EXHIBITION BY INSTITUTION: A CULTURE WORK SIMULATOR

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ABSTRACT

Exhibition by Institution: A Culture Work Simulator is an art museum simulator through the first-person perspective of an entry-level cultural worker. The simulator is based on Nanaimo Art Gallery, a regional, publicly funded, art museum in Nanaimo, British Columbia. The premise of the simulator is inspired by tasks required of entry-level gallery employees, some real and others more poetic, and it poses a critique of institutions spurred by neoliberal structures of funding that cause persistent job insecurity in the arts and culture sector. This artwork is a three-dimensional environmental narrative created through an emergent process with digital tools, transposing and appropriating a local organization as a way of exploring virtual space.

Keywords: simulator, video game, environmental narrative, cultural worker, space, regional institutions, labour, institutional critique, precarity, memory, new media, Nanaimo, locality, organizational theory, collaboration, phenomenology, appropriation

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> For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty.[1]

Exhibition by Institution is an environmental simulator based on my experience as a precarious worker at Nanaimo Art Gallery, a public art museum in Nanaimo, British Columbia.[2] This artwork recalls the gallery through various forms of mapping, making use of my memories and experiences as a worker to give an impression of space. Mundane work activities are mingled with dream-like sequences to create an interpretation of three-dimensional space that gains its form from a building and location that I have known for many years. My MFA thesis project is a singular artwork offered as a downloadable file and it is released independent of gallery or museum support, but at the same time, it is marked by institutional support.

Nanaimo Art Gallery was my first art-related career position, and I began working there as a volunteer while I was still an undergraduate student in 2015. I was hired for various roles in the years that followed, taking in each exhibition and its contents as student, artist, and young professional. During my time there in 2018, Nanaimo Art Gallery hosted a travelling exhibition curated by Vancouver Art Gallery titled *The Poetics of Space*, after Gaston Bachelard's 1958 book of the same title. I spent many hours in that exhibition, reading its foundational source material in an attempt to understand its message in relation to the artworks that were presented.

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[1] Gaston Bachelard and Maria Jolas, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 4.

[2] According to CUPE, Canada's largest union, "Permanent jobs make up a declining share of the overall jobs in the post-secondary workforce. They're being replaced by people working in temporary, involuntary part-time and multiple jobs. Those in precarious jobs also tend to be paid considerably less than those in permanent, full-time jobs, and have much less in terms of benefits, job security and regular hours. ... Workers in jobs that are precarious in multiple ways (such as work that is temporary and part-time) tend to be paid even less. Women and racialized workers are much more likely to be employed in these types of precarious jobs." See "Precarious Work on the Rise," Canadian Union of Public Employees, accessed May 4, 2021, https://cupe.ca/precarious-work-rise.

Bachelard posited that there was an intersection where architecture, poetry, dreams, imagination, and lived experience met, and that place takes its shape as both a feeling and idea: as the dream-like memories of the first home one remembers living in. In the exhibition, this was exemplified by Annie Pootoogook's pencil crayon and ink drawing "Listening to the Radio" (2005-06) of a family gathered around the kitchen table. The domestic scene struck me with its spatial intimacy: a family shares a meal, their knickknacks are displayed on the wall, various household objects are cluttered in a pile on the floor, and the radio chatters and vibrates with the symbols of the Inuktitut language. Likewise, Alex Morrison's series of drawings "Every House I've Ever Lived in Drawn from Memory" (1999), with its apt title, has occupied a corner of my mind for several years now due to the artist's technique of mapping from memory.

While the first home is indeed a powerful space to inhabit and recall, I also believe that the same could be said of the first workplace of significance.[3] Over the last year I have had a lot of time to reflect on being within and without art spaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Encounters with art, art making, and art education have shifted since I began my graduate degree in Fall 2019. Schools and galleries have been difficult to access, if they could be accessed at all, and while local places have taken priority over all others since the onset of the pandemic, even these intimate relationships to place have been disrupted and altered from what they once were. My connection to Nanaimo Art Gallery was educational, professional, and at times, personal; it was my corner of the artworld and while it was humble it was my first professional home.

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[3] Henri Lefebvre notes that the workplace is a significant site of many personal and global struggles: "The space of work is … the result, in the first place, of the (repetitive) gestures and (serial) actions of productive labour, but also - and increasingly - of the (technical and social) division of labour; the result therefore, too, of the operation of markets (local, national and worldwide) and, lastly, of property relationships (the ownership and management of the means of production)." Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 191.

The people that I worked alongside taught me many lessons about the everyday operations of a regional art museum and because most aspects of the gallery were run by a single person, I felt as though I could understand the importance of each role. These mentors helped me to learn how to manage exhibition tours, art-related events, and classrooms. Each of these workers in their different capacities, from the director to the part-time front desk person who had been there for over a decade, afforded me opportunities that I otherwise would not have been able to access. My undergraduate art education at Vancouver Island University had been limited and insular, but Nanaimo Art Gallery allowed me to meet and work with many practicing artists from across Canada, and my artistic practice benefited immensely from the exchange of service for education and professional development.

In a way, *Exhibition by Institution* is a love letter to a space and time that I have longed to go back to, but it is not an idealized form of love. I worked there from 2015-2020 in various paid and unpaid roles across many short-term contracts and gigs, meaning I performed many of the unglamourous tasks required to maintain the space: I swept the floors, washed the baseboards, scrubbed the walls to keep them white, and removed the dust bunnies from the corners. Eventually I moved on to tasks such as organizing supplies, corresponding with artists and guests, and facilitating workshops.

I had to resign from my most recent contract position as a Program Coordinator in January 2021 due to an illness in my immediate family. I could not accept the risk of facilitating in-person workshops as a caregiver to someone enduring an arduous series of medical treatments, and the demands of my contact were very specific as to what my duties were to be, making it so that I could no longer be accommodated.

The loss of public and workspaces has been felt by many as we have collectively adapted to quarantines, travel restrictions, and other lockdown measures since early Spring 2020. In

sociological terms defined by Ray Oldenburg in his writing The Great Good Place, the home is

the first place of experience, the workplace is our secondary space, and a third place is public

space where one can relax and socialize without spending much money.[4] All three spaces are

required for personal wellbeing. A home is our first place because it is the most necessary as our

private space of comfort and self-care, our workplace provides a sense of purpose (or at least it

functions as a means to an end in terms of quality of life), and our third place is a gathering space

"where community is most alive and people are most themselves."[5]

Nanaimo Art Gallery was my second place and the street it is located on, with all its local

businesses and nearby harbour, was my third place. Now my bedroom fulfills my needs for all

three spaces at once; it is still my bedroom, but it has also transformed into being my workplace,

classroom, studio, coffee shop, and meeting space too. The loss of my second and third places

has made my world much smaller in a real and embodied way, as if the walls have somehow

moved to change my perception of my first place.

While I have always appreciated Nanaimo Art Gallery and its surrounding downtown area,

I have never felt the need to document or reference it before I lost access to it, fallaciously

assuming its permanence in its current state despite its history of renovations and organizational

shifts. Nanaimo Art Gallery was formerly called Madrona Exposition Centre and it was founded

by faculty at Malaspina College, now Vancouver Island University.[6] The gallery operated out of

two locations simultaneously with separate programming: "its original site on the Vancouver

Island University (VIU) campus (established in 1976) and its downtown space in a repurposed

[4] Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1999), 16.
[5] Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place,* 20.
[6] "Gallery History and Vision," About - Nanaimo Art Gallery, accessed April 30, 2021, http://nanaimogallery.ca/index.php/about-nag.

bank building in the heart of Nanaimo's arts and business district that was opened in 1999."[7] I

began my undergraduate degree during the transition period in 2014-2015 when Nanaimo Art

Gallery parted ways from the campus location, and I was witness to some of the renovations and

negotiations that occurred between the newly separate regional institutions. I worked at both

locations in similar capacities over the next several years.

Nanaimo Art Gallery's downtown site, the bank building, was not purpose-built for sharing

or storing art and this has caused problems in terms of the gallery's continued growth, but I

believe this is also what makes it interesting. The location lacks loading bays and designated

street parking. The old bank vaults are still accessible behind employees-only doors and a cash

deposit drawer is present in the lobby, though it has long been bolted shut. The remnants of

wickets where bank tellers used to stand were long ago removed, but their presence still affected

the design of the ceiling in the exhibition space until a renovation a few years ago. In this space

contemporary art stands atop the aged infrastructure of economics.

To understand the building through its history and architecture is one way of knowing it,

but Bachelard's writing encourages a deeper, more free-associative, and phenomenological

approach to space that blends objective and subjective accounts. This is the site where poetics

flourish: "the function of the real and the function of the unreal—are made to co-operate" in

service of the artistic representation of space.[8]

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[7] Marie Leduc, "Does Global Curating Serve Local Interests?," Canadian Art, September 28, 2016,
https://canadianart.ca/essays/nanaimo-art-gallerys-contemporary-transformation/.
[8] Bachelard et al., *The Poetics of Space*, XXXIV-XXXV.

It is important to acknowledge those who occupy a space with us, as interactions and day-to-day life in a space is the foundation of our memories and therefore our conception of the world. I worked with several people to realize various aspects of this project, though none as extensively as my collaborator and partner, Matthew Fox. Matthew is an experienced artist and creator with knowledge of both video game design and contemporary art. His three-dimensional modeling skills provided the architecture for my ideas and experiences. We worked closely as we often do, conceptually and spatially, in our shared home office in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

In the following chapters of this support paper, I will describe our process and approach to creating *Exhibition by Institution*. I will detail the simulator's place in relation to contemporary art and video games and discuss its implications in terms of institutional critique, appropriation, organizational theory, and space. Woven throughout this paper are anecdotes and accounts of the Nanaimo Art Gallery as I have experienced it as a precarious low-wage cultural worker. *Exhibition by Institution* is an exploration of how participation in this sector in this position, place, and time impacts the perception of this particular space and the activities that can occur within it.

CHAPTER ONE: PROCESS

1.1   Process

Exhibition by Institution began from a sense of longing: as in, how can I regain a space that I have lost access to? In his work "Rubbing / Loving," Do Ho Suh documented the entire interior of his apartment in New York before he had to move. His process involved placing paper on every surface of his home, carefully conforming it to every wall, floor, appliance, doorknob, and dial. He then rubbed the paper with a pencil crayon causing the textures of each surface to be captured with an intriguing and intimate level of detail. When the rubbing was complete, Suh removed the paper from the surfaces and reconstructed each part of the apartment independent from its original context. Suh explains his motivation as trying "to understand [his] life as a movement through different spaces."[9] His artwork is an act of preservation and love and it occurs on a large scale by noting even the smallest of details. He elaborates, "... just imagine how many times that I actually flip that light switch when I was living in here for eighteen years."[10]

Soh's work for "Rubbing / Loving" is indexical, emphasizing the relationship between his cast objects and the molds they were made from, and this directly connects his artwork to his former apartment. While this material aspect is interesting, it is his architectural reference point and archival intentions that captured my imagination.[11]

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[9] D*o Ho Suh: "Rubbing / Loving" (SHORT)*, *Art21*, accessed April 26, 2021, https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/do-ho-suh-rubbing-loving-short/.

[10] *Do Ho Suh: "Rubbing / Loving"*, *Art21*.

[11] Writer Julian Rose on Suh's process and use of architecture in his fabric sculptures of former apartments: "Architecture, after all, is at bottom a series of negotiations and translations—between the conceptual and the material, the representational and the real. If an architect must transform the two-dimensional space of the drawing into a spatial structure, Suh begins with a fully realized building and, via an exhaustive process of measuring, converts it back into flat fabric components (creating what is essentially an enormous garment pattern), which he stitches together to re-create an enclosure. The acute difficulty of these multiple translations makes for poignant moments, as when a modest, doughnut-shaped doorknob must be divided into no fewer than twelve fabric faces, patched together to provide some approximation of its smooth three-dimensionality." Julian Rose, "Julian Rose on

I aimed to craft a similar re-creation of Nanaimo Art Gallery's architectural space. Digital tools, with their three-dimensional capabilities, offered a way of mapping that mirrored my intangible and oneiric memories. Bachelard's idea of poetic space as a combination of the real and imagined was also a starting point for the project.

The model that Matthew and I created was based off information that I could recall as well information that we could find online, making the project predominately from memory and found images. Matthew and I aimed to enter the actual building as little as possible, due to ongoing pandemic precautions. To begin the process, I initiated and conceptualized the project by drawing out maps with pen and paper with additional details verbally articulated to Matthew. I also gleaned images from online sources to supplement our reference materials. Google Street View was used to construct Commercial Street, which is the street at the front of the gallery, and Wharf Street, which is visible from the back of the gallery. The gallery's social media pages provided details to work from in a piecemeal fashion too; as in, how does the building connect to the others around it? Where was that oddly placed pillar in the art education space precisely located in relation to the nearest wall? We made a single trip to the gallery to gather a few reference photographs of the exhibition space after much of the model was already built, and we used these to fill in a few aspects that were missing from our memories (the oddly shaped design of the ceiling, for example).

I then wrote out a structure for the series of events that would occur in a day/night cycle in our model based on my time working at the gallery, which also involved writing and placing the text and artworks that appear throughout the exhibition space roughly based on patterns present

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Do Ho Suh," Julian Rose on Do Ho Suh - Artforum International, February 1, 2015, https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201502/do-ho-suh-49834.

within previous exhibitions. I explained the dimensions of Nanaimo Art Gallery to Matthew as I felt and experienced them, often gesturing in relation to my body what the width of a hallway or room potentially was. He built the space as he understood my directions and in alignment with his own memories, and then we would look at the model together and revise it until it felt correct.

The project was built in Unreal Engine, a game engine known for its support of both commercial and non-commercial projects, as well as its developments for gaming, film, and television (fig. 01).[12] Blueprint was used to program the virtual gallery, which is a schematic aspect within Unreal that allows for visual coding maps. This is a straightforward form of programming that does not require typing out purely text-based commands.

Matthew modeled each object in Blender in a digital process that shares some traits with traditional sculpting. The texture of each object was made in Substance by Adobe, a suite of programs for 3D work.[13]

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[12] A thorough description of the game engine: "Unreal Engine (UE4) is a complete suite of creation tools for game development, architectural and automotive visualization, linear film and television content creation, broadcast and live event production, training and simulation, and other real-time applications." "Frequently Asked Questions," Unreal Engine, accessed April 30, 2021, https://www.unrealengine.com/en-US/faq.

[13] Matthew used three programs within Substance by Adobe: Substance Painter is a 3D painting application that allows for the generation of textures and materials directly on 3D models. Substance Designer is a schematic, map-like material creation application that can work adjacent with Painter. Alchemist is like designer, but it works directly with textures in a visual manner, unlike Designer with its procedural maps.
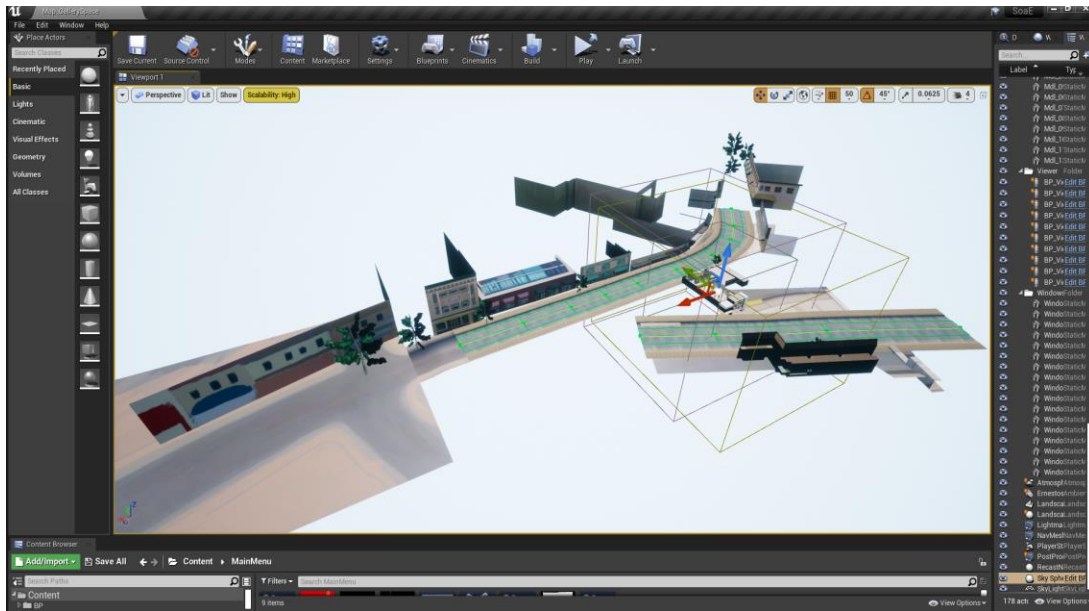
Figure 01: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, Exhibition by Institution (process), 2021.
Photo: Matthew Fox.

I created the two-dimensional figures of adults and children that populate the gallery space with Adobe Photoshop. The adult forms are built-in default shapes in the program, and I appreciated them as a type of readymade in the tradition of Cory Arcangel claiming his Photoshop gradient paintings as such.[14] The child forms were drawings by children that I had kept, scanned, and tidied into digital paper cut-outs. The young artists of Nanaimo Art Gallery's art education space were generous with their artworks, and I was often gifted work at the end of each workshop I led.

The sound effects were commissioned from Sound Engineer Ernesto Suarez with additional sounds supplemented by Eric Matyas, both of whom were discovered through a Google search. "Luna," who provides the voice samples for the children, is a three-year-old child voice actor

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[14] James Gaddy, "Cory Arcangel, The Andy Warhol Of Tech, Turns Hacking Into High Art," Fast Company (Fast Company, July 9, 2018), https://www.fastcompany.com/1664593/cory-arcangel-the-andy-warhol-of-tech-turns-hacking-into-high-art.

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found through Fiverr.[15] I coordinated with Luna's mother, who is also a voice actor on Fiverr,

providing her with a list of questions to read to Luna so she could respond to them without

coercion. Nanaimo-based band Ah, Venice was found through Spotify and Facebook. These

individuals are loosely connected to the process given that they were unaware of the full scope of

the project, and their involvement mirrors my own place in the gig and short-term contract

economy.

1.2   Video Games, Simulators, and Walking Simulators

Exhibition by Institution looks like a video game and uses the same technology and

methods as a video game, but it is most accurately described as a simulator. A video game is an

artificial situation, often a fantastical scenario, that puts the player into a position of conflict or

somehow points toward a clear goal that must be achieved.[16] A simulator relies less on the

whimsical nature of other worlds, placing the user into a simplified but dynamic representation of

a reality as a system.[17] There is no way to 'win' a simulator because it is not a game in the way

that video games often are. There are no points or opponents, and the primary purpose is to

experience a situation or environment.

Environmental simulators, also referred to as 'walking simulators', are a format that is

strongly connected to indie game development because it is an easier experience to program and

create for beginner developers. Two well-known walking simulators include *The Stanley Parable*

(2011) and *Gone Home* (2013), both of which are first-person narratives. The term walking

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[15] "Today, Fiverr is one of the leading online marketplaces for freelance services. Although various alternatives have emerged over the years, Fiverr appears to continue growing faster than its competition." See J. P. Silva, "Year One of Fiverr," in *Startups in Action: the Critical Year One Choices That Built Etsy, HotelTonight, Fiverr, and More* (New York, NY: Apress, 2020), 111.

[16] Louise Sauvé et al., "Distinguishing between Games and Simulations: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Educational Technology & Society* 10, no. 3 (July 2007): pp. 247-256.

[17] Sauvé, 251.

simulator is not only a description of a genre though and it is often used in a disparaging way because of "ongoing debates concerning the policing of 'real' and 'fake' games, or games and nongames, a demarcation with profoundly gendered roots."[18] These gatekeeping notions that favor competition downplay the strong suits of simulators, chiefly that these so-called walking simulators provide a way of understanding space that is unique to three-dimensional environments. In video games the primary purpose of playing is to achieve a goal or to resolve conflict, so more atmospheric elements are not made the focal point of the experience. Walking simulators remove the element of conflict, or decentralize it, to bring the setting to the foreground and this creates room for the user to consider their relationship to space in a more in-depth way.[19]

The simulator is akin to a digital diorama that invites movement and exploration. Its two- and three-dimensional elements are carefully placed for the user's consideration. The format is a sort of digital miniature that offers a "version of a sphere of concrete activities in real life."[20] While I worked at Nanaimo Art Gallery as an art educator, I made dioramas with child learners using 2D and 3D elements to create the illusion of something large made small. The process to build this virtual experience is somewhat similar in that it is a diorama on the scale of a whole building.

Video games and simulators are an underutilized form in contemporary art practice, likely due to the amount of labour involved. A team of people with various skillsets are needed to realize a project of this scope. Mel Chin, an artist with a diverse practice, coordinated with a team to create an interactive video game installation titled KNOWMAD in 1999. Chin gathered an

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[18] Paula J. Massood, Angel Daniel Matos, and Pamela Robertson Wojcik, *Media Crossroads: Intersections of Space and Identity in Screen Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 50.

[19] "To interact with an individual, an object or space holds great potential for engagement and increased understanding." Robert W. Sweeny, "Pixellated Play: Practical and Theoretical Issues Regarding Videogames in Art Education," *Studies in Art Education* 51, no. 3 (2010): pp. 262-274, https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2010.11518807, 266.

[20] Sauvé, 251.

archive of weavings by "nomadic peoples of Iran, the Caucuses, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Central

Asia, and Anatolia" to draw from, and then he worked with a group of software developers to

build a video game to put the images in motion.[21] He was concerned with the ideas of cultural

preservation, mapping, and movement. By using a medium associated with popular culture, he

hoped to preserve the knowledge and imagery in the knotted threads of the weavings while

activating it in a new way. Of the work, Chin said:

> I think you can play the game and not have the direct associations of 'Oh, now
> I'm going to find out about travel culture,' but play the game and say, 'Wow,
> video games can be more than the dungeons and slashing projects that I've seen
> before, [in] games before.' They can be more about a visual reward, and that's
> okay, too. So, I think it's about creating flexible space, conceptually and
> personally.[22]

Chin's take on video game space as a flexible way of mapping through movement is an

inviting way of sharing through a medium that has often been eschewed for its associations with

pop culture and sexism. By asking viewers to become active within a three-dimensional space, he

incorporates learning in a more intuitive way. Where can people go in these constructed worlds,

and where can we lead them? Chin offers a formula: Motion + Action = Place.[23] Mapping.[24]

Planned motions and actions are the basis of both video games and simulators. This

mechanic is addressed by the notebook placed throughout *Exhibition by Institution*, which acts as

a map to lead the visitor through the objectives of each day and night in the sequence of events.

1.3   Organization and Collaboration

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[21] "KNOWMAD," Art21, accessed May 8, 2021, https://art21.org/read/mel-chin-knowmad/.
[22] "KNOWMAD," Art21.
[23] "KNOWMAD," KNOWMAD – Mel Chin, accessed May 8, 2021, http://melchin.org/oeuvre/knowmad/.
[24] Map is a term used to describe a level in video games.

In 2018, the then-director of Nanaimo Art Gallery asked the staff to read Jay Rounds's article "The Museum and Its Relationships as a Loosely Coupled System" for a meeting. The gallery had been operating out of its downtown location since 1999 but it had only functioned as a singular location from 2015. It was, and relatively speaking, still is, a new endeavor for staff and visitors alike in its current iteration, and I believe the motivation behind giving this article to staff was to serve as an instructional text. I chose to use this writing and its associated diagrams on the adult figures in *Exhibition by Institution* because it was the sanctioned way of understanding the visitor's experience to our gallery.

Rounds's writing on this topic stems from organizational theory, as in the sociological study of social organizations, which is a way of understanding all of the various relationships that make an organization function. The concept of loose and tight coupling was coined by Robert Glassman "in 1973 to describe types of linkages that he observed in living systems at all levels."[25] He observed, originally from a biological perspective, that a tightly coupled system is one in which all elements are intensely interdependent on one another. This interdependence can be gauged and assessed by how much outside factors affect the strength of the coupling. Rounds provides an example of a tight coupling with a light switch, a light bulb, and the circuit that joins them together.[26] If the switch is flicked the electricity will flow to the bulb causing its filament to glow, and this system will work without fail most of the time. But large unforeseen systemic failures that are not planned for, such as the power going out or a component breaking down, can cause all elements to cease functioning.

[25] Jay Rounds, "The Museum and Its Relationships as a Loosely Coupled System," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 55, no. 4 (2012): pp. 413-434, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2012.00166.x, 415.
[26] Rounds, 415.

By contrast, a loosely coupled system is built around overlapping interests but each element possesses its own purposes and concerns as well. All elements benefit and advance together through their limited exchanges but if failure occurs its impact is lessened overall through their strategic approach to interaction.[27] A tightly coupled system creates catastrophic loss, whereas a loosely coupled system allows for localized failure. The collection of overlapping and adjacent concerns in a museum context in terms of both staff and visitors often produces unpredictable results but this can be accounted for in a loosely coupled system, which is why Rounds argues this is a healthier expectation for an organization.

In relation to arts and culture organizations, tight coupling refers to a Rationalist Model of achieving goals. The Rationalist Model is a system that does not allow for unplanned events or unpredictable outcomes and instead it focuses strictly on planned outcomes. Put simply: "a goal is formulated, and an exhibition is designed to achieve that goal. Visitors experience the exhibition, and they change in the ways intended."[28] The Rationalist Model is intentionally narrow, linear, and efficient in terms of scope and it relies on assumptions of individual control over all circumstances within large organizations.[29] All parties must be working toward the same goal at the same time toward the same outcome to fully realize the determined outcome, and all external factors are not accounted for because they should not affect such solid plans. The light switch will always work; the visitor will always have a fruitful experience if the exhibition is

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[27] Rounds, 416.
[28] Rounds, 414.
[29] "For instance, the exhibition designed to carry the museum's intention may differ from day to day in what is actually available for the visitor to experience. Interactives have broken down. Certain objects have been removed temporarily for conservation … Changes of that sort may be less frequent than those of the more volatile streams, but when they do happen they change what the museum offers to the visitor." Rounds, 422.

planned and executed correctly.[30] It should not come as a surprise that the use of the word

'rationalist' in this context stems from Rational Choice Theory, which is rooted in economics.[31]

An Emergence Model "is designed to show how people and organizations work within a

flow of events that is only partially amenable to their control … [it] depicts a loosely coupled

system that accommodates a multiplicity of agents, intentions, influences, and circumstances."[32]

As the word 'emerge' suggests, this model places possibility alongside planning. This way of

operating acknowledges that different departments have varying operational goals and needs

within an organization, and that visitors to an organization are active agents within their own

lives and that they will take away whatever they want or need to from their museum experience.[33]

Rounds justifies an Emergence Model and loose coupling because it is a less rigid and more

resilient foundation for art museums and galleries, and given that these organizations are always

placed in a position to justify their worth to society at large, this way of approaching is less

prescriptive to each individual person and each individual visit they choose to make. Loosely

coupled systems are also easier to change through a process of gradual, localized adaptation.[34]

Since reading this article, the concept of loose and tight coupling has become part of a

basis for how I can involve others in my practice to produce artworks. I frequently work with

other people in my projects for a myriad of reasons: to gain a perspective that I did not otherwise

have, to make use of a skill that I don't have, to realize a certain component, or even for

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[30] To continue the economic observation of gallery goers: "From the point of view of the Rationalist Model, a visitor is simply a piece of raw material, waiting to be transformed into an outcome." Rounds, 429.
[31] Rounds, 417.
[32] Rounds, 420.
[33] "... a dozen visitors in a gallery at the same time may be experiencing a dozen different exhibitions. If achievement of the museum's intended outcomes is dependent upon each visitor having the same experience, then success will be rare." Rounds, 423.
[34] "... an important advantage of a loosely coupled system is its capacity for accommodating change in some elements without threatening the persistence of others … these local adaptations can be swift, relatively economical, and substantial" Rounds, 426.

pleasure or proximity. I can maintain my vision for my own work without much disruption if I involve others in a loosely coupled system.

In Stephen Wright's essay "The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration" he posits that collaboration requires three implicit ideas: "... first that collaboration emerges and flourishes under certain sets of circumstances; second that it is diversity, rather than commonality or similarity, which makes collaboration 'fruitful and necessary'; and third … that collaboration is founded upon mutual interest."[35] This definition does not quite fit for the *Exhibition by Institution* project as all contributors, except for Matthew, were sought out and hired (though in the case of sound engineer Matayas, his work was Creative Commons licensed). Additionally, collaboration foregrounds working *with* instead of working *alongside*; to continue the example of the light switch and its wiring, the production of *Exhibition by Institution* was a parallel circuit as opposed to a series circuit. The sound engineers and the child voice actor were very loosely coupled to this project's system as they received minimal information about the artwork, but enough information so that they could fully participate to fulfill their roles. They had no stakes in the project beyond their own hired task.

Matthew and I were tightly coupled in that we needed each other to complete integral aspects of the overall experience, but our overall working relationship resembles the Emergence Model in that we both have overlapping concerns as well as concerns that are unique to ourselves. He works primarily in Substance and Unreal Engine, whereas I work in Photoshop, Google Workspace, and on research. He is an active artist in the process as am I. We could do aspects of each other's tasks but could not fully realize them on our own, and we allow each other creative space while maintaining our roles within the project. As the artist behind the concept, I

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[35] Stephen Wright, "The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration," *Third Text* 18, no. 6 (2004): pp. 533-545, https://doi.org/10.1080/0952882042000284943.

led the project while also embracing artistic choices that he and the other contributors made as they arose during the process of making.[36]

To take the use of organization theory a step further, the entire artwork itself has emergent properties. In *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*, Natalie Loveless writes:

> Emergence is relevant to research-creation … because it refigures disciplinary research objects in ways that invite us to think interdisciplinarity-as-emergence: as productive of outputs that exceed what is demonstrably present in their constituent parts. An approach to research modeled on emergence insists on the complexity of lived histories and worlds, and on the difficulty of accounting for and responding to such complexity.[37]

Loveless proposes that emergence occurs as part of the joined processes of making and thinking, and it happens because pointed questions are asked and complex stories are discovered. Emergence eschews strict disciplinary allegiance because solutions are not neatly gathered by any one way of thinking or creating, and room must be left to see what happens.[38] I did not know that I would set out to make a simulator, nor did I know who I would work with or when I would work with them. Instead, I wondered what happened when I tried to articulate my experience of precarity, and then I tried to tell the most complex stories that I could.

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[36] Mel Chin described a similar working process with KNOWMAD: "I wanted to limit my influence, rather than saying 'it has to be this this this.' I said, 'I sort of see this, but you do not have to be held to that,' because if we're going to make art, it should be liberating." *Mel Chin in "Consumption", Art21*, accessed May 8, 2021, https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s1/mel-chin-in-consumption-segment/.

[37] Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2019), 26.

[38] "What happens" is an intentionally ambiguous term Rounds uses because, similar to Loveless, he says, in "the Emergence Model, many things are happening at once. Rather than a unitary, predicted outcome, we instead see a distribution of events …" Rounds, 425.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY

2.1   Precarity

The word precarious means uncertain or unsteady and it conjures images of imminent danger. Precarious finds its root in the Latin word for 'prayer,' as if a divine wish for safety when an unfortunate event is about to occur may prevent the worst from happening.[39] Many artists and cultural workers survive with a prayer by accepting a portfolio career composed of precarious work, with income arriving in hiccups of gigs, short-term contracts, and individual sales.[40] Extended healthcare plans, retirement savings, and investments are banished to distant dreams.

Small indications of this insecure way of life are written in the margins of the notebook that is used as a navigation tool throughout the event sequences in *Exhibition by Institution*: "2nd job starts next week @ 4:30PM - don't forget!" and "call the low income dental clinic (are they still in operation?)." The notebook I carried with me at the gallery contained notes likes these alongside whatever work-related objectives needed completion. Class was thrown into sharp contrast for me when I began employment as a cultural worker, where many coworkers and peers were often from more privileged financial backgrounds and were supported throughout their education and subsequent job insecurities.

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[39] A full definition to provide a full background of the word's origin: "*Precarious* comes from Latin *precārius* (source also of *English prayer*), which meant 'obtained by asking or praying'. It was originally used in English as a legal term, in which 'obtained by asking' had undergone a slight change in focus to 'held through the favour of another'. This introduced the notion that the favour might be withdrawn, and that the possession was therefore uncertain, and so the adjective soon came to be used for 'depending on chance or caprice' and, in the 18th century, 'risky'." John Ayto, "Precarious: Word Origins - Credo Reference," precarious | Word Origins - Credo Reference, accessed July 29, 2021, https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/acbwordorig/precarious/0.
[40] Nicole S. Cohen, "Cultural Work as a Site of Struggle: Freelancers and Exploitation," *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society* 10, no. 2 (2012): pp. 141-155, https://doi.org/10.31269/vol10iss2pp141-155, 145.

To clarify, cultural worker is a general title for a group that can refer to a number of different professions and skills.[41] A museum worker, curator, educator, or freelance writer can all fit under this umbrella. Cultural work is regarded in society as being more rewarding and it is less likely to be seen as a site of class struggle because it allows for relative autonomy in comparison to other sectors, it facilitates personal expression, allows opportunities for personal growth, and it might even allow name recognition in terms of the creation of cultural works (exhibitions, books, movies, etc.).[42] However, the cost for these perks and their perceived desirability is precarity, and "cultural workers seem to need no coercion to fully invest themselves in their work or to work long hours for low pay."[43]

Guy Standing, professor and advocate for basic income, wrote of the growth of this type of work to the degree that he argued that it marked the emergence of a new social class: The Precariat, which is a portmanteau composed of the words precarious and proletariat. The precariat class cannot find (or rejects) full-time work, they are marked by income insecurity and an uncertain future, and they do not have a connection to their community or a defined craft.[44] Standing expands on the global economic context that has created this emergent class:

> Although there have always been many people living a precarious life, the modern
> precariat is a contrived structural feature of global capitalism. Globalization was built on
> what we now call 'neo-liberalism,' ushering in a market model based on maximizing

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[41] My favourite definition of a cultural worker: "*Cultural worker* has a moral positioning embedded into it, as well as an inherent accountability. To call oneself a cultural worker, as opposed to a *creative*, is to essentially say that your labor, or at least a particular fraction of it, occurs with the intention to uphold a certain culture. It proposes that your labor as an artist, your work in art and literature, is accountable to the idea of *culture.* And, if we as organizers and anti-racists and socialists and communists and revolutionaries are committed to upholding a revolutionary culture, then our labor as cultural workers is accountable to the notion of working to uphold that revolutionary culture." Devyn Springer, "Cultural Worker, Not a 'Creative,'" Medium (Medium, May 19, 2020), https://medium.com/@DevynSpringer/cultural-worker-not-a-creative-4695ae8bfd2d.

[42] Cohen, "Cultural Work as a Site of Struggle: Freelancers and Exploitation," 142.

[43] Cohen, "Cultural Work as a Site of Struggle: Freelancers and Exploitation," 145.

[44] Guy Standing, "The Precariat: From Denizens to Citizens?," *Polity* 44, no. 4 (2012): pp. 588-608, https://doi.org/10.1057/pol.2012.15, 590.

'competitiveness,' commodification of everything possible, and regulatory control of collective bodies perceived to be barriers to competitiveness and commodification. A result is a global market economy steeped in social and economic insecurity, in which economic volatility and chronic economic uncertainty are defining features.[45]

Precariousness is a symptom (or feature, depending on who you ask) of globalization and it is inescapable in the arts and culture sector. The uncertainty was also projected into *Exhibition by Institution*'s sense of space through the variety of tasks required, the free-falling sensation that occurs into the mineshaft, and the aimless drifting toward the uncertain future in the last sequence. I could not imagine creating a cultural work simulator that did not somehow speak to this overwhelming sensation.[46]

At a lecture called "Why Games? Can People in the Art World Think?" for LOOP Festival 2016 in Barcelona, Hito Steyerl spoke about the very real ways that video games, simulators, and algorithms have assisted in constructing our daily lives and our financial precariousness in ways that we do not tend to question. She details how the art market, which is always in search of safe investments, has cultivated data and created algorithms to fuel financial success, and how the government of China has gamified citizenship with the Social Credit System, rendering all aspects of life as it is lived into points to be gained or lost in relation to real world privileges. Steyerl states, "… [games] work as a sort of behavioural training for people. Not only to train them for military action … games also prepare people behaviorally for functioning efficiently in the workplace."[47]

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[45] Standing, "The Precariat: From Denizens to Citizens?," 591.
[46] Steyerl describes the sensation of precarity quite succinctly: "Imagine you are falling. But there is no ground." Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," e-flux, April 2011, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/.
[47] *Hito Steyerl Talk: Why Games? Can People in the Art World Think?*, *YouTube* (YouTube, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQG5HUxNRbk.

Steyerl tries to impress upon us that video games are not casual time-wasting media. The code that drives popular game titles is also behind your online banking app and the government agency that collects your grant applications. Video games, simulators, and algorithms are kin to tools that reinforce precarity.

2.2   Appropriation as Dedication

In late 2017, I was wrapping up my undergraduate degree and preparing for my final exhibition. I felt a resistance to displaying my work in the gallery setting, not in the sense that I viewed the gallery as a looming figure of authority— far from it. The View Gallery, located on the Vancouver Island University campus, was a new part of the school's operations as Nanaimo Art Gallery had withdrawn its leadership from that location only two years before. The gallery did not express what I wanted to express in its limited space and scale, and instead I thought of other sites on campus that held interest or meaning to me.[48] One of these areas was a staircase.

The longest continuous staircase on the Nanaimo Campus of Vancouver Island University is a stretch of 403 stairs, with its starting point at 68.0m (223ft) above sea level and its top reaches 143.9m (472ft).[49] The staircase is a prominent feature of the university and I had used it for exercise and stress relief even before I had begun to attend classes there, and so I aimed to designate this object as a work of art. I made arrangements with the facility to apply one sequential number per tread, counting each step starting at the bottom of the stairs by Building

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[48] A "decisive shift in contemporary art occurred when artists broadened the concept of a site to embrace not only the aesthetic context of a work's exhibition but the site's symbolic, social, and political meanings as well as the historical circumstances within which artwork, spectator, and place are situated." Rosalyn Deutsche, "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum," in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 162.
[49] "Nanaimo Campus Highlights," Nanaimo Campus Highlights | VIU Facilities | Vancouver Island University | Canada, accessed April 30, 2021, https://fscd.viu.ca/campus-development/nanaimo-campus-highlights.

193 (Students' Union/Students' Union Pub) and ending by Building 380 (Fisheries & Aquaculture). The numbers were applied on the right side of each staircase in pastel pink spray paint, and the stair closest to the bottom was the first in the series to mark the process of upward movement. I wore a navy-blue jumpsuit, worker's attire, throughout the install as both an aesthetic and practical choice.

I called this project *An End and A Beginning* to denote the very distant start and end points of the staircase, and as a reference to the uncertain timeline of the required labour (fig. 02). The university's approval took several months, and I worked for approximately 40 hours over the course of 3 months (January 2017-February 2018) to apply each number to each corresponding tread. I was interrupted by over a month of inclement weather and many stairs had to be stenciled a second and third time due to the amount of de-icer that was used on each tread.

Figure 02: Amber Morrison Fox, *An End and A Beginning*, Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo 2017-2018.

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In selecting this staircase and designating it a work of art I was appropriating an aspect of the university for my own purposes, but this was not a one-sided affair. The university itself shaped my learning experience with its architecture, concourses, pathways, and stairs. I felt a need to respond as part of "a process of mutual influence."[50] The back and forth between myself and the stairs, the both of us wearing the other down over the course of several years, was of more significance to me than displaying artwork in a gallery.

To the same end, I worked at Nanaimo Art Gallery for a significant period at the beginning of my career in arts and culture. The exhibitions, lectures, workshops, and mentorship I received in that space became the foundation that I continue to build my artistic practice upon. Every relationship and skill that I cultivated there still factors into my work in a myriad of ways that I find difficult to describe.[51]

In Isabelle Graw's essay "Dedication Replacing Appropriation: Fascination, Subversion and Dispossession in Appropriation Art" she writes:

> Appropriation must now be understood as a form of dedication— because the situation appears to be dedicated to the appropriator— it is a situation with which the appropriating artist is confronted as if it were meant to be. This kind of reconstruction of the concept of appropriation is particularly useful for artistic production. Because the moment an artist appropriates something— be it an illustration from advertising, or the situation in the home of a collector— that something has, in a certain way, fallen into his or her hands.[52]

The artist is inspired or influenced by something and it moves them enough to reproduce it in a way that stakes a claim. An object or idea impresses itself on its observer so deeply that the

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[50] George Baker and Isabelle Graw, "Dedication Replacing Appropriation: Fascination, Subversion and Dispossession in Appropriation Art," in *Louise Lawler and Others* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 52-53.
[51] I believe Graw expresses it best: "A person who appropriates an object is also faced with something that emanates or appears to emanate from that object. The object infects the person and something transfers from it to the person." Baker, "Dedication Replacing Appropriation," 54.
[52] Baker, "Dedication Replacing Appropriation," 54.

observer must respond in kind, and this is a form of dedication. Graw refers to this type of artmaking as "a complex interactive relationship."[53] She describes the innate tension between the artist and the reproduced object: the object exudes influence over the artist, yet the artist exudes their influence over the object. The tension developed through this process remains unresolved with both parties, artist and influence, giving and taking from one another.[54]

Appropriation art has previously been viewed as purely subversive in intention, but I find viewing it as an act of dedication is far more compelling. It implies that an imperfect relationship cannot be resolved; I shape the institution and it shapes me. We cannot be separated and we need each other in some capacity to continue to function.

Yet, despite the interconnectivity between the artist and subject, Graw champions the appropriated artistic subject's autonomy because it had and continues to have its own narrative or trajectory before and after the artist's selection and intervention. She goes on to state that Institutional Critique is a form of appropriation because it is inspired by and intimately connected to the institution itself:

> Thus I would propose an interpretation of artistic appropriation that allows the appropriated material a certain momentum, and in which the possibility that the artist is enthused by this dynamic is feasible. This material can also have the form of an institution with which artists see themselves confronted ... Institutions have particular specifications, especially for practices that are circumscribed with terms such as 'institutional criticism' or 'location specifics.' This one could say that the institution-critical approach— such as that of Michael Asher— continues to be led and influenced by the appropriated institution.[55]

Institutions develop policies and strategies for displaying work, even work that is critical of them, thereby sanctioning it. And if the institution is the medium with which the artist speaks

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[53] Baker, "Dedication Replacing Appropriation," 55.
[54] Baker, "Dedication Replacing Appropriation," 54.
[55] Baker, "Dedication Replacing Appropriation," 54.

then without it, they would not have a voice at all. Even if an artist were to ignore all galleries and museums and elect to only show work on their own, in their studio or perhaps in a site in nature, their work would still reflect hallmarks of its institutionalization. Art education is an aspect of institutionalization as well and all skills learned or rejected from this context is again a choice in relation to it. As critic Aruna D'Souza aptly writes, "Art does not exist as a social concept outside its institutionalization."[56]

To acknowledge the internalized institutional bent within artistic practice is not to condone or condemn institutions themselves. It is an awareness of what is learned and inherited, and this information can act to make more informed, intentional choices in the process of making.

I do not wish to impede on my appropriated subject's autonomy or trajectory because our stories are linked, but I am compelled to represent it nonetheless as it has imprinted on me. While this simulator and the model within it are directly referenced from Nanaimo Art Gallery to be as close to the real thing as possible, it is not truly an act of copying or a form of plagiarism. It is a translation of physical, real-world space into digital space and form. It is a type of replica, as the word model implies, but it allows the people that interact with it to use the space differently than it could be experienced in person. I also want to suggest that as an artwork intended for the internet and made entirely with technology, *Exhibition by Institution* has shifted away from previous modes of appropriation and how it was interpreted prior. After its release it will circulate on websites and social media platforms, some of which I have intended and others I have not, blurring lines between consumption and production as it gets distributed.[57]

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[56] Aruna D'Souza, "What Can We Learn from Institutional Critique?," ARTnews.com (ARTnews.com, December 2, 2019), https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/hans-haacke-new-museum-retrospective-institutional-critique-63666/.

[57] "Within a culture of information consumerism, governed by ... "re-gestures", i.e. re-blogging, re-tweeting, the nature of information circulation and processing presupposes a "scrambling of boundaries of consumption and production"." Kaja Marczewska, "The Iterative Turn," PARSE, April 5, 2020, https://parsejournal.com/article/the-iterative-turn/.

The act of copying something that already exists and distributing it online is the hallmark of the Iterative Turn.[58] This is not appropriation as Sherrie Levine or Richard Prince have wielded it. The tools of technology (hardware, software, online capabilities) are fundamentally different ways of creating and developing artwork that require a different comprehension of copying and relation. To copy and paste, like and dislike, are common functions online, so why not within art as well? The Iterative Turn "draws attention to the changing conditions of cultural production, where questions of the aura are no longer a creative concern. The iterative project offers means of reconceptualising attitudes towards technology and, as a result, "transforms the 'danger' that acts of copying typically pose to creativity into a form of liberation from it, a 'saving power', transforming plagiarism into iteration, copying into a paradigm of creativity itself."[59]

Iteration itself may be a more useful word than appropriation too in that it refers to technology: it is representative of versions, development, and repetition. It acknowledges originality as a lineage to descend from, as something to be built upon. Iteration shuns traditional notions of power and ownership that are reinforced through antiquated wealth-centric systems such as copyright, and instead it embraces generosity through creating a constellation of points of reference. This model of Nanaimo Art Gallery is copied from its real-world source, but it is an iteration.

2.3   Institutional Critique

On the surface this term appears direct in intention: Institutional Critique poses a critique of an institution. This way of working emerged from conceptual art practice in the late 1960's and it

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[58] The Iterative Turn is a development that shows the impact of technology on the artist's thinking and process. Marczewska, "The Iterative Turn."
[59] Marczewska, "The Iterative Turn."

was focused on examining systems of power that relate to collecting and displaying art in galleries and museums.[60] It is an investigation of authority and an attempt to hold those that display and collect art accountable.

Notable artists working in this scope include Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Hans Haacke, Adrian Piper, Robert Smithson, Martha Rosler, Lee Lozano, and Andrea Fraser among others. Laderman Ukeles utilized a feminist socialist approach in drawing attention to the menial labour that allows galleries to operate through her Maintenance Art Manifesto, opting to clean the gallery and shake hands with sanitation workers instead of displaying artwork. Smithson wrote about the concept of cultural confinement, referring to galleries as cemeteries above the ground, and he often rejected institutional contexts for his work in favor of other working methods such as land art.[61] In more recent decades, Andrea Fraser offered tours of galleries and museums in character as a docent or guest lecturer to provide performances that disrupt the public's perception of the museum's inherent authority. These artists refused galleries and museums, rejecting their approval as they were simultaneously embraced by them.

This way of working implies an antagonistic or adversarial relationship between artist and institution, which to some degree is understandable given the differing aims and desires of individual artists as compared to what appears to be a monolith of The Institution. However, it is fallacious to think of the institution of art as separate from the artist. Art institutions, or more accurately the art world, is composed of many constituents: it is the artist, the directors, the janitors, the curators, the educators, the learners, the gallery goers, the donors (individuals and corporations), the buyers, the schools that educate artists as well as their faculty, the various

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[60] "Institutional Critique | MoMA," The Museum of Modern Art, accessed April 30, 2021, https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/institutional-critique.

[61] Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," in *Art in Theory, 1900 - 2000 an Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 971.

family members of those involved, and so on. It would be a very limited and imprecise approach to think of an institution as a single building or even a group of buildings. The Institution is everyone and everything vested in talking about and showing art in whatever format that may be used.[62]

In her essay The Institution of Critique (2006), Hito Steyerl writes:

> If during the first wave of institutional critique, criticism produced integration into the institution, the second one only achieved integration into representation. But in the third phase the only integration which seems to be easily achieved is the one into precarity. And in this sense we can nowadays answer the question concerning the function of the institution of critique as follows: while critical institutions are being dismantled by neoliberal institutional criticism, this produces an ambivalent subject which develops multiple strategies for dealing with its dislocation. It is on the one side being adapted to the needs of ever more precarious living conditions. On the other, there seems to have hardly ever been more need for organizing the new struggles and desires that this constituency might embrace.[63]

To unpack this summary of the development of Institutional Critique, Steyerl asserts that the first iteration of this approach was to challenge the inherent authority of cultural institutions, the second wave fought against symbolic gestures of change and insisted on more material and concrete gestures of representation (Steyerl gives the example of institutions involving minorities for symbolic representation to bolster their public profile while otherwise upholding social and political complacency), and the third wave she simply describes as precarious. This precariousness comes from uncertain revenue streams (donations, grants, awards) and an

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[62] Andrea Fraser provides a much more comprehensive list of what composes the institution of art: it "... also includes the sites of the production of art, studio as well as office, and the sites of the production of art discourse: art magazines, catalogues, art columns in the popular press, symposia, and lectures. And it also includes the sites of the production of the producers of art and art discourse: studio-art, art-history, and now, curatorial-studies programs. And finally, as Rosler put it in the title of her seminal 1979 essay, it also includes all the 'lookers, buyers, dealers and makers' themselves." Alexander Alberro, Blake Stimson, and Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 281.
[63] Alexander Alberro, Blake Stimson, and Hito Steyerl, "The Institution of Critique (2006)," in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 492.

unresolved, undefined position within society which Steyerl astutely points to as a result of neoliberalism.[64] Any art establishment that receives funding from the government or any large funder has strings attached: their values must align, quotas and deadlines must be met, and their levels of engagement must meet a certain threshold in order to continue their affiliation. In the spirit of fairness, the individual organizations that are trying to develop better practices are in a tough spot fiscally, socially, and societally.

As an artist and former worker in this framework, I accept that I am as much a part of this system as anyone else. My work is not disingenuously critiquing a building and the people that operate it, it is critical of myself as much as anyone else. I feel I must disclose that I am deeply vested in this topic because I was one of the most precarious workers in 'my' gallery until the day I had to resign. I was so grateful for each new contract I received that I did not question if I was ready to work without job security or health benefits for many years.

Exhibition by Institution is not a critique of one particular building or place, nor is it a representational critique. I present a self-implicating and reflective critique—as in, who am I and what do I do when I work in this space, and how do the ambient neoliberal values in my sector become my values too?

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[64] "... neoliberalism's trademark rhetoric that human wellbeing is contingent on developing individual entrepreneurial freedoms … chiefly the freedom to operate in the market ..." Anthony Davies, "Take Me I'm Yours: Neoliberalising the Cultural Institution," Mute (Mute Publishing Limited, April 18, 2007), https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/take-me-im-yours-neoliberalising-cultural-institution.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SIMULATOR

3.1   A Visitor's Walkthrough of *Exhibition by Institution*

The events in the simulator are planned in a specific sequence to guide the visitor through the experience, and while small deviations can occur through the visitor's choices, all those that move through the program will roughly take the same linear path due to its pre-planned design.

In terms of new media and technology, a walkthrough is most simply defined as a way of using an application to examine how it works. It is a hybrid technique that comes from Cultural Studies as well as Science and Technology Studies. This method involves a thorough exploration of a defined digital space that entails interacting with and viewing all available elements to come to a better understanding of a given program's intended purpose, function, and implications.

Every piece of software is built with intention by its developers. The references and imagery invoked in the user interface serve the purpose of shaping how people move through the experience of using it.[65] The walkthrough is an active visual examination that is carried out to determine step-by-step actions needed to make the program function, and it fully considers how this impacts the individual user's perception as they make use of the application. The process of a walkthrough is a way of examining embedded technical aspects at the same time as social and cultural influences, and it is also a way of comparing the makers' intentions against the user's experience.[66]

The software that makes *Exhibition by Institution* possible is Unreal Engine, an engine created primarily for making video games. Like many video games, this simulated space is maneuvered through by using the keyboard and mouse. The W, A, S, and D keys on the keyboard

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[65] Ben Light, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay, "The Walkthrough Method: An Approach to the Study of Apps," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 3 (November 2016): pp. 881-900, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816675438.
[66] Light, "The Walkthrough Method."

are used to move forward, backward, left, and right in the space. The mouse is used to manipulate the point of view, known as the camera, as it is referred to in the game engine. The first-person point of view is used to place the visitor in the shoes of the cultural worker, but it is also notably a traditionally gendered way of seeing within the scope of video games because a male protagonist and perspective is frequently assumed. While many video games tell the player who they are through a disembodied floating pair of hands in front of the camera, or by voice clips, this simulator removes these common visual cues to invoke a sense of ambiguity as if to ask: who exactly is playing this role? A hint: *Exhibition by Institution* is rooted in my lived experience and small cues reinforce this: my floral notebook, for instance, and the female figures in the DAY 04 sequences.

While a walkthrough is a technical examination of a piece of interactive media, it is also a longstanding way of experiencing video games and simulators in thorough detail. A walkthrough in this context refers to vicariously experiencing a game or simulator through someone else's encounter with it for the purpose of enjoyment or preparedness in case one wants to have a first-hand experience with the media that is being described.[67] Walkthroughs can be written, spoken, or recorded video accounts.

In the technical spirit of the walkthrough, I feel I must also clarify the term that refers to the person moving through the experience of *Exhibition by Institution*. A person using a computer, or any other form of technology, is called a user. A person playing a video game is typically referred to as a player. A person looking at an artwork would be called a viewer. For the sake of this paper and this particular artwork, I will use Jay Rounds' choice of language from

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[67] To clarify: "A walkthrough isn't a general strategy — it needs to help the person who is reading it to get through the game from beginning to the end. Every piece of the game needs to be covered; bosses, puzzles, items, etc. You want people to turn to your guide if they get stuck on a particular part." Brandon Guerrie, "Complete 100% Guide to a Walkthrough," VentureBeat (VentureBeat, May 3, 2010), https://venturebeat.com/community/2010/05/03/complete-100-guide-to-a-walkthrough/.

"The Museum and Its Relationships as a Loosely Coupled System": visitor. A person that downloads *Exhibition by Institution* visits the space to experience it.

In the following chapters, I will describe a visitor's walkthrough of *Exhibition by Institution* from the moment of opening the program through all the events in order of sequence, as well as their sources and points of reference.

3.2   DAY 01: Exhibition by Institution [Images 02-06]

The simulator's main menu features an open notebook and a pamphlet. The pamphlet is made to look like a guide to an exhibition and it features the simulator's title and a random series of art-related jargon, and selectable options appear as handwritten entries on the notebook's page. When 'start' is selected the visitor loads into a room that has a gray and white grainy texture on the walls and floors. Voices can be heard somewhere deeper in the building.

Moving the mouse around reveals that the visitor has loaded beside a white desk setup near a lobby. On the desk there is an open notebook, similar to the one that is featured on the main menu. The desk is situated in front of a large block of text on the wall describing a localized greeting and it declares that this space is an art gallery. The visitor navigates with one hand on the mouse and the other hand on the W, A, S, and D keys on their keyboard, and as they do, they notice the sound of nearby echoing footsteps, implying that these are their own feet making contact with the floor.

As the visitor orients their view toward the exhibition space, the once distant sounds in the background amplify: murmuring voices, shuffling footsteps, rustling papers, and the ding of notifications on phones. A partial wall in front of the visitor informs them that THIS IS THE EXHIBITION'S TITLE WALL. This text, presented in the same style as the greeting behind the

front desk, explains itself and describes what the gallery visitor can expect to see within this exhibition.

Entering into the exhibition space, the FIRST ARTWORK, titled as such, also describes itself and its place in the exhibition. Like the other descriptions before it, it is presented in a spartan sans serif font as if to formalize its own less formal intentions. The text is large in scale, and this is felt by the visitor who must maneuver the camera, up and down, or left to right, or several steps backward to read it all. The illusion of giant vinyl text is carried by the size of each word in relation to the floor, walls, and ceiling.

Other characters move about the space in a randomized fashion. These figures are two-dimensional, and their flatness stands out in contrast to the three-dimensional environment they and the visitor are present within. They slide in front of artworks as if viewing them, moving quickly and pausing abruptly, occasionally blocking the visitor's view. The figures are marked with text and diagrams, but their movement makes it difficult for the visitor to discern what this might mean. The forms of these gallery goers truncate the sentences placed on them, leaving only fragments removed from their context. The diagrams on them express models that relate to how art institutions should perceive their visitors. Despite the busyness of the text and labels, each person is a single bright colour that contrasts the dull room.

After FIRST ARTWORK, the empty space near the floorboard is labelled THE SPACE BETWEEN THE ARTWORKS and it is placed close to the ground. It is directly between FIRST and SECOND ARTWORK to draw attention to empty space as a distinct choice. SECOND ARTWORK builds on the thoughts from FIRST and serves to move the viewer through the exhibition in a counterclockwise way. At this point, the visitor may become aware of the ordering of the space and may elect to explore the space as they will, but the implied order may shape how they make this choice.

The rest of the artworks in this template-like exhibition continue to explain and justify themselves to the visitor as they explore the space. The door in the farthest back corner of the room looks as though it should be an exit, but it has no interactive properties. The street outside is visible through the glass, clearly distinct from the street scene visible in the foyer, but it is similarly made off limits. A text description tucked by this inescapable exit reminds the visitor that all of these writings are A GENERALIZATION, OF COURSE.

The visitor moves across the gallery, back to the front desk with the open notebook. Written in the notebook there are two objectives listed: view the exhibition and then find the light switch and turn it off at the end of the shift. The switch is beside the front desk and it triggers the next sequence of events.

3.3   NIGHT 01: End of the Day I [Images 07-09]

The streetlights are on outside the building and the gallerygoers have left. When the visitor checks the notebook for their next objective, they are instructed to find and turn off the light switch in the back room of the gallery—but in order to do so, they must navigate through the exhibition space without touching the crates of packed up artworks, lest the alarms be set off.

When the visitor enters the gallery space, the text-based artworks from the first exhibition have been removed from the walls and other surfaces and they have been placed into large shipping crates, ready for transport. Crates of various sizes are left in different configurations throughout the room, some of which impede the visitor's path.

3.4   DAY 02: Art Education [Images 10-15]

One of my roles at Nanaimo Art Gallery was as a program coordinator for their children's studio art classes on Saturday mornings. Each lesson was built around a specific artwork as part of a given exhibition's programming. The classes all functioned fairly similarly: take the children to view an artwork in the exhibition, discuss it with them, and then relate that to a hands-on activity or skill.

I was encouraged to use the See, Think, Wonder thought routine to discuss artworks with children to assist them in understanding their own thoughts of what they looked at. See, Think, Wonder is one of many thought routines by Project Zero, which is a division of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, and it follows a straightforward template that can be used for any type of artwork: "What do you see? What do you think about that? What does it make you wonder?"[68] I found that this approach was useful for assisting the children to talk through even the most complex objects and ideas, and I even began to use it for myself when writing essays and discussing concepts that were new to me.

In this sequence there is a series of objectives relating to children's art education as I have learned it from mentors at Nanaimo Art Gallery. The visitor must gather the children from the art education room one-by-one and then lead them as a group to the video projection room in the exhibition space to watch the video artwork. The text of the questions from the See, Think, Wonder routine appear on screen as the children are asked about what they think in relation to the artwork. The children, all voiced by then-3-year-old child actor Luna Crowe, respond to the questions. After the viewing is over, the visitor must then lead the learners back to art education space.

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[68] "See, Think, Wonder," Project Zero, accessed May 26, 2021, https://pz.harvard.edu/resources/see-think-wonder.

3.5   NIGHT 02: End of the Day II [Images 16-17]

For this sequence in the simulator, it is nighttime in the gallery and the exhibition has concluded. The objects that were situated on plinths have been packed away, and now the plinths themselves must be moved out of the exhibition space and into the storage room.

In the process of preparing for an exhibition in 1967, sculptor Barbara Hepworth wrote, "I think we must discuss the whole question of plinths."[69] A plinth is a structure, usually box-like and made of wood or another sturdy substance like marble, which supports an artwork or object for display. A sculpture is placed on a plinth for viewing so visitors can walk around an artwork and see it from many different angles.[70] Plinths used to be a go-to option for displaying artworks, but as of the 1960's they had largely fallen out of fashion in favour of using display methods that better compliment aspects of the artworks themselves.[71] Due to artists like Hepworth, it is now understood that the plinth becomes an extension of the object and because of this its use should be carefully considered and not be simply employed as a default choice.

Nanaimo Art Gallery has many plinths, though they do not often get used for exhibitions. The art education staff and I did make frequent use of plinths in our department, however, this was because they were repurposed as to support projectors or materials during workshops, and less frequently they were used during children's exhibitions. When the plinths are not in use, which as stated is most of the time, they are stored in a former bank vault (fig. 03). The contrast between the infrequently used and unfashionable plinths and the heavy bank vault door with its

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[69] Eleanor Clayton, "'The Whole Question of Plinths' in Barbara Hepworth's 1968 Tate Retrospective – Tate Papers," Tate, 2016, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/25/whole-question-of-plinths.
[70] Tate, "Plinth – Art Term," Tate, accessed May 26, 2021, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/plinth.
[71] Eleanor Clayton, "'The Whole Question of Plinths' in Barbara Hepworth's 1968 Tate Retrospective – Tate Papers."

system of protective pins and cogs, always left often because it contains nothing of value, struck

me as quite funny: low value objects behind a former high security system.

Figure 03: Amber Morrison Fox, *Nanaimo Community Archives*, Nanaimo 2017.
A similar bank vault door on the lower floor of the Nanaimo Art Gallery building.

It was decidedly less humorous whenever a certain size of plinth was required though.

The bank vault is not purpose built to store the large, heavy plinths and it was burdensome to

obtain the needed size. Plinths have to be hauled in and out of the narrow, tightly packed room in

order to locate and extract the one that is required. I replicated this frustrating experience as an

activity in the simulator because it is decidedly unique to this space. I often joked that it

resembled a game of Tetris, albeit with only one shape and less organization. The tedious and

draining nature of this sequence is entirely intentional.

3.6   DAY 03: Reception [Images 18-19]

The visitor is kept in a confined space made up of three folding tables against a wall in the lobby area of the gallery. They are unable to leave this small area and they are given the objective to serve beverages to all the gallerygoers at the reception for the new exhibition. This sequence is influenced by Job Simulator and its representation of the absurdity of customer service work (fig. 04).[72]

The gallerygoers are programmed to mill about the lobby area, adding challenge to the task in that the length of time to complete this objective is dependant on the randomly programmed movements of the visitors. There is an intriguing new exhibition in the gallery space, but the visitor can only see a small fraction of it from where they are positioned behind the tables as they work.

Figure 04: Owlchemy Labs, screenshot of Job Simulator gameplay 2021.

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[72] Job Simulator is notable for being one of the first titles available for many consumer-level virtual reality devices. "Job Simulator: The 2050 Archives: Owlchemy Labs," Job Simulator: the 2050 Archives | Owlchemy Labs (Owlchemy Labs), accessed July 27, 2021, https://jobsimulatorgame.com/.

3.7   NIGHT 03: Maintenance [Images 20-22]

Nanaimo Art Gallery's Visitor Services Coordinator posted a sign by the sink in the backroom that states, "Everyone wants a revolution, but no one wants to do the dishes." This sentiment is similar to a statement in Merle Laderman Ukeles' Maintenance Art Manifesto from 1969: "… after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?"[73]

In this sequence, the visitor is given a game-like objective: find the dirt and grime that mars the white walls and clean it up. To make the walls white again, the visitor is equipped with a spray bottle of cleaner and a rag, and these tools are positioned on the screen like how a first-person shooter game would display a weapon to let the visitor know that they are an active being with a concrete goal. Laderman Ukeles specifically notes washing walls as an action in her manifesto as a necessary maintenance activity, asserting that to do this task is the same level of effort as artmaking. She also points out that it is a task that denotes one's place in a hierarchy of roles that is shaped not only by class, but by gender: "… culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay."[74]

As a precarious entry-level worker, I was never asked to paint the walls because that was a separate skilled position. There is no other aspect to this sequence than to clean the walls and appreciate the task for the labour it requires.

3.8   DAY 04: Models [Images 23-25]

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[73] Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "MAINTENANCE ART MANIFESTO 1969" (Art Practical, 1969), https://www.artpractical.com/uploads/docs/5.4-Ukeles_MANIFESTO.pdf, 1.
[74] Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "MAINTENANCE ART MANIFESTO 1969," 2.

There is a small-scale model of the gallery, as it appears in the game engine, presented as an artwork on a plinth in the centre of the exhibition space. After a moment of looking, the roof slides off the model and falls to the side, revealing a single small figure standing inside corresponding to where the visitor is standing in the exhibition space. The roof then slides off the full-scale gallery model too and a towering figure stands above the visitor. The figure is a child's drawing, like those that appear in DAY 02, and it looms large over the visitor. The use of children's artwork is intended to complicate notions of scale, as children are small compared to grown people and their artwork is viewed diminutively as well. The small and large figures, vastly different in terms of scale, position the visitor as being in between them.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes of two contrasting figures and their differing notions of space: the intuitionist and the miniaturist. The intuitionist observes space a surface way, feeling it overall without truly committing to the details that compose it, whereas the miniaturist is hyper focused on the minutiae that make the space unique and differentiate it from other similar spaces. He writes:

> Intuitionists, in fact, take in everything at one glance, while details reveal themselves and patiently take their places, one after the other, with the discursive impishness of the clever miniaturist. It is as though the miniaturist challenged the intuitionist philosopher's lazy contemplation, as though he said to him: 'You would not have seen that! Take the time needed to see all these little things that cannot be seen all together.' In looking at the miniature, unflagging attention is required to integrate all the detail.[75]

Bachelard's chapter on miniatures celebrates tiny models as fuel for the imagination that make us "both vigilant and content."[76] But while he positions miniatures as a form of in-depth examination and meditation, he also cautions that they can be prone to exaggeration. I would like

[75] Bachelard et al., *The Poetics of Space*, 159.
[76] Bachelard et al., *The Poetics of Space*, 159.

to posit that the miniaturist and the intuitionist are not as separate as they both seem. The miniaturist must be part intuitionist because embodying both ways of seeing and experiencing space is necessary and appropriate at different times. If one only commits to details or aspects of a space and they are unable to see the larger picture, they cannot possibly place details accurately in the space. The experience of a space overall requires generalist knowledge of scale as well as specialist knowledge of detail and placement. The visitor in *Exhibition by Institution* is made aware that they exist at all levels of space through this sequence: they are the small figure in the miniature model, they are the person observing the miniature, and at the same time they are also observed by the construction of the simulator itself. The reiteration of the See, Think, Wonder routine prompts the visitor to investigate their thoughts of scale, space, and representation.

3.9   NIGHT 04: Mineshaft [Images 26-34]

It is nighttime in the space once again, but in this iteration, cracks have appeared on the floor. The visitor follows the cracks into the exhibition space where the floor is most uneven and damaged. Like Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth*, the long crack installed in the lobby of London's Tate Modern in 2007–2008, the visitor is invited to walk across the broken and uneven surface of the floor. Just as they begin to investigate this disruption to the space, stanchions, barriers used to keep gallery visitors inside or outside of certain spaces, emerge from the floor to become barricades that trap the visitor in the middle of the room. The visitor cannot escape as the exhibition space shakes, rumbles, and caves in. They fall into darkness, tumbling downward, left to look up and watch as the light from the exhibition space retreats into the distance.

Figure 05: Microsoft and Mojang Studios, screenshot of Minecraft gameplay 2021.

After a few moments of free fall, the visitor lands in a narrow mineshaft deep under the gallery. This area is influenced by Minecraft in terms of both aesthetic and action, as the visitor is prompted to pick up a pickaxe to extract themselves from the mine (fig. 05).[77] This in-game use of resource extraction is intended to draw parallels to Nanaimo's labour history of coal mining.[78] The idea to mashup eclectic elements is anchored to a poetic statement by Steyerl:

> As Minecraft Redstone computers are able to use virtual minerals for calculating operations, so is living and dead material increasingly integrated with cloud performance, slowly turning the world into a multilayered motherboard.[79]

The idea of a "multilayered motherboard" composed of all available matter inspired a synthesis of objects and experiences that bridge past/present, local/global, and analog/digital references. The corridor is dark and looks as though it was composed of blasted rock, though the rock texture was sourced from Piper's Lagoon, a nearby beach with rocky cliffs, and the shaft

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[77] Minecraft is second bestselling video game in the world to date, though it is only second to Tetris. Matt Peckham, "Minecraft Is Now the Second-Bestselling Game of All Time," Time (Time, June 2, 2016), https://time.com/4354135/minecraft-bestelling/.

[78] Nanaimo Art Gallery and much of downtown Nanaimo "… is built on a foundation of mine waste," specifically a by-product of industrial mining called slack. Jesse Birch and Will Holder, *Black Diamond Dust* (Nanaimo, Canada; London, England; Glasgow, Scotland: Sternberg Press and Nanaimo Art Gallery, 2016), 40-42.

[79] Hito Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?," e-flux, November 2013, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/49/60004/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/.

itself based on the interactive mineshaft exhibit in Nanaimo Museum. Lanterns, also modeled

after historical coal mining artifacts that were observed at Nanaimo Museum, are placed

periodically to provide lighting for the visitor to navigate the space. The floral notebook, which

was primarily used as an instructional tool until this point, becomes a site for poetic inquiry into

labour past and present.

The layout of the mineshaft area is based on the placement of the streets around Nanaimo Art

Gallery, tying together what is above and what is below. The connection between the surface and

the network of tunnels below is also intended to draw parallels between histories of low wage

labour, as low wage work then and now is differentiated by many factors, one of them being

space. The gallery area is open with high ceilings and many areas to safely explore, whereas the

mineshaft is cramped and limited with sudden drop-offs.

Nanaimo Art Gallery's exhibitions often hinge on local stories, and I wanted to incorporate

some details of the histories I have learned while working there. The city of Nanaimo, as it is

now, was built over the last two centuries by working class settlers of various backgrounds who

cut down trees and mined abundant coal deposits. Nanaimo's name comes from the

Snuneymuxw, of the Coast Salish People, who have lived in and maintained the mid-island

region for generations. Snuneymuxw's traditional knowledge of coal deposits were extracted

when they signed the Treaty of 1854 with The Crown, though the supposed benefits of this

contract for the Snuneymuxw have been undermined since its inception.[80] Chinese citizens were

brutalized, excluded, and legislated against until they were removed from local mines.[81]

Historical class and race-based conflicts endure largely unresolved, as Nanaimo continues to

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[80] "History," Snuneymuxw, accessed May 4, 2021, https://www.snuneymuxw.ca/nation/history.
[81] Peterson, *Hub City*, 52-53.

transform, shifting away from its working-class roots, with wealth disparity becoming a widening chasm in recent years.[82] Nanaimo is significant in Canadian history for its resource extraction and ornery labour disputes, and the psychological weight of these histories impacts perceptions of space within the city even now. [83]

At the outset of the mineshaft there is a pickaxe placed on a plinth for the visitor to wield in order to break rocks that block their path. To escape this area, the visitor must remove the barriers in their way. If they are not careful, they may fall into deeper mineshafts and they will be forced to restart the sequence from the beginning, implying their simulated demise. The sequence ends when the visitor finds their way out of the mineshaft. They reach the surface of another island, a reference to the mineshafts that followed resource-rich veins even under the Salish Sea itself. The unique coastal geography of Nanaimo is in full view as the visitor looks back at the harbour where the gallery is located. The visitor is invited to "drift away" in a decrepit boat, and while the scenery is idyllic the circumstances are less than ideal. The visitor sails alone toward an uncertain future with no resources.

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[82] [82] According to the 2021 State of the Nanaimo Economy report: "The largest number of households in Nanaimo (21%) report household income between $20,000 and $39,999 per annum. The second largest number of households (16%) report household income of $40,000 to $60,000 per annum." 42% of Nanaimo makes less than 60k per household, while 34% earns 100k+. Middle income households are rare at 24%. Amrit Manhas, 2021 State of the Nanaimo Economy (City of Nanaimo, 2021), https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/doing-business/economic-development/2021-state-of-the-nanaimo-economy.pdf.
[83] "Nowhere else in Canada were working people considered more radical than in B.C., and the hotbed of discontent was Nanaimo …" Jan Peterson, *Hub City: Nanaimo, 1886-1920* (Surrey, BC: Heritage House, 2003), 184.

CONCLUSION

Matthew and I have re-created the rooms, doors, walls, and windows of Nanaimo Art Gallery. The sequence of activities available to the visitor in the digital space are a combination of my real and imagined experiences, connecting local labour histories across time and space.

In the non-simulated version of this space, I performed entry-level roles and tasks while still learning to be an artist, very much aware of the fact that I was acting on the organization's behalf. I had much more experience as a worker than as an artist, so I allowed my professional background to take precedence. This choice influenced my art practice because I believed my personal artistic work had to align with my presence as a worker in an institutional space— or perhaps and even more likely, this was internalized due to the precarity of my presence. I was always only a few months or weeks away from the end of a contract.

I was often asked to strategically pose for the gallery's social media presence for promotional purposes as I performed my contractual roles, which I was content to do as I could see what I looked like when I worked from a position outside of myself (fig. 06). These photographs flattened the complex reality of contemporary cultural work into something idealistic and palatable because the weight of my precarity was invisible. At the same time, being present there to perform the part, to gain experience through on the job training, workshops, and lectures benefitted my practice. It is complicated to be an artist in this neoliberal enclosure: to build a young institution while it builds you, hanging on for as long as you financially can.[84]

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[84] Marx defines the enclosure that capitalism creates for workers as "... a degraded and almost servile condition of the mass of the people, their transformation into mercenaries, and the transformation of their means of labour into capital." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. David Fernbach, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (London, UK: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1982), 880-881.
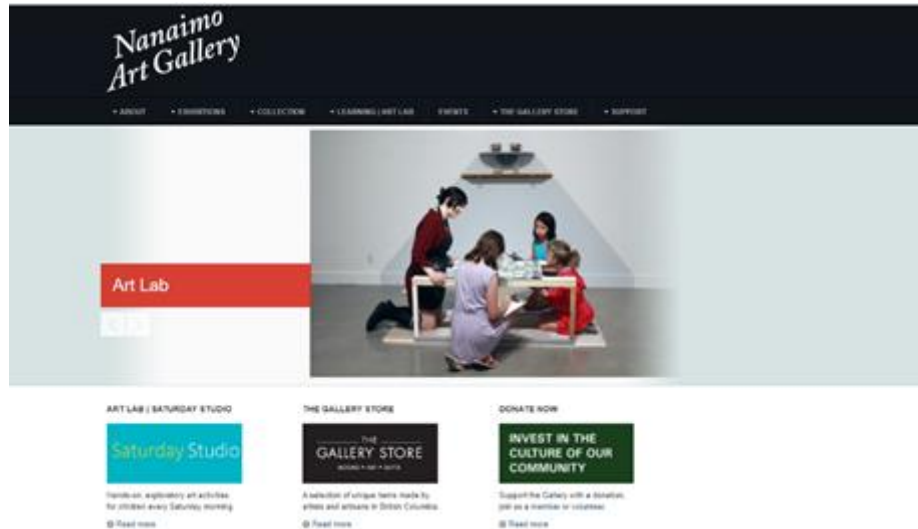
Figure 06: Nanaimo Art Gallery website, 2017-2021.
Amber Morrison Fox poses with children from the art education program.

Ken Lum, known for his compositions that pair text and image, wrote an essay after his

artwork *Melly Shum Hates Her Job* (1989). He discusses how the work resonated with the Dutch

community it was placed in, and he describes how the concept of Melly is representative of more

than just an anti-work sentiment:

> Melly Shum herself moved from Vancouver to Rotterdam. Her presence on the side
> of the Witte de With serves as a salient reminder of the precarious relationship
> between the local and the global. Local identities can only be defined by breaching
> the dichotomy of the global and the local as two distinct terms. Conversely, the
> fraught phenomenon of globalization can be best understood through a consideration
> of local traditions and histories.[85]

Local knowledge is necessary to understand one's place in a global context, but artists are

expected to have 'portfolio careers' that demand travel and beget a lack of personal ties to any

given place. Lum uses the word 'precarious' to describe the division between local/global, which

is the same word selected by Steyerl to explain the position of museums and galleries under

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[85] Ken Lum, *Everything Is Relevant: Writings on Art and Life, 1991-2018* (Montreal: Concordia University Press, 2020), 201.

neoliberal policy, and the same word again is used by Standing in his portmanteau 'precariat' to talk about employment that offers no benefits or security.

The implication that artists and cultural workers have long faced is that they should make themselves available to chase work globally to survive, but this approach favours art world centers that breed competition and drain 'periphery' places of meaningful artistic experiences (not to mention imposing quality of life issues on artists and cultural workers). Regional institutions like Nanaimo Art Gallery are regarded as career stepping stones or transitional spaces for young professionals that are on their way to somewhere larger and better funded, but this view only serves to create a brain drain and a perception of a hierarchy of arts and cultural institutions. Smaller communities become deprived of ways of seeing and representing themselves to themselves and others under this mode of operation.

My everyday efforts seemed to be inconsequential in my local gallery space at the time I was performing them due to this transitory framework: cleaning, organizing, greeting, counting, facilitating, serving, posing, and simply keeping the lights on. I thought, and was told by others in my field, this duration in my life was going to be short but I ended up working at Nanaimo Art Gallery for five years. I valued this time and the connections that were made there, even if it was always accompanied by gut churning financial uncertainty. By projecting my roles, these mundane activities, and the specific local space that they were performed in into virtual space, I can examine it in a way that is removed from the past reality of my lived experience and take it in from a more poetic standpoint. As Bachelard says, "we are never real historians, but always near poets" when it comes to our memories of the spaces we have inhabited.[86]

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[86] Bachelard et al., *The Poetics of Space*, 6.

Additionally, I can ask others to step into my role as a volunteer, a front desk worker, and an art educator in a delimited yet involved way, and I can point toward histories of the city I live in and the situations that persist because of them. Bringing visitors into my position(s) inverts the institution's hierarchy of roles by hijacking its typical top-down point of view, turning the museum into an object to be examined from a different class standpoint.

The simulator is a single person experience, a solitary walkthrough of a virtual workplace populated by two-dimensional non-player characters. Alienation from labour in contemporary life, as I understand it, is also experienced in a solitary manner.[87] A potential solution to push back against this alienation is the embrace of community support alongside other workers (for example: unions, artist run-centres, artist collectives) and the rejection of labour as a primary site of personal meaning and identity.[88] Given that the labour situation is not sink or swim, it is more akin to sink or tread water, movements against work have begun to ignite worldwide. The Great Resignation is now affecting the labour market in Canada and the United States as workers reclaim their time instead of working at jobs that do not serve their wallets or their interests.[89] Lying flat, or tang ping, is the Chinese rejection of excess labour in favour of doing as little as

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[87] Marx wrote, "... my work is an *alienation of life*, for I work *in order to live*, in order to obtain for myself the *means* of life. My work is *not* my life." Karl Marx, "Comments on James Mill, Éléments D'économie Politique," Economic Manuscripts: Comments on James Mill by Karl Marx, accessed July 29, 2021, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/james-mill/index.htm#084.

[88] "By recognizing that (worker) agency is social, inherently connected to others rather than individualized, conceptual work on a relational understanding of autonomy demonstrates that young women's agential decisions, perceptions of and reactions to the labour market are shaped and informed by the experiences of those around them, as well as their past experiences and future expectations." Nancy Worth, "Feeling Precarious: Millennial Women and Work," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 4 (2016): pp. 601-616, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775815622211.

[89] Leah Golob, "Gen z, Millennials Playing a Significant Part in the Great Resignation Trend," The Globe and Mail, July 13, 2021, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/investing/personal-finance/young-money/article-gen-z-millennials-playing-a-significant-part-in-the-great-resignation/.

possible to sustain oneself.[90] The examination and refusal of work by workers has the potential to improve future labour practices.

According to geographer Dr. Nancy Worth: "developing an understanding of the impact of subjective experiences of precariousness … is critical" because statistics do not capture the full scope of precarious work and its impacts.[91] *Exhibition by Institution* is a simulation of my subjective experiences as low-wage cultural worker, and it is my attempt to provide a first-person perspective through an interactive medium for others to experience. My artwork is a poetic exploration of space and labour, depicting the insecurity and precarity of cultural work in this place and time.

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[90] Lily Kuo, "Young Chinese Take a Stand Against Pressures of Modern Life - by Lying Down," The Washington Post (WP Company, June 5, 2021), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-lying-flat-stress/2021/06/04/cef36902-c42f-11eb-89a4-b7ae22aa193e_story.html.
[91] Worth, "Feeling Precarious: Millennial Women and Work."

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IMAGES

Image 01: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *Exhibition by Institution* (logo for website), 2021.

Image 02: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *Exhibition by Institution* (main menu), 2021.

Image 03: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 01: Exhibition by Institution, 1*, 2021.
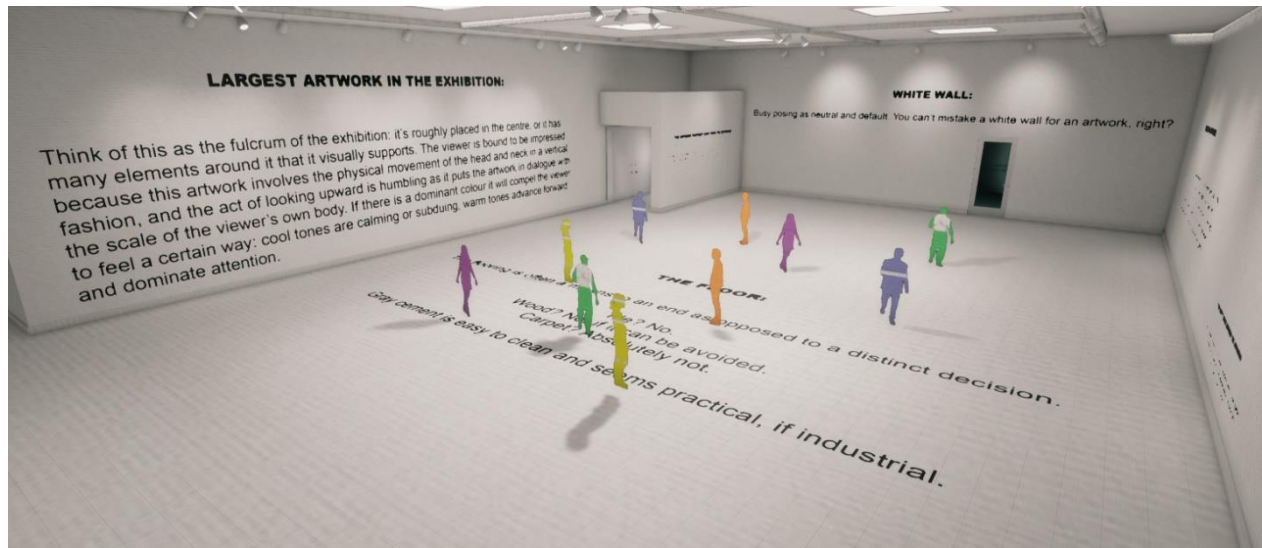
Image 04: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 01: Exhibition by Institution, 2*, 2021.
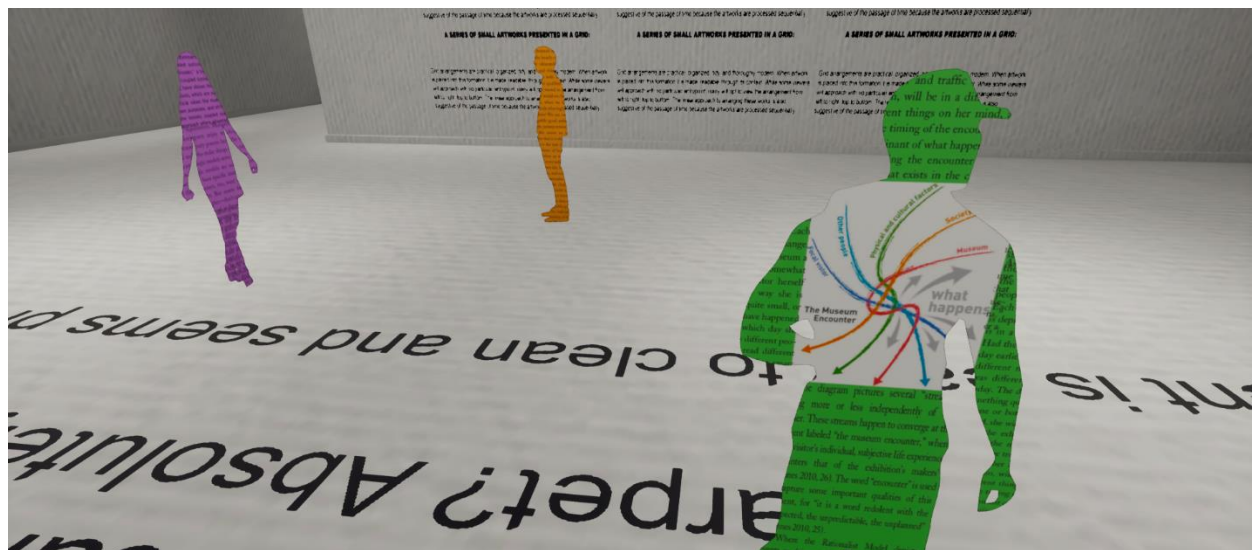
Image 05: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 01: Exhibition by Institution, 3*, 2021.

Image 06: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 01: Exhibition by Institution, 4*, 2021.

Image 07: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 01: End of the Day I, 1,* 2021.

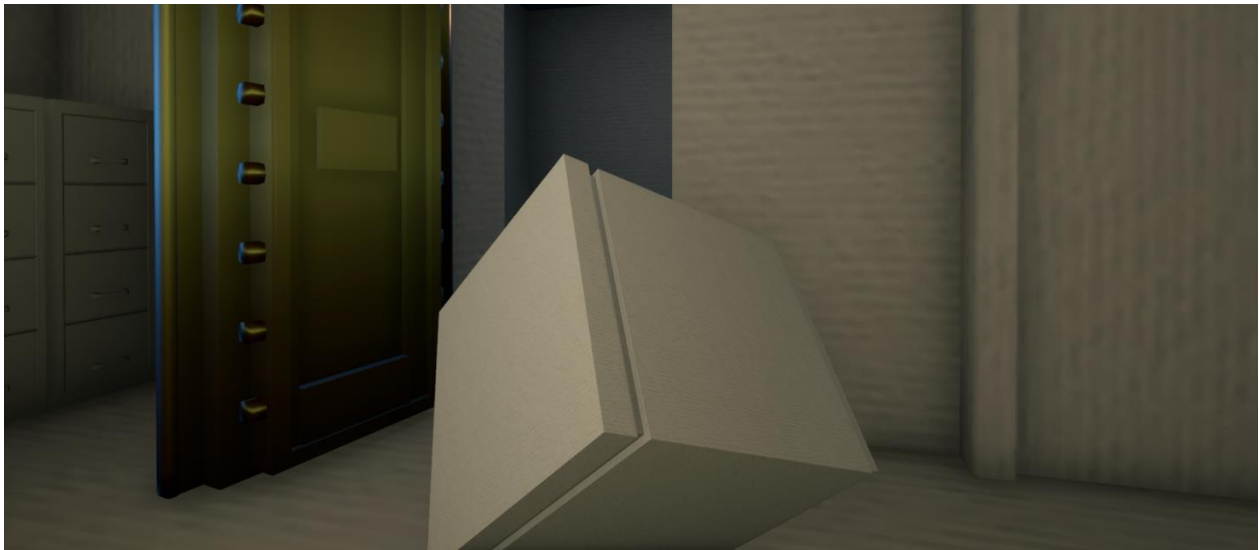**Image 08:** Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 01: End of the Day I, 2,* 2021.

Image 09: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 01: End of the Day I, 3,* 2021.
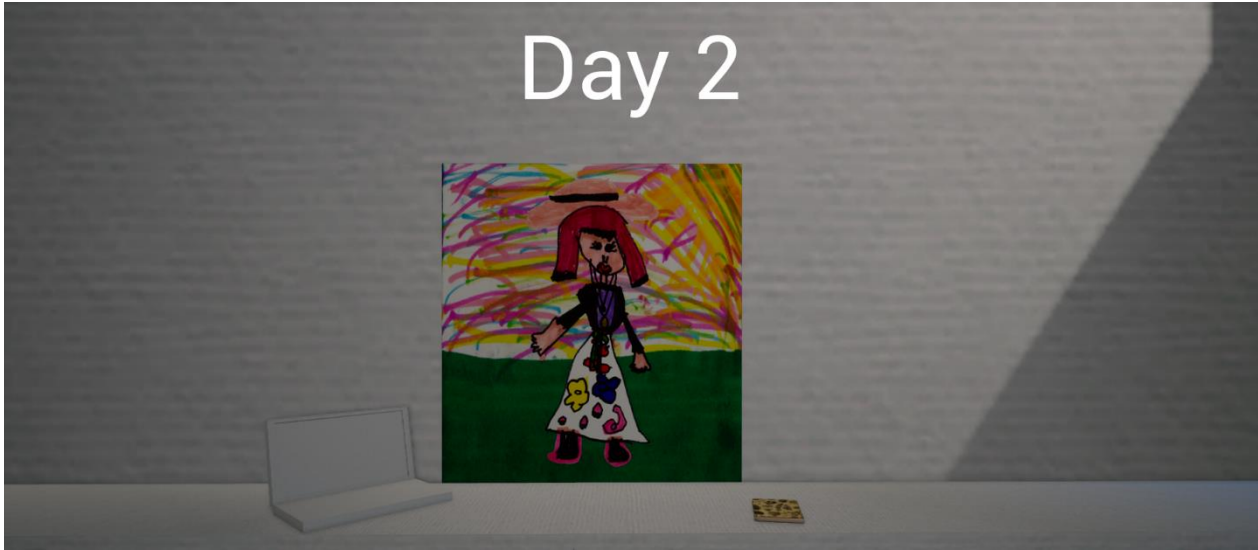
Image 10: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 02: Art Education,* 1, 2021.

Image 11: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 02: Art Education,* 2, 2021.

Image 12: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 02: Art Education,* 3, 2021.

Image 13: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 02: Art Education,* 4, 2021.
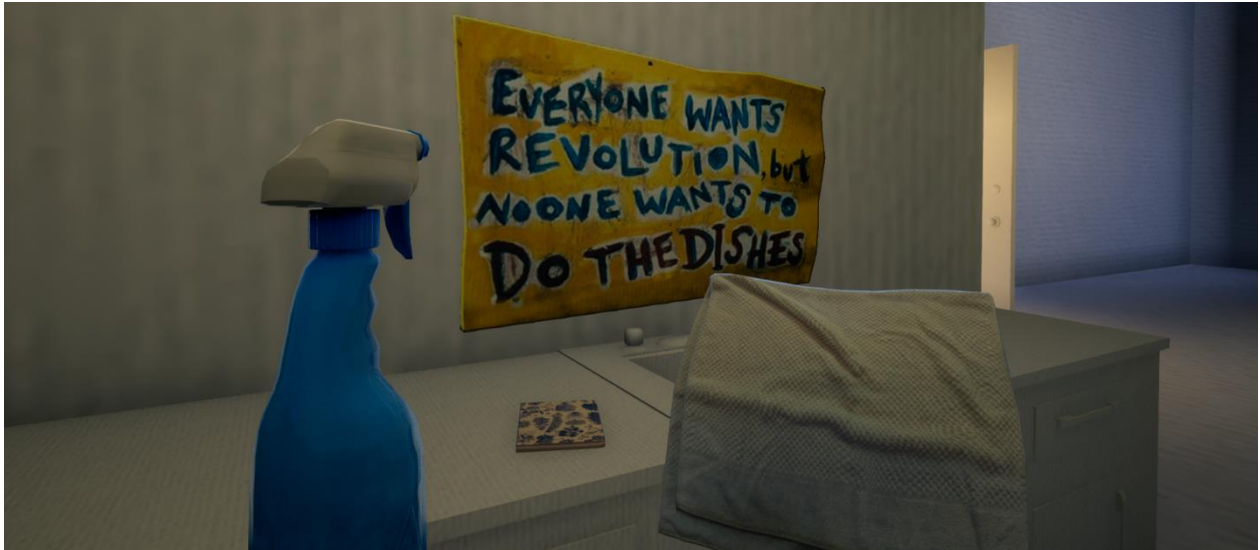
Image 14: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 02: Art Education,* 5, 2021.

Image 15: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 02: Art Education,* 6, 2021.

Image 16: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 02: End of the Day II*, 1, 2021.

Image 17: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 02: End of the Day II*, 2, 2021.

Image 18: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 03: Reception*, 1, 2021.

Image 19: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 03: Reception*, 2, 2021.

Image 20: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 03: Maintenance*, 1, 2021.

Image 21: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 03: Maintenance*, 2, 2021.

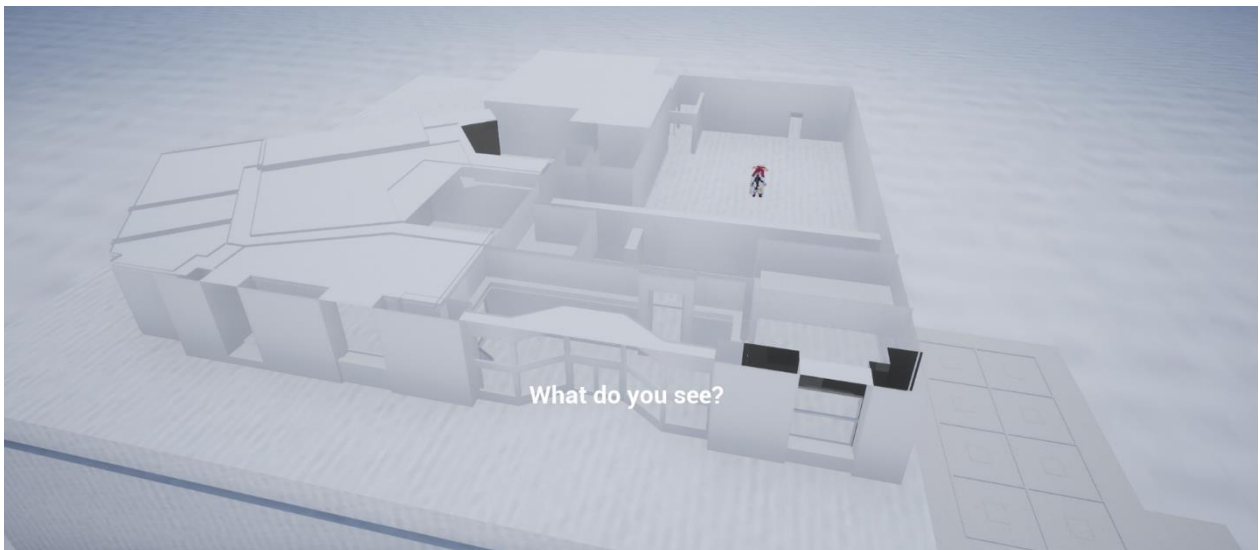**Image 22:** Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 03: Maintenance*, 3, 2021.

What do you see?

Image 23: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 04: Models*, 1, 2021.

Image 24: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 04: Models*, 2, 2021.

Image 25: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *DAY 04: Models*, 3, 2021.

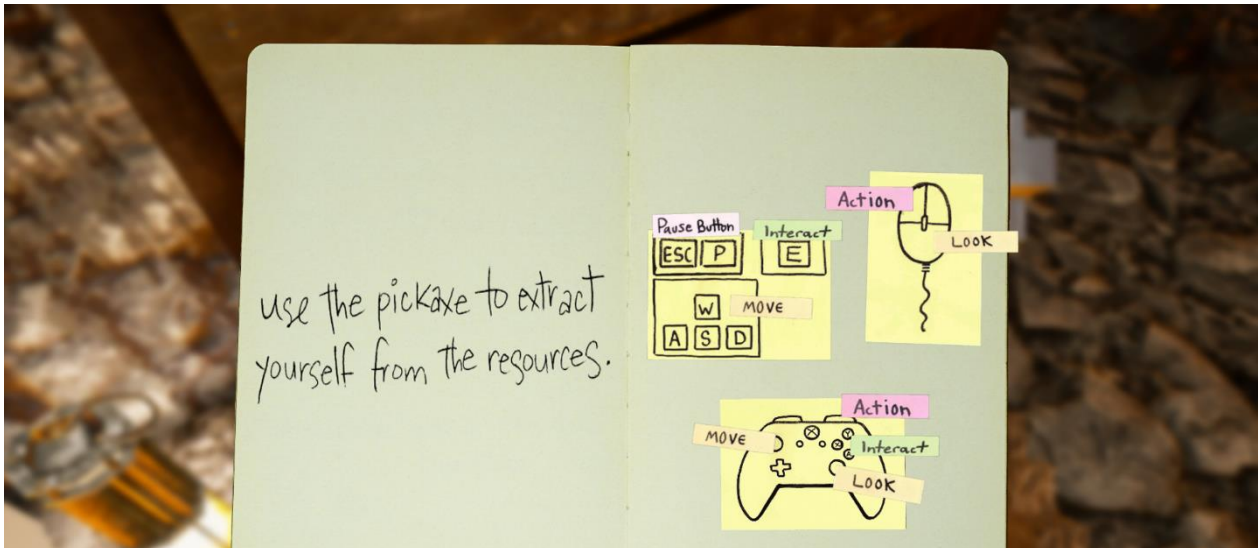**Image 26:** Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 04: Mineshaft,* 1, 2021.

Image 27: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 04: Mineshaft,* 2, 2021.

Image 28: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 04: Mineshaft,* 3, 2021.

Image 29: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 04: Mineshaft,* 4, 2021.

Image 30: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 04: Mineshaft,* 5, 2021.

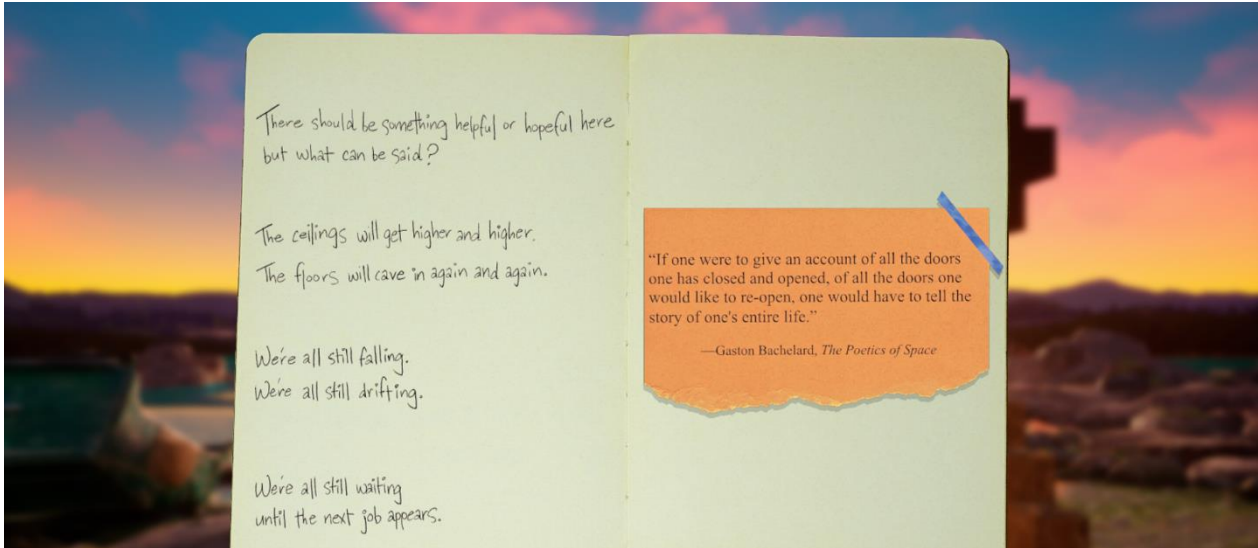**Image 31:** Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 04: Mineshaft,* 6, 2021.

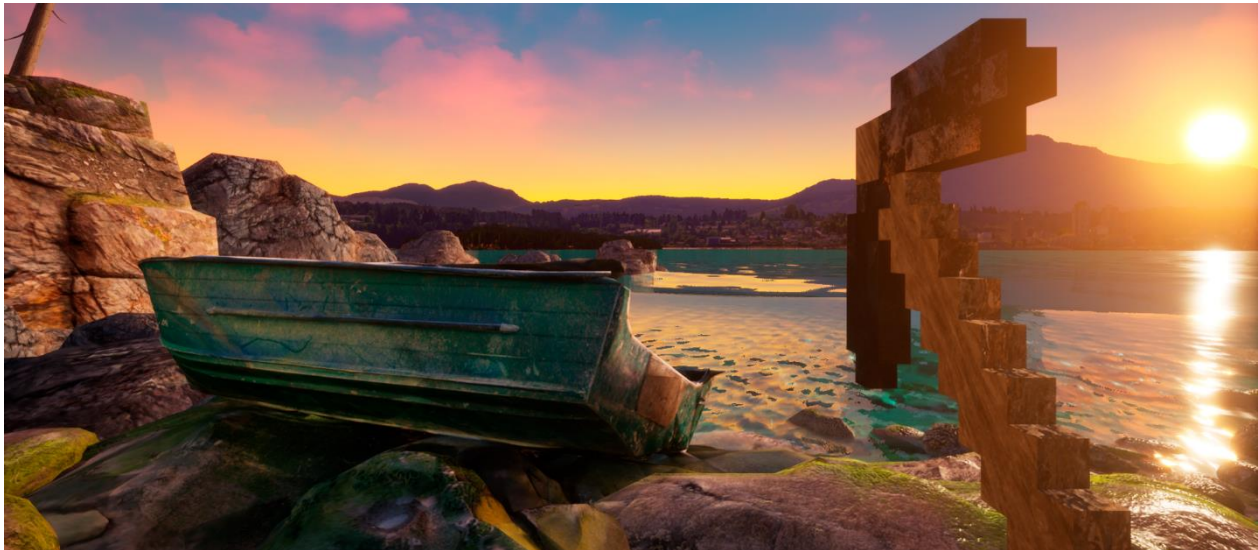**Image 32:** Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 04: Mineshaft,* 7, 2021.

Image 33: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 04: Mineshaft,* 8, 2021.

Image 34: Amber Morrison Fox and Matthew Fox, *NIGHT 04: Mineshaft,* 9, 2021.