Hunger for the Hungry: Understanding and Benefitting the Global Hungry through Installation Art and Post-Digital Interactive Design

Doug Burnett

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HUNGER for the HUNGRY

Understanding and Benefitting the Global Hungry through Installation Art and Post-Digital Interactive Design

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Abstract

Hunger for the Hungry, by Doug Burnett

Remember when your dad used to tell you not to waste your vegetables because people in Africa were starving? And remember how you looked down at those mushy brussells sprouts and said, "Let them eat it then!" Well, you should. In fact, if everyone did, we would effectively end world hunger.

How can this story be told? Installation art has the potential to make a powerful, tangible impact on participants but on relatively few people. Interactive design can reach many but often with a shallow impact. What can be accomplished through a new fusion of these two media?

Installation art, with its physical space, ephemerality and participation, is a constant commentary on itself. Interactive design provides new means of increasing that introspection, creating an even greater effect on the participant. If space is merely perception assumed through the window of our view, can the screen, as a window within our window, translate real space to the fake—not as virtual space, but received as literal space? Can this translated space remain ephemeral despite digital immutability? Can new forms of participation be discovered through mixing installation art's acquired language of physical participation with interactive design's native-speaking status in that language—a merger of the under-participated with the over-participated?

Post-Digital ideology helps to answer these explorations. It is a point of convergence for installation art and interactive design, a philosophy and aesthetic that seeks to re-humanize the fake through embracing the real world as a digital material. It provides a common lexicon between the high arts and the presumed low arts.

This common language allows the artist to direct participants’ attention to the message, rather than the technological execution of that message. Roberta Smith warned of the superficial reactions that the "delusions of high-tech" in installation art can create. Too often, the tantalization of technology trumps reading a piece as art. But humanizing the materials and conventions allows the piece to return to its original reading. This includes the exploration of performance as a challenge to passive voyeurism, live video as a window to real and ephemeral space, and simultaneous inter-participation that is both web-based and gallery-based.

But creating web-based installation art presents significant challenges. Merely documenting installation art online cannot be sufficient. It must actually translate the entire experience of an installation to a digital format. However, this translation must still be received as art in order to create an experience that neither of the two mediums could accomplish on its own.
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HUNGER
for the
HUNGRY
Understanding and Benefitting
the Global Hungry through Installation Art
and Post-Digital Interactive Design

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences in candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

September 5, 2011

by Doug Burnett
Why feed a stray cat?

While reading a blog post about saving penguins, I decided to see what would happen if I made a random comment, "35,000 people die of starvation every day. I bet they need our help more than the penguins do." When I came back a few days later, there were dozens of responses and counter responses—people shouting in favor or contradiction to my comment. This kind of dialogue is interesting to me, because many inhibitions are removed when writing under the shroud of anonymity.

One comment that particularly stood out to me was the following:

"Um, stray cats anyone? You want to feed the stray cat but if you do they will be able to reproduce which means more starving kittens. So don't feed the stray and it dies which in return means less starving cats in the future which is a good thing."

Now, I don't pretend to think this comment is capable of speaking for the entire American society, but I find it an interesting look into how we feel different merely because we won the geographic lottery, where the only difference is, in our dependency, someone keeps giving.

This thesis seeks to span this geographic tide through the convergence of art as technology and technology as art in order to create something that can influence the way we understand and approach world hunger.

Installation Art & Interactive Design

Installation art and interactive design have the potential for a powerful symbiotic relationship that can benefit the world hunger discussion. Though each comes from a very different background, they can point in a very similar direction.

Installation art is a continual commentary on itself. It constantly redefines itself as a reaction to its nebulous categorization. It is a placeholder for art that uses space, time, and ephemerality as physically participatory materials. But what really is space? If the only thing that differentiates space is its boundaries, and if spatial perception is only measured through the window of our view, can space exist within the screen, which in itself is a window of our view that can display boundaries within?

And if high society’s traditional art has acquired the language of physical participation to create installation art, what can be gained from the aboriginal, native-speaking medium of interactive design? Or vise-versa?

Digital, by default, exists immutably. Digital shape forever holds its form. But in stark contrast, incessant change is written into the very cells and systems of the containing world around the digital. So is digital’s invitation to the dinner table of installation art negated by its ephemerality status? Or worse, does interactive design’s superficial and passive level of participation make it forever banished from the family of art altogether?

Post-Digital

Post-Digital ideology seeks to bridge this gap by coexisting in both the digital and the world. It is a rethinking of the fake (the digital) and mixing it with the real (the human), to create new forms that are both rigid and dynamic. This reformation is often created through the translations between the two worlds and can provide a common lexicon between the two. Post-Digital is a return of design to the human. For example, Stefan Sagmeister, a graphic designer, uses real world elements to build typography, a category of design almost wholly dominated today by the digital.

The convergence of installation art and interactive design on Post-Digital turf is new ground for both installation art and interactive design. New media are always rejected by media already in place. Photography and video both began as pop-cultured outcasts from art, but over time, their use became an insightful addition to artistic expression.

Digital interactivity has already begun to be included as an artistic medium. But what more can be done in this direction? Furthermore, what more can be done to take this experience to the web? Can challenging installation art to explore the web as literal artistic space have significant suggestions?
for its own potential? On the other side, can greater possibilities be suggested by challenging interactive design to further translate the real into the digital in both content and ideology, and to create an artistic experience by also treating web space as literal?

Why Art, Design & Hunger?
Who really cares whether or not installation art and interactive design have a canonized friendship?
The answer is probably, “hardly anyone,” unless that friendship can cause a greater good in the world.

Art has long been able to subtly but penetratively reach into participants’ hearts to create art activism. If the accepted friendship of installation art and interactive design can extend and strengthen that reach, then in a small way, greater good can come about in the world.

Installation art, by its unconventionality, scale, and physical participation, has a unique ability to be activist. Doris Salcedo is an inspirational example.

The way she uses quotidian objects, and the absence they suggest, is quite provocative. However, works such as hers are site specific and have large space requirements, making them inaccessible to the majority.

While photos can document the piece, they are unable to recreate the experience and thus dramatically reduce its impact. But what if interactive design could broaden installation art’s reach and additionally translate or even augment the participatory impact of the installation art into a screen-based format? But can anything be experienced artistically on the web? Probably not any less than a urinal can.

Walking in a distant desert far away from this conversation is world hunger. It’s a realm rarely addressed directly by traditional art, and is only sometimes addressed by interactive design but rarely from an artistic approach. Modern history seems to have delegated this responsibility to journalism, as in centuries past, and motion graphics and film the past in few decades. What caused this compartmentalization of issues? Is hunger too common or even cliché a cause to be approached by traditional art? Or is world hunger too distant from societies that produce traditional artists to instill in them a need to address the issue?

In a world of so much abundance and so many minds passionately seeking solutions, why does world hunger still exist? Human slavery, an issue just as old as hunger, has been overcome by the progression of humanity, while world hunger increases, not decreases. What is it about our views on hunger that allow us to give in small ways and ignore in others, or to feel comfortable with any kind of luxury while there is suffering in the world?

What does this all mean?
While the scope of these posed questions is far too expansive to be addressed in a single thesis, the main question which I address is: “How can challenging installation art through post-digital interactive design, create both physical and online artistic experiences that will cause people to challenge their views on world hunger?”

This question is translated into the following problem statement: Using the media of installation art and Post-Digital tangible interactive design as tools of art activism, I will create both a physical and an online experience which seeks to help participants challenge American views and behaviors toward world hunger and to recognize the ironies therein. By creating an installation art exhibit that subtly uses technology as a material to increase initial curiosity and overall impact, and by translating the exhibit into a web-based environment that not only documents the space but stands as a continuation of it, the thesis will seek to challenge the definition of installation art, challenge participants to artistically receive a web-experience, and challenge interactive design to use the real world as a means to a new form of interactivity.

And finally for me personally, as an American, as an interactive designer, as an activist, as an installation artist, what is my place in the fight against world hunger? In the pursuit of this self-discovery, I hope in some small way that good will be done and takeaways for installation art and interactive design will be realized.
1518 Chairs Stacked Between Two Buildings (2003), by Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, is a powerful example of activist installation art. She often creates works to discuss third-world issues.

Stefan Sagmeister challenges the line between design and activist installation art through the use of post-digital, real-world elements as design material.
What is space?

Installation art exists in an actual space. While a painting is about what is on a flat canvas, and the frame is an ornament to that canvas, installation art’s frame is, metaphorically, as important if not more important, than the canvas itself. Marcel Duchamp was one of the first artists to really push the use of space above and around a work. This broadened approach to defining art has played a vastly important role in shaping 20th century work and can be considered the genesis of installation art.

We cannot experience space except it be through the windowed view of our perception. We can only assume that the space always exists independent of our viewing it. How then does this differ from viewing the exact same experience through a window within a window, in other words, through a screen showing the space? One obvious answer is context. The participant, when looking through the screen, understands that he or she is not actually in the space. But is this enough to disqualify the space from existing to the participant in a web-based format? This will be a difficult question that the exploration of the thesis will attempt to answer.

Another aspect of space is boundary. The differentiator when selecting an installation art space is not the contents of the space but the boundaries that create the space. All literal space is just empty air boxed into different sizes. So do boundaries exist in digital?

Digital space is ever expanding with technological advancement. But installation art does not deal with space as a collective. It deals with a specific space. Digital space is compartmentable and thus does conceptually house a finite space; however, it is most likely necessary in this translation to suggest real boundaries from real world conventions.

Another challenge in creating space on the web is voyeurism. If participants do not experience the space with their real, observable presence within it, the actual space cannot exist. But if voyeurism is removed, a real space can begin to be defined. This can be done by allowing users to understand that their presence is manipulating the real world beyond their own screen. Their presence in the space should not only become existent to everyone else in the space, but also not anonymous. While it may sound pervasive in a web context, this is the way in which a real space functions. Everyone is acutely aware of other presences in the room, from what they are looking at, to where they are standing to even what they are wearing and how they smell. These real world expectations of awareness of others can be applied to make the digital space more real.

Attempts at anti-voyeurism are not unique to the web. Installation art, from its conception, has sought to use the participant as a piece within the art. Unlike a painting, an installation cannot be viewed anonymously by anyone anywhere, independent of the other viewers. The participant is experienced as part of the art when viewed by other participants. Furthermore, installation art has come to include the presence of human performers within a space. This adds a deeper level of anti-voyeurism as the participants actively know that the art is looking back at them.

Ann Hamilton masterfully uses anti-voyeurism as a means of humanizing her work. It creates an intriguing mixture of discomfort and curiosity. The participant directly shapes the piece, since the piece reacts to you. This same achievement can be created on the web as well. Performance art as a presence in the online space, can add a significantly more deep level of reality to online space perception.
What is participation?

The web is very comfortable with participation. But it is commonly superficial in that a site often requests users to click here and there with very little consequence. Users have been trained to quickly skim through site contents, find what they are looking for and move on. Time tolerance is significantly decreased on the web, even when viewing the same content from a more time-dedicated medium. As a result, online attention span is quite low. But this model is not tyrannical over all web interaction. Web-based exploratory interaction is much different. It is about discovery and exploration and is growingly common. It is layered so that the more a visitor explores, the greater the experience. One way to achieve this deeper participation is through an awareness of space—that users are truly participating with more than something digital.

Mekanism's NOLAF website showed just how powerful perceived human participation is on the web. While videos on the site were pre-recorded, they seemed very responsive to your every action, whether you acted or not. Another form of deeper participation is allowing users to permanently affect something, in a way that everyone can see. The Edding Wall of Fame is a powerful example of this. By giving users an infinite social drawing pad, participants began to not only create their own sketches, but to manipulate other sketches in a continual self-recontextualization.

But allowing participants this amount of control can be unsettling, both online as well as in installation art. It requires the artist to relinquish a certain amount of control over the piece in exchange for increased engagement. By doing so, the piece becomes more curious, instilling a greater element of discovery and exploration. It furthermore adds a level of ephemerality that makes a piece never the same twice.

This deeper form of participation is where interactive design can much more fully blossom into an art experience. Installation art is based on this deeper participation. Walter De Maria's Lightning Field is a good example of this. Participants must stay over-night in a cabin made for viewing the field in order to experience a beautiful array of lightning. Carl Andre's Magnesium Squares creates meaningful space simply by delineating it. Participants hesitantly step onto the art and feel a sense of specialness.

This draws one to ask if a new form of installation art can be created through merging this deeper form of interactive design simultaneously with the tangible participation created in installation art. The same piece could allow for communication between the real and the fake, which opens the door to many forms of artistic expression and message.
What is ephemerality?

Since both space and participation are crucial aspects of installation art, it is by default necessarily ephemeral. Site specific works are taken down. Time-specific events vanish once they are done. The combination of that space and that time—each sky in James Turrel’s *Sky Space*—will never exist again. And with the addition of participation in a space and time, an even deeper layer of ephemerality is revealed, because spaces can be molded and even recontextualized.

This ephemerality, however, becomes very complex when dealing with the digital realm. Every medium except the digital exists in a constantly changing state, from the micro to the macro. Every material on earth, whether perceived as organic or man-made, is in a constant state of decay. However immutable or rock-solid something may seem, it is constantly never the same. And when reproduction of a real world object occurs, that reproduction is always a unique alteration of the original.

It is only in the digital realm that something can remain the same constantly. A digital form at its basest level is forever the same code required to make it. Replication of that code always remains constant.

This code does not slowly change over time and is not subject to the elements. Though the code may be destroyed or lost, this is a result of the impact of the real world on the digital and not the digital itself changing. Digital, especially in regards to the web, is a constant attempt to give the exact same experience to every person everywhere—a perfect marketers world. As digital progresses, it is constantly moving upstream from its containing world’s entropy.

What this all means is that either digital form has to be created to intentionally change (although that change is still a simple constant), or digital must include the real world within it in order for ephemerality to exist. The latter is the more promising application and will be the main use of ephemerality when translating the real exhibit to the digital web-based exhibit. It should be noted, however, that the mere inclusion alone of the real world cannot ephemerize a piece. The real world, digitized as photograph, for example, will forever look that same way. Thus a more constant level of integration is required, likely through streamed video, which constantly can be updated to match real-world entropy. In other words, you have to make the experience as little digital as possible in order for it work.

*Mexico Via Pacífico* exemplifies this well. Each “page” of the site is a live video feed. Type on signs in the scene can be clicked. From weather, to wear, to passers by, to human intrusion, the site is constantly ephemeral, making every visit to the site a truly unique experience.

On a side note, since ephemerality is so important to installation art, relatively very few people are able to experience it. However, installation art has become comfortable with allowing photographs to preserve a piece. To the best of my knowledge, though, installation art has never been preserved to be re-experienced online. In doing so, this challenges the installation art community as to what ephemerality in installation art is. Can a representation of installation art that is experienced online be ephemeral, or can it still be considered an installation?

*Mexico Via Pacífico* (2010) is a bold attempt at creating ephemeral interactive design. Each page is a different live video feed of constructed real space. Type displayed in the poster can be clicked, bringing the participant to another live video feed.
From mind to meal

With these three considerations having been treated (space, participation and ephemerality), the actual form of the piece can be shaped. The execution of this type of installation must be very honest and simple in its functionality, both from a usability standpoint, and more importantly, from a messaging standpoint. If a viewer's most salient thought after experiencing a piece is, “I wonder how he did that,” the piece will have utterly failed. The entire purpose of communicating visually rather than textually is to create a stronger connection with the viewer. However, if the medium of visual communication overshadows the message, it would have been better for the text to have just stood alone. Brian Knep addresses this challenge in his interactive installation art pieces. While his works are fun to engage with, he uses the gallery setting and curious titles to encourage participants to look beyond the medium.

Another way to overcome this technological tantalization that interactive installation design constantly confronts is to focus on the human rather than the digital, which is what Post-Digital work attempts to achieve. Post-Digital design is reactionary to the clean-cut, generated popular digital design styles. It acknowledges that digital has become so ubiquitous and ingrained into our thoughts and behaviors that digital no longer become separated from the way we perceive the world—it becomes a new limb of our own body.

Thus, when a viewer experiences something digital, he or she experiences it by how closely his or her generation has reached reality. In opposition, actual reality is always perceived as reality and thus, cognitive analysis more easily passes the “how,” and travels to the meaning directly. In more practical terms, designing in Post-Digital is to replace computer generated objects with real objects.

Thus, by using Post-Digital design, with a simple and honest functionality, I hope to allow the message to trump the mode but in a way that impacts the participants more fully than the stand-alone message.

The end goal of the entire thesis is to change people's perspective on global hunger to a point that they not only contribute to its relief, but they seek to live a higher principle of understanding. By skipping a meal and donating its cost, the participant not only generates free money to donate to the poor but he or she develops an understanding of how consuming it is to suffer from hunger, even from just one meal.

While the installations and interactive spaces will lead to awareness of the idea of hungering for the hungry, it will not be an overwhelming or commercial-like brand upon the work. This is because the work, in addition to the message, can facilitate greater understanding and connection with the hungry throughout the world.

Primary Research

As qualitative research in helping me understand American views on hunger at an unbiased level, I posted comments on random blogs. My intent was to evoke a reaction. For example, as I mentioned before, on a blog about saving a community of penguins, I posted, “35,000 people die every day from starvation. I bet they need our help more than the penguins do.” The post received replies for weeks as people anonymously expressed opinions for or against the comment.

Another form of qualitative research I have been performing is a method to help me better understand hunger. On September 1, 2010, I began a plan to skip 100 meals over six months (concluding March 1, 2011). Without bending the intent by eating two-meals worth of food after skipping, I intend to come to better insights both as to how, in a very small way, the experience of true hunger feels. During this period I am keeping a frequent journal of my insights and reactions.

This summer I participated in primary research performed by TRU Research under the direction of Fleishman-Hillard Digital, the company for which I interned. I observed 18 focus groups on location and
via webcam in six different states. In addition to my own insights obtained from the qualitative research, TRU wrote up an extensive analysis.

I will also perform informal and formal testing with the following criteria: (1) technically (Do participants understand how it functions and where to go?)

(2) conceptually (Do they find meaning in the work, and does the meaning inspire them?) and

(3) practically (Do they intend to change anything in their life as a result?)

This can be measured both verbally and ethnographically. This primary research will be performed at each stage of the project.
thesis message:

“Ending world hunger is truly achievable. It could be as simple as all of us skipping one meal a month and donating its cost.”
Thinking about making Hunger

It is important to note that the actual execution of the thesis concepts are second to the thesis concepts themselves. This thesis is about discovery rather than product. The execution is a result more than a destination. That being said, the design will seek to embody the principles of installation art and Post-Digital concepts. Installation art has approached both post-modern clutter and modernist minimalism. So where each execution falls on that spectrum will depend on the subject matter and the message of the particular piece. There will be an emphasis on real world objects, like the flower in Close/Far, rather than digitally created designs. This will be true in both the online and the in-person exhibits. There is also a necessary aspect of ambiguity to allow participants to come to their own discoveries about the work.

In the physical exhibit, recontextualizing the objects into new spaces will encourage the viewer to read the art as art and begin to think about what the art means to them. Eloquent place-settings in a dirty, metropolitan back-ally, lone flowers growing out of a street sidewalk, a collection of tweets from starving kids in affluent areas of the world—these are the recontextualizations that will help viewer intrigue.

The use of technology must be subtle to avoid the focus on the medium rather than the message.

In the online exhibit, a significant effort will be required to create an experience that does not reflect a common website. Common websites are built on the idea that the web is made to give information as quickly as possible to an audience that has an ever decreasing attention span. Where the same person in real space may give more attention to something before determining its interest-value, he or she may likely have a much shorter attention limit on the web. So if the web-experience interface can leave the traditional web design structure, it may have a higher likelihood of being treated as the real world is experienced.

Proposed execution elements
The execution of these theories is best revealed in several manifestations of the idea, namely, three installations and three interactive pieces (see figure 1.1). Each subtly leads the participant to Hunger for the Hungry. Each piece also incorporates the empty plate as a connecting symbol between them.

Real-world space
1. Close/Far Internet-controlled begging flower
2. Fine China Solitary plate on sidewalk
3. Starving Real-time tweets about “starving”

Digital space
4. Empty Plate Facebook Connect motion graphics
5. HFTH Share your skipped meals experience
Target Audience

The primary target audience is native-born Americans who have grown up in American society. The age group's range is only hindered by a generation's willingness to interact with modern technologies. The work is also especially targeted to individuals willing to get involved in world hunger issues but lack the incentive. The work is also especially targeted at those who, through no fault of their own, feel different than the starving—they cannot see themselves as benefactors of their geographic inheritance.

While the setting for the physical space is downtown Chicago, the majority of the actual audience will be reached online. Those participating in Chicago will be representatives of the average American as they are displayed in the digital spaces.

Locations

The pieces will be embedded throughout different areas of downtown Chicago, similar to the way an art biennial is set up. Pieces one and two can be more of happenings, since it is expected that their existence will be brief and repeated. The third ideally will be in a downtown building which is open to the public. Four and five will exist in digital space on hungerforthehungry.org.

Hardware/Software

The technical development for the project will utilize Arduino circuit boards, with servo motors, other world manipulators, and sensors to react to the input they are receiving from the participant. The digital pieces will be created using Adobe Flash CS5 and will communicate with a database via Action Script 3, to PHP, to the Zend Framework, to MySQL, which will in turn, talk with a computer which will process the data with simple Processing code in the Arduino software, and send the information to the Arduino board.

Piece number one of the exhibit will use the computer's webcam to send a video feed from the flower and the reacting environment to Ustream, a live streaming video service, using the Ustream API.

Piece number three will use the Twitter API to search for tweets that use the word “starving.” Due to the ping-limits of the Twitter API, it will call for groups of tweets only a few times a minute and reveal those tweets through the entire minute.
Close/Far

A simple flower struggles through the cracks of a busy city sidewalk—but when a passerby walks past it, the flower begins to interact with him or her. Over time, the participant realizes that the flower is beckoning for him or her to give the flower a drink of water.

The plant is controlled by either randomly chosen visitors to a website, who most likely will be affluent participants experiencing the feeling of begging for the first time, or it may be a group of selected children in third world countries.
Fine China
Randomly placed plates will be positioned throughout the city as an extension of the installation. Like Close/Far, it highlights small, unnoticed spaces, especially since it is often occupied by the homeless. While the empty plate may initially suggest the lack of food for the global hungry, further exploration brings the viewer to see that the plate is of a quality that would be found in affluent homes. Thus it represents the ability to forgo a meal and donate its cost to fill a hungry plate.
Starving

What appears to be falling pieces of paper turns out to be real-time online conversations of affluent people casually using the word "starving," which happens at an average of four times a minute. Each piece of paper has the conversation printed with the ability to scan it with a phone and respond directly to the person who posted that conversation.
Plan for addressing new design aspects
A better understanding of the post-digital movement will improve the aesthetic and concept of my design. Since I am a relative novice in this area, I plan to do a three-credit independent study in Winter 2010 to allow me time to better understand this movement.

Plan for addressing new technical aspects
While I have experience in each of the technical aspects of this project, it will be necessary to delve deeper into real-time Zend server calls and responses, the Twitter API, printer hardware integration, two-axis servo motion, custom rotate, drag and drift functionalities, appropriate flower types, and packaging Arduino circuitry into a protected and compacted format.

Dissemination
The project will be disseminated via the installation art exhibit, open to the public in a public area. It is anticipated that the exhibit will be open for at least a week. The project may be re-displayed in other locations depending on how well the project is received.

The exhibit will be well documented with video and photography to allow me to submit the installation art to places like SIGGRAPH for consideration in the installation art category.

Once completed, I will submit this website to FWA, Dope, American Design Awards, Abduzeedo, Webby Awards, Comm Arts Interactive Awards, One Show, Picka Awards, Communicator Award, Design Licks Awards, Adobe Achievement Awards, How Design Promotion Merit Awards, and Interactive Media Awards.

Conferences and exhibits to visit
- PSi - New York installation art exhibit, MOMA
- Martha Jackson Gallery - Historically significant gallery for installation art
- Mass MOCA - Very large gallery for installation art in Massachusetts.
- Mattress Factory - Large gallery for installation art in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania
- Art Park Revisited - a gallery at the University of Buffalo of the influential works produced at Art Park in Lewiston New York

Evaluation Plan
In my evaluation, just like my primary research, I will sense the response to my work, (1) technically (do users understand how it function and where to go) (2) conceptually (do they find meaning in the work which inspires them) and (3) practically (do they intend to change anything in their life as a result). This can be measured both verbally and ethnographically. This primary research will be performed at each stage of the project's development. This analysis will be completely qualitative.

This verbal and ethnographic research will be performed on a continual basis as various pieces are in production and completion stages. I will use both subjects who are familiar with the project and those who are not.

Once feedback has been obtained, I will make changes accordingly as they are received. I also know that I must be willing to change or remove entire sections of work that I have been creating if testing proves it necessary.

Budget

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### Timeline

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**Digital Space**

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**Follow Up**

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### Credibility

I have spent a year studying in specific preparation for this thesis:

- **Thesis (Spring 2011):** 12 credits dedicated to research and execution of the thesis
- **Thinking About Making (Winter 2011):** project-based art seminar for personal project concepts
- **Independent Study (Winter 2011):** post-digital design
- **Thesis Planning (Fall 2010):** prepared proposal and design and project concepts for thesis
- **Installation Art (Fall 2010):** history and practice of installation art
- **Advanced Computer Graphics (Fall 2010):** studio course for coding and designing interactive experiences, especially with database interaction
- **Public Speaking (Fall 2010):** researched topic of hunger for several speeches and delivered them in public settings as a preparation for any speaking I may need to do for the thesis
- **Art & Activism (Spring 2010):** history, case study, and critical thinking about using art as a tool for making public change for good. Wrote a 15 page paper about why art has not done more in the realm of world hunger
- **Tangible Media (Spring 2010):** studio course for building, coding, and designing physical interactive art using Arduino

Over the past year I have created (or am currently creating) the following projects which have prepared me for my thesis:

- **CRCachi (Fall 2010):** a post-digital design experiment which uses photography of clay as characters and settings. The environment uses a database (ASS, PHP, Zend, MySQL) to allow visitors to communicate with other people acting as other characters in the scene.
- **Installation Art Concept (Fall 2010):** a detailed concept and proposal of using a physical space to build a piece of art
- **CGD Display Wall Exhibit (Spring 2010):** an interactive screen that allows the viewer to swipe his or her hand in either direction to be able to select a video to watch
- **Competent Universe installation (Fall 2009):** an interactive installation that used a camera-projector set up to engage people to step in certain physical locations to activate different pieces of the screen. When all pieces were activated, the message appeared.
- **Various AIR applications:** I have created several AIR applications which run as independent applications.

The following experiences have helped prepare me conceptually to address the issue of hunger:

- **Lived in Uruguay for two years as a missionary for my church.** I spent every day with the poor, visiting them in their homes and talking with them on the streets. At least in terms of poverty in that country. I became very aware of the hardships and lifestyles of the poor and hungry, and the tragedy of not being able to help them with all of their physical needs.
- **Experiencing hunger:** since I was eight years old, I have participated with lasting in my church, where once a month I have fasted for 24 hours and donated the difference to the poor. From an early age, I feel like this has shaped my view of hunger. As mentioned in my primary research, I also am currently skipping 100 meals over the next six months to be able to better understand hunger.
- **This summer, in my internship, I worked with a client who had a significant amount of money that they wanted to put toward helping American teenagers fight world hunger.** I spent more than 100 hours performing primary and secondary research to both create concepts and designs.
- **In Oct 2010 I gave an informative speech on the RIT campus about American views on world hunger.**
- **In February and March 2010, I created a one-minute 3D animation to help aid the cause in Haiti which was shown on the Current TV website.**
Close/Far in real space

The logistics of getting a real flower to move organically proved to be difficult, but finding the right place turned out to be even harder. The space had to be public yet secure, it couldn't suggest the space sponsor was shirking in its duty to the poor, and of course it needed a place where it would be noticed.

While the Leo Burnett Building was not an ideal space for this, it was a very good first start, and I am grateful to them for offering the space. As anticipated, the flower did get people's attention, and to my delight, people not only asked how it worked but what it meant.

I had to try several different flowers before I came upon one that had the right flexible/rigid ratio in its stem.
Making Hunger

After more than a year of thinking, it became time to begin the execution of the theories and ideas. There were many logistical roadblocks that I incurred as I began to do so but the overall intent and purpose was, in the end, reached.

This chapter will be mostly visual. The installation art visuals are shown in the following order:

- *Close/Far* in real space
- *Close/Far* in digital space
- How to make close far and far close
- *Fine China*
- *Starving*

The rest of the visuals will be taken from the Hunger For the Hungry website

- Intro video: don't waste your brussels sprouts
- Helvetica in Monterrey Jack Cheese
- Intro video: send your brussels sprouts
- Intro video: putting you in the picture
- Empty your plates to fill plates
- A bowl of billions
- The fruits of UN labors
- Is the glass 99.8% empty or .2% full?
- Do the math
- Actually it really is butter
- Documenting and recontextualizing
Close/Far in digital space

I was able to produce all the elements of the experience that I was hoping for. And while the project’s ephemeral nature made it more art-worthy, it also detracted from my ability to understand the full results of the effort. Costs in maintaining a quick-response live video feed and having a public space to keep the flower proved too difficult for the project’s timeline. Further options will be pursued down the road.
How to make close far and far close

The Arduino circuit board that powered the device proved to be mostly reliable. There were times when I need to uproot the device and manually adjust it or restart it. However, I am very satisfied with how I engineered the device, itself. Servo motors are connected to the input pins, which allowed them to be controlled from Flash through the Arduino Glue Framework. There was one significant failure of the device, however. It functioned very well the first week, but after remaining moist in the dirt, the circuitry began to falter, and in the end, the device would not turn and bend the flower anymore.
Fine China

Probably the most satisfying part of doing Fine China was to be in a public space, knowing I was doing something very strange, and feeling a rush of creativity that comes from knowing that you seem odd. The chinaware was purchased at a local thrift store. The piece garnered many looks from passersby, but suspicion was greater than curiosity, and the piece remained mostly un inspected.

There was one homeless man that asked if I was going to keep the chinaware and another store employee who called his manager.

I feel very satisfied with the overall feel of the piece. The stark contrast of fine dishes and silverware put in places where I find homeless people begging or sleeping every day was, to me at least, a very significant message.
Starvation

This piece was also on display at the Leo Burnett Building in Chicago. I built the Twitter feeder in Flash and had it automatically print every time a new tweet was displayed. I also had to be careful not to reach the ping limit for the Twitter API, so I had to group tweet searches and display them one at a time.

The obvious struggle in this space is to avoid looking like an office mess rather than a piece of art.
**Intro video: Don't waste your brussels sprouts**

The site opens with a number counting up to what appears to be the site-loaded percentage but is actually the number of people who have starved thus far today.

The tone of the intro video is intended to be playful and engaging and is centered around the idea of your dad telling you to eat because people in Africa are starving. It uses the mentioned place-setting metaphor as the environment to tell the story. Some type is treated digitally; others are treated post-digitally.
remember when your dad used to tell you not to WASTE

because people in AFRICA were

let them EAT it
Helvetica in Monterrey Jack Cheese

If all type was created digitally only, I felt it was missing an opportunity to not only integrate into the place-setting metaphor more fully, but to highlight significant messages.

The type was made by taking a large block of Monterrey Jack Cheese (chosen for its texture, moldability, and flake) and cutting it into 26 cubes about 3 cm squared. Then using a knife, I cut out the counter spaces for each letter individually while looking at a display of Helvetica Condensed Bold. After making the major cuts, I went back with a very fine razor blade and smoothed out edges and cleaned up the letter forms.

Then I took each letter and it carefully placed it under studio lighting. It took about ten iterations of shooting and manipulating in Photoshop before I got the look and feel I was going for. Each picture was imported into Photoshop and manually cut out and shadowed to ground the letter form.

I built the typeface functionality in Flash by assigning an image to each typed letter and, by experimentation, manually adjusting the kerning for each individual letter.

This same process was repeated with hotdogs to create the numbers.
Intro video: send your brussels sprouts
Using the new typeface for a bold impact, I highlighted the main numbers involved in the hunger equation, namely that there are one billion people suffering from hunger, and that we spend twenty times more on losing weight than on feeding the hungry. The juxtaposition of these two numbers not only suggested that we are grossly unaware of food need in the world, but that it would be so simple to remedy — since eating less means needing to lose less weight, and since a modest transfer of funds from one to the other would mean doubling and tripling our efforts to feed the hungry.
what if you skipped a meal and DONATED its cost to fight global

not only would it cost you NOTHING

but if everyone in the 1st world skipped ONE MEAL a month and donated it

so what

END WORLD charity
Intro video: putting you into the picture

One of the biggest problems with global hunger is that geography mentally separates the haves from the have-nots. We are less able to project ourselves into the situation of those in need. Thus metaphorically, I wanted the video to unexpectedly include the viewer into the equation. When users connect with Facebook to begin the video, Flash pulls their name and profile pic into motion tracking meta data embedded in the video from After Effects. The same is done for the user's location, although this is done through detecting the browser's location.
Empty your plate to fill plates

The site needed a community feeling in order for the site to feel more like a movement. So there is a section for people to see and enter their own "empty plates," the representation of skipped meals. As you add more skipped meals through the site, you move into higher categories of donors. Rolling over each plate allows you to see the person (written with the cheese type), the number of meals donated, and the representative cost of those meals donated. When you login, you can literally drag your brussels sprout over to donate it to a charity.
They found it would take $200 BILLION each year to end hunger.

In 2003 the United Nations held a summit with 25 first world countries to find the true cost of ending world hunger.
How can skipping meals END WORLD HUNGER?

A bowl of not enough billions

The intro video made a bold statement that if the first world skipped one meal a month and donated it, we would have enough money to end world hunger. I needed a section of the site to engage and substantiate that fact. The user flow is purposely unique and playful while trying to keep it very intuitive by matching real-world conventions of interactivity such as picking something up and putting it down. This first part explains how the UN found it would take many more billions of dollars a year to end world hunger.
The fruits of UN Labors

Despite specific UN plans, there has been little increase in global food funds. Fruit was a beautiful and fun way to set this idea up. It's almost as if it were the fancy bowl of fruit eaten at UN tables while countries promised with crossed-fingers to uphold their agreements.

The fruit was set and shot in a lighted studio at 66 angles to allow the user to drag it around.
ars later, only six
ies have succeeded.
countries may
ay reach the goal.
countries have never
ade a plan.
ated with the
0s give the least

Each country agreed
to end world hunger
by donating
of its GDP.

United States
Population: 311,485,000
GDP: $14,119,000,000,000
Goal: No schedule yet
Is the glass 99.8% empty, .2% full?
The problem with the UN agreement was that the wealthiest countries were unable and unwilling to hold up their part of the bargain, especially the United States. This is an important part of the story, because it shows how small of a change each country would need to make in order to end world hunger.
If everyone in those same countries skipped... we would raise enough money to end world hunger.

We will raise $100 BILLION and effectively end world hunger.
and simply donated its cost to any charity...

Do the math

If each citizen of those same countries skipped three meals a month and donated its cost, it would be equivalent to each country reaching the 7% quota. It's intended that the act of interacting with the numbers helps not only better remember them, but to feel you are a part of them.
Actually it really is butter

Butter is an icon of over-consumption, especially when shown in large melting chunks. It also proved to be a very fun medium to play with to reverse-build a simple graph.

I glued numbers to toothpicks and placed them at varying heights in a full stick of butter. Then I stood that butter on its end, placed it in a lighted studio and put it in front of a time lapse camera. The idea was to hold a hair dryer over the butter to allow it to quickly melt. It proved to be quite difficult. I had to start over four times, as the butter became untenable too quickly and toppled over. This is why the finished result is in a pyramid shape.

The whole process, including the compositing, took about fifteen hours, but I was very happy with the result.
Documenting and recontextualizing

Lastly, the site needed a section to display the three installation art pieces. For Fine China and Starving, this was merely a process of documenting them with photographs. For Close/Far, the goal was to recontextualize this live installation to simultaneously change its meaning depending on the location and setting it was viewed from.
HUNGER?

Each year to end hunger
CONTINUE

Of its GDP to end world hunger.
CONTINUE

If everyone...
- Drag the threes onto the calendar

Drag the plates

World hunger.

HOME
Testing

One of the paradoxes of Post-Digital design is that what’s familiar in the real is foreign in the fake. While Post-Digital brings the user experience in more alignment with real-world conventions, a place where we are all very familiar, those conventions are unexpected in the digital world. Thus the conventions are not as intuitive as it may seem.

Testing showed that actions like picking something up and putting it elsewhere, grabbing something to turn it, or pulling something to move it, all were difficult for users to understand.

While testing was performed informally throughout the entire design process, the website was put through an official testing phase in order to better understand exactly what was misunderstood.

After testing the site interaction on many different users, I found that while the interactivity was engaging, there were two persistent issues I needed to clarify in the interface:

1. Which objects were interactive
2. Where to click to engage that interactive object

Clarifying object interactivity

There were several places where it was necessary to clarify with text what to do with an object. While this made the UI was less discoverable, it became much clearer what users needed to do. In every retest thereafter users followed the desired site flow with much more accuracy. The following copy was added to the site:

- (1) Donation page, added "Drag to donate"
- (2) End Hunger fruit, added "Click and drag fruit plate to the left"

Clarifying where to click

In order to draw the eye to interactive elements, I added animating arrows, a more consistent design and repetition to the brown continue buttons. The main issue users were struggling with was the progression through the End Hunger? section. Originally, the dots along the bottom were buttons to click through each section. Even after adding animation to those buttons, users still did not understand how to use them. So I added consistent continue buttons instead, making them only appear when users should continue. Further testing proved that doing so greatly improved understanding of how the interactivity works. I made the following changes:

- (1) Donation page, added animated arrow
- (2, 3) End Hunger fruit, added animated arrow and brown continue button
- (4) End Hunger 7%, added brown continue button
- (5) End Hunger calendar plate, added animated arrow
- (6) End Hunger calendar plates, added animated arrow
- (7) End Hunger butter, added animated arrow
- (8) End Hunger final, added brown home button
Conclusion

My original purpose of this thesis was to understand how challenging installation art through post-digital interactive design can create both physical and online artistic experiences that cause people to challenge their views on world hunger. While there is much more that would need to be done in order to fully answer this question, there were some discoveries that have been meaningful to me personally.

How was installation art challenged?
First of all, how did post-digital interactive design challenge installation art? This basically comes down to whether or not perceived space was created digitally. If it did, then it means an entire new realm of space can be opened up to the medium. It means space not only exists on a plane, nor only in the three-dimensional environment surrounding the work, but in the inter-spaces present everywhere simultaneously. Anyone on earth, in addition to accessing the installation, can contribute to its meaning by participating with it. It also adds new thoughts on site specificity, because the location which a participant views the work from recontextualizes the installation. In Close/Far, if a child living in a corrugated metal house goes to an internet cafe in Uruguay and controls the flower, it is a different but equally meaningful piece of work than if an affluent participant does the same.

I have noticed a phenomenon when watching something on a screen and especially watching younger generations watch something on a screen. No matter the screen size or the context of the screen, the engaged viewer temporarily forgets he or she is in a living room and joins the environment within the screen. This, to me, is digital space.

In Close/Far, the main piece of this thesis, I saw this happen in part. Participants onsite and online were able to interact with each other through the flower. While participants may not have completely left their own space mentally, viewers online clearly understood they were affecting a real space and participating with real responses.

Another part of Close/Far I was pleased with was how the real space could not exist as an artwork without the online space. There was a moment of discovery when both the onsite and the online participants realized the flower was not moving on its own but by and in reaction to them. I also feel satisfied with how each digital installation, Close/Far, and Starving, remained ephemeral despite them being on the screen.

In the end, I personally feel like digital space was created and that significant new ways to approach installation art have been explored.

But is it art?
The second question to ask is, "did I create art?" A big part of this question is whether or not I caused participants to ask themselves questions beyond, "how was this made." I have to be honest that I did get lots of those kinds of questions. People wanted to know how the flower was moving or how something worked on the website.

One of the reasons for this problem was that I never found a space I was really happy with for Close/Far. I hadn't realized just how difficult this would be to find. Ideally, a gallery space would have been the best venue. It would have given people the context to begin to read the piece as art. But as Brian Knepp discovered in his interactive works, even when placing works in a gallery—it can still be a struggle to get participants past having fun with the piece. And perhaps this is something I should become comfortable with. There is nothing wrong with "art as fun." It can be a good entry into engaging people with a work. And no matter what you do, some people will never get it. But that is part of what makes it art, rather than advertising—the message is intended to require you to work for it rather than a message that is created to be immediately understood by all.
*Fine China* was satisfying because of its simplicity. It was easy to read. However, the venue, in the city streets, made it less likely for people to engage with, because they feared it could be something dangerous. But it was thrilling to have people look at me as if I were crazy while I installed the piece.

*Starving* also was a more simple piece to read. It was wonderful to see people engaging with the piece by picking up the different printed slips of paper and seeing what was on them. And it was enjoyable to watch people timidly do so at first, not knowing if it, as art, should be touched.

All in all, I think the answer to this question is that if these pieces were in the right setting, they would truly be art.

**Views on world hunger**

Lastly, it is important to ask, "did the work cause people to change their views on world hunger?" In preparation for this thesis, I took a public speaking class where I gave a few speeches about world hunger. The greatest thing I learned from it was just how much people stop listening once they realize the topic is world hunger. It is such a saturated topic, yet it feels so overwhelming.

I can tell that my work struggled with this as well. What excites me, though, is that people seemed much more willing to engage with the topic as art, rather than with words. Perhaps this is because, like I said in chapter one, world hunger is a topic less often addressed directly in art. Perhaps, also, it is the fun factor I mentioned.

The website was the only piece that directly dealt with teaching fact and donating. I am very happy with the way I told the story in the video and the interaction of how skipping meals and donating the cost of those meals can make such a big difference. But while the art pieces intentionally didn’t direct people in one particular direction, I do feel that they caused people to rethink a little about how they use the word "starving", how distant they feel third-world hunger is, or understand how iconic our views on world hunger are.

Looking back, I obviously have not made any kind of significant change in our country’s views on world hunger. I’m not sure I’ve even significantly improved one person’s view on world hunger, other than my own. But I do know that this kind of work is worth pursuing and fighting for.

Mary Harris Jones is credited with saying that our purpose in life is to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted.” It’s my hope that after more than a thousand of hours of labor through this project, through this own personal affliction, some small comfort may be brought to someone in the world.

But when it comes down to it, in the end, it is up to us to decide whose empty plate it is.
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Review of Literature

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A case studied approach to art as activism; efforts include ACT UP, Guerilla Girls, Gran Fury, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Liz Lemon, and Suzanne Lacy. Critical analysis of each studied case and the reaction of society to it.

Thinking Outside the Box
“Creative Proactivity: Thinking Outside the Box,”
Studio Potter; Blackwell Publishers, 2009
Using innovative and post digital approaches to reaching an audience through art. The article highlights an artist’s use of art activism to fight hunger. Ruth McKinney Burket uses ceramics with real finger prints from children in Africa to increase artistic effect. Likewise as artists we all can do similar art activist work.

From Margin To Center
Reis, Julie H.; From Margin To Center;
MIT Press, 2001
A concise and inspirational history and theory of installation art, including artists such as Allan Kaprow, Dan Flavin, Claus Oldenburg, and Jim Dine. The author covers the salient works that shaped installation art.

Act/React: Interactive Installation Art
Act/React: Interactive Installation Art (DVD);
A review of the interactive digital exhibit at the Milwaukee Art Museum. Artists include Janet Cardiff, Brian Kneip, Liz Phillips, Daniel Rozin, Scott Snibbe, and Camille Utterback. A useful series of examples of using technology and digital in a museum setting accepted by the general traditional art community.

Essays on Act/React
Fifield, George; Donath, Judith; Act/React: Interactive Installation Art; Milwaukee Art Museum, Aspect, 2008.
Commentary on the role of technology in installation art from a historical and theoretical standpoint. The authors bring up very important insights about how art has treated technology in the past as a lens with which to look at technology of the present.

Hunger: A Modern History
Vernon, James; Hunger: A Modern History;
The author presents the process that has brought us to the current situation in world hunger, especially from a historical point of view. Our view of hunger today is only an invention of the last 150 years. Before that time, there was no commonly held humanitarian belief, especially toward the hungry.

World Hunger: 12 Myths
Lappe, Frances Moore; Collins, Joseph; Rosset, Peter; Esparza, Luis; World Hunger: 12 Myths; Grove Press, 1998.
An extensive treatment of twelve myths about world hunger, citing scholarly sources and statistics. Many misconceptions surround hunger including the belief that there isn’t enough food to go around, just more money is the answer, free trade is the solution, and that feeding the hungry only creates more reproduction of hungry people.
Challenges of Feeding the World
Global report on the challenges with helping the one out of every seven people on earth who are hungry, which is no different than the situation the world found itself in 30 years ago, despite great advancements in the Green Revolution.

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White Man's Burden
Easterly, William, The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good; Penguin Group Inc., Feb 27, 2007.
An informed and excoriating attack on the tragic waste, futility, and hubris of the West's efforts to date to improve the lot of the so-called developing world, with constructive suggestions on how to move forward.

American Views on World Hunger
Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger
Statistical results and analysis of an extensive 2001 survey of U.S. citizens on their views about foreign aid, especially how it pertains to government appropriation. The most salient findings include Americans believe that (1) we think we give more than we do and that is too much, (2) we do more than our share of contributions in the world (3) and a significant amount of our welfare spending goes toward the poor. All three of these beliefs are actually false, which makes the findings an affective source for understanding ironies in American views on world hunger.

Trends in American Giving
Report on the percentage of income donated to charitable organizations as reported in US tax forms.

Obesity High Among Baltimore's Homeless
Study surveying homeless in the Baltimore area, finding a trend of changing food habits from undernourishment to obesity. The study cites high caloric, low nutritional-valued cheap foods as the cause of the change. The study suggests a very different world of poverty within the United States.

REPORT: Teen Views on Fighting World Hunger
National focus group survey where teens about fighting world hunger. Salient findings include seeing a redefinition of the word "hunger" to be a more quotidian common experience between meals, rather than a real lack of food. I personally was able to observe the focus groups, spending 20 hours watching on location and online.
Afflict the comforted and comfort the afflicted.

It's a simple idea—skip a meal, donate its cost. It's not a charity or a foundation. It's a principle to live by, an empty plate. How can a new fusion of interactive design and installation art empower this message?