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Hardwired Banality: The Everyday of Screen Consumption

Brandon W. McDonald

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HARDWIRED BANALITY:
THE EVERYDAY OF SCREEN CONSUMPTION

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

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The oversaturation of screen time is an issue that is becoming progressively worse in contemporary society. The screen's seductive ability to allow us limitless access to information and entertainment has us tethered to our devices at all times. This constant consumption can have detrimental effects on our ability to achieve solitude, show empathy, engage in face-to-face communication and on our cognitive awareness of our surroundings. These ideas are explored in drawings that are presented as a visual narrative. This narrative shows a young couple going through their day as the viewer sees them through the perspective of the devices that they use in their daily routine. The narrative begins with the couple waking up in the morning, about to start their day. The couple goes their separate ways as the drawings follow them individually throughout their respective days. The viewer will see images of the couple texting each other constantly, suggesting that they stay in constant communication with each other despite their physical separation from one another. We will then see how they act with one another at home as they finish out their evening before going to bed. To achieve the effect of the couple's reflection on the screen of their devices, white color pencil on black paper is used.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In today's society, there has been a shift in our beliefs about the degree and manner to which we should be connected with each other by technological means. The use of these devices has become common practice in every aspect of our lives, beginning when we wake up in the morning, continuing through our use of technology in the work place, and lingering when we go home to rest. In many ways, society demands our constant attention with these devices in an "always on" culture. We are expected to engage with social media sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter while simultaneously responding to work related issues at all hours of the day. We are similarly expected to always have our devices on our person at all times, hence we demand an instant response to our emails and text messages out of fear of being ignored. Coupled with our need to constantly surf the internet and stream content in our down time, these demands make it difficult to put down the phone or laptop and allow ourselves a moment of pause, the ability to enjoy a meal with friends or loved ones, or even a moment of boredom.

I use a visual timeline to show how technological devices (those with a screen) are deleterious to face-to-face communication, personal space, and physical and mental health. The two characters in the timeline are a young millennial couple; Although extensive use of screen time affects people of all ages, the millennial generation is the first to grow up with this technology so vastly accessible. Throughout the timeline, the work illustrates the different situations that technology affects our daily routine, showing the viewer how often we partake in the visual overload of screen time. The timeline will show how the constant use of these technological devices affects our relationships with other people, especially those in a romantic relationship.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH DATA

Sherry Turkle and Scientific Studies

When discussing the use of these new technologies, many tend to be defensive regarding negative commentary on their use. This is understandable, and the positive aspects that this technology brings to society should be noted. We now have unlimited access to vast amounts of information at our fingertips. We can communicate with people half a world away from us. The use of these devices has revolutionized how business operates, dramatically increasing productivity. Finally, this technology simplifies everyday tasks by allowing us to be better organized. When considering all that this technology offers us, it is difficult to see a downside. However, the seductive nature of these devices comes at cost. Technology that is supposed to connect us together, inadvertently separates us. We have become tethered to our devices in a way where they become part of our attire, and without them we feel naked and helpless as we walk out the door. We rely so heavily on these devices because we look to them to solve our every problem, even when they are entirely inapplicable. We turn to our phones instead of generating conversation at the dinner table. We check our texts, emails and social media profiles claiming to be productive, when in reality we are bored and do not want to be alone with our thoughts. When it comes to relationships, our response to a text message from a significant other is silence, showing we are angry but do not want to deal with the situation at hand. All of these great tools that have been created to bridge the conversation gap amongst people are often times used as an escape from the very purpose they were meant for.

The work of Sherry Turkle provides the structure of the scientific research for *Hardwired Banality: The Everyday of Screen Consumption*. Turkle is a licensed clinical

psychologist and professor at MIT, whose research dealing with the effects of self and technology trace back fifteen years. Turkle is concerned with the effects technology is having on our capacity for solitude, face-to-face interactions and are empathic responses to one another. Through her research, Turkle states that people are drawn to this technology for multiple reasons, the first being that we fear boredom (Turkle “Reclaiming Conversation” 36). We have become accustomed to life being a steady feed of information that stimulates us to the point where the very thought of becoming bored or allowing for a moment of pause or reflection is not an option. This is supported by a recent study out of the University of Virginia which surveyed hundreds of undergraduate students by asking them to sit in a room for 15 minutes and entertain themselves with just their thoughts. However, they were given the option to inflict negative stimulation (electric shock) if they so choose during this process. The end results were 67% of the men and 25% of the women eventually shocked themselves during the 15-minute period, with many participants shocking themselves as early as 6 minutes into the evaluation - this after they had told the research team that they would pay money to not be shocked. The very thought of being alone with one’s thoughts was more unbearable than receiving an electric shock.

The capacity for solitude is vital to the human psyche for multiple reasons. In relation to individualistic needs, solitude is a vital part of the creative process. Being alone with one’s thoughts is important to allow the brain time to wonder and imagine. Imagination is key to creative thinking, which then leads to innovative ideas. For oneself to explore these creative endeavors, time away from the everyday happenings in society is important in stimulating the creative process and exploring alternate ideas.

one could argue that the cognitive characteristics associated with solitude (e.g., limited sociality, limited intersubjectivity, personal time perspective) offer opportunities for

transition from the social “world of work” to the potentially creative worlds of “phantasy” and/or scientific theorizing. Taking advantage of the creative potential of solitude requires openness to this transition between workaday sociality and imaginative involvement in other realities (Long 25).

Even in the small moments when in a public setting and you find a moment of being alone, allowing the brain to explore and take in the surroundings enhances the brain’s imaginative process. Every time we take our phones out during a lull, we interrupt the brain’s ability to wonder and imagine, which is when the brain is most active.

In terms of intimacy, solitude also plays an important role in our relationships. This idea at first may seem farfetched, but a person’s capacity for solitude and self-containment is vital in being a good partner in a relationship. Turkle states

It’s the capacity for solitude that allows you to reach out to others and see them as separate and independent. You don’t need them to be anything other than who they are. This means you can listen to them and hear what they have to say. This makes the capacity for solitude essential to the development of empathy. And this is why solitude marks the beginning of conversation’s virtuous circle. If you are comfortable with yourself, you can put yourself in someone else’s place (Turkle “Reclaiming Conversation” 61).

The people who lack the capacity for solitude often look for relationships to fill a need rather than having a mutual connection with an individual. This creates unfair demands on one partner that can lead to the relationship becoming toxic.

Technological devices have damaging effects on face-to-face conversation as well, because in-person interactions happen in real time. Conversation is difficult when in person, you

cannot always control what you say. Technology allows us to edit and have peers proof read a message before hitting “send.” Because of this we avoid interacting face-to-face with one another and prefer to text instead, using this to defend ourselves to avoid confronting rejection or difficult conversations. One of the most common phrases that individuals described to Turkle during her research was, “I’d rather send a text than talk.” People need face-to-face interaction not only for our mental well-being, but to build empathic skills towards one another. This skill is achieved by being able to read faces, body language, and being able to pick up on the tone in a person's voice. Otherwise it is easy to misjudge a conversation that is strictly through digital messaging

In face-to-face conversation, we see facial expression and body language; we hear tone of voice. In texting, you don’t have these rich clues, so small details of punctuation can mean the difference between being understood or not. And without context, small details easily lead to a rush to judgement (Turkle “Reclaiming Conversation” 188).

This rush to judgment can often kill a conversation and create negative feelings between individuals. Without experiencing the conversation in person, we cannot see how our words and actions affect the person with whom we are conversing. The oversaturation of screen time has made individuals feel less empathy towards one another without realizing the effects of their actions. This view is backed by a study out of the University of Michigan by Sarah Konrath. Konrath specializes in the cost and benefits of empathy and is the principal investigator of the Interdisciplinary Program on Empathy and Altruism Research at the University of Michigan. The study was a meta-analysis of data that combined 72 American college studies from 1979 to 2009. The results showed that students as of 2009 had 40% lower empathy than students 30

years ago. The biggest drop occurred after 2000, and Konrath suggests that this correlates with the rise of screen technologies and social media.

These concerns become even more pressing when considering a Virginia Tech study that examined what the presence of a mobile device (smartphone, cell phone, tablet or computer) had on a face-to-face conversation between two people. The study examined 200 people (100 dyads) where they sat across from one another to have a 10-minute conversation. The purpose of the study was to measure the connectedness and empathic responses of the participants to each other. The study took place in a real-world setting to see who would place a mobile device on a table or hold it in their hand. The groups were unobtrusively observed from a distance by trained research assistants. Out of the 100 dyads, 29 had pulled out a device during the 10-minute session. Once the session concluded, the participants were asked to fill out a 5-minute survey. For the 71 dyads who did not pull out a device during the session, results showed a significant positive effect on conversation for those who did not pull out a mobile device during the 10-minute period. This included the effects of variables such as age, gender, ethnicity and mood. The other 29 had reported that the presence of a device negatively impacted the connectedness and empathic response they had with one another (Misra 288-90).

Like the research above, a study published in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Researcher* discussed what the mere presence of one's phone had on their cognitive performance. The research team randomly assigned participants to one of three location conditions (desk, pocket/bag, or other room) and administered multiple tests that would require full concentration to perform well. All participants were instructed to turn their phones on silent and those in the desk condition to have the phone upside down. Results showed participants who placed their phone in the other room outperformed those with the phone on the desk and did

marginally better than those who had their phone in their pocket or bag. The results suggest that the presence of one's smartphone affected the cognitive capacity of the participants who were either in the desk or pocket/bag group. The second part of the study examined a person's self-reported dependence on their smartphone in their daily routine and affected cognitive ability. The same questions were administered with same location conditions, however, some participants were instructed to turn their phones off. Results showed that those who reported greater dependence on their smartphones performed worse than those who reported less dependence on their smartphones. The study overall provided definitive evidence that smartphone presence and dependence negatively affect the user's cognitive capacity.

Technology's Impact on the Next Generation

When considering the information provided above, it is important to talk briefly about the effects this technology has on children, especially with the millennial generation coming of age and starting to have families of their own. Children crave the attention of their parents, they look to their parents for approval, support, and often just someone to listen to them. Children are often full of questions and a child's parents are often their first role model and educator in their lives. When Turkle first began researching this topic, she hypothesized that her results would yield that children's use of technological devices would make it difficult for parents to communicate or connect with their children. However, the opposite was true, as the children were complaining about the parents not providing the appropriate attention to them. The parents were often times too busy on their phones responding to work related issues, social media, or simply browsing the internet. Children complained that they had to fight for the attention of their parents over their devices. This disruption of communication between a parent and child can have negative consequences as children grow and develop. A study conducted by the

University of Michigan Medical School examined parental problematic technology use and how that correlates to child behavior problems. The study examined a sample of 170 U.S. couples who had small children and asked about their technology use while interacting with their children and how that affected the children's behavior. The parents who reported difficulties managing their use of technology were more likely to use their devices while spending time with their children. This interruption of quality time between parent and child was linked to those children having more internalizing and externalizing behavior problems.

Still, the use of this technology among children should also be considered, especially during a time in our society where the general consensus is to introduce these types of devices early and often to meet growing educational and technological demands. We live in a society where children younger than ten have smartphones, products like baby strollers have a built-in spot for smartphones and schools supply students with tablets to complete all their classwork. The growing demand to introduce technology early and often in children's lives has subsequently caused less time for play. Play is crucial to the development of children and adolescents. Yet, time for unrestricted play is being cut short for educational tv programs, video games and computer programs in hopes to best prepare children for their futures. The results is schools cut programs for the creative arts, recess, and physical education to focus on technology, arithmetic and reading. Time to imagine, create, and explore through play is being cut both at school and home. To quote a study from the American Academy of Pediatrics

Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can

master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers. As they master their world, play helps children develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and the resiliency they will need to face future challenges (Ginsburg 183).

Knowing all the benefits that play has in the development of children, why is it we consistently force-feed this technology on children in lieu of play? Aside from society's demands for education and technological advancement, parents are led to believe these things are necessary for their children to be successful and fear being judged if they don't provide all these opportunities to their children. Although there are clear benefits of technology use among children, it is important that parents understand the benefits of play and find a healthy balance for their children to reap the benefits of both.

Technology Use Survey

To correlate with *Hardwired Banality: The Everyday of Screen Consumption*, the following information was collected by a survey that was conducted with students who attend Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The purpose of this survey was to collect data from students who are considered part of the millennial generation (18 to 24 years of age) to see how and when they use technological devices in their daily routine. When comprising the questions, it was the intention of the researcher to make the survey straight forward and provide simple one to two worded answers to better ensure honest responses that participants would not over embellish. The questions in the survey correspond to scenes used in the timeline of the thesis exhibition. The survey was administered through email where random selection of 2000 students received the survey. Of those 2000 students, 311 responded to the voluntary survey. The participants in

the survey were kept anonymous from the researcher, so gender and race are not factored in the final results. The following is the results of the data collected:

Do you use multiple electronic/smart devices at the same time? (Examples include televisions, phones, computes, etc.)					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	302	97.1	97.1	97.1
	No	9	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	311	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 1. Survey Question 1. 2018.

How many of these devices do you have on you at all times?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2	267	85.9	85.9	85.9
	2-3	39	12.5	12.5	98.4
	3+	5	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	311	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 2. Survey Question 2. 2018.

Do you use these devices within an hour of waking up or falling asleep?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	307	98.7	98.7	98.7
	No	4	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	311	100.0	100.0		

Fig. 3. Survey Question 3. 2018.

How often do you look something up on your mobile devices daily?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	28	9.0	9.0	9.0
	4-5	75	24.1	24.1	33.1
	5+	208	66.9	66.9	100.0
	Total	311	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 4. Survey Question 4. 2018.

Are you required to use a mobile device to complete tasks that pertain to your place of employment or school?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	250	80.4	80.4	80.4
	No	61	19.6	19.6	100.0
	Total	311	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 5. Survey Question 5. 2018.

Have you checked your phone while spending time with family or friends?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	303	97.4	97.4	97.4
	No	8	2.6	2.6	100.0
	Total	311	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6. Survey Question 6. 2018.

Do you consider your phone or mobile devices essential to staying organized throughout the day?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	215	69.1	69.1	69.1
	No	96	30.9	30.9	100.0
	Total	311	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 7. Survey Question 7. 2018.

When you have moments of downtime throughout your day, do you usually use one of these devices?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Almost always	234	75.2	75.2	75.2
	Sometimes	75	24.1	24.1	99.4
	No	2	.6	.6	100.0
	Total	311	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 8. Survey Question 8. 2018.

Have you ever used your phone during or right after having an intimate moment with a partner?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	162	52.1	52.1	52.1
	No	149	47.9	47.9	100.0
	Total	311	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 9. Survey Question 9. 2018.

The results from the survey above supported the images that are depicted in *Hardwired Banality: The Everyday of Screen Consumption*. When reviewing the data collected, most participants use their devices constantly throughout the day, during work, personal, or leisure time. It is clear from the data collected that most participants who participated in the survey use their devices to stay organized and are required to complete tasks that pertain to work or school.

It is also interesting when reviewing the results to the final question that pertains to the use of one's phone during or immediately after having an intimate moment with a partner, that over half of the participants said they have used their phone. This is troubling when considering these moments are arguably when we as individuals are most connected with one another. To say that our devices interrupt or are the first thing we are concerned with following these intimate moments shows the inability to separate our physical and virtual lives.

CHAPTER III

INFLUENCING ARTISTS

Writings of Will Eisner and Scott McCloud

The overload of screen time and our use of technological devices is a complex subject that encompasses numerous variables and situations for debate. A narrative timeline was chosen to tell a story of these various situations, some of which would be at home, in the car, at work or running errands. These situations are important to consider due to society's use of these devices. If I were to focus on a specific situation, that would not be enough to cover the impact that screen time has on society, nor would it be feasible to address these different scenarios in one singular work. Therefore, it is important to break down these multiple variables and situations concerning screen time into an expansive visual story.

Before a story is composed, it exists in the abstract. At this point, it is still a lot of thoughts, memories, fantasies and ideas, floating around in one's head, waiting for a structure. It becomes a story when told in an arranged and purposeful order. The basic principles of narration are the same whether told orally or visually (Eisner "Graphic Storytelling" 4).

The structure of the exhibition is credited to the writings of Will Eisner and Scott McCloud. Eisner is considered one of the legends and innovators in the cartoon and comic world. He is best known for his works *A Contract with God* and *The Spirit*. McCloud is an established artist and writer who is best known for his works *Zot* and his writings *Understanding Comics*, *Reinventing Comics*, and *Making Comics*. Although the writings of these two artists tend to pertain to the graphic and comic artforms, the content in their writings is easily adaptable to the art of storytelling.

The exhibition consists of 25 white color pencil drawings on black paper that portray, in narrative fashion, a young millennial couple going through their day in various situations. The viewer will see the couple from the perspective of the devices that they use throughout the day. These images, banal in nature, are stereotypical scenes of the everyday. Although these images are not glamorous, the banal quality of the images selected for the story are important for familiarity purposes. Eisner states

Comic book art deals with recognizable reproductions of human conduct. Its drawings are a mirror reflection, and depend on the reader's stored memory of experience to visualize an idea or process quickly. This makes necessary the simplification of images into repeatable symbols. Ergo, stereotypes (Eisner "Graphic Storytelling" 11).

The structure of the exhibition is to be read as a visual story as each image represents a specific moment in the timeline. Each moment is a fraction of time in the story, which is important since each image deals with a different aspect of daily screen time. Therefore, each image provides a different piece of vital information. This allows the viewer to take in each image individually as a separate thought, then connect them together to understand the greater whole of the idea. The use of the timeline is to show when, where and how the couple is absorbed in the use of screen time. Eisner states 'The story form is a vehicle for conveying information in an easily absorbed manner. It can relate very abstract ideas, science, or unfamiliar concepts by the analogous use of familiar forms or phenomena (Eisner "Graphic Storytelling" 5).

Visual narratives offer a way to communicate complex ideas to a wider audience. This is possible through the use of multiple images in sequential order to break down an overarching idea into parts more easily understood. The viewer then pieces these individual parts together as

a participant in the story to bring their own experiences to the work. The viewer can connect these separate parts thanks to the space in between each panel or image

See that space between the panels? That's what comic aficionados have named "the Gutter." And despite its unceremonious title, the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the heart of comics! Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea (McCloud "Understanding Comics" 66).

The viewer as participant brings their own experiences to the work by use of the space in between the drawings in the exhibition. By using the stereotypical "average day" that many are conditioned to due to their own routines or even what is portrayed in media, the viewer can connect the individual images as one unified idea. Using their imaginations to fill in the gaps and bring closure between the drawings. McCloud states "Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality (McCloud "Understanding Comics" 67).

With the topic of screen time, there are various devices we use daily in many different situations, as a result of Eisner and McCloud's influence with constructing the timeline, the choice of frame in the narrative has significant importance in communicating ideas in the story. To indicate to the viewer what device is being used at that moment in time, each device has a set size frame. The timeline uses four distinct sizes that range in order from smallest to largest, cell phone, tablet, computer, television. Throughout the show, the cell phone size drawings appear more frequently than any other size drawing, providing a larger emphasize that our cell phones are more "addictive" than the other devices. The size of the frame (along with the setting that

the character is placed in) will give the viewer the necessary information as to what device they are using at that time.



Fig. 10. *Thesis image 1*. 2018

Troy Brauntuch

Troy Brauntuch is an American contemporary artist working out of Austin, Texas. Brauntuch is well known for his white conte on dark cotton drawings of everyday scenes and war related subject matter. In 1977, Brauntuch was a member of the pivotal show *Pictures* at Artists Space, the show curated by Douglas Crimp, focused on a return to representational imagery. The show featured contemporaries like Sherrie Levine, Jack Goldstein, and Robert Longo.

Brauntuch's approach to his work has influenced the aesthetic choices of the drawings in the exhibition. His subtle use of the white conte on dark cotton creates a low contrast image that makes the work difficult to see from a distance, but just enough to allow the viewer to understand something is there, which draws the viewer in for a closer examination. It is then that the viewer sees and appreciates the level of detail and control that Brauntuch executes in his drawings. The low contrast image creates a sense of something being amiss in the everyday objects he chooses to depict in his work. The visual aspect of the low contrast image pulls the viewer in for close examination while bringing a "disturbing" aspect of these scenes of everyday

life. This is critical to the narrative of the show. The images in the exhibition mostly come off as banal, since they depict scenes from the couple's day.



Fig. 11. *Thesis image 2*. 2018

To establish visual interest that maintains the viewers' attention, the look and feel of the low contrast imagery entices the viewer to continue with the story by constantly drawing them closer to examine the drawings in detail.

Eric Fischl

Eric Fischl is an American painter and sculptor working out of Sag Harbor, New York. Fischl has gained international acclaim and is considered one of the most influential figurative artist of the late 20th and early 21st century. The content in Fischl's work deals with dark disturbing undercurrents of mainstream American life, which has earned him the title "the bad boy" of American painting.

The themes in Fischl's work have informed the ideas and content used in the imagery for the exhibition. Two of these works, *The Krefeld Project* and *Bad Boy*, are particularly

influential. The Krefeld Project is a body of work that depicts a man and a woman in their mid-forties that seem to be lovers living together. The way Fischl depicts the couple in the work shows them disconnected from one another in different interior spaces of the home. This disconnection between the two is present throughout the work, even during intimate moments depicted between the two characters.

Each scene was full of emotion and drama that left unresolved the questions that had inspired the scene. What emerged instead was the dark portrait of a middle-aged couple whose relationship was defined by ritual, ennui, missed opportunities, and tense, quirky sex (Fischl 331).

The way that the characters are juxtaposed with each other has influenced how the two characters were depicted in *Hardwired Banality: The Everyday of Screen Consumption*. The image *10:49 pm* suggest the couple having sex while the female character is glancing at the viewer, indicating she is looking over at her phone. This moment is significant in the story by stating that during one of the most intimate moments between two individuals, our devices have the capability to distract and disconnect us from one another.

Bad Boy depicts a naked woman laying on a bed in an exposed position in front of a young boy that is staring at her. While the boy is staring at the woman, he reaches behind him and appears to be stealing something out of the purse of the female figure. In this work, the relationship between the woman and the boy is primary and almost distracts the viewer from the act of the boy stealing from the woman. This hidden element in Bad Boy has influenced moments in certain drawings in the show. For example, in the drawing *6:30 pm* showing the couple eating dinner while watching television, if the viewer moves on from the piece too

quickly, they may miss the female character glancing down at her phone while both are watching television.



Fig. 12. *Thesis image 3*. 2018

This moment is of importance in the overarching theme of the show by reinforcing the attention we give our devices and the variety of digital-stimuli we surround ourselves with at any given moment.

Jeff Wall

Jeff Wall is a Canadian artist who is well known for his large-scale back-lit photographic transparencies that portray scenes from everyday life. Wall is credited with helping to establish the Vancouver School, which is an artistic movement of photographers from Vancouver that started in the 1980's. The content and process of Wall's work has had considerable impact on the thesis exhibition because of his focus on scenes of everyday life. Wall's photographs tap into the prior experience of the viewer by depicting scenes that are familiar. Many of Wall's photographs are recreations of scenarios that he had witnessed or experienced himself prior to making the work.

The work *Mimic*, which may be Wall's most recognizable piece, depicts three individuals walking towards the camera, an Asian man and a white couple. The boyfriend makes a racial

gesture towards the Asian man by raising his middle finger to the corner of his eye and “slanting” his eye as a way of mocking the Asian man. Although it is understood that scenarios such as this happen daily, many people often overlook or think nothing of these moments, but Wall’s photographs such as *Mimic* force the viewer to confront these everyday moments. This is the most appealing quality to Wall’s work, and although my work does not address the racial issues of Wall’s *Mimic*, the ability to create the subtle gestures or moments to emphasis an idea is something that is used in *Hardwired Banality: The Everyday of Screen Consumption*. The ability to address these everyday occurrences is seen through the thesis exhibition. Examples are the works *4:03 pm* and *5:05 pm* which show the characters using their phones while driving.



Fig. 13. *Thesis image 4*. 2018

Although the danger of using cell phones while driving has been well documented, we still tend to call and text while operating a vehicle. By confronting the audience with our two characters behind the wheel from the viewpoint of the phone, it brings a different perspective to the audience.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

Hardwired Banality: The Everyday of Screen Consumption is an exhibition comprised of 25 white color pencil drawings on black paper. The exhibition debuted on March 31, 2018 in Kipp Gallery at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

The drawings are presented as a visual timeline to tell a story of a couple going through their daily routine. The individual images address specific scenarios of screen time, while as a collection of images address the overall theme of show. The drawings are composed of white and black color pencil on black paper, creating a low-contrast image of the subject's reflection on the screen of their device. This places the viewer from the perspective of the device itself looking at the scene depicted. The drawings are displayed in protruding black frames, which gives the subtle drawings a more dominant presence in the gallery. They are difficult to see from a distance, enticing the viewer to step closer to examine the work up close. It is when the viewer is upon the work that they discover the minute details that maintain the viewers' attention. This allows the viewer to discover vital content while scanning over each image that would easily be overlooked in a more abrupt survey of the work.

In lieu of titles, the work is labeled with a specific time of day that is presented in black vinyl at the bottom right hand corner of each image. This information tells the viewer exactly what time each image takes place in the narrative. The scenes depicted along with the time associated with each image are to create what many would consider a "stereotypical" day. This allows the audience to better relate to the work to confront their own use of these technological devices in their daily routine. As the viewer progresses through the narrative, they will notice that the timeline begins and ends with images of the story's female character waking up to begin

the day. The two images appear to be the same and have the same time association. After a second glance, the final image is slightly different, indicating to the viewer a new day has begun and that the oversaturation of screen time is a continuous loop day in and day out.

Finally, the work is shown tightly together to allow the viewer to seamlessly read the images as a cohesive unit. The narrative is boxed into the gallery with a wall at each end of the timeline, creating a intimate space as the viewer peers into the couples life together.



Fig. 14. *Thesis image 5*. 2018



Fig. 15. *Thesis image 6*. 2018

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Hardwired Banality: The Everyday of Screen Consumption confronts the audience with the reality of our “tethered” everyday lives. By having the viewer see the story unfold from the perspective of each device gives new insight on how our devices effect every aspect of our daily routine. We as a species crave deep personal connection to one another that is both mental and physical. The overuse of our devices prevents these connections and hinders what it means to be human.

To end this collection of data on a positive note, a study published in *Computers in Human Behavior* studied children who went away to a technology free camp to study how they would cope without technology. After five days at the camp, children had a better grasp of real-world communication skills such as tone of voice, body language, spatial distance between individuals and other communication cues. To top it off the children enjoyed themselves, made new friends and felt relieved to not feel the constant demand of always responding to text and social media post. Turkle, who also quotes this study in her own research coins this “the talking cure.”

As a society, we hold our devices in the highest regard because of what this technology can do for us that we are naive or ignorant of the harm it can cause in return. This technology is here to stay, and this collection of data isn't meant to argue for its removal. We need to find the balance between technology use with a purpose and when that same technology needs put in its place. This is critical as we and technology continue to build upon our complex relationship with one another.

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Appendix A

Technology Use Survey Questionnaire

Tech Use Survey

Default Question Block

Block Options

Q1

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

PROTOCOL TITLE: HARDWIRED BANALITY: THE EVERYDAY OF SCREEN

CONSUMPTION

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

Hardwired Banality: The Everyday of Screen Consumption is the thesis title of MFA candidate Brandon McDonald's show. The purpose of this study is to collect data on technological device use among millennials. Data collected will be compared to similar studies and inform the researcher's imagery used in the completion of artworks for their thesis show.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

You will be asked to answer 9 questions that pertain to your use of technological devices in your daily routine.

Responsible Institution

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Time required:

2 to 5 minutes

Risks and Benefits:

There is no risk in participating in the study. It is not anticipate that you will benefit directly by partaking in this experiment.

Incentive or Compensation:

You will be entered into a drawing to receive gift card for your participation. Winner will be notified through their I-mail.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept anonymous from the researcher. Your answers will be collected and grouped with others who participate in the questionnaire as a group of data. Therefore, there will be no connection between yourself and the answers you provide in the questionnaire. Data will be stored on a password protected desktop computer that is locked in the researchers studio.

When the study is completed and the data has been analyzed, results will be kept on file for 3 years due to federal law. Your name will not be used in any report or publication.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you elect to discontinue participation, any information already collected will be discarded. There is no penalty or loss of benefit for choosing not to complete the questionnaire.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence or penalty.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Student researcher: Brandon McDonald (bbks@iup.edu)

Faculty Adviser: Nathan Heuer (nathan.heuer@iup.edu)

Agreement:

If you wish to participate in this study, please click on the box below indicating that you have read the consent form and allow your answers to be used in the collection of data.

Federal law mandates that copies of all informed consents be retained for a minimum of three years after completion of the research. The principal investigator is responsible for the maintenance and retention of such records. If the principal investigator is a student, the faculty sponsor is responsible for the maintenance of these records. If the investigator leaves the institution with this three year period, all records must be forwarded to the Office of Assistant Dean for Research.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

- I have read the informed consent and agree to participate in the study

Q2

Do you use multiple electronic/smart devices at the same time? Examples include televisions, phones, computers, etc.)

- Yes
- No

Q3

How many of these devices do you have on you at all times?

- 1-2
- 2-3
- 3+

Q4

Do you use these devices within an hour of waking up or falling asleep?

- Yes
- No

Q5

How often do you look something up on your mobile devices daily?

- 0-3
- 4-5
- 5+

Q6

Are you required to use a mobile device to complete tasks that pertain to your place of employment or school?

- Yes

- No

Q7

Have you checked your phone while spending time with family or friends?

- Yes

- No

Q8

Do you consider your phone or mobile devices essential to staying organized throughout the day?

- Yes

- No

Q9

When you have moments of downtime throughout your day, do you usually use one of these devices?

- Almost always

- Sometimes

- No

Q10

Have you ever used your phone during or right after having an intimate moment with a partner?

- Yes

- No