Formal Analysis Paper: *Recycled*

Over the course of the last three years, a collector named Thomas Sauvin would visit a recycling center in Beijing, China and collect discarded color negative film strips, digitize them, and store them in his own archive. As of now, Sauvin has amassed a total of over 500,000 images that are mostly dated between the early 1980s and and 2000s, when 35mm color film was popular in China. The vast majority of these photos depict important moments of family life and simultaneously illustrates growth in Chinese economy. *Recycled*, a project made by Sauvin with the collaboration of a multimedia artiest name Lei Lei, is a collection of over a thousand of these moderately crumpled photographs and three television screens that rapidly display a myriad of strikingly similar images from Sauvin’s archive.

These photos which are able to be seen clearly show Chinese people that are either from Beijing itself or have come to visit from all over China to see the various attractions in the nation’s capital. Regardless of whether or not they are native to Beijing, nearly every photo depicts a Chinese family or couple. Nearly all of these family pictures share a common theme, which is the importance of family. By looking at the faces of the individuals you can see that they are not simply smiling just because they were told to do so, but because they genuinely enjoying the time they are spending with their family members. Regardless of the context that each still depicted, an individual decided that the moment the family was sharing together would be one that they would want to cherish together. The concept of togetherness and significance of family as shown in these photographs shed light on the bigger picture of Chinese culture. Chinese culture has generally been a prominent example of what is known as a collectivist culture, where the individual as person is not as important as the wellbeing of their family and society. American culture on the other hand is generally known to be individualistic in that the individual’s needs supersede those of others. This contrast between the collectivism portrayed in this piece vs. the general individualism of the society in which the piece is present breadth since collectivism is more of a foreign concept.

Though there are not any date stamps on the photos, it is fairly easy to differentiate the imagines that are closer to the ones from the early 1980s and opposed to the newer pictures from around the early 2000s based on the occurrences, clothing, and location of the events that are shown as well as the quality of the image in the photographs. Certain pictures depict life on the farm, living in small simply structured homes, and scenes of people interacting with nature. Unsurprisingly, these pictures also tend to have lesser quality than those of the rest of the collective whole. The clothes of the people in these photos appear to be tailored at home or done so locally. On the other hand, a great amount of photos appear in much better quality and depict family scenes in places such as the renowned Tiananmen Square or other various attractions in Beijing and random at home family pictures in well-structured homes. As the quality of the photos progresses the number of photos in nature related environments decrease while the quality of the houses, photos outside of home, and intricacy of clothing worn increases. In the background of the higher quality images things such televisions and vehicles can be scene. This correlation of picture quality and an advancement of living conditions represent the economic changes in China throughout the timeframe of about 20 years in which these pictures were taken. The work of art depicts the change that comes with an increase in cash flow such as a better economy, as seen in the fancy modern clothes with intricate designs, the increase in tourism, where families that are not from the area come to visit prominent sites, and an increase in technological advancement and availability as seen in the advanced household appliances seen in the photos. Despite all the changes that are seen in the photos in the course of this time frame there is only one major thing that did not change and that is how nearly every family in the photos showed genuine happiness. Regardless of the amount of wealth they had, or where they were, these people were happy because they had the one thing that mattered to them the most, family.

The work of art is in the shape of a disorderly asymmetrical pyramid composed of wrinkled versions of the photos Sauvin salvaged and three screens randomly angled towards the top of the structure. The wrinkling of the photos gives the two-dimensional photographs a kind of three-dimensional quality since they are no longer flat and now take up more space. The transition from 2D to 3D gives the photos more of a realistic feature to them since things like pictures and drawing are commonly associated with 2D whereas actual object are associated with being 3D. The wrinkling of the photos makes the captured moments seem like they are cast out and thrown away to be forgotten, but on the contrary the fact that these photos exist expresses that these moments have been captured and are frozen in time to exist for lifetimes. *Recycled* is situated on the floor up against a wall furthermore adding to the image of memories being cast away and ignored as they are a thing of the past. If the piece had been situated in the center of the display room such a feeling would not be as evident. The televisions being angled and being present in the pile of crumpled photos, implies that the televisions also appear to be cast out, but the fact that they are closer to the top of the pile signifies that it is a more recent kind of abandonment. The placement of the screens near the top show contrasted with the photos below display a sort of timeline of technologies. Both photos and television are modes of technology to display memories, but eventually they get outdated and forgotten and when the next huge technological advancement comes in, eventually it will also be cast out in such a manner.

The word “recycled” means to take something and change it into something else, while keeping its core substance the same. The piece *Recycled* by Sauvin and Lei is essentially a piece