tape and facilitate the further dissemination of his work to a wide audience. Its release and further use is now uncontrolled by the artist. The simplicity of its content is appropriate for an art multiple that is no longer supported by an art context.

"When you make any type of artwork there is a lack of control. By producing a work you declare yourself as a subject to be paid attention to, but at the same time you have no control over its interpretation."

(Sullivan, 11 January 2006)

Sullivan also facilitates the work of other artists in his work *Kiosk* (2005), by having them produce a poster series, which he pastes to a public kiosk (Goddard, G8). In this case, the



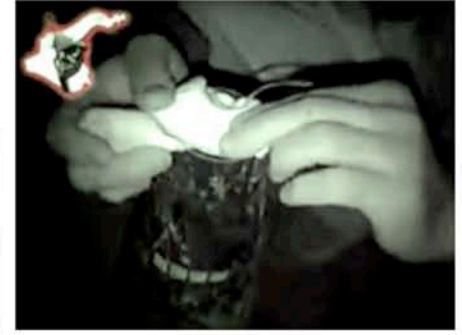
The Real Toronto



CNN reporter via videophone



al-Qaeda statement video



al-Qaeda operational video

work of the artists is not even given the chance to be acquired because Sullivan has immediately used them. The role of the audience is reduced to passive audience or viewer. A very vital role to a work, which situates itself in the public domain.

As a form of communication and expression, art must be shared with others. This seems almost an oversimplified notion, but to create art and not work to have it seen or experienced seems like a wasted effort. Developing the work further, to the point where it functions primarily as a disseminated form, devalued, given away, or available to view in public space, results in the increased effectiveness of communication and expression through art.

"[The 1960's and 70's] were a moment when art was seen to be inseparable from the mass media." (Gale, 3)

My work draws a correlation between the artistic practice of my subjects and the parallel methods of various groups who use devalued forms of production to disseminate their work. In recent years small organizations and groups have more frequently taken to producing and releasing their own promotional material. Primarily using consumer video equipment and amateur videographers, these groups subvert the process of using reporters and the mainstream media to create publicity and produce creative material. This material is then released to larger

media networks or broadcast directly through the Internet, reaching the audience directly.

Some of the groups using and releasing their work with these methods include: home-produced hip-hop DVD's like *The Real Toronto* (Galiwango, 60), a recent project by rap group The Beastie Boys, called *Awesome; I Fuckin' Shot That* (2006), had 50 camcorders distributed to fans which were then used to produce a video of their live performance (Howell, E4), grassroots media groups and local cable networks. Even major news networks have adopted the use of satellite videophones, which emulate the raw, low-quality images of amateur videography. The whole notion of "embedded" journalism is that a source, located directly in the fray, reports on information with immediacy at the expense of visual quality.

The most pervasive and subversive use of this newly accessible technology and dissemination through the mass media has been by the Islamic radical groups connected with al-Qaeda and its splinter organizations. These groups have increased the pace and sophistication of their releases in recent years and are acting in a way similar to that of competing franchises, vying for recognition and respect from their target audience (IntelCenter, *Evolution* 7). Extremist groups have established promotional divisions in their organizations to generate popular recognition of their cause.

This direct access is a more recent shift in the practice of dissemination, facilitated by communication technology, and one that I address in this series. It is the control that smaller groups and individuals have been able to acquire over the media that allows for this efficiency of distribution. A whole range of groups, including artists, have become increasingly reflective and exploitative of dissemination practices previously limited to use by larger organizations. All of these groups come with private interests and different methods of utilizing this recent availability of technology.

The videos produced by these groups inadvertently share some universal styles: low quality, colour balancing, and occasionally in-camera effects like the "nite-shot" feature, used to film in low light situations. This later image is illuminated by an inferred light and results in a monochromatic green image. Because of the visual codes inherent to these videos they are quite recognizable as a product of the consumer video equipment and amateur videographers who produce them.

"There is a [growing] community who are attune to certain [alternative] types of communication and they recognize the marks that define these methods."

(Sullivan, 11 January 2006)

These "marks", mentioned by Sullivan, include both evolving and subversive content, which surrounds us on the streets and in the media. They are strategies used by artists and other groups to produce and distribute work that act outside of the traditional conventions, thus attracting an alternative audience. The art world itself would be considered by many to be an alternative community and these five artists' are pushing the production of their work toward even more alternative methods. The resulting artwork is a devalued form, which contains within it, many inherent aspects of home-production and subversive practice.

I find the relational aesthetic between these videos and the artists I have selected very interesting and by following similar codes, it is simple to produce stills that are referential to videos of this style. During the course of meeting and speaking with these artists I recorded our discussions with video in a casual manner. I never attempted to have the camera intervene or in any way be the controlling factor of our discussion. I wanted to capture the five artists in a casual manner, which would allow them to feel unrestricted by its presence. This, I thought, would be more conducive to our discussions and would reference the videos produced by extremists, which primarily depicts speakers in the act of recording themselves.



Andrew Reyes



Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri

Each of the five artists that I spoke with is literally depicted in my photographs, acknowledging them as a primary source for the notion of effectiveness, which I recognize in the manner of their practice. The combination of academic study, which culminates in the production of a conceptual artwork, challenges me to relate my research somehow in a visual product. The directness of my approach is an up-front depiction of my general artistic interests, with no concealed allusion to creative influences. I admire the practice of these artists and do not attempt to imitate them in any way. Their individual practice is inspirational to me and the creation of my own work. I follow them with the interest of an observer, confident of my personal art practice.

The need to integrate a research-based project with a personal and conceptual artwork has resulted in a pairing of disparate references. It is difficult to form a unified visual work from multiple perspectives. I see a correlation between the practice of disseminating devalued forms of art and the forms of dissemination coming from devalued approaches to media distribution. This promotional media is coming from groups, which include Islamic extremists, grassroots media networks, and innovative musical groups. As well, I am intrigued by constructed formulas and systems of presentation used by the news media. The approach to photographic representation and presentation in this series reflects my

awareness of these structures. The various references used in this work come directly from my personal interests and observations and do not necessarily reflect the views of the specific artists that I have chosen to depict. This work, at its essence, is a collection of references that reflect my own interests.

"The context: Images flooded with multiple associations."
(General Idea, 1 min. 40 sec.)

Applying the visual qualities of these amateur video images, to the five artists that I have chosen, is a way of highlighting their artistic practice, an attempt to connect the way different groups have advanced their methods of dissemination and distribution. A devalued form of art production and a devalued visual quality of image.

My work makes referential connections to media sources through the content of the images, but also a relational aesthetic between the television monitor is established in the presentation of the images. The television screen, with its intrinsic qualities of high contrast, oversaturated reds, and pixelated detail is a familiar image. Like the artists whom I feature in this series, I wish to present the work in a visual form, which can be easily recognized. I have layered my images with visual filters that mimic these screen effects and the style of my media sources.



Screen, Robin Collyer (2000)

The television is a private form of viewing and one that functions in a way to escape public reflection, but the power of its immediacy is huge (Bourriaud, 16). I have an innate desire to lay some claim in a subject, which occupies much of my attention, but does nothing but project it self outwardly. A form of nagging helplessness is brought on by constant consumption without dialogue. By filtering my own images through means, which help them to mimic the media, I am able to reengage myself in the discourse.

The quantity and disparity of the images in this series is a very important part of the works overall presentation. A visual overload of primary and support imagery is essential to impart a reference to contemporary mass media's approach to presentation. This excess comes from the news media's perceived role as essential facilitator of the information age and it becomes vividly apparent when viewing networks like CNN and CityPulse 24. There is no main focus or resolution in this saturated style of information presentation. The viewer is expected to scan, gather and form their own conclusions.

Elements of Dissemination, alludes to these notions of media presentation and positions the viewer in a role similar to that of a television audience. The arrangement of the series mimics an array of monitors that provide an excess of information to the viewer. The images lack consistency and the flow of sequence becomes interrupted



The Situation Room, CNN

by varying scales, appearances and features. The body of images act as support material for a common theme, the subjects of my research, but in many cases are either to unclear or isolated to act as confirmation of anything specific. Enlargements in scale of two images could suggest their significance, if it wasn't for the triviality of one. The saturation of information in the whole series works to devalue and marginalize each element that it is comprised of.

Familiarity of form and devaluation are the two key notions behind this series. They are inherent to the practice of the five artists I have focused on and to the qualities of presentation that I have employed in my own work. They are also key in the effective distribution of artworks, which act outside of the formal traditions of presentation in fine art. These methods are alternative approaches to expression and subversive strategies in the dissemination of one's work.

-Miles Collyer

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