# ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE WORLD*

*results may vary

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# Abstract

This thesis focuses on methodologies and strategies used in advertising to bring comprehension to our understanding of the Anthropocene. *ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE WORLD\** builds on Timothy Morton's concern of lack of temporal and spatial recognition of "Hyperobjects" by focusing on photographs and videos of everyday household single-use plastic objects coupled with ubiquitous, albeit, "bent" advertising disclaimers. The thesis incorporates advertising directed narrative approach to messaging in pursuit of answering the growing call for artistic responses that can effectively break down the complexity of the current environmental crisis. Does the embracing of advertising seem counter-intuitive when seeking a solution to the growing amount of plastic in the world? *ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE WORLD\** asks us to consider the possibilities while declaring that *results may vary.

# Acknowledgements

# Dedication

To Sanya who never stopped believing in me. Ever.

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All photographs by Tom Feiler, except for Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, and 14

"The world is going to pieces and people like [Ansel] Adams and [Edward] Weston are photographing rocks!" (Lippard, *Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West* 9).

Chapter 1: Introduction

In January of 2019, I wondered if I was an uncaring monster. When leaving Edward Burtynsky's, *Anthropocene* exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), I remember feeling unresponsive to his series of large-scale aerial photographs of coal and potash mines, ponds of lithium and phosphorus and mounds or distant landfills. Moreover, I also remember feeling troubled *that I was unmoved* by these aesthetic images of ravaged landscapes. Being somewhat certain that I am not an uncaring monster, I needed to understand why those images left me numb. Visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff believes traditional, "Anthropocene visuality produces a kind of anesthetic, which numbs our awareness of the actual physical conditions of the Anthropocene" (230). A point echoed by curator and art critic Bénédicte Ramade, "climate change is by nature disproportionate, overspilling our comprehension in terms of scale and temporality, it becomes virtually impossible to visualize" (23).

My research expands on the growing call for artists to address climate change in the Anthropocene in a new way. Scholar Julie H. Reiss in *Art, Theory and Practice in the Anthropocene,* states, "the vast repercussions of global climate change are difficult to grasp for most people, and individual artistic responses can effectively break it down to a more comprehensible scale" (vi). Reiss further implores, "the need for decentering the human; an acknowledgement of interconnectivity and interdependence; and perhaps most importantly, the potential for art to help us…reshape consciousness and create new narratives" (v).

Motivated by a disconnection to those images of faraway landscapes, my research expands on the call for new ways of visualising the Anthropocene. I turned my attention closer to

home to objects located *in* my own home: single-use plastic objects. As I discovered in my research, single-use plastic objects are all around us and are not going away any time soon. Author Erle C. Ellis, in *Anthropocene: a Very Short Introduction* asserts, "Plastic materials alone now far exceed human biomass, growing from 2 million tonnes produced annually in 1950 to 300 million in 2015. Total historical production, now 5 billion tonnes, is enough to wrap Earth's entire surface in a thin layer of plastic film" (148).  Researcher Heather Davis observes, "plastic is ubiquitous and infiltrates so many aspects of our daily lives that its presence is easy to take for granted and also hard to fathom" (349). Davis further declares, "there is no way to extract one's life in the twentieth century from plastic" (349).

Through a research-creation approach, I enlisted the directed narrative strategies of print advertising as a means to focus attention on these ubiquitous objects that entangle us. Admittedly, advertising may seem an unlikely partner in the examination of the propagation of single-use plastic; it does, however, have the potential to do more than just sell products. As author Robin Landa notes in *Advertising by Design: Creating Visual Communications with Graphic Impact*, "Good advertising is not deceptive, stimulates the economy and competition in commerce, and offers choices and information to the public. Advertising is in its greatest role when created for public service – it can help save lives, teach responsible behaviour, and benefit society in many other ways" (2). Landa quotes Creative Director Steffan Postaer's assertion, "Print [advertising] is a sales tool that needs to invite and seduce a person into buying or doing something" (qtd. in Landa 7). Coming from a commercial photography and directing background, I can attest to the power that imagery and text have in garnering our attention. As professor Liz Wells in *Photography: a Critical Introduction*, notes "the essence of advertising generally and advertising photography in particular, is to turn which is ostensibly mundane into

an exciting and arresting image" (208). As per Landa, advertising is a "common medium/language now", possessing the power to "cross over and connect everyone" (41). In *Photography: the Key Concepts*, theorist David Bate, further affirms advertising messages are, "integrated into the unconscious sensory message, experience of daily life", giving consumers/viewers the possibility "to think about a specific product in even just a split second of fleeting vision" (146).

Using an interdisciplinary approach in conjunction with a practise-based cyclical research methodology inspired by the writing of Hazel Smith and Roger Dean, this thesis explores the following questions: is there a more direct way to artistically engage in the Anthropocene than photographs of landscapes? How does the utilisation of print advertising strategies (image and text) offer a more directed way to address the Anthropocene?

Chapter 2: Methodology

Traditionally, advertising photographers and directors are required to execute goal-orientated concepts that have been generated by advertising agency's art directors, writers and creative directors. Authors Hazel Smith and Roger Dean in *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, define goal orientation as having "start and end points – usually consisting of an initial plan and a clear idea of an ultimate objective or target outcome" (23). However, in my research, I discovered that the development of advertising concepts are produced through methodologies, similar to those utilised in fine art practices. The process is anything but straight and narrow; resembling a circle. Smith and Dean's model of cyclical research methodology encapsulates and visualises my process. Their visual model demonstrates that creative production and investigation can begin at any point and suggests that "iteration is fundamental to both creative and research processes" (Smith and Dean 19). Additionally, the authors describe this art practice methodology as a "cycle structure combined with a web-like structure" allowing one to "jump from one point in the circle to any other" (Smith and Dean 21).
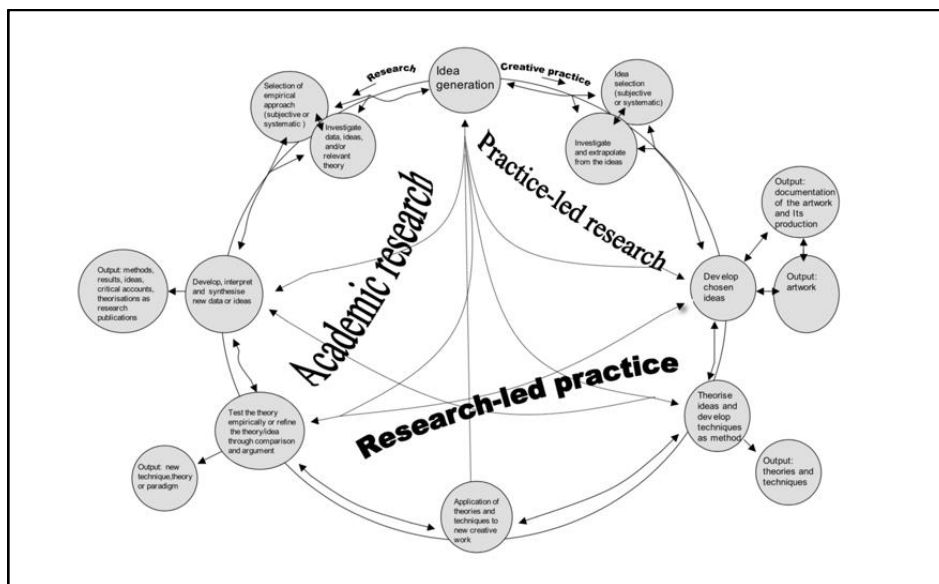


Figure 1. Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's model of creative arts and research processes.
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In the course of my research and production, critical readings often provided the starting points for new areas of exploration in my photography studio. Inevitably, the new work produced in the studio would lead to more critical theory research. The search for new critical theory readings would often spawn into discoveries of other visual artists' work. Often, these case studies were in the form of physical books. Not merely, a catalogue of images these books often contained critical readings that would then spur on new studio explorations. I appreciated that non-linearity was a method that could generate creative freedom. Further creative development occurred when I ceased working in isolation and began collaborating with members of Toronto's advertising community.

Advertising creatives work in a similar, often collaborative cyclical structure of working and re-working concepts and then reflecting on the results. According to writer Adrian R. Mackay in *Practise of Advertising*, when developing a concept, advertising 'creatives' research must synthesise "creative briefs, strategy statements, communications objectives and other input" before crystallising them into an advertisement "that will engage the audience's interest, make the advertisements memorable and achieve the client's communications objectives" (79). Working in teams, they look for "fresh, unique and appropriate ideas that can be used as solutions to communications problems" employing brainstorming strategies[1] (80). Authors Linda Candy and Ernest A. Edmonds in *Interacting: Art, Research and the Creative Practitioner*, echo this process when they state "reflective practice in creativity involves multiple iterations" (13). More than just reflecting on the work, an artist can "take an empirical route to new

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[1] Author Adrian R. Mackay defines "brainstorming" as group sessions where "creative teams will try and put the problems out of the conscious mind" resulting in a "wide-ranging and long lists of ideas that can be organised into creative themes or issues on which creative strategy could be based" (80).

understandings" by introducing "a principled enquiry stream to reflective practice" (Candy and Edmonds 13).

In considering the "web-like structure" of methodology as defined by Hazel and Dean, it became clear that the process flows in many directions, stopping and starting, reversing and moving forward again. Graeme Sullivan, in *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* observes that "there is an extensive range of modalities and methods that can be used to yield critically grounded and individually transforming outcomes" (119). Sullivan further theorises this "dialogue" within the artistic practice as a "coalition of practices" flowing "within and across, between and around the artist, artwork, and context" (119). In the course of the development of my thesis project, I came to realise that fluidity between practice-led and research-led methodology was integral to my art-making practice. Anthropologist, Tim Ingold in *The Textility of Making* writes poetically of this fluidity, "Practitioners, I contend, are wanderers, wayfarers, whose skill lies in their ability to find the grain of the world's becoming and to follow its course while bending it to their evolving purpose (92).

# Chapter 3: Literature Review and Artists That Have Influenced My Work

In this section, I delve into critical theory that considers relationships between humans and human-made objects. To further contextualise my positioning of the potency of text used in combination with imagery, I surveyed the work of John Baldessari, Edward Ruscha, and Fischli and Weiss.

## Literature Review

It was the accessible, vernacular writing style of theorist Timothy Morton that first drew me into his texts. Reading Morton would eventually lead me to the writing of other Object-Oriented Ontology theorists. Expanding the foundations of Speculative Realism's rejection of correlationism, Morton along with theorists Levi Bryant, Ian Bogost and Graham Harman developed what they coined Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) posits that everything is an object, and there is nothing else but objects. Author Christopher Peterson in, *The Gravity of Melancholia: A Critique of Speculative Realism Object-Oriented Ontology*, acknowledges that Object-Oriented Ontology "seeks to fully renounce human privilege altogether in order to place all beings (human, animal, plant, and thing) on the same ontological footing" (66). In *Politics of Nature*, Latour states, "to recapitulate the hierarchy of beings in a single ordered series, political ecology is always manifested, in practice, by the destruction of the idea of nature" (25). Morton echoes Latour's sentiment by stating, "we are better off giving up on the idea of nature altogether", asserting that nature is a "useless concept, or at best a distracting one" (Sparrow 101). Morton further emphasises, that if in embracing

OOO's flat-ontological democratisation of objects2 we must accept that everything is Nature

regardless of being man-made or not and that "if the set of nature includes everything, the

concept of nature becomes useless" (*Ecology Without Nature* 63). Morton further adds, "Nature

is everything, and thus there is no way for us to situate ourselves outside of it" (Sparrow 111). In

*The Ecological Thought*, Morton states, "all beings are interconnected; this is the mesh" (94).

Morton defines the term "mesh" as, "something disturbingly entangled, without center or edge,

so finely interwoven that everything is caught in it" (*Poisoned Ground: Art and Philosophy in

the Time of Hyperobjects* 43).

Applying Morton and Latour's concept of nature to my work: I suggest that the common-

place single-use plastic objects I employ as subject matter, are as a part of nature as any

landscape or organic object. While I understood Morton's concept of plastic-as-nature, it did not

reveal why *I* felt it was important to use, explore and work with the particular common plastic

objects.

Political theorist Jane Bennett's concept of "vibrant materiality", gave me some

conceptual tools to further interrogate my relationship with these objects I was photographing.

Bennett, in *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*, issues the challenge for us to drop the

"habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)" (vii). Bennett

maintains that in considering all matter as vibrant, we begin to "horizontalize" our relationship

with things (112). Bennett goes on to suggest that when we "linger" on those moments we find

ourselves "fascinated by objects" we become aware of our mutual material vitality (17).

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2 Levi R. Bryant in *The Democracy of Objects*, states, "The democracy of objects is the *ontological* thesis that all objects, as Ian Bogost has so nicely put it, equally exist while they do not exist equally. The claim that all objects equally exist is the claim that no object can be treated as constructed by another object. The claim that objects do not exist equally is the claim that objects contribute to collectives or assemblages to a greater and lesser degree. In short, no object such as the subject or culture is the ground of all others. As such, *The Democracy of Objects* attempts to think the being of objects unshackled from the gaze of humans in their being for-themselves" (19).

Embracing Bennett's strategy afforded me a deeper understanding of my exploration and work with common plastic objects and how I gained "a greater appreciation of the complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans" (112).

## Case Studies – Artists' Practices

There have been a few times when I burst into laughter at an art gallery. The last time this occurred was in Mexico City at the Museo Jumex February 21st, 2018. The show was: *Learning To Read With John Baldessari.*
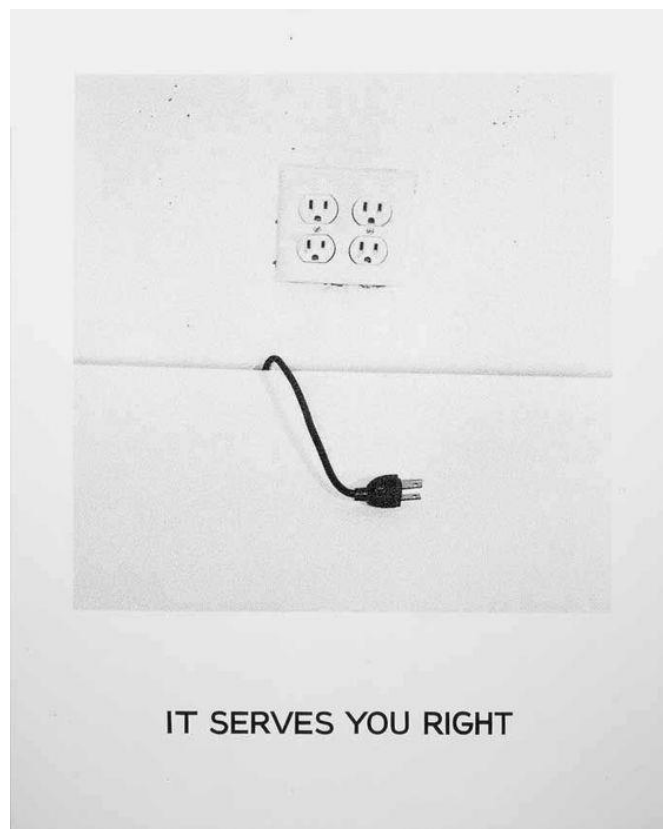


Figure 2. Baldessari, John. *Goya Series: IT SERVES YOU RIGHT*, c.1997
Ink-jet and enamel paint on canvas
75 x 60 in.
Image courtesy of John Baldessari

In, *John Baldessari: with Essays by Maria Tucker and Robert Pincus-Witten and an Interview by Nancy Drew*, interviewer Nancy Drew describes John Baldessari as a "tall, cigar-smoking, mentor, ex-painter, shaman, joke teller" whose art "incorporates language and images as equal information" (62). According to Drew, Baldessari is a "purveyor of puns and multiple entendre, connoisseur of irony and paradox" (62). Regarding the work, *IT SERVES YOU RIGHT,* Baldessari uses a stark, black and white image of an electrical cord unplugged near an electrical outlet. Editor and author Aimee Selby, comments in *Art and Text*, *IT SERVES YOU RIGHT* is an affirmation of the "relationship between image and text is both unsettlingly eloquent and constantly on edge" (208).

This work, in particular, is of interest to me because the choice of the words and their implied accusatory tone not only created a narrative but, raised lingering questions, all without asking a question. This shrewd playfulness is one that resounds with me and my experience in advertising. Why is the electrical plug or the socket being accusatory? Who is to blame and, what did they possibly do? It is the tautness between the text and the image of an object that appeals to me most about Baldessari's work. I employ a similar strategy, creating narrative tensions and play between image and text in my body of work: *ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE WORLD*.

Jan Avgikos, in *John Baldessari: National City*, adeptly identifies in Baldessari's work, "image points to text, and text points back to the image. Tautological closure is the default mode of the phototext painting" (19). I argue that, when done successfully, there can also be an openness in the pairing. Rather, I concur with author Russell Ferguson's observations in his chapter *Unreliable Narrator.* Fergusson's maintains that Baldessari's work is anything but "redundant repetition" adding that the "linguistic and the visual" are "inextricably linked…yet remain fundamentally irreconcilable" (92). Kit Hammonds and Gabriel Villalobos, in *John*

*Baldessari: Learning to Read with John Baldessari*, add, "this interplay challenges the modes of

interpretation proper to each", and "alters our way of looking" (44).

Another artist who works with this strategic interplay of text & image is Edward Ruscha.

Ruscha began his career in the early 1960s working in a wide range of media: "experimenting

with painting, drawing (both with conventional art supplies and with food, blood, gunpowder,

and shellac), printmaking, photography, film, and books" (Schwartz xiii). Schwartz further

asserts, Ruscha's primary focus has been the "written language and typography" with the

majority of his images consisting primarily of words (xiii). Designer and author Michael Dooley,

in *Ed Words: Ruscha in Print*, observes that Ruscha's work, using an economy of words:

"highlight the symbolic power of words… creating a subversive element in the words' meanings"

(32).



Figure 3. Ruscha, Ed. *Pay Nothing Until April*, c. 2003
acrylic on canvas, 60" x 60" (P2003.13)
@Ed Ruscha, courtesy of the artist.

In *Ed Ruscha Artist Overview and Analysis*, writer Anne Souter describes the painting as a "snow-capped blue mountain sitting against a yellow sky, while the incongruous phrase, *PAY NOTHING UNTIL APRIL"* sits on a frontal plane (*Souter).* Simon Morley, author of, *Writing on the Wall: Words and Image in Modern Art*, speaks of Ruscha's work as "trading on the language of advertising while remaining most definitely a work of art" (9).  More than simply borrowing from advertising copy clichés it embodies the melding of image and text. Ruscha does not treat the text as a title or a caption but as a component. This overlay of text over image creates a tension independent of what the text is saying and the image revealing but, as Morley states, allows "freedom of mental and sensual movement" in the images while juxtaposing rigidity in the "predetermined route constructed from a horizontal reading of letters" (9). Ruscha's *PAY NOTHING UNTIL APRIL,* stands out for me not only in the use of a phrase that sounds like it comes from advertising but through the relationship between the text and the image of the mountainous landscape, the combination seems visually and conceptually challenging, even inharmonious, yet inextricably connected. Furthermore, there is something about the familiarity of the phrase itself that at first makes it seem innocuous, but it is the combination of the image with the text that results in the whole becoming charged and resonant. For my body of work, *ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE WORLD\**; much time was spent in the studio crafting common or familiar advertising disclaimers in an to attempt to achieve a similar level of disquieting tension as seen in Ruscha's work.

Author and critic Nancy Princenthal in *The Indiscreet Charm of Fischli and Weiss*, describes Fischli and Weiss as artistic partners who have over three decades created work in a "range of disciplines, including film, video, photography, sculpture (using a variety of materials as well as found objects), artists' books, drawings, installations and public works sited outdoors"

(66). Similarly to Edward Ruscha's interests in written language, the Swiss duo of Fischli and Weiss also use language as a way to "entertain and unsettle" (Spector and Trotman xvii). For my thesis research, I looked specifically at the duo's twenty-one-year ongoing multi-faceted project titled, *Questions (1981 – 2002)*. *Questions* began with their early film *The Least Resistance* (1980–81), the artists' alter egos (Rat and Bear) embark on a journey, seeking meaning with their discoveries compiled into the book, *Order and Cleanliness* (1981), which includes an outline of "big and little questions", from "Should I change the bedding?" to "Must I be ashamed of having no opinions about most things?".



Figure 4. Fischli, Peter and Weiss, David. *Will Happiness Find Me?*, c. 2003.
https://www.artspace.com/peter_fischli_david_weiss/will-happiness-find-me-2
Accessed 8 Nov. 2018.

Curator Nancy Spector, author of *Peter Fischli David Weiss: How to Work Better,* reflects on the choice of texts in the work stating, "The questions range polymorphously from the metaphysical to the empirical. They entertain and unsettle. In this way, Fischli and Weiss 's work casts doubt but also invites wonderment, that rare state that only great art can incite"(xvii).

Spector notes how Fischli and Weiss employ Boris Groys's theory that there are two types of questions:

- where the answer is factual, ("What is the diameter of the Earth?"),

- where the answer is a contemplative cue, ("Why is the Earth not a cube?") (252).

Spector quotes Groys' own observation of the work noting, "These questions cannot be answered because at first glance, even if they sound quite simple and everyday, they have an uncanny quality of immediately addressing the whole of the world, of life or of fate…" (qtd. in Spector 335). It is the simplicity of the work that attracts me because it is deceptive in its simplicity. In other words, there is more lying under the surface that draws you back to their work long after you have experienced it.

I include the work of Fischli and Weiss in my case study research because of this sophisticated use of humour in their work. Though single-use plastic objects may not seem the stuff of humour, I too endeavour to use this as a strategy within my own practice. In advertising, the use of humour is one strategy to communicate effectively with an audience. Executive Director of advertising of BBH London John Hegarty writes, "humour has an important role to play in advertising. We use it because it's a way of making people relax and listen. When your audience is in that state of mind, they're more likely to remember what you're saying and act upon it" (35). Author Heather Diack, in *The Gravity of Levity: Humour as Conceptual Critique* notes, humour provokes and "reveals the instability of known things and the contingency of measures to account for the world as it is" (77).

My final case-study is the short film, *Still Life* (2001) by Sam Taylor-Wood. *Still Life* is an approximately four-minute-long time-lapse video. As described by cultural critic and art historian T.J. Demos, in *A Matter of Time – Tate Etc., Still Life* is a "Caravaggesque display of

fruit, which soon transforms before our eyes into a collapsed mass of rotting matter, the food of

flies" endlessly repeating over and over again (4). Interviewer Selene Wendt, in *When a Painting*

*Moves... Something Must Be Rotten!*, quotes Taylor-Wood reflection on *Still Life* suggesting that

the work "comes from the themes of our mortality and what it means to be human" (qtd. in

Wendt 40).  Years ago, I had the good fortune of seeing this piece at the Museum of

Contemporary Art Cleveland, Ohio (May 2008). After watching the film repeatedly, I became

more aware of the ballpoint pen lying near the edge of the frame. The presence of the static,

unchanging plastic pen spoke louder than the rotting organic matter. I was struck by the

realisation that while the sequence likely took weeks to capture the decay of the organic matter,

an incomprehensible amount of time would be required to show the plastic ballpoint pen decay.

A similar contradiction between the unequal and troubling decay timelines in our world of 'stuff'

is a central point of investigation in my body of work: *ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE*

*WORLD\**.



Figure 5. Taylor-Wood, Sam. *Still life*, c. 2001.
https:// https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXPP8eUlEtk
Accessed 25 July. 2019.

# Chapter 4: Production of *ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE WORLD\**

The path of the work contained within *ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE WORLD\** was anything but linear. I return now to Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's statement regarding the creative process as a being cyclical and combined with a web-like structure. (21). Reflecting on the work, I suggest there were multiple webs that, at times, felt very entangled. Before I discuss the work contained in *ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE WORLD\*,* I will briefly reflect upon selected preliminary studio inquiries.

Upon my entering OCADU's IAMD program, I remember feeling embarrassed about my commercial advertising background. I believed that my time at OCADU would be about distancing myself from the advertising world. Amusingly enough, it would be the years of studio explorations at OCADU along with discussions with peers from both the art and advertising worlds that would lead me back to embracing my advertising roots.

Even as a young child, I could occupy myself for hours with rubber bands, paper clips or egg beaters. Earlier studio explorations involved a similar focus on everyday household objects photographed or filmed projects on seamless backgrounds. For example, in creating my 4K[3] looping videos *LID SPINNING* and *SPONGE* the original footage of the pot lid spinning or a sponge absorbing water was slowed down or reversed. In doing so, I was able to produce never-ending loops of a pot lid spinning and a sponge relentlessly absorbing and expelling water. As visual theorist Johanna Drucker suggests "looping videos could create a narrative that unfolds over time through cuts and editing techniques" (Drucker 22).

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[3] Author Richard W. Kroon, in *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Media, Entertainment and Other Audiovisual Terms,* defines 4K as "digital video with a resolution of 4,096 horizontal pixels and 3,112 vertical pixels" (295).

Figure 6. Feiler, Tom. *LID SPINNING*, c. 2016.
https://vimeo.com/191556198
Accessed 26 Oct. 2019.



Figure 7. Feiler, Tom. *SPONGE*, c. 2017.
https://vimeo.com/368989353
Accessed 26 Oct. 2019.

During the winter of 2017, leaving this motion-work behind, I focused my attention on

photography, specifically high-speed flash photography. I used falling and bouncing water-filled

rubber balloons as the subjects-objects of my high-speed flash photography experiments. The

balloons were captured with high-speed flash during moments of impact with a surface. The

resulting investigation opened further meditations into the differences between photographic

time and non-photographic time. Reading photo-theorists Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest

analysis about high-speed flash photography clarified my insights into how high-speed flash

photography "opened up a truly new visual world" acting as an "accessory that will manipulate

time" (77). As I was soon to discover, this meditation into perceived time became my motivation

to reflect on the longevity of those single-use plastic objects I was photographing.



Figure 8. Feiler, Tom. *WATER BALLOON*, c. 2017.

Figure 9. Feiler, Tom. *WATER DROP AND CUP*, c. 2017.

During the summer of 2018, throughout the early months of 2019, my parents' health declined radically. Their rapid decline forced me to come to contemplate to my own relatively short time left on this planet, and what *I* was leaving behind. Looking for a way to cope with these feelings of sadness, I began photographing artificial flowers in the manner of 17th century Dutch Vanitas/Memento Mori painting. Not only did the utilisation of the Vanitas style echo my own feelings about mortality, the use of plastic flowers provided an opportunity for me to contemplate my existence in relation to these objects that are left behind - long after I cease to exist. At this point, I also began collaborating with Mikey Richardson, designer and creative director of *Jackknife Design (Toronto).* We began investigating different text treatments for these Vanitas pictures, using the anthropomorphised phrases that I had provided him.
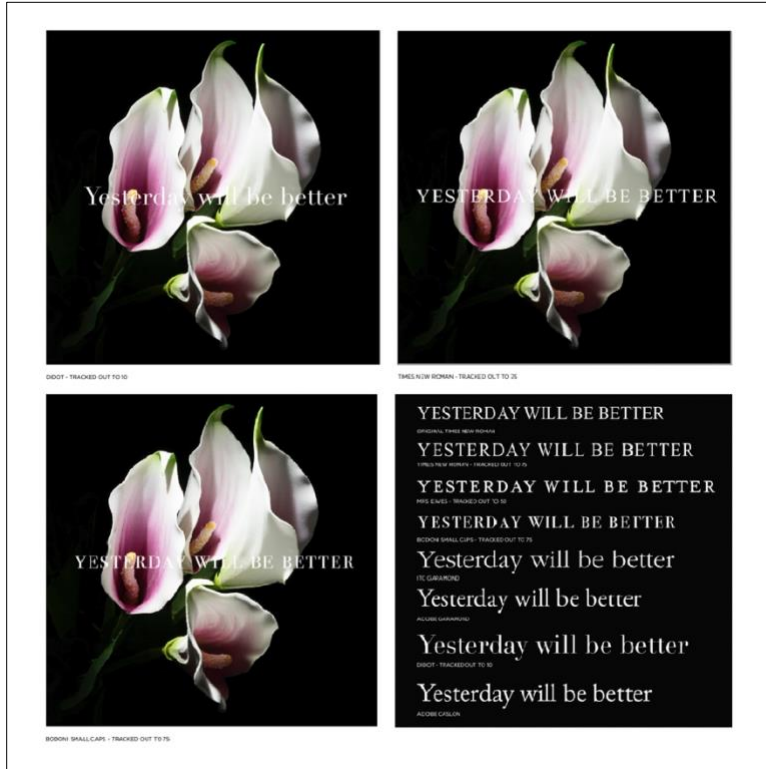
Figure 10. Richardson, Mikey. Type Exploration, 2019.



Figure 11. Feiler, Tom. *YOU WILL DIE FIRST*, c. 2019.

After examining the work, and creating several large 48"x48" sized proofs of the work, I determined that the use of artificial flowers was not the right subject/object choice. I began reviewing some work that was a part of my earlier high-speed flash image suites. Looking closely at my photograph of a *WATER DROP AND CUP*, as in my experience with Sam Taylor-Wood's, Still Life, the plastic cup itself came into visual and conceptual focus. The commonality of the plastic cup, more than the artificial flowers, resonated with me, plastic is everywhere, and we barely notice.

I returned to the studio and commenced working on a new series of photographs and looping videos of the following plastic objects: clear plastic cup, bubble-wrap, water bottle cap, water bottle, take-out coffee lid, plastic straws and plastic bags that would become the subject matter of my thesis project.

After years of resisting my commercial background; I finally began to consider the advertising strategies as a critical technique. Working primarily with photographs, I turned my attention to print advertising. A print advertisement or ad is a method of advertising that uses physically printed media, such as magazines, newspapers, billboards and posters etc. Unlike other forms of advertisement like broadcast commercials or on-line videos, print ads are a "cooperative relationship between words and images" allowing ideas to be "expressed through the combination of words and images" (Landa 52). Literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes describes the role of text with the photographic image in advertising as being, "undoubtedly intentional, frank, or at least emphatic" (33). Barthes goes on to observe that text has two functions when coupled with a photograph: "anchorage and relay" (38). Author Ed White in, *How to Read Barthes' Image-Music-Text* , summarises Barthes' observations stating text was a "linguistic anchor" helping to "choose the correct level of perception…a vice which

holds the connoted meanings from proliferating, or going in the wrong direction", or a "form of selective, directed control" (29). Having finalised the images, I began working on the text that would be combined with the images. Looking for expert feedback and guidance, I turned to international award-winning creative director and copywriter, Sanya Grujicic.

Wanting to use the language of advertising itself with the images, we began exploring three areas: anthropomorphised language (object speaking to viewer, e.g. "What did you think was going to happen?"), well-known brand taglines (e.g. NIKE's *Just Do It*), and commonplace, conventional advertising disclaimers and claims (e.g. results may vary). Lists were made and compiled and edited repeatedly until final selections were made in each category. In the studio, rough prints were made and attached to the wall while the final texts were printed on index cards adhered to the images with thumbtacks. Using thumbtacks allowed us to move and rearrange the selected text quickly and repeatedly. The text editing process continued for over two months, during which I commenced researching typefaces and advertising art-direction strategies employed in print advertising.

In my previous research with Mikey Richardson, I explored how typefaces can be as influential as the words themselves. Typefaces, according to journalist Kit R. Roane, in *A Typeface for All Time,* can act as "a mass communicator, an unseen persuader that helps readers understand both the message and the messenger" (71). Writer Pamela Henderson, *Impression Management Using Typeface Design*, further upholds, "that typeface design impacts perceptions of advertised brands, influences the readability and memorability of ads" (3). In the production of the work, I began with typeface Helvetica. According to Roane, Helvetica has been used by "hundreds of firms", brands and even governments (71). While at first attracted to the ubiquitous nature and history within advertising of Helvetica, I felt that the typeface was too common and

cold. I began working with *New Century Schoolbook* a typeface researchers in studies have

called "friendly" (Stopke et al. 71). I wanted the text to be friendly and not threatening.

Collaborating with advertising creative director Juan Torres we explored type treatment

on the following:

- using anthropomorphised language text with the application of typeface and
  layouts recognisable with known consumer brands,

- employing actual brands taglines and the typefaces associated with those brands,

- implementing familiar advertising disclaimers and claims with negligible type.

Additionally, I was looking for a type/layout strategy that I could apply to all nine images in this

body of work.



Figure 12. Torres, Juan. Type Area One, 2019.

Figure 13. Torres, Juan. Type Area Two, 2019.



Figure 14. Torres, Juan. Type Area Three, 2019

The type and layout explorations continued, as did fine-tuning the photographs in

Adobe's Photoshop CC2019. It was through the image editing process a determination was made

that the images were most potent when they were monochromatic. Author Charlotte Cotton,

observes, "The presence of black-and-white photography –like the top hat and tails worn by an

illusionist – directs the viewer toward thinking about the persona and motivations of the maker

as a recognizable entity, shaped by and adhering to the historic conventions of a creative discipline" (11). In wanting to direct attention to all plastic objects and not just the one specific plastic object in front of my lens, the use of monochromatic imagery directs the viewer to the objects themselves "since black-and-white situations are theoretical" it cannot be "encountered as such in the visible world" (Gelder and Westgeest 53).

Increasing the scale of the photographs to larger than the object's original size was a method of calling attention to the object while defamiliarising it. The large size was also a nod to the larger print executions in contemporary advertising. The objects in the photographs are sharply in focus. I wanted the photograph to represent the object and not romanticise the object in any way. The decision to photograph the objects against a black background was a conscious one. The removal of all background allowed the objects to appear to be floating in space by removing any indication of scale or point of reference to another object or location. In photographing the object, I tossed the objects in the air in order to have them not resting on any surface. Finally, the majority of the objects were cropped to occupy the centre of the image, thus increasing their separation from the background.

Switching to monochromatic images affected the type treatment that was selected in the final images. Looking back at Edward Ruscha's treatment of the text, I note that he primarily worked with full-colour images with white text. I discovered in my own work that once my images became monochromatic, the use of white type stopped functioning harmoniously with the image.

Looking at the typography and text experiment that Grujicic, Torres and I explored, it became clear that the strategy of using minimal font size (fine-print) worked both for the image

design and conceptually. We designed the type to be the same relational size of fine-print that would be common in print advertisements.

Additionally, we embraced the advertising concept of "bent headlines" with "straight pictures" (Aitchison 218). Advertising agency founder Lionel Hunt outlines the concept this way, "If the idea in the ad is being carried by the headline, it means the headline will contain a twist, a trick, a turn, a shock factor; it will be *bent*. Therefore, the accompanying visual must play the subservient or *straight* role" (218). The inverse is also possible, straight headlines coupled with bent images; however, as advertising executive and John Hegarty warns, there must always be a "juxtaposition" between the two (218). Hegarty, in discussing the role of an advertising agency copywriter concludes, "You're using words and pictures. What you don't want to do is make the picture do what the words are doing, and the words do what the picture is doing…a simple picture and an intriguing headline" failing to do this will create an ad that "will be boring and forgettable" (218). Hegarty offers the classic example of the Volkswagen Beetle print ads[4], "a straight photograph of a car" when coupled with a "bent headline like Lemon, will have everybody sit up and take notice" (218).

The final printed work in ADVERTISING WILL SAVE THE WORLD\*, were comprised of familiar and easily overlooked objects coupled with easily overlooked advertising disclaimers. We used the asterisks symbol as not only a conceptual nod to print ad disclaimers but also as a method to direct the viewer to the text located in fine-print in the bottom right-hand corner of the images.

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[4] Volkswagen's ad "*Think small*" was created by Doyle, Dane, Bernbach of New York. Author Laura Clark Geist in, *Humor is Hallmark of VW Ads,* comments, "In the 1950s, full-color ads from Detroit automakers showed big, powerful cars against so-called beauty-shot backgrounds. The advertising copy was long, using words of adulation. By contrast, VW's "Think small" ad was black and white. It showed a lonely-looking Beetle against a stark background. The copy used irony and a self-deprecating sense of humor" (Geist).

Figure 15. Feiler, Tom. *\*KEEP AWAY FROM HUMANS*, c. 2019.

In conjunction with the production of the photographs, I started to film three looping sound videos of selected objects. There was something about the *POT LID* work that I felt could be used to communicate plastic's longevity. I began with the 4K looping sound video: *SPINNING COFFEE LID*. The objects were shot in studio on a white surface with a white background. I filmed the *COFFEE LID* in the same manner as *POT LID* looping the footage to be perpetually revolving and slowing down only to rise back up and repeat the cycle.

Figure 16. Feiler, Tom. *SPINNING COFFEE LID*, c. 2019.
https://vimeo.com/368997651
Accessed 26 Oct. 2019.

The next video produced was *FLOATING BAGS*.  This 4K looping sound video showed bags falling and rising into and out of frame. Filming the bags against a black background allowed me to isolate them from any specific location or place. The bags were filmed all falling into the frame then; selected takes were reversed in Apple's Final Cut Pro X software. Additionally, some of the footage was slowed down in the software.



Figure 17. Feiler, Tom. *FLOATING BAGS*, c. 2019.
https://vimeo.com/368997550
Accessed 26 Oct. 2019

The last video produced was *ROLLING WATER BOTTLE*. This 4K looping sound video showed an empty plastic water bottle rolling into the frame and settling in the centre of the frame when suddenly, the water bottle begins to rock back and forth until it eventually rolls itself out of the frame.



Figure 18. Feiler, Tom. *ROLLING WATER BOTTLE*, c. 2019.
https://vimeo.com/368997596
Accessed 26 Oct. 2019.

# Chapter 5: Conclusions

In starting this project, I was seeking to add to the growing number of artists looking for a new way to visualise the Anthropocene. Funnily enough, I turned to advertising as a means to try and comprehend an almost incomprehensible problem in terms of scale and temporality. Advertising, by nature, is tasked with solving problems presented by a client. In my research process, I began to treat myself as a client asking the question, "So, what is another way to demonstrate what the hell is going on with our planet?" More than my own client, I also took the role of the 'creative' seeking ways to visualise a complicated problem, making it as simple as possible. In using everyday single-use plastic objects, I recognise that they are everywhere and surround us to the point that their presence melts away into the background. Margaret Olin, a cultural historian, asserts in *Re: Response to Walter Benn Michaels*: "You (we) have been looking without seeing" (45). I hope the work produced here at least instigates an awareness of the presence of these plastic objects and, given a choice, maybe we can use them less or not at all.

Regardless of how you may feel about advertising, it is all around us as part of our cultural landscape. It can motivate us. Perhaps, the advertising strategies and methods I employed will motivate us to do something about what is happening to us, around us and all over us. Will advertising save the world? Probably not but it is worth a shot*.

*results may vary

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# Appendix A: Final Exhibit Photographs



Figure 19. Feiler, Tom. *COFFEE LID:\*CAUTION:MAY CAUSE GUILT*, c. 2019.



Figure 20. Feiler, Tom. *PLASTIC CUP:\*GUARANTEED TO LAST LIFETIMES*, c. 2019.

Figure 21. Feiler, Tom. *STRAWS:\*TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLIED*, c. 2019.



Figure 22. Feiler, Tom. *WATER BOTTLE:\*PROBLEM NOT TO SCALE*, c. 2019.

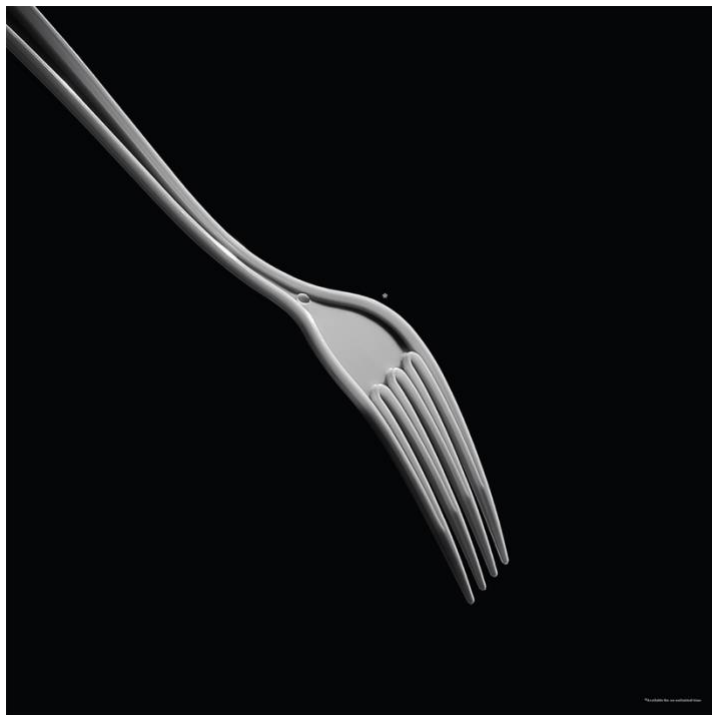Figure 23. Feiler, Tom. *BUBBLE WRAP:*CONSEQUENCES NOT INCLUDED*, c. 2019.



Figure 24. Feiler, Tom. *FORK:*AVAILABLE FOR AN UNLIMITED TIME*, c. 2019.

Figure 25. Feiler, Tom. PLASTIC BAG UP:*KEEP AWAY FROM HUMANS, c. 2019.



Figure 26. Feiler, Tom. *PLASTIC BAG HEART SHAPE:*RESULTS MAY VARY*, c. 2019.

Figure 27. Feiler, Tom. *PLASTIC BAG DOWN:*USE AT OUR OWN RISK*, c. 2019.

# Appendix B: Documentation of Exhibition at Milk Glass



Figure 28. Exterior of exhibition. Videos and scrolling LED screen facing street.



Figure 29. Detail of iMac monitor displaying 3 videos.



Figure 30. Exhibition didactic with photographs displayed on wall.

Figure 31. Group of 6 photographs on wall.



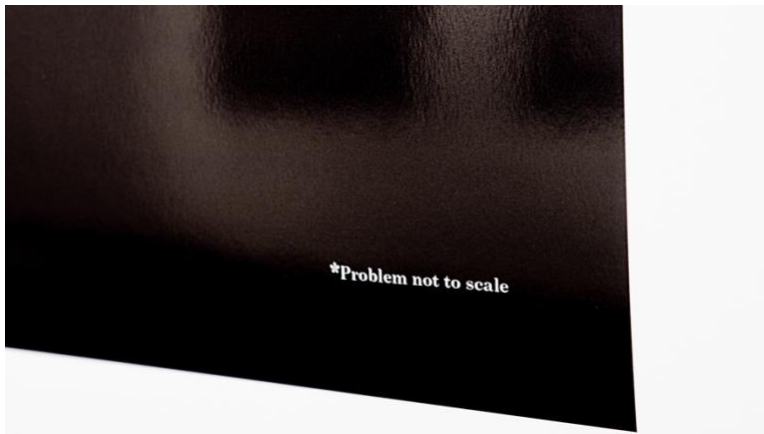Figure 32. Group of 3 photographs on opposing wall.



Figure 33. Detail of type on *WATER BOTTLE:\*PROBLEM NOT TO SCALE*, c. 2019.