

Take Me To Another Strange World // Stupid Boring Internet

by

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Statement

This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of Master of Visual Arts/Doctor of Philosophy at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text. I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This research paper responds to the contemporary calls made by theorists Jean Baudrillard and Marshall McLuhan to interrogate media with art to act as a respite from the ego trance of what McLuhan called, Narcissus-narcosis. Baudrillard's and McLuhan's criticisms contextualise art as respite from media, whereby art can show the charm of a strange world to relieve the deceiving, deluding nature of media. Art can turn away from the content of media and interact with its structure and configuration instead, and by doing so it can immunise individuals and society.

In both of my ongoing MFA projects, *Romantic Grass of the Week* and *Wireless Psychics Experiments #1- 10*, art is envisaged as an inoculation to save us from being totally absorbed in the virtual. This injection performs, plays with media structures, and translates them into different forms and artefacts. The work continues as our immunisation then becomes embodied in acts of divining.

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<<INTRODUCTION>>

*Take me to another strange world
because I am disappearing from mine.*

*Take me to another strange world
without messages, because I'm covered in them*

This paper and my performance projects *Romantic Grass of the Week* [*Romantic Grasses*] and *Wireless Psychics Experiments #1- 10* [*Wireless Psychics*] welcome speculation on how virtual, imaginary, past and future worlds intersect through the Internet and the art object. I take a particular interest in media studies. Like media theorists, Baudrillard and McLuhan,¹ I speculate that we find ourselves at a juncture being prepared for slavery to our virtual selves, or a total absorption into the virtual. We are numbed and deceived by the Internet, suffering from a Narcissus-narcosis (the stupor of absorbing virtuality,² social media, the Internet).³

Insert: Art. Art can ask questions that even social science can't. My inspirations to make art were alternatives to virtual slavery- utopic/dystopic visions of grass growing over social media and off-the-grid Wi-Fi. These visions propelled my performative investigations into the Internet's structure, asking questions like: Can grass grow in a virtual environment? Can we experience the Wi-Fi network? Can I affect the online Wi-Fi environment? and/or Can other forces affect the Wi-Fi environment? Beyond offering artistic alternatives, within the context of media

¹ See *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact*, ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg (Brisbane: IMA, 1997); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964; repr. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

² The internet, the (social) media (world) that has been created for us by computers and governance. In a pop culture context: "Virtual: Computers: Created, simulated, or carried on by means of a computer or computer network: ie. virtual conversations in a chatroom," *American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed., s.v. "virtuality," retrieved November 14, 2016. Compare with virtuality (philosophy): a Deleuzian term encompassing all potentiality.

³ McLuhan identified the narcissism of electric media with narcosis. First reality TV, now the Internet. Narcosis: a state of stupor often brought on by drugs. Both narcosis and Narcissus come from the Greek word *narkissos*, numbness; "This extension of himself by mirror numbs his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image." McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 41-42.

studies/research, this paper also positions my art as an immunisation against the stupid, boring Internet.

The title of this paper, "Take me to another strange world,"⁴ comes from the notions of controversial social theorist and critic, Jean Baudrillard.⁵ In *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact* as well as his book, *The Perfect Crime* he expresses theories that are concerned with the disappearance of the individual as a result of virtuality taking over.⁶ In 1994, he emphasizes that his intention is not to integrate with media, but to reveal and challenge. In this paper we approach another strange world by focusing on structure and configuration of the Internet rather than its content:

I'm searching for this strangeness of the media. It's their only charm. Since when we take the media as media, they are very deluding, very very deceiving. But we can take them as **another strange world**.⁷

For me, the threat of virtuality taking over is compounded by its stupidity and boringness. Although most people do not share this feeling, I feel betrayed by the "Take me to another strange world" cyber-utopian fantasies of new economies and lateral structures as promised by the Internet.⁸ I find my utopian ideals subjugated within the current hegemony, as we are distracted and absorbed by our own reflection.⁹ One look at the success of Facebook and its related movie *The Social Network* shows that virtual identities have been pushed to the fringes in favour of the idea of personal 'branding' and the cultivation of an online 'following.'¹⁰

⁴ Interview with Jean Baudrillard (1994) in Nicholas Zurbrugg, "Introduction: 'Just What is It That Makes Baudrillard's Ideas So Different, So Appealing?'" in *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact*, ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg (Brisbane: IMA, 1997), 4.

⁵ Anne Marsh, "Snapshots of Nothingness," *Herald Sun*, July 16, 1994, 37. Marsh calls Baudrillard controversial because he predicted the end of the world in 2000.

⁶ *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact* ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg; Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1996).

⁷ Zurbrugg, "Introduction" 4. Emphasis added.

⁸ Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2004).

⁹ Gabby Dunn, "Get Rich or Die Vlogging: The Sad Economics of Internet Fame," *Fusion*, December 14, 2015, <http://fusion.net/story/244545/famous-and-broke-on-youtube-instagram-social-media/>; *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Second Life," last modified September 12, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Life. Although artistic possibilities are available in the free-form Second Life, the first Second Life millionaire gained her money through real estate.

¹⁰ Aaron Sorkin and Ben Mezrich, *The Social Network*, directed by David Fincher (2010; Los Angeles, CA: Columbia Pictures Sony Home Entertainment, 2011) DVD. Compare with virtual identities in game playing contexts. Margaret Wertheim, *The Pearly Gates of*

Exposing your face/identity on the Internet is now itself a commodity, complete with monetary and social value.¹¹ This is typified by *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year" in 2006, "You," the person who created online content, with the traditional headshot cover image replaced by a computer with a mirror for a screen.¹² Moreover, Mark Zuckerberg (creator of Facebook) was named *Time*'s "Person of the Year" in 2010.¹³



Figure 1: Cover of *Time*, December 25, 2006 (the grey monitor 'screen' is a reflective mylar surface).

According to McLuhan and myself, media work their magic—or their mischief—sub rosa, directly on a nervous system, simulating the stress of a disease (Narcissus-narcosis).¹⁴ And so it becomes the duty of the artist to immunize against exhaustion from these new technologies, for in the artist's ability to see the true nature of the present they can equip us for the future.¹⁵

In the preparation of my art inoculation, my research interests respond to some key observations of McLuhan:

Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet (Sydney: Doubleday, 2000) 240-300; Kathy Cleland, "Mirror States," exhibition essay, accessed September 12, 2016, http://www.kathycleland.com/?page_id=62.

¹¹ Carla Poertner, "Is Facebook Making us Stupid, Boring and Insecure?" *Huffington Post*, April 20, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/carla-poertner/social-media-b_6960960.html.

¹² Slavoj Žižek, "Is This Digital Democracy or a New Tyranny of Cyberspace?" *The Guardian*, December 30, 2006, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/dec/30/comment.media?CMP=share_btn_link.

¹³ Lev Grossman, "You - Yes, You Are TIME's Person of the Year," *Time*, December 25, 2006, accessed Oct 27, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>.

¹⁴ Hans Selye in McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 12-13; Carr, *The Shallows*, 16.

¹⁵ McLuhan, and Wyndham Lewis in McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 64-65.

“The effect of electronic technology had at first been anxiety. Now it appears to create boredom.”¹⁶

“No society has ever known enough about its actions to have developed immunity to its new extensions or technologies... Today we have begun to sense that art may be able to provide such immunity.”¹⁷

Grasses and the **carrier frequency for Wi-Fi** were the chosen art subjects to be invested with the power to immunise against the stupid, boring Internet. Their banal, ongoing nature I believe could affect Baudrillard’s and/or McLuhan’s predictions of our absorption into the Internet’s spectacle.

Firstly, my online intervention work *Romantic Grasses* uses images of grasses, investing them with seemingly magical powers of proliferation as if they could be the first thing to grow in a new virtual world order, diverting it from its inherent narcissism.¹⁸

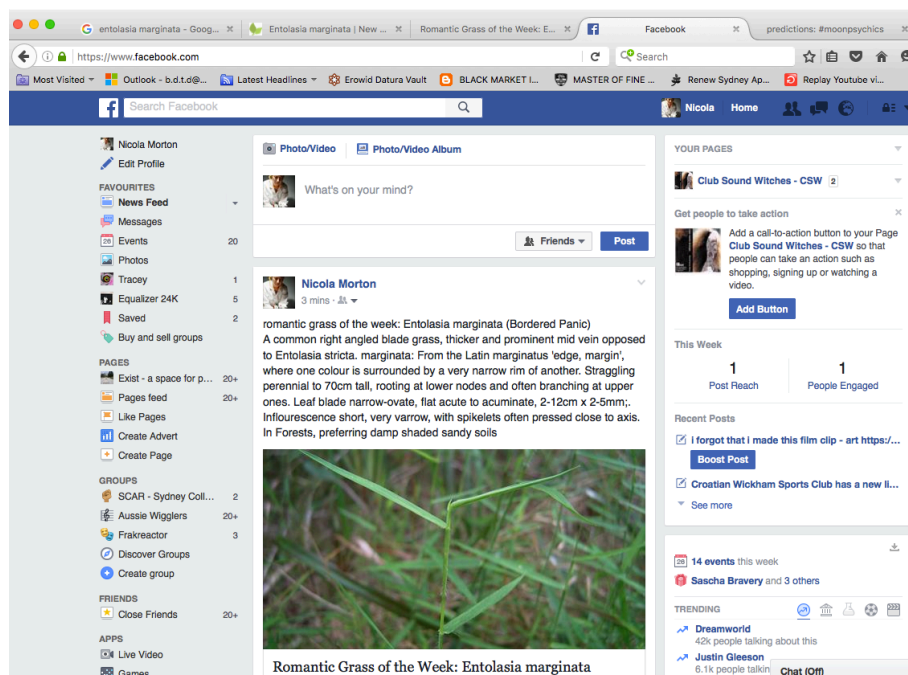


Figure 2: Nicola Morton, *Romantic Grass of the Week* (26-10-16). Screenshot from Facebook.

Grasses are subtly ongoing. They are at least 55 million years old and present on all continents.¹⁹ They were chosen as my artistic subject, because they are the first

¹⁶ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁸ *Romantic Grasses* is not exhibited in the gallery, only published online.

¹⁹ *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Poaceae,” last modified July 26, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poaceae>.

plants to colonize disturbed land. Compared to trees and other seedlings they are simpler and smaller, a frontier plant, resistant to trampling and being grazed upon. In a world consumed by virtuality, *Romantic Grasses* explores virtual grasses through meme-like devices that is aimed at providing insight into the proliferation of structures that can emerge from the Internet's soup of identities and information.

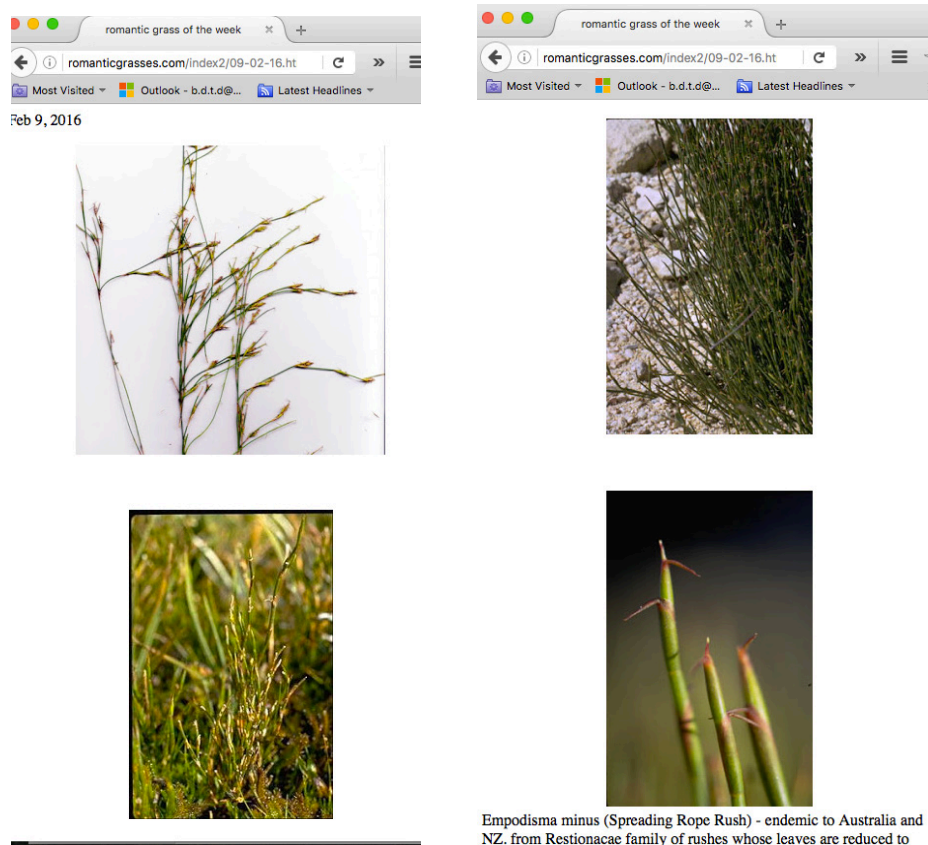


Figure 3: Nicola Morton, *Romantic Grass of The Week (09-02-16)*. Screenshots of archive website <http://romanticgrasses.com/index2/09-02-16.html>.

Once considered to be basically insensate organisms, recent scientific research show that plants have evolved sophisticated sensing systems for interacting both with each other and the environment - some of which mirror technological structures, like the Internet.²⁰ And like the microbes and bacteria underground that allow **grasses** to communicate with each other, the occurrence and dispersal of **Wi-Fi's radio frequencies** (electromagnetic reflections/refractions from the sun and its surrounds) in the Earth's atmosphere (and in space) allows for certain devices to communicate.

²⁰ Nic Fleming, "Plants Talk to Each Other Using an Internet of Fungus," *BBC Earth*, November 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20141111-plants-have-a-hidden-internet>.

Secondly, *Wireless Psychics* is a series of performance works that explore the possibility for developing a sixth sense for perceiving Wi-Fi's carrier frequency's presence in order to reveal and exploit its nature. This new ability could ideally give rise to personal agency within the social control mechanisms of an absorbing virtuality.



Figure 4: Nicola Morton, *Wireless Psychics Experiment #3*. Performed for Liquid Architecture 2015, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. Photo by Alan Warren.

Wi-Fi is essentially a communication protocol that turns digital data into a modified radio frequency that enables devices to interface with each other.²¹ Wi-Fi is often the last step connecting the stream of Internet media to a user's mobile device. A Wi-Fi radio (amplifier, transmitter and receiver of 2.4 GHz and 5 GHz) is found in laptops, smart phones, tablets, smart appliances, Wi-Fi routers/modems etc. A Wi-Fi radio operates on a much higher frequency than a normal radio or cell phone, which allows the signal to carry more data. Typically the broadcast range of Wi-Fi radio is 23-46 metres. The Wi-Fi carrier frequency operates within an allocated portion of the naturally occurring electromagnetic spectrum, which is subsequently amplified by transmitting and receiving devices and hotspot repeater towers throughout what we know as the cellular network.²²

In a land dependent on and absorbed in its virtuality, the possibility that radio waves could be harnessed by a person's sensitivity for long distance

²¹ For more detail see *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Wi-Fi," last modified November 2, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wi-Fi>.

²² Jennifer Horton, "How Wireless Internet Cards Work," *How Stuff Works*, May 19, 2008, <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/wireless-internet-card1>.

communication without the use of conventional tools or technology gives the power of electric media back to the people. This hypothetical sensitivity takes root in the act of training, hence the instructional sets, tests and regular performances of *Wireless Psychics*.

Wireless Psychics and *Romantic Grasses* are both speculative projects that investigate the increasing virtualisation of our contemporary world through performance, performative interventions and the resulting artefacts. Outcomes have been realised as performances and performative interventions throughout the course of the Masters programme, and so the examination exhibition is an opportunity to present artefacts from a selection of the performances.²³

In an effort to rescue the viewer from Narcissus-narcosis, the paper tangentially explores clues and traces that immunise us and when we truly know the structure of the Narcissus-narcosis disease, we speculate on discoveries in the future. The first chapter is about finding a clue, the concept of *trace* in art: we find a disappearing subject, a clue to building our inoculation. The second addresses how in tandem to finding the clue, we (intentionally) lose the uniqueness of the psychic. As the disappearing subject is applied to the paranormal, so too, can we disappear the super powers induced by Narcissus-narcosis. The third and fourth chapters turn the emphasis away from the conceptual nature of art (or the crime of disappearance) back to the structure and configuration of electric media (the dynamic perpetrator).²⁴ This is where we act on our clues. Artists take over the communication towers of electric media as unintended imaginary and material translations occur (i.e. turning a remote control into sound and a wasabi-pea can into a Wi-Fi camera). Whilst in the fourth chapter the artists use their deep knowledge of media to write a new, alternative future of media using ancient divination methods. It is a long game for the protagonists. We must keep at our training, constantly updating our vaccine for the continually evolving Narcissus-narcosis disease. We wait and see if we actually disappear into our mirroring virtuality or instead slip into another world away from the content of ego, the other and advertisements.

²³See Attached Image Folio.

²⁴ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, i-xx. Electric media is a term used by Marshall McLuhan to describe media that is powered by electrical processes (TV, radio, telegraph, records, Internet) opposed to mechanical processes (printing press, analog photography).

<<CHAPTER 1 - A TRACE IS FOUND>>

FOUND: trace of strange world without humans

Trace: noun. A mark, object or other indication of the existence or passing of something.²⁵

Trace: term used in Derridian deconstruction.²⁶ A term used for the “mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present.” This “always already hidden” contradiction is trace.²⁷

Trace: term used by Baudrillard for photograph – “Behind every fragment of reality something has to disappear.”²⁸



Figure 5: Jean Baudrillard, *Sainte Beuve*, 1987. Photograph.

²⁵ *Dictionary OSX*, version 10.11.16, s.v. “trace,” last modified July 2016.

²⁶ A metaphysical study, a science of presence with the root problem found in language and its forced closure of structures/definition. The translation of trace in French includes ‘track’ ‘mark’ and ‘path’. Derrida refuses to strictly define the word, the terms ‘difference’ ‘spectre’ and ‘pharmakon’ are synonymous.

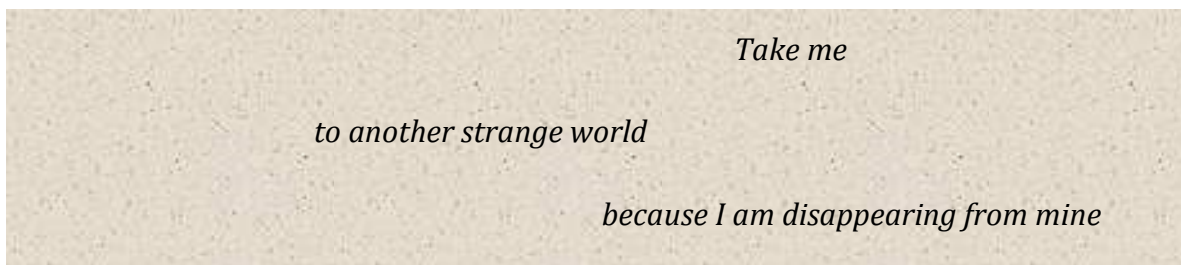
²⁷ *Wikipedia*, s.v. “trace (deconstruction),” last modified September 17, 2016.

²⁸ Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, 1-3.

A trace is found in my art projects of another strange world. Another strange world where the artist doesn't exist or even where humans don't exist. This chapter of the research paper addresses both Rosalind Krauss' and Jean Baudrillard's ideas of art acting as a trace of a future without the artist and/or without any other human beings respectively. The found photographs in *Romantic Grasses* act as an immunisation utilising traces of existence and identity to fight off Narcissus-narcosis (the spectacular overdose of electronic media).

Baudrillard suggests that it is our humanity that is cut off by the photograph (trace) and uses his photography artworks to support his view of the future (nothing), a world without humans.²⁹ In Baudrillard's all-consuming virtuality, the moment we see his photographs, the rest of the world disappears and the viewer becomes part of the image—the rest of the world is left behind and we are taken to another strange world, without human subjects.³⁰

Whilst normally used to deconstruct language, Krauss uses Jacques Derrida's concept of trace within art criticism, for example, interpreting Jackson Pollock's painting method as a mark of self-destruction.³¹ Krauss applies the time-folding trace to art: the subject sees themselves in the mirror and smashes it—the traces are clues, as the artist makes their mark in a present already occupied by the future.³²



²⁹ Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, 1-2.

³⁰ In *Art and Artefact* Baudrillard's view of this virtuality is idealistic, one in which it was both created and controlled by the artist. However, only a couple of years later, in *The Perfect Crime* he frames the commercial world as the creator of this all-consuming virtuality. This chapter is primarily concerned with the artist-created virtuality and his views in *Art & Artefact*: Jean Baudrillard, "Objects, Images and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Illusion," in *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact*, ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg (Brisbane: IMA), 10-28.

³¹ Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: October Books, 1993), 325.

³² *Ibid.*, 260.

So in the context of Baudrillard’s disappearing world³³ and Krauss’ rupturing of the artist’s ego, I propose the concept of the **disappearing human subject** in *Romantic Grasses*.³⁴ Lost in the quagmire of self-branding in the Internet, *Romantic Grasses* analogizes Baudrillard’s photography and concept of future nothing plus Kraus’ Derridian concept of the fractured artist, to discover *Romantic Grasses* as virtual clues from a disappearing subject. As the human subject disappears the exploitative gaze disappears – so please, take me to another world away from Richard Prince’s portraits (where a 50 year old male artist sells screenshots of Instagram models with his comments below for \$100,000).³⁵

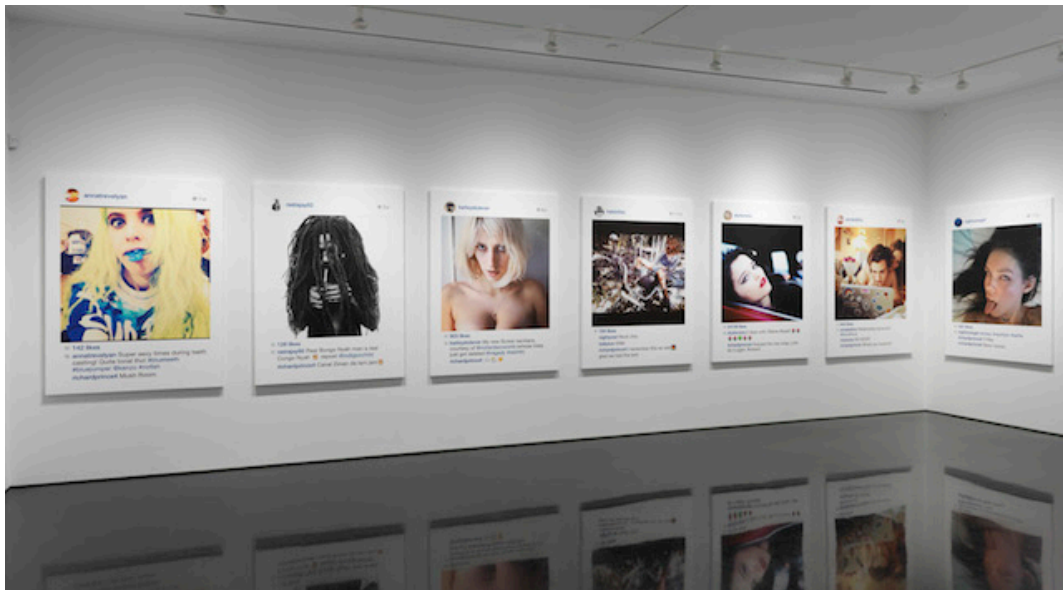


Figure 6: Richard Prince, *Richard Prince: New Portraits*, 2014. Installation view, Gagosian Gallery, New York (© Richard Prince. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery. Photography by Robert McKeeve).³⁶

Although Prince claims to be combating the delusional nature of media by reappropriating the images and self-branding of hipsters, he is taking the media as media. Baudrillard instead challenges us to find “another” take on or function of media because corporate and social norms can inflict a self-perpetuating, deluding function on the photograph, a perfect crime.³⁷ McLuhan also admonishes this

³³ Jean Baudrillard, *Ecstasy of Photography* exhibition, (Melbourne: ACCA, 1994), accessed November 4, 2016, <https://www.accaonline.org.au/exhibition/jean-baudrillard-ecstasy-photography>.

³⁴ “Glitch: noun. A sudden usually temporary malfunction or temporary irregularity in equipment.” *Dictionary OSX*, version 10.11.16, s.v. “glitch,” updated July 2016.

³⁵ Hannah Jane Parkinson, “Instagram, an Artist and the \$100,000 Selfies – Appropriation in the Digital Age,” *The Guardian*, July 18, 2015, accessed 26 October, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jul/18/instagram-artist-richard-prince-selfies>.

³⁶ Tiernan Morgan, “Richard Prince Inc.” in *Hyperallergic*, accessed 26 October 2016, <http://hyperallergic.com/152762/richard-prince-inc/>.

³⁷ Zubrugg, 7; Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, 1-5.

appropriating behaviour: anything that focuses the eye on the content of media acts as a distraction.³⁸ Hence all discussion in this paper side-steps commercial content and focuses on reimagining media through discovery and trace of the hidden.

Romantic Grasses:³⁹ Regularly for the last three years, whenever I've felt a distance from and passion for the environment, I've collected photographs of a certain grass species. In my own way I have been trying to reimagine the Internet as a disturbed environment that is ripe for regeneration. Rather than sowing seeds in a physical environment, I imagine 'planting,' re-purposing this photo in Facebook feeds. Found photographs (from books and online) with text descriptions for identification and any particular naturopathic uses are posted in realtime as my status updates on Facebook and archived on <http://romanticgrasses.com>.

Grasses are the first to colonize disturbed land. The photos of *Romantic Grasses* hope to take the viewer to a new virtual world beyond the social identities of Facebook. Their virtual charm is in their one-dimensionality (narrow colour palettes and flat). Pictorially, these photos taken by hobbyists lack depth and a human subject, alluding to the virtual world of nothingness and absence that Baudrillard holds most dear.⁴⁰



Figure 7 (Left) Jean Baudrillard, *Ecstasy of Photography*, 1994 Installation View, ACCA, 1994. Courtesy of ACCA Archive



Figure 8 (Right) Nicola Morton, *Romantic Grass of the Week (02-06-13) "Eragrostis Curvula,"* 2016. Web Page.

<http://romanticgrasses.com/index2/02-06-13.html>.

³⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 20.

³⁹ Descriptions of artworks by myself, Nicola Morton will be presented in this paper formatted thus – indent, bold title, double line space.

⁴⁰ Baudrillard, "Objects, Images..." 10-28.

In addition to the emptiness, Baudrillard goes to pains to include a trace of human in each photograph, something that is missing in *Romantic Grasses*. In Baudrillard's photo (fig. 7) chosen from the *Ecstasy of Photography* exhibition, there is a figure, but it is a figure of death, a statue or possible gravestone figure lying prostrate on grass. Here it is the lack of depth of field that lures the viewer into nothingness. No distinguishing features allow for the figure to be neither the self nor the other, a disembodiment in a world without living bodies. The human is extinguished from the photograph, but a trace (possibly a catastrophe or imperfection) is left.

"We leave traces everywhere—viruses, lapses, germs, catastrophes signs of defect or imperfection, which are like our species' signature in the heart of the artificial world."⁴¹

Other photos in this exhibition include beds that have been slept in, chairs that have been sat in, and so on.⁴² Anne Marsh also discovers a trace of Baudrillard himself, the photographer in these photos, a trace of the creation of the illusion.⁴³

Because *Romantic Grasses* are found images and re-shared they are often of low quality, fitting Hito Steyerl's criteria of an underground economy of sharing poor media.⁴⁴ They are neither in high definition (HD) nor interactive—instead, they are proletarian: uploaded, downloaded, shared, re-formatted, re-edited.⁴⁵ *Romantic Grasses* does not conform to the David Attenborough, HD idealist stereotype illusion that, according to Baudrillard, ruins profound illusion.⁴⁶ Instead it is the poor, profound illusion of grass in your social network. It is devoid of human subject. It creates an ironic, artificial function of itself instead of a glorified mirror of the human subject.⁴⁷ These photos of grass are not granted a viral meme power in the current virtual environment, and must wait for the human subject to disappear before their regenerative potential is recognized in virtuality.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Baudrillard, "Objects, Images," 24.

⁴² Baudrillard, *Ecstasy of Photography*.

⁴³ Anne Marsh, "Snapshots of Nothingness."

⁴⁴ Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *E-Flux* #10, November 2009, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Baudrillard, "Aesthetic Illusion," 29.

⁴⁷ Baudrillard, "Objects, Images," 13.

⁴⁸ Although the Facebook platform regenerates them to a degree amongst my friends according to corporate and social norms/algorithms, the numbers of likes, and re-shares are minimal.

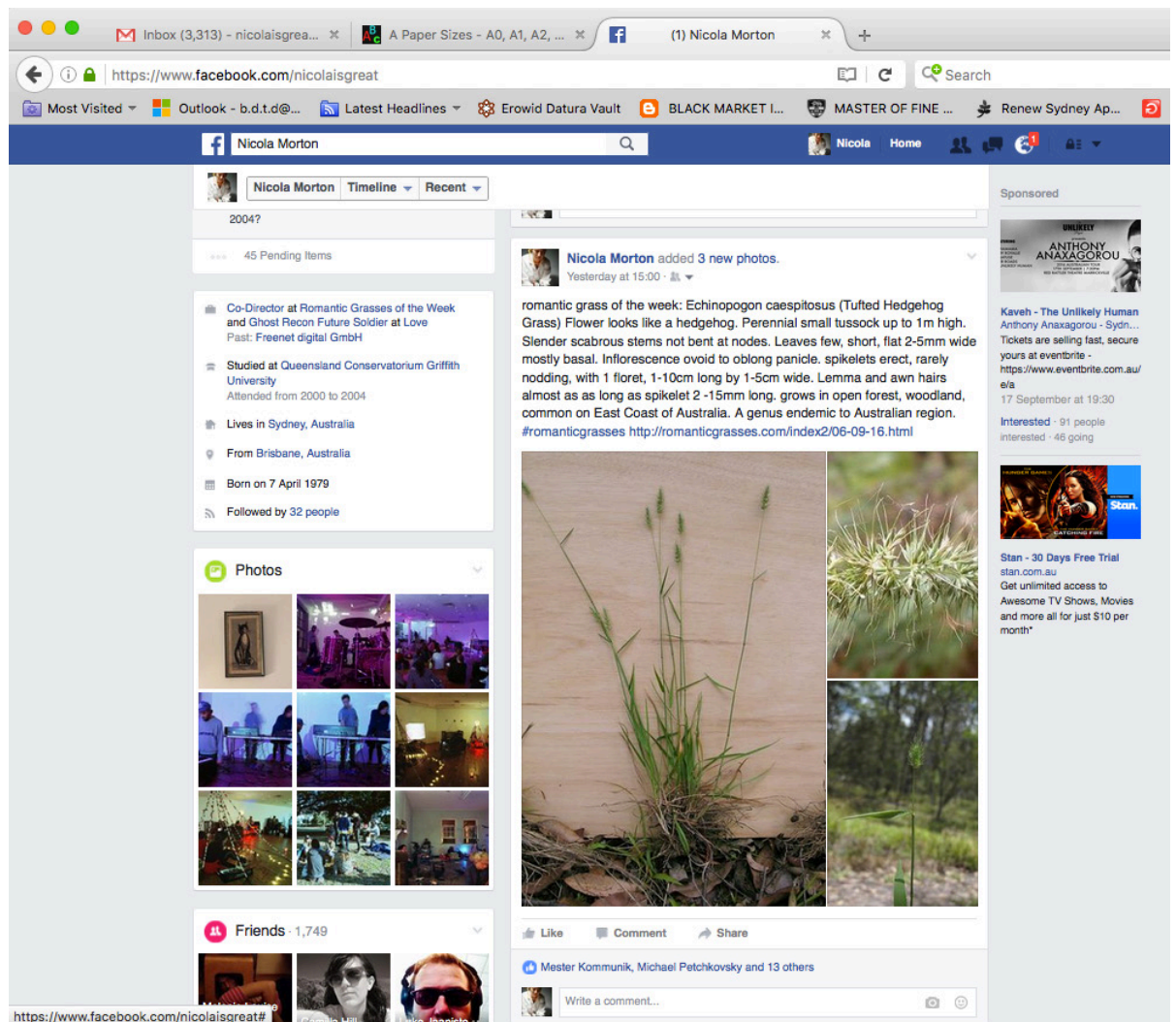


Figure 9: Nicola Morton, *Romantic Grass of the Week* (12-09-16). Screenshot.

Jacques Derrida, also a French counter-culture post-structuralist, encourages us to deconstruct the structure of language and symbolism.⁵⁴ Art theorist, Krauss further encourages us to deconstruct the structure of the mark.⁵⁵ In an effort to fracture time, the artist fractures the subject, leaving shards of glass and identity as clues for a viewer's conditional reasoning.⁵⁶ *Romantic Grasses* is content shared online, where the trace of the sharer functions as its mark. It utilises a 'romantic' strategy espoused by Krauss, an artists' violence of self, the photos accompanied by shards of the artist's identity. The photograph draws the viewer in via fragments of the artists self, to an artificial world of grass, with fragments of other human subjects surrounding it on the viewer's screen.. In the minefield of 'self' and 'other' that is the "stupid boring Internet" it remains neither, as *Romantic Grasses* becomes a trace of a virtual life without us.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Poertner, "Is Facebook Making us Stupid."

“WE SHALL BE YOUR FAVOURITE DISAPPEARING ACT”⁵⁰

Romantic Grasses assumes a virtual identity that will, according to Baudrillard’s ideas about the ‘precession of simulacra,’ eventually precede their real identity.⁵¹ These grasses commingle with our virtual identities, and only time will see if they survive when the human subject has been trampled.

These found photographs of grasses can act as traces or clues to another world, either Baudrillard’s future world without humans or Kraus’ disembodied, fragmented artist. The role of trace in these artworks can be likened to the role of trace in immunisation – by the viewer being presented only traces of the human subject/experience, the Internet’s power of self-reflecting Narcissism-narcosis is abated. As social media becomes an all-consuming virtuality, *Romantic Grasses* are imagined as an immunisation against slavery to our virtual selves, The re-purposed photographs are bestowed a magical power to ‘grow’ and ‘regenerate’ in this virtual environment.

⁵⁰ Baudrillard, “Objects, Images,” 15. Baudrillard reworks Barbara Kruger’s 1984 photo montage artwork *Untitled (we will no longer be your favourite disappearing act)*.

⁵¹ Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra,” *Art & Text*, trans. Paul Foss and Paul Patton, Spring 1983 (Melbourne: Paul Taylor), 3-47. Baudrillard developed notions of ‘simulacrum’ and ‘hyperreality’ where reality was displaced by virtuality, simulation and copies. His essay “Precession of Simulacra” features an argument of the “logic of simulation” characterized by a precession of the model and a confusion between the model and the fact.

<<CHAPTER 2 - THE PSYCHIC IS LOST>>

In chapter two, the disappearance of the subject/event is intersected by the paranormal.⁵² In the exhibition, documents of events imbued with a paranormal nature (ie. Psychic, ghost etc) are processed and multiplied, smashing the uniqueness of the suggested paranormal event into a multiplicative mundane artwork. The art of transforming something special into the boring-everyday is also reflected in the mission of the artists' Narcissus-narcosis vaccination which aims for the mundane in favour of a unique druggy spectacle of the Internet.

*Take me to another strange world where I
am a randomly coloured pixel in the universe of a malfunctioning
machine.*

*Take me to another strange world ... take
me via UFO.*

*Take me to another strange world where I can talk to my dead
husband.*

Ghost Glitch (Fridge Magnet) and *Ghost Glitch (Screen Capture)* are still images from *Wireless Psychics Experiment #5*. This accidental image was acquired by screen capturing from the webcam recording of *Wireless Psychics Experiment #5*. The image shows an accidental glitch that occurred while documenting a psychic test during the new moon. In pagan religions the new moon is regarded as the time

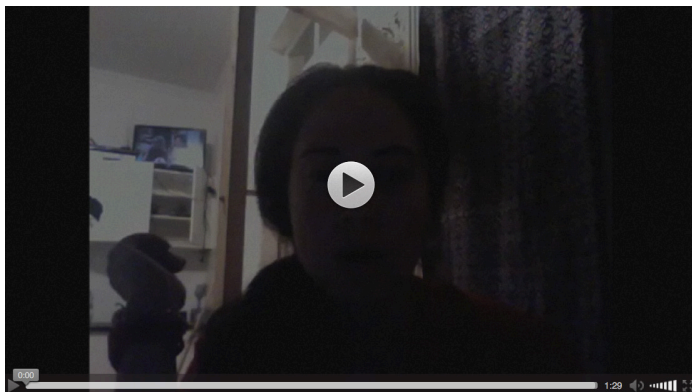
⁵² *Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. "paranormal," accessed November 3, 2016, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/paranormal>: denoting events or phenomena such as telekinesis or clairvoyance that are beyond the scope of normal scientific understanding.

when the veil is 'thin' between dimensions.⁵³ I use these cultural beliefs as grounds to present the glitch as a psychic (paranormal) artefact, evidence of a strange world where a picture of me becomes a randomly coloured pixel.



Figure 10: (Left) Nicola Morton, *Ghost Glitch (Print)*.

Figure 11 (Right) Nicola Morton, *Ghost Glitch (Fridge magnet)*.



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[#moonpsychics new moon in Libra, Oct. 13, 2015](#)

[WIRELESSPSYCHICS EXPERIMENT #5: SWEET SPOT/NEW MOON](#) The new moon is time to find your strength within. Start at your Wi-Fi router, as you walk, try and sense the Wi-Fi strength. Retrace your steps and identify the spot you felt the strongest Wi-Fi, place a special amulet there. If you want to test your ability you can use the Wi-Fi SweetSpots app (Android and iOS) and retrace your path again.

Figure 12: Nicola Morton. *Wireless Psychics Experiment #5 (2015-10-13)*. hyper-Linked video, 1:29 (left), text (right). <http://moonpsychics.com/content/pages-newmoon/20151013.html>.

⁵³ Simone M Matthews, "General Overview Full and New Moons," *Universal Life Tools*, accessed August 19, 2016, <http://www.universallifetools.com/tag/new-moon-april-2016/>; Tess Whitehurst, "The Veil Between the Worlds is Thin, What Does it Even Mean?" *PaganSquare*, October 5, 2015, <http://witchesandpagans.com/pagan-culture-blogs/fresh-brew/the-veil-between-the-worlds-is-thin-what-does-it-even-mean.html>.

This glitch was unintended but its function in the disappearance of the world as we know it is clear. Although this was supposed to be a photo of the artist it is instead an abstract pattern of RGB pixels test patterning on a grey background. This parallels Baudrillard's anecdotes about the human subject not wanting to be captured: "One's inability to photograph human beings is clear proof of the manipulation of the photographic subject by its object."⁵⁴

The metamorphosis of the web camera video from mirror to pixelated glitch also follows the Derridian conjecture of violence that exists within a pure trace or imprint, where a multiplicity precedes unity, the mirror smashed to fracture and layer time.⁵⁵ I am being manipulated by the webcam to either not exist or believe in ghosts?

Baudrillard reiterates a series of accidents that happened when he tried to photograph a person. First a full roll of film was blanked and then a roll of film disappeared.⁵⁶ He further explains accidents as a trace of the human subject—lapses, catastrophe, signs of defect—are like our species' inscription in the mainframe of the artificial world.⁵⁷ Accidents are a scene of a crime, where clues can be left. So instead of pursuing the ghost I pursue the trace. *Ghost Glitch (Fridge Magnet)* enlarges the glitch's pixels to become pieces of a puzzle, and the viewer is given clues to another world that was, a trace of a world without human's. In *Ghost Glitch's* accidental manipulation we are left with another that-has-been.

Ghost Glitch (Fridge Magnet) is infused with plasticity, allowing a viewer the option to rearrange the pixels (24 printed fridge magnet puzzle pieces) on the steel sheet in front of them. This is an attempt to create a relational effect with the viewer, an emotional connection to solving a puzzle of traces/clues. This relates to not only an attempt to erase the subject (person/artist) but also an attempt to erase the singular event and replace it with multiples.

⁵⁴ Jean Baudrillard "The Art of Disappearance" in *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact* (Brisbane: IMA, 1997), 29.

⁵⁵ "Pure trace—it does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or wibile, phonic, or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude," Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 260.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Baudrillard "Aesthetic Illusion," 24

*Take me to another strange world
where the psychic
is unexceptional: the Internet*

The Internet is engaged with its own virtuality and has from the start tried to build virtual communities. Even before the Internet went public, counterculture icons Stewart Brand and Larry Brilliant in 1985 founded one of the oldest continually operating virtual communities, The WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link).⁵⁸ These days its 2693 members however do not compete with the 1.65 billion of Facebook.⁵⁹ Howard Rheingold, a leading voice in The WELL, imagines the Internet as one big virtual community, as a point of singularity, and attests that the Internet can gift us with precognition:

“If we are temporally close to a point of singularity in human/planetary history/evolution, then maybe we can feel some kind of presently unexplainable 'fore-echo.'”⁶⁰

Collecting portrayals of the psychic in the media is part of Susan Hiller's oeuvre. She is an artist and anthropologist who maintains that the psychic is part of the real world.⁶¹ Her found cinema work *Wild Talent* proclaims, “a world without UFOs, demons, etc. How tedious.”⁶² However upon closer inspection her artworks imbue the psychic with the same tedium that affects everyday life.

⁵⁸ *Wikipedia*, s.v. “The WELL,” last modified July 28, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_WELL

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, and “Number of Monthly Active Facebook Users Worldwide as at 2nd Quarter 2016” *Statista*, accessed August 18, 2016, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/>.

⁶⁰ Howard Rheingold in “Spirituality,” title page for conference on *Whole Earth Lectronic Link*, accessed August 18, 2016, <http://www.well.com/conf/spirit/>.

⁶¹ Sarah Kent, and Jacqueline Morreau, “Anthropology into Art: Susan Hiller interviewed by Sarah Kent & Jacqueline Morreau,” *Artlink*, Sept-Oct 1982 (Sydney: Writers & Readers, 1982), 138-53. On Hiller's anthropology in art see page 139: “it turned out to be an approach to art practice that takes some of the methods and/or attitudes toward art of anthropology, and uses them to deal with cultural artifacts from our own society.”

⁶² Sarah Kent, “Susan Hiller, Lisson Gallery: An Artist Fascinated By the Wild, the Untamed and the Paranormal,” *The Arts Desk*, November 15, 2015, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.theartsdesk.com/visual-arts/susan-hiller-lisson-gallery>.

Hiller's inclusion of unsubstantiated events into the dry, dispassionate, academic objectified is an amendment to both anthropological research methods and conceptualism.⁶³ Art historian Dr Alexandra Kokoli writes of Hiller, "Most interestingly, in the hybrid field of 'para-conceptualism,' neither conceptualism nor the paranormal are left intact... as... the prefix 'para' symbolizes the force of contamination through a proximity so great that it threatens the soundness of all boundaries."⁶⁴ So it is in Hiller's arrangement of the paranormal and other heady concepts of death that the constructs of rationality (and conventional anthropology) are blurred.



Figure 13: Susan Hiller, *Wild Talents*, 1997. 3 channel video installation; chair, lights, 2 programmes: colour with sound, 6 min 26 sec.; 1 programme: black and white, silent, 6 min 30 sec.

Her photographs conform to Baudrillard's notion of a trace of the subject as discussed earlier. For example, the photographs in *Monument* focus on forgotten hero plaques in a London park, and the images in *J Street Project* focus on Jewish street signs in Germany. Often the objects are given a magical or spiritual quality, like the holy water in *Homage to Joseph Beuys*. All her collections feature an attention to detail and a large number of images, emphasizing the omnipresence of the object and the non-importance of the human subject – we are dematerialized.

⁶³ "It's our [artists] job to represent and mirror back the values of the culture in a way that people haven't seen before." Rachel Cooke, "Susan Hiller: I've had just the right amount of attention, enough not to live in total despair," *The Guardian*, January 30, 2011, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jan/30/susan-hiller-tate-britain-interview>.

⁶⁴ Susan Hiller, "About," artist website, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://susanhiller.org/about.html>.



Figure 14: Susan Hiller, *J Street Project*, 2002-5. 303 photographs, each 28.67 x 20 cm. Installation at Timothy Taylor Gallery, London, 2005.

In addition her appropriative treatment of the Internet demonstrates more ‘another strange world’ qualities. The viewer is presented with many unfamiliar things made to look familiar. When viewed together the large collections of colourful auras and levitating people debase the uniqueness of the subject, their feats becoming all too familiar/normal (fig. 15)

This unifying principle reminds Yve-Alain Bois of Alfred Jarry’s *pataphysique*, a virtual world/science of imaginary solutions espousing “not very exceptional exceptions.”⁶⁵ This principle mediates out the validity of the human subject and the material/media, putting more focus on the (non-visible) object/concept.

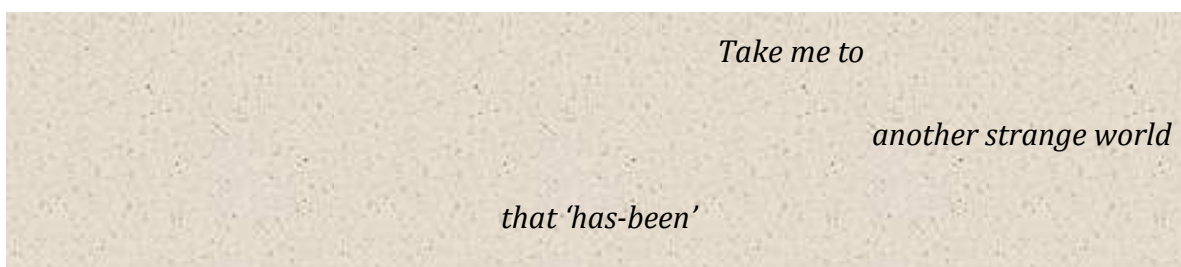


Figure 15 (Left) Susan Hiller, *Homage to Marcel Duchamp*, 2008. 50 digital prints, each 30.4 x 30.4 cm, overall 190 x 380 cm. (Right) Susan Hiller, *Homage to Yves Klein: Levitations*, 2008. 150 monochrome dry prints, each 10.2 x 15.2 cm, arranged in 25 framed composites; overall 170 x 170 cm

⁶⁵ Susan Hiller, Yve-Alain Bois and Guy Brett in conversation, “Retrievals,” *Susan Hiller* (London: Tate, 2011), 28.

The effect is surprisingly banal, as the presentation of so many images look so similar. The human faces are not distinguishable, and upon a longer inspection they become less kitsch and more banal. Their lack of ability to create a unique picture challenges the media of photography and the Internet. The success of the work lies in taking away the dimension of uniqueness of each photo, which highlights an absence, and as a result they become like Baudrillard's photographs of nothingness. It also brings to mind Walter Benjamin's prediction that mechanical reproduction techniques would shatter the 'aura,' the power of art's link to magic.⁶⁶

Hiller respects that the people who made the photographs were purposely striving for the rest of the world to disappear as they completed their paranormal feat, picturing a "self seen only in dreams."⁶⁷ Could we all see ourselves as the same in our dreams?



The mingling of 'psychic' and 'staged photograph' has a history running from the nineteenth century photographs of spiritual mediums with their ectoplasm⁶⁸ to Yves Klein's *Leap Into The Void*.⁶⁹ Each of these photographs tried to erase what had actually been and replace it with a new emotive meaning. It is hard to discuss performance works such as *Wireless Psychics* without discussing its documentation, the performance photograph. Even without intent to deceive, performance photographs can erase the 'truth' of an event through cropping, close-ups, and symbology, thereby augmenting and alluding to more than just the event.

⁶⁶ Andreas Leventis "Auras: Homage to Marcel Duchamp" (2010), reproduced in *Susan Hiller* (London: Tate, 2011), 120.

⁶⁷ Andreas Leventis "Levitations: Homage to Yves Klein" (2010), reproduced in *ibid.*, 119.

⁶⁸ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "ectoplasm (paranormal)," last modified 18 August 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ectoplasm_%28paranormal%29.

⁶⁹ Cornelia Parker in "Artists on Art Cornelia Parker on Yves Klein's Leap Into the Void 1960," Interview by Martin Gayford, *The Daily Telegraph*, Feb 3, 2001, 12.



Figure 16: (Left) Eva Carriere and fake ectoplasm, 1912. Courtesy Wikipedia.

Figure 17: (Right) Yves Klein, *Leap Into the Void*, 1960.

Artists and practitioners are consistently reconstructing the indexicality of photography.⁷⁰ Photographs are objects in the now, but also referent to traces of ‘that-has-been.’ In *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes contends that photography makes the world able to overlap, and to superimpose.⁷¹ Photographs remind us of the ever-changing nature of life and affirm in the now, the ephemeral nature of performance that was.⁷² Within the life-death narrative, the structuralist, Barthes, locates the ‘punctum’, an emotional and physical closeness the viewer can feel when viewing the photograph.⁷³ Post-structuralist Baudrillard politicizes the power of the image further. The art of photography evolves from Barthes simultaneous memento of an ever-changing world to Baudrillard’s murderous capacity of the image to create a new simulated world, the hyperreal, which bears no witness to ‘that-has-been.’

Wireless Psychics Experiments (The Photos) [WPE (The Photos)], are documents of performances for audiences.⁷⁴ Currently at just two photos, it exemplifies the

⁷⁰ Anne Marsh, *Performance Ritual Document* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 2014), 33.

⁷¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1989), 74-77.

⁷² Marsh, *Performance Ritual Document*, 30-34.

⁷³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

⁷⁴ Marsh, *Performance Ritual Document*, 24. Documentation is usually understood to be a recording, photographs, video or film of the live event as it was being performed before an

ephemeral, dynamic and ongoing nature of the *Wireless Psychics* project. In Appendix 1,⁸⁴ all ten experiments are described- three of them are not yet performed, six of them are not documented by photograph or video. *WPE (The Photos)* intend to act as cul-de-sacs, pooling training energy, disappearing the event in lieu of a somewhat mundane emotional connection/effect. *WPE (The Photos) (i)* is from *Wireless Psychics Experiment #8 [WPE#8]* and *WPE (The Photos) (ii)* is from *Wireless Psychics Experiment #3 [WPE#3]*. *WPE#8* will be installed in the examination exhibition.



Figure 18: *WPE (The Photos) (i)*, 2015. Digital photo print, 8" x 12". Photo by Alan Warren.

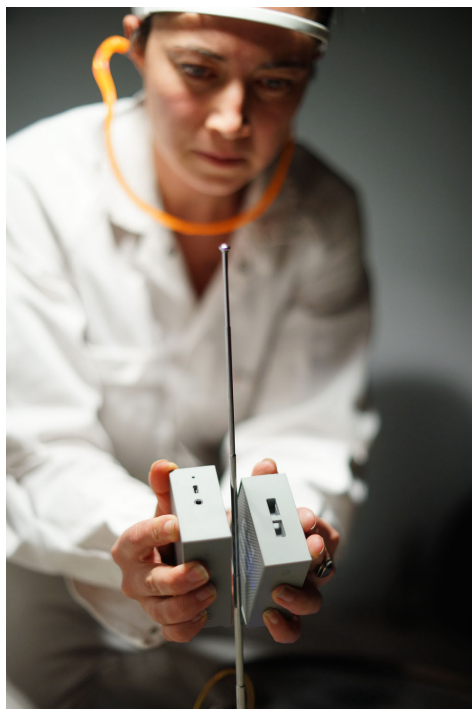


Figure 19: *WPE (The Photos) (iii)*, 2015. Digital photo print, 12" x 8". Photo by Alan Warren.

audience (other *Wireless Psychics Experiments* performances were held without audience in the studio or home or for video).

WPE#8: A Philodendron's bio current is monitored by an Electroencephalograph (EEG) headset attached to the plant. Electrical fluctuations in the range of the standard human brainwave states of relaxed, in focus, and alert produce movement in two servomotors placed like ears on the headset. The audience is invited to wear a similar headset and monitor their own brainwaves while sitting with the plant. While sitting with the plant the audience is invited by a text to, "Sync with the plant to access your news feed."

WPE #3: This experiment translates the three Wi-Fi frequencies present in the room into sounds (2426 MHz [the lowest], 2438 MHz [the mid-point] and 2448 MHz [the highest]). These frequencies are transposed into the auditory range (multiplied by 10^{-7}) to produce a drone-like chord of audible sine waves tuned to 242.6, 243.8 and 244.8 Hz. The artist performs by sitting on the floor with three items: a set of speakers around her body (solid object), an antenna (resonant object) and tray of water (resonant object). She performs slow improvised movements that reveal the effect of solid and resonant bodies on sound waves and clusters of frequencies. The monotony and closeness in pitch of these sine waves cause a slight acoustic beating (a pulsing of the volume). This experiment invites the viewer into an experience of an acoustic approximation of the Wi-Fi frequencies present in the room.

WPE (*The Photos*) has a photographic focus and contributes to the dialogue around performance documented by photograph, by creating dead traces and artefacts. In this way this work compliments the *WPE#8* and *WPE#3* performances but is not them. The photographs and performances are authored simultaneously but the document and performance are titled separately.

Photographs of performances are continually treated as discrete artefacts from the actual performance.⁷⁵ This separation of artefact and actual performance allows

⁷⁵ Marsh, *Performance Ritual Document*, 18.

for the moment of performance to remain ephemeral, leaving the photographic documents of performance as artefacts whilst acknowledging a fluid present. At least half of the performances of *Wireless Psychics* remain largely undocumented to emphasise the ephemeral nature of performance and the continuous nature of 'training.' And so, *WPE (The Photos)* represent final dead ends in the training, a documentation that is 'already dead,' 'a mute witness of its own history.'⁷⁶ In comparison with Klein's *Leap into the Void* the emotional effect is not a miracle but instead everyday symbols of struggle.

Without contextualisation it is difficult to say what documentation photographs may impart to a viewer. So *WPE (The Photos)* can be analysed for their range: from generating traced (a clue of the past), punctum (a feeling of emotional and physical closeness) or simulated (the objects in photograph create a new truth) meanings.

What Has-Been?

- i) A medium length shot with close-up focus on Philodendron with electroencephalograph headset device installed on top of it. A new plant shoot is in focus and centre of attention. There is an audience member who is out of focus, but we can see he has fluffy cat ears on.
- ii) Close-up. Artist in white suit in white room holds hand held speakers up to an antenna. Antenna and speakers are in foreground focus.

According to Barthes, photographs presented as what 'has-been' would have differing effects relying on the subjectivity of the viewer, for example if they were familiar in a love/death way with the subject, or with the particular details of certain symbols.⁷⁷ Barthes contends that a photograph can have more effect if the viewer was not actually there.⁷⁸ Similarly the photographs *WPE (The Photos)* create a closeness that could not have been experienced in the live performance. The symbols of outstretched hands in *WPE (The Photos) (i)* and the close up of the plant shot in *WPE (The Photos) (ii)* create an emotional closeness, symbolic of everyday hope, struggle, as well as represent an augmented trace of what-has-been, no longer representing the event. See figure 20 for how a further cropping of *WPE (The Photos) (i)* has enhanced effect (for promotions). Whether this

⁷⁶ Ibid, 18.

⁷⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 78-82.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

emotional effect can supercede and disappear the actual event, replacing it with a hyper-reality, lies in further multiplications, additions and development for presentation strategies of *WPE (The Photos)*.⁸⁹



Figure 20: A cropped image from *WPE (The Photos)* used to promote a group show at AirSpace Projects.

WPE (The Photos) carry with them a varying range of emotional/physical and symbolic meanings in addition to or substituting their use as performance documents. Their intent to disappear the event is evident in the emotional connection construed within the photographs and will be further developed with the progression of the *Wireless Psychics* project.

Susan Hiller approaches the disappearing event in another way. She presents the ephemeral as audio installation. She records first person accounts of paranormal events (such as UFO abductions and out of body experiences) and uses a whole lot of them in the one installation, almost creating one singularity. *Witness* includes more than 500 recordings in different languages of people's experiences/sightings of UFOs and abductions, whilst *Clinic* uses 200 recordings (again in different languages) of people's out of body experiences. Although not presenting themselves as evidence, these narratives account for people's similar experiences in different worlds that may-have-been.⁷⁹ The audio narratives do not serve as evidence, it in fact erases the unique event, due to the similarity of the multiplicity of the accounts. Aesthetically, the installation of *Witness* and *Clinic* contrast each other. *Witness* consists of 400 disc-shaped speakers (almost looking like UFO artefacts) hanging from the ceiling at different lengths, whilst the installation of *Clinic* emphasizes emptiness, the 20 speakers hidden with no trace of any

⁷⁹ Ann Gallagher, "Shapeshifting," in *Susan Hiller* (Tate: London, 2011) 23.

artefacts; instead there is just audio triggered by sensors. The magic is found not in the uniqueness of the event but in the mundane multiplicity of bare speakers or numbered emptiness respectively.



Figure 21: (Left) Susan Hiller, *Witness*, 2000. Approx. 400 speakers, 10 audio tracks each of 50-60 recordings; wires, lights.
Figure 22: (Right) Susan Hiller, *Clinic*, 2004. Audio sculpture: 20 speakers, amplifiers CD sources, sensors, real-time audio processing, light modulation system.

We activate the unspectacular in the psychic to alleviate and transform the function of deceiving, deluding media. Instead of the uniqueness of the Narcissus-narcosis stupor we are met with a normal, boring, multiplicity. The psychic is a possibility hidden in multiplicities of situations, it is not an authority or unique event. *Ghost Glitch* is a (possibly psychic) accident that the viewer is allowed to remediate from several puzzle pieces, while *WPE (The Photos)* present us with the everyday symbols of struggle with technology. Similarly, Susan Hiller's large collections of paranormal accounts make the original aura of each event disappear, as they start to appear possibly normal. The understated emerges, subduing the 'special' psychic, paranormal events. And so, our magic is repurposed into the mundane in order to immunise and find relief from the exhausting spectacle of media's stupefying effect.

<<CHAPTER 3 – IT SPEAKS IN COLOURS>>

Take me to another strange world without messages, because I'm covered in them. Take me to a world where I can hear the remote control but not the TV. Take me to a world where the only visible light is Wi-Fi's 2.4 GHz. Take me to a world where I can climb a mountain of Wi-Fi.

Moving away from conceptualism and traditional media studies, my works focus on the configuration and structures of media rather than the nature of art or media's content. McLuhan attests that the structure and configuration of media is where we find its magic and subliminal charge.⁸⁰ In particular this chapter is concerned with the process of **translating** or converting a functioning electric-media into something else (for example, Wi-Fi signals into a 3-D mountain model, or a wasabi-pea can into a Wi-Fi antenna). Instead of picking an emotional effect and painting that, contemporary artists working with technology tend to work from a discovery and translate it into something else:⁸¹

A.N. Whitehead explained how the great discovery of the nineteenth century was the discovery of the technique of discovery. Namely, the technique of starting with the thing to be discovered and working back.⁸²

Peter Blamey; Adam Somlai-Fischer, Usman Haque and Bengt Sjöln; and Peter Jellitsch mix and match **structures** of different media. Their translations of Wi-Fi's radio waves and infrared radiation invite us into strange new imaginary worlds and media. Similarly, by translating the bio-currents in a viewer and plant in *Wireless Psychics Experiment #8*, I hope to imagine a new model of physiological media that can help us face impending changes. As McLuhan noted,

⁸⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 20.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸² *Ibid.*

“The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He, then, builds models or Noah’s arks for facing the change that is at hand.”⁸³

*Take me to
another strange world
where I can hear the remote control
but not the TV*

Peter Blamey is a Sydney artist working with electromagnetic energies and media devices. His installation at Merry Crisis, *Nano* (2016) constructs an environment devoid of media as we know it. He mixes and matches structures from televisions, radios, computers, telegraph and solar power to present a model for change where solar power is the base of our transmitting media.



Figure 23: Peter Blamey *Nano*, 2016. Installation view, Merry Crisis, Sydney. Courtesy: Peter Blamey.

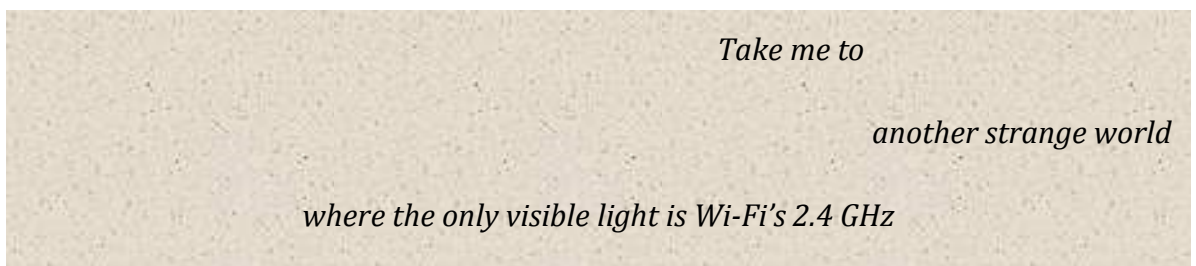
His previous work with solar panels utilises visible light from burning stainless steel wool, projections, strobing lights, etc to convert the light’s (solar) energy to sound.⁸⁴ This installation (fig. 23) sees him delve into non-visible light.⁸⁵ We work

⁸³ Ibid., 65.

⁸⁴ Peter Blamey, *Catcher*, performance, accessed on November 7, 2016, <https://peterblamey.net/catcher/>.

back from the trace he presents us with to discover his process. There is text on the wall about the speed of light in a nanosecond. The rule also on the wall represents this. We can put our hands in the gloves on each side of the rule and measure the distance the speed of light travels in a nanosecond. There is an installation on a table. There is a telegraph key, and a radio, and a hardly noticeable LED on the left hand side of the table. Then there is a rule (without the gloves) like the one on the wall. On the right side of the rule, are a solar panel and a computer speaker. If we press the telegraph key we hear a sound. We trace the process first through any wires. The solar panel is connected to a speaker where the sound comes from. But how does the solar panel create sound? The telegraph key acts as a switch to power the radio, which in turn powers the LED to turn on. Once on, the light pattern emitted by the infrared LED is translated by a solar panel and amplified by a speaker. The light pattern lasts a fraction of a second, the modulations in it hardly perceptible to the ear.

This whole situation is uncanny, all the items removed from their usual function. Normally that LED would turn on a TV, but now it's making a sound. Normally, that radio would tune into a station and play music. Normally, that telegraph key would be used to create an alphabet. Take me to a world where I can hear the remote control but not the TV.



Adam Somlai-Fisher, Usman Haque and Bengt Sjöln made a *Wi-Fi Camera Obscura* [*Wi-Fi Camera*] in 2006. The artists previously worked with mobile phone carrier frequencies, architecture and game design individually but came together for this project.⁸⁶ The trace of discovery that made this camera possible was that a wasabi-

⁸⁵ Peter Blamey, *Nano*, installation, accessed on November 7, 2016, <https://peterblamey.net/nano/>; also see Peter Blamey, *Invisible Residue*, performance, accessed on November 7, 2016 <https://peterblamey.net/invisible-residue/>.

⁸⁶ Lucy Bullivant, *Responsive Environments: Architecture, Art and Design* (London: V&A, 2006).

pea can was a perfect size to act as an antenna for the wavelengths emitted by Wi-Fi devices.⁸⁷

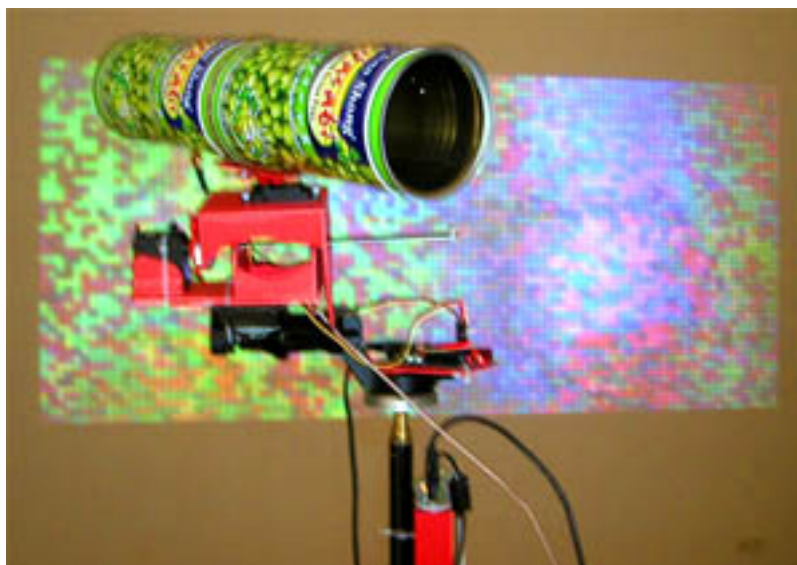


Figure 24: Adam Somlai-Fisher, Usman Haque and Bengt Sjölén, *Wi-Fi Camera*, 2006. Robotic arm, wasabi-pea can pinhole lens, Arduino microcomputer, projector (now called *Single Pixel Wi-Fi Camera*).

The *Wi-Fi Camera* mixes the form of a camera obscura with recycled rubbish and Wi-Fi station IDs/wavelengths, along with other representational forms like thermal imaging. Instead of the pinhole lens of a camera obscura we have a wasabi can and instead of seeing visible light reflected from objects the computer receives the reflected/amplified/transmitted strengths of the 2.4 GHz signal.⁸⁸ Denser objects and receivers/transmitters would reflect more light and more Wi-Fi waves.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Adam Somlai-Fischer, Bengt Sjölén and Usman Haque, *Wi-Fi Camera*, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://wificamera.propositions.org.uk/Single-Pixel-Wifi-Camera>.

⁸⁸ "Wi-Fi Camera Obscura," in *Perimeters, Boundaries and Borders: an Exhibition from Fast-UK and Folly*, ed. John Marshall (London: Fast-UK, 2008), 18-20.

⁸⁹ Adam Somlai-Fischer et al, *Wi-Fi Camera Obscura*, digital document, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.aether.hu/2007/wificamera/wifi-camera-obscura.pdf>.



Figure 25: Adam Somlai-Fisher, Usman Haque and Bengt Sjölén, *Panoramic Wi-Fi Camera*, 2010.

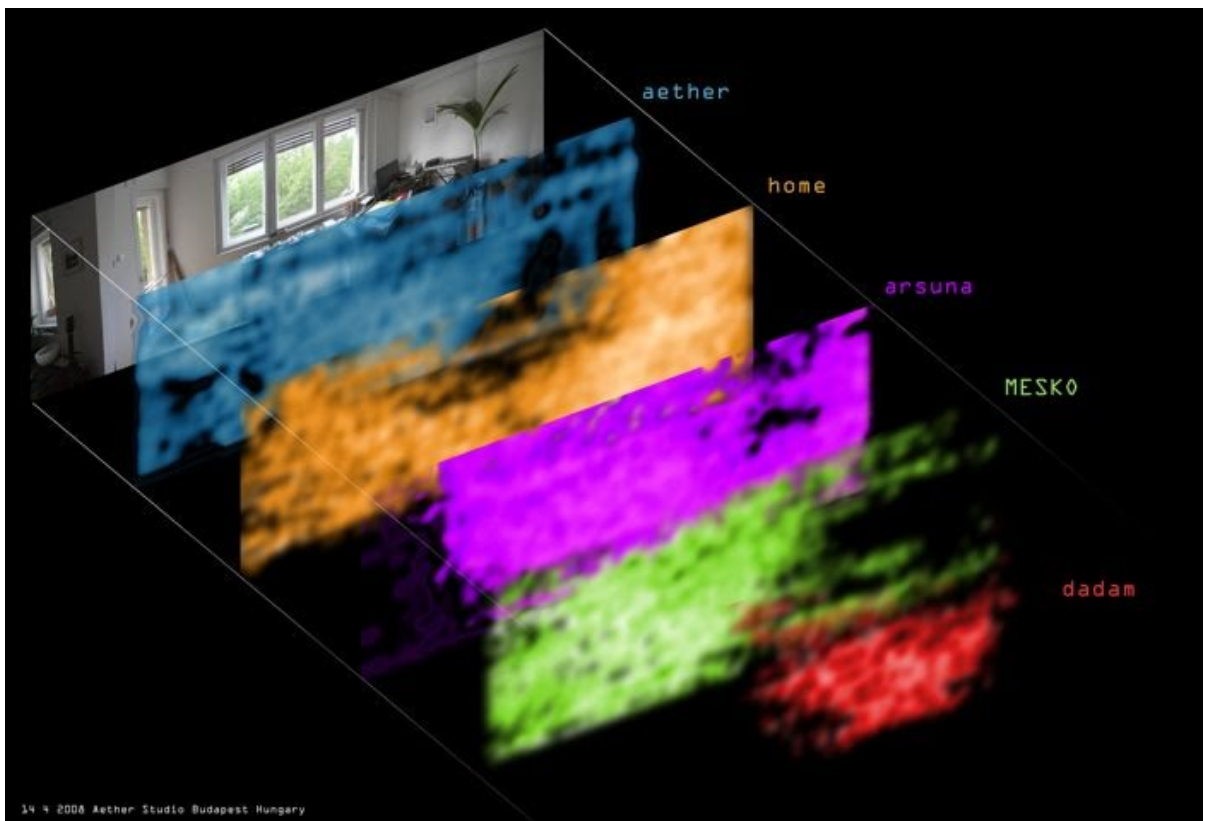
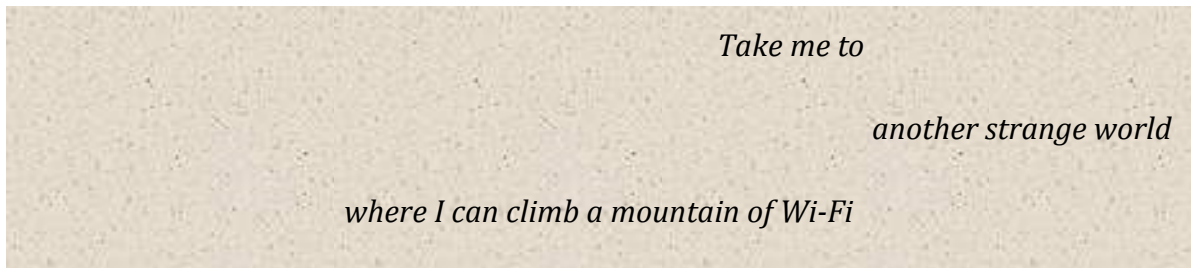


Figure 26: Adam Somlai-Fisher, Usman Haque and Bengt Sjölén, *Wi-Fi Camera*, 2008. Visualisations at Aether Studios.

When looking at the Wi-Fi wavelengths individually (fig. 26) or panoramically (fig. 25), the content/messages of our world disappear, and instead of seeing reflections of ourselves in the electric media we see the physical reflections of our constructed electric media environment. Take me to a world where the only visible light is Wi-Fi's 2.4 GHz.



Architect/artist Peter Jellitsch uses Wi-Fi radio waves to describe a space without describing the space at all. His previous works, *Streambody Drawings* (fig. 27), explore the algorithmic movements of radio waves emanating from a Wi-Fi router's antenna. His discovery that modelling radio waves can describe a space is the trace we work back from. The disappearing subjects of his representations are the space, as Wi-Fi becomes the appearing object.

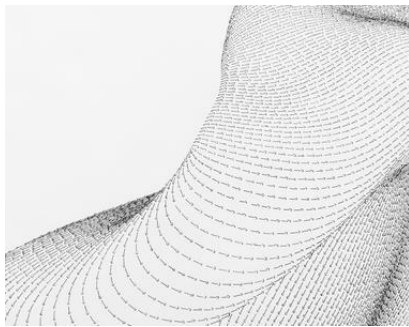


Figure 27: Peter Jellitsch, *Streambody Drawings S01/110*. 2011. Crayon on paper. Courtesy La Panacee, Montpellier, France.

Jellitsch's installation *Bleeker St Documents* mixes and matches a 3D printed form with handwritten Wi-Fi wave measurements and a photocopied explanation of how a Wi-Fi antenna works, to help us triangulate and visualise the room. One part of the installation is a 3D printed model of the 'ping', upload and download speeds at different times in different areas of the apartment. The model looks more like a mountain landscape than an actual apartment. The space measured and modelled is Julia Ault's apartment, artist and cofounder of Group Material, which Jellitsch used for an artist residency over 45 days.⁹⁰ The other components of the installation do not offer many more clues about the space; they are simply there as cognitive aids.

⁹⁰ Peter Jellitsch, "Bleeker St Documents," artist website, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.peterjellitsch.com/category/2012/bsd-nyc/>; and Vincenzo Della Corte, "I'm Drawing: Internet Studio Visit with Peter Jellitsch," Oct 9, 2015, accessed November 5, 2016, <http://arawtip.blogspot.com.au/2015/10/im-drawing-internet-studio-visit-with.html?view=snapshot&m=1>.



Figure 28: (Left) Peter Jellitsch, *Bleecker St Documents*, 2012. Measuring Notations (WLAN Network): pen, pencil on paper, 12 sheets, each 12 x 20 cm; Model: coated ureol, 80 x 24 x 120 cm; Page Duplicate: inkjet print (Alois Krischke, "Wirkungsweise und Eigenschaften von Antennen" in Rothammels Antennenbuch, Stuttgart 1995, 64–65), 100 x 140 cm (framed: 109 x 149 cm), © Peter Jellitsch, New York/Vienna, 2011/2012. (Right) Peter Jellitsch, *Bleecker St Documents*, 2012. Detail. Model: coated ureol, 80 x 24 x 120 cm. © Peter Jellitsch, New York/Vienna, 2011/2012.

They are 24 A4 sheets of measurements that Jellitsch used for the model ('ping', upload, download, etc.) and an enlarged, two page explanation of how Wi-Fi radio aerials function. Jellitsch compares his "art by triangulation approach" to Joseph Kosuth's conceptualist 1965 work *One and Three Chairs*, in that all three objects are different ways of representing the one thing.⁹¹ Whilst Kosuth includes a subjective description of a chair, a painting of a chair and an actual chair, Jellitsch subverts Kosuth's formula to science, offering us measurements, models and equations. Ideas aside, Jellitsch leaves us with a form of Wi-Fi waves translated to a solid 3-D miniature mountain landscape.

Blamey, Jellitsch and Somlai-Fischer et al are not alone. Artists have been exploring electromagnetic energies (like Wi-Fi) in the 2000s as they explored sound art in the 1990s.⁹² The relation that electromagnetic energies have to media is a lure to those hoping to comment and expose the imposing social and technological structures of our time. McLuhan guided artists,

⁹¹ Kelsey Campbell-Dollaghan, "Infographic: Sculptures Made by Wi-Fi Signals," *Fast Co Design*, January 15, 2013, accessed November 7, 2016, <http://www.fastcodesign.com/1671628/infographic-sculptures-made-by-measuring-wi-fi-signals>.

⁹² Douglas Kahn, *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 20.

“To prevent undue wreckage in society, the artist tends now to move from the ivory tower to the control tower of society.”⁹³

WPE#8 is discussed in Chapter 2 in the context of artefact/photographic documents of the performance. However, I would like to talk to the process of this work in more detail in this chapter, in particularly what is going on regarding translations. For *WPE#8* both plant and audience member wear devices that respond with movement according to the physiological bio-currents in the plant stem and brain. The devices (made by Neurogear and sourced from a children’s high-tech dress up toy) translate these sensed bio-currents in real time to servomotors that rotate the ‘ears’, where the speed of rotational movement of the ‘ears’ indicates the average electromagnetic bio-current in the human brain and plant stem. As discussed earlier the work involves instructions, a text on the wall encouraging the viewer to anticipate a Wi-Fi connection by synchronising the fluxes of rotating energy, translating (imagining) them into an Internet news feed.

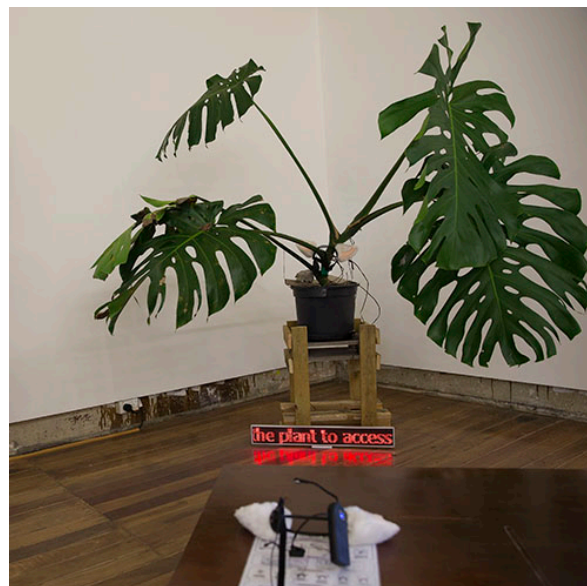


Figure 29: Nicola Morton. Installation View *Wireless Psychic Experiment #8* (2017), Sydney College of Art Gallery.

The future model *WPE#8* presents is a new physiological media, a successor to the ages of electrical and mechanical print media. Neurogear are commercially testing

⁹³ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 65.

the same media model by testing the market allure for a toy. However, by adding a plant and an artist's touch I display a hidden synergy: the magic happens in the disappearing of electric media devices and the interaction of our physiological messages with our houseplant. Bio-currents are used as a potential new medium that could interface with the Internet. We could receive messages, images and other information directly through our brainwaves. But the new device is not electrical, it is a houseplant. It is integrated into the future narrative where plants are recognized to be just as important as humans in the development of media.⁹⁴

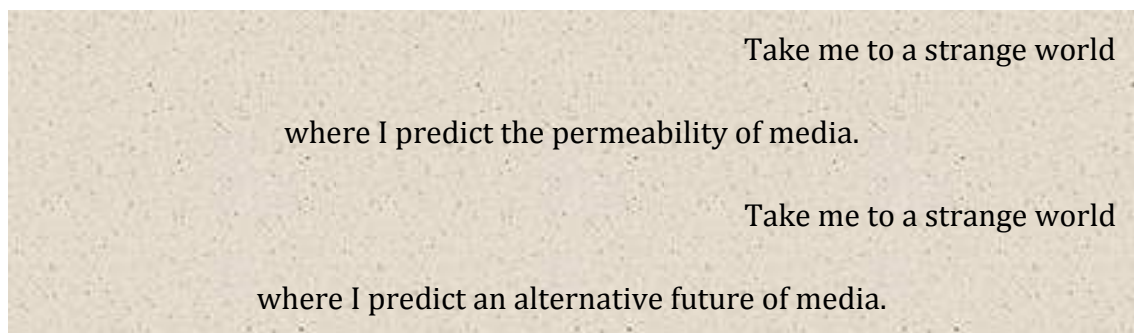
Reflecting a deep understanding of media now, artists translate the current structure and configuration of media into strange worlds where we can hear our remote control and where we can photograph the Wi-Fi with a wasabi-pea can. Artists work with these electric media energies to provide alternative nerve centres of control. *WPE#8* asks if plants could be the new media devices, translating bio-currents from the plant and viewer to aid mass communication. Could it be an evolution of process from print to electric to physio/bio-logical? An imagined future: Please consult the plant for your news feed.

⁹⁴ Also see Note 25, pg.6.

<<CHAPTER 4 - ALTERNATIVE FUTURES>>

*Divine: **verb.** Discover something by guesswork or intuition; have supernatural or magical insight into future events. Discover (water) by dowsing.*

*Divination: **noun.** the practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown by supernatural powers, often using occult traditions. From Latin 'divinare'.*



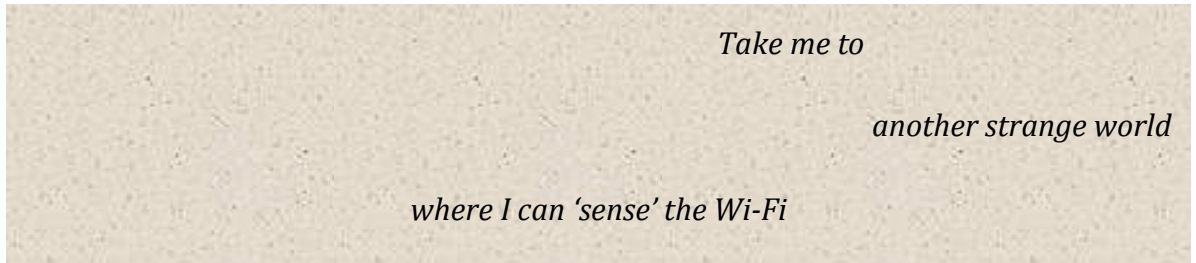
The artist is always engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because he is the only person aware of the nature of the present. – Wyndham Lewis⁹⁵

Being aware of the media environment constitutes more than just technical skill with its associated devices. Suzanne Treister and I are aware of the consuming Narcissus-narcosis of virtuality and its alliance with social control and governance. Responding to McLuhan's call, we use divination to write a history of the future.⁹⁶ By working within the structure and configuration of electric media we predict where it's going. Combining the 'magical' properties of Wi-Fi carrier frequency, astrology and dowsing in *#moonpsychics* and *#wifowell* I write future alternatives

⁹⁵ Wyndham Lewis in McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 65.

⁹⁶ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "divination," last modified October 4, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divination>; predicting the future by way of an occultic ritual or process.

for embodied mass communication, training the artist's and viewer's sensitivity to Wi-Fi strength. Similarly, Treister uses the 'magical' properties of electrical governance and symbology of the Tarot to write many possible futures of embodied and disembodied mass communication.



Prediction and divination were the focus of the event score⁹⁷ and performance series' *Wireless Psychic Experiment # 5* (WPE#5), *Wireless Psychic Experiment #10* (WPE#10) as well as the web/screen work titled *#moonpsychics*. I also investigated the possibility of constructing a divination device in *#wifiwell*.

WPE#5: Sweet Spot/New Moon: Event score and regular performances for video (2-4 minutes each). The instructional text is as follows: "The new moon is time to find your strength within. Start at your Wi-Fi router. As you walk, try and sense the Wi-Fi strength. Re-trace your steps and identify the spot you felt the strongest Wi-Fi. Place a special amulet there. If you want to test your ability you can use the Wi-Fi SweetSpots app (Android and iOS) and retrace your path again." This work is performed on every new moon since August 14, 2015. The monthly performances have been recorded on webcam mainly at the artist's home in Leichhardt and studio in Callan Park, Rozelle. It usually consists of a greeting, an acknowledgement of which zodiac sign the new moon is in, and then during the walk to the amulet there is a split screen between the webcam and the simultaneous screen recording of the Wi-Fi SweetSpots app.

⁹⁷ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "fluxus," last modified November 27, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fluxus#Event_score; *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Grapefruit (book)," last modified November 13, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grapefruit_%28book%29: The event score involves simple actions, ideas, objects from everyday life recontextualised for performance, it is a proposal for action. The event score can be performed by the artist or others and is open to variation, interpretation. Fluxus event performances are simple and elevate the mundane, they are different to 'happenings.'

WPE#10: Switch On/Full Moon: Event score, regular performance for video (2-3 minutes each), performance for audience. Instructional text as follows: “Share the crazy energy of the full moon with someone in your home. Give them 2-3 Wi-Fi capable devices. Whilst you shut your eyes, ask them to switch the Wi-Fi on in only one of the devices. Then you can open your eyes (or keep them shut) and pick the device with the Wi-Fi turned on. Can be done IRL or over Skype, etc.” This work is performed by the artist for video, on every full moon since July 30, 2015. The monthly performances have mostly been recorded in one shot on the webcam in the artist’s home. The work can be performed for audience upon request/for a fee.⁹⁸

Here, the focus is on divining the permeability of Wi-Fi by training a sensitivity to the ‘feel’ of it: when it’s on, when it’s strong. After three months (6 tests), the process seems to become random as to whether the psychic tests are right or not and an archival website was started. Gradually these experiments changed and developed into new works using ancient occult methods for divining, including astrological predictions for the tests *#moonpsychics*, and also *#wifowell*, a divining rod for Wi-Fi.

#moonpsychics is an ongoing web and screen documentary project. The web part of the project involves an email group who were first emailed the event scores and encouraged to perform them. Now, the same group is emailed astrological prediction texts plus updates on the artist’s last psychic test, each fortnight. The web part also incorporates an archival website, that is an integration of the event scores and the artists’ fortnightly performances from *WPE#5 and WPE#10*,⁹⁹ plus the astrological text predictions for each event.¹⁰⁰ If you search *#moonpsychics* on Facebook, you may see performances from others of the event score, performances

⁹⁸ *WPE#10* has been performed for audiences on July 23, 2016 at Verge Gallery, University of Sydney, and October 12, 2016 at Airspace Gallery, Marrickville.

⁹⁹ As at November 14, 2016, *#moonpsychics tests* consists of 32 entries/html pages from July 30, 2015 – present.

¹⁰⁰ As at November 14, 2016 *#moonpsychics predictions* consists of 31 entries/html pages from August 29, 2015 – present.

from the artist and astrological texts. Two screen documentary examples are presented in the examination exhibition and **attached** as a **DVD**: *#moonpsychics* (excerpt 1) and *#moonpsychics* (excerpt 2).¹⁰¹

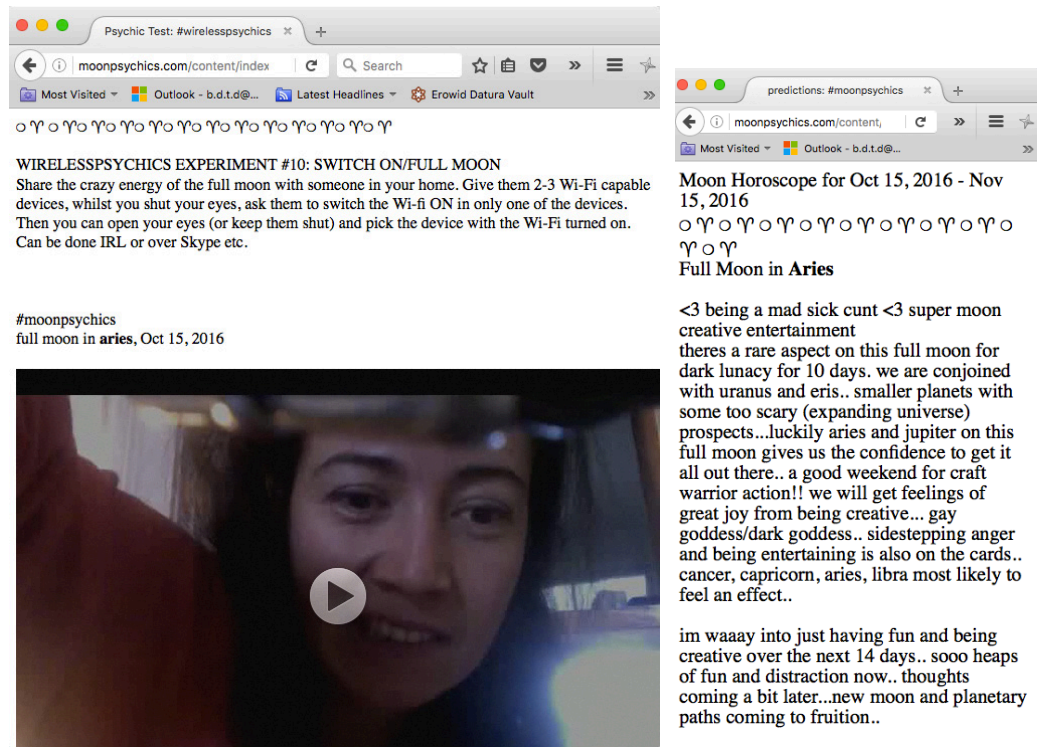


Figure 29: Nicola Morton, *#moonpsychics*.(2016-10-15) Screenshots of website, (Left) video, event score and (Right) text.

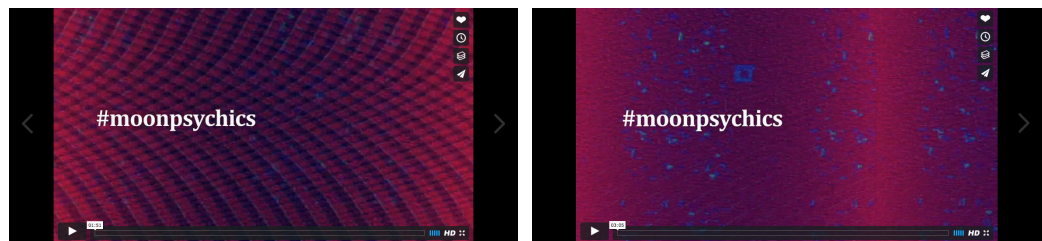


Figure 30: Nicola Morton, (Left) *#moonpsychics* (excerpt 1) 1:51 video <https://vimeo.com/191391447> (Right) *#moonpsychics* (excerpt 2) 3:05 video <https://vimeo.com/191392708>

¹⁰¹ A final screen documentary will be produced after the project's fifth year.

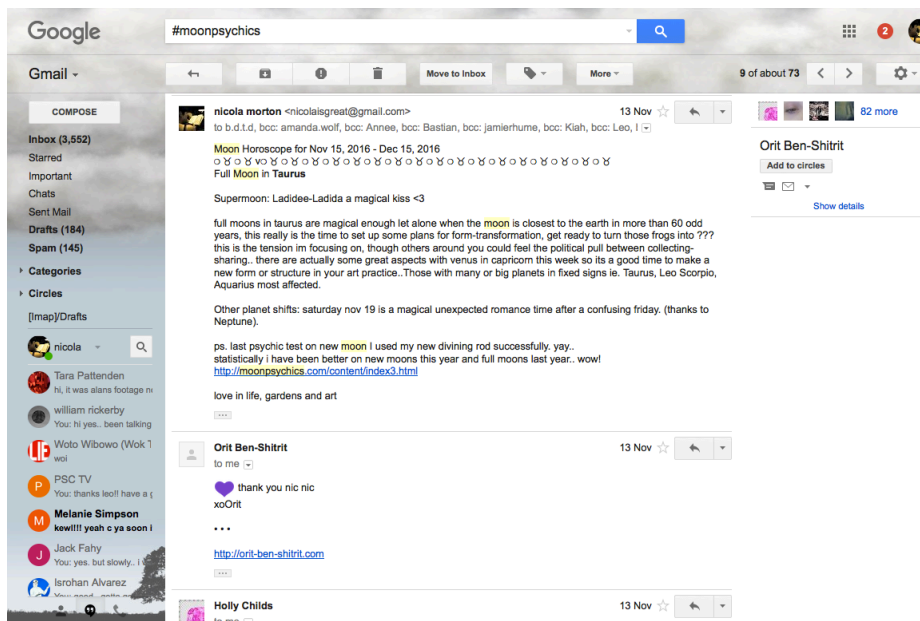


Figure 31: Nicola Morton, #moonpsychics.(2016-11-15) Screenshot of email.

#wifowell is a sculpture that responds to its environment. It is assembled in the form of a divining rod. It resembles a Y-shaped fork, a shape that has been used since the 1600s to divine for water. It holds the idea that one could divine for Wi-Fi transmissions as one divines for water. It is used in the regular *Wireless Psychics Experiments #5* performances from October 30, 2016 – present.



Figure 32: Nicola Morton, #wifowell, 2016. Divining-rod sculpture from recycled e-waste and bicycle parts, 55 x 55 x 30 cm. Photograph: Lyndal Irons.

WPE #5 and *#10* were planned for the full and new moons following a statement in Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder’s cult book *Handbook of Psi Discoveries* that said Soviet psychic research had proved that mediums were more psychic on the full moon.¹⁰² The email group who were initially sent the event score, showed interest in the zodiac sign that the full or new moon occurred in and how that could affect the test performance. So I delved into astrology and incorporated it into the fortnightly emails, “the study of the movement and relative position of celestial bodies interpreted as having an influence on human affairs and the natural world.”¹⁰³ The Western Astrology of the Zodiac (star signs) can be traced back to the ancient civilizations of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries BCE.¹⁰⁴ Each test for *WPE#10* and *WPE#5* from August 2015 had a corresponding astrological prediction (see figs. 29, 30 and 32)¹⁰⁵

“Moon Horoscope for Sep 16, 2016 - Mar 16, 2017
 ☾☿☿ ☾☿☿☿☿☿☿☿☿☿
 Lunar Eclipse in Pisces - Full Moon
 so the confusion, extra thoughts that the moon has been planting in your mind will start getting clearer or even epiphany on Friday. Those with strong Virgo or Pisces in their planets will be more affected. Look at the planet and the house Virgo or Pisces are in. i.e. Pisces in fifth house - are gonna have a massive party, but in seventh house its relationship renewal. I’m in 10th and will be challenged career wise.. Friday night is a bit of a crux, if we been putting energy into something (material or spiritual) it has the potential on Friday to meet or not meet our expectations. Let’s celebrate what floats!!”

Figure 33: Nicola Morton, *#moonpsychics*. (2016-09-16) Text excerpt.. Website: <http://moonpsychics.com/content/pages-fullmoon/20160916.html>.

#wifowell also embraces a divination method sourced from occult knowledge. The customized dowsing rod is used in performances of *WPE#5* from October 2016. As the test for *WPE#5* was meant to find strength/deposits of Wi-Fi a dowsing rod holds more easily explainable symbolic content in a live performance (compared to the initial experiments using amulets). The most common dowsing rod (practiced since the fifteenth century CE) is a Y-shaped branch from a tree, which wiggles and turns downwards when a deposit is found (skeptics attribute this

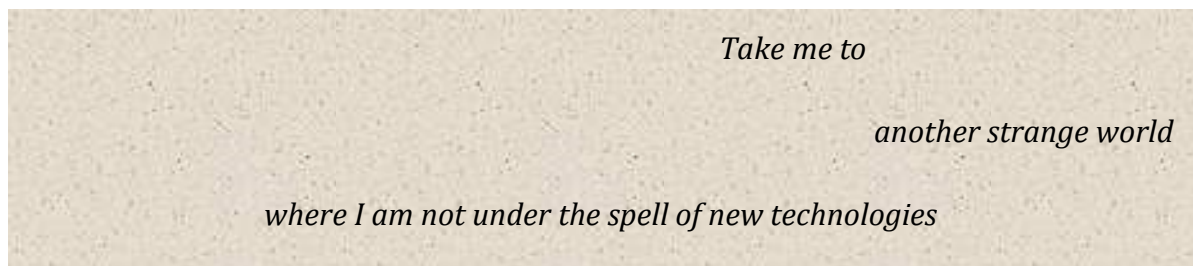
¹⁰² Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder, *Handbook of Psi Discoveries* (London: Abacus Books, 1974), xiv.

¹⁰³ *Oxford Dictionary*, sv. “astrology,” accessed November 3, 2016, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/astrology>.

¹⁰⁴ *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Astrology,” last modified November 1, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology>.

¹⁰⁵ Figure 25’s corresponding *WPE#5* Test: unsuccessful; Figure 26’s corresponding *WPE#10* Test: successful.

motion to micro-movements in the dowser's muscles).¹⁰⁶ *#wifowell* is a balancing sculpture modeled on this idea with an electric media twist - it is made using parts and antennae from Wi-Fi routers, PCI cards, hearing aids and a bicycle and turns upside down when a deposit is found.¹⁰⁷ As an object it has a use post the *WPE#5* performances, it also fits into an imagined post-apocalyptic scenario of searching for a natural deposit of radio waves of 2.4 GHz, which could then be stored or amplified. These are the most ubiquitous waves our cellular networks currently transmit on, so in a future scenario when the network is down we can imagine using *#wifowell* to look for a well of wireless knowledge.



Artist Suzanne Treister also shares a passion for divining the future of media. Her deeply researched conspiracy theories fuel her vision of the power structures inherent in technology and governance. In her project *Hexen 2.0* Treister researches the figures and organisations involved in the post WWII convergence of social engineering, technology and cybernetics. The hierarchies and organizational meetings/events she exposes are relevant components of the structure and configuration of electric media, and her research points to a conspiracy of social control that uses electric media to put us under a spell.¹⁰⁸ In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan attests to electric media as a co-conspirator for social control, however he also spends a good deal of the book detailing the social control inflicted by print media.¹⁰⁹ Treister's approach brings McLuhan's media studies approach into an

¹⁰⁶ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "dowsing," last modified September 25, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dowsing>

¹⁰⁷ Nicola Morton, *WPE#5* (Oct 30, 2016), video and text, <http://moonpsychics.com/content/pages-newmoon/20161030.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Suzanne Treister, *Hexen 2.0*, (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012). Also see "Cybernetics Meetings" in *Wikipedia* s.v. "Macy conferences," last modified June 5 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macy_conferences.

¹⁰⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 3-22.

even larger macro-environment of diverse living organisms, politics and power, what Foucault calls bio-political governance.¹¹⁰

Part of Treister's *Hexen 2.0* is a fully customized and hand-drawn 72-card tarot deck, which will "construct possible alternate futures" or "map out hypothetical future narratives."¹¹¹ The Tarot has been practiced for divination from the late eighteenth century. It is a subset of cartomancy, that is the process of using cards to gain an insight into the past, present and/or future by posing questions.¹¹² About ten of Treister's 72-card tarot deck relate directly to electric media. Treister selects the founders and components of Internet: Web 2.0, ARPANET, DARPA, computers, programming, WWW, the Intercloud, social media and even space Internet to be the subject of her cards. Treister chose her figures to relate to the traditional meanings of the Rider-Waite¹¹³ and Crowley-Thoth¹¹⁴ decks. The extensive selection of characters and organisations that make up the deck deploy such a multiplicity of future narratives so strongly related to the structure and configuration of electric media that I felt that I must do a reading in order to write my future for electric media.

Driven by the second half of this paper's title, "stupid boring internet" I asked Treister's tarot deck, "How will I no longer be exhausted by electric media (the Internet)?" Because this is a complex question I did a 10-card Celtic cross spread in order to have a larger context to draw from to create my own future media narrative from Treister's cards. The initial reading takes the form of abstract notes including the traditional title of each card drawn (present in large print on Treister's cards), the traditional meaning of the card, then Treister's customized title and meaning of the card, followed by an overall summary.¹¹⁵ In analysis of the initial reading, Treister's matching of traditional tarot symbols to electric media symbols displays a similar pattern of subverting meaning that McLuhan and Lewis

¹¹⁰ Larssen in Treister, *Hexen 2.0*, 6.

¹¹¹ Black Dog Publishing, "Hexen 2.0" Promotional text for Book, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://blackdogonline.com/all-books/hexen-2.0-tarot.html>

¹¹² *Wikipedia* sv., "Tarot."

¹¹³ A. E. Waite, *Rider-Waite Tarot Deck* (London: William Rider & Son, 1910).

¹¹⁴ Aleister Crowley, *Thoth Deck* (California: Ordo Templi Orientus, 1969).

¹¹⁵ I find the Rider-Thwaite tarot deck can easily imply a life lesson with its suite of goodies and baddies and habit of throwing light on or finding the hidden meaning of a situation. The traditional celtic cross reading draws on my own knowledge and experience with the online-engine at *Tarot Goddess*, accessed October 4, 2016, <http://tarotgoddess.com>.

Lapham used when first comparing the social controls of electric and print media.¹¹⁶ For example McLuhan's Print used "eye" and "active" whereas his Electric used "ear" and "reactive";¹¹⁷ Lapham's Citizen's "authority" and "achievement" become the Nomad's "power" and "celebrity;"¹¹⁸ and Treister turns "temperance" into "ARPANET packet switching."¹¹⁹



Figure 34: Nicola Morton's Celtic cross reading of Suzanne Treister *Hexen 2.0* tarot card deck.

¹¹⁶ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, x-xxii.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xii.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xxii.

¹¹⁹ Treister, *Hexen 2.0*, 40.

Card 1: Your situation

Traditional: *Knave of Swords* – News that brings sense to a situation; messages, communications, often written.

Treister: *Interplanetary Internet* – NASA bringing Interplanetary Gateways powered by the inventor of the Internet Vinton G. Cerf and Jet Propulsion Lab. Wired Internet to Mars, Venus and Mercury and tetherless to Saturn and Jupiter.¹²⁰

Card 2: Influences

Traditional: *XIV Temperance* – moderation, balance between the spiritual and physical. Union of the conscious and unconscious forces of life.

Treister: *ARPANET* – the first to implement TCP/IP protocol, the packet switching that brought us the Internet. Funded by the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. The first four network nodes in 1969 between UCLA, University of Utah, Stanford Research Institute and University of California, Santa Barbara. Founding members include Vinton G Cerf and others.¹²¹

Card 3: Foundation

Traditional: *10 of Chalice* – joyful completion, happy family life, abundance, endurance in love relationships, fertility and expansion.

Treister: *Bob Black* – “Abolition of Work” essay, 1985: work should be transformed into productive play. Art taken back from shops and collectors, unleashing the creative power stultified by work. Most work serves the unproductive purpose of commerce of social control.¹²²

Card 4: Influences that are passing away

Traditional: *3 of Pentacles* – co-operation with others to create a venture, the ability to transform talents into material goods or success.

¹²⁰ Treister, *Hexen 2.0*, 100; Toby Howard, “The Interplanetary Internet,” *Personal Computer World*, November 1998, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.cs.man.ac.uk/~toby/writing/PCW/ii.htm>; Bill Weber, “The Interplanetary Network: The Gateway to Exploration and Discovery,” September 16, 2002, digital document, accessed November 4, 2016, [http://descanso.jpl.nasa.gov/seminars/abstracts/viewgraphs/IND for Descanso.pdf](http://descanso.jpl.nasa.gov/seminars/abstracts/viewgraphs/IND_for_Descanso.pdf)

¹²¹ Treister, *Hexen 2.0*, 40.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 57.

Treister: *Electronic Social Engineering* – cybernetic systems of intelligence gathering, feedback and behaviour control, Flickr, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and so on – social media monitoring active listening – visibletechnologies.com & Radian6: sales/marketing force for companies track 150 million social media sites; InQTel – not for profit investing in information technologies for the CIA.¹²³

Card 5: What is on your mind at the time

Traditional: *VII The Chariot* – movement into the next phase of life, you are being pulled by the twin forces of fate and fortune, career advancement.

Treister: *VII Norbert Weiner* – an evolving jack-of-all-trades, father of cybernetics, interested in robotics, advisor for India, research into Soviets, mathematician and ethical commentator. Anti-militarization of science had a turn around in thinking from Macy Conferences. *The Human use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* to 1964, *God and Golem, Inc: A Comment on Certain Points where Cybernetics Impinges on Religion*, and declined to join Manhattan Project, the second installment of Macy Conferences, post-1960.¹²⁴

Card 6: Near future

Traditional: *10 of Pentacles* – creating a facility to share wealth with joy and pleasure. Great satisfaction, prosperity.

Treister: *Gerrard Winstanley, 1609–1676* – communal ownership of public lands, social economic organization in small agrarian communities, the true levelers. Pulling down hedges and filling in ditches to plant crops.¹²⁵

NB. Cards 1-6 form the cross and Cards 7-10 form the right-hand column.

Card 7: How your situation is affecting you at this time

Traditional: *10 of Swords* – Wisdom gained after struggle, the ending of a difficult situation, sharing knowledge with others for better or for worse.

Treister: *DARWARS* – self-sustaining architecture for training systems allowing continuing on-demand training anywhere anytime for everyone, online virtual

¹²³ Ibid., 64.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 33.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 71.

role-playing games and world.¹²⁶ From the people who brought you Telenet in the 1970s – BBN.¹²⁷

Card 8: How others view your situation

Traditional: *XIX The Sun* – an expansive life affirming energy, creativity and relationships with children, procreation, love and sexuality.

Treister: *Anarcho-primitivism* – an end to industrial civilization, marginal, imagined autonomous zones.

Card 9: Hopes or Fears

Traditional: *9 of Swords* – worries that keep one awake. A love that needs to be looked at more closely, only then will it be transformed.

Treister: *Tavistock Institute of Human Relations* – changing behaviours in groups and civilian populations. Action research first used in a clinic in 1920, helped in WWI shell shock and WWII psychological warfare and psychiatric services. Kurt Lewin, 1946, founded TIHR for the study of wider social problems and cooperated with the military to implement these policies. Lewin was a Macy Conference Attendee. Clients include UK Central and local governments, EU, international agencies, health authorities.¹²⁸

Card 10 – Overview

Traditional: *4 of Wands* – stability of ventures, a new love.

Treister: *Josiah Warren, 1798-1874* – First American anarchist, “The Peaceful Revolutionist” individualist anarchist communities autonomous zone, Utopia, Ohio 1847, and Modern Times, NY 1851. He invented a Labor Note as currency and experimented with alternative economies labor for labor time store, 1827-1830.

My future narrative becomes:

NASA is expanding the Internet to different planets, the dominance of electric media on earth will not be enough. Vinton G. Cerf, one of the founders of the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹²⁷ Wikipedia, s.v. “BBN Technologies,” last modified October 23, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBN_Technologies.

¹²⁸ Treister, *Hexen 2.0*, 98.

TCP/IP protocol, is the mouthpiece for this expansion/total contamination. However, the aim of the Internet was to abolish work, so why aren't we having fun like we were promised? Because the Internet has been a site for electronic social engineering, but it is being pulled away from this, evolving into a structure more conscious of the power structures behind it. There is an opportunity for true leveling, a planting. Whilst currently my personal energies and fun seem to be usurped by NASA and government intelligence gathering, others see me as an anarchist 'back to nature'-ist. My fears are another world war will further install social engineering practice and action research on groups. However, the time (labor) I put into my mission to alleviate boredom from electric media will receive equal rewards.

Divining alternative futures to electric media involves a bit of magic, as the artist presents an imaginary scenario, an uncanny, not-so-predictable future. Treister and myself are aided by the magical nature that Lapham ascribes to electric media, which provides an audience more ready to believe in magic, than science.¹²⁹ Through the structures of electric media, the artists' political motivations separate the viewer from the rational function and power plays of money and governments to conceptualize a heretic future in the viewer's imagination, where the artists' alternative futures can posit a magic of their own.

Separated from the content of electric media, the artist divines other worlds of the future that interact with electric media's structure and configuration.

#moonpsychics and *#wifowell* use divination as an attempt to gain insight into questions into the presence and strength of Wi-Fi signals by way of an occultic ritual or process, whilst astrology, dowsing and tarot are used by Suzanne Treister and myself to give more symbolic weight to the free-thinking natures found working with the structures and configurations in electric media.

¹²⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, xxii.

<<CONCLUSION>>

The rapturous consumption of our egos and our physical selves into a cyber-utopia or dystopia where possible, follows predictions for the future of media by media theorist, Marshall McLuhan in his 1967 book titled *Understanding Media*. Although not a complete absorption of our physical selves, the ego-consuming, ego-messaging, social media of the Internet is a kingpin of our lifestyle in society today. McLuhan says it has become the artist's duty to immunise us from the stupefying effect of the media and take us to another strange world.

As we sit by the lake of virtuality/electric media, the artist disturbs the reflection, revealing traces, planting seeds of thought that question our existence and uniqueness – effectively injecting us with thoughts that immunise us from Narcissus-narcosis. In chapter one, I focused on how *Romantic Grasses* present a trace of the disappearing physical self, placed within fragmentary traces of the artist's virtual self/identity. Hereby this trace of disappearing virtual self concomitantly immunises us against slavery to the immense self-reflection of our Facebook selves. In chapter two, I discussed how during *Ghost Glitch* and *WPE (The Photos)* the psychic and paranormal are interfaced, effectively disappearing the subject and the uniqueness of the event. Here the portrait of the artist as subject and the record of the video transmission or event disappeared. Whilst our viewers having been exposed to residual traces, of this are potentially immunised to the superpowers of the stupid Internet .

After we are immunised and doubts are formed on the solid reflection of the lake/ourselves, we discover an interior ecosystem that powers all media. You must truly know something to be at peace with it. In chapter three, I looked at how, in this environment of increasing Narcissus-narcosis, the artist can take over the control tower and try something different, like translating bio-currents in plants and humans to a form of communication, in works such as *WPE#8*. Whilst in chapter four, I explored the use of divination methods in *#moonpsychics*, and *#wifowell*, and used Treister's *Hexen 2.0* to write an independent artist's future for the reactive structure and configuration of electric media.

A concluding discovery from the research is that the duty of the artist to effect

change must continue and adapt because electric media is dynamic, reactive and in flux (a continually evolving structure). So, *Romantic Grasses* perseveres through a seemingly endless list of 17,000+ grasses and sedges, whilst *Wireless Psychics* (see Appendix 1 for a full description of all 10 experiments/performances) is maintained by continuing to perform and create new performances.

Stuck in a galaxy where we are driven by currents of electric communication and media, traces of imagined pasts and futures intersect the viewer and give them respite from the rapids and swells of rhizomatic technological advancement. If we hold on to the branches held out by artists, we are immunised rather than drugged, and we will mutter under our breath “Stupid, Boring Internet” as we are taken to another strange world.

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Appendix A: List of all Wireless Psychics Experiments 1- 10

No. **Title** –Medium- Description

- 1 **Investigating synaesthesia with 3 wireless frequencies (900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2437 MHz)** – Participatory Performances x 10min; Oil Pastel on Paper

Viewers are briefed by me about the EM spectrum and where the frequencies 900, 1800 and 2437 MHz exist in respect to senses of sight and sound (they can see and hear live lower case music directed by myself). They are then given 3 sections to fill with color (drawing with oil pastel) corresponding to the devices I place in front of them: a 3G phone (900 Optus) 4G phone (1800 MHz Telstra) and laptop connected to Wi-Fi Channel 6 (2437 MHz).

PERFORMED:

AT THE HUB, SCA.

On Wednesday afternoon from 3 – 5pm Sep 2, Sep 9, Sep 16, Sep 23 2015.

- 2 **Telepathy Twins – Ariel Garten and myself**

Durational Performance and Performance for Audience

Ariel Garten was born on the same day as me and has developed a consumer EEG headband and app called Muse. She is a total stranger and lives in Canada. From Wednesday 17 Jun, I will try and engage Ariel in psychic tests to see if she can 'sense' what I am thinking. If she concedes to giving me a discount or endorsing me with her headband, I will leave these telepathic remarks through the data collection of her Muse app. On Wednesday 17 July I received the Muse headband (with a partial discount). The EEG headband connects via a patent Bluetooth carrier frequency (like Wi-Fi also 2.4 GHz) and data from the app about my ability to calm my brainwaves and when and where I use the headband is sent via Wi-Fi from my phone to her company, Interaxon

For Audience: I use speakers from Experiment #3 to tune to Wi-Fi Channel 6 (2426-2448 MHz). I use my phone's Bluetooth (2400-2483 MHz) to transmit the display from phone app to a TV. Now the audience can see what I'm thinking. The TV shall be on a plinth behind me. Sound from the app is presented in a small guitar amp under a tray of water used for Experiment #3. Data from the app is transmitted real time to Ariel's company Interaxon via Wi-Fi Channel 6

PERFORMED:

Doubtful Sound, Brand X Studios, Tempe, Sydney, Sep 13 2015; Liquid Architecture, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Oct 3 2015.

- 3 **Vibrations of Wi-Fi Channel 6 (2426-2448 MHz) in Water and Air to find Sweet Spot** – Performance

The Wi-Fi carrier frequency for Channel 6 which exists in the room will be tuned (stepped down) to be seen in water and heard in air. I create water patterns in a large circular tray powered by the sine wave 242 Hz. I have directional speakers producing sine tones at 2426 Hz and 2448 Hz. I also throat sing with a base of 242-

244 Hz and use the resonant capacity of my throat, larynx and chest to create upper harmonic partials that appear just as loud. The singing bowl is tuned to 121 Hz and also creates upper harmonics.

PERFORMED:

Doubtful Sound, Brand X Studios, Tempe, Sydney, Sep 13 2015.

Liquid Architecture, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Oct 3 2015.

4 **Electro Magnetic sounds of Wi-Fi Modem and Brainwave Reader in User-Feedback Loop**

Performance

Electrical impulse of artist wearing EEG headband and Wi-Fi modem measured with coil pick up. 2 x speakers; 2 x screens – 1 with Wi-Fi Analyzer app in realtime and 1 of brainwaves in real time.

5 **Sweet Spot/New Moon**

Durational Performance; Participatory

On every new moon from August 2015 –.....

For participants:

The new moon is time to find your strength within. Take your spirit animal or inner child on a walk through your home. Start at your Wi-Fi router, and as you walk, try and sense the Wi-Fi strength. Re-trace your steps and identify the spot you felt the strongest Wi-Fi, and place a special amulet there. If you want to test your ability you can use the Wi-Fi SweetSpots app (Android and iOS) and retrace your path again.

I will conduct my tests using my Nekomimi Cosplay Ears controlled by EEG. There is a special 'bug' built in to the ears, when the left ear twitches, the developers have told us that it means something, but no consumer has been able to find out what it means. I have taken this sign to be the psychic identification of a sweet spot.

PERFORMED: <http://moonpsychics.com>

6 **We are Cats with Telpathy**

Instructional Installation

Two viewers are invited to put on EEG cosplay headset each and are encouraged to aspire to an affinity where their 'cat' ears (and brainwaves) are moving in synchronicity.

PERFORMED: with Jasmin Stephens (curator) at *A Curator Visits*, Sydney College of Art, The Hub.

7 **Investigating field strengths of 2437 MHz with coloured stickers**

Participatory Performance

We all know how volatile Wi-Fi is, especially at the SCA campus, Participants are

briefed about the EM spectrum and where the carrier frequency 2437 MHz exists in respect to senses of sight and sound. They are then given 3 dot stickers, red, yellow and blue 24 mm and asked to place them in places where they believe the 2437 MHz is strong, medium or weak (colors respectively). I follow them with the Wi-Fi SweetSpots app and tell them how correct they are

8 **Psychic affinity for house plants – Version 1 for The Wall's Philodendron bipinnatifidum and EEG Brainwave**

Instructional Installation

INSTRUCTIONS:

This Philodendron's brainwaves are being monitored by an EEG headset, which creates variations of movement in the 'ears' according to the standard human ranges of relaxed, in focus, and alert. Monitor your brainwaves too with Fluffy Ears headset supplied. Think about the Wi-Fi environment around you. Can u establish a different kind of wireless communication using the carrier frequencies in the air. Find an invisible, soundless carrierwave and modulate it with your thoughts.

Can u establish telepathy or affinity with the plant?

INSTALLED: The Walls, Miami, November 14-28 2015,

9 **Psychic WI-FI TUNING WITH ROTATIONAL MOTION**

Instructional Installation

Instruction Card: Can you guess which motor is which Wireless radio frequency, tuned to 3G, 4G and Wi-Fi, Answer on back of Instruction Card.

Found object installation all motors tuned to 2400 rpm (Wi-Fi); 3500 (4G optus) and 900 rpm (3G optus) - 12 x 200 rpm computer fans; 1 x 3500 rpm airbrush motor without brush attachment; 1 x 900 rpm blender.

10 **SWITCH ON/FULL MOON**

Durational Performance, Participatory

On every full moon from July 2015 – present

Share the crazy energy of the full moon with someone in your home. Give them 2-3 Wi-Fi capable devices, whilst you shut your eyes, ask them to switch the Wi-Fi on in only one of the devices. Then you can open your eyes (or keep them shut) and pick the device with the Wi-Fi turned on. Can be done IRL or over Skype, etc.

PERFORMED: <http://moonpsychics.com>

Nicola Morton

b. Brisbane 1979

Artist: Sound, Video and Live Art

Education

- Bachelor of Music Technology (2003) Qld Conservatorium of Music.
- Master of Fine Arts (2017) Sydney College of Art

Awards & Residencies

- Curator/Director of *exist-ence 5: international festival and symposia* (26-30/06/13) by Brisbane City Council and Queensland College of Art, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne.
- Shortlisted for Southern Panoramas Competition at 17th International Contemporary Festival by SESC_Video Brasil (30/09/11–11/12/11) Sao Paulo, BZ
- Asialink Grant for Performing Arts Residency, (4/05/11-18/11/11) Yogyakarta, ID
- Renew Newcastle, Artist in Residency (4/02/11-28/02/11) Loop Space and Hunter St Mall, Newcastle, AU

Solo Exhibitions

- “The Shamanic Death of Capitalism” (24-25/06/11) Installation 5mx10.5mx3m; 2 channel AV Projection 1.5hr, Performance 1.5hr. Jogja National Museum, ID.
- ‘Spystation NC1074’ (4/02/10-28/02/10) 5 x Mixed Media Installations 1.5mx4m each; 3 Channel New Media Screening 24hours; at Loop Space New Media Gallery, Newcastle, AU

Group Exhibitions

- “Wireless Psychic Experiment #8” in *Headland* (28/11 – 6/12/15) at The Walls, Miami, Australia
- “The Artist is Present or do you believe in ghosts?” in *Other Film Festival* (26/11/14) 2hr Performance and Video Installation (24 x 5”x7” touch screens), Boggo Road Jail, Brisbane.
- ‘Remote Viewing Experiment’ (2010) 60min video in
 - 1) *17th International Contemporary Art Festival* (30/09/11-11/12/11) cur. Solange Farkas with Olafur Eliasson, Shaun Gladwell, Cinthia Marcelle SESC Belenzinho, Sao Paulo, BZ
 - 2) *Off The Strip New Genres Festival* (14/10/10-16/10/10) Las Vegas, USA.
- ‘Love Hypnosis Exchange” (2010) Performance & AV Projection 15min; Mixed Media Installation 2mx2m. in
 - 1) Orientation Week (2015), Queensland College of Art, Brisbane.
 - 2) Opening of *M.Lugas Syllabus” Independence* (2011), Taman Budaya, Yogyakarta, ID;

Select Performance

- “Wireless Psychic Experiment #10” for *Double Vision* (2016), Verge Gallery, Sydney.
- “Wireless Psychic Experiment #10” for *Sound In Motion* (2016), Airspace Gallery, Sydney.
- “Wireless Psychic Experiment #2 & #3” for *Liquid Architecture* (2015), Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane

Select Publicity/Critical Writing on Work

- Gallasch, K (2013) “Alien and Other States of Being” (interview) *Realtime* issue 115, Sydney AU, 23
- Moody, S. “Psychedelia Now” (2012) *Art & Australia* Winter 2012 Sydney, AU. 616-623
- Sanchez-Kozyreva, C. “Asthma and Other Wicked Catalysts” (2012) *Pipeline* January/February 2012, Hong Kong, CHINA. 24
- Spicer, D. “Soundcheck– Club Sound Witches” *The Wire* Dec 2012, London, UK, 65

CATALOGUE OF WORK IN EXHIBITION

- 1) *Wireless Psychic Experiment #8*, installation 1.5m x 2m x 2.5m (plant, chair, Neckomimi EEG headsets).
- 2) *Ghost Glitch*, installation 2.2m x 2.3m x 1.7m (*Print* 48cmx48cm (framed), *Fridge Magnet* (30 pieces x 6 cm x 3 cm), coffee table, steel sheet, sofa, wall).
- 3) *#wifowell*, sculpture 55 cm x 30 cm x 55 cm (recycled e-waste, bicycle parts).
- 4) *#moonpsychics (excerpt 1)*, video 1:51.
- 5) *#moonpsychics (excerpt 2)*, video 3:05.

LIST OF MEDIA ATTACHED AS FOLIO

- 1) *Wireless Psychic Experiment #8* (photos of previous install at Walls Gallery, Miami)
- 2) *#wifowell* (front/back)
- 3) *Ghost Glitch* (crop)

LIST OF MEDIA ATTACHED AS DVD

- 1) *Wireless Psychics Experiment #5 (2015-10-13)*, video 1:29.
- 2) *#moonpsychics (excerpt 1)*, video 1:51.
- 3) *#moonpsychics (excerpt 2)*, video 3:05.