



INSTALLATION PROGRAM

Developed for
20th Annual Convention of the Media Ecology Association
Myhal Centre for Engineering Innovation and Entrepreneurship
The University of Toronto
2019

INTRODUCTION

*From the essay "Hot and Cool in the Media(S)cene"
by Julia M. Hildebrand and Barry Vacker*

Winners of the 2019 John Culkin Award for Outstanding Praxis in the Field of Media Ecology

Anthropocene—Mediacene.

Layers of fossils—Layers of media technology.

Ways of living—Ways of seeing.

If we are in the Anthropocene, then how can we not be in the Mediacene? If technological civilization has transformed the **eco**-systems on its host planet, Earth, then how can mediated civilization have not transformed the **ego**-systems in its host species, human consciousness? If we have extended visual technologies into the tiniest particles, into our bodies, around the planet, and into deep space, then how can our visions have not been transformed?

Mediacene. Mediaseen. **Media(S)cene**.

We do not mean "Mediacene" in a strict scientific sense. Rather, we mean it as a techno-philosophical concept related to how media technologies make us **see**, and in turn, how we can **see** them. Hence, the playful term "Media(S)cene." The goal is to creatively combine theory and art. Rather than explain, the goal is to explore, expand, explode.

With the Media(S)cene, we present an imaginative probe into our contemporary media environment. It's like McLuhan's approach upgraded for the 21st century—"McLuhan 21.0."

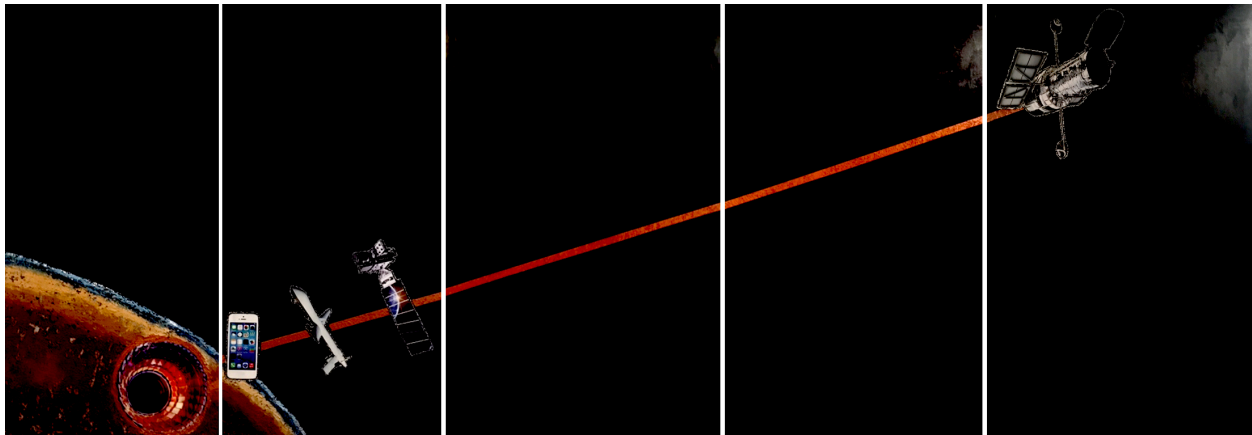
Place your phone camera over
the QR code to access
the award-winning essay



*Conceived and designed by Barry Vacker and Julia M. Hildebrand, this installation includes the **first six works** of Media(S)cene, developed for the atrium space available in the Myhal Centre for Engineering Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Media(S)cene is an ongoing project mixing art, images, and media theory to shape a new visual ecology for the 21st century.*

*Also included are **five additional artistic contributions** (graphic art, music, and video) that offer creative interpretations of the essay "Hot and Cool in the Media(S)cene."*

Special thanks to Paolo Granata and the Media Ecology Association for the gracious invitation to introduce the Media(S)cene installation.



ROPE OVER ABYSS (NIETZSCHE'S TELESCOPE)

Zero, nada, zip. We've found 2 trillion galaxies, but no aliens, no gods, and no universal meaning for human existence. Writing in the wake of Darwin, Nietzsche knew humanity faced a massive existential void between the past and the scientific future, prompting the famous phrase "man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman—a rope over an abyss." Extending from the Large Hadron Collider to the Hubble Space Telescope are layers of media, a rope of technologies which the 21st century zeitgeist has yet to scale.

The technologies represent the layers of media that extend from underground to the Earth's surface and into space, each shaping the human gaze; how and what we see. Starting from the left, the Large Hadron Collider is part of **endo-media**, technology that looks into things. The iPhone belongs to **ego-media**, technology for humans looking at humans and our activities. Drones and satellites are **eco-media**, technologies that look down onto Earth. The Hubble Space Telescope belongs to **exo-media**, technology for looking away from humanity into space.

Five panels, mixed-media and acrylic with pumice. 6' x 18'

Photographic and graphic images, left to right: The Compact Muon Solenoid Detector on the Large Hadron Collider, CERN. Apple iPhone, modified from image in Wikimedia Commons. Predator drone deployed by the Pentagon. Graphic image of NASA satellite. Hubble Space Telescope, NASA.

Concept: Barry Vacker and Julia M. Hildebrand. Painting: Barry Vacker and Liza Samuel



MESSAGE OF ELECTRIC LIGHT

Are there any media technologies more symbolic of contemporary human existence than electric light and electronic screens? Electric lights illuminate our cities and homes, turning darkness into light on a daily basis, while powering our array of electronic screens, the black mirrors which fill our daily consciousness with images and information from around the planet. Powered by all kinds of electric light, human **civilization is now a 24/7 planetary megasystem** visible from space at night. That's the message of electric light. Welcome to the **glow** of the Anthropocene, radiating from America and around the world.

Two panels, printed and mounted on foam core. 3' x 9'

Left photo: "City Lights of the United States 2012," composite image by the Suomi NPP satellite from April and October 2012, NASA. Right photo: Light Pollution in North America, found at the website for the Light Pollution Science and Technology Institute, Thiene Italy. Image computed from data supplied by the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program of the United States Air Force.

Concept: Barry Vacker and Julia M. Hildebrand. Graphic design: Barry Vacker and Sara Falco



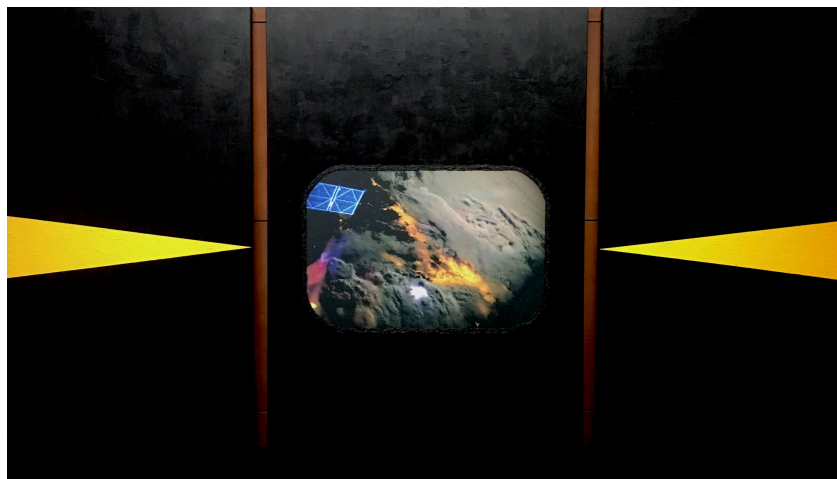
HOT AND COOL MEDIA

In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan developed a hot-cool binary based on how much human involvement is needed when engaging with a medium. Inspired by the poetics of the hot and cool, we re-theorize McLuhan's binary towards a **different hot-cool scale** that explores the effects of contemporary media that look into and away from us. Hot take? Chill out!

Two panels, printed and stretched canvas. 4' x 5'

Text from "Hot and Cool in the Media(s)cene," by Julia M. Hildebrand and Barry Vacker

Concept: Julia M. Hildebrand and Barry Vacker. Graphic design: Barry Vacker, Julia M. Hildebrand, and Sara Falco



SPACE STATION ANTHROPOCENE (L.A. AT NIGHT)

Layers of media: the International Space Station looking down on Los Angeles, immersed in the **vanishing points** of electric lights. A global **capital** of media and spectacle, Los Angeles and Hollywood are emblematic of a civilization awash in lights and screens, yet ever more removed **from its long-term impact on the planet.** Layers of human-made fossils, extinction events, and climate disruption—all part of the Anthropocene.

Triptych, mixed media with acrylic and pumice. 6' x 10'

Photo: Parts of Los Angeles at night, taken from International Space Station. Johnson Space Center (July 21, 2013).

Concept: Barry Vacker. Painting: Barry Vacker and Liza Samuel



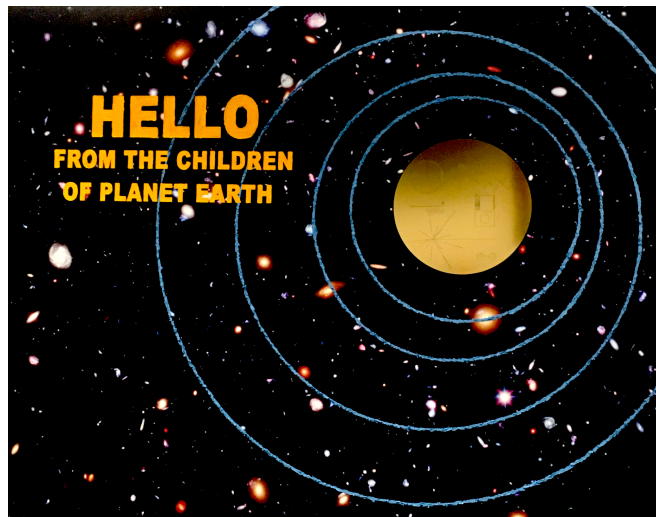
HOT PLANET, COOL MEDIA

The universe is cooling, but it's getting hotter on our little rock. In the observatory on the right, a brainy species measures the acceleration of the expanding universe, while its home planet heats up due to fossil-fuel climate disruption—which the same species seems unable to adequately address. The flames on the left are a controlled burn to prevent a drought-fueled wildfire from engulfing the Hobby-Eberle Telescope (HET) at the McDonald Observatory in the Davis Mountains in far west Texas. The HET is the **fourth largest optical telescope** in the world and the desert is intensifying in West Texas.

Triptych, mixed media with acrylic and pumice. 6' x 10'

Photo: "HET and Controlled Burn on Guide Peak," by Frank Cianciolo (April 17, 2011).

Concept: Barry Vacker. Painting: Barry Vacker and Liza Samuel



"HELLO FROM THE CHILDREN OF PLANET EARTH"

Now far outside the solar system, the Voyager spacecraft is hurtling through the voids of the Milky Way. Launched in 1977 to map the outer planets of the solar system, Voyager is part **exo-medium** and **ego-medium**. With its striking images of Saturn and Jupiter and their moons, Voyager shows the power of **exo-media** to generate awe and wonder in the gaze away from humanity. In case Voyager is discovered in some distant future, Carl Sagan's team of scientists attached the famed Golden Record **with images of humanity** and its civilization along with greetings in dozens of languages. **The Golden Record is our shiny ego-medium in the deep fields of outer space. Yet, stardom is stardust in star stuff.**

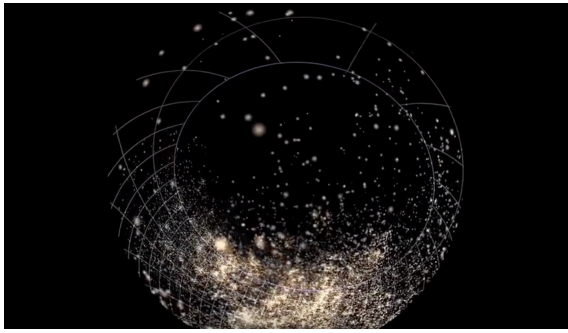
Mixed media with acrylic and pumice on stretched canvas; full-size replica of the NASA Voyager Golden Record plaque, laser etched on golden laminate, purchased in E-bay from Eclipse 9 (Australia).

Image: Hubble Deep Fields collection, NASA/ESA. 4' x 5'

Concept: Barry Vacker and Julia M. Hildebrand. Graphic design and painting: Barry Vacker, Sara Falco, and Liza Samuel

FIVE ADDITIONAL ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Creative Interpretations of Probes from the “Media(s)cene” Essay



*Place your phone camera
over the QR code to
view on YouTube*

COOL MEDIA COSMOS

This two-minute video poetically contrasts the glowing orbs on Earth with the universe revealed by cool media technologies.

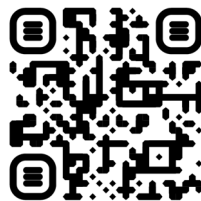
Produced and directed by Christina Betz.



GLOBAL FRICTION

Aliens visit Earth post-Anthropocene and discover this simulated cave painting of the human psyche trapped in the holographic universe (central sacred geometric symbol). Perhaps a McLuhanesque Rorschach projected into the future. Friction, fission, fusion.

Concept and Graphic Design: Sara Falco



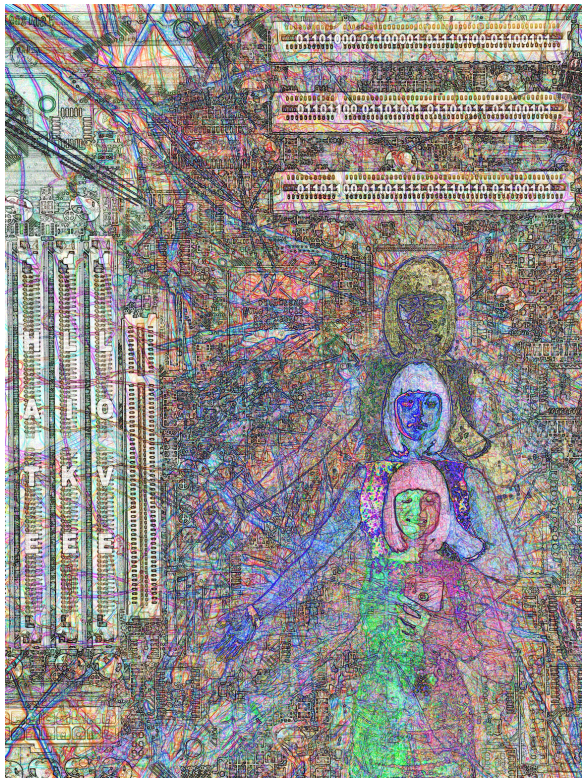
*Place your phone camera
over the QR code to
listen on SoundCloud*

SKYGLOW BLIND

A 4-song EP inspired by ideas in the essay “Hot and Cool in the Media(S)cene.”

“Anthropocene” — “Hot Media Rite” — “Song of the Simulacrum” — “Apollo 11 a Thousand Years Ago”

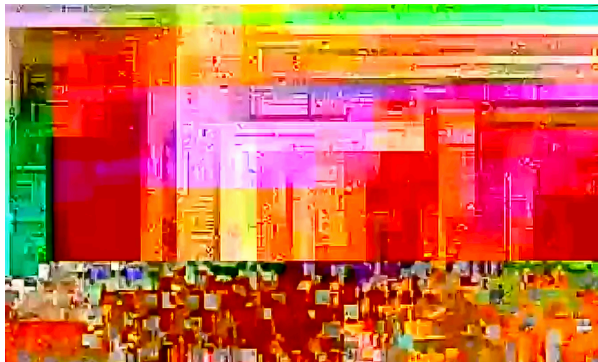
Produced and performed by Madeline Rafter



HATE LIKE LOVE

A graphic commentary on hookup culture and our warped sense of identity in virtual spheres. It illustrates how the human form expresses emotions – hate, like, love – after plugging into technology. Connected to circuits and cyberspace but disconnected from the mind, body, and spirit?

Concept and Graphic Design: Sara Falco



HOT MEDIA ON PLANET EARTH

This one-minute video quickly probes the conditions of hot media technologies.

Produced and directed by Lauren Miralles-Snow

Music by Great Time

BIOGRAPHIES

Julia M. Hildebrand

Julia M. Hildebrand recently earned her PhD in Communication, Culture, and Media from Drexel University. She has accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Communication at Eckerd College, Florida, to begin in August. Her research lies at the intersection of media ecology and mobilities research with a special interest in visual communication and mobile technologies. She has published in journals such as *Media, Culture, & Society*, *Digital Culture & Society*, and *Transfers*. For her article in *Explorations in Media Ecology*, she won the Walter Benjamin Award for Outstanding Article in the Field of Media Ecology (together with Nicholas Grodsky and Ernest Hakanen). Since 2019, she serves on the Executive Board of the Media Ecology Association.

Liza Samuel

Liza Samuel is a mixed-media artist currently living and working in Philadelphia. She received her Certificate from The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and BFA from University of Pennsylvania. Her work has been exhibited at Cerulean Gallery, Great Far Beyond Gallery, and The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia.

Sara Falco

Sara Falco has been a graphic designer and photographer since she was 10 years old. She is fluent in Adobe Photoshop, InDesign, and Illustrator. Sara is also a student at Temple University, majoring in Media Studies & Production and minoring in Gender & Sexuality. Her work is inspired from a diversity of illusions including expressionism, animation, street art, the cosmos, and other projections of stardust.

Christina Betz

Christina Betz is an in-house editor at a video production company in Philadelphia. Her documentary *Superfundland* was screened at the 2019 Arcosanti Film Festival. In her free time, she loves to work on her photography and science-related passion projects.

Madeline Rafter

Madeline Rafter is a self-taught multi-instrumentalist and performer based in Philadelphia. She has performed all over the East Coast and has released four studio albums.

Lauren Miralles-Snow

Lauren Miralles-Snow is a graduate student in the Department of Media Studies and Production at Temple University (Philadelphia). She has an undergraduate degree in Psychology from Saint Joseph's University where she studied media effects. Lauren is currently working towards a career in media production as a producer, director, and editor of multi-media projects.

Brooke Storms

When not appearing in indie films (see Brooke in IMDB), Brooke works at the Grayson Sky International, a marketing firm in Old City, Philadelphia. Brooke also helps produce events for the Center for Media and Destiny and narrated the short video *Specters of the Monolith* (2017, in Vimeo), a tribute to the 50th anniversary of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Brooke is a graduate of Temple University.

Barry Vacker

Barry Vacker teaches critical media studies at Temple University (Philadelphia), where he is an associate professor in the Klein College of Media and Communication. His most recent books include *Black Mirror and Critical Media Theory* (Lexington 2018) and the third edition of *Media Environments* (Cognella 2019), a textbook anthology used in undergraduate and graduate courses. Barry's 24-minute video *Space Times Square* won the 2010 John Culkin Award for Outstanding Praxis in the Field of Media Ecology. He earned his PhD from the University of Texas at Austin.

Gail Bower

Gail Bower is the founder and president of Bower & Co. Consulting LLC, a revenue strategy firm that works with mission- or purpose-driven organizations to uncover and develop reliable sources of revenue that also drive their social or environmental missions. Trained as a futurist, Gail studies where society is headed, what trends are on the horizon, and how these trends impact her clients' businesses. She serves on the board of directors for the Center for Media & Destiny.

THE CENTER FOR
MEDIA AND DESTINY

The Media(S)cene installation was funded by the Center for Media and Destiny, a small non-profit dedicated to theorizing 21st century media via creative projects: books, videos, art, panels, and presentations. Partial funding was also provided by Barry Vacker. The artists and designers on the production team were compensated for their services, while Julia Hildebrand, Gail Bower, and Barry Vacker donated their time. Thanks to Gail Bower and Jarice Hanson (Professor Emerita, University of Massachusetts-Amherst), board members of the Center, for their enthusiastic support of this project. For more information, visit: www.mediaanddestiny.org.