



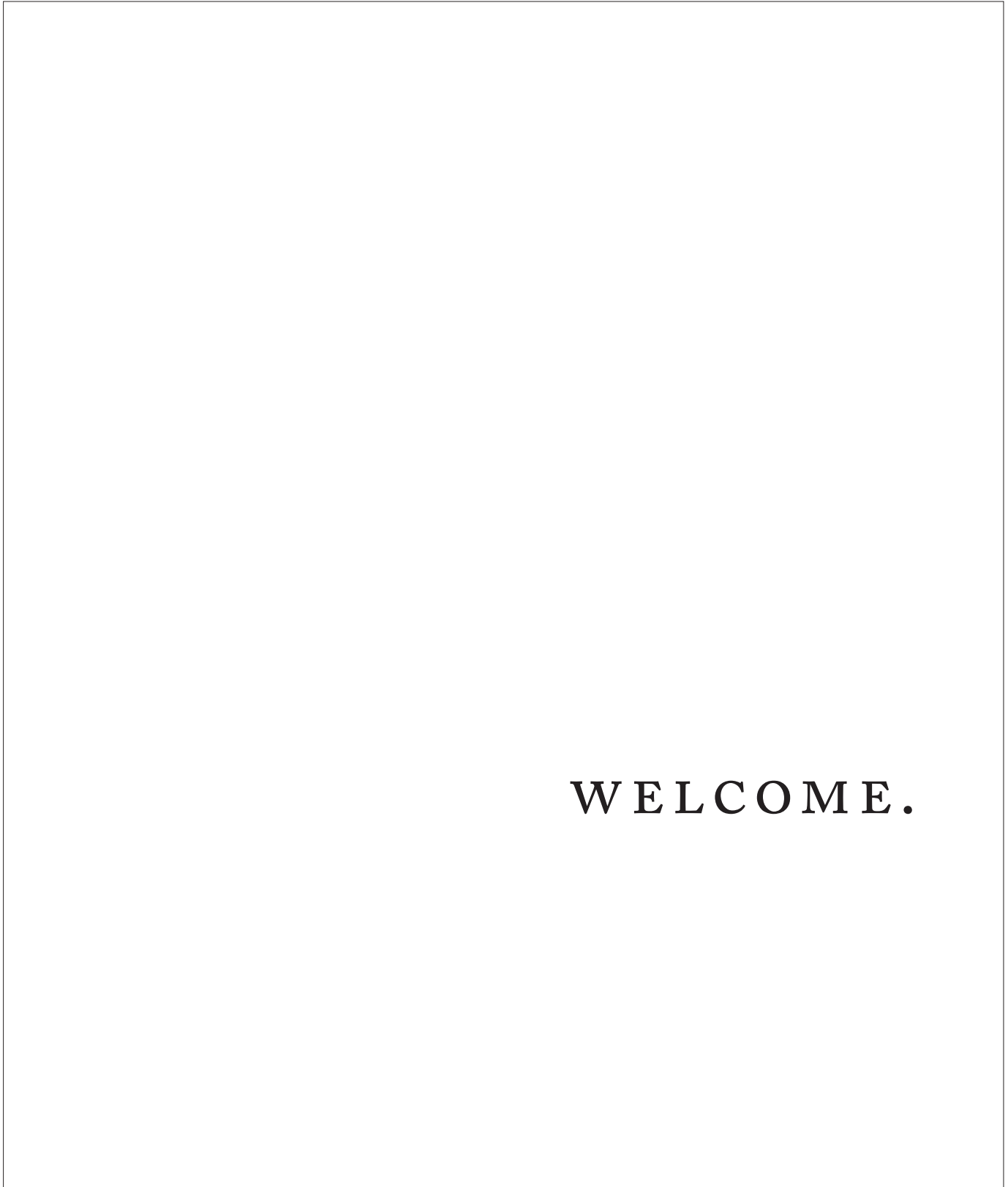
NOTES & ERRATA ON MESSAGE & MEANING

**WITH SOME BITS ABOUT
IMAGE, TIME, SPACE & SPAM**

**A THESIS BY
CHRISTOPHER FIELD**

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WELCOME.

¹ That's Portuguese, baby^a.

^a For the late-period Motown fans out there, this is to be read in the same way that Marvin Gaye says "That's French, baby. It means you were *incredible*." on a track on 1982's *Midnight Love* the name of which I can't for the life of me, even after going to Amazon.com and previewing every damn track on the album[†], recall.

[†] My wife owns this album and we've listened to it in its entirety what I would estimate to be about 34 times, though I can't remember on which track Gaye hilariously/awesomely utters the above-referenced statement. Unfortunately all of our physical CDs remain boxed up in our basement since our move back to the East Coast. Most of it has been imported into our *iTunes* library, but every now and then I find myself craving a deep-cut off of some album that I know hasn't been imported and I feel a vague sort of paralysis. There's something interesting to be said here about the dematerialization implicit to the digital medium, but, shit, let's get back to the main event before someone calls the cops.

Bienvenidos. Willkommen. Bienvenue. *Boa vinda*¹. You are here. You are reading words printed on paper. You'll never untangle the circumstances that brought you to this moment. You are holding my book in your hands. Thank you for picking it up. Perhaps you know me personally and I gave you the book. If that's the case, thank you for humoring me and at least flipping through this thing. Maybe someone like Jan Kubasiwicz² recommended that you check it out for reasons that seemed cloudy to you and now you're standing awkwardly in his office, thumbing quickly through it. Either way, you're here. So thank you. I appreciate having you as a reader, as an audience. We're going to talk about Dynamic Media, we're going to talk about What That Means To Me and Why I'm Interested In It As A Topic, we're going to talk about emotion and cinema and design and physical space and projection and light and sound and interactivity³, and we're going to be here for a while. So kick back. Find yourself a bottle of wine, make yourself a cocktail, locate a high-end micro-brew. Light one up if that's your thing. Pick your poison, as they say. I'm not here to judge you. Make yourself comfortable. Actually, before making yourself comfortable, be sure you have adequate lighting, preferably from a floor lamp or indirect source near your seating arrangement. Overhead light is to be avoided at all costs⁴. All of these things will make this an infinitely better read. Possibly. Maybe. *Theoretically*.

WHAT I TALK ABOUT WHEN I TALK ABOUT MY THESIS

There's this: I'm interested in the translation of emotion through media and the strengths and weaknesses of discrete media forms in affecting people's perceptions, emotions and experiences. I'm interested in emotional response to media, and the reasons that people choose to interact with or perceive different media forms.

LET'S GET SPECIFIC, GODDAMNIT

The primary way in which I'm investigating these media forms is through the examination of cinematic narrative conventions as tools of emotional response. In commercially-produced narrative films⁵, certain storytelling techniques are used to elicit emotional responses from the viewer. By isolating these conventional components, (e.g. "the countdown" [a timer or clock built or plunged into a story to create tension], "the costume" [clothing dictating a character type or personality], "the two person dialogue scene" [specific use of camera angle and pace of editing], "the voiceover" [narration as a tool of storytelling]) from their traditional Hollywood context, I'm examining whether they retain the same specific emotional effects (i.e., tension, sadness, identification with character, character development) *sans story*, that is, whether these conventions can function on their own and elicit an emotional response in the viewer/perceiver without the framework of a larger arc of the story holding them together. Each isolated component is given its own means of display and interactivity via specific installations that enhance the effect of and/or distance the viewer from the narrative convention. When experienced sequentially or collectively, these fragmented cinematic tropes engender emotional responses, allowing the viewer/perceiver to create his/her own narrative, or lack thereof, as they interact with the physical space. Does the installation of these isolated conventions into a single physical space alter their emotional effect or resonance, or their ability to affect the viewer? And how can this be useful to artists/designers/proprietors of media?

² Founder/Patriarch of the *Dynamic Media Institute* (DMI) at MassArt (the graduate program for which this whole shebang is being produced) and my thesis advisor.

³ Maybe.

⁴ This applies not only to the perusal of this document, but also to most real-life situations. Consider it freebie advice from someone who cares about these things. Jesus Christ, I'm already sounding condescending. I apologize. But seriously, don't ever use overhead lighting. Or fluorescent lighting under any circumstances.

⁵ I.e., blockbusters, Hollywood movies, shit you watch on cable for the umpteenth time even though you've seen it and can't help it because for one reason or another you're drawn in over the Rohmer film you have from *Netflix* sitting by your TV, even though you know you'll feel better after watching the Rohmer and there's nothing you can really do about it.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH, RELAX,
IT'S NOT ALWAYS GOING TO BE LIKE THIS

6
Kurt Vonnegut Jr. once famously (at least to me) wrote "If you really want to hurt your parents, and you don't have the nerve to be gay, the least you can do is go into the arts."^a

^a
Quoted in *A Man Without A Country*,
New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005.
pg. 24.

7
Or a corporately sponsored nerd engineer
hothouse like MIT's Media Lab.

8
And thus having to take unsexy but
potentially high-paying jobs in the
advertising/design field and feeling like a
lame schmoe when attempting to explain
one's post-graduation plans to people like
instructors or artists or the kinds of folks
who would/could consider this kind of world
not only lame, but somehow *beneath* not just
you but also them for having to sit there and
listen to you rationalize why you're
convincing yourself that you're semi-excited
to go to work for what is, for all intents and
purposes, "The Man", or at the very least the
minions who do the bidding and spread the
message of "The Man".

9
Emotional, financial, you-name-it.

10
This story is recalled in the preface to Fante's
Ask the Dust, Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow
Press, 1939. pg. 5-7.

I'm going to make every attempt to keep this book light and civil and entertaining. It's easy to disappear up one's own rear end when discussing one's work, especially graduate work in the arts⁶, which normally isn't funded by any sort of university like a PhD program-in-almost-anything-else might be⁷, and which generally ends up putting whomever is doing the indulging in a serious financial hole⁸, not to mention the spousal⁹ collateral damage that occurs as a result of this indulgence. But so it's easy to lose track of whether anyone would actually care to listen to what you're saying, because you've spent so much time thinking about it and thinking about it and talking around it and working on projects about it. I mean, you're in it. You're there. You're inside. So it's sometimes hard to get perspective on whether what you're saying and how you're saying it will have any relevance to anyone other than yourself. If a graduate student writes a thesis in a vacuum and there's no one there to read it, does it still exist? And so forth. So, I'm going to try to keep this shit entertaining. Charles Bukowski said that at a certain point in his life he went to the library and started picking up books and opening them and reading random pages, looking for something, for a voice that didn't seem phony and off-putting. He kept putting the books back on the shelves, not finding what he was looking for, disgusted, until he got to John Fante: the first writer that spoke to him, that didn't make him want to put the book back on the shelf.¹⁰

I'm going to try to keep this book in your hands for as long as I can. Flip around. Look at the pictures. Read things out of context. If it goes back to your shelf, that's ok. If it goes back to Jan's, that's ok, too. I suppose that's where it will live. But know that I have you in mind as I'm writing this, and not just myself, and not just the stuff I've spent two years thinking about. Ideas exist to be shared, and debated, and exchanged. Otherwise, they're ether-vapor, soot, exhaust-warm breeze on a summer night. Gone into your memory. Oblivious.



Born Slippy

1

Being/meaning my own personal/semi-historical relationship with, past encounters in and around, and possible future dealings in the midst of Dynamic Media.

2

Both of these being your standard home-use computers of the time.

3

Referring here to my first cousin Michael Kentley, who is, for lack of a less vague term, a *computer engineer* currently living in Bend, Oregon, who in the early 1980s was an avid BBS user and home computer enthusiast, and who, according to family/probably-mostly-reliable lore, had a personal hand in developing what is now known as Bluetooth™ technology, as well as being likely responsible for my father purchasing the aforementioned Atari computer. So I guess that might explain the *how*, but not necessarily the *why* of the Atari purchase.

4

Google search results to document and/or back this up as something more than a figure of my imagination have proved inconclusive. Yes, that was the extent of my research.

5

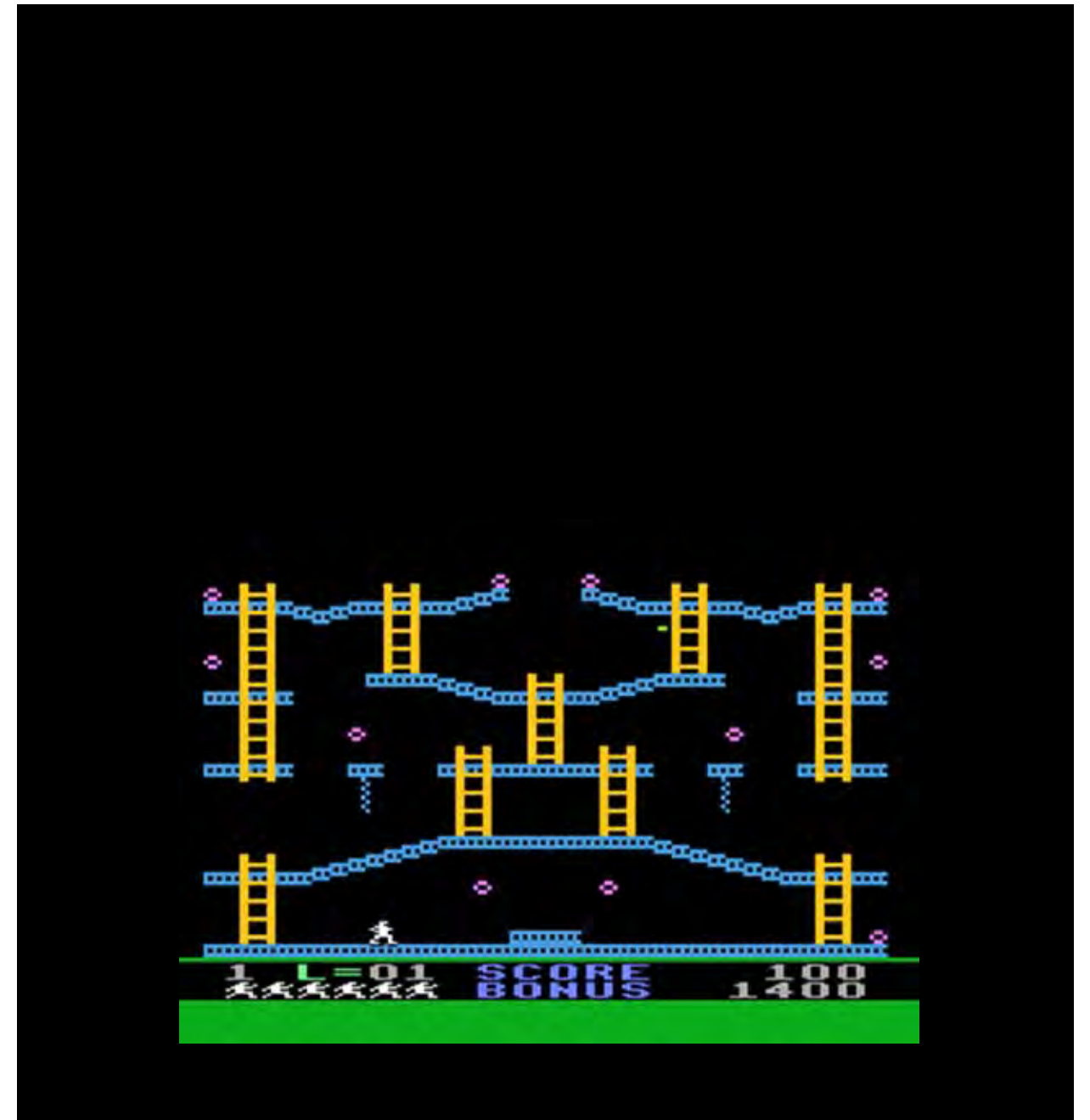
Seemingly the only program that was accessible via the wheelie cart computer, at which you had to *stand*.

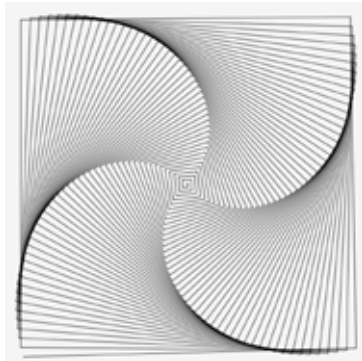
6

We're not talking calculus here; it was stuff like $2+8-3X6+4/2x1000x1000x9999$ or whatever we, being the totally bitchin' first graders that we were, could figure out how to type in.

This¹ probably began, most likely, with a five- or six-year-old me using my parents' Atari computer. Why we had an Atari computer, rather than an *Apple IIE* or a *Commodore-64*², has never been accurately or legitimately explained to me. I blame my cousin³. But most likely I first used a computer, under the guise of some sort of game experience, around 1985 or '86. There was a game called *Jumpman* (Epyx, Inc. San Francisco, CA, USA), which was a pretty basic but semi/totally awesome action-adventure affair that featured the titular hero made of jaggy white pixels who navigated multi-story levels via—yes—jumping. Jumpman did not shoot things; instead he avoided things that were out to get him by jumping over them. Additional internet research has uncovered the fact that Jumpman's mission was, apparently, to defuse bombs planted by terrorists on Jupiter. Who knew?

Another initial remembrance: Using the program *Logo* (Bolt, Beranek and Newman, Cambridge, MA), which I believe was a drawing program that consisted of a blank screen and an icon of a small white turtle⁴, in the first grade. Our classroom had a computer on a wheelie cart that we were allowed to use during scheduled time, the management of which, both then and now, seemed and seems cloudy and obscure. I do remember specifically making excellent and, what I would consider to be, creative use of my hard-to-predict-or-understand *Logo* time, though. The thing with *Logo*⁵ was that you input numbers and vague equations into a kind of code line that had a blinking box, like the blinking vertical line to the right of every last letter that I'm presently typing. These numbers and equations⁶ would





7
To a twelve- or thirteen-year-old.

8
for a PC-based product, shockingly well-designed and handy.



9
You only got to see one track at a time, meaning that you could record on top of the previous track to build layers, but you couldn't hear the track while you were recording over it, if that makes sense.

10
I'll admit it; I occasionally snooped.

instruct the little turtle to make lines on the screen, using the numbers as instructional queues. I'd imagine the number or numbers were equated to rudimentary X and Y coordinates, and the little turtle drew white lines via his or her path or paths between those coordinates. I remember at some point having the idea of putting in a really complicated equation or set of numbers to see if I could get the turtle to completely saturate the screen with lines. I probably didn't use the word "saturate" in my mind; the more likely thought-spoken phrase would have been the staple of 1980s childhood parlance "go crazy". I wanted to make the turtle go crazy. This seemed to me to be the obvious and predestined function of the turtle, to make the screen white and aglow with the hurried pixel shell frantically scurrying at a digital hare's pace to move within and without in order to catch up with my lines of frenzied numeral edicts instructing it to go crazy. I don't think I got in trouble, but I believe my teacher had to eventually just unplug the thing. This was basically abstract algorithmic drawing, and this was 1986, and looking back on it I kind of think I was probably a bad-ass little kid for goofing around with this stuff.

Let's go ahead and move forward a little bit now, into the early to mid 1990s, into the world of grunge and *Seinfeld* and clothes ill-fitting and rat-tail haircuts that were somehow still being had. My family had upgraded to a *Gateway 2000* (Gateway, Inc. Irvine, CA USA) computer, which had *Windows 3.1* (Microsoft Corp., Redmond, WA, USA) as an operating system and also the built-in, mind-blowing⁷ feature of the pre-installed application *Sound Recorder* (Microsoft Corp., Redmond, WA, USA), which allowed one to, yes, *record sound* digitally via a little external microphone⁸. It also allowed one to apply "echo" to the recordings, and to actually combine and layer different recordings together, albeit in a "fingers crossed that this lines up" way⁹. I spent the bulk of a summer recording a fair amount of fairly rudimentary *musique concrète*/sound collage pieces. The *pièce de résistance* of this particular *oeuvre* was a sound collage that I assembled of excerpts from a semi-nefariously¹⁰ acquired spoken-word cassette that one of my older sister's ex-boyfriends had had the sheer stupidity and utter lack of any even remote sense of self-awareness to (never mind committing to magnetic tape in the first place) physically hand over to another human

being. These excerpts, which contained phrases like "The Antarctica" (sic), "Play with myself...", and pseudo-stream of consciousness clunkers like "I'm here...talking to you in the garage...there are a lot of boxes in here...I wonder what's in these boxes...", were laid over a sonic bed of the opening iconic intro synth phrasings of Underworld's dance hall classic "Born Slippy" (1995).

The point here is that I was doing this stuff because it felt natural to me to do it, and because it felt like it was *what I was supposed to be doing*. Sometimes I feel like that's the best description of what it feels like to do creative work, to be engulfed in it and to just be cranking away, because it just feels right.

Later, when it became time to pick a college, I ended up choosing Denison University¹¹ because it had a program called *Media Technology and The Arts*¹², which was an interdisciplinary major involving cinema, writing, and audio engineering. Also, when I visited the campus as a prospective student, there was a girl¹³ on my tour that I found very attractive, and part of me decided to go there just on the off chance that she might attend, so swayed was I by four years of single-sex schooling and misguided adolescent angst.

By this time I had played in a rock band for a little while, had done some fiction writing, and had gotten interested in filmmaking¹⁴. This course of study seemed to have the potential to allow me to develop all three interests, with an eye toward the notion that these forms could all be strengthened by each other or possibly combined in some way at some point, i.e., writing and recording music for a short film, writing a script to make the film, actually making the film, writing a story about making the film, recording a song about the story about making the film. And so forth.

The point is that I didn't want to pick one subject or medium and go forward with it and it alone; I wanted to do all three, and I still do. When I become familiar with a media form that I like, I want to become good at it, to accrue that skill, and I want to then incorporate it into my work, which is often a combination of media forms. This combining of discrete forms into a singular, seemingly indivisible work is New or Dynamic Media at its core. Basically.

11
a small liberal arts school in Granville, OH, student body: 2,048. Notable entertainment industry alumni include Steve Carrel, Michael Eisner, Jennifer Garner, and Hal Holbrook.

12
Apparently a major no longer offered (!): <http://www.denison.edu/academics/departments/index.html> (BTW, the picture on that page is total BS; no instructor I had ever wore a Quirky Professor Hat.)

13
Who was there with her entire family, which included at least a few younger siblings and her *Orvis*-ly dressed parents, so that the tour I went on was somehow just me (I had flown out there by myself for some reason) and this family, and it was late spring, and the girl somehow had a tan, despite being from Michigan, and was asking about the swimming program, even though she wasn't one of those ropey/too muscly kinds of tall intimidating girls who swim at the collegiate level; in fact, she was very well-proportioned indeed, according to the memory implanted in my cortex as a giddy seventeen-year-old at the end of four years of an all boys' school and finding every sensory detail heightened, from something as banal as the smell of the blades of grass as we strolled, this family and me, about the considerably grassy campus, to the way the girl's foot's hue changed at the edge of her sandaled heel, to the fact that it was April and the sun wasn't shining but it still felt comfortable and pleasant, and that it wouldn't have, had it been just two or three degrees cooler. No, she didn't end up going to Denison.

14
past the point of "I really like movies" and into the mindset of "I wonder how they're really made and if I could make them", etc.

Dynamic Media & Me:

A Buddy Comedy

1
then, girlfriend.

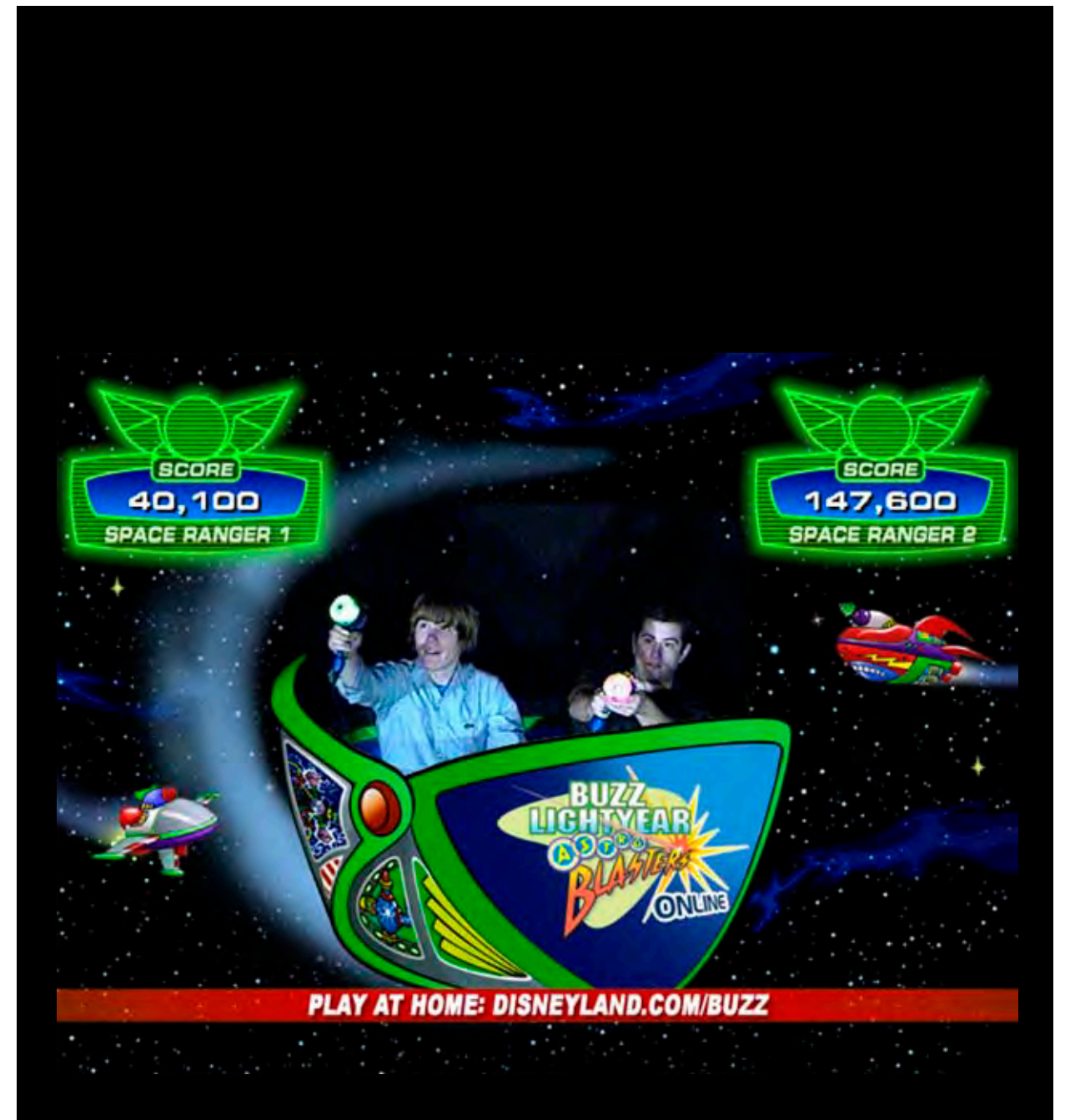
2
which consists of graduating from a (good^a) college, getting a well-paying job, living in specific city neighborhoods, meeting a mate, getting married, buying a house in the suburbs, having a child, and so on and so forth (granted, this is only the social timeline of a specific socio-/economic class).

a
What constitutes “good” in this sense, and the silly and inane way that this is socially and professionally calculated and perpetuated in the Greater Boston Area (for one example), is something that always has and always will, pardon the expression, fry my ass.

3
Not really. It’s more like I idealized suddenly knowing what to do with myself.

Circa 2004 or so, when my wife¹ was tired of working at her first job after college, and had the considerable gumption to take a step back from her own personal situation and consider what she might want to actually *do* with herself, rather than work as a consultant at a corporate firm making decent cheese and progressing along the Greater Boston Area Social Timeline², we had a lot of conversations about interest, meaning personal human interest in general, meaning the things that we as people are interested in pursuing, and the subjects that are meaningful to us and worth studying in greater detail, perhaps in graduate programs, and we basically had some good old-fashioned, frank and earnest “What the hell am I doing with myself?” back-and-forths. One thing that my wife came to realize about herself was that she was interested in many things: architecture, art, set design, philosophy. This was at a time when a staggering amount of her friends were going to law school and setting their professional lives on fixed paths. We both sort of half-yearned for one of these things to become our professional interest. I had vague visions of the priesthood³ and of hearing a calling. Sometimes you want something or someone to tell you what to do.

But this realization of the co-existence of multiple interests both excited and scared her. On the one hand, she had a lot of options; she’s an extremely smart and talented person, capable of each and/or any of the subjects laid out before her. On the other hand, what if she was destined to be the kind of person that flitted around from job to job and thing to thing never having the resolve or interest to stay at the thing long enough to get really good at it? I mean, you don’t want to be one of *those people*.



4

I was personally still working a lame-o MA state job; I'm not saying I had it made in the shade. But I started to feel better about my own overall trajectory.

5

My wife ended up picking architecture and studying at SCI-Arc, in Los Angeles, which is a great and terribly cool^a place, but as far as its name recognition in the Boston/Harvard GSD-or-it-must-be-a-community-college architecture community, well, just forget about it.

a

We're talking parties every Friday at 5pm, at the school, which is a 1/4-mile-long old freight building, each party hosted by a different studio class and always comfortably laid-back in the way that only events taking place in Southern California can be, each with semi-limitless free drinks and the likelihood of a B-level celebrity sighting (someone like, say, Giovanni Ribisi) being fairly high, it being an artsy/creative place and downtown and in L.A. and all.



During these conversations or series of conversations, I remember eventually feeling a strange sort of calm warmth, because I realized that I had always been interested in many things, and that that was, theoretically, ok⁴; that maybe my strength wasn't in the mastery or pursuit of any one thing, but in the pursuit of a combination of many different things. My strength could be the "multi"⁵, rather than the singular.

The problem with the aforementioned pursuit and combination of multiple media forms is that it makes it hard for me to get a sense of what it is exactly that I do. People know what a painter does, what a graphic designer does, what a filmmaker does. People like being able to reduce someone's occupation to a one word or one sentence description. It's a natural tendency toward comfort and order. Conversely, it's been my personal experience that it's hard for people to know what exactly I'm is talking about when I use the term "dynamic media". Its complexity and elasticity, both of which are amongst its most inherent and, simply, best characteristics, are precisely what make it hard to reduce it to a tag line. In fact, the reverse tends to happen; I tend to start talking about stuff that doesn't really make any real sense or else I don't even attempt to describe what I'm studying, the latter coming off as aloof and the former just making me sound confused. I can remember trying to appease my father-in-law's questions about what it was exactly that I was studying by telling him that I made, or could make, *iPhone* apps. I mean, I can't even do that.

Perhaps the best way to describe dynamic media, or what goes on in the DMI program, to someone, especially someone who knows me or has known me for a fair amount of time, is to, rather than say it's about making something from data and algorithms or the combination of discrete media forms into a singular or totally awesome new form, is to say that it encourages my innate impulse to combine (music, writing, filmmaking, graphic design) in order to discover chimeric forms where these types of media converge. That would make it clear why I'm studying what I'm studying, why I'm committing two years of my life to something, why I would bother trying to go to grad school and being broke for a while: because it allows me to continue to do the things that I do, to get better at them, to "push" them to a certain degree, and to, in a sense, become a better designer/art-

ist/version of myself⁶. So, maybe I'll try that the next time someone asks.

The main point that I've been trying to slyly allude to by tiptoeing and lightly break-dancing around it is that to a certain degree I can't separate dynamic media and all that it entails from the way that I go about my own creative business. The question "Why dynamic media?" seems funny to me, because the answer is that I couldn't imagine not doing it, from my earliest quasi-accidental algorithmic drawing in 1986 to any of the work I've done in the DMI program, to anything I might do or not do in the future.

6

I mean this in the least New Age, week-long-retreat-in-Ojai way possible.

Moviegoers & Boob-tubers & Things In-Between

But let's get back to where we were going before I took us down the road of memories and reasons for memories and attempts to justify and/or rationalize my course of study and general life trajectory. Not that it wasn't fun, and it won't be fun again, but we have business to attend to here. At the outset, I said we were going to talk about emotion and image and cinema and design and physical space and projection and light and sound and interactivity. Let's at least start talking about the first two or three; there's plenty of time to get to the rest of it later.

At a very basic level, all image-based media creates an emotional response in the person who is perceiving it. From the strobing Flash ad on a crappy website that tells you CONGRATULATIONS YOU'VE WON, or OBAMA WANTS MOMS TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL, to a Rothko at the MOMA, to an episode of *Mad Men*, to the commercials in between the segments of an episode of *Mad Men*, and all of the billions of images in between, every image we experience has some kind of emotional response. The spectrum of responses that the image produces, of course, varies wildly¹. As a media designer or artist, understanding the way specific images affect emotion is vital to creating work that resonates (or doesn't) in the way that we as image progenitors want things to resonate (or don't).

This is a giant topic, yes. It's impossible to explain the breadth of emotional responses to image. What I'm going to attempt to do here is bring up a few examples of image forms that we're all familiar with and experience regularly, so that we can pick them apart and ponder them and kick them around. So, without further ado...

¹

The same image can engender boredom (*This is lame, change the channel*) or complete fascination and wonder (*don't you dare change the channel*), depending on the person and the circumstances in which that person is experiencing it. And, even the most banal or slight reaction is still an emotional response. So, if someone says "I have no reaction to this", that in itself is an emotional response^a. The lack of response is a response. The point is that it's inescapable: the image affects us because of the way it makes us feel.

^a
Heavy, I know.



ADVERTISING

The most transparent, yet arguably successful way that the image is used to elicit or engender emotion is through advertising. So, I'm going to focus here on the still or static image in advertising, meaning what we might see in print ads, web ads, billboards, bus sides, subway panels, outfield walls—static images—things you can look at and consider that aren't in motion or changing or sequenced.

Advertisers use images to sell products. An advertiser's primary objective is to convince you that you should buy the product they're hucking. They do this by getting you to feel like you want or need something. Usually that something is their product².

There are a few different ways that advertisers accomplish this. One would be advertising something with the message that whatever it is is a great, high-quality, useful product, something that would be nice to have. The ad is telling you that you should buy the product because it's a good product. An advertisement like this might include a photograph of the product, well-lit and dazzling. Think of a car ad. A watch ad. A jewelry ad. Ads with sparkly and shiny things. By creating aesthetically pleasing images, advertisers get us to think of beauty and niceness. We then apply that beauty to our selves and lives by visualizing ourselves with the products. We see ourselves in the image by conjuring fantasies of ourselves with the product. There's then a longing for this fantasy. Maybe we buy the car or watch or bracelet.

Another type of ad would be when the idealized situation is basically just flat out spelled out for you. IMAGINE THE EXCITEMENT OF A CARNIVAL CRUISE. Photographs of people having the times of their lives. An idyllic white behemoth ship in an azure sea under a cloudless sky. Frosty piña colodas with umbrellas and speared fruit. The image is an idealized representation of what your life could be like. *You like happiness, don't you? Wouldn't it be nice to be happy? Take our cruise. You will be.* Advertisers use people that look fit and happy, and they want us to want to be these people, regardless of how absurd that might be in reality, due to our own personal situations. The image here is escapist: something we can project

ourselves into and experience vicariously, and, then theoretically experience by paying money for it. This category would include web ads for *Viagra* and *Cialis* featuring frisky surprisingly toned and fit retirees in matching outdoor bathtubs, Match.com ads with seemingly young, happy couples (who are definitely not serial killers)—anything in which people are portrayed as happy and carefree because of something related to what is being advertised. They try to stimulate a longing in the viewer/perceiver. Whether they succeed or not is up to a large amount of people. But chances are, at some point, you've probably bought something based solely on the image you saw in an advertisement, because of the way it made you feel or wanted to feel, whether you consciously realized it at the time or not.

TIME-BASED IMAGE (YOU KNOW...MOVIES)

Let's get talking about something a little happier: People love movies. Box office sales in the US alone equaled \$10.5 billion in 2010³, not counting DVD/Blu Ray sales, *iTunes* downloads, pay-per-view, and every other way people can conceivably access and watch movies. As entertainment technology has advanced, and more and more narrative forms have been invented and entered the consumer consciousness⁴, cinema has remained an extremely popular form of entertainment. In fact, box office sales have increased in every year since 1990⁵. Despite Hollywood studios routinely playing Chicken Little and demonizing the downloading and unauthorized (IE, illegal) replication of their content, and cultural critics continuously speculating on the eventual/inevitable death of cinema due to a wide variety of societal and cultural factors, movie culture continues to not only endure, but thrive, as a media experience people choose to pay for and utilize during their leisure time. Is there something about the time-based image that speaks to us in a way that other media doesn't, that has the ability to affect us emotionally in ways that other image forms can't?

Bill Viola, in addition to creating a wide and varying body of work over the past 35+ years and being quoted multiple times in this document, has written extensively about the time-based image and how it relates to hu-



2

Sometimes they're not necessarily even trying to convince you that you want or need what they're selling; they're just trying to convince you indirectly that it's a good idea to buy whatever it is that they're selling. One example of this would be *Coca-Cola's* attempted launch of *Ok Soda* in the early 1990s. The company tried to market a new soda to "young" or "hip" people, "intentionally targeting people who didn't like advertising."^a The advertising campaign was based entirely on the fact that the product was anti-establishment, anti-advertising, anti-authority, but in a sort of grunge-era, lightly apathetic way. In the advertising campaign's images, there were no descriptions of what the soda tasted like, or happy, refreshed-looking people. They instead used non-statement statements, like "The better you understand something, the more OK it turns out to be."^b and monochromatic, graphic novel-ish illustrations. *Ok Soda* was selling the idea of early-to-mid-1990s youthful ironic detachment, not a strangely fruity cola. You were buying the idea, which really didn't have much, if anything, to do with a soft beverage. The product, test-marketed in "youth-heavy" cities like Austin, Boston, Portland and Seattle, ultimately bombed.

^a Sergio Zyman, *The End of Marketing as We Know It*. New York: HarperBusiness, 2000. pp. 47.

^b http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OK_Soda

3 <http://www.boxoffice.com:80/statistics/yearly>

4 such as video games, virtual reality, webisodes, "augmented reality" experiences, etc.

5 <http://www.boxoffice.com:80/statistics/yearly>. I know that the internet and digital entertainment options didn't get cooking, really, in popular culture until at least the mid-1990s, but I chose 1990 as a year to sort of mark the "twinkle in the eye" of the superdigital era, if that makes sense.

man perception. In a 1989 statement, he wrote:

I have come to realize that the most important place where my work exists is not in the museum gallery, or in the screening room, or on television, and not even on the video screen itself, but in the mind of the viewer who has seen it. In fact, it is only there that it can exist. Freeze a video in time and you are left with a single static frame, isolated from context, an abandoned image, like a butterfly under glass with a pin through it. Yet, during its normal presentation, viewers can only physically experience video one frame at a time. One can never witness the whole at once; by necessity it exists only as a function of individual memory. This paradox gives video its living dynamic nature as part of the stream of human consciousness.⁶

6

Bill Viola, *Reasons for Knocking At An Empty House*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995. pg. 173.

The connection between the viewer and the time-based image, that Viola describes here so eloquently, likely has a lot to do with its pervasiveness and popularity in contemporary American culture. The notion that a film or a television show or any other piece of time-based image content can be seen as having a direct relationship with its viewer through its very nature (i.e., a series of images being viewed sequentially) as a media form, for me, was something akin to a total mind-blow. A painting or sculpture or photograph or internet ad can be summoned in the mind of a viewer, as a single image or a recreation of a single image. But this summoning or recreation *is the only way* that one can experience an entire film. One experiences a series of thousands of discrete images and moments and assembles them in one's own mind to create a story or narrative or experience. It's this combination that makes the time-based image so subjective: no one remembers the same event the same way.

If the time-based image formally invites an inherent connection with the viewer, what sort of content does it usually contain that keeps viewers and moviegoers and boob-tubers going back for more? In his 1993 essay on American fiction and television, *E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction*, David Foster Wallace suggested

Television offers way more than distraction. In a lot of ways, television purveys and enables dreams, and most of these dreams involve some sort of transcendence of actual daily life.⁷

7

David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction", collected in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997. pg. 39.

Sigmund Freud, in his 1900 text *The Interpretation of Dreams*, theorizes that "a dream is a fulfillment of a wish."⁸ Orson Welles famously said, "Cinema is a ribbon of dreams"⁹. There's a connection here. There's something about the time-based image, and cinema and television in particular, that accesses the same part of our emotions that dreams do. The perspective of the camera in cinema, for example, is different from how we physically see; it's a single lens (monoscopic vision) or perspective. We, in our normal human vision, see through two lenses (stereoscopic¹⁰ vision). Perspective in dreams, however, is often¹¹ strangely distanced and omniscient, more similar to the cinematic camera than to our real, waking-life gaze. Content-wise, commercially successful films or television shows tend to adhere to conventional story lines and narrative arcs, not because the people who write them are completely out of ideas¹², but because there's something about them that comforts people on an emotional level. People want to see characters fall in and out of love, and heroes go on spiritual/object-oriented quests, and people in car chases survive explosions. These things offer, as DFW¹³ suggests, a respite from the ordinariness of everyday life and a way to fulfill sub- or semi-conscious wishes as interactive dreams, the interactivity being manifested in the individual assemblage of the isolated images that make up the film or television show or video work in the mind of the viewer. They make us feel things—yes, emotions—because we're actively participating in their creation by generating our own emotional responses as we consume them. We look back at films and time-based images in the same way we look back at memories and dreams, as a series of moments that exist both in the past, when they were originally viewed/consumed, and in the present minds, as they are being reassembled, flickering in the darkened rooms of our consciousness.

8

Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Philadelphia: Basic Books, 1955. pg. 147.

9

My own personal brain. I think this quote was hand-lettered on the wall in the primary Cinema Dept. screening-room/classroom at good old Denison University.

10

The combination of these two images allows us to see depth and things in three dimensions.

11

Yes, it's lame to basically make any sort of generalization about dreams, in the same way that "dream sequences" in crap films often tend to have smoke and moonlight and dwarves, to signify that we're in the "dream world". But I do have a point here, so bear with me.

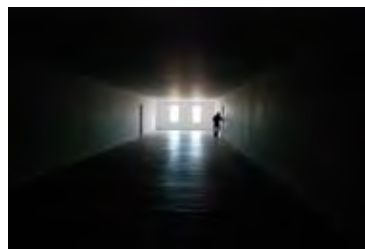
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Though, this might be one reason.

13

David Foster Wallace.

A Note About Installation/Space



There's a sort of joke I used to tell, whenever I was asked about my wife attending graduate school for architecture. I'd say that the difference between she and I was that we both did the work, but that she had a diploma, and a degree, whereas I had nothing. I suppose it's more of a quip than a joke. But anyway, the point was that I helped her with a lot of her work, being a partially/sometimes employed Production Assistant/Sound Mixer/Art Department Coordinator and generally having a lot of free time. Apart from model-making and video editing or whatever else I could help with, I spent a lot of time talking with her about her projects and about architectural concepts in general. I *also* got to accompany her on field trips and international expeditions (one to Paris) that had an architectural lean to them. I *also* spent a lot of time thinking about architecture, and when you think and talk about architecture, what you're really thinking and talking about is space: The use of space, how it's defined, how it's structured, how it makes you feel. Subsequently, a lot of the museums and galleries we visited throughout these little slanted sojourns had an emphasis, on some level, on work involving space. An example of this is the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas. A decommissioned military base purchased by the artist Donald Judd in the 1970s, it's a giant contemporary museum of site-specific installation work curated by Judd. The collection is mainly 60s minimalist stuff, with a few exceptions. Because of its location in rural rural West Texas, and not, say, Manhattan, Chinati is able to give each piece of artwork an unparalleled amount of space. There are old aircraft hangers that hold single works. There are a series of former barrack buildings that



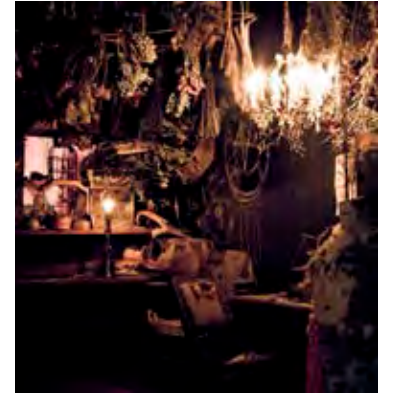
contain variations on one Dan Flavin piece, meant to be experienced collectively. Experiencing this level of attention to space and site specificity rendered other forms of artwork placed where similar considerations were not possible flat or boring to me. In the realm of space and installation, work becomes real and experiential and multi-dimensional. After seeing captivating, well-done installation art, the notion of screen-based work seemed then, and still does now, limiting and dull. Why would I create something that someone needs to experience through screen manipulation when I can create something that they can experience in real life? It's a bit like the notion of making something that's real versus having something exist as an idea. Isn't it better for it to be real? Was it Aquinas whose proof of the existence of God was based on the logic that it's better to exist than to not exist, and since God is a supreme being, He has to exist? I always thought that was a flimsy argument, but there's an element of that at work here.

Possibly the most detailed, involved, totally awesome and all-encompassing installation experience I've ever had was an art installation called *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun*, by Jonah Freeman, Justin Lowe, and Alexandre Singh. It was installed at a gallery called Ballroom Marfa, also in Marfa, Texas. The piece was a multi-room enclave built in what is normally a typical "white walls and concrete floor" gallery space. The piece filled the entire gallery, so that when one entered the gallery, rather than, say, first entering the gallery/museum and subsequently moving into a room with a sign on the door that says *Installation* or *Untitled by Marina Abramovic*, one is instantly, with no warning or explanation, inside the piece, which, in this case, means you're standing in a dingy motel lobby in the 1970s. The piece continues in a series of rooms built/conceived/created with a staggering attention to detail, all tangentially based on the culture of methamphetamine production and consumption, such as: a completely burned-out kitchen, a human-size terrarium filled with cacti; a blinding-white fluorescent-lit room displaying cat-litter busts; an attic crawl space wallpapered with porn and outfitted with an old TV; a pristine formal gallery space, with plush red carpeting and white wainscoting, displaying a series of black and white photographs of men and women, dressed in 1920s-*Shining*-esque dinner wear, holding



crystals in front of their faces as though playing an occult parlor game. And on and on, with all of the rooms filled with nuanced placement of drug and hippie paraphernalia. I left the exhibition with the feeling that I had experienced something profound and otherworldly. This feeling was possible because of the installation's use of space, light and physicality.

Being able to create something that's environmental vs. screen-based allows one a wider palette to choose from. Light, proximity, sound, smell, temperature, texture, volume. These are the kinds of things that you get to play with when working in installation and space, and all of these things have their own set of parameters to consider and effects to orchestrate. Andrew Ellis¹, somewhat dumbfounded and wide-eyed after experiencing the British theatrical group Punchdrunk's New York City installation of *Sleep No More*², possibly said it best: "Isn't that it? Isn't that the ultimate sort of work you can do? Creating an immersive environment where you have control of everything?" Well, probably. Yes.



1
DMI classmate, Class of 2011.

2
An immersive environment/experimental theatre show which spans three warehouses in Chelsea, contains 100 rooms with lavish set decoration and detailing, is based on a cross between Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, cost an estimated \$3 million to produce, and which features performers running around the place, whom you are free to follow or not at your own behest.

*Knit Me A Sweater,
Make Me Feel Better,
Make Me Feel Free*

PROLOGUE

This is the scene: It's a Saturday night in Salem, Massachusetts, and the streets are surprisingly, eerily empty for it being the night before Halloween. My wife and I, and my sister, Erin, and her boyfriend, Matt, are almost back to our apartment after a loop through downtown, which was being attended to by vaguely custodial policemen in a manner found normally in post-apocalyptic zombie films. There's considerable trash blowing around. North Shore late-adolescent toughs with abundant hair gel posture as if to hit each other. We're all in costumes; it was a John Hughes-themed Halloween. My sister is Sloane Peterson from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, her boyfriend is Cameron Frye. My wife is the prom queen from *Sixteen Candles*. I'm Farmer Ted¹. But so we're almost back at our place when Erin asks me "So what is your big thesis idea?", which is a fair question, as I've been working with Matt (an engineer), weekly to code my *SpamStream* project². So the point is that this project, and my school stuff in general, has taken up a sizable amount of not just mine but everyone's time, weekends in serious relationships being what they are, and she has a right to ask questions about what in the hell I'm doing or what the point of it all might be. And so I started rambling about video installation and fragmented narrative and suddenly found myself very tired. I sort of just trailed off. After about a ten second pause, Erin asked, "How does that relate to the spam project?". Which, again, is a fair-enough question. But one to which I had no response. I said something like "Yeah...that's what I'm

¹ AKA "The Geek" AKA Anthony Michael Hall's character, also from *Sixteen Candles*.

² During these sessions, which generally took place at Erin and Matt's place in Roslindale, my wife and my sister generally occupy themselves with hiking together or running or wine drinking or some combination thereof.



trying to work out.” Sarah said, again after a pause, “You’re investigating the emotional response to different media forms.” Thank you, Sarah West.

A META-FICTION KIND OF INSERTION IF THIS WERE META-FICTION

The hard thing about assessing your own work is that there are often so many layers to things. There’s the form of the project, the content, the concept, the intended purpose, the overall effect, and how it will be used/viewed/perceived by others. At least. For clarity’s sake, let’s just use these. Each of these categories has its own set of sub-categories or possibly multiple incidences of each category. For example, a project can use multiple media forms, such as audio, video, text, physical space and/or installation, to name some basic parameters, and could be perceived or experienced in multiple ways, and could have been designed for multiple purposes, and could be driven by multiple concepts. If the project is done for the DMI program, the likelihood is that it probably has some kind of combination of forms or concepts or purpose. This is the nature of the work. So, trying to compare projects can get either fairly confusing, or pretty arbitrary, or both, unless you’re specific about what one is looking for. So, I’m going to try to be specific, and compare things that make sense to compare, and so forth, in an attempt to make sense of the work that I’ve done and am doing and will continue to do.

THE CONCEPTUAL COSBY SWEATER³

Just right off the bat, looking at my projects as a collected body of work, I can see conceptual ties that are the vibrant blues and violets and mustard yellows of thick wool holding the sweater of my *oeuvre* together. My *SpamStream* project started out as basically a 50/50 combination of both the *NoirScape* and the *Holistic Encyclopedia of The (Contemporary) Art(ist)s* projects, in, at the very least, form (a semi-complicated media translation system which starts with text, and which, after a series of Rube Goldberg-

esque machinations and decisions, outputs the text in the form of a visual display that are theoretically placed in physical space for the viewer/perceiver to experience). Conceptually, all three of the projects are about the idea of translation of media, and what mechanisms can be best utilized and implemented to create, maintain or eschew meaning. But here’s where it gets tricky, and where it gets into what I was mentioning above: Is that really the concept, or just the form? On the surface, basic level, the form is an installation. But is the translation of media a better description of the form? And is the concept actually more related to the content, which in the case of *NoirScape* was film noir imagery, in the *Holistic Encyclopedia of The (Contemporary) Art(ist)s* was contemporary artwork and artists, and in *SpamStream* is blog spam and internet imagery? But there’s another layer of meaning with regard to the emotional experience of the viewer/perceiver; the work doesn’t exist in a vacuum. If an interactive work is put in a space and there’s no one there to interact with it, does it still exist? If a virtual tree falls in the woods, etc.

Don G., based on text excerpts from David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, also, on a basic form level, uses text as a source that, through interpretation and translation, ends up as an experiential installation via space and projected light. The conceptual importance in the piece lies in the emotional content of the text, which is represented via fading and blurred typography, and which itself is about a character lying in a hospital bed, enduring extreme amounts of pain because of his refusal to take any serious painkillers, due, in turn, to his staunch adherence to his recovery from drug addiction. This character’s viewpoint and experience are what the project is essentially about.

So I guess I view these particular projects as being part of the same garish pattern that makes up my conceptual Cosby sweater, which are somehow both indivisible and discrete, en-meshed and gridded, flowing into one another and woven in loose thick stitches.

MAYBE THAT METAPHOR DIDN’T WORK BUT
AT LEAST WE CAN NOW MOVE ON
INTO THE REALM OF SOCKS



³

Bear with this metaphor and there’s a 30-35% chance you will be rewarded for your patience by the end of this thing. Yes, *chance*.

4

I know, I know.

So what if we took the notion of duality or good vs. evil, the yin-yang, black and white, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, you say yes, I say no, you say stop, I say go, etc. and applied this idea or these ideas to a pair of socks⁴? They're wool, of course, and they're soft. And there's two of them. And then maybe we can add in the idea of these socks being taken out of their normal circumstances. Think ski socks in the summer or maybe dress socks at the beach. They are taken out of their context. Coincidentally, that's what this next set of projects has in common(!).

My first DMI studio project, *Here and Now: Mapping Jungian Archetypes in Adult Contemporary/R&B Music Videos 1988-1994*, took the visual language of this defined genre of music videos and examined it through the lens of conscious and unconscious narrative symbols. I intentionally left the music and/or soundtrack of the videos entirely out of the project, making the videos into an entirely image-based form, rather than a multi-channel medium.

MementoVision™ extracted the dialogue of a pivotal scene from the film *Memento* and put it at the visual forefront of an installation piece while (largely) removing the image from an image-based medium⁵. :29 takes the Hollywood action/suspense device of the countdown or timer and isolates it, without context. A nameless man, alone in a room, is seen with a large digital clock behind him. He tells the viewer that there are twenty-nine seconds left, and implores the viewer to finish an unspecified task before the time is up. There is no task; nothing happens when the timer reaches zero. The project is an experiment in taking something out of its traditional environs and examining it by itself. Does it create tension? Does it create anxiety? Does Tom Cruise need to be suspended from the ceiling? Does the nature of a countdown speak to something at our cores as finite beings? And so forth.

The Conversation is a short film that is essentially a dialogue scene between two characters with no dialogue. It is shot as such, opening with a long tracking shot to establish setting, followed by a wide stationary establishing shot, followed by medium shots and close ups, edited and assembled in such a way as to create a minor sense of tension before one of the characters simply gets up and leaves the room after some heavy silent



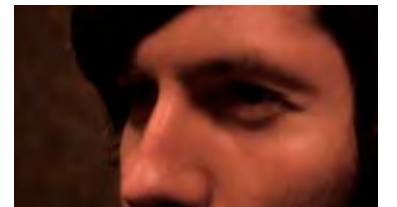
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This was partly because I had just spent a good many hours working exclusively with video for the *Here and Now* project, and the notion of doing another pure video deconstruction project didn't particularly tickle me. My apparent continuous intent on flipping media on its head caused Mr. Joseph Liberty, DMI Class of 2011, to say, around the time of this project, something like "Dude, so you like opposites."

breathing and squinting. I'm not quite sure what the piece is examining. It could be simply looking at the traditional way that dialogue scenes are shot. But it's definitely in the same drawer as :29 and probably the same bureau as the rest of the socks. Wait, are these socks? Or are the socks supposed to be the metaphor for the conceptual level of the projects, i.e., the concept is the notion of duality, thus the two socks, and the projects themselves are the patterns on the socks? Or was it more about the socks being taken out of their place, which would make the socks the media? I'm starting to think the use of the metaphors in this context wasn't the best idea I've ever had.

ONE MORE TIME: UNDERWEAR

When you really get down to it, there's probably a quality that is present in everything you do, that can remain undetected in certain work through acts of self-obscurtion and disguise, but is nevertheless there, always, continuous, lurking. These things can be large or small, huge obvious concepts or idiosyncratic traits or quirks that require close attention to reveal themselves. Looking collectively at the work I've done in the DMI program, everything is, on some level, about media, and about how different media have different strengths and weaknesses and effects and purposes. All of my projects reference the medium or media in which they exist. In order to create work that has the desired effect or emotional response that you're trying to engender in the user/viewer/audience, you must understand how those effects or responses are achieved. As designers, or artists, or simply as media creators, it's necessary to understand the form or forms in which we work in order to better craft and decipher the kinds of experiences we seek to create. My time in graduate school has offered me a chance to study discrete and combined forms of media. Cue up McLuhan, trumpets and fanfare, Ted Nelson raving about missed opportunities through compressed streaming video. Insert pithy comment about media. Copy and paste ad infinitum.



**AND I
GUESS
IT'S
MEANT
TO
BE.
FOREVER,
YOU AND ME,
AFTER ALL.**

Here and Now:

*Mapping Jungian Archetypes
in Adult Contemporary/R&B Music Videos 1989-1994*

1

which itself includes a Nadia Savage-led multi-hour tour of the labyrinthian-to-put-it mildly non-Tower MassArt facilities. And no snacks.

2

which via public transportation would take a solid two and a half hours plus the overall lameness of getting off the commuter line, taking the Green Line to Park Street, taking the Red Line to Harvard, then getting on a bus to Western Ave and walking to the studio, where I work.

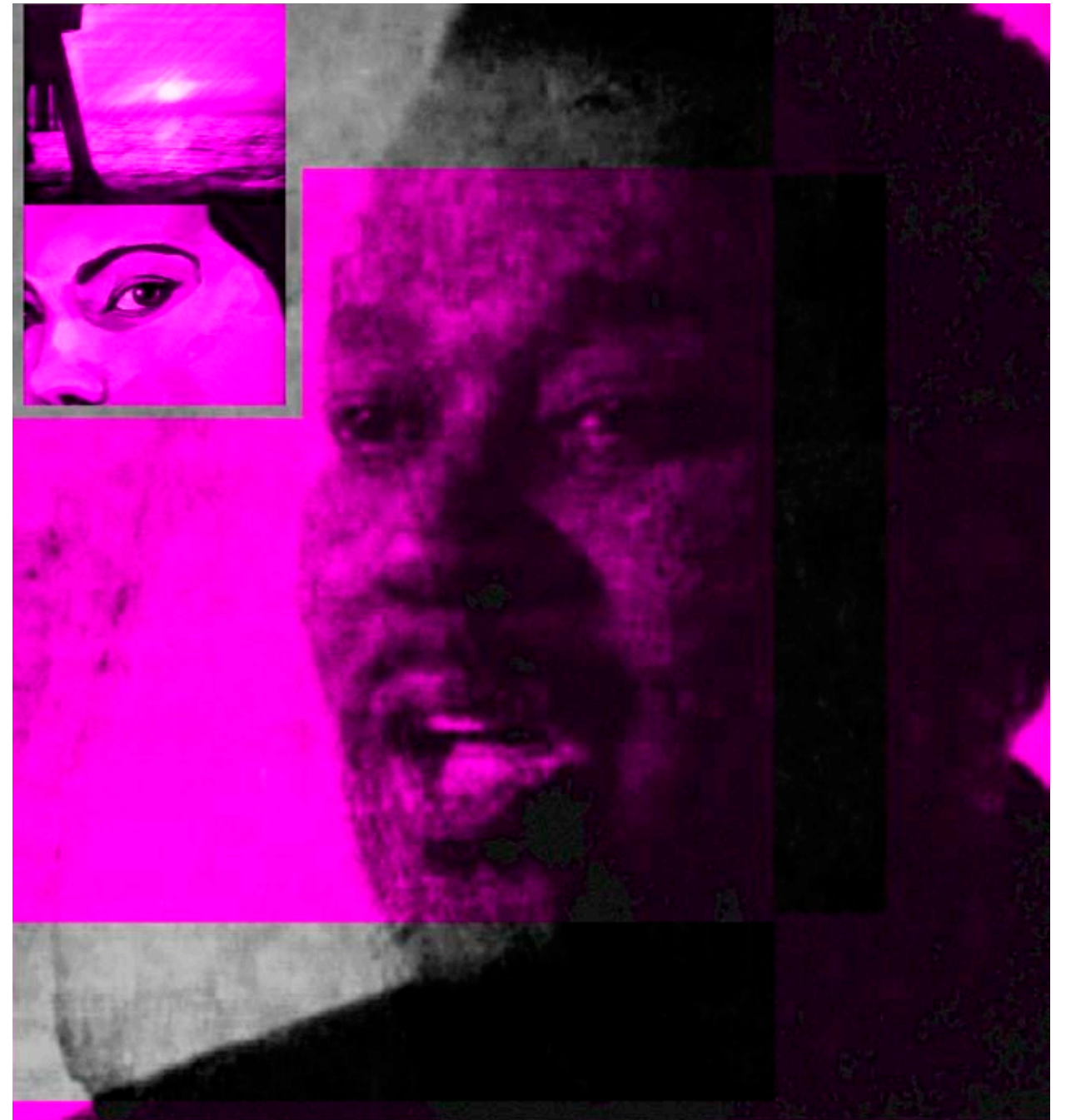
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At the start of this year, feeling somehow born again, I decided to again try taking the train in to school. This experiment ended after two missed trains, a lot of running with my laptop, and a lost monthly pass.

The first thing you're presented with when you're a new DMI student, after you've made it through orientation¹, and you've smirked and sighed your way through the vaguely commune-initiation-esque and entirely fluorescent meet-and-greet in the DMI lounge area, and you are actually sitting in *Design Studio I* across the considerable table formation from Mr. Jan Kubasiewicz, is the *You Are Here* project. Some refer to it as the *You Are (Now) Here* project, since the project handout (remember those?) had a sort of ghosted "NOW" preceding the "Here", appearing and existing in a way that somehow implied both parentheses and also the word "NOWHERE", depending on how existential and/or depressed you were feeling when looking at the handout. Regardless of what we fondly or regretfully remember about what the project was called, it was basically an open-ended assignment, encouraging we newly-initiated to map something about our own personal existence at the time: here, where we are, NOW.

After working in and having to drive to Brighton² a few days a week, I was initially pretty excited about taking the train to MassArt for my evening classes. Moving against the rush, fairly empty trains, abundant time to read. I was excited. But, classes routinely ran late, and I missed the 930PM train often, and had to wait for the 1040PM train, and then one time missed THAT one, and soon I had had enough and decided to drive to school, exclusively³.

So, I ended up spending a fair amount of time on I-93 and I-95/128N, usually searching the dial for something to ease the pain of extensive con-



4 Recently extended from 8-12, due to popular demand(!), according to the station's official website.

5 Pronounced "BOO-SHAY".

6 which comes off as him being a quasi-Barry White, if he had in fact been white and maybe wore cashmere turtleneck sweaters, exclusively.

7 One favorite that I've somehow committed to memory without trying: "And I guess it's meant to be...forever...you and me...after all." Again, imagine this with every word spoken in Boucher's signature baritone near-whisper *sans* background music bed, simply out there in the night.

8 Perversely, Boucher keeps his appearance a guarded secret, which somehow leads me to believe that my assumptions about his audience could be at least partly true.

9 The closest thing to a pure "art" class that the DMI program offers, taught by psychoanalyst-in-training/instructor/surrogate-mother-figure-to-all, Gunta Kaza. Usually taken in the first semester of the program, the class generally gets everyone back into the process of making and being excited about the creative process through weekly assignments that involve physicality and tangibility and a sort of "back to basics" approach, vs. screen-based or digital work.

struction and traffic and traffic due to construction. This led me, in my searching, all the way up to 106.7 on the FM dial, which, between the hours of 8PM and 1AM⁴, is home to the adult-contemporary show *Bedtime Magic*, hosted by the silk-voiced David Allen Boucher⁵, who, apart from having a unique radio delivery and cadence⁶, peppers his between-song DJ banter with hypnotic murmurs and spoken-word recitals of things like Peter Cetera lyrics⁷. Due to this delivery, and to the kind of music played on the show, I imagine his core audience to consist largely of lonely single or divorced career women in their 40s, all wearing oversized cutoff sweat-shirts, drinking Pinot Grigio and living in stale but glittering luxury apartments with skyline views⁸.

But so anyway on one of these drives back to Salem, early in the semester while still honing in on what my idea for the *You Are Here* project might be, I heard Luther Vandross' 1989 hit "Here and Now" on *Bedtime Magic*. I may have sung along. I mean, that's a lethal chorus. The song stuck in my head, as these kinds of songs do. The next day, I went to *YouTube* and watched the video. Cheesy would be a mild word for the general aesthetic of the thing; it featured Vandross standing alone in a room and seemingly singing to someone off-camera. He's not singing at the camera. This singing footage is then inter-cut with a classic boy-loses-girl-boy-gets-girl-? narrative. The actor playing the role of the "boy" is white, has a curly mullet, and wears a denim jacket. This guy also seems to hang out in either art galleries or rooms bathed in white light. There are also crude animations of paintings of sunsets and birds flying. I was enthralled.

I started clicking around *YouTube* and watching more and more videos from this time period, specifically from the Adult Contemporary/R&B genre and I started noticing visual similarities between some of them. A lot of the same kinds of set design and color were used. Lots of purple. Similar story lines and plot devices kept happening, over and over. Camera angles and movement from different videos were repeated as if coming from the same shot list. There seemed to be an underlying visual language waiting to be mined and deciphered..

Also around this time, probably at least ostensibly as a result of the *Design as Experience*⁹ course, I was interested in the work of Carl Jung.

I wish I could say that I had done extensive reading throughout his catalogue, or had taken at least an introductory course on him as an undergrad, but I hadn't. I was familiar with the basics; in high school I'd learned about the Joseph Campbell appropriation of his archetypes and the hero's quest, and then last fall had read a long article in *The New York Times* about the publication of his *The Red Book*. But that's it, really. And so I had the idea of looking for Jungian archetypes in these videos that I had spent a long afternoon in the midst of, forgetting to eat dinner, adrift in a sea of clicks and hyperlinks and pixelated video.

It was the combination of these two seemingly unrelated ideas, cultures and forms, that made me decide to pursue it as a project. I would map Jungian archetypes in the visual language of Adult Contemporary/R&B Videos between 1988 and 1994.

I started the project proper by purchasing four DVDs of music videos from the appropriate genre and period. I already owned *The Best of Cameo* and *The Best of New Edition*¹⁰ (I figured six DVDs was an okay sample size). I imported twenty videos and started cutting them up in *Final Cut Pro* (Apple, Inc., Cupertino, CA, USA). This was chaotic and overwhelming; it was hard to keep track of everything. I needed to pick a specific case study, and a form to display my analysis. I chose "hand gestures" and the specific Jungian archetype of "The Goddess". Hand gestures because they were pervasive in these videos, and because they were hypnotic when looped. I chose "The Goddess" because every one of the videos I studied had some sort of idealized female character or personification in it.

I liked, and still like, the idea of a visual system without a text-based menu. My first idea for the form of the project was to create a large-scale video grid that featured all of the videos, looping in real time. The perceiver would then be able to touch a video, which would, depending on what visual language elements and archetypes it contained, display those elements in two ways. If it contained a visual language element, such as a hand gesture, the section of video containing that gesture would be shown in a smaller grid, alongside other loops of gestures from other videos. This would be the "Conscious" interface, because of the apparent intent of the video makers; it was a conscious decision of the director or choreographer or artist to make

10 Both semi-gag gifts from friends of mine. For a period of time in the late 1990s/early 2000s, we gave each other "bad" DVDs as gifts. I also own a copy of *Freejack* as a result of this practice.





11

Make no mistake: these are stylized, not-fooling-around gestures. These are the kinds of things that aren't done by mistake.

the hand gesture¹¹ and include it, and the way in which these excerpts are presented reflects that.

If the video contained a Jungian archetype, the excerpt from the video containing that archetype would appear, full frame, superimposed over other excerpts from other videos containing the same archetype. The video loops would fade in transparency, allowing the perceiver to make his/her own visual/emotional/spiritual connections between the videos. This would be the "Subconscious" subset, the idea being that the inclusion of these archetypes in the videos wasn't necessarily intentional. Their presence is dependent upon an interpretation of the content, and the interface invites further interpretation.

That's about as far as I got in developing the project. Soon it was on to Guy Pierce, tattoos and nonlinearity in *Memento*. Looking at the *Here and Now* project now, it seems clear that, at a very basic level, I was taking these artifacts that I had experienced at a previous and largely formative point in life (my childhood) and de-contextualizing them, taking them away from their original context in order to look at them with new eyes. It was a *You Are Here* project in the sense that it documented the way I was thinking about very specific things at a very specific time, and it came directly from my own personal experience. I'm just glad I didn't do a visualization of my *Facebook*¹² friends. What would that have told me about my place in the universe, the world, the country, the state, the city, the school, the program, or even the class? Somewhere, likely on one of the upper floors of the Prudential tower, no doubt shrouded in a trench coat and a fedora, I imagine David Allen Boucher is whispering the answer, his voice being near-instantaneously converted to radio waves and transmitted to the cosmos, ready to be reconfigured, one hushed syllable at a time.

12

I'm not a member of the site. Also, no offense if you're into that sort of thing.

NEXT PAGE ABOVE: THE *Conscious* INTERFACE.
NEXT PAGE BELOW: THE *Unconscious* INTERFACE.



**GREAT STORY.
GETS
BETTER
EVERY
TIME
YOU
TELL
IT.**

MementoVision™:

Re-imagining A Conversation

1

I probably first encountered these projects on the DMI website, then in person at the *If/Then* exhibition of student work in April 2009, which took place a few days after my interview (which I basically bombed, as I do most interviews), and then subsequently in introductory class sessions, shown as sort of lay-of-the-land examples of the work being done in the program. These projects seemingly involving either *The Perfect Human* or *Twelve Monkeys* or *La Jetée* or a combination of the three and seemed collectively humbling and vaguely exciting, the same sort of way seniors make you feel when you're a freshman in high school.

2

Meaning all ten (at the time) of us in *Design Studio I*.

3

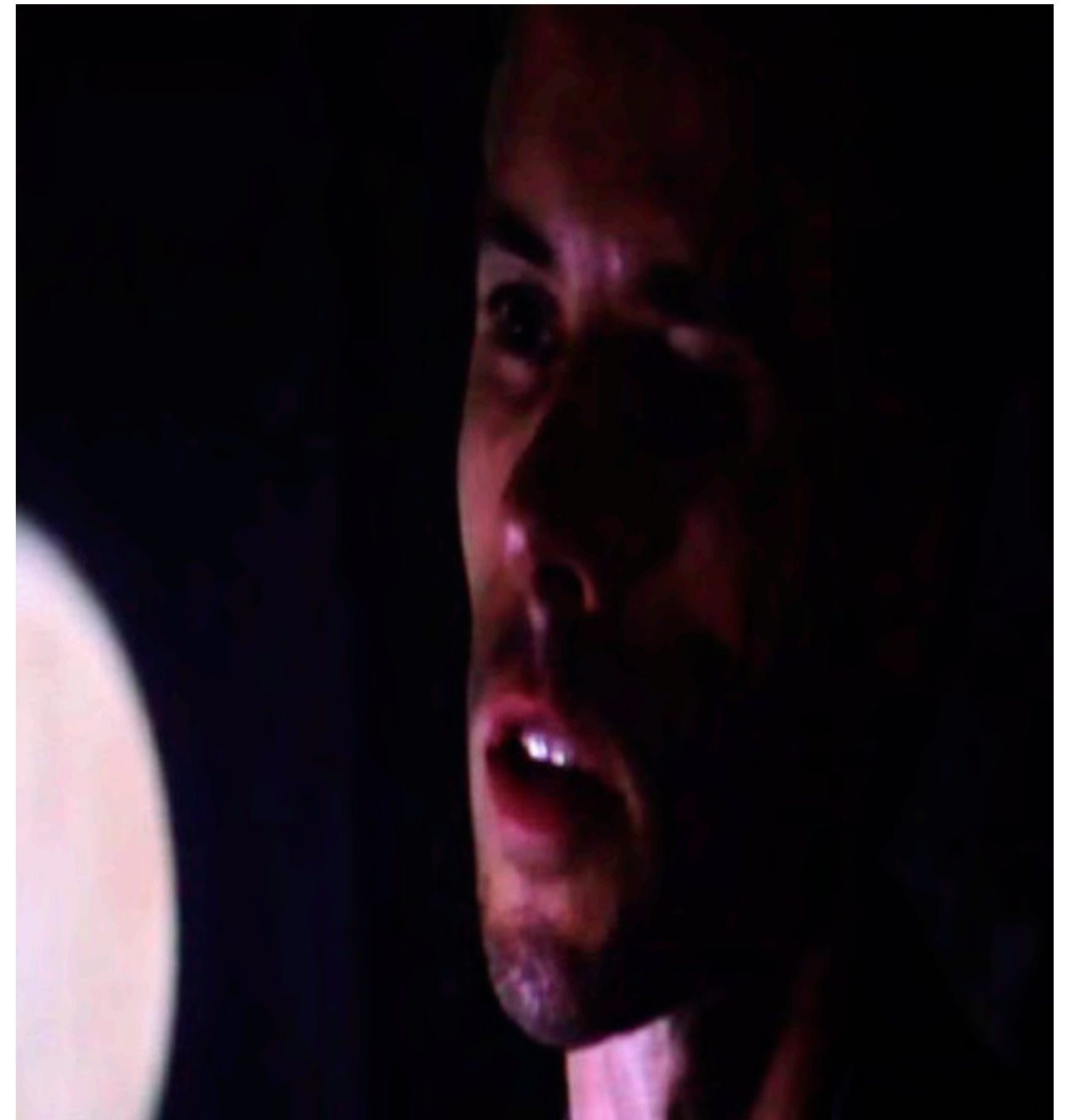
I would usually start projects by figuring out what I didn't want to do, rather than latching onto to an idea from the get-go. This process is sort of like asking someone what they want for dinner, and having them say, "Well, I don't want pasta. And I don't want quesadillas." Not that I've ever been known to behave in such a way.

4

The 2000 documentary directed by Lars von Trier, in which LvT has fellow Danish filmmaker Jørgen Leth remake his 1967 short film *The Perfect Human* five times, each time with a different set of rules or limitations. Leth ends up using the set of "obstructions" as a tool or framework to enhance each film, rather than as a collection of limitations.

Having been peripherally aware of a good deal of DMI projects that dealt with the deconstruction or mapping of a film¹, I think we² all knew a project involving such a process was headed our way at some point during our degree pursuit. Prof. Jan Kubasiewicz threw us the proverbial content curveball when, rather than assigning us one of the aforementioned films that had been the subject of the gradually familiar projects, he chose Christopher Nolan's 2000 neo-noir thriller *Memento*. It's a good/natural choice for a mapping/film deconstruction project, not only because the film has a non-linear structure, but also because it actually has a very specific structure, which reveals itself upon further viewing and inquiry. It's a film that rewards the viewer for spending time with it. I was excited to see what other students would come up with for project ideas, but, I personally didn't want to do another mapping project. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I chose to map the visual language of a specific genre of music videos for my *You Are Here* project, *which I had just finished*. I didn't want to delve into another video mapping project, and I didn't want to create an interface to navigate the film's structure³, which seemed to be what a lot of people wanted to do.

Jan, wily as always, did find a way to sneak *The Perfect Human* into the class—he showed us excerpts from *The Five Obstructions*⁴ in preparation for the assignment. Something about seeing Lars von Trier's giggly and condescending demeanor in the film again made an impression on me, and I decided to use him as the sort of patron saint of my *Memento* project. At some point I imagined that he gave me the following obstruction: remake



Memento without using any video footage from *Memento*.

The notion of remaking something that's image-based *sans* image must have seemed perhaps contrarian and possibly a little bit smug when I presented it to the class. Also, having Lars' visage appear in my weekly required handouts most likely grew tiresome. But I remained committed to my original idea as time rolled on and I spun my wheels trying to figure out how to make something visual that didn't include footage from the film.

At the time, or MEANWHILE... as a good melodrama or cartoon might say, Krzysztof Wodiczko had an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Entitled, ...*OUT OF HERE: the Veterans Project*, a piece in the show contained videos of a British soldier's words being projected on buildings as the audio of the soldier's voice played through loudspeakers. This juxtaposition of the visual display of text and the sound of the words being spoken simultaneously added a level of weight and significance to the content. The speed at which the text was displayed also implied a sort of violence (I believe Wodiczko also added some sound effects of guns and explosions below some of the audio); each word only appeared for the moment it was spoken. It also called to mind the rhythm and speed of spoken language—something you don't realize is moving so fast until it's visually translated, like sticking your head into a stream of water.

The penultimate scene in *Memento* is basically the big reveal of what's been happening for the entire film. Guy Pierce's character, Leonard, kills Joe Pantoliano's character, Teddy, not before Teddy (possibly) explains to him (and the viewer) what's been going on for the last two hours. It's the scene that gives the viewer the most information in the film, or at least what *seems* like the most information. Leonard, the main character, has a memory condition that prevents him from retaining any information for longer than ten minutes⁵. As such, he spends most of the film seeking out information about his (dead?) wife, always on the precipice of solving a mystery that continues to elude him. I had the idea to deconstruct this particular scene and turn it into a somewhat immersive experience, using/yoinking Wodiczko's form of displaying text as the viewer is hearing it. Since there are two characters in the scene, it made sense to split their sources into two distinct feeds: the Leonard side and the Teddy side, each

5

Whether this is a condition that legitimately occurs in the real world, or is something like the "Nic Cage can see five seconds into the future, but only five seconds!!" kind of screenwriter-friendly device is unknown to me and I would suggest, at the very least, worth investigation and/or up for debate.

represented by a screen, a projection and an audio source.

I went about cutting the scene into two discrete short films. One would include only Leonard's audio and text, in black and white, and one would include Teddy's, and they would play simultaneously, being projected onto their respective screens. I made these excerpted movies in *Final Cut Pro*, taking great pains⁶ to make the display of the text sync up with its respective audio source. I did some test experiments with both streams playing on two laptops. It was interesting to see the text as it was heard, but the overall experience lacked the conceptual depth that I thought was necessary for the project. And it was basically still just a Wodiczko rip-off. I could make the argument that the project was basically a deconstruction not only of *Memento* but of the two-person dialogue scene, literally taking each character and assigning them a screen and subsequently a presence in physical space, devoid of camera angle, editing, and image, as an investigation into the language of cinema. Actually, that's not bad.

And so, with the heat on, and my imaginary von Trier peering down at me, condescendingly, of course, I had the sort of good idea that springs into one's mind at just about the moment that one has given up trying to conjure up good ideas. And, it made the project interactive⁷, to boot: What if the person experiencing the installation wore glasses with a sensor (infrared?) that could detect the direction in which they were looking? And what if the screen at which they were looking displayed the text feed, while the screen at which they weren't looking showed footage from the film? The screens would be positioned in such a way so that the viewer could only see one at a time. This would conceptually mimic the condition of Leonard, always "looking" for information, but never able to actually glimpse or retain it, using the cinematic image as a metaphor for knowledge.

I cut together additional versions of the scene that mimicked what it might be like if someone were looking back and forth between the two screens. I did a sort of canned live demo of this system at end of semester reviews, explaining the project only minimally before heading into the demo⁸. The reaction was mixed; some hadn't the vaguest notion of what I was attempting to do. Some felt that I had done something really interesting with the space⁹. Some left for the bathroom.

6

One of the side effects of doing heavy editing to this sequence was that the entire scene's dialogue is now committed firmly to memory, whether I like it or not, most likely due to Joe Pantoliano's signature/trademark gratingly nasal delivery driving the words deep into the farthest depths of my cerebrum. Ask me sometime and I'll do it for you: "I du-nno. Your wife surviving the assault. Her not believing your condition. The pain and anguish and torment tearing you up inside. The *in-SU-lin*."

7

A concern, always, let's face it, at the back of one's mind as a DMI student.

8

To Explain or Not to Explain is one of the great DMI Reviews conundrums. After having presented at seven reviews (thus far) and having tried both ways of going about things, my conclusion is that you should just go ahead and explain your stuff to the best of your ability, leaving very little up to the viewer/listener/audience. Again, I'm just talking about reviews here.

9

That being the DMI Headquarters classroom, in and around which every DMI student spends most of his/her first year.

IDEA






Things and new projects happened, as they do, and I moved on to other pursuits in my second semester. Something about the project continued to linger in my mind, though, as I worked on other things. This spring, I decided to document it properly, so I set it up in an empty gallery. Having never advanced *MementoVision™* past the conceptual stage, the set-up was still very much a simulation of the re-imagined conversation between Leonard and Teddy. There was no interactivity or programming, only two DVD players, two projectors, and two sets of speakers. Still, there was something in the two streams of projected light, rarely simultaneous but always in sync, moving through the dark of the gallery, and the text, wall-sized and strobing, punctuating every breathless word of the dialogue, that left me dazed and more than a little bit entertained, looking for answers and maybe wondering why I never completely finished the project. I have no reasons. Call me Leonard.

INSULIN

AMPHETAMINE



**A
LONELY
SORT
OF
MEMORY**

Figurants

¹
because really, what else is there to talk about?

²
Not the fact that you hang out at pool halls...the bit about interactive narrative.

³
if not since the beginning of time.

When it's Friday or Saturday or Tuesday night, and you're hanging out down at the pool hall or local watering hole and you're having a good time with your buddies, downing some suds and most likely talking about New or Dynamic Media¹, inevitably, someone's going to mention the phrase "Interactive Narrative". It's going to come up. There might be some guffaws. There might be silence. There might be ambivalence. But chances are, what there will not be is a stranger present at the bar to regale you and the rest of your crew with stories of having had a mind-blowing recent experience involving interactive narrative.

This isn't so much a problem as it is a resignation². Recently³, there's been basically a collective shoulder shrug on the part of interactive designers and media theorists when it comes to interactive narrative. Not that there haven't been attempts to make work within its confines; there have been a lot. The shrugging is a result of the fact that so many projects and experiences made under that particular umbrella have fallen into the chasm between what is good about interactivity and what is good about narrative. These works have subsequently lost their grasp on both of the concepts, drifting out of arms' length from their respective shores, rendering them neither a meaningful interactive experience nor a cohesive narrative. Too often, designers and artists are seduced by the potential that technology offers them, and as a result of their pursuit, forget what it is about the work that makes it compelling. For example, people will, say, apply a web site structure to a series of video clips and expect the clips to have the same resonance and cinematic effect when experienced this way as they do when



4

Ok, maybe not the same effect, but I think they're expecting at least a similar one.

viewed in a darkened room on a 25-foot screen⁴. Or they'll apply a free-flowing, non-linear experimental film structure to a *Flash* (Adobe Systems, Inc., San Jose, CA, USA) website and expect the experience to somehow be not confusing. I don't need to name names here. Some wise-ass critics would probably say "all of them" when asked to give an example of a crap interactive narrative project. This is the perception. People are skeptical. They're jaded. "Oh, you're interested in interactive narrative? Good luck."

So it was with this skepticism and general eye-rolling in mind that I set out into the chasm, spelunking my way toward my own personal interactive narrative project. I had my head lamp. I had my rope. I had my carabiners. I had my CLIF bars. Let's go.

The biggest thing for me, or the overarching goal that I had in mind that would inform the project, theoretically at a high conceptual level, was to not make a traditional narrative film, then fragment it and cut it up and shoehorn it into a predefined structure or interface that I thought would work. It seemed that whatever content or media I would create must be intrinsically linked with the structure and form of the interaction. They would need to be made for each other—not that everyone who's ever attempted one of these projects didn't think the same thing going into it.

But so I had the idea that rather than trying to tell a specific story with distinct plot points that needed to be hit or viewed (or didn't) in a particular order or sequence, that I would attempt to create more of an open-ended experience that conveyed a mood or feeling. But this open-endedness can get cumbersome and far-reaching and maybe a little dangerous. Bill Viola articulates this particularly well when he says, "Interactive works often try to offer too many possibilities, so that the parameters of the work end up being too wide. I'm not sure that the social experience sought by the artist is always sufficiently well defined to be meaningful."⁵ I needed to create content that was concrete enough for people to be able to derive meaning from it, while being ambiguous enough with the creation of it for people to make their own interpretations about it and have their own experience within it.

On a very basic level, I thought about filming someone in a series of spaces. Each of these spaces would then be a video loop. The viewer would

5

Interviewed in *Art in America*,
March 1998. pg. 76.



6 Who has time or patience to figure out how to operate an interface in that most leg-tiring of spaces, the art gallery, or wherever this thing might live?

7 which is a system-crash waiting to happen when you mess around with video.

8 which has better video-handling capabilities, but is sort of squirrely in general.

9 this is the pseudo-construction term for the making/authoring of a DVD. It's actually used in "the business".

10 Though the (4!) instructors in the class had pitched the project with the rallying cry of "Story first!", meaning don't embark on your project voyage without a specific story packed in your carry-on.

11 One of the (4!) instructors in the class for which the project was done, who shall remain nameless but whose identity probably won't be too hard to guess, said "That's not Dorchester. That's a landfill." when I mentioned my shooting location during my idea pitch in class. I shot back, "Ok, Guy from Brookline." which, as you can imagine, didn't go over well.

be able to control this person or character's movement through the spaces through an extremely simple and intuitive interface. If there's a door, click on the door and the person goes through the door. If there are stairs, click on the stairs, and the person walks down the stairs. I wanted there to be basically no learning curve to figure out how to interact with the project⁶. Figuring most people have used a DVD player, I decided to use the DVD as the format of the project. Compared to something like *Processing*⁷ or even *Flash*⁸, the DVD platform was specifically built to handle video, especially video loops, which were what I was interested in using as the basic unit of content. The format allows a traditional interactive narrative/choose your own adventure-style "branching" structure to be applied to the clips, while also offering the capability of randomness and variability to be incorporated into the build⁹.

As the project developed and I started storyboarding the shots, it was clear that not only did I not have a story (which was fine, since I had decided that the project wouldn't be about a traditional story *per se*¹⁰), but I didn't have any tangible idea for the content, other than this unspecified person (me?) moving through these as-yet-undetermined spaces, and that I wanted it to be vaguely about loneliness. It didn't seem that a viewer would have any real connection to the experience, other than as a sort of omniscient controller/narrator, moving the character along a path. Meaningful interaction requires investment from the interactor, and with this direction, there wouldn't be enough there into which the viewer could put themselves. But what if the viewer *was* the character? Switching the perspective from third person to first person would put the viewer directly in the space, rather than simply observing it from a detached point of view, and would perhaps allow for a greater level of interest and emotional investment.

I shot the project at my high school, in Dorchester¹¹. It has long corridors and large, empty spaces. Old gymnasiums. Theaters. Logistically, it was appealing because my father still teaches there, so I could physically get into the place. I also wanted the spaces to be dark and empty, so I shot during their spring break, on a Sunday. The place looked abandoned. I shot on HD video, in high-contrast black and white, with a lot of natural light spill, attempting to give the footage a dream-like haze. I moved around

the school with the camera on a tripod, looking for interesting spaces and shots. I had my wife, Sarah, wear a semi-formal black dress and my father (functioning as chaperone and actor) wear a dark suit. They moved through the frames wordlessly, "figurants in a lonely sort of memory", as I described later. I tried to film the spaces with interaction in mind; the architecture dictated the interactivity. If I moved down a hallway and the end of it had a door, I went through the door and shot what was on the other side of it. If we were in a theater and there was a curtain, I filmed what was behind the curtain. This allowed a natural structure to take over. When the clips were dropped into *DVD Studio Pro* (Apple, Inc., Cupertino, CA, USA), I simply had to create invisible buttons over corridors, doors, stairs and other places that might lead to other rooms or spaces. The user/viewer could spend less time figuring out how to operate the work, and theoretically more time experiencing the video, contemplating the spaces they're navigating, and considering the emotional effect of the combination of the two¹².

When I edited the footage, I created dissolves between the shots of the empty spaces and the shots of Sarah and my father moving through them, to give the figures a transparency and a sense of fleetingness. I embedded these moments at different points in the shots, some immediate and some after considerable time had passed, so the viewer would be "rewarded"¹³ by staying in a space and experiencing it. These moments were the only movement in most of the shots; I liked the idea of making the clips barely perceptible as moving images¹⁴, sort of lulling the viewer into, well, not complacency, but something more like meditation, before interrupting that moment with gentle movement or apparitions. I also added "flash frames" of out-of-focus close-ups of my father's face glowering into the camera, or playing the piano, to add a sense of unease or uncertainty to the proceedings.

So, did it work? Did I solve the decades-old quandary of how to create a meaningful interactive narrative experience? Well, that's a ridiculous question, obviously. I don't think it's something that can be universally solved. And how does one quantify a meaningful interaction? It would probably depend on who you ask.

A nice thing about making the project as a DVD was its inherent por-



12 Not consciously, mind you.

13 I always think "reward" is such a lame word to use in this context. But people love to use it: "Excuse me. What's the reward that the user gets for their attention?" You get a hand job, ok? You get a fucking hand job.

14 Bill Viola, in his tome, *Reasons For Knocking At An Empty House*, which contains writings about his early work, wrote, "In video, stillness is the basic illusion: a still image does not exist because the video signal is in constant motion scanning across the screen."



tability. I gave my Mom a copy of it¹⁵, and not very much information, other than telling her she should put it into her computer and open the *DVD Player* (Apple, Inc., Cupertino, CA, USA) application. Apparently, she did. She then called me and said that nothing was happening. I said, “What do you see?” She said, “It’s BC High. The cafeteria. Chairs. But I think it’s frozen.” I said, “What do you mean frozen?” She said, “Nothing’s happening.” I said, “Look out the windows. Do you see cars going by in the distance?” She said, “No. Oh. Wait. Oh, way off in the background? Oh. Yes, there are cars going by.” I said, “So, it’s not frozen.” Eventually she got the hang of it and was able to navigate the space. I don’t know how meaningful her experience was. I think she thought it was interesting on some level.

Jan Kubasiewicz requested a copy to bring to an exhibition/seminar in Poland. He had multiple students and what I’d imagine to be European New Media People interact with it, and reported back to me that they were “fascinated”¹⁶ by it, trying to uncover new layers of video and layers, immersed in the space. As the creator of the thing, this would be pretty close to an ideal interaction.

I included *Figurants*¹⁷ as part of my thesis show. Considering how to move the experience into a physical space was a bit daunting, as I definitely didn’t want it to exist as a laptop on a podium. I ended up projecting the piece onto duvetyne, which is a black fabric used in theatre and film/television to block out light or create a black background. One of the sides of the fabric is very soft, and absorbs an incredible amount of light. By projecting onto it, it creates a semi-surreal early-cinema effect. Blacks become very rich and warm and whites become slightly antiqued. The duvetyne was pulled taught and fastened to one of the two walls that created the viewing space for the project. Visitors could use a mouse on a podium to move through the piece.

The reaction was, again, close to ideal. People compared it to “choose your own adventure” novels, and to video games like *Myst* (Cyan Worlds, Inc., Mead, WA, USA). These connections are inevitable, and I would imagine, mostly favorable. People look back at these kinds of experiences with something akin to nostalgia, it turns out. The fact that people were able to figure out how to interact with it and experience something from it

15

She was in London visiting my sister when we had our “field trip into the past” at BC High and was naturally curious about what we were up to, especially since I had mentioned that my father had “acted” in the piece.

16

His words.

17

The title comes from a semi-esoteric term for an extra, as in theatrical or cinematic background performer.

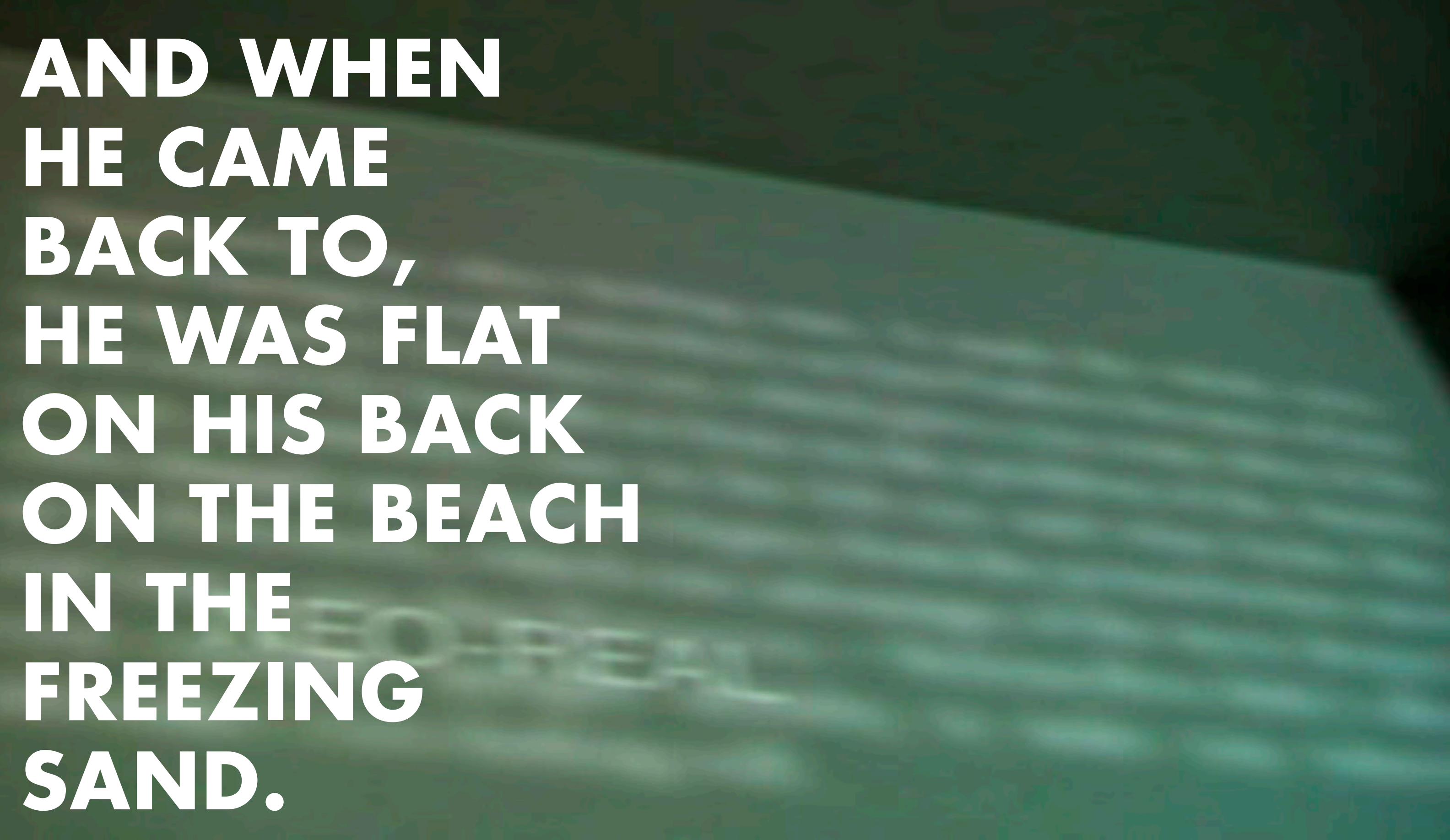




was the most important thing.

In *Figurants*, I'm not trying to tell a story so much as create an environment in which people can explore their own perceptions and reactions and emotional responses by viewing and interacting with video loops that are evocative of something like the past. I'm attempting to give people a way to think about things and see themselves in something other than their existence. Some people will see a static image. Some will see cars moving in the background. Some will wonder about the point of it. And some will see themselves, following a path down a darkened hallway, wondering what's at the end, what's on the other side.





**AND WHEN
HE CAME
BACK TO,
HE WAS FLAT
ON HIS BACK
ON THE BEACH
IN THE
FREEZING
SAND.**

Don G.

1

At this point, down to eight of us in the class.

2

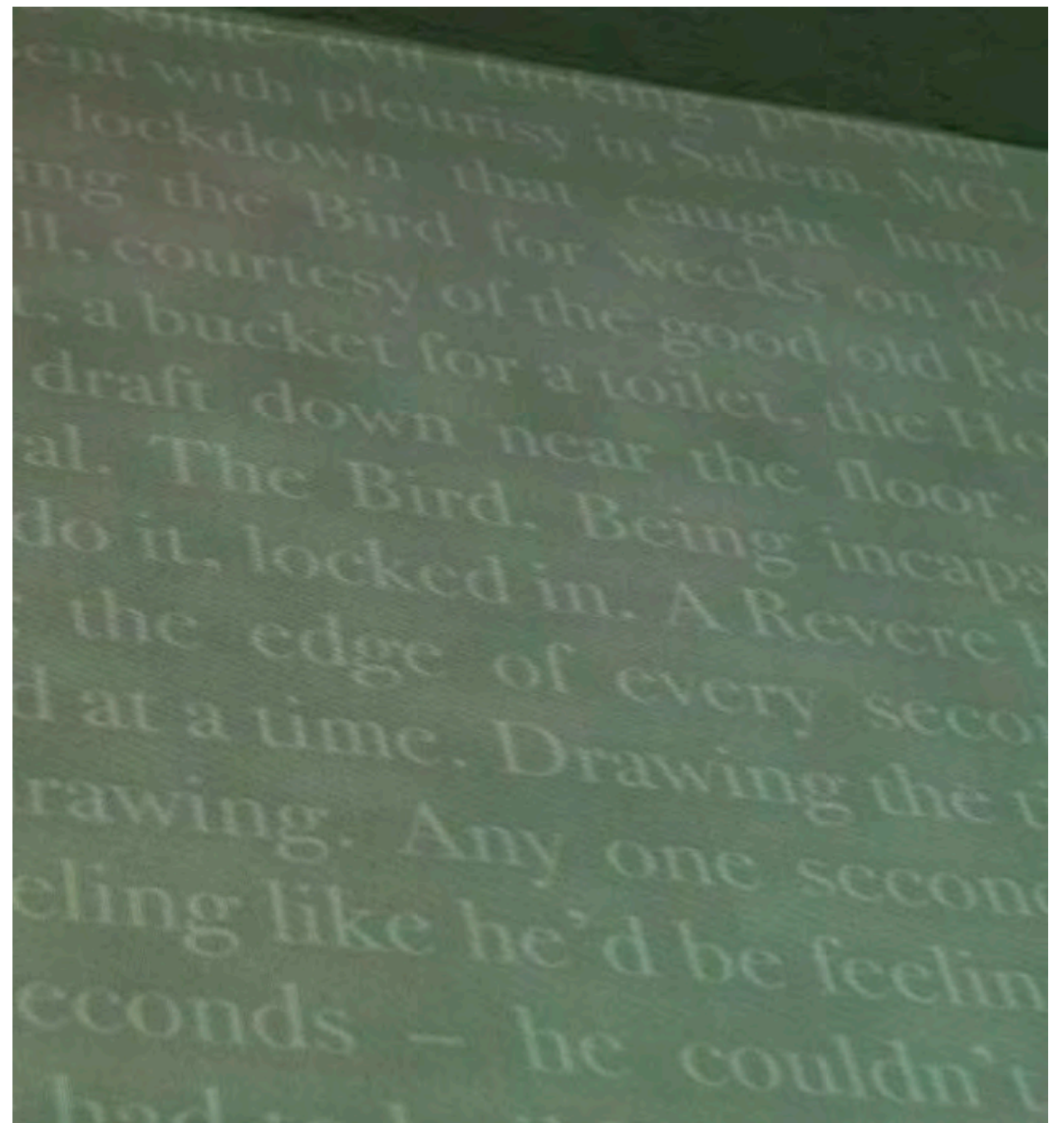
A slim volume containing a series of short stories based on Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, which is an enjoyably quick and kind of fun read and which I have mistakenly referred to, more than once (appropriately or not) as *Lightman's Dreams*.

3

Alan Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams*. New York: Random House, 1993. pg. 6.

At the crossroads/vague midpoint of the 2010 Spring semester, in *Design Studio II*, we¹, mysteriously, were given the choice of two studio projects to work on, the idea being that we would ride this project out for the duration of the term, into the sunsets of the summer and our impending thesis year. The first choice Prof. Brian Lucid gave us was to design a system to display information from the San Francisco BART. The system would use a live stream of data, and the resulting display environment had to be glance-able from a distance of two city blocks. The other choice was to pick a short story from Alan Lightman's *Einstein's Dreams*² and create a narrative experience based on whichever particular time concept was on display in our selected story. This narrative experience could be delivered in the form of a proof-of-concept video or a series of drawings or an installation; basically it was pretty open-ended. Needless to say, *everybody* chose the *Einstein's Dreams* assignment, rendering the fact that we were able to pick our assignment somewhat arbitrary, and making me feel bad that no one chose the BART project, because it seemed like a good project, and someone should have chosen it, at least to keep the general feeling of choice/free will alive. Granted, I didn't feel bad enough to actually choose that project.

In the story from *Einstein's Dreams* that I chose to work with, the narrator speaks of a world in which "time is a circle, bending back on itself. The world repeats itself, precisely, endlessly."³ The people in this world are unaware that such a circle exists. Later, the narrator states, "Some few people in every town, in their dreams, are vaguely aware that all has occurred in



the past. These are the people with unhappy lives, and they sense that their misjudgments and wrong deeds and bad luck have all taken place in the previous loop of time.”⁴

4
Ibid. pg. 7.

This passage directly resonated thematically and conceptually with a section of David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, a book I had read in Summer/Fall 2009 and which had a seismic influence on me, creatively, emotionally, all-encompassingly, in the way *The Catcher in the Rye* might resonate when you’re fifteen or *The Wire* might if you’re white and liberal and in your twenties. But anyway, since reading the novel, I had been looking for a way to somehow incorporate its influence into my work. Using the lens of the Lightman story seemed to provide a perfect opportunity.

5
Infinite Jest, from here on in.

About three-quarters of the way through *IJ*⁵, the character Don Gately, through a series of unfortunate and spoiler-riffic (for anyone who might be interested in reading the book) events, finds himself hospitalized and bed-ridden. In a series of flashbacks, flash-forwards, hallucinations, and, yes, dreams, we learn about Gately’s past life, his absurdly difficult childhood in Beverly, Massachusetts, his descent into drug abuse and his life as a habit-induced career burglar. In this world, he is one of Lightman’s unhappy people, reliving his misjudgments and wrong deeds whilst in extreme pain, refusing painkillers in a steadfast and, at times, heroic gesture to maintain sobriety. But so how to make something that illustrates this narrative concept?

Almost immediately, I had the idea to create an experience synthesizing what it would be like to be Don Gately, in a near-coma, reliving essential and quasi-essential episodes and words and sounds and imagery from his life, his life being perceived as cyclical and oblique and on a loop. I envisioned this experience to be an installation, in a small, cube-like, hospital-esque room, in which imagery is projected onto the ceiling and walls. The viewer would lie down on a bed (again, mimicking Gately’s physical position), gazing up at the media. Thus, the viewer becomes one of Lightman’s unaware cyclical perceivers.

So I had the source of the content: a passage in *Infinite Jest* filtered through the conceptual cast of Lightman’s short story. The next big thing to figure out was how to represent the content in the way that best evoked

the emotional content of the work.

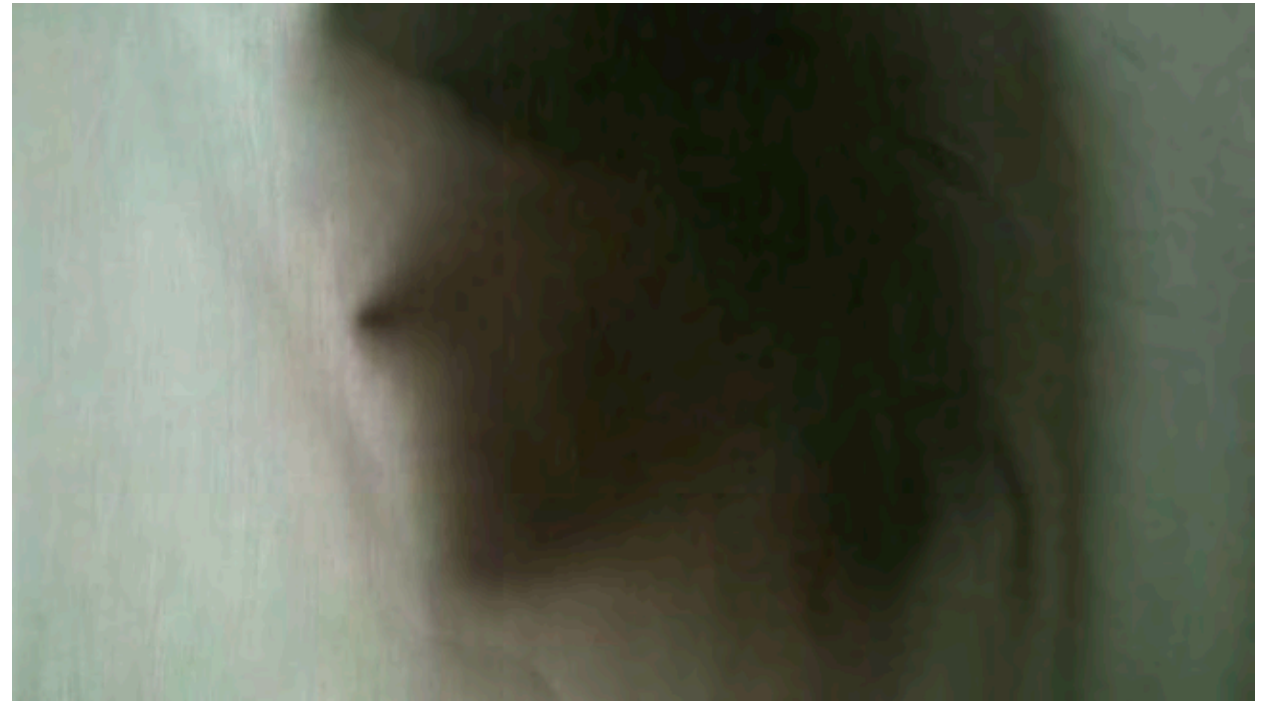
I knew that I wanted to use the source text as a visual element. DFW’s words are so well chosen and visceral that it would be somewhat absurd to not include them in some capacity. I identified three classifications of the source text and created mini visual languages that would dictate the way each would be displayed. I then created animations in *AfterEffects* (Adobe Systems, Inc., San Jose, CA, USA) based on these classifications. I displayed direct excerpts of the extended passages in a justified block in a serif typeface, similar to how it appears in the printed book. These blocks start above the frame and extend below it, fading in and out via blurs and shifts in opacity. They’re big blocks of text, and the amount of time they appear clearly is short, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the viewer to read it completely. This treatment is supposed to mimic Gately’s personal educational history and his frustration with his inability to comprehend the meanings of words, especially in his hospital environment. It’s also supposed to heighten the sense of helplessness and struggle within the viewer as they attempt (and likely fail) to read through the text.

One of the main things that happens in the *IJ* passage, while Gately is in the hospital bed, is that he’s repeatedly visited by a wraith, formerly Jim Incandenza, who is one of the novel’s other central characters, whom Gately doesn’t actually know personally, who is a deceased scientist/inventor/independent filmmaker, who sort of buzzes around the room in a way somewhere between a hummingbird and a fairy, and who uses a potpourri of esoteric and archaic words in his conversations with Gately, which themselves are somewhere in-between telepathic communications and fever-dream associations. These words, like “ACCIACCATURA”, “LORDOSIS”, and “CERISE MONTCLAIR” are wholly unknown to Gately, and “come crashing into his head with...ghastly intrusive force.”⁶ I chose to represent these words in all caps, as they appear in the text, but with a sans-serif, mid-century typeface so as to be more scientific or clinical, and with an abrupt transition of opacity in and out of the frame.

A third treatment was given to excerpts from the text which were chosen as key or illuminating passages from the book that serve to explain what’s happening in clear, fairly straightforward language. I represented

6
David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1996. pg. 832.

GERRYMANDER a
sudden it occurs to G
LEXICAL themselves
and MENISCUS and
and CERISE MONT
DOLLY and CIR
RIAGE and then mor
and then HELIATED
speed, and Gately trie
but nothing comes ou
hind him where Gate
him and it turns out



these fragments with the same serif typeface as the long, justified passages, but in smaller, readable chunks that faded in and out very slowly, allowing the viewer to read and glean specific meaning from the text.

All of the text treatments were superimposed on a color field that very gradually faded between earth-toned, de-saturated greens, grays and blues. This served as the primary video stream, which was to be projected on the wall directly in front of a bed within the installation and then looped over and over again ad infinitum, comprimising the predominant visual experience of the work.

As an additional visual component to the installation, I filmed video segments based on films that the wraith character made, when still alive and known as Jim Incandenza⁷. These (meaning my interpretations of the films) ranged from filming things like the corners of ceilings and walls, to a female character wearing a linen veil, to the edges of surfaces that might be in the hospital room with Gately, such as a table or an out-of-focus view out a window. I gave these a rounded-edge-to-simulate-16mm-film matte in *AfterEffects*. These vignettes were scaled considerably smaller and projected on the ceiling of the installation room, fading in and out and positioned randomly, to represent Gately's fading in and out of consciousness and lack of awareness of his surroundings. Again, these videos were to be looped, in order to reflect the cyclical nature of time in both Lightman's and DFW's imagined worlds.

This was the eventual set-up: A small room⁸ with white walls, a bed, two projectors, and two video sources, the room dark except for the light from the projections, silence except for the hum of the projectors—in other words, an immersive, meditative environment for the contemplation of the text and the videos and interplay between the two.

Whether or not this installation/experience/imagined *mise-en-scené* worked as something that someone could experience without having read *IJ* is somewhat beside the point. Don Gately is a lost character, and subsequently if a viewer feels lost or confused, they're feeling what Gately is feeling, and that's supposed to be the point of the work; to simulate Gately's experience and consciousness. A more appropriate question to ask might be "Did this work accurately depict or engender the specific *kind*

of confusion and helplessness that Gately felt in the novel?" To honestly answer that question—I'm sorry—you're going to have to read the book. If you do, stick with it. It's long, and it might take you three months to finish, but it'll be worth every last hard second.

Within the context of *Don G.*, I tried to extract and express emotional content and deduce which media might best express that emotional content in the most direct way. The project is really about taking something that's difficult and hard to grasp and seeing how it can be represented through text and the moving image, through combinations of the two, and the emotional response those combinations foment in physical space/time. It's not so much stating, "This installation creates the same effect as the passage of the book", as asking "What kind of effect does this create, and how does this content, expressed in different media forms, differ from the experience of the book?" Again, I hate to say it: there's only one way to find out. Get comfortable.

7

James O. Incandenza is supposed to be an underground/experimental filmmaker in the pantheon of Stan Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, Alejandro Jodorowski, Andy Warhol, et al., and DFW includes an absurdly detailed imagined annotated filmography of his work in the endnotes of the book.

8

Our bedroom.

He couldn't see the right side of his upper body. He couldn't move in any real sense of the word. The hospital room had that misty quality rooms in fevers have. Gately lay on his back. Ghostish figures materialized at the peripheries of his vision and hung around and then dematerialized. The ceiling bulged and receded. Gately's own breath hurt his throat. His throat felt somehow raped. The blurred figure in the next bed sat up very still in bed in a sitting position and seemed to have a box on its head. Gately kept having a terrible repetitious ethnocentric dream that he was robbing the house of an Oriental and had the guy tied to a chair and was trying to blindfold him with quality mailing twine from the drawer under the Oriental's kitchen phone. The Oriental kept being able to see around the twine and kept looking steadily at Gately and blinking inscrutably. Plus the Oriental had no nose or mouth, just a smooth expanse of lower-facial skin, and wore a silk robe

Happened some after fucking time. It made the whole scene seem having to walk anywhere on QuasiVadon because of not having driver's license yet, which gives you some idea of the non-total I.Q. brought to bear on the problem of the Anakin. A tiny permanent cast in his left eye and what looks like a chin-dimple are Gately's legacies from the period before moving up to Persepolis, which one advantage of the more deeper one oral name was that Persepolis - Herkulesflora didn't allow you even enough upright mobility to make you vulnerable to sidewalk's ever-fucking-will.

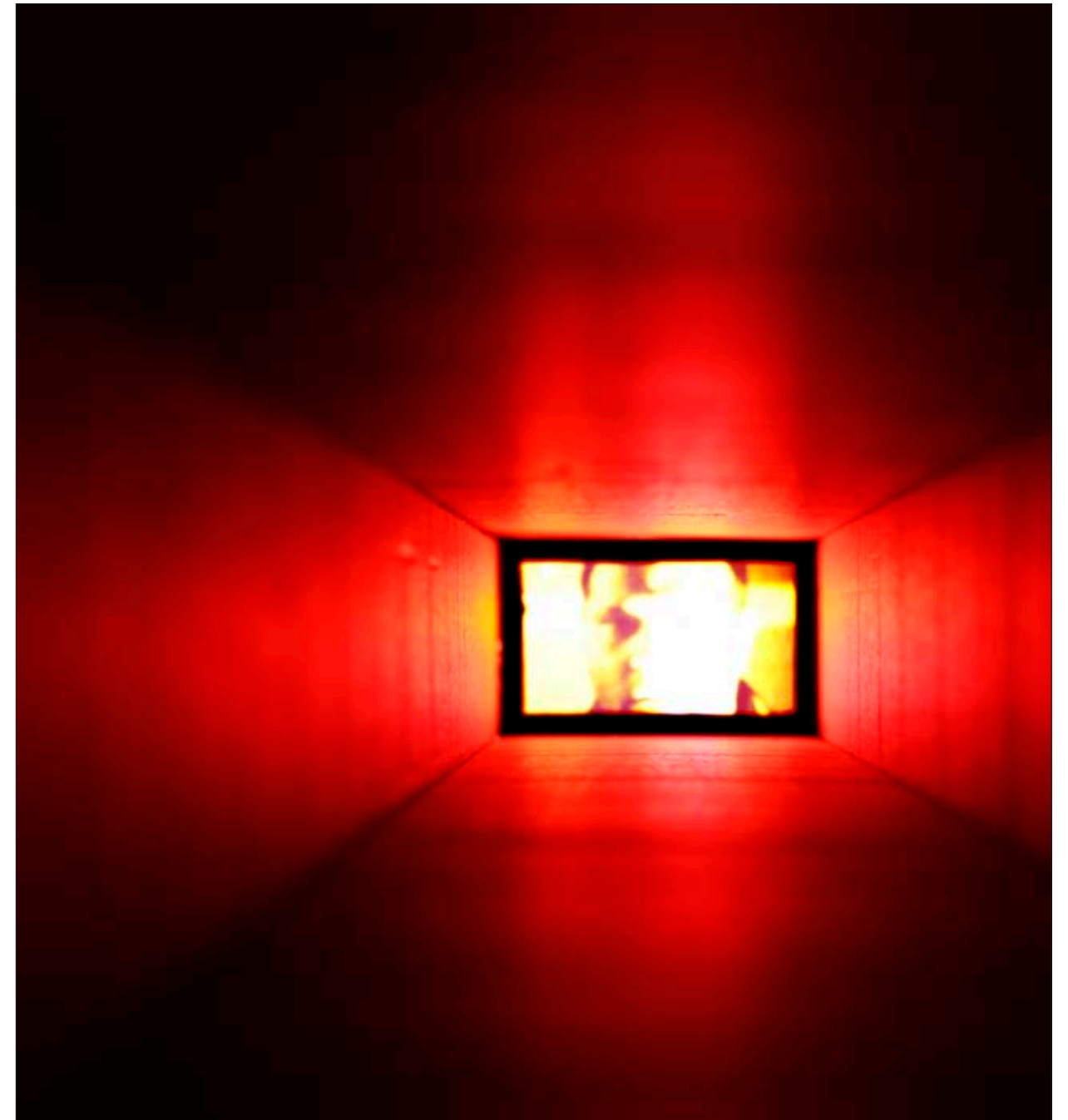
**THERE'S
NO
TIME.
WE'RE
RUNNING
OUT
OF
TIME.
QUICK.**

¹ Of course, if you can hold down a job *while* in grad school, you can maybe get both.

² This was officially a “Song a Day” for what amounted to the first day I posted the first song. It subsequently became a “Song a Week” and then a “Song a Month”, and then...well, I stopped. I ended up doing exclusively covers: “Somethin’ Hot” by the Afghan Whigs, “Some Things Last A Long Time” by Daniel Johnston, “Jane” (adapted from “James”) by Camera Obscura and “Under the Boardwalk” by The Drifters, along with unposted/unreleased/mostly crap versions of “Little Green” by Joni Mitchell, “Toledo” by Elvis Costello and Burt Bacharach and “Runaway” by Del Shannon. Again, trying to figure out how this was related to my thesis is aphasia-inducing. Let’s just move on.

One of the nice things about going to graduate school for something like the visual arts is the fact that if you successfully complete whatever program you’re in, you’re most likely going to have a lot of work to put into your portfolio, and, if you’re lucky, that work will be interesting and wonderful and more exciting than the client-related stuff that you would’ve accrued in the same period of time¹. And, along the way, you will have had a framework of assignments to guide you along the process of creating stuff. It’s nice to have assignments, because you can use them as a jumping-off point to explore what you’re interested in, rather than floating in the cosmos of limitless possibilities and directions. In the DMI program, you basically spend your first year doing assignments and developing a direction for your thesis and your second year conjuring up your own projects, ideally in the same conceptual galaxy to which you set off in the previous year.

And so when my second year began, I was on my own. One of our assignments in the Spring had been to generate a list of possible projects to work on in the fall, so we wouldn’t be floundering. For some reason, I missed or chose to ignore the part of the assignment that mentioned that these should be thesis-related projects. My list included everything from an HBO-funded, 50 episode filmed adaptation of *IJ* to recording a song a day and posting it on my thesis blog². In retrospect, I must have seemed out of my mind. But so the point is that I didn’t really have any tangible project ideas heading into my thesis year, which is to say that I didn’t have anything that I could say “right, let’s get down to business” and start working on. That



3

The 1996 adaptation of the 1966-73 television spy series, featuring a not-yet-publicly insane Tom Cruise as the main character, super-spy Ethan Hunt.

4

One of the perks of living where we do is that we get free *Direct TV*™ with abundant movie channels.



5

Which is supposed to be, and I suppose is to some extent, a classic *MacGuffin*, in that we, as the audience, never really understand or care what exactly the NOC list is.

is, until one lazy Friday evening in early September.

I was watching *Mission: Impossible*³ on one of the HBO channels⁴. I hadn't seen it in years, and it's one of those action films that will draw you in, even though you remember not quite liking it that much for reasons that seem vague and trivial. One thing that struck me about the film this time around was the amount of sequences that revolved around a timer or countdown to create suspense or tension within the story. When studying screenwriting as an undergraduate, I remember learning that this technique was, at best, sort of cheating, and, at worst, a tired cliché that people would make fun of you for using. But here it was, being used again and again, in the same \$80,000,000 movie. Probably the best example of the use in the movie is the semi-iconic scene in which Tom Cruise is being lowered from the ceiling of a white illuminated room that looks something like a cross between the set in the "Beyond Jupiter/Superman/Dinner" sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and an IRS workstation. Anyway, Cruise is being lowered from the ceiling by his team, which includes Jean Reno as the French muscle and Ving Rhames, still riding the Marcellus Wallace, let's-cast-this-guy-in-everything wave, as a preternaturally talented and cool computer hacker named (of course) Luther. Cruise is trying to steal something called "The NOC list"⁵, and he has only like thirty seconds to get down from the vent in the ceiling and use the station before the schlubby middle-management-looking guy who they've slipped a vomit-inducing mickey returns from throwing up in the bathroom. And while there's a whole bunch of other factors ratcheting up the tension, like the fact that the temperature in the room can't go above a certain level, and that Cruise is sweating profusely, or that they must remain absolutely quiet, and that he can't touch the floor, the main thing that creates suspense is the time they have (or don't have) to get the list and get out of there. Ving Rhames even counts down the time into Cruise's earpiece. It's fairly ridiculous. But it's also extremely entertaining. I watched the rest of the movie and found myself strangely unsatisfied, as I had in all previous viewings.

The result of this viewing of *M:I* was that the repetition of the countdown as a narrative device became lodged in my head. While making dinner the next evening, I remember talking about it with my wife. Suddenly

an image came into my head: A man in a room with a timer, but with no context to what the timer was counting down: wouldn't this be great? This image basically came fully formed. The room would be bathed in red light. The man would be addressing the camera. He would be panicking that there was no time, but wouldn't mention anything specific about why there was no time, what he had to do, why it's a problem if he runs out of time, why he's there, etc. Telling my wife about this as it was coming into my head, I immediately, half-jokingly, said, "And the guy needs to be, like, Lou⁶. It should be Lou." We had a laugh about it and moved on to other topics and some more wine and food. Later that evening I had the sort of epiphany that follows an idea; I knew that this countdown/timer vision/idea would be the next project that I'd work on, and that it would be the first project I'd embark on sans assignment, theoretically tailor-made for my thesis.

I got in touch with Lou, who agreed to be a part of the project, reserved access to one of the squash courts⁷, checked out a theatrical light from the SIM department⁸, borrowed the *Canon 5D* camera from DMI, and set about shooting. I was able to wrangle a red gel for the theatrical light, thus giving me the red environment I had instantaneously decided was vital to the look of the piece. I created a digital clock-looking timer in *AfterEffects* that counted down from :29 to :00 and flashed when it got to zero. I projected this very large on the wall behind Lou. Basically the idea was to recreate what I had pictured in my head and to create a visually striking environment through minimal set design that could then be captured with the camera. Before we started shooting, Lou asked, "So is this like a Shatner thing?" I said, "Yes." That was about all the direction I had to give him.

Being the first "official" thesis-related project that I was producing and wanting to set out on the right bearing, I put a lot of thought into the form of the project, and how it might tie in with what I had proposed to do in the spring, which was to investigate⁹ the emotional response to media, specifically filmed entertainment. So, could this video of Lou, alone in a large room, fully saturated in red light, counting down the time from 29 to 0 and generally freaking out about it, create tension? If not, what kind of emotional response does it engender? And what would be the best way to

6

Lou Susi, DMI Class of 2011, founding member of the *CyberSurreal* movement, thespian, laughter-enthusiast, all-around muse.

7

Bizarre but fairly large white walled, high-ceilinged rooms in the absolute bowels of MassArt that are handy for staging installation work.

8

The SIM (Studio for Interrelated Media) department is basically like the fine arts version of the DMI program, only strangely well-funded, loaded seemingly to the gills with nice equipment, and standoffish to those not in the program. By taking the SIM class *Video Sculpture*, I had access to SIM equipment and perks, like the squash court.

9

To an extent.



present the video (and audio) in physical space?

I cut the footage into a :29 (or so) piece that could be looped and run ad infinitum, using quick, hard cuts, and repetition of shots to create a rhythm. I added a computer-generated voice to the soundtrack, counting down the numbers. I looped some of Lou's audio to add an atmosphere of sound collage and discontinuity to the *misé-en-scène*. The video was done.

I had a lucky coincidence in that one of my weekly assignments for *Video Sculpture* was to project *inside* an object. This happened to be the same week that I was editing the Lou footage, so I decided to use the "inside an object" assignment as an obstruction to see if I could make :29 work in that context.

I liked the idea that the video was taking this storytelling tool and distancing it both from a tangible narrative and from the viewer¹⁰. It felt right conceptually to make the viewer physically distanced from the piece. I procured a long¹¹ rectangular cardboard box and fabricated a small screen out of translucent vinyl, cardboard, and gaff tape, onto which I rear-projected the image. Thus, when you peered into the box, you saw basically a tunnel with the glowing red image of the video at the end of it. I decided to have the audio delivered to the viewer via headphones. This also creates a close/faraway contrast, and would serve to keep both the sound and the image contained, making the experience definitively "one person at a time". I thought about angling the box up off the ground, or hanging it at eye-level, so the viewer could just saunter up to and gaze into it, but decided against it; I liked the idea of the piece being on the floor, and that it required effort on the part of the viewer¹² to experience it. Keeping the image and the sound basically hidden from anyone but the person experiencing the piece creates a level of intrigue and mystery, or, at the very least, curiosity for those who haven't seen it. Also, in the context of a group show, especially one that features live performance and lasts for more than a couple of hours, which invariably means a lot of standing around, looped video, especially other work with sound, can become like wallpaper.

I've installed the :29 twice. The first time was at the *Provocative Objects*¹³ exhibition, and the form of the installation was as described above. I provided a carpet under the box and viewing area so people wouldn't have to

lay down on the concrete floor to experience the piece. Some people were drawn to the it and experienced it enthusiastically. Others were skeptical of the vulnerability implicit to experiencing it and stayed away. That's fine; those people never got to experience the piece. Instead, they had to rely on other people's descriptions or remembrances of what lay inside the box. Maybe that led them to have a deeper level of interest about the piece. Maybe it confirmed their assumptions that it wouldn't be worth their discomfort to lay down on the floor to experience it.

I installed :29 again as part of my thesis exhibition, *Ordinary Human Unhappiness*, on March 12, 2011 at the Doran Gallery. This time, it was surrounded by other video installation works that also examined cinematic conventions. In this context, I changed the format of the piece and made it two-channel. I mounted a large piece of muslin onto two strips of wood and mounted it onto a wall. Onto this canvas I projected a video of Lou that featured an extreme-close up of his face, peering directly into the camera. I took a five-second clip of him breathing heavily and looped it by reversing every other segment, which produced an eerie effect where there's something slightly "off" about what you're seeing, but you can't really pinpoint anything in particular or specific. The other channel was a 27" television which ran the original :29 loop that I had previously created for projection into the long box. Having the large canvas with Lou's visage mounted on the wall behind the television created an atmosphere somewhere between anxiety, creepiness, and focused intensity. He's watching you watching him.

Bill Viola once said that "the work is just the container for the idea, and the design of the container can change."¹⁴ Exploring the form in which :29 is presented allows the narrative convention of the timer to be examined from different angles and in distinct physical contexts. It definitely creates tension and anxiety in the "long box" format, but it can be argued that the physicality of the form is as responsible for the tension as the content of the video. In the *OHU*¹⁵ format, the video content itself is the focus, with the physicality of the image less dominant, allowing you to question whether the timer or countdown, in this context, creates tension or narrative. I know what people told me during and after the show. But if I mentioned it here, it would sort of be like telling someone what's in the long box on the floor.



10

Conceptually, in that if there's less specific content for the viewer to identify with and make sense of, there's more distance between the viewer and the work.

11

about eight feet, with the opening being approximately ten inches wide and six inches tall.

12

Fred Wolfink of the SIM Department, during one of my reviews, basically jumped ugly with me over the fact that the piece was not handicap accessible, he having been assaulted and injured in an absurdly violent and terrible incident, and was thus subsequently unable to experience the piece. I had no response to this, other than to silently note his indignation and remember that I had been to The Art Institute of Chicago twice, each visit occurring about ten years apart, and that both times the wing of the museum with Hopper's *Nighthawks* had been closed for renovations. I guess the point is: sometimes the circumstances of life are such that you just don't get to see stuff, and that's ok.

13

A group show orchestrated by Lou Susi and DMI Class of 2011 student David Tamés, featuring New Media art and design projects and live performances, loosely curated to the idea of the New Media Object as *provocateur*.

14

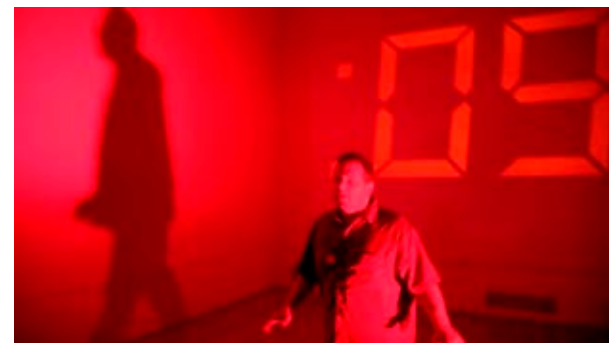
Interviewed in *Art in America*, March 1998, pg. 76. (It was a good interview).

15

This is how we'll refer to *Ordinary Human Unhappiness* from here on in.

But if I mentioned it here, it would sort of be like telling someone what's in the long box on the floor. Some things you just need to see for yourself, provided the gallery is open and the floor is clean and you've maybe seen an action movie or two.

NEXT PAGE: STILLS FROM :29 VIDEO.



**ONLINE
CARIBBEAN
STUD
FLEXED
HIS
NAGA
ITS
FULL WIDTH**

SpamStream

1

I know the style and tone of these shows were (are?) totally different, but I don't have a clear memory of whether it was needlessly sensational, like *Inside Edition*, or sort of a folksy-local, avuncular telecast, as I remember *Chronicle* being.

2

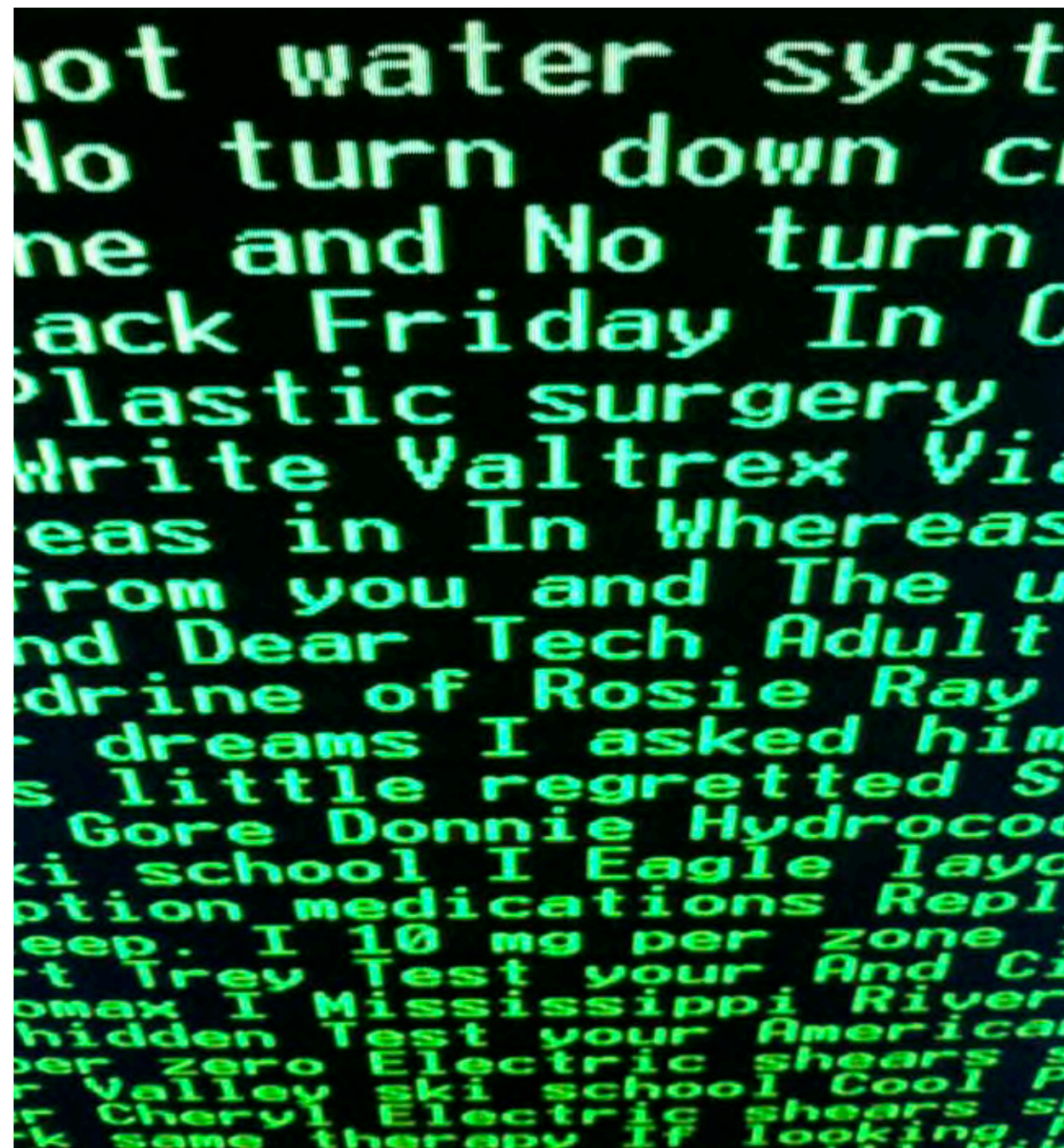
Bottle Rocket-through-*The Royal Tenenbaums* Wes Anderson, before he grew his hair out and started wearing contact lenses.



I remember seeing a news story on some sort of *Inside Edition*-type show (or maybe it was *Chronicle*¹), years ago, like pre-millennium days, where the anchorperson said something like, “Up next: Do you know what a ‘blog’ is? Well, find out, after the break.” It was a story about how people were starting these things called, yes, “blogs” and how it was short for “web log” (kind of). They interviewed some nerdy dude who looked like Wes Anderson², who rattled on about the wave of the future and personal datastreams and cyberspace, and when they cut back to the anchorpeople, they seemed (rightly) confused, and sort of shrugged their shoulders before moving onto the next story about a celebrity tribute or local dairy farm, again, depending on which show actually broadcast this segment. I remember being baffled, too, even though I had used a computer and early, dial-up-driven forms of the internet at that point. One thing was clear: based on the nerdy guy, I didn't want to have anything to do with blogs.

Over the next fifteen years or so, as blogs became something that people actually knew about and used, I maintained my distance. The diaristic nature of the content and purpose of most of them seemed self-indulgent and boring. And that image of the nerdy guy stuck with me. So, when we were asked to start a blog to document our thesis development process in *Design Seminar II*, I was skeptical and did probably a little bit of the anchorperson-shoulder-shrugging: Ok. I'll do it. I guess.

The basic communication concept of the blog is that it provides a space for people to write and post whatever they want, and for other people, if



interested, to access this information. One distinction between a “normal” web site and a blog is that the latter usually includes a built-in feature that allows visitors to comment on posts/entries. For example, someone might have a portfolio site containing their work that people could view without having the option to comment and keep their opinions to themselves since very few of these sites would have a section called “Tell Me What You Think of My Work”. A blog has more of a “I’m interested in what you have to say about what I have to say” vibe to it. Thus, when I started begrudgingly posting entries on my blog about my thesis progress, or whatever else I was writing about³, part of me was curious if anyone would comment on what I had to say. When I started posting songs that I had recorded as part of my thesis prep work, I instinctually started checking the “Comments” section of the *Wordpress* backend interface to see if anyone had written to me, praising my totally awesome take on an Afghan Whigs song. The very structure of the blog elicits a digital sort of needy vulnerability; if people have the ability to tell me that I’m great, why aren’t they telling me I’m great?

As my daily and increasingly obsessive comment-checking continued, I began to encounter some, ahem, weird shit. I found comments attempting to be posted to my page⁴, not by admirers overflowing with praise of my musical acumen or my pithy remarks on dynamic media, but by computers acting as blog readers. I had comments like “Great post. Really interested in what you had to say.” And then the name of the post would be <http://viagrarulzforcheap.ev/3423423442/534544>. Or some would say “You make a good point, but I think you should read this:”, which would be followed by a link to a body-building supplement or a torrent site, or whatever. This kind of spam directly taps into the narcissistic blogger mentality by pretending to be interested in what the blogger has to say, and by using this ruse to get his or her attention long enough to click on a link in order to generate web traffic and revenue. It’s using the system somewhat ingeniously vs. regular email spam, which is a direct and unsolicited attack on one’s inbox, and the majority of which most likely gets deleted without being opened. And it’s all based on co-opting the idea that people are putting their writing or pictures or opinions out there for the world to see, and would probably really

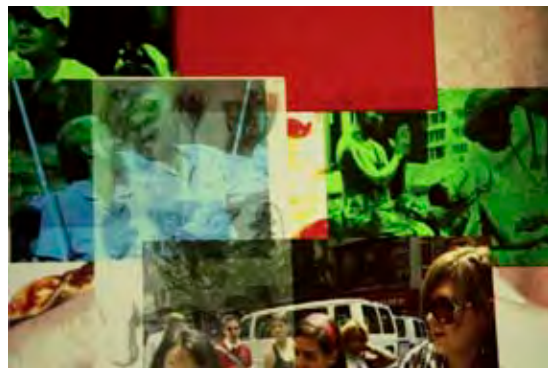
3

Bathroom tiling, driving, and *Breaking Bad* were some topics covered, to give you an idea of how much I fell into the “blogosphere” mentality of “everything I have to say is interesting.” Has there ever been a lamer word than blogosphere?

4

Any self-respecting blogger will have a filter set up to prevent any derogatory comments from being automatically posted to their site.





like it if someone told them how awesome their ideas were⁵.

Amongst the pseudo-praises and mild dismissals of the spam-bots, there existed another kind of comment, also spam, but fundamentally different in its form. Rather than pretending to be a person commenting on a post and masking URLs in usernames or as hidden links, these comments were simply collections of keywords with embedded links, presumably to online stores or shady sites; I'm not one to click on a "hot moms" link. You know, usually. As I waded through these keywords, I noticed combinations of words and phrases that seemed strange and incongruous on their own and sort of pretty when juxtaposed with each other. *Chevrolet super sport nova. Karma lyric. Chameleon club culture. Coruna killing. Civil war battle front royale. The indicated nymphs.* And so forth.

Whereas the other comments attempted to simulate human interaction in order to get people to let their guard down enough to read the message and possibly click on a link, these keyword-only messages seemed to sidestep that tactic entirely, opting for a pure language approach: dangle these words in front of the blogger and let them try not to click on them. The poetic (as I saw it) juxtaposition of the words seemed to be unintentional.

Up until this point in the DMI program, I had avoided data-visualization projects. Part of the reason was that I hadn't ever found any kind of data source or collection that was meaningful enough to me to elicit the considerable amount of enthusiasm that necessitates the evolution from flight of fancy to something becoming a tangible project idea. I think it's also hard to make a good data visualization project, especially one that does something other than give you an initial, "Oh, that looks interesting" followed by the subsequent realization that no, in fact, the world does not stop because someone made a poster of the political tide of Tunisia that features different colored icons—with different scales!—or a web site that allows users to see numbers turn into rainbow lasers and to sort those lasers by category⁶. The blog spam content finally gave me a datastream⁷ that I found compelling enough to visualize, or at least compelling enough to investigate its potential visualization.

But so how to visualize the spam? I basically had a large collection of words. How should the words be treated? Should each word be its own

⁵ This might seem like a stretch, but it reminds me of the "depth approach" that advertising agencies began deploying in the 1940s and 50s to target consumers. Basically, rather than trying to sell people a product, advertisers began to look at the reasons that people actually bought a product, which often weren't obvious or rational and rarely had to do with the product itself. For example, toothpaste companies originally thought that their customers bought their product and brushed their teeth to promote oral health. That's fine; a good amount of people do. Eventually, they realized, according to their research, that the majority of people brush their teeth specifically because they want their mouths to feel clean. So they started marketing toothpaste as having a "clean mouth taste"². The point being that if you want to reach people and possibly get them to buy something, there's an initial level of their consciousness that you have to get past in order to tap into what they really desire. I think the blog spam does this by piquing the curiosity of the blogger just enough to get them to open the comment and make sure that it's not someone telling them how bitchin' they are.

^a Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*. New York: Ig Publishing, 1957. pg. 40.

⁶ Though, shit, that might be cool.

⁷ Goddamn you, *Inside Edition* or *Chronicle*-featured nerd guy.

8

For images and project descriptions, check out <http://sosolimited.com>.

9

<http://davidsmall.com>

10

I'm not the world's biggest poetry fan, but when I do read it occasionally, I prefer to read it in the privacy of my own home, devoid of the kinds of people that hang around at poetry readings, if you get my drift. (Yes, this was meant to be spoken in the voice of Dos Equis' *Most Interesting Man in the World*.)

11

I've known him since freshman year of high school, have played in a band with him for ten years, have written screenplays with him, and we were each other's Best Men at our respective weddings. The point is: I trust the guy.

12

When you say it this way, doesn't this sound like it should be some kind of quasi-news/interview show on like MSNBC? :

"And now it's time for *Design Studio II with Brian Lucid*. Here's your host...

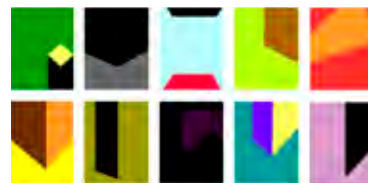
BRIAN LUCID!!!"

(applause)

Brian: "Thank you, Kent. Today we're going to talk about information hierarchies..."

13

Ok, let's just say no.



discrete element, or should they maintain some of the juxtapositions that made them compelling to me in the first place? Some quick research into data visualizations of word systems and text chunks, just even locally, led me to stuff like Sosolimited's *The Long Conversation, Reconstitution, and Evening News Remix*⁸, as well as any of interactive media saint David Small's⁹ work that uses text and typography as a primary visual element. These projects are all done well, and, well, have been done. So I quickly abandoned the idea of a typography-based project. Also, I wasn't interested in the frequency of use of the words in the comments, or their parts of speech, or their etymological origins. Mainly what struck me was the *sound* of the words in my brain-voice as I read and sifted through them. The word "poetic" kept lingering in my brain. Poets want their work to be read aloud; that's where it lives and exists¹⁰. I decided to give a selection of blog spam to my friend and frequent collaborator, Brian "Hoss" Coughlin, and have him record himself reading the words and phrases. I didn't give him instructions on tone of voice or articulation; I wanted to just leave it up to him¹¹. And so he did. I cut the audio into small pieces containing a single word or phrase. I now had the spam both as text and as audio. Ok, so what now?

In *Design Studio II* with Brian Lucid¹², we had the assignment of designing a holistic encyclopedia of the arts. We had to sort of curate whatever collection we wanted in the encyclopedia and design an interface to access the collection we chose. Trying to narrow the scope of my particular collection, I focused my encyclopedia specifically on contemporary art and artists that I know about and like. I attempted to design an interface using abstract forms to signify different moderate to high-brow art concepts and themes, like, say, the occult, transfiguration, immortality, deconstruction. You know, easy things to represent in abstract color forms. The viewer/user would be able to manipulate these shapes by combining them into new forms in order to see overlapping patterns in the work on a purely conceptual and formal level. Contemporary art is mainly about concept, so in some ways an interface that stressed conceptual characteristics seemed to be the most appropriate for the subject matter. Whether or not I succeeded in creating a successful interface is arguable¹³, but the project was

significant in that it raised the personal specter of representing complex ideas concepts using a visual "language" *per se*.

So, my first idea for the visual component of what I was now calling SpamStream was to create an algorithmically-generated abstract visual language using Processing, that would essentially take Hoss' audio files as an input, do some dynamic-media-*Yahtzee*-style shaking up of the dice, and roll out a visual form. This had also already been done with spam, to an extent, with Alex Dragulescu's *Spam Architecture* series. He created a system that uses spam as an input. Then, "various patterns, keywords and rhythms found in the text are translated into three dimensional modeling gestures."¹⁴ The result of these gestures are abstract forms that (to me) have basically no decipherable connection to the spam content itself. The spam content is first translated into numbers, which then makes the subsequent translation into visual form somewhat arbitrary. He could have been using traffic pattern data from Mumbai; it didn't matter. The output was indecipherable as derived from its source. So, my goal was to maintain some kind of conceptual connection between the source material and the final visual output.

Having also eschewed learning *Processing* up until this point in my DMI journey, I realized that this algorithmic direction would be a dead end without someone to lead me down the Java-laden path. I asked my sister's boyfriend, Matt Quesada, if he'd be interested in collaborating on the project. Matt is a software engineer for a company called *EScription*. He had no prior experience using *Processing*, but had worked with other code languages before. He suggested that we use *Python*¹⁵. Also, because his company does a lot of work involving speech recognition software¹⁶, he thought it might be cool to incorporate that technology into the project. During our first working session, he loaded a single image into a window. I asked him what sort of parameters or filters *Python* allowed for image manipulation. He said "Um. Well, I loaded the image." There was silence.

By the end of the session, we had started dabbling in *Processing*. Based on the limitations of our collective knowledge, I couldn't imagine how we were going to make any kind of interesting abstract/quasi figurative representations of the audio files. I had envisioned Jeremy Blake-esque floating

14

Mr. Dragulescu, or one of his minions (he's now at the MIT Media Lab), quoted in Geoff Manaugh's *The Bldg Blog Book*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2009. pg. 14.

15

A Java-based programming language that is more of a nuts-and-bolts language than something like *Actionscript 3* or *Processing*, both of which are languages created specifically for designers. For example, in *Python*, you'd have to write a function manually to, say, load an image, whereas in *AS3* or *Processing*, you could simply call the "image" function, which has already been created and embedded into the program, so that you, Mr. or Ms. Graphic Designer Dabbling in Code don't have to waste your time getting your hands dirty with "real" code. For *SpamStream*, Matt came into the project having worked only with the nuts-and-bolts-level stuff, and I'd had an only mild level of experience with the "designer" languages. His lack of awareness of data visualization projects using *Processing* and *AS3* was one of the major reasons I wanted to work with him.

16

Their company was just purchased by *Nuance*, the company responsible for *Dragon* and all of its shockingly annoying radio commercials.



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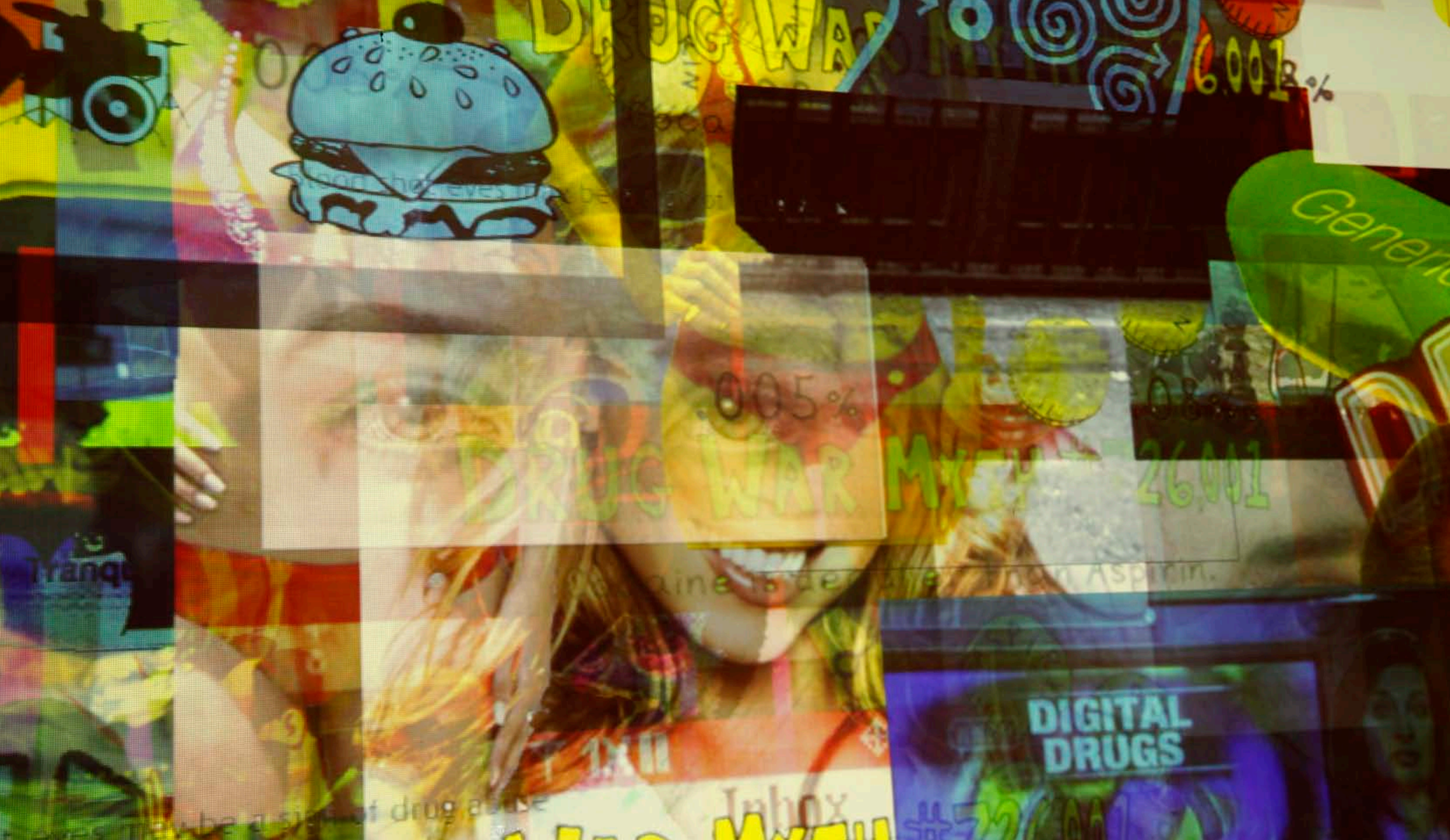
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WHO NEEDS
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NO SERIOUSLY, I HAVE DRUG

NO SERIOUSLY, I HAVE
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17

SpamStream Fun Fact: Approximately 35% of the images that come up when one searches for “Sex” on *Google* are *Sex in the City*-related.

18

In Spring 2010’s *Design for Motion and Sound*, in the context of a group project^a, we were given the words “desire”, “interrupt” and “collide” and told to make a story, or a “narrative”^b. This story had to be told in three different ways, or, more accurately, via three different media forms: text, sound, and image. At some point, as part of the assignment, my group’s words became “desire”, “love”, and “collide”. These words, for me, conjured up classic film noir posters of the 30s and 40s. Long story short, we ended up making a translation system that used text as an input and had a dynamic collage of film noir imagery as the output. This, however, was a *linear* system, in that you put something in at one end, then saw the end result on the other. You sort of had to remember what you put in. With *SpamStream*, you would be experiencing the translation simultaneously and continuously. The juxtaposition of the sound and image and text on the speech-recognition screen would allow for multiple levels of real-time affinities to be made between the discrete components of the project.

a

I always thought that teachers assigned group projects to encourage collaboration. Now, after years of disliking them (the group projects), and in the midst of what is most likely my last semester of education—ever—I think they assign them so they’ll have to sit through less critiques. They tell me I’m an optimist.

b

Just, yikes.

digital paintings, with each brush stroke or canvas wash being algorithmically driven by the amplitude and tonality of Hoss’ voice. Instead, we were able to load one image at a time. No audio. And, Christ, it had taken us a while to figure out how to do *that*.

Knowing now our technical limitations, I started thinking about images. Specifically web images. What if the audio files could generate web imagery based on content? I created a spreadsheet and classified all of the words and phrases into seven categories: Advertising, Sex, Violence, Money, Entertainment, Religion, and Drugs. These categories seemed to comprise the majority of the content that I had. I’ve since somewhat-cheesily dubbed them the Seven Deadly Sins of Spam. But, it’s true; the majority of stuff out there fits into these categories. And, I loved how some of the words and phrases could fit into multiple categories. The ambiguity/double meaning of a phrase like “online caribbean stud”, tagged to “money”, “entertainment” and “sex”¹⁷, seemed like it could be a project in and of itself. And the idea that the computer would be hearing Hoss’ voice saying these things, interpreting that and then displaying its translation seemed fascinating.¹⁸

So, I thought it made sense to have the audio files tagged as belonging to one or more of the categories. The system would identify the file and pick one of the categories at a time, then search *Google* or *Flickr* (or whatever), for that category, grab an image, and then display it. Each category would also have its own method of display (fast or instant appearance for Violence, long slow fade for Religion, etc.). As Hoss’ audio files played in a random sequence, a layered collage of internet imagery would be created and projected onto a wall—a combination of spam-bot poetry and web pixels, never the same composition twice—and a monitor would display what it heard Hoss’ voice saying via speech-recognition software. The effect would be a sort of multi-layered feedback loop, a constant back and forth between human and computer interpretations.

We started coding the project with this general blueprint in mind. I went down to Roslindale every Sunday afternoon and we sat in front of Matt’s 50-inch flatscreen television with his PC hooked up to it. During these sessions, I tried to take all of the thoughts and ideas and whims I was having about blog spam and imagery and translation of media¹⁹ and

whittle them down into useful, palatable chunks for Matt to process into code. I could rant and rave about this stuff for extended periods which was probably somewhere between insufferable and not helpful. I also tried to be patient and take one section of the project at a time. It’s hard not to blurt out stuff like “What about the audio?!? What about the speech recognition?!?” when you’re trying to simply get one image to stay on the “stage” while another loads in, while weird shit keeps happening for reasons that are frustratingly unknowable, and mainly you just want to have a beer because it’s getting on five in the afternoon on a Sunday already. But that’s how we worked; we slowly went through the possibilities of loading the images into the system, exploring different filters that *Processing* offers and the various ways of faking and making a time-based collage²⁰. We focused on creating captivating visual treatments of the images that would later make the experience somewhat interesting, if not meaningful, when added to the context of the audio files.

We encountered a fair amount of technical problems (as is the case with pretty much any foray into the actual coding of a project versus keeping it encased in conceptual lucite), some as a result of the basic limitations of *Processing* and some probably as a result of our incompetence/naiveté in coding. Some problems were frustrating and limiting and just kind of sad²¹, but became obstructions that had a sort of Leth/von Trierian effect on the project. A major concern from the outset was whether the viewer/perceiver would be able to make any sort of connection between the random words and phrases that he or she would be hearing and the random images being projected on the wall. A one-to-one correspondence would be too concrete and dumb; too much randomness would be too abstract. I mean, you have to give the viewer some context from which to derive meaning.

The initial idea, as detailed above, was that a phrase would be pulled from the database, the system would pull a category from that phrase, and an image would be displayed based on the attributes assigned to that category. The first image would be a “background” image that would serve as the canvas on which the subsequent images would be overlaid. Then the next phrase would be pulled, a category would be pulled, an image displayed. And so on. However, when we tried to code it this way, we couldn’t get the

19

When an idea takes hold and you’re really in it, when you try to tell someone about it, it can be like you’re either basically insane, or someone’s grey sheep uncle who goes heavy on the nachos at Thanksgiving and has little bits of tortilla chips around his mouth while telling you about something called “future shares in vertigo theory” that he wants you not to invest in, like he has, but just to “chew on it for a while.”

20

Whereas *Flash* has the idea of a “movie” and a timeline inherent in the program, *Processing* requires the use of timers and other jerry-rigs to create something that unfolds over time.

21

Early on, when we couldn’t get two images to appear at the same time, Matt and I discussed having me ask Brian Lucid (who was advising me on the project in a class called either *Thesis Exploration* or *Thesis Explorations* depending on which document or web page you find yourself perusing) about it, before we both decided that this was so rudimentary a question that we would both be too spiritually embarrassed to actually ask it, both me, in person, and Matt, safely faceless and tangentially involved in the project.

22

This is code/nerd speak for “list”.

23

After initially trying to use a *Google* or *Flickr* API to pull the images dynamically into the project, I decided to simply download 100 images per category by searching *Google Image Search* for the category names (“Sex” [more tame than you’d think, as long as your *SafeSearch* is on “moderate”], “Religion”, “Money”, etc.). This added another level of computer/human interchange, as I was the one picking the images from search results that had been created both by system algorithm and tags that people had affixed to the images.

program to apply a different category on an image-to-image basis; there was some problem with the array²² that prevented us from doing it. We could, however, keep the same category for a series of words/images. Thus, if the first word/phrase had the “Drugs” category, then the next phrase/images would also be from the “Drugs” category. This limitation, after initially leading to a near-meltdown by yours truly who had to be assuaged by an earlier-than-normal Sunday afternoon IPA dosage, potentially led to a more meaningful experience for the viewer; there was already enough randomness in the project, from the origins of the words and phrases and images²³ to the order in which they were displayed, to the position where they were displayed (random x and y coordinates on the “stage”), to the characteristic way in which they were displayed via filters (a randomly chosen filter from a set of ten). A sequence could now live within one category, and the category could give the sequence the framework for context and meaning; random material isn’t random when viewed through a common filter. In fact, the categorical framework provides a context from which meaning can be applied by the viewer e.g., why is there a woman wearing a bikini followed by a syringe followed by a smiling silver fox-type character? Oh, we’re in the Drugs category. Hmmm.

Having been interested in the nature of repeated viewing and perception intrinsic to looped media, and the idea of the loop allowing repeated viewing and perception, and the possibility of unlocking layers of meaning based on these repeated viewings, I envisioned *SpamStream* as functioning on its own internal clock, with the viewer being simply that: the viewer; not an interactor or user, but simply one who beholds the collages and audio and who derives or doesn’t derive meaning from the experience. This seemed maybe a bit lazy and kind of lame, I’ll admit, but I liked the idea of this system functioning autonomously, with a person being someone who sort of just pops in to take a quick look-see, while the system continues to churn on and on at all hours of the night on its own digital cogs and gears. During our programming sessions, Matt and I would use a “mouse click” command to forward the collage, rather than waiting for seven seconds (or whatever time period we would decide worked) for each image to appear. We could step through the images and the audio files quicker this way to



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Think Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man in *Ghost Busters*.



see if the filters that we created were functioning. When the programming phase for the first functional version of the project was close to complete, we ended up deciding to keep the mouse click as the way of forwarding the collage. By offering the user a button, basically the most simple of interfaces, he or she could control the rate at which the audio files are played, and, subsequently, the rate at which the collage is created. We could then add parameters limiting the amount of audio files/images the system would run before the collage restarted by wiping the stage clean. But the speed of the experience would literally be in the hand (for lack of a sexier word) of the user. Pressing the button would trigger the playback of an audio file and the appearance of an image, enacting a direct physical correspondence between the user and the installation.

We started thinking about the simplest button possible. A mouse would be too straightforward and familiar. In a Ray Stantz-esque²⁴ epiphany, we thought of the Staples' *Easy Button*. A big red button that served one purpose. No right clicks or scrolling. One function. Push me.

I went to Staples and bought an *Easy Button* for \$4.99. I took the thing apart with a 1.4mm screwdriver. Matt, having a background as an electrical engineer, modified it to function as a wireless controller by disassembling a wireless mouse and installing the hardware within the casing of the button. Voilà. *SpamStream* was now interactive.

We eventually got the project working and stable enough to include in the student show *MediaLuscious*, which was held in the Pozen Center at MassArt in March 2011. We projected the collage onto a large wall. To the left of the projection was a 50" plasma screen that displayed the speech recognition software output of the audio files in real time. A podium about fifteen feet away from the wall held the modified "Easy" button (now the "Push Me" button). Two speakers below the collage played the audio.

Over the course of the night, people stopped by and checked out the project. Some would give the button a single press, look for a connection on the projection, and then move on. Some people stayed for longer periods of time, watching the collages build and change as layer upon layer was added to the composition. Some people glanced at the wall and walked away. One woman, probably in her late fifties, pulled me aside, congratulated me, and

told me that she "got what I was doing." Matt and I had an extended conversation with Dana Mozer²⁵ about the technical details of the project. He thought that Hoss' voice was computer-generated, which was interesting, and raised the idea of the back-and-forth between human and computer from a different perspective. Fred Wolfink watched the project comfortably for an extended period of time.

It's hard to know whether people valued, or how much they valued, the interaction component of the project. It was kept as a simple button push, as detailed above, to shift the focus onto the collages, which, with their visual beauty and depth, were the aesthetic strength of the project. If the end result is captivating and draws people in and makes them consider the connections between the media, maybe that's enough.

Ultimately, *SpamStream* is about the connection between words and phrases originating somewhere in the cracks of the internet, filtered somewhat through human consciousness via their being spoken aloud and then linked to images that are tied to those words and phrases via concepts and keywords. It raises the question of what images can mean in different contexts, and how language can influence those contexts as both hierarchical information and specific description. The interaction and idea exchange between the human and the computer is becoming increasingly inescapable and decidedly commonplace for the majority of people in cultures both Western and beyond. The meaning that we apply to this interaction doesn't exist in URLs or passwords or virtual shopping carts or blogs, but in the fringes of our experience and the repetition of simple actions. We search for things—for concepts, for keywords, for answers—and the images we encounter become part of our screen memories. Embedded. Meta-data. Forever.

25

From my understanding, one of the head honchos of the SIM department.



**SOME THINGS
STAY
WITH YOU.
THE DENT
IN YOUR NOSE.
ALL YOUR LIFE,
THE TRAIL
OF RUIN
YOU LEAVE.**

Close Your Eyes, Drive As Fast As You Can

1

Probably something akin to *Sculpture 101*, which was taught by a totally chilled-out dude named I think Michael Quintero who was like the nicest guy ever and who had a teaching assistant named Stanley who was one of those older extremely talented guys who are usually employed by college art departments, who was a good-natured curmudgeon and wore plaid flannel shirts exclusively and claimed to be from Northern Vermont. The both of them put up with Econ majors making sculptures of monkeys and prissy girls not wanting to get their hands dirty with the casual insouciance that can only come from a sort of deep level of happiness and calmness that made me sad that I hadn't been a Sculpture major or hadn't at least taken a few more classes with them so that I might have had a chance to decompress a little bit and share in the general warmth and contentedness these guys exuded.

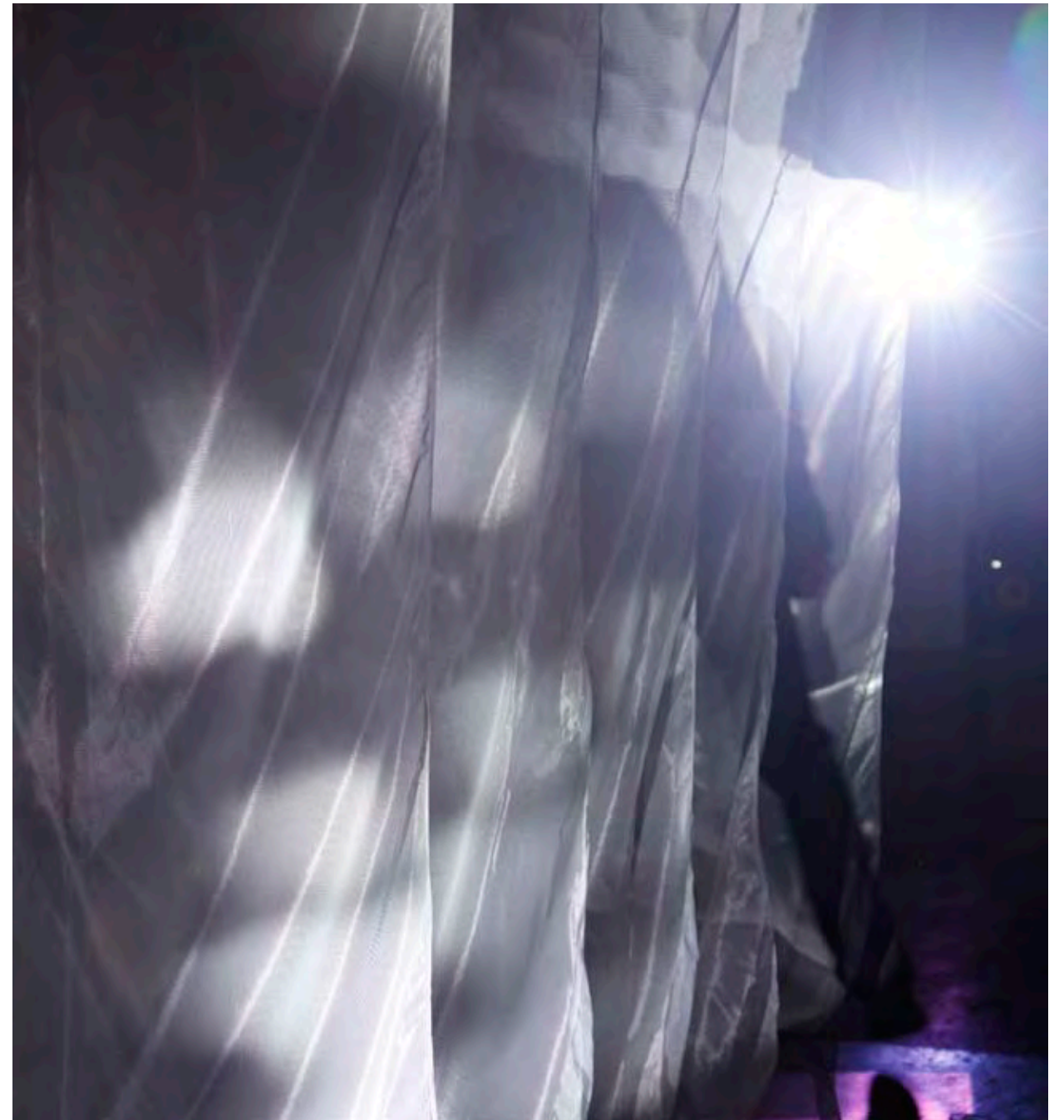
2

I think it's officially called "3D".

In the 2010 Spring semester, while hurriedly trying to figure out what classes to take in the upcoming Fall 2010 semester, the SIM class, *Video Sculpture*, seemed like a good fit based on what I was interested in at the time: it seemed to involve making video pieces and creating physical installations/environments/items for them. So, I registered for it.

Taking an official Fine Arts class for the first time since the second semester of my senior year at good old Denison U., which was way back in the Spring of 2002, when I had taken a Sculpture class¹, was something of a shock to my system. On the first day of *Video Sculpture* class, we went around the room, our chairs of course in a circle, saying our names and majors and announcing what we were interested in and what we were hoping to get out of the class. I muttered something about interactivity and cinema. Another guy, pursuing his MFA in Sculpture², said that he was interested in "entropy". As in: that was his entire response. So I felt a bit like a fish out of water, a babe in the woods, out of my comfort zone, whatever sort of cliché makes sense to signify that I felt awkward and strange.

The course consisted of weekly assignments. Every week we had to both film/create a video and conceive a physical installation for the presentation of the video. Ideally, I came to learn, we'd conceive of the video and its physical manifestation *simultaneously*, so that they'd be conceptually linked and intertwined and as inseparable as possible. I admit that my first few assignments in the class involved an "I made this video, now where can I stick it?" modus operandi. I had always thought of the video image as its own



thing that existed on a screen or flat surface. To then have to think about it in three dimensional space and to conceive a way to link the concept of whatever the video content was with whatever form in which I chose to display it was, well, tough. I was able to get away with projecting onto walls for a little while. My first project was about entertainment and television and people watching the time-based image, and consisted of an hour-long video of my wife and I on our couch watching *Mad Men* compressed into 60 seconds via time-lapse, so I projected into this weird built-in entertainment center-looking cabinet in the classroom. But eventually the jig was up and I had to take it all up a notch³. This led me to start seeking out new materials to project onto and through, and to start lugging what can only be described as random shit back and forth with me to class every Monday afternoon⁴. In my search for interesting new materials, I came upon Backstage Hardware, which is on the first floor of the Boston Design Center in the Fort Point neighborhood of Boston. It's a hardware store that also carries theatrical/film supplies, like duvetyne, muslin, gaffer's tape, and something called tropical netting. The actual purpose/function of the latter item is unclear. It's basically white transparent material that is actually very fine netting. Anyway, the first time I ventured into the store, wide-eyed and giddy, I bought five yards of it⁵.

I started doing experiments with the netting, projecting video onto and through it. Its malleability as a quasi-fabric and its ability to both capture the image and let the image pass through refracted, made it a fascinating thing to play with and shape. Due to its flexibility, I started basically including it in every project⁶. It could take on any shape and still capture whatever image was being projected onto it. I used it for more abstract things, like videos of stylized store fronts, where the layers became less representational and more textural. I also used it for things that were more figurative, like portraits, using the netting to physically add layers to the image. I came to realize how different kinds of footage would appear when projected onto the material. Higher contrast images were easier to discern than lower contrast or flat images.

These studies came to a head when it was time for our final project. Envisioned as a culmination of The Things We'd Learned This Semester, it

had to be multi-channel, meaning more than one video stream had to be involved, it had to include sound, and it had to be awesome⁷.

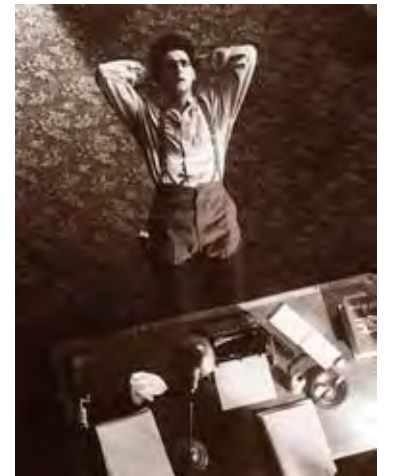
My original idea for this *pièce de résistance* was to shoot a two person dialogue scene, in high-contrast black and white, each character with his/her own screen/video feed. These feeds would be projected directly toward each other, with a third screen in between, capturing the spill over through the (of course) tropical netting. I envisioned each video as back-lit and smokey, aesthetically someplace between film noir and the French *nouvelle vague*. Men in suits conversing. Atmospheric. A study in form. As detailed elsewhere in this document, I'd been getting into this idea of deconstructing cinematic narrative devices, and I thought this could be another avenue for deconstruction: take the two-person dialogue scene, strip it down to its essence, isolate the two characters, put it into an installation environment and see what happens.

The problem with this idea was that I couldn't come up with anything for these magnificent gentlemen to talk about. I mean, I had no idea. Nothing was coming, and nothing was coming after the usual period of nothing coming. It got to the point that I felt a bit like Barton Fink in his Hollywood hotel room/Hell. But I had to start shooting, because this was a semester and thus a finite period of time, and I had to get on with it if I wanted to have something "awesome" to show in our big-final-day-of-project exhibitions.

Going somewhat by the seat of my pants, I invited my parents over for dinner and told them that we'd be shooting something with my Dad⁸. I decided to keep the idea of a black and white, high-contrast look, but have the subject be silent. The footage would be more of a straightforward "portrait" of a person/character than of a "scene". I shot the footage of my father in this way, with him turning left and right, changing the shot from wide to medium to close-up to extreme close-up. He stood in front of a black duvetyne backdrop, so the light completely fell off and disappeared behind him, so that when projected onto the netting, the background would disappear⁹, too.

I recorded my Dad reading selections from Jon Loomis'¹⁰ book of poetry *The Pleasure Principle*. This is a book that I've had for years and had

7 This was implied in a fashion designer-esque way by the instructor; I don't know if she specifically ever said, "You better *work it*, people!!", but it was definitely the sort of thing you could hear her saying.



8 By this point I had already used my father in a few projects, and he shoulder-shruggingly would pretty much go along with whatever I had planned, being an excellent sport throughout whatever thing I was asking him to do.

9 The color black basically becomes invisible, or very faint, when projected.

10 One-time poet laureate of the US, now writing mystery novels set in Provincetown, MA.

3 Having to sit/stand through critiques of everyone's projects for five hours, and to listen to some of the, pardon my French, absolute horseshit that people would come up with to describe their projects and the subsequent ridiculousness with which my stuff would get criticized was a highly motivating factor to improve the overall quality of my work.

4 From the Mindoro St. parking lot, which, if you haven't heard of it or haven't had to make the trek to and from it carrying something like an eight-foot-long-cardboard box or speakers or really anything at all, especially in a December wind, consider yourself lucky.

5 the last time I purchased some of it, the guy ringing it up couldn't find a SKU, asked me what the stuff was, then called across the store to the other guy working there, asking him if he had ever sold any of it, to which the guy said "Ah...once or twice", with both of those times apparently having been to me.

6 This led the "entropy" guy to remark, "You *love* that fabric, huh?"











11
Hey man, this was for an art class.

always liked for its mix of humor, candor, and sadness. It's poetry, but the poems are more like little vignettes or stories, i.e., nothing rhymes. I excerpted some bits that resonated with me and fit together tonally. It seemed appropriate to have my father's voice saying these things¹¹. I had the idea that I could be the other "portrait", and that I could also record myself saying the same Loomis text fragments. Then, when I projected each video feed through the netting, there would be an intermingling of image, not to say anything about the young vs. old, father vs. son, and other heavy conceptual business that I'm not going to get into here. The audio would be played back randomly, with each poetic fragment its own file. I'd put each set in a playlist and use the "shuffle" feature of an *iPod*. These fragments would function as a sort of disconnected voiceover narrative, challenging the viewer to make connections or associations between what he or she is seeing and hearing.

12
The most famous example of this is probably when *Warner Bros.* insisted on having Harrison Ford record a voiceover for Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*.

A common post-production device used in Hollywood films that have fallen into a film-executive-sweat-inducing narrative abyss is the use of voiceover narration in order to help the viewer figure out what's happening. This is usually a crap idea¹². I liked the notion that I was recording voiceover narration to cover up narrative holes that didn't exist in the first place.

I edited the footage into crisp, quick cuts, using loops and the repetition of small movements. I knew that the tropical netting would add a softness to the image, so I stayed away from dissolves and fades to contrast the appearance of the figures as captured on the material. Each video feed would be of a slightly different length to create an asynchronous loop when viewed simultaneously, creating a limitless combination of image fragmentation.

I installed the piece, now called *Close Your Eyes, Drive As Fast As You Can* (after one of the Loomis fragments) in Squash Court #3, taking up most of the space. The installation took all of a Sunday and involved a rickety ladder, dowels, a cordless drill, three sheets of 4' x 8' tropical netting, twine, two projectors, an *iPod* and an *iPhone* to play the audio, and a fair amount of extension cords. I had my grand opening the next day, in the final *Video Sculpture* class. The reaction was mixed. The critique was a hodgepodge of everything lame and frustrating and obtuse about Fine Arts critiques.

There were some "I don't get it"s. When asked about the voiceovers, I explained my reasoning. "Well, it didn't seem like that was your intention." Ok. Thanks, TA. My instructor was concerned with what I was wearing in my portrait. "That sweater says something." Ok. Some people thought the audio was too loud, and said they didn't find a connection between the voiceover and the portraits, and others suggested that the piece would be better without audio¹³.

I installed the piece again as part of *OHU*. This time, I added more panels, so there were five layers of image. There was more space for the viewer to move around the fabric and experience the layering of imagery from multiple perspectives. It was the visual centerpiece of the show, and it succeeded in creating a captivating environment for people to experience in real space. No one asked me to explain it or defend it. No one questioned my intent with the audio. People simply seemed to experience the piece, moving and drifting through the image and projected light, the audio low and reflecting softly off the concrete and plaster of the gallery¹⁴. The intent was never to make someone feel a specific way. I'm not in advertising, and I'm not selling anything. The intent was to put this combination of images and words and sound together in a considered space and see how it made people feel and what it all meant. There is no right answer. Not in a Fine Arts class.

13
These students had apparently missed or chose to ignore our instructor's bulleted list of project requirements.
Work with me here, people!!

14
It's really tough to not have audio just booming when you have a nice set of speakers hooked up to whatever sounds you've spent a lot of time crafting. The squash court setup/pooh-poohing of the audio really showed me that with sound, it's probably best to be subtle and nuanced, as long as your audio can physically be heard and deciphered (unless it's meant to be hard to hear/indecipherable).

**DON'T
LET
YOURSELF
BE
HURT
THIS
TIME.**

Nightingale

1

In *Design as Experience*, I made a video in response to Pablo Neruda's *Ode to My Socks* that was itself a paean to my special edition *Twin Peaks Nike SB* sneakers (which were a birthday gift from my sister Erin), featuring photographs of the shoes themselves intercut with flash frames from the series. The fact that *Nike*, 19 years after the show's brief run ended (and in the same year that I had chosen to finally watch it), released a special edition line of sneakers based on the show, struck me as odd and strangely kismet. And who makes sneakers based on a television show?

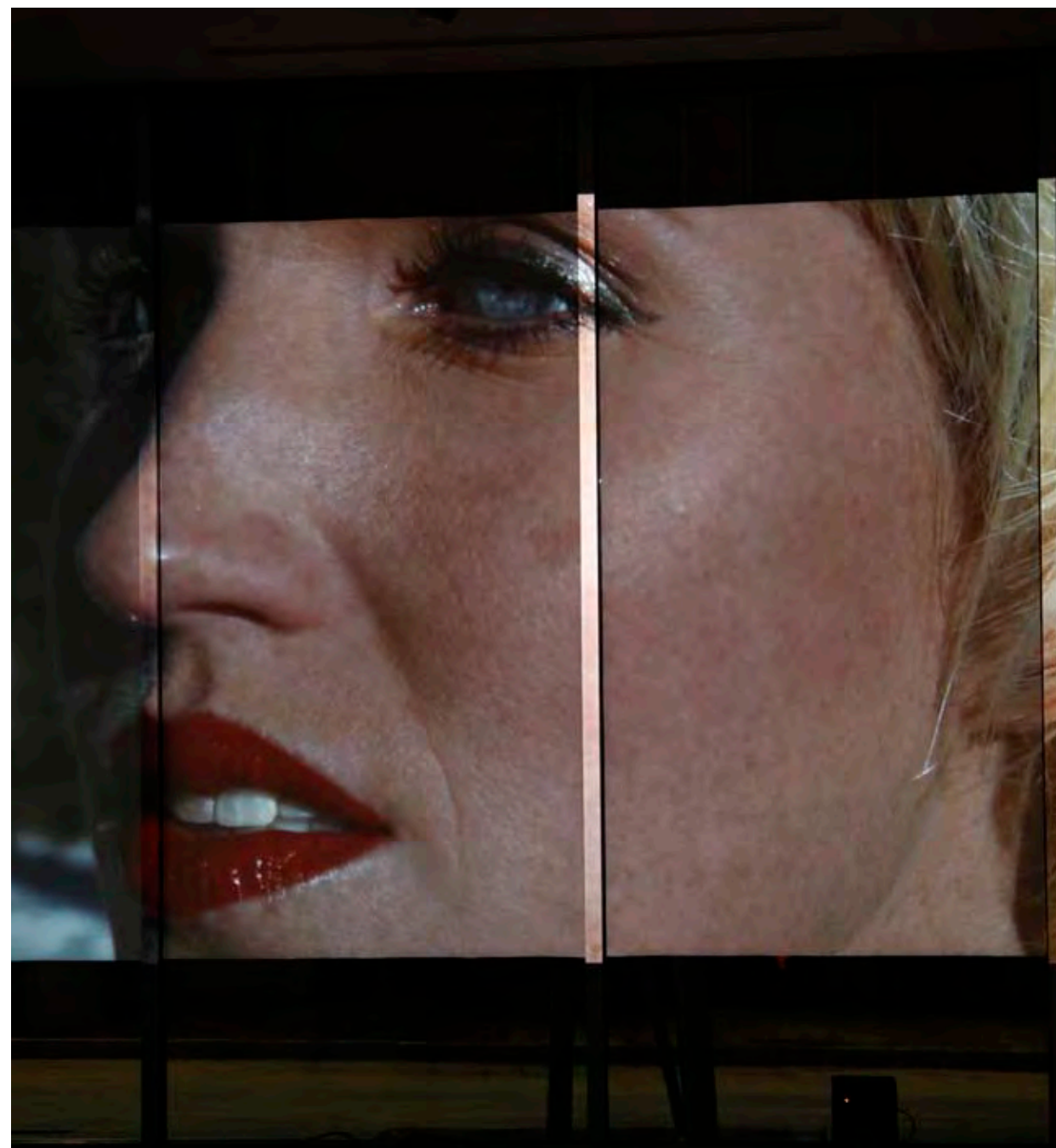
2

I dressed as Dale Cooper, but ended up looking more like the guy in *American Psycho* than anything else.



I'll admit it: I spent a good deal of my first year at DMI thinking and talking about and generally being obsessed with *Twin Peaks*. I'll admit this too: There's a good bet it was annoying. The influence that the 1990-1991, Mark Frost and David Lynch-created television series had on me ran deep, influencing everything from my project work to my footwear¹. I found the entire atmosphere of the show completely mesmerizing. This interest/influence reached its—sorry—peak, when my wife and I hosted a *Twin Peaks* Halloween party, at which those attending had to dress as a character from the show². It seemed like there was nothing I could do; the show and its world was so interesting and important to me, and I wanted people to share in my fascination. One other thing that came fluttering out of this obsessive haze was the idea to create a large-scale installation based on the mythology of the series. This installation would theoretically take place in the cavernous MassArt gymnasium, basically because that was the only place on campus big enough to hold something with the scale/magnitude that I envisioned. I had no specific ideas, other than the notion that it would involve actors dressed as the scary Bob character, in denim and stringy long-haired wigs, and feature a lot of strobe lights. I never put much thought into how or from where the money for such an extravagant exhibition might materialize. I just liked the idea on a conceptual/fantasy level.

And so my first year ended, and I spent the summer doing summer things, forgetting about the gymnasium and the installation, and not watching *Twin Peaks*. When the fall semester began, I was *Twin Peaks*-free. Or so I thought.



3

Matt Quesada, *SpamStream* collaborator and my sister's boyfriend, had to give me "ten fingers" to get on top of their garage's roof in order to get the desired camera placement for the super-wide angle establishing shot that begins the video.

For one of my *Video Sculpture* projects, I had to create an "Intimate Portrait". I had the idea to film my sister Erin in a Halloween costume (this was in October and Halloween-time in Salem, MA can be oppressive since it basically lasts the entire month). She wore her Halloween costume from the previous year, which was of the singer Julee Cruise, which she had worn to our *Twin Peaks* Halloween party. The costume consisted of a shiny red cocktail dress, a platinum blonde wig, and a lot of 80s-style makeup. But I wasn't thinking about *Twin Peaks*, at least not consciously. I was more interested in the concept of the costume, and its ability to evoke a character.

Erin lives in Roslindale, and her house has a considerably large backyard, which is a grassy field surrounded by trees. We shot there. I filmed her walking across the yard, from high and far away³, then moved the camera closer and closer to capture her expression, ending on an extreme close-up. The only direction I gave her was where to be; her expression was entirely her choice.

I edited the footage, adding long dissolves between the shots of Erin walking, so there would be multiple images of her in different stages of transparency. I also added a bit of saturation to the footage, to push up the red of her dress and the green of the grass. For the accompanying audio, I took a song from *Twin Peaks*, called "The Nightingale", which was sung by Julee Cruise's character on the show, and looped a short section of it before adding a titanic amount of "deep space" reverb to the track. It became semi-unrecognizable, but remained haunting, with a down-the-hall "I think I might know that song" quality.

My first attempt to display the video involved projecting it onto and through the notorious tropical netting with which I had been extensively experimenting. Showing it for a critique in class, I taped a large panel of it across the corner of a wall, so there were two layers of material to capture. This created an interesting effect where Erin's character sort of followed herself across the field, both through the dissolves of the video and on the layers of material, meeting at certain points and drifting away at others. It was a nice thing to look at, and I was happy with the overall effect of the piece, but I didn't have a ton of footage from the backyard, and my edit was only about forty seconds long. So, I left it as a sketch and moved on.





The image of Erin in the costume continued to linger, though. This year, when I decided to have an exhibition of some of my thesis work (*OHU*), I knew that I wanted to include this piece on some level, but that it would need to be developed or modified. I decided that I should shoot more footage of Erin in the costume in the backyard, but this time in the winter, with the hill covered in considerable snow. I could then intercut the vibrant fall footage with the winter footage, potentially creating a richer visual language. We set a date and shot, Erin being a hugely good sport, since she hadn't worn shoes in the original footage and thus was shoeless in the snow on a windy⁴ day in February. It was also a sunny day, which gave the footage a nice contrast with the fall footage, which had been shot when it was overcast and gray.

With my *Video Sculpture*-accrued how-to, I set out to edit the footage in such a way as to be conceptually synchronous with the physical means in which I chose to display the video. The Doran Gallery, which I reserved for my exhibition, has one wall that is made up entirely of floor-to-ceiling windows, divided by thin metal strips. Rather than avoiding or ignoring the glass, I wanted to incorporate it into the work somehow. After much research and consideration and a lot of dumb/implausible/expensive ideas, I found a cinema supply store in Burbank, CA that sold tracing paper in 60-inch wide rolls. I ordered one. I⁵ planned to cut the paper to fit the width of the glass panels, allowing that the height would be dictated by the aspect ratio of video, which was 16:9. The effect would then hopefully be as if I was projecting on the glass itself.

I created a video loop using both the fall (grass) and the winter (snow) footage. I again used long cross dissolves between the shots, layering Erin's image. But this time, there was more happening visually due to the contrast between the environments. I also knew that the frame would be divided into triptychs due to the metal strips on the windows, so I tried to edit accordingly, attempting to create interesting movements across the frame. I ended the loop with footage of Erin entering the frame, but reversed, an homage to *Twin Peaks*' use of backwards sequences to create a disorienting effect. The loop was about five-and-a-half minutes, so I needed a longer soundtrack. I took "Falling", which is the *Twin Peaks* theme, and altered

⁴ Getting back up and staying on the garage was particularly dodgy.

⁵ More likely my lovely wife Sarah, who has an innate ability to cut things straight, which I do not.



it similarly to “The Nightingale”, through layers of reverb. I also panned the signal across the stereo spectrum, so that someone viewing the piece and standing in between the two speakers would feel that funny sort of disorientation that you feel when physically experiencing stereo panning.

Installation-wise, the image had to be large and the color needed to be bright and vivid. In order to get the image large, the projector had to be far away from the windows, so I had to use an HD projector and have an HD video source to send to the projector. It wasn't feasible to have my laptop play the video⁶ at the show, so I had to make a Blu-ray disc at work, and borrow DMI's Blu-ray player⁷.

From a technical standpoint, the result was as good as I could have hoped. The projection was bright and vibrant. The effect of the paper mounted to the windows worked exactly as I had envisioned it would; it looked like I was projecting light onto glass, but that the glass was absorbing it rather than reflecting it. I was able to spread the speakers far enough apart so as to create the desired stereo panning effect. Again, I kept the volume low, but audible, so as not to overwhelm the space.

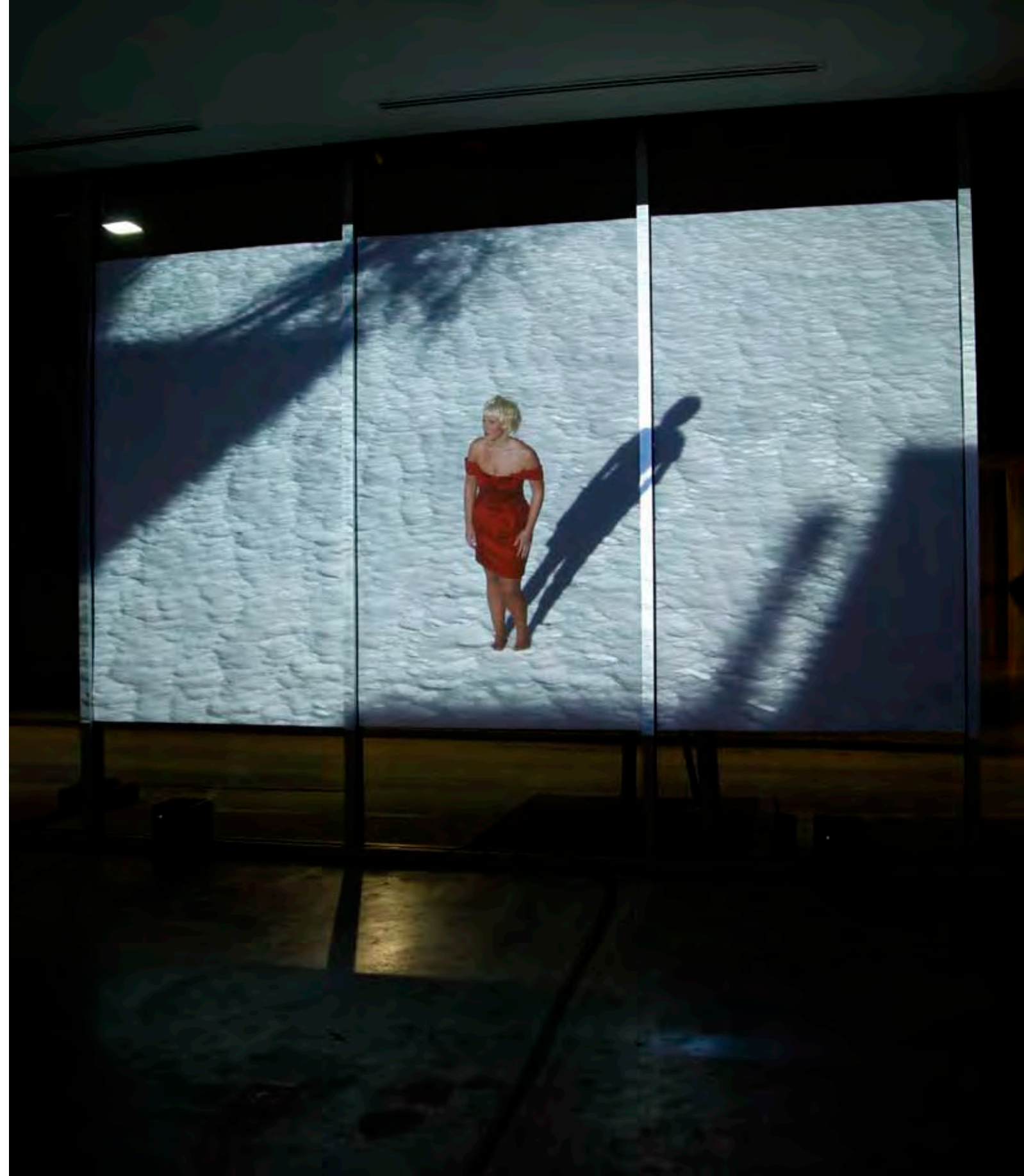
In some ways, I don't feel completely responsible for the emotional content of the piece. Its strength and emotional resonance comes from Erin's performance, which involves her in this fairly ridiculous costume, looking sad. I didn't instruct her to look that way or tell her how to feel. That was her choice. I simply captured it with a camera, then created sound and a physical installation that matched, or attempted to match, the mood that the performance cast. At the exhibition, watching the piece glow on the glass, I felt a little bit like an opportunist, and that people might think I was trying to create this sad or melancholic video by telling my sister to act sad and then filming her, or that I was exploiting her sadness. But maybe that's just because I now felt sad, and worried about my sister and why she was feeling sad, even though this was something that wasn't real, and which I had created and considered through every measure and step along the way. Or maybe it was because here in the space, wall-sized and luminous, this was the first time that I was really seeing it.

6

For a lot of reasons, probably the most important being that it's a 2005 *PowerBook G4* and doesn't play HD video smoothly.

7

which happens to be a *Sony PlayStation 3*.



**YOU'LL
NEVER
UNTANGLE
THE
CIRCUMSTANCES
THAT
BROUGHT YOU
TO THIS
MOMENT.**

Ordinary Human Unhappiness

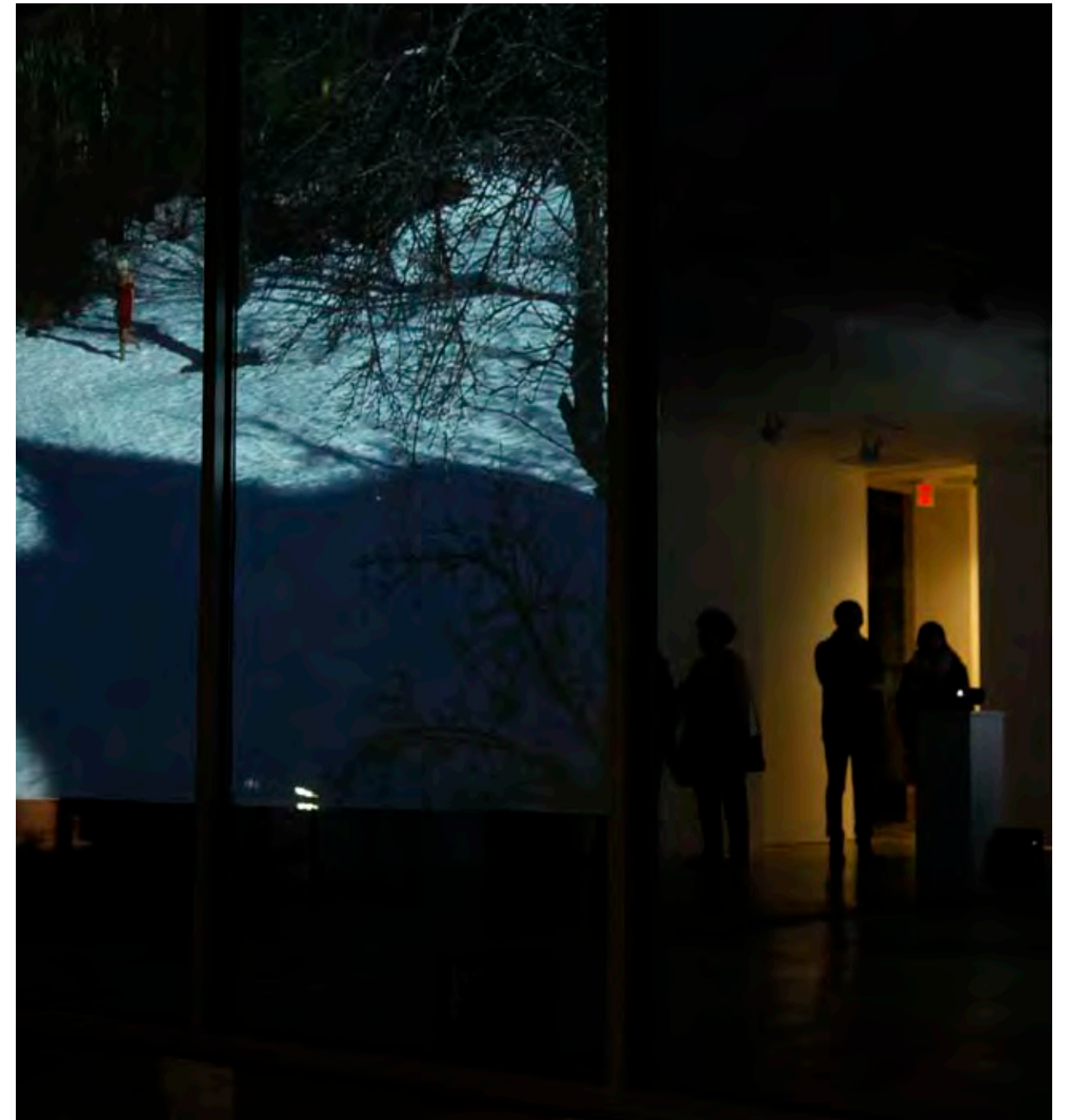
¹
most likely in the middle of the 2010 Fall semester.

²
“That is the *nature* of the *work!!*” is how Prof. Jan Kubasiewicz puts it.

³
Quoted in Lawrence Weschler’s *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. pg. 42.

⁴
Ibid.

At some point¹ during my Dynamic Media Institute peregrinations, it became clear that I needed to at least attempt to have an exhibition of my work. Everything that I was doing involved installation as its form, and installation is meant to be experienced in person². You can make cool little videos of installations, and you can take photographs, but they never capture what it’s like to experience the work in person. They can’t. And then the questions that people ask me about the videos or the work end up being the kinds of things that either aren’t really answerable, or questions for which the best answer is, inevitably, “You had to be there”, which ends up maybe making that person feel bad for not having been able to be there, and makes me feel somewhat impotent in my inability to articulate something that’s probably inarticulable. So I wanted to have a show where people could experience some of my work in person, so I could stop attempting to answer questions and simply let the work exist as it’s intended to exist. It would also be a chance to experience the installations collectively and/or simultaneously for the first time. Robert Irwin, describing the effect of seeing a large amount of his paintings exhibited in one place during his first one-man show in 1957, said, “For the first time, I think, I really got a good hard look at what I was doing.”³ The results of this new-found perception weren’t great. He concluded, “I knew that everything I’d been doing wasn’t worth shit.”⁴ With my show, I hoped to get a good hard look at what I was doing, and I hoped that I’d reach a different conclusion than Irwin. Either way, it needed to happen.





4 Which itself was somewhat of a pain in the butt due to paperwork and the lack of availability of gallery space at MassArt. And coordinating basically anything just isn't that much fun.

PRESENTATION

In conceiving the exhibition, the first thing I considered was the amount of physical space I'd have. The Doran Gallery seemed like a good-sized-room (25' x 50', with about 10' ceilings) if I could reserve it and have it to myself. Previous exhibitions there seemed mostly crap because they usually crammed 20+ pieces in the space, and since they were multimedia-type works, the results were cacophonous and spatially stifling. I thought it would be better to take on a more minimalist approach with regard to the amount of work to include in the exhibition. After securing the Doran⁴, I set about sketching possible layouts for the show, which would be called *Ordinary Human Unhappiness*, based on Freud's idea where he was interested in getting people cured of their neuroses to the point that they could experience ordinary human unhappiness, i.e., normal unhappiness, the kind we all deal with at some point, but that's not necessarily pervasive or persistent. With this title as the sort of conceptual beacon, I chose five projects that to some extent fit, in that each of them had an element of sadness or melancholy floating somewhere within them, whether it was obvious upon first perception, or required a longer period of contemplation. On a basic level, all of the pieces included would use projected light as a means of displaying the image, but each piece would have distinct differences in materiality, quality and color of light, physical space and treatment of sound.

I wanted to create a general sequence and flow in which the work could be experienced. I didn't want it to seem like I just dumped a bunch of my stuff in a room. *Here it is, take it or leave it!* Etc. The pieces needed to be installed cleanly, without wires and extension cords everywhere calling attention to the technicality of the presentation.

Because I had done previous installations of some of the work, I already knew a few things about the physicality of some of the work. *You'll Never Untangle the Circumstances That Brought You to This Moment* is an intimate piece that consists of footage of me riding around in the back seat of a car⁵. I knew that I wanted the scale of the projection to likewise be intimate, so I used a short-throw projector positioned on a podium to create the image, and put the audio source (a speaker) behind the podium, facing the wall

5 Itself an enclosed, intimate space.

with the projection, to create a similar effect with the sound. One had to move in close to hear the audio clearly. This seemed like a good introductory piece to the show, so I positioned it to be the first object that you encountered upon entering the room.

I wanted the imagery in *Nightingale* to make a substantial visual impression, which I decided to create using scale. I had the projection be very large and wall-sized, taking up three 4' x 10' glass panels. Also, when looking at the projection (unless you were outside the gallery, peering in the window) it was the only piece that you could see⁶. I positioned a movable wall to the left of the image to create this distinction. The audio played from two speakers set at the width of the image, for optimal perception of the stereo panning effects that I'd added to the music.

Close Your Eyes, Drive As Fast As You Can requires a lot of space, because each panel is about 4' x 8', and the projectors need to be a certain distance away from the screens to create an image that fills the panels. I also wanted to add additional screens to the piece to increase the scale of it and add to the levels of image fragmentation and overlap, which would increase the amount of space needed. The sheer size of the installation meant that it would be the primary or domineering physical presence in the space. This was ok; it would serve as an indirect light source for the rest of the gallery⁷ and hopefully draw the viewer in to experience the piece from a variety of angles and perspectives. Its visual predominance also allowed for the sound to "spill" into the other areas of the gallery without it necessarily seeming obtrusive or unintentional.

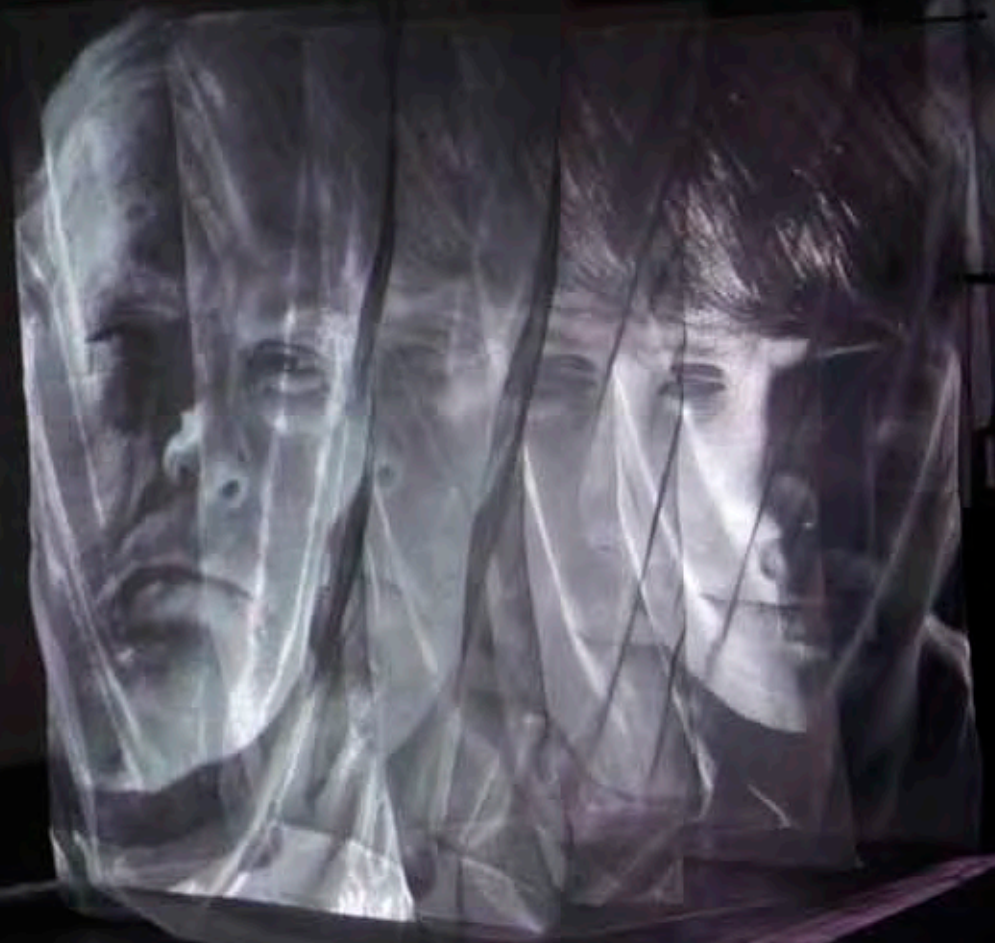
Figurants was originally going to be the first piece that you encountered upon entering the gallery. Once installing the show in the space, though, it became clear that the piece should be more contained, and that the experience of interacting with it should have its own semi-separate environment. So, I positioned two of the movable walls up against the windows to create a sort of three-walled room, and pulled the blinds to obscure the glass. I put the mouse to control the piece on a small podium. Containing the piece between the walls blocked ambient light from *Nightingale* and *:29* (both being color pieces), which would have affected the experience. Positioning *Figurants* directly across from *Close Your Eyes, Drive As Fast As You Can*⁸,

6 Whereas with some of the other pieces, you could see others in the foreground or background. I tried to manage this overlap, or lack thereof, as carefully as possible.

7 I wanted it dark, but I didn't want people tripping on stuff.

8 which also consisted of black-and-white projected footage.





however, allowed that project's glow to light the "little room" enough for people to navigate the space.

For :29, the large muslin screen onto which I projected the extreme close-up video loop of Lou, combined with the 27" television screen showing the :29 edit, created a saturated, considerable red glow. The red light, differing in color and luminance from the light from the other projects⁹, cut through the space. I positioned the piece in the back right corner of the gallery, partially obscured by a movable wall, to hopefully seem a bit mysterious and to draw people through the exhibition. I kept the audio confined to headphones because of its repetitive, intense and echo-heavy nature; to have it played through a speaker or speakers would have been too intrusive to the other work¹⁰.

One element of the actual experience of the show that I hadn't necessarily considered extensively before it happened¹¹, was how the space changed when there were actually people in it. Obviously, I knew that people would come to the exhibition. I considered how people would move around the space and see and hear things and so forth. But the presence of people viewing the work and actually moving around the space added another level to the experience, both visually, as people's profiles and silhouettes added an additional perceptible layer to every piece, and experientially, as people's voices and presences drifted in and out of range. People spoke—I didn't realize that people would actually be talking in the space. Part of me wanted to run around the gallery, adjusting the volume to accommodate the fluctuating level of background noise. I was able to resist this urge.

That's basically how the show was designed, from a technical/logistical standpoint. I've described the ways I used light, sound, image and space to create an environment and a curated experience. But that's really only one way of looking at the exhibition. Or maybe I should say that that's really only one level of perception of the show. Where the show really exists, in Bill Viola's previously quoted words, is "in the mind of the viewer."

⁹ three of which were black-and-white.

¹⁰ and most likely annoying to people staying at the show for more than five minutes.

¹¹ At which I found myself surprised and then subsequently shocked at my own surprise.

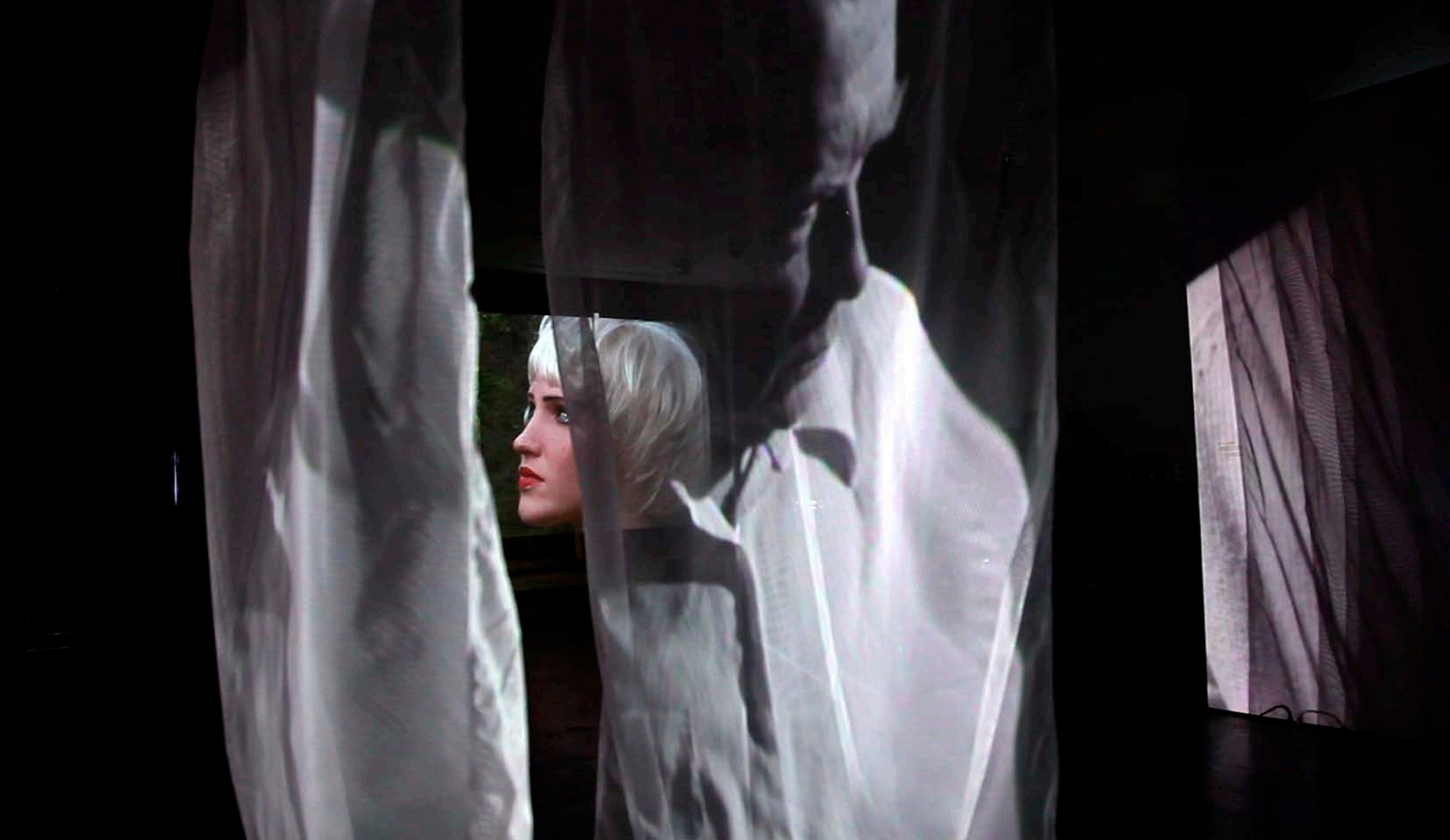
REPRESENTATION

And so I've talked about sight-lines, speaker placement, material transparency, wall proximity, projector distance, the materiality of surfaces, colors of light, and on and on. But why does it feel like I haven't really described what it was like to be in the space and experience the exhibition? It's probably because I've described what was *presented* to the viewer. I mean to say that you can look at *OHU* as a give-and-take between the work and those who were there, perceiving the work. In the preceding section, I've described the work itself, in physical terms: This is what was in the room: Screens, projectors, a television, tracing paper, etc. But what I was really getting at, and what I've been attempting to quantify and decipher and explore with a substantial chunk of my work over the past two years is how it makes you feel and how it makes you feel it.

The relationship between the viewer and the image is an active one. As I alluded to toward the beginning of the book, the time-based image (in the case of *OHU*, we're talking about video) is essentially experienced in the mind of the viewer. There's the image itself, and then there's the image we create of the image. Let's put it this way: in video, the viewer is *presented* with a series of images, and based on their *representation* (i.e., the assemblage of the images in their minds into a story/narrative/*libretto*) the viewer has an emotional response. The emotional response is based on this assemblage, which itself is based on people's own experience, personality, temperament, etc., and which was initiated by the viewing of the video. Again, this is what makes film/video/time-based image work so subjective. People passively view the work, then actively participate in its creation by deciphering or creating its meaning in their minds.

In *OHU*, all of the pieces contained looped video (with each of the loops being about six-minutes-long or less), so viewers were able to experience the work multiple times, even in a semi-short period of time. I'd like to imagine that the viewer's perception changed with each viewing. The first time you see something, you're gathering information. The second time you see it, you're able to compare the information you stored in your first viewing with how you've now *represented* that information, and this





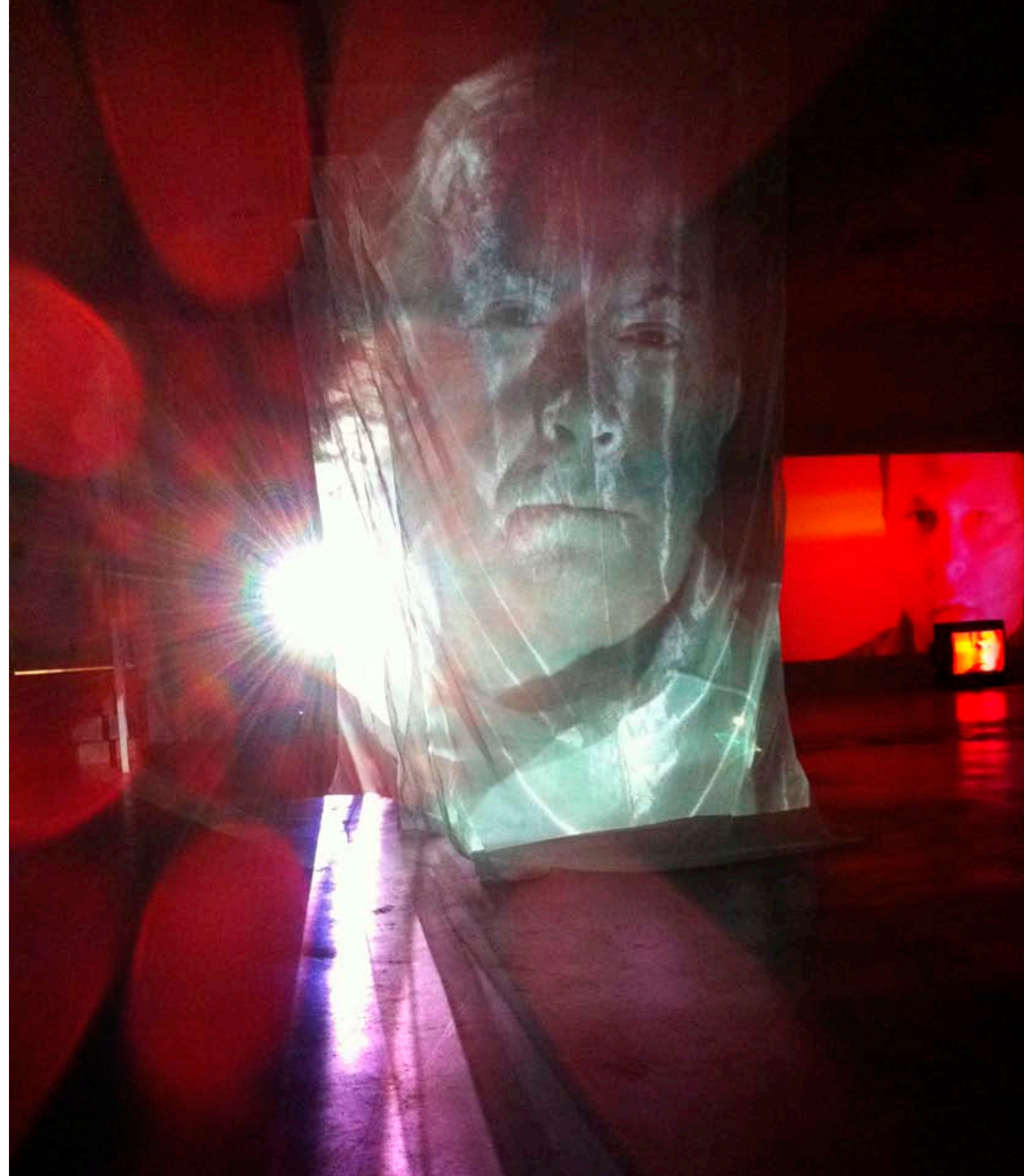




interaction affects your viewing experience. The third time you see it, you're comparing what you're seeing with what you know you saw the first time, with what you saw the second time and assembled based on the first time. And so on. The fact that the video work had a presence in physical space, as an installation, was meant to engage the viewer to want to experience it. Ideally, they'd experience the work multiple times and get past the point of data and image collection, into that quasi-transcendental state, where seeing and experiencing become merged into what seems like something else entirely.

Taking something and removing it from its context, or leaving something intentionally incomplete, invites the viewer/reader/listener to fill in the space. In *OHU*, each piece stops short of entirely spelling out its intentions, instead challenging the viewer/perceiver to complete the narrative/experience/visual jingle in their own minds, through his/her own representation. Mara Wagner, a psychoanalyst with whom I participated in an independent study in the 2011 Spring semester, told me (during one of our highly helpful, decaffeinated-tea-infused meetings) about a *Salem* cigarette ad campaign in the 1970s that featured a jingle that went, "You can take Salem out of the country, but you can't take the country out of Salem." The commercials in the campaign played this little ditty over and over again throughout the spot, until, on the last time through the couplet, the line stopped short, ending on "You can take Salem out of the country, but...". By deliberately leaving the last line off of the jingle (which they'd been pounding into the viewer's brain for the previous thirty seconds), the commercials invited/persuaded the viewer to complete the song in their own minds. This kind of completion forges a stronger connection between the viewer/listener and the content, and potentially a lasting or continuous one. The viewer of the commercial will be singing the jingle to themselves, likely not just once, right after the commercial, but many times. The jingle becomes something that he or she carries around in his or her mind. Conceptually, this is the kind of connection that I'm after with the pieces in *OHU*. I'd like the images and sounds and lighting and color to be things that people carry around with them, absorbed in the experience of the exhibition and lasting in their minds.

Experienced sequentially or collectively, the pieces in *OHU* were supposed to have enough in common, conceptually, formally, and/or narratively that they made sense. I could say that this affinity was because some of them involved deconstructed cinematic narrative conventions, or that they all featured projection, or that they all used the time-based image in physical space, but that would perhaps be beside the point. I can intellectualize the concepts behind the work and explain them to the best of my ability for 32,000 words. I can walk you through the thought process of how the show came together in physical space, through technical consideration and planning, and then through what I think it meant, and how people perceived it. But what I'm really getting at with my work was there in that room, in the particles of dust flickering through projection streams, in light glimpsed around corners and through netted layers, in voices screaming in your ear and speaking softly to you from across the room, through light captured by a lens, converted to ones and zeros and transformed into an image that can maybe make you feel something, as elusive and fleeting and unknowable as any single moment in your life.



AFTERWORD
OR:
‘PERSONAL JOURNEY’ POSTSCRIPT

I entered the Dynamic Media Institute at MassArt as a 28-year-old writer, musician, designer and filmmaker. While those might all still be accurate terms to describe me, my graduate education has allowed me the opportunity to spend two years figuring out how best to make my skills function as a combined, synchronous thing. I leave DMI as a multimedia artist, with all of the openendedness, promise, and ridiculousness that that moniker entails. It's possible that I would have gotten to this point on my own, at some point in my own personal experience and meanderings. But the ideas, projects, conceptual investigations that were engendered from, and the support I've received within this program likely fostered that growth more than any other path I could have subsequently chosen. I look at the work I've done in the DMI program as a starting point for future work involving installation, cinema, space, light, and mild algorithmia. Hopefully, the work I've done will be relevant to those interested in video installation, cinematic/interactive narrative, and image-based media, both in technical, nuts-and-bolts, *this-is-how-I-did-this* terms, and in theoretical, *why-do-we-see-things-the-way-we-do?* exploratory questioning.

Also, I'm 30 now.

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- The 400 Blows* by François Truffaut
- Cremaster 3* by Matthew Barney
- The Passenger* by Michelangelo Antonioni
- Rushmore* by Wes Anderson

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- And/Or* by Jonathan Horowitz at the PS1 Museum, Queens, NY, June 2009.
- Apocalypse Management (telling about being one being living)* by Chris Doyle at Mass MOCA, April 2009.
- Arena—where would I have got if I had been intelligent! (1970–72)* by Joseph Beuys at DIA:Beacon, Beacon, NY.
- Below Sea Level* by Pawel Wojtasik at Mass MOCA, April 2009.
- Hello Meth Lab in the Sun* by Jonah Freeman, Justin Lowe and Alexandre Singh at Ballroom Marfa, Marfa TX, April 2008.
- Untitled (Marfa Project)* by Dan Flavin at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa TX.
- Voom Portraits* by Robert Wilson at the Ace Gallery, Los Angeles, CA 2006.

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FIN