

DESTINED TO RETURN

MARKUS OBERNDORFER

REVISITED Installation | 2016

- ¹_ Ed Ruscha: 'Every Building On The Sunset Strip'
- ²_ Realtime frame (based on final visual frame defined by spectator with headset)
- ³_ 4x 360 VR of the Sunset Strip and additional material (fanfold book, cardboard VR, text, photographs,...)

REVISITED Source Footage Collage | 2019

- ⁴_ Ultra Wide Spacetime Video Panorama
Afterglow, Westward, Original: 9x 4k

REVISITED Source Footage Collage | 2019

- ⁵_ 4 Zines with 24 Spacetime Collages from six fixed perspectives of the 360° sphere

REVISITED Source Footage Collage | 2017

- ⁶_ Early Morning / Timeline 2 / Eastbound
Left Camera, Sunset Strip, Los Angeles
Collage-Duration: 7'32", six parts

Staging The Ordinary | 2019

- ⁷_ Afterglow / Timeline 3 / Westbound
360 VR with Spatial Audio (Hear VR Now)
- ⁸_ Volume Pedal to trigger REVISIT Radio

REVISIT OST (Soundtrack) | 2018

- ⁹_ 3x Vinyl LP with six unique inserts as part of an 'Information Block' vinyl flipbook collage

Installation view: Excerpts of REVISITED, Bildrecht Artist Statement, Ars Electronica 2019 | Font: Areal BL | Print: Digital Laut | Design: Markus Oberndorfer | All Content: © Markus Oberndorfer, Bildrecht 2022 | Except Fig.¹⁸ & Fig.¹⁹ © Rockstar & Take-Two Interactive.

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COLLAGE IN THE AGE OF AUTOMATION

¹⁰_ REVISIT Font, Printed Matter

IN DIALOGUE WITH SUNSET STRIP

Markus Oberndorfer about his photographic journey through Hollywood 50 years after Ed Ruscha

REVISITED started in late 2015 with a desire to question the medial parameters of 360 degree video, which as a practice began to establish itself more and more at that stage. My aim was to draw attention to the fundamental shifts that took place between 360 degree video and the two main media of our time — photography and film. By creating an interactive media installation, I wanted to allow the audience to experience these differences first hand.

My interest in 360 degree video is a natural succession of my media-reflexive work up until now. But also more generally, I am fascinated by changes that occur over longer periods of time. That is why I was looking for a place as much as a work of art which I could take as point of departure for my exploration of 360 degree video in REVISITED. In order to create a viewer experience of medial and topographical developments over time, I not only needed a place where a ‘then and now’ or a ‘before and after’ could be staged, but I needed a place that already existed as a representation, ie. that already had been captured by older media, such as photography and/or film.

I found Ed Ruscha’s seminal photobook ‘Every Building on the Sunset Strip’ (1966) to be the ideal frame of reference for my project. The book encapsulates the spirit of the 1960s in a daunting way and was also itself highly experimental, exploring the limitations of photography and photobooks. In the shape of a fanfold, Ruscha created a panorama of the buildings on the already then famous part of Sunset Boulevard leading through West Hollywood by mounting an automated 35 mm camera on a pick-up truck. It was a kind of Google Street View avant la lettre apart from the fact that Ruscha only recorded one specific sideways view or field of vision, not an all round gaze.

Half a century after Ruscha’s photographic journey down Sunset Strip I returned to the very street in Los Angeles, primarily known for its nightlife, hotels, and billboards, to once more render these 2,4 kilometers in a mediated and media-conscious way through 360 degree video. To focus attention on the spatial and medial differences in the

juxtaposition of the two endeavors, I kept as closely as possible to Ruscha's set-up and course of action. As such, my work could be viewed as a re-enactment and continuation of Ruscha's performance from 1966 which results in a juxtaposition of multiple discrete media practices, timelines and perspectives.

Apart from the topographical changes that have taken place over the last 50 years, I am above all interested in the experiential value and the perception of these different representations of an actual space reproduced by visual means. What happens to the viewer and why? What are the qualities of each medial representation, what are the differences?

From photographic frame and -collage to 6DoF¹:

One vital difference between the two-dimensional, static visual space of the printed photobook and the three-dimensional dynamic visual space of the 360 degree videos lies in the limitation of the field of vision, ie. the segment that is shown. This selection of perspective or view is absolutely central in the composition of an image, and while in photography or film, it is the producer of the images who has the power to define this — in Virtual Reality and 360 degree video, the power shifts to the consumer who becomes an active co-producer of the (final) images.

In regard to the composition of the images, Ruscha chose quite a radical approach in his documentation of Sunset Strip. Instead of consciously selecting and composing each photograph, as carried out earlier in a first unsuccessful attempt², he minimized his influence through human or artistic agency by refraining from manually pushing the shutter. By mounting the camera in a fixed position onto a pick-up truck and using a serial timer, the exposures are spatio-temporal fragments of a strictly mechanical or automated process. As such, the result is a visually static space predetermined by camera position, perspective, point in time and the rhythm of traffic. Viewers of Ruscha's photographic recreation of Sunset Strip cannot alter these given parameters retrospectively. They are however given the possibility to open and close the pages of the fanfold book and determine the rhythm with which their gaze moves through the preselected panorama.

To record my 360 degree videos of Sunset Strip, I mounted a cube with six cameras on a pickup truck and later on stitched the images together. Yet in contrast to Ruscha's photo collage, viewers of the video cannot determine the pace with which they view and hence travel through space. In a 360 degree video, viewers however are given much greater power to choose the cutout that they want to see within the 360 degree environment. Also known as degrees of freedom (DoF).

The power thus is transferred away from the producer of the images to the person consuming them. Depending on how viewers move their head, new image sequences are instantaneously compiled in the field of vision of the VR headset. As part of my three-piece media installation REVISITED, every one of these unique sequences that are created in real-time by the person wearing the headset can be witnessed on a TV-monitor by everyone else looking at the installation. Every viewer who is willing to embark on this journey through this history of provided mediascapes, starting with an original copy of Ed Ruscha's book from 1966 and ending in the virtual 360 degree video environment of the Sunset Strip from 2016, thus also becomes a protagonist and active part of the overall performance.

The Afterglow:

This dialogue between two original works and my continued reflection have lead to additional projects and creative explorations of the 360 videos and their source material. Under the title 'REVISITED Source Footage Collages' and 'Collage in the Age of Automation' I examine temporal, spatial, contextual and performative qualities of the installation and its contents. In particular, I have sought to raise questions in these works that Ruscha did not consider or that were not central for him, not least also because they were technically not feasible in the 1960s, at least not without considerable effort. To give an example, I investigated the possibilities of creating seamless panoramas of the storefront plane (à la Ruscha³) from video source footage instead of photographs. Also, I looked into what options there are to translate movement. How could I artistically visualize the driving dynamics of the four 360 degree videos I had made into two-dimensional, static visual space? The panoramas of spacetime created in such a way depict objects not only based on their volume, but also on their extent in time and space.

Using the Sunset Strip as a point of reference, the multiple projects of REVISITED and the (still ongoing) REVISIT series thus offer a complex examination of the development of media and generally highlight the influence that time and its concepts have on us, our environment, its representations and ultimately, our experience and perception.

Text: Markus Oberndorfer
Translation: Vreni Hockenjos
Reflektor Magazine 1/2018

Markus Oberndorfer studied Art and Photography at Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. He lives and works in Vienna with a primary focus on photography and audiovisual time-based media, occasionally writes essays and uses performance, objects and other forms of artistic expression to create spatial installations. Born 1980 in Gmunden.

To this date the workgroup REVISIT consists of three main projects: REVISITED (The Sunset Strip), REVISIT ZUMA (The Westward Beach Road) and REVISIT PCH (The Pacific Coast Highway between Malibu Peer and Westward Beach Road). All projects have been elaborated based on similar trains of thought and include numerous subprojects within various mediums.

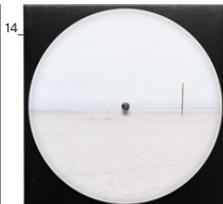
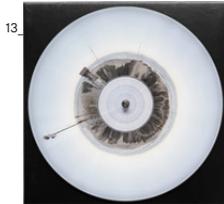
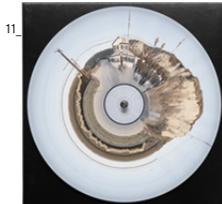
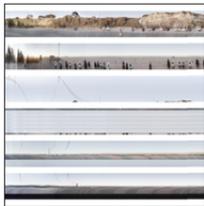
¹ Degrees of freedom refers to the number of ways that a rigid object can move within three-dimensional space. Within a VR environment, you can have either 3DoF or 6DoF.

3DoF, known as 360° VR, gives spectators a fixed, all-encompassing perspective of an environment. 6DoF, known as Full VR, additionally gives spectators the freedom to move within the virtual environment.

In REVISIT I use the term as a reference to six perspective axes within the moving 360° VR environment. Left, right, sky, bottom, front and rear.

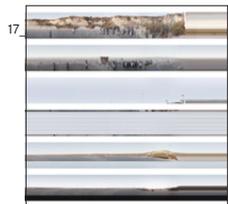
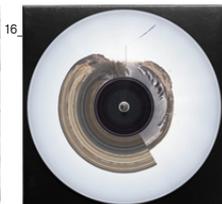
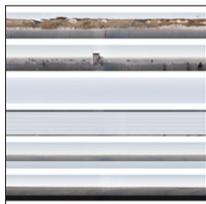
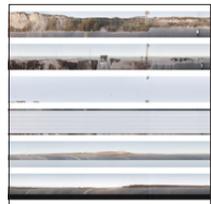
² Cf. Doris Berger, Before Publication, The Making of Ed Ruscha's Every Building On The Sunset Strip, p.113.

³ Cf. Ed Ruscha: 'All I was after was that storefront plane', Doris Berger, Before Publication, The Making of Ed Ruscha's Every Building On The Sunset Strip, p.122.



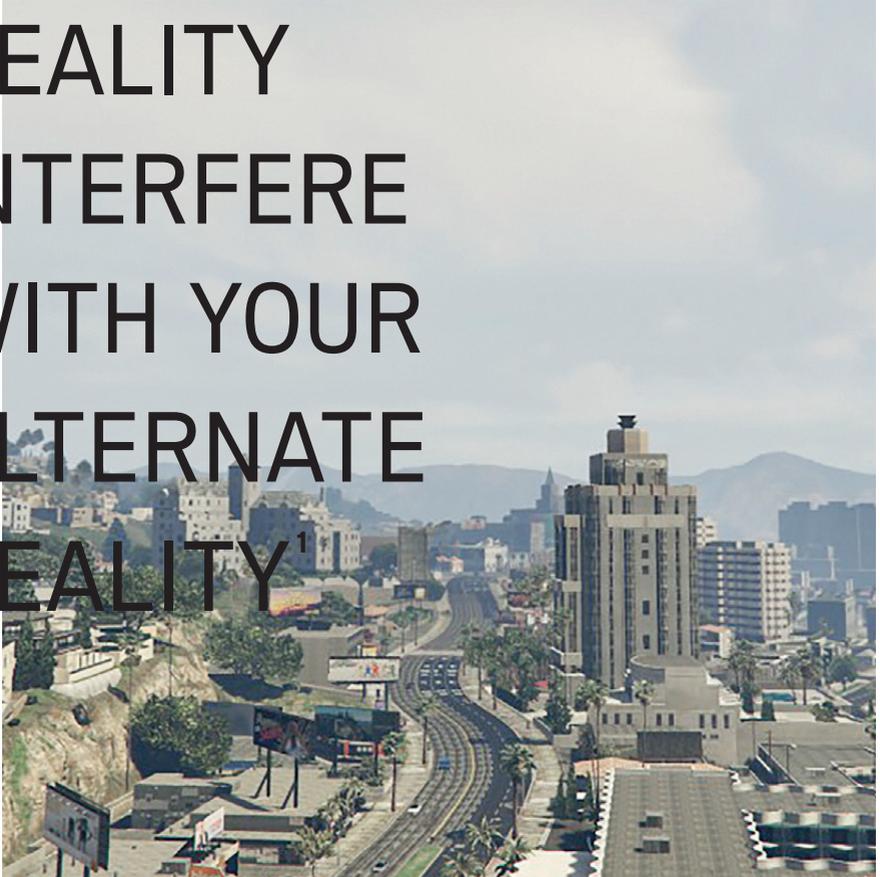
PICTURE DISC Vinyl
 11_ Suspension
 12_ Disbelief
 13_ Inner Source
 14_ Unfolding Time I

PICTURE DISC Vinyl
 15_ Unfolding Time II
 16_ Destined To Return



REVISIT ZUMA Source Footage Collage | 2020
 17_ Zuma Beach / Southbound / All Cameras
 Westward Beach Rd, Malibu 2016
 Collage-Duration: 6'58"

DON'T LET REALITY INTERFERE WITH YOUR ALTERNATE REALITY¹



¹⁸_ The Eclipse Blvd (GTA V), In-Game-
Photography, Los Santos, 2021-03-02

¹ Markus Oberndorfer, 'Don't Let Reality
Interfere With Your Alternate Reality'

STAGING THE ORDINARY | Markus Oberndorfer

‘Reality is understood as a system of representations and variations which people construct using symbols’¹ based on the ‘relationship between the qualities of the surroundings and the human condition.’²

This is true for real life while being present at a place in person, and with all our senses, but generally every surrounding that creates an attractive force so strong as to make us engage. For example a 360 degree surrounding of the Sunset Strip like in this case, or the game-world of the Eclipse Blvd³ and GTA V that — based on its architecture and grid — undoubtably places us in an albeit compressed and rendered version of Los Angeles and the Sunset Strip.

The aim of my central media installation REVISITED is ‘to draw attention to the fundamental shifts that took place between 360 degree video and the two main media of our time — photography and film.’⁴ It focusses on topographical changes and the evolution of media. In particular those we have at our disposal to document our world (the pre-existing) with. It scrutinizes power relations that evolve with every new medium and manifest between content-creator and -consumer.

The idea behind the project ‘Staging The Ordinary’ is to pair the concept of the place — the constellation of signs and symbols — with other stimulants like music and narrated content to create a surrounding that makes us even more involved. Something that invites us to interpret the pre-existing while drawing from the situation⁵ and within; our Inner Source.⁶ For that reason an entirely staged spatial audio surrounding has been created for this participative 360 VR installation from a sound library and scripted and recorded conversations of passers by. A radio broadcast (REVISIT RADIO) with music produced for the project (REVISIT OST) and additional narrated content like daily news, weather forecast,... can optionally be added.

Most content narrated by the radio host, has been taken and interpreted from the 360 degree surrounding and the project itself. For example from billboards (some of which include temperature indicators, promote the upcoming season of Game of Thrones,...), the

horizon (with the incoming marine layer), and so on. Every spectator putting the headset on, and with this act deciding to engage with the surrounding, could gather this information. Provided that the individual considers it as important and feels the urge to associate with it in a moment that Hermann Schmitz describes as ‘the onset of the sudden in a moment of primitive present’.

Architecture as a cultural phenomenon carries many strong references. ‘It is the inextricable link to cultural identity and acts as the identity holder in the form of the commonplace.’⁷

‘Feeling of belonging evolves from the participation in the common practice of interpretation and explanation of the past and hence collective identity.’⁸ It is thereby mostly signs or symbols that we personally associate something with or places that are embedded in our daily routines, that attract our attention. To one person it might be a record shop, to another a concert venue; a place one has visited or seen in a film or in media coverage. The announcement of a TV series or computer game on a billboard or ‘just’ the alley in between.

‘The more you know about the spatiality of feelings/sensations, the higher the competence to built spaces of sensation. Creating feelings means staging atmospheres.’⁹

The precondition for engaging with a surrounding and with what is presented, is the willingness to immerse. In case of medial representations, spectators need to surrender to what is described as the ‘Suspension of Disbelief’.¹⁰ The concept that to become emotionally involved in a narrative, audiences must react as if the characters or environment is real and the events are happening now. Moments like ‘Look! Over Here!’ while finger pointing at something that can only be seen in the 360 degree environment, show that what is true for literary content or film, is also true for other media involving our senses that can generate true-to-life reactions. The ‘border between fiction and witnessing’¹¹ blurs in the illusion of being present on site. For the moment we surrender to the alternate reality, until we get pulled out of it by external influences or decide to disembark from it ourselves.

Even though spectators immerse into an entirely staged, always same and partially directed experience through narrated content, the chance that one person will ever have the same experience as another, is zero. It would require more than one person seeing, reading, stringing together and interpreting the exact same signs and symbols as another while 'time unfolds'.¹² But selection and perspectivism are based on the resources available to individuals.

A moment (and also the past) is 'always interpreted from the perspective of current needs.'¹³ We never see it all, we never feel the same and keep drawing new perspective lines through the same 360 degree tunnel until we believe to have seen it all. 'The fact that most moments were subsequently the same did not detract at all from the possibility that the next moment might be utterly different. And so the ordinary demanded unblinking attention. Any tedious hour might be the last of its kind.'¹⁴

Text: Markus Oberndorfer
Proofreading: James Munro

¹ Cf. Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre*, 2. Neue Ästhetik, Suhrkamp Verlag 1995, p.22-23.

² Cf. Dominika Gortych, *Cultural Topographies of the Holocaust and Identity. On The Semantics of Emptiness in the Contemporary Polish and German Literature* p.26.

³ Fig.¹⁸– The Eclipse Blvd, p.10 & Cf. Markus Oberndorfer, *In Dialogue with Eclipse Blvd, Destined to Return*, p.14.

⁴ Cf. Markus Oberndorfer, *In Dialogue with Sunset Strip, Destined to Return (DTR)*, p.5.

⁵ Cf. Hermann Schmitz, *Was ist Neue Phänomenologie?*, Rostock, Ingo Koch Verlag, 2003, p.89-97.

⁶ Fig.¹³– Inner Source, DTR, p.9.

⁷ Cf. Martina Novakova, Erika Foltinova, *The Ordinary – Everyday – Commonplace as a Reference of Cultural Identity*, p.1.

⁸ Cf. Dominika Gortych, *Cultural Topographies of the Holocaust and Identity. On The Semantics of Emptiness in the Contemporary Polish and German Literature* p.26.

⁹ Cf. Michael Hauskeller, *Atmosphäre, Philosophische Untersuchungen zum Begriff und zur Wahrnehmung von Atmosphären*.

¹⁰ Fig.¹¹–¹² Suspension of Disbelief, p.9.

¹¹ Cf. Inge Marzszolek, *Von der Mediatisierung zur Musealisierung, Transformation der Figur des Zeitzeugen, Werkstatt Geschichte, Heft 62 (2012)*, Klartext Verlag.

¹² Fig.¹⁴–¹⁵ Unfolding Time, DTR, p.9.

¹³ Cf. Dominika Gortych, *Cultural Topographies of the Holocaust and Identity. On The Semantics of Emptiness in the Contemporary Polish and German Literature* p.26.

¹⁴ Cf. Deborah Frausch, *Can Architecture Be Ordinary?* S.12 & Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005 [1981]), p.166.

IN DIALOGUE WITH ECLIPSE BLVD

Markus Oberndorfer about his photographic journey through Vinewood West during times of the pandemic.

The Eclipse Boulevard¹ is Rockstars' interpretation of the Sunset Strip in Los Santos. It is situated in Vinewood West and is known for its landmark architecture, venues and billboard landscape; in the game Grand Theft Auto V, as well as in real life.

I started playing GTA V in succession to shooting my 360 degree videos of the Sunset Strip in 2016 to look for parallels between the gaming environment and the videos. Both medial representations of the place are based on realtime interaction and decision paths within self-contained environments and imagery. Apart from comparing their experiential values, I examined topographical aspects arising from their juxtaposition. For example which of the Strips' characteristic spots and buildings made it into the compressed version of Los Santos and how Rockstar translated them and the Strips' billboards into the game.

Following the concept of REVISITED, I walked and drove up and down the Eclipse Boulevard with my Avatar during different online sessions and times of day and recorded myself doing so. The results show either North, or South Side of the boulevard out of ego-perspective² and while walking East or West. Once again following in the footsteps of Ed Ruscha, whose famous medial representation 'Every Building On The Sunset Strip' from 1966, acts as point of reference for REVISITED and its related subprojects.³

To highlight some of the landmarks and billboards, whose 2016 real life pendants can be discovered in the 360 degree environments, I walked across the Eclipse Boulevard and took pictures with GTA Vs in-built Snapmatic camera. Similar to how I would do it in real life.

In the game the buildings, venues, shops and billboards carry modified, but contextually corresponding names. The infamous Whisky A Go Go is called Tequi-La-La, The Hustler, The Lust Resort, Terners Liquor, Ellens Liquor, The Standard Hotel, The Generic, and so on. One billboard advertising a perfume spells 'Le Chien: Smell Like a Bitch', another one for a film 'Die Already 4'.

Apart from this video walk through, that shows the process of me taking in-game photographs while strolling around, a slideshow with the Snapmatic pictures⁴ can be viewed on my Rockstar Social Club page including a map with location information, that shows where on the Eclipse Blvd the pictures have been taken, and when. Playing GTA and embarking on a journey that scrutinizes its surrounding based on the concepts of REVISITED, has been the closest to continuing my work on site during the pandemic.

GTA V (Grand Theft Auto V) is an open world computer game by Rockstar Games. It is one of the most expensive games ever made. Extensively marketed and widely anticipated, it became the fastest-selling entertainment product in history.

Disclaimer: The in-game photographs depict copyrighted material of Rockstar & Take-Two Interactive. They have been made for research purposes within the context of REVISITED.

Text: Markus Oberndorfer
Proofreading: James Munro



¹⁹_ The Generic
IMG-42-2021-03-02

¹ Fig.¹⁸_ The Eclipse Blvd, DTR, p.10.

² Cf. John Berger: 'Perspective makes the eye the center of the visible world, but the human eye can only be at one place at a time. It takes its visible world with it as it walks.' (Ways of Seeing, Part 1, 1'40")

³ Cf. Markus Oberndorfer, In Dialogue with Sunset Strip, Destined To Return, p.5.

⁴ Rockstar hosts its own in-game photo contests at irregular intervals. <https://gta.fandom.com/en/wiki/Snapmatic>

‘All media are extensions of some human faculty, mental or physical. The extension of any one sense displaces the other senses and alters the way we think, the way we see the world, and ourselves. When these changes are made, man change.’ (Marshall McLuhan, The Medium is the Massage)

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