

ERASING THE IMAGE, REVEALING THE GAME: THE WORKS OF PAUL PFEIFFER

by

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(Under the Direction of Isabelle Loring Wallace)

ABSTRACT

In an age defined by the inundation of ever-newer forms of mediating technologies, philosophers and art historians have worried about the fate of the “real.” That is, defining the “real” has become increasingly difficult due to the fact that digital technologies threaten to blur the distinctions between lived experience and its simulation. In his best known work, contemporary artist Paul Pfeiffer appropriates photographs and television broadcasts of professional sporting events and then manipulates the material via digital editing software. Like the athletes that are the ostensible subjects of these works, Pfeiffer skillfully and playfully enters into the game of representation in order to affect its outcome. By reexamining how these works have been characterized, and how digital imagery has been received more broadly, this thesis attempts to question the very premise that the digital necessarily negates the real.

INDEX WORDS: Paul Pfeiffer; New Media; Video Art; Game Theory; Sports in Art

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the literature surrounding Paul Pfeiffer, a larger cultural belief persists, which essentializes the difference between the media and its audience. This theory, according to its proponents, tends to characterize and interpret the widespread availability of mass communication technologies as the machinations of some external, sinister agency that works against the will of otherwise innocent bystanders.¹ When considering Pfeiffer's works, critics have centered on the artist's multimedia practice and his use of a variety of digital processes and gadgetry—large format chromogenic-print digital photography, Photoshop, time-based video editing software, television and LCD monitors, to name a few—to connect his work to the recent critique of perceptual overload. Further supporting this conclusion, Pfeiffer appropriates the material for many of his digitally manipulated videos and photographs from popular media sources we know well: from clips of *The Price is Right* and *Risky Business* to footage of Michael Jackson's bizarre public address in 1993 (regarding allegations of child molestation); from photographs of Marilyn Monroe to stills of Alfred Hitchcock films.²

¹ As of yet, the literature on the artist is limited to essays from two catalogues and several reviews. For essays that worry about the fate of a media-duped society, see: Stephano Basilico, "Paul Pfeiffer: Disturbing Vision," in *Paul Pfeiffer* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004): 23-27; and, Dominic Molon, "Corporealities," *Paul Pfeiffer* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003): 11-21. However, Pfeiffer has gone on the record about his own work numerous times, painting a more ambivalent picture of society's relationship to the media.

² Pfeiffer was born in Hawaii, raised in the Philippines in a Protestant college town, and currently lives in New York. He attended art schools in the U.S., earning a B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute (1987), an M.F.A. from Hunter College (1994), and participating in the Whitney Museum of Art Independent Study Program (1998). About his childhood in the Philippines, Pfeiffer says: "I grew up in a university setting that was Protestant, and that also means that it was American. It was basically built by American missionaries and, more generally speaking, in the Philippines today it is hard to walk down the street without consuming the detritus of American pop culture." Paul Pfeiffer, "Scenes of Horror: *Poltergeist*, *The Exorcist*, and *Amityville Horror*," *Art 21*, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/pfeiffer/clip2.html>.

As a result, most critics propose that Pfeiffer's work warns against embracing an insidious mass media that hooks society on a steady stream of celebrities which will, once and for all, wrench spectators from real, lived experience. But the nostalgic undertone that usually marks these readings—suggesting that we have lost some other, less mediated, pre-televisual “real”—smacks of disingenuousness. We should consider the fact that Pfeiffer was born of a moment that desired and created the technologies that have helped propagate the modern celebrities who populate (or are effaced from) his works. In a different reading, I argue that, because of the ways in which Pfeiffer implicates the spectator, his work shows how modern society has come to accept the terms of new media, has adapted to new rules and learned new plays.

Pfeiffer's favored subject matter over the past decade—televised broadcasts of professional sports and the publicity photos of its athletes—has been used to support the above critique on contemporary media. In an age of 24-hour sports networks, exorbitant player salaries, and lucrative endorsement deals, it may indeed seem that the cultural machine that turns athletes into superstars is overwhelming and pernicious, a systemic problem. Fitting, then, that Pfeiffer has borrowed from the visual record of professional sporting events to explore the ways in which celebrities are sanctified within culture. Adept with digital editing software, Pfeiffer submits photographs and videos of athletes actively engaged in the game to what has been called his signature process of erasure, reducing the number of players in the image to one or zero. Thus critics argue that Pfeiffer, using images and tools that appear to be borrowed directly from the playbook of advertisers, foregrounds and magnifies the role of mediated images in both the creation and destruction of iconic status.

If not entirely unfounded, such a reading unfairly places the artist outside of a media system whose images and tools he continually engages, making his autonomy from that system difficult to claim. Furthermore, this analysis eschews a crucial aspect of the subject matter to which the artist has obsessively returned—the sports game. Removing the details of the fast-paced action that make watching sports so entertaining, Pfeiffer does more than merely amplify and critique society's veneration of athletes. In his works, Pfeiffer underscores the presence of the surrounding sports spectators, playing up the exchange between the crowd and the main event, another game within the sports arena, and asks us to take seriously the ways in which we, too, participate in the framing and construction of the athletic spectacle. Pfeiffer's pared-down digital prints and video loops of boxing matches, basketball, soccer, and hockey games invite us to consider what is happening in the arena, and reflect back to us our own spectatorship within the space of the art gallery.

The first clue that these images are about more than the iconicity of the players comes from their manipulation—they are slowed down, partially effaced, touched up, layered over—which Pfeiffer effects through a thorough exploration of new media in his art and art-making process. In order to reduce the commotion of sports imagery, Pfeiffer employs the kinds of digital editing software that have risen in conjunction with pervasive new visual technologies.³ Thus, the compositional simplicity that Pfeiffer creates signals to the viewer the ways in which new technologies can be used to alter images in order that we might find our own point of entry into the image. By questioning the stability of the photographic record, Pfeiffer shows how the

³ As I see it, Pfeiffer's use of this software is emblematic of the growing availability and "amateur" use of such products as Photoshop and iMovie. Pfeiffer might only disagree with the degree of the availability of these programs: "To me the issue of the artist's hand is less important than the idea that there are these amazing tools out there that are almost exclusively being used by the mass marketing industries." Paul Pfeiffer and Thomas Ruff, "Paul Pfeiffer and Thomas Ruff in Conversation," in *Paul Pfeiffer* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004): 70.

mediated image is not merely a representation of an event that has passed but itself a court or field on which new meanings can be created and negotiated.

Pfeiffer addresses a digital-age audience literate in the kinds of special-effects wizardry that can both create the wonderment of preternatural fantasy and frame the athlete in terms of a religious icon. In his ongoing series *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (2000-present, figs. 1, 2, and 6), Pfeiffer most clearly exaggerates the visual links between religious icons and sports celebrities.⁴ Culled from the glut of action photographs sold online by the National Basketball Association, Pfeiffer applies his editorial eye to these dynamic compositions, deleting most of the information that often crowds such sports imagery. After scanning the 8 by 10 inch glossy prints, Pfeiffer typically erases the other players, the ball, the lines on the basketball court, and even the player's name and team logo from his jersey, leaving only a lone, centrally-positioned, unidentifiable athlete in front of an arena packed with adoring spectators. If in the artist's reworked 48 by 60 inch digital prints we still recognize something of the sports celebrity, it is because the artist magnifies the logic already at work in the "original" action-shot aesthetic.

Consider, for example, the archival photograph that Pfeiffer manipulated to create his *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse no. 8* (2002, fig. 1), which depicts the great NBA center Wilt Chamberlain's elegant layup in mythological terms. In the original image (fig. 3), the 7' 1" Chamberlain occupies the central position, his impressive arm length and monumental mid-air jump reading like an updated version of the classical Canon of proportions. He is defended by a nameless, faceless player occupying the left margin—the eventual subject of Pfeiffer's image—whose equally valiant effort to block Chamberlain's shot only further aggrandizes the superstar's ability. Two more players flank this central match-up; standing squarely on the ground, they fix

⁴ As I discuss in chapter one, the first five images in this series are sourced from some of the last photographs of Marilyn Monroe, taken by photographer George Barris months before her death in 1962.

their gaze on the basketball, which hangs suspended at the top of the photograph. The composition is thus classically organized: the ball forms the apex of a triangular figural group anchored by the supporting players, that, obeying the hierarchy of Holy Family and other religious paintings, work to reinforce the saintliness of the central figure(s).

As with athletic trading cards, this particular NBA action shot was no doubt chosen for mass distribution from among the countless other photographs taken from different angles precisely because of the ways in which the layout successfully adheres to visual tropes inherited from a long tradition of Western art. The impact of this image of Chamberlain's venerable athletic prowess therefore relies on a general understanding, whether conscious or not, of how images work to convey reverence onto the subject of representation. To put it simply, there are rules to representation which one must play by in order to communicate meaning. Explicitly spelled out in earlier periods (Polykletos' Canon of proportion, Dürer's *Four Books on Human Proportion*), the conventions and ideals of representational composition and layout are nevertheless evident in a publicity shot of a twentieth-century athlete. The photographer's camera is not an unbiased witness to Wilt Chamberlain's superior athleticism but a shrewd participant in the construction of the mythological superstar.

In his edited version of the Wilt Chamberlain photograph, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse no. 8*, Pfeiffer exaggerates the compositional tropes found in the "original" print creating a scene that more explicitly borrows from the canon of Western art—e.g. the layout of Renaissance panels depicting Christ's resurrection and the formal simplicity of Byzantine icons. Pfeiffer adroitly shifts a lone player, pulled from the margins, onto center stage and thus bestows onto him all of the attention originally meant for another figure. In repositioning the role of this athlete, Pfeiffer simultaneously threatens the public recognition of the specific superstar and yet

maintains the allure of the generic sports celebrity by exalting a new player in his own secondary narrative. That is, Pfeiffer insists that the image's surface is open to reinterpretation. In order to cast a supporting player in the leading role, Pfeiffer uses the representation of the surrounding audience to camouflage the other players on the court from view. Pfeiffer scans the source image into Photoshop and copies elements of the existing background information into new image layers that he then meticulously pastes on top of the forms that he wants to "erase." Traditionally outside of the parameters of court play, the audience is brought to the fore by Pfeiffer, literalizing their (and, of course, his own) participation in conferring a certain reverence onto the celebrated athlete. In this way, Pfeiffer disrupts expectations of passive spectatorship and active athletes. Having "erased" the boundary lines on the court, Pfeiffer further upsets the conventional distinction between spectators and the playing field, between the witnesses and the main event.

It is right to say that Pfeiffer's deified athletes address the ways in which mediated images construct and sell an obsession with celebrity. However, this reading relies on an oppositional tension between the public and the media, a binary that starts to break down when one considers the means by which these photographs are made and disseminated. Sure, the photographer situated on the edge of the court has privileged access to the action. But once the image is bought by a distributor, it can become a valuable commodity, framed by a serious collector, or a mass produced trading card, crammed in the spokes of some kid's bike just for the sound effect it creates. Or it could be bought by the NBA and end up on its website as a digital image, subject to the revisionary whims of anyone equipped with the readily-available image editing software (and the inclination to use it). If the photograph is working within an established visual vocabulary to bestow celebrity status onto the athlete (rather than merely confirming this

“truth”), then the terms can be switched around and played with to create new meaning within the game of representation.

In Pfeiffer’s seamless digital prints, the content, and not the surface, reveals the interference of the artist.⁵ No longer appearing to play the game, the figures are stopped in their tracks, suspended in mid-air or arrested by some supernatural force, symbolized by the effects of the nearly physical presence of the arena’s fluorescent lights that Pfeiffer manipulates and intensifies. Borrowing his title from Dürer’s famous woodprint series produced in 1498, the end of the last half-millennium, Pfeiffer thus imbues these images with an apocalyptic narrative that suggests the rapture of the Christian End Times. But there is an uncanny doubling in the narrative of these players who also, simultaneously, appear caught in the teleporting light shaft of an unidentified foreign object. That Pfeiffer is able to make these images of basketball players bend to two apocalyptic narratives—the Christian Rapture and alien abduction—speaks to not only the malleability of images in the digital age but also to the legibility of the conventions of (both visual and verbal) representation.

In the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* series and his larger body of sports-related works, Pfeiffer draws our attention to the relationship between the main event and its witnesses. Pfeiffer brings the background forward, playing up the role of the spectators in order to suggest the ways in which the game spills out beyond the sidelines. The works intimate that athletes are subject not only to the rules of the game but to the countless opinions, viewpoints and interpretations of a plurality of onlookers. Moving beyond the notion of an oppressive, authoritarian (indeed, apocalyptic) mass-media machine, Pfeiffer encourages us to see and think of spectatorship as active. To pose a question lacking in the critical response to Pfeiffer’s sports-

⁵ Though his erasures are usually meticulously hidden in the final print created by the artist, in *The Long Count* series (discussed in chapter three) Pfeiffer explores the results and implications of his process when he is unable to achieve total erasure of the athletic figure.

related works: how is the position of a spectator in the gallery similar to that of a fan in the arena? Like the influence of fans who pack themselves into the arena and vociferously mark their presence, the process of viewing art sparks verbal and written debates that prove paramount to the valuation of the work of art. In front of Pfeiffer's work, the viewer is invited to negotiate the meaning of these images, extending the artist's play within the photographic frame out to the space of the spectator, an equally active participant in the game of representation.

Writing in Europe before the start of the Second World War, cultural theorist Johan Huizinga compares the "staked out" boundaries of various forms of play to the framing involved in representation. He states that, in art, "representation" is traditionally understood to mean the mimetic copy of ordinary reality, a mechanical and exacting transfer of the artist's point of view onto a rectilinear piece of cloth. But, Huizinga goes on to argue that the space of re-presentation would be more accurately described as a dynamic playing field on which what is presented is continuously "reproduced" by the active participation of adoring fans.⁶ In other words, Huizinga distinguishes between two very different definitions of representation. Further enriching his case, Huizinga points out that the term "illusion" derives from the Latin *inlusio*, *illudere*, or *inludere* meaning "in play."⁷ Like Huizinga, Pfeiffer employs the metaphors of play in order to contend with and destabilize the parameters of both the literal, local game of sports and the conceptual, omnipresent game of representation. He invites viewers in a visual culture to join the baying crowds that gather around the spaces of representation and illustrates ways one can exploit the

⁶ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* [1938] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 15. As Huizinga puts it, "The word 'represents' [...] does not cover the exact meaning of the act, at least not in its looser, modern connotation; for here 'representation' is really *identification*, the mystic repetition or *re-presentation* of the event. The rite produces the effect which is then not so much *shown figuratively* as *actually reproduced* in the action. The function of the rite, therefore, is far from being merely imitative; it causes the worshippers to participate in the sacred happening itself."

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

technologies of new media in order to find new points of entry into the game of interpreting and defining the meaning of images.

Pressing on the idea that representation is a game whose rules are inflected by the active participation of its spectators, the following chapters of this thesis explore three of Pfeiffer's sports-related works completed in distinct media. The first chapter continues with the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* series, photographic representations of basketball players, and deals more fully with the ways in which the rules of the game parallel and overlap those that control representation. Finding a formal analogue in Jacques Derrida's writing *sous rature* (under erasure), Pfeiffer's own method of digital erasure can be seen to share with linguistics a rejection of the Western philosophical notion of a "metaphysics of presence." Building on this critique, chapter two tackles Pfeiffer's *Caryatid* works, digital video loops of hockey and soccer matches displayed on tube televisions, in which the athlete's privileged position in the center of the monitor begins to fall apart. Turning to *The Long Count* series (2000-01), a triptych of small LCD video loops in which Pfeiffer conceals the figure of Muhammad Ali from three of the boxer's championship bouts, chapter three continues to grapple with issues of spectatorship and canonical texts written on the subject. The conclusion will test the efficacy of the metaphors of sports developed here in order to unpack an unlikely subject: Pfeiffer's *Live From Neverland* (2006). This two-part work pits a manipulated version of Michael Jackson's 1993 televised press release, in which the troubled pop icon addresses the child molestation charges brought against him by a visitor to his "Neverland" estate, against a chorus of children assembled by Pfeiffer who recite Jackson's statement in lieu of the singer's own voice. Addressing the game of public relations, Pfeiffer places the celebrity in the role of the athlete who struggles to maintain control of his image in the face of shifting public opinion. Taken as a whole, these chapters make a

sustained argument about the crucial interdependence between the game (of sports, representation, public relations) and its spectators.

Chapter 2: Protecting the Spectacular Game

Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theatre, no more illusions, when everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication. *We no longer partake of the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication.*
—Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*

For Jean Baudrillard, the widespread dissemination of the television, which began in the middle of the last century, signaled a distinct shift in the way we experience the world. Fulfilling an Orwellian fear, Baudrillard imagines that the television infiltrates the private sphere, monitors and regulates the individual, and destroys the boundaries between private and public, interior and exterior. Seeing the collapse of the difference between the staged and the real, Baudrillard contends that “the simple presence of television transforms our habitat into a kind of archaic, closed-off cell, into a vestige of human relations whose survival is highly questionable.”⁸ This is no minor criticism, but a warning against a technology that Baudrillard predicts will pervert humanity as we know it. In a sentiment that seems to echo Walter Benjamin, Baudrillard claims that, via visual technologies, we encounter the material world “with no resistance, and no halo, no aura.”⁹ That is, we encounter the world virtually; gone are the distinctions between surface and depth, spectacle and secret. The danger of such a culture lies in its inability to separate real, lived experience from its ubiquitous representation.

Baudrillard is perhaps the postmodern theorist most associated with diagnosing society’s loss of the “real” in an age inundated by the mediated image, or simulacra. “[P]resent-day

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. Bernard Schutze and Caroline Schutze (New York: Seiotext(e), 1988), 17-18.

⁹ Ibid., 27. Note, too, Walter Benjamin, who inversely linked the rise of mechanical reproduction and a desire to get closer to the object of the spectacle via representation to a loss of the aura. See “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 222-23.

simulators,” he argues, “attempt to make the real, all of the real, coincide with their models of simulation. [...] Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference, between one and the other, that constituted the charm of abstraction.”¹⁰ Following this logic, one might imagine Baudrillard to be equally critical of the proliferation of sports media that allow increasingly dispersed spectators easy access to the game and thus threaten to destroy the spectacle of arena sports. In an age of 24-hour sports networks, spectators are shielded from the discomforts of inclement weather and prohibitive gate prices by way of the vast spectrum of sporting events telecast into the individual’s living room.

In this chapter, I consider Paul Pfeiffer’s ongoing *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* series against Baudrillard’s claim that our postmodern society of image saturation has lost the spectacle, the stage, the illusion. Acknowledging the ominous tone of the title of Pfeiffer’s series, and the history of art and technology it invokes (i.e. Albrecht Dürer’s fifteenth-century woodcut of the same name), we might anticipate that Pfeiffer’s images share Baudrillard’s perilous outlook. I argue that, as a whole, the series stakes a different kind of apocalyptic claim, one that sees the “end times” not just as an end, but as a new beginning, and embraces digital-age technologies as a means of reengaging the surface of representation.¹¹

Indeed, the series of altered basketball images that Pfeiffer’s series is best known for is itself a new beginning within a larger series that began with five altered images of Marilyn Monroe. In *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, nos. 1-5 (2000-01, figs. 4, 5), Pfeiffer digitally reworks five of the last images of Marilyn Monroe, taken just months before her death in August of 1962, so that her figure can no longer be (directly) seen. George Barris’s original photographs

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra,” in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2.

¹¹ While it is true that the Apocalypse can be associated with a rebirth, a revelation that occurs at the end of an era, in the Christian narrative, the aftermath of the Apocalypse is more severe, more final; it refers to the end of the world, and any who remain unredeemed are fated to suffer in perpetuity.

of Monroe on the beaches of Santa Monica are reduced to washes of blue, lavender, and pale orange sky that fill the whole of these images, not unlike the color field paintings of Mark Rothko. In contrast to the all-male basketball players who Pfeiffer isolates and venerates in the latter images of his *Apocalypse* series, Pfeiffer began this series by effacing the presence of the twentieth-century's first centerfold from her image.

To many, Monroe was the last icon of the silver screen. In his biography of her, Norman Mailer passionately avers that:

she was never for TV. She preferred a theatre and those hundreds of bodies in the dark, those wandering lights on the screen when the luminous life of her face grew ten feet tall. It was possible she knew better than anyone that she was the last of the myths to thrive in the long evening of the American dream.¹²

I will return to the complexities of the gendered roles of theatrical spectatorship in the third chapter, but for now, suffice it to say that, for Mailer, Monroe's visceral presence on the screen depended on the theatrical effects of the spectacle, an exchange between the icon and her adoring fans which television could not duplicate. And though he insists on giving Monroe agency, if we are to believe Mailer, her every move was motivated with the end goal of giving form to the fantasies of her audience in the shadows of the theater. Monroe's fame was born of the postwar moment, her unfettered display of feminine sexuality a symbol of a return to traditional gender roles at a time when industry was struggling to re-accommodate the influx of returning soldiers. Her premature death in 1962 was thus, for Mailer, in some way linked with the end of this era and the beginning of "the long decade of the Sixties which ended with television living like an inchworm on the aesthetic gut of the drug-deadened American belly."¹³

Unlike the basketball players who populate the later images in Pfeiffer's series and achieve fame in large part due to the televisualization of their sport, Monroe's celebrity, at least

¹² Norman Mailer, *Marilyn Monroe* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973), 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

according to Mailer, is somehow attached to and defined by the technologies of a pre-television era.¹⁴ As Leo Braudy argues (assuming her death was a suicide), “in suicide, as in the desire for fame, what appears as an individual assertion can also reveal the cultural forces that have helped shape that individuality.”¹⁵ This is particularly true when, as with Monroe, “one becomes symbolic before one is real, created by others before one can create oneself.”¹⁶ We might understand the agents to whom Braudy refers in these passages as the studio executives who played a large role in creating and orchestrating the stardom of actors in their employ. In other words, Marilyn Monroe’s fame can be seen to be the product of a system that created the beloved icon by killing Norma Jean Baker.

Cultural theorist Joshua Gamson argues that the demolition of the Hollywood studio star system in the early 1950s paved the way for a new relationship between celebrities and their fans more akin to the game playing found in sports.¹⁷ Among the factors contributing to this shift, Gamson identifies television as suddenly and significantly altering the playing field, “new players entered the game from now-dispersed subindustries of star making and from the new television industry, and strategies began to shift to meet the new environmental requirements.”¹⁸ In addition, television’s smaller size and pedestrian accessibility “literally down-sized the celebrity,”¹⁹ and a nascent public relations industry emerged to meet the changing needs of celebrities who were suddenly more in control of their public image. In the new, radically dispersed celebrity system, Gamson argues, viewers eventually became familiar with the rules of

¹⁴ This is not to say that the iconic images of Monroe don’t mirror, in many ways, such images of male athletes (i.e. trading cards), nor is this to imply that her images haven’t been subversively reread by the technologies of the televisual era (i.e. Warhol). However, the degree to which she is connected to her image is, as I will argue, quite different.

¹⁵ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame & Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 538.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 40-54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

the public relations game, conscious of those pulling the strings, conversant in the ironic gaps between “image” and “reality.” Thus, with the rise of new technologies of fame, viewers adapt and become knowing “readers, enlightened about the falseness of celebrity, [able] to ‘see the joke’ of the performed self.”²⁰

This does not mean that contemporary viewers have lost their fascination with celebrity, but it does suggest that the celebrity is now less permanent, consistent, authoritative. To distinguish this new self-conscious spectator, Gamson invokes the metaphor of the game:

Unlike the true believers (who read celebrities realistically) or the anti-belief hipsters (who read them as fiction), a good chunk of the audience reads the celebrity text in its own language, recognizing and often playing with the blurriness of its vocabulary. They leave open the question of authenticity and along with it the question of merit. For them, celebrity is not a prestige system, nor a postmodern hall of mirrors, but, much as it is in the celebrity-watching tourist circuit, a game.²¹

Gamson’s description of modern celebrity sounds a lot like Johan Huizinga’s definition of the game: “a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious’, but at the same time absorbing the player [read also, fan] intensely and utterly.”²²

Baudrillard’s warning that simulacra have come to replace the “real” loses some of its apocalyptic tone when the celebrity image is positioned analogously to the game and viewers are represented as knowing participants. It appears, then, that the trouble for poor Norma Jean was that she could no longer maintain the image of Marilyn Monroe, an image whose meaning had become so fixed on the cultural stage that it could scarcely be played with.²³ That is, she couldn’t age, couldn’t lose her sex appeal, couldn’t significantly alter the two-dimensional image of herself. Thus, her fame proved to be a double-edged sword, offering a kind of celebrity perhaps

²⁰ Ibid., 54.

²¹ Ibid., 172-73.

²² Huizinga, 13.

²³ Of course, Andy Warhol would emphatically and provocatively recontextualize Monroe’s image in the 1960s, but, importantly, from the position of an art-world outsider and antagonist.

unparalleled since her death but also rigidly tied to an unbending, inflexible image. Her death assured her fame—the star didn’t outgrow and contradict the icon. Pfeiffer’s Rothko-esque digital prints refer to the work of a high-modernist artist who aimed to achieve religious transcendence by attempting to evacuate the figure from the painting (and who, of course, also committed suicide). Pfeiffer’s twenty-first-century revisions of some of the most iconic images of Monroe share this desire to remove the figure from the image and thus draw parallels between the ideals of abstract art and the totalizing finality of the iconic celebrity who lived and died by the image.

If, for Baudrillard, the television era exacerbates the apocalypse of the “real” in a world that no longer distinguishes between the spectacle and the real, then what is to be made of the spectacular revisions that Paul Pfeiffer creates from a rather mundane set of action shots of professional basketball players in the rest of his ongoing series, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*? Reducing these images to a lone athlete caught in the glow of a supernatural light, surrounded by a sea of adoring spectators, Pfeiffer, it would seem, is interested in the ways in which the image can still convey and enact the spectacle. Whereas Benjamin and Baudrillard worry about how the proliferation of images erases the distinction between the spectacle and the real, Pfeiffer utilizes erasure to reinsert the drama of the spectacle into these images of basketball players.

Actually, to describe the technique that Pfeiffer uses to achieve this effect as “erasure” is misleading, for he does not, in fact, efface any part of the image. To say something obvious, it is indeed impossible to rub away any part of a photograph to reveal some underlying image. A photograph indexically captures only what transpires directly in front of the camera’s lens. Taking into account the position of the photographer, the image also symbolically reflects the

presence of the photographer whose vantage point is passed on to the viewer—interferences and all. These restrictions, though, do not stop Pfeiffer from playing with the image and creating new scenarios out of the information in the photographic frame. Through a process he prefers to call “camouflaging,” Pfeiffer restages the action on the court to affect his own narrative.²⁴

Working in Photoshop, Pfeiffer creates layers *on top of* the original image, moving pixel information from the background into new layers that cloak the other players, the basketball, even the boundary lines on the court (and, elsewhere, Marilyn Monroe). What makes Pfeiffer’s process so compelling and challenging is that he is able to change and re-contextualize the image using visual information already present in the original. As opposed to indexical photography, which captures the three-dimensional world in all of its two-dimensional luminosity, the digital tools that Pfeiffer uses allow him to engage the material image with all of the rich metaphors of depth associated with the plastic arts. Allowing one to create multiple layers in a single image, Photoshop inflects the way we can talk about the surface of the photograph, and creates a new set of rules for photographic representation, or rather, a new playing field where the rules have been profoundly altered. A skilled player in this new arena of digital manipulation, Pfeiffer embraces virtual depth to re-draw the borders of the typical action-shot aesthetic.

For Pfeiffer, then, Photoshop becomes the virtual stage on which he enacts inventive spectacles. Though Pfeiffer’s expert digital edits are not visible on the surface of his c-print photographs, his revisions leave the viewer in no doubt that something has been changed. Even in an image such as *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, no. 7* (2002, fig. 6), for which the original close-up shot already excluded other players (see fig. 7), Pfeiffer wipes Patrick Ewing’s

²⁴ According to Pfeiffer, the process is “not so much erasure and it never really is. It’s actually more like camouflage in the sense that you are taking pieces of the background from around the image and very slowly applying the pieces over the body so that in the end you’re presenting the illusion that you are seeing through to the background.” See Paul Pfeiffer, “Erasure, Camouflage, and ‘Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,’” *Art 21*, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/pfeiffer/clip1.html>.

uniform clean, covering his name and team number and obscuring the outline of his familiar squared-off flattop with the brilliant glow of an overhead light that sufficiently prevents recognition of the New York Knicks superstar. The manipulated light effect forms a halo around the head of the athlete, whose outstretched arms suggest a crucified figure or a willing submission to a preternatural force.

In each of the digital prints of basketball players, Pfeiffer begins with a standard action shot and transforms it into an enigmatic image of a player-cum-saintly icon (or alien bait). Pfeiffer thereby counters the expectation that mass production inevitably leads to the destruction of the spectacle (à la Benjamin and Baudrillard). With the tools of digital manipulation, Pfeiffer reinserts a legible, if still somewhat ineffable, agent into these images in order to suggest a metaphysical power behind these iconic representations, an inexplicable force acting from a place beyond the confines of the arena. He cloaks his images in intrigue and mystery not to deny or confirm the efficacy of icons but to draw attention to what it is the iconic image sets out to do in the first place.

Pfeiffer's working method references Jacques Derrida's *écriture sous rature*, or "writing under erasure," and is sympathetic to its goals. For Derrida, all of Western philosophy relies on the notion of an underlying truth, a foundational presence, what he calls a "metaphysics of presence"—a belief in some originary moment that precedes and exists outside of language.²⁵ As emblematic of this faith, Derrida cites Martin Heidegger's attempt to signify that part of human experience that preexists language by writing "being" and then crossing it out: ~~being~~. For Heidegger, "being" had become too loaded with the baggage of centuries of philosophical

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 18-26.

meanings.²⁶ So, to mark his resistance to these ossified metaphysical meanings, Heidegger draws a line through the text. But as Derrida argues, in attempting to strip the metaphysical connotations of “being,” Heidegger, in fact, seeks to return the word to a “purer,” more intangible, “original” meaning. That is, Heidegger’s new construction, “~~being~~,” is just as implicated in the metaphysical project. Further, Heidegger’s defaced “~~being~~” itself becomes a visual sign that works to signify precisely what for Heidegger was meant to elude language: transcendental presence.

For Derrida, nothing escapes the signifying order, not even metaphysical concepts, because we rely on language to articulate and define these ideas. When Derrida puts metaphysical language “under erasure,” he aims to call attention to the transcendental connotations of the word while simultaneously asserting his resistance to the supposed permanence of these concepts. Significantly, Derrida’s “~~being~~” remains playfully in dialogue with all of the connotations that the word can evoke. Pfeiffer’s “erasures” to the photograph work in a similar way. Suppressing the visibility of his technique, Pfeiffer nonetheless lays bare his physical manipulation of the image, leaving behind a trace of his interference through the noticeable concealment of the player’s identity, the missing game, the uncanny presence of the lone athlete. Just as Derrida resists the ponderous gravity of metaphysical concepts thought to exist outside of the playful construction of meaning, so, too, does Pfeiffer cross out the action on the court and the identity of the basketball players in order to playfully underscore the ways in which the image can be used to construct athletic superstardom more generally. And as Derrida questions metaphysical concepts without trying to establish a new meaning that exists outside of language, so, too, does Pfeiffer simultaneously refer to images of the Christian apocalypse and

²⁶ Here I found helpful Arthur Bradley’s excellent explication of Derrida’s text. See Arthur Bradley, *Derrida’s ‘Of Grammatology’: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), esp. 20-21, 150.

alien abduction not to deny or confirm the existence of the metaphysical agency behind these beliefs, but to align the visual tropes of both and thus whimsically deconstruct the primacy or uniqueness of either narrative over the other. In so doing, Pfeiffer evidences a desire to perpetuate the metaphysical idea of the phenomenal athlete and that idea's reliance on the presence of readable motifs that work, paradoxically, to reinforce the notion that their representation is not entirely possible.

Indeed, referring to Pfeiffer's technique as "erasure" evidences a progressive understanding of the mutability of the image in the digital age. It is, of course, equally impossible to reveal what may have existed beyond what is visible in the photograph's frame as it is to uncover that which is obstructed by the other objects within that frame. But "under erasure," Pfeiffer nudges the photograph out of its indexical relation to the past, using digital technologies to re-cover the image and bring it into the present, where it is once again open to the play of interpreters.

For example, it is not important that we know that *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, no. 7 is actually produced from an image of Patrick Ewing. The athlete in each of the works of this series merely stands in for the type of celebrity the image can confer. Wrenched from the context of the game, stripped of any identifying marks, it is not any one individual athlete who is put on display but a general symbol of veneration. At Pfeiffer's hand, the player's jersey (and the image itself) becomes a *tabula rasa*, a "blank slate" whose meaning remains to be written. Western philosophy has invoked the notion of the *tabula rasa* in its effort to describe the purity of the human mind before it is corrupted by experience or impressions.²⁷ However, the Latin phrase is best translated as a *scraped* tablet, a *cleaned* slate. One *expects* to see a player's name and team

²⁷ See, for example, John Locke's privileged account of the child's mind: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1690], ed. Roger Woolhouse, London and New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

number on his jersey. That it is missing makes one consider the artist's intervention, his "erasure." In other words, the *tabula rasa* does not bespeak any pure, original state but rather an active attempt to start anew after a period of interference.

Recall that Pfeiffer digitally brings the audience forward, thereby exaggerating the dynamic between the athlete and the marveling multitude. The spectators in front of Pfeiffer's large-format digital c-prints are confronted by the theatrical drama of these scenes, and encouraged to empathize, at least momentarily, with the position of the sports fans packed in the arena. A sea of tiny dots on the image's surface, these large crowds have gathered to watch an exciting showdown between two opposing teams. (Of course, and as I discuss in the next chapter, the crowd is not necessarily united in its aims.) Their sense of awe, magnified and multiplied by the artist's interventions, seems to suggest that they have come willingly in order to subjugate themselves to the splendorous drama on the court. Whereas for Baudrillard images threaten to deplete the spectacle of its drama, Pfeiffer, following Derrida, seems to embrace the image's surface as another exciting stage which can be the site of the spectacular. In Pfeiffer's image, the fans aspire to replace the ostensible main event—the basketball game—with another, equally playful metaphysical narrative. Thus, Pfeiffer's images underscore the fans' desire to indulge knowingly in the construction of celebrity as an intangible, ephemeral quality, and to do so at the level of representation. As Gamson argues, even as we have learned the tools of celebrity, we still desire to lose ourselves in the illusion, the drama, the spectacle, and to do so, as Pfeiffer's images illustrate, in front of a photographic representation (that does not refer back to any indexical "real" referent).

Denying the individual identity of these basketball players, Pfeiffer creates allegorical celebrities.²⁸ Located in the more three-dimensional, theater-in-the-round setting of the arena, Pfeiffer's images project a kind of fame that is dependent on the phenomenological exchange between the audience and the stage. Played to television audiences as much as those assembled in the arena, basketball's spectators are fragmented, allowing its celebrities a reprieve from the universality of the image *à la* Monroe. But television's decentered spectatorship need not result in the destruction of spectacle. On the contrary, viewers become lively participants in the on-going construction of celebrity.

Thus we are working toward a distinction between Baudrillard's view of images that destroy the mysterious illusionism of the spectacle and a more positive view that does not claim the apocalypse of the real. Pfeiffer is able to keep the meaning of the sports images "in play" through digital manipulation. The image—the space of representation—provides a valid analog to the game, as both involve the continuous movement of players (or spectators) and, in this series, playfully articulate a space perceived to be outside of the "real."

With his beautifully simple and convincing "erasures," Pfeiffer figures forth spectators who are comfortable with allusions to a metaphysical presence (the iconic athlete) within the frame of representation. The fame of Pfeiffer's basketball-playing horseman is significantly less totalizing, more relative. He is offered as the center of the crowd's attention, but he is not named, and thus not made to bear alone all the weight of that attention. He remains a generic symbol of the aspiration to fame, and, according to both apocalyptic narratives considered here, will soon ascend into a realm where his individuality no longer matters, leaving the stage open to the next

²⁸ Strategically, I am calling Pfeiffer's images of basketball players allegories in order to distinguish the type of celebrity that they ultimately portray from the more oppressive celebrity achieved by the iconic Monroe. As I argue in the next chapter, with the allegorical figure, as opposed to the symbolic icon, the spectator's role as interpreter/participant is made clear and thus provides a better analogue to the new type of celebrity to which the basketball players refer.

player. These images require a willing suspension of disbelief—that some force outside of the picture’s frame (and out of the hands of the player and the crowd) notionally controls and confers celebrity. Whether or not that higher power exists beyond the image is less important when considering the fate of the image than the fact that it is ultimately an effect of, an idea created within, representation.

Within Pfeiffer’s *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* series, then, there is a symbolic apocalypse—the (literal) disappearance of a type of celebrity firmly attached to the image of the individual, symbolized by Marilyn Monroe—and the suggestion of resurrection—a new type of celebrity that iconicizes only the aspirations of fame. Borrowing his title from Dürer’s woodcut, Pfeiffer recalls that era’s heated debate over the function and meaning of iconic representation, a debate which mirrors this shift in many ways. Martin Luther and his followers, angry over what they saw as the egregious selling of indulgences by the Catholic Church and its insatiable appetite for decoration, deemed the proliferation of iconic images (one of the results of the Church’s newly acquired wealth) an affront to the sanctity of God and the Saints pictured within, whose divine holiness, they argued, could not be represented. The propagation of religious icons and the availability of pardons for anyone that could afford the fee angered Reformers who thought that penance should befall all parishioners equally, regardless of their economic status.²⁹ Given an exchange value, indulgences, and the icons they helped purchase, threatened to destroy the Church’s moral authority. In a way, the Reformers saw the icons of the Catholic Church as Hollywood fans did the images of Monroe, as more important than the actual person who existed behind the surface. Newly objectified as commodities, icons impinged on a worshiper’s ability to believe that behind the icon was a transcendent signified, concealed from the material world.

²⁹ Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 27-28.

Indeed, the Reformers' reaction, their iconoclastic white-washing of the images in the church and their destruction of icons, itself became a visible sign (like Heidegger's "~~being~~") that was meant to refer to the "metaphysical presence" of God. Ironically, the debate as to whether or not the divine could be represented in visual form becomes moot, as the effaced icons become a representation of the Reformer's own definition of divinity. Pfeiffer's images without Marilyn Monroe, might be read as iconoclastic, an attempt to cover over the beleaguered icon in order to return to the surface, in all of their monochromatic richness, a playful revision of one of Western art's foundational—and thus metaphysically loaded—rules of representation: men look and women are seen.³⁰

According to Baudrillard, the debate between iconoclasts and iconolaters centers on whether or not spectators believe that the image is able to refer to that which is thought to exist beyond the frame of representation. The iconoclasts' "metaphysical despair came from the idea that the image didn't conceal anything at all, and that these images were in essence not images, such as an original model would have made them, but perfect simulacra, forever radiant with their own fascination."³¹ We can hear in Baudrillard's description a critique, too, of the promotional images of Monroe, which, in their overwhelming similarity—i.e., they all portray the stereotype of the blond bombshell—fail to refer to a more complex, three-dimensionally "real" person. For the iconoclast, images fail because they lose their ability to refer back to an original and true signified; they refer only to themselves, becoming copies in the absence of an original.

In contrast, Baudrillard's iconolater embraces the image, though not without consequence.

³⁰ See, for example, John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1977), 45-64.

³¹ Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," 5; 4-6.

[T]he icon worshipers were the most modern of minds, the most adventurous, because, in the guise of having God become apparent in the mirror of images, they were already enacting his death and his disappearance in the epiphany of his representation (which, perhaps, they already knew no longer represented anything, that they were purely a game, but that it was therein the great game lay—knowing also that it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them).³²

In other words, for Baudrillard, to indulge in images is to destroy the dialectic between the real and the imaginary. In his disavowal of iconic representations, Baudrillard is dismissive of the ability of “the great game” to successfully hold the attention of those spectators who separate it from the “real.” For both the sports fans pictured in his images and the art-going public standing in front of them who exhibit the desires of iconolaters, Pfeiffer creates spectacular images of basketball players. If, as Derrida argues, neither the game nor the real escape the space of representation, then the series of basketball players in Pfeiffer’s *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* may be seen to illustrate that both are still possible in the digital age. Pfeiffer plays with both the literal depth of images—via Photoshop—and their figurative depth—their containment of a host of accrued meanings, as Derrida did with “~~being~~.”³³

Dürer’s own woodcut series *Apocalypse* (1498), of which *The Revelation of St. John: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* is the fourth of fifteen prints, exemplifies how an artist at the end of the fifteenth century was likewise able to reinvigorate the image via new technologies, and to circumvent the prohibitive costs of religious imagery. Dürer printed and published this series in his own workshop, capitalizing on general fears of the coming half-millennium. The greatest demand was for Dürer’s collection of loose-leaf illustrations (with no text), which the

³² Ibid., 5.

³³ Furthermore, like Derrida’s slashed signifier, Pfeiffer is simultaneously an iconoclast—“erasing” parts of the sacred indexical photograph—and a lavish iconophile—restoring through invention and artistry the spectacular to the banal, mass-produced image. Thus Pfeiffer is implicated in a project that seeks to both destroy and uphold the image. By conflating these urges, Pfeiffer exposes how both actions overlap and rely on each other, just as his images blur the line between spectators and the spectacle in arena sports.

printing press made affordable to a much wider audience than previously possible.³⁴ Dürer, who would eventually become a supporter of Luther's teachings, showed how new technologies can provide a solution to the exclusive control over materials exercised by one group (the Catholic Church) without threatening the status or sanctity of the subject matter therein. The apocalypse was no light matter to Dürer's audience, and his prints reflected the gravity of the subject.³⁵

Pfeiffer's own allusion to the twentieth-century phenomenon of alien abduction, itself coincident with the sudden proliferation of a new visual technology, the television, illustrates the continued relevance of the image as the site of active debate about the existence of something beyond the physical realm (or beyond our solar system, as the case may be). Whether or not extra-terrestrial beings exist "out there" or are ghost-in-the-machine type fabrications, new technologies are certainly not the death knell for belief in the invisible within an image-saturated world. Mass communication technologies do not necessarily usher in utter transparency, nor, as Baudrillard claims, does the flood of images necessarily threaten to "dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them." Like the best footage of UFOs, Pfeiffer's poster-sized prints are as difficult to authenticate as they are to discredit to those who want to believe. And even if the proliferation of images in his series eventually makes them formulaic, and thereby decreases their ability to amaze, nothing keeps the artist, or anyone for that matter, from re-submitting the image to (new) technological editing processes, again reinvigorating the image and creating new meaning.

³⁴ Giulia Bartrum, ed., *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy: The Graphic Work of a Renaissance Artist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 124-5.

³⁵ Koerner, 27-28. According to Koerner, while Luther railed against effigies of the virgin and saints because of a deep-seated mistrust of the Catholic Church's claims to intercession, he nevertheless accepted and advocated the use of images in the service of educating worshipers on their personal journey toward salvation. For Koerner, then, the Protestant Reformers' iconoclasm was in fact an effort to preserve the use and meaning of images in order to signify the divine, a point which Pfeiffer's images seem to share.

The need for revision is also important within the realm of professional sports. After years of refusing “instant-replay” to its referees, before the start of the 2002-03 season, the NBA joined the list of professional sports leagues who have created guidelines for the use of a technology familiar to fans from decades of seeing it in television broadcasts.³⁶ Instant replay simultaneously privileges the camera as the site of mediation while calling the eye unaided by technology into doubt, and allows fans to review rulings made by the referees, calls which may seem a great deal less close in slow-motion instant-replay. Thus the rules were bent to accommodate the fans, a group thought to have been dispersed and fragmented by the television, who demanded that the game keep up with the new technologies to which they long ago adapted.

The NBA continues to cater to the spectators’ interest in new visual technologies. This year, the NBA borrowed a move from Pfeiffer’s playbook in their advertisements for the upcoming playoffs. The 30-second spots begin with an empty arena, an empty court and empty seats. And then one player appears with the ball and then another who defends him, then another and another, until both teams are fully present on the court. The sound of the crowd begins to erupt, a player makes the shot, and the once-empty stands are filled with fans jumping to their feet. Then, as quickly as they came in, all the figures disappear, returning us to an empty arena with empty seats, and the text, in all caps: “WHERE WILL AMAZING HAPPEN THIS YEAR?” The commercials convey the unpredictability and excitement of these buzzer-beater moments, the thrill of fleeting apparitions that entertain us in the arena. There are two spectacles here: the vintage footage of playoff games long past and the spectacular animation of that footage. Like the artist who so often turns to professional sports for his inspiration, the NBA

³⁶ The National Basketball Association, “NBA Rules History,” http://www.nba.com/analysis/rules_history.html (accessed October 30, 2008). The NBA rules stipulate that instant-replay is to be used “to review certain last-second plays at the end of each quarter and overtime periods.”

insists that “amazing” is equally available to those privileged few who can afford the exorbitant gate prices and the viewers who are happy to have a seat in front of the television screen.

Chapter 3: On Caryatids, Ruins, and an Anti-narrative Impulse

I have spent these several days past among my papers with the most pleasing tranquillity imaginable. You will ask how that can possibly be in the midst of Rome? Why, the Circensian Games were taking place; a kind of entertainment for which I have not the least taste. They have no novelty, no variety, nothing, in short, one would wish to see twice. [...] When I observe such men thus insatiably fond of so silly, so low, so uninteresting, so common an entertainment, I congratulate myself that I am insensible to these pleasures: and am glad to devote the leisure of this season to literature, which others throw away upon the most idle employment.
—Pliny, in a letter to Calvisius³⁷

If in *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* Paul Pfeiffer plays up the spectator's role in the construction of iconic athletes, his various *Caryatid* works cast the athlete, and by extension, his audience, in a less favorable light. Creating digital video loops from televised broadcasts of professional ice hockey games and European football matches, Pfeiffer denies players the static and venerable position of religious icons. In one video, we watch footballers collide with the turf and, in another, hockey players have disappeared from footage of what should have been their proudest moment: a victory lap around the rink hoisting their newly claimed trophy, the Stanley Cup. After the artist's manipulations, the tele-visual record is no longer a panegyric to the athlete, but an obsessive return to the injured or lost player, the faded glory of the fallen hero.

As compelling an aspect of the game as winning, failure is the necessary enemy of victors. In professional sports, the intensity of the competition carries far beyond the bounds of the field (or rink). Indeed, in a profession that idolizes the agility of youth, players are primarily in competition with their own rapidly deteriorating bodies. For all of the accolades and riches that superstardom can confer, an athlete's playing career is relatively short-lived, especially in the sports that appear in Pfeiffer's works, as the rigors of training and the demands of the game

³⁷ Pliny, *Letters*, vol. II, trans. William Melmoth, rev. Winifred Margaret Lambart Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915), 185-87.

take their toll on the body. As a result, most athletes' careers end in their thirties, just as business professionals are beginning to make the climb up the company ladder. Factor in career-ending injuries, and an athlete's race against the clock is that much more intense. Surely, part of the mythology surrounding great players is their ability to succeed under extreme physical and temporal pressures.

The video loops discussed in this chapter center on athletes succumbing to the pressures of the game. The palpable potential symbolized by the basketball players suspended in midair in the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* images is here countered by punishing defeat. There is no reprieve from the barrage of injuries incurred by the soccer players, no hope for the return of the hockey champs who once supported the now free-floating trophy. In a sense, then, this chapter deals with the aftermath of the apocalypse. The goal here, however, is not simply to situate the *Caryatid* works as the denouement of an inevitable narrative arc. Rather, I want to argue that, like the notion of immortal fame, the abject failure of forgettable athletes is part of a much larger cultural game that plays out in an arena of images.

In the introduction and first chapter, I showed that the audience plays an active role in the representation and construction of the (alienated) basketball celebrity. Here, I argue that Pfeiffer's *Caryatid* works display and fulfill a complementary phenomenon: the spectators' fascination with and desire for the hero's fall. Though a perennial bother to philosophers and moralists (from Pliny's dismissal of circus fans to the more recent media outrage over Michael Vick's illegal dog-fighting ring), the violence of athletic spectacles has always fascinated crowds. Leaving a trail of blood in his wake, the victorious gladiator stands tall atop a pile of defeated foes; his victory is defined against the pathetic fate of his opponents. Aggrandizing the winner requires, to an equal degree (and paradoxically), the amplification, or championing, of

the loser's defeat. In the *Caryatid* works, Pfeiffer seems expressly interested in turning our attention to the role the loser plays. Like the ancient architectural columns his title refers to, Pfeiffer calls attention to and aestheticizes the weight that the loser is made to bear.

In *Caryatid (Red, Yellow, Blue)* (2008, figs. 8-10), that loser is the composite of several different wounded players. In each of three 32" television screens aligned in a row on the gallery floor, we watch a looping, 30-second montage of soccer players falling hard on the field. At first, the video snippets seem rather humorous, a bloopers reel of missed kicks and poorly timed blocks. But the looping of the video repeatedly confronts us with the violence of the player's fall, and makes us reconsider our initial *schadenfreude*. Digitally copying the relatively neutral background information on top of the other players and the ball, Pfeiffer isolates a lone footballer in the center of the screen, and removes the causality from the player's heroic dive in each of these two to three-second clips, drawing our attention to the downward trajectory of his falling body.

Out of all of this tumult, a sequence of events starts to emerge. The clips are arranged according to the color of each player's uniform so that we read each screen as three discrete, but generic, players: a red, yellow and blue footballer. Further, the artist organizes each of the clips according to camera shot; in unison, each of the video loops begins with a brief wide-shot clip of a distant player in midair, just as he starts to descend, and ends with an extreme close-up of a hurt player, face down on the ground, writhing in pain. In between, Pfeiffer montages together a series of different clips taken from varying camera angles and zooms so that, when read as a single 30-second video, we get the impression that we are progressively closing in on the (composite) player and his imminent injury.

For example, in the video of the “red player,” Pfeiffer compiles thirteen clips of players who have in common this sartorial hue. Though slight discrepancies in the patterns of their uniforms make it clear that they are not the same player or even necessarily from the same team, they nevertheless notionally cohere into a single player by way of the artist’s deft assemblage. Pfeiffer beautifully arranges the clips so that the action in one complements the preceding segment while also subtly setting up the next. The clips are slowed down, further highlighting the elegance of the resultant composite figure whose fragility is attenuated for the viewer’s pleasure.³⁸

This delayed, repetitive look at a falling player is immediately familiar to us from network television’s sports coverage. Pfeiffer borrows footage from those moments in the game when the action stops and the network returns to the scene of the blunder, analyzing it in slow motion from every camera angle available, while the announcers bemoan what has just happened. Pfeiffer’s silent video loops keep us in this moment, and remove the ostensibly altruistic tone of the commentary and the replay that seek to resolve the trauma on the field and return us to the progress of the game. We are no longer examining the footage to figure out where something went wrong, where exactly the injury might have occurred, who might be responsible. Pfeiffer clears the way for an unencumbered view of the collapse, allowing and inviting the viewer to meditate on the player’s pain, to engage in sustained empathy with the athlete.

True to form, Pfeiffer removes all of the identifying marks from the uniforms of the various players. Not only does this add to the formal simplicity of his composition—we see only red-, yellow-, and blue-clad players against a mostly green background—but it helps to unite the

³⁸ It’s not entirely clear in these clips whether the source footage has been slowed down by the artist or whether it was already in slow-motion replay.

different players in each screen into three allegorical figures. As with the basketball players in the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* series, Pfeiffer downplays the individuality of the footballers. Actually, Pfeiffer goes beyond merely suppressing the identity of a player. We could have just as easily watched the fall of a single athlete, cut and pieced together from a series of fragmented camera angles using video editing software. Instead, in each monitor, Pfeiffer chooses to construct a new, more generalized player who does not refer back to a single, lost athlete.

By reducing the players to the primary colors, which are also mentioned in his title, Pfeiffer alludes to Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue* paintings (1966-70, see fig. 11). However, unlike Newman's mythically empty canvases, Pfeiffer's videos are complicated by an equally important formal theme: the players' failure.³⁹ This formal and figurative complication is strictly at odds with the goal of the large rectangles of flat color that fill Newman's paintings. As Harold Rosenberg describes them, Newman's paintings "induce emptiness to exclaim its secrets," in order that they "might function as part of a totality. [In] each instance it was the totality that counted, a whole greater than its parts."⁴⁰ In other words, the compositional simplicity, the "emptiness" of the canvas, is an attempt to reduce the world to its essence, to symbolize purity and truth and thereby transport the viewer beyond the material canvas to the realm of transcendence. Pfeiffer's video triptych seems purposefully different from Newman's project because his primary colors are attached to players in the material world, and players who succumb to the laws of gravity, fall to the ground, and thus fail to transcend physically.

³⁹ Harold Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1978), 59-62.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

The distinction between Newman's and Pfeiffer's works, then, seems to derive from the antagonism between symbolic and allegorical art, which Craig Owens defines as one of the fundamental distinctions between the work of Modern and Postmodern artists (i.e., Newman and Pfeiffer, respectively). As Owens points out, Romantic artists first articulated distaste for allegorical art, which they saw in the works of the French Academy's history painters who filtered contemporary events through the visual figures of classical myth, creating banal personifications.⁴¹ For the artists and critics who advocated for a more modern art, art was either of its moment or about the past, either symbolic or allegorical. As Owens puts it: "Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them."⁴² In contrast, Modern artists sought to create original compositions that, failing the referential ambiguity of allegory, convey a transcendental "truth." For Newman and the other artists of the New York School (e.g., Pollock, De Kooning, Rothko) that make up the period of high Modernism, to be original meant to be abstract, to work toward the overt and emphatic removal of the human figure from the surface of representation.

Thus, the goal of a symbolic art, seen here in Newman's works and Rosenberg's words, is to be a metonym for a greater, transcendent whole. The symbol, as Owens argues and Rosenberg demonstrates, is believed to succinctly and fully stand in for the essence of a thing.⁴³ In Newman's paintings, the primary colors—the paint—are to be the part that refers to the whole. That whole is also the paint, for in Greenbergian modernism, the material of the paint is considered the essence of painting. Barring any cursory reference to the figural, Newman's painting is a referential totality: it is the aspiration of the paint to refer to itself, the symbol and

⁴¹ Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," in *October* 12 (Spring 1980), 75-76.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 69. As Owens states, his own interpretation of allegory draws from Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

⁴³ Owens, 81-84.

its meaning are present simultaneously. In contrast, according to Owens, an allegorical work of art is “extravagant, an expenditure of surplus value; it is always in *excess*.”⁴⁴ In other words, allegory fails to refer clearly to a single, originary meaning, a metaphysical presence. It takes us outside of the image for another, secondary meaning. Thus, for Owens, “allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another,”⁴⁵ thereby threatening the idea of purity with “surplus,” wholeness with fragmentation, simplicity with complication.

Pfeiffer’s appropriative art refers to the primacy of Newman’s primary paint colors but doubles their meaning and restores to the human figure the weight of their representation. Allegory accepts the idea of doubling and adds the idea that with the double comes the proliferation of supplemental meanings. Rosenberg’s comments display a concerted effort to signify a metaphysical presence via the purity and singularity of a symbolic art, and thus he necessarily conceals another, paradoxical doubling that occurs in the four compositionally similar images that make up Newman’s series, and which threaten to derail the viewer’s path to transcendence. For, in order for the symbol to work, it must act as a synecdoche for something larger and thereby nevertheless reduce that which is meant to exist outside of language to a sign which must be read or interpreted within a larger historical context. Pfeiffer’s work presents a foil to this construct by compiling parts of several players into a whole without giving us a transcendental symbol. In comparison to Newman’s triptych, Pfeiffer’s videos present the moving image on three separate screens, playing up the viewer’s durational experience in front of the work of art.⁴⁶ Further, Pfeiffer’s three-channel video work figuratively divides Newman’s

⁴⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁶ In allegory, time is something that is cited and played with. In the academic history paintings of the late eighteenth century, current events were interpreted via the classical past. In a similar manner, sports coverage broadcasts a type of time that exists outside of “real” time. The playing clock can be paused, replayed, set back. Even when the game is broadcasted live, in real time, to locations across the globe, time in sports is understood to be relative, fragmented, a negotiable term. “Team A may have won today, but Team B’s time will come.”

canvas into three distinct sections, filtering the viewer's moment of transcendence in front of the work of art through the language of a digital age viewer who is confronted by the distracting and ubiquitous presence of multiple sources of output. In front of these three screens, the viewer is denied a holistic view of the work of art, and is instead forced to furtively glance from screen to screen in order to compare and contrast the looped footage. Thus, Pfeiffer extends the referential potential of the image beyond the primary colors, beyond the soccer game, to the spectators who gather to watch these players. Pfeiffer's athletes function more like three allegorical figures of defeat, whose pain from playing the game is portrayed as a rich, complex metaphor even in the so-called age of simulacra.⁴⁷

It might seem counterintuitive to link Pfeiffer's various strategies of representation, including that of disappearance, with a postmodern allegory that hopes to extend the possibility of meaning. Nevertheless, Pfeiffer utilizes "erasure" precisely to draw the viewer's attention to something in the instant replay that we may not have otherwise noticed. The camera zooms in, and the action slows, but there is no altercation to weigh in on, no illegal move to put the blame on. In an age overwhelmed by mass mediation, the historical record risks becoming lost in the clutter of visual stimuli (with the countless number of regular season matches in soccer alone, is it any wonder that there are so many fair-weather and post-season-only fans?). In *Caryatid (Red, Yellow, Blue)*, Pfeiffer makes direct reference to the volume of broadcasts all portraying more or less the same thing. The looping videos have the effect of making clear the repetitive elements of the game, the plays and maneuvers of the footballers that, though meant to advance their team to victory, sometimes backfire and fall flat.

⁴⁷ That is, according to Baudrillard and as discussed in the first chapter. Later in this chapter, I will return to a discussion of the severity of Baudrillard's arguments.

Looping in unison, we watch three generic footballers who tumble to the ground, grab for their variously injured body parts (calf, ankle, thigh), and end up face down, with their arms over their heads. Their pain turns out to be a highly introspective experience. Shielding their faces from view, they deny the viewer's desire to zoom in on the players' pain and experience.⁴⁸ Before we can get in for a closer, better look, the loop starts again, pushing us out into the upper bleachers, forcing us to search to make out the action on the distant field. To create this diagetic loop, Pfeiffer technically adds information to the footage, by which he reduces much of the original context.⁴⁹ The result of the competitive narrative of the game is simply no longer relevant. By isolating those moments that put a stop to the regulated playing clock, Pfeiffer draws attention to the fact that built into the game itself are moments that suspend the forward progress of play. Denied access to the full expression of the player's pain, the viewer is continually confronted by his or her own desire to see that pain. Moreover, the instant replay, which returns us to the immediate past, illustrates the way in which the game is aware of its own record. Compiled from different clips taken from games played on various occasions, these videos make clear the fact that the viewer is not watching a "real" fall. Linked by the artist's careful manipulations and the color of their uniforms, the players in these videos instead highlight for the viewer the formal elements that are a part of the supposedly documentary sport's coverage. Traumatic injuries, and our own obsessive attempt to return to that traumatic moment, are turned into beautiful visuals by the artist. Thus Pfeiffer's videos isolate and exaggerate an anti-narrative element always already present in sports broadcasts.

⁴⁸ As Laura Mulvey discusses, the close-up also works to disrupt the flow of the narrative by "breaking narrative verisimilitude," and destroying the idea of male agency vis-à-vis the narrative. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), p. 12. I discuss Mulvey's article in detail in the next chapter.

⁴⁹ There is an insistence on the rhetoric of the material in digital editing software. Photoshop allows users to add "layers" to an image and time-based editing software like Macromedia Flash and iMovie organize the editor's work on a "stage" or in a "project," respectively.

If these clips deny us the resolutions of these player's injuries, what is it, then, that the artist wants to put on display? In part, the subject of these video loops is a desire to see the fall. In the context of the Christian narrative, the "fall" is the result of choice, and thus brings with it the implication that we sometimes desire to disobey the rules that lead to success, to virtue, to transcendence. The incessant video loop enhances the trauma of violence as it simultaneously exaggerates the elegant simplicity of the (strangely) balletic fall. When one considers that soccer players are often charged with "playing up" their injuries during a game in order to gain advantage through penalties on opposing players, one must consider that the morally upright narrative of success and victory is never without the taint of deception and a very real impulse for the anti-narrative of defeat. Thus, the ascension of the basketball players in *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* can be read in contrast to the painful grounding of fallen soccer players. And not only do Pfeiffer's soccer players act as allegories of the fall, but, as a triumvirate, they also harken back to the crucifixion of Christ and the two thieves—a violent scene marked by the added cruelty of its spectators—though without the promise of resurrection.

Placing us before the cross, so to speak, Pfeiffer's work thus richly extends beyond its own proscribed playing field—the television frame and his maneuvers therein—to include the spectators who stand in front of his work. Like the witnesses who mocked Christ on the cross, our motivations to look at these images are called into question. And if the pain performed by these players is visually appealing, then we must acknowledge our own macabre attraction to the violence of sports.

The sports arena is a unique and ancient cultural institution in which the ability to contain and divide the danger and brutality on the court from the spectators is notionally guaranteed by the wall separating the stands from the field, but this wall is not necessarily held to be an

impermeable barrier. Preferring the “leisure of literature,” Pliny lumps together the barbarism of spectators and athletes alike, and thus we must consider our own position in front of Pfeiffer’s work (and indeed, Pliny’s indulgence in his own rather pitiless entertainment—the condemnation of the crowd). Having earned a reputation for aggressiveness, soccer fans are particularly apt subjects by which to evoke the human propensity for violence. Diehard soccer club fans’ willingness to resort to physical violence and racist invective remains a constant tension that threatens to erupt every time rival factions meet in the same arena. It would be too simple to stereotype soccer fans as erratic, immoral roughnecks, or to claim that it is easy to distinguish between those fans who go too far and those who respect the game.⁵⁰ Pfeiffer universalizes the violence of the game, and he does not allow fans to recognize and identify with their team—he has obscured the competitive action. Instead, Pfeiffer gives an attractive picture of the fall that draws one in to the violence, lulling the viewer into a prolonged gaze at the spectacle that he has created.

In order to assess the uniqueness of the dynamic created between spectators and the players on the field in arena spaces, we might consider the divisive power play between oppressor and oppressed, subject and object, that Michel Foucault attributes to the cultural institutions born of the enlightenment—jails, mental wards, hospitals, and schools.⁵¹ For Foucault, Jeremy Bentham’s 1785 design for a new kind of public prison, the Panopticon, emblemizes the culture of normalization that emerged in the eighteenth century and which

⁵⁰ For a compelling essay that attempts to characterize different historical moments and locations by the attitudes of their crowds, see Allen Guttman, “Sports Crowds,” in *Crowds*, ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiewis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 123-27. Of particular interest is Guttman’s description of a brutality that reemerged post-1960 (the era of the television) in sports spectatorship. Citing the toppling of goal posts and the riotous post-game exuberance seen on college campuses (think Ohio State), as well as the rise of ethnic, racist, and nationalist slurs that have plagued European soccer club fans, Guttman notes how the spectators can color the tenor of the spectacular game to negative effect. Ultimately, he argues that it is up to the crowd to determine and affect its own moral code (which he believes will mete out its own self-regulation in the end).

⁵¹ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* [1975] (New York: Random House, 1977), especially part three, “Panopticism,” 195-228.

sought to build monolithic structures that could manifest and advertise a clear distinction between society and its outcasts. Inside, the Panopticon reinforced the dichotomy between prisoners and their guards. Arranged in cells around a central tower, the prisoners were well-lit and always seen, while the guards were cleverly disguised in the central tower, never seen. The architectural layout was intended to constantly reinforce the divide between subject and object, viewer and viewed, so that prisoners would feel as if under continual surveillance and thus adjust their behavior in anticipation of being caught by the moral authority lurking behind the guise of the central tower.

If we compare this structure to the sports arena, the relationship between seer and seen at first appears to have been flipped. As with the basketball players in the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, in *Caryatid (Red, Yellow, Blue)*, the athlete in the center of the stadium is the one subjected to the objectifying viewpoints of countless spectators. Desperate as he may be in his moment of ecstatic pain, he is unable to escape the penetrating gaze of the assembled crowd and the television crews (for whom he otherwise willingly performs). The player is bodily imprisoned by the inquisitive eyes of the surrounding fans, a multitude that extends ad infinitum via the television.

And yet, this description seems too totalizing, for Pfeiffer allows the viewer to witness these players' injuries without betraying any player's individual identity. The players that we hone in on are only generic allegories, the nameless, faceless targets of the camera's hunting eye. The constant surveillance does not, in fact, catch the player's every move (hence Pfeiffer's need to reconstruct the fall from several video fragments), and he retains, via the artist's digital camouflage, his anonymity. In the televisual age, when cameras are all around us, we can empathize with the player's sense of being continually sighted, but to what degree the

technologies of visualization lock us up in culture's institutions is a matter that remains to be debated.

The progression that Pfeiffer creates in these loops evidences a bit of the player's aspiration for attention. Near the beginning of each loop, just as the players start their descent, we can see part of the risks they take, not only to make the play, but, judging from the acrobatics involved, to entertain and display their athletic prowess. Once he fails, the player seeks protection from the spectator's gaze. In a similar manner, fans sometimes aspire to be the focus of each other's and the camera's roaming eye (e.g. exposing their bare chests painted to spell out their support for their team, even in the chill of winter). Thus, both players and fans exhibit a more fluid understanding of the seer/seen binary, seeking out the space on both sides of the camera's lens. For both, the camera is no more a divide than the boundary lines separating the game from the stands—respected, but not utterly impassable.

Pfeiffer's reference to an arena sport, whose fans are notorious for their quickness to violence, mobilizes yet another form of attention-seeking spectatorship. Those who have witnessed the hooliganism of soccer fans, even those who have watched a televised game at a rowdy sports bar, can appreciate the difficulties of continuing with such naïve generalizations that paint spectators as disembodied, all-knowing seers. In a sense, rowdy fans are a lot like the athlete: their dramatic antics attract attention just as do the dazzling moves of the soccer player. These spectators actively pursue the position of the spectacle.

As Allen Guttman recounts, there have been several notorious examples of crowds exploding into mass pandemonium at soccer matches, rushing the field, and in the process toppling over the stands or some large section of the barricading wall resulting in the accidental

death of hundreds.⁵² In a related sense, Pfeiffer is like those rowdy fans whose disturbance spills over into the game and who color its representation. Pfeiffer disturbs the visual record in order to highlight and aestheticize the violence of the sport. To what degree, then, are Pfeiffer's alterations similar to the violence of a few unruly fans? Is it unfair to lump the artist in with such a controversial enterprise as the aestheticization of violence? At least for the moment, I want suggest that Pfeiffer's method is a bit like a vandal's. But before we lock him up in the panoptic prison, we might seriously consider: to what end this vandalism? As has become the warning of philosophers since the wildfire-fire like spread of television in the latter half of the twentieth century, the outbreak of new technologies of representation threaten to vandalize and destroy all vestiges of the real. Jean Baudrillard (as well as Guy Debord and Paul Virilio) has warned us out our total fall into simulacra, a state in which binary oppositions (reality versus representation) no longer have any meaning. For Baudrillard, this is a *fait accompli*: "nothing separates one pole from another anymore, the beginning from the end; there is a kind of contraction of one over the other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapse of the two traditional poles into each other: [...] an implosion of meaning. *That is where simulation begins.*"⁵³ As discussed in the first chapter, for Baudrillard, the appearance of television ushered in a new perspective of the world. This "television" significantly shifted the structure of panoptic vision because it enacted "a switch from the panoptic mechanism of surveillance [...] to a system of deterrence, in which the distinction between the passive and the active is abolished."⁵⁴ In Baudrillard's eyes, the relationship

⁵² Guttman, 126-7.

⁵³ Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," 31.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 29. To be sure, reality television, which Baudrillard calls *vérité*, does not follow the seer/seen dynamic of Foucault's panopticon: "In the 'vérité' experience it is not a question of secrecy or perversion, but of a sort of frisson of the real, or of an aesthetics of the hyperreal, a frisson of vertiginous and phony exactitude, a frisson of simultaneous distancing and magnification, of distortion of scale, of an excessive transparency. The pressure of an excess of meaning, when the bar of the sign falls below the usual waterline of meaning: the nonsignifier is exalted by the camera angle. There one sees what the real never was [...], without the distance that gives us perspectival space and depth vision...." Ibid., 28.

between the viewer and the television is profoundly distinct from the traditionally bifurcated subject positions relative to vision (seer/seen) inherited along with the invention of Albertian perspective in the Renaissance. He states, “the eye of TV is no longer the source of an absolute gaze, and the ideal of control is no longer that of transparency. This still presupposes an objective space (that of the Renaissance) and the omnipotence of the despotic gaze.”⁵⁵

But as I argued in chapter one, Baudrillard goes too far when he says that tele-vision destroys the distinction between the dramatic spectacle and the real. If the allegorical is meant to “rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear,”⁵⁶ then what we have in Pfeiffer’s triptych is a material, grounded representation of the real, physical trauma that Baudrillard wants to say is no longer possible in representation. The violent riots that sometimes erupt at sports games show conclusively that spectators do not always sit by passively. Indeed, the spectator in front of the privileged work of art is also not always well-behaved. To refer back to Barnett Newman’s *Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* paintings, the third and fourth iterations of the series have quite notably been on the receiving end of the work of vandals, whose transgressive acts now color the way these images are perceived.⁵⁷ When Baudrillard diagnoses the postmodern condition as hyperreal, he gives short shrift to the kind of subversive meanings that can accrue as a result of violence against the image. Pfeiffer vandalizes the source material and destroys its ability to convey a semblance of the game. By interfering in the

⁵⁵ Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra,” 29.

⁵⁶ Owens, 68.

⁵⁷ Both paintings were attacked by males who gashed the surfaces of these canvases with sharp metal objects. In the case of the third painting in the series, the controversial restoration further extended accusations of vandalism, making for a fitting illustration of the point I am making here: namely that vandalism is itself an active re-scripting of the ideologies underpinning meaning. For an excellent discussion of how complex the vandal’s act can be, see Gridley McKim-Smith, “The Rhetoric of Rape, the Language of Vandalism” *Women’s Art Journal* vol. 23, no. 1 (Spring – Summer, 2002): 29-36.

broadcast footage, Pfeiffer does not attempt to restore an “original meaning” to the athletic game, but, as Owens argues about the role of the allegorist, he “adds another meaning to the image.”⁵⁸

As in the arena, and even the art museum, the television screen is another space that attempts to contain the vandal’s act. But if the vandal exists at all, it is in distinction from the orderly citizen, and thus these two figures create a binary that we might find maps in a counterintuitive way onto the distinction between the real (the vandal’s material destruction) and the image (the orderly game when its participants and spectators follow the rules). If Pfeiffer can be called a vandal, then it is to say that new visual technologies also contain, and reinterpret, the richness of both the real and the image.

To put it more simply, the arena contains both the ludic spectacle and the madding crowd. Players must tune out the distractions of the roving cameras and the crowd’s taunts in order to concentrate on the game. Likewise, the fans have their own distractions to contend with, both in the arena—the hotdog vendor, the disorderly enthusiasts a few rows ahead—and in front of the TV—the comments of the announcers, the commotion in the bar. Both groups are capable of causing a distraction and being distracted, and thus both groups are familiar with and positioned on both sides of the seer/seen binary. The members of each of these groups are subject to rules imposed to keep order; rules that are, for the most part, accepted and followed. Generally, the two sides, the players and the fans, stay physically separate. But the efficacy of this division, and the resultant order, depends on a willing subjugation to the rules, not any absolute or essential truth concerning the nature of the two groups.

Thus, the television’s space seems a lot like that of the arena—rarely erupting in the sort of mass pandemonium that Baudrillard fears, utterly destroying the spectacle. And if *Caryatid* (*Red, Yellow, Blue*) sets out to illustrate this point via the vandalism of the image, Pfeiffer’s

⁵⁸ Owens, 69.

earlier *Caryatid* from 2003 (fig. 12) reminds us that the image is a dynamic space capable of multiplying meaning, even by including the representation of a symbol of transcendence.

Caryatid (2003) prominently features a potent symbol in the center of a stadium full of spectators. Here we watch the Stanley Cup, the National Hockey League's annual championship trophy, parade around the rink, unaided by a would-be-joyous player. The physical supporters have been obscured by Pfeiffer's digital intervention, as the artist playfully restores to the trophy an intangible "metaphysical presence." As is to be expected, in this loop, we are again aware of the manipulation that has occurred. And if we are by now not convinced of any "real" supernatural force, we may still experience a sense of amazement from the spectacular trickery of digital editing software.⁵⁹ In other words, while we might perceive that the video has been altered, we can still desire the illusionism of representation.

In several frames of this loop, the viewer's position is directly opposite from spectators and members of the media trying to get a shot of the trophy. At one point, the viewer is squeezed between two equally ambitious cameramen trying to capture the action—we are aligned with the camera, positioned by it (ultimately)—and yet, for most of the video, the floating trophy steals the show. For here we are in an immediate, post-championship moment, when all of the concerted efforts to get to an end, to determine a victor, are given over to ecstatic celebration. Moreover, without any evidence of the players who have just won, we are denied the conclusion of a teleological narrative. The champions are not as important as the ecstasy of the spectacle, here underscored by digital technologies. The physical weight of the symbolic trophy is literally ungrounded using the special effects that are a familiar feature in films, commercials, on

⁵⁹ To be sure, as digital manipulation tools continue to advance, the impressiveness of Pfeiffer's video may lose some of its technical grandeur. If anything, this should add to the argument that his work is only another restaging of possible meanings relative to a specific place and time.

magazine covers, etc. By applying commercial processes to the media footage of the athletic event, Pfeiffer plays with the visual language of both advertisements and sports broadcasts.

All this to say the trophy itself is a symbol of transcendence that is created within the space of representation. The Stanley Cup, though notionally weightless here, is not unencumbered. As Owens argues, the binary between symbol and allegory is based on the notion that the symbol as a motivated sign refers to a larger metaphysical concept on its own, i.e. without the help of digital software.⁶⁰ The generic player that we saw in both the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* photographs and the *Caryatid (Red, Yellow, Blue)* video loops has been removed as we trace the path of the floating silver chalice. But this symbol, a part that is meant to refer to a greater, ineffable whole (a transcendental, essentially true idea) is here only comically rarefied. The trophy may be a synecdoche for championship, but, separated from the players onto whom it is meant to confer champion status, the trophy acquires new meanings, disrupting its symbolic purity.

In terms of its physical appearance, the Stanley Cup itself is continually altered. Every year, its ownership changes, and the names of the new winning team members are etched into its base. To accommodate all of these names, the trophy has more than quadrupled in size since its origins as a small silver chalice (a copy of which still tops the current trophy). As one of the National Hockey League's most potent symbols, the Stanley Cup, also known as the Holy Grail to hockey fans, must work hard to promote its image, traveling around the world to build and preserve its iconicity. And, like the Holy Grail, the Stanley Cup is a metaphor for the quest as much as the end goal. In order to promote the championship, the Stanley Cup has its own press schedule: it has been a guest on late night talk shows, visited the White House, and lent moral

⁶⁰ Owens, 82-3.

support to American troops in the war zone.⁶¹ Thus, what Pfeiffer's elusive, floating trophy dramatizes is another theatrical presentation, another publicity stunt, of the trophy on the digital stage. The trophy's symbolic power is thus not simply the result of an inherent authenticity, but of a well choreographed public relations campaign which, like an allegory, continuously works to link the silver chalice to the notion of victory and success.

Adding to the spectacle he has created on the screen, Pfeiffer shrouds this video in the mystery of museum display. *Caryatid* plays on a small-format, thirteen-inch combination TV/DVD player which the artist has plated in chrome, mirroring not only the polished silver trophy but our own reflection on its surface. Thus, if one side of the object allows us to disappear before the fantasy of the mystical image, the other sides remind us of our physical presence in front of the work of art. Set on a pedestal and encased in a plexi-glass vitrine, this soon-to-be outdated tube television becomes an historically relevant object, not a banal machine threatening to deaden the aura of faraway objects, but every bit as enigmatic and prized as the trophy. And, as is the case here in the art gallery, Pfeiffer's reflective television is just as precious and rare as the caryatid mirrors to which its title and chromed surface refer.⁶²

The mass availability of mirrors dates only to the first half of the 19th century, a period that also saw the invention of photography. According to David Summers, the mirror produces an image that never actually "fixes" the viewer and is thus analogous to a new type of modern image that is not fixed, singular, irreplaceable, but rather one among a multitude of fleeting images.⁶³ Like the fallen footballer or the free-floating Stanley cup, the subject of representation

⁶¹ See "The Stanley Cup..." NHL.com (http://www.nhl.com/cup/fun_facts.html).

⁶² Briefly popular from the 7th to 5th Centuries BCE, caryatid mirrors, as their architectural counterparts, were comprised of a female statue base supporting a mirrored disk on its head. They were available only to the wealthiest of patrons and were primarily used in religious ceremonies. The only full-scale monograph on this topic to date is by Lenore O. Keene Congdon, *Caryatid Mirrors of Ancient Greece: Technical, Stylistic and Historical Considerations of an Archaic and Early Classical Bronze Series* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1981), 8-15.

⁶³ Here I am relying on David Summers's account in his tome *Real Spaces* (London: Phaidon, 2003), esp. 551-5.

is never fully objectified. The crowd is bound to distract itself, to turn its attention to some other spectacle. In the *Caryatid* works, Paul Pfeiffer foregrounds his manipulations and lays bare the malleability of the record in the digital age, thereby preserving the chance for spectacular illusionism. In our period of media saturation, images may not be charged with the gravity of symbolic metonymy, but nor are they stripped of their allegorical power, their ability to refer profoundly to something beyond themselves.

Chapter 4: Accounting for *The Long Count*

“There are two things that are hard to hit and see, that's a spooky ghost and Muhammad Ali.”

“Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, your hands can't hit what your eyes can't see.”

—Muhammad Ali

Like the spectators in the last two chapters, boxing fans have joined in both celebrating and condemning one of their sport's most iconic figures: Muhammad Ali. When Ali entered the world of professional boxing in 1960, his quick footwork combined with his ability to take a punch made him an unstoppable foe. But his career was riddled with setbacks as a result of his equally unstoppable propensity for inciting the ire of his fellow pugilists, middle-class Americans, even the United States Army. Ali was a braggart who boasted invisibility in the ring but clamored for the media spotlight anytime he was outside of it. In *The Long Count* triptych (2001, figs. 13-16), Paul Pfeiffer literalizes Ali's mythical invisibility, erasing the iconic athlete from three of his most televised fights, along with his opponents and the officiating referees. By removing the fighter from the ring, Pfeiffer once again attempts to reinterpret the historical record in order to redirect the viewer's attention from the celebrity of the athlete to the role of the spectator.

The *Long Count* series is comprised of three LCD screens showing video loops taken from the footage of the final rounds of three of Ali's heavyweight title wins. In this group of videos, Pfeiffer veers from his usual editing techniques, allowing the ghostly outlines of the pugilists and referee to remain in the finished work. Unlike the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and *Caryatid* works, where the artist's slick edits are not visible on the surface of the image, the *Long Count* videos were made using a technique that reveals the artist's interference,

but the indistinct traces that result do not cohere into a spectacle that replaces what has been removed.⁶⁴ Pfeiffer copied the front row fans on top of the action in the ring, and for three minutes, the length of one round in professional boxing, the videos appear to display a steady back-and-forth pan of the spectators seen through the intermittent traces of the not-totally effaced figures in the ring. The viewers of Pfeiffer's videos are thus confronted by their counterparts instead of the exciting action of sparring pugilists. From the spectators' reactions, we can read subtle clues about that action that has been concealed. When they nudge each other and stare, or appear to yell out, we can gather that someone has just taken a hit, or possibly dodged one.⁶⁵ The celebration that erupts as the round ends is glimpsed briefly before the loop begins again.

Without any real action in the ring, do these videos finally offer the obscenity that Baudrillard warns against in a society with "no more spectacle"? Does the broadcasting of the match destroy our ability to witness, firsthand, the dramatic bout? Have 24-hour sports networks dulled the thrill of watching the game? The implications of these questions are intensified in our digital age, when images are (literally) more close at hand than ever; Pfeiffer's choice of display medium—three go-anywhere, small-format, 3 x 4 inch LCD monitors—stresses this point. As has been suggested in the literature on this work, Pfeiffer's exaggerated interferences within the televisual record direct the gallery viewer's attention to the manipulability of the mediated image and encourage the viewer to consider the ways in which all images are only the simulacra of the

⁶⁴ Pfeiffer says that this series was born out of his failure to achieve full erasure in an earlier sports video. Paul Pfeiffer, "Digitally Erased Video," *Art 21*, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/pfeiffer/clip1.html#>.

⁶⁵ Though not integral to my analysis here, it should be noted that in Pfeiffer's relatively quiet installation we do not, in fact, hear the audience. There is, however, sound in these videos, which the artist splices together from ambient sounds recorded during pre-fight interviews with each of the athletes. Heavy breaths, non-verbal noises, and background interruptions are cut together to create a soundtrack that also seems to convey the hastened heart rate one might expect from an exhausted athlete. The boxer's words are excised from the audio record as his presence is effaced from the video.

real, a guise of the truth.⁶⁶ But this line of reasoning, also seen in the questions above, is indebted to the same naïve binary of passive spectators and active spectacle argued against in the previous chapters. Pfeiffer's loops show how the repetition of "simulacra" doesn't rob them of interest or power. One can watch the videos and continually find something new in the footage.⁶⁷

As a result of Pfeiffer's interventions, the subject that emerges in his videos is the assembled crowd of these legendary fights. Usually concealed by the media spectacle that centers on the celebrated athletes, the crowd now takes over as the main event. This is particularly significant given the history of the three films that Pfeiffer appropriates: three Muhammad Ali fights that were broadcast live, via closed-circuit satellite—some of the earliest and most successful sporting events to use this new format. Pfeiffer calls attention to the hype that surrounded these televised spectacles, borrowing the titles for each of these videos from the catchphrases by which these fights were commonly known. Thus, *The Long Count: I Shook Up the World* refers to the 1964 bout between Ali—then Cassius Clay—and Sonny Liston in Miami Beach, where the young pugilist, against 8-1 odds, first won the heavyweight title; *The Long Count: Rumble in the Jungle* borrows the catchy slogan created by Don King to promote the politically fraught bout between Ali and George Foreman in 1974 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire); and *The Long Count: The Thrilla in Manila*, calls to mind the brutal fight between Ali and Joe Frazier in 1975 in the Philippine capital.

What distinguishes *The Long Count* videos from the other works I have discussed is the overt reference they make to a significant development in the way sports spectators engaged

⁶⁶ Stefano Basilico argues that Pfeiffer's *Long Count* series is exemplary of the artist's overall interest in the spectator's "distressing willingness to accept at face-value the imagery we consume." Basilico, 27. My argument differs from Basilico's in that I find Pfeiffer's interest in sports imagery to be a commentary on the ability of the sports spectator to show simultaneously a desire for the soap-operatic narratives of the game and a healthy skepticism of its fairness.

⁶⁷ It took me over a dozen views to notice a few seconds in *The Long Count: I Shook Up the World* when, for reasons one can only guess, a man suddenly runs across the length of the screen.

with/in the athletic spectacle. Taken from three of the biggest spectacles in the history of broadcast sports, Pfeiffer's videos refer to a period in which new visual technologies—satellite broadcasts, television, video recording devices, etc.—threatened to drastically alter the relationship between the spectator and the “real.” Though temporally bound to the event, the closed-circuit audiences of Ali's fights were no longer moored to any one physical location. When Cassius Clay defied the odds and won his first heavyweight title in a match against Sonny Liston after just six rounds, only 8,300 saw the event live in Miami Beach (just half of the venue's seating capacity), but 700,000 gathered in front of 271 movie screens across the nation to witness the event via satellite (grossing nearly \$4.5 million, a record closed-circuit door take).⁶⁸ Unlike the sports arena, where spectators are a vivid and ever-present background to the action, filling the space beyond the fighters and the ropes, the movie houses where these live telecasts played situated the audience in front of a screen, and thus threatened to deaden the stimulus of live action.

At least, that was one of the dreaded effects of new visual technologies judging from theories about spectatorship contemporaneous with these Ali fights. In three seminal texts by historians of culture, film, and art—Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Laura Mulvey's “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), and Rosalind Krauss's “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism” (1976)—we find great anxieties over the introduction and widespread dissemination of new forms of visual media that threatened to irreversibly alter our relationship to the spectacle. Positioned in front of LCD monitors, Pfeiffer's twenty-first-century viewers are confronted with their own, notional spectatorship, while also conjuring another moment equally shaken by the advancement and widespread dissemination of new visual technologies. By

⁶⁸ Michael Ezra, *Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 81-84. The statistics that follow regarding the Clay-Liston bout are conveniently gathered and reproduced in this excellent book.

turning the pugilists into a ghostly veil, Pfeiffer draws our attention to the spectators in these videos and thus foregrounds the fact that the athletic spectacle is always an imbricate of the main event and the surrounding crowd. By removing the screen of the fighting athletes, Pfeiffer makes the gallery viewer look directly at these earlier spectators, and thus suggests that there is some kind of relationship between the two audiences. Even so, our position in front of the small LCD monitors on which these videos play situates us frontally to the screen, threatening to return us to the supposedly less dynamic spectatorial experience found in the cinema, where our gaze is theoretically not returned.

In this chapter, I argue that Pfeiffer ultimately confronts the viewer with the spectacle of spectatorship. We see these boxing fans from the 1960s and '70s and, more profoundly, they seem to see us. Unique in the artist's sports-related oeuvre, the *Long Count* videos aggressively foreground the spectators' sightedness in the filmic record and thus insist that the viewer contemplate his or her position in front of and distinct from the image, to emphasize the fact that the filmic record is another stage on which we perform identity. As in his other works, Pfeiffer again embraces the surface of representation as an analog to the sporting field, playfully interacting with digitized pixels in order to destabilize the notion that the image is a substitute that completely effaces the real. As such, Pfeiffer explores a new ontology of representation that is no longer beholden to the notion of an indexical relationship to some perceived "real" event, captured by the camera and preserved (or simulated) in celluloid frames.⁶⁹ Making the familiar sports broadcast strange, Pfeiffer shocks his viewers with imagery that sites a newly created spectacle. By examining the underlying ideologies in the writings of Debord, Mulvey, and

⁶⁹ Questions about the ontology of photography and film are as old as the mediums themselves. Because of its believed "objective" qualities, photography created a crisis in a period of high-classical painting which had become unsure of its own claims to truth. For a quick look at the issue as it pertains to both photography and film, see André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" and "The Myth of Total Cinema" in *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 9-22.

Krauss, I hope to question the assumption that technology threatens to wrench utterly the viewer from the dynamic of “real,” live spectatorship. Via technology, Pfeiffer wards off the “ecstasy of communication,” confronting viewers with the “drama of alienation” from themselves—they are simultaneously seer and seen.⁷⁰

Coeval to Muhammad Ali’s early career, when the iconic pugilist first enjoyed record-breaking audiences via closed-circuit broadcast, French theorist Guy Debord was worrying about the spectator’s ability to distinguish the “real” from the spectacle. In his highly influential *Society of the Spectacle*, first published in French in 1967, and subsequently in English in 1970, Debord frets about the loss of “real” human interactions within a society inundated by mediated images. Debord avers that “all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.”⁷¹

In his critique of a society that has sacrificed its mobility and agency to the moving image, Debord reveals an ideology that consecrates the real and the spectacle as an inviolable binary. For Debord, the spectacle “is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society.”⁷² In other words, if the spectacle exists at all, it is to the detriment of any concept of reality. However, one can also infer that in order for the real to exist, it must define itself against the presence of the spectacular.

Perhaps most clearly manifested in the hypnotized cinema audience pictured on the front-and-back cover image of his text’s English translation (fig. 17), Debord’s “society of the spectacle” is imagined as the cinematic audience, hopelessly passive, enraptured by the glowing

⁷⁰ Here again, then, as in the rest of this thesis, I take as my subject the relationship between viewer and image. As in all of these works, much could be said about how new technologies of representation are threatening to profoundly revise our negotiation and understanding of time in the media age. An analysis of this sort would likely begin by considering the work of Paul Virilio and his well-known and provocative proposal that the digital age has replaced “space” with “speed.” Such an apocalyptic revision of how we view the world is certainly related to the general project here, and is an open arena for future study of Pfeiffer’s work.

⁷¹ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman (Detroit: Black & Red, [1970] 1983), thesis 1.

⁷² Ibid., thesis 6.

spectacle (which we do not see), and homogenized by the disposable 3-D glasses they all wear.⁷³ The unwitting subject of the photographer's voyeuristic gaze, the audience is presented as an immobile, uniform mass who have surrendered their individual engagement with the real world for the cheap thrills of simulated depth.

Of course, this image is a rather banal example of a passive audience, and, paradoxically, relies on *representation* to disparage these spectators' immobility. It therefore follows that if the cinematic audience can be pictured as dull and unoriginal, it must be done against some other, more active image of a crowd. Enter Pfeiffer's black-and-white video of the spectators at the 1964 Clay v. Liston bout in Miami Beach. Pfeiffer brings the spectators front and center, and for three minutes the camera pans across an audience that is directly in the line of the camera's lens; they engage in conversation, look around to their fellow spectators, appear to shout toward the boxers. This makes it difficult to describe them as mesmerized, passive. To be sure, many of the spectators follow the (erased) action in the ring, but they do so against a backdrop of several wandering eyes looking in several different places, noticing different things, drawing different conclusions, hoping for different results.

To be fair, there is a significant difference between the audience pictured on the cover of Debord's treatise and the one highlighted in Pfeiffer's videos. The former gather in front of the colossal cinema screen, whereas the latter, at least in the original footage, are positioned in front of a real, live event. And since Pfeiffer borrows his footage from that which was broadcast across the country via closed-circuit satellite, the fairer comparison would be Debord's cover image of moviegoers in front of a 3-D film and boxing fans gathered in the movie house.

⁷³ First published on the cover of the English translation by Black & Red (1970), this image still graces the cover of a new edition translated by Ken Knabb and released by Rebel Press in 1983.

When we search for representations of the fans who gathered to watch, via closed-circuit satellite, Cassius Clay battle Sonny Liston for the heavyweight title, we find that they appear no less animated than their counterparts captured on film at the event and brought to the fore in Pfeiffer's *Long Count: I Shook Up the World*. In fact, so sensational was this relatively new form of sports spectatorship that, the day after the bout, the *New York Times* decided that the reactions of one of those crowds were sufficiently newsworthy and "fit to print":

From the start, the spectators at the Paramount [Theatre in Times Square] made it vocally clear where their sympathies rested. The general support for Clay seemed to transcend any betting considerations and even the normal empathy for an underdog.

From every sector of the darkened arena, cries were raised:

"Move, Cassius, keep moving. Stick him. Give it to that Big Bear."

[...]

"Watch it, Cassius. Look out. Oops. Lead, lead, lead. Fight back. Stay away. It's a long fight."

Sorrowing groans filled the stuffy, smoke-laden air during the near-disastrous (for Clay) fifth round, when the challenger, semiblinded, it later developed, by liniment in his eyes, spent three minutes in full retreat.

In the stunning turnaround of the sixth and final round, when Clay handled Liston nearly as he willed with flicking jabs, quick crosses and booming hooks, general grief gave way to jubilation.

The sudden end, the circumstance of which remained unexplained for at least 10 minutes while everyone with access to the microphone at ringside shouted everyone else down, produced a delayed incredulous reaction.

[...]

There was a long moment of silent disbelief. Then the whooping started:

"He did it. He did it. Cassius did it. He beat the Big Bear. He's the champion."

Outdecibeled, but not completely muffled, there also was a minority chant:

"It can't be. I don't believe it. Shoot him, shoot him (meaning Liston)."⁷⁴

This rather lengthy excerpt illustrates two things. First, the content describes a very different spectatorial experience in front of the film screen than that pictured by Debord. The crowd is neither passive nor silent, made up of fans neither unaware of their distance from the actual event nor wholly unanimous in their reaction. Further, this article works to give *presence* to the remote crowd, and thus makes the spectators just as much a part of the spectacle vis-à-vis the mechanics

⁷⁴ Joseph M. Sheehan, "TV Watchers Loved the Action as Their Favorite Won," *New York Times*, February 26, 1964, p. 28, ProQuest, via Galileo, <http://www.galileo.usg.edu>.

of print and visual technologies as those spectators stationed in front of the actual athletes. In this article, the Paramount Theatre audience is “sighted” through the haze of a smoke-filled cinema just as were the spectators they could see via the fight’s telecast through the fancy footwork of the pugilists.

Actually, the spectators in Pfeiffer’s video and those gathered in the Times Square theatre are not all that different from Debord’s cinema audience. When one turns Debord’s book over to reveal the rest of the image of the passive cinematic audience, one realizes that these spectators are neither as homogenous nor as entranced as Debord would have us believe. A patron on the far left breaks his concentration with the mesmerizing screen and looks out toward the camera, curious about its presence. Behind him, and over one, another figure fidgets with his glasses, further detracting from the sense that this audience is locked in a tunnel vision toward the screen. Moreover, the audience is dressed up, suggesting not just the sartorial codes of another time, but the extra-ordinariness of such an uncommon event.⁷⁵ The audience willingly dons the identity-obscuring glasses, giving itself over to one of the thrills of what Tom Gunning might group into the cinema’s long tradition of attractions.⁷⁶

Indeed, this playful rereading of Debord’s cover image is indebted to the kind of de-centered looking that is emphasized in Pfeiffer’s looping videos, which position the viewer across from a lively group of spectators at whom it is difficult to get a good, long look. The plurality of attendees that Pfeiffer brings to the fore, the shadows of the two boxers, the roving

⁷⁵ For Debord, civilization began with the historicization of time and led to a Sisyphean battle to keep up. Gone were the halcyon days of cyclical time once labor came in and commodified it. See Debord’s chapter on “Time and History,” theses 125-146. I would argue that Debord misses the disruptive power of the sports game which is highly ritualized and quite cyclical, and open to the laws of chance.

⁷⁶ Arguing against what had become the de facto characterization of early film spectators as naïve and credulous, and therefore terrified of the illusions of the first films, Tom Gunning historicizes these patrons, placing them in a context in which visual entertainments were readily available and actively sought out. Instead of frightened children, Gunning restores agency to the first decade of film audiences who were excited by the thrills of a “cinema of attractions.” See “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator” in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 6th ed., eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 862-76.

camera, all contribute to the viewer's uncertainty as to where to look. Whereas Debord would have us believe that the spectacle (the image) flatly and totally replaces the real, the image, magnified by the artist's edits, is just as slippery and duplicitous as reality is "intangible." In 1964, 700,000 people happily gathered in front of cinema screens, willing to believe in the power of technology to convey enough of a semblance of the unfolding events in Miami Beach to make it worth the cost of admission.

Recall, too, that for Johan Huizinga, the play element is "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly."⁷⁷ The athletic spectacle is always already meant to be a transient experience, a temporary apparition that we willfully seek out. The live, closed-circuit telecast of the Ali bouts offered a similarly transient experience, and attracted the attention of knowing, real spectators who actively sought out an escape from "ordinary life." As such, sports spectatorship acts as a foil to Debord's mindless spectator unable to comprehend, let alone actively pursue, a spectacle that *is*, in fact, perceived to be a "supplement to the real world."

A similar desire to bifurcate passive spectators and an active screen also undergirds the thesis of Laura Mulvey's seminal essay on film spectatorship, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Published in the journal *Screen* in 1975, the same year as the third Ali fight film in Pfeiffer's triptych, this article was among the first to critique classical narrative cinema for perpetuating an essential myth of patriarchal society: men look and women are seen.⁷⁸ Equipped with the tools of psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey argues that male spectators identify with an active male protagonist on the screen with whom they voyeuristically sexualize the object of

⁷⁷ Huizinga, 13.

⁷⁸ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18. Similarly concerned with the gendering of a seer/seen dichotomy, John Berger argues that the history of European nude paintings likewise set up a power play between a presumed male looker and an objectified female subject.

their gaze: passive females.⁷⁹ For Mulvey, the cinema produces a misidentification for the male spectator because he misrecognizes his own ego-ideal in the male protagonist on the screen, and thus slips into a false sense of reality. The danger of “the phantasy world of the screen”⁸⁰ lies in the way in which it leaves men in a state of confusion: at one moment they are meant to identify with the active male figure and, in the next, lose themselves in the voyeuristic pleasure produced by the close-up of the female object on the screen.⁸¹ This tension, between passive and active looking, leads males to “pursue aims in indifference to perceptual reality, creating the imagised, eroticised concept of the world that forms the perception of the subject and makes a mockery of empirical objectivity.”⁸²

Though progressive in her critique of patriarchal society’s gender roles, and their perpetuation in the tropes of Hollywood cinema, Mulvey ultimately reinforces the idea that (male) spectators in front of the filmic screen become psychologically deluded, no longer able to recognize objective reality and, worse, become uninterested in doing so.⁸³ Thus, as with Debord, Mulvey’s argument is underpinned by a rather simplistic view of the tools of the mass media which cause the pernicious confusion of the distinctions between reality and the image. And

⁷⁹ Mulvey, 9-11. Playing to the male’s gaze, these films allow men to deny their own disembodied, passive spectatorship through the psychological pleasures of voyeurism (the female sex object) and identification with the film’s protagonist (the ego ideal). Here, too, let me acknowledge a glaring omission from the surface of this thesis: the gendering of (male) sports athletes and spectators. While Mulvey’s excellent critique of the exclusion of substantive female roles in Hollywood cinema is fundamentally good activist scholarship, its applicability to sports crowds is ultimately less useful. Whereas for Mulvey the division of subject and object is drawn by the filmic screen, in the boxing ring, and in Pfeiffer’s installation of his *Long Count* series, that screen is significantly more permeable. As such, the very opposition of the terms “active” and “passive” fails to find much traction. Simply put, if we do imagine a predominantly male audience for the all-male professional sports that Pfeiffer takes as his subjects, then we at least start to complicate the assumptions made about the gendered power roles on both sides of the seer/seen dichotomy. Nevertheless, in Pfeiffer’s work, the homosocial nature of sports and its spectators is still a complicated issue that deserves closer attention.

⁸⁰ Mulvey, 11.

⁸¹ The narrative film is threatened (and thus threatening to its male viewers) when the diegesis is disrupted by the fragmented close-up which destroys the illusion of depth. Ibid., 10.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ I am certainly not the first to critique Laura Mulvey’s argument, and my analysis here is in part emboldened by the work of Tania Modleski in her reading of Mulvey’s argument. See “The Master’s Dollhouse: *Rear Window*” in *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 73-86.

while both authors desire to deconstruct the legacy of socially-constructed and gender-determinant subject positions in slightly different ways—Debord critiques the apparatus of new technologies, Mulvey attacks the conventions of classic Hollywood cinema—both condemn new visual entertainments for threatening the spectator’s ability to experience the real.

Pfeiffer paints a very different picture of the society of the spectacle, foregrounding active, engaged, and sometimes distracted, fans in front of the sporting event, thereby disrupting the notion of passive spectatorship. Though the live boxing bouts featuring Ali and his opponent were distinct from their cinematic broadcasts in their lack of mediating technologies (this is, of course, not true anymore in arenas that feature the Jumbotron above the action, offering supplemental and even competing views of the action below), at a basic level, the boxing arena reduplicates the environs of the cinema: patrons sit in relative darkness and direct their attention toward the brightly lit action in the ring. However, the actual space of the arena differs significantly from that of the movie house in that the seats are arranged in the round, fully encompassing the lit stage. One’s view in boxing, as in most spectator sports, is simultaneously comprised of the ring and the surrounding crowd. No matter where you are seated, you look toward the amassed others. Whereas narrative cinema allows the (male) spectator to (mis)identify with the film’s protagonist while mitigating his own passivity in the darkened theater (according to Mulvey), the boxing ring provides a semi-permeable screen through which other spectators are always sighted, reflecting not his (or her) ego ideal but a diversity of various responses, attitudes, identities, viewpoints.

Thus, the sporting event strains the convention of passive spectatorship, situating the viewer in the madding crowd, actively participating in the media spectacle. But it remains to be seen if these sports fans can convey their dynamic spectatorship in the sporting arena out to the

spectator in front of the cinema, television, or LCD screen, and thus communicate with the twenty-first-century spectators assembled in front of the Pfeiffer's triptych.

We might recall that the audience at the Paramount Theatre went on to find representation in the pages of the *New York Times*, and became part of the larger representation of the spectacular fight that also included the ringside spectators in Miami Beach. In Los Angeles, the number-one market of the Clay-Liston fight (selling 105,000 of the 120,000 available closed-circuit seats), the action on the screen was trumped by a traffic melee that erupted at one overcrowded drive-in theater. As Michael Ezra describes it:

The craziest scene of all was at the Orange Drive-In Theater. Amazingly, 15,000 people packed into 1,400 cars to see the fight. The chaos quickly spilled over, as one of the worst traffic jams in area history—no small feat in L.A.—occurred when motorists began parking on the shoulders of an adjacent highway to pirate the broadcast. After those spaces filled up, cars began stopping in traffic lanes, and about 5,000 people gate-crashed the drive-in. It took a combination of seventy-five California Highway Patrol officers, sheriff's deputies, and police to break up the congestion, which had caused half-mile backups in all directions.⁸⁴

Compiled from the pages of newspapers, Ezra's retelling further evidences the extent to which the reverberations of the Clay-Liston spectacle were felt far beyond the epicenter in Miami Beach, on the opposite coast. But the fact that the magnitude of the sports spectacle ends up encompassing its furthest spectators might actually bolster Debord's fears of a spectacular society. Further, in terms of Mulvey's argument, the disorder of this traffic buildup would seem to indicate the crowd's "mockery of empirical objectivity" in the grips of the spellbinding screen. That is, here the spectators risk becoming confused with the spectacle, their traffic melee a reflection of the clash between the boxers in Miami Beach. But this is to deny the simple fact that the representation of this crowd in the contemporary newspapers (as in Ezra's retelling nearly half a century later) works to show this scene as a breakdown of civil order. Stressing the

⁸⁴ Ezra, 84.

taxing efforts that it took to restore the flow of traffic, these accounts successfully indict the crowd for the disruption their tunnel vision caused while also, and paradoxically, working to confirm that crowd's desire for a temporal break from rationality.

In other words, the field of representation (the newspaper article, the scholarly recounting) can simultaneously exclaim the logic of a law-abiding society and flaunt ecstatic irrationality; it can condemn the spectacle while portraying its magnitude—it is the site of a battle. Analogously, our attraction to the boxing match is itself a desire to watch two players struggle to erect or stabilize a binary opposition, to confirm a winner and a loser. The problem with Debord's and Mulvey's theories, then, stems from the manner in which they attempt to strip the spectator of agency in front of the moving screen and to condemn the image as the flattening of reality. As the satellite spectators in New York and Los Angeles showed, the screen—a field of representation—is often seen as a space they too can enter, capable of simultaneously representing the dichotomies of the “real” and the unreal spectacle, the rules of the road and a desire to ignore them, the rational and the irrational.

Before moving on to contend with these issues in Pfeiffer's manipulated video loops, I briefly want to consider one of the foundational texts on video art, Rosalind Krauss's 1976 article “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism.” Written the year after the last of the Ali fight films cited in Pfeiffer's triptych, Krauss boldly claims that the medium of video art is not in fact physical (the amalgamation of various equipment: magnetic tape, looping reel, monitor, etc.) but psychological: “the medium of video is narcissism.”⁸⁵ Responding to some of the earliest experiments with the new medium, Krauss identifies a concentrated effort by certain artists to grapple with video's inherent capacity to provide (nearly) instantaneous feedback of the artist's own body. Thus, as she argues, the functionality of early video mostly resembled that of a

⁸⁵ Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism” *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 50.

mirror, providing the artists (Vito Acconci, Lynda Benglis) or the viewers (in the case of video installations by Bruce Nauman or Peter Campus) with their own reflection.

Not undramatically, in her assessment of the nascent medium, Krauss diagnoses video—a glorified mirror—as psychologically dysfunctional. The narcissist, according to Freud and Lacan, exists in a self-centered *loop* that he is unable to break free from and thus remains unaware of an external reality.⁸⁶ According to Krauss, the mechanics of video produce this delusional state because video’s playback function tempts the performer with an immediate reflection and thus forgoes the need for more critical reflexivity. In front of the video camera, one’s subjectivity is substituted by its reflection on the screen.

The result of this substitution is the presentation of a self understood to have no past, and as well, no connection with any objects that are external to it. For the double that appears on the monitor cannot be called a true external object. Rather it is a displacement of the self which has the effect [...] of transforming the performer’s subjectivity into another, mirror, object.⁸⁷

Disassociated from the surrounding context, the video’s playback function converts the performer into his or her own object of desire, and thus leads to narcissism. Thereby, video art precludes the spectator in front of the screen from the dynamic exchange between subject (reality) and object (the image) and reinforces a seer/seen binary that is merely the glorified, but perverted, self-contained loop of the lone performer/artist. In contrast, reflexive media—which Krauss identifies as painting, sculpture, and film—separate the object of the gaze from the spectator, providing distance from the object in both space and time, and allowing for critical reflection in the abstract on the content therein.

Thus, even though Krauss groups film with the psychologically healthier media, by essentializing video as an art that excludes the subject in front of the screen, her argument

⁸⁶ Ibid., 57-8.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 55.

parallels those advanced by Debord and Mulvey.⁸⁸ What, then, are we to make of Pfeiffer's video loops in terms of Krauss's analysis? For Pfeiffer, the medium of video is expressly materialistic—his entire art making process is based on his ability to exploit the mutability of digital imagery. The *Long Count* triptych does not merely present the arena spectators as performers for their own benefit. Nor, for that matter, does the monitor mirror back to the gallery viewer his or her own reflection. No, the three monitors face the gallery viewer with the arena fans and situate an exchange between spectators via the televisual screen. As Anne M. Wagner argues, video is more psychologically complex than Krauss's definition of the medium as the narcissist's attempt to bracket out the spectator. According to Wagner, video is both a means of surveillance (which can act as a narcissistic mirror to the performer's actions) and a process of monitoring—that is, video extends the performer's actions far beyond his or her own purview “out to the other side of the TV screen.”⁸⁹

Pfeiffer utilizes this more dynamic understanding of the video screen in order to enact a face-off between the viewers in the gallery and those in the arena. Contra Krauss, Wagner defines video as a subject matter—not a medium—that is always concerned with “[summoning] you into the present moment, as an audience, and sometimes, under selected circumstances, to make you all-too-conscious of that fact” in order to “foreground an audience's understanding that *it* is what is being seen.”⁹⁰ According to Wagner's view, neither the spectators at these fights nor those situated in front of Pfeiffer's LCD monitors are any longer witnesses of the boxing

⁸⁸ Here it must be said that Krauss did attempt to redeem video art that managed to allow its performers to achieve a critical distance—either spatially or temporally—from their own reflection. See Krauss, 59-62. She describes Peter Campus's work *dor* in which the artist allows the viewer to face his or her own desire to be seen in the space of the video's projection even as this is denied by the artist's distancing of the camera's lens in one room and the screen in another. Ultimately, for Krauss, this video only further indicts the viewer's narcissistic impulse to be seen in the video, and thus she does not allow for the viewer to learn something about the phenomenon of video, which extends the viewer's projection to other spectators.

⁸⁹ Anne M. Wagner, “Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence,” *October* 91 (Winter 2001): 68.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69; 70.

match. Instead, both are the scrutinizing (and scrutinized) spectators confronting their own notional representation in the screen.

And before we doubt the awareness of the camera by those historical spectators, we might remember that these fights are memorable in large part precisely because of the size and scope of their closed-circuit audiences. Such a feat necessitated the presence of hulking camera equipment. Moreover, the ring was lined with photographers, who worked not only to capture the fight, but threatened to place every seat in the house in the cast of the camera's flash. It would therefore be disingenuous to suggest that these crowds were ever unsure about the presence of cameras in their midst—the unwitting bystanders to the camera's voyeuristic gaze. As we look at these fans no longer hidden by the distraction of the boxing round, we realize that they are still seen, and thereby recognize through video art the potential for the image to continue to perform long after the initial recording. As with the fans who gathered at the Paramount Theatre in Times Square to watch the Ali-Liston bout on the big screen, sports spectatorship is not the narcissistic loop of self-reflection, but a desire to assert and convey allegiance with the pugilist in front of and to the rest of the assembled crowd. Aware of their immediate surroundings—what Krauss calls “external objects”—these fans knowingly battle for ground in the struggle for representation within the space of an ever-increasing spectacular event.

Thus, the subject of Pfeiffer's *Long Count* videos reveals itself to be the *presence* of the spectator—not his or her narcissistic reflection vis-à-vis the media image or even the viewer's unwitting subjugation to the omnipresent camera. In utilizing the new technologies of digital media, Paul Pfeiffer dramatically shifts our relationship to the work of art. Each of the videos in the *Long Count* plays on a small LCD monitor mounted on five-foot-long poles that project out from the gallery wall. The privileged object of art is therefore displaced from its pride of place.

But Pfeiffer's works are much indebted to the traditions of art and the museum. The *Long Count* videos are attached to the wall by proxy—firmly affixed by thick steel rods. At once the effect is to meet the gallery viewer up close, short-circuiting the distance that they normally stand from the work of art, and to place the analyzing viewer in the center of the gallery. This is largely practical: because the works are so small, one needs to get close to view the miniature imagery. In that they demand a closer look, they also threaten to block the viewer's peripheral vision, imitating cinematic tunnel vision. This forces one to rely on other senses to determine if one is alone in the gallery, if someone else is waiting to take a look. Like the sports fan, the viewer becomes situated within a room of other spectators, pulled from the margins, centered on, and “caught.” Pfeiffer draws the viewer's attention to his or her own positionality in front of the screen.

The Long Count does not present the viewer with his or her own reflection, per se, but rather a more generic spectator, one that, as a type, is conceived of as diametrically opposed to the fine-art connoisseur. To the reticent viewers situated within the sobering art gallery, these neck-craning, seat-leaving fans can be a bit jarring if not downright confrontational. Calling attention to this difference, Pfeiffer reminds the viewer that the rules and proprieties of spectatorship are different depending on where one is located. That we can adapt to shifting expectations regarding our presence in front of the screen suggests that we have internalized a sophisticated sensitivity to our environs even as more and more of it is given over to the visual field.

With the plethora of new visual technologies comes the danger that real spectators will lose their agency to the omnipotent presence of the screen. But new technologies also bring the promise of disrupting existing regimes of production. When Krauss reduced video to a

psychological medium (and a sick one at that), she was in part resisting a shift in the positionality of the subject vis-à-vis its means of representation. In so doing, she necessarily ignored some of the medium's more innovative functions. For not only is video capable of instant feedback, but it equips the viewer with the ability to stop the action, speed up or slow down, reverse, freeze the frame. In the past decade, the turn to digital video and the proliferation of desktop editing software (e.g. iMovie) has once again dramatically shifted the spectators understanding of the finality of representation. Within five years of Pfeiffer's *The Long Count* videos, twenty-first-century viewers had seen the introduction and wide-spread dissemination of such now-familiar technologies as Youtube and personal media players (i.e. iPods). Pfeiffer's small, 3 x 4 inch videos play on small-format LCD monitors and therefore presciently prefigure the level of conversational fluency that viewers of his work bring to the technologies he utilizes.⁹¹

And as we have been able to adapt to new visual modes in our own period of technological change, Pfeiffer illustrates the ways in which we as spectators can manipulate the screen via the very technologies that were supposed to subject us to its deadening flatness. Pfeiffer positions us in front of an emerging technology in our digital age—the LCD monitor—and, simultaneously, in front of the boxing spectators, who represent a moment in which new visual technologies spawned a new art medium—video art. Differences between these moments are still visible: from the black-and-white spectators in the earliest fight video to the color, higher-resolution spectators in the later two; from closed-circuit telecasts beamed into movie houses to live video streaming into an iPhone's touch-sensitive LCD screen. But while the apparatuses of visual technology have changed, so, too, have we grown more comfortable in front of the screen without losing our sense of the distinctions between the real and the image. As

⁹¹ From among a host of possible examples, I offer a few keywords for a Youtube search that illustrate this fluency: "Autotune the News," "Michael Jackson tracking project," and "Supercut."

Pfeiffer sights the viewer, he foregrounds the mutability of the image and thus suggests ways to renegotiate the end result. After all, the looped footage of these fights, though taken from the final round, never ends, and never confirms the athlete's victory.⁹² Though the spectators have come to watch the resolution of a binary opposition, all they see is the constant play of transparent images across the surface. Like the arena spectators in Muhammad Ali's fight films, we, too, are encouraged to view the space of representation as a game we can enter, and, with sufficient training and skills, affect the outcome—or at least enjoy trying.

⁹² The title of Pfeiffer's triptych also recalls the contingency of athletic victory. In boxing, the "long count" refers to the 1927 rematch between heavyweight champion Gene Tunney and former champion Jack Dempsey, fought on Soldier Field in Chicago to a record-breaking audience. Failing to heed a relatively new rule, after knocking Tunney to the mat during the seventh round, Dempsey remained standing over his opponent instead of retiring to a neutral corner so that the referee could begin the count. After a few seconds of reminding from the ref, Dempsey obliged and the count began. But Tunney got up just before the ref reached ten and went on to win the match (by unanimous decision). Known as the "Battle of the Long Count," the true winner of this bout is still debated by boxing enthusiasts. For his part, Dempsey congratulated his opponent after the bout, saying "You were best. You fought a smart fight, kid." See, Larry Schwartz, "Defeats didn't Dampen Dempsey," *ESPN*, <http://espn.go.com/sportscap/00014146.html>.

Chapter 5: Epilogue

In October 2005, just before the start of a new season, National Basketball Association commissioner David Stern announced that the league's newly adopted dress code would go into effect November 1st, opening night. A first in professional sports, the regulations as initially written would have required players to wear a jacket and tie whenever involved in league business, including promotional appearances and team flights. After player protests led to a backlash in the press, the league took on a less-restrictive "business casual" code, which nevertheless included a controversial clause banning players from wearing visible chains, pendants, or medallions. Those players taking offense implied that this particular rule was racially motivated, a direct attack against the hip-hop style worn by many of the league's young, black players.⁹³ Commissioner Stern was less clear in justifying the dress code: "we decided that the reputation of our players was not as good as our players are, and we could do small things to improve that."⁹⁴ Whatever the reasons, the fact that the NBA turned to the rulebook in order to dress up its public image makes clear a connection between identity and representation, as well as a desire to control and manipulate how that image is perceived. Moreover, the public debate that ensued over the meaning of the new dress code illustrates how even the writing of the rules can be subject to negotiation and play in the court of public opinion.

⁹³ On players' reactions, see *Associated Press*, "Pacers' Jackson: dress code is 'racist,' Forward wears jewelry to protest rule, which he says attacks culture," October 20, 2005. See also Tom Sorensen, "Dress Code Suitable Only to NBA Suits," *The Charlotte Observer*, October 26, 2005: "Clothes don't make the man. That's the reason the NBA dress code, which is an attempt to sell a sport played primarily by blacks to a ticket-buying audience made up primarily of whites, is unnecessary." Interestingly, though this was the first league-wide dress code, some of the NBA franchises already had similar policies in place.

⁹⁴ In John Eligon, "N.B.A. Dress Code Decrees: Clothes Make the Image," *New York Times*, October 19, 2005.

Once the rules are established, playing by them can have benefits. NBA superstar LeBron James has embraced the league's dress code, and has become somewhat of a fashion icon as a result, appearing on such magazine covers as *Fortune*, *GQ* and even *Vogue*—the first black male to do so in *Vogue*'s 116-year history.⁹⁵ James recently attributed his success in the fashion game to Stern's guidelines, which prompted the all-star to hire a personal stylist and declare that when “you look good, you play good.”⁹⁶ For James, then, succeeding in the game depends on factors that extend beyond the boundaries of court play. Consequently, he approaches the maintenance of his public image with the same skillful maneuvering that he exhibits on the court.

Indeed, as the hugely successful career of NBA megastar LeBron James makes clear, it is important for athletic celebrities to style themselves for success both on and off the court. Thus, the metaphors of one game—sports—also apply to yet another—the game of public relations. In Paul Pfeiffer's *Live From Neverland* (2006, fig. 18), the artist takes as his subject an infamous public relations statement from the 1990s, starring one of that decade's most controversial public figures, and uses footage of the statement to put on display the act of representation. In this two-part video work, Pfeiffer pairs the muted video footage of Michael Jackson's 1993 public declaration (released to media outlets across the U.S.), in which he claims his innocence in relation to recent charges of child molestation brought against him by a young visitor to his sprawling “Neverland” estate, with that of a choir of children from the Philippines, assembled by the artist, who chant in unison the performer's words.

In the original video, Michael Jackson, seated in front of a neutral background and wearing a red-collared shirt, directly addresses a single, close-up camera and lays out his case to

⁹⁵ Though too complicated to address here, James' appearance with supermodel Gisele Bündchen on the April 2008 cover of *Vogue* created quite a controversy, critics panning what they found to be a perpetuation of negative racial stereotypes between black males and white females.

⁹⁶ In Tom Withers, “James to appear on GQ cover in February,” *Associated Press*, January 12, 2009.

the American public. In his speech, which lasts just over four minutes, he is at times tearful and angry, and blames the “incredible, terrible mass media” for distorting and sensationalizing the accusations made against him. He further implores our sympathy by telling us that he has been subjected to a “dehumanizing and humiliating examination” by the Santa Barbara and Los Angeles police departments who obtained a search warrant that “allowed them to view and photograph” the lower part of his body in their search for clues. In the gallery, Pfeiffer displays this footage on a standard-size tube-television which sits on the floor opposite a large projection screen on which a group of male and female adolescent Filipinos recite his plea in the style of a Greek chorus. The work begins and ends the same way: on the projection screen is a still-camera shot of empty choral risers positioned on an unadorned stage; on the television monitor, the color bars that used to appear when networks went off the air for the night. Soon, on the projection screen, single-file lines of the chorus members emerge from the edges of the frame—boys from the left, girls from the right—and begin processing into position on the risers. With only a few hiccups (the girls miss a row when filing in and have to readjust, backing up their line and thus disrupting the symmetry of the boy and girl entries), the choir is in position and, like a conductor making his entrance, Michael Jackson suddenly appears on the television, facing the children.

In well-timed unison, the choir begins to recite the pop-star’s words. Where necessary, Pfeiffer has slowed down and sped up the video of Jackson so that his lips move in sync with the choir. For their part, the chorus also speeds up and slows down when reading the text in order to add drama to the words and convey a semblance of the pop star’s emotion. The arrangement is beautifully cadenced, so that even Jackson’s oddly frank discussion of the parts of his body that were searched rings in the viewer’s ears long after the video is through: “my body, my penis, my buttocks, my lower torso, my thighs.” Near the end of the performance, the boys and girls break

into antiphony, obscuring Jackson's text a little, but building the tension that rises to a fever pitch when, at the end, they all shout, once again in unison: "I love you. Goodbye." For a brief second, the television monitor cuts to the blank faces of two newscasters before returning to the color bars as the children in the projection begin to exit in the same manner in which they entered.

This work is effectively a dialogical loop between conductor and chorus within an unending video loop. The well-rehearsed choral recitation is timed to line up with the well-choreographed, edited Jackson video, creating an exchange between the two screens which occurs for only a brief moment in the longer cycling video of the choir entering and exiting the stage. Entering into the darkened room where this work is located, we are placed in the middle of these loops, not only temporally but physically. That is, we are positioned between the two performances, between Michael Jackson's supplication and the young chorus which turns it into a script and performs it as if a school play. There is no vantage point in the room from which to look at both screens at once, thus we must constantly turn from left to right to avoid missing any of the little choreographed gestures that are part of the choral performance or the expression of Jackson's composed facial features. We are challenged, then, like a sports fan, to follow and evaluate the action. We can look to the performers on the projection screen, and delight in their skillful melodic reading, or we can turn to Jackson's monitor and watch the King of Pop attempt to save his reputation. Do the children, if read as authors of their speech, advocate for Jackson's exoneration and thus transcend the ridiculous controversy, or does their recounting of the invasive body search turn the accusations back onto Jackson, reminding us of the victims of his alleged crimes, and thereby effect his fall from grace?

We are always aware of both presences at once, hearing the chanting of the chorus as we watch Jackson or hearing Jackson's words in the choir's performance. And though Jackson

doesn't show us his exit or entry (television is a medium of fast cuts and fragments), we understand his televised statement to be every bit as choreographed and rehearsed as the choir's concert. We are sophisticated viewers aware of the strings behind the *deus ex machina*, but this does not preclude a suspension of disbelief in order to find our own moral stance. It is left up to us, then, whether we empathize with the "horrifying nightmare" that Michael Jackson says he has been put through or we take pleasure in condemning the plastic-surgery fanatic as a symbol of dehumanization.

In this thesis, I have attempted to argue that spectators—even in an age of digital overload—maintain their agency via a complex understanding of new media. The celebrity is not some towering myth or a paralyzing drug that threatens to dull our perceptive faculties, but a rich allegorical figure that we continue to construct. LeBron James and Michael Jackson might reflect the two extremes of fame and infamy, the winner and loser of a difficult public relations game, but both exemplify the ways we, too, can learn to negotiate our postmodern positionality vis-à-vis the image. Thus, I argue here again that Pfeiffer confuses, or "erases," the boundary between the screen and the spectator, and thereby returns us to the underlying issue present in all of his works, whether they focus on the publicity game or the game of sports—we are all direct participants in the game of making meaning.

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Figures

Fig. 1

Paul Pfeiffer, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, no. 8, 2002

Digital duraflex print

48 x 60 inches



Fig. 2

Paul Pfeiffer, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, no. 17, 2004

Fugiflex digital c-print

48 x 60 inches



Fig. 3
NBA Archives, *Wilt Chamberlain goes for a layup*, ca. 1968-73



Fig. 4

Paul Pfeiffer, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, no. 3*, 2000

Digital duraflex print

57 x 69 x 3 inches (framed)



Fig. 5

Paul Pfeiffer, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, no. 2*, 2000

Digital duraflex print

47 x 59 inches



Fig. 6
Paul Pfeiffer, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse no. 7*, 2002
Digital duraflex print
47 x 59 inches

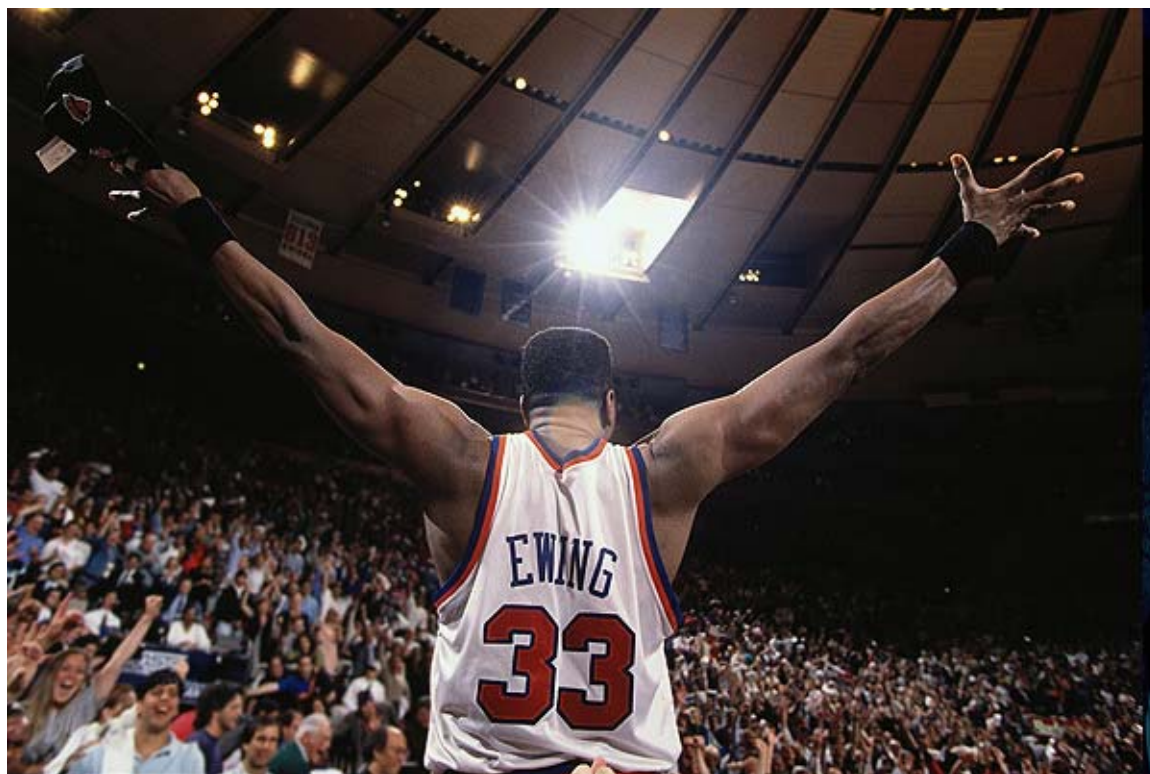


Fig. 7
NBA Archives, Patrick Ewing (takes a bow)



Fig. 8
Paul Pfeiffer, *Caryatid (Red, Yellow, Blue)*, still, 2008
Painted 32" video monitors, three channel digital video loop
25 x 96 x 21 inches



Fig. 9
Caryatid (Red, Yellow, Blue), still

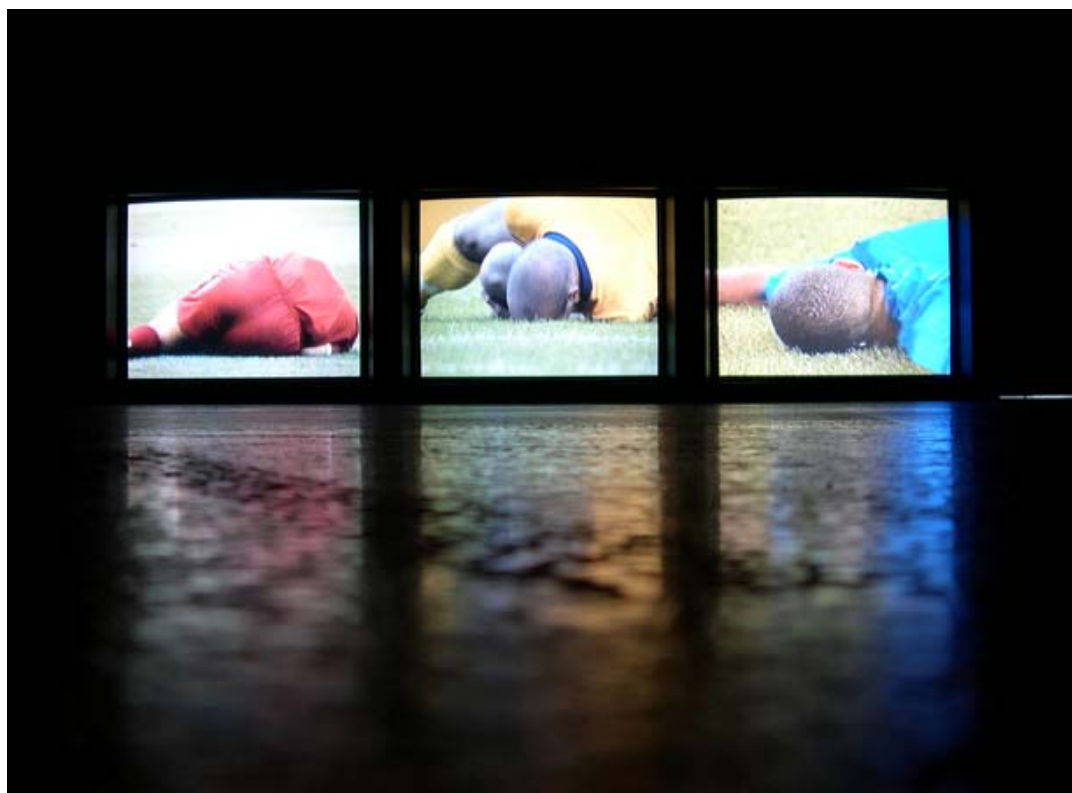


Fig. 10
Caryatid (Red, Yellow, Blue), still



Fig. 11

Barnett Newman, *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue IV*, 1969-70.

Acrylic on canvas

108 x 238 inches

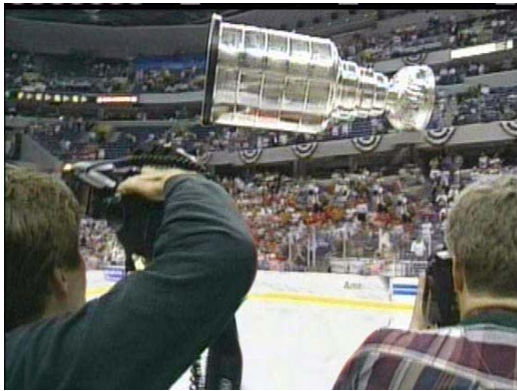


Fig. 12
 Paul Pfeiffer, *Caryatid*, 2003
 Top: *in situ*; bottom left and right: stills
 Chrome monitor/DVD player, Plexiglas case, DVD
 20 x 20 x 20 inches

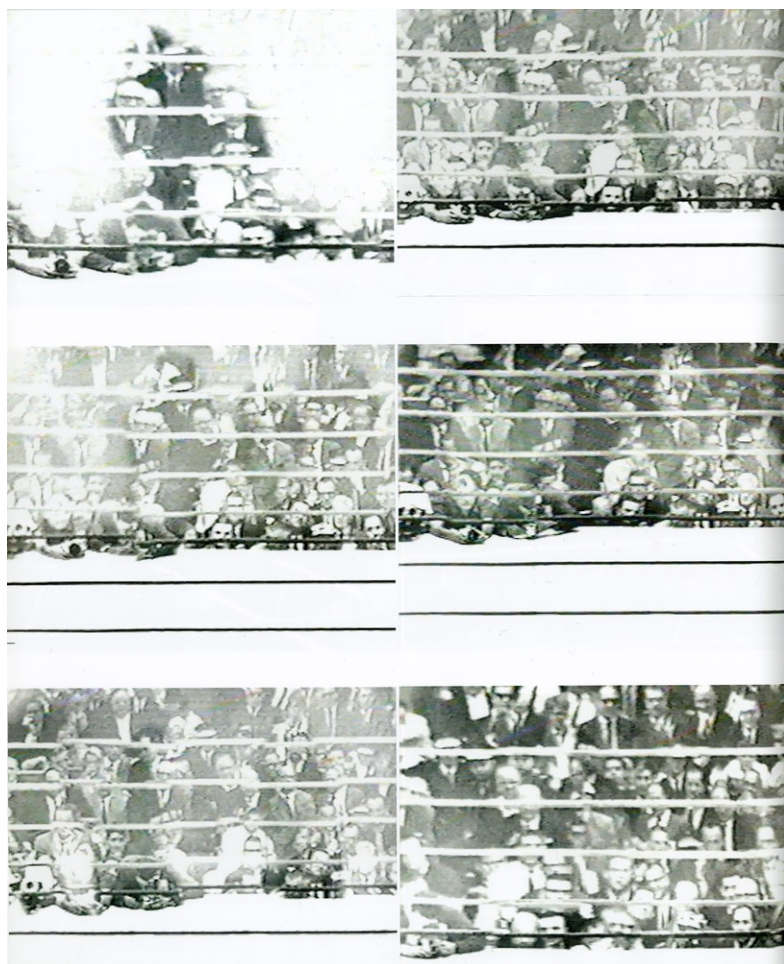


Fig. 13

Paul Pfeiffer, *The Long Count: I Shook Up the World*, 2000-01

Stills and installation view

3 min. digital video loop, LCD monitor, and metal armature

6 x 7 x 60 inches

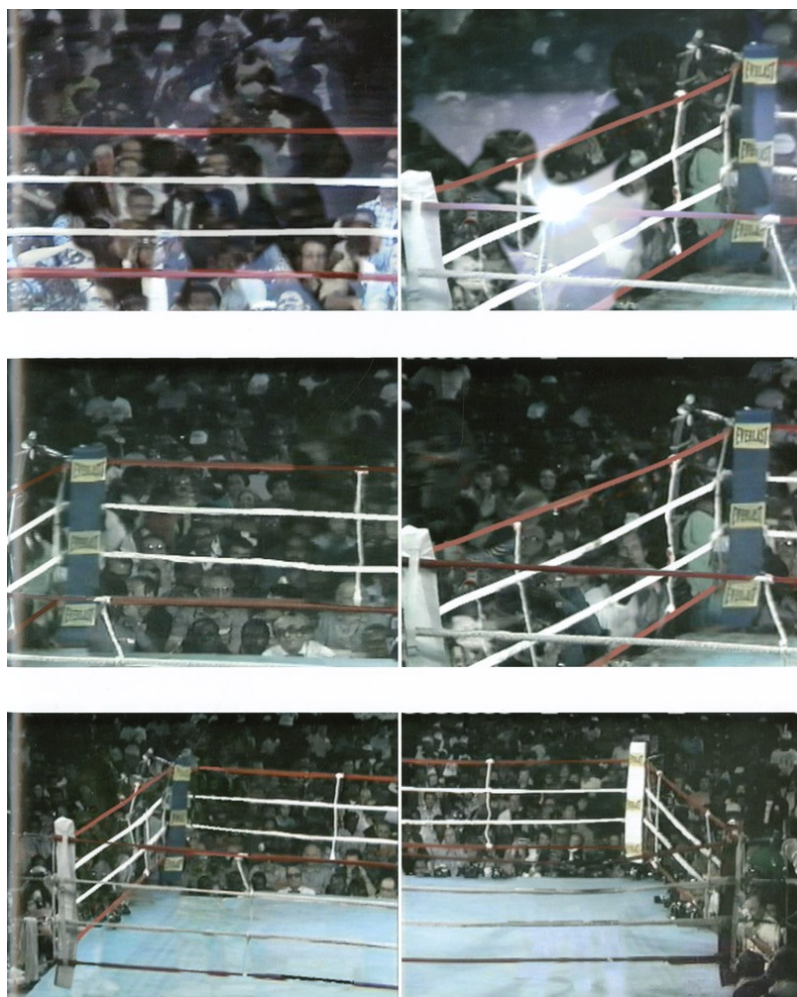


Fig. 14
 Paul Pfeiffer, *The Long Count: Rumble In the Jungle*, 2000-01
 Stills and installation view
 3 min. digital video loop, LCD monitor, and metal armature
 6 x 7 x 60 inches



Fig. 15
Paul Pfeiffer, *The Long Count: Rumble In the Jungle*, 2000-01
Stills

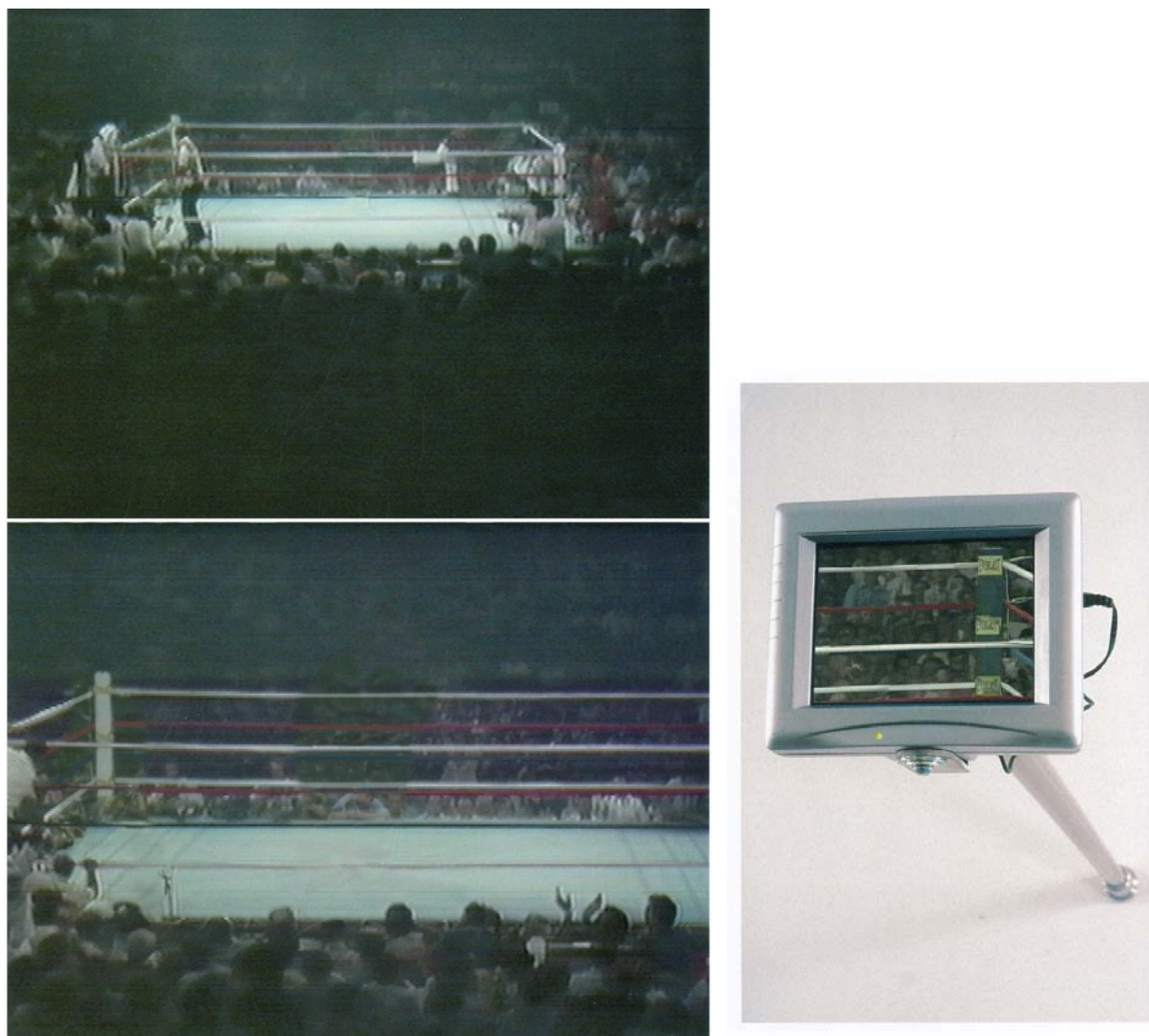


Fig. 16

Paul Pfeiffer, *The Long Count: Thrilla in Manila*, 2000-01

Stills and installation view

3 min. digital video loop, LCD monitor, and metal armature

6 x 7 x 60 inches

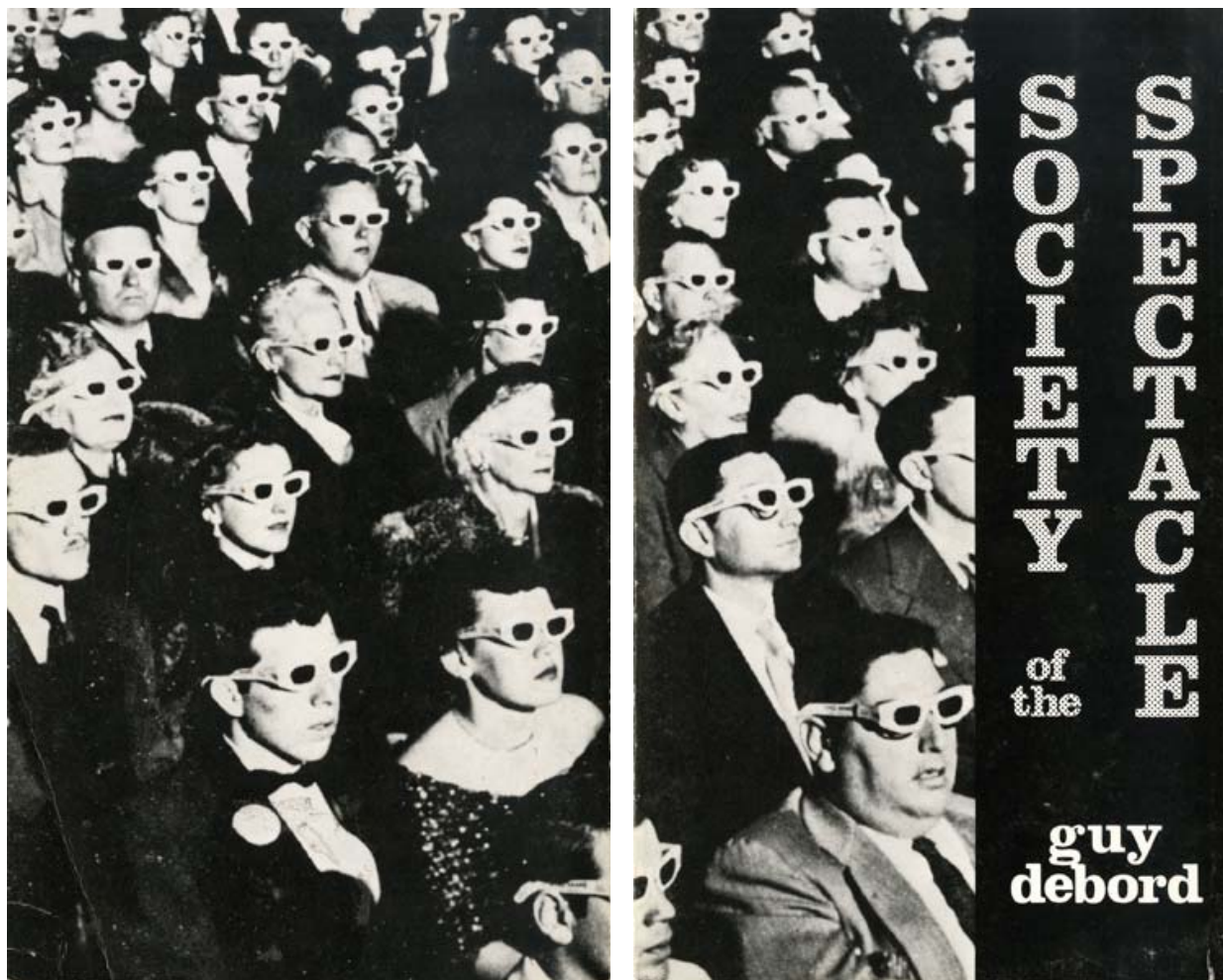


Fig. 17
Front (right) and back (left) cover, *Society of the Spectacle*.
Published by Black & Red, Detroit, 1983.

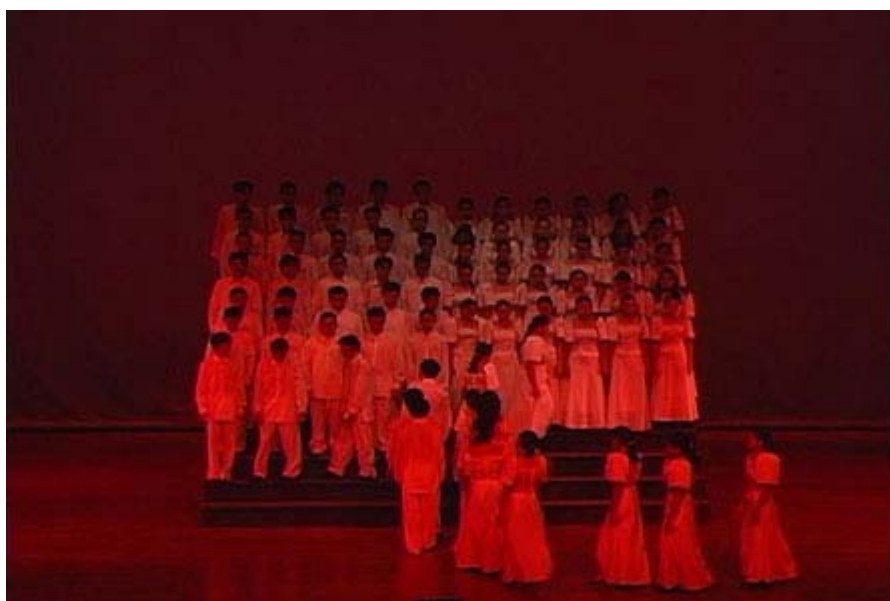


Fig. 18
Paul Pfeiffer, *Live from Neverland*, 2006
Video stills
Single channel projection, DVD and monitor
Dimensions variable