

LOOKING DOWN SEEKING YOU ARE HERE:

remote sensing intimacy and images in the narrow gate of here and now

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

by

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*Visual and Critical Studies
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Spring 2020*

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Abstract

Out of a love for love, images, codes, riddles, potentiality, and temporality, this text utilizes remote sensing to develop ideas around interpersonal ways of seeing and sensing in the present. By stitching together personal anecdotes, media + photography theory, associative writing, and images, this text navigates three related areas of inquiry in the technological era (21st century): remote sensing + satellite technology, love + affect, and aerial photography. The first section of this thesis focuses on defining and expanding remote sensing. At times remote sensing will refer to how personal experiences and communication are mediated by digital sensing. Other times, remote sensing will refer to our relationship to images and photographs—specifically discussing the influence of remote sensing technology, satellite imagery, aerial photography, and what I am calling the vertical gaze, on contemporary ways of seeing and sensing. The following sections look curiously and critically at these technologies, and how they structure our lives, loves, homes, and relationships. I am looking at the technical and socio-political applications of the vertical gaze, as informed by the writings of Laura Kurgan and Joanna Zylińska. I consider the prominence of the vertical gaze by analyzing objects of inquiry such as: The National Collection of Aerial Photography, Google Maps, The Blue Marble (1972) and subsequent images of the whole earth. Looking down seeking YOU ARE HERE, and questioning what it means to find intimacy, presence, or comfort in measurability, resolution, substitution, mediation, and a sense of orientation.

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Acknowledgments

A toast !



Cheers

Two cranes with man baskets pictured in celebration. A moment of gratitude for every person and place standing with me through this project.

I would like to thank my exceptional advisors, Shawn Smith and Terri Kapsalis, for their hard work, support, and presence. I am so grateful for Katie Giritlian for her time, close reading, trust, and warmth. Also, extending gratitude to my thesis cohort for their support and love, not to mention having had the gift of learning from (and alongside) you all.

Thank you to my dear friend Ola for slowing me down, hyping me up, holding my hand, and so much more through every page and moment of this. Thank you to Gabrielle Welsh, Lucas Rief, Max Hart, Miles Hogerty, and Susana Cardenas-Soto for helping, holding, and encouraging me.

Thank you to all of the places and people in my life that I can call home. Thank you to all those dear to me located on W Walton St, for your friendship, care, and support. Thank you to Gloria Cowdin and Aliza Russell for your love from afar. In closing, I am sending so much love and gratitude to my parents, Wesley Brockman, Brent Kroh, and Mary Kroh, as well as THE HOUSE OF LOVE and all those who pass through it.

xoxo

Pure will in every moment, baby... In a surveillance state, everyone is a performer... but when surveillance is weaponized, it can project limits on human interaction, or at least, that's how I see it.

So, I advise pure will in every moment, beloved. (What that mean?)

—R.A.P Ferreira

I come back here all the time—standing in t-pose, floating over this indiscernible space, looking down seeking a sign that reads YOU ARE HERE.

This indiscernible space is what I have come to know as the narrow gate of here and now.¹ This here and now has less to do with naming a specific mark in time that holds a moment and more to do with the instability of time and space. The ability to stand in (or rather the inevitability of always standing in) the narrow gate of here and now is something I have found comfort in. Comfort in knowing the idea of a single unmediated moment of presence is errored. A comfort found in acknowledging unavoidable and precarious intersections of presence and intimacy—physical, digital, and otherwise immaterial.

Remote sensing in the narrow gate of here and now. In what follows remote sensing will be used to discuss the influence of machinic vision² on interpersonal ways of seeing and sensing, contemporary photographic conditions, and experiences of love and intimacy. Remote sensing is not limited to the proper definition—although the proper definition and associations bring about my concerns and suspicions. It will encompass an expansive and personal understanding of remote sensing, as seeing and sensing situated at a distance in space or time. At times remote sensing will refer to how personal experiences and communication are mediated by digital sensing. Other times, remote sensing will refer to our relationship to images and photographs—specifically discussing the influence of remote sensing technology, satellite imagery, aerial photography, and what I am calling the vertical gaze, on contemporary ways of seeing and sensing. This is not to privilege distance in the way of hope or a holy experience. It is the cold underbelly that I am pivoting towards: the fallacy of neutrality,³ multiplying distance, layers of meaning, and limited access to the acquired and/or extracted data.

2. When I say machinic vision I am referring to Joanna Zylińska's use of the phrase/concept in relation to what she calls nonhuman photography. She explains nonhuman photography as images/photographs that do not 'picture' human presence, are not made by humans, and/or are not for humans. Joanna Zylińska, *Nonhuman Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 51.

1. The phrase "Narrow Gate of Here and Now" is sourced from Boris Groys, "Comrades of Time," *e-flux*, no. 11 (June 2009). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/11/61345/comrade>

3. Media theorist Nora Khan, addresses the prominence and subsequent desire for this vantage point by explaining how the god's eye view asserts itself through most of the technology we use. This assertion thus influences how we position ourselves and see/sense the world, as "worldbuilder," sovereign, central, or at the very least neutral. She explains that particularly Western technology intentionally presents as neutral (oftentimes synonymous with 'good') as a means of hiding its political imperatives. She calls this fallacy of neutrality in Western technology (speaking specifically to literal machine seeing software) "...a shifting, soothing mask...which is constantly adjusting itself through design to hide the real ideology of neoliberal, techno-positivist capitalism..." Nora N. Khan, "I See What I Want To." *In Seeing, Naming, Knowing*. (New York: The Brooklyn Rail, 2019).



Remote Sensing in the Narrow Gate of Here and Now

Someone on tinder told me they think I am “...using object relations as a site for constructing narrative time— as a means of solidifying temporality.”⁴

This stranger’s observation is true in the way that I have located the narrow gate as a place for these ways of sensing and seeing. This gate is a fictitious site where I imagine remote sensing occurs—one’s body momentarily floating above linear time and geographic space. I think this narrow gate could be something likened to post digital/post-internet, or whatever best describes the contemporary experience of external knowledge, online-ness, and displaced temporality. The narrow gate of here and now is the site for remote sensing and the vertical gaze.

I imagine myself standing in t-pose over the gate. T-pose (alternatively bind pose) was first introduced to me as a friend of mine joked that I often take on the physical form when gesturing a feeling of being whole and grounded at a specific moment in time. It is a default pose for a 3D model figure before it is animated, also appearing at times in some role playing games during the introductory character build. The pose has a comical and non-sequitur appearance, resulting in various memes including or referencing the pose.⁵ T-pose has become something of a symbol or gesture of groundlessness— simultaneously carrying instability and comfort one experiences when remote sensing.

4. Anonymous, *Tinder message to author*, 2018.

5. “T-pose.” *Wikipedia*. Last modified March 26, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T-pose>

6. United States Federal Government: Earth Science. n.d. "What Is Remote Sensing? Earthdata.nasa.gov, Accessed February 20, 2020. <https://earthdata.nasa.gov/learn/remote-sensing>.

At its most basic, remote sensing is the action and/or process of acquiring information about an object, place, or phenomenon, without making physical contact with it. Methods of remote sensing involve cameras and/or sensors in conjunction with satellites, airplanes, spacecrafts, etc. The data collected by these means is then transmitted, stored, processed, and manipulated digitally. There are countless alternative definitions of remote sensing, as the definition is dependent on the specific usage and technology across various disciplines and discourses. Some of the disciplines and various applications that make use of remote sensing are: geography, cartography, oceanography, archeology, agriculture, military observation, and state surveillance.⁶ Some specific examples of these are: traffic control, detection of storms and weather, creation of Google Earth, mapping soil types, observing construction and building alterations in search of tax-evaders, tracking the distance of migrating birds, and an investigation of fraudulent crop insurance claims.⁷ Remote sensing processes are most notably used for military purposes and within earth science disciplines. I am using the term and action to develop ideas around remote sensing intimacy, bridging the experience of intimacy with digital communication and an acquisition of data.

Telepresence is a sense of being in a different physical location or participating in a distant event, by means of mechanical devices. Telepresence elicits sensory fantasy— akin to virtual reality or what I can imagine floating in a sensory deprivation tank might feel like. Remote sensing is less about tricking (or tricking out) the senses. It is upfront with its immateriality. Its visual representations are poorly rendered, like crunchy maps of inexpressible data. There is something about the representation being an inconsequential poor fake⁸ in an era of deep fakes.⁹ This is not to say that a telepresence robot is that of a deep fake in its intentions, but the gesture is in the same vein.

8. Kelsey Lu, "Poor Fake", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRG6dDrpj0s>, 4:42, April 18, 2019.

Telepresence and remote sensing are both tools used to mend an absence of time, or gaps in knowing all at a distance. Remote sensing reminds us of our first prayer, or a prayer wheel, outsourcing faith in one way or another—while telepresence is a cold fiction out of touch, despite its pseudo physicality.

7. GIS Geography. "100 Earth Shattering Remote Sensing Applications & Uses." GIS Geography.com, February 10, 2019. <https://gisgeography.com/100-earth-remote-sensing-applications-uses/>.

9. Deepfake is a technique for human image synthesis based on artificial intelligence. It is used to combine and superimpose existing images and videos onto source images or videos using a machine learning technique known as generative adversarial network. "Deepfake." Wikipedia. Last modified April 12, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepfake>



Image of Kim Kardashian (physically present) and Kanye West (present via telepresence robot) at exhibition opening in 2016. Retrieved from <https://hypebeast.com/2016/8/kanye-west-famous-sculpture-exhibit>. Accessed March 10th, 2020.

Looking down seeking you are here, Looking down seeking a sign reading you are here,

Where we are, these days, seems less a matter of fixed locations and stable reference points and more a matter of networks, which is to say of displacements and transfers, of nodes defined only by their relative positions in a shifting field...Orienting oneself in this open and ongoing interaction appears all the more imperative and all the more impossible. "Where am I" in what? Where am I, where? In the global market, in the universe, in the family, in a corporate database, in some collective history, in the city or the desert, in the Internet, on the information superhighway?

—Laura Kurgan

Our sense of spatial and temporal orientation has changed dramatically in recent years, prompted by new technologies of surveillance, tracking, and targeting. One of the symptoms of this transformation is the growing importance of aerial views: overviews, Google Map views, satellite views. We are growing increasingly accustomed to what used to be called a God's-eye view. On the other hand, we also notice the decreasing importance of a paradigm of visibility that long dominated our vision: linear perspective. Its stable and single point of view is being supplemented (and often replaced) by multiple perspectives, overlapping windows, distorted flight lines, and divergent vanishing points. How could these changes be related to the phenomena of groundlessness and permanent fall?

—Hito Steyerl

The vertical gaze is a vantage point most commonly attributed to that of an aerial photograph. Alternatively, it can be a birds eye view, god's eye view, view from above, remote sensing, top down system, a transcendental experience, a means to determine the relative position of something or one's self, and onward. **A seeking you are here,¹⁰ you are whole, and you are here actually to inhabit an information system.¹¹**

10. *Seeking a sign a sign reading you are here, seeking enacted through orientation and separation. The separation could be a subsequent consequence of the process itself, or a consequence of the absence built into the necessity of the gesture. The separation could also be an intentional distancing, potentially due to an overwhelming closeness, a means of momentarily escaping the body and its labors, or a grounding exercise that folds in on itself.*

11. *"You Are Here: Actually inhabit an information system" is the first project in Laura Kurgan's Book "Close Up at a Distance." She is speaking specifically about geographic information systems from the early 1990's to today (2020). She is concerned with GPS (global positioning systems and remote sensing technology collects and located data spatially. Explaining, "...once that point is recorded it can be linked to or labeled with any sort of data: the address can be connected to the name of a road, a dollar amount...a crime committed or thwarted...or almost anything else that can be store in a database—and that included nonquantitative data." In Kurgan's project she uses a GPS receiver and antenna to digitize information of her movements and location, explaining that she had the opportunity to "actually inhabit an information system." She explains that the system was scattered, uncertain, and confused. Her project is not directly related to what I am discussing, but I am interested in the underpinnings, play, and scattered nature of technological sensing, or simply inhabiting (often inadvertently) an information system of any form. Laura Kurgan. Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics. (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2013). 59.*

The prominence of the vertical gaze began with aerial photography in the twentieth century: born out of cartography, accelerated by government surveillance of agriculture, as well as the military operations and mapping in World War II.¹² The vertical gaze can be most practically and legibly exemplified as a relationship with maps, orientation, navigation, and use of physical space to assist in structuring one's reality. Today the vertical gaze encompasses image making and vision through tools/technological means such as satellite imagery, google street view, drone photography, CCTV (video surveillance/security cameras), etc. These technologies are becoming an increasingly inseparable part of our lives, offering vantage points that are outside of human vision and at times human agency. From the micro—looking at your childhood corner store on google street view¹³—to the macro—looking at The Blue Marble (1972)¹⁴—these images embody how the vertical gaze alters our understanding of images, representation, time, and reality at large.

13. *The specific action of looking at your childhood corner store via google street view was a short lived social media trend, but in working on this project many people have shared that they use google street view in a similar way (myself included). I am interested in the use of google street view to visit another geographic location and temporal moment (as you can view multiple years of imaging/documentation), enacting a sort of time travel. Is this impulse and desire based in nostalgia—longing for home, the familiar, and/or comfort found in orientation.*

14. *The Blue Marble is an image of the whole earth taken in 1972 on Apollo 17. It was not the first image of the whole Earth, but is one of the most prominent and widely distributed. Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. n.d. "The Whole Earth Disk: An Iconic Image of the Space Age." [airandspace.si.edu](https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/whole-earth-disk-iconic-image-space-age), Accessed February 2, 2020. <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/whole-earth-disk-iconic-image-space-age>*

12. *The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. n.d. "Cartographic and Architectural Records: Aerial Photography." [archives.gov](https://www.archives.gov/research/cartographic/aerial-photography), Accessed November 18, 2019. <https://www.archives.gov/research/cartographic/aerial-photography>*

The National Collection of Aerial Photography (NCAP), based in Edinburgh, Scotland, holds one of the largest collections of international aerial photography. The NCAP differentiates two types of aerial photography: vertical photographs and oblique photographs. I find the differentiation, as well as how they define the two, interesting in regards to the rise of images of this nature. The NCAP explains that the vertical image is more useful and popular, due to the accessibility of quantitative information (vertical images can be easily scaled and measured). Citing potential usefulness as for something like assessing property boundaries. They go on to explain that the oblique image provides the viewer with easy comprehension, but the details and physical features of the image are often challenging to recognize and quantify.¹⁵ The descriptions show how value is placed on the acquisition of information over visual comprehension. This acquisition of information, alongside surveillance, was the initial drive for producing vertical gaze images ie. aerial photography. These driving forces are still found within remote sensing technology and other digital interactions.

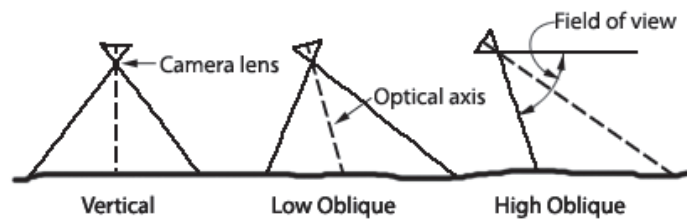
The value placed on the acquisition of data through aerial photography and verticality cannot be ignored as it informs not only our social and political lives, but also our viewing and image making practices. In *Nonhuman Photography*, Johanna Zylinksa discusses the technical and cultural algorithms that shape our image making devices, as well as our viewing practices in general. Zynlinska explains by articulating, “To speak of the photographic apparatus is of course not just to argue for a straightforward replacement of the human vision with a machinic one, **but rather to recognise the mutual intertwining and co-constitution of the organic and the machinic, the technical and the discursive, in the production of vision, and hence of the world.**”¹⁶

15. *The National Collection of Aerial Photography*. n.d. “Vertical and Oblique Aerial Photography.” NCAP.org. Accessed December 2, 2019. <https://ncap.org.uk/feature/vertical-and-oblique-aerial-photography>

16. Laura Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics*. (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2013). 78.



Cropped Google Maps image (screenshot), low oblique angle (the space between vertical map view and street view). Depicting 1909 W 42nd Ave. Kansas City, KS 66103 (My mom and step-dad's home/home to many). December 1, 2019.



Camera orientation for various types of aerial photographs



How a grid of section lines appears on various types of photos.

Diagram showing differing perspectives and camera orientations within aerial photography. Retrieved from <https://www.e-education.psu.edu/geog480/node/444>. Accessed March 8, 2020.

Our relationship to images of the whole earth helps to understand the machinic vision's influence on human vision and how we understand time, representation, and our relationship to the world. The following images (page 14) exist within the realm of the vertical gaze even if not formally representing the vertical gaze. The most notable images of the whole earth are Earthrise (1968), The Blue Marble (1972), The Blue Marble: The Next Generation (2005), and The Black Marble (2012). Of these images, Earthrise, is an outlier. In *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics*, Laura Kurgan explains that Earthrise depicts the whole earth from the position orbiting the moon. In the frame of the photo you can see the surface of the moon as a sort of foreground to the earth, which helps to orient the viewer. The other images show the earth freestanding or free floating in space.¹⁷

All of these images, with the exception of The Blue Marble (1972),¹⁸ were made using satellite images and remotely sensed data. Today the image of the whole earth is constantly updated with new data, creating a patchwork and mesh of nonlinear time. The Blue Marble (1972) is one of the most widely distributed images in history, and some attribute its popularity over its predecessors to the surge of environmental activism at the time. Not only were these images instigators for a planetary consciousness, but also produced a problematic idea of a planetary unity or common humanity. Viewing these images creates a strange totalizing experience (with the potential to assert narratives of a common humanity, assertion of power, and erasure of difference), while simultaneously one of disjointed space and time—an incomprehensible sense of orientation, in which we are remote sensing, but not on the ground or floating.¹⁹

These images, programs, and channels are not neutral. In Hito Steyerl's article, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," she explores the politics of linear perspective vs. the vertical. She notes, "The view from above is a perfect metonymy for a more general verticalization of class relations in the context of an intensified class war from above—seen through the lenses and on the screens of military, entertainment, and information industries."²⁰ Not only is this vantage point a perfect metonymy for general class relations, but the vertical gaze was born out of information industries, governments, military and intelligence establishments. The vertical gaze sustains itself with the same kind of imperative—as the National Collection of Aerial Photography descriptions of vertical aerial photography illustrated.

17. Laura Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics*. (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2013). 9.

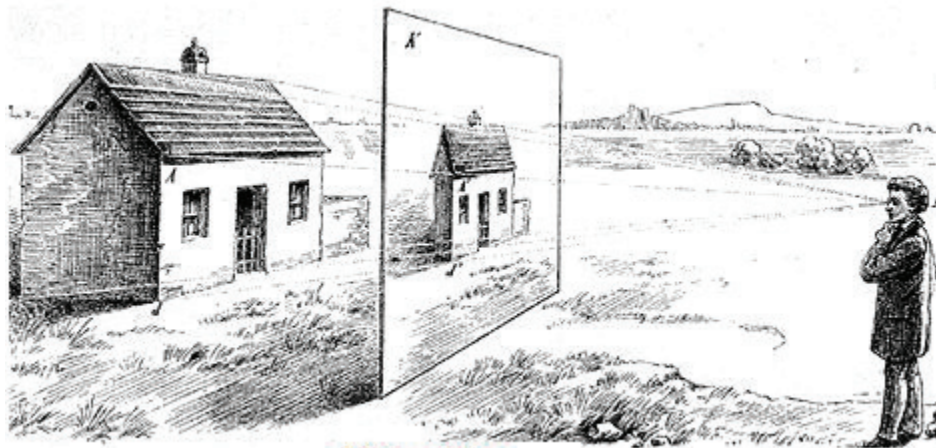
19. Kurgan. 12.

18. *The Blue Marble (1972) was shot on a Hasselblad—the image that circulates is a cropped and edited version of the original.*

20. Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective" *e-flux*, no. 24 (April 2011). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/>



Images showing various sides of the whole earth image from 1972-2012: *The Blue Marble 1972* — *The Blue Marble: The Next Generation 2005* — *The Black Marble 2012*. Retrieved from <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov>. Accessed March 2, 2020.



Picture Plane

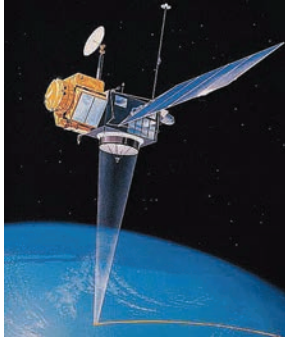
(and by grounded I mean more or less physically grounded)

We are floating when remote sensing. I am grounded while seeing and sensing the world in the picture plane. One can feel grounded emotionally or spiritually while remote sensing, which is not the case with these images of the earth. This differentiation is not meant to privilege the experience of being physically ground, but rather address the vantage points producing different experiences. Image retrieved from <https://www.slideshare.net/JimeAlenaGrabowski/intro-to-perspective>. Accessed December, 2019.

It seems there is a certain inescapability and/or necessity of the vertical gaze, given their origins and imperatives, as noted by Khan, Kurgan, and Steyerl. Not to mention, the co-constitution of machinic and human vision, as Zylinska explained. Even though we may be disoriented outside of Earthrise (1968), there is a desire to escape the linear time and space found in the picture plane, and find space in the displaced temporality and neutrality of the vertical gaze. Laura Kurgan mentions that these images [of the whole earth] being virtual does not make them any less true. Rather, they require us to pause and consider what we mean by truth. She explains that these images and other data-based images help us understand that the truth of images has become synonymous with resolution, measurability, and construction of algorithms to translate representation and reality.²¹ There is a comfort that comes with resolution, measurability, and a sense of orientation. Steyerl explains that our current groundlessness and loss of horizon (what I am calling the vertical gaze) puts us in a state of free fall, but we don't feel like we are falling at all.²² The vertical gaze disorients us, and we are required to confront the sense of comfort that comes with orientation, as well as the technologies and systems that allow one's body to momentarily float above a physical point located in a sea of limitations.

21. Laura Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics*. (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2013). 13.

22. Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective" *e-flux*, no. 24 (April 2011). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/>



Floating, falling, screaming YOU ARE HERE

*My humblest experience in truth came packaged as a thought in this sense:
The map is the only territory
When I say out loud, "the world is my idea"
When I say out loud, "suede Timbs on my feet make my cipher complete"
I am saying the same thing out loud
I find comfort in the allegory of the journey
Because I am in a literal search for brightness, voluptuousness
Brimming clarity in service of nothing else*

—R.A.P. Ferreria



"Floating in Sky - Skyrim Glitched". YouTube video, 0:48. Posted February 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8pr8uU20-E>. Accessed September 2019.

My dad introduced me to his girlfriend via her live stream on Twitch™ at thanksgiving in 2018—commenting to her for me a message reading: “Vivian says hi!” To which she replied, “Can’t wait to meet her!” After that she added me as a friend on Animal Crossing: Pocket Camp, sometimes visiting my campsite or sending me gifts. We met a few months after that.

@Bethesda, Skyrim, and Wesley Brockman

My dad and I communicate primarily through SMS text messages (often very cryptic, coded, and short lived in length), snapchat videos of his new son (my half brother), and various other app based interactions. That being said, it was abnormal to receive a DM via instagram at 12:03 am in March of 2019. “Call me for a sec?” It was even more surprising due to the string of text messages he had yet to reply to. So I rang.

A new ps4 sandbox game akin to Little Big Planet.

The conversation began to inform me that Dreams had just released a limited edition early access version. I was excited for him, as he had been talking about the creative potentialities the game had to offer for the past few years. The conversation then moved onto our unresolved text conversation regarding girlfriend’s health. He provided some context and details, but quickly changed the subject, “So you have been playing skyrim again, huh?”

From Dreams, to Skyrim, to Fallout, we discussed our relationship to these video games—as based in enjoyment, escapism, agency, and memory. He was dreaming about the VR opportunity of Skyrim, “...like if had VR Skyrim, the first thing I would do would be to go to Whiterun and my first house, Breezehome. And I would stand inside and get all teary, because it feels like home, you know?”

We discussed the ways in which you can make a home a home in Skyrim (as well as games like Oblivion and Fallout), by dropping collected goods onto the floor, positioning your targeting reticle each individual object, and carefully, but by nature haphazardly, dragging it through the air to its intended position. I reminded my dad of his home in Oblivion (the previous game in The Elder Scrolls series), where he had filled his room with a sea of wine bottles. Upon entering you were forced to push your little digital body through the bottles, resulting in an endless echo chamber of clicking glass. He was excited that I remembered this, and stated that every time he came across a bottle of wine he was reminded of his real mission in the game; turning around to deposit an inventory full of wine bottles to his humble home.

He took on a similar self assigned task in Fallout:²³ collecting and meticulously placing the stacks of pre-war money on the bed in his room, "...some of the stacks would slide between the side of the bed and the wall, and I would have to pull each individual stack from under the bed to place back on top. Then I would realize that I had literally spent hours sitting on the floor on the duplex reaching into the game to perfect my home."

²³.*Fallout is a post-apocalyptic action role-playing open world video game developed by Bethesda Game Studios and published by Bethesda Softworks. In Fallout you can collect the object of pre-war money/ stacks of bills which had little to no trade value for the common currency of Bottle caps.*

I revealed that I did not have a home in my current playthrough of Skyrim. To which he replied, "Oh no... You gotta have a home Viv. You have to have a place to go home, to go rest and regroup. I just feel like you haven't really played the game if you don't have a home."

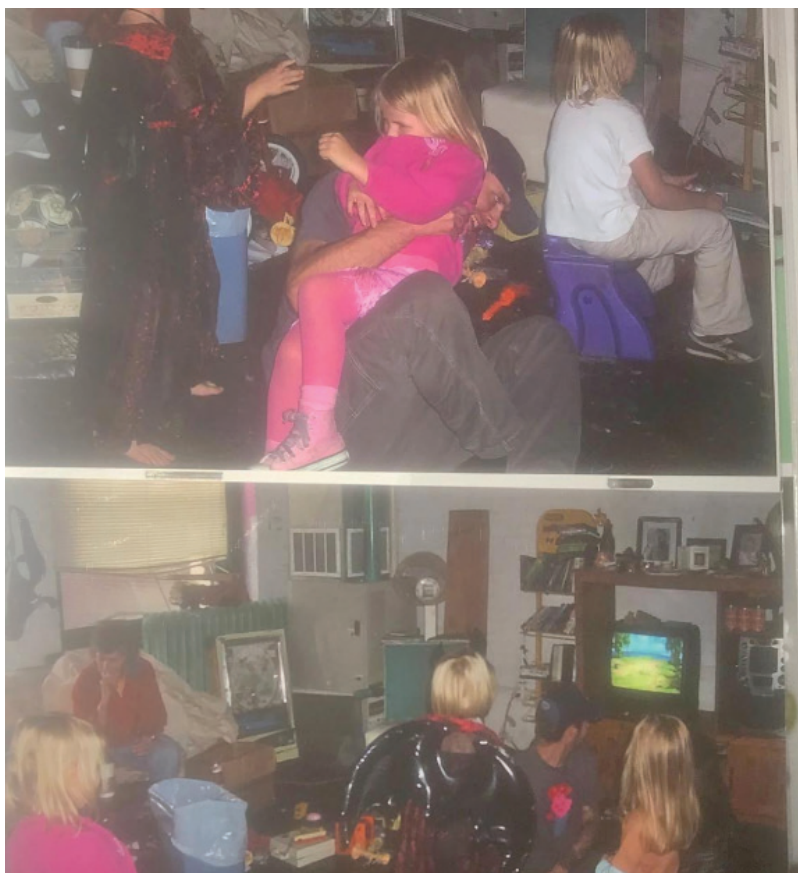
The last bit of our conversation involved other key parts of the game that brought a sense of fulfillment and wholeness to his experience. He had forgotten about a set of green glass armor that he crafted/enchanted in the game and spent a good amount of time talking about how beautiful it was. —**the ability to stand in your home, surrounded by the song of wine bottles gazing into a mirror, and in first person camera view looking down at your green glass armor to see your green glass boots, screaming YOU ARE HERE.**

pray2playstation

The first, and perhaps last, time I actively tried to pray, talk to god, or sense/summon something in that manner was kneeling on the floor of my dad's apartment at 20th and Baltimore. I recall assuming that, if god were real and omniscient, god would already know that I did not believe. That said, I made sure to open the prayer with a long preface addressing my lack of belief and scepticism. I attempted to be as transparent as an 8 year old can be, explaining that I did not really understand how the whole thing worked, nor did I think I could participate in the standard way. Alternatively, I proposed a formal negotiation: wagering various promised acts of virtue in exchange for my prayer. In closing my prayer prelude, I posed questions about the logistics of our potential agreement. I was most curious of god's ability to answer and/send me some sort of immaterial information to formalize and concretize this interaction.

Only then did I submit my prayer.

I prayed for a PS2.



“Diptych” image of the apartment at 20th and Baltimore. Myself pictured in the top right corner playing Dragon Quest VIII on our recently acquired used PS2, circa 2006.

Pray2playstation is a form of remote sensing as an act of substitution. Remote sensing as an immaterial extension to fulfil some sort of need ie. a suspicious bargain with god or substituting physical distance with a gesture of digital love. Substitution sits between love and the contemporary condition of fracturing time. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild discusses time strategies and love in, *So How's the Family? and Other Essays (2013)*. In the section "Families Class Gaps and Time," Hochschild introduces the idea of "time strategies" which deal with performance in the home when there is a scarcity of time. Time strategies: matching time to symbols of meaning and fun. She describes specific programs, such as Family360, that evaluate a client's performance in the home (performance as spouse or parent). But more importantly she focuses on ways that working parents and families independently deal with scarcity of time and how to create meaningful time with the lack thereof. Hochschild offers a number of ways in which people enact time strategies: scene resetting, enduring, deferring, being a busy bee, delegating, downshifting, innovating, and exiting.²⁴ Each example requires an individual to manage feelings and make some sort of substitution. A gesture of substitution. An unsatisfactory symbol of meaning. Or perhaps an unsatisfactory experience of time.

²⁴Arlie Russell Hochschild, *So How's the Family? And Other Essays*. (Oakland, CA: Univ of California Press, 2013).

HOUSE OF LOVE

SMS text message I received from a close family friend in January of 2018

January 5, 2018 7:55PM

V. Ever done a short on the Kroh/Brockman household? . Wish I had a clip of hangng out, in the kitchen, wi your mom one, recent night. Cocktails... Isa at her dads and your mom is stressed.. SO, we

get to discussing the Pet Sit job. Ed leaps up on the stool in btwn us and listens to the details of La Paz. . . when M and B return... then goes downstairs to update Mittens.

YOU come flying thru the kitchen door asking me if I had a sandwich in my backpack., we run to the LR and view the remains. . . PETER IS IN THE DIN RM. . .

peaking out at us with some Arugula dangling from his ear. WITHOUT missing a beat, your exhausted mother .. Bacon in one hand, frying panin the other says I am gonna make you a sandwich. And potatoes. And dessert to take home.

And ..

. . . During all of this Brent saunters in smiling. Gazing at his beautimus wife then back at the fridge. . MARY and he are communicating with ESP. No words needed with these two old soulmates. Then your Soul Pop floats back upstairs. Mary still wiped out. But glowing.

Of course all of the animals are hanging out with the humans. Smiling.

and I SWEAR! Peter was chuckling!!

Kitten is stealthfully circling the party deciding whether or not to engage. WHICH she has been DOING lately! FALCOUR is in the same position he was in when YOU ran in to tell your mom her X, your dad, had invited you to dinner! Falcour took one

look at your moms REACTION, let out a long sigh as if he took her pain, fell back in his bed next to the Chef Stove and held space. Just like he has seen his Soul Pop do, every minute of every day. THEN calmly, most astutely, with focused eyes aimed straight up at those gas burners he waited. And sure enuf, Mother Mary

set down her bloody gin, rolled up her sleeves and started cooking.

PS ...even the plumbers downstairs yanking the tree out of the toilet, trudging up the back stairs, sweaty and frustrated, were offered a gin and tonic made with tarragon and beet juice. . *ONLY THE BEST FOR MY HAMILTON MEN!* I can almost hear her saying... flashing that million dollar smile. Lovingly.

This is, simply, a

HOUSE OF LOVE

JANET XX

And I can't stop thinking about that HOUSE OF LOVE.

Is it the fact that Janet took the time to type this—press press press pause, press press pause, press, and onward—for the length of 2283 characters (and spaces) on her flip phone? Or the way she managed to simultaneously compress and expand a few passing moments heavy with the weight of our home? Or the typos and misspellings that tie the sentiment to a moment far gone? Or maybe it's as simple as reaching for some reason to keep caring like Mary.

The scene Janet described was dated about a week or so before the text was delivered. It was not the content of the message that struck me, because I was there, and it was a night like any other in our home. My mom, Mary, came home from work, tried to figure out where Isabella (my younger sibling) was, fed the chickens with me, plumbers came to remove roots from our pipes through the basement toilet, we made a papier-mâché crown out of the stack of medical bills, Janet stopped by to discuss pet sitting details (or maybe put money in her hidden safe), her sandwich was stolen from her bag on the bench by the permanent foster dog Peter, my mom made a new sandwich, and onward. We almost always had someone stopping by for dinner or living with us for a few months, the animals are always a part of the scene, my mom is busy.

This tangible recollection of the scene does not serve to memorialize a significant moment, nor is it reaching into the past for sweet nostalgia. Janet wanted me to make a film, but that becomes secondary, if not mutable, to the experience of reading the SMS text. The experience of reading the message is related to a meshing of memory and disjointed sense of time that is produced by remote sensing. The message is a gesture, holding a series of gestures, carrying their own complex network of love and labor. Simplified the HOUSE OF LOVE is a container that holds the home, a site or satellite sending and receiving signals at all times, a larger body, but not a hive mind.

I am able to piece together the HOUSE OF LOVE through a series of fragments. The message, the background noise during the phone call to the landline, this site as pieces towards a seemingly whole image of narrative time, that would otherwise be challenging to determine its shape and/or truth value. Any attempt at description becomes a reduction or a stand in, an unsatisfactory symbol or metaphor for the events and interactions it holds. When I say event I don't mean a party, event as a state of things. A state of things like a photograph, embedded or inscribed with meaning and value by all of its protagonists. I have come to see it like this because there is never a satisfactory casual and singular representation of what the location is or my distance and relationship to it.

Mary is the name of my mother.

The image is tired too



Remote sensing as a process is about sensing and acquisition of data. This is a practice about making that acquisition of data visually legible. satellite imagery, remote sensing, and nonhuman photography are not safe from the gaps and holes that constitute photographic meaning. With (or without) deep fakes, post-post-ironic memes, digital tokens of love, state surveillance, and remote sensing intimacy, our perception and idolization of photographic images at large has shifted. In *On Photography* (1973), Susan Sontag describes the photograph itself as “both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence.” This is a claim that we are over romanticizing our distance from reality, in fixating on the photographic object as that which is real. I would argue that “pseudo-presence” and manifestation of absence are more generative and potentially productive than Sontag will allow them to be—especially today (2020).

We are no longer looking to images to produce knowledge and power, because we know they can't give us what we always already don't have. We share an image with a friend that is self reflexive. We are not fetishizing the top of the hierarchy of images or the AI-generated image, but calling them into question—or at the very least we are attributing more value to the poor image.²⁵ The ability to turn to the photograph which confesses its lack of truth and wholeness is comforting. We know we are crumbling, fracturing, tired, and sweaty, and the image is too.

²⁵ Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of The Poor Image.” *e-flux*, no. 10 (November 2009).

I consider photography in terms of a visual code, units of language, and an ability to extend myself elsewhere in order to ground my reality (in both viewing and producing images). I had previously viewed this as my own naïve longing to give meaning to the gaps, absence, and loss that comprise photography, or perhaps something time based, a thing of the times, a subconscious generational understanding that the photograph was never about unmediated wholeness or truth.

To think of the photograph or image as either an unmediated moment of representation (a document or proof) or as the product of a sovereign individual producing a fixed meaning is incorrect—as Ariella Azoulay describes in her short essay, “What is a Photograph? What is Photography?” Azoulay suggests, “to inquire what the photographic entity is, one should suspend the priority attributed to the photograph and the agent, who aims for sovereignty over the field of vision from which the photograph is produced.”²⁶ Azoulay’s use of the word suspend is incisive here. In a way she is stating that we do not have to commit to removing the veil of priority and authority, but let it hang in the air above in order to inquire. To say suspend ensures there is still a certain power and a value to the so-called free agent; but to inquire with consideration for all protagonists allows for greater depth, complexity, and a clearer idea of what is or was inscribed in the photograph. She elaborates on the multiplicity of factors that effect and affect what a photograph is in *The Civil Contract of Photography*.²⁷ Within this text Azoulay directly proposes a new ontology of photography:

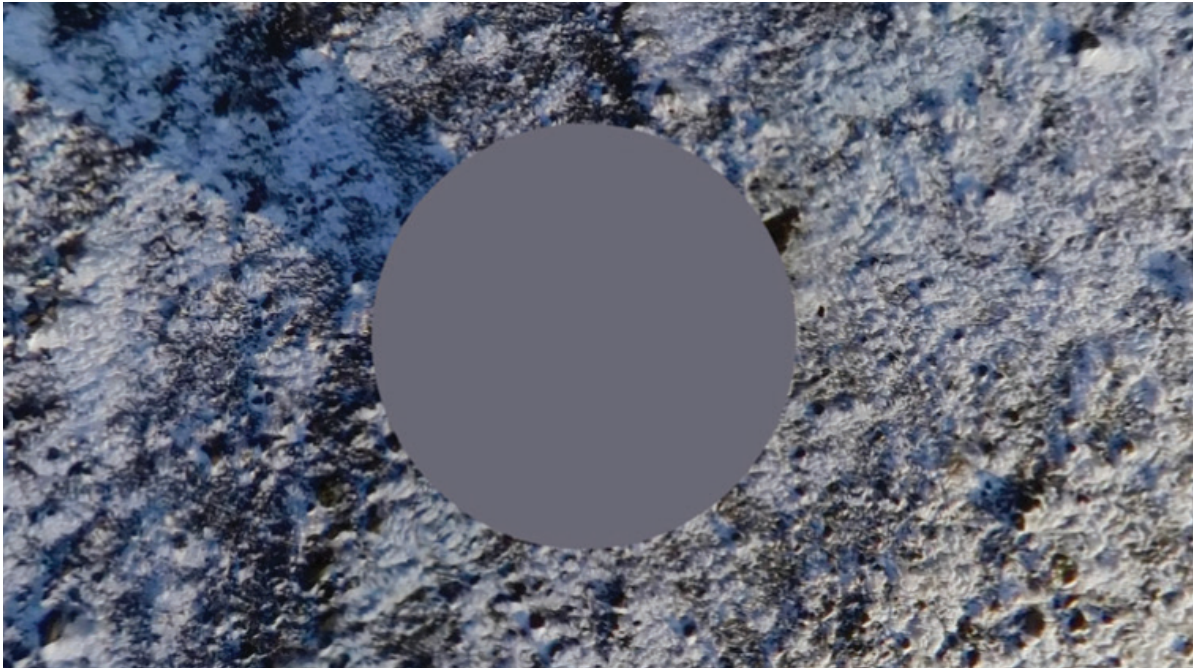
The theory of photography proposed in this book is founded on a new ontological-political understanding of photography. It takes into account all the participants in photographic acts — camera, photographer, photographed subject, and spectator — approaching the photograph (and its meaning) as an unintentional effect of the encounter between all of these. None of these have the capacity to seal off this effect and determine its sole meaning.

This political-ontology of photography is working to decentralize the sovereign power of a photograph, and thus change our relationship to such conditions dominating us. As we circle back to remote sensing we are required to confront the technologies and systems that allow us to escape the ground when seeking wholeness, clean data, clear truth, and/or orientation.

²⁶ Ariella Azoulay, “What is a Photograph? What is photography?”, *Philosophy of Photography*. Vol. 1 No. 1. (2010)

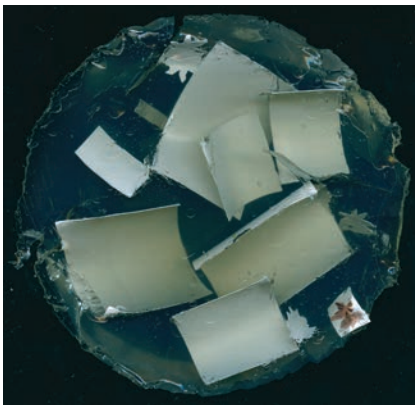
²⁷ Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

*(BIRDS EYE VIEW/GODS EYE/GOD TRICK/AERIAL VIEW/THE VERTICAL GAZE/WHY MY DAD SAID PLAYING SKYRIM
VR WOULD MAKE HIM CRY)*



*Looking down screaming you are here.
The fantasy of a stable sovereign voice.*

A gelatin here and now...



In some ways this thesis is a critique of remote sensing technology, mediated intimacy, and/or contemporary photographic conditions, but above all it traces how these spatial and temporal conditions feel and act. By tracing, outlining, and moving through these overlapping experiences, the form folds in on itself. I am still standing in t-pose over this indiscernible space. What am I waiting for?

I like things slightly abstracted, maybe even coded—but definitely clear, and seemingly neutral. The vertical gaze—a neutral sovereign eye, allure of clean images and clear data, a top-down-bird’s-eye-god’s-eye understanding. I like maps, diagrams, alignment charts, floating in the low oblique space above Google Street View, the work of Forensic Architecture,²⁸ that 53-second videos of someone cooking without ingredients shared via twitter,²⁹ Sara Cwynar’s 60-second videos commissioned by MOMA.³⁰ Free floating, free falling, suspended, suspend belief, suspense, tend, and tension. A world of images, ingredients, and gaps informed by the vertical gaze. A gelatin here and now, poetry, riddles, dead ends. Gaps informed by the vertical gaze.

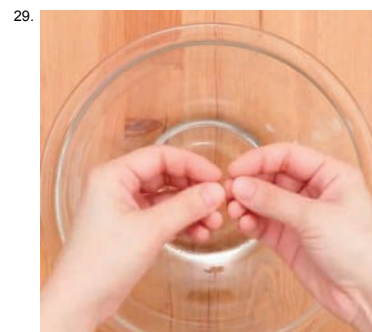
A turn towards memory, a bluetooth enabled text activated vibrator, birdwatching, a relationship to god, to thinking towards the inexpressible stitch to the gap from here to there, or me to you. Active or passive, but always at a distance. I am not here to criticize remote sensing your intimacy or information, nor am I positing that it is productive or romantic—I am only bringing it to the surface to analyze all of the protagonists involved.

“The wholeness the hand seeks in the object without ever being able to find it is a gesture of disappointed love.”³¹

What does it mean to seek wholeness from the immaterial or artificial object. To seek wholeness from, or place trust in, an interface you only just met.

The screen didn’t even wink back, only stared blankly.

28. Forensic Architecture is a research agency of architects, artists, filmmakers, journalists, software developers, scientists, lawyers, as well as other collaborators, led by Eyal Weizman. As stated on their website: “We investigate state and corporate violence, human rights violations and environmental destruction all over the world. Our work involves open-source investigation, the construction of digital and physical models, 3D animations, virtual reality environments and cartographic platforms. Within these environments we locate and analyse photographs, videos, audio files and testimonies to reconstruct and analyse violent event. We also use our digital models as tools for interviewing survivors of violence, finding new ways to access and explore memories of trauma.” They focus on specific cases and issues that have not been adequately addressed by the respective state or location the event/issue took place. These cases almost always have something to do with collection of images and data to analyze spatial and/or architectural dimensions of the site of issue/conflict. They carry out their work with various human rights organizations and other activist groups globally.



31. Vilém Flusser and Nancy Ann Roth, *Gestures*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

I am asking myself and whomever might find themselves reading this, to consider this unavoidable and indiscernible space. This consideration could be that of comfort, in knowing that the idea of a single moment of unmediated presence is errored. Maybe this consideration means locating what we mean by truth when truth has become synonymous with neutrality, measurability, and resolution. One could employ Ariella Azoulay's socio-political ontology of photography proposed in *The Civil Contract of Photography* or Joanna Zylinka's machine kinship in *The Creative Power of Nonhuman Photography*. Or perhaps this consideration points you to the advice of Rory Allen Philip Ferreira.³¹

“...pure will in every moment, beloved.”

31. Rory Allen Philip Ferreira, alternatively known as R.A.P Ferreira (formerly known as milo).



The Museum of Modern Art, "Sara Cwynar: Modern Art in your Life - Part 6", https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=60&v=-5iKFFz7zeg&feature=emb_title, 1:00, October 18, 2019.

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Love and survival are both encoded into our DNA... One serves the other.

Do the lone person in the wilderness merely survive to love again? Or is it in his nature?

Is love merely reducible to a set of hormones and synaptic impulses meant to propagate our species?



August 18th 2018

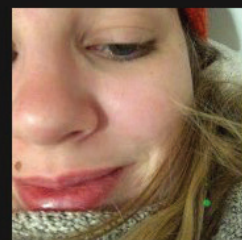
Viv. recalling a time when we were writer/

friends. . .FRENCH ARTIST COLONY. ,ETC.

Come by Aquarius for a free 15min

REading On Mon. J xx

**u ever tried
skyping a turkey?**





To all my friends