No Teeth or Tails but We Still Run:
A Study of Reality
and the Fear of its Fragility

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My brainstorming for this project started with three mind-maps based on three very different words: Minerals, Hallucinations, and Collections. While I would have been unable to see a correlation between the three when put together (except minerals and collections—my first thought was a rock collection) evaluating them separately through mind mapping revealed that there were a handful of words that showed up on all the mind-maps that fell into certain subject categories (if the words themselves didn't pop up). These were: Death, Money, College, Aging, Politics, Books, and Study. I experimented with mind maps based on this list of words, and they came back more or less connected. Whether this was because I'd already put them in a list or my subconscious was doing it naturally, I can't be sure. I came to the conclusion that these words all fell under one overarching theme: the future—and not in a positive light.

As I researched I realized the articles that I willingly read word for word and/or searched for explanation and elaboration on were articles and talks leaning in a creepier direction: ones that interpreted the list of words my maps came up with as a catalogue of fears. None of the articles I read were strictly repulsive, but they were unnerving. Unnerving is the goal of the artwork I hope to create, since none of my research or interest was about anything too gruesome, so I hope my project doesn't represent anything gruesome. My focus is on quieter, more modern fears.

The question my research has posed is this: What's so scary about the future? Why are we afraid of a reality that doesn't exist yet? And what does this fear say about mankind?

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The future is the unpredictable inevitability to which everyone is committed. There is nothing we can do to view or manipulate it beyond actions that have shown to have certain effects on future events in the past (i.e. sleeping is restful, if you don't eat now you'll be hungry later). There are practiced and unquestionable correlations between certain actions and results, proven and understood by science, and human beings have accepted this as a permanent truth. However, everything we can say about the future can only ever be called a prediction; even if there is evidence that one thing will always happen because of another, we can't say it will just because the second thing has happened. TED Talks by Sean Caroll discuss the idea of entropy— the expanding of matter, space and the universes, and the science behind what makes the future exist. We've made a presumptuous decision that the constants of time that happen after now will be the same as the present when really it exists with all the freshness and possibility of a newborn child. The second after now could go as far in augmenting reality as to manipulate current subjects into believing that the truths in past realities had always been the ones in the current. The fragility of human understanding of this concept might not go as far as being cosmically insecure, but instead manifests in smaller acts such as acting in consideration for your present self instead of your future self because one is certain and the other is not. Consciously doing this proves at least a basic, instinctual understanding that the future is nonexistent and unpromised in the present. Questioning this feeling of insecurity leads to doubt and fear over the mentioned implications of a nonexistent post-reality.

The perception of reality and topics like this are important to how people will react to knowledge about any current situation. In the TED Talk 'The Security Mirage,' Bruce Schiener talks about how human beings perceive how safe they are, and how the weight behind things we are scared of can change over time. It is easier to fear things we can envision clearly, and harder

to envision the abstractly terrifying. But what is most dangerous is when humans get so comfortable with a threat they treat it casually—disrespecting the threat it may pose in favor of the comfort casually dealing with it may lead to. When a guard is lowered over something dangerous, it becomes even more dangerous. Human beings can also adapt to fearsome threats quickly enough if doing so is self-preservative. If you are surrounded by lions, you stop being scared of lions quick enough and move on to handling them. The TED Talk discusses how the most dangerous fears are the unlikely, improbable, or otherwise unfamiliar anomalies in the universe towards which humans have little to no experience dealing with. It's the reason why the news and journals report obscure and catastrophic disasters instead of the person who died by falling off a ladder in the studio or a handyman killed by socket electrocution. Those are things that happen so much we've developed precautions, yet which kills more people in a year?

I believe the fascination with reality and the future in this nature causes the same morbid curiosity that kept me researching this. It is a shift in reality towards which humans have no experience, it's freshness causing us to risk struggling to understand it and how to prevent it. However, even with every possible precaution, we cannot control the future beyond predictions and probability. 2 may not always equal 2. One month people were terrified of swine flu and a few months later no one was willing to take the shots. The mindset about the sickness had gone from panic over the mystery and implications of a new and not understood virus (even though more people died from falling off perfectly understood ladders that year), to an almost passive resignation to the situation. The cycle repeat again when a new and mysterious cure to the illness came out—giving the public something to be afraid and suspicious of all over again.

This goes beyond fear of the dangerous. A common fear is the fear of being unable to perceive dangers and the result of the future properly. This is the abstract baseline that runs under many things, from something as simple as the fear of being wrong to the fear of memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's. In the TED Talk 'On Being Wrong' by Kathryn Schultz, she discusses how being wrong feels like being right, or people wouldn't question opposing opinions or views. This train of thinking leads to the question of what place 'wrong and right-ness' takes in an insecure reality for which, incidentally, there is no permanent right or wrong answer.

But this strain of fear in relation to the future is of perception of the present and past. It's the fear that the definitive linear pattern will break itself, regress, loop, or skip while the individuals experiencing it are unaware. This puts the individual into a situation in which they believe their experience is right, and still adheres to the laws they have learnt from and believe in, even when it's an eternity past broken. The website, scp-wiki.net or the SCP (Special Containment Procedure) Foundation is a fictional collective of containable subjects with anomalous properties, similar to the 1960's show *The Twilight Zone*, a couple of which deal with the subject of broken time perception in a horrifyingly implicative way.

On the website there are examples of time loops and their fictional effect on the entities trapped within them. One example of this, told through regular prose, is 'Loop' by an author working under the alias Leicontis. In the story a couple becomes trapped in an almost self-induced loop where one of them is murdered and the other one breaks a lamp. By breaking the lamp the couple resets the situation and switch places with each other (i.e. if the husband was shot and the wife breaks the lamp, the next time around the wife will take the bullet). There are two factors in this story that make it especially horrifying: The couple constantly makes the choice to continue the time loop to save each other—so their imprisonment is technically voluntary, and as you read you see their sense of self and sanity degrade as the story goes on—starting with becoming used to the pain of getting shot and ending (in the story, at least) with

them forgetting everything but their responsibility to not let the other die. What makes this scary isn't specifically the fear of getting trapped in a similar situation since it's commonly believed to be impossible. Even in the loop the couple feels time passing, but they spend every other minute with a bullet wound. The fear is that if nothing changes there will be nothing to refresh the mind, and that an eternity could be spent doing the exact same thing over and over. People fear a conscious afterlife, aging, and developing mental or memory disorders for similar reasons.

The second work relevant on the website is a study in reality along with eternity. The fictional containment page *SCP-1733* by an author under the alias 'bbaztek' is about a VHS recording of a Celtics vs. Miami Heat basketball game where everyone in the tape becomes aware that the tape is repeating. The difference from the aforementioned loop story is the amount of time between loops, the number of participants, that the time loop is not self-induced, and that the participants don't know they're in a VHS tape. What's horrifying about time and reality in this instance is that everyone shown on the VHS exists outside of it, and the VHS tape itself is nothing more than that, except the story it shows changes the more it is played and the feeling that they've dreamt the game before. The people inside it, however, believe firmly that they're still real and make bargains and sacrifices for their escape, escalating to the point where the chaos inside the VHS's world is so bad that the fictional researchers suspend replaying. This specific work raises a question about reality and how much we trust it will never change, even though when our understanding of the universe is compared with its size and how much we don't know, we shouldn't be as sure as we are.

Exploring reality insecurity leads to questions of who defines the laws or if they can be defined along with consideration that the present an individual experiences might be a loop or inconsistent in other ways that the individual cannot perceive (time is slowed, has regressed, or is stuck in some way). Being aware of being trapped in this system implies something even more horrific. For example, the movie *Groundhog Day* is about a man who finds himself trapped in a single day and he's the only one aware it's repeating. He's trapped long enough to know everyone personally and learn entire languages—which is considerably better than the indefinite imprisonment he had presumed he'd be stuck in before being freed. There is even a part in the movie when he considers death as a better alternative to the detention he had been placed in. This is the specific conundrum I want to address with my artwork.

What's so scary about the future is that it is this technically untouchable constant toward which nothing can be sent and from which nothing can be received, so nothing about it is promised. The definition of the future reaches from the second after the current one to a million years from now. And even though we understand the distance between those two times, they are equally untouchable at present. It's a completely unknown frontier that we trust will stay constant because the past has taught us it will. The only reason the past is more tangible is because we have evidence of it in the present—so it feels more definite and real. We have nothing real from the future, only guesses and probabilities that let us predict what's coming even though we can't be sure; it's the uncertainty that is the frightening part.

Fear of the future is an extension on fear of the unknown, since certainty is always more comfortable than things that are unsure. The notion that something could change in a million ways that you wouldn't know about is something mankind avoids thinking about. Ignoring the implications of having a future helps the present feel bigger. We don't wonder about it because we feel we understand it in the same way that people are more excited about space than the limited but equally unexplored 8000 feet of dust and lava between our feet and the other side of

the planet, or the bottom of the sea for that matter. Both the earth and the ocean are as present as we are, but we think of and fear distant space just because it's a constant mystery.

This topic forces individuals to consider and face their own significance as well as their understanding and trust in the future. People considering the future should question why they feel so secure about something that doesn't exist yet, and whether or not the present that *does* exist is linear, applicable, resultant, or as real as we think it is.

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