

PLACE:

AN ARTIST'S EXPERIENCE IN A HIGHLY MOBILE WORLD

by

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ABSTRACT

In this highly mobile world, it is the undefined and in-between spaces encountered, such as while being in a car or train, that characterize the non-place. Traveling across town or across the globe, most of us spend much of our time in these spaces. *PLACE: An Artist's Experience in a Highly Mobile World* investigates the external-to-internal experience of moving through the non-place. Explored through my own recent travels, the non-place is analyzed as informed through the cognitive and by imagination; I consider the subjective view to the totality of experience.

In my body of work, I interrogate the non-place through my own external and internal experiences. Investigations on topical and related questions asked by contemporary theorists such as Marc Augé and Michel Foucault are compared and analyzed. This body of work also considers the social, cultural, and artistic precedents, together with the related concepts of mobilities and supermodernity.

This work does not take the position of an argument. This is instead a personal query in the quest for a better understanding of the world I live in. The end product of my travels and artistic explorations, it is by interrogating these ideas that I learn about the world and of my own reality within it.

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INTRODUCTION

If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.¹

What is non-place and what is its relation to place? The non-place is mostly understood as an undefined or in-between space, whereas place is recognized in its ties to a personal history or collective memory that has been attributed to a particular location. Airports, train stations, and spaces encountered while traveling are considered non-places. These spaces function as transition sites within urban circulation and mobility.

Introduced by French anthropologist Marc Augé in his first edition of *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, the concept of non-place² has gained considerable recognition as a practicable area of concentration within cultural studies and anthropological research. In an age of increased mass communication and shrinking global distance,³ the idea of the non-place has become more prominent as an inquiry of interest.

American notions of mobility and travel are deeply embedded in our collective imagination through culturally symbolic ideas such as freedom, Route 66, and the American Way. Many of us have distinct childhood memories of time spent as a

¹ Augé, *NON-PLACES: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (Second Ed.), 63.

² *Ibid.*, viii.

³ Urry, *Mobilities*, 47.

passenger in a moving vehicle. Going to the store across town or traveling across the country, a child's view of the world is often experienced intensely.

As a little girl, my father's vocation as a Career Missionary to migrant and Spanish speaking populations kept my family consistently on the road living in a perpetual state of mobility. Traveling throughout California and neighboring states, it was during those long drives looking through the backseat window of my parents' car that I watched the movement across the landscape and the interior of my own consciousness, through imagination, come alive.

Figure 1

It is from intense experiences, good or bad, that a lasting relationship with the idea of travel is created.⁴ As a result, strong, emotional ties to mobility are now inseparable from our daily lives.

PLACE: An Artist's Experience in a Highly Mobile World explores these concepts together with the external and internal experience(s) of moving through the non-place. Placing sociologist John Urry's view of mobilities (See Page 3) alongside Marc Augé's idea of supermodernity as the setting for the non-place, it is by interrogating these ideas that I come to terms with the world around me and of my reality within it.

Using video for documentation and manipulation, my recent travel experiences are recorded and altered to evoke the passage of time as filtered through emotion, memory, and imagination. The resulting videos are projected directly onto walls and through Dura-lar, vellum, and clear acrylic blocks.

⁴ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 185.

CONTENT: NON-PLACE AND THE EXTERNAL-TO-INTERNAL EXPERIENCE

In *PLACE: An Artist's Experience in a Highly Mobile World*, the non-place is presented as a contemporary phenomenon that is familiar yet strange. Taking the idea of non-place as a point of departure, my work focuses within the area of contemporary urban travel and its predilections to the internal space as informing experience. In my experience, the non-place of travel many times encourages an introspective state that can be suggestive to a kind of virtual or parallel reality.

Sociologist and author John Urry investigates these ideas in his updated version of mobilities. Called the “new mobilities paradigm,”⁵ the essential idea resides in the transport of people, goods, and information. He explores the historical and recent changes that have occurred within mobilities, and its affect on social structures and the systems people use.

Urry informs how improvements in technologies, transportation, and communication have quickened the pace of society.⁶ The non-places of airports and motels offer landline to wireless access as part of their hospitality services. Its consumers utilize a broad range of mobile devices such as cellular phones, MP3 players, and laptops. Living in a highly mobile world of global interconnectedness and mass travel through physical and virtual high speed technologies has left an indelible mark on how individuals receive and perceive their environment, information, and each other.

⁵ Urry, *Mobilities*, 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

There are different reasons for mobility and travel. Social sciences and cultural studies continually analyze the complexities and the displacement that occurs in such instances as migrations and diasporas.⁷ Refugees escaping economic or political crises many times instigate mass migrations. Nomadism and homelessness occur from situations such as bankruptcy, much as we are currently experiencing in our society. Circumstances associated with travel can be very serious and continue to create very real challenges for people in these situations.

While not denying the seriousness of such dire circumstances within travel, the focus of my body of work originates from my own recent journeys. Since childhood, the idea of travel was always one of adventure and imagination for me. Frequenting the non-place as a user and as an observer, I have found the non-place to be an interesting space.

I personally find that I am more acutely aware of my own interior thoughts and feelings when I go through such spaces. In conjunction to an influx of external information, in the non-place I find that my thoughts range from everyday tasks at hand to states much like meditation. It is also in such spaces that my imagination will take hold of external information and rearrange or create new forms from it. When talking with others about this project, I find that their experiences are similar. It is in such environments that we may find ourselves going over the schedule for the day, consider the present challenge, or use the time to either focus or unwind.

⁷ Ibid., 35.

A couple of years ago my peers and I visited New York City to study contemporary art. I was intrigued by the amount of foot traffic there was as we got on and off the subway each morning. Taking in the sights, I found it amazing that I was spending my time watching the external world while very much inside my own head. Going in and out of my thoughts, individual commuters temporarily melted into a human wall of moving landscape and would reappear as individuals as my thoughts subsided. I did what I could to take in these experiences at my own thoughtful pace and enjoyed a temporary freedom from everyday expectations.

Figure 2

In a catalogue essay for artist Olafur Eliasson's exhibition *Olafur Eliasson: Your colour memory*, Jonathan Crary makes observations about Eliasson's work in reference to external information and human perception through optics:

...he reveals the precariousness of our notions about what belongs to the world and what belongs to us as perceivers... Most of us, most of the time, are completely unaware of how the specific physiology of the human optical system is intertwined with what we assume to be a direct and "objective" view of external reality. Our body, in many different ways, is always a part of our visual experience, yet we habitually delete those corporal features from conscious awareness.⁸

Crary articulates how we as perceivers typically make assumptions about what is objective, what is reality, and how we take our bodies for granted as informing to a full understanding. Looking at the perception of information as significant to Eliasson's work, Crary explains that by creating environments Eliasson offers participants an experience to hopefully understand his art in a different way. An artist myself, I understand how consideration to the internal perception of information could be helpful in acquiring additional knowledge for study in other disciplines, as well.

⁸ Crary, "Illuminations of the Unforeseen," In Jonathan Crary, Olafur Eliasson, Imail Soyugenc, and Richard Torchia, *Olafur Eliasson: Your colour memory*, 19.

There are newer developments in anthropology where genuine consideration is being given to the subjective thoughts and actions of an individual's experience.⁹ This postmodern trend is believed to reveal more information for more well-rounded results. As the conventional omission of subjective information is turned on its head, some anthropologists believe that information enhanced by a personal account or description is more likely to reveal other insights that are possibly pertinent. This approach considers the observer's experiences as having weight and interpretations and interior feelings as relevant in evaluating information.

Thinking on the nature of particular non-places, such as those encountered in areas of circulation or mass transit, certain expectations, behavior, and emotions are incited. For example, a car ride is often experienced in a rather continuous way, plausibly played out in close yet comfortable proximity to others as shared space while the disjointed experience of a subway or bus commute may encourage a more introspective, solitary response.¹⁰ Accepting an unspoken contract upon entering into mass transit systems, this particular behavior is one way that travelers maintain an acceptable distance.

How people engage or disengage with each other or their immediate surroundings is more than just interesting to observe. It communicates the level of impact that certain systems have on societies. John Urry describes this social distance as experienced in collective modes of travel:

⁹ McGee and Warms, *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*, 537-551.

¹⁰ Urry, *Mobilities*, 119.

And forms of social distance become widespread, even involving ways of minimizing the viewing of the close-to body of one's fellow passengers. [Erving] Goffman describes the importance of developing 'civil inattention', being in public but minimizing attention to others.¹¹

This civil inattention is a behavior that mass transit users exhibit to create a buffer or safeguard for others and self while traveling. The modern idea of the screen by use of a newspaper or magazine is a method passengers have used to maintain this behavior. Urry equates the modern screens of magazines and books to laptops and cell phones as the contemporary version of maintaining a level of social detachment.

These methods vary among individuals depending on their purpose for travel and personal involvement. For example, commuters tend to internalize by way of study or work while the tourist's tendency is to maintain that level of reservation by watching others or the movement across the landscape.¹² Discussing these behaviors as a development within modern mobility, Urry makes a direct connection to sociologist and author Georg Simmel.¹³ Simmel expounds on the effects of mobility on modern society:

But Simmel has much to say about the contemporary city where new modes of movement and restlessness are widespread... because of the richness and diverse sets of onrushing stimuli in the metropolis people are forced to develop an attitude of reserve and insensitivity to feeling. Without the development of such an attitude most would not be able to cope with such overwhelming experiences caused by a high density of population and its movement. The urban personality is thus reserved, detached and blasé... Simmel analyses the fragmentation and diversity of modern life and shows that motion, the diversity of stimuli and the visual appropriations of place are centrally important features of that new modern urban experience.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 106.

¹² Ibid., 107.

¹³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

Urban attitudes and social distance aside, travelers may also express a sense of freedom from everyday responsibilities when in certain non-places. Individual roles can be shed for a temporal, unique sense of autonomy.¹⁵ This is particularly relevant to areas of mass circulation where identity is claimed only by the identification one carries.¹⁶ Anonymity as liberating, a temporary break from labels and responsibilities can be a pleasurable experience.

A considerable amount of communication also occurs in contemporary travel. My video *4:01 minutes* (Plate 1) reveals a duality within travel as a simultaneous reaching out and closing off of social space. As individuals wait to commute, connections through texting and other technological forms are observed as individual pockets of communication and walls are erected.

Also of interest to me is the space between the observer and the observed. Specific to those scenes recorded through a train window, as the window fluctuates from its transparent to reflective qualities throughout the ride, the distance between the spectator and subject is heightened. The focus moves from the observed to the observer and back again. Alluding to surveillance recordings, this video also foregrounds the audience as complicit in the act of looking at individuals being unknowingly videotaped. Reading an exterior-to-interior, glass-to-mirror view as a way to interpret the external-to-internal experience, this is yet another paradox that is revealed through this particular work.

¹⁵ Augé, *NON-PLACES: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (Second Ed.), 83.

¹⁶ Urry, *Mobilities*, 144.

As an individual circulates through space toward a destination, there may be pause for reflection as she moves through a landscape. She may ride through a crowded subway, bodies brushing past one another, yet remain solitary within herself. It is in this vein that the concept of non-place, as described by anthropologist Marc Augé, has significance.

Augé illustrates the conditions for non-place within the context of supermodernity.¹⁷ Supermodernity is the position or world view which understands the contemporary experience as an excess of excess, mostly from an informational and spatial standpoint. This informational explosion, a repercussion of the increase in generational span and longevity, explains Augé, is one factor in the increase of technologies. Solidifying the relationship of non-place to supermodernity, Augé qualifies:

This, as we have seen, is expressed in changes of scale, in the proliferation of imaged and imaginary references, and in the spectacular acceleration of means of transport. Its concrete outcome involves considerable, physical modifications: urban concentrations, movements of population and the multiplication of what we call 'non-places', in opposition to the sociological notion of place, associated by [Marcel] Mauss and a whole ethnological tradition with the idea of a culture localized in time and space.¹⁸

Augé proposes an increase in circulation as a major factor in the rise of non-places. The growing demand for the transport of goods, services, and travel and the systems by which

¹⁷ Augé, *NON-PLACES: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (Second Ed.), 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

its users move is a hotbed in the creation of such spaces. Yet the view that places are in complete opposition to non-place (and visa versa) is an inflexible one as some non-places may also possess some of the attributes of place.¹⁹

For example, an historical event can quickly mark a non-place as a type of place. Yet this type of space may still continue to function as a non-place depending on its original purpose.²⁰ From a proposal for marriage on a train to the yearly Anaheim Rose Bowl Parade, the example of intensity versus duration in experience can label non-places as a type of place.

Geographer and philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan articulates this phenomenon in his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*: “Many years in one place may leave few memory traces that we can or wish to recall; an intense experience of short duration, on the other hand, can alter our lives.”²¹ For Augé, places must possess at minimum the three characteristics of identity, relations, and history. Augé clarifies that the ultimate factor lies in people’s desire to create places, even from non-places.

Dualities also occur within supermodernity. For example, the idea of expansion is dual in nature such as the shrinking of the globe through expansion of technologies. From both a communication and circulation standpoint, technologies have so increased in

¹⁹ Augé, *NON-PLACES: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (Second Ed.), viii.

²⁰ Ibid., 64.

²¹ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 185.

the area of connectivity that it in turn impacts our concept of distance.²² The minimization of global travel times and growing communication routes via mobile interconnectivity allow an individual to travel greater distances at higher speeds, physically and virtually.

It was nearly a century ago that the Italian Futurists recognized such a possibility for a more technologically adept world. This connection between technology, speed, and culture is explored in their paintings, sculpture, and film. One of the first avant-garde movements to employ film making, this new medium became influential to their art, evident in the 1916 manifesto *The Futurist Cinema*.

Royal College of Art Fellow and author A.L. Reese discusses the relationship of film with Futurist cinema:

But once again, they set a precedent for the avant-garde film to come... Stories were minimal enough to prefigure the early films of Vito Acconci, William Wegman and Bruce Nauman in the 1960's, as in a love-story between the painter Balla and a chair, or a 'discussion between boxing gloves' from Ginna's 1916 *Vita Futurista*. Some of the Futurist films had such story-lines, or more conventional ones, but already there were suggestions that the art of film could go further into abstraction.²³

Levels of abstraction were attained by the Futurists and succeeded by avant-garde movements such as the Surrealists. They explored the applications of montage and hand painted film. These practices would be perfected and brought to the fore decades later in the 1960's through avant-garde experimental film.

²² Urry, *Mobilities*, 54.

²³ Reese, *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant Garde to Contemporary British Practice*, 28.

PROCESS: DOCUMENTATION AND MEDIUM SPECIFICATIONS

Looking for non-place, I set out to gather visual documentation. Several trips were planned in advance and a small, palm-sized digital camcorder was purchased to record my travels. The videos documenting my recent travels to and through California, Idaho, Wyoming, and several townships and metropolitan areas in and around Nagoya, Japan come together to form this body of work. I gathered most of my visual material based on findings and illustrations made by Augé and Urry. Augé describes those areas of non-place as spaces of transition; this is a fairly direct link to Victor Turner's influential research in sites of ritual and the liminal, or the position of being in-between.²⁴

Victor Turner's writings on the rituals of the Ndembu tribe opened a door to consider the ambiguous or less identifiable areas that exist within most social structures. In his book, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Turner focused on customs, practices, and rituals regarding such areas as between adolescence and adulthood. His investigations spurred an interest in spaces of transition within social hierarchies and other similar systems. He referred to these spaces as passages and liminal states or sites. These areas can be considered as a type of non-place in that they are experienced as transitional spaces. Understanding this as an important connection and its continued discourse in the study of such sites within populations, the non-place as a source for visual analysis is not far removed.

²⁴ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 93-111.

Although I initially viewed my video documentation primarily as a resource for painting, this position quickly gave way to my growing fascination with the activity and processes of film making. The results of my initial footage revealed how much of my travel experience was also being experienced as through the lens. A certain amount of separation or isolation is experienced in the use of a camera, reinforcing the relationship of non-place and its internalization to digital video. The shifting views and compositions created by the instability of a hand-held camera reveal a certain intimate quality that is clearly subjective. The nature of this medium had strangely positioned me into a pseudo-virtual reality that was my own.

To articulate the cognitive within experience and bring the purposes of Art into the picture, I return to Tuan:

Art makes images of feeling so that feeling is accessible to contemplation and thought... The images of place, here sampled, are evoked by the imagination of perceptive writers. By the light of their art we are privileged to savor experiences that would have faded beyond recall. Here is a seeming paradox: thought creates distance and destroys the immediacy of direct experience, yet it is by thoughtful reflection that the elusive moments of the past draw near to us in present reality and gain a measure of permanence.²⁵

It is through art that artists continually attempt to capture fleeting experiences within the present. The temporal moments and thoughts that sporadically pervade an individual's everyday existence challenges artists to give ephemeral ideas form, to attempt at an illusion of permanence.

Yet I find it fascinating how the very experiences I try to capture have transformed almost as soon as I perceive them. Extreme conditions, pain, intense joy,

²⁵ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 148.

and intensity in general appear to level off in the mind in order to process an experience. This transformation process continues as memory and then imagination take hold of an experience.

My video *moving through* is one example of this phenomenon. Filmed while on a train ride through Nagoya, the reality of the experience has been smoothed over and replaced by a rhythmic, trancelike quality. The bumpiness of the ride and the difficulties faced in travel are exchanged for something more tolerable, maybe even more romantic or even prosaic. The end result is more fictive and less real.

These internal devices are viewed as central to a person's capacity to process information and operate in the world. Deriving from past knowledge through memory, emotion, and imagination, these internal filters can be understood as tools to deal with the world around us. This internal activity is not only pertinent but beneficial to an individual's cognitive abilities. Recognized in science as an aspect of the way the brain works (called the Default Mode Network), this internal activity is particularly useful in working out social situations and problem solving.²⁶

Thinking about how to visually interpret the emotive and imaginative, I looked at practices previously engaged by artists within the genre of experimental film. Techniques such as the out-of-focus view and manual versus digital layering were employed. Understanding the cognitive as drawing from a layering of diverse experiences, levels of visual representation as well as abstraction were used in order to communicate different modes of seeing.

²⁶ Spreng and Grady, "Patterns of Brain Activity Supporting Autobiographical Memory, Prospection, and Theory of Mind, and Their Relationship to the Default Mode Network," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 22, no. 6 (June 2010), 1112-1123.

I experimented with a range of views and materials where I incorporated both manual and digital techniques. Segments of digital video footage are projected and re-recorded through a screen of translucent Dura-lar or transparencies of artwork. This adds another layer of information and maximizes areas of abstraction. The inversion of positive and negative form and the use of arbitrary and heightened color are also employed. These processes visually come together to articulate those transitions from external to internal.

The additive and subtractive quality of painting is the very nature of constructing and editing video. The collage or montage element of both media and the time involved in the accumulation and arrangement of each successive layer reveals this relationship. As a result, clip segments are fashioned together in a collection of analogous moments that imply narrative, yet are never fully realized. Set on a loop, these videos replay in a fictive element, just as imagination re-configures or re-contextualizes certain events and memory continually erases and edits experiences over time.

Temporality

Understanding the nature of photography and cinema as the past-tense becoming an audience's present-tense experience, experimental video utilizes time as a way to free itself from linear narrative. The importance of time over narrative and ideas of non-linear narratives are evidenced by the methods of contemporary film. For example, Doug Aitken's 1999 film installation *Electric Earth* (Plate 2) uses several wall projections. In order to foreground its non-linear narrative, this particular film is arranged though a hall-

like walkway for participants to experience and engage with over a period of time.

The film of a young man taking a walk through the city at night becomes a fragmented experience for the viewer.

The nature of today's relationship with the digital world easily reveals the non-place as conceptually appropriate to digital media. The fleeting moments and profusion of information experienced while on a commute or journey are usually realized in a non-linear way. The arrangement of video clips, editing, and enhancements also act to foreground that this is a constructed experience.

Realizing the minimal presence of my own hand in this media, part of my research was in the area of manually generated practices. I looked to artists of the past for inspiration and investigated the techniques of abstraction within experimental film.

Stan Brakhage

Recognized for his innovative abstraction within experimental film, Stan Brakhage is considered a leader in video manipulation. His early associations with the avant-garde through movements such as Fluxus eventually led this independent filmmaker to carve out his own unique path within the art world. Brakhage drew from nature as a resource for material and for meaning. His work encompasses all that is in experience: the external elements as experienced, internalized, and reinterpreted visually through the artist's individual response.

First recognized for the out-of-focus view and surface manipulations in his psychodramas, Brakhage's surface techniques eventually blossomed into a life-long affair with the moving abstract image. His interest in the formal aspects of light and form are evident through the application of found material, surface scratching or sgraffito, use of abstraction, and direct painting techniques.

In his later work, Brakhage's fascination with elements from nature produced a more internal and spiritual sensibility. Referencing a clip from his 1997 film *Commingled Containers* (Plate 3), the sense of intimacy is clearly evident by the scale and manual manipulation undertaken. Brakhage's footage of an underwater scene is visually intensified through the application of paint and other similar techniques; these were applied to the surface of 16 millimeter film.

CONCERNING VIDEO INSTALLATION

My sculptural video installation *intervals* is installed as one work containing six displays across two opposing walls (Plate 4). Small yet powerful projectors are placed behind clear one-inch thick acrylic blocks, projecting digitally altered video loops inside them (Plate 5). Upon close investigation, the color photocopies of my artwork on vellum affixed to the inverse side of the acrylic blocks reveal a hint (or step removed) of my hand in this work. The intense color, movement, and intimate scale seen from across the space engages viewers to explore each video on a more personal level.

My conceptual reasoning for the use of clear cast acrylic is fairly straightforward. This type of acrylic is commonly used in areas of high traffic and circulation such as airports and similar transition sites. Its durability, high clarity, and manmade aesthetic make it an ideal building material. It is available in many forms as an industrial material and as a high impact replacement for glass. Aiming for a similar manmade aesthetic as is found in such spaces, I had the displays custom fabricated. My hand removed, this installation alludes to the minimalist works of such artists as Donald Judd and Dan Flavin.²⁷

The dimensions of each display, their relationship to other forms, and the space between each display are all taken into consideration. The dimensions of the displays

²⁷ Foster, et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, Vol. 2, 492.

correspond to a projection throw; of which, the blocks are also specifically scaled to a 16:9 ratio, a direct reference to the landscape setting or widescreen format within cinematography. Transparency of the material also works as an indirect reference to the transient experience in travel in its relationship to the industrial materials of window or mirror. Used for its durability in such spaces, acrylic as a multipurpose material is often polished for ease of maintenance and aesthetic purpose.

The sculptural elements of the work and the videos can be interpreted as pauses or intervals. The open spaces between each display are there as transitions between each video and for the human form to circulate through or occupy. Also referencing personal technology by the intimate scale, this juxtaposition of object and video is an interpretation of internal experience within an external reality.

Looking to Michael Fried's seminal writing *Art and Objecthood*, Fried points to the question of allusion versus illusion and critiques those theoretical shifts particular to the state of painting and sculpture in the 1960's. Concentrating on such movements as Minimal Art and Specific Objects, Fried compares minimalism to the purposes of theater. Dubbing Minimalism as "literalist," Fried illuminates that a connection to theater is evident in the intent behind such art. Referring to the work of artists as Donald Judd and Robert Morris, Fried emphasizes this connection through the concepts of time and duration:

The literalist preoccupation with time – more precisely, with the *duration of the experience* – is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical, as though theater confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of *time*; or as though the sense, which, at bottom, theater addresses is a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective...²⁸

Understanding sculpture as an unfolding or revealing along with the concept of duration, Fried reveals the shift that was occurring from modern to postmodern concepts. His concern for the direction of art is readily apparent in this writing. Yet Fried's critique foretells of the postmodern attitudes to evolve in art – one being a predilection to the theatrical, referencing the idea of duration and time in cinema.

A great deal of contemporary installation is interested in an experience through the creation of environments. Looking at art critic Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of "relational aesthetics,"²⁹ Bourriaud discusses how experiential artwork involving social interaction is a primary focus for many contemporary artists, especially to those whose work is situated within installation. Concerned with an experiential encounter, this concept evolved out of the era of Fluxus and such happenings of the 1960's.³⁰ Artists such as Felix Gonzales-Torres and Pierre Huyghe³¹ have utilized social interaction and the experiential as a way to complete a work of art. Contemporary art's theatrical penchant through installation and new media is unfortunately for Fried, quite alive and well.

²⁸ Fried, *Art and Objecthood: essays and reviews*, 166.

²⁹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 15.

³⁰ Scanlan, "Traffic Control: Joe Scanlan on Social Space and Relational Aesthetics," *Artforum*, New York: Summer 2005, Vol. 43, Iss. 10,123.

³¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 58.

Although this body of work does not make use of an over-stimulated or immersed environment, it does consider the participant's body and interaction within the space. For instance, I utilize audio to pique investigation of the space. Two videos with audio are placed on opposite sides of the gallery. The audience can hear the videos yet cannot see them; this presents an opportunity for participants to seek its source and thus engage with the work as a whole. Looking for and creating opportunities for interaction is one way that individuals can access a work of art and hopefully, pull from their own experiences toward an understanding of my work on their own terms.

COLOR AND FORM:
EMOTION, MEMORY, AND THE IMAGINED

I took my first airplane ride at three years old. It was a new experience for me. I was excited about flying. My family and I were taking a plane back East to Jacksonville to visit my father's family. Up to that point, I had only known of my grandparents through photographs.

As I looked out the small, round window at the clouds, the colors intensified into brilliant oranges and reds as the sun set. I honestly believed we were on our way to Heaven. It was then that I realized that Grandma must live up in the sky.

I felt similar emotions recently while on my trip to Japan. Looking out through the window to the great expanse of the Pacific Ocean below me, I felt the intensity and the excitement of the journey and my heightened emotions seemed to literally color everything.

Figure 3

Using color and levels of representation as a way of articulating my experience of the non-place, my decision to manipulate video in this way is approached cautiously. Understanding the languages of color, representation, and abstraction through the theoretical and historical sides of painting, the way I use these concepts is fully dependent on the intention of each work.

Two different sides to a subway experience are presented in the video shorts *moving through* (Plate 6) and *0:52 seconds*. The video *0:52 seconds* weighs heavier in the external experience through the excessive movement and verticality of the video shots, whereas the double projection *moving through* extends the long shot around a

corner exhibiting a slower, consistent, almost romantic view. The former work's jerky quality and intensity is heightened by its short duration; it is also the only work that makes use of the standard screen format.

A subtle approach is used to counter the illusion of representation in both videos. Heightening local color, the excessive amount of hue saturation is mostly intended to agitate or disrupt representation. Aiming for a surreal or dreamlike quality to visually convey the external-to-internal experience required this denser application. The videos are also experienced in a loop where narrative is implied but never fully materialized. These works function like memory, as a series of unresolved fragments.

For the video installation *intervals*, the internal, introspective state is foregrounded through color, form, and motion. Inset into acrylic blocks and presented on clear acrylic displays, these intimate videos are a visual interpretation of that strangeness of the in-between that I experience in such non-places. The external world is interpreted as processed through internal filters such as imagination and emotion in order to present the idea of non-place as a meditative spectacle. Arbitrary, oversaturated color and levels of abstraction are used as a way to transform these videos into moving, visual microcosms.

Abstraction and pure color are all the trademarks of late nineteenth to early twentieth century movements such as the Symbolists, Fauvism, and Der Blaue Reiter. Their reasoning was to communicate a break away from the visual representation of the external world.³² As photography had essentially usurped representational painting for

³² Foster, et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, Vol. 1, 86.

the time being, artists looked to other concepts to visually interpret, such as the psyche and emotion. Abstraction and color were used to convey these ideas.

Associated with the art movement Der Blaue Reiter, Wassily Kandinsky's seminal work *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* of 1912 discusses color as a dialogue relating to the psyche by use of association to objects in the real world. Of this association, Kandinsky states: "And so we come to the second result of looking at colors: *their psychological effect*. They produce a correspondent spiritual vibration, and it is only as a step towards this spiritual vibration that the physical impression is of importance."³³

The power of color and the imaginary component as a compliment to the psyche, color also informs my work. Using color in his work as well, Olafur Eliasson's installations many times include color as the primary element in his environments.

Olafur Eliasson

Olafur Eliasson utilizes color in an engaging way (Plate 7). In his installation *Room for One Colour*, Eliasson uses colored light to induce optical effects such as after-images; Eliasson's environments are experiments in perception. His color-saturated environments are filled with only one color per room. As people experience a room over the course of a few minutes, the color will saturate the eyes of participants to reveal its complimentary color when a participant's eyes close. Using alternate methods in the

³³ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art: and painting in particular*, 1912, 44.

experiential, Eliasson communicates an internal experience as informing the entire experience. The external experience is transformed as the information makes its way through the eye and into the brain.

In my work, I challenge myself at visually articulating the exterior experience as cast by internal activity. An interpretation of my own experience through the use of representation, abstraction, and color, these works are the end result.

THE EXPERIENTIAL: MOBILITIES, TRAVEL, AND CIRCULATION

The increase of technological mobility in the late nineteenth century inspired artists to explore movement. Experiments in motion through time-captured panoramic photographs displayed the versatility of photography as a tool and as medium.³⁴ This encouraged further experimentation, as evidenced in Muybridge's influential documentation on the body in motion. As film became available, topographically inspired films related to travel and motion have allowed audiences to experience other places.³⁵ Understanding photography's role in filmic travel,³⁶ artists continue to investigate such ideas as mobility and travel through their art.

Novelists, poets, and artists' tales of travel and adventure endure in our collective imagination. From the New Testament's ancient parable of the good Samaritan to the nineteenth century romantic view of the Parisian *flâneur* (a precursor to the modern day tourist), these characters are commonly cast as pleasant, plausibly wealthy and respectable, male citizens.³⁷

The idea of travel also carries with it an element of the unknown and the possibility of risk. Accidents, terrorism, and reminders to be wary are evident in the

³⁴ Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice*, 17.

³⁵ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁷ Urry, *Mobilities*, 69.

amount of surveillance in such spaces.³⁸ An activity such as loitering is also less acceptable in areas of high traffic and circulation; it is often perceived as linked to suspicious activities.³⁹

There is the opposing side to the romantic or precarious views of travel: be it positive or negative, mobility as we know it can also be considerably mundane. The everyday commuter follows prescribed routes and methods of behavior. This brings to mind the regulation of traffic and population flows where circulation is dictated by those in power.⁴⁰

Academics in the study of urban systems continually analyze the way we circulate and consider space. Philosopher and theorist Michel Foucault used the idea of heterotopias⁴¹ as a description for those ambiguous spaces that seem to defy a specific definition, function, or physical place. These spaces are found in-between places and often outside, similar to the ideas of non-place. Foucault was interested in the way we use space and of the systems we construct within them. Many architects also refer to these particular theories.⁴² And although we understand these concepts to be symbolic, we regularly see the physical manifestations of such power structures through the posting of speed signs and regulations placed alongside roadways as safety precautions.

³⁸ Urry, *Mobilities*, 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴¹ Crampton and Elden (ed.), *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*, 44.

⁴² Pløger, "Foucault's Dispositif and the City," *Planning Theory*, 53.

Urry discusses the continual development of urban pathways and improved technologies as altering city life. In the mid-twentieth century, the paving of roadways in the United States modified traffic flow to become more uniform and efficient.⁴³ Urban and town centers that had formerly sought to direct highway traffic into central business districts redirected circulation in exchange for efficacy of flow. As evidenced in most small towns today, many motels, rest areas, and shopping malls are encountered on the edges of a town, together with such travel related businesses.⁴⁴

Kim Sooja

Artist Kim Sooja challenges the accepted norms within circulation by the use of her body as spectacle. Thinking about such ideas as circulation or the function of a space, Sooja orchestrates her own visual rupture within social expectations.

Sooja creates video works of her performances. In her video explorations (Plate 8), she physically places herself into unique microcosms of experience. Looking at her combination performance and video work *A Needle Woman* (filmed in Nepal, Yemen, Brazil, and Israel), Sooja places herself in the middle of a busy street in the midst of heavy traffic. Standing motionless she becomes an obstacle and disrupts the flow of commuters.

Using her body in this way, Sooja reiterates the unspoken but implied contract a person enters into when in spaces of circulation. Creating visual rupture, she becomes a

⁴³ Urry, *Mobilities*, 114.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

spectacle. Interesting to observe is the reaction that varies as passersby still try to maintain their social distance. Results vary depending on the level of inconvenience. The video only shows the back of her head and the viewer is positioned as though behind her. This visual placement allows her audience to see the event unfold as through her own eyes. The viewer has now become participant and can experience Sooja's discomfort in the obstacle she has become.

CONCLUSION

Why I See the World As I See It

My father's work occasionally sent him to other countries and my fascination with the idea of travel grew as I received postcards from him and collected the stamps. Weeks would go by and every time he came back, my father was physically, intellectually, and spiritually altered. I decided to find and understand this transformation on my own terms one day.

Figure 4

This body of work is an attempt to realize this original quest. Inspired by psychological, philosophical, and the anthropological approaches through a more subjective point of view, my attempt to expand on the conceptual dialogue of non-place through my artwork and my writing has made me so much more aware of how my personal experiences have shaped, and will continue to shape my perception of our collective attitudes toward a sense of place.

As our world continually grows smaller through ever-expanding transit and information systems, our perception of the world changes through continuous interaction with the non-place as the idea of non-place erodes. Familiarity allows each participant to shape the non-place from a personal perspective, bestowing each with a sense of place and belonging – a place where personal identity is allowed to flourish. This body of work has allowed me an opportunity to get to know the world around me, and to hone my

perception of how I relate to this world. Particularly today, in a world of high accessibility to transit and communication routes, the subjective view (an often overlooked reserve) is quite possibly the next great frontier for information and creativity.

The contemporary reality of the non-place is rarely far from place – it is in fact very close. From my own travel experiences, I have learned that it is through the internal experience of the self that we interpret and comprehend the other side of the non-place: place.



Plate 1. Arin Lindstrom. *4:01 minutes*, 2011, detail (video still), single video projection, 4 min./01 sec., loop.

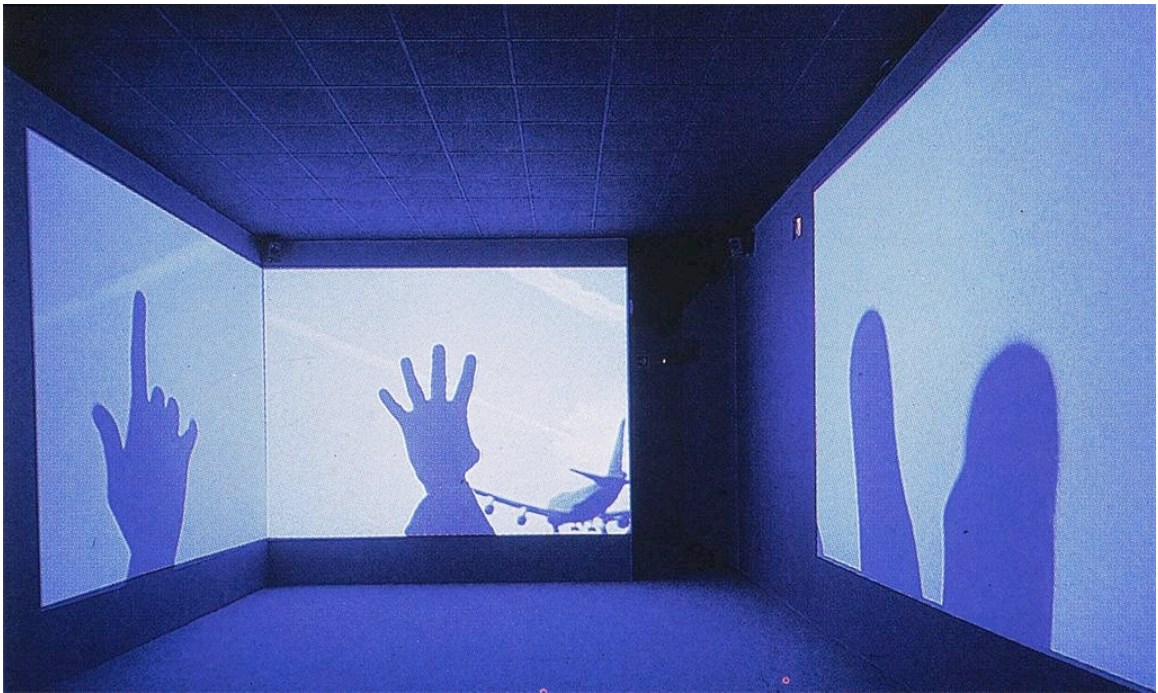


Plate 2. Doug Aitken. *Electric Earth*, video installation, eight laserdisc projections, Biennale di Venezia (48th: 1999). <http://artstor.org>.

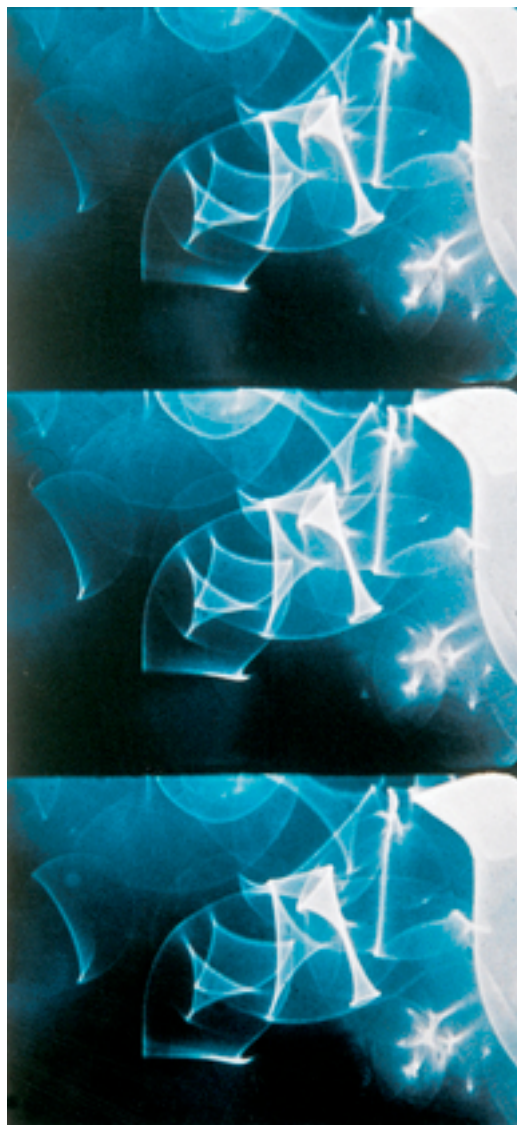


Plate 3. Stan Brakhage. *Commingled Containers*, 1997, 16mm print, color, sound, 5 minutes. <http://www.moma.org/collection>.



Plate 4. Arin Lindstrom. *intervals* (1 – 6), installation (front view), 2011, single video projection loops through six acrylic blocks with original color prints on vellum. Photograph by Carrie Quinney.



**Plate 5. Arin Lindstrom. *intervals*, installation detail, 2011, single video projection loops through six acrylic blocks with original color prints on vellum.
Photograph by Carrie Quinney.**



Plate 6. Arin Lindstrom. *moving through*, 2011, detail (video still), double video projection, 3 min./57 sec. loop.

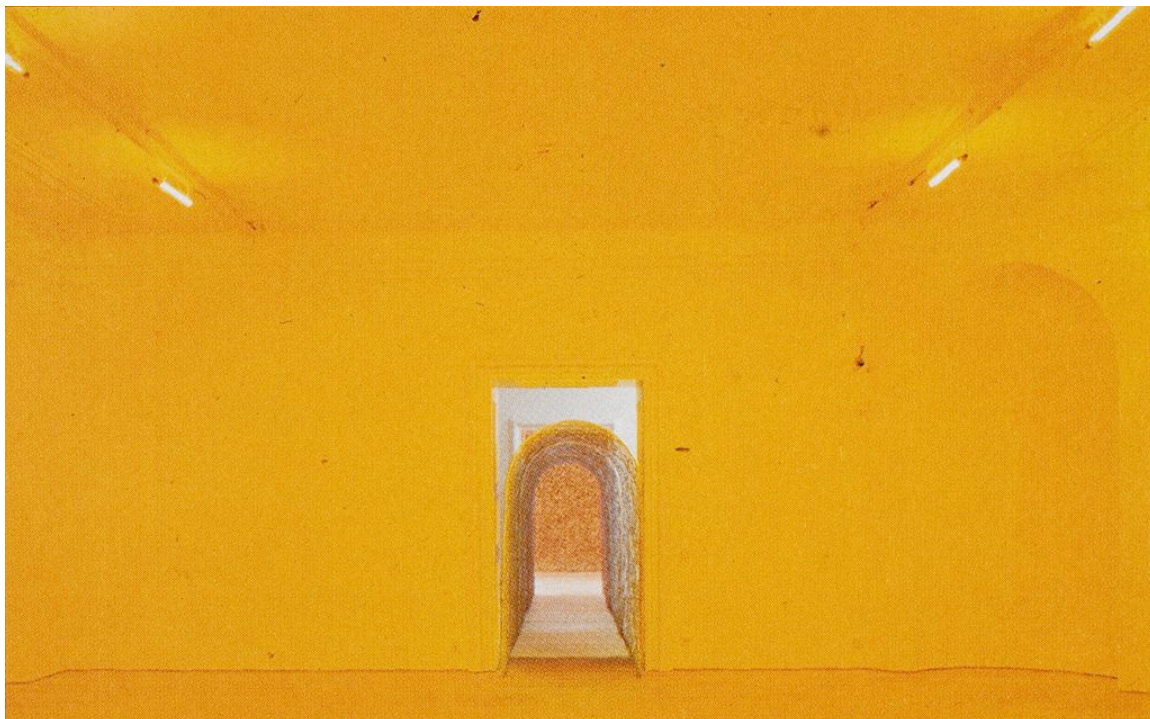


Plate 7. Olafur Eliasson. *Room for One Colour*, installation, 1998, mixed media.
<http://artstor.org>.



Plate 8. Kim Sooja. *A Needle Woman*, 2005, 6 channel video projection, 10:40 minutes. Courtesy of Kimsooja Studio, Installation view, LACMA: Kimsooja – Your Bright Future: 12 Contemporary Artists from Korea. <http://www.mfah.org/>.



**Plate 9. Arin Lindstrom. Exhibition view from the rear of gallery.
Photograph by Carrie Quinney.**



**Plate 10. Arin Lindstrom. Exhibition view from the back right side.
Photograph by Carrie Quinney.**

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APPENDIX

DVD

In this thesis document I have included a DVD as visual documentation of my videos from my thesis exhibition *PLACE: An Artist's Experience in a Highly Mobile World*, which was exhibited at Boise State University's Visual Arts Center in March 2011. Please find attached in back of document.