

CRYSTAL RADIO

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Project Option in Lieu of Thesis
Presented to the Graduate School of the University of
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the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
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// For You, dear reader.

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// ABSTRACT

**Abstract of Project in Lieu of Thesis
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The interactive installation Crystal Radio transmits an intimate devotional into a viewer's skull via the consumption of a crystalline confection. Led by the voice and image of an elusive lover, viewers traverse through a constellation of moving images and enact the position of 'loved object'. A vocabulary of visual, audible, and edible forms are remixed to render a contemporary carte du tendre, (map of tenderness) that exist within various topographical structures--that of the cavernous space within the viewer's own body, and more broadly the installation setting of the gallery space.

Directly addressed to the reader, this paper will focus on the models developed over a history of works that prompted the creation of Crystal Radio. Such frameworks include the relationship between two figures, methods of gifting in the confrontational and amorous mode, and the use of technology, structure and language to explore the dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

//CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION : WHAT I WANT FOR YOU

Reader, I want to share a current experience I have had because it describes exactly what I want to do for you. I was standing in the backyard of an old converted hotel in Kassel, Germany. It was daylight and I could smell the smoke emanating from a barbecue and the unmistakable scent of bratwurst cooking over a flame. A string of people were entering and exiting from a darkened passage just to one side of the yard. Curious to see where they were going/ coming from, I approached the area and entered into a long hallway. With each step, my pupils dilated wider, the light was escaping from behind me. At one point I felt that even if I held my own hand up to my face, I would be unable to see it. Feeling my way into the darkness I continued walking until I reached the opening of a pitch-black room. Uneasy because of my lack of vision, I wondered if I should enter. Suddenly, I was startled by the feeling of a slight hand on my shoulder and waist. A woman had been approaching me the whole time, but I could not see her until she was right next to me. She delicately guided me through the center of room, and her touch and pace were so gentle that I was not afraid. We continued walking together for about ten seconds and then I felt her hands release me. I looked up only to realize I was not in complete darkness anymore. I could now see

that there were other figures in the room. They had also been led to the center until their eyes could adjust, and then were released to walk freely wherever they chose¹.

Again, this is what I want for you. I want you to be curious about meeting me somewhere mysterious and unfamiliar. I want you to find your way until you feel that I have temporarily taken a hold of you. I want you to let me walk with you side by side so that I can lead you through a space I have built for you. Along the way I want to describe my thoughts and materialize them like scenes that appear spontaneously before your eyes. Some of these may seem familiar because you have felt them before, or seen them before, or read about them in important books, but I want to show you how I have transformed them. I want to do these things because this is how I operate. I am a hostess, and I bestow gifts upon you to seduce you, and delight you. But as you know, with hospitality comes great responsibility. So I must warn you that my generosity is not always benign. Sometimes I will give you things only because I expect some form of reciprocation. Other times I will overwhelm you with a sweetness that you might find repugnant. Ultimately though, I will release you from my gentle grip. I will let you decide what this place is, and how long you want to stay.

1. Description of entering This Variable, 2012 a performance-based work produced by Tino Sehgal for Documenta XIII at the Grand City Hotel Hessenland in Kassel, Germany.

// CHAPTER TWO: TWO FIGURES

Let me begin at the beginning. I will introduce a premise in which there are two figures. I will place them in a scenario so that you may see an example of the way they interact. One character is walking in a circle muttering silently to herself. She stops for a moment to hold her own body, to cry. She continues pacing in a figure eight, and suddenly leaps with joy. She chants and hums. Again she stops. Remembering a betrayal, she claws at the floor and asks, why? She opens a notebook and is seen furiously scribbling, a recipe, a plot, a potion. She is the lover. Behind the dimly lit scrim that is revealed in the corner like a thought bubble, another figure appears. The ghostly figure is the loved object, and remains absent, and disengaged. It is absence that provokes the lover to embark in an ongoing interior monologue that never progresses or breaks free from itself. A circuitous rhetoric, a language of 'extreme solitude...a structural one which offers...a discursive site of someone speaking within (herself) amorously while confronting the other (the loved object) who does not speak².' We are witnessing a language of amorous seduction, a place where a declaration becomes an event of hieratic order, a local legend, a sacred history³.

2 Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. New York: Hill and Wang, p.3 1978. Print.

3 In *A Lover's Discourse*, Intro. Wayne Koestenbaum utilizes this description to explain the sanctity of language held by the lover in uttering a declaration.

This *Barthian* model of lover/loved object falls into a larger producer/consumer model that two figures engage in. The figure in control is always in question, at times it is common for one character to upstage the other and hold all the authority as is the case with the absent loved object. Unexpectedly, the plot may turn, shifting a sense of dominance from one figure to another. Other times still, the two can be seen on the same plane, a sense of control oscillating between them like a ping-pong match. In order to fulfill the romantic's wish of mediating these two opposites I engage both parties in a situation of exchange. In some instances a transaction occurs when one bestows a gift upon the other; an edible sculpture, a confection, an operetta, a verse, a meal and so on. Other times one figure will enact a task-oriented ritual, while the other is meant to remain as a mere witness. Included in this exchange is language; the act of speaking materialized as romantic prose, song, monologue and dialogue. Overall the encounters point to the body, particularly the mouth, as the aperture through which these exchanges pass; it is here that both physical and metaphorical manifestations are consumed, digested, and excreted.



The iScream Machine, 2009

//CHAPTER THREE: TWO FIGURES ENGAGE / EXCHANGE

Gifts: Confrontational and Amorous Modes

Beware of the Greeks bearing gifts for a gift may not always be as generous or benign as it seems⁴. Ever present in the gift is the expectation of reciprocation, graciousness, and the wish to control the other. A first example of such exchange is found here, at a sorbet-colored ice cream push cart. Three performers clad in candy striped dresses gather around. They sing along with a MIDI electronic tune that emulates Frere Jaques:

*Have a choco, have a choco
iPop treat, good to eat!
Go ahead and scream out,
show desire with a shout
gather round, make the sound.*

Their voices have attracted a crowd of spectators to which they direct their attention. A procedure is explained ; Gifts of custom crafted popsicles are housed within the iScream Machine. Such gifts can be obtained by merely 'screaming for ice cream'. One must place their face into the bedazzled victrola-like horn attached to the front of the cart, open their mouth, and scream to the highest capacity . An Arduino-powered

⁴ Refers to the Greeks who honored the city of Troy with the gift of a monumental horse. Once inside the city walls, an army of soldiers burst out of the horse and conquered the city.



The iScream Machine, 2009

LED scream-o-meter illuminates and measures the the amplitude of a scream. A scream in the 'red zone' earns the highest prize. Sweets are hierarchically modeled after the most popular mobile phone devices (in 2009), therefore a Choco iPop, Blackberry Bon-Bon , Raspberry Razr, and Orange-Ocher Nokia are up for grabs.

Ivan Pavlov, father of classical conditioning, discovered his hungry dogs would salivate at the sound of a bell. Each ring meant a reward was coming, and so excited, the dogs would drool in anticipation of their treat. Similarly, a bing of a text message or the swooshes of email emanating from my mobile phone, would produce a sense of excitement within me. I did not drool, but I was classically conditioned by the mechanics of this product.

The iScream Machine, 2009 was conceived after asking: When is a time that a human would salivate at the sound of a bell? Images of being a child and running after the infamous neighborhood ice cream truck raced through my mind. There was something magical in that experience that urged a more important question: Who are the producers of desirable objects, and how does a visceral experience heighten the desire to consume? With these questions in mind, I sought to recreate an experience of aural recognition, visual familiarity, anticipation and reward deeply rooted within a producer / consumer relationship. But how

to avoid a complete mimesis of the already established model? The answer was to present a de-stabilized model, one which created a platform that questioned the 'capital' at stake. No monetary funds were required for the exchange of this confection, instead a piece of the viewer's body was requested, "and the scream...is the operation through which the entire body escapes through the mouth."⁵

A scream is a commitment. It suggests an exertion a subject is willing to impart upon themselves, in order to receive a desired gift, "In the scream, nothing is perceived or expressed; in the scream the body discovers its excessive presence, 'la pure presence du corps'⁶ " Motivated by a gift, the scream materializes a subject's bodily presence. A present for presence, if you will. Therefore, an ice cream popsicle transcends a benign treat, and becomes a Confrontational gift:

Generosity in the confrontational mode uses, gifts, generous actions, and alternative exchange systems as a forum for social dissent and criticism. Based on a nominally gregarious or generous gesture, the projects within this group have an underlying interest either in questioning the politics of unequal distribution of wealth or in creating a

5 Delueze, Gilles and Bacon, Francis. Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press. 2003. Print.

6 Rushton, Richard. Passions and Actions: Delueze's Cinematographic Cogito. Lancaster University Press. P.149 2008 Print.



Greetings, Darling , 2012

temporary system where market capitalism is replaced by other modes of exchange such as barter and redistribution. In either case, the capital economics that normally permeate our public lives and interactions are scrutinized and transformed⁷.

I enact the role of producer, therefore I also engage in a mode of confrontation. Antagonistically I bestow a gift and say, *Yes, this is for you, but in return you are obliged to give me a part of your soul⁸*. Such a gesture disrupts a consumer's feelings of control. A scream in exchange for a sweet, highlights the meaning of capital, as it transforms an immaterial gesture into one that confronts the meaning of value. The producer, not the consumer, is the one who accrues power in this case.

Such a confrontation also occurs when the gift consumes you. A present becoming a presence. Let me explain, as a viewer you would find yourself standing in a nearly empty room. The sole object, an enormous free-standing greeting card that surpasses your height. Lured by its scale, but also by a direct address, you read the term of endearment *Darling* that has been engraved onto its surface. Filigree patterns decorate the structure's skin. Curious for a more detailed look, you take a few steps closer and then stop

⁷ Purves, Ted. *What We Want Is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005. Print.

⁸ As described by Marcel Mauss's notion on gift relationships, that 'things create bonds between souls'

short--the proximity of your body releases a sudden burst of operatic song. You are the Darling, and you are being serenaded with banal wishes, congratulations on graduating, and expressions of sympathy by verses that sound like Hallmark mashups. As you listen, you peer inside the greeting. Instead of the text you might imagine to be inside, something like “all I need is you” you find an etched iambic formula. Listening more carefully, you realize that the verses are structured according to this formula⁹ :

Verse One:

Darling, my darling, darling, why—

I hope your wish comes true

Your sweet sixteen is happening

My sympathy's with you

It's always hard to say goodbye

I heard that it's a boy!

A box of smiles on your day

Let's celebrate with joy

⁹ Formula written according to “Conventional Verse” from the book: Sandman, Larry. *A Guide to Greeting Card Writing*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1980. Print.

*Verse Two:**The sweetest song is sung for you**Congratulations dear**Your graduation, wedding day**A prosperous new year**Hoping you'll feel much better soon**We'll compromise our love**Thank you for your thoughtfulness**You're what I'm dreaming of*

Archetypes of contemporary recordable gift cards and nineteenth century valentines collide to produce *Greetings Darling, 2012*. This work exists as an all encompassing greeting in the most literal sense; it includes a formula which can be replaced with any sentiment. Exaggeration of scale and abrupt bursts of aria mark a moment of confrontation--it is impossible for you as a consumer to possess this gift but rather, you are the one who becomes engulfed.

A desire to seduce rather than avert the attention of figures led me to embody the role of the lover. One who produces gifts in the amorous mode:

The amorous gift is a solemn one; swept away by the devouring metonymy which governs the life of the imagination, I transfer myself inside it altogether. By this object, I give you my All, I touch you with my phallus; it is for this reason that I am mad with excitement, that I rush from shop to shop to shop, stubbornly tracking down the 'right'



Sabor Saver Savor, 2011

fetish, the brilliant successful fetish which will perfectly suit your desire. The gift is contact, sensuality: you will be touching what I have touched, a third skin unites us¹⁰.

While traveling through Buenos Aires, Argentina I envision the city as a body, the figure of the loved object, and the recipient of my many devotional acts of courtship. In order to display these acts, I choose to visit sites known for their historical importance, touristic attraction, and scenic allure. At each location I prepare a dedication to my beloved; a delicately crafted dining experience; a table draped in a white lace cloth, and a lovingly arranged meal. Evoked by such a scene, I write a romantic bilingual text to honor each site. Compositionally arranging the objects within the space, I document the evidence of my romantic gesture with a camera. Images and texts are combined to produce a series of stereographs, which are then strung from the gallery ceiling in a mobile-like fashion. Viewers of the installation are invited to observe the stereographs through a visor. Once their eyes gain focus, double vision converges into a single perspectival image, allowing their bodies to become virtually situated within the site of the dedication. On the face of the card, the locale acts as a pictorial description of the gift set within an urban landscape; on the rear of the card the site is one of language--bilingual texts

10 Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. New York: Hill and Wang, p.75, 1978. Print.



*In the furnace, flowers also bloom.
There's still offer to us you, for showing me how to
reverse this space. And by the time your tongue
leaves the fig, I will have said once again on the day:
"... I have stretched my breath and have fallen to live
once more in a thistle that will never flower."*

*En el horno, la harina también florece.
Tere veces se la ofrece a, por mostrarme como recorrer
este espacio. Y antes de que tu lengua sienta el gusto del
higo, se habrá dicho, como ella lo dijo una vez:
"... me aliento se tardo y caigo para habitar nuevamente
en un cardo que nunca será flor."*

Sabor Saver Savor , 2011

run together and create a muddle of amorous rhetoric. Upon closer inspection, a viewer may notice that the meals portrayed remain uneaten and untouched. A choice that suggests a yearning feeling the devotee is faced with while waiting for the loved object, who perhaps, may never appear. This work presents the amorous gift only as a relic for the observer to experience through the science of optical illusion.

A play on words, *Sabor-Saber-Savor, 2011* includes the phonetic English spelling Savor (savor) one that assimilates "saber" and "sabor" the Spanish words for "knowing" and "taste" respectively. The title also directly alludes to the Freudian oral stage¹¹, or the idea that one introduces things into the mouth as a child does, in order to come to a better understanding of the world, as a way of "savoring" it.

Excess and Satiation

Let us recall the story of Pavlov's dogs once more. In the second half of the story, the psychologist continued to ring his bell and present the food, only this time the dogs did not salivate. Becoming satiated, their hunger had ceased. One step after satiation is the repulsion that occurs after being continuously exposed to a stimulus.

11 Part of Freud's Theory on infantile sexuality and psychosexual development which asserts that since birth a child is stimulated through actions for desire and pleasure, on of these being the "oral" stage.



Red Velvet, 2011

I see the trajectory of this initial longing to eventual satiation rendered as the consumption of an entire heart-shaped cake.

This cake has been tenderly crafted for me: it is my favorite flavor, I am starved, both excited and grateful for this gift, I vow to *have my cake and eat it too*. You, the standing witness, watch me. You watch as an image of an untouched confection sits in the right frame, while my dangling curls obstruct my actions on the left. Cause and effect: as one frame shows the cake being consumed, the other shows the impact of that consumption upon the structure of the heart shape. After a few seconds my tongue is revealed gingerly lapping up the rosy icing. Look how delicate nibbles transgress into assertive bites, frosting and floury residue accumulate on my face. As I continue to eat like an animal, only utilizing my mouth, the dilapidating cake assimilates a demolished landscape, or the opening of a flesh wound. I have almost completed my task. Nearing the end, I become repulsed by the saccharine ingredients, and a thick maroon syrup surges from my lips.

You look, as I look in horror, at the chewed up remains of the now inedible *Red Velvet* cake.

This image references another gesture, one in which two tons of chocolate and two tons of lard have been gnawed at by an artist over time. Uneaten portions of chocolate and lard were then



Scintillation, 2010

spit out and sculpted into candy and lipsticks respectively. The goal of that gesture is similar to that of Red Velvet, 2010 as it “references the loss of control over one’s own physicality, and the transformation of the corporal self into something that no longer registers as desirable social currency.¹²”

Fixated on the moment of satiation I remember young Midas, whose vain wish was to turn all that he touched into gold¹³. At first enchanted, but later horrified by his food becoming an inedible metal, he sought out to reverse his desire. Such a thought spawned the following imagery. A slow motion image of a sparkling basin. Bright red lips. The boiling liquid from the basin rising up against gravity. A mouth opening suddenly, and streaming out a fluid of guilt vomit. Continuous fluid pouring through the parted lips, intercut by images of the basin, and strobed flashes of the mouth spewing out gold. Concluding *Scintillation, 2010* is an image of the mouth licking its lips - a perverse gesture that reveals a sense of satisfaction after the act of purging a glittery appetite.

12 Description of Janine Antoni’s work “Gnaw” 1992.

13 In response to the kindness Midas showed Silenus, Dionysus’s father, the god Dionysus granted Midas the gift of turning whatever he touched into gold.



Helium Hum , 2010

Transformation of voice and language

*The heart is the organ of desire (the heart swells, weakens, etc., like the sexual organs), as it is held, enchanted, within the domain of the Image-repertoire...The heart is what I imagine I give. Each time this gift is returned to me, then it is little enough to say...that the heart is what remains of me, once all the wit attributed to me and undesired by me is taken away: the heart is what remains to me, and this heart that lies heavy on my heart is heavy with the ebb which has filled it with itself...*¹⁴

In this scene, you will watch as the heart transforms the voice. You approach a room because you hear a familiar melody of classical violins playing. Upon entering, you find a cinematically scaled video projection and some empty seats. You sit down. Across the projection you read the title, *Helium Hum*. In the next scenes there are glittering orbs, a young girl whose gaze was to the ground, but whose eyes lifted upon seeing you in the room. Illuminating her body and the wall behind her is the cartoon image of a fairy tale princess. You realize then that you are looking at a projection of a projection. Such projected images turn from floating orbs to a manicured garden where the silhouettes of two figures are seen embracing in a waltz. Intermittently these scenes are interrupted by the luminous foil, and shadows

¹⁴ Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. New York: Hill and Wang, p.53, 1978. Print.

of dancing balloons. You see the girl again, she opens her mouth, takes a breath, purses her lips, and delicately hums the intro to *So This is Love*, from Disney's 1950 version of *Cinderella*. A close up image of her singing mouth fills the screen. This causes the projected images that light up her lips to appear as a mere color shifting grid that locks her into place. You can tell that she is singing over the original music track, because you hear it playing somewhere amongst the dead space of the room she is in. She sings the song in its entirety and you hear the same violins and quirky flute melodies that lured you into the room in the first place. You sense that this is an intermission of sorts, and that act two is about to begin. The girl has something in her hands, one of the balloons. She firmly grips the sides of the heart shape and takes a bite out of its crest. After a brief scene of a lingering shadow and a water-colored moon, you hear the slurping sounds of helium being extracted. *So This is Love* begins to play once more, and the girl begins to sing along, only this time she breaks in order to intake helium breaths. As she sings and inhales, her vocal chords constrict and render the lyrics into a high-pitched version of the love song. She continues to sing, and extracts all the air from the balloon until it becomes a heart shaped carcass that she tosses onto the ground. The song ends.

A *Helium Hum* is not the moment when you suck up all the air around you, retorting x loves me, y loves me not. It is not the theme song of the cartoon you saw when you were seven about an over-privileged prince and a servant girl from an upper class family falling in love. A *Helium Hum* is the moment you realize that language has failed to describe what can only be known, not by singing, but by feeling,

Song is the precious addition to a blank message, entirely contained within its address for what I give by singing at once my body (by my voice) and the silence into which you cast that body. (Love is mute, Novalis says; only poetry makes it speak.) Song means nothing: it is in this that you will understand at last what it is that I give you; as useless as the wisp of yarn, the pebble held out to his mother by the child¹⁵.

So after this revelation, you still sing along to every lyric, but now you sing with a deep sense of irony.

If there are no words to speak to your beloved, then how do you describe your position? I lay awake at night thinking of this very question deciding that maybe I would try to speak once more. I imagined the way the conversation would play out, how the dialogue would shift between us, the dynamics of control . I envisioned two points (my beloved and myself)

¹⁵ Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. New York: Hill and Wang, p.77, 1978. Print.



Two Fans , 2012

and between these points was infinite space. I became interested in visually describing the space in language that gets in the way of true communication and intimacy. In order for us to really speak we had to be the same, and stand on the ground of the same plane. The answer became clear when I saw a floating ribbon extending from an oscillating fan at the hardware store. As the head of the fan rotated, another fan's wind speed pushed the ribbon away. A dominance that would otherwise be invisible to the naked eye, was marked by this simple ribbon. Upon seeing this, I remember being a child and playing with an oscillating fan in my home. I placed my mouth close to the grill, turned on the fan and began to speak. My voice became chopped and robotic because of the rotation of the fan's blades. As I sang la-la-la my tongue accidentally came through the grill and butted up against one of the plastic blades, in shock I turned the fan off and cooled my tongue with ice. Only one fan can speak into another without getting it's tongue bitten. When Two Fans get together and speak, they say:

*Once we stood in front of one another
leaps of faith replaced by cautious
parameters,
we measure our words, we lie
we say that it must not go on this way
but wait!
you waited, now it is my turn*



Two Fans, 2012

*waiting, the fate of the powerless
shifts of control are happening
with every line spoken an underlying subtext
the absence of your language
is the indication of exhaustion
we form two perpendicular lines
breaks in the hours undulate,
tenderness, resentment,
and the anxiety of proximity
it will last until we both have had enough.*

Rendered as a windy and dragging voice that one would imagine a fan to possess, is a dialogue between two equals. They stand on the same plane of chroma blue, a site that enables the replacement of itself with any other image in space and time, a site of pure potential. Speech patterns are narrated by the fans' movements: Heads oscillate away from one another; Blades spin hypnotically; A neon ribbon that emulates an image of a shaking vocal chord gets swallowed up by one fan, eliminating the space between them; Together they fall, into an image of themselves.

Two Fans, 2012 is the image of the lover and beloved subject living in the same territory, attempting to speak to each other but ultimately competing for one's mastery over the other. When they both give up their will-to-posses¹⁶ they transcend together into their future.

¹⁶ Barthes describes the 'will to possess' or 'Sobria Ebrietas' as a narcissistic thought: "The other owes me what I need." He proposes the only way to break a sense of control, and truly love the other, is to give up this thought.



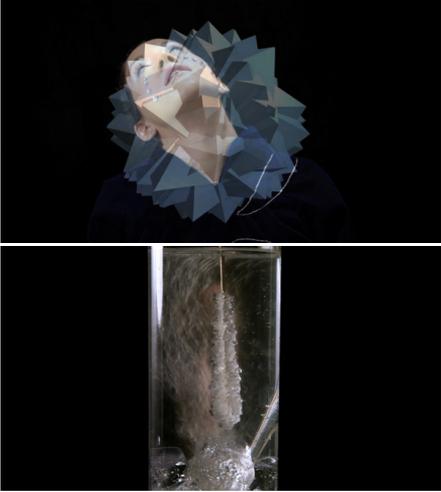
Crystal Radio, 2012 (video still)

// CHAPTER FOUR: CRYSTAL RADIO

This is what I propose: The future is a site enabled by a declaration. The launching pad of such a site, resembles the setting of a highly stylized listening room. You arrive to the space, where crystalline orbs float overhead. Their skins are made of mirrors, therefore the rest of the room becomes a fragment of architecture within them. Rectangular frames of moving images are centralized on their faces. You approach one orb, then another, and another, recognizing a recurring figure. You also catch a glimpse of yourself in the reflection, an observation that foreshadows your role.

Set in scenes without context, the figure you see is the lover, only a dark emptiness fills her atmosphere, she is alone. Inspired by the absent loved object, she engages in a series of gestures. Tensing and releasing the weight of a large harp in the background, as a spinning bow and arrow eclipse the foreground, she references images you know to be associated with stories of Eros, Aphrodite, and the like. *A lover's discourse is one of solitude and mythology*¹⁷. This figure's labor is an exercise in preparing to utter a declaration, one which measures the weight of words, the weight of music and song, the weight of a consequence.

¹⁷ As described by Barthes in "A Lover's Discourse"



Crystal Radio, 2012 (video stills)

As if possessed by some demon of language the next scene depicts the lover's head rotating slowly while a pulsating crystal interjects between movements. Glistening on her cheeks are remains of hardened tears, her eyes are rolled back into their sockets, revealing only the pearl colored portion of her eyeballs. Resembling an image of St. Theresa¹⁸ the lover is absorbed in a moment of pure joy or pure terror, she is in a state of loquela¹⁹, her body language resembles a saying:

I take a role: I am the one who is going to cry: and I play this role for myself, and it makes me cry: I am my own theater. And seeing me cry this way makes me cry all the more; and if the tears tend to decrease, I quickly repeat to myself the lacerating phrase that will set them flowing again²⁰.

A cluster of crystalline rock candy is seen brewing amidst a basin of boiling water in the next scene. An abstracted version of the lover's face peers through. This sequence suggests that her hardened tears have now melted to produce a super-saturated solution, an offering to her beloved, in the form of a rock candy confection.

18 Refers to the Bernini sculpture "The Ecstasy of St. Teresa" located in the Cornaro Chapel in Santa Maria della Victoria, Rome, Italy

19 In Barthes glossary the term "designates the flux of language through which the subject tirelessly rehashes the effects of a wound or the consequences of an action..."

20 Barthes, Roland. A Lover's Discourse: Fragments. New York: Hill and Wang, p.162, 1978. Print.



Crystal Radio, 2012 (video still)

In a final scene, the lover is seen climbing up an evolving crystal formation, until her body disappears from the frame.

As of now you have remained a mere observer of these gestures, but that is about to change. An attendant approaches you with a crystalline lollipop that likens the one you saw the lover preparing in the video. As you take it in your hand you feel the vibrations of something emanating inside a buzzing crystal shaped base. The attendant instructs you to bite down on the candy, and so you do. Once your mouth has enclosed over the structure, your teeth conduct vibrations of sound that materialize as a voice inside your head, It says:

Listen to me

Your head is a cave and it houses everything

Your ear is close to my mouth

My lips are close to your ear

Hello

See my words as geometric,

look to the left

see how I have labored for you

by waving my hands to sculpt you a song

Don't be nervous

pace the room slowly

I am here

And you will find me

This is all for you

There is romance in this room

and if I made it dark then maybe



Crystal Radio, 2012 (installation view)

*you could tell me all the things
that you could not say in light
your eyes would roll back, softly in your skull
your lips would purse and be ready to speak
You would take my hand into yours
and trace a triangle on my palm
with your index finger, then you would leave
I would wait,
get angry at you for making me wait,
then forget to be mad when you returned--
instead I would take your hand,
extend your fingers
and trace a triangle on your palm
And when we hold hands,
the triangles multiply,
and make a new structure
for climbing , for speaking
all of that which exists on the other side.*

A combination of what you are hearing and what you have seen prompt you recognize this voice as the lover's. You also discover that she is directly addressing you, her loved object. In this text she provides a set of instructions to invite you onto the scene with her. The voice of the lover also urges that she is speaking to you and for you, this text then is a declaration of sorts. Nearing the end of the spoken text the lover describes a fantasy in which you have both previously engaged, the last line being "all of that which exists on the other side." An image of the figure climbing the morphing crystal comes to mind, the other side. Enabled by this declaration, and



Crystal Radio, 2012 (installation view)

the crystalline structure, the image-repertoire²¹ is broken, a future is possible.

*...a word is a bit of a crystal in formation*²²

A Crystal Radio is a simple radio set that utilizes a crystal diode in order to receive frequencies. Previous strategies of engaging the body in acts of exchange prompted a vision: A declaration materialized from a lover's mouth as a frequency of glittering crystals received as a telepathic message. Such a transmission is central to *Crystal Radio, 2012*, as it suggests the declaration of one figure to another as the beginning of communication, and therefore progress.

Careful analysis of the *Barthian* lover, inspired this notion, as progress was a theme absent from the model. The root of the problem lie in the loved object's absence from the discourse. Such an absence condemned the lover to a lonely life of muttering in the dark. As an attempt to rescue the lover from this destiny, a scenario that would invite the loved object onto the scene was formulated.

Crystalline forms serve as the dominating structure for supporting this notion of progress. Varying stages of crystal formation can be seen throughout. The rock candy confection, for instance is a result of a sucrose solution

21 As described by Barthes, the image repertoire is the set of truths and internal language uttered by the lover.

22 Description of a crystal in Christian Bok's Book, "Crystallography"



Crystal Radio, 2012 (installation view)

precipitated as a cluster of organic crystals for the viewer to consume. Mirrored crystal housings encase the videos that are dispersed across the space. An animated crystal structure present throughout the videos begins with a simple rhombic shape, and then evolves into a more complex crystalline structure. The crystal image is not only present as a physical formation within the work, but also a more abstract architecture that scaffolds a potential imminence.

Children! What magnificent materials our earth still has as "material for our building games!" Just think: We have rock! Metal and diamonds! And many beautiful sands! And water! Fire and air! We can blow--suck-hit--bore--lift--press--smelt-- and soon we shall be able to fly! We can live in the air! "Exploit the engineers!" Fire them with the flames of your fantasies, so that they will quickly build machines that can melt the crags at any point--happily smooth them down--cement the crevices with melted, multicolored spheres and crystals--like hardened cement--and launch glass bubbles like sparkling rockets.²³

Bruno Taut and other like-minded architects imagined an urban landscape composed of crystalline buildings. Much like the modernists they reveled in the idea of creating new spaces that would promote the evolution of an advanced society. Asymmetry, imperfect geometry and organic forms were their preferred structures,

23 Whyte, Iain B, and Bruno Taut. *The Crystal Chain Letters: Architectural Fantasies by Bruno Taut and His Circle*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985. Print.

as they believed it provided a myriad of solutions to the current social problems. Similarly my project Crystal Radio engages in the idea of an imagined future, as it is a structure that encourages various vantage points, rather than a singular position. Recall a line previously mentioned in the text addressed to the loved object--*All of that which exists on the other side*, and the sight of the lover scaling a giant crystal until she disappears from the frame, both the sound and image propose a space for the lover and beloved subject that is not yet seen, a conversation that is about to happen. *All of that which exists on the other side* is a hopeful wish for progress that starts with a declaration and evolves into a potential exchange between lover and loved object.

//CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

To conclude, I will summarize all that I have done. First, I have identified the role of two opposing figures, often embodying one of these figures as a means of representing their role within a dichotomous relationship. These are the characters I have played: One third part of a glib trio of singing tricksters, who produce edible gifts to bestow upon an unsuspecting audience; The devious lover, who leaves behind an enormous greeting for her beloved to stumble upon; The amorous nurturer, who presents offerings of food and poetry to honor the absent love object; The loved object, who becomes satiated by consuming an entire confection gifted by an anonymous lover; The voice that anthropomorphizes two inanimate subjects, who engage in a tumultuous dialogue; The gothic figure of the lover and hostess, who invites the loved object onto her scene in order to declare her love, and propose a future. Counterpart roles of consumer, loved object, and witness are often embodied by an audience member or participant.

Second, I have placed these two figures in situations of exchange, in order to emphasize the power dynamic and shifts of control that occur between them. Such exchanges include gifting in confrontational and amorous modes, and the correspondence of dialogue and song. Results of these interactions have led to the

exploration of thematics such as generosity, motivation, desire, excess, and satiation.

Third, I have used various forms of technology to enable these exchanges. Such technologies as food, electronics, and language, have been placed in relation to a body, my own, or the viewer's, in order to produce a sense of affect.

Finally, inducing a sense of affect is important to my practice because of its potential agency for change. I will explain how I arrived at this thought. A history of work shows that I have shown one figure outweighing another until just recently. A breakthrough occurred with the piece *Two Fans, 2011* in which I illustrated the two figures as equals, engaging in a dialogue about their relationship. Although nothing is resolved, at the end of their conversation they at least fall together into a new site, leaving the old one behind. This idea of progressing into a new, more hopeful site was further explored in *Crystal Radio, 2012*.

Crystal Radio began once again with the exploration of two figures, this time emphasizing the Barthian model of the lover / loved object. I began with this model because of my inclination to empathize with the figure of the lover, recognizing her situations as familiar experiences of being in love:

*Game: there were as many chairs as children,
minus one; while the children marched around
a lady pounded on a piano; when she stopped,*

*everyone dashed for a chair and sat down,
except the clumsiest, the least brutal, or the
unluckiest, who remained standing, stupid, de
trop: the lover.*²⁴

A Lover's Discourse provides a glossary of emotions and behaviors experienced by the powerless lover, as she struggles to break free from the *image repertoire*, that is the image of the absent love object. In the text, the only solution to dissipate her agony is to give up the *will to possess*, which equates to ceasing all feeling for the loved object. Strategies proposed for this cessation lie in forgetting or alternatively, committing suicide²⁵. Either way the solution is a sort of death. If such a solution is not evoked, then the lover resumes to a lonely life of retorting the same circuitous rhetoric.

Upon contemplating the solutions of death or agony, I concluded that they were too drastic. Instead, I wanted to propose a way for these two figures to communicate, in order to break free from stagnation. *Crystal Radio* evokes the fantasy of luring the loved object's body with an amorous gift as a means of directly implanting a declaration, "This transcendence is not a movement from one being toward another; its transport happens (for all parties): by way of transgression or effraction.²⁶"

²⁴ Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. New York: Hill and Wang, p.53, 1978. Print.

²⁵ Description of *Sobria Ebrias*, will-to-possess section in *A Lover's Discourse* p. 232.

²⁶ Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1991. *The inoperative community*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Thus, an inoperative friction between lovers that Nancy suggests, becomes an operative strategy in my work. Ultimately the project suggests that this friction carried within a declaration is one that allows for an alternative to death. In essence, it suggests that communication inspired by love and hope allows for the possibility of change and progress within interpersonal relationships.

The notion of progress deserves further attention. When I envision progress I do not wish to recall an unrealistic image of utopian fantasy, but rather an image of a hopeful future grounded in the present. Such a position is derived from Brian Massumi's principles that hope must be separated from "a wishful projection of success or a rational calculation of outcomes²⁷". Hope then, should be thought of as a vantage point that induces the potential for multiple possibilities. Even if among those possibilities is the chance that two figures may separate.

Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA) 1991, a work by the artist Felix Gonzalez Torres, metaphorically rendered the dissipating body of his diseased beloved as a pile of one hundred and seventy five candies placed on the gallery floor. Visitors were encouraged to consume a piece as they engaged with the work. Such an exchange was one that symbolized Gonzalez-Torres's wish to control the pain induced by the loss of his partner.

27 Zournazi, Mary. 2002. *Hope: New Philosophies for Change*. New York, NY: Routledge.

The notion of progress is evident in the re-generation of the work. As viewers consume the candy, a fresh batch is replaced, and thus the allusion to the body of the beloved, becomes restored once more.

In another example, two lovers decide to end their romantic affair by embarking on a journey. They start as separate points, and agree to meet in the center. A man begins in the Gobi Desert, a woman begins at the Yellow Sea. After 2,000 kilometers, they walk past each other and say, farewell²⁸. The Great Wall Walk, is a contemporary work that engages two figures in a romantic exchange, but does not offer a straight forward solution for progress. Here, the declaration is uttered as a dismissal to their relationship, and it is unknown when and if their paths will cross once more. Progress is still apparent however, in that they will both continue walking toward a future scaffolded by their interpersonal histories.

Similarly, *Crystal Radio* breaks the unproductive rhetoric of the image repertoire and suggests a point where two figures can engage in some form of mutual exchange, and then progress, *The future is a site enabled by a declaration* .

28 Description of The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk, 1988 a performance work by Marina Abramovic and her partner "Ulay" taken from the medienkunstnetz.de archive.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Cristina Molina was born in Hollywood, Florida and has spent most of her life living in Miami. She attended Florida International University where she received her BA in Psychology in 2008 and a BFA in Art in 2009. She is a graduate of the University of Florida's School of Art History where she received an MFA in Art + Technology in 2012.

Molina's work has been exhibited in local and international venues; some of which include the Frost Art Museum where her work received "Best in Show" curated by Fred Snitzer, The Urban Nomad Film Festival at SCOPE Miami 2007, ArteAmericas the Latin American Art Fair, The Gallery at the University of Genoa in Genoa, Italy. The Harn Museum of Art, the North Miami MoCA Optic Nerve XI film festival where her videos were voted 'Audience Favorite', and the Dialog Space in Proyecto Ace, Buenos Aires, Argentina.