2008

The Open Road

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Virginia Commonwealth University

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The Open Road
Bryan Madison Condra

This creative project, entitled The Open Road submitted to the Department of Graphic Design, is approved by the following committee for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts, Graphic Design/Visual Communications.

Bachelor of Fine Arts in Design, Old Dominion University 1999
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia 2008

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Bryan Madison Condra

*The Open Road*
Thanks This project is for my dad, who has more wisdom and strength than anyone I know; my mom, who is always cheerfully positive; and my sister, the best of writers, who thinks I’m the coolest guy around. Special thanks to Sandy and Rob for keeping me on the righteous path.
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“...in those brevities just before dawn and a little after dusk—times neither day nor night—the old roads return to the sky some of its color. Then, in truth, they carry a mysterious cast of blue, and it’s that time when the pull of the blue highway is strongest, when the open road is beckoning, a strangeness, a place where a man can lose himself.”

William Least–Heat Moon, BLUE HIGHWAYS
INTRODUCTION

In our journeys on the open road, we travel through a landscape of visual imagery composed of patterns, rhythms and a spectrum of changing colors. Our previous experiences, mental and physical attitudes and expectations, shape our perceptions.

By visually interpreting and presenting my experiences of the journey on the open road I hoped to tell a story of how the open road energizes the creative spirit. My goal was to explore how the landscape is altered by motion and speed as we pass through it, and how the journey can be experienced in various ways. I wanted to investigate and interpret how we shift the boundaries of our perceptions.
I have always loved driving, and the freedom to walk out the front door, start the car’s engine, put the transmission into first gear and steer a vehicle down a road. My understanding of how my car works, how it handles and how fast it will go contributes to my thrill and passion of moving forward. A large part of my life is experienced by driving through it. When navigating my car I want to see what is around the next turn, through the break in the trees and beyond the horizon. There are no certainties, only possibilities.

In Walt Whitman’s poem ‘Song of the Open Road,’ he proclaims in the first line, “Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road.” When beginning my journeys on the open road there is an excitement and curiosity which also instills in me a sense of light-heartedness, and a sense of wondrous awe. As the landscape changes so can the quality of light, the patterns of weather, and the journey’s rhythm. Road signs, abandoned gas stations, old tractors and endless stretches of fields and tree lines contribute to the glory of being on the open road and a journey toward heightened awareness.
By interpreting my experiences as a driver in a car traveling down a highway, my intention was to organize and translate this imagery using color, pattern, texture and shape in an innovative way to convey my impressions. As a visual communicator I wanted to define what my challenges would be and how my creative project would relate to those who would interact with it.

From inside my 1982 BMW 528i I engaged my surroundings on the road. From this vantage point I began my visual interpretations. These impressions and observations became the research for my creative project.
Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good fortune—I myself am good fortune;
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
Strong and content, I travel the open road.

Walt Whitman, SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Recording our journeys is a common compulsion. We want to remember where we have been, what we have done and who our companions have been along the way. We see things that we have never seen before, and by traveling beyond the borders of our homes and neighborhoods, and leaving the security of the familiar, we engage the thrill of exploration. We strive to make records of what we have seen and felt, of the impressions presented upon us, for our own memories’ sake and as a way of sharing the experience with others. We want to prove that we have been over the mountain and around the bend.

Beyond the factual documentation of proof is the determination to make a personal observation about how our experience has affected us.

Although humans have depicted the significance of the journey throughout recorded history, it hasn’t been until the last century that through the art of photography we have taken a different view of ourselves in motion.

I took the digital image below to document how we use our surroundings. The road leading off the highway meanders to a house or trailer and shows the presence of a property. The mailbox is an index to that house; it offers a hint of what may be hidden beyond.
The snapshot is the quintessential document used to record a journey. From well-composed images of mountain ranges to pictures of friends at a filling station, photographs capture one moment of an experience. Dividing what I had seen into specific layers of information helped to separate my imagery. By carefully dissecting these layers, and defining their constraints and boundaries, I began to render them more powerful and dynamic. When reassembled and arranged in a more specific way, these layers created a distinctive pattern that became a visual diary of my story.

*Images like the one below were taken from my car, with a digital camera, as I traveled down the road. I compiled these snapshots as visual research and documentation. Being able to refer to, and reflect upon, these images helped me to categorize my information.*
The landscapes along the roads in southeastern Virginia captivated me. They provided the context in which my creative project was created. The project did not identify a study into the semiotics or typographic imagery of the state road system, or how the system impacted the environment. It was meant to interpret imagery in the landscape along rural state roads and explore how these visual impressions could be recorded and translated.

I took pictures of my surroundings and began to arrange them into groups that conveyed degrees of meaning and presence. For example, the road sign below presented imagery that was more immediate to me as a traveler, and was placed in the forefront of the hierarchy I wanted to establish.
PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

While pursuing my BFA in Design at Old Dominion University, I embraced print making and screen printing. I furthered my study of screen printing for its versatility, and explored the medium by analyzing large posters layered with color and texture. I defined relatable visual symbols in the automobile and placed these in contexts that were vibrantly colored. I also began to experiment with large oil-based mono prints, in which cars were juxtaposed with backgrounds to define a variety of perspectives, scales and content. The finished pieces were similar to snapshots or static memories. I wanted to make them more dynamic, and spent much of my undergraduate study experimenting with them.

After entering graduate school at VCU, I drove frequently between Richmond and Norfolk. These trips took about an hour and a half. While driving this route in my BMW I became familiar with the sights and surroundings of the journey.

Screen printing was a medium that would boldly present my digital photographs. I explored a variety of color palettes while deciding which imagery in my research would be defined and presented in this way.
The repetition of the decisions made while driving began to define consistent choices, which created patterns of my journey. I began to create patterns of places, using landmarks such as where I regularly stopped to get gas, or to turn to get peanuts or grab a hamburger. My driving became consistent in its timing and rate of speed. I began to categorize this imagery into different layers of importance. Some of this imagery created landmarks that consistently defined distances, including how far to go and how far I had come.

I began to recognize what was unalterable and what could change. Telephone poles, mailboxes and fence posts were constants that created pace and rhythm. Tree lines, fields and gardens changed in their appearance according to the time of day, the slant of the sun, the possibility of rain and the velocity of wind. Throughout the seasons there were variations in the scenery, and in the clarity and depth of the landscape.

There was also unanticipated imagery such as an airplane crossing the horizon, dogs running along a fence or a moving tractor.

Sketches were made to record connecting parts of my visual imagery. My goal was to define movement and rhythm in a way that was specific but could convey organic fluidity.

The sketches above show a division of information into patterns, each with its own importance, meaning and direction.
We may all travel down the same path, but we will each see it differently.
When contemplating ways of translating my experiences of the open road, I decided to configure a visual language patterned in a way that was specific to me and would define my project’s rhythm. It needed to relate to the physical area being explored and to the specific details I was witnessing.

One of my investigations involved creating panels of information that would relate to each other. Even though each of these panels would be self-contained in their direction, they lacked a continuity. This model was discarded. However, the use of an arrow, as a symbol to show direction and flow, remained. This would eventually be included as an element in my project. The individual panels were changed to a more continuous substrate: The scroll.
The stretch of road I traveled on from Richmond south to Norfolk follows Route 5, Route 106 and Route 10 through Chesterfield County. I drove along the Jordan Point Bridge over the James River, past fields of cotton and peanuts, to the town of Surry. Then I continued to the dairy farms near Bacon’s Castle and the meat packing plants of Smithfield.

Road signs were prominent symbols in my research. I photographed signs that were particular to the road and of importance to finding my destination. Bold signals of authority, these placards signified where the present was and where the future would be. These images needed to be clear and commanding. There were numbers and arrows, mile charts and route references, town directions and secondary road markers. There was a need to investigate how to show their presence.

Small studies of road symbols were created with acrylic paint to investigate their importance along my route. I wanted these to convey authority and a dynamic presence. Investigation of these images’ colors and sense of scale where combined with arrow symbols to create more deliberate impact.
SUB PROBLEMS

Before I determined the final form of my creative project in my MFA exhibition, I investigated many themes of flow, pace, pattern and rhythm. Many small ideas became valuable and relevant to my creative project. I have presented four that were of particular importance.

DEFINING A RHYTHM: sub-problem 1

I traveled to New Orleans over the holiday break my first semester in graduate school. My mother was living there in my grandparents’ house on the West Bank and was in the process of moving out of the house that for 30 years had been a bastion for our family. I wanted to make a record of my feelings and my relationship with the area. My relationship was not only to the house but to the expanse that surrounded it, including the city of New Orleans. For years I had driven through the streets of the French Quarter, down the lazy and meandering River Road and out to the Emerald Isle. This time I wanted to capture the imagery from the window of my car. I took pictures to record what was unfolding before me.

This detail of an 8” x 12.5” scroll, from left to right, illustrated a journey. It presented the landmarks and specific visual imagery to accurately and chronologically illustrate a stretch of Highway 10 in New Orleans, from a specific point to a determined end. I used photographs, small paintings and typographic entries running in lines to provide information about each particular section. This use of the scroll helped to create a dynamic continuum.
The top of this scroll detail has a digital photograph for each house on a specific street. Below and to the right of these are blurred images of a passing street car. At the bottom of the scroll detail are digital photographs of the rows of cemetery plots along another part of the trip. Directly above is a small acrylic painting I made as a personal interpretation.

This scroll detail shows digital photographs of markets and store fronts in the French Quarter of New Orleans. The small bright acrylic studies are meant to reflect the varied patterns and rhythms of the market. The lines of handwritten type is a simple narrative describing the imagery, sights and sounds of the market.
My idea was to sit in the passenger seat while my mother drove the car. I took a series of photographs to record particular roads, neighborhoods and aspects of the community. In considering how I could use the experience to contribute to an exploration of my creative project, I decided to create a visual journey, from Highway 10 South as it pours into New Orleans, through the Crescent City to the Garden District and the French Quarter, over the Mississippi, to Algiers Point, along General Meyer Boulevard, along the levee in the West Bank and to the house that my grandparents bought before I was born.

I composed this as a photographic notebook and placed the seven rolls of glossy images on a 8” tall piece of paper that scrolled for 12.5 feet. These photographs were in horizontal groups of different lengths and hierarchies, depending on personal relevance and importance. Interspersed with the photographs, I made quick acrylic images and handwritten notes. This scroll was my study of how I could present rhythm, pace and tempo to tell a personal journey.

This scroll detail shows the journey’s end. Clouds, warm colors and small paintings create a sense of tranquility.
THE PROTAGONIST: sub-problem 2

I next wanted to translate seven personal stories and how each of these influenced my perceptions of the road. My idea was to create large acrylic paintings with layers of screen printed images. The canvases were to be different sizes and shapes, from 30” X 48” to 42” X 53,” each containing an image of a car driving down a back road to serve as the unifying theme. Each of the cars was random in make and model, and each was consistently shown in motion and at a distance in the picture plane. Positions, perspectives, vantage point and scale would vary from each study to the next. Each landscape would have its own color palette, evoking specific feelings of joy, anxiety or tranquility.

After the completion of two paintings in my initial exploration in this sub-problem, it became apparent that particular points of my translations were not clear. My inability to clarify some of the complex imagery presented difficulties in the subject’s relationship to its immediate context. I needed to reevaluate and alter my process in an attempt to more clearly define my intentions. I needed to focus and edit more precisely what I wanted to relate.

The sketches left, and above, were investigations into how the vehicle affects our journey. I was trying to show the dynamics of the journey through the image of the vehicle itself. This effort proved to be ineffective and irrelevant to the project. Eventually this investigation was considered outside the scope of my research. It is the surroundings, not the vehicles, that become rich and dynamic.
These paintings seemed separate and without a cohesive theme. They were not showing the connections needed to relay a seamless and forward-moving dynamic. The imagery and visual narrative needed to increase in resonance as the story unfolded. I realized that there needed to be an investigation into a substrate that would present my research as a continuous stream of information. The attempt to illustrate my research with physical layers of information and visualization would be the next investigation.

A structure, like a curving road that would ground my imagery, is what I needed to create. I would keep this idea of a scroll, or an ambling path, in mind as I researched ways to establish effective symbolism. Though these investigations into the vehicle itself were not used, they were helpful in determining what had relevance to the project, and what did not.

This 3’ x 5’ acrylic painting was an initial investigation of how I might create a sense of curiosity and excitement. As a single piece it supported a singular idea, but it was difficult to connect a group of these together as a collection that would have flow and rhythm.

This sketch was an initial idea of a vehicle traveling through surroundings that could affect mood. This sketch is a study for the painting to the right.
CAPTURING THE DETAILS: sub-problem 3

Small intimate studies were made of imagery found along the road: glimpses of forgotten machinery, and the trees and small plants that hover and thrive around its base.

I wanted to explore the language of road signs that were found along the road. Who put them there? Why were they there, and did they communicate a message? What were they meant to convey?

I began to make quick 4” x 4” abstract paintings on bristol board using acrylic paint. They were snapshots of a bigger picture; for example, snapshots of the weather and of the colors of the leaves. They were also parts of a larger composition, but in the moment they were simply a recording of the mundane. I created seven of these small portraits to keep as place markers.

Small acrylic paintings were composed as quick studies of the simple shapes and colors seen along the road. Intimate portraits investigating how a sense of immediacy could be introduced were helpful in determining space relationships.
As previously referenced, I wanted to show how we all have journeys, and how each of us has a distinctive way of recalling these. My own translation of a journey would take place on a particular section of road, from a specific beginning and end. It was a 90-minute trip, down 71 miles from my apartment in Richmond to my father’s house in Smithfield. Most of this journey is traveled along a two-lane road which meanders through the countryside. This road passes farmhouses, gas stations, courthouses, used car lots and abandoned farm machinery. To create my own interpretation of the imagery of these sites, presenting layers of information and a hierarchy that created levels of importance would be key factors.

I was making this journey twice a week, and, as in New Orleans, I took quick snapshots from the window. My effort was aimed at creating categories which would help in the eventual distillation of the information being accumulated. Photos were taken of farmhouses and barns off the road, of shacks behind the barns and the garages behind those. Their placement in the surrounding fields and farmlands were indexes of a population.

I also took photos of the green spaces surrounding the road, including the tall trees, the rows of hedges, and crops of corn and soybeans. These spaces created lines and boundaries, and divided yards and fields. This resident’s yard, and that worker’s field– these elements began to create a pace along my drive. I gained a sense of who owned what, and where that property ended. I could tell which plants were cared for, and which were left to the wild, and knew what crops were harvested, and what fields were tilled over. This division of the ground around me was a category that would help to define the boundaries in my creative project.

From my car, I took over 100 digital photographs as I traveled along the road. These images were put into categories, to determine how my imagery composition could be categorized.
Armed with an enhanced determination of how to engage my audience with my research, a starting point of how to progress with my creative project presentation was created. The determination to make a sculptural piece that would communicate with subtle text, patterns of color and graphic imagery, and present a translation of my journey would be the direction.

At the same time, my vision was to incorporate layers of information. This sculptural piece would tell the story of my journey down a specific section of road for a specific distance.

A scale model of my exhibit space in the Anderson Gallery on the campus of VCU helped to envision placement of the piece. It was important to understand how the piece would be approached by viewers.
The first change in this early exploration into my creative project was to make my translations more cohesive. There was a need to signify how the highway flowed through the landscape and through each of the vignettes I was presenting. Smaller sub-problems were composed to address these concerns, by working with small painted studies of arrow systems, way finding graphics and directional sign indexes and cues. These images were without context, and without a starting point or beginning. I later focused on them not as a main part of the sculptural piece, but as a topic that would later be revisited as an integral part of my layered imagery.

![Early exhibit layout model.](image)

*Early exhibit layout model.*

![Above is an early idea of how I would create layers of information and present them in levels of hierarchy. This study included photographs, small paintings and hand-written entries.](image)

*Above is an early idea of how I would create layers of information and present them in levels of hierarchy. This study included photographs, small paintings and hand-written entries.*
The second change was to realize that I was creating a particular process in my interpretations of the road. There was a need to edit my material down to the essential elements. The information needed to be clear, informative and cohesive. The story is chronological and would be organized in a way that would orient the visitor to an experience parallel to mine. This orientation needed to be made first to show how the experience of the open road changes with every travel upon it.

In considering the method to engage my audience and define my process, I began to see much of my project as an installation that would allow the viewer to become intimate with my process and conclusion. I would address the viewer’s own experience of the open road, and with that connection being made, present my own translation.

After deciding to use a scroll style as my substrate for my project, I needed to begin to lay out my information. Since my journey had a specific chronological path, I placed my images and landmarks in a sequence that was as true-to-life as possible. Once this layer of landmarks was determined, there could be movement on to the next layer. These preliminary images to the right have been placed on the gesso prepared polystyrene sheet that was the canvas for the project.
THE PANEL

Instead of a series of separate panels as initially investigated, I envisioned a long narrow panel that would represent the flow of the road. Instead of producing my interpretations in a realistic way, I wanted to explore a minimalist approach by presenting just enough information to allow the viewer to create his or her own appreciation of my journey.

Instead of presenting large elements of type, small passages were handwritten as if from the details of a journal. Layers were created including information that defined importance, time, distance and speed.

A five-inch tall, gently curving horizontal panel, which extended 25’ in length, was created. The bottom of this panel was 48” from the floor, a height requiring viewers to get closer to the piece to view imagery, words and pictures. The frame for this rolling panel was made of wood and was a bit like a small shelf, unobtrusive in sight, but adequate enough for proper rigidity. The panel was held upright by four steel poles secured with 1’ square stands. This panel was made of plastic acrylic and primed with gesso to ready its surface for paint.

The photograph above shows how the screen printed images were attached to the panel substrate with small dowel rods. At this stage I was still undetermined as to the specific background colors along the panel. These images also show the modular construction of the panel, and the pole structure made to support it.
The imagery that composed the separate layers of hierarchy in my project was attached in various ways. These three images show how particular images were screen printed directly onto the panel. Screen printing was the strongest way to present images I had taken with my digital camera.
This detail of the panel shows three levels of information. The scenery or background of a specific area on the route is colored on the front of the panel. The road sign is mounted away from the panel and enlarged in reference to its hierarchy. The digital print of the house is mounted on the panel but is not as pronounced as the sign. Behind these images is a line of handwritten text.

This image shows the 52 second looped black and white video of passing over the James River on the Jordan Point bridge. I recorded this as an investigation of rhythm and pace. It is shown through a 4” x 6” LCD screen. The low-volume audio that could be heard was of my car traveling over the steel bridge deck, and the intermittent noise from passing cars. To the left can be seen the inclusion of the arrow symbols to emphasize direction, way finding and to determine flow and pace.
One of the levels of hierarchy presented was that of way finding. I had taken digital images of all the road signs on my route and screen printed them on to chipboard. The background was painted with acrylic and the warm color palette was meant to create excitement and heightened awareness. These small pieces were inserted onto the panel with small dowel rods. The background on the panel is still unfinished at this point. These road sign images were larger in scale compared to other imagery as they were prominent features in my visual interpretation.
This panel detail shows a cluster of road signs, with arrow symbols painted behind them to accentuate pace. The video is to its right, and beyond that are more small screen printed images.

The scale of my project was kept small. This engaged the visitor by encouraging intimacy. I wanted viewers to read the type, investigate the video, and follow my translation of a journey from a specific beginning to an obvious end.
This detail to the left shows an overhead view of “The Open Road.” It is easy in this perspective to see how the patterns of colors represented the different sections of the panel.

This detail shows the imagery and layers of visual information on a section of the panel. A tractor drawn with a paint pen is behind the small screen print of a house and the small painting of a hedge sits above that.
CONCLUSION

My creative project attempted to deliberately convey a message by telling a story, and creating a visual style of narrative for it, and to identify a final conclusion to that journey.

When I reflect upon my project’s conclusion, the first thing to consider is what inspired my research in the first place. It was important to me that whatever topic that was to be explored, it should concern a subject matter with which I identified. The topic chosen for my creative project was one I was passionate about, and it was my singular objective to convey my enthusiasm to others. The goal was for my audience to identify with the same sights and sensations I had encountered, and it was hoped that the viewer would rediscover and reinvent how the world is perceived. My research led to reading poems and books, studying paintings and photographs, and listening to the journeys experienced by others. With these ideas percolating in my mind there became an ability to expand on how to bring my interpretations to a new level— I ventured into a process that would invite my audience to expand its horizons.

I wanted to keep the momentum of my creative project fresh and deliberate by being autobiographical. The final outcome was to be a personal translation of my impressions. My creative project is a story at a particular time and at a specific place.

At times my project was frustrating, and it became hard to disengage myself from it. It can be challenging to relay to someone a topic in which you believe strongly, as you want to convey every detail of the experience. Indeed, if I ever have an urge to retell this story, I’ll likely pile the audience into an old bus and drive them down the road!
I knew this creative project would be engaging to me. I was constantly, both physically and mentally, passing through my journey, wondering how to convey the experience. In some respects that made the project more challenging to define, since my thoughts were always changing. Perhaps this proves that my conclusions might always be open-ended.

Our lives are infused with impressions of the world around us. We document those that give us hope, freedom and a renewed creativity. Though we may travel down the same paths, using the same number of steps, we will each invigorate our impressions with the colors, sounds and sights that are of personal significance.

*This ‘Live Bait, Ammunition’ sign is typical of the imagery along Route 10 South. This road is rural and provides examples of both decay and forgotten splendor. Much of the imagery I found along this route is hidden behind something else. The past grandeur indicated in this outdated sign is indicative of what makes a journey an individual story.*
EVALUATION

It is often assumed that when you begin to define a problem, and work towards a solution, that it will progress easily, with complete confidence in the process. This is not always the case.

My intent was to undertake a creative project that would present my interpretations of my journeys on the open road by translating the excitement that I felt when it was first experienced. When beginning to choose my initial direction, it was difficult to clearly define what it was that was to be explored. There was an abundance of imagery, material and process that I wanted to investigate further, interpret and communicate to the viewer.

My initial thoughts were to produce seven silk screen paintings that would each be a translation of particular stories and events. These would show how my attitude and mood altered these stories and defined their compositions. This proved to be too broad in the scope of the creative project. After completing two silk screen paintings, it was concluded that I needed to clarify my message. These initial paintings were not specific to me in composition and context. At this point I began to realize that my creative project was essentially going to explore and define my own process of interpreting my experiences on the open road.
With the decision to redefine and reevaluate my project on a smaller scope, it became easier for me to focus and move forward. I became more determined in how my research was to be directed. By taking photographs from my car, shooting video, making mental notes and driving down the same road many times, there was a need to see things that had not been noticed before. Patterns and rhythms of the visual imagery in front of me were categorized, and this information was set into layers and hierarchies. I composed color palettes, lists of particular landmarks and signs, and distance markers. Small paintings and sketches of the road and landscape were created to study how the road breathed and moved as it was passed through.

Instead of separate translations I decided to organize everything collected onto one surface that would connect my graphic elements into a continuous flow of information. My translation would project the vastness and length of the road as well as the small details that only come from truly looking at what is around us. Although I struggled with the difficulty of how to engage my viewer I believe the attempt was ultimately successful. My goal was to show that all of us travel along the open road with our own particular expectations and ideas, but that we each will have our own process of how we interpret and translate the journey we undertake. That process is how we create our memories. These memories are the threads that make up the fabric of our daily life experiences.
**FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

My creative project was an exploration of my own curiosity, spirit and wanderlust. I was able to work many of the pieces and parts of my research into a cohesive interpretation that worked in addressing what was set out to be created, my own translation of a journey.

This creative project will always be a continuing story that changes with each journey. I have created my own layers of imagery and information, whether they are based on a highway, byway, or back road, that I can reference.

My sub-problems, research, collections of photographs, sketches and drawings have inspired me towards a new direction of design and communication. I will continue to pursue how to compose layers of information and imagery into my screen prints and how they can be more aggressive, dynamic and spirited. I will refer back to this project as my first formal investigation into the telling of my own visual stories.
ANOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This book helped me to manage and translate the visual process that takes place when organizing and interpreting visual imagery. Rudolf’s explorations into how psychology translates an artist’s influence by following certain rules helped me to create layers of information.

Arnheim’s book helped me to understand how we can think with our senses. Our perceptions and thoughts are intertwined. I realized that “perception” is received by the senses at the time when they are stimulated by the outer environment. In vision and hearing, shapes, colors, movements and sounds are susceptible to definite and highly complex organization in space and time.

Berger’s book suggests that we explain our world with words. I used his explanation of imagery to better understand how the way I see things is affected by what I perceive.

This book presented Borofsky’s installations in an unexpected presentation of images and environments that differ dramatically in character with their heroic scale and spare elemental imagery. His thought process presents a flow of drawings reproducing the passage of time.

*Highway* is a book of photographs from Jeff Brouws, which he gathered along old highways and back roads in search of roadside culture. This book of photos and essays helped me to present the environment along the road in a visual way that is informative and specific in highway landscapes and symbolism.

Chung is an artist best known for his murals, large charcoal drawings, multi-media installations, watercolors, and woodcuts, that are at times combined with experimental theater. His works with animation and video, which set his drawings in motion, are mesmerizing. His dream-like installations combine multiple levels of complex imagery that comment on his own experience. His installation piece, “Stripmall,” was a study of motion and visual culture, and influenced some of my own visual interpretations.

This book is a collection of photos from Fulton’s 1932 motorcycle journey around the world. These inspired my own journey home, and how I might document and illustrate it. An idea evolving into an experience can shape your life and attitudes.


This dynamic travel diary of Guevara’s eight-month motorcycle journey across South America, as a 23-year-old medical student in 1951-52, helped me to look beyond the obvious context of our surroundings.


This book was the first to inspire me to look beyond the bend in the road and to truly concede that it is not the destination, but the journey. Moon’s book was a record of a personal journey on the road, of searching for places where change did not mean ruin and where time and men and deeds connected. I was inspired by how Moon saw the road as a path to enlightenment and the inner self, to truly be curious in wondering what’s along the road, just ahead, and what’s around the next bend.


In Horvath’s web-based audio/video piece, *Boulevard*, we follow a striking woman, the passenger of a convertible car, driven by an unidentified driver through the city, passing its generic streets, billboards and motels, with an unknown destination. Horvath’s works are scenes where imagery is composed of layers. His visual imagery engaged me and helped me to attempt to address the differences between consciousness and identity.


Jenks’ book is a collection of critical essays addressing vision as a social and cultural process. These essays helped me to understand the manner in which seeing things is not simply a part of our natural ability, but is only a small part of the process we use to translate and interpret what we experience.

Juxtapoz Magazine. San Francisco.

Juxtapoz is a counterculture publication, which embraces the outsider art begun in southern California. Cars, rock and roll culture, sci-fi imagery and graffiti art are some of the topics covered. This publication always influences me with style and color.


*On the Road* gave me an appreciation for the art of translating a feeling of wanderlust, whether it be visual or verbal. This book is one of my favorite stories of fiction. It was the pivotal book that excited me about my creative project.
Lyon’s book is a collection of photographs he took when riding with the Outlaws Motorcycle Club in Chicago in the 1960’s. These photos inspired me as snapshots of the protagonist in his environment. The pictures are simple in their composition but complex in their strength, romanticism and reckless abandonment.

Patton, Phil. *Highway: America’s Endless Dream*. New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1997. Patton’s essay, ‘Road to Nowhere’ describes how Americans have traditionally gone on the road to find America and themselves. The author professes that the song of the open road is also the song of the self, a song of elusive identity, of blue skies, blue roads and simply, the blues. He states that tourists have taken to the road, dedicated to the idea that on the road the traveler will inevitably and eventually meet himself. These ideas helped me in interpreting imagery with personal experience.

This particular book is a collection of Rauschenberg’s paintings shown at the Whitney Museum in New York City in 1990. His use of current and contextual photographic images led him to a broader and often more overtly topical range of references than might otherwise be achieved. His use of patterns and movement, and the way he received and processed information, appealed to my own techniques in screen printing.

Rose defines ‘critical visual methodology’ in an approach that describes the visual in terms of cultural significance and social practice. She states that successful interpretation depends on a passionate engagement with what you see. This book has been very helpful in developing my own visual process and methodology.

*Royal Road Test* visually interpreted the act of throwing a Royal brand typewriter out of a Buick Le Sabre while cruising down the highway. The photographs in the volume record the before, during and after effects of the experiment. This test was a visual and sensory experience of being in motion. This happening that Ruscha performed and recorded helped me to interpret the highway and how it is experienced in new and different ways.

Salmieri’s book celebrated the Cadillac as a philosophical statement, a form of patriotism and a way of life. His photographs are visions that encompass hope, and inspired me in how I began to compose, and collect my photographs.

The book, *Lost Highways*, relayed to me that while journeys tend to focus on a final destination, detours are always possible. Other journeys never seek or reach a final destination, becoming extended wanderings with no clear goal. In America’s vast landscape, with its seemingly endless straight roads, it is possible to stray from the path. Sargeant’s book helped me to define my interpretations of my visual translations.


Wallis’s book connects the culture, daily life, challenges and allure of the “Mother Road.” This work helped me to take a closer look at why I engage with the open road, why the road inspires me and how it helps me to organize my thoughts, my perceptions and my dreams. The book offers evidence that ‘life begins at the off ramp.’ The open road provides a feeling of personal involvement. Everything in that environment is honest, helping us to regain the experience of ‘going’ rather than merely being transported from place to place.


Wise’s book is a photo essay, a study of life as a long haul trucker. He graduated with a degree in photography from the Rhode Island School of Design, and a few months later enrolled in a truck driving school. He drove for six years, struck by the wonders of travel and change, of how the country was being slowly revealed to him as he drove across it.


Whitman’s poem “Song of the Open Road” has been the battle cry for my creative project. His words of wisdom have permeated through every thought. This work has been the spirit that has connected my research and story.
CREDITS

Sandy Wheeler, my patient advisor
Bob Kaputof and Rob Carter, my believers and readers
Roy McKelvey for his endurance
My graduate faculty
My family and friends
My 1982 BMW 528i
Those before me who have inspired my wanderlust and the need to tell the story.