THE COSMOS WILL BE TELEVISED

AN ARTIST'S GUIDE THROUGH MEDIA, TRANSMISSION & PHENOMENA

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B.F.A., Iowa State University, 2007

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B.F.A., Ft. Hays State University, 2007

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
Of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Fine Art
Department of Art and Art History
2013

This Thesis entitled:

The cosmos will be televised: An artist's guide through media, transmission, and phenomena

Written by Ryan Wade Ruehlen
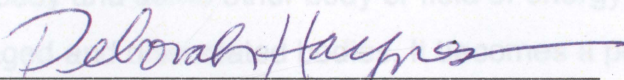
Has been approved for the Department of Art and Art History

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April 26th, 2013

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

ABSTRACT

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THE COSMOS WILL BE TELEVISED // Thesis directed by Professor Mike Womack

I collect and create specific phenomena by taking everyday moments, and unveiling patterns and gestures within our contemporary world. I manipulate, compress, de-compose, amplify and distort scavenged materials in order to tease out abnormalities in the reality I know. By relating to my environment in new ways I form compositional inquiries.

Much of my work incorporates video and sound based media, creating meditative spaces through simple actions and observations. Video is a space of inquiry, a space of translation between my body and some other body or field of energy. Video forms an extension between engaged and dissociated bodies. It becomes a perceptual prosthetic.

During the first half of this text I discuss television culture and how it has shaped my perceptions of the world, as well as how the televised-media device is used as an artistic tool. Using video and sound based media allows for the chance to see alternative versions of my everyday, and in this way generates utopian thought.

The second half of this text is dedicated to my artistic process and some of the work that has come from my studies. Following that I discuss my thesis exhibition work, *The Distance Between* (2013) relating it to perception, starlight, and television materiality.

Within the larger scope of this thesis project I focus on *how I see* rather than *what I see*, making connections to artist Tom Sherman and Ilya Kabakov. Beyond this I utilize Michel Foucault's conception of *heterotopia* as a mode of perception while arguing that key elements of utopian thought overlap with artistic praxis as actions of play, speculation, and technological augmentation.
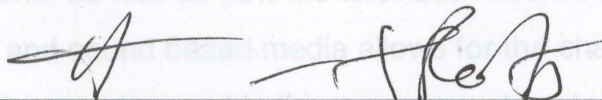
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been fully realized without the generosity of the following:

TELEVISION AS TOPOGRAPHY

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

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WARM GLOW

I was born with a television in my crib. Figuratively speaking. Not to say that I watched a lot of television as a child, but its presence has been a part of my life since I arrived. When I was young I would watch selective shows throughout a week, or catch glimpses and transfix on movies my parents would put on. Sometimes I would turn on the tube just for background noise to provide atmosphere and stimuli to other activities such as playing with building blocks, or drawing, or doing those weird imaginary things that children do effortlessly—suspension of disbelief.

Regardless of how often the television was on, it affected my relationship to my immediate environment and how I imagined that space. Television, when taken from its Greek origins translates to "far-sight". Many aspects of society and images of nature portrayed within that black box framed how I understood my surroundings.

Of course, like every Western child born with the television always in their periphery, it provided some sort of entertainment value and distraction. In a different light though, the television was a gateway into society, its warm glow and ambience brought the chaotic and saturated life of the world "out there" into my most intimate space. Similarly to a radio I enjoyed the sound of human commentary, the sound of voices and the fuzzy noise that accompanied the transmission of those voices. Being

young in the 1980s and '90s, television had yet to reach its digitized, hyper-real surface qualities, and thus held its distance as mystical and otherworldly. Its grains and noise, its static and disruption, coupled with its minimal programming supplied the desires for alternatives to the regularity of life. Television moved in a constant stream from one place to many, and it was restricted by its signal's low capacity to represent the images it was capturing and carrying. It is continually unfolding or as Marshall McLuhan argues, "TV is a medium that rejects the sharp personality and favors the presentation of processes rather than of products" (McLuhan 1964, 414).

The attributes of its form allowed the viewer to accept its content as *unreal*. Its fakeness was visible and therefore allowed me to enjoy it as fake. I wasn't disappointed by its unreal qualities; I instead opened myself up to the plasticity of its structure. Its ability to be both hard and physical (concrete), countered by its poor visual transmission and relatively crude representations, made for a magical experience. It made me feel less alone, it gave me an audience, a portal to gaze into, or just reassured me that activity was in fact happening outside of myself. It expanded my worldview at a young age.

Television's prior relation to the internet and its continued project of charting and connecting many aspects of the world, introduced me to places far away from my home and simulated a journey into the unknown. My family didn't have very much money, so most movies I encountered came to me through television, instead of the cinema. Many of my earliest memories revolve around catching movies on TV late at night when I was supposed to be in bed already. The first movies that I recall watching are *Alien, The*

Abyss, and the *Indiana Jones* trilogy (figures 1-3). All of these films are formed around epic travels into unknown territories where humanity is confronted with existential rupture and the possibility that our perceptions of reality are not what they seem. The haziness of the television's transmission confronted the instability of my limited knowledge of the universe.

These constructed images confirmed that nagging feeling inside of me, that feeling that there is something beyond my direct, concrete experiences of the world, that I live in only one version of reality and that it was possible to imagine, invent, and inhabit alternative and utopic versions of reality. These images verified my experiences with what some may call the *supernatural* and they further pointed out those terrifying moments when an overlap happened between different versions of existence. Televised representations of subjects like ghosts, monsters, demons, and spirits became the visual language of my personal, paranormal experiences and even my nightly dreaming.

Television culture provided images for my imagination, and as a result, my worldview. Technological transmissions became akin to supernatural encounters for me. In that way, television formed *how I see.* Without physically residing in the same space as I, there were moments when a bridging of the gap between distant worlds and distant bodies became possible. Technology made magic, the ghostly, and absurd more tangible, more real.

My art practice speculates on the surroundings I live within, which is largely informed by my proximity to technologies such as television. By speculation I mean that I draw new correlations between things in my environment; I imagine them arranged

differently or see what possible connections I can make. Television has conditioned my thought patterns and molded my perceptual capacities. The world that television brought to me reinforced the idea of alternative realities and spaces that existed "in-between" two points; places where I capture distinct aspects of the human condition.

My body and my environment mirror each other in complex ways, adapting to one another and forming each other's behaviors. Gestures and language, phrases and images transmitted from television have become my own, and due to that relationship a feedback loop develops between the transmission and my body. The enhanced image, transforms perception beyond the naked eye. Technology allows an access point, a doorway, into something beyond my concrete experience.

As an artist, I want to examine this relationship. I use various media tools to alter my perceptual framing as a method of art research. Research leads me to form, to patterns, and to anomalies.

IMMACULATE BROADCAST

Whether or not I like it, I have been deeply shaped by my relationship to television, and moving images in general. In the last 20 years (and to a larger extent in the last 10 years) the TV experience has become a more sophisticated form with sharper images, clearer sound, less "air" with a far greater technical ability to render anything from the imagination into visible appearance (figures 4-5). As its appearance has gained near perfect realism, and through its digitization, television "now more than ever, is controlling large parts of our brains, tricking and playing with our perception, controlling and exacting what we see" (K 2013, 102).

How I see within the television experience, as well as beyond it, has reconstructed my sense of reality and in many ways made the world around me complex and precarious. I believe this effect of disconnect within my immediate, physical life has arisen congruently to television's, and information technology's, refinement. Refinement in form has allowed the content to appear more certain, and more believable. Through this enhancement, the "reality" proposed by media structures (which affects our non-televised livelihood) has made participating in media a hyper-real experience. I am claiming this from a phenomenological point of view: It is hyper-real from an experiential perspective and its content is real in that we recognize it as real.

Due to development of digitized culture, the occurrence of arising and evaporating events within the television/media-device is experienced as visual and sonic truth. In that way, the video-formatted, digitized, televised program, whatever it may be, becomes a porous medium where I may propose anything. Its permeable

qualities are what drew me into it as an artist. Digital media has become ubiquitous for the very reason that it is elastic and mimics my physiology—perfect tools for an artist. What propositions I choose to pursue within this technology are integrated back into my actual lived experiences. It presents a specific version of truth, regardless of how absurd the content may appear. Think of any news broadcast or commercial break displayed on a media device: as a viewer I am expected to believe what I am confronted with.

As access to various technologies becomes democratized, and imagery easier to fabricate through computer-aided rendering, it has presented a particular problem for artists who choose to work in video and sound based media. The mainstream has fully embraced the surreal, the absurd, and the farfetched. They have co-opted the aesthetics of modernism, the language of post-modernism, and doused it in endless coats of escapism.

In early 2013 the corporation Nabisco released a new TV commercial for *Oreo* in which people within a library setting begin arguing (in a whispering fashion) about what they prefer about the cookie. This unfolds into a violent and destructive situation in which each person's desires and compulsions turn them into ravaging and irrational beasts. Mainstream media, which now include large pockets of YouTube, Facebook, and major online news sources, as well as traditional network and cable television, are able to portray some of the most ridiculous propositions that one may imagine. It is ridiculous however, in a certain manner. Anything can be said and it is taken as fact. This is done for the pure use of consumer-oriented conditioning, whether it's the consumption of objects, emotional states, or lifestyle stabilizers. Televised propositions

are largely made to reify the conventions of society. They are set forth to verify that this version of society does in fact exist and is desirable. It dismisses utopian thought, and criticizes any idea that may be disruptive to the perceived normalcy of culture at large. This isn't a new idea. However, it poses a difficult situation for artists who cross paths with this loud and fast visual culture. It is the difficulty of adequately dealing with, that is to say *representing*, irrational, grotesque and fantastic aspects of humanity when mainstream media has done such a marvelous job of presenting it (figures 6).

How do I deal with this predicament? Images have become hyperbolically saturated within my mental space. Images are flattened. An artwork can be created and put out into the vacuum of culture and is very easily neutralized because of this compression of shared images.

The power of artwork becomes deflated in many ways. An artist has the weight of all these images constantly with them, deciding very carefully how to direct their ideas through such startling amplification. I have to be mindful of how to produce work, in the sense that the work can very effortlessly disappear into the wallpaper, the static, of this global, visual culture. I mean to say there is a difference between an artwork entering the mainstream and shifting culture, like Duchamp's or Cage's work, and an artwork entering the mainstream and being defused by culture.

John Cage entered the musical and visual art community through the mainstream. Within this opportunity he proposed radical ideas about the nature of *listening* and how one can produce art. He forever changed the shape of art making. In the 21st century, due to mediation, and technological augmentation within daily life, it is

difficult, if not improbable, for an artist to alter perception in the manner of someone like Cage. Why is this? It largely has to do with the expanding and complicated nature of the global community, which is to say the multitude of fractured and niche communities that arise via the Internet and popular culture. There are innumerous websites and avenues that artists and audiences can sift through, participate in and negate. It is impossible to keep up with everything important that is happening in the "art world". In this day what I must do is not so much focus on shifting the entire landscape of art-making, like Cage, but rather translate and find correlations between differing languages that have arisen within various cultures, including my own.

TO PROPOGATE A WAVELENGTH

The quick onset and sudden departure of the significance of an artwork has become a normal state of affairs. This is largely linked to the hyper-saturation of images that predominately reach us through media devices, including television. The televised-media experience has not just catapulted our lives and our attention in a thousand different directions, it has noticeably turned the volume up. How does an artist navigate images, reuse them, twist and distort their material, and create new encounters within such meticulously controlled transactions of images?

I become an information trafficker. I speculate. I work through *radicant* behavior, as Nicholas Bourriaud claims, " Instead of producing an object, the artist works to develop a ribbon of significations, to propagate a wavelength, to modulate the conceptual frequency on which his propositions will be deciphered by an audience" (Bourriaud 2009, 134).

He goes on to affirm, "One transports data or signs from one point to another, and this act is more expressive of our era than any other. Transformation, transcoding, passage, and normed displacement are the figures of this contemporary transferism" (134). Bourriaud finds possibility in this place between things, this space between transactions, maybe even just the interaction of different transmissions, varying formats. From this approach of traversing the space between things McLuhan emphasizes that, "All media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms" (85).

What has become important, even vital, to explore is the thoroughly compelling nature of everyday social exchanges. As an artist I translate states of being, places of transience, moments of fleeting. The familiarity of instantaneous conversation between acquaintances, though they may be separated by time and space, like a *Skype* video meeting, is now an everyday activity.

I decipher interferences that spontaneously arise within our omnipresent, technological infrastructure. These are moments when I witness beauty in its failure. Moments of failure become moments to imagine difference, to see what forms might otherwise suit our fragile existence. They are also moments when I am confronted by the indeterminate nature of things, the spontaneity of all events.

During the January 2013 presidential inauguration, singer-songwriter James Taylor gave a performance to a massive crowd prior to President Obama's speech. Due to the scale of the audience Taylor was displayed on several jumbotron screens around the area. During his performance of the *America The Beautiful* the technology of the sound system and one of the jumbotrons began to malfunction creating a warped and strange experience for the audience that presented a revision and disrupted version of that classic American song. I am interested in using this malfunctioning language, this sort of rift in what is seen as normal, as a place to construct a persona, a method of researching how my own self is constructed from these experiences.

In these times I construct persona out of bits and pixels of televised culture, I map my environment right on to the surface of my eyes, and deep into my neural pathways. I extend myself—my perceptions, out into a larger environment in complex

ways. Connecting with an environment in new and remarkable ways become pivotal rituals for the 21st century artist. A feverish longing to inhabit new and different places feeds my mode of research and aid in revealing the seemingly unreal moments in our everyday lives.

Analog, and now digital, technology has increasingly entered the frame of normal vision, that is to say the mind's eye. How I perceive and compose an environment, and how I locate or dislocate myself within it, is determined predominately by my relationship to information technology. I *cannot see the world without it*. Media technology fully circumscribes the structure of social engagement. I would argue that it has enhanced people's ability to connect beyond the isolated individual and in that way extends from our human nature. Media has the opportunity to augment environment with self (body): to layer and blur the edges of self and other.

To expand upon human existence and understanding through technology, to augment reality, has the potential to harmonize and alienate us from our environment. The reason I utilize various new media as an art tool is to confront this counter-position of harmony and alienation within human development.

AUGMENTED NATURES

In so many conversations I've had or information I've received there is this underlying fear that technology separates us even further from our natural upbringing, our truest nature. I want to focus on the interconnecting qualities between technology, human experiences, and the natural world that I inhabit. To the same degree that technological interactions distract and disable me from my physical environment, these interactions also fuse me to that environment. It allows me to grasp the interdependence of my surroundings, and it makes tangible those most interior natural orders within the human complex.

It would be an ordinary incidence to come across someone wandering around a park, an alleyway, or a grocery store taking high definition images of a growing plant on his or her mobile device. They can then access information based on that image, seeking to find out more about the plant. Within a nearly instantaneous moment, this person could have complex information, dialogue, feedback, conflict and insight that interfaces with their physical experience of their surroundings, and with the plant. Not to mention *Quick Response Codes* (figure 7), those black and white matrix barcodes found all over buildings, public transit, shipping materials, and commercial space that sync up with mobile devices to provide enhanced context of the object or place perceived. These are subtle differences that have arisen as examples of the ongoing project of augmenting our environments.

With the perpetual sophistication in media technologies, largely due to audio/video refinement, augmented realities become more and more embodied and

integrated into my everyday life. Informational architecture overlays my bodily existence and perceptions. The television has moved from an object that I watch in order to perceive something outside myself to an interface that I wear on my body in order to personify those immaterial realms of human consciousness. It has become Omni-vision.

To a specific degree, video, as a tool and as an experience, enhances my cognition. Tom Sherman considers "artists as the primary researchers in the field of perception" (Sherman 2012, 5). Contained within that thought he stresses that, "Our perception and experience (consciousness) lags behind the speed at which the video instrument translates the world into digital electronic data and writes this data into memory" (4). What makes video, or media devices in general, so potent for artists is how these tools function on an exceptionally different mode than other art materials (figure 8).

Video does not manifest information like paint on a canvas does. It examines information. Video's "realness" propels artistic study, however, Sherman underlines that the medium, "Is most effectively used as a process-based technological device…an instrument for examining a field of data in real time" (8). Video technology captures, it discovers, material that my senses tend to miss. It enhances sense perception. It is that very reason that video's qualities are an extension of our being, that it is a version of nature because it grows out of us.

Western culture is in the process of fully integrating technological materials into the human experience. As a result, the perceived separation between body and environment that has inundated large portions of this culture for thousands of years is

beginning to erode. As I integrate digital technology, and its outgrowths, into every aspect of my existence I create the possibility to supplement concrete space with speculative qualities, diagrams of divergent versions of that space, models of warped and foreign understandings of space.

In a video-performance titled *Augmented Natures (2013),* I take on a particular persona and place this persona into a simulated landscape. The space is claustrophobic, with hints of domesticity, like plastic plants, coffee tables, television monitors, chairs. Within the television is illuminated, black and white imagery of digitized landscapes, mapped onto the surfaces of a figure, the persona.

The video landscape that is mapped onto the figure modulates between highly processed images of picturesque terrains. The figure talks to himself and some absent "other" using transmitted words taken from monologues off of the 1950s and '60s television show *The Twilight Zone.* These monologues focus around a subject whose sense of Self has ruptured, when suspension of disbelief has filled their mind. These monologues, spliced together and distorted, explore the inability to see the difference between self and environment.

The persona in this situation is the quintessential Modernist man. He dresses simply, white collared shirt, black tie, dark slacks, and slightly embellished spectacles on his face. He fluctuates between logical behavior and manic outbursts. He struggles with his raw existence, his place in the world; he attempts to overcome his alienation.

Within the larger frame of the video, the television resides on a flat surface, a tabletop in a domestic space, where a subject awkwardly, yet patiently prepares food.

Hands are seen making a sandwich. The frame focuses on the hands while they carefully toast bread and methodically slices lettuce, tomatoes, and spreads mayonnaise on to the bread. They wash the dirty dishes and utensils and prepare the food to be eaten. The televised persona's emotional state is estranged from the commonplace task of the hands, of the extended body.

His world seems foreign because he has ostracized himself from his most innate qualities that link him to the rhythms of his ecosystem, his cosmos. He seeks *elsewhere* as a mode of salvation, and when confronted with the bizarre and divine in his own backyard he is struck with terror.

He is an archetype of modern civilization. He has always been an embedded chunk of the environment, completely inter-connected with all things, regardless of his feelings otherwise. This video presents a schism between the ordinary activities of life and the psychological and spiritual turmoil that humanity is constantly faced with. The television becomes a placeholder for the head, the psyche. It becomes a reference point for how television culture informs and constructs the subject's environment. Television, in this sense, becomes a mode of fracturing the self.

Environment and body are just mirrors reflecting each other, completely dependent on each other. The Western world is just now coming back around to the idea of interconnection between all things. In many ways this is disruptive to my behavior and psyche. This disruptive quality alters the structural integrity of society. Disruption shows alternatives though. This can provide routes for artistic research and contemplative action.

Disruption serves as a catalyst for utopian thought. As an artist, through small actions and encounters, I survey this notion. I unveil the eternal qualities of human nature, modes in which I sync up with my larger environment, when I recognize harmony and rhythmic interdependence. I uncover distinctive suggestions of how one navigates the world with fresh eyes. I find utilizing the far off (and not so far off) spaces of other worlds as places of imagining how my own world is structured or could be revised/shifted. In his text *Red Mars*, Kim Stanley Robinson hypothesizes on humanity's innate desires

> When we first arrived, and for twenty years after that, Mars was like Antarctica, but even purer. We were outside the world, we didn't even own things—some clothes, a lectern, and that was it! …This arrangement resembles the prehistoric way to live, and it therefore feels right to us, because our brains recognize it from three million years of practicing it. In essence our brains grew to their current configuration in response to the realities of that life. So as a result people grow *powerfully attached* to that kind of life, when they get the chance to live it. It allows you to concentrate your attention on the real work, which means everything that is done to stay alive, or make things, or satisfy one's curiosity, or play (Robinson 1992, 342).

Robinson's Martian research station is an image of human nature extending beyond the organic and beyond the mechanical. By reaching so far out as to step into the absolutely foreign I may experience my most fundamental, natural aspects, those aspects that bring deep joy, terror and meaning.

This utopian outlook focuses on the simple notion of "making things" and "play" which I would argue are at the core of the artist's base function. To play is to rearrange, and try things out, to *not know*. Art is a space of figuring out unknown things, however,

this leads to "a thoroughly real-life praxis where the aim is to realize fictions and describe their realization" (Groys 2006, 37).

Boris Groys expands on this idea while considering an installation by artist Ilya Kabakov titled *The man who flew into space from his apartment* (figure 9). The work features a constructed room filled with Soviet Union-era propaganda, domestic objects, and a large seat with elastic and metal propelling wires that suspend the seat in mid air. There is a large hole ruptured in the ceiling. There are remnants of a body recently there, but the body's absence is highlighted. The subject has been flung to outer space; they have left this realm of every day consequences, of human suffering. Groys sees within this installation how utopian actions, which branch out from a curiosity for the unknown, provide speculations on actual, normal life. He believes this is at the heart of the artist's intentions.

Only through active play can an artist yield compelling results. This desire to make things, to play with forms, is utopian in that it feeds my most fundamental nature. When I think of play, I think of the re-configuring of something—an object, a space, an idea. To re-configure something is to see something as different, that is to say it has the power to reshape how I see.

Coming back to Bourriaud's concept of the radicant, this playful quality is situated around a need to translate one thing into another. It is about coming into contact with something strange and acquainting oneself with it; coming into contact with something familiar and reassessing its language and terms, attempting to see if it fits in a space that seems uncertain.

Media tools, televised pathways, social networks, and participation-oriented systems of knowledge (Wikipedia) give artists an ocean of material to traverse and translate. What was on one day factual, the next day is not. What was on Monday taken at face value is on Wednesday contested fervently. Information, i.e. knowledge, has become fluid, which can be disorienting and problematic for the artist who is socially constructed to engage truthfulness.

From this trajectory, there lies a gap between technology integrating us within an environment and starkly simplifying our livelihood, like on Robinson's Mars, and the place where I find myself right now. With technology complicating and stratifying my relationship to the world beyond the centered, subjective viewpoint of the body, I am stationed in between modern ontological modes of constructing the subject as separate and isolated, and a new, multi-format, divergent subject.

As an artist I inquire into this divergent subject, and I reflect my larger ecosystem through acts of nomadism, cultural ambiguity, and trans-media application. Working across media, across potentially incongruent, contrasting formats, becomes the obsession of 21st century makers. The confrontation between a multitude of languages, visual or otherwise, has become an ordinary encounter for large pockets of our globalized world. What an artist creates can as easily be dismissed as it can be shown to communicate imperative features of the world community.

Artists, in this day and age, can't possibly speak for all humankind, nor fully represent the intricacy of human relations to their land, to their spiritual roots. Instead I want to develop and search out what Bourriaud calls cultural *archipelagos*. He

enthusiastically claims that translating across experiences, and melding with ideas and features in an inter-subjective manner leads us to new versions of communication and shared experience. He stands by the notion of the body-in-flux, emphasizing, "The figure of the subject defined by the radicant resembles that advanced by queer theory, which views the self as constructed out of borrowings, citations, and proximities, hence a pure constructivism. Thus, the radicant subject appears as a construction or montage, in other words, as a work born of endless negotiation" (55).

Locating and relocating provides me with new vantage points. By relating and traversing unstable landscapes, indeterminate geographies, in creative ways, I am able to provide new context, and deeper meaning to that land. I am inherently shaped by and embedded in my geography, and I make sense out of the cosmos through that perpetual forming. My land is complicated though, it is constructed from multiple cultures and places, and there is an overlap between materials and ideas that have cross-pollinated through travel, trade, and globalization.

In a recent performance work I collaborated with artist Kari Treadwell to create a compositional inquiry into a very old technology and a new one. The work *Composition for Singing Bowl and Television* draws a correlation between these two distant objects. During the performance we sit cross-legged on the floor of a gallery. Treadwell holds the singing bowl, which is an ancient bell that originated in Nepalese culture. It is a hand-built, bronze form. It is shaped like a traditional bowl with sacred Sanskrit markings. The bowl is "played" by rubbing a rounded wooden stick around its upper edge, creating a singular tone that resonates and vibrates continually within an environment, and deep

within the body. It has been used for meditative practice, for calling attention to time, as well as for ceremonial healing. I sit facing Treadwell, holding a small tube television in my lap, screen facing down with a blank, static channel on. The back of the tube TV is facing up and I move around the circular, plastic form that incases the cathode ray tube with an amplified microphone in a similar fashion to how the singing bowl is played. Together we perform a two tone, pulsing composition that heals the audience through tonal vibrations as well as highlighting the similarities and differences of these two technological objects and their sonic qualities. These two instruments played together reform the neural maps of the brain. They reconfigure how one may experience, or understand the sound of those objects. Bringing the television of modern, Western culture together with the ancient Nepalese singing bowl, we bridge together distant geographies and distant modes of sound production.

Artists of the 21st century not only create new maps; they reform the terrain of their maps. The terrain is reformed by way of mediated and direct experience of that land; which I see as both flat and round, lacking and complete, effortlessly visible and exceedingly atemporal.

SURVEYING UTOPIA

Google Earth is an incredible eye onto the world. Or at least what it has been able to, or chosen to capture. There is a strange and addicting game I play sometimes, that I am sure is common of many people who regularly use the Internet. I take the little human figure that is located near the cardinal direction region on the virtual map of Google Earth, the one that prompts the program to enter into "street view" wherever I place the little figure.

I take the figure and drop it randomly on the world map, somewhere, anywhere, and wait a brief second for the map to change to a first person perspective of the place I have landed. Maybe I drop myself somewhere on the outskirts of Oslo, Norway, where I have never been. The far-reaching eye of digital photography allows me to see this place in a 360-degree, particularly mobile, arrangement. I move similarly to a car (because the simulated space has been captured via car) and I drive through paved landscapes in high definition. I am able to view a distant space, an area I have not physically been, without a second of hesitation.

I move around this apparently real system of images that allows me to feel like I am actually seeing the place I dropped into randomly. It is static though. Nothing moves in this terrain. It is frozen and quiet, in that it has no smell, no sound, no touch, no air. It resembles walking on a foreign planet in a sealed spacesuit, able to see and maneuver but feeling isolated in all of my other senses. Wonderful things happen along the way, though. At every turn, every push of the browser, the weather changes, rain and snow materialize and just as quickly vanish. People and vehicles appear and disappear and

blur into each other. Buildings that were located on the corner of a block in one frame, upon turning around after passing them, suddenly are no longer present. Was it a figment of my imagination or did the information vanish?

Google Earth is a spacesuit; it is a prosthetic tool for my grasping of an unknown world. It protects me from the hostile qualities that I may be exposed to without the suit. Because Google Earth is selective about where it chooses, or has the capacity to, imbue with an image, my hometown in the middle of Kansas is harder to see, to navigate, than a town I may select in a country I have never been to. If I perchance visit my hometown via Google Earth's street view, it offers me an isolated turn down memory lane.

Its particular accessibility psychologically flattens my visual memories of that place. Only two roads are available for travel out of the countless that physically reside there. Google, although its intentions are to make my hometown more accessible, available to my grasping, instead make it foreign to my eyes. I travel along the main street like an automated tram, I am on a safari or an amusement park ride where my gaze becomes the means and the end. This movement compelled me to draw comparisons between familiar locations.

In my artwork titled *Walking / Vivid / Inertia* (2012) I take a virtual walk down the "main" streets, the broadways, in cities where I have lived. I take a walk simultaneously through three streets at once; I begin searching for similarities in the signs found in those different locations. I study the skyline in each of these cities, seeing how strikingly similar they appear, and also how their particular difference has shaped my

understanding of those places, and how I saw the world at large through the lens of those city-structures. The visual language of globalization has penetrated all of these places (figure 10).

Hints of that penetration arise within this multi-channel video. Much of the scenery, the topography, of these individual places feature signs and remnants of commercial architecture, masking the locational uniqueness of these places. To a large extent these cities become *nowhere lands,* or as Michel Foucault proposes, heterotopias. He believes that, "The anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt, a great more than with time" (Foucault 1967, 2). He argues that the *heterotopic* site, and its relational points, implicates our core understanding of space in contemporary times, remarking that

> The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place….I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of window that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there (4).

The mirror becomes a metaphor for the mind as well as the projection of an environment from that mind. Foucault sees that utopian thought overlaps with actual reality, which informs and becomes tangible and normalized. Heterotopias exist as the *realness* of my projections, as symbolic spaces that reside in-between mundane human behaviors and my impressions of a perfect order.

The heterotopic system is both isolated and also penetrable. It is separated from my domestic life and from public space and yet accessible through certain routes,

rituals, privileges and deviations. Foucault posits that heterotopias may include, psychiatric wards, prisons, hospitals, cemeteries, libraries, museums, motels, colonies, and most ideally, *boats*, movable places that lack any place at all other than *in-transit*. To elaborate on his suggestions, I would go on to include airports, public transit systems, resorts, computer kiosks, and corporate-franchise establishments, like commercial restaurants, billing agencies, "pre-fab" oriented shopping centers, like Wal-Mart, and nearly all other places that have come to infiltrate what was once constituted as public space.

Foucault states that in order to enter into a heterotopia voluntarily, an "individual has to submit to rites and purifications" (6) such as when one goes through the tedious, and often times dehumanizing, procedures of security checkpoints inside of airports before entering the holy space of distant-travel.

I would contend that what Foucault refers to as specialized places that are separated from normalized social life, such as a prison or a museum, have become the spaces that I reside in virtually all of the time now. This expansion affects humanity in deep and habitual ways. The heterotopia has moved from the periphery to the center of my existence. I began exploring spaces such as airports, creating an ongoing series of video works titled *Surveying Utopia (2013)*. In the first few of these works, I maintain an observational approach about what is captured on camera and also place myself in close proximity to multiple, passing subjects within the frame (figure 11).

I utilize the mobile structures within the airport as modes of experiencing the space. I station myself along the fantastical "moving walkways" within the terminal or

within shuttle trains that take me from terminal to terminal. These overlapping spaces have reached near perfect efficiency. Even with the proliferation of smart phones with embedded cameras, photography and video documentation is largely illegal within the highly sanctioned spaces of airports. I began with the intent to capture these spaces in a hyper-real, matter-of-fact approach, letting the situation itself become strange just by its capturing.

Carrying my camcorder around my neck, hanging by my side, I left it on record while moving through the airport. I didn't touch the focus, nor the white balance, nor any other parameter and let the camera roll until I left the airport and felt safe to toggle through what I had discretely recorded.

When I viewed the video later, to my surprise, that terminal had been visually blown out, and de-focused due to significant amounts of sunlight passing through endless rows of large windows running along the building. The figures and space became ambiguous, everything passed fluidly into everything else, no one had distinct faces, and the specificity of the terminal, and its extensions, was highly diminished. The place truly became what it was at heart: an *in-between*, a waiting room, and of "no activity". I decided to treat the sound encapsulated within these video documents in a way that mirrored how they were digitally perceived.

I amplified, reverberated and compressed the sonic atmosphere. Through this manipulation the video is filled with the drone of perpetual noise, bathed in warmth, and saturated with the technological trembling that fills our contemporary mental space. It is the sound of smooth machinery, overlapping voices, and rhythmic ambience. The

spaces perceived become unreal in as much as the figures are located nowhere, and yet they appear as though they could be anywhere. They become archipelagos of human transience, of our desire, and compulsion, to be somewhere else. The terminals expand into documents of human wandering; an inability to know where one belongs.

The translation of the behavior and dimensions of the airport through the camera, and how the camera saw the environments I moved through, created what I call *stupid phenomena*. It is stupid in that it lacks continual, conscious adaptation. It is stupid in the sense that the camera's actions involve only its base function, its designed program, and the results arise out of the camera's primary reactions to its immediate surroundings. It is not reacting to the past, nor anticipating the future, it is responding with *no mind*.

Light, and an uncertain depth of field, unveiled a variation of what was present; it manifested a new thing, a phenomenon that rendered the environment as spatial poetry. The videos tell stories of longing and daydream; they convey moments of passing apparitions, spirits that pace, unresolved. The enhanced image, that is to say the televised perception of these spaces, is more real than how they appear to the naked eye. It is precisely this point, which I claimed early on in this essay, that technology allows an access point, a doorway, into something beyond my concrete experience.

The material within works such as *Walking / Vivid / Inertia* and the series *Surveying Utopia* extend perception beyond an immediate, singular observation. These works imagine the actuality of something that transcends the surface of the cityscape,

the airport terminal, and the pathways that lead to and from their inter-connected locations.

POST-PRODUCTION AS A MIRROR

WHEN COMPRESSION, DISTORTION, DE-COMPOSITION, AND FEEDBACK
ENHANCE NATURE

_____

VIDEO RHYTHMS

Video is an opportunity to immerse myself in the passage of time, and that's why I am drawn to it as an artist. In particular I am drawn to short video constructions. I like assembling glimpses or versions of my ecosystem. I enjoy sifting through the complicated and blurry lines that are drawn between one thing and another within that ecosystem. I find there is not so much a need for narrative arc as a need for inter-personal relation. In many ways the video can become a percussive action, a rhythmic cycle, an ongoing pulse of sound and visual field simultaneously occurring.

It becomes percussive in its drive towards pattern recognition and formation, as well as its movement towards background, ambience, structure and repetition. Video allows me the elasticity to search for patterns, and for the creation of meditative situations. I find video and sound most useful for capturing phenomena and documenting performances. The way video and its extensions allow me to see and record the world gives substance to experiment with, to tease out, to see what else is there. I want to manipulate and play with the material.

With these materials, whether found or fabricated, I tend to use compression, distortion, de-composition, and feedback as a way to tease out abnormalities in the

reality I know. These four terms are frequently used during production, and more so during post-production, in a music-recording studio. They are different tools that control the aesthetic parameters of the sound experience. I am interested in using them beyond that context. These methods provide new meaning for sourced materials, rather than diminish the quality of their original or found state.

COMPRESSION

When I say compression, I mean the act of flattening out something, seeing what remains, smashing variable content together, using materials from different kinds of sources. *Radio Violent Compositions (2012)* is an ongoing series of works where the compression of large amounts of music files are layered together as one sonic experience. The process varies from composition to composition. In one version, I take every song on the 2012 *Billboard-Top 100 Pop Songs* and stack them all on top of each other so that the listener is exposed to all 100 songs as one song.

It is violent in the sense that harmony is dissolved and we are left with undulating noise that is patterned with a poly-percussive atmosphere. In another version I take the top five American popular songs from every year counting from 1962 to 2012 (50 years) and sequentially lay the first second of each of those songs back to back, which is 250 seconds/songs placed into one "ribbon of significations" (Bourriaud 2009, 134). This organization of sound largely leads nowhere; there is no arc in that every second that passes is the first second of a previous composition. Each second has the potential to affect one's memory through subconscious connection to familiar sounds, even if it is

extremely brief. All 250 songs are leveled, and what is given is a study of possible

rhythms. Finding form in new ways with pre-existing languages requires the damage of

those languages, the bastardization of those languages, and an alteration in our neural

pathways. Artist Paul D. Miller, aka DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid, calls this *Rhythm*

Science. He earnestly states that working as an artist provides "not so much a new

language as a new way of pronouncing the ancient syntaxes that we inherit from history

and evolution" (Miller 2004, 74).

DISTORTION

Distortion refers to elasticity: the possibility of twisting something until it is nearly

unrecognizable. I am not necessarily referring to the sound experience, that most are

familiar with, when an electric guitar is given more gain, providing that chunky, harsh

sound. I bend something out of shape, re-form its material so it becomes something

entirely different, something unexpected.

I aim to distort the material's prior relationship to reality, or how it functioned in

society. In the video piece *OM: The vibrational energy of all things* (2012) I stand in the

frame and let forth as harsh and loud of a scream as I can (figure 12). This short burst of

energy is then distorted by stretching its length to one minute, far longer than anyone

could scream for in a single breath. It is not slowed down in motion, nor is its pitch

altered: it is experienced as *real time*. This primal sound is countered with a deep,

resonating tone, held in the key of C. This tonal sound references the vocal OM that is

chanted, and sustained during a meditation or yogic practice. Its sound symbolizes that

of all existence being spoke out of the void, the original vibration. OM is the root of all being. OM is an account of the original sound.

I wanted that sound and that symbol to be coupled with the primitive scream, the violent sound that all creatures use when their existence is threatened. I believe the scream was a much more compelling way of describing our current global situation, as I witness and experience the havoc of human devastation to the lands and other beings coming from all directions. I inhabit a fragile system that could be annihilated at any time. The scream becomes a distorted beckoning, a plea for life to thrive, for us to change our ways. This stretched scream becomes a guttural force, speaking without words.

Distortion can also come in the form of adding something to an object/space that was imagined but not necessarily present in the actual experience. A common phrase that comes to mind is when someone gets ridiculed for "distorting the facts" or "distorting the truth." I am thinking of this as a positive possibility rather than an action that lessens the value of something. One night, in early autumn, I was walking home and I encountered a grid of street lamps failing to operate "correctly." They were all flickering on and off, flashing on and staying lit for indeterminate lengths of time, no longer than a second or two. They all seemed to be flashing irregularly, randomly, but I wanted to find a rhythm, a pulse, some sort of harmony within their disruption.

I videoed the situation and then organized sound accordingly. In this work, *Dysfunctional Streetlamp Composition* (2012), I created a specific tone, note, and duration for the six streetlamps that malfunctioned within the camera frame (figure 13). I

assigned separate tone/notes to each street lamp, and allowed the duration of the tone/note to last exactly as long as the light emitted from the lamp during each flicker. I also placed a deep tone beneath the entire composition that became the background, the "street-noise." The final video is a distortion of the original such that the street lamps now function as a constructed, synaesthetic experience. The lamps are distorted beyond the mundane-anomaly into a composition that finds harmony and rhythm within this infrastructural failure, the failure of the lights to do their duty.

DE-COMPOSITION

De-composition means the degrading, or picking apart of material. When a life form dies, it decomposes, but in that process it becomes something else; new life springs from its alteration. Degradation of material leads to unfamiliarity with that material, one is forced to try and imagine it as something else. De-composition becomes the focus in a work titled *Speculations on the Sonic Memory of Ancient Life* (2013). For this piece I work specifically with two petrified tree forms within the University of Colorado's Natural History Museum. These trees have been dated from the Late Triassic period, about 225 million years ago. I wanted to imagine these trees, as a living, breathing body, able to sense the world around them, to hear it. I made an accompanying soundscape that is presented along with the petrified forms. Starting with sourced materials, like the digitally recorded sounds of a forest, insects calling out in nighttime treetops, birds and reptilian life shuffling about, and wind passing through grass, I formed two similar compositions.

Before these trees were stone, found in the deserts of Arizona, the area was a warm, wet and sub-tropical environment. These are the sounds surrounding the trees as I imagine it. After a few moments of natural ambience the sound begins to collapse. Every second that passes, the sound is digitally diminished, one bit at a time. The sound becomes hardened, like the trees forming into stone. Eventually the sound has lost so much information that it becomes a dull rhythmic beating before it fades completely. I wanted to contrast the immense length of time of the trees' transformation, their solidifying, to the four and half minute long blip in time of the sound of the forest transforming and diminishing.

FEEDBACK

When I say feedback, I mean the reverberation of an environment against itself. Feedback is the bouncing back, or oscillating of multiple subject/object relations. This can be observed in social communication, electronic systems and mathematical equations. Mathematician W. Ross Ashby refers to feedback as a "circularity of action" (Ashby 1956, 53).

In the crudest way, I take something and I put it through an input, like a television monitor. Whatever comes out of the monitor, I take that record and put it back through it again. I video the sky. I long to be closer to those passing clouds overhead. I watch the video. I long to be closer to the clouds, so I re-video the transmitted sky. I watch this video. The clouds become harder to decipher. I long to be closer to the sky, I continue

to grasp at it; I suffer. I re-video again, I attempt to gaze farther into the beaming light of the screen and its depicted sky.

I watch the video. The sky, my image of the sky, is no longer there. I become indifferent to whether or not what I am experiencing is sky anymore. When I look closer now, when I video, I am not expecting to find something that I desired. I look, out of play, out of curiosity of what may arise just through looking. I continue the circularity of action, this ritual, to see deeper patterns form out of the interfacing of technology, sky, and subject.

Roy Ascott sees a vital connection between the processes of art and the results that grow from those inquiries. He states, "To discuss what one is doing rather than the artwork which results, to attempt to unravel the loops of creative activity…leads to a consideration of our total relationship to a work of art in which physical moves may lead to conceptual moves, in which behavior relates to ideas" (Ascott 1964, 128).

Separation Anxiety (2012), which I described above, reflects a relationship rather than representation. It is an idea related to behavior. The imagery that begins to show up, through re-video processes, mimics the repetitious behavior of my actions, the cycle of my proximity (figure 14). The screen, which is to say the environment, begins to look more and more like my actions, my input. I do not get closer to the sky I perceived as such, the sky I longed for. What I actually get closer to is the expression of myself within an environment, the reflection of my patterns within the patterns of a video transmission. I see the distance between my separation shrink, dwindle, and dissolve.

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN

AN INVESTIGATION OF STAR LIGHT

————————

THE ANALOG CHILD

For my thesis exhibition I wanted to diverge from some of my working methods that I have engaged in specifically within this paper. Although I consider myself a pragmatic artist, in that, I will work with any material as long as it serves the idea, I have tended to find a source of inspiration and clarity through digital means such as video and sound production. Much of my work utilizes the shift through digital culture and I explore ways in which I can disrupt that digital flow, or at least how I can use it as a lens that expands my perceptual capabilities. With my thesis work, I re-introduce analog technology, more specifically, I deal directly with the tube television, that beautiful and short-lived object that played a vital role in my young life.

Although digital means have allowed for me, as an artist, to see the world in fresh and compelling ways, there is something lost within that technology that analog provides. Analog deals with atmospheric circumstances. Digital does as well, but to a different degree. Analog technology is physically oriented, whereas digital is structured as a binary system of 1s and 0s, i.e. it is more abstract, and it can be more contained and more controlled. I find that analog is strangely unpredictable, which feeds my curiosities as an artist; I am looking for the unexpected.

Maybe this curiosity also stems from the act of looking back. Because analog TVs are no longer used by the average Westerner, they become new again, ripe with possibility precisely because they are now foreign to the everyday. As global culture unfolds what is apparent is an obsession with "progression" of technology. The goal is to continually move away from what has been made to make something "better".

With this thought in mind, I wonder if analog technology, such as a tube TV, has been fully understood, fully complicated, fully expressed. Or has the analog just been tossed aside for a shiny, new technology to forever be remembered as a bunch of heavy, obtrusive objects with fuzzy signals? Is there room for exploration still? Can it serve a different function? Regardless of its antiquated utility I want to speculate on the TV as a tool, which relies on my general practice, drawing on correlations between disparate things/situations. TV pulls its signal from the atmosphere around it and far out into space and I wanted to study that through perceptual means. I went back to analog for this specific project because the effect that I was interested in could only be had through that analog experience.

LIGHT POLLUTION

When looking up at the stars at night what I see is something from long ago. Light emitted from stars has traveled, in most cases, somewhere around 13 billion years to reach my observation on Earth. They become images of an ancient time. The twinkle of starlight is a perceptual effect that I commonly experience anytime I gaze up at the night sky. However, more and more people have gravitated towards cities where light pollution scatters for miles upon miles. Even in cities where the nights are abundantly clear and light pollution is low, visibility of the actual night sky, the stars, is diminished quite severely. What is usually experienced is a pinkish-orange haze that coats the sky, leaving one to look up and find a few closer, brighter stars, and not much else.

I don't really pay much attention to those stars, with my immediate surroundings glowing all night long, guiding my eyes downward to direct myself through the night. If someone were to go without seeing a truly clear, dark night for long periods of time and then happen to experience it, by chance of leaving the city far in the distance, it can be a startling phenomenon. It reminds me of how incredibly tiny I am. It reminds me of how absolutely endless and open our universe is. And it reminds me of how much is unknown, and beyond my ability to fathom. Stars were the first night light. They became the place where humans formed the earliest cosmological structures; our deepest symbols and meaning grow out of those structures. Humans have relied on it for navigation of both the physical and spiritual world. These early understandings that humans came to are deeply engrained within my body and mind, within my psyche and languages.

In the span of human development, television is an extremely sudden, and thus far, short lived human tool. Even with the small window of time that TV has been with humans, it has drastically re-shaped our cognition, our sight, our mannerisms, and our behaviors. For many people in the 20th, and now 21st, century, mobile devices, computers and televisions are a main source of light at night. It is what we sleep to. Even when the content is at its most loud and obnoxious, it can still manage to lull our bodies into a state of relaxation.

When an analog television is not receiving a transmission from somewhere specific, it displays noise. This is "noise" at its purest, in that it is a completely random and indefinite series of dots passing through each other electronically. This is provided through a cathode ray tube. The cathode ray tube, or CRT, is a vacuum tube, which has the capability to accelerate and redirect electron beams onto a fluorescent screen. Controlling the intensity of three electron beams, which display as red, blue, or green, creates an image. When there is no received image, noise is present.

There are numerous sources of electromagnetic noise that cause the familiar patterns of static. Atmospheric sources of noise are the most ubiquitous, and include electromagnetic signals driven by cosmic microwave background radiation. Cosmic microwave background radiation saturates nearly the entire observable universe, and according to most cosmologists, is left over from an early stage in the development of our perceived universe.

With the use of a radio telescope an observer can see that there is a glow that connects all things through the cosmos; there is no real "space" between stars in this

sense. Energy is emitted and transmitted between all things. This becomes the raw data, the raw transmission passing through the analog television. Unlike digital television signals, which are now how technology is formatted, analog TV's base signal is not necessarily localized; it receives information from larger atmospheric conditions. With this more open field of reception, that is less controlled, there is more room for actual noise to pass through it. Television noise's visual and sonic attributes, I believe, are a version, or an abstraction of my larger atmosphere; a picture of the cosmos.

Television noise is a signal from the stars, a vacant and mysterious message. The ambience of TV, the white noise, clears the mind of thought; it alters brain wavelengths. This is why people use it to fall asleep, or to take a temporary escape from immediate reality and mundane life. Stars and televisions are ubiquitous tools for navigating the night, for preparing dreams, and providing light. Their distant signals have universally shaped humanity.

A SHEET WITH HOLES

For the artwork *The Distance Between* (2013) I wanted to bring together two simultaneously familiar, simple, and mind-shaping forms: stars and televisions. I wanted to bring the stars down to the Earth's surface, and transcend the television's fundamental signals. While working on an earlier project in the studio, I remember staring at a few TVs while tuning into "snow" and thinking how the flickering of the static, its racing across the screen, was similar to the flicker of a star's twinkle. The static became a tool for creating starlight at ground level. Crude in its simplicity, I built a large wooden structure made out of 2 X 4s. I created a four panel screen made out of cotton fabric and painted it black. This screen covered one side of the entire structure. The structure rose over 12 feet tall and 8 feet wide, rising as a field to encompass the viewer's periphery.

I filled the structure with CRTVs (Cathode ray tube televisions). These are the ubiquitous black boxes that most anyone who grew up before the early 2000s would recognize or possibly have in their home. They are bulky objects, large and odd. They emit a cool, bluish light that is projected onto the surfaces and subjects surrounding its glow. The tube TVs also emit a static that can be tangibly felt, it has a visceral quality that fills the air around the TV. I stacked them inside the structure, on top of each other and side-by-side. I filled the structure with 30 televisions ranging in size, from 10-inch monitors to over 30-inch monitors. Using small sewing needles, I individually poked thousands of tiny holes into the large, black screen. I placed the holes in seemingly

chaotic patterns, but I was striving for perceptual accuracy within the realm of *how I see the stars*. How do stars tend to group together and dissipate within my perception?

This is the crude logic I am relying on when I place a hole on the surface. I covered the black screen with these holes, placed intuitively, yet methodically, throughout. I turned on all of the televisions at once, the illumination of the screens passing through the holes, like sharp beams. I didn't want to use the images that are sent through the TV screen, I just wanted to use the form and its most basic content for the basis of a larger phenomenon. I wanted the TV's raw data, its stupid phenomena, its warm glow. My impulse to avoid using transmitted images and constructed sound comes from what I discussed earlier: that through the mediation and hyper-saturation of images, due to the rise of the Internet and television, I am faced with the dilemma of getting lost in the daily shuffle of visual transaction. Images become flattened. I wanted to utilize the television as a perceptual tool, rather than a mediating device.

Around the structure is a soft, white halo from the TV light moving outwards in its entirety. The twinkle that we catch in the simulated starlight is exacted within this phenomenon. It is so close that the mind recognizes it as the same, in that it creates depth out of the black space and the stars *feel* distant, even when they are only a few feet away. The smallness of the holes isolates the RGB color structure of the television static. When I look with my naked eye, I see this as white static, but when the transmission is broken down within the tube, it is red, blue, and green.

The isolation of light through the holes allows some of the stars to also be perceived in these colors, which is an exceptionally close similarity to what I see when I

look up at a sky full of stars. The room requires a lack of light pollution to fully see the stars. Along with that, my eyes have to slightly adjust to make out nuances in this fabricated sky; in that way this phenomena mimics the natural world, my actual observation. I chose to leave all the TV's volume up, using just their white noise, void of another signal. At first I thought this would be an overwhelmingly annoying sound, that is, a bunch of televisions buzzing with a constant drone. It becomes more like standing by a waterfall, calming. The sound changes the wavelengths in the brain, I enter into a lower, more meditative state—the mind is soothed. It is also like urban-ambience, the sound that is emitted from all the electricity passing through the city, pulsing across the atmosphere. The sound reminds me that I mostly gaze up at the stars from urban environments, never separated from that humming sound, that auditory wallpaper, that fills my every perception. In this state of perceiving, it does not matter if it is the "real thing" or artificial, if those are actual stars or just needle holes poked in a sheet.

The experience that is offered up reaches an innate human desire, the desire to see beyond the social constraints of one's time and place. It is a "desire to escape the gravitational field of the ancients, tradition and civilization, to leave the pull of the old world, to float free in a state of weightlessness" (Groys 2006, 12). The cosmos, the "out there", is the space of imagination; it is a place of utopian thought. It is where I look to imagine far beyond the individual self.

The experience of the piece grounds the person within it. It brings me back to my most basic curiosities, my most unconscious recollections, held in the body's genetic memory for millennia. *The Distance Between* is concurrently an incredibly mundane,

ordinary experience and an unexpectedly moving one. Humans have an avid desire for

relation to the stars, "Especially for primitives and scientists, which is to say everybody"

(Robinson 1993, 309). We all look up at them in wonder. This piece offers reverence to

that universal human curiosity.

CONCLUSION

I want to leave my project open, unresolved, in need of continued care and inquiry. It has become somewhat of a cliché in the 21st century to claim that artists don't provide answers; they ask questions. While I agree with this sentiment, I want to go a step further in claiming that artists speculate. As an artist I make assertions about the nature of self and environment. I offer different versions of how I might perceive the reality I'm located in.

Media technologies that have arisen and blossomed in my lifetime deeply reinforce the ways in which I consider my world, and how I then translate it. As I put forward earlier, media technology, like television, is a spacesuit. I wear it to encounter much of a world beyond my immediate life. It allows me travel, and gives me the chance, as an artist, to individually imagine how the world is, or possible could be. From this standpoint I take on the role of "an illegitimate cosmonaut (who) appropriates, privatizes, and deploys global utopian energies entirely for his own ends, without previously having been selected and authorized by society" (Groys, 5).

These "global utopian energies" are what shape humanity's dreams and aspirations. These collective dreams are filtered through the individual, who then is responsible for responding, for giving these experiences meaning. I compose artwork from drifting through space, and I hypothesize on my direct experience, whether it's a work like *Dysfunctional Street Lamp Composition* where I sought out harmony in the disruption of an illuminated walk way, or the work *The Distance Between* where I bring the stars down to the earth and place them right before my eyes.

The world is an ocean of noise and I string together bits and pieces from all around me, playing with the structures of these pieces, seeing if something new might unfold, something unexpected. Or maybe something eternal unfolds, something that has always been there but was hidden underneath the chaos of daily life, the speed of human transaction.

When I was young the television experience lead me to distant worlds, and it expanded my curiosities. It propelled me outwards, away from my home, away from my body. Now, as an artist, I go inward, I search those embodied images and ideas that have leapt out at me. I sift through this relentless flow of images, making connections, and re-learning *how to see*. This becomes the utopian project of an artist such as myself: the art of re-learning how to see.

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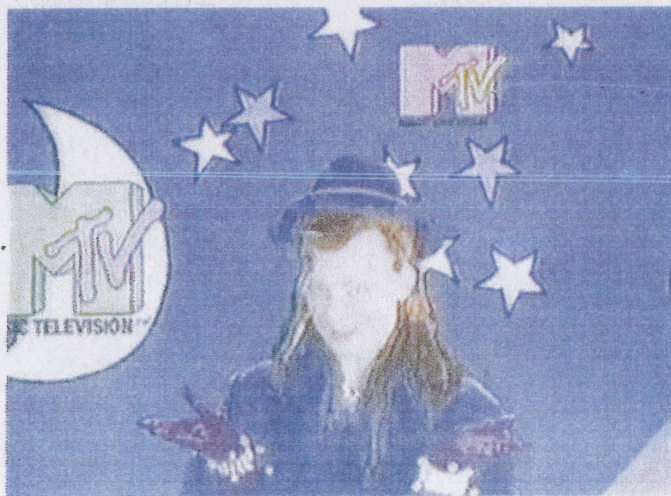
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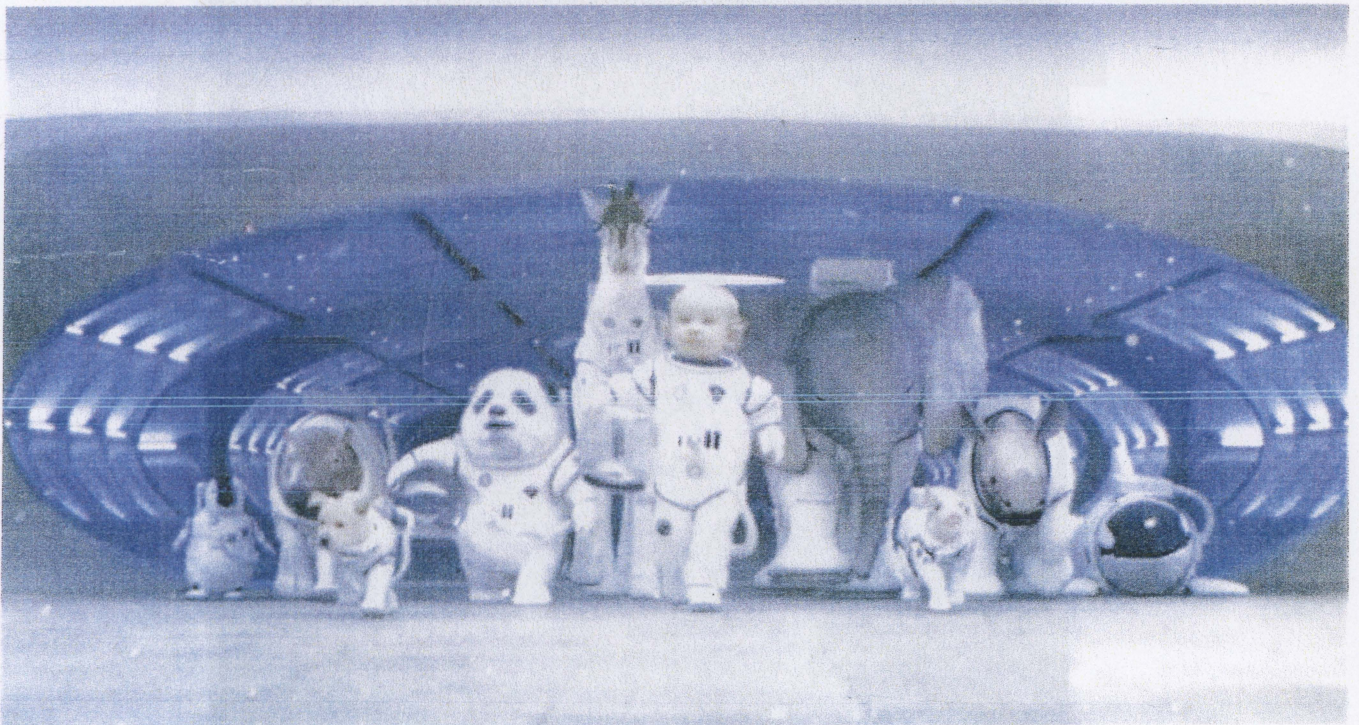
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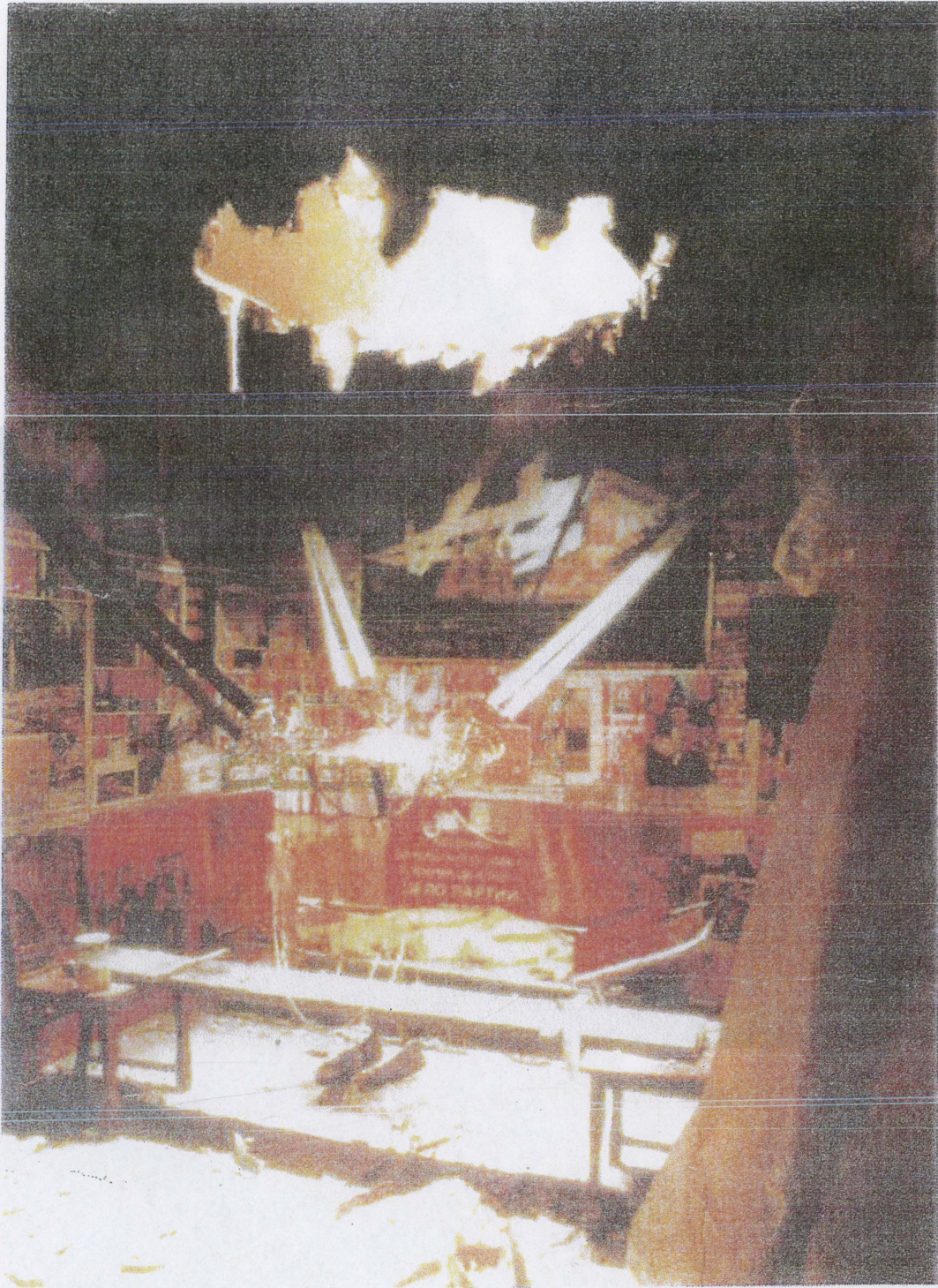
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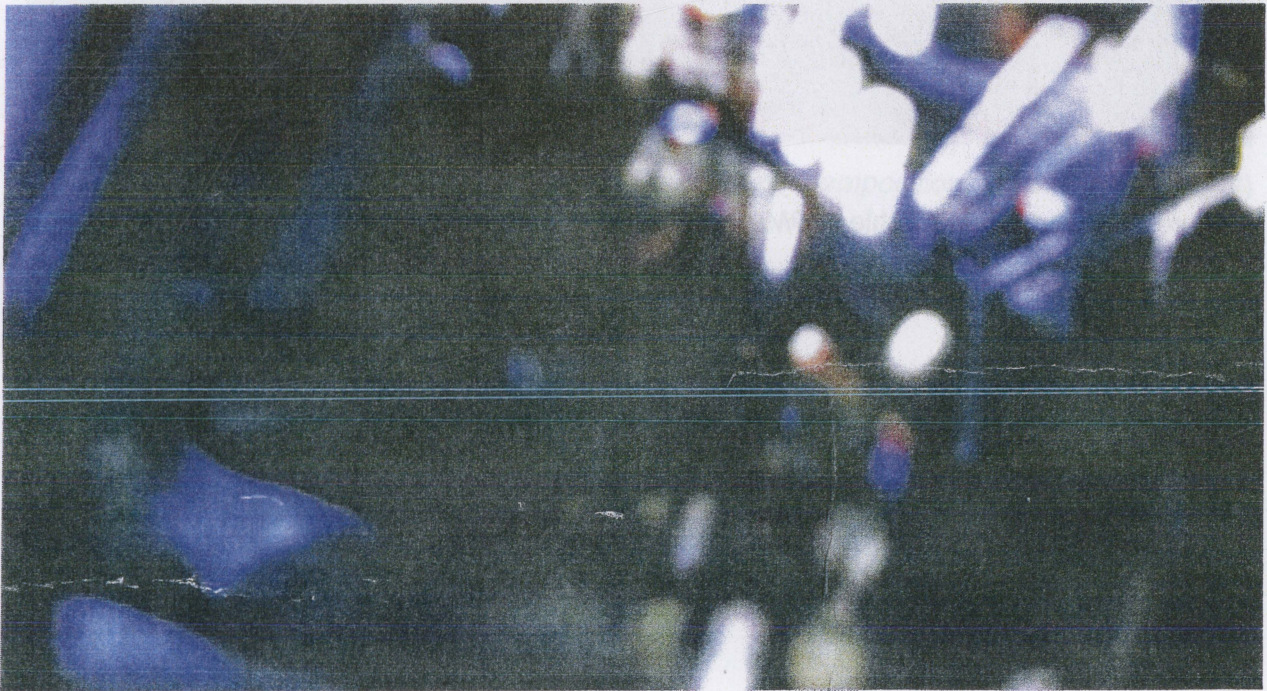
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AFTERWORD

Upon installing the work *The Distance Between* within the University of Colorado's Art Museum a series of problems arose that altered the piece in ways that left me dissatisfied and ultimately lead me to re-building the work outside the museum for my final thesis. This decision was made towards the end of the exhibition *Indeterminate Geographies,* which was the Spring 2013 Master of Fine Arts show.

Things change between the studio and the museum. This predicament becomes excruciatingly apparent as the scale of a project grows. My first mock-up version of this work was made with a stripped down bed frame, approximately six feet tall, and four feet wide. The televisions within the sculpture were just stacked, precariously behind the bed-frame, which had a black sheet stretched over it to display the stars that the viewer would encounter. The phenomenon of the star light was perfect in my eyes.

The project that was constructed for the CU Art Museum was twelve feet tall and nearly ten feet wide: dramatically larger than the mock-up version. Once inside the museum, upon the final two days of installation I ran into issues of temperature control, "public safety", light pollution issues as well as the sound reverberating into the larger exhibition. With all these problems on the table, many little compromises were made that added up to an unrealized project.

When talking with a professor about the project, post-install, she remarked on the lack of intensity of the sound of the piece. She bluntly stated that this work was scaled up four times from its original size, and if volume is the sonic equivalent to physical scale then why wasn't the sound of the TVs intensified and fully experienced as that "rushing waterfall" of noise that was anticipated. When dealing with a larger show, with other artists works in it, and with the museum's need for control over certain details, I was asked to diminish the sound from its intended effect.

Many museums have a fire-code and conservation methodology that requires that a space remain within a precise temperature and humidity range as well as a code that takes specific public safety into consideration. The piece was deemed hazardous to

walk around fully. A black veil was placed on both sides to cut out extra light pollution, to maintain a lack of entrance around the object, and contain potential heat that may arise from 30 tube TVs running for hours on end. Within the pressures of installing under a short amount of time, and needing to do some of the creative work (like work with the star mapping) I gave in to many compromises that left me feeling estranged from the piece, and ultimately unsatisfied.

Due to how the piece was constructed, and then re-worked, it left the original phenomenon nearly lost; only leaving the viewer with a grid of "starlight" that appeared inorganic and confusing, and monolithic for arbitrary reasons. I was given the chance to re-imagine the work outside the museum as a final version of my thesis. I took the offer not wanting to leave graduate school regretting how my thesis work turned out.

I went back to my first plan, stripping it down to its necessity. Although still scaled up quite a bit from the first version bed frame, it relied on the effect of the star field, sonic saturation, and the viewer's ability to experience the entire work, including the mess of TVs, cables, plug-ins and electricity. I went back to that harsh relationship between the precarious stacks of TVs glowing and resting in a way that could lead a viewer to a sense of unease, and the emotionally striking and embodied quality of observing a field of stars.

Rather than intimidating the viewer with the monolithic scale of the work in the museum I wanted to intimidate with beauty, to startle the viewer's senses. This is my goal. Through the hard learned lessons of working within the museum I was able to alter the work, get back to what it needed to be at the core, and eliminate that compulsive, personal drive to "go big" for an MFA show. Although *The Distance Between* still fills the perceptual field of the viewer, and encompasses the body, it doesn't rely on its scale for its emotive power. It relies on the deep-seated experience of a relationship to the night sky, to that particular twinkle, a relationship that has the power to stir the most alienated and removed person to imagine their place in the universe. It serves as a reminder of smallness and humbleness.

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