

Reasonable And Senseless: A Technical Disaster

Donna Szoke, Michael Alstad, KD Thornton

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Digital art has its roots not so much in academies of art as in military defense systems.

Michael Rush, *New Media in Late 20th Century Art*.
Thames & Hudson; NY. 1999. p. 171.

Of course the Hindenburg exploded. How could it have done otherwise? With that much hydrogen, static electricity, idealism, promise, and live coverage, what else could have happened?



Video still from *reasonable & senseless* by Donna Szoke. Image source "Hindenburg Explodes" Castle and Pathe footage. 1937. Courtesy of Prelinger Archives.

The technical disaster is perfect in hindsight. The 20/20 vision of the historical process lays it bare and obvious: Desire, foolish hope and misplaced facts culminate. The technical disaster is perfect in its absolute inversion of its idealized, capital projection: Three Mile Island; Love Canal; Thalidomide; D.E.S.; Chernobyl; Bhopal. Even beyond the material plane, our North American cultural imaginary is rife with imagined carnivals of slaughter that the entertainment engines of suspense/horror/action films pump out: Hal of 2001; Alien's profoundly corrupt maternity; the Terminator's terrible paternity. In each instance what is most jarring is humanity's ability to be obviously naive and fatally unaware of the seeds of disaster that culture midwives into fruition.

The technical disaster is commonly called an "accident". In hindsight the outcome is less accidental, and more often a logical conclusion to a series of steps. Our human fallibility and our lack of foresight turn it into an almost magical event, as if a rational, eternal system has suddenly lurched out of control. Yet a series of instances occurs and the disaster is just the next logical step to a series of actions. And we rub our eyes, blinking in wonder at the churning mouth of an unfolding catastrophe. And then we watch it in replay. Media is the perfect cohort to technical disaster, locked in an eternal loop of Echo and Narcissus. Buddhist artists make art to create Karma, to unleash positive forces into the world—it assists healing, elides war, and makes new perspectives possible. Unlike the dark vision of the media which normalizes the horrific, makes slaughter banal, and militarizes our collective, cultural imaginary. It is the opposite of prayer, dispersing intent into calamity. Angels, bodhisattvas and other entities observe as humanity seesaws along in its oblivion, canonizing its half-baked ideas.



Video still from *reasonable & senseless* by Donna Szoke. Image source "Duck and Cover" Archer Productions Inc. 1951. Courtesy of Prelinger Archives.

The notion of contemporary, critical electronic arts and a reckoning with the technical disaster has been fueling a discussion amongst a handful of Canadian artists on both eastern and western seaboard. In this context we have been remotely discussing the role of the artist as watchdog, soothsayer, prophet or recalcitrant gravedigger. Collectively a desire to present work together has emerged, a work that is a sum of parts—while some works are individual, some inform each other. Consistently our dialogue centres upon digital media, its role in presenting an alteriority to mainstream media and its twin motives of seduction and terror. To these ends we propose a stew of pharmacological disaster, ecological mayhem, geopolitical despair, and a fool's hope.

Donna Szoke



Installation image *Milk*, by K.D. Thornton. 2004



Image courtesy RADARSAT International. RADARSAT-1 data © Canadian Space Agency/Agence spatiale canadienne 2003. Received by the Canada Centre for Remote Sensing. Processed and distributed by RADARSAT International..

Michael Alstad

The following is background information for the work of Michael Alstad. His proposal will look at the effects of global warming on the polar ice cap.

Source for the following text: <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov>

Natural Hazards

Earth scientists around the world use NASA satellite imagery to better understand the causes and effects of natural hazards. The goal in sharing these images is to help people visualize where and when natural hazards occur, and to help mitigate their effects

Ward Hunt Ice Shelf

The Arctic's largest ice shelf is breaking up. The Ward Hunt Ice Shelf is a remnant of the compacted snow and ancient sea ice that extended along the northern shores of Ellesmere Island in Northern Canada until the early twentieth century. Rising temperatures have reduced the original shelf into a number of smaller shelves, the largest of which was the Ward Hunt Ice Shelf on the northwest fringe of the island.

The Ward Hunt Ice Shelf encompasses Ward Hunt Island and covers the mouth of the Disraeli Fiord. Until recently, fresh melt water formed a 43-meter deep lake on top of almost 400 meters of seawater in the fiord. Called an epishelf lake, the relatively fresh water dammed by the 3000-year-old ice shelf became the basis of a rare ecosystem. Disraeli Fiord was the largest remaining epishelf lake in the Northern Hemisphere.

Between 2000 and 2002, the Ward Hunt Ice Shelf began to crack and eventually broke in two, allowing the lake behind it to drain rapidly into the Arctic Ocean. Derek Mueller and Warwick Vincent, of the Centre d'études nordiques at Université Laval in Quebec, Canada and Martin Jeffries of the Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in Fairbanks, Alaska described the event in a paper published in *Geophysical Research Letters* on October 18, 2003.

This Standard Beam Mode RADARSAT-1 image clearly shows a large crack dividing the ice shelf in half. The crack runs from the Arctic Sea to the right of Ward Hunt Island and the bright white ice grounded there and back to the rougher, mountainous region. The image, acquired September 27, 2003, has a resolution of 25 meters.