

**Tra Bouscaren**  
Department of Media Studies  
University at Buffalo  
PhD Application  
1/2/12

Statement of Purpose

In pursuit of a PhD in Media Studies, my intention is to contribute to the field of aesthetics from the perspective of the working artist. This intentional collapse of the third person into the first with respect to who is writing theory of art is something I have been interested in for 15 years or more. Specifically, I would like to examine the porousness of consciousness and control with respect to these kinds of signifying 'boundaries' of authorship, so as to actively dislocate this traditional, first person perspective in exactly the same moment that I claim it. I believe that aesthetics produced by artists whose work reciprocally informs that field may have the capacity to expand and empower our sense of language in general, and it is in this sense that I have been drawn to the Department of Media Studies at Buffalo where you have been working on such problems for some time now already.

As an undergraduate at Yale, I studied Studio Art and majored in Philosophy. I wrote a senior thesis with Ken Gemes and graduated in 1997, earning *Distinction in the Major*. After developing a foundation in the classics of Ancient and Modern Philosophy, I came to focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Continental Tradition. I was and still am particularly interested in thinkers of this period such as Kierkegaard, Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud each of whose work fractured traditional metaphysics into radical alternatives of how to approach and explain the world. Recognizing many aspects of these viewpoints not only as such, but also as motives

applicable to art production, I felt justified thereafter in my pursuit of art as a philosophical enterprise.

Currently I am finishing my final year of an Interdisciplinary Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of Pennsylvania. I have had the pleasure and privilege of working at Penn with many great teaching artists including Joshua Mosley (Video), Jenny Perlin (Video), Terry Adkins (Sculpture), Nancy Davenport (Photo), and Matt Freedman (Drawing). The work that I have done with them has helped me in my transition away from painting and towards installation, kinetic sculpture, video, sound, and other time-based media. I have also enjoyed the opportunity to work with thinkers outside of my department including two Independent Studies: one on “Bad Poetry”, which I was both researching and writing, with Marcella Durand in the English department, and another on “Spectacle/Post Spectacle” with Helene Furjan of the Architecture department. In my final semester this Spring, I am looking forward to working with your old student, Orkan Telham, in a course he’ll be co-teaching with Professor Furjan on Visual Epistemologies. On my own, as I hope you’ll gather from at least some of the other materials that I am submitting for this application, I am currently researching and working on reciprocal systems, the human animal and the animal kingdom at large, organ xenotransplantation, Dada, schizophrenia, macaronic verse as applied to written as well as visual languages, the reading of metaphysics as comedy, the reading of everything as comedy, and therefore reading Buffalo Bills as metaphysically important.

Between earning my BA and the beginning my MFA, I had 13 years of life experience as a working artist, 8 of which were spent living and working overseas. In North Africa for 2 of those years and in Berlin for nearly 5, I learned to speak French,

German and some Spanish, and have gathered a perspective on art in the world that would have been impossible to arrive at in any other way. 10 solo shows and more than 40 group exhibitions down the road, I realize that I was lucky to enjoy some early commercial success as a painter. It was exactly that experience of the commercial side of the art world however, that eventually drove me away from painting and towards more experimental and ephemeral forms of art.

While living in Berlin, I was seeing too much great work artists' studios that wasn't commercially viable and therefore wasn't making it into the galleries. Perhaps to come to peace with myself, I developed a curatorial interest in anything that wasn't making it in the commercial art world and founded Hooker Projects in order to exhibit and promote such work. An entirely artist-run initiative, I co-directed the project for two years in collaboration with Marcus Eek and Hair Entertainment. During that time we exhibited experimental music, installation, video, and performance artists including Kaj Aune, Happenings, Wooden Veil, Axolotl, Spires That In The Sunset Rise, and Nicola Lopez. This experience was a turning point for me both as an artist and as a person. Through the work I did with Hooker Projects, my own process as an artist became transformed and my outlook on what art should mean changed completely. It's what led me back to graduate school at Penn, and it's what now leads me on (hopefully) towards a PhD at Buffalo.

The Department of Media Studies' openness to working with and across other departments is ideal for me, and your history of production speaks for itself. That you are located in the same building just across the hall from the Department of Visual

Studies is of course a great bonus, as is the strength of the broader University at Buffalo as a whole.

I found your department after tracking down Professor Katz in Philadelphia last summer who generously spent some time talking with me about what was going on up in Buffalo. Excited, I planned a trip to the campus to see your facilities and in hopes of meeting some more of you. I emailed with Roy Rousell, had a skype conversation with Marc Böhlen, got to meet with Jordan Dalton and Paul Sargent, and had coffee with Paul Vanouse and his partner Joan Linder in their home studio. I was amazed at every turn. Everyone I met was warm and welcoming, and it was clear to me in every case that this personal generosity of spirit was founded on the kind of extraordinary professional accomplishment that makes kindness easy. I would feel honored to work with you in your program.

Thank you for your time.

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