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Figure 1: *Mandalation*, proposed installation view from interior.

Mandalation

Prepared for: Clinical and Translational Research Building, Public Art Proposal

Prepared by: Florida Research Ensemble

March 31, 2014

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STATEMENT OF INTEREST

Background

The Florida Research Ensemble (FRE) was formed at the University of Florida in the late 1980s by colleagues from a number of different colleges with a common interest in how electronic technologies and new media create new opportunities for education. The guiding ambition was to use media in the context of consulting to integrate learning across the institutions of society. Part of the object of inquiry from the beginning was the process of collaborative creativity itself.

Qualifications

In the 1990s the group implemented a conceptual consulting agency, the EmerAgency, to assist citizen participation in public policy formation. A project--ultimately published online with the title *Miami Virtue* (Figure 2) -- adopted the Miami River as a microcosm to model the global entanglement of all the policy issues challenging Florida as a civic sphere. The translatability function of this "konsult" genre featured tourism as an interface to connect popular culture behavior with the formation of national identity. The FRE came to translatability through structuralism, one of the formative movements of cultural studies. Part of the paradigm shift of modernism is the recognition that signification works not by direct correspondence between sign and referent but through differential relations within a system, of which natural language is the prototype. The anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss extended his demonstration of the unity of world mythologies through the mechanism of transformation (permutation and combination of a limited set of mythemes) to indicate that any one system of any sort is translatable into any other system, by means of a proportional analogy. His analogical process is grounded finally



Figure 2: Miami Virtue, still from video documentation.

not on linguistics but on music. The success of structuralist transformation (translatability) has been explained more recently within cognitive psychology, which has shown that analogy is the fundamental operation of all thinking. The purpose of the konsult is to configure complex global problems within a rhetoric of analogy, supported by digital media, leading to enhanced civic participation in community decisions.

The most recent FRE project, *Murphy's Well-Being* (Figure 3), applied konsult to the policy problems associated with the Cabot/Koppers Superfund site in Gainesville, Florida. Invited to participate in the exhibition "Region4: Transformation through Imagination," sponsored by the City of Gainesville, the FRE created an interactive installation placing interviews with community

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residents affected by the pollution in the context of three central registers of cultural causality--history, popular culture, and ideology. The installation used cinematic montage to guide users through the composition of individualized fables expressing the moral of the local disaster. This collective wisdom showed the historical, mythological, and metaphysical forces that produce environmental disaster as a part of everyday life in advanced society. This konsult has been ported to an online version, and has been included in international curated exhibitions.

The present proposal is to create a konsult installation for the CTRB. The purpose of the installation is in the spirit of Paul Klee, who said that art does not reproduce the visible, it makes visible. The proposed konsult will make visible the translatability cycle itself operating invisibly through the work of the denizens of the CTRB. One purpose of the installation as consultancy is to introduce visitors to the rhetoric of analogy that underlies the cycle of inquiry from pure to applied research.

Participants

The FRE is a collective composed of multiple disciplinary practices, depending on the project. For this project, the collaborators are (in alphabetical order):

Juan Griego - artist, Art + Technology MFA student, School of Art + Art History. His role will involve developing analogical linkages, digital cinema acquisition and production, and installation fabrication.

Dr. Jack Stenner - artist, Associate Professor of Art + Technology, School of Art + Art History. His role is lead artist, concept and analogical linkage development, digital cinema acquisition and production, computer programming and installation fabrication.

Thomas Storey - artist, Art + Technology MFA student, School of Art + Art History. His role will involve developing analogical linkages, digital cinema acquisition and production, computer programming and installation fabrication.

Dr. Gregory Ulmer - theorist, Professor of English, Film & Media Studies, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. His role involves the theorization and development of analogical linkages.



Figure 3: *Murphy's Well-Being*, installation for Region 4: Transformation through Imagination at The Thomas Center, Gainesville, FL.

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Figure 4: *Mandalation*, proposed installation view from exterior.

CONCEPT

MANDALATION

The digital cinema installation, entitled *Mandalation*, is designed to represent and supplement the translational practice performed in the CTRB at the University of Florida. Historically architecture functioned as an interface relating microcosm with macrocosm, individual with collective mind. Visitors to a Gothic cathedral or Palladian villa were able to comprehend by means of the architecture alone their location both physically and metaphysically. The explanatory power of architecture was lost in modernity, a casualty of the collapse of wisdom traditions supporting cultural common sense due to the emergence of modern science. Knowledge necessarily became the province of experts, with each discipline sequestered within its own institution, producing a new dimension of reality for which tradition had no equivalent. The responsibility for interface with the general population transferred to popular culture and mass media, which propagated not common sense but commodities. Society has long been aware of this breakdown of cognitive mapping, with many calls for developing a new unified knowledge, of which Edward O. Wilson's national bestseller, *Consilience*, is a leading example.

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Mandalation introduces into the CTRB a miniaturization of system translation, like the play within a play in Hamlet, that visualizes the contribution the CTRB enterprise is making to consilience (the term emphasizes that the aim ideally is not just coherence but a true unification). The installation takes up the symbolic mapping already in place in the Perkins+Will design--the "prism" concept of glass whose transparency and energy efficiency evoke the openness of the work accomplished in this setting (the movement of learning from pure research through testing to care and well-being in everyday life). This translational research has a symbolic dimension in turn, modeling wholeness as a fundamental value of education. *Mandalation* takes up this translational trajectory, evoking in its design the resources of patterning that art and science both learned from close observation of nature.

The digital installation evokes and displays the principle of translatability leading to consilience at several levels, beginning with the figure of the mandala itself as metaphor. The mandala is a design based on the geometry of circle and sphere common in most pre-modern civilizations, and a commonplace of contemporary self-help and new age culture as well. The familiarity of the figure allows for quick recognition, evoking emblematically the basic principle of a unified order. *Mandalation* appropriates the functionality of mandala in this symbolic sense, but is not literally a mandala nor confined to the traditional geometries or cosmologies it represented in wisdom traditions. Rather, *Mandalation* addresses the possibility of a contemporary equivalent of mandala, going beyond the historical associations of the symbol to express contemporary knowledge about the coherence of reality. The principle of unity is consistent across epochs: the infinite variety of phenomena -- the surface of experience -- is structured by a reduced system of form, which in turn expresses a core of causal force. The Ancients named these causal elements Earth, Air, Fire, Water. Contemporary science has its own set: gravitational, electromagnetic, strong and weak nuclear forces. Complexity and chaos theory, topological and fractal geometries, exceed the range of traditional sacred geometries based on the Fibonacci Sequence and the Golden Number. Nathan Hale's classic, *Abstraction in Art and Nature*, charts the repetitions of forms through the three media (solid, liquid, gas). Thus the vortex eddy, for example, appears in a mushroom or the hair patterns of a dog, the motion of surf, and blowing smoke. The brain is a cauliflower, morphologically (or vice versa).

Mandalation takes up the mandala function, then, at several levels. In purely visual terms mandala figures express intuitively the principle of coherence as a unified image. The digital cinema display gathers itself periodically into a unified configuration, and then repeats the unfolding of juxtapositions across phenomena, a kaleidoscopic movement simulating the meditative effect of the traditional figure. *Mandalation* rewards further attention through its montage representing forces, forms, and phenomena, displaying the abstractions that unify art and nature. Cultural and social iterations of the forces are included in the unfolding assemblage, in architecture, city forms, traffic patterns, and related processes and events. Complexity mathematics inverted the relationship between order and "chaos" assumed in traditional civilizations, so that turbulence, instability, and dispersal are included within consilience. Translatability in all endeavors counters entropy, breakdown, decline, catastrophe, the resistance in general of what Sartre called the practico-inert to the designs, ideals, capacities, and aspirations of humanity not just to survive but to thrive. *Mandalation* visualizes the principle of measure at work in the CTRB.

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Figure 5: *Mandalation*, proposed installation view from exterior.

FORM

The architecture of the CTRB takes up the mission of translation, expressing it through transparency, relating the internal functioning of its occupants with the external world. The bidirectional flow of inside and outside, are key concepts that organize the structure. The entry vestibule leading into the main lobby is one place where this flow is articulated such that the passage from one to another is highlighted. This liminal space is the boundary between inside and outside, mirroring the building concept literally and figuratively. Formally, *Mandalation* takes this one step further, reinforcing the overall CTRB concept while introducing the virtual, unseen or unnoticed structures that allow us to make sense of our world. A reflective cube is suspended between inside and outside spaces. As people enter the building, their presence is reflected on its sides. Video monitors are embedded in each end of the cube. Viewers outside the building will recognize the content on the screen as a view looking into the lobby. Viewers inside the building will observe an outward view, looking towards the entry drive. One can tell these are “live” views because motion on either side is present in the image. The cube functions as a sort of “portal” between inside and outside, that makes literal the bidirectional relationship of in and out. But, amplifying the concept of translation, *Mandalation* augments this image with sequences of animated content and image processes that show us how pattern is a fundamental order. For example, the torus is but one part of a fractal pattern that can explain a forest. These forms appear to float or otherwise perturb the three-dimensional spaces portrayed by the “portal.”

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Figure 6: *Mandalation*, proposed installation view, interior.

METHOD

The *Mandalation* “portal” will be composed of a welded steel frame with exterior panels of Type 304 mirror polished stainless steel. The panels will be 11 gauge in thickness to avoid oil-canning so the surface is flat and maximally reflective. Panels on the top and bottom will be removable for easy access to the internal components of the structure. The structure will be suspended from hollow stainless steel support tubes concealing power and network cables routed from the plenum above. The support tubes will be attached to the structure above via steel angle brackets and mechanical fasteners. Each end of the “portal” will contain 2 industrial quality LED monitors configured as a “video wall” with content that spans both screens. These monitors are designed for 24 hour, 7 day per week operation over long periods of time. The structure will be designed to allow easy replacement or service of any equipment, should that be necessary in the future. In addition to the monitors (2 each side) will be 2 computers, each with a dedicated video camera. The cameras will also be industrial quality intended for 24/7 operation. In addition to the computers, a backup media player will be installed. The backup playback device will deliver pre-recorded content in the event of hardware failure or periodic maintenance. *Mandalation* will be designed to be accessible for service via the network. It will use off-the-shelf components and open-source software where possible to maximize its long-term viability and maintenance.

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Figure 7: *Mandalation*, proposed installation view, detail.



Figure 8: *Mandalation*, proposed installation view, detail.

BUDGET

Estimate

An estimated cost for commercial-grade materials, installation and maintenance. This estimate assumes the client will deliver standard power and network connections to the point of installation at the plenum.

Description	Quantity	Unit Price	Cost
LCD Video Wall Monitor (Samsung UD46C-B)	4	\$ 3,250	\$ 13,000
Sculpture Materials: 11GA, T304 #8 mirror polished stainless steel enclosure with lightweight square tube frame.	1	\$ 7,000	\$ 7,000
Sculpture Fabrication: weld frame, shear and break sheet.	1	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
Installation: lift rental, fasteners, angle brackets	1	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Computer	2	\$ 7,000	\$ 14,000
Cables, mounts, hookups, misc hardware, software	1	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
Camera	2	\$ 3,000	\$ 6,000
Backup media player (BrightSign 4K Player)	2	\$ 1,000	\$ 2,000
Graphics production (storage, media, programming, travel, incidentals)	1	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
Graduate student labor.	2	\$ 5,000	\$ 10,000
Artist's commission @ 15%	1	\$ 59,000	\$ 8,850
Total			\$ 67,850

Timeline

Pending the availability of funds, work would begin after the end of the Spring semester (May 1st, 2014).

- Order Materials (May 2014)
- Fabricate "portal" (Summer 2014)
- Test and complete "portal" (August 2014)
- Programming and graphics development (Fall 2014)
- Installation (December - Christmas Break, 2014)