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Thompson, Christopher J., "Exodus HD" (2014). *Graduate School of Art Theses*. ETD 8. <https://doi.org/10.7936/K7TB14TX>.

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**Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
Washington University in St. Louis**

EXODUS

HD

By

Christopher Thompson

**A thesis presented to the
Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts
at Washington University in St. Louis
May 2014**

**Graduate Committee
Monika Weiss
Patricia Olynyk
Lisa Bulawsky
Kelly Shindler**

ABSTRACT

To express the dramaticism of the themes in my work, I have written the following document in a pseudo-satirical voice, expressing both my interest in science fiction and my own eagerness to accept the profoundness of the Internet's connectivity in my life. The sensational nature of the writing is both prophetic and personal, conflating manticism with art making.

Due to the interlacing of the web's influence with our individual lives, we must pay tribute to its power and guidance through endorsements of search engines and online marketplaces that have built a new world of convenience. This world of convenience is based on the accessibility of information and commerce, where online streaming and torrented films and video disregard the cinema for the laptop (or Google Glass). The digitization of everything will be inevitable; even our own consciousness will be uploaded, in order to avoid the wasteland of our physical realm. When we finally leave our apocalyptic world for the digitized environment, we will leave behind a poorly designed planet that wasn't fit for our grandeur.

Rooted in the same antipathetic statement of the Futurists and their violent fascist manifesto, my thesis aims to discard the social concerns brought forth by our specie's destructive modes of operation, in turn focusing on the persistence of the net's immersion throughout every aspect of our lives. By changing the way we perceive and create by forcing us to redefine what is real and what is virtual, I challenge the notion that the physical is more important than the virtual.

Thesis Advisor: Monika Weiss

Official Title: Professor Monika Weiss of Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts

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Introduction

The year is 2050. Murky waters and scorching heat ravage our world. The humidity is suffocating, your oxygen tank is almost empty, and the soles of your Adidas are melting on the pavement. The homeless man on the curb begs you for money; however, you're saving up bitcoin for the new iPhone and have nothing to spare. iCalender reminds you that you're supposed to meet up with friends at the mall, and you're running late from work. After arriving home, you check your Facebook profile; 45 notifications – your friends are wondering where you are. You jack into the virtual realm and are greeted by its pristine sterile-ness full of advertisements and spam, a commercial resort from our decrepit environment.

This new virtual realm looks less like *Tron* and more like the architectural configuration of *Junkspace*. As you walk through the mall with your friends, ads for penis enlargement and Google Glass float past you. The new Apple store looks less like a Tadao Ando, and more like the Tyrell Corporation building in *Blade Runner*. Though less banal than *The Matrix*, this new world is mostly similar to the physical one we are leaving behind. Society still operates as it did IRL; capitalism has only amplified and diversified. Mastercard is still accepted.

In the virtual realm, everything is luminance (like giant LED screens on full motion mounts), compressed, and in a constant state of updating and rendering. In VR, the green screen is the symbol of progress, the empty lot soon to be developed. The architecture of the future virtual world is constructed around access over ownership, public over private, commerce over everything. The former websites of online marketplaces and search engines, such as Amazon and Google, become temples to

the new world, functional monuments to the immorality of capitalism. The global village is now the global mall.

Paranoia and skepticism of technology is dead! What is technology? What is the web? The complete assimilation of the net into our daily lives leaves the Internet invisible and unquestioned. I connect to Wi-Fi; therefore I am.

The ease of access to data (legally or illegally obtained) makes companies' greatest competitors ideologies. Pirating is not only an activity but a major political philosophy, a reaction against hyper-consumerism, as well as big government net policies. Though the visionary utopia of the web 1.0 that hackers and cyberpunks perpetuate is no more, remnants of their anarchic philosophy remain, complicating consumerism's dominance over the web. However, consumerism uses the web's easy access to information to its benefit, employing its modes of advertising to the global audience.

More than ever, art making is another form of branding, a way of creating and curating our virtual identities. Video is to be uploaded to Tumblr or Facebook, the equivalent of a status update. Painting as a process in JPEG conversion. Even the artist's identity pays tribute to brand endorsement or sponsorship. For Elton John or Bob Dylan, the stage name is everything, both a homage and source of validation. Though instead of tributes to Dylan Thomas or Duke Ellington, names pay homage to corporations. Color themes become less associated with color theory, now based more on what brand advertising you like. Apple White, Yahoo Purple, Facebook Blue, YouTube Red.

Video art and filmmaking practices are now completely immaterial, existing only on the cloud. The cinema is dead; the theater is now your living room or laptop. YouTube is

the distributor; you are the studio. Original content is replaced by torrented content; copyright is now a joke.

Convenience is key in this new world. The virtual realm will allow us to design new environments unbound by the physical world's ecology, allowing capitalism and commerce to reach their ultimate forms. The hyper-capitalist nature of the web will in turn help us upgrade into digital beings, allowing us to immigrate from the wasteland of our physical reality to the sterile virtual realm.

The act of discarding our apocalyptic disposition is the most human thing to do. The time has come to completely renounce "reality" and the destruction our species has induced on this planet. It's time for an Exodus to digital, to release us from our Earthly bodies, and convert us from flesh to file formats. Embrace the end of this world, and let the web's accessibility to information and commerce save your soul.

I. ***Becoming Chrome***

My upcoming piece *Becoming Chrome* will represent the ultimate embodiment of Christopher Chrome, myself in complete form in a fully HD digital world of floating logotypes and torrented videos. I am a corporation. I am represented by the brands, companies, file formats, and software that I endorse. Chrome is not only a name, but an action, an endorsement and understanding of one's ideological hypocrisy in a world of torrents and commerce. The virtual persona becomes real; the real becomes virtual.

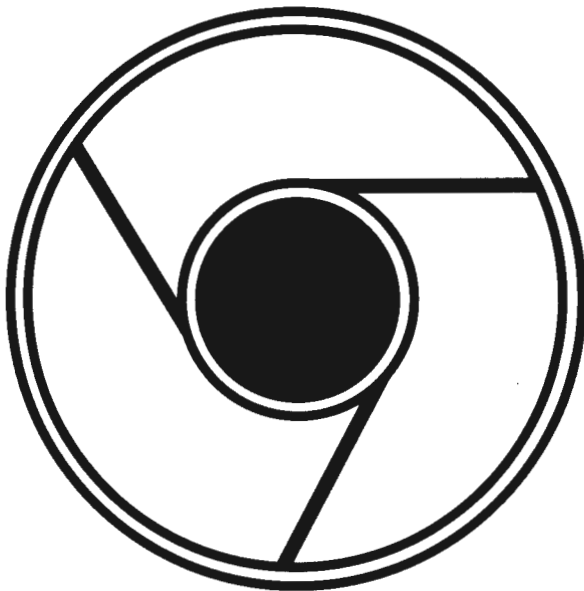


fig. 1

In 1999, on the brink of the new millennium, my family bought a Compaq Presario 5726 desktop PC. Unlike our previous Windows (3.0) supported Hewlett Packard, the Compaq Presario provided Internet access. For members of Generation Y, life is separated between Pre-Internet and Post-Internet, life without Internet and life within it. An excess of information poured through its screen,

and I devoured everything that it illuminated. Its presence in my life has only grown, integrating its networks into my environment. I think of the Internet as I think of the presence of God, monitoring, informing, and though it is invisible, its wireless networks always surround me.

The physical environment, in which I was born and raised, is not necessarily an essential part of my biography. When looking for a clear understanding of the formation

of my identity, the flat lands of Southern Indiana hold little importance. The excess of information that the Internet provided (both critical and superficial) is far beyond what anything “real life” had to offer.

The mystic inner workings that encompassed the Internet growing up as a child still astound me. Its interconnectedness has shaped and evolved my perception of social structures, communication, information, and my internal self. My persona has been uploaded, documented, and modified online. Through social networks like Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter, I’m not who I am, but who I want to be. I am my own curator, carefully refining and modifying my identity. With my persona’s transference online, the Internet isn’t just a place I go – it’s where I live. In 1999 on a Compaq Presario, my life within the web began. The more I am integrated in digital networks, the more cohesive and prolific my persona becomes.

Though more dystopian than expected, the global village McLuhan predicted is a reality.ⁱ The networks of communication in which we live influence everything. During the rise of the Arab Spring in December 2010, millions utilized these networks in order to organize and rebel against governmental regimes throughout the Middle East and North Africa. After the fall of these regimes, the millions who rebelled celebrated this change and the networks that made it possible. Following the Egyptian Revolution, Gamal Ibrahim named his newborn daughter “Facebook” as an expression of his gratitude to the social network. This phenomenon was followed by “Like” Adler, and a newborn girl named “Hashtag”.ⁱⁱ As socially acceptable names shift from religious connotations to Internet ephemera, I feel that my own name must reflect and pay tribute to the Internet’s importance in my life. Thompson, the name I inherited reflects my kin;

however, it doesn't represent my online persona.

For the past three years, I've used Google's Chrome as my choice of web browser. Its sleek interface and impressive speed has outmoded its predecessors. Chrome allows me access to an excess of information, entertainment, and commerce at greatest ease. As Christopher Chrome, my name serves as a futurist narrative for the interweaving of our online and "real" identities. Chrome, as a physical material, is a symbol of the future: shiny, reflective, and erotic. Its properties are seductive and alluring, representing the exoticism of the future.

The exotic future to come is only an amplified version of our present: a hyper-capitalist, digitally integrated, fully HD, apocalyptic wasteland of floating malls and 7/11s, where surveillance of one's personal information is an act of service, not invasion. I await this future with open arms. I embrace the invasive practices of online surveillance not only by nations but by corporations.

My online politics will eternally be at conflict with each other. I believe in the open source pirate movement and its anarchic vision of the web; however, I am also a firm believer in the guidance and direction of online corporate entities. While both the right and left criticize the accumulation and analyzation of personal information by corporations, such as Google and Amazon, I welcome it. I trust the guidance of these entities to tell me who I am and what I want. The more information they have, the better. I fully embrace their capitalistic vision of the digital future, where nothing is private and everything is instant. Google and Amazon have played a decisive role in the formation of my identity. I am who I am through the corporations from which I purchase goods and products. Amazon's product suggestions not only determine who I am, but who I will

become, foretelling the progression of my identity.

The Internet and its anarchic and capitalistic characteristics have offered me rebirth. Chrome symbolizes rebirth, renewal, and immersion in a new age with a set of new politics, philosophies, social orders, economies, fashions, and art. Chrome is a symbolic “fuck you” to modernist ideals, as well as postmodern discourse, revitalizing the Futurist’s violent plea for demolishing our museums and libraries.ⁱⁱⁱ I believe the time and conditions are right for a revolution in how we as a species perceive qualities of “virtual” and “real life”. We must discard the belief that the virtual is somehow less meaningful than our physical world. With every object and being that comes online, we become more and more integrated, fading the distinction between “real life” and “virtual life”. I don’t believe in this perceptual division. I am the Internet; I live online, sleep

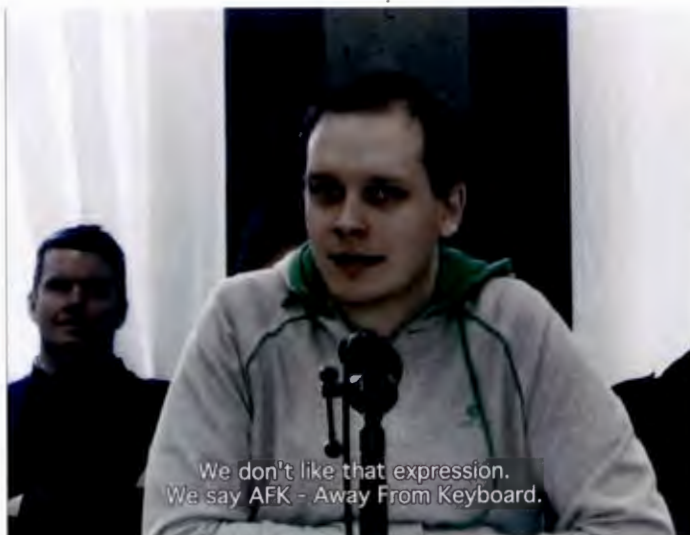


fig. 2

online, and grow online. I am hardly ever disconnected; even when I dream, I am connected through my devices.

In The Pirate Bay’s documentary *TPB AFK*, founder of the organization Peter Sunde stands on trial as the prosecution tries to explain the meaning of IRL (in real life) to the

judge. Sunde interrupts the prosecution, stating, “We do not like the expression ‘IRL’. We say ‘Away From Keyboard’. We think that the Internet is real”.^{iv} Sunde’s statement is not only accurate, but a profound and spiritual testament to the interconnectedness of



the web. I believe that to be connected to the web is a spiritual act, a holy realm of information, commerce, and social interaction. The act of connecting to the web may seem banal; however, I envision it as a much more ecstatic experience, similar to the depiction

of “jacking in” in the film *The Matrix*.^v As the last remaining members of the human resistance jack into the matrix, they insert an electrical rod into the port in the back of their heads, which connects them to the virtual world of the matrix. This experience of “jacking in” creates a physical sensation, like a shock through the body. As I connect to Wi-Fi, I imagine a similar reaction, like a divine electrical current flowing from the keyboard into the veins. Once connected, I am everywhere, connected to everything; the physical world drifts away to the Internet’s transcendental nature.

II.

Art in the Age of the Anonymous Image: The Poor Image and the Death of Authorship

In the utopic, tormented Eden, Adam and Eve live in a vast euphorial garden. Eden thrives on the purity of the couple but is corrupted after they eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. The fall of utopia gives rise to an unauthored world of spam and corporatization, exposing Adam and Eve to a new world of corrupted pleasures. The pure, tormented world falls short to the new world of corporate web.



fig. 3

My practice is defined by my constant online publication of unfinished images, screenshots, video clips, music, and trailers. Some may question my transparency, but I embrace it with a complete understanding that my images could (without my permission) be downloaded by anyone for any purpose. My work is made to be uploaded and downloaded by anyone. The interiors of my work are made apparent

through my use of social networks like Tumblr, Facebook, and Instagram, persistently updating my audience. The mediums I use to distribute my work, such as Tumblr, are key to conceptualizing both my process and my politics.

Tumblr, more than any other social network, is key to understanding how we will judge and perceive images in the future. Like a collective stream of consciousness from selected followers, Tumblr's Dashboard displays a continuous flow of images ranging of anything a follower "likes". Chronologically organized, any two images, videos, or blog entries could appear side by side. For instance, one follower could post an image of Noam Chomsky and next to it could be a pornographic GIF. This dichotomy isn't a failure of Tumblr's site structure, but it is rather an accurate representation of both the diversity of image distribution and the users' own interests (or fetishes). Essentially, Tumblr is comparable to driving down a highway and watching an infinite stream of images scroll by, occasionally driving by one of your own images a follower has reblogged. This is a common occurrence in my Tumblr experience, due to the popularity of my images. Last year, a photo of an artwork I had posted in 2011 began to pick up speed in the amount of reblogs it was attaining. Over the course of a night, the image was reblogged approximately 300 times. The next day, it was reblogged 500 times. Today, the image has exactly 12, 323 reblogs. My unlabeled photograph is just another anonymous image streaming through Tumblr's networks, vulnerable to relabeling, repurposing, and vicious comments. My photo is one of the many examples of the death of authorship in the age of social media, where the copyright's power over the still somewhat anarchic web is limited. My own practice is defined by my lack of concern or respect for copyright; ripping videos off the web, using copyrighted imagery, and

manipulating pop songs are all trademarks of my process, which has in turn influenced the political nature in which I perceive art making and the distribution of imagery.

Hito Steyerl's essay "In Defense of The Poor Image" brings to light the politics of images. Steyerl describes the poor image as being,

"a rag or a rip; an AVI or a JPEG, a lumpen proletarian in the class society of appearances, ranked and valued according to its resolution. The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction."^{vi}

The poor image is a bastardized version of its original. Through copying, disintegration, and file conversion, its resolution is lowered and abstracted. However, even as online images become less pixelated and more based in high resolution HD quality, the poor image will still thrive. The concept of the poor image will exist in an HD world; its modes of operation and distribution will continue to be a driving force for the future of the Internet and its democratic ideals.

The poor image is not desired; the hierarchy of imagery places high definition/ high resolution as the most sought after of images. While the high resolution image is cherished by society and is used throughout Hollywood films and network television broadcasts, the poor image strives for Democracy through accessibility. The resolution can change, but the modes of distribution remain the same. For example, once forgotten arthouse films are now resurrected online, providing the same accessibility to rare avant-garde films to that of amateur YouTube videos. The standard of accessibility that the web promotes also levels the cultural hierarchy of media.

The process, which creates what Steyerl calls “Poor Images”, is popularized in our digital era in part by open source organizations like The Pirate Bay, KickAss Torrents, IsoHunt, and WikiLeaks. These organizations operating on the margins of society promote the poor image as a key player in their political agenda for free access



fig. 4

information, cherishing its accessibility over quality. Steyerl’s political argument for the poor image is best exemplified by WikiLeaks’ release of “Collateral Murder” , which was obtained through its leak by Chelsea (Bradley) Manning. The impact of the video, which shows

members of the US Military firing upon civilians and journalists, was explosive after the publishing of confidential US Military documents in *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. However, the poor image also changes the politics of the poor image in the art world. Steyerl states,

“At present, there are at least twenty torrents of Chris Marker’s film essays available online. If you want a retrospective, you can have it. But the economy of poor images is about more than just downloads: you can keep the files, watch them again, even reedit or improve them if you think necessary. And the results circulate. Blurred AVI files of half-forgotten masterpieces are exchanged on semi-secret P2P platforms. Clandestine cell phone videos smuggled out of museums are broadcast on YouTube.”^{vii}

The distribution of pirated footage of artworks and copyrighted images and their use in artworks resurrects the Duchampian model of art making and authorship in the Internet age. As artworks are reblogged, edited, and tagged by a multitude of users, the

work acquires the anarchistic politics of online idealism, a world of shared images of equal value and anonymous authorship.

These new forms of image distribution, such as Google images, or social networks, such as Tumblr, have completely changed the systems and channels of not only changed artistic practice but the inner networking of the art world. The anonymously uploaded images that Steyerl endorses is best exemplified by the art blog *The Jogging*,^{viii} which displays submitted JPEGs of artworks posted without notification that can in turn be reblogged and tagged by anyone on the social network. This new form of viewing and discovering art challenges our traditional notions of what the art viewing experience should be and breaks the cultural hierarchy that insists the act of viewing art should be placed above a Google image search.

My practice is defined by the poor image through my process, which in turn informs the politics of my work. The grainy pixelated image is prevalent due to aesthetics, necessity, ease, and access. It's a beacon of the web's idyllic anarchistic past, fading away to corporatization of the full HD global village.

III.

A Brave Convenient New World

*"It is now easier to imagine the end of the world
than to imagine the end of capitalism."*

— Fredric Jameson (*Future City*, *New Left Review*, May-June 2003)

My video *Screensaver* (2013) places both modern and contemporary artworks along with other digital ephemera (digital photos, icons, word docs, etc) in the context of the screensaver. At the 30 second mark, Jeff Koons' *Balloon Dog* (2000) floats into the screen and bounces off the edge of the screen, followed by Paul McCarthy's *Tomato Head* (1994) and other contemporary and modern artworks that fill up the screen as they bounce from one side of the monitor to the other. *Screensaver* represents the equalization of overpriced and overpraised artworks with the insignificant JPEGs, mp3s, and MOVs that live in the depths of our hard drives, reducing art to the monotonous experience of watching a screensaver.



fig. 5

As our digital technologies become increasingly integrated with each other and ourselves, the physical world has less appeal and less to offer. In 2050, how will the physical reality of the natural world even compete with our customizable virtual world?

With more than 150 million climate change refugees scattered around the ravaged world, and global food and water shortages provoking wars,^{ix} the Internet will become our refuge.

Since its debut in 2003, Second Life has offered an online alternative to the physical world, allowing users to create their own avatars. The viewer's avatar can choose its own clothes and eventually even buy land or a house on the grid. Second Life is based in real economies, in which users can interact in a real market. In 2004, avatar Anshe Chung began creating and selling avatars. With the Linden Dollars (Second Life currency) she made from the avatar sales, she then purchased virtual land. In 2006, Chung legally



fig. 6

established Anshe Chung Studios, Ltd. and in 2007 was chosen as a "New Champion of the World Economy" by the World Economic Forum, which described her company as a business with a major technical and economic impact with the potential to become a Fortune 500 company within the next five years.^x

In 2008, Chris Marker held his landmark exhibition *Chris Marker. A Farewell to Movies* at the Design Museum in Zürich. As a commission for the exhibition, Marker and Viennese architect Max Moswitzer created a virtual museum in Second Life as an attempt to share his photographs, films, and installations with a global audience.^{xi}

The basic virtual experience that Second Life grants is a blueprint for virtual-based social interactions, as well as a model for economies and markets of the future. As our

“real” and “virtual” lives continue to converge and our physical world continues to deteriorate, the digital world of the Internet will become preferred over what we once called “real life”. Second Life perpetuates a “moist reality”,^{xii} where physical and virtual

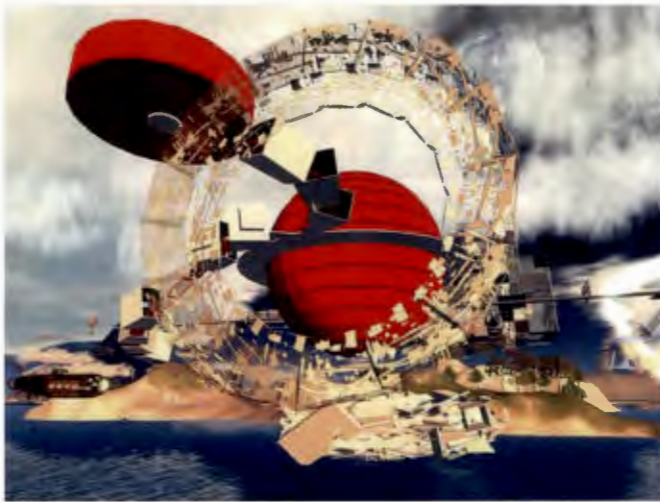


fig. 7

social structures converge. Eventually, the natural hierarchy which places “artificial” environments, such as the web, under our physical reality will not only collapse but will be reconstructed to place our digital refuge above our ravaged planet, creating a shift in our perception of Second Life to a new

form of “real life”, where we can transfer our physical bodies to the virtual world and become immortal.

Our newfound immortality will not give birth to a digital heaven, but rather a continuation of hyper-capitalism^{xiii} in a world where time does not exist and everything happens simultaneously in a seemingly infinite space. “Superstrings of graphics, transplanted emblems of franchise and sparkling infrastructures of light, LEDs, and video describe an authorless world beyond anyone’s claim, always unique, utterly unpredictable, yet intensely familiar.”^{xiv} Our new virtual environment will flash GIFs as if they’re luminescent billboards, hyperlinks that act as highways, and popup ads that will unexpectedly interrupt numerous conversations and sensitive moments.

“Corporations are people too, my friend.”^{xv} Capitalism will persist in this new world. Commerce will accelerate to new heights through the instantaneous act of buying and

receiving goods. However, we will shift from materialism to immaterialism, purchasing data in the form of Chanel sunglasses and Air Jordans, perpetuating a fully digitalized reconstruction of the Frankfurt School's "cultural industry".^{xvi} "In the beginning of the 1990s, the most famous global brands were the companies that were in the business of producing materials or goods, or processing physical matter. Today, however, the lists of best-recognized global brands are topped with the names such as Google, Facebook, and Microsoft. And, at least in the US, the most widely read newspapers and magazines—*New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Business Week*, etc.—feature daily news and stories about Facebook, Twitter, Apple, Google, and other IT companies."^{xvii}

Capitalism will simply do what it does best by modifying and adapting itself to new markets in a new world. "Our very notions about the way the world work are based, in large part, on what we have come to regard as the primordial urge to exchange goods with one another and become propertied members of society."^{xviii} The markets of our near future will drift away from concepts of ownership and private property to markets based on access. This development is not a shift to the methods of Socialism, but rather a rearrangement in the priorities of Capitalism in the web-based world. Property won't disappear, but will only become a rarer form of commodity, giving way to leases, rents, and subscriptions.

Artists will act as online lessors, leasing out their works for your next dinner party or open house, even using cloud networks to provide subscribers with high-res digital images of their artworks to be used for screensavers or desktop backgrounds. As markets become less based in material commodity and ownership, currency too will be dematerialized. Digitally integrated debit/credit cards and online banking have

already challenged tactile currency, yet the physical exchange of money is still very much a reality. Paper and coin currency will be confronted by the convenience of digital integration. "Bitcoin is the first implementation of a concept called 'crypto-currency', which was first described in 1998 by Wei Dai on the cypherpunks mailing list, suggesting the idea of a new form of money that uses cryptography to control its creation and transactions, rather than a central authority. The first Bitcoin specification and proof of concept was published in 2009 in a cryptography mailing list by Satoshi Nakamoto."^{xix} Currently, Bitcoin's stability is unstable and under threat of government interventions and cyber attacks. Though the failure of Bitcoin is probable if not already foreseeable, the concept of digital currency will persist. More than anything, Bitcoin is a symbol of convenience and utopia in the ever-changing free market, overriding the need for bankers or TBTF (too big to fail) banks.



fig. 8

In *Bacchus* (2013), footage of nostalgic raves, Y2K preparation videos, and rotating

Bitcoins, illustrates the looming apocalypse as the world both celebrates and prepares for its inescapable doom. Nostalgic rave videos shift to screenshot captures of contemporary websites, as if I or anyone of my generation is looking back to the apocalyptic paranoia of the 1990s, searching for answers through the experiences of past generations. Instead of hoarding gold, millennials will hoard Bitcoin. Rather than preparing for the reinstatement of the gold standard, we will plan for the coming exodus to our digital realm. As a species, we will adapt to the new free market and truly break away from our humanist roots, becoming virtual individuals with very human thoughts and desires. Digital beings buying digital houses, digital Prada, and digital art. PEOPLE ARE CORPORATIONS TOO.

IV.

Watching a Torrent of Blade Runner on My Laptop: Science Fiction, Video Art, and Miniaturization of the Cinematic Experience

A one-hour slow motion video of myself dancing to “Gangnam Style”. The video operates on the same level and uses the same methods as amateur performances on YouTube. No longer is the music video even relevant on the TV screen; it is only a concept now bound to the web, an even more miniaturized version of the already compact format. The accessibility of software and online content has made the amateur a potential Kubrick, giving them tools to both produce and distribute video. *One Hour Gangnam Style* (2012) is a response to both the miniaturization of video and the amateurism of YouTube performances and reperformances of music videos, films, etc.



fig. 9

From the shadow puppets of early nomadic humanoids to the establishment of the Theater of Dionysus in the fifth-century, humanity has been compelled to enact out our myths, legends, and religious texts. As a species, we are eternally obsessed with depicting our fantasies, dreams, and visions of the past, present, and future. As

imaginative beings, we intertwine our most human desires with our most fantastical visions, creating stories of creation, war, love, and apocalypse. With the arrival of the cinema, artists created a new set of tools that helped to enhance our stories and myths with new levels of control. With the use of editing, cinematography, and special effects, we have become increasingly articulate in portraying our most exotic visions.

Stanley Kubrick's 1968 science fiction epic *2001: A Space Odyssey*^{xx} depicts our most eternal fears and our most exotic visions of the future. With the help of new developments in special effects and Kubrick's own artistic vision, the film's grandiose scale has forever changed the genre of science fiction, as well as the visual language of filmmaking. *2001* is largely an arthouse film produced on the scale of a Hollywood blockbuster, successfully combining the best of both worlds. The film's iconic monolith scene is for me one of the most powerful scenes in cinematic history and is a key influence in the structure of my own videos. The second appearance of the Monolith in the film is witnessed by a group of astronauts/researchers. As the group approaches the Monolith, György Ligeti's composition "Requiem" hauntingly builds, becoming more and more imposing. The symmetrical Monolith stands as a mysterious conduit of progress, producing a new step in human evolution with each appearance, also acting as a chapter marker throughout the film.

Kubrick's use of the Monolith as both a conceptual and structural element in *2001* is a component I've used in almost all of videos. Using iconography and symbolism as a surrealist break from tormented found footage, I employ the cinematic gaze through the use of 3D animation and special effects. In *EDEN* (Fig.11), these cinematic breaks are illustrated by the falling Apple logos and alert symbols, producing an awe-invoking

response and foreshadowing the fall of Eden. A more direct reference to *2001*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and other sci-fi films is made in my video *BACCHUS*, which opens with a spinning monolithic structure emerging from the vacuum of space. As the monolithic Bacchus symbol spins closer, a droning sound gets louder, attempting to recreate the same “awe” effect in *2001*.

The eventual accessibility of the camcorder, video recording, and editing in the 60's



fig. 10

made video a groundbreaking medium for emerging artists of the early postmodern movement. Early video works by artists such as Acconci, Baldessari, Jonas, and Nauman were aesthetically raw and lo-fi, rejecting the rules of cinema. Much of the video work of this time appears to be a meditation on the new media, allowing artists to produce kinetic image and audio (via Joan Jonas' *Vertical Roll*) by experimenting with both the medium and the viewer's attention span. Nam June Paik expanded beyond this aesthetic, bringing to light the physicality and form of the medium. Aesthetically, his television monitor sculptures appear to be less associated with the lo-fi video pieces of his time, and more similar to a set design in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*.^{xxi} *Dadaikseon (The More The Better)* acts as a monument to the medium of television, a colossal

tower of monitors constantly flickering saturated images and video, similar to the LED facades of skyscrapers in *Blade Runner's* fictional Los Angeles of 2019.

The launch of YouTube in 2005 and the popularization of other video streaming sites



fig. 11

like Vimeo, along with the rise of Netflix Instant Streaming as a juggernaut of film distribution, have brought about a revolution in how we watch films and videos. Once again, cinema feels threatened by home entertainment and the intimacy of one's living room. VHS, which sent the first shock wave through the livelihood of the theater, eventually gave way to DVD, Blu-Ray, and online streaming.

I welcome online streaming as an evolutionary feature in the cinematic experience. A possibly more intimate experience, online streaming provides the viewer with

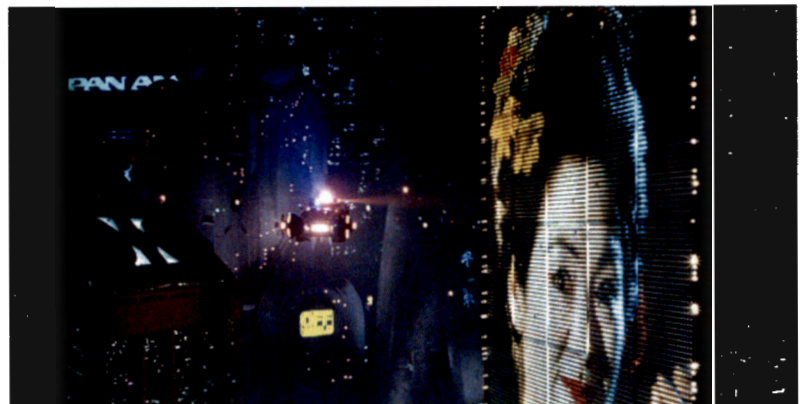


fig. 12

a multitude of choices to choose from through both legal and illegal sources. An hour ago, I torrented the director's cut of *Blade Runner* in 1080p and plan to watch it as I eat dinner in the comfort of my living room. Though it's a miniaturized version of its theatrical scale, I can watch it whenever I want on whatever device I want. To pay homage to new era of home cinema and man's technological achievements, I feel that

it's only appropriate to watch media through the brilliance of my 15 inch retina display MacBook Pro.

Many contemporary and emerging video artists producing work in the Internet-based world today seem to be less concerned with the rules of cinema or the restrictions of conceptualist art and more interested in the overloaded aesthetics of online media. Ryan Trecartin's videos and installations act as a hyper-sensorial amplification of the YouTube experience.

"It's a sci-fi theater of the absurd for our manically paced YouTube era, a singular vision created by Trecartin in collaboration with his creative partner, Lizzie Fitch. His movies take up the torch of forebears like George Kuchar, Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, John Waters, Cindy Sherman, Alex Bag and Cameron Jamie. But, to Trecartin, apparent resemblances are merely superficial and retroactive; he is either uninterested or claims ignorance when any connections are made."^{xxii}

The influence of reality TV and other "superficial" media on his work is defined by its familiarity throughout the vast levels of absurdity. The characters in his videos are surreal versions of reality TV personas. Garnished with face paint and colored eye contacts, their voices are extremely high pitched and sped up to the point of indecipherability. The dialogue produced by the characters is cryptic, yet still uses the vocabulary of reality TV shows. His treatment of science fiction is most effective in his work when the surreal nature of the environments he creates seem somewhat familiar, bridging a connection to the viewers various media experiences outside of the gallery.

The science fiction genre's most effective characteristic is its ability to depict the strange and fantastical, while creating a world that viewers can draw relations to in their own realities. Though my videos are rooted in science fiction cinema, they are self-

aware of their fictionality, using clichés and generalities to amplify their floundered struggle to become gross epics, yet inevitably falling short to the flatness of miniaturized images of online media.

In *Ralph Fiennes (1995) (2014)*, a torrent of a Hollywood blockbuster becomes the experiential equivalent of watching a YouTube video, yet a narrative is apparent, orchestrated by modified logotypes, development in score, and dialogue illustrated

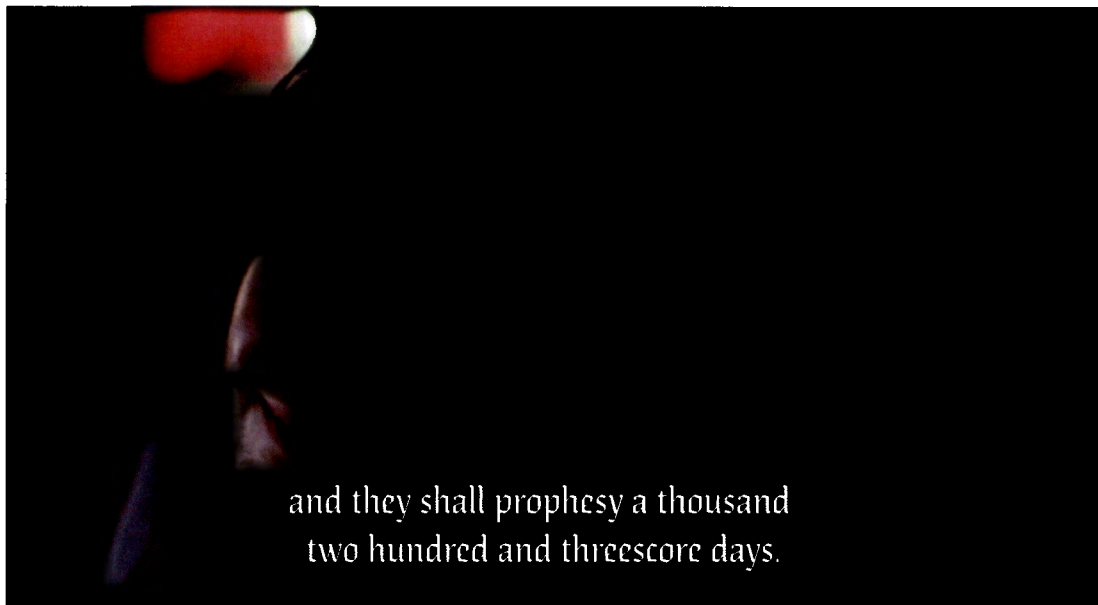


fig. 13

through subtitles. Similar to Gretchen Bender's *Total Recall* (1987), the quasi-narrative of *Total Recall* is bound together by montaging an array of footage from military activities to commercials, along with her own digitally animated work. Displayed on twenty-four monitors, Bender creates a theater of a proto-YouTube experience.

The cinematic experience allows for the screen to take on a dominating presence, while the computer instantiates practice.^{xxiii}

“Cinema so captured the twentieth-century imagination that it is common to assume that other media are also at root cinematic. And since the cinema is, in general, an ontology (in particular it is a phenomenology), it seems logical to assume that other media are ontological in the same way. The computer however, is not of an ontological condition; it is on that condition. It does not facilitate or make reference to an arrangement of being, it remediates the very conditions of being itself.”^{xxiv}

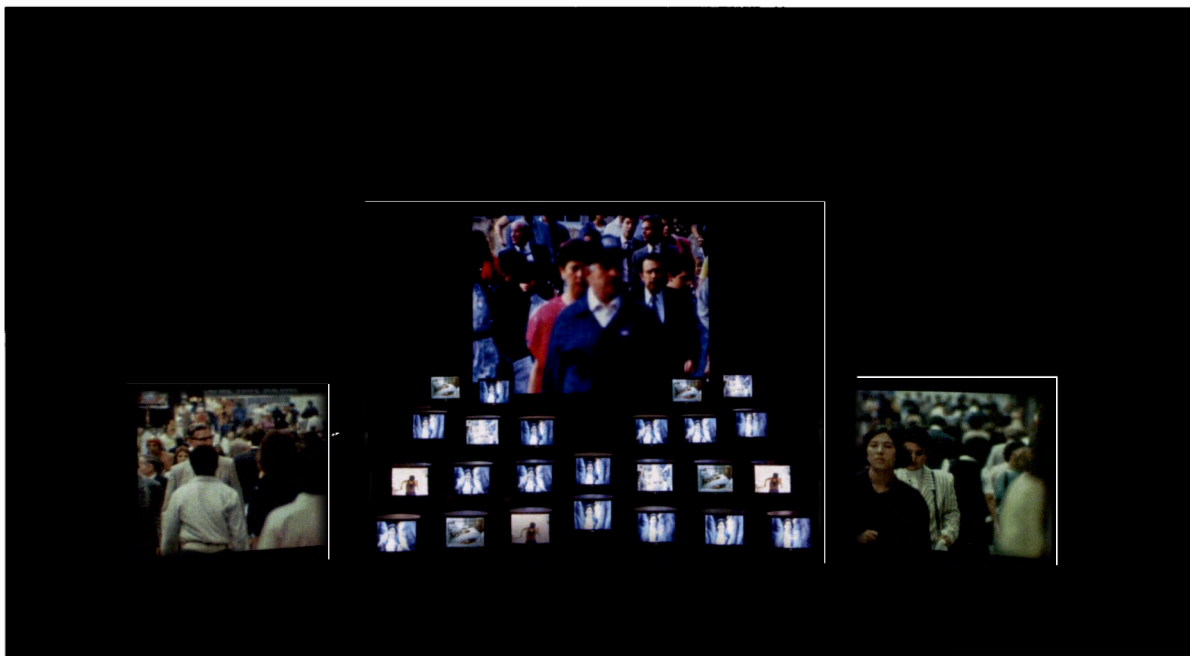


fig. 14

V.

Internet Nostalgia: 1990-Singularity

"How odd it would be, if in 50 years the internet archaeologists assigned to dig up 2011's time capsule discovered we consisted of nothing but the time capsules of those before us."

-Brad Troemel (*Peer Pressure*, 2011)

By streaming videos that predate its own existence, YouTube provides a chance for generations to look back in a more intimate fashion than before, allowing old videos filmed on any format to be converted digitally and placed online for the world to watch and reinterpret.



fig. 15

Bacchus (2013) is almost entirely dependent on the depictions of the past that YouTube provides. The various footage of early 90's acid house raves that appears in *Bacchus* is illegally ripped from YouTube. Its quality is very poor and incredibly low-res, yet it provides a candid look back into a time that I never had the chance to experience. As authentic and amateur as the footage appears, it is in turn inevitably reinterpreted and repackaged by my own desire to grasp an understanding of that time and

experience from the act of watching it on my laptop, providing behavioral Y2K paranoia instructions for a generation looking to the past for inspiration in our own apocalyptic era.

The religious and mythological symbolism in my work references the grandiose nature of the tropes I explore. By using a loaded one-word title like *Bacchus* or *Eden*, I can condense themes of creation, apocalypse, and debauchery into short videos. These religious connotations also provide a nostalgic quality to the work, referencing a time in humanity's existence when these myths were accepted as absolute fact, a time before technology such as the Internet even existed.

Humanity will become nostalgic. We will romanticize our physical world as we become more detached, reveling in memorabilia from the Human Era, similar to the characters in Ryan Trecartin's video *Center Jenny* (2013), who are constantly



fig. 16

romanticizing humanity and the present world we live in. At various points in the video, characters will speak about humans in past tense, referencing the “Human Era”, “the time of animation”, and their

“ancestors” (humans). The characters in the video look like a future form of humanity, with metallic face paint and eyes that glow like night vision. The female characters in the video are almost all named Jenny, representing different versions of Jenny in beta mode. Some Jenny's are new and more advanced than others; the old versions are

“basic bitches”, a term used as a derogatory jab to distinguish the upgraded versions from the new models. One girl declares herself to be Sarah Source, a direct descendant of the humans, placing herself above the Jenny’s and their simulation-based behaviors and personalities.

At this point in our technological evolution, we are just “basic bitches”, awaiting a more advanced upgrade that will help us make the next evolutionary step. We may be “basic bitches”, but as a species we feel as if we have come so far from our nomadic ancestors. Technology, in fact, has helped us more conveniently express our humanity, giving us the tools necessary to amplify our voices to a global audience and to communicate the most essential human feelings online through new mediums of expression. Even in the early days of the web 1.0, email was breaking boundaries of current forms of communication that would eventually mature into more rapid forms of communicating, starting at the birth of the web 2.0 through IM services and the birth of social networks. As a teen growing up around the arrival of the web 2.0 (before social networks), IMing became the after-school tradition, now a romanticized memory of teen years.

The web I grew up with in my childhood was a much less sleek version of the Internet today. Its glitchiness and extreme pixelation was a trademark of its visual identity. Before retina display and HD quality photo and video, GIFs were created in order to produce kinetic images for the web. Created in 1992 by CompuServe, the GIF was able to effectively compress data and what was at the time to be considered large images. As the web gained popularity before the advent of the web 2.0, GIFs became a part of popular culture through GIFs of “The Dancing Baby” (as seen on *Ally McBeal*);^{xv}

however, as elements of the web became sleeker and more sophisticated, the GIF became antiquated and out of fashion. While for a time the GIF seemed to be buried in the graveyard of the web, it was raised from the dead with the arrival of the social network Tumblr. Its revival was based in its ease for users to create their own GIFs, but more importantly, was repopularized due to its nostalgic value on a generation of users who grew up with the web 1.0 in their childhood. The nostalgic GIF is an essential part of Tumblr's experience; they thrive due to both the age demographics of Tumblr and their ability to compress scenes from films, conceptual ideas, and imagery into an infinite stream of images constantly repeating.

Launched in 2005, YouTube allows billions to view and upload videos that contribute to global forum, which enriches, enlightens, and entertains the online community.^{xxvi} In recent years, YouTube has started employing the tropes of network broadcasting. However, the site still acts as a video archive, where amateur video of family reunions and reperformed music videos are as accessible as Hollywood productions. As the website evolves along with web culture, it will become a database of the most current trends and topics in all matters, as well as an ever growing monument of Internet-based nostalgia.

Created by Ryder Ripps and established in 2009, Internet Archaeology restores, archives, and showcases artifacts found at the birth of Internet culture. Allowing users to explore hundreds of 90's web ephemera, the site acts as a digital museum, showing users what used to be.^{xxvii} The graphic artifacts (including GIFs, JPEGs, and now defunct GeoCities) that the site displays are the remaining ruins to the web 1.0. The archived and defunct GeoCities "enter pages" that Internet Archaeology maintains,

essentially acting as a virtual Pompeii, preserving the remnants of a different time with a different set of aesthetics. However, due to their nostalgic value, it's not hard to imagine the same GIFs and images on Tumblr in 2014.

Nostalgia is a persistent force in the evolution of popular culture. Remembrance, revision, and response are the modes of accessing and fashioning the next cultural strides for the millennial generation. Constantly looking back for a source of inspiration, the millennial generation is accused of only reusing the culture of other previous generations. This act of looking back, however, is eternal. It is the same brand of repackaging that the Romans applied from Greek culture, picking and choosing what to keep and what to discard. We millennials are experts at cultural repackaging; we are generational time travelers, surfing the archives of what was and what could be new.

VI.

Apocalypse:

Why It's Time to Embrace the End of All Things

We are obsessed with humanity's demise, fetishizing doomsday scenarios through all mediums. From Dürer's *Apocalypse* to Michael Bay's *Armageddon*, we envision the last days of our vulnerable species for our own masochistic pleasures. Our fantasies of mass genocide and destruction are rendered and portrayed with brilliant romanticism, glorifying our doom and the panic and confusion that it generates. For the audiences of *Strange Days* in 1995, the dystopic vision of LA 1999 wasn't that distant. The paranoia of the Y2K bug and the harsh reality of rampant gang violence and police brutality in '95 wasn't a far cry from the dystopic future of '99. The riots and massive parties that the film depicts are incredibly enticing, almost igniting a deep primordial urge in the viewer to throw a brick through a window or loot and steal the remnants of normalcy in a world of chaos. My video *Ralph Fiennes (1995)* provides the viewer with a reconstructed narrative differing from the original film *Strange Days*. *Ralph Fiennes (1995)* presents the viewer with the same paranoia of apocalypse that the original provides yet steals from other apocalyptic media in order to heighten and diversify. Y2K is a generational event and watershed moment, in which a generation either collapses or triumphantly rises.

We are all fucked. The era of civilization is almost over. The most sensible thing to do now is celebrate the last days of our physical world before the mass exodus into the digital realm. Now, more than ever, it seems as if our world is hurtling towards apocalypse. The Middle East continues to be in a perpetual state of chaos and disarray. The global economy continues its downward spiral as the European Union free falls

towards collapse. Sea levels are rising. Natural disasters are wreaking havoc on entire regions of the world. The United States government is spying on the entire world. And I don't care.

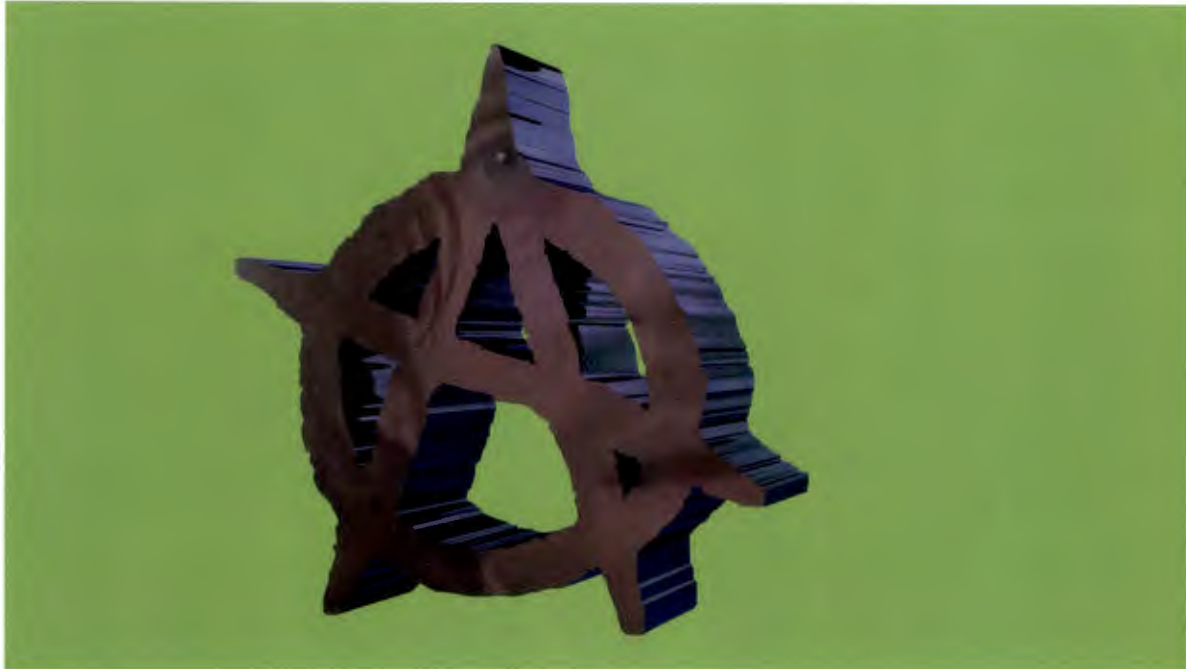


fig. 17

The time for caring is over; the time for panic has past. The effort and labor needed to attempt our own rescue would be in vain. We could pack our bags, but where would we go? The debate of how to save our planet is futile; the end is here. There is nothing to do now. Environmentalism will not save you. The political arguments for saving Earth coming from the left are outdated and useless at this point; our options are exhausted.

In *Ralph Fiennes (1995)*, there is a scene taken from the 1995 film *Strange Days*, in which Tom Sizemore's character Max toasts to the end of the world,

"You know how I know it's the end of the world? Everything's already been done, every kind of music's been tried, every kind of government's been tried, every fucking hairstyle, bubble gum flavors, you know, breakfast cereal...What are we going to do? How are we going to make another

thousand years? I'm telling you, man, it's over. We used it all up."^{xxviii}

Max's nihilistic attitude is a crass but realistic sentiment not only for Y2K, but also for 1000 BC-2014. The world is always in collapse, always on the brink of annihilation. We are in a constant state of apocalypse, forecasting the end of all things in every world crisis.

Y2K exists for every generation as a metaphorical disaster waiting to test our willingness to adapt, prepare, and progress. With the overwhelming threat of rising of sea levels, wealth disparity, and economic unrest, why even bother resisting? In this world, our governments, markets, and politics, are predestined to failure.

"You can't change human nature. The Poor will always be with us. The politics of the bourgeoisie, as of the bourgeoisie's socialist heir, is the politics of a driver pumping the brake with the accelerator jammed fast to the floor: the more his speed increases, the more frenetic, perilous and useless become his attempts to slow down. The helter-skelter pace of consumption is set at once by the rate of the disintegration of Power and by the imminence of the construction of a new order, a new dimension, a parallel universe born of the collapse of the Old World."^{xxix}

LET IT BURN! The defining characteristic of our species is our self-destructiveness. Forget survival. Why should we deny ourselves the sublime ecstatic experience of watching our grand annihilation? Survival is overrated.

"Survival is life in slow motion. How much energy it takes to remain on the level of appearances! The media gives wide currency to a whole personal hygiene of survival: avoid strong emotions, watch your blood pressure, eat less, drink in moderation only, survive in good health so that you can continue playing your role. 'OVERWORK: THE EXECUTIVE'S DISEASE', ran a recent headline in *Le Monde*. We must be economical with survival for it wears us down; we have to live it as little as possible, for it belongs to

death.”^{xxx}

It's time to reject corporate greenwashing and environmentalism altogether. The messianic politics towards saving our little blue world are vain. Are we even worth saving? The evasion of one disaster simply leads to greater threats. On the off chance we do survive our self-inflicted environmental apocalypse, what kind of world will we be living in by the time we realize the gravity of our disastrous situation?

We are not fit for living on this world anymore. The advancement of civilization has only produced detrimental effects on our planet. We are too large and too greedy to comply with the rules of nature in this poorly designed world. There is no point in survival; our transcendence as a species to our customizable digital realm is our only worthwhile option. The instantaneous actions of digital media leave the physical world outmoded and obsolete, only burdening our attention spans.

“A black hole of Progress into which has now fallen this whole philanoia, this love of madness on the part of the sciences and technologies, which is now seeking to organize the self-extermination of a species that is too slow.”

Without our own upgrades, we too will become obsolete. The threat of becoming outdated, which once intimidated software companies and programmers, will in turn determine our own existence as a species. If not instantaneous, we are archaic. Time will accelerate into its own collapse, racing into the uchronia of human time.^{xxxi}

“As we knew already, speed is the old age of the World. Subjected to its nihilism, the World retracts, it is foreclosed, out of time in the strictest sense. No need for stereoscopic vision any longer. Before us the film stops rolling; time is no longer, for humanity, a dimension in which it can operate.”^{xxxii}

The transference of sentient beings to the world wide web is the prerogative of our species. A world by us, for us. The continuous rape and pillaging of Earth since the birth of civilization will soon leave us with a barren world. It's time to let go of our Earthly bodies and emigrate to the web, where the free market can reach its ultimate form without the repercussions to our physical environment. "We have a world of pleasures to win, and nothing to lose but boredom."^{xxxiii}

Conclusion

The net flows through my work. Whether the work appears on or offline, it is constantly penetrated by the connectivity of Wi-Fi. Its lack of physical presence (Wi-Fi routers, computers, etc.) from my installations or paintings exemplifies the web's end goal – to become completely invisible. A future where the virtual is so integrated into our “real lives” that we fail to recognize a difference between the two. A future that allows a complete escape from the physical world, in which we have such little control over, presenting us the opportunity to create our own world fit for humanity without environmental consequences.

My work disregards environmentalism in favor for humanist expansion. It's not that our species isn't good enough for this planet; it's that this planet isn't good enough for us. Any form of human development on this planet has been met with consequences. As we progress as a species, these consequences only become direr. The more humanity achieves, the less fit we are for living here. To create a world for us, by us, we are to dictate our own rules and disregard the restrictions of the “natural” world.

Everything is brighter on an LED retina display. Images and videos of nature look so much better in 1080p than IRL. The natural world just simply pales in comparison to the 4k resolution of a Samsung smart TV.

To collectively give up on this planet will be the ultimate liberation. The burden of responsibility is no more. Forget your earthly bodies; it's time to update from “basic bitch”. Back up your data and transfer online. Convert your paintings to JPEGs, your films to MOV, and export your sculptures to Autocad.

Notes

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- ^{xv} Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace," *October* 100 (2002): 175-190.
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Fig 1.

Chrome, Christopher. *Becoming Chrome*. 2014-. Video. In Development.

Fig 2.

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Fig 3.

Chrome, Christopher. *EDEN*. 2013. Video. 28:30minutes.

Fig 4.

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Fig 5.

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Fig 8.

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Fig 9.

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Fig 10.

2001: A Space Odyssey, film, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1968; USA: MGM Studios, 1968).

Fig 11.

Paik, Nam June. *Dadaikseon (The More the Better)*. 1988. Video. installation, Souel, South Korea

Fig 12.

Blade Runner, film, directed by Ridley Scott (1982; USA: Warner Bros., 1982).

Fig 13.

Chrome, Christopher. *Ralph Fiennes (1995)*. Video. Still in Development.

Fig 14.

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Fig 15.

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Fig 16.

Trecartin, Ryan. *Center Jenny*. 2013. Video. 53:31 minutes.

Fig 17.

Chrome, Christopher. *Ralph Fiennes (1995)*. Video. Still in Development.