

Jake Bohrod  
University of Southern California  
Statement of Research Philosophy  
bohrod@usc.edu

*...To assert that the external world is divided from us in perception is a way of beginning to justify our conviction in the existence of that world.*

-D.N. Rodowick

My research is motivated by the absence abound in a divided world. It views media under a philosophical lens, challenging static epistemologies and locating in the myriad forms of media an underlying sense of Being without the Self. It examines how both old and new media might facilitate ethical interactions with unseen, unheard, and unfelt Others, or how these media forms epitomize the worst kind of ideological coercion. An ethics of absence, of other-than-being, typifies my approach for its guiding tenet is one of skeptical inquiry into media product, practice, and consumption that recognizes the dual nature of perception: it takes us from the world, thus returning us to it.

My approach to film and media research has largely been based on an exploration of the changing film and digital apparatus as it affects how we interact with our own collective and individual ideological and political beliefs. As the field attempts to contextualize and theorize the constant shifts in the ways we encounter media such as film and video games, a re-evaluation of ethics and the responsibility shared between media producer, object, and consumer must follow. Established political and ethical philosophy has been marginalized in discussions of these changes that have brought about the latest media iterations – new and interactive media – where my primary interest lies, while most attempts to politicize the blooming field end up discussing the ethics of digital media primarily in terms of a binary political status quo. The methodology I employ draws from the ontological quest of continental philosophy as well as more tangible concerns of social action to destabilize notions of the historical and cultural impact of media in the digital age.

While philosophically attuned and invested in the contemporary, my research also accounts for the structural and historical contexts of media artifacts. In analyzing the topic of digital and interactive documentary for example, I track the historical trajectory of the documentary form as an agent of political engagement in “old” visual media such as photography and film. Its function in the context of the history of representational media within various key national and cultural frameworks informs the contemporary question of *now what?* that guides my research.

Finally, a practice-based component rounds out my methods by grounding them in theoretical *enactment* – an increased investment in conceptual argument that utilizes the aural, visual, and interactive in combination with more traditional, textual discourse. Becoming media literate in this way reflects the ethical content of my research by signaling toward a critically informed, action-oriented return to the world.