Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Art in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University

2014

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Abstract

I am part of the Millennial Generation that grew up bearing it all on Facebook, and anybody can become a YouTube celebrity. All of our actions now have the potential to become spectacles to be shared with the masses. Technology influences everything, and it is changing at a dizzying pace. The future is an unknowable and exciting time.

Knowing our history is important because it helps us understand our current condition. It is interpretations of these stories that get passed down through the generations. The work in *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind* is how I deal with the technology and social media overload, by creating my own interpretation of human history through a cavewoman named Ugha and a future woman named Xugha. Ugha and Xugha are one and the same person, and act as a stand-in for me.

In my historical interpretations I use narrative and humor to open the door for viewers to consider the serious and complex hypotheses being explored. It is easier for us to laugh at Ugha, a less developed person, than at ourselves, even though we may not have any more knowledge about the questions of life. I use Ugha, and her future self, Xugha, as starting points to evaluate where we are as a people now, and how we got to this point in our evolution.

Questions about the emergence of our humanity cannot be answered with certainty. Just what is it that makes us human, where does this knowledge come from, and how can we trust it, are some of the larger questions that are at stake in my research.
There are as many versions of the stories as there are sources. I am interested in the narratives the literature provides, and the ambiguity of our knowledge.

The artifice of my sets serves to support the instability of the knowledge that inform the stories I tell. Flat, painted backgrounds and pedestrian materials such as cardboard are used for props. The museum diorama is a stylistic influence and sets the foundation for my departure. Museums are a trusted source of authority and truth, and a convention for transferring knowledge about common and well as exotic places, times, and beings.

Capturing a cave or space age woman in photographs or on video is absurd because of the conflation of linear time. Video and the theories I am questioning both pretend to be objective, but are not. Contemporary humans are situated within a hyper-real time, where progressing technologies are blurring the boundaries between reality and unreality. Today everything happens online and real, person-to-person communication is being replaced by code. I use my videos of fabricated situations, environments, and characters to draw attention to the progression from the real to virtual. The characters within my work are spectacles to be observed and questioned. Because of the Internet, social media, and new forms of entertainment such as reality TV and user-based web content, we are all spectacles like Ugha and Xugha.
Dedication

This document is dedicated to those of the past and future.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the continuous support of my thesis advisor, Professor Robert Ladislas Derr. I am sincerely grateful for his motivation, enthusiasm, and incredible knowledge. I would also like to thank my committee members Professor Rebecca Harvey and Professor Jessica Mallios, as well as Professor Aspen Mays, for their encouragement, insight, and provocation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind a revisionist version of human history, with a focus on the evolutionary journey, is explored through a feminist lens. Difficult questions without definite answers about the emergence of our humanity are hypothesized. Just what is it that makes us human, where does this knowledge come from, and how can we trust it, are some of the larger considerations. Playfully artificial sets are used instead of realistic environments to reflect the ambiguity of our attained knowledge. The skepticism of seeing reflects the skepticism of believing uncertain theories concerning our origins. The mimicked environments such as a cave interior, or the surface of an alien planet, are the stages for Ugha the cavewoman, and Xugh a the future woman, to act out theories about women’s roles. Suspicion is raised through the constructed environments, as well as through the absurd act of capturing a cavewoman on camera.

Through Ugha and Xugh a, inventions and social structures are examined, and their origins and futures are inferred. These characters exist in a world that is shaped by our relationship to and dependence on newly emerging technologies, entertainment, and forms of information sharing. The impact of the Internet and social media on the Millennial Generation are reflected in Xugh a’s actions. We are situated within a hyper-real time where technological progression is blurring the boundaries between reality and unreality. The use of fabricated situations, environments, and characters draw attention to
this evolution from real to virtual.

I begin this paper by discussing the current social landscape and the effects that technology has upon my generation and the society in which we live. Rapidly advancing technologies, the Internet, and social media have an extensive influence on contemporary western youth culture. The evolution of humanity was driven heavily by early technologies that changed and grew with us over time. The importance of knowing the past to understand the present is shown through visual narratives starring two characters.

Stories about the emergence of humanity are told through a cavewoman character named Ugha, and her journey from Ape to homo Sapien. Videos and photographs show her invention and use of certain technologies that allow her to continue on the evolutionary path. Social and cognitive developments are also illustrated, with the larger question of what makes Ugha human. Through Ugha I present the emergence of contemporary gender roles, hyperreality, and characteristics that differentiate Millennials from previous generations.

Xugha is Ugha’s future counterpart from a distant time and place. Predictions of the future are presented through her. The environment in which she resides is, like Ugha’s landscapes, also made from pedestrian materials such as cardboard and paper mache with no attempt to faithfully simulate authentic environments. This artifice is highlighted to support one of the fundamental notions of my thesis, though humans have gathered volumes of information about ourselves and the world in which we live, there is still a great deal that is unknown and unknowable. Therefore we should be skeptical of what we see and read.

The artwork in the installation of *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind*
surrounds viewers and situates them in the present, between the past and future. Viewers first encounter large photographic portraits of Ugha and Xugha, and can spend time looking at the nuances of the characters, costumes, and sets. The portraits serve as a still introduction to the exhibition before seeing the more complex moving image work. Next to and across the room from the portraits is the projected installation of the video work. Life size videos starring Ugha are playing on one wall, and on a perpendicular wall the videos starring Xugha are playing simultaneously. The projections meet in a corner so viewers can watch either side, or both at the same time. The short videos are playing on a loop, which allows viewers to enter the space at any time. Even if they enter in the middle of a video, a new one will soon begin. The works are timed with pauses inserted between each so that moments of exchange exist between the characters. Viewers are able to narrow their concentration on one character, when the opposite wall is black during these pauses. The sound is heard through speakers and noises from both videos are heard concurrently. Past, present, and future are blended and time is represented as a cyclical construct.
Chapter 2: My Experience as a Millennial

I am part of the Millennial Generation and was raised in the Digital Age and on the Internet. Access to information is readily available because of the world’s connectivity, and the phrase “Google it” is common language understood by all. My peers and I grew up bearing it all on Facebook, and anybody can become a YouTube celebrity or Internet famous. All of our actions now have the potential to become spectacles to be shared with the masses. My experience of the world and technology from the perspective of a Millennial drives the research that informs *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind*.

The Internet has had an enormous impact on every aspect of contemporary life in American culture. The discovery of new information and its dissemination is easier than ever before. Nearly anybody has the potential become an expert in anything because of the Internet and information access. No topic is left offline. An example demonstrating this is Wikipedia, the digital encyclopedia that contains information about nearly every person, place, event, object, and idea known to human kind. Not all embrace Wikipedia, however. It is still shunned by academia because the information presented isn’t entirely reliable as anybody can author an article. Each article is reviewed, but the fact checkers cannot possibly keep up with the new articles that emerge each day. For every accurate piece of information or truth on the Internet exists a falsity. That is also part of the appeal
of the database; every topic is worthy enough to be included, from a PhD’s article on neurology to a teenagers article on the latest PlayStation game.

The connectivity comes at a heavy price concerning personal freedom. The citizens of the United States are privileged to have democratic access to free information, but on the contrary our government has controversial access to its citizen’s private information. Surveillance abroad and at home is also easier than ever to administer, as proved by the 2013 NSA surveillance scandal.

Users also pay a price of patience. Surfers of the web are bombarded with so much stimulus, that it is easy to become over-whelmed and over-stimulated. The ease and speed of the Internet has caused users to become increasingly impatient. We demand instant gratification and our attention spans are becoming shorter and shorter.

Social media is another legacy of the Millenial Generation. Websites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to name a few, exist to broadcast all parts of one’s life to the entire world. Everything, no matter how personal or insignificant, is newsworthy because of these sharing platforms. Users’ lives become spectacles to watch and follow. According to research conducted by psychologists Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell a “narcissism epidemic” is under way (Davidow, “The Internet ‘Narcissism
Epidemic’”). The rise of narcissism coincides with the rise of the Internet and social media, and users exhibit “grandiose exhibitionism and entitlement/exploitativeness.” Users develop obsessive needs to post daily, or even hourly. Through status updates and uploading photos, one can prove the good time being had and make attempts to one-up friends and strangers. These behaviors don’t stay in cyberspace. They bleed out into life offline and cause real life problems such as anxiety and social disorders.
This blending of public and private that happens on social media sites also now happen in another form of popular entertainment, reality television. Unspectacular people with unspectacular lives are the subjects of reality TV. A group of “normal” people living in a house that is wired with surveillance cameras in every room is common television content. A psychotic phenomenon known as “Truman disorder,” which name comes from the 1998 movie *The Truman Show*, is surfacing in people between the ages of 18 and 30. People afflicted with Truman delusions feel that they are always being watched, recorded by cameras for others entertainment (Marantz, 32-37).

Another social phenomenon caused by technology is the reliance and obsession that people have with their portable gadgets such as tablets and cell phones. These devices allowed people to be connected with friends, family and colleagues at all times. The downs side to this is that real, face-to-face communication is abandoned. Also, sometimes being unreachable is desirable.

The Internet has been a wonderful tool for the democratization of information, but this is changing with government attempts to control free Internet. Technology is also eradicating personal privacy. Social media has connected the world, but is diminishing social etiquette. Technological growth comes with both positive and negative consequences. Knowing the history of humanity, and our cognitive and social development, as well as our relationship with technology, allows one to put the current human condition into perspective. *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind* considers the positive and negative effects of technological advancements because so much of the world and society as I know it is a result of the Digital Age.
Chapter 3: History’s Place in the Present

The photographs and videos featuring Ugha in *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind* are dramatically set in pre-historical times. History is important because it helps us understand our current condition. History comes from stories and interpretation of evidence, which can oftentimes be vague and incomplete. After all, it is interpretations and specific versions of these histories that get passed down through the generations. My practice, and specifically the invented characters within my work, is how I deal with the technology overload that characterizes the current socio-political environment. These characters and the stories they tell are the vehicles through which I create and pass on my own interpretations of human origins and future pathways. Knowing where we come from reassures us about our current situation, and helps us to attempt to predict some aspects of the future. The future is a frightening time because it is unknown. Jean Baudrillard argues, “We require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end,” (10). I can begin to make sense of my place within the cosmos through the creation of a visible story of human history that traces Ugha the cavewoman, and her activities through time. The realization that there is something bigger than oneself diminishes petty problems and the insignificance becomes apparent when put into perspective with the vastness of time and space.

Questions about the emergence of our humanity cannot be answered with certainty. Just what is it that makes us human, where does this knowledge come from,
and how can we trust it, are some of the larger questions posed in my research. When did
the change happen, when was our humanness fully formed, and what caused it? Is it the
use of tools that make us human? Is it our own self-awareness? Or maybe it is the fact
that we create art solely for the purpose of creating. These questions can never be
completely resolved. There are as many versions of the stories as there are sources. Of
concern are both the narratives that science provides, and the slippery nature of the
theories posed.

The inventions and contributions of ancient women that paved the evolutionary
path, such as the termite stick and container, and the cultural developments that happened
along the way are some of the topics explored in my art making. For example, the
container allowed for a surplus of food, which eventually led to larger communities living
together that required social organization. The container helped facilitate the change from
solitary living, a common lifeway in the animal kingdom, to living communally, the
human lifestyle of choice. There is research that argues women invented the container
because of their need to carry food and children at the same time. If early females were
not the innovators, these researchers are arguing, then life as we currently know it would
very likely be quite different (Dahlberg). Through a feminist lens, a revisionist version of
the history of humans concerning our evolution from apes to Homo sapiens is explored.

Ugha, a stand-in for the early female innovators, evolves physically in her appearance, as
well as intellectually with the usage of technologies and emerging self-awareness.

My exploration begins by taking a look at the image of evolution itself. Human
evolution is an extremely complex theory that deals with gradual change over an
immense expanse of time; so massive that it is nearly incomprehensible. It is a theory that
is impossible to prove, yet difficult to deny. Evolutionary theory is represented by a simple graphic in the mass cultural consciousness. On the right side of the image is a chimpanzee walking on its knuckles, followed by a chimp-like creature that is hairy and bent over but walking on two legs. The figure gradually loses body hair and stands up right until it ends with a picture of fully erect modern man on the left side. It is a succinct image that condenses millions of years worth of time and volumes of information and theories.

Human evolution, a tremendously long and complicated journey, is condensed and simplified in a panoramic representation in the video, *The Image of Evolution*. I make the well-known graphic a moving image to draw attention to the way we use signifiers to create and interpret meaning. Humans think and communicate through signs. Signs are often compact stand-ins for very complex issues and concepts. The concepts are that which are being signified. Similar to my question of how much knowledge is lost through time, is the question of how much of the concept is lost in the translation into the signifier. *The Image of Evolution* is set in the African savanna; a grassy plane bordered by large and far-off mountains under blue skies. The only sounds are insects and birds chirping. At the beginning of the video, Ugha, a hairy creature, enters the frame from the left in an ape stage, walking on her hands and feet. The video time is significantly slowed down while she is in this evolutionary stage in order to mimic the long time frame humans had to spend in this state. While on the left side of the set Ugha picks up a stick and uses it to dig. Ugha slowly makes her way from the left side of the stage, where she started as an ape, to the right side of the stage, where she leaves as a human. Eventually that same stick used for digging becomes a more advanced tool, a spear, as Ugha walks
across the stage and exits on the right as a human in a full upright position. The video time speeds up to match the time spent in each evolutionary stage. I made no attempt to conceal the edges of the painted backdrop to show that the story does not fit neatly into compartmentalized time frames as we often like to think, but rather the artificial start and end is a construct.

Figure 1. Amanda Kline. *The Image of Evolution*. 2013

I discuss this important piece first because it is representational of what I am most interested in, the story of human evolution. *The Image of Evolution* establishes the form of the videos used throughout the thesis work. Many of the videos are shot from the same centered vantage point where the entire scene is visible, and mimic the viewing style of dioramas. It is a short story that unfolds in a constructed, artificial environment starring one character. There is minimal editing, and the character and her actions advance the narrative.
Mary Reid Kelley is a contemporary video artist who has influenced the visual style of the videos in *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind*. Her videos are formally striking in a black and white palette, and she performs on a digitally rendered background. The characters’ faces are covered in thick cartoon like make-up making them feel as rendered as the environment in which they exist. Similarly, my videos are set within a stylized, phony set. My characters are also silly in that one wear’s a buck-skin dress, and the other a tin-foil top and metallic leggings.

Reid Kelley makes work about the “historical misunderstandings surrounding modern French history,” (Jenni Sorkin, “Softer Atrocities”). She humorously illustrates these misguided histories through women that were always on the margins. The art21 article featuring her states, “Reid Kelley presents her take on the clash between utopian ideologies and the realities of women’s lives in the struggle for liberation and through political strife, wars, and other historical events,” (“Mary Reid Kelly,” *art21*). Her interest in women’s history is apparent in her 2011 piece, *The Syphilis of Sisyphus*. In this piece Reid Kelley plays a French bohemian woman, Sisyphus, who is caught up in dilemmas caused by the unfortunate fate and place of women throughout history.

Like Mary Reid Kelley, I am interested in women’s history, and the lack of and flawed nature of the subject. The difference between the work of Reid Kelley and myself lies, in part, in the use of character. Reid Kelley uses archetypes. The character’s individuality is denied by the use of make-up and plastic spheres that replace eyes. My characters, Ugha and Xugha, are representative of women as a group, but are unique individuals with distinct personalities and stories. They are stand-ins versus archetypes.
Another difference is Reid Kelley’s work is heavy with poetic, pun-filed dialog. My work, save for one video, *Woman the Inventor: The Container*, contains no dialog.

Figure 2. Mary Reid Kelley. *The Syphilis of Sisyphus*, 2011.
Chapter 4: Women’s Place in History

Technological innovations used by early hominids, especially those that may have been invented and used by women, are the subjects of a few videos in *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind*. These early tools were the catalysts that allowed for brain growth, which was succeeded by the birth of culture. For instance, advancement in food procuring and storing allowed for physiological changes that redirected energy from being exerted on essential physical jobs like predation and digestion, to that energy being used on brain growth. This caused social changes, such as the smartest individual in a group being valued over the strongest individual in a group (Dahlberg). The contributions of ancient men, such as hunting, are the focus of much of the literature and studies dealing evolution. I am interested in less well-known research that suggests that women were key agents of change.

Two of my videos, *Woman the Inventor: The Termite Stick* and *Woman the Inventor: The Container*, are about the roles of specific inventions within the hunting and gathering dietary habits of ancient people. Procuring food was, and still is, one of the basic conundrums of all life. Getting sustenance from the environment is always at the forefront of survival for any living being. Complex social behaviors stem from the basic survival behaviors of obtaining food. For example, a group member that is adept at hunting is a good ally to have. Staying well nourished requires a certain amount of innovation, and humans solve this problem by manipulating the resources around them into tools (Gremillion, 4).
A lot of research has been done on the topic of human evolution, and much of it focuses on hunting and competition, activities traditionally engendered as male. “Man-the-hunter” is a well-known phrase, and I propose “Woman-the-gatherer.” Research into contemporary hunter-gatherer societies, such as that authored by Robert Kelly in his book, *The Foraging Spectrum: Diversity in Hunter-Gatherer Lifeways*, shows that the energy obtained from gathered food, primarily done by woman, is just as plentiful as the energy that comes from hunted meat. In fact, many groups rely more heavily on food obtained by females. In addition, there is no evidence to support the claim that hunting is a strictly male activity. Females from contemporary hunting-gathering societies hunt small game, and also assist males in group hunts of large game. In many groups, women are responsible for corralling the large game that are then killed by the males. Research models from various aspects of contemporary hunting and gathering societies can be applied to ancient hunting and gathering societies (Kelly). My videos about ancient women, the gatherers and hunters, ask viewers to consider the contributions of females towards our evolutionary change into modern humans. The need of gathered food when hunting failed to bring any returns, as well as the important roles women played in hunting, is often forgotten.

*Woman the Inventor: The Termite Stick* is the first video in which I present a story of female innovation. In my narrative, it is a woman who invented a very important piece of technology that aided in evolution, the termite stick. In the video, Ugha is walking around in the forest outside of her cave dwelling. In her possession is an old decaying log. Ugha knows there is food in the log in the form of termites, and comes up with the solution of how to retrieve the food. She picks up a long stick and pushes it into the log.
and shakes it around, picking up and pulling out termites, which she can then consume. The termite stick is supposedly one of the first tools used by ancient apes that put them on the evolutionary tract towards humans. The termite stick is also the precursor to the digging stick, a tool used to plants seeds and dig up roots and tubers, which led to larger agricultural endeavors (Dahlberg, 14).

Figure 3. Amanda Kline. *Woman the Inventor: The Termite Stick*. 2012.

Another tool that may have been invented by females is the container. The container is an important invention because it enabled females to store and transport resources for the long distances they traveled, allowing them to carry their food and their young offspring (Dahlberg, 8). The first containers were made from materials that do not preserve well and so are absent from the fossil record, such as grass, leaves, and animal skins. Theories about the invention of the container by hominoid females are made from interpreting data collected by observing non-human primates and contemporary hunting-
gathering groups. Since no decisive evidence exists, this story of female invention can only ever be a theory. My work is created to turn convincing research into concrete, visual narratives and to make a permanent record of women’s first achievements. The story of this female invented tool is presented in the video Woman the Inventor: The Container.

This video begins with Ugha sitting in the forest outside of her cave with a baby on her lap. A narrator explains the importance of the container while Ugha looks at viewers and gestures to things in the scene to help advance the story. Through her actions and gaze at the camera, Ugha demands that she be recognized as the inventor and makes audiences aware of her agency. While playing with her baby she notices a rabbit in the bushes. She picks up a rock and throws it at the rabbit, killing it, and then uses a rock to skin the rabbit and turns the hide into a sling. While holding her baby, Ugha picks berries from a tree and puts them in the rabbit skin. Women were able to move about more freely, collecting food and other resources while keeping their babies safe because of containers.
The Woman the Inventor videos are about human’s early invention and use of technology. We have been dependent on technology from the beginning. It has aided in removing humans from our primal, ape state. The videos also serve to reinsert and emphasize the essentialness of women’s work in the long journey of human evolution. Woman the gatherer, the mother, the inventor, existed alongside Man the Hunter.

The form of the narratives in the Woman the Inventor videos is informed by Martha Rosler’s 1975 video, Semiotics of the Kitchen. In the piece Rosler stares directly into the camera as she demonstrates the use of kitchen gadgets and utensils, tools used traditionally by women (“Semiotics of the Kitchen”, Electronic Arts Intermix). Through her unflinching, confrontational gaze and violent gestures, Rosler challenges this tradition. Women’s work takes on a new value once it is acknowledged that preparing food is a difficult, time-consuming, and most importantly, an essential job. Like Rosler, I parody a how-to demonstration in the Woman the Inventor videos. A static camera
records Ugha as she picks up and shows viewers how to use certain tools. Instead of a woman demonstrating typically perceived female tools, like that in *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Ugha is a woman demonstrating early human tools.

Figure 5. Martha Rosler. *Semiotics of the Kitchen*. 1975.
Jean Baudrillard states in *Simulacra and Simulation* that technology “is the functional sophistication of a human organism that permits it to be equal to nature and invest triumphally in nature,” (111). Indeed, our advanced use of tools is one of the characteristics that sets human beings apart from other animals. However, when examining this aspect alone, we are not very different from the apes that manufacture and use tools. Humans are also distinguished because we are social animals, though we are not the only social species. This puts conventional knowledge of humanity in a tricky situation because new terms, rules, and guidelines have to be drawn. We like to think of ourselves as somehow separate or different from the rest of the life on this planet. Not having clear guidelines or characteristics as to what those differences are upsets the hierarchy of life, and invalidates the notion that human life is valued above all else. So, what, then is it that makes humans human? Perhaps it is some sort of high order consciousness, or even unconsciousness. Maybe the difference lies in human irrationality, (Baudrillard, 138). Or maybe there is no difference at all. In addition to our ability to invent and use technology, I look to culture, society, and matters of the mind and exploring this more slippery side of the human-ape dichotomy.

The creation of art, story telling, and other forms of culture and communication in later humans are more subjects explored in *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind*. Contemporary humans no longer have to focus all of our energy on survival. We have time for leisure, can make art, and contemplate our existence. Perhaps this is where some
of our humanity lies. Self-awareness and the emergence of the ego could be one of the fundamental traits that distinguish humans from other animals. Humans can acknowledge their self-awareness through art or by marking the body. I explore these theories in the videos, *Ugha Was Here* and *Ugha the Narcissist*.

*Ugha Was Here* is about creativity and self-awareness in ancient people. In the beginning of the video, Ugha checks over her shoulder to make sure no one else is present, while sneakily entering a cave. After crouching behind a stalagmite and preparing her paint, Ugha dips her hand in red pigment and makes prints on the cave wall. She surveys the scene and then quickly exits. Viewers possibly witness the first graffiti artist in action when Ugha tags the cave walls with her handprints. Her desire to leave a mark and let the world know she exists is evident when looking out at the camera, possibly having a phenomenological experience. The question of whether this type of experience was possible in a cave person looms. Cognitive developments such as the ability to be self-aware are as critical to our evolution as are invented tools. This piece also demonstrates that Ugha knows she is doing something that might be socially unacceptable, leaving behind graffiti. She knows the difference between right and wrong, because she looks around to ensure nobody else is present to catch her in the act.
Cave art is proof of our innate desire and need to create, to communicate, to contemplate the world around us and our role within society. The emergence of representational image making marks a significant change in human consciousness (Lewis-Williams). I am interested in the identities and motivations of our artist ancestors. The traditionally presumed gender is male, but I propose that the hands of women, such as those that Ugha represents, also had a hand in the making.
Chapter 6: Artifice

The artifice of my sets serves to support the ambiguity of the knowledge that inform the stories I tell. The works, set tens of thousands to millions of years ago, are clearly an artifice in and of themselves. Flat, painted backgrounds and commonplace materials such as cardboard and paper mache are used for props. I do not want to present the real, but rather I hope to unveil the traditionally accepted beliefs to show them as what they are, speculation. These sets that mimic different environments such as the African savanna, a forest, and the inside of a cave are the stages on which Ugha the cavewoman performs recreations of past events. Her future counterpart, Xugha, acts in alien landscapes 2000 years in the future, where the skepticism of seeing obviously artificial sets reinforce the skepticism one should have when reading theories of human origins and predictions of the future.

The museum diorama, an authoritative source of what is often taken for concrete fact, is a stylistic influence. Museums are a trusted source of truthful information about the natural world. It is an institution for transferring knowledge about both familiar and exotic places, times, and beings. We often learn about history in these institutions, especially as children, and do not question the material presented. One should acknowledge that the research informing the displays could be outdated, or that the contributors are misinformed or biased. Museums are run by directors and funded by groups that have their own religious and political opinions, and so the information presented is filtered and biased.
Diorama displays rely heavily on fabrications because much of what is shown no longer exists, such as natural history scenes with extinct plants and animals. Artists and historians must interpret the scenery in dioramas showing events that happened before the invention of photography, and even from before the advent of language and writing. Museum dioramas more commonly try to minimize the artifice and engulf viewers with an authentic experience from a frozen slice of time. For example, an exhibit about wooly mammoths is not simply a drawing of a mammoth on a white wall. Rather it is a three dimensional, life-size model within a built environment that mocks a distinct place with decorations like rocks, vegetation, animals, and other things specific to the habitat of the wooly mammoth. Dioramas are elaborate, yet static structures that are made to tell dynamic stories and information. The idiosyncratic relationship between the form and content of dioramas is why I mimic these displays. The displays present not only a form of a wooly mammoth, but attempt to contextualize the animal and include extra information such as where the mammoth lived and what it ate. They are supposed to transport viewers to another time and place as if they are looking through a wormhole.

Museum visits are for entertainment as well as education. Going to the movies and playing video games are similar forms of entertainment in that participants want to trade in reality for a virtual, or constructed reality. Dioramas as entertainment date back to the early 19th century. Franz Niklaus König’s illuminated, transparent pictures of scenic landscapes, known as Diaphanoramas, were displayed as early as 1811 (Gernsheim, 14). In 1821, L. J. M. Daguerre, along with partner Charles Marie Bouton, expanded upon the idea, calling his large, elaborate displays dioramas, and the form of entertainment became very popular in Paris and London where the shows were staged. In
addition to the large scale and masterfully depicted scenes, the real magic of the dioramas was the allusion of the passage of time due to changes in lighting. Visitors were witness to a performance and could hardly get enough, often remaining for multiple shows (Gernsheim, 22).

Dioramas in museums, historical societies, and university buildings are designed to be viewed from one point and there is little audience interaction. My style of video shooting is similar in that the camera faces the scene directly and there is little camera movement. My work is more confrontational to viewers than museum dioramas. During the recorded performance I, at times, look directly at the camera and break the fourth wall, engaging with viewers and inviting them to question the idiom “seeing is believing.” Ugha has a sense of agency when she confronts viewers because it is intended to challenge and encourage the audience to think about the authenticity of recorded history.

Through crude cardboard rocks and paper trees, I am pushing the artifice to the forefront. This obvious slippage from the real to the unreal highlights the instability of the information presented, because the stories I am telling are factually unstable themselves. One can never know with certainty whether a female invented the termite stick, or if cave paintings were made by artists, or just angsty cave-teens trying to leave their mark in the world.

Using a relatively recent invention such as a camera to capture an ancient being such as a cavewoman is absurd because of the conflation of linear time. Do viewers still accept video as truth, or is it now accepted that it can lie? Photographs and video have a certain power because of their relationship to the real. These mediums should be viewed
with skepticism because they are easily manipulated. The content of the videos and photographs in *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind*, and the objects and settings themselves, do not suggest any attempt at duping viewers. The sets are not trying to hide anything or suggest digital magic. Video and photography imply the real, something that must exist before the camera. In his book, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, philosopher Roland Barthes states, “It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures; or even like those pairs of fish (sharks, I think, according to Michelet) which navigate in convoy, as though united by an eternal coitus,” (5-6). New technologies are changing the relationship between digital media and the real, and perhaps making the difference between the real and unreal disappear altogether. Computer generated graphics, or CG, eliminates the need for any real object. The graphics appear to be so real that movies can easily be set on alien planets with no objections from viewers’ discerning eyes. The same advancements are being made in video games and 3-D simulators. People author photographs, videos, and other media to communicate something. The message is usually objective. Similarly, the research that exists on human origins is done by people with certain ideologies. We must be skeptical of the medium and the message.

Contemporary humans are situated within a hyper-real time where progressing technologies are blurring the boundaries between reality and unreality. Today everything happens online; real person-to-person communication is being replaced by virtual code, one no longer has to leave home to buy groceries or pick up medication, human resource
departments look at a screen with statistics and numbers when making hiring decisions without ever interacting with a real person, and the list continues. Virtual reality is replacing actual reality. In 1994 Jean Baudrillard pointed out, “the cinema in its current efforts is getting closer and closer, and with greater and greater perfection, to the absolute real, in its banality, its veracity, in its naked obviousness, in its boredom, and at the same time in its presumption, in its pretension to being the real, the immediate, the unsignified, which is the craziest of undertakings…” (46). I use my videos of fabricated situations, environments, and characters to draw attention to the extreme advancement of technology that is blurring the lines between the real and imaginary. It is not only advancing technology that is causing this blending, but also the new social landscape that is the Internet, new forms of entertainment such as reality television, and the users that become indiscriminately transfixed. Internet based social networks are replacing physical social interaction. Watchers do not know or care to what extent reality TV is based in reality as long as it is entertaining. Similarly, the diorama is based on the notion of historical and scientific knowledge, but its primary function is entertainment.

The objects in my videos such as a cave wall covered in ancient handprints, have a clear reference to things that exist, or have existed, in the real world, which viewers can easily recall from their past experiences of having seen them in museums, on television, or in magazines. Of course the viewers’ memories stem from recreations (or simulations) themselves, as a diorama artist interprets the scene she creates in the natural history museum from her various research endeavors. She did not stand before a scene of a wooly mammoth. It is a cycle of interpretation, recreation, and artificiality with no actual first person source of fact. There was no scientist, author, or artist present to document
scenes from early human life 30,000 years ago. Baudrillard argues that, “the facts no longer have a specific trajectory, they are born at the intersection of models,” (16). The real, the factual, doesn’t have a place in line and the original reference is lost.

Reenacting the activities of a cavewoman on camera is an absurd activity. Experiencing a cavewoman first hand is not possible in reality, but capturing a simulation of her on camera makes the event real, because seeing is believing. The staged event is created solely for the purpose of being captured and turned into a digital photograph or video. The camera is what validates it. The event becomes real, once turned digital (Baudrillard, 117). Once digital it can be shared with the world and is forever solidified on the Internet. This interchange between real and fake, and the blend of now with the past, lends a certain absurdity to my works. The cavewoman within my photographs and videos is a humorous spectacle who is meant to be observed and scrutinized. The Internet, social media, and new forms of entertainment such as reality TV and user-based web content has turned all users into spectacles like Ugha. We put ourselves into the public realm for others’ entertainment. The line between public and private is getting thinner as we broadcast all parts of our lives. In addition to sharing and recording our cyber activity, we exhibit our time spent offline by posting photographs and status updates. Every aspect of our lives become part of the digital, online archive.

Photographers have been using artifice since the mediums invention. Hippolyte Bayard’s 1840 Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man is an early example of artists challenging photography’s relationship to the real. In the convincing photograph, Bayard presents himself as a victim of suicide because the French authorities did not recognize his own contribution to the invention of photography (Marien, 16). Henry Peach Robinson caused
an uproar with his 1858 work, *Fading Away*, which shows a young girl on her deathbed. Audiences were outraged by Robinson’s decision to photograph a dying child, though it was later revealed the photograph, composited from five different negatives, was completely staged (Marien, 156).

Figure 7. Hippolyte Bayard. *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man*. 1840
Chapter 7: Character and the Shortcomings of Knowledge

Ugha and Xugha operate as stand-ins. It is easier to laugh at Ugha than at ourselves, because we perceive a less developed and less complex person, even though we may not have any more knowledge about the questions of life. I use Ugha as a starting point to evaluate how far we have come on the evolutionary spectrum. I use Xugha to make clear that it has not necessarily all been forward movement towards progress. Comparing Ugha’s and Xugha’s activities to our own is a way to analyze the current technological and social landscape. Technology is changing at an overwhelmingly rapid pace, but I question if it is all for the better. I am inviting viewers to consider the effects technology has on their lives by presenting these characters as the opposite of the virtual. Ugha, as an early human, has no access to digital technologies, and leads a very different life. Her problems are about survival because of her rough physical environment. Her situation stands in stark contrast to that of the Millennial generation, whose environment is that of the Internet and whose problems are of a very different nature.

The work of Cindy Sherman has been very influential to my production of Speculation of the Trajectory of Human Kind through her performance of characters, often playing upon stereotypes. Sherman does not make self-portraits, though she is pictured in all of her work. She uses her own body to portray different fictional characters. This is an act that users of social media and consumers of entertainment platforms such as Youtube, where anybody can be any character of his or her own choosing, can fully relate, myself included. Using images from popular culture as well as
art history, Sherman is concerned with the politics of representation in our increasingly image-based world, and shows viewers that identity is a slippery construct. Identity is becoming more fluid with technologies that blur reality and virtual reality.

Notions of, and challenges to, an ideal femininity can also be found in Cindy Sherman’s work. As Shirley Madill states, “By presenting archetypes from historical portraiture, Sherman brings to light the degree of standardization that is common in art history but absent in actual society… They are allegories of the falseness and shortcomings of art historical representation,” (Madill, 18). In addition to sharing an interest in representation of woman, I am interested in the shortcomings of knowledge, and look to Sherman’s work for inspiration on how to use myself as a character within constructed environments to act out tricky stories concerning our evolution in the past and future. Instead of using multiple archetypal versions of the same character-type, like Sherman does, I use only two characters who evolve and grow within my body of work. Sherman is more concerned with the surface of her characters and with the details of their appearance, and I am more invested in their personalities and habits.

In *History Portraits*, Sherman studies a reproduction of an original painting from Western art history when making her photographic versions. Sherman has not seen most of the original paintings that she is recreating, but only their reproductions, making simulation and artifice a concern. As author Arthur Danto points out in his writings on Sherman’s *History Portraits*, Jean Baudrillard’s argument that we live in a world of simulation and simulacra is quite fitting (Danto, 11). Sherman is using photography, a medium that for most of its history was believed to be an objective and perfect recorder of reality, to recreate a painting, a medium that lends itself to subjectivity. Photography,
of course, is now known to be a subjective tool that has all of the powers of manipulation and interpretation as does painting. Author Christa Döttinger argues, “Photography is distancing itself from its essence, the direct connection to reality, and is creating artificiality,” (Döttinger, 35). Sherman has created a new reality (her photograph) based off of a reality that was an interpretation (the source painting) of a scene from real life. I use artifice in Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind in a similar fashion. I create a simulation of a world that cannot actually exist in the present, and act out stories that can be neither validated nor denied. I am questioning the understanding of evolution of human life, but also the nature of reality in the 21st century.

Figure 8 Cindy Sherman. Untitled #216. 1989.
Chapter 8: Narcissism, X/Ugha, and the Artist

Humans are narcissistic creatures. Social media is a contemporary example of this since it is primarily used to promote oneself. Artists have been making self-portraits for thousands of years, and now the activity is popular among non-artists as well in the form of taking “selfies” on camera phones to upload to social media websites. I suspect that we have always been self-obsessed and that our brains evolved to be narcissistic from the beginning as a survival strategy. Being concerned primarily with oneself helps ensure one’s survival. Narcissism no longer functions solely as a means to survive and pass on genetic material, but is now an anti-social behavior. Research undertaken at Western Illinois University found correlations between Facebook users with the largest number of friends and a behavior known as “grandiose exhibitionism,” which includes” self-absorption, vanity, superiority and exhibitionistic tendencies,” (Pearse, “Facebook’s Darkside”). Additionally these users “often say shocking things and inappropriately self-disclose because they cannot stand to be ignored or waste a chance of self-promotion,” (Pearse, “Facebook’s Darkside”). Narcissism is especially prevalent in the current age, where anybody has the potential to become famous, and reality TV has catapulted Joe-Schmo to the status of celebrity.

Ugha sees her reflection for the first time in Ugha the Narcissist. Sitting outside of her cave eating termites, she gets thirsty and goes to a stream to get a drink of water. Upon peering into the stream she sees something that startles her, and causes her to jump back and yell in a defensive manner. She cautiously goes back to the stream to investigate
and realizes it is herself that she sees. She is first awed and has moments of disbelief, but soon becomes amused and captivated with her own reflection. The video ends with her staring at her self in the river, much like social media users stare at their pages on screens for an endless amount of time.

I am not immune to narcissism as is evident in the use of myself as an actor in the work in *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind*. The multiplicity of characters that I perform reflects my membership within the Millenial Generation, since we can assume any identity online. I am an anomaly because I do not currently use Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. As an ex-Facebook user, however, I am familiar with the over abundance of sharing and gloating. Ugha and Xugha are the replacements for the lack of social media, and through whom I can become somebody else and exhibit anything I want for the world to see.

Figure 9. Amanda Kline. *Ugha the Narcissist*. 2013.
Vito Acconci’s video works have been associated with narcissism. In his 1971 video, *Centers*, a close-up Acconci faces the camera while his extended arm and hand point directly at the center of the frame. He attempts to keep his finger dead center for the 20-minute duration of the video, with the only movement being a slight wavering of his arm. He is pointing at his own image in a video monitor, while at the same time pointing directly to viewers. In her 1976 essay, *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism*, Rosalind Krauss, makes an argument for narcissism as the main distinguishing characteristic of video art, and cites *Centers* as an example. She states, “For *Centers* was made by Acconci’s using the video monitor as a mirror As we look at the artist sighting along his outstretched arm and forefinger towards the center of the screen we are watching, what we see is a sustained tautology: a line of sight that begins at Acconci’s plane of vision and ends at the eyes of his projected double. In the image of self-regard is configured a narcissism so endemic to works of video that I find myself wanting to generalize it as the condition of *the* entire genre,” (Krauss, 50). Acconci is engaging with his own image in *Centers*, as in many other works.

Vito Acconci’s early video works were meant to be played on small television monitors, which were instruments for solitary viewing, where one was able to consider his or her own direct relationship to the piece. The viewing experiences of the Millenial generation are similar because individuals watch media that is moderated through small mobile phones and computer screens. The narcissism of the Millenial viewers is different from that of Acconci, in that viewers are not only watching themselves, but they are recording themselves for others to watch. I share Acconci’s penchant for using my own
body as the “central instrument” in my artwork, and the Millenials penchant for using their own bodies as entertainment (Krauss, 52).

Figure 10. Vito Acconci. *Centers*. 1971.
Chapter 9: Social Class and Religion

I am interested in the cultural differences that go beyond tool use as distinguishers between humans and other animals. Queen Ugha was made in conjunction with research pertaining to the emergence of social stratification. Homo sapiens and Neanderthals coexisted some 40,000 years ago, and Homo sapiens were the more intelligent of the two groups. They used body decoration, such as painting and simple jewelry, as a way to distinguish themselves from their lesser neighbors, who did not have the mental capacity to conceive of or understand social hierarchies (Lewis-Williams, 90). So the classes were born. Ugha Experiences a Boom is a video about spirituality in humans, or our acknowledgement that something larger outside of the observable environment may exist.

Queen Ugha begins with Ugha in a cave painting on a rock. She accidentally gets pigment on her arm and begins to ponder the mark she has made on her own body in a moment of self-awareness. The next scene cuts to Ugha dragging a series of cumbersome rocks into her cave. Pictured next, is the cave with a huge rock throne now in the center. Ugha confidently enters the frame, painted, wearing a crown of leaves and carrying a scepter. She is now performing her empowerment. After walking to the center of the room and surveying the scene before her, Ugha sits down on her throne. A horn is removed from the top of her scepter and a declaration is made by blowing into it, thereby creating a loud howl that echoes out before her. After acknowledging her painted arms, she makes a clear boundary between herself and others by drawing a half circle around the throne with her scepter. With a deadpan look she calmly gazes into the camera as
though it were a mirror. This action positions viewers below her because we can do nothing but watch her watch herself. Her ego is in control.

Figure 11. Amanda Kline. *Queen Ugha*. 2013.

Religion is a powerful institution in the current socio-political environment that will continue to be influential for some time. Cognitively advanced humans might have conceived of religion after hearing thunder and seeing lightning. The immense, seemingly otherworldly boom and flash of fire from the sky could have been the first instance in which humans interpreted events in nature for higher powers outside of themselves and the visible world around them (Campbell, 4).

*Ugha Experiences a Boom* is a split screen video that depicts Ugha’s reaction to experiencing thunder and lightning in two very different ways. The environment and situation is the same for both sides of the video; Ugha is collecting food in the grasslands under a dark and moody sky. Her behavior differs after thunder claps and lightning
strikes. On the left side Ugha reacts instinctively, or logically to a storm by hurrying her gathering in order to get out of the storm quickly because she doesn’t want to get wet. On the right side she reacts in a spiritual, or illogical, manner. She is astounded and dumbfounded by the phenomenon from the sky and stumbles around the scene in a confused manner looking to the plants for answers. This video shows that humanity is distinguished by factors of the mind that are more elusive than tool making. The split screen narrative with two different endings supports my argument that some aspects of our humanity cannot be known with certainty. One should consider all possibilities before coming to a conclusion.

Figure 12. Amanda Kline. *Ugha Experiences a Boom*. 2013.
Chapter 10: Xugha and the Future

The second part of *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind* is concerned with the future. Like the very distant past, the future is unknowable. One can make predictions about the larger state of the world and the fate of future generations, but these can never be known with certainty. Many people in Western culture, or at least those traditionally considered to be responsible, base their actions in the present on what they believe will be the future consequences. Many cultures have myths of wise-women, soothsayers, and other people that are very powerful and even feared because of their power to predict the future. Other cultures think these people, the crystal ball gazers and palm readers, are crazy or crooks. Either way, people are curious about what is to come.

I present my own predictions of the future through the actions of a character named Xugha. Her narratives unfold in a bizarre landscape on a distant place. Her shiny metal costume is made primarily of what is easily recognized as tinfoil. I designed Xugha’s outfit and the set she inhabits in a style that mixes the past and the future. I want to conflate linear time, so the style is influenced by a 1980’s and 1990’s version of the future because this is the period in which I grew up. The 1982 movie *Blade Runner* and the persona of 1970’s Ziggy Stardust era David Bowie were visual influences for the creation of Xugha. Xugha is first used to examine how humans might eat in the future, and visual comparisons are drawn to the actions Ugha makes while eating in the past. I compare the act of eating because it is universal to all humans and other animals, and has
always been an activity that has been necessary for life on this planet. Works starring Xugha will also address how humans interact with technology of the future. Finally, I will explore the power humans have over their environment in the future. The exploitation and over consumption of the resources on Earth is a growing concern, and future generations may have to devise new ways to procure the necessary elements to sustain life.

The first video starring Xugha, *Xugha is Hungry*, shows her eating. Eating in this future world is very different than eating in the past or present. Strangely, Xugha does not use her mouth at all. The video starts with Xugha walking towards a strange, bright yellow organism that is in the center of the scene. She inspects the thing by looking, touching, and smelling to see if it is ripe. After determining that it is ready, she takes off her gloves and puts her hands into tentacle like branches growing out of the top of the organism. She then kneels and waits in silence. If one looks closely, a slight pulsing movement of her hands can be detected. After a few moments she stands up, puts her gloves on, and exits the frame. Xugha collects food from the tentacles by absorbing it into her body through her hands. No longer does she need to waste time or energy to chew, and she does not need to make tools to get nourishment. The environment has evolved or has been altered to easily serve the needs of humans, or perhaps post-humans. *Xugha is Hungry* contains similarities to *Woman the Inventor: The Termite Stick*, such as the arrangement of the environment, the framing, and the movements of the characters to remind viewers of Xugha’s ancestor, Ugha.

I use this video to draw attention to the importance of skepticism. Though the future is beyond our scope of knowledge, Xugha’s way of eating seems to be an
impossibility for a human or future version of ourselves. This obscurity is emphasized by the viewers’ inability to understand what Xugha is doing in the video unless the title is read. By constructing such a perplexing concept I am calling into question the viewer’s ability to know anything at all, and that even seemingly obvious truths should not be taken for granted.

Figure 13. Amanda Kline. Xugha is Hungry. 2013.
Chapter 11: Obsolete Technology

New digital devices are introduced to the public at astounding rates, and old gadgets become quickly antiquated because technology advances at such a rapid pace. Computers and cell phones are getting smaller, while their computing power and storage space grows. Even objects such as eyeglasses are being replaced by digital versions, like Google Glass, that have the power to do much more than correct vision. Tech magazines feature articles about cars that will soon drive themselves. The advancements can be a great thing and make certain parts of users’ lives easier, but a lot of trouble and anxiety can be caused by the next generations of devices. Staying updated and acquiring the newest version of equipment, software, operating systems, plug-ins, and the list continues, can be an impossibly nerve-racking task. When a device that is used to organize one’s life, store months of hard work and years of precious memories fails, the effect can be devastating. On the other hand is the saying “Facebook is forever,” which means that anything posted online is there to stay, whether one wants it to or not. One may find that removing regrettable photographs from the Internet is virtually impossible. Technology is a double-sided coin that can cause relief and headache.

_Xugha Performs a Trick_ is about the obsolete fate that nearly all technology must face. Much more illogical than the first video starring Xugha, viewers are left confused and the narrative is unclear, to mirror the uncertainty of the future. Xugha enters the scene and gets caught on what appears to be a string of fog hanging from above. The
artifice of the set is highlighted from the moment Xugha appears within the scene because of her interruption of the set. She walks to the center of the landscape, sits down, and starts to wave her hands around above the ground. After lifting the ground, what is clearly only paper, Xugha sticks her head underneath it in a moment of worship or communication. She seems to move the very ground she rests upon, which causes a tree like object to fall over. Slightly startled because it was unexpected, Xugha is not deterred and simply moves it to the side. A translucent bodily object suddenly appears on the ground when Xugha makes a magician like gesture with her hands. She looks to the camera when the object appears. Disappointed in the presentation of the object, she goes through the backdrop and gets a light to shine on it. Xugha then proudly presents the object to viewers before walking off set. There is no indication of what the object is used for or what it does, and it represents how all technology eventually becomes useless and it is replaced by something bigger (or smaller), faster, or better. Xugha’s object is obsolete from the moment it is created.
I continue to address how technology quickly becomes antiquated in *Inspector Xugha*. Xugha walks around her environment with an armful of stuff, and multitasks, while struggling to hang on to it all. She walks on screen and briefly uses an object as a telepathic communication device. Upon close inspection, viewers can see that the object is a short candlestick holder. She juggles the objects and grabs hold of a View Master toy and uses it to inspect a tree. A compact disc is used on another plant-like organism by gently rubbing the CD on the hanging appendages, seemingly to gather data about the plant. Xugha then moves on to inspect a bush and collect data using various objects that can currently be found in many homes and offices, but are quickly disappearing, such as analog notepads and a calculator. Struggling to see because of low light, Xugha is able to make the bush glow. Through technology Xugha is able to mediate her environment, such as making a bush into a lamp, but she is concerned with collecting data at the same time. She does this in order to have complete control over all the resources in her
surroundings, because they are quickly becoming obsolete and exhausted in their current state, much like technology.

The dependence on and frustration caused by technology is addressed in the video titled *Bad Reception*. Xugha is standing motionless, seemingly concentrating on something while holding a strange object in her hands. She paces around the scene a bit with a focused look on her face, which is suddenly broken by what seems like a glitch in the video that is caused by the object she is holding. Annoyed by the disturbance, she shakes the object and attempts to continue to concentrate. The glitches get more intense and more frequent and Xugha’s frustrations grows and turns into anger as she walks around the scene attempting to find a spot with clear reception. The object continues to malfunction and she loses control, smashing it and tearing down the entire set in her rage. Interruptions in reception cause glitches in Xugha’s telepathic device, and that leads to
actual glitches in the video and interruptions in viewing. Xugha’s reality in her space-age environment, the virtual, is affecting the actual reality experienced by viewers when watching the video.

Figure 16. Amanda Kline. Bad Reception. 2013.

Ryan Trecartin is a popular, young American artist who makes work about, among other things, how digital technology and the Internet shapes users’ live. His chaotic videos such as I-Be Area from 2007, are difficult to comprehend because the imagery is fast moving, brightly colored, and nonsensical, and that is the point. His “renditions of an oversaturated world” reflect the online landscape and reminded viewers of their (over) connectivity, (Langley, “Ryan Trecartin”). The self-aware actors and actresses in his videos are caricatures of the “modern-day technophiles they satirize,” (Langley, “Ryan Trecartin”). The characters are like avatars of the Internet itself and viewers experience an absolute sensory and information overload when watching his
work. The multiple and overlaid images in his works is parallel to the abundance of screens and images that viewers encounter in their everyday lives. The frustration that can come from dealing with technology, and from watching Trecartin’s videos, is the same frustration that Xugha releases when she gets disconnected in *Bad Reception*.

Figure 17. Ryan Trecartin. *I-Be Area*. 2007.
Chapter 12: Portraiture

Portraiture has a long tradition in art history, from pre-historic statuettes of “Venus” figures to the contemporary “selfie.” Styles range from realistic depictions, to the distorted and abstract, to the completely fabricated and beyond. The artistic representations of people are created in all mediums, but photography has dominated the form ever since its invention in the 19th century.

Photography quickly became accessible to the public and democratized the tradition of portraiture. Those that could not afford painted or sculpted portraits could attain a photographic portrait relatively quickly and cheaply. The carte-de-visite, patented by Andre Disdéri in 1854, was a small photograph of a person that was used as a calling card. Cartomania quickly spread across Europe and collecting cartes-de-visite of friends, families, and celebrities became immensely popular (Marien, 85).

Photographic portraiture has been used for personal pleasure, but was also adopted by anthropologists, ethnologists and other scientists as a way to study people. Edward Sheriff Curtis used photography to document and study Native American people and culture in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. George Horse Capture writes, “One of Curtis’ major goals was to record as much of the people’s way of traditional life as possible. Not content to deal only with the present population, and their arts and industries, he recognized that the present is a result of the past, and the past dimension must be included, as well” (Capture, “Edward Curtis”). Curtis traveled with traditional Native American garments and props, and would often dress up his subjects who no
longer wore this clothing of the past. In addition to creating portraits that contained a mixture of fact and fiction, Curtis staged and photographed past battles and ceremonies.

Contemporary social media outlets such as Facebook and Instagram are popular platforms for sharing portraits, especially self-portraits, popularly known as “selfies.” Profile pictures are the contemporary cartes-de-visite. They are made for public viewing, as a way to advertise oneself. Selfies usually appear to be casual snapshots taken on the fly, but are often times made with great care and much time because makers want to present themselves in the best light possible.

My portraits of Ugha and Xugha draw on portraiture’s long and complex history. The portraits are a tool for examining the strange otherness of the characters, their costumes, and environment, similar to the portraits made by Edward Curtis. Like the sitters found in 19th century cartes-de-visite and 21st century selfies, Ugha and Xugha stand in confident poses, aware of the social power and importance of their photographic images.
Figure 18. Amanda Kline. *Portrait of Xugha*. 2013.

Figure 19. Amanda Kline. *Portrait of Ugha*. 2013
Chapter 13: Exhibition

The exhibition of *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind* includes both photographs and videos. Viewers see two large 40” x 30” photographs, *Portrait of Ugha* and *Portrait of Xugha*, which serve to give the characters in the work authority. The figures stand large and confident in the portraits, and are undisturbed by the unlimited amount of time that viewers can spend looking at them and their surroundings. Viewers can contemplate questions about what they are seeing when standing in front of the still images.

On one wall is a life size projection of the videos starring Ugha. These videos include *Woman the Inventor: the Termite Stick*, *Ugha Was Here*, *Queen Ugha*, and *Ugha Experiences a Boom*. The individual videos play one after another, with the four video series looping. The videos starring Xugha, *Xugha is Hungry*, *Xugha Performs a Trick*, *Inspector Xugha*, and *Bad Reception*, play on a life size on another wall. The two projections meet in a corner, and are approximately 13 feet long, and seven feet high. The projections start where the walls meet the floor so that one is on the same level as the characters in the video and seem to occupy the same space.
The videos are meant to be seen as diptychs, and sequenced and timed to allow for certain moments of exchange between the two characters. *Woman the Inventor: the Termite Stick* plays at the same time as *Xugha is Hungry* because of the direct comparison I am making about eating in the past and future. *The Termite Stick* plays for a bit longer, during which the Xugha screen is black. As *The Termite Stick* video ends, Ugha walks to the right and off screen at the right edge. This is timed so that Xugha enters her screen in the next video on the left edge while heading to the right. Xugha continues Ugha’s journey. During *Ugha was Here*, Ugha looks out to the audience. Xugha mimics her gaze to viewers in *Xugha Performs a Trick*. The videos are timed so that both character look at viewers simultaneously. When Ugha loudly blows into her horn in *Queen Ugha*, Xugha seems to be listening to her call in *Inspector Xugha*, as she sits still and looks out into the distance. The entirety of *Ugha Experiences a Boom* plays
while the Xugha screen is black, since the split screen nature of *Boom* is visually complex. Similarly, the Ugha screen is black while Bad Reception plays. The “glitches” in the video are jarring and attention grabbing.

This also gives the viewers a visual break and a chance to focus on an individual video for a time. The ambient sound of both videos play simultaneously, and the environmental noise from the past, present, and future serve to engulf audiences in the experience of the narratives.

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 21. Amanda Kline. *Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind*. 2014.
Chapter 14: Conclusion

*Speculation on the Trajectory of Human Kind* is intended to give women their own agency and narrative in history. I use the dawn of human life to begin my own interpretations of the importance of women in our evolutionary journey. I also hope to provoke deliberation on human origins, and deeper consideration for our place among other animal life. Furthermore, I speculate on the future of our species by considering the current Millennial generation and their relationship to digital technologies, with a focus on the Internet and social media. This technology mediates the virtual and physical environment, and I ponder the waning line between virtual and actual reality. I announce my membership within the Millennials by using myself as the characters Ugha and Xugha. Becoming another person is easy when screens mediate one’s identity and communication. The distant past and future can never be known with total certainty. Plainly artificial environments are used to reinforce the skepticism that is necessary of theories about these difficult times.

Future plans include creating video and photographic narratives starring women from antiquity. The worlds of ancient Rome and Greece are very influential to contemporary Western life and I am interested in exploring those origins, specifically as they relate to women. I will also research Classical mythology, and consider how myths transform through time, and how they function today.


