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T0WARD CY83RGN0S1S

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T0WARD CY83RGN0S1S

by

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Report

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Abstract

TOWARD CY83RGN0S1S

Rachel Meredith Stuckey, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Jeff Williams

Can we experience enchantment with cyberspace as we can with outer space? Can late-night web browsing provide unexpected encounters equivalent to those had in the space between radio frequencies? These questions drive my art and research. What I am pursuing is cybergnosis, or intuitive experiences of mysterious spiritual realities on the cyberplane. My goal is to question traditionally held divisions between technology and the human, and to explore marginal views of technologies. My research involves embedding myself in outlier online communities, some composed of people who feel afflicted by computers, and others who are collaborating with them in unusually empowered ways, be they spiritual, psychological, political or otherwise. I use video-based performance, net-based projects, and multimedia installations to evoke empathetic yet critical renderings of these experiences. In this report, I write about five of my artworks: *Estrin Tide is Fresh, Everyone Else is Tired* (2016), *Hello Nebula? It's me, Margaret.* (2015), *Innernet Addict* (2015), *TOWARD CY83RGN0S1S* (2015), and *Welcome to my Homepage!* (2014).

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Introduction

Can we experience enchantment with cyberspace as we can with outer space? Can late-night web browsing provide unexpected encounters equivalent to those had in the liminal space between radio frequencies? In exploring such questions, I have found myself gravitating towards ideas and practices that initially struck me as distasteful or indulgent. My goal is to question traditionally held or commonsense divisions between technology and human bodies/minds/systems of belief, the people who define those boundaries, and to explore marginal views of technologies. What I am pursuing is cybergnosis.¹ My research involves embedding myself in outlier online communities, some composed of people who feel afflicted by computers, and others who are collaborating with them in unusually empowered ways, be they spiritual, psychological, political or otherwise. I have studied blogs of persons with Morgellons disease, who feel that nanotechnology has invaded their bodies, and whom medical science deems afflicted with an internet-spread, willfully contagious mental disorder. I have embedded myself in online forums dedicated to polyphasic sleep to better learn the myth and mysticism of cheating sleep in the name of hyperproductivity. I attended the first annual BodyHacking Conference (a subculture that predominantly expresses itself on the web), to learn from figures at the forefront of the transhumanist movement, and the many ways that willful technological intervention can optimize or evolve the human. I have chatted with chronic pain sufferers who use the internet to perform activities their physical bodies won't allow in a given day—and realized that many robust online communities are sustained by such people. I have followed the net-based projects of feminist artists and activists reclaiming the web for communal political and spiritual aims. I've been trained as an email-based

¹ Cybergnosis - intuitive experience of mysterious spiritual realities on the cyberplane.

tarot reader, have visited sacred sites in cyberspace, and encountered a variety of people with Unverified Personal Gnosés² derived from online experiences.

I have become interested in anomalous, unapologetic, and ecstatic exchanges with the digital, which refuse to let new technologies fade into the background of daily life. I use video-based performance, net-based projects, and multimedia installations to evoke empathetic yet critical renderings of these experiences. The boundaries between digital and physical space, and between devices and bodies, are constantly updating. My work leans into the frustrations and confusions of recalibration as it affects our thoughts, beliefs, and interactions with each other.

My multi-media installation, *Estrin Tide is Fresh, Everyone Else is Tired*, serves as a cornerstone for discussing the other works, as it represents the culmination of various ideas and research veins carried over multiple projects. My other works focus on human/technology interactions through character-driven video (*Hello Nebula? It's me, Margaret.* and *Innernet Addict*) and fourth dimensional cyberspace installations (*Welcome to my Homepage*, *Welcome to my Guest Room Digital Artist Residency*, and *TOWARD CY83RGNOSIS*).

² An Unverified Personal Gnosis, or UPG, is an individual's spiritual insight that is valid to the individual though it may not be experienced by anyone else.

Chapter 1: The Future is So Hot Pink

My most recent work, *Estrin Tide is Fresh, Everyone Else is Tired* (2016), focuses on the transhumanist movement, which intentionally collaborates with technology in an attempt to accelerate human evolution.³ *Estrin Tide* is a multi-sensory installation that simultaneously questions, parodies, and promotes biohacking and transhumanism through the character Estrin. Estrin Tide sleeps hyper-polyphasically to thrive as a 9-to-5 library IT employee and a 5-to-9 transhumanist, vlogger, Reddit forum moderator, adult computer literacy teacher, gamer, quantified self tracker, and chillwave/synthpop/trap-loving new age hacker. As the Xenofeminist manifesto urges, “If nature is unjust, change nature,” and so she does.⁴ Estrin is not content with life as *just* a low-paid, unfulfilled 9-to-5er, but her only alternative is hyper-employment. The demands of a 21st century lifestyle have led Estrin to feel that her natural body and mind are frustratingly inadequate. She is seeking ways to keep up with a huge range of activities, not just to survive, but for positive self-transformation, pleasure, and human advancement. Estrin has concocted her own self-optimization routine from the ideologies and practices of biopunks, Grinders, Xenofeminists, and YouTube metaphysicists to transcend the limitations of meatspace.

TRANSHUMANISM, CYBORGS, AND OPEN-SOURCE MENTALITIES

My own influences when creating the character Estrin Tide grew out of a number of personalities I came across during my research. I was inspired by the sensory

³ Transhumanism is an international movement that promotes the self-evolution of humans through science and technology. Transhumanists aim to expand cognition, improve the body, reduce or end aging, control emotional states, increase human connectedness, automate tedious labor, and create and merge with machine intelligence that surpasses the capacity of the human brain, among numerous other goals.

⁴ Laboria Cubonics, “Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation,” accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.laboriacuboniks.net>.

perception enhancement projects of transhumanist artists and founders of the Cyborg Foundation, Neil Harbisson and Moon Ribas. Ribas perceives earthquakes in real-time as vibrations in her forearm via a subdermal magnetic implant. Harbisson, born colorblind, senses color as sound frequencies using a cranial implant that converts video data to sound vibrations. Both are interested in bodyhacking as a creative pursuit, using technology to expand the definition of what it means to be human, or a “cybernetic organism,” as Harbisson prefers, and to develop an experience of electric empathy with the world around them, rather than seeking productivity-enhancement, escapism, or gadget-fetishism.⁵ They identify as cyborgs because their implanted technologies have become integrated into their lives, dreams, and neural pathways as part of the body, rather than external to it. Harbisson makes reference to a cyborging process that happens even with common, external devices. Use of “first-person technology language like ‘I’m running out of battery,’” when a cell phone is low on power exposes the extent to which these devices are experienced as extensions of the self.⁶

Estrin is also informed by the Catalan collective, GynePunk. GynePunk is a group of activists, self proclaimed as cyborg witches, who combine open-source hardware and software, citizen bio-science, and folk medicine with punk and activist ethos to provide open-source, DIY/DIT gynecological tools and knowledge to persons in need as a way of decolonizing and de-corporatizing the female body. Member Paula Pin describes their practice as a reboot of historical herbal witchery and lay healing, driven by a desire to

⁵ Richard MacKinnon, Neil Harbisson, and Quinn Norton, “Cyborg Pride & Identity” (panel presentation, BodyHacking Conference, Austin, TX, February 21, 2016).

⁶ Neil Harbisson, “Life and Art in the Age of the Cyborg”(lecture, BodyHacking Conference, Austin, TX, February 20, 2016).

“update ancestral knowledge with the independent use of technology.”⁷ The group uses occult language to describe the injustice they feel toward expected patient/health provider roles:

Patients are ignorant slaves of lab diagnosis technologies that send a message only translated and read by the doctors that in some kind of possession of the clinic oraculo have the only sacred truth. ...I don't want to be forced to enter into their hygienist temples, in veiled body jails, in those fabrics of corporal standardization and sickness limited parameters.⁸

Feminist scholars have redefined the occult as knowledge that has traditionally been hidden from or denied to women or, more broadly, as something “underneath or in front of a boundary that must be crossed in order to contact and actualize its knowledge.”⁹ An open-source methodology dissolves that barrier, emphasizing the importance of equal access to shared tools and knowledge, as a practice of an “open sharing of occult knowledge as liberated power.”¹⁰

Another artist who blurs the ideology of technology and metaphysics in the name of open-source, open-access, and expanded boundaries between humans and devices is Limor Fried, electrical engineer and founder of the electronics company AdaFruit Industries. Fried has created projects influenced by the hidden dimensions of cyber- and personal space like Etherwidget and AEther, that allow artists and engineers to add internet connectivity to small, unconventional devices, and Fresh Air, a personal signal-jamming device “intended for city-dwellers who feel that their personal space is being

⁷ Ewen Chardronnet, “GynePunk, the cyborg witches of DIY gynecology,” *Makery.info*, June 30, 2015, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.makery.info/en/2015/06/30/gynepunk-les-sorcierres-cyborg-de-la-gynecologie-diy/>.

⁸ “GynePUNK: DEScolonización Científica/Viscera (English version),” *Hackteria.org*, May 11, 2015, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://hackteria.org/wiki/GynePUNK>.

⁹ Melissa Raphael, *Thealogy and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 75.

Constance Wise, *Hidden Circles in the Web: Feminist Wicca, Occult Knowledge, and Process Thought* (Plymouth, UK: AltaMira Press, 2008), 5.

¹⁰ Wise, *Hidden Circles in the Web*, 77.

overrun with undesired radio transmissions.... Much like the personal air ionizers available in catalogues, this device is for cleaning up the air around the user.”¹¹

The method of Estrin’s presentation is informed by the typical format of YouTube vlogs in general, but her cadence and delivery are specifically inspired by a number of heavily self-branded metaphysical lifestyle gurus found on the site, including Teal Swan, Infinite Waters (Diving Deep), Joanna Devoe, Aeia, and numerous others. All of these content creators are dedicated to evoking a sense of authenticity and devotion to their message through constant updates, lengthy ad-libbed posts, and keeping current with YouTube-recommended best practices and trends.

ESTRIN TIDE IS FRESH, EVERYONE ELSE IS TIRED

The character Estrin Tide combines the confident, self-assuredness and mind-over-matter mentality of these YouTube personalities with the vast technical knowledge and techno-optimism of GynePunk and Fried. Estrin therefore answers my own coding deficiencies with an unshakeable conviction that even the hardest-to-follow hacks work, as long as you believe they do. Estrin serves to update the tiresome computer sales phrase “It just works!” into a techno-new age mantra: “If you believe it works, It just works!”

At the same time, Estrin offers a critique of the particularly masculine appeal of mainstream bio- and bodyhacking. The most sought-after biohacks place extreme demands on the mind and body. Polyphasic sleep schedules in particular employ potentially male-oriented titles like Everyman and Uberman, derived from the “will-to-power” over “weak reactive” human impulses outlined by Nietzsche.¹² The Everyman’s three-hour

¹¹ Limor Fried, “AEther: Networked Microcontroller Prototyping,” last modified October 6, 2004, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.ladyada.net/techproj/aether/index.html>.

Limor Fried, “Fresh Air,” accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.ladyada.net/techproj/freshair/index.html>.

¹² Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, “Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism,” *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20, no. 1 (2009): 29-42.

core sleep plus three equally spaced twenty-minute naps and the Uberman's six equally spaced twenty-minute naps presume accommodation from employers, friends, and family, and the brute force of will over nature. The biohacking companies like Bulletproof and Onnit transform self-help, dieting, and meditation advice into a testosterone-throttled program of rigorous self-control. Unlike productivity-driven Silicon Valley workers, business students seeking a competitive edge, or wealthy mid-lifers searching for immortality, Estrin's biohacks aren't about dominating the competition, making a profit, or spending a fortune. She operates at the collectivist, DIY, open-source margins of both the body and technology. Commercial technologies like FitBit and the Apple Watch give the illusion of access to personal data, but corporate engineers and executives determine what and how these devices track. Mainstream healthcare and the elite transhumanist movement rely equally on highly paid professionals to interpret, heal, or optimize the body. Bringing a feminist approach to the biohacking movement, Estrin looks to bring open-source computing ethics to the body as a way to interpret, heal, and optimize herself on her own terms. She compresses the Uberman sleep ratio to the point that her naps go virtually unnoticed by herself and those around her, reducing sleep to more of a personal tic than a disruptive activity. Estrin naps for fifteen seconds every three minutes, something she calls hyper-polyphasic sleep. As a citizen of both the real world and the net, the micro-naps also serve as sync points, allowing her to recalibrate with the present moment.

Named after an actual family of female biomedical computer scientists, synthetically produced estrogen, and lunar rhythms, Estrin Tide is interested in cycles. She seeks to expand her potential by technologically replicating and altering natural cycles and by modifying her body to perceive cybernetic machine-cycles. The installation environment of *Estrin Tide is Fresh, Everyone Else is Tired* is designed to coax visitors

to sync with Estrin's various cycles while watching a running playlist of her YouTube video dispatches. The vlogs cover topics like Estrin's sleep schedule, her political decision to stop eating and instead receive weekly nutrient injections, PSAs on pressing computing topics, new age hacking tutorials, and chat sessions with transhumanist allies. Each video is three, six, or nine minutes in duration, with fifteen-second breaks that accommodate Estrin's micro-naps and encourage viewers to do the same. Estrin's custom-mixed audio of sleep state-inducing binaural tones and neural pathway-clearing white noise play during the micro-naps. Estrin's modified sleep schedule has made sun cycles decreasingly relevant to her. Instead of using WiFi-connected smart lighting to mimic natural light cycles, Estrin subverts the night/day paradigm by programming Chromotherapeutic light frequencies recommended for optimal energy, relaxation, and cellular restoration. A digital clock in the installation, *Moon Clock: 4 Phases 2 Optimize U* (2016), which displays the current lunar cycle, represents Estrin's decision to sync with the moon rather than the sun as the planetary timekeeper that best suits her mental and bodily wavelengths. Timer-controlled aromatherapy diffusers emit a scentscape intended to orient visitors towards the present moment or the future at appropriate intervals. During the vlog series Estrin receives an implant that provides an extrasensory perception, Quintessence, a bodily experience of wifi-based internet traffic, which she hopes to allow her viewers to experience as well.

The installation requires no direct actions from the visitor, reversing the expected personal preference oriented dynamic of YouTube viewing and 'smart' health technologies in favor of a shared experience. Following the methodology of synchronized meditation, Estrin believes that if everyone were to recalibrate by micro-napping at the same time, the restorative benefits of the naps would be increased for all participants due to the crowdsourcing effect. Even if a viewer is not interested in subscribing to hyper-

polyphasic sleep as an optimization tool for their own life, they can still help Estrin. As a hyper-employed transhuman she doesn't want your money, she just wants your time — adding one more task to your own hyper-employment.

Chapter 2: Empowered, Enchanted, Afflicted

Prior to *Estrin Tide*, I was interested in drawing parallels between technology use and spiritual enchantment/disenchantment, particularly around the turn of the 19th century. In this chapter I discuss some contemporary examples of enchanted media as they relate to Modernist views and the search for cybergnosis within my own work. I explore these ideas through various media, including the internet, projection-mapped and multi-channel video, as well as live video-based performance.

Many people are initially drawn in by technologies for rational reasons, such as an appreciation for their design, societal pressures to upgrade, or a desire for the lifestyle they provide. There are certainly other, more personal ways of connecting to technologies. Although the internet and digital technologies are designed to serve a rationalist approach, artists are imagining alternatives and subcultures are seeking weird or even transcendent digital experiences. At the same time, latent desires to connect to technologies (and not just through them) can manifest in detrimental forms, such as disease, obsession, and addiction.

SPIRITUALITY AND MEDIA: FROM MODERNISM TO TECHNOPAGANISM

During the Modern period, several factors contributed to a uniquely enchanted view of technology. Ether physics, for example, provided a very evocative, sensorial way of looking at the universe. At the same time, many shared a widespread interest in the occult. These beliefs intersected vibratory scientific discoveries including wireless telegraphy, the X-ray, and the electron.¹³ In his book *Haunted Media*, Jeffrey Sconce suggests that conceptualizing a message traveling hundreds of miles relatively

¹³ Linda Henderson, "Vibratory Modernism: Boccioni, Kupka, and the Ether of Space," in *Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature*, eds. Bruce Clarke and Linda Henderson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 126.

instantaneously by telegraph was not too far removed from conceptualizing telegraphic communication with spirits of the dead.¹⁴ At this moment, scientific thought and discoveries were influencing spiritual practices, and occult spiritual activities were influencing new technologies. However, when Einstein's Theory of Relativity overtook ether physics it put a fairly distinct wedge between science and spirituality, part of a process which Max Weber, and later Theodor Adorno, spoke of as the "disenchantment of the world."¹⁵ Where early Modern conceptions of telecommunications incorporated the otherworldliness of ether, post-Relativity science denies any mysterious or spiritual qualities in such technologies.

This disenchantment is a trend that has contributed to the rationalizing of media. Jeffrey Sconce writes about this as a shift in position—from controller of or collaborator with technology to victim of technology.¹⁶ Occult narratives around communication technologies have shifted from enchanting to haunting. Erik Davis, in his book *TechGnosis*, suggests that the warm, personal "soul" of the analogue realm and the colder, distanced "spirit" of the digital realm indicate the division of "the world between clay and information."¹⁷ The writer Jennifer Cobb speaks about this phenomena of rationalization as creating a mind/body split because cyberspace engages the mind yet denies the body.¹⁸ Sherry Turkle similarly argues that cyberspace acts as a mirror that

¹⁴ Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 28.

¹⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Minimal Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life*, trans. Dennis Redmond (2005), §146, <http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/MinimaMoralia.html>.

¹⁶ Sconce, *Haunted Media*, 3-5.

¹⁷ Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (London: Serpents Tail, 1999), 10.

¹⁸ Jennifer J. Cobb, "A Spiritual Experience of Cyberspace," *Technology in Society* 21 (1999), 394.

reflects our cultural needs, but largely replicates the dominant habit of splitting mind and body.¹⁹

The shift of technology towards the utterly rational mirrors a shift in occult rhetoric away from technology. Instead of imagining spiritual telegraphs and mechanical gods, major occult movements that developed after relativity science, such as Gardnerian Wicca and New Ageism, look to a pre-technology time and are essentially nature-based.²⁰ Occult practices have shunned electronics as unsacred, just as empirical science shuns the occult as implausible. However, important shifts began occurring with the introduction of the internet. Margaret Wertheim, in her book *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*, compares cyberspace to heaven and other divine landscapes. She argues, “One of the great appeals of cyberspace is that it offers a collective *immaterial arena* not after death, but here and now on earth.”²¹ She describes the coexistence of physical and cyber realms as a dualistic or multilevel view of reality, which is similar to mystical narratives.

When considering the re-enchantment of technology, Technopaganism is an important subculture to examine. Technopaganism, as I define it, is an embrace of technology as a tool to access the divine or a practiced view of cyberspace as an enchanted realm. Others have defined the Technopagan as “one who embraces modern science and eschews romanticizing the distant past.”²² While classical thinkers including Weber believed that rationalization would lead to the “marginalization or even the disappearance of religious-mythical ideas and magical practices,” media culture scholar Stef Aupers argues that technoanimism “can be seen as a direct but unforeseen

¹⁹ Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005/1984), 10-12.

²⁰ Shawn Arthur, “Technophilia and Nature Religion: the Growth of a Paradox,” *Religion* 32 (2002): 303.

²¹ Margaret Wertheim, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 234.

²² Eric A. Powell, “Solstice at the Stones,” *Archaeology* 56, no. 5 (2003): 38.

consequence of the accelerating process of rationalization.” Aupers continues, “This process does not contribute to the disappearance of religion. On the contrary: it can be seen as the main driving force behind the emergence of this archaic form of religion.”²³ This movement indicates how some people are seeking a more enchanted relationship with contemporary digital technology.

Interesting parallels exist between contemporary Technopagans and occultists at the turn of the twentieth century. For both, technological innovations play an essential creative role for spiritual practice. Just as many Modern occultists worked in a variety of science fields, an overwhelming number of Technopagans are located in Silicon Valley, working in the tech industry. However, unlike tech-related fields and many online communities, Technopaganism is not male-driven. Paulina Boorshook writes in her article “A Goddess in Every Woman’s Machine” about the “female-principle-honoring” environment of politeness, respect, and sharing of knowledge that defines Technopaganism, which much more resembles Theosophy’s emphasis of universal brotherhood and support of women than the standard hierarchical operations of most online forums.²⁴

Mark Pesce, a figure who publicly identified as a Technopagan during the 1990s (but who currently identifies as a Futurist), was also the creator of VRML, a standard file format for representing the World Wide Web in three dimensions.²⁵ Pesce believed VRML could be operator-generated sacred space and promote a higher level of online interactions in support of a Technopagan practice. Within the space of VRML, Pesce held

²³ Stef Aupers, “The Revenge of the Machines: On Modernity, Digital Technology and Animism,” *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 30, no. 2 (2002): 216.

²⁴ Paulina Borsook, “The Goddess in Every Woman’s Machine,” *Wired* 3, no. 07 (July 1995), accessed April 20, 2016, <http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/3.07/technopagans.html?pg=12&topic=>.

²⁵ “VRML,” *Mark Pesce*, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://markpesce.com/vrml/>

digital rituals including *CyberSamhain*, a “digitally enhanced version of the ancient Celtic celebration of the dead.”²⁶ Sacred space in traditional paganism exists between the physical and psychic realms. *CyberSamhain* aimed to include cyberspace as a third component, creating a ritual that collapsed mind, body, and internet. Prior to the event, participants were encouraged to create digital three-dimensional objects to be contemplated on various computer terminals from the VRML space during the ritual. As a general tool, VRML did not catch on because of high bandwidth requirements and the need for specific browsers, and it was ultimately outpaced by newer software. As a spiritual space it became its own occult. To actively contribute, participants had to know how to code for VRML, have access to a high bandwidth internet connection, and the proper software.

MANIFESTATIONS OF ENCHANTED MEDIA IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Several important contemporary artists are engaging with the idea of enchanted digital technology, and my own work is in conversation with this work.

A body of artworks that is not blatantly mystical, yet which seems to make accessible an experience that VRML could not, is Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller’s *Video Walks*. The walks are designed for specific locations, such as a train station, a theater, or a library, and involve the staging of fictitious occurrences that are recorded in a single take with video and binaural audio. The participant is guided along the same path by the narration and watches the walk on the screen of an iPod or camcorder. Their artist statement describes the experience as follows:

An alternate world opens up where reality and fiction meld in a disturbing and uncanny way that has been referred to as “physical cinema.” The participants

²⁶ Erik Davis, “Technopagans: May the Astral Plane be Reborn in Cyberspace,” *Wired* 3, no. 07 (July 1995), accessed April 20, 2016, http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/3.07/technopagans_pr.html.

watch things unfold on the small screen but feel the presence of those events deeply because of being situated in the exact location where the footage was shot. As they follow the moving images (and try to frame them as if they were the camera operator) a strange confusion of realities occurs. In this confusion, the past and present conflate and Cardiff and Miller guide us through a meditation on memory and reveal the poignant moments of being alive and present.²⁷

In the process of participating in the work, the viewer exists between two time-spheres connected by the ether – the viewer occupies the ethereal space between past and present, digital and physical, through the screen of the device.

An artist experimenting explicitly with etheric, or physically disjointed, connections across space is Catherine Richards. Richards' works *Charged Hearts* (1999) and *L'intrus* (2012) engage more directly with Modern fascinations, using luminescent gas tubes and electromagnetism, but the artworks' functions and interactivity are controlled in a way only contemporary technology could allow. In these works, the viewer connects not to another moment, but to a technological object as a virtual extension of themselves. By lifting a bell jar containing an anatomical glass heart, the spectator plugs into the object, causing the heart to pulse luminescently. Richards says of *Charged Hearts*:

As our technology becomes increasingly wireless the space around us is filling up. It is not limited by our body boundaries. We are already cyborgs: part flesh, part machines. We are already plugged in, all the time, systemically bonded. The human heart, the symbolic seat of the emotions, is also one of the body's better known electromagnetic fields. The electromagnetic wave is the heartbeat itself.²⁸

Charged Hearts and *L'intrus* allow for a curious, physical experience of the otherwise invisible etheric, electromagnetic relationship between body and technology.

²⁷ "Alter Bahnhof Video Walk," *Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller*, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/bahnhof.html>.

²⁸ Catherine Richards, "Charged Hearts – Artist Statement," *Catherine Richards*, accessed April 20, 2016, http://www.catherinerichards.ca/artwork2/Hearts_statement.html.

Lynn Hershman Leeson explores the connection between technology and the body through the cyborg. Her pieces, “Tillie, The Telerobotic Doll” and “CyberRoberta,” both include cyborg-like dolls, and invite the viewer into a cyborg experience through interaction with the dolls. Each doll has one eye replaced with a closed-circuit video camera and the other replaced with a web cam. The web cams broadcasts live footage to each doll’s website, where a user may “telerobotically turn that doll’s head 180 degrees, allowing visitors to [the] web site to survey the room [the doll] is in.” Leeson calls the project “The Dollie Clones,” referencing the first cloned sheep, Dolly, and the fact that one doll is a software clone of the other. When the dolls “are exhibited together, each is programmed to pirate the others’ information, blurring their identities.”²⁹ These dolls comment on how the human body is increasingly experienced through technologies, troubling the idea of a strict mind/body split and allowing viewers to occupy a cybergnostic position between mind, body, and technology.

Kristin Lucas’s augmented reality project, *Yard Sale in the Sky* (2012), places this mind, body, device hybrid directly in the hands of participants. The project is “grounded in a collective experience of the yard sale, but floats in and out of sight via a technological sensory organ, the phone.”³⁰ The project answers, however crudely, the Theosophical aim of developing a new organ to sense the astral plane. The digital objects of the project were commissioned from local artists, who often interpreted the prompt with a mystical bent, creating altars, stairways to heaven, and dream catchers. Objects, which could be seen using the camera of smart phone or tablet outfitted with an augmented reality app, were sold at yard sale prices and re-located to the purchaser’s

²⁹ Lynn Hershman Leeson, “Tillie and CyberRoberta,” *Lynn Hershman Leeson*, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.lynnhershman.com/tillie-and-cyberroberta>.

³⁰ Kristin Lucas, *Yard Sale in the Sky*, accessed April 20, 2016, www.yardsaleinthesky.com.

geo-coordinates of choice. An important text to help understand the aims of *Yard Sale in the Sky* is *The AR Art Manifesto*. The Manifesto, created by cyberartist group Manifest.AR in 2011, proclaims:

Augmented Reality (AR) creates Coexistent Spatial Realities, in which Anything is possible – Anywhere! ... In the 21st Century, Screens are no longer Borders. Cameras are no longer Memories. With AR the Virtual augments and enhances the Real, setting the Material World in a dialogue with Space and Time.³¹

The objects and interface of *Yard Sale in the Sky* visualize another dimension. Participant experiences were fittingly bewildering or animistic. The purchaser of an object titled *Robocat head?* complained that during storms her object would relocate from her front yard to China but return again in clear weather. Others mentioned positive sensations brought from knowing their object was present, even without using the app to look at it.³²

Though, digital enchantment and bewilderment are possible even in simple, lower-tech frameworks. Olia Lialina, a scholar of the vernacular web, created her net.artwork *Some Universe* (2002) from a collection of her favorite star backgrounds from Web 1.0 homepages to create “the most beautiful web page.”³³ Lialina says of the heroic, vernacular web element:

It was very popular with the first web makers probably because there were a great number of science fiction and computer game fans among them. Their desire to make the web look like the futuristic backdrop of their favorite pieces was justified. Not only by their taste but by the hope the new medium was offering. The Internet was the future, it was bringing us into new dimensions, closer to other galaxies.... A great feature of the outer space background was that it could be just two colors, maybe half a kilobyte in file size, but it would instantly give a futuristic mood for your page.³⁴

³¹ Manifest.AR, “The AR Art Manifesto,” *Manifest.AR*, accessed April 20, 2016, www.manifestar.info.

³² Interview with Kristin Lucas, February 3, 2015.

³³ Olia Lialina, “Some Universe: The Most Beautiful Web Page,” *Art.Teleportacia*, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://art.teleportacia.org/exhibition/stellastar/>.

³⁴ Olia Lialina, “A Vernacular Web,” in *Digital Folklore*, ed. Olia Lialina and Dragan Espenschied, (Stuttgart, Germany: Merz & Solitude, 2009), 22-23.

This sentiment of simplicity evoking a futuristic or mystical feel is reminiscent of David Rose's search for enchantment in *Enchanted Objects: Design, Human Desire, and the Internet of Things*. He complains that twenty years of new internet-connected objects has yet to produce something truly enchanting. "Instead," he writes, the technologies "are difficult to understand, frustrating to use...[they] diminish rather than empower us."³⁵ He offers as a counterexample his father's wall-mounted barometer, a simple object that visualizes an atmospheric condition we cannot see, as a ponderous and fascinating technology. It is Rose's belief that technology should be more captivating and enchanting, and my belief that, like with *Some Universe*, this comes from an economy of design and involvement of natural forces.

WELCOME TO MY HOMEPAGE!

My net.art project, *Welcome to my Homepage!* (2014), is an evolving, expanding, web-based cyber dwelling. The project fuses the familiar and clashing structures of a colonial/suburban dollhouse and web-architecture reminiscent of early homepages and CD-ROMS as a point of departure for an additive and curated space that is perpetually in flux. I returned to the early internet to imagine different possible futures in the web. Web 1.0 was an awkward and unresolved territory that bared its flaws. Users were relentless in constructing, expressing, and updating their identities in this new domain, and thus were often savvy about code and dedicated to their net communities. The seamless, professional design of the current interface of the internet functions far less whimsically and facilitates access without much conscious thought. The interface's invisibility renders its operation mysterious and remote. Web content creation is often portrayed similarly to Occult schools of knowledge; difficult to access and available only to highly specialized

³⁵ David Rose, *Enchanted Objects: Design, Human Desire, and the Internet of Things*, (New York: Scribner, 2014), xi.

initiates. As seen through groups like GynePunk, this is not necessarily true. Many shareware and open source tools, resources on how to use them, and community platforms for distribution are readily available. The use of these tools and display of their residual logos and link-backs on my site supports the “open sharing of occult knowledge as liberated power.”³⁶ *Homepage!* rejects prohibitive barriers but repurposes an occult sense of mystery as an easily parted veil that welcomes visitors to engage imaginatively and critically with the web. If a visitor navigates outside of the house they are cast into the ether, a territory outside of the primary site that is not-quite-empty cyberspace, positioning the site in a distant, rural location within the network. The site can be explored by passive interaction, but it also invites more active participation.

With the *Welcome to my Guest Room Digital Artist Residency Program*, housed in the attic of *Welcome to my Homepage!*, I invite artists to apply for a month-long residency which offers an extended experience of the web browser as creative space. Since the program’s initiation, the *Guest Room* has hosted 15 artists, many of them completely new to incorporating cyberspace into their artistic practice. A Facebook community of nearly 100 users has grown around the residency in the past year, as each artist brings their own network of supporters to keep updated on the project. *My Homepage* and its *Guest Room* are an adaptable framework; unlike a cybernetic feedback loop it can never achieve equilibrium because of the ad hoc, unstable, obsolescing nature of the internet, in which elements disappear, change, or malfunction and visitors come and go.

³⁶ Wise, *Hidden Circles in the Web*, 77.

CYBERPARALYSIS AND OTHER MALADIES

TOWARD CY83RGNOSIS (2015) is an installation work that fuses my interests in health, technology and the occult. I explore outlier experiences on the internet, which exhibit tensions between people who feel affected by technology, and others who are collaborating with the net in unusually empowered ways. The project is a video-based installation, which probes the uncomfortable ways that the internet leeches out of its devices and into physical bodies, as well as my curiosity in the potentially transcendent aspects of these manifestations. *Welcome to my Homepage.net* has moved off the web and into the physical dimension.

The project sources a variety of internet-borne phenomena, including internet addiction disorder, Morgellons (a bodily infestation of experimental nanotechnology, or an internet-spread delusional parasitosis), ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response, a bodily phenomena identified by YouTubers and brought to the attention of the science community), Unverified Personal Gnosis (individually determined spiritual beliefs often sourced from content online or in media), and Technopaganism. The internet spills into our bodies, psyches, and spirituality, permeating everything. These creative and visceral expressions of the internet are to me reminiscent of Modernist Occult concepts like the ether and the Fourth Dimension, which I believe are important parallels to draw on when considering the re-enchantment of technology.

A loose narrative structures *TOWARD CY83RGNOSIS*. Margaret, an ethereal inhabitant of the home, is afflicted with an internet-borne parasite. In parallel to the nineteenth-century spiritualist belief that a person could use rigorous meditation to develop a new sensory organ that would allow them to experience the astral plane, Margaret has used occult rituals to transmogrify her parasite into an organ that allows her to communicate directly with the internet without computer mediation. She appears in

projection-mapped bits and parts around the house, as a presence transmitted through packet data. She is echoed, in many moments at once, as a higher-dimensional being who manifests in physical reality through cyberspace. A network of cameras survey the house and rooms of the homepage in a parapsychological search that both confirms and denies Margaret's presence in the house. This information, which blurs fact and fiction, is distributed and remapped in space and through the ether.

Early web scholars conceptualized cyberspace as a physical space. My attempts to represent cyberspace in the physical realm are akin to Claude Bragdon's exercises in *A Primer of Higher Space* for visualizing the fourth dimension using the third dimension.³⁷ My hope is that this translation can awaken the viewer to the potential for cyberspace to not be a rational space as we conceptualize it, but an enchanted other-realm, like the Modernist ether or fourth dimension.

I returned to Morgellons and to Margaret to continue exploring net-bourne phenomena in a more direct form with *Hello Nebula? It's me, Margaret* (2015). The work is a desktop-based video addressing a Morgellons-like condition, loosely adapted from Judy Bloom's youth fiction *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* and expanding the story of *TOWARD CY83RGN0SIS*. The pubescent struggle of Bloom's Margaret is mirrored in my Margaret's becoming a cyborg. In *Hello Nebula*, Margaret communes not with God, but with a nebula and online forums to find answers for her ailment. She receives 'one weird trick' to reach nirvanic cyberspace by reprogramming her disease into a functional organ.

Experientially, the work is composed of celestial journeys, interrupting phone calls, and a rash of YouTube video solutions for skin problems and computer building,

³⁷ Claude Bragdon, *A Primer of Higher Space* (Rochester, NY: The Manas Press 1913).

my own 3D renderings of shimmering landscapes, objects, and mystical creatures, Processing sketches of interactive starscapes, and a divine tableau of ‘weird trick’ health ads and WebMD articles cued by an omnipotent performer to mis-sung pop songs re-performed through Auto-Tune filters.

On the less mystical side of affliction, I began to amass a collection of confessional YouTube videos about internet addiction. In all the videos I found, the YouTuber was static, seated in front of a laptop webcam, or frozen in front of a device being recorded by someone else. The types of videos ranged from exasperated complaints during periods of internet service loss, to matter-of-fact realizations, to post-addiction tales of triumph, to taunting siblings or roommates ripping devices away from their addicted cohabitants and recording the reaction. I empathized with the umbilical cord of dependent and distorted body/web-device boundaries present in each video.

In my two-channel video, *Innernet Addict* (2015), I reanimate the static bodies of these YouTube confessors through my own body, as a way of processing and mobilizing their stories. The video’s intentionally spare aesthetic places me in a void completely separated from the chaotic disruptiveness and holding power of digital devices that stagnate addicted users. Using my body to move with and through these stories complicates and deepens the read of the work; as the subject is no longer simply a static and pitiable other, the viewer perhaps begins to see glimmers of their own technological dependency.

Conclusion

In my explorations of avid and atypical computer users and their communities, I find myself wondering about my own relationship to computers. By Donna Haraway's definition, I am a cyborg. Yet, as I try to gain a comprehensive working knowledge of computing, I am still unable to grasp the whole of the machine. Most users have slipped into a comfortable situation of blissful ignorance of how the computer, the internet, or any number of technologies function, because "they just work." As Donna Haraway argues, "Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert."³⁸ In an attempt to reconcile my desire to work with contemporary technologies that seem just beyond full understanding or control, I exploit their unknowability to construct fictive and enchanted realities. In Estrin and Margaret's worlds, it becomes possible to merge with technologies in transcendental ways. As Estrin teaches, "Once you have reached a higher level of metaphysical practice through hacking, you will be able to...just feel the connection through the Wi-Fi as you become more aware of its subtle presence."

³⁸ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 278-9.



Illustration 1: Installation view, *Estrin Tide is Fresh, Everyone Else is Tired*



Illustration 2: Installation view, *Estrin Tide is Fresh, Everyone Else is Tired*

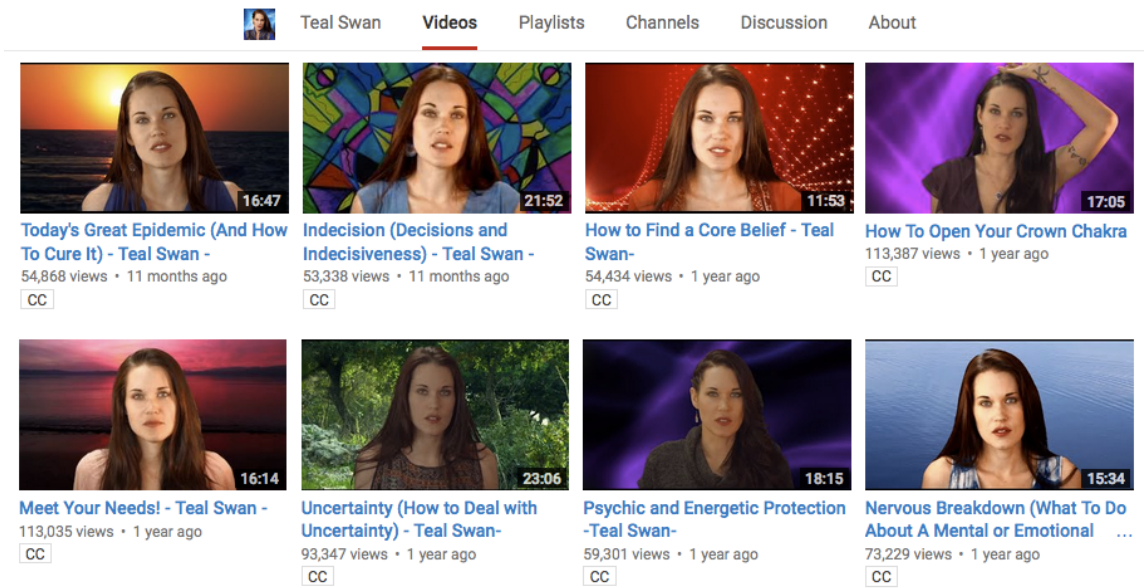


Illustration 3: Screen capture from Teal Swan's YouTube channel

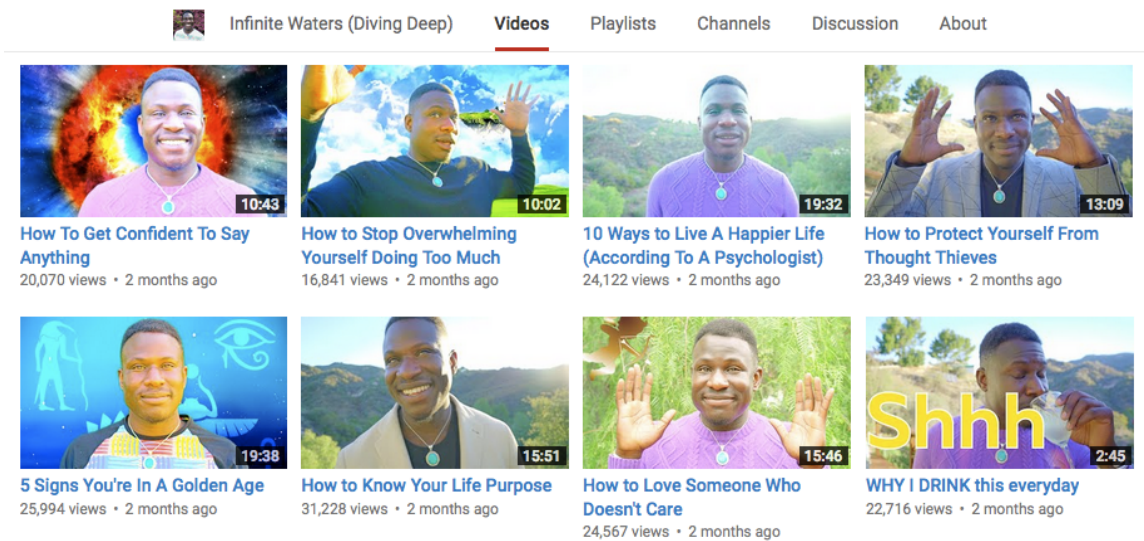


Illustration 4: Screen capture from Infinite Water's YouTube channel

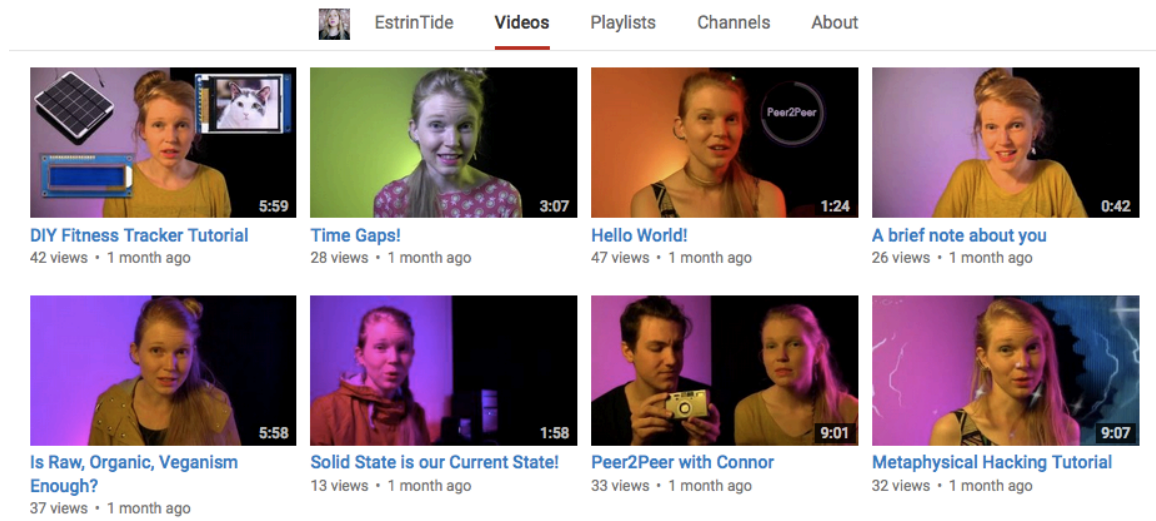


Illustration 5: Screen capture from Estrin Tide’s YouTube channel

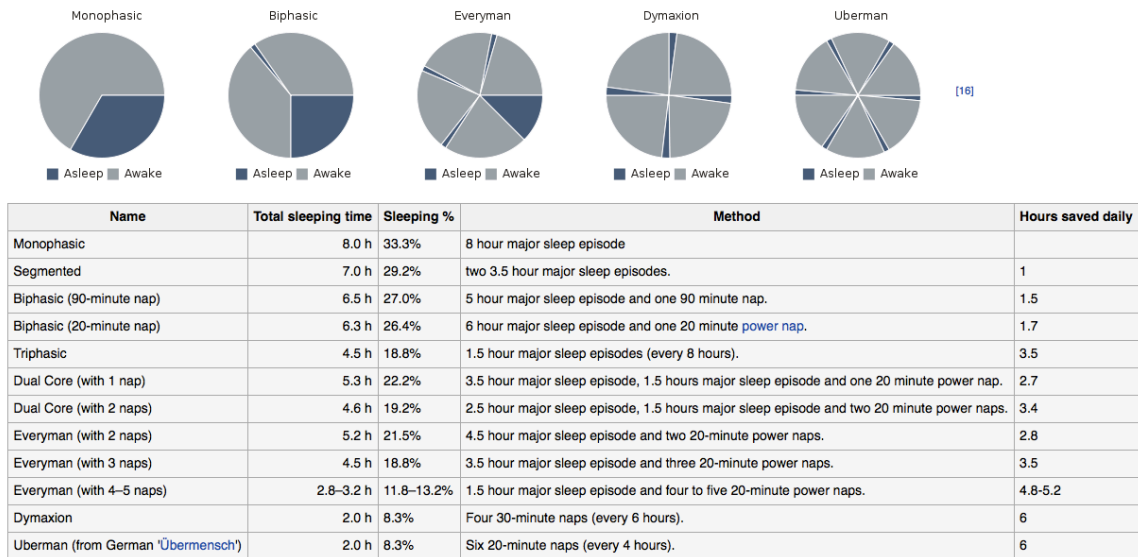


Illustration 6: Comparison of polyphasic sleep cycles (Wikimedia Commons)



Illustration 7: Installation view of *Moon Clock: 4 Phases 2 Optimize U*



Illustration 8: Promotional image for *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller



Illustration 9: *L'intrus*, Catherine Richards



Illustration 10: *CyberRoberta*, Lynn Hershman Leeson (The Hess Collection)

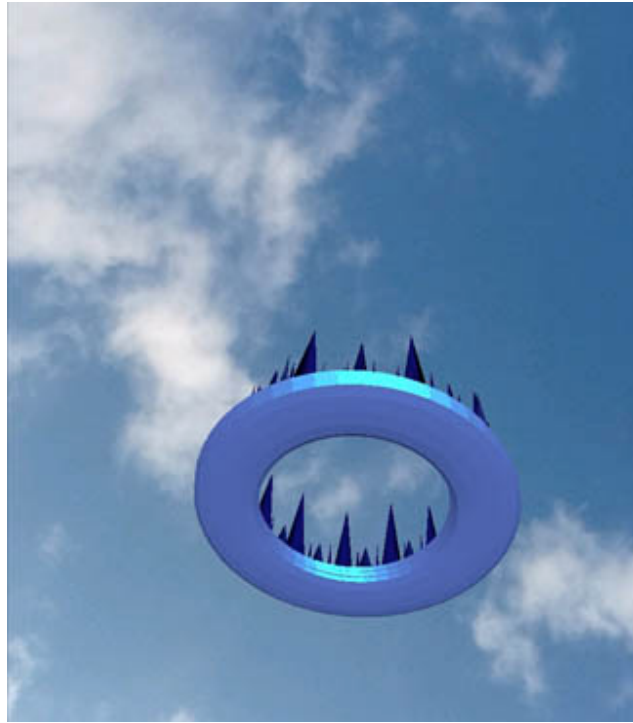


Illustration 11: *Time Fall Crown* by Melanie Clemmons commissioned for *Yard Sale in the Sky*

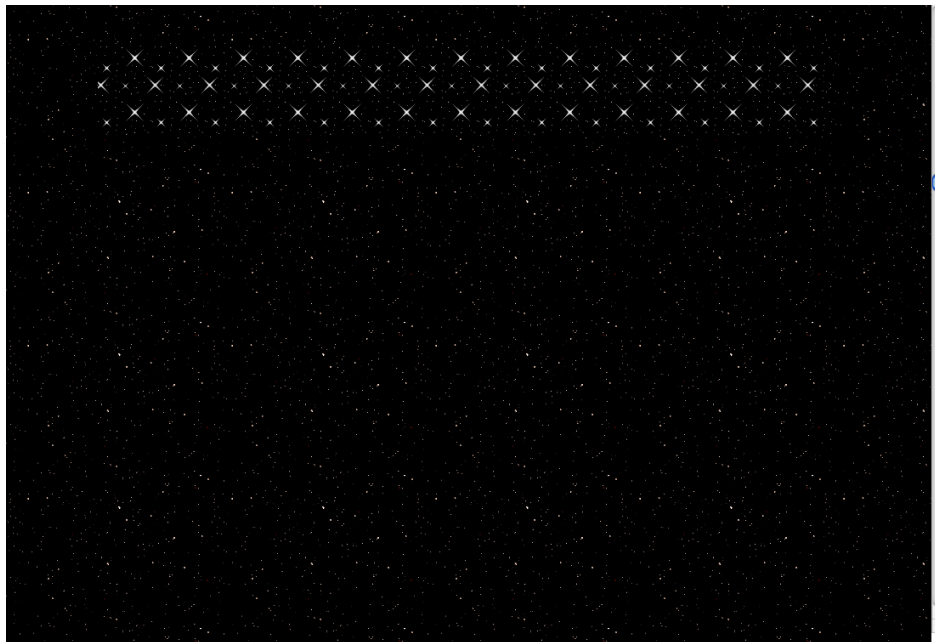


Illustration 12: Screen capture from *Some Universe*, Olia Lialina

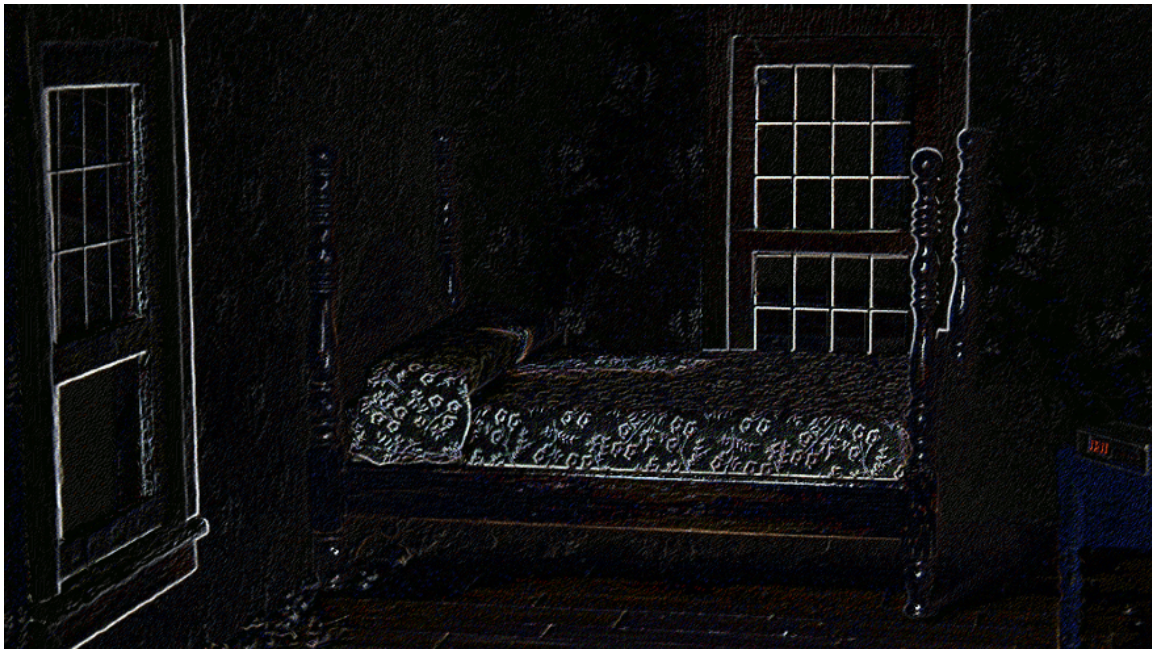


Illustration 13: Screen capture from *Welcome to my Homepage!*



Illustration 14: Screen capture from *Welcome to my Homepage!*



Illustration 15: Splash page to *Welcome to my Guest Room!*



Illustration 16: Installation view of *TOWARD CY83RGN0SIS*



Illustration 17: Detail view of *TOWARD CY83RGN0SIS*

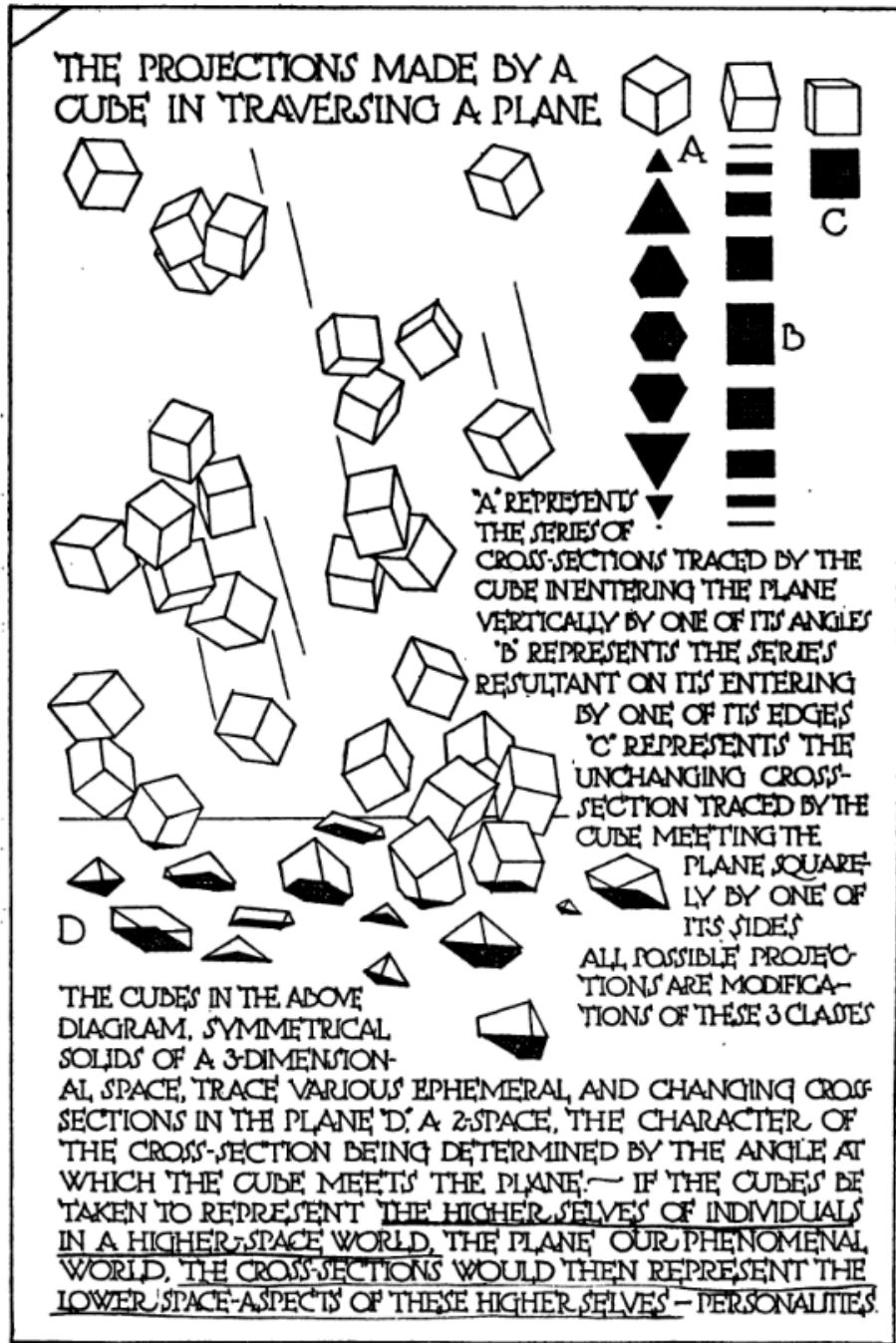


PLATE 30

Illustration 18: Plate 30 from *A Primer of Higher Space*, Claude Bragdon



Illustration 19: Still from *Hello Nebula? It's me, Margaret.*

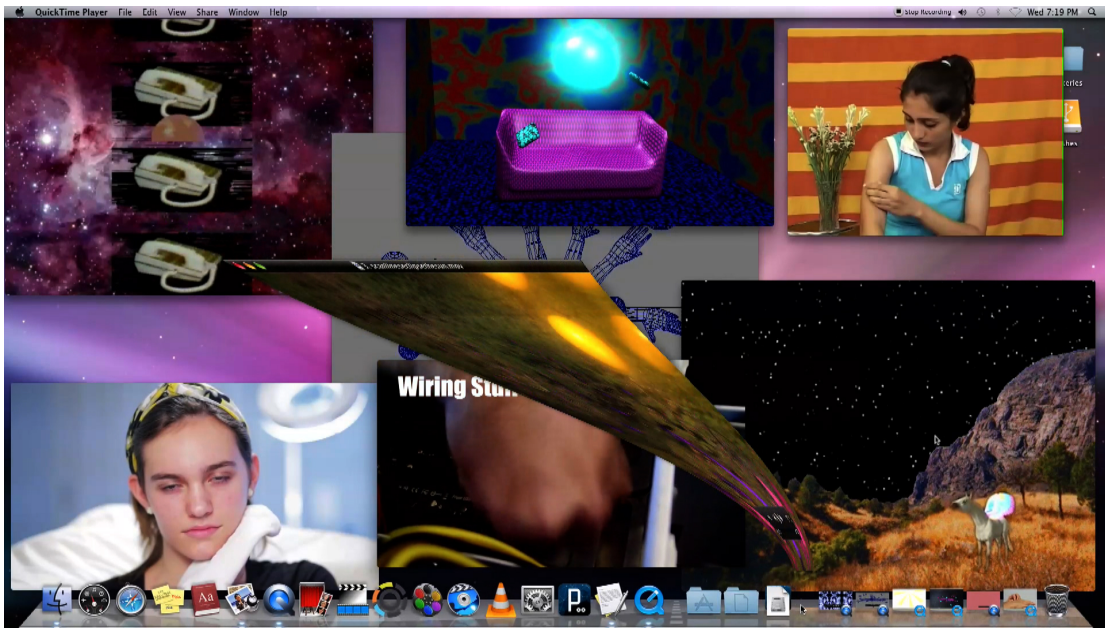


Illustration 20: Still from *Hello Nebula? It's me, Margaret.*

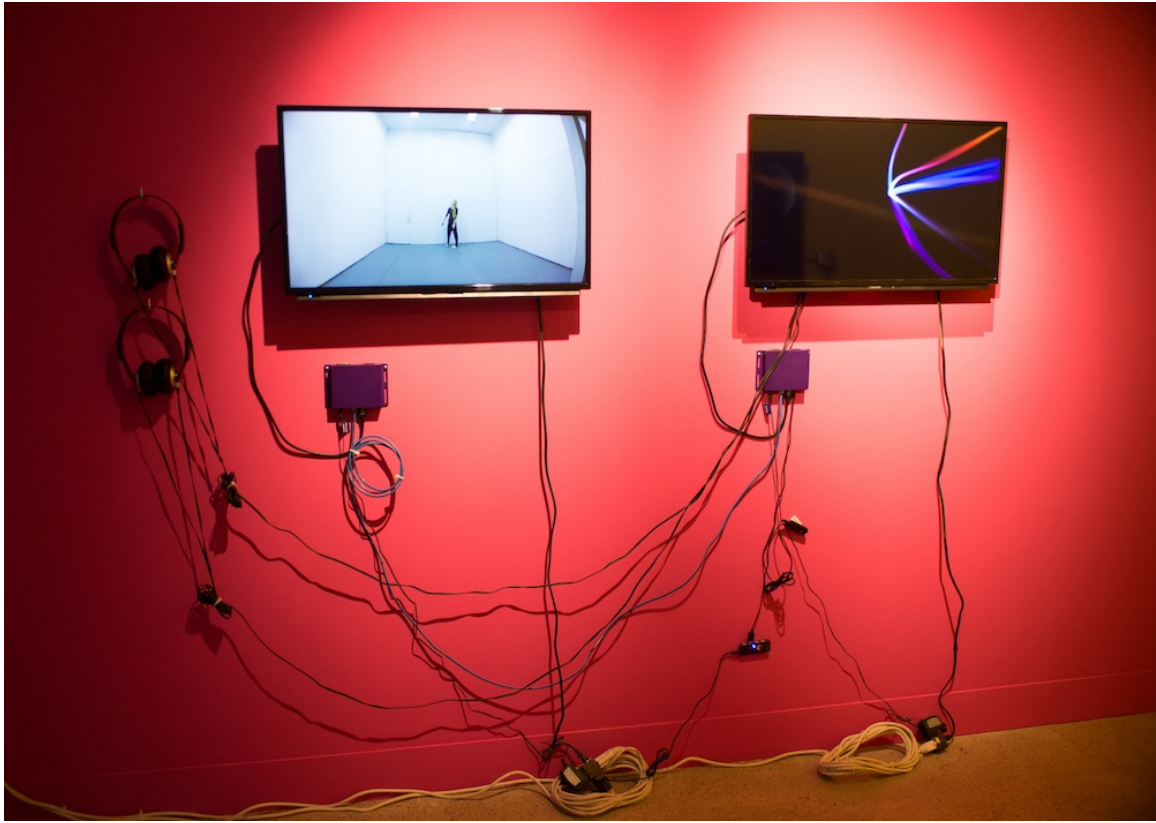


Illustration 21: Installation view of *Innernet Addict*

Glossary

bodyhacking — manipulating the human body by embedding, ingesting, or otherwise merging with technologies, in an attempt to improve the human condition.

biohacking — manipulating the human body and mind as systems, causing them to function in ways other than intended.

biopunk — a techno-progressive political and artistic stance, stemming from the science fiction subgenre of the same name, which emphasizes technological body modifications.

cybergnosis — the intuitive experience of mysterious spiritual realities on the cyberplane.

Grinder — a transhumanist who promotes an open knowledge of science and practices self-experimentation with functional, body-implantable electronic hardware.

DIY (or DIT) — Do it yourself. Do it together. A statement promoting the use of individual or shared skills, rather than purchasing a commodity or commodified service.

meatspace — the physical world, as opposed to cyberspace.

polyphasic sleep — the practice of sleeping multiple times in a 24-hour period.

Quintessence — an extrasensory perception, or cyborg sense, of wifi-based internet traffic.

transhumanism — a movement that aims to transform the human condition using technologies to enhance intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.

vlog — a video blog; a personal video intended for public viewing online.

Xenofeminism — a feminism adapted to the complexities, abstractions, and virtuality of current reality.

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