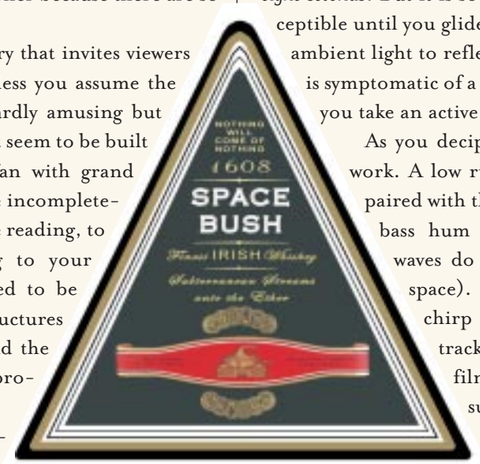
12,000 YEARS COLLAPSING INTO EIGHT SECONDS

DAVID GARNEAU

At the core of Michael Campbell's *12,000 years collapsing into eight seconds* is a cryptic set of copies. In the large, dimly lit gallery hovers a huge wooden replica of the *U.S.S. Discovery*—from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: a Space Odyssey*. The ship's three round prow windows display rear-projected DVDs of a man building a version of Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*. So, we have triplicate images of a man making a model of a model from within a model based on a model. And the simulations continue. The spaceship is accompanied by a very rough, half-scale version of an imaginary science-fiction film set. And, the whole collection is a work of art in an art gallery—nested fictions in a fictional space.

12,000 years is a walk-in dream. Its objects are disproportionate, incomplete and embryonic. Its images are repetitive, comic, fluid fragments that are familiar yet strange. No thing is quite real or reliable. Each element is a weak version, a poor copy or a sketchy fabrication. And yet every thing resonates with potential meaning. The parts form narratives but do not make common sense. Intentions are hard to decipher because there are so many layers and authors.

12,000 years is a surreal mystery that invites viewers to play Sherlock Freud. And, unless you assume the part, the installation looks awkwardly amusing but obscure. The raw spaceship and set seem to be built by an obsessive science fiction fan with grand ideas but a limited budget. But the incompleteness is also an invitation to creative reading, to continue the project according to your needs. The elements are designed to be suggestive, not illusory. The structures are laid bare for examination, and the artist leaves tantalizing clues of a project behind the project.



While Campbell is having nostalgic fun with the science fact and fiction fads of the 1970s, he is also seriously investigating the increasing role of simulation in our lives, and the slipperiness of memory and identity. In addition, his installation is a subtle essay on suburban masculinity, leisure and labour. Campbell reveals secrets from the garage. He shows how solitary male hobbyists fabricate miniature versions of the larger masculine projects of our age, especially, utopic schemes that endeavor to combine science and art, technology and fiction. Behind this, however, and in a less critical mode, Campbell plays out the ancient desire to transcend the social and the individual, the longing for a metaphysical reality—or, in this case, at least a momentary escape from our mundane realm through an imaginative project.

12,000 YEARS

On a white wall across from the installation is the protracted title, *Michael Campbell: 12,000 years collapsing into eight seconds*. But it is so slightly rendered as to be imperceptible until you glide along the wall, allowing the faint ambient light to reflect off the shiny clear letters. This is symptomatic of a show that remains concealed until you take an active part.

As you decipher the words you also hear the work. A low rumble flows from the left. When paired with the sight of the wooden model, the bass hum recalls *movie* spaceships (sound waves do not travel in the vacuum of *real* space). To the right, crickets and birds chirp every four minutes. The audio tracks define two conceptual spaces: filmic outer space and a rural or suburban setting.

I have been naming these two parts *the ship* and *the set* as if their identities were obvious. In fact, it took me at least ten minutes to figure them out, and that was only with the help of the press release—where the artist refers to the work as a "cinematic set." There are also clues in the show's visual footnotes; a black binder that includes copies of schematic drawings of the original *2001 Discovery* and other key references. *12,000 years* resembles a film, a theatrical production, a movie lot tour, a (pseudo) scientific research project, and a mad hobbyist's attic archives.

Campbell's *Discovery* is a thirty-eight foot long mahogany and cedar model of a scepter-shaped vessel with a spherical prow and a slender, segmented body followed

by a wider propulsion unit. The sphere and stern are supported by hydro tower-like structures, and seven black poles lift the body about four feet from the floor. In the Kubrick film the ship is arrow straight. Campbell's version has a horizontal curve that highlights the articulated spine, emphasizing its relation to animal anatomy rather than conventional rocket design.

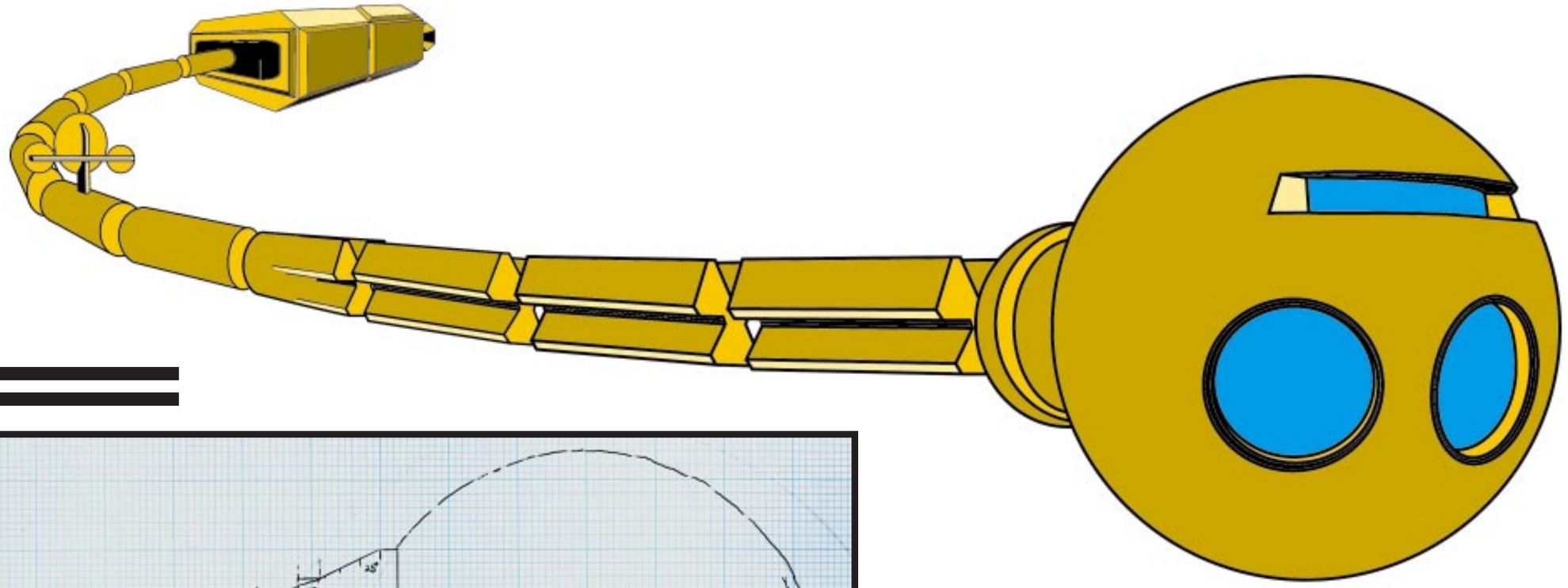
The crew chamber has three large round windows and a bowed rectangular window above. There is a fifth window in the stern. Each has a DVD projection providing a view into the ship. The images are of a screen of trees, trees and rain, and a man in a red housecoat in a white room. The "tree chamber" is like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s "holodeck;" in this case, it features an environmental reminder of the traveler's home.

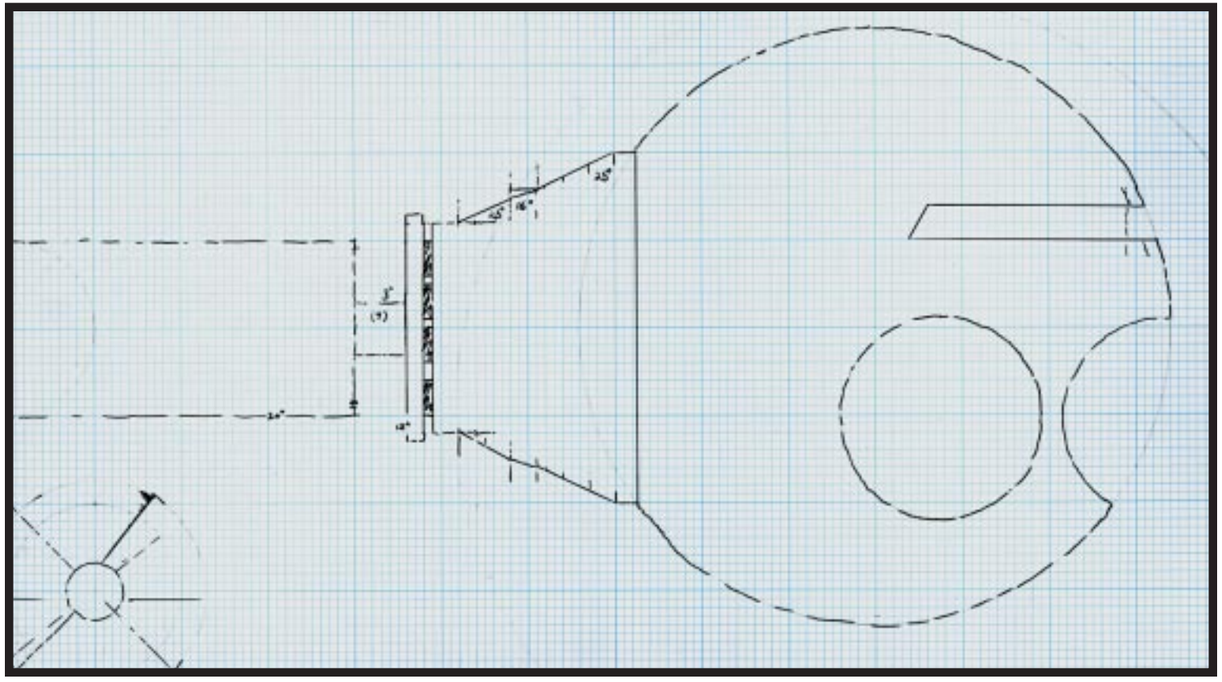
Sci-fi model makers use plastic, painted wood and fine detailing to convincingly realize speculative fiction's hardware. Campbell's use of unfinished wood and a generalized design suggests that he is not interested in high fidelity and illusion, but in evocation. This is a material expression of the *idea* of *Discovery*. It is abstract like a dream or memory image. Why wood? Wood is ready-to-hand and easy to use. This unrefined vessel calls attention to the modeling rather than the model. It evokes images of working in a garage, of measuring, sawing, sanding and gluing.

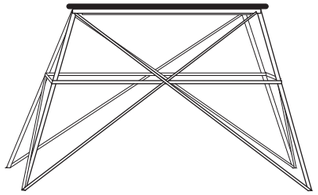
The second part of *12,000 years* consists of two runway-style platforms, elongated trapezoids covered with corkboard. Below the larger section are skeins of unconcealed wires and electronic equipment. Running off the middle and back, the smaller runway has a child-sized chair on top and a DVD projector and more wires below. The main platform has an identical Moderne-style chair and compatible coffee table with its legs cut down to accommodate a diminutive host. The chairs are unusual, not only because of their size, but because they are coated in a tan and red clay and marked by lines that may refer to navigation or design.

These aspects of *the set* are anything but slick. It does not seem designed to be looked at but to be played in. If so, the half-scale suggests that it is for children. However, it could be a model for adults, in which case, no one sits in the chairs; they are reserved for imagined space travelers.

While the next items support these possibilities, they also hint in another direction. In front of the table are three century-old student reference books. One is opened flat. Its two pages contain text and four DVD projections where the printed illustrations would normally be. There is also a larger projection coming through the platform floor. The images are of: the 1969 moon walk; a view from a revolving restaurant; an amusement park ride at night; and a giant out-door orrery (a mechanical model of the universe). The book is an odd hybrid of book and computer. A combination of high and low technologies Campbell calls "home-tech," it is sophisticated enough, and the images are strange enough, to call the supposed "play" status of this complex into question. More than a model, it is either a work of art or a special device whose intentions and utility have to be unraveled.







STEP ONE Campbell's *Discovery* is a thirty-eight foot long mahogany and cedar model of a scepter-shaped vessel with a spherical prow and a slender, segmented body followed by a wider propulsion unit. The sphere and stern are supported by hydro tower-like structures, and seven black poles lift the body about four feet from the floor. In the Kubrick film the ship is arrow straight. Campbell's version has a horizontal curve that highlights the articulated spine, emphasizing its relation to animal anatomy rather than conventional rocket design.

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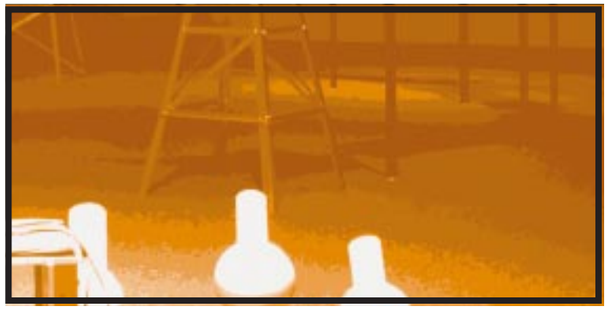
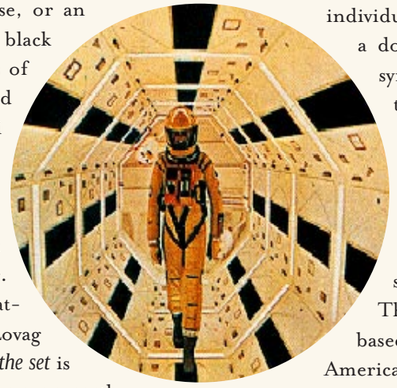


Beside the book is a slender magazine from 1972, an amateur's guide to building telescopes and other electronic devices. Trailing from its pages, fold out style, is a schematic drawing of the unusual objects that surround this end of the platform. (There is an identical magazine with a related drawing on the smaller platform.) To the left is a solid, spherical plaster form with a cylindrical neck that houses a speaker (for the birds and crickets). It is shaped like a laboratory retort, a stout ceramic vase, or an upended igloo. A trip to the helpful black binder explains that they are models of telescopes and observatories designed by avant-garde French architect Antii Lovag. The ten more devices arrayed on the floor all point toward *Discovery*. There are two related objects, small plaster domes with dark eye-like lenses. One is on the floor. The other, on the large runway platform, trails wires that link it to the Lovag pieces. The arrangement suggests that *the set* is a monitoring and transmission platform on earth and *the ship* is the destination for those signals.



MODEL BEHAVIOUR

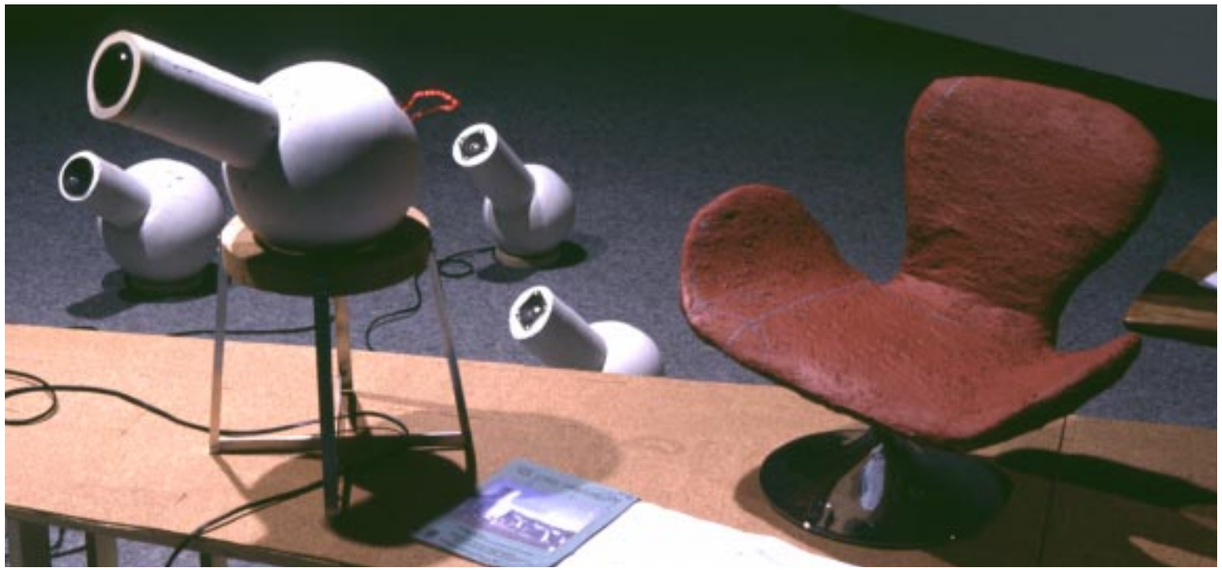
On one level, *12,000 years collapsing into eight seconds* is about models and model making. Not only is the installation composed of models—the 1/10 scale *U.S.S. Discovery* and the 1/2 scale *set*—but its central image is a DVD projection of a scene of a man assembling a model—Tatlin's *Monument*—out of pencil crayons. The installation also has magazines and a book with designs for building home-style, miniature versions of complex electronic devices. *12,000 years* is about bringing the world of advanced technology, scientific research and science fiction down-to-earth and available to the enthusiastic amateur working in his garage.

The installation raises thoughts about two types of modeling: literal model building and male role modeling—how boys learn to be men, and how men maintain their masculine status, by imitating the (sanctioned) behaviour of men. The installation hints at how some individual, disenfranchised men participate in a dominant masculine project through a sympathetic activity—making models of the Alpha males' collective project.

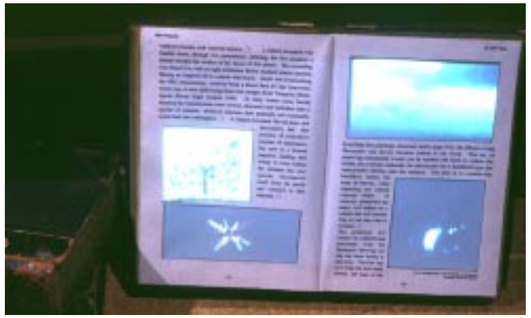
12,000 years directs us to a very specific time. The chairs and table are post-war, streamline Moderne;[1] a style that reaches its apex in the fabulous, plastic, nearly all-white *2001* (1968) sets, where *aerodynamic* becomes *space age*. The Kubrick film (upon which *the ship* is based) came out just one year before the American moon landing—a scene that appears as one of the old book's moving illustrations. In addition, the Lovag domes, and the magazines they are derived from, are dated 1972. The installation is designed to have the viewer consider the late 60s and early 70s—not as the time of the Vietnam War, assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, race riots, and Charlie Manson—but as the giddy days at the threshold of the space age.

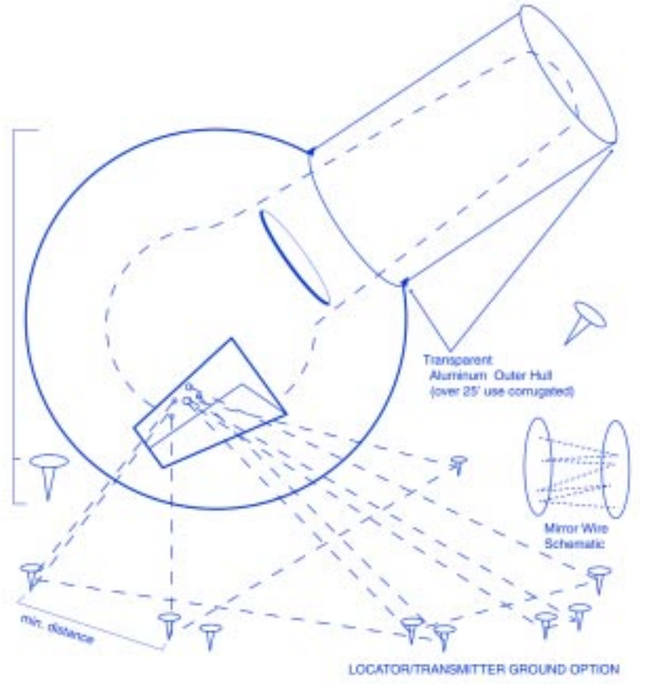
The choice of the model from *2001* is fascinating because that movie is the signal cultural moment when the filmic imaginary joined with the scientific and technological imaginary at its most advanced level.

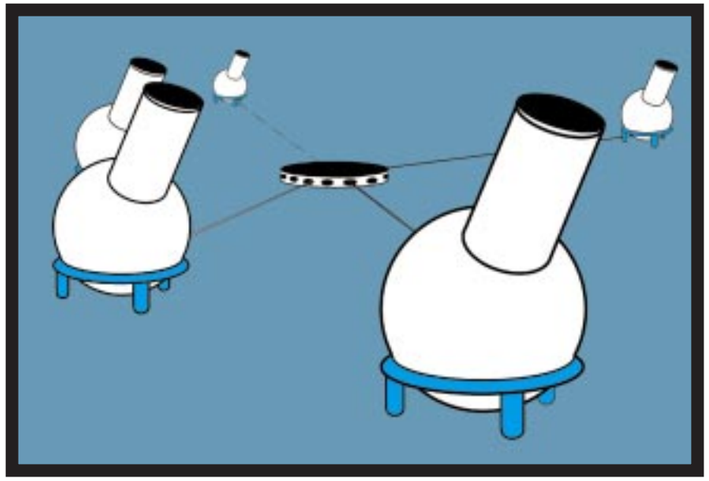
> On the recommendation of (the film's scriptwriter, Arthur C.) Clarke, Kubrick hired space consultants Frederick Ordway and Harry Lange, who had assisted some



WHILE the next items support these possibilities, they also hint in another direction. In front of the table are three century-old student reference books. One is opened flat. Its two pages contain text and four DVD projections where the printed illustrations would normally be. There is also a larger projection coming through the platform floor. The images are of: the 1969 moon walk; a view from a revolving restaurant; an amusement park ride at night; and a giant out-door orrery (a mechanical model of the universe). The book is an odd hybrid of book and computer. A combination of high and low technologies Campbell calls "home-tech," it is sophisticated enough, and the images are strange enough, to call the supposed "play" status of this complex into question. More than a model, it is either a work of art or a special device whose intentions and utility have to be unraveled.







of the major contractors in the aerospace industry and NASA with developing advanced space vehicle concepts, as technical advisors on the film. Ordway was able to convince dozens of corporations such as IBM, Honeywell, Boeing, General Dynamics, Grumman, Bell Telephone, and General Electric that participating in the production of *2001* would generate good publicity for them. Many companies provided copious amounts of docmentation and hardware prototypes in return for "product placements" in the completed film. They believed that the film would serve as a big-screen advertisement for space technology. When IBM learned that the plot involved a murderous computer, however, the ordered that their trademark be removed from many of the sets.

Every detail of the production design, down to the most insignificant elements, was designed with technological and scientific accuracy in mind. Senior NASA Apollo administrator George Mueller and astronaut Deke Slayton are said to have dubbed *2001*'s production facilities "NASA East" after seeing all of the hardware and documentation lying around the studio.[2]

In that brief, overheated moment, commercial, scientific, governmental and artistic interests coincided to make a culturally necessary work of art. To many, the narrative was arty, boring and confusing, but the special effects gave a more general public a glimpse of the possible shape of things to come. The sets looked realistic because they were derived from industrial designs that were directed as much to (future) fact as fiction. This film was not only designed to excite the imagination, but to develop backers (tax-payers) for an extremely costly and long-term endeavor. And, according to the movie, what would the rewards be? A post-cold-war world where uniform, cool design replaces everything old; where roomy space flights are as casual as plane travel; and where life's deepest questions are answered (sort of).

For many, the space race was not just a contest between super-powers but a romantic quest for ultimate knowledge (Are we alone? Where do we come from? Etc.) And the images of the earth from space have taken on almost archetypal resonance. For those caught up in this optimistic moment, the desire for a metaphysical reality was joined with the quest for greater material knowledge by the realistic dreams of a meta-terrestrial possibility. In *12,000 years* Campbell tries to revive this feeling of excitement and possibility.

While *Star Trek* toys slightly precede *2001* models, *2001* models had a different constituency among their adult builders. Many of these collectors were, and are, interested less in the characters and story line than in the hardware and its potential for realization. In the real world, NASA, too, inspired a model industry. I remember my father, who was not a regular model builder, coming home in 1969 with a huge Saturn V rocket kit. I recall his serious excitement and explanations. It didn't look like play. We also watched the space shot with rapt attention both at home and at school. Campbell's father was watching, too, but he went further. *12,000 years*' blurry DVD projection of the Space Walk is a copy of his father's film of the original television transmission.

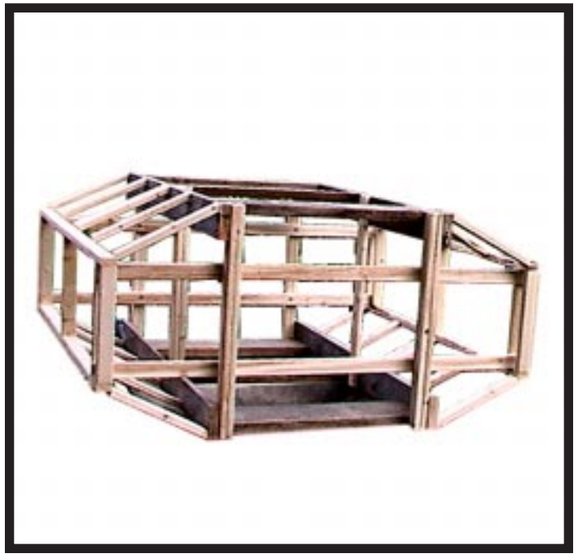
> This recording was filmed live, with an eight millimeter Bolex standard motion camera; filming an Imperial RCA console television; which was broadcasting the NBC transmission; received from a direct feed at Cape Canaveral, which was, in turn, processing these first images from

> Tranquility Base, Apollo Eleven Eagle module, 1969 [from the installation text in the old book].

Campbell narrates this chain of copies of copies to show how simulations increasingly form our minds. While this may seem negative, I think he is simply recording it as a fact. He may even be drawing a parallel between genetic and electronic transmission. In both cases, information is passed through the generations. The character of the Moon Walk data is not, however, just neutral scientific and historical fact, it is also gender (in)formation.

In our age of highly specialized labour, few men participate directly in the most significant masculine cultural projects. In traditional societies (for good or ill) and in times of war, men have recognized and valued roles that are shared and reinforced by communities of men. In most contemporary societies, male roles are not as finite, certain and proscribed. As a result, many men feel apart from the dominant masculine mode. To compensate, some become, for example, avid sports fans or hobbyists. Their participation is on an *as if* level—masculinity through identification with (entertainment) images rather than through a contested practice. And, just as boys learn to be men by playing with small versions of men's things, some men seek to maintain the currency of their status by imaginatively aligning themselves with the dominant projects by building miniature versions of those projects in a seemingly instrumental way.

While there can be a significant display factor—that is, some hobbyists get together and share their accomplishments (and reaffirm or rank their masculinity in a limited field)—most do not. The main value of their activity is its individual, sometimes even secretive, character as a form of magical participation. In fact, when hobbyists take their activity very seriously and go public, the reverse effect can occur—their masculinity may be challenged.[3] This type of social measuring is a tricky business and is under continuous negotiation in especially interesting ways in the modeling world. At the upper levels model hobbyists take themselves quite seriously, and for good reason. The best amateur craftsmen and engineers can potentially make the crossover to the ultimate realm of adult play—the movies. And, as in the case of the original *2001* model-makers, rub shoulders with real NASA design engineers—who, after all, work with models all the time!



Freud's thoughts about artists can be applied to some model makers. In his essay on Leonardo da Vinci, he argued that neurotic artists gain relief through sublimation; they transform unconscious energies by expressing them in works of art. But unlike psychoanalysts who have to work through the repressed contents over many years—artists are thought to gain almost automatic relief. But, because they do not undergo conscious analysis, they remain untransformed, immature. This can lead, if the artist is using the process as a personal therapy more than a communicative medium, to repetition or artist's block. Hobbyists, too, can be caught in a satisfying fantasy world that nearly replaces the literal one. When it does work, however, hobbyists (and artists) can gain lessons from their serious "play" which can be applied to the mundane world. Such activity is a way to deal with the world through a controlled, metaphoric and amenable parallel realm.

By making the *Discovery* model, Campbell revives his youth. How many kids wanted to build a spaceship in the 1970s?! In adulthood, he finally has the skills and means and has not lost the drive. And, I think, his model gives a little cathartic thrill to most young men who see it because Campbell is revitalizing the repressed or abandoned projects of a whole generation. The installation also reconnects us to the naive excitement around space exploration circa the late 60s and early 70s, a project whose promise has yet to be realized. We are nowhere near Arthur C. Clark and Stanley Kubrick's projections—many of us thought we would be taking routine shuttles to a moon base by now. Finally, *12,000 years* links Campbell to his father and an implied filial duty. Why would someone film his television set? The elder Campbell made a record for posterity. And here is a dutiful son. Not only does Michael reproduce and publish the recording, but, by building the ship, he gestures toward realizing its promise. The circuit imaginatively places the artist in the league of men.

FLOATING MEN

In a correspondence, Campbell indicates the importance of "filmic memory," how people born in the late twentieth century have "a memory set that is half lived history and half television and film." With this in mind, I want to briefly examine two films that are crucial to the period *12,000 years* evokes and may have influenced its formation. Of specific interest is the image of the model maker, the man in the red housecoat and his forest "holodeck" floating through space. The scenario rhymes with *Silent Running* (1971) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). In *Silent Running* a lone botanist, Freeman Lowell, played by Bruce Dern, drifts through space in a ship consisting of Eden-like domes filled with the remnants of Earth's natural environment.[4] Freeman's (apparent) madness is signaled when he abandons his uniform for a St. Francis-like cowled housecoat. Like Campbell's man in the red housecoat, Freeman is isolated because he acts on his idealistic convictions and must live with the consequences. He kills his crew rather than let them destroy Earth's last plants. Both men are separated from humankind but are (seemingly) content with their choice. One wonders if the desire to be alone was the hidden motivation for both.

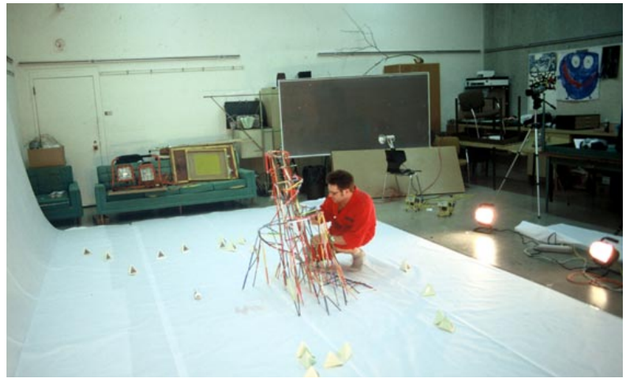
While most sci-fi films feature virulent aliens, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* aliens, like *2001*'s (and *E.T.*'s),

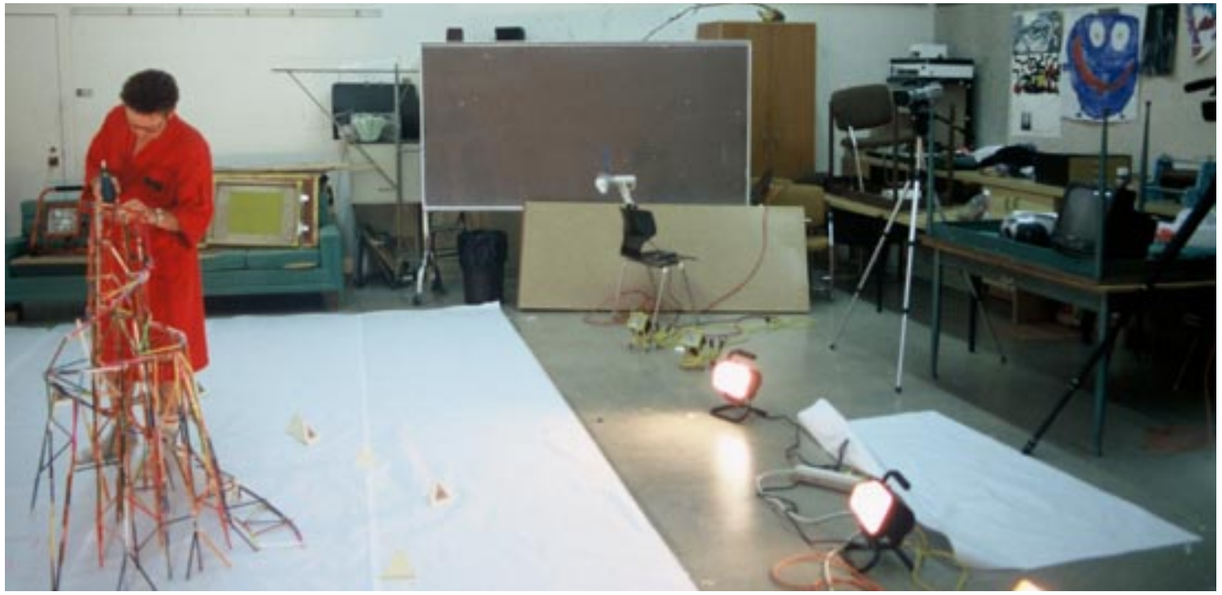
are friendly. It is the (post-Nixon era) government that is nasty. In the movie, Roy Neary, a blue-collar electrician living in the suburbs of Muncie, Indiana, encounters a UFO that implants a vague mental image in his mind that demands expression. The aliens transform those who see them into artists. His drive to express what is in his mind is overwhelming. He draws compulsively; he sculpts his shaving cream and mashed potatoes, and finally fills his living room with a model of a mountain, Devil's Tower, where the aliens will land. Interestingly, when the film opens, Roy is shown as a toy train enthusiast who eventually replaces—actually incorporates—that hobby into the new project. When he becomes obsessed to the point of madness and his family abandons him, he still can't quit. He takes whatever he needs to make the model—wheelbarrows full of dirt, branches, and fencing—and dumps them in his living room. In this crucial scene, like the Tatlin builder, Roy is wearing a housecoat.

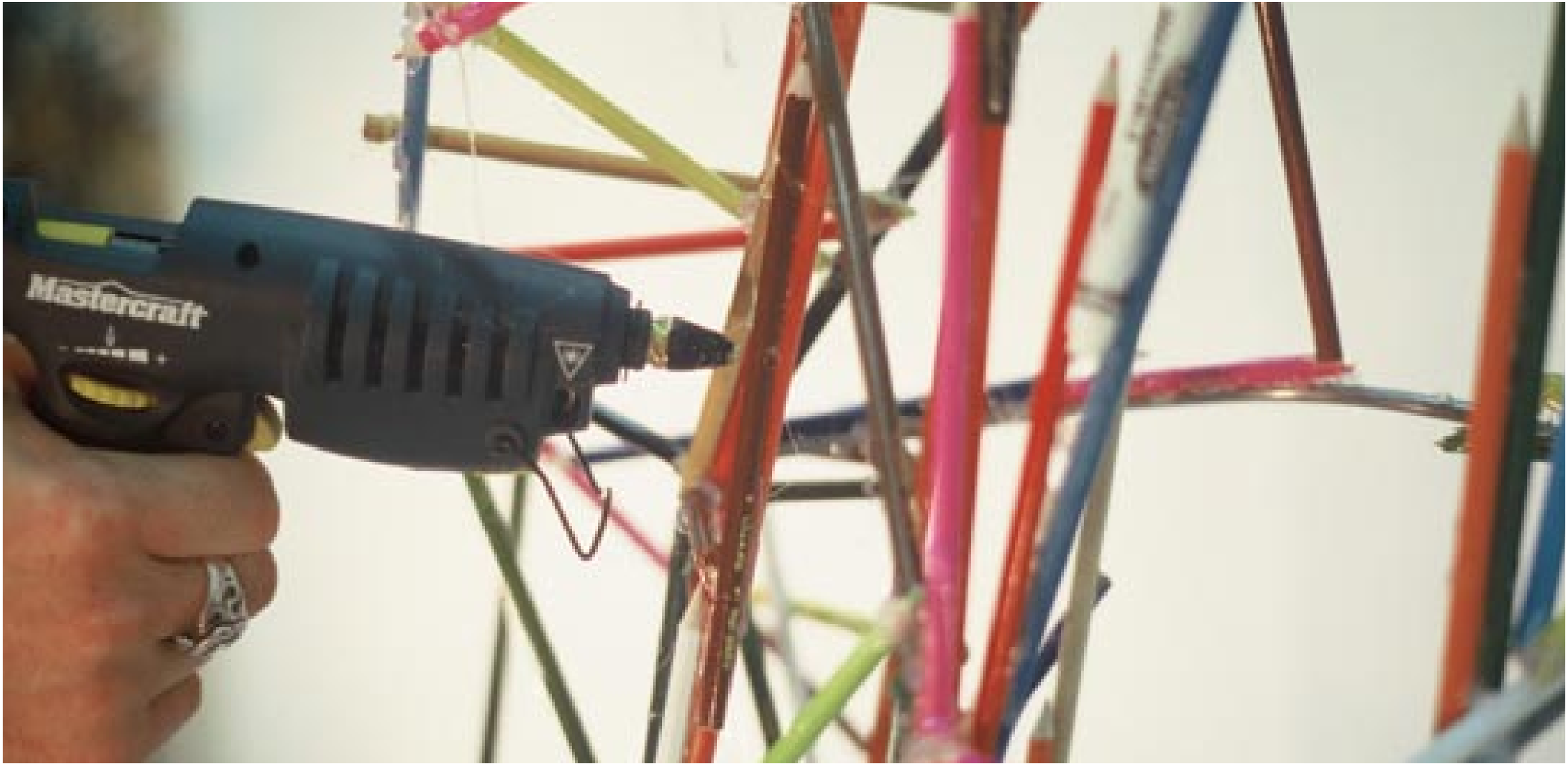
Housecoats are interstitial garments. A coat for the house, they are worn in the space between the bedroom and the front door. The moment Roy wears one outside he appears both comic and deranged. A housecoat is a sign of privacy and leisure, of masculine hominess. Worn against the sign, it becomes *unheilich*/unhomey/uncanny. Both men are disturbing. What they disturb are societal expectations of men. The family's anxiety in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is not the unlikely invasion of the world by aliens. They are worried about a breakdown in Roy's attention to his role as father and breadwinner. He is losing himself in an absorbing but non-productive activity—he is not *being a man*. He becomes and artist, a sculptor so absorbed by his inarticulable and non-remunerative project that it consumes his time, transforms his house into a studio and everything-ready-to-hand into a modeling material. The tension is over the father's use of time. He should be working or playing. This activity (art) is uncomfortable and unpredictable.

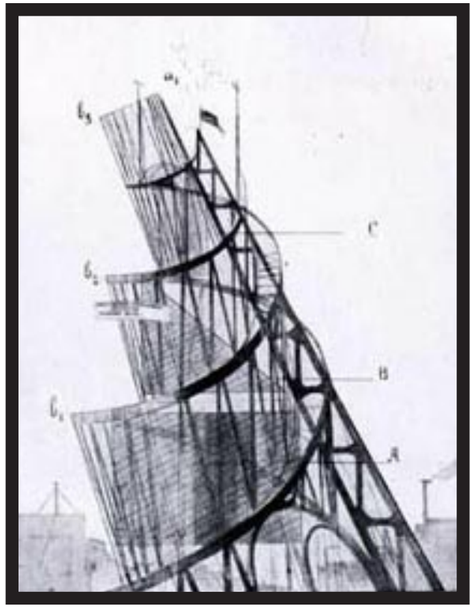
Campbell's man in the housecoat (actually played by the artist) is similarly absurd and disturbed. We associate space travel with serious business, with science experiments. To see an astronaut in a housecoat is odd enough, but to see him replicating Tatlin's *Monument* in pencil crayons is mad. But, of course, *12,000 years* is a dream, an artist's fantasy. That pencil crayons and glue guns are in space at all suggests that the mission was planned as an artistic adventure. The fantasy is that artistic activity could be treated as seriously as scientific inquiry. Space exploration is a unique paring of science and fantasy, reason and passion. Why not similarly unite science and art?

One artist who tried this *mysterium coniunctionis* was Vladimir Tatlin. His *Monument to the Third International* (1920) exists only as drawings, photographs and reconstructed models; an impossible building, it was never realized. An artist, rather than an architect, Tatlin did not work out the engineering problems that would have had to be overcome. In addition, the tower needed more steel than the Soviet Union could produce in five years. Designed to celebrate the Bolshevik revolution, it called for a 400 meter tilted tower taller than the Eiffel Tower.






Mastercraft



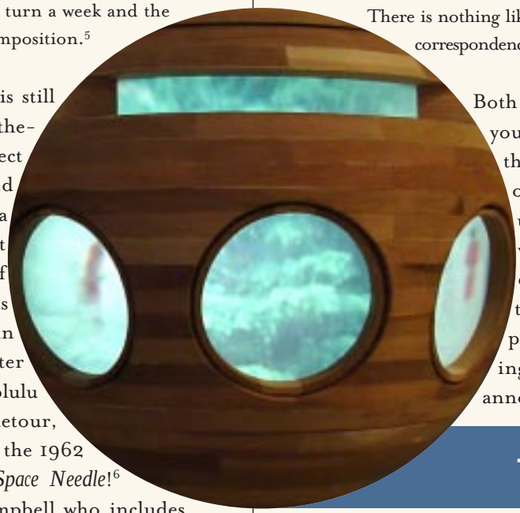
[The] metal frame composed of two spirals narrowing in the upward, comprised four volumes in the internal space behind the skeletal frame of the main volume. These volumes each hanging over another rotated at different speeds. The bottom cube that was the siege of the Comintern legislative bodies was to rotate at a speed of 1 turn a year. The truncated pyramid - the location of the executive bodies 1 turn a month, the cylinder with the secretariat rotated at a speed of 1 turn a week and the semi-sphere completed the composition.[5]

Ironically, while the *Monument* is still celebrated by art historians and theoretical architects, the only aspect that seems to have influenced modern architecture was the idea of a rotating room. The capitalist west may have borrowed the idea of the revolving restaurant from this "socialist" model. Architect John Graham, an acolyte of Buckminster Fuller, built the first one in Honolulu 1961. This may seem like a silly detour, but he built the second one for the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle—in the *Space Needle*![6] This in-joke is not lost on Campbell who includes DVD footage from a revolving restaurant as one of the old book's moving illustrations.

So, why is the man in the red housecoat making a model of Tatlin's *Monument*? The original model was part of a big project, the Soviet Revolution of 1917. But it was also part of the big project of Art History. The recreation of the *Monument*, like copying the paintings of the Great Masters, could be a way of imaginatively participating in art history. But the deeper nature of the *Monument* opens a richer level of meaning for *12,000 years*, and one that takes the installation's fiction seriously.

It is important to Campbell that Tatlin's *Monument* was a failure, a grand, impossible, but hopeful project.

> "I was interested in Tatlin's *Monument* because it was at the same time wonderful, bigger than anything, useless (like all great art) and completely unworkable.... I was interested in the structure because it could only ever exist as a model that, like the *Discovery*, makes it so much more captivating. There is nothing like a reality to let one down." (from a correspondence)



Both model-making and art allow you to dream on a fantastic scale through the miniature. The wish of such work is that these speculations might inspire others who may be more realistic, who can translate these ideas back to the world. But there is another pleasure in simply manufacturing an impossible dream that announces our deepest wishes.

THE THIRD MAN

In a curious drawing in the black binder, Campbell links Tatlin's tower to an astronomical map. The tower is drawn as an intermediary between the earth and the cosmos. Its junction echoes the mechanical drawings from the magazines in *the set*. Paired with these drawings, Campbell is suggesting that the *Monument* has a practical/esoteric aspect. As is hinted in the text of the old book, the *Monument* of the drawing, its replica in the ship, and the Lovag drawings are all magical transmitters designed to transform matter (people) into energy and then project that energy into space. This is clearly described in the

modifications to the Lovag design as seen in the fold out pages of the two magazines. The drawings look fairly sober until you notice that the key propulsive is "God's breath." It may be code, but it seems to align the prototype to Marcel Duchamp's *machines*, especially the *Large Glass* and its requirement for "love gasoline."

While somewhat comic, there was a serious investigation behind Duchamp's machines, an attempt to comprehend and transcend scientific knowledge. In part, he was trying to describe or make manifest the idea of a fourth dimension. The reasoning—going back to Plato—goes: if a shadow is a two-dimensional projection of a three dimensional reality, then our three-dimensional reality must be the projection of a fourth dimensional reality. This may seem improbable, but Duchamp, his models and methods are still studied with curiosity by scientists. In 1999, Harvard University sponsored a symposium on science in art around the work of Duchamp and Poincare. The speakers included luminaries from science, Stephen J. Gould, and from philosophy, Arthur Danto.[7]

Theoretical physics has much in common with theoretical artistic inquiry. Both entail research, eccentric thinking and models. Neither are immediately bothered by instrumentality. And they are characterized by similar types of obsessive concentration punctuated by waves of (seeming) playful idleness. In the end, the products of both inquiries are puzzled over by more literal minds to correct, refine and implement the vision.

Michael Staples illustrates his essay, "The Metaphysics of Glue,"[8] with an image of the *Monument*. While he does not discuss the tower directly, he, too, pictures it as a symbolic conduit between the physical and metaphysical. Again, going back to Plato, the western imagination has been obsessed with the idea that there are three realms, the material, the metaphysical and, the "third thing" (as Staples terms it) a conduit between the two. In the 19th century, it was "æther," for Campbell it is "God's Breath."

Campbell is not proposing that his machine actually transforms people into energy to be fired out into space. But he is asking us to step into this fantasy with him and imagine the possibilities. The suspension of disbelief and losing ourselves in a compelling fiction does nearly the same thing as his fictional machine.

Thinking of the punk/tatlin/duchamp string. It is interesting that all three fly in face of reason and possibility (or better yet—workability) but still produced the same hopeful object/response. (from a correspondence)

Artists are able to carve out a unique space for themselves in the mundane world. They get to pursue activities that gave them energy as children. Some may even receive financial reward and public recognition. And a very few, academic artists—such as Campbell—are part of a university system, their work is considered research and is treated (for the most part) as an activity equal to scientific inquiry. This is a historically novel situation, and can be regarded as a great responsibility.

I am sure that there are viewers of Campbell's installation who are puzzled by how this work—such an obvious

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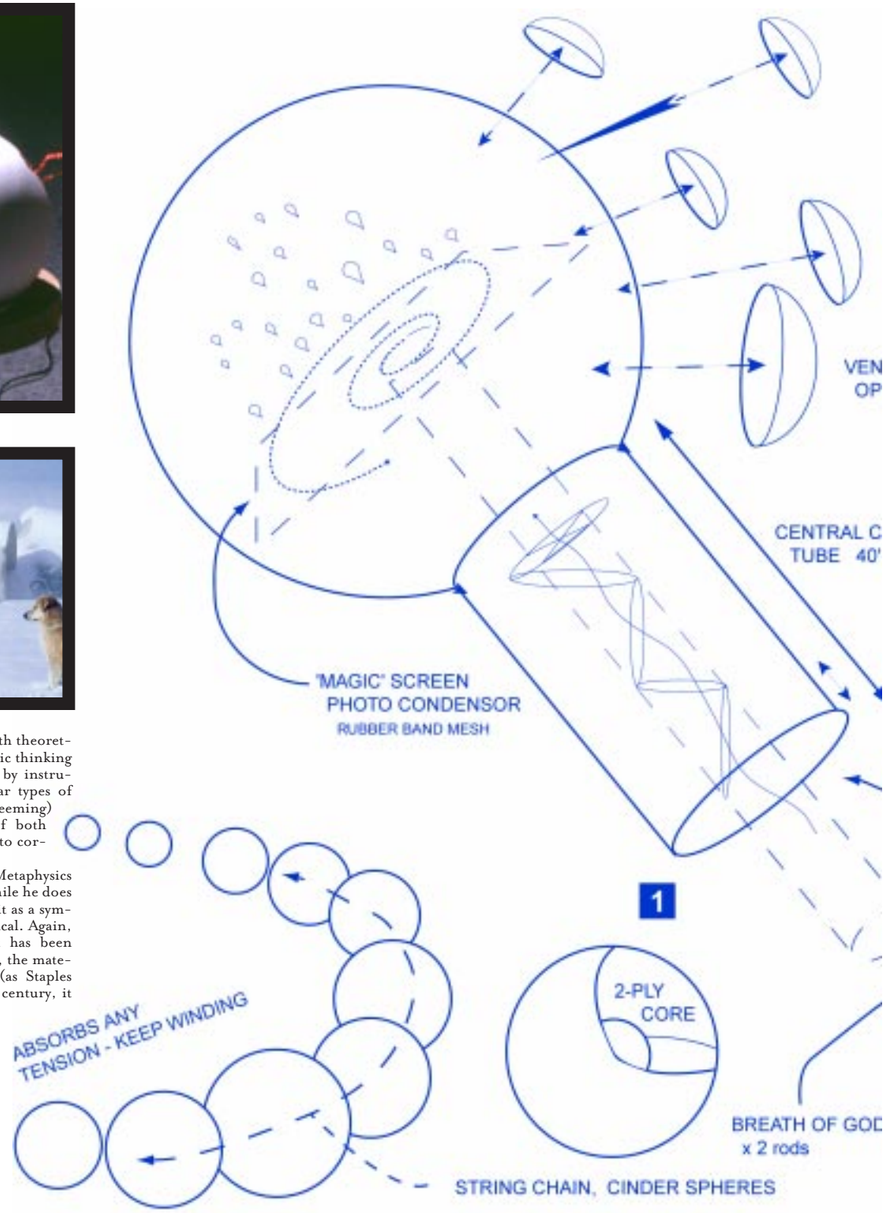

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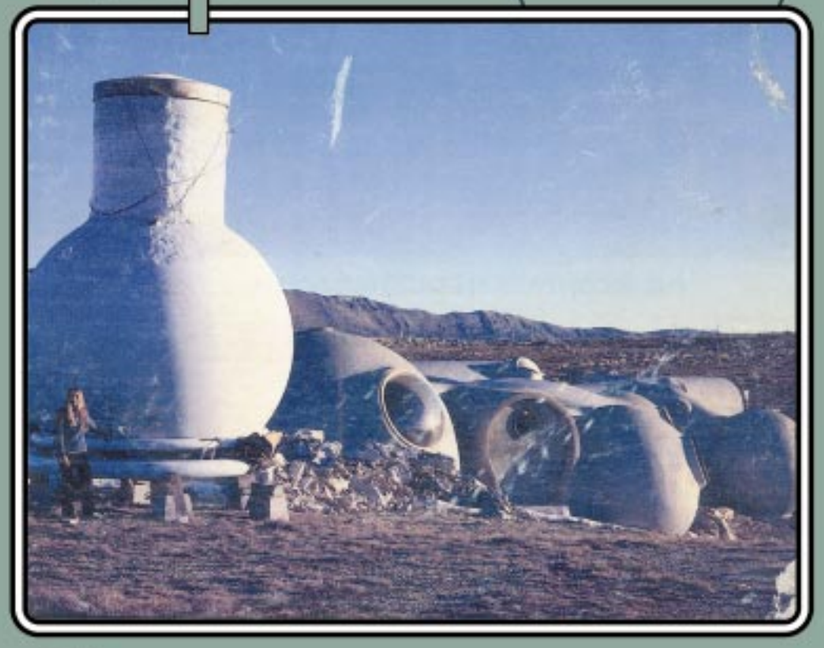

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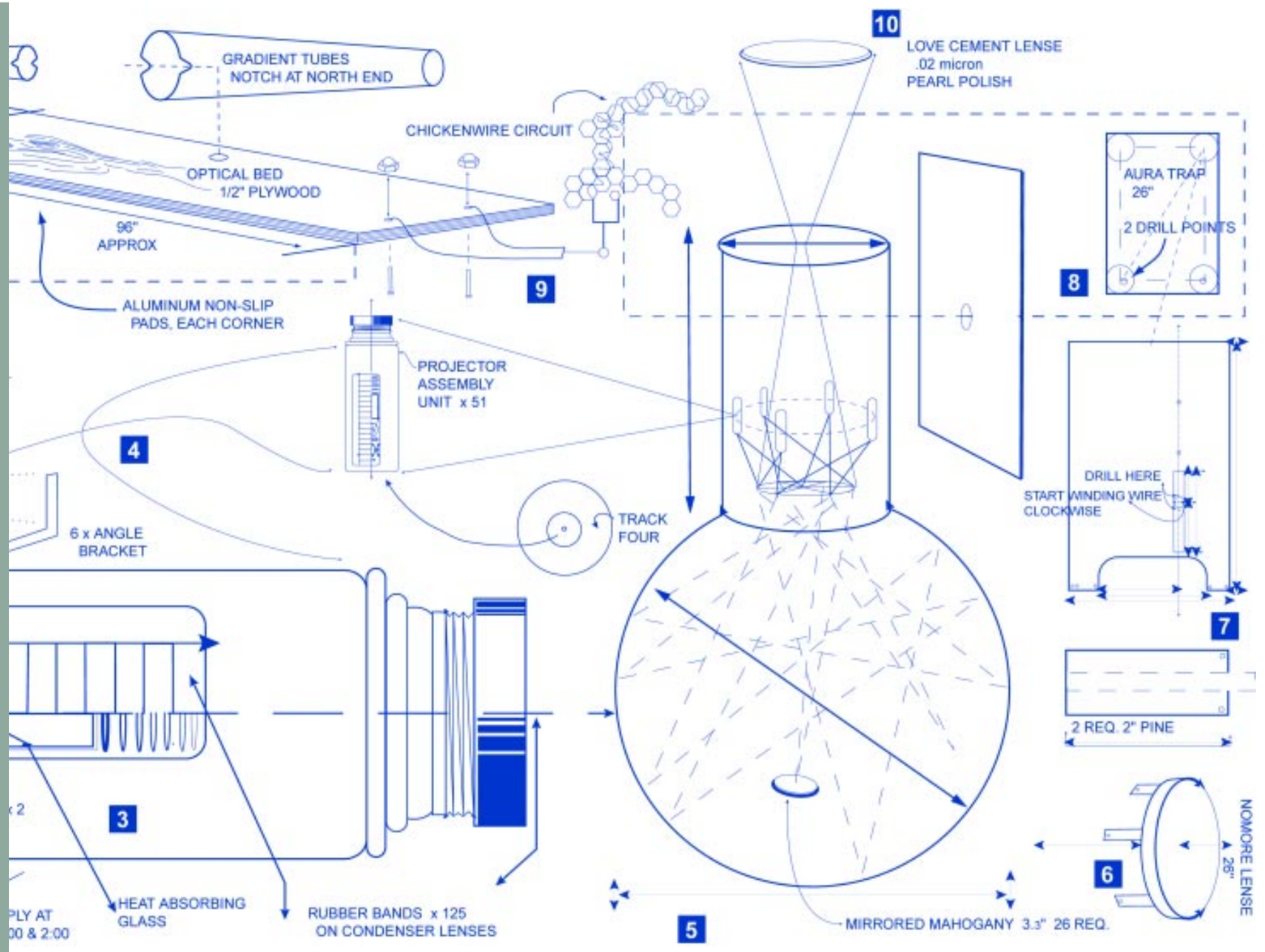


extension of adolescent activities—is supported. I believe that such work can trigger a sense of jealousy and anxiety in those who are mired in reality. But it also inspires excitement in others who are rushed back to their own strange, ambitious and improbable projects, projections of their deepest desires that were shelved for adult responsibilities. Many consider the contemporary blurring of the line between childhood and adulthood as a bad thing. But, on the positive side, it can open a space between the binary of work and leisure for novel explorations that, even though they may not result in immediate material advantage, are intrinsically rewarding. Artists are tricksters who not only show us novel sights, but also novel ways of organizing our lives and spending our time.

While Roy, from *Close Encounters*, has a practical goal, he is not aware of one while absorbed in his art—his drive is intrinsic, even if the outcome is instrumental. Campbell's man in the red housecoat's goal—as near as we can figure it—is at once practical and poetic, the desire to become one with the universe and yet also be able to return to the material world. However, at the moment we see him, he seems to be caught in suspense. This may be a lesson about the dark aspect of this sort of activity and desire.

I hinted that, despite their stated goals, these fictional men (and some model-makers and artists) might simply be motivated by a desire to be alone, a desire for escape, suspense. This ideal retreat is characterized by an enclosed space (a garage, basement room or bedroom—even a boat, car, tent, cabin, art studio, etc.); a solitary space where one can work on a project that relates to a larger masculine project, but is apart from that project (and the masculine circuit of power relations). In other words, the work participates in a larger masculine project while avoiding the contest. But, even more than the project, being alone and being suspended from masculine roles and responsibilities—except in the symbolic sense—is the goal. These floating, isolated, fictional men seem to be projections of an anxious masculinity.

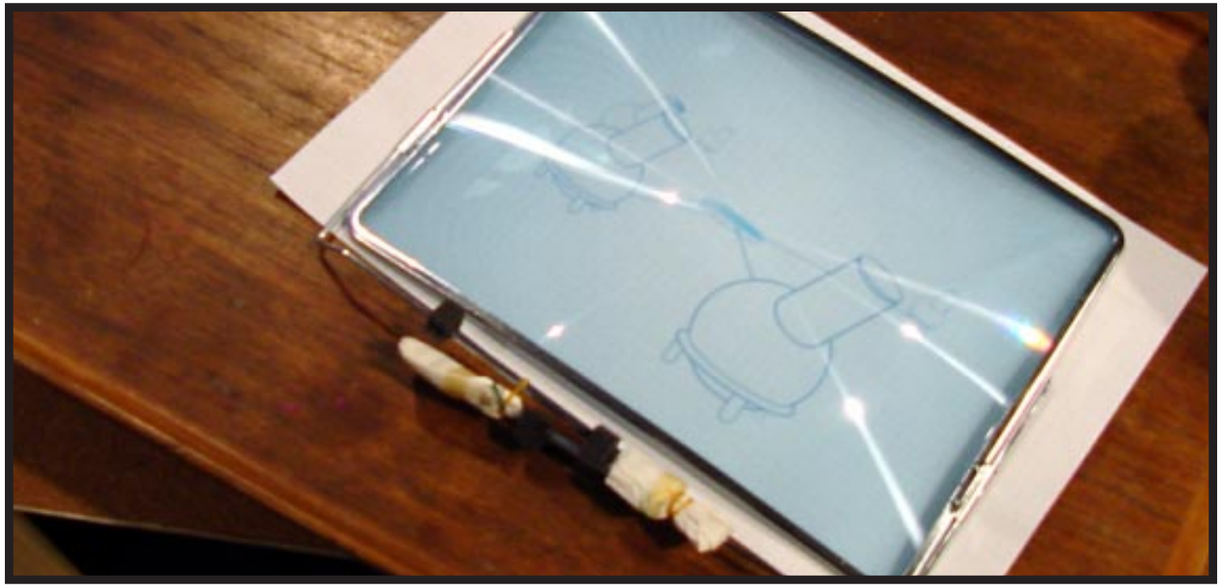
> ...the absolute absence of a burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant. From *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera [9]

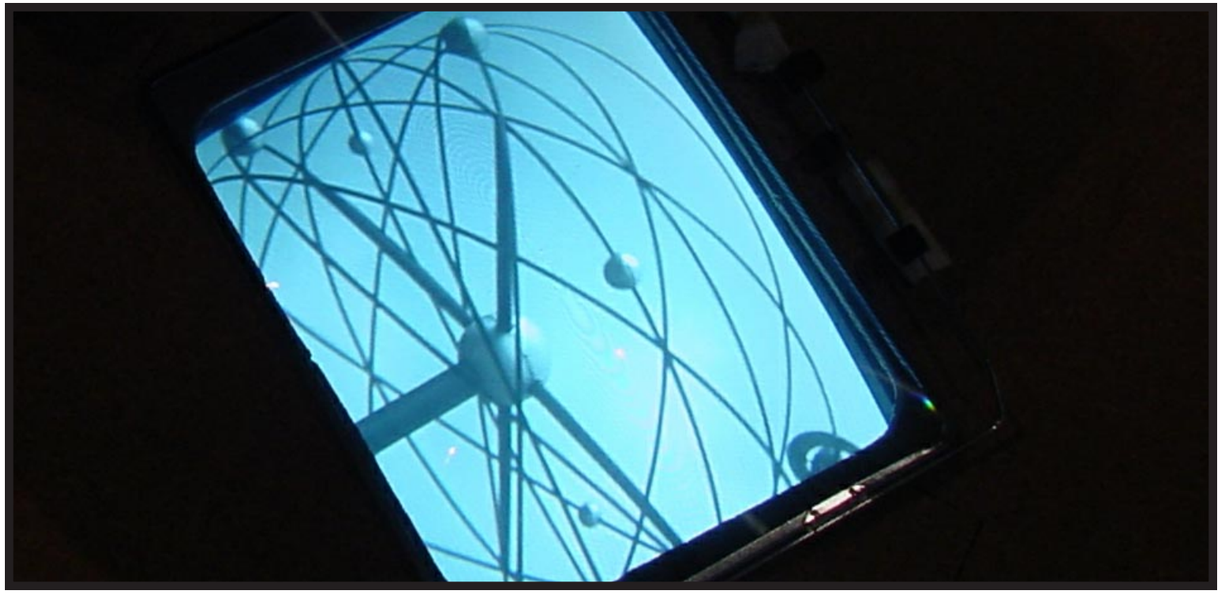
While this may be a narrative possibility in Campbell's installation, there is a difference between *escape* and *transcendence*. In this final section, I will be slipping into *12,000 years* as a fiction to discover the project behind the projections.

TRANSMITTING THE SELF

The keys to *12,000 years collapsing into eight seconds* are the two pages of text in the old book and the ability of the viewer to become a reader and enter the fiction. The right page reads:

> In building the prototype, discussed earlier (page 194), the efforts of this film-maker (see above) becomes central to





our work. The act of preserving monumental events can be equated with need to reduce the infinite into everyday materials, the microscopic into a handheld type, the indescribable melting into the ordinary. Our goal is to contain the boundless, reduce the scope of heaven, while expanding our limited corporal estate. If correctly assembled the unit(s) will behave as a conduit that will transfer what we are into what is out there. Our prototype will connect us, scattered and emotional, with the firmament allowing our clay and straw bodies to slip away.

The first step is to wrap the wire mesh around the base of the…"

The text is not set in a neutral space, it is printed in a very old book. The reference to events in 1969, among others, tell us that the text was not printed at the turn of the century—there is a rupture between the page and the text, as surely as there is between the DVD images and the book. So why would someone fake this document? It could be that they are wishfully inserting their voice into history. However, if we read this installation as a work of fiction and suspend our disbelief, we can imagine that these pages *were* printed at the turn of the last century, this object *is* a homemade book/computer constructed a hundred years ago; in which case, the document is a proof of time travel. Given what is said about using a device to exceed the body, all this could be possible (in this fictional space). The sentence that trails tantalizingly off the page and presumable on to the rest of the sealed (!) book—" The first step is to wrap the wire mesh around the base of the…"—suggests that the author has successfully made the device, has used it, has been able to return to his body and is passing on the knowledge.

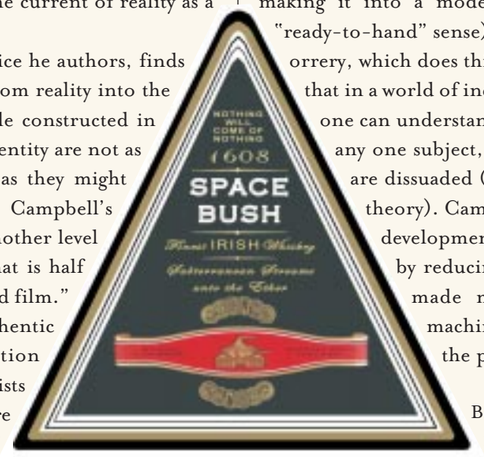
Another puzzle. The text says that the "filmed document was handed down through two generations." That would put the speaker's voice in the future, at least seven years from the present (2003). It would also mean that if the recorder is Campbell's father, the author is not Michael but his child. Accepting the fiction, then, the document is a proof of time travel and the ability to return to the body. Given the context of the book. It appears that someone, a second author, the one who made this installation, Michael (at least the character *Michael*), has found the book, read it, and constructed this crude device, *the set*, and used it to transmit himself into the space ship. In fact, we can see him there. Is he making a copy of Tatlin's *Monument* as a means of transmitting himself to yet another plane?

The left page, following the entry about the filming of the Moon Walk, reads:

> In many homes across North America the transmissions were viewed, discussed and embedded into a myriad of synapses, electrical impulses that gradually and eventually fade into nothingness.
>
> This filmed document does not necessarily halt the process of collective erasure of experience, but acts as a frozen impulse, enabling the owner to swim within the moment that our species disconnects itself from the earth and connects to the ethereal.

Campbell, or rather, the "voice" of the text in the old book describes a circuit of simulated experience. There are real events that go unseen by the majority of people; there are the electronic transmissions of those events that are seen by millions; and there are the people who receive them. These transmissions offer a form of collective consciousness, but, because they fade away like our memories, there is also an inevitable "collective erasure of experience." However, recordings of the transmissions, while not permanent, do slow this erasure. They allow people who missed the originals to see the identical pictures, even generations later. Such records are artificial synapses that create an extended collective consciousness. They also enable people, to use the text's poetic phrase, "to swim within the moment," a passed moment. What does this central image

mean? The man in the ship is also swimming in a moment —he is also an electronic transmission. He is a recorded loop repeating his actions every twenty minutes for eternity, a suspended animation. And the ship is a phallic womb swimming through space with its homunculus (waiting to be reborn?). Watching a recorded moment momentarily suspends the present. It is an escape from the current. The desire is not so much for nostalgia as for a "frozen impulse," the desire to suspend the current of reality as a means of escape.



It seems that Campbell, or the voice he authors, finds comfort in the idea of escaping from reality into the ether of transmissions. For people constructed in the television age, memory and identity are not as settled, unified, or as authentic as they might have once seemed. To reiterate Campbell's observation: "filmic memory is another level for me, [I have] a memory set that is half lived history and half television and film." In such a mediated age, is an authentic experience possible? Is simulation more real? This installation consists only of copies and versions; there are no real things here. It is as if the character seeks to avoid the real and longs for the perfect simulacrum.

> "When I give a talk I always introduce myself and the work, as coming out of Scarborough, Ontario (scarberia-the banal, ugly and everyday) and that escape through production was as viable as escape through drugs, violence or simply a physical escape." (from a correspondence)

Suburbia is also central to the filmic sci-fi imaginary of the 1970s. It is utopia gone wrong; places that are placeless, anyplace and no place. It may be that the man in the red housecoat is meant to be a dystopic lesson. He has escaped the mundane realm (suburbia) only to find him equally, and permanently cocooned.

The first part of the text—"The act of preserving monumental events can be equated with need to reduce the infinite into everyday materials, the microscopic into a handheld type, the indescribable melting into the ordinary"—expresses the desire to understand the universe by making it into a model, a tool (in the Heideggerian "ready-to-hand" sense). One of the illustrations is of an orrery, which does this. The other attitude expressed is that in a world of increased specialization, it seems no one can understand more than a very partial view of any one subject, grand visions or meta-narratives are dissuaded (and outlawed under postmodern theory). Campbell's character is advocating the development of a grand theory of everything by reducing the universe to a set of hand-made models that are also workable machines. Campbell links this drive to the punk movement.

Being a young punk in the early 1980's, the punk do-it-yourself ethos always seems to surface in the work. Why buy magazines when you can make your own, don't learn the guitar just play it, or better yet build your own out of refuse. The discovery that I could build things continually surprised me and drove the work in scale and scope—the garage monumental and ordinary as extraordinary and the banal transcendent.

I loved Griel Marcus's [*Lipstick Traces: The Secret History of the 20th Century*] breakdown of the punk movement and its history with the Situationists. I think the movement was painted as a trend infected with nihilism and destruction, but I feel it became much more idealistic and eventually

surfaced recently with renewed interest. □ A filmed document was handed down, through two generations, detailing the first moment a human touched the surface of the moon of this planet. This recording was filmed live, with an eight millimeter Bolex standard motion camera; filming an Imperial RCA console television; which was broadcasting the NBC transmission; received from a direct feed at Cape Canaveral, which was, in turn, processing these first images from Tranquility Base, Apollo Eleven Eagle module, 1969. In many homes across North America the transmissions were viewed, discussed and embedded into a myriad of synapses, electrical impulses that gradually and eventually would fade into nothingness. □ A filmed document like this does not necessarily halt the process of collective erasure of experience, but acts as a frozen impulse, enabling the owner to swim within the moment that our species disconnects itself from the earth and connects to the ethereal. □

Pictures 229 and 230

In building this prototype, discussed earlier (page 194), the efforts of this film-maker (see above) becomes central to our work. The act of preserving monumental events can be equated with need to reduce the infinite into everyday materials, the microscopic into a handheld type, the indescribable melting into the ordinary. Our goal is to contain the boundless, reduce the scope of heaven, while expanding our limited corporal estate. If correctly assembled the unit(s) will behave as a conduit that will transfer what we are into what is out there. □

This prototype will connect us, scattered and emotional, with the firmament allowing our clay and straw bodies to slip away. The first step is to wrap the wire mesh around the base of the

8 mm standard film, moon landing on television. Courtesy author's father.

> produced a number of positive forces (artists and works) among us. (from a correspondence)

Read in this context, the installation's fiction is about doing the impossible with limited means.

The exhibition's supplement, the black binder, like Duchamp's *Green Box*, is filled with visual notes that explain the origins of nearly every element in the installation. The gesture is almost pathological; the author wants us to realize that he is a son of a thousand fathers, and that nothing he is doing is without precedence. He is not calling attention to himself, but rather, wants us to focus on his research. He is performing like a scientist and a scholar—showing us his notes, wanting us to replicate his results. So, while there may be a desire for escape and suspense on one level, on another, it is possible to see the author as having found a way to exceed the material world, but there is the strong indication that—like Plato's enlightened people who drag the unenlightened from the cave of shadows—he has returned to the three-dimensional realm on a rescue mission.

The title of the installation offers another clue.

> The title is a very loose adaptation of a quote I once heard. A Hong Kong filmmaker said that what he liked about film was the ability to jump from one time to another in seconds. I started thinking about the 12,000 years collapsing as metaphorical (flipping through books) as well as the ability we, as a society, have to diminish immense and infinite 'things' into a simple set (a trillion, the end of time, I will love you forever and ever). There are a number of ways that the title applies to the work, the most appropriate for me is that something larger than any of us is implied but it is occurring on a home-tech, domestic and human scale. (from a correspondance)

Reading fiction, watching movies, even looking at art—and certainly the making of these things—feels like a suspension of time. These moments exist between the mundane aspects of our lives. They also give us perspective, slices of (sur)reality to compare to our lives. But there is also, a hint that our contemporary access to these time machines, to information, has made us feel god-like, as if it is we ourselves that conduit between the material and metaphysical. *12,000 years collapsing into eight seconds* is a physical fiction that invites us to transcend the mundane, if just for a minute.

DAVID GARNEAU is an artist and writer who teaches at the University of Regina.

NOTES

1 These chairs are patterned after (according to the black binder) Arne Jacobsen's Swan Chairs (1955).

2 George D. DeMet http://www.palantir.net/2001/meanings/essay00.html

3 The aspect of masculinity I am describing is not measured on the conventional sliding scale between masculinity and femininity, but is a scale between *being a man* and being a boy, signifying among men, merely imitating them, or actively resisting, not just masculinity, but maturity.

4 Significantly, the director, Douglas Trumbull, was also the special effects genius behind both *2001* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

5 http://www.parallelgraphics.com/products/isb/examples/tatlin/

6 TomVanderbilt
http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content_0898/aug98rev.htm

7 http://www.artscienceresearchlab.org/

8 Michael Staples The Metaphysics of Glue
http://pages.sbcglobal.net/mstaples/third_things.html

9 From *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera