

**MARS AIN'T THE KINDA PLACE TO RAISE YOUR KIDS: A PERFORMANCE
INSTALLATION**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is in support of my MFA thesis *Mars ain't the kinda place to raise your kids*, a performance installation that explores the intersection of installation art and postdramatic theatre practice. Taking place in a gallery, this performance includes elements of recorded sound, projected video, object installation, and live performance. Created with five actors, a sound and video designer and a small technical crew, *Mars* examines the real-life race to colonize the red planet. Rooted in theories and practices stretching from the Dadaists to the postdramatic thinkers of the 2000s, *Mars* attempts to erase the divide between the audience and the performer, the real and the fictional, the performance and the installation. This paper examines the theoretical and artistic influences of the work, as well as its process of creation, and offers a reflection on the reception of the work as both a performance and as an installation.

PREFACE

In accordance with The University of Lethbridge, as a fulfillment of my thesis for the MFA in Theatre Studies, I have created a performance installation entitled *Mars ain't the kinda place to raise your kids (Mars)*, presented at The Penny Gallery from May 26th to May 28th 2016. In support of this live performance installation, I am submitting this paper as a reflection of the theoretical study and theatrical processes that I undertook during my two years of study, culminating in the creation of this work. This document will serve as a resource, a guide, and a roadmap of my journey into this new frontier. It will consider the work from various perspectives:

- performance installation: contextualization, influences & themes
- the use and impact of venue/space
- the creation and use of text/narrative
- the influence of design/installation elements
- the workshop/rehearsal process
- the performance/reception of the work
- afterthoughts

I have been making theatre for over twenty years. Primarily identified as a playwright, I have been involved in the creation of dozens of new works for the stage that have been produced extensively at theatres and arts festivals across Canada and abroad. Since I began writing plays in the mid-1990s, I have worked within a fairly traditional professional framework: proscenium stages, customary playwright-director-dramaturg relationships, standard three-week rehearsal periods, and productions which observe a

traditional actor / audience relationship. For many years, I considered myself a successful, contented, working artist.

Then something happened.

I don't know if I could pinpoint the exact moment, the exact date, the exact time. I suppose it was incremental. I found myself dreading going to the theatre. Trapped in my seat (which can often cost as much as fifty dollars), experiencing another traditional, mimetic script played out onstage with familiar characters and unsurprising outcomes, surrounded by a well-heeled audience, half of whom were asleep, I began to feel more and more like a trapped animal. Like a vegetarian butcher, I could no longer stomach my own product or workplace. I felt estranged from what I saw as becoming an increasingly conservative system of creation and production no longer relevant to and / or reflective of the world around me. These subscriber-based, proscenium theatres felt increasingly dated, inflexible, economically restrictive, and bound by traditions and methodologies no longer conducive to creating truly engaging performances. Sitting in these theatres, surrounded by dated architecture and an aging audience, watching carefully structured, realistic "well-made" plays, I couldn't help but feel like one of the last stragglers at a party trying desperately to feel relevant, hip and engaged, but secretly feeling depressed and bored, knowing that all the cool kids had left the building ages ago.

At the same time, I found myself spending more and more time exploring the world of visual and conceptual arts. As a spectator, I loved the autonomy, the flexibility, and the openness of the gallery experience, where I could receive and explore the work on my own individual terms, at my own pace, creating my own narrative. Still very much focused on text and time-based narrative, I longed to find a way to marry the craft of

writing and performance with the freedom and flexibility of the conceptual art experience. I submit that my perception of the white cube is coming from the perspective of a theatre artist. I acknowledge that, for many visual and conceptual artists, the gallery space has many restrictive and negative historical, political and social implications. In fact, many artists may feel as constricted and hemmed in by a gallery space as I, a theatre artist, regard the black box. I will address this issue further in Chapter Three.

Entering into this MFA program, my aim was to break out of my singular role as playwright / theatre artist, and to become more fully engaged as a multidisciplinary artist. I longed to work more collaboratively with artists outside my practice, and to work in venues that have more flexibility and agency. My goal was (and still remains) to push the boundaries of what performance can be in this increasingly fluid, multidisciplinary world: to leave the black box behind and enter into the white cube. Through much theoretical study and practical studio work, along with the examination of the work of other artists, I have been building a new vocabulary, a new methodology, a genre I identify as performance installation: multidisciplinary, flexible, immersive, and playful. I am moving from a traditional theatre performance into a more fluid, open, multidisciplinary practice. Not wanting to completely abandon my focus on text, narrative, and performance, yet still desiring to have some autonomy over the experience, I have been studying work that straddles both installation and performance, and how moving from a black box into a gallery can affect the reception of the work. I have been looking at the effects of this spatial transition on narrative and how design elements can function as both practical performance tools as well as an installation exhibit: the ephemera of a performance, the remnants, the traces of a live event.

Mars is a reflection of this journey. It combines elements of my research and practice, both past and present. It employs newly discovered methodologies and theories.

Mars is a step in a new direction. It is a leap into the unknown.

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Many people have brought me to this point. First, to Professor Jay Whitehead who first championed me and who was instrumental in my being here. To my committee for their support, confidence, generosity and sense of humour. Particularly, to Denton Fredrickson who was a fierce ally, on and off the ice. To the theatre department, and all its faculty and staff. To all my financial supporters. To the many students with whom I had the opportunity to work and play. To my downtown office and staff, who kept me company on many cold, winless nights. To the book club. To Bryn, Shona, Megan. To Dave Hoffos. To Gail Hanrahan. Especially, to the cast and crew of my Mars mission, my colonizers, who generously gave so much. To my family, who is always somewhere in my work.

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CHAPTER 1

Performance Installation



Figure 1.1. STO Union's *What happened to the seeker?* Photo credit: STO Union.

“If what Nadia Ross does isn't theatre, then give me less theatre — and more of this stuff, whatever you want to call it.”

- Stephen Hunt, Experimental theatre looks for the Seeker

STO Union is “a multidisciplinary company that brings together artists from a variety of mediums in the creation of original contemporary theatre, installations, live art and video for presentation in Canada and abroad” (stounion.com). Based in the small community of Wakefield, Quebec and led by artistic director Nadia Ross, STO Union has been a progressive model of theatre creation in Canada for the last twenty years, and continues to evolve, embracing a postdramatic aesthetic.¹ *What Happened to the Seeker*, their most recent work that premiered in 2015, uses video, object installation and performance to tell the story of one woman's spiritual quest for enlightenment from 1965 to the present day. STO Union is just one example of a performance troupe that has

¹ I will explain postdramatic theory in more detail later in this chapter.

embraced the multidisciplinary aesthetic of performance installation. There are many other artists and collectives around the world working in this mode that have equally influenced my thinking and practice, including: Lebanese theatre and visual artist Rabih Mroué; Romeo Castellucci and his company *Societas Raffaello Sanzio*; German collective *Rimini Protokoll*; Argentinian writer and creator Mariano Pensotti; UK writer/performer Tim Crouch, and the famed British performance troupe *Forced Entertainment*.² I will refer to some of these artists and their specific creations throughout this paper, creations that have been enormously influential on my practice and work, specifically, *Mars*, this thesis project.

Performance installation is a term I use to describe a practice that combines elements of live performance and conceptual art installation. It involves aspects of current postdramatic theatre practice as well as elements of relational aesthetics, performance art, sound, video and object installation. Combining both a theatre (narrative, time-based, text-driven) and gallery (fluid, open-ended, immersive) experience, this kind of multidisciplinary work is becoming increasingly *de rigueur* in the world today, where artists no longer feel the need to identify themselves, specifically, as a singular type of artist, confined to a specific genre of work. I believe we live in a time and place where the strict binary definitions of art (and indeed, identity, sexuality, etc.) are slowly being erased. Society has become more and more fluid. Visual artists are becoming actors,

² For more information on these artists see their individual websites: forcedentertainment.com, marianopensotti.com, raffaello sanzio.org, rimini-protokoll.de, timcrouchtheatre.co.uk. Information on the work and life of Rabih Mroué can be accessed on his Wikipedia page.

social workers are becoming choreographers, singers are becoming sculptors, and poets are becoming conceptual artists.³

These chameleon-like creators, crossing genres, moving between disciplines, working outside their comfort zones, are embracing what critic Claire Bishop refers to as the act of re-skilling: “the move from one area of disciplinary competence to another . . . the bringing to bear of one set of competencies on those of the newly elected discipline” (“Unhappy days in the Art World”). Also referred to as de-skilling - a term based in economics used to describe the way in which skilled labour is replaced by new technologies operated by semi-skilled workers - this practice allows for a malleable and shifting form of art which destabilizes the notions of genres and begins to erase the divide between audience and performer, amateur and professional, as artists begin working outside their areas of expertise. This kind of multidisciplinary work is not new: there has been a long history of artists crossing boundaries and disciplines, such as the Dadaists and Fluxus participants. These artists and movements will be explored later in this chapter.

The spaces in which this work is being presented and displayed are shifting as well: galleries have become restaurants, theatres have become galleries, and classrooms have become theatres. It is becoming increasingly impossible to pigeonhole artistic practices. Even funding bodies are responding to this trend. *The Canada Council for the Arts* has recently undergone a major restructuring of their granting systems to reflect and support this increasingly multi- and inter-disciplinary world.⁴

³ Some examples of recent artists embracing “re-skilling” include: American poet-turned-conceptual artist Kenneth Goldsmith, British-German dancer-choreographer-relational artist Tino Sehgal, and Canada’s Alana Mitchell, journalist-turned-actor known for her recent one-woman performance / lecture, *Sea Sick*.

⁴ In 2016, The Canada Council for the Arts released a new funding model that greatly streamlined their granting programs and allowed for more flexibility from applicants, particularly artists whose work is multidisciplinary. For more information see their website: canadacouncil.ca.

With *Mars*, I am throwing my own voice and perspective into this timely and heady conversation. I am attempting to merge text- and time-based narrative and live performance with the spatial openness and malleability of a gallery exhibition. One of the defining features of performance has always been its impermanence. It must be experienced in the here and now. Feminist scholar Peggy Phelan writes in her influential 1993 book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, live performance “cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.” (146). That is, the essence of performance lies in its own disappearance, its temporality. This belief in the ephemerality of theatre continues to endure. I am attempting to create work where the residue, the detritus of the performance exists as a tangible object with its own value and narrative once the actors are gone. Elements of the performance will remain visible. *Mars* will celebrate the communal, phenomenological element of live performance - presence, being, immersion - but will also embrace the tangibility and permanency of an exhibition. Post-performance, the live actors will be gone, but the objects - the videos, the projected text, and the remnants of action - will remain, telling a (perhaps altered) narrative. I think of relational artist Rirkrit Tiravanija’s influential 1992 relational performance installation, *untitled (free/still)*, first presented at the 303 Gallery in New York, where he prepared and served a free communal meal (Thai curry, rice) to an ongoing, revolving group of spectators, and the detritus of the event - leftover food, dirty plates and cutlery - became the exhibit when the artist was not present. Some spectators had the opportunity to experience the shared meal with the artist present, whereas others experienced only the aftermath, the results, of the experience. This is the effect I am

exploring in *Mars*: the traces of a performance remain as tangible objects that can be viewed, explored, and experienced by spectators separate from the live event. In this way, I am able to extend and shift the life of the work. The experience of the performance, the interplay of the actors and audience remains, endowing the space and the objects with history and experience. The objects carry the weight and the experience of the finished performance. Similar to walking through an abandoned settlement camp, or the ruins of a deserted city, the traces of the performance become ghostlike, relics, haunted and informed by the absence of physical bodies.

By placing the actors in a gallery, alongside objects and videos presented as sculptural pieces, I am hoping that the spectators will view the live performance as a kind of installation in itself, a series of living tableaux. Referring to the sensory, phenomenological work of Romeo Castellucci and his company Societas Raffaello Sanzio (SRS), Professor Stephen Di Benedetto writes:

Both theatre and fine art conventions work together as elements that move beyond design and function as expressive form. In this way, human figures become sculptural objects that are interchangeable with the other stage machinery. The theatrical event is the shaping of stage environments by the actors' body or by sculptural objects and the space between the objects, the temperature, the sound waves and the amount of light. (101)

Postdramatic

I relate my ideas of performance installation closely to the theories of postdramatic theatre practice. Postdramatic theatre, as defined by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his 1999 titular book (translated into English in 2006), is an examination of trends that Lehmann believes have been present in theatre since the 1960s. According to Lehmann, this work “becomes presence more than representation, more shared than communicated

experience, more process than product, more manifestation than significance, more energetic impulse than information” (85). Lehmann introduced the term postdramatic to depict performances that no longer take the dramatic text as the primary point of reference, a position I see as valuable / productive and incorporate into my own methodology. Jen Harvie, Professor of Contemporary Theatre and Performance at the *University of London* writes in *Making Contemporary Theatre: International Rehearsal*

Processes:

[Postdramatic theatre] no longer focuses on the dramatic text: more than this, it is not principally defined by (but may also play with) both character as it is conventionally understood through psychological realism, and narrative in its conventional linear organization around conflict. . . . postdramatic theatre focuses on theatre, emphasizing the visual (for our media age) and sacrificing a sense of coherent narrative synthesis. (12)

Often linked to postmodernism, postdramatic theatre shares many of the same elements of the former but with a few subtle differences. Postdramatic theatre tends to engage more politically and socially with an audience than do postmodern works. It more strongly embraces the idea of community and communality, whereas postmodernism often celebrates the individual experience, the impossibility of a shared meaning and a feeling of helplessness in the face of an unstable world.

We are still very much engulfed in the postdramatic age. I have used (and will continue to explore) aspects and practices of the postdramatic in my work. *Mars*, as a performance installation, is deeply influenced by this theoretical and practical phenomenon. I will explore specific examples and traces of postdramatic practice, which continues to evolve and shift in response to the changing artistic and social climate of our age, in later chapters.

Roots / Lineage

Performance installation has deep roots. This kind of multidisciplinary, immersive collage of genres and disciplines can be traced as far back as the early 20th century with the Dadaists and their Readymades, their collages of discarded materials, cutups, the playful mixing of life and art, performer and spectator, and “bombastic anti-traditional intra-disciplinary events” (Bailes 2). It is impossible to imagine current visual and / or performative practice without acknowledging these artists who led such a creative upheaval and whose influence still so strongly resonates. Put simply - artistically - we wouldn't be where we are today without them.

Furthermore, in the late 1950s and 1960s, Allan Kaprow's Happenings along with the Fluxus movement, built on the Dadaist tradition, and continued to blur the lines between art, performance, and life.



Figure 1.2. Fluxus. Photo credit: guitai.wordpress.com

Happenings and Fluxus, both of which can be traced back to experimental art makers such as musician John Cage who attended Black Mountain College in the late

1950s⁵, utilized an amateur aesthetic, a DIY attitude, happenstance, and a multidisciplinary approach to their work, embracing and mixing together elements of live performance, visual art, conceptual art, film, video and sound compositions. As the work of these artists began to infiltrate the national (and international) consciousness of the art world (particularly, in New York City), the idea of a structured narrative became more and more blurred, and a kind of amateurism prevailed, erasing the line between professional and amateur, between audience and performer. However, as similarly related the Happenings and Fluxus movements were, it is important to acknowledge their different methodologies and impulses. “With happenings, the course of events depends on the reactions of the viewers and the outcome is usually left open, whereas a Fluxus action often presented a carefully prearranged scenario into which the public would be integrated but had little opportunity to react” (“Fluxus” 122). It is hard to separate the current trend of immersive theatre and the relational arts from these early pioneering movements. Many books have been written about the influence of Dada, Fluxus and Happenings on the current trend of performance installation; there is simply too much history and work to go into too much detail here.⁶ Suffice to say, although my creation is more structured, more linear and regulated, it owes a huge debt to these daring artists who were breaking the mold of how art is defined and understood. Traces of their ideas, their aesthetics, and philosophies can be found throughout *Mars*: the use of repurposed, everyday objects; a fluid, moveable audience; an immersive spatial environment; and a DIY, unpolished aesthetic, to name just a few.

⁵ Founded in 1933 and closed in 1957, North Carolina’s Black Mountain College was a progressive arts-driven educational institute linked to some of the most influential avant-garde artists of the 1950s and 1960s: John Cage, Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, and Merce Cunningham, to name a few.

⁶ *Fluxus Experience*, by Hanna Higgins is a great comprehensive resource.

CHAPTER 2

The Mission to Mars



Figure 2.1. Mars One Logo

It is Mars One's goal to establish a permanent human settlement on Mars. Human settlement on Mars is the next giant leap for humankind. This exploration of the solar system will bring the human race closer together. Mars is the next step of the voyage into the universe. Furthermore, human settlement on Mars will aid the understanding of the origins of the solar system, the origins of life, and human's place in the universe. As with the Apollo Moon landings, a human mission to Mars will inspire generations to believe that all things are possible and that anything can be achieved with perseverance.

- Mars One Website, 2016 (mars-one.com)

I am using the real-life Mars One Mission as the narrative jumping off point for this performance installation, the planning of which began in 2013. The Mars One Mission, which strives to establish a permanent human colony on Mars by 2027 (although the date keeps shifting), is a non-profit foundation led by Dutch entrepreneur Bas Lansdorp. Since 2013, this mission has been seeking out four ordinary human beings - four settlers - who will be the first inhabitants of this new human colony. Over 200,000 citizens from across the globe have put their names, and their bodies, forward. An

international committee will select the four individuals and they will be trained at a simulated camp here on earth that will replicate the conditions they will face on Mars. There will be a series of pre-human flights where housing units, life support systems and supply units will be sent ahead to prepare for human residents. A *SpaceX Falcon Heavy*⁷ will launch the first group of four colonists in March 2026 who will, after a seven-month journey, arrive on Mars. Every two years, following the first mission, two more candidates will be sent to Mars, to grow and populate this experimental colony. It is a seven-month journey. There are no guarantees. They will never return home. The response has been overwhelming. The selection process and the logistics of the operation are still underway. Landsdorp is hoping to raise funds partially by turning the mission into a stranger-than-fiction, reality-television show.

Mars One is certainly not the only player in the race to colonize Mars. NASA, as well as private and national outlets and individuals from across the globe have all been proposing human settlements: *Human2Mars*, PayPal founder Elon Musk's *Space X Project*, Jeff Bezo's *Blue Origin*, Richard Branson's *Virgin Galactic*. The colonization of Mars has become a global phenomenon, capturing the imagination of populations around the world. "[Mars] will become the new frontier, the new hope, and the new destination for millions of earthlings who will do almost anything to seize the opportunities waiting on the Red Planet" (77).⁸

⁷ Falcon 9 Heavy, designed and manufactured by SpaceX, an American aerospace company founded by Elon Musk, is, according to its Wikipedia page, "a super heavy lift space launch vehicle being designed and manufactured by SpaceX. [...] Falcon Heavy was designed from the outset to carry humans into space and it would restore the possibility of flying crewed missions to the Moon or Mars." ("Falcon Heavy")

⁸ This quote is taken from the New Yorker article *Project Exodus: What's behind the dream of colonizing Mars*, by author Elizabeth Kolbert, who is quoting author Stephen L. Petranek from his soon-to-be-published book, *How we'll live on Mars*.

Over 200,00 individuals from across the globe have applied to be part of the Mars One Mission. Why? What is this fascination? The Inspiration Mars Foundation (an American nonprofit that aims to launch a manned mission to Mars in 2018) held a press conference in Washington D.C. in 2013 where journalist Miles O'Brien stated: "[I]f we don't seize the moment, we may miss the chance to become a multi-planet species, and sooner or later, humanity will cease to exist. There are always reasons not to do it . . . the costs, the risks, the rationale, Columbus or Magellan would never have left the harbor if they dwelled on these worries. Sometimes you just have to weigh anchor and shove off" (Slobodian 2). Some believe, as a species, we have a biological need to explore, to expand the borders of our world. Some supporters state the necessity of our species survival, or point to the idea of pursuing a utopian ideal, a return to innocence. The race to colonize Mars is a chance to start again, to start over, to do better, to feel a part of something bigger, greater than the individual self. The ego clearly comes into play. Mars One candidate Katelyn Kane states "everyone thinks they're special I guess, but I really do think I'm special . . . I want there to be a statue of me on Mars, in the future" (mars-one.com).

The nature of the Mars One Mission is, to me, fantastical. It is reminiscent of a juvenile game, a return to the magical imaginations of childhood. The quest to settle Mars reminds me of building forts, creating imaginary lands and places, envisioning far away futures. It is reminiscent of family camping trips I took in my youth: sleeping under the stars, looking up at the moon, the planets, and imagining other worlds, other realities. As well, I cannot ignore or disregard the obvious resonances my Mars project has in regards

to settlement camps and the increase of transient populations on Earth: harsh conditions, removal from one's homeland, divided families, with no chance of return.

In reference to Jean Baudrillard, my Mars Colony, installed inside a gallery, composed of discarded items sourced from dollar stores, *Walmart*, and thrift shops, exists as a kind of simulacrum: a model, a copy, of something that does not have an original or source. It is a kind of futuristic, DIY Disneyworld.

I imagine this performance installation as a portrait of humanity, a microcosm of our existence: a curated group of individuals, re-settled, reconfigured in a new environment. It exists as a museum display, objects that a curator or museologist has brought together to tell a story, to create a narrative, to reflect a historical time and place. *Mars* will be a portrait of humanity; four souls thrown together, a curated vision, an assortment of souls, living objects, lab rats in a Plexiglas dome, set adrift, observed. It will be an immersive experience, using everyday objects and movements, found and sourced text, all brought together to create a phenomenological experience of humanity.

Structure

Structurally there are three distinct phases, or acts, to *Mars*. Phase One exists as an immersive physical installation. As the audience enters the gallery, they encounter a visual and aural environment. A series of conceptual sculptures are displayed on plinths throughout the space, consisting of various, random found objects (camping gear, tents, a tricycle, etc.) There is a television monitor playing a promotional welcoming video, outlining the *rules of the game*, the implications being that the gathered spectators are the final candidates for the Mars One Mission. As the lights begin to shift, a twenty-minute

recording of over two hundred different voices begins in the front room of the gallery. These text fragments are culled from actual transcribed interviews and conversations I conducted with friends and strangers, describing who they are and their reasons for wanting to go on this one-way adventure. Eventually, near the end of the recording, four individuals enter the room: the four performers, the chosen colonizers.

Phase Two edges towards a more narrative performance. Moving into the main room in the gallery, where a series of chairs are scattered throughout the large interior space, a more formal theatre experience begins. This second space holds a physical installation representing a kind of low-fi, makeshift settlement reminiscent of various transient locations: a refugee camp, a community campground, and an imagined futuristic colony. The installation consists of a series of objects displayed on plinths, on the floor and hanging from the ceiling throughout the space, with elaborate title cards, or descriptions of the objects, attached to the plinths or the walls, mimicking object descriptions one would encounter at a gallery or museum (*see Appendix I*). These objects, discarded items, found items, old pup tents, children's toys and camping gear are meant to represent the high tech gadgetry that is being developed for the Mars mission. For example: an old Viewfinder becomes a Multi Unit Spectroscopic Telescope, a few hanging plants become a greenhouse, a tricycle becomes a space rover, reinforcing themes of childhood, fantasy, and play. After the audience has had time to explore the environment, the scripted performance begins. We are on Mars. We are now watching a live feed from Mars. The narrative follows *a day in the life* of the colony. We witness the settlers going about their day: practicing yoga, making music, building structures, and watering plants. The audience becomes a kind of witness, a scientific observer monitoring

the four colonizers as one would lab rats in a Plexiglas container. There is the omnipresent voice of a narrator throughout, providing information, technical and personal details of the colonizers, and the conditions on Mars.

Phase Three exists, post-performance, as a return to installation. The live performance over, the space, now void of actors, holds the detritus and traces of the performance. The audience is left together as its own kind of makeshift community, confronted with remnants of life, the ephemera of the experience, the residue and the detritus of the completed performance, representing this failed settlement. The gallery, littered with dirt, water, as well as the objects mounted on the plinths, can be explored and experienced by the spectators at their own discretion. It exists as a kind of lost, abandoned civilization. Sound and video projections will flicker and fill the space with an eerie presence, or, more accurately, an absence: the end of a world, the collapse of a civilization.

CHAPTER 3

Space is the Place: black box vs. white cube



Figure 3.1. *The Penny Gallery*. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

But this traffic of re-skilling between white cube and black box is more complicated than a question of . . . simply switching the context for performance. The proscenium is a discourse (immersion), an architecture (the black box), and a structure of spectatorship (ticketed, with a beginning-to-end experience). The white cube, in turn, is also a discourse (of mythic transparency, assisted by the glare of full lighting), and a structure of experience (the autonomy of the viewer), giving rise to different modalities of performance: ongoing presence (like a sculpture) or the loop (as in video).

- Claire Bishop, Unhappy days in the Art World? De-skilling Theatre, Re-skilling Performance

One of the first decisions I made when embarking on this creation was to place *Mars* in a gallery opposed to a traditional theatre space. I wanted to escape the confines, the restrictions and traditions of a black box theatre and instead, work within the more flexible structure of a white cube. I wanted to experiment with how this shift in venue

affects an audience's reaction and engagement with narrative and performance. I chose The Penny Gallery in downtown Lethbridge. It is a large, accommodating, multi-room space in a central location with enough flexibility to house this simulated Martian colony. As I have stated, my goal for *Mars* was to function both as a performance and an installation. Just as artistic genres and practices have become increasingly fluid and multidisciplinary over the past century, I wanted the physical space, the environment to exemplify that trend. My intention was to create a space that plays, shifts and erases the divide between performance and installation. By placing this work in a gallery, I felt I would have more freedom and play. I could create a more immersive and autonomous experience and environment for an audience. I could use the vastness and spatial openness of the Penny Gallery to disrupt a theatre audience's expectations (a stable seating arrangement, a single, directional gaze, a division of performance / audience space), allowing them to interact with the text, the narrative and the performers in different and fresh ways. I accomplished this by setting the various installations and performing areas throughout the venue, by placing the seating (chairs) randomly, in various directions and configurations, and by allowing (in fact, *encouraging*) an audience to move with agency throughout the performance.

Black vs. White

What exactly are the spatial and structural differences between the black box and the white cube? For myself, coming from a theatre background, I consider the white cube to be an accessible, open, fluid, and empty blank space waiting to be inhabited. It represents absence, neutrality. Whereas the black box theatre is saddled with structural

and architectural elements that define and delineate the space more rigidly (ie: seating, riggings, lobby, a proscenium playing area, an inaccessible backstage). There are more 'rules' attached to a theatre space. There are ways of behaving, and a more structured viewing experience (assigned seating, etc.). A white cube allows for more autonomy, for a more individual experience. Consider this: exiting a black box theatre mid-performance can disrupt and upset the experience for everyone. It is socially unacceptable. Whereas, in a gallery, the viewers are free to wander, to come and go as they please without judgment. A gallery space allows for a more immersive, and autonomous experience than does a proscenium theatre. Gallery spectators are more mobile; they can more freely choose how to interact with the work. Their gaze is more fluid. There is more visibility in a gallery space. Generally, the viewing experience is more individual than collective.⁹ Often, the work is less time-based. Viewers can interact with the work at their own pace. Inside a black box theatre, where work is generally more time- / narrative-based, an audience feels more restricted; there is a stronger sense of regulation and control over the viewing experience, dictated by the director / creator.

We can examine the differences between these structures simply in terms of their colours: *black* box and *white* cube. White and black create very different physical, neurological responses. A black space absorbs or swallows light. A viewer disappears. Theatrical lighting erases and places an audience in the dark. The structure of the theatre is generally supposed to disappear, plunging an audience in a mysterious, altered world or location. We are less aware of the structure of the building. Things are hidden behind curtains, on grids far above our heads (lighting equipment, set pieces). The actors arrive

⁹ There are many exceptions to the idea of an individual viewing experience. Particularly with the rise of relational aesthetics in the 1990s, which I will address later in the paper, more artists are asking spectators to to function and relate to their work communally.

onstage, magically, from backstage areas inaccessible to the audience. The lighting focuses and directs our gaze towards the stage, the actors. Conversely, a white space holds light. It reflects light. One can never fully disappear. White exposes things. Makes things visible. It is difficult to hide, to disappear. White reveals. Black conceals.

The use of alternative performance venues is not a new phenomenon. The traditional theatre space - a proscenium stage, a separated seating arrangement, a lobby, and a backstage area hidden from view - has become an increasingly outdated structure in regards to the production of contemporary immersive, multidisciplinary work. Performing artists working in a postdramatic climate have been, for decades, leaving these black boxes behind in favour of more fluid, open, accessible spaces, challenging the nature and reception of narrative and performance. The use of found space, repurposed space, and public space in performance and installation is becoming more and more popular. Abandoned warehouses, city streets, parking garages, daycare centres, have all become viable artistic venues. For the purposes of this work (*Mars*), I believed a gallery space was the most appropriate and exciting option.

The Museum Effect

This is not to say that the gallery - the white cube - is without its own historical, political and social implications and restrictions. I accept that, for many visual/conceptual artists, the white cube has become as oppressive and dated as the black box theatre. Historically, museums and galleries have embodied, at times, an oppressive, hierarchal environment - socially, economically, and politically. Placing works of art in a gallery space or museum automatically endows that work with importance and validity. The

question becomes: who decides what is art, and what is not. (This is exactly what the Dadaists were rebelling against with their playful, irreverent Readymades). Curators and gallery owners have traditionally focused the gaze of the spectator in their own perspective. They have chosen, arranged, and positioned the work. They have structured the environment and have controlled, managed and scripted the viewing experience. The curator, the gallery owner, has enormous power: “The museum is an institute of discipline which indoctrinates appropriate behavior in the viewer” (Casey 4). Just as with the proscenium black box theatre, the gallery or museum comes with its own set of implied behaviors: look this way, follow this path, stay quiet, do not touch the work. Many conceptual and installation artists have been fleeing what they view as the oppressive white cube for the freedom of open and found spaces, spaces without the historical weight of centuries, removed from the heavy hand of curators. This has been particularly evident since the rise of relational aesthetics, a term coined by French curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s, which concentrated on human interactions, rather than objects, as the focus of the work.¹⁰

However, despite these criticisms, I do feel that, as a theatre artist, the white cube offers a fresh perspective and a new platform for performance. By using a gallery as a performance venue, by placing actors and a scripted narrative in a space where, traditionally, spectators are accustomed to being passive observers, surrounded by objects and images, I hope to destabilize the way an audience interacts with and interprets my work. *Mars* exists at the intersection of performance and installation, between animate (read *actors*) and inanimate (read *sculptural*) objects.

¹⁰ Relational Aesthetics will be explored in more detail in Chapter Eight.

Performance Art

There is a long tradition of performances taking place in galleries. As mentioned in Chapter Two, artists associated with Dadaism, Fluxus, and Happenings often used alternative venues for their performative work: art galleries, storefronts, beaches, street corners, and forests. In some cases, they did away with a venue altogether (here I am thinking of Fluxus event scores, or instructions, for performance). In the 1960s, these artistic movements gave way to performance art, a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of conceptual, political, and body art which began to take root in the early to mid-1960s. Some of these seminal artists include: Yoko Ono (*Cut Piece*), Carol Schneeman, Joesph Beuoy (*I Like America and America Likes Me*), and the now iconic Marina Abramovic. The ephemeral performances created by these artists, often staged in art galleries, placed the physical body at the centre of the work. Physical presence and temporal endurance became the focus of the work. And the gallery became a more performative, active space. Visceral, political, and sometimes physically dangerous, performance art activated an audience and forced them to become more than spectators: they became engaged witnesses, forced to confront the physical body in the space. Sensually, they could smell, hear, at time, taste the work. In some cases, they became active participants in the work itself (ie: Ono's *Cut Piece*, where audience members were invited to cut away pieces of the artist's own clothing). Mars, although less politically motivated and more narratively focused, owes a debt to this work, which began exploring the idea of the gallery, the white cube, as a space for performance that could activate spectators and shift the behavior of viewers.

The Penny Gallery

One of the challenges I faced was to not simply transform the gallery into a theatre (adding proscenium-type seating, stage lighting, a hidden backstage area), but to embrace the gallery on its own terms: to celebrate its openness, its accessibility, to let the space influence / dictate the work, rather than letting the work dictate the space.

There are certainly drawbacks and challenges when attempting a live, narrative performance in an open, unregulated space, including less control over theatrical elements. The Penny Gallery is not equipped with elaborate sound and lighting equipment. My challenge was to make this work to my advantage. I tried to bring in as little outside theatrical equipment as possible, allowing the space to exist on its own. I wanted to keep its physical essence as a gallery in tact. Primarily, apart from a sound system, video projectors, and television monitors, I used only what the gallery had to offer. I didn't alter the venue to suit my needs; I allowed the venue to influence and *write itself* upon my work.

I spent many hours thinking specifically about the environment I wanted to create for *Mars* and how I could best use the Penny Gallery to my advantage. My vision for the space often shifted throughout the creative process. I initially imagined the entire environment would be immersive and fluid. There would be no seating; the audience would be free to wander and observe at its own discretion throughout the duration of the evening. However, as the work progressed, I began to think in more practical terms. The duration of the performance would be roughly seventy five to ninety minutes. There was still a strong narrative element to the piece that I needed to regulate. I realized that I

needed to maintain a certain level of control over the spectators' gaze and attention. I felt I could not completely hand over autonomy to the audience. But, I did want them to feel as much play and freedom as possible within the narrative structure. I did not want the audience to be restricted by one particular gaze. I wanted multi-perspectives and room for movement and agency.

I finally settled on the use of seating, but configured in such a way that would allow for movement throughout the space. I placed groups or clusters of chairs throughout the gallery, setting them up in front of the various stations, or installations. This allowed me to avoid a proscenium sensibility in the space, and circumvent a singular cohesive gaze. This arrangement, I hoped, would permit and encourage an audience to explore, to move about the space, observing specific scenes and interactions at their own discretion. Moving from room to room, from installation to installation, the audience must negotiate the environment, and their relationship to the building, to the performers and to one another. The gallery becomes an *active space*, a *practiced* place, in reference to De Certeau.¹¹ There are no ushers telling the audience how to behave, where to sit or how to experience the work. The audience becomes active participants in creating the space, the mood, the environment, and the narrative. They become part of the action, both the voyeur and the object of voyeurism. The audience is watching the performers, but it is also watching itself. French philosopher Jacques Rancière, in his acclaimed 2009 essay *The Emancipated Spectator*, explores notions of how to overcome the passivity of theatre

¹¹ Philosopher Michel De Certeau, in his influential book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, distinguishes the notions of space and place. Place represents a fixed, stable building, environment or "an instantaneous configuration of positions" (117). Space, meanwhile, "is composed of intersections of mobile elements" (117). Space is not fixed; it can be transformed by the participants. It is something unstable, fluid. These writings, along with Henri Lefebvre's reflections on the same subject, were helpful in how I thought of and used the physical place / space of the Penny Gallery.

audiences. Writing about the work of British theatre artist Tim Crouch (specifically, his 2007 play *England*)¹² and referencing Rancière, Professor Stephen Bottoms writes: “Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting, Rancière proposes: “The spectator also acts . . . [S]he observes selects, compares, interprets” (“Materialising an Audience” 454). This is what I am attempting in *Mars*: to emancipate an audience to the degree that their presence is *active*. They become more than spectators; they become witnesses, a part of the experience. Their movements and presence in the space affects and influences the work and the environment. They become a culpable presence in the work.

The audience as actor: the observer becomes the observed

In my production design, there is no distinction between the playing area and the viewing area. I attempted to build an equal, non-hierarchical, and shifting environment. The entire space is visible. Everything is exposed. There is nowhere to hide. The audience, thus, becomes a part of the exhibit; their bodies can be seen, felt, heard, and must be dealt with physically by the other spectators. They become performers - animate objects - in the performance installation. The visibility and openness of a bright gallery space has a strong affect on how bodies, both audiences and actors alike, are received and interpreted *physically*. The audience remains visible to one another. As they move physically through the space, they contribute to scene and transform the space and help create the environment. They become implicit in the action, in the narrative. Space is an enormous

¹² Stephen Bottoms writes in the Introduction to *Tim Crouch: Plays One* that Crouch's plays “make up one of the most important bodies of English-language playwriting to have emerged so far in the twenty-first century....I can think of no other contemporary playwright who has asked such a compelling set of questions about theatrical form, narrative content and spectatorial engagement.” (11)

marker and touchstone of both performance and installation. Transforming The Penny Gallery into my own makeshift, low-fi Mars colony, I was able to use the entirety of the space, and, in turn, create an immersive environment which functioned as both a performance venue and as an exhibit; both ephemeral and tangible at the same time. As the arts become more and more fluid, our venues must reflect and embrace this vision. By transforming spaces, by appropriating them for purposes other than their original intentions, we can influence how the art is received and experienced.

CHAPTER 4

Text: language as object and action

As stated in the previous chapter, *Mars*, despite moving into the realm of installation, is still, at heart, a text-based, narrative work. In my own artistic practice, everything begins with text. What is the story? Who are the people telling the story? The word is the driving force. However, moving performance into installation, the question becomes how to use text and narrative in a more tangible, non-mimetic, and fluid fashion? How does placing the words and story in a gallery as opposed to a theatre shift the audience's reaction to and relationship with the text? For *Mars*, I decided to use the text/dialogue in a variety of ways to upset and destabilize the traditional theatre experience: projected, spoken, pre-recorded, live, written. My hope was that using text/dialogue in these different mediums would awaken different sensations in the viewer/spectator; it would produce a more varied interpretation, and a more fully immersive and unstable experience. The text partially exists apart from the performer, outside the performer. The pre-recorded and projected text allowed for a permanency to the work: a tangible record. It created an aural and visual sensation that added to the phenomenological experience of the work. The jumble of spoken, projected, and recorded text came together to contribute to and inform the narrative in different ways. This kind of open and disjointed text references the postdramatic as discussed in Chapter One, in that the narrative and dialogue becomes less linear, and more fragmented and volatile.

The text and dialogue used in *Mars* is compiled from a variety of sources: found text (online testimonials, Mars One promotional material), verbatim (personal interviews),

and dramatic/fictional writing, all of which are blended together to create a hyperreal, unstable mishmash of truth and fiction, reality and fantasy. My goal is for the audience to become uncertain as to what is true and what is fictional. Where does the true story and details of the Mars One Mission end and the fictional story begin? Whose words are the actors speaking? Gathering text from real sources, real people, provides legitimacy; the scripted dialogue and invented narrative destabilizes this and calls its authenticity into question.

The Process of Writing

To create the narrative / text for this piece, I began by researching the actual Mars One Mission, scouring their website, reading articles, following discussion groups, and watching online testimonials of prospective applicants. As well, I began interviewing friends, colleagues, and strangers, asking them specific questions about the race to colonize Mars (*see Appendix 2*), their thoughts and perspectives, recording and transcribing their responses. I used this raw verbatim material as a way of building my own narrative, developing my own ideas, and creating my own characters. Much of the actual text from these interviews makes up the bulk of the material in the recorded aural montage in Phase One.

Over the past few years, I have begun using verbatim text more frequently in my work. I often begin a new project by interviewing, recording, and transcribing text from sources and/or people with whom I want to work. This authentic, verbatim text is then edited, re-purposed and inserted into my own fictional writing, so that the result is a mash-up of actual text and invented writing: the line between truth and fiction becomes

blurred to the point of unrecognizability. This echoes Jean Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality, a state of being where the division between the real and the fictional disappears until there is almost no distinction between the two. The creation of hyperreal text mirrors the themes I am exploring in *Mars*: a fictionalized narrative based on reality, yet presented as a kind of truth.

Once I had researched the Mars One Mission, developed my own fictional story and compiled verbatim text, I then began to construct (or perhaps more accurately, *compile*) my characters, my four Martian colonizers. These four characters (Kartik, Mandy, Ayumi, and Max) are composites, drawn from actual people I interviewed. They are not strictly *real*; they exist as personas, fictional versions, or simulations, of genuine people.

The primary story of *Mars*, the driving, performative narrative, depicts a day-in-the-life of these four settlers. The text in this section is primarily fictional, invented by myself, peppered with actual stories, instances and quotations from the actors' lives. The audience observes the action as if they were visitors at *The Mars 3.0 Visitor Centre, Observatory & Gift Shop*¹³, watching a live feed broadcast from the actual Mars settlement: specifically, "March 27th, Day 124" (MacArthur 27). The audience eavesdrops on the intimate conversations and interactions amongst the four, as they navigate their lives and relationships on this far away planet. They practice yoga, make food, play music, and build structures. Along with this dialogue, we are guided by an unseen voice, a hidden narrator, who interrupts and comments on the action, the characters and the physical environment.

¹³ This is the fictional narrative frame of the performance. The idea being that the audience has come to *The Mars 3.0 Visitor Centre, Observatory & Gift Shop* to observe a live feed from the Mars Colony. Thus, the Penny Gallery becomes a kind of Disney World, or amusement /information centre.

The Omniscient Narrator

The narrator is a major component of this work. A large portion of the written text is spoken and broadcast, via a microphone, by an omnipresent, all-knowing narrator. Injecting the event with facts, information, commentary, internal thoughts and judgments of the characters, this disembodied voice will structure and anchor the event, filling the space with a kind of aural score. She will provide information beyond the scope of the action, relating information the characters will not, or cannot, know. In a way, she acts as a kind of all-knowing, God-like figure, revealing secrets, inner-thoughts, from both past and future perspectives. The colonizers do not interact with this omnipresent voice. They *appear* to be unaware of her presence. It begs the question: what is her relationship to them? What is her relationship to the audience? Does she have ulterior motives? Should the audience believe her? Is she telling the truth?

The use of a narrator also lends the event a kind of clinical, scientific element. We are watching, spying upon these four settlers, eavesdropping on their intimate conversations and private moments, studying them like lab rats. They are unaware of us, unaware of being observed. There is the feeling the settlement is being controlled by outside forces. It begs the question: who is in control of our lives? Our worlds? In a sense, I am framing this work as a kind of social experiment, a reality television show in the mode of *Big Brother* or *Survivor*: a group of strangers, thrown together, cameras following their every move. *Mars* becomes a study of human behavior, of human interactions.

Mariano Pensotti's 2010 creation *El pasado es un animal grotesco*¹⁴ informed my decision to use a narrator. This theatre work, which has been touring internationally since its premiere in March 2010 at Teatro Sarmiento in Buenos Aires, is set on a revolving stage where four onstage performers narrate one another's story. There is no direct dialogue or verbal interactions between the characters. In her essay "Ventriloquist Theatre and the Omniscient Narrator", Professor Barbara Fuchs writes about what she calls ventriloquist theatre, or, "putting characters onstage but replacing their dialogue with narrated text" (Fuchs 165). Referencing the work of Pensotti, as well as New York based theatre company Elevator Repair Service (ERS)¹⁵ who both employ narrators in their work (albeit, in very different ways), Fuchs explores the political ramifications and effects of using a disembodied narrator on an audience. Specifically, she argues, the use of narration creates a complex, hierarchal power dynamic between the onstage characters and the unseen narrator, as the narrator has more agency, more freedom and mobility than do the onstage characters. The omniscient narrator has far more knowledge and insight into the characters than do the audience. We only know what she tells us. We, thus, become partial voyeurs, subject to the narrator's whims.

In my own exploration of narration, the characters in my fictional world, at times, act out of synch with the narrator's voice; the actors *appear* to have some agency and freedom over the power of the narrated text. This begs the question: who is in control?

¹⁴ Pensotti describes this creation on his website: "The attempt is to narrate a multiple array of stories . . . in which ambitious and exorbitant fiction is contained within a precise historical and temporal framework. The play is acted by four actors . . . They alone embark on the heroic task to narrate and perform that multiplicity of stories, bringing to life dozens of characters and situations. A mega fiction which is narrated with minimum stage resources." (Mariano Pensotti web)

¹⁵ Elevator Repair Service is a New York-based theatre ensemble founded in 1991. It is perhaps best known for its recent theatrical adaptations of great American novels, such as the 2006, six-hour long Gatz based on based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

By playing with the idea of offstage narration alongside onstage dialogue and exploring the complex relationship between an all-knowing narrator and onstage characters, I am exploring the power dynamic, and the questions of social control that arises from this convention.

I am, at heart, a writer. I adore text: the power, the simplicity and duplicity of words. I love the way a series of words, of sentences, either spoken, recorded, projected, can conjure up whole worlds, entire universes. I am amazed how a single word or phrase can evoke such deep emotion, recognition, empathy, or outrage. I never want to completely abandon the written word. But, as stated in the Preface, I had become tired and dissatisfied with the traditional, mimetic form of theatrical storytelling, of prescriptive dialogue that attempts, but often fails, to imitate life. By bringing my words, my stories, into a gallery space, by using them in a variety of ways, I am attempting to free theatrical text from the stage. Remaining true to my *writer self*, I am pivoting my practice into a more conceptual, physical, and tangible space. *Mars* allowed me the opportunity to put some of these ideas into practice. It allowed me to experiment with performance text and dialogue outside of the traditional structure of theatre, and to observe the ways in which a new environment can affect the reception of text and narrative and, in doing so, can shift its meaning.

CHAPTER 5

Design / Installation



Figure 5.1. Object templates. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

In the spring of 2016, I transformed The Penny Gallery in downtown Lethbridge into my own Martian settlement. I constructed this simulation of the proposed Mars One Colony from a mishmash of found and borrowed objects, scavenged from secondhand stores and antique shops, and purchased at cheap dollar stores. Rather than attempting the impossible, costly task of trying to realistically represent a futuristic settlement, which would be constructed out of high-tech materials and equipment, I decided to go in the other direction. I was aiming for a low-fi, ramshackled, DIY aesthetic: an immersive environment that would evoke an innocent sense of play, fun, and pretend. My Mars Colony is meant to depict and evoke a familiar, make-believe world of childhood, of backyard forts and summer camping trips, of late-night stargazing and the innocence and wonder of the unknown. Rather than looking to the future, I chose to examine the past as a way of representing the sci-fi, speculative world of a Martian Colony. For myself,

space colonization conjures the nostalgic age of space exploration in the 1960s and 70s when, as a child, outer space held such mystery and awe.

On a different register, given that we are currently witnessing the largest mass refugee crisis since the Second World War, there are, for me, echoes in this work of settlement camps and transient communities that have sprung up at the edges of countries. These vast settlements are filled with displaced populations, removed from their homes, eking out a meager existence in a tough, unwelcoming environment constructed of cheap, discarded, scavenged, and donated items. I am in no way comparing the plight of these forced migrants with the situation of these fictional voluntary colonizers; however, as I explore this work, I cannot help but to see the resonances and resemblances of both worlds.

This low-fi, immersive design concept for *Mars* places the work outside of the more traditional theatre experience. A lot of current Canadian theatre design, particularly in professional proscenium theatre spaces, is still attempting to replicate realistic environments. Traditionally, the material, set, and props for a performance are generally meant to accurately mimic the world they are trying to depict. Although postdramatic, conceptual design has been prevalent in theatre for decades (creating a space that is not meant to realistically represent an environment: a pile of sand becomes a mountain top, a metal cage becomes a house), at most professional theatres across Canada and the US, one is still faced with exact replicas of porches, kitchens, bedrooms, offices, etc. By merging my theatre practice with installation, I am attempting to strip the environment of reality and force an audience to confront the ‘falseness’ and playfulness of the

environment. By displaying objects on plinths with (as one would find in a museum or gallery), I am hoping to distance myself from the mimetic traditions of theatre design.

Objects vs. Props

The found and recycled objects I compiled for *Mars* are an assortment of children's toys and second-hand camping gear, sourced at thrift stores and junk shops, or donated from friends (a Rubik's Cube, old pup tents, old tarps, etc.). To build my colony, I began weekly visits to the secondhand stores around Lethbridge, collecting old gear and abandoned items. I attempted to buy as little "new" merchandise as possible, as I wanted the environment to feel nostalgic, random, and shoddy. I was looking for items reminiscent of my own childhood in the 1970s. My family was avid campers throughout my youth and, with our hardtop pullout trailer, our Coleman stove and coolers and tents, old orange wooden canoe and homemade fishing poles, we would do the rounds of campgrounds throughout Ontario. I have powerful memories of this time: laying out at night under the stars, in front of the campfire, far away from our small town life, telling stories, imagining other worlds, other universes, feeling both the comfort and awe and fear of the sublime. This is the feeling I was trying to capture in this work: a random group of strangers, travelling, vacationing families, camping together in a temporary community, thrown together, far away from home, under the huge sky, contemplating their place in the universe.

ReadyMades

My choice of design for *Mars* was greatly informed by Duchamp's Readymades: regular, everyday objects displayed in a gallery or museum, that were chosen by an artist based on irony and humor, sometimes modified, sometimes not. Readymades were meant as an antidote and rejection to what Duchamp referred to as retinal art, work that is solely visual and aesthetically pleasing to the eye. As stated earlier, the objects and props that make up my design are found, scavenged, and, like these Readymade sculptures, they were chosen for their playfulness, irony and nostalgic quality. Displayed on plinths spaced throughout the gallery, complete with detailed invented descriptions of what these objects were supposed to represent, these old toys, tricycles, and Coleman coolers are clearly not meant to be what they claim: skilled replicas of high tech 3D food printers, space exploration vehicles, and HDFI Satellite Systems. Instead, they are meant to create for the viewer a sense of play and humour. As with the Readymades of Marcel Duchamp, simply by identifying and labeling, by choosing an object and redefining it, the object is removed from the everyday, and elevated to the realm of art. Or in my case, by identifying and labeling a 1970s toy Viewfinder as a Multi Unit Spectroscopic Explorer then, *voilà!*: that is what it becomes. In art, as in life, the power of words to transform and define objects, ideas or others, is palpable. As a writer, I am acutely aware of the influence and authority the act of naming carries. Language is perhaps the most tangible method we have as a way of defining and addressing the world around us.

Technical Support



Figure 5.2. The Mars technical crew. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

I wanted to bring into the space as little technical equipment as possible. I wanted the Penny Gallery's natural space, its atmosphere and structure, to feel as unaffected as possible, and to avoid trying to recreate a traditional theatre environment. I did not want to build walls, bring in large set pieces, or install a traditional lighting grid. I did not want to upset the low-fi, makeshift quality I was aiming for with a plethora of technical gear. I chose instead to focus as much as possible on natural lighting and simple effects. I brought in projectors and a television monitor. As well, I installed two speakers, a mixing board and a microphone. The sound equipment became necessary as the natural acoustics in the gallery were very poor, and I needed to ensure the spoken text (particularly that of the narrator) could be deciphered and understood as clearly as possible.

I attempted to incorporate this technical equipment into the overall design aesthetic. With a nod to Bertolt Brecht, the influential 20th century German theatre director and playwright ¹⁶ I chose not to attempt to hide the limited technical elements (speakers, projectors, microphone, etc.). Instead, I wanted all the elements of design, performance and installation to be visible, on display.

The sound design included a number of elements: a pre-recorded, mixed soundscape, a soundtrack of popular music tracks, and live music played by the performers. The pre-recorded soundscape in Phase One of *Mars* (over two hundred brief, distinct voice clips, recorded by students and friends and mixed together with effects and underscored music) was built in-studio with the assistance of University of Lethbridge sound technician, Kelly Roberts. The canned music played throughout Phase Two of *Mars* was a mishmash of original compositions, popular and classical music stretching genres and eras. Musically, the tunes were chosen for their atmospheric or emotional quality, not for any specific musical style. Working with Wade Galbraith and Matt Rederburg (students at The University of Lethbridge) we compiled a soundtrack of diverse musicians and bands, including: *Yo La Tengo*, *Glenn Gould*, *William Basinski*, *Fleetwood Mac*, *Devandra Banhart*, *Tim Hecker*, *Queen*, *The Rolling Stones*, *Broken Social Scene*, and *Mungo Jerry*, to name a few. As well, at one point during the performance installation, two of the actors played live instruments (guitar, drums lending the work immediacy, liveness, and authenticity).

¹⁶ Here I am referencing Brecht's use of stage design; specifically, his exposure of a theatre's stage machinery (visible lighting grids, backstage areas, etc.) as a way of reminding an audience of the artificiality of the art form. His goal was to prevent an audience from losing themselves emotionally in the play, allowing them to experience the work from a more intellectual, politically engaged perspective.

I attempted to utilize natural light as much as possible throughout the performance, rather than depend on theatrical, artificial lighting. Due to some visibility issues, I had to use some of the gallery's track lighting, but generally, I tried to allow the gallery to retain its naturally-lit, open quality, as opposed the focused, directed gaze often found in traditional proscenium theatre spaces.

There were two video components used in *Mars*. Working with Bryn Hewko, fellow graduate student and professional film editor, as well local actor Alexa Elsner, I shot and edited the first "welcome" video. This was shot as a kind of pre-flight safety, or instructional video, one would encounter on an airplane. Capturing a tacky, purposely amateur feel, Elsner was outfitted as a 1970s airline attendant and her robotic performance, combined with cheap video effects, was at once hilarious and slightly disturbing.

The second video, a silent 35mm film with a recorded voiceover, represented the future of the colony: all the settlers have died, leaving behind two young, Martian-born siblings. I decided, rather than shooting the footage myself, I would try to find the footage online. This mirrors my focus on the other found or scavenged material making up the colony. I managed to track down some found footage on Youtube¹⁷ posted by someone who purchased a box of old, discarded film stock at an estate sale outside Austin, Texas. The style and theme of the silent video fit perfectly with my Mars aesthetic. It felt like a low-fi, home movie from the 1970s: grainy, bad sound quality, out-of-focus. I cast 13-year old Dylan Taylor, son of a local friend, to record the voice over.

¹⁷ Uploaded from Youtube on Jan 14, 2012 (Found Footage Super 8 Reel 97.16521.61). These movies were found in ten boxes at an estate sale outside Austin, Texas. The films vary in formats ranging from old 35mm stock reels to betamax.



Figure 5.3. Dylan Taylor in the recording studio. Photo Credit: Greg MacArthur

At the conclusion of the live performance, my intention was that the space, void of actors, filled with the objects and their descriptions, the videos and soundscape, the mess of the performance, would live on in the gallery as an installation. The design, thus, would move from pure practicality to take on new import as a visual, aural, and tactile phenomenological experience. Obviously, an element of the narrative would be lost to these post-performance visitors. But perhaps, to spectators solely experiencing the work as an installation, a new and different narrative would emerge, one that would have a more interpretive energy, a narrative and experience over which I would have much less control.

CHAPTER 6

A work in process: workshop and development



Figure 6.1. Workshop #2. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

The creative development and rehearsal period for *Mars* took place over the course of roughly eight months. Once I had an initial working copy of the script and had landed on a concrete design idea, I began the process of reworking and refining the text and narrative, amassing my creative team (actors, designers), and collecting material for the installation. Rather than using a traditional three-week rehearsal process, I decided, out of both practical and creative preference, to elongate this process to allow the actors and myself more time for creative exploration. The work took place over three periods: the first workshop (focusing on the text); the second workshop (focusing on the spatial properties and the choreography / movement of the actors); and the final eight-week

rehearsal process, which brought all of the text, physical, technical, and design elements together.

I wore many hats during the creation of *Mars*. Acting as playwright, director, designer, and installation artist, I needed to structure and use my time wisely. By extending what is traditionally a three or four-week rehearsal period in a standard, professional theatre production, to almost three months, I was able to create a strong sense of community amongst the actors. As well, I was able to give myself enough time to make mistakes, to explore various creative avenues before settling on one. I wanted to create a strong collaborative environment where everyone in the room would feel empowered to make creative decisions, regardless of their role. The creative team included: five actors, stage manager / assistant director (Cassandra Watson), video designer (Bryn Hewko), sound engineer (Kelly Roberts), and sound designers (Wade Galbraith, Matt Rederburg). Rather than working within the traditionally strict roles dictated by most theatre creation, where one's position is fixed, I wanted to create a more freer, more open environment, where roles and responsibilities could be shared: an actor may come up with a design idea; a sound designer may have directorial feedback; the stage manager may have thoughts on the installation. The creative process of *Mars*, from the initial research phase through to the writing, workshopping, and rehearsal, was intense, encompassing, and extremely stimulating. I continually felt supported and challenged by my colleagues and fellow artists throughout the creation and implementation of this original, multidisciplinary work.

Casting



Figure 6.2. The Colonizers. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

Casting, as they say in the theatre, is 90% of the job; it is essential to find the right mixture of people. In some ways, casting is like creating a temporary community of souls who will be working together, sharing space, making decisions, and revealing secrets. There is an intimacy that occurs very quickly in a rehearsal process. I looked on my four primary actors, in essence, as my own chosen settlers, with myself playing the role of curator, bringing together an assortment of bodies and minds and arranging them in space, composing pictures, and emotions, creating a narrative. These curated individuals represent humanity. They become a reflection of the spectators. They are us. We are them. In the presentation of this work, we all come together to create a real community, a temporary settlement within the walls of the Penny Gallery.

I wanted to cast the show as early in the process as possible. Avoiding the audition process, I selected and approached four individuals whom I thought captured the essence of the four characters I had created. I originally wanted to work with a group of non-

professionals, people from varying backgrounds, generations, cultures, and experiences. However, this proved to be difficult, financially and creatively. Relying on non-professionals, whom I could not pay, and who may not truly be aware of the level of time commitment necessary for such a venture, made me nervous. Given more time and money, this is a decision I would reconsider. In the end, I decided to cast primarily through the University. I selected three students (AJ Baragar, Nick Bohle, Danielle Martens) as well as local visual artist Mandy Espezel. I cast local friend, Andrea Billington, a native New Zealander, as the voice of the narrator. The role of the narrator required less of a commitment (the dialogue is read, not memorized, and the amount of rehearsal time is less involved, so I felt more comfortable working with a non-actor, a non-professional performer). I felt Andrea would lend the voice a rich, authentic flavor, a distinct foreign character, setting her apart from the other colonizers. As a group, these five were mature, diverse, and adventurous, throwing themselves into the work

I held an informal meet-and-greet with the four settlers at my home in December 2015. We got to know each other; we shared food, drink, and spoke about our lives and our thoughts about the Mars One Mission. I recorded and transcribed these conversations (*see Appendix 3*) and proceeded to insert these details and verbatim dialogues into the performance text. Here, again, my intent was to embrace hyperreality, further conflating fiction and truth, as the actors' actual words, stories and lives became mixed in with fictional dialogue culled from other sources.

These four actors, along with the narrator, really did become a temporary community. The installation at the Penny Gallery became a temporary home, a base where we collaboratively built this unique world, our own Mars Colony. The performers

seamlessly and generously fell into these characters. They shared themselves, their lives and experiences, all of which become rich fodder for new material in what became a shifting, developing text and narrative.

The First Workshop

On November 6th 2015, I held the first semi-public reading / workshop of *Mars* at The University of Lethbridge. Having worked on this project for almost a year, it was time to share the initial draft of *Mars* with a few friends and colleagues. The focus of the workshop was on the text and narrative. It was a dramaturgical investigation whereby I could concentrate on the words and relationships of the characters. I needed to hear the play aloud, in the mouths of others. I gathered together as much of the actual cast as was available, as well as a group of roughly fifteen individuals, to read through this first working draft. After the reading, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with a few of the participants. I was curious to garner feedback: areas of confusion, moments of clarity, lasting images, impressions, etc. I had a great many discussions with Instructor Natasha Conde-Jahnel and Jay Whitehead in regards to the narrative flow of the script, the ideas / themes, and the relationships between the characters. As well, I had (and continued to have) numerous conversations with visual artist and committee member Denton Fredrickson, in regards to the visual and installation components of the work. We discussed my vision and explored various possibilities from both practical and creative considerations.

Out of this initial reading, I took the next few months to refine the performance text, cement the design and conceptual installation and then, emerged in January 2016 with a new working draft and a stronger sense of the world of my Mars Colony.

The Second Workshop



Figure 6.3. Workshop #2. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

For three weeks at the end of January 2016, I was a guest artist in Professor Gail Hanrahan's New Play Development class at the University of Lethbridge. Here I was able to explore *Mars* on its feet with limited technical elements (sound, props) and a large class of students. I was primarily interested in a physical exploration of the text, the movement and staging and the use of the objects or props. There are three primary elements or discoveries I made throughout this process which I would like to discuss in

more detail, and which continued to evolve as the work progressed: the movement / physical vocabulary, the performance of labour, and the aesthetics of failure.



Figure 6.4. Workshop #2. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

Physical Vocabulary

“Human figures become sculptural objects that are interchangeable with the other stage machinery.”

- Stephen Di Benedetto, Sensing Bodies

Yvonne Rainer, a pioneering member of the Judson Dance Theatre¹⁸, created a ground-breaking approach to movement, employing the physical language of the everyday in her work: “The performers themselves appeared as “neutral doers”, behaving

¹⁸ Judson Dance Theatre (1962-64) was a collective of artists, dancers and musicians based out of Greenwich Village.

more like functionary workers within the performance space as they completed tasks and objectives drawn from the vernacular of everyday actions” (Bailes 17). This approach to dance, traces of which can be seen today in the work of choreographers such as radical French artist Jerome Bel and Canada’s Ame Henderson and her dance theatre company *public recordings*, celebrates the natural, authentic movements and actions of human behavior and interaction. Rather than a highly stylized, physically-demanding style of dance that requires extensive training, this exploration of movement celebrates the beauty and simplicity of human bodies completing simple gestures and actions, movement that can be replicated and performed by almost anyone. (A great example of this work is the New York-based performance troupe 600 Highwaymen’s 2013 production of *The Record*.)¹⁹

When I began thinking about a movement vocabulary for *Mars*, I looked to this kind of everyday, gestural work as a touchstone. I knew I did not want to block the work realistically (that is, the precise method a director uses to stage a play: where and when the actors stand, move, interact, enter and exit the stage). Rather, I wanted to find a kind of physical essence that would replicate still images, or brief tableaux. I wanted the movement of the actors to feel natural and authentic, but also heightened. I urged the actors to adopt an economy of movement, stripping away any unnecessary movements, or physical tics. I urged them to explore stillness, presence. Don’t *do* anything; just *be*, be in the space, be present and available. I did not want them to indicate, or mimic the text. I did not want the blocking to do what the text was already doing. For example, if the narrator describes one of the performers drinking a glass of water, I urged the actor not to

¹⁹ 600 Highwaymen is a theatre company created by Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone in 2009 in New York City. *The Record* is a hybrid theatre/dance piece where a group of strangers - everyday people from all walks of life - come together to perform, or enact, a series of pre-learned actions and gestures.

replicate that action. Rather, observe the glass of water. Or hold the glass of water. Never indicate or *act out* what the text is saying. The use of tableaux as a physical vocabulary for this work came about for various reasons. I felt they would create a feeling of still images, of photographs, moments frozen in time. These tableaux would create a sense of the actors as objects, as memories. They become a part of the landscape, on par with the objects displayed on plinths, creating images that are sometimes in synch, and sometimes in juxtaposition to the narrated text. I wanted to create a physical language and choreography that would upset the traditional idea of theatre blocking and, instead, create an environment that heightens the artificiality and “make-believeness” of this Mars Colony. The actors fully embraced this style of work; they found a beautiful and haunting rhythm, pace, and stillness that was natural yet heightened, engaging yet disturbing.

Performance of Labour

Another idea that grew out of this workshop was the use and ‘performance’ of physical labour. There are a number of physical tasks undertaken by the colonizers during this performance installation: building a small cabin out of sticks, performing yoga, drawing pictures, hanging laundry, crocheting, and playing music. Again, not wanting to work within a typical mimetic theatre structure where actions are often mimicked or faked, I urged the actors to fully embrace the reality of their actions.



Figure 6.5. Mandy with Viewfinder. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

During the performance, the actors are *performing* action, not *miming* action. They are physically engaged in the task at hand. The audience is witnessing the actual creation of products in real time, whether it is the building of a cabin, the composing of a song, or the creation of a mural (*i.e. the cave drawings*). This is yet another layer in this work that plays with the idea of reality and fiction, truth and imitation. A stimulating and challenging element about the notion of performed labour is that it creates space where mistakes could occur. Things could fall apart. Material could malfunction. The cabin could collapse. The musicians could play badly. This brings me to the third element I want to address: the aesthetics of failure.

Aesthetics of Failure

In her book *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*, Sara Jane Bailes writes:

As a trope or mode of activity, failure is inclusive, permissive even. It can lead to unanticipated effects. One of its most radical properties is that it operates through a principle of difference rather than sameness. A failed occurrence signals the unpredictable outcome of events where a successful

instance might, by comparison, be considered exclusive, prohibitive, and militated by mainstream values.” (2)

This idea of failure as an accepted, almost sought-after performance tool has become an important element of postdramatic theatre practice. Often, within the scripted or rehearsed work, room is made for what Lehmann refers to as “irruptions of the real”: genuine moments of life interrupting and upsetting the staged action. Consider an actor sneezing mid-performance, or accidentally dropping a plate, mid-scene: these moments remind the audience of the reality of the world and the people around them. It brings them into the *here and now*. Rather than treating these moments as mistakes, as something to be avoided, in a postdramatic universe, these moments are to be embraced. There is a clear link here to the work of Dadists, John Cage, and the Happenings and Fluxus movements (as mentioned in Chapter One), where chance encounters, random interactions and chaos were often encouraged, if not the actual overriding structure for the work.

There is a difference, however, in errors and interruptions that enhance the reality and immediacy of the world and those that would completely unhinge and / or stop the action of the work. A missed line, a dropped prop, a siren overheard in the distance creates space for life to intercede and creates a tangible reminder of the reality of the situation. However, a video malfunctioning, a complete power failure, or a medical emergency are disruptions that do not enhance the experience but rather, stop the performance and impede the narrative of the event.

In essence, I wanted *Mars* to embrace and create space for unscripted, accidental moments. Within a structured, narrative, and time-based environment, where certain plot points must be communicated, and where certain actions must occur, I wanted to leave room for play amongst the performers and within the space itself. I wanted to cement the

structure and movement of the work, refine the images, and define the relationships between the characters, but I wanted to leave space for life, for an *active presence*. I attempted to create a mood and environment where the audience and performers alike would be aware of one another, of the reality of the space and the *liveness* of the experience.

Rehearsal



Figure 6.6. Studio Rehearsal. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

At the end of February 2016, after another rewrite of the script, I began the formal rehearsal period, with the cast and crew now fully assembled. We rehearsed over the course of three months, sporadically at first, and then more intensely as the opening approached, which gave me plenty of time to explore, experiment, and refine the material. The first two months of rehearsal were held at the University. Working with assistant /

stage manager Cassandra Watson and the four colonizers (I didn't feel the need to work with the narrator until later in the process, as her text was set apart from the action, and physically, she was not interacting with the performers), we explored and built upon the work that began in the two previous workshops. The rehearsal space at the University (a black box room that had to be cleared of objects / props at the end of each rehearsal) wasn't conducive or equipped to the setting up of the installation or working with technical gear, so we instead focused on the text, the relationship between the characters and the physical vocabulary of *Mars*. Over the course of eight weeks, meeting regularly once a week, a familiarity began to develop between the four actors, a sense of ensemble and community. This was what I had hoped for engaging in an elongated rehearsal process. I longed for authentic relationships, a sense of camaraderie between the settlers, so that the audience would believe these four had been living together for a long period of time. The environment they were responsible for creating and inhabiting had to feel genuine, open, and familiar: a group of friends camping out under the stars, dreaming of the future, longing for the past.

The Penny Gallery



Figure 6.7. Penny Gallery rehearsal. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

At the beginning of May, the production moved into the Penny Gallery, the venue for our performance installation. The creative team now had the opportunity to work simultaneously with all the artistic and technical elements in play. We had four weeks of rehearsals before the first public performance. Being in the actual performance venue shifted the work slightly, mainly from a technical framework, and allowed the creative team to really solidify the physical look and feel of the environment of this Martian Colony.

Artistically, after a month of rehearsals, the actors had already established a strong sense of their characters, relationships, and physical movements. They were more familiar and comfortable with the text, and thus, could play more with the material. If anything, being in the Penny Gallery helped to reinforce, for the actors, the phenomenological sensibility of the work, allowing them to really get a handle on the atmosphere I was

trying to create. Having all the technical elements in play (soundscape, objects, lighting) enabled the actors to be able to fully explore the world of this settlement: what it feels like to be inside this space, sit inside the tents, ride a tricycle, play a guitar with an amplifier. It gave them an accurate sense of the work spatially (ie: the distance between the installation objects, how long it would take to travel from room to room). The main issue facing the actors was the acoustics. Due to the poor quality of sound in the Penny Gallery (something I did not anticipate), I had to ask the actors to increase their volume and to heighten the level of their performance. They could not be as intimate with their work (vocally or physically) as they could in a smaller venue. Because the gallery is a large, *echoey* space, they were forced to raise the level of the volume of their work to ensure the audience would be able to hear the dialogue and fully engage with the performances.

Technically, the venue shifted the work on various levels. Acoustically, as I have just mentioned, the Penny Gallery is not very well equipped. Sound becomes hard to define. As a result, I had to pay close attention to the sound levels (microphone, music, the actors' voices) and the placement of the speakers. I tried to correct this problem as much as possible by hanging tarps and adjusting the placement of the plinths, the tents and the seating arrangement. Ultimately, there was little I could do. I believe, the issues with sound were the biggest implements to the success of the work.

The quality of the lighting was another element that needed attention. As stated earlier in this paper, I wanted to use as much natural light as possible, avoiding having to bring in a lot of theatrical lighting equipment. Being in the space for longer periods, I was able to experience how the exterior light shifted and played in the gallery. I decided to begin the event at nine in the evening. *Mars* would begin at dusk, and shift into night

during the performance installation. This was ideal, as the performance of *Mars* ends at the completion of a day, as the four actors sit around a campfire, contemplating the stars and their place in the universe. The naturally dark space created the perfect ambience. I did have to adjust and focus some of the track lighting in the gallery to allow for visibility and clarity of the objects, but generally, I let the time of day and the earth's natural illumination dictate the quality of the atmosphere.



Figure 6.8. The Penny Gallery rehearsal. Photo credit: Greg MacArthur

The most challenging aspect of the physical environment was deciding on the seating arrangement for the audience. This was an issue on which I gave much thought and deliberation. I went back and forth, in many directions (chairs, no chairs, one row of chairs, seating in the round, etc.) before finally settling on a solution. I decided to use chairs, but to group them together in small numbers and place them in front of the various plinths, or installations. This gave the space the feeling of an art gallery more than a

theatre, and encouraged audiences to move about, individually, switching locations, focusing on one tableau, and then moving on to another. In the end, I was happy with this arrangement. I managed to create an environment that fulfilled my desire to have a moveable, flexible space while allowing for comfort and accessibility for less mobile audience members.

The opportunity to have complete access to the Penny Gallery for an entire month was luxurious and so instrumental to the success of *Mars*. It allowed for a flexible schedule, and the time to be able to explore, adjust, and solidify the environment. I had ample time to make technical adjustments. The actors had the ability to adjust to the specific physical demands of the space and alter their performances accordingly.

And so, after almost two years of creative exploration, research, writing and rewriting, amassing and building objects, making videos and soundscapes, rehearsing and installing, *Mars* had its unveiling on Thursday May 26th 2016 premiering to an invited audience.

CHAPTER 7

Reception / Reflection



Figure 7.1. Audience awaits the performance. Photo credit: Lee Burckes

“Mars ain't no place to raise your kids, but it turned out to be a great setting for a story.”

- Matt Rederburg, personal email

After almost two years of contemplation and work, I premiered *Mars* to a live audience for three public performances (May 26th, 27th, 28th 2016) at The Penny Gallery in Lethbridge, Alberta. The gallery was accessible during that time as an installation as well, outside of the evening performances. These are some of the personal reflections and discoveries I made during this brief public run. There were slight deviations in the performances each night and the behavior and response of the audience shifted somewhat, but there was enough of a consistent response that enabled me to gauge how the general public responded to this work. The opening night was perhaps the most tense and volatile, as this was the first time the cast was experiencing *Mars* with a live audience. I had many

questions: How would the spectators move in the space? How would they interpret the narrative? Would the audience interact with the installation prior, during and/or after the event? How would the actors react to living bodies moving amongst them? These queries were at the forefront of my mind as I experienced the premiere presentation of *Mars*. For clarity, I will separate the experience into three sections: the pre-performance (installation); the live performance; and the post-performance.

Various elements were in play as the audience began gathering roughly thirty minutes prior to the beginning of the performance: a looping video, projected text, a large, graffiti-like Welcome to Mars sign, a series of object installations, and a bar. It was interesting to watch the various guests arrive at the space. Many of them were uncertain as to where to go, and/or how to interact with the environment. What were the rules of this event? How much freedom were they allowed? Some sat in chairs, waiting patiently for a formal theatre performance to begin. Others gathered in groups, chatting, drinking, treating the space as a kind of informal, pre-show social event. Others were more focused on the physical installation, wandering throughout the gallery, reading and examining the displayed objects and their written descriptions. Some members physically interacted with the objects themselves, looking through the Viewfinder, or drawing their own pictures on the Post-it Notes and placing them on the walls of the gallery. There were people enjoying the experience in groups, while others were content to experience the environment on an individual level. The welcoming instructional video played on a loop throughout, greeting the audience as they entered the space, providing context for the evening. Overall, I was extremely pleased with the energy and atmosphere that I was able to create. It felt social, convivial, and immersive. I sensed that some attendees, who were perhaps expecting a

more traditional theatre experience, felt somewhat de-stabilized by the experience, but many embraced the playful, immersive, communal environment.

The recorded soundscape in the front room of the gallery marked the beginning of the formal performance. Without announcing and/or trying to guide people into the space, I chose to begin the soundscape unobtrusively and hoped that the audience would gravitate into the room naturally, without instruction. Unfortunately, this wasn't entirely the case. I found myself having to invite and lead some audience members into the front room. Eventually, the rest followed. I experimented with the execution of this element slightly the following nights: beginning the soundscape earlier, having it play on a loop as the space first opened. I was attempting to create a scenario where the performance could begin without any outside interference or instruction. Perhaps a different space or configuration would assist in creating this dynamic. Once the audience was fully gathered in the room, I felt the mood and environment (dimly lit, an ambient underscore, large blue projected text covering the wall) was appropriately mysterious and calming. The soundscape, a collage of over two hundred audio clips, lasts for roughly twenty minutes. I was anxious to see if it would hold the public's attention. Most people I spoke to afterwards found this element of the installation emotionally strong and engaging. The audience was attentive, quiet and involved with the voices. They embraced the humour and the confessional nature of the text. I felt strongly that this aspect of the performance installation brought the audience together in a cohesive physical and emotional space: a group of relative strangers, gathered together, listening to voices, watching one another, experiencing one another. It was a gentle and effective beginning to the journey to Mars.

Once the soundscape began to fade out, no one knew what would happen next, or what to expect. This created a playful tension in the room. When the performers, the four colonizers, finally entered the space, there was a palpable shift in energy. The focus moved to these four strangers, and the scripted performance began.



Figure 7.2. Mandy. Photo credit: Lee Burckes

The performance then moved from the front room into the main installation space. The audience easily followed the actors' lead. As the colonizers milled about, some of the spectators grabbed chairs immediately; others hung out at the bar, chatted or browsed the exhibition space, as playful 1970s pop songs filled the gallery. Eventually, the music faded out, and the actors entered their respective tents. The space became quiet, and the audience seamlessly settled into the performance.

First, a word about the seating arrangement. As stated earlier in this paper, I put a lot of thought into the challenge of creating a comfortable yet fluid, moveable space:

chairs, no chairs, scattered chairs, etc. I eventually decided upon groupings of seats spaced throughout the gallery in front of each installation. This permitted the audience to remain static, focused and seated (for disabled, tired, or elderly patrons), while still allowing for (and encouraging) movability amongst the more adventurous spectators. I used standard blue plastic industrial chairs, which were clearly not a part of the landscape of this Martian Colony. This set them apart from the rest of the space, and gave the audience clues as to where to observe each scene/tableau. After consciously observing how the audience moved in the space throughout the performances, and chatting with folk after the event, I feel that this decision was indeed successful in creating an immersive, physical, yet structured and comfortable experience. Various audience members spoke to me of how the seating arrangement allowed them clues as to how they were expected to interact with the performance, while still allowing for individual autonomy. The seating directed their gaze without being too heavy-handed.



Figure 7.3. The Colonizers prepare for their voyage. Photo Credit: Lee Burckes

The scripted performance lasted roughly one hour. The actors all found a comfortable, playful, focused energy. On the whole, I felt their volume and clarity was at an effective level. They were at ease with the material, and with one another, and found lots of room within the text and structure to improvise, allowing the performance to feel active and unrehearsed. I enjoyed watching the audience gradually discover the structure of the performance over time. At first, some felt tentative, uncertain how to engage with the performers. But as the evening wore on, more and more people began moving throughout the space, following certain characters, observing specific scenes. Some did

remain stationary throughout, but I felt they were equally engaged in the work, choosing to experience the event on their own terms, at their own pace.

The relationships the actors created, the energy between the four colonizers, felt genuine, affable. The various scenes played out over the course of the performance had a gentle, subtle and at times surprising and humorous tone. I felt the pace and momentum of the performance was generally strong, if at times, a bit slow. The construction of objects (Max's cabin, Mandy's cave drawings) was highly effective; I enjoyed watching the material grow and develop over the course of the performances.

One issue I felt needed more attention was the style of performance amongst the four colonizers. Due to the mix of trained actors and non-professionals, I felt the performances lacked uniformity. Some of the actors felt more formal, with more obvious characterizations, whereas others felt more authentically themselves. Given more time and resources (read: money) and under different circumstances, I would love to see this work enacted completely by non-professional actors. Although there would be more risk, I believe it would be closer to the aesthetic and feeling I was hoping to create.

The narration was impactful, witty, and generated a spirited, unique energy to the performance. Working with performer Andrea Billington over the rehearsal period, I was able to continually tweak the narrated text for humour, clarity, and emotional impact. Ms. Billington often offer her own suggestions and interjections, many of which made it into the text. I did a significant amount of editing, as I felt the text dragged in places. I still believe the narration could use more massaging: some clarification and tightening. I added a few leading phrases such as, "*Let's go over and see what Mandy's doing*", or "*Look! Kartik's having a shower*". These statements helped focus the audience's

attention, and gave coherent clues as to where and when to direct one's gaze. As I expected, at times it was difficult to hear the text clearly. Despite many attempts to adjust the volume and placement of the speakers, and to dampen the space, the sound quality of the *microphoned voice* was difficult to hear, and thus, some details and ideas were lost.

There were some sound and clarity issues present in the final video as well (a young girl playing in a field, the voiceover of a young boy). The video itself was effective in creating an evocative, mysterious, slightly creepy feeling, but the text was difficult to understand. It felt a bit rushed, muffled. This was partial due to the recording itself, as well as the acoustic problems in the space. Given more time and technical resources, I would have preferred to re-record this element for a clearer, more emotionally satisfying experience.

The final few minutes of the scripted performance played out in the darkened gallery, with only a few lanterns lighting the space, the actors moving slowly throughout the audience, conversing in a casual, somewhat philosophical manner. It was one of my favourite moments of the evening. The room, the audience, felt quiet, contemplative. There was, for me, a kind of gentle pervasive sadness in the air, a sense of loss, of mystery. The actors disappeared through a side door, mid-dialogue, leaving the audience together, in the dark, in the quiet stillness, to contemplate the experience. They were left with the detritus of the performance, the memory of bodies in space, and the echoes of voices and lives now gone. The performance over, the actors disappeared, the space returned to its beginnings as an installation. The audience was free to explore the world, the objects, with a newfound perspective and understanding.



Figure 7.4. The Garden. Photo credit: Lee Burckes

Writing these words a week after the completion of this project, and having had many informal conversations with audience members, I feel incredibly proud of the experience I was able to construct. Audiences, ranging from thirteen to seventy, some veterans of the arts scene, some never having been to a gallery or live performance, all spoke of the uniqueness of the experience, and the enjoyment and freedom they felt as they explored this strange, yet familiar, Martian Colony. They spoke of their engagement and empathy with the performers, and their appreciation of the fluidity of the space. Some mentioned feelings of reflection, of wonder, of melancholy and longing at the completion of the experience, feelings that stayed with them over time. Building this work with my collaborators was invigorating, challenging, and exhausting, both artistically and personally; sharing this work with the public was satisfying, insightful, and encouraging. I feel I am at the beginning of a new creative chapter in my life. I am anxious to continue

my experimentation with performance installation, and to test the limits of this kind of multidisciplinary, immersive work. As I move forwards, reflecting on this creation, and envisioning future projects, I feel both curious and excited to see where this journey will take me.



Figure 7.5. Kartik in the shower. Photo credit: Lee Burckes

CHAPTER 8

We've been to Mars...now what?



Figure 8.1. Blue moon on Mars. Photo credit: Google Images

“Art was intended to prepare and announce a future world: today it is modeling possible universes.”

- Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics

In 1998, French writer and curator Nicolas Bourriaud published his enormously influential collection of essays, *Relational Aesthetics*. In this book, he defines what he views as a new mode in the art world: work that is focused on the event, the experience, the conversation, rather than the concrete object. According to Bourriaud, relational aesthetics is “[a] set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space” (113). Some of the artists he mentions (Sophie Calle, Rikrit Tiravanija, Vanessa Beecroft, Tino Sehgal) have all produced innovative, multidisciplinary work that stretches the boundaries and challenges the traditions of the

art world. “[R]elational aesthetics projects tend to break with the traditional physical and social space of the art gallery and the sequestered artist studio or atelier. Relational aesthetics takes as its subject the entirety of life as it is lived, or the dynamic social environment, rather than attempting mimetic representation of object removed from daily life” (Chayka).

This movement has had a far-reaching influence on many facets of the performing and visual arts. As a performance installation, *Mars* borrows heavily from this movement. In his book, Bourriaud writes about the creation of temporary communities, small utopias, that this kind of work conjures. In a sense, that is what I was attempting with this project: a temporary settlement, a space where the audience and performers can exist for a time, to share an experience, and to consider the nature of humanity and the need for community. But what kind of community? For Bourriaud, the work of relational aesthetics enables “microtopias” where groups of people are brought together in gentle harmony to share, communicate, and freely experience one another. However, Claire Bishop, responding to Bourriaud’s book in her essay “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” argues that Bourriaud’s focus on these “microtopian communities” limits friction and is not conducive to true democracy. She argues that the artists Bourriaud references in his book are attempting to smooth out any notion of conflict and antagonism, which, she argues, is an essential element in any healthy, functioning society. Referencing Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy; Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Bishop argues that if the goal of relational aesthetics is to conjure true democratic communities, the work must not erase, but rather embrace, elements of conflict and active debate between different segments of society.

Personally, I agree with Bishop. I believe that communities must celebrate struggle. We must, as human beings, acknowledge our own personal desires and recognize our differences and flaws. We are all in this together, but that doesn't mean we all must walk the same path. *Mars* attempted to create a space where, for an hour or so, a group of people could come together and experience humanity in all its messy glory: the joys, complications, victories, successes, tears, laughter, and quiet moments of tranquility.

It's hard to go backwards. To discover a new frontier, a new terrain, to is to be forever changed. You cannot *unlive* an experience. The last two years, anchored by the performance installation, *Mars ain't the kinda place to raise your kids*, have been an eye-opening, enriching, and, at times, a difficult and lonely journey towards an unknown destination. Before embarking on this mission, I knew that I had exhausted and outgrown my present practice, and that I wanted to expand my borders and experiences. I needed to stretch my muscles, to expand my universe, just like the four fictional colonizers of this project.

Will we colonize Mars? Will the Mars One Mission become a reality? Perhaps, at some point in humanity's future, we may make it to this far away planet and establish a new settlement, a new outpost for humanity. But one thing is certain: we may be able to leave this planet, but we will not be able to leave ourselves. This performance installation, *Mars ain't the kinda place to raise your kids*, allowed me to move in a new direction: it enabled me to discover a new personal artistic frontier. It has shifted my thinking about what performance can be in this ever-evolving, multidisciplinary universe. It is hard to imagine disappearing back into the familiar confines of the black box theatre

and the structure of mimetic, representational theatre. Like these four mythic colonizers, I will not be coming home.

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APPENDIX 1

Equipment Descriptions²⁰

MUSE (Multi Unit Spectroscopic Explorer) is an integral-field, seventh-generation spectrograph. It is designed by an eleven year-old Korean girl. It has the ability to reach beyond four solar systems and can penetrate dark matter as well as flesh, bone, polyester and fire. It has a memory capacity of 2.6 billion images as well as an advanced corrective red eye application. It comes in an array of colours, has its own attractive carrying case as well as a comfortable eyepiece lined with synthetic baby hair. It is self-lubricating, lightweight and weather resistant. It comes with an easy-to-use 1,896 page manual. It can predict the future. It can repair your past mistakes.

THE ANJAN 3000, named after its developer Karl Anjan, is a state-of-the-art 3D food printer. This hot food device uses food protein powders that are UV sterilized, fortified with nutrients and have a shelf life of 245 years. The various nutrient components are divided into powder cartridges. Flexible augers dispense all of the powders into the mixing chambers, where water, oil, textures and colours are added. After the mixing process, the food pastes are transported to the dispenser head, and the food items are then printed by a computer-generated code. Programmed with thousands of recipes developed with Master Iron Chef Chen Konichi, some of the tasty foods available are: penne noodles, turkey loaf, curry paste, cakes and biscuits, chocolate, quesadillas, burgers, broccoli, cheese, peanut butter, bubble gum, bacon balls, sweet and sour chicken and Jamaican beef patties. It is self-cleaning, self-governing, self-effacing and can also be used as a sunlamp for both humans and small hairless rodents. It is multi-racial and non-denominational.

THE S.E.V. is a modular multi-mission space exploration vehicle consisting of a pressurized cabin that can be mated with a wheeled carriage to form a rover for planetary surface exploration. The S.E.V. is the size of a small pickup truck. It has 12 wheels. It will allow the attachment of tools such as cranes, cable reels, backhoes, sprinklers, toboggans, and kites. With wheels that can pivot 360 degrees, the S.E.V. is able to drive in any direction. It has a fireworks feature and cruise control. The pressurized module contains a small bathroom with privacy curtains and a showerhead producing a water mist for sponge baths. It also contains cabinets for tools, workbench areas, a mini-bar and two crew seats that can fold back into comfortable beds. It can communicate in 17 languages. If lost or stolen, it can find its own way home.

²⁰ These descriptions are a conflation of the accounts of actual scientific objects and my own invented text/commentary.

The 788 Blazer HDFI Satellite System is one of the most complex, state-of-the-art communication systems ever developed. It consists of 17 linked areostationary satellites in orbit over the Mars settlement, 3 in orbit around the sun, connected to 198 ground stations on Earth. It enables 24/7 communication. Because of distance, weather patterns and aliens, there could be slight delays of between 2 and 542 minutes. There is the possibility of sparks. Both voicemail and video messages are easily workable options as well as holographic imaging and karaoke. The radio waves are sent through orbiters using UHF antennas. The antennas are omni-directional and steerable, so the antenna can move to point itself directly to any location on Earth. It can read your thoughts. It regulates your emotional imbalances. It may correct memory loss. It may also lead to violent tremors, temporary colour blindness and calcium deficiencies.

The Cave Drawings were discovered on the walls of an underground cave system located on the southeast flank of Pavonis Mons, a large shield volcano in the Tharsis region that straddles the Martian equator between longitudes 235°E and 259°E. The volcanic caves are 150 meters (492 feet) across and 178 meters (584 feet) deep. They contain the remnants of an ancient underground city complete with thousands of living quarters, ventilation ducts, stables for livestock, wine cellars and exercise apparatus. The cave drawings are thought to be over 1 billion years old. They were drawn with an unknown carbon-based substance similar in consistency to a *Sharpie*. The images give off a faint odour of spoiled butter. They seem to depict ancient burial rituals, hunting expeditions, drinking games, sexual practices, nights-out-on-the-town and fashion trends. Examining the complex, base images, one can see the first recorded evidence of pornography, racism, toilet humour, Pop Art, caricature, anti-feminist rhetoric and traces of Egan Schiele's figurative paintings.

The Micro-Tek GreenGrow Unit was conceived and designed by the *Agriculture and Biotech Research and Education Centre (SABRE)*. This biosphere, made from a reinforced, lightweight oil-based translucent material, covers 2,153 sq./ft. Using a system enriched by the Martian atmosphere rather than a closed system, this sustainable greenhouse is capable of producing a balanced diet of enough beans, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers and rice at 3,040 calories per person per day. Frozen seed samples from Earth are heated up in incubators to 21 - 24 degrees Celsius. They are immersed in vaporized nutrients sourced from Mars, which are then planted in Martian soil inside growing racks. Martian soil has the consistency of dried Llama poop. There is a complex ventilation system that expels excess oxygen to prevent toxic levels, which could lead to a fire. Inside the growth chamber, plants grow in one of a dozen pots mounted on a rotating cylinder. The cylinder turns gently and hums soft ambient music. Local Martian sunlight harnessed for plant growth is enriched by efficient solar LED's and dreams.

The Mars Floating Tub is a state-of-the-art deep space bathing apparatus that was designed by Swedish product engineer Klaus Klaus Klaus. It is a high functioning system that recycles and purifies water in a complex delivery system that makes use of anti-gravity and telepathy. A geothermal pool is drawn out of the Martian bedrock and heated to a comfortable temperature of 98-102 degrees. The water comes from deep within Mars. It smells vaguely like Listerine® Cool Mint™ mouthwash. There are seventeen features to the shower nozzle, including but not limited to: PowerSpray: a shower mode that boosts the force of the water spray. Some showerheads offer a concentrated center PowerSpray™ for easy rinsing of thick hair; Full body spray, a full spray pattern across the shower face that maximizes water coverage and warmth; Massage Spray Invigorating Spray that varies water flow to create a massage experience; Misting Spray Fine Water Droplets create a gentle, soft mist spray experience; Water Saving Spray, when you need to shave or lather up, a water saving spray lets you decrease the water flow to conserve water and save money; Rain Shower, a drenching, rain-like shower spray that typically provides the largest coverage.

This Microscopic Creature is more commonly known as an assassin bug. Its technical classification is as follows: Kingdom Animalia; Phylum Arthropoda; Class Insecta; Order Hemiptera; Suborder Heteroptera; Family Reduviidae; Subfamily Harpactorinae; Tribe Harpactorini; Genus Arilus; Species cristatus. Its molecular and physical make-up will morph and adapt to the Martian atmosphere causing it to grow various sharp appendages, self-reproduction organs, a keen sense of smell and a bad attitude. In three hundred years, the population of this bug will exceed 3.6 million. It will be responsible for the death of a family of Australian vacationers, seventeen Pakistani biologists and a Chihuahua named Oslo.

This **Entertainment / Amusement Centre** is fun for the whole family. It is a replica of the great 75,000 sq. ft. theme park called, *Dubai III*. It was designed by the great Russian architectural and social engineering team The Blast Brothers. The Zero Gravity Chamber is surprisingly authentic. The music system is hooked up to a floating satellite system currently enroute to Venus and is broadcast into deep space. Please ensure you strap yourself in. Wear your wristband at all times. The legal drinking age is 12. Management is not responsible for lost or stolen items. Or brain aneurisms. Or radiation poisoning. Or random animal attacks. Or bed bugs.

cast / off

Anonymous. Mixed Media Sculpture, 2023

Bronze. Radio waves. Sympathy. Wool, mice, plastic, wood, yarn, bark, gum, string, felt, pasta, bronze, saliva, broccoli, dirt, shell, glass, enamel, bone, hair, stem cells, semen, feces, Kraft Dinner, vinyl, wax, hide, plasma, ice, colour, racism, hockey, lips, memories, iron, gold, zinc, silicon, skin, crayons, wire, retinas, heart valves, venison, nerves, dental floss, light, cables, letters, books, socks, concrete, thoughts, children, politicians, canvass, music, towels, toilet paper, kettles, dildos, turkey, corn dogs, photographs, keyboards, cigarettes, icons, turtles, black, history, snow, leaves, neon, toques, radios, carbon, coal, rock, fear, expectation, loss, kryptonite, marble, sight, perspective, fur, grapes, syphilis, Alzheimer's disease, chalk, tea, bolts, spray paint, ink, carcasses, cassette tapes, windows, pets, thumb tacks, popsicles, toast, grass, gluten, irony, soap, jewels, paper towel, steel, paper, aluminum, shadows, newspaper and pavement.

APPENDIX 2

Mars One Questionnaire

State your name, your age and what you do.

Why do you want to go to Mars?

What makes you a good candidate for the MARS ONE MISSION?

Describe your utopia.

Do you believe in the possibility of alien life forms?

What are three nonessential items you would bring with you to Mars?

If you could bring one painting, sculpture, or *objet d'art* to Mars what would it be?

If you could bring one person with you to Mars, living or dead, who would it be and why?

What would you miss most about the planet earth?

Do you believe, as a species, we are inherently selfish? Explain.

What terrifies you the most in your life?

Tell me something beautiful you have created in this world.

Tell me about a situation that you had to maneuvered out of.

Tell me about a particularly difficult time in your life?

What are the reasons for not going to Mars?

APPENDIX 3

Verbatim text (excerpt)

*Recorded: December 11th 2015
1203 5A Avenue South, Lethbridge, AB
Present: Greg MacArthur, AJ Baragar, Mandy Esperzel, Danielle
Martens, Nick Bohle, Cassandra Watson*

alright okay so like, I was in the wilderness all the time, in the forest, growing up

I started a band the day this friend of mine got a drum kit
I said let's start a band
we bought a pub
redid it in Turkish baroque and redid the floors
it was in this building
it was super creepy, if you went down into the basement, there were tunnels and
ghosts

I was a dog walker for a year
I'd pick up dogs all over the city in a van and then I'd, like, tether them to

how many dogs are we talking

six
I had one leash around my chest and then all the leashes tethered onto that
on the beach people who hire people to walk their dogs are loaded
I made 16 dollars an hour
I'd leave my house at like 530 in the morning then drive for an hour and then go
walk dogs on a beach

does anybody have life insurance

I smoked weed so I could never get life insurance

you can if it's medicinal

I wish I could get medicinal

my dad passed away when I was 7
I had a dark childhood
I was depressed
I was messed in the head

I just was at that time

.....

what's the first thing you're gonna do when we get to Mars

I for sure want to jump around and test the gravity, what the gravitational pull is like because that is important

I feel like a pet name for Mars would emerge based on, like

Ralph
we'll call it

yah like something would just randomly come up and that would be it

Kid Rock

ha ha yah like Kid Rock

Kid Rock

and then it's stuck, you can't unstick it

the first thing, the first thing I'll do, the first thing I will absolutely do
I will assess the functionality of everything and make sure what the robots built was what they were supposed to build

yah I'd like check gravity
check the surroundings
I'd be like a cat like pushing things off a ledge, a table, just to watch it fall

I will totally look around Mars, to look for, like, other civilizations, for like

I think for us when we get there, it's only the four of us so

we will have to have rules cause there disagreements so we'll have to have a way to decide

like, okay, you don't wake me up before 11

so the designated time to wake up is 11 on Mars, that's the

.....

there's this place called castle falls

it's very picturesque, very beautiful
so I was there with my dad and my brother and I haven't fished very much
I was maybe five years old
I hadn't caught too many fish but I was determined so I started fishing at six at
night
and then I was fishing till it was pitch black outside like 1130pm
and I caught a fish, I finally caught a fish
and my dad helped me get it in and we took it back cause we were gonna eat it the
next day and he put it in a bucket left it in a bucket overnight in the water
so during the campfire that night I was super curious about the fish that I caught
so I went to the bucket to look at it
and I noticed it had minnows in its stomach
I was five
and I see there's these two baby minnow fish inside it and I was like
oh no it was pregnant
but obviously it wasn't
it ate them
I was five
I was like
oh no I killed a mommy fish
so I was trying to save them
I was squeezing this fish trying to get the fish out

what happened to the fish

it was just smished

was the fish
it was dead?

yes

one experience that I remember very vividly was this one brief moment with my
dad
and I don't know what was going on with him but he got super into us accepting
Jesus Christ into our hearts
I remember being really little
my younger sister was maybe about threeish and I would have been about five
and I just remember my dad being very like very focused on us and like
do you accept Jesus into your hearts?
it was extremely important

was it our of the blue

yes it was totally out of the blue
and at the time I was like oh yah this is really important

so I was like yah I totally do and he was like he'll know if your lying
you were five years old?

yes
so it become this moment I had to really think about it

and did you accept Jesus Christ

I did at that time
as much as you could as a four years old
but now I don't know

too late man
once he's in there he never gets out

at that point I don't know if he knew he was sick

along the similar lines
when I was about six or seven I met this girl my age and we were camping for a
week in the same campground
and on one of the last nights and she comes up and she's like
she starts talking about God and I had no idea who this God was
I was like whoooo is this
is he like your Dad or something
and she's like
you don't know who God is?
and I'm like no
and she lectured me about who God is and she was very precise and I was like
wow
I didn't understand it then
and I went to my parents and I was like
I learned about God and they were like from who
and I was like Sally or whoever

infinity, for me, it's harder to imagine it not going on forever because of there's
an end, a line then what's on the other side of that

what is the end
that screws me up too

the shape of the universe
that is a crazy thing to me

.....

Alan Watts

he's a Zen guy

he says we are part of the universe the same way a wave is part of the ocean
we are constantly a part of an active now

are you talking about time?

the fourth dimension where you cant actually

I had this really high conversation with my roommate we were talking about that
exact thing how theoretically it is true that you can that time can be fluid but, ya, it
would rip your body apart

maybe if there was a suit that could hold you in, hold you together

but in a wormhole there's endless spinning, spinning, spinning

you get caught in a loop

you don't actually get anywhere

if there is another life form what do they look like

Transformers

I never understood that...why are they cars

to hide, to disguise

but on their home planet are they cars

no

no

but are they from another planet

yah they're aliens

they're a particular kind of malleable metal

but what are they

they're metal

extraterrestrial life,

if they exist the chances that they would be technically like us is so small
they would either be a million years behind us or a million years ahead of us
the chances that they would exist like us, in this sliver of time is

but that's also true on earth
there's dolphins and whales and shit and if we die off they're probably gonna
become something pretty amazing

we exist, all of our atoms exist, because a star exploded

all those elements: carbon, hydrogen, oxygen
and if we are those elements then we are the universe and the universe is
conscious
we might not just understand it's consciousness

we're all made of the same stuff the rest of the universe is made of

it's Spinoza, the philosopher thing

everything has the potential to be cognizant
not that it is, but
I'm not saying that that plate is

we should have a rule on mars you cant yell at the plants

the UN released a statement that they recommend every human on the planet
become vegan
and the reason for that is water and fuel and the carbon footprint from all these
food lots
they use 70% of the water we use on

by the year 2050 they'll be 9 billion something people on the planet

I fucking love broccoli I could eat

I love cats but if I died in my sleep my cat would eat me immediately

he would

he would for sure eat me

my cat would, when I'm asleep, jump on my chest and start licking my eyeballs
I swear if I die with my eyes open she would just eat my eyes

is that an affection thing

no it's a resourceful thing
they love you but if you die they're gonna eat you

dogs are

dogs are always the first ones to be killed in the zombie movies

I Am Legend

oh my God don't bring that up
that is probably the most heartbreaking moment

it's the worst I saw it on tv and it's the worst

Will Smith is a doctor and he stays behind after the apocalypse to find the cure
he's the last person on earth

no in New York or something

and everyone else has gone to, like, the quarantine zones in Mexico and he's the
only guy left

he has a dog

he has a dog and he goes out

he's basically trying to find a cure for this zombie plague

and in the course of doing that his dog gets bit

cause these zombies are actually smart and they set a trap for the dog

so at the end Will Smith has to kill his dog

he has to shoot his own dog

.....

those French Fries are horrible

from the printer

those chunky fries

they're like half a potato

no one wants that

you know who had the best fries?

IKEA

you know they also have the best ice cream

the ice cream is really good too

don't they have Perogies too or

oh no

no no no I meant Costco

Costco

sorry I'm just gonna put a cap on that conversation

oh I meant Costco too because they

yah
ice cream

has anyone read the Tibetan Book of the Dead

not fully, actually no I haven't read it
no

it talks about the proper way to help someone die
the proper way to die
the things you need to get off your chest in order to feel, like, complete at the end
of your life
it's a step by step guide of how, how to die

have you heard of the death cafes?
it's basically a café where they have a set time where people come in and talk
about people
in their life who are dying
or if they themselves are currently ill and dying
it's a public space to talk about death

I heard they're going to do the next American execution as part of the Super Bowl
halftime show

someone told me recently that all the killings, I guess executions, are online

no
maybe there's an archive but

you can ask for, you can request what kind of death you get
so this guy
Ronnie Lee Gardner
he picked to be killed by a firing squad
so they basically
they get five people
they have this long room it almost looks like it would be a two-way glass
but there's a cubbie about this big
the guns stick out of there
so there's a person here, there's a person here
and there's sand bags all around

and they're strapped into this chair
but only one person has the actually bullet
the actual shot
so no one knows who fires the lethal shot
and these people get medallions for killing the person
they volunteer to do it
they all get a medallion
saying thank you
thank you for killing this person
you did a service to your country