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In Rift

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

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Indiana Wesleyan University
Bachelors of Science in Pre-Art Therapy, 2011

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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ABSTRACT:

In Rift is an exhibition of object, video, and sound installations investigating the process of embodying ambience from the natural world. As a whole, this work questions the distinct differences in experiencing a place psychologically, through the circulation of digital media, and holistically, in actual, present time. *In Rift* is comprised of two distinct works: *Loose Liquids* and *Gorge*. The first piece, *Loose Liquids*, contains specific imagery of water, rock, plant life, and digital blobs, combined with human cadence such as breathing, shivering, and rolling. This explores how a location's details accumulatively contribute to an overall experience as we strive to embody and personify the things within our surrounding. The arrangement of screens illuminates the movements and memories of "things," further defined as objects that self-arrange and possess the ability to affect human experience.

Gorge, contains two facing videos of steam and rock, providing an immersive experience among dissipating particles and low-frequency sound. Amorphous, golden objects function as an emblem for romantic consumerism, and the visually enticing, and idealized attraction to nature. Dispersed as a field, these golden clay objects sit on shiny, gridded plates, in reference to the digital screen. As the word *Rift* defines an open space split between two geological formations, this work investigates the in-between, transitional states of perception and experience, body and mind.

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DEDICATION

In Rift is dedicated to H. Andrew Cserny and Retta June Cserny.

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ATMOSPHERES

The following narratives demonstrate significant experiences among distinctly profound atmospheres.

In March 2013 I walked into the Rothko Chapel in Houston, TX. I imagined what to expect based on texts and pictures. Still, I found the space enthralling. The dark omnipotence of Rothko's paintings created a specific, pensive atmosphere when surrounded by a cold, reverberating, circular structure. His paintings forced a meditative mental state through use of deep color and large scale. This atmosphere appeared simple, yet felt uncanny, as my body and mind were completely absorbed in the space.

Four months later, I climbed to the 13,775-foot summit of the Grand Teton in Jackson, WY. Anticipating the sense of accomplishment and seeing the aesthetic formations drove the vigorous journey to its completion. The two-day climb tested my physical and mental limitations, embedding the experience into my body's memory and sense of place.

In 2012, I saw a video online about a girl backpacking in Iceland through an unusually barren, beautiful, and fascinating landscape. Among the abundant videos about Iceland, the specifics of this source are not as pertinent as the vividness of video itself, which allowed me to project my mind into another place. As she encountered animals, waterfalls, and moss, she also experienced ample amounts of solitude, connecting with nature. This video formed my own desires to also experience Iceland's ecological details. I began learning more about Iceland, determined to immerse myself in these fantastic, atmospheric qualities.

In July 2014, I sat in my tent cold and soaked by rain at the Landmannalaugar base in Iceland preparing to hike one of the most beautiful backpacking trails in the world. Coursing through this expedition, my mental state alternated between wonder and frustration. Swarms of people crowded the trail in pursuit of the same magnificent adventure. Yet, the vast and incomparable ecology was surreal. It oscillated between geothermal-active hills to blinding snow and wind, shifting from lush, sunny grass to an unforgiving mist. As a circulation of Internet videos guided my idea of for this place, the actual environment dissolved all preconceived expectations.

In all of these events, I was attempting to embody the atmosphere of a place. The process for comprehending and absorbing each location's details depends on the vehicle of presentation, whether through digital media or in actual, present time. For instance, a transitional shift in perception occurs when my idea of the Rothko Chapel dramatically changes, moving from my knowledge through text and images, to a completely immersive experience. Additionally, my understanding of Iceland fluctuates. I first psychologically experience a video through the Internet, and then witness the actual location as a full, mental and bodily surrounding. This "digestion of fantastical and idolized information of ecological¹ places," is what philosopher, Timothy Morton describes as "romantic consumerism."² Specifically, that we construct and consume extravagant ideas about the natural world, based on what we understand consciously through text, images, and videos. In this paper, I argue the significance of a combined physical,

¹ In terms of language, I agree with Timothy Morton in using the word *ecology* to describe an all

² Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. (London, England: Harvard University Press, 2007), 109.

psychological, and immersive experience in order to more fully comprehend the atmosphere of an ecological place. This process molds an individual's sense of self, allowing a deeper understanding for what constructs a location's ambience, altogether, creating a sincerely phenomenological experience.

BODY: Material Body

In all my work, I address the human body as a malleable vehicle, embodying experiences and absorbing properties that contribute towards a sense of place. Maurice Merleau-Ponty focuses on the perception of experiences, as they inhabit “the flesh.” He refers to the body as a “mass of tactile, labyrinth and kinesthetic data.”³ Philosopher Dylan Trigg adds to this concept in his book *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, describing experiences of the flesh undergoing “transitional memory.” He uses “transitional memory” to “refer to the dynamic movement of memory being between place, cognition and embodiment” as they contribute towards a place's atmosphere.⁴ However, Trigg's use of the word “transitional” implies specifically spaces *between* the body's malleability and during the embodiment of a place, created when details of a space are processed for absorption. In my work, whether I imply, represent, or provoke this transitional action, movement connects a body to the specificity of places and to the ambient atmosphere projected through details.

Before graduate school, I spent a great deal of time active in physically demanding roles. In addition to summiting the Grand Teton, I worked as a Wilderness Therapy Guide in Utah. In

³ Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012), Chap. 3, The Lived Body, location 1582.

⁴ Ibid., Preface, location 224.

spare time, I pursued adventures in adjoining states such as Colorado, Wyoming, and Idaho. I also climbed the South Six-shooter tower in Moab, UT, used my vehicle as a home, and was responsible for leading groups of adolescents, canyoneering through canyons. Every instant of life demanded physical activity, oscillating between extremities of euphoric or arduous experiences.

The interest in testing mental and physical endurance persisted in my first year of graduate school. The challenges of conveying these conceptual investigations gradually lead to an incorporation of body as a material. I entered the program with a history of producing art works in clay and attempted to stay true to these methods. However, my tendencies in handling the material had become too ingrained for drastic deviation. In order to best convey my interests of human endurance and limitations, I sought to test my own capabilities by manipulating found objects. Continually searching for materials that were intuitively attractive to me, I made choices based on what could later be manipulated, extracted, cut, pasted, and painted. There were similarities in the ways I manipulated found objects and my previous methods for touching clay. Each handling required close attention to the characteristics and properties of the found object. This collection process has grown throughout my graduate experience, and now informs my methods for working in performance and video.

Simulating the human body's reactions to stress when mentally and physically tested, I created *Stress Reactions* (Figure 1), and *Stamina I & II* (Figure 2, 3) in Fall 2013. *Stress Reactions* observes the properties of rubber when cut, painted, then stitched back together with wire. Through this process, the act of stitching caused a distressed reaction from the material, imitating

similar mental reactions when the human body endures stress. *Stamina I & II* consists of Resusci Anne heat activated paper that was taped to my body. I applied friction to the paper with a climbing rope, vigorously pulling it back and forth on parts of my body, until the heat was too strong to handle or the paper became torn. Resusci Anne paper is an outdated, yet valid method for training CPR. The paper records feedback marks to assess the quality of resuscitation breaths applied by the learner. Additionally, when a rope undergoes too much friction, this can cause it to snap, leading to a climber or mountaineer's death. I was curious about how the combination of this rope, paper, and action could create a relationship that related to the delicate circumstances for testing human perseverance.

In the act of applying tension, the mind and body work as separate entities, yet in unity towards the same goal. Merleau-Ponty also argues that no limb or part of the body is independent; instead they all exert effort towards the same act.⁵ He states that there is a “synthesis of one's body,” and I find this holistic mind-body cohesion to be pertinent to an embodiment of place. For instance, in *Stamina I & II*, a conscious will of the mind sustains the process of physically enduring friction from the rope. Similar to my summit of the Grand Teton, my mental determination to reach the peak drove my body's physical movement. This sense of tenacity parallels to the heat reactive paper's boundaries while undergoing applied friction. This emphasizes that to cohesively embody a place, physical and psychological experiences need to align. Dualism between mind and body occurs when consuming imagery alone, requiring the mind to fantasize the body into that place.⁶ When these faculties are separate, a full encapsulation of a place's

⁵ Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, Chap. 3, The Lived Body, location 1623.

⁶ Ibid., Chap. 3, The Lived Body, location 1606.

atmosphere is lost. Through mind, body, and action, an individual has the capacity to accurately embed memory and sensation of a place into comprehension.

Endurance and stress force a state of susceptible malleability for the body to immerse in a surrounding atmosphere. David Abram refers to Merleau-Ponty's "Flesh" as the "animate earth...the biosphere as it is experienced and lived from within by the intelligent body – by the attentive human animal who is entirely a part of the world that he or she experiences."⁷ In this sense, the materiality of the "flesh" becomes malleable to a surrounding, holistically impressible by pleasure, discomfort, and the unexpected. The heat activated paper in *Stamina I & II* serves as a locus for action and experience, absorbing and reacting to the atmosphere I was applying. While aspirations of endurance like my summit of The Grand Teton are often associated with themes of the sublime, I find there is a more complex experiential phenomenon occurring, beyond a simple pursuit of superiority in the face of danger.⁸ I find my own examples of ecological exploration to differ from the sublime as they pursue an integration of place through the malleability of one's self. With a focus on creating more work about this bodily experience, I pointed my attention towards artists such as Chris Burden, Marina Abramovic, Matthew Barney and Ernesto Pujol.

In Spring 2014, I began documenting performance with video to communicate the body's reflexive movements in extreme scenarios. In the video, *Balance* (Figure 4), my feet attempt to

⁷ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human-World*. (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc., 1996), 65.

⁸ Boris Groys, *Art Power*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), *The City in the Age of Touristic Reproduction*, location 1322.

grip an angled rock, inevitably slipping. In *33 Degrees Fahrenheit* (Figure 5) the video focuses on my feet walking 33 degree Fahrenheit water, catching reactions of the body in physically enduring circumstances. In the crux of the video, my foot reflexively shakes due to the cold and recoils when touching an unexpected plant in the water. A third video, *Cliff* (Figure 6), projects onto the floor and shows hands moving back and forth on the edge of a cliff. Standing on a wooden platform, approximating the size of the cliff, the viewer can look down at the hands with a similar distance. This piece investigates the mental repetitiveness of a sustained, suspenseful action. Collectively, these three videos function as an analysis of the body's boundaries, using physical movements as a vehicle for psychologically integrating a sense of understanding for the surrounding place.

In the summer of 2014, my working methods shifted from an approach of analysis to playfulness during a residency at Nes Studios in Skagaströnd, Iceland. At Nes, I created a series of sculptures made out of materials I had collected from garbage, abandoned art materials, and soil. Fleshy pieces of pink latex, malleable remains of AMACO scultamold, and painted aluminum foil were combined intuitively, with a focus on how each material intersects. For example, with the piece *Reproduction* (Figure 7), I gave these sculptures human attributes and oriented them towards the soil, suggesting a relationship between humanity and the earth. Through physical manipulation and material choice, these pieces personified themes of dependability, power, and visceral connection, yet allowed flexibility in interpretation. Conceptually, the book *Collapse* by Jarrod Diamond was a huge influence, as it concerns the rise and fall of societies who depended on the prosperity of ecological places. Applying human attributes to this work became a form of

anthropomorphizing the sculptures, a practice that has more recently and intentionally emerged in my work.

BODY: Tension

After working at Nes Studio, I hiked the Laugevegur Trail in South Iceland. This made me reconsider the imagery and videos I saw and watched prior to traveling – there was a dissonance between what I imagined through digital media and experienced in actual, present time.

Beginning the hike, I understood that my desire to visit Iceland was far from unique, as a majority of other visitors have access the same circulating, digital content.⁹ As art critic and media theorist, Boris Groys states, “Digital images have...an ability to originate, to multiply, and to distribute themselves through the open fields of contemporary means...immediately and anonymously.”¹⁰ This ability to self-distribute and congruently conflict with our understanding of a place, creates an underlying psychological tension. The circulation of images and videos signal a sense of the uncanny, due to their augmentation of reality and position as an “other.”

Exposure to these digital sources provides a sense of experience without locating the physical body to that place. Through anticipation and fantasy, these images force a projection of one’s self into the graphic context. Groys reiterates a similar idea, “that the digital image is a

⁹ This is evident from Iceland’s escalation in tourism over the past four years, increasing by more than 500,000 people.

¹⁰ Ibid., *From Image to Image File and Back: Art in the Age of Digitalization*, location 1048.

copy...but the event of its visualization is an original event.”¹¹ Merleau-Ponty describes this scenario in relationship to paintings, as their texture provides a living space for the eye. Similarly, the first video I saw of a girl backpacking through Iceland functioned as a mental portal for understanding Iceland’s atmospheric qualities. Yet, the lack of details in the video became apparent when I experienced the actual, physical place. For Merleau-Ponty, the “discrete sensorial messages are only the punctuations or the caesurae” within a place. Here, he implies that while we absorb the highlights through visual images, not enough information is present for complete understanding.¹² While digital imagery serves as an independent, mental experience of place, additional information of atmospheric details is pertinent for embodiment.

Additionally, Trigg emphasizes the value of experience beyond visual stimuli. “The body intervenes in its own materiality, providing a bridge to our being-in-the-world that would be damaged were it the case that human beings were solely mental substances, he argues”¹³ Similarly, Abram claims that the human body is an intelligent being, connected to the Earth, aware of such separations.¹⁴ Again, physically moving towards the Grand Teton summit functions as a method for accumulating memory and assimilation of place. While this tension is not always brought into conscious awareness, an underlying psychological conflict surfaces,

¹¹ Ibid., *From Image to Image File and Back: Art in the Age of Digitalization*, location 1073.

¹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible; followed by working notes*. (Evanston [Ill.]: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 421.

¹³ Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, Chap. 3, The Lived Body, location 1641.

¹⁴ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human-World*, 65.

separating visual experiences from sensations and action. Our innate ability to distinguish a filtered, altered image of “nature” and a physical, ecological place, often translates as an uncanny or disconcerting feeling. The occurrence of this psychological tension and innate awareness of it is the aim of my video *Walk by Moonlight* (Figure 8).

Walk by Moonlight conveys an atmosphere of desire and unease by combining symbolic imagery and unaccountable action. This is achieved through depictions of the moon, oscillating between a blurry distance and close clarity. The moon, a loaded symbol of transitions, mystery, and the “other,” becomes intersected by fragments of bizarre human conduct such as feet moving on a glittery surface and a mouth filled with golden flakes. Other embellishments, such as gold glitter, fill the figure’s environment. This imagery strives to create fantastic, other worlds, specifically attempting to assimilate surreal ideas into a lived reality. Additionally, nature defies usual expectations when purple water rushes backwards into the sea and the sky turns pink. Sound connects this disjointed imagery and emphasizes the intensity of psychological conflict. As the figure confronts possibilities of estrangement from an idolized world, the atmosphere suggests an unknown and unfitting surrounding.

Working in this conceptual direction, along with a method for sequencing images and sound, I developed my next set of videos. I began incorporating more research on the connotations associated with gold, as its vibrant characteristics are visually compelling and imply associations with power, desire, and glamour. Further, the implications of gold relate to the ideologies projected on nature, as both provoke fantasies of desire and escapism.

The implications of gold threaded between several of my works, reinforces the common depictions created in film as an object of wonder and lustful desire. In Guillermo del Toro's film *Cronos* (1993) a mysterious golden device serves as the entry for eternal life and source of obsession for main character Jesus Gris. In Paolo Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty* (2013), gold subtly embellishes background details and the overall atmosphere with shades of yellow. As the main character indulges in parties among models and high art, gold functions as a reference for decadence, beauty, and a lavish lifestyle. Popularly, Peter Jackson's movie *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012) narrates a search for gold treasure, coupled with the inescapable possessiveness of the powerful gold ring. Additionally, Matthew Barney's 2014 film *River of Fundament* symbolically saturates the viewer with golden objects through inspirations of Egyptian reincarnation from Norman Mailer's book *Ancient Evenings*. Here, gold symbolizes immortality and ancient deities, contrasted with the abject, laborious process of reaching high position through a river of feces. Shades of gold take form in satin bed sheets, a metallic straightjacket, and molten bronze. These, among the many cultural implications relating to gold, assimilate into our understanding, becoming an emblem for Timothy Morton's idea of "romantic consumerism." As objects of desire, they create fantastical imaginations for embodying supreme experiences of eternal life, transcendence, power, and escape, similar to what's desired through the construction of nature.¹⁵

BODY: Surreal Place

My next three pieces incorporate many of the associations described with gold, yet refrain from using the actual material. Instead, this work focuses on the process of desire and construction of

¹⁵ Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 109.

experiences in the natural world. For my candidacy review in Spring 2015, I created a three-channel video installation titled *The Search* (Figure 9), *The Experience* (Figure 10), and *The Aftermath* (Figure 11). Stemming from ideas of desire and a surreal sense of place, each video played in intervals with each other, projected on two different walls within the same room. *The Search* investigates the deep-rooted human desire to obtain physical objects of beauty. Located at Crater of Diamonds State Park in Murfreesboro, AR, individuals partake in the laborious process of combing through dirt, hopeful to find diamonds. Specific movements, such as circulating water, echo the mesmerizing effects stimulated by luscious objects. Accompanying sounds express the psychological fluctuation between anxious anticipation and calm endurance. Specifically emphasizing the physical and mental process of searching, the character's attempts never unearth failure or success. My methods of shooting and editing this video were greatly influenced by Camille Henrot's video sequencing techniques in *The Strife of Love in A Dream*, and *Cynopolis* as they repeat and arrange images like sculptures in space. For the video piece *The Experience*, detailed and color-saturated videos of plants and the body were heavily influenced by the work of Pipilotti Rist such as in *Pour Your Body Out* and *Pepperminta*. Filled with enchanting colors of pink, green, and blue, *The Experience* depicts a character's fleeting first encounter with a natural surrounding. Displaying her imaginative nature, the character wears attire of violent pink and wonders sporadically through a lush green environment. Sounds of a high-pitched voice and a bubbling vortex accentuate the nature of this occurrence. *The Experience* documents the ephemeral, over-hyped qualities of a new experience, while also critiquing its own excessiveness.

The Aftermath follows a figural creature roaming through a landscape as it undergoes both destruction and revitalization. Between a burnt forest floor and interior, sterile room, the character repeats an undistinguishable ritual. Upward dissipating particles of smoke and steam appear consistently throughout the video to indicate signs of warning and mysticism. The similarities between these particles and the character's white, ghostly legs work towards creating visual unity. The temporality of subject matter receding and appearing throughout the scene becomes an applicable illusion for our own mental states. It imitates how restless minds are driven to oscillate between known, existing areas and a wandering imagination of indistinguishable places. Several of David Lynch's films, especially in regard to sound, and Ingmar Bergman's film *Through a Glass Darkly*, influenced my approach to depicting specific atmospheres and psychological spaces. These sources guided my knowledge on the manipulation of color, sequencing of scenes, and importance of sound while striving to create a surreal sense of place.

Focused on the process in which we desire and undergo experiences of a place, led to a further investigation for what details contribute towards those sensations. Combined with my drive to always collect detailed, close-up shots, I began to investigate the phenomenological perspectives on objects and their contribution towards experiencing an ecological location.

BODY: Becoming Things

Comprehending our surroundings independent of human thought is essentially impossible. Yet, Philosopher Dylan Trigg describes place as an "empirical idea...a reality independent of human

life.”¹⁶ Essentially, we understand objects in our surrounding the same way we understand our own human bodies, through the categorization of names, identities, and roles.¹⁷ Perceived for human use, we see the details of a natural environment as objects. *Objects* become *things* when they have the ability to self-arrange and affect us, as theorist Jane Bennett describes in her book *Vibrant Matter*. Collectively, *things* formulate the details of a place, taking on a life of their own as this creates a phenomenon.¹⁸

Additionally, when objects become things, they also become an *other*, a present, unclassifiable energy. Jon Rafman demonstrates this in his disturbing video *Main Squeeze* where the violent rupture of an unattended washing machine, is the dominant imagery. Stated by Merleau-Ponty, “the enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen...visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world and its cohesion is that of a thing.” In some scenarios, things’ animation and our potential to be “seen” by something unknown, creates tension or repulsion, perceiving these indefinable entities as uncanny and surreal. Dylan Trigg describes human existence as gaining a sense of alienation within our own inhabitation, conflicting with the presence of *things*, as they are the sole proprietors for our estrangement.¹⁹ This is also an aim for my video *The Aftermath*. The sense of the uncanny occurs under many

¹⁶ Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, Introduction, A Phenomenology of Place, location 319.

¹⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹ Dylan Trigg, *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror*. (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2013), 25.

scenarios of conflict and the recognition for such sensations is an innate response to the dualistic, inconsistency within the perception process.

An example of a merge between things and a bodily *other* occurs in *Solaris* (1972), a film by Andrei Tarkovsky. This film explores the materiality of the body and a sense of surreal alienation as its main character Kris Kelvin is assigned to a space ship and encounters repeated, vivid hallucinations of his former wife, Hari. Her alien body is capable of regeneration and adaptability to harmful scenarios while aboard the space ship. Her impalpable, yet convincing representation provokes states of nostalgia for Kris, as he reminisces for her human presence, yet finds himself in conflict with her *otherness*. In one scene, Hari undergoes a fatal accident with the metal siding of a door, recovering almost instantaneously, and providing the viewer with an understanding for her malleable, fleshy substance. The depiction of her adaptable and fluid nature as a human *other* connects with both my past and current work on the human body's adaptable assimilation of place.

Things create ambience as they work within an interconnected system of relations, similar to the essential union between human's mind and body.²⁰ Heidegger was a leading figure in proposing that we dualistically categorize *things* from objects on a conscious intentionality of interpretation, rather than through instinct and sensation. He argues, the way *things* or objects are presented is simply how they are. However, work for the exhibition *In Rift* creates a need for the viewer to extract relationships and intentionality through sound and time-based installation. As

²⁰ Graham Harman. *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenology to Thing*. (Chicago and LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court. 2007), Chap. 2, Objects and Things, location 556, 29.

Timothy Morton describes in *Ecology without Nature* “Ambience denotes a sense of circumambient surrounding *world*. It suggests something material and physical, though somewhat intangible, as if space itself had a material aspect.”²¹ Philosopher Graham Harman, says that “things are events, not perceptual or physical occurrences, they are “how” not a “what.” Harman describes the way we experience *things* goes beyond their physical properties of color, weight, shape, and scale, into a deeper phenomenon, often grasped through instinct rather than comprehension. Physicists refer to a similar theory as *Dark Matter*, an essence that is not constricted by the laws of gravity or visual evidence.²² Additionally Harman states that “in some way phenomenology misses the point, since it claims that the true being of a thing lies in the way it is present in our minds,” rather than absorbed through experience²³ *Things* and the value that derives from an ecological place are perpetually moving and evolving, requiring us to do the same.

WORKS IN EXHIBITION

The exhibition *In Rift* highlights the chasm in space and time as our mind and body dualistically experience places, *things*, imagery, and ambience. The exhibition is divided into two parts, allowing the viewer to experience moving events and orient their body around work in the space. Providing the ability to see, hear, and sense *things*, this work comprises the details that formulate an atmosphere of the natural world. Depicting ecological locations through *things* and my own

²¹ Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 33-34.

²² Robin Wall Kimmerer and Krista Tippett, *On Being: The Intelligience in All Kinds of Life*. Audio Podcast, MP3, 21:07.

²³ Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenology to Thing*, Chap. 2, Equipment, location 450, 23.

intuitive subjectivity, the work is an attempt to restore some sense of aura to the *things*' presence and the ever-shifting ecological sphere.²⁴

The first piece, *Loose Liquids* (Figure 12), contains specific imagery of water, rock, and plant life, and incorporates digital, amorphous blobs. Cadence within the imagery derives from human movements such as breathing, shivering, and rolling. The sequencing of this content illuminates the memories, and characteristics of such details in a place. As the screens position at different heights and angles on the wall, their arrangement connotes a disorder to the *things* and their ephemeral tendencies. This work is an attempt to view *things* from another perspective. Fictitious, imagined, and fantasized, the content unavoidably becomes anthropomorphized through human subjectivity. As a whole, this piece explores how a location's details accumulatively contribute to an overall experience as we strive to embody and personify the things within our surrounding. Accompanying this installation, reverberating sounds reference movements such as squishing liquids, ripping voices, and buzzing digital devices. In this piece, the transitory state occurs between perceiving an illusory environment through sources of augmented reality, and by experiencing those components in actual, present time.

The second piece, *Gorge* (Figure 13), contains two facing videos of steam and rock, providing an immersive experience among dissipating particles and low-frequency sound. Amorphous, golden objects function as an emblem for romantic consumerism, the visually enticing, and idealized attraction to nature. Dispersed as a field, these golden clay objects sit on shiny, gridded plates, in reference to the digital screen. The arrangement of objects in a field references phenomenology's

²⁴ Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, 63.

use of the term *field* as a “area of action” and place of “energy.”²⁵ While *Loose Liquids* focuses on the mental experiences by use of the screen, this piece allows an opportunity for a mental and physical unified experience. As the word *Rift* defines an open space split between two geological formations, this work investigates the in-between, transitional states of perception and experience, body and mind.

Overall, this exhibition functions as an ambient simulation of the ever-shifting process of experiencing ecological places through mental-physical embodiment. Reinforced with the title *In Rift*, the exhibition accentuates chasms in our understanding of things and place and highlights our own body’s malleability while absorbing those properties.

SUMMARY

The in-between approach to *In Rift* purposefully strives to put the viewer in a mental and physical state of transition. Removing any reference to a specific geographical location, the process of embodiment becomes the emphasis for this work, as well as the particular atmosphere for the viewer to absorb. The vehicles and mediums for which we perceive the natural world will continue to evolve, provoking a tension as we strive to piece together any oppositional forces in understanding our surrounding environments. My ambition is to recognize these shifts, how they affect human relationships with ecological places, and to embrace the uncanny sense of conflict these changes provoke.

²⁵ Ibid., 104.

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Walter Benjamin speaks about the loss of aura through multiplicity. Additionally, he mentions, the medium for which we perceive the world around us is continually evolving.²⁶ These ever-shifting modes of perception affect the way humans adapt and digest a surrounding environment. While the globalization of imagery presents us with new understandings of ecological places, that imagery can also influence our capacity for understanding and embodying such locations. Developing forms of digital media, such as virtual reality, provoke believable, immersive-like experiences. Yet this form of media still skews perceptions of the particularities of the places shown, failing to fully replicate the ephemeral components in an atmosphere. As digital media extracts only select information about a place, the human mind-body also becomes limited in the process and scope of embodiment.

The fluctuating manner of *In Rift* strives to convey the tension between experiencing “nature” through digital copies and experiencing an atmosphere of ecological places through embodiment. The goal is not to advocate technological regression, but to question the differences and ways our human bodies adapt to progressing technologies. As new developments in digital media evolve how we perceive the natural world, the malleability of our mind and body also becomes in conflict, creating greater needs for adaptability.

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. (USA: Prism Key Press, 2010). 17.

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Figure 1: *Stress Reactions*, rubber, gesso, wire, 2013



Figure 2: *Stamina I*, resusci anne heat activated paper, applied friction, 2013



Figure 3: *Stamina II*, resusci anne heat activated paper, applied friction, 2013



Figure 4: *Balance*, still image from video, 2014



Figure 5: *33 Degrees Fahrenheit*, still image from video, 2014



Figure 6: *Cliff*, wood and video installation, 2014



Figure 7: *Reproduction*, paper mâché, sculptamold, dirt, plastic, aluminum foil, 2014

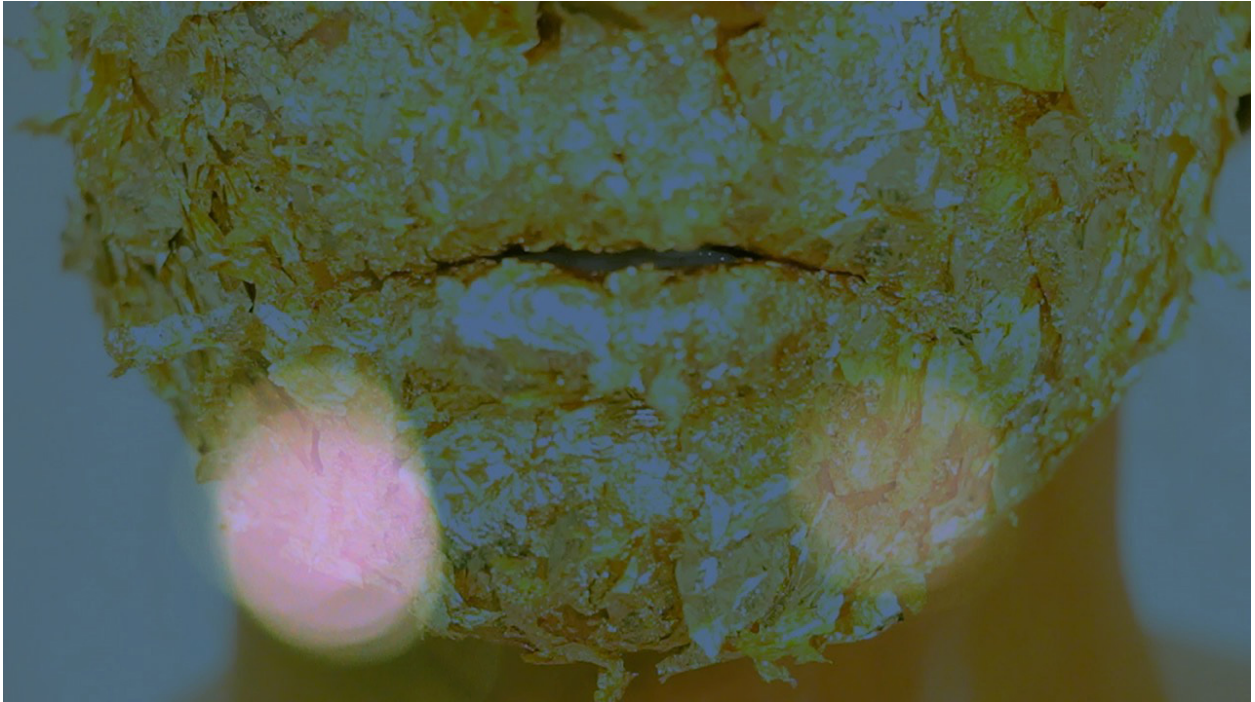


Figure 8: *Walk by Moonlight*, still image from video, 2014



Figure 9: *The Search*, still image from video, 2015



Figure 10: *The Experience*, still image from video, 2015



Figure 11: *The Aftermath*, still image from video, 2015



Figure 12: *Loose Liquids*, 5 channel TV Installation, 2016



Figure 13: *Gorge*, 2 channel projected installation, plastic, ceramics, sculptamold, 2016