Unguided Tour

Catalina Ouyang
Washington University in St Louis

Follow this and additional works at: http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/undergrad_open

Part of the Fine Arts Commons

Recommended Citation
ABSTRACT

Tactics of fragmentation and excerpting are used in the works *Dad Animals Entering Helmut Newtons, E, My Fond Things* and *Unguided Tour* to explore territory spanning intimacy, sex, memory, identity and representation of identity. The works follow a logic of collage/montage/sampling, consisting of preexisting objects, sculpture, found text, original text, digital collage, video, photography, etc. Taking cues from the visual sensibility and detached, irreverent attitude of what this thesis terms “Queer Thoughts/White Flag artists,” the works’ slick formal qualities become a Trojan horse within which is delivered a poetic and emotionally submerged experience, where a still image or object becomes time-based in the act of reading text within the image. The body of work *Unguided Tour* expounds upon this movement of *detachment-to-meaning* through the lens of Susan Sontag's 1977 short story of the same title. Drawing from Sontag’s essay “Against Interpretation,” the works evade overt conceptual or political interpretation (or colonization and control, in Sontag’s terms). Rather the work’s intent is to craft a malleable experience surrounding a question of sex, love, family or other. The work preserves indeterminacy, not because it means nothing but because the expansive interaction of its meanings and levels of exploration should not be crystallized.
“In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.”

-Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation”
INTRODUCTION

On my computer, there are folders of photos from trips I have taken since 2011. They are not organized well, they are bad travel photos. My dad is good with a camera but I am not. I feel embarrassed and guilty about photographing things, especially when I travel, because it feels like a pedestrian thing to do. Also I am bad at it. Inevitably, some months after each trip, I realize I wish I had taken more photos.

On my computer also there are fourteen folders, each containing either a handful or thousands of images of guys without their clothes, sometimes me without my clothes, sometimes the both of us without our clothes. I cared about these people at some point, if vaguely. These date back to 2010. There are videos (bad quality, shot on a point-and-shoot camera preceding the age of the ubiquitous iPhone), iPhone photos, Skype screenshots. I have taken great pains to preserve these files across the lifetimes of three laptops. I wonder sometimes if people actually beat off to their own sex tapes and sexts. I never do because it gives me the feeling of having molested myself. I hardly ever look at these photos, and never for pleasure or reminiscing—but it is important that I have them.

On my Tumblr there are posts tagged #my life, which are about that. They are usually written during periods of loneliness, self-loathing or disillusionment. They are usually, disappointingy, about men or my family.¹ In my desk drawer there are three pocket-sized grid paper notebooks which I sporadically kept as diaries between 2011 and 2014, as I found convenient. These are also mostly about men or my family.

Pedestrian or not, these elements and their extending emotional horizons constitute and inform my work. Bodies fall into orbit, then out. Someone I used to love² is stretched out,

¹ Pedestrian, exhausted concerns…
² Vaguely.
spaghettified, transferred onto the clear plastic screens of a magazine display. Disembodied voices in literature, flattened on sloping plastic, tell us about characters losing something that seems at first important, then less. My travel snapshots, my libraries of sex. my characters tumbling away from each other: these are bodies in stagnation and movement, studies in inertia. I suppose at a root level all of my work is interested in the juncture where relationships (of any kind) begin to disintegrate—between lovers, within the family, within the self.

Most of the raw vernacular imagery has been distilled and edited out of my finished works; but their sense of terminated longing persists. In my works Dad Animals Entering Helmut Newtons, My Fond Things and Unguided Tour (consisting of 4 separate parts), I use fragmentation, excerpting and assemblage/reassemblage to create moments of dissonance between aesthetic and conceptual elements. In these works, exhaustion and jadedness coexist with an earnest inquiry into the interior condition of longing and love (against all better sense). Dad Animals and My Fond Things follow a strategy of repurposing preexisting images or objects, while in Unguided Tour I locate preexisting literature as a proxy through which to expand the concerns that have driven my vast personal library of images and diaristic text.

---

3 I resist the term “found” in this case, because “found” connotes a sense of working-from-what-one-happens-upon, whereas in my case I seek out specific preexisting material that conforms to an idea I am trying to express or explore.
FORM & HANDLING

In my frantic, haphazard browsing of art on the internet, the majority of the art I tend to bookmark as “exciting” inhabits a formally sleek, often digital, skin. I have come to term these “Queer Thoughts/White Flag” (QT/WF) artists, after two nearby galleries (in Chicago and St. Louis, respectively) who tend to adhere to this aesthetic. Numbering among them Sebastian Black, Dena Yago, Lena Henke, Anicka Yi and the likes of Brian Khek, Ivana Basic and Ian Swanson (who have not shown at QT/WF but might very well fit in), most of these artists are making work about the internet or globalization or consumer cultures or, indeed, about nothing at all beyond materiality.
My interests are not limited to materiality but I do think form and material are paramount. In *Anywhere or Not at All*, Peter Osborne writes, “It was the ironic historical achievement of the strong programme of ‘analytical’ or ‘pure’ conceptual art to have demonstrated the ineliminability of the aesthetic as a necessary, though radically inefficient, component of the artwork through the failure of its attempt at its elimination: the failure of an absolute anti-aesthetic” (49). As aesthetic is necessarily implicated in the reading of a work, I treat the QT/WF visual sensibility as a collage element unto itself, to be used as a political or masking tool. I coopt QT/WF’s understated, sterile, mass-produced veneers, clean lines and glossy surfaces, the near-complete removal of the artist’s hand. Not least of all because I draw visual pleasure from this kind of work; but more importantly because I am interested in ways of subverting or repurposing this irreverent attitude, this callousness, this insensitivity to the personal. In the QT/WF camp, layers of irony bury earnest intent, if indeed there is one that extends beyond a comment on materiality or digital culture. When, then, the personal is infused into an infertile shell, something exciting and disarming happens. I seek this out in my work.

*Darja Bajagić at Queer Thoughts*
To expound upon this tactic further, consider this 2014 review in Art Review of “Number Seven,” an exhibition featuring video work from Ed Atkins and Frances Stark. The reviewer describes Atkins’ and Stark’s “unusual” willingness to take emotional risks in their work:

[Atkins and Stark] dive straight into taboo issues like death and the (im)possibility of love – utterly exposing themselves in pictures and poetic words to a general audience that increasingly hides behind technology, and an artworld currently obsessed with distanced observation and artistic research. (Bradley 113)

This pandemic of “distanced observation and artistic research” is exactly what I am pushing against. Previously I described my preoccupation with “men and my family” as “pedestrian, exhausted concerns.” Which is an honest claim, one I have more likely than not been conditioned to have by a millennial aversion to sincerity of any kind. Yet, as I see it, eventually every grade of interest can be broken down. What makes an interest in digital culture or Instagram or global value chains or transnational corporations or consumerism, for heaven’s sake, any less pedestrian and
exhausted than a concern as primal as love? So I will own it—my work, at a core, addresses distances between people who are, or have been, at their closest, and who will end up otherwise. And to justify this, to offer something new, I revert often to an old tactic in short-form fiction: to make strange and defamiliarize that thing we all presume to understand, intimacy and loss thereof.
Catalina Ouyang, Dad Animals Entering Helmut Newtons, 2014

Dad Animals Entering Helmut Newtons consists of three wall-works and a book, which collapse the two opposing associations I have with my father: the animal butt drawings he made when I was a child, and his enthusiasm for erotic photography, which I inherited also at a young age. The original Helmut Newton photos were scanned and printed large, and then were collapsed—or
collided—with oversized sculptural renditions of my father’s animal butts. While not overtly feminist, the work subverts the power dynamic of the male gaze by challenging conventional and historical representations of women and sex. Helmut Newton’s photographs dominated not only my father’s library but also the covers of Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar, with Newton’s characteristic erotic-urban, sadomasochistic style. In the photos, the women are looming, ferocious, aloof: in charge and in touch with their sex. Yet at the same time, they are stripped down to their erotic appeal, “no longer persons but personae” behind Newton’s cold, exacting lens (White Women).

Sontag asserts: “To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they can never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed” (On Photography 14). If, as Sontag claims, photographing someone is a “sublimated murder,” then surely we can recognize the violence in Newton’s photography. I pass no judgments on the photographer himself; I know he had a wife, June, and they collaborated frequently. What my work does question is the (male) demographic (my father, for example) who collects Newton monographs: who is in it for the art? Who is in it for the porn? I remain dubious.

The book I made consists of scans taken from the Helmut Newton monographs White Women (1976) and Sleepless Nights (1978) (just two of the many editions my father owned, but these became my personal favorites), my own personal essay “Spillings” (2013) and family snapshots. Geoffrey Batchen writes in “Vernacular Photographies”: “[Vernacular photographs] produce what Barthes might have called a ‘writerly’ photography, a photography that insists on the cultural density of photographic meaning and assumes the active involvement of the viewer as an interpretive agent” (77). In my work I make literal this “writerly” quality in photography, either by pairing the images

4 Whatever this might mean.
5 This explored my present-day sexuality in the context of my upbringing and my parents’ sexuality.
I do not see *Dad Animals* as being about my father, or about my autobiographical context specifically. I like to think about this work through the lens of how Leigh Ledare talks about his explicit portraits of his mother. He says of the photos, “My mother is not the subject matter. The content is issues of contract, exchange and power dynamics” (49). Likewise, my father is not the subject matter, my ex-lover is not the subject matter, my Florentine fling is not the subject matter, my pussy is not the subject matter. Rather, the content in *Dad Animals* investigates issues of family, inheritance, innocence, representation, resistance and acceptance of sexuality.

---

6 To be clear, the work is not about these things or making a definitive argument about them, but rather opens an experience surrounding them. The investigation does not land.
MY FOND THINGS

Someone I was seeing once texted me, in the infancy of our ambiguous relationship: *yr damn near impossible to read*. This should not have taken me by surprise but it did—pleasantly so. I felt as if I had inadvertently achieved something. This compulsion to frustrate readability translates to my work in that a certain slipperiness characterizes most literature I admire, and I seek to translate this into my art. The work, then, should not be immediately *about* feminism, intimacy, memory or anything else. Sontag argues in “Against Interpretation” that “by reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable” (6). In my view, the strategy of assemblage serves this concept in the sense that the preexisting associations with a certain object, image or text are necessarily beyond my control. So as much as I can position the elements in a way that my understanding of them crafts a certain narrative or experience, every experience of the work depends on the individual’s understanding of the included elements. I do not try to assert an authoritarian control over a reading of the work.
With My Fond Things, my thinking began with these photos which are ostensibly of intimate moments or acts. I wanted to do a funny but also unkind thing with them, being that this is my understanding of sex, as hinted at in Dad Animals—it is funny but unkind. The slick veneer of aluminum, acrylic and translucent photographs encases a messy interior, within which float hazy images of memory and emotion. The combination of QT/WF aesthetic and bodily, intimate content yields this Other, mysterious entity, that is both spectral and clinical. “Alien,” I have heard viewers describe the Fond Things. “Uncanny.” “Clinical.” “Torture.” I do not view these pieces as particularly twisted or violent, as some members of my audience did, but I believe this comes down to our contrasting relationships with sex. For me there has always been a distance, a humor, a sense of jaded futility in sex; for others this attitude, as it is expressed in My Fond Things, comes across as destructive. So perhaps, somewhere in the middle, we arrive at some new understanding of lovemaking.  

---

7 As will be revisited in Unguided Tour.
8 I detest this term, but it feels appropriate here. Love-making. The manufacturing of it.
FRANCES STARK, COLLAGE AND TEXT

To be clear: I am not a fan of Frances Stark’s affinity for cultural appropriation, as in her 2013 piece *Put a Song In Your Thing*, in which she thought it prudent to coopt the style of daggering in a completely uncouth\(^9\) comparison of herself (a middle-aged white artist and professor) to black performers and hip hop artists\(^10\). That said, here I will be discussing her non-offensive oeuvre. Stark moves fluidly between both conventional and unconventional media, which I do find exciting: from cut-paper collage to publishing to video, cybersex performances\(^11\) and Powerpoint presentations. In

\(^9\) read: racist
\(^10\) Real quote from Stark: “That’s what rap is, and that’s what I do” (Griffin 84)
the context of my own work, I am interested specifically in her text-driven collage works, which admittedly are very visually attractive.\footnote{12 Again, I will always award good form.}

Collage, of course, has a particular significance and grounding in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In an interview with Rick Poynor, cultural critic David Banash says: “Tristan Tzara, André Breton, Ezra Pound, Walter Benjamin, William S. Burroughs, D.W. Griffith, John Cage, Kenneth Goldsmith, Andy Warhol, Steve Tomasula, just about any one I was interested in seemed to be cutting things apart and reassembling them” (Poynor). So there is a tradition of collage being used as a primarily politicized form of visual construction, where critique and nostalgia are used to respond to the possibilities and limits of a growing commodity culture. Stark, however, coopts the form of collage for personal rather than political ends. The work is often inspired by the autobiographical and the literary, but takes graphic cues from minimalism or Fluxus art. Stark uses text from writers\footnote{13 Mostly male.} including Miller, Beckett, Goethe and Robbe-Grillet to reflect a personal interior space of self-doubt and to explore personal threads of being a mother, a professor, a writer and artist—sometimes to fairly humorous effect.

Over half of Martin Prinzhorn’s write-up on Stark’s exhibition \textit{A Torment of Follies} focuses on Witold Gombrowicz’s novel \textit{Ferdyduke}, the starting point of Stark’s large-scale collages—which goes to show the importance of the source text. Within his dense breakdown of this reference, Prinzhorn outlines references to Dickens, Kafka, Laurence Sterne and Jean Paul. The references to literature and its history are storied and deep-rooted. Stark both integrates a sequence of \textit{Ferdyduke} into the work, and also takes the text as inspiration for visual motifs. Excerpts of the novel are integrated with vaudeville-like dance figures and playful ornamental and material details.
A 2011 review of Stark’s exhibition *This could become a gimmick [sic] or an honest articulation of the workings of the mind* tells us this:

To a Selected theme (Emerson v Nietzsche), 2008, literally casts the cover of Friedrich Nietzsche’s 1908 book Ecce Homo as its subject matter, with a blue pansy blossom covering the cover’s title and the male figure. The work is part of a 2000 series titled after Nietzsche’s final book, which discloses his own interpretation of his achievement, development, and meaning of his oeuvre - a theme that Stark’s work echoes adamantly. Similarly, the final work in the show, *I must explain (again)*, 2009, is a text scroll that spills over onto the floor, wherein the artist endlessly explains herself as her words slowly roll away and out of view, not unlike Nietzsche’s sanity or the illusive nature of the creative process itself. This could become a gimmick [sic] or an honest articulation of the workings of the mind is ultimately not unlike Robbe-Grillet’s *The Voyeur*, which places the audience inside the mind of Mathias, the protagonist. Here, we are inside Stark’s mind. (Garza 43)

Which is all to say: Frances Stark works with a lot of existing literature to explore herself. The writing tends toward the modernist, male, absurd: highbrow to the point of impenetrability. An
article in *Modern Painters* says this: “Self-doubting, self-deprecating, self-critical, self-conscious, self-involved, self-reflexive, self-indulgent, self-obsessive, self-pleasuring: All are adjectives (some critical, some factual) that have been thrown at Stark over the years” (84). I think all of these adjectives do apply, particularly “self-indulgent and self-obsessive.” Honestly, I do not particularly like what Stark is all about; but I discuss her here because the overlaps between our approaches to using text are irrefutable. And perhaps I am the same.

Another artist/poet who has worked often with text,14 Dena Yago informs visual impressions of intimacy with her writing, sometimes collapsing photo, object and poem. She, like I, often begins a train of thought in writing and proceeds “to disassemble the nucleotides of the intimate and personal,” then reassembles them into destabilizing formations that expand outwards (Tasman). Yago says in an interview with DIS Magazine: “When thinking about making an image or a sculpture I would ultimately become very disappointed, because of the richness and multi-valence of language. Poetry and writing had become a way I could draw out landscapes and relationships between objects” (Tasman). Yago uses text to suggest a position from which—or toward which—to experience the work. In writing we talk about gesturing; there is an entire genre dedicated to “hint fiction,” which I think is an apt way to think about my work, as a collection of hints.

---

14 Whom, I profess, I like considerably more.
The intractable pain of limited motion
and feeling uninvolved.
The hurt wants its feeding.
It's not fed by full force collision against a stationary wall.
Not try to look undead but just barely alive,
the softest way of dying happens inside yourself.
I am incapacitated, dazed, and every time the turnstile turns
another hell gains entry.
How to plumb the aggravation
that tears at the walls of patience with swift blows
scored by the impatient tapping of acrylics on laminate.
Violation of a crowd to the tune of
"Do you ever feel like a plastic bag?"

Dena Yago, Untitled, 2014

Dena Yago, Heat Island, 2014
“Unguided Tour” is the last entry in Susan Sontag’s 1977 collection of short stories, *I, Etcetera*. The story is an assemblage of phrases, tags and slivers of luminous detail. It is essentially a dialogue between a traveler and someone else, taking place after a trip has ended. Resorting to every cliché of European travel, it reflects on the vain attempt to see “the beautiful things, the old things,” in the company of a lover and under the conditions of modern tourism. From cafes, postcards, the seduction of waiters, standard complaints, unrequited yearnings—the entire terrain of cliché is traversed.

The traveler, an exhausted, jaded tourist, is confronted by a potential new lover who insists repeatedly: “You should have taken me instead.” The sex scenes from the trip—with the waiter and with the past lover—reveal no discernable difference in tone or treatment. They are interchangeable. Whether it is Sontag’s waiter or “him,” makes no difference. “It wouldn’t have been different. I would have left you too,” as Sontag’s protagonist says.

---

“Cliché,” interestingly, refers to both a trite expression and a photographic negative.
I am an exhausted, jaded tourist, questioning the whole ritual of anything. In (Broadsides) I excerpted sections from Sontag's story and revised them minimally, tailoring the text to my own experiences by replacing nouns and pronouns. “The comely waiter” becomes “the comely Italian,” “him” becomes “E,” “the hotel” becomes “the apartment.” These alterations, essentially
inconsequential, serve to highlight the interchangeability of the narrator’s experiences and my own—in effect, the interchangeability of anyone’s primal emotional experiences. The revised text was then organized across three “broadsides,” which were blown up to a scale that is not intimate and printed on a substrate that is not precious. In this vein, the work in Unguided Tour is modeled after the QT/WF aesthetic—aluminum, plastic, created digitally, printed mechanically. Ostensibly the pieces are inert, formal sculptural entities; but upon inspection they yield an experience that becomes time-based, as the act of reading necessarily is. The QT/WF sensibility acts as a Trojan horse to lure the viewer with one expectation, and then serve up another entirely. I view this as a tactic of defamiliarization.

In Unguided Tour I am interested in the notion of the reader’s insertion into the text they are reading. As Sara Meyer writes of “Unguided Tour,” “It does not matter which place or characters we are dealing with. The same discourse may be applied to a variety of interchangeable role players, literary or “real” ones, who participate in and follow the rules of this particular kind of grammar—the grammar of tourism” (Meyer 55). Using texts from Sontag, Lydia Davis and Eula Biss (the latter two which explore themes of family, inheritance love and sex), I treat the texts as collage objects, similarly to the way the Helmut Newton scans were used in Dad Animals. I am seeking loose junctures where Eula Biss’ ruminations on inheritance/inevitability meet with Sontag’s meditations on interchangeability and Lydia Davis’ account of a daughter inheriting the dilemmas of her mother and her mother’s mother; where Davis’ quippy explanation of how sex is done relates to Sontag’s exhausted dismissal of lasting love. The levitating Skype hand in (Lydia and Skype Hand) becomes a motif that reappears in (Broadsides), a sort of visual letter that strings a thread from Davis to Sontag,

---

16 Broadsides, in poetry, referring to a letter-pressed, often precious poster featuring a poem; usually between letter- and tabloid- sized.
17 I was not able to find further information on Sara Meyer, I do not know her credentials or current occupation; but I do know she has written a damn good essay on Sontag’s fiction.
18 “How It Is Done,” Lydia Davis; and The Balloonists, Eula Biss
while the complementary high- and low-placements of *(Eula and My Hand)* and *(Lydia and Skype Hand)* create a relationship of vertical movement.

I think about the work under the terms David Lazar applies to the form of the essay. In “Occasional Desire: On the Essay and the Memoir,” he writes:

The essay leans toward the profane, toward a severe attitude concerning memory, and the persona performing it. It mixes memory and desire, and tries to separate them, to disinfect the effects of fearful or dubious desires. It desires to understand its desire. It threatens to sink the narrative ship, to send chronology rolling away down a steep hill, while it stops and argues with itself. The essayist accepts the reader looking over her shoulder—or it may enlist the reader as an accomplice, an intimate, in the process of self-examination, in the processes of asking difficult questions of any subject it turns to. But in its classic form, the essay doesn’t quite know where the hell it’s going to go from the outset. (104)

I believe, like Lazar, that an essay or a work of art has permission to tussle with an idea, rather than being obligated to land on an agenda. The works in *Unguided Tour* desire to understand their own desire, they mix their constituent parts, confuse time and place; they are figuring out, alongside the viewer, where they are going. Meyer writes: “It is through the dynamics of reading that the submerged emotions of longing, pain, loss, and alienation can surface at last, and it is through the specific engagement of the reader with the text that other relationships the story speaks of come alive” (Meyer 60). In this statement we may trade “reader” for “viewer” and “text” for “artwork,” and be left with how I want my work to be experienced. The text and my ensuing artwork teases the reader/viewer’s desire to arrive at interpretation, to colonize the material and control it. Instead, however, the reader/viewer is left to identify a line or moment of relevance or resonance, and continue the route through the text or artwork.

Meyer argues that “Unguided Tour” “evokes a pained awareness of how impossible it is to experience anything that is not mediated for us by a multitude of cultural agencies, a variety of

---

19 It is perhaps telling that I first came across “Unguided Tour” in an anthology not of fiction but of essays *(The Next American Essay*, ed. John D'Agata).*
‘guidebooks’ ruling even the most private sensations and emotional responses” (Meyer 55). The use of collaged elements in *Unguided Tour* to explore this interior space of longing takes a private experience and mediates it via an understanding of preexisting artifacts—or extant “cultural agencies.” Both photography and the tourist are engaged in the act of collecting and accumulating—they are packaging reality, framing an infinite variety of landscapes and people, which in its plenitude amounts to sameness. As Sontag writes in *On Photography*, “Taking photographs has set up a chronic voyeuristic relation to the world which levels the meaning of all events” (11). With meaning leveled, interpretation is made elusive, perhaps impossible.

Meyer describes the story as “a patchwork of ready-made utterances” (54). I cannot help but connect this to the Duchampian precedent of the readymade; so here we are working with ideas of extracting found material and reassembling it, or “patching” it back together. In *Broadsides* this happens on the wall, or rather the image of a wall. What seem to be private snapshots are taped on the wall next to scans of books; John Williams and Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum make an appearance, on the pages where their characters begin to fall out of love. Lydia Davis deliberates on inheritance. All the while, Sontag’s displaced text floats in the negative space, tenuously unattributed.

In *(Eula and My Hand)*, the scanned image of a hand thumbing through the pages of Eula Biss’s *The Balloonists* is printed onto an aluminum plate, which perches on a transparent shelf installed seven feet high. The text on the right page reads: “Are we going to keep living the same stories our parents lived?” Due to the luminescence of the aluminum substrate and the distance from the viewer, it can only be read at a certain angle (obliquely) and at a close proximity, where the viewer is standing almost directly beneath the piece. I was interested in creating a set of parameters for viewing which would make physical (or literal) the obstacles to interpretation which are explored in Sontag’s text. As a counterpoint or complement, the text in *(Lydia and Skype Hand)* requires the
viewer to get on hands and knees and read the text beneath the Skype hand that levitates over it. These two pieces explore different ways in which the access of content can be defamiliarized.
In *(Backsides)*, an indistinct but recognizable image is sliced into, cut away to reveal two “eyes” with tongue-like flaps of gel medium hanging underneath. The filmy image of a female figure sticking her ass coyly toward the camera, spreading her legs, is a Skype screenshot taken while I was in Florence. The boudoir booty screenshot is suspended in an acrylic gel medium, but the transfer
process has been prematurely terminated so that a papery haze exists over the image. The “eyes” become revelatory windows, a peeling-back to reveal something innocuous: the poetic gesture of a male figure walking away, apparently unaware of the lens following him.

Two modes of vernacular photography are merged here: the travel snapshot with the Skype screenshot.\textsuperscript{20} The image of a retreating man, first seen on the leftmost piece in \textit{Broadsides}, is here

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{20} The Skype screenshot is interesting as a new form of image-making because it destabilizes the established relationship between voyeur and subject. On Skype, I have control over the timing of when I press command-shift-3; but I have no control over the webcam at the other end, I am not positioning the lens. Likewise with the images of myself, I am in control of my body’s position in relation to the camera, but the person at the other end decides the moment at which to take the screen capture.
\end{quote}
pictured again in two stills of retreat. What the uninformed viewer will not know is that the retreating man is the A of the text in *(Broadsides)*—the A who vied against E for my elusive affection, the A for whom I fell while I was in Florence, in a betrayal of my overseas lover E, who remained waiting for me in America, even as A and I were vacationing Easter weekend to the French Riviera. Everything in the body of work is connected, but these connections are not immediately clarified for the viewer’s digestion. The viewer cannot colonize my experience but they can feel its residue through the proxy of the image. *(Backsides)* is my inside joke in *Unguided Tour*, for its context was the moment in which Sontag’s text became real and applicable for me.
AGAINST INTERPRETATION

Sontag makes this claim: “interpretation means plucking a set of elements (the X, the Y, the Z, and so forth) from the whole work. The task of interpretation is virtually one of translation. The interpreter says, Look, don't you see that X is really - or, really means -A? That Y is really B? That Z is really C?” (“Against Interpretation” 2). The myriad discrete elements in Unguided Tour each carry a weight of preexisting associations, which are situated together to synthesize a dialogue. But each part is not meant to represent a particular symbolic voice, or serve a particular political purpose. There is no X, Y, Z that corresponds to an A, B C. A motif, a certain phrase, a formal relationship, a material decision, does not embody a specific idea, but rather is part of an expansive experience being crafted.

As for how all the work should be read (or not), I will address the question with this anecdote: in Where Art Belongs, Chris Kraus recounts the story of when Walter Benjamin traveled to Moscow in the winter of 1926. This was chronicled in his diary. Apparently, Benjamin wanted to see a woman named Asja Lacis, to whom his first book, One Way Street, was dedicated. But as it turned out, she was living with Bernhard Reich, who happened to be a close friend of Benjamin’s. So Benjamin became a kind of third wheel. Only twice during the six weeks did Benjamin go out alone with Asja. Kraus says of all this: “the diary isn’t about heartbreak. Rather, it is informed by heartbreak” (111).

What forms the experiential center of a work is not a sum of parts or an extractable concept. Kraus describes longing as a thing that can be sampled, as a drug is sampled, a piece of music is sampled, an image is sampled, a text is sampled. It can be excerpted, it can be collaged.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Garza, Evan J. “Frances Stark.” Rev. of *This could become a gimmick: [sic] or an honest articulation of the workings of the mind*, artist Frances Stark. *Art Papers* January/February 2011: 43. Print.


