

Privatised Deprivation

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Author: Rafael De Lima

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Introduction

Visual culture constitutes a fundamental part of the social fabric in post-industrial capitalist nations. It has been widely observed that photography has the ability to legitimise certain power structures and grand narratives (Bourdieu 73). In the words of photomedia artist Joan Fontcuberta, photographic images have been credited with an authority over lifelike representation, with the capacity to disguise their function as the messenger of partisan ideologies (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya)¹. On the other hand, one could argue that visual culture spearheads the endless flow of digital information made possible by contemporary technology. In other words, the binary data we are fed on a daily basis takes its more poignant form as imagery. A consequence of this visual phenomenon has been the development of a virtual, free-for-all, nearly infinite library comprised of visual junk which fleshes out the world, its inhabitants and their impact on the planet in ways never seen before. Taking these two ideas into consideration, the artwork presented in this research paper deals with the creation and recontextualisation of images which present themselves self-reflexively as a works of fine art, as advertising and as a part of this digital flow of visual junk.

The artwork, entitled Privatised Deprivation, follows in the traditions of Dada and Situationist *détournement* in order to reflect on the state of affairs of contemporary capitalism. As a part of this critical line of thought, it proposes a critique of visual culture's active agency in this process. It appropriates the visual and written language of advertising, more specifically real estate and land development advertisements. As a visual language, advertising promotes a lifestyle based on an irrational reliance created by private credit and public debt. Such behaviour, where private properties and their owners take priority over public spaces, creates so-called non-places (Augé 78), the ubiquitous, faceless urban corridors shared by citizens and virtual capital alike. This artwork also explores the

idea of the image as an end-in-itself commodity. It updates the concept of the spectacle, with all of its current repercussions in the 21st century, and argues that, with the aid of digital technology, the cinematic has pervaded the lives of everyone. One of its main concerns is to present and engage the spectator with issues which concern all citizens living in the hyper-connected world of virtualised means of production. Despite being originally motivated by critical thought, *Privatised Deprivation* recognises the impossibility of achieving the anti-establishment goals proposed by idealistic artworks and writings of the 20th century, such as Guy Debord's manifesto. Without any outward feelings of resentment or helplessness, it tries to deal with the impossibility of operating outside the capitalist framework within contemporary art practice.

One of my main personal reasons for pursuing the concepts of *Privatised Deprivation* is that it allows me to reflect on my own condition as a "legal alien" incapable of fully acclimatising to its host culture. More specifically, how my role as an artist can be affected by this situation. Here I borrow from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their concept of minor literature, (Deleuze and Guattari 16) an idea that revolves around Franz Kafka. For them Kafka, as a writer and as a citizen who was a foreigner in his own land, managed to quietly subvert the values of the society in which he lived and had to learn how to operate within his environment as an outsider, living in a perpetual state of inner diaspora.

This project also celebrates cities and urban spaces as the places which facilitate a confluence of ideas and interactions leading to the greatest human achievements in both creative and scientific fields. However, in the so-called post-industrial era, the city has become a place which keeps most of its inhabitants running on a metaphorical treadmill, spending and overspending their incomes on unattainable symbols of status. It became the stage for an exclusive game played at breakneck speed for the benefit of a few, a vicious circle of never-ending distractions, squander and waste.

The cinematic as advertisement

Privatised Deprivation started out as a vehicle to analyse hidden agendas in visual culture. The origins of the ideas explored here can be traced back to a photo series started in 2011 entitled *Real Estate Real Talk*. In it, I sought to depict private and commercial properties for sale, rewording the conspicuous "For Sale" signs in an attempt to flesh out the commercial nature of land development and the seductive dreams they represent to the middle class.. Inscribing a neatly presented, ready for sale property with crude jokes or a confrontational anti-sales tagline was at first a way to subvert the one-way top-down communication loop the viewer submitted to when looking at these images. This approach was inspired by the film *They Live* (John Carpenter, 1988) (figure 1) and subsequently by Slavoj Žižek's lectures and essay on the film (Žižek 2009). *They Live* depicts the

human race unknowingly enslaved by alien invaders who brainwash their subjects – earthlings – by continually broadcasting concealed messages of submission via mass media and billboard advertising. Žižek points out that the *ideologico-critical glasses* that appear in the film – a resistance guerrilla group creates special goggles which allow them to decode the messages and identify the aliens – constitute a tool which allows us to flesh out the hidden ideology of contemporary consumerist hedonism. Žižek claims that this hedonism operates in much more sinister ways than we might realise at first, disguising a quasi-authoritarian regime under the guise of the post-ideological *end-of-history* times of today. This project has a similar aim: by presenting images which may seem familiar at first but, having been re-contextualised and re-imagined, to expose their ideological leanings.

Another of my main concerns has been to correlate formal concerns with socio-political ones, while remaining outside the arena of politically engaged social protest. As I developed my approach to photography, I realised that my concepts for artworks came from abstractions, from mental images rather than a desire to figuratively portray subjects around me or to stage fictitious scenes. My method then became about finding ways to devise panoramas where disparate images collide to create their own visual logic. In other words, my mental impressions of places and people take priority over a more objective representation directly captured from the world that surrounds us. Hence, my intention that the images created for this series would toe the line between straightforward representation and absurdity, between visual seamlessness and an amalgamation of seemingly discrepant ideas.



As this project evolved, the very definition of *advertisement* and the way to tackle it changed quite substantially. When pondering the nature of digital media, the tool I would use to realise this artwork, I started thinking about how, by making previously high-end technology affordable to professionals and amateurs alike, it had helped the aesthetics of cinema to seep into other visual media. Reaching that conclusion took me to *the cinematic* as the ultimate form of subliminal propaganda, in other words as *the ultimate*

advertisement – an aesthetic which all other forms of visual mass media have aimed to emulate throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Here I understand *the cinematic* as a set of conventions which have pervaded the visual since cinema's first days, mostly by the Hollywood film industry. In the words of professor Douglas Kellner, these conventions include clichéd plot structures, dramatic lighting, making use of the high contrast and depth of celluloid film texture shot by high end camera equipment, dazzling visual effects, expansive sets or far-flung locations. All these persuasive techniques in visual communication work in tandem to promote American ideals in politics, economics, foreign policy, and even personal relationships, to non-Americans around the world (Kellner 4-5). However, here I employ the term *cinematic* in reference not only to cinema, but also to television, ads and online videos, amongst other visual mass media which owes some influence to the seduction and persuasion of cinema.

This diegetic element, which seems to exert far more influence on real life than the other way around, became a central point of this research. As much as the semiotic approach employed by Roland Barthes to dissect photographs and advertisements is admirable and influential, he clearly suffered a shock when coming from photography to the analysis of cinematic images (Polan 71). Therefore I thought it necessary to break away from his approach for a number of reasons. For instance, *Privatised Deprivation* entails an element of narrative within still images which Barthes did not account for in his writings.



Figure 2: Rafael de Lima "Privatised Deprivation #1" (2013). Video installation/website.
<https://vimeo.com/79741726>



Figure 3: Rafael de Lima "Privatised Deprivations #2" (2013). Video installation/website.
<https://vimeo.com/79741726>

The star as everyone/The diegetic as spectacle

Reasoning that cinema has been the most efficient means of delivering ideology to the masses in the industrial age, I figured that dealing with advertisements alone would not suffice to fully flesh out the ideas behind this project. Even though cinema itself has recently lost some of its mass appeal, it has established the blueprint for how to seduce a mass audience. All forms of visual mass media still pursue the cinematic as the quintessential visual experience to be emulated. In other words, *Privatised Deprivation* initially set out to decode and critique advertisements and evolved to become an investigation of the visual influence of cinematic strategies in society via mass media.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord discusses the role of the star – not only the movie star but also the politician – within the spectacle, and characterises them as characterless maverick who serves, on movie, television and now computer screens, as a surrogate version of the audience's desired lifestyles, frustrated personalities, their unfulfilled hopes and aspirations (Debord). This phenomenon has created, over time, a global top-down hierarchy in which a number of developed societies control underdeveloped ones, not via economic hegemony but via the spectacle itself (unpaginated). Rereading Debord, it dawned on me to insert a mix of characters from different movies in my images. In figure 3, *Privatised Deprivation #2*, I picked the figures of two particular actors: Jean-Paul Belmondo – as a stand-in for Jean-Luc Godard – and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Godard's oeuvre has been about the way in which cinema manipulates its audience and its role as the soft power branch of global capitalism and America. As an artist, he has managed to remain irreducible in his leftist stances, writing and directing many movies that are based on his political beliefs. On the other hand, Schwarzenegger is a political figure from the right who was at first seduced by images of America, eventually

becoming a member of the same industry which promotes American ideology via seductive, spectacular images. This concept in itself is particularly interesting to me, having come from a society, in my case Brazil, which severely lacked in spectacular values and was prone to being seduced by images imported from the outside.

Images produced in visually commodified societies add another dimension to the ideas discussed so far: the way social mores, their ethical, moral and political parameters, have been influenced by the dramatic plot structures and acting methods of television shows and movies. As *Privatised Deprivation* is an artwork revolving mostly around still images, an interesting problem arose for me: is it possible to express narrative in a single photograph without relying on the photo series template. In George Baker's assessment of August Sander (72), he explains the problematic of expressing narrative via single images (figure 4). This suggested a hybrid approach to recreate that tension between quasi-cinematic narrativity and more photographic stasis. Hence I deemed appropriate to remove the generally smiley and relaxed, mostly female, models from product advertisements and replace them with macho men-on-a-mission action stars, who appear to purposelessly wander around, freed from the conflicts and resolutions of the three-act narrative structures they generally adhere to.

Another cinematic element in *Privatised Deprivation* is that of dystopia, commonly seen in science fiction, where a dark future has developed out of society's mistakes in the present. Initially serving as a cautionary tale with moralistic undertones, dystopia has since lost its appeal to scare or educate the audience. Hal Foster comments that dystopia has been appropriated by neo-conservatives to symbolise any system which differs from neoliberal capitalist ideology (Foster 76). In *Privatised Deprivation* this interplay of ideas finds its equivalent in a space between consumerist utopia, as represented by the so-called "artist's impressions" of architectural projects, and moralist dystopia, springing from the traditions of social documentary and their more indexical approach.

Aesthetically, there is also an element of reaction against what I perceive as a "new sincerity" in a generation somewhat younger than mine; something akin to a nostalgia for "real" experiences in a world of digital artifice. This ideological shift is matched by a trivialisation and lack of direction regarding bigger social issues, if not a complete withdrawal from them. Walter Benjamin criticised similar developments during the Weimar Republic as a simple aestheticisation of class struggle (Baker 77). Though such Marxist-influenced critique is outside the realm of this artwork, I would like it to show the ambiguous feelings towards a middle-of-the-road leftist stance when dealing with political issues.

Privatised Deprivation is a project defined by the discrepancies it embraces. While striving not to be a simplistic or unintentional embodiment of current

neoliberal values, my artistic pursuits take me close to *subversive* territory – again, a concept plagued with problems in the 21st century. These problems manifest themselves in the cynicism felt in post-industrial societies towards any kind of change, positive or not, that the future might bring – it could be argued that this cynicism stems from boredom, which takes us to the territory of entitlement and privilege. Hailing from a place that is not regarded as the developed West, this privilege had always created some uneasiness within myself, a schism in my conscience as something which needs to be dealt with and as a situation which can never successfully done with. As someone who is been caught between polar opposites for most of my life, I had always felt the urge to learn the actual terms of the dialogue between the upper and lower echelons of the global marketplace – some might call that diplomacy, or even empathy. Doing so would allow me to use the appropriate channels of communication between opposite parties in order to represent a different point of view, which is one of cultural resistance to a worldwide monoculture. This monoculture, which is the product of a very specific socio-economic system, is monolingual and has historically manifested itself in a top-down manner – geographically speaking from North to South, West to East. For the rest, who are grossly under and misrepresented in this exchange, and whose odds in the relationship are so low, the only solution is to be a gentle subversive of this world order.



Figure 4: August Sander "Portrait of Anton Raderscheidt" (1928). Silver gelatin print on paper.

The city as the stage for the spectacle

In 2003, Eva and Franco Mattes of 0100101110101101.org created an urban intervention in which a fake Nike shopfront, featuring its famous swoosh logo and sports apparel, was used to announce the bogus purchase of a Vienna public square and its subsequent name change to Nikeplatz, the name of their art project (figure 5). With this work, the

Mattes successfully managed to appropriate, subvert, confront and estrange – an approach which has influenced how I think about presenting my own work to an audience. In an urban context, they recreated the spirit of the 1960s performance artists and their unsellable, ephemeral art. Professor Ruggero Eugeni referred to this artwork when discussing urban spaces as the current embodied representations of the spectacle (9).



Figure 5: Eva and Franco Mattes "Nikeplatz: (2003). Intervention.

Privatised Deprivation follows a similar line of thought – that of the city as the ultimate receptacle for spectacular values. However, my approach differs from Eva and Franco Mattes in a sense that my urban intervention is contemplative not disruptive. Instead of intervening with the city flow, here urban images are manipulated in order to peel off the many layers of data, advertisements and imagery which stand between the city dweller and their immediate environment. Representations of cityscapes which create a estrangement, in a subtle Brechtian way, of elements we might have grown accustomed to but which when scrutinised from a different become strange nonetheless. That should allow the viewer to rethink the way people relate to the environment surrounding them.

Despite the fact that renderings of artist's impressions were the original blueprint for this project, there was a need to imbue the images in *Privatised Deprivation* with a more cinematic, otherworldly appeal. Nevertheless, the goal was also to avoid the dystopian vistas of lush Hollywood sci-fi productions as they are meant to awe and enthrall movie-going audiences but not necessarily provide a different take on. The challenge was how to make the mundane urban strange again.

My original idea was to photograph poorer or undeveloped urban spaces and incorporate them as contrasting, though still visually coherent, parts of the cityscapes to be featured in the advertisements I worked on. However, the relative high level of social cohesion in Australia, the interference of city

councils and the actions of private property owners posed me with a challenge. Faced with a lack of run down vistas, a decision was made to incorporate parts of images from books, leaflets, newspapers or the internet, as a way of heightening the visual effects of a make-believe landscape. And having embraced a more cinematic approach, I specifically chose not to focus on the causes and consequences of gentrification alone as that it would somehow diminish the scope designed for this project to achieve.

The desired effect was that the resulting images would come closer to resembling the contemporary version of urban alienation by emphasising a disjointed feeling of commercialised social life. A 1990s American architectural movement dubbed New Urbanism, which was advocated a return to idyllic ideas of suburban life, raising it to a new level of cinematic, idealised Disney-fication, can also exemplify this phenomenon. Comprised of master-planned communities, removed from the more organic growth and bustle of the inner city, it is a throwback to a reality that never existed outside of old movies and advertisements. Its consequences are a sense of segregation and the exclusion of unwanted elements (grungy or poor) from social life in urban environments, while creating a daily life based fictional narratives from mass-media imagery (Burris 69).

The idea of “urban *photogénie*” as developed by Jean-François Chevrier can also be applied here. He proposes that the current makeover of urban spaces as stages for the spectacle has affected the way photomedia artists depict cities, as exemplified in the work of Thomas Demand, Edgar Martins, amongst other artists (figures 6 & 7) (Chevrier et al 173). Photography, previously assigned an indexical, objective, almost scientific view of the world by theorists and photographers alike, has been turned upside down and has become instead the manipulative tool of choice for artists and marketers alike. With this project, I am trying to comment on the perils of visual culture and how it can seduce its viewers into an unattainable lifestyle. This is also a way of reflecting on my own work as an artist in order not to simply become a producer of spectacular, seductive, unreflecting art.



Figure 6: Thomas Demand "Public Housing" (2003). Type C photograph, 100cm x 157cm



Figure 7: Edgar Martins "This is Not a House (Untitled, Phoenix)" (2009). C-print, 150cm x 120cm

The denial of seduction and the flattering of perspective

Having witnessed in person many master works of Japanese art of previous centuries – woodblock prints, ink wash paintings and Nihonga (a fusion style of Japanese painting started in the mid-19th century) – their use of perspective left a long lasting impression. The people portrayed appear as just a background to the main topic, the natural landscape. It appears that the desired effect on the viewer was to create a space for transcendence

and introspection. This approach seems to me the opposite of the visual accuracy pursued by more realistically inclined Western art. Applying these concepts to photography and more contemporary aesthetics, it is as if the more technically correct, more photo-like perspective draws you in to the picture, making you believe the depicted object is present, instead of just a simple two dimensional representation.

My work always tries to self-consciously present itself as fabrications, subjective creations. The principles of Western aesthetics in photography and figurative painting or sculpture often claim a certain cultural neutrality, even a scientific inevitability, photography itself being the result of major scientific research and development. Deviating from these lines of thought has always been important to my practice. Previous work somehow avoided one-point or two-point perspective, for reasons that were not yet clear to me – for example, my portrayals of urban landscapes had a tendency to emphasise horizontal lines and flat perspectives rather than depth. These aesthetic choices of flatness and layering may have been caused by a longstanding fascination with Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (figure 8). Originally a landscape painter, he managed to abstract the city spectacle into idealised shapes and colours, displaying an ideal of the way his mind pictured a city.

The challenge for *Privatised Deprivation* was how to employ photography in a way which made linear perspective or lighting both unreal and superfluous. Photoshop has made an impact on the way still images are perceived as real or unreal, but that was not the route I wanted to take. The solution had to do with my own personal experiences in Japan, where I had become acquainted with Japanese aesthetics.

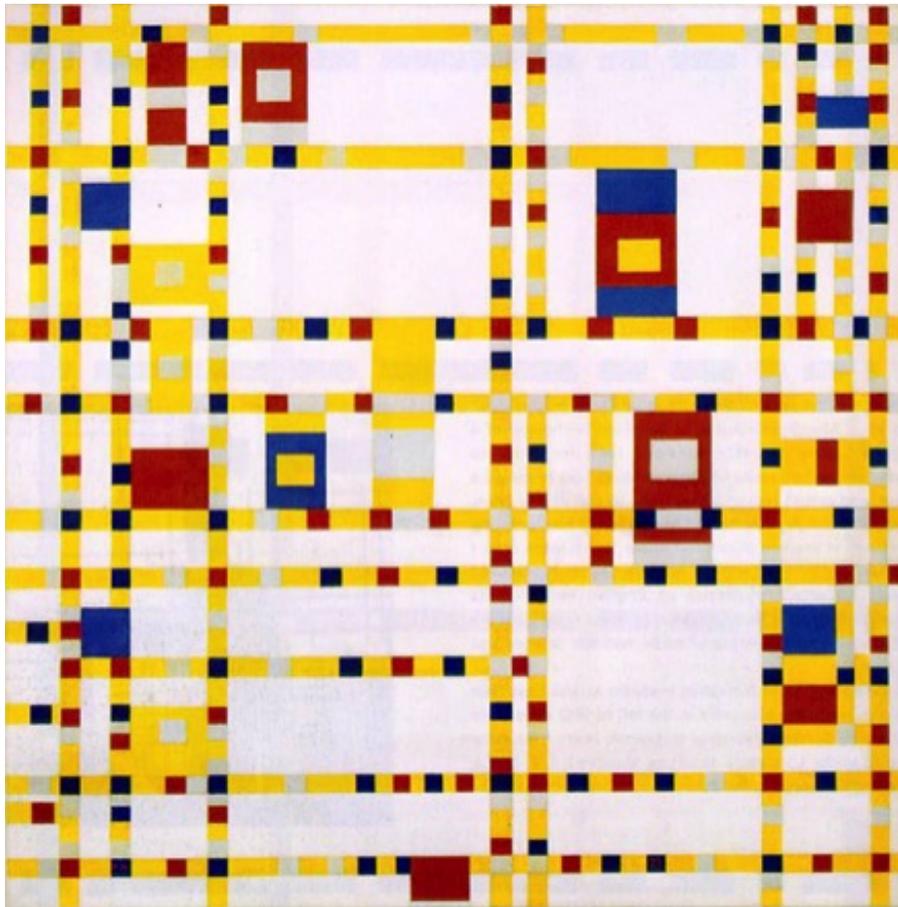


Figure 8: Piet Mondrian "Broadway Boogie Woogie" (1942-43). Oil on canvas, 127 cm x 127 cm

Japanese landscape illustrations were never intended to objectively represent any given vista; nor were they concerned to astonish the viewer with a glimpse of the sublime. Unlike European paintings of the same era, they employed a bird's eye view point which perhaps reflect some Buddhist beliefs such as harmony of the individual with the universe (Vartanian and Wada, 81). This idea is visually expressed in the flattened, layer-upon-layer perspectives of landscape paintings, as opposed to the more mathematical perspective of their European counterparts. Japanese landscapes are said to reconstruct rather than reproduce nature, while the subjective tone with which the artist has imbued the image is of higher value than verisimilitude (83).



Figure 9: Hokusai "The 36 Views of Mount Fuji (South Wind, Clear Sky)" (1830).
Woodblock print. 25 cm x 38 cm.

Hokusai employed perspective in his Ukiyo-e images in a very singular way (figure 9). Living in the early 19th century, he was aware of trends in European art to the point of employing two-point perspective in his images. However he did that in a way which subscribed to his very traditional Japanese way of seeing. Figure 9 for instance shows Western perspective employed almost in a "wrong" way; the result is a fascinating example of one culture competing with another for aesthetic supremacy. I can understand the situation he had to negotiate: how plug in to a foreign culture which at the time saw itself as superior, while at the same time not being ashamed of the culture one has been brought up in.

An important modification to most of my images was to remove the sky from the photographs I originally shot. The landscapes were at first captured with a wide-angle lens and later overlaid with a flat grey cloudy sky shot with a telephoto lens. The resulting effect is that of a crooked linear perspective which has been abruptly cut halfway through the image, not unlike a theatre stage that does not try to hide its inner workings and machinery. Jeff Wall's *The Destroyed Room* has a similar feel; a single window within the photograph hints that the whole image was a construction, set in a studio.



Figure 10: Jeff Wall "The Destroyed Room" (1978). Transparency on lightbox. 159 cm x 234 cm

The sleekness of clumsiness

The spectacle is best understood as a culturally specific phenomenon, reliant on the affluence of the so-called post-industrial societies. The pursuit of affluence, be it national or personal, lies at the core of current socio-economical structures. Sleekness is one of tools the spectacle has at its disposal to seduce audiences. For artists, sometimes working at the margins of the mainstream, this situation sets up a conundrum: how to use the social platform provided by art to create an ongoing dialogue, while maintaining a degree of detachment and autonomy from the mainstream in order to keep this dialogue alive. As art can be a powerful tool for catharsis, and sometimes a dangerous weapon, these strengths have been often been neutralised by political and societal pressure.

Hal Foster has commented on the impossibility of being an artist who sets out to make objective social commentary and critique one's own culture of origin (90). This is the situation of artists who hail from a place such as the U.S., which has a culture very much indebted to the values of the spectacle and marketing seduction (93). This interplay between unintentionally endorsing one's culture and analytically debunking it makes up for the tension of another aesthetic choice within this project: that of clumsiness or a deliberate attempt at recreating lack of skill.

Japanese art critic Midori Matsui, when observing recent developments in contemporary Japanese art (33), proposed the existence of a movement she coined Micropop. This movement gathers apparently unrelated artists who have in common a certain marginality, geek culture, naive stylings, ideas that can be summarised in the Japanese aesthetic concept of *hetauma* (literally unskilled-skilled). Usually applied mostly to manga, this

concept lacks a direct equivalent in the West and it differs significantly from naïve art as the *hetauma* artist intentionally pursues an awkward, almost clumsy feel in their work; a major exponent of this so-called Micropop sensibility is Japanese contemporary artist Makoto Aida (figure 11). Matsui contextualised the Micropop aesthetics as a movement of gentle cultural resistance to major dominant linguistic and political forces, using Deleuze and Guattari's "minor literature" – which will be discussed in more detail later – as a reference point (35). This conceptual connection made me contemplate some of my own aesthetic decisions as this project progressed.

When considering the degree of seamlessness in the images of this project, a level of clumsiness and inadequacy would be desirable, if not inevitable. As previously mentioned, coming from a culture of tackiness, sleekness seemed at first like a superior way of visually communicating ideas. Later on, I realised it was just a more effective and seductive marketing tool. Nevertheless, having been caught within this paradox ever since and it seemed to me that a level of visual tackiness and clumsiness is a way of subtly subverting the paradigm of seductive images.

In this research, the proposed concept is to, metaphorically, create a puzzle, a maze, complete with the possibility that the artist may not be able to leave it. Regardless of its contradictory nature, this resolution strikes me as the perfect way to reflect mass media's influence on the jittery nature that shapes contemporary society. Real estate ads are particularly fascinating for the high aspirations they want to sell, and how they are based on very feeble economic and theoretical arguments. The irony itself is that images selling those aspirations are sometimes made in quite poor style. My work itself treads a very thin line where clunkiness is presented with a level of skill, and both the highs and lows average each other out in the end. Clunkiness is not simply employed as a tool to express irony towards what may be regarded as lesser forms of art. The main objective here is to engage the audience with equal amounts of humour and self-deprecation.



Figure 11: Makoto Aida "Ash Color Mountains" (2009-2011). Acrylic on canvas, 300 cm x 700 cm.

The digital as junk



Figure 12: Joan Fontcuberta "Orogenesis: Kandinsky" (2005). Digital Photograph, 120cm x 160cm.

The term *photogénie* as employed by Chevrier was originally coined by Jean Epstein, an early 20th century film director. With this term, Epstein sought to describe a visual aesthetic which situated his medium of choice – cinema – advocating that it should not simply borrow from other media, such as painting, photography or theatre but create a language of its own (Farmer 2010). Echoing another Fontcuberta quote, there is a case for applying a similar approach to digital media technology as well, as arguably the digital realm has transformed photography into a whole new different medium. He claims that film photography created the anomalous precedent for the artist as a “register” or “capturer” of images, as opposed to the more traditional role of the artist as a “writer” or “inscriber” of images. According to Fontcuberta, with digital technology visual artists now can once again write, but with pixels instead of paint (UOC) (figure 12).

Another consequence of digital media is what could be perceived as the breakdown of barriers between previously distinct media. Having the ability, with current technology, to use the same piece of equipment to create photography, video art, television, cinema or holiday snaps shows me that the only boundaries between these visual media are the pre-established genre conventions between all of them. Faced with this end of previous medium-specific differences, all we are left to deal with is binary data, decoded, read and saved as different file formats by computers and tablets. Thus, the computer screen becomes the mediator between people and any other form of information. And without these gadgets, we are left with mangled, unreadable, humanly undecipherable, and ultimately transient data – that is to say, junk.



Figure 13: etoy Corporation "TOYWAR" (1999-2000). Online intervention/performance

These thoughts ultimately led me to reflect as to how *Privatised Deprivation* ought to be exhibited. Having reached the conclusion that simply exhibiting these images as printed photos in gallery space might do them a disservice, seeing the staple white cube might rob the work of some of its vitality. A place for the ritual of explicit commercialism, as opposed to an art gallery, thus seemed like the ideal place to show this work. The Internet, whose allegedly main function consists of displaying ads on search engines to its users, seemed like the platform to for doing so. Thus I set out to create a website as a façade for a non-existent agency as a stage for selling the representation of proprieties or land and for reframing the work before it gets taken out of its original context and is reintroduced into the digital whirlwind of online binary data – or in other words, digital junk. As a matter of fact, this approach allowed me to build an all-round consistent way of tackling the topic of this project, that of the digital fake.



Figure 14: ®™ark "GWBush.com" (200). Website.

However, trying to anticipate the inevitable commercialisation and decontextualisation of this artwork does not simply constitute an attempt at protest fuelled by a mindless rebellious streak. I realised that this work, which started out as a conceptual photo collage commenting on the nature of capitalism and digital technology was starting to reach another dimension as a part of the traditions of Net Art, as established in its early days in the 1990s. The earlier works of Eva and Franco Mattes and jodi.org, their online interventions and misuse of binary code were particularly informative. But more importantly, art collectives such as etoy Corporation (figure 13) and ®™ark (figure 14), who revelled in the boundary-free nature of what now may be seen as more primitive incarnations of the Internet. By playing complex games with corporate brands – or even with then U.S. presidential candidate George W. Bush – and their online identities, these collectives managed to create an uneasiness with the status quo, still not acquainted with this virtual environment of the internet, in the form of corporate guerrilla warfare which was soon followed by lawsuits from above (Tribe and Jana 80). The reverberations of their actions can still be felt in actions by organisations such as Pirate Bay, a BitTorrent host who call themselves performance artists (The Pirate Bay Blog), and who are currently facing numerous copyright breach threats from a number of multinational corporations.

Nevertheless, my approach would sit closer to a younger artist who currently uses the Internet and digital media in his work, Cory Arcangel (figure 15) – who is renowned for his daft sense of humour. As a part of the first generation that has grown up as digital technology slowly took over Western societies, his work shows no sign of negativity or rebellion against the current order of things, in a very Warholian manner. In a way, it is an agreeable way of tackling your own position in the world; as much as *Privatised Deprivation* presents a side a rebellion, the website almost exists as a benign form of satire (figure 16). Putting a negative spin on it, it could be seen as a sign of resignation; however with a positive spin, it proposes that too many radicalisms of the past were misguided, thus showing us a way to look forward without resentment – there are contradictory feelings at play. Seeing I am personally not much of an activist, there is a sense that the corporate warfare pursued by net artists has been somehow diminished and even co-opted by current social networking systems.

As much as this project deals with subverting mainstream beliefs, its subversive aspects remain rather “minor” ones. Deleuze and Guattari (16) proposed the concept of *minor literature* when discussing the writings of Franz Kafka. As a writer, he faced the consequences of *detritorialisation*, the dismantling of an established society by another more powerful foreign one. In his hometown of Prague, he was a Czech Jew forced to write in German, the language of the dominant Austrian minority in his homeland. For Deleuze and Guattari, that situation creates all sorts of interesting issues: by writing in a language which was not his own, Kafka deterritorialised the German language in return; this allowed him to create his own genre of literature, which raised the political problems of his convoluted situation as an individual. There are repercussions of this proposition for my own situation as a theoretically fully functioning citizen who in fact struggles with marginalisation as a newcomer and for pursuing a line of work within the arts. In addition, further parallels can be drawn between Net Artists and the concept of deterritorialisation. Up until recently, the Internet had spawned a virtual world, free of national borders, striking fear into governments from all over the world. Net Artists came into play by denying the way in which the public at large had been using the Internet: for convenience, consumption, instant communication and networking. They had managed to overlay cyberspace’s ephemeral, transient nature by focusing on the glitches and little gaps within the system, or using its mainstream functions for completely different, contingent functions. Doing that, they proposed a new way of using the social construct that is the Internet, and deliberately reinvented its language as a system. Working from a stateless environment, Net Artists found what Deleuze and Guattari might call “[their] own third world” while in the process of reappropriating a dominant language or culture (18).



Figure 15: Cory Arcangel "Super Mario Clouds" (2002). Video installation with modded game cartridge, dimensions variable.

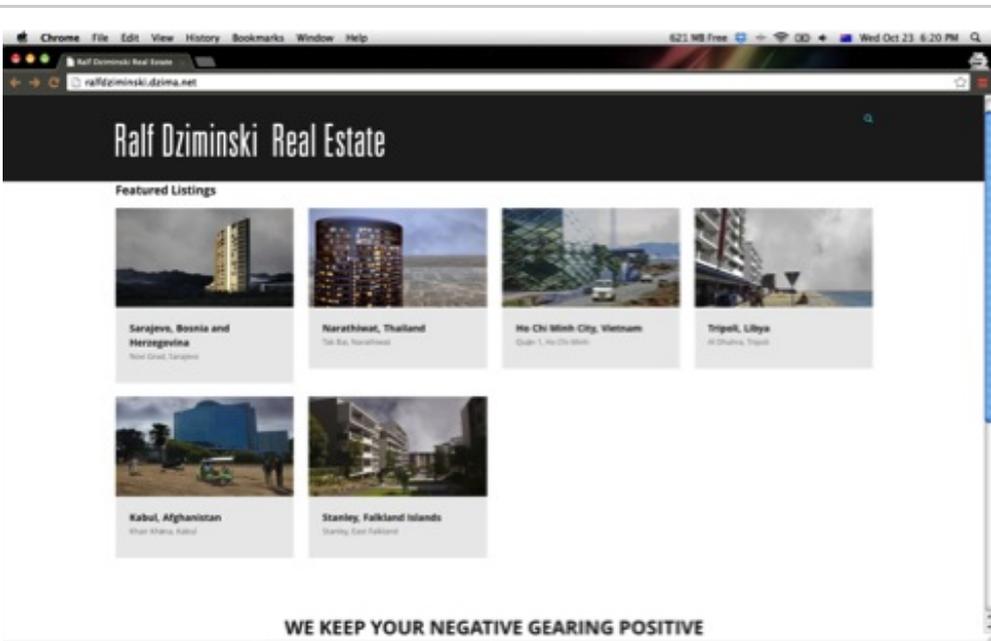


Figure 16: Rafael de Lima "Privatised Deprivation" (2013). Video installation/website.
<http://ralfdziminski.dzima.net/>

Conclusion

My work proposes a way of interpreting society in the current socio-political-climate: the idea that images have an unspoken power over people; the idea that society is not held together by principles of altruism or a master narrative guiding a nation's direction but that the spectacle is the actual glue that binds everything and everyone together; that digital media are the chemicals which compose that glue; that the city, more specifically metropolises and megalopolises, is the stage, or test tube, where all these chemical reactions are taking place. To emphasise that effect, this dissertation employed very distinct voices, such as that of Bourdieu, Debord or Deleuze and Guattari. However, here their ideas were applied with a slightly different meaning, one that may not have been

applicable at the time they produced their theoretical works. That has been one of the main challenges entailed in this paper: how to update some, by now, relatively anachronistic ideas to a more contemporary context.

The idea of the photographer working as the contemporary version of the painter of yesteryear, as proposed by Fontcuberta has been a great hand in this project. Also, some Japanese aesthetic concepts were brought to the fore as part of a personal belief – and as also pointed out by Midori Matsui – that elements of Japanese culture still provide us with an example of a minority culture successfully resisting a total takeover from a global monocultural and monolingual behemoth. According to personal experience, in a sense Latin American countries, amongst other cultures, have not been as successful with asserting and negotiating their place in the global domain. On the plus side, what at first may manifest itself as a relative inferiority complex, down the track allows you a different point of view on things which may be regarded as either normal or aspirational. Since the outsider status may rob you from to power to pursue an agency in moulding the world, it gives you the power of a greater insight.

My reasons for setting out this agenda is the marginalisation I have personally experienced and which I have observed in people who are also in the same situation, that of never being fully accepted in a society which they have chosen to join and to which officially they already belong. It is not a situation which makes for great news headlines therefore you may not hear about it but which is always there, boiling under the surface. Working in the arts only adds to that sense of marginality and minority. However this project was not carried out of spite or resentment, though rather as way to reflect in a more contemporary context on the ideas presented by Pierre Bourdieu, Guy Debord, Hal Foster, Deleuze and Guattari. After all, the dreams I was supposed to buy into are not something that I necessarily miss out on – hence, the private/privatised boundaries that lead to marginalisation do not necessarily correlate to a feeling of deprivation. The invisible walls I have to overcome became more of an interesting challenge rather than a bane. In other words, this is my own personal political resistance to a visual syntax created by a society I feel I do not belong to. Instead of taking refuge in a commonplace inferiority complex, my stance is to deterritorialise its sleekness and spectacle with calculated tackiness and humour. And despite all the political commentary present throughout my work, I have no interest in becoming the artist pigeonholed within the capitalist critique genre, as for me art is a practice of contingency: it cannot be accounted for or limited by the day-to-day practicalities of politics and economics.

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About the author

Rafael De Lima holds degrees from Charles Sturt University and Sydney College of the Arts (University of Sydney). His work pursues a hybrid approach between *non-photography* and *cinematic spectacular*. Using that as a starting point, he enquires the many ways in which visual communication is employed to legitimise *seductive* and *partisan* grand narratives. Currently his practice employs a multimedia approach in video and audio installations.

rafaelcdelima@gmail.com

1. <http://youtu.be/TGQ-00vkXzA?t=26m6s> ↵