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by

Hiba Ali

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**Mapping Immaterial Flows: How Consumption Invisibilizes Labor: The
Satellite and Shipping Container**

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Satellite and Shipping Container**

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Hiba Ali

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

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Abstract

Mapping Immaterial Flows: How Consumption Invisibilizes Labor: The Satellite and Shipping Container

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

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The kiosk system went down and everyone missed their flight. I had this experience recently at Chicago O’Hare International airport when I was flying to Austin. It affirmed the importance of understanding networks and how their working (or in this case, the lack thereof) immobilizes goods and people. Usually, when you check in for a flight, there is a kiosk, a station where you can print out your ticket, bag tags, and receipt. This automation of airline customers and their luggage is routine and due to its speed, allows a lot more people to obtain services. A standard of speed and ease of access is therefore coupled and expected. When this automation is no longer available, people *lose their shit* or more elegantly stated, the artifice of entitlement becomes gruesomely apparent. *I understand everyone has a place to go and we won’t get their soon enough.* However, the system is down and the airline workers are doing their best. Of course, once the network is back in place, the kiosks will resume operation and yes, they will arrange a later flight. But in a global economy where networked spaces are equated solely to make money at an expedient pace, how do we get people to understand other ways to respond

to a malfunction? The common assumption is that systems are supposed to be perfect and a glitch or a malfunction is an exception, however it is quite the reverse.

What if networks weren't based on dualism? The binary being either: an all digital *internet of everything* kind of space or a cyberpunk infused reversion to the analog.¹ Instead, what should be thought of and put into place is a multiplicity of network configurations such as A to Z, *alif to bari yay*, 1 to a 1000, uno to millón.² This is what I propose in my research and arts practice: how do we build multiplicity and equity in systems? Networks are not arbitrarily put into place, they have funders, users, buyers, beneficiaries, and losers involved. Therefore, they are porous flows, exchanges, and axioms, *always* open to change.

My research lies in between histories of media, technology, and globalization. I investigate these themes through performance, sculptural installations, reading groups, and workshops that focus on the role of technology. Specifically, my practice is focused on objects that are produced from global circuits and their embedded codes, encompassing both the technological and sociological. I investigate the history of objects such as the satellites and shipping containers and make immaterial streams tangible. The specific objects of the satellite and shipping container carry information that frames notion of historic and present day globalization facilitated by technology. The sections of this text are not necessary meant to be read sequentially, there are organized like *nodes*. In the first *node*, I will examine the role of satellites in my projects, *Satellites* and *TELL A*

¹ “The Internet of Everything (IoE) is a broad term that refers to devices and consumer products connected to the Internet and outfitted with expanded digital features...connected to the global Internet.” <Techopedia Inc. “What Is the Internet of Everything (IoE)? - Definition from Techopedia.” *Techopedia.com*, 2018 Techopedia Inc., www.techopedia.com/definition/30121/internet-of-everything-ioe.>

² I am switching between languages to indicate that multiple systems already exist but are not widely practiced due to the assumption that they are not needed.

STAR. Satellites project examines *Our World*, the first global transmission (1967) through a sculptural installation, video and website. This project critiques the notion of technoutopianism, a idea that technology will resolve all inequalities plaguing humanity. Then, I will review *TELL A STAR*, a 3-channel installation, where I divert the history of the first American satellite, Telstar (1962) through the lens of Afrofuturism, archival research and fluidity of identity.

In the second *node*, I will review my project, *Con-tain-er*, its installation and performative elements and the role of “flows” within global shipping networks. Near the ending *node*, the role of networks, “junk,” and the use of workshops will be examined as part of my arts practice. Demanding the creation of more inclusive and divergent networks is central to imagining fluidity. It is within reach, we need to imagine it.

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WHOSE WORLD IS THIS?

Through a series of physical and digital assemblages, the multimedia installation *Satellites* includes sculpture, video and NewHive, an interactive website platform. *Satellites* maps out systems of vision by investigating landscapes known as frontiers, both “outer space” and “Western”, digital and physical, metaphorical, and literal. *Our World* aired as a special program in 1965. It was the first global transmission featuring fourteen countries. The program's transmission was the harbinger of a lens that framed the notion of “globalization”; its vision substituted equity with connectivity. This framework simplified the understanding around global connections, being that, just because different countries are *connected* does not they are *communicating* or even understand each other. For example, Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany (as part of Eastern bloc, at the time,) withdrew participation prior to the Six-Day War.¹ Not to mention the many other countries that were completely left out as part of the “global” discourse of this program, since *Our World* featured only fourteen countries.

“Who owns most of the world’s satellite?...Who are the players involved in satellite development, operation and regulation?”² In *Satellites*, I investigate the technotopian ideology that “global” vision is premised upon. I situate my research in connection with contemporary artists such as Hito Steyerl and Sondra Perry who investigate the role of systems, structures and their omission(s.) Hito Steyerl in *Fluidity Inc.* examines role of fluidity comparing financial storms and weather systems. “Liquid in

¹ The Six-Day War is also referred to as the Third Arab-Israeli War was between Israel and Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

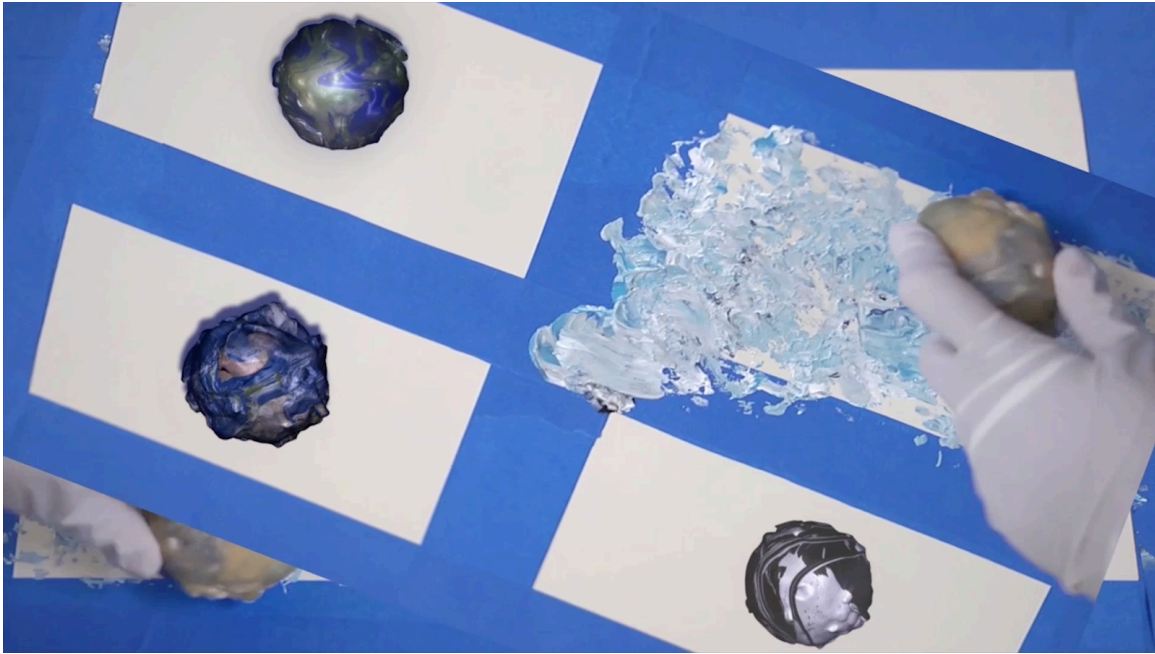
² Lisa Parks (ed.), James Schwoch (ed.), *Down to Earth: Satellite Technologies, Industries, and Cultures*, 2012

the physical sense: a liquid can take on any form; ... liquid assets are ones bought and sold easily; and in the psychological sense: being ‘liquid’ is being fluid, adaptable, always on the move – a true example of a postmodern human.”³ This applies to the policies and regulations embedded in network structures; they dictate what goods and people are able to retain fluidity and rigidity. Sondra Perry in *Graft and Ash for a Three Monitor Workstation* where she probes, through the construction of Blackness, the role technology plays in imaging a world for “othered” bodies who do not fit into computer defaults. “The artist’s avatar explains in a computerized monotone how the belief in a fundamentally just world is detrimental to the health of people oppressed by anti-black racism.”⁴ Through remixing archival footage of *Our World*, *Satellites* make visible the subliminal codes that have historically guided our perception of imagining the world and its limits.

Lisa Parks writes in *Down to Earth: Satellite Technologies, Industries, and Cultures* states that, “live satellite transmissions, direct satellite broadcasting, and remote sensing have been used not to unify the world but increasingly to divide and patrol it.” In *Satellites*, metal signs, blue acrylic, clear plastic and earth-like painted sculptures warp, lean, shimmer and mutate referring to the force exerted on the Earth by network technologies.

³ Arni, Sophie. “HITO STEYERL, LIQUIDITY INC., MARCH 8 - MAY 24, 2015 ARTIST SPACE, SOHO.” *HITO STEYERL AT THE ARTIST SPACE*, Copyright Global Art Daily™ 2018., 2015, www.globalartdaily.com/hitosteyerlartistspace.html.

⁴ Katzman, Celine. “Sondra Perry.” *Art in America*, © 2018 Art in America. All Rights Reserved., 17 Nov. 2016, www.artinamericamagazine.com/exhibitions/sondra-perry/



1. *Satellites* Video Still, 7:78, HD 720, 2016

Satellites implore viewers to think about how arbitrary lines can become permanent carvings like cartographic divisions of a map. Broadcast media clips from *Our World* are spliced into the 7:59 minute long *Satellites* video. The edits highlight the inherent contradiction embedded in the message of “techno-globalization,” a globalization that is implemented by the means of technology. In the *Satellites* video, there are 4 sections, each section is approximately 2 minutes each splicing together footage from a 90s satellite promotional video, *Our World* from 1967, Starbucks’ AIDS Awareness in Africa Campaign from 2009 and footage that I shot. The editing strategies used in the video are appropriation, specifically remixing and resampling. This strategy

makes space for alternative interpretation of history that was not present before, especially when one is not analyzing this history linearly. I skip around the timeline of satellite technology to show how the satellite, being a type of man-made tool, can be developed differently depending on who is engineering it (the multiple players involved,) for what purpose and ultimately who is going to use it.

Remixing the footage is an update, a reminder of technology's constant obsolescence.⁵ This is also where the ideology of techno-utopianism, that technology would completely resolve the issues plaguing humanity, emerged. This idea, regarding satellite technology, rose to prominence in the 60s, catapulted in the 1990s dot com bubble and percolates into the present. The installation aesthetics reference the notion of “twinning,” in the *Satellites* video, my hand stamps with acrylic paint the grooved edges of a warped globe sculpture onto canvas paper. On the wall opposite of the video projection, I stamped with acrylic paint similar patterns featured in the video. This action (in the video) mirrors the painting on the wall in the *Satellites* installation. In the *Satellites* installation, the wall painting and projection size of the *Satellites* video are proportionate to each other. The *Satellites* project explores the reappearance of the “techno-utopian” message through the 60s in *Our World*, 90s and early 2000s. It also examines how songs paired with propaganda are utilized in a similar way. This is the case for the Beatles song, “All You Need is Love,” which was featured in *Our World* and also in the 2009 “Aids Awareness in Africa” Starbucks Campaign where people from different countries were invited to sing “All You Need Is Love,” according to GMT time in London.

⁵ Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2016. Print.

In the face of this simplistic narrative elucidated by techno-utopianism, *Satellites* challenges this gross simplification of digestible bytes by pairing hyper-media, such as videos and websites, alongside the slow media of sculpture and thereby, creating intellectual counterpoints from one space to another, frame-to-frame and reference-to-reference.



2. *Satellites* Installation at UT-Austin, Austin, TX, U.S.A., acrylic, metal, plastic, canvas, paint, projector, HD 1080 video, 2016



3. *TELL A STAR* Still, 2018

TELL A STAR

“They put our rubies up there, they put our diamonds up there. They put our money up there but I didn’t see our history.” --Ahib Ail, Engineer/Historian, Earth/Pluto, 1962/3962⁶

In 1962, the first American satellite, Telstar, was launched into outer space. In 3962, all of the Earth’s cities were connected to cities on Mars and Pluto. This quote is written simultaneously in the past and future.

Ahib Ail’s quote inquires about the hopes and ideals invested in technology. In the wake of proxy wars, the privatized investment of the satellite was created in order to impress the superiority of Western American capitalism as a haven for future global safety. This is the case for Telstar, a showcase for the 1960s space race.^{7 8 9}

In a world where nothing is permanent, multiplicity is another name for information. Excess is information’s *nom de plume*; a pseudonym for both is ‘network culture.’^{10 11} In the 3-channel video installation, *TELL A STAR*, an alternative universe is presented where Mars, Pluto, and the Earth’s cities have been connected. Sourced from AT&T Corporate Archives in San Antonio, archival photos of press release images of

⁶ This quote is written by Ahib Ail. “Ahib Ail” is an anagram of my name, Hiba Ali. “Ahib Ail” simultaneously wrote this quote in the year, 1962 and 3962.

⁷ Toor, Saadia. *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan*. Pluto, 2011.

⁸ Curtis, Adam, director. *Love and Power: The Influence of Ayn Rand-All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*. BBC, 2011.

⁹ Allen, Michael. *Live from the Moon: Film, Television and the Space Race*. I.B. Tauris, 2009.

¹⁰ Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Verso, 1991.

¹¹ Terranova, Tiziana. *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. Pluto Press, 2004.

Telstar taken in the 60s are reenacted throughout these videos in different guises and hairstyles. Unlike the utopian Populuxe aesthetic that promise a modern look to “keep up” with the future, the bare-bones prop-like aesthetic of *TELL A STAR*’s construction materials: aluminum foil, ribbon and tape measure, infer that the future is “now.”¹² The songs sampled are The Tornados *Telstar*, Sun Ra’s *Satellites are Spinning* and H1BA’s *TELESTAR*. In the year 3692, the speaker in *TELL A STAR* announces that the satellite’s orbit will not be visible from Earth but it will be seen from stations on Pluto and Mars. In the year 1962, Telstar sent its first national transmission from the Andover Earth Station to Holmdel, New Jersey.¹³ This connected America to itself forming a linear closed loop, *TELL A STAR* creates a multilinear electric hula-hoop. In the alternative reality of 3962, regions are connected without being conquered and cities are interlinked without being dominated.

¹² In addition, the hunger for the “new” and “future” material including that of iron, coal and gold, have historically created war, pollution and increased global warming. Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard Univ. Press, 2013.

¹³ EEE Maine Section. “Milestones:First Transatlantic Transmission of a Television Signal via Satellite, 1962.” *Milestones:First Transatlantic Transmission of a Television Signal via Satellite, 1962 - Engineering and Technology History Wiki*, ETHW, 8 Feb. 2016.
ethw.org/Milestones:First_Transatlantic_Transmission_of_a_Television_Signal_via_Satellite,_1962.



4. *TELL A STAR*, 3-channel installation, 3 HD TVs, speaker, cables, router and extension cords, 00:05:30, 2017

3 CHANNELS OVER ALL?

TELL A STAR's HD TV's were centered on three walls. They are placed equidistant from each other to require the viewer to labor to see all of the screens; this placement is done to contrast the present digital visual economy of easy access. In order to see all of the three videos, the viewer has to navigate from screen to screen. Even if a viewer is occupying the center of the space, they are unable to view all of the three screens simultaneously. In addition, the role of text introduced another order of labor for the viewer. When the large text scrolls from one screen to another and reappears, the viewer has to consider the text's relationship to the three screens and their body. Far from being a passive experience, a mindset that is generally applied to digital media art, *TELL A STAR* embodies an *activated* experience of storytelling.



5. *TELL A STAR* Zine Back Cover, 2017

A PRIVILEGED UTILITY, OK?

The venture of the first American satellite in 1962 was the first successful private investment.¹⁴ This paved the way for public infrastructure of relaying information across the world being owned and operated by corporate entities and not the public. The privatization of the first satellite laid the foundation for contemporary modalities of privatization such as the move to eliminate net neutrality.¹⁵ The satellite was never made with public use in mind, it was made for profit, paying consumers have always been at its center; it is not a *public* utility but a *privileged* utility. *TELL A STAR* practices a hard, slippery reality of pushing towards equity through the fiction of equality. Through storytelling, it shifts away from a hierarchic Earth-centric, Milky Way-centric narrative.

As identities are not fixed constellations, but constantly mobile, ever fluid, like the land, the stars, the sea, the space - they can never be owned by a sole entity. There are many stories not told, *TELL A STAR* is one of them.

¹⁴ BS, SC. "PRELUDE TO SATELLITE LEGISLATION," Public Relations Department American Telephone and Telegraphy, March 6th, 1962.

¹⁵ Glaser, April. "How to Save Net Neutrality Before It's Destroyed." *Slate Magazine*, 22 Nov. 2017, www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2017/11/how_to_save_net_neutrality_before_it_s_destroyed.html.

FIRST IS THE WORST, THE LAST IS THE PAST

Why is it important to study the first? Why not the last? Why not somewhere in the middle? When assets are allocated to conduct an endeavor for the first time, institutions place the most emphasis on its success. Satellite interconnection is a high stakes financial investment where failure is stigmatized. It is a harbinger of empire as defined by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt as “the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world.”¹⁶ To put it simply, the stakes are high so the institution(s) will ensure success, in order to pave the way for the future. Even though the hierarchical idea of first is the best, last is the worst is problematic, it is at its best, a shining emblem of toxic-colonial-patriarchy and nowhere is this idea more salient than in the pursuit of technological advancement.^{17 18}

¹⁶ Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Braille Jymico Inc., 2011.

¹⁷ Technology-related fields are heavily male dominated. This is also not considering the role of racial bias and institutional racism in this field. The most predominant sector of American population represented in the technological field has historically been and continue to be white and male. Only recently stories of Black women and other minorities are being documented, let alone being televised such as the movie, *Hidden Figures*, which shows the pivotal role “Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson played in the launch of [first] astronaut, John Glenn, into orbit” and turning the tide for America, during the Cold War, in the Space Race. <Melfi, Theodore, director. *Hidden Figures*. 20th Century Fox, 2016.>

¹⁸ Collins, Keith. “Tech Is Overwhelmingly Male and Men Are Just Fine with That.” 29 Mar. 2017, qz.com/940660/tech-is-overwhelmingly-male-and-men-are-just-fine-with-that/.



6. *Con-tain-er* Video Still, 2017

CON-TAIN-ER(S)

The *Con-tain-er* installation, measuring 65” x 34” x 23”, features a yellow crate that was previously used to transport large artwork for museums.¹⁹ It is part of a larger system of circulation that is emblematic of the global shipping industry. Artists such as Allan Sekula and Fred Wilson have explored globalization’s reorganization of labor and resources under a neoliberal doctrine. Allan Sekula has made a body of work regarding the maritime industry, exploring the networks of ports in *The Forgotten Space*, invisible labor of seafarers in *Shipwreck and Workers*, materiality of goods flow in *Ship of Fools*. Allan states, “The container makes possible moving factories anywhere in the world in search of the cheapest labor...[The cargo container] lowered shipping costs to such an extent it didn't matter where you made things...These two key maritime inventions set the machine in motion and we are living with the consequences.”²⁰ With rise of containerization, resources and labor are made immaterial. This is heightening in Fred Wilson’s *A Thousand Points*. It is a sculpture of a plastic black globe, referencing oil, whose pores are “perforated across Africa to indicate...the natural resources of the continent have been leached.”²¹ The shipping container industry has changed the way

¹⁹ It was given to me by Jeff Williams as I was exploring previous body of work on satellites and global flows.

²⁰ Allan goes onto highlight the lack of human rights of seafarers, “[they are] kept aboard ships sequestered, an industry that runs on their invisible labor” “this industry invented means of transport which in fact made globalization possible notably the container...the container makes possible moving factories anywhere in the world in search of the cheapest labor..the developed world countries with United States in the lead could of deindustrialized had it not been the possibilities opened up by the cargo container...” M HKA, director. *Allan Sekula - Ship of Fools - Interview by Grant Watson (M HKA)*. *Allan Sekula - Ship of Fools - Interview by Grant Watson (M HKA)*, M HKA, 2010, vimeo.com/12397261.

²¹ Schubert, Karten. “Fred Wilson.” *Frieze*, © FRIEZE 2018, 1 June 2011, [frieze.com/article/fred-wilson-0](https://www.frieze.com/article/fred-wilson-0).

goods and people flow across land, sea and air. The *Con-tain-er* installation traces historic "flows" of people and goods: the Silk Road, spice trade, triangular trade including slavery, Columbian exchange, to the most current, refugees. The present day movement of goods across borders, zones and spaces is commonplace in our daily reality; however, it is relegated to the background of our contemporary globalization.

In this performative text, I excavate this object's history and the system in which it circulates: "what" moves when items are shipped and "how" they are shipped. I employ historic and cultural allusions to communicate the timeless nature of this kind of movement. I refer to the uneven spread of globalization, specifically how corporatization effects labor and how import and export effect local and global exchanges.

We are already part of a world that global shipping has created. It is all around us, from the food we buy to where our clothes are made. Uneven globalization makes some countries the recipients while others are tasked with laboring for increasingly lower wages. The global shipping industry is indicative of our contemporary moment of globalization and political alliances.



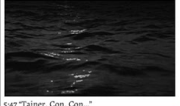




In the following passage, I will expand on particular elements that I include in the *Con-tain-er* installation. In the video, first, I will refer to "stoppages," which are produced in the title, its repetition and usage of diegetic sounds. Second, I will focus on the interiority and exteriority of the sculpture, expanding on the placement of the two screens as well as their visuals. Lastly, I will refer to the performance and interactive element of the balloons scattered around the installation.

STOPPAGES IN LAND-SEA-AIR

With the video, the breaking down of the word “Con-tain-er” refers to the stoppages in the global shipping industry, the gaps that exist between land, sea and air, which the process of intermodalism seeks to bridge. Intermodalism, invented by Marshall McLean in the 1950s, is a seamless loading and unloading of cargo between ships, trucks, and freights. This is also where the repetition of the word “Con-tain-er” refers back to the utilitarian object, the shipping container. Diegetic sound-- keyboards, keys and footsteps--is used as a way to highlight the gaps between spoken passages.

CHANGE THE OBJECT'S

Sculpturally, the aesthetic treatment of painting the metal locks and frames yellow refers to the color of the container itself. This strategy masks the origins of container and also makes the container unusable. Painting the silver lock with yellow acrylic paint creates a stoppage, pauses the mobility of the container and highlights the system it (now, cannot) circulate(s) in. I draw attention to the outside because as consumers, we are primed to be interested in the inside (for its valued goods) and not necessarily the outside, the object that holds the valued goods. The two screens, one hung up outside of the crate and one on the inside, share the same audio. Throughout their run time, the two video loops work as quotations of one another. They metaphorically “ship” images back and forth requiring the viewer to travel the distance.

<p>A container of TEU 20 tons OF FEU 40 tons Few or by force the many Port to port Can be USB but more likely Wood, pipes, sugar, people, steel, made in China, shipped in Hamburg, unloading in New York Hopes and ideals that have gained material form</p> <p>*CROUCH DOWN*</p> <p>Con *POP BALLOON*</p> <p>Con *POP BALLOON*</p> <p>Con *POP BALLOON*</p> <p>Con *POP BALLOON*</p> <p>*stair* A landification of the sea A seaification of the land Permeable porous endless global highways</p> <p>*STAND UP* Routes routes routes</p> <p>*GESTURE TOWARDS THE AUDIENCE* Far East - North America, North Europe - Far East, Far - East Mediterranean, North Europe - North America, Mediterranean - North America, A thing called intermodalism Marshall McLenn in America immigrants land ownership someone else's land of this system</p> <p>*CROUCH DOWN*</p> <p>stair Con con Con</p>	<p>3:36 "A container of TEU..."</p>  <p>4:34 "Con..." "Pop Balloon"</p>  <p>5:34 "Far East..."</p>  <p>5:47 "Tainer, Con, Com..."</p> 	<p>*POP BALLOON*</p> <p>E-bay Buy to buy Port to port Route to route</p> <p>*STAND UP* *GESTURE TO AUDIENCE AND GO DOWN ON FINGERS*</p> <p>There are 5 going from Asia to Europe 4 to South America 3 to different parts of Africa How many have reached directly into your home and Touched your body</p> <p>*POINT TO SELF* It's in the clothes food and everything u do Even when you say u are from "here"</p> <p>*FACE IN RECTANGLE PARAMETER* Ali baba Knock of knockoff of knock offs Steal from the rich and give to the poor 1000 and 1 nights 40 days and 40 nights So Scheherazade won't die How many sultans of empires Must be kept from sleeping Gianni Figuredheads authority minority drones panorama Flying post heads Taking things back and forth Containerization Making global standards of boxes Meticulous simulated mechanics Of a system, made by humans</p> <p>Book logs, shipping logs, follow NAFTA guidelines, follow the American Patriot Act Making sure no international good goes uninvestigated While we cut our own down</p> <p>*GESTURE TOWARDS AUDIENCE*</p>	<p>7:06 "So Scheherazade won't die."</p>  <p>8:04 "And letting it all unfold..."</p> 	<p>From my family to your family From your world to my world</p> <p>*GESTURE TOWARDS AUDIENCE*</p> <p>It's yours It's yours From my family to your family From your world to my world</p> <p>*GESTURE TOWARDS AUDIENCE*</p> <p>It's yours It's yours It's yours</p> <p>*STAND IN CENTER*</p> <p>*Tain Tain Com stain set* Just in time marketing Manufacturing is always late Raw material Raw capacities Raw vegetables GDP, walmart 27th most powerful nation</p> <p>*FACE* Birds butterflies and angels Birds butterflies and angels Terrorists and refugees</p> <p>The sea Wrestles the contemporary economy Birds butterflies and angels Birds butterflies and angels logistics are military Customer boxes Refined movement Minimizing paths traveled Maximizing tariffs For you for me</p> <p>*STAND IN CENTER*</p> <p>Er-er-er container</p>	<p>8:36 "From my family to your family"</p>  <p>10:05 "Refined movement"</p>
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7. Excerpt from *Con-tain-er* Performance Script, 2017

RELATIONSHIP TO LABOR

The performance of the popping of balloons and patrolling an artificial border of Amazon-ordered catchall "international" flags calls to attention the axis on which cultural exchanges have occurred. Through text and the femme body of an employee in all-black attire wearing a Bluetooth device, the worker is provided instruction on how to speak about the history of global exchanges. As she breaks down the word, "Con" "tain" "er," she ruminates on a different method of circulation that is equity-driven rather than profit-driven. Circulation is emblematic of the global shipping industry. This installation refers to the uneven spread of globalization, specifically how corporate production invisibilized offshore labor into an easily discarded tag of "Made in___."



8. *Con-tain-er* Installation at UT-Austin, Austin, TX, U.S.A., UT-Austin, Crate, computer screen, LCD TV, 2 HD 1080 video, balloons, spotlights and 2 speaker sets, 2017

AND THE FLOW OF MESSAGES

Lastly, I will explicate on the interactive element of the balloons; they are scattered around the installation. Since they appear both in the video and installation, they further connect both spaces. These balloons are lo-tech messengers within the space, they move as viewers interact with the installation. They also possess a sense of danger, since they could burst like in the *Con-tain-er* video. Printed on the balloons is a customized iconography of “birds, butterflies and angels,” mentioned in the video, which are timeless non-industry related messengers.

ER-TAIN-CON

The *Con-tain-er* installation is about the global system of the shipping industry; we are inextricably embedded in this industry as it foregrounds and shapes our present day reality. This installation excavates this history by tracing historic "flows" of people and goods to the uneven spread of globalization, specifically addressing the erasure of human producers. In the installation, I visualize this history through constructed "stoppages" in the text, video and sound, aesthetic treatment of the interior and exterior of the container and the interactive element of the balloons.

CURATED AND LED BY HIBA ALI

VYTYDYGYTY
workshops 2018

a digital art & community series

The second part of the VYTYDYGYTY series features a tutorial on Blender, an open-source 3D program. Artist and organizer Hiba Ali will instruct participants on how to import a basic sculpture 3D object (motorcycle, dog or a robot) and learn how to add texture and animate it. We will create a digital zine compiling our creations. Participants should download Blender in advance and bring a mouse (and charger as needed.) If you don't have a laptop, you are still welcome to join us!



MARCH 13 TUESDAY
@ ATM GALLERY
6 PM

9. Workshop: VYTYDYGYTY Series PT2, Blender, ATM Gallery, Austin, TX, 2018

A CRITIQUE OF NETWORKS

Networks are not stilted and finite, they are porous and always open to change. Ultimately, it is the flexibility, the durability, the transferability that draws me in as an artist and theorist because change is *never* neutral; it involves negotiation, tilted matrixes and infrastructures that mediate our experiences of technology. Networks interlay, overlay, underlay our IRL - URL - televisual - mediated realities. Networks vary in shape, nature, goal and orientation. They can range from commonplace technologies of household plumbing, root network of trees, underground fiber-optic cables, an octopi's tentacles, the growth of hair; all are networks that carry information. My research focuses on objects, the satellite and shipping container that are produced for global circulation and their embedded codes, both the technological and sociological. Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski in *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*, outline the many fields in which networks are laid across the Earth and their institutional regulatory bodies. They say that,

“Media infrastructures are concentrated in particular locations and spread across vast distances. They are highly automated, relying on sensors and remote control, and require human labor for their design, installation, maintenance, and operation. They operate ethereally, transmitting signals at the speed of light, and are grounded in bunker-like facilities heavily secured on earth. Media infrastructures are material forms as well as discursive constructions. They are owned by public entities and private companies and are the products of design schemes, regulatory policies, collective imaginaries, and repetitive use.

Interwoven within political-economic agendas, media infrastructures have historically been used in efforts to claim and reorganize territories and temporal relations.”²²

Moreover, the conditions for these systems are not made accessible to the public as this knowledge is siloed on a need-to-know basis. Therefore, there is less impetus to change how systems are structured and how they are “conditioned of the present by the future.”²³ This is their *circular causality*, the most salient example would be if we pre-ordered a part that later came to have a malfunction in it, we would have innumerable copies of it and could not change it. We would have to address the malfunction by creating another part in order fix it. This is because the malfunctioning part has already been pre-ordered and cannot be changed. This is due to the part’s being relegated for its “always, already” future use.^{24 25} I see this stilted set-up for how networks are created; they are put in place and then sealed off. They remain inflexible to change to the needs of the people unless increasing financial assets are promised by neoliberalism.

²² Parks, Lisa. *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*. University of Illinois Press, 2015.

²³ Simondon, Gilbert, and Cecile Malaspina. *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Univocal, 2017

²⁴ Steyerl, Hito. *Duty Free: Art in Age of Planetary Civil Warfare*. Verso, 2017.

²⁵ Ibid 1.

JUNK OR TRASH HEAP – ITS ALL INFORMATION

My practices focuses on networks of invisible information flows we take as granted and makes these processes tangible, particularly investigating the labor behind the objects that are produced from techno-globalization. How are present day circuits organized and how are they “wired” in the present? How do historic entanglements and restrictions of mobility occur? I study these objects, the satellite in the projects, *Satellites* and *TELL A STAR* and shipping container in *Con-tain-er*, and the networks in which they operate. I address these systems and their embedded objects through sculptural installations, digital media workshops and reading groups. I believe that by knowing what is missing in the network we can change its structure to be more inclusive.

The network in my practice means the Internet, global circulation and commodity culture. I investigate the circulation of present day “junk” and what we regard as mundane or everyday objects. Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* refers to the purest form of capitalism as the information society. Today, this wealth of information is in excess, considered as “junk.” The “junk” of information found in commonplace objects, such as the satellite and shipping container, both objects that I examine, reveals present-day society’s organization of power and culture. Terranova, Tiziana in *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* mentions, “overflows,” supply and demand of commerce and their entry points, rest stops and offload points reveal the value of these places as well as the value of the commodity traveling through this system.



10. *Net Neutrality Reading Group Session 1: Fiber Optics, Gender and Race* at Museum of Human Achievement, Facilitated by Welcome to My Homepage Residency, Austin, TX, U.S.A., 2018

HOW 2 COMMUNIC8??

Inaccessibility is a limiting factor that prevents people from understanding and implementing many technologic applications and tools. I address this gap in equity by using open-source (OS) also known as open-access (OA) applications by engaging with diverse communities. OS/OA, via opensource.org, are software whose code can be duplicated, copied and shared.

In addition to essays, installation of digital media and sculptures, digital media workshops provide an avenue to bridge theory and praxis by learning about technology's history and practice its contemporary usage. I contextualize my pedagogical practice within a trajectory of open and free schools that address lack of access such as those mentioned in the book, *The Interventionists Manual for the Creative Disruption of the Everyday*, published in 2006. The book catalogues four different types of artistic interventions: nomads, reclaim the streets, ready-to-wear and the experimental university. I draw from a combination of these categories in my open-source technology based workshops. Similarly, artists like Salome Asega continue this approach in a series of workshops and archive featuring manuscripts, films, and rare books in her project, *Iyapo repository*. She develops the *Iyapo repository* "through a series of workshops where participants become archivists of a future history they envision" by creating sketches for objects and "works to bring them to life."²⁶ For example, an object in the *Iyapo repository* is a sensory suit that "stimulates the feeling of being underwater...this suit is useful for helping people with water-related phobia as a form of therapy." The Atlantic,

²⁶ Asega, Salome. *Iyapo Repository*, www.salome.zone/iyapo-repository/m4ooq2owkikqok82lha8k5vq0k72j3.

Indian and Pacific Oceans connect the global Black diaspora, as traversing the water was a rite of passage to reach a new destination.²⁷ In my practice, I focus on open-access applications because they are free to download and share, whose learning can continue beyond the workshop. Organizing and facilitating digital media workshops increases legibility of labyrinths-like closed off information regarding technology whereas previously this knowledge was only available to those in tech-specific industries. Through these workshops, audiences stake a claim within the discourse surrounding digital media in the present to shape it for the future. Accessibility shapes empowerment and agency especially to marginalized communities. Sharing these applications is necessary in order to empower communities and individuals. I organize reading group workshops whose curated readings reveal how larger systems functions.

Focusing on the recent legislation dismantling the net neutrality principle, I assembled reading group sessions that focused on *Fiber Optics*, *Gender and Race* and *Surveillance and Agency*. These sessions fill in information gaps and provide a platform where we can share a mixture of observational, academic, and vernacular knowledge regarding technology's infrastructure, its history and media. I have also led and curated VYTYDYGTY, a digital media series that featured a reading group, open-source workshops of Blender and Unity and a performance evening. The VYTYDYGTY series is a digital art and community series; it addressed the contemporary mode of making art through digital tools, interfaces and systems of circulation. This series is cross-curated across contemporary art galleries, ATM and MOHA and brings together Austin-based artists regarding contemporary discourses on digital art, new media and community. This

²⁷ It is also a passage I draw my own connection to as my Ethiopian ancestors came to India as slaves by passage on the Indian Ocean.

is an effort to collate, crossover, and collaborate across contemporary art spaces and audiences in the city of Austin. Through a reading group, workshops and performative lectures, VYTYDYGTY series explores creating video games, 3D sculpting, active browsing and performing as a manifestation of our digital presence(s.) This series addresses the power of simulation to create spaces that reimagine the present through digital technologies.

SMETSYS SPELLED BACKWARDS IS SYSTEMS

Systems define our everyday, in the past and future, networks and their policies of legislation and governance have created a reality around us. As Alexander Galloway warns about his term for policies, *protocol*,

“But protocol is also dangerous in the way that a weapon is dangerous. It is potentially an effective tool that can be used to roll over one’s political opponents and protocol has already proven this in the sphere of technology. What poses a real threat to Microsoft’s monopoly? Not Macintosh (the market). Not the Justice Department (the state)...What poses a real threat to global dominance of American culture? Not the French Ministry of Culture. Not Bollywood. Instead it is the transitory networks and temporary autonomous zones—each protocological spaces—that bring out vulnerabilities where before none were thought to exist.” The policies and legislation are not written in stone and are always open to be changed; they are at best, negotiations. People and their communities should have the power to decide how they want to interact with networks, a bottoms-up approach, not top-down.

In this text by tracing networked objects of the satellite and shipping crate and through the sculptural installations, *Satellites*, *TELL A STAR* and *Con-tain-er*, I mapped out pathways, which make these invisible global networks palpable. Sculptural installations, workshops and reading groups engage the taste and preference of multiple audiences. This strategy makes art, technology and its imbricated discourse more accessible and requires a negotiation of the viewer towards it.

There is no need to throw your hands up and say, “What is to be done?” When there so much to be done!! Oppression and inequity is coded into the system, in my practice, determination and hacking through these systems by appropriating technologic tools and apparatuses changes the way these structures operate. Just like when you use something the way it wasn't designed to, not only the tool is changed (in how you use it) but also the user is changed and all of the spaces around it. In the act, there is a chasm, a void created, in a moment of exciting mundanity, thereby, changing the very foundation networks are built upon.

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