

**From *Jim Campbell: Material Light*. Germany: Hatje Katz, 2010, p 40.**

## **Last Day**

As I write this I am sitting in an airport waiting to catch a plane to New York. On the other end of this flight, family members are deciding if and when to turn off my grandmother's life support. Not expecting the complications delaying this act, which was supposed to happen yesterday, I've taken bereavement time from work, shared the news of my grandmother's death, and accepted condolences from friends. The awkward truth, however, is that she is still alive and I am unnervingly anxious to end any incongruities between life and death, be they conversational, physical, or legal. The sadness and the plain inconvenience of these facts is overwhelming and embarrassing.

At this time just one year ago, I was preparing for Jim Campbell to install *Last Day in the Beginning of March* at the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art. The immersive darkness of the piece was itself a limbo between life and death, a fictional retelling of the last day of the life of Campbell's brother reenacted as an expansive space between the artist's pixels and personal experience.

Museum goers choose an opportune moment to visit a work of art, but curators live with a work in the context of their life, seeing it at different times of day and through the eyes of diverse viewers. My colleagues and I watched *Last Day* slowly evolve from a series of electrical parts. It is difficult to say at what point the piece became the piece. Once realized it was impossible to imagine it as the mass of wires and lights and scrims of which it is composed.

I spent the mornings before we opened to the public lying on the floor in the darkness, sometimes allowing the pools of light to spill around me. Sometimes I would remain in the dark, perhaps brushing the light with the tip of a finger. During opening hours, I lurked in hidden obscurity as a mother wept for her son, a recent suicide. I cringed as a friend apologized to me for the failings in our relationship, the darkness engulfing the truly unforgiving smirk on my face as I slunk away in retreat. One afternoon a group of girls jumped from light to light, spinning in circles in an electric version of hopscotch. Many couples kissed. In its last week, three musicians recorded an improvisational piece as the sound of *Last Day's* rain flooded their tracks.

The spectacular darkness of *Last Day* evoked both the suffocation of being buried and the comfort of remaining hidden. The pulsing lights revealed a glimmer of hope while illuminating a circling pattern of desperation.

Then we unplugged the cords and they were gone.

- Lauren Fensterstock