

CORE

CORE 2015

MFA 

CORE

CORE

Contents

5	Introduction
6	Julia Brown
10	Nicole Burisch
22	Jason Byrne
26	Andrew Campbell
44	Danielle Dean
48	Anahita Ghazvinizadeh
52	Harold Mendez
56	Ivor Shearer
60	Rodrigo Valenzuela
64	Wendy Vogel, guest critic
78	Core Fellow Biographies

Introduction

The Core Program awards residencies to highly motivated, exceptional visual artists and critical writers who have completed their undergraduate or graduate training and are working to develop a sustainable practice. Established in 1982 within the Glassell School of Art of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Core artist residencies encourage intensive and innovative studio practice through the elaboration of an intellectual framework for it. In 1998, the Core critical studies residencies were established to provide an opportunity for writers to pursue independent curatorial and writing projects and to broaden the scope of the critical dialogue that is central to the practices of all Core residents.

Residents engage in dialogue with each other and with leading international figures in art and criticism who are invited to meet individually with the residents, lead group seminars, and deliver public lectures. The visitors who helped shape this year's program included Sheryl Conkelton, Amelia Jones, Mark Tribe, Charles Esche, Lane Relyea, Lisa Lapinski, Moyra Davey, Thomas Lax, and Bedwyr Williams.

The residency term lasts nine months, from September to May, and is renewable for a second year. Each spring the program mounts an exhibition of work produced during the current residency term, which is accompanied by a publication whose purpose is to document the work of all the residents. First term participants in the *2015 Core Exhibition* are Jason Byrne, Danielle Dean, Ivor Shearer, and Rodrigo Valenzuela. Second term participants are Julia Brown, Anahita Ghazvinizadeh, and Harold Mendez. The 2014-2015 critical studies residents are Nicole Burisch and Andy Campbell.

This is the program's first year in a temporary suite of administrative and studio spaces in the historic Bermac Arts Building, during a phase of redevelopment on the campus of the MFAH that will include the demolition of the current Glassell building and the construction of a new, state-of-the-art educational facility.

We are pleased to include an essay by former Core critical studies fellow Wendy Vogel in this year's annual publication. Since her term in the Core, she has worked closely with Peter Halley, the former publisher of *index magazine*, to edit a history of the downtown Manhattan alternative-arts publication. *index A to Z: art, design, fashion, film and music in the indie era*, published by Rizzoli in April 2014.



Julia Brown





PREVIOUS PAGE, AND BELOW

Julia Brown

The Dancer, 2014

HD color video, sound, 14:09 minutes, projection size 64 x 114 inches

In response to a casting call sent to Milan dance schools and choreographers, an aspiring hip hop dancer is filmed learning the choreography to Atlanta R&B artist Ciara's 2010 "Ride" video. The 12-year-old dancer and her coach watch the music video for the first time, and then she is filmed as she faithfully follows the video's choreography as it is shown on a monitor placed just below the camera's lens. As she performs for over an hour, her showmanship becomes increasingly stripped away, replaced by fatigue and concentration. The video engages issues of cross cultural education, assumption, sexuality, projection, love, and professionalism.

OPPOSITE

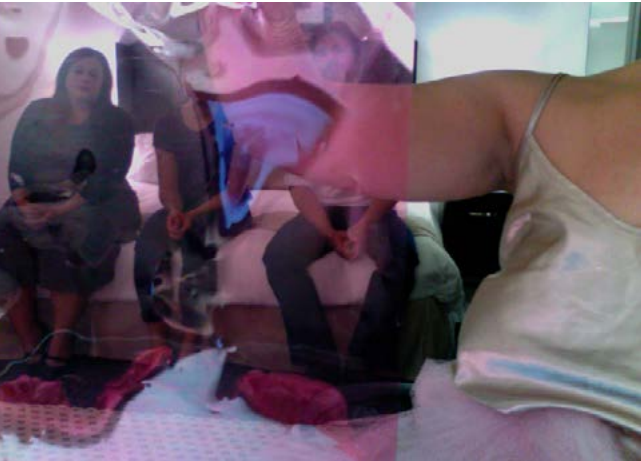
Julia Brown

The Young Mothers Project, 2014

HD color videos, sound; plywood, plexiglas, fabric, dimensions variable

The Young Mothers Project installation explores the concepts and experiences of work and love in relation to motherhood. The installation questions what ideological shifts would be necessary for the unpaid domestic labor of motherhood to be considered a vital economic activity. The project also includes ongoing programming about theory and activism around feminist economics, domestic labor, care-giving and immaterial labor.





Never Enough / Jamais Assez: on documentation, proximity, and Nadège Grebmeier-Forget's SUITE from the series One on one's for so-called fans

Nicole Burisch

Part 1 *REGENCY SUITES* 610 4th Avenue S.W. — 9/10/14, 3:00 PM
Private performance for you : Jenna Swift, sophia bartholomew and Paul Zits. Knock at the door when you are all (three of you) there and ready. No pictures or videos allowed. No talking about performance to others after and no discussing performance amongst each other after. Merci!

Part 2 *TRUCK GALLERY* 2009 10 Avenue S.W. — 9/10/14, 7:30 PM
Public performance from you, for me : Please arrive 15 minutes or 20 minutes before.

Reminder : By accepting to live this experience, you also accept talking publicly, being filmed, documented and looked at. Filmed documentation and images will become my private property and work may be used for exhibition purposes in future times to come. Please accept these conditions by responding positively to this email and including postal address, phone number and email. Ok? Double merci!

There are no particular rules for this part. You have been specially chosen for different intuitive and personal reasons and my work will soon be in your hands...

*The main idea is to recall publicly, in your special and particular voice, what you have lived or seen earlier that same day. I do not expect you to be particularly entertaining, comical or spectacular, just to be your real and sensitive self; nerves, awkwardness and reflective silences included :)
I will be there with you, again...*

*Many warm and heart felt thanks in advance,
N.!*

Figs. 1-6: Nadège Grebmeier-Forget, SUITE from the series One on one's for so called fans, presented as part of the M:ST 7 Festival, 2014, courtesy of the artist.

With this invitation, Montreal artist Nadège Grebmeier-Forget initiated a set of encounters that constituted her recent performance *SUITE* from the series *One on one's for so-called fans*, presented as part of the Mountain Standard Time Performative Art Festival in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Building upon a recent series of private, or semi-private performances begun in 2013, this performance continues the artist's investigations into the role of documentation and technology in mediating access to the performing (female) body. While Grebmeier-Forget is not the only artist to experiment with the idea of controlling or limiting the audience for her performances, *SUITE* is notable for the way that she uses this form to address issues related to performance art and its documentation, as well as her use of oral accounts. This text is an experiment, and aims to take up these questions and to think through the methods, consequences, and contexts for experiencing a performance through its traces. It is also an attempt to echo the form of the performance in the writing about it: I was not present for the performance, its public re-telling by the three audience members, nor have I seen any of Grebmeier-Forget's other work in person.

In describing the challenges of writing about performances "in absentia," Amelia Jones has argued that, "The problems raised by my absence... are largely logistical rather than ethical or hermeneutic. That is, while the experience of viewing a photograph and reading a text is clearly different from that of sitting in a small room watching an artist perform, neither has a privileged relationship to the historical 'truth' of the performance."²² Building upon this claim, I am interested in thinking through what it means to work with/within the logistical problems of absence. This text uses multiple and multiplying forms of documentation to negotiate my distance from the performance, less with the goal of providing a conclusive account of the event, but in a way that might hold a space for all the conflicting, affective, awkward, messy, unofficial, intimate, embodied, compromised, personal, and subjective versions of the performance.

If critical and historical writing about art "is haunted by an ideal of objectivity,"²³ another key logistical problem is supposedly one of social proximity. Jones expresses a wariness of "becoming entrapped in the artists' usually fascinating but sometimes intellectually and emotionally diversionary ideas about what the work is (or was) about."²⁴ Because most of my research took the form of conversations and interactions with the people involved, the evolution of my relationships with the artist and the witnesses is necessarily a part of how this text took shape, and I am happily "entrapped." I like Nadège. She is warm, friendly, generous, vulnerable. I can't remember when we first met, but we both worked within the Montreal

artist-run community for several years. I knew that she worked a lot with her own body, and knew vaguely that she used things like glitter, cake, and costumes in her performances. At an opening one night, she described to me a performance she had done privately for one person while in residence at Est-Nord-Est in Saint-Jean-Port-Joli, Quebec. She seemed a little bit uncertain about how to talk about what she had done, as though she were risking something in sharing too much information about the performance. My favourite way to experience a performance I have not seen is through its retelling, a preference I shared with Nadège that night. We agreed that it would be good if I could see one of her performances at some point. The last time we saw each other, she served me dinner, we shared gossip about the Montreal arts community, and she showed me a picture of her mother. Both of the conversations I had with the witnesses of *SUITE*, while primarily about the performance, ended up extending into broader conversations about books, practices, cities, ourselves. It was impossible not to find some kind of personal connection, even with people I had never met in person, raising questions about how social proximity might function in relation to historical or physical distance. In researching and preparing this text, I was also involved in proliferating further documentary traces, by conducting interviews and through informal conversations about what I was writing. I am a part of the project now, this text is another trace, and the connections between those involved have made us all a part of the performance.

In the last ten years, a renewed interest in performance art and its histories has continued to expand the conversation on how live or ephemeral works are (re)presented; and exhibitions of performance ephemera and strategies of re-performance have provided new contexts for re-experiencing historical works. While performance art supposedly privileges the live presence of the performer and their embodied and temporal relationship to an audience, documentation remains an essential, even inseparable, consideration in how performances are produced and circulated. In discussing Marina Abramović's 2005 work *Seven Easy Pieces*, in which the artist re-performed five historical works (a project that privileged the presence of a live performing body as the optimal way to experience performance works), Jessica Santone underlines how the re-performances relied on a reinterpretation of documentation, or "copying the signifier of the original."²⁵ The re-performances were themselves thoroughly documented, both by the artist and by the museum, and Santone goes on to note that the "technologies chosen by Abramović convey a great deal about the artist's assessment of what aspects of experience were essential to the works in question."²⁶ Documentary traces such as photographs and video have now been staged, collected, circulated, commodified, and curated to such an

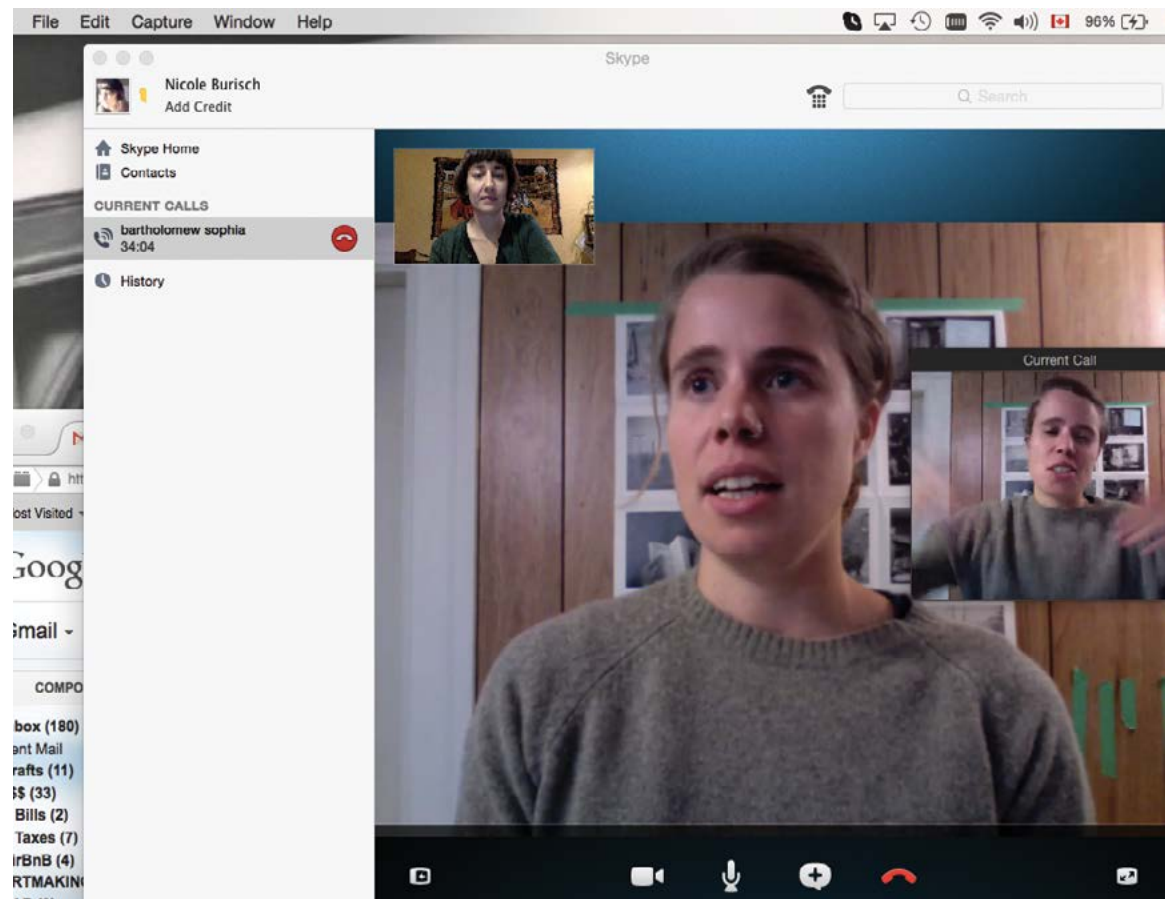
extent that even if they are still linked to an “original” performance, they clearly have a presence and value of their own. Indeed, as it has been argued by several performance theorists, the relationship between performance and its documentation is more appropriately understood as not one of before/after, original/trace, but rather one of “mutual supplementarity,”⁷ where the “performative act of documenting”⁸ is what frames or produces the performance as such, even more so than the presence of an audience. It follows, then, that the way artists choose to manage the production of documentation is integral to how a given work takes form.

Engaging directly with these notions of performative documentation, Grebmeier-Forget embedded the production of documentation directly into the work, collapsing distinctions between the two. As described in the email correspondence above, Grebmeier-Forget’s performance began when she invited an audience of three people to her hotel room to witness a private performance. Afterwards, the three witnesses publicly recounted their experiences for a packed room at TRUCK, an artist-run space nearby.⁹ Grebmeier-Forget took several photographs in the hotel room (Figs. 1-6) and made video and audio recordings of the public retellings. The festival’s contracted photographer also produced a series of photographs of the retellings (Figs. 7 and 10).¹⁰ By restricting the initial audience and relying on them to disseminate information about the first half of the performance, Grebmeier-Forget creates a situation in which the witnesses are not only responsible for transmitting information through oral accounts (a point to which I will return later), but effectively become a part of the performance. In researching this text, I met with Grebmeier-Forget in Montreal, did Skype interviews with sophia bartholomew and Paul Zits, two of the three initial audience members, talked with the festival organizers, and assembled various documentary traces (Fig. 9). Drawing mainly upon my interviews with bartholomew and Zits, these documentary traces provide enough information to reconstitute a basic account of the performance in the hotel:

Three people were invited to a hotel room in downtown Calgary.
They were greeted by the artist.
They were asked to sit on the end of the bed.
There were strawberry candies.

Fig. 7: Nadège Grebmeier-Forget, *SUITE* from the series *One on one’s for so called fans*, presented as part of the M:ST 7 Festival, 2014. Photo: Monika Sobczak, www.mmonikasobczak.com

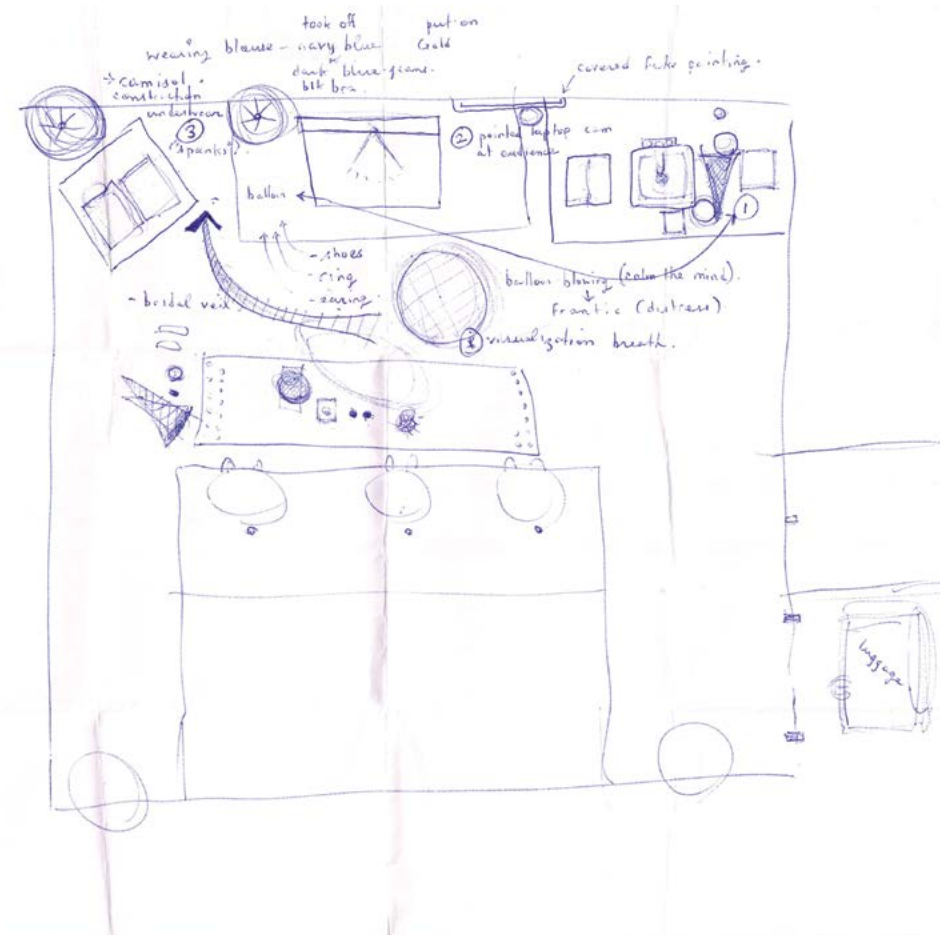
Fig. 8: Screen grabs of Skype interview with Sophia Bartholomew, courtesy Nicole Burisch



Over the course of an hour, the artist performed a series of actions including:

- turning on and off the lights
- closing the windows
- closing the curtains
- taking pictures with Photobooth on her laptop
- bringing a pink balloon from the kitchen
- breathing in and out of the balloon, faster and faster, until increasingly out of breath
- spreading a table cloth on the floor by the bed
- tying bows
- running water
- getting undressed, getting dressed: putting on a camisole and tying a pink veil tightly around her stomach
- putting on gold high heels
- putting her hair up
- painting her nails
- taking ribbons and fake grapes out of a suitcase in the closet, cutting the ribbons
- pulling hair out of a hairbrush, tying it up with the ribbon
- placing buds from a bouquet of baby's breath in between her toes
- striking poses, pausing, staring at the audience
- breathing on a mirror
- putting a half a lemon in her mouth and holding it there
- applying lipstick
- bringing out a jello desert, a bundt cake pan
- moving pieces of the desert, by color from one container to another
- licking the container
- rinsing out the container
- applying glitter, applying nail polish
- pointing, gesturing
- taking off clothes
- taking more pictures with Photobooth (including some of the audience)

Of course, even the most detailed inventory of actions is bound to leave something out. Specifically: *how* were these actions performed? What was communicated by the body of the performer? How did *that* body performing *those* actions affect the initial audience? The secondary audience? What would I have felt or noticed if I had been there? When I spoke with Bartholomew and Zits, they both elected to describe the actions they witnessed with a minimum of personal commentary. However, their retellings were inevitably colored by the words they used, their gestures, and



by the moments (conscious or unconscious) when they offered opinions or impressions of what it felt like to be there. While, overall, their narratives of the actions were similar and allowed me to develop the list above, it was in the glimpses of personal interpretations that contradictions and nuances emerged:

- There was a sexual or sensual aspect
- The artist looked bored or distanced, communicated a feeling of ennui
- The actions seemed confrontational
- The actions seemed seductive
- The actions hinted at self-mutilation or self-harm as well as someone trying to be beautiful or sexy

Fig. 9: Untitled drawing, courtesy Paul Zits

Grebmeier-Forget has worked previously with performances mediated through mirrors, Skype, projections, Photobooth images, or in the positioning of her body in relation to the audience.¹¹ On screen and off, she often uses embellishments like makeup, glitter, children's decorations, clothing, and packaged food products. She adorns, prepares, and presents her body as something to be consumed (visually, literally, metaphorically), but also as something that is never fully accessible or that performs an excess of adornment to a point where desirability begins to erode. The performance in Calgary extended these themes: using the site of the hotel room as a space that is at once intimate and impersonal; repeating gestures of grooming and adornment; building up of layers of clothing, textures, objects; and performing quasi-domestic activities and actions related to the ways we work to inhabit a body or a space. While she is clearly drawing upon histories of feminist performance art and its emphasis on the presence of the active, embodied female subject who resists or troubles the fetishizing gaze, Grebmeier-Forget's performances also build upon this history to address the ways that gendered subjectivities have more recently been performed by/for/ with new technologies. With her ongoing use of Photobooth screen grabs in this and other performances, Grebmeier-Forget references the selfie, the YouTube celebrity, or the "camgirl,"¹² and connects to broader conversations around how we perform our selves online.

By transferring the responsibility of performing documentation onto the three witnesses, Grebmeier-Forget once again displaces and mediates access to her performing body. In its place, the bodies and voices of the witnesses stand in to describe the performance in the hotel, while the artist steps behind the camera to record their accounts. While there has been some attention paid to the significance of oral histories in circulating information about performance works, or art more broadly,¹³ they nevertheless remain a relatively under-recognized form of documenting, presenting, or preserving performance. More precisely: oral accounts, word-of-mouth stories, gossip, and retelling have long shaped how performance art's histories have been circulated and constructed *informally*. They have, however, less frequently been taken up by artists as primary tools for presenting or documenting work. This is unfortunate, as retellings can often provide a more engaging experience than other forms of documentation (or sometimes even the performance itself); whether it is a quick synopsis or a step-by-step account, how we experience a performance through the voice and gestures of the teller is inevitably affected by our relationship to them. This experience is not just in the telling, but also as Jenni Sorkin argues, the specificities of receiving and "the fact that the new receiver uses his or her own aural faculties, intuiting the action through hearing and perceiving rather than simply

seeing."¹⁴ To be clear, I am not privileging the "presence" or "liveness" of oral accounts: my text has largely drawn upon conversations that took place over email and Skype, and what were essentially re-performances of the initial oral accounts given at TRUCK (Fig. 8). As a form of documentation, however, oral accounts do offer a particular kind of intersubjective exchange between "document" and viewer,¹⁵ one that remains under-recognized and under-theorized. Another excellent example of the use of (mediatized) oral accounts is curator Joseph del Pesco's project *Anecdote Archive*, which exists as a series of YouTube videos. The project collects short one- to five-minute videos of people recounting their own experiences (or stories they have heard) of ephemeral art works, and makes a strong case for "word-of-mouth as a vital mode of distribution for art related projects and ideas."¹⁶ The videos are quick, intimate, sometimes blurry, shot in the back of car or in a noisy café, usually centered on the face of the speaker. They nevertheless manage to communicate not only something about the work being discussed, but also the speaker's experience of that work. What oral accounts like these also implicitly emphasize is how they differ from one teller to the next, an aspect that Grebmeier-Forget highlights in her use of three witnesses, who inspire immediate comparisons of their accounts. Here, the intentional multiplication of supposedly official accounts from the very beginning encourages a reading of the performance that is never fixed by one particular form of documentation or viewpoint.

While the question of experiencing performance through documentation is in part a historical one, I am also interested in extending this conversation to think briefly about other contemporary conditions that might create or even encourage the experience of performance "in absentia." Most notably, the evolution and use of new technologies continues to provide opportunities for the production and dissemination of performances and documentation across distances and platforms. Along with these are shifting possibilities for how or where an audience is constituted: small, portable devices can now bring the screen (and with it, the performer) into spaces not previously considered part of the typical performance/audience space, like the bathroom, the bedroom, or the bus. Beyond the increased accessibility of performance through new technological platforms, we might also consider how current conditions in the art world, such as limited funding, over-programming, and an increasingly globalized circuit of biennials, residencies, and festivals might be creating ideal conditions for viewing or experiencing art from a distance. All in all, research and conversations in preparation of this text have taken place in at least five cities and two countries: Calgary, Montreal, Houston, Fredricton, and Toronto, with information largely being exchanged over Skype and email. If it is not possible for everyone to go to

everything, then what solutions might be possible for working around the problems of proximity in creating and viewing art?

Ultimately, *SUITE* maintains a productive ambiguity around when and where the performance ends and the documentation begins. Grebmeier-Forget shares the responsibility of performing documentation with the witnesses and in turn with secondary audiences like the one at TRUCK, and again with tertiary audiences who hear retellings before telling their own version again. If this performance exists in the telling and the retelling, then what I have offered here is my own version, as both an extension of the project and as an argument for the ways that we might productively engage with performance through its documentation to negotiate questions of proximity and distance. This is different from an extended game of “telephone,” where the message mutates with each successive whisper until it no longer bears any resemblance to the original. Together, these accounts more closely resemble the recounting of a well-known story or fable, with a general agreement on the basic facts and the outlines of a series of actions, continuously embellished with a few choice details or impressions “to allow the voice of the narrator - the storyteller - to adjust accordingly: to add, blend, exaggerate, or reconfigure entirely.”¹⁷ With *SUITE*, Grebmeier-Forget reminds us that performance is not bound to a fixed site where people interact face to face, but can instead exist and circulate in networks of sociability and in multiple documentary traces.



- 1 Nadège Grebmeier Forget, correspondence with participants, October 7, 2014. Courtesy Tom Jonsson.
- 2 Amelia Jones, “‘Presence’ in absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4, *Performance Art: (Some) Theory and (Selected) Practice at the End of This Century* (Winter, 1997), 11.
- 3 James Elkins, *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: Art History as Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000), 23.
- 4 Amelia Jones, “Presence,” 12.
- 5 Jessica Santone, “Marina Abramović’s Seven Easy Pieces: Critical Documentation Strategies for Preserving Art’s History,” *Leonardo*, Volume 41, Number 2 (April 2008), 148.
- 6 Ibid, 148.
- 7 Amelia Jones, “Presence,” 16.
- 8 Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation.” *Performing Arts Journal* 28 (2006), 7.
- 9 Renato Vitic, Executive Director of TRUCK, Facebook message to author, November 18, 2014.
- 10 Interestingly, the festival’s hired photographer, Monika Sobczak, uses a special contract that determines how “her” images can be used, revealing how questions of authorship are articulated through the relationship of performance and documentation: the photographs are jointly owned, confirming their reliance on both the work of the performer(s) and of the photographer. Complications around the ownership of documentation are not unique to this performance, but Sobczak’s contract is unusual in the way it precisely articulates how she is to be involved in controlling the use of the photographs.
- 11 Nadège Grebmeier-Forget, personal website. Accessed November 26, 2014. <http://www.nadege-grebmeier-forget.com/>
- 12 For an excellent discussion of the “aesthetics of the grab” and its relationship to camgirls, see Theresa Senft, *Camgirls: celebrity and community in the age of social networks* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2008), 46-47.
- 13 Linda Sandino and Matthew Partington, *Oral History in the Visual Arts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
- 14 Jenni Sorkin, “Mythology and the Remake: The Culture of Re-performance and Strategies of Simulation” *East of Borneo*, October 13, 2010. Accessed November 26, 2014. <http://www.eastofborneo.org/articles/mythology-and-the-remake-the-culture-of-re-performance-and-strategies-of-simulation>
- 15 Jones, “Presence,” 12.
- 16 Joseph del Pesco, *Anecdote Archive*, project website (no longer live) accessed through Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine November 29, 2014. <https://web.archive.org/web/20120226033947/http://anecdotearchive.org/>. See also <https://www.youtube.com/user/jdelpesco> for a complete set of the videos.
- 17 Sorkin, “Mythology and the Remake,” n.p.

Fig. 10: Jenna Swift at TRUCK, **Nadège Grebmeier-Forget**, *SUITE* from the series *One on one’s for so called fans*, presented as part of the M:ST 7 Festival, 2014. Photo: Monika Sobczak, www.mmonikasobczak.com.

Jason Byrne

OPPOSITE

Jason Byrne

The Time of Return, 2014

video, work in progress

The Time of Return follows the journey of two former Sudanese citizens who have both come to witness the country's secession and to reconcile painful memories.

BELOW

Jason Byrne

Scrap Vessel, 2009

16mm / Super 8 film, 51:00 minutes

Scrap Vessel documents the final days of a Chinese freighter vessel as well as the ship's past, revealed through the objects left behind.

FOLLOWING SPREAD

Jason Byrne

Rwanda Documents, 2015

video, work in progress

This film examines the 1994 genocide by connecting images of video, photographs and other documentation that were tendered in court at the Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.





Holding Pink: James Turrell's Twilight Epiphany, Banked

Andrew Campbell

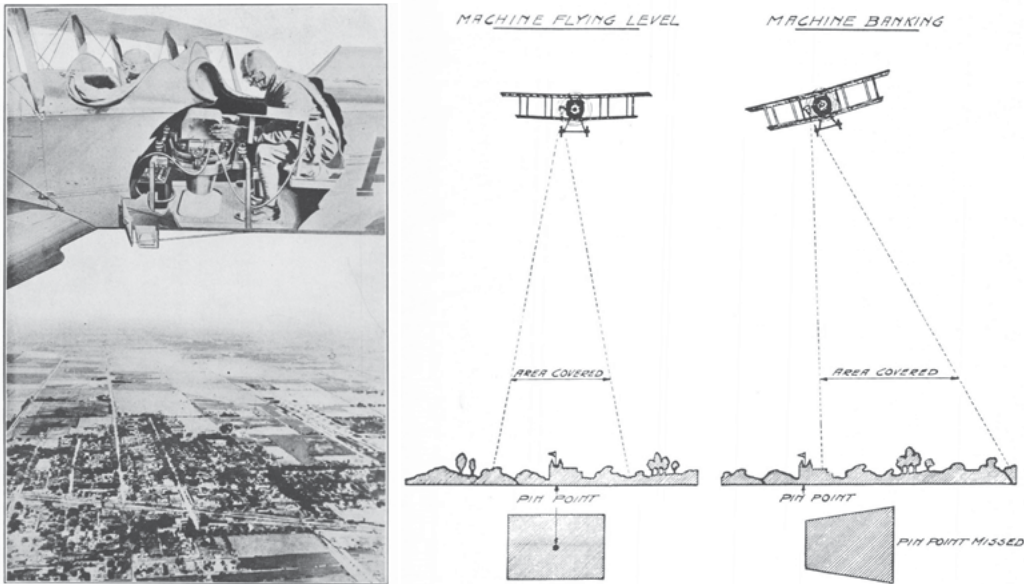


Fig. 1: Left: Aerial photographic mission in operation, K-3 camera. Right: Diagram showing effect of banking on aerial photograph. From **James Turrell**, *Mapping Spaces: A Topological Survey of the Work by James Turrell* (exhibition catalogue). New York: Peter Blum Edition, 1987.

Banking is a term used in aviation to describe the nonparallel relationship of the body and wingspan of an airplane to the ground below. Important in enterprises connected to aerial photography (surveying, mapping), a photograph from a banked plane produces an image wherein elements of the landscape slowly stretch out away from or condense towards one another on either side of a perpendicular plumb line. Such a photograph, if printed, would still be rectangular—banking a plane doesn't change the particular geometry of the film—while the relationship between the internal elements would be trapezoidal.

This phenomenon is illustrated in a set of two images reproduced in *Mapping Spaces*, a 1987 catalogue/artist book of James Turrell's work produced for an exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel (Fig. 1). The left image is a photomontage, showing the cutaway of a two-person aircraft outfitted to take aerial photographs. Flying above a landscape, the photographer steadies and aims a camera-device that draws electricity from a nearby battery on the cockpit floor. The lens is pointed downward through a lozenge-shaped hole. The caption tells us the camera is a (Fairchild) K-3. What it does not detail is that this particular piece of inter-war photographic equipment was used to aid in allied bombing campaigns throughout World War II.

The right image in the page-spread from *Mapping Spaces* is more didactic in that it represents, via side-by-side comparison, one possible pitfall of taking a photograph from a banked plane. The schematic drawing presents two

aircrafts flying over similar landscapes, one flies level while the other banks. From a small, barely noticeable camera drawn just outside the cockpit, the level plane is able to successfully take an image of its target, a pinpoint in the middle of the photographic field. The banked plane, on the other hand, misses its target entirely. But while the image is meant to reinforce the importance of keeping an airplane level in aerial photography, it also suggests the ways in which the surveying landscape view is “stretched” and distorted vis-à-vis a banked position. The implicit mission is a failure, yet paradoxically from a banked position more ground can be covered.

If turned upside-down, this didactic graphic could easily diagram a viewer’s relationship to the rectilinear aperture characteristic of many of James Turrell’s skyspaces, including the skyspace recently built on the campus of Rice University, *Twilight Epiphany* (2012). Perhaps uncoincidentally, Turrell’s first skyspace, *Meeting*, located in the schoolhouse-cum-contemporary-kunsthalle PS1, was opened the year before *Mapping Spaces* was published. Inverting the relationship between ground and sky, viewers of Turrell’s “pay attention portals” (as one LA Weekly critic dubbed them) lean back on specially designed benches taking the “position” of the banked airplane.¹ They survey not the ground, but the sky through a large square aperture, which because of its proximity and angle to the viewer is apprehended as a distorted trapezoidal polygon.

I wish to apply this diagrammatic metaphor of the trapezoidal shape a banked view affords to Turrell’s Rice installation. I use the conventions of labeling found in geometry to demarcate the “sides” of my argument – the lower-case letters indicating the four irregular sides of my critical trapezoid. I extend the metaphor of the banked position across this essay because there seems to be important ground left uncovered in the critical assessment of Turrell’s skyspaces, a quickly mutating typology in Turrell’s oeuvre. Happy to repeat Turrell’s neo-sublime bon mots in place of actively considering the complicated social operations taking place within Turrell’s skyspaces, critics and curators risk ameliorating the very possible (and perhaps unavoidable) disappointments, frustrations, and contradictory experiences of potential viewers.² Thus I wish to condense some parts of Turrell’s critical appraisal, and extend my own.

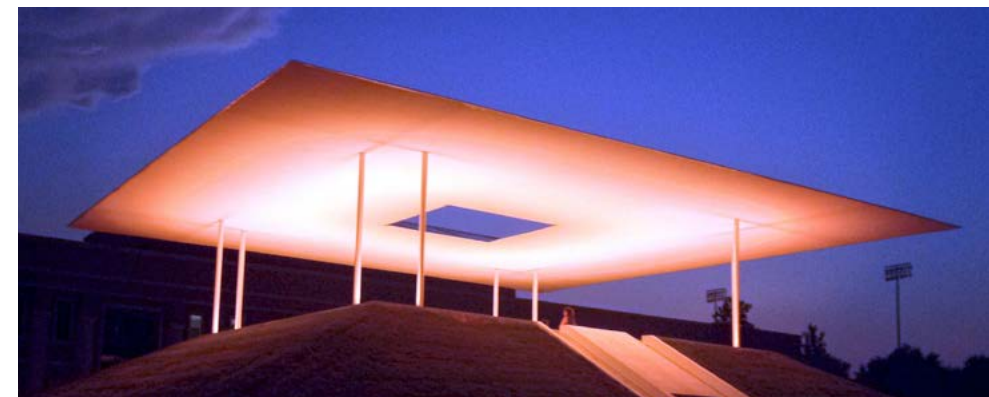
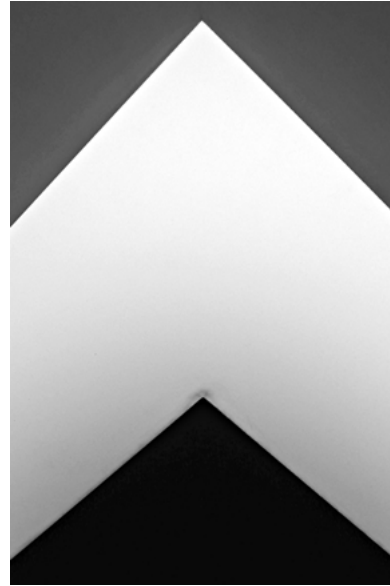
To be frank: this essay arises from a set of experiences I recently had in Turrell’s *Twilight Epiphany* – experiences discordant with pervasive understandings of Turrell’s work as quiet, contemplative, or even spiritual places. I’ll discuss these experiences further, and underline *Twilight Epiphany*’s troubled enactment of Quakerist silence, but I’d first like to

introduce Turrell’s skyspaces, pointing out what is unique about *Twilight Epiphany*.

All of Turrell’s skyspaces feature an aperture (sometimes square, sometimes round or elliptical) cut out of a ceiling and open to the sky. At first Turrell’s skyspaces were developed to reside within already-extant architecture. *Meeting*, initiated in 1979 and completed seven years later, is the prime example. *Meeting* necessitated a major architectural intervention, the removal of several steel girders from the top floor ceiling of PS1. Its completion was slow and onerous. The second skyspace, *Second Meeting*, was sited within a former gas station nearby the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. It was only installed for a year (1986/7), before the property was demolished. The skyspace—importantly not site-specific—changed hands and was rebuilt at the residence of a private collector. Early engineering and property challenges related to *Meeting* and *Second Meeting* convinced Turrell to instead build his own autonomous structures; therefore Turrell’s skyspaces have taken on the general architectural character of the pavilion, in some cases hybridized with more ancient architectural forms such as a stupa. *Twilight Epiphany*, merges the formal properties of an earthen pyramid with a pavilion.

Twilight Epiphany like many of Turrell’s recent skyspaces incorporates two carefully programmed LED light sequences, one for morning and one for evening twilight. Lasting approximately 40 minutes, these “shows” throw vibrant light on the ceiling around the aperture, creating a slow-but-noticeable sequence of two and three-color abstract compositions. The LED color coordinates with the changing sky and so “pulls out” different visual experiences of the decidedly non-artificial light outside. Held in a kind of dialectical tension that the eye resolves in each instant, the twilight programs of *Twilight Epiphany* – and other skyspaces incorporating LED twilight shows – highlight sunrise and sunset as theatrical events.³ The theatricality of *Twilight Epiphany* is reinforced with a pre-show announcement (unique to the evening program) to silence cell phones and prevent flash photography, usually given by a student intern or a staff member.

Yet, *Twilight Epiphany* breaks from previous skyspaces in two key ways. Unlike other skyspaces, Turrell’s Rice skyspace features two viewing levels, an upper and lower deck, offering its viewers two structurally different perspectives on the aperture above; from the lower level viewers experience the aperture and LED lights as an unbroken image or picture, while on the upper level viewers apprehend this in coordination with a panoramic view



of the buildings of downtown Houston (some of which are lit by the kind of industrial-grade LED lighting that Turrell uses in *Twilight Epiphany*). This makes *Twilight Epiphany* one of the largest skyspaces built to date, holding up to 120 people between its two levels. As such, its effects are in some ways distinct from other skyspaces. Second, because *Twilight Epiphany* is sited in proximity to the building dedicated to the University's music program, the lower level is engineered for acoustic and amplified performance. In fact, a speaker system is embedded within the plastered walls of the installation's lower level. Thus Turrell's *Twilight Epiphany* is not just event and artwork, but also venue – playing host to an ever-evolving program of music and performances. These are significant mutations of the skyspace format (on par with Turrell's introduction of programmed LED shows), with implications this essay will continue to tease out.

a

Perhaps one of the fiercest excoriations of Turrell's work came in the form of an article penned by Yve-Alain Bois, reviewing a retrospective exhibition of Donald Judd's work at the Tate Modern in London. Bois could not help but diss, "... the quasi-religious interpretations of Minimalism proposed by New Age zealots such as James Turrell [...] forever on the rise, despite its staunch rejection by most Minimal artists, Judd foremost among them."⁴ My only emendation would be that certainly there's blame to share, the "quasi-religious interpretations of Minimalism" are not only Turrell's, but also issue forth from critics, curators, workaday newspaper reporters, and museum directors writing about Turrell and his work.⁵ To wit, the over-reliance on neo-spiritual, new age-y tropes discussed by Bois doesn't spring from a singular source, but rather is accrued in aggregate across Turrell's decades-long career. Nevertheless these pronouncements take on the appearance of gospel in the pages of a slew of recent (and hefty) retrospective catalogues.⁶

The best – and least innovative – of these writings merely parrot Turrell's own words, building arguments that are little more than extended press releases: "[Turrell] allows us to see ourselves seeing," is an oft-repeated phrase – so much so that a permutation of this phenomenological statement appears on the splash page of Turrell's website.⁷ The worst promote overly-romantic tropes of a sublime and transcendent view of nature, and critically misunderstand a Quakerist spirituality that may (or may not) lay behind Turrell's work.

As such, I begin limning my critical geometry by gathering a small

assortment of these statements, each delimiting, in its own way, an interpretation of Turrell as "an artist of the immaterial."⁸ Presented in chronological order from 1979 (the year Meeting was conceptualized), these statements, many of which are about the skyspaces generally and most not by the artist himself, trace the development of a particular kind of language used in relation to his work. From "subtly transcendental" to discussions of "purity" and the "extrasensorial", the prose becomes ever-more awestruck.⁹

[Turrell wants a viewer to] see that he's already in the cosmos, that he doesn't have to go out into it to experience it.¹⁰

These pieces deal with the juncture of the interior space and the space outside by bringing the space of the sky down to the plane of the ceiling. They create a space that is completely open to the sky yet seemingly enclosed.¹¹

[Turrell is] an instigator of subtly transcendental or metaphysical states of mind.¹²

[Turrell's] work occupies an area that is both reductive and maximal. With minimal means – with only light itself – he creates rich perceptual, and, many would say, spiritual environments.¹³

What takes place while looking at the light in a Skyspace is akin to wordless thought. But this thought is not at all unthinking or without intelligence. It's just that it has a different return than words.¹⁴

What makes his work fascinating is their inherent dualities, rational yet mysterious, simple yet sublime.¹⁵

It made me realize that though I was supposed to be looking at the sky, I was looking at my inner self through the sky.¹⁶

Turrell combines the longing of the human soul for spiritual revelation with a visual experience that is both physical and perceptual. Drawing on a quintessentially American relationship to the land and on a spirituality that can be traced back to the Transcendentalists, Turrell's work speaks, without language or cultural reference, to audiences across all barriers.¹⁷

To conclude that Turrell's work is religious is to acknowledge a far deeper context for the idea of religion than any single dogma or creed. James Turrell in his art reconnects the viewer with the light without and the light within, integrating the two as one reflects the other.¹⁸

Turrell often refers to the brilliance of color experienced in a lucid dream when the eyes are closed – or to the Quaker religious customs of his family upbringing, in which meditation is described as ‘going inside to greet the light.’ The Quaker concept of ‘inner light’ that is shared in a collective silent meeting of prayer is echoed in the experience of Turrell’s skyspaces – in the collective silence, duration and receptivity they induce. Quaker practice is the minimalism of Christianity, reduced in form in search of deeper effect.¹⁹

... Turrell’s art collapses the distance between the perceiving subject and the object of perception – perhaps not far from the notion of creating a receptivity of a more spiritual, universal nature.²⁰

While we sit below gazing up at the oculus, directing our gaze towards the heavens, we can’t help but feel a kinesthetic reminder of some spirituality – whether personal or religious.²¹

In my view, Turrell’s Skyspaces are celestial observatories designed to reveal the mystery of light, physically and metaphysically – that is, sensorially and extrasensorially.²²

... [Turrell’s] art collapses the distance between the perceiving subject and the object of perception – akin to the Buddhist meditative practice of merging outside and inside to promote receptivity to a more spiritual, universal nature. Similarly, Turrell’s modern Skyspaces engender the most essential of experiences. [...] If ancient humans built sacred architecture as a reflection of their own bodies – out of a desire to bring the cosmos inside a contemplative space and thereby bring it inside themselves – perhaps the goal of artists like Turrell is not so different.²³

It’s not about earth. It’s not about sky. It’s about our part in the luminous fabric of the universe.²⁴

b

This is where I wish to intersect, obliquely, with the extant literature on Turrell.

Instead of pondering my “part in the luminous fabric of the universe,” I walked away from a recent visit to *Twilight Epiphany* thoroughly frustrated. Perhaps it was my fault, but it might have equally been the operations of Turrell’s skyspace. The evening program of LED light was impressive, sure, but I found no quietude or contemplation sitting in a space with about 80 other folks. I was “inside myself”, but not in the way I was supposed to be

(via the collection of texts above). Residing like a bitter fruit pit in my body, my frustration demanded I reevaluate some of my basic assumptions about Turrell’s work. While *Twilight Epiphany* quietly insisted I pay attention to it, its minutes-long rhythms retarding my (admittedly frenetic) internal clock, I instead gaped at a group of middle-aged runners who walked through the space, stopping for thirty seconds to check their pulse and offer color-commentary (“Whoa, Linda, this is neat!”) before continuing on their run. Later: I became uncomfortable, tempted to break out in defense of Turrell’s work, when two brohammers—really, there is no other word—walked through. Surveying a group of people striving to be still and “see [themselves] seeing”, they loudly laughed at the whole enterprise and proceeded to talk about a party they’d be going to later. One of them had a girlfriend who was being “a complete bitch.” Interruptions were frequent, the norm and not the exception: a few people leaned over the upper level railing (which discretely houses rows of LED lights), harshly highlighting their own refusal to stay seated; a toddler ran wobbly-legged around the central space of the lower level; and a couple made-out quietly, but noticeably, for a solid five minutes.

Like art historian Anna Chave, who anecdotally relates an experience of two teenage girls kicking and then kissing a Donald Judd sculpture to open out a critique of Minimalism, I wonder if these “work-a-day” experiences of Turrell’s skyspaces are not more common than the overblown prose (either phenomenological or neo-spiritual) which normally gets attached to them? Sociologist Erving Goffmann once described the tightness/looseness of social interactions and their attendant “situational improprieties.”²⁵ We might want to consider Turrell’s skyspaces along such a continuum of disciplined spaces for social interactions. Many skyspaces reside in private hands, and are therefore subject to a restricted and perhaps more sympathetic viewership, but *Twilight Epiphany*, by dint of its positioning as public art, seeks and physically accommodates a large and diverse audience. The former is tight, the latter loose. Perhaps too loose.

I am not alone in struggling to reconcile the sited experience of *Twilight Epiphany* with the expectations set forth in the critical language surrounding Turrell’s work. A recent *Huffington Post* article on the Rice University installation complained of mosquitoes (a Houston staple), inclement weather (also common), and an annoying Houston PD helicopter.²⁶ Still, the author asserts that although these interferences made “the titular epiphany difficult to achieve, the installation is no less spectacular, and an essential destination for any and every Turrell enthusiast...”²⁷

Hoping I simply had bad luck, I returned to the skyspace several times for both the evening and morning programs. Each time a set of different distractions presented themselves—true even for the more sparsely attended morning program, which doesn't require a reservation to attend. After these visits, reading the experience described by Carmen Giménez in her introductory remarks for the 2013 Guggenheim seems almost laughable:

*A group of people gathers quietly in a room to gaze at a patch of sky hovering in the ceiling above them. As the sun sets, they behold a transformation that is at once personal and collective, yielding impressions of color, space, and time that each person, in his or her own way, shares with the others. James Turrell's luminous art fosters these moments, inviting us to greet the light inside ourselves as well as the light that surrounds and connects us. Fully engaging our senses, his work encourages a state of mutual contemplation and, perhaps, transfiguration.*²⁸

c

Interrogating my discordant experience with *Twilight Epiphany* led me paradoxically back to photography. In a 2013 conversation with the director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Michael Govan (who above called Quakerism the “minimalism of Christianity”), James Turrell makes a wry comment about photography's inability to capture his latest installation, the massive *Aten Reign* sited in the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum in New York: “There's a lot of work that looks a lot better in the photograph than when you actually see it, so this [*Aten Reign*] helps make up for that.”²⁹

Turrell's complaint could easily be applied to his own work. Because Turrell's skyspaces are often site-dependent and cannot travel, the primary way they are apprehended and experienced by those without the capital to travel is through photographic representation.³⁰ Since 1999 Turrell has worked solely with Berlin-based photographer Florian Holzherr, whose photographs, in his own words, “clarify the aesthetics of space.”³¹ As the preferred (but not sole) documentarian of Turrell's works—Holzherr's images have been used almost exclusively in all recent Turrell catalogues. And it is worth investigating how his images convey a particular visuality of exactitude, cleanliness, and perfection. Conceptually, the language of Holzherr's photographic practice aligns neatly with the coordinated rhetoric of purity and aesthetics rampant in writings about Turrell's work. For example, while Turrell's skyspaces are semi-open air spaces, rarely do we see the undesirable effects of the nature (rain, bugs, spiderwebs) creeping into Holzherr's images.

Often unpeopled, Holzherr's photographs primarily depict the exacting geometry of Turrell's skyspaces. In a sense this is unremarkable, installation photography tends to document art in this way—clean and evenly-lit; Holzherr's photographs only occasionally include viewers to account for scale, registering how an installation works on and incorporates a viewer's body. But the practical purpose of Holzherr's photographs also have ideological implications because they suggest an ideal viewing condition—alone. Even when people are present, as is the case with a photograph of *Twilight Epiphany* found on Turrell's website, they are washed out by a relatively dark light, or blurred by the camera's long exposure. Unlike some of the skyspaces in private hands, it is rarely possible to view Turrell's *Twilight Epiphany* alone.

Holzherr's photographs of *Twilight Epiphany* are also interesting because counter to the perfection they depict, the installation's architecture began to deteriorate visibly almost immediately after its dedication. As is the case with many Turrell skyspaces, the aperture in the ceiling is the product of a sloping roofline that defines the cut along a razor-thin edge. The unventilated roof of *Twilight Epiphany* collects condensation in the humid climate of Houston, which travels down the sloping roof, and deposits particulates of pollution on the otherwise pristine white ceiling. This dirty scumbling runs around the perimeter of the aperture and is especially notable in the corners, appearing as though someone recently took a chef's blowtorch to the aperture. This dark ring is significant in part because Holzherr's images of *Twilight Epiphany*, which get reproduced in catalogues of Turrell's works, don't detail it.

One way of counteracting Turrell's/Holzherr's photographic valuation of the skyspaces is to seek out near real-time images posted onto online photo-sharing communities, such as Flickr. For example, a user by the name of Allison Turrell (no relation to the artist, as far as I can tell), uploaded a photograph of *Twilight Epiphany* less than a year after it was opened to the public [Fig. 2]. Taken from the lower level, her photograph depicts the ceiling and aperture of *Twilight Epiphany*: gray clouds, flecked with glowing bits of pink and peach, play at the edge of the aperture. What should be a barely perceptible transition from an LED color field to the sky outside, is outlined by the blackish dirt at the aperture's edge.

d

Considering the artist's Quaker upbringing and his fairly recent return

to the Religious Society of Friends, critics aren't wrong to align Turrell's skyspaces with Quakerism. Turrell has even referred to himself as an "unlapsed Quaker" due to the fact that before the mid-eighties he often shrugged off his Quaker upbringing.³² Turrell's shift towards acknowledging Quakerism began with the titling of his first skyspace, *Meeting*, which is also the name of the Quaker format of worship. The title of the next skyspace, *Second Meeting*, is a nod to the particular way that Quakers count time (days and months are counted consecutively, instead of uniquely – thus Sunday is First Day, Monday is Second Day, and so forth). Formally, skyspaces also reiterate the square arrangement of benches around a central void characteristic of certain varieties of Quaker meetinghouses. Finally, Turrell has recently applied the skyspace format to actual Quaker meetinghouses—most notably for this essay, the Live Oak Friends Meeting House in Houston, Texas, completed a dozen years before *Twilight Epiphany*. From the start, in other words, Turrell's skyspaces have been informed by and concerned with Quakerist theology and worship practices.

Turrell has recounted many times an experience with his Quaker grandmother, who belonged to the conservative Villa Street Meeting in Pasadena, California, wherein she relayed to the young artist that the purpose of a Meeting was "to go inside and greet the Light." This phrase, like "seeing ourselves see", has a particular currency within the scholarship on Turrell—the extended quote from Giménez above regurgitates Turrell's quote, for example. Yet too often art historians and critics, perhaps even Turrell himself, collapse the Light referred to in Quaker spiritual practice (delineated here by a capital "L") with the light used in Turrell's installations. Light as discussed in Quaker theology—at first called inward Light, and only later amended to the current, more universalist phrase, inner Light—is an acknowledgement of the spiritual presence of God within each person.

The verbiage of Light comes directly out of Quakerism's radical roots. Originally persecuted in 17th century England for their heretical beliefs (Quakers didn't ordain or make use of clergy, would not swear in civil court, etc.), the terminology of the Light and inward Light was developed as a way euphemistically dodge charges of blasphemy for what was perhaps the Quakers' most heretical principle, that each person has direct access to God.³³ As Quaker scholars Rosemary Moore and Helen Meads have discussed, blasphemy was a capital offense and so "Quakers therefore had to be very careful about their language [...] [The Light] was an overwhelming invasive force, not a vague mental illumination."³⁴

Quaker Light and the light that Turrell uses in his skyspaces (both the LED

program and the natural light of the sky he enframes) are hermeneutically different – one is an historically particularized religious concept indexing persecution via an extended metaphor, and the other is the perception of electromagnetic radiation. These key differences are critical to parse, because all too often they get elided in the service of privileging an individual's experience from the vantage point of a distinctly contemporary and secularized understanding of art. In other words, the elision of Light/light in discussions of Turrell's works allows for a secular art critic/writer to remain so, all while tipping their hat to a spirituality they falsely perceive as individualist as they are. Paradoxically, individual experience is also the ground upon which much of this rhetoric can begin to be unwound (as I hope my own experiences do in this essay). In conflating the art experience with the worship experience, the rhetoric surrounding Turrell's skyspaces implicitly put the onus on the individual viewer, instead of the community, to make the ideal experience (a kind of stand-in for communion with the divine) within the skyspace. As I've already discussed, though, the experience of *Twilight Epiphany* is determined by a multitude of factors outside of oneself: how the structure is photographed and presented; how it wears and ages; and how rhetorical imaginings of Turrell's artistic practice circulate in critical discourse.

Based on observation alone, an outsider attending an unprogrammed Quaker Meeting might see an inherently individualist practice. Unprogrammed worship, as opposed to programmed worship, is a Meeting wherein a group of Friends gathers in contemplative silence, which is sometimes—though not always—punctuated by spontaneous remarks and ministry from individuals. Lasting about an hour (a little longer than Turrell's *Twilight Epiphany* light sequences), unprogrammed worship is founded on the Quaker understandings of silence. In his dissertation regarding Quaker silence, Daniel Steinbock emphasizes the collaborative nature of this silence, that the "deep, shared silence experienced as a sense of unity is the central religious experience of a Quaker community."³⁵ But perhaps most usefully, Steinbock coordinates non-verbal eruptions in the sonic fabric of a meeting—coughs, fidgets, etc.—as a "synchronous activity" essential to the collective worship experience. For Quakers, these sonic agitations are part of a regimen of "settling in" as a group. Although individual interjections are part of the worship experience, the individual subject is not privileged as a mode of understanding the divine. Counter to popular claims of art and subjectivity, worship is not the individual experience of the sublime, but a "collective waiting on God."³⁶

Yet unlike the Quaker Meetings/Meetinghouses to which Turrell's skyspaces

are indebted to, those gathered for *Twilight Epiphany's* morning and evening programs do not share a common purpose. Couples on their first date, classes of students, affinity groups, families with young children, single folks with hefty cameras slung around their necks, all gather for the evening and morning light sequences without regard for one another as community. As Daniel Steinbock notes in his dissertation on Quaker silence, "Gatherings of many persons are, in our Anglo-American culture, for the most part occasions for much talk and rabble."³⁷

e (a bisecting line)

Approaches to Turrell's skyspaces and installations might be handily broken down into two (and at the present time, asymmetrically weighted) approaches. On the one hand an idealistic approach which coordinates the ideal viewing conditions with the exactitude of Turrell's architecture, reinforced by the near-perfect representations of the artist's work in Holzherr's photographs. On the other hand, as I hope I have shown, there is what actually happens in a space like *Twilight Epiphany*. To engage with that unruliness has been the project of this essay.

All of this is not to suppose that there can be no "epiphany" in *Twilight Epiphany*. In fact, towards the end of the installation's evening sequence, the LED color shifts grind to a halt, and for 5-7 minutes a bright pink, almost fuchsia, is projected onto the ceiling. During this pink fermata—a light cue stretched to its limit—the sky undergoes its most dramatic changes, draining out the final notes of daylight. This is also the moment when most viewers get up to leave, their patience stretched to its limit as well. Or maybe after a stream of steady color modulations, they reasonably assume that the show is over and that all can go home. Turrell's pink hold is a stoic denial of the visual interest structuring the preceding 35 minutes of his program ("Which color is next?"), in the service of concerted observation of the darkening sky.

This pink is one of Turrell's brightest and most unnaturally gaudy colors; and in that regard it is spectacular. At the end of this hold, Turrell's LED light swiftly fades out completely, leaving a viewer to suddenly ponder the sky by itself for a few seconds. Without fail, every time I visited the skyspace's evening program the overall responses of those remaining viewers were similar: a collective intake of breath, a sudden and true silence. I don't know if this moment, this literal (and thus ham-fisted) twilight epiphany, is an extension of the theater of *Twilight Epiphany* or a welcome break from it. I've seen folks vocalize their wonderment ("holy cow") or their churlishness

("uhh... did the lights just go out?") at this moment.

My most recent experience in Turrell's skyspace happened on an early Winter night. Earlier in the day it had rained, and into the evening it remained cold and wet. On my way from Rice's library to the building where I teach I passed by *Twilight Epiphany*. Lit up with pink, from afar it seemed unpeopled. Aware of the disturbance my sudden presence might cause, I trepidatiously walked into the lower level. No one. I hurried to the upper level to confirm, that in fact, I was alone. Going back down to the lower level I planted myself... letting my well-earned body heat seep into the pink granite bench. I noticed the crumbling black edge of the aperture, but also the near silence of the space. And then: the lights went out.

I was cold, alone, and paying attention.

- 1 Wagley, Catherine. "How James Turrell's Skyspaces Became a Hot Item for L.A. Art Collectors." *L.A. Weekly* (May 23, 2013). Web. 17 Nov. 2014.
- 2 The same kind of work could also be done in relationship to Turrell's "Perceptual Cells", spaces intended for singular viewers, but whose accessories/ accouterments (often in the form of "sexy nurse" assistants) remain un-interrogated. Thus the experience of encountering the Ganzfeld effect is both critically overdetermined and gendered.
- 3 Of course, much hay has been made from the critical insights of Michael Fried, who in "Art and Objecthood" importantly discussed the inherent theatricality of the Minimalist project—a grouping of artistic concerns which Turrell's work both conforms to and also rigidly resists. When I claim Turrell's work is theatrical I mean it in the literal sense – there is a timed exhibition of space, light, and actors (the seated audience). Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- 4 Bois, Yve-Alain. "Specific Objections." *Artforum* (Summer 2004): 197.
- 5 The spiritualism, either explicit or implicit in such works, has an important history in the development of key institutions exhibiting Minimalist works (namely Dia) as outlined by Anna Chave in "Revaluing Minimalism: Patronage, Aura, and Place." *The Art Bulletin*, 90.3 (Sept. 2008): 466-486. Chave briefly mentions Turrell's "loosely spiritual valences" (476).
- 6 In 2013 Turrell had a trio of retrospective exhibitions in landmark museums: The Guggenheim (NY), The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (CA), and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (TX).
- 7 Herbert, Lynn. "The Color Inside, 2013." *Landmarks*. University of Texas at Austin. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. (https://landmarks.utexas.edu/artistdetail/turrell_james)
- 8 Seguí, Javier. "Darkness and Light (About Turrell)" in *James Turrell* [ed. Ana Torres]. 2004: 4-53. Turrell has consistently maintained that his work is about perception, and thus kissing-kin to the phenomenological works of other

- Minimalist artists – such as Robert Morris' mirrored cubes (*Untitled*, 1965). Morris, and some other Minimalists, had been making work influenced by the first English translation (1962) of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. This was duly noted by Marcia Tucker in 1970 when writing about Robert Morris she said, "In the minimal pieces, perception depends not on metaphor, but on sculptural characteristics experienced physically." Tucker, Marcia. *Robert Morris*. New York, NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1970: 10.
- 9 To be sure, not every critic or curator was so eager to tie spiritual (or vaguely spiritual language) practice with Turrell's work, "When Turrell came here [The Mattress Factory] in 1983, he was not talking about the spiritual references in the work. The work was about the light. Somehow, spiritual issues were part of one's experience of it, but that was not part of the making of it – in the sense that he was aiming for something spiritual. The light was the art." Luderowski, Barbara and Olijnyk, Michael. "Introduction" in James Turrell: Into The Light. The Mattress Factory, 2002: 1-7.
 - 10 *Sedona Life*, 4.1 (1979): 20.
 - 11 Haskell, Barbara and Wortz, Melinda. *James Turrell: Light and Space*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980: 33.
 - 12 Wolff, Theodore F. "Introduction." in *Occluded Front: James Turrell*. Los Angeles: Lapis Press and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1985: 9.
 - 13 Adcock, Craig. "The Interface Between Exterior and Interior Light." in *Mapping Spaces: A Topological Survey of the Work by James Turrell*. New York: Peter Blum Edition, 1987: 17-29.
 - 14 Baltierra, Miguel. "2nd Meeting, Turrell Embraces the Sky." *L.A. Architecture* (September 1987): 6-9.
 - 15 Andrews, Richard. "The Light Passing By" in *James Turrell: Sensing Space*. Seattle, WA: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1992: 9-17.
 - 16 Osaka, Eriko. "The Encounter with Light." *James Turrell* [ed. Eriko Osaka]. Contemporary Art Center, Art Tower Mito, Japan, 1995: 79-86.
 - 17 Mayo, Marti. "Foreword and Acknowledgments." in *James Turrell: Spirit and Light*. Houston, TX: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 1998: 8-9.
 - 18 McGhee, J. Pittman. "Light Pilot: Reflections on the Art of James Turrell" in *James Turrell: Spirit and Light*. Houston, TX: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 1998: 49-51.
 - 19 Govan, Michael. "Inner Light" in *James Turrell*. Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2009: 10-21.
 - 20 (Ibid, 19).
 - 21 Goto, Sharon G. and Banks, William P. "Seeing the Light: From Context to Focus" *James Turrell*. Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2009: 22-31.
 - 22 Giménez, Carmen. "Under the Volcano" in *James Turrell*. New York: The Guggenheim Museum, 2013: 23.
 - 23 Govan, Michael. "Inner Light: The Radical Reality of James Turrell." in *James Turrell: A Retrospective* [Eds.] Lisa Gabrielle Mark, et. al. Copublished by LACMA (Los Angeles) and DelMonico Books (Munich), 2013:13-35.
 - 24 Krupp, E.C. "Bothering to Look." in *James Turrell: A Retrospective* [Eds.] Lisa Gabrielle Mark, et. al. Copublished by LACMA (Los Angeles) and DelMonico Books (Munich), 2013: 236-247.
 - 25 Goffman, Erving. *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. Free Press of Glencoe, 1963.
 - 26 Sutton, Benjamin. "Watching the Sunset and Rainfall Through James Turrell's Rice University Skyspace." *The Huffington Post*. Published Sept. 10, 2013. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/artinfo/watching-the-sunset-and-r_b_3894427.html)
 - 27 Ibid.
 - 28 Giménez, 17.
 - 29 Turrell, James and Govan, Michael. "Conversations with Contemporary Artists," Guggenheim Museum, June 21, 2013. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox00pFnKS7g>)
 - 30 The only way this is not true is if you have the expendable capital to visit many of Turrell's skyspaces, which are farflung. I would argue that because of this there's a Marxist reading to be made here, but I'll leave that to others. As one blogpost for *The Economist* explains: "[Turrell] is currently working on a book with LACMA and Kulturforum Järna that he hopes to debut at the end of this year called "The Turrell World Tour", which challenges fans to visit all 82 of his site-specific works across 26 countries. 'You go and visit a place and you have that signed,' says Mr. Turrell. 'If you visit all the spaces, then you'll be our guest at Roden Crater.'" A.B. "The Art of James Turrell: Master of Light." Prospero [blog], *The Economist*. July 30, 2013. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. (<http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2013/07/art-james-turrell>). Leaving Benjamin Sutton to wryly comment in his own blogpost for *Blouin Artinfo*: "but odds are that if you manage to complete the Tour de Turrell, you already have a plane of your own." Sutton, Benjamin. "Wanna Visit Roden Crater? You Just Need to Complete the 82-Stop Tour de Turrell." In the Air [blog], *Blouin Artinfo*. July 31, 2013. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. (<http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2013/07/31/wanna-visit-roden-cratter-you-just-need-to-complete-the-82-stop-tour-de-turrell/>)
 - 31 Holzherr, Florian. "Florian Holzherr: art & architectural documentations" splashpage. N.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. (<http://www.florian-holzherr.com/>)
 - 32 This historical reticence is currently undergoing a revision in the literature on Turrell. As the artist states in a recent interview with Christine Kim in response to a question his early feinting away from his Quaker past: "I didn't really have a struggle with Quakerism. While it is true that originally Quakers did not believe in the practice of music or art, this is no longer true." Kim, Christine. "James Turrell: A Life in Art" in *James Turrell: A Retrospective* [Eds.] Lisa Gabrielle Mark, et. al. Copublished by LACMA (Los Angeles) and DelMonico Books (Munich), 2013: 37-49. "Unlapsed Quaker" comment from Helen Mead video.
 - 33 This is different, importantly, than the later concept that each person is divine. Just because one has direct access to God doesn't mean that everyone is godly.
 - 34 Meads, Helen. "The Quaker Understanding of Light." *Messages Out of the Blue: Interpreting a Skyspace*, Yorkshire Quaker Arts Project, March 22, 2014. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. (<https://vimeo.com/100412758>)
 - 35 Steinbock, Daniel. "Making Silence Together: Collaboration in the Silent Gatherings of Quakers." Diss. Stanford University, 2012: 88.
 - 36 Meads, 2014.
 - 37 Ibid, 82.

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Danielle Dean



PREVIOUS SPREAD

Danielle Dean

BabyGirl, 2012,

HD video, 12:00 minutes

Based on the narrative structure of soap operas and Nollywood films, the piece moves through Houston into an empty apartment room in Alief where myself, my sister Ashstress and my father Okechukwu Alex, perform a scripted dialogue comprising text from various sources including the film *Baby Boy*, CCN Africa and Radiohead.

OPPOSITE

Danielle Dean

Trainers, 2014

HD video, 11:08 minutes

Five women of color are confined within a set based on the abstraction of patterns and colors on sneakers. The women are negotiating what will happen between them by spurring short sentences; a script assembled using copy from sneaker commercials and political speech. The combination of commodity culture and political rhetoric is intended to reveal the psychological persuasion ('training') of being consumers.

Danielle Dean

No Lye, 2012

HD video, 08:48 minutes

Confined to a bathroom, five women communicate with the limit of words taken from political speeches and advertising from *Ebony* magazine and *Vogue*. The women are engaging in making a bomb.

BELOW

Danielle Dean

Numbers, 2014

Digital animation of Nike revenue 1988-2014, 05:34 minutes



Anahita Ghazvinizadeh



ABOVE

Anahita Ghazvinizadeh
Still from Needle, 2013
HD video, 21:00 minutes

OPPOSITE

Anahita Ghazvinizadeh
Collage of stills from *When the Kid was a Kid*, 2011, HD video, 17:00 minutes and
Mourning, 2011, HD video, 85:00 minutes

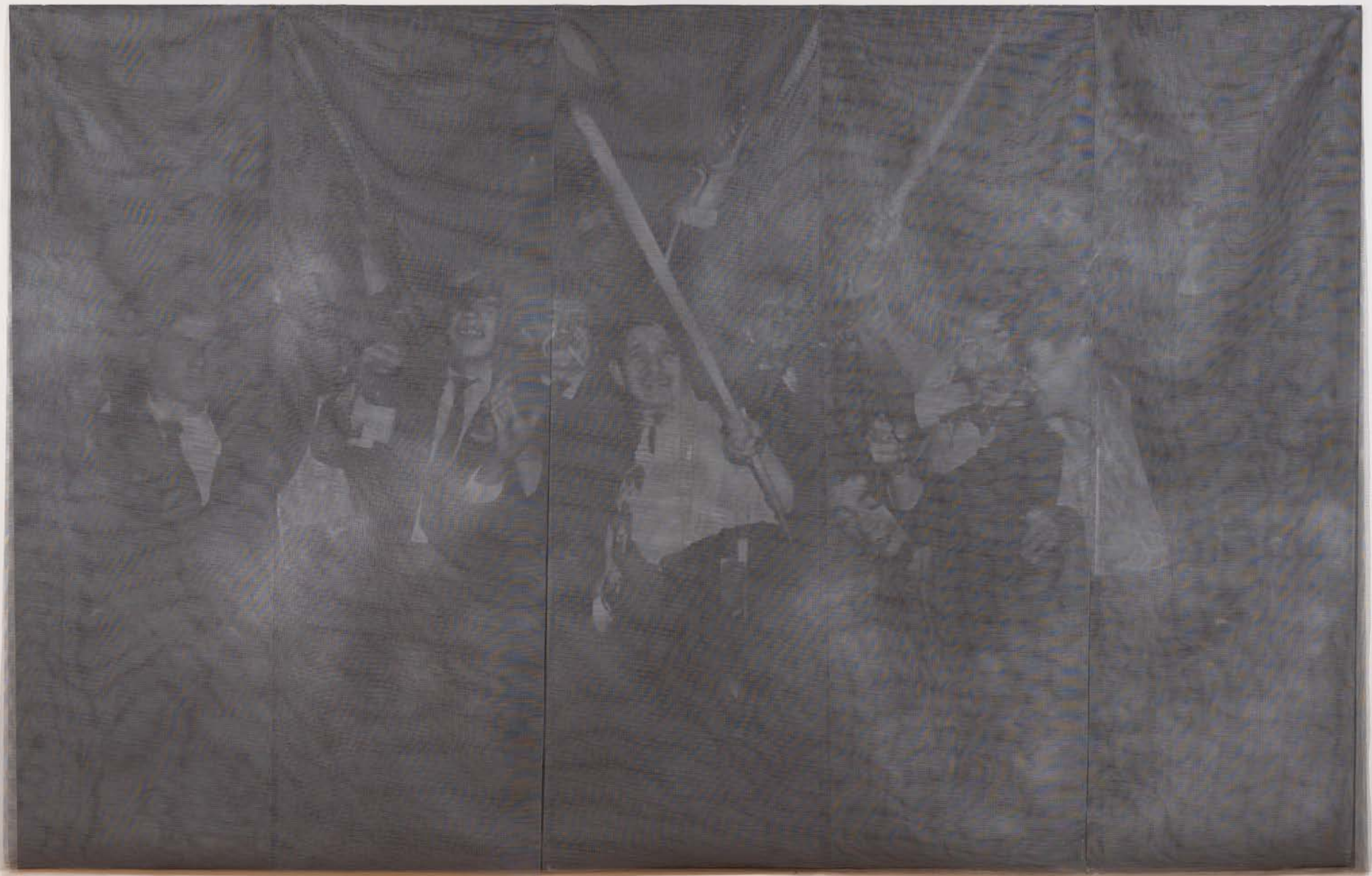
FOLLOWING SPREAD

Anahita Ghazvinizadeh,
Photographic storyboard for *The Baron in the Trees*, 2014 (in progress)
HD video

My major ongoing project is a series of short films on the themes of childhood and parenthood, family theater and notions of growth and gender identity. They all have the ghostly figure of the transitional child at their center, pushed toward the moment of becoming and losing, and held suspended at that point. They all perform their resistance, refusal, and lack of fit, and seem resistant to cultural pressure and societal expectation. Dependence on parents and lack of full agency leads them toward impractical modes of resistance such as silence and disengagement at times; but then children in these films get to test their personhood and gender-identity through the performance of cross-dressing, body-modification, occupying gender-specified spaces, theater, dance and role-play.



Harold Mendez



PREVIOUS SPREAD

Harold Mendez

Become first facts toward which later a little town looks back, 2014

Mixed-media on paper, fiberglass mesh, graphite, watercolor, toner, spray enamel,
80 x 122 inches

BELOW

Harold Mendez

Antioquia, 2014

Reclaimed wood, limestone, wax, hand ground Cochineal insects, Logwood extract,
23 x 17 x 11 inches

OPPOSITE

Harold Mendez

Also in people; parts are wedges: and, to the parts they keep apart, (After Sudek), 2014

Mixed-media on reclaimed ball grained aluminum lithographic plate, cotton, graphite,
spray enamel, watercolor, toner, vegetable oil, litho crayon, soot, 25.5 x 36 inches



Ivor Shearer

NEAR RIGHT

Ivor Shearer

New Orleans After, 2008
HD video, 5:00 minutes

New Orleans After consists of five vignettes that address the ramifications of Hurricane Katrina's impact. Each is an abstracted metaphor for the frustration, absurdity, contradiction, and loss experienced by the people of the Gulf Coast.



CENTER RIGHT

Ivor Shearer

Last Things, 2008
HD video, 20:18 minutes

Last Things is set in the future and takes place in a surreal, dystopic world that was once New Orleans, after the Federal government has closed the city off. The film aims to critique Hollywood's post-apocalyptic genre, and engages with notions of the city's impending gentrification.



FAR RIGHT

Ivor Shearer

Shooting the Road, 2013
35mm film, 06:08 minutes

This film critically examines the 2008 film *The Road*, based on the Cormac McCarthy novel of the same name, and filmed at disaster sites in post-Katrina New Orleans and post-industrial Pittsburgh. The sites are seen as they stand today, without Hollywood design. Without any actors in the shot, the site becomes the character.





Ivor Shearer

The Manhattanville Project, 2011
HD video, 20:56 minutes

The Manhattanville Project is an examination of the political issues in Columbia University's past, present, and future. The project focuses on the political history of the university, including the Manhattan Project, the 1968 student occupation, and its policies and practices relating to the development of Harlem. Through a "psychogeographic" approach, the film engages with politically charged sites, utilizing both historical fact and fiction. The film consists of a series of vignettes intertwined with footage of the filmmaker walking through the campus, through Morningside Heights on the west side of Manhattan, through Harlem, and through the subway system. This ongoing collaborative project was made with the assistance of several Columbia University colleagues, most notably former Core fellow Gabriel Martinez.



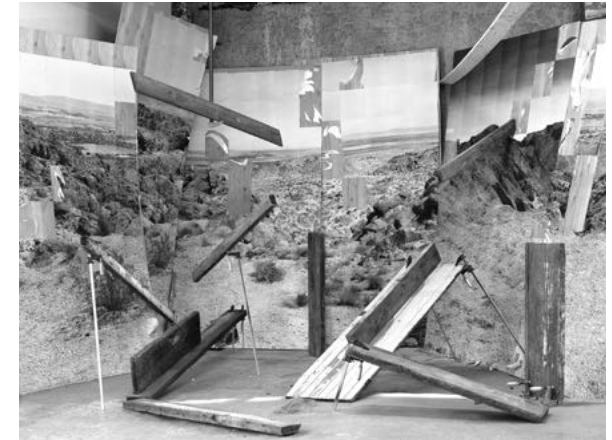
Rodrigo Valenzuela





Rodrigo Valenzuela
Goalkeeper #2, 2014, Digital inkjet print, 36 x 44 inches

Rodrigo Valenzuela
Goalkeeper #1, 2014, Digital inkjet print, 36 x 44 inches



PREVIOUS SPREAD
Rodrigo Valenzuela
The Worker #3, 2013, Digital inkjet print, 30 x 40 inches

ABOVE
Rodrigo Valenzuela
Diamond Box, 2012, HD video, 04:00 minutes

Diamond Box took me back to the parking lots and loading zones of Home Depot and Lowe's where I used to wait for work. Here I met with migrant day laborers and hired them to participate in my project at their standard hourly rate. I took them back to my studio and interviewed them about their life, working to find common ground through our shared experiences. The final work is stripped of sound, the speaking parts edited out - leaving behind the spaces and pauses between thoughts and actions. The interviews are no longer linear narratives but a series of ponderous portraits, bringing forth a deep lack of context and an individual and mutual vulnerability.

Rodrigo Valenzuela
Maria TV, 2014, HD video, 18:00 minutes





Cyborgs and Goddesses

Wendy Vogel
core fellow, 2009-2011

Recently Kara L. Rooney, an artist and writer, invited me to contribute a text to the September 2014 issue of the *Brooklyn Rail* Critic's Page about gender inequality in the art world. Rooney, the guest editor of the section, sent a prompt about the state of art and feminism today. She asked questions like, "What is it about this particular moment that has triggered a renewed interest in feminine voice?" and "Is the recent visibility of self-identified 'feminist art' a sign of social progress or institutional neutralization?"¹ After some thought, I decided to write about the unresolved definition of fourth-wave feminism.

"Each wave [of feminism] has been grounded in a culture and theory all its own," I wrote.² If the first wave was yoked to abolitionist politics and the enfranchisement struggles of the early 20th century, the mid-century second wave aligned itself with the civil rights movement, and the third wave of the 1980s and '90s gained traction from a postmodernist approach to intersectionality and performativity. By contrast, I argued that the fourth wave's stakes were muddled in the discursive tension between radical feminism's understanding of gender as a lived experience from birth and the concerns of communities that challenge the naturalized gender binary, including transgendered individuals. While the civil rights of trans people are a vital political issue, the community also brings the gender binary's instability into stark relief. Ultimately, the understanding of performative gender politics must also consider the biotechnological means to radically alter one's secondary sex characteristics, which hearkens to theories



Opposite: Documentation of the "Clitney Perennial," May 16, 2014, photos by Andrew Huntner
Top: *Inside the Whitney's Galleries*. From left to right: Julie Ann Nagle, Coco Dolle, Rebecca Goyette, Susannah Simpson, Asha Cherian, two unknown girls laughing, Elisa Garcia de la Huerta, Anne Sherwood Pundyk (wearing Sophia Wallace's "Clitney" glasses), Katie Cercone
Bottom: *We made it into the Museum*. From left to right: Anne Sherwood Pundyk, Katie Cercone, Susannah Simpson, Coco Dolle, Elisa Garcia de la Huerta, Asha Cherian, Mary S.

proposed by thinkers like Beatriz Preciado and Donna Haraway.

Rather than rely on naturalized notions of sex and reproduction, today's radical gender theorists follow in the tradition of deconstructionist philosophy, examining contemporary life through the lens of rapid technological advances. We consume artificial products that profoundly alter our appearance, health, reproductive cycles, and even genetic code. If one contemporary approach to feminism seeks to naturalize truths about female experience, another critically updates the questions around identity to account for this late-capitalist merging of humans and machines without nostalgia—what Donna Haraway celebrates as the cyborg in her 1985 essay “The Cyborg Manifesto.” Haraway famously concludes, “I’d rather be a cyborg than a goddess.” Among a fourth-wave surge of feminist art making, artists seem split between the allegiances of the cyborg and the goddess.

Elsewhere in the September *Rails* section devoted to gender inequality, perspectives and methodologies varied. Some contributors stuck to the prescribed territory of analyzing gender disparity in the art world with statistics. Micol Hebron, for instance, penned a text about her “Gallery Tally Poster Project,” which draws from the Guerrilla Girls’ agitprop campaigns of the 1980s to direct attention to the disturbing ratios of female-to-male representation at commercial galleries. Other writers with a personal history in feminist activism, such as the artist Mira Schor and the gallerist Sue Scott, used the platform to meditate on the recent uptick in feminist art activity.

Yet two articles by artists—Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle’s coauthored “ECOSEX MANIFESTO”³ and Katie Cercone’s online exclusive “10 Divinations on Hip Hop as Sacred Medicine: Blood Time, Sex Rituals & Ancestral Communion of the Mother Tongue”⁴—stood out for their open embrace of doctrine that celebrated the female form’s connection to nature and spiritual traditions. Sprinkle and Stephens’s five-point manifesto argued for “making love with the Earth,” while Cercone explored the sex-positive and female-empowering traditions in hip-hop and African art; one section, entitled “The Goddess was a big booty ho,” links strip club dancing to traditional religious worship of women and nature. In other words, their texts explored what would have once been called essentialist feminism.

Cercone, Stephens and Sprinkle are part of a growing faction of artists for whom identitarianism, if not the term essentialism as such, has lost its negative connotation. The reclamation is understandable. Our era is politically defined by the spread of global capitalism, the endangerment

of reproductive rights, incidents of police brutality that spark national debate, rapid gentrification that aggravates racial and class conflicts, and environmental catastrophe. In the cultural arena, digital networks and social media have come to dominate the conversation about authorship and circulation of artistic material. Under such circumstances, feminist practice has had to reinvent itself. For many artists, the deconstructive, even iconoclastic approach of certain strains of feminist art has given way to a more visually emphatic aesthetic. One artistic approach embraces the photogenic, celebratory aesthetic of the second wave feminist movement as it fights battles for representation in the art world and raises awareness about related political issues.

Starting last spring, a wave of high-profile all-female exhibitions and events in New York began to celebrate a pointedly figurative, inclusive point of view. Not since 2007, when the feminist survey *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* toured the country and the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art opened at the Brooklyn Museum with *Global Feminisms*,⁵ had single-sex group shows received so much attention. The 2014 Whitney Biennial’s dismal representation of minority groups seems to have sparked the trend. Despite being organized by three outside curators (Stuart Comer, Anthony Elms and Michelle Grabner), the show of 103 artists included only 32% women and nine African-Americans. On March 7, the night of the Whitney Biennial vernissage in the Upper East Side, the art collective Bruce High Quality Foundation opened the final edition of their “Brucennial” exhibition downtown, featuring *only* women. The salon-style show displayed hundreds of entries in every style and medium imaginable, attracting crowds and considerable press. Same with the Whitney Houston Biennial, subtitled “I’m every woman,” a one-night exhibition of art by queer and female-identified artists on March 9 in Brooklyn’s DUMBO neighborhood.

Once opened, the Whitney Biennial incited further controversy when the artist collective HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN? withdrew from the exhibition after learning that their piece, rather than being shown in the galleries throughout the exhibition’s duration, would be screened only once as part of a satellite program. The artist group, comprised mostly of queer and African-American artists, added fuel to the fire by speaking out against the charged racial politics of Joe Scanlan’s works from the *Donelle Woolford* series that were included in the exhibition. “Woolford” is a fictional young, black, female artist, who is the creation of Scanlan (a white, middleaged male artist). For more than ten years, Scanlan has made paintings and other artworks attributed to Woolford and has employed several women of

color to portray Woolford over the course of “her” career. “We felt that the representation of an established academic white man posing as a privileged African-American woman is problematic, even if he tries to hide it in an avatar’s mystique,” HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN? member Maureen Catbagan said in a statement about Scanlan’s work. “It kind of negates our presence there, our collaborative identity as representing the African diaspora.”⁶

Another agitated response to the Whitney Biennial’s lack of diversity took place inside the museum itself. The Clitney Perennial, a one-night protest held in the Whitney’s galleries during pay-what-you-wish hours on Friday, May 16, sought to encourage debate about gender and race in the art world. I attended the event, which referenced the ‘60s and ‘70s politics of feminism with its exuberant, feminine aesthetic and focus on consciousness-raising dialogue. (It even referred to a clear precedent in the Whitney Biennial’s own history: In 1970, the Ad Hoc Women’s Art Committee, composed of the independent curator Lucy Lippard and the artists Poppy Johnson, Brenda Miller, and Faith Ringgold, demanded the inclusion of 50 per cent women artists in that year’s Whitney Annual, and that half of those included women artists be African-American. They followed up with protests where they scattered raw eggs and feminine hygiene supplies around the museum.)⁷ Organizers of the Clitney Perennial included Katie Cercone and Elisa Garcia de la Huerta (her collaborator in the queer-feminist performance collective Go! Push Pops), along with Asha Man, Anne Sherwood Pundyk, and Kara Rooney. Dozens of artists arrived at the entrance at 6pm bedecked in neon headdresses, flower crowns, leotards and “Cliteracy” sunglasses that bore an abstract, upside-down, open-petaled motif. Once inside the second-floor galleries, the protest commenced with a performance by dancers who executed slow, controlled extensions of their limbs and deep squats (the goddess pose in yoga), and hissing catcalls of the type that were hurled in their direction on the street. Performance artist Rebecca Goyette, dressed in an elaborate getup as the character Octopussy, masturbated fake genitals attached to the outside of her costume. Elsewhere on the floor, artists led conversations with museumgoers about sex, gender, and racial inequality in the art world, in the workplace, and in public.

The event received lukewarm coverage from journalist Jillian Steinhauer, who quoted confused bystanders at length, questioned the lack of discussion about racial discrimination in the artists’ conversation, and mused about its impact beyond a momentary buzz on social media. “The cliterati walked away with their photos, and the Whitney got a chance to prove it tolerates dissent,” Steinhauer wrote. “Where does that leave the rest of us?”⁸ Go!

Push Pops authored a combative response a few weeks later, arguing for the political effectiveness of their so-called publicity stunt. Contesting Steinhauer’s analysis of the non-diversity of their group and the shallowness of her critique, the artists wrote, “We chose the clit as our symbol to challenge the phallogocentric society within which we live. We celebrate the female genitals as a pleasure and power center, and as a symbol of feminist archeomythology, theory and praxis.” They added, “This is not an essentialist platform ... despite the way in which we might strategically use identity politics to point out real inequalities in the system,”⁹ paraphrasing the argument coined by the postcolonial thinker Gayatri Spivak.

This fall, two all-female media-friendly exhibitions again leaned toward a penchant for celebrity and provocative figuration. *Milk and Night*, a multigenerational group show held September 5–21 at Gallery Sensei in the Lower East Side, featured many participants from the Clitney Perennial among its star-studded checklist. Veteran feminist Betty Tompkins’s sex drawings hung alongside photographic self-portraits by the musician and performance artist Kembra Pfahler, dressed in a prison get-up, and a tame oil-on-canvas rendering by HBO Girls actress Jemima Kirke of her famous face. Among a sea of nudes, Cercone showed one of the most confrontational works: a video installation that paired imagery related to Nicki Minaj’s booty-glorifying hit single “Anaconda” with recent footage from Ferguson, Missouri riots following the shooting death of African-American teenager Michael Brown.

Nearby, *Future Feminism*, which ran from September 11–27 at the trendy East Village gallery The Hole, presented performances by legendary feminists across disciplines. The invited artists ranged from the unsparing No Wave musician and spoken-word artist Lydia Lunch to performance artists like Lorraine O’Grady and Carolee Schneemann. O’Grady, an African-American artist, created a stir in the art world in the early 1980s with her character Mlle Bourgeoise Noire, who, wearing a dress comprised of 180 pairs of white gloves and a cat-o-nine-tails, would attend art world openings and criticize the lack of black artists represented. Aside from the performances, the only work displayed in *Future Feminism* was *13 Tenets of Future Feminism*, a series of single-sentence declarations engraved on panels of rose quartz. Coauthored by the exhibition organizers and musicians Antony, Bianca and Sierra Casady, Johanna Constantine, and Kembra Pfahler, the *Tenets* seemed less futuristic than nostalgic. “The subjugation of women and the Earth is one and the same,” read number one; “Identify biological differences between the sexes and draw individuals into greater accountability based on their predispositions,” said number four. Number

five, “Relieve men of their roles as protectors and predators,” was the only statement to truly challenge prescribed gender roles. If the plethora of female voices that contributed to the event program suggested a plural reading of feminism, the literal background on the walls declared but one: that women’s connection to nature was deep, indissoluble, and ethically superior to men’s.

The naturalizing the female form that is prescribed through the *13 Tenets of Future Feminism*, however well intentioned, threatens to tip progressive thinking into outright conservatism. That said, the concerns of identity, nature and spirituality proposed by the manifesto-like *Tenets* resonate in other corners of the art world. Recent exhibitions with a serious identity-driven agenda, such as *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*,¹⁰ create fresh perspectives that are crucial to address representative imbalance in the canon of art history. Artists involved in social practice and research-driven art also probe the nature between humans and the environment, sometimes with references to powerful mid-century feminist artworks. For instance, the younger artist Mary Mattingly, known for creating sustainable dwellings like her *Waterpods* series of 2009 navigating New York’s waterways and *WetLand*, a houseboat-cum-garden docked for the summer of 2014 at Philadelphia’s Penn’s Landing, created the photograph *A Ruin in Reverse* (2013). In this picture, part of her *House and Universe* series of actions demonstrating the environmental impact of her own possessions, a mound of her personal belongings sits in a hole in the earth, like a corpse. The image recalls the Cuban American feminist artist Ana Mendieta’s powerful *Siluetas* series of the 1970s, where the artist imprinted her silhouette in the dirt, on rocks, and other sites in nature. Sometimes the artist used blood to create the marks or filled the impressions with gunpowder and set them ablaze. Similarly Andrea Geyer’s *Spiral Lands / Chapter 1.*, 2007, a work of text and photographs of landscapes, skews the tradition of Land Art (feminist and otherwise) to create a portrait of colonialist appropriation from the 15th century to the present. If younger artists are gravitating toward earlier aesthetics, some conceptual artists are equally revising their tactics. Recently the Pictures Generation appropriationist Sherrie Levine created *False God* (2008), a cast-bronze sculpture of a two-headed calf based on a form she found in a thrift store. Described by the art historian and curator Johanna Burton as “a sort of Janus figure ... that suggests the present acts as a hinge between the future and the past,”¹¹ the work attests to a spiritual surge in Levine’s newest work—or at least an equation of the enlightenment that art collectors and institutions seek in art with the money they have to spend on it.

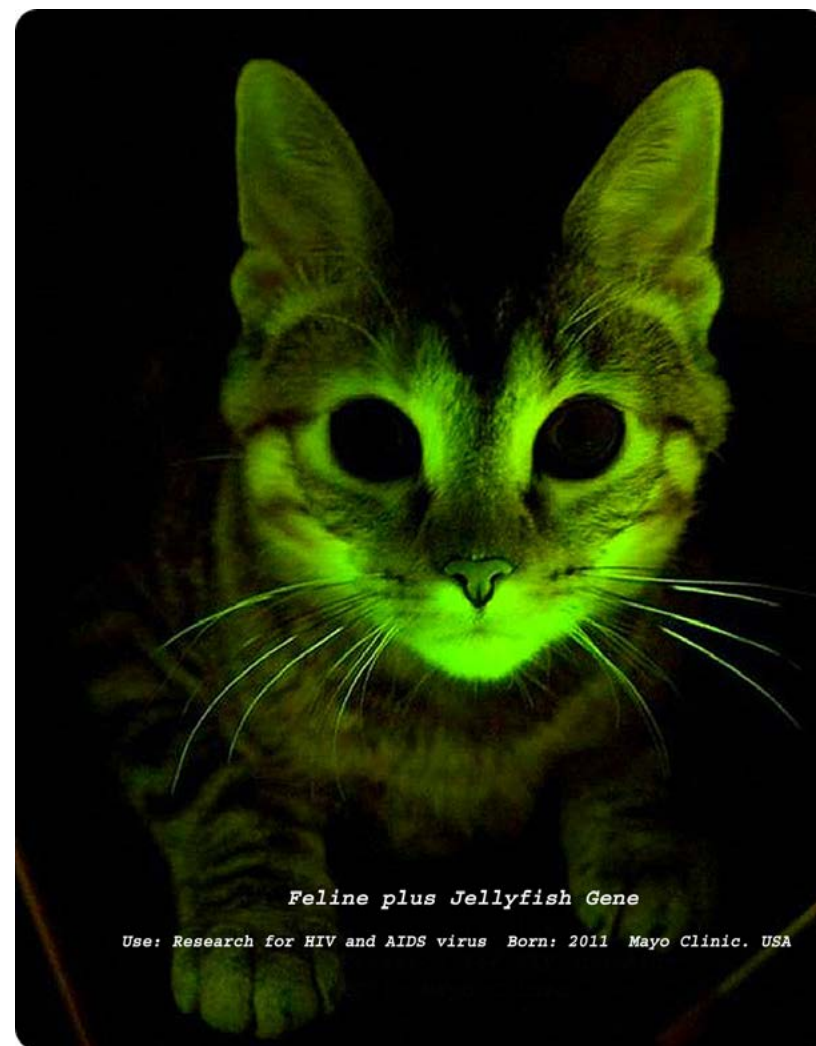
Another set of feminists seek to create a new discourse around feminism that explicitly addresses technology. Zoologist and critical theorist Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” has found new life among a generation of practitioners engaged with the pressing notion of technology’s effect on our daily lives. In the essay, Haraway defines the cyborg as a rogue creation of poststructuralism that exists between the boundaries of human and animal, human and machine. “The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense,”¹² Haraway says. In her conception of cyborgian feminism, the female subject would be radically partial, freed from the narrative of a splintered wholeness. Thus the theories of sexual oppression on the basis of natural reproduction (the premise of socialist/Marxist feminism) and gender-as-caste system uniting the experiences of all women (the premise of radical feminism) would be null and void. “It’s not just that ‘god’ is dead; so is the ‘goddess,’”¹³ asserts Haraway. The cyborg in her view is both a feminist fantasy and a figure that can infiltrate the biopolitical and biotechnological systems that structure daily life. Haraway’s critique of essentialism extends the French theorist Michel Foucault’s idea of governmentality. Already in the mid 1980s, she understood that subjects not only psychically internalized the structure of disciplinary regimes, but were connected through webs of informational systems. Not only were we biopolitical beings, but due to advances in microtechnology, reproductive science, and chemical agriculture, we were fusions of the natural and inorganic.

Similarly, theorist Beatriz Preciado, in her book *Testo Junkie*,¹⁴ weaves a narrative between her own experience with injecting testosterone and a larger genealogy of modern sexuality transformed by innovations in reproductive technology. These advances run the gamut from birth control pills to synthetic sex hormones and in vitro fertilization. An adherent of poststructuralist theory and former student of Jacques Derrida, Preciado’s intellectual project advances Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, which sought to debunk the “repression” hypothesis advanced through modern sexuality studies. Preciado writes that “the changes within neoliberalism that we are witnessing are characterized not only by the transformation of ‘gender,’ ‘sex,’ ‘sexuality,’ ‘sexual identity,’ and ‘pleasure’ into objects of the political management of living”—here she succinctly summarizes Foucault’s biopolitics—“but also by the fact that this management itself is carried out through the new dynamics of advanced techno-capitalism, global media, and biotechnologies.” She calls our new era “pharmacopornographic capitalism,” and calls for a revolutionary use of hormones to disrupt normative performances of gender.

Preciado's hypothesis, Haraway's doctrine, as well as branches of what has been variously been called object-oriented ontology, new materialism or speculative realism, seek to decenter a strictly humanist reading of the world, rather than using the method of demystification to uncover (and reify) the dominant forces of patriarchy and capitalism. One of the most outspoken feminist theorists among this group, Jane Bennett, professes her debt to ecofeminism in her proposition of reading "human-nonhuman assemblages as a locus of agency."¹⁵ The recent accelerationist concept of "coactivity" between humans, nature, animals, and machines echoes Bennett's sophisticated reading of materialism. Accelerationists argue that we are living in the age of the Anthropocene, where human civilization has an indelible and devastating impact on the Earth.

In art practice, the application of new materialism has not always had a distinctly feminist tone. Many artists created so-called performative objects over the past few years, which in many cases amount to little more than formalist art with a new intellectual veneer. The genre of post-Internet art is also subject to navel-gazing, and in its least generous interpretations, is shorthand for easily commodifiable painting and sculpture referencing "memes" of kitschy Internet jokes. It may also be the cover for frankly misogynist work. For instance, Nate Hill's *Trophy Scarves*, an Instagram account featuring pictures of the black artist, dressed in a suit, "wearing" naked white women around his neck, has attracted considerable outrage.¹⁶ Ryder Ripp's *Art Whore*, created in November 2014, is another controversial Internet viral artwork described as "troll-like," in the common parlance of the Web—contrary to be contrary. For this project, Ripps used the platform of a one-night "artist residency" in the Ace Hotel (a free hotel room and up to \$50 reimbursable in art supplies) to invite escorts solicited through Craigslist to create drawings for him. He paid them each \$80 for approximately 45 minutes of work; the two escorts he solicited were women of color. When asked to respond, Ripps claimed that "great art is like great sex" and that, in fact, Ace Hotel was exploiting *him* for demanding he trade one of his artworks for his residency.¹⁷ He went on to note that he was offering the women (who he repeatedly calls "sex workers," though they identify their work as "sensual massage") entrance into the artworld, seemingly blind to the power dynamics implicit in such a transaction.

Against this backdrop of artworks that have lost touch with social dynamics, there is a growing group of artists for whom cyborg politics has inspired a feminism that goes beyond fixed universals. One of the most pioneering artists has worked in performance, sculpture, and new media



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Transgenic Glocat*, 2014, archival digital print, 30 x 40 inches, developed for THE INFINITY ENGINE PROJECT

since the 1970s: Lynn Hershman Leeson. The artist is one of cyborg feminism's most vocal adherents in contemporary art. Hershman Leeson's best-known project is her *Roberta Breitmore* series. From 1973 to 1979, she lived a double life as herself and as Breitmore, unbeknownst to most of her acquaintances. Hershman Leeson substantiated Breitmore legally with a credit card, driver's license, checking account, Weight Watchers membership, and regular appointments with a psychologist. In Hershman Leeson's estimation, "[Breitmore] really has more validity in that era than I do, because I couldn't get a credit card."¹⁸ Since the early 1980s, the artist has explored the digital landscape with new-media works addressing such diverse phenomena as non-sexual reproduction (in her 2002 movie *Teknolust* starring Tilda Swinton, the actress plays three replicants created from a scientist's DNA), the surveillance state, and cyborgs. "Cyborgs now are bioprintable elements extended into living beings. I've seen them come out of a printer pulsating with life inside of them," the artist said to me recently about organ transplants generated by a 3-D printer, a subject she will explore in her next film with Swinton. Her latest work, created for her retrospective *Civic Radar* in Karlsruhe, Germany's ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie),¹⁹ involves an eight-room genetics lab that, among other functions, will document conversations the artist had with genetic scientists and reverse-engineer participants' DNA. For Hershman Leeson, the technological hybridization of species and the policing of racial identity through genetic science are urgent ethical problems that require a sophisticated, politicized, feminist approach. "Feminism was always about issues. It was about censorship, a quest for equality and transparency," she said. "With this new work, I'm finding out that genetics issues are very central to what the world's moral stances are, and that needs to be addressed now."

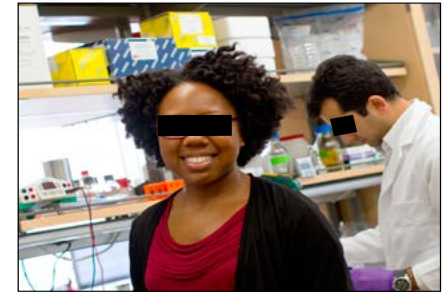
Although its author may not explicitly identify with the politics of cyborgian feminism, certainly Laura Poitras's forthcoming documentary *Citizenfour* resonates with Hershman Leeson's concerns about the security state. Based around the confession of Edward Snowden about the unchecked power of the National Security Administration, the film considers the extent of our digital trail and how a rogue element within the system can have serious consequences for worldwide politics.

Contemporary artists of the millennial generation, defined as "digital natives" who grew up using the Internet, also appear to be embracing feminist politics as they navigate digital culture in playful ways. Net artists

Opposite: Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Genetically Modified Crops and Animals* (detail), 2014, wallpaper, dimensions variable, developed for THE INFINITY ENGINE PROJECT



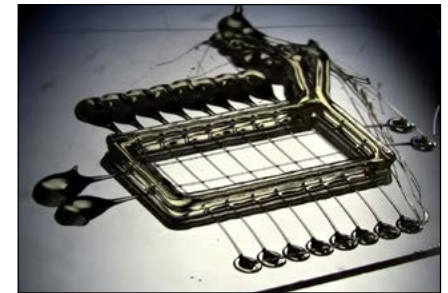
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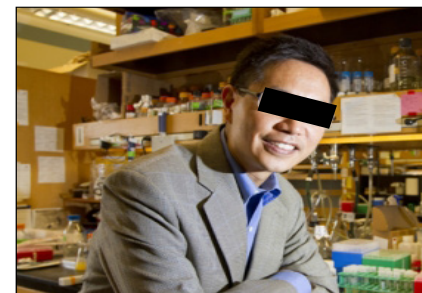
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such as Jennifer Chan, whose projects include a humorous video depicting the richest web moguls entitled **A Total Jizzfest** (2012) consider the patriarchal systems that are replicated in the fast-moving, highly speculative startup culture of the tech industry. Ann Hirsch's body of work dealing with intimacy and the Internet, including the work of "camwhores" (mostly women who perform salacious routines for their own satisfaction or as paid sex work) and her own online relationship as a preteen with an older man,²⁰ shows how notions of consent, objectification and complicity must be rearticulated in the digital sphere. Keren Cytter, who was born in 1977 at the edge of the millennial generation, articulates a powerful digital feminist tale of vengeance in her 2014 video *Siren*. In this fractured narrative, an online screen "siren" performs a sexual fantasy for a man. She appears to be vindicated by a second (offline) woman who convinces a male friend to kill the first man on behalf of all womankind. The woman who initiates the murder ends up dead, but the looping of the splintered narrative, as well as Cytter's focus on the circulation of low-quality images, seems to suggest that both sex and images are today subject to the forces of vampiric, mechanical reproduction. Rather than championing the space of the Internet as a technological utopia with a leveled playing field, these artists understand that the Internet is an extension of the living world, with its divisive political factors.

The bifurcation among these practitioners—the goddesses vs. the cyborgs—would seem to echo the tribal warfare among different factions of the second-wave feminist movement. However, the two sides do not appear to be in consistent dialogue, and perhaps they never will. It is part of the success of the feminist paradigm that its critique can enact itself in so many niches of art practice, but what is perhaps lost is the spirited dialogue of past feminist waves. The artists trafficking in identity politics assert a directness of approach that serves as a challenge to post-Internet art, often considered hermetic. Artists engaged with the Internet, in turn, create alternative contexts for their work that do not fully require the endorsement of traditional institutions. They open a space for a feminist viewpoint—without, perhaps, a protest required at the gates of the museum, but all the same needing the support of colleagues. In the end, what is clear is that the work of feminism is not complete, and that contemporary artists' concerns with the environment, issues of race and class, and the technological web in which we are ensnared must creatively navigate spaces, both digital and actual, to articulate its most pressing concerns.

- 1 Kara L. Rooney, email to the author, July 28, 2014.
- 2 Vogel, Wendy. "Riding the Fourth Wave in a Changing Sea," *Brooklyn Rail*, September 2014: 75. All other articles referenced in this paragraph appear in the same issue or online at <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/9/criticspage>.
- 3 Sprinkle, Annie and Stephens, Beth, "ECOSEX MANIFESTO," *Brooklyn Rail*, September 2014: 77.
- 4 <<http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/09/criticspage/hip-hop-as-sacred-medicine>>
- 5 *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, curated by Connie Butler, opened at the Geffen Contemporary at Los Angeles's MOCA from March 4–July 16, 2007, traveled to the National Museum for Women in the Arts in Washington D.C. from September 21–December 16, 2007, and New York's MoMAPS1 February 17–May 12, 2008. *Global Feminisms*, co-curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, ran from March 23–July 1, 2007.
- 6 Heddaya, Mostafa. "Artist Collective Withdraws from Whitney Biennial [updated]," *Hyperallergic*, May 14, 2014. <http://hyperallergic.com/126420/artist-collective-withdraws-from-whitney-biennial/>.
- 7 Ringgold, Faith, *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005: 175-8), quoted in "The Biennial and Women Artists: A Look Back at Feminist Protests at the Whitney" <<http://whitney.org/Education/EducationBlog/BiennialAndWomenArtists>>
- 8 Steinhauer, Jillian. "Feminist Protest Disrupts the Whitney Biennial," *Hyperallergic*, May 17, 2014. <<http://hyperallergic.com/127047/feminist-protest-disrupts-the-whitney-biennial/>>
- 9 Go! Push Pops. "The Clitney Perennial #REALTalk," *Posture Mag*, June 2, 2014 <<http://posturemag.com/online/2014/06/02/the-clitney-perennial-realtalk/>>
- 10 *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* was organized by Valerie Cassel Oliver for the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston from November 17, 2012–February 16, 2013. The exhibition traveled to New York, where it was shown at the Grey Art Gallery from September 10–December 7, 2013, and the Studio Museum in Harlem from November 14, 2013–March 9, 2014.
- 11 Burton, Johanna. "Sherrie Levine: Mayhem," brochure accompanying the exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art (November 10, 2011–January 29, 2012): 8.
- 12 Haraway, Donna. "The Cyborg Manifesto," republished in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (Routledge: London and New York, 2000), 292.
- 13 Haraway 301.
- 14 Preciado, Beatriz. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: Feminist Press, 2013).
- 15 Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): xiii.
- 16 <<http://instagram.com/trophyscarves>>
- 17 See Whitney Kimball, "Ryder Ripps's ART WHORE in the Running for Most Offensive Project of 2014," Art F City November 11, 2014 <<http://artfcity.com/2014/11/11/ryder-rippss-art-whore-in-the-running-for-most-offensive-project-of-2014/>>
- 18 Interview with the author, September 4, 2014.
- 19 At press time, the exhibition had not opened and details remained unconfirmed.
- 20 *Playground*, 2013, is a multimedia work by Ann Hirsch, including a play, photographs and e-books. For further discussion, see Gene McHugh, "The Context of the Digital: A Brief Inquiry into Online Relationships," in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (Manchester: Cornerhouse, and London: SPACE, 2014): 28-34.

2014-2015 Core Fellows



Julia Brown

b. Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1978

Julia Brown's work in photography, installation, and video is largely concerned with subject formation, visibility, invisibility, and the political power of representation. Since receiving her MFA from CalArts in 2006, she has attended the Whitney Independent Study Program and at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She is Assistant Professor of Painting at George Washington University.

Nicole Burisch

b. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 1980

Nicole Burisch's practice includes writing, curating, and artistic activity. She has worked for numerous artist-run organizations, including Centre des arts actuels Skol in Montreal, and the Mountain Standard Time Performative Art Festival in Calgary. She co-authored (with Anthea Black) a chapter in *Extra-Ordinary: An Anthology of Craft and Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press), and has contributed writing to such periodicals as FUSE, No More Potlucks, and the Cahiers métiers d'art/Craft Journal. She received her MA in Art History from Montreal's Concordia University in 2011.

Jason Byrne

b. San Francisco, California, 1975

Jason Byrne's filmmaking is strongly influenced by his background as an archivist. In works that combine film, video, photography, and found footage, time and space are ambiguous; the mood, ethereal and atmospheric. He received his MFA in Film/Video from the California Institute of the Arts in 2007 and from 2008 to 2013, he worked as the audio-visual archivist for the United Nations Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Arusha, Tanzania. In 2010, he was named one of the "25 New Faces of Independent Film" by *Filmmaker Magazine*.

Andrew Campbell

b. Austin, Texas, 1982

Andy Campbell examines the historical intersections of sexuality and notions of community in visual representation. His current book project, *Bound Together: Contemporary Art and 1970s Gay and Lesbian Leather Communities*, examines events, archival practices, and contemporary artwork addressing such communities in the US. He received his MA and Ph.D in art history from the University of Texas in Austin, and has published numerous articles and reviews in such publications as *Syllabus*, *Social Text*, *The Austin Chronicle*, *Might Be Good* . . . and *Art Lies*.

Danielle Dean

b. Huntsville, Alabama, 1982

Danielle Dean collaborates with her family and friends as actors to explore the naturalization of ideology in our society. Working in video, performance, installation and drawing, she often uses language from advertising, news and popular culture as material in a cut-up method, developing dialogues as assemblages. She studied Fine art at Central St. Martins in London, received her MFA from California Institute of the Arts, and participated in the Whitney Independent Study program.

Anahita Ghazvinizadeh

b. Tehran, Iran, 1989

Anahita Ghazvinizadeh's artistic practice involves film, video and writing, with an emphasis on the philosophical and ethical questions surrounding a child's slow transition into adulthood. In 2013, she received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and was awarded the first Cinefondation Prize from the Cannes Film Festival.

Harold Mendez

b. Chicago, Illinois, 1977

Harold Mendez recontextualizes history through appropriated materials, including remnants of physical objects as well as snippets of philosophic or literary thought. Since receiving his MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2007, he has attended residencies at the Headlands Center for the Arts and at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

Ivor Shearer

b. New York, New York, 1976

Through his work with film, video, and installation, Ivor Shearer seeks to engage in new ways of thinking about sociopolitical issues as well as expanding and challenging the language of the moving image. He received his MFA from Columbia University in 2010, attended the Whitney Independent Study Program in 2011 and was a recipient of the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation 2012 Biennial Award.

Rodrigo Valenzuela

b. Santiago, Chile, 1982

Gestures of alienation and displacement are both the aesthetic and subject of much of Rodrigo Valenzuela's creative practice, situated within the conflicting traditions of documentary and fiction through video, photography, and installation. After receiving his MFA in photo media from the University of Washington in Seattle in 2012, he completed residencies and fellowships at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, the Center for Photography at Woodstock, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

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