The Conflation of Image Making and Image Fixation in Six Acts

THESIS

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

By

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2011

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ABSTRACT

Questioning the disjunction which occurs between the real and virtual structure of the moving image, this selection of works and concepts explores the dissection of time and exploitation of structural artifacts. Expanding upon the disjunction which occurs, the subsequent writing investigates the conflation of image making and image fixation which is ever-present within my studio practice. Looking at the history of film and television as a visual and narrative structure, this work will survey the methods and techniques in which a conversational gap can be actualized and given a physical form.

To my mother,

Sheryl.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document and the ideas within would not have been possible without the support and guidance of my colleagues and faculty members at this institution.

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FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Art

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ACT 1

A GUN IS INTRODUCED

This work exists to convey the parts of a conversation in which words (though perhaps present within the work) might not suffice. My interest in film (both the structure and the object) is a central voice within this conversation. Writhing with internal questions (often fleeting as the latest one is the most imperative), my ravenous digestion of film comes with a certain desire for disillusionment and a burning aspiration to share my idiosyncratic hypotheses with others. But how does one compress this emotion, this experience, and this perception? Through sometimes over-complicated (or understated) structural forms, I am able to generate the missing element for this conversational breach. With the two-dimensional product of film as a source, I am allowed and compelled to re-explode the cinematic elements back into three dimensions. In the end, I know that my translations are not at all what were employed in the original filmic process; I merely wish to provide alternate possibilities that are often mechanically unsound and unusual. My interest lies in the construction of forms which allow me to convey a small portion of the way I see the moving image, and contribute to the aforementioned conversational gap.

To express ones initial interest in the practice of making art far too often revolves around the statement "I loved to draw as a child." Although this may be true for some, for myself the practice was more about the conversation that the figures or shapes would develop with

my peers and authoritative figures. I quickly discovered that good drawings resulted in peers huddling over my shoulder, eagerly awaiting the next stroke of the crayon. It resulted in blue ribbons at the fair. It resulted in contests that made my drawing the logo for an elementary school, which is still used today. One could argue that my love for the arts initially stemmed from this profitable result, or that I was able to use the work to make up for shortcomings in the areas of sports or music. The addition of an extremely supportive single parent who would always tell family friends that she could "not draw a straight line with a ruler" is the reason that I am sitting in a colorful and dirty studio, rather than a dreary office being bombarded with fluorescent lighting. I could not have made it this far without her.

Living miles away from my elementary school friends, I knew only a few children in my own neighborhood. To be isolated in suburbia is quite an interesting conundrum. I found friends in the books of the local library and characters I watched on movies and television, leading to my early appreciation for film. My wife often jokes that my knowledge in the area of cinema and television exceeds that of adults twice my age, something that I was unaware of for quite some time. The moving image became a comfortable structure that I could exist in and spend time with.

ACT 2

TIME WARPS AND OTHER DILEMMAS

I believe that my first exposure to the human potential for time travel was the 1985 feature, *Back to the Future*, and its subsequent mainstream sequels. Who wouldnt be enamored at the thought, considering my impressionable age and the way in which time travel is portrayed in the film? While the protagonist does experience multiple problems and paradoxical time shifts, we are left with an ending in which he was able to go back in time to improve the quality of his own life, and simultaneously made every member of his family successful as well as making his father's enemy the new family's lackey. I was a firm believer of this methodology and follower of time travel in film and television, but did not seriously consider the science behind such an event until late in my high school career. At the suggestion of my science teacher, I read Stephen Hawking's The Universe in a Nutshell. Words seem unable to describe the sheer disappointment with which I read Hawking's easily explained yet sound posited theory, explaining that time travel by human means never becomes available due to the lack of "time traveling tourists". My world was crushed, and having seen behind the curtain at what can be considered the language of "hard science fiction", the *Back to the Future* films would never be the same for me. I would later read works by Carl Sagan, in which he counters this position with the equally simple solution, proposing that any "time traveling tourists" are simply in disguise. Why

this had not occurred to me before is surprising, as the basis for my interest would clearly illustrate this theory in *Back to the Future Part II*, as the protagonist dons a leather jacket, sunglasses, and a hat to avoid raising suspicion when time traveling.

When my interest in art and image making became more serious, I was pursuing the study of photography and video as a medium. The time-based structure allowed me to reference and use the encyclopedia of film and television knowledge which I had unknowingly been building throughout my life. My early attempts to make visible and contextualize my interest in time shifts and time travel took the form of immersive sound installations and interactive videos. It would be several years before I would create a work which satisfied my desire for a missing conversational element.

The Outer Space Box is an interactive sculpture that activates a space by both capturing an ephemeral event, and from that point on becoming an artifact with which the visitors to the space may question or discuss its purpose and method of operation.

Constructed of wood, metal, and plastic, *The Outer Space Box* has two visual forms which may be seen by the viewer. During its performance and operation, the object appears to be a large fabric cylinder with two wooden openings which sits on a large white pedestal. The fabric cylinders autonomously open and close at unspecified intervals, though when open allow for a viewer to look through the device to a small monitor which is playing back video from the very location they are standing. The viewer is not in the video, providing a quick realization that what they may be seeing is not a real-time event. Supporting the small television monitor is an uneasy stack of science textbooks, film books, mathematics textbooks, Choose Your Own Adventure novels, and unmarked VHS tapes. As the viewer explores the installation, the only sound comes from a hiss of static on the television monitor. As the object comes to life and the fabric cylinder opens, a cacophonous

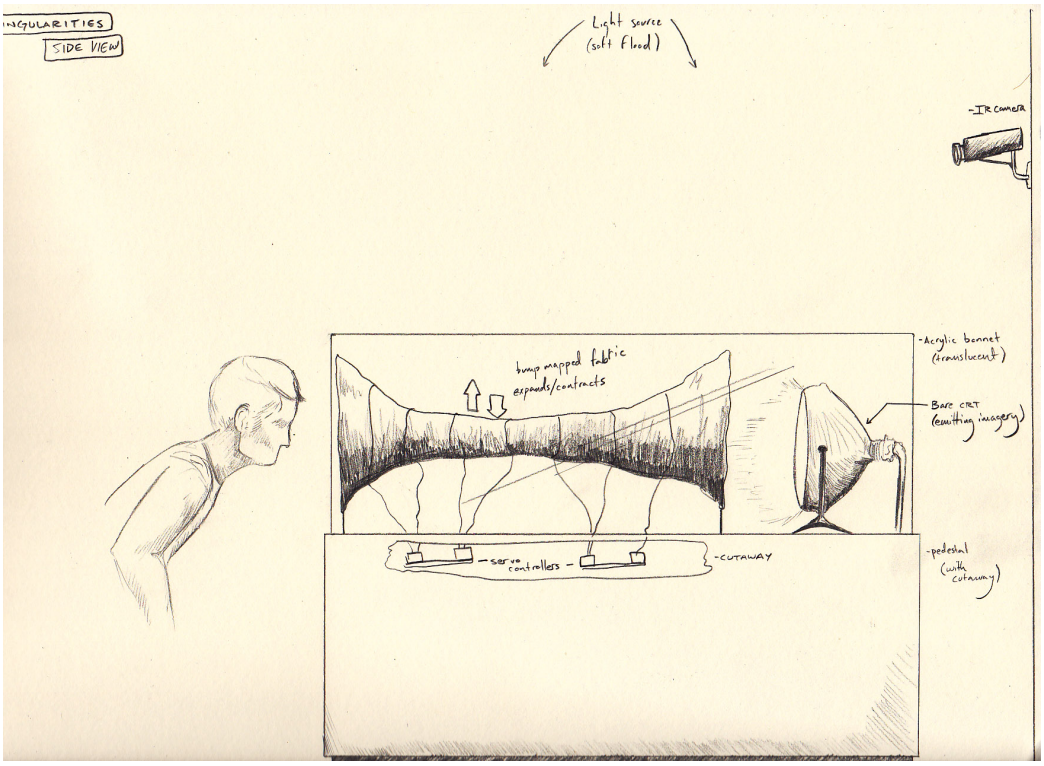

Figure 2.1: *The Outer Space Box*, original concept

yet mechanical noise fills the space and continues until the cylinder has reached its maximum opening. This noise is again present as the fabric cylinder closes for the viewer, and returns again to the quiet hiss which permeates the space.

With the appearance of autonomy, *The Outer Space Box* is carefully controlled from within by an unseen operator. Initial designs and prototypes were dependent upon a reliable robotic system which used multiple methods of detection to interact with the viewer/participants. After rampant mechanical failures, the solution became clear. Why design a system to operate this device when I am clearly capable myself? Encouraged by engravings and records

detailing the late eighteenth century mechanical Turk, I was able to quickly design and construct a new operating system.

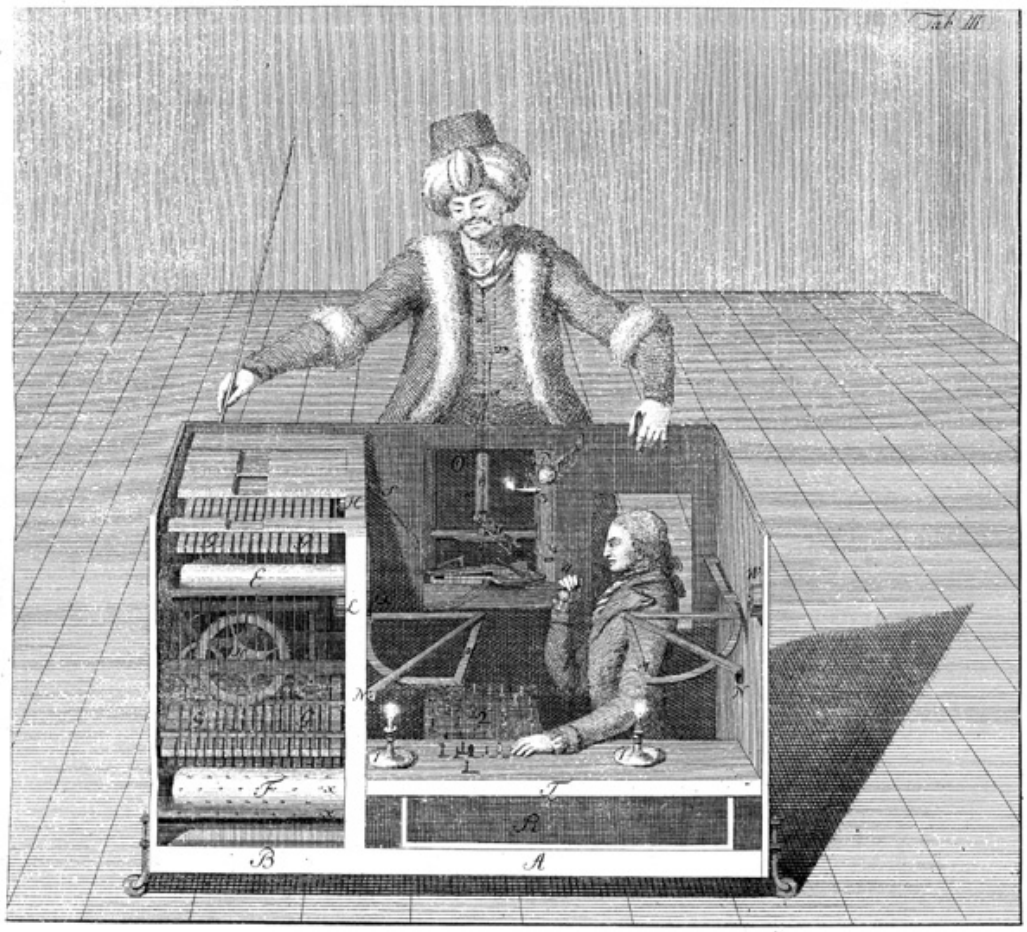

Figure 2.2: *The Turkish Chess Player*, Wolfgang von Kempelen

To avoid seeming "too human", I instituted a random countdown timer which would tell me when to close or open the fabric apertures for the viewer/participant. My successful simulation was confirmed quickly by visitors to the work openly critiquing the work,

both with positive and negative feedback. After one hour, the main wooden gear shattered violently while in operation and the performance was over.

After the performance, *The Outer Space Box* remains in the space and has a single panel on its pedestal removed, revealing the inner workings of the device. Comprised of multiple electronic capture devices, monitors, and wooden cogwheels, the inner workings are fully exposed. Again, the viewer is invited to navigate the space and explore the installation.

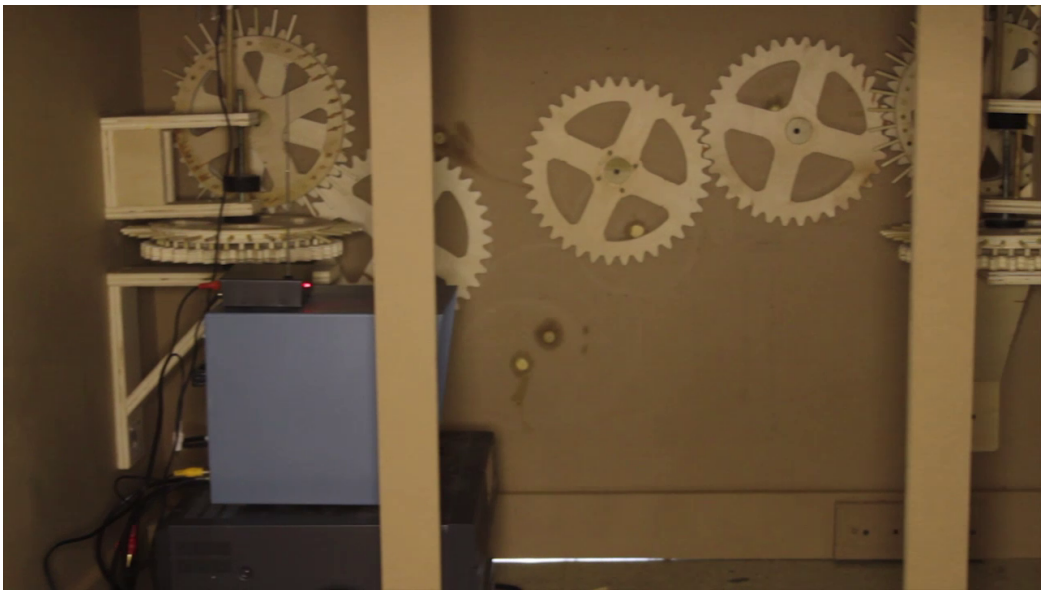

Figure 2.3: *The Outer Space Box*, exposed mechanisms (video still)

The Outer Space Box is the product of scientific research into the field of black holes and the science behind what would make a time travel event possible. The writings and illustrations of Kip Thorne in his text Black Holes and Time Warps heavily influenced the visual design of the fabric cylinder, and the relationship of the viewer to this form. Illustrated as an hourglass shaped figure, Kip Thorne presents the theoretical notions that

a space-time event such as a black hole could produce “tunneling” by which the fabric of space-time is actually folded on itself and connected at two points, allowing for a shortcut.

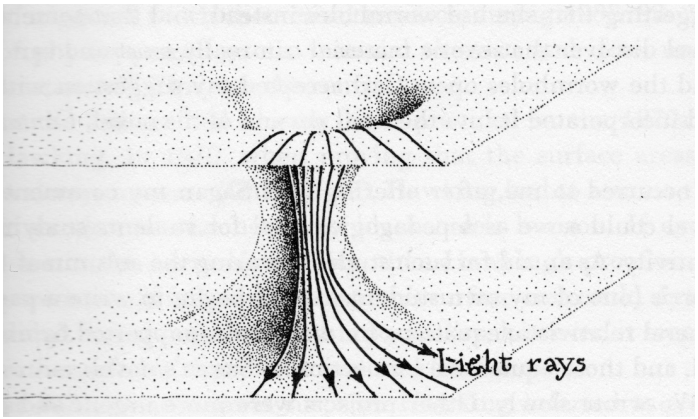

Figure 2.4: Illustration of a wormhole, ©Thorne

While these space-time events are purely theoretical and instantaneous, the project essentially came out of a necessity for me to relate the ideas of astrophysics to a physical analog. Represented by a fabric hourglass with two apertures, the representative black hole allows the two planes of space-time to be connected. Representing the two planes are the actual reality of the viewer, and the cathode-ray-tube displaying a video feed. While the video feed is of the space, a disjointed experience may occur as the viewer/participant recognizes the architecture of the space in which they stand, but are for an instant confused as to why they cannot see themselves. This disjuncture can be equated to the security cameras and feeds which have become accepted parts of our modern civilization; being seen on camera multiple times a day is not unusual. An interesting phenomenon which occurs during the performance is disbelief by the viewer, just after confusion sets in. Nearly every

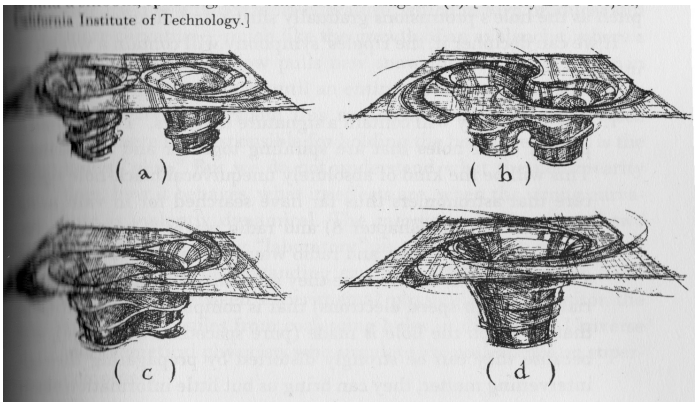

Figure 2.5: Illustration of a wormhole, ©Thorne

participant to the space waved their hand, in an attempt to make their presence known or to have the instant reciprocation in the television monitor.

With the culmination of my performance, *The Outer Space Box* became an immediate relic. Instantly documented through multiple photographs and videos, the object was preserved within the space. Even photographs of small broken pieces of a wooden gear were taken so that a faithful reproduction could be made in the future. While viewers of the artifact may have seen it in its original performance, a majority are seeing it for the first time. In doing so, we are forced to rely upon any clues available and reimagining the space as it was during its life. Perhaps drawing from visits to the Museum of History, *The Outer Space Box* is presented in its own diorama of the space. What did this object do? How did one interact with it? What was its purpose? These questions are raised and speculated upon, though never confirmed or answered by the installation or space.

While *The Outer Space Box* is a project concerned with the concepts of astrophysics and analog capture devices such as black holes, my appetite for discussion of these ideas was being whetted. Always in the back of my mind is the belief or desire to physically

travel to a previous point in time, as I'm sure anyone would, given the chance. It only seemed logical that should the technology ever be available, a large fiscal sum would be involved and I would need a form of funding.

A Lifetime Contract is a project which embodies a central idea: commitment and reward.

Proposed to be executed and signed at an exhibition opening, *A Lifetime Contract* exists in its material form as an original legal document complete with documentation of the processes required to prepare such a document. The aforementioned contract stipulates an agreement between the owner or curator of the exhibition space and me, in which the form of an escrow contract is negotiated. The agreed item in escrow is the honorarium associated with the exhibition, and the terms are simple. Should I ever receive the opportunity or possibility to revisit that very exhibition reception within my lifetime, I shall. I am required to do so only by means which are deemed safe and scientifically accurate. The legalese concerning the idea of a time traveling artist is something that confused my legal counsel, prompting multiple "why?" answers to my questions.

In working on *The Outer Space Box*, a large portion of my research covered the paradoxical possibilities concerned with fictionalized versions of time travel to the past. Often mentioned among the texts are theories in which a paradox is impossible, as the probability of such an event would be reduced to zero by the time that it affected the past and once again reached itself. Though more interesting are the theories that time travel would be entirely possible, though the traveler would be in a parallel universe to his own. This is validated by the logic that he would be unable to affect his own past, and unable to cause a paradox of any sort. In digesting these ideas and [im]possibilities, I became fascinated by the sheer commitment one would be required to uphold in order to avoid such a paradox

from occurring. To arrive in a past time, only to realize that you must live the rest of your life making as little an impression as possible is perhaps the opposite mindset we are raised with. From a very early age, children are so often told that they can make a difference and do anything they want. Is it possible to reverse this way of thinking, and make a conscious decision to leave almost no social footprint?

In conversations with my legal counsel, I had the most trouble concerning the escrow associated with the project. My first requests for the legal document in which I dismissed any monetary involvement or reward were met with confusion. While my own legal knowledge is admittedly limited, for all purposes it seemed nearly impossible to create a contract between two parties in which an act is upheld and nothing is exchanged. This further piqued my interest in the project.

Immediately obvious is the dimension of the commitment. Considering the average lifespan of a white male, I would need to uphold my end of the agreement for possibly a period of 50 years or more. Less obvious is the perceived reward. Is the reward to be the agreed escrow? While the honorarium may be a sizeable sum in todays society, will 50 years of inflation destroy the magnitude of this achievement? Regardless of the sum, perhaps the honorarium represents the idea of a reward. As I will be pining for the monetary reward until the contract is fulfilled, I can understand that it is perhaps is an object representing the intended commitment rather than actual currency. The less apparent reward present in the agreement may occur the very second I sign the legal document within the space of the exhibition. Considering the various hypotheses on the subject, it is entirely possible that in signing the form I have enacted a series of events which eventually culminate in my appearance at that very event. Will I be an old man? Will I take the place

of an everyday object, so as not to arouse suspicion and create further paradoxes? And always looming is the possibility that I will die with the contract unfulfilled.

ACT 3

FAILING TO SUCCEED, TWO INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SAME STATEMENT

In Act I, my perception of failure was one of negative status. To fail is to be unsuccessful, to be unable to do something, to stop functioning. Not an uncommon perception, the public school system, standardized testing, and my mother instilled this definition in me. To provide a timeline, Act II takes place in the summer of 2010. After Act II, my perception shifted. Perhaps the tipping point for this new insight was the failure of *The Outer Space Box*. During the culmination of the performance, a portion of the mechanism had reached its limit and ultimately broke. Immediately concerned with repairs and redesigns due to the failure, I had yet to perceive that the instant the object broke, it had become artifact. Upon this realization, my focus shifted from repair and rejuvenation to one of conservation. Documenting each broken shard of wood and the placement of the electronics, I could safely display the object in its original form just as it had been during the performance. I learned that while a failure may be perceived that with good documentation and care, the new artifact can exist as a successful record of the event.

Act III is set in the fall of 2010, and is concerned with the perceived success and failure of two different works.

The Wedding Party is a work concerned with recontextualizing the motion and spatial awareness of digital video by generating new forms and investigating how the new forms activate a space.

Figure 3.1: *The Wedding Party*, installation view

The Wedding Party consists of six small wooden painted sculptures, is installed with multiple layers of precision. Each of the sculptures is representative of a single object which appears in the frame of a wedding video. Taking place outdoors, the videographer is navigating the physical space while at the same time, using digital technology to process and compress the light, color, and objects within the field of view. Throughout the video,

six objects are chosen and motion captured. How do these objects appear or disappear around the rigid structure of digital video? Reduced to thousands of pixels, are these flat representations a reliable record of how object 1 related to object 2 if I was a participant navigating the space? Using generative processes and custom software, the objects within the video are translated into rudimentary 3D forms, and a new virtual tableau is constructed. Though the couch and lamp are transformed and translated into other forms, can the digital representations still relate in a virtual space as they once did in real physical space?

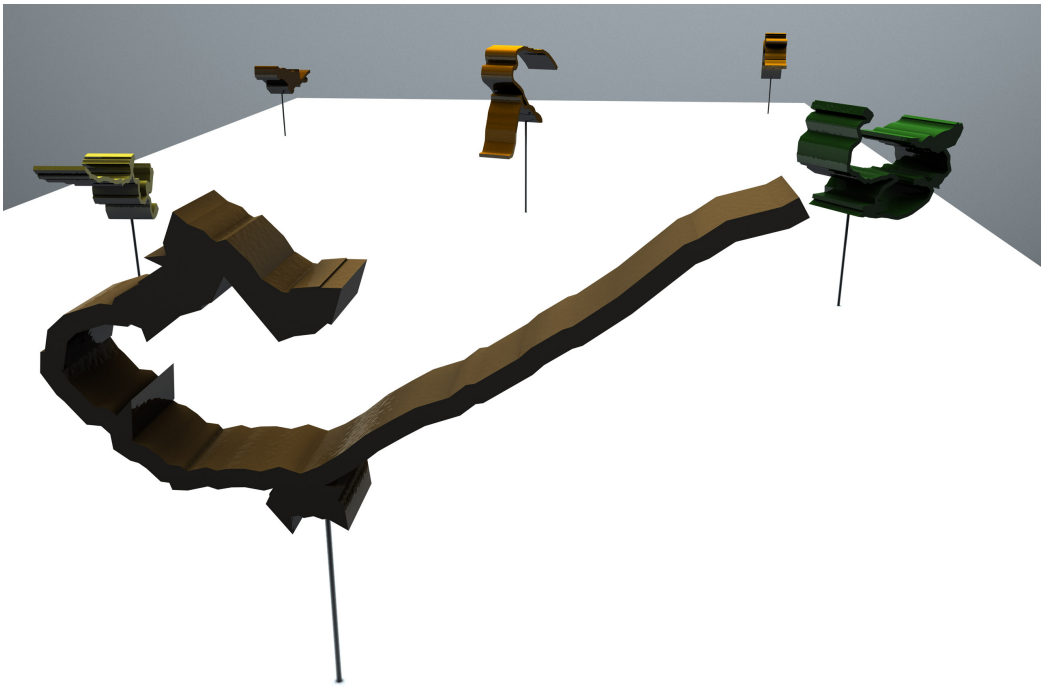

Figure 3.2: *The Wedding Party*, 3D model

During early production of *The Wedding Party*, I was invited to exhibit the work in the Fotofest 2010 Biennial based on previous work and exhibitions. The curator had no knowledge of the new project, yet was very open to anything I proposed. At the time he

did not ask about the project, nor did he at any time up until the exhibition. The six small sculptures shipped in a simple crate with only an instructional sheet on where each object was to be placed in relation to the others.

I flew to Texas later in the month to see the exhibition, excited not only to see the work installed for the first time, but more at the premise that the project had taken on so many characteristics of the Fluxus movement. With such little instruction or description, what was the curator to do when faced any decisions? Arriving at the site, I was speechless upon seeing how faithful the installation was to my measurements, and yet how much the structure had changed. My measurements and virtual tableau had only considered the sculptures to be installed upon a flat surface, yet the curator used a different pedestal for each object. This new development sent the objects into new translations of a third axis.

I found immense success in this work, and it represented a large shift in my studio practice. No longer did my work need to function exactly as it had when described in the original drawing. Expanding upon the lessons learned in *The Outer Space Box*, I learned to embrace the communicative degeneration that can happen when proposing, executing, and exhibiting a work. The obsession and infatuation with film loops and the degeneration of the moving image was something that I would further explore nearly a year later, in Act V. To get there I would pursue the artifacting and intentional degredation of digital video streams, allowing me to begin to view the moving image as an object and non-linear structure.

At present *TV for Virtual Flowers* is an abandoned virtual work which intended to create and question a relationship of looping within a natural and yet unnatural environment.

Similar to the ideas which were ultimately explored in *The Wedding Party*, this incomplete work began with interests in man's attraction to color and its similarities or contradictions with that of plant life. The 3D model proposed a large Plexiglas aquarium housing a plant, with the light for the plants to be produced by a large television monitor. The video which was to be displayed on the monitor would have been a live feed, from a small station by which participants are invited to place various objects in the field of view. A camera close-up of these objects was to yield a simple color field which then washes over the plant life allowing them to grow.

Research while planning and conceptualizing this project revolved around the work of Ken Goldberg and his writings on telepistemology, the study of knowledge acquired at a distance. This is a field of study which I am still very interested in exploring. While virtual modeling and design were being completed, I became overly concerned with the logistics of the project as a bio-artwork. What was to happen if the plants would simply die or not respond? Would the project be a failure? At this point, I had not embraced failure as an option.

Design of the project and further research into the work of Ken Goldberg produced a major change in the project: the plant life would be instead replaced with robotic flowers. The reasoning for this change revolved around the reaction of the plant to the television. I was confident that photographic sensory methods would be wholly more effectual than a life form. Design of the project continued, rapid prototyping possibilities for the robotic flowers and how they would translate motion (success) to the viewers of the space.

Just after this point, I began to feel that I was solving problems but the solutions would drastically alter my original conceptual basis for creating the work. I was no longer creating a work about the natural and unnatural environment, and was dealing more with issues of

security and surveillance. While valid exploration and interesting concepts, I ultimately felt like abandonment of the project was my only option at the time. Though the project did not reach fruition, I continue to find immense success in the initial 3D models which served as both a design tool allowing reification of early concepts and a catalyst for the development of plans for the work.

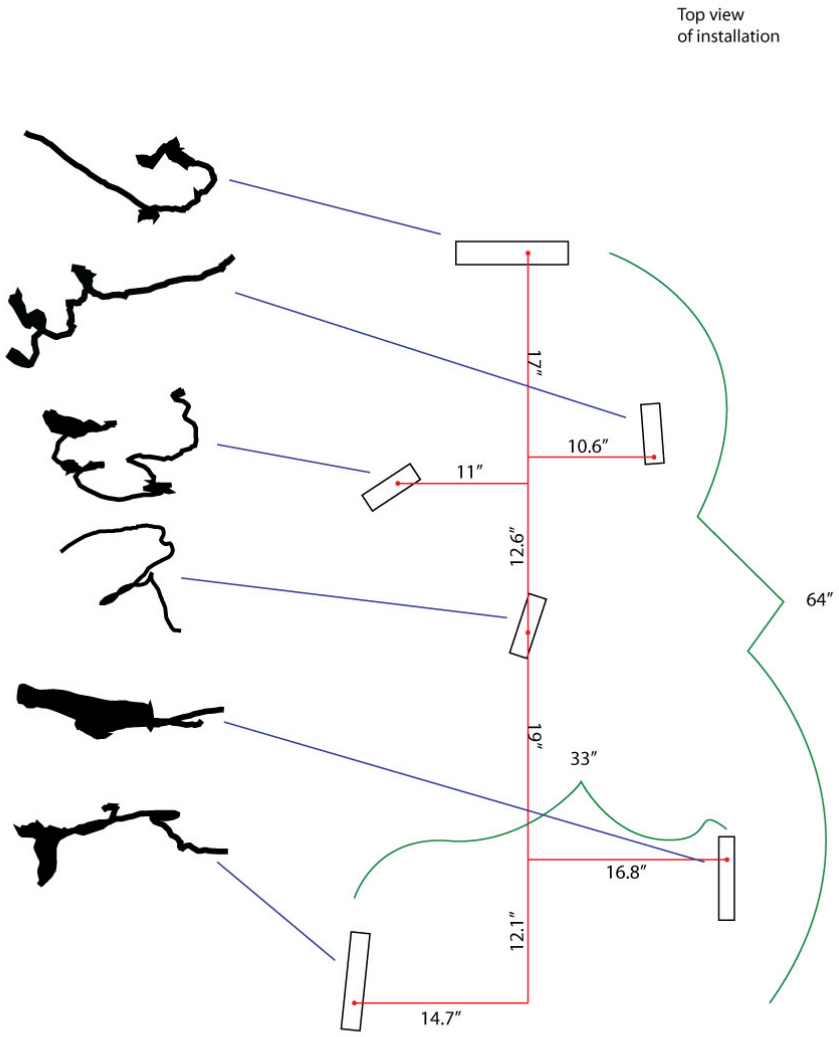

Figure 3.3: *The Wedding Party*, installation instructions

Figure 3.4: *TV for Virtual Flowers*, 3D model

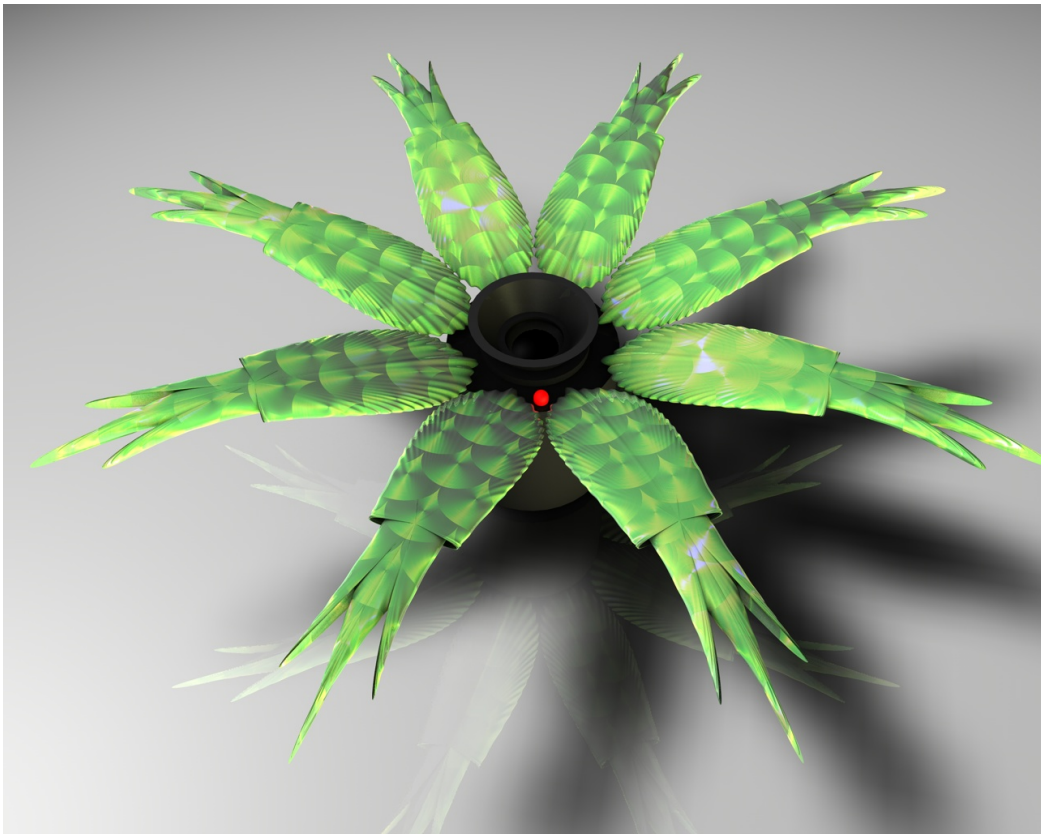

Figure 3.5: *TV for Virtual Flowers*, 3D model for rapid prototype process

ACT 4

SURVIVAL, EVASION OF FAILURE

In October of 1957, the United States Department of the Army issued Field Manual 21-76 to enlisted men. This manual made its way into my hands nearly 50 years later, and has been in my studio ever since. Though it is a surprisingly comprehensive guide to staying alive, the care with which the illustrations are handled is what immediately attracted my interest.

Not information to be taken lightly, I have a healthy admiration for the text and images contained within the manual. Should one look at the following editions, a decline in image quality and the artists' hand will steadily disappear. For this reason, I became enamored with the perceived "golden era" of the Army Field Manual. An interest in the unknown artisans hands, which crafted these lifesaving images, fueled numerous possibilities on how to convey my thoughts to another, though I could not settle on a final method or technique. The work became about approaching or working with the existing imagery with the same amount (or more) care than the original unknown artists. I was seeking to bring these line drawings and scenarios from a previous generation to a contemporary space. What kinds of advantages would I have, with over fifty years of technological advancements since the publishing of the manual? Would availability of materials become a factor? The manual consists of hundreds of carefully rendered objects, references, and actions. Approaching

the project, I knew that curating these drawings and choosing which images I would like to continue working with would be an important matter. After multiple logical solutions (mathematical decision, algorithmic choices, games of chance), I ultimate came to the realization that I could relate my own experiences (or lack thereof) to this text. Which of these actions or objects had I already performed or used before? Were there any situations that I had dreamed about as a child? Certainly the section on how to make a "hobo stove" was something I had gotten in trouble for when I was about 8 years old. In the photograph *FM 21-76*, the manual is documented as not only an object, but my time spent with the manual. Parsing the text repeatedly, post-it notes were placed on particular images that were pertinent to my own history, and thus developing a brand new table of contents, which would become my source for imagery.

In re-making the images from the manual, process drove creation. Early on the decision was made to approach the new objects and images with the same (if not more) care than was perceptible within the original drawings. For *Figure 17. Gas cans*, I had the option of purchasing brand new gas cans which would have been similar in appearance to the 1957 portrayal. Rather, I opted to seek out original cans which had been used by the Armed Forces from the period of the text. The search took weeks, but I was able to acquire the appropriate number of gas cans so that I could spend hours sandblasting and restoring them to an original appearance.

The final intention for *Figure 17. Gas cans* is that it be used for its intended purpose, and then preserved in state with any environmental artifacts it may obtain in its journey. The performance of using the new object would be documented through video, and then accompany the sculpture. While it would make perfect sense to test the gas can raft in a controlled environment such as a swimming pool, I desired to use the raft for its true

purpose: to cross a lake in the winter of 2010. Planned to a T, the performance would require the insulation of my socks with chicken feathers (*Figure 183. Insulating socks*), donning protective eyewear to avoid snow blindness (*Figure 185. Improvised sunglasses*), and the successful launch of the gas can raft (*Figure 17. Gas cans*). The location had been scouted weeks in advance, filming permits researched, and a crew trained for my own safety should something go wrong. You cannot imagine my shock and disappointment upon arrival at the proposed location, only to see a man fishing through a hole in the middle of the lake. The lake had frozen. Being from Texas I had never seen a frozen lake, much less brought this possibility into my "well planned" performance. I had no choice but to postpone the performance.

In curating the images from the manual, a select few presented such elaborate and grand environments or actions that I would not be able to reproduce them with my current resources. Architectural mockups and model railroads opened my eyes to the world of the miniature, and the possibilities that lie within. I was instantly enamored with a particularly large model of a small town that existed at my local hobby shop, and spent hours over repeated visits trying to understand every facet of the town and the relationships that were being forged and destroyed within. More interesting was the construction of this miniature, and the exposed materials within. There was little or no attempt made to hide the chicken wire and plastered paper towel shell, which formed the earthen crust of the fantasy world before me. I immediately purchased terrain supplies and began working with *Figure 166. Diverting a stream*. Fishing in a bayou accounted for many of my summer weekends as a youth, and my friends and I often diverted the path of the water to catch larger fish. Though we did it on a much smaller scale, we had often talked of building a design that appears

within the manual. I would now be able to vicariously experience this through the use of my scale model.

Starting as any land surveyor or architect does, I made a map. The 1957 drawing provided a few landmarks that were necessary for the model, but over eighty percent of the model would be fabricated from my memory. So what drove the creation of these landforms? Had I seen this section of forest in a movie long ago? Or perhaps the mouth of the river was from when I read J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit in fourth grade for a book report. In fact, the map pictured above was drawn so quickly, any attempts to recall a reference were an act of retroactive continuity. Seen often in literature or film series, retroactive continuity can provide details, which fill in timeline gaps, or provide an entirely alternate history for an event. The iconic example may be one of "comic book death" in which a popular character dies, and then is "magically" brought back to life after a fan uproar. In summary, I am not sure why the landscape of *Figure 166. Diverting a stream* looks as it does, and will forever speculate on the pop culture and life experiences, which shaped the fictional terrain. Upon creation of the map, I then pursued the creation of the model with an extreme attention to detail. Every rock face was carefully carved with a single razor blade, and every tree was made and painted by hand. Whittling the "logs" that would become the dam of the river, I used a small knife, which left marks similar to a hatchet of the model's scale.

The figure itself went through several iterations: a 3D model produced as a rapid prototype, a hand sculpted clay miniature, and a repurposed Dungeons and Dragons figure from my own collection. All failed. I then found a model railroad set of four figures playing basketball, and was able to repaint and add accessories to the readymade figure to achieve the look of my spear fisherman.

Knowing that the non-linear narrative for the figure would need a source or destination before/after he procures his food, a small campsite was built within the woods of the model. Just as much minutia occurs in this element, as graphite pencil shavings resemble remnants of a campfire, and a small piece of my shirt is used to make a simple tent in the same manner I was instructed to as a youth.

The photographs within this body of work have the distinction of being the most technically difficult while also being the images which initially drove me to pursue this series. Shot on a large format view camera and printed from negatives as chromagenic color prints, the now-archaic processes and equipment are similar to the methods that would have been used at the manual's time of publishing.

Each photograph is approached in the same careful manner as the aforementioned sculptures, creating an elaborate set or costume which will be used for only a fraction of a second. Compounding this attention or fear for the image making process is the associated cost or margin of error for analog imagery. Only two negatives are exposed for each scene, solely for the purpose that I may blink as I remotely press the shutter.

Survival, Evasion of Failure is an ongoing series that I will continue making images and works for long after my time at this institution. Even in my attempts to actualize the straight-laced methods of survival, the lake crossing failure is a prime example of the sardonic approach with which I view the manual's text. Testing the feasibility and accuracy of the fifty year old practices, I am always secretly hoping for a successful outcome. The exploration of epistemological issues and what an instructional manual can provide are the concepts which this project will seek to either answer or further question, as the pursuit of how we obtain and use knowledge will forever be a part of my studio practice.

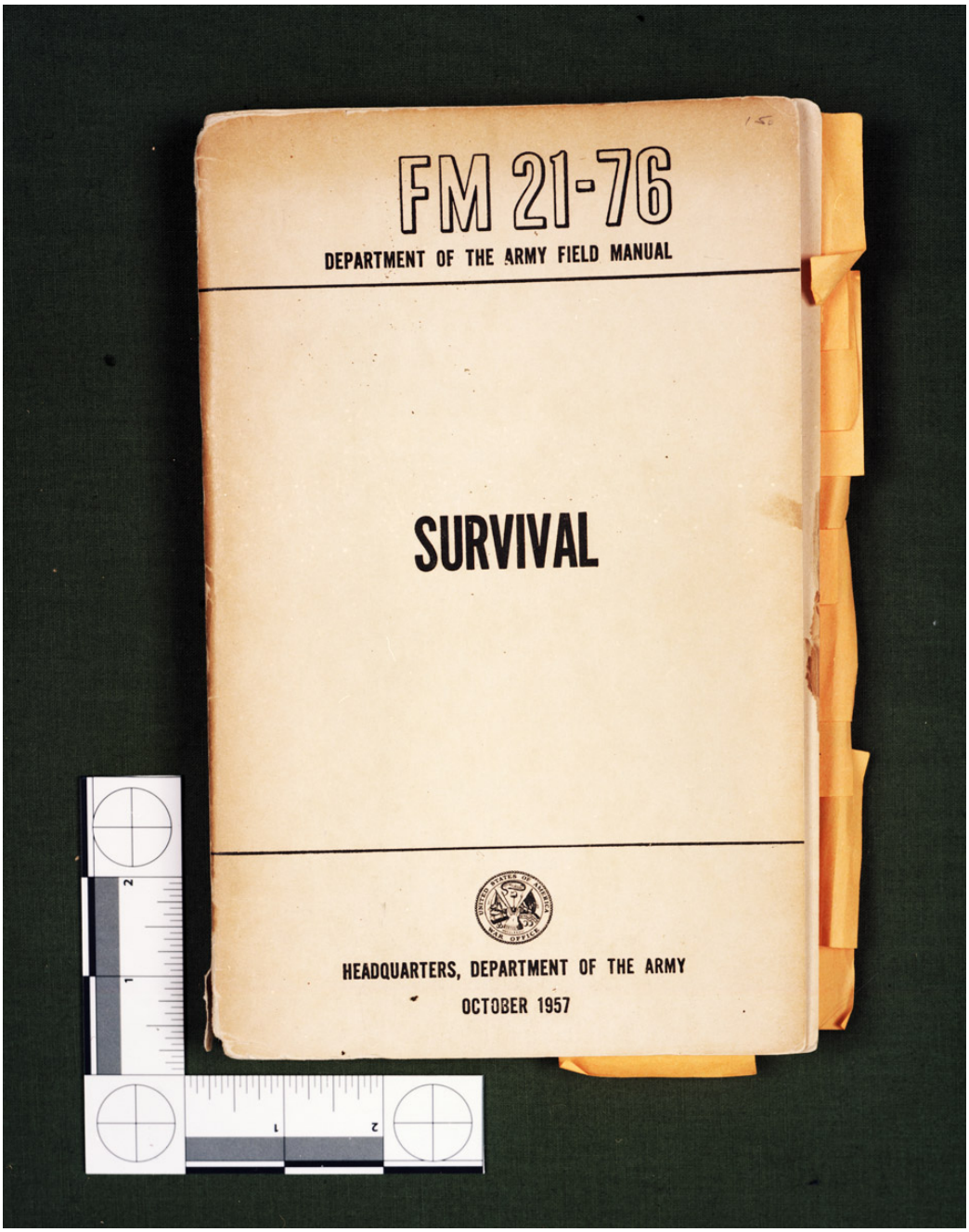

Figure 4.1: *FM 21-76*, c-print

Figure 4.2: *Figure 17. Gas cans*, assembled

Figure 4.3: Proposed filming location for raft launch

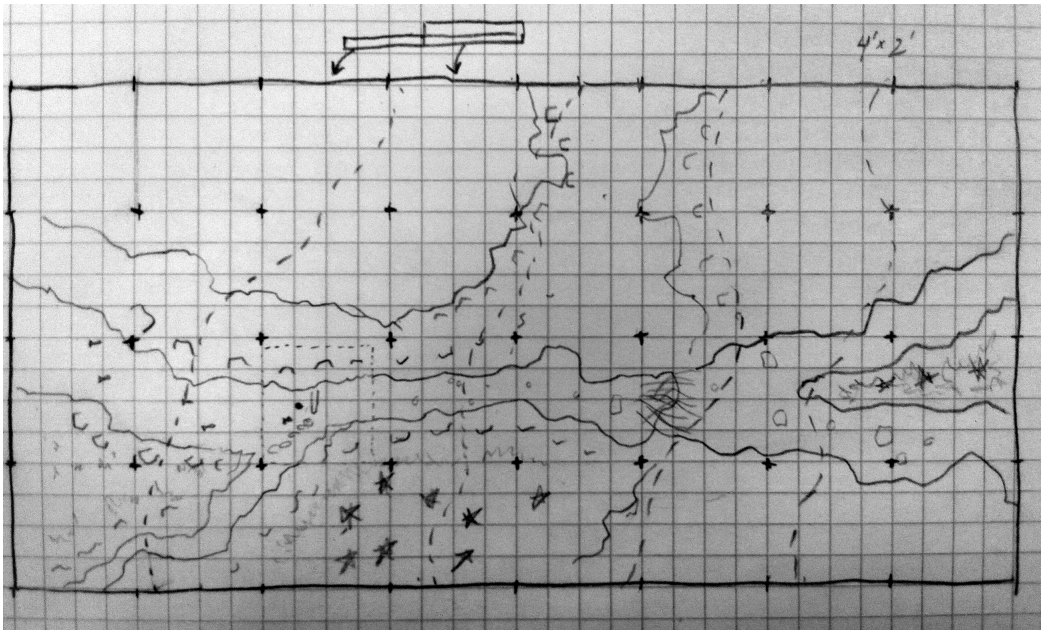

Figure 4.4: *Figure 166. Diverting a stream*, original map

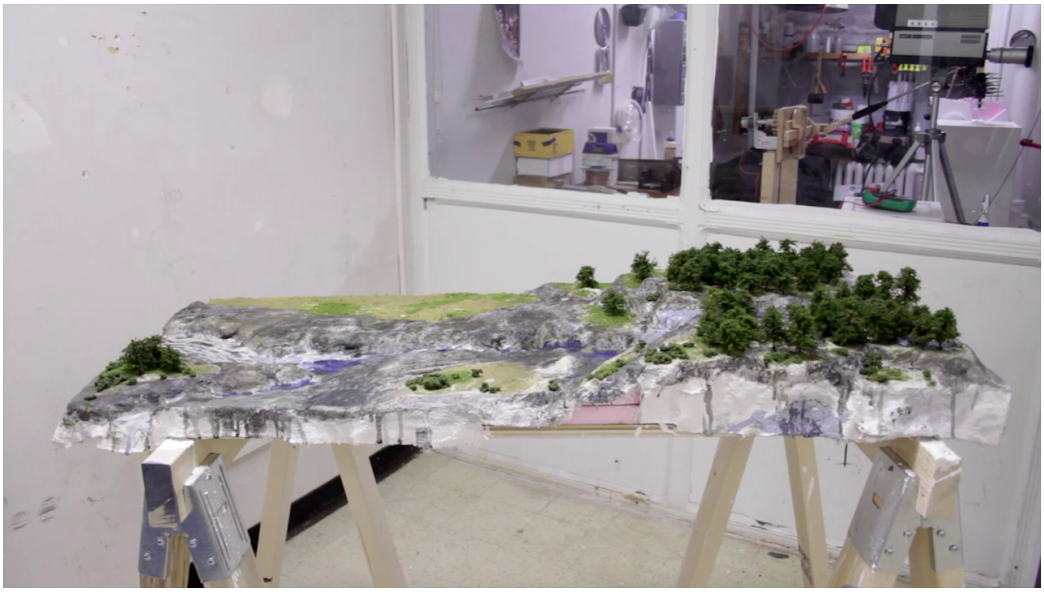

Figure 4.5: *Figure 166. Diverting a stream*

Figure 4.6: *Figure 166. Diverting a stream*, detail

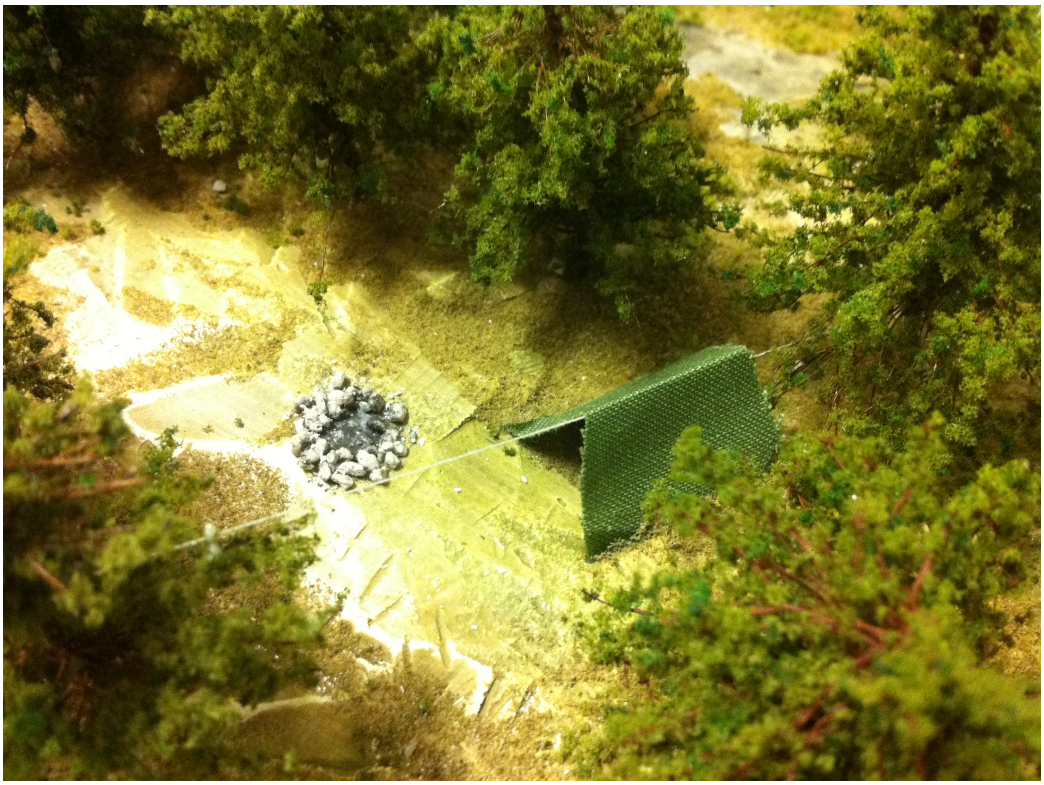

Figure 4.7: *Figure 166. Diverting a stream*, detail

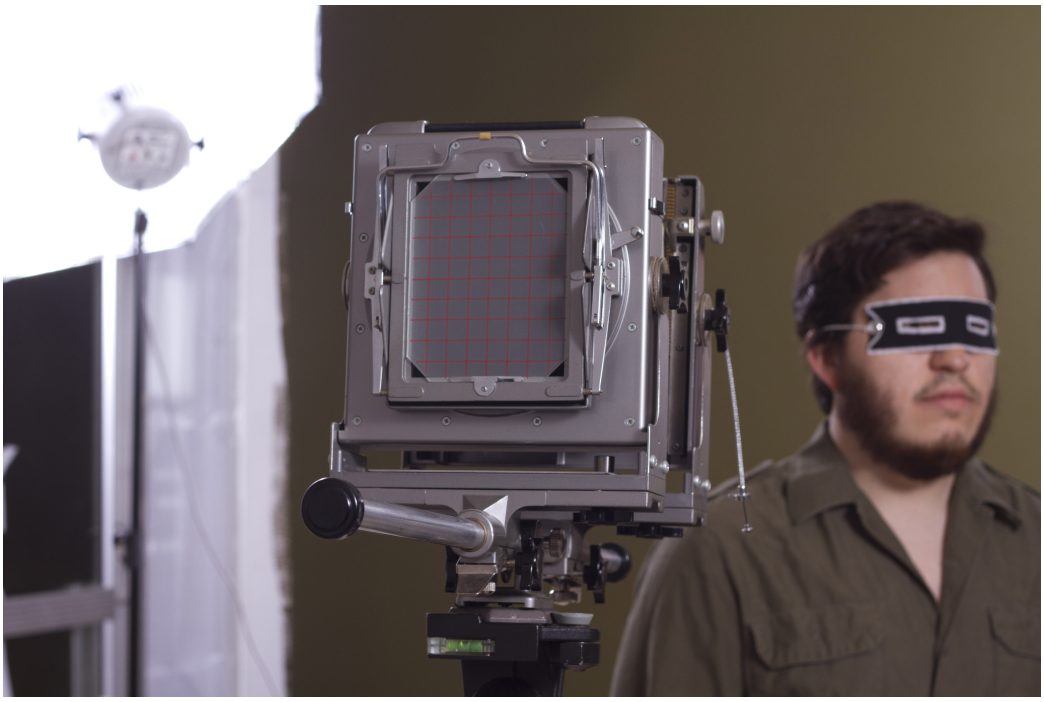

Figure 4.8: *Figure 185. Improvised sunglasses*, set photograph

Figure 4.9: *Figure 185. Improvised sunglasses*, c-print

Figure 4.10: *Figure 183. Insulating socks*, c-print

ACT 5

PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL LOOPS

When I was young, I stayed up late every weekday night to watch a syndicated cable television program called Movie Magic. The premise for the show was simple, documentary footage of film production and special effects techniques were shown for films currently in or about to release to theaters. Essentially, the program was a half hour commercial for whatever mainstream blockbuster would be released that week. Viewing the show marked several "firsts" for me, and has been an extremely large influence on my studio practice. Among the "firsts" are perhaps the first time I saw a miniature used as an illusory object, or the idea that in films the actors shoot blanks. While one would think that pulling back the curtain on such a large part of my life would have been traumatizing, I experienced the opposite effect. I became utterly fascinated with mimicking the effect by way of Lego sets and stockpiling firecrackers from the Fourth of July celebration. It would be years before I would so much as touch a video camera, but I needed to begin building the set of skills I knew that I would need.

Reduced to using poorly recorded television on VHS tapes as my guide for these new constructions and effects of my own, my frustration was constant. If I couldn't see the details through the barrage of analog artifacts, how could I accurately reproduce my own versions? Nearly ten years later, I saved up three hundred dollars between birthday money

and garage sales and bought a DVD player. I then discovered the A-B loop, and my life changed. No longer did I have to rewind, and predict the tape delay. I could simply have a flawless loop presented on my television, and bask in the repeatable structure. The increased appearance of this technology in the home has led to the widespread ability of this resource. In the canon of television narrative, a show in the 1960's or 1970's may have had a single plot point to parse out in a 30 minute period. As technology has advanced, so has the complexity of the narrative structure within film and television. The viewer can be rewarded for rewinding, and ultimately obsessing over moments or scenes [3].

This method would suffice for many years, though I would eventually discover a fascination and reverence for film as a celluloid object. I held my family's vacation films cradled in my arms like a newborn. The objects that had once served as a memory trigger, allowing them to transcend rural Kansas and visit the white sandy beach which had been so incredibly pleasant that one summer. I cared for these films as if they were a lost reel from Casablanca or Citizen Kane. Cotton gloves, chemical cleaners, and microfiber dust cloths were a given, if I planned on viewing these projected images. After viewing them multiple times, I became worried that I was damaging the film simply by running them through the projector. They were digitally captured, and carefully stored. I wanted to relive this moment of seeing vacation which took place sixty years earlier so dearly, that I formed a small business transferring strangers' family films. I did this for two years, and loved every vacation.

I would not take a university course discussing formal elements of the moving image until 2009, then enrolling in a class titled "Recent Cinema Since 1945". As with the aforementioned epiphanies concerning film and narrative structure, I left the 10 week course with new eyes. I had developed the idea to see a film in discernable layers, and could

navigate the structure of the moving image with new vocabulary, confidence, and finesse. The elements of mise-en-scène and the concepts of auteur theory would heavily drive the development and execution of two upcoming works.

42 Cuts is a work, which creates a conflation of real and virtual space and time.

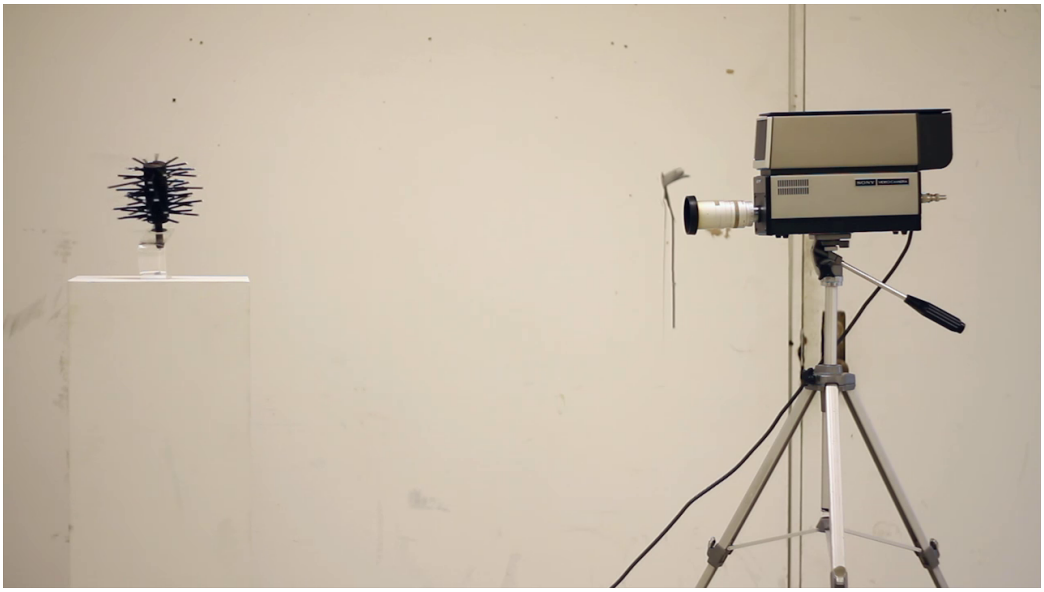

Figure 5.1: *Trailer for 42 Cuts*, video still

The sculpture both consists of and at the same time, provides documentation of a mechanical sculpture created solely for the purpose which its name suggests. From a single scene from Kihachi Okamoto's 1966 film The Sword of Doom, I have extracted a single visual element from one of the most climactic moments of the film. In extracting this single element, directional snowfall, the original timing of the film has been retained throughout *42 Cuts*. Each "cut" is represented and recontexualized through analogue means in the form of a small rotating wooden sculpture, each of which has been carefully painted to match the

original cut for which it corresponds to. The careful arrangement of each wooden sculpture allows for a simulated snowfall which corresponds to a single cut when viewed through the lens of a video camera. Suspended in the air, the entire rotating structure houses 42 simultaneous "cuts" which are all constantly in individual motion. The viewer is invited to experience this reimagining of the film's climactic scene by exploring the 10' ring of foam, wood, and plastic which comprises the sculpture, though another element is at play. The video feed which focuses on a single "cut" is directed at an offsite monitor, which the viewer may also encounter and view the "film" in its original structured timing.

Figure 5.2: *Trailer for 42 Cuts*, video still

42 Cuts could be considered an inefficient technological work, due to both its design and reason for existence. Attempting to recreate a fifty year old film capture of Japanese snowfall though purely mechanical means is not a sound solution.

Always inspired and fascinated by the formal and production elements of film, I am continually struck by the amount of information that can be compressed into the celluloid format. To create a record of the event is a wondrous feat in its own right, yet to seize control and become the auteur is something that this project was seeking to dissect. Largely consisting of visual research, the pre-production for this sculpture involved a laborious method of re-storyboarding the film from the final edit, and methodically handcrafting each wooden "cut".

While installation of this sculpture has been unsuccessful and is still evolving, this project provided multiple milestones for my studio practice. While I mention several times about the impact which film and film production has had on me, this project marks the first time that I was able to visually break down a film into its basic elements. In doing so, a new way of seeing is born which has paved the way for numerous other projects.

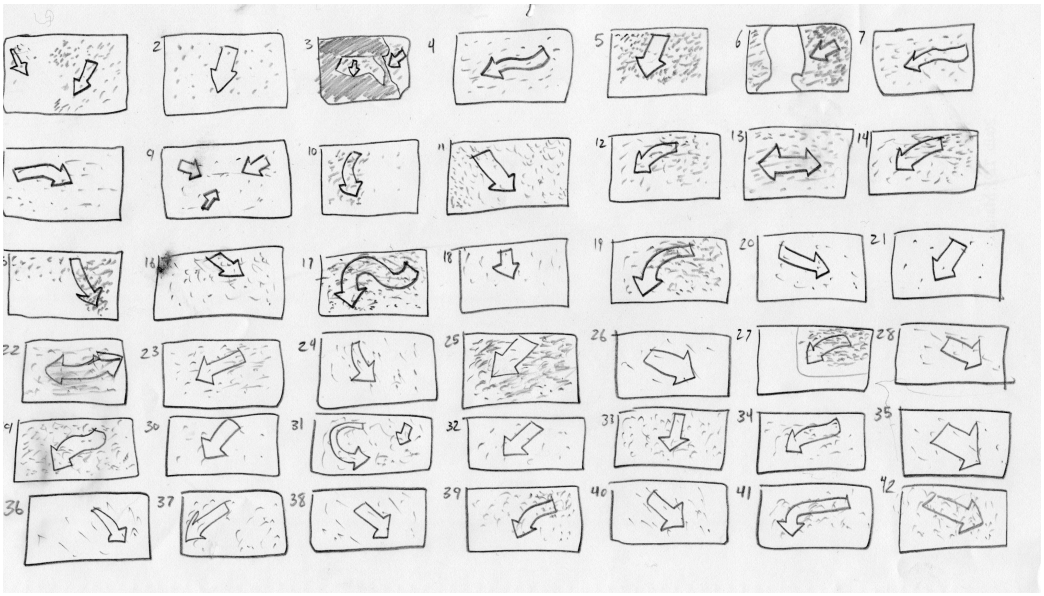

Figure 5.3: *42 Cuts*, original storyboard

Having seen Kihachi Okamoto's film numerous times as a youth, I was not sure at first why I became so struck with the snow scene during the conception of this project. It was only after drawing the storyboards that I noticed a careful attention to the captured directionality of the snowfall, and a similar if not equal care in the method in which I labeled the directionality of the wooden sculptures on my new storyboards. Having just written about John Ford's war-era documentary films, I was enamored with the way he carefully flipped negatives of battle scenes to show that the enemy combatants would always be moving in a left direction. While this can be purely perceived as a visual attention to detail only, viewings of the film give the sense of progress as the Allied forces charge from left to right in the same way our eyes will navigate a page of text. As we witness the Axis powers moving from right to left as they attack, a sense of regress can begin to seat itself unconsciously in the viewer. Though the direction is merely reversed, actions seem unnatural, and something as primitive as throwing a grenade seems out of place when thrown from the "wrong" hand.

Spending months rewinding The Sword of Doom and carefully picking apart frame by frame was an incredible experience, both in terms of conceptual development in my studio practice and the methods of translation/transmogrification I would use months later.

Intermission is an interactive installation completed for the Masters of Fine Arts Exhibition Spring 2011, which poses questions of both robotic autonomy and the nature of how autonomy is often simulated within the history of film.

Composed largely of cardboard and wood, *Intermission* exists as a large-scale installation inviting the viewer to explore and dissect the space. The viewer's first exposure to this work is via a small television monitor, in which two video feeds are switching back and forth. The first feed shows a mechanical left-right panning motion of someone (or no

Figure 5.4: *Intermission*, installation view

one) inside of a round structure. The second feed is merely white text which reads "INTERMISSION". An important factor, the viewer at this location can only see the monitor, as a large wall resembling the back of a movie set blocks all other views. Is this live? The subtle switching video feeds seem to resonate in the typical fashion one would expect a security monitor to, however the two feeds have different durations. As the viewer debates whether the feed is live or pre-recorded, the only other visible object from this point is a small black box which manipulates a large video camera. At this point in the installation, the illusory construction may begin to break down, as the viewer associates the mechanical panning video feed with the similar motion of the camera immediately to their left. Walking around the "set" wall, the viewer is instantly confronted by a larger than life space pod,

thus realizing that the cryptic construction on the video monitor is surely the object in front of them. Nearly seven feet in diameter, this craft appears to be painted cardboard and not suitable for space travel.

The creation of the EVA pod was an undertaking that spanned a period of 8 months from conception to complete object. A breakthrough in the project, I was able to find instructions for a 4 inch tall paper model of the EVA pod on Google Japans image archives. There is very little information about the origination or creator of the paper model, with the only credit going to "UHU002". I often wish I had the contact information for UHU002, if only to see/hear their reaction upon seeing images of their toy model brought into its destined size of a seven foot diameter. The paper model provided the shapes needed to reproduce the EVA pod, but nearly an entire month had to be dedicated to translating the drawn image into a file which could be interpreted by a Computer Numerical Control (CNC) mill. The CNC mill could then cut my life-size EVA pod pieces out of cardboard. Five pounds of hot glue holds the entire structure together, with over one mile of electrical wiring delivering power to the lighted panels.

In stepping past the representative wall which previously blocked any view, the participant has made an important decision pertaining to their physical relationship to the installation. In terms of geolocation, the viewer is now inside of the film set. Regardless of how they will respond to the dialogue taking place, they have become an actor and a formal aspect of the *mise-en-scène*. As they explore the immediate area, the actor will see a second camera constructed from raw cardboard, which is directly facing a glossy black sign containing "INTERMISSION" in white, waxy text. At this very moment, the illusion of the second video feed has been shattered. What could have been a looping DVD of pre-rendered text is now quite obviously a live feed of a physical construction. To see

Figure 5.5: EVA Pod, paper models

a text plate in this manner is unexpected in the times of contemporary video production, and further complicates perception for the actor. Does this work look back to the classical era of Hollywood in which title cards were a tangible object? Only to be discarded once immortalized on film? Directly behind the actor at this point is a stairway leading into the rear of the space pod. Upon entry, hundreds of randomly blinking indicator lights battle for attention. The "buttons" appear to do important things though in fact do nothing, and do not respond to touch. Also in the space is a small panel of eight toggle switches and green lamps, simply offering two positions, on or off. The actor may freely interact with the panel, turning on or off items labeled actions as "EXT COM", "INT COM", et cetera. They also desire to create a suspension of disbelief though also do nothing as they are mere parts of a prop. Looking up, the actor is looking directly into the panning camera, and the

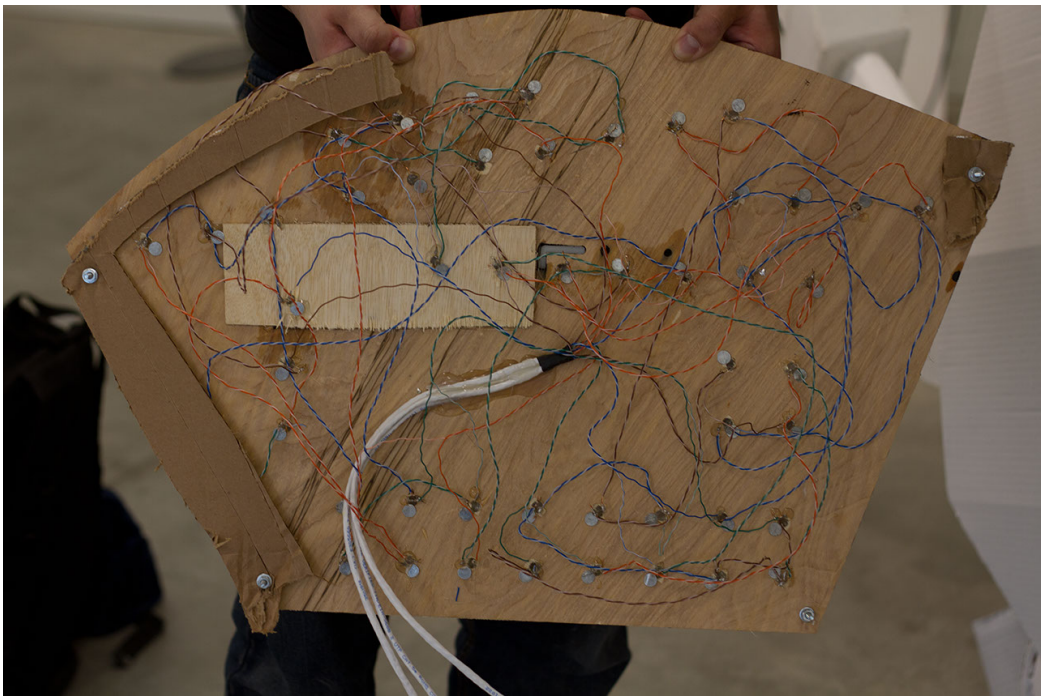

Figure 5.6: *Intermission*, interior wiring

final illusory moment is deconstructed. The realization that all previous actions may have been streamed "off the set" for the actor who has just stumbled upon the monitor for the first time sinks in and the work is complete.

As with the conception and initial production for *42 Cuts*, the source footage for *Intermission* became apparent to me after repeated viewings of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. Having seen the film frequently when I was younger, I had a respect for the film. I did not necessarily understand the underlying conceptual nature of the film, or perhaps even follow the disjointed narrative which occurs, but I had a respect for the authentic feel of the film. I would later learn that this authenticity can be attributed to Kubrick's hiring of NASA engineers as production designers for the film, a choice which many feel was key to

Figure 5.7: *Intermission*, video still

the film's success and iconic status. The scene in reference for *Intermission* takes place just as the protagonists realize that HAL 9000 (Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic computer) may not have their best interests in mind, and realize they must escape his constant surveillance to discuss options. As the astronauts enter a small Extra-Vehicular Activity (EVA) pod, and assure themselves that HAL can no longer hear them as they have disabled all communication within the vessel. As the astronauts discuss the possibility that HAL may need to be shut down, the camera quickly cuts to what the viewer realizes is HAL's point of view. Swiftly and mechanically panning left and right, the audience is treated to a close-up of lips moving, and a hiss of white noise. Shortly thereafter, the film goes black, and the word "INTERMISSION" fills the screen for a surprising length of time. In an instant, Kubrick's filmmaking has told us a plethora of information. Not only do we understand that HAL may be considering his own wellbeing over that of his operators, but he

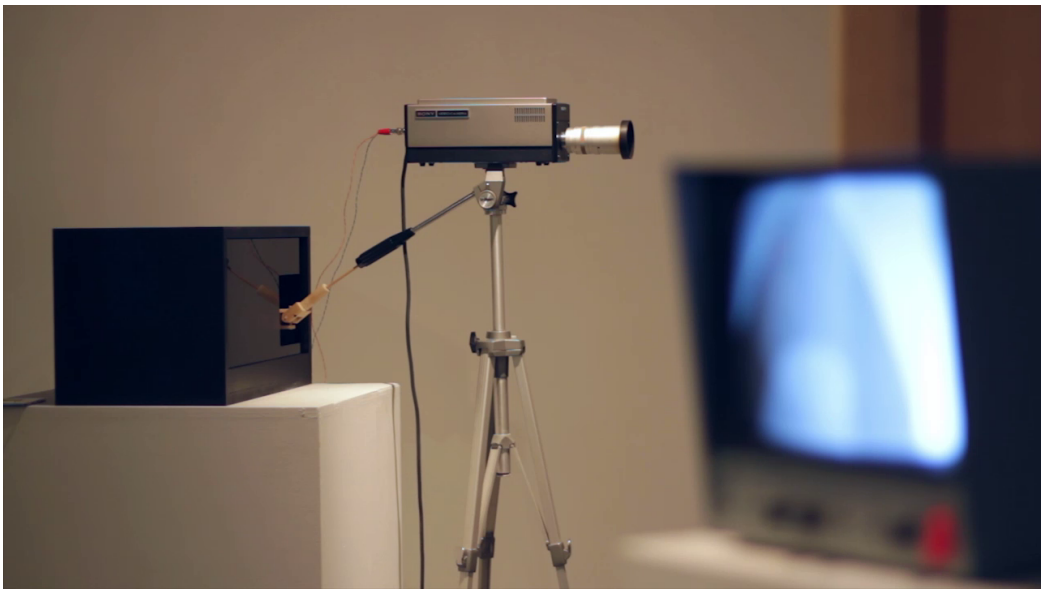

Figure 5.8: *Intermission*, video still

has taught himself to read lips. Should this not be enough, we are then bathed in darkness and treated to a single word, at arguably the climax of the film.

Speaking to the occurrence of the word "INTERMISSION", Kubrick has allowed multiple implications to take seat. Originally from the days of stage theater, the intermission allowed the actors a break, rather than the audience. Speaking quickly, enunciating, and projecting ones voice at a crowd is more than taxing on the actor's mind and body. Is this the intention of Kubrick's intermission? While Frank and Dave may not need a break, HAL could be using the time to plan his upcoming actions leading to Frank's demise. With the mainstream introduction of cinemas, the intermission eventually became a time for the audience to take a break. Whether they were getting concessions, using the restroom, or simply absorbing the first half of the film and make speculations on what was to come.

Figure 5.9: *Intermission*, video still

Kubrick's intermission certainly seems in line with a forceful gesture that the audience absorbs what has just transpired. Unlike the intermission typically in a cinema, the house lights do not go up. This unsettling disjuncture was Kubrick's aim. If the screen proposes an intermission, yet the venue does not, to whom do I listen? Do I risk getting concessions or sit in silence for nearly three minutes per the director's design?

While I mentioned having a respect and appreciation for the film, it was not until I saw an original 70mm print of the film in 2003 that this scene struck me. The striking nature of this scene is two-fold: from a purely narrative standpoint, and also from a production standpoint. To imagine a viewpoint just feet behind the camera, as we can see a crew of twenty or more people all working in sync to simulate an autonomous being. It is this relationship that *Intermission* is questioning and reenacting: revisiting the looping nature

of HAL's surveillance and that a structure has been created which emulates and explores an autonomous being that is repetitive and mechanical.

ACT 6

CURTAINS

I came to the graduate school with an open mind, with no preconceived notions about whom or where I would be in two years. Doing so has been one of the greatest adventures of my life thus far, building both professional relationships and a stronger idea of what my studio practice really is. The abilities and vocabulary which have developed in these two years is only a fraction of what I plan to continue exploring in the coming decades.

The self-aware narrative structure which I recognize as my own life will continue to be written, chapter by chapter. The recognition of my practice and experiences as part of a larger construct or fabrication is a relatively new development, but one that I intend to explore in future actions and dissect in future writings. The illusory nature of the moving image can be recognized by Krzysztof Kieślowski's belief that the filmmakers are simply "lighting cameramen", capturing the controlled angles of the light while an actor performs in the midst of the construct. This is echoed in the aforesaid works, both through my acknowledgment of film as a virtual representation of a possible reality, my desire let my practice span adding physical form from filmic and numeric processes, and virtualizing the physical as translation and transformation of one proposed reality into another.

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