Push Play

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PUSH PLAY

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
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*Push Play*, a site specific installation that was situated inside Kipp Gallery on September 6th to 16th, 2011 explores the processes of learning, play, games, and understanding the self. These processes relate to humanity’s ongoing journey for acquiring knowledge, and achieving progress for the betterment of the individual, or society. Using various media, *Push Play* recreates this journey in the form of a game board using symbols, icons, sounds, lights, video projections, and sculptural elements indicative of our busy and overloaded minds. Emphasis is placed on accumulation and abundance, to simulate a mind in today’s culture bombarded with sensory information, which must be sifted through and organized for coherent thinking. *Push Play* is information, and it will reference epistemologists, artists and their styles, pop culture, esoterica, itself (games), and my identity.
I would like to thank and acknowledge the following people; for they have showed constant support, granted me valuable opportunities, and informed my process and my thoughts. Above all, my gratitude to my committee members Susan Palmisano, Ivan Fortushniak, and Dr. Robert Sweeny who have provided valuable guidance and inquiry.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*Push Play*, an interactive mixed media-installation, explores how we accumulate, interpret and apply information to formulate decisions. The installation references a large board game that invites audience participation as a means to experience different learning and decision-making styles. According to current epistemological thought, information is gathered in a variety of ways, including idealism\(^1\), empiricism\(^2\), and rationalism\(^3\). Philosopher Gaston Bachelard\(^4\) (1934) holds that all three ways of thinking are relevant. *Push Play* looks at the inclusive approach of Bachelard, utilizing sensory experience and personal reflection to lead the viewer through various abstract exercises making the thought process evident and then interpreted. The *Index of Learning Styles* formulated by Dr. Richard Felder and Barbara Solomon (2000) states that interpretation of knowledge is facilitated by the four dimensions of learning styles defined as active/reflective, sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, and global/sequential. *Push Play* emphasizes the various

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\(^1\) Idealism holds that all knowledge comes from within, like intuition. Reasoning happens *a priori*, which means without experience.

\(^2\) Empiricism holds that all knowledge comes from experience through the senses.

\(^3\) Rationalism is the abstract, which is displayed in the concept of imaginary numbers or pure geometric forms. Modern rationalism makes equal reference to experience, reason, and abstraction, saying they are all necessary for acquiring knowledge.

\(^4\) A French philosopher who contributed to the fields of poetics and philosophy of science.
complexities of these differing learning styles by providing information to the viewer/participant who in turn experiences the game from his or her interpretive approach. This is not unlike appreciating and interpreting other forms of art, but with the focus on the playful and informative aspect.

Philosophical influences of epistemology, psychology of play, contemporary art and artists, mathematics, alchemy, mythologies, and the perceived cyclical nature of reality inform the interwoven content within the gallery installation. The installation reflects varied art movements and styles, using paint, ink, video, and found objects to represent information in a multitude of forms and modes of delivery. The installation space is a game board where the role of the viewer is that of participant who is encouraged to actively attempt to make sense of it. To refer to a concept in electromagnetic communications, the participant must pull a signal from the noise, which is to draw a coherent piece of information from a veritable sea of assorted stimuli. The cyclical template for the board mirrors a life journey of exploration and discovery, from birth to death as life passes from one to another. A throne is situated at the entrance to the installation, within a vestibule created between the beginning of the game (representing
“birth”) and the end of the game (“death”). Occupying the throne is the Game Master Troll, the embodiment of tricksters/referees and performed by myself. As creator and instigator, the Game Master Troll introduces the interactive complexities of the game to the viewer/participants as they enter the installation.

The game motif is a strategy to engage the viewer to actively participate by offering them a chance to play. It is my belief that play is a very underestimated and misunderstood learning enhancer. Play comes naturally to children as a way to understand reality and their place in society. Play broadens learning and is underused by adults (Bergen 3). My approach to making art has always involved some form of play because it allows for experimentation, instantaneous pleasurable feedback, and incorporation of error into the learning process.\(^5\)

The imagery and organization of *Push Play* simulates my stream of consciousness, a diminutive interval of time within my mind, portraying incoming and outgoing information made up of sensorial elements and iconography. Andre Breton, French poet credited with founding Surrealism, would call stream of consciousness “a veritable

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\(^5\) There are no real errors in play, since something can always be learned from mistakes. It all becomes part of the play. As Jackson Pollock would comment about his playful approach to painting, he did not use the mistake, he denied it from even occurring; there were never mistakes (Harrison 585).
photography of thought” (Parkinson 49). The free flowing of information is akin to the mind playing, with its meandering queries, insights, and outbursts. The installation requires that the viewer/participant sift, ponder and aid in understanding themselves through their interaction with the various components of the game. Ultimately, I learn from it as well, by observing the players and asking them questions. Ideally the game activities evoke a sense of wonder and awe in the viewer/participant through the process of acquiring knowledge.
CHAPTER II

INFLUENCES

Artistic

Befitting the work’s preoccupation with abundance of information, the artistic influences for *Push Play* are varied and widespread. From the grim and admonishing paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, the floral and saccharine work of Gustav Klimt, the exploding and imploding masses of Nancy Rubins, to the visceral and provoking work of David Lynch, the inspirational sources are constant, relentless, and disparate. The previous work underwent vast changes when I discovered the action painters of the 1940s, and through their influence, began to focus on the process of painting and its residual effects, rather than on mimicry and creating an illusion on a flat picture plane. There was a shift from creating picture windows into scenes like still-lifes and landscapes toward concentrating on the processes of mark making, surface texture and paint application. Artists like Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, and Barnett Newman epitomized this new direction in painting. Additionally, my discovery of Robert Rauschenberg’s work which combines objects with a similar process oriented technique as well as Jean-Michel Basquiat’s raw color, loose style, and primal imagery also changed the direction of my
work. These expressive, process driven approaches to painting, prompted me to combine all manner of information (marks, icons, symbols) and ideas onto canvas. This led me to a unique group of artists who organize the visual and contextual information in their work, by creating puzzles, games, bricolage, or installation. Most notably the concepts and forms of Matthew Ritchie, William T. Wiley, and Pipilotti Rist provided the impetus for the particular strategies in my installation, *Push Play*.

Matthew Ritchie is a British visual artist whose work encompasses the mediums of drawing, painting, video projection, digital media, and sculpture. His work focuses on process, as well as information overload. Ritchie’s work is a viscous mapping of reality, using codes and fictional/real physics, and a layering between sculptural, installation, and two-dimensional work, like doodling and action painting. Ritchie’s intent is to fully disclose, and cryptically tell a narrative through his created characters which exist in his artificial microcosm (Weintraub 52).

Ritchie states that “information is a sublime experience. The place we do have, where you can disappear, is into the information nexus. You’re going to be confronted with so many paradoxes of your own position, that you cannot make a definitive statement. It becomes sublime, you have to just sit there” (Weintraub 62).
The viewer is typically overloaded sensorially when immersed in Ritchie’s work. His work bombards the viewer, and through their patient sorting and comprehension, it is no longer unnatural or unnerving, but achieves a calming beauty. The grand scale of his work unifies all the disparate elements, and this shift in perspective offers another level of understanding as the whole is realized and appreciated.

Despite the seeming disorder, Ritchie does construct these interweavings with formal principles in mind. Color is specifically chosen, shapes and forms codified and translated, light is specifically oriented and projections are plotted out well in advance with a direct unified theme. Philosophically, Ritchie plays with Lyotard’s (1982) Post-Modern thought of simultaneous informational dialogue, embracing the fluid, and bouncing from multiple levels of subjectivity. Embracing the notion of constant streaming information and its myriad of connections, visual artist William T. Wiley also exhibits this all-inclusive approach in a more contained and humorous style.

Wiley pulls from cartoons and sequential art, detailed rendering, found objects and assemblage, painted scenes, and tongue-in-cheek humor and wit. Both he and contemporary Robert Arneson, who is a humorous ceramicist from the same Bay area, were considered key
figures in transitioning from Funk Art in the 50s to more blatant and psychedelic art forms such as those of Robert Crumb, Peter Saul, or the Hairy Who⁶ (Fineberg 281). They have all had a hand in influencing the style found in *Push Play*.

Wiley addresses various world events in some of his work, either openly, or hidden cryptically within the piece. Sometimes the logic behind the flow of information is not fully evident, so there is a puzzle to be solved by viewers who care to engage with his work. Some of his works appear as a sketchbook or rambling notes to oneself or intricate observations. This free, and often confusing, exchange of information is a strategy that is adopted by *Push Play*. In addition, his layering of “low art” doodles on top of “high art” abstraction or realism is also emulated in the installation, which toys with the presuppositions of what fine art should be.

Wiley primarily works with drawing media, with the addition of watercolor washes, acrylics, oils, inks or markers. Sometimes, objects inspire him and he incorporates them onto or near his 2D, or uses them solely as an assemblage work of art. Experimentation and discovery is integral for Wiley, and though there is sometimes a plan, the journey is

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⁶ A collection of Chicago Imagist artists in the late 1960s, who blended cartoons and comics with fine art.
the focus and the end result can be a mystery. His style evolved from his tribulations, and when at the San Francisco Art Institute he said:

I was pretty knocked out by the school, felt a little bit shaky about it, seemed like a lot of the skills and badges I accumulated back in high school just didn’t hold that much water. But I guess whatever belief I had in my own work, and whatever eagerness I had to get it on, I just adopted pretty much anything that came along. I liked all the different ways of seeing, and different ways of doing things. I’d never seen so much of all that before. Things seemed bigger, sort of “more,” more paint. In class we’d sort of worked with small things, quiet things. At that point I got sort of heavy into Francis Bacon, mainly just the technique, that kind of blurred quality. I did that a lot, and drawing. And finally I used some of those techniques to shift away from specific figuration. I started mixing in figures, animals, still life, landscapes, sort of blurring and smearing to obscure some of that information that was drawn pretty specifically. Pretty heavy emphasis on dramatic contrasts, too (Richardson 6).

As stated before, his blending of styles and media is similar to that found in *Push Play*. This all encompassing hodge podge of material,
content, seriousness and absurdity is one of the fascinating qualities of
the work. In an effort to simulate reality’s plethora, where there is
harmony and discord among different elements, *Push Play* uses similar
techniques employed by Wiley. Wiley’s subversiveness, with his freedom to
mock and laugh in a serious and sterile environment as the art world, is
evident in the character in *Push Play* as well. The Game Master Troll, my
alter ego, parallels Wiley’s Mr. Unnatural; both are trickster figures, a mix
of wisdom and folly. Different personas are also an aspect of the work of
Pipilotti Rist, another inspiration which can be seen in her quest for
understanding her identity, and creating large immersive environments
using video and light.

Pipilotti Rist is a Swiss-born artist who primarily works with video
and audio installations. The content is sometimes viewed as feminist,
though her focus is mainly on the body and her identity. She creates
using a multitude of disparate approaches, including interventions,
happenings, sculptural installations, music, video, film, and projections
which have “room in them for everything (painting, technology, language,
music, movement, lousy flowing pictures, poetry, commotion, premonition
of death, sex, and friendliness)- like in a compact handbag” (Ravenal 31).
The handbag is a recurring metaphor for Rist, who likes to look into others’ bags to see all the contents. She believes that the objects inside tell us a lot about their owner, their wishes and fears. Rist’s art is like inviting others to look into her bag (Rist 20). The bag is then a material manifestation of our minds, and creating an immersive environment that simulates the bag, or mind, is an invitation to explore and investigate the workings of the owner/possessor. My work is also a scattered array of various aspects of my identity (thoughts, ideas, metaphors, icons, feelings, and drives), and Push Play, as a large site specific installation, takes this idea to a grand scale.

Changing the viewer’s role is important to Rist as well. She actively seeks to involve and absorb the viewer into the work, for without viewer participation, she considers the work incomplete. In Achterbahn, Rist inserts her art into the urban flow of a train system in Germany. By absurdly altering signs, adding directives for the passengers, incorporating sound and video within the trains, and repurposing the space she made the passenger the performer and creates a new experience from a mundane one (Rist 22). In Sip My Ocean, Rist projects a video of a watery encounter, with the camera zooming all over her body in fluid motions and the colors enhanced and shifted. The video is large and
encompassing, and suspends the viewer in its wake. It is doubled and mirrored, situated in a corner that is “a stable juncture from which the imagery appears to radiate and behind which it seems to disappear, producing doubling and mutating forms that further distort and disorient” (Ravenal 30). This is a referenced aspect of the one of the corners in *Push Play*, which also invites and includes the viewer, and enthralls them with the moving painting. Through the inspiration from Rist’s immersive and projected environments, Wiley’s puzzles and humor, and Ritchie’s all-encompassing displays and organization of information, the installation *Push Play* is created.

Philosophic

The nature of knowledge, how it is achieved, and how it is transmitted is a key element in *Push Play* and is the subject of a branch of philosophy labeled Epistemology. All philosophical enquiries are valuable and of interest to the work, from the two divergent fields of Ethics\(^7\) and Metaphysics\(^8\), to Ontology\(^9\) and Epistemology as further subsets within Metaphysics. Whereas all elements of philosophy reveal

\(^7\) Moral philosophy, concerned with such topics as Good/Evil and Virtue/Vice.

\(^8\) Philosophy concerned with explaining the fundamental nature of being and the world.

\(^9\) Philosophy concerned with explaining the nature of being, existence, or reality.
themselves to some degree in the work, the primary focus is on the
nature of acquiring knowledge.

We begin with the paradox of inquiry, brought forth by Meno to
Socrates\(^{10}\). In *The Dialogues of Plato, Vol. 1*, a dialectic between wealthy,
learned Meno and disheveled, unassuming Socrates about the concept of
virtue leads Meno to propose the following paradox: knowledge cannot be
attained because if we need it (we do not know) how do we know when
we have achieved it, and if we have it (we do know) why do we have to
bother for we already have it? This quandary forms the basis for
centuries of re-clarification of what knowledge is and how it can be
gained. It showed that the enquirer has an intermediate level of
knowledge—enough to recognize a correct answer but not enough to
answer on one’s own (Sorenson 64). Socrates merely dismissed this
paradox with the notion that knowledge is really recollection; his belief is
that we know everything, but it is obscured and forgotten within our
mind. The only way to draw it out is to be led on a logical journey— and
recollected. This idea spawned the Socratic Method, and it is aptly
demonstrated by Meno’s slave boy, who knows nothing of geometry, but

\(^{10}\) A classical Greek Athenian philosopher, credited as one of the founders of Western philosophy, and
only recorded through the writings of others, including his pupils Plato and Xenophon.
is goaded towards the solution of a handful of complex geometric problems (Cahn 12-19).

Socrates skirts the issue, but demonstrates another fascinating aspect of knowledge, logical deduction. The paradox is not solved, because anytime a person reduces anything to its smallest or simplest nature, there is something smaller or simpler. This is called irreducibility, or the problem with getting to the heart of the matter; we have to have faith in the assumptions at the core where everything else rests upon. We know knowledge exists, despite a rock solid foundation proof for it, which is a core of Post-Modern thought. So, the thinkers move on, and attend to clearer definitions for knowledge later, when perspectives change and minds revitalize. Paradoxes abound in the content of the installation Push Play, to remind us that knowledge is ever expanding. In addition, paradoxes can be the most intriguing developments within the framework of human knowledge.

Almost two millennia later, the father of modern philosophy, Rene Descartes\textsuperscript{11}, lends his thoughts on the matter. In his Meditations on First Philosophy, he desires a solid foundation from which to build an unshakeable structure of knowledge. To do so, he immediately discards

\textsuperscript{11} French philosopher, writer, and mathematician who introduced the Cartesian coordinate system for analytical geometry and is credited for influencing Western philosophical thought to this day.
anything from which doubt can arise. By reducing information in this way, he arrives at only one piece of information that could not be doubted: that he was thinking (Cahn 97). If he doubted this thought, that would indeed be another thought. In a later work this development was phrased as “Cogito, Ergo Sum”\(^2\) and it would serve as the basis for his philosophical system. If he can doubt everything but his mind, than reality can be understood through the mind only, or Idealist theory as it came to be called. In essence, if all the senses are taken away and the mind numbed then reality ceases to exist for the ex-observer. One goal of my installation is to make the viewer aware of the act of thinking. By integrating various puzzles, hidden narratives, and codes throughout the space, \textit{Push Play} prompts intellectual action on the part of the viewer, and in this way requires him or her to think. Awareness of thought could occur from all the prompt words strewn around the space promoting thinking, and from the game’s directions.

Contrary to Idealism is the theory of Empiricism, which contends that reality is not entirely of the mind but of what we perceive. The leading empiricists that refute Descartes are John Locke\(^3\), George

\(^2\) “I think, therefore I am.” According to Descartes, the Cogito is undeniable, because in the act of denying one is thinking, one thinks and renders the denial false (Cahn 63).

\(^3\) English philosopher and physician, known the Father of Liberalism.
Berkeley\textsuperscript{14}, and David Hume\textsuperscript{15}. Locke argues that we can be mistaken about the external world, which falls short of Descartes’ absolute certainty, but “our understanding of physical objects is a paradigm of knowledge” (Cahn 109). Our knowledge of the world is rooted in sensation, which can lead to an internal reflection. Locke states that all objects have two qualities: a primary aspect (qualities inseparable from an object, such as size, solidity, and velocity) and a secondary aspect (powers in an object that produce sensations that are subjective, like color, taste, and odor).

Berkeley agrees with Locke in saying that the secondary qualities are mind-dependent, but he takes it one step further and believes that primary qualities also are dependent on perception. Berkeley would argue that matter didn’t exist outside of perception, and that matter would not blink out of existence if we stopped perceiving it because God would still perceive it (Cahn 110).

Hume, who does not share Berkeley’s theism, does share the advocacy of empiricism. Hume reveals that we never really see a connection between a cause and an effect, but only two separate events that we connect by assumption. The assumption violates the principle that

\textsuperscript{14} Irish philosopher and clergyman, who posited that matter is only an idea in the minds of perceivers.

\textsuperscript{15} Scottish essayist and historian who raised questions regarding causality.
our knowledge rests only on our senses, which are finite (Cahn 183). He also formulates the “problem of induction,” which shows that we do not have good reason to believe the future can be learned from the past. Hume would say that any attempt is doomed to circularity, because “when we try to demonstrate that the future will be like the past, we shall inevitably appeal to some principle of nature’s uniformity, thus assuming what we are trying to prove” (Cahn 184). *Push Play* emphasizes the sensorial, with a multitude of stimuli to evoke a reaction out of the viewer/participant. The sounds, lights, and tactility are intended as vehicles for the process of information. To demonstrate Hume’s problem with causality, the temporality of the looping video projections altered each participant’s journey around the board as well, so the circularity of the quest around the game board did not follow a uniform path.

All of these are valid questions concerning what we know and how we acquire information, and it forms the core of epistemological study. From the two camps of Idealism and Empiricism arose Rationalism, which sought to reconcile the two. Rationalism’s main exponent is Gaston Bachelard, who demonstrates that both perception and reasoning are necessary for knowledge, and when one is the origin for the other, there is an instance for its reversal. Observation can lead to thought, and
thought can lead to observation. Bachelard states: “Wherever the starting point of scientific activity may be, this activity will carry conviction only if it leaves its home base; if scientific activity is experimental, then reasoning will be necessary; if it is rational, then experiment will be necessary. To apply is always to transcend” (Jones 48). It is at the crossroads where the epistemologist should wait, between realism and rationalism, always reconciling the two and using both to hasten scientific progress forward (Jones 52). I believe poet Andre Breton would add: “Poets and artists join forces with scientists at the heart of these ‘fields of force’ created in the imagination by the reconciliation of two different images” (Parkinson 68). It is here where Push Play dwells, between two extremes, waiting to unify or to force equilibrium. Push Play provokes moments of pure sensorial experience that prompts the viewer/participant to reflect, re-experience and/or continue to investigate.

Research

Learning styles, how we acquire and organize the information into coherent and cohesive thoughts, are unique to each learner. Felder and Solomon’s Index of Learning Styles, an online educational aid is an assessment of learning biases set on four continuums to allow the
learner to better utilize their method of learning. The Index’s continuums are: Visual (pictorially) vs. Verbal (words), Active (doing) vs. Reflective (thinking), Intuitive (rational) vs. Sensorial (perception), and Sequential (systematic) vs. Global (big picture). The continuums are arranged so there can be no true balance between the extremes so to demonstrate our particular learning biases. The installation *Push Play* contains aspects of all types of learning styles: the icons and words of the murals, the sensations and ideas it evokes, the sequential space for the viewer/participant to explore, meditate upon, and to grasp its overarching nature. The primary idea behind the game is to evoke awareness in the viewer/participant that learning is occurring, and to excite within the participant further interest into acquiring knowledge.

Making learning exciting is a complex task, one that is highly dependent on the learner’s desires and goals. Learning that is fun can be accomplished through an activity naturally practiced by children: play. According to Merriam-Webster, “play” is described as recreational activity, especially the spontaneous activity of children. More specifically, play is defined as a range of voluntary, intrinsically motivated activities linked with pleasure, performed by animals with highly complex nervous systems, and for cognitive development, socialization or for ends not fully
understood, like aesthetic awareness (Sutton-Smith 121). Play is often seen as a teaching aid for skill sets with future use implications; Bergen dismisses this perspective stating, “The pedagogical value of play does not lie in its use as a way to teach a specific set of skills through structured activities called ‘play.’ Rather, play is valuable primarily as a medium for learning” (3). The word *medium* is important here because it can mean: 1) “a condition in which something may function or flourish,” 2) “a means of effecting or conveying something,” 3) “a channel of communication,” or 4) “a surrounding or enveloping substance” (Bergen 3). In addition, any time activity is done for its own sake it is seen as play; activity done for external reward, salary, or pay is seen as work (Bergen 11).

It is very difficult to define play for sometimes the means and the ends are both important, and it can still be construed as play. Ideally, intrinsic motivation (even if a game field is set and there are rules imposed), an internal locus of control, freedom to perform non-instrumental actions, and an active engagement are indicators of play (Bergen 11). Because play is often viewed as not serious, adults tend to incorporate more rules into the play to further clarify and elicit a desired end, in other words, to become like work. My installation seeks to elicit a
play response in the individual despite its controlled layout, its ambiguous rules, and its form that originated from outside of them. *Push Play* is like a set stage for a number of responses to be acted out, acted upon, and experienced. The title itself reminds the viewer/participants that it is pushing the concept of play upon them.

A final element that permeates the installation’s strategy of a game is the ancient pseudo-philosophy of alchemy. The basis for the birth of alchemy lies in the following axioms of Greek thought that predates it: 1) that there is a unitary process in nature, an ultimate substance that all things are composed of, 2) that there is a conflict of opposites which are held together by the overriding unity, and 3) that there is an definite structure in the ultimate components of matter (Lindsay 3). We can see that these ancient presuppositions are still relevant today, though the elements differ from the classical four (air, fire, earth, water) of the past to the Periodic Table\(^{16}\) of today. When alchemy was founded, it was co-created by the dyers and the bronzers of Ancient Egypt, two guilds with skills of changing the colors of fabrics and metals, respectively (Hopkins 45). Interesting to note that changing its surface pigments led to discoveries of changing its inner nature.

\(^{16}\) A tabular display of the chemical elements organized according to their atomic properties. It is currently at 118 known elements.
With the advent of alchemy, the art of it developed too rapidly for scientific understanding to keep up with it. Undesired and unexpected products were brought about, coupled with an insufficient way of attempting to formulate explanations for the products. If anything, alchemy spurred critical thought and led humanity to the refinement of the Scientific Method\textsuperscript{17}, but only after 1000 years. In the meantime, philosophical and spiritual notions explained what was occurring (Hopkins 2). The focus started to shift to the esoteric aspect of the material experimentation; the art of alchemy was elevated more than the science of it. This science, the hunt for understanding matter, was the first time people got close to divinity through materials; the matter served as a medium for attaining higher truths, like creating the ultimate substance\textsuperscript{18}, and achieving panacea\textsuperscript{19} and a universal solvent\textsuperscript{20}. “Although it depended upon false premises and definitions,” Hopkins states, “it was a consistent whole; and, given those definitions, the result was far from being absurd. So plausible did this philosophy seem that the theory of alchemy and its hopes took a firm hold on the ancient mind and influenced the best-

\textsuperscript{17} According to the Oxford English dictionary, it is a method of procedure that has characterized natural science since the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, consisting in systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses.

\textsuperscript{18} This was thought to be gold, which was linked with the sun and God. This explains why they sought to convert all matter to gold, to elevate the inherent essence of the matter to divine standards.

\textsuperscript{19} A remedy that cured all diseases, neutralized all toxins, and extended and rejuvenated life indefinitely.

\textsuperscript{20} A solvent thought to dissolve all substances, even gold. It was called Alkahest, but never was found. Today, we think of water as a universal solvent due to its polarity and abundance.
educated scholars for more than a thousand years” (4). It became a journey for achieving a transcendent state, like religion, but with a more solid\textsuperscript{21} foundation.

The philosophy of alchemy and its mysterious nature influences the themes of *Push Play*, of journeying for knowledge and a transformation because of it. It also influences my artistic process, by the very act of turning base substances into works of art through the arcane gestures, rituals, and musings of the contemporary artist. I think that art itself is the new form of alchemy, a quest to understand and achieve transcendence through materials. Still we search for that enigmatic object, the alchemist’s long sought Philosopher’s Stone, which was believed to be instrumental in converting lead to gold and thus bridging the gap between the mundane and the divine.

**Media**

The final category of influences involves a book, an author, and a movie. The book is a fictional treatise on a disorganized religion titled *Principia Discordia, or How I Found Goddess, and What I Did to Her When I Found Her*. The book is written by Gregory Hill under the

\textsuperscript{21} Pun intended. Matter was always seen as more real than energy, or spirit.
pseudonym of Malaclypse the Younger, as a response to all the self-important and organized patriarchal religions. The book spreads its message through subversive humor, and it self-subverts to negate fanaticism by using Zen and Dadaist techniques which promotes free thinking and a skeptical mindset. The book itself is a compilation of many short essays, mythologies, opinions, jokes, absurdities, Zen koans, diagrams, cartoons, puzzles, and assorted minutiae. Hidden inside, or not so hidden, are nuggets of wisdom and seeds for critical thought. The core ideas of the book lie with the Greek goddess Eris, who was snubbed by the other Olympian gods by not being invited to a wedding, and who then introduced the Golden Apple of Discord to affect the whole event with chaos (Jackson 17). The book reveres Eris, and teaches about the importance of discord, chaos, and unpredictability. I agree with this much despised, and misunderstood, concept. The order in which we organize thought about art, the world, or the art world is not perfect; sometimes, to shake things up, chaos needs to be inserted so as to re-clarify, re-question, and rebuild to make these systems of thought stronger and better. My art revolves around this unpredictable state, its wild divergences, and my questioning and skeptical nature. Borrowed symbols, themes, and unorthodox processes inspire my installation *Push Play*, and
hopefully will motivate those who have a predisposition towards nonconformity.

The next influence affects my disposition towards the organization and distribution of information. James Joyce, the Irish author of *Finnegans Wake*, *Dubliners*, and *Ulysses*, is considered a very influential writer of the modernist avant-garde, and utilized a stream of consciousness style that I adopt in my art making. Considered to use all manner of literary device, style, characters, and format, I think of him as a bricoleur\(^\text{22}\) of literature. His most famous novel *Ulysses* is told within the span of one day, follows a character named Leopold Bloom who is similar to Odysseus, and, moreover, the entire book parallels Homer’s *Odyssey*. It is filled with puns, wordplay, and allusions, and is highly organized, despite its meandering and unfocused narrative. Declan Kiberd states, “Before Joyce, no writer had so foregrounded the process of thinking” (1). My installation utilizes this all-over, no content denied, all materials welcome style, but with a modicum of control and intent. This abundance allows the viewer to take what is readily available from it and construct a thought that could be uniquely personal to them. Joyce and

\(^{22}\) A person who makes bricolage, which is the combination of diverse materials readily available for an end or as a focus on the process of making. A tinkerer.
the *Principia Discordia* also heavily influenced the *Illuminatus! Trilogy*\(^{23}\), three fantasy/sci-fi detective novels which I also borrow from for *Push Play*, and contains the same style of information organization that *Ulysses* employs.

Finally, my last influence is the movie *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* directed by Terry Gilliam\(^ {24}\) and based on the novel by Hunter S. Thompson\(^ {25}\). Thompson’s book is extremely influential, and it tells of an era overflowing with possibilities, and the experiences of its two main drug-induced protagonists ranging from sweet sincerity to base monstrousness. Thompson paints a vivid picture of the American Dream gone bad, with nightmarish encounters, and self-defeating characters. My interest, however, lies in the opulent and creative style of Gilliam’s movie. The visual overload of these two degenerate, but intelligent, men’s experiences fleecing two Las Vegas hotels and leaving detritus in their wake, is overwhelming. Here, abundance of mind altering substances is the catalyst for chaos. In my work, I want to tap into that disorienting feeling, the clammy mix of sickening and exciting, and wild unpredictability

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\(^{23}\) Three fiction books by Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea that delve into a vast conspiracy that blends between factual history and lies, covering all manner of genres, characters, plots, and organizations such as the Bavarian Illuminati, Cults of Cthulhu, the Syndicate, and the Discordians.

\(^{24}\) Ex-member of the Monty Python comedy troupe and celebrated director of *Brazil*, *Twelve Monkeys*, and *The Fisher King*.

\(^{25}\) American journalist and writer who is credited as creator of gonzo journalism.
of Vegas on mescaline. There is a fascinating aspect of that wild, sloppy abundance and the way it mires and prohibits the explorer, or the viewer/participant in the case of *Push Play*. The movie displays the after-effects of extreme experimentation with drugs, whereas I simply display the effects of my creative process on a space ready for intrepid investigators (the viewer/participant).
CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF WORK

This section of the thesis will be approached in a less traditional manner. Since most shows are organized displays of individual works of art, and the written thesis typically analyzes each one separately or as a cluster, my installation *Push Play* is to be examined as a whole, with the individual components only serving their full purpose in context with each other. In analyzing the work it is important to note that each element within the installation will be reviewed in the sequence that the viewer/participant would navigate the installation’s game board.

Upon entering the “Vestibule” through the gallery doors, there is a dais with a throne and two large curtains flanking it concealing the rest of the installation space. Behind the throne is a mottled drapery with a letter T cut out and exposing a spinning light ball, a tease of what lies behind the curtain (Figure 1). The coral-like throne belongs to the Game Master of *Push Play*, a hybrid of satyr/harlequin/trickster deity/barker. I adopt the role of this person, to lure and welcome players (viewers/participants) to the game. I also answer questions, pose dilemmas, and award individuals who succeeded in winning an aspect of
the game\textsuperscript{26} for incentive purposes. It is necessary for the Game Master, as an authoritative figure, to sit separate from the chaos of the game so as to be a non-intrusive element. To my right hand is my Monkey familiar\textsuperscript{27}, who is representative in many cultures as a clever trickster or a liaison between the animal and the human. The Game Master as alter ego and the monkey are humorous elements that I mirror from the work of William T. Wiley; the alter ego being a different facet of my personality and allowed free reign during the exhibition, and the monkey as symbol for carefree playfulness and acumen.

Many things within the larger space and the vestibule are linked with multiple meanings, facades, moods, and an underlying absurdity. The vestibule itself is a foreboding though welcoming pocket outside of the turbulence of the larger space, a beginning and ending locus. It is a locale representing the zero, the origin for all number lines (positive, negative, complex, etc.), a placeholder number that does not represent any actual quanta, and is intimately linked with its twin, infinity. Another

\textsuperscript{26} Vince DeStefano, an undergraduate art student at IUP, solved the puzzle within an hour of the opening. He was awarded a painting of his choice made and signed by me.

\textsuperscript{27} Familiars were psychically connected helpers of mages who adopted animal form. They could be used as spies, couriers, guardians, and colleagues.
word for zero is cipher\textsuperscript{28}, which recurs many times in the game, and is also a fitting description of the Game Master. The zero was a concept throughout history that elicits much consternation. It is thought to be representative of void and damnation and is subsequently suppressed. But to others, it is necessary, as an emptiness that needs to exist at the heart of all things (Seife 23). This concept is an example of hidden lore, an intriguing bit of information that gives structure to every area of the installation. If the viewer/participant investigates deeply enough, or addresses the Game Master with questions, everything in the space can be fully understood.

At the left of the vestibule is a card (Figure 2) that pertained to playing the game and on the floor adjacent is a colorful “START” leading to the slit in the curtain. This is the beginning of the actual game and where experience varies. This description will be reviewed in a systematic clockwise outer-to-inner method.

Immediately to the player’s left is a roiling and waving curtain, with a front projected image of flowing and bubbling colored oils (Figure 3). Reminiscent of the visual stimuli overload of the American 1960s, it, and

\textsuperscript{28} A systematic procedure for encrypting or decrypting communication. The difference with codes, which usually affect meanings of words to shorten sentences, ciphers are dependent on transforming the individual letters, which heighten their complexity and enhance its security.
most of the other contents of the game, is constructed to evoke a hypnotic and disorienting feeling which sets an ominous mood to provoke cautiousness. The moving screen and projected image represent the wild, soupy potential\textsuperscript{29} energy that exists before any life form is established; a “Birthing Station”, complete with caul\textsuperscript{30}. There is sound that accompanies this looped projection, but it is blended with the cacophony of the other various sounds and music within the game. This overlapping of sounds is intended to enhance the participant’s sense of disconnection, to create an uncomfortable feeling that this is somehow different, or alien, and to provide some challenge to the game. The sound is another blended mix of intervals of notes played by various instruments, cropped vocals, and bars of music. It consists of varying quiet, harmonious, loud, or discordant sections fused together, again a reference to the abundance and chaotic aspect of potential energy. Here, the moving drapery sweeps onto the adjacent wall as a metaphor for potential that gives way to form, the dynamic moment that occurs when ideas arise or thought happens. The flowing fabric contains elements of the blossoming mural from the first wall in the installation.

\textsuperscript{29}This is a term borrowed from thermodynamics, which equates to the stuff that all matter and energy derive from, a generic and versatile substance with infinite possibilities.

\textsuperscript{30}A thin, filmy membrane that can cover a newborn’s head. Once believed that those born with it still intact would have a great destiny in the future, or could perceive realms beyond the normal senses.
A thirty foot mural is painted on the entire length of the first wall that is visible upon entering the interior of the installation. The style is reminiscent of Matthew Ritchie’s sweeping nebulae, with written instructions, labels, calculations, musings, and extraneous doodles. The imagery represents the first three stages of the journey towards realization (Figure 4). The mural contains many puns, wordplays, directives, red herrings, and recorded observations. Many of the nuances on the wall can be reviewed in Appendix A.

The first five feet of the wall represents the first stage: “STAYGE WON: JEST-STATION”, a play on the words for birth and a mocking locale (literal translation for a jest station). Intrinsic to this idea is that language can be utilized just as fluidly and ambiguously as visual symbols and icons, to represent the fullness and openness of reality with its multiple interpretations. The mural includes a large self-portrait of me as cherubic (Figure 5). The cherubic symbol is linked to the birthing area, and represents the start. The image further depicts awareness, indicated by a conscious stare and a dialogue caption near its mouth. This is to show that everything depicted in the installation is aware of the journey, completely self-referential from start to finish. The remainder of the wall entails crawling vine line drawings, random doodles, and a semblance of
coherent information. The mural is a reference to Marshall McLuhan’s assertion that the content is not as important as the medium in which it is delivered; this is a game about information, its gathering, interpretation, and application. Specific meaning of each element is irrelevant unless the player makes it otherwise. Here, visual and verbal cues for pondering are implemented, as well as active ones (directions for actions). The entire space is inundated with examples of the four continuums of learning biases from the Index of Learning Styles: visual/verbal, sensing/intuitive, active/reflective, and sequential/global. The beginning of the act of learning starts on this wall. I created this for the participants to actively decode, deconstruct, assimilate, and interpret.

The symbols used in the mural sized painting are unconscious doodles, like symbols of the process of individuation that appear in dreams, which are, according to C. G. Jung, “images of an archetypal nature which depict the centralizing process or the production of a new centre of personality” (115). For Jung, the self is not only the center, but the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious (115). Lastly, colorful ink washes on cut Yupo paper flows from the wall mural onto the floor; the wall itself cannot contain all the information, so it drools and collects as puddles on the floor.
The next stage (or section) in the mural is called “B. IMP-ETUS”. The joke here is the inconsistency of the labeling system, starting at a STAYGE WON (1, spelled as its homophone) and going onto the letter B. The following stage after IMP-ETUS reverts back to the numerical system with three spelled correctly. In the title IMP-ETUS, I have isolated the “imp” within the word. Imp is intended to reference a troublemaker spirit linked with promoting misfortune or harm. The imp is also closely affiliated with the “fae”, mercurial beings of Arcadia, who drink deeply of the passions of life, good and bad. Trolls\textsuperscript{31}, who are of Norse origin, are also linked with these spirits and it is my primary pseudonym. Troll appears within this game numerous times, and is an aspect and name of the Game Master. It is a persona I play often as devil’s advocate, which opens unintentional avenues for exploration. The word impetus means a driving force, incentive or stimulus. I believe this force is necessary for change to occur, as a universe without change would be static, stagnant, as well as devoid of meaning, excitement, or consciousness. Once awareness happens on the part of the participant, a more meaningful observation can take place. Everything is understood in relation to the

\footnote{31 It is interesting to note that trolls have achieved a trickster status on the Internet, as the group of people who bait chatters into irrelevant, emotional morasses to get them off topic. The maxim “Do not feed the Trolls” originated as a warning to keep people from falling for their derailing machinations.}
self and others, and this awareness facilitates a deeper understanding. In this way, thoughts delve beyond surface impressions and stimuli, to the inherent nature and causes. After the material aspect is formed from birth, the mind then formulates a direction to strive toward (this was referred to historically as the Will, and is exemplified by the drawn upraised head, Figure 6), which leads to the next stage on the wall.

“ST GE 3 (? - ION±)”, the next stage (or section), refers to a rebus solved as “Question minus Ion” which reveals the word “Quest”. This stage has a video projected onto the corner between two walls, and is a continuously looping movie about travel (Figure 7). The audio that accompanies this video is the most dominant in the game (installation) with musical tracks by the Boards of Canada\textsuperscript{32} layered with a Qawwali\textsuperscript{33} singer, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. The movie is split and mirrored then projected onto the corner of the two walls. This strategy promotes a rhythmic disappearing and reappearing of imagery like in Pipilotti Rist’s \textit{Sip My Ocean}. The repeating imagery and bilateral symmetry is further reflected in the mirrors at its base, which serve to enhance the scale of the video by projecting it onto the floor, encompassing more of the

\textsuperscript{32} A Scottish electronic music duo, credited with having a “warm, analogue style from the 1970s.” I chose their music to bring some semblance of order, harmony, and peace throughout a generically chaotic, discordant, and frenetic space. Again, there is a place for everything and everything in its place.

\textsuperscript{33} The devotional music of the Sufi, who enter into God’s presence by the use of circular means like repetitive mantras and ecstatic spinning. They are a mystical tradition within Islam.
installation space. The mirrors promote an investigation up close, which allows the viewer to break the projection and their shadows travel with the video. We all travel to achieve things, when there is a clear direction to move towards and when the mind needs information.

The next section, the “Wall of Trolls”, is devoted to the idea of gathering information. It is homage to Warhol’s Pop and street art and includes the stenciled stylized likenesses of me, the artist or creator, repeated ad nauseam (Figure 8). Warhol’s use of this technique was to promote visual apathy, in its unyielding, machine-like promulgation. The repetitive copies were chosen to express a full, yet boring, influx of data. A word, or term, is printed over each representation. In all regards, the words seem randomly assigned, but are linked by a code key that exists nearby and when solved reveal a paragraph that is relevant to the entire object, and purpose of the game. See Appendix B for the placement and resulting paragraph. Here we have the seemingly tedious aspect of information gathering, but within it, when effort is applied, meaning can be drawn from it. Again, there is a spilling of the wall onto the floor, the overabundance of the mural’s information leaking color and shape in the form of ink washes on cut Yupo paper.
Near the “Wall of Trolls”, as the mural slowly degrades away is a continuation of the painting/drawing as first seen at the entrance. Here, a painting of a nude woman, a kind of carrot for the cherubic me to reach for, is having a dialogue, in this case as writing on the walls (Figure 9). In actuality, she is speaking in response to the cherubic portrait of me from across the room, which has claimed “I See You!” She responds with “No you do not. You are a drawing.” And he responds simply, “Oh, yeah,” as if he just realized that he cannot see because he is two-dimensional and incapable of sight, or speech for that matter. This is another example of the awareness of the drawings in this journey, a humorous jab at the absurdity of their situation, stuck in a game as pictures. At the base of this corner is a large pile of magnetic tape from old videos, strewn about the game board (Figure 10). The magnetic tape is information in material form, accumulated and unorganized. It plays a role of unfocused yet concentrated ideas, gathered like cobwebs cluttering the space. The tape gathers about a projector. The video shown from this projector reveals a huge chomping human mouth across the game’s exit.

The next wall represents “Culmination”, which is expressed through intricate drawings, done in black and gray on a white banner to contrast
with the vibrant color of the previous stages. These images appear like floating and drifting microcosms, built from unknown evolutions of organic and inorganic material (Figure 11). It is here where information has culminated and incarnated itself for applicable purposes. It is also the area which I am concerned less about. The action of learning is far more intriguing to me than its application. Action is energetic and exciting, whereas matter, and this also means an applied idea, is static and realized. I see realization as a singular end to potentiality’s infinite possibilities. I know this is not entirely the case, because matter (even ideas) can continue to evolve. This wall seems less attended to than the others, with less fervor of creation, yet draws some participants due to its calmer and more ordered nature. Also evident is the playful, moving colored lights that dance across the banner, in contrast to the colorlessness of the wall, and as a means to signify the superfluous and “wild” that often plays upon our ordered systems.

The banner leads us to another draped curtain with front projection and an alchemical symbol for Mercury\textsuperscript{34}, recurring from the

\textsuperscript{34} Mercury is a loaded symbol. He is the Roman messenger of the gods, and represents the widest array of abilities than any other god, among them being trickery, magic, science, politics, travel, medicine, and stories. Adopted from the Greek Hermes, it also names our swiftest, hottest, and most contrary (because it is perceived at times to move in retrograde) planet in our solar system. The dualistic nature of the god, his balance between Mars and Venus, afforded him a special place in alchemy, as the fluid, metal Quicksilver which is an integral component in achieving the highly sought Philosopher’s Stone.
beginning of the game. Like the birthing beginning, this drapery is the “Final Destination” for forms and energies to degrade back into potential (Figure 12). The projection here is another video of colored fluids, but this time with slower pulsations, with accompanying noisy audio and layered gibberish. The quieter nature of this area contrasts with the more noisy and vibrant beginning, highlighting the natural entropy that occurs with time’s progress. But like sleep, which restores and rejuvenates the body from the rigors of waking and thought, which breathes new life and insight into the experiences of perception, this “death” leads to the all-consuming mouth which brings the participant back to the vestibule. The viewer/participant is symbolically consumed so as to come full circle, to step back into the “zero” space of the vestibule as they started. Here, it is the crossroads:\(^{35}\): a chance for the participant to make decisions, to continue on the cycle, or to leave. The participant can choose to enter the game again, with greater resolve and a curious desire to understand.

In mirroring that reentry, I will attend to the analysis of the inner clockwise section of the game board.

\(^{35}\) These were considered in the past locales bordering two realms, which represents liminality and the free congress of either side. It is interesting to note that Hermes (Mercury) also was god of borders and patron of those who traversed them. The crossroads are a space where change happens, a recurring theme in the installation: when one thing becomes another.
The inner section is mostly composed of detritus that mimics the web-like nature of a mental landscape (Figures 13 & 14). The brain, a vastly curious bit of meat, is capable of bestowing a mind to those life forms that are born with one. Interesting to note is the brain’s myriad of web-like structures, synaptic conduits, and pool of proteins, ions, and molecules that are responsible for memory, creativity, logic, emotion, and functionality. It is a complex piece of hardware that has unique software program that allows it to grow and adapt and even question itself.

Orange construction fencing is suspended to create elaborate mesh forms and obstacles for the participant. It, too, was projected upon and created cast shadows and the illusion of neuro-circuitry. Sprinkled masses of magnetic tape, mentioned previously, pepper the space and bar occasional progress forward. Great masses of tangled twine also are splayed and dangled to further complicate the overhead and shift the space away from that of a gallery. Scattered throughout the game are three dice, useful for the participant to sit upon and absorb the activity of the game in stillness. Also throughout and placed on the floor, are markers of direction, stylized colorful patterns to assist the flow of the participants, like indexical symbols (Figure 15). The most important area
in the inner section, though, is the cluster of televisions that face the “Wall of Trolls” (Figure 16).

The “Televisions” are another object of information gathering. Since they utilize light, which is an important aspect of all electric and mechanical communication (except Braille and speech), it makes sense to include these devices as another means to loop information to the participant in this light sensitive environment. Influenced by the art of Nam June Paik\textsuperscript{36}, the televisions become sculptural and lead the participant to find and face the transmitting screens. Two of the TVs transmit nothing but noise, akin to the space in general. There is a quote within the space, made by a cartoon on the facing wall mimicking Shakespeare’s \textit{Romeo and Juliet}: “But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It speaks, and yet says nothing.” This refers to the window screen of the TVs and its vacuous content. However, one television shows a looping video of a stop-motion animation of mutating forms. As written about on the wall of ST GE 3 (? - ION±), “There is a relationship between the televisions and the Wall of Trolls,” this one TV is important. In fact, the pattern on the TV is a continuous animation of a numerical system, which decodes the order of the words on the Wall of

\textsuperscript{36} Korean born American artist known for his pioneering work with video art, and large TV sculptures with looped playback.
Trolls. The numerical system, along with the code, can be reviewed in Appendix B. Only three participants have solved this puzzle that I know, by presenting the Game Master with the password that could earn them a reward which can promote learning (Figure 17).

The alternate name that I adopt in art making and for *Push Play* is Trollus Pentemegistus. Since the installation is modeled after my mind, an underlying facet of this journey is also a search for identity. The concept of the “True Name,” or ren in Egyptian, which is far different from the name we are arbitrarily bestowed with at birth, is believed to have special powers, and to those who are knowledgeable of this name can have power over the so-named person. The ren was a typographical representation of the totality of the person’s past, present, and future; not unlike the genomic code that we know about today. Trollus Pentemegistus is a derivation from the highly lauded figure within alchemy known as Hermes Trismegistus. A figure, credited with the writings of hundreds of manuscripts over many lifetimes and geographies, is thought to be the combination of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth, who shared similarities despite different cultures and pantheons. Literally translated as “thrice-great Hermes,” he was a key figure in shaping alchemical practice.
Hermes is an important figure, not only in alchemy, but in almost all the fields where revelation was involved... The quest for the truth in a breaking-down society (referring to the Middle Ages) gained an ever-greater urgency, while in general losing faith in unaided human efforts. Not only in matters of religion but in those of almost any field of inquiry, whether astrology, alchemy, physiology, botany, iatromathematics (medicine linked with astrology), or even rhetoric, the seeker turned despairingly to the spiritworld.

Hermes saw the totality of things. Having seen, he understood. Having understood, he had the power to reveal and show. And indeed what he knew, he wrote down. What he wrote, he mostly hid away, keeping silence rather than speaking out, so that every generation on coming into the world had to seek out these things (Lindsay 159-60).

At first, my adoption of this nomenclature was systematic, by adding the “thrice-great” word Trismegistus after my first name, Michael. Then my first name gave way to the Latinized corruption of my nickname Troll,

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37 Michael is Hebrew for the question “Who is like God?” and is the name of the highest archangel in Judeo-Christian belief. The phrase “Hoo is like Gahd?” appears on the wall in the second stage of Push Play.
into Trollus. Finally, in homage to Discordia, where the number five is revered and that I have an affiliation with, I altered the “thrice-great” to “five times great,” which became Pentemegistus. And thus, is the evolution of that which I am called for the purposes of my alchemical creations and of the game.

In addition to my sympathy with clever Hermes (Mercury), I have aligned myself with various other trickster deities from around the globe. From Loki (Norse), Eris (Greek), Set (Egyptian), Anansi (African), Puck (Celtic), Raven and Coyote (Native American), and even, in some aspects, Satan (Christian). I do so because I have an affinity for them, and I exhibit the qualities that they also possess. The qualities that all trickster deities and I possess are the following:

1) A fundamentally ambiguous or anomalous nature
2) A deceiver and trick player
3) A shapeshifter
4) A situation-inverter
5) A messenger and imitator of the gods
6) A sacred and lewd bricoleur (Hynes 34-42).

Tricksters serve a purpose, to keep everyone from becoming stagnant and complacent. Stirring things up, they can be seen as the great
motivators, like the court Jesters who would be the only ones that could critique and reveal the foibles of the King. There is also an interesting difference with Native American tricksters versus their European counterparts. In early American tribes, the tricksters were both heroes and villains, because they revealed a fullness of the complexity of life, open to the paradoxes that occur, and could be both wise and foolish. In an epigraph to comedian George Carlin’s *Napalm and Silly Putty* (2001), Byrd Gibbons, a professor of English at University of Arkansas at Little Rock, is quoted: “Many native traditions held clowns and tricksters as essential to any contact with the sacred. People could not pray until they had laughed, because laughter opens and frees from rigid preconception. Humans had to have tricksters within the most sacred ceremonies for fear that they forget the sacred comes through upset, reversal, surprise. The trickster in most native traditions is essential to creation, to birth".
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The title of my installation, *Push Play*, holds many contexts. The work is an experiment to involve the viewer in the state of play, to consciously be aware of playing, and treat learning as an ongoing, exciting act. I attempt to push the agenda of play onto others who may have forgotten, or undervalue, its importance. A play is also a theatrical act, involving others in a constructed realm to see how things develop, grow, and achieve an epiphany, in the form of catharsis or enlightenment. It is also a reference to the way I construct my art. I play, which defines how I create, and that brings purpose to my existence and I seek to instill that in my audience. But I am not always nurturing, for I tend to push the audience away, to make them earn their revelations. I see my work sometimes like a type of play that pushes, with its grating sounds, contrariness, disregard for design, discordant blends of the sacred and the lewd, or a touch of anarchy. I attempt to contain and compartmentalize these opposing forces within me and onto each individual work, to find a balance. *Push Play* became a chance for me to reconcile it all in a larger, exploratory space.
We are always absorbing copious amounts of information through our observations, our dialogues with others, our reflections, and our conscious and unconscious hallucinations. Unless one practices meditation to clear the mind, there is never a moment of pure stillness or void as our minds are always thinking. To empty one's mind is simply to reflect on the concept of nothingness, which, according to Descartes, is still a concept of the mind. “Cogito, ergo sum.”

So we exist and are constantly shaping ourselves through thought processes: understanding our identity, reality, purpose, and community, as well as constantly striving. We cannot stop the natural learning process in our everyday lives, though some people over time may refuse to add to their formidable knowledge-base that they have slowly and rigorously accumulated. To close one’s self off from the learning our world offers, is in my opinion to no longer be a part of life. As humans, we appreciate pleasure and avoid pain. There is always something more that we strive for, a pleasure that satisfies every aspect of our being. I think there are times when we should remain humble and be in awe of the world. We should not sit too long, however, but join in the splendor and be one with it. Play, I believe, is the answer. To lose our sense of play is to lose what it is like to be human.
We all play differently and we all learn differently. To analyze how we play and learn best, we must be always attending to the acquisition and application of knowledge. The game I have created is an infinitesimal portion of the ongoing quest for knowledge, fueled by various artistic, philosophical, and conceptual influences. The real game is that of life which occurs in the world’s arena outside the installation. To be consciously aware, to self-reference, to attend to the matters of the mind that are labyrinthine and elusive, the habits I hope to instill in the participants of *Push Play.*
Fig. 1. Game Master Troll’s throne and familiar
Fig. 2. Game instruction card
Fig. 3. “Birthing Station”
Fig. 4. First stage of the first mural
Fig. 5. Close-up of self-portrait
Fig. 6. Close-up of upraised head in second stage of mural
Fig. 7. Video projection about journeying
Fig. 8. Second mural of “The Wall of Trolls”
Fig. 9. Responder drawing
Fig. 10. Accumulation of magnetic tape and projector
Fig. 11. Large printed “Culmination” doodle
Fig. 12. Video projection of mouth on exit
Fig. 13. Inner “cerebral” detritus
Fig. 14. More inner “cerebral” detritus
Fig. 15. Indexical décor and a die
Fig. 16. Cluster of televisions
Fig. 17. The Game Master Troll barking an order
WORKS CITED


<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/jun/16/jamesjoyce-classics>


WORKS REVIEWED


APPENDIX A

Mural Ramblings

A listing of the various words or phrases that crept onto the starting wall of *Push Play*, for elucidation or confusion.

-Wants up on a thyme...
-Two much?
-Sit under the body three --The Buddha became enlightened by sitting under a Bodhi Tree. The body three could also be the Trinity.
-Hoo is like gahd? --The corrupted translation for the name Michael.
-May I land my kinky machine? --A quote from Jimi Hendrix’s ‘Third

Stone from the Sun’.
-U know watt U knead
-Testes your knowledge
-No thighself
-Pride B4 no fall --A derivation of Pride before the fall, but this time with no error.
-Think it ovaries
-Seek/sage
-Take fun guy

-½ faith in reason

-In dulge in one-der

-Eye am culpable of bean mercurial

-Novus Trollus Seclorum --“A New Troll for the Ages” The Seal on the dollar bill.

XLIX → L --Roman numeral for 49 to 50.

-By hook or by crook

-TROL --My tetragrammaton (Four Letter Name) instead of JHVH.

-But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It speaks, and yet says nothing.

-L.H.O.O.Q. --Duchamp’s joke. “She has a hot ass.”

-I \[(x^2+y^2-1)^3-x^2y^3= 0\] U --The equation is algebraic notation for a heart.

-Aurum nostrum non est aurum vulgi Latin for --“Our gold is not the common gold.” A reference to alchemy’s more noble pursuits.

-Terbium rods


-The fates lead him who will; him who won’t they drag.

-Attraction to all things uncertain
-We’ll ride the spiral to the end and may just go where no one’s been.

-Carne vale  “Farewell to the Flesh” Fat Tuesday, or carnival, as celebrated before 40 days of Lent.

-1) is fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous 2) deceiver and trick player 3) shape-shifter 4) situation-inverter 5) messenger and imitator of the gods 6) sacred and lewd bricoleur

-Isocyanic acid, polymethylenepolyphenylene ester, polymer with $\alpha$, $\alpha'$, $\alpha''$-1, 2, 3- propanetriyltris [ω-hydroxypoly oxy (methyl-1, 2- ethanediyl)]]

-Aye’ shelbi tat Aye’ shelbi  --An Arabesque name for “I shall be that I shall be”

-Self-improvement is masturbation. Now, self-destruction...

-“Hapax” legomenon is not a hapax legomenon, but “dis” is.

-Gozer the Traveler. He will come in one of the pre-chosen forms. During the rectification of the Vuldronaii, he came as a large and moving Torb! During the Third Reconciliation of the last of the Meketrex supplicants they chose a new form for him, that of a giant Sloar! Many Shugs and Zuuls knew what it was to be roasted in the depths of the Sloar that day, I can tell you!  --From Ghostbusters.

-We never actually touch  --Atoms don’t touch, their electrons are shared.
-(F)LUX --A name for my faux movement, Fuck Enlightenment! Lux is Latin for light.

-All infinities look the same

-“When I was in Mommy’s tummy, I was painting at a table.” –Zane Holmstead

--An interesting quote from a child in “My Kid Could Paint That.”

-There is a relationship between the TVs and the Wall of Trolls
APPENDIX B

The Wall of Trolls

Contemplation demands for to to Thoth you Lucifer the this spermatozoid order peace nothing cohesive must to versa (f)lux at time vice that chair hail you jester man.

For Tetragrammaton (Troll) don’t in coherent information cerebral the it coyote this Caca. Rest egg it now paradox being chaos god and and is is fnord all.

Do time Loki the at concept philosopher’s stone an Void sit Troll and.

Raven if Eris password thoughts breed convert die monkey remember feces accentuate Hermes.

And it’s deciphering.

Now, you must remember that all this information is for nothing if you don’t sit at rest and at peace to convert it all to cohesive and coherent thoughts.

This chaos demands an order to accentuate it, and vice versa.

The password for the man in the chair is paradox.

It can be decoded using the following duodecimal system ordination.