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Hello Sally,

I make videos. Sometimes they play in theaters, sometimes they play in galleries. Sometimes people watch them on their laptops, and some probably even watch them on their phones. Six of them are about to be installed at an art institution in Prague in the Czech Republic. I live in Pasadena, California, one block east of Orange Grove Boulevard where the Rose Bowl Parade takes place each January. A block to the west of my house there's a Buffalo Wild Wings. Sometimes I'll see it and think "B-Dubs" to myself, just like you all down at headquarters. I've always been drawn to it because there are six TVs on the front patio that all point in different directions while facing the same thing: the chicken chain restaurant consumer-subject. While I'm tempted to avoid philosophical jargon like "subject," I think it will become a useful term later on in this letter. You may already know this, but it's a word used to indicate an observer of an object. So at B-Dubs, the primary objects are your menus and whatever's on TV - a golf tournament last time I passed by. The reason for writing this letter is because I would like my videos to play on those TVs, and will now explain why.

Regardless of what's on the TVs, they seem entirely at home amidst B-Dubs' black and yellow exterior cladding system. As if they are structural elements. And so your tagline goes: "Lively sports-bar chain dishing up wings & other American pub grub amid lots of large-screen TVs." I'll often drive by and imagine the monitors displaying works of art instead of golf or a still image of the directTV logo. I'll wonder what kind of world would allow art to play on TVs at a chicken chain restaurant, and what else that world would entail. Like if my art would be more at peace with itself and the world, and how the chicken restaurant consumer-subject might respond. I wonder if Buffalo Wild Wings would even exist. Further down this line of thought, everything I seem to know starts to disappear, like in Back to the Future when Marty McFly and his siblings start to dissolve from a family photograph because he time travels back to a past in which his teenage mother starts to fall in love with him.

TVs don't always seem so at home, and that can be an issue for artists who rely on them. Sometimes I'll imagine a future in which images seem to just appear - no screen, no projector, no smartphone, no cables. Just the light. I often get worked up while looking at art in which a theatrical or sculptural presence feels disrupted by some alien tech that hasn't been properly "dealt with" as an artistic material. Maybe that's all too obscure, so let me talk about the issue in terms of interior design. I live in my friend's Grandmother's house and when I look at the living room where much of her art collection resides, what I find more strange than the forearm-to-fist Venetian candelabras protruding above the fireplace or the flattened perspective in the chaotic paintings from Bali is a black plastic 42 inch Samsung monitor.

I think the paintings from Bali are my favorite objects in her collection. The perspective is similar to the play camera in televised football; elevated and angled downwards, it flattens the field while still showing the human figures in profile. But the perspective of the painting's field is even more severe - impossible even. Trees become rivers. Distance becomes a mysterious hierarchical form. I look at it several times every day; it's a nice feeling to just let a work exist with you without having to turn on something external to it or start from the beginning. Almost like casually watching a 24 hour golf channel during a stop at B-Dubs. There's always something on.

Sometimes I envy painters because there's no such thing as a corporate paintingscape working 24/7 against alternative ways of seeing paintings. What I mean by that is that there's a corporate mediascape working 24/7 against alternative ways of seeing video art. Do you know of this French guy named Jacques Lacan? The psychoanalyst? He came up with this term "master signifier" aka "S1" to explain the empty signifiers to which a subject's identity are most intimately bound. As an American teenage boy who is scripted to locate his world of reference in 1985, Marty McFly might suggest his S1 is the "pop culture" of that moment. In a staged alien visitation to his father's bedroom in 1955, he claims that he's "Darth Vader, an extraterrestrial from the Planet Vulcan" while wearing a radiation suit in an attempt to coerce his father into asking his mother out to the high school dance. A B-Dubs' exterior cladding system might propose that its S1 is branded corporate architecture. And so what this means is that a painting can claim that its S1 is Painting (yeah, a capital P), and that when a subject looks at a painting they're probably going to think of other paintings to figure it out.

But what is summoned when someone looks at one of my videos? Some looping video they half-watched on Facebook. The "Monday" episode of The X-Files. Groundhog Day. Whatever. The S1 of the electronic images I make is that corporate mediascape, managed by a rather small number of household names like Google, Netflix, and Comcast. Not a God-like top object that gives meaning

and reality to everything within it, nor something we can we ever get to the bottom of. Sure, one can think outside the bun. But there is no metalanguage for the mediascape that serves as the S1 for that particular slogan. Further, this mediascape is not only an empty, symbolic loop that passes through things; it is literally everywhere. Within us and around us, like an energy field. Sorting out relationships between subjects and objects starts to get complicated.

Regardless, I'm often quite grateful that I don't have to wake up and think about what to paint or how I could possibly be painting right now. And perhaps not even painting is safe from this S1. Every morning I open my clamshell and immediately feel the urgency of creating some sort of feedback loop with the images I see. Screens in the mediascape demand expressions of novelty. The content emerges from and reproduces a loop form. An aimless infinity of product cycles concealed behind fresh faces, fashions, and seasons. I was reading something about prestige television the other day, and the author claimed that *The Sopranos* was one of the "richest achievements in the history of television." You know business better than I do, but I have a feeling they're right in that regard. From my perspective though, each and every one of its achievements fully resides within the scope of the history of cinema and the 19th century novel. It all makes me wonder what it would have been like to live amidst radical ruptures within this loop of narrative form, such as the movies of Alfred Hitchcock in the 1950s or serial novels by Charles Dickens in the 1860s.

I just finished teaching a class in the art department at UCLA called *Great Expectations*. What emerged as a drunk joke about treating a ten week academic quarter as a live action Dickensian coming-of-age story became a syllabus for a "new genres" course that sought to make sense of the fourth industrial revolution we're living through. You know - mobile devices, artificial intelligence, gene splicing and all that. Kind of like Dickens' narrator-subject Pip exploiting the potentials of railways and Victorian era commodities during the first industrial revolution. There was a soft trolling of the students I found to be productive in which I brought up movies like *Star Wars* in relation to the video art they were presenting. I'd break down the mechanics of a scene when, for instance, Yoda lifts the X-Wing from the Dagobah swamp to demonstrate to Luke Skywalker how The Force - the power within and around them that will later be used to confront Darth Vader - can be harnessed. How shots become tighter and cuts quicker to intensify Luke's attempt, then shots wider and cuts slower so that we can feel his failure before Yoda's inconceivable levitation. The goal here is to acknowledge that we have all been programmed to respond to these kinds of scene composition through sustained exposure since birth. It's why prestige television grips us so well. Like baby formula.

What often becomes a 14 hour work day is punctuated by brief strolls through the neighborhood in

which I mumble to the rhythm of my dawdling pace and realize that I've committed my life to a certain unpopular idea: that there are other ways of making (and making sense of) images. As Yoda quips in that scene - "you must unlearn what you have learned." Though I've been seeking out these other ways for almost a decade now, I still feel like I'm seeing things I haven't seen before. If we used to think of a screen as something that showed a sequence of images strung together in time, now we have multiple images within multiple screens spread throughout space all at the same time. We have CCTV meshes deployed across cities. Virtual cameras in computer imaging. Fly-through mode in CAD software. Crowd-sourced swarms that gather around a single target. A wikipedia page with thousands of authors. A chicken chain restaurant that offers the same branded experience in the US as it does in Canada, India, Mexico, Oman, Panama, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates & Vietnam. Something less like collage, and more like sculpture or theater. Or music, with its tendency towards multiple voices: multiple subjects. The subject splits from 1 to 2, becoming aware of its inherent objecthood. The world enters a rendered universe now viewable from all sides. Modeled from all sides, towards an infinity of points of view. This creates a curvature of space. It bends and recedes, and therefore grows deep as the impersonal, collective subject engulfs it. Kind of hard to explain, but judging by the way your restaurants are composed, I think you know what I mean.

On a B-Dubs patio, the infinite loops of my videos can thrive. They loop before anyone arrives and after everyone leaves. Because they have no beginning, middle, or end - no closure - they move beyond that storybook formula and reverberate in a state of uncertainty. Through the palpable logics of their structure, they create a systemic memory. Less like a single game, and more like a 24 hour golf channel. Narrative loops become literal objects on the surface of the screen, and time becomes spatial by assuming the shape of a ring. The goal here is to allow the work to move within and around us while violating our counterfeit intuitions.

Until then,

Norm

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