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Flight Signs, Flight Symbols

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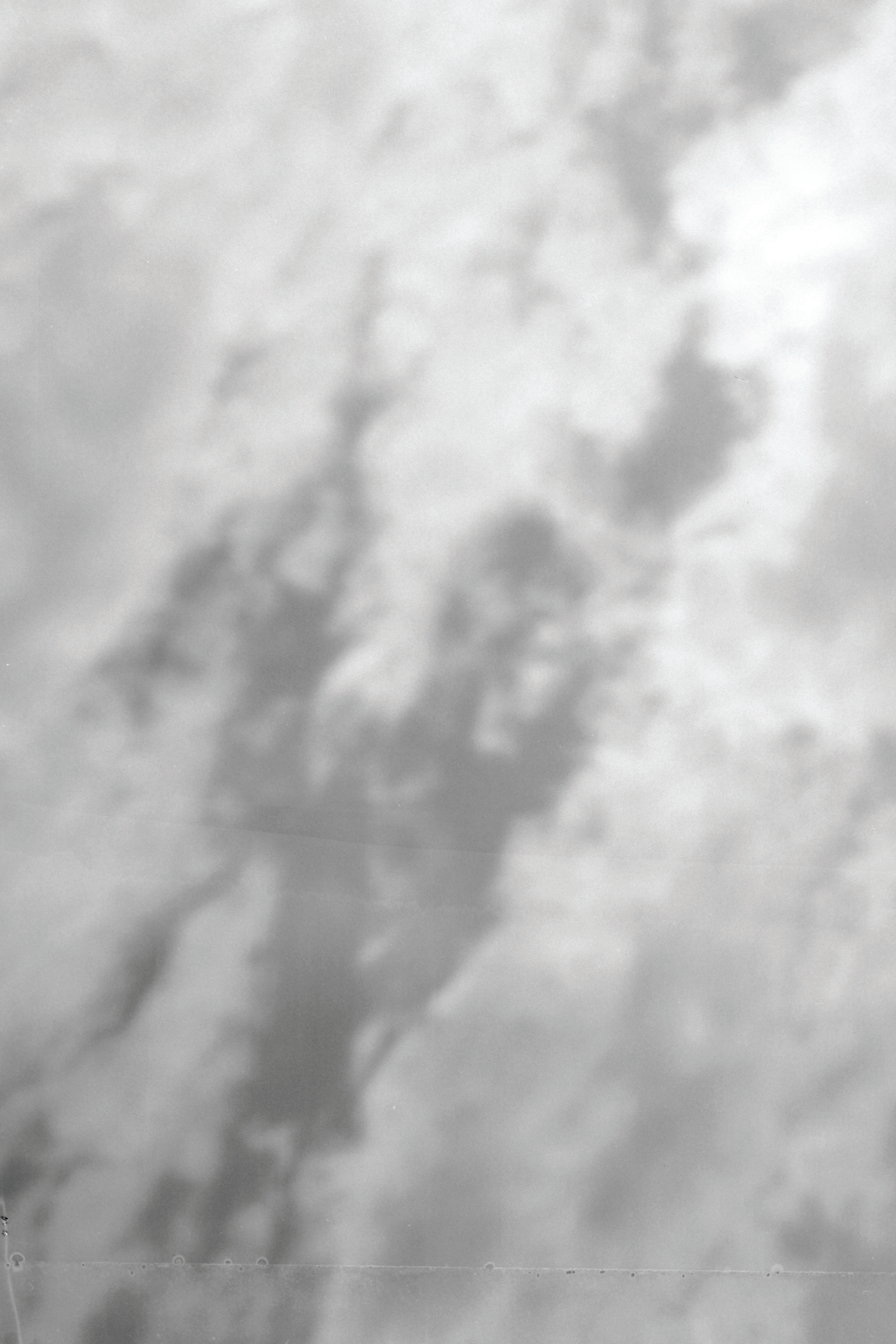

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Flight Signs Flight Symbols

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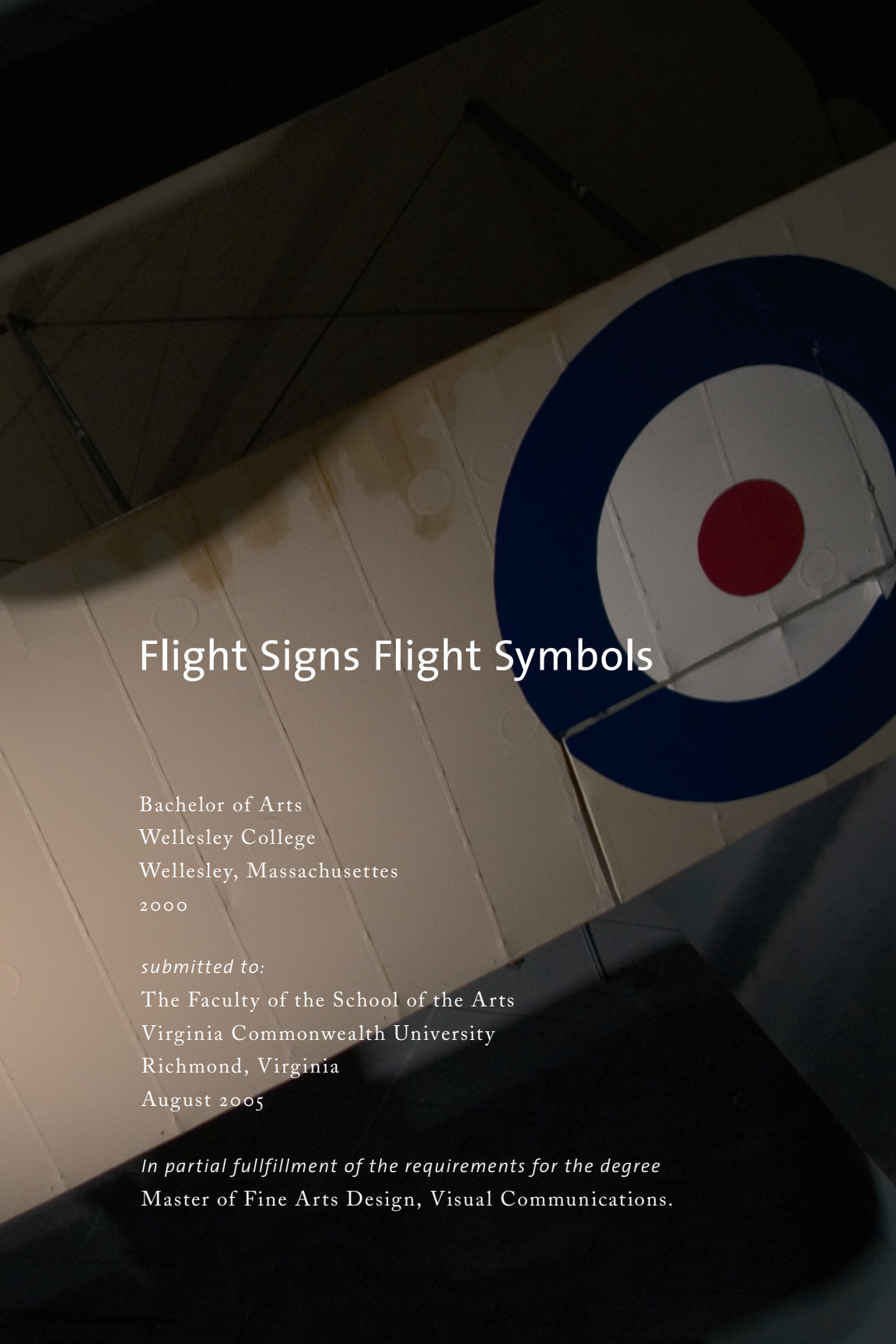

Flight Signs Flight Symbols

Bachelor of Arts
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submitted to:
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Finally I would like to acknowledge all those people who shared their experiences and stories of flight; without them, my project would not have been realized.

Dedication

To my Mom and Dad, Peg and Dale Urban, who have loved and supported me through thick and thin.
Thank you.

I am investigating the significance of historic events of flight through image making; particularly incidents that captured the collective imagination and became part of our cultural memory. These events have surpassed mere entries in historical texts and become mythic. In the terms of Jungian psychology, they have become symbolic. In terms of Semiotics, they have become signs. Through photographs and installation, I seek to understand their presence in my, and our, unconscious mind.

Abstract

About once a week, a Hercules transport passes overhead. I stand on the beach as it flies out to sea, towards nothing I can see, but I know it is bound for Iraq. An assumption, yes; but it is a time of war, and this is Charleston, the last stop for many as they head to fight in a desert on the other side of the world.

Summer 2004

Again, a rescue helicopter flies along the beach from Beaufort to Charleston. It seems to happen every afternoon around 1pm. Everyone stops and stares. Kids are fascinated. The restaurant patrons speculate as to why the helicopter is making its run. Occasionally, they ask me if I know. I too, can only speculate.

July 2, 2004

My Mom gave my Dad the birthday present of an airplane flight over Charleston and out to our house. There was room for two more in the plane, so my dad asked his friend Ray and me. We woke early to leaden skies and rain. For a while we all thought we would have to reschedule, but the pilot insisted it would clear.

As we arrived at the airport, an executive jet was unloading, Louis Vuitton and all. The military hangers were just across the tarmac and a Hercules was loading. My god, they are big.

Ray began to look a bit green as we walked out to the Cessna. It was tiny. Almost as soon as he climbed into the back seat, he had to get out. The claustrophobia was too much, and I would have the backseat to myself. The pilot asked if I got airsick. How did I manage to forget that little detail? I flashed back to several nausea inducing flights and accepted his offer of airsickness bands.

I brought up two cameras, my digital and the pinhole. My father carried another digital. I began clicking away as soon as we walked out to the plane. Once we were aloft, I thought it might be interesting to try the pinhole and see if the resulting blur of images captured the motion. Not a good idea. Staring through a lens-piece started my airsickness, doing the pinhole exposure calculations only made it worse. I spent the rest of the ride trying to hold down my breakfast while blindly snapping away.

The landscape is different viewed from above. Dimensions are flattened and distances shortened. It is hard to say how high we are, but whatever the height, any secrets of the land are exposed; the hidden rivers and lakes, the exact size of houses. The waste treatment plant carefully camouflaged in the interior of an exclusive resort seems immense, as do the shipping terminals and the phosphate plant.

I'm not sure what happened, but I discovered half my pictures were corrupted when I got home. Luckily my Dad's were fine. Too bad his camera is lower resolution. The surviving images are hazy and washed out from the humidity. The colors tend to green. Some of the compositions are nice, but without highlights and shadows, the images are rather dull.

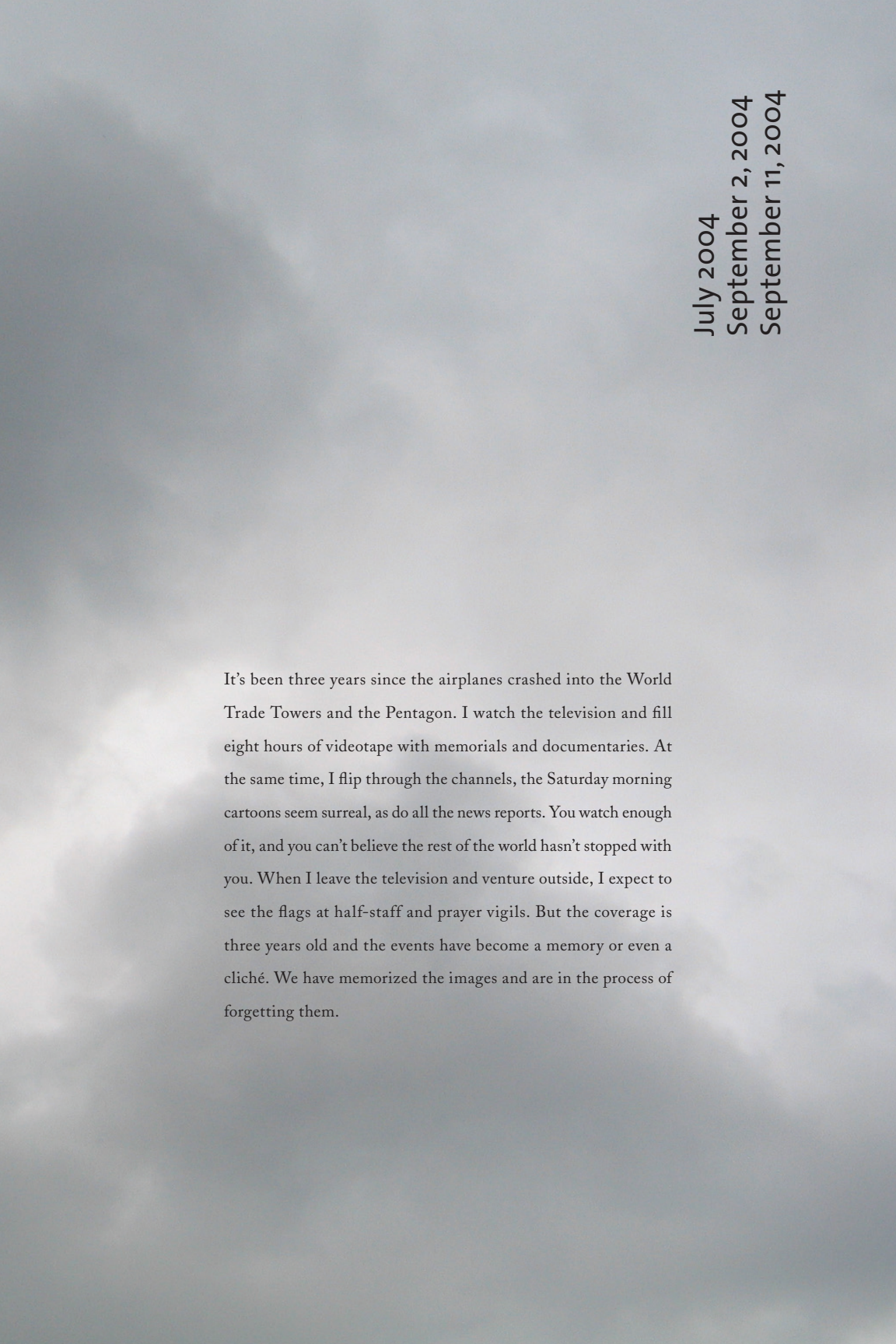
We have a few hours to wander around the mall until the museums close and we have to head back to Richmond. Children run around yelling and screaming, past parents too hot and tired to care. The steps to the Air and Space Museum are packed. The doors rotate with the swish of a vacuum, releasing us into the cool dryness of a building which I can't help thinking of as a giant display case. I look up and am drawn to the Spirit of St. Louis. It's silver paint shimmers in the afternoon light as it still holds some of Lindbergh's charisma, if a plane can be charismatic.

Sputnik hangs nearby. The Apollo 11 command module sits beneath, the surface that withstood 5000 degrees Fahrenheit protected from human hands by a Plexiglas shell.

July 23, 2004

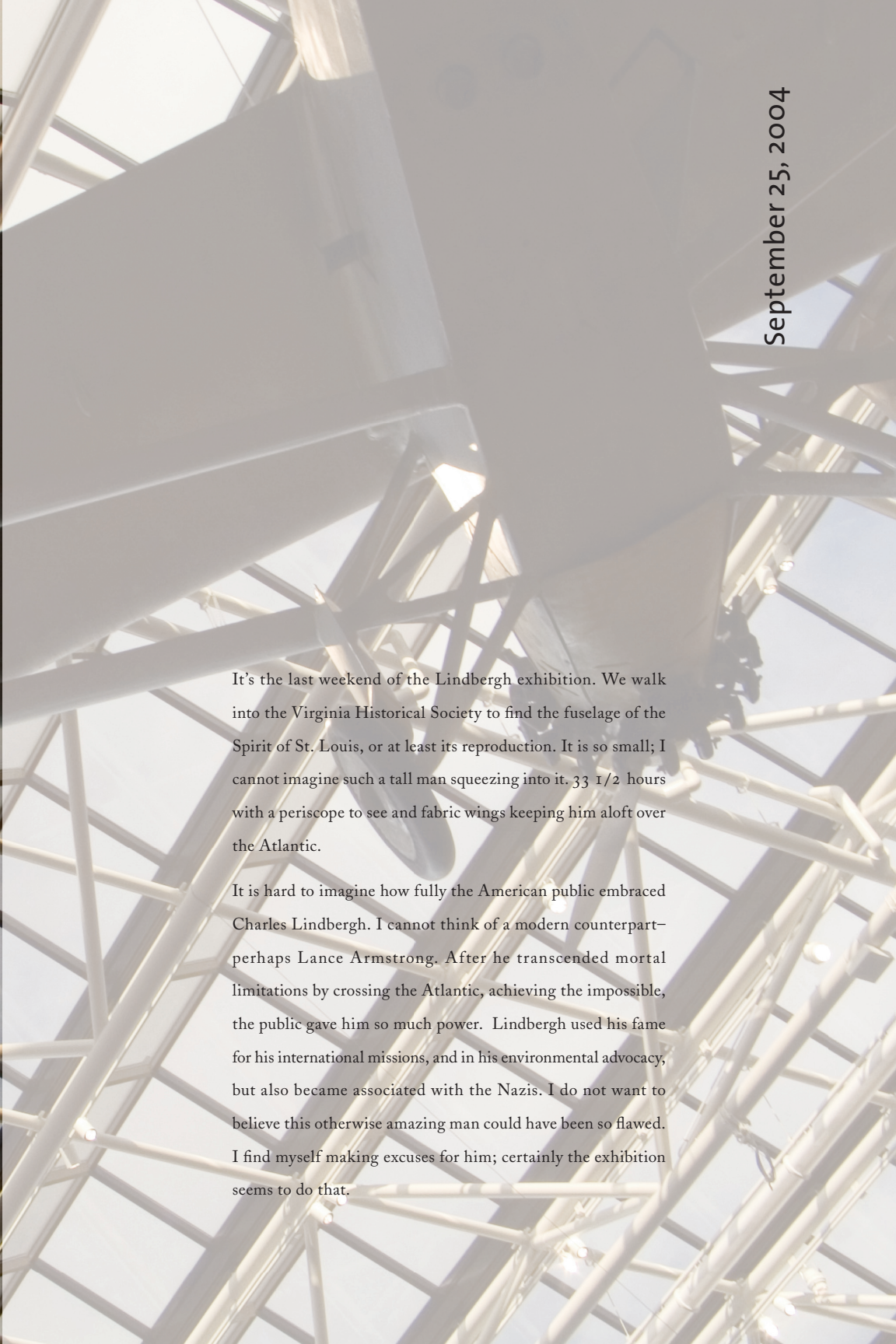
I sit in a black movie theater as *Farenheit 911* opens. The sounds of September 11th, 2001 reverberate around me. Crashes and screams. In the dark, I feel the tension of the audience. I am almost relieved when the images of that day finally appear. Somehow these familiar views of the events are less terrifying than the images in my head.

I briefly watch George W. Bush's 2004 nomination speech. As expected, the president evokes memories of September 11th. He uses words like *terror*, *freedom*, and *safety* a lot. Images of the airplanes and ground zero are displayed behind the various speakers. "A Safer World, A More Hopeful America".



July 2004
September 2, 2004
September 11, 2004

It's been three years since the airplanes crashed into the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon. I watch the television and fill eight hours of videotape with memorials and documentaries. At the same time, I flip through the channels, the Saturday morning cartoons seem surreal, as do all the news reports. You watch enough of it, and you can't believe the rest of the world hasn't stopped with you. When I leave the television and venture outside, I expect to see the flags at half-staff and prayer vigils. But the coverage is three years old and the events have become a memory or even a cliché. We have memorized the images and are in the process of forgetting them.



September 25, 2004

It's the last weekend of the Lindbergh exhibition. We walk into the Virginia Historical Society to find the fuselage of the Spirit of St. Louis, or at least its reproduction. It is so small; I cannot imagine such a tall man squeezing into it. 33 1/2 hours with a periscope to see and fabric wings keeping him aloft over the Atlantic.

It is hard to imagine how fully the American public embraced Charles Lindbergh. I cannot think of a modern counterpart– perhaps Lance Armstrong. After he transcended mortal limitations by crossing the Atlantic, achieving the impossible, the public gave him so much power. Lindbergh used his fame for his international missions, and in his environmental advocacy, but also became associated with the Nazis. I do not want to believe this otherwise amazing man could have been so flawed. I find myself making excuses for him; certainly the exhibition seems to do that.

September 25, 2004

October 21, 2004
October 23, 2004

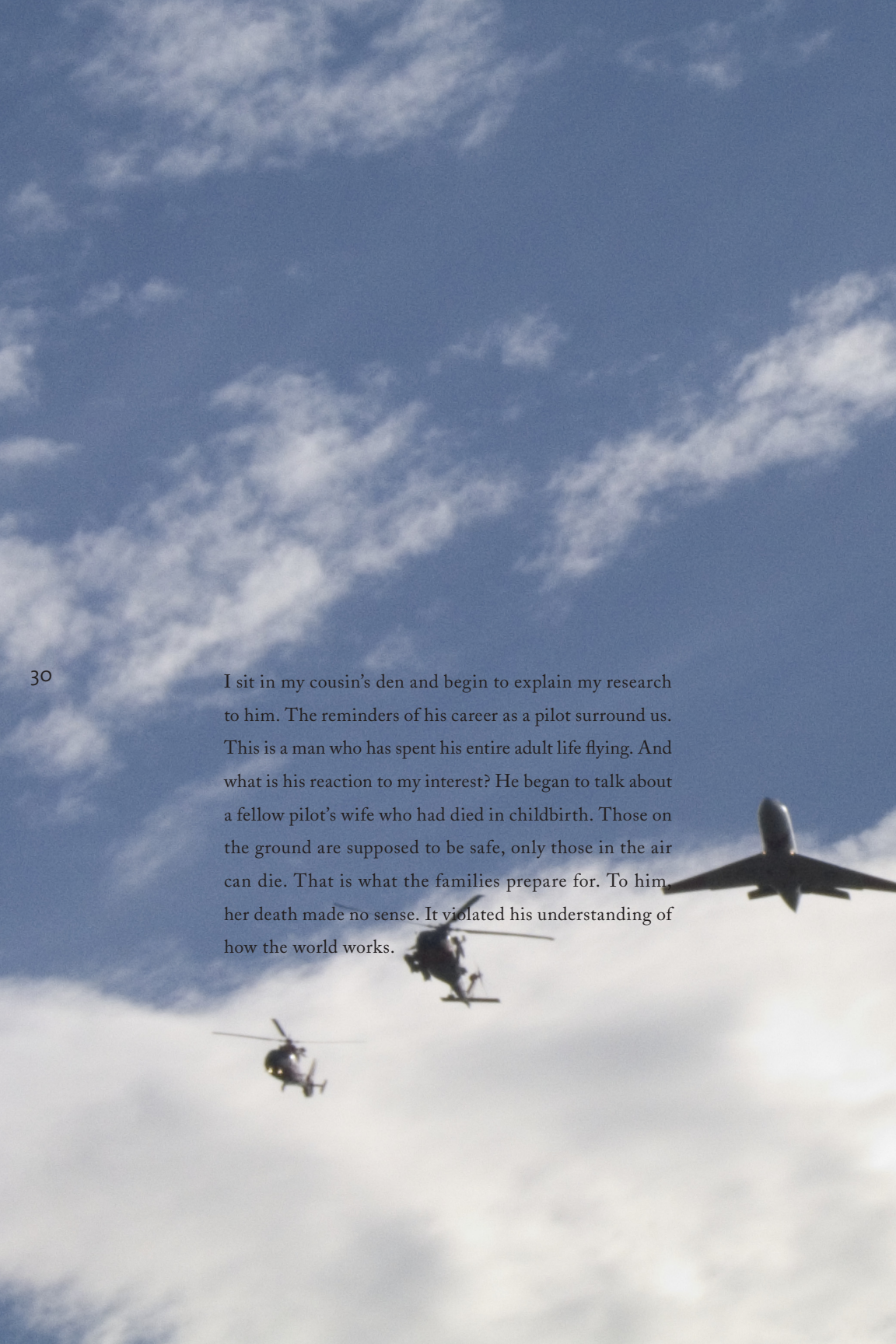
PEDESTRIAN ACCESS TO
BATTERY PARK CITY
WORLD FINANCIAL CENTE
RESTAURANTS, SHOPS,
MARINA, HUDSON RIVER
EPSON
AUSTRALIA

What a strange place.

People walk through on their way to work, on their way to the drug store. Others stop and stare, funneled into the handful of viewing spots surrounding the site. The World Trade Center Site is a memorial and sacred space: a place of commerce and a construction site, and a tourist site complete with souvenirs. Tragedy has been co-opted by the great Yankee entrepreneurial spirit.

The people are diverse. Foreigners, many of them German and British, men with patches on their jackets from working the recovery effort are scattered throughout the crowd. They recount their experiences and I catch snippets as the conversations fade in and out. Small children completely oblivious to the weight of the place recount the physical details of the collapse with macabre glee.

Thank
For Your Praye
All Those Lost
From The Port Au



I sit in my cousin's den and begin to explain my research to him. The reminders of his career as a pilot surround us. This is a man who has spent his entire adult life flying. And what is his reaction to my interest? He began to talk about a fellow pilot's wife who had died in childbirth. Those on the ground are supposed to be safe, only those in the air can die. That is what the families prepare for. To him, her death made no sense. It violated his understanding of how the world works.

November 24, 2004

November 25, 2004

Aircraft are frozen in mid-flight. There's something sad about a plane that can no longer fly, like it's lost its purpose in life.

It's the day after Thanksgiving and the line for the parking lot snaked back a mile. There are thousands of people here. Children make up at least half the crowd. They wander around with their heads craned back, looking wide-eyed. Some are too young to care, while others probably begged their parents to come to the museum, and there are those that were most likely probably dragged here complaining.

How many people circling around the planes have actually flown them? Perhaps the old men with their campaign baseball hats? Or the young men in their fleeces holding the hands of small children?

I am unexpectedly moved by Amelia Earhart's flight suit, displayed near Charles Lindbergh's. Certainly, she is a role model of a fearless woman who was not confined by society's expectations. But I can't help remembering that she wore pants because she hated her ankles. I am embarrassed that this is what I am thinking about.

A crowd surrounds the Enola Gay, staring. Its silver skin shines with the spotlights, brighter than I thought possible. It seems to glow.

It is far too crowded to photograph with the pinhole. There are so many people filing through you can't physically stay in one place for more than a few moments. I try to prop the camera on a ledge. The exposure calculation is for twenty minutes. Its been overexposing so I try for ten. I spend those minutes guarding the camera and trying to keep people from hitting it and decide that I won't try for a second exposure. A man asked if it is a camera. He is intrigued by the concept. A couple of people apologize for ruining my shot. It's too hard to explain that they have actually made it, so I don't. They'll just be ethereal streaks.

The negative sits for weeks until I receive the needed chemistry from the Photographer's Formulary. It is finally processed with the shots from Kitty Hawk.

December 17, 2004

WILBUR
WRIGHT
ORVILLE
WRIGHT

We drive down from Norfolk in the dark. In the blackness of the moonless night I find it hard to imagine that we are traveling the length of an island. We finally see the ocean through gaps in the dunes as we search for the hotel.

The morning dawns cold and bright. I open the curtains and am blinded by the sun reflecting off water. Eventually, we leave the hotel for the Wright Brothers monument. It is completely different than I expected. Trees ring wide, flat fields, and there is only one huge grass covered hill. There is no sand, no water. I know that a hundred and one years have passed, but I expect to see the beach captured in that photograph. I also expected more people, but this is an off year (no one really pays much attention to a 101st anniversary, do they?)

As we park, I hear a school band playing slightly off-key. We make our way to the exhibition hall that looks like a strange hybrid of an airplane hanger, a Victorian greenhouse and an inflated sports dome. People mill around the lobby looking at the exhibits. Voices come from the auditorium; a ceremony recognizing the Tuskegee airmen is underway. I listen for a while until I realize it is almost 10:40am and make my way outside. I look up the hill to the spire of the actual Wright Brother's memorial. A small crowd encircles it, staring upward.

A jet passes overhead and the flyover begins with most of the audience still indoors. People begin to trickle out as an announcer does her best to rouse the crowd, calling out each airplane with an enthusiasm usually relegated to sideshow barkers. Four Coast Guard planes pass overhead in a perfect diagonal line then separate just beyond Kitty Hawk. The two small planes and the helicopter head inland while the transport flies out to sea.

Eventually the entire auditorium spills out onto the fields. The children from the band run around, some pretending to be too grown up to be impressed by the airplanes, but most are fascinated. The stunt planes start performing, arcs of smoke sketching their movements. They buzz the field, then climb to specks, they loop

and turn and flip and cartwheel and freefall. It's dizzying and my neck begins to hurt. An older couple is telling anyone who will listen that they are from Oshkosh and travel around the country seeing air shows. I wonder if either of them were pilots. Later, I overhear them telling a reporter that this air show is nothing "to write home about" compared to the Oshkosh Fly In.

By 1:00pm, it's all over and the people begin to disperse. We walk out to first flight marker. A huge stone with a plaque marks the take off point of December 17, 1903. Pillars mark the landings of the four flights. I am struck at the artifice of it. Such monuments are definite, but the reality is that the actual take-off and landing points must have been lost in the 25 years of blowing and shifting sand. At best, they are approximations.

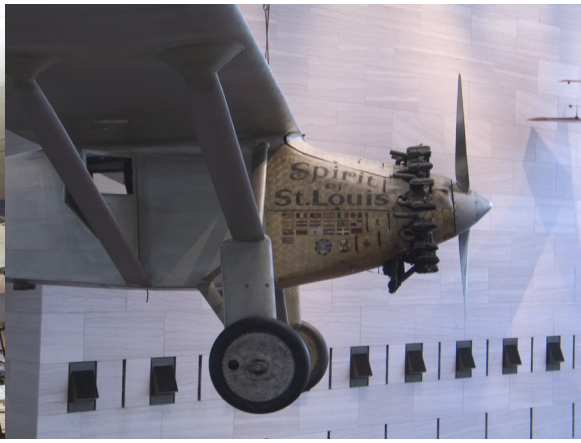
Auditorium

March 1, 2005

I've already lost count of the number of languages I've heard. Certainly this is a tourist destination. I wonder what it must say about our country that we display bombers and missiles just down the street from our seat of government.

Amelia Earhart's plane faces out towards the atrium. There is a model of the airplane she was lost in. I can't help wondering what she would have been like as an old woman. I like to believe the theory that she went down in the Pacific spying on the Japanese. It makes her death seem less like a mistake.

Sitting by the Wright Flyer, I am passed by crowds of people. A metallic voice periodically interrupts the reverie with announcements. It is disconcerting to have it break the carefully contrived artifice of the exhibit. The museum has tried to emphasize the era the Wrights lived in with white picket fences, wood paneling, and a reconstruction of the house they grew up in. Wilbur and Orville are simultaneously made greater geniuses because they figured out how to fly with the tools they had and demythologized



because they lived in a real time and place. I hear a child ask,"Is that it? Is that really it? I don't think that's it. It would be all torn up." It's funny that this symbol of national pride was in the hands of the British for such a long time. It rode out WWII near London because of the Smithsonian's refusal to acknowledge that the Wrights and not Langley were the first men to fly.

So why are all these people here making their secular pilgrimage? Probably nothing more complex than having been told this is a good place to visit, that it is something they should see. That this is "important." I wonder if the middle-school students in the lobby feel that their visit is more than an excuse to get out of school?

Heller
LE REDOUTABLE
TYPHOON

March 16, 2005

My father surveys assorted airplane models. They are all fighter jets, one or two civilian aircraft. He notes how the history of aviation has been one of war. And that NASA was one of the few purposeful attempts to find a peaceful use for aviation. I am reminded of di Vinci's bluster promising untold military advantage to whatever duke or prince paid for his then still imaginary machines.

1/35
Heller
LE REDOUTABLE
USS SPRUANCE
TYPHOON

AIRPLANES
1:48
SHIDEN TYPE 11
TAMIYA
68
MESSERSCHMITT
Bf109E-4/7 TROP
TAMIYA
55
REPUBLIC F-84G
THUNDERJET
TAMIYA
45
NORTH AMERICAN
P-51D MUSTANG
TAMIYA
49
FOCKE WULF
Fw190 A-3
TAMIYA
66
SKYRAY
35
MESSERSCHMITT
Me262
A-1a
87
SUPERMARINE
SEAFIRE Mk.I
66
32
TAMIYA
1/48 SCALE
82
March 16, 2005

When I mention to someone that I am investigating flight, they immediately launch into some anecdote about flying. It never fails. Flying is a topic that evokes a response. Laurence Goldstein writes about man's relationship to flight, *"The research of anthropologists and folklorists has uncovered no historical period–not even in the most archaic cultures-in which the desire for flight did not exist."*[1] As visual communicators, we seek to provoke responses in our audience. So, looking at a topic as powerful and universal as flight, or any idea that has found its way into the collective unconscious, can lead to understanding of how we achieve those reactions.

I am not trying to make an encyclopedic survey of flight. I could not. It is simply too large of a topic with too much history. Instead, I am addressing turning points in the history of man's relationship to powered flight. These events include the Wright Brother's first flight, the transatlantic flights of Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart, the dropping of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima by the Enola Gay, the destruction of the World Trade Center. This list is by no means complete and is limited by sites or artifacts to which I have access. While the bombing of Pearl

Harbor or the London Blitz are both very important historical events, I was simply not able to experience either first hand.

Flying, even in a historical context, is too loaded to address objectively; any investigation of flight is a personal, subjective vision. This could be true of any concept or historical event. All are constrained by the limits of human perception. As Carl Jung writes, *"Each word means something slightly different to each person, even among those who share the same cultural background. The reason for this variation is that a general notion is received into an individual context and is therefore understood and applied in a slightly different way."*[2] In terms of semiotics, there is universality to signs, but there are also cultural and personal factors that influence how individuals interpret signs; the signifiers remain the same, but the signified shift and change from person to person. So, my study is limited to my own relationship to flight, my own perspective and my own interpretation of its relevance or personal significance. While observations of the individual cannot lead to conclusions about all of humanity, it certainly may lead to greater understanding.

You know,

I really like things

that fly.

I'm talking about potential creative project topics and make a statement in passing. It is amazing how unassuming a moment of clarity can be, how simply things can start. I find that it is hard to know when a process or a project begins and I sometimes only recognize what I am creating when it is nearly formed. So it is with my creative project.

Spring 2003 At the Rochester Institute of Technology I create an installation work for my experimental drawing class. I suspend fifteen paper airplanes carrying cargos of lead type in front of a charcoal drawing 80″ wide by 120″ high. The completed piece receives mixed reviews, but the planes fascinate viewers. America has just started bombing Iraq, and many see the lead type as bombs and the children's toy airplanes become sinister. This is not my intention, but I feel like I have discovered something important, the potential for innocent objects to take on complex meaning and the potential for viewers to see references to major events in unrelated contexts.

Fall 2003 I read Roland Barthes' essay *Einstein's Brain* as part of seminar with Professor Sandy Wheeler.

"Einstein's brain is a mythical object... he is commonly signified by his brain, which is like an object for anthologies, a true museum exhibit."[3] I am reminded of the work of the British conceptual artist Cornelia Parker. She is fascinated by the idea that the aura of a person or of history can cling to the most common objects. She has gathered dust from Freud's couch, a scrap of Lindbergh's blanket and taken electro micrographic photos of Einstein's equations. Both Barthes and Parker are interested in secular objects that have the potential to become mythical, even religious artifacts. They hold the aura of the individuals who have touched them. They are proxies for great ideas and events of history — even canvases onto which we project our interests, ideas and beliefs.

I write, *"Whereas we once had holy relics, holy sights, we now have secular shrines. The Grassy Knoll. Ford's theater, Graceland, the World Trade Center site – each has become a shrine in and of itself. In visiting these sights, we encounter moments that defined individual and collective history. It is as if we can somehow become part of the event by walking where it took place and having the essence of history cling to our feet."* *(see appendix)*

Spring 2004 As part of Professor Sandy Wheeler's Workshop, I analyze the photograph *Untitled (boy as bird)* by Ralph Eugene Meatyard according to John Szarkowski's five aspects of determining the aesthetic quality of a photograph: *The Thing Itself, the Frame, the Point of View, the Detail,* and *Time*.

I interpret *the Thing Itself* as both an image frozen in a piece of film and the various contexts I have encountered the photograph in; first as an image in a book, then as an image online and as a computer desktop.

Meatyard frequently uses multiple frames within the frame of the photograph. These can be doors, holes, or windows, anything that offers a route through and out of the photograph. Meatyard's use of the frame tends to place himself and his camera as an observer of a surreal world. In his photographs it is hard to determine the relationship of the photographer to the subjects. He is outside their world looking in.

The Point of View is demonstrated by Meatyard's tendency to create images in bazaar and decaying environments. These places remove his images from the realm of reality. Another interpretation of the point of view is a common theme in the images of any photographer, not just Meatyard, and that is the tendency for the photographer to place herself in the image through the choice of subject, setting, scale, etc. To a greater of lesser extent, all photographs are self-portraits.

My interpretation of the photograph's *Detail* becomes the most influential aspect of this study on my work. I am interested that the viewer can clearly "see" the bird in the photograph. The child, Meatyard's son, is also interesting. But more than anything else, I am fascinated by the hole in the wall. What is on the other side? What would you see if you looked out through it? What if that hole became the camera aperture? How could I photograph with the hole? This line of thought leads me to the idea of a pinhole camera.

The pinhole camera, with variations known as the camera obscura or the camera lucida, is the oldest and most primitive form of photographic devices. The Chinese philosopher Mo-Ti explained the principle as early as the fifth century BC, while the Islamic scholar Alhazan described and experimented with the camera around 1000 AD. Later individuals such as Leonardo da Vinci, Johannes Kepler and Jan Vermeer experimented with the devices.[4]

Pinhole cameras are very easy to construct; the oatmeal canister version is a favorite in elementary school science classes. But controlling and calculating exposures on handmade device can be tricky and I did not want to spend my time creating a camera. I wanted to use it. So I bought one.

Any photographic material can be used in a pinhole camera. Previously I created photographic images using resin–coated paper as a negative for contact printing. Any form of black and white film may also be used. However, I do not have access to a darkroom, so I am left with one real alternative, Polaroid film. Traditional pack film relies on the camera's mechanism for development. Take away the camera and it doesn't work properly. While it is possible to perform a pinhole conversion on a Polaroid, I do not have the time or the inclination to attempt it. So I opt for a camera capable of handling a 4 x 5 Polaroid back. I reason that at that size, the prints can be used as final pieces.

My first attempts at pinhole photography are slow exposures that produce dark, but usable images. When I take the camera outside, the pictures are frustratingly overexposed. Rather than trashing them, I decide to scan them into Photoshop and manipulate the levels to bring out hidden details. The results are surreal and abstract, but beautiful.

Meatyard used his photographs to capture chunks of time. As a photographer, he was fascinated with the ability of the lens to see things that the human eye could not, chiefly to perceive and document stretches of time, not just instants. His images were the antithesis of Henri Cartier-Bresson's decisive moments. The long exposures of the pinhole complement Meatyard's approach perfectly.

As I address the child's imagined wings, I return to my paper airplanes. I follow Meatyard's approach and place them in decaying environments. These planes, as well as wooden models, find their way into my bedroom as I sleep and I use the pinhole camera to create sevenhour-long exposures. The images are a synthesis of Meatyard's approach to time, detail, frame and point of view.

p10, Meador

Late Spring 2004 I happen across the book *Whiskey (Defense)*. It tells the history of Scotland through the history of Scotch Whiskey. Images of places are juxtaposed against distilleries and the different stories inter-twine to form a poetic narrative. I am intrigued by the idea that history can be told through the story of an object.

Summer 2004 My creative project begins in earnest and I want to understand ideas and events of which I have only cursory knowledge of, so I start to read. My initial goal is to learn more about semiotics and Jungian psychology, topics I am familiar with but can by no means fully understand. Also, I have given the subject of flight very little serious thought.

Barthes' collection *Mythologies* seems a logical place to begin since the essay "*Einstein's Brain"* is found there. Reading this book leaves me with a somewhat better understanding of how semiotics can be used to view popular culture, but more than anything I learn that Barthes was an astute observer of society.

Another text, *The Flying Machine in Modern Literature* proves somewhat more enjoyable and pertains directly to my subject, but after these two analytical texts, I don't feel like I am getting any closer to why man is fascination with flight. A friend suggests I read Beryl Markam's memoir, *Into the Night,* and in her words I begin to understand the motivation to fly. Soon, I read autobiographies of Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart and letters of the Wright Brothers.

It is mid summer when I happen on the book *The Flyers*. The author, Noah Adams, tells the story of the Wright Brothers as he travels around the country and the world, tracing their footsteps and their impact on contemporary society. I've been compiling a list of important events in the history of flight as part of my research. This book convinces me I need see the related artifacts and sites. I now have a course of action: go to sites and museums, photograph what I see with my pinhole and my digital cameras and follow the images wherever they lead me.

Fall 2004 Limited time and money mean I have to edit my list of sites. I decide on The Air and Space Museum, home of the Wright Flyer, the Spirit of St. Louis, the Bell XS-1, a Bleroit XI and Amelia Earhart's plane; The Udvar-Hazy Center, the home of the Enola Gay; The Wright Brother's Monument at Kitty Hawk; and Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan.

I make the decision to switch to Polaroid type 55 film. It produces a positive image and a very fine grained, 50 speed, 4 x 5 negative that will enlarge well if I scan it into Photoshop. But shooting with this film means that I have to carry a large bucket of water around New York City to stop my exposed negatives. Perhaps if I was confident in my exposures, I might be able to shoot without developing my negatives. But I have never used this film before and, well, I can't afford to come back to New York again. As for carrying a very large backpack with cameras and film and a bucket of water around New York (Soho on a Saturday afternoon!)… I will never do it again.

The World Trade Center Site proves far different than I expected and my focus shifts from Ground Zero to the absence in the sky above to the people hovering around it. The interaction of these individuals with the place stays with me, even as I ride the train home. The remnants of shrines. The multiple nature of the site; the people that visit, those that live with it; all these things speak of the different ways we deal with monumental events, with memory and with history. I take these observations along with me as I visit other locations.

At each place I visit, I photograph with my pinhole but also take digital photos as fail-safes. In time, I become confident enough to trust my exposure calculations, developing my negatives later in the comfort of my home.

Spring 2005 There is a distinction between the pinhole and digital images. The pinholes are dreamy and poetic, more impressions than fact. The digital are sharp and analytical, almost too easy to make to be worthy of much attention. But there are some nice compositions and details of sites that I was unable to capture with the pinholes. I struggle with how to deal with the images when I finally happen upon a way I can translate the digital into the pinhole format.

I return to the idea of photographing myself sleeping. Sleep is the place of dreams and dreams are the playground of the unconscious, a place where symbolism reigns. If I introduce images into my dreams, would the symbolism of the images translate? I print out one of the digital files on a sheet of overhead film. I have an old overhead projector and use it to project the image onto my bed and the wall above it. Set the camera up, calculate the exposure, 1.5 hours, set my alarm clock. At 1:30 am, it goes off, I stumble out of sleep, close the camera shutter, hit the off switch on the

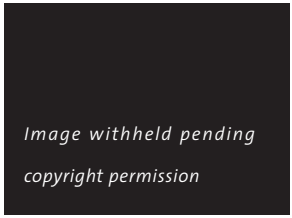
projector and gratefully crawl back into bed. The next morning, I awake with a start and develop the film. It worked. I have a methodology. Too bad it's not particularly easy to sleep with a bright light in your face.

After a week or so, I am able to estimate how long an image might take, usually between 1.5 and two hours. I realize there is a way to turn the overhead projector off without waking up. I buy a timer plug and set it for about the time required for exposure. When the timer goes off, power is cut to the projector and it turns off. The Polaroid type 55 requires so much light for exposure that the ambient light of the night and early morning don't expose the film enough to impact the latent image. I am able to sleep through the night. Hallelujah!

I make around thirty of these sleep images and, after the detour of a broken negative scanner, scan all of the images into the computer and manipulate their curves in Photoshop. Some images are more successful than others, but overall, I am pleased.

It is mid-semester and I am perplexed. I have been sssigned an awkward gallery space for my graduate show. I have my pinhole site photographs. I have my pinhole dream images. How do I make them fit in that space? I turn ideas around in my head. A physical constraint of the space is a very ugly and unusable wall with two large windows.

I remember artwork and design that has had a great impact on me. For the most part, these are installation works. Pieces where the viewer enters the world of the artist. I return to Cornelia Parker's almost clinical installation works that are somehow both poetic and reasoned as they address issues of cultural identity and significance. I find Christian Boltanski's use of shadow and light as he transforms existing environments particularly effective.



the artist and Luhring Augustine Gallery, N.Y.

Pipilotti Rist. *Herbstzeitlose.*

Entering through blackness into another world, her mind. Simple details become expressive; leaves on floor. Branches with plastic containers suspended, film projected over it, plastic distorts...

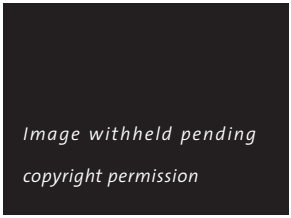
Written in Rist installation

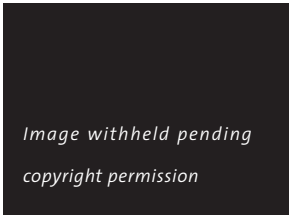
October 22, 2004

While I was in New York City in the fall, I was fortunate enough to see works by Pipilotti Rist and the Wilson Sisters. In both of these pieces, the viewer walks into a darkened room with images projected onto the walls, surrounding you with sight and sound. I also recall the photographs I have seen of Will Burtin's exhibition designs. In his case, he created enormous three-dimensional diagrams of complex biological systems to reveal their inner workings. Again, the viewer enters into the space to understand a concept, idea.

p 112, Remington, R. Roger and Barbara J. Hodik

Will Burtin. The Upjohn Cell Exhibit.





the artists and Gallery 303, N.Y.

Jane and Louise Wilson. *Erewhon.*

Darkness, beautiful, intimate space. I have never seen such projections. Disconcerting to watch two corners at once. How eloquent an empty room can be, full of meaning in the absence of the stuff of life. Gorgeous face-mounted prints. Huge, feels like you can walk into them. They're mounted so your reflection seems to stand in the spaces they portray. A ghost standing in rooms where ghosts are visible just out of the corner of your eye.

Written in Wilson Installation,

October 22, 2004

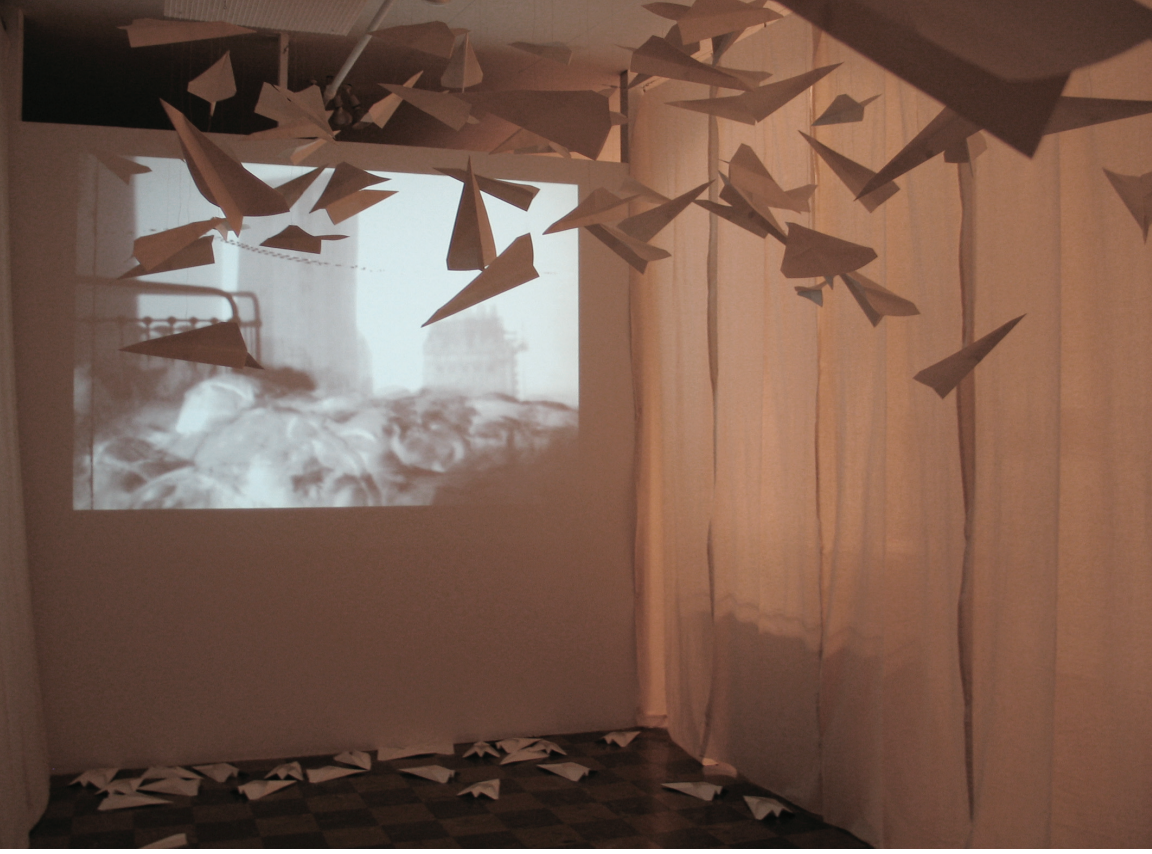
At first, I want to build light boxes and display dreams as backlit images. A sort of timeline of flight. The site images would be projected onto a wall in the same space. But the feedback at my midterm review is that the idea is too complicated and doesn't have enough impact. I need to simplify and rely on the strength of my photographs and my content. I should also address the sound of the environment.

I spend spring break tossing around ideas. The image I keep returning to is of photographs projected onto a wall, large and glowing. A room where they surround the viewer on all four walls, squadrons of white toy airplanes hanging from overhead, casting shadows. I'm hesitant because I've used projection before, but I give in to the appeal of that image and try to make the installation happen.

My first and most monumental obstacle is finding enough projectors. Rental quickly proves ridiculously expensive and I find out that there are not enough projectors available on campus. So I downsize to three projections, then two, then one. I am also having difficulty finding enough inexpensive toy airplanes to fill the space. I return to my paper airplanes — cheap, easy to make and effective.

I return to the problem of my awkward exhibition space and the ugly wall. If I block the windows out with black plastic, I don't need to make the wall I build in front of them light proof. Also, since I only need one flat surface to project onto, I can address the wall with aesthetics, not function, in mind. I mull over the problem. Bed sheets? Curtains? Sheetrock? The simplest, most inexpensive and most eloquent answer is to use panels of inexpensive muslin hung from a suspension wire by clips. Muslim and wire were frequently used in early aircraft and the panels will move slightly in the air, evoking a feeling of lightness.

With the physical aspects of my installation decided, I spend the remaining weeks editing my photographs and creating the video. Initially, I use Adobe After Effects, but when I export the images, the quality is less than desired. I know there must be some way



around the problem, but I don't have much time to figure it out. Apple's iMovie program initially provides less than perfect results, but it is very easy to use and I play with the settings until I get good results. Unfortunately, it proves to be terrible at rendering text.

I am still struggling with how I might include some of my observations and theories in the final installation. A friend suggests I try to speak them as a background to the projections. Very well. I decide to combine my voice with the sounds of flight. I hunt down sound files on the Internet, everything from the wind and waves on the shore of a Scottish loch (listen closely and you can hear a brogue) to the sound of a reproduction 1903 Wright engine. I use Apple's GarageBand Program to create the track and after some false starts I feel confident with the program.

I work mixing and recording the sounds as I build the sequence of images, going back and forth between the two to perfect the timing. When the video is nearly complete, I show it to my advisor. His immediate reaction is to loose the text (problem solved!) and to

loose the vocal. I agree. He also suggests I draw out the transitions between the images to emphasize the dream-like quality of the video. Also, to increase the sound volume so that it takes over my exhibition space. Done. And Done.

I am able to get into my exhibition space four days before the MFA show opens. My father helps me run wires tightened by turnbuckles across the room. I pick up a trick from Cornelia Parker and hang "egg crate" florescent light diffusers from the wires in the center of the exhibition space. I then drop the paper airplanes on fine wires from the grids. When I set up the fabric panels, my exhibition space is transformed. The projected video and its sound make it come alive. Between the lighting, the airplanes, and the softly defined space, I feel like

A Chronology of Events

3500 BC	Daedelus creates wings to escape the island of Crete. His son Icarus flies too close to the sun, the wings melt and he crashes into the sea.
1483 – 1499	Leonardo da Vinci sketches designs for flying machines.
1891 – 96	Otto Lillenthal uses mathematical calculations and scientific experiments to explain aerodynamic lift
December 17, 1903	The Wright Brothers fly.
July 25, 1909	Louis Bleirot crosses the English Channel.
WWI	Baron von Richthofen's "Flying Circus" terrorizes the Western Front.
May 20, 1927	Charles Lindbergh crosses the Atlantic.
June 18, 19 1928	Amelia Earhart Crosses the Atlantic.
July 2, 1937	Amelia Earhart is lost in the Pacific.
September 7, 1940 – May 11, 1941	London is bombed in the Blitz
December 7, 1942	Pearl Harbor is bombed.
August 6, 9, 1944	Nuclear bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
October 14, 1947	Chuck Yeager breaks the sound barrier in the Bell XS-1.
June 25, 1948 – September 30, 1949	The Berlin Airlift
May 1, 1960	Gary Powers' U2 spy plane is downed by the Soviet Union.
September 11, 2001	Hijacked planes are crashed into the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

left The Wright Brothers Monument (Pillar Rise)

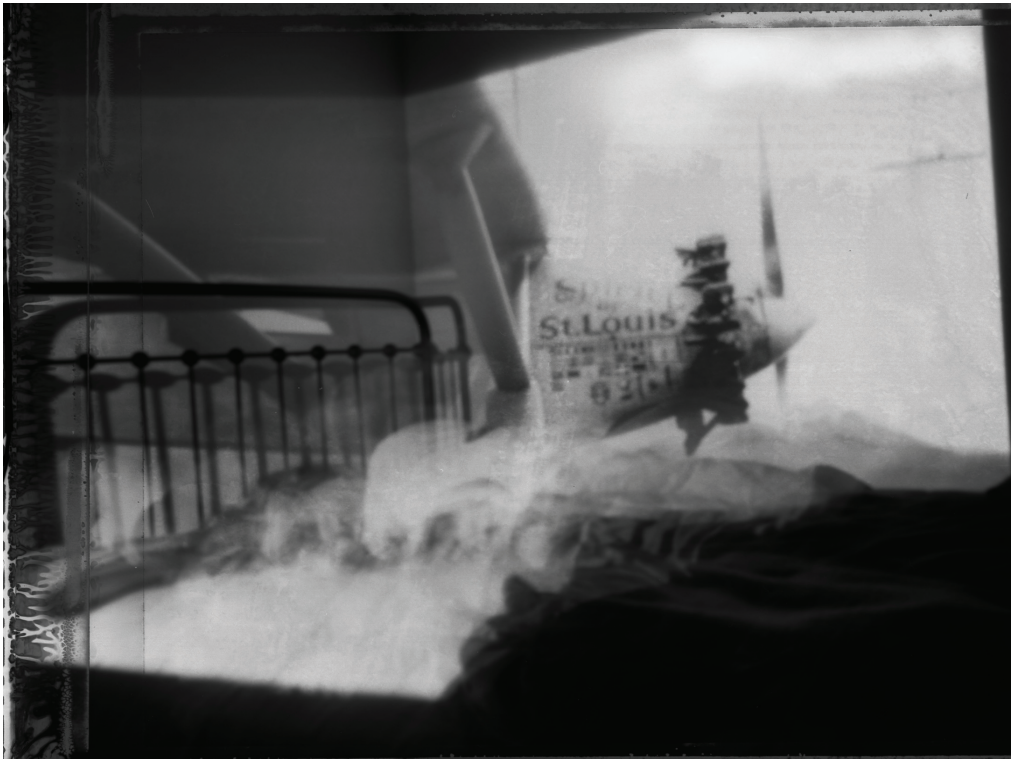
right The Wright Brothers Monument (Pillar Set)

preceeding The Wright Brothers Monument (Witnesses)

left Dream of Grandure

right top Dream with Improbable Vehicle
right bottom Dream with Commentary

preceeding Dream with Audience



left Dream of Impossible Distance

right Dream with Adoration

preceeding The Spirit of St. Louis (Commemoration)

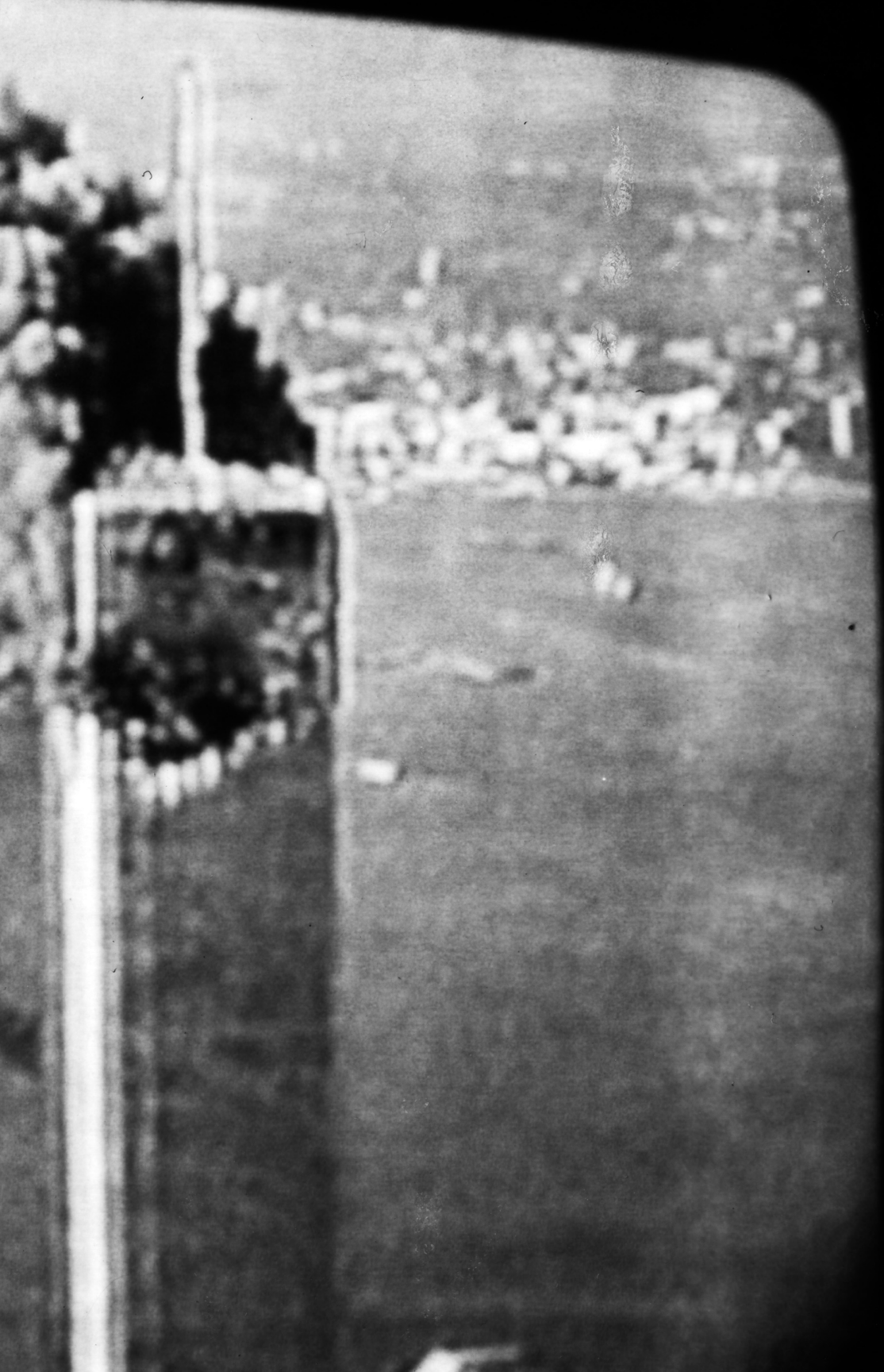
ENOLA
GA

left Dream of Scorched Earth

right Dream of Fear

preceeding The Enola Gay (Glow)

9:03:AM



left The World Trade Center Site (Viewing)

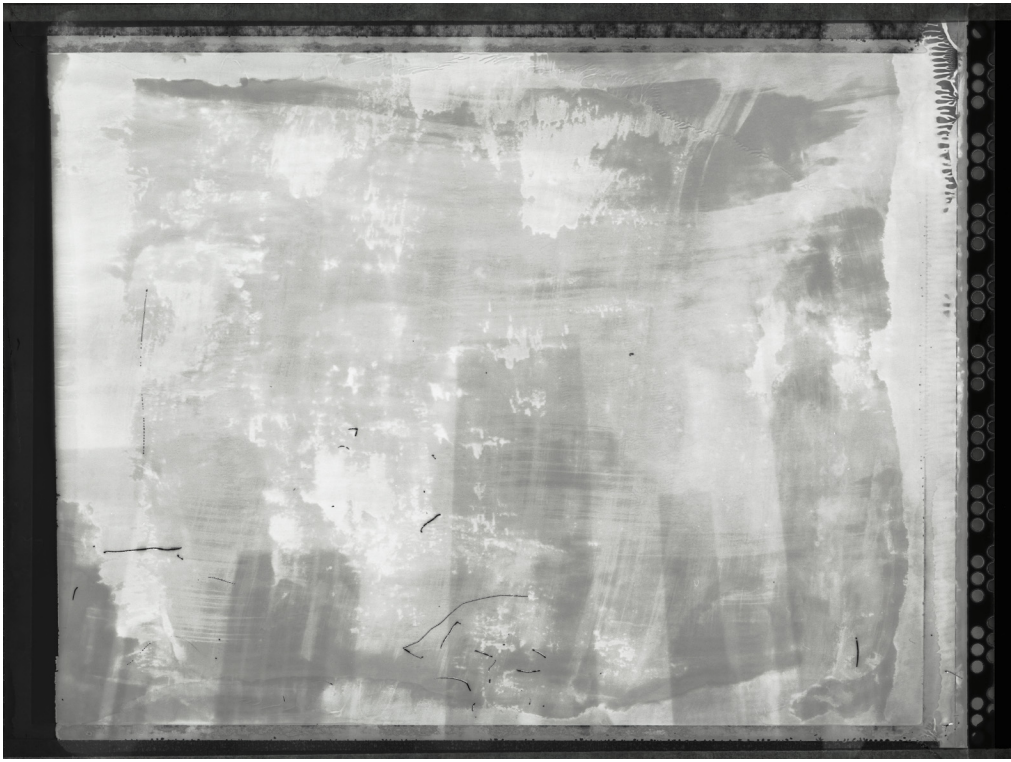
right The World Trade Center Site (Constuction/Memorial)

preceeding Televised Memory

left top Dream of Reconstruction

left bottom Dream with Illumination

right Troubled Dream (World Trade Center)



left Hole Left by Two Airplanes Crashing

right Empty/Filled

preceeding The World Trade Center Site (Viewing Bridge)

following Dream Formation

Flying
is about power.

I have successfully created another world for the viewer to enter.

In many religions and mythologies, gods live in the skies and rain down fire or lightening when man displeases them. Later, Leonardo da Vinci boasted that his flying machines were powerful weapons of war, giving great advantages to whichever military force possessed them. In ascent, the change in perspective affords knowledge not available to those on the ground; in war this is an invaluable

Icarus tries to escape Crete

Leonardo da Vinci military aircraft

The Berlin Airlift

he U2 Spy plane

Leonardo da Vinci sketches designs for flying machines as weapons of war.

advantage. The better you know your enemy, the easier he is to defeat. Ascent also allows you to go around or escape your enemy completely.

The "Flying Circus" terrorizes the Western Front

Bombs dropped from above hit the opposing army where it is the most vulnerable. Those same bombs may also be used to isolate the enemy and cut off its supply lines or to cripple it by targeting the civilian population. As soon as man flew the fear of firebombing spread. The British, historically paranoid about the sovereignty of their island, came to fear the power of aeronautical forces. They were wary of Germany's potential for firebombing even before World War I broke out. The bombing of London only confirmed this fear.

London is bombed in the Blitz

Pearl Harbor is bombed.

Nuclear bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

September 11, 2001.

The United States used aircraft to deliver the ultimate weapon, the nuclear bomb. Later t aircraft

Flying is about transcending the natural order.

became the weapon turned against the United States.

Physiologically, man is not intended to fly. We do not possess any of the structures needed to achieve sufficient aerodynamic lift. Every time we defy gravity, we thumb our noses at nature and its laws.

Once airborne, distances are traversed at impossible speeds. Terrestrial barriers are breached. When Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic, a journey that previously took days was suddenly possible in 33 1/2 hours. His accomplishment forever altered

Icarus flies.

Otto Lillenthal explains aerodynamic lift.

The Wright Brothers fly.

Louis Bleirot crosses the English Channel

Charles Lindbergh crosses the Atlantic.

Amelia Earhart Crosses the Atlantic.

Chuck Yeager breaks the sound barrier.

our knowledge of how the world works.

Flying is about falling.

The opposite of fly is crashing. Falling to earth is frequently fatal, a sort of punishment for having the arrogance to venture into the realm of the birds and the gods. Icarus flew so close to the sun that his wings melted, plummeting to earth and punished for his arrogance in aspiring to the realm of the gods and the birds. Lillenthal and Earhart both died in a similar manner.

Icarus flies too close to the sun and crashes into the sea.

Otto Lillenthal dies in a glider accident.

Amelia Earhart is lost in the Pacific.

The U2 spy plane is downed.

September 11, 2001.

left Dream in Perspective

right Dream Potentials

preceeding Dream Passenger

following Watching

Flight draws us.

Common events draw us.

Memories draw us.

Display an airplane in a museum and people will come to see it. If it is somehow important or historic, crowds flock. I have spent the past year on an odyssey, following breadcrumbs of history around the country. And I have watched as other people perform similar pilgrimages.

Ask someone why they visit the World Trade Center Site or the National Air and Space Museum or the Wright Brothers' Monuments. You will undoubtedly receive as many different answers as people asked. But as you observe individuals at these places, you can see wonder or reverence or disbelief or indifference. I sat on the viewing walk at the World Trade Center Site and in one surge of people, I saw a man rushing through the crowd with a CVS prescription, shoppers with bags, businessmen with their cell phones glued to their ears, Vietnamese vendors hawking commemorative photographs and books, construction workers on their breaks. Tourists snapping photographs and children bored with the whole thing.

To an extent this is how our culture as a whole deals with any major event, traumatic or otherwise; we mark it, we profit from it, we ignore it, we live with it, we go on.

Conclusion Part 2

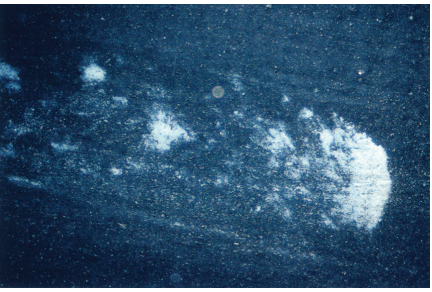
A Fall 2003 essay responding to Roland Barthes Essays "Einstein's Brain" and "Garbo's Face"

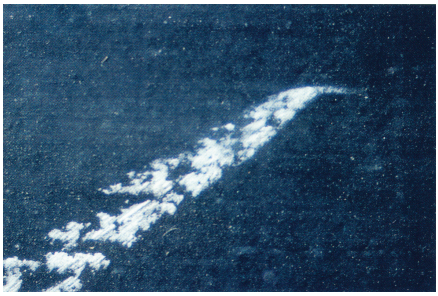
We give power to objects. We assign them importance and meaning far beyond the simple fact and purpose of their existence. If we, as physical beings, are to conceive of an abstraction, we must find an embodiment, a symbol that brings it into our realm of experience. The fact is that you cannot hold a memory, visit an idea, or worship at the feet of a concept. Thus, the image of Greta Garbo becomes the embodiment of the platonic human ideal. Einstein's brain is a manifestation of intelligence and insight into the divine order.

The artist Cornelia Parker took photomicrographs of a blackboard that had been preserved covered with Einstein's equations used to illustrate his 1931 Oxford lectures on the theory of relativity.

Regarding the piece, Parker has said, *" I struggle to understand Einstein, Freud, Hitler... but somehow by looking at something really closely that they are associated with...you can sort of make a different more intuitive sense out them. I think I know more about the theory of relativity by looking through a microscope at his equations; looking is a different kind of knowledge."*[5]

She, and we, search a chalkboard Einstein touched for hidden meaning, for unseen traces of genius. Perhaps this is why that





board has been preserved for the last fifty years, untouched, a secular relic.

Where as we once had holy relics, holy sights, we now have secular shrines. The Grassy Knoll. Ford's theater, Graceland, the World Trade Center site – each has become a shrine in and of itself. In visiting these sights, we encounter moments that defined individual and collective history. It is as if we can somehow become part of the event by walking where it took place and having the essence of history cling to our feet.

There are places that have a sense of the past about them, which feel haunted. Walking down the streets of Charleston, I am very aware of history having occurred there, feeling the collective tread of centuries of feet on the same sidewalk I stand on. Walter Benjamin speaks of the aura, in reference to the reproduction of the image, but I think that it also clings to places, to things, to people, a remnant of what has been. Or, perhaps even what might be.

There is the old joke that when someone shakes hands with their idol, they will never wash that hand again – but why would anyone say such a preposterous thing? And why would everyone immediately understand the intention behind it; it is nonsensical statement that makes perfect sense. There is a basic understanding that the aura of that person maybe transferred through contact, just as the aura of a place maybe transferred to us when we visit that sight. I wonder; if the aura of Einstein's genius clings to his equations on the Oxford chalkboard and someone were to wipe it clean, would the chalk dust still hold the essence of his words? If you were to breath in that dust, would you be absorbing some of his genius?

We look at Einstein's brain, hoping that in coming in contact with such a prodigious engine, we might somehow absorb some of his insight. In the Catholic faith, the relics of saints have long been revered. A pinky bone might have miraculous powers, healing the faithful when they are exposed to it. In much of contemporary society, we no longer believe in such things, but we preserve our relics and make our secular pilgrimages. We need manifestations

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Color images were created with a Canon PowerShot G5 and a Polaroid Spectra camera. All black and white images were shot with a F250 pinhole camera outfitted with a Polaroid back and shooting Polaroid type 55 and type 77 film. Images were then manipulated with Adobe Photoshop CS.

Video was created in iMovie with sound editing in GarageBand.

Book design created in Adobe InDesign using Adobe Caslon and Thesis: The Sans.