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WE MAY SEE A GREAT AND UNRECOGNIZABLE FUTURE

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PACIFIC NORTHWEST COLLEGE OF ART

THESIS ABSTRACT

WE MAY SEE A GREAT AND UNRECOGNIZABLE FUTURE

States of social destabilization, defined by fluctuation and mutability, have historically yielded a proliferation of utopian and apocalyptic visions. The psychedelic counterculture of 1960s and 1970s California grew out of a state of destabilization, and made numerous advances towards a utopian future. Currently, much of the world has been destabilized in our shift from an analog to a digital society. Today's destabilization, perhaps a continuation of the change set in motion in the 1960s, has led to the emergence of both techno-utopian visions, and prophecies of a technological apocalypse.

In three inter-connected sub-sections, "Destabilization," "Utopia," and "Apocalypse," this paper examines the role of destabilization in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome; the history of California utopian movement; the internet as a psychedelic site; and the techno-apocalypse of the theoretical singularity. Through this examination, we may begin to understand how – as a direct evolution of the networks and non-linear models of thinking proposed by the psychedelic counterculture and Deleuze and Guattari – the internet and virtual spaces have increasingly altered our awareness of time, space and the body, creating a state of destabilization and the emergence of new utopian and apocalyptic visions.

INTRODUCTION: AFTER THE WAVE

I was born in the spring of 1982, several years after the high and beautiful wave of American psychedelic counterculture had crested, broken, and rolled back.

What I have to go on, in exploring the history of the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, is largely rumor, speculation, and misinformation. The counterculture of 1960s and seventies America exists as a collection of stories featuring protagonists who embarked on uncharted adventures through time, space, and the deeper reaches of the mind in an attempt to build a better world for themselves, their children, and their children's children. These legendary figures have become mythological: Ken Kesey and his Pranksters, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Grace Slick, Jerry Garcia, Timothy Leary and Charles Manson, Angela Davis, Owsley "Bear" Stanley, Allen Ginsberg, and all of the San Francisco flower children. Their stories have melded with American consciousness, joining the ranks of the American legends of the West alongside John Henry, Annie Oakley, Pecos Bill and Jesse James. They have shaped the cultural landscape of the United States, figureheads of our subconscious national identity.

America, they say, is the land of opportunity. It is the land of possibility and potential, where a person can become whomever they desire, and can will a new world order into existence simply through the power of a collective dream, shared ideals, love, and higher-consciousness.

Or, at least, they can try.

In a number of ways, the youth movement of the 1960s and seventies succeeded: the war in Vietnam was met with national protest and criticism, advances were made in

the civil rights of women and ethnic minorities, stifling cultural mores of the 1950s were loosened and sexuality became a little less taboo, and some people, perhaps even society as a whole, found a little bit of inner peace and harmony. But Neal Cassady died of exposure, depressed and somewhat out of his mind, counting the ties of a railroad track somewhere in Mexico. Grateful Dead t-shirts are sold today at Target Superstores nationwide. Our government is losing its “War on Drugs,” while American farmers get caught in automatic-weapons fire over marijuana groves, protecting their investment in California’s largest cash crop.¹

Captain America died in the flaming wreckage of his motorcycle.

A veneer of cynicism, ironic detachment, and disempowerment has coated the dreams of those born in the wake of the California counterculture.

Disco happened.

Reagan happened.

The nineties happened and the 2000s happened.

Kurt Cobain and Biggie Smalls died under mysterious circumstances, and we haven’t set foot on the moon since 1972. Things change, things stay the same. Things don’t go exactly as planned.

But punk also happened. Digitization happened, and modalities offered by the virtual environment of the internet suggest a new psychedelic revolution. We are living in

¹ *The Green Rush*, directed by Jason S. Edwards (2008; Seattle, WA: IndieFlix, 2010), DVD; Alison Stateman, “Can Marijuana Help Rescue California’s Economy?,” *Time.com*, March 13, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1884956,00.html> (accessed April 12, 2011).

a threshold moment, a liminal temporality that is destabilizing our perceptions of mind and body, time and space.

We haven't seen utopia yet, but we may just need to wait a little longer.

In his book *Imaginary Communities*, Phillip Wegner argues that utopian narratives, beginning with Thomas More's seminal *Utopia* of 1516, surge during periods of "historical liminality" – transitional periods between one mode of life and another.² These liminal eras exist in states of destabilization, forcibly shocked out of a set of stable conditions into a period of fluctuation and unfamiliarity. In these cultural moments, limits of possibility are unbound. Innovative visions of utopian worlds flourish, as do imaginings of worlds in chaos – apocalyptic visions of humanity's end.

The 1960s and seventies qualify as a destabilized period, a cultural disruption sparked by institutionally ingrained racism and sexism, and a compulsory draft for a prolonged, unpopular war. Now, in our 21st century, we are experiencing a similarly destabilized temporality, in which internet-connected societies are undergoing a transformation of the ways individuals and networks relate to and process information, a transformation of the very mechanics of thought. Additionally, our imagination and perception of self and our world has been complicated by ongoing wars with nebulous foes, economic meltdowns and ecological catastrophe. Perhaps what we are experiencing is not an actual state of destabilization independent unto itself, but instead a continuation of the movement begun half a century ago.

² Phillip E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 34.

We can look to the past for help in imagining possible futures or alternate presents. Historical propositions provide ways of looking at what might be wrong, or right, about the world in which we currently live. Perhaps, in studying the destabilized world of the past fifty years, we may come to see the potentialities and possibilities open to us, emergent visions of apocalyptic catastrophe and utopian harmonies.

CHAPTER 1: DESTABILIZATION

A state of destabilization is a state of change. Often marked by ambiguity, haziness, or confusion, destabilization indicates a moment or period of transition, a movement between states of being. It is an effect of a period of rupture, of disruption, during which out-dated modalities begin to fall away and new modalities grow.

Destabilization shares many characteristics with the fluctuating, decentralized rhizome of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, and is personified in popular culture by characters who freely move between worlds, found in television programs such as *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files*, and *Fringe*. The world's population is witnessing a shift from an analog to digital society. Destabilization is the state of the world today, a world in flux, ripe with potential for radical improvement or radical failure.

This notion of destabilization dovetails with Guattari's concept of transversality. In geometry, transversality is used to describe "a line that intersects a system of other lines."³ Transversality can be understood as a movement across a network of intersecting ideas and concerns. In discussing the work of contemporary artist Sterling Ruby, Robert Hobbs describes the theory of transversality as having the potential to "catalyze radical new ways of re-construing and elaborating on the unending dynamic of continuously changing subjectivities that constitute people's ongoing affiliations with themselves and their world."⁴ Ruby's work often describes transmutable states and physical embodiments of transition or androgyny. The 2006 series of plexi mounted lambda prints,

³ *The Free Dictionary*, "Transversal," <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Transversality>. (accessed March 26, 2011).

⁴ Robert Hobbs, "Sterling Ruby's Post-Humanist Art," in *Sterling Ruby*, ed. Alessandro Rabottini (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2009), 29.

Physicalism/The Recombine 1-6, depict images of female body-builders collaged with sometimes phallic or testicular images of home decor objects and candles. The focus in these images is on the hyper-musculature of the figures, which renders them androgynous and, almost, un-human. Much like Ruby's sculptural work with its profusion of drips, protuberant growths, and fluid movement, these prints are, in great part, about a state of becoming. They attempt to reside in a trans- state, a state of movement or liminality where things are, perhaps, not what they seem to be or what they seem to be becoming.⁵ As a model of thought, transversality represents a method of achieving rupture, of somehow inducing a revelation that twists the ways by which people relate to the world. Rather than remaining anchored to static forms or structures, transversality encourages change and fluctuation – or destabilization.⁶

Transversality and destabilization are concepts related to the rhizome, as detailed in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Their text outlines a set of basic parameters in defining the rhizome: "1 and 2. Principles of connection and heterogeneity:

⁵ We can see in Ruby's work an influence from artists such as Mike Kelley with his positioning of adolescence as a transmutable state, and whom Ruby worked closely under in graduate school at the Art Center at the College of Design in Pasadena, CA, as well as Bruce Nauman, who's work over his long career has spanned a range of media, and who appears to take a state of change as a life-long philosophical tenet.

Catherine Taft, "A Conversation with Sterling Ruby," in *Sterling Ruby*, ed. Alessandro Rabottini (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2009), 106.

⁶ As a further example of transversality and destabilization in art, we could also consider Gregor Schneider and his *Haus ur*, a perpetually changing, always in flux, and logic-defying reconstruction of the architecture within the walls of Schneider's childhood home. Within these walls, Schneider generates a state of confusion and claustrophobic fear. His apocalypse is, it would seem, an apocalypse of fear, in which lead-lined walls might serve one of two purposes, containment, or shelter.

Norman Rosenthal, *Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art*, (London: The Royal Academy of Arts, 2000).

any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be.”⁷ All points of the network are connected, and all points can be connected to “*anything* other,” not simply any other point. This is the condition of indiscriminate heterogeneity, of being comprised of diverse, even incongruous, components. The rhizome is dispersive and open, connecting all points of all things.

“3. Principle of multiplicity: it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, ‘multiplicity,’ that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world.”⁸ Within the rhizome there is no central hub or pivot, nor is there subject or object, but instead a multitude of determinants or dimensions. There is no hierarchy; it is decentralized, functioning with neither a central nervous system nor brain.⁹

“4. Principle of asignifying rupture: against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure.”¹⁰ The rhizome cannot be broken. If cut, ruptured or split, the rhizome will rebound, continually sprouting off of the newly exposed lines and generating an ever more complicated network. Deleuze and Guattari nominate ants as living rhizomes, marching freely through and around ruptures like water coursing towards the ocean.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹ The Marvel Comics character Multiple Man embodies this rhizomatic trait. Multiple Man possesses the ability to generate multiple facsimiles of himself who then act independently of the original, generating their own duplicates, ad infinitum. However, it isn't clear as to whether the original Multiple Man functions as a central core or pivot, i.e., if he is killed, do the duplicates live on, or do they, too, perish?

¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 9.

And, finally, “5 and 6. Principle of cartography and decalcomania: a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model.”¹¹ Here, Deleuze and Guattari compare the rhizome to a map, in contrast to a tracing. A tracing or rubbing is a direct, one-to-one account of some other form, a transformation from physical object to representational sign. A map, on the other hand, necessarily interprets and abstracts the scale, orientation, and detail of the original it represents. It is a flexible, ever-changing document with multiple modes of entry. Google Maps, for example, is an almost infinitely flexible system of representation, allowing for shifts of scale and magnification, strata of detail, and movement across or through the surface, plus a myriad of ancillary informational applications, from restaurant recommendations to custom travel routes. Prone to change and fluctuation, Google Maps represent an unfixed document, not amenable to any structural or generative model.

Societies in a state of flux or destabilization often yield utopian narratives, and by extension dystopian, anti-utopian, and apocalyptic narratives. Beginning with the earliest manifestations of the genre, Wegner posits that utopian narratives appear during periods of “historical liminality.”¹² More’s *Utopia* was published shortly after the European settling of North America, and is thus situated, Wegner claims, between the old world and the new. These periods of change and cultural transformation act as facilitators or catalysts for the conception of new modes of life. Utopian narratives propose new methods of organizing and structuring a society, critiquing existing forms by imagining new paradigms.

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹² Wegner, *Imaginary Communities*, 34.

The utopia, translated from Greek as “not-land” or “no-place,” exists nowhere.¹³ It is outside of physical bounds. Similarly, utopian propositions often exist in a state of “uchronia,” or “no-time” – divorced from our common conceptions of time and space.¹⁴ These concepts, the utopia and the uchronia, can serve as markers of a state that cannot be defined. They exist outside of geo-temporal boundaries, in states of fluctuation and remove.

This transitional position describes a state of liminality – caught between two alternative conditions. This borderland is a space of ambiguity and particular power, a place of magic and transformation. The in-between space “lacks a form, a givenness, a nature. Yet it is that which facilitates, allows into being, all identities, all matter, all substance. It is itself a strange becoming.”¹⁵

Again, to use the example of Google Maps, and the internet at large, we find systems of visualizing the physical world within the digital realm, of manifesting real-world parameters in a limitless, dimensionally ambiguous space. Google, acting as portal to the digital world, freely offers Sketchup, a program for rendering three-dimensional objects in virtual space. Within the program, one can assign specific dimensions to an

¹³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 135.

¹⁴ Wegner, *Imaginary Communities*, 25.

¹⁵ Grosz, *Architecture From the Outside*, 91.

This is a trope widely found in mythology and folklore. I was first introduced to the term “liminality” in relation to Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in which much of the magic described takes place where the field meets the forest. It is also found in Native American folklore, as Larry Ellis writes in “Trickster: Shaman of the Liminal,” “the shaman is a liminal figure, a mediator who stands between the supernatural and the world of the People.”

Larry Ellis, “Trickster: Shaman of the Liminal,” *Studies in American Indian Literature* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 56, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20736767> (accessed March 26, 2011).

invented object, and render, for example, a one-foot cube. Alternately, one could render a 100-foot cube. One can also adjust the viewpoint from which to see the cube, and the proximity of that position to the cube. There are no external markers of scale or dimension in Sketchup's digital space, making a solitary one-foot cube indistinguishable from an isolated 100-foot cube. The digital space of the program obliterates relativity, and its objects hover in a wholly nebulous space.¹⁶

This ambiguous space is one of imminent possibility. Like earlier technological modes of the virtual, such as reading, writing, drawing, or even imagining, the space of digital virtuality generated by the internet and programs such as Google Sketchup are spaces of potential. "The virtual is the space of the emergence of the new, the unthought, the unrealized, which at every moment loads the presence of the present with supplementarity, redoubling the world through parallel universes, universes that might

¹⁶ My series of laserjet prints, *In Advance of The Coming Age* (Fig. 1), bound in book form, attempts to capitalize on this ambiguity. The series is a growing collection of digital sculptures created in Google Sketchup. As printed images, they manifest themselves between the languages of printmaking, drawing, and sculpture. They seem to transverse each camp, and, lacking a marker of scale, represent objects either monumental or miniscule. The images are situated in an ambiguous space, putting the audience on somewhat destabilized ground, where clear definitions begin to fall away.

I am, of course, not alone in this pursuit. Chrystal Gallery Exhibition One went online on October 5th, 2010. Located at <http://chrystalgallery.info>, the exhibition is an internet-based exhibition of digitally rendered works in a modeled exhibition space, curated and rendered by Timur Si-Qin, and featuring work by Kari Altmann, Charles Broskoski, Lindsay Lawson, Billy Rennekamp, Maxwell Simmer, and Harm Van Den Dorpel. Much of the work, including Broskoski's *ABACAB*, 2010, and Van Den Dorpel's *Sol*, 2009, is difficult to distinguish as digital rendering, and exists within pre-existing structure as painting and sculpture. The work seems, in some ways, to be trying to hide or mask its digitality and fool the viewer into believing in the physicality of the objects. Conversely, Kari Altmann's *How to Hide Your Plasma (Handheld Icon Shapeshift for Liquid Chrystal Display)*, 2010, blatantly acknowledges its physical impossibility through morphing, impossible fluid dynamics, and a changing interior space with digital texturing.

have been.”¹⁷ Through the computer screen, whether peering into the framework of spatial rendering generated in Google Sketchup, scrolling through Google Street-View, or clicking through an endless chain of recommended YouTube videos, what is experienced is a sort of dislocation from space and time, eventually rewriting the neural pathways of the brain associated with memory and stimuli response.¹⁸ Grosz describes this phenomenon of dislocation as a “supplementarity,” an additional layer of experience and reality that acts as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, the physical world, at least for now. These digital realms are destabilized in their nature, flexible and ever changing, offering an infinite range of possibility unrestricted by the laws of physics governing the actual world.

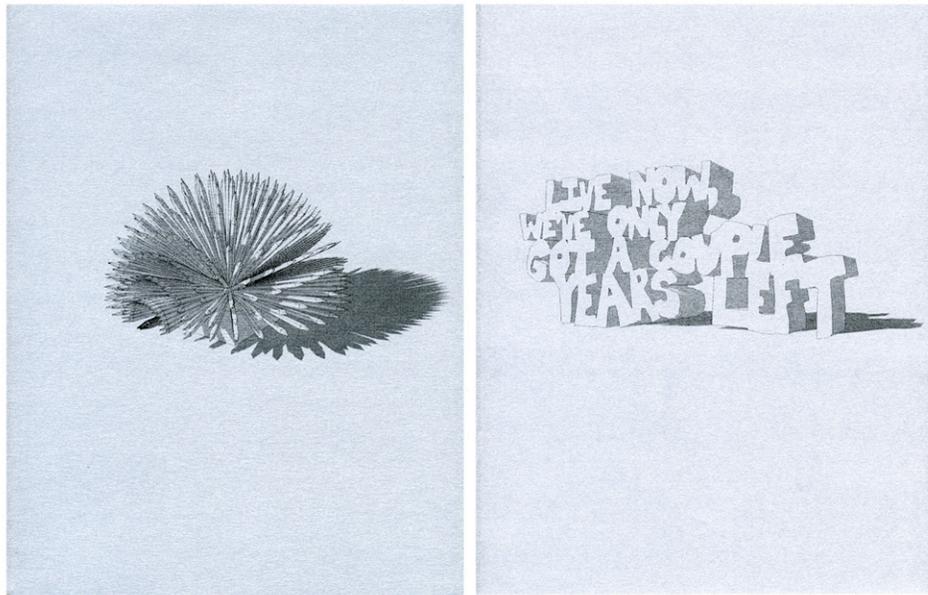


Fig. 1, Daniel J Glendening, Selections from *In Advance of The Coming Age*, laserjet prints on silver paper bound in artist's book, 2010-11

¹⁷Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*, 78.

¹⁸Nicholas Carr, “The Web Shatters Focus, Rewires Brains,” *Wired.com*, May 24, 2010, http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/05/ff_nicholas_carr/all/1 (accessed April 17, 2011).

On television, the concept of destabilization is personified by characters in the series *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files*, and *Fringe*. Each of these series features a character that is able to move between differing worlds or states. These characters act as liminal bodies, akin to the Native American Shaman who stands between the world of the natural and the supernatural.¹⁹ David Lynch and Mark Frost's *Twin Peaks* (1990-91) places its protagonist, F.B.I. Special Agent Dale Cooper, in the heart of a destabilized world. Dispatched to the Pacific Northwest town of Twin Peaks to investigate a murder, Cooper is soon caught in a space between the physical world and an indefinite metaphysical world, traveling through the "black pool" to the "Black Lodge," a funhouse-mirror inversion of the series' main setting, the Great Northern Hotel.

Chris Carter's *The X-Files* (1993-2002) centers on a pair of protagonists, also Special Agents of the F.B.I., Dana Scully and Fox Mulder.²⁰ Agents Scully and Mulder are assigned to investigate The X-Files, F.B.I. case files that are difficult or impossible to explain, and that often deal with instances of the paranormal, the occult, or the extraterrestrial. The plot of the series centers on agent Mulder's search for "truth," seeking to reconcile what he believes and what he factually knows. Abduction is a pervasive theme of the series, and Agent Scully is eventually abducted by some unknown, possibly extraterrestrial, force. In her abduction, she enters an unidentifiable space – bright white, and without apparent physical limitations.

¹⁹ Ellis, "Trickster: Shaman of the Liminal," 56.

²⁰ *The X-Files* is heavily influenced by Lynch and Frost's earlier series *Twin Peaks* in form, content, atmosphere and even cast. Fox Mulder is played by David Duchovny, who appeared in *Twin Peaks* as cross-dressing D.E.A. agent Dennis/Denise Bryson, and actor Don S. Davis appeared in *Twin Peaks* as possible-alien-abductee Major Garland Briggs and in *The X-Files* as Dana Scully's father, Captain William Scully.

Fringe (2008-), created by J.J. Abrams, Alex Kurtzman, and Roberto Orci, follows the work of F.B.I. Agent Olivia Dunham and her work with Fringe Division, a Joint Federal Task Force, employing scientist Walter Bishop and his son, Peter. Fringe Division is tasked with investigating “Fringe Events,” which, like the X-Files, defy rational explanation and are linked to manifestations of the paranormal or fringe science, including extra-dimensionality. Through the course of the series, it becomes apparent that certain characters, Agent Dunham and Peter Bishop in particular, are able to move between parallel dimensions, sometimes at will.²¹

Each of these characters function as an embodiment of destabilization and liminality, able to transition between states of being. Agent Cooper moves between the contemporary world and the inverted metaphysical realm of the Black Lodge, which arguably represents Purgatory (but may also be linked to extra-terrestrial intelligence; the narrative is ambiguous). Agent Dana Scully is abducted, possibly by extra-terrestrials, or possibly by a shadowy government agency (again, the narrative remains ambiguous). She enters into an unidentifiable space, without clear boundaries or relativity, akin to the formless space of a computer rendering program. Agent Olivia Dunham and Peter Bishop occupy a fully liminal space, deliberately transitioning between dimensions. The characters act as facilitators of cross-dimensional movement as well, able to force or aid others in crossing the threshold between worlds.

²¹ Again, *Fringe* is heavily indebted to its predecessors, including *The X-Files* and *Twin Peaks*. In the January 21, 2011 episode of *Fringe*, “Firefly,” the characters of the program went so far as to reference, in dialogue, the character of Dr. Jacoby from *Twin Peaks*. Dr. Walter Bishop, sporting Jacoby’s trademark blue and red sunglasses, referred to Jacoby as an old friend from Washington State.

These characters are emblematic representations of liminality, manifesting a bridge between the known world and an alternate, undefined space. They act as triggers or agents of the state of destabilization, upsetting what may be defined as truth or reality, and creating an ambiguous space in which the laws of physics fail to accurately describe the world.

A state of destabilization is one of infinite possibility. It is a moment in which social or personal structures begin to collapse, ushering in a new range of possible modalities. It is a moment of rupture, of disruption, preventing solid footing and simple readings. Contemporary society is marked by destabilization. The shift from analog to digital technology, and the spread of the personal computer, the internet, and social networking has altered the ways in which humans communicate, conduct business, and think about the world. We are at the cusp of technological advancement so rapid that the current generation of Americans will likely see transformations in the cognitive relationships between human and machine that cannot yet be imagined. This uncertain state, this period of liminality and destabilization, is a period of potential, and offers the opportunity for both advancement and disaster. Society is positioned to imagine a new and better world to emerge from the change, or to usher in a host of catastrophes beyond control. As in an earthquake – the sure ground suddenly in turmoil and uncertain – a destabilized state increases the sharpness of the senses, provoking awe, and initiating a wider investigation of possibility and potential.

CHAPTER 2: UTOPIA

Since the 1516 publication of Thomas More's *Utopia*, the utopian narrative has been firmly entrenched within the genres of science fiction and speculative fiction, often functioning as a form of social critique. Utopian thinking motivates the bulk of social and cultural advancement. It is that which prompts one to get out of bed in the morning: it is the feeling of hope that today will be better than yesterday, and that tomorrow will be better still. As a genre, it allows for the hope of a better world. As Richard Noble points out, the utopian impulse "is present in virtually every future oriented activity humans engage in, from the aura of hope surrounding the purchase of new clothes or planning a holiday, to the commitment to a better world implicit in medical research, constitution writing and making art."²² To this end, science fiction and utopian fiction offer a model centered on proposition: the proposal of possible futures or alternate presents that offer a window into an alternative to what is known.

Along with the sense of hope inherent in utopian thinking, comes the strong threat of idealism or escapism. There is a powerful impulse to imagine a perfect world, without addressing issues of pragmatism or functionality. Many real-world manifestations of utopian models, for this reason, fall short of perfection, but may be seen as urgent gestures towards manifesting latent potentialities in the real world. The state of California, in American mythology, represents an idyllic world, the "California Dream" birthed by the promise of streets paved with gold. Out of the unstable geography of California, and the fog-shrouded streets of San Francisco, have emerged numerous

²² Richard Noble, introduction to *Utopias*, ed. Richard Noble (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 12.

utopian movements, manifesting in popular music, the psychedelic 1960s counterculture of Haight-Ashbury, the Burning Man Festival, and the psychedelic technologies of LSD and the internet. California is geologically unstable: a perpetually destabilized site giving rise to novel social potentialities.

California has been linked, as long as it has been a state, to ideas of utopia. It is situated on the West coast of the United States, straddling the San Andreas Fault system. The San Andreas Fault runs from Mendocino to Mexico, and more than 350 low-magnitude earthquakes are detected in California in a typical week.²³ Despite the state's geological instability, it has, since the discovery of Gold at Sutter's Mill on the American River, attracted wave after wave of settler and traveler. In the years following the gold rush, the California population of non-Native Americans exploded from 12,000 to 300,000, with subsequent population booms following the completion of the railroad in 1869, during the Great Depression, and in the aftermath of World War II.²⁴ Beginning with the discovery at Sutter's Mill, California became known as a place of freedom and liberty. Historian Kevin Starr quotes from a 1849 diary entry by Bayard Taylor describing San Francisco: "The very air...is pregnant with the magnetism of bold, spirited, unwearied action, and he who but ventures into the outer circle of the whirlpool, is spinning ere he has time for thought, in its dizzy vortex."²⁵ California has come to represent a psychological space of hope and excitement, independent of its political or social realities, and in spite of, or perhaps due to, its unstable ground.

²³ "California-Nevada Fault Maps," *U.S. Geological Survey*, <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/recenteqscanv/> (accessed March 21, 2011).

²⁴ Kevin Starr, "The Gold Rush and the California Dream," *California History* 77, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 61, <http://0-www.jstor.org.catalog.multcolib.org/stable/25462462> (accessed March 21, 2011).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

This space that California occupies in the imagination is perhaps best articulated through popular music. The Mamas and the Papas' 1965 track, "California Dreamin'," describes the commonly held belief that California is a paradise on Earth: "All the leaves are brown / and the sky is grey. / I've been for a walk / on a winter's day. / I'd be safe and warm / if I was in L.A. / California dreamin' / on such a winter's day."²⁶ Through the text of the lyrics, and the sense of longing conveyed in the delivery of the vocals and the music, the song positions California as a utopic destination, free of all physical and psychological distress. This view is sustained in popular music still, evident in 2Pac's "California Love" (1995), in which Dr. Dre proclaims, "we in that sunshine state with a bomb-ass hemp beat / the state where ya never find a dance floor empty," and Katy Perry's 2010 single, "California Gurls," in which she sings, "I know a place where the grass is really greener...you could travel the world / but nothing comes close to the Golden Coast."²⁷ Each of these tracks is a product of its era, and therefore stylistically divergent. However, each can be understood as an evolution of the "California Sound" in popular music, attempting to capture and convey the lifestyle of pleasure and individual fulfillment found on the West Coast.²⁸ Popular music portrays and perpetuates the psychological space represented by the concept of "California": a utopia of happiness,

²⁶ The Mamas and the Papas, "California Dreamin'," *If You Can Believe Your Eyes and Ears*, vinyl record, Dunhill Records, 1966.

²⁷ 2Pac feat. Dr. Dre and Robert Troutman, "California Love," compact disc, Death Row, 1995; Katy Perry, "California Gurls," mp3 download, Capitol Records, 2010.

²⁸ Richard Aquila, "Images of the American West in Rock Music," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 11, no. 4, (October 1980): 422, <http://jstor.org/stable/968289> (accessed March 21, 2011).

liberty, never-ending sunshine and incessant beach parties, where everyone is young, beautiful, and libidinous.²⁹

Popular music articulates the California dream, but the concepts of utopianism find expression in actuality as well. In the 1960s, as a response to the war in Vietnam, 1950s consumerism and sexual repression, and socially ingrained racism, sexism, and homophobia, a youth culture seeking a spirit of freedom and hope began to emerge. The counterculture of the 1960s found a haven in California, and San Francisco especially.³⁰

Some of these countercultural movements manifested as isolated, hermetically sealed utopian projects, such as Black Bear Ranch in Northern California. The residents of Black Bear Ranch attempted to withdraw as far as possible from the rest of society, operating in an isolated enclave without interference or influence from the outside world.³¹ The denizens of Black Bear Ranch did not seek to change or reconstruct the society they found themselves within, but instead to build a new social order from scratch. Other factions of the counterculture, rather than dropping out of the social

²⁹ These three tracks, establishing California as a utopian site in the popular imagination, serve as a starting point in a series of sound pieces I present in conjunction with my sculptural *Growth Amplifiers*, as well as available for download online. These sound pieces are fairly simple in premise: they are slowed versions of the songs themselves. I begin with the source mp3 file, and in the sound-editing program Audacity I decrease the tempo of the song file, slowing the song without altering the pitch. To determine the final length of the track, I simply transpose the time meter of the original. For example, Katy Perry's "California Gurls" is three minutes, 56 seconds, long. My sound piece, *CA-Gurls*, is three hours, 56 minutes, long. This comes out to be a change in speed of approximately -98%. In the end, the final piece is something of an inversion of the original. A utopian pop-song becomes a dystopian soundscape, full of drones and intermittent clicks and wails that set the inner workings of the body trembling. They sound large, and somewhat frightening, not unlike NASA's recordings of deep space, *Symphonies of the Planets*.

³⁰ Barry Miles, *Hippie* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2005), 9.

³¹ *Commune*, directed by Jonathon Berman (2005; New York: First Run Features, 2007), DVD.

structure, became heavily involved in altering and attempting to better the political and social landscape of the United States, pursuing advancements in civil rights, free speech, environmentalism, women's rights, gay rights and personal freedoms.³²

Many of these same organizations, especially those associated with underground publications, such as *The Berkeley Barb* and *The Oracle*, were heavily involved in cultural advancement through art and music, with intrinsic ties to drug culture. In 1965, chemist Augustus Owsley Stanley III was arrested, and subsequently acquitted, on charges of manufacturing Methedrine. On his return to Berkeley, Owsley revealed to friends that he had been working towards synthesizing LSD. Owsley was producing the most potent LSD on the market and, under the name Bear Research Group, he had ordered enough raw material to produce a million and a half doses.³³ Endorsed by cultural figures Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey, and musical groups such as Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead and the Beatles as a means of both recreation and a vehicle for achieving higher consciousness, LSD use quickly became widespread throughout the counterculture. With this came the aesthetics of psychedelia in fashion, music, and album and poster art, exemplified by the work of Wes Wilson and Stanley "Mouse" Miller. On January 3, 1966, Ron and Jay Thelin opened The Psychedelic Shop at the corner of Haight and Ashbury in San Francisco, stocking books on drugs and philosophy, plus drug

³² Such as San Francisco's Diggers, the publishers of the *Berkeley Barb* and San Francisco *Oracle*, HALO (the Haight-Ashbury Legal Organization), and Ann Arbor's Students for a Democratic Society, and New York's Fugs, among many, many others. Miles, *Hippie*, 58, 186, 200.

³³ Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Random House, 1984), 4.

paraphernalia, fashion accessories and psychedelic posters.³⁴ It was the first store of its kind in the nation.³⁵



Fig. 2, Screenshot from Google Streetview of Haight and Ashbury, San Francisco, CA, February 10, 2011.

The term “psychedelic” was coined in the late 1950s by Humphrey Osmond, psychiatrist and early experimenter with mescaline and LSD. The term takes as its roots the Latin *psyche*, meaning “soul,” and *delos*, “to reveal,” roughly translating as “soul-revealing.”³⁶ A psychedelic experience can be characterized by a tendency to manifest some aspect of one’s mind or spirit previously unknown, or by an experience of perception or mental exaltation unbound by prior restraints. Aside from hallucinogenic substances, such an experience is often linked to sensory stimulation or deprivation, and is marked by changes of perception, synesthesia, altered mental or bodily awareness, or

³⁴ Miles, *Hippie*, 96-102.

³⁵ Something of the kind is still there, along with a Ben and Jerry’s ice cream shop, and, nearby, a GAP store.

³⁶ Don Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club: How Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Huston Smith and Andrew Weil Killed the Fifties and Ushered in a New Age for America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 68.

mystical revelation.³⁷ In some sense the psychedelic state could be regarded as an unveiling, a revelation of perceptual capacities previously unknown. What the psychedelic state achieves is best described as a psychological destabilization.

In his first experience with *Psilocybe cubensis*, or Mexican psilocybin mushrooms, psychologist and LSD researcher, Timothy Leary, “was forced to confront the fragile nature of his beliefs. The mushroom ride shattered the foundation of his philosophy of life and his view of himself.”³⁸ Similarly, physician and founder of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, Andrew Weil, experienced in his second experiment with mescaline, “a kind of spiritual transcendence...Everything just felt right – like he was seeing into the essence of things. But there was also something frightening about the experience.”³⁹ The psychedelic is apparent, like the sublime, “as an experience of shock and awe and as a destabilizing force...as revealing a reality that is fundamentally indeterminate, undecidable and unrepresentable.”⁴⁰ The experiences of Leary and Weil provoked both awe and terror, of a sense of wonder and discovery coupled with the sensation of unknowing. What is described is the destabilizing force of the experience, psychedelic sensation shaking loose the foundation upon which the experiencer sits. This destabilization prompts a re-discovery of the self, a re-defining of the parameters

³⁷ Flotation chambers are a common means of achieving a state of sensory deprivation. I recently spent an hour suspended in a flotation chamber, in which I was lying on my back enclosed in a tank of body-temperature saline. The chamber was utterly without light, and silent except for the sounds of water on the ear. I did not experience visual or auditory hallucinations, though I did experience dissolution of the body, and shifts in my sense of time and perception of space. Upon exiting the tank, my visual senses felt oddly sharpened, and I felt physically heavy and disoriented.

³⁸ Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club*, 41.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁰ Simon Morley, introduction to *The Sublime*, ed. Simon Morley (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), 19.

apparent in both the self and society at large. The psychedelic state, and its presence throughout the counterculture of 1960s San Francisco, prompted those who experienced it to seek out a new modality of life. The psychedelic culture strove to build a new utopian world not only through mental or psychological states of transcendence, but in the actual, physical world.

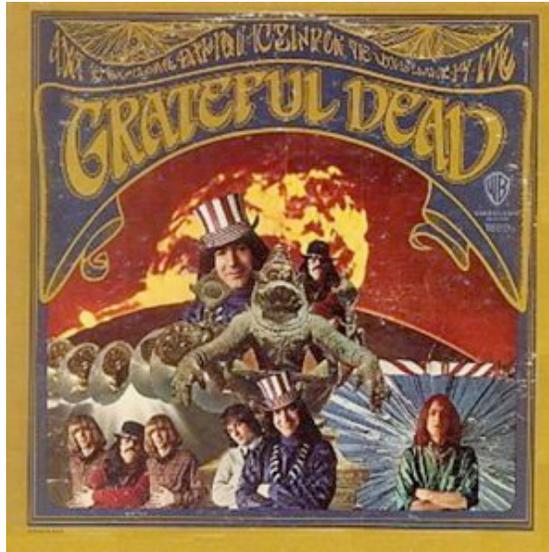


Fig. 3, The Grateful Dead, *The Grateful Dead*, Warner Bros. Records, 1967.

Psychedelic music and visual art often represents an attempt at describing or invoking a psychedelic state. At other times, it is an attempt to manifest or evoke the state itself. The Grateful Dead, as the house band for Ken Kesey's Acid Test events, exemplified the psychedelic music scene of San Francisco. The music of The Grateful Dead, typified by lengthy improvisational performances and spacey song structures, captured the psychology of psychedelia, prompting a "turning inward" and personal investigation along with physical exaltation.⁴¹ The Grateful Dead's eponymous debut

⁴¹ Aquila, "Images of the American West in Rock Music," 424.

album was released in 1967, and featured a cover designed by Mouse Studios, the company headed by San Francisco artists Stanley “Mouse” Miller and Alton Kelley.⁴²

The sound of the band at this time was a mash-up of styles and genres, referencing pop rock, bluegrass, folk, country and western, and blues, and laced throughout with spacious, echoing guitar lines and interweaving melodies. Aside from their counterculture role as proselytizers of LSD and psychedelics, The Grateful Dead, in their live shows and recorded music, represented a state of mind. Their compositions are open-ended and improvisational, and in performance a piece could easily stretch from a three-minute pop song to a twenty-minute soundscape. The band attempts to build or provoke, through sound and music, a utopian state of mind linking introspective self-discovery and extroverted communal joy.⁴³

The Grateful Dead are intrinsically tied to the musical history of San Francisco, and their influence continues to exert itself on contemporary musicians and bands in the fault-lined city. The band Wooden Shjips formed in San Francisco in 2006. Described as “heavy psych and space rock,” the band formed with the intention of integrating as many genres of music as possible, including minimalist composition of the 60s and 70s, garage rock and the improvisational model of jazz and psychedelic rock.⁴⁴ The band, coming out

⁴² The Grateful Dead, *The Grateful Dead*, vinyl record, Warner Bros. Records, 1967.

⁴³ The first concert I have any memory of is a Grateful Dead concert. I have no memory of seeing or hearing the band, but I do remember walking around in the grass at the top edge of the amphitheater. I found a cache of crystals and polished stones someone had left at the base of a pole. There was an amethyst, and maybe a tiger’s eye. I kept the stones, though I no longer know where they are. I was very, very young. I also remember going to a music festival of some kind, in the summer, and sleeping in the back of my dad’s truck with him and my mom. I don’t remember if my brother had been born yet. Again, I was very young. I remember, perhaps, a river, and a lot of dry grass or hay.

⁴⁴ John Doran, “Album Review: Wooden Shjips - ‘Vol. 2’,” *NME*, March 19, 2010, <http://www.nme.com/reviews/wooden-shjips--2/11148> (accessed March 26, 2011); Him

of an improvisational background, writes songs that, although densely layered with repetitive riffs and fuzzed-out noise, are structurally spacious and open-ended, much like the long jams of The Grateful Dead. While Wooden Shjips' sound is decidedly darker and more oppressive, both bands generate a feeling of space and an alternate mode of perception for the listener. The compositions of Wooden Shjips are long and heavy, creating the sense of a lightless void, of a confrontation with death.⁴⁵ The compositions are similar in atmosphere to the star-tunnel sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a frightening journey on the way to a new world, a destabilized liminal zone leading towards utopia.⁴⁶

Tall, "DiScover: Wooden Shjips," *Drowned in Sound*, October 2, 2007, http://drownedinsound.com/in_depth/2430248 (accessed March 26, 2011).

⁴⁵ Wooden Shjips, *Wooden Shjips*, compact disc, Holy Mountain, 2007.

⁴⁶ This is the sort of space I'm attempting to generate in the series of digital collages, *In Anticipation of the Coming Age* (Fig. 4). The works in this series manifest physically as archival inkjet prints, 36"x24," and are, effectively, posters. The collaged imagery is almost exclusively found on the internet, and the subject matter of the imagery is culled from an ongoing list of associated topics, from quantum science diagrams, images of the large hadron collider, Neolithic standing stones and ancient architectural marvels, astronauts, scientific geniuses and rock and roll gods, Kama sutra manuals, starscapes and geologic formations. This kaleidoscopic assortment of imagery is arranged in the visual field of the collages in such a way as to generate an otherworldly psychedelic space, through repetition of forms, reflective and radial symmetry, and visual overlay and interference. The images are drained of color, rendering them somehow dead, as inert crystallizations of a particular moment in space-time.

Aesthetically and conceptually, the series *In Anticipation of the Coming Age*, and the previously discussed series of sculptures created in Google Sketchup, *In Advance of The Coming Age*, can trace a lineage back to the work of Soviet Constructivist artists, in particular the *Proun* paintings of El Lissitzky, which attempt to render a four-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane through geometric abstraction, and the architectural renderings of Vladimir Tatlin, whose *Monument to the Third International*, though never realized, is something of a utopian touchstone. Additionally, the paintings of spiritualist Hilma af Klint are worth noting, the depictions of abstract spaces and mystical geometry attempting to channel or illicit some occult force.



Fig. 4, Daniel J. Glendening, *In Anticipation of the Coming Age #3*, archival inkjet print on paper, 2010.

Despite their apparent darkness and weight, however, the compositions of *Wooden Shjips* are not simply a nihilistic view of the world: they seem to be earnest attempts to trigger an altered state in the mind of the audience and performer. It may simply be the case that, in a contemporary world beset by cynicism, an audience must be forcibly thrust, rather than graciously invited, into the psychedelic headspace generated by the compositions.

In 1986 a group of friends met on Baker Beach in San Francisco to burn a nine-foot-tall wooden effigy. What began as a small gathering of friends has, over the years,

grown into a massive annual event, the Burning Man Festival. The self-proclaimed “annual experiment in temporary community dedicated to radical self-expression and radical self-reliance,” is held each summer in the Black Rock Desert, 120 miles north of Reno, Nevada, with ticket prices starting at \$210 each.⁴⁷ The festival grew out of San Francisco counterculture and has evolved, for better or worse, into a sort of hedonist-utopia vacation spot. The festival largely functions as an attempt at an isolated ideal society, a sort of yearly Black Bear Ranch, with a prohibitively expensive price tag and copious quantities of drugs and alcohol.⁴⁸ In 2010 the festival hosted in excess of 50,000 attendees escaping the tyranny of everyday life, shedding their clothes and reveling in the sun and dust of the desert.⁴⁹ It is difficult to determine whether the attendees are truly searching for a utopian space of “radical self-expression and radical self-reliance” or simply for a site of radical excess.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ “Frequently Asked Questions,” *Burningman*, http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/about_burningman/faq_what_is.html (accessed March 21, 2011).

⁴⁸ Although, granted, there are some opportunities to volunteer to offset cost.

⁴⁹ “Burning Man,” *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burning_Man (accessed March 21, 2011).

⁵⁰ I attended in the summer of 2003 and 2004. While there, I heard nostalgic stories from attendees of decades past, who decried the increasing population and regulations, speaking longingly of a time when one could “drive out into the desert, put a brick on the gas pedal and climb up onto the roof to shoot guns out into the night.” I personally became disillusioned with the whole enterprise, culminating on the night of the burn in 2005. I was attempting to find my way back to camp. Admittedly, I was intoxicated, which didn’t help matters, but the fact that revelers had stripped the makeshift city of street-signs helped my dislocation in no way. My fatigue climaxed when I stumbled upon a lone hand-painted, homemade street sign, designating the cross street of Haight and Ashbury. It suddenly seemed clear to me that this wasn’t any real sort of utopia, or even a truly positive manifestation of a desire for social change. This was a hedonistic booze-cruise allowing participants a week to let their hair down and take their pants off, and fly some tie-dye banners in an attempt to recapture something of an era decades past. Yes, the festival operates largely on a gift economy (unless you’re buying a latté at the cafe with your U.S. currency) and yes, it’s built largely by volunteers and attendees, but it’s

While The Burning Man Festival might be seen as a nostalgic, hedonistic vacation from the everyday world, other cultural movements borne out of the San Francisco counterculture have a broader range of effects. Several key figures of the San Francisco scene went on to become heavily involved in computer technologies and the development of online communities, leading to the consolidation of the internet. In the Spring of 1968, Stewart Brand, one of Ken Kesey's band of Merry Pranksters, began publishing *The Whole Earth Catalog*, a publication featuring product listings and reviews by members of the community and its readership. The catalog ran listings for an eclectic range of products, from books on Buckminster Fuller, to a one-man saw-mill, to a Hewlett Packard desktop calculator. Aside from simply being a listing of purchasable products, the catalogue operated as a network of communication, allowing readers to suggest new products in later editions, disseminating information about scientific and artistic advancements throughout the counterculture community. Fifteen years later, that print community became the model for the Whole Earth 'Electronic Link, or the WELL.⁵¹ The WELL, founded in 1985 by Stewart Brand and Hog Farm Commune resident Larry Brilliant, is the longest running online community, and is "widely known as the primordial ooze where the online community movement was born."⁵²

The internet was born, in part, out of the psychedelic counterculture surrounding San Francisco. The internet is a site of rapid sensory stimulation and altered awareness of

still a vacation, a holiday, and not necessarily a new social organizing principle – no matter how hard one tries to take the spirit of the playa home. It is a hermetic Dionysian utopia with an admission fee.

⁵¹ Fred Turner, "Where Counterculture Met the New Economy: The WELL and the Origins of Virtual Community," *Technology and Culture* 46, no. 3 (July 2005), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40060901> (accessed March 26, 2011).

⁵² "Learn About The WELL," *The WELL*, <http://www.well.com/aboutwell.html> (accessed March 21, 2011).

space, time, and the body, and represents an evolution of the the rhizomatic network and models of non-linear thought evidenced in the psychedelic counterculture. It functions as a psychedelic site, a space of liminality where the user experiences a state of extreme sensory stimulation, a distorted perception of space and time, and an altered sense of mental and bodily awareness. The internet, and the computerization of society it represents, is not simply a new tool for carrying out a common task. It is, Elizabeth Grosz writes, a “transformation of the very notion of tool or technology itself. The space, time, logic, and materiality of computerization threaten to disrupt and refigure the very nature of information and communication, as well as the nature of space, time, community, and identity.”⁵³ Just as Timothy Leary described that first psilocybin experience as “shattering the foundation” of his philosophy and sense of self, and inviting a new examination of identity, the digitization of culture has served to disrupt the structure and sense of self of society. And just as Andrew Weil experienced a feeling of one-ness and spiritual transcendence, “cyberspace is a mode of transcendence, the next quantum leap in the development of mind, as flying transcends the bodily activity of walking.”⁵⁴ Internet-connected society is living through a technology-fed psychedelic revolution, more potent and powerful than the LSD-fed revolution of the 1960s. This movement towards and increasing engagement with the virtual world of the internet has restructured entertainment, methods of communication, commerce, aesthetics; in short, nearly every facet of the human experience. We may not yet have achieved the ultimate transcendence of disembodiment, but we have altered the ways in which we perceive and consider our

⁵³ Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*, 51.

⁵⁴ Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*, 84.

bodies in virtual and actual space. The internet itself is not a utopia. It is a psychedelic destabilizing force, pressing a reconsideration of extant social orders.

The counterculture of the 1960s and psychedelic San Francisco made many steps in overturning social repressions and restrictions, though the ultimate utopia that the counterculture was striving for was never attained. 1969 saw both the success of Woodstock and the radical failure of Altamont, and by 1972 Timothy Leary himself was regularly using heroin.⁵⁵ The years leading out of the 1960s saw a shift in popular consciousness, “a harder edge to the drugs, and to the entire scene.”⁵⁶ One cannot simply blame the drugs, however. Today, it is hard to find the sense of hopefulness and faith exhibited in the stories of 1960s California; instead, there is a fog of irony, cynicism, and hopelessness in the face of power. The post-60s generations are able to look at the successes and failures of their parents’ generation, sometimes with nostalgia, and see not only idealism, but also sadness, and frustration with the government and society. The counterculture wanted to build something, and though they had some great successes along the way, they ultimately were unable.

They wanted to build something, but maybe that something is still being built.

California is located on a series of fault lines. The state straddles the Pacific and the North American Plates, split down the length. It is a geologically unstable site, prone to earthquakes and tremors. The ground itself moves, perpetually destabilized. Perhaps, it is this physical destabilization that generates the particular state of mind bred in

⁵⁵ Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club*, 179.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

California: the state of mind of the dreamer, of the traveler, of the Prankster, of the psychedelic, and of the utopian. Perhaps the utopian impulse rests, not only in periods of temporal liminality, but also in places of geological fluctuation.

San Francisco is a port city, populated by immigrants and pioneers, and the very soil beneath it moves, shifting with the tectonic plates.

CHAPTER 3: APOCALYPSE

The antithesis of the utopian manifests itself in a range of related forms, including the anti-utopian, the dystopian, and, most devastatingly, in the apocalyptic. A narrative of the end of time, or the end of the human race, the apocalyptic narrative often depicts an event of mass catastrophe and devastation, such as nuclear war or ecological disaster. The narrative describes a world in which the social structures we as a Western society are accustomed to have collapsed, resulting in a lack of government and social leadership, a scarcity of resources, and a society in anarchy.

Like the utopian narrative, the apocalyptic narrative stems from a psychological state of unease. Rather than the vision of hope and the possibility of a better world offered by the utopian vision, the apocalyptic is a manifestation of the anxieties and fear brought on by a state of instability. A destabilized state, manifesting a world in flux, has the potential both for radical success and radical failure. Imminent possibility and potential also includes the potential for disorder, collapse, and death. An unclear future can easily foster anxiety and a fear of the unknown. Anti-utopian and dystopian narratives, such as *Zardoz* and *Logan's Run*, offer a limited view of both sides of the utopian/apocalyptic coin, depicting flawed efforts of utopian societies, at a temporal remove from some unnamed apocalyptic event. Other narratives pull tropes more directly from the biblical Book of Revelation, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (cited as the first apocalyptic science fiction novel), and theories of an impending technological singularity.⁵⁷ These narratives, such as James Cameron's *The Terminator*, situate the

⁵⁷ Elena Gomel, "Mystery, Apocalypse and Utopia: The Case of the Ontological

audience just at the cusp of change, as the world transforms from a recognizable space to a space of nightmare.

The Book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, was likely written sometime in the first century C.E., in Asia Minor, by an exiled Christian known as John the Elder.⁵⁸ The text relates a symbolic narrative describing the final confrontation between the forces of good and evil, the events of which were relayed to the author, according to the text, in a vision. Apocalypse is an anglicized adaptation of the Greek *apokálypsis*, meaning, “lifting of the veil” or “revelation.” In its literal form, it is a noun, meaning the disclosure of some hidden thing, the removal of the veil resulting in clarity of vision: the naked truth. It is the making visible of the unseen, or making known the unknown, but it is also intrinsically linked to the narrative events of The Book of Revelation and eschatological narratives more generally.

The narrative events of The Book of Revelation are foundational in western anxiety over, and imagining of, the world’s end, appearing even in comic books and Saturday-morning cartoons. In 1986 Marvel Comics introduced a character named Apocalypse, a.k.a. En Sabah Nur, loosely translating as “The First One.”⁵⁹ Apocalypse is introduced as a mutant of great power and intelligence, with the ability to control and manipulate his body-structure, able to “rearrange and restructure its molecules”⁶⁰ at will. In the Marvel Comics mythology, and the animated television series *X-Men*, the narrative

Detective Story,” *Science Fiction Studies* 22, no. 3 (November, 1995), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240456> (accessed March 26, 2011).

⁵⁸ L. Michael White, “Understanding the Book of Revelation,” *PBS*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/revelation/white.html> (accessed March 21, 2011).

⁵⁹ “En Sabah Nur,” *Marvel Comics Database*, http://marvel.wikia.com/En_Sabah_Nur_%28Earth-616%29 (accessed March 26, 2011).

⁶⁰ Louise Simonson, *X-Factor* 1, no. 6, July 1986, 12.

story-arc of the character Apocalypse appropriates a portion of Revelation. Revelation 6:1-6:8 reads:

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say, as with a voice of thunder, “Come!” And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I saw, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a balance in his hand; and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, but do not harm oil and wine!”

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” And I saw, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him; and they were given power over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.⁶¹

The biblical narrative is adapted in the 1993 episode of the animated series *X-Men*, “Come the Apocalypse.” The villainous character Apocalypse uses a machine to enslave and to transform unwitting mutants into twisted versions of their former selves, dubbing them his Horsemen: Pestilence, Famine, and War, led by Archangel, or Death.⁶²

⁶¹ Rev. 6:1-8 [Revised Standard Version]

⁶² It is this particular narrative that led me, as an eleven year old child, to dig up my parent’s bible and seek out Revelation. In a perhaps strange, but not unusual, sequence of events, it was a spectacularly villainous character in a Saturday morning cartoon based on a super-hero-team comic book that led me to the stories of the Bible. It sounds something like the Christian coalition trying to hook children by presenting them with biblical narratives in unconventional forms, like rock-bands at church, but I think in actuality the comic book writers just recognized a fantastic story when they saw one.

I have been working on an on-going series of graphite on Bristol drawings of the character Apocalypse. In these 8.5”x11” drawings, the imagery is appropriated from *X-Factor* #6, but the character is presented excised from setting and alone on the white page. The drawings are a little absurd in their use of a comic book character as a stand-in

The narrative presented in *X-Men* appropriates the symbolic figures of Revelation, positioning them as characterizations of their namesake maladies. As characters, Apocalypse and his horsemen are personifications of the threat of global collapse and societal ruin. Their very presence brings about war, famine, pestilence and death, and, if left unchecked, the end of humanity. As personifications of these apocalyptic forces, the threats they represent and facilitate may be stopped, i.e. if the character of War is destroyed, then with him the concept of War is destroyed as well. In this instance, the threat of global devastation can be considered from a position of safety, as it is squelched by the heroes of the narrative shortly after its manifestation. With roots in Revelation, many of the tropes of the apocalyptic narrative predate the emergence of the dystopian and anti-utopian lines of the utopian narrative genre. However, the apocalyptic narrative as it manifests in 20th century popular culture can be examined alongside the dystopian narrative form.

In *Imaginary Communities*, Phillip Wegner defines the anti-utopia as “the sub-genre of the narrative utopia that takes as the target of its critical estrangement not the histories of the present, but the desires and programs of the very generic institution from

for catastrophe, and relate to this broader cultural conversation regarding the ways by which we as individuals and as a society construct meaning in our lives. I was raised without religion in the strict sense, though my dad was raised Catholic. Somewhere along the way, strict observance of faith lost priority to my parents, and so I was raised without those fixed religious structures. I don't think I'm unusual in my generation. People build meaning and morality in their lives through their experiences, whether that is structured by the church or by Saturday morning cartoons. I read comic books, and taught myself how to draw by copying the illustrations, sitting alone in my room with a pad of paper and a Dixon Ticonderoga no. 2 pencil.

which it emerges.”⁶³ This, Wegner argues, differs from the form of the dystopia – the “bad place,” in opposition to Thomas More’s idealized “no-place.” Wegner writes:

The former [*dystopia*] presents a critique of the limitations of a specific form of imagining place, the latter [*anti-utopia*] a rejection of this cognitive act altogether...Taking as one of its most important tasks the unveiling of the limitations of the older generic logic that binds the utopia to what is now understood to be a constricting and false social totality, [the dystopia] turns the reflective gaze of the utopian form back in on itself.⁶⁴

While many narratives of the utopian genre utilize the model of the proposition to establish a critical stance against the status quo, the dystopia finds flaws not only with the status quo but also with the idealism and narcissism of proposing an ideal society.

Wegner describes the dystopian narrative as performing an “unveiling,” aligning the narrative form with that of the apocalypse, or revelation. The dystopian world is the would-be utopia exposed and revealed, having fallen to pieces under its own weight.

Apocalyptic and dystopian narratives depict societies whose rules no longer function. These societies, through the influence of totalitarian regime, pandemic, ecological disaster, or other external forces, are in a state of disorder and collapse. The forms seem to diverge in two regards, though: the degree of social disruption, and the chronological placement of the narrative relative to the catastrophe. The time frame of the dystopian and anti-utopian narrative is most commonly situated at a distant remove from cataclysm, while the apocalyptic is positioned at the moment of disaster.

John Boorman’s 1974 anti-utopian film, *Zardoz*, takes place on Earth in the year 2293. The world presented in the film seems to be entirely rural and agrarian, devoid of

⁶³ Wegner, *Imaginary Communities*, 148.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

urban centers and advanced technology, as we know it. The protagonist, Zed, is a member of a warrior class charged with overseeing the caste of farm laborers, who are forced to surrender grain crops to Zardoz, a deity in the form of a massive floating stone head (later revealed to be simply a man in a machine, the man behind the metaphorical curtain). Boorman's rejection of the utopian model is established through Zed's interaction with an elite caste known as the Eternals, a social caste adorned in flowing Greek robes, hermetically isolated from the broken world outside. Critic Marsha Kinder wrote at the time of the film's release:

Boorman is attacking a utopia...which, in trying to control behavior and minimize risk and pain, actually eliminates the possibilities for growth and intensity. In forming an elite society totally cut off from the misery and violence experienced by the masses, the Eternals harden their hearts and lose their humanity; since their egalitarian society is based on the enslavement of others, they are bound to reap the consequences.⁶⁵

Kinder goes on to level the critique against Boorman that, while there may be some truth to this judgment, the film fails to establish this failure through any means other than the author's imposed logic. There is nothing inherent in the portrayal of the Eternals to say that their "nonsexist, classless, communal society" is, by its nature, sterile and inhuman.⁶⁶ Boorman's film, rather than offering a nuanced critique of the utopian form, is a rejection of the form altogether. The seemingly utopian social order of the Eternals is, despite its harmonies, flawed, simply due to its existence. The film concludes not with an exposure of these failings, but in death. Rather than perform an apocalypse, or revelation, for the

⁶⁵ Marsha Kinder, untitled film review, *Film Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (Summer, 1974): 56, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1211395> (accessed March 26, 2011).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Eternals, Zed brings about death and destruction, a rejection of the propositional society of the Eternals.

Michael Anderson's 1976 film, *Logan's Run*, on the other hand, operates as a dystopian narrative, in which the flaws of the depicted utopian society are critiqued from within, resulting, ultimately, in happiness and freedom. The film takes place sometime in the 23rd century, and Anderson's protagonist, Logan 5, lives in a society that is, like Boorman's Eternals, hermetically sealed off from the outside world. In order to maintain the utopian social order, citizens are killed at the age of 30, preventing over-population and resource scarcity. Logan 5, slated for "renewal," or death, and a companion, Jessica 6, manage to escape the confines of the city. Outside of the city walls, they discover a vast world: Washington D.C. overgrown with tropical vegetation, and a lone human occupant – an old man, survivor of some unnamed catastrophe. Logan 5 and Jessica 6 bring the man back to the city as proof of the existence of an outside, and as evidence that life is possible beyond the age of 30. Ultimately, the city walls are destroyed and the populace leaves the confines of the city for a new, wider world.

Anderson's film functions as a critique of the utopian social model, rather than a rejection of its possibilities altogether. The critique in *Logan's Run* comes from within, through a process of revelation experienced by a member of the society itself. Rather than a blanket rejection and destruction of the utopia, Anderson's narrative depicts a society paying a heavy price to maintain a seemingly utopian lifestyle, submitting to social control only because no alternative is presented. Here, it is perhaps the exterior world that presents a true utopian model, in which people may suffer the hardships of life and aging,

but are able to do so with free will. It is the mechanisms of social control required to maintain a utopian model that lead to its perversion.

The anti-utopia of *Zardoz* and the dystopia of *Logan's Run* contain elements of a post-apocalyptic narrative. Both films depict a speculative future Earth, devastated by some unnamed calamity, perhaps nuclear war, or ecological collapse. The narratives presented, however, are removed from the disaster by a significant period of time, and in that time a social order has been rebuilt and firmly established for several generations. Enough time has passed that the citizens no longer possess any memory or understanding of a world outside of the structures they know. The escape of Logan 5, and his subsequent return to the city, represents a schism between what is known and what is believed. The existing social order, believed to be the only possible social model, is suddenly ruptured by the knowledge of an outside, or a mode outside of the self. This rupture acts as a source of destabilization, opening up new potentialities and possibilities.

The apocalyptic narrative situates its audience at the cusp of change, in the temporal liminal zone between a recognizable contemporary world and humanity's collapse. James Cameron's 1984 film *The Terminator* bridges this temporal gap, depicting, through a narrative involving extensive time-travel and flash-forward sequences, a version of a contemporary Earth and a speculated future Earth. This speculated future describes a world in which artificial intelligence technology has outpaced its human inventors, becoming the dominant "species" and subjugators of the human race. Within Cameron's narrative, audiences experience the set of circumstances leading up to this apocalyptic future and that future itself. This future could be considered as one possible outcome of what is described as the technological singularity.

The technological singularity is a concept describing the point at which technological advancement extends beyond, and accelerates out of human control. The term “singularity” is borrowed from mathematics, where it is used to describe a “value that transcends any finite limitation.”⁶⁷ In the 1950s, it was first used in relation to the accelerating pace of technological advancement. Typically, the point of the technological singularity is imagined, both in theory and in popular culture, to represent the point at which “machines reach a level of intelligence to produce other machines, outside of human control,” a point theorist Vernor Vinge hypothesizes will occur between 2005 and 2030.⁶⁸

The hypothetical approach of the technological singularity has sparked a range of interpretations, hopes, and fears. Theorized projections of a post-singularity world run the gamut among scientists from the blissfully utopian to the *Terminator*-like devastation of the human race. Bill Joy, co-founder of Sun Microsystems, writes:

[W]hile replication in a computer or computer network can be a nuisance, at worst it disables a machine or takes down a network or network service. Uncontrolled self-replication in these newer technologies runs a much greater risk: a risk of substantial damage in the physical world.

Each of these technologies also offers untold promise: The vision of near immortality that [Ray] Kurzweil [author of several books, including *The Age of Intelligent Machines*, and visionary of a techno-utopian future] sees in his robot dreams drive us forward...Yet, with each of these technologies, a sequence of small, individually sensible advances leads to an accumulation of great power and, concomitantly, great danger.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Roger Lockhurst, “Catastrophism, American Style: The Fiction of Greg Bear,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 37, no. 2 (2007): 222, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20479311> (accessed March 26, 2011).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 223

⁶⁹ Bill Joy, “Why The Future Doesn’t Need Us,” *Wired*, issue 8.04, April 2000, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.04/joy.html?pg=1&topic=&topic_set=9 (accessed March 26, 2011).

While Joy recognizes the potential rewards and benefits of the technologies he describes, including robotics, genetic engineering, and nanotechnology, he is also quick to point out the potential dangers of unchecked advancement. Without certain safety checks in place, he argues, humanity as a species is in danger of rendering itself endangered, subjugated to a robotic sentience. The two potential futures outlined by Joy and Kurzweil, an unchecked catastrophe and a blissful utopia, respectively, are representative, undoubtedly, of extremes. It is Danny Hillis, founder of the Long Now Foundation, who proposes, perhaps, the most likely outcome: “[Hillis] said, simply, that the changes would come gradually, and that we would get used to them.”⁷⁰

Those changes are happening now. On March 15, 2011, Robonaut 2, the “first dexterous humanoid robot in space” was “unleashed from his foam lined packing crate” aboard the International Space Station.⁷¹ The robot is designed to work alongside the human astronauts, and, despite its lack of full autonomy, is already being referred to as a “he” rather than an “it,” lending the machine a veneer of humanity and individuality. Meanwhile, back on Earth, researchers have developed a system in which nerve cells, extracted from mice, are coaxed to thread themselves through a designed network of tiny silicon and germanium semiconductor tubes, laying the groundwork for “hybrid neural-electronic systems.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ken Kremer, “Robo Trek Debuts ... Robonaut 2 Unleashed and joins First Human-Robot Space Crew,” *Universe Today*, March 18, 2011, <http://www.universetoday.com/84208/robo-trek-debuts-robot-2-unleashed-and-joins-first-human-robot-space-crew/> (accessed March 26, 2011).

⁷² Rachel Ehrenberg, “Computer Chips Wired With Nerve Cells,” *Science News*, March 18, 2011, http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/71395/title/Computer_chips_wired_with_nerve_cells (accessed March 26, 2011).

Contemporary society is now living, if Vernor Vinge's timeline is to be believed, at the cusp of change. We are situated, just as in Cameron's *The Terminator*, in the period of transition between a world we know and recognize and a world irrevocably and drastically changed. The world has undergone a shift from a state dominated by analog technology to one dominated by the digital, in which the speed of the development of digital, genetic and nano- technologies is increasing at an exponential rate. It could be said that every society is a society in flux, but rarely are the mechanics of that fluctuation so evident in the lives of its citizens. The internet, with a history dating back to the late 1950s, did not become a common middle-class household tool until the mid-to-late 1990s. While large portions of the world do not, due to economic and trade reasons, have common household access to the technology of the internet, much of the Americas, Europe, and Asia have witnessed a social shift from a pre-personal-computer, pre-internet mode of life to one dependent on this technology, and are churning out ever-newer, ever-faster tools.

This is a schism; this is a revelation. Society is now living through that temporal liminality, a destabilized state between what was and what will be. Such change gives rise to imaginings of new worlds; of utopian visions of unity and unrepressed happiness and personal expression, as well as the utopian converse, the dystopia, the apocalyptic. The apocalyptic and the utopian visions, both arising out of fluctuation and serving to usher in a new modality, are recto and verso, front and back. It is no coincidence that, even in an apocalyptic world such as that of Cameron's *Terminator*, or Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*, we witness the struggles of a small band of survivors fighting against the odds in a destroyed civilization, attempting to find order, happiness, and even love.

These apocalyptic fictions “found ways to explain the survival of a select group. This group, purified through the sacrifice of a large percentage of its members (and perhaps by a return to primitive conditions), might eventually be able to build a new, infinitely better world.”⁷³ Within the narrative structure of the dystopia, the anti-utopia, and the apocalyptic there lingers, amid the upheaval and pain, a glimmer of hope.

A society in flux can find within the potential energy of its destabilized state the possibility of a better world. A state of change, a state of transition, is a forking road. It is a path leading to an infinitude of possibilities, for better or for worse.

⁷³ Martha A. Bartter, “Nuclear Holocaust as Urban Renewal,” *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (July 1986): 148, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239742> (accessed March 26, 2011).

EPILOGUE: THE MANY ENDS OF THE WORLD

We are living in a destabilized world.

This destabilization, triggered by socio-political stresses, by war, and the digitization of our culture, indicates a state of flux. Definitions have become fluid, hazy, and out of focus. Out-dated modalities are falling away, and new methods of perceiving and understanding our world are emerging from the digital morass. Printed newspapers are suffering from a decline in readership as people increasingly rely on the internet for their daily news. Personal identity is a flexible construct, ultimately self-defined in the blank spaces of the Facebook profile page. Described by Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, illustrated by the technologies of Google and the virtual spaces of the internet, and depicted in popular science-fiction television, destabilization is a state of imminent possibility. As in an earthquake, many structures fall, but following that disruption new models may be built and maintained.

Out of the destabilization of the 1960s and contemporary society, we can expect visions of both utopian structure and apocalyptic chaos to arise: the twin faces of speculative precognition. The counterculture of the 1960s and seventies attempted to jump-start a new age of happiness, love, and personal liberty. They made many gains, but looking back on the movement from a point of cultural remove it is easy to wonder what may have ultimately gone wrong. Why is it that the wave simply broke and rolled back, collapsing under its own weight, and couldn't keep the tide rising? It is easy, looking back, to view the movement as a failure, because we're still at war, and protests don't seem to work like they once did, and free love won't get you anywhere but heartbroken

and sick. It is easy, looking back, to see something magical. It is easy, looking back, to be cynical.

I turned 18 in the year 2000. The fall of that year I voted, for the first time, in the presidential election, and watched what appeared to be the failing of the democratic system as Al Gore, with the majority of the popular vote, ceded the election to George W. Bush. The United States military has been actively deployed to the region surrounding the Persian Gulf on and off since I was nine years old, and has been involved in the region in some capacity for close to a century.⁷⁴ Despite the Pentagon's attempts at suppression, on March 27, 2011, *Rollingstone.com* published photographs depicting members of the U.S. Military's 5th Stryker Brigade, stationed near Kandahar, Afghanistan, posing with the bodies of slain Afghan civilians. The images were snapped on digital cameras, and were passed around from soldier to soldier, stored on USB hard-drives smaller than a cigarette lighter. The soldiers are grinning next to the bloodied bodies, thumbs up.⁷⁵

It seems, sometimes, that the countercultural revolution that peaked that summer of 1969 just wasn't enough.

It seems, sometimes, that nothing will ever be enough.

But maybe, there's the possibility that what was jump-started half a century ago is still going, quietly, and that we're looking back trying to see an end point that is still up ahead on the horizon. The internet, a site of sensory stimulation and altered awareness of

⁷⁴ "U.S. Intervention In The Middle East," *Information Clearing House*, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article6308.htm> (accessed April 17, 2011).

⁷⁵ "The Kill Team Photos: More War Crime Images The Pentagon Doesn't Want You To See," *Rollingstone.com*, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/photos/the-kill-team-photos-20110327> (accessed April 17, 2011).

space, time, and the body, is an evolution of the networks and non-linear models of thought exemplified by the psychedelic counterculture. Our daily use of the internet and digital media is altering the function of our brains, rewriting the neural pathways associated with information storage and retrieval, the ability to filter and respond to stimuli, and motor-function.⁷⁶ We, as a culture, are developing rhizomatic tendencies. We are increasingly connected to each other via digital networks, and we can begin to see, perhaps, a shift in the way we think and process information. The edges of ourselves may be beginning to fall away, individual consciousnesses bleeding into one another. This technological shift has altered the substructure of our society, and it is advancing at an exponentially increasing rate. We are nearing the hypothetical singularity, at which point our technologies may begin to take on a life, and a consciousness, of their own.

We may, through technology, become a truly global society, and leave war behind.

We may, as a species, achieve a state of techno-cultural transcendence.

We may become slaves of the machines.

We may simply keep living, keep fighting.

We may just get used to it.

The world will probably not end tomorrow. The world will probably not end the day after tomorrow, or the day after that.

⁷⁶ Carr, "The Web Shatters Focus."

There is the possibility that, five billion years from now, some distant descendent of ours will look on as our sun exhausts its core supply of hydrogen, transforms into a red giant, and swallows the Earth.

*

“It’s after the end of the world,” Bob Nickas told me. “The world has ended many times – that’s something Sun Ra said.”

LIST OF WORKS

1. *We May See A Great and Unrecognizable Future*. 2011. Installation view. Mixed media installation.
2. *We May See A Great and Unrecognizable Future*. 2011. Installation view. Mixed media installation.
3. *Supplication*. 2011. 30" x 40"
Archival inkjet print in frame.
4. *Vision*. 2011. 8" x 10"
Archival inkjet print in frame.
5. *Vision*. 2011. 8" x 10"
Archival inkjet print in frame.
6. *In Anticipation of the Coming Age #10*. 2011. 37" x 25."
Archival inkjet print in frame.
7. *In Anticipation of the Coming Age #1-9*. 2010-11. Each 37" x 25."
Archival inkjet prints in frames.
8. *Aoxomoxoa Formation*. 2011. Dimensions variable.
Vinyl records, sodium tetraborate.
9. *Don't Look Back (Dad's Shelf) #1*. 2011. 45" x 62" x 11"
Wood, hardware, acrylic, contact paper, mixed media objects.
10. *Don't Look Back (Dad's Shelf) #2*. 2011. 45" x 62" x 11"
Wood, hardware, acrylic, contact paper, mixed media objects.
11. *In Advance of the Coming Age*. 2010-11. 8.5" x 8.5" x 1"
Laserjet prints, bound as artist's book.
12. *Monument #88*. 2011. 1" x 2" x 1"
Polyamide.
13. *Sharon's Couch*. 2011. 8" x 10"
Archival inkjet print in frame.
14. *CA-Gurls Growth Amplifier*. 2011. 48" x 25" x 21"
Psychotria viridis (chacruna), speakers, wood, hardware, wiring, grow-light, sticker, plastic bottles, water, vinegar, silicone, copper wire, galvanized nails, ceramic, spray paint, sodium tetraborate, soil, stereo receiver, mp3 player, with sound (*CA-Gurls*, digitally manipulated mp3 of "California Girls" by Katy Perry, 3:56:00).

15. *Growth Structure*. 2011. 43" x 43" x 8"

Ipomoea tricolor (morning glory), wood, hardware, yarn, ceramic, spray paint.

16. *Grow Box*. 2011. Dimensions variable.

Wood, paneling, insulation, grow-lights, hardware, plastic cups, label tags, soil, wiring, copper wire, plastic bottles, vinegar, galvanized nails, *Datura stramonium* (jimson weed).

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