

ATLANTIS UNBOUND

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master in Fine Arts

in

Art

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 2009

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Lori E. Hiris

April 2009

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We are contributing to the largest database ever created. Bits of data, fragments of text, pixels of color and decibels of sound are collected, stored, copied, distributed, and redistributed. Access is free and monitored by computational algorithms, which compile complex profiles to feed the marketing campaigns that drive our consumer economy. We freely surrender our identities to Facebook, MySpace, and personal websites codifying our likes and dislikes, purchases and credit reports. Our expanding familiarity with the database informs our habits, customs and behaviors and re-affirms our trust in the all-powerful algorithm. Algorithms design our airplanes, guide our missiles, erect our architecture, and construct our virtual and real spaces. They are our problems solvers - the convenient answer to complex issues; the delimiter of chance; the logic, method and gray matter for the database.

The algorithm and database culture has driven technology and scientific research from *in vivo* (observations from real life) to *in vitro* (experiments in artificial environments) to *in silico* (computer simulations).¹ In the computer simulated environment a hereditary trait is broken down to its most essential bits of information, which are cloned, morphed, spliced, catalogued, tagged and coded for the database. The separate genes identified in this virtual space are no longer considered part of the human body. They have been removed from the body, transferred to the artificial space where they are, by law, considered artifice, altered by the human hand, transposed by technology and patentable under US law as “invention.” The gene-traits (codes) are corporate owned, and are available through the database for consumers of this “database culture”.

¹ Jeff Augen. 2005. *Bioinformatics in the Post-Genomic Era*. Boston: Pearson Education.

The algorithm and database have eclipsed time. They have masked narrative in its temporal reign over culture. We have, instead, a formal arrangement of elements - catalogued, tagged, embedded with code - discrete units of information capable of being infinitely recombined to produce various meanings. Random access has replaced the linear trajectory of story. Cinema is blasted to bits and reconfigured by the viewer between one available ending and the other. The database culture engenders a multiple read. Each interface reassembles the information to provide a different “take” on the data, another point of view, a conterminous reading.

In my installation the conceptual tension of the database and the narrative is played out. Screen A and B are configured like an open book. The left screen [A] depicts the narrative *Atlantis Unbound: Act I and II* and the right screen [B] replays the story with a five-second-time delay. The hand-drawn and erased animation of *Atlantis Unbound: Act I* portrays a conversation between Francis Galton and Charles Darwin and serves to slow down the temporal beat of changing technology. Their hand-written correspondence contrasts with the text messages in *Proteus: Act II*. The conversation gives way to visions of utopia with mythological references as Galton pursues the secrets of hereditary traits. Dream-like sequences invade the correspondence creating a stream of consciousness portrayal of Galton’s ambitions.

Screen [B] becomes increasingly disturbed with interruptions, splices, color bursts and fragments of text and flies. Contiguous strands of film footage spliced in montage flicker in various portals, in boxes around the screens, demanding that the viewer imbue them with meaning and reassemble the story. The images appear and disappear in the

convex dish screens, exhibiting chromosomes and *Drosophila-Melanogaster* flies in various stages of development and transformation. The third cinematic screen, behind the open book [screens] lures the viewer backstage where the animated sequences are viewed in reverse while a montage of out-takes and time-coded clips fill screen [C], to provide yet another take on the narrative. The third screen evokes memory as the symbols and mythological references in the first two screens are replayed and recombined to provide another version of the story.

The data derived from the study of the hereditary traits in *Drosophila-Melanogaster* remind the viewer of the tremendous potential in technology and genetic engineering. My Installation is witness to this ever-changing technology and how it shapes our culture, history, and politics. Dreams and nightmares coexist in this installation and my intent is merely to invite the viewer to consider the consequences.

Inheritance in the age of database culture and the sovereignty of the Algorithm conspires to envision utopia - a New Atlantis: Bound and Unbound.

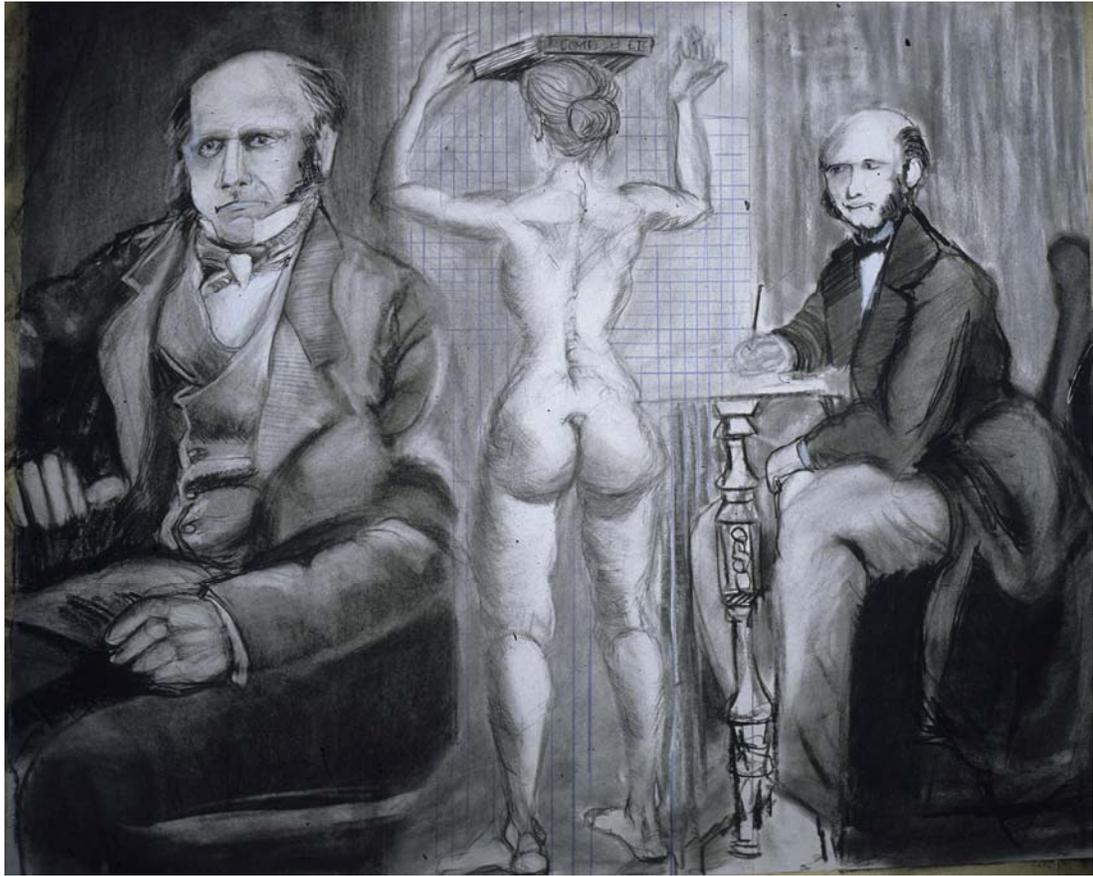


Image 1: Darwin and Galton Measure



Image 2: Watson discovers the structure of DNA



Image 3: The Fly Room. After T. H. Morgan



Image 4: Drosophila-Melanogaster Gynandromorphs



Image 5: Digital Box with petri dish



Image 6: Entrance to digital installation.

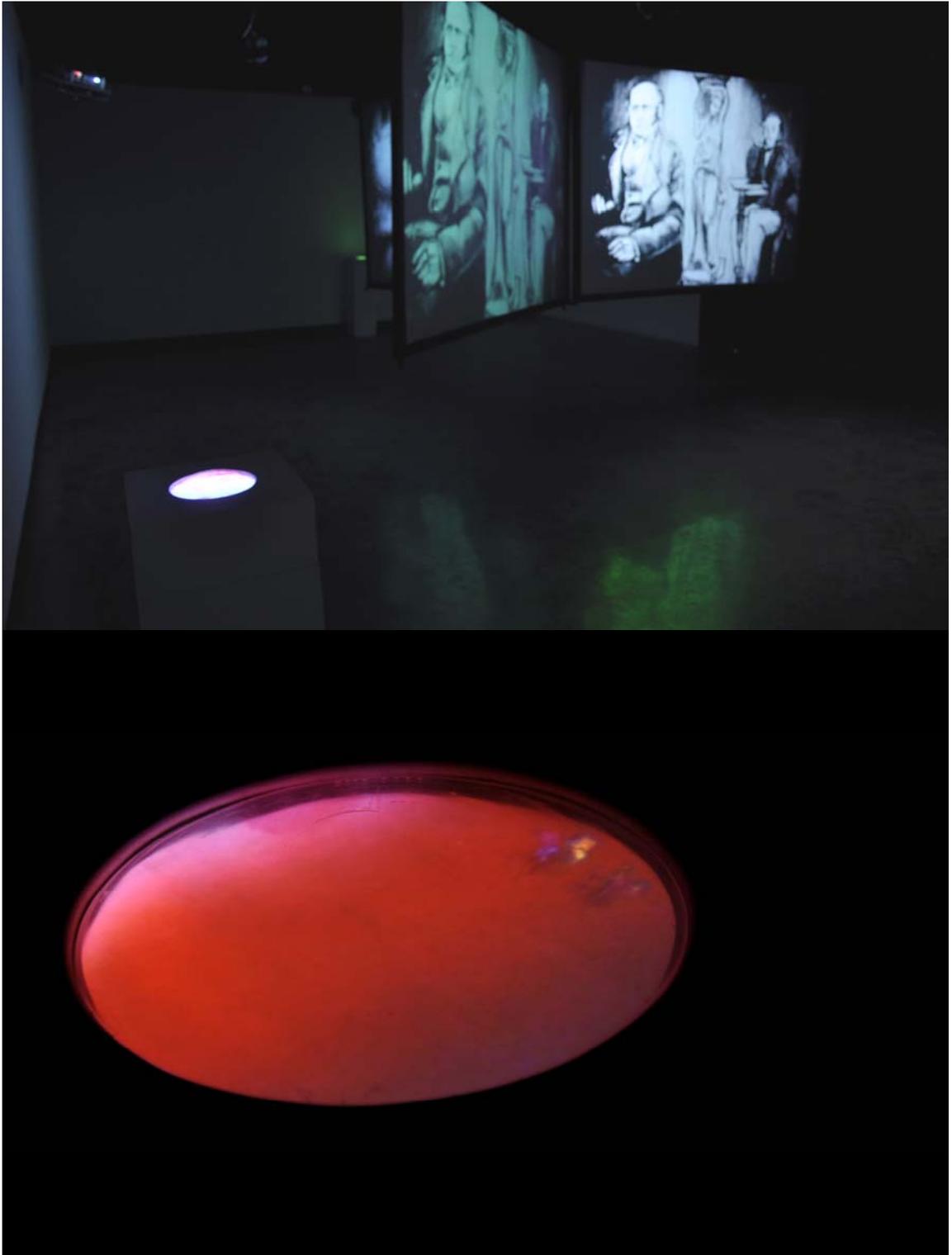


Image 7: Screens and digital box

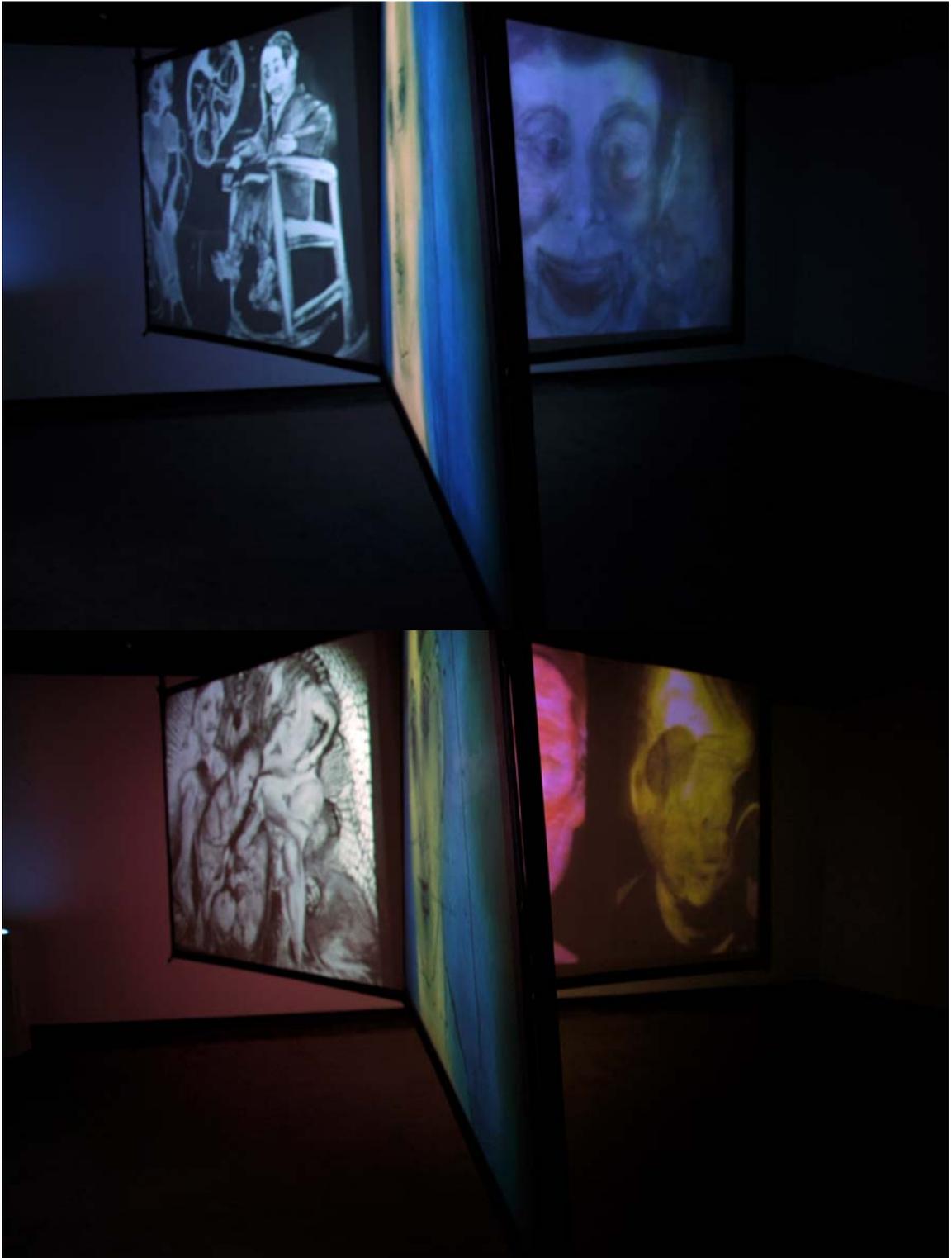


Image 8: Installation 3 screens



Image 9: Chromosomes and cell differentiation



Image 10: Proteus Cloning.



Image 11: Rabbits and Pangenesis

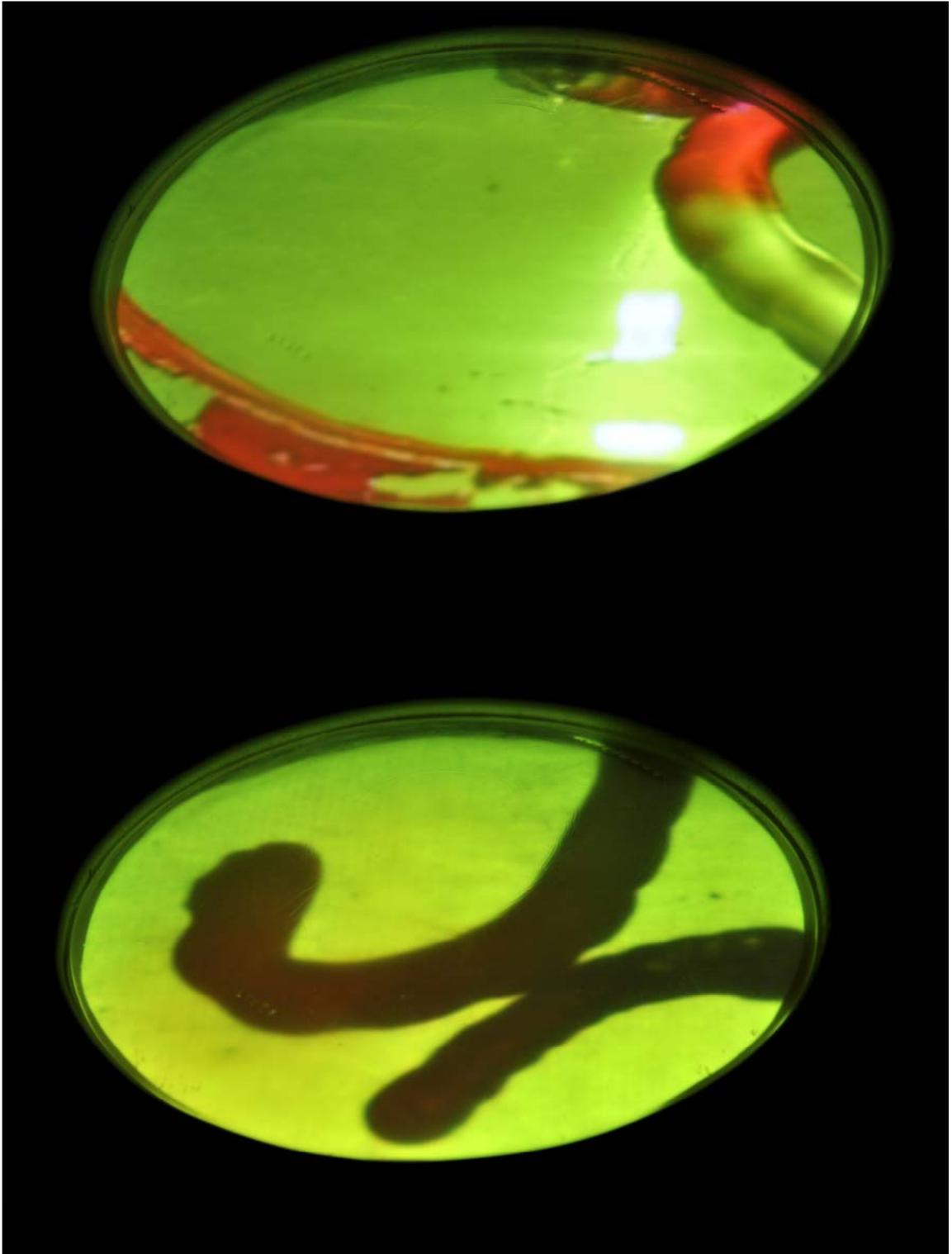


Image 12: Digital Box with Chromosomes