

3-19-2021

## The Value of *Sleep*: Aura and Aesthetics of Cohabitation in Juha Lilja's Revision of Warhol

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**The Value of *Sleep*: Aura and Aesthetics of Cohabitation**

**in Juha Lilja's Digital Revision of Warhol**

**by**

**Christopher Costabile**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Liberal Arts  
with a concentration in Film Studies  
Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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**Date of Approval:  
March 11, 2021**

**Keywords: Walter Benjamin, YouTube, digital video, experimental music, installation art**

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## Abstract

This thesis positions Juha Lilja's 2013 digital video work, *Sleep*, as a prime example of what the author terms an "aesthetics of cohabitation" — a newly suggested method of artistic creation set in opposition to capitalist society's commodification of both space and time, represented here through the work of Robert Hass and Jonathan Crary. Lilja's eight-hour-long video work, which is accessible on YouTube, is a reimagining and re-envisioning of Andy Warhol's film of the same name. It subverts the intended function of digital streaming platforms while using digital technology to meet aesthetic criteria in shot length and overall duration, which Warhol could not meet due to technological limitations in the 1960's. By invoking and extending Boris Groys's contemporary interpretation of Walter Benjamin's concept of aura, the author argues that aura can be reconstituted in the home space through a process of cohabitating with digital works which employ a unique confluence of spatiotemporal design, experimental aesthetics, and experience of the work over long durations. In order to elucidate this process, the essay draws parallels between Lilja's work and experimental music by Alvin Lucier, Maryanne Amacher and La Monte Young. Ultimately, the following question is posed: can sleeping during a work of art — particularly a visual work throughout which the main subject also sleeps — be considered not only a valid form of artistic appreciation, but potentially an auratic form of cohabitation that might alleviate extreme bouts of alienation brought on by ever-increasing engagement with digital apparatuses, and their projected media, during life in quarantine due to the COVID pandemic?

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Sleep will always collide with the demands of a 24/7 universe. The huge portion of our lives that we spend asleep, freed from a morass of simulated needs, subsists as one of the great human affronts to the voraciousness of contemporary capitalism. Sleep is an uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism....Sleep poses the idea of a human need and interval of time that cannot be colonized and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability....In spite of all the scientific research in this area, it frustrates and confounds any strategies to exploit or reshape it. The stunning, inconceivable reality is that nothing of value can be extracted from it.

— Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (10)

There are cinephiles who consider the aisles of a movie theater to be hallowed ground on which the truest form of film appreciation takes place. Some purists won't even begin to entertain the notion that digitally-shot video viewed in isolation on a tablet or smartphone can possibly constitute a cinematic experience, let alone one that could produce vivid memories or hold significant impact on the viewer's life. Only a 35 or 70mm print projected onto an enormous screen in an auditorium full of spectators could offer such a perspective-altering event. As Haidee Wasson says, the theater "undergirds histories of the powerful American industry, changing leisure patterns, and enduring theories that seek to assess the specific language of film and its relationships to subjectivity, identity, and experience." (v.)

But in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns disrupted daily life across the world, forcing countless theaters to close, while distancing human interaction and rapidly accelerating our transition to digital interfaces for nearly every facet of existence — a transition that was already inevitable before the onset of the pandemic. By substituting in-person

experience — even something as mundane as filling a real shopping cart full of groceries — with a virtual version like Instacart, the pandemic has increased our needs and desires for what media theorist Robert Hassan calls "immaterial accumulations," fostering an economic model founded on digital experiences like touching a screen or entering a code, which substitute for experiences we once undertook in person with other individuals. Some of these immaterial accumulations are experiential in nature, and serve as personal benchmarks brandishing amounts of time spent engaging with digital interfaces, like the number of hours spent playing a particular video game or listening to music on Spotify. These trends threaten to be a death knell for the era of theater-going as our primary way of watching new films, as well as concerts as a means of hearing music. Before COVID struck, market giants like Netflix and Amazon had already positioned themselves not just as substitutes for the theater experience, but also as major players in the development and distribution of new, marquee films. Two of the nine Best Picture nominees in 2020 were original Netflix productions, with the slate of new films produced by streaming companies increasing yearly. Theatrical runs are no longer needed by these companies. For some productions, like Scorsese's *The Irishman*, a theater run has become a mere negotiating chip — a bone to throw filmmakers and their diehard fans as a means for contracting a marquee director or actor/producer. From our vantage point at the middle of the pandemic, one can see theaters veering in the same direction as vinyl record stores — a novelty visited only by the aforementioned purists.

With or without the restrictions imposed on us by this virus, current trends in temporal media point to the need for new, rich aesthetic forms that can be experienced in isolated environments. Late capitalism's rapid and drastic changes to the ways we experience media and gather information — again, as accelerated by the pandemic — will, in turn, rapidly and drastically change *us*. Twenty-first century consumers find themselves under constant duress by media conglomerates to download more, skip to the next song, buy additional cloud space, use algorithmic filters, and perform countless other actions intended to convert data into dollars.

Although the digital commodification of moving images has lagged behind other media due to the form's greater information storage requirements, Hassan states in his recent book, *The Condition of Digitality*,

Capitalism, and by extension, accumulation, have undergone a mutation in response to their changed technological environment...Analogue accumulation became digital accumulation with the introduction and establishment of digitality as the environment within which accumulation takes place...[this chapter] is meant to signal the importance of time and space for the processes of accumulation. With the digitalisation of time and space, capitalism has broken free from the technological shackles of analogue technique. (77)

The result for consumers means our digitized media experiences are shorter, but they're also more plentiful. Price tags are smaller too, but now they appear (on the screens of our banking apps) every month, every week, or every time we click on a link. Hassan's process of "accumulation" is controlled by algorithmic industrial forces which dictate things like cost, membership and freedom of choice, and which seek to exert control over more than just our devices and information. Having already expanded our accumulations of objects like book collections or letters from friends by digitizing and evaporating their materiality in the form of ebooks and emails, through our use of their proprietary virtual platforms which daily become more intrusively essential amid the pandemic, these same forces try to further commodify our very experience of time and space.

So how does one reconcile the *quantity* of time in which we're forced to engage with the digital apparatus, with the *quality* of time we naturally seek as individual human beings and valuable members of society? With texting, social media, online shopping, and myriad other digital tools already distancing members of society from human interaction, what sort of isolated,

personal experiences can individuals (many of whom live alone) seek out now that they find their spatial dimensions further confined while in a state of quarantine? In a resistant response to our accelerating digital conditions, this essay suggests a series of formal principles for digital media creation, as well as its experience, which I call an “aesthetics of cohabitation.” I cite existing examples of media, foremost among them Juha Lilja’s 2013 digital video *Sleep* (a reimagining of Andy Warhol’s film of the same title), which I believe contribute to a phenomenology for audiences that counteracts the suffocating condition of late capitalism’s digitization of our once-analogue spaces which has been compounded by pandemic quarantines. Necessary for this process of cohabitation is artwork which interacts with both the experiencer and the experiencer’s space — often through long durations — in a way that signifies the presence of another embodied entity in the room, and here I suggest that Lilja’s *Sleep* illustrates this phenomenon both through its experimental aesthetic and its willingness to employ digital technologies that invoke formerly unprecedented manipulations of space and time. If an observer or listener is willing to submit to often long, unorthodox modes of experiencing works such as this, a cohabitation aesthetic can emerge from the interaction between the embodied individual, the work which implies a second embodiment, and their entanglement within the unique spatiotemporal conditions of the individual’s chosen room.

While Hassan’s 2020 book deals specifically with digital commodifications of space, in Jonathan Crary’s *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2014), he shows how technological intrusions of late capitalism have attempted to constantly and fundamentally commandeer and recalibrate our experience of time so that they impede our ability to sleep, accentuating as much as possible the condition of wakeful production. These texts establish a seemingly impenetrable 21st century culture of digital commodification, which I use as a backdrop to discuss how artists and scholars can push back against these conditions through a cohabitation aesthetic. We are so ingrained in a culture of digital immateriality infiltrating both our space and time that fully eluding it is impossible, but cohabitation with these forms may hold the potential to transcend at

least some fundamental aspects of this condition. Of particular importance is the democratized use of forms which invoke the same commodified platforms we seek to resist, such as industry-leaders like YouTube, Twitch, and the major social media platforms which encourage artists to conform the spatiotemporal qualities of their work to industry standards. Via algorithms, these platforms attempt to divert the viewer's attention to short video after short video, which like a drug, acts upon the viewer's pleasure principle and intends to keep them watching as long as possible while rarely providing meaningful experiences. Perhaps engaging in an act of rebellion, Lilja makes *Sleep* readily accessible on YouTube, allowing a consistent streaming experience of all eight hours of his film. Like Lilja, artists and users of these media formats should amplify the most counterhegemonic of aesthetic elements the platforms offer, such as YouTube's uninterrupted streaming, and turn them against themselves to create protracted experiences of time and reconditioned applications of space that function as a form of resistance to the opposite conditions these platforms cultivate. The utilization of digital apparatuses to invoke experiences heretofore impossible in reproduced media, such as uninterrupted long duration via platforms like mp3 and mp4, time-stretched audio without corruption of pitch, cloud-based memory which allows for greater storage capacity — all of these products of capitalism are necessary tools for combatting the industries that wrought them and fashioning the aesthetics of cohabitation I advocate for here.

In addition to the use of digital media, an aesthetic of cohabitation also requires a focus on artworks that manipulate the experiencer's sense of space and time. The most fertile landscape to find this phenomenon is in 1960's New York avant-garde scenes which were determined to explode the boundaries between separate media and blur lines between music, painting, literature, and other forms to the point where all art functions primarily as experience rather than object. Although movements like FLUXUS, minimalism, pop art and indeterminacy were founded or prominent in the 60's, these movements, through the work of individual artists bearing intensely heterodox influences and methods, carried much of the aesthetic forged

during this time period into work created in the decades afterward. The aesthetics of these works, in tandem with advancements in technology, translated the effect of a live experiences or “happening” embedded in the work to reproducible versions released commercially on discs or tapes. Among these works, long-duration experimental cinema like that of Warhol, Michael Snow, and others first began to play with extended duration and psychological manipulation of viewers in the 1960’s, and Lilja’s work takes their ideas further into the realm of cohabitation. Recently, Kornelia Boczkowska’s essay has recontextualized Warhol’s early cinematic ventures to show how they function as precursors of the slow cinema movement usually acknowledged to be rooted in the work of international art cinema directors like Andrei Tarkovsky and Chantal Akerman. Following Boczkowska, Warhol’s work eventually paved the way toward a slow cinema aesthetic, which has for years resisted or accounted for the same types of hyper-commodified indulgences of quick cuts, high-budget action narratives and reality TV binge-watching, which have multiplied and accelerated for viewers today. As Crary points out, “there are now very few significant interludes of human existence (with the colossal exception of sleep) that have not been penetrated and taken over as work time, consumption time, or marketing time.” (15) I argue the slow cinema aesthetic, augmented by digital techniques in Lilja’s *Sleep*, combats the conditions outlined by Crary, and functions as a primary example of a work that utilizes and subverts digital tools produced and manufactured with capitalistic intent, while adhering to aesthetics that resist the technologically atemporal impositions of late capitalism. In its bid to cohabit with the viewer, it seeks instead to provide a meaningful, unique event accessible in the viewer’s own personal space. By channeling Warhol, who comes with his own litany of commercial associations (which are largely beyond the scope of this writing), Lilja complicates Crary’s point, implying that sleep is so important the viewer should set aside eight hours worth of capitalist obligations to cohabit with a video of a man sleeping, while at the same time hosting his work on the commodified platform of YouTube and existing as yet another form of consumption undertaken on a digital device.

In seeking to position Lilja's work as a foil to the immaterial, atemporal conditions outlined by Hassan and Crary, respectively, I examine it through an extension of Boris Groys's interpretation of Walter Benjamin's auratic theory in his work "The Topology of Contemporary Art." While Groys argued that aura can be reproduced in the contemporary gallery space via installation work, I advance Groys's position to show that avant-garde digital media like Lilja's, through the cohabitative act, can also result in the reconstitution of auratic events within the home viewing space. This occurs not just through cohabitation of the viewer and the mediated work of art, but also (what Hassan would call) the "analogue" space reproduced and represented digitally in the work, cohabitating with the unique analogue space and time inhabited by the viewer's embodied self while experiencing the work. In order to adequately define and qualify the methods behind what I deem "cohabitation", and the means by which the reconstitution of aura allows for a resistance to Hassan's "condition of digitality," I additionally address phenomenological events by invoking experimental music — specifically those in which the composer's intention is to engage the embodied listener through techniques that can cause their spatiotemporal experience to vary significantly depending on when, where and how the listener engages with the work. To properly extend Groys's view of aura, it is necessary to show how more contemporary approaches to formal aesthetics effectively turn the experiencer's unique room space into something approaching the equivalent of an installation gallery space, a phenomenon most prominent in musical works of composers with ties to the 1960's avant-garde.

Music, with its abstract yet all-consuming spatial qualities, presents itself as an ideal medium to examine in this context, because while cinema locks the viewer's gaze into a monocular perspectival space, the freedom Lilja invokes through both durational and digital presentation places its treatment of space in line with that of experimental music. For artists like Alvin Lucier, Maryanne Amacher and La Monte Young, durational and architectural techniques contribute to the reconstitution of aura, drawing parallels in their aesthetics to Lilja's work with

digital video. I argue that Lilja extends some of these aesthetic techniques using the more concrete medium of representational video, working with digital tools and on digital platforms that suggest cohabitation through Lilja's constant embodied presence on screen, while co-creating an experience of space both constructive and emblematic of our current pandemic-era condition. Several theorists, like art curator Manuel Cirauqui and musicologist Cecelia Sun, make prescient arguments about the transposition of experimental music from recording space to listening space, and how the value in much avant-garde work created in the mid-twentieth century can be found not in its objectification through analysis of recordings or scores, but in audience experience, interplay and reaction to these works. Avant-garde art that placed emphasis on these forms didn't fully emerge until after Benjamin's formulation of his theories about aura, and by examining not only scholarly theory, but also some of the live, phenomenologically recorded experiences of these works, I show how they can make possible the reconstitution of aura in a small room or solitary listening (or viewing) space. In doing so, I argue that some specific "dimensions" of these works, particularly their approach to time, space, "fidelity," and the observer/listener's embodiment within a unique environment, all contribute to the reconstitution of an original "auratic event." Subsequently, I show how Lilja's work parallels and builds on some of these techniques, adding concrete context in the form of the literal cohabitative experience of human sleep, as well as digital advancements that enable uninterrupted temporality and the transposition of embodied space, to produce a more complete form of cohabitation.

### “The Slow Style”

Lilja’s *Sleep* begins with a static, black-and-white shot nearly an hour in length, with no cuts but a couple of digitally-edited zooms onto details of Lilja’s nude back and backside — a position and shot that is a direct homage to the earlier Warhol film. Warhol’s lover, the poet and actor John Giorno was also seen in the nude in Warhol’s iteration of the film, and the stark way in which Lilja’s room is lit also seems like an intentional throwback to the look of the original rendition of *Sleep*. Staticky lines scroll across the screen that appear to have been generated by a digital filter to make the movie look like it was shot on old film stock. During Lilja’s opening hour the viewer hears little other than the ambience of the artist’s room, but there is a very audible ticking clock, and every once in a while, a standard-issue five-note whistle notification from Lilja’s cell phone can be heard going off in the background. When this first occurred in my initial viewing of the video, I wondered whether a phone or other device in my own room had made the sound, before realizing it had emanated from Lilja’s room, now encased within (or perhaps *encasing*) my own. So little happens during this first hour that the viewer begins to notice extremely minor details — several unmoving shadows on a dresser, Lilja’s breathing growing louder and slower. When Lilja slightly rustles in bed, the viewer looks intently at the screen to see if it could possibly amount to something approaching narrative or action. But Lilja subverts those expectations, keeps sleeping, and as time passes, the viewer begins to feel increasingly at ease, while Lilja himself begins to seem increasingly *present* within the viewer’s room. When the first cut finally occurs at nearly the one-hour mark, simultaneously disembodying and re-embodying Lilja in a different position, it feels like a monumental event.

Though it diverges from Warhol’s work in numerous ways, it’s worth comparing the two versions to help contextualize Lilja’s goals and motivations for making this piece. Lilja’s work reimagines and revises Warhol’s 1964 film, purposefully invoking digital cameras, filters, and

even aerial drone shots, while capturing the durational vision Warhol intended but ultimately compromised due to technological limitations at the time. It seems clear that Warhol originally sought an aesthetic not unlike the one in his work *Empire* — a long static shot of the Empire State Building — and with *Sleep* intended to capture eight straight hours of unencumbered sleep, but was unable to do so. Thus, Lilja's work purposefully engages with technological devices, methods and platforms that allow him to document a full eight hours of his sleeping self — as opposed to Warhol's five hours and 21 minutes — and extend Warhol's aesthetic beyond anything possible in the 1960's. Another aspect that lends Lilja's work a greater sense of cohabitation, as opposed to Warhol's repetitive visual document of a live event, is that Warhol's version featured an actor (his lover John Giorno), whereas Lilja's work is completely authored by himself. Lilja acts as director, cinematographer, composer, and also "stars" as the nude sleeper, making him alone with us (the viewer), whereas Warhol was physically present in the room to film Giorno, granting the work a more exhibitional context in contrast to the intimacy found in Lilja's. Additionally, Lilja uses takes of up to an hour long, with different camera positions and digitally-manufactured zooms and pans within static shots, whereas Warhol was forced to use loops of filmed content only a few minutes in length. Lilja also adds additional flourishes such as the superimposed dream sequences and an electronic soundtrack that evolves slowly and interplays with his room's ticking clock, which becomes an aural metaphor for the way his film engages with time at the heart of its aesthetic.

Lilja's soundtrack is emblematic of the artistic touches in his work that diverge aesthetically from Warhol's, encompassing a slow cinema aesthetic, albeit one which delves even further into slow cinematic territory than most examples of the form in its capturing of a live event with no narrative whatsoever (most slow cinema still grazes narrative content within a fictional context). The soundtrack begins a couple hours into the piece as a subtle synthesizer drone that the listener hardly notices. Gradually, the pieces grows louder as it interplays with the sounds of Lilja's clock and breathing — percussion is added, as well as a hypnotic melody that

modulates every so often, keeping the viewer entranced, but also making them aware of the work and their own surroundings occasionally. Although the music itself does not invoke experiential phenomena that attempt to cohabit with the viewer (listener) in the same way as the experimental music I analyze in this essay, it complements Lilja's overall cohabitation aesthetic by mirroring the hypnotic pace of several of his dream sequences and thus adding depth to the connection between Lilja's own subconscious and the viewer's. And it does so in an unobtrusive manner, while offering the viewer another aesthetic element with which to engage, whether the viewer chooses to focus intently on the artwork, or simply let it inhabit the room. Lilja's largely subtle, hypnotic music allows for the possibility of either experience.

Warhol's version, which could perhaps be considered even less eventful than Lilja's due to its lack of any soundtrack or dream sequences, often gets categorized under an "aesthetics of boredom", with some authors like Scott Richmond, in his piece "Vulgar Boredom," claiming that while Warhol's films invoke a meta-boredom that subverts vulgar events, they are still profoundly boring because of how little happens. In his film *Blow Job*, for example, we see only a man's face while he is presumably receiving off-camera oral sex. He then smokes a cigarette, forcing the viewer to wonder if the "blow" in question had more to do with the cigarette smoke; or even here in *Sleep*, where Warhol's lover John Giorno's naked body is eroticized via specific camera angles, setting up the expectation of an upcoming presentation of sexuality, only to leave the viewer with five and a half hours of Giorno sleeping and occasionally rustling his head about. While "ambient film" might work as a more appropriate designation, since Warhol himself encouraged people to move about and participate in other activities during his films, the "boredom" label treats these films as too readily dismissable and also seems presumptuous in regard to individual viewer interpretation. Art scholar Branden Joseph instead envisions Warhol's *Sleep* as a work entrenched in an aesthetic of repetition, since many viewers have historically failed to acknowledge the looped sections of only a few minutes in length. While Joseph's reading of the film is valuable in that it fits snugly with both Warhol's paintings and

other repetitive avant-garde work of the period like FLUXUS pieces and early minimalism, I agree with Kornelia Boczkowska's recent short essay "Boredom Revisited, Or How Andy Warhol Predated Slow Cinema," which recontextualizes Warhol's films as works of proto-slow cinema, arguing that they "enable viewers to gain a temporary relief from profound boredom which is occasionally interwoven with captivation." (159) Analyzing the Jørgen Leth film of Warhol eating a burger, but extending her claims to Warhol's own films as well, she argues that elements like the act of eating, Warhol's stardom, the juxtaposition of a privileged person in a suit eating fast food slowly, and even a line where he remarks that the ketchup is stuck in the bottle, all constitute contextual elements that place that film and Warhol's own early film experiments more in line with slow cinema. She concludes "the boredom Leth exploits is one based on nostalgia and absurdism and therefore remains closely linked to slow cinema aesthetics." (159)

Boczkowska's point about "occasionally interwoven captivation" especially resonates with Lilja's version of *Sleep*, as Lilja edits this film with definitive artistic intent to highlight these moments of captivation. For instance, at 56:30 Lilja turns over for the first time, which prompts the film's first cut to a close-up of his head buried in his arm, which subsequently prompts the first dream sequence to occur, superimposed onto this new shot. All of this occurs within the span of one minute, illustrating how Lilja seeks to highlight moments of captivation and use them to impose a loose sense of formal structure onto the film. These choices, along with elements like stylized lighting and long, static takes, move the film away from mere process or experiment and firmly into the realm of slow cinema. Despite this, Lilja's film does intermittently straddle other genres, from documentary to the way his dream sequences echo early French impressionist film, however the "live-ness" of his work, coupled with its intensely long overall duration, plays a pivotal role in the process of cohabitation. This is especially evident in its presentation of space and the way it affects the viewer. As slow cinema scholar Tiago de Luca points out in his essay "Slow Time, Visible Cinema," "through its contemplative mode of

address, slow cinema elicits a heightened awareness of the viewing situation” and he goes on to write “the slow style, with its deflated pauses and rhythms, diverts attention away from the screen and onto the film theater itself.” (25, 38). Though his essay is largely focused on the theater experience, “the slow style,” as de Luca calls it, of static camera placement, exceptionally long takes, and little to no narrative elements, not only fosters a greater awareness of the minutia taking place on screen, but also makes the viewer hyper-aware of their own embodiment within their space. By the time Lilja's phone notification goes off, causing the viewer to question whether it occurred in their own living space, it has become apparent that through the paced ticking of the clock, Lilja’s occasional rustling and breathing, and the overall ambience of his room represented on screen and via sound, that the durational occupation of the work within the viewer's space has resulted in a superimposition of Lilja’s virtual space onto the viewer’s living space — the digital overlaid onto the analogue, altogether forging a new type of “here and now” shared by the viewer and the work.

## Reconstituting Aura

There is value in applying Benjamin's auratic theory to contemporary works given the aura's ties to problems of memory, authenticity, and what Benjamin calls "the here and now" of a "unique existence in a particular place," (22) but it's worth noting some ways in which auratic theory must be refined from its original form before it can be adequately applied to today's vastly more abstract and complex reproductions like Lilja's *Sleep* or Hassan's digitized "accumulations", which exist only in virtual space prior to being converted to light and sound via algorithms on our digital devices. While overlooking some of the problematic aspects of industrializing artworks, Benjamin viewed mass reproducibility as a phenomenon powerful enough to spur social change on a wide scale, which would erase the importance of the authenticity of aura as determined by institutions and the elite classes, and at last place art in front of the gaze of the commoner "in his or her own situation," who would in turn "actualize that which is reproduced." He heralded this as a "shattering of tradition which is the reverse side of the present crisis and renewal of humanity. Both processes are intimately related to the mass movements of our day....for the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual." (22) Benjamin also notably suggested about the processes of reproducibility that "their most powerful agent is film." Nearly a century out from these claims in his seminal essay, some scholars debate whether there is any value left in invoking the auratic as a lens through which to view artwork and culture. At the beginning of her piece "Room for Play: Benjamin's Gamble With Cinema," Miriam Hansen wrestles with the prospect of once again returning to the "Artwork" essay, discussing its different versions, problematic history, and mentioning the fact that fellow theorist Peter Wollen suggested "the essay should be shelved altogether." (3) Elsewhere, Hansen points out

instances in Benjamin's own works, like his "Little History of Photography" and unpublished hashish experiments, where he complicates and contradicts the relatively straightforward claim of his own infamous "artwork essay" that states reproductions of works necessarily deteriorate and destroy aura. By connecting aura to nature and defining it as a gaze that can be returned, distinguishing between "genuine" and "simulated" auras (and implying that in its genuine form it can under certain conditions be incorruptible), and admitting much of the auratic argument was established as a polemical attack on the theosophists whom Benjamin admitted he found "repugnant" (*Benjamin's Aura*, 351, 356-358), Hansen unearths the grounds upon which Benjamin himself undermined a strict adherence to the claim that mechanical reproductions at mass scale would ultimately result in the destruction of aura.

Indeed, while Benjamin's own writings reveal ways in which auratic theory is perhaps more fungible and problematic a theoretical lens than previously thought, another shortcoming of the work is its inability to account for artistic movements and aesthetic principles which arrived after its inception in 1935. Cage's indeterminacy, Pollock's abstract expressionism, musical minimalism, FLUXUS — there is an exhaustive list of foundational experimental artistic practices that have sprung forth since Benjamin's writing, most of which place a profound importance on the observer's interactive participation with the work as it exists in "the here and now" — though this is certainly a here and now Benjamin could not have predicted — and all this is to say nothing of digital media. In his discussion of the digital condition, Hassan is almost entirely dismissive of pre-digital cultural theorists like Adorno, Debord, and Baudrillard, stating "their perspectives no longer suffice as critique of the production of culture today, because although there was significant analytical purchase when they were written, they were conceived in a pre-digital time, and with analogue-dependent theories guiding their logic." (10) Though he doesn't specify Benjamin on his list of names, it isn't difficult to imagine Hassan counting Benjamin's aura among these other "pre-digital" theories unfit to grapple with late capitalism as manifested in contemporary digital culture.

While I agree with Hassan that in many respects — the onset of the internet age does require a theoretical framework that accounts for digitality — Benjamin’s auratic theory is at once both undercut and granted new life by the aforementioned advancements of the 50’s and 60’s avant-garde, and in ways that have nothing to do with digital technology. In his original essay, Benjamin was attracted to Dada as a movement which seemed to bypass the creation of aura by treating paintings, literature and other media with an aesthetics akin to that of photography and film — one of pure reproduction. He says, “What they achieved...was a ruthless annihilation of the aura in every object they produced, which they branded as a reproduction through the very means of its production.” (39) Given the tendency in avant-garde forms to tear down the very fabric of objective media platforms, and the auratic as a theoretical framework concerned with formal aesthetics, it follows that our understanding of the two should evolve together and complement one another. A common thread among avant-garde artistic movements that evolved after Benjamin’s writings on aura is their reliance on the involvement of the embodied experience of the observer in a particular environment to co-create some or all of the work’s essential effects. Installation work became common practice among serious artists, and in the 60’s especially, conceptual art challenged fundamental notions of time, space, and reproduction. Composers began to write pieces where “tape” or “loops” were designated as one of the instruments. Graphic scores by John Cage (and other FLUXUS members), La Monte Young’s infamous text-based musical pieces, *Compositions 1960*, or even a film such as Stan Brakhage’s *Moth Light* — these works blurred lines between media, calling attention to the fundamental materials of their respective media, demanding interactivity with the experiencer of the work, and begging the question of whether these pieces existed as original, auratic works, or as reproductions — a question for which there is no simple answer.

If one were to adhere strictly to Benjamin’s argument about the deterioration of aura, these types of works retroactively problematize it, but when viewing reproductions from the perspective that under the right conditions, they are capable of refashioning or at least

reconstituting aura, or creating what I would describe as “an auratic event” for the experiencer of the work, these types of pieces bestow new relevance on auratic theory. They cast aura as a potential process for overcoming and searching for meaning within the intensely commodified landscape of contemporary media platforms. In this context, Benjamin’s theory has, like a weed that yields aesthetically-pleasing flowers over time, evolved its own response to the critics of his era. One of those original critics was Benjamin’s Frankfurt school interlocutor, Theodore Adorno, who warned against the unintended effects of mass reproduction. In “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” Adorno argued that through exposure to shorter, more commodified versions of musical pieces (at one point he analogizes a listener placing a key moment in Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony into their pocket), the avid and meaningful listener would succumb to the “fetish character” of music and become an “acquiescent purchaser,” predicting that the mass manufacturing of records would cause music to permanently cross over into commodified objectification and become desired only for its exchange-value (279). At this point, he says, “the isolated moments of enjoyment prove incompatible with the immanent constitution of the work of art, and whatever in the work goes beyond them to an essential perception is sacrificed to them. They are not bad in themselves but in their diversionary function.” (273) While Benjamin envisioned a culture that would democratically experience and embrace full artworks on a mass scale, Adorno correctly predicted the forces of industry would so thoroughly commodify musical works that the purchase of a record or the experience of a song would take place in service of hooking the listener with catchy tunes, jingles, or even advertisements merely meant to coax them into buying and accumulating more. Thus a masterwork like *Symphony 7* reduces down to a handful of notes from its famous climax, when the inverse should take place — the handful of notes should function as one small but important facet that complements and informs the listener’s experience of the work as a whole.

As Hassan shows, in the digital age, this phenomenon has grown exponentially, bolstered by the elimination of spatial boundaries for digital accumulations:

The sea-change stems from a 'mutation' in the processes of accumulation, a mutation caused by digitality and its capacity to create a new kind of accumulation because of the existence of a new form of space — a virtual and networked digitality that has rendered accumulation as a process no longer limited by physical geography. This is a logic of accumulation, by virtue of its virtuality, that is able to colonise social and cultural life much more deeply than before, exposing almost every register of existence as vulnerable to commodification. (6)

Thus, a device that can fit in a pocket allows us to accumulate limitless numbers of digital "objects", and in an age of cloud storage and streaming one wonders whether "accumulations" is even the most appropriate word. Elsewhere Hassan uses the term "flows" — just as capital flows across the globe in neoliberal economic parlance, information and content flows through our devices so that the number of views or listens themselves become a type of "accumulation", proudly tallied for us by our personalized software. It is evident what Hassan means when he says the works of a pre-digital theorist such as Adorno are rendered inadequate to evaluate the digital cultural landscape, because the commodified materials themselves have taken on an entirely new quality in their digital form — their immateriality allows them to manifest in spaces (or non-spaces) and multiply at a rate Adorno's work couldn't have possibly addressed, and perpetually compound upon each other to create palimpsests of experience which are only fleetingly entwined with our corporeal existence.

As previously stated, however, an evolved version of Benjamin's aura remains valuable as a lens with which to analyze reproductions of artworks "in the here and now" — a phrase which, amid the COVID-19 quarantines, as well as advances in both aesthetics and

technologies that allow for the portability of the auratic, has outgrown Adorno's critiques, and increasingly applies to a variety of places, but pertinently in an age of quarantine, to the confines of the experiencer's own housing space. Here I turn to Boris Groys's interpretation of aura as outlined in his "Topology of Contemporary Art". In Groys's estimation, Benjamin "overlooked the possibility — and thus the unavoidability — of reauratizations, relocations, and new topological inscriptions of a copy" and also that "the modern age organizes a complex interplay of dislocations and relocations, of deterritorializations and reterritorializations, of deauratizations and reauratizations." (74) He points out that a single shot of film footage can be exhibited in a theater, digitized and viewed on a computer, inserted into a larger artwork in a gallery, and so on, to the point where its "reproductions" are so altered, recombined, reconstituted, and removed from the original source, one must accept the fact these new versions may be capable of forging some form of aura in their own right. For Groys, the ideal setting for these "reauratizations" is the art gallery installation space, which he describes as "a socially codified variation of individual flaneurship...a place for the aura." Given Benjamin's precedent for the importance of the "here and now" in generating a work's aura, Groys is justified in arguing that the durational process and interactivity necessary for an audience to properly absorb an installation piece, along with installation work's often intensely specific spatial design, allows for reproductions of items to be arranged in an installation setting and recodified into artwork that allows for an original, auratic event. Exemplified by Lilja's *Sleep*, the advancement and conjunction of avant-garde methods with particular digital technologies has allowed for a comparable version of the auratic-inducing installation experience into the individual experiencer's home, granting viewers and listeners the potential to recreate auratic events in their own unique space via an aesthetics of cohabitation.

While he doesn't address the interplay of the digital work with the analogue space of the experiencer the way I do here, or the way Groys does in his discussion of auratic installation work, philosopher Jos de Mul has already laid some groundwork for the potential reconstitution

of aura using digital technology. De Mul views this phenomenon as a result of the user interfacing with a virtually endless array of “digital recombinations”, stating,

As the number of recombinations of a database is almost infinite, the work of art in the age of digital recombination brings about a return of the aura. Especially in those cases where the user is enabled to change the contents of the database and to insert new elements in the database, each query becomes a unique recombination. And as a consequence, the digitally recombined work of art regains something of its ritual dimension.

Although de Mul and Groys both undermine Benjamin’s assertions about the demise of the aura, one of the essential stakes of his original argument about “mechanical reproducibility” was the reproduced object’s ability to democratize messages embedded in the original auratic work in order to engage large theaters full of people. Though my proposal for an aesthetics of cohabitation with digital works places an emphasis on individual spectatorship in ways Benjamin may not have favored, our age of pandemic-induced quarantine presents us with situations in which social engagement is either impossible or carries with it a questionable set of ethics and risks. In the current environment, a digitized aesthetic of cohabitation such as that encompassed in Lilja’s *Sleep* offers a best-of-both-worlds solution in that it can reconstitute aura for a massive population (albeit, each within their individual space) while democratizing the very concept of aura itself and encouraging experiences which foster introspection. It embraces digital tools while striving to reject the subjugatory state those same tools can impose upon us.

## Dimensions of Music

Warhol's version of *Sleep* has a history of being entwined, through repetition and mechanics, with experimental music, and particularly the piece *Vexations* by Erik Satie. In 1963, John Cage organized a performance of *Vexations*, which Gary Comenas says Warhol himself was rumored to attend (warholstars.org). Comenas also documents an event that took place in 2007, which both Branden Joseph and John Giorno attended, that synced *Sleep* and *Vexations* together for about 20 hours at the Tate Modern in London. I argue that Lilja's work takes his more advanced aesthetic approach to *Sleep* even further into the realm of musicality, while offering an approach to aura distinct from both Benjamin and de Mul in the way it co-creates an experience for the viewer in "the here and now." As we've established, there are two phenomena that, because of the era in which it was devised, Benjamin's original theory of aura could not account for. De Mul's work establishes one of these as digital technologies and their resultant recombinations. Ultimately, Lilja's *Sleep* makes use of digital tools and platforms, not through recombinations, but to enhance its ability to recreate an auratic event via cohabitation within the viewer's unique analogue room space. In addition to digitality, it is necessary to address the other phenomenon unaccounted for by Benjamin, which is the aesthetic evolution (and revolution) which took place throughout the late 50's and 60's in American experimental movements like minimalism, indeterminacy, FLUXUS, and others which, as stated above, pushed media in the direction of pure experience. Groys's work eloquently fills this gap in Benjamin's theory through its discussion of installation work. However, in order to both define cohabitation aesthetic more clearly, and to illustrate how Groys's installation-based reaurizations can sufficiently be transferred outside of the gallery space and into our personal spaces, experimental music presents itself as an ideal subject for mining the dimensional

techniques necessary for artworks to accomplish this. Although some of the works analyzed here use electronic sound, none of them expressly employed computers for their creation, or relied on computers to achieve their effect. Instead, their aesthetics were borne out of the physical manipulation of dimensions within acoustic space. Notably, all of these composers have worked in the medium of sound installation, and all have released tracks or albums that successfully reproduce and translate the psychoacoustic effects achieved in their installation settings to the home space. In addition to the slow cinema style with which Lilja engages in *Sleep*, I argue he uses aesthetic methods parallel to these artists, while advancing them with both the concrete representation of the video medium and contemporary digital tools which extend the duration of his work, add subtle but realistic effects, and reflect back to the viewer complex representations of space.

In works by Alvin Lucier, Maryanne Amacher and La Monte Young, dimensional characteristics of experimental music — space, time, “fidelity”, and music’s relationship to our own embodiment within the space that surrounds us — contribute directly to the process of cohabitation that Lilja’s moving image work exemplifies. Lutz Koepnick, in his book *On Slowness*, offers the following insightful passage on the subject of sound within specific environments, while discussing the work of Brandon LaBelle:

Sound is simultaneously boundless and site specific. It overflows defined spatial borders and pushes against the fixities of architecture, yet at the same time it cannot do without some material presence, some navigational dynamic emerging from, echoing through, and being bound to some very specific location...it at once emerges from and transcends given rooms....Sound, precisely in drawing our attention to the dynamic and relational nature of space, stresses the fact that we cannot think space independently of temporality, as much as it, in all its apparent immateriality, reminds us of the conundrums of embodiment and embodied perception. (229)

As stated earlier, it's important to note that cohabitation arises not merely between the spectator (audience) and the performer of the work, but also between the original performance room or auditorium, and the observer's (or listener's) personal space, forging at the same time a cohabitation of spaces and a cohabitation of people through transmitted media. Koepnick's observation also cements the degree to which, in durational works, time is interlocked with space. Musicologists Lopes and Guedes take this point so far that in their piece "Composing Music With a Space," they acknowledge that all spaces have an "aural architecture" and advocate that composers spend a great deal of time in any given space before creating music inside of it, saying a composer should "investigate ways to combine the coming musical composition with the sonic expressiveness of the space. Above all, this phase serves to keep record of what is being experienced, absorbed, and made aware in order to provide compositional raw material to be systematized afterwards in the composition." (10) Similarly, the fact that Lilja's intensely personal work was created in his own bedroom provided him with an intimate knowledge of cinematographic opportunities for the manipulation of camera perspective, lighting, object placement — thus, a thorough acquaintance with the "visual architecture" of his small, particular room space, which informs the aesthetic composition of the work.

Perhaps no contemporary musical artist's investigative approach to space has been as exhaustive as Alvin Lucier's. In his 1965 work, "Music for Solo Performer", Lucier used electrodes attached to his head to convert his alpha brain waves into a trigger for a speaker system that then engaged live timpanis and other percussion pieces. While the piece was disembodied in that he played music directly with his mind, for the audience it became a strangely embodied performance work in which he sat, guru-like, closing his eyes to meditate intently enough to draw forth the required brain waves. Lucier has fashioned a career from using sound to blur these types of distinctions between space, time, and embodiment, perhaps never

more astutely than in his infamous piece that begins “I am sitting in a room, different from the one you are in now...”. In *I Am Sitting In a Room*, Lucier uses two tape recorders to record himself instructing the listener on exactly how he is creating the work. He records his original voice on one machine, plays that recording back into the room to capture on the other machine, then captures the subsequent recording again on the first machine, continuing this process until his voice becomes like a paint brush onto which are layered the “colors” of fundamental musical elements like timbre and reverb, shaped by the unique acoustic properties of the room. By the end, any practical semblance of his speaking voice has vanished, and all that remains is a series of pulsing but arrhythmic tones that sound almost synthetic in nature. The work is a driving force behind Manuel Cirauqui’s essay “Room Trick”, which envisions Lucier’s piece and other experimental work as instigators for an imaginative process undertaken by listeners so that sound becomes a mechanism by which the physical structures of the composer’s performance can be built or rebuilt by the mind: “as the complete recording ‘migrates’ from its original scene, Lucier’s living room is contained as cipher and thenceforth superimposed onto the subsequent, remote, unpredictable, countless listening rooms the work will be replayed in.”

(9)

Cirauqui’s interpretation illuminates how Lucier’s piece both on its own, and as it exists superimposed onto “countless listening rooms”, exemplifies Groy’s point about “deaurizations” and “reaurizations.” According to Benjamin’s original theory, Lucier’s voice would lose its aura the first time it finds itself recorded and played back into his room as a reproduction. Instead, his voice is “reaurized” by the live, unpredictable properties it gains from its projection into the room and subsequent recordings and playbacks. Though Lucier’s entire performance of the piece (approximately 45 minutes in length) is then “deaurized” when committed to a reproducible format such as vinyl, compact disc, or mp3, once it is played back in the form of one of Cirauqui’s “superimpositions” into the unique space of a listener, Lucier’s voice acquires further unpredictable attributes from its temporal cohabitation with this new space, and the work is

again reaurized for the listener. Interestingly this process closely mirrors the function of de Mul's "recombinations" without expressly invoking digital means (unless the listener chooses a digital format for playback, such as mp3). The listener has the freedom, even through analogue technologies, to listen to the piece, manipulate it, perhaps even record it, sample it, or use it in other ways Lucier never intended. Through a process of recombination, sound's ability to fill, occupy, invade, superimpose upon, and acquire the properties of its surrounding space, even in a purely analogue form, illustrates how a medium as abstract as experimental music can find ways to cohabit with an individual. In the same way, Lilja's *Sleep* so thoroughly encases the viewer in an embodied, temporal experience of Lilja's room, that for the duration of the work, Lilja's room, the room of the viewer, and the two individual experiences within them seem to merge into one cohabitated space. In his analysis of evocations of space in experimental music, Cirauqui's description at the conclusion of his essay of what he calls "aural anamorphosis," can almost substitute for a description of the cohabitation aesthetic in Lilja's work, if one were to merely substitute the descriptions of "listening" with those of "viewing":

The room trick reflects on the structural depth of sound recording by interiorizing the space of the listening room, bringing it back to the listener in the form of an aural anamorphosis. The listener is thus confronted with the reflection of his or her own listening space as an idealized plane...a third space seems to emerge, communicated as a fiction: a space that is not the actual listening space (itself inaccessible and unpredictable for the speaker) nor the recording space (no less nondescript and inaccessible for the listener), but an idealization of both. A fictive listening room, an auditorium that evokes the impossibility of a common space for transmission, and whose remoteness is equal for both speaker and listener. (11-12)

Another important factor to consider within this discussion of space is the necessity of the listener's embodiment and agency within that space. Consumers are provided with a broad range of options for altering their experience of artworks, from the relatively benign, like pausing or rewinding, to more drastic manipulations like filters, photoshopping, or just carrying content to completely different environments on portable devices. However, in order to reconstitute aura through personal, independent engagement with often boundary-pushing works, one must adhere to a set of principles, usually set forth by the artist, to such an extent that our compliance with them can be thought of as a type of *fidelity*.

As we know from Benjamin, even a perfectly exact replication lacks the aura of an original, so this definition of "fidelity" has less to do with preserving the exact *quality* of the original as it does staying true to the aesthetic the artist has set forth for the piece when it is experienced. As Gascia Ouzounian points out in her in-depth reading of the work of composer Maryanne Amacher, for whom embodiment is a core principle, our experience of temporal artworks becomes a type of performance unto itself. Amacher herself was quoted as saying she "wanted to create a kind of music where the listener actually has vivid experiences of contributing this other sonic dimension to the music that their ears are making." (Oteri 2) Her music is based on creating distortion product otoacoustic emissions (OAE's), a psychoacoustic phenomenon in which the listener's inner ear produces its own tones. As a result, listeners often report a sensation as if her music is taking place inside their head. Ouzounian, who conveys her personal listening experience with one of Amacher's CDs, details the challenges in retaining the fidelity of the works which were each originally designated for particular architectural sound spaces, while describing her attempt at an intensely embodied practice of listening which "puts the entire body on equal ground with the ears. Listeners must turn their sonic gaze inwards, and in the process reimagine their bodies as sites within which sounds can resonate, rather than as neutral, unengaged receivers." (73) In this sense, Amacher's music represents a type of internal, embodied cohabitation in which external sounds and internally-produced sounds share

the resonant space of the listener's aural perception, an experience that can vary from listener to listener through elements of physics, physiology, and adherence to what we're defining as "fidelity" (Amacher's music must be played loudly and without headphones to properly achieve the OAE effect).

Like Cirauqui's superimpositions of room space, Ouzounian's analysis of Amacher also implies a superimposition, but rather one of embodiment. The experience of OAE that Amacher's work achieves takes place on a micro scale — within the ear — in conjunction with the macro-level embodied process that occurs through the external vibrations of sounds outside the body that eventually enter the ear. Here, Lilja again offers a somewhat analogous technique in the form of the dream sequences he superimposes on top of the static shots of his sleeping self. These segments similarly act as secondary, more internal embodiments than that of the shared room space, and which take place at the micro level of Lilja's consciousness, now entwined with the viewer's. The dream sequences in question take place in various countrysides, and are sometimes filmed by a free-floating drone, while at other times they are shot on foot or on motorcycle, wandering the landscapes and roads of Lilja's town. Importantly, the dreams are shown from a first-person perspective, and none of them invoke anything fantastical or jarring, nor do they invoke anything proprietary to a particular place or time. The viewer sees a man walking a dog, nondescript apartment complexes, a beachside with slow-moving clouds — Lilja's dreams are pleasantries, seeking to invite the viewer into this second degree of cohabitation by offering up an atmospheric mode of universality. Although these dreams are vague and mysterious, they could be anyone's. And in much the same way a listener's ears create new tones in Amacher's work, Lilja's dreams prompt the viewer — already in a state of awareness regarding themselves and their environment after the first hour of Lilja's work — to contemplate their own past dreams. This becomes an invocation of the mind coaxed from the viewer by Lilja's slow aesthetic, at this point allowing his work to simultaneously

cohabit with the viewer's embodied living space as well as images from their subconscious mind — a second, more abstract form of embodiment, not unlike Amacher's OAE experiments.

Equally important to our discussions of space and embodiment is the element of time, an aesthetic function whose extension and manipulation became so commonplace in 1960's experimentalism it may as well have been a rite of passage. In addition to Warhol's 60's experiments with durational film, the plastic arts were undergoing a transformation during that period with the emerging prevalence of minimalist sculpture and installation work, both of which require a durational interaction between artwork and spectator. If all art in the nineteenth century "aspired to the condition of music," as the famous Walter Pater quote says, in the twentieth, all art aspired to the condition of theater: the experience of artworks, whether reproductions or originals, increasingly required conditions not unlike a theater performance, which has the ability to affect live audiences in real time. As Al Hansen states in "A Primer of Happenings and Time/Space Art," "these performances engulf the spectator; the environment is a work of art that the observer goes into and walks around in and in some cases actually participates in." (6) And among the 60's experimentalists who placed such emphasis on time, perhaps the most extreme aesthetic approach was developed by La Monte Young, often acknowledged as the godfather of minimalist music. Young considers all of his pieces eternal compositions, going so far as to place exact time stamps next to the titles of their performances, which he believes are merely official representations of how a given eternal piece would have existed during that particular duration of time. His *Dream House* drone installation uses sine wave generators to create a complex sound environment in which the listener perceives melodies, rhythms, and other shifts in basic aspects of the sound (none of which are actually present in the source drones) as they slowly walk through the space over long durations. The commercially released recording of *Drift Study 31|69 C. 12:17:22-12:25:33 PM NYC* uses fewer pitches than Young's *Dream House* installation, but sufficiently replicates the same type of effect on disc for consumers.

Though her work “The Theatre of Minimalist Music” analyzes one of Young’s earlier forays into duration, *Composition 1960 #7*, musicologist Cecelia Sun argues against the longstanding practice among musicians and scholars of viewing pieces of music as objects, positioning Young’s work (which itself is just the textual notation of a perfect fifth with the instruction “to be played for a long time”) as an example of a piece which appears primed for analysis as an object, but which in practice reveals itself to be far more theatrical in nature. Sun says “the striking reductiveness of Young’s bare fifth forces all meaningful relationships from those within ‘the music itself’ out to the external ones between the piece and its participants.” (48) She goes on to talk about instances in which both she and others have performed the piece, and how its value resides in the wide variety of reactions it elicits from listeners who tend to either find it soothing or excruciatingly long and mundane. Sun concludes that “as object, *Composition 1960 #7* holds limited interest...but taken as a performance ritual, it becomes rich and complex.” (48) Her use of the word “ritual” is noteworthy given Benjamin’s insistence that auratic works are entwined with and dependent on ritualistic acts. It speaks to the potential for Groys’s “reaurizations” in this type of “theatrical” — yet near-effortlessly reproducible — work whose cultural utility depends on audience reception over the course of long durations.

Viewing Young’s work through the context Sun provides helps establish duration as another essential dimension in the process of experience that ultimately leads to the full-fledged cohabitation aesthetic exhibited in Lilja’s work. Regardless of whether the viewer enjoys it, pays full attention to it, watches it on a huge theater screen or on a seven-inch tablet, assuming they sit through the full video, Lilja’s *Sleep* locks them in for a full eight hours, and the experience unwittingly becomes an *event*. Recalling de Luca for a moment, a slowly-evolving work such as this, in which the camera and its subjects rarely or never move and the audio captures mundane room sounds or repetitive music, coaxes the viewer into an awareness of their surroundings, and through the sheer length of duration and anomalous nature of its aesthetic form and content, thrusts them into a situation with the potential for memory creation. The “fidelity” and

quality of the viewer's engagement with the work will determine whether the experience remains memorable for the viewer and whether it is truly auratic, but any eight-hour experience such as this carries with it the potential to transport the viewer's mind into spaces outside the mere four borders of whatever screen *Sleep* is playing on. After fifteen years of first listening to the five-hour CD version of La Monte Young's *Well-Tuned Piano*, I can still recall several details about how my room looked during the experience. A fully cohabitated auratic event that unfolds over multiple hours triggers senses beyond those engaged directly by the work itself, so that, once again, the individual's room may become analogous to that of an installation space.

## **The Value of *Sleep***

Aside from the possibility that a viewer might experience a highly immersive, auratic event watching Juha Lilja's *Sleep* at home, does this aesthetic of cohabitation provide us with anything we lack? What benefit, if any, can the reaurization of reproduced artworks in individualized home spaces provide? In addition to his arguments about authenticity, it is apparent that Benjamin's trepidation surrounding aura derived from the inaccessibility of auratic works by the general public, which resulted in original paintings or theater performances becoming associated with elites, threatening to further cultural and educational divisions between classes. While Adorno proved to be right in his assessment that mass reproductions would only further commodify and devalue these works for the general public, digital technologies (including the internet itself) points to ways in which reproductions of works can be democratized, recombined, and distributed at mass scale to grant auratic experiences to individuals while avoiding the social risks involved in a widespread pandemic. Lilja's intention when creating *Sleep* was not only to set right the original authorial intent of Warhol by using digital technologies to reproduce a full eight hours of sleep on video. His distribution philosophy of making the work available to all on YouTube, free of charge, challenges the business model of corporate giants like Netflix, Amazon, and YouTube itself, which often requires pay-per-play to access copywritten content. A recent blog coaching users on how to gain YouTube subscribers states "The key to getting views – which usually takes time, is creating entertaining video content that provides real value. Your videos need to be high-quality in order to meet the standards of today's viewers...Also, the more videos you upload the more are your chances to reach the required hours of watch time." (Raouna) Lilja disrupts both the medium's insistence on

“taking time” to build viewers by using up a full eight hours of the user’s time on one video, while also acting as a multi-hour, low-fi, black and white monolith in a sea of hi-definition, vainglorious content. Lilja’s creation of the work, in which he handled every aspect of production himself, demonstrates how digital technologies allow artists to operate free from the demands of a production studio or distributor that might be eager to infringe upon the artistic process.

Although Hassan’s book was written and published just before the COVID pandemic struck, one of its larger themes, which is apropos in the context of our discussion of Lilja’s work’s ability to cohabit two highly insular and individual spaces, is that of alienation. Indebted in large part to the work of philosopher Rahel Jaeggi, Hassan reframes Jaeggi’s critique of late capitalism’s effects on alienation within his own critique of digital automation and accumulation, and speaks to the ways in which technology shuts out the user’s ability to understand or engage with the larger world it represents. He says,

Digital-automation destroys the analogue relation to leave us in a new relationship with technology—a relation of relationlessness—that shuts us out from its logic, its operation, and the virtual and material worlds that it creates...automation appropriates the actions of working upon the world for itself. It abstracts the context of the relation into its own automaticity... Disconnected from a logic that is programmed to discard us wherever possible, and from a magical logic we cannot fully comprehend, we become powerless to take back possession of what is in effect the appropriation of what could be another possible life, another possible world. Yet we are dependent upon digitality and its networks of appropriation—and are thereby compelled to live through the ‘relation of relationlessness’ dialectic that is digital alienation. (62)

This critique rings especially harsh for high-risk individuals living through the pandemic’s quarantines, and even moreso for that portion of society who live alone. Whereas capitalist

endeavors to some extent leave everyone at the mercy of Hassan's "relation of relationless" condition, for many, digitally mediated experiences may currently be their only connection to the world beyond their homes. This is where the value of works like Lilja's *Sleep* is most apparent. *Sleep*, slow cinema, the experimental works of music discussed here, some ambient music — many of these works are exceptional in that they have the ability to transport an auratic experience otherwise only accessible in another country or city, or in a public space which under normal conditions would be cohabitated with other individuals, safely into the individual's home space. Reproduced and experienced properly, these works may provide the experiencer with a new form of auratic experience that satisfies pandemic-era yearning for original, in-person events like gallery installations or visiting a remote island, except by engaging with our digitally-infiltrated home spaces and devices.

The phrase "experienced properly", however, stands out as problematic. Many experimental artists who create works of the nature discussed in this essay include specific instructions on how to experience them. Many of Young's and Amacher's works, for instance, rely on specific aural characteristics of the acoustic space, and the artists take the time in some of their commercial releases to write out ways the listener can adhere to their particular brand of "fidelity," covered earlier. Lilja, however, does not, and his work just happens to be centered around the one human activity Jonathan Crary calls, in the above epigraph, "an uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism" and "an interval of time that cannot be colonized and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability." (10) Crary frames sleep as a near-rebellious act in the wake of all-encompassing capitalist forces that threaten to deprive us permanently of the last human need which he believes resists commodification. This begs the question, can a viewer adequately experience Lilja's work, and benefit from it, by falling asleep to it themselves? If sleep is valued by Crary in this way, and also by Lilja enough to film himself engaging in the act for eight hours until the sun shines into his room and he finally wakes...would falling asleep to his work perhaps constitute the ultimate form of cohabitation?

Returning for a moment to music, notable composer Max Richter and drone artist Robert Rich have respectively created works with the explicit intention of putting listeners to sleep. Richter created a long-duration, slow-moving musical piece also entitled *Sleep*, expressly for that purpose, and in the 1980's, Rich performed infamous "sleep concerts" for dozing audiences when he attended Stanford university. While Lilja's *Sleep* is primarily a visual work, his accessible, digital presentation of it instigates cohabitation in a comfortable setting, foregoes the jarring repetition of Warhol's version for lulling, meditative dream sequences, and practically invites the viewer to imitate his eight-hour long act of rebellion.

This idea isn't without precedent. In his essay, "The Sleeping Spectator," film scholar Justin Remes discusses Abbas Kiarostami's work *Five*, which paid tribute to legendary director Yasujiro Ozu, and he calls a great deal of attention to the fact that Kiarostami encouraged viewers to fall asleep to the work if so inclined, pointing out that Kiarostami admitted falling asleep to films himself, while complimenting many of those films as the type that would stick with him and force him to ponder them long afterward. Remes also cites cinema scholar William Brown, who advocates for the process in several of his writings, admitting to the fact that he would often sleep in theaters exhibiting art house films, due to their slower, more inviting pace. While struggling with this phenomenon, Remes pointedly asks, "does a film exist only in relation to a spectator, a subject who objectifies the film and processes its sensory information? Or does a film exist independently, regardless of whether it is seen or heard?" (236)

Given how Lilja opens up his room, mind and body (again, he sleeps in the nude, with some shots depicting him in compromising positions), and the degree to which we've established the shared experience between the viewer and Lilja, it seems as though sleeping "together," however much it undermines Benjamin's original intentions for auratic theory, may act as an effective route toward reaurization of the work, as it emulates Lilja's act with a mirrored form of cohabitation, particularly if the sleeper also dreams during the video. If the sleeping experience is pleasant, with the viewer waking only to ponder the film in greater depth,

as Kiarostami suggested might be possible, why should anyone argue that this method of experiencing the work is any less valid, enlightening or beneficial than wakefully (and perhaps mindlessly) staring at the screen for eight hours? William Brown, in the blog essay Remes refers to, called “Sleeping in the Cinema,” makes perhaps the most sensible argument for appreciating films through sleep. In one eloquent paragraph, he illustrates how the act might offer relief from Crary’s “24/7” condition of late capitalism, suggest a safe space away from the threat of the virus, and justify the aesthetics of cohabitation I’ve argued for here:

With regard to cinema, we might remember that there is a paradox in that to sleep/to do with another the thing that arguably requires the least ‘withness’ is in fact perhaps the most intimate or the greatest exposure that one can make of one’s self. Sleeping in the cinema, in which we are ‘most ourselves’ becomes in this way a communion with the film. Many humans sleep alone, within spaces that are familiar to them. Perhaps it is as much the space of the cinema as with any particular film that we feel so intimate and safe that we can allow ourselves sleep. (wjrcbrown.wordpress.com)

Lilja’s *Sleep* originally exhibited at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in the Netherlands, as part of a program called *Signals: 24/7*, which featured works that railed against the attention economy through digital means. Perhaps Lilja has now placed it, ad-free, on the most consumer-friendly video platform in existence precisely because so much of YouTube’s other content rarely grants us the space to dream.

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