

# Urban Mesh: Exploring Data, Biological Processes and Immersion in the Salmon People

Prophecy Sun, Kristin Carlson, Jim Bizzocchi, Thecla Schiphorst

Simon Fraser University and Illinois State University  
Surrey, BC, Canada and Bloomington, IL, USA

pdsun@sfu.ca, kacarl1@ilstu.edu, jimbiz@sfu.ca, thecla@sfu.ca



Figure 1. *Salmon People*, 2015. Surrey Art Gallery's UrbanScreen. Andreyev and Overstall Press shots used with permission of the artist.

## Abstract

Information systems are continually recontextualizing data, migration patterns, biological components and processes, between life and code. As Geographer Eugene Thacker states, these systems can be scientific, or many things, with lasting effects that are cultural, social, and political. As these systems evolve and grow, so to do the artworks created in the afterglow, becoming vital reflections of our contemporary algorithmically soaked culture. This paper examines these ideas alongside the *Salmon People*, a video and sound installation thematically concerned with the shared dark ecologies of nonhuman and human animals. Like information flowing through high tech super highways, sockeye salmon deftly negotiate seen and unseen geographies, technologies, politics, and cultures. In order to understand the artworks content, sequences and layout, as well as the logic of the shot selections, we conducted a close reading analysis of the installation. We suggest that the work is generative and claim that the projections are made up of 9 videos playing concurrently in 3 large vertical panels. This paper examines these ideas, asking the questions: What role does the screen play in the design of this artwork? What are the types of audience immersion and interaction? Finally, we address the work on three levels: the structural, the narrative, and the immersive. The structural level identifies the key frames, and any overlapping frames. The narrative level investigates the 3 vertical panels in relation to story parameters such as plot and story world. The immersive level considers how the audience oscillates between a heightened state of immediacy and hypermediation.

## Keywords

Biomedial, Immersion, Experience, Generative, Projection, Dark

Ecology, Narrative, Research Creation, Data Technology, Algorithm, Hypermediation.

## Introduction

Consciously or not, we participate every minute of everyday in the transfer of data along the global information highway. This highway is comprised of a plethora of network cables hidden often beneath our feet, laying in sinkholes, and sprawled along the ocean floors (Starosielski, 2015). These cables send data into the skies and back down to the earth again. This infrastructure carries and connects us all virtually into the transoceanic internet traffic filled superhighway. As writer Susan Buck-Morss describes, we are all implicated in this exchange of power, integrating technology into our daily life practices as tools and as weapons that extend the human relationship, whilst “at the same time intensifying the vulnerability of what [Walter] Benjamin called the tiny, fragile human body” (Buck-Morss, 1992, p. 33). Thus, data systems are everywhere, part of the air we breathe, part of our bodies, part of our urban and wild cultural ecologies.

Drawing inspiration from these ideas, we introduce the *Salmon People* (2014), a video and sound installation by Canadian artists Julie Andreyev and Simon Lysander Overstall. The piece presents audiences with glimpses of spawning sockeye salmon migrating across urban landscapes. This artwork alludes to information systems, making the invisible a visible part of our everyday. The sockeye are projected onto surfaces to showcase salmon swimming around our information highways, deftly defying consciousness, time and space, as we understand it. Likewise, as Eugene Thacker suggests art and life are inseparable, a form of Biomedial. Biomedial can present us with a “unique instance in which biological life itself is at once the tool and the object, the product and the production process” (Hansen, 2010, 127). The fruit of

what Thacker is revealing to us is outlined in these two statements: Biomedica is life working upon life; biology and technology are inseparable. Drawing further inspiration from these ideas, we discuss the foundational poetics on which the artwork presents itself, describe the primary modes of observing the installation through fast, and onsite viewings. Followed by a discussion of work in relation to contemporary installation and projection practices; a form that was first introduced by magic lantern artists in the 1700's.

We present a series of analysis, beginning with several key authors in the fields of narrative, immersive and interactive aesthetics. We examine how the audience oscillates between a heightened state of immediacy and hypermediation. In particular, how the piece offers the audience a chance to witness sockeye salmon swimming through oceans often back-dropped by urban cityscapes.

Andreyev and Overstall's *Salmon People* is a dynamic artwork using data and biological phenomenon. Our contribution lies in the investigation of the artwork, to illustrate how experimentation, exhibition and fieldwork can be more valued and widely disseminated through deep analysis. We suggest that the work is an important addition to the ISEA community because it provides a unique viewpoint about the interrelations among art, design, biological processes and technology. We believe that technology systems and data formations can often be intrusive to biological systems like sockeye salmon. This artwork is a source of inspiration, bringing awareness to fish, on a peace keeping missive, moving through human and nonhuman landscapes, cultures, and media politics.

### Terminology

In this paper we introduce several important terms that we use to frame our discussion of the artwork *Salmon People*. These terms are: Triptych, Mesh and Dark Ecology, Biomedica and Vitalism. Each of these terms has a unique history. We do not attempt a comprehensive overview here, as this is not our aim. Instead, we build a framework that overlaps and references foundational thinkers.

#### Triptych

A Triptych is a work of art that is divided into three parts. In historical works such as paintings, the middle panel is often larger than the two other sections. However, in contemporary practices such as video installations, artists tend to use equalized panels (Gardner and

Kleiner, 2009).

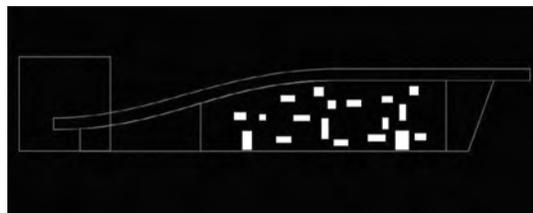


Figure 2. *Salmon People*, 2015. Surrey Art Gallery's Urban-Screen. Installation View.

#### Biomedica

Biomedica can be defined as the recontextualization of information, biological components and processes, between life and code (Hansen, 2010, 122-123). Biomedica can be scientific, or many things, with effects that are cultural, social, and political (Hansen, 2010, 123). Geographer Eugene Thacker suggests that biomedica is "the ability to create conditions in which biological life itself is understood as being informational and yet not necessarily immaterial" (Hansen, 2010, 124). Further, as information systems and algorithms evolve and grow, they are increasingly seen as vital and adaptable (Hansen, 2010, 117).

#### Ecology/ Mesh / Dark Ecology

Simply put, Ecology refers to the interactions organisms have with each other, other organisms, and with chemicals of their environment (O'Neill et al., 1986). We have borrowed both the terms Mesh and Dark Ecology from author Timothy Morton. Mesh is closely related to Dark Ecology. Mesh refers to the interconnectedness of all living and nonliving things that consists of infinite connections and disconnections (Morton, 2010). Dark Ecology refers to the horror, ugliness, and irony of ecology (Morton, 2010).

#### Vitalism

Vitalism means that "living organisms are different from non-living entities because they contain non-physical elements/ governed by different principles than are inanimate things" (Bechtel and Richardson, 1998, Web).

#### The Installation: Salmon People

*Salmon People* was showcased at the Surrey Art Gallery's UrbanScreen, Surrey BC. Artists Julie Andreyev and Simon Lysander Overstall created a kind of triptych

installation using projections that show a “below the water point of view” of surviving spawning salmon onto the surface of a building (<http://julieandreyev.com>). The installation was located on the west wall of the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre near the city center. The building’s roof was built intentionally slanted (see fig. 2). The projections follow the curve of the roof. The videos are projected using two large 2 HD projectors. The projectors use a proprietary software program to map and merge the videos onto one architectural surface (see fig. 3). The piece is displayed in 3 vertical sections, with 9 videos playing concurrently in the 3 vertical sections. Each panel has a Fraser Valley skyline on the top, a salmon shot on the bottom, and an ocean video in the middle section to merge the 3 panels together.

*Salmon People* was previously shown at two other media events. Firstly, at Interactive Futures 2014: More-Than- Human Worlds at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Here, the artwork was shown on a single, vertically oriented screen (see fig. 4). This iteration highlighted both sound and video. The video consisted of 3 vertical layers. The first layer was of a Vancouver city skyline on the top, a salmon shot on the bottom and an ocean video in the middle section. The conference explored alternative conceptions of human relations with other animals and the environment using new media.

Secondly, the piece was exhibited at Videographe Gallery in Montreal, Quebec. In this rendition, the scale of the projections was very different from the other exhibitions. The work was shown as part of a festival. Three videos were projected onto the inside of 3 small exterior windows, using 3 separate projectors (see figure 5). Each projection had a Vancouver city skyline on the top, a salmon shot on the bottom and an ocean video in the middle section. The audience was able to witness the work from the street or sidewalk after dark. Notably, there was also an accompanying soundtrack that consisted of water, nonhuman and human synthesized and found textures.

### Artistic Context

The projection as an artistic tool has informed many artists including Michael Naimark’s *Displacements* and Ron Arad’s *720 Degrees* to name but a few. *Salmon People* draws from a rich history of environmental/ installation art in public spaces such as Joseph Beuys’ *7000 Oaks*, Christian Moeller’s *Hands*, and Jean-Paul Riopelle’s *La Joute*. The first large scale projectors were

built at the beginning of the 20th century. They were first used to create background ambience and support performances in opera houses and theatres. Large format projectors have also served as inspiration to artists such as Schneider-Siemmsen and Herbert von Karajan (*The Cosmic Space of Gunther Schneider-Seimssen*, Website). Large Format Projections have also been an inspiration for contemporary cinema and by artists who desire an extremely powerful video or film output (Suzanne, 1995). The rapid advancement of projector technology over the past 15 years has enabled artists and filmmakers to portray seemingly ineffable gestures with a facility and immediacy that was not possible only a short time ago (Cadena, 2006). Also the variety of these artistic forms and genres demonstrate the elastic potential of the projector to generate innovative aesthetic fragments and ethereal visual landscapes. It is not surprising that artists such as Andreyev and Overstall have taken up these new consumer grade technologies for artistic production.



Figure 3. *Salmon People*, 2015. Surrey Art Gallery’s Urban- Screen. Installation views.

### Audience Engagement

Audiences are currently able to view the piece in the evenings, from dusk to midnight. During the daylight hours, the work exists only online, in print and in our memories. The viewer can choose to engage with the piece in many ways: via a Skytrain ride, sitting in a car or bus, or on foot. We chose to do a close reading of the *Salmon People* using all of these options. Each viewing offered us a unique opportunity to experience the work in a new way. We discovered that no two viewings are the same.

### **Fast Viewing: Skytrain**

Observing the *Salmon People* required multiple viewings, over many days, from varied angles. One approach we used was by frequent evening Skytrain trips on route to and from Simon Fraser University's Surrey Campus. The viewings provided me with a general knowledge base of the location, geographical context and scale of the installation. During our trips, we took photographs and observed the installation from a distance, noticing any changes in lighting, projections and pedestrian movement or participation (see fig. 6). We noticed that the train tracks did not veer left or right of the grounds. Instead, the train appears to move in an arch around buildings and has a constant flow. Perhaps, reminiscent of a body of water, flowing across distance. Or possibly like Andreyev and Overstall's schools of salmon swimming around rocks, buildings, boats, and bridges etc.

### **OnSite Viewing: UrbanScreen**

Another approach we used to observe the work was by multiple onsite viewings. Two viewings were in our car, 1 in a taxi cab, 1 on foot. Each viewing offered a closer reading of the work. We took photographs and video (see fig.7). We tried to reverse engineer the 3 vertical sections. We noted any transitions, repeating imagery, and found no identifiable loop existed. We noticed that the location did not provide monitors or surround speakers for the accompanying soundtrack (listed on press material). We also took notes on details such as where the projections came from, the ideal spot to witness the piece, and how often the Skytrain passed by the location. Other observations included: the projection depth, architectural structures such as the community centre, parking lot, skate park, artificial turf, grass hill, closed off seating area, road, skytrain, and tracks etc. We noticed muffled sounds of the Skytrain passing, cars, skateboarding, and sometimes people playing soccer on the adjacent artificial turf field. We observed that the live soundtrack comprised of water, human and nonhuman synthesized textures is not presented in this version of the installation. Being able to listen to the soundtrack would arguably, create a deeper immersive experience. These details became a constant backdrop while watching the video sections unfold.

### **Analysis**

Upon analyzing the work a few questions arise. What role does the screen play in the design of this work? What are the types of audience immersion and interaction? In the following section we analyze the *Salmon People* on three levels: the structural, the narrative, and the immersive. The structural level identifies the key frames, and any overlapping frames. The narrative level investigates the 3 vertical panels in relation to story parameters such as plot and story world. The immersive level considers how the audience oscillates between a heightened state of immediacy and hypermediation. Finally, we locate the work in the contemporary art context and analyze the work alongside foundational authors in the field of new media.

### **Structural Level**

*Salmon People* appears to be a large-scale triptych at first. Further analysis reveals multiple videos, and overlapping key frames. The screen consists of 3 vertical sections, with 9 videos playing concurrently in the 3 vertical sections. Each panel has a Fraser Valley skyline on the top (city skyline or river skyline, an intersection of river and the industrial city, almost wastelands), a salmon shot on the bottom and an ocean video in the middle section to merge the 3 panels together (see fig. 8). The middle section serves an important role: to merge together the bottom and the top video frame. Sometimes the middle images blur for a moment to display faint reflections of grass or trees. The 3 vertical sections continuously play until one section fades out and another appears in its place. The overall panel imagery consists of sockeye salmon, ocean views, industrial cranes, paddle boats, tugboats, logs, barges, birds, bridges, trees, skylines, and cityscapes. There is no discernable



Figure 4. *Salmon People*, 2014. IF2014: Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Process photo used with permission of the artist.

loop. The video footage is layered, with nonrepeating patterns. Certain elements are mirrored more than once such as bridges or boats moving along the water or images of birds. However, each video contains a slightly varied frame, or sequence of the same location. The middle section seems to shift slowly over time; the water line rises higher and lowers as the piece moves through different segments. The work is site-specific in one way. The top video panel shows skyline footage from the Fraser Valley landscape and surrounding oceans. This is different than earlier *Salmon People* renditions shown at Emily Carr University of Art+ Design and Videographe Gallery.

Audiences engage with artistic works in many ways and with many different, oscillating perspectives. Philosopher Umberto Eco in his *The Poetics of The Open Work*, suggests that artworks can be both open and closed (Eco, 1989, p. 4). On a structural level, *Salmon People* is both an open and a closed work. The piece offers audiences diverse ways to engage with the material. The viewer can choose to engage with the work in many ways: a Skytrain ride, sitting in a car or bus, on foot, online, in print, casually, intentionally, and accidentally, and through conversations of collective memories.

A work of art, therefore, is a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole...Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself (Eco, 1989, p. 4). Here Umberto Eco suggests that there are many ways to view an artwork. Thus, each viewing of an artwork is a unique, creative experience. Interestingly, Eco suggests that each viewing of an open work provides an audience with a richer interpretation. Alternatively, he also suggests that viewing a closed work will result in a limited number of interpretations. Therefore, a successful work will have multiple interpretations, which in turn increases its “aesthetic validity” (Eco, 1989, p. 3) and transforms our perception of a space.

### Narrative Level

*Salmon People* is a series of visual abstractions. The piece is divided up into 3 vertical panels showing sockeye salmon migrating across the Fraser River. The story is simple, yet complex in its design. Firstly, the title *Salmon People* is taken from a first nation’s narrative (Tom Jay) about salmon that live in houses under the sea. In the story the salmon return home each year and are welcomed in human homes as guests (Andreyev, Website). Secondly, the work appears to be a straightforward triptych but is in fact a 9-panel piece. Each panel additionally portrays an aspect of the overall story. The plot is advanced only when a frame changes such as when a single fish becomes a school of salmon, and then continues on their mutual journey.

*Salmon People* is thematically concerned with the shared ecologies of nonhuman and human animals. The piece pushes the audience to consider our shared ecologies. Philosopher Timothy Morton in his *The Ecological Thought*, argues of a dark ecology and the irony of our interactions with nature. These concepts provide a pivotal lens to view the artwork, where we can no longer continue to romanticize our mutual existence (Morton, 2010, p. 8-15). The fish shown in the video clips are survivors of the salmon cycle of life. The salmon mesh and interconnect with all living and nonliving things that share the Fraser River such as boats, log booms and bridges (Morton, 2010, 20). Thus, the piece signals an important message to the audience about the importance of our mutually intertwined worlds.

*Salmon People* is a bi-product of postmodernism. Theorist Lev Manovich in his *The Language of*

New Media, describes one of the key effects of “postmodernism” as that of spatialization-privileging space over time, flattening historical time, refusing grand narratives (Manovich, 2001, p.78). The artwork intentionally flatten(s) historical time and urban space: compositing...superimposing a number of elements... within a single space (Manovich, 2001, p.159). *Salmon People* could fall under several of Manovich’s five principles of new media: Numerical presentation, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding, in particular variability and transcoding, which are useful frameworks to create a complex narrative.

Author Henry Jenkins considers narrative a little differently. In his *Game Design as Narrative Architecture*, he suggests that “spatial stories are held together by broadly defined goals and conflicts” and that plot gets pushed forward by the “character’s movement across the map” (Jenkins, 2004, p.239-240). *Salmon People* relies heavily on this type of “environmental storytelling” whereby the “staging ground” is set and surviving salmon migrate across the screens (Jenkins, 2004, p. 239-240).



Figure 5. *Salmon People*, 2015. Surrey Art Gallery’s Urban-Screen. Press photo used with permission of the artist.

Theorist Janet Murray delves further into how we can actively participate in a visual work. In her *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, she suggests that some digital works provoke the “active creation of belief” and this function of immersion is reinforced by agency” (Murray, 2012). Here Murray states that a media work or detailed story world can encourage viewers to believe in it (Murray, 2012). Complimenting Murray’s ideas, author Marie-Laure Ryan in her *Will New Media Produce New Narratives* defines narrative as:

[O]ne that brings a world to the mind (setting) and populates it with intelligent agents (characters). These

agents participate in actions and happenings (events, plot), which cause global changes in the narrative world. Narrative is thus a mental representation of casually connected states and events that captures a segment in the history of a world and its members (Ryan, 2004, p. 337).

Ryan’s definition suggests that members who actively participate in their world believe in their world. Thus a digital media world or work of art has the thematic potential to be “affected by historical, cultural, and medical factors” (Ryan, 2004. p. 337). *Salmon People* offers the viewer an open work, devoid of distinct cues, yet organized and orchestrated with sequenced digital images that merge with a certain flow-like state. Authors Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä in their *Fundamental Components of the Gameplay*

*Experience: Analysing Immersion*, describe Csikszentmihalyi’s “flow state” (Ermi and Mäyrä, 2005, p. 2) which resonates significantly with *Salmon People*. The thematic “flow state” of content is accessible and maintains what Ermi and Mäyrä describe as a “particular successful balance...regardless of the skills of the person” (Ermi and Mäyrä, 2005, p. 2) viewing the work.

### Immersive Level

*Salmon People* attempts a type of minimalistic totality – its scale is meant to capture the importance of the salmon’s travels, but its temporality is fleeting. There are many types of immersion. Immersion is the state of consciousness, or perception whereby the user’s feels physically, mentally, emotionally or sensory immersed (Adams, 2004). Immersion can also be defined as when the user feels that the simulated world feels like it is real. Again, in Janet Murray’s *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, she defines concepts of immersion, agency and transformation. Murray’s description of immersion is especially relevant to this discussion. She writes:

The experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place is pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content...Immersion is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water...We seek...the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus (Murray, 1997, p. 98).

Here Murray suggests that audiences can participate and enjoy the experience of learning to swim, and

similarly learning to embrace the participatory activity of exploring new environments or digital artworks (Murray, 1997, p. 99). In Murray's remediated version *Humanistic Design for an Emerging Medium Glossary*, she further defines immersion as:

[The] experience of the interactor, a sense of being contained within a space or state of mind that is separate from ordinary experience, more focused and absorbing, and requiring different assumptions and actions (like swimming when immersed in water). Immersive experiences are disrupted by inconsistency and incompleteness of the environment, and reinforced by encyclopedic detail and a sense of vast spaces within clearly marked boundaries. Immersion is further reinforced in digital environments by the active creation of belief, by which the interactor is cued to explore and to take actions within the immersive world and is rewarded for the actions with appropriate responses. Immersion and interactivity are characteristic pleasures of digital environments (Murray, 2011). *Salmon People* transports audiences into a fantastical space, which is "separate from ordinary experience," where fish are seen below and above water moving through human and nonhuman landscapes. The piece pushes the audience to be "more focused and absorbing" (Murray, 2011) even though a viewer's immersive experiences can be "disrupted by inconsistency and incompleteness of the environment" (Murray, 2011). Here we are referencing the fact that the installation is outside, in a public space, and viewers do not have the same luxuries or comforts of an interior space or contained gallery. Nor is the artist able to dictate and control things such as sound, lighting or weather patterns. However, the artists do have the ability to use technologies such as projectors and mapping software to create works outdoors.



Figure 6. *Salmon People*, 2015. Surrey Art Gallery's Urban-Screen. Taken from a moving train.

Complimenting Murray's articulation, Ermi and Mäyrä suggest a three-part model of immersion: sensory,

challenge-based and imaginative (Ermi and Mäyrä, 2005, p. 1). They state that they approach immersion as one of the key components of the digital experience. Evermore, that "[I]t is often taken for granted that a bigger screen and a better quality of audio equal greater immersion (Ermi and Mäyrä, 2005, p.4)." In the *Salmon People*, the screen is impressively large. The digital experience of "cinema...now becom[es] the cultural interface, a toolbox for all cultural communication, overtaking the printed word (Manovich, 2001, p. 85). *Salmon People* is also a "work in movement" as no two-on-site viewings are the same (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 158-159). Game designer and scholar Eric Zimmerman in his *Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games: Four Naughty Concepts in Need of Discipline*, suggests four levels of interactivity: cognitive interactivity, functional interactivity, cultural interactivity, and explicit interactivity (Zimmerman, 2004, p.158-159). He argues that cognitive interactivity is the "psychological, hermeneutic, semiotic reader-response" (Zimmerman, 2004, p.158). Here Zimmerman extends Eco's thought on open and closed works, whereby the audience can choose to view or interact with a media work several times. Further to this, he suggests that an audience can continually shift perspectives with each viewing as our memories can alter our perception of an artwork. For example a person can "reread a book after several years have passed and...find it's completely different than the book [they] remember" (Zimmerman, 2004, p.158).

Memories can be a tricky thing to recreate, capture, and translate into an art form. Moreover, exhibiting a contemporary artwork can be a challenging affair, no matter the medium. There are also many modes and styles of presentation. A work can choose to be interactive or immersive. In fact, the artist creating the work, whether digital or not, can choose to build characters without any individual personality. Author Tom Gunning in his *The Cinema of Attractions*, claims that "cinemas of attractions directly solicit spectator attention" and in doing so the "energy moves towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inward towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative" (Gunning, 1950, p.58-59). Interestingly, in filmmaker Jim Bizzocchi's *The Fragmented Frame: The Poetics of the Split-Screen*, he discusses how the splitscreen has an under-theorized history in moving image (Bizzocchi, 2009, p. 1-3). He states, "contemporary domestic media technologies privilege the pleasure of complex moving

image narratives and visual constructions” (Bizzocchi, 2009, p.1). While Gunning and Bizzocchi’s ideas are similar, they relate to different aspects of immersion. The mediating qualities of *Salmon People* are an interesting site of contemporary thematic tensions, which “directly solicit spectator attention” (Gunning, 1950, p.58). And, if indeed the split-screen is under theorized, *Salmon People* represents a unique space wherein to further explore because of the intersection of scale, location, economy and history.

In the *Salmon People* the audience can clearly see that the technologies of the built city (skytrains, roads, parking lots, towers etc.) are meant to disappear when viewing the work. Theorists Bolter and Grusin in their *Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation*, describe remediation as the process by which media “digest” or adopt other media technologies (Bolter and Grusin, 1999). Here, the salmon flows that once dominated the culture of the regions (Fraser Valley History, Website), have been momentarily subsumed by the larger than life representation of both the distant present and the near past. The salmon are not gone. But they are not here, either. They have been remediated into another form of representation only, projected onto a concrete building.

In theorist Marshall McLuhan’s *The Playboy Interview*, he argues that media can be cool and hot. He suggests that in a cool medium many details are left for the viewer to fill in, whereas in a hot medium the details are complete and there is little room left for audience engagement in other ways (McLuhan, 1998, p.246). McLuhan’s ideas are particularly relevant to this discussion on immersion. Using McLuhan’s notions, *Salmon People* is both a cool and a hot work of art. The audience starts off first as a passive recipient, and then becomes active participants, filling in details, constructing meaning, immersing themselves into the artwork. Lev Manovich’s ideas are similar to McLuhan, Zimmerman and Eco’s as they relate to the design of an artwork. However, Manovich’s concerns are primarily with the viewer engaging with a work on many levels and through different pathways. For example, he suggests that oscillations can happen between the user and the screen (Manovich, 2001, p.92). Further to this Manovich states:

[I]n the simulation tradition, the spectator exists in a single coherent space—the physical space and the virtual space that continues it—in the representational

tradition, the spectator has a double identity. She simultaneously exists in physical space and in the space of representation.” (Manovich, 2001, p.113).

Here Manovich argues that audiences continually flip between immersion and engagement. Additionally, in the phrase “[we] simultaneously exists in physical space and in the space of representation,” Manovich poetically describes a complex set of relations that can also be emulated in the design. Manovich argues that the user can exist simultaneously in a physical and virtual space (Manovich, 2001). When it comes to *Salmon People*, this could not be more evident. The audience cannot help but be enthralled with the overwhelming history that has been subsumed, and yet also be pulled into the notable silences that emerge. For example, the silences occur in the layered videos, frames, sequences and images. The piece engages viewers in an artistic discourse, full of “classical, and even more so modern, art [that] is “interactive” in a number of ways (Manovich, 2001, p.56).

## Conclusion

*Salmon People* transports audiences into a fantastical space, separate from ordinary experience, where fish are seen as for their vitalism, below and above water moving through human and nonhuman landscapes. To understand the content, sequences and layout, as well as the logic of the shot selections of the artwork, we conducted a close reading. We introduced the installation and outlined the foundational poetics on which the site-specific piece presents itself. Like ideas and information highways, sockeye salmon are biological, self-organizing structures, deliberately negotiating geographies, technologies, politics, and cultures. To understand these systems, we explored the primary modes of observing the installation through fast, and onsite viewings. We suggest that the work is generative, comprised of 9 videos playing concurrently in 3 large vertical panels using 2 HD large format projectors. There is no discernable loop; video footage is layered, mirrored, varied, sequential, with no repeating patterns. The fish shown in the video clips are survivors of the salmon cycle of life. The salmon mesh and interconnect with all living and nonliving things in the Fraser River such as birds, animals, boats, log booms and bridges. The piece challenges the audience to consider our mutually intertwined worlds. Finally, by surrendering pre-conceived intentions and allowing the poetics of the

installation to lead us into the work, we have arrived at a new challenge: “How can the scale of an installation provoke immediacy?” “Can an experience of immediacy on a large scale bring consciousness to indigenous and biological issues?”

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