"Tumbling through Space in a Gold Box"

Reconceptualizing New Communication Technologies as Atmospheric

by

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ABSTRACT

New communication technologies have undoubtedly altered the ways in which persons interact and have had a profound impact on public life. Engaging this impact, much of the scholarly literature has focused on how these interfaces mediate interaction however, less is known about technology's modulating effects. The current project moves beyond mediation, underscoring how social relations are not only activated by technology, but are actuated by these interfaces. Through an extended case study of Portals, gold shipping containers equipped with audio-visual technology that put persons in digital face-to-face interaction with others around the globe, the current project engages such actuation, highlighting how the co-mingling of affect and technology generate new ways of noticing, living and thinking through the complex relationships of public life. The human/technology relations mediated/modulated by the Portal produce unique atmospheres that activate/actuate public space and blur the boundaries between public and private. Additionally, the atmospheres of the Portal generate a digital co-presence that allows for user/participants to feel with their interlocutors. This "feeling with" suspends user/participants in atmospheres of human connection through the emergence of an imaginative dialogue, and the curating of such atmospheres leads to dialogic transformation. As such, the Portal operates as an atmospheric interface. Engaging the concept of atmosphere attunes those interested in new communication technologies to the complex gatherings these technologies create, and the potentialities and pitfalls of these emerging interfaces on public life.

DEDICATION

To all of the strangers I met while tumbling through space in a gold box….

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Someone once told me that the only thing stupider than starting a doctoral program is not finishing it. While there have been several moments when I have wanted to give up (including a heart attack), these words kept me going. However, these words alone did not prevent me from making a mistake even more ill-informed than pursuing a doctorate in the first place – it was all the people who supported me along the way that truly got me through. Maybe starting a Ph.D. is stupid, but the relationships one builds throughout the process make it worth it.

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CHAPTER 1

MODULATING ATMOSPHERES

*Cold air greets me as I exit the subway at 42nd Street. Despite temperatures in the low 20s, Times Square is a symphony of the senses, a composition of interacting bodies and things. Cloudy skies are broken open by flashing lights while an invisible conductor modulates between the grandiose notes of car horns and the rhythmic medley of millions of feet striking concrete. My footsteps reverberate a polyphony across the pavement as I approach the Portal. Illuminated by the dancing lights above, the Portal's gold-painted walls appear as a crotchet in the choreography of urban life, but upon entering the Portal the city suddenly falls silent. The digital screen in front of me projects my Portal partner, Omid. He greets me with a "hello" while closing the doors to his own Portal in Berlin. Together we compose new notes, conversation vibrating frequencies across time and space, articulating new forms of connection through the digital interface of a golden box.*

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De Souza e Silva (2006) suggests that an interface is a communication mediator that meaningfully connects information between two discreet entities. Technological interfaces generally serve to translate digital information to users of such technologies. Her use of hybrid spaces as a concept to understand mobile technologies as interfaces between the digital and the 'real' highlights the importance of engaging such communication mediators. In doing so, she underscores that these technologies should be understood as more than mere translators of information in that digital technologies are intrinsically social. As a "social interface," digital technologies such as mobile phones serve as intermediaries between multiple users. Subsequently, digital interfaces do not simply mediate information, they mediate relationships as well.

Stressing the sociality of digital interfaces, de Souza e Silva (2006) suggests that "every shift in the meaning of an interface requires a reconceptualization of the type of social relationships and spaces it mediates" (p. 262). These social relationships are not limited to the users of such interfaces, however. Ash, Anderson, Gordon and Langley

(2018) argue that digital interfaces are actively and purposely designed to elicit particular types of social relations and interactions between the user and the interface. This suggests that while digital interfaces may generate new forms of interaction between users, the interface itself needs to be understood in terms of each user's interaction with that interface, and the promises and constraints afforded by the interface in and of itself. Reconceptualizing the types of social relationships and spaces each new interface mediates requires engaging not only what people do with technologies but what technologies themselves are doing (Rose, 2016).

Attending to what technologies themselves *do* further illustrates de Souza e Silva's (2006) suggestion that each interface requires a reconceptualization of the social and spatial relations they mediate. While digital technologies may be understood in relation to other, similar technologies, because each interface is actively designed to modulate user action, each interface must be understood individually before considering how a single interface is similar to or different than other digital technologies.  Each interface is a composition of objects modulated by the technology's designer who organizes an interface to encourage users to interact with it in particular ways. This fosters a particular set of social-spatial relations unique to the interface. Additionally, designers cannot completely control how users might interact with a particular interface. As a result, while designers might intend for particular types of interaction and/or interfaces may be similar to, or an extension of other interfaces, the uniqueness of each individual interface, and the distinctive activity of users warrants consideration of an interface independent of other technologies.

A new interface that warrants investigation are Portals. Portals are gold shipping containers equipped with audio/video technology used to connect people across both

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physical and affective geographies. The Portal is a unique communication mediator and can be articulated as a part of The Internet of Things (IOT) – "the widespread connection of the Internet to physical things" (Zappen, 2018, p. 55). As a physical object, the Portal operates as a complex site of interaction as it engages both the physical (the 'real') and the digital simultaneously. The impact of the Portal as an interface between the 'real' and the digital, between the diverse interlocutors who step inside its grey-carpeted walls, and between what those communicators do and what the digitally connected shipping container itself is doing are the principal foci of the current project. Specifically, this project engages the affective potentiality of the shipping container as both a mediator and modulator of communication. What follows is an overview of the Portal as an interface and the ways in which the shipping container has been used to mediate and modulate communicative interaction. I then outline the principal arguments of the project suggesting the Portal operates as an *atmospheric interface* that challenges current theoretical approaches to both technology and affect with the capacity to (re)shape public life. I conclude here with a preview of how those arguments unfold in the chapters that follow.

## Unit: Portals as Modulating Interface

Portals are one of the principal projects of Shared Studios, an organization using technology with the specific purpose of creating human connection. Founded by Amar C. Bakshi and Michelle Moghtader, Shared Studios is a multi-disciplinary art, design, and technology collective. Their primary goal is to create what they call wormholes in the world, using technology to connect people around the globe and create meaningful dialogue among diverse populations (Shared Studios, *About*). Through three major initiatives − Portals, Portal Paths, and Portal Phones − Shared Studios' mission is to

generate human connection across geographic boundaries, carving out spaces of human relation through art and technology.

Shared Studios' primary initiative and principal art and technology interface is the Portal. The Portal is a repurposed shipping container, painted gold and equipped with immersive audio-visual technologies. Potential participants can sign up to use the Portal and then enter the shipping container to have a conversation with users who signed up in another country. Generally, participants are given the prompt: "What would make today a good day for you?" as a means of generating discussion, and/or Portal curators provide specific prompts relevant to both envisioned dialogue as well as the particular Portal connection. For 20 minutes, participants can talk to each other about anything they choose. Conversations have included both the mundane and more directed cross-cultural dialogue. Some participants have danced with one another, played music together and talked about their pets, while others have involved policy makers in conversation with those persons impacted by policy decisions. There are 40 Portals, housed in diverse locations including universities, refugee camps and public squares online in 20 countries. As of 2018, there have been over 150,000 intimate dialogues in the Portal, over 22 hours of conversation are logged in the unique space of the shipping container each day, and an additional 100 million people pass by a Portal every year. The Portal as an interface for human connection raises questions about the role of such technologies in generating cross-cultural dialogue and how these interfaces modulate connection by encouraging the exchange of everyday talk. Additionally, the number of intercultural connections and the use of Portals by policymakers produces questions regarding the potential of such talk to (re)shape public life and policy, as well as how the interface of the Portal itself works to modulate these socio-spatial relations.

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Modularity refers to the ways in which each part of an interface is simultaneously connected to, yet independent of other parts. Ash et al. (2018) posit that understanding an interface requires engagement with the various units that compose that interface. These units are those things that visually, audibly and haptically appear for a user. These may be buttons or boxes on a mobile application's home screen, sounds that alert a user that they have received a message, or the feel of a mobile device in one's hands. Each of these units *do* different things and function independently of one another, but all collectively compose the interface.

The units that compose the Portal include the use of a shipping container to house communicative interaction and the ways in which shipping containers are already rhetorically understood by users. Additionally, the grey-carpeted walls, and the size and dimensions of the container create an atmosphere that might impact communicative interaction. The use of the color gold to adorn the outside of the container further calls on previous rhetorical articulations of color that may influence the conversations within. Finally, the use of a floor to ceiling screen, a projector, and patented camera technologies further influence how users interact in the Portal. Each of these units contributes to what Portal founder Amar Bakshi describes as users' ability to "walk through the internet" (Shared Studios, *Story*, n.d.).

The Portal must be understood as both an interface for human connection as well as a technology that modulates interaction in ways that users feel like they are literally walking through the technologies of the Portal itself. As such, the arguments presented in the current project attend to the Portal as a mediator *and* a modulator of human connection. In doing so, the project addresses both the theoretical and practical implications of the Portal as a digital interface and proposes the concept of an

*atmospheric interface* to capture both the mediating and modulating effects of new communication technologies such as the Portal. I now turn to the theoretical and practical problems addressed by the current project, and how human connection as mediated and modulated by technologies manifest in relation to the Portal as a technological interface.

## Modulating Units: The Potentiality of Portals

The Portal operates as a 'social interface,' a digital platform that mediates sociality between two or more users (de Souza e Silva, 2006). Unlike mobile technologies, the Portal is both stable and temporary, both public and private, and generates both real and imagined spatialities. Subsequently, the uniqueness of the Portal requires a rethinking of both the theoretical and practical implications of it use as a mediator and modulator of social interaction. As such, my arguments here challenge existing theories of hybrid spaces and affective publics. Additionally, as an extended case study the Portal may offers insights into how such social interfaces might address practical problems of public life including the ubiquity of polarizing media narratives and the power of everyday talk. Finally, the Portal raises questions about how the technology itself modulates such interaction, the potentiality of these technological interfaces to improve cross-cultural interaction, and how these interfaces might be used to influence the public policy decisions mediated and modulated by the Portal.

**Theoretical Problems**

The Portal as a social interface presents challenges to both de Souza e Silva's articulation of hybrid spaces as well as Papacharissi's (2015) conceptualization of affective publics. To address these shortcomings, I propose the theoretical conceptualization of social interfaces such as the Portal as technological atmospheres – *atmospheric interfaces*. In what follows, I briefly sketch out the challenges to both

hybridity and affective publics central to the theoretical arguments proposed in the project's review of literature and articulated through the use of atmospheric interfaces throughout the project's extended case study.

**Hybrid Spaces and Affective Publics.** De Souza e Silva (2006) makes a distinction between the reality of a hybrid space and those of virtual and augmented realities. Hybrid spaces occur when it is not necessary for the user to leave a physical space to engage a digital one. As such, a central component of her definition of hybrid spaces is mobility. The use of smartphones and other mobile devices (smart watches, fit bits, etc.) allow users to be immersed in both physical and digital spaces simultaneously. Hybrid spaces recognize that the digital world is not "out there somewhere," but rather "here and amongst us" (Van den Boomen, Lammes, Lehman, Raessens & Shäfer, 2009). Another key aspect of her definition of hybrid spaces is sociality. Mobile devices move actions generally performed in private to public spaces, spaces that are already intrinsically social, and these technologies are used to interact with the social environment of public spaces. Subsequently, hybrid spaces are not just "here and amongst us," but also bring people "here and amongst" one another. De Souza e Silva suggests that locative media recreate physical spaces as "multiuser environments" of communication and sociality through the simultaneous engagement with both physical and digital worlds.

The sociality of digital worlds suggests what Papacharissi (2015) has termed affective publics – those publics who are connected, disconnected, identified and mobilized through various expressions of feeling on/across digital communication networks. These publics then materialize across these digital platforms, leaving distinct digital footprints that support connective action through various statements of opinion

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and fact which may disrupt or interrupt dominant political narratives. She suggests that such feelings occur through the sharing of stories across digital networks, creating a "structure of feeling" that supports and sustains often oppositional publics. Papacharissi (2016) adds affect to conceptualizations of networked publics by suggesting that "affect is present through the intensity that permeates the stream and networked rhythms of storytelling that emerge" (p.317) across digital platforms.

**Theoretical Arguments**

While Papacharissi's (2015; 2016) affective publics highlight the ways that digital technologies make affects visible, her account does not recognize how these technologies might themselves express and modulate the affective experiences of the users of these technologies. One of the principal arguments of the current project is that the Portal itself acts as an affective force. The unique space of the shipping container makes participants *feel* as if they are in the same room. It creates a digital co-presence that demonstrates how the physical space of the Portal and its audio/visual technologies not only alter the space of the shipping container, or simply mediate the experiences within, but produce the very experiences and associative meanings of the social relations inside its grey-carpeted walls. Attending to the Portal as an interface that modulates affective interactions requires attending to how the various units of the Portal work to shape such interaction. Ash et al. (2018) suggest that to understand the affective potential of a technological interface one must attend to the interface's vibration, or how the various units of the interface relate to one another and its users. The physical structure of the shipping container, the intimate space created inside the gold box, and the technologies used to generate connection operate at amplitudes that encourage and discourage particular interactions. Additionally, the Portal generates frequencies that encourage faster or

slower modes of engagement, particular rhythms of engagement, and various associations and connections that might resonate beyond the experience of the Portal itself. Following Ash (2013) the Portal creates an atmosphere that shapes "how objects [and people] encounter one another and that, in turn creates multiple times and spaces" (p. 27). Subsequently, attending only to affective publics fails to account for the potential of an interface itself to "perturb" users through the modulations of amplitude, frequency, rhythmic articulation, resonance and tone (Ash et al., 2018), as well as the affective forces of these perturbations.

The multiplying of space and time are central to the theoretical challenges to de Souza e Silva's hybrid spaces articulated in the project's review of literature. While the concept of hybrid spaces accounts for the merging of digital and physical spaces and the ways in which this doubling of place generates new forms of social relations, new communication interfaces such as the Portal create *multiple* overlapping space-times interacting simultaneously. Participants point to how being enveloped in the unique atmosphere of the Portal creates feelings of occupying the space of their own Portal location, the geographies of their interlocutor's Portal, as well as being suspended in a sort of liminal-virtuality between these geographic locales. The multiplying of space-time in the Portal moves from a doubling of place indicative of de Souza e Silva's hybrid spaces to account for the way technological interfaces such as the Portal both mediate affect and are themselves capable of affecting users of such interfaces. Further, the Portal does not rely on the mobility of de Souza e Silva's hybridity. Instead the Portal is a fixed location that suspends bodies in multiple spaces. The Portal is an "attuned space" (Ott, Bean & Marin, 2016) – an atmosphere that invites a particular sensory experience of both time and space. As such, the Portal creates an atmosphere of energetic activations, fields

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of affect whereby space and time perform users as much as users perform them (Thrift, 2004).

The term a*tmospheric interface* is proposed as a device for understanding new technological interfaces in the current project's review of literature before being actuated through an extended case study of the Portal to demonstrate the unique socio-spatial relations mediated and modulated by such interfaces. The Portal represents a "shift in the meaning of an interface" that warrants "a reconceptualization of the type of social relationships and spaces it mediates" (de Souza e Silva, 2006, p. 262). Additionally, the unique configuration of the Portal's various units highlights how these socio-spatial relations are modulated by the technological interface itself. While hybrid spaces account for the interaction between physical and digital spaces, and affective publics attune us to the ways in which affect gets shared over digital platforms, the experience of the Portal suspends participants in conditions outside of their immediate understanding. McCormack (2009) suggests that just as a hot air balloon is activated by the air in which it is suspended, atmospheres trigger a set of affective relations. The Portal not only mediates affect, but the interface itself actuates a series of unreal yet materially pressing set of social relations modulated by the interfaces interacting units. It is atmosphere as actuating and interface as interaction that lead to the proposal of the theoretical construct of *atmospheric interfaces* to make sense of technological interfaces such as the Portal.

**Portals and Publics**

The construct of an *atmospheric interface* is then employed to address how the Portal might challenge participant preconceptions and to speculate as to the public policy potentialities of the project. As such, I locate the Portal within an already existing public to determine how this particular interface might alter public discourse through

conceptualizations of both public opinion and the public sphere. The Portal has been used to connect ambassadors to the U.N. with refugees, communities of color with police, rival gang members, prisoners with the communities from which they are locked away, and immigrants with rural communities that consistently vote against immigrant interests. The potential of the Portal to create connection that might change public opinion and potentially impact policy means it has to be understood in relation to other forms of publicity and modes of decision-making.

As previously indicated, one of the central theoretical moves of the current project is to extend Papacharissi's (2016) affective publics. Her articulation already engages publics as they manifest across digital platforms through the use of technologies but is limited in the types of technologies approached. Additionally, the Portal could be conceived as operating within a networked public sphere which raises questions about its efficacy in light of many neutralist approaches to such a conceptualization. Does the Portal serve as a node in a "grass-roots based computer public sphere" (Buckstein, 1997)? Does it create a "deterritorialized cyber-space" (Fraser, 2007) that expands the public sphere in productive ways beyond the nation-states that house each Portal? Does it serve as an enclave for action (Dahlberg, 2007), and does the Portal both mediate and modulate opinion formation that might translate into public policy or political action? Does the Portal move beyond a 'virtual space' to create a network of gold boxes that do the deliberative work of a 'virtual public sphere' (Papacharissi, 2002)?

Finally, the Portal shifts understandings of private and public in important ways. They generate private conversations that occur in public space, provide spaces for private interests to be discussed on the public's behalf, and bring the private (often banal) inner-worlds of participants in contact with strangers. The blurring of these distinctions is

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indicative of new technologies and it is important to continue to unpack the ways in which new technological interfaces such as the Portal disrupt these categories. Additionally, given the ways in which various technologies are created to modulate particular types of interaction, and that each Portal is curated by an individual who further shapes that interaction, it is important to understand the ways in which the technology itself, and the ways in which it is employed, might actuate the conditions necessary for challenging public opinion, public life, the public sphere and public sphere theory as well.

**Practical Problems**

The current project subsequently builds upon the existing literature in public sphere theory, networked, virtual and affective publics as a means of gauging the affective potential of the Portal as an atmospheric interface. The use of everyday talk in the Portal seems to generate human connection that subsequently challenges polarizing media narratives about participants (and the countries in which they reside) and generate mutual *feelings* of humanity for participant interlocutors. This makes the Portal particularly interesting to study as an atmospheric interface for the emergence of vernacular rhetoric. While some of the conversations within the Portal include discourses of the historically marginalized (Ono & Sloop, 1995; Sloop & Ono, 1997), my primary interest in the vernacular here is in relation to interlocutors' use of everyday talk (Hauser, 1999) in the Portal and the impact of such talk on institutional discourses. However, I am also interested in how diverse global interlocutors engage vernacular exchanges in the context of the shipping container and how such exchanges might provide these communities agency in the face of institutional renderings of who they are and the places they call home. The Portal itself serves as an atmospheric interface that modulates the

emergence of such discourses, and this interface subsequently shapes the interactions within. The prompt for each Portal participant (What would make a good day for you?) leads participants to share ordinary aspects of everyday life not necessarily indicative of public opinion formation, however research has shown that technologically mediated everyday talk serves as an avenue into more deliberative political discourse (Graham & Wright, 2014; Graham, Jackson & Wright, 2015a; 2015b). Additionally, these vernacular exchanges of the ordinary lead many participants to discover shared connections that challenge their assumptions about the person with whom they are speaking. Gold Books that participants write in upon exiting the Portal suggest that many participants are surprised at how different their interlocutors are compared to how persons like them (and their countries) are portrayed in the media. Subsequently, the connections that arise as a result of these everyday exchanges have the potential to challenge dominant narratives and point to how the Portal and similar atmospheric interfaces might provide a more nuanced understanding of the potentiality of the vernacular in shaping and re-shaping public discourse as well as the potential of such interfaces for facilitating inter and cross-cultural dialogue.

The use of everyday talk seems to be most prevalent when participants engage the aforementioned prompt, however many of the 150,000 conversations that have emerged in the Portal are more carefully guided by a Portal curator. There are over 32 curators who form a "trusted, global community of people who program dialogues, classes and events, lead local outreach and provide live language interpretation" (Shared Studios, *About*, para. 1). Curators are generally persons with strong ties to the community wherein the Portal is located, and as a result Shared Studios relinquishes much of the Portals' use to curator discretion. This use includes how the Portal is programmed, the cities with

whom the Portal will connect and the types of dialogues that might occur. Subsequently, the curator plays an integral role in mediating conversations in the interface and how the Portal might modulate user interaction.

The Portal has subsequently been curated in a number of different ways that speak to the interfaces potential to engage opinion formation through not only the vernacular exchange of everyday talk, but through more official, institutional exchanges as well. Aforementioned, the Portal was curated to facilitate conversations between United Nations Ambassadors and Syrian refugees. It was used to connect tech entrepreneurs with other innovators at the 2016 Global Entrepreneur summit where users also had the opportunity to "talk tech" with then President Obama. A Portal was launched at the Joe and Jill Biden Cancer Summit in September of 2018 to facilitate conversations between cancer researchers, survivors and community members about cancer related research and issues of public concern. Additionally, the Portal was used to facilitate discussion surrounding criminal justice reform through a grant funded project out of John Hopkins University in Baltimore. These more formally curated events demonstrate the potential of the Portal to engage both the vernacular and the official in potentially impactful ways.

Whether the Portal is employed to engage ordinary, everyday talk or more formal, deliberative discourse, the curator plays an integral role in shaping the possibilities for exchange by determining the purpose/goal of the Portal in their community. Shared Studios' co-founder Amar Bakshi insists that curator control is central to the success of the Portal. Rather than bringing a Portal to a community and telling that community how to engage the shipping container, Bakshi provides support for members of that community to use the Portal in ways that they believe will most benefit their own community. Subsequently, the curator plays an integral role as a mediator of the socio-

spatial relations within the Portal and the potential of the interface to impact public opinion and perhaps policy. Moreover, curators determine the digital connections between Portals which impacts the interface's vibration, or how it relates to other Portals in the network and modulates user experiences in ways that influence the interface's potential to shape public life.

By employing the concept of atmospheric interfaces, the current project engages the influence of technological interfaces on public life through an extended case study of the Portal. In the forthcoming chapters I argue for the use of atmospheric interface as a concept to describe such technologies in the project's review of literature. I then detail methods of digital and affective rhetorics and the use of a participatory critical rhetoric as a device for doing atmospheric things. I employ these methods in each of the extended case study chapters, outlining how the Portal blurs distinctions between private and public by activating and actuating public space, the role of everyday talk and how the Portal modulates users to create human connection through imaginative dialogue, and the participatory experience of curating a Portal to mediate such connections/conversations. The project concludes by arguing for the use of atmospheric interface to appreciate the Portal, but more importantly, how the concept might be employed to understand additional emerging digital interfaces and their impact on public life.

### Preview of Chapters

To assess the potential of digital interfaces on public life, I offer an outline of the current project's forthcoming chapters. Each chapter builds upon the arguments previewed thus far, sketching out a case for the use of atmospheric interface as a concept to more fully texture the mediating and modulating effects of new communication technologies. The principal arguments for this concept are detailed in the project's review

of literature and then enlivened via an extend case study of Portals in subsequent chapters. The remainder of the introduction outlines the principal topoi and arguments of each of the project's chapters.

Chapter two serves as the project's review of literature wherein I extend and challenge de Souza e Silva's (2006) articulation of hybrid spaces/realities and Papacharissi's (2015) incorporation of affect as it emerges and spreads across digital environments. Building on these literatures, the chapter engages Portals as a means of reframing such technologies as atmospheric interfaces. In so doing, I argue that the Portal disrupts conceptualizations of both space and time outlining how the interface operates as an expressed world and a technology of both condition and suspension, key arguments that underpin additional chapters. The arguments in Chapter two provide the conceptual frame of atmospheric interface which is then demonstrated in the extended case study of Portals in the chapters that follow.

Chapter three of the project details the methods and techniques used to study the Portal as an atmospheric interface. This chapter outlines the use of both digital and rhetorical field methods and the use of non-representational techniques to engage affect and atmosphere as they manifest in technologies such as the Portal. These techniques allow for the emergence of data and alternative practices of presentation to explore the ways in which digital technologies attune users to various space-times as sets of energetic activations – recognizing that digital technologies and the space-times they activate perform us as much as users of such technologies perform them (Thrift, 2004). Additionally, this chapter details the data collected for the project including participant observation, interviews of Portal curators, participants and partners, digital rhetorical analysis of Portal press and documents associated with Shared Studios, and qualitative

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data analysis of 130 pages of user responses collected in Portal Gold Books outside of the shipping containers.

Chapter four serves as the first case study of Portals, employing the use of an atmospheric interface to demonstrate the ways in which such technologies both mediate and modulate socio-spatial relations and communication practices. This chapter explores the way the Portal, as an atmospheric interface, blurs distinctions between public and private. Through an exploration of global and networked publics I argue that the Portal operates as a modality to the otherworldly creating a digital co-presence that, following Sheller and Urry (2003), blurs public and private space, public and private interest, and public and private life. Additionally, I argue that the blurring of private and public is in part a result of the modulating units of the Portal itself and these units act on participants through both intrinsic and extrinsic perturbation. Subsequently, I argue that the mediating and modulating effects of interfaces such as the Portal suggest new ways of conceptualizing both the public and the private through a blurring that is best understood as atmospheric.

Chapter five explores how atmospheric interfaces such as the Portal modulate affective elsewheres that foster human connection across geographic locations. Moving beyond an affective elsewhere however, I argue that the Portal and similar interfaces generate unique atmospheres that suspend participants in imaginative dialogue. In this chapter I suggest that the use of everyday conversation is an especially effective form of communication for creating human connection especially when mediated by digital technologies, and that the modulating effects of the interface works with the everyday to generate transformative dialogue. As an atmospheric interface, the Portal generates conditions that might lead to more successful intercultural exchanges through techniques

of bridging, expression, and agency. As such, I challenge existing approaches to intercultural dialogue and argue for the use of atmospheric interfaces such as the Portal and every day talk for creating human connection when engaging cross-cultural communication through transformative dialogue.

Furthering the argument about the ways in which technologies themselves modulate socio-spatial relations and the ways in which these interactions are simultaneously mediated by the persons engaging such technologies, Chapter six extends the use of atmospheric interfaces through an examination of Portal curators and the curation process. Following Ash et al. (2018), this chapter explores the atmospheric interface of Portal as a modulating unit. The relationship between the technology, user, and curator constitute the interface's vibrations, including how its amplitudes encourage or discourage interaction to generate rhythms of engagement that might lead to a transformative dialogue.

The final chapter (Chapter seven) summarizes key arguments and suggests the ways that atmospheric interfaces such as the Portal occupy a precarious space between the digital and the real, between the past, present and the future and between hybrid interfaces such as those theorized by de Souza e Silva (2006) and those yet to be introduced. I conclude by reiterating de Souza e Silva's call for the importance of theorizing each new communication interface and speculate as to those interfaces yet to arrive on the scene. I argue that these new interfaces require attention to not only the ways in which technologies mediate interaction but modulate such interactions. I do so as a means of exploring how as the digital and the 'real' continue to blur through virtual, augmented, hybrid and atmospheric realities, scholars must be attuned to both the material and immaterial aspects of these interfaces, to both the effects and affects of such

technologies, and the potential for such interfaces to shape and re-shape public life,

public discourse and public policy.

CHAPTER 2

A CASE FOR AN ATMOSPHERIC INTERFACE

Communication interfaces have undoubtedly altered public life. Traditional spaces of public exchange have moved to online environments and much of our everyday conversation occurs on digital platforms from social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to messaging services such as imessage, Whatsapp and Viber. Social media alone accounts for nearly 34% of mobile internet usage and the number of active social media users is projected to increase to over 3 billion by 2021(Clement, 2019). These interfaces have become primary spaces of public interaction and subsequently influence anything from where one might vacation to consumer decisions and political ideology.

The impact of such technologies was perhaps most pronounced during the United States Presidential election of 2016. The spread of "fake news" across social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter are often cited as having impacted public opinion of the election with the Pew Research Center reporting that over 60% of respondents experienced a great deal of confusion as a result of fake or misleading news online (Clement, 2019). As more persons engage digital technologies it is becoming increasingly clear that these interfaces play an important role in shaping public discourse and influencing public action.

While it is clear that digital technologies are impacting public discourse, the extent to which each technology does so warrants attention. Much of the scholarly literature attends to mobile technologies (de Souza e Silva, 2006, Hess, 2015; 2018 ), the spread of public opinion in and across social media (Coleman, 2013; Papacharissi, 2010;2015), the ways in which these communication networks create new forms of

community (Hink, 2018; Reinwald, 2018), and, in a similar vein to the arguments I make here, how digital technologies guide and manipulate our attention (Wise, 2018), and/or enact an algorithmic agency (Johnson, 2018). However, additional attention is needed to discern the impact of these technological communities and affordances on publics. Additionally, while communication scholars have recently initiated a discussion about the role of the body in digital public life (Brower, 2018; Lunceford, 2018) and the emergence of public affects over social media (Papacharissi, 2015; Papacharissi, 2016) the unique ways in which various technologies engage the body and its affects is still undertheorized. Following these conversations, the current project seeks to further animate the potentiality of digital technologies on public discourse through an examination of the unique ways in which one such technology, Portals, mediates and modulates new forms of public interaction and the promises and pitfalls of such technologically actuated communication. The dynamics of the Portal are rooted in its publicness and its potential to influence the public. As such, the current project seeks to build upon literatures of technology, specifically as these literatures converge with theories of publics and the public sphere. In so doing, I account for the ways in which interfaces such as the Portal create unique experiences of publicness mediated via affective interaction and a 'digital co-presence.' I argue that these interactions generate particular atmospheres that further modulate the potential of such interfaces to influence public opinion, policy and public life.

　　　As a discipline, communication has been a robust place for the study of the public sphere, including the emergence of networked and digital publics, however the convergence of literatures of affect and atmosphere with such scholarship has been

limited[1]. As such, in what follows I trace out theories of affect and atmosphere and how these concepts have been activated by literatures of technology. In so doing, I articulate the publicness of Portals throughout to account for the ways in which new interfaces such as the Portal require a rethinking of technologies as atmospheric interfaces that uniquely influence public life.

## Vibration: Mediating and Modulating Technological Affects

*This was an utterly surreal situation – to be fully transported from the district and find myself in strange limbo along with Cuban "Robin," suspended somewhere in space between Washington and Havana.* Sarah Feder – D.C. Portal Participant

While new communication interfaces have inevitably influenced public life, the impact of such technologies has been met with both joy and skepticism. Early approaches to new media presented them as either utopian or dystopic. Despite the chasm between these seemingly opposing views, focus on the unbridled potential of such technologies or the inevitable doom that they might bring rest upon the same fundamental idea. Van den Boomen et al. (2009) suggest that new media "marked a shift from the material to the immaterial" (p. 8), essentially moving from matter to mind. While early approaches to new media recognized the potential of such interfaces on interaction and public life, these debates were often predicated on the idea that new media technologies existed separate from the materiality of the user.

This separation between the "cyber" and material worlds was followed by recognition that emerging media could no longer be assumed to exist "out there" in relation to media users. The rise of smartphone and locative media technology

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[1] An exception here is the work of Zizi Papacharissi (2015; 2016) who has theorized the convergence of affect and technology. Additionally, recent scholarship by Ott, Hamilton & Marin (2016) engages the concept of atmosphere in the discipline of communication, however their work does not deal primarily with technology nor does it announce itself as specifically interested in theories of the public sphere.

fundamentally altered the distinction between user and interface as users moved from desktop computers to mobile phones, laptops and tablets. This shift in interface is what de Souza e Silva (2006) marks as a move from "cyber" to "hybrid." Adding to this point, Hess (2015) suggests, users now exist in an always-on and always-connected world that seamlessly moves in an online and offline hybridity, speaking the multiple languages and embodying the various subjectivities between them" (p. 1629).

Subsequently, the internet is no longer something that is "out there" rather, it is something that moves "here and amongst us" (Van den Boomen et al., 2009, p. 8).

Understanding the internet as moving "here and amongst us" changes conceptualizations of both place and interaction. The hybridity of digital and physical spaces offered by de Souza e Silva functions as a sort of doubling of place. The idea that cyberspace exists apart from physical space assumes that persons engaging the cyber are somehow disconnected from the physical environment around them. Instead, mobile phone users are simultaneously interacting with both the cyber spaces of their smartphones and the local and embodied relations of their physical environments (Miller & Slater, 2000). This creates "two theres there," a doubling of place that impacts users' understanding of immediate environments and the cyber environments with which they are hybridized (Moores, 2012). Mobile devices become the interface between the digital and physical. From the merging of this mix between and amongst the materiality of the 'real' world, mobility, and sociability arises a hybrid reality (de Souza e Silva, 2006).

To more fully unpack the relationships among reality, mobility and sociability constituted by a hybrid reality, de Souza e Silva (2006) makes a distinction between these hybrid realities and those of virtual, mixed and augmented realities. Because mobile technologies allow for digital spaces to exist "here and amongst" users, hybrid spaces can

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be distinguished from virtual and augmented reality in that while both of these technological realities consider the connections between the digital and the physical, they either focus on the technology used to construct these realities separate from the physical (virtual) or are restricted to the overlaying of digital graphics on top of a physical reality (augmented) rather than merging the physical and digital into a simultaneously interacting environment. Further, mixed reality fails to engage the communicative and social functions of a hybrid reality (de Souza e Silva, 2006).

They are the communicative and social functions highlighted by de Souza e Silva that are particularly important when considering the relationship among digital technology, affect and public life. De Souza e Silva (2006) underscores this importance when discussing hybrid spaces as social spaces. Mobile devices such as smart phones move actions generally performed in private to public spaces, spaces that are already intrinsically social, and these new technologies are used to interact with the social environment of physical spaces. Mobile phones can be used to pay for items at point of purchase (e.g. Apple pay), exchange money (e.g. Venmo), take photographs of one's physical location, play music at parties, engage the physical environment through augmented reality games (e.g. Pokeman Go), get directions, find places to eat or meet up with nearby friends, and to shape public opinion through the spread of publicity such as news, fake or otherwise. Hybrid realities are not only indicative of the digital being "here and amongst us" but these technologies have brought people "here and amongst" one another as well. New and locative media technologies recreate physical spaces as "multiuser environments" of communication and sociality with the potential for the spread of publicity and public opinion formation.

The impact of digital technologies on communication and social relations is no longer predicated on a clear distinction between the materiality of the physical environment and an immaterial digital space. Instead digital relations can be considered what Van den Boomen et al. refer to as "in-material" or an intricate web of mutually shaping relations between bodies and digital technologies. In this way, these in-material relations are similar to conceptualizations of affect in that rather than reducing the world to disparate substances (in this case between the physical and digital worlds), affect can be understood as being a part of a world in process (Brower, 2018). Van den Boomen et al. (2009) contend, "when it comes to digital material, the lines separating objects, actions, and actors are hard to draw, as they are hybridized in technological affordances, software configurations and user interfaces" (p. 9). As such, engaging such technologies requires recognition of an interface's vibrations – or how various units of an interface communicate with the user to shape interactions (Ash et al., 2018). These vibrations generate various amplitudes of interaction moving these interfaces beyond multi-user environments to encompass the multi-sensory as well. Just as affect illustrates the forces of encounter between and amongst bodies, these same intensities are present in the technological affordances of the digital. I now turn my attention to the in-material web of relations between bodies through literatures of affect before engaging the affective relationships between bodies and technologies.

**Amplitude: Mediated Affects and Public Life**

I begin by fleshing out conceptualizations of affect itself. Affect is the brief, sometimes sustained force, and the passage of these intensities between bodies, other bodies and things (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). Affect is marked by a gap between content and effect. It is this gap that distinguishes affect from emotion. Massumi (2002)

highlights this demarcation noting that "emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized" (p. 277), whereas affect accounts for the pre-personal intensities that exist prior to emotion. Affect is fundamentally social. It is the medium that brings bodies into relation, it is "a materialist account of bodily association" (Woodward & Lea, 2010, p. 157).

Theories of affect are materialist in that they account for the relationship between bodies (human and non-human) and how these bodies "sustain and transform each other" (Woodward & Lea, 2010, p. 157). Woodward and Lea (2010) outline four ways in which attention to affect challenges ontological and epistemological approaches to the relationships between bodies and things, between subjects and technologies. The first is that attention to affect unhinges subjects and technologies from a 'world-in-itself' that is out there to be investigated. Instead, theories of affect highlight the world as becoming, "a continuous formation of the world as an infinite series of bodily enactments" (p. 157). Theories of affect attend to the myriad relations between the social and material, engaging the material as a process of "continuous doings…arranging the social as a symphony of interacting bodies" by attending to how various materialities are made possible through the relationships between the materiality of bodies and the material conditions of the world (Woodward & Lea, 2010, pp. 157-158), between the material world and the digital. Finally, theories of affect give agency to the non-human, decentering the human subject by highlighting "a series of bodies-in-moving-relation" (Woodward & Lea, 2010, p. 157) making agency the purview of the digital as well. This

expansion of agency highlights not only the forces of encounter between people, but between people and the digital and physical spaces of hybridity.

The focus on materiality is only one avenue in the study of affect. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) note that there is no single theory of affect and it is reductive to assume that a single, totalizing theory does, or might exist. This is because it is impossible to exhaust an understanding of what the "body can do" (p. 3). Rather Seigworth and Gregg offer eight orientations to the study of affect. As it relates to the relations between bodies and technologies at least two of Seigworth and Gregg's orientations coalesce to provide a nuanced reading of these relationships. One approach to the study of affect focuses specifically on the relationship between bodies and technologies highlighting those moments where "technologies work increasingly to smudge the affectional line between the living and the non-living" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 6). This particular approach is important in understanding how technologies might modulate affective atmospheres as a result of these relations by generating various amplitudes of interaction by encouraging or discouraging user interactions with digital interfaces (Ash et al., 2018). The ways in which technologies modulate amplitudes of interaction highlight a second of Seigworth and Gregg's approaches through a focus on atmospheres of sociality and feelings of belonging, the affective relations that constitute human connection. Together these two orientations highlight the role of affect in both human-to-human and human-technology relations. Both orientations engage material relations between and amongst bodies, between bodies and technological amplitudes, and how these relations might emerge in the hybrid spaces of digitality/physicality.

These hybrid spaces connect affect and its interrelations with technology to public life. Papacharissi (2016), in detailing the affects associated with social movement

campaigns on Twitter, highlights the in-betweenness of affect, the "not-yet fully formed possibilities and potentialities" of these intensities, underscoring what she calls affective publics (p. 311). She goes on to outline affective publics as those publics who are connected, disconnected, identified and mobilized through various expressions of feeling on/across digital communication networks. These publics materialize across digital platforms and leave distinct digital footprints, support a connective though not necessarily collective action, express themselves through various statements of opinion, fact or a blend of both, and interrupt and/or disrupt dominant political narratives. Through her examination of Twitter hashtags across social movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring, she is one of the first scholars to explore the interrelations of technology and affect as both mediators and modulators of public life. She asserts that the sharing of stories across digital networks creates a "structure of feeling" that both supports and sustains various, often oppositional publics, and that these "spreadable technologies afford *texture, tonality, discursivity,* and *narrative modality* to networked and affective publics" (p. 320, emphasis in original).

Papacharissi (2016) suggests a potential reclaiming of the affective intensities of co-presence in/across digital publics however, her assertions represent a shift in traditional articulations of the public sphere. Human connection is central to many conceptualizations of publicness, and this connection has primarily been linked to a shared spatiality and the importance of co-presence in the exchange of ideas. Habermas's (1989) original conceptualization of the public sphere as a singular, comprehensive institution wherein private citizens bracket differences to discuss matters of public concern through rational debate is predicated on such notions. However, the rise of new communication technologies has generated what Thompson (1995) refers to as a "public

without places" (p. 125). Tracing the rise of mediated publics, Thompson outlines how the shared locales of traditional publicness were essentially dialogic in nature. Persons present for public debate were face-to-face with other interlocutors, drawing on a rich set of symbolic cues including sights, sounds, visual appearance and spoken words. Part of the richness of this face-to-face interaction is connected to the ability of such engagement to generate the sort of affective intensities necessary for human connection. Thompson refers to the intensities of a physical presence in a shared locale as the "traditional publicness of co-presence" (p. 125). However, with the rise of new mediated communication technologies, actions and events can occur independent of a co-presence and may be distributed with others outside of a shared spatiality through digital networks. While Papacharissi (2016) has engaged affect as a means of conveying a type of co-presence in digital publics, this extension follows both utopian and dystopian responses to the shift from a 'traditional publicness of co-presence' to the affective publics she articulates.

This extension, transformation, and displacement of a 'traditional publicness of co-presence' can be traced via examination of a 'mediated publicness' developed as a result of new communication technologies. Initial displacement occurred via the press. The press allowed for the exchange of ideas without the face-to-face interaction and dialogical exchange associated with a shared spatiality. Instead it generated a "mediated quasi-interaction" (Thompson, 1995, p. 127). Despite the initial transformation in publicness generated by the printed word however, co-presence was still central to Habermas' conceptualization of publicness. While individuals might encounter ideas via the press, the sharing of those ideas still occurred in salons and coffee shops through face-to-face communication.

Given the importance of co-presence to publicness, it is not surprising that Habermas lamented communication mediums such as the radio and television and his concerns were echoed by Dewey (1954). The television, while widening the scope of information and allowing persons to engage ideas far removed from their local contexts, is unidirectional (Habermas, 1989). It replaces the dialogical exchange associated with a shared spatiality with a despatialized, unidirectional, and non-dialogical form of visibility. New mediated technologies such as television displaced if not replaced co-presence through the transmission of information via invisible administrators and producers (Thompson, 1995). It essentially replaced a public sphere with a public screen.

DeLuca and Peeples (2002) challenge the importance of co-presence to publicness arguing that the privileging of dialogue and face-to-face interaction ignores other forms of communication and is inadequate when engaging new, mediated communication practices. They suggest that the focus on co-presence and face-to-face dialogue to conceptualizations of the public sphere ignores the realities of technological advancement and the ways in which these advancements have re-shaped the communication environment. DeLuca and Peeples move us from a public sphere to a public screen, highlighting how activist groups might stage image events that challenge the unidirectional flows of information produced by state actors and corporations. Image events are "staged acts of protest designed for media dissemination" (Delicath & DeLuca, 2003, p. 315). Thus, these image events create a form of interactivity via a medium generally conceptualized as unidirectional, creating an exchange of information not dependent on co-presence or face-to-face dialogue.

Additional communication technologies further engage interactivity without engaging co-presence. Unlike television, the Internet is often predicated on two-way

exchange (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2009). Through social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc., individuals can communicate ideas to large audiences, increasing the prevalence and publicness of information and generating a new, virtual public sphere. Papacharissi (2002) conceptualizes such a virtual public space, noting that while the Internet may or may not constitute a virtual public sphere (predicated on its ability to enhance democracy), the Internet creates a space for the exchange of ideas and discussion. In addition, unlike Habermas' bourgeois public sphere whose members constituted the elite, publicity and public opinion via the Internet, while dependent on an intellectual leadership, opens up deliberation and debate to all those with Internet access (Mahlouly, n.d.). Thus, the Internet generates fluidity in the flow of information. Contrasting the careful production and dissemination of images associated with the public screens of television, the Internet "enables horizontal communication that may be less effectively surveilled, controlled or censored by national societies" (Urry, 2003, p. 63). Consequently, despite being despatialized and void of co-presence, the Internet and its associative interactivity does provide a space for dialogue and 'digital' discussion.

This interactivity has allowed for the connection of multiple publics across geographic locations. Recognizing this shift Fraser (2007) notes that conceptualizations of the public sphere need to account for the ways that transnationalism has changed the 'who,' 'what,' 'where' and 'how' of communication practices. Persons from varying locations are now able to communicate about interests that extend beyond the nation state through what Fraser calls a "deterritorialized cyberspace" (p. 19). This deterritorialized cyberspace can be likened to a networked public sphere that connects various communicators across contexts no longer dependent on traditional forms of publicity or intermediaries such as the state (Pfister, 2014). These networked publics are formed

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through the spaces that emerge as a result of networked technologies (boyd, 2011). boyd (2011) notes that these communication networks "…allow people to gather for social, cultural and civic purposes, and they help connect with a world beyond their close friends and family" (p. 39).

Despite focus on the connective potential of digital interfaces much of the scholarly literature follows DeLuca and Peeples (2002) assertion that this connection occurs independent of the 'traditional publicness co-presence' and its associative affects. Papacharissi (2016) is one of the few scholars to suggest, however, that these intensities are not limited to face-to-face, body to body interaction, but are also generated in and across digital environments. Papacharissi returns to the materiality of affect outlined above, highlighting the ways that affect is not only experienced between bodies, but between bodies and other bodies through digital interfaces.

She makes this connection between affect and technology by outlining the processes through which social media users organize around a cause or concern. She proffers that in coming together around various issues, these communities do so through various feelings or sentiments. These sentiments are expressed through structured storytelling across social media platforms. Speaking specifically of stories associated with the Egypt uprising on Twitter, Papacharissi (2016) suggests that affect,

> is the drive or sense of movement experienced before we have cognitively identified a reaction and labeled it as a particular emotion. Its in-the-making, not-yet-fully-formed nature is what invites many to associate affect with potentiality. In this particular storytelling structure of #egypt, affect is present through the intensity that permeates the stream and the networked rhythms of storytelling that emerge (p. 317).

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She outlines these "(soft) structures of storytelling" in the form of graphs that track the flow and number of Tweets around a particular hashtag. Tending to the affective pace of movement online, Papacharissi demonstrates the affective relations between bodies and technologies suggesting that prior to social media users' ability to actually understand and label an event suggested by a hashtag (in the case of #egypt — revolution), the repetition of #egypt worked to create an affective chant of intensity in the in-between space of digital users and the marking of the event as revolution.

Additionally, while Papacharissi connects technology to an affective public, additional attempts have been made to unpack affect in relation to technology and public life. For example, Brower (2018) challenges Marshal McLuhan's long held assumption that "the medium is the message." He suggests that digital media are constitutive of a "post medium." Rather than the meanings of digital media being reliant on the medium through which they are produced (i.e. the internet), Brower argues that digital media,

> produce a fundamental recoding of expression in the form of 1s and 0s that are not committed to an expressive analogy. Those 1s and 0s instead take a dynamic expressive form that opens up the real-artificial distinction by calling into question the confinement of subjective embodiment to the limitations of external, physical experience (p. 49).

Subsequently, the message cannot be relegated to the medium as the digital dissolves the medium as a result of information no longer being determined by the physical conditions of that medium. Brower's "post medium" account of digital media is akin to de Souza e Silva's (2006) defining of the digital as producing a hybrid reality. The real is not represented on a particular medium while existing *over there*. Instead, the digital screens through which we interact every day turn back onto the body of the user rather than

toward an externalized, physical medium (Brower, 2018). As a result, Brower's (2018) "post medium" account of the digital replaces the medium with the viewer-participant of digital interfaces giving "texture to the life of affect" (p. 51).

**Resonance: Technological Affects as Modulators of Public Life**

It is evident that there has been a move by scholars toward the orientations of affect suggested by Seigworth and Gregg and how these intensities are experienced in/across digital environments. However, despite recognition that affect is experienced in human relations with non-human technologies, most of these orientations still focus on intensities experienced *between persons* that are *mediated by* technology. Subsequently, additional focus is needed to assess the ways in which these technologies themselves modulate affective intensities that shape interaction. While Brower (2018) initiates this conversation with his "post medium" account of digital media by complicating conceptualizations of how we interface with technology, he does not necessarily account for how technological units themselves modulate affect or the atmospheres created by these affective relations between bodies and digital environments. Rather than limit the focus of affect on relations between humans in/through digital interfaces, scholars need to additionally attend to those affective intensities generated by technological interfaces themselves, how various technological units work to modulate user interaction, and the affective atmospheres they produce.

Geographer James Ash has initiated conversation around the affective intensities of the digital. Ash (2013) goes as far as to speculate the affective outside of human consciousness or intentionality focusing instead on how technological objects relate to one another. He does so by attending to what he calls "perturbations" or the ability of an aspect of one object to effect another in some basic way (p. 22). His argument is not void

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of the human all together, but rather attends to the ways that technologies create

perturbations that ultimately generate affective responses from their human users by

producing atmospheres specific to the technological object in question. Not only does

Ash complicate the affective relations between technologies and their users here, but

additionally he challenges de Souza e Silva's argument that these technologies create a

doubling of place or a hybrid reality. Through an engagement with the iPhone, Ash

argues that these technologies generate unique atmospheres. He demonstrates these

atmospheres by highlighting the ways in which the internal placement of the iPhone

antenna caused problems for users when their hands blocked the phone's ability to signal

between the device and cellular towers. In addition, he uses the placement of liquid

contact indicators used to detect water in the device to suggest that these indicators, in

their reaction to user sweat, prevent the phone from operating which produces an

affective atmosphere specific to the device which modulates user engagement.  While not

the entirety of his argument, Ash's basic premise is that rather than understanding the

affective and spatial as being limited to the human body, it is possible to "consider how

spatial awareness is shaped through the ways that aspects or qualities of objects appear to

humans through processes of perturbation" (Ash, 2013, p. 26).

These perturbations suggest how the various units that make-up interact to both

mediate and modulate user interactions, and provide the framework of unit, vibration and

tone as a procedure for understanding these mediating and modulating affects. While

units compose an interface, vibration consists of how these units work together with users

to encourage and/or discourage various forms of interaction (amplitude), the speed or

slowness of such interactions (frequency), the rhythms of these engagements or their

rhythmic articulation, and how various forms of interaction are made present through the

association of various units with one another and the user (resonance). Ash et al. (2018) suggest that these vibrations encompass the overall feel, or affective intensities of technological interfaces accounting for an interfaces tone of engagement. Subsequently, Ash (2013) and Ash et al. (2018) complicate theories of affect to more fully attend to the ways in which, rather than just a hybridizing of the physical and the digital or simply focusing on the mediating effects of technological interfaces, these interfaces themselves generate unique affective atmospheres in and through which humans interact.

It is this complication to theories of affect and Ash's (2013) move toward the concept of atmosphere that guide my arguments here. Technologies themselves generate intensities and subsequently both mediate and modulate interactions between humans and these non-human technologies to produce unique atmospheres of relation. Moving beyond de Souza e Silva's (2006) conceptualization of a hybridized reality constituted by a merging of the physical and digital, I argue that attending to the atmospheric provides a more nuanced reading of the affective intensities between humans and technologies. In so doing, I build on the previous sections engagement with the processual framing of interfaces as unit and vibration to explore the expressed 'feel' or tone of these digital technologies. Following this argument, I move toward the concept of atmosphere before articulating the Portal as an illustration of new communication technologies as atmospheric interfaces.

### Tone: Portals and a Move Toward the Atmospheric

The potential of digital interfaces to modulate user interaction suggests that these technologies act upon users as much as users act upon them. Despite recognition of this potential in the scholarly literature, Ash et al. (2018) note that these modulating effects have yet to be fully theorized. Whether these technologies are examined as sites for the

production of discourse, or "algorithmic governance or surveillance, these processes are often placed in contrast to the surface appearance of interfaces, which are mainly considered to be significant only as a means of obscuring and glossing over these regimes of discursive production, aggregation, analysis and so on" (Ash et al., 2018, p. 166). Subsequently, digital interfaces are often analyzed for their potential for social and political discourse *or* the surfaces of such interfaces are studied to unpack the outcomes of user interaction with the 'hidden mechanisms' of the interfaces operation. To engage both the discursive potential of interfaces to mediate public life, in tandem with an examination of the mechanisms that modulate such interaction requires a reconceptualization of the processes of both the mediating and modulating effects of new technological interfaces. As such, this project seeks to illuminate how new interfaces activate and actuate social and political interaction. To do so, the project offers an extended case study of Portals as an *atmospheric interface*. I now move to the key theoretical underpinnings of such a move, outlining how the interface of the Portal is best understood through the concept of atmosphere. It is this theoretical grounding that drives the arguments that follow in the extended case study of the Portal in subsequent chapters.

**Atmospheric Tones**

As a concept, atmosphere has been employed in a number of ways. Some scholars focus on how various spaces possess or become possessed by the atmospheric. For McCormack (2008) atmospheres are impersonal or trans-personal intensities and Böhme (2006) articulates atmosphere as a qualified aura. Atmosphere has been articulated as a sense of place (Anderson, 2009), as well as with movement rather than a qualified state in a particular spatial field. For example, Brennan (2004) conceives of atmosphere as the collective transfer or transmission of feeling, and Thrift (2008) articulates atmosphere as

aesthetic waves. Additionally, Stewart (2011) positions atmosphere as attunement. As such, the concept has been taken-up in myriad ways. Rather than an exhaustive account of atmosphere across the social sciences, my focus here is on those tenets that offer insight into new communication technologies. These include atmospheres as expressed worlds of relation, condition and suspension, and the interplay between these intensities of relation and the material world.

Atmospheres exert force and open up or limit possibilities in the material world. However, atmospheres maintain a degree of ambivalence. They are both real – they can press on us – and yet they are not entirely sensible. Subsequently, atmospheres maintain a level of ambiguity. They are "disordered, shifting and contingent – that which never quite achieves the stability of form" (Anderson, 2009, p. 78).

It follows, then, that atmosphere builds upon Massumi's (2002) articulation of affect as the trans or pre-personal intensities that emerge between and amongst bodies. Further, atmosphere builds off Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) conceptualization of affect as 'becoming.' Subsequently, atmospheres are experienced in "lived duration" (Anderson, 2009, p. 78), making it conducive to the real yet not necessarily sensible conceptualization of atmosphere in that, as a phenomenon of weather, atmosphere has been associated with instability, the shifting of forms and the transmission of airs. In this way, atmospheres "interrupt, perturb, and haunt fixed persons, places and things" (Anderson, 2009, p. 78).

While atmospheres perturb places and things, Ash suggests that these places and things can themselves exert disruptive forces. Atmospheres press and are pressed upon by the subjects and objects entangled in their airs. Ash's conceptualization follows Dufrene (1973) who points to the intensities generated by the aesthetic object to establish the

conditions in which representation occurs. Dufrene uses the term atmosphere synonymously with luminescence, interiority, and the unconditioned to explain affective qualities of objects. While his engagement might be associated with the sublime, he further outlines minor atmospheres including the "lightness of dance," the "nobility, fervor, majesty [and] tranquility of architecture" (p. 179), the cruelty of a book and/or the innocence of a child. For Dufrene an aesthetic object's atmosphere is an "expressed world" in and from which that object is apprehended and given meaning. Given that the object – and its attendant atmospheres – are always becoming and change with new forms of relation, "atmospheres are indeterminant" (Anderson, 2009, p. 79).

Böhme's (2006) definition of atmosphere shares the aesthetic qualities outlined by Dufrene but he places more emphasis on the spatiality of atmospheres, describing them as "spatially discharged, quasi-objective feelings" (p. 398). Böhme (1993) outlines spatiality as the presence of things, "of persons or environmental constellations" (p. 121) and atmospheres are spatial in that they are "tinctured" through such presences. His definition of atmosphere highlights uncertainty, suggesting that atmospheres are both objective and subjective, they are thinglike in their presence yet subjectlike in that they are "sensed in bodily presence by human beings and this sensing is at the same time a bodily state of being of subjects in space" (p. 122). In highlighting the ambiguity of atmospheres, Böhme (1993) returns the concept to its materialist roots through his focus on spatiality. It is difficult to locate an atmosphere, yet they seem to envelope various environments with particular types of feeling.

Böhme's (1993) articulation suggests that while atmospheres are produced through bodies in relation, they cannot be reduced to those relations. Atmospheres exist even when the human subject is absent. Stewart (2011) accounts for both the presence

and absence of the human subject through what she calls the everyday sensibilities of "living through things" (p. 445). For Stewart (2011), things do not matter in terms of their representations but rather as a result of their "qualities, forces, relations and movements" (p. 445). In her articulation of affect she asks what possibilities might arise if rather than thinking of the world as dead, or the effects of distant systems, that instead we conceptualized the world as "lived affect" (p. 446). She challenges scholars to engage "living through things" by attending to "the proliferation of little worlds of all kinds that form up around conditions, practices, manias, pacings, scenes of absorption, [and] styles of living" (p. 446). Stewart (2007) articulates these little worlds as ordinary affects. Following Pile's (2010) assertion that affect slips beyond representation, Stewart (2011) posits that attending to atmospheric attunements is a creative practice that requires us to engage the ways that often "incommensurate elements hang together in a scene" (p. 452). Engaging atmosphere is an exercise in attending to the atmospheric surrounds in and through which bodies, bodies and things come into relation – are registered. Atmospheres work to activate things within a given spatio-temporal arrangement, they are conditions of suspension in the airs of processual sense-making (McCormack, 2015).

It is important to note that any time bodies come into relation these shared affects are always already entangled in both the discursive and extra-discursive airs of their surrounds. This is especially important to note when considering how global others might become suspended in particular atmospheres that place competing affects into relation and speaks to the volatility of atmosphere. The intensity registered by bodies when they come into relation are "subject to continuous, free-floating forms of control" (Ott et al., 2016, p. 348). These free-floating forms of control act as "affective

economies" as "a form of public circulation and accretion of attitudes, investments, and dispositions (affects)" (Cisneros, 2012, p. 138). Subsequently, various groups navigate the material world differently and subsequently "feel" an atmosphere at different emotional registers (Muñoz, 2000). Atmospheres, then have the potential to establish the conditions in which persons register shared affects and different affects are experienced and judged differently by different bodies. When "incommensurate elements" (Stewart, 2011, p. 452) become suspended in an atmosphere these shared affects may experience volatility in the process of becoming atmospheric.

Choy and Zee (2015) build upon the idea of atmosphere as condition and suspension through recognition of this potential volatility. They highlight suspension as the art of noticing, that atmospheric suspension denotes both a condition and a process. Atmospheres are both "the event in which particles are dispersed into a medium, agitation…and how these particles come to settle" (p. 213). Their articulation of atmosphere accounts for how affectivities become suspended or gathered in a shared medium. Becoming atmospheric is to attend to the ways in which shared affects are animated by the practices, problems, and potentials "presented by living as an element among others in the turbulences and volatilities of a ubiquitous air" (p. 217).

The concept of atmosphere as condition and process highlight its potential to frame both the mediating and modulating effects of digital interfaces. Every interface is both its composition of various units (its surface appearance), and the technological mechanisms of code and software that comprise its appearance and use. As such, digital interfaces act upon users in ways that are both visible and invisible. Each interface must be understood through its various units, how these units communicate with other units, and with the user of that interface. These interactions establish conditions that guide, but

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do not fully determine the processes of user action. In what follows I trace out the use of atmosphere as a concept for understanding what digital interfaces do as a means of accounting for "their efficacy in relation to forms of (non)human action" (Ash et al., 2018, p. 178) in ways that challenge existing conceptualizations of the impact of these communication technologies on public life.

### Tumbling through Space in a Gold Box: The Portal as Atmospheric

The Portal serves as one such atmosphere suspending users in the shared medium of the shipping container. As such, the Portal illustrates how new communication technologies challenge existing articulations of both affective publics and hybridization. While affective publics account for the ways in which digital technologies support affect across digital networks (Papacharissi, 2015; 2016), as a physical object, the Portal provides a specific location for the sharing of affect, an object that itself has the capacity to affect and be affected. Further, while mobile technologies create hybridized realities in which users simultaneously exist in both physical and virtual spaces (de Souza e Silva, 2006), the Portal demonstrates how new communication technologies *multiply* space by placing users at once "here and amongst" multiple spaces/realities. New communication technologies like those of the Portal create new spatio-temporal arrangements or atmospheres. These atmospheres are expressed worlds that suspend users "here and amongst" the real, the virtual and the spaces between.

**Expressed Worlds**

To conceptualize new communication technologies such as the Portal as atmospheric begins by engaging how these technologies have the ability to affect and be affected. Papacharissi (2015) demonstrates how social networking sites (SNS) such as Twitter have the potential to support affect across distributed networks. She articulates

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these architectures of support as electronic elsewheres, "social spaces sustained through digitally enabled affective structures that support meaning-making" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 24). Therefore, electronic elsewheres work to digitally support and make affect visible. Before outlining how technologies such as the Portal depart from these electronic elsewheres, it is necessary to articulate how the Portal operates as a similar structure by utilizing digital technologies to support and make affect visible – as an *affective elsewhere*.

The Portal acts as an affective elsewhere via the communicative exchanges that occur within the space of the shipping container as well as the physical structure of the Portal itself. Each Portal is lined in gray carpet contributing to participant experience. It is an ambient room free of external distractions. While webcams create a fish-eye effect and limit the visual scope of the user, the Portals are equipped with specially designed cameras to balance out this effect, and the Portal provides a full body view of each of the participants. The dark and limited space of the Portal coupled with the full body, modified camera essentially creates a virtual hologram of each participant. Those who have participated in the Portal suggest that it feels like they are breathing the same air as their interlocutor. The usual performativity is stripped away. The user "functions in terms of being and materiality rather than appearance and mimetic imitation" (Balme, 2014, p.177). The Portal supports and makes visible affect by compelling participants to let go of facades and express a sort of authentic self with others.

This presentation of the self and participant affect is demonstrated in participant responses to interacting with their interlocutors in the Portal. One participant commented, "I would have never expected to be face-to-face with a complete stranger who made me feel as if she knew me." Another participant noted, "I think it's really interesting to throw

two strangers together, the initial tension seemed to show both of our hopes to create connection and reach mutual understanding." Despite the interactions in the Portal being between strangers, one participant highlighted how "most importantly, we laughed from our hearts, because we connected." Each participant's response points to the way in which the Portal serves as a unique space for participants to *feel with* their communicative partners. Participants felt as if their partner really knew them, could affectively access their hopes and dreams, and laughed together with their hearts. In this way, the Portal is similar to the sort of connective affects shared across other digital platforms.

While the Portal supports affect by allowing participants to *feel with* others, the experience inside the shipping container moves beyond that of an electronic elsewhere in that the Portal itself acts as an affective force. The unique space of the shipping container makes participants feel as if they are in the same room. This 'digital' co-presence demonstrates how the physical space of the Portal and its audio/visual technologies not only alter the space of the shipping container, or simply mediate the experiences within, but modulate the very experiences and associative meanings of the relations inside its gray carpeted walls.

The ability of the Portal to shape the meanings and relations within is also demonstrated by participant responses to the Portal. Participants often highlight that the experience is "otherworldly," a "magical" moment whereby they are "transported into the life of another." In this way, the Portal operates as an intrinsic perturbation, a disturbance caused by the Portal as an object itself. One Portal participant noted that "the image was blurry, slightly ghostly, but a warmth filled the space." Finally, another participant sums up the way in which the Portal itself 'perturbs' users when they stated, "the experience

begins before you even step in, the nervousness of anticipation emanating from its golden doors – and then lingers after you step out." The Portal creates an atmosphere that shapes "how objects [and people] encounter one another and that, in turn, creates multiple times and spaces" (Ash, 2013, p. 27). As one participant stated, "it's like time traveling, tumbling through space in a gold box."

Rather than simply supporting affects, the Portal operates as an expressed world around which these affects are produced. While Papacharissi's (2015; 2016) affective publics and electronic elsewheres highlight the ways that digital technologies make affects visible, her account does not recognize how technologies might themselves express and shape the affective experiences of the users of these technologies. More, the Portal itself has the capacity to both affect and be affected, creating unique spatial atmospheres that shape the encounters within. I now turn to the ways in which these new communication technologies further complicate theories of technology by multiplying space, suspending participants between manifold realities simultaneously.

**Condition and Suspension**

As previously outlined, the simultaneous interaction of the digital and physical through mobile devices has been theorized as a hybrid reality (de Souza e Silva, 2006). While this merging of realities has generated new forms of sociability through a *doubling of place*, new digital interfaces such as the Portal further complicate this merging of realities by creating *multiple* overlapping spacetimes interacting simultaneously. This multiple interaction produces an atmosphere of relation, creating the conditions in which Portal participants are at least momentarily suspended.

This overlapping of space-times is suggested in the quote by D.C. Portal participant Sarah that opens this chapter. In her conversation with a participant in Cuba,

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Sarah noted that she felt "suspended" in "a strange limbo somewhere between Washington D.C. and Havana." Her comment is reiterated by multiple Portal participants. They point to how being enveloped in the atmosphere of the Portal creates feelings of occupying the space of their Portal location, the geographies of their interlocutor's Portal, as well as being suspended in virtual space between geographic locales.

The feeling of being suspended in multiple spaces simultaneously is perhaps best articulated by a participant in the New Haven, Connecticut Portal after connecting with the Portal in Erbil, Iraq. This participant noted,

> My biggest take-away from the experience is this sense of location/dis-location. When inside, I actually felt dizzy at points because I couldn't quite place myself relative to my surroundings. And yet I was very conscious of the fact that I was on the sidewalk, outside the Art Gallery, and in New Haven.

This comment points to how new interfaces such as the Portal at least momentarily suspend participants in multiple spaces. While de Souza e Silva's (2006) hybrid reality accounts for the simultaneous interaction between physical and digital spaces, the Portal generates an atmosphere that dislocates/locates participants in the physical location of the Portal while simultaneously locating/dis-locating them into/from the digital space inside the Portal itself. Further, the Portal adds to this doubling of space by situating the user into the physical location of their interlocutor's Portal while simultaneously suspending both participants in the "magical," "otherworldly" space in-between these physical and digital environments. In doing so, the Portal suggests how new communication technologies are "becoming-atmospheric" as users of these technologies experience "a susceptibility and embeddedness in airs through being gathered in a shared medium" (Choy & Zee, 2015, p. 217).

The atmosphere of the Portal not only suspends participants in multiple spaces simultaneously, but in multiple times as well. Aforementioned, several participants have narrated the experience as one in which they felt as if they had been "transported" and likened the Portal to "traveling through time." Other participants have suggested a similar disruption to their sense of time in the shipping container. A New Haven participant noted, "I felt as though I was in a different time when speaking in the Portal – something in the architecture, the simplicity, the apparent lack of contrivance, liquidated fear, boundaries." This participant's experience further suggests the way that this disruption of time supports and makes visible particular affects in the Portal by stripping away "contrived" performativities to allow for a *feeling with* their communicative partner in Iraq. One participant adds to this multiplying of time and its affective potential when stating, "You are being opened up to an unknown person's world or a period of time that seems infinite."

The multiplying of spacetime in the Portal shifts the doubling of place indicative of de Souza e Silva's (2006) hybrid reality and suggests ways in which new communication technologies do not just mediate affect but are themselves capable of modulating users/participants. Participants occupy the space inside the Portal, the geographic location of each Portal, and the "otherworldly," liminal spaces created by the unique atmosphere of the Portal itself. Further, time emerges or emanates from the Portal as a technological medium that both makes particular affects visible *and* produces those very affects. The Portal is an "attuned space," (Ott et al., 2016) – an atmosphere that invites a particular sensory experience of both time and space. As a D.C. Portal participant recapitulates, "I found myself just wishing I could step through the screen, into/across the world!"

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**Unreal Realness**

While the Portal's suspension of participants in multiple spacetimes and its potential to conjure particular affective states serve as evidence for the use of atmosphere when engaging such technologies, the Portal maintains a degree of ambiguity that further suggests a move toward the atmospheric. The spacetimes and affective forces produced inside the Portal are felt by participants however, these feelings are not entirely sensible.

The ambiguity of the atmosphere produced by the Portal is articulated through a shared sense of the real and the unreal by those participating in conversations in the shipping container. The unreal-realness of the Portal has already been noted by participants describing the experience as "magical" and "otherworldly." These statements suggest that while participants sense the atmosphere of the Portal "pressing upon them," they simultaneously struggle to make sense of the experience. Subsequently, the experience of the Portal has a material effect on participants but that materiality "never quite achieves the stability of form" (Anderson, 2009, p. 78).

This instability of form is perhaps most articulated by participants as "ghostly." One participant had a difficult time naming their experience in the Portal and simply stated, "A GHOST 2 YOU." Aside from the images of haunting conjured by participants, many articulate the experience as "surreal," or "almost unreal." Another participant noted that the experience was like being "struck by lightning" and one participant simply stated that it was "indescribable." The feeling of being struck by lightning suggests the material force of the Portal's atmosphere, yet comments about it being "surreal," "unreal," and "indescribable" point to the ambiguousness and uncertainty of such atmospheres.

This ambiguousness further highlights the distinction of such technologies from the hybrid reality articulated by de Souza e Silva. The ghostly images of participants

conjured by the screen in the shipping container are similar to a virtual reality, where the digital reality is separate from the physical space. However, participants are aware of and remain in the physical structure of the shipping container, suggesting an overlaying of reality similar to that of augmented reality. Still, neither of the ghostly images in conversation are augmented, the digital and the virtual interact simultaneously. While this seems in line with de Souza e Silva's (2006) concept of a hybrid reality, as previously noted there is more than a doubling of space that occurs in the Portal. As a result, the experience is more akin to Van den Boomen et al.'s (2009) configuration of the digital and the physical into "hybridized technological affordances" (p. 9). However, while technologies such as the Portal might be considered such affordances, these relations fail to capture the affectivities of the experience. While Papacharissi (2016) engages affects across digital platforms, her theory of affective publics moves away from the pressing materiality of the Portal experience. The simultaneously real and unreal, the felt yet indescribable experience of technologies such as the Portal are best articulated as atmosphere.

Articulating the Portal as atmospheric provides not only an understanding of the unreal-realness of the experience within the shipping container, but the affective forces these golden boxes have beyond their gray carpeted walls. The conversations within the Portal often make the issues and circumstances of others more real for participants. This potential for the realization of affects is perhaps best articulated by a D.C. woman and her husband after speaking to a Syrian refugee through the Portal to Berlin. She recalled,

> I just witnessed my husband communicate with a refugee in Germany that moved me beyond comprehension. It made the issues currently facing our world so much more real. This experience will stay with me forever. This changed me. I am so grateful for this deeply unique experience.

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While hybrid realities account for the ways in which the digital and virtual interact, and affective publics account for the sharing of affect across digital platforms, the experience in the Portal suspends participants in conditions outside of their immediate understanding. McCormack (2009) suggests that just as a hot air balloon is activated by the air in which it is suspended, atmospheres trigger a set of affective relations within a particular spatial field. Rather than just mediating affect, the technology of the Portal actuates these seemingly unreal yet materially pressing relations.

## Atmospheric Interfaces and Public Life

Public life has undoubtedly been transformed by social relations activated by innovative communication technologies. The rapid pace at which these interfaces emerge requires incessant theorizing about the impact of such technologies on communication practices. One such avenue of exploration has been on the affective, engaging how new communication technologies provide platforms that support and make shared feelings visible. The sharing of affect occurs in the merging of digital and physical spaces as mobile technologies blur distinctions between technologically mediated realities. As scholars consider the impact of these technologies in blurring realities, they should remain attuned to the idea that social relations are not only *activated* by technology, rather they are *actuated*.

Attending to how social relations and their affects are actuated focuses attention on how interfaces themselves modulate various relations and affectivities into being. Subsequently, as the world of complex devices expands and increases it is important to attend to the unique atmospheres these technologies generate. Further, by engaging the atmospheric, scholars are better equipped to understand the potential of such interfaces to

shape the actions, communication and environments in which they operate – to essentially shape public life.

Additionally, attending to the atmospheric as it emerges in the spaces between affect and technology accounts for the multiple realities actuated by technologies. Technologies do not so much generate a hybrid reality as much as they generate atmospheres that shape the way persons and objects encounter one another, "creating multiple times and spaces" (Ash, 2013, p. 27). Subsequently, these times and spaces make possible the affects that emerge, how they materialize and the ways in which they suspend objects and subjects, enveloping them into diverse forms of relation.

Engaging the co-mingling of affect and technology suggests new ways of noticing, living and thinking through the complex technological relationships of public life. The Portal provides one illustration for how new communication technologies propel scholars to think through the affective impact of technology. The Portal demonstrates how the affective forces of these technologies require becoming atmospheric. It serves as an example of the multiplying of spacetimes and technological perturbations of such interfaces, and the concept of an atmospheric interface is one way of accounting for the impact of new digital interfaces on public life. As such, I now turn attention to how the concept of atmospheric interface might more fully account for these impacts. While Papacharissi's (2015; 2016) affective publics may not fully attend to the ways that technologies themselves both mediate *and* modulate affect, her work is of particular value in explaining the tangible impacts of such affects on various publics. I make a similar move here, employing the use of atmospheric interface as a conceptual frame through an extended case study of the Portal.

To assess the potential of atmospheric interface as a conceptual frame for understanding the impact of digital interfaces on public life, and to demonstrate the ways in which such technologies alter engagement in/with the public the project's extended case study answers the following questions:

RQ1: How do atmospheric interfaces such as the Portal activate public space? How do such interfaces mediate and modulate interactions between public and private?

RQ2: How does the technology of the Portal itself work to both mediate and modulate a "feeling with" and what are the effects of such mediation/modulation on the affective relations of such interfaces?

RQ3: How do technologies such as the Portal suspend participants in atmospheres of human connection, and how might these technologically mediated/modulated 'digital' relations generate an imaginative dialogue that might inform public opinion?

RQ4: How might users of technologies such as the Portal curate atmospheres to encourage dialogic transformation, and how might atmospheric curation inform how other similar interfaces might be used to mediate/modulate public life?

RQ5: What are the theoretical and practical implications of atmospheric interfaces on public life?

Before addressing the project's questions in the chapters that follow, I first delineate the data and methods of the project. Chapter three outlines participatory critical rhetoric, digital rhetoric, post-phenomenological methods, and expressive writing as devices for doing atmospheric things. Additionally, the chapter describes the procedures for data collection, and the types of data that inform the extended case study that follows.

CHAPTER 3

PARTICIPATORY CRITICAL RHETORIC AND DIGITAL DEVICES FOR DOING

ATMOSPHERIC THINGS

Engaging the ways in which technologies operate as atmospheric interfaces capable of both mediating and modulating interaction requires attention to the ways in which Portal participants interact with the Portal, as well as how the Portal itself acts upon participants. Accounting for such interaction necessitates methods that attend to what makes up the interface of the Portal itself (unit), how these units relate to one another and to Portal participants (vibration), and what overall 'feeling' is generated through such interaction (tone). As a result, methods capable of engaging the ways in which participants and the Portal gather in the ubiquitous airs of atmosphere must be capable of generating a multi-faceted account of the Portal experience while experimenting with the potentials of the interface itself to shape the "affects generated by gatherings of artifacts and texts" (McCormack, 2015, p. 102).

It is with this tension between the more empirical and the experiential that I engage participatory critical rhetoric (PCR) and various devices for doing atmospheric things. In what follows I outline the ways in which PCR allows for a 'doing' of rhetorical criticism and a "field-working" (Lorimer, 2003) that attempts to move beyond discovering materials to one that is actively engaged in the ongoing processes of the sensory and sensory-making affective materialities of the Portal. In doing so, I place PCR into conversation with digital rhetorics and engage non-representational techniques as atmospheric devices for understanding how the Portal modulates "user action with the aim, hope and promise of producing desirable outcomes" (Ash et al., 2018) for Portal creators, participants and curators. PCR coupled with these techniques allow for the

emergence of data and alternative practices of presentation to explore the ways in which

digital technologies attune users to various space-times as sets of energetic activations –

recognizing that digital technologies and the space-times they activate perform us as

much as users of such technologies perform them (Thrift, 2004). The use of such methods

to attend to the tension between the empirical and the experiential highlighting how the

Portal as an atmospheric interface and the interactions within require "the need to think

about feelings, technologies and politics *together*, through each other" (Kuntsman, 2012,

p. 2, emphasis in original).

## Participatory Critical Rhetoric

*"Wow! They have internet?"*
*An inflatable version of the Portal is set-up in the foyer of a large student union on the*
*campus of Arizona State University for the university's welcome weekend for incoming*
*freshman. The event in the union is a carnival with games and loud music, an event that*
*already seems antithetical to the goals of Portal connections. As students shuffle through*
*the foyer into the room housing the carnival, they pass a Portal connection to*
*Afghanistan. Students are hesitant to enter the Portal but are noticeably intrigued by the*
*glowing screen emanating from its gold, inflated walls. The Portal curator, Sarah and I*
*assure this particular student that they do, in fact, have internet in Afghanistan. I study*
*the face of our Afghani partner glowing back at us while I attempt to mitigate the*
*offensiveness of an ill-informed American college freshman. I cannot help but wonder*
*who was responsible for determining this particular connection. A carnival seems an*
*unlikely place for thoughtful connections between the U.S. and Afghanistan. The*
*intellectual ethos of American college freshman to engage such a connection seems even*
*more troubling. I watch as the curator brushes the comment off and welcomes another*
*group of students into the Portal. Having studied the Portal for the past 3 years, I wasn't*
*prepared for the disjuncture between my understanding of the interface's potential for*
*human connection and the problematic unfolding failure in front of my own eyes. It*
*became shockingly clear that to fully understand the Portal as an atmospheric interface*
*requires participation.*

The need to think about affect, technology and politics as working through one

another suggest the importance of participation when engaging the Portal as atmospheric.

The Portal was created with the purpose of participation and user engagement with the

Portal is central to its function as an interface for human connection. While Shared

Studios initially conceived of the Portal as a sort of public art project, Iannelli and Masur Masurò (2017) suggest that what makes an art project public is its ability to generate participation by those who encounter it, that when it comes to publics – participation matters. Additionally, the various units of the Portal themselves are designed to actuate a particular type of participation, and subsequently the technology of the Portal further stresses the importance of a participatory approach to its study. The Portal as a site wherein affect, technology and politics work through one another requires engaging participants at the site of rhetorical invention. This particular approach provides opportunity to engage the shaping of things as they move in, generate, and in some sense emerge from the atmospheres in which Portal users are affective participants (McCormack, 2015).

In what follows I outline the impetus for engaging participatory critical rhetoric in the study of atmospheric interfaces such as the Portal. I begin with a brief overview of the move toward participation in the study of rhetorical discourses and the key assumptions of PCR. I then argue that the creation of the Portal as a public art project, its goals of human connection through the exchange of everyday conversation, and the potential of the technology of the Portal itself to both mediate and modulate such connection through embodied and emplaced rhetorics warrant participation by the researcher through a specifically participatory critical approach.

**A Move Toward a Participatory Critical Approach.**

The affective participation of Portal users and the potential of these interactions to (re)shape participant understanding of the persons and places with whom they interact necessitates both qualitative and rhetorical approaches to their study. Recently, there has been an increasing interest in the use of field methods by rhetorical scholars (Dunn, 2016;

Endres & Senda Cook, 2011; Hess, 2011; McHendry, 2016; McKinnon, Asen, Chavez & Howard, 2016; Middleton, Hess, Endres & Senda-Cook, 2015; Senda-Cook, 2016). In addition, a focus on rhetorical invention is shifting conversations in qualitative circles as well (Conquergood, 1991; Heron & Reason, 1997; Pink, 2009; 2015). As such, this project approaches the study of the affective participation of Portal users, the modulating effects of the technology of the Portal itself, and the potential of the Portal to (re)shape public discourse about the persons and places through which participants engage the atmospheric interface of the Portal using a participatory critical rhetoric.

As early as 1947, rhetorical critics were grappling with the need for participation in their research. In an attempt to engage the effects of rhetoric on an immediate audience, Thompson (1947) suggested critics attend speeches and even interview members of such audiences. Additionally, ethnographers have also been interested in the importance of the political in qualitative research. While Conquergood's (1991) call for a rhetorical ethnography maintained an equation of rhetoric with the political rather than the everyday, scholars from both fields have continued to assert a sort of merging of methodological practices and this call has been echoed most prominently in the field of rhetorical studies. Blair (2001) encouraged rhetorical critics to engage the materiality of place by being present at the site of rhetorical invention as well as to experience rhetoric through the body. Pezzullo (2001) further urged rhetoricians to engage in processes of rhetorical exchange. Subsequently, several scholars have answered these early calls and established a methodology under the banner of rhetorical field methods and/or a participatory critical rhetoric.

Endres, Middleton and Senda-Cook (2016) outline the areas around which rhetoric and qualitative methods merge. They begin by placing each method into the area

of critical/cultural studies. Scholars interested in critical/cultural work attend to the ways in which individuals and communities engage in symbolic practices. This approach generally attends to the "doing" of these symbolic practices. Rhetoricians have long been interested in this "doing" of rhetoric and qualitative scholars attend to these same practices even while they may not label all such symbolic activity rhetoric. In addition, both qualitative and rhetorical scholars are equally interested in everyday performances of self/culture. While rhetoricians have engaged these exchanges as vernacular (Hauser, 1999; Ono & Sloop, 1995; Sloop & Ono, 1997), qualitative scholars are equally interested in everyday acts as they give meaning to communities in particular contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lindolf & Taylor, 2002; Tracy, 2010). This piecing together of everyday practices by qualitative scholars is generally done through the process of bricolage whereby researchers weave together context, participants and performances of symbolic activity (Tracy, 2013). Following McGee (1990), for rhetorical scholars this process generally includes piecing together the discursive fragments of texts that come to compose a seemingly 'finished' discourse. Finally, these methods merge around a shared interest in reflexivity as a central component of the research process, extending beyond the recognition of researcher bias to attend to the ideologies that inform not only texts/participants, but the researcher's sense-making processes as well. Shared critical commitments, attention to the process of rhetorical invention and participation, and the weaving together of reflexive accounts of lived rhetorics already binds rhetoric and qualitative methods.

While each method shares a commitment to the everyday practices/performances of the communities under study, the weaving together of rhetorical fragments, and researcher reflexivity, it is important to highlight key differences that inform the present

project. First, while qualitative researchers operate as participant observers by engaging the symbolic activity of a community in the context (field) in which such activity occurs, participatory critical rhetoric calls on the researcher to move beyond participation and observation to actively engage in that symbolic activity. Middleton et al. (2015) suggest that "the critic in the field confronts the opportunity to join with and adopt the political commitments of the communities in which thy conduct their research" (p. 43). As such, the participatory rhetorical critic embraces "the potential to engage in an immanent politics of criticism" (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 42). An immanent politics moves beyond simply engaging a community as a participant observer and instead positions the researcher as an active participant in the rhetorical process. This may include the lending of one's body in support of the political commitments of a community or providing expertise to help shape a community's rhetorical practices. Subsequently, PCR shifts the focus of the researcher from simply observing rhetoric to "doing rhetoric" (McHendry, Middleton, Endres, Senda-Cook, & O'Byrne, 2014) with the capacity to both analyze and intervene through immanent participation.

Immanent participation also requires the participatory rhetorical critic to recognize that the symbolic activity of the communities they study are enacted in lived settings. This places the emphasis "on the immediate social relations in which they are present when in the field of rhetorical practice" (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 43). While qualitative researchers adopt a distinct role that guides their interaction, participatory rhetorical critics work alongside the communities they study, adapting, shifting and interacting in ways that are guided by the embodied actions of those communities with/in the field.

As an orientation to the study of communities *in situ* participatory critical rhetoric adopts an immanent politics that moves beyond the traditional research practices associated with both rhetoric and qualitative inquiry. The enactment of an immanent politics necessitates the researcher be attuned to moments of opportunity (Kairos) and use their practical wisdom (phronesis) to act as advocates for the values and commitments of communities under investigation (Hess, 2011). As such, a participatory critical rhetoric requires the "rhetorical intervention into rhetorical spaces and action in which we engage when we describe and interpret insights gained through in situ rhetorical study" (Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres, 2011, p. 387). The critic becomes both a co-creator of the lived rhetorics of the communities they study as well as an active advocate for those communities.

Finally, a participatory critical rhetoric requires attention to "the relationship between critic, rhetor, text/context, and audience by placing the critic in direct contact with audiences and rhetors, inviting new perspectives on these complex rhetorical processes" (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 7). It focuses attention on the everyday practices of vernacular communities and the ways in which the communication practices of these communities are lived and expressed. PCR attunes critics to those practices that are most conducive to advocating with/for communities through a sustained engagement that underscores the types of rhetorical practices that might enrich or constrain the communities they engage in ways that mere focus on participant observation or a "text-centric" approach do not afford.

Participatory critical rhetoric suggests that discourses and texts associated with a particular rhetorical phenomenon necessitate active engagement by the rhetorical critic in conjunction with traditional methods of analysis (Middleton et al., 2015). As previously

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noted, the Portal was initially conceived as a public art project and the effectiveness of such projects are predicated on participation (Iannelli & Masurò, 2017). However, the Portal itself functions rhetorically in a system of already existing signs associated with the use of the shipping container and discourses of a transnational public sphere. Subsequently the Portal necessitates attention to participants/participation, the rhetorics surrounding participant interaction as well as those produced by participants.

Focus on the participants with whom a participatory rhetorical critic works alongside, their rhetorical practices and the rhetorics of the field complicates the rhetorical critic's approach to rhetor, audience and text. In outlining a participatory critical approach, Middleton et al. (2015) highlight the ways in which texts are already embedded in larger contexts and in conjunction with various social practices and performances. Additionally, PCR provides an intersectional approach through its engagement with embodied and emplaced understandings of rhetoric. Finally, as previously noted, participatory critical rhetoric recognizes the importance of an immanent politics. Subsequently, the potential of the Portal to challenge the socio-spatial relations of participants through the affective performances of both participants as well as the modulating effects of the Portal itself align well with a participatory critical approach. As such, I engage Shared Studios' articulation of the Portal and its intended goals as a public art project for human connection in relation to PCR's primary assumptions. In doing so, I outline the ways in which the project requires both an embodied and emplaced understanding of the Portal's rhetorical potential before outlining how the Portal's goal for human connection suggest the importance of an imminent politics that require those interested in such interfaces to themselves participate with these interfaces. PCR

recognizes this importance suggesting that critics themselves are integral to the processes of rhetorical invention which necessitates a "self-awareness of one's own ethics and politics" (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 11) in the shaping of rhetoric.

Before engaging the importance of participation to the study of Portals, it is necessary to first define participation and the specific impetus for such active engagement in this project. As a rhetorician I began the study of the Portal through traditional rhetorical analysis. This included engaging the literature produced by Shared Studios to more fully understand how the project articulates it goals and defines itself. Additionally, using a concept-based criticism (Jasinski, 2001) based in theories of the public sphere I analyzed press coverage of the project over a two- year span to gauge how Portals were being rhetorically constructed by both media and participants. Much of this analysis is detailed in Chapter four of the present project. It was from this initial analysis that the importance of participation became salient. Press coverage attempted to detail participant interaction but missed out on the particulars of the interactive encounter of the Portal. Adding to this failure to fully capture the experience, much of the press coverage noted Portal participation as affective and that participants often found it difficult to articulate. This further complicated the ability of the press to communicate these experiences. As such, understanding the Portal and unpacking its potential impact on both participants and public life necessitated my own participation in the exchanges amongst Portal users. Additionally, the technology of the Portal itself seemed to impact these affective responses, making an active engagement with the technology of the Portal necessary for understanding how it was being articulated by Shared Studios, Portal participants and the press. Subsequently, participation in this project is defined by active engagement with not

only the texts produced by Shared Studios and press coverage of the Portal project, but includes my own participation in cross-cultural conversations in the Portal, curating conversations in the Portal, and working with Portal sponsors and curators to bring a shipping container to Tempe, Arizona, engaging a diverse set of stakeholders to secure funding and program Portal connections. Additionally, participation here is not limited to the active engagement between researcher and research participants but between researcher and technology. As Thrift (2004) contends, technologies perform us as much as users of such technologies perform them. As such, participation in this project includes an active engagement with both research participants and the technology of the Portal. This participation centers my own body as a critic and my own relations with both other bodies and technologies.

   **Portals: An Embodied and Emplaced Approach.** This shift toward the critic's body is a recognition of what Landau (2016) would call "*feeling rhetorical criticism*" (p. 73, emphasis in original). Rhetoricians are trained to remain detached from the texts under their study (Black, 1978), however, some texts (and their associative contexts) warrant an expanded analysis, particularly for their affective qualities. This project argues that the experience in the Portal is an affective one rooted in the interactions between participants and between participants and the units of the Portal itself. While the data for this project include interactions recorded following participant experiences in the Portal, understanding the Portal as an atmospheric interface is something that moves beyond what can be recorded to what is *felt*. Subsequently, analysis of Portals requires a feeling rhetorical critic.

My own affective response to the Portal is partially what motivated my interest in the project. Landau (2016) suggests that rhetorical criticism often requires the critic to not only move beyond the symbolic, but to "listen to our guts." My first interaction with the Portal created a gut feeling that told me, "something interesting is happening here." As such, engaging a participatory critical approach "is useful for moving away from evaluating symbolism alone, for comparing and contrasting another audience of rhetoric" (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 85), the critic as audience him or herself. Understanding the Portal as an atmospheric interface that both mediates and modulates human connection requires embodied field methods that do not dismiss my own affective response.

The relationship between the body and the technology of the Portal further suggests a participatory critical approach. As noted earlier in this project's introduction, if digital interfaces and the relations amongst these interfaces and users are "co-produced, it is necessary to look not only at what people do with technologies, but also with what the technologies themselves are doing" (Rose, 2016, p. 337). While Shared Studios designed the Portal to modulate particular interactions, design alone does not guarantee that participants will engage the Portal according to such design or that the Portal's modulating effects will generate the affective connection between participants intended as a result of its design. The potential of the Portal to not just activate, but to actuate particular interactions requires the critic to experience these modulating effects to determine the efficacy of the Portal's design and whether or not these interacting units do, indeed, generate human connection and (re)shape participant understanding of the persons and places with whom they communicate.

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In addition to the importance of embodiment in capturing the affective qualities of the Portal, the space of the Portal itself also warrants a participatory critical approach. Blair (2001) stresses the importance of understanding the materiality of place by attending to how place itself operates rhetorically. This is especially true of the Portal as the space of the Portal itself allows for rhetorical invention and exchange. Participants enter the Portal to speak to interlocutors with whom they would not otherwise have the opportunity to meet were it not for the technology of the Portal. Additionally, press coverage notes that participants often experience the Portal as 'otherworldly' suggesting a multiplying of space through a recognition of the space inside the Portal, the location of the Portal they are in, and the location of the Portal holding their interlocutor. Subsequently, the Portal creates a unique atmosphere that can only be understood when one participates in its use. Middleton et al. (2015) echo the importance of place by highlighting how the scene is a participant in rhetorical action. Here, the scene of the Portal at least partially determines the potential for rhetorical invention and the technology of the Portal itself seems to modulate such interaction suggesting that one must participate in order to fully understand its rhetorical potentiality.

Attention to the Portal as an interface that itself may potentially modulate rhetorical activity further suggests the need for a participatory critical approach. As outlined in this project's review of literature, the Portal multiplies space by positioning participants in the geographic location of their own Portal, that of their interlocutors Portal, while suspending them in the shared, liminal space between these physical locations. Subsequently, the atmosphere of the Portal has the potential to disrupt the ways in which participants rhetorically construct place, potentially generating articulations of

space outside of their immediate understanding. The Portal serves as a place that mediates rhetorical activity, however it may further modulate such activity by disrupting rhetorical constructions of place itself.

**Portals: An Immanent Politics and Public Life.** While embodiment and emplacement suggest a participatory critical approach, engagement with the political possibilities of the Portal warrants focus on the uniquely rhetorical dimensions of the shipping container. Participation allows for an embodied understanding of the affective experience of being in the Portal, and this participation recognizes the importance of the shipping container as a site for rhetorical invention. However, a focus on the potential of the Portal to impact public life and (re)shape public opinion further suggest a focus on the rhetorical.

One reason for the use of a specifically rhetorical approach is a focus on vernacular discourse. As noted earlier, PCR is committed to an immanent politics that attends to immediate social relations in the spaces in which they occur (Middleton et al., 2015). My interest in the current project emanates from the potential of these relations and the ways that participants use every day talk to form opinions about their Portal partners (Hauser, 1999; 2011) as well as how these conversations might be guided to reflect the values and positions of a diverse set of interlocutors. Guiding such activity underscores that a commitment to vernacular discourse requires attention to both the political and material realities of vernacular communities (Ono & Sloop, 1995). As such PCR serves to illuminate how the political and emplaced rhetorical practices of participants unfold in the unique space of the shipping container and how these conversations might be guided to encourage dialogue between diverse persons. While

some Portal connections are designed to engage specific issues and ideas, most of the connections are guided by the prompt "What would make today a good day for you?" highlighting the project's goal of connecting diverse persons around the exchange of every day conversation. This raises questions about the logics of these seemingly mundane exchanges (Ono & Sloop, 1995), how they work to shift perception in relation to the unique space of the Portal, how the technology of the Portal itself modulates such interaction, how the experience might shift public opinion about the persons and places with whom participants engage, and how these conversations and opinions might be shaped at the site of rhetorical invention – inside the Portal. Subsequently, these logics may work to form specific types of vernacular exchange across other digital platforms with the potential to impact ideology and potentially policy.

Additionally, the project requires engagement with the various official discourses that are circulated about the places and people participating in the Portal. This is particularly important given many of the places that have housed Portals and the connections made between these locations and others, most notably the Portal in Tehran, Iran; and the Zaatari Camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

While not a part of the current project as these activations occurred prior to my engagement with Portals, the refugee camp in Jordan and the placement of the first Portal in Tehran, Iran, highlight the rhetorical potential of the Portal. While Bakshi contends that one of the project's goals is to expand notions of the public square, the project attempted to engage new avenues of public discourse with the United Nations using one of the Portals to connect to refugees fleeing Syria. Ambassadors to the U.N. were able to interact with people in the camps, who may have provided them with context that could

impact policy decisions about the refugee crisis. Referencing this particular connection, Lilian Mehrel of Shared Studios notes that engaging ambassadors provides an opportunity for policy makers to hear the stories of those impacted by policy decisions. Despite the Portals' claims that their goals are not directly political, Mehrel adds that discussions such as those between ambassadors and refugees provide a unique opportunity because "these are the people who are making decisions, making projects and initiatives that could actually change someone's life. It's elevating the potential of the Portals" (Westcott, 2015, para. 8). While not intending to be overtly political, the use of the Portal to connect official and vernacular communities might be likened to Fraser's (1990) articulation of a 'weak'/opinion-forming public. Akin to congressional hearings whereby governments request testimony directly from the people, this past use of the Portal suggests their rhetorical potential via public opinion seeking that may impact policy makers and policy decisions.

The placement of the first Portal in Tehran is also articulated by members of Shared Studios as having been strategic. The Portal was activated during the Iran/U.S. negotiations about Iran's nuclear program in 2015. Because Iran is one of the most inaccessible parts of the globe for Westerners, particularly those from the U.S., locating the first Portal in a country seen as a political adversary to the U.S. makes a strong statement about the rhetorical potential of the project. This particular Portal connected 650 Americans with Iranians. Bakshi believes that when people enter the Portal they do not feel compelled to represent the entirety of their nation's culture or political policies (Paine, 2015). Instead, he contends that participants are able to move beyond the media narratives of each country to engage one another in conversation about their daily lives. Bakshi insists that strategic placement of the Portal such as this are important becuase "it

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is a unique space that when you enter it and exit it, people feel different" (Sadon, 2015, para. 9). While he acquiesces that he does not expect the Portals to bring about world peace, he does hope that the project will encourage conversations free from government influence, extend beyond the media narratives of the Iran nuclear negotiations, and the political differences between the U.S. and Iran (Drennan, 2015). This would seem to be a lofty goal for the Portal and indicates the necessity for understanding its rhetorical potential through a participatory approach.

While the project seeks to counter official accounts of the persons and places connecting through the Portal, these official accounts could have an impact on how the project is received by participants and whether or not it is brought into particular communities. In addition, these discourses may impact Portal curators and organizers which may then lead to particular types of Portal programming that might reinforce rather than challenge participant understandings of the places and person with whom they interact. Subsequently, it is important to engage how these narratives influence one another (McCormick, 2003) and the tensions they create with vernacular exchanges that occur inside the shipping container (Pezzullo, 2001). The circulation of dominant narratives of place, people and the project itself warrant rhetorical analysis in conjunction with participatory approaches.

Finally, the shipping container itself suggests the importance of a rhetorical approach to the study of Portals. The use of a shipping container evokes a connection to an already existing global exchange of goods. Shipping containers have become ubiquitous representations of global trade, and symbols of multinational corporations and the spread of global capital. In addition, each container bears the literal markings of its

travels as a means of global commerce, and these markings may psychologically impact participants through a shared sense of sentimentality central to understanding the affective responses between participants and the space within the Portal. The shipping container is a relatively inexpensive, uniform space that exists all over the world. This readymade design allows for the reimagining of the shipping container as a place for human interaction. Thus, the containers are already recognized as connecting people (nation-states) across the globe and this gives agency to the Portal as both a mediator and modulator of participant interaction regardless of its placement within a specific geographic area or the participants interacting within. However rhetorical constructions of globalization, the spread of global goods and capital as well as the use of shipping containers by multinational corporations may impact participant understanding of the experience of the Portal and the value of the exchanges within.

Each Portal is painted gold and Shared Studios suggests that the color is important to the experience. They assert that the color evokes images of global currency, the exchange of global capital, and is representative of the sacred. This articulation of the shipping container suggests that understanding how it functions rhetorically to shape interactions within must include an analysis that attends to the official discourses that evoke such a description as well as the vernacular exchanges that occur inside.

The tension between existing conceptualizations of the locations in which the Portal is placed, the people who live in these places, and the shipping container itself as a symbol of globalization further suggest the need for a specifically critical approach to participatory rhetoric. As previously noted, there has been an increase in the number of rhetorical scholars interested in the convergence of rhetoric and qualitative methods, however not all of these approaches are necessarily critical in nature. As such, the current

project follows Middleton et al. (2011) by engaging a "*telos* of *critical praxis*" (p. xviii, emphasis in original). To understand the relationship between dominant narratives of persons and places that may be challenged by the vernacular exchanges amongst Portal participants includes recognition that power is "made material through discursive practice, and that it is communicated by both [the] presence and absence of rhetorical action" (Middleton et al., 2011, p. xviii). While Shared Studios highlights the absence of government and/or other institutions in the conversations that occur inside the Portal, the influence of such systems and the impact of existing narratives about the places and people participating in the Portal still influence the exchanges within. Additionally, the shipping container itself is bound to such conceptualizations and may impact participant interactions. Subsequently, both institutional and discursive constructions of power inform the atmosphere of the Portal and remain suspended in the airs of Portal interactions. Given participatory rhetoric's focus on issues and machinations of power as they manifest from a textual, contextual and interactive position, the method is particularly useful in understanding how the various rhetorics of the Portal interact.

In addition to attending to the impact of power on Portal participant interactions, a participatory critical approach positions the critic as an active agent who might intervene on behalf of the communities they study. As previously noted, participation in this project includes my own engagment in cross-cultural conversations within the Portal, the curation of the Portal and the conversations within, and actively working with a diverse set of stakeholders to secure funding and program the Portal and its potential connections. As such to intervene can be understood in a multitude of ways based on these various types of participation. The Portal itself might be understood as an intervention through its

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potential to challenge dominant narratives of place and those who occupy such spaces as well as its potential to intervene by creating a space for conversations free from government or institutional censorship. Additionally, as outlined in the project's opening chapter, the curator plays in an integral role in shaping participant interactions within the shipping container, organizing the connections between Portals, curating topics of conversation, and ultimately determining how the Portal will serve the community in which it is placed. Curators are additional units who interact with the technology of the Portal to produce particular outcomes for Portal user/participants and subsequently intervene to shape such interactions. As both an advocate for the placement of a Portal at Arizona State University/Downtown Tempe, and one of the primary curators for the ASU/Tempe Portal, a specifically critical approach to participatory rhetoric is employed here given my engagement with the rhetorical scene in which the tensions between dominant narratives and participant interaction unfolds. As a curator, I am able to intervene in the immediate scene of the Portal to guide participant interaction. As such, a participatory critical approach is employed given my position as both critic and curator of the Portal as an atmospheric interface. The role of curator provides an immediacy through which I was able to intervene in the rhetorical situation, weighing concerns regarding the connections between Portal participants and guiding conversation to encourage connection through dialogue.

The Portal as an atmospheric interface necessitates an approach that is participatory, critical and rhetorically focused as a means of thinking through "feelings, technologies and politics together." The very purpose of the Portal is to activate connection through participation through affective exchanges between those who engage

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the Portal. This focus on affect underscores the importance of the body in mediating such exchanges and the need for a "feeling rhetorical critic" to understand the affective materialities that manifest amongst participants, their Portal partners and the technology of the Portal itself. The importance of the technology as a collection of units that, at least in part modulate such interaction further highlights the need for an active engagement indicative of a participatory approach. Further, placement of each Portal and the rhetorical constructions of such places necessitates the critic be at the site of rhetorical invention. This is especially the case given the potential of the Portal to disrupt these discursive constructions of place. Finally, the placement of my own body as critic into the role of curator highlights the immanent politics of a participatory critical approach via my own intervention on behalf of Portal participants to disrupt dominant understandings of both persons and places by shaping atmospheres more conducive to cross-cultural dialogue. As such, a participatory critical approach lends itself to the critic as scholar-activist operating within the scene wherein the immanent politics and rhetorical efforts of participants coalesce in the Portal's unique atmosphere.

### Digital Rhetorics and Post-phenomenology

The potential of the Portal's atmosphere to mediate participant interaction warrant digital rhetoric as equally important to participatory understandings of the Portal as atmospheric. That said, the focus of this project moves beyond the Portal as a technological interface alone to engage the affective and communicative practices associated with such an interface. Subsequently, while the Portal as a technological interface necessitates attention to the digital, Hess (2018) reminds scholars of digital rhetoric that "digital does not signal the absence or eschewing of analog" (p. 6).

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Similarly, Pink et al. (2016) call for a digital ethnography to de-center the digital and instead focus on communicative practices as they interface with the digital. Focus on the digital in this project recognizes that while the digital has "fundamentally altered the nature of production and reception of texts" (Hess, 2018, p. 9) the Portal cannot be understood solely as a digital platform. Subsequently, engagement with the technology of the Portal requires focus on both the technology itself as well as the interactions and relationships mediated by the interface.

While it is important to recognize that the Portal is an interface that mediates interactions between participants, it is equally important to attend to the ways in which the technology of the Portal itself modulates these interactions. As an approach, digital rhetoric is concerned not only with the lived experience and communicative practices of digital media users but should be equally attuned to the ontology of things (Hess, 2018, p. 10). Central to my arguments about the Portal as an atmospheric interface are that the Portal itself "perturbs" and has the potential to shape the meanings made in it, and the relationships between those meanings and other discourses. As such, "discursive practices and material phenomenon are mutually entangled" and the interactions between Portal participants, the various units of the Portal itself, the discourses that inform the use of the Portal, the places of connection, and the people with whom participants are communicating constitute a 'network of discursive—material—digital entanglements' (Zappen, 2018, p. 60) all of which inform the atmosphere of the Portal and the interactions within.

These discursive—material—digital entanglements suggest an expansion of the ways in which participation is defined in this project. In doing so, I move beyond the

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ways in which the critic might participate at the site of rhetorical invention to engage the

ways in which the technology of the Portal itself is an active participant in such rhetorical

activity. As such, expanding participation by recognizing the agency of the technology of

the Portal itself warrants a post-phenomenological approach to its study. Ash et al. (2018)

provide one such approach to these entanglements of which I have already employed in

articulating the theoretical arguments for the Portal as atmospheric interface in Chapter

two of the project – interfaces as unit, vibration and tone. Unit serves a means of isolating

the various aspects of the digital and material and how these units act upon users.

Vibration underscores the relationships between units and how these units interact with

one another as well as the user, while tone engages the overall 'feel' of the interface for

user/participants (Ash et al., 2018). Engaging the entanglements of the discursive,

material and digital means engaging the digital as both an object and subject of study.

The post-phenomenological method of unit, vibration and tone are applied in

concert with a participatory critical rhetoric to engage the Portal as atmospheric interface

as a means of expanding the definition of participation here to more fully account for the

ways in which the technology of the Portal itself is an active participant in the rhetorical

scene. Unit is employed as a way of understanding how the physical and digital structure

of the Portal work to shape participant interaction. The curator, both curators interviewed

here and me as scholar-activist, further operate as units that modulate participant

interaction with the Portal. A participatory approach is coupled with the post-

phenomenological to assess the ways in which the technological units of the Portal and

curator interact at particular frequencies through discursive and extra-discursive means to

encourage or discourage particular types of interaction. Additionally, these rhythms of

engagement highlight the various vibrations that create feelings of connection and/or disconnection that cultivate particular affects within the atmosphere of the Portal. Together, the post-phenomenological method of unit, vibration and tone work with a participatory approach to more fully attend to the discursive—material—digital entanglements of the Portal as atmospheric interface.

**Atmospheric Devices**

While the discursive—material—digital entanglements of the shipping container warrant attention to post-phenomenological approaches to a digital rhetoric, the Portal as an atmospheric interface raises methodological questions about how one responds to these "worlds that oblige, force, or cause thinking to take place in ways that are not always given in advance" (McCormack, 2015, p. 89). McCormack (2015) suggests that the rigidity of the word 'method' stifles thinking about atmospheres. Similarly, participatory critical rhetoric further notes the limits of the word method, suggesting an orientation to the study of rhetorical phenomena, performances and practices. As such, Anderson (2009) contends that while atmospheres exert force and enable or constrain possibilities in the material world, they also maintain a certain degree of ambivalence. This ambivalence, and the indeterminacy of atmosphere suggests an approach more akin to having one's head in the clouds. As a result, the study of affect and atmosphere are less about methods and more about techniques – what McCormack (2015) would call devices for doing atmospheric things. Subsequently, while this project is grounded in participatory and digital rhetorical methods, focus on affect and atmosphere require non-representational techniques of expression and presentation.

As a technique for doing atmospheric things, this project engages alternative

writing practices and forms of presentation rather than representation. Stewart (2011)

suggests that attuning oneself to atmosphere is to approach the world as "lived affects

with tempos, sensory knowledges, orientations, transmutations, habits, [and] rogue force

fields" (p. 446). Engaging such techniques are warranted when attuning to various space-

times as sets of energetic activations – recognizing that space-times perform us as much

as we perform them (Thrift, 2004). The Portal as participant may activate/actuate such

performances of space and time. As previously noted, the Portal moves beyond de Souza

e Silva's (2006) doubling of place by multiplying the experience of space for participants.

In this way the Portal may act as a form of condition and suspension (Choy & Zee, 2015)

by potentially suspending participants in these multiple spaces simultaneously. The Portal

as participant may disrupt time as well. As noted in this project's review of literature,

participant accounts in Portal press have indicated that they feel like they are "traveling

through time," are being "transported," with one participant event suggesting, "I felt as

though I was in a different time when speaking in the Portal." The Portal as an

atmospheric interface and active participant calls for experimentation in presentation to

more fully capture (if this is possible) the shipping container's "qualities, rhythms, forces,

relations, and movements" (Stewart, 2011, p. 445).

Techniques for doing atmospheric things in this project take the form of

expressive writing and presentation – writing that attunes to the rhythms and forces of

relations activated and actuated by the Portal. This type of expressive writing is

encouraged when engaging a participatory critical rhetoric (Middleton et al., 2015) and

the multiply data of the project outlined in the section that follows suggest such

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presentation as non-representational techniques involve "gathering, assembling, reassembling, arranging, [and] rearranging" (McCormack, 2015, p. 102) texts and artifacts. In the spirit of this experimentation, the analysis chapters of this project engage expressive, performative writing that is embodied, relational, and consequential (Pollock, 1998). The writing in this project includes the assembling, reassembling, arranging and rearranging of my own experience with the atmospheric interface of the Portal as both participant and curator, participant accounts and Gold Book data, as well as curator and participant interviews to get at "the specificity and performative efficacy of different relational configurations" (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 16) activated and actuated by the Portal.

## Research Methods and Analysis

As previously outlined, the definition of, and impetus for participation in this project have shifted over time. Much of this shift is predicated on the ways in which data for the project increasingly highlighted the need for various types of participation in an effort to understand those things that presented themselves as particularly *interesting*. Davis (1971) encourages qualitative scholars to consider those propositions that emerge from data that present themselves as "interesting" and suggests that scholars be attuned to how the proposition challenges an audience's immediate assumptions and beliefs about a particular phenomenon. As such, while the present project began as a concept driven rhetorical analysis of Shared Studios, Portals and their associative press, what emerged from that analysis was the need for various types of participation to more fully capture the ways in which the diverse units of the Portal mediate and modulate user interaction to establish the overall tone of the Portal experience. As such, methods for analysis build

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upon the ways in which project data evoked various modes of participation and analysis chapters are organized via the progression of participation necessary to capture the unique tone of the Portal as an atmospheric interface.

Given that analysis and insights about the Portal as atmospheric interface emanate from various levels of active engagement with the Portal, the project's data are outlined in relation these particular modes of interaction. Data were first collected via a concept-based criticism (Jasinski, 2001) of Shared Studio's own articulation of the Portal, its intended goals as a public art project, and press coverage of the Portal. Initial rhetorical analysis suggested variations in participant experiences of the Portal as well as the affective nature of interaction with the shipping container. This prompted analysis of participant response to their experience with the Portal through Portal Gold Books, books in which participants record their thoughts about their time in the shipping container after exiting a conversation in the Portal. As a written response to the experience, Gold Books failed to fully capture the affective qualities of the Portal experience and the potential of the technology itself to both mediate and modulate interaction, leading to my own engagement with the Portal through participant observation. Recognizing my own experience of the Portal could not speak to the varied interactions of other Portal participants, interacting with participants was added to analysis of the shipping container experience via interviews. Finally, participant observation led to the realization that one of the primary units in the success of Portal interactions are curators of the interface as these persons have the ability to shape interactions at the moment of rhetorical invention. This led to the need to both interview curators of the Portal, as well as my own curation of shipping containers at multiple sites to understand how curators mediate these moments of rhetorical invention and how the technology of the Portal itself might

modulate such interaction. As such, the data for the project are outlined in relation to these varied modes of participation.

**Rhetorical Analysis**

Data collection for this project began with a concept-based criticism of Shared Studios and their articulation of the Portal project as well as press coverage of the project. Concepts guiding this analysis were theories of the public sphere and articulations of private and public in relation to the use of new communication technologies. Initial analysis was done to capture the impact of such technology on public life by attending to how the project has been taken up and circulated. These data include over 150 popular press articles, domestic television news stories about Portal locations in the United States, and radio programs including interviews with Shared Studios' founders Amar Bakshi and Michelle Moghtader. Analysis was also done on Shared Studios' website, curator recruitment and training documents; documents created by Shared Studios to solicit new Portal partners (Cities, Universities, etc.) and materials used to secure corporate and non-profit funding for the placement of a Portal in a particular location.

**Qualitative Analysis**

Initial analysis of Portals and press coverage of the project suggested varied articulations of the ways in which Portal participants experienced the Portal in relation to both the mediated conversations within as well as how the technology itself modulated these interactions. Additionally, Shared Studios as well as press coverage of the Portal highlighted affective qualities of the shipping container that warranted additional data and analysis. As such, participant accounts of the experience were solicited via 130 single-spaced pages of written responses to the Portal experience captured in Gold Books placed outside of every Portal site. The data span from 2014 -2017 and include Portal

responses from conversations between people in New Haven, CT – Tehran, Iran; New York City, NY – Erbil, Iraq; and Washington, D.C – Berlin, Germany. Noting that "something interesting was happening" in the unique space of the Portal and its potential for human connection, I approached the data with the sensitizing concepts of affect (to attune to the embodied, emotional qualities of the Portal), atmosphere (to attend to the unique space of the Portal and the technology used within), and dialogue/connection (to capture those moments in the data that indicated connection between participants). In doing so, the data were approached through an intentional analysis. Intentional analysis attempts to demonstrate how "human experience is embodied, practical, emotional, spatial, social, linguistic, and temporal" (Wertz, 2011, p. 127). This process proceeded through first-level, descriptive coding wherein sensitizing concepts were bracketed in an attempt to remain true to the data. First-level coding was followed by second level, iterative coding wherein the sensitizing concepts of affect, atmosphere and dialogue/connection were engaged in assessing the data. While coding for affect and atmosphere poses challenges given their ambiguity and pre-personal nature, I did so by attuning myself to those moments in the data wherein participants spoke to moments of intensity, ambiguity and their own struggle to "capture" their experience. All coding was done in NVivo with the data generating the following codes: ATMOSPHERE, CONNECTION-DISCONNECTION, UNIVERSAL NARRATIVES, CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS, REAL-UNREAL, and SIMILAR INTERESTS. Coded data were then put into conversation with theories of affect, atmosphere, technology, everyday talk and dialogue.

While the unique atmosphere of the Portal was evident in the data, as Davis (1971) suggests, qualitative researchers should be attuned to those interesting moments in

the data that challenge our immediate assumptions. While the code ATMOSPHERE is theoretically interesting, it was CONNECTION and its relationship to SHARED INTEREST that produced the most surprising, and subsequently the most interesting codes for analysis. The emergence of everyday talk was *interesting* in that participant surprise at having interests in common with diverse others initially seemed both mundane and frustrating as it revealed a serious lack of knowledge by participants of intercultural others. Subsequently, the codes of HUMAN CONNECTION were put into conversation with SHARED INTEREST to explore the consistent emergence of everyday, ordinary conversation in the Portal.

After engaging the connections between everyday conversation and the codes HUMAN CONNECTION and SHARED INTERESTS, second level coding proceeded alongside an engagement with literatures on affect and third places/spaces in an effort to potentially capture the theoretically intriguing code of ATMOSPHERE to engage more empirically based claims. Through this coding process, additional codes of BRIDGING, EXPRESSION and AGENCY emerged, and data were re-coded in NVivo to reflect these codes and to support empirical claims about the Portal as a unique space for human connection.

Focus on human connection and the potential of the Portal warranted further examination and so additional second level coding proceeded alongside engagement with literatures on the connective potential of public art as well as literatures of intercultural and cross-cultural communication/dialogue. The code of HUMAN CONNECTION generated additional codes of CHALLENGE PERCEPTIONS and FAILED CONNECTIONS, and the primary code of ATMOSPHERE yielded the code ATMOSPHERIC ACTIVATION. Data were then re-coded in NVivo to reflect additional

claims relating to human connection and the potential of the Portal as activator of both public and private atmospheres.

**Participatory Critical Rhetoric**

Given the generative complexity of Gold Book data and challenges in attuning to the affective and atmospheric through representation alone, the necessity to engage the Portal through more active modes of participation became apparent. As such, participant observation proceeded at several Portal sites including the Portal housed at Shared Studios' headquarters at The New Lab in Brooklyn, NY; a Portal in Times Square in New York City, NY; a temporary, inflatable Portal launched for an event welcoming incoming freshman at Arizona State University in Tempe, AZ, a Portal shipping container housed in downtown Tempe and two Portals at separate locations in the San Francisco Bay Area. Lindolf and Taylor (2002) underscore the importance of engaging participants through intersubjectivity – a sort of "we in relation." And understanding participants intersubjectively requires the researcher to immerse oneself into the sites of other people's experiences (Pink, 2015). Subsequently, to more fully engage the ways in which participants experience the affective dimensions the Portal and to more fully articulate the potential of the interface to both mediate and modulate human connection required active participation in the Portal experience. This active engagement was conducted via 250 hours of participating in Portal connections between the above listed sites and over 40 locations both domestic and abroad.

It was during one of these observed connections that the impetus for additional modes of participation were warranted. As articulated in the narrative that opens this chapter, there is often a cultural disconnect between Portal participants, particularly between American participants and those abroad. While this disconnect presented itself in

Gold Book data (FAILED CONNECTIONS), observation at the temporary, inflatable

Portal in Tempe underscored the importance of the curator in facilitating such

connections and the need for curators to address participants at the site of rhetorical

invention to intervene on their behalf. As such, to fully understand the ways in which the

Portal acts as a site for productive inter and cross-cultural dialogue, and to engage the

ways in which users, curators and the technology of the Portal itself mediate and

modulate such connection, required the enactment of immanent participation. Middleton

et al. (2015) suggest that immanent participation challenges the researcher "to focus on

the immediate social relations in which they are present when in the field of rhetorical

practice" (p. 43). Thus, over the course of four months I worked with the City of Tempe

to secure stakeholders, bring a Portal to the city and participated in the curator

onboarding and training process. Additionally, I served as the principal curator of the

Tempe Portal for the duration of its placement – one month; and I assisted in

programming the Portal and its connections. This allowed for a "being in fieldwork"

(Marcus, 2008), and more importantly, provided opportunities to act as a unit in the

process of participant connections, to shape these connections at the site of rhetorical

invention, and to immerse myself as researcher into the Portal experience to capture the

ways in which the technology of the Portal itself both enables and constrains particular

types of rhetorical activity.

In addition to engaging an immanent participation, interviews were also

conducted to more fully understand participant's engagement with the Portal at the site of

that experience (Pink, 2015). Interviewing Portal participants allowed for an

understanding of the essence of the Portal experience shared between and amongst Portal

users (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10

participants outside of the Tempe Portal in Tempe, AZ. Each participant was interviewed immediately following their experience in the Portal to further understand the rhetorical strategies used by participants when communicating with cross-cultural others through the technology of the Portal. Informal conversations with participants were also engaged outside Portals in San Francisco and Sunnyvale, CA. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Portal curators, including domestic curators for the Portals in Milwaukee, WI; San Francisco, CA; Oakland, CA; Dallas, TX; Colorado Springs, CO; Los Angeles, CA; Andover, MA, the Global curator for Shared Studios who oversees the entire network of curators for the Portals project, co-founder of Shared Studios, Amar Bakshi and Programming Coordinator Ben Gordon. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with international Portal curators in San Pedro Sula, Honduras; Gaza City, Palestine; Lesbos, Greece; Mexico City, MX; Amman, Jordon and Stockholm, Sweden. All interviews were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB)[2] and were audio recorded before transcription in Otter.ai. Transcripts were then coded using NVivo. While transcripts were coded with the sensitizing concepts and codes that emerged in previous data, the interviews generated additional first level codes of CURATING DIALOGUE, CURATING PUBLICS and CURATING TECHNOLOGY. Second level coding led to the codes of PERTURBATION, ACTIVATION, FRAMING, and SUSPENSION. Informal interviews and conversations with over 40 curators across the Portal network also contribute to the present project's data. Both formal and informal interviews were conducted to better capture the sensory experience of the Portal, to identify rhetorical strategies used by participants and curators when engaging in cross-

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[2] Recruitment scripts and Interview guides are included in the current project's appendixes

cultural dialogue, and to more fully understand the Portal as an atmospheric interface for human connection.

Engaging increased levels of participation throughout the process of data collection and analysis was done as a means of "being in fieldwork" (Marcus, 2008). This method of immersion moves beyond participant observation and interviewing to more fully capture the experience of participants in situ (Middleton et al., 2015), recognizing that digital interfaces have a profound effect on the research process. Subsequently, understanding how the Portal not only mediates, but modulates human connection required a processual engagement with the interface. Both participatory critical rhetoric and digital ethnographies necessitate varying methodological approaches. Additionally, engaging the digital is an open event, requiring an open and flexible research design (Pink, 2015). Understanding the overall tone of the Portal necessitated immersive engagement with each of the various units that compose this interface, and all of the ways in which both human and non-human units interact to establish the overall tone of the Poral experience and its potential impact on public life.

Establishing the overall tone of the Portal experience requires identifying each of the various units that compose the shipping container as an atmospheric interface and then determining which of those units will be the primary focus of analysis (Ash et al., 2018). The actuation of particular tones of interaction are dependent on the various units of an interface and the ways in which these units interact. Ash et al. (2018) focus their post-phenomenological approach to the study of digital interfaces on the interface itself, however the current project argues that to capture the overall tone of an interface as atmospheric, both the non-human components that comprise an interface and the persons who actively engage that interface should be conceptualized as equally important units.

Manovich (2011) suggests that an interface is not a single thing, but rather a collection of units that determine the interface's overall function and its potential effects. Following Manovich, I argue here that understanding emerging interfaces as atmospheric requires attention to *every* unit that comprises an interaction, both those that establish the interface as a whole as well as the persons who interact with that interface. While Ash et al. recognize that scholars often attend to the human at the expense of understanding technology, it is equally important that when engaging technology, we do not do so at the expense of understanding the impact of human users of those technologies. As such, this project attends to both the human and non-human as important units that work together to establish the overall tone of an interface as atmospheric and the affects that it does or does not support.

Each of the analysis chapters of this project are organized around both the human and non-human units that comprise the Portal as atmospheric interface. Chapter four focuses on the shipping container itself, including its placement and the technologies that compose the Portal as an interface. Chapter five extends beyond the Portal itself to engage how these various units interact with and are impacted by Portal participants. Finally, Chapter six explores the role of the curator as an integral unit in shaping the ways in which the Portal both mediates and modulates interaction. Subsequently, each chapter builds upon the ways in which distinct units of the Portal interact with one another, generating various vibrations that shape the overall tone of the Portal as atmospheric interface.

CHAPTER 4

ATMOSPHERES OF PERTURBATION AND THE BLURRING OF PUBLIC AND

PRIVATE

*I thought the gold dumpster was so stupid, we were joking about public art speak –*
*obviously a commentary on commerce and waste, right outside one of the richest*
*University Art Galleries in the world –* New Haven Portal Participant

Whether a participant views the Portal as a powerful tool for human connection or

a "gold dumpster" is contingent on existing symbolic constructions of both shipping

containers as readymade objects and the technologies the Portal employs. Further, user

understanding of the Portal is impacted by those technological affordances hidden from

participant view (both in an outside of the Portal) that compose the overall experience.

The current chapter explores the myriad units of the Portal itself to establish a frame for

understanding the types of affect supported by the Portal and the various ways in which

the shipping container might be understood as an atmospheric interface. I begin with a

discussion of the Portal as a form of public art and attend to the physical make up the

shipping container as an affectual readymade that momentarily disrupts participants'

understanding of the shipping container's function within systems of global capital. This

disruption is predicated on the technologies hidden from participant view which in part

determine the Portal's ability to unclasp the container from commodity forces through an

enactment of digital co-presence. I then explore how the placement of the shipping

container into particular locations has a profound impact on the affective potential of the

interface. Subsequently, both the discursive and extra-discursive blur distinctions

between public and private in ways that directly impact the potentiality of the "gold

dumpster" to support particular types of affect and influence public life.

**Art and the Affectual Readymade**

The potential of the Portal to influence public life is predicated on Shared Studios' conceptualization of the project as a form of public art.  As an art project, its goal is human connection and the achievement of this goal is dependent on participant interaction with the project. This focus on interaction situates the Portal into the burgeoning field of participatory public art, an increasingly salient form of public expression over the past two decades. Participatory public art seeks to engage social life in a number of political-economic contexts through "relational, connective, conversational, and dialogical artistic performances" (Ianneli & Masurò, 2017, p. 8). Mclean (2009) suggests that public art works to reconfigure the public members' relationship with themselves through various modes of artistic expression. These artistic expressions may take a number of forms including graffiti, urban knitting, the construction of street furniture and theatre to highlight the various challenges and/or issues faced by the communities in which they are staged. Participatory public art attempts to generate "active-audiences" who collaborate in the process of artistic sense-making, and the efficacy of such projects are generally measured through the relationships these projects build between and amongst various community stakeholders (Ianneli & Masurò, 2017). Thus, as a form of participatory public art, the Portal's potential to support particular types of affect and generate human connection are linked to its ability to foster relationships with those persons in the communities that house the shipping container and the types of relational, connective, conversational and dialogic performances it inspires from "active-audiences."

Engagement with the active-audiences of the Portal begins when participants make contact with the shipping container. As such, the types of relationships and

conversations the Portal inspires cannot be understood without attending to the shipping container itself as an already existing symbol and the technologies that enable participant interaction with the project. Before detailing the interactions that occur within the container itself (Chapter five), I first outline the container as an affectual readymade that establishes the foundation for those interactions.

**Affectual Readymade or Gold Dumpster?**

Interaction between Portal participants begins with the shipping container itself as a "common good" – a recognizable symbol of the movement of commodities across networks of globalization. As previously noted, the container functions as "a readymade design. It is a relatively inexpensive, uniform space that exists all over the world" (Freeling, 2015, para. 2). The description of the Portal as a "readymade" design suggests the shipping container's ordinariness as a delivery system for mass produced "common goods."  In its very banality the container itself becomes yet another symbol of "the standardization of mass-produced items available before a person even thought of needing it" (Hamilton, 2013, p.3).

The Portal's attempt to recontextualize the shipping container from a mover of goods to a space for human connection likens it to other art projects that draw on the banal as a means of challenging existing conceptualizations of common items. The most notable of these recontextualizations is Duchamp's *Fountain*, a store-bought urinal placed on top of a pedestal and declared art! It was Duchamp who coined the term readymade to describe such gestures, describing the readymade as the recontextualization of the "banal and obvious commodity" (Hamilton, 2013, p. 3). The Portal offers a similar gesture asking those who engage the shipping container to re-imagine their relationship to this ordinary object. This reimaging raises questions about whether the gesture works to

challenge participants or if it reaffirms existing ideas about the shipping container as a symbol of global capitalism.

While Duchamp's readymade seeks to wrest an object from the drudgery of its daily function, for Guattari (1995) the readymade generates a transformational aesthetic that opens up new possibilities for the engagement of social life. Guattari's articulation of the readymade positions it as a refrain – constructed through the detachment of a material object from the all-encompassing self-evidence of its form, function and meaning generating a new assemblage of sensory affects. Zepke (2008) suggests that the "affects generated by the readymade therefore go beyond the conditions of possibility of the subject-object relation" (p. 34). The readymade generates an aesthetic moment that brings the contradictions of an object as commodity into focus for the viewer/participant. It creates a gap in comprehension between existing conceptualizations of the material object in question and rematerializes that object into new configurations of sense and sense-making. Thus, it creates a gap between content and effect, what Massumi (2002) suggests is the primacy of affect. Any instance of an aesthetic moment wherein an ordinary object (commodity) is wrestled from "capitalism's perpetual commoditizing process is an affectual readymade" (Hamilton, 2013, p.14).

The efficacy of an affectual readymade is in its ability to at least momentarily wrench the viewer/participant loose from existing understandings of an object as commodity or in the service of what Appaduri (1986) defines as the commodity situation. For Appaduri the commodity is not a static object but rather a series of material situations wherein the materiality of the physical world is seen only in its ability to be exchanged for another materiality. Just as the shipping container hides the commodities it carries across oceans to awaiting consumers, the commodity situation is valued through these

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very mechanisms of trade and the adherence to an abstract currency while hiding the exploitative social and cultural relations of commodity production and exchange. The commodity becomes a mystery because it no longer exists as a thing but as a "constant valuation framework" (Hamiliton, 2013, p. 15). The efficacy of the affectual readymade is in its ability to make visible those systems hidden by the flows of global capitalism.

The affectal readymade can thus either operate to territorialize or deterrtorialize through the aesthetic unclasping of the object from the material forces of capitalism. Wise (2018) articulates this process concisely as a coming together and a coming apart, the arranging of both the discursive and extra-discursive elements of an assemblage. When engaging assemblages of enunciation[3] surrounding commodification, territorializing occurs when the aesthetic moment draws the viewer/participant's attention to the capitalist logics that govern a material object. Deterritorialization occurs when the aesthetic moment outrageously over-codes an object so that it completely escapes the grasps of capitalism all together. While the ability of an affectual readymade to create aesthetic moments of deterritorialization are rare given the entrenchment of global capitalism, any time "materials are perceived to be, even if momentarily, something other than commodities" the readymade engages "materializing" strategies that alter a viewer/participant's relationship with the commodity system (Hamilton, 2013, p. 15).

**Reconceptualizing the Shipping Container.** One of the principal ways in which an affectual readymade disrupts the viewer/participant is by creating a moment wherein common conceptualizations of an object as part of a commodity situation are called into question. The Portal creates several such moments. These moments of "non-sense-

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[3] Assemblages of enunciation refer to those arrangements of languages and meanings. See Deleuze & Guattari (1987); Wise (2018).

making" highlight how the shipping container and its associative technologies vibrate with other units (participants and curators) to establish the overall experience of the Portal as atmospheric interface.

One of the ways the Portal brings these contradictions into visibility is through participants' inability to articulate it as anything other than a container for the spread of goods. Several potential Portal participants stood perplexed outside of the Portal in Tempe trying to determine the purpose of the project. This moment of confusion was generally addressed by asking questions about the cost of the Portal and its associative materials. The "social life" (Appadurai, 1986) of the container as commodity includes its reproducibility, mobility and its relatively inexpensive form, which led one participant to calculate the overall monetary value of the Portal. He proceeded to add up the cost of the container, making estimates about the price of its technology, internet usage, its camera, the carpet on the walls, and even the ramp that leads participants inside. These moments of return to capitalist renderings occurred because the seemingly ordinariness of the container is suddenly wrenched from its associative meanings, leaving participants to engage alternative means of perception and interpretation (Hamilton, 2013) to make sense of the shipping container's placement in the middle of a public square. As part of the commodity situation, participants make sense of the project via their (in)ability to wrench the container loose from existing frameworks of valuation.

This attempt to territorialize the shipping container into frames of valuation is further expressed in the participant quote that opens this chapter. Despite having been inside the Portal and having experienced a conversation, the participant in New Haven cannot seem to make sense of the Portal as a place for human connection and continues to see the container as "commentary on commerce and waste." The New Haven participant

goes on to bemoan the placement of the Portal outside of "one of the richest Art Galleries" in the Country returning to a critique of their understanding of the container within existing capitalist logics. Subsequently, the Portal created a moment of confusion and prompted participants to search for common understandings of the container. In this way the container makes visible the logics of the commodity situation and territorializes those logics as participants attempt to re-materialize the Portal back into those existing frames.

Participants' need to territorialize the Portal back into existing frames of valuation is further evidenced in several participant's questions about the purpose of the project. During the month-long installation of the Tempe Portal at least one passerby a day inquired about the company behind the Portal, Shared Studios, whether or not they are a non-profit (they are not) and how the project could possibly "make any money." Additionally, Tempe participants were often confused about not being charged an entry fee to engage the Portal and the failure of Shared Studios to capitalize on the monetary potential of this fee to generate profit left them perplexed. This focus on profit is both connected to the container as a common good as well as the experience of engaging the Portal as a piece of art. As a commodity situation, participants are unable to make sense of the shipping container and its goals leading them to reinforce existing understandings of the material situation and its "possessive relationships with the world and its materiality" (Hamilton, 2013, p. 16). Just as participants struggled to make sense of the shipping container as something other than a carrier of common goods, they enacted other territories of commodification by attempting to (re)frame the project into the boundaries of capitalism's incessant focus on profit.

The need for participants to territorialize the Portal back into systems of valuation is not surprising. As previously noted, the entrenchment of discourses of capitalism constrain the ability of any affectual readymade to deterritorialize. As such, the efficacy of an affectual readymade is situated in its ability to conjure new temporalities and situations outside of commodification. For this to occur, the affectual readymade must enact new "materialities, sensations, and perceptions" (Hamilton, 2013, p. 18). While the shipping container itself created confusion that might awaken these contradictions for the viewer/participant, these participants generally returned to discourses of commodification associated with the shipping container as a common good. While the container itself may fall short of deterritorializing the commodity situation, it does, if even for a brief moment, call the logics of the commodity into question. The unclasping of the shipping container prompted participants to territorialize the Portal back into discourses of capitalism, however the need to do so demonstrates the "precariousness of the commodity moment" (Hamilton, 2013, p. 17).

The potential of the Portal to move participants beyond their need to territorialize the container back into commodity is more likely to occur once they have entered the Portal. The same participants whose primary focus was on the Portal's profitability or the shipping container as a common good often changed their descriptions of the project after having conversations inside. Comments upon exiting the Portal focused on the people they had met and the quality of their interactions, shifting attention from profit to connection. Essentially focus on the movement of commodities was replaced by the movement of feelings and ideas. In these moments the Portal makes visible what capitalism obscures; instead of people being isolated from one another, the Portal puts people into direct contact. While the shipping container hides the commodities it

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transports, the Portal makes visible alternative ways of engaging people and places once participants have stepped inside.

This visibility arises in part through engagement with the technology of the Portal which generates new sets of discursive-digital-material engagements (Zappen, 2018). Thus, the potential for deterritorialization is a result of the machinic assemblage of participants and the Portal's technologies. I now turn to these technologies and the ways in which they operate as units in the experience of the Portal as atmospheric interface.

## Atmospheric Perturbations in a Gold Box

While the shipping container itself highlights the Portal as an assemblage of enunciation by attuning to the discourses (particularly of capitalism) that in part shape the Portal's atmosphere, the machinic assemblage of the Portal speaks to its deterritorializng potential. Wise (2018) articulates the machinic assemblage "as an arrangement of corporeal bodies and technologies" (p. 71). When mapping an assemblage, it is equally important to attend to both assemblages of enunciation and the machinic. As such, while the shipping container assists in understanding the ways in which the discursive might impact the Portal experience, the technology of the Portal, and participant engagement with that technology speak to the extra-discursive units of the Portal experience.

Engaging the extra-discursive units of the Portal begins with an examination of the technology of the interface. To understand how these technologies operate as units in an assemblage it is necessary to outline those units. However, what is ultimately important about the machinic assemblage is not necessarily what it is, but rather what it does (Wise, 2018). Subsequently, mapping the units of the Portal includes isolating each technology, but more importantly examining how those technologies function, their various expressions, affects and behaviors. Specifically, when these behaviors perturb the

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intended atmosphere of the Portal, they stir up atmospheres of their own. As such, the extra-discursive necessitates consideration of the relations between units of the assemblage, their relation to the bodies outside of those units, and the ways in which both intrinsic and extrinsic perturbation shifts the atmospheric tone of the shipping container.

Focus on the ways in which Portal technologies perturb participants is important because these perturbations essentially alter the atmosphere of the Portal and "an atmosphere matters because it shapes human conduct" (Ash, 2013, p. 22). Perturbation refers to the capacity of one object to affect another in some basic way. In relation to the atmospheres generated by the Portal's technologies, this perturbation happens both intrinsically and extrinsically with intrinsic perturbation occurring as a result of "a component that forms part of the object itself" and extrinsic perturbation occurring as a result of forces outside of the immediate object (Ash, 2013, p. 25). Subsequently, both the technological units of the Portal, participants and curators are essential in the circulation of various atmospheres within the Portal and these atmospheres shift as a result of perturbation by both the Portal's technologies and the relationship between these technologies and outside forces.

The various units that comprise the technology of the Portal are: a projector, camera, the screen and the hole carved out of that screen to accommodate the camera, the speakers and microphone, Blackspot software, Zoom meeting software, and the internet on which that software operates. While each unit is integral to the overall experience of the Portal, the function (or failure) of particular units have varying impacts on the Portal experience and its ability to challenge the territorializing effects of the shipping container itself. Subsequently, for the Portal to deterritorialize and produce an atmosphere of human connection, certain units must function in specific ways, and this functionality

may or may not generate particular affects as participants are suspended in varying

atmospheres inside the Portal. Subsequently, technological perturbations may produce

competing atmospheres that might enable or constrain feelings of co-presence between

participants. As such, the units can be categorized into the material and immaterial, the

physical and the digital each with an important role to play in the experience of the Portal

as atmospheric and each with the potential to perturb that atmosphere, actuating new (and

often unintended) atmospheres of their own.

<div align="center">***</div>

*Pulling back the giant door that functions as the Portal's screen I feel like Dorothy about to discover the man behind the curtain in the Wizard of Oz. All of the Portal's magic exists behind this heavy door. I find the camera propped up against its edge, the Mac Mini computer, the BIAMP (something I had never heard of), and a series of cables and cords. I suddenly feel like a child on Christmas morning who was expecting a pony to be wrapped inside the box and only found a pair of socks. I have always known that the experience of the Portal was achieved through already existing technology, but it feels so disappointing to see the familiar Apple on the back of the computer, the same cords connecting the speakers as the ones that used to poke out of a stereo in the 1980s. The illusion continues to dissipate as I turn on the camera and begin to learn how everything works. The curator training me reminds me that participants should never see behind the screen. As the magic washes away, it becomes clear as to why. When you know the 'man behind the curtain' is nothing more than a computer and an internet connection it no longer feels like a wormhole to another world, but rather a Google search bar from the inside of a gold box.*

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The technological units of the Portal include the internet, the Zoom meeting

software which enables connections across the network of 40 shipping containers,

Blackspot software which reduces glare to enhance the Portal experience, the projector,

camera, speakers, microphone and the screen on which images of participants are

projected. As part of the machinic assemblage, the function of each of these units

generates particular affects from Portal participants and even minor failings in the

expression of these digital units may perturb participants returning them to

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understandings of the shipping container as a symbol of global capitalism rather than a site for connection. In order for participants to feel as if they have been transported to another world, connected with diverse others through co-presence, and to be fully immersed in the Portal as an atmospheric interface, the success of the Portal's technologies rely primarily on the dimension of disappearance.

**Disappearance**

When articulating the "clickable world" through an examination of Google Glass Wise (2018) urges scholars to seriously consider the ways in which digital interfaces "disappear into everyday objects" (p. 73). This sort of disappearance draws the users' attention away from the technology itself and back to their own needs and desires. A focus on disappearance is consistent with theoretical approaches to technology. Latour (1999) suggests that the more refined technology becomes the more its inner-workings essentially evade human perception. Additionally, in advocating for an alien phenomenology Bogost (2012) contends that each technological object is home to a "tiny universe" hidden from user view (p. 9). The Portal operates as such an interface drawing participant attention away from the technology of the Portal and towards connection with the persons in the shipping container with whom they are connected. This disappearance is an integral function of Portal technology that allows for the experience of its unique atmosphere.

The technology of the Portal is assembled in such a way as to generate this atmosphere. Internet speeds are high to ensure immediacy in reaction and response from participants on both sides of the screen. In this way the technology becomes "transparent," the speeds generate a connection that erases the fact that the conversation

is happening over an internet connection "so that the user is no longer aware of confronting a medium, but instead stands in an immediate relationship to the contents of that medium" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 24). While the immediacy of the conversation and participants on both sides of the connection feeling as if there is no delay in response is dependent on more than just the internet connection, these speeds greatly impact the transparency of the Portal as an atmospheric interface.

Internet speeds, of course, are not always reliable and this is particularly true for a number of the countries/cities that house a Portal. Subsequently, the internet operates as a sort of extrinsic perturbation by creating interrupted connections, resulting in a frozen image of the participants and lags in response time by those on the other side of the screen. These moments generally drew Portal goers out of the illusion of sharing the same space as their interlocutors. During a slow and occasionally broken connection between Herat and Tempe one participant on the Tempe side became less concerned with connecting with his counterparts in Afghanistan and more interested in talking to me (I was curating the connection) about internet speeds and how the Tempe Portal maintained internet connection. While discussions of the shipping container often led participants to territorialize the Portal back into discourses of capitalism, internet perturbations often caused participants to territorialize the experience back into common discussions of technology. The success of an affectual readymade is its ability to disrupt habitual interpretations (Hamilton, 2013) and internet issues often resulted in participants returning to existing habits of critiquing slow and frustrating internet connections.

Internet speeds also led participants to reframe their experience into other common habits of talk associated with technology. During a particularly troublesome connection with Dallas, Texas, the internet intermittently would go out, disconnecting the

Tempe Portal from Dallas and requiring either side to call the other back. When calls end, the screen returns to a normal MacBook Desktop and the Zoom meeting software becomes visible to those inside. This breaks the illusion of transparency drawing participants back to the medium through which they were having the conversation rather than on the conversation or the persons with whom they were speaking. This and other failed connections between Tempe and Amman, Herat and Lagos led several participants to refer to the Portal experience as "glorified Skype," refocusing participants on commonly known (and used) video conferencing software. The illusion of transparency was further shattered when participants were familiar with the Zoom software. One participant commented "I use Zoom for work! That's all this thing runs off of?" This particular statement suggests the power of the illusion of the Portal and the importance of the technology in maintaining that illusion. When confronted with the medium of connection, the Portal becomes nothing more than another common technological tool of which participants already have an existing understanding. As a result the internet has the capacity to perturb the atmosphere of the Portal drawing attention away from human relations to human-technology relations altering the ways in which participants experienced the space of the Portal.

Even software unfamiliar to most participants worked to disrupt the atmosphere of the Portal. Blackspot software is used to diminish the glare emanating from the projector which directly faces the screen. This software is essentially just a digital black spot that curators position over a hole in the screen that allows the camera to capture participants so they can be broadcast to the connecting Portal. When positioned incorrectly, the projector's glare creates a shining light on the image participants are viewing of their Portal partners. This image then draws attention to the projector in the

participants' own Portal and refocuses attention away from the persons with whom they are speaking and back onto the technology of the shipping container itself. During a connection with Lagos, who were having trouble locating their black spot to reposition it over their camera hole, a Tempe participant asked what was causing the glare. When I indicated it was the projector, the participant inquired about the location of our projector, eventually seeing it despite it being hidden in a carpeted box on the right side of the Portal. This participant then made remarks about the quality of the projection, the type of projector, and suggested a projector that he believed would be better suited for the Portal. While not familiar with the Blackspot software, the failure of this particular unit acted as an intrinsic perturbation which drew attention back to the interface of the Portal itself. Subsequently, attention to the technology in the shipping container distracts participants from the goal of the Portal which is to suspend them in an environment and to interact with their interlocutors "naturally." Essentially, the Portal attempts to generate an "interfaceless interface, in which there [are] no recognizable electronic tools" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 23). However, even when participants are not familiar with the tools that create such disappearance, when made recognizable the technological units of the Portal become more important than the connections made inside as these units then reshape the atmosphere of the space inside the Portal's walls.

Portal connections are generated through feelings of co-presence between participants who are made to feel as if they are in the same room. While the Blackspot might draw participant attention to their being projected on a screen rather than feeling like they are standing in the same room, the quality of that projection is integral to these feelings of co-presence as well. Bolter and Grusin (2000) suggest that in order for a technology to create this sort of presence, it "should come as close as possible to our

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daily visual experience" (p. 22).  Subsequently, the quality of the projection is central to

how the persons on the other side of the connection are viewed by participants and

whether or not those projections come "close to our daily visual experience." This

became especially relevant during a connection between Tempe and Milwaukee. While

the Portal in Milwaukee was once a shipping container, it is now a screen positioned in

the curator's house. The ways in which the technology of this particular Portal are set up

leads to a projected image of those in Milwaukee that can best be described as "too big."

In other words, the proportions of the image are often not to scale making the participants

on the Milwaukee side of the Portal appear much larger than those connecting with

Milwaukee. This distortion in scale is a familiar challenge for persons interacting on

digital interfaces. As a result, the distorted image both makes the technology of the Portal

transparent and acts as an intrinsic perturbation highlighting how the image fails to match

the visual experience necessary to generate co-presence. Subsequently, the projector and

the fact that the image is being projected become present for the participant and diminish

feelings of co-presence by disrupting the illusion that participants are in the same room.

This then draws participants out of the atmosphere of connection usually generated by the

Portal as they are perturbed into the competing atmospheres of Portal technologies.

The feeling of being in the same room is dependent on the Portal camera as well,

and of the Portal's technological units, the camera is probably the most visible to

participants. The full wall screen at the end of the Portal has a small hole cut into it at

about eye-level of which the camera sets behind. This hole often blends into the

background but comes into focus when the camera angles are not correct, and the hole

subsequently ends up on the face of a participant on the other end of the Portal. Once the

camera is discovered, participants are able to make sense of how they are being projected

to their partners and how their partners are being captured for them. During a connection with Amman (whose Portal is in a cultural center rather than a shipping container) and Tempe, a young woman was having a thoughtful conversation about Middle East policy with the Amman curator. When another man joined the curator in Amman, he ended up projected with the camera hole in the middle of his forehead. Once the camera was made present for the participant in Tempe, feelings of co-presence diminished given the technology's perturbing the atmosphere that had been created in the space of the Portal via the disruption of transparency and the participant's sense of the visual. This is evidenced in the swift change in conversation from Middle East policy to how the Portal worked and whether or not the camera was there the whole time.

Ultimately the camera and the projector work together to create the illusion of being in the same room essential to the atmosphere of connection generated by the Portal. One of the principles of transparency is the creation of a linear perspective (Bolton & Goran, 2000). In the Portal this perspective is achieved through the process of keystoning the projector and adjusting the angle and aperture of the camera until the two Portals are aligned and participant eye contact is established. This process not only makes the technological units disappear, but the sense of there being two Portals disappears as well. When positioned correctly, the corners and edges of the container are perfectly aligned with the corners and edges of the connected Portal making it appear that the Portal is a continuous space with two openings on either end rather than two shipping containers with a screen between them. Together, the camera and the projector are two of the most important units for maintaining the "interfaceless interface," generating a transparent immediacy that leads to feelings of co-presence.

While feelings of co-presence and the conversations that occur as a result of transparent immediacy are explored in detail in the next chapter, one experience is worth noting here. This particular Portal connection speaks to the importance of the technological units of the Portal and how these hidden units establish a foundation for understanding the conversations that might occur, the overall tone of the Portal as and its potential to generate affective co-presence when these unit vibrate correctly. The Colorado Springs curator recounted the story during a conversation with the Tempe Portal:

> We were connected to Aberdeen Australia, and a woman brought her daughter in who had Down Syndrome and the mother was saying that she was probably not going to speak… that she's very introverted and, and was probably not going to speak. And midway through the mother's conversation with the curator in Aberdeen, the young woman stood up and walked to the center of the Portal and, and reached out and tried to hug the guy, Jeff on the other side. And I said, oh she's hugging you! And he reached out and hugged. It was such a beautiful Portal moment!

This account from the Colorado Springs curator suggests how "real" the experience in the Portal can be when each of the technological units is working. Additionally, the co-presence demonstrated in this connection is contingent on the disappearance of the technology and the transparent immediacy of feeling like each person involved were in the same room. The connection created an affective interaction and "interactivity increases the realism and effectiveness" (Bolton & Goran, 2000, p. 29) of the Portal as atmospheric interface.

Overall, the efficacy of the Portal is contingent on the functioning of its technological units. Further, this efficacy requires participants to unhinge the Portal from assemblages of enunciation that shape their understanding of both the shipping container and public art. Prior conceptualizations are often predicated on the logics of capitalism

however, the recontextualizing of the Portal often leads participants to territorialize the shipping container back into these logics revealing how the Portal as an affectual readymade might momentarily makes those logics visible. As such, the potential of the Portal to deterritorialize participants from these discourses is more likely to occur once they have experienced conversations inside. This creates a unique atmosphere for human connection which only happens when the technological units of the container disappear to allow for co-presence through transparent immediacy. When these units perturb this atmosphere, new atmospheres emerge, atmospheres that generally lead participants out of the space of the Portal and back into less appealing atmospheres of which they may already be familiar. Thus, these units must vibrate at specific rhythms, encouraging feelings of connection through the co-presence of participants as they become suspended in the shared atmosphere of the Portal.

While assemblages of enunciation and the perturbations of the machinic assemblage of the Portal's technology provide a foundation for understanding its potential as an atmospheric interface, this atmosphere does not exist outside of the geographies of each Portal's location. As noted in this project's opening chapter, there are over 40 Portals in 20 countries around the world and each Portal location is integral to its potential to generate co-presence and human connection. Subsequently, the placement of each Portal provides not only a foundation for understanding the vibration of its technological units, but also its potential to shape public life by situating each Portal into the various publics in which they are placed. The quote that opens this chapter exemplifies the ways in which place interacts with conceptualizations of the Portal as both a piece of public art and as a container for shipping goods. The New Haven participant's understanding of the Portal was in part shaped by it having been placed

"outside one of the richest University Art Galleries in the world." As this comment suggests, Portal placement is an additional unit that profoundly influences the Portal as atmospheric interface.

## Portal Placement and the Blurring of Public and Private

*Definitely been some dangerous moments for me. Cause I was always in the hood with my projects. So, like I would encounter, I mean I had the police roll up on me. They see this gold container in my back yard and they thinkin' I got drugs in here, like I'm storing drugs in here. They got a swat team and guns and I'm like, whoa, bro it's a tool for learning – but you know I got different things I've had to deal with, with my neighborhood you know? – Milwaukee Portal Curator*

The Portal as a piece of public art already speaks to its publicness, however, to understand the ways in which place functions as a unit in the overall tone of the Portal experience, the shipping container must be understood within articulations of place, publicness and the public sphere. This is particularly true given the project's goal of generating dialogue and its position as a public art piece that engages active audiences. Dialogue between active audiences seems to occur through co-presence of amongst members of these audiences, a co-presence that is at least in part contingent on the placement of the Portal into the public sphere. As such, I know turn to the ways in which the Portal operates publicly. Specifically, I explore how the unit of placement blurs distinctions between private and public both establishing a foundation for understanding how the technological units of the Portal vibrate with participants, and how this vibration generates co-presence and human connection.

Place as a fundamental unit for human connection in the Portal relies on a definition of place that moves beyond articulations of place as specific geographies. It requires an understanding of the relationship between the body and place. Casey (2001) articulates our situatedness in place as a series of tenacious traces, impressions of place

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"that remain lodged in our body long after we have left it" (p. 688). Thus, the connection between place and the body comes to define a geographic self. How we live and experience place and its habitudes (the interplay between social and individual agency and the material conditions of place) delineate our "place-world." As we inhabit place, we hold it in both our bodies and our memories. It is here that the geographic self comes to enact a connection to place, through a "tenacious holding on to place so as to prolong what [we] experience beyond the present moment. In this way, place and self actively collude" (Casey, 2001, p. 687). This active collusion highlights the ways in which place works on the body and generates particular affects, affects that are important when understanding the potential of the Portal to create human connection through co-presence.

The Milwaukee Portal being mistaken for a drug cargo container speaks to these habitudes of place. Located in the neighborhood of Amani, the 53206-zip code on Milwaukee's north side, the Portal sits in the center of a neighborhood with the nation's highest rate of incarceration (Toner, 2014). While the Portal was originally placed in a public park in the neighborhood, it was moved to the curator's back yard until it was shipped to another location. During this time, the Portal was still operating and subsequently there were a number of persons coming in and out of the Portal daily as it made connections to other sites around the world. Given crime rates in the neighborhood, the movement of people in and out of the back yard, and the placement of the container in the 53206, perceptions of the Portal were clouded by already existing understandings of the neighborhood. As Casey (2001) suggests, the habitudes of place are hard to shake; they stand "ready to be retrieved when the appropriate impression or sensation arises" (p. 688).  The Milwaukee Portal highlights how the placement of Portals into particular

publics can alter conceptualizations of the shipping container, in this instance mistaking it for a drug cargo container rather than a place for co-presence and human connection.

While the placement of the Portal into public spaces shapes understandings of how it (should) function, the Portal's goals of human connection suggest alternative functions and understandings of the various units of the shipping container. The tension between these seemingly opposing modes of operation is in part a result of the ways in which the Portal challenges participant conceptualizations of how the Portal operates publicly as a private space for interaction. Subsequently, the potential of the Portal to create co-presence and human connection can be found in the ways in which the Portal challenges participant understandings of its publicness as a result of its blurring of the public and private spheres.

The distinctiveness of the public and private spheres has always been suspect. Habermas' outlining of the literary public sphere detailed how private letters were written with the understanding that they would be read by a public audience (Habermas, 1989). Warner (2002) challenges scholars to more deeply engage how these categories influence one another. In addition, conceptualizations of these categories impact how they emerge and relate to one another, leading Asen and Brouwer (2001) to call for a reconfiguration of these boundaries as 'permeable.' And Sheller and Urry (2003) argue that categories of private and public "have always been mobile, situational, flickering, and fragmented" (p. 114) calling for them to be dispensed with altogether. However, there is value in retaining an understanding of the phenomenological experience of private and public, and it may be more generative to explore the ways in which these categories are put into dialogue. Thus, the Portals might be understood as a site where categories of public and private are placed into this conversation by engaging a private sphere in a public space, sharing

private interests that might shape public life, and generating public discourse through private interaction.

As a new interface and modality in a global networked public, the Portals follow a trend in the blurring distinctions between private and public. Globalization has created a world that is progressively interconnected "where social relations (private and public) are increasingly 'stretched' across distance" (Youngs, 2009, p. 136). Communication technologies allow for the consumption of private thoughts (through blogs, Facebook posts, Tweets, etc.) by anyone in the public who has access to the Internet (Dahlberg, 2006). This stretching of relations engages a stranger sociability across geographic distance. The Portals are just one of many interfaces that demonstrate the permeability of categories of private and public and the changing relations indicative of a global networked public.

Sheller and Urry (2003) conceptualize the boundaries between private and public as a means of unpacking how various technologies have blurred distinctions between the two spheres. Following their lead, I engage three distinctions between private and public blurred by the Portals that occur through the placement of each shipping container and the ways in which this placement subsequently operates as a distinct unit in the overall tone of the Portal as atmospheric interface. These distinctions include: public space/private space, public interest/private interest, and public life/private life. The Portal disrupts distinctions between each of these categories of public/private by generating co-presence that simultaneously takes place in both public and private space, encourages private conversation free from state and public control, and the Portal's returning the body to the site of deliberation to create an atmospheric interface for human connection.

**Portals and Public/Private Space**

Engaging the publicness of private interactions in the Portals begins with the distinction between public and private space. Sheller and Urry (2003) outline this distinction by noting that public spaces are those locales outside of the intimate spaces where people gather to socialize in less regulated ways. Private spaces are marked off from public ones, and "privacy is viewed as much as a spatial arrangement as a social one" (Sheller & Urry, 2003, p. 112). The Portals disrupt this distinction by offering a private space for unregulated interaction in the middle of the public space of a city or town. The Portal itself is simultaneously visible to the public, but the conversations in it are private, and while these conversations may be recorded, it is entirely up to the participant to determine if recording will occur. Additionally, the habitudes of place highlight the power associated with the presence of the Portal in a public space as evidenced in the Milwaukee Portal being mistaken as a storage unit for narcotics. Yet, while as a physical object it is viewable by anyone who is part of a particular public and its habitudes, the conversations inside the Portal are private interactions not visible to those publics. In this way the Portals align nicely with Sheller and Urry's (2003) discussion of the automobile. While visible to the public on roads and subject to public laws, the relations within the moving capsule are cut off from the public and thus the automobile operates simultaneously as both a private and public space. The Portals, too, both announce themselves publicly while shielding the conversations within from public scrutiny. They are subject to the regulations and restrictions of the public spaces within which they operate and to understandings of how those spaces do or should function, but the conversations within are unregulated and completely up to participants.

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The privacy of participant interaction in public space is especially interesting given the placement of Portals in restrictive locations such as Tehran, Iran, and Havana, Cuba. Portals in Tehran and Havana are housed in countries that restrict access to and information from the U.S. The Portals in Iran and Cuba did not receive any push back from their governments however, this is in part due to the conversations within the Portal being private. Despite the Portals being visible in the public spaces of Tehran and Havana, the privateness of the conversations within the Portal meant they were shielded from state surveillance. In this way the Portal provides a unique space of privacy since even the Internet (accessed in the privacy of one's home) is regulated by the state in both Iran and Cuba.

This blurring between private space and public space generated several interactions and moments of human connection that may not have otherwise occurred in the public spaces of restrictive countries such as Iran and Cuba. This included Iranian women dancing inside the Portal despite restrictions on public dancing by women and an Iranian man coming out of the closet and declaring his homosexuality to his New Haven counterparts. While social networks provide spaces for persons to share private information publicly, in areas where various types of public actions are restricted, the atmospheric interface of the Portal operates as a private space for public interaction.

In addition to providing private space for public actions/interactions less regulated by the state, the Portal generates co-presence that further blurs the lines between public space/private space. While Sheller and Urry's (2003) auto-mobility *and* the Portals render the immediate space of the world outside the automobile/Portal as two dimensional, the "private-in-public" space of the Portal enriches the private experience inside with the potential to re-animate the world outside the Portal walls. This was most evident in a

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story that the Colorado Springs curator relayed about one of their connections with the

Portal in Gaza City, Palestine. The Colorado Springs (CS) curator told the story to a

participant in Tempe (TP), recounting how when connecting with Gaza the participants

on the Gaza side always seemed to be having so much fun. She continued her

conversation with the Tempe participant,

> CS: She [Gaza curator] reminded me that they only get four hours of electricity a day and that this was something [talking in the Portal] that the community looked forward to as a result.

> TP: And they are using that four hours of electricity to talk to you!

> CS: Well, they can't leave their City, literally, they can't leave their city. So, the Portal is their way of traveling to other places around the world. So, they take it very seriously there. They take it even more seriously, I think probably the most of anybody else in the Portals because of that. The curator in Gaza told me that it helped them imagine a world outside of the City. They were always having fun because being in the Portal was like a celebration. In fact, she [Gaza curator] said they refer to the Portal as a celebration of life.

Gaza participants engage the private space of the Portal but in doing so are able to engage

new publics of which they would never have had an opportunity because "they literally

can't leave their City" as a result of the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the increasing

expansion of Israeli settlements into Palestinian territory. This allows participants to

imagine and re-animate worlds outside their Portal by allowing them to be present with

others while in the restricted space of Gaza. The blurring of private space and public

space indicative of the Portal allows participants to imagine new publics and share things

restricted in the public spaces in which their Portal is located via the co-presence they

experience interacting with others through the interface.

**Portals and Public/Private Interest**

Conversations and interactions between participants within the Portal further blur

distinctions of public/private. While the state is assumed to operate on behalf of the

public, and the private sphere is conceptualized as private institutions representing private interests (Sheller & Urry, 2003), the Portal opens up a space where private, more intimate interests get shared on the public's behalf. This distinction between private and public moves beyond conceptualizations of private interests as those of privately held institutions, institutions increasingly entangled with the interests of the state. This focus on individual interests is in part evidenced by the young man making a private declaration of his sexuality in direct contradiction to the public laws against homosexuality in Iran. The Portal essentially returns the focus of private interest back to the individual by providing a space for persons to share their own articulations of self and communicate their own narratives. By engaging the personal, conversations in the Portal have the potential to change user understandings about their own relationship with both the state and global others.

The potential for altering participant understanding of the state and global others is connected to the project's self-described ability to challenge media narratives. One participant who entered the Portal between the U.S. and Iran noted that, "learning about a country or culture through the media is hard, but actually getting to know someone is much more powerful" (Shared Studios, *Story,* n.d.). The Andover, Massachusetts curator refers to the Portals as "global libraries." He contends that while anyone can Google information about another country, each participant is a story that they will not find on the web. Subsequently, the rhetorical power of the Portal is its ability to direct the attention of its users on individual stories. The confined space of the Portal creates an intimate environment wherein participants are forced to attend to the other user. The Portal essentially directs attention away from media narratives about a particular country

or culture and focuses that attention on an individual and his/her interests rather than those of both the state and private institutions of corporate media.

This focus on the private interest of the individual rather than those of institutions or government is one of the central goals outlined by the project. Bakshi insists that the Portal cannot be the project of any government or corporation as this has the potential to lead to mistrust. Another participant from the Portal between the U.S. and Iran states, "governments sometimes try to separate people. Sanctions try to separate people. But at the end of the day, people want to connect and experience that shared humanity" (Sepulveda, 2015, para. 7). According to Bakshi, the Portals allow for preconceived notions generated as a result of media narratives to be dispelled, confirmed or questioned by users. In bypassing barriers of strained international relations and politics, the Portal creates a conduit of human connection; a connection Bakshi insists "has enormous implications for the greater global community" (Sepulveda, 2015, para. 6).

While the organization insists that it is not overtly political, its placement of the first Portal between the U.S. and Iran, and its use of the Portal to connect U.S. Ambassadors to Syrian refugees underscore the kinds of global implications the project espouses. For Bakshi, the placement of the first Portal in Tehran was a way of bridging the distance between Iran and the west. As a former reporter with the *Washington Post* who spent a great deal of time reporting in Iran, Bakshi notes that the psychic distance between the U.S. and Iran was the greatest he could imagine (Drennan, 2015). Iranian-American co-founder of the project, Michelle Moghtader criticizes both U.S. and Iranian media for perpetuating this distance. "Tehran has a very active art scene, and I'd always tried to write about it through my work as a journalist, but I always felt confined to the media narratives of the current situation" (Drennanen, 2015, para. 9). Moghtader notes

that many Iranian-Americans who left Iran for the U.S. around the time of the Iranian revolution in 1979 still believe that the country is the same as it was prior to their leaving. She notes that "they're like, well, isn't it like this? And they get very animated about that, which is good" (Drenanen, 2015, para. 10). She hopes that the "digital" connections in the Portal will help shatter prominently held beliefs and media perpetuated preconceptions about both the U.S. and Iran. This positions the project as political regardless of Shared Studios' intent demonstrates their goal of connecting strangers from "other-worlds" as a means of altering perceptions of public life generated by media narratives in both nations. Further, the placement of the Portal during the negotiations between the U.S. and Iran over Iran's nuclear program connects the private interests of individuals to potentially alter how both nations' participants might engage the public interests of their respective countries.

The project overtly engaged the political process with its placement of a Portal at the Zaatari refugee camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan. The project was used in tandem with the U.N. commissioned virtual reality film, *Clouds Over Sidra*. The film virtually embeds viewers into the Zaatari camp through the eyes of Sidra, a 12-year-old Syrian refugee (Westcott, 2015). Ambassadors then entered the Portal to Zataari to address refugee concerns about the Syrian war and humanitarian crisis. The idea was to use both the film and the Portal as an empathy-building channel by harnessing the power of having to face another human being. When asked what she hoped to get out of the conversation, Dania, a 14-year-old refugee in the Zataari camp said, "I want them to find a solution for the Syrian crisis because we want our country back" (Westcott, 2015, para. 9). One of the creators of *Clouds Over Sidra*, Barry Pousman remarked that entering the Portal made him feel like he was back in Zataari, and that the use of the Portal could have profound

implications on policy. Exiting the Portal after having spoken with children in Zataari, Pousman stated, "That's a ninth-grade girl sitting on the other side of that camera…That is more powerful than every explainer video [about Syria] I've seen on Facebook so far" (Westcott, 2015, para. 17). Bakshi asserts that this 'power' is the result of the intimacy created by the space of the Portal and the "digital" presence of another human being whose experiences and articulations of place and personhood one must answer to at least while in the Portal itself. While the Portal between the U.S. and Zaatari brought policy makers "digitally" face-to-face with those impacted by policy decisions, the focus on co-presence as a means of altering perceptions remains grounded in the "inner-world" of the individual and their unique expressions of self.

The accountability generated through co-presence in the Portal is explored in more detail when outlining the participants as affective units in Chapter five. That said, the power of this co-presence occurred multiple times throughout the duration of the Tempe Portal and is further evidenced in interviews with Portal curators. The Dallas curator recounts a story that speaks to the power of co-presence in the Portal. When asked about any particularly troublesome participants he said,

> Yeah, I have one guy. I was outside the Portal and asked, hey, want to come in and talk to someone in Afghanistan? The guy laughed and said he would only tell them to run! I said, okay, come in and tell them that, I am sure they would be interested in hearing your perspective. He immediately was like, "oh no, I am not gonna' do that!" He had a lot to say about what he thought about Afghanistan but was too chicken to actually share those thoughts with the guys in Herat.

As the man in Dallas demonstrates, participant understanding of the places connected to particular Portals is shaped by existing discourses surrounding those locations – most often generated through media representation. However, when given the opportunity to have those epistemologies challenged, the very thought of being accountable to another

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person in a face-to-face conversation, digitally or otherwise was too 'real' for this particular participant. The extent of this 'realness' and its ability to generate affective connections between participants is explored in subsequent chapters, but the power of co-presence additionally speaks to the potentials and pitfalls of sharing one's private interests with public others.

**Portals and Public/Private Life**

If the Portals have the potential to re-shape spatial dimensions of public/private and engage public discourse through the private interests of participants' "inner-world," its return to co-presence is perhaps most salient in its blurring of public life and private life. Sheller and Urry (2003) note that the distinction between public/private here follows feminist approaches to publics as anything taking place outside the private space of the household. The private here pertains to "the domestic, the familial, the *personal,* the *bodily* and the intimate *inner world* of the individual" (Sheller & Urry, 2003, p. 112, emphasis added). The focus on the bodily and intimate inner world of the individual is exemplified in the co-presence produced by the Portal and its potential to generate publicity through the personal, private life of participants. Project creators assert that the Portal provides a space to publicly connect to the lives of strangers and "a chance to talk with people on the other side of a great divide" (Inskeep, 2015, para. 4).

The Portals are not the only digital interface to allow for an encounter with a stranger, however. There are a number of websites such as the now defunct Chatroulette, an online chat website that randomly pairs users around the world with a stranger via text, audio and video chat. However, persons who have engaged the Portal insist that the experience is different. The Portal intensifies connection by the nature of its design. Within the narrow confines of the shipping container, lined in gray carpet, it is just the

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participant and a stranger. "It is an ambient room free of external distractions" (Sepulveda, 2015, para. 5). This intimacy is in part created by the technological units of the Portal, including the Portal camera. While webcams create a fish-eye effect and limit the visual scope of the user, the cameras in the Portal balance out this effect, and the Portal provides a full body view of each of the participants. As previously noted, when these technological units work properly, "you see the other person fidget and move. You can walk around your space. It feels like you're breathing the same air" (Sadon, 2015, para. 7). While other interfaces provide opportunity to engage strangers, the Portals describe themselves as being more effective at allowing users to move beyond their public selves to better engage the inner world of individual participants. "There's so many ways in which we perform online and with strangers," Bakshi says. "In this kind of set-up there's less pressure. The usual performativity is stripped away" (Wang, 2015, para. 13). The detached performance of online identity is resituated within the body of the Portal participant. While other interfaces might allow one to exist beyond their bodies by creating digital identities and markers across a technological network (Sheller & Urry, 2003), the Portals use technology to resituate participants back into their bodies through the creation co-presence.

This co-presence is exemplified not only by claims from Portal creators and facilitators, but also by participants themselves. Andrew Ackerman, who used the Portal between the U.S. and Iran, commented that with all of the digital information we receive daily "it's startling, just to stand and talk to another person as a person" (Wallace, 2014, para. 2). "You get a feeling for a real person," notes another participant (Wallace, 2014, para. 3).

The sentiment of a 'real' connection via 'digital' co-presence is further typified by the reactions of participants upon exiting a Portal. Participants note that the space itself and the intimacy of the conversation leave them with a "warm feeling in the symbolic sense" (Shared Studios, *About*, n.d.). Bakshi notes that people come out "giddy, weeping and even agitated" (Marie, 2015, para. 5). One participant noted the profound impact standing face-to-face and 'digital' body-to-body had on him. "It tells you that every human on the planet has something to connect about" (Shared Studios, *Story*, n.d.). "I had goose bumps and wanted to reach and touch the screen," said another participant. "This was truly one of the most amazing and fascinating experiences of my life" (Shared Studios, *Story*, n.d.). Participants report being moved by the experience and comments often make reference to the co-presence of others and the intimacy of sharing one's private life with a stranger.

The potential for such co-presence is again limited to the placement of the Portal. Participants will notice that when engaging the Portals in Afghanistan and Iraq they likely will not encounter a woman on the other side. While the Portal has the ability to blur private and public by engaging the private interests of persons free from state control, the publics in which the Portal is placed still govern the interactions within. Women are generally not part of the public sphere in Afghanistan and Iraq and while it was never explicitly stated that they were not allowed in the Portal, cultural customs meant that female participants are generally not part of the public life of Portals in some locations.

The publicness of the Portal is one of the many units that compose this atmospheric interface. This publicness includes the placement of each Portal and the social and cultural discourses that shape participant understanding of a gold shipping

container and whether or not it serves as a container to store narcotics or a place for co-presence and human connection. The potential for such connection is predicated on the sharing of the private 'inner-worlds' of participants in public space with the potential to reshape (or further entrench) various aspects of public life.

## Affectual Readymades and Public Life

The potential of the Portal to impact public life is dependent on each of the units that compose the interface. These units include the shipping container itself as an affectual readymade with the potential to territorialize and perhaps deterritorialize the assemblages of enunciation that govern understandings of the shipping container as a symbol of global capitalism. The potential of the Portal as an atmospheric interface is additionally continent on the technological units of the container and the ways in which they perturb in ways that actuate particular atmospheres in the Portal. Ash (2013) outlines intrinsic perturbation as those which emanate from a component within a technological object itself with extrinsic perturbations emanating from those objects and relations outside the immediate sphere of the technological object. These perturbations speak to the need to engage not only the ways in which digital interfaces mediate, but additionally how these technologies modulate to encourage or discourage particular affective interactions as intrinsic perturbations within a machinic assemblage. Additionally, the placement of the Portal into public space may both enhance and/or limit particular types of interaction through the emanation of extrinsic perturbations. Finally, the publicness of private interactions inside the Portal further works to generate unique atmospheres as each of the technological units interact, creating the co-presence necessary to generate such interactions and potentially challenge public life. Subsequently, each of the previous units establish a foundation for the potential of the Portal as an atmospheric interface and

whether it operates as a space for human connection or is nothing more than a gold

dumpster. I now turn to another important unit in the overall tone of the Portal experience

– participants.

CHAPTER 5

EVERYDAY TALK AND ATMOSPHERES OF IMAGINATIVE DIALOGUE

*I like to travel. So, this is like, the closest thing I have to that right now. I'm just leaving work and I was like, I'm going to the Portal and they're like, Why? Why do you love the Portal so much? It's just so cool. Like, who knows who I'm going to talk to or what I am going to talk about? I mean, even when you're traveling like sometimes you just get stuck with other tourists, you know? And you don't talk to people from there. The Portal is different. Even if I talk to someone about like something stupid, like my job or something, it's like, you learn so much, you know?-*
Tempe Portal Participant

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, much of the success of the Portal in generating human connection is predicated on both the physical and technological units of the shipping container as well as its placement. The technological units are especially important to understanding digital technologies as modulators of interaction. However, these units further interact with participants to generate particular rhythms of engagement that further mediate these interactions. Ash et al. (2018) suggest that user interaction with an interface determines the types of affects it might support and the interface itself may encourage or discourage particular types of connection and/or cultivate various feelings from users. In what follows I take up the ways in which the technological units of the Portal interact with participants to move beyond an affective elsewhere, instead generating multiple atmospheres that allow for the emergence of particular affects and encourage human connection. I then explore how these atmospheres suspend participants in moments of imagination that bridge connection and set the stage for what Poulos (2008) calls an "accidental dialogue." The Portal's technological units generate rhythms of engagement between participants through the exchange of everyday talk, and it is through this everyday exchange that dialogue emerges between participants. While Poulos (2008) contends that dialogue is an escape from the everydayness of interaction,

the technological units of the Portal suggest that it is through the everyday, when suspended in the atmospheric interface of the Portal, that the rhythms of engagement necessary for human connection emerge.

### From Affective Elsewheres to Atmospheres of Human Connection

As outlined in the arguments presented in this project's review of literature, the various units of the Portal interact to establish the overall tone of the interface as atmospheric. These units help establish an affective architecture that works to foster participant *feelings*, what Papacharissi (2015) deems an affective elsewhere. However, the affective elsewhere as an architecture fails to account for the ways in which multiple affects are simultaneously suspended both inside and outside of the Portal. Instead, the Portal works to foster connection between participants who speak inside its technologically mediated walls as well as create connection between and amongst members of the communities in which the Portal is placed. Unlike the restrictive metaphor of architecture, atmosphere allows for the co-existence of multiple forms. Anderson and Ash (2015) suggest that while bodies and objects may interact (and affectively so) these interactions may or may not merge, mix and mingle together. Instead, other atmospheres may emerge in relation to or in opposition to one another. Anderson and Ash (2015) note this co-existence, suggesting that atmospheres exist "alongside one another without fusing or melting together precisely because the objects and bodies that make up an atmosphere do not exist as a set of totally interactive or accessible relations" (p. 40). This co-existence suggests two important differences between an affective elsewhere and an atmospheric interface. The first is that those bodies and objects that generate affective relations in the form of atmospheres cannot be limited to a particular architecture or set of body/object relations. Additionally, in

engaging such relations, it is important to explore all of the various, perhaps competing atmospheres that are emerge. As such, engaging the ways in which participants affectively support one another and the communities wherein the Portal is placed it is necessary to further attend to those units outlined in the preceding chapter (shipping container, technologies and placement). It is the interaction of all the units of the Portal that establishes it and similar technologies as atmospheric since these units do not simply support affect, but form "multiple atmospheres that touch, contact, and rub up against one another rather than a single, overarching, or dominant one" (Anderson & Ash, 2015, p. 39). Engaging the rhythms of participant interaction then require attention to the ways in which the other units of the Portal both mediate and modulate that interaction to produce multiple atmospheres that shape the overall tone of the Portal. This underscores the role of each of the Portal's units, highlighting how the support and suspension of affect in the atmospheres of the Portal occurs both inside and outside its gray carpeted walls.

**Atmospheres Inside the Portal**

Papacharissi (2015) suggests that conversations that are supported by affective elsewheres "bridge phatic and paralinguistic conventions of the everyday to afford expression, and possibly, agency claimed affectively" (p. 25). Gold Book data recounting participant responses to the Portal and participant interviews suggest this bridging, expression and affective agency, highlighting how the Portal as an affective elsewhere can act as "a powerful disruption, help accumulate intensity and tension" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 29) and create human connection. However, these moments of bridging and agency often butt-up against one another, push, pull and suspend participants in multiple atmospheres simultaneously.

**Bridging.** Participants suggest that the experience in the Portal helped affectively bridge their lives with those of their interlocutors by suspending them in unique atmospheres that generated new relations. One participant commented, "I would have never expected to be face-to-face with a complete stranger who made me feel as if she knew me." Another participant noted, "I think it's really interesting to throw two strangers together, the initial tension seemed to show both of our hopes to create connection and reach mutual understanding." Despite the interactions being between strangers, as noted in this project's opening chapters, one participant commented that "most importantly, we laughed from our hearts, because we connected," highlighting how these strangers *feel with* one another. Participants felt as if their partner really knew them, could affectively access their hopes and dreams, and laughed together with their hearts. The Portal serves as a bridge between participants, generating an atmosphere that supports the shared feelings of diverse others. One participant noted their hope for the Portals project and its ability to be an affective bridge by stating, "I hope this project can continue to build bridges between people in other countries."

**Expression.** The Portal further operates as atmospheric by allowing participants to express themselves and tell their stories in a space that affectively supports them. One of the ways this occurs is through the Portal's blending of public and private highlighted in the previous chapter. Expression also occurs through participants being able to share personal stories as a result of this private yet public setting.

As outlined in Chapter four, the Portals disrupt the distinction between public and private by offering a private space for unregulated interaction in the middle of the public space of a city or town. While viewable by the public the conversations within are private while the shipping container announces itself publicly it shields the participants inside

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from that public, and while the Portal itself is regulated by the places in which it is placed, the conversations within are not. The public/private nature of the affective elsewhere of the Portal creates "the affective character of an experience that renders it fulfilling for individuals" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 25).

Participants also note the way atmosphere of the Portal supports the sharing of their own lives and stories. "What you are offering to us is to share our stories, conversation and lives across cultures," commented one participant. "We found pleasure in connecting and sharing our hopes for our countries," said another. The Portal as an affective elsewhere for expression is perhaps best summed up by a New York City participant after having spoken to a woman in Erbil, Iraq who noted, "it's so nice to express our feelings across cultures."

It is important to note that some countries and conversations may not be as disruptive to the distinction between private and public as others. As noted earlier, women are not often afforded the opportunity to speak in Portals housed in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. This demonstrates those moments when an existing atmosphere might shape the types of affect supported by the Portal. As noted earlier, the public circulation of "attitudes, investments, and dispositions (affects)" (Cisneros, 2012, p. 138) require various bodies to navigate publics in different ways and these bodies are subsequently read differently as a result of these already existing atmospheres. Particular "national affects" that emerge through the organizing of bodies within a particular nation or culture and the discursive rendering of particular bodies impacts how these bodies are experienced (Muñoz, 2000). As part of a particular national affect some countries do not make a distinction between private and public, or the intensities of these distinctions may be greater or less than in Western cultures. What (and who) is relegated to the private

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sphere is contingent on "continuous, free-floating forms of control" (Ott et al., 2016, p.348) that are shaped by and shape the affective economies of a particular country. As such, the ability of the Portal to suspend participants in an atmosphere that supports affect is contingent on the ability of the interface to support the agency of its users and different bodies may or may not be supported as a result of these affective economies. Subsequently, the atmosphere of the Portal is not total, rather competing atmospheres might emerge based on the persons inside. As Anderson and Ash (2015) suggest, "we cannot be sure of the character of the atmosphere before registering its effects in what bodies do – an atmosphere is revealed precisely as it is expressed in bodily relation" (p. 44).

**Agency.** In the sharing of stories and expressing feelings across cultures, the Portal produces varying atmospheres some of which may support participant agency. This agency was perhaps most expressed by participants in response to media narratives that shape their understanding of other cultures and geographic locations. The Portal provided the affective support for certain participants to *feel* the similarities between themselves and their communicative partners, generating agency to both sides of the conversation.

This sense of agency is suggested by a number of Tempe participants and those who contributed to Portal Gold books. Despite the failure of the Afghan Portal to support the agency of female Afghanis, a Tempe participant recognized the agency of their male Afghani partner not usually afforded by Western media when he noted, "After hearing so much about Afghanistan in the news, it was refreshing to hear an actual person's story and to hear that they are optimistic about their country's future despite the current conflict." Additionally, another participant recognized their interlocutor's agency when

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they stated, "It was amazing hearing from an actual person. You could never have an experience like this from just hearing about the person in the paper or on TV." After speaking to a woman in Palestine, a D.C. participant said, "The images of people in Palestine we see in the media paints them in such a biased way. It doesn't help us understand the heart and personality of the people living there." While agency may be limited for some Portal participants, the Portal does seem to generate an atmosphere that supports new forms of agency in relation to media narratives about particular places and people.

Aside from media narratives, the most compelling story of agency provided to Portal participants is perhaps of those in Gaza, Palestine. As noted in the narrative outlined in the previous chapter, the Portal literally provides Gaza participants the agency to "travel" outside of the confines and blockades imposed by the State of Israel. As the Gaza curator notes, "the Portal allows us to imagine worlds outside of Palestine, outside of the conflict, outside of the occupation." It is important to further note that despite similar cultural confines to those in other Middle Eastern nations, young women are often participants in the Gaza Portal and the Portal is curated by a woman. The Gaza Portal was launched in conjunction with Mercy Corps and Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG), an organization that seeks to demonstrate the impact high speed internet could have on the movement of people and goods that currently hamper the Gazan economy. In this case, the Portal highlights GSG's mission by providing both men and women in Gaza the opportunity to imagine life outside of the current restrictions that limit agency in the Gaza Strip.

The Portal's ability to generate multiple atmospheres for the enactment of their own agency is further evidenced by participants outside of Gaza as well. "I am always

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bothered at the stereotypes people have about America," stated a Tempe participant. "I was happy to put a face to those misconceptions." After speaking to someone in the U.S., a participant in Iran noted, "This is something we miss when we only watch videos of protests or the Shah. I'm sure she [her Portal partner] would say something similar about the U.S." Another Iranian participant was particularly grateful for the experience as noted by his U.S. partner after leaving the Portal. His partner commented, "We had a fascinating conversation about being gay in Iran. The Portal is great as a space for people to talk about things not usually on the table in some countries."

While the Portal may generate varying atmospheres that support some participant agency over others, the shipping container does seem to generate atmospheres that support various types of agency through the sharing of affect. Participants are able to acknowledge the agency of others by *feeling* the experiences of their communicative partners and in some cases are able to express their own agency as well. Subsequently, the atmosphere inside the Portal allows participants to feel a bridge between themselves and cultural others, compels them to express their own feelings, to feel a sense of agency not afforded by other third spaces/places, as well as the opportunity to feel the agency of others. The space within the Portal provides privacy despite it being in a public space and within this private space, the atmospheres of the Portal support participant feelings.

**Atmospheres Outside the Portal**

In addition to supporting affects within, the Portal generates atmospheres that support the feelings of those in the community in which it is placed as well. Each of the 40 Portals online across the globe have a curator. While the curator as a unique unit in the overall tone of the Portal experience is explored in more detail in Chapter six, the importance of the curator in relation to the Portal's ability to support community affect is

worth mentioning here. The curator is not only responsible for facilitating the connections between their Portal and others in the network, but curators are also responsible for deciding with whom their Portal will connect and for what purposes the Portal will be employed. While each Portal focuses on everyday talk rather than engaging in formal, deliberative discourse, the curator plays an integral role in shaping the possibilities for exchange by determining the purpose/goal of the Portal in their community. Shared Studios co-founder Amar Bakshi insists that curator control is central to the success of the Portal. Rather than bringing a Portal to a community and telling that community how to engage the shipping container, Bakshi and Shared Studios' Global Curator provide support for members of that community to use the Portal in ways they believe will most benefit their own community. Subsequently, curator control provides an opportunity for the shaping of emergent atmospheres both inside and outside the Portal's gold painted walls, and further highlights the potential of the Portal as an atmospheric interface.

The potential of the Portal to support the feelings of community members is perhaps most exemplified by the curator of the Milwaukee (MC) Portal. As noted in Chapter four, the Milwaukee Portal is located in the neighborhood of Amani, the 53206-zip code on Milwaukee's north side with the nation's highest rate of incarceration (Toner, 2014). MC himself was once incarcerated, a community activist and father, his role as curator is both professional and personal. "I believe curators are the front line in patching up the world," says MC. When the opportunity to place the Portal in Amani was presented, MC took that opportunity to the front lines of his neighborhood using the Portal to repair relationships between community members, law enforcement and the incarcerated, bridging connections between these groups, providing opportunities for

expression, and using the Portal as an affective elsewhere for the enactment of agency.

The enactment of agency was a gradual one, as MC noted in an interview:

> The first people to come and check it out were the youngsters. Lots of folks are scared to come in at first, but the youngsters are curious. Once they had seen it they brought their parents out. Pretty soon all the elders were coming out. Some of them [the elders] rarely left their houses, but eventually they were coming out too. Now it's become a place for the community.

While it took some time to get many community members out to participate in the Portal,

MC was already a trusted member of the community. This trust helped establish the

Portal as an affective elsewhere – a third place – between home and work where the

community could gather and talk to one another. It was also an affective elsewhere

wherein the community could connect with places other than the neighborhood of Amani.

The Milwaukee Portal has been used to connect the community with other U.S.

and international Portal locations. The Portal was used to connect local gang members

through the use of a shipping container and a Portal screen in an effort to encourage

dialogue between rival street gangs. This connection is one of which MC is most proud.

He noted that through the Portals rival gangs came to an agreement about ways they

might work together to reduce gun violence[4]. Additionally, MC noted the impact of

another connection – between Milwaukee and the Portal in Gaza:

> It was interesting for the community to realize they had something in common with the folks in Gaza. In Gaza they are dealing with military [Israeli] violence but their stories are familiar to the violence folks here are dealing with in terms of the police. You feel like you are not alone in this world and you see the hardships that lots of folks are going through in other places and know you are not the only one and that they have been through so much but they overcome it, you know?

The connection between Milwaukee and Gaza created an affective connection around

shared feelings of brutality and violence. But the connection was not simply a matter of

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[4] Details of this curation are explored later in this chapter

similarities in experience. The connection served as acknowledgment of mutual fears and, more importantly, it provided participants with a sense that they were not the only ones experiencing such feelings. Despite the geographic and cultural distance between Milwaukee participants and those in Gaza, their feelings were understood, recognized and validated by members outside of their community. MC expressed that while community members are aware that "bad stuff" happens in many places around the world, hearing others express the fears and hopes of the community in such a far-away place led to feelings of connectivity – not just with those in Gaza – but with the world.

The Milwaukee – Gaza connection and the impact of the Milwaukee Portal on the Amani neighborhood demonstrates how the Portal acts as an affective elsewhere. The Portal provides a space for participants to gather with others in their community as well as those around the globe. This third-place fosters connection through affect, a recognition that these feelings are not unique, but shared. And while there is risk in these seemingly disparate groups over-identifying, the space of the Portal supports and makes visible collective affects inside and outside of participant communities that might at least connect communities to one another in meaningful ways.

The collective affects shared in the Portal emerge in the everyday ordinary conversations that occur within and around it. As previously noted, participants entering the Portal are given the prompt, "What would make a good day for you" as a catalyst for conversation. Given that the Portal seems to act as support for the sharing of collective affects, it is important to examine the role of the types of communication within the Portal on generating these shared feelings. As such, I now turn my attention to how everyday ordinary conversation acts as the "social glue" that binds these feelings of human connection together through the generation of an "accidental dialogue."

**Everyday Talk, Accidental Dialogue, and Human Connection**

As demonstrated by Milwaukee and Gaza Portal participants, the emergence of shared feelings of connection generally follows a recognition of similarity in experience. While the conversations between Milwaukee and Gaza followed the prompt, "What would make a good day for you," the exchange eventually led to more politically charged and affectively intense communication. This is consistent with other digital interfaces. As noted in the project's opening chapters, technologically mediated everyday talk serves as an avenue into more deliberative political discourse (Graham & Wright, 2014; Graham, Jackson & Wright, 2015a; 2015b). However, irrespective of the potential of these everyday exchanges, "research generally focuses on the rationality, purposefulness, and outcomes" of digitally mediate communication (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 26). This remains the case even as researchers underscore the ways in which this digital communication is generally fragmented, and these exchanges often include personal, everyday talk rather than focused deliberation. Subsequently, much of the research on technologically mediated communication overlooks the importance of this everyday conversation in fostering connection and shaping political discourse (Papacharissi, 2015).

Research on political discourse mediated through digital technologies also tends to ignore the importance of everyday ordinary talk. Much of the research on engagement in the public sphere via digital technologies focuses on political party engagement and/or how activist groups utilize a variety of digital mediums (Graham et al., 2015b). Countering this approach, Graham et al. (2015b) argue that in order to more fully understand how people engage the public sphere through technology, scholars must analyze their everyday political talk. While Graham et al. focus their own research on the ways in which political talk emerges in non-political digitally mediated conversations,

they highlight the utility in engaging the everyday to more fully understand the role and efficacy of this ordinary conversation in shaping political discourse and its potential for influencing public action.

The importance of technologically mediated everyday conversation is that it fosters a supportive, friendly communicative environment (Graham & Wright, 2014). In particular, digital interfaces allow for a presentation of self through the telling of personal information that may lead to connection. This everyday banter acts as a kind of social glue (Basu, 1999), and the exchange of everyday talk via technologically mediated interfaces allows for the emergence of "soft, networked structures of feeling that are affectively felt and lived prior to, or perhaps in lieu of, being ideologically articulated" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 29). This suggests that everyday talk across digital platforms engages participants at the level of everyday living/being rather than through more formal structures of knowing.

While much of the focus on everyday talk mediated through technology focuses on how this talk generates affects (Papacharissi, 2015; 2016) and may lead to political action (Graham & Wright, 2014; Graham et al., 2015a; 2015b), the research is especially salient here because it highlights the potential for the Portal as an atmospheric interface to foster human connection through its focus on the everyday. It is through this everyday conversation that the potential for meaningful dialogue may *accidentally* emerge to foster human connection around everyday interests and shared concerns.

The distinction between meaningful communication and everyday talk is connected to a communicative exchange's ability to create "a special connection – a *deeper* moment where meaning and relation merge into some new form of engagement" (Poulos, 2008, p. 117, emphasis in original). Broome (2009) provides a comprehensive

outline of the ways in which dialogue has been studied in the discipline of communication summarizing dialogue as discourse that is attentive to both "listening and inquiry" that leads participants to "mutual respect and understanding" (Dialogue Theories section, para. 1). The intensity of interaction indicative of dialogue suggests an affective dimension to such communication. This intensity is perhaps most salient in Böhm's (1996) definition which focuses on the suspension of judgment by participants to allow multiple viewpoints to exist simultaneously in a sort of affective tension with one another. The suspension of beliefs, the affective tensions that arise in a meaningful communicative moment suggest that dialogue is different from (perhaps superior to) everyday communicative exchanges. Dialogue seems to move "beyond the everyday exchange of messages, implying a particular quality of communication that makes possible learning and change, in both self and others" (Broome, 2009, Dialogue Theories section, para. 3).

Theories of dialogue suggest that achieving these moments necessitates a deliberate attempt at more meaningful communication. However, research on digital interfaces suggest that meaningful conversation often emerges through the everyday when these exchanges are mediated (Graham & Wright, 2014; Graham et al., 2015a; 2015b). Further, Poulos (2008) argues that even when not mediated by a digital interface, we often "stumble into dialogic moments accidentally – moments when it becomes clear that a strong heartfelt connection is made between humans" (p. 117). The potential for digital interfaces to support such accidental moments suggests that contextual conditions may lead to moments of dialogue – creating an atmosphere that is conducive to meaningful exchange. While most agree that dialogue cannot be forced, certain contexts might act as a catalyst for such exchange. In what follows, I argue that the Portal as a

unique atmosphere provides such conditions. It is the unique atmosphere of the Portal, with each of the container's units generating particular rhythms of engagement that distinguish the Portal as an atmospheric interface rather than simply an affective elsewhere. When coupled with digitally enabled everyday exchange, participants move from moments of shared connection to a recognition of a shared humanity, from this shared sense of being human to human connection. This connection occurs through the Portal's ability to suspend participants in moments of imagination, inspiring the courage necessary for them to take communicative risks that generate meaningful connections – connections that are unique to the interface as atmospheric.

**From Ice Cream to Instant Friendship**

Akin to the recognition of shared affect that resulted from similar experiences between Milwaukee Portal participants and their partners in Gaza, participants in the Portal often recount their surprise when discovering they have shared interests with cultural others. What is noteworthy here is that these experiences generally are not as affectively charged as those similarities discovered in the Milwaukee – Gaza Portal. Rather, similarities discovered in the Portal are most often around ordinary activities that are a part of participants' everyday lives. Even more interesting is that these shared experiences of everyday living seem to prompt shared affects, leading participants to not only recognize similarities in interests, but a shared humanity. The Portal operates as an affective elsewhere wherein the sharing of the ontological becomes a catalyst for new epistemologies around cultural difference and geographic distance.

The sharing of everyday life as opposed to engaging in more affectively charged conversation is by design. Shared Studios encourages such ordinary talk with the prompt, "What would make a good day for you?" Bakshi asserts that the goal of the Portal is to

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engage people at the level of the everyday and he does not want participants to feel compelled to discuss more complex issues. For Bakshi, the primary goal of the Portal is to use art and technology to get people talking and he believes that conversation is more likely to occur if participants are able to talk about less affectively charged topics and share their own personal stories.

The sharing of the everyday often leads participants to initially feel awkward in the Portal. One participant recounted this initial tension when they stated, "It was a bit weird at first. I was initially nervous to speak to them [participant in Afghanistan] because I kept thinking those people have gone through so much; so how can I possibly connect with them?" The participant's initial worry points to the difficulty in starting dialogue when there are expectations to engage more affectively charged topics. However, they added, "I just started talking about my love of music and discovered that they played guitar. They were so wonderful and funny." Another D.C. participant connecting to the Erbil Portal stated, "The last thing the person I met said to me was that he was expecting an awkward encounter, but it ended up being an awesome one because we both have a love for literature." By starting with an everyday interest, participants were able to discover similarities that stripped away the initial awkwardness and allowed for affective connection to occur.

Participants are often surprised that they share these everyday interests with cultural others. One participant connecting from New York to Nairobi, Kenya exclaimed, "He plays video games too!" "It was so nice to connect with someone who also loves ballet as much as I do," described another participant. A D.C. participant was surprised that their partner in the Iran Portal "loves ice cream too!" The surprise that cultural others enjoy similar activities and foods point to the role of media in shaping perceptions of

cultural others. The participant excited about sharing a love of ice cream with their partner in Iran added, "So much of what we see about Iran is the media's coverage of such a narrow aspect of that country." Media narratives play a powerful role in shaping our perceptions about other countries and their people however, the sharing of everyday interests humanizes Portal participants in ways these seemingly narrow depictions cannot. A D.C. participant connecting to Gaza further illustrates this potential. "It was a wonderful opportunity to learn about Palestine and the people there. It was such a humanizing experience. The images of people in Palestine we see in the media paints them in such biased ways but now I understand better who lives in Palestine." Connecting around shared, everyday interests and activities seems to generate a shared understanding and the potential for human connection – as one participant noted, "it was so nice to connect on an individual level about things that interest us."

The potential for connection is further demonstrated in participants' declarations of friendship in the Portal. The New York participant who connected with his Nairobi counterpart over a love of video games explained, "I left feeling like I made a friend on the other side of the globe." Bonding over a shared love of ice cream, the D.C. participant exclaimed, "Instant friendship!" A participant in the Portal in New Haven Connecticut connecting with Iran said, "A connection formed quickly with just the two of us in the room." Connecting with a participant in Berlin, another D.C. Portal user suggested a lasting connection after leaving the Portal. "I imagine we will have a lifelong friendship," he proclaimed. Use of the word friendship would seem to suggest sustained interaction between Portal participants as is "imagined" by the D.C. participant. While it is impossible to know whether or not these "instant friendships" moved beyond the confines of the shipping container (without a longitudinal study), these proclamations of friendship

highlight how engaging conversation at the level of the everyday led participants to a recognition of shared interests, creating an immediate connection which may lead to lasting friendships as well.

One explanation for why these discussions of the everyday might lead to feelings of friendship is that the atmosphere of the Portal suspends participants in the conditions necessary for dialogic imagination. Dialogic imagination often occurs in moments when one is not expecting it, when persons are suspended in a moment of going nowhere beyond a simple connection (Poulos, 2008). When each of the Portal's technological units are attuned, they create a space in which participants feel as if in the same room. Thus, the Portal serves as a suspension's precondition "subjects of suspension are agitated into atmospheric recognition by proximity, into episodes and dealings with the condition of being surrounded and filled with the particles with which they share a medium, as well as with others who share this condition" (Choy & Zee, 2015, p. 215). In these moments of suspension, the Portal generates an atmosphere through its various units' rhythmic articulation. These rhythms establish a space for talk in which dialogue might emerge as a result of a shared co-presence between Portal users. Poulos (2008) suggests that "dialogic imagination opens up in the aimless, uncharted spaces of talk merging into dialogue, of transcendent meaning and connection emerging from co-presence" (p. 122). The Portal's technological units in tandem with the space of the shipping container establish the atmospheric conditions necessary to suspend participants in moments wherein dialogic imagination might emerge.

The emergence of dialogic imagination from the everyday communicative exchange of participants is evidenced in an interaction between the Tempe and Herat Portals. A male participant in Tempe began an exchange with his male counterpart in

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Afghanistan by talking about their everyday lives as university students. Both participants realized their shared struggles in taking exams and that both were studying engineering. As they bonded over these everyday commonalities, they became increasingly more comfortable with one another. Within the atmosphere of the Portal there was a move from a focus on each individual in the exchange to the commonality that exists in the space between them. Buber (1996) explains that this space between creates a recognition of interdependence between communicative partners. It is an affective force that generates an intersubjectivity. It is in this space that the conversation ignited dialogic imagination that led to a more meaningful exchange. As the participants engaged their shared interests, the Tempe participant asked his counterpart in Herat what he hoped to do with his degree once finished with university. The Herat participant proceeded to discuss how he hoped to develop artificial intelligence that would detect the presence of suicide bombs. This led to a more meaningful exchange about the number of suicide attacks in Afghanistan, the American presence in the country, the Herat participant's simultaneous appreciation and disdain for U.S. troops, and a twenty-minute conversation about global security and peace in the age of terror. Here, the various units of the Portal interacted with the everyday talk between participants to encourage rhythms of engagement that moved beyond both the interface of the Portal and the participants within, to a dialogic moment that demonstrated the connection between persons across the globe.

**From Friendship to Shared Humanity**

The rhythms of engagement between Tempe and Herat suggest that in addition to potentially making new friends by simply realizing shared interests, the atmosphere of the Portal has the ability to open moments of dialogic imagination that lead to

connections beyond the walls of the Portal itself. The experience prompts a shared humanity through the emergence of affect between participants suspended in the atmosphere of the Portal. A D.C. participant connecting with Havana, Cuba exemplified this shared humanity when they stated, "I left with the overwhelming feeling that we're all good, we all want to be better, and that we must give everyone the opportunity to reach their full potential." This experience helped another D.C. participant to "understand our common humanity" after speaking in the Portal to Iran. A move from individual connection to a shared feeling of the human experience is most exemplified by another D.C. participant after connecting with Erbil in Iraq. They noted, "This was a really amazing experience for me to meet someone with a very different background than me, yet I found the common humanity in all of us." The sharing of lived experiences not only creates friendships between individual Portal participants, it generates a shared sense of humanity, altering perceptions about the person and place with whom they spoke and what it means to be human. These moments occur as technological and physical units of the Portal interact with Portal participants through an everyday exchange that creates the conditions necessary to suspend participants in an atmosphere of dialogic imagination, imaging worlds both inside and outside of the Portal walls.

This shared sense of humanity emerges as a result of the Portals' ability to support and make affect visible to participants. As noted by the D.C. to Havana participant above, the experience creates an "overwhelming feeling." A participant connecting to Iran from New York City expressed that they left the Portal, "feeling understood, feeling cared for, feeling strong and alive." The affective potential of the Portal is further demonstrated by another New York City to Havana participant who noted that they had an "overwhelming feeling loss" after leaving the Portal because they now understood the "universality of the

human experience and the terrible consequences of actions around the world." The affective potential of these technologically mediated exchanges of everyday life is best summed up by a D.C. participant after speaking to a Syrian refugee in the Berlin Portal. This participant reflexively stated, "I'll never forget what I saw today. I am changed forever. Thank you for this opportunity to experience the humanity that we need more of in this world. It's bittersweet – wish we could do more."

Experiences in the Portal highlight the connective potential of digital interfaces and these moments of connection suggest that the unique atmosphere of the Portal (and its various units) create a space where these affects become suspended to generate a dialogic imagination. These connections provide the Portal with its own mediality, a transmission of meaningful communication across technologically mediated platforms. The Portal's mediality "invites particular *forms* or *textures* of affective attunement" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 118 emphasis in original). As an affective elsewhere, the Portal creates a unique space for the sharing of various forms and textures of feeling – but when coupled with the technological and physical units of the shipping container, these shared affects become suspended in moments of dialogic imagination that lead to more meaningful communication and a shared sense of humanity. The Portal's dialogic potential separates it from other interfaces that operate as affective elsewheres. Additionally, this dialogic potential extends beyond the architecture of the Portal itself and thus does not limit the support of affect to the interface of the shipping container. It further moves beyond an affective elsewhere in that more than just sharing affect, the Portal itself generates such affects by suspending participants in an atmosphere that is more conducive for meaningful communicative exchange. These shared affects emerge from the everyday ordinary conversations in the Portal as they vibrate with other Portal

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units, moving conversation from similar interests and experiences to friendship, from friendship to moments of dialogic imagination that create feelings of collective human connection.

While the technological and physical units of the Portal generate an atmosphere that establishes the conditions necessary for suspending participants in moments of dialogic imagination, it is participants (and Portal curators) who determine whether or not these moments will be engaged beyond ignition. Poulos (2008) contends that these moments engage us, "rather than intending it, or orchestrating it, or manipulating the situation" (p. 124). However what participants do when they are "in the zone" of conversation requires the capacity, curiosity and courage to capitalize on this moment of suspension. I now turn to what makes participants a central unit in establishing the overall tone of the Portal as atmospheric – the dialogic courage necessary to allow themselves to engage affective moments of suspension in the Portal through a sharing of narrative conscience.

**Atmospheric Volatility**

The conditions necessary for dialogic imagination to suspend participants in the atmospheric interface of the Portal are contingent on participant volatility. Choy and Zee (2015) articulate volatility as the potential for something to escape the conditions of its atmospheric surround. For participants, there are two principal moments when this escape from the potential for dialogic suspension occur. Participants may avoid becoming suspended altogether by choosing not to enter the unique atmosphere of the Portal, or they might opt out of more meaningful exchange when moments of dialogic imagination emerge in the Portal's atmospheric surround. As noted in the previous chapter, a participant's volatility prior to entering the Portal is in part connected to assemblages of

enunciation about the shipping container and those with whom they might interact. While declining to participate provides an easier route for escaping the atmosphere of the Portal, those who do enter may still find moments to resist becoming suspended in dialogic imagination as well. As noted in Chapter four, this might occur through a failure of the machinic assemblage of the Portal's technologies. While machinic and assemblages of enunciation may impact participant volatility, additional factors interact with and within the atmosphere of the Portal that might dissipate the potential of dialogic suspension.

## Dialogic Courage and Dissipating Atmospheres

Whether or not participants allow themselves to be suspended in the Portal's atmosphere or permit such potential to evaporate is contingent on courage and the dialogic possibilities of co-presence created by the Portal. Poulos (2008) defines dialogic courage as the ability for participants "to move *together*, into the transformative possibilities of dialogue, where none will emerge unchanged or even unscathed" (p. 126, emphasis in original). Dialogic courage is about risk. It requires opening oneself up to inquiry by attuning to the story of another and engaging one's own vulnerability by allowing others to bear witness to stories of one's own. The Portal provides an atmosphere for engaging such courage, opening up a space for dialogic imagination and a sharing together by participants. This occurs in part through the exchange of everyday talk outlined above but also because the Portal mitigates risk by providing a safe atmosphere for participants to engage such courage. Subsequently, the Portal generates dialogic possibilities by creating atmospheres that both require courage while allaying some of the risk necessary for the exchange of meaningful dialogue. If participants have the courage necessary to interact inside the Portal, some of the risks of co-presence

associated with dialogue are actually assuaged by the unique atmosphere of the Portal itself, highlighting how the interface both mediates but also modulates interactions.

The potential for dialogue is of course contingent on whether or not participants choose to engage the unique atmosphere of the Portal; and it is often those participants who might benefit the most from dialogic exchange that choose not to take this risk. While Gold Book data suggests the potential of everyday talk to bridge human connection through expressions of affect, participant observation and curation of the Tempe Portal demonstrated a significant number of potential participants unwilling to take the first step towards the sharing of such affect – the risk of stepping into the shipping container. Ben Gordon, Director of Partnerships for Shared Studios expressed that the organization is more interested in the depth and quality of conversations in the Portal than with the number of participants who might engage Portal connections. This seems apropos given the organization's goal of human connection, with Shared Studios' primary interests in the value of Portal connections rather than attempting to persuade uninterested persons in engaging such connections. This is also consistent with literatures of dialogue which highlight the necessity of starting with a true interest in inquiry (Broome, 2009; Poulos, 2008). What is of interest given this failure of courage is the potential that dissipates as persons refuse to take the risk of engaging the Portal's unique atmosphere.

Failure to engage the courage necessary for dialogue occurred on multiple occasions outside the Tempe Portal. When asking a middle-aged White woman if she would like to come in and speak with someone in Erbil, Iraq she hesitated. I then said we would be connecting to Lagos, Nigeria later in the afternoon to which she responded, "Well, I've been to all of those places, and I've talked to those people." While I can only

speculate as to the accuracy of this statement, it seems unlikely that this particular woman had visited both Erbil and Lagos. Additionally, even if she had, she would likely have not spoken to the persons she would have encountered in the Portal. What is more likely is that this particular woman may not have been willing to place herself into the potentially awkward and even "dangerous" situation of the Portal. As Levinas (1981) contends, dialogue is risky because it is ego-reducing and may in fact be dangerous to a person's long-standing ideologies, identities and understandings of self which are transformed in the service of a greater moment of possibility. These moments of possibility are stunted when one is not ready to take the risks necessary to talk to persons outside of their ideological purview or who might challenge their sense of self.

Several other potential participants had a similar response to that of the woman who "talked to *those* people." While many of the people who chose not to participate often indicated that "it was weird to talk to a stranger" or "what would I say to a stranger" many engaged a more overt refusal that suggested an implicit superiority or perceived lack of value in speaking with diverse others. This usually came in the form of statements similar to "I have nothing to say to anyone in…." with one middle-aged white man following the previously discussed woman in her isolating of place by stating, "I have nothing to say to *those* people" when asked if he would like to chat with someone in Iraq. Many of the participants unwilling to take the risk necessary to engage in dialogue often did so by distancing themselves from their potential Portal partners, symbolically positioning them as potentially dangerous others or *those* people from *those* places.

I reference both the age and race of the previous two participants intentionally here as these sorts of statements only came from this particular demographic. These statements became so frequent that I made it a point to ask other curators in the Portals

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network if they had experienced anything similar and if so, who made such othering

statements. It is worth noting that curators in countries other than the U.S. generally did

not experience this sort of response, often only having familiarity with the general

anxiety of speaking with a stranger or language concerns by potential participants. As

outlined in the previous chapter, the Dallas Portal curator experienced a man who stated

that he would tell the participants in Afghanistan "to run." This story was communicated

when I asked the Dallas curator about my concerns with persons who rejected the Portal

in ways that seemed to indicate a refusal to believe the project had value or that there was

anything to gain by speaking with diverse others. One of the curators of the Andover

Portal had an especially astute observation regarding this phenomenon and why this sort

of cultural othering often came from a particularly middle-aged demographic. When

asked about othering he highlighted the tendency of such comments to come from a

particular demographic stating,

> Something I've noticed, just working these last six months, is it straight up comes
> down to age. Because I'm blessed with the ability to see like, children as young as
> three go through the Portal to like adults as old as 90, you get to see this weird
> curve where like, kids between three and like 12 just get it! Everything in life is
> still so new to them so if we happened to have a person in Jordan – I [kids] don't
> have any context on Jordan, [so] it's going to be okay. You enter like the high
> school levels, like 13 to 25, that age is a little bit more receptive, but you've now
> started to build up your biases and barriers, so that creates a wall. So, no matter
> what you try to say, no matter how many jokes you crack or whatever, even if you
> try to spin it a certain kind of way – nothing, because the barriers are already
> built. And then there is this, like 40, 50 and up where those barriers just close
> them off and they would rather send their kid in than come in, you know? But
> then there's older folks and some of them are shy but like, they are curious and, I
> don't know, maybe beyond some of those barriers or something, so then they
> seem to do okay. Like I said, it's this weird curve, right?

The Andover curator's observations are especially interesting because he provides a

potential explanation for a hesitancy to engage or a failure to see the value in the

experience. He suggests that this may be due to the various biases and barriers persons

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construct as they age, with those barriers dissipating as persons reach old age. While this is only one explanation, it was evident during the duration of the Tempe Portal as well. Generally young children were eager to check out what was inside the shipping container, young adults were anxious to engage in conversation, and the elderly were especially interested in learning about cultural others. On the "weird curve" identified by the Andover curator were the middle-aged (most often white in the case of Tempe) who seemed uninterested in taking the risks necessary to tear down "those barriers." Poulos (2008) contends that dialogic courage requires "overcoming the risk and the potential anxiety that threatens to overwhelm us" (p. 127). Portal data suggests that certain persons may not be up for the challenge of confronting such risk with the courage necessary for meaningful dialogue.

One of the challenges of this "weird curve" is that those persons reluctant to take the risk necessary to engage meaningful dialogue with diverse others may be the very persons who might benefit most from such exchanges. While Shared Studios is most interested in generating meaningful connections, one of their primary goals is to bridge divides between cultures and communities. Many of the individuals who enter the Portal already share this sentiment and are thus open to the risks associated with dialogue. While this makes the Portal an especially effective space for dialogic exchange, this effectiveness is paradoxical in that those who might benefit the most from the conversations in the shipping container are likely those persons least likely to take the risk to step into its gray carpeted walls. This paradox is highlighted by the curator of the Oakland Portal who underscores the challenges curators face when trying to get those most in need of connection with diverse others into the Portal:

As somebody invested in bringing people into the Portal and like someone who really believes in its mission, I have kind of felt more offended by that [people refusing to enter/othering] than I should. I mean, of course I don't react like in a negative way but like, yeah, I have come across people who have just said, "why would I come in, I don't get it. Like, I don't get the whole like point of this [Portal]." So, like, yeah, they are like, why would I? Why would I go in and like expose myself in this, like, kind of vulnerable way? And in this new way, using this technology that I don't necessarily understand or, or like.

I don't know – and those are the people who you would hope to, like get through to the most. And that's a problem. Yeah. It's like, you could just say, all right, if you don't like it, like, go ahead and move, walk away. And like, that's kind of ultimately where you have to like land sometimes. But those are the people who could probably gain the most from having these connections. And I haven't really come up with like, a go to method of like, convincing them to come in. I think you just have to, I don't know, prodding and say, well, what if someone in the Portal has something they want to say to you?

The paradox of the participant "weird curve" suggests that when it comes to human connection, persons have to be open to connecting. Despite the Portal providing an atmosphere that encourages dialogue through everyday talk, this dialogue is only possible if participants take the first of many risks that may challenge their worldview in the Portal – the risk of stepping inside.

While the Portal requires participants to at least be courageous enough to step inside the shipping container, once inside, it may actually mitigate certain risks that open up the possibility for meaningful, transformative dialogue. Poulos (2008) suggests that dialogic courage coupled with dialogic imagination can lead to narrative conscience. Narrative conscience occurs when persons build story together, it "is the storied eruption of imaginative possibility that pours forth into our lives as a primary pathway to all forms of knowing together" (p. 128). The Portal's atmosphere serves as a space that might assuage certain risks to imbue participants with the courage necessary to open up new imaginative possibilities with their Portal partners as they work to story the world and know together.

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The ways in which the Portal mitigates risk to allow participants to courageously

know together is perhaps most evident in the gang talks curated by the Portal in

Milwaukee. As noted previously, the Milwaukee Portal is housed in a neighborhood with

the highest incarceration rate in the country.  Using the Portal and a Portal screen (an 8-

foot screen that operates without the shipping container), the Milwaukee Portal curator

(MC) put two rival gangs into conversation. The initial conversation with rival gangs GD

and Vice was far from dialogic as the curator suggests,

> We had the screen on the GD side of town and the container on the Vice side of
> town. And we got the [gang] leadership and basically all the people who have the
> animosity walk into the container and to the screen and face each other. First, it's
> chaos! Chaos! The reason why its chaos is people really don't fucking like each
> other. Saying "Fuck you!" throwing up gang signs, disrespecting – chaos! I
> expected the chaos at first.

Despite the initial chaos, the Milwaukee curator was aware of the potential of the Portal

to generate an atmosphere for dialogic imagination. He continued,

> But one thing I knew about Portals and what I appreciate about Portals is it gives
> you what you need, it gives you the up close and personal experience, but it gives
> you the space you need to stay away and still feel safety.

The safety of distance coupled with the full body face-to-face co-presence of the Portal

eventually generated the imaginative possibility for human connection. MC went on to

state,

> You know, then after the chaos. Well, in order to build community, you gotta start
> with chaos. It's chaos cause nobody know each other. But now they comin' on a
> daily basis – it took a few weeks but I'm gettin' the leadership and they gettin'
> people to come in, so it went from fuck you and this that and this that and gang
> signs to, where you from? Now people finding out they got family members in
> common, and finding out some of they kids go to the same school, this guy cousin
> is connected to his cousin. And then the magic starts happening!

 The distance of the Portal mitigated the safety risks involved in bringing these rival

 gangs together. Additionally, it provided the space necessary for gang members to work

through their initial feelings of disconnection, what MC calls "the chaos." Subsequently, the Portal provided an atmosphere for dialogic courage, moving gang members from the performativity associated with their gang affiliation to functioning in terms of being and materiality (Balme, 2014). This allowed for the emergence of connective moments wherein rival gang members were able to imagine new forms of relation by engaging their everyday commonalities. Again, the potential for everyday talk is illustrated here, but this everyday conversation moves beyond the ordinary in that it provided rival gang members a space "for learning, for growing, for changing, and for constitutive transformation in encounter" (Poulos, 2008, p. 122). As MC put it, the magic started happening! This magic is indicative of narrative conscience. Each gang member was able to recognize not only their own stories, but to see themselves in the narratives of their rivals.

The magic that happened between rival gangs in Milwaukee has led to the merging of a community park that used to divide the neighborhood and a yearly truce between the rival gangs that culminates in a barbeque. MC credits the Portal for bringing about this truce. He boasts,

> After we got the gangs together it brought the park together rather than being divided and it gave us a chance to do more. Let's give them a cause. You can't deny that you're a dad. We all dads. That has nothing to do with gangs, colors, we want all the kids to come to this playground to play so we started a Father's Day weekend cease fire. That for at least a weekend we don't hear no gun shots. We want all of the men in the neighborhood to stand up and be dads and for one weekend nobody gets shot, nobody gets hurt and it's been successful.

And so, the Portal provided an atmosphere that now extends beyond its carpeted walls. It served as a space that mitigated risk for participants allowing them to speak courageously past their differences. Subsequently, they were able to find narrative conscience, weaving together both their stories and their neighborhood park.

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## Atmospheric Interfaces and the Potential for Connective Action

The Portal may be considered an affective elsewhere. It operates as a third place, a space between home and work wherein individuals can connect and discuss issues. While many digital platforms have been conceptualized as third spaces because they do not occupy a physical space, the Portal is better conceived as a third place given the importance of the physical structure of the shipping container on its affective potentials. The Portal is a physical, electronically mediated elsewhere that operates affectively. And it is in part this physicality that makes the Portal an affective elsewhere with the potential for human connection.

The Portal moves beyond conceptualizations affective or electronic elsewheres in its potential to not just mediate, but to modulate affect. It is through the unique atmosphere generated by the space inside the shipping container, the technological units of the Portal and their relation to participants that move the Portal from a third space for the mediation of affect to atmospheric one that modulates such interaction through the use of technology. These technologies interact with the bodies in the Portal, modulating interactions in ways that open up the possibility for unique feelings of affect that allow participants to share feelings together through the use of everyday talk. Further, the Portal extends conceptualizations of affective elsewheres in its unique ability to establish an atmosphere that leads to dialogic imagination and the sharing of narrative conscience.

As such, the space of the Portal itself is important in understanding the potential for dialogue within. The Portal blurs distinctions between private and public creating a private space within a public location for communicative exchange. Further, the audio and visual technologies of the Portal provide a sort of 'digital' co-presence by placing

interlocutors in a virtual face-to-face, body-to-body conversation. This creates an atmosphere that enables the types of connections that occur inside the shipping container.

The Portal being both private and public also provides an atmosphere for the free expression of ideas by participants and connection between participants and their communities. This expression emboldens participants with a sense of agency through which they can share their own lived experiences with others from within the shipping container. The agency afforded by the Portal works to bridge the experiences of participants with their communicative partners in the Portal. While this is not always the case given some of the Portal locations' cultural constraints, when participants are afforded agency it often generates connection that extends beyond the confines of the Portal to the communities in which the Portal is placed. As demonstrated by the Milwaukee and Gaza Portals, the placement of the shipping container in various geographic locations can have a profound effect on those communities, bridging connection through the expression of agency outside as well as inside the Portal walls.

The Portal's potential for bridging connection and enacting agency makes it a unique space that supports and makes affect visible. As an atmospheric interface, the Portal supports these shared feelings through the expression of everyday ordinary conversation. This everyday talk reduces the pressure participants feel to connect with diverse others by allowing them the opportunity to share their own lived experiences. The sharing of individual interests and stories subsequently challenge perceptions about intercultural others by dispelling one dimensional media narratives, allowing participants to connect around the often-ordinary experiences of everyday life. Connecting through these everyday activities makes participants feel as if they have made a friend in their Portal partner. Additionally, this friendship provides participants with feelings of

connection to others, leading to a shared sense of humanity. The affective intensities shared between and amongst participants are made visible in the unique space of the Portal as atmospheric interface.

Participants reflect on these shared affects by suggesting that the experience in the Portal is "deeply moving" and "deeply human." Further, participants have described this atmospheric interface as "very compelling" and "powerful," like "being struck by lightning, deeply human, smart and challenging." As an atmospheric interface, the Portal makes visible shared feelings of humanity and the compelling, smart and challenging potentialities of new communication technologies.

The Portal differs from other communication technologies in its ability to support affect in ways that move beyond the everyday, generating an atmosphere of dialogic imagination, providing a space for participants to courageously share common interests through narrative conscience. These "magic moments" often occur accidentally, as demonstrated by the participants in Tempe and Herat, the unique atmosphere of the Portal allows participants to move from those things they share in common to more meaningful dialogue. The atmosphere of the Portal works to mitigate some of the risks associated with traditional co-presence, creating a space that allows for the usual performativities of participants to dissipate, suspending them in moments of dialogic imagination. This atmospheric suspension leads to a sharing and knowing together, a narrative conscience that bridges participant stories. This narrative conscience is summed up nicely by one of the Andover, Michigan curators who suggests,

> The Portal is like a human library. You can get on Google and look up any one of the places that connect through the Portal network, but in those 10 million results you will not find the unique stories of the people you will meet inside the Portal.

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As demonstrated here, the potential of atmospheric interfaces such as the Portal are that they generate an atmosphere for the sharing of affect around every day ordinary life. As such the Portal operates as a space of connection around the ontological rather than requiring participants to engage in rational or deliberative discourse. Further, the unique atmosphere of the Portal establishes the conditions necessary for the sharing of meaningful dialogue both within and outside of the shipping container. While this connection around the everyday and the potential for dialogic imagination are strengths of the Portal as atmospheric interface, it also presents a challenge in terms of what participants will do with this newly acquired sense of connection.

This is perhaps best articulated by a New York City participant after connecting to Honduras:

> If we have a chance to have a window into the world we don't know, what do we ask? How do we find the words to express our curiosity and also our humanity – that we love, cry, smile and fight disappointment. Life is actually quite simple, so is conversation. It's what we do with this conversation that matters.

Following this participant, what do we do with the connections made possible through the atmospheric interface of the Portal? Or in the words of a D.C. participant, "what are the promises of digital media, in light of a socially-conscious, artistically-minded politics?"

The persons most vexed with answering such a question adeptly serve as the final unit in the Portal as atmospheric interface – curators. Given the ways in which the space of the shipping container, its technological units and participants interact to generate the unique atmosphere of the Portal, what role does the curator play in creating these "magic moments" of dialogic exchange? Further, how do curators shape the atmosphere of the Portal in ways that might move participants from a connective to collective action? I

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now turn my attention to the unit of curation and how Portal curators work to establish potentially transformative rhythms of engagement as part of the overall tone of the Portal as atmospheric interface.

CHAPTER 6

CURATING ATMOSPHERES

*Sweat drips down my forehead and into my eyes as I squeeze myself behind the screen at the back of the Portal frantically trying to determine why the camera isn't working. Despite having gotten to the Portal 45 minutes before a big connection with a local Tempe High School, the internet had gone down, and I had spent the previous 30 minutes frantically switching between the ethernet and the WIFI to determine which would make for the smoothest connection. Now the camera wasn't working and just as I fixed it my partners in Mexico City messaged me to say that while they could finally see me, now there must be something wrong with my microphone because they could no longer hear me! Plug and unplug the BIAMP. Sweat. Plug and unplug the ethernet cord. Sweat. Plug and unplug the camera. Sweat. Sweat. A teacher from the High School enters the Portal to tell me the 100 8th graders slated to practice their Spanish with Mexico City are getting impatient. Sweat. Turn the mic on. Turn the mic off. Sweat. Sweat. Sweat.*

As evidenced by the ways in which the Portal's technological units perturb participant interaction and generate alternative atmospheres inside the shipping container, the Portal has the potential to generate multiple atmospheres. Sometimes the affective atmosphere of connection is disrupted, displaced and replaced by atmospheres of technological familiarity and the territorializing of existing suppositions, but such is the volatility of atmosphere. This volatility speaks to the precarity of the atmospheric – atmosphere as an emergent cause. As Anderson and Ash (2015) suggest, "we cannot be sure of the character of the atmosphere before registering its effects in what bodies do – an atmosphere is revealed precisely as it is expressed in bodily feelings and qualified in emotions and other actions" (p. 44) between those bodies and technologies. While the technological units of the Portal interact with Portal participants to generate an affective atmosphere of connection, it is the curator who works to actuate such an atmosphere, engaging with not only those technological units, but attempting to shape the ways in which these units might foster an atmosphere conducive to dialogic imagination. However, the volatility of atmosphere points to the ways in which "atmosphere is not an

inert context but a force field in which people find themselves" (Stewart, 2011, p. 452). And it is up to Portal curators to attune participants to particular atmospheres so that the shipping container moves beyond an inert context for human interaction to an atmospheric interface for human connection.

The various atmospheres in which participants might become suspended are influenced by modes of relation already discussed in previous chapters. These include both the discursive and extra-discursive atmospheres of the Portal as a public art project and its placement within a particular location, the atmospheric surrounds of the shipping container itself and its technological units, as well as the atmospheres of human connection that emerge through the exchange of everyday talk and imaginative dialogue. Each of these atmospheres might operate independent of one another, they may interact to generate new atmospheres, and/or they might simply touch, make contact "and rub up against one another" (Anderson & Ash, 2015, p. 39). Subsequently, curators interact with the changing relations of each of these shifting atmospheric surrounds as they attempt to achieve Shared Studios' mission of human connection. I now turn to the vibrations between the curator and the often competing atmospheres of a Portal's public placement as well as the ways in which atmospheric shifts impact a curators ability to engage atmospheres conducive to transformative dialogue.

**Curation and Atmospheric Publics**

Of the many competing atmospheres with which curators must contend are those that surround the Portal's location. As outlined in previous chapters, these atmospheres include those generated by the larger geo-political discourses of the countries in which a Portal is located and the media narratives that inform understandings of these places. However, there are additional atmospheres that emerge via the relations amongst the

Portal and local narratives of place as well as the discourses and objects in the immediate

vicinity of a particular Portal. As such, curators attempting to conjure atmospheres of

connection inside the Portal are often faced with local atmospheric surrounds that "move

in and through bodies and spaces, rhythms and tempi" to "establish trajectories that

shroud and punctuate the significance of sounds, textures, and movements" (Stewart,

2011, p. 448) both inside and outside of the Portal.

The influence of atmospheres outside of the Portal "bumping up" against those

generated in the shipping container is evidenced by both curator interviews and

throughout my own experience curating the Portals in Tempe and San Francisco. At

times atmospheres outside of the Portal remained distinct from, but heavily impacted the

ability of curators (including myself) to generate particular atmospheres inside the Portal.

At other times these external atmospheres followed participants into the Portal "rubbing

up" against atmospheres of connection emerging in the shipping container. In these

moments of atmospheric contact, it is the curator who is tasked with managing the

atmospheres in which participants find themselves suspended.

**Atmospheric Surrounds**

Contact between the atmosphere of the Portal and those surrounding its

placement are evident in the New Haven participant's articulation of the Portal as a "gold

dumpster" outlined in Chapter four. Given its placement outside of the Yale University

Art Gallery, the participant was already suspended in the atmosphere of "one of the

Country's richest Universities." As previously noted, this atmospheric surround

subsequently impacted the participant's understanding of the Portal, situating the

shipping container as a readymade back into discourses of global capitalism. This

meeting of atmospheres is indicative of the ways in which narratives of particular places

might influence how persons engage the Portal both inside and outside its gold painted walls.

The New Haven participant calling the Portal a "gold dumpster" became a refrain I shared often with other curators. The reason being that the Tempe Portal was placed within 500ft of an actual gold dumpster. The dumpster had been placed outside of a nearby building under renovation and while a different shade of gold, to the unfamiliar viewer the two objects seemed to serve the same purpose. This led to an encounter with a Tempe Portal participant who actually attempted to enter the dumpster one afternoon mistaking it for the Portal (which was not open at the time). She conveyed that after trying to figure out how to get into the dumpster she had decided that the entire project must have been a hoax, only returning after a friend of hers had explained that she was likely not actually at the Portal. The mishap is indicative of the ways in which both subjects and objects interact to generate atmospheres – "vitality is shared by *all* things" (Bennett, 2010, p. 89). While the placement of a giant gold shipping container into a public space may work to garner attention, other objects such as the gold dumpster next to the Tempe Portal "rub up against" the atmospheres of the shipping container rendering it an inconspicuous object with the potential to fade into the background.

While humorous, it is this blending or failing to blend into the atmospheric surrounds of Portal placement that often poses a challenge for curators eager for the emergence of atmospheres of connection. After all, it is difficult to cultivate atmospheres of dialogic imagination if participants simply pass the Portal by or mistake a gold trash bin for the shipping container. This was a challenge faced by the Oakland Portal curator (OC) who expressed having to contend with competing atmospheres in an interview. She narrates,

In a location like mine, I've got a school where there are like portable containers like this all around. So, yeah, like, it's conceivable that you just like, won't even be curious about it. So, like, I don't know, maybe even though it's bright, even though it's gold, and like, you know? In certain landscapes that definitely stands out – in mine it stands out a little bit less.

The same sentiments about the Portal disappearing into the atmospheres of its location were shared by the Stockholm curator (STC). The Stockholm Portal has been in multiple locations and STC recounted how some atmospheres were more conducive to the affective experience curators hope to foster in the Portal than were others. STC notes,

This is really the most unfortunate place, site for the Portal to be at. There's not even a local pub around here where you'd get some drunkards and such. It's really quite unfortunate because, I mean, there are people who walk by it, but it's literally just a street that you pass by – not a place where you stop and there's also, ah, not an incline but a decline where there are steps that you go down so it just kind of blends into the background. And, umm, it's just, it's just very unfortunate. And the people who do ask me about it, there was this lady who just now, just five minutes before we connected was like, "so what is this really" and so I explained to her like you're welcome to come in and she was like, "I have to go home, I have to go home and cook, have to go to my children." So, it's really just, it's not a place where there is much activity unfortunately.

The placement of the Tempe Portal as well as the locations of those in Oakland and Stockholm suggest the importance of the atmospheres surrounding the Portal and the vitality of the shipping container as an object that might shift, shape and generate particular affective atmospheres. As Shaviro (2011) suggests, "a world of objects is really a world of experiencings" (para. 38). Subsequently, curators have to contend with the ways in which existing ways of experiencing public space and the experiencings of objects within that space create atmospheric surrounds that may or may not be conducive to those they hope to conjure in the shipping container as these atmospheres often dissuade persons from participating in the Portal altogether.

The surrounds of the San Francisco Portal worked similarly to dissuade participants from entering. Further, as part of an activation with technology giant Twitter,

the placement of the San Francisco Portal generated additional challenges for those of us curating the Portal and to the generation of dialogue. Placed in Hayes Valley near Twitter headquarters, the Portal had been rebranded as a space for #Tweetups. Tweetups is used to describe when persons who interact on the social media platform meet up IRL (in real life). Twitter assisted Shared Studios in expanding the Portal network from 14 to 20 countries and as such they had significant influence over the two-week activation. Given potential participants' familiarity with Twitter in the Hayes Valley neighborhood, they often saw the Twitter branding and simply passed by – commenting, "oh, it's just a Twitter thing." Further, Hayes Valley participants often expressed excitement when told about the Portal but then shrugged off participation, more interested in how the technology was being used rather than how they might benefit from a conversation mediated/modulated by the technology. When participants did enter the Portal (especially those participants who worked for Twitter), they usually just peaked their head in and then exited without actually speaking to the persons on the other side. Twitter employees often commented that they "were just there to see what all the emails were about" as they apparently had been bombarded by company emails about the project. One woman even peaked her head in and said, "oh, I get the concept" before immediately exiting the Portal. In a city as rich and diverse as San Francisco, the partnership with Twitter as well as the placement of the Portal in Hayes Valley generated an atmosphere less conducive to dialogue than other Portal locations. Adding to this atmosphere, and similar to that experienced by the Oakland curator, the San Francisco Portal was also located in a park that included the use of several repurposed shipping containers housing businesses. Once again, despite its gold color, the Portal was rendered inconspicuous. This fading into the background was further exacerbated by Twitter branding and the familiarity persons in

Hayes Valley have with the company as well as their perceived knowledge of technology in general.

While the material context of the shipping container may impact whether or not a person chooses to participate in the Portal, the discursive further shapes the "force field in which people find themselves" (Stewart, 2011, p. 452). As noted in previous chapters, media narratives and existing understandings of the habitudes of place have a profound impact on the conversations that might occur, and the atmospheres that may envelop participants once inside the Portal. While I explore how curators must contend with the shifting of atmospheres below, it is important to first underscore those discourses that inform the atmospheric surrounds of the shipping container which often prevent persons from participating in the Portal.

As noted in Chapter five of this project, several potential Portal participants in Tempe met my invitation to come in and connect with responses like "what do I have to say to *those* people" or an overt refusal to talk to someone from "*that* place." This type of engagement often caught me off guard despite it happening regularly and speaks to both atmospheric volatility as well as atmosphere as an emergent cause. Having been enveloped in the atmospheric surrounds of connection inside the Portal, these responses jolted me into new atmospheres of xenophobia as well as the reality that not all persons are keen to engage cultural others. These comments operate as what Stewart (2011) would call "pockets" – moments when there is an affective shift, a "change in the air, a pocket of possible trouble" (p. 446). I began to assume that this was a uniquely "American thing" however as a researcher it was important that I approach this assumption reflexively. As such, I began to ask curators in other locations if they too have experienced these "pockets of trouble" – an alteration in the atmosphere, a shift of

the senses in the atmospheric surround of their Portal. While one of the Richmond curators posited a "bell curve" for American participation, did this curve exist in international locations as well? Or were these "pockets of trouble" akin to the rising airs of a uniquely American atmosphere?

Generally, international curators did not experience these particular "pockets of trouble." However, the San Pedro Sula curator (SPSC) did experience an unfolding of these pockets of refusal in a comparable way. SPSC encountered some people who were hesitant to talk to international others as a result of already existing conceptualizations of "those" persons and "that" place. These preconceptions hung in the air of the university surrounding his Portal. SPSC explained this in an interview saying,

> People here, most of the time, they don't know what to say, or they don't see themselves as that interesting. As well, I will say that in every country are people that are like, very, opposed to interaction and I totally get [that] here. Like not every student in the university, I'll say, there are like a few of them, and they're like, really negative like to when you mentioned USA or you mentioned like capitalism, they, they think it's the same thing. They see them, they see that as something bad and I will get the same answer. Like, "why I would want to talk to someone in the USA?"

The hesitancy of participants to interact with the U.S. here is similar to those in the U.S. who may be opposed to interaction. SPSC speculates,

> But I would say it has to do with culture. And not everybody is like, going to see it, like more educated people are like, going to be more interested. More on it. People are like, like you just said they're on their bubble. It's difficult for them. And sometimes I do get it [people who refuse to interact] and it's strange for me, like, how can people not see [value in the experience].

SPSC notes that there exist persons who are hesitant to participate as a result of preconceptions and perhaps problematic views of cultural others in every country. These moments, even if only reported by curators in the U.S. and San Pedro Sula suggest that

curators must be ready to attend to these atmospheric shifts in sensation - these pockets - if they hope to curate valuable experiences of connection.

It is the failure to see the value in the experience that poses one of the principal challenges to curators trying to cultivate these atmospheres of connection. Given the potential of the Portal to challenge perceptions, it is often those persons who might gain the most from the experience who refuse to participate given their already existing preconceptions. Subsequently, curators must determine whether or not to engage these pockets of trouble and persuade participants to enter the atmosphere of the Portal. These moments call the curator into a state of attention, an attunement of the senses to make sense of how to proceed. As the Stockholm Curator suggests, "I mean you can sort of sense when somebody is keen on meeting or whether… you have to judge the body languages." As McCormack (2015) suggests, atmospheres are "sometimes turbulent mixtures of elements in different degrees of motion that can be and sometimes are sensed as intensities of feeling" (p. 97). Subsequently, it is up to curators to manage these intensities, sense these turbulent mixtures, and attune to how participants might shift the atmosphere of the Portal.

While atmospheres surrounding the Portal may remain distinct from those emerging in the space of the shipping container itself, these atmospheres may come into contact. As participants make the decision to enter the Portal, they bring with them the atmospheric surrounds emanating outside with the potential to transform those atmospheres within. Here it is important to make a distinction between those atmospheric changes that occur within the interior of an already existing atmosphere and those that occur when a distinct atmosphere makes contact with another and potentially "overrides or defuses its potency to affect" (Anderson & Ash, 2015, p. 45). This allows for

engagement with the forces of atmospheric transformation and how such transformations might be sensed. Whether a subtle shift in the atmosphere within the Portal or the subsuming of it by way of infiltrating atmospheres of the Portal's surrounds, the curator must be equipped to sense and make sense of how to manage such shifts.

The potential for an atmosphere to "override or defuse" an atmosphere of connection inside the Portal was most salient during a temporary installation of an inflatable Portal during Arizona State University's (ASU) Fall 2018 Welcome Weekend. The inflatable Portal or Portal_Tent is more conducive to indoor, temporary placement. While the inflatable may take a number of forms, it is often encased in gold foil to have the same visual impact as that of the shipping container and the interior works to generate a similar atmosphere as the gray carpeted walls of the Portal_Container (Shared Studios, *Shared_* Spaces, n.d.). The inflatable Portal at ASU was housed in the Student Pavilion, a large building that serves as a space for university students to meet, study and hang out. Encased in gold foil, the inflatable was placed in the lobby of the Pavilion near the entrance, a placement that would seem to garner attention from the moment students walked into the large entryway. However, as part of Welcome Weekend events, the atmosphere of the Portal_Tent was often overridden by the atmospheres of the larger events of the weekend of which students were already familiar and had come to the Pavilion to engage.

The ASU Portal was part of three days of events of which very little attention was given to the programming of connections in relation to the events surrounding the inflatable. While some atmospheres have the potential to expand epistemologies through the introduction of varying modes of relation, others have the potential to shut-down such variation (Ash & Anderson, 2015). Each of the events of Welcome Weekend generated

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powerful atmospheres that often led to this "shutting down," enveloping any potential for connection within the inflatable into the often carnivalesque surrounds of the ASU Portal.

This "shutting down" was most pronounced on the opening evening of the ASU Portal. The Portal was programmed to connect to Herat, Afghanistan. While this connection may have generated productive conversations between the Herat curators (many of whom themselves are university students) and new students to Arizona State University, the opening coincided with a carnival adjacent to the foyer where the inflatable was placed. Students often simply ignored the inflatable as they made their way into the neighboring room to partake in games and dance to music. When students did stop to chat with our partners in Herat that same music often drowned out the potential for connections as students dealt with the inability to hear their Afghani counterparts let alone listen carefully enough to discern accents and make legible the conversations in which they were engaging. As a volunteer (I was not an official curator at the time of the ASU Portal), I worked to steer student attention into the inflatable and probed them with potential questions they might ask their Afghani counterparts about life in the university however, the energy of the carnival generated an atmosphere more conducive to a party rather than serious intellectual engagement and students often approached the inflatable with an energy that stifled dialogue in favor of exuberant monologue. In doing so, rather than passing these affects without influence, ASU student affect communicated a particular intensity that diminished the potential of the curator (or myself) to generate an atmosphere of connection. Subsequently, the ASU Portal's capacity to affect diminished to the point that it was inaccessible to those persons both attempting to curate and engage the inflatable.

Additionally, the overwhelming affect generated as a result of the carnivalesque atmosphere outside the inflatable led to an exoticizing of the curators in Afghanistan positioning them as a sort of side show whereby students lined up to quickly gaze upon *those* people from *that* place. As Cisneros (2012) suggests, affects are mobilized through the circulation of "images, signs, tropes and discourses" (p. 137) and the circulation of particular discourses surrounding Afghanistan coalesced with affects of the carnival to envelope potential ASU Portal participants in an atmosphere of problematic curiosity and one-sided exchange. Students would briefly enter the ASU Portal, grill the Afghan curators with questions about the Taliban, US intervention, how they could possibly have internet service, and whether or not they lived in caves before quickly exiting without allowing their Afghani counterparts the opportunity to respond. The circulation of particular narratives about terrorism and the liberatory power of the US government dominated conversation as ASU students rationalized that the emergence of technology in Afghanistan must surely be the result of the American presence there. Several ASU participants popped into the ASU Portal, attended the Carnival and then brought friends back to gaze upon the curators in Afghanistan ultimately turning the inflatable into a side show exhibit to the carnival students had come to attend.

The subsuming of an atmosphere of connectivity and imaginative dialogue occurred as a result of the arrangement and configuration of affects associated with both the carnival and existing discourses of Afghanistan. The carnival enveloped participants in a powerful atmosphere, making it difficult for both participants and curators to shift these formidable airs. As Bakhtin (1981) suggests, "while the carnival lasts, there is no other life outside of it. During carnival time life is subject to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom" (p. 7). Coupled with the overwhelming power of media narratives about

Afghanistan and ASU student inexperience with Afghani people outside of such representation, atmospheres of connection and dialogue gave way to the rules of pre-existing discourses and the carnivalesque.

The carnival atmosphere surrounding the Portal_Tent at ASU points to the ways in which atmospheric surrounds influence those generated inside the Portal's walls. However, while the carnival atmosphere overpowered the potential for an emergence of atmospheres of connectivity and imaginative dialogue, there are moments when these atmospheric shifts operate within the Portal as well. As such various atmospheres bump up against or merge rather than subsume those atmospheres with which they come into contact. As Anderson and Ash (2015) suggest, rather than overpowering an atmosphere the introduction of new affects creates tipping points whereby the boundaries between atmospheres may coalesce to produce new atmospheric surrounds. The introduction of new affects into the atmosphere of the Portal is perhaps one of the primary challenges faced by curators who are responsible for responding to such affects, interpreting their influence on the atmosphere of the Portal and working to mitigate these "tipping-points" to avoid the type of atmospheric take-over of the Portal outlined above.

**Curation and Atmospheres of Dialogic Transformation**

Each of the curators in the Portal network has various strategies for dealing with atmospheric tipping-points and all curators interviewed expressed moments when such atmospheric collisions occurred in their Portal. While some strategies may not prevent the overriding of atmospheres of dialogic transformation by those of the Portal's surrounds, most often curators work to mitigate these tipping points to diffuse particular atmospheres or merge these atmospheres with those already in the Portal. Engaging these atmospheric shifts demonstrates the ways in which "an atmosphere's tipping point is not

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absolute or fixed, but relative to the objects that compose the existing atmosphere, as well as the arrangement of objects and intensities of affect in the new atmosphere" (Anderson & Ash, 2015, p. 47). Subsequently, curators weigh these relational moments, employing various strategies to balance competing affects and their culminating atmospheres to maintain the goals of connection outlined by Shared Studios.

**Curating Shifting Atmospheres**

Strategies for dealing with atmospheric tipping-points range from ending a connection to subtle forms of transforming conversation toward more productive dialogue. While some of these strategies seek to mitigate tension between interlocutors, others attempt to suspend participants in that tension, allowing dialogue to emerge from the gathering of multiple perspectives. This suspending of perspectives is indicative of dialogue as it allows a variety of viewpoints to exist simultaneously while limiting attempts to prematurely resolve these varied views (Böhm, 1996). Additionally, suspension is a condition of atmosphere, as becoming atmospheric is to locate those moments when shared affects are animated by the practices, problems, and potentials "presented by living as an element among others in the turbulences and volatilities of a ubiquitous air" (Choy & Zee, p. 217). As such, while some strategies might include eliminating particular perspectives and problematic atmospheres from bumping up against atmospheres of connection inside the Portal, often transformative dialogue in the shipping container emerges from the potential of such tipping-points to suspend participants in the volatility of these atmospheric shifts.

The Milwaukee Portal curator (MP) often employs a strategy of suspension. As a principal member of the project on criminal justice reform that put competing gangs, police and communities into conversation through the Portal, MP has also experienced

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the very real danger of suspending participants in the volatility of competing

atmospheres. To engage in suspension requires that participants shift their very

subjectivity to new grounds and this suspension is a risky endeavor (Poulos, 2008). As a

curator, MP had to summon not only the courage necessary to deal with often dangerous

situations, but to inspire this courage in participants as well. MP details a moment of

suspension as a dialogic strategy during an installation of the Portal in a particularly

dangerous neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago:

> So here I am, I am an opposition gang member conducting research about police
> in a hostile neighborhood, West Side of Chicago. Often, people would come in
> there and get into it with another person on the opposite side.

When asked how he handled these moments of tension, MP suggests the value of

suspension for engaging dialogue. He continues,

> First, it was exciting to me. Like, I want to see…it was exciting because I wanna
> see, can they kind of work it out. To the person I would try to say like, hey, hey,
> just try to cut in and be like, look he is in your city and he just got an opinion, just
> opinions. You know this is your opinion and this is their opinion.

MP stresses that despite the potential for hostility, it is productive, even "exciting" to

allow the volatility of competing viewpoints to become suspended in the atmosphere of

the Portal. This recognition points to the risk involved in engaging a transformative

dialogue and the ways in which the "opinions" of the interlocutors are rooted in deeply

held understandings of both self and in this case neighborhood. As such, MP reminds

each of the participants of their shared sense of place – highlighting how they both live in

the same city, a city to which they each hold deeply rooted connections. MP uses this

connection to neighborhood as a bridge between competing opinions, reminding

participants that they also have the expression of deeply held beliefs in common even if

those beliefs are different. Rather than try to resolve the conflict between interlocutors,

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MP allows their varying viewpoints to remain in tension, opening participants up to the viewpoints of others by bringing them together around shared understandings of place and the passions that come from their connections to that neighborhood. In doing so, MP creates a dialogic space where each participant's "I" is transformed into a shared "We" – what Buber (1970) would suggest is becoming one another's Thou. By allowing opposing viewpoints to become suspended in the Portal, MP was able to lead participants to productive conversation via recognition of the very volatility of those competing points of view. MP sums up the emergence of this interdependence:

> Eventually, like they just start talking. You know they still frontin' a bit but they know they got connections to the city and they just comin' at it, they just comin'at each other cause they all want somethin' for themselves and their neighborhood, you know?

Subsequently, a generative atmosphere emerged from the suspension of participants in the "turbulences and volatilities" of the Portal's "ubiquitous airs" (Choy & Zee, 2015, p. 217) wherein participants were able to recognize "the *interdependence* of self and other, the *intersubjectivity* of meaning, and the *emergent* nature of reality" (Broome, 2009, para. 6, emphasis in original).

This generative atmosphere does not always emerge when suspending participants in tension. Rather, there are often moments when curators must take a more direct role in managing a connective atmosphere that promotes moments of dialogic transformation. These include subtle tactics for shifting conversation when a tipping-point occurs as well as more overt strategies for ending conversation in the event that the risks involved for both participants and the curator create dangerous atmospheric volatility.

The establishment of atmospheres of connection begin prior to participants entering the Portal. Participants are often nervous to enter as a result of general

apprehension. As the curator of the San Pedro Sula Portal suggests, "people don't know what to say or they don't see themselves as interesting." Curators primarily use two strategies for addressing this apprehension. First, consistent with research on intercultural interaction, curators work to frame the experience for participants (Trawalter, Richeson & Shelton, 2009). Second, curators often draw attention away from what potential participants "need to say" and/or "interesting" things about themselves by placing the impetus for engagement on the persons on the other side of the Portal or topics that distract from an impetus for engaging dialogue. By reframing the experience and removing the pressure for participants to "be interesting" curators provide the elements for an atmosphere of connection to occur.

Framing as a strategy was expressed by several curators. According to Trawalter et al. (2009) people often avoid cross-cultural interactions because doing so may induce stress. However, when a cross-cultural conversation is framed effectively it may allow people to judge a potential interaction as worth their effort despite the negative outcomes associated with the conversation or the stress it might induce. A framing strategy used to produce atmospheres of connection was expressed by one of the curators in Colorado Springs who said,

> Lots of people are hesitant to come in because they don't know what to ask so I always say to them, well what if someone in Mexico City or Puerto Rico or wherever has something they want to ask you? I find that shifting focus to how others might be curious about them makes people feel a bit better. They are like, well I can answer questions! Which takes some of the pressure off.

Here the Colorado Springs curator reframes the experience of the Portal as less of a dialogue requiring the participant to keep conversation moving and instead as simply a person there to answer questions posed by others. Additionally, the curator takes the

pressure off of the participant by placing the onus for conversation onto the other participants in the Portal.

Framing is also accomplished through the use of prompts. While the general prompt for engaging conversation in the Portal is "What would make a good day for you?" specific prompts are often used depending on the persons who may participate. One of the Andover curators explains this framing device.

> Sometimes I'll see someone is wearing like a concert t-shirt or a sports team and so you can kind of immediately get a feel for things they like. So, if one of the kids is feeling shy, I just get them talking about the band or their team or whatever and then use that to get them in [the Portal].

Here the Andover curator reframes the "stress inducing" atmosphere of the Portal by shifting attention away from conversation and to a personal interest of the potential participant. This strategy further highlights how everyday talk is not only useful in building connections between participants in the Portal but additionally works to ease tension and encourage participation in the first place. By reframing the experience as something other than a dialogue and focusing attention away from participants' need to sustain such conversation, curators establish the airs for the emergence of atmospheres of connection.

It is when these atmospheres of connection bump against other atmospheres that "pockets of trouble" may emerge with the potential to generate atmospheric volatility. These tipping-points subsequently require more overt forms of intervention and/or strategizing by curators. Subsequently, curators must assess the volatility of the atmosphere within the Portal and use both discursive and corporeal tactics for dealing with such volatility.

Curators engage several discursive strategies for managing atmospheric volatility. One such strategy involves the clever use of translation to maintain a particular atmosphere to avoid such an atmosphere from being overridden by potentially negative affects. This strategy was outlined by the curator of the San Pedro Sula (SPSC) Portal and relayed during an interview. He identifies the moment of atmospheric shift in the Portal,

> Well, I had once a conversation that I didn't like. I was a translator at that point and we were connecting with L.A. and someone from our university decided to enter to get an experience of what was this about. And they were like really conservative and the people on the other side were talking about laws about smoking weed and stuff like that. And they were talking about facts and rules and trying to change people's perspective about how that [weed] isn't bad. And the people here were trying to tell them that that [weed] was bad and the people on the other side were like trying to say that it was good. And it started getting really awkward.

SPSC describes this tipping point as awkward however, in the space of that discomfort is a recognition that an atmospheric shift is occurring. This shift is characterized by "affects meeting one another in ways that produce (or fail to produce) new relations between the entities within that atmosphere" (Anderson & Ash, 2015, p. 46). Up until the conservative university student had arrived the curator had been in fairly open conversation with the L.A. Portal participants about the spreading legalization of marijuana. The presence of a new person disrupted the threshold of the Portal's atmosphere changing its ability to affect and producing new forms of relation. Subsequently, SPSC had to respond to this "relational weighing" between competing atmospheres to mitigate the connective atmosphere being overridden by the introduction of new bodies and relations. SPSC worked to subsume the introduction of new affects into the current atmosphere by employing strategic translation.

> Normally I try to do the translation as more, like, most accurate as possible. In that situation I tend to change some words because things were getting like, "this is my point of view and this is correct" and the others were the same, "that was

my point of view and I'm correct or you are wrong." So, I tried to change words to like sound more friendly, to sound more, like sensible to ensure all sides could be heard. And yeah, it was, I would say one of my toughest connections.

By using translation to soften the tone between interlocutors SPSC was able to maintain an atmosphere of connection despite opposing views. By preventing the atmosphere being overridden by the insertion of an oppositional viewpoint, SPSC allowed for the debate to continue without it devolving into an argument. This strategy was effective as SPSC notes,

> They went from getting very heated to just agreeing it is okay not to agree. The student [on the San Pedro Sula side] was speaking very hostile but I kept it friendly and soon everyone was laughing and, like there was change, they changed what they talk about.

As a discursive strategy strategic translation is one way in which curators can prevent connective atmospheres from being overridden by the introduction of potentially volatile affects.

Of course, strategic translation only works when there are language barriers. Additionally, sometimes the introduction of atmospheric volatility requires more than simply steering conversation through the use of a friendly tone. As such, curators have to come up with often overt strategies to deal with these "pockets of trouble" including the use of the curator's physical body.

The placement of the Portal in potentially dangerous areas means that curators themselves may face physical dangers as well. The Milwaukee Portal curator (MP) has experienced a number of moments wherein he found himself, often suddenly, suspended in a volatile atmosphere that potentially threatened his safety. MP recounts one such event when the Milwaukee Portal was placed in the park that separates the two gang territories in his neighborhood.

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> One time 40 gang members rolled up on me. I'm in the park by myself in the container. I was scared as shit 'cause I see all of these cars pull up in the parking lot, guys hopping out. I was like, oh…what the fuck is going on, you know? And they like, "what's this?" And I'm looking like, the fuck is going on? And I was like, well this is a learning device. And he's like, "what do you mean a learning device?" And I was like, hey, you know what, come check it out.

Despite being scared, MP recognizes this moment as a potential opening – what Cissna and Anderson (2002) would call a "moment of meeting." Rather than try to dissuade the gang members from entering the Portal or to encourage them to leave, MP invites the gang members into the possibilities of the Portal as a "learning device." Further, rather than spend a great deal of time attempting to manage the volatile atmosphere generated by the gang "rolling up" on him, MP instead leans into this atmospheric tipping point, recognizing that "atmospheres take on particular phenomenal appearances…as affects meet or fail to meet one another and build or fail to build intensity" (Anderson & Ash, 2015, p. 47). Leaning into the tipping-point subsequently allowed for the dissipation of this pocket of trouble. MP continued,

> So right when I said check it out it disarmed them. Like they weren't expecting it. They were like, "oh he ain't scared?" So it kind of disarmed them right away. They like "so we can go in?" And I was like, yeah, check it out.

When asked if they then went on to have a productive conversation inside MP added,

> They came in and coversated. Next thing I know I end up throwing a picnic that bring the gang members and the kids – that's how I started the gang truce. That was the first they engaged the Portal.

While dialogue between persons inside the Portal requires dialogic courage, MP suggests that establishing atmospheres that might foster such dialogue necessitates a courageous curator as well. Despite the very real potential for physical harm, MP utilized a potentially volatile tipping-point to foster affects of connection. As Poulos (2008) suggests, generating the conditions necessary to become suspended in transformative

dialogue requires "we imaginatively open ourselves up to possibility, when we take the risk to embrace spirit rising out of the heart, and when we cultivate a sense of self-other relations" (p. 119).

Generating conditions for the emergence of dialogue in volatile atmospheres is contingent not only on curator courage but the physical presence of the curator as well. Often, these tipping-points generate "a pause, a temporal suspension animated by the sense that something is coming into existence" which may call the curator into "a state of attention that is also an impassivity – a watching and waiting…an attunement to what might rind up or snap into place" (Stewart, 2011, p. 446). Whether a curator feels comfortable leaning into the volatility to watch, wait and determine what might occur is at least partially contingent on how the curator's body is read and responded to by the bodies and relations that shifted the Portal's atmosphere. Subsequently, how a curator responds to these pockets of trouble is not only a matter of a curator's discursive dexterity, but their physicality as well.

MP provides an example of a tipping point that occurred during a connection between Milwaukee and Los Angeles where atmospheric volatility generated varied responses from the curators involved in part due to differences in curator physicality and presence inside the Portal.

> I remember one time the police came in and we're talking to L.A. – we're talking to Black Lives Matter, some people from Black Lives Matter L.A. – and the police pulled up for a disturbance in front of the Portal container. So the police come inside the container and the lady in L.A. from Black Lives Matter is like, "I knew this was a set-up! You fucking pigs! What is this you fucking pigs!"

The entry of the police officer on the Milwaukee side of the Portal speaks to the speed at which atmospheres might shift, the ways in which this sudden envelopment suspends curators in a heightened sense of awareness, and how a sudden shift in atmosphere can

place the curator body in a precarious position wherein they must determine their own safety in regard to how they might respond to such volatility. MP recounts the challenge:

> I'm like calm down trying to get the lady from Black Lives Matter L.A. to, I'm like please calm down – know that our police are friends of the community. We wanna show you how we can co-exist with police. She's like "no, you guys, this is a fucking set up. Police kicked my ass, I fucking hate you!" And I can see the curators in L.A. are getting real nervous, you know?

It is here that MP realizes that a strategy of suspension is likely unproductive as the tension between the woman from Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the police officer is too volatile, but equally important here is a recognition that his fellow curators are becoming uncomfortable. Understanding that dialogue cannot be forced and attuned to the safety of his counterparts, MP tries to calm emotions. However, given the immediate physical proximity between his counterparts in L.A. and the BLM guest, they are more fully experiencing the affective intensities of this newly emerging atmosphere.

> The L.A. curators were in fucking chaos so, I'm kind of used to this and my being a big guy I can kind of use my size to say, okay calm the fuck down. So I stepped outside and called them and said look, I'm gonna walk this police officer out and then you try to get her out of the Portal. They both small women so it was unsafe for them…they not feeling safe – it wasn't time for mediatin.

Given the chaotic and potentially unsafe atmosphere generated by the meeting between the woman from BLM and the Milwaukee police officer MP chose to shut-down the conversation rather than risk this tipping point leading to the subsuming of connection into a more volatile atmosphere. MP remained impassive, watching and waiting to see how the tension would unfold however, the immediate danger to the L.A. curators left them enveloped in the chaotic airs of atmospheric volatility necessitating an end to the connection rather than a strategy of leaning into the tension between participants.

While not a regular occurrence, there are moments when participants have to be escorted out and this process may include the use of security to remove a problematic

person. However, generally curators employ discursive strategies to deal with potentially

volatile participants. As MP suggests,

> You know there are moments when people gottta get escorted out but, you know,
> I never had any moments where I gotta fight anybody. It's all about the way you
> do it. I might say, hey, you know your times up. We gotta make room for other
> people. Or, we got rules about what can be said so we gonna cut the conversation
> short.

Telling participants that there is a 15-minute time limit is one of the principal ways in

which curators deal with potentially volatile conversations. During a connection between

London and San Francisco this strategy was used to remove an intoxicated participant

who began to speak inappropriately to a woman who had joined him in the London

Portal. Additionally, while there are no "formal" rules for engagement in the Portal,

indicating that there are such rules for civil and productive engagement can often assist

curators managing atmospheric volatility. MP adds,

> I'll say, hey there are certain things you can't say and I need to cut the
> conversation short cuase I don't wanna lose my job or anything. Or, I'll tell them
> I wanna introduce them to or show them someone or something outside, you
> know? It's really figuring out – you know even if they're bein' – you know I
> always find a way to get in with them. You just gotta hear em out and stuff.

Here MP suggests that the curator needs to be attuned to all aspects of the Portal

experience. It is not just the ability to steer conversation, but similar to the Stockholm

curator's insistence that reading body language is important, curators must use the

principles of dialogue throughout – "genuine dialogue, when it does occur, is a complex

matrix of speech and silence, of giving and receiving, and of listening and expressing"

(Poulos, 2008, p. 119). While the physical presence of the curator is sometimes needed to

ensure atmospheres of connection, it is a curator's ability to adhere to the principles of

dialogue that attune them to a variety of discursive strategies that establish an atmosphere

of dialogic transformation. As one of the L.A. curators suggested during the activation

with Twitter, "essentially, curators are like global talk show hosts" – each doing their best to make sure that the atmosphere of the Portal is more akin to *The Oprah Winfrey Show* rather than *Jerry Springer*.

## Curation and Technological Perturbation

Curators must contend with the ways in which atmospheres shift and how both the placement of the Portal and Portal participants might generate volatile atmospheres not conducive to Shared Studios' goal of human connection. However, as this chapter's opening vignette suggests, the technology of the Portal itself may work to perturb the atmosphere of the Portal and the shipping container's technological units play an integral role in establishing the sort of atmospheres necessary for transformative dialogue. As outlined in Chapter four, when attention is drawn to these technological units or when the "invisible universe" of the shipping container's technology fails, they may disrupt the co-presence felt between participants by drawing attention away from atmospheres of connection and toward the technology itself. As such, curators must contend with these moments of technological perturbation.

One moment of technological perturbation occurred in the Colorado Springs Portal. This particular moment highlights the importance of the curator as a unit in the overall tone of the Portal as atmospheric interface. At the time the Portal was housed outside, and rain was causing an extrinsic perturbation via internet disruption. With the internet not working, the Colorado Springs Curator (CS) was frantically trying to establish connection. CS recounts:

> I was at the mall and the door [to the Portal] was open and this man steps in. And I am trying to get the internet working and want to ask him to step out but it's raining and so I tell him it's okay to stay and that I am working on the connection. You know how it is? You don't want to let them see the door [Portal screen] open but you don't want to be rude. So, I just told him I was doing my best. And then I

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realize that it is the internet and the rain so I said I'm so sorry, we aren't going to be able to connect and I could tell that he was really disappointed. It was clear that he really wanted to talk to someone.

The failure of the internet subsequently established an atmosphere that had the potential to pull the participant out of the Portal experience by drawing attention to the technological units that help establish that atmosphere. As noted in Chapter four, when these units perturb, new atmospheres emerge, atmospheres that generally lead participants out of the space of the Portal and back into less appealing atmospheres of which they might already be familiar. As such, CS actively worked to maintain an atmosphere of connection independent of the technological units of the Portal.

> And this man is in his early 20s. I think he was 23ish. And he said, "well what is this?" And I am trying to connect and he's talking to me and I can tell that he is speech and, he's hearing impaired. And I notice that he has cochlear implants and I say, oh is that new? Cause my brother-in-law has just started wearing one and I am trying to draw his attention away from our not being able to connect. And I feel so silly working on it so I just get to talking to him instead. And I say it's not connecting but you know while you're here you can chat with me because he needed to chat with somebody.

As a skilled curator, CS is able to recognize the need this man has to engage in conversation and subsequently uses the technological perturbation as an opening for inquiry – opening herself up to the story of another (Poulos, 2008). While the failure of the internet might lead the participant out of an atmosphere for dialogic transformation, CS uses that perturbation as a moment of possibility for dialogue to occur.

> So, I spent an hour chatting with this guy in the Portal not connected to anything and still had the same experience as though he was on the other side.

The young man had been particularly interested in connecting with Afghanistan because he had spent time there in the military. Despite the technological perturbation disrupting the man's ability to engage in dialogue with the persons with whom he came to speak, CS made herself present for the emergence of narrative. As Poulos (2008) suggests,

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Stories just emerge, naturally, as a primary way that we relate with each other. On

any given occasion, we may find ourselves in a story, standing at the threshold of

a new world, which is itself a threshold for joint action or shared possibility or

dialogic engagement (p. 128).

CS responded to a technological perturbation by turning it into a moment for

transformative dialogue opening herself up to the shared possibility of this young man's

story. CS highlights standing at this threshold:

> He was in Afghanistan, his eardrums were blown out by fire, gun fire. His parents
> had rejected him saying he was faking it. Even though he had cochlear implants!
> His friends don't understand him because he is depressed all the time. And so I
> said to him, I got kind of weepy and I said, thank you for your service. And he
> started to cry and he just grabbed me and said, "can I hug you?" I mean he needed
> to talk to somebody. He needed to talk to somebody who wasn't military telling
> him, "oh it will be better, just ride it out." Or you know, he wasn't talking to his
> parents who were dismissing him, his friends who don't have time for him
> anymore – he had no one. And so, I mean, we were meant to be connected to
> Afghanistan but the damn internet! But it was okay, you know, it's kind of like
> really weird that one of my best connections wasn't even connected. So, you
> know, it's like this miracle of this comfortable space where anything is allowed.

This moment in Colorado Springs suggests two important points about the Portal as a

unique atmospheric interface. First, the space of the Portal itself generates an atmosphere

that is conducive to the type of dialogic transformation that occurred between her and the

young man, what CS calls the "miracle" of the shipping container. Second, this moment

highlights how a curator can respond to technological perturbations to invite dialogue

rather than reterritorializing participants back into familiar narratives or experiences they

may have had with similar technological interfaces. Even when the technological units of

the Portal do not vibrate at specific rhythms, the curator can still encourage feelings of

connection through their own co-presence allowing participants to become suspended in

an atmosphere of connection even when, as CS puts it, technology "isn't even connected."

## Curating Atmospheres of Connection

The curator is an integral unit in establishing the overall tone of the Portal as an atmospheric interface. Establishing an atmosphere conducive to the emergence of imaginative and transformative dialogue is dependent on the space and placement of the shipping container itself, the technological units of the Portal, and Portal participants. However, it is the curator who works to ensure that each of these units vibrates at rhythms that produce an overall tone of connection in the Portal. Subsequently, curators help determine the rhythmic articulation of the Portal as an interface. Ash et al. (2018) suggest that units of an interface communicate with one another as either staccato or legato and this communication determines whether or not the interface creates an experience of connection. When units communicate in a discontinuous or staccato manner, they have the potential to generate volatile atmospheres that require additional effort by users of the interface to seamlessly engage both the interface itself and other users. When units communicate legato the atmosphere generated is experienced as smooth and continuous. Each of the Portal's units must communicate in ways that generate a legato vibration. While Portal placement, participants and the Portal's technology may lead to staccato rhythms, the curator orchestrates each of these units back into legato by conducting the meeting, bumping and colliding of multiple atmospheres.

These competing atmospheres include the placement of the Portal and the ways in which its publicness engages the shipping container's surrounds. This discontinuous staccato rhythm may include the introduction of new atmospheres by Portal participants with the potential to suspend interlocutors in either productive or dangerous atmospheric

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volatility. Further, the failure of technological units may perturb the atmosphere of the Portal modulating interactions and disrupting the interfaces mediating effects. Subsequently, the Portal as atmospheric interface requires the unit of curator to maintain a rhythm of articulation that encourages transformative dialogue and an overall tone of connection.

CHAPTER 7

ATMOSPHERIC INTERFACES AT THE INTERSECTION

*I close the door on the Tempe Portal for the last time. As I do, I am reminded of how I came to this project and the magic of engaging strangers. I am in a car on my way to Upstate New York to go apple picking. I have no desire to pick apples or to leave the City for Upstate, but I have somehow been roped into this day-long adventure. As we determine who will ride with whom I end up in a car, this little moving box, with a woman I have never met. She tells me about a project that involves other little boxes, gold ones where people interact with strangers all over the world. That conversation would change the course of my life. I lock the gold padlock on the Tempe Portal and realize just how much this gold container has, indeed, changed my life. I now have friends in over a dozen countries, places I would have never thought to visit and people I would have never known – strangers, now friends, all because of another random conversation with a stranger, in a different box on my way to pick apples.*

De Souza e Silva (2006) argues that in order to more fully understand the impact of new communication technologies on public life, we must theorize each new interface as it arrives on the scene. Additionally, Papacharissi (2015; 2016) encourages scholars to attend to the ways in which these technologies do not simply mediate conversation, but support affect. Subsequently, in theorizing the impact of new interfaces, scholars must consider both their material and affective effects and how these effects reconfigure the types of social relationships and spaces each new interface mediates. This requires engaging not only what people do with technologies but what technologies themselves are doing (Rose, 2016). Engaging this technological "doing," Ash (2013) encourages scholars to attend not only to how persons use technology to mediate interaction, but to consider how technologies themselves modulate such interaction. And Ash et al. (2018) propose the concepts of unit, vibration and tone as a vocabulary for the analysis of how interfaces operate to modulate user response and action. Subsequently, interrogating the emergence of any new technology necessitates attention to how such technologies both mediate and modulate interaction and their affective and material effects.

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Following this call, the previous project sought to unpack the ways in which a new interface, the Portal, demonstrates the affective impact of technology and how emerging technologies such as the Portal are atmospheric. To understand the Portal as an atmospheric interface, I attended to each of the Portal's physical, human and technological units. These units include the participants who enter the Portal, the shipping container itself, its various technologies, and the curators staffed to orchestrate its rhythms. All of these units interact to establish the overall tone of the Portal – the atmosphere that emanates as a result of the vibrations of these intermingling units. Thus, the Portal operates as an atmospheric interface in that rather than just mediating interaction between persons and technology, the Portal itself modulates such interactions as the various human units of the Portal vibrate with the technological and physical units of the interface. This modulation then impacts how both participants and curators mediate the conversations within the unique atmosphere of the shipping container. Further, the overall tone of the Portal's interacting units and the atmospheres that emanate bump up against those atmospheres of the Portal's surrounds making the public spaces in which the shipping container is placed yet another of the Portal's vibrating units. Additionally, participants may alter the atmosphere of the Portal as they interact with other participants and with Portal curators. Curators then must work to mediate conversations and manage shifting atmospheres modulated by the technologies of the shipping container itself to maintain Shared Studios' mission of creating human connection. Thus, the Portal and similar new technologies operate as atmospheric interfaces. The experience of the Portal suspends participants in conditions outside of their immediate understanding. It not only mediates affect, but the interface itself actuates a series of unreal yet materially pressing 'digital' social relations modulated by the interface's interacting units.

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I now return to the principal arguments of the analysis as a means of unpacking how the Portal as a new communication interface suggests a reconceptualizing of similar technologies as atmospheric. In doing so, I challenge current ways of understanding new communication technologies. One such articulation is de Souza e Silva's (2006) hybrid spaces. While this accounts for the ways in which new technologies double place, hybrid as a concept does not account for the multiplying of space and time indicative of new communication interfaces such as the Portal. The Portal generates multiple, overlapping space-times interacting simultaneously and the shipping container itself has an affective force. While Papacharissi (2015; 2016) accounts for affect in terms of how it is shared across technologies, her articulation of affective publics does not account for how technologies themselves modulate affect. As such, these technologies actuate various interactions. The concept of atmosphere accounts for this triggering of affective relations and further underscores the ways in which interface users might be suspended in particular types of (inter)action. While hybrid spaces account for the interaction between physical and digital spaces, and affective publics attune us to the ways in which affect gets shared over digital platforms, the experience of the Portal represents a gathering of affect in the ubiquitous airs of atmosphere. In what follows I weave together the arguments of the previous chapters and highlight how the theoretical construct of *atmospheric interfaces* provides a means of making sense of technological interfaces such as the Portal. In doing so, I return to each of the project's research questions in turn.

*RQ1: How do atmospheric interfaces such as the Portal activate public space? How do such interfaces mediate and modulate interactions between public and private?*

**Atmospheric Resonance and Public Space**

One of the principal ways in which interfaces such as the Portal are atmospheric is their actuation of public space. It actuates as a piece of public art and its engagement with active audiences. As a public art project, the Portal invites participants to collaborate in the artistic sense-making process and create relational, connective, conversational and dialogic performances with active members of the public. This active engagement is tempered, however, by its being a readymade. The shipping container has the potential to be inconspicuous and subsequently not activate the space as was the case in the Oakland, Hayes Valley and Stockholm locations. Additionally, it may be mistaken for other objects such as when it was placed next to other similar containers in Hayes Valley and Oakland, or next to a gold dumpster in Tempe. This failure to enact atmospheres of engagement is also a result of the social life of the shipping container – its reproducibility, mobility and relatively inexpensive form. This may shape participant interaction leading persons to conceptualize the container outside of a public art project and into familiar understandings of its purpose and use. However, as an affectual readymade it has the potential to generate an aesthetic moment that brings the contradictions of an object as commodity into focus for the viewer/participant. As an object in a public space that invites audience/participants to actively engage it, the Portal has the potential to activate these spaces and actuate unique atmospheres that envelop participants. Subsequently, while the Portal may become subsumed into the existing atmosphere, when it actuates new modes of relation it demonstrates itself as atmospheric.

**Territorializing**

The potential for the actuation of new atmospheres occurs when the "social life of the container" presses upon participants causing them to territorialize the container

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back into the spread of goods. This was evidenced in Tempe participants inquiring as to the cost of the container, whether or not Shared Studios is profitable and comments such as "how does this thing make money?" Additionally, the New Haven participant who referred to the Portal as a "gold dumpster" was convinced by the social life of the container that it was clearly commentary on "commerce and waste." These moments of return to capitalist renderings occurred because the seemingly ordinariness of the container is suddenly wrenched from its associative meanings, leaving participants to engage alternative means of perception and interpretation (Hamilton, 2013) to make sense of the shipping container's placement in the middle of a public square. Thus, the container alters the surrounding atmosphere of the public space in which it is placed. It may fall short of deterritorializng, or enacting entirely new "materialities, sensations, and perceptions" (Hamilton, 2013, p. 18), but it does, if even for a brief moment, call the logics of the commodity into question. The unclasping of the shipping container prompted participants to territorialize the Portal back into discourses of capitalism, however the need to do so demonstrates the "precariousness of the commodity moment" (Hamilton, 2013, p. 17).

**Atmospheric Collision**

In addition to the impact of larger narratives on the Portal's potential to actuate public space, the atmosphere of the Portal may collide with the atmospheric surrounds in the area in which it is placed. These collisions may result in the subsuming of the atmosphere of the Portal into that of the public space in which it is placed, or those surrounds may bump up against the atmosphere of the Portal to create new atmospheres.

The New Haven participant's comment that the Portal resembled a Gold Dumpster in front of one of the "Countries richest Universities" demonstrates the ways in

which the atmospheres of the public space surrounding a Portal has a profound impact on those that might emanate from/within. This may lead to the atmosphere of the Portal being subsumed into the existing atmosphere of its surrounds when placed in an area with similar objects. Or it may be rendered inconspicuous when placed in proximity to other containers subsequently disappearing into the atmospheric surrounds of the public space in which it is placed. This was the case with the Hayes Valley location in SF wherein the Portal was surrounded by other shipping containers as well as branded by the ubiquitous Twitter logo so recognizable by the Silicon Valley set and occurred as a result of the unexpected placement of an actual gold dumpster next to the Portal in Tempe. The lack of potential participants and the everyday practices that inform a public space's atmosphere also may render the Portal unrecognizable. This is what happened with the placement of a Portal in a school parking lot with little to no pedestrian traffic in Oakland, and the "unfortunate placement" of the Stockholm Portal on a decline off a street used for getting from point A to B rather than for pedestrian lingering. Additionally, the atmospheres surrounding the Portal may be more powerful than those generated by or emanating from the Portal itself as was the case with the inflatable Portal at ASU in Tempe. Finally, the very habitudes of place may generate an atmosphere that comes into contact, collides and colludes with that of the Portal. This is apparent in the mistaking of the Portal as a drug container by police when it was placed in the Milwaukee curator's backyard in the 53206 neighborhood as a result of the zip code being known for drug activity and crime. Subsequently, understanding the Portal as atmospheric recognizes the ways in which its potential to activate public space is contingent on both the atmospheres generated by the Portal itself but on those atmospheres surrounding the Portal as well.

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The Portal acts as an atmospheric interface in its ability to actuate various social relations as a result of its placement. Even while the shipping container may sometimes be subsumed into an existing atmosphere its territorializing (and potentially deterritorializing) effects suggest that as an object, the Portal itself sets these relations into motion. In this way the placement of the Portal into various publics creates a gathering of airs that press upon participants and enact new forms of spatial relations. Using the language of atmosphere to conceptualize technologies such as the Portal highlights how they might enact resonance – associations beyond the interface itself that make present new ways of engaging public space.

## Rhythmic Articulations in the Airs Between Public and Private

Understanding the Portal and similar technologies as atmospheric recognizes the tensions between such technologies and the discursive and extra-discursive conditions that inform conceptualizations of both public and private. While technologies have been recognized as blurring the distinctions between these categories, engaging this blurring as atmospheric highlights how technological interfaces themselves actuate unique environments with the potential to suspend users into new forms of relation. Engaging the Portal and similar technologies as atmospheric accounts for how such technologies interact with both the public and private spheres as "forms of attending to what's happening, sensing out, accreting attachments and detachments, differences and indifferences, losses and proliferating possibilities" (Stewart, 2011, p. 448). The atmospheric moves beyond the notion that technologies blur distinctions between public and private by attending to the human technology relations suspended in the blurry airs between these categorical distinctions.

Using the language of atmosphere accounts for how the Portal and other such technologies express themselves "through specific encounters which are shaped by the particularity of other objects that are present in a situation" (Ash, 2013, p. 24). The Portal may contribute to the atmosphere of a public space and its presences are felt by those interacting outside of its gold walls. However, the conversations inside are private and subsequently generate their own unique atmospheres. The presence of the Portal and its potential to contribute to a public atmosphere is evidenced in it being mistaken for a dumpster in New Haven and Tempe, and as a container housing drugs in Milwaukee. Subsequently the shipping container comes into contact with both the material objects in a public space and the discursive conditions that shape such spaces. However, these encounters may not occur between the public space housing the Portal and the private space inside the shipping container where interactions are shielded from exterior atmospheres. This allows for the actuation of unique atmospheres through the engagement of specific encounters not privy to those outside the Portal. This included Iranian women dancing and an Iranian man expressing his homosexuality despite both being illegal just outside the gold painted door of the shipping container. While current interfaces such as laptop computers or social networking sites may provide for private interaction in public spaces, the Portal allows participants to be suspended in atmospheres separated from but existing alongside one another.

Articulating this co-existence as atmospheric demonstrates how both private and public spaces have the potential to affect as a result of their mass and weight as both distinct but connected atmospheres. Mass refers to the individual object of the Portal itself and its potential to affect as it encounters the public space wherein it is housed. Weight refers to the selective relations that emerge between the Portal that actually occur

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and thus form a specific atmosphere (Anderson & Ash, 2015). Subsequently, the Portal has a mass which shapes its ability to affect both public and private atmospheres, but these atmospheres do not necessarily weigh upon one another. Instead they exist alongside side one another as distinct yet present atmospheres – the atmosphere of the Portal as it interacts with the public space in which it is housed, the atmosphere of the public space outside the connected Portal, and the unique private atmosphere created as a result of the conversations inside. In this way, conceptualizing new technologies such as the Portal as atmospheric accounts for the simultaneous private *and* public as well as private *in* public atmospheres emanating in the blurry airs between these categories. As atmospheric the various relations both inside the privacy of the Portal and the public encounters outside its walls are equally present yet remain distinct even while the bodies and relations both outside and in contribute to the public atmosphere of the Portal's placement and the private atmospheres of connection inside simultaneously.

The multiple atmospheres emerging from technologies such as the Portal also generate multiple spacetimes suspending participants inside the private space of the shipping container and resonating beyond its gold walls. Participants engage the space inside the Portal, the public space in which it is housed, and the public space of the connecting Portal simultaneously. This led one participant unable to place themselves relative to their surroundings yet still aware that they were in a gold box on a sidewalk in their city. Further, several participants articulate the experience of being in the Portal as traveling through time, speaking in a different time or being transported through time while in the container. The multiplying of spacetimes is powerfully expressed by participants in Gaza City. When these participants step into the private space of the Portal, they are able to travel to the other public spaces in the Portal network. Gaza

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participants "literally can't leave their City" and the Portal provides a private space for the re-animating of public worlds outside their own Portal. Subsequently, the meeting of the various atmospheres both inside and outside the shipping container act as an attuned space that invites a reimagining of both space and time.

Re-imagining technologies such as the Portal as atmospheric accounts for the affects that emerge via digital co-presence, returning the user back to both their own body and narratives rather than the detached experience of a computer screen or the disconnect between individual stories and mass media. As such, technologies such as the Portal envelop participants in an atmosphere that emerges as they gather with others in the space of the shipping container which then may cause them to think differently about various publics through these private interactions. This emergent causality or the process wherein effects become causes and vice versa is demonstrated in the ambiguous airs between participant private interest/life and public interest/life.  Participants are encouraged to share their private stories with the potential to alter understandings of public life. As "global libraries" the Portal allows for the emergence of an atmosphere that directs attention to individual stories and away from media narratives that might shape public understandings of people from particular places. The Portal has included the sharing of the private "inner-world" of Syrian refugees with policymakers at the U.N. holding them accountable to the private interests of these participants through the face-to-face digital co-presence contributing to the atmosphere of the shipping container. Additionally, this accountability associated with the 'digital' co-presence of the Portal's atmosphere is suggested by the Dallas participant who refused to enter the Portal and share his rather harsh opinions of the Afghani people with the actual Afghanis on the other side of the container. Subsequently, the atmosphere of the Portal moves beyond simply creating a

hybrid space that engages users in both the digital and physical simultaneously by situating participants back into their bodies without the ability to engage the detached performances generally associated with online communication. "Feeling like they are in the same room" and getting "a feeling for a real person" suggests that the Portal does not just mediate interaction between public and private life but modulates such interaction by enveloping participants in an atmosphere that emerges through co-presence and then causes participants to alter assumptions about their interlocutors and the publics in which they are from. Using the language of atmosphere highlights this emergent cause and draws attention to how the blurring of private and public life both emerge through the gathering of bodies in digital relation in the Portal and generate a cause that may itself have some degree of weight (Anderson & Ash, 2015) on participant understandings of both the private and public lives of others.

*RQ2: How does the technology of the Portal itself work to both mediate and modulate a "feeling with" and what are the effects of such mediation/modulation on the affective relations of such interfaces?*

The co-presence experienced by participants in the Portal generates a form of digital relations that extend beyond the mere spreading of affect across digital platforms (Papacharissi, 2015; 2016). Instead, the Portal itself plays an integral role in both mediating and modulating affect and shaping these digital relations. While participant and curator interactions impact the affects experienced in the Portal, the shipping container and its technological units contribute to the emergence of such affects. As previously noted, the Portal impacts such affects as a result of its position as an affective readymade and the placement of that readymade into public space generates a co-mingling of atmospheres which emerge from discursive constructions of space and place. However, the digital relations and their accompanying affects are further modulated by

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the technological units of the Portal. Subsequently, the added impact of this modulation on the affective relations in the Portal suggest a reconceptualizing of such technologies as atmospheric.

## Technological Vibration and Rhythmic Perturbation

A move toward the atmospheric accounts for how the technological units of interfaces such as the Portal move beyond simply supporting affect and operate as expressed worlds that themselves produce such affective experiences. This occurs through what Ash (2013) calls perturbation whereby the machinic assemblage of the Portal's extra-discursive units press upon participants and curators to shape the atmosphere of the shipping container. Perturbation may occur intrinsically as a result of a particular technological unit or extrinsically through outside interference with the workings of these units. This perturbation demonstrates the ways in which the interface of the Portal generates atmospheres that move beyond meditating affect through the modulating effects of the technologies of the shipping container.

The potential for the atmosphere of the Portal to generate connection is contingent on the "tiny universe" of the shipping container's technologies becoming transparent through the process of disappearance. Fast internet speeds ensure immediacy in conversation, blackspot software eliminates projector glare, camera resolution and the lining up of Portal containers through software such as Wirecast approximates daily visual experience by recreating the scale of interactions in the physical world, and camera placement and screen keystoning work to achieve linear perspective between participants. Each of these technological units function to maintain an "interfaceless interface" that allows for the emergence of co-presence between participants and an atmosphere of connection.

The perturbation of any of these units creates an atmospheric shift that shapes the actions of participants and the environment of the Portal by drawing participants away from connection and suspending them in different spatial atmospheres. This is evidenced in the extrinsic perturbation caused by slow or unreliable internet between Tempe and Afghanistan shifting the atmosphere from one of connection across space and time to the Tempe participant territorializing the experience of the Portal back into common discussions of technology. Extrinsic perturbations associated with the internet additionally led participants in both Tempe and Dallas to draw their attention back to the Zoom software used to connect the Portals, diminishing the transparency necessary for an interfaceless interface to suspend participants in atmospheres of human relation. Further evidence of the modulating effects of the Portal's technologies are the intrinsic perturbations that occurred as a result of attention being drawn to the camera by participants in Tempe and Aman, moving the conversation from Middle East policy to the technology of the Portal itself, and the failure of Blackspot technology in Lagos led participants to recognize screen projection making these elements more important than the connections being made inside the shipping container. Finally, the co-presence necessary to sustain an atmosphere of connection was perturbed by the failure of the Portal's technological units to generate linear perspective between Milwaukee and Tempe. Subsequently, understanding the Portal and similar technologies as atmospheric accounts for how these technologies perturb users and modulate interaction by focusing attention on "what aspects of an object appear in any given situation [and] how the qualities presented might change if an object is moved or placed in relation to other objects" (Ash, 2013, p. 27) and persons.

The interaction between persons and the technological objects/units of the Portal demonstrates how those technologies act as an affective force that both mediates and modulates participant interaction. However, the participants themselves further shape the atmospheres that emerge through such digital relations. As previously noted, when the technological units of the Portal disappear atmospheres of connection emerge in the shipping container. These atmospheres generate a sort of digital co-presence that suspends participants in airs of possibility. These airs shape the digital relations between participants generating rhythms of engagement that move from everyday talk to atmospheric conditions of imagination that set the stage for dialogue. While understanding how new communication technologies such as the Portal do more than just support affect as a result of their modulating effects, how these technologies interact with users highlights the potential of such modulation to generate atmospheres of human connection.

## Resonance and Atmospheric Envelopment

*RQ3: How do technologies such as the Portal suspend participants in atmospheres of human connection, and how might these technologically mediated/modulated 'digital' relations generate an imaginative dialogue that might inform public opinion?*

Using the language of atmosphere to articulate new communication technologies suggests that such interfaces do more than simply support affect as an affective elsewhere (Papacharissi, 2015). Instead, as atmospheric these technologies allow for the emergence of multiple affects becoming simultaneously suspended both inside and outside of the Portal. The emergence of multiple atmospheres and the affects they support differ from the affective elsewhere in that the affective relations that emerge via interaction with an interface cannot be limited to the architecture of the interface itself. Additionally, these relations may or may not merge, mix and/or mingle together. Engaging such interfaces

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and their affective relations requires tending to the multiple, often competing atmospheres that surround, envelope and suspend user/participants and the various resonances or associations made present as a result of the multiple units of an interface. Articulating such interfaces as atmospheric accounts for how affective relations are connected to the ways in which each of these units interact with one another to support or fail to support affective relations.

Interaction between each of the Portal's units allow for the emergence of atmospheres inside the Portal that support affect by generating a bridge between participants and cultural others. Further this atmosphere compels participants to express their own feelings and provides them the opportunity to feel their own as well as others' sense of agency. This *feeling with* is evidenced by participants noting how they "never expected to be face-to-face with a complete stranger" who made them "feel as if she knew me." Additionally, the bridging led to participants feeling as if partners, despite their being strangers, could affectively access their hopes and dreams, that they "laughed from [their] hearts because [they] were connected." Participants were able to express themselves in the atmosphere of the shipping container by sharing their "stories, conversations and lives across cultures," and provided the opportunity for the expression of participant agency. This agency is evident in an Iranian participants' coming out of the closet as gay in the private atmosphere of the Portal and the agency provided Gaza participants who use the shipping container to "travel" outside the restrictive confines of their homeland. Finally, the atmosphere inside the Portal allowed for the feeling of others' agency by challenging media narratives through the exchange of personal stories with participants in Tempe and D.C. commenting that "it was amazing hearing from an actual person [in Afghanistan]," and "the images of people in Palestine that we see in the

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media paints them in such a biased way" but the Portal "helps us understand the heart and personality of the people living there." The interaction of the various units of the Portal generate atmospheres that suspend participants in digital relations and support affect through the bridging of difference and the expression of agency between cultural others.

While the supporting of affect inside the Portal is similar to that of an affective elsewhere, unlike the restrictive metaphor of architecture suggested by the term, the atmospheric accounts for how atmospheres inside the shipping container often "rub up against" atmospheres surrounding Portal placement. The Portal instead names a condition of liminality, suspending participants in the airs between. Thus, affects floats like particles both inside and outside of the Portal and are contingent on multiple atmospheres before settling into moments of connection or disconnection. Additionally, the various atmospheres of the Portal's surrounds may make their way into the Portal creating atmospheric shifts that impact the digital relations and their associative affects inside the shipping container. Finally, articulating interfaces such as the Portal as atmospheric accounts for how the interface itself might shape the affective relations outside the immediate confines of that interface by generating atmospheres that spread out into the various publics housing an interface such as the Portal.

The ways in which the shipping container itself proliferates atmospheres into the publics in which it is placed is evident in the placement of the Milwaukee Portal in the Amani neighborhood as well as the connection between this Portal and that of Gaza City. The placement of the Milwaukee Portal led to the entire community coming out, with elders actually doing so for the first time in a long time, to share in the connections being made inside the shipping container. This Portal also served as a safe space to bring rival gang members in the community into contact supporting affective relations wherein

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rivals recognized their shared sense of space and eventually came to a truce (if only for the annual Father's Day event). When connecting with Gaza, the shared feelings of police/State violence that Amani participants had with their counterparts in Palestine led to what the Milwaukee Portal curator recently described as a "humbling" of Amani participants as they realized that they shared conditions with far-away others, as each are suspended in the atmospheric volatility of their surrounds. Subsequently, the atmosphere of the Portal "bumped up against" that of the Amani neighborhood of Milwaukee and the atmospheres of Gaza City registering new effects in what bodies can do, what they can feel and the types of affect that might be supported by the digital relations of an interface.

The impact of atmospheres outside of the Portal on the digital relations that might emerge as atmospheres inside the shipping container is further evidenced in the mistaking of the container for a gold dumpster in Tempe or the reference to the Portal as a dumpster given its placement outside of Yale University. Additionally, the interface might disappear into the background of its atmospheric surrounds as it did at the Oakland, Hayes Valley and Stockholm locations. Finally, participants themselves may cause changes in the airs of atmosphere by generating a "pocket" of trouble as was the case with Tempe participants reluctantly wanting to engage the atmospheres inside the Portal if it meant talking to *those* people from *that* place, and San Pedro Sula participants' disinterest in chatting with participants in the U.S. assuming they would be enveloped in atmospheres of capitalism. Finally, the atmosphere of the interface of the Portal may be completely subsumed by competing atmospheres such as those of the carnival at the ASU Portal. Accounting for the atmospheric highlights the impact of volatility on the types of affect supported by digital relations with/in an interface. Attention to the atmospheric suggests that rather than just support affect, new communication technologies such as the

Portal generate unique atmospheres that mix, mingle, bump-up against and envelope not only the participants in digital relation, but the very atmospheres that might emerge as a result of these relations.

## Atmospheric Vibration and Transformative Dialogue

When atmospheres both inside the Portal and those of the shipping container's surrounds envelop participants in digital relation the type of affects supported by such atmospheres has the potential to encourage participant vibration that leads to human connection. This connection generally follows the sharing of every day talk as this type of interaction often leads to a supportive, friendly communicative environment particularly when mediated by technology (Graham & Wright, 2014; Graham et al., 2015a; 2015b). And while dialogue is generally associated with an intensity that generates a deeper moment of meaning and relation from participants (Broome, 2009), the atmosphere of the Portal supports this intensity by approximating face-to-face communication and allowing for the emergence of accidental dialogue (Poulos, 2008) via a digital co-presence. Unlike technologies that simply support affect as would an affective elsewhere, new communication technologies such as the Portal suspend participants in atmospheres wherein the affective intensity necessary for the emergence of a transformative dialogue may occur.

The move from everyday exchange to transformative dialogue is evidenced by several participants across the Portal network. Exchanges often begin with a recognition of shared interests, often to the surprise of participants. Whether connecting over a shared love of ice cream, video games or music, participants often discover similarities that help to overcome the awkwardness of speaking with a stranger and open up moments for a more engaged dialogue to emerge in the atmospheric airs of the Portal. This leads to

moments of dialogic imagination wherein the "aimless, uncharted spaces of talk [merge] into dialogue" (Poulos, 2008, p. 122). Participants then express feelings of friendship with their partners. While the word friendship may indicate sustained interaction beyond the moment of atmospheric suspension in the shipping container, the use of the word by participants does suggest a level of connection beyond an acquaintance or at least the affective intensity associated with friends. As such, in these moments of connection, the sharing of every day talk often sparks dialogic imagination and moves the conversation beyond the mundane. This was evidenced by the Tempe and Herat participants moving from discussions of their shared interests at the university to a dialogue about the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Once these moments of dialogue occur participants move beyond media narratives associated with their counterparts and develop a shared sense of humanity as was evident in a New York City participant leaving a conversation with Havana "feeling understood, feeling cared for, feeling strong and alive," and a D.C. participant declaring that they were forever changed as a result of "experiencing the humanity" of a refugee with whom they were speaking in Berlin. Rather than simply supporting affect, the Portal suspends participants in atmospheres that generate the affective intensity necessary to move beyond the everyday, spark imagination through digital co-presence and participate in potentially transformative dialogue.

The potential for these moments of dialogic transformation to occur are contingent on whether or not participants have the courage to be suspended in the Portal's atmosphere or permit such potential to evaporate. The need for courage is necessary for transformative dialogue and this courage speaks to how the Portal operates as atmospheric. Because the shipping container supports the affective intensity of digital co-presence participants feel accountable to their interlocutors and this accountability

requires courage. This is perhaps most evidenced in the Dallas man who was quick to speak disparagingly about Afghanistan and the Afghan people but unwilling to step inside the Portal and share his feelings with the participants in Herat. The Portal is atmospheric in that it suggests an affective proposition – it lures (or fails to lure) persons in by generating feelings about other people or the situation that might occur inside the shipping container. While affects may spread across various technologies, the Portal acts upon users, impacting whether or not they have the courage to share such affects and engage the risky business of transformative dialogue.

The atmosphere of the Portal acts upon users and necessitates participant courage to engage the affective force of its airs; however, the shipping container simultaneously mitigates such risk. As highlighted by the Milwaukee curator, "it gives you the up close and personal experience, but it gives you the space you need to stay away and still feel safety." The ways in which the Portal creates multiple atmospheres that both require courage and mitigate risk is most evident the use of the shipping container to put rival gang members into dialogue. With the safe distance afforded by the interface gang members were able engage in narrative conscience, recognizing each other in one another's stories and shedding performative enactments of their gang personas. This led to a truce between members that culminated in a face-to-face meeting in their neighborhood park. Subsequently, while the interface creates the distance necessary for such dialogue to take place, the co-presence and affective force of its atmosphere allows for the emergence of narrative consciousness which leads to transformative dialogue and the eventual courage necessary to continue these complex conversations in publics outside of the shipping container.

While the eventual (and now annual) meeting of rival gang members in Milwaukee suggests the potential of interfaces such as the Portal to influence public opinion, the sustained impact of the shipping container is less evident. As such, the ability of these conversations to influence public opinion in meaningful ways represents a limitation of the current project. Participants indicate that they will remain friends with their Portal partners and the exchange of social media accounts to sustain such contact often occurs in the Portal. However, without a long-term study of these participants it is impossible to say if the moments of transformation they experience in the Portal have a lasting impact on their opinions of the people and places from which their partners are from, or if they continue to engage these persons beyond their initial interaction. While the atmosphere of the Portal generates a powerful affective force that both holds participants accountable to one another and generates strong feelings of connection, these moments may be fleeting. This acknowledgement only reiterates a move toward the atmospheric when engaging new communication technologies such as the Portal. These moments of atmospheric suspension may generate the conditions necessary for the exchange of affect and human connection, however just as atmospheres represent a gathering, an enveloping and a becoming – they dissipate, evaporate and fade away.

*RQ4: How might users of technologies such as the Portal curate atmospheres to encourage dialogic transformation, and how might atmospheric curation inform how other similar interfaces might be used to mediate/modulate public life?*

The ephemerality of atmosphere suggests that controlling their volatile airs may not be possible. Atmospheres are emergent and as such to shape how such airs gather requires attuning to the intensities that give rise to their form. However, atmospheres are ambiguous, having a material effect on those enveloped in them yet never quite achieving stability (Anderson, 2009, p. 78). How then does one work to shape the ambiguous airs of

the atmospheric? Better yet, how does one predict the shape they will take? These questions apply equally to new communication technologies. Just as atmospheres require an attunement of the senses to their pressing effects, so too do these technological interfaces. Understanding how such technologies both activate and actuate user interaction offers insight into how users might maximize their connective potential. Engaging the language of atmosphere then necessitates a heightened awareness to the emergence of their airs and new communication technologies call for a similar attunement to the unknown ways in which use of such interfaces might (re)shape human interaction.

**Shaping Atmospheric Tones**

Portal curators provide one way to engage the complexities of shaping the atmospheric. As the principal mediators between participants and the technology of the interface itself, how they work to manage competing atmospheres to generate transformative dialogue may indicate strategies for how users of new communication technologies might shape the impact of these new interfaces on public life. While many bemoaned the introduction of smartphones portending increased digital connection at the expense of face-to-face interaction, much of these dire predictions did not come to fruition. What has occurred, however, is the use of platforms designed for connection to further divide. As social media environments become increasingly populated with persons in ideological bubbles and as governments and private actors use these platforms to drive users apart, it becomes increasingly important to understand how new interfaces designed to connect may instead generate atmospheres of disconnection. While one cannot predict how a new technology will be used in relation to human connection, engaging the language of atmosphere highlights how persons get enveloped in often

competing airs and curators serve as a potential example for how such atmospheric volatility might be mitigated.

Curators must weigh relational shifts and tipping points in the arrangement of affect with/in the interface. There are many strategies for engaging such relational and affective shifts to maintain atmospheres of connection and encourage transformative dialogue, but the strategy of suspension is perhaps the most notable when engaging new technologies such as the Portal. The Milwaukee curator's use of suspension left participants floating in volatility and suggests that interfaces that allow for the experience of affect through digital co-presence yet maintain distance as a result of the interface itself may provide a space for persons with opposing opinions to engage conflict even if there are expressions of hostility. The interface of the Portal is unique in that it provides a space for *feeling with* others by bridging cultural difference, allowing for the expression of often opposing ideas and the enactment of participant agency. While this *feeling with* may occur in face-to-face communication, the shipping container still maintains distance between interlocutors, mitigating risk while fostering the courage necessary for transformative dialogue. Computers and social media sites (SNS) also provide this distance; however, the accountability of digital co-presence in the Portal provides a unique space for the airing of grievances. This leads to the stripping away of usual performativities, with participants ceasing to "front" as the Milwaukee curator suggests. For Amani participants in Milwaukee this allowed for the emergence of an atmosphere of connection around a shared sense of place which eventually led to transformative dialogue between interlocutors. As interfaces become more experiential and less dis-embodied, the strategy of suspension allows users to sit in their discomfort while not risking the dangers of that discomfort when experienced face-to-face. Suspension allows

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for dialogue to emerges from the gathering of multiple perspectives and engaging the Portal and similar technologies as atmospheric highlights suspension as a condition of atmosphere – as shared affects are animated by the space of the shipping container and its digital relations.

The potential for curators to shape the ways in which shared affects gather into atmospheres further highlights the potential of every day talk as a strategy for dialogic transformation. Consistent with previous research on the efficacy of engaging the everyday to move towards more meaningful conversation (Graham & Wright, 2014; Graham et al., 2015a; 2015b), the Portal underscores how these more mundane exchanges act as a social glue (Basu, 1999) through the sharing of stories that focus on participant living/being rather than through more formal structures of knowing. As such, when shaping atmospheres of dialogic transformation curators might engage framing as a strategy by moving attention away from more formalized dialogue and framing the interactions inside the shipping container as the sharing of everyday likes, dislikes and activities. Additionally, encouraging participants to share stories about themselves, or simply come in to listen to the stories of others often re-frames the experience around the everyday yet allows for the recognition of oneself in the stories of others which then leads to more meaningful dialogue. Subsequently, by framing conversation around the everyday curators create the conditions necessary for participants to become suspended in transformative dialogue as imaginatively open themselves up to others.

This opening up to others occurs at least in part as a result of the space of the shipping container and its technological units. Additionally, the space of the container and its technological units further highlight a move toward the atmospheric when engaging new communication technologies. The Portal provides what the Colorado Springs curator

refers to as a "miracle" – an intimate, "comfortable space where anything is allowed." As technologies continue to blur the spaces between the physical and digital worlds, between public and private, designing these interfaces in ways that create a 'digital' co-presence may lead to the sharing of affect and the sort of *feeling with* necessary for transformative dialogue and human connection. When the technological units of the Portal interact to generate a feeling as if participants are in the same room these participants become enveloped in an atmosphere more conducive to dialogue. Böhme (2014) argues that atmospheres mediate between "states of a person" and "the objective qualities of an environment" (p. 92). The intimate space of the shipping container and its technological units modulate participant interaction as atmospheres of connection emanate from its gray carpeted walls and apprehend users into the conditions necessary for dialogue.

Dialogue is often difficult to achieve and just like atmosphere may struggle to take form. Using the language of atmosphere underscores how dialogue might "take us…rather than us intending it" (Poulos, 2008, p. 124). As such, curators attempt to set the conditions necessary for such "taking" – conditions that are contingent both on the participant and the interface, the subject and the object. Using the language of atmosphere when engaging new communication technologies breaks the subject/object, human/technology dichotomy. Atmosphere emphasizes how moments of dialogic transformation do not simply occur through the use of language and are not just contingent on the expression of affect. Additionally, the atmospheric highlights how dialogue is not limited to a particular materiality – to either the physical or the digital world. Instead, moments of dialogic transformation envelop, they are something external and thereby accessible to many subjects, "felt as intensely personal [yet] are impersonal in that they belong to collective situations" (Anderson, 2009, p. 80).

## New Communication Technologies as Atmospheric

*RQ5: What are the theoretical and practical implications of atmospheric interfaces on public life?*

The theoretical and practical implications of the atmospheric on public life have been articulated throughout this chapter and the previous analysis. However, it is important to return to the importance of atmosphere as a concept for understanding these implications. As a concept, atmosphere has received little attention in the discipline of communication. That said, Ott et al. (2016) suggest its heuristic value, particularly for qualitative and rhetorical scholars. They argue "when examining atmospheres, it is not possible to locate rhetorical inducements wholly on one side of the emotive/affective, signifying/asignifying divide" (p. 349). As such, atmospheres problematize the subject/object dichotomy, they do not take form as either emotion or affect, as the semiotic or the sensual. Instead they exist in the liminal spaces between these seemingly neat categories. Just as the Portal and its atmospheres operate in the airs between public and private, the shipping container as an atmospheric interface further highlights the ambiguity between the emotive/affective and the signifying/asignifying divide. It complicates the dichotomy between human and technology and suggests that both might affectively act upon one another "with quasi-objective sentiment, with feelings that are suspended in air" (Böhme, 2014, p. 93). Additionally, atmosphere may be shaped by aesthetic practices, making them particularly useful for rhetorical analysis. As such, the concept moves the study of rhetoric away from the symbolic *or* material and provides scholars with a conceptual frame for understanding the ways in which the sensual and articulations of the sensed intersect and interact. Additionally, understanding how aesthetic moments not only shape atmospheres but how participatory critical scholars

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might work to shape these atmospheres provides another useful tool for engaging in rhetorical advocacy. As such, the concept of atmosphere serves as a fruitful one for continued engagement in communication studies.

The utility of atmosphere as a heuristic device within communication studies is evidenced by its potential application to theories of the public sphere by underscoring how new communication technologies are shaping public life via a return to co-presence. While early conceptualizations of the public sphere were predicated on co-presence (Dewey, 1954; Habermas, 1989) recently scholars have questioned the importance of such presence in the shaping of public discourse (Delicath & DeLuca, 2003; DeLuca & Peeples, 2002). The concept of atmosphere suggests that new communication technologies mark a shift back towards co-presence and this shift highlights the importance of such digital co-presence in holding interlocutors accountable to one another. This accountability often leads to the emergence of dialogue, dialogue that might have a meaningful impact on how interlocutors conceptualize the persons, places and publics with whom they interact. While theories of the public sphere suggest that co-presence is not entirely necessary in the shaping of public discourse, the potential of a digital co-presence to both mediate and modulate interaction highlights how such presence may be important in generating productive dialogue. As such, attending to the atmospheric accounts for how particular airs might transform public discourse and how the affective force between persons, even when mediated, may have a profound effect on public life.

In addition to the atmospheric enriching theories of the public sphere, the concept of atmosphere highlights the potential in bridging geography and communication studies. While a robust conversation around atmosphere in geography has included its potential to

underscore how objects and technologies act upon users (Ash, 2013; Ash et al., 2018) much of this conversation encourages scholars to move away from the human to focus solely on the potential of the non-human. In communication studies conceptualizations of atmosphere have generally focused on atmosphere as mood (Highmore, 2013; Sumartojo, 2015) or as an inexplicably personal, human experience (Kasements, 2014). Subsequently, while geography has shifted its focus to the non-human, much of the use of atmosphere in communication studies has focused solely on the human. However, the previous analysis demonstrates that while ignoring the non-human fails to account for the ways in which objects act upon and subsequently shape public discourse, it is equally important to attend to the human as an integral unit in shaping the overall tones of public life. As such, both the human and non-human must be considered when engaging new communication technologies. While the "tiny universes" of technologies themselves have the potential to (re)shape interaction, the ways in which these universes act upon users *and* how users act upon them requires attention. The bridging of communication and geography here accounts for how the discursive and extra-discursive, the emotive/affective, signifying/asignifying, the human and the non-human are integral units in the shaping and re-shaping of public life.

The focus on both the material and symbolic underscores the potential of atmosphere to add nuance to conceptualizations of an emplaced rhetoric indicative of participatory critical rhetoric and rhetorical field methods generally. In conceptualizing an emplaced rhetoric, Middleton et al. (2015) articulate four axes of the field in participatory critical rhetoric. These axes suggest that an emplaced rhetoric is intersectional in that space/place operates as one of many units that influence the construction and enactment of rhetoric. Additionally, an emplaced rhetoric highlights

how "place/space is made, maintained, challenged, and performed through a co-relationship between bodies and environment" (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 96), that rhetoric is both material and symbolic, and that the field itself is a participant in rhetorical action. The focus here on both the material and symbolic thus suggest the value of the atmospheric to participatory rhetorical methods.

First, place accounts for both the physical site of fieldwork and the ways in which it might attune the researcher to particular ways of being in-place. Expanding on this attuning, atmosphere underscores the affective force of place and how such places not only attune the researcher to a sense of place but suspends them in particular airs. These airs then influence the potential for rhetorical action. Further, when the critic enters the site of rhetorical invention, they have the potential to shift the atmosphere of a particular place potentially dis/mis-placing other atmospheres that impact rhetorical activity. Atmosphere helps attune the critic to the affective force of place, moving beyond an understanding of the spatial practices of a particular place to account for the affects associated with such practices. Engaging atmosphere suggests that places, and the objects and bodies within them have the potential to press upon the critic shaping both their understanding of the field and the types of rhetorical activity that might occur in their surrounding airs.

Second, an emplaced rhetoric accounts for the field as a community of meaning. Moving beyond the field as a physical location, place as a community of meaning accounts for the discourses that shape a particular location and limits or expands its potential for particular types of rhetorical action. The previous analysis highlights how existing discourses come to shape a place and was most exemplified in the mistaking of the Milwaukee Portal for a drug container given its placement in a neighborhood known

for crime. Adding atmosphere to this understanding of an emplaced rhetoric recognizes that while the critic must understand the discourses that shape a particular place to effectively engage the types of rhetorical action that (might) occur there, they must further be attuned to the affects that accompany such discourses. Attuning to the atmospheric further accounts for how objects and/or bodies in a place might collide with atmospheres generated as bodies and things come into relation. As a community of meaning, atmosphere draws the critics attention to not only the discourses that shape a particular place and its practices but attunes them to the ways in which everything operating within a particular place interacts with those discourses to generate shifting airs that impact the rhetorical potential of the field.

Third, while participatory critical rhetoric already recognizes the sensorial experience of the field as context, atmosphere further animates the messiness of place as both text and context. The atmospheric accounts for how multiple places might operate within a particular geographic location as physical and virtual places interact and intermingle. In this way while people and place interanimate each other (Middleton et al., 2015), the atmospheric accounts for how people, objects and technologies act upon persons in a particular place and shape rhetorical action. Additionally, the atmospheric highlights how the potential to act upon bodies and things might shift generating new meanings that alter the potential for rhetorical activity. As such, the interactions between bodies and things when conceptualized as atmospheric accounts for both how places and people interanimate one another, and for how such interaction might shift in the volatility of air as these atmospheres bump-up against, merge and collide.

Finally, participatory critical rhetoric recognizes place as a rhetorical actor. In this way the atmospheric adds to this conceptualization by underscoring how such places not

only act, but act upon persons in the field. As the previous analysis suggests, competing atmospheres might alter the rhetorical potential of a place or a particular place may actually shape rhetorical action. Engaging the language of atmosphere highlights how place as a rhetorical actor might subsume persons into existing surrounds, interact with those airs surrounding bodies and objects within a particular place, and enact entirely new airs as these bodies and objects become suspended in the ubiquitous airs of the atmospheric.

The atmospheric adds nuance to the study of rhetoric in situ by attuning the scholar/critic to the shifting airs of an emplaced rhetoric and the impact of such rhetorical activity on public life. This suggests its utility for communication scholars by focusing researchers on both the ways in which persons shape place as well as how places shape rhetorical action. Additionally, the previous analysis underscores the utility of merging conceptualizations of atmosphere as emanating from technology in the discipline of geography with its articulation as exclusively human in communication studies. The merging of fields around the atmospheric accounts for how understanding public life must move beyond the symbolic *or* the material, highlighting the importance of both when engaging a rhetoric that is both sensed and sensual and how these aesthetic moments might be used as tools for rhetorical advocacy. Finally, atmosphere adds to theories of the public sphere through a return to digital co-presence that might alter public discourse by suspending interlocutors in airs of accountability with the potential for transformative dialogue.

In conclusion it is this return to a digital co-presence in the shaping of public life that highlights atmosphere as particularly useful when applied to new communication technologies. As demonstrated in the previous analysis, atmosphere illuminates how

technologies act upon users just as users act upon them. It provides a conceptual frame for understanding how these technologies perturb and the impact of such perturbation on human/technology relations. As human and technology relations become increasingly intertwined, atmosphere provides a concept for more fully articulating what these technologies are doing and how these doings impact public life. Use of atmosphere neither attends only to technologies as disembodied, nor focuses attention merely on the bodies of users. Instead, it draws attention to the airs between and the potentiality and pitfalls of these relations.

Just as technologies are neither about only the user or completely disembodied, engaging new interfaces as atmospheric recognizes the digital and the physical, the public and private are no longer distinct categories. Despite much of public life moving on rather than offline, technologies such as the Portal mark a shift back towards presence, a digital co-presence that has the same affective force as face-to-face relations but may work to mitigate some of the challenges (and dangers) of face-to-face interaction. And while the internet has made it possible to engage multiple spaces simultaneously, and mobile phones have doubled place through both physical and digital interaction, technologies such as the Portal point to a multiplying of spacetimes that make clear distinctions between the physical and the digital moot. As such, the concept of atmosphere attunes us to the complex gatherings these technologies create. To engage new technological interfaces as atmospheric is to account for the ways in which changing relations leave us tumbling through space – sometimes in a gold box.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello!

I am a graduate student under the direction of Aaron Hess in the School of Language and Cultures at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand the impact of new communication technologies (audio and augmented reality) in communicating cultural difference and informing public policy. I am recruiting individuals who have participated in Portals and Portal curators to participate in informal interviews, which will take approximately one hour. Individuals must be over 18 years of age. Interviews will be audio recorded to assist the researcher in thoroughly and accurately capturing the information shared, however, your name will not be associated with the interview information. All audio files will be transcribed anonymously for Portal participants and marked only by Portal location for curators to protect your identity and audio files will be erased upon completion of the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please e-mail me at Brandon.Ferderer@asu.edu.

Brandon B. Ferderer, M.A.
Hugh Downs School of Human Communication

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDES: PORTAL PARTICIPANTS AND CURATORS

INTERVIEW GUIDE: PORTAL PARTICIPANTS

(1) Informed consent: Have participant read the consent letter. Ask if there are any questions. Invite those who would not like to participate to leave. Those willing to participate must provide written consent to the researcher.

(2) Introduction: "Today we are here to talk about your participation in the Portal and the overall experience of connecting with a stranger through the Portal's technology. The one rule to keep in mind is there is no right or wrong answer to any question. Your experience of the Portal is what is most important. If at any point you become uncomfortable, we can move on to the next question or terminate the interview."

(3) Remind participant that the interview will be audio recorded; ask if they have a preferred pseudonym. Encourage them to also use pseudonyms when referencing the individuals with whom they spoke during their participation in the Portal.

**Assessing the potential of 'digital' co-presence via augmented reality technologies in fostering intercultural connection***

1. Describe your experience in the Portal…
   a. How did it feel?

2. Have you ever met/talked to anyone from the country/state/region that you connected with in the Portal?
   a. What were your initial thoughts about this place and the people there?

3. What did you talk about with your Portal's partner?
   a. Who initiated conversation?
   b. Did either of you direct conversation?

4. What did you expect from your Portal's partner?

5. Was there anything unexpected about your Portal's partner and/or the conversation you had?

6. Do you feel like you benefited from the experience?
   a. If so, how? If not, why?

7. What was your experience with the technology in the Portal?
   (was it cumbersome, noticeable, not noticeable, realistic, etc.)

**\*The included interview questions are a semi-structured guide and may not be asked verbatim. Additional 'probing' questions may be proposed during each interview.**

INTERVIEW GUIDE: PORTAL CURATORS

(1) Informed consent: Read consent form to participant and get verbal consent to audio record phone call and signed consent via electronic mail. Ask if there are any questions. Invite those who would not like to participate to leave. Those willing to participate must provide written consent to the researcher.

(2) Introduction: "Today we are here to talk about your role as a Portal curator and the ways in which you work to connect participants through the Portal's technology. The one rule to keep in mind is there is no right or wrong answer to any question. Your experience curating the Portal is what is most important. If at any point you become uncomfortable, we can move on to the next question or terminate the interview."

**(3)** Remind participant that the interview will be audio recorded; ask if they have a preferred pseudonym and remind them that while they may use a pseudonym interview data may be associated with their specific Portal/Portal location.

**Assessing the role of the curator in fostering intercultural and cross-cultural dialogue via digital interfaces such as the Portal\***

1. Given the location of your Portal, have you found that it further activates the space of the square? In other words, what do you feel has been the overall impact of the Portal in this location?

2. Given the potential of the Portal for intercultural connection have you ever curated a connection that you felt did not go particularly well? If so, could you discuss that connection with me?

3. Similarly, have you ever experienced a connection that you think went particularly well in terms of the Portal's potential to dispel media narrative/challenge participant perceptions? If so, could you tell me about this connection?

4. I've heard informally from other curators that one of the most exciting parts of curating is being part of the curator network. Can you talk to me about your experience in this network, what you've gained from it, any challenges you have faced etc.?

5. How would you describe the Portal experience?

6. What do you think are the most beneficial connections in the Portal?

**\*The included interview questions are a semi-structured guide and may not be asked verbatim. Additional 'probing' questions may be proposed during each interview.**

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL

Aaron Hess
CISA: Language and Cultures
602/496-0652
aaron.hess@asu.edu

Dear Aaron Hess:

On 2/15/2019 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of Review: | Initial Study |
| Title: | Understanding the relationship between technology, user and curator of intercultural connection through the digital interface of the Portal |
| Investigator: | Aaron Hess |
| IRB ID: | STUDY00009680 |
| Funding: | None |
| Grant Title: | None |
| Grant ID: | None |
| Documents Reviewed: | • Revised Ferderer IRB.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Portals Appendix F Revised.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Portals Appendix D.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Portals Appendix C.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Portals Appendix E Revised .pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Portals Appendix A.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Portals Appendix B.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; |

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 2/15/2019.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:
      Brandon Ferderer