

APPROVAL SHEET

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ABSTRACT

Title of Document: PLAY IT AS IT LAYS

William Edward Stitt, M.F.A., 2016

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In the multi-channel looping video installation *Play It As It Lays*, I project the sights and sounds of a series of complete circuits around the Baltimore Beltway (I-695) at night, in a variety of special configurations. Inspired by a nocturnal experience of pleasurable disorientation on the Los Angeles freeway, the work draws its character from experiments in digital cinema, cyberpunk literature, postmodern and psychoanalytic theories of spatial practice, and the aesthetics of Baltimore's built environment – at once a unique place and a generic piece of contemporary American highway. Guided by the thinking of Marshall McLuhan, Fredric Jameson, Michel Foucault, Margaret Morse, Victor Burgin, Mary Anne Doane, Laura Mulvey, and others, *Play It As It Lays* presents a series of trips through a familiar space made strange, a contemporary hyperspace built of artificial light and sound, contributing to an ongoing aesthetic project of cognitively mapping the self and the lived environment in motion, as they reciprocally affect and recreate one another in a mutually interdependent relationship.

PLAY IT AS IT LAYS

By

William Edward Stitt

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2016

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Dedication

This is for Sarah, who talked me into it; Chris, who didn't talk me out of it; Robin, who listened to me talk myself into it and then agreed; Dan, who probably talked everyone else into it; and the citizens of the State of Maryland, who paid for it; Marcus and the staff of Mercy Hospital, who literally saved my life; Dad and Mary, who kept watch and brought me milkshakes and *Vogue*; Mom and John, who gave me love and encouragement, a seaside getaway, and delicious bread; all my friends at Penland School of Crafts and in Spruce Pine, NC, who welcomed me home whenever I needed to come back; Michelle and Alfred, who took care of Henry; Eddie and Zoe and Eric, who kept me grounded; Bradley, Mike, Steven, and Erik, who gave me so much music; Lindsay, who joined me for Sunday buns and conversation; all my sisters and brothers (birth, step-, and -in-law), whose examples I am constantly trying to live up to; Bastian, Connor, Desmond, Julie, Ryan, and Linzey, who are endless sources of inspiration and wonder; Melissa and Mollye, who sent me all the gifs...

And for Henry, who sat on my keyboard whenever I needed to stop.

Thank you.

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I am also indebted to Mark Alice Durant, Matthew Porterfield, and James Smalls, my oral defense questioners, for your willingness to read, interpret, and question my written ideas and exhibition.

My classmates Tom Boram, Elena DeBold, and Cliff Evans have spent the last nine months reading and offering feedback on this document, and I am deeply grateful to you for the time and attention you've invested.

The installation itself would have been nearly impossible without Melissa Cormier's late-night driving skills, and the technical expertise and generosity of Jeffrey Gangwisch and Christian Valiente in UMBC's Visual Arts Production Center. I owe you big.

I would also like to thank Lisa Moren, Graduate Program Director, and the faculty and staff of the Intermedia and Digital Art program at UMBC, and Symmes Gardner and the staff and crew of the Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture, for making my thesis exhibition, and the three years of education and development it represents, possible.

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Introduction: Art in the Dark

“First, imagine darkness. Although it does not come first, its effect remains primary and overwhelming.... Imagine, then, this unaccustomed gloom, its velvety eclipse of space, its obscuring of orientation.... What happens in the dark? How does light structure and create its own world?... [T]he screen or projection surface opens up another space, a space of illusion perhaps, or representation, or simply of the play of light.”

- Tom Gunning, “The Long and the Short of It”¹

“The recorded-video art installation can be compared to the spectator wandering about on a stage, in a bodily experience of conceptual propositions and imaginary worlds of memory and anticipation.... That is, legitimated and contained by the boundaries of the art institution, a world is declared into existence.”

- Margaret Morse, “Video Installation Art”²

Play It As It Lays

To understand a work of art from the inside, as its creator, in the midst of the process of creation, is a strange task. After the fact, with time and repeated viewing, a critical distance develops, and the basic themes, structures, and preoccupations become evident. In the moment, as the work unfolds, however, I stand with the viewer, trying to conceptualize what I see, hear, and feel in real-time,³ in Jacques Lacan’s space “between perception and consciousness.”⁴

¹ Tom Gunning, “The Long and the Short of It: Centuries of Projecting Shadows, from Natural Magic to the Avant-Garde,” in *Art of Projection*, ed. Stan Douglas and Christopher Eamon (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 23.

² Margaret Morse, “Video Installation Art: The Body, the Image, and the Space-in-Between,” in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, ed. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture, 1990), 159.

³ Searching for the work’s meaning is akin to seeking relationships between an individual wave and the ocean, a process of analyzing the breakers and ripples, in order to understand how this particular work – which comprises essentially the same material as previous work, mixed perhaps with some influx of additional muck kicked up from the ocean floor, blown from the shore, or dropped from the sky – is at once its own phenomenon and a part of a greater cycle.

As a child, I stood on the beach, my feet in the wet sand at the water’s edge, watching the waves. Observing them rolling and crashing on the beach, I took notice of the cross-breaks formed by the uneven landscape beneath the water as it turned the waves aside, collapsing them at angles, creating rippling

I process information very slowly,⁵ which may be why my work in video is often long in duration and either changes very slowly, or overwhelms the senses with dense layers of simultaneous information. My plodding cognitive tempo may also be why I return again and again to the same content and themes, re-examining them each time in different combinations, from different perspectives. One of my legs is shorter than the other, literally⁶ and figuratively. Walking slowly forward, I ultimately move around and around in circles. One circuit brings me around to you, the reader, whom I imagine standing side-by-side with me right now, as we⁷ set about viewing my three works – *Janus*, *Fish Eyes*, and *Only Revolutions*.

We see, we hear, we feel. We want to understand. We stand in the dark, between the glowing images. I turn to you and say:

“One of my earliest memories is of riding in the back of my parents' station

cymatic patterns of interference in the shallows, patterns that grew more dense and complex as the undertow drew them back into the next rising wave. I began to believe that if I could accurately record all these interference patterns in the water, just before they disappeared under the swells, I could use that information to reconstruct the wave itself, and perhaps the one before, and the one before that, working my way back through recreations of every previous wave, to the very first. The result would represent a total compilation and comprehension of the washout from that first wave.

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 56.

⁵ For a number of years, I lived with a persistent fear that I might be mentally disabled, and that everyone around me was too polite to tell me so. I imagined that every compliment paid to my intelligence, my creativity, my verbal facility, was actually spoken in an awkwardly generous, patronizing tone that I lacked the social skills to recognize. The only relief from this paranoid anxiety came from pulling out and examining my driver's license. “If I really were retarded,” I would reassure myself, “they would never let me drive a car.” Small wonder, then, that my thesis work – a demonstrative act of my creative intellect – involves driving. Of course, it might have been wiser of “them” not to let me drive anyway, but that would have put an end to this work and its exegesis before it ever began.

⁶ I share this anatomical quirk with my father and his sister, both of whom have undergone surgical knee replacements. Every three steps or so, my left foot catches and drags, my knee torques and pops as the leg attempts to realign itself, and I am three steps closer to my own eventual surgery.

⁷ I am speaking of us communally here not because I presume to know your thoughts, but because, in preparing this ekphrastic passage, I feel as though I am standing with you, the viewer, seeing the work for the first time.

wagon, on the way home from seeing *The Empire Strikes Back*, staring out the rear window into the dark, past the red glow of the taillights, dreaming spaceships into the streetlamps and headlights receding into the distance in front of me.”⁸

*Janus*⁹

We stand in the darkened white cube of a gallery space. A roughly life-sized projection of a highway at night fills the wall in front of us, as if we are looking backward from a moving car. Sounds wash over from above, as though coming from nowhere, filling the room: the sounds of an engine, of wind, and of wheels jostling on rough pavement.

Turning, we can see, directly behind us on the opposite wall, a forward-facing, mirror landscape, rushing toward us in the reflected ghost-light of a second projection. Standing in the space between, we are faced with a choice – to look down the highway ahead as it approaches and glides past, or behind as it recedes and vanishes into darkness. Alternatively, we could position ourselves perpendicular to the illuminated walls, looking

⁸ The first time I can recall thinking seriously about the use of light as a material in film was while watching the 1997 theatrical rerelease of *Empire*. At the end of the scene in which Luke Skywalker leaves Dagobah, his spacecraft ascends into the night off-screen. The camera holds on Luke’s teacher Yoda as he looks up into the white light from the rising ship. It bathes his face, the color shifting to red as he turns his gaze downward, then fades into darkness. The effect still gives me chills whenever I think about it. *The Empire Strikes Back*, directed by Irvin Kershner, cinematography by Peter Suschitzky (Century City: 20th Century Fox, 1980), film.

⁹ The title of this work is a reference to Janus, the two-faced Roman god of doorways, passages, and beginnings. He is represented looking forward and backward at once. Gilbert Meadows, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (London: Jupiter Books, 1978), 128. But the title also connects with the ekphrastic character of this chapter: “Ekphrasis, then, has a Janus face: as a form of mimesis, it stages a paradoxical performance, promising to give voice to the allegedly silent image even while attempting to overcome the power of the image by transforming and inscribing it.” Peter Wagner, “Introduction: Ekphrasis, Iconotexts, and Intermediality – the State(s) of the Art(s),” in *Icons - Texts - Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, ed. Peter Wagner (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 13.

back-and-forth at each image, or askance, peripherally, at both.

Those familiar with the urban geography of Baltimore city understand from landmarks and road signs that what we are seeing is the Beltway (I-695). For those unfamiliar with Baltimore, watching long enough makes clear that the visual experience is that of a complete circuit of the highway. The projections loop, and the circle continues. There is no point of departure, no destination.

We are situated in an endless, undocumented present. The road ahead moves toward us, and the past recedes into the distance. If surrendering to the illusion of movement, we may even begin to feel the highway moving *through* us. But there is no video to represent where we are now. We are free to move around the space, changing vantage points, but our general location remains constant relative to the oncoming and outgoing landscape. Standing between the two projections, we are suspended in time and space, seeing the past and the future, and the movement between them, again and again, never arriving anywhere but the unrepresented here and now.

Fish Eyes

Crossing to the opposite side of the gallery, we stand facing into the corner. On the two adjoining walls, larger-than-life images of the nighttime road glide by, seen as though from the opposite side windows of a car. The passing landscape – pools, points, and trails of artificial light – appear to emanate from the centerline of the corner itself. We cannot see what is directly ahead of us on the road, nor behind. A wide-angle lens distortion in each image warps the lines of motion around its center, emphasizing the

primacy of the moment represented there. It's like the imaginary perspective of a fish swimming through the night air, an eye on either side of its head.¹⁰ As we move closer, between the projections, the lights move past into our peripheral vision, to the edge of perception, and seemingly around and behind us. As before, sounds of the road and the engine wash over us from an invisible source overhead.

This too is an endless trip around the Baltimore Beltway, which we join *in medias res*, and which loops just at the moment it might be completed. Without visible signage, it takes longer to identify a simulated location, relying as we must on roadside landmarks. But the visual cues are there – the Harbor Tunnel, the purple stadium, the postindustrial darkness of Essex – and there is plenty of time to see them over and over.

Enveloped, as though by the opening pages of a picture book – or surrounded, as though by the event horizon of a black hole flattened into two dimensions – our bodies are illuminated by the light of the images reflecting from the walls. Here, in the perpetual unfolding of a moment, it is possible to see only what is around us now, with no visible representation of where we have been or what is to come.

¹⁰ The title of the piece is inspired by this effect, as well as the curved distortion in the images, a result of using cameras with “fish eye” lenses.

When a great white shark attacks, it closes its eyes and relies on an electroreceptive sense to orient its body in space. With eyes on either side of its head, the shark cannot see directly in front of it, but can sense electrical impulses from the muscular activity of living prey through cilia on its face, similar in function, though different in medium, to hairs in the human ear. In this critical space, the great white “sees” and “hears” electrically. Cristen Conger, “What is Electroreception and How Do Sharks Use It?”

animals.howstuffworks.com, accessed March 27, 2016,

<http://animals.howstuffworks.com/fish/sharks/electroreception.htm>.

For a vision of how such a predator might function in a Marshall McLuhan-esque sea of electrical information, see Steven Hall, *The Raw Shark Texts* (New York: Canongate, 2008).

Only Revolutions¹¹

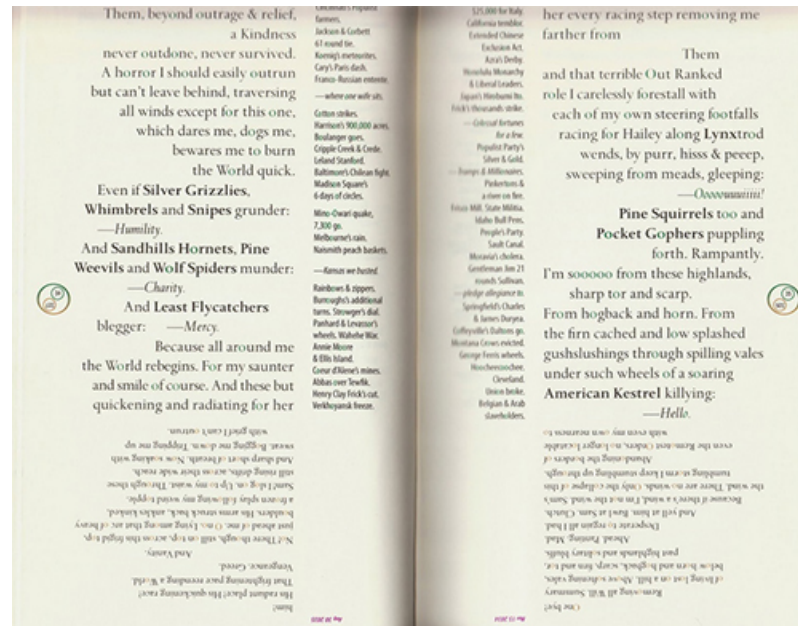


Figure 1: Mark Z. Danielewski, *Only Revolutions* (2006), page layout.

On the wall opposite the corner piece is a single projection, smaller than the others, composed of two nearly identical forward views, side-by-side, of the highway at night. It looks like a stereoscope without the mechanism for resolving the two halves into a single illusion of three dimensions.¹² Drawn closer by the more intimate scale of the projection, we again have a choice, but a different one than in *Janus*. Should we try to

¹¹ This title is a reference to a 2006 novel by Mark Z. Danielewski, in which the romance of two characters, living in different eras, is told simultaneously from the perspective of each. Every page is divided in half, each half printed in mirror orientation to the other (Fig. 1). The characters' first-person narratives begin at opposite ends of the book, and can only be read by turning the book upside-down and backwards at least once. "The publisher" helpfully "suggests alternating between [them], reading eight pages at a time." Mark Z. Danielewski, *Only Revolutions: The Democracy of Two, Set Out & Chronologically Arranged* (New York: Pantheon, 2006).

¹² For a detailed description and analysis of the stereoscope, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 118-132.

focus on one of the images here? Or let vision relax and expand to take in the wider field of shifting patterns in motion?

Nearing the wall, we become aware of voices and music emanating from an unseen source above – a parabolic speaker with a limited range of audibility. At first, the sounds seem chaotic, but gradually, it is possible to make out two radios endlessly scanning available frequencies, pausing on each station for only a few seconds before moving on to the next.

There are small variations in sight and sound between the two journeys spreading out before us, until each path crosses the Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River, but in opposite directions. The paired images are at that moment revealed as separate roundings of the Beltway, one on the Inner Loop and the other on the Outer, taken at different times, but presented simultaneously. The two radio scans, then, are the same radio in the same locations, but at different moments – again, until the paths cross at the bridge.

The visual effect can be entrancing. Occasionally, bright streetlights fill the frame to its limits, revealing the projected rectangle of the picture plane, but typically, the individual lights, lane markers, traffic cones, concrete dividers, and other cars appear to manifest out of a shapeless darkness. The impression is of two tunnels side-by-side, two divergent futures that arrive at the same place once during each rotation. We stand close, watching again and again, awaiting the approaching horizon that never arrives.

These are meant to be quiet, contemplative works – perhaps even hypnotic¹³ – that ask for the viewer’s time and patience. The collection of pieces seems almost certainly *about* spending time – in their space, in their light, in the dark, in motion, on the road, away from everywhere but here, in *another* space of transit.

What happens here in the dark? How do these configurations of light and sound structure and create their own world, within the white cube of the gallery, a world both like and unlike the one we know from experience? How did this world come to be? What does it mean?

¹³ For the principal theory of the entrancing power of roadways, see Griffith Wynne Williams, “Highway Hypnosis: An Hypothesis,” in *The Nature of Hypnosis: Selected Basic Readings*, ed. Ronald E. Shor and Martin T. Ome (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1965), 482-490.

Chapter 1: Between Perception and Consciousness

“‘The idea of another locality,’ writes Freud, in a famous phrase. ‘The idea of another space,’ adds Lacan, ‘another scene, the *between perception and consciousness*.’”

- Victor Burgin, *In/Different Spaces*¹⁴

“This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn’t be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done.... It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art.”

- Tony Smith¹⁵

In the Beginning

I trace the genesis of this work to a nighttime experience on the Los Angeles freeway in 2010. Waking up in the back seat of a friend's car, I found myself staring out the windows, disoriented, lost in the seemingly endless circles of on- and off-ramps, a dizzying, beautiful space at once real and unreal – an *other* space, as Jacques Lacan or Michel Foucault¹⁶ would have it – with no real purpose except to be traversed, to be a space between other spaces. I was reminded aesthetically of the “City of the Future” sequence in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*,¹⁷ and the highway scenes in Michael Mann’s

¹⁴ Victor Burgin, *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 47.

¹⁵ Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., “Talking with Tony Smith,” in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), 386.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neal Leach (New York: Routledge, 1997), 330-336.

¹⁷ *Solaris*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, cinematography by Vaidm Yusov (Moscow: Mosfilm, 1972), film. The scene was filmed in 1971 on the Tokyo Metropolitan Expressway. In 2005, artists Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani produced *TME – Tokyo Metropolitan Expressway*, a two-channel parallel-projection video contrasting the original footage from Tarkovsky’s film with a contemporary re-staging. I discovered the piece very recently, so it wasn’t an influence on my current work, but it looks very similar and obviously shares influences. Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani, “Kelvin TME,” *fisherelsani.net*, accessed April 2, 2016, http://www.fischerelsani.net/selected/kelvin_tme.html.

early digital films *Collateral*¹⁸ and *Miami Vice*.¹⁹ The experience was so uncannily beautiful that I never wanted it to end.²⁰ I felt like Tony Smith on the New Jersey Turnpike,²¹ like Fredric Jameson in the Bonaventura Hotel.²²

I saw an afterimage of the color and aesthetics of that strange place in a grocery store parking lot in North Carolina in 2012. I was doing a series of exercises my psychotherapist had suggested to help me achieve some sort of rapprochement, or at least détente, with my reflection.²³ I was meant simply to sit quietly in front of a mirror, re-familiarizing myself with my alienated double. The technique never worked at home – it felt awkward and forced. Only in the parking lot, in the weird glare and shadows of the

¹⁸ *Collateral*, directed by Michael Mann, cinematography by Dion Beebe and Paul Cameron (Universal City, CA: DreamWorks, 2004) Digital Video.

¹⁹ *Miami Vice*, directed by Michael Mann, cinematography by Dion Beebe (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2006) Digital Video.

²⁰ My rationalization of the built environment in terms of movies I've seen strikes me as a reversal of the "natural" order of perception, or a step along the precession of simulacra, akin to William Gibson's (in)famous description of "the sky" as "the color of television, tuned to a dead channel." William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1984), 3.

²¹ Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," 386.

"What [Tony] Smith saw in the dark horizon beyond the freeway [in the late 1960s] has become in the intervening period [to the late 1980s] a landscape of suburbs, malls, and television in which everything, including the natural environment, is either enveloped by the low-intensity fictions of consumer culture or abandoned to decay. A subject in this everyday world is surrounded by images and a built environment that are, at times, hard to tell apart. Three-dimensional objects are no longer a prior reality to be represented, but rather seem to be blowups of a two-dimensional world. Two and three dimensions interchange freely with each other in a derealizing process so hard to grasp that we turn to catchwords like postmodernism in desperation." Margaret Morse, "Video Installation Art," 157-158.

²² "I am... at a loss when it comes to conveying the thing itself, the experience of space you undergo when you step... into the lobby or atrium.... I am tempted to say that such space makes it impossible for us to use the language of volume or volumes any longer, since these are impossible to seize.... [Y]ou yourself are immersed, without any of that distance that formerly enabled the perception of perspective or volume. You are in this hyperspace up to your eyes and your body...." Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 1/146 (July – August 1984), 82-83.

²³ I began this particular round of therapy at the insistence of my roommate, who was frightened when I came home drunk and began punching and spitting at my reflection in the bathroom mirror. In her examination of the performance art of Ulay/Abramović, Kathy O'Dell extends Jacques Lacan's theory of the "mirror stage" to include the child's first acts of violence and self-violence, observing that, in addition to playing mimicking games at the mirror, children often hit their own reflections. Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 36-38. See also Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1966; New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 1-7.

orange floodlights overhead, blurred by my tears and the dirty rear-view mirror, did the person looking back at me begin to resemble my distorted self-image.

Something in the quality of the light was crucial to that experience. When I returned recently to that same parking lot to reflect on the moment, I discovered that the orange lights had been changed out for cool white fluorescents. The *other* space was gone, the connection lost.

An Other Space

I began work on *Play It As It Lays* still later, after reading Michel Foucault's 1967 lecture "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" for a writing class at UMBC in 2014 (even though the work's title, borrowed from Joan Didion's novel of the same name, seemed to be there long before, waiting for me to make a piece to go with it, a tribute to the novel's main character, whose grappling with a nervous breakdown in the 1960s entails ceaseless driving on Los Angeles freeways).²⁴ Foucault's invocation of real spaces, utopias (unreal spaces), heterotopias (spaces at once real and unreal), and the mirrors – literal and figurative – between them,²⁵ resonated with my experience of this

²⁴ Joan Didion, *Play It As It Lays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970).

²⁵ "First of all, the utopias. These are arrangements which have no real space. Arrangements which have a general relationship of direct or inverse analogy with the real space of society. They represent society itself brought to perfection, or its reverse, and in any case utopias are spaces that are by their very essence fundamentally unreal. There also exist, and this is probably true for all cultures and all civilizations, real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged, and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable. In contrast to the utopias, these places which are absolutely other with respect to all the arrangements that they reflect and of which they speak might be described as heterotopias. Between these two, I would then set that sort of mixed experience which partakes of the qualities of both types of location, the mirror. It is, after all, a utopia, in that it is a place without a place. In it, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up potentially beyond its surface; there I am down there where I am not, a sort of shadow that makes my appearance visible to myself, allowing me to look at myself where I do not exist: utopia of the mirror. At

aesthetic/psycho/social place. Foucault names a vehicle – “the ship” – as a model heterotopia. His description could be seen as a transliteration of the automobile in a contemporary American context: “... a placeless place... closed in on itself and at the same time poised in the infinite ocean.... [I]t has been not only and obviously the main means of economic growth... but at the same time the greatest reserve of imagination for our civilization....”²⁶ I wrote “Madness Is My Heterotopia of Choice”²⁷ in response to Foucault’s essay, and it became the seed of a screenplay for an imagined film adaptation of the experience of listening to an audiobook while driving.

On the Road

As I began to acquire the footage for this film, driving around Baltimore at night with GoPro cameras attached to my car, spiraling through the interchanges and across the highway systems that cleave, connect, and alienate the city from itself, the experience of these spaces – the way they look, sound, and feel – overwhelmed and displaced my initial intention to accompany them (and perhaps even distract the viewer from them) with the text of an audiobook. I breathed and felt my body in these spaces. I dreamed, I thought, I talked to myself. Sometimes I simply went quiet. I found myself wanting to represent and reflect this “swift non-place”²⁸ in emplaced moving imagery, an environment I hoped would encourage viewers to feel their way through the experience for themselves, rather

the same time, we are dealing with a heterotopia. The mirror really exists and has a kind of comeback effect on the place that I occupy: starting from it, in fact, I find myself absent from the place where I am, in that I see myself in there.” Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 332.

²⁶ Ibid., 336.

²⁷ Wes Stitt, “Madness is My Heterotopia of Choice” (2014) Unpublished. See Appendix A for the full text.

²⁸ Ibid., 2.

than listening to me narrate it for them (though, ironically, it could be argued that I have done just that in ekphrastic form in the Introduction to this thesis).

Gradually, my directionless meanderings through the city fell into an orbit around it. I began restricting my drives to the Beltway (Fig. 2). In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Marshall McLuhan argues that all technologies function as extensions of human organs, enhancements to which we reciprocally adapt ourselves psychically and socially.²⁹ In McLuhan's view, the automobile is an extension of the feet and legs. Perhaps my habit of walking in circles asserted itself here. I began going around and around in the car.

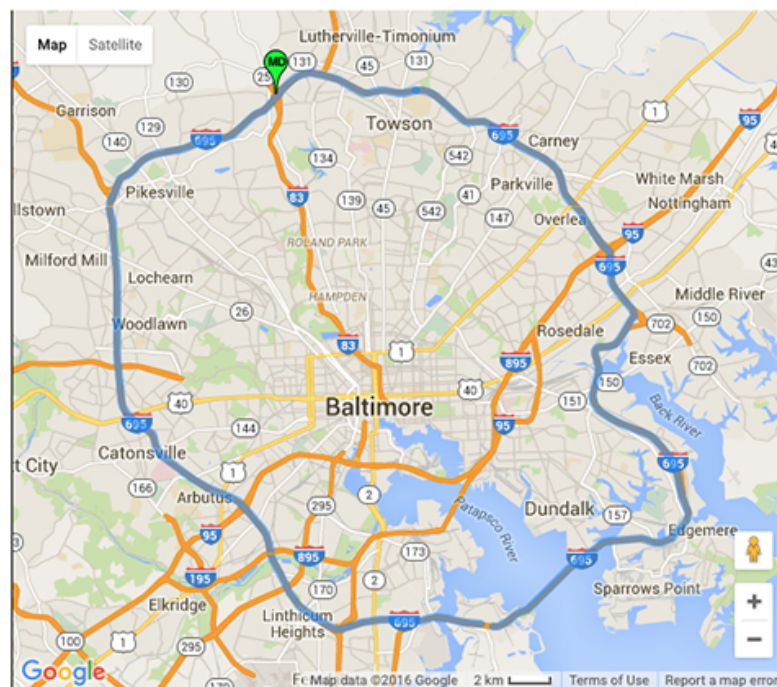


Figure 2: The Baltimore Beltway (I-695).

²⁹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2013), 77.

The Beltway is an uncanny space. Many of us spend quite a lot of time here, but do our best to distract ourselves from the experience – with music, literature, telephones, daydreams – our habituation to the environment allowing us to drive unconsciously. As a symbol of state power, this highway is nearly unparalleled. The Eisenhower Interstate System, of which the Beltway is a part, is considered among the greatest public works in history.³⁰ As an accelerated conduit in, around, and out of the city, the Baltimore Beltway functions (mostly) efficiently, but because of the unpredictability of traffic, accidents, and other obstacles, the commonsense tendency is to spend as little time on it as possible. I suspect that I am one of a very small number of people who have deliberately driven all the way around it multiple times.

³⁰ Richard F. Weingroff, “The Greatest Decade 1956-1966: Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Eisenhower Interstate System, Part 1: Essential to the National Interest,” *fhwa.com*, accessed April 9, 2016, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/50interstate.cfm>.

Chapter 2: Hyperspace

“This latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings, perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world.”

- Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*³¹

“Traveling through hyperspace ain’t like dusting crops, boy.”

- Han Solo, *Star Wars*³²

Tunnels of Light

My colleague Tom Boram, a filmmaker interested in the aesthetics of science fiction, said of my piece, “It looks like hyperspace” (Fig. 3). His direct reference was to the visual language depicting spacetime travel in television and film: the slit-scan “tunnels of light” in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Dr. Who*, the elongated trails of starlight flashing past in *Star Wars* (Fig. 4) and *Star Trek*.



Figure 3: Tom Boram’s vision of hyperspace, as seen in *Only Revolutions* (2016).

³¹ Jameson, “Postmodernism,” 83-84.

³² *Star Wars*, written and directed by George Lucas (Century City: 20th Century Fox, 1980), film.



Figure 4: Science-fictional hyperspace, as depicted in *Star Wars* (1977).

But the word “hyperspace” is also linked to postmodern theories of spatial practice, a major strain of which, like my project, was inspired by meditations on the physical and psychical environs of Los Angeles.³³



Figure 5: Postmodern hyperspace, as explored by Fredric Jameson, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja – the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles.

³³ Fredric Jameson, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja all contributed monumental works to the field of postmodern cognitive mapping after a group tour of Los Angeles in 1984. Victor Burgin, *In/Different Spaces*, 23-24.

Postmodern hyperspace (Fig. 5) in Jameson's view, represents a "mutation"³⁴ of the lived environment, an affect (or "intensity"³⁵) of profound subjective disorientation, which demands an aesthetic program of "cognitive mapping"³⁶ as a corrective. It is this sort of mapping I have attempted in my work,³⁷ but with different methods. Jameson analyzes the urban spatial array through the lens of literary criticism. I hit the road with digital cameras.

The simultaneity of multiple visual perspectives is central to this project, as video cameras increasingly enhance rear- and side-view mirrors, changing of our experience of the road. So, too, the specific treatment of sound in the installations. The speakers are hidden in darkness above, so the sounds heard in the room seem to emanate from the images, from the space itself, perhaps even from inside the viewer. Each bump and jolt provides a felt document of physical interface with the road. The scanning radios further tie *Only Revolutions* to a sense of place, as the available stations and the strength and quality of their signals vary with the location of the car relative to their broadcast centers.³⁸

Writing in the 1980s, Jameson and his contemporaries distrusted "this new space," and found its disorienting beauty disturbing, "in part because [their] perceptual

³⁴ Jameson, "Postmodernism," 80.

³⁵ Ibid., 64.

³⁶ Ibid., 92.

³⁷ Tom also described my earlier video, *Me Tarzan... You Jane Eyre* (2013) as a work of "cognitive mapping."

³⁸ A poignant illustration of this reality can be found in the first episode of the second season of *The Wire*, where Bodie Broadus drives from Baltimore to Philadelphia. An urban youth who has never left his home city, Bodie is disoriented when he gets far enough from Baltimore that the radio stations change. *The Wire*, Season 2, Episode 1: "Ebb Tide," written by David Simon and Ed Burns (New York: Home Box Office, 2003), video recording.

habits were formed in that older kind of space... the space of high modernism.”³⁹ Having grown up in the world these pioneers of postmodernism were exploring, I cartographically approach the territory of hyperspace as a native rather than an émigré. Instead of “seeking a way out of the ‘spiraling orbit,’ [which has] become a vicious circle around a city,” as Victor Burgin describes their collective crisis, I have sought to stabilize the orbit. Rather than joining Jameson’s search for an exit from the Bonaventura Hotel,⁴⁰ I have rented a room.

Travels in Space and Time

In 2006, I encountered three video works that fundamentally changed my thinking about the nature and potential of the medium. The first was Shirin Neshat’s *Turbulent* (1998), in which she uses opposing video projections to activate the space in between as a site of immersive, participatory viewership⁴¹ (Fig. 6). Two singers – one male, one female – face one another on screens across a darkened room. They take turns performing and reacting to each other’s performance across the literal and symbolic divide of the gallery space.⁴² Where viewers choose to stand and to look determines not only what they see, but also who they might imagine themselves to be. Are they part of the woman’s

³⁹ Jameson, “Postmodernism,” 80.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 80-83.

⁴¹ I first saw *Turbulent* as a DVD of the video, presumably the official documentation of the piece. For the purpose of single-screen presentation, the opposing images from the installation were shown side-by-side. The work is similarly documented in print. See Melissa Chiu and Melissa Ho, eds., *Shirin Neshat: Facing History* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2015), 102-113. It was nearly a decade later when I eventually experienced the full video installation in August 2015 as a part of the Hirshhorn Museum’s *Shirin Neshat: Facing History*. Though I understood from written descriptions that this configuration represented a flattening of the intended viewing space, what caught my attention at the time was the simultaneity of multiple viewpoints on display.

⁴² See Melissa Ho, “A State of In-Between: Shirin Neshat’s Iran,” in *Shirin Neshat: Facing History*, ed. Melissa Chiu and Melissa Ho (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, in association with Smithsonian Books, 2015), 18.

audience? The man's? Might the viewer *be* the man, or the woman, depending on who is being faced? Or does the viewer attempt, with back pressed against one of the adjacent outer walls, to observe both sides of the confrontation simultaneously?



Figure 6: Shirin Neshat, *Turbulent* (1998), two-channel video with sound.

The second was Canadian-American artist Jillian McDonald's *Zombie Loop* (2006),⁴³ a two-channel video installation that I encountered at the Soap Factory Gallery in Minneapolis (Fig. 7). *Zombie Loop* is structurally similar to Neshat's *Turbulent*, and seeing it was the first time I had experienced such an installation in its intended form. The piece consists of two looping videos projected onto opposite walls of a darkened viewing space. In one, the artist, costumed and made up like a zombie, lumbers down a dirt road toward the camera. In the other, she flees from the camera down the same road in the opposite direction, dressed in the manner of an archetypal horror movie heroine. The camera moves at a constant pace relative to each figure, so that to the viewer, neither appears to come any closer or go further away, but endlessly chases or pursues.

⁴³ See "Zombie Loop," [jillianmcdonald.net](http://www.jillianmcdonald.net/projects/zombieloop.html), accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.jillianmcdonald.net/projects/zombieloop.html>.

Depending on the viewer's choice of position – facing the “victim,” facing the “zombie,” or standing perpendicular to and watching both – character identification can shift. A viewer can embody the perspective of pursuer, prey, or bystander, all in the course of a single interaction with the work.



Figure 7: Jillian McDonald, *Zombie Loop* (2006), two-channel video.

The third piece was *Show/Down* (Fig. 8), by Suzanne Kosmalski. Projected into a corner, this installation features two unsynchronized video loops showing cowboys and Indians shooting at and fleeing from each other, the footage appropriated from Hollywood westerns.⁴⁴ The perpendicular configuration of this work encourages a viewer to experience the projections in a quite different way than McDonald's. It is possible to take in all the imagery at once, but the arrangement subverts cinematic conventions of linear perspective, drawing the eye not into but across the pictures in real space, rather

⁴⁴ See Celia Aldarondo, “Irreconcilable Differences: The McKnight Fellows Co-Exist at MCAD,” *mnartists.org*, August 10, 2006, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.mnartists.org/article/irreconcilable-differences-mcknight-fellows-coexist-mcad>.

than onto a single flat surface. The implied movement and directional gaze between the two exist in a sort of intermediary place between the side-by-side and the oppositional.



Figure 8: Suzanne Kosmalski, *Show/Down* (2006), two-channel video with sound.

Discovering multi-channel video spurred a fit of creative ideation. The possibility of showing more than one place or moment onscreen at the same time had not occurred to me before, or had failed to make an impression. It spoke to a question I'd been thinking about for as long as I'd been reading novels and watching movies. The culture in which I had grown up seemed to assume a rough equivalence between the two media. My question was this: How could a video adaptation of a text address the tricky formal devices employed in literature – multiple narrators, epistolary storytelling, simultaneous action, fluid time, etc. – without falling back on conventional filmmaking techniques of

voice-over, crossfades, or excision?⁴⁵ I imagined a two-screen adaptation of *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Alexandre Dumas, 1844) on opposing walls, forcing viewers to choose which narrative information they take in, an approach that seemed thematically resonant with a story of dual identity. I also conceived of a three-channel film version of *Frankenstein* (Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, 1818), projected on translucent screens spaced to allow either discrete attention to each of the story's narratives – Walton's letters, the Baron's confession, and the Creature's tale – or simultaneous viewing of the overlaid whole.

These were daydreams.⁴⁶ I lacked the resources and technical sophistication to realize the inspirations born of this new understanding of video, and spent the next several years exploring other artistic interests, though I never put these fantasies completely out of my mind.

My introduction to video editing software's capability to treat multiple layers in real time revived these earlier preoccupations with simultaneity and multiple viewing. I began layering dozens of films transparently within the picture plane, creating works that

⁴⁵ My thinking at the time was not focused on the (substantial) differences between cinema and video art as media – an excellent discussion of which can be found in Margaret Morse's "Video Installation Art: The Body, the Image, and the Space-in-Between," 156-161 – but rather on the differences between literature and the moving image, and how some of these might be approached more experimentally in adapting stories between the two. See Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, eds., *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (New York: Routledge, 1999). Indeed, at that stage of my education, I was unaware that film and video were different media with separate histories. I thought of the latter primarily as a low-budget version of the former. In the time since, with further study, I have become aware of Jonas Mekas's experimental multiscreen projections in the early 1960s, which inspired Andy Warhol's *Outer and Inner Space* (1965) and *Chelsea Girls* (1966), and of Gene Youngblood's important book *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970). It is worth noting that the entertainment industry itself experimented with multiscreen projection between the 1920s and 1950s, as part of the development of widescreen movies. Synchronized film proved expensive and impractical on a commercial scale, however, and was abandoned in favor of anamorphic projection (Cinemascope). See Robert E. Carr and R. M. Hayes, *Wide Screen Movies: A History and Filmography of Wide Gauge Filmmaking* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1988), 11–54.

⁴⁶ For a useful theorization of the relationship between daydreaming and creativity, see Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 436-443.

allow a viewer to watch the whole cinematic history of Dracula at once, in *Draculas and "Draculas"* (2013) or to view in juxtaposition every *Tarzan* and *Jane Eyre* film adaptation ever made, in *Me Tarzan... You Jane Eyre* (2013).

Of Other Spaces

When Foucault first articulated his concept of heterotopia – in the preface to his 1966 *The Order of Things* – he framed it as a literary space where objects and creatures as diverse and incompatible as those in Jorge Luis Borges's fictional ancient Chinese encyclopedia could coexist.⁴⁷ In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault recasts the idea of heterotopia as a type of physical and social space, distinct from both utopia and real space, yet simultaneously enmeshed in both. I experienced a similar development in my thinking about video work when I began to present multiple variations on the same narrative simultaneously in the same visual space.⁴⁸ As I turned my attention from the narrative flow of time to structural concerns of placement, gesture, and density, I observed the sort of collapse of temporal phenomena into more spatial concerns that permeates postmodern thinking – McLuhan, Foucault⁴⁹ Jameson,⁵⁰ Henri Lefebvre,⁵¹ etc.

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), xv-xvii.

⁴⁸ For Marshall McLuhan, such an evolution is inevitable in a technologized environment. As he observed in *Understanding Media*, "the moment that sequence yields to the simultaneous, one is in the world of structure and of configuration." McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 31.

⁴⁹ "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed." Foucault, "Of Other Spaces..." 330.

⁵⁰ "We have often been told... that we now occupy the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think that it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time..." Jameson, "Postmodernism," 64.

⁵¹ "Today everything that derives from history and from historical time must undergo a test... [N]othing and no one can avoid trial by space." Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 416.

I sensed an imperative for the presence of physical space in my work. At the time, my personal aesthetic preference for the clarity and vividness of screen-based imagery vis-à-vis projection overshadowed this discovery. But in my mind's eye, the series of phase-shifting videos I chose to present side-by-side – *Hoja to Jo!* (2014), *Time is the Space* (2015), etc. – began to manifest spatially, projected into corners or at opposite ends of a darkened room.

This visualization was likely also inspired by Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor's *Leviathan*,⁵² as presented in the 2013 Whitney Biennial. Produced and distributed as a feature-length documentary film, *Leviathan* is composed of a series of long shots taken at night, from a variety of perspectives,⁵³ on a commercial fishing boat⁵⁴ at sea, using GoPro high-definition digital action cameras.⁵⁵ In the gallery at the Whitney Museum, the piece was shown on a loop in a dark room, and projected to fill an entire wall. Visitors were meant to stand, though a few beanbag chairs were scattered on the floor. There were no scheduled show times, so viewers were free to come and go as they pleased, a setup that suited the temporal, conceptual, and structural construct of the film: *Leviathan*'s 96-minute duration and its looping structure made it unlikely that gallery visitors would take it in completely in one sitting. Furthermore, the film was large and loud, and projected in close proximity to the standing or prone viewers' bodies, and it had no recognizable "story."

⁵² *Leviathan*, directed by Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel (New York: Cinema Guild, 2012), digital video.

⁵³ Including the points-of-view of a dead fish, a television set, a chain-rigger, a fishing net, and the ship's propeller.

⁵⁴ "The ship is the heterotopia *par excellence*. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and police take the place of pirates." Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 336.

⁵⁵ This is the same setup I used to capture my footage.

Altogether, *Leviathan* delivered a series of slowly unfolding sensory impressions and, as such, was less a movie than a space for experience.⁵⁶ To enter this space was to be enveloped, to watch and try to resolve the partially abstract imagery on the wall, to be affected physically by the sounds of machinery, water, and the metallic groaning of the ship, and to think about the relationship between my body and those around me, both onscreen and in the room.⁵⁷

I ordered a DVD of the film (Fig. 9) as soon as I got home, and though it remains a favorite, watching it from beginning to end on a computer monitor always seems like a flattened invocation of that original experience, a shadow of its installed spatial form.



Figure 9: Still from *Leviathan* (2012).

⁵⁶ “Experience implies that a change has taken place in the visitor, that he or she has learned something... it exploits the capacities of the body itself and its senses to grasp the world visually, aurally, and kinesthetically.” Morse, “Video Installation Art,” 165.

⁵⁷ I was reminded of a staging of Philip Glass and Robert Wilson’s *Einstein on the Beach*, which is similarly constructed of slowly developing tableaux without overarching plot, performed very loudly over a long duration in a darkened theater where the audience is free to come and go at will. Whether Glass and Wilson’s opera, written in 1975-1976, was influenced by the relatively new field of installation art, or vice-versa, or both, I don’t know, but as a practitioner of one and aficionado of the other, I intuitively perceive a structural connection between the two.

Chapter 3: Light Speed

In Medias, Res (of Light)

The reason for darkness in a gallery space filled with projections is self-evident. But why so much darkness in the videos themselves? Why the highway at night? In the night, there is no illumination except for artificial light,⁵⁸ and man-made illumination is the material and medium of my project. McLuhan argued that “electric light is pure information... a medium without a message,”⁵⁹ overlooked as a vehicle for communication but exemplary in its power to transform human experience and perception,⁶⁰ able to collapse the division between day and night, indoors and out, work and leisure.⁶¹ Writing in 1964, McLuhan anticipated the coming digital age with further speculation that computerized electronic communications represented an external storage and operation of the human nervous system. The computer controls and monitors that regulate our cars and highways, the satellites and talking phones that guide us, the EZ-pass fields that allow us to pay tolls invisibly without stopping – these may be the new dendrites we have grown for ourselves in the intervening half-century.

Electric light makes the road visible. It regulates the flow of traffic. It illuminates the maps, either from within or without. Digital storage allows the harvesting and transporting of light and sound for later use. Capturing electric light, storing and projecting it electronically, I have brought the entirety of the Beltway, as seen and heard at night, into the gallery by day. I have made leisure, or at least the idle passing of time,

⁵⁸ Except for the stars, all but invisible in the city, and the moon, which periodically appears at the top of the frame in *Janus*. Perhaps significantly, the moon looks smaller and less bright than the streetlights. I briefly considered cropping it out.

⁵⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 23.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

my work (and yours, as a viewer). The light travels round and round the circuit like a video loop, like the road, the radio, the car, the clock, my cognition.

The Vehicle of Your Gaze

When experiencing this work, in what role is the viewer? Where is the camera? Who sees what the viewer sees? At first glance, experience and commonsense suggest that one's point of view should be that of the driver, or a passenger in the car. Such was my intention when I began filming, but a desire for compositional and (Albertian⁶²) perspectival clarity led me to exclude the visual clutter of dashboard, hood, and defrosting wires by mounting the cameras on the exterior of the car. I was so absorbed in my own perception of the project (at the time, a narrative vision⁶³) that I failed to notice the change in (subjective⁶⁴) perspective caused by this shift until an early viewer of the footage observed that the actual vantage point presented was not that of a passenger or driver, but of the car itself.

Film theorist Laura Mulvey has argued that the mechanism of pleasure in the moving image involves viewer identification with a powerful, active protagonist,⁶⁵ an

⁶² Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 43-59. (Originally published as *Della pittura*, 1435.) Though reticent to discuss the mechanics of vision in any detail, Alberti, writing before Kepler's identification of the eye as a lens and Newton's investigation of optics, appears to construct his model of perspective based on a conception of seeing as a form of projection – the eye sends out straight rays of perception to apprehend the visible object.

⁶³ See Appendix B: for a fragment of the narrative.

⁶⁴ “[It] is within psychoanalysis, arising, as is often noted, at the same historical moment as the cinema, that projection receives its most sophisticated theorization, and one which ultimately returns to the project of a mapping of subjectivity in relation to space.” Mary Anne Doane, “The Location of the Image: Cinematic Projection and Scale in Modernity,” in *Art of Projection*, ed. Stan Douglas and Christopher Eamon (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 160.

⁶⁵ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Media and Cultural Studies Keywords*, 2nd Edition, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 271.

argument that incorporates Lacan's theory of the "mirror stage," which provides Mulvey "a model of cinematic 'identification' in opposition to identification's own 'mirror image' – scopophilic objectification."⁶⁶ Concerned that the straightforward presentation of onscreen beauty for pleasurable contemplation tends to bring the narrative flow of film to a halt, she theorizes a transfer of the viewer's gaze to the protagonist, allowing for voyeuristic pleasure within the theatrical structure of the story.⁶⁷

I would have it both ways. Although the videos in *Play It As It Lays* do unfold over time, they are not dramatic narratives in an Aristotelian sense. There is only one moment in *Fish Eyes* where such a transfer to an onscreen surrogate would be possible, when my hand is briefly visible, paying a toll. I believe, however, that viewer identification can take place nonetheless. Sharing a structural affinity with "point-of-view" films like *Dark Passage* (1947), *Lady in the Lake* (1947), *Russian Ark* (2002), and *Enter the Void* (2009) – a type of film that Mulvey does not discuss – my videos present onscreen action in the first person, through the "eyes" of an unseen protagonist. The gaze of the viewer and the active subject – the car – are unified throughout, offering direct contemplation of the landscape, pleasure in speed, and power, and seeing.

Returning now to my imaginary side-by-side dialogue with "you," the viewer of *Play It As It Lays* and reader of this thesis, I envision you observing the projections. Your "eyes" are the digital cameras affixed to the car. You are not seated but standing. Your feet – McLuhan's models for the medium of the automobile – are on the ground. Your field of vision floats above the road, without obvious vehicular containment. The sounds

⁶⁶ Burgin, *In/Different Spaces*, 46.

⁶⁷ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 270-271.

of the highway, wind, and engine reach you from around, from within, resonating through the body of the car as they would through your own flesh and skull. The literal and figurative vehicle for your gaze here is the automobile.

In *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, sequential artist Scott McCloud observes that people project their awareness into inanimate objects when interacting with them, an idea he attributes to McLuhan.⁶⁸ “When driving, for example,” McCloud writes, “...the whole car – not just the parts we can see, feel, or hear – is very much on our minds at all times. The vehicle becomes an extension of our body. It absorbs our sense of identity. We become the car.”⁶⁹ He further describes these powers of absorption and identification in other useful devices – wooden legs, forks, telephones, and eyeglasses – arguing that “in every case, our constant awareness of self flows outward to include the object of our extended identity.”⁷⁰ Your part in this projection, then, may be to project yourself into the unseen moving body at the center of the action. Should you lose yourself in what you see, you will find yourself in the car.

⁶⁸ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 38. I searched McCloud’s source, Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2013), for the reference, but was unable to find it. McCloud’s intellectual debt to McLuhan is clear, but his conclusion appears to arise from a misreading of the “late great” media prophet’s text, a misreading that has produced a brilliant insight. As discussed earlier, McLuhan theorized that we fashion these tools deliberately as extensions of our bodies, rather than suggesting that we endow external objects with aspects of ourselves.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 39.

Afterword: (Chapter IV) A New Hope

We stand together in the dark, watching. After a while, we begin to watch others watching. A man and a woman sit between the projections in *Janus*, facing “forward,” pretending to drive. She turns around to look “behind,” and they sit back-to-back. Her eyes, wide with childlike joy and wonder, shine in the reflected light. She smiles and leans back to tell him, “I love this view. I never spend any time looking this way when I’m in the car.”

I speak to you again:

“She’s having my childhood experience, and her own. She’s seeing what I saw, and what she sees. She’s in another space and time, right here and now.”

That’s what can happen in the dark.

Appendix A: Madness is My Heterotopia of Choice

This Heterotopia is the shit. Here in the stark, shadowy yellow sodium world of the Ingles parking lot at 11:17 pm, just me and Dave and Amanda and Mariah and Bill and Brit and all the rest who don't come quickly to mind. Only they aren't here, they have heterotopias of their own, higher-class non-place places, I imagine. Just me here in my car, slowly, slowly, stiffly moving my eyes toward the gaze of the yellow shadow eyes in the rear-view mirror. He is over there – in there? behind there? right here? – me, distorted by the light and the angle and the crying and the dirty glass. I begin the exercise. Staring at his face until it begins to change, to become something other, something new, someone with something to tell me about over there over here, in here out there, where we should always be the same, but, notice-focus, in the circuit we can allow for some difference that might come back with me.

My point is this: Foucault was right about the mirror. I *am* “over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent.... Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself.”⁷¹ I *do*. I *have to*, right? Have to come back from the spotted glassy nowhere-where of the mirror place, mirror world, back to the car, my second-favorite heterotopia, like Foucault's boat, without sails, on land, a rolling piece of space, a “place without a place... that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given

⁷¹ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 332.

over to the infinity of the”⁷² road. Can’t stay locked in a contemplative staring contest forever, got to move, got to feel the momentum in between, on the way, in suspension, out of time, in the now. I have to let the change take hold, feel the wind rush across this new face, in my swift non-space, on the way to a new place.

- March 2014

⁷² Ibid., 336.

Appendix B: Fast Car

(Excerpt from an Imaginary Audiobook, Read by the Author)

[* Indicates a track division on the audio recording.]

*I suppose you've been waiting for me to tell you something.

I think you should be ready to listen to anyone by now.

Are you alone?

In the car?

In the dark?

Are you afraid?

You should be. You should be afraid all the time, in the car.

Even as I speak, you're risking your life, and the lives around you. You're changing the chemistry of the planet. You're killing people yet even to be. You're driving through a cloud of past and future ghosts, through the smoke of danger.

So now that we're alone,

Would you like me to tell you a story?

*Our civilization will end.⁷³

*Through the windshield of the car, I see a landscape filled with future ghosts. All these spaces will be underwater, beautifully engineered metal structures slowly rusting and corroding away, unnaturally colored lights burning on like phantoms in the murky

⁷³ As I drive, I can't stop thinking about Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway's little book *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), which I terrified myself reading recently. It has turned my outlook in a distinctly nihilistic direction. I had a similar experience in 2001 when I read Ward Churchill's similarly brief *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 1998), which effectively ended my self-conception as a left-wing academic and birthed my identity as an artist. What changes will this new traumatic encounter with a tiny piece of literature herald?

shallows until at last the power goes out. On a rainy night, this future is easy to visualize, already all but manifest in the hazy, glowing spheres around the street lamps overhead.

But it's all still here tonight, intact, in the open air, exposed to the sky, and on this freeway, this plateau of suspended time, lulled by the drone of the engine and the rhythmic passing of lane markers, I almost believe the future can be outrun, or ignored indefinitely, the trauma put off until after I've become a ghost myself.

That's the beauty of speed.⁷⁴

*Sometimes it's too fast for me. Have you seen the film *Scanners*?⁷⁵ It's like that.

*I'm in the American Visionary Art Museum, and I'm trying not to let the voices in the permanent collection get past my guard. But the pull is too great, my protected self opens up, and I can hear them calling to me, all these creative minds, speaking through their pieces on the walls ("My art keeps me sane," says the man hiding inside a sculpture of his own head⁷⁶). Voices echo in the galleries, resonant with hope and desperation and desire and persistent, insistent vision. And here comes the oscillating, lopsided synthesizer score bubbling up in my inward ears, signaling the pressure headache just before it arrives.

*Madness. It's madness, and it's my madness, too, and I can feel my head deforming, changing, pulsing with new flesh, new organs (Who said that first? Fredric

⁷⁴ "We say that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty; the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath—a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot—is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*." F.T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Marinetti: Selected Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 41 (originally published in *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909).

⁷⁵ *Scanners*, written and directed by David Cronenberg (Toronto: Avco Embassy Pictures, 1981), film.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Jameson⁷⁷ or David Cronenberg⁷⁸?), receptive, reaching out, pressing against the inside of my eyes, my temples, my mouth.

*It's like when you're walking down the street and sense a crazy person approaching, and you must quickly bury your own madness, stifle its light, before the passing madman feels it on the air and comes to meet you, irresistibly drawn by the flame of your kinship.

*Another reason to keep moving. Another trauma to avoid – the trauma of interface. Creeping, settling, magnetic madness that gathers in any place you stay for too long, it calls you to grow new organs, to alter your neurology. It curls around the handles of your car doors and pulls, gently at first, seeping through the vents and the cracks above the windows, filling the safe space of the car, unless dispelled by the rush of oncoming wind and the inertial thrust of forward motion.

*Here's a funny thing:

Sometimes when I'm driving, I forget how to drive.

I'm hurtling along at 75 mph, and suddenly it's all gone, or gone so deep it's practically the same – the actions, reactions, anticipations, tools and rules and reflections, so deeply ingrained in habit that they can't be recalled by the conscious mind. It's terrifying. And exhilarating. And strangely, calmly, curious and liberating, like childhood or amnesia or immersion in a foreign culture. It's a moment of doubling, of mirroring,

⁷⁷ “The newer architecture therefore—like many of the other cultural products I have evoked in the preceding remarks—stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, as yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions.” Jameson, “Postmodernism,” 80.

⁷⁸ “I had visions. And I could feel the visions coalesce and become new flesh, uncontrollable flesh... Long live the new flesh!” *Videodrome*, written and directed by David Cronenberg (New York: Universal Pictures, 1983), film.

inversion, of desperately hoping with all one heart that the knowledge will return, that I will regain control, before something terrible happens, even as I dream in the depths of the other that it won't, that this sudden emptiness could be a palimpsest (I'm not so naïve as to wish for a tabula rasa), that this break might be the opening to a new, unimagined state of consciousness.

Sometimes, it goes further – times on the highway when it *all* disappears. The language, the history, the codes, the matrix of intelligibility that maps the intersections between all these fragmentary, instantaneous, coincidental, tangential events and objects - it all goes, and I'm alone, atoms and the void, with no idea what I'm doing, where I'm going, where I've been, who I am, how this works, just seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling the giddy, soothing, dangerous onrush of experience. My head feels better now.

*This is the thin river in the dense rain.⁷⁹

*This is *another* space.

*I've grown new organs, new flesh.

*In a fast car.

- November 2015

⁷⁹ “[T]he conception of time and history as narrative, as an unfolding sequence of events... dates back to a much earlier era, to the ancient Heraclitian notion of time-as-river.... [T]he countermodel of the explosive event can also be traced back to ancient Greece, to Democritus. In his *Fragments*, he describes the world as a vast rainfall, with events occurring when individual drops accidentally touch one another.... The important and insufficiently acknowledged theorist of photography, Vilém Flusser, stresses that these two conceptions of the world are not mutually exclusive. ‘The two world views [of Heraclitus and Democritus] do not contradict one another since rain is a thin river, and a river is a dense rain.’” Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 3-6.

Appendix C: The Philosophical Cabbie

Think of me like that stalwart trope of film and television – the philosophical cabbie. Like Jamie Foxx in *Collateral*, Morgan Freeman in *Driving Miss Daisy*, or any number of wisecracking sophists from the annals of *Seinfeld*. But not like Bobby De Niro in *Taxi Driver*. I'm not like him at all. No sir. Not a bit.

I'm going to take you for a ride tonight, free you from the cares and worries of driving so you can really appreciate the experience. Let you take in the sights and sounds of the highway and the dreamlike feeling of motor-powered motion, maybe nudge you to turn your head around some so you can get a couple of different perspectives on the road as it glides by in the dark. You're free to sit anywhere you like, move around, even let yourself get hypnotized by the highway and drift into reverie if you want, without fear of getting lost, spinning out of control or crashing. Don't worry about the fare, either, friend. This one's on me, and the taxpayers of the great State of Maryland. (So, maybe a little bit on you. But you've already paid, so why not? See? I'm funny, as well as clever.).

And along the way, I'll share some stories and ideas that may illuminate the journey for you. Or, if not, at least give you something to think about. See, I've done this particular drive a lot, and I thought about it a lot even before I started, so I have had a lot of time to think about it myself. That's what you do when you drive, right? You think. Therefore you are. *Cogito-ergo-sum* kind of joker. Funny, right?

After a while, you kind of internalize the driving, and it starts to do itself without really needing you. So you either sleep – which will get you pulled over, I guarantee – or you think. I'm a thinker, so I think.

But I'm getting off track already. Like I said, you don't have to worry about any of that stuff tonight. You can do what you like – just sit back and relax, look, and listen. And feel. Maybe do some thinking yourself. I'll take care of the rest. Fair warning – I'm not going to pull over for any rest stops. You'll have to figure that part out for yourself.

Here's the thing, though. I'm not actually going to take you anywhere. Not in the sense of your having a particular destination in mind and my getting you there by the quickest route. That sort of thing is for when you're in a hurry. We've got some time, so I'm going to drive you around and around the Beltway. Just around and around and around. There isn't really a specific starting place. You get in, like you just did, and we go. And there's no real set ending, either. Either you get tired and get out, or I do, and I kick you out and shut off for the night. Or we ride this thing down and over and out together, like Sandra Bullock and Keanu Reeves in *Speed*. Until we run out of gas.

We can figure that all out later, though. For now, just fasten your seatbelt, clear your mind, and open up your senses. We're going for a ride. In 'n out, back and forth, around and around, over and over.

- March 2016

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- Judith Butler⁸⁰

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