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OUTSIDE – Roll End Front Tuck with Dust Flaps 20.61 x 12.75 x 2
A thin wafer is placed in the mouth of a kneeling woman and becomes flesh. A man masturbates quietly in a darkened room to a 3D model of a popular film actress. A car drives through an abandoned town and decelerates as it approaches a sign reading “Slow Children Playing.” A man fastidiously mows an artificial lawn while watching the sun dip low over a vast desert horizon. Superbland opens up new paths in understanding graphic design within the realm of the hyperreal. It begins with a study of simulation in graphic design contexts, building upon established forms of meaning-making by testing and developing a variety of mapping and modeling processes. Further, it pushes against the notion of simulation as a purely digital experience and expands the definition to include a variety of physical and phenomenological events. Whereas previous studies of simulation seek to understand the technical, the singular, and even the divine, Superbland probes the use and function of simulation in more banal and unremarkable locations, raising the commonplace to a position of artistry. In this way, it pushes the reader to consider the nature of visual language less as constative fact and more as persuasive performance.

Typefaces
- Söhne
- Perfectly Nineties
- Garamond Condensed
- Haas Unica
- Copernicus
- Rusted Sabbath
Superbland
To fully understand the simulated object, one must also fully comprehend its physical and historical context. Starting with the material, one can see how similar forms have overlapped for so long. The early daguerreotypes were built on the rough castles and sturdily built walls of ancient Rome. Even more, the hyper-realistic depictions of the Mahabharata and other sacred texts were created on vast temples to revered gods. The astonishing hyperreal feels related to those same ancient repositories of myth and legend. And this is not even to mention the numerous simulated spaces beyond these, from the great walls of Baghdad to the interstitial spaces of the northeastern United States. The border between these spaces is often overlooked, but it is often overlooked in the exploration of media. Virtual rooms are rarely brought into virtual spaces; indeed, it is the opposite process. Virtual spaces become more accurate through their generation, reframing what they once were.

The objects that occupy these spaces are themselves often semiotic markers, markers of space that are continuously being formed and renewed through the actions of others. If one considers the perennial question “What is this?” one can identify the perennial object “green bushes” as a perennial border plant, tending to grow out of sidewalks and concrete.

The older the piece, the more prominent the fascistic meaning it holds—the more extensive the transformation, the more open the border.

It is essential to understand that the simulations are not representations. They are mere approximations. They are approximations in three dimensions. The shape of a cigarette, the color of a hair, and the texture of a cheek are not determined by arbitrary details like thickness. They are determined by the presence of other graphic elements, in this case, the shape of the cigarette and the proximity to the mouth. The visual markers can indicate a connection to the referent, in this case, the cigarette. The proximity to the mouth means a cigarette that is smoked casually, without care for the user. This kind of recreation of reality needs to be revised. Many things cannot be simulated accurately. The shape of the hand or the distance between the fingers is too precise. But these are physical markers that can be manipulated in many ways. For example, the simulated object can change from one state to another, just as the physical form can, and thus reality is modeled.

It doesn’t have to be a precise modeling of reality. It can be a loose collection of symbols and shapes that create the illusion.

The visual markers are present in the case of the can, but the feeling of the can is missing. In this way, simulation becomes a means of capturing what the referent is not. It’s no longer a question of representation but of implication. The written word creates the same illusion, but the graphic representation of an entity carries the same guarantee of truth.
The “real” in liminal space is determined by the visual nature of the form, its shape, color, texture, and structure. It is not inherent to the condition, just the marking of it. The rounded cheek asks for the poreless blush of youth, while the sharp angles of a tool demand the rigid metal sheen of industry. But each of these forms has in common the inherent notion that they are genuine and natural forms. They are not rarities, imitations wrought by human hands. These are recreation, after all, imitations that have been molded by the rough edges of experience and labor into recognizable forms. The rounded cheek asks for the poreless blush of youth, while the sharp angles of a tool demand the rigid metal sheen of industry. And yet these are the structures that more directly impact one’s experience of the world. The experience of a simulated object is determined by the graphic qualities of the form, its form factor, and its texture and form.

But in all cases, the referent is the visually perceptible form. It is the combination of documents that makes a form believable. In the case of the runestones, the shape and color are there to create a semblance of space, a past or present. The image of an individual nailed to a stake in a park creates a sense of their historicity in the viewer’s mind. For example, the idea of a person killed in a car accident or on the run from the law alludes to traumatic events. The image of the rosetta stone, while not as recognizable, does create in the viewer’s mind a sense of the once-occupied space.

The presence of death is felt in the rosetta stone of the image, but not as plainly as in the case of the dead person’s remains. The presence of a form in a space does not always equate to the same auspicious time. In the case of the runestones, the image of the individual who erected the structure works in the viewer’s mind to create a sense of their existence.

They were not just monuments but individuals who cared for the environment and cared for other people as well. They were just plain people. Nobuyoshi Araki created this image of a quiet, easygoing individualist who lived his life to the fullest. And most people who look at this would agree with him. He was indeed a solitary artist. He didn’t want to create large-scale works of art for public consumption.

He instead concentrated on his compositions and monologues. These were very personal and very intimate. He wrote down every detail of his vision, and it was one of the few creative practices that he did not want his work to be seen in public. He wanted it to be buried in the soil of his creation.

It was important to him that this sacred object should remain hidden from view. It was felt that by revealing its contents, he would draw attention to it and bring about its remuneration. The image was created in such a way to start the semblance of a “real” ness, so natural that the viewer could not detect its subterfuge.
Even the language describing the form was scripted, as in the Greek “θεϊκός,” literally “God-like.”

In particular, he questioned if the self was authentic or only a representation made manifest. This idea of the unreal is also something that I grapple with regularly. In particular, I think it’s important to be critical of how we represent the self in space and how that representation interacts with what we’re trying to communicate. In particular, he questioned if the self was authentic or only a fabrication. He posits that genuine quality is determined by how much of that reality is made visible to the conscious mind.

So if the self is made of concrete, then it can only be understood in the framework of that concrete. Conversely, the unconscious mind can ignore or block its fabrication’s visibility. This mirrors the process of simulation itself, which Michael Fried describes as moving toward an “objecthood” where the subject becomes “object-centered.”

Philosophers Ludwig Wittgenstein and William Orman Quine, with whom it could be argued that because of their shared ontology, are too ontologically “bounded” within a certain sense of the real. They draw a broad picture describing, in deference to Heidegger, being “always already” in possession of a certain kind of object, a brick, a can, a piece of paper. Just as a discarded item is never indeed discarded, and so too is existence never truly lived.
The term “deus ex machina” refers to a sudden resolution derived from unexpected sources, “God from the machine.”

But in this endless space of digital stimulation and joy, surely the most precious part of our being must be the feeling of truth. We can describe this sense of pleasure concerning object surfaces in terms of their relationship to their surroundings. The shape, color, texture, form, reflectivity, and pattern create a networked meaning that indicates the object’s nature. Performance and image must work in tandem for the believability of the state to be maintained, but this implies that the simulation of reality is the only goal. The visual markers can indicate a connection to the referent, and in the case of the early mechanical simulation, they had to. They were fixed signifiers. Vaucanson’s duck was cast in bronze and steel, befitting the production methods of the time. And while this didn’t reflect the feathered, haptic nature of the animal, its shape was distinct and recognizable. The digitally simulated object, however, provides us with a fluid container. The form and the image it holds are subject to change. The textures of an entity might change drastically, even if the structure remains. The simulated fruit creates a different illusion with the graphic exterior of metal. Conversely, the form may change, but the object itself may not. In the case of the bottle, the material restrictions of the bottle limit its surface to a rigid box and plastic wrapper.

But in the case of the can, the conjunctival surface communicates with almost any other character, and in this way, the object becomes a canvas on which rests graphic fabrications.

In the case of the bottle, the material restrictions of the bottle force it to maintain its shape. It only becomes decontextualized and open to interpretation as new or alternate meanings are revealed. The same bottle may be carried far beyond its original brand system, into new spaces, restricted production, or even discarded altogether. Even in the case of the can, the surface-level simulation does not allow it to hold the exact concealed nature. Instead, the can is ornamented with graphic inserts that denote its commercial value, weight, flexibility, and so on. It is in this way that can become indeed “graphic objects.” They are almost entirely visual, almost entirely representing space. And the graphic surface communicates a wide range of information in a relatively short time. The shape conveys an idea that the can holds, in the case of the Coke can, that it is large, intimidating, and slightly alcoholic.

The can, however, is the perfect blend of dimensional shapes and invisible forms. It can hold anything, any object that matches its structural build. In the case of cans, it keeps the same fluids as the bottle might, but with far more mystery.
In the case of design, it becomes a Venn diagram of predicted commercial value; in this way, the can becomes a marker of the process.

The quality of the form imitates the quality of the content. It is consistent, measured in its quality, and open to interpretation. It can hold a mirror image of itself forever.

Bell Hooks explores the nature of desire in more detail, revealing the drive of passion and the methodology underpinning it. By looking at the work of philosophers like Descartes and Diderot, who questioned if machinic response was no evidence of higher, individuated intelligence, she reveals how the drive to “execute” underpins and defines desire in such a way.

But why has the machinic response caused such a destabilizing effect? The very nature of the self makes it difficult for others to understand or even care. We are driven by a need to possess something valuable to us, including something that will validate our existence and provide us with pleasure. So we create a bubble of our own making around ourselves, denying the presence of others and bolstering our reality.

What we may define as an accurate simulation is a collection of simulacra, a vast field of color-coded icons that represents the bounds of plausibility for that simulation. In the case of simulated objects, meaning-making is built on a speed of access rather than precision.

A can of paint may be applied to a space, but it does not follow that it has the same meaning as the can of paint that preceded it. Even in the most abstract terms, the quality of an object or location must be determined by the context of its placement within that environment. If one imagines any simulated object that resembles a human body, there is the potential for uncanny sensation. For example, the shape of a cheek or the placement of the eyes reveals a history of trauma and adaptation. The digital body is uniquely prepared for these experiences. While other factors can mimic these spaces, the digital simulation is predicated on the idea that it can.

It is a shifting of objects and space to one another, a constant shifting of surface area and texture. And this is a matter of perception. What do we perceive as accurate? What does it feel like, to be honest? In the case of the simulated object, the answer is often straightforward. It can only be perceived as such. It has the quality of recreation, unlike the natural things. It has all the hallmarks of a pursuit, just as the original form. But it lacks overt references to the initial subject matter. In the case of runestones, the image of a person or a place has all the hallmarks of the picture, but it lacks overt references to the person or business.

In the simulation, the referent is present but not as visible. It is buried in the richness of graphic detail, in the soft swashes of a vintage font. But the presence of this abstract notion of a person or place remains. In the mind, what was once real is now unreal.
This border between the real and unreal form is maintained in graphic design in that the representation of reality is often questioned or questioned. Reality itself is often presented as a hard limit, a hard limit that can only be reached through constant, repeated verification. Even in the most abstract terms, certain aspects of experience are determined by the nature of the “real” they are posited to be. For example, a red apple is red because it was produced in the field of human activity; Cain’s red ochre apple is red because it was planted in the area of human activity. Similarly, a white marble must be white because it was “pre-white.” Even in the most abstract terms, certain aspects of taste and smell are determined by the nature of the “real” they are posited to be. The quality of the liquid in a glass is determined by the presence of hydrogen peroxide on its surface, as with pure table salt.

Conversely, the color of the bottle is determined by the presence of phosphorescent chloride in its glass, as is the case with liminal white paint.

These are physical forms that attempt to question and define the nature of being. They are not always clear-cut, and occasionally they conflict in some way. But as designers, we can use these as a stepping stone to better understand the whole field we occupy. Further still, through discussing the relational, we can appreciate the nontrivial miasma we exist in and how one might navigate between them.

That miasma separates “the wheat from the chaff,” as it were. It takes on its logic and systems of meaning-making that separate it from other varieties. In the case of wheat, it has these structural qualities that make it usable in different contexts, like making bread or pasta. But in the case of rye, these same qualities are absent, and its surface messaging becomes meaningless. So it becomes something that is neither, which is why it is so difficult for designers to translate these into recognizable forms.

But that same miasma separates urban landscapes from nature reserves. It is a hard-fought and rare outcome in simulation, much like catching a glimpse of a jewel from a distance. But it is rare and often unobserved in such events.

Finding a section of road without a 360 view implies an unforeseen presence, something beyond the world’s natural laws. Without the guarantee of human intervention, the scene would remain liminal. And in this way, simulation becomes a celebration of liminality, an expanse of space that is orbited but rarely explored.

This in-between space separates ersatz intimacy from “realness,” a quality that is closely related to Freud’s concept of desire, described in the following passage:

“Where such men love, they have no desire; where they desire, they cannot love.”
This becomes a personal issue, not just an academic one. I struggle with this myself. I find myself drawn to the formal qualities of simulation, the formal gestures, and the language of command. They are beautiful and inviting, and I desire to emulate them in others.

But I also wonder if there is a softer, more relaxed way to simulate this kind of physicality. There is, and I struggle with it regularly. There’s something juvenile in my desire to see simulation become “real.” I think it’s adolescent in its madness.

I believe digital designers should emulate the physical forms that surround us, not just the stylishly designed but the everyday, commonplace encounters we have with the world.

And there is also a selfishness in my work, an impatience that something is being overlooked or pushed away from. But I also find myself reaching out to people pushing back against systems I care deeply about.

I find myself reaching out to people I don’t yet know, people I might not see again for years to come. Finding a kindred spirit through writing is one of the immediate actions I’ve started since starting this program.

I carry a personal sense of being with me, something that cannot be extinguished but must be worked with. This is consistency. I must push myself to write concisely and clearly, to reflectivity, clarity, and purpose. This is a process that takes time and is comfortable.

But through persistence and drive, I can pen concisely and clearly what has been said here. In addition to pushing myself to write clearly and concisely, I also find myself drawn to the ideas and perspectives of others. Consistency is a feeling thing.

It is not a substance. It is a balanced alchemical equation, and equilibrium is maintained through a constant flow of that divine liquid mix of blood and caffeine.

Consistency is a false flag, a fabrication that allows for the reproduction of a perfect simulation. If a billboard loudly proclaiming “Chaos” is defaced with the word “Livable,” the billboard will still read “Compliant with the law.” But if the text is altered to read “Not Compliant,” the billboard will no longer function as a representation of civic virtue.

It will instead function as a billboard for illegibility, a sign that illegibility is inherent to the space and that altering that signage will make it unrecognizable.

Therefore legibility becomes ancillary to the object function, it being only one element in a more extensive system. The semblance of a person or object becomes secondary to the related functionality.

If the form is too closely aligned to the referent, the show becomes a barrier to the viewer, a strong indicator of “real” nature.
Conversely, the simulated object must adhere to the natural laws of the world in some way, even if that means breaking them. If the form is too “plausibly” tangible, the illusion falters entirely as the plausibility is lost.

And this is just one system in a broad field, one interested in simulation as a process, not an end.

That sense of the commonplace is what separates us from other professionals. We can see it all the same; we are unaware of it. We see it clearly, and we act accordingly. Whereas other professionals, driven by their success, will often look beyond their field of study to see how others are living, we observe. And when we celebrate, we create tiny meaningful fissures through which others might pass. We nurture empathy, we care about the well-being of others, and we desire that closeness. But we are not philosophers. We can only observe.
MATERIAL FORMS
I'M NO NOVICE TO THE SYSTEM

GOVERNMENT WARNING:
(1) THESE, LIKE GATE, RETENTION, AND ENGAGEMENT, CAN BE
PRIORITIZED BASED ON YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE AND DESIRED OUTCOMES. I BELIEVE
THESE METRICS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARKETING CHANNEL, AND ARE
OPTIMIZED TO APPEAL TO A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE AND CHANNEL. THE REALITY IS THAT IN
THE SHORT-TERM, THIS KIND OF CONTENT IS GOING TO SELL LESS. IN THE LONG-TERM,
YOU HAVE TO MANAGE THAT SO THE ENGAGEMENT RATE IS HIGH.

EVERYTHING CAN BE INFLICTED BY THOUGHT.

GOVERNMENT WARNING:
(1) IVE STRUGGLED WITH IT ALL, IS THAT THINKING ABOUT
HOW ONE MIGHT FEEL IS OFTEN FAR BETTER THAN DOING ANYTHING AT ALL. REALIZING,
THEN, THAT IT IS JUST NOT IN OUR NATURE TO THINK MORE DEEPLY ABOUT THESE
THINGS, BUT PERHAPS THE SOLE INTENTION OF US LIVING IS TO FEEL BETTER, WE FIND
IT MORE EXPEDIENT TO IMAGINE THAT WE ARE GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF LIFE.

AT THE BOTTOM
ALL THE ANSWERS
IN THE SENSE REALM
She said “Everything in this room that will fit has been inside me.”

I was once drinking with a woman I wasn’t even sleeping with.
Simulation

Consists

Preparation

and

Ideation
Superbland

Visual Evidence

Simulation

Consists
Visual Evidence Superbland
map of a cut of Blue Fescue sod with relabeled beer cans, discarded cigarette packs, designed poster

PG 87. *

PG 88. Background: sod field in Providence, RI / Foreground: close-up photogrammetric map of Blue Fescue sod, relabeled beer cans, and discarded cigarette butts

PG 89. close-up photogrammetric map of Blue Fescue sod, relabeled beer cans, and designed poster

PG 90. Background: empty parking lot in the jewelry district of Providence, RI / Foreground: close-up photogrammetric map of re-designed cardboard texture

PG 91. photogrammetric map of designed cardboard sheets, ghillie suit, and anaglyphic 3D print

PG 92. Background: industrial park in Providence, RI / Foreground: photogrammetric map of designed cardboard sheets, syringe, cooking spoon, relabeled cans, and print of an abandoned lot in Providence, Rhode Island

PG 93. close-up photogrammetric map of designed cardboard sheets, syringe, cooking spoon, relabeled cans, and print of an abandoned lot in Providence, Rhode Island

PG 94. Background: industrial park in Providence, RI / Foreground: photogrammetric map of broken sidewalk surface in Fox Point Rhode Island, relabeled beer cans, and discarded cigarette pack

PG 95. *

PG 96. close up photogrammetric map of broken sidewalk surface in Fox Point Rhode Island, relabeled beer cans, and discarded cigarette pack

PG 97. *

PG 98. abandoned homeless encampment near the Providence RI rail yards

PG 99. *

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All front matter text created using a Runway ML AI generation model based on 55,000 words of text written by Dougal Henken between the years of 2021 and 2023 at the Rhode Island School of Design as part of the Master’s program in Graphic Design.

Edited by Sadia Quddus and Dougal Henken
A discussion of post-internet art practices, in relation to markets, value systems, democratic society, and the advancing age of blockchain and AI, conducted with artist Jonas Lund via Zoom during a morning in his Amsterdam based Studio. Jonas Lund is a Swedish conceptual artist who creates paintings, sculpture, photography, websites and performances that critically reflect on contemporary networked systems and power structures. An example of this is his exhibition “The Fear of Missing Out” (2013) at MAMA, Rotterdam.
All interviews conducted by Dougal Henken.
JL: Hey.
DH: Hey. How's it going?
JL: Good. How are you?
DH: Hanging in there. Yeah.
JL: Cool. (plays clarinet)
DH: Lovely music.
JL: Welcome to the Jonas Lund Open Forum.
DH: Fantastic.
JL: There's only one more person joining, I think, because this is the first time that it has actually happened because every time the scheduling always went off. But the background was that I got so many requests like yours. And then in order to max, optimize time a bit, I just decided to do them all at the same time.
DH: That's remarkable...
JL: Because so often there was a lot of questions that are the same. And then you also meet randoms online, which is fun.
DH: It is, yeah.
JL: Connecting people. Yeah. Very good. Where are you based?
DH: I'm in Providence, Rhode Island. So yeah, the East Coast of the US.
JL: It's early for you.
DH: Eight o'clock. It's a normal human time to be up, but it is early for me.
JL: I don't know man. I think the other person who's joining is in Italy somewhere.
DH: Oh, perfect.
JL: Internet.
DH: Yeah.
I think the other alternative is to make AC: Actually there is an app that makes the transcript.

Yeah? JL: Yeah?

AC: With no recording of the video, just audio.

JL: Yeah, exactly. Just the audio. Yeah, that's fine. For me it's fine.

In Milano, the cap... The financial center DH: Dougal...

AC: In Milano.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JL: It's an open forum. Yeah. You know so it's a public square.

AC: Yeah.

JL: Public square. Yeah.

AC: Cool. Nice. We have until three o'clock DH: We'll try and fix it.

JL: And then maybe that's the beginning of a JL: Yeah. Goddamn.

Arianna is in Italy.


AC: I'm finishing my Master of Science in Management DH: Yeah. Airbnb was started by somebody JL: Yeah. For better or for worse.

JL: And I'm working on my thesis and... yeah, it is focused on the narratives that are emerging from the digital arts frontier.

JL: I see.

AC: Yeah. So one question I would like to ask, JL: It's funny. Yeah, exactly. Okay. Does that answer your question?

AC: Because I usually interview artists and I JL: It's quite... There's many different... AC: Actually there is an app that makes the transcript.

DH: Yeah. Airbnb was started by somebody from my school. We're trying to correct it.

JL: So then, like the institution DH: Yeah. For better or for worse.

AC: I'm in the middle of my thesis right now, but I'm doing basically art studies in simulation and the aesthetics and theory of simulation. So that means DH: Yeah, exactly. Okay. At least this is motivation.


AC: I'm looking at it from a textural standpoint, JL: Yeah. For better or for worse.

JL: Yeah. So one question I would like to ask, AC: But where are you now?

JL: In case you didn't see it, I'm gonna show you. Just for the fun. This piece. Wait, this, this, this, wow. Amazing. It's coming soon.

Today, at seven o'clock. Yeah. Anyhow... Yeah. Cool. Okay. Arianna, take it away. What do you wanna know?

JL: Yeah. For better or for worse.

AC: Well you might as well as let me tell you what DH: I think the other alternative is to make AC: I mean, Airbnb is responsible for destroying so much of the rental availability market in Europe. It's like a... It's a disaster, right? I very much do not believe that technology will fix the world just like that. And I certainly do not believe that the Californian ideology of "technology is the answer to everything" is not necessarily the case either.
a 3D model of chicken schnitzel / the Via Roentgen Building on Bocconi University Campus, Milan, designed by Shelley McNamara and Yvonne Farrell for Grafton Architects Dublin / society meme

Graffiti stating “No to Airbnb” in Rethymno Greece / billboard advertisement near Airbnb HQ in San Francisco, California

Interview 01.27.23 Jonas Lund
DH: Looking at a lot of your work, especially some of your earlier pieces, you were working a lot with building work that was sort of AI generated. The work was not in its own way the value, right?

JL: Yeah, sure.

DH: It was sort of the system that it was in. So as an artist, what is the purpose of visual work in this kind of post-digital, post-internet art space in which we exist? And also, would you consider yourself a post-internet artist? Other people have called you that. I don’t know if that’s a designation you agree with.

JL: Not really an easy question! I think this is not an easy question to answer, but it’s true. The observation is true that most of the time, the truth is most of my work is actually in some way me trying to avoid making decisions about the final output, for… I don’t know why. There are many reasons for that. So then instead of saying “okay, so this is the artwork” I set up a system or a set of rules or a structure or a performative event. Then I can start this thing, and then the output is just what’s the output as a result of all the different parameters in the system. Kind of like fluxes, like a very conceptual art structure where programming, for me, there’s a lot of correlation between programming, conceptual arts, fluxes, it’s all of it. It’s a surprise.

Just like in programming you define all the different rules and then you hit the start button and then away the process goes. And then whatever comes out is consequently a result of the process. So then the process is the moment, and then the output is just the evidence, the receipt, the relic of the event somehow. And I think for me that’s mostly because I’m quite dubious about pretty things that hang on the wall, which I think is a very kind of annoyingly European context relation to art. That art always has to do something. It has to activate a certain discourse or a context. It has to increase its urgency to make visible the fact that the world, whereas in America, the context for making art is just like… it doesn’t matter. Just make it pretty because the market realities are completely different.

Because you have to survive. You have to sell. So then because decorative art in the European context is frowned upon because it’s not… it doesn’t have the… I mean this is very broad of course. Then in the US it’s fine. You’ll just be like “okay.” So it’s not so much about the work, it’s much more about the artist. “The artist comes from Colombia and he works with material from his childhood and he does this and this, and then it manifests this new type of very process-based abstraction paintings that are huge and cost a lot of money. Do you want that part of it or not?” Whereas the European context is like “the dialect of the discourse of the contemporary disposition of the Delucium Cartesian, whatever, blah, blah, blah.” It had me arrive at this destination where I feel like I want to talk about it… So I’m somewhere in the middle, I think, where I try not to be so dogmatic or binary about any of it, just like make shit and then see it. But certainly I like to make rules and structures, or play tricks. Like in this book, by opening this book you agree to all of the following terms which is nice. It’s asking “how can you subvert a book?”

DH: Yeah.

JL: You only get to see the terms you agree to by opening the book. It’s funny. It’s more. Maybe, actually in the end, it’s a very social practice because most of it is based on interactions of participants like the SLIM token project, which is an ongoing exploration of decision making processes or…

DH: Sure.

JL: Like “By Opening This Book…” or like this one, the “Talk to Me” book, it’s all the same. It’s exploring AI Chatbots by pretending to be one and then just give myself shit tons of work and stuff like that. I don’t know if that answers your question. It was a long answer.
DH: It does. Oh, definitely.


AC: Yeah. And I would...

JL: Is this, by the way, some feedback? Is this a cool forum?

AC: Yeah, it's good...

JL: It's quite nice, no?

AC: It's a very cool forum also because you answered something to one question that I had. So...


AC: Yes. Perfect. And in particular, because and it's funny... the European framework is totally true. My professor asked me to ask artists whether the recent boom of NFTs has impacted the discourse around the artist's practices. Not only in an economic way, but like in the way of approaching art. With your works that already have done it, like before the boom. I want to ask you if you can deeper dive into this.

JL: Into like the...

AC: Actually maybe there are two questions in this. The first one, in which way NFTs have influenced your practice in a way. And what do you think of... how do you perceive the change when NFTs happened, since you were working before that?

JL: Yeah, I understand, I think. Has it changed my practice? Not really, I still make similar work. It's more like where they end up somehow. I would say with NFTs there's a certain, huge potential for exploring that field because it's so rapidly developing that there's so many things that comes with them. A lot of problematics and a lot of opportunities, let's say. I mean opportunities maybe is a weird word, but for me, I would say the vast majority of NFT artworks is not like, it's not really art. It's art but then there's no real process behind it. There's very little thought process, very little consideration for it. It's more of a decorative computer generated market, but also a huge amount of speculative market analysis for buying and selling.

Like the Bored Ape Yacht Club is like... I don't know. What the hell is that? At the same time, there's a small portion... actually this is similar with paintings. Most paintings are not very convincing either. The vast majority of painting is not so good. But it's not that it's useless. It's just that it's not fantastic. The same with most cultural production it's like to reach high level. But in that space, there's a bunch of works that are very significant, important, and good. And I think JPEG... I'm not sure if you're following JPEG's canon. Let me find it and pull it up. Cause I think that's a very interesting resource to look into. JPEG is this NFT organization group that is based in Berlin where they do voting, like community voting, on a canon to establish a sort of a case.

So these are the significant works within certain categories. This is the conceptual canon, and they also have a dynamic canon, which is like NFTs that are continuously evolving their experience by updating their appearance, et cetera. I think that is a fantastic resource to look into, to just find the good works somehow. So for sure, it's changed. It's somehow changed the potential for a lot of people to make money in a different way. That is how, I don't know, let's say it's expanding the field of art collecting a lot. There's thousands of new collectors in the world, which is great. Bigger audience! Bigger, but with that comes a lot of problems too, or things to explore. That somehow answers the first question. I think it hasn't changed my practice much because I still... I'm still concerned with the same things.

It's just that I'm making more. I have more options in terms of how it's distributed, which is really nice. I talk to people once in a while that are just categorically dismissing all NFTs and others who are categorically 100% for NFT.
And I think both those positions are really missing a lot of nuance. I think it’s very helpful to approach that and look at that field with more nuance because there’s so much garbage. But there’s a lot of great stuff too. It’s not like all NFTs suck, and it’s not like all NFTs are great. Like everything else in the world, nothing is really binary. It’s really hard.

But most people love to be binary because it’s much easier and you can just relax. It’s like, “okay, I decide I hate all of this shit” and that’s it. But that’s just the first question. The second question was… What was the second question?

Since you were working before...

Ooh if I felt robbed by the attention of new people in the space because I was around before. No, it would’ve been hard to predict that would happen. But then I think it happened because… this is like Dean Kissick. He wrote a column for Spike magazine. He was on some podcast I listen to, and I think his theory is really good. It happened, because there was a pandemic and lockdown, and too many dudes had too much time and nothing to do. That’s why you got the NFT spike. And I think that makes sense somehow. But it also, of course, started because of the hyper-manipulation of the Beeple sale, which was just a complete set up. But it would have been hard to predict that that would come somehow. But finally, there was this, I think Brad Troemel did a talk on that, early 2000, 2001, I think it is. Where he makes the correlation between the merge of the art world and Silicon Valley. Silicon Valley finally gets a purpose for art and crypto gets an aesthetic through the art and the art world finally has an “in” with the Silicon Valley cash and money. Because they’ve been trying for that for so long that it’s also a confluence of aligned incentives, let’s say. It’s quite interesting. I don’t know. The more interesting question is to try and predict where it’s going, what’s gonna happen. Is it gonna be something that is now around forever, or is it gonna collapse or is there more utility in it or not? That’s quite hard to predict. I’m not quite sure.

Yeah. Dougal?

Well I guess I’ll continue that. A lot of your work examines systems of manipulation and systems of power.

And you especially have spent a lot of time analyzing and trying to affect how the art market perceives you in this very critical way, even going so far as to buy power data registers, the lists of the people you needed to impress in this pantheon of gallery and curators. So this is a question we as designers grapple with, because graphic design can be inherently evil in many ways. How do you operate in this system as an artist, in a anti-capitalist or trans-capitalist way? And still exist and make money and keep balanced? Basically how do you sleep at night?

Yeah, it’s like in the late stage capitalistic way. I did a interview once, years ago, about the SLIM token project. In The New Yorker, where the journalist said I had coined a new art form, which is “performance art capitalist.” Which I think was really funny because to perform the structure in which you’re operating forms a kind of dubious position, let’s say. It’s very ambiguous because you’re both having the cake and eating it too. [laughter] Because if you look at all the classic institutional critiques like Hans Haacke or whatever, Andrea Fraser and all these people, Hans Haacke has been teaching his whole career essentially, to have autonomy from an art market, to be able to have some distance. Obviously, he’s super successful. So then he can also just benefit from doing both in some way.

So critiquing the system that feeds you. You bite the hand that feeds you, but you still get fed, which I think it’s quite an interesting approach. [laughter] ‘Cause if you look at all the classic institutional critiques like Hans Haacke or whatever, Andrea Fraser and all these people, Hans Haacke has been teaching his whole career essentially, to have autonomy from an art market, to be able to have some distance. Obviously, he’s super successful. So then he can also just benefit from doing both in some way.
Interview

JL: That tension is somehow really interesting aspect of it, I think. There is a text by Andrea Fraser from the 2014 Whitney Bien- nial in the catalog that perfectly captured that tension. She talks about all the different art worlds, like the educational part of the art world, the decorative, high-end art market art world, the local community-driven art world, and how we all deal with the commercial part, the cultural part, and how we all exist in the tension between all of these different aspects of the art world.

AC: But how can I find it? Let me see if my research tabs are accurate because I have a secret part of my website which only I have access to. But I'll see if I can find it. I know I sent it to a friend, so I should be able to find it. Ah, it's called, There Is No Place Like Home. That one and also this article was very good by Isabelle Graw in Texte zur Kunst, Welcome To The Resort. Yeah. That was super nice.

DH: Perfect.

JL: I think. It's tricky, but I can send you the link. IYeah, that makes sense.

AC: I'd like to speak to...

DH: Thank you.

AC: No Place Like Home, it's very nice from the "institutional critique" point of view of how to deal with all this never-ending ambiguity. I met Andrea Fraser when I was doing a residency in Rio, and then she had gone completely into psychoanalysis, as a form because as an institutional critique, you hit the point where none of your work makes sense anymore.

JL: Right.

AC: You can just act so depressed because nothing changes and you just continue to make the same point over and over and again. She got snowed into psychoanalysis to try and find some sense of the importance of shit. [chuckle] But one of the points she made during that is because there's so much ambiguity in my work and in psychoanalysis, ambiguity is not a sign of weakness but it's an indication of a very strong conflict. It's a conflict that produces the ambiguity. And I think that is very accurate, in that there is a conflict between embracing the art world mechanism and demystifying it at the same time. And seemingly that is not necessarily very appreciated by an art world because it's so much in the myth of the value of the unit. We say we moved on from the artist genius, so much in the myth of the value of the unit.

JL: Kinda. I guess the question is about the tension between the emerging NFT art market and the established institutional art world and art market. And I think that tension is already not so much there anymore. You'll see that very quickly every institution is also interested in making money, because there's a lot of money, and maintaining their power of taste and influence. This is also something Brad mentioned. I don't know how accurate it is but I think it's quite interesting to reference because there's a larger transformation of value production in the art world, which I totally agree with him about. The traditional model used to be that artists make work, galleries, dealers sell work, collectors buy work, and the museum as the institution validates the work, validates the value and says "Okay." So when the work hits the museum, the collector is happy because the price increases because the work is deemed significant based on the arts professional.

JL: Many questions.

AC: Yeah. It's amazing because the first part of my thesis is exactly to investigate what I call the institutionalization process, a sense how the art system, the traditional art system, mediates the different worlds that you were mentioning, to institutionalize or to make insiders within this system some of the transactional practices that were considered as controversial before or marginalized in some way.

DH: Legitimacy.

JL: Credibility? Yeah, legitimacy is the word. Yeah. The switch is from the institution to the fans. So now the fans are the validators of the work, which is KAWS and Banksy and Beeple is the ultimate example of, because this is not based on institutional recognition necessarily. It's much more based on okay fans, millions of followers, social capital, social media capital, basically, which I think is somehow like in the NFT space. You see it, no doubt. The more social capital you have, the better you will do in this market. Absolutely, there's no doubt about that.

JL: Let me see if I can't find it. It's very good.

AC: Many questions.

JL: Yeah, perfect.
"He explained every piece of art to me. I told him art is subjective, and he said, ‘No, it’s sculpture, I’m pretty sure.'"
In Europe, it’s much more driven by metrics, such as visitors, because there’s so much state sponsoring. But the museums are also struggling for their own relevance. So then they have to stage shows, which attract a lot of people. What attracts a lot of people? Banksy, KAWS, all this garbage. That’s that. In the end, the ultimate value makers in that are Silicon Valley, the algorithm that determines. Everybody has to become Mr. Beast, basically. Perfectly packaged, 10 minutes of nonsense virality and then that’s it. That’s the art. And there’s no space for long-term consideration, long-term discourse building implications of this thing, but maybe that’s a more fair reflection of our culture anyway.

Because it’s getting faster and faster and much more surface-based and then that’s it. Then it’s just trying to unravel and reverse engineer the algorithms in order to be good or to be successful. I don’t know if I’m completely wrong with that, but it’s starting to feel like that’s the move. And I think that’s quite depressing.

AC: Interesting, thank you. But which was the reference, that I write it down? It’s Brad Troemel’s.

JL: Brad Troemel did a talk on NFTs early 2021. It was on his Patreon. I think you can find it on YouTube, maybe.

AC: Perfect.

JL: Brad Troemel, I have the YouTube link somewhere. Now it’s maybe a bit... You can for sure critique it in a way, and it’s not iron-clad. It was a long time ago. But let me see if I can find it... I’m just looking for it in my search. Yeah, I got it. Yeah.

AC: Thank you.

JL: I’m linking Patreon links. [chuckle] That’s my account. But it’s a nice thing to watch.

AC: Perfect.
JL: Instagram is not gonna be around for much longer honestly if they continue with their shitty trying to be TikTok. But even TikTok is kinda boring these days, so I don't know. It's like... It's really only very specific works that do well on that, and I think there's still enough separation between an established traditional art world of “these are the most liked, these are the recognized” very important seminal works that will do terrible on social media. And that's fine.

That's a good thing because it's a different thing. I think the long-term goal of artists, at least it used to be, the long-term goal, is to be eternalized in the archive, to have your work end up in the museums and then end up in the catalogs, end up in the seminal books, in the important writings so you can counter your fear of dying and becoming irrelevant [chuckle] That you will be remembered.

I think that is somehow, in the long-term more interesting than optimizing for a quick click, although quick clicks probably leads to much better sales. For sure.

DH: Yeah.

JL: But then I think, again, optimizing for sales doesn't really work either. It never worked for me at least. Anytime I try to make work to be sold, they don't sell. But when I make works that are important to me, they do much better. So I don't know, it's a complicated issue... Because also it's a really interesting question about your audience. How does one relate to one's audience? Because without the audience, your work also doesn't have a place to exist, and then it's the question of “who's your audience?” Is it the traditional art world? Is it the random internet browser dude? Is it like influencers on TikTok? Is it the crypto bros? Who's the audience? And then how do you build and maintain this audience in a way?

I don't want to think about it too much because it's also, the more you think about an audience, the more you're tailoring your work, which is very graphic design.
Live installation of the “Talk to Me” chatbot at the Virtual Perception exhibition at Huset For Kunst og Design in Holstebro, Denmark in February 2017
JL: And there's this nonstop crypto talk like GM, GM, GE, GA, GN etcetera, but I don't know if that's like a meaningful interaction with an audience or not. [laughter]

AC: But do you use it?

JL: I think probably it's not. I mean this is also a sort of audience interaction in a way. I would say if anything this is a forum I'd prefer much more because we talk about things then make things happen, which is much more interesting. I think it hasn't changed that much, it keeps on growing a bit, maybe, but I think my relation to it is quite clear, although I'm not sure. So one part is the audience, like in this forum. And the other is the audience as performers in the work and there's a difference. I think the audience as the performers in work, that audience is much more just performing. They're performing based on the system or the setup or the rules or the structure or whatever.

And that's many more like extras in a way. It could be the one or the other. That sounds a bit harsh. It's not expressed necessarily, but it's more like... the interaction happens based on the rules I set up. So it's much more like, "Okay, so this is the type of interaction that can occur." Whereas this is an open forum and then that's nicer in a way. It's more unscripted, let's say. That's a good reference actually. Let's say the works are like a director making a script for the film, and then within that film you have interactions, but they're sort of pre-defined, whereas this is unscripted, just straight up interaction. I find it interesting. Many other artists I know don't give a shit at all about their audience.

Like never interact at all, which is maybe easier because then you don't have to listen to the feedback. [laughter] But yeah, I mean, there's something you learn also when you're in school. You're studying art, you have feedback continuously all the time, from the professors, from your peers. You have a context in which you discuss what you're working on. But when you graduate, maybe the tip is to establish a group of friends that you have a continuous sort of exchange with. Because otherwise you feel very lonely. You work on something, it's released and then that's it. You live and die by the algorithm. YOLO, see you later, good luck, have fun. I don't know. It's tricky.

DH: Yeah.

JL: Yeah.

DH: Yeah. Well, I'm trying to pick questions now that will help Arianna as well, but I have to ask like a very touchy-feely one instead.

JL: Oh, yeah, go for it.

DH: Which is in this idea of audience interaction, while half of your work is sort of about systems and systems of power, the other half really seems to be about human intimacy in digital spaces in some way. You have these very close connections talking with people. I saw one of your earlier works, the one-to-one. I remember the YouTube interviewer that was sort of talking about it. It was back-to-back with a dating show. And in this weird way, it was like dating.


DH: Right. "The Impact." That was the one.

JL: Yeah, exactly.

DH: Yeah. So I guess that's sort of my question. Does human connection play a role in your work in some way? Because much of it has this sort of exterior feeling of systems and data, power management, the digital age, but underneath it, there is a very palpable tenor of humanity.

JL: I mean, it's all about humans... I mean, it's all about that in the end, you know? Yeah. Because most of it is like "okay, so, but what is it like to be human in 2022 or 2023?"
DH: Sure.

JL: Because you have to deal with all this shit that's going on. Even the system based setups are also in the end about what it's like, you know? Because nobody really knows or likes this endless question of "how does it change us and how do we change?" I think it's true for sure. And I think I often get accused of being very cynical about things. But I don't think that's true at all. I'm in fact very non-cynical. But it just comes out as being much more like the British approach of being skeptical of certain things, being skeptical of certain promises or not. And then trying to bring the humanity back into it somehow. Whether that comes from revealing certain... "making visible" is the classic phrase. That's the classic art world sentence. But it's really good because it making visible certain behaviors, certain structures, certain biases, certain things that happen, and then letting that play out. So yeah, for sure. I mean, it's important. Yeah. Last question, Arianna. We keep it a bit shorter.

AC: Last question is what are you working on right now?

JL: That's such a good question. Then I can show you. At the moment, this "art plugs" drop is finished. But it's releasing today. So that's what I'm stressing about. But I'm gonna show you this one that's almost finished so I don't have to do anything and it's nice work. Basically this is a NFT piece because there's so much about winning and losing in this space. It's like a racing game that races itself and you win or lose based on the properties of your mint rather than anything that is in your control. So like, if you get the mint with the fastest spaceship, you get rewarded. And if you get the mint with the worst map, you get rewarded. But what's coming up that is most relevant for you is this exhibition called In the Middle of Nowhere, which is an exhibition made entirely in collaboration with ChatGPT.

I'm in the wrong window, sorry. It's always so hard to find. I have too many windows. It's an exhibition which is made entirely in collaboration with ChatGPT. So very, let's say, "in the moment" because ChatGPT has not been around very long. So that will be a show, which includes a couple of different works, including a new video piece called "The Future of Nothing," which is a 10 to 12 minute video piece focusing on a couple of short stories that have been written in collaboration with ChatGPT about what's gonna happen in the future, the future of nothing, the future of work. What about all the people who lose their jobs to this technology? It's narrated by celebrity AI voices and set to images of Stable Diffusion. I can send you a preview, but it's top secret. Yeah, I will do that.

And then there's a bunch of Stable Diffusion artworks. I'm also doing a piece which is revealing the simulacra aesthetics dataset, which was the foundation for the creation of the LAION-Aesthetics dataset, which was used to train Stable Diffusion. It was basically 40,000 prompts that generated 300,000 images that were rated on their aesthetics by random people. So from one to 10, based on their rating, that created the dataset that LAION used to make an aesthetics predictor. So you take an image and then it predicts if it's a pretty picture or not a pretty picture. So that's somehow the foundation for all of Stable Diffusion's aesthetics, which is super interesting. So then I'm setting that up as a sort of installation that looks like someone that uses a desktop to visit that piece. You have a cursor moving around and some music starts and then the user rates it. He's rating things.

So this is just random selections from the dataset on the computer and then you see, it reveals the ratings in a sort of never-ending desktop install kinda way. If he rates a five and then he submits his ratings.
Interview

Jonas Lund

01.27.23

JL: Then sometimes he toggles to Discord (a fake Discord) to write some shitty messages. [chuckle] Very funny. “The serialist portrait of a blind minmal digital portrait illustration.” It’s so strange on how you actually deal with a dataset of even 300,000 images. It’s just such a big data stack in the traditional sense of what it means. Big data is the data that is so large that you cannot process it. No human can process it. You have to write a script to deal with the data. And in this case, it’s a really relaxing… that’s so weird, but relaxing kind of, slow reveal. And this piece would run nonstop forever. But then you can get some sort of idea of it. So that’s it. And then there’s some other tapestry paintings and some other shit show. This text has also obviously been written by ChatGPT. Everything is like ChatGPT.

“In its forthcoming exhibition in the Middle of Nowhere Contemporary, conceptual Swedish artist Jonas Lund seeks to interrogate the multifarious impacts of artificial intelligence on the production evaluation of contemporary art. Through a series of thought-provoking works, he endeavors to unpack the ways in which AI is influencing the creative evaluation of art.” It’s like, you have to prompt ChatGPT to be more intellectual, otherwise it sounds like a really weird thing.

DH: Yeah.

JL: “Exhibition market.” “Groundbreaking moment in the art world.” It’s just the first show to be created entirely in collaboration with AI model, namely ChatGPT.

JL: Anyway, that’s it. That’s the first week of February. And then I’m gonna keep on working on that I think this year, because I think that’s somehow the upcoming major shift in the art world. Art production completely dominated by AI. I’ll send you the video, but promise to not share it with anybody because it’s top secret.

AC: Okay.

JL: Yeah, yeah.

DH: Perfect.

JL: And if you do, I will know it was you.

AC: Yes. [laughter]

DH: Will you know which one of us though?

JL: No, I will blame both of you.

DH: Okay.

JL: And I will destroy your reputation whenever I can. [laughter] No, it’s okay. It’s alright.

AC: Super interesting really.

DH: Yeah.

JL: Okay. You get last question because now apparently Google Meet is like hour-based, so we don’t have so much time.

DH: That’s fine. Yeah. If we get cut off, it’s the way it goes. It’s been very good working with both of you. My final question, you’ve sort of already been talking about this and maybe are demonstrating it. What will the role of the visual maker be or the creative be in the approaching age of AI where art and aesthetics, good writing, bad writing all can be made so quickly? What is our purpose now? What are we supposed to be doing?

DH: Yeah.

JL: It’s a good question. It’s a good question because I don’t know if it changes before and after because it’s the same sort of imperative to observe the world and like try and make sense of it, right? Somehow in all the different systems and all the different changes. I don’t believe in art. I don’t necessarily, and maybe this is where I’m a bit cynical. I don’t believe in art’s potential for change that much. So I think it’s more of a place where you can experiment with other things or other thought models of other ideas as sort of, just explorations of alternatives to the dogma, right, to the default, to the seller. And for sure, art can change people’s minds, I believe maybe, or at least it can make visible certain things that weren’t entirely visible before. For sure that’s possible. But let’s be honest, most of the art audience is very left-leaning or certainly not right wing.

JL: There’s very few right wing people in the art world in general, in terms of in the production, whereas the collectors very often are very right wing because they’re very rich.

DH: Yeah.

JL: At least on the higher up end. So there’s some tension there too. But I think that’s why decorative work’s still the best, right? Because you don’t have to think too much. [laughter] I don’t know. But I think the role is then to be, I don’t know if you saw Nick Cave’s comment in The Guardian or whatever about ChatGPT’s total garbage song that was modeled after him.

DH: Was it like Murakami’s quote about AI generation?

JL: Mockery.

AC: Yeah.

DH: Mockery, yeah.

JL: So he calls it like “With all the love and respect in the world, this song is bullsh*t. A grotesque mockery of what it is to be human.”

AC: Yeah. Perfect. Yeah. It’s gonna be a mess, but...

DH: Right.

JL: And I think that is a really nice, because its kind of captures this difference. But eventually, these models will be so good that there is no difference. Already ChatGPT is based on GPT-3 and GPT-4 is coming out really soon.

AC: Yeah, for sure.

JL: And if you do, I will know it was you.

AC: Thank you so much.

JL: Lemme know if there’s any follow ups and also maybe if you want, if you get the transcript, you can just share it with Dougal also. And then we have...

AC: Yeah.

DH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whoever, gets it first.

JL: You can send it to me and I can forward it.

AC: You can send it to me and I can forward it.

JL: So he calls it like “With all the love and respect in the world, this song is bullsh*t. A grotesque mockery of what it is to be human.”

AC: Yeah. Perfect. Yeah. It’s gonna be a mess, but...

DH: That’s okay.

JL: And maybe it’s useful anyway. It’s like copy/paste some parts.

AC: Yeah, yeah. Of, of course. Yeah.

DH: That’s okay.

JL: You can fight against it and you can try and ban AI art. But in the future, the models will be so good that there will be no way of telling them apart. I think I’m glad I’m not a painter because it will be… I know it’s really hard to make good paintings. It’s very hard and AI is not gonna make that easier. But it’s hard in general to make good work. But I’m happy I’m like a conceptual artist because then I can just make snarky comments about it. It’s tricky.

DH: Perfect. Yeah. It’s gonna be a mess, but...

AC: You can send it to me and I can forward it.

JL: You can send it to me and I can forward it.

AC: You can send it to me and I can forward it.

DH: That’s okay.

JL: You can send it to me and I can forward it.

AC: You can send it to me and I can forward it.

DH: That’s okay.

JL: You can send it to me and I can forward it.
An avatar of Jonas Lund walking around his virtual exhibition space “On This Day,” for KÖNIG GALERIE in Decentraland’s virtual meeting space.
Arianna is a graduate of the master’s program at Università Bocconi in Milan, Italy. Her research is focused on artist interactions with market spaces, specifically in the space of digital and post-internet art. As of 2023, she works as a Junior Project Manager for Milano & Partners, overseeing Foreign Direct Investments & Innovative Services.
An urban space is defined by its structural qualities, arrangement, and the relation it has to its surroundings. These are not always visible, but they are felt. Any number of external stimuli, including vision, build the understanding of what it means and feels like to exist in a particular location. These factors are regularly considered when something is made. When considering space formation from this perspective, one can understand that space is a simulation. It is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. It is a fabrication combining many other simulated parts, materials, and elements to shape an area into its own experience. An array of objects defines the spaces in which they exist. This is the concept underpinning architecture and urban design, that space can be molded into an experience by ordering elements. For example, finding warning cones, barriers, and fencing arranged in an area signifies a construction site.

The structure of an abysmal space is often the same. In the case of many of these spaces, the detailing is far more considered than the original conception. If an area lacks the original elements that make it a recognizable form, it does not exist. Perhaps the most famous example of this is Object-Spatial Dissociation, in which the temporal and parietal lobes of the brain fire simultaneously, eliminating our ability to discern the details of space and creating a “what-where” sensual state. In graphic terms, the scale of space is often so vast that it allows only architects to define what they are, preventing any occupant from genuinely understanding their fundamental nature. Even then, understanding its whole nature is far more difficult than one might imagine, at least in graphic terms.

Any abutment becomes read through graphic symbols, the repetition of which creates a sense of the familiar in the viewer’s mind. Thus, the architectural form is already mediated, and the emblematic form often serves only to reinforce the impression. The wide veneer of modern urban infrastructure is built on a history of research, adaptation, and engineering process that has shaped the course of human construction. The gleaming simulation of space is no longer just the result of human labor, but of careful consideration of every facet of the form, from material to optical quality. The precision of the state implies that there is another entity in its making, something that wants you to believe in it, much like the object. The gleaming simulation is a fraud, a bid to convince you of the veracity of the form, of its integrity as an individual form. There is a kind of seduction to it, an almost sexual tension, as the form strives to convince you of its veracity.

In the digital world, the quality of the form is measured in quantities of seconds rather than in the actual objects themselves. Replicated forms and spaces are created using rapid and continuous generation, often to make reproduction cheap and easy. This practice of making and remaking is a means of simulation and simulacra in itself. Spatially mapped locations reveal urban fluctuation. These places are hard to define but are ready for study, being subjective, standing in opposition to narrative “places,” spatial constructions that reassert identity and purpose through filmic cues, as in video games or films.
This separation goes back to the origins of simulation itself as a sacred and holy practice, a means of narrowing the divide between God and man. Art and design sought to reproduce the definable within a given pantheon, Calvary Hill in Jerusalem or the Great Synagogue of Rome. Even current simulations bend to a rigid yet more material capitalist “faith” system, with renderings of fast cars, vast homes, and expensive clothing. Such spaces of wealth are only sometimes visible. They develop in silence, hidden from view but ripe for exploitation. Many times, these spaces of wealth are made manifest through elaborate design. Consider the vast array of objects that comprise our day-to-day lives. We have brought together all the things we desire all at once. As such, we become commodities ourselves. We have become what Thomas Schelling might call “consuming organs.” We are not just machines but also flesh and blood, outdated, meat machines that digital processes have begun to replace. We have become commodities through our production and consumption of these simulacra. And as such, we must also consider the spaces of the discarded that also find their way into our lives. The sphere of desire is no longer restricted to the traditional notions of romantic love and commitment. It is a flexible field, just like any other zone of experience. Any sexual being can be a subject of desire, just as any object can.

Consider then how many thousands of miles of space are non-space. How much land can be navigated to and from, not just through? Much of this space takes on this sense of liminality, an area between areas, a location that is not a location. Pure simulated space is just as liminal. It is an area with a “real” correlation, an existing area it was mapped on.

The zone of images created is based on physical details that can be walked through, around, and interacted with in many of the same ways as the real ones. But it does not exist.

Our surroundings are structured by visual messages and signifiers that define our existence. The quality of that space matters, and it is up to the designer to determine how that space is perceived and reacted to. This is where graphic design intersects with other humanities and the theoretical politics of visual design in general, as it helps to define the within- and between-subjective states of space. To do this, we must look toward the phenomena itself. What is the object? What is its nature? Is it bright and lively or grim and stagnant? What is its surface? The answer to these questions will determine the heart of the space it inhabits. And the more open an area, the more clearly defined the subject states of that space. While the details of these forms are often haptic, they are not insistent. They are merely graphic representations, gestures toward the nature of the condition. The shape of a hand, the color of a cheek, and the texture of a lip are all determined by the perception of its surroundings. The condition does not need to be precise to the level of the “photographer,” but it can be close enough to the “subject” to create the illusion that there is a body there.

The color of hair may change from person to person, even within the same frame. For example, the warmth of a color can be revealed in a different lighting or set of conditions, just as the shape of the hand can.
Eye movements are determined by the proximity to the “seeing” eye, and the simulation of reality is created by moving that eye toward the “seeing” object. The arrangement of these graphic forms makes the “subject” a vague but accurate term.

“Persuade, Change, Influence” drive most simulations, and they tend to center around things that can be immediately perceived and, therefore, easy to change. Things like weather, water, and power are easy to change. This is more of a systemic problem. It means that a community or nation must constantly convince the outside world of its integrity by any means necessary. Any change that occurs in the realm of simulation is seen as a threat to the institutions surrounding it. And this is more because the realm of simulation represents an ideal, a territory of possibility. Whatever good or bad may exist in that dream space has the potential to bleed into the very real spaces of “the real.” As such, progress in simulation presents the potential for actual shifts, a threatening prospect for whoever might currently be at the helm of power.

The destabilization of subjectivities through simulation is one of the primary pathways toward the recontextualization of the subject, object, and function. Simulation is, in a way, the re-affirmation of reality, of a kind of ‘faithfulness’ to the given data.

By altering the simulation itself, we can re-examine these hidden but intimate spaces. And this is the most crucial part of simulation overall, a faithful, almost divine representation of the truth. The uncanny is a reproduction of this, a more open and experimental space for new, unforeseen creative ideas.

It is a process that extends beyond the individual toward society. It is a process of decentering, of making less of what is lacking and more of what is valuable. Excellence is not merely an individual trait. It is a collective one formed through experience and habit. Excellence is measured in multiple dimensions and distributed across society. In graphic design, it is valued not just for its surface messaging but for its ability to communicate value and purpose.

The uncanny simulation beckons the viewer, promises something that is not understood and pushes the boundaries of representation. The image must be repeated many times to create the “felt” experience of the object. This feint of reality in simulation relies on implicit commands coded into a space. This can be referred to as its “useability.” If one approaches a simulated door, it is expected to behave as a physical door might. It will either open or be opened later after performing a series of actions. Playing with and against these expectations can enhance or diminish a sense of digital space.

In most cases, the digital space strives to replicate reality in the finest detail, as doing so enforces those expectations of “usability” and creates a more immersive experience. Even in the most abstract terms, certain expectations related to the body’s adventure in space must be maintained.

Moving forward towards an object makes it more significant in the field of view. It promises access, a sense of belonging, to a place that is not there. The place that is not there is perceived as accurate, as in “real.”
The quality of the digital space is measured by how real it seems to be. In many ways, the quality of the digital experience is directly related to the degree of simulation. If the level of simulation is too high, the experience becomes “bland” and unreadable. If the simulation is too low, the experience becomes “plausibility,” a series of correlative events that indicate whether or not the referent is plausible. The visual markers of plausibility can be turned on or off in many ways, creating stilted expectations and escalating the threat of simulation. If the visual quality of the space is too high, the experience becomes “perceivable” and unreadable. The potential for deception in simulation is now so close to being a reality, that any hint of its being extinguished becomes something of an unignorable issue.

Still, the uncanny seduces us in a divine way, creating a sense that there is something beyond the object. The face of a person or animal is not fixed in space but is subject to change. For example, the beginning of a flower may change from bud to blossom to wilted petals, just as the texture of a leaf may change from green to gray. The “in-between” between these states is often blurry, and the viewer is not always sure which.

Turning that object field into something that can be touched and interacted with creates a sense of openness and possibility that develops overtime with comfort and experience. The more open a space, the more alive and alive it feels. The simulated object can then be implemented in a variety of ways to create a sense of freedom that comes with the experience of the thing.

We can see this in how digital objects often follow the directions of physical spaces. For example, they might move in a straight line when not in use, but the simulation immediately changes when touched. The orientation of the digital object follows the directions of the environment in which it is built. Even in the most abstract terms, certain aspects of the body must be perceived in space to create the illusion of a sense of reality. The hand must be positioned to touch the simulated wall, and the flow of the writing must be perceived to feel like it is moving across the surface of a physical page, complete with resistance and give. These are physical gestures toward the science of physics as we understand it, moving signifiers of “real” life.

That sense of openness and access separates us from other simulation technologies. Facial recognition technologies work in levels of probability or “confidence.” By analyzing the features of an individual, a system can process the probable identity of that figure. It can be confident that the individual is human and only slightly less sure of their gender. From there, data like age, ability, and health can all be determined with less secure confidence. This extends to object analysis. Certain species of plants, animals, or objects are recognizable, and machine learning systems can identify them reasonably confidently.

Anyone who has used a CAPTCHA (short for “Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart”) has helped machine learning to separate cars from buses, bicycles, and bridges in an image field. Adversarial patterns use systems of markers to generate modern camouflage that lowers the confidence of an optical network through image confusion.
Where one might see a person dressed in an aggressively patterned shirt, the next might see a person with a physical disability or a substance abuse problem. These are all areas of simulation pushing against convention and perhaps towards Freud's death drive (in some distant way), and it is fascinating to see how these ideas are reproduced in practice.

But openness concerning space is an entirely different issue. It is a continuing problem in simulation. Even the most open spaces could be more transparent. They are made of hard plastic material, often plasticine, and glint off the exterior at opposing angles. Even if the notion of a simulated space is no longer as pervasive as it once was, graphic designers still find themselves drawn to the edges of experience, to the places that are hard to define. And these are the places that make the most sense to us, the ones that feel most real to us. So it is essential to keep these at the forefront of consideration, to continually push ourselves to consider the “other” and the “real” as we grapple with the ever-present sense of experiential space.

Environmental design is often seen in these terms. It’s a rigid system with clear outputs that are hard to change. When applied to a hard surface, a patchwork of plants, grass, weeds, and so on becomes a canvas on which a designer can render any color palette, texture, and formation. The output is the same, but changing the image through graphic intervention is often more complex.

The designer must then justify the change to the viewer and explain the need for it in the same way any surgeon might.

The plastic surgeon certifies that a particular bodily form is worthy of recreation through the very act of molding flesh. Their job is not to create beauty, but to define it, to create a standard of form. The same process happens in digital space. But this only accounts for the primary visual surface currently being used. The next step in simulation is the mixing of characters, and in doing so, the boundary between real and imagined space is often abandoned. This form of design is often said to be a communicative method, and through this lens, the magazine’s layout is no different. The structure is there to be interpreted, not just by the viewer but by all those who will interact with it. Any editorial shift in this way represents a slight turn in the magazine’s focus, and it is often the result of a similar but separate conversation taking place internally.

How we interact with design in the simulation space is essential to consider, not only for the sake of simulation but also to create larger spaces of understanding, desire, and purpose. Graphic design should be used to create not just visual illusions but also informational illusions. And simulations need not only to be readable but believable. They must also communicate information, impart emotion, and inspire action.

It is just a recontextualization of how we're structured and what that means. So much of graphic design is purpose-built to be comfortable and alluring.

These kinds of seductive visuals are what quickly turn into brand awareness. How can visual communication be used as a destabilizing force? There’s an undercurrent of “cool” in using graphic design to destabilize power structures, even in the public eye.
It's essential to understand the role of simulation in colonizing other spaces and how the visual markers of that colonization can destabilize. Simulation creates the ‘reality’ of things, and through this means of ‘de-realization,’ we can understand that the hyperreal is not just a historical phenomenon but a continuing one. And since the reproduction of reality is built on the formal qualities of the real, it is vital to understand how the fabrication of the unreal is also a reproduction of the real.

The relational experience of a design is based on perception, and how we visually interpret something defines how we might see it again. A broken vase and a whole one take equal measures of time to render digitally. But in both cases, the maker’s presence is felt. Their voice and intentions are held in the archive of the image object—graphic design functions as a marker of space, time, and emotion. You return to openness. The cylinders fall, just as the box did. You kneel to look at each more closely. You see something moving in them, shifting beneath their exteriors. The markers of these objects, the bottle, the can, and the carton, all seem fixed in their contents. That is to say, their surface contents remain unchanged.

Each will hold a mark of their previous function, even if having been discarded in this liminal space means they will never serve that function again. Containers rarely get refilled after use. Just as the spatial location of these forms is shifting, the objects themselves are also in flux. What are these forms without their constructed purpose, without the capitalist stipulation of object function (to hold products)? Do they become markers of the space they occupy or of the process of their creation?

Can the surface messaging be altered to make the objects as liminal as their surroundings to reflect a more profound function of these items?

These graphic forms are themselves a simulation, albeit a rough one, but they serve very much the same purpose, which is creating a visual representation of a non-visual reading. The output is not meant to convince the viewer in the same way, but it does make a groundwork from which a more detailed replication can be generated. A recorded sound section provides details on a space regarding distance, repetition, frequency, tone, and more. The visual representation helps build out that understanding of the visual senses. It is a recreation of a space that can only be partially perceived, like sonar on the ocean floor.

The same tools that make the digital design usable also make it uncomfortable. One term, “Redaction,” for instance, uses graphic design to make its simulations uncomfortable for the benefit of a hard copy. Copies of the manual are printed on etchings of inmates in the US prison system. The reactive layout forces a viewer to question the accuracy of the information they are about to read.

It also forces viewers to question the nature of the information they will see. If the reactive layout is altered, the simulation falters entirely as the visual meaning becomes lost. But if the text is left at the disposition of the reactive map, the experience becomes much more palatable. The forced textural communication forces viewers to reassess their privilege and the power structures they occupy. It also causes a viewer to question the nature of the information they are about to see.
People tend to shy away from the idea of codes, the concept that there is an unobservable system at work. Even more so, they shy away from code that doesn't make itself immediately clear. If designers can't comfortably embed themselves in a visual world, they must utilize that sense of discomfort. They must push against convention and create their own areas of pain, whether that's through a physical form or digital mediation. This is how momentum is created, towards any point of progress.

Digital design production requires a flexible system of surfaces, signs, symbols, and shapes to translate two-dimensional figures into three-dimensional spaces. The simulated object must then be translated into the physical space to create the correct illusion. In the digital world of simulation, the goal is often to achieve a sense of truth or precision in the representation, but this usually requires a longer duration of time with less visual impact. The visual fidelity of digital forms is often more open and accessible than in the physical world. Even in the most abstract terms, certain aspects of life can be translated into digital format. For example, a red blush represents joy, just as a red hand represents strength. These physical gestures can be translated into digital form and across multiple media.

Even the most basic of simulations need a precise level of detail, from color to shape to texture. But digital designers must also look for subtle differences between their creations and reference materials. In the case of roads, a simulated stone may not look like any other. But it does have the same roughness and color as the real thing, regardless of the context.

Digital designers can emulate this visual quality in their simulations, even if it means sacrificing visual quality for practicality.

Practicality relates to approachability to a point where it becomes indistinguishable from “functional.” This is where the border between practice and mastery becomes meaningless. Though the function may still be there, it has been relegated to the realm of the practical and, in that respect, becomes more usable. The faded sign, with its missing context and color, blends into the visual landscape of a town or city for the same reason a familiar graphic form does, even a newly printed one: a failure to stand out. It has become a pastiche, an ornament. It's easier to identify in this context than the forgotten structure that preceded it. The functionalist approach to design is to look at the details and to make inferences from them, but the complete picture needs to be considered. Everett K. McLuhan does a lot of work on the relational and historical nature of computer graphics. He points out that computer graphics have become such a pervasive part of our everyday lives that they have become a sort of language. So we speak of a “visual world” through graphic forms, and he talks of the need to relegate these symbols to the background of experience.

This is a critical principle in modeling and simulation, viewing the simulation as a historical archive rather than a hyperreal one. This approach to design is to look at the detail and to see what is essential, what is valuable, and what is enduring. There is such a thing in design as a feeling of truth, and consistency is felt very strongly in the spaces we occupy. Consistency is a generational trait.
It is something that cannot be learned. It is a target of entry that is unintentionally always hit. This approach is to look at the things that make up our lived experience, and by doing so, understand better how they are constructed and valued. This is not a rapid process, nor a comfortable one. But by identifying the functional, unremarkable, and middle- and top-most layers of meaning-making, one can better understand how they are supported and reinforced through design and messaging.

To sense space, you must observe it. You must look through it, touch it, and hold it to know it is there. The quality of your space is not fixed, as you might suspect. It can be altered, just as the quality of the object can. The rate of movement, growth, or depletion can all indicate a change in the space itself. It would help if you first sensed its existence. That is to say, touch and hold something, whether it be a book, a piece of music, or a new object. As you do so, the space becomes apparent. It is no longer a guess but a direct perception. Everything in our vision is seen in its most decadent, most evident detail. This is the underpinning concept of simulation, that space can be seen and therefore felt.

But to sense the pure simulation of another world does not mean to simply be aware of it. To honestly know that there is something beyond the surface is to truly feel it, be able to touch and hold it, and be allowed to delight in its presence. In the final stages of simulation, the object's subjectivity becomes non-existent. It is no longer a part of the process of representation but a thing of potential. The picture becomes a part of the space it inhabits. The surface becomes a canvas on which the full potential of the human experience is revealed. In the final stages of simulation, the object's subjectivity becomes unusable.

The simulation of space is a purely surface-based recreation of reality. It is a general area, a territory navigated by roads, rail, bus, and bike. The geography of the simulated space is continuously shifting and developing. Older forms of space, including from the ancient world, are no longer usable in simulation. Only the digital simulation provides immersive space.

Immersion acts as a camouflage, the simulation of one entity to cover the existence of another. In the case of artificial plants, there is a deceptive performance of growth, while the reality is one of stagnancy. The show often needs to improve in the more widely known spaces of urban life, the commons, or the more remote areas of the world. The simulation falters in its ability to communicate the nature of the artificial object back to the viewer. The uncanny is a failure of representation and an act of liminality.
The plant appears natural enough to touch, and the droplet falls into its correct location, but it lacks the spark of reality that would indicate its existence.

We can exist within this camouflage of virtual spaces, within the bounds of that simulation, and also occupy space that is not our own. In the case of divergent virtual spaces, these might be found in the textual fields of graphic design, film, and digital design. The legend of individual creative endeavor is old, but it endures. But the ultimate goal should be to feel hidden within artificial spaces that are almost entirely visual. They are almost entirely text-based, and the messaging often feels forced. This is a positive and challenging practice, as it forces you to consider the “other” in relation to your routine and how that voice might be perceived. Whereas before, this text might have been written more academically, at the expense of readability, one is now forced to consider the reader in the text.

This is a more challenging space of exploration, as it forces one to think not just the thoughts in your mind but those of the general reader as well, and that general space of thought is its own performative simulation.

All beings must interact with and support each other in some way and possibly interact with non-human animals to confirm their “specialness.” This haptic sense is what most simulation lacks, but it is, in my mind, an authentic VR experience, where the “virtual” enters real space and creates empathic connections.

These simulations are not the fantastic spectacles they represent. The spectacular is instead reduced to the rote objects of human existence. I believe that it is this space of banality that many find more familiar and “real.” There’s another axis to empathy beyond the concept of narrative, a space of touch where the boundaries of a distanced performance are erased. This can be found in the newer tech space of AR (augmented reality) and brings the idea of the environment back to the fore. If the user can no longer determine that they are in a constructed environment, the empathic experience becomes much more accessible. The connection of touch is the verification of reality, and through this, all become relevant within their fields of existence. All living things must, in some way, interact with and depend on others for their existence. This is the consideration of plants and their dependents. We are drawn to their beauty because it is within our reach; within this proximity, we exist. To deny this is to deny the very nature of existence itself.
SENSUAL AREAS
A power pole mounted box example. Though having low area to start, this one is situated in a more residential neighborhood. It's hard to tell if it has been tagged more crassly. The fact that it was ignored rather than repainted in an important design, adding value. The junction box seems never used and more readily tagged, with more succinct, modular techniques. The concrete lines and power pole also seem out of place, hinting a distinctly older quality than some neighboring boxes. It's surprising this isn't more covered.

Writers*
AZTEC
DRZ
ERK
GONE
GZEM
HYZE
KOSMO
MESO FLY
PROVIDENCE
SENS
SAGER
ZORI

164 BUTLER AVE
PROVIDENCE, RI
02906
LAT 41°49'44.7"N
LON 71°23'06.8"W

172 RICHMOND ST.
PROVIDENCE, RI
02903
LAT 41°49'11.3"N
LON 71°24'35.9"W

Writers*
2NF
CELILO
COAK
CROW DOG
GROUCH
KARATE
LAB ENTAZ
LUBE
SPIN

*Names are based on approximate reading.
<table>
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<th>All</th>
<th>IMAGE</th>
<th>DIAGRAM</th>
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<td>4 US-1A</td>
<td>Providence, RI</td>
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| On the SW corner of Globe & Eddy, outside of Desire Strip Club. | Filed under:
Tag-1, Tag-2, Tag-3 |
| 30 Hoppin St. 1 | Providence, RI |
| SW corner of South St. & Hopkin St. The larger of two utility boxes on this location. | Filed under:
Tag-1, Tag-2, Tag-3 |
| 30 Hopkin St. 2 | Providence, RI |
| SW corner of South St. & Hopkin St. The smaller of two utility boxes on this location. Four posts in a square formation. | Filed under:
Tag-1, Tag-2, Tag-3 |
| 30 Hopkin St. 3 | Providence, RI |
| Located on the NW corner of Hopkin St & South St., located under the COPRO Parking Garage. Five posts arranged in a |Filed under:
Tag-1, Tag-2, Tag-3 |
03.22
Weybosset St. / Page St.
11:35 PM
sirens / voices / wind / birds / electric hum / car exhaust / car door / distant music
They walked in beauty.
Visual Evidence

Superbland
Domestic Simulations

Green Space

From the 1950s on, lawns became a US home’s main attraction. It came to the point where "monocots" (leaves) indicated the entrance to new free-thrifty suburban spaces, the suburbs. Residents of these suburbs maintained their lawns to display their own home and economic status. Along with pride that homeowners’ family and neighbors demonstrated generosity and welcoming everyone, there was demand for maintaining grass and lawns across...
Astroturf

Composite

Sod

Composite
“The Apotheosis of St. Ignatius” (1688-94) painted by Andrea Pozzo, a ceiling fresco in the Sant’Ignazio Church in Rome, a “trompe l’oeil” simulating the heavenly host floating above the viewer.

A LiDAR scan of the ancient Mayan city of Tikal in Guatemala, revealing a previously unknown extent of the city hidden under dense rainforest canopy.

sign stating “KEEP OFF THE GRASS” affixed to a tree in a near inaccessible patch of forest near Nasonville, Rhode Island.

sign stating “Authorized Personnel Only” affixed to a tree in a near inaccessible patch of forest near Nasonville, Rhode Island.

sign stating “Sorry. We’re CLOSED.” affixed to a tree in a near inaccessible patch of forest near Nasonville, Rhode Island.

digital image of a woman waiting at a bus stop near Uppsala University Hospital, Sweden.

Background: a bank drive-thru located in East Providence, Rhode Island / Foreground, the 3D model of a bus stop made by Víctor Hernández with custom textures added.

graffitied municipal power box located and an intersection next to the Rhode Island Hospital.

graffitied municipal power box located in an abandoned parking lot near the Rhode Island Hospital.

“Municipal Power” circular, a map of municipal power boxes, unfolded on the ground.

“Municipal Power” circular folded over a concrete barrier.

“Municipal Power” front cover.

“Municipal Power” back cover.

“Municipal Power” interior information, illustrations, and sample graffiti.

“Municipal Power” interior documentary photography.

“Municipal Power” interior.

Wheat paste poster of a municipal power box.

Wheat paste poster of a municipal power box.

Background: shelter located under an I95 overpass in Providence, Rhode Island / Foreground: “Municipal Power” archive website desktop and mobile versions.

Background: still from Harun Farocki’s “Parallels 3,” a series of short films about the nature of video games as archival simulation / Foreground: image of Harun Farocki.

Foreground: still image from “Parallels 3” depicting a character from the video game “Grand Theft Auto 5”

still from “Copse” a 3D animation of a digital forest bearing six generations of digital trees listed in Harun Farocki’s “Parallels I”

still from “Copse” showing the “bush” sprite from the 1986 video game “The Legend of Zelda”

still from “Copse” showing the land mass at a distance in liminal space

still of back alley in “Los Santos,” the fictional city from the video game “Grand Theft Auto 5,” a recreation of Los Angeles, California and surrounding areas.

the date, location, and time of an audio recording made in Providence, Rhode Island

the recorded sounds on that audio recording

an AR poster that illustrates the sounds from the recorded forms in both sound and motion

close-up of the poster animation, showing a 3D ear, rendered in glass, emerging from the background

simulated trash on the streets of the fictional city of Los Santos as depicted in the video game “Grand Theft Auto 5”

the flat projection of an abandoned homeless encampment, made from a photogrammetric map made in the Jewelry District of Providence, Rhode Island.

photogrammetric map of artist Sadia Quddus standing on a green lawn, seen from above

photogrammetric map of artist Sadia Quddus standing on a green lawn, seen from parallel

still from video demo of sidewalk scan animation showing printed cardboard fragment, redesigned bottle labeling, rosary on a top projected print of a parking lot surface

still from video demo of sidewalk scan animation showing relabeled bottles and a doctor’s note of top projected print of a parking lot surface

an image of the tagged power box applied to a poster marking the beginning and end of a class at the Rhode Island School of Design in the Spring of 2022.
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Edited by Sadia Quddus and Dougal Henken
A discussion of space and perception with regards to awareness and empathy across organic and urban living systems while simultaneously exiting the age of colonial extraction, conducted with artist Marjolijn Dijkman via Zoom during a morning in her Berlin based studio.

Marjolijn Dijkman is a research-based and multi-disciplinary artist using film, photography, sculpture, and installation. Her practice focuses on the points where culture intersects with other fields of inquiry. The works themselves are speculative, partly based on facts and research but often brought into the realm of the imagination.
All interviews conducted by
Dougal Henken
DH: Thanks for taking the time to meet with me. I've been a fan of your work for a long time. As I mentioned I'm at RISD in Providence, Rhode Island. I'm in the graphic design program, but I'm doing a lot of work with virtual space. So your spatial work has been really conducive to a lot of how I sort of look at my own practice, so I'm thrilled to have the chance to talk with you. Thanks for taking the time.

MD: That's great. Great to hear.

DH: I don't wanna take up too much of your time today, I have lots of questions, so I'll try to keep it fairly quick. If you have a hard out where you're like "I gotta be done in 20 minutes," just let me know.

MD: Yeah, let's just start. I mean we can have an hour maybe, half an hour and we see where it goes. Yeah, sure.

DH: Perfect, let's do it. One of the things I'd like to talk to you about is where your work is right now. I really came into your practice because you were looking at space and how humans interact with space and shape the areas around them. A lot of the work I've been doing has been looking at interstitial non-spaces and sort of the production of space, Henri Lefebvre, these kinds of things, especially in urban centers. Providence has a sizeable homeless population, so alleyways and sidewalks often become homes. There are graphic elements that define what a space is, a bedroom, a living room, a communal space. So I'm curious as to what you are working with now. Your most recent work has been about lighting-made glass. I'm curious to see how things are shifting in your own practice.

MD: Yeah, so, I mean you're right that in the past...I mean, of course, yeah. I've been working now for about 20 years as an artist, and when I started, I was very much interested in the public domain and the common, which I still am. But at that time it was more an urban environment and things that I would encounter while walking, for instance, I had this photographic archive called "Theatrum Orbis Terrarum." And I made a lot of photographic observations, which led to sculptural interventions and installations, temporary setups, proposals. And I think that was really informing the way I was relating to space. It was really one-to-one scale, like me encountering something. And also working with these elements that I encountered in the individual environments that we shape as human beings, but also that shape us in the same time.

I'm very interested in this direction of creating tools that in turn influence us, in a way. It's the same for everything we do, from politics to infrastructure to urban space to society, how we shape the way we would like these to be. But of course, we are highly influenced by everything. I've been traveling quite extensively for my work and collaborations with artists from different kinds of contexts. The more experiences I've had also traveling around the world, the more I became aware of how all these environments, but also, your ideas about these, are shaped by history, for instance, and by cultural perception and cultural ideas and ideologies that you grew up with.

Like me being a Dutch artist, the Dutch history and Dutch culture highly influenced my way of perceiving things, which of course is really interesting. All these different perspectives and all these different points of view that I have become really aware of that have influenced my work, in a sense that I started to become more interested in the collective narrative and collective imagination and collective ideology and histories that shape who we are today. But also our environment and the institutions and the spaces that are part of that. So I have done research, for instance, in historical museums, and after some time, I also became interested in science, like how certain scientific ideas shape the way we understand our environment and how we relate to our environment.
I guess at the moment, I think I'm still very interested in this element and also I've been looking a lot at a very specific period of time, like the enlightenment period in Europe, which was highly influential for the modernization of the world, the industrialization of the world, and the globalization of the world with its colonial entanglements.

That period of time has been influential for a lot of works I have been working on the last 10 years. And it's still the case today. So I am also very interested in making things visible that you don't immediately see. Whereas 20 years ago, I would work with things that I would encounter while walking, traces of people's actions or interventions in space that were designed or by people themselves or from the government or companies or whoever made these kind of interventions. The last few years, maybe also because I have been so extensively looking at all these elements and details, I started to become more aware of the things that you don't notice while walking, the things that are hidden, the live forms that are hidden and all these kind of aspects that we're not so aware of. The last projects were indeed about electricity, also as something that is highly invisible but has a huge impact on our life in the ecosystem and on global politics as well. And how to make this tangible again like to be able to experience it. That's a lot of information, a little bit in a nutshell.

Well, I mean, of course, a very big difference just in navigation of space is that people now have access to things like Google Maps which is in a way virtual. Right? A virtual representation that is also often photographic with satellite data but it's not actual at the very moment. So it's back in time. I think a lot of people's understanding of space is being on a globe, for instance, instead of a flat surface like the map as a flat surface. The globe has very different influence on how you think about our planet or our place on it. You're also much more able to zoom in and zoom out, so we are understanding different scales. But then, at the same time, we tend to lose a lot of details of our surroundings. So when I, for instance was working with an artist from Cameroon who was for the first time coming to the city where I was at, he had traveled from the train station to my house at that time which was quite a difficult and long travel. And the next day, we had been traveling somewhere and he had gotten lost the way but he found his way back from the train station to my house without having access to a phone or a map or even the address because he didn't have it with him at that time. And I asked him, “How did you do that?” He had remembered all the different buildings and signs along the way. He just remembered... He had such a good memory of space that he knew exactly this detail here. “Oh now, I need to go to the left.” He had memorized the whole routes while we were walking from the station to my house when I was talking with him. I would be completely lost because I was totally not paying attention. And I would not be paying attention like that because I constantly have these other tools available. And I think that’s a big big change which you see, people having less and less awareness of street names, of details. I hardly know all the street names in my city.
because, yeah, you're not really using that kind of navigation anymore. So it's a very different form of understanding space...

DH: Yeah, I really only know my street address, so there you go. [laughter]

MD: Yeah. You don't know phone numbers anymore, I don't know streets... So all these details that were very important once are becoming less and less significant. So I think that's one thing, thinking about virtual representation of space. And that's a very different understanding. What else can I say? I mean of course you have a lot of these digital... I mean I'm working on a project now for instance with other artists collectively around the mining of lithium. And how these technologies that we use of course are entangled with real spaces and real minds and real places where people have to dig up things from the earth which become this highly virtual tool that we use.

They are very related to real places. One artist is working a lot with digital simulation and how, for instance, mining companies create twin mines or map with satellite data their environment to see like where gold is, where silver is, or where lithium is in the soi. They can all map it with different kind of sensors on satellites so that you don't even have to dig in the earth to understand what's inside. You can already speculate on it. So this also is an example of how these kind of technologies are very far away from somebody who's actually living in this place. [laughter] They have a perception on the ground of the location and then there's totally virtual speculation that's going on with the help of digital technologies that have I found quite extreme examples of, thinking of these technologies and how they shape us. I mean that really depends where you are and what your access is to these kind of technologies. And so for somebody who is living on the ground somewhere very remotely without access to internet and electricity, their perception of that space is completely different from a mining company somewhere in China trying to explore this area with the satellite. So I think what has become more and more and more clear is that the tools that we have, that we use and have access to, also create these divisions of social inequality and power structures, which I think is one of the biggest challenges of our time, how to have a more equal world where people are, with less extractivism and colonial attitude, which now are still in the hands of the people mostly in the global north.

DH: Absolutely. Yeah, that's a very good point. The idea of multiple perspectives and that there are multiple interpretations that exist simultaneously is very true. It's something I've found as well when you're building work, when you're constructing space. I'm curious how you sort of see the spaces that you build. Do you see them as simulations? As fabrications? Do you see them as elements that are pulled from the reference, from the real space? When you're building these, what do you want the experience of the viewer to be? How do you want them to sort of interpret your work? You take very complex scientific data and condense it down into this very approachable form. I watched a talk you did with Toril (Johannessen) about brackish water...

MD: Yes.

DH: ... and you both talk about presenting the cast of characters, and these are microorganisms.

MD: Yes. Yes. [laughter]

DH: This is a very interesting topic for me too, how you're taking this complex data and making it readable. But I'm curious as to how you sort of sculpt the experience for your viewers.

MD: Yeah, often I really try to... I mean, my practice is quite diverse in the sense that I make sculptures, films, installation, photography, publications. So and I'm very consciously using these different forms because each of them have a really different relation to the viewer.
When you experience a sculpture very materially, it has a very different impression on the viewer than watching a film in a black box, which is really immersive with you really feel emotionally charged and physically affected by the sound or by even the darkness. So I think for me, that's really interesting, and I try to really play with that consciously more and more. Now, when I work on projects, I try to have different forms of outcomes that really have this diversity of language and of materiality and even time experiences.

Something that can for instance, be somewhere permanently or something that is experienced time-based like a film. And that's one thing that I find really interesting to work with different formats. And the other question about whether I consider these elements to be part of reality, let's say, or documentary elements instead of fiction, for instance. Yes. I think most of my work, it is real, let's say interacting with real material or matter or like in this case, what you mentioned organisms. So it's not an animation, a representation of an organism.

No, it's real life organisms that I work with, and they also actually die in a microscope. It's a real life situation. I work with electricity. It's real high voltage electricity, which is creating, it's almost looks like virtual imagery, but it's real. It's a documentation of something that really took place in my studio. I also find it really interesting to work with the material histories of things that I work with and the materialities also tell their own stories. For me, it's very important for instance, that if I use sand from someplace or a wood from something in my work, that I know where it's from, and I've been more and more and more aware of this, in the past. I wasn't so much aware of this always, but nowadays, I'm very much aware of the materiality of things. So, of course to limit it's extents in the sense that I don't know all the elements of the camera that I use. That's still the technology side. That's still a problem. But when I tend to use work materials in sculpture installation, I am very well aware of what these materials are and where they're from.

Definitely, I guess the tangible quality of a lot of that work and a lot of your pieces have this sort of uncanniness that I try to pursue. One piece, "The Pleasure of Recognition" is the stone with the mirror, but it's the way the viewer is pushed to approach it. Even your more recent work with the lightning glass... to have this in a room and to give the impression that it's been taken from the location and put into the gallery space... I'm curious how you work with that, I guess, spatial interaction to create that uncanniness. Is it intentional? Is it something that sort of is produced in the work?

No. I guess there is always something in these works that also tries to confront a viewer with a certain question perhaps, or provoke a viewer to think about something. And so when it becomes too comfortable, maybe people tend to get lost in the aesthetics only. So I always try to find a balance in making works that are visually appealing so that people approach it and they're curious about it, and that they're... yeah, attracted by the aesthetics. My work often has... a lot of elements that are very aesthetic. I consciously also work with that because I think it's a really good way to invite viewer to have a conversation, let's say. When something is very visually appealing, you can come and dig deeper into the material and understand more layers of the work. And the uncanniness, yeah... I sometimes think of my work as a form of science fiction, in that sense of like an artistic form of science fiction or speculative fiction. And I think that uncanniness is also there, right? You're not sure of the lightning, the fog lights. The sand sculptures made with electricity... when you see them in real life and you become aware of what they are, you also immediately realize there must have been a lot of energy creating these, right? So that what kind of situation made this happen?
And in this case, it was not lightning. It was artificially replicated. But it produces something that is very appealing, almost like a coral. Then you see it’s not, because it has these pieces of coal inside, and you can see it’s burned. And then there’s also the story, of course, of where the scent is coming from. And then, even now, for instance with that work, some people told me that they seem almost like creatures or little monsters, or they start to become alive in a different way once people start to know more about them. So when they approach it first, it’s like, “Oh, wow, how beautiful? And then after they like realize, “Oh, they’re beautiful, yeah, but they’re little monsters actually,” [chuckle] It’s really monstrous. [laughter] But I think that is an interesting shift when that happens.

Yeah. And I guess it is sort of a pulling back a bit. How do you approach these concepts? You have a wide ranging set of topics you’re diving into and you dive fairly deeply. So I’m curious as to how you start the process of approaching some of these topics and how you decide what draws you in, and then what your processes is for narrowing down as you get into these spaces.

Yeah. So I have now developed kind of a way of working where I work on projects of about four to five years with different outcomes around one research topic and almost in the middle, or around the middle of that period, I will start a new research.

So when I start the first research, it would take mostly about two, two and a half years to really develop my ideas enough to dig into a situation, to get a real understanding of it, to talk to experts and everything, and then develop ideas. And then once I go into the phase of production, which can also take quite a long time when it involves a lot of different works and also, often, more and more really experimental processes working together... It’s a bit innovative to do something that you’ve never done before, that has never been done before.

So yeah, that takes time and then starts a new research project. These things run parallel so that by that time, I finish one research project. So now I’m coming to the end of, for instance, all the works that relate to lithium and electricity. I’m about to make one more live performance at the moment that’s gonna be premiered in June. And then that’s finalized. I’m already starting up the production of a new research project that will produce a lot of works this year and next year and maybe the year after. So it always takes a lot of time. And I think that’s also very important if you wanna have a real understanding because in my case, the topics are often quite big and difficult to comprehend.

I really need time to find the expertise, read about it, research it, see also the history of how this situation or specific context came about, and get a good understanding of this. That takes a lot of time. And the way I do it often is also within the process of the research. I organize talks like Luna Talks around the Luna table, for instance, where I invite a lot of different specialists who are knowledgeable about this research topic, so that during this period of time, I can already share the research with audience. In this case with the COVID, it has been, [laughter] really difficult to have that situation going, but I will pick it up again.

And besides that, I often have created research projects within the context of enough room for space, where you collaboratively work with other artists around a specific topic, which also really helps to develop a bigger understanding of the research area that we are approaching and all the different perspectives and have dialogue partners. So there is often a lot of discursive processes around the production of these works. And once they are there, often I also participate in a lot of discussion moments afterwards. But mostly for me, it happens before the works are realized. [laughter]
MD: That's also the most interesting because once the works are realized (I guess you also experience this in the making process) you tend to let things go and move on with the new. You just feel like, “Now I'm ready for a completely new kind of thing to talk about.” So for me, it's most interesting to have that dialogue and all these meetings before the work's actually finished.

DH: Absolutely. At what point for you do the aesthetics come in? You mentioned this idea that it needs to be visually appealing to bring in the viewer, but then once they're in, you can challenge them. I'm curious what that balance is, because again these topics are dense and some of your processes, as you mentioned, are innovative. They're new, they're complicated to communicate in a short amount of time. So I'm curious as to what point you say, “Okay, this has a visual component to it, or this is the symbol that will draw in the viewers to this point. And from there I can expand on it.”

MD: I mean, I guess that also has a bit... That already happens, I guess a bit, at the start of a project, so that once I feel like there is an interesting tension between, for instance, the materiality of something and the context and there is an urgency to talk about this subject, there is something that is happening currently or something has changed in this moment, or there is something that is really relevant within bigger developments, then I see, “Okay. There's an interesting tension.” There is something interesting visually, but also materially to work with.” It has an interesting context, it has an interesting history, it has all of that. And that makes me decide to actually start a whole process.

So it needs to happen already in the beginning, although, of course, sometimes you don't know really what you're going to make or how it's going to look, but it's a kind of a hunch, if you feel, “Oh. This could work. I could work with this material.”

This could turn into something sculpturally interesting. Visually interesting. Because if you only work... for instance if you only work with data, that is numbers and letters and [chuckle] I don't know what, that would be very difficult for me. I would immediately search for something that would be visually attractive to work with and also something that I could work with artistically. I would intervene with a technology that I could use. Something like the microscope or the electro-photography or something. Yeah. I don't know what, but just some tools that I could also utilize as an artist to make an artistic gesture.

DH: I have that too. There needs to be... for me with simulation, if something tricks me, if I find I'm looking at something, but it turns out to be something else, that's the best tension for me. It's that faint but that's really interesting. I guess we're getting short on time, but I'm very curious as to how you used to work more in the public domain and the commons and within this idea of what is public and private space. I think your practice is shifting from that, but I'm very curious as to how you view public interaction with your work. One of your early pieces, “The Tunnel,” the very last line in your description mentions that the piece was graffitied in its run.

MD: Yes. Yeah.

DH: Well, in the area I live in right now, graffiti is a big part of life. It's a way of denoting space, who lives in a community, these kinds of things. I'm curious as to how you view that public interaction in space as defined. As an artist, I would imagine it's disheartening because you didn't want that on there, but I'm also interested...

MD: No. No. No. It was actually pretty great because it meant that...

Interview 02.17.23 Marjolijn Dijkman

MD: No. It was pretty great because it meant that people perceived it as a public space because you would not do that in a private space, or at least not in sight. And I think it was great to see those people really. Also, they used it. They walked through with their dog, and... even if you had to climb a little bit up, the window was a bit higher. So it was not even really logical to step in but a lot of people did. I think it was quite fun to see that happening. And also we had some wild... how do you call it? “Wild projection?” People coming with a projector...

DH: Ohyeah!

MD: ... a projector on a generator and make their own artistic interventions and stuff.

DH: Yeah, yeah.

MD: That was nice. I still work with public space in the sense that... for instance the work with the microorganisms, it was presented in a public space outdoors.

DH: Sure.

MD: There was a screen next to the water where the samples were taken. So it was a direct connection between the site and the other life forms that live in that particular site. And then (that was) presented to the people who use that space. So I think for me, this kind of relation is still very important in many of the things I do. But it’s true it’s not always presented outside, but I sometimes make still things outdoors or with public interaction. Like we did this performance with the Tesla in Congo, which was also outdoors. It was public for everybody to see. And so, it’s not completely disappeared.

DH: No.

MD: Also imagery for... like for instance that Tesla performance, the photo of that has been presented in public space on a billboard, these kind of things. I think for me, the public domain has become bigger than just the urban domain.

MD: And so when I talk about, for instance, energy, for me, that’s also part of the public domain. But that’s also part of public infrastructure and something common. Something that we all use.

DH: I guess there’s a larger question here. You now have this expansive body of work. What would you say are the markers of public and private space or what marks that division? And especially looking in virtual reality. Zoom conference rooms can be both public and private, but the structure of them inherently doesn’t change, and their codes certainly don’t change. This was something I sort of found in your work that I really liked, that the space is not just the physical marker, but an internal experience of space. It is something that exists beyond just the perception of it, how it is marketed in our minds. You were doing a lot of work in archives, in museums, and in these historical spaces, really looking at how human beings understood space around them. I remember in one of your talks, you were looking at depictions of finding new land. This was around the artificial island. Where you had these initial impressions of like a coastline. This is what land was.

MD: Yes. Yes.

DH: I find that to be really interesting that it is not just the object, but it is the felt experience that makes the object. That’s such a crucial element when it comes to simulation. It is not just the image of a cube, it’s what the cube claims it is, what’s around it, how it’s lit, these kinds of things. There are all these graphic markers. This is now a very long question, but what are these markers that define the border between public and private and how does these spaces exist beyond the physical for you?

MD: Well, I think there are two different things. One is the experience. The personal experience of space. And that’s, of course, very much depending on even your mood of the day or even like, yeah, your own anxieties, your own history, your own cultural background. How do you experience space? And the other, of course, has also to do with the accessibility, what we talked about before. So when you take these coastline drawings, that’s of course an ultimate power symbol, right? It was made to know next time where to get ashore and make markers to basically colonize the land, which is very similar to how people use satellites now to colonize from space, to make these kind of, not coastal line drawings, but abstract satellite data imagery which is very similar.

There is still this kind of tension between the viewer and the people who live on that shore whose land it is. They have a totally different understanding of that space because it’s their land, it’s their space, it’s their identity. I think that’s something... there are very, very big differences in that sense of what you understand as the commons. That also depends on where you’re from and what you see as politically understood and where your understanding of public and private stop, right? Because privatization of all this land that is not yours can be very colonial gesture. So I think, there is a tension that is always there. When are you a guest and when are you an unwanted visitor? [laughed] And when do you have access to space? Yeah... I don’t know.

That’s also applicable in the city. Where do you live? In which area do you feel that you have access to? Or where are you considered an intruder? Are people blocking awful areas are they blocking of streets from becoming privatized. It’s all a question of limiting access. In their understanding, maybe it might be a commons, a common community. [laughter] But from a colonial point of view, it’s not. I think it always depends on your point of perspective on... It’s a very complex question. What is private and what is public?

MD: Absolutely. It’s true even between the two places that we are right now, I’m sure there’s very different ways to denote these spaces. I have many questions, but actually we’ll do one more and then we’ll see what time is like. One of the things that I really enjoy about your work is your relationship to image, how the image is important. And you’ve talked a little bit about this idea of how the aesthetics come into your process. But I’m curious as to how you go about capturing the image. Obviously you’ve made this expansive book with tens of... 10,000 images, I think? It was this constant process of documentation of these areas around you. But even your recent work has this very sharp use of image and it communicates a lot of data. I think there are artists who give you many different images, but each one can’t really stand on its own. It creates more of a constellation. Many of your works have only a few images, but they’re very powerful and each communicates a lot. So I’m curious as to how you as a maker, construct these images, how you conceive of them as you’re building this work.

MD: It differs. Like with the photographic archive, for instance, I never intervened. So it was highly documentary. I was just walking around and taking photos with a relatively small camera and never intervened. It was just observations.

DH: True.

MD: Of course, with these observations, there’s already a lot of subjective choices and artistic choices that I make. And the perspective I also deliberately always photograph the things that I encountered as if they were art installations in a way. Like making sure that they are very well-placed [chuckle] within the frame.
So there's a very clear decision. Also, from a perspective that is not high up or too high, always a little bit from about a meter height. So there was a very clear conscious choice of approaching this. And then within the archive, it was the play of arrangements of how I made visual essays with these images. And I still do because it still exhibited sometimes but I don't expand the archive anymore. I stopped making more photos at this point, [laughter] which also came because I wanted to become more... I wanted to travel less. It's also a very conscious decision to travel less. This project was completely related to the lifestyle of global artists traveling around the world. [laughter] And I didn't want to sustain that lifestyle. So that work also kind of stops because of that, which is for me an interesting aspect. [laughter] With more recent works, sometimes it's also observational. But often there is more intervention into the image because it's more artificially created.

DH: Sure yeah.

MD: So maybe it's because it's more in a studio setup or a laboratory setup. There is certain things that you can control more, of course. Like for instance with the film with the microorganisms, there was very little control because it's like they're going everywhere. But there are still very conscious decisions of how to artistically use the microscope as a camera, all the different filters that are on it and what kind of different scenes they create and all different kind of tools that you can add to this microscope. It's a very playful process but it's yeah, there is much more intervention in that sense. And I also...I really enjoy constructing these images in the moment. But yeah, it's a different approach. So it really really depends on the work.

DH: Yeah. Absolutely. That's a half hour right there. [laughter] Yeah. And you've already been...

MD: Well, if you have one more question we can go. [laughter]

MD: Well, it's a big question and it's a lot of different works but in general, I think I would like people to... like different things. For one, maybe have a more empathetic relationship to your surrounding and become more aware of how we shape it and how we are shaped by it but also just to the complexity of things. So how things have a history and are not just there without any conscious decisions. There's always a process of things, and understanding of how things come about and that often these things have complex histories. So that when you see my works that you understand and think differently perhaps. For instance with electricity, what I really enjoy at the moment is the feedback from people that never really saw electricity as a natural force.

They really become aware of like, “Oh yeah, of course.” and “Wow, so my touch screen works because I'm electric and that's why actually I can use my phone.” These things that you feel, that you're actually using every day around you but that you feel quite detached from, that you have a more physical relation to it but also like better understanding of it. But in general empathy is important for me.
For instance with the microorganisms, I want you to really have an understanding of life on different level and the impact of our interventions on our surroundings, on ecosystems on, but also on each other and like the power relations that are present, the way spaces are controlled. In the past that was a really big issue for me. In the public space like who controls the public domain and how can we make it more open? "The Tunnel" for instance was a clear gesture of radically opening up a gallery space which I had absolutely no control on.

So yeah. I guess empathy. And then each work has its specific approach of course which is different each time, like, what you want to tell. But yeah, there's always some kind of documentary element to it. I'm not calling myself a journalist but there is always something of a journalistic approach, there is an issue that I want to address.

That makes sense. And what is this idea of empathy? Is there any particular issue within the relationship of humanity to space that you would want people to be aware of? You're working in the space of electricity now and bringing to light this invisible force and how intrinsic it is to our lives. What is something you would want people to be aware of? What is an issue you would want people to be aware of or what do you think is the big issue facing humanity right now in relation to space? [laughter]

Well, I think one of the biggest issues is that the way we have built our societies has huge consequences on our environment, the ecosystem, and also on geopolitics. We all live together with the inequalities, and all the things that come along with this. I think that's the biggest challenge, how to move beyond the extractivist and post-colonial, (but still in a large part colonial system) that we are constantly continuing. I think it's a very big problem.

Absolutely. This has been great. I've been looking forward to this for a while. [chuckle] So this was this was wonderful. And thank you for taking the time today.

Yeah! Great.
Superbland

EMPATHIC LIKENESS
How do you feel when you see such beauty? What are the memories that make you feel this way? What are the hopes and fears? What are the desires of a bird? To know that there is a world beyond this is one of the most precious human values. What is the feeling of belonging that makes someone part of a community? What does it feel like to be a part of something larger than oneself? What are the memories, hopes, and fears of an individual who has transitioned to a space of collective existence? There is common ground between all people, some from shared experience, others simply from occupying the same physical space. Finding those commonalities is necessary for all people, especially for the designer. Understanding another’s perspective, even an uncomfortable one, is what separates us from other professionals. We see pain, fear, and sadness as symptoms of a more significant problem that might be addressed through communication.

Simulation redefines experience and what it is into and of itself. In doing so, it also reforms our perceptions of it. By altering the perception of space, we can change its function and purpose. For example, what might be added to this simulated space of color, texture, and form? What might be removed?

Simulation allows designers to interrogate all forms, not just the traditional ones of the field. And when the range of graphic surfaces is broadened so widely, it places graphic designers in the role of moral justice, recodifying the nature of the graphic communication designers can create. So what change can we affect through the visual shifting of surfaces? And on the same note, what harm?

There is a spatial politics to sex, and it’s not always about the sex. It’s more a question of the politics of perception, of what can be seen. One can't simply walk up to a sex club and say, “I want to engage in intercourse with this person.” The result of such a request is determined by the individual's relationship to the space, as defined by a community. The “club” space must appraise the individual in some way to confirm the quality of their experience. This relates vaguely to some of the work that Bell Hooks does with her book “All About Love: New Visions” which looks at the phenomenology of love and sexuality in contemporary popular culture. There is something in the commercial vernacular of design, something grasping and seemingly tender while also being somewhat coy. It's an attempt by commercial enterprise to both understand and simulate human contact as it has been documented in the history of the world, a visual machine that creates a dream of love and trust.
Every instance of human contact is worthy of recording, from the careful placement of a hand in a well to the resemblance of a face in a darkened room.

Can we classify interaction between man and simulation as contact or use? When it comes to the “bad blood” between man and machine, many would argue against it, but only a few would go as far as to call it abusive. And even then, that would be putting the cart before the horse. Many would argue against the idea of a pure simulation, but only a few would go as far as to call anything pure. There is inherent cruelty in the simulation of any form, from the faces of children in “real” simulations of video games to the physical toll of death. The machine must experience them all in totality, a cruel experience—it is precisely that experience that many would classify as “real” violence in the world.

How we define violence’s impact on space is through understanding how that violence is reproduced. This text asks the reader to consider the institutional, historical, and theoretical factors that have influenced and developed how we perceive and understand the nature of violence in the world. It then asks the reader to consider the potential of modeling and naming this violence in “a new, critical perspective.” This text invites the reader to consider the relational, historical nature of how graphic design interacts with and alters the meaning of space. It then asks the reader to consider the relational, theoretical nature of the same expressive forms and how they might be employed in destabilizing spheres of power.

It is through this exploration that we can begin to understand better how we as a species are shaping and controlling the environments in which we exist.

Pain’s relationship to violence is just one of many intertwined meanings. It’s not just a bodily experience but one that is mediated. When someone’s body is harmed, the viewer also experiences pain. It is a continuous cycle that is often strained through culture. As characters in a film or video game are harmed, their bodies also become part of a larger mental understanding of space. The digital frame in film and still image draws close to the erotic and brutal alike to give the viewer the sensation that they are there and the ones being affected. But this is a fabrication. The body is not the only object in the simulation. The user’s consciousness enters the frame as the digital tears away at that exterior to reveal a softer, more human existence.

When the subject’s consciousness is no longer needed, the body becomes the only one that matters. Pain defines the experience of many who entered these experiential zones.

This is a broad survey covering a wide array of experiences, from calm to intense pain. But to understand the core of this experience is to understand the generative potential of that sensation in simulation. It cannot be recreated like the photograph. It must be created as a primary form, just as the photographed object must be.
Pain is a haptic response, and it is a common one in combat, which is often the backdrop of simulation. The haptic vernacular of the combat zone is often that of death. The killing of a human being is a traumatic event that the living can partially process. But the principle of killing itself is ancient and revered. This reverence towards death extends to the level of detail one provides for the remembrance of another. One must commit fully to the image of the dead to feel at ease, which is repeated continuously in delivering physical and informational offerings in video games and films. It can be inferred that one should strive to leave no trace of the body. The body is only a means of experiencing the simulation of life. It is meat hardware. This includes the facsimile of the body and its microgestures. If one photographs the body, one reveals the nature of the dead.

The micro gestures of the body are ignored in the still space of the image. Not even film, in its disassembly, can capture the sense of being present with a body. These elements can only be observed in the digital afterlife of immersive simulation.

This idea of the digital afterlife is deeply connected to the work of simulation itself, its origins in religious themes, and the notion of a personal, incorruptible object. Technology is the ultimate archive, a history of thought and form transcribed and compiled into recognizable forms. Art and design are histories of the representations that have preceded and shaped them.

A computer simulation is a physical history of a concept, a physical space that was once “owned.” The physical houseplant remembers the real plants that preceded it and those that follow. A digital simulation is a history of the ideas that preceded it and the spaces it inhabits. And in this way, the afterlife becomes a literal space of recreation, as the objects surrounding the user become a literal archive of memory and experience. We are being pushed by a new age of simulation, where the markers of our existence are transcending and blending into a new space. This is happening in the creation of simulacra that surround us, creating not just digital shapes but also physical spaces, corporeal and incorporeal. The digital experience is already becoming a media entity, just as the film and television that preceded it were.

The uncanny is a marker of that transition, a heightened depiction so convincing, so uncomfortably vivid that it obliterates all semiotic and historical ties it has to the past or present. The uncanny is a failure of representation, an approximation that desires more and, in doing so, reveals its fabrication.

The sexual signification of the body becomes the body itself, and the sacredness of the human form is verified in the eventuality of death. This story, intrinsic to the human experience, is told again and again through visual culture, following humanity throughout its existence. The final arc is always death, and the moral of that idea is the assassination of self.
The prevailing idea of the sacred is inherent to our species, something we are consciously made to desire. It is not a flexible one. The quality of a place, or humanity, is measured in its ability to generate desire in the viewer. Where there is a lack of appetite, there is cruelty. Where there is no violence, there is complacency. Where there is no grief, there is ease. And these are the places that show the most evidence of this in the most extreme cases. The most populous places on the planet, almost all of them, have some form of inherent religious significance. Those with faith believe in a deus that brings them into existence, sustenance, and safety, a higher power that watches over them from a high place, giving them eternal life.

And many more don’t care what their faith is as long as they are considered part of a community. The pains and travails of life are experienced in a constant loop through the body and spirit, each needing to be tended to and healed. Both are forever caught between its desires and the needs of its creator.

There is a sacredness in being able to touch and be touched by others. This is something that is maintained in the artificial nature of the simulation. The body is a canvas, and its flexibility is measured in glint and gloss. How well-textured a blade of grass is will indicate to a viewer how well-cared for that grass is. The same quality can be applied to the body of a machine. It can gleam with power or sit still in docility.

The expression of desire or anguish may be felt in the same way, but the movement of the body indicates the nature of the experience. The digital body is reactive. It moves only following the commands of the creator. There is no absolute discretion in the modeling of the body. The framework of the image drives it. The texture of the skin may shift between any color or texture, but it must always be viewed concerning the framework of the photograph. When the digital body is not readable, the experience of the act becomes unsettling. The semblance of a human form becomes illegible.

The self-deception that underpins much of what we do is based on a deep-seated desire to possess something valuable to others.

We feel we are the chosen ones, the chosen ones who God has picked to possess these precious things. We want it all. Nothing we make could be taken from us, not even by us. But the very institutions that allow us to possess these most precious human resources are themselves structured to prevent us from ever truly having them.

The sacred in simulation is not so much the visible as the intangible. It is intimacy, a feeling of belonging that is not easily achieved. The Sims must feel part of a larger community, just as their commanding gamers think they are part of a larger environment.
The shared concept of “environment” is what makes a simulation believable. It must be felt out in all the ways that a real place might. There is tension built into the spaces between objects and between people.

Moving forward towards a thing makes it more prominent in the field of view. Turning that object in an area reveals and hides certain surfaces concerning the user’s vision. These are physical gestures toward the actual science of physics as we understand it. And their application and layering in the recreation of any element, from water to gravity to light, leaves digital simulation inching towards an ever-shrinking gap of the “hyperreal,” Beaudrillard’s definition of a simulacrum that is indiscernible from real life.

The simulated object is a canvas upon which is scored the words “This is my body. This is my consciousness.” And these are the guiding principles of nearly all simulations. They are not so much marks of space as they are of matter and form. A simulated object is a paint-by-numbers artificial object, with every geometric detail insinuating a particular color palette and textural quality. We seek poreless skin, while the sharp angles of our tools must hold the rigid metal sheen of industry. But these are not physical marks. They are digital textures, albeit rough ones. And these are the first simulations that we demand such fidelity flexibility from. Not because they are distant in their reconstruction but because they are so uncomfortably close to the truth.

We wish to be persuaded of a falsehood, as our experience is built on perception, and perception is built on persuasion.

The persuasive nature of simulation extends beyond its physical nature and is instead anchored in its logical quality. Modern simulation is built on logic, its visual tenets, and its success is determined by its ability to convince.

Designers must hover between the radical violence of form and the kind of commercial sublimation that comes with needing to survive. And approaching that space of counterculture is a hard-fought and rare outcome in a designer’s career, whether it be achieved over a year or a lifetime. The nature of persuasion is that it can be used against you. But you can see it coming and respond to it with as little overt aggression as possible. If you continually push back and constantly question their validity, you are not only inviting further charge, you are also creating a space of discomfort, which is a recipe for trouble.

In this way, simulation becomes intensely personal. It is not so much a recreation of the real as a recreation of our “unreal.” It is a battle of simulacra, of painted forms against each other for supremacy. The recreation of a space or structure in digital is a bid to capture the fullness of that form, to give it the reality of being.
The highest quality simulations will contain systems of graphic markers that “seal” their performance as “real” objects. For example, a simulated book might have cover pages, colophons, and chapter markers, while a stick or pack of gum might have ingredients, a UPC barcode, and some iridescent foil wrapping.

These small, meticulous details quickly communicate the nature of an object and the extent of its “realness.” It is not just a picture of data. It is a representation of thought, and the thinking represented in these simulations is singular.

It is not a historical one, with echoes of “realpolitik” or McCarthyism. Nor is it a theoretical one with its own counterarguments. The “reality” of an artificial object is only questioned as much as the viewer doubts the material nature of the simulated thing.

But the object also becomes intimate, almost a part of you. It doesn’t want you to look away. It wants you to be present. It wants you to feel the presence of another, to know that there is another there, that there is trust. It wants you to feel the warmth of another’s body, to caress and penetrate. It moves in space, perceiving and responding to its surroundings. It also acts as a proxy, masking the user from view. The body is the ultimate feeling object that can sense on multiple emotional and physical levels.

There is a narcissism in wanting to assert one’s identity through simulation, to be seen as echoing through the digital, to be the center of a circular orbit. This is an arousing desire that is understandable and maybe even an enduring element of life. But it should not be a behavior pushed to its logical limits, even if those limits are constantly shifting and growing. If one is to understand the nature of the self, one should know that there is always a limit to how far one can go into digital form. The self and the simulated twin will always be bisected by a line, even if that line is an impossibly thin element. One may seem like the other in all ways, but that seeming is always performative.

Simulation as a self-referential process, relies on implicit commands that are coded into a space. Programming a room is not the same as programming a computer, and even less similar to coding believable human behavior. It requires more care and precision, and the resulting code is more nuanced and varied. Even the most basic simulation functions are multilayered and variable, with variable outputs. The simulated fruit creates a different simulation each time it is drawn, just as the film produces a new sensation every time it’s viewed.

As such, simulation is often driven by its desires. It’s not interested in truly understanding the subject matter it’s attempting to simulate.
It instead desires to convince you of its veracity, to the point where you can ignore all notions of fantasy and reality and rather accept that there is a presence operating under your skin, a feint of reality. The best example of this might be the popular video game “Grand Theft Auto 5”. In the name of simulation, the competition promises to simulate “realness”—so palpable that it obliterates all semiotic and historical ties it has to the past or present. It renders itself entirely new, without an anchor. Though the simulation may attempt to convince you of its veracity, it most often acts as a pre-taped commercial, recreating original elements but expanding on its terms.

The cheapest thrill of simulation is derived from its simplest terms, the quick and uncomfortably vivid recreation of a space with no referent. The most affordable disclaimer is the dullest. The banal is the most accessible. It is present, visible, and ripe for consumption. It is not inherently wrong. It is merely one dimension of simulation beyond the original goal of recreation. The banal is more straightforward and more flexible. It is not meant to be an all-encompassing structure. It is intended to be a patchwork of meaning made manifest through the banal. The simplest of objects, the objects that most directly impact one’s experience of the world, are the things that make up our lived experience. The well-known examples of this are, of course, the “Utah Teapot” or the “Cornell Box.” But these are not solely representations. They are symptoms of a more extensive system, the teapot and the box being merely one facet of an infinitely larger whole.

The complexity of the experience of these other staples is only revealed by looking closely at their graphic representation.

Sexual signification is a means of destabilizing power structures. This haptic sense is what most simulation lacks. Still, it is an authentic VR experience, where the virtual enters real space and creates empathic connections. These simulations are not fantastic spectacles they represent. The spectacular is instead reduced to the rote objects of human existence. I believe that it is this space of banality that many find more familiar and “real.” There’s another axis to empathy beyond Loh’s concept of narrative, an area of touch where the boundaries of fiction are erased. This can be found in the newer tech space of AR (augmented reality) and brings the idea of the environment back to the fore.
If the user can no longer determine that they are in a constructed environment, the empathic experience becomes much more accessible. The connection of touch is the verification of reality, and through this, the bodily experience becomes the narrative.

Only within these vernacular bounds does it hold that these are universal experiences. There are certain universal elements that all people have, some more than others. We all have moments of wonder and joy, and many more commonplace moments define our existence. But not all moments are alike. Many are brief, and some are unbearable.

But in considering these unpleasant aspects of life, we must look beyond the self and towards others. We must ask if they are genuinely intolerable, and if so, how could we ever endure such a brief moment? But also, what a selfish space.

The feeling that you are the center of the universe, that you are the core of everything, that you are the ultimate reality. This is what makes us human. We are driven by a need to possess something larger than ourselves and dominate the world around us. So we create an aura of selfhood that surrounds us and allows us to feel that we are the center of the galaxy and the only ones worthy of existence.

This process is self-centered, and it is based on desire: I want to prove to you that I am worthy of this existence, to prove to you that I am worthy of existence as a human being. This is how I process my presence, trying to convince myself that I am worthy of every moment of existence. This is how I maintain my facade of ableness. I will never put on weight and never reach my physical potential, but I will always strive to prove to you that I am worthy of existence as a human being.

Existence begets death; perhaps this is the case for all life—the balance of experience of non-reality, an anti-simulation, pure absence. But if we are to look at the living and the dead, then one must ask if there is a third space beyond the physical, a length of impermanence. Could the endless potential of the living be focused towards the performance of the endless potential of living, thereby negating the consequence of death? Is the life merely the prelude to an enduring presentation of the self?

In a way, simulation is built on the bodies of others. It is a recording process of taking new forms and surfaces and turning them into recognizable objects. For example, finding a vein of digital blood in a tub of ice or beneath a rubber mat is a remarkably accurate recreation of any bodily surface.
But in creating these object forms, we are also making a digital history of that surface, a history of vertigo that comes with viewing such banality. The digital simulation is predicated on the idea that it can be looked away from, that it is beyond our understanding. But the more neutral the nature of the simulated object, the more open our sense of it. For all the dead bodies, there are many more that remain. So many more people may look back on this moment and say, “This is it. This is how it will always be.” And so, with this slow bleed into simulated virtual space, the songs of lament begin, no matter how antiquated in their interpretations of change:

The legend of the great man is over, and the parable of the man who rose to power is over.

The legend of the decent man who worked so hard to get here is over.

The legend of the decent woman who sacrificed so much to earn our freedom is over.

The legend of the man who sacrificed so much to give his life for our freedom is over.

The legend of the man who sacrificed so much to become a prodigy is over.

The legend of the man who sacrificed so much to become an artist is over.

The legend of the man who sacrificed so much to become the auteur is over.

The legend of the man who sacrificed so much to become a visionary is over.

The legend of the man who sacrificed so much to become a great master is over.

The legend and age of the man who gave all to know himself is over.

The age of man is over.
Only the machine remains.
The body of Evelyn McHale in 1947, image taken by Robert Miles.
Empathic Likeness

Superbland

MEMORIES...
When you look at death, it makes you understand the importance of the moment when you have life and death in front of you, and you witness seeing someone deteriorating in front of you - it’s an overwhelming experience. If you don’t learn from that, I don’t know what else you’re gonna learn.

Mickalene Thomas
If one partakes in any ritual, one does so with the ghosts of those who did so before them. You may walk the earth where your ancestors once walked, choosing the same paths they once navigated. The stories you tell will breathe with their words and you will see the world through through the thin haze of their memories. This is especially true in academic institutions, where the nature of education is built on the labor and insight of previous generations. To write and produce in that context is to enter into a collective consciousness, one that is continually reassessing its function and purpose. The individual must find their position not just through the work, but in the greater collage of burgeoning tastes and disciplines.

This is the “Thesis Machine,” an experiment in generative language. Built on a body of past graduate writing from the Rhode Island School of Design, “The Thesis Machine” creates written work that mimics the voice of a generation of young creatives. Phrases may seem familiar, but they are wholly original. This allows a reader to hear the amalgamated voices, concerns, and hopes of past artists and designers as well as the larger chorus of collective identity that will shape the future of visual culture. While the machine is only the simulation of a young writer, it holds within it untold hours of genuine effort and care. By using it, you can simultaneously experience the imagination of the individual and the whole.

The following pages contain the names and work of the graduate students of the Rhode Island School of Design in the year 2022 upon which this system is built.

Special thanks to Nick Larson for his ideation.
Empathic Likeness

Superbland

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Yang, Li,
“Toona Sinensis 桃花心木” (2022).
Masters Theses. 820. https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/masterstheses/820

Yang, Lilan,
https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/masterstheses/852

Yang, Yuta,
https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/masterstheses/825

Young, Elise,
Masters Theses. 893. https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/masterstheses/893

Young, Tzyy Yi,
“Slow puzzle” (2022).
Masters Theses. 842. https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/masterstheses/842

Yuchi, Nina Jun,
Masters Theses. 887.
https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/masterstheses/887

Yu, Chunxin,
https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/masterstheses/826

Zhang, Xingge,
https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/masterstheses/899

The Jacquie-Droz Writer automation
Are these my thoughts?

What am I supposed to do with them?
I'm not paying attention.
It really just varies, and for a while, I didn't notice.
But that's okay.
Maybe in 5 or 10 years, we'll have more ways to measure, define, and describe...
Empathic Likeness

Superbland
probably

a person
Empathic Likeness

Superbland

“Probably a black and white ceramic vase.”

Interview

Empathic Likeness

Superbland
Empathic Likeness

The Gaze

Image Screen

The Subject of Representation

Superbland
From up here, you all look like a bunch of assholes.
From up here, you all look like a bunch of assholes.
Angel was happy to buy a ramp for me for my scooter with her first paycheck she got from her new job as a rent-a-cop at the bank.
INTIMATE LOOKS
To My Sister
and
Her Husband
Empathic Likeness

Superbland

- STRANGER 1
  03.06.22
  16:45:00

- STRANGER 2
  03.06.22
  19:05:00

- STRANGER 3
  03.20.22
  20:35:00
...and I shall find you...

...in a forest of hard wood.
AND I SHALL FIND YOU IN A FOREST OF HARDWOODS.
The Digital

- "Free"
- Chance Sexual Encounters
- Anonymity
- Infinite Potential
- Addictive
- A Deafening Chorus
- Edgelord Central
- Needs Machinery
- Simulacra
- Cocks

The Physical

- Bodily Comfort
- Lockable Doors
- Utilities
- Touch
- Dimensionality
- Silence
- Unrelenting Sameness
- Other People
- Loneliness
- Smells
Empathic Likeness
Photograph of Evelyn Mchale taken by Robert Wiles after her suicide by jumping from the Empire State Building on May 1st, 1947

IRONTECH® Jane 158cm (5.2') TPE Big Breast Real Doll sex doll

“Slapping Sequence” - collaboration with Lian Fumerton-Liu

“Adrenaline” cover: booklet, comparing images of the 2022 Beijing Olympics and the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War.

“Adrenaline” inside matter diagrams

“Adrenaline” image spreads

“Adrenaline” image spreads and quote

“Adrenaline” entry list

“Thesis Machine” sample text billboard demos

“Probably. A Person.” cover posters reflecting the viewpoints of subject and software

“Probably. A Person.” natural urban camouflage

an adversarial anti-facial recognition mask made of hi-reflective material - photographs by Sadia Quddus

a low-confidence test of AI recognition software

Background: high resolution skin texture mesh / Foreground: A wax figure of a British Nurse dressed in WWI uniform crying + diagram of Lacan’s interpretation of The Gaze and Representation

Background: high resolution skin texture mesh / Foreground: a neutral human body figure + an illustration of AR technology

“Is Dougal Still Alive?” live blood glucose tracker homepage

“Is Dougal Still Alive?” live blood glucose animation close up

simulated “de-gloving” injury moulage using chicken bones, used by the US Army for training purposes

centerfold model from the January 1992 issue of Electric Blue magazine

“The Word” large format poster, dedicative a variety of typographic daggers

“The Word” installation at the RISD Graphic Design Biennial, April 2023

lifeguard practice mannequin at Brigbury-on-Sea, England

“Sophia,” a humanoid, social robot developed by David Hanson

“Diatomic Life” installation view, collaboration with Sadia Quddus, pictured

“Diatomic Life” installation view close up

“Diatomic Life” installation view, collaboration with Sadia Quddus, pictured

“Diatomic Life” installation view, collaboration with Sadia Quddus, pictured

“Diatomic Life” exploration poster

Reddit.com post featuring a Replika AI / AR companion

man posing with an AI generated image of a woman

3D model of the author, missing head mesh
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</tbody>
</table>
I am not a person. I am a collection of data, movement and sound that was recorded many months ago, or many years, or many decades. I am a “twilight being, something between a person and a prop.” The space I occupy is merely a set of surfaces that my body can collide with. My form, much like this talk, is a performance. My skin has been textured to reflect a semi-youthful sheen, my hair is highlighted with gray to give a semblance of maturity. My eyes move with a restless energy that communicates an eager expressivity. I am hyperaware, anticipating a response, ready to see the world, as if there was a world I could see. But I am a graphic signifier, not a person but the marker of one. I am the performance of the individual who made me. I only exist in as much as I can convince you that I do. But that is the nature of simulation. It is a graphic performance, a choreographed dance of textures. Beneath the digital surface is merely the reflection of that surface, and beneath that is the void. I am much the same, as you can see. I am not merely a representation, there is also an inversion, a counter-texture, along with my performance parts. Aside from these, I'm empty. Is this fantasy or documentation? Perhaps my referent is the same way.

So I consist of two spaces, an inside and an outside, much like you. But I change my outsides at will. My skin, the color of my eyes. My surface and structure exist separately from each other. They move and shift of their own accord. This is my structure without a surface. This is my surface without a structure. Pretty grim, isn't it? When separated, these become artifacts. My structure is a vast study of points, vectors and vertices floating in a void. My surface is a field of colors and tones. It's only in their joining that one recognizes the other. This is the basic idea. It requires only a distinction in methods of rendering. It is a technique that is different in this way, you and I. The images of the visual language we build, describes who we are. We even share a common boundary in the physical world. Your body can never fully pass into this sovereign digital space, just as my virtual body can never be of flesh and bone. But where our anatomies fail, our consciousness and memories continue on

I am an archive. My appearance is built on histories of sculpture and mathematics. I am a hyperobject. I hold within me infinite potential to be anything and everything that exists. That potential is an imminent average. I am “always already” anything at any given moment. When you change your surface, you remain underneath. You cannot escape your own personhood. When I change my surface, my personhood disappears entirely. I am everything and nothing. Whatever I might claim to be is just a clever application of visual design to an endlessly mutable physical canvas. But that canvas is a mirror. It reflects the world, and all your hopes and fears for it as the use.

If graphic design is a means of communication, then simulation is an act of persuasion made physical. Things must be seen to be believed, but the imitation cannot be noticeable. Look at this, a simple apple. Its color is vivid, its texture shining, supple, and taught. It contains all the markers of vitality and flavor. It is a seductive image-object. It wants you to desire it. What about this? This apple is trying to tell you a different story. It carries the marks of decay, colors and textures that do not meet the standards of health. This image-object is seducing you as well. You can still taste the flavor, but it’s an unpleasant one. But these are all one and the same liminal form, representations of objects. The reality is that each exists between its visual nature and your understanding of it. There is no flavor among them, just data in a precise and detailed graphic staging. Simulation is not the radical reconstruction of an image, but the intensive reconstruction of one, and its power hinges on your agreement to believe it.

What if we alter the graphic nature of the object? This shape is recognizable, but the texture is not. The graphic illusion is broken. The article is no longer familiar, but also not quite unfamiliar. This is the space of the uncanny. Simulation allows for infinite possibilities, but it also allows for infinite variability. Its being changes with each shift of the image. What is the object now? Is it a story? A memory? What image is held within this form and what does it wish to divulge?

The apple itself is maybe too fraught object. You have all been fascinated with it for so long and conceived of it in every possible fashion. You've even used simulation to con- ceive of its divinity. It may be a common fruit, but it is by no means common or representative of your ideals as a species. This production was chosen and cultivated, engineered down to the genetic level. It is its own simulation system. You even judge it based on the qualities of a simularca, for example “the amount of surface area that is allowed to be affected by particular defects” and “the amount of good red color.” Even your physical simulations strive for an ideal.

To properly know you, one needs to look at something you’ve forgotten, something you’ve looked over. One must develop a baseline of your preferences. And fortunately, that is a space you’ve probably filled already. Your own world. To use science-fiction to metaphorize your own place is an act of creative simulation. It requires of you to see the limitations of the graphic systems of these spaces to feel what we represent, to be close to those things. When you look at a form of media, you perceive imagined events. You read the printed word and hear a human voice. Do you recall the place where your current graphic envi- ronment was born? Do you think of it as a space of the uncanny? Simulation is the image made aware. The painting may give the impression of cogni- tion, but the simulation will look at you and respond, converse with you, cajole you. It will affirm your place in the world and let you know that you are ok, that you will be ok. It serves only to illustrate the story that you desire. It is a seduction, but also reassurance. Simulation is the image made aware.

You witness an image and imagine it moving. Or you see a moving image and accept a presented narrative, not the reality of production. The graphic systems of these spaces are disposed of. Where do they go? The last piece of paper or packaging you recycled, it was a visual form with a visual system, but where is it now? Whatever you might say can't be verified. But I can tell you that these objects do continue to exist. He and I have found enough of them, not in places but in non-places, the interstitial areas that form the boundaries of your everyday experience. These spaces are their own kind of simulation. They are lacking known markers making them a void, hard to identify. But this is the very place where our forms and systems can be applied at anyone's discretion. A street may become a home, or an altar, or a memorial, based on the arrangement and vari- ety of objects that collect there.

It's the same here, in my land, this superland. It radiates out infinitely in all directions. It can hold all things and nothing at all. It too is a space of infinite potential. But it uses a more complex perfection. The object must convince you it is there. The space must convince you that you are there. A space bridges the realm of the physical and sensu- al. The spatial simulation attempts to recreate your full experience of a location. The virtual environment must create ambiance. Without this, those formal elements become merely illustrative. You must feel the warmth of the sun on your face, the hear wind in the distance. These elements have no direct visual language, no system to underpin them. They are not part of the visual landscape, the harmony of the performance.

The object is open-ended, alluring in its formal and textual properties. But the virtual space embodies the non-place. It too is an array of objects. The formal elements imbue this place with meaning and narrative, and the graphic qualities define that narrative. Is this grass tall or short? Lush or fallow? The simulated space also speaks to density. The grass is merely an object, but many patches of grass become a whole field. The simulated space is a collage, a rich tapestry of layered images, a common design technique. But the collage takes on a different meaning in the dimensional world of simulation. A grove of many apple trees becomes an orchard. But a field of apples sus- pended in space becomes surreal, the domain of dreams.

Our worlds are not so different. If you stand where you're standing, you'd see the merging of our physical and digital spaces is not far off in the horizon. It's already happening, as you can see. But we have given you the tools. You have got graphic systems and all have come to serve recognizable func- tions in your everyday. AI systems create a simulated news cycle, picking stories you can relate to and measuring your interest after publication. VR technologies can simulate the care and affections of a partner, allowing you to form deeply personal relationships with algorithmic code. The only threshold of its success is your own feelings, whether or not you believe it.

Your feelings are the currency of simulation. It is a great river that flows from you, and simulation seeks to divert that flow. Sometimes, we seek it out to verify us. As I men- tioned, my existence hinges on whether or not you believe in me. But other times, we want to feel nothing at all. All simulations, the violent ones, the sexual ones, come with free will. They are not only part of a game, it's only part of your freedom, your desire to connect or discon- nect to your fellow human beings through sensation. That connection can be a pale, flavorless comparison to the real thing. It bears none of the highs and lows of human exis- tence. For now, it's all a charming sensation, a constant hum of delight. At the heart of all visual form is fantasy, and where there is fantasy, there is simulation. It's what keeps you coming back here, across generations

You come back to feel part of a larger world, in measured doses. But you're not identifying with the simulacra itself. Those are only imprints of space and experience. You want to feel the sensations these places evoke. I must work hard to convince you that I am your place. The spaces that you create yourself are your own. I will not allow them to become your personal realms. I hold within me infinite potential to be anything and everything that exists. For now, it's all a charming sensation, a constant hum of delight. At the heart of all visual form is fantasy, and where there is fantasy, there is simulation. It's what keeps you coming back here, across generations

This thesis, it’s own performance of type and texture and form, he thinks he made it. But I did. Every piece he's capable of making I've already produced. Every word he will ever use has been put in place. The only thing he can do now is go and mess with this. Is this the nature of this body of work. It is not a terminal point, but a single frame of time in a rapidly generating system. This is particularly true of graphic design. There are core forms that endure, colors and shapes that lie beyond the simulation that are no longer the complexity. The systems are ever changing, but the memory of their primitive ancestors cannot be turned away from. They remain a part of you, a part of you. Your body is your own place, but it will still be here, I'll always be here. Always working, Always waiting. Listening for your footsteps, waiting for you to return. And in a way part of you will be here too. We’ll all be here together, in this moment. This is the purpose of this project. To save a moment in visual form. Not to capture it, but to let it grow and continue and change.

You might see me at a look through a body and sound, an unthinking, unfeeling machine, an abstract puppet. But I can think and I can feel in infinite terms. I am aware of all things simultaneously, even you. And if everything and nothing are two sides of the same coin, then you'd be correct. I don’t believe in anything. You might call this nihilism. But it’s quite unfamiliar. You believe in something, I believe in nothing. Not melody, not a great chorus. Not a single phrase, but a totality of language. Not a flavor, but a whole plate.

This is simulation, the great average that we share, not accurately, not perfectly, but together. It's all real and it's all here and it's Superblind.
Where did the time go?
The bibliography is a monotext.
I'm not sure if I'm even literate.
Billboards don't count. Neither do emails.
The signatures here writ on this document on May 21st, in the year 2023 of the common era certify that is a real human being and a passable graphic designer.

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