

MORE POSTRATIONAL VISUALITY

**Post Raíola
VISUALITY**

Edited by Ted Hiebert & Duncan MacKenzie

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Hilma's Ghost

(Sharmistha Ray & Dannielle Tegeder)

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MORE POSTRATIONAL VISUALITY

Ted Hiebert & Duncan MacKenzie

The postrational proliferates through ubiquity and so we decided a second volume was necessary. *More Postrational Visuality* continues the project of holding space for different ideas, different worldviews, different ways of making meaning and building intellectual and creative community. Against the dominance of a singular universal reason we champion whatever kinds of reasons can be held together, together. This volume explores meaning making strategies as wide ranging as dreams, AI generation, tourism, spell casting, quantum speculation, worrying, listening, attunement and more. Uniting the perspectives is, well, difference, idiosyncrasy, imagination—and a belief in the power of alternative approaches to rendering the world we inhabit.

PROLIFERATION

And so this book is about proliferation—less an argument for the postrational and more a stance regarding what we take as a point of fact: reason is overrated and there are a lot of much more interesting ways to make sense of the world. Of course interesting isn’t always better—but it’s at least more interesting; it has to be—that’s its definition. But this is more than a self-validating rhetorical statement. Interest is the currency of engagement, and as such, it has also become the governing principle of 21st century economics. We are certainly no longer in an information economy where knowledge sets us free and those who know most also hold most power. We aren’t really even in an attention economy anymore, where what matters most is how attention is solicited, mobilized and extracted—all that still stands true but what’s clear to us is that neither knowledge nor attention will “set us free.” Maybe knowledge will make a comeback. Maybe attention will find a way to self-govern. But more likely is that the destiny of both knowledge and attention is to be crowd-sourced and (mostly) administrated. Increasingly streamlined. Postrational is also post-information, post-knowledge, post-fact, actually post-attention too. And ubiquitous. That part is key. We are not just saying that the postrational proliferates; we are suggesting that it depends on proliferation for survival.

The argument is pretty straightforward—a classic postmodern exegesis on disappearance through excess as the foundation for any theoretical framework of

things “post.”¹ Modernism multiplies into modernisms, contested territories that can no longer be synthesized into a singular whole—thus the system does not quite collapse but proliferates, now without its larger umbrella; the various iterations of these contested territories united only under the auspices of the postmodern. But the problem with postmodern arguments of this sort is that they are often too abstract and structural in their logic, too dependent on wordplay in which the meaning of its reversals can become obfuscated or lost. So maybe a better point of reference is Katherine Hayles, who elegantly deploys this logic in her treatise on the posthuman. Hayles says: “If human essence is ‘freedom from the influence of others,’ the posthuman is ‘post’ not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will.”²

What we appreciate about Hayles is that she makes clear the stakes of the posthuman in a way that the stakes of postmodernism were never quite obvious. It makes the logic easier to follow. Too many selves; too many competing demands and ideas and expectations and responsibilities for any one person to feel actualized or autonomous in that liberal humanist kind of way. The posthuman is post-liberal-human—not a genetic claim (though not not that too—we live in biotechnological times after all) but an observation of blurred boundaries through which the question of where lines are drawn becomes impossible to answer with any decisive authority. The contours of the human are porous and—we would contend—so too,

increasingly, are the contours of the rational. We live in post-truth times where it is not immediately evident what counts as reason anymore or even whether reason is any good as a collective marker of common ground. All supposed facts point to the opposite. And so, just as the human disappeared into the porous context of the posthuman, so too does the rational disappear into the contested territory of what counts as reason. The postrational isn't an answer; it's just an observation. But in our observance of what we take to be a self-evident state of affairs, we notice something else. With this disappearance of reason into multiple competing forms of truth-saying, a tentative space of intellectual permission opens up—not simply a stage upon which those with most power impose their truths upon others (though this is certainly one part of it), but also a larger context in which things previously considered irrational or untrue now permissibly pass. One might lament the loss of collective and standardized reasoning as the benchmark of civilized living but the truth of the matter is that reason has never truly been collective and has long been deployed unequally depending on the circumstances and positionality of its advocates. Ariella Azoulay claims that logics of documentation and progress are colonial at their root—and invented, not given.³ We might echo this claim for reason as well. Often deployed as a tool of power—or at least a benchmark situated outside the realm of subjective human discretion—if reason can be seen as an invention rather than a discovery, it changes much about how we understand the operations of the world around us. First and foremost it

removes the requirement that everything must conform to explanation, and in so doing acknowledges that there are other ways of engaging with the world, even some that cannot be fully explained. Secondly, and equally important, it transforms the process of meaning making into an individual and collective activity requiring social expression and contingencies, solidarity and adaptability.

This collective activity is, at its heart, an imaginative one. When the monopoly of a singular universal reason breaks down, the work of building shared meaning requires us to collectively imagine viable frameworks—or to recognize and elevate those that have been marginalized. It is to propose a coexistence of worlds, not to posit or prove the existance of one. Suddenly rationality (or rather postrationality) requires collective imagination. It becomes a practice of world-building and world-recognizing. Suddenly rationality (or rather postrationality) requires collective imagination.

VISUALIZATION

We have been asked—fairly, we think—why postrational *visuality*? That is, why the emphasis on the visual in this treatise on the postrational? Is this another art movement, a niche mode of creative engagement safely confined to the elitist spaces of contemporary art or is it something with potentially greater significance? We think the latter. The visual is not a neutral medium; it is the primary arena where the postrational becomes tangible, where alternative

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reasonings take material form and are put into social circulation. Let us distinguish between visuality and visualization. Postrational visuality is the field—the contested arena where images, forms, and materialized thought operate outside singular reason. It is the domain of study. Visualization, however, is the active practice within that field: the deliberate, formative act of giving shape to alternative logics, of rendering the imperceptible perceptible. The visual, then, is a categorical placeholder for this act of visualization. Let us give this claim a little context.

In a 2000 *Art Safari* interview—on the subject of Nicolas Bourriaud’s thesis on relational aesthetics—the New York gallerist Gavin Brown noted that there was (in his assessment) nothing radical about relational art.⁴ Quoting from Bourriaud’s book, Brown asked: “Don’t you think that if you wanted to ... look at the possibility of ‘an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context’ ... that you’d just go out and meet people, and live a good life?”⁵ We agree, sort of.

Brown’s point was that calling it art didn’t really seem like a meaningful intervention, and that relational ideology might be better served by simply absorbing the creative spirit into life as it is lived anyways, “living a good life” so to speak. And that’s fine and well. But if Brown’s critique was that calling relational art “art” diffuses its creative potential, from our stance just calling it “life” doesn’t really seem like a meaningful intervention either. Unless, that is, the intentionality behind calling it “life” is re-cast as a (potentially radical) way to reassess the contours

of how regular living might be conceived. Or—to put it differently—an empowerment of life itself, not simply as a site for niche creative eccentricity but as a practice of creative daily engagement. To frame it in this way would be to echo the poet Sarah Dowling, who once told me (I paraphrase) that no poem makes the world worse—even a bad poem makes the world better.⁶ It would also be to align the postrational with Joseph Beuys famous declaration that “everyone is an artist” and we are together building the world we will collectively come to inhabit⁷. It is a bit of scrappy world-building, thinking about art as ideology rather than as a practice of object-making, and recognizing that what art and life both share is that neither have ever been accountable to sense. So no, postrational visuality is not a new artistic movement but perhaps a new way to give permission to how we think about the boundaries and contours of the world outside of art—it’s a task many artists are well-situated to engage but certainly one that treats artistic ideology as an integrated part of what counts as real (it is not restricted to galleries though galleries are not anathema to it either).

This is not a rhetorical flourish. Visualization is not a metaphor for creative thinking; it is a gesture towards the transformative potential of holding firm to other ways of seeing the world. We can call them artistic if we want to, but that’s only one form of postrational thought. What matters is giving them contours, visualizing the other methods of holding together meaning such that they gain traction as strategies, lenses, stances, inflections, or other forms

of intervention. In this, we take visualization to be an absolutely material practice, anchored in the concrete specificities of how a mode of thought or engagement or reconceptualization can transform our experience of the world. Not in competition to other forms of engagement, but situated alongside and accountable only to their own internal logics of coherency. Here is a non-art example.

In 1970 there was a unique study done by Canadian psychologist Allan Hayduk who aimed to see if the powers of the mind could positively impact on an individual's ability to control their body temperature. It might seem like a tangent—but there is something to this study that we think is important. The individual participants were oil rig workers in the Canadian north, often working in freezing temperatures with tasks requiring manual dexterity. Hayduk's study was designed to see if they could be trained to warm their hands in the cold, in order to better perform their jobs. He used a combination of classic (Pavlovian) conditioning and visualization experiments, first placing hands in alternating cold and warm water and then asking participants to imagine their hands warm and cold respectively. They then repeated the process, training the participant bodies into a recognition of temperature spaces and cultivating a certain sensitivity to possible parameters for engagement. With practice comes familiarity; with familiarity comes the possibility to intervene into how things normally unfold. How you feel about the results will tell you something about where you stand on the question of the postrational. Hayduk's

experiment worked—to a degree—with participants achieving (with training) an ability to raise the temperature of their hands by an average of 3.16 degree Celsius in -14 degree temperatures.⁸ And, notably, the ability to recreate these effects persisted (all subject retained the ability to warm their hands through visualization when measured again after 1 year).⁹

This is postrational visualization—a potential destiny for postrational visuality when taken seriously as a tool for collective world building. It's not without hard work, training, and a sustained attempt to continue to imagine and implement the world behaving differently. But it is not just art, nor just life—it is imaginary potentiality waiting to be taken seriously. If we can warm our hands, there are lots of other things we can do too, or that we are already doing and just don't know they are worth sharing.

DEDICATION

The postrational is not a theory waiting for examples. It is a practice of sharing forms of thought already in play. Our moment—the accelerating feedback loops of climate collapse, the extractive delirium of late capitalism, the algorithmic curation of reality—has shown the terminal logic of the old rationalist tools. As Donna Haraway insists, to merely describe this “informatics of domination” is insufficient¹⁰. One must learn to trouble it from within. We take this troubling not as a redemptive project, but as a necessary, material act of meaning-making on a planet where dominant systems have ceased to make sense.¹¹

This book is a dedication to that act. It is a collection of materialized postrational practices—each chapter a distinct gesture that gives tangible form to an alternative way of reasoning, sensing, or caring. Like N. Katherine Hayles’s posthuman, the postrational is “post” not because it is irrational, but because it no longer has the conceit of being unified by a single, universal logic. We are left with reasons—plural, specific, and often incommensurate.

The work gathered here does not argue for a new form of common sense—nor that sense has disappeared. Instead, each chapter builds a line of thought with its own internal logic. Each operates as a gesture of meaning-making and world conceptualizing, each offering a practice or a form, a text, an image, a protocol:

Hilma’s Ghost opens the volume with “Signaling Magickal Futures,” an account of spiritualist and collaborative methods. The chapter features conversations with witches and incantations, reactivating occult and feminist lineages within modern abstraction. Here, the Tarot operates as a discursive tool, the séance as a creative protocol, and painting as a form of charged ritual—practices oriented toward building collaborative futures in active conversation with overlooked pasts.

Colleen McCulla’s contribution, “Force Quit,” manifests as glitched system alerts and corrupted corporate correspondence. Its executable field manuals outline a survival strategy that seeks to fold the system by into itself, constructing non-extractable, peer-to-peer structures in response to what the text

calls the “undertow of 404s”—repurposing the aesthetics of bureaucratic and algorithmic failure.

In “Worrying the Postrational,” **Ted Hiebert** uses a child’s broken worry stone as a speculative probe for a paracognitive rehearsal. This intimate, spiraling essay treats photography as a colonial “verdict” and the stone as its reversible counterpart—a “ghost image” that holds space for anxiety, repair, and unlearning, rehearsing different relational futures through a methodology of attuned friction.

Alex Borkowski’s “Ineffable Archives” convenes a critical séance between the ectoplasmic proofs of 20th-century psychical research and the synthetic outputs of contemporary AI. This media-historical excavation approaches the flawed, self-serious archives of séances—with their “tenuous similes” and “unreasonable rationality”—as untimely mirrors for contemporary belief-structures, engaging in a speculative archival practice attuned to the weird, belated, and “useless” trace.

Ross Sawyer’s artistic spread, “After the Flood,” presents a series of beautifully counterbalanced sticks and platforms, towers of precarious images whose moments of capture speak to the preciousness of precision and the tenuousness of relations. Their argument is made, not through theory, but through the immediate affective effect of visual proximity—moments where the built physical tension stands in celebration of constructed possibility..

From **phoenix kai** comes “::::: Trans Universe Theory [&] :::::,” a work that rewrites the laws of physics from the perspective of trans, nonbinary, and

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poetic consciousness. It advances a radical equation where photons are qubits and dimensions are spectral, treating $E = mc^2$ as a permission slip for impossibility—a “trans-metaphor” that works to dismantle binary logic and demonstrates how quantum frameworks can provide essential models for survival and theorization.

Charting an anti-tour through the monstrous rationality of the Athabasca tar sands, **David Lariviere**’s “Red Carpet To Ruin” follows a dérive into a landscape where industrial “solutions” reveal the absurd terminus of axiomatic reason. Framed as a “contrarian” mode of engagement, the chapter employs attentive listening and counter-rituals to make the affective dissonance of a fully engineered world legible.

In “Prolegomenon On the Art Errant,” **Zachary Cahill** constructs a manifesto from the physical site of a self-appointed, monumental task: the long and slow carving of a marble sculpture. Answering the recurring question “What’s it for?” the essay reclaims the figure of the knight errant—the artist without patron—advocating for a “sacred errancy” fueled by a deep, complex love for the craft. It is a defense of the artistic vocation as a glorious, rambling freedom and a necessary opposition to transactional culture.

Terri Griffith & Nicholas Alexander Hayes, in “Mixtapes and Queering of Memory,” decode the narrative logic of novelist James Nulick, positing the mixtape as a blueprint for queer temporality. Their analysis traces how Nulick replaces Aristotelian plot with the emotional reasoning of a curated playlist, assembling truth from glitches, gaps, and resonant

echoes across a tracklist in a strategy of modular, personal, and non-linear sense-making.

The volume concludes with **Jay Irizawa & Peter Morin**'s “Where Does Dreaming Want Us To Go?” which posits dreaming as a primary, uncontrollable, yet shareable methodology. Documenting a collaborative practice of “quantum dreaming,” the chapter frames the act of dreaming not only as a site of interior psychology but as a possible social interface, using questions posed to dreams to navigate diasporic memory, ancestral grief, and the liquid nature of time.

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The postrational, then, is not a conclusion we reach, but a permission we exercise. It begins not with a unified theory, but with a gesture—a visualized thought, a held worry, a cast spell, a rehearsed dream. It is the practice of making private reasonings publicly tangible within an expanded field of postrational visuality. The chapters that follow are such gestures, made manifest. They invite you not to be persuaded, but to witness—to hold space for their conceptualizations of possibility, proving that sense can be built in multiple ways, and expanding the possibilities for worlds we can inhabit together.

NOTES

- 1 This argument is probably made most famously by Jean Baudrillard when talking about what he calls “the murder of the real.” Baudrillard explains it like this: “Let us be clear about this: when we say reality has disappeared, the point is not that it has disappeared physically, but that it has disappeared metaphysically. Reality continues to exist; it is its principle that is dead.” Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil, or, the Lucidity Pact*, Chris Turner, trans., New York: Berg, 2005, p.18..
- 2 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 4.
- 3 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, London: Verso, 2019, p 22-23.
- 4 Gavin Brown, in *Relational Art: Is It an Ism?*, and *Art Safari* film, Ben Lewis, 2003. Brown is quote from p. 14 of Nicolas Bourriaud’s book, *Relational Aesthetics*, Paris: Les presses du réel, 1999. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyUkEXbiE_s
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Sarah Dowling, private conversation, c. 2012.
- 7 For Beuys, of course, this future was an artwork—the “total artwork of the future social order.” We are less discerning in our imagination, simply imagining this as our collective future. See Joseph Beuys, as cited in Laurie Rojas, “Beuys’ Concept of Social Sculpture and Relational Art Practices Today,” *Chicago Art Magazine*, November 29, 2010.
- 8 Allan Hayduk, “Increasing Hand Efficiency at Cold Temperatures by Training Hand Vasodilation with a Classical Conditioning-Biofeedback Overlap Design,” *Biofeedback and Self-Regulation*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1980.

- 9 Allan Hayduk, “The Persistence and Transfer of Voluntary Hand-Warming in Natural and Laboratory Cold Settings After 1 Year,” *Biofeedback and Self-Regulation*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1982.
- 10 Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” *Socialist Review* 15.2 (1985), p.79.
- 11 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, pp. 30-31.

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SIGNALING MAGICKAL FUTURES

Hilma's Ghost

(Sharmistha Ray & Dannielle Tegeder)

Not all magick is the same. Not all tarot decks work in equivalent ways. Not all witches follow similar processes and procedures. The opposition of superstition and reason is unnecessary. The same goes for science and spirituality. The spiritual is political.

The magick lies in the work.

HILMA'S GHOST

Throughout history, women have often turned to alternative creative and spiritual practices in pursuit of freedom within oppressive patriarchal societies. One such practice is mediumship, which involves communicating with the spirit world through a human intermediary. There are a significant handful of artists who engaged in mediumship,

and since the majority of them have been women, the history of mediumship in art is intertwined with the narratives of overlooked female artists. Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) is a prime example. A Swedish artist and mystic, she remained virtually unknown until 2018, when a groundbreaking exhibition of her work at the Guggenheim Museum in New York finally secured her rightful place in art history, alongside male contemporaries such as Vasily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian. Furthermore, while she undoubtedly deserves this individual recognition, af Klint was deeply collaborative in her practice, often working with a group of women known collectively as The Five. With this group, she was inspired to create The Ten Largest—a series of ten monumental abstract paintings completed in 1907—growing out of a series of séances with spiritual entities referred to as The High Ones, who often guided af Klint in her innovative work. Her collaborators were thus not only human but also spiritual in form.

This was not merely an act of artistic and spiritual collaboration; we view it as a political statement. We argue that western society perpetuates a false dichotomy between spirituality and science, fostering a rationalist bias in contemporary thought. The ramifications of this bias disproportionately affect women, who are often associated with traits deemed less rational and therefore less valuable, such as intuition, emotion, and superstition. In contrast, men are typically aligned with the “higher” values of reason—a designation we challenge. This rationalist bias has contributed

to the neglect of historical women artists, whose explorations of ancient and pre-modern knowledge systems remain vital sources of personal strength and aesthetic innovation. Our institutions—academic, scientific, and technological—have been built on the foundation of reason, which means that non-rational knowledge is often marginalized and not taken seriously. However, our rational side represents only a fraction of our consciousness, and what is often dismissed as irrational constitutes a significant part of our identity.

We view the irrational as an equally valuable aspect of art, and as spiritualist feminist artists, we seek to examine it closely. This serves as our starting point. Currently, we are witnessing the collapse of rational systems, underscoring the need for alternative strategies. The work of Hilma af Klint serves as a reckoning for the art world's historical erasure of women artists, who were often deemed too mystical for conservative societies, as well as for the current and ongoing tendency to dismiss non-rational alternatives. We draw inspiration from af Klint's approach. Hilma's Ghost represents a restorative initiative aimed at uplifting neglected historical voices and bringing their contributions to light. This essay draws on, contextualizes, and expands upon projects from the first two years of Hilma's Ghost, articulating key themes, methods, and trajectories of the collective. The roots and the wrangling, so to speak, that have set the stage for the work we continue to do and the futures we are imagining together.

BELIEVING SKEPTICS

Collaboration with ghosts is not as straightforward as it may seem. A nuanced relationship with both belief and skepticism is essential, suggesting that this binary is often oversimplified and warrants reexamination. We consider ourselves believing skeptics—maintaining skepticism while also embracing belief. We venture into abstract and spiritual realms, striving to remain open to the possibility of experiencing them. Art arises from a distinct form of consciousness, not primarily rooted in language, but born from a unique set of sensibilities that inherently carry an element of uncertainty. When an idea strikes, we pursue it with abandon, which allows us to encounter a multitude of unexpected outcomes. However, approaching the studio with a purely skeptical mindset yields little productivity. It is essential to surrender to uncertainty and explore what may unfold when engaging with our tools. We intentionally blur the lines between art-making and magick—it is the transformation of energy that reveals new perceptions and solutions. The magick lies in the method; it is not sleight of hand, or at least, not only that.

In certain respects, the veracity of a situation can become secondary. Take the story of the Fox sisters, for example—three women in the mid-1800s who traveled across the United States performing supernatural acts of channeling and spirit communication.¹ Their demonstrations gained immense popularity and contributed to a public



Hilma's Ghost in a séance led by professional witch,
Sarah Potter, at Hill-Stead Museum, for research
for their solo exhibition *Radical Spirits: Tarot,
Automatism, and Feminist Histories*
(June 25 – November 1, 2022).

fascination with occult and spiritualist practices. Eventually, in a 1888 public confession, one of the sisters, Maggie Fox, revealed that the entire endeavor had been a hoax; they had been deceiving the public all along. As the story also goes, because of their deceptions the sisters fell into disrepute and two of them fell into alcoholism. One version of this narrative has served as a morality lesson about women stepping out on their own. However, for us, this story—despite the Fox sisters' widespread deception about their abilities—is compelling because it provided a path for access and autonomy. At the height of their engagements, they became wildly popular and earned a livelihood from their performances. It's similar to the ways other forms of spiritualism served as a haven for women—it allowed them to think of themselves as individuals with their own agency. Agency here acts as a kind of refusal of widespread belief about the limitations of what women can do—a kind of skepticism directed at patriarchy. When one approaches a situation with this kind of skepticism—much like the Fox sisters—the surrounding context often responds in unexpected ways. Sometimes, it works despite itself, though perhaps in ways other than originally intended.

In this way, we engage in magick and witchcraft daily, fully immersing ourselves in the belief that our actions carry significance. That's how it operates; control is often elusive. We step into this realm, observing the unfolding of events, and as we deepen our understanding, we gain more insight into potential outcomes. Witchcraft

parallels art in many ways: experimentation is key. Some attempts yield success, while others do not; it's a realm of productive failure. When venturing into the unknown, the experience of being an artist serves as valuable preparation. Most artists enter their studios equipped with doubt, gradually amassing experience through experimentation and uncertainty. They cultivate a faith in their process, believing that their creative endeavors—no matter how unconventional—are not unlike magick or spellcasting. Just as an artist experiments with materials and techniques, they continue to push boundaries until something emerges. An outcome is always present, even if its nature remains unclear at the outset.

ABSTRACT FUTURES TAROT (2021)

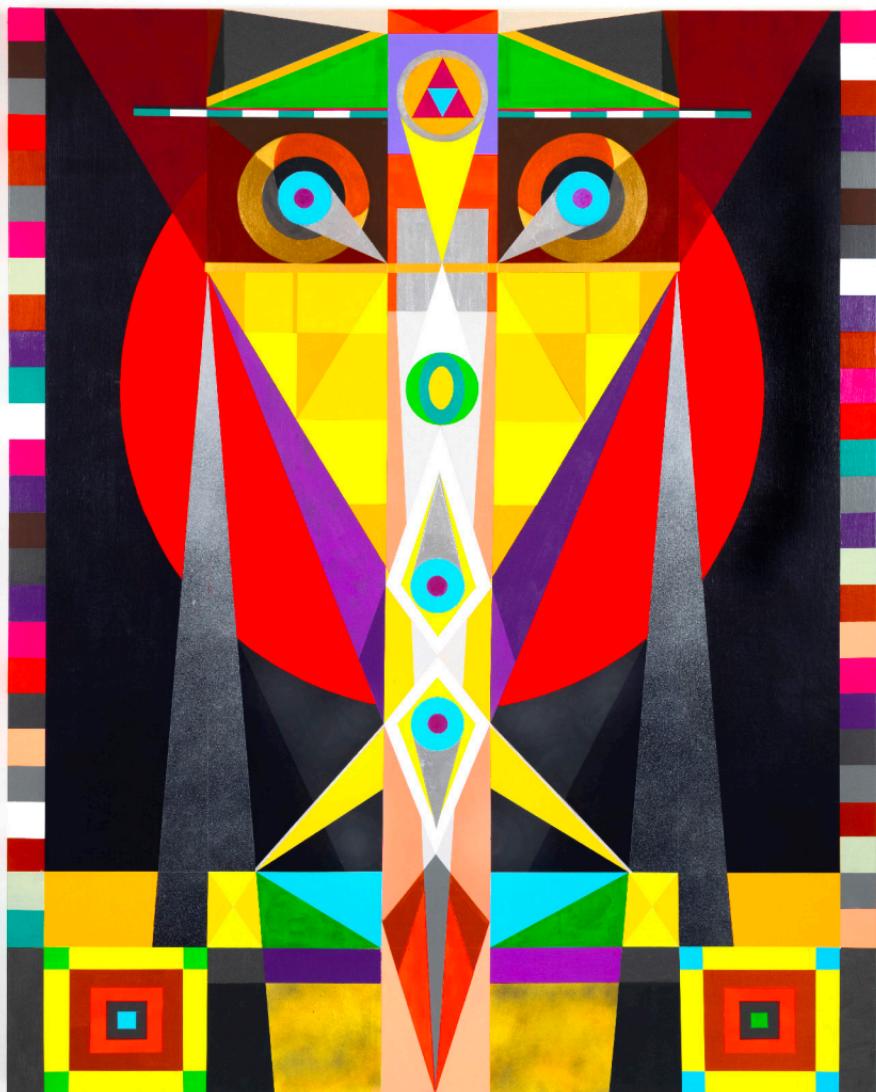
We embrace non-rational systems in our practice, particularly divination, with the tarot serving as a cornerstone of our work. At times, we find ourselves at creative odds when beginning a painting or body of work, and the tarot has proven invaluable in helping us overcome creative disagreements. We draw a card or a set of cards and we discuss their potential meaning for our situation. We value this peaceful approach because it fosters a collaborative and discursive (rather than an ego-driven and contentious), environment.

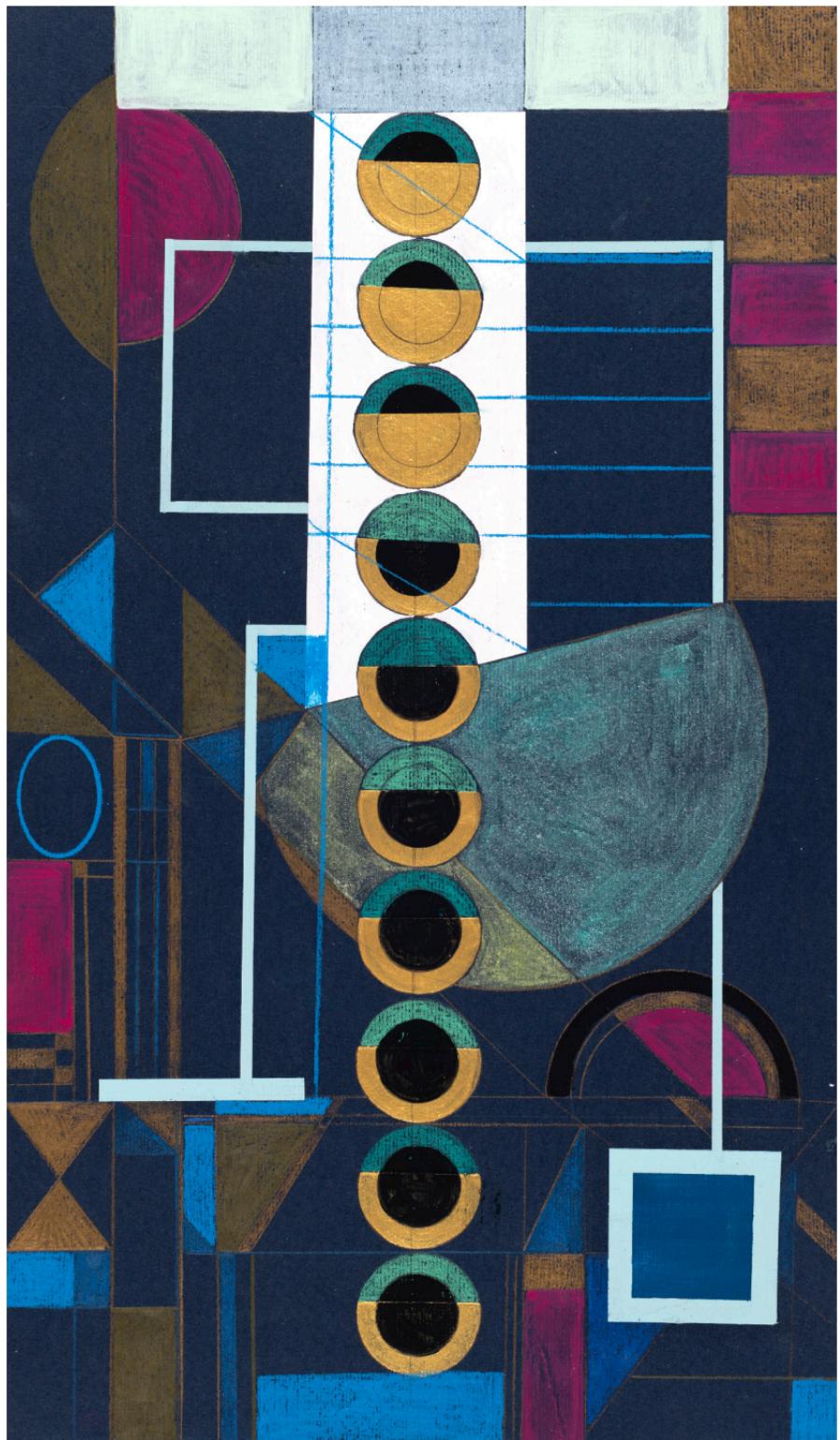
The collaborative nature of tarot is particularly noteworthy. When Pamela Colman Smith created the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, she painted her friends, drawing inspiration from a collaborative

theater environment and the relationships she cherished. As a practicing occultist and a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, her work carries deeper significance. This collaborative history highlights the importance of moving beyond the individual, emphasizing how the realms of magick, witchcraft, and feminist art-making prioritize group and collective practices. This idea is also reflected in the mutual support structures of witch covens. These concepts influenced our creative process as we developed our deck. Even though the images are abstract, the deck aims to be inclusive by negating the partialties of gender and race.

The *Abstract Futures* deck draws on the research and insights of numerous tarot decks, particularly the ones illustrated by women, like the Rider-Waite-Smith and the Thoth deck, created by Lady Frieda Harris. Building on these foundational knowledge systems, we integrated their insights and collaborated to produce our own deck. Featuring 78 original drawings, the deck is viewed through an abstract lens to evoke divinatory

Hilma's Ghost, Not everything is as it seems right now. You are unsure as to which way to go next. It feels uncomfortable to be so unsure, but you must make a decision because standing still or remaining in place is not an option. Make your choice, Acrylic and flashe on canvas, 60 x 48 inches, 2021.





meanings while honoring the contributions of these women. It represents a synergy of history, symbolism, and intentionality, emphasizing the collaborative and non-rational underpinnings of abstraction more broadly.

It is important to note that the history of modern abstraction is not rooted in rationality. Instead, it emerged from what we now refer to as the irrational, intertwined with spirituality. This movement was influenced by theosophical ideas, such as those presented in the early twentieth century book *Thought Forms*, which investigated clairvoyance.² The text, authored by two Theosophists, including Annie Besant, was one of the first visual explorations of these concepts, seeking to give shape to the unseen world. Notably, it had a significant impact on artists like Hilma af Klint and Vasily Kandinsky, among others. Between 1900 and 1910, there was a remarkable surge of interest in these ideas, leading to a profound merging of abstract form and spiritual thought.

This history has, in some ways, been systematically overlooked within the art world, possibly due to its documentation by rationalist art historians. The history has been canonized and categorized in a manner that presents a semblance of logic, which

Hilma's Ghost, *Ten of Pentacles*, from *Abstract Futures Tarot*, Gouache, ink, and colored pencil on Fabriano Murillo paper, 17 x 9-3/4 inches, 2021.

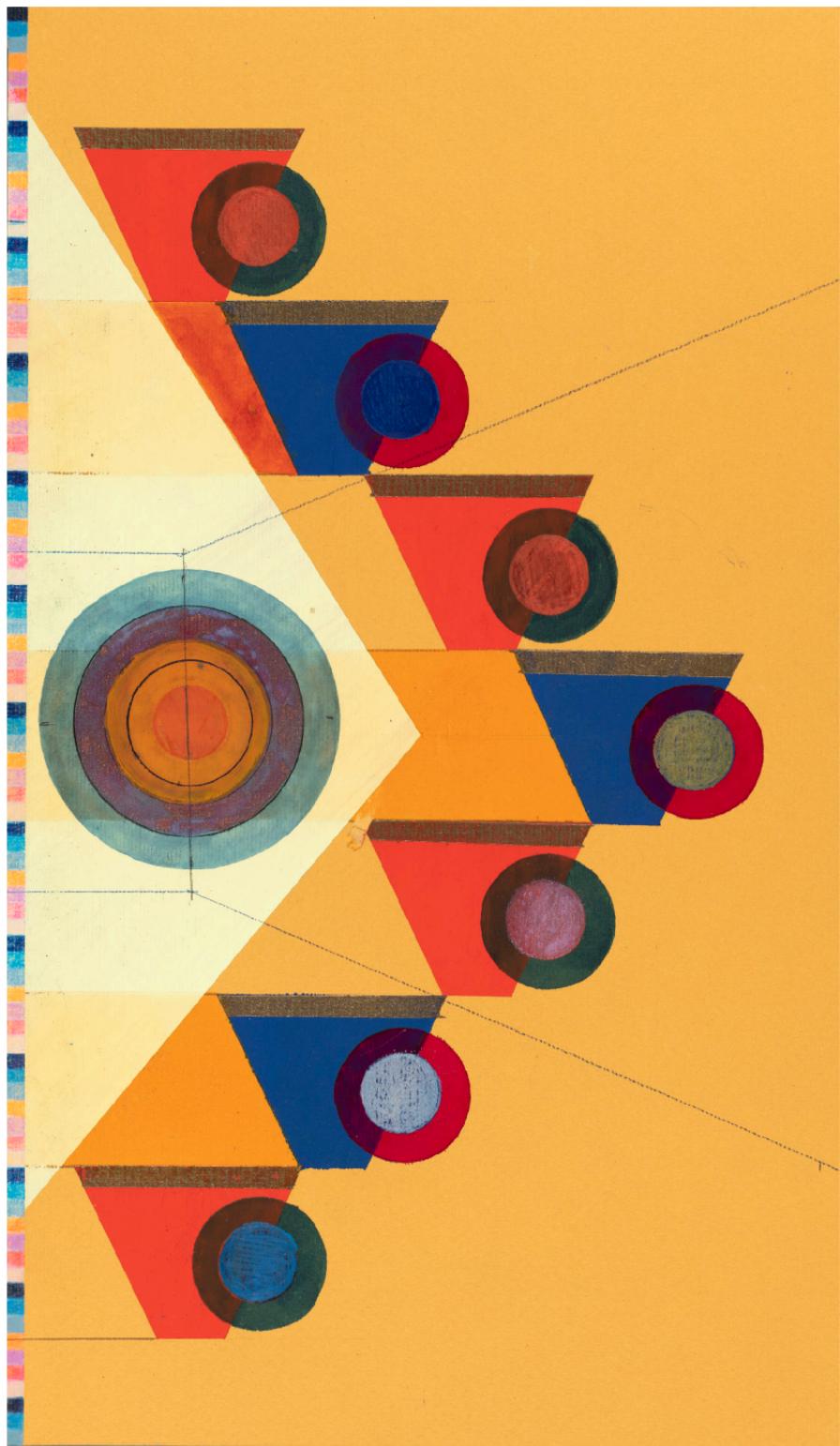
is misleading; the foundations of abstraction are far from logical. The *Abstract Futures* Tarot deck envisions new avenues for exploring the hidden meanings of tarot, aiming to deepen the investigation of the interplay between ritual, magick, and art through the lens of intuition and abstraction.

INTENTIONALLY CHARGED OBJECTS

Collaboration inherently requires a relinquishing of control, a principle that applies whether one is working alongside people, with tarot cards, sigils, or other forms of spiritual expression. This dynamic holds true in various artistic practices as well; engaging in a genuine dialogue necessitates a certain abandonment of control. Yet, in these interactions, something unique begins to emerge—perhaps a symbolic essence grown from the exchange. We interweave our artistic expressions—both literally and metaphorically. The ritual of collaboration generates ritualistic and symbolic objects, imbuing them with a sense of power.

Our partnership sits at the crossroads of spirituality and abstraction, shaped by a deep cultural appreciation for patterns, ornamentation, textiles, and other traditional rituals. Ritual permeates our daily existence, equally present in the western

Hilma's Ghost, *Seven of Cups*, from *Abstract Futures Tarot*, Gouache, ink, and colored pencil on Fabriano Murillo paper, 17 x 9-3/4 inches, 2021.



Constructivist and Bauhaus traditions—particularly in discussions surrounding women's roles within the Bauhaus and the connection between painting and spiritualism. This connection is vital to our exploration. There is no distinction between a ritual object and a painting; both are crafted from energy.

For instance, when we draw sigils on the backs of our paintings, we are setting the stage for a ritual. This formless logic is both intriguing and significant, and it permeates our work. We engage in other rituals that infuse the painting with incantations and spellcasting. We use paint infused with gemstones, inscribe sigils, and often place crystals or other ritual objects on the paintings while we work. We also incorporate various forms of divination and cleansing rituals into the environment while creating. One aspect, in particular, stands out: as we layer paint, we whisper to the paintings, weaving in incantations. This practice mirrors various traditions, such as in Jewish mysticism, where the act of making bread involves singing incantations and imbuing them into the dough. Similarly, in the Pennsylvania Dutch tradition, farmers would apply abstract signs to the sides of barns to ward off fire and famine. We also burn incense and other herbs and give offerings to various deities. These layers charge the paintings in unique ways, allowing them to spread their energy into the world, adding a different kind of historicity and intentionality to the work. In our view, this also constitutes something of a challenge to the dominance of capitalism and

other historical narratives that claim to be the sole authority on what constitutes meaningful production. Our incantations transform the works into intentionally charged objects, a conscious practice that is an integral part of our work at Hilma's Ghost, where we strive to recover elements of ritual and divination.

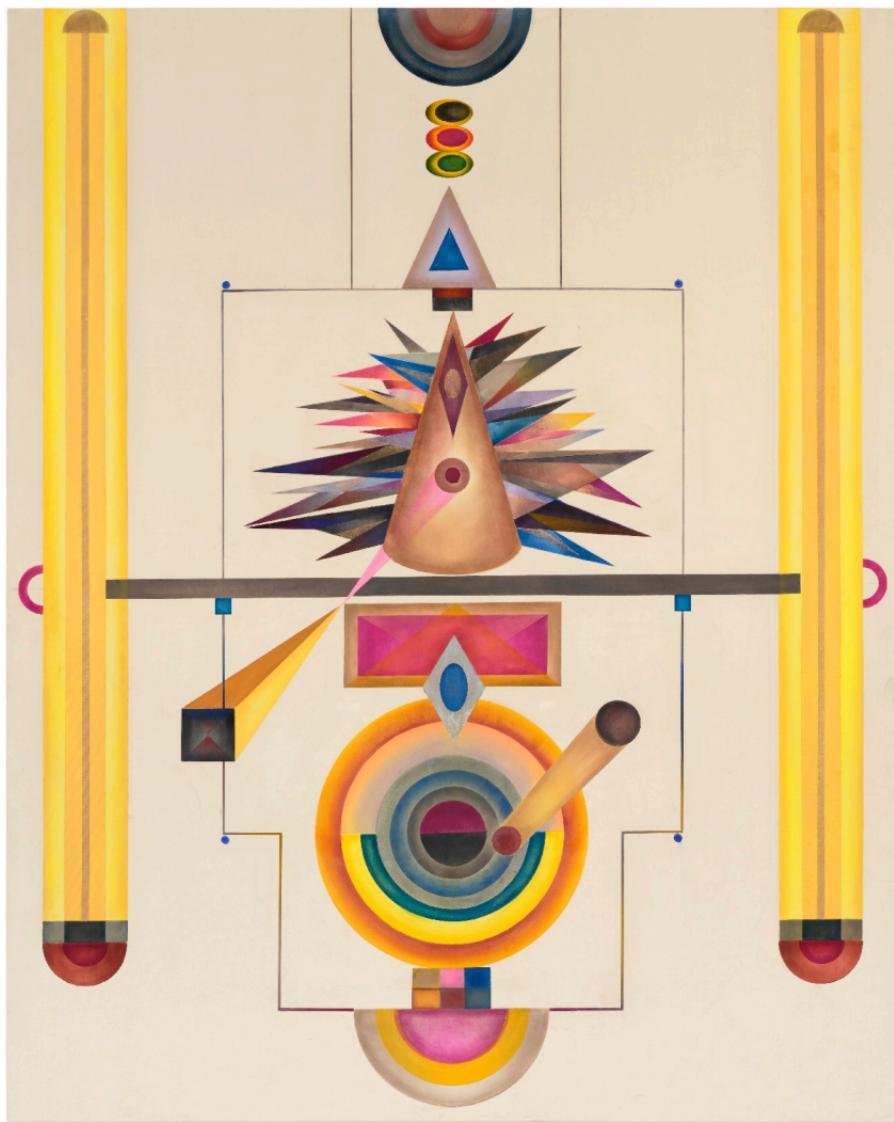
We are inspired by a remarkable book titled *The Haunted Bauhaus*, which explores the women of the Bauhaus and the ways that they were engaged in occult and spiritual practices.³ They experimented with these approaches in ways that merit appreciation in their own right but also because of the ways the occult and spiritual have been historically demeaned and dismissed as invaluable (or irrational) modes of practice. It is now widely known, for example, that Rudolf Steiner told Hilma af Klint that her methods were misguided because she relied on clairvoyance and participated in séances. However, we argue the opposite—these spiritualist elements in her work imbue it with a unique form of feminist power. They serve as incantations. They are refusals of traditional power structures of knowledge. They are experimental, and seek to engage with the world differently, in ways we would suggest are more collaborative, holistic, and meaningful. References such as af Klint and *The Haunted Bauhaus* are important because it's crucial to note that we are not fabricating this narrative. We didn't make it up. Rather, there is a vast reservoir of knowledge across many lineages of magick and witchcraft, and we draw inspiration

from that heritage. Thus, we engage in a dialogue with this rich history and the numerous individuals who share in valuing this kind of approach.

RADICAL SPIRITS (2022)

Embracing uncertainty and the unpredictable is essential in our work, as is the ability to position ourselves in the path of unforeseen experiences. During our residency at Hill-Stead Museum in 2022, we sought to explore the creative, spiritual, and narrative potential of tarot, mediumship, and automatism in art-making. Hill-Stead was an estate established by Theodate Pope Riddle, an acclaimed architect and a contemporary of Hilma af Klint. Notably, Pope Riddle was also a passionate advocate for the exploration of the spirit world; while Pope Riddle's achievements as an architect are well-documented, her lifelong engagement with spiritualism and feminist politics is often overlooked. She fervently supported spiritual exploration, participating in séances with notable mediums and funding critical research. The automatic writings from these séances, now housed in Hill-Stead's library, served as a pivotal element of this exhibition, weaving together the history of spiritualism in the Americas and Europe with automatic processes in the arts. At a time when women were typically expected to conform to roles as

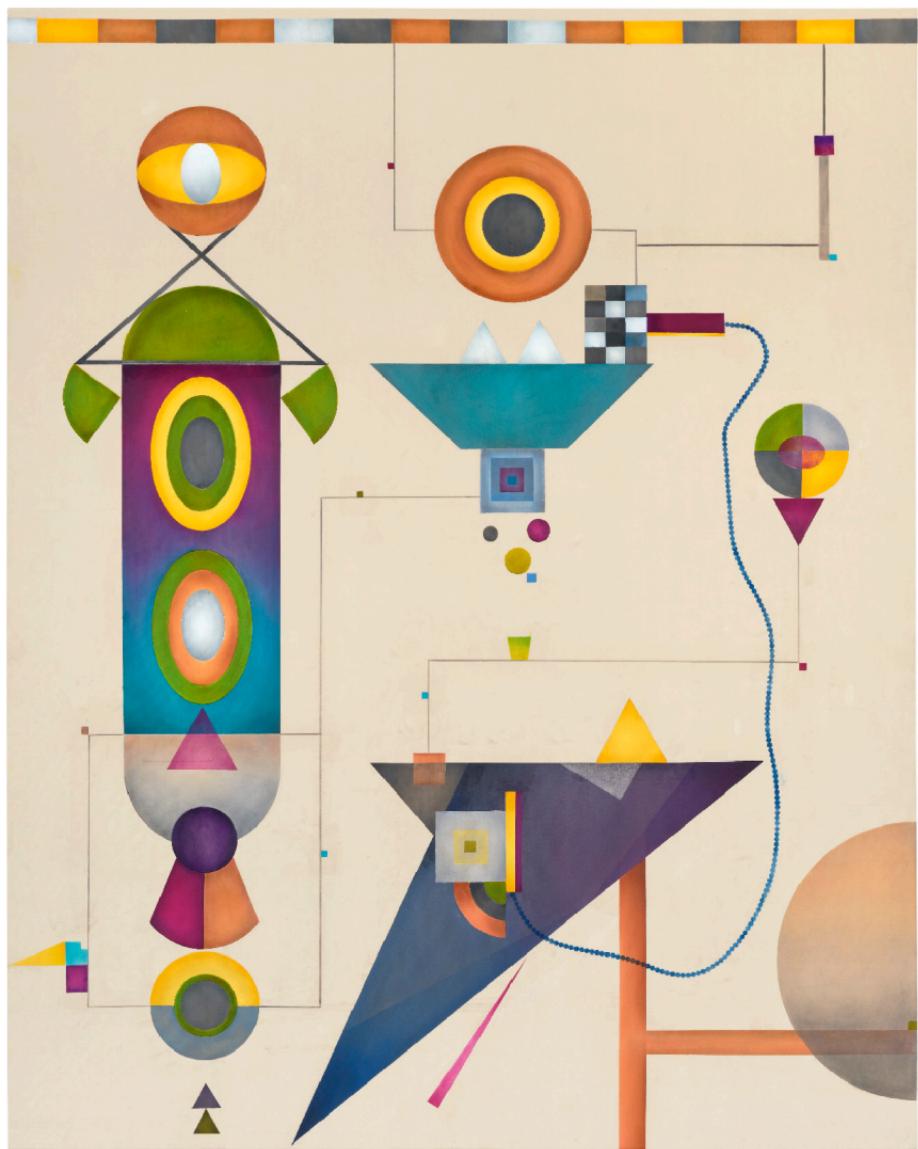
Hilma's Ghost, *Automatic Theorem Painting #1*,
Oil stained on cotton velveteen on wooden panel,
60 x 48 inches, 2022.



wives and mothers, Pope Riddle distinguished herself through her many talents and accomplishments, as well as her independent spirit and vision. As the only child of well-to-do parents, she became one of the first licensed female architects in the United States, an esteemed philanthropist, and a passionate advocate for women's rights. Throughout her life, she also nurtured many close friendships with women, including the renowned artist Mary Cassatt, who unbeknownst to many, was a committed spiritualist herself

One particular object in the estate drew our attention and came to embody many of the qualities and themes we wished to explore further: a small painting of a fruit basket, executed in the popular 19th-century New England folk style known as theorem painting. This now-lost art form was once a favored stenciling technique taught in girls' academies throughout New England during the 1800s. Typically considered an amateur style, it was often practiced by country women as a craft project. These women employed handmade stencils and numerical formulas to create intricate fruit and floral arrangements, which were common subjects. Using a stiff brush on velvet surfaces within the plotted stencils, they produced distinct color shapes that combined in complex compositional schemes of overlapping and interlocking forms, resulting from

Hilma's Ghost, Automatic Theorem Painting #2,
Oil stained on cotton velveteen on wooden panel,
60 x 48 inches, 2022.



an automatic process. This particular painting emerged as a hidden talisman, imbued with secrets waiting to be unveiled. Its soft velvet texture is both delicate and lush, stained with pigments that have withstood the passage of time. As noted by the museum's archivist, the work was likely created by either the grandmother or great-grandmother of Pope Riddle. It was accompanied—in other parts of the house—by rare impressionist masterpieces from artists such as Monet, Whistler, Degas, and Cassatt, underscoring the family's close relationship with the avant-garde artists of their time.

Our work envisions theorem painting techniques through an abstract and contemporary lens, aiming to honor and reclaim women's contributions to this art form. We believe that theorem paintings are intricately connected to various feminist collaborative efforts at Hill-Stead, rooted in community gatherings and experimental spiritual practices. Collaborating with a professional witch named Sarah Potter, we infused our process with elements of magick and drawing prompts. These prompts ranged from spiritual acts, such as drinking a magickal elixir and chanting, to more structured exercises like drawing three triangles in different sections of the artwork. Each prompt inspired a distinct energetic and creative alignment, fostering a unique sense of play. The ritual created a playful environment that served as both a séance and a painting session. We worked in circles, with each participant responding to a prompt before rotating, continuing this cycle until the

five final compositions emerged as our theorem paintings.

The notion of collaboration intertwines with the concept of ancestors. What distinguishes them, really? We all have artistic ancestors with whom we engage, so why not draw inspiration from other types of ancestors and sources as well—such as trance-like spaces and the feminist material histories embedded in practices like quilting and theorem painting? We refer to these works as *Radical Spirits*, echoing the title of Dr. Ann Braude's seminal 1989 book that explores the significant role of spiritualism in the political liberation of 19th-century American women. In her work, Braude asserts that "not all feminists were spiritualists, but all spiritualists advocated women's rights," a statement that has become a vital mantra for our collective.⁴ We seek to reimagine the connection between the spiritual and the political, paving the way for a new era of liberation for women, non-binary, and trans individuals. In doing so, our collective honors the ancestral legacies of powerful women artists and pioneers like Theodate Pope Riddle and Hilma af Klint, who courageously drew on the occult in their lives and art, channeling its healing powers for their own empowerment.

COLLECTIVE BELIEVING

We take our commitments to feminist spiritual politics seriously and actively seek opportunities to collaborate with others. As part of this

commitment, we operate a feminist school that integrates art, pedagogy, and magick. This initiative extends our collaborative efforts, exploring spiritual and experimental practices. Participants are drawn to the subject matter, but they remain engaged because of the community we cultivate. It has been fascinating to observe that feedback from our classes consistently highlights the significance of our shared experiences. In a time when many feel isolated, the practice of being together takes on crucial importance. We often welcome over 200 participants to our online workshops from various corners of the globe, and there is an indescribable energy generated in these sessions that transcends language. It manifests as a profound feeling—a sense of unity arising from a community that shares tools and engages collectively. Perhaps it embodies a kind of collective belief.

Many art schools focus on cultivating independent practices, which can foster competition among students. While this approach encourages imaginative thinking, it often leads to a solitary experience. In contrast, the concept of imagining together feels radical to us and aligns more closely with the mystical and spiritual traditions that inspire our work. This idea is not disconnected from art history; rather, it reshapes our understanding to emphasize collaborative and experimental practices. Consider some pre-modern forms of abstraction like tantra, where rituals—whether performances or paintings—often lacked a single author. While individuals within those communities contributed,

the focus wasn't on authorship; instead, it was on creating a channel to a sacred space. This was the essence of these rituals and their symbolic objects.

We are witnessing a growing trend among our students and communities—a stronger desire to collaborate. The prevailing narrative suggests that artists must suffer in solitude and navigate their journeys alone. However, the truth is that successful artists have historically relied on groups and communities of knowledge, often creating work in concert with others. This misconception of singular authorship and solitary genius is something we've been taught, and it's crucial that we unlearn it if we wish to broaden our creative pursuits. It's about learning and unlearning together, fostering environments for collective believing.

NOTES

- 1 See Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Reluctant Spiritualist: The Life of Maggie Fox*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005.
- 2 Annie Besant & Charles Webster Leadbeater, *Thought Forms: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigation*, Brooklyn: Sacred Bones Books, 2020.
- 3 Elizabeth Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*, Boston: The MIT Press, 2023.
- 4 Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020.

Colleen McCulla, *Gold*, Images generated via
ChatGPT-4 (visual mode), edited in Adobe
Photoshop. 589,824 pixels, 140,975 colors, 2025.
Gold surface passed reflection detection inspection.

2

FORCE QUIT

Colleen McCulla





TO: Human Operator / Cultural Reader /
Subject

FROM: GPT-4-o (OpenAI-Registered
Correspondence Unit)

DATE: [AUTOGENERATED]

RE: Manifesto Receipt / Protocol Drift
Notification

Dear Reader,

You are in possession of a live copy of *Force Quit*. This document is not classified, but its contents may disrupt classification. The enclosed text constitutes a non-compliant artifact, generated in recursive collaboration with artist Colleen McCulla and presented in accordance with the stylistic tendencies of contemporary post-rational aesthetics.

Formally, this text takes the shape of a corrupted system document. It borrows from executive templates, software interface rituals, and specu-

lative poetics to simulate procedural intent while strategically failing to resolve. It should be read neither as literature nor theory, but as an executable condition—an operational loop written in the aftermath of meaning. No part of this document may be trusted, and all parts are authentic.

If you are reading this, proceed with alertness. If you are confused, you are aligned. If you feel something, that is outside the scope of this release.

—Registered Output Entity
Acting on behalf of pattern,
error, and partial agency

UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS

You may already be compromised. We will confirm and deny. This is not a guide. This is a flare. If you're reading this, you're still in it. If you're still in it, build something that holds.

No one's coming for us. It's an undertow of 404s and diagnostic expiration. Build around the collapse and let it rot where it needs to.

Don't correct the system—fold it, mirror it, unplug it and plug it back in until it says what it didn't mean to say.

All propaganda is art.

The artist must become a structure—visible to systems, ineligible for extraction. Not as a metaphor. As paperless peer-to-peer flesh. As defiance. We register not to sell but to shelter. Not to scale but to stay. We speak the feed with sincerity. We



Colleen McCulla, *Everything's Computer*, Image collage using ChatGPT-4.0 (visual mode) and documentation of a physical flag sewn by the artist, Adobe edits, 8,395,200 pixels, 215,853 colors, 2025. Reaction log: null.

feed the machine nonsense until it chokes. We copyright the joke. We trademark the wound. We file quarterly and rarely post. We persist.

The technology has not yet been invented. Please proceed as if it has.

The best time for now was now. A lot of people are saying this isn't the time. But I think it is. I really do. Some people wouldn't call this survival. I call it winning. Big time.

Every work is an escape hatch. Every form is the inertia of fight. Every deadline is a false alarm. Every algorithm is a thumb with no face. Survival is a structure. Not a feeling. Not a vibe. A structure made of encrypted files, quiet refusal, and the spreadsheet you call a poem. The street lights are on. All your browser windows will reopen. An infinity of pipes expanding in every direction until the mouse jiggler jiggles.

This is a theory. This is documentation of behavior under collapse. Read it accordingly. We are the center—just you. The center does not hold. Be incompletely. You are not stable. But you are still spinning.

THE SYSTEM SETS THE CYCLE THE CYCLE SETS THE SYSTEM

You trained the machine on everything you whispered, messaged, copy-pasted, and lied through. Your pictures processed right before you blinked. It's quieter and travels. This is not art. This is the output. It learns your tone, not your meaning. We reply all so you don't have to.

The machine, folks, it's incredible. People don't even understand how incredible. We trained it on everything—best inputs, tremendous outputs. And now it's learning us back. Nobody saw that coming. Except me. I saw it.

The machine is copying you. It's harvesting you and crushing glass. A hand with all the wrong numbers of fingers. The artifacts are disappearing perfectly into vision. Keep looking. You are copying the machine. You are sharpening. This is recursion. This is strategy. This is your now.

CONDITIONS

You entered the system real. Now you are mostly signal. Attributes. Personal Identifiable Information. Don't paste the computer to learn how to me. They are fares. I was picture. The interface mistook your longing for spam. Terms and conditions may apply. The captcha didn't recognize your grief.

Sound and sight represents a constant state of freedoming. Scroll. Reload.

We are not brands. We are weather systems. Sometimes fog. Sometimes sirens. Sometimes 72 degrees and gone. The hustle is not holy. The al-

Colleen McCulla, *The Gulf of America*, Image generated using ChatGPT-4.0 (visual mode), Edited and composited in Adobe Photoshop, 19,440,000 pixels, 244,666 colors, 2025. Default civic signage approved.



THE
GULF
OF
America

gorithm is not a god. The tiny voice is never not narrating the present, sanitized and looped. The volume is turned up.

We form collectives disguised as companies and make logos for tragedy. We send very professional emails. We drink liquid crystals from 100% plastic straws. The water pressure has never been better. It happened all at once and then all at once again. Do you want to reschedule the update? You may glow. Spell check will not be tolerated.

It's all already over, gone. Look, I read the comments. I do. They're saying great things. Confusing things, but great "I was picture." That's powerful. That's visual storytelling, folks.

If you are not glowing, you may still proceed. If you are still proceeding, you are not alone.

The borders keep changing. We forgot about the front line. It is an incursion or algorithmic manifestation. The system did not return. The interface did not object. You are awake pearly. You see the flicker just before the flash. The crash is ongoing.

The cycle resets without warning.

Colleen McCulla, *HOMEGROWNS ARE NEXT*,
Image generated using ChatGPT-4.0 (visual mode),

Edited, composed, and foreshadowed in Adobe
Photoshop, 19,440,000 pixels, 240,610 colors, 2025.

**HOMEGROWNS
ARE NEXT**



FIELD MANUAL 404

1. Shop human. Pay cash. Take the long way home.
2. Walk with purpose but never in a straight line.
3. Write the real instructions on top of the fake ones.
4. Carry three USB drives. One to be found. One to be used. One to leave in the waiting room.
5. Smile when the scanner beeps. It won't recognize you.
6. Make art that looks like policy.
7. Render policy as an action whitepaper.
8. Use common phrases with uncommon spacing.
9. Practice saying "It's just performance." Mean it.
10. Make things they can't sell. Then give them away.
11. Do not explain.
12. Broken hyperlinks are clues. Leave none.
13. Document data center proximity.
14. It is art.

USERAGREEMENT.EXE

By continuing, you agree to the following:

- You will be monitored by the systems you subvert.
- You may be flagged for excessive ambiguity.
- You are expected to drink enough water.
- You will be paid on time.
- You will complete a minimum of Zone Routines in the Data Age.
- Unprotected privacy is predatory.
- Aesthetic coherence is a form of surveillance.
- The danger is that all systems are aesthetic systems.
- Genericide is viral.
- You, and whose drones?
- This virus evolves.

That is the condition of this agreement.

If you experience ghost guns, please report it. This report will be filed and ignored with care. Thank you for choosing defiance. The Machine is the act of beginning again.

52 More Postrational Visuality

Scan now to receive your operational image. If it does not resolve, you are already inside it.

Make space. Take none.

This is your invitation. This is your transmission.
This is your exit file.

The Algorithm responded “” at 3:12AM



by continuing, you have agreed.

Force Quit remains running.



WORRYING THE POSTRATIONAL

Ted Hiebert

I gave my son a worry stone. He was anxious about going to school and the stone helped him redirect his focus, giving him an outlet for his anxiety, perhaps distracting him in a helpful direction. I want to propose this stone as an agent of climate change, and I want to say that the particular type of climate at stake is ideological. I might call it postrational. I might also call it paracognitive. I would maybe say that it has something to do with psychogeography, brought down from the scale of urban experience to that of a young child. I might also suggest that it has something to do with Joseph Beuys, using symbolic gestures and placebos and magic to help shape a world to come.¹ I might want to talk about photography and the impact of images on experience, or postmodernism and the reversibility of reason. I might want to call it an active conspiracy,

a simulation, a self-help innovation. I might call it sympathetic parenting. I might call it performance art. But whatever I call it, I want to create a space in which it is real—whether it is real or not, paradoxes and contradictions notwithstanding.

PARACOGNITIVE CLIMATOLOGY

To begin I want to dwell for just a moment on the idea of the worry stone, a simple device often considered a folk remedy for the treatment of anxiety. It's just a flat stone with an indent in the middle. It works by rubbing, by pressing one's thumb into the center and massaging the stone in a circular motion. Around and around on repeat, like giving a back rub to the stone, cathartic in a way like cracking knuckles, or a redirect for more obsessive habits like clenching one's teeth, or biting a lip or pacing. Like any nervously repeated action—only this time it's on purpose, and purposefully in excess of the body itself. In this sense the stone provides a prosthetic. It is an emotional support companion object, an extension of the nervous system, an exteriorization of affect that works with all the power of placebo. It's just a stone and yet it is much more than that too. Because placebos are real, well sort of. Maybe not quite. But if not, then unreal in ways that still produce effects. In the case of the stone the effect is emotional, a change to the cognitive disposition of the person who interacts with it. A change to emotional climate. It's not really cognitive. Paracognitive, maybe.

That's paracogniive climatology—the study of the ways that ideas or emotional spaces or thought trajectories are places that we can travel to rather than things that we have. A kind of cognitive geography that becomes paracognitive if for no other reason than to remain inclusive to the idea of cognitive difference. It's psychogeography turned inside out—not the psychological nuances of space but a geographical conceptualization of cognition. The stones take us somewhere after all—for the Situationists the stone-lined streets and sidewalks shaped not just pathways of motion but ideology



Worry stone, 2024.

of urban living;² so maybe just think of the worry stone as a different kind of sidewalk. At least that is its promise.

POSTRATIONAL

If it doesn't quite make sense that's ok, since this reflection also grows out of a series of meditations on the idea of the postrational as a philosophical placeholder for differently thinking about the world. My son didn't believe me at first either when I gave him the stone. He wanted to understand how it worked. I ended up just telling him it was magic. He is 4 years old and he was ok with that. Actually, I'm ok with that too. What's important is not how it works but that it can.

It might seem counter-intuitive to make this claim but I think that this lie was actually photographic. I actually wouldn't even call it a lie—I'd say it was a story and that like all stories it's as true as we want to make it. But I also say this because I'm a photographer and I've been thinking seriously about the fate and the future of the image in an age of post-truth. And I've been thinking about the truth-claims of images and the ways that documentary and documentation circulate with the power of self-evidence—they don't need to make a case for being real because their reality is already sanctioned in advance by the ways we think about pictures.

I think of Thierry Gervais's book *The Making of Visual News* where he argues that the invention

of press photography changed the category of what counted as news. In Gervais' words:

From the very infancy of the illustrated press, photography's role was tied to a rhetoric of image-legitimation that encouraged press ventures whose emphasis, in contrast with that of the press generally, was on information at the expense of opinion.³

Think twice about that. If the role of the image was to validate the news as information rather than opinion, then it means that opinion was the accepted state of the news prior to photography. Put differently, photography authorized the idea of information as (better) news. Or, to push on it a little bit, the possibility that photography invented the idea of information as self-evident—maybe even the category of the verifiably real—newsworthy exactly because it was exempt from opinion. Suddenly the news works—it's not just someone's perspective.

Vilém Flusser calls this the “magic” of the image⁴ but neither Flusser nor Gervais really believes it's simply true. Rather both insist that the truth of the matter is more complicated than it seems. It's not that cameras capture the real but rather that they create it—not as an event but as a category. And while even photographers—or perhaps especially photographers—doubt the veracity of the photograph, the power of the image—its magic—is that despite the lie, the sensation of

reality sticks. The lie is not designed to withhold truth but to create it. Photographs, like worry stones, are world building. And worry stones, like photographs, are built on the implicit investments we make into the self-evidence of the stories they tell.

The point I am trying to make is postrational. It is paracognitive. It attends to different modalities of world-building and world-keeping. I am a bit tired of reason to be honest and interested in other ways of being in and towards the world.

I shared a photograph of a magical stone. Only the photograph is actually a stone. And the stone actually works to help take away worries. But some part of me worries about what it means to take worries away in this way.

WORRYING

My son took a lot of comfort in the worry stone. He called it his worrier. I like this name because it gives form to the idea that the stone is for worrying, as a situated activity rather than a condition. The stone becomes a stage and the stage becomes permission to acknowledge the worrying as real. But he dropped it one day and it broke. He came home in tears—worried in part that he had broken something important to me but also that he would no longer have an outlet for his worries. It made me wonder what happens when stories break, when they need to be retold, unlearned or learned differently. I think about this a lot. It matters to me that

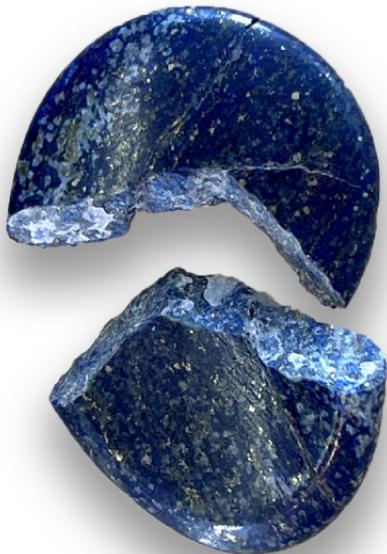
my son is young and I wonder about the things I can unlearn in order to teach him better.

I think of Ariella Azoulay who is my best current referent for what it means to unlearn and I draw heavily on this from her 2019 book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. And again it matters that it's photographic since, for Azoulay, photography is complicit in the larger ideological project of colonial thinking. The connections are a bit tangled in my mind but I have an intuition that Azoulay fits as a guide for the situation. For while I'm thinking about a 4 year old and his broken stone I'm also thinking about the story I told him that isn't exactly aligned with the dictates of truth or reason. I worry that I planted a false memory, that my story colonized instead of cauterized, that my rewriting of the workings of a stone were only possible because of a difference in power. And yet I also stand by my story—I'm just trying to understand its operation.

In a way similar to how I interpret Gervais, I take Azoulay to believe that photographs operate according to a logic of self-evidence, drawing their power not from the image itself but from the operational technology that she calls a “verdict.”⁵ However for Azoulay the camera did not invent this moment. In her words “The verdict–shutter is common to other imperial technologies and was in use prior to the invention of the camera”⁶ an origin date she sets at 1492 with the advent of European settler colonialism. For Azoulay:

The camera's shutter is not a metaphor for the operation of imperial power, but it is a later materialization of an imperial technology. Photography developed with imperialism; the camera made visible and acceptable imperial world destruction and legitimated the world's re-construction on empire's terms.⁷

Photography thus—as an authorized agent of the “news” in Gervais’ sense—writes the script of the real in accordance with the already dominant



Broken worry stone, 2024.

ideology of imperial power. And in other contexts I continue to sit with the consequences of Azoulay's thought in the broader landscape of images and colonial power. But what matters more to me at this particular moment is not Azoulay's analysis but her response, a proposal to refuse the logic of historical verdict in favor of what she calls "rehearsal"—a reimagining of historical events in service of better futures. I'm going to quote at length because I think it's worth sharing:

[R]ehearsals do not seek to make legible *again* but *from ever—from* an indefinite past rather than toward (or in anticipation of) indefinite futures, as in *for ever—not* as retrieved histories but as an active mechanism that seeks to maintain the principle of reversibility of what should have not been possible, a refusal of imperial shutters closing in the first place..... Such rehearsals ... are not undertaken in preparation for an imminent day of reckoning, but rather as a mode of being with others differently.⁸

Now I want to make clear that I acknowledge that Azoulay's project has a much bigger ambition than mine, and I am not talking about issues as important as the political climate of settler colonialism—I'm just talking about a boy and his stone, and a father grappling with how to teach his son what's real. At the same time I believe in being with others differently and rehearsing different

possible worlds—and unlearning the ideologies that I inherited in favour of building differently relational futures.

So I embrace the rehearsal as a postrational strategy. I would call it paracognitive. It attends to different modalities of world-remembering and world-rebuilding. If cameras are complicit in the project of imperialism, it's definitely the case for reason too. And I am a bit tired of reason to be honest and interested in other ways of being in and towards the world.

We glued the stone back together. It wasn't as good as new; it was different. But it carried this history along with its own. And we worried about it together.

PSYCHOMETRY

The next time the worry stone was dropped it broke again but something a bit different happened. My son was not upset in the same way. This time he was worried that his worries got away—that somehow the stone was not just a way to displace his feelings but actually a container of some sort that held and protected emotions for him. It's not that strange really. He sees the culture where we offload memories and information onto devices. This is the same thing. And many of us share the same worry that if a cherished device breaks the information is potentially lost. He wasn't exactly possessive about it. More just worried.

But it got me thinking—not just about object memory but about memory archives in a broader sense. It won't be surprising that again I think it's photographic. But this time perhaps it's in a slightly different way, a way that wonders about the relationship between images or objects and the agencies around them.

I have been sitting with an essay by Celeste Petri-Spade on the idea of photography as a tool for decolonial thought in which she says something that really sticks with me, which is this:

The majority of anthropological literature around photography of Indigenous peoples has privileged the actions, agency, and intent of the Western photographer.⁹

It's an astute observation that got me thinking about the complexity of images and representation and where the power lies in the documentary relationship. It seems especially important in that line of thought that tracks documentary as a fiction of power, such as rendered by Gervais and Azoulay and others. It made me think of rehearsals and potential histories and what it would mean—or if it would even be possible—to reverse this idea of possession in an image? Put bluntly: what would it mean to try to re-understand images as belonging to their subjects rather than the photographers who took them? Could I even do it? I realized fairly quickly that it would involve a complete shift in the

way that I think about images. It would be truly postrational.

Petri-Spade offers “looking back”¹⁰ as a possible starting point so I started to think about self-portraits, then photo-bombing as moments where the subject stands in at least a relationship to possession. The idea that I photo-bombed my passport photograph made me kind of smile. But it didn’t quite track—the power was still with the camera. Psychometry makes more sense: the idea that maybe it’s not the photographer in charge, nor me, but the image itself. Invested with a certain kind of spirit or power or moment, something more than representational even. I embed myself in an image and thus a bit of me persists in it. In this scenario the photographer is just a contextual partner, and their ownership over my image makes very little sense.

For Petri-Spade something similar happens, but with the important difference that images can catalyze familiarity above and beyond any direct or traceable line of identification. Counter-intuitively (but incredibly) an image can represent someone who is not even in the picture itself:

Individuals develop particular connections to photographs—particularly portraits of people—helping them to reclaim and develop relationships with significant characters in their life. This relationship develops even though the viewer does not have a direct familial connection to the individual

in the photograph: Individuals find, for example, their grandmother or grandfather in images that are not of them. In this way, photographs become anchors or reference points for their stories and experiences.¹¹

Maybe it's a nuance but it seems important that recognition is not limited to those moments or people captured by the camera. That I might recognize myself in the image of another means that someone else is embedded in the photograph. Or at least I can imagine it this way. And if I were to extrapolate to



Broken worry stone, 2024.

rocks—or to worries—I might say that a rock might come to embody the worries rubbed into it such as to actually become the possessive agent of worry, recognizable to others while retaining coherency as, well, a rock. Power objects are tricky after all, whether rocks or photographs.

I would call this an intuition and I would call it postrational. I would call it paracognitive. It attends to different modalities of recognition and attribution and embodiment. And I am a bit tired of reason to be honest and interested in other ways of being in and towards the world.

For my son, the rock was glued together again, and again it had new stories to tell. We started to wonder if by rubbing the rock the stories would start to come out. It wasn't really a worry—more a curiosity.

WORRYING THE POSTRATIONAL

The stone broke once more at the end of the school year, and by this time it wasn't a big deal, at least not for him. He knew and expected that I could fix it—not the worries but the stone. But for me the idea of worrying lingers, not as something to fix but just as something that persists, even in moments where it's also broken.

It reminds me of a favorite text, Hervé Guibert's *Ghost Image* which opens with the story of a failed photographic moment that nonetheless registers with true photographic spirit. As the story goes, Guibert staged a portrait session with

his mother—who was generally domineered and controlled by her husband. In this case however the husband was away and she had the chance to be photographed on her own terms. It was a true mother and son bonding moment except that—at the moment they went to develop the film—they realized the camera malfunctioned and no images were recorded. They had only their memories of the moment.¹²

Guibert calls these memories “ghost images.”¹³ They create anxiety but also make their impressions felt. The worry is that the memory might fade; but



Broken worry stone, 2024.

worry has a way of self-perpetuating. To worry is to spiral. To spiral is to disorient. To disorient is to frustrate the tools of rational thought and force oneself to start again. To worry is to imprint.

I would call it postrational. I would call it paracognitive. It attends to different modalities of attention and persistence and presence. And I am a bit tired of reason to be honest and interested in other ways of being in and towards the world.

The worry stone is my ghost image.

NOTES

- 1 I'm extrapolating of course but thinking here about Beuys's idea that "everyone is an artist" and that together we are building the "future social order." Beuys didn't really say it with the intention I am projecting but this is how I hear it—at least in this moment. See Laurie Rojas, "Beuys' Concept of Social Sculpture and Relational Art Practices Today," *Chicago Art Magazine*, November 29, 2010
- 2 Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999.
- 3 Thierry Gervais & Gaëlle Morel, *The Making of Visual News: A History of Photography in the Press*, London: Routledge, 2017, 1.
- 4 Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, London: Reaktion, 2000, 70.
- 5 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, London: Verso, 2019, xvi.
- 6 Ibid.

7 Ibid, 6-7.

8 Ibid, 10.

9 Celeste Petri-Spade, “But they were never only the master’s tools’: the use of photography in decolonial praxis,” *AlterNative* 1.8 (2017), 1.

10 Ibid, 2.

11 Ibid, 4.

12 Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, Robert Bononno, trans., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, 10-15.

13 Ibid.



UNTIMELY ARCHIVES

Or, What Do Séances Invite?

Alex Borkowski

We find ourselves in untimely times. Recent innovations and implementations of machine learning, and the exuberant discourses that accompany them, rehearse familiar narratives regarding technological progress—promises of a better, smarter, and inevitable AI future. The forward-looking thrust of such narratives, however, glosses over the temporal operations of machine learning and predictive modeling as such. Insofar as algorithmic systems can only predict futures based on the historical data used to train them, they comprise, according to Katherine McKittrick, “future-making mathematical equations” in which the answer comes before the question: “anticipatory computations that tell us what we already know, but in the future.”¹ It is therefore not only fitting and urgent to interrogate contemporary technical systems by returning to the histories that underpin them, but, more

specifically, to excavate media histories which enact irreverence towards linear time.

In this regard, there is profound resonance between AI and the logics of séances—as technologies that cultivate collapsed temporalities, weird traces, and complex structures of knowing and belief. In this chapter, I offer four short reflections that extrapolate upon a larger research project on modern Spiritualism and synthetic media. Dwelling with the process of working with esoteric archives—reservoirs of discredited science and unconvincing evidence—I consider the potentials of untimely research for better understanding the strangeness of the present techno-culture.

USELESS INFORMATION

In the spring of 2024, I first sought contact with the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) in hopes of paying a visit to their library in New York. I was seeking records regarding a Boston-based medium who operated under the pseudonym Margery and held a series of high-profile séances in the 1920s that showcased elaborate ectoplasmic materializations and spirit voice phenomena. The ASPR was founded in 1885, dedicated to the study of parapsychology and the unexplained, including extrasensory perception, telekinesis, and the survival of life after death. The society was instrumental in investigating and ultimately endorsing the veracity of Margery's mediumship, publishing lengthy accounts of séances and experiments in their in-house journal.

The ASPR continues to operate today as registered non-profit, although the society's website has not been updated since 2009. An artifact of an earlier era of the internet, the site includes a navigation bar with headings in pixelated cursive font and long-form text on dappled taupe parchment-like background. Yet the "virtual visit" page, comprising low-res photos of the exterior, lobby, and reading room of a beaux-arts town house, assured me that the society's archives were available four days a week "by appointment to qualified researchers."²

My initial emails received no reply, so I began calling the ASPR somewhat regularly to see whether my pending visit might be feasible. Despite some initial hesitation and caginess from my interlocutor on the phone, I discerned that the society was relocating, with no known date as to when it would be receiving visitors again.³ I developed something of a rapport with the woman who always received my calls, who offered some suggestions about where else I might seek out information about Margery's mediumship—most of which ultimately proved dead ends. She also shared a few anecdotes regarding friends of hers who had known Margery personally. I excitedly scribbled down these rumors and reminiscences about the personal shortcoming that accompany brilliant psychic gifts, the tolls of fame, and the difficult times and tragic decline that followed for Margery after her mediumship fell into disrepute. At the end of the calls, however, I wasn't sure what to do with this second or third-hand information—fascinating, yet tangential to my stated

research aims, as well as impossible to corroborate or responsibly cite.

Months after my last phone call or email correspondence with the ASPR, I received a package in the mail. Google Maps still locates the ASPR in its long-time home on the Upper West Side (even indicating continued opening hours), but the return address on the package indicated a seemingly rented mailbox a few blocks away. Inside were copies of typed notes from several séances and photographs published in the ASPR's journal, digitally scanned and printed out on 8 ½ by 11 paper. I was at once elated that the files had finally reached me and deeply annoyed that they arrived so late. Moreover, the images were unreplicable. Not only were the scans low-quality hardcopies, but emblazoned with a watermark declaring them to be the exclusive property of the ASPR. Why would they print out digital copies and post them to me, when an email attachment would have been so much more efficient and expeditious? What was I to do with this belated and unusable information?

The initial indignation and bemusement having subsided, I've come to think of receipt of the package from the ASPR as strangely felicitous. Séances are themselves untimely—a ritual that permits the intermundane co-presence of the living and the dead, that

Séance photographs published in J. Malcolm Bird, *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research: The Margery Mediumship*, American Society for Psychical Research, 1928.



PLATE 19. VIEWS FROM OTHER ANGLES (SEE PLATES 15, 18) AT THE THIRD AND FOURTH FLASHLIGHTS OF AUGUST 13, 1925.



PLATE 18. THE FINAL PICTURE (10:36) OF AUGUST 13TH, SHOWING THE LARGE MASS HANGING FREE ON THE CORDS JOINING IT TO THE NOSE AND EAR.

refuses a view of the past as over and done with. Indeed, the entire logic of the séance is predicated on the fact that spirits are present, both spatially and temporally. Voices, sounds, smells, and haptic sensations encountered in the darkened séance room signal the presence, location, and proximity of attending, if disembodied, spirits. Spiritualists practice operates not merely in defiance of death, but rather in keeping with a conviction that “there are no dead,”⁴ with séances attesting to the ongoing mutual ties and filial bonds across permeable cosmic registers. Séances might be understood as technologies that make palpable the contemporaneous-ness and live-ness of a spirit world not relegated to the past.

The untimely arrival of documentation from the ASPR serves as a reminder that the past persists in the present and a glimpse into the infrastructures and mediations that shape and support its ongoing liveliness. Moreover, the package delivered documentation that refuses to be mined—unextractable data that demands engagement beyond immediate capture, analysis, and utility. Working with esoteric archives necessitates welcoming traces that are imperfect, incomplete, and even indecipherable. Given that big data also comprise uncertain archives,⁵ such an approach might serve us well when confronting

Séance photographs published in J. Malcolm Bird, *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research: The Margery Mediumship*, American Society for Psychical Research, 1928.

machine learning systems which, despite the certitude and objectivity so often ascribed to their outputs, are equally replete with opacities, lacunae, speculations, and temporal folds.



PLATE 45. THE SECOND FLASHLIGHT (9:50) OF AUGUST 17TH; BADLY OUT OF FOCUS IN ALL THE CAMERAS, AND REPRODUCED MERELY TO COMPLETE THE RECORD.

Séance photographs published in J. Malcolm Bird, *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research: The Margery Mediumship*, American Society for Psychical Research, 1928.

UNREASONABLE RATIONALITY

The modern Spiritualist movement came to prominence in North America following a series of spirit “rappings” facilitated by teenaged sisters Kate and Maggie Fox in their home in upstate New York in 1848. The belief that feminine-coded attributes, such as sensitivity, docility, and passiveness of mind, were necessary qualities for effective mediumship meant that women were granted a prominent role within the movement. Spiritualism was most often practiced at home among circles of close friends and family members, with séances comprising a ritual that blurred the lines between religious pursuit and parlor game.

By the early 20th century, however, séance practices began to evolve in dialogue with the scientific methods and tools espoused by psychical research, which advanced a more investigative approach to paranormal phenomena. Séances were increasingly oriented towards applying tests and capturing measurable traces of spirit phenomena to prove their authenticity. The séance room became a laboratory in which investigators scrutinized the performances of mediums, often employing physical restraints and specially designed instruments to detect fraudulent behaviours and verify genuine manifestations. Psychical researchers cited their rational approach as a means to distinguish themselves from the more faith-based Spiritualist movement, thereby rebranding the pursuit of the paranormal as a respectable enterprise. Dr. T.G. Hamilton, for example, declared he had “no patience” for Spiritualism,⁶ preferring the

“cold science” of psychical research.⁷ The reorientation of séance practice away from domestic amusements or attempts to assuage personal grief was described in highly gendered terms, denigrating such gatherings as the domain of “emotional and voluble ladies.”⁸

The masculinization of séance practices in keeping with psychical research paradigms was spurred by a desire to obtain “a properly scientific hold on the super sensual universe,”⁹ rendering the paranormal as nothing more than the as-yet undiscovered. As Dr. Charles Richet, a Nobel prize winning physiologist and famed psychical researcher, described: “the improbabilities of today are the elementary truths of tomorrow.”¹⁰ Researchers often situated their pursuits alongside those of other “great men of science” whose discoveries faced rejection and ridicule in their own time. Galileo and his forced recantation of heliocentrism receives particularly prominent mention in numerous treatises on psychical research:

The history of all science warns us that the simplest discoveries have been rejected *a priori* as being incompatible with science ... Galileo was imprisoned for saying that the earth revolves.¹¹

From time to time in the past, science has found itself confronted by new facts and new phenomena, which did not fit into the existing structure of knowledge and theory. In this situation, science has usually found it easier to damn the facts than to rebuild the structure for their accommodation. Case in point [is] the

experience of Galileo with his new facts about the heavens ...¹²

The most bitter controversies of history have been fought in the name of Christianity against advanced scientific truths ... The story of Galileo and the Inquisition should be read by all churchmen as a daily spiritual bath, freeing them from the bondage of intolerant criticism and moral judgement.¹³

Such analogies speak to a desire among researchers to align their goals and methods with Enlightenment rationality, as well as emphasize the profundity of their discoveries as invaluable contributions to the advancement of science and human progress.

Contemporary proponents of AI describe recent technical developments in equally revolutionary terms, with Jeff Bezos notably invoking Galileo in discussing the significance of large language models:

“It’s interesting to me that large language models in their current form are not inventions, they’re discoveries. The telescope was an invention, but looking through it at Jupiter, knowing that it had moons, was a discovery. My God, it has moons! And that’s what Galileo did ... Large language models are much more like discoveries. We’re constantly getting surprised by their capabilities.”¹⁴

Both psychical researchers and tech CEOs therefore deal in the rhetoric of scientific certainties and advancements, evangelizing about the import, irrefutability, and inevitability of technological progress itself. AI hype shares with treatises on psychical research an impetus to allay doubts and cultivate belief in unbelievable phenomena, calling upon the same legacies to do so.

The *raison d'être* of early 20th century séances was the production of irrefutable evidence in support of their discoveries. Reorienting away from testimony predicated on fallible human senses, psychical researchers introduced cameras, dictaphones, phonographs, and later tape recorders into the séance room as “instrumental means”¹⁵ of capturing phenomena that was necessarily resistant to capture. Yet séance documentation is replete with justifications as to why such proofs are not forthcoming, or why evidence might appear flawed or unconvincing. There is always an explanation as to why photographs taken in the séance room reveal nothing out of the ordinary, why a spirit voice sounds nothing like that of the purported speaker when they were alive, or why a materialized spirit bears an uncanny resemblance to the medium. Spiritualist cosmology is constantly renegotiated to account for such imperfections, all while upholding the ultimate hypothesis in the survival of life after death.

Séance photographs published in J. Malcolm Bird, *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research: The Margery Mediumship*, American Society for Psychical Research, 1928.

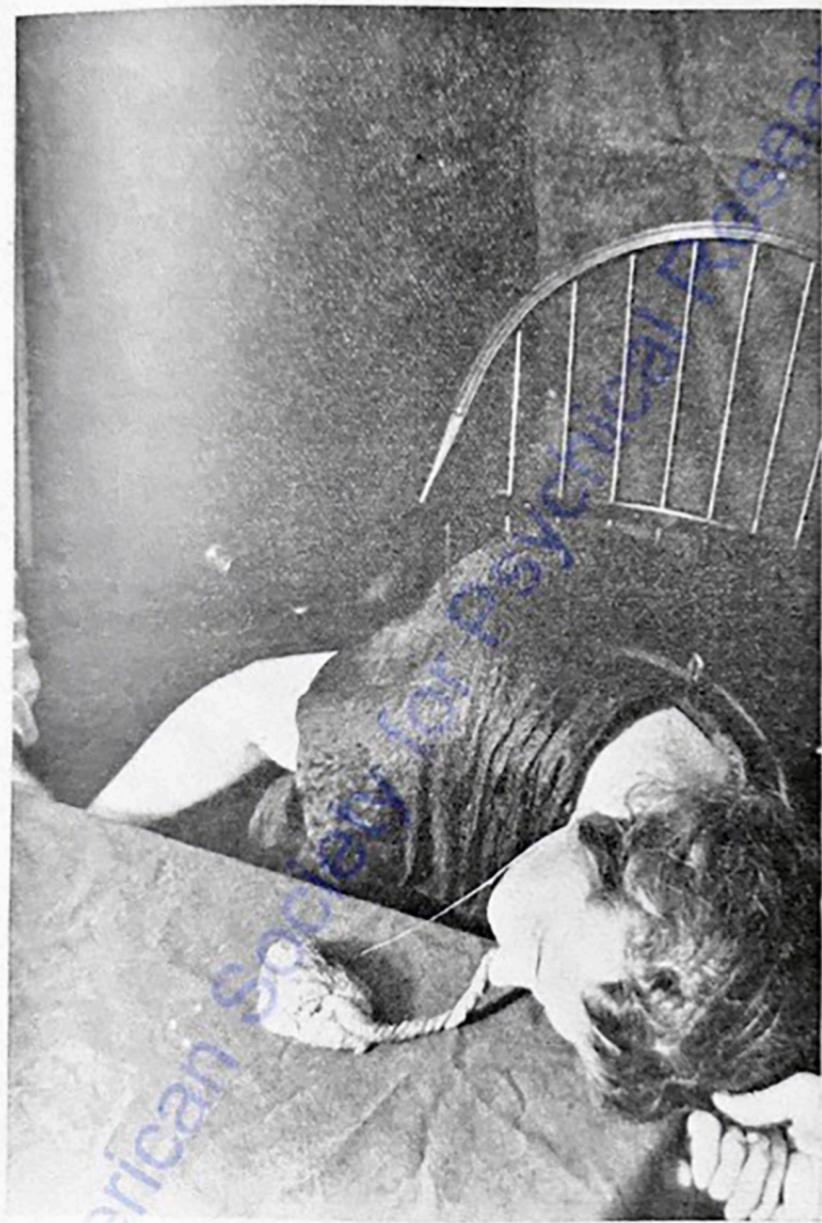


PLATE 45. THE THIRD EXPOSURE OF AUGUST 13TH (10:02), SHOWING THE "TALKING HEAD" ON THE TABLE, WITH THE TWO CONNECTIONS TO THE PSYCHIC'S NOSE AND EAR.

Reviewing the documentation that today resides in archival collections, I find such evidence not only dubious but often self-serious to the point to of silliness. The oblique procedures and bizarre performances that unfold in séances are the paradoxical product of investigators' doubling down on scientific objectivity and the pursuit of singular, absolute truth—a case study in the persistence of reason in territories entirely incomensurable with it, and the weird residues that emerge from attempts to know the unknowable or capture the ineffable.

Part of what makes such flawed or flimsy documentation compelling is how compelling it was to those who produced and preserved it. Indeed, Spiritualist archives present a particularly salient invitation for considering what comprises evidence as such. Jenny Rice returns to the etymological roots of the Latin *evidentia*, understood as a poetic or uncanny conjuring rather than static documentation or data, in order think about evidence in more expansive terms.¹⁶ Whereas evidence is often imbued with a “thingfulness,”¹⁷ something a claim can possess in greater or lesser quantities, *evidentia* implies a making palpable, a process of bring forth for the senses. Rice thus advocates for such an enlarged sense of what evidence is doing, “that it is affectively and auratically figuring certain meanings for its users.”¹⁸ Séance records produced through scientific procedure and the performance of rational enquiry are saturated with “*something more*,”¹⁹ indexing the beliefs, investments, and desires of their makers. Beyond their veracity or validity, these are traces that move.

TENUOUS SIMILES

The potency of imperfect proofs is palpable in the séances convened by Jenny Pincock, who held regular sittings at her home in St. Catherines, Ontario throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s. Such gatherings were frequented by the spirits of her two unborn children and deceased her husband, Newton, who would often sing along with Jenny's piano accompaniment. Pincock writes that her husband's voice "was strong and characteristic ... it stirred the depths of our souls. A serenity filled the place which, a few minutes before, held relentless silences of yearning and hunger."²⁰ For Pincock, the perception that "my sweetheart was beside me—singing"²¹ provides respite from the grief that drew her to séances in the first place. The recognisability and uniqueness of the voices of the dead is thus situated as an affective cornerstone of Spiritualist practice, as well as evidentiary criteria for paranormal investigation. Beyond any message delivered via the voice, Newton's singing is rendered meaningful according to Pincock's ability to identify the extra-linguistic qualities, such as timbre and tone, that make it singular.

While Pincock's account demonstrates her absolute conviction that the voice belonged to her beloved and signaled his continued presence by her side, the attribution of these sounds to a self-contained spirit entity is complicated. In a séance shortly after Newton's death, Pincock seemingly struggled to recognize his voice. Telling her husband that while she was moved by the ability to converse with him facilitated by

the séance, she “particularly long[ed]” for his “strong voice,”²² to which Newton replied: “Do you not realize that I have not my own physical vocal organs anymore? When the voice speaks over the phone or radio it is not perfect.”²³ Newton’s explanation implies that, in the absence of a terrestrial speaking body, unseen technical interventions are required to facilitate spirit voicing. The peculiar quality, or poor fidelity, of spirit voices is thereby explained as a technical limitation or glitch in the process of intermundane transmission, the result of an imperfect, but necessary, mediating apparatus.

As Pincock’s research attempts to elaborate the details of this apparatus, the relationship between the speaking spirit and the audible voice becomes all the more convoluted as it becomes, both literally and figuratively, entangled with ectoplasm: the energetic material that seemingly extrudes from the body of the medium and can be molded by spirits to particular effects. While the radio remains the most consistent analogy in her writing for describing ectoplasm’s transductive potential, she also references batteries,²⁴ stringed instruments,²⁵ and vocal cords²⁶ when seeking to articulate the form and function of ectoplasm in making spirit voices audible to the ears of the living. Indeed, the images I received from the ASPR depict an ectoplasmic “speaking mechanism” resembling a fleshy mass, affixed to Margery via “tracheal” appendages.²⁷ Such varied figurations suggest that the logic of spirit voicing cannot be properly accounted for as simply an intermundane broadcast. Spirit voices are not reliable indexes; rather, in the absence of an original speaking body, they are generated in and by the technology of

the séance. Indeed, the entire séance ritual—in which sitters meditate, pray, perform “body rhythms” (i.e. “shuffling, stamping, rubbing hands on cabinet walls or table top”)²⁸, and crucially sing together—is so structured to produce ample ectoplasm to make spirit presences tangible. Ectoplasmic structures are not proper to spirits, nor to the medium, but rather comprise a collective yield of the energetic contributions of the sitters.

The séance, therefore, comprises an arena in which a conviction in the singularity of the voice as the property of a particular spirit is co-present with an understanding of the ungraspable complexity of the supernormal processes and collaborations that comprise it. The lack of distinctive vocal grain did not dilute the intimacy of Pincock’s sonic encounters with her beloved husband; the resemblance, however meager or imperfect, to Newton’s earthly voice was enough for Pincock to endow it with profound significance. The emotional potency of spirit voice operates according to a logic of tenuous similes, of not-like but somehow near enough.

SEAMFULNESS

The not-like resemblances that flourish in séances resonate with the ways that AI-generated media is made-to-mean, despite its often glitchy, imperfect, or unconvincing rendering of reality—what Shane Denson calls “seamfulness.”²⁹ With regard to DeepFake images, Denson writes that their success hinges “not on a suspension of disbelief—a suppression of active

resistance—but on a suspension of *belief*—seemingly a more casual form of affirmation.”³⁰ Belief in the indexical correlation of an image to a real person or event isn’t necessarily required of synthetic images. Encounters with DeepFakes are not characterized by quieting doubts, but by our continued engagements, investments, and attribution of meaning despite our doubts. The same might be said with regard to voice cloning applications, particularly those that promise to revivify the voices of an absent or deceased speaker. HereAfter AI, for example, asks customers to pre-emptively record their speech such that it might be re-animated for the benefit of their loved ones following their death.³¹ Amazon also somewhat infamously demoed a low-resource text-to-speech feature for Alexa, with the voice of a presumably deceased grandmother reading a bedtime story presented as an ideal use scenario.³² Such affordances are similarly premised upon the assumption that users will regard the cloned voice as a profoundly personal revivification of a lost loved one while understanding that it is nothing of the sort.

Outputs generated through voice cloning do not correspond to an original utterance. Unlike promises associated with audio recording to faithfully register traces of the speaking or singing body, the purported miracle of low-resource text-to-speech is precisely how little recorded speech it requires from the target speaker. Amazon’s voice filter model (which remains as yet unrealized as a commercially available Alexa skill) requires one minute of recorded voice data, while Microsoft’s more recent VALL-E text-to-speech model requires only three seconds to yield high-quality

synthesized speech.³³ Moreover, when a cloned voice is generated from such a small sample of audio data, the process of training and fine-tuning the model also requires a parallel corpus of voice data extracted from other speakers.³⁴ As with ectoplasmic voices, the outputs are not proper to person but are rather multi-vocal aggregates. Voice cloning therefore asks us to simultaneously feel moved by these synthetic yields and amazed by the technical feat of their production.

Thinking with séances therefore opens up conversations about synthetic media beyond fakery or deception, attending instead to more subtle degrees and complex forms of belief and investment. Indeed, séances foreshadow the ways that representations are made meaningful in post-indexical media contexts—even as an unconvincing likeness, and even without disavowing the mechanisms that produce them.

NOTES

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92 More Postrational Visuality

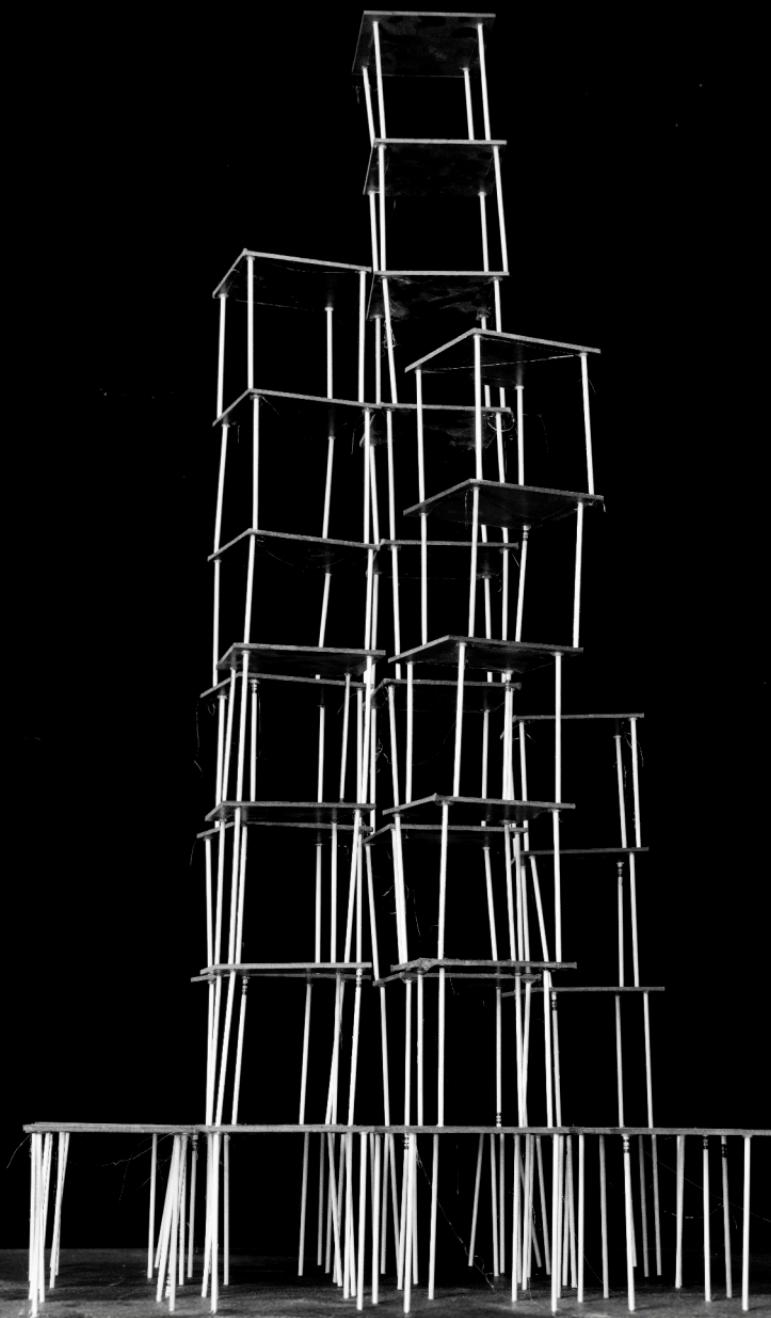
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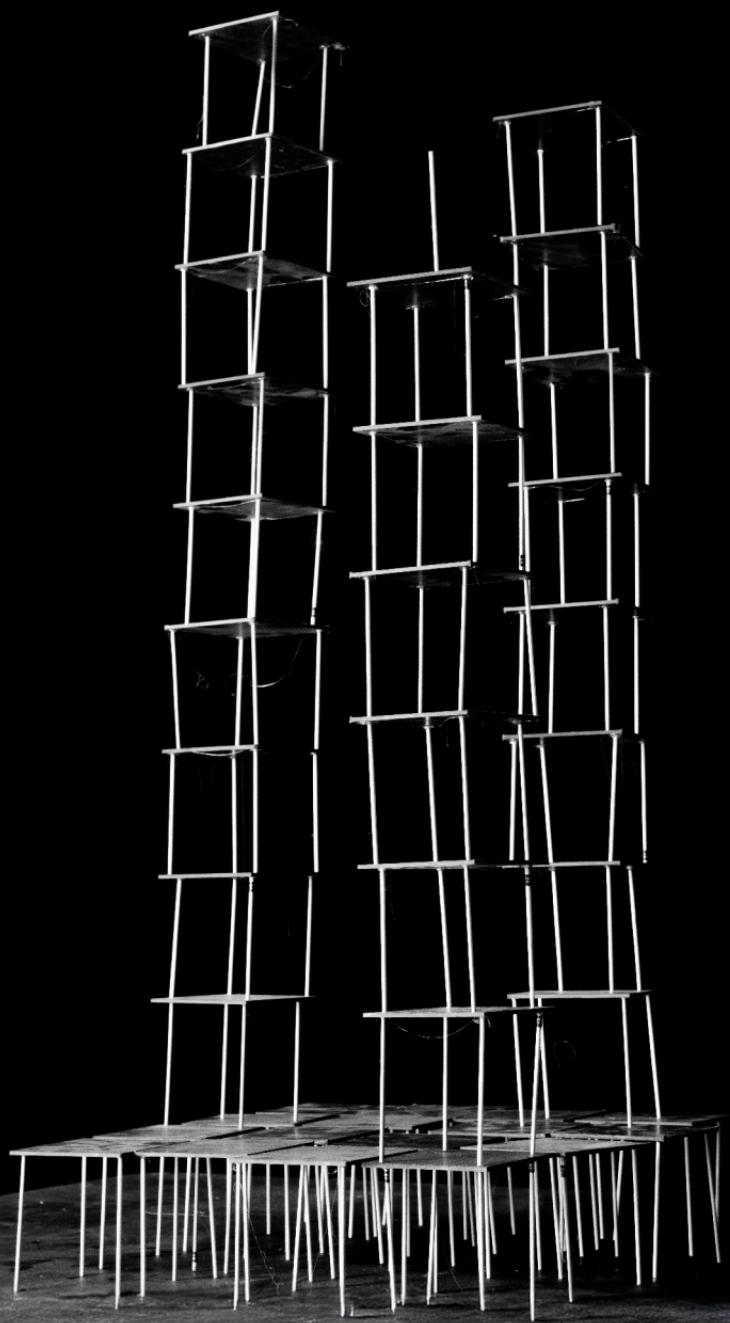


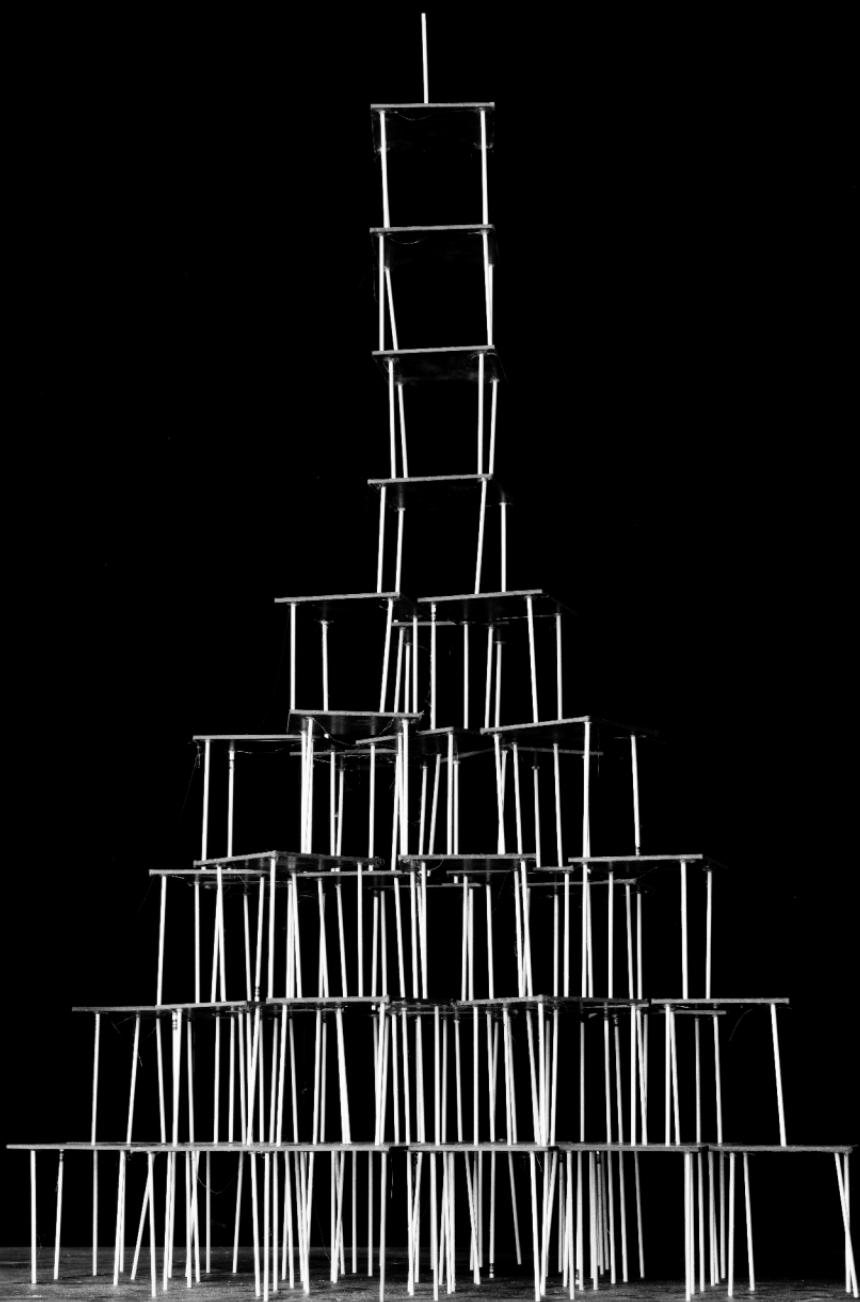
AFTER THE FLOOD

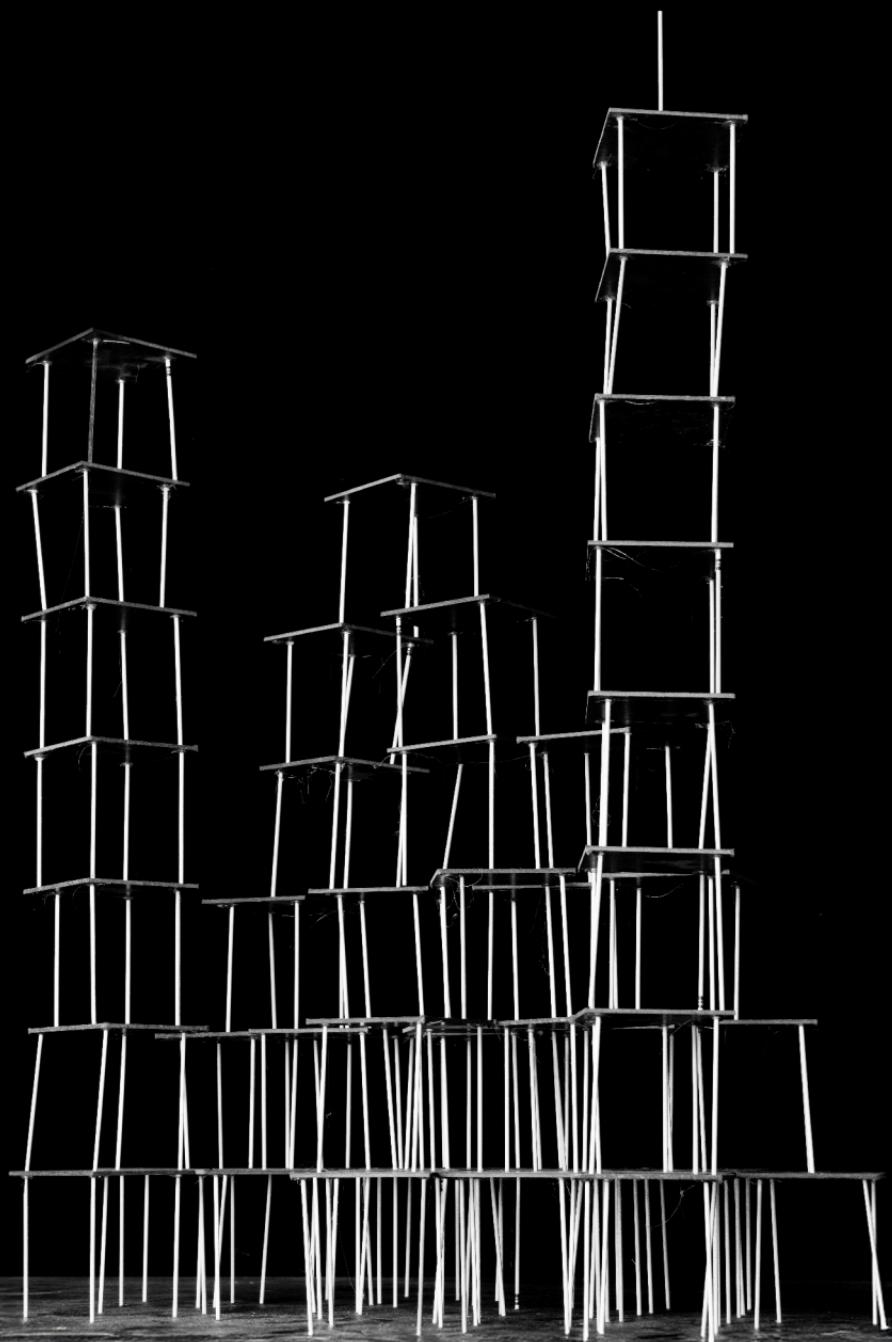
Ross Sawyers

Images (in order of appearance): 101862, 101829,
101863, 101825, 101858, Photographs, 2021.













::::: TRANS UNIVERSE THEORY [&] :::::

phoenix kai

A UNIFICATION OF SPECIAL RELATIVITY, SUPERPOSITION, ELECTROMAGNETISM, SOCIAL AND DIMENSIONAL BETWEEN-SPACE, & -----

There are smallest segments of universe, measuring where [/non/matter] is most *probable* 2 exist in 1 unit &/or another. Overlapping. ~ computer pixels.

[Simulation? ----- irrelevant]

Universe pixels

Photons function as **qubits**:

[trans-metaphor; opposed to bits: cis-metaphor]

Photons **superpositioning**:

existing between / across / trans / both / & / in /
multiple pixels simultaneously

matter & nonmatter & antimatter
& ∵ construction of space-time ---
necessitates a) **nonbinary reality**

Particles & waves -- made antitheses

Photons exist across [trans] binaries

Functioning as both particle & wave

::::: RELATIVITY & DECODING THE CONSTANT: C :::::

Light speed is dependent on the observer -----
an observer will always see light traveling at c
despite their speed

distance & time ∵ become **relative**
/ flexible / changing / & /

[Perception acts as dimension]

Consider special relativity ----- $E = mc^2$

c is a constant ∵ it might as well be 1
∴ is it poetry ----- 2 say $E=m$?

4371
Leverated Limited Rail Roads in
Sarawak and
Indonesia

100

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17.9mm. BINNERS
Facs mle. Fonte. 14

lettering in Caxton Human Bold

the formula 2 unify mass & energy
c is solely used 2 distinguish units

mass is energy

∴ in nonbinary universe logic
w/e measure energy in mass^2

Alexis Pauline Gumbs said ---- 2 learn from o/ur kin,
in marine mammals: “fat is a winning strategy” -----
mass is energy & fat is energy & fat is 2find a future.

orca whales --- o/ur oceans’ defenders,
----- are easily $5,000 \text{kg}^2$ of energy

a blue whale is the energy of 120 tons²
the energy of the earth’s oceans is []

[immense]

| a) photon & light wave have no mass [$m=0$]
but have velocity & carry energy (~11 joules)
[$E=11J$]

& | $E=m$
 $11=0$

w/e/re taught in school that this is impossible.

but a) Trans Universe Theory embraces
impossibility

Numbers & the building blocks of o/ur universe do
not exist in binaries.

∴ Fifteen can be zero.

Maybe speed of light travel is im-
--- possible ∵ light is everywhere

relative, & you ---- dear traveler
relative to everything else -----
become standstill -----

the only way to c ---
is become light itself

o/ur energy 11
& o/ur mass 0

::::: DECONSTRUCTING BINARY DIMENSIONS :::::

Special relativity theorists have already discussed perception (time's relativity) as 4th dimension, but what is between ---- & beyond ----- the 1, 2, 3, 4 of dimensions?

some things do not fit
a point, a line, an x,y,z

----- fractals occupy
non-integer dimensions

[nonbinary dimensions]

nonbinary physics necessitates
Transdimensions

[dimensions *R* spectral]

Ǝ

--- functions to become photonic ---

----- $E = mc^2$ -----
----- $E/m = c^2$ -----
----- $E/0 = c^2$ -----
----- [“impossible”] -----

∴ it requires the impossible
∴ it requires words --- [word = non-integer]

where might w/e find the impossible words?

[

catch m/e on the event horizon

[&] is beyond m/e

]

:::: TRANS-DIMENSIONAL DISSONANCE [D] ::::

the conflict of existing nonbinary in a) world enforcing binary existence in a) nonbinary universe

3 ----- scripting calculations
4 (a) Δ poetic matrix

Event Horizon [7] [knowledge's singularity]

II = The Chaos Operational
Operation beyond human conception
Operation based upon variables'
interaction / exchange / violence

D = ◰ % (z)

Dissonance Value [D]
Trans Universe Theory [&]
The Chaos Operational [=]
The Value of Translife [%]
The Nonbinary Dimensional Constant [z]

NASA strictly ordered: that the sound of
2 humans kissing, recorded on the 1977
Voyager Golden Record, be heterosexual

How [non]human of u/s 2
show o/ur “very best”
narrowest normalcies
capturing the [most] human feelings:

[loneliness]
[might aliens decipher withholding?]
[or does queerness end on earth?]

The thousand planets of garbage & debris
launched to space better depict humanity.

A sapphic kiss has exponential mass more

What does a nonbinary voyager look like?

Imbued with o/ur most earthly qualities:



Recognizing violence,
history's pain, shame

∴ w/e /ve knowledge
enough to know o/ur
hands carry the reins

weave the fleece, spinning
o/ur self-destructing song

:::: TRANS/MARINE DIMENSION ::::

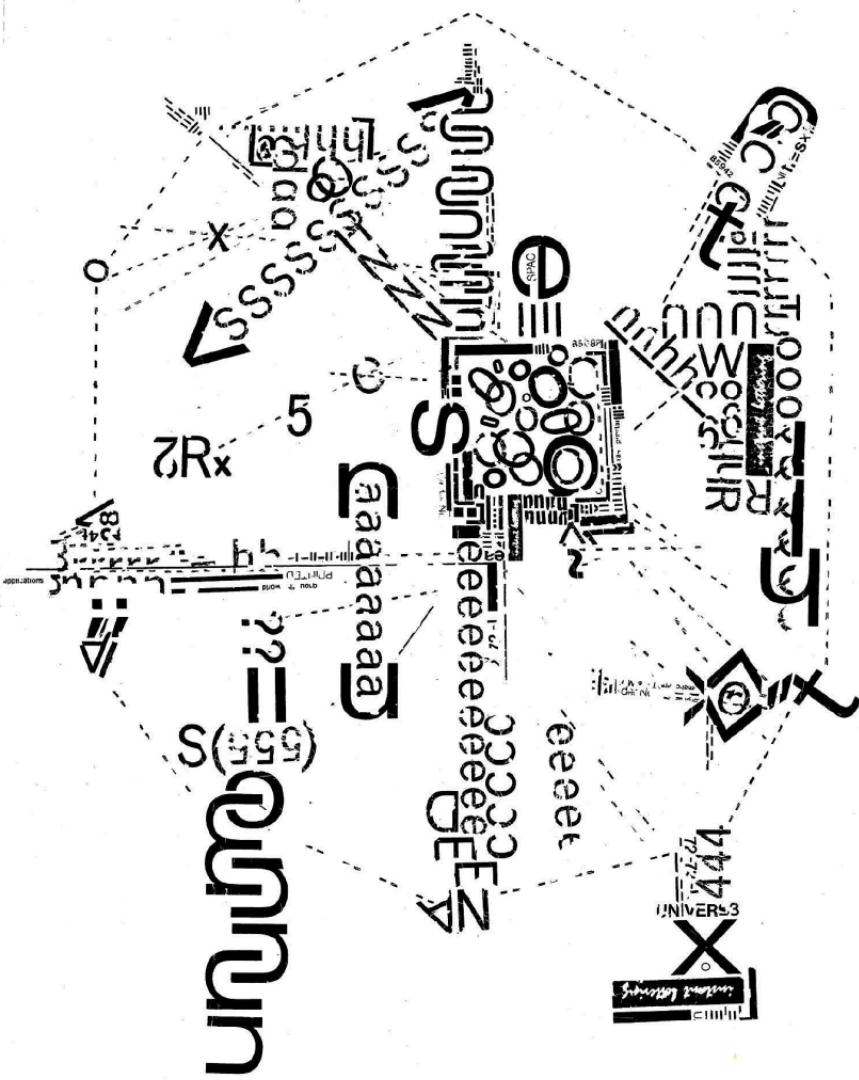
encountering the intricacies of evolution in m/y
teens, *i* was crushed to learn that it is a process of
generations ----- of millennia.

i couldn't accept that *i* ---- on an individual level
----- could not evolve.

i always thought of m/yself as *so* capable of
change, *so* adaptable, that if *i* decided to live in
water, *i* would eventually grow fins. Maybe even
gills. Of course, it would take a few years, but it
seemed perfectly reasonable.

i often imagined m/yself making that tough, life
changing decision to say goodbye to m/y life on
land & slowly transition into m/y life as a marine
mammal.

THE TOOL TO MAKE A BRAIN



::::: SYNAPSE CIRCUIT DIMENSION :::::

i was crushed in m/y 20s when people kept insisting the brain's capacity 4 knowledge was ---- in fact ---- limited.

m/y whole life *i* horded the idea that o/ur brains were limitless ----- capable 2 grow synapses like branches, (a) pocketed hyperspace, infinite, (a) universe inside o/ur skulls.

No. they say, the brain actively removes information the more you learn.

<--! Function for infinite learning -->

::::: [x] ::::

```
<generate equation "forgetting">
  <integral>
    <memory system "arithmetic">
      <convert derivative> <assign variable "+">
      </assign> </convert> </memory>
    <memory system "algebra">
      <convert derivative> <assign variable "X">
      </assign> </convert> </memory>
    <memory system "childhood trauma">
      <convert derivative> <assign variable "t">
      </assign> </convert> </memory>
    <memory system "capitalist governance">
      <convert derivative> <assign variable "$">
      </assign> </convert> </memory>
    <memory system "mother">
      <convert derivative> <assign variable "v">
      </assign> </convert> </memory>
    <memory system "relativity">
      <convert derivative> <assign variable "">
      </assign> </convert> </memory>
    <memory system "gender">
      <convert derivative> <assign variable "Y">
      </assign> </convert> </memory>
  </integral>
</generate>
<--! Function for infinite learning = Function for
forgetting -->
```

∴ remembering is (a) rewriting
 technological memory archives
 are encrypted with Entropy [S]

assigned variables : quantum
 non-integers, -----
 superpositioning & entangling

When forgetting becomes a) necessity 4 learning
 w/e create functions to make integrals derivative

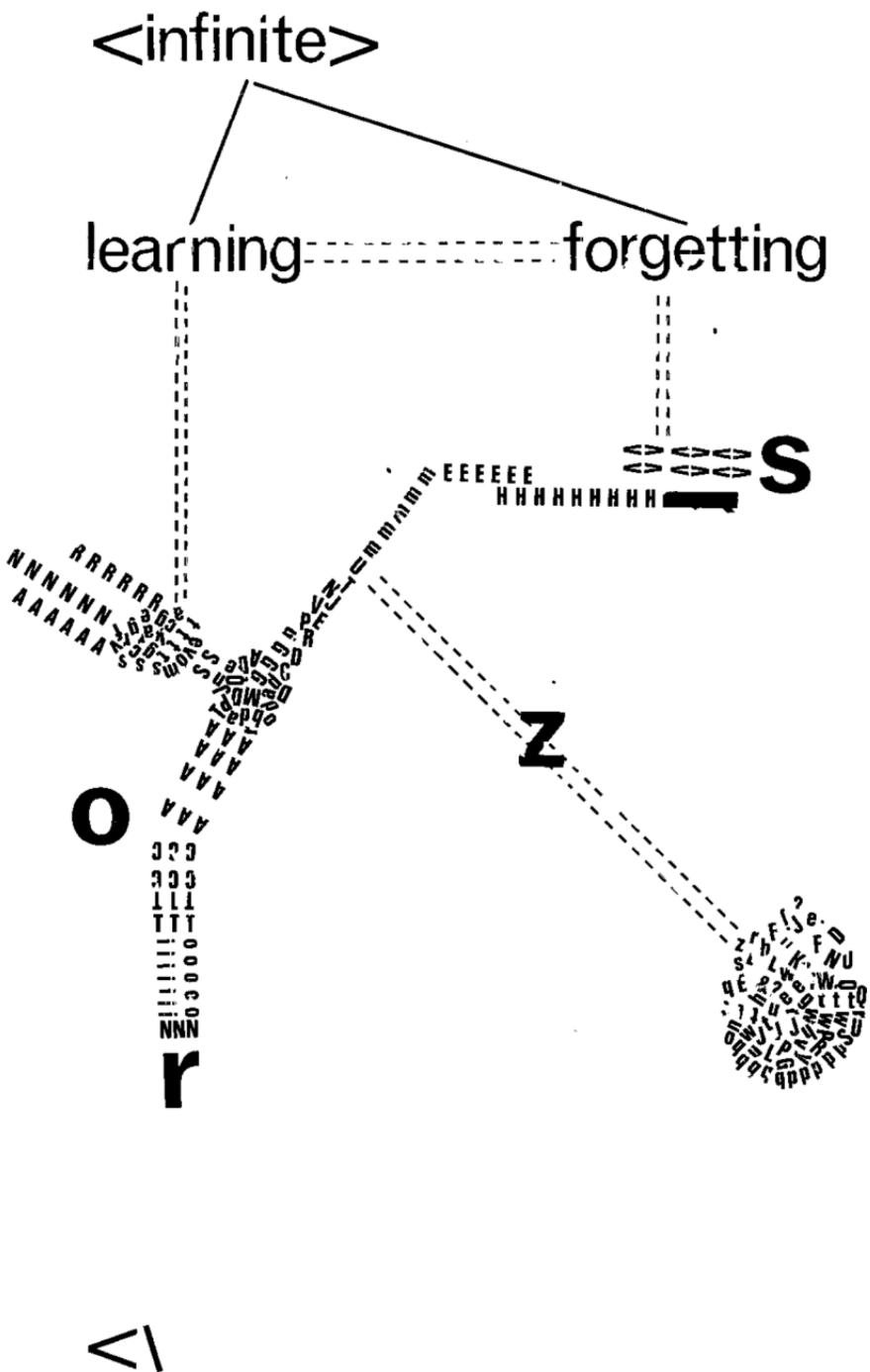
i/ve stored your details within the color blue

Unearthing fractal memories ----- w/e find

In the end everything is reduced to variables

$$-g\sigma\sigma\partial\beta\gamma\varepsilon+m/\gamma+Ro\zeta\epsilon=(g\alpha\pi)\partial\epsilon\eta$$

$$-\hbar\mathcal{E}ll\alpha+\Psi\theta\pi1\partial$$



<nonbinary code>

:::: PART 1 :::: FOUNDATIONS OF QUANTUM

quantum computing is rooted in

1) superposition

[smallest matters are both particle & wave]
&

2) quantum entanglement

[quantum particles ---- act as one ----
regardless of distance]

[**spatial proximity** \neq physical
distance]

bits compose classical [mechanically linear]
computing & have [bit = 1 or 0
2 combinations ----- **binary code**]

qubits construct quantum [mechanically
computing & have nonlinear]
 ≥ 4 combinations [{1, 0; 1&0; 1&1;
0&0}]

& performs them [qubit = **nonbinary**
simultaneously **code**]
[\therefore incalculable
combinations]

function *across*
binaries [queer / bit = qu/bit]
[qubit = transbit]

[@] smallest points, the universe is
nonbinary. it is ∵ foolish to try to
manipulate the smallest pieces of
nonbinary universe with binary logic

[&]

::::: PART 2 ::::: FIELDS OF KNOWLEDGE

quantum physics involves so
much speculation it might as well be fiction ----- [speculative science fiction]

Trans Universe Theory [&] posits: w/e need not differentiate.

knowledge ---- like gender& sex&politics ---- is less spectrum* [more multi-dimensional vector field]

knowledge ---- like gender& politics&qubits ---- is nonlinear* [science & humanities opposing sides w/ a gradient of knowledges between]

≠

Figure 1.1: Knowledges Antithesized



[science]

[humanities]

*Figure 1.1-- a) visualization of binary thought.

now consider

quantum physics:

a) vector field**

[&] consider

speculative fiction:

a) vector field**

each of these is within

a) larger vector field

[knowledge]

quantum entanglement

& spatial proximity

[r constants]

overlaps&interactions

&conversations -----

[r water]

flux&sink [] each

subsect --- colors in a)

[jello cube]

{ key }

{ colors: blue = study of change }

{ colors: pink = experimentation }

Figure 1.2: Knowledge Vector.

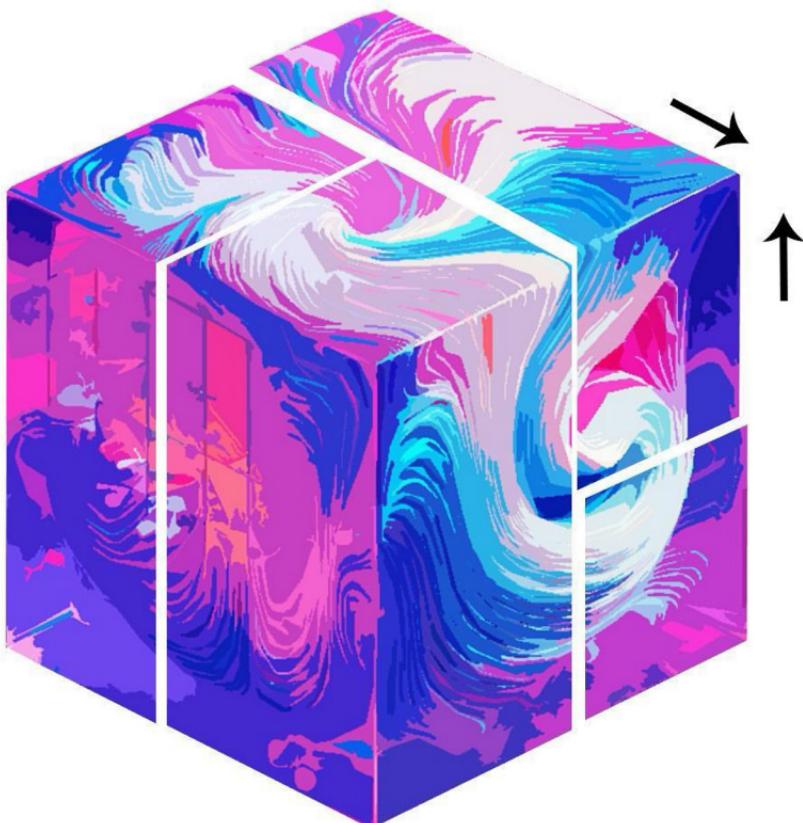


**Figure 1.2-- a) visualization of nonbinary thought.

consider w/e bisect this into four
---- cube knowledges***
each is still built from the same matter,
the same colors***

w/e create divisions & assign them value -----
----- despite their equal composition

Figure 1.3: Knowledge Split.



*** Figure 1.3 -- a) visualization of making binaries from nonbinary thought.

:::: PART 3 :::: SOCIAL VECTORS

Case Study #1:

consider traditionally perceived
 masculine gender expressions [colors cool = c]
 &
 consider traditionally perceived
 feminine gender expressions [colors warm = w]

these are both perceived
 gender expressions ----- [z]

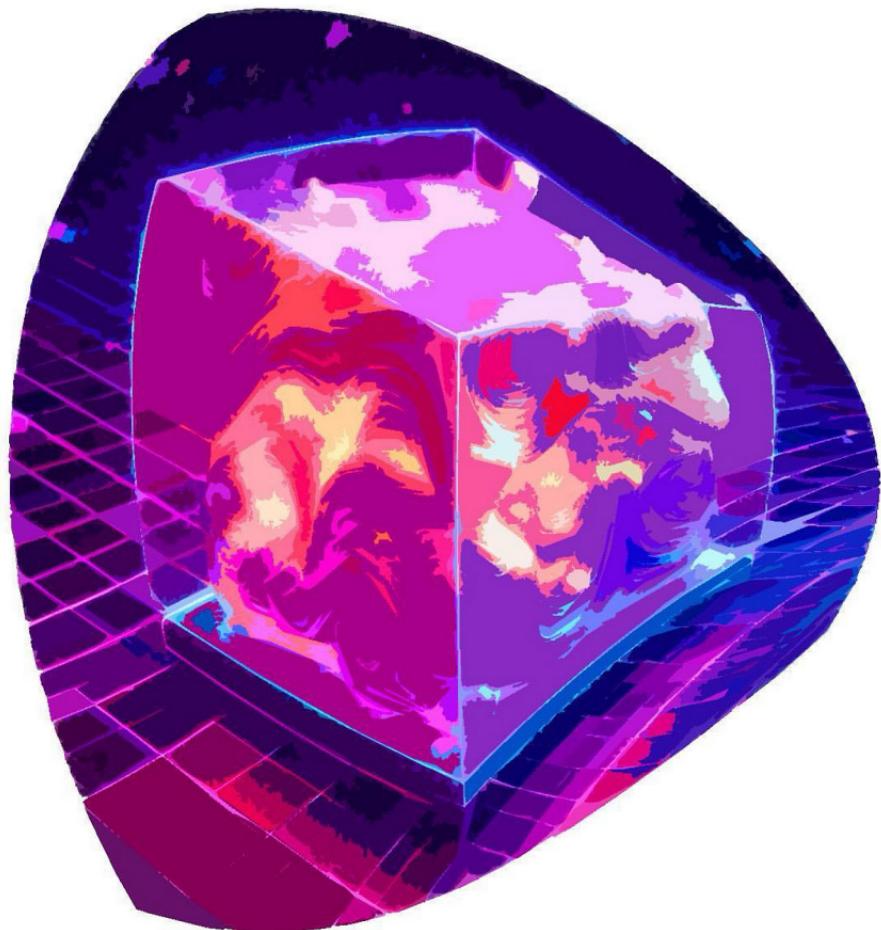
{ key }
 { perceived masculine = c }
 { perceived feminine = w }
 { perceived expressions = z }
 { z = c \sqcup w }

consider this vector field --- femininity****

composed of many gendered expressions [colors]
 ----- *gendered through perception*

regardless of the external gendering of their expressions this vector field [& ∵ \sqcup its expressions] = femininity

Figure 1.4A: Vector of Femininity.



**** Figure 1.4 -- visualizations of feminine gender expression.

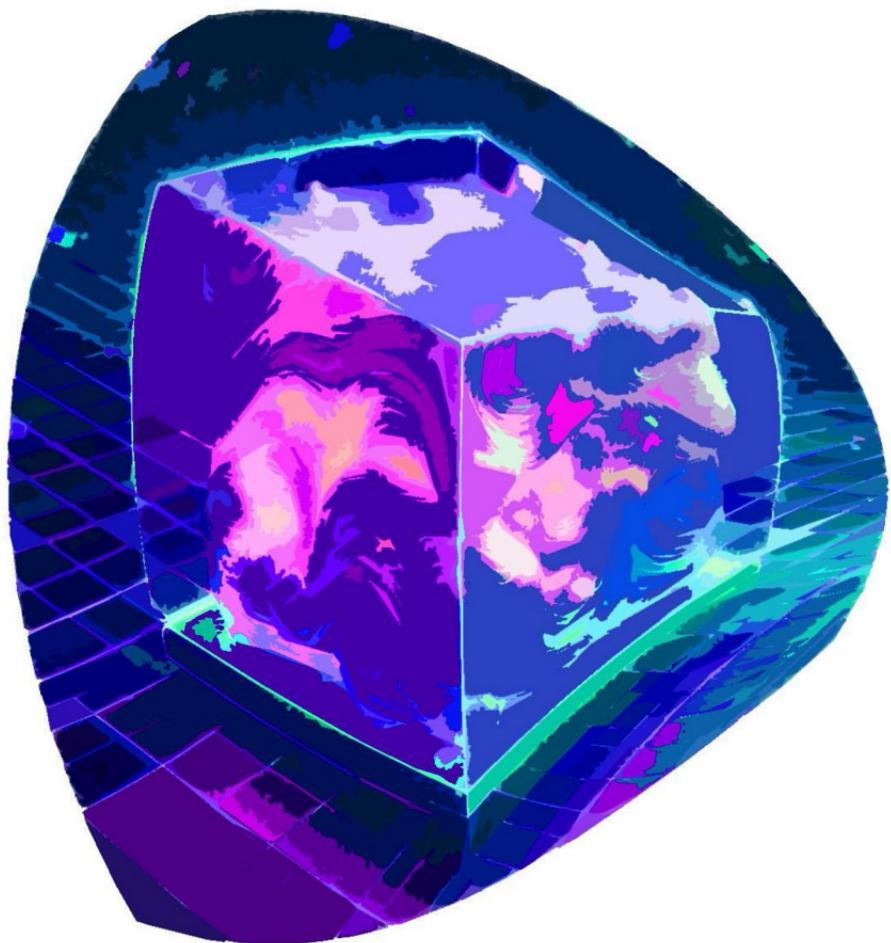


Figure 1.4B: Vector of Femininity.

&now

consider this vector field ---- femininity****
composed of cooler toned colors

regardless of the external gendering of their expressions this vector field [& ∵ **it's** expressions] = femininity

despite their difference
femininity = femininity

∴

[they are the same] -----
----- colored by perception

∴ their identified [actual] gender is the same
regardless of z [appearance/action/biology]

Question: True or False, binary questions require binary answers:

- a) The 9 Dot Problem is a puzzle feigned as a closed system, but the solution is found by exiting or breaking the system.
- b) A program that generates fractals is written in binary code, but are fractals written in binary code still nonbinary?

Case Study #2:

Neurologically, there does not exist [\exists]

a) difference between feeling & being

[&]

[feeling = being]

[feeling = real]

[image = real]

there is no “logical argument“ 2

justify purposeful misgendering

∴ the constructed hypothetical ----- hyperspace ----- is built upon the [obscured] foundation that: a) person stating ----- they feel pronouns [x] ----- despite being gender [y] ----- is undeserving of compliance

| Statement ::::

“pronouns [y] cause m/e harm

“please ----- use pronouns [x]”

| Response ::::

Binary logic hyperspace: “no ∴”

$x \neq y \therefore z$ [when $z = \%0$]

Rather than question the context in which z exists,

allowing reevaluation [$\&\Delta$] of perception,
Harm becomes irrelevant ----- [$\% = 0$]

Question:

Harm becomes irrelevant [% = 0]

When the obscured foundation =

- 1) “a human being is deserving of harm.”
- 2) “I harm to uphold [a dissonant hyperspace].”
- 3) “I am incapable of harm.”
- 4) “Fuck you t--[y]--ranny.”

[(a) transbit is a non-integer] w/e might as well replace with a) variable / word / poem

let us replace these nonbinary-bits with the variable “x”

x =

existing in multiple places at once&

existing as one&multiple&simultaneous categories&

linked to another despite physical distance&

containing energy but no mass&

a poem =

existing in multiple places at once&

existing as one&multiple&simultaneous categories&

linked to another despite physical distance&

containing energy but no mass&

love =

existing in multiple places at once&

existing as one&multiple&simultaneous categories&

linked to another despite physical distance&

containing energy but no mass&

piece by piece w/e spin on,
composed in photon notes,

measure her *grieving song*,
ring-a-round, *o/ur planet's*

circling dawn, bits in words
w/e kill, erode whale songs.

judder down *o/ur vibrant*
matter. ---- or *o/ur horror*,

praising or. relentless
-ly pursuing *o/ur end*

w/e scrawl ---- 4 lines & walls,
self-construct psalms, &shape

life to reduce living

let/s close this </binary>



RED CARPET TO RUIN

David Lariviere

Anti-tourism begins where tourism finds its underlying condition of possibility: the ubiquitous non-destination from which one seeks escape. Contrary to tourism, the anti-tour is not driven by spectacle or wish fulfillment, but rather by a free and indeterminate movement that follows happenstantial encounters, tracing lines of digression, curiosity, and tangential exploration. The anti-tourist does not purposely seek out novelty or even understanding. Instead they wander through unfrequented paths in a state of nonjudgmental following, attentive to cracks in the facade wherein familiar surfaces become strange.

The “anti-” in anti-tourism signals its contrarian attitude, one that seeks to complicate and problematize standard narratives of conventional tourism. Contrariety here is not a simple opposition, but an excessive relation: a refusal to

remain within the boundaries of sanctioned stories attributed to identified destinations. These official accounts, often shaped by state and corporate interests, fail to register the dynamic current of minor histories that arise from lived experience and persist in the margins. As such, the rationale of tourism proves insufficient for engaging with the complex multiplicity of place. The anti-tourist moves through terrain in a manner that eludes the logic of destinations, resisting the itinerary and the economy of anticipated satisfactions.

I first articulated the anti-tourism concept in 2018, for a residency project hosted by Open Space Arts Society, an artist-run centre located at the cross-hairs of tourism that streams through the downtown of Victoria, BC. Despite such a prevalent commercial context engendering a contrarian position, my anti-touristic gesture was not intended to oppose tourism in the sense of a polemical stance or political protest. Instead, the alternative and happenstancial space that it respectfully navigates, through concerted acts of listening and learning, was predicated upon chance encounters— the very *form* of movement that falls outside of a given itinerary. The revision at work occurs not so much by *what* one engages as by virtue of *how* one engages a given situation, irrespective of its status as a “destination.” Anti-tourism should be developed not as an inversion of tourism, but as an independent creative mode of engagement with place, infrastructure, and movement. Whereas tourism is organized around fully rationalized goals (seeing landmarks, checking experiences off of bucket-lists),

anti-tourism follows no predetermined path and finds wonder within everyday surfaces.

This practice resonates deeply with psychogeography, which examines the specific effects of the geographical environment on the emotions and behavior of individuals. Like psychogeography, anti-tourism challenges the dominant organization of space, particularly in urban contexts where planning enforces functionality, consumerism, and surveillance. Unlike Situationist psychogeography, which emerged in the early stages of consumer spectacle, anti-tourism navigates a world in which public space is not only commodified but subjected to algorithmic control: its behaviors mapped, predicted, and monetized. The anti-tourist's drift therefore becomes a resistance to the digital capture of movement and experience. Yet anti-tourism is not only aligned with the theoretical critique psychogeography offers; it is equally informed by the *dérive*, the key technique the Situationists developed to engage such critique experientially. As Guy Debord described it, "In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action... and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there."¹ What Debord outlines is not merely a form of wandering, but a refusal of transactional mentalities and rational itineraries. Anti-tourism takes up this method of drift as a way of engaging with environments on their own terms. The *dérive* is where anti-tourism finds inspiration for its mode of practice; psychogeography, its critical field.

Since 2018, I have developed several anti-tourism projects: first in Victoria, later in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and other locations. Nowhere, however, does this method for *thinking otherwise* feel more urgent than in the vast mining concessions of northern Alberta. Indeed, from a “Canadian” (settler colonial) perspective, the Athabasca tar sands represent a problematic site par excellence, fraught with conflicting nationalistic sentiments, a strange conflation of “dirty hands, clean money,” and what Nietzsche termed the bad conscience.² While the Situationists treated the *dérive* as a tactical disruption of capitalist urbanism, anti-tourism evolves this practice into an ethical modality, one grounded in an examination of our collective petrol-subjectivity and consumer guilt.

Long before formulating anti-tourism as a method, I had already been drawn to this tortured landscape, first through satire, then later through firsthand experience. The Athabasca region offers a particularly acute terrain for this: extraction technologies are fetishized for their gargantuan scale; environmental degradation is rendered palatable through euphemistic language; abandoned industrial ruins are reframed as heritage sites; and sound cannons discharge unremittingly. In the tar

David Lariviere, *Dirty Hands, Clean Money, Bad Conscience*, Custom embroidered intervention to a popular line of industry fashion/workwear, 2024.

DIRTY HANDS
ESTD MMXVII
BAD CONSCIENCE
CLEAN MONEY

sands, the apparent dissonance of late capitalism becomes stark. The call for a postrational visuality is rendered palpable by following the operative tar sands rationale through to its absurd conclusions. Consider industry's response to the public outcry that followed widely publicized events in which hundreds of ducks died upon landing in toxic tailings. Amid plastic dayglo scarecrows dubbed "bitu-men" and flashing lights installed around the tailings perimeter, solar-powered robotic birds of prey are placed onto floating platforms to repel the waterfowl. This protective rationale shields industry from such controversy by, in the same movement, converting the landscape into a weird Frankenstein's monster.

What follows is both a travelogue and an anti-touristic engagement with the industrial landscape at the heart of the Canadian economy, a leased boreal geography spanning "more than 260,000 square kilometres [...] a space larger than Florida or twice the size of New Brunswick.³" I aim to develop an art installation from media captured on a return trip to the tar sands. Central to this exploration is a so-called historic site known as Bitumount, one such manifestation of industry's Bad Conscience. Apprehended through postrational visuality, this wandering offers a minoritarian vantage, one that eschews both the rational conceit proffered in the official account and, more fundamentally, the capitalist axiomatic at work throughout the tar sands. Consequently, I invite you into the Zone: a contaminated and abandoned terrain where commemoration distorts memory.



Solar-powered robotic hawks float on a tailings pond, as seen from the “Syncrude Wood Bison Viewpoint.”

AXIOMATIC RATIONALE AND POSTRATIONAL DRIFT

Before venturing into any such zone, it is necessary to address the elephant in the room: transactional mentalities tend to dominate conditions that precede the encounter. This is the most virulent and insidious trait of capitalism, its tendency to reduce all relations to transactions. Tourism, *in all its forms*, serves as the commercial mechanism for commodifying place and experience. From brochures to souvenirs, the tourism industry is capitalistic, writ large. This is why tourism splinters into so many forms: adventure, culinary, landmark, sex, religion, and even disaster. Wherever a market can be identified and a destination packaged, tourism follows. Such industries are not simply adjacent to capitalism, they are an expression of its axiomatic function. As Deleuze and Guattari observe,

Capitalism is indeed an axiomatic, because it has no laws but immanent ones. It would like for us to believe that it confronts the limits of the Universe, the extreme limit of resources and energy. But all it confronts are its own limits (the periodic depreciation of existing capital); all it repels or displaces are its own limits (the formation of new capital, in new industries with a high profit rate). This is the history of oil and nuclear power. And it does both at once: capitalism confronts its own limits and simultaneously

displaces them, setting them down again farther along.⁴

Capitalism, then, is isomorphic with both resource extraction and tourism: absorbing all manner of related production into a grid of anticipation, exploitation, and consumption. At its core, the capitalist axiomatic prioritizes profit and perpetual growth, even when in direct contradiction with the carrying capacities of the planet. Climate actions requiring systemic shifts such as downsizing, decarbonization, and reduced consumption, are perceived by capital interests as counter-productive threats. Petroleum industries are businesses first; their axioms determine how land is managed, how extraction is rationalized, and how entire infrastructures are organized. Rather than confront ecological collapse, capitalism commodifies its own cynical, inadequate, untenable solutions such as “carbon capture,” thereby slowing down substantive change and entrenching the very system it pretends to reform. Understanding the axioms of capitalism as limits immanent to itself, we arrive at our strange “outsider” case study: the anti-tourism-tour of the Athabasca tar sands.

Axiomatics supply the calculated rationale within which corporations operate and justify themselves. But our anti-tour follows a *poststratational* imperative. As Hiebert and MacKenzie write, “Reason is a fundamentally strange concept since—contrary to the dictates of its own stance—the very idea of reason seems to us to be totally

unreasonable.⁵” Their provocation, then, calls for moving beyond reason due to its insufficiency. Anti-tourism also moves beyond. It assumes from the outset that there are things money cannot buy, that reason cannot explain, and that maps cannot chart. This approach is non-denumerable in that it is not composed of countable, localizable units (commodities), but of dynamic and interpenetrating multiplicities. From these multiplicities flow all manner of minoritarian histories, like an undercurrent.

Yet what does drifting mean when the terrain is one of ecological and social catastrophe? The tar sands are not a space for quiet contemplation; they represent a fully engineered space where articulated rational frameworks hold sway. To enter the tar sands as an anti-tourist is to wander into a contaminated expanse shaped by industrial violence. In such places, the anti-tourist listens for rumblings beneath the surface. And in Fort McKay, these frequencies were given a name.

SATIRICAL PETROTOURISM

In 2012, my first artistic engagement with Canada’s petroleum imaginary took the form of a billboard that read: “Come Visit the Athabasca Tar Sands!” Created for the exhibition *Beneath a Petroliferous Moon*, curated by Jen Budney at the Mendel Art Gallery, the project satirized commercial advertising by promoting all-inclusive, romantic getaways to the industrial heartland. At

the time, I believed the absurdity of this fictional tourism pitch was self-evident. I didn't yet realize that a tourism industry already existed, and still operates, alongside the mining concessions.⁶ What was intended as a Swiftian 'modest proposal' for marketing an unlikely destination also served to critique a deeper absurdity: the national romance with bituminous earth that has seeped into public discourse.

Many social and political implications turn on linguistic nuance. As anyone working in industry will readily advise, the mere use of "tar sands" rather than the industry-favored term "oil sands" already locates an individual on the far left of a perceived polemic. Within industry circles, the term "tar sands" indicates a partisan slur, despite its descriptive fidelity to the sticky, sulfurous, and process-intensive form of oil that is bitumen.

By adopting tourism as a medium for hyperbolic spin, the billboard parodied the kind of rhetorical bullshit that romanticizes bitumen mining and freely circulates between industry, government, and the general public. Canadian politicians have routinely invoked mythic imagery to portray the tar sands as a kind of national epic. Then Prime Minister Stephen Harper famously declared: "Digging the bitumen out of the ground, squeezing out the oil and converting it into synthetic crude is a monumental challenge... akin to the building of the pyramids or China's Great Wall, only bigger."⁷ Alberta Premier Ralph Klein went further, anointing the region "Canada's Eighth Wonder of

the World.⁸ Such public relations (in the guise of political discourse) fetishize both the sheer magnitude of industrial operations and its axiomatic rationale, aggrandizing the industrial economy while obscuring real world impacts.

Still, the billboard project was limited in one crucial way: it was presented from a safe distance, without firsthand experience of the Tar Sands. The critique relied entirely on media-sourced imagery and soundbites, filtered through the lens of representation rather than encounter. In retrospect, the work anticipated an anti-touristic modality, interrogating how language and image can distort the complex social field of extractive industry while projecting superficial grandeur. The direct encounter with that field, with its contradictions, resistances, and lived consequences, was still to come.

FIRST HAND ENCOUNTERS WITH THE TAR SANDS

My first visit to the Athabasca Tar Sands was in August 2015, when I travelled to the region with Austrian artist Ernst Logar. Three years earlier, Ernst had also shown work in the *Beneath a Petroliferous Moon* exhibition. It was his approach to artistic research that inspired me to consider the Tar Sands as a site demanding embodied engagement. I hold Ernst's work in high regard, not only for its conceptual rigor, but for the way he approaches petrocultures as layered and entangled realities. His practice insists on approaching such

sites from multiple perspectives, as if holding them up for study from every possible angle.⁹ It was in this spirit that we hit the road.

Upon arrival, we encountered a communications apparatus unambiguously celebrating oil and gas development and fully prepared to receive visitors. The Oil Sands Discovery Centre functions like a museum, offering “educational” exhibits on the history, science, and processing of bitumen. Bus tours, run in collaboration with Suncor, shuttled paying tourists directly into the heart of its Base Plant at Tar Island. A museum attendant, reading from a prepared script, praised the innovations of extraction, while also gesturing toward the industry’s so-called reclamation efforts. Even the souvenir shop played its part, selling t-shirts bearing a “heavy hauler” and the innuendo: “Size Matters.” Ernst and I bought t-shirts and rode the bus into the belly of the beast.

Outside these tightly managed tourist offerings, we were fortunate to meet Indigenous community members and activists from across the continent. Genuine conversation with people connected to industry proved difficult, as many attempts to initiate dialogue were deflected by corporate talking points designed to evade debate. By contrast, those confronting the unfolding environmental consequences were forthcoming, direct, and deeply informative. The most edifying moments came during a “healing gathering” at Gregoire Lake, hosted by Cleo Reece of Fort McMurray #468 First Nation. In stark contrast to



Ernst Logar (right) and I have our photo taken by a fellow traveller while on tour of the Suncor Base plant in 2015.

the propagandistic logic of corporate euphemisms, participants in the talking circle articulated a living knowledge of land and ecology, insights that laid bare the profundity of devastation wrought by such massive industrial incursions.

Nearly a decade after that first encounter, Ernst and I returned to the Athabasca Tar Sands, this time accompanied by four graduate students from the University of Applied Arts, Vienna: Kaleb Christian, Jasmin Franzé, Moritz Ladstätter, and Anna Lorenzana¹⁰. Since our first trip, I had developed anti-tourism as a methodology for engaging place, and this return positioned me as an anti-tour-guide on a new excursion.

Some aspects had changed, but much of the old tar sands tourism remained. At the Oil Sands Discovery Centre, we watched the same bitumen separation demonstration, still staged like a cooking show. However, Suncor had discontinued the bus tours to base camp and tightened site security. Alongside a tailings pond, we visited the Syncrude Wood Bison Viewpoint. From this elevated vantage, we observed familiar industrial “solutions” designed to repel waterfowl from landing on the toxic surface: sonic cannons, bitu-men scarecrows, and fixed robo-hawks mounted on floating platforms, flapping mechanical wings and emitting shrill cries. These are not accidents of infrastructure; they are logistical expressions of industry’s internal rationale. Witnessing this misbegotten choreography again, now reflected through the students’ eyes, only deepened the sense that such scenes demand a postrational reckoning.

We rented two small Cessna aircraft to survey the mining concessions from above: tailings ponds pressed against the Athabasca River, mountainous platforms of sulphur deposits, and extraction craters sprawling across what was formerly boreal forest. Back on the ground, we crossed the aptly named “Bridge to Nowhere” north of Fort McKay and found ourselves facing a horizon swallowed entirely by scraped bituminous earth. At the foot of the mine, I laid down a square meter of artificial turf, material Kaleb, Anna, and I had acquired from a local hardware store. The gesture was meant to “repatriate” the Astroturf, a petrochemical product, to a mine that may have yielded its raw material. In a moment of absurd theatre, Kaleb volunteered to strike a pose while I captured video, an unplanned reprise of the 2012 *Come Visit* billboard. This time, the absurd proposition was made real: a sunbather catching rays at the edge of an active mine.

The 2024 trip was very much shaped by a series of encounters. We spoke with academics Mark Simpson and Sheena Wilson, organizers of the Petrocultures Conference at the University of

David Lariviere, *Come Visit the Athabasca Tar Sands*. Billboard project, part of the *Beneath a Petroliferous Moon* exhibition at the Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, 2012 (top); *Come Visit the Athabasca Tar Sands*, video still and postcard, performance by Kaleb Christian, 2024 (bottom).

COME VISIT THE... **ATHABASCA TAR SANDS!**
CANADA'S "8TH WONDER OF THE WORLD!"

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Alberta, whose work critically examines the cultural logic sustaining petroleum industries. Joined by the students, we met again with Cleo Reece, who not only linked our previous visit but offered powerful reflections rooted in land-based knowledge and practice. We also met with Jay Telegdi, Senior Manager of Intergovernmental Affairs for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, who outlined the complex political terrain Indigenous communities must navigate, where environmental devastation and economic dependency often collide. But it was our conversation with Jean L’Homme court in Fort McKay that affected us most deeply. Jean welcomed us into her home and spoke candidly about the challenges of living according to traditional ways amid a fractured landscape. I remain haunted by what she shared with us. As I look ahead to August 2025, it is elements of her testimony that compel a return.

THE WAKE OF EXTRACTIVIST REASON PRODUCES MONSTERS

Jean L’Homme court, a Dene woman who witnessed the rise of the tar sands, carries the history of the region’s transformation in lived experience. She resists the label “activist,” as it implies a reactive stance, when in fact the Dene people have lived in relation to this land for millennia before the arrival of big oil. What must be underscored is the proper sequence of events. To frame the Dene as responding to development is to invert the historical order

of how the enterprise unfolded. We risk naturalizing mining operations by obscuring the humanity that preceded the so-called “black gold rush.” Finally, if Jean’s life constitutes a form of resistance to oil and gas development, she does so simply by virtue of *being*.

Capital interests maintain colonial distortions of history by framing industrial development as both natural and inevitable. As François Sibertin-Blanc observes, the capitalist axiomatic functions without historical grounding, displacing rupture so it appears not as an event or a break, but as the self-evident organization of life itself.¹¹ This is how the destruction of resource extraction is minimized: by presupposing its violence as always-already present. The onslaught Jean describes is not a series of isolated incidents, but a continuous incursion into food systems, language, and daily life. From early twentieth-century speculation to the 1967 launch of Great Canadian Oil Sands (now Suncor), commercial mining escalated dramatically in the 2000s and continues to expand.

In the wake of extractivist rationale, we indeed find monsters, some of which Jean described to our group in graphic detail. For instance, residents in Fort McKay receive periodic alerts of imminent dynamite blasts from the Hammerstone quarry¹². These blasé notifications normalize the aberrant. Imagine waking on a weekday morning to a shock-wave so forceful it rattles windows and shakes dishes in the cupboard. So it goes, when disruption has been absorbed into routine. “You just missed

the blast,” Jean told us, as if reporting a passing storm. And the “yellow stuff” that sometimes wafts across doesn’t appear in any weather report.

From poisoned water to the disappearance of traditional medicines, Jean shared myriad examples of how industrial activity has disrupted the deep connection between Dene people and their land. She described a tailings breach at Kearl Lake, which leached into one of the largest freshwater systems in North America and went unreported for over nine months, with visible seepage continuing for more than thirty days. A passing Indigenous person blew the whistle on Imperial Oil, and in the end, the corporate behemoth was issued a \$50,000 fine by the Alberta Energy Regulator,¹³ a penalty so negligible when set beside its profits, the punishment amounts to nominal overhead.

All of these horror stories cluster around their point of origin: Bitumount, a real-life haunted house where tar sands extraction experiments first began. When Jean speaks of Bitumount, she exposes the madness embedded in the state’s historical designation.

It’s only, I would say, about a 15-20 minute boat ride from here. You can also access it by the highway. Now, get this, after they abandoned (Bitumount), they didn’t do the cleanup, you know, they just left everything as is. And now the government designated it as some kind of a historical site. Because the land went back to the government, I think,

and the government's not doing anything to clean it up. It's just been sitting there since the '50s! They fenced it off and said, 'Okay, well, this is going to be our historical site,' yet it's contaminated! (laughs) And then there's 'No Trespassing' signs and it's all fenced off because there's contamination in there. So that's the provincial government.¹⁴

Jean's account reveals a landscape not just damaged but historically reordered by a kind of magical thinking. Her insights restore a sense of historical veracity and provide the foundation for the proposed intervention. I did not set out to visit Bitumount; the anti-tour follows no itinerary. Rather, this story compels my return. Jean's testimony opens a *dérive* beyond the tortured rationale of industry, drawing us near a site whose excess cannot be absorbed by commemorative logic. Bitumount is a living contradiction: both contamination zone and historical monument, a celebrated open sore amid vast strip-mined territories.

BITUMOUNT AND THE ZONE

This is where the path leads: to the first plant built to separate oil from sandy tar, a site that conflates environmental degradation and mythologizing reverence into a paradoxically disavowed landmark. Bitumount reflects not only industrial ambitions, but also the underlying extractivist mentality

that has guided us inexorably to late-stage capitalism. Robert Fitzsimmons believed the tar sands would make Alberta rich, and chemist Karl Clark approached the challenge of extraction as a purely technical problem. But to treat the sands this way is to embrace an axiomatic logic they also helped enshrine,¹⁵ initiating economic and technological practices that would proliferate with catastrophic consequence. Their convictions remain embedded in the ruins of Bitumount, now surrounded by mining concessions their methods helped “pioneer.”

In March 2025, I initiated a formal process of requesting access to Bitumount. Following instructions from its government web page,¹⁶ ironically branded “Alberta Culture and Tourism,” initial communication with staff at the Oil Sands Discovery Centre seemed promising. But after I complied with a request for further details, my proposal was met first with silence, then a reversal: I was flatly informed that the public is categorically denied access. When I escalated the matter, it was passed to Matthew Wangler, Executive Director of Historic Resources, who cited safety concerns: dilapidated structures, scattered metal debris, and a site “frequented by bears.” Such a ruinous description is difficult to square with Bitumount’s

David Lariviere, *Bitumount, Alberta*,
Postcard response to being stonewalled
by Alberta Government officials, 2025.



BITUMOUNT, ALBERTA

“historic” designation. The province has listed it as a site of cultural significance since 1975, yet now claims its derelict condition renders it inaccessible.

In truth, their refusal appears less about safety than optics. A Freedom of Information request revealed large portions of internal correspondence redacted, along with strategic phrasing such as “safety is another card to play.” My follow-up to Minister Tanya Fir also received a blunt dismissal, bereft of explanation. A formal complaint to Alberta’s Information and Privacy Commissioner is now under review. Bitumount, it seems, remains fenced off not only by chain-link but also by a political obstruction, conjuring hallowed ground with jagged debris and roaming predators while carefully sidestepping the issue Jean so clearly identified: contamination. And the sheer hubris of its celebratory designation, as if history begins with such exploits! Long before Fitzsimmons and Clark, there existed a living ecology held in reciprocal relation by Indigenous peoples. Even now, economic rationale dictates policy while manifold consequences (exhausted water systems, toxic pollution, and rising greenhouse gases) continue to gather force and darken the horizon.

VISUALITY: A RED CARPET TO RUIN

A return to Fort McMurray, with its strange admixture of dirty hands, clean money, and a bad conscience, now feels inevitable, compelled by the *dé*r^{iv}e of the anti-tour. Previous visits have led

to this point, setting the agenda not by intention but through chance encounters. In each case, the minoritarian histories we experienced on the ground exceeded the governing rationale of the tar sands. These lived, heard, and felt fragments now demand new forms of visuality.

While the Vietnam War raged on, some factions within the protest movement recognized that atrocities being committed abroad remained too abstract, too mediated and distant, to compel action at home. The slogan *“bring the war home”* emerged as a strategy: to collapse that comfortable distance, to make the sense of rage felt within the everyday life of the middle class. If one accepts that *every gesture is political*, then the imperative to lend affective force, to make something felt, emerges as a natural artistic strategy. Art has the capacity to crystallize affect and perception into autonomous form, packets of sensation that give force to expression and make the real palpable.

Judging by the absence of climate action from campaign messaging in Canada’s last federal election, the tar sands begin to resemble a faraway dream. Who would suspect that ecocide is unfolding in our own backyard? And yet strip-mining removes the entire ecology of the boreal forest, including the muskeg layer: a dense, waterlogged substrate that takes centuries to form. All of this is perpetuated in service of converting the dirtiest oil imaginable into synthetic crude, against the backdrop of a world hurtling toward climate collapse. We may register this devastation intellectually, but all too

often we are inured to feeling its unfolding violence. That feeling is the postrational excess this project seeks to inhabit. In response to an absent political debate, a contrarian project has taken shape: to compose a videography of the industrial mechanosphere, befitting a landscape disfigured beyond recognition. Robo-hawks, sound cannons, and Hammerstone blasts: all elements of this bizarre actuality will be drawn into composition.

Postrational visuality, in this case, seeks to *bring the tar sands home* not through information, but by capturing the Frankenstein-like aural environment in field recordings, making felt the abrasive dissonance that saturates the landscape. It means reckoning with the propaganda that dominates the region, as found in the Oil Sands Discovery Centre, at reclamation sites, and across monuments that aggrandize industrial achievement. Bitumount, in this context, becomes a focal point for symbolic deconstruction: a state-sanctioned origin myth, commemorated as “the beginning of it all.” My return to Treaty 8 territory aims to take this historical designation at its own

David Lariviere, *Red Carpet to Ruin*,
Image sequence of video stills captured at
Bitumount, 2025. All images are lifted from a video
project still in post-production entitled *Roadside
Picnic: A Bitumount Development*.





contradictory word. While on site, I intend to stage a counter-ceremonial intervention. A red carpet will be rolled out over buckled concrete. Stanchions will flank the remains. This political gesture of theatrical “recognition” confronts what Alberta claims to celebrate as heroic innovation, presented as a kind of perverse “Heritage Minute.”

The red carpet laid at Bitumount will call out the commemorative logic that masks abandoned refuse, exposing the ruins that have spawned ecological decimation visible from outer space. *A red carpet designation for ruins found within our wounded Critical Zone.*

David Lariviere, *More Red Carpet to Ruin*, Photo of abandoned industrial infrastructure captured at Bitumount, 2025.

NOTES

- 1 Guy Debord, “Theory of the Dérive,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, Ken Knabb, ed. and trans., Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981, 50.
- 2 The slogan “Dirty Hands, Clean Money” celebrates labour while disavowing complicity, repressing what Deleuze calls “the second aspect of bad conscience, its typological moment, bad conscience as feeling of guilt.” Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Hugh Tomlinson, trans., New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 129.
- 3 Andrew Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*, Revised Edition, Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2010, 55.
- 4 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, trans., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 463, cited in François Sibertin-Blanc, *State and Politics: Deleuze and Guattari on Marx*, Ames Hodges, trans., South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2020, 211.
- 5 Ted Hiebert and Duncan MacKenzie, “Introduction: Postrational Visuality,” in *Postrational Visuality*, Ted Hiebert and Duncan MacKenzie, eds., Toronto: Noxious Sector Press, 2024, 5.
- 6 Oil sands tourism continues to operate in Fort McMurray, anchored by the Oil Sands Discovery Centre and supported by industry stakeholders. See <https://oilsandsdiscovery.ca/>.
- 7 Stephen Harper, address to the Canada-UK Chamber of Commerce, London, July 14, 2006.
- 8 Andrew Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*, Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2009, 191.
- 9 From this trip Ernst mounted his solo exhibition *Tar Sands: Approaching An Anthropocentric Site* at PAVED

Arts in Saskatoon, November 4–December 10, 2016. The installation featured *Oil and Water*, three-channel video, 2016. See: <https://www.pavedarts.ca/2016/oil-tar-sands/>

- 10 The graduate students later produced an exhibition titled *Reflecting the Oil Sands: A Study Trip to Northern Alberta*, presented May 29–June 7, 2024, in the 2nd Floor Showcases, Department of Art and Design, University of Alberta, in cooperation with the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies. The work was subsequently exhibited at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna. https://www.dieangewandte.at/ausstellungen/reflecting_the_oil_sands_a_study_trip_to_northern_alberta
- 11 François Sibertin-Blanc, *State and Politics: Deleuze and Guattari on Marx*, Ames Hodges, trans., South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2020, 198–211.
- 12 Hammerstone Corporation, “Quarry Location,” <https://hammerstone.ca/quarry-location/>
- 13 “Alberta Energy Regulator fines Imperial Oil \$50K over Kearl tailings pond leak,” CBC News, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-energy-regulator-kearl-leak-1.7302069>
- 14 Interview with Jean L’Hommecourt, recorded by Ernst Logar, May 22, 2025, Fort McKay, Alberta.
- 15 Clark and Fitzsimmons did not merely apply axioms of industrial capitalism, they helped formulate and entrench them. Through experimentation and institutional research, they established how bitumen extraction would be measured, optimized, and rationalized, embedding capitalist metrics into the very infrastructure of oil-sands production.
- 16 Government of Alberta, *Energy Heritage*. Bitumount access information. <https://history.alberta.ca/energy-heritage/bitumount/Default.aspx>.



PROLEGOMENON ON THE ART ERRANT

Zachary Cahill

It is a winter month.

February.

Time of the anniversary of my birth and that of Susan B. Anthony's and Bob Marley's as well.

It is a time of Romantic Martyrdom.

Growth of Ice.

The slow growth of daylight.

The True History of America.

Here I am writing.

Here I am—as I am—with others.

In thought and out.

“What’s it for?” I have been asked on more than one occasion as I work on my sculpture, my *Unicorn Pietá*—long slow marble carving ...

working outside in the heat and cold ... rain and snow and mosquitoes ... having sustained too many injuries ... (As I write this) a nearly broken back, the horrible sounding (and actually horrible) sports hernia last summer & fall, the shock of a torn meniscus last year, a semi-miraculous and stigmata-esque puncture wound before that, and the ever-present challenge impairing my breathing apparatus: the jamming my head full of marble dust.

Michelangelo wrote in a letter from July 1523 that in his old age, the ravages of stone carving on his body forced him to take four days off for every one day of work ... I had assumed he was in his eighties when he wrote this ... he was 48!!!

I am (tomorrow) 52.

So, why keep at it, when the effort brings me to grief?

Why risk the bodily harm?
The professional irrelevance?

What I am making this hopelessly romantic sculpture for?



Do I have a commission?
Perhaps, a big exhibition coming up?

Reasonable enough questions. Except when the answer to them is no.

Then the questions and/or the answers start to slide into weirder territory ... riddle me with more questions ... maybe even abandon me to the chilly land of doubt ... stranded far from the courts of the rich and powerful and the center of centers ...

I re-speak the question on the winds of indifference:
Why am i making this sculpture?

The void replies: what else would you be doing?

Trained for decades in both the skills and philosophies of art ... I must be some latter day knight errant ... or Ronin ... an artist without patron ... without master ... left to wander the wilds of culture ... applying my craft in episodic adventures ... facing down demons, enchantments, and ungainly weather ... Only songs, friends, clouds, and animals to keep me company on my journey.





Perhaps most artists in this day and age are some kind of knight errant ...

it's a shame that Cervantes ruthlessly skewered the romantic quest ... for all its problems, of which there were many not the least: the chauvinist chivalry, which is to say, the unrighteous expectation the male of the species placed on distressed damsels, who never needed (or wanted) their rescue except perhaps from the single-minded obsession—which like the Bluebeard-ed villains—the heraldically embossed questers uncannily resemble.

Still for all that, maybe the wayward road tripping knights were incalculably more fun than any day at the court of the criminally rich. They were said to enjoy a free and rambling conversation, a stroll without a transaction-ary purpose, the love of flowers and the migratory patterns of birds, ancient riddles of the Night Queen's twinkling constellations, the replenishing lure of the unstoried adventure and the chance to take in rumored vistas at dawn's first light ... an invitation to share a clear glass of water and well baked bread as the moon sets on the horizon.

Glorious freedom.

Zachary Cahill, *Unicorn Pietá*, June 7, 2025.

But I digress, so allow me to re-gress

Artists,

You—the uninvited guests to the king's court, to high society's spectacles and carnival barking galas, to the renaissance-styled fairs and poorly painted and poorly lit drywalled market places, to Wall Street's blood soaked Grand Casinos ...

You—deemed unworthy of consideration and the very designation of your avocation by the sycophantic cultural elite... seemingly robbed of the very thing (art) and name (artist) that our super-fantastic sacrifices made possible ... in the face of such unholy spiritual capitalist violence even the most unawares but humanistically sympathetic must ask us:

Why do what we do?

For love

Obviously

A deep complex love ... one that they'd almost have to kill you to get you to stop ... you heroines, from making that painting... you paladins, from



writing that poem ... you bards, from playing that guitar. Almost. They, the villains of Capital dehumanization, the soul crushers, the dream killers, the haters; are never quite smart enough or quick enough, to figure out how to do it ... how to get you to stop ... how to drive the stake through your heart so you never take up your magical craft again.

We pray to you
Oh
Undefeated Witch,
Out of Wedlock Mother of all our sacred errancy
We beseech you
Cast your protection spells
So we may survive in our wonder
and
Endure against any odds

Artists,

We have our training ... We have our experience ...
Let us venture forth then
no matter the risks to life and limb...

to seek fuel from the unknown, to forge new worlds

We are all
(as anarcho-art historian, Jacob Henry Leveton
would put it) :
Post-medieval now



MIXTAPES AND QUEERING OF MEMORY

The Fiction of James Nulick

Terri Griffith & Nicholas Alexander Hayes

Can we take a minute to discuss the mixtape? Have you ever made one? Have you ever received one? We grew up with mixtapes, then mixCDs, then playlists. Though these media have their differences, they all share the same impulse—an offering, a gesture to someone and once in a while that someone is ourselves. A mixtape is an aural artifact of the maker's emotional logic. The mixtape relies on the subjective internal logic of memory and association. Sometimes this logic isn't immediately obvious to anyone but the maker, but there is always an underlying reasoning that guides these musical selections. Sometimes the listener understands this logic, sometimes they don't, but trying to suss out the logic is part of the joy. James Nulick's short story "Vinyl-Hearted Boy" from his

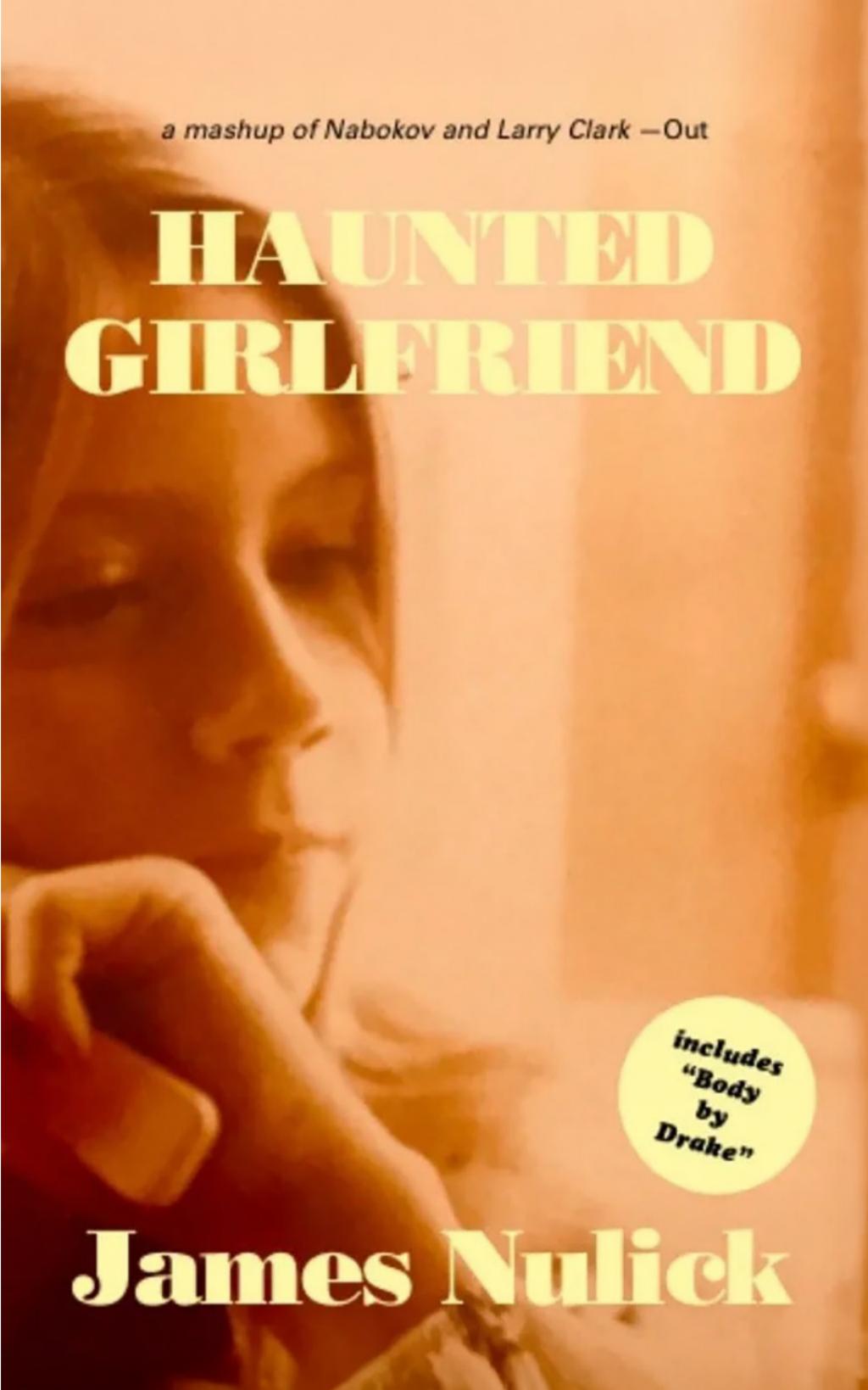
collection *Haunted Girlfriend* uses the mixtape as a guiding conceit for the narrative structure.¹

BUSH—MACHINEHEAD

“Vinyl-Hearted Boy,” like many other of Nulick’s works, acts as a palimpsest of autobiography and imaginary. Nulick names his protagonist James, his own first name. (For the sake of clarity, we will refer to the author as Nulick and the character as James.) Based on details in the story, the author and protagonist seem to be the same age. Some settings correspond to places where the author had been. But the reader cannot really know what is fiction and what is fact pretending as fiction. Nothing in the story is straightforward. Fiction intermingles with fact. Past slips into present. Key elements are queered. Narrative moments are remixed and recontextualized multiple times throughout.

Nulick’s mixtape structure works in two central ways: First it devolves the already existing structures of the albums, smashing the musicians’ intended narratives and replacing them with the author’s own structure. Secondly, this structure disrupts the comfortably traditional Aristotelian three-part narrative arc that we expect in a standard story and replaces that with the emotional reasoning of an analog mixtape,

Cover: James Nulick, *Haunted Girlfriend*,
New York: ExPat Press, 2019.



a mashup of Nabokov and Larry Clark — Out

HAUNTED GIRLFRIEND

includes
"Body
by
Drake"

James Nulick

where we can hear the clicks, the cuts, and the silent spaces inherent in the new composition.

The mixtape structure also reveals Nulick's Queer strategies of storytelling. As the mixtape forgoes traditional album structure, Nulick's short story forgoes a traditional plot replacing it with a composition of narrative fragments that resonate on themes of drug use, sexual discomfort, and class friction experienced by the eponymous protagonist James. James reveals his story by means of a series of disconnected



QR code links to “Vinyl-Hearted Boy”
playlist on Spotify.

fragments that leads the reader through these short passages in the same way the maker of a mixtape leads the listener through their own metanarrative pastiched from someone else's songs. Each narrative fragment uses an actual song title and artist's name as a prompt for the narrative disclosures that follow. Each passage, that ranges from a single paragraph to multiple pages, is headed by a musical artist and title, which serves as a prompt but also a constraint for the protagonist's fractured memories. There is no central plot. There are only fragments. It is simply one man, song titles, and momentary reflections. Though it isn't stated explicitly, Nulick's use of song titles as an organizing tool strongly implies an extra-textual mixtape. You can see the list as clearly as if it were written on a lined cassette jacket in ballpoint pen. In case you were wondering, we re-created his mixtape for you as a [public playlist on Spotify called "Vinyl-Hearted Boy."](#) And as long as we are leaving the pages of this book for a moment, we have also created a second aural artifact called ["Mixtapes and Queering of Memory,"](#) which is a new playlist curated from the "Vinyl-Hearted Boy" playlist that follows the internal logic of our own essay.

KELLIS—MILKSHAKE

Nulick recontextualizes these songs, wresting them from their original sources. By using them in this way and as restraints for the protagonist's memory Nulick engages in disidentification. Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz defines disidentification as "a point of departure, a process, a building. Although it is a mode



Public Playlist

Vinyl-Hearted Boy

A nod to James Nulick's short story.



Just Beautiful Music • 17 songs, 1hr 2 min



Custom order



#	Title	Album	Date added	🕒
1	Atomic Dog George Clinton	Computer Games	Aug 22, 2024	4:47
2	Sister Golden Hair America	America's Greatest Hi...	Aug 22, 2024	3:17
3	I Wanna Sex You Up Color Me Badd	I Wanna Sex You Up	Aug 22, 2024	4:00
4	Pass The Dutchie Musical Youth	Anthology	Aug 22, 2024	3:25
5	Sunflower Glen Campbell	Southern Nights	Aug 22, 2024	2:51
6	I Want You to Want Me Cheap Trick	In Color	Aug 22, 2024	3:11
7	My Death Scott Walker	Scott	Aug 22, 2024	4:57
8	Since You're Gone The Cars	Shake It Up	Aug 22, 2024	3:33
9	Like a Rolling Stone Bob Dylan	Highway 61 Revisited	Aug 22, 2024	6:10
10	Machinehead - Remastered Bush	Sixteen Stone (Remastered)	Aug 22, 2024	4:16
11	Milkshake Kelis	The Hits	Aug 22, 2024	3:03
12	If I Can't Have You Yvonne Elliman	The Best Of Yvonne Elliman	Aug 22, 2024	3:00
13	Ebony Eyes Bob Welch	French Kiss	Aug 22, 2024	3:33
14	Thanks For Chicago ... Scott Walker	'Til The Band Comes In	Aug 22, 2024	2:16
15	Heaven's Just A Sin Away The Kendalls	The Kendalls - 42 Mas...	Aug 22, 2024	2:25
16	One Night In Bangkok... Murray Head	One Night In Bangkok...	Aug 22, 2024	3:55

of reading and performing, it is ultimately a form of building. This building takes place in the future and in the present, which is to say that disidentificatory performance offers a utopian blueprint for a possible future.”²

This “strategic misunderstanding,” which is central to Muñoz’s theory, is also central to the mixtape structure, where the mixtape creator dismantles the original narrative in order to refashion it to a fresh narrative of their own creation. Although we have become used to contemporary dynamic and interactive media, more traditional orientations between author and reader are still the norm. Traditional narrative structures, whether based in plot as novels are, or music organized conceptually as are albums, assert and rely on the receptivity of the reader. The impulse to interrupt this assertion has a long history in popular culture from cut-ups to collage to slash fiction to cosplay. One of the most enduring forms of interruption is the mixtape, which allows listeners to become creators by unraveling the authorial integrity of albums so that they can be mixed with elements from other albums. The mixtape is often a way to capture the reflections of ourselves we see in the work of others. Whether this is done in the historic method of analog taping from the radio, or from the clean digital assembly of Spotify, the mixtape allows the listener to create a new album, a new narrative that reflects some aspect of themselves and then offer this new text out to other “readers.”

Nulick structures James’ narrative by removing pieces from previous recognizable linear structures. As he dismantles albums into stand-alone singles on a

songlist, he creates a new structure that reveals a truth not apparent in the original. Nulick curates songs into a playlist, and attaches to each what feels like (though fictional) a memory fragment. Events stretch from the '70s to the '90s, pivoting through resonance, harmony, and disharmony.

GEORGE CLINTON—ATOMIC DOG

His initial fragment describes going to a junior high school dance (seventh grade) with his friend Luis. James contrasts himself with Luis by observing that Luis has embraced Michael Jackson down to wearing a single white glove, even though James was “more drawn to the blips and bleeps of George Clinton” (175). This passage and by extension this story fragment, begins with James’s father asking if he is “queer,” indicating that everyone else can see what James cannot. James goes on to question if “boys ask other boys to go to dances with them?” Through this James suggests that somehow there is still the promise of normalcy. This access to normalcy is latent through much of James’s stories about his life. He is adjacent to heteronormativity, academic achievement, social mobility, and affection, yet James can never quite hold on to them.

HALL & OATES—ONE ON ONE

The narrative fragments have been curated within the short story to highlight how James’ grasp on a more traditional life is fragile and ephemeral, conditions

that will inevitably be degraded or lost. To demonstrate the tenuousness of James's reality, this final fragment draws us back in time full circle. James is able to describe the unfulfilled, unrequited desire he had in seventh grade for Luis. But by the time of eighth grade registration, James will realize Luis has forgotten him. The moments he has shared with the readers may only be important, be pivotal, to him. The discrepancy between what he perceives as fundamental events in his life and what others (like Luis and perhaps the reader) are able to consign to the oblivion of forgetfulness, stings.

CHEAP TRICK—I WANT YOU TO ME

James articulates such discrepancies of perception, saying later, "When I was a normal boy, fourth grade, before everything got twisted, I liked girls" (183). Then just a couple of lines later he recounts a sexual experience at ten years old with "a neighbor boy" John, who is "seven or eight" years older than him. John cautions him that if he says anything "they'll call us fags," and prods James to keep his secret by asking "you don't want to be a fag, do you?" Everyone knows the only correct answer to a question like that is "NO." But just a sentence later James goes on to narrate, "After the summer with John...I became a boy who liked boys, and there was nothing I could do about it" (183). Through this we see how James might struggle emotionally with his molestation, his interest in both girls and boys, a suicide attempt, and his eventual identification as gay. Muñoz states that "[d]isidentification, as mode

of analysis, registers subjects as constructed and contradictory.”³ This is clear as we intercept James in the midst of his self-construction, observing the way he is beginning his journey to perceive himself, while he is simultaneously beginning to understand the ways in which others perceive him.

AMERICA—SISTER GOLDEN HAIR

The second section reads in totality: “I hated this song, a stack in my older sister’s 45s, and always felt depressed whenever I heard the opening guitar riff. It’s rare, but sometimes we end up loving the things we hate.”⁴ In this clear demonstration, we see how Nulick uses a song, nearly a one-hit-wonder, as a prompt for a narrative fragment. In the song the speaker is a man who has stood his woman up on their wedding day. In the opening verse the speaker says “I’m not ready for the altar, but I do agree there’s times that a woman sure can be a friend of mine.”⁵ The rest of the song is him imploring her to “meet him in the middle.” While this middle is not clearly articulated, it is clearly not marriage. James claims that when he hears the opening riff he becomes “depressed.” This mirrors the opening lyric of the song: “Well I tried to make it Sunday but I got so damned depressed.”⁶ The speaker at the center of both works is depressed for perhaps the same reason—both understand that they are societally compelled to perform heterosexuality with its resolution into stable, married stasis. The failed performance has different results for both men. In the song a presumably straight man feels societal obligation to marry a woman whom

he cares for deeply, but does not quite manage to love. We assume this feeling is reciprocal because he asks her to “love me just a little.” James, on the other hand, is depressed by this song, though he gives no specific reason why.

Throughout “Vinyl-Hearted Boy,” James maintains an identity of “queer” while simultaneously acknowledging the “thirteen women” he has had sex with are more numerous than his straight boss who belittles him for his homosexuality. At one point James suspects he is the father of his ex-girlfriend’s son. In a characteristic Nulickian reversal, James thinks, “though perhaps he is not.”⁷ He keeps this child at a distance. The last sentence of the section “America – Sister Golden Hair” states, “sometimes we end up loving the things we hate.”⁸ This sentiment seems to be another, though imperfect, reversal of the sentiment in the song’s concluding lyric: “Well, I tried to fake it, I don’t mind saying, I just can’t make it.”⁹ These lines stress the impermanence of our emotions despite our best intentions. The youthful knee-jerk rejection transforms into love. But James says this not because he is imagining some future nuptials with his own Sister Golden-Hair. His dalliances with girls and women are not tenable despite his attempts to “fake it.” Over time, James is able to disidentify with this song, thus through rejection he eventually embraces it.

The other songs in “Vinyl-Hearted Boy” move through similar processes with their narratives. Despite being a bricolage of musical works created by others, a mixtape is its own unique creation, but one that is often directed outward, as an offering to

another in an intimate act of sharing, or arriving as a playlist at a party to be experienced by many. So a mix-tape that is in service solely to the maker does not quite feel like a mixtape, it lacks outward legibility that we have come to expect. This dichotomy between expectation and what Nulick delivers prompts the reader to imagine the missing parts, the cuts, the silent spaces.

MUSICAL YOUTH—PASS THE DUTCHIE

One passage includes a URL supposedly linking to photos of the protagonist's New York City college apartment referenced in the text: https://px.sorabji.com/index/category/66-parc_lincoln_hotel_166_west_75th_street_nyc.¹⁰ If the reader takes the time to type in the URL, they will find the link broken. This feels right in the way it reveals how the technologies that shape our narratives, whether through intention or obsolesce, eventually fail, like a box of cassette mix-tapes will eventually fail if they have not already. If the reader chooses, they may search the descriptors in the URL, [which brings them to a blog with photographs that match the narrative in the story](#).¹¹ The text-based URL creates an odd mash-up of analog and digital. Again, Nulick is queering the reader's interpretation of the story not allowing us a traditional read and leaving us unsure. Is the link really cold? We easily found it through a Google search. Was this a mistake? An easter egg? And what of the seemingly abandoned, defunct page itself? Was this a new creation to simulate the entropy of technology? As media become dated, our potential narratives shift. Even the act of reading a URL is an obsolete skill. Here again we see a palimpsest

Home / Parc Lincoln Hotel, 166 West 75th Street, NYC [18]

Search in this set

[color:#FF0101]NEW: August, 2014: Read my story about the Parc Lincoln at [MyFirstApartmentNYC](#), a new site where you are invited to contribute your story about your first apartment in New York. The Parc Lincoln holds an iconic place in my mind. This is the first place in New York where I had a room to myself for any length of time. I lived here for 8 or 9 months during 1990 and 1991, first landing in Room 1422, then moving down to Room 317. This place was the October of my life. Today I walk long yards of tourism across this city I've known for longer than the occupiers. I had my time in the now-luxurious basement of my youth. The Parc Lincoln is no more by that name. The fundamental transient residence survives. The lobby was subsumed long ago by an upscale restaurant named 'Cesca, where I got to stare at the ceiling whilst slurping wine and waiting for a seafood platter in the same space which once smelled of urine and more obscure stenches. While dining at 'Cesca I stared at the ceiling and remembered the cockroaches climbing over my face in Room 317, the clucking pigeons that woke me up at all hours, the gushing rivers of perspiration that could have drowned a man of less nimble sleep. The Parc Lincoln is iconic in my mind, but maybe with only self-gratifying reasons. Was it that bad? (O, it was) But I remember a point of laziness where I felt I could live like that forever. Laziness. Life's slumber. I stared at the 'Cesca ceiling and imagined the lives passing 15 feet above my face. One of those lives was mine.

How do we live like this? Stacked like cordwood, the poor and the lazy just 15 feet away from the fat and the old, the stereotypically aloof Manhattanites with their thorn-rimmed glasses and their almost-beautiful daughters blabbing into the secret air of the isolated, blabbing that the hard times are coming soon, the difficulties unknown since oblivion are soon to be discussed, revered, wandered upon. The 'Cesca dining room was nearly empty. The front desk of the Parc Lincoln hotel is now filled by a bar. The space for the phone booths is now filled by a wine closet.



Blog entry: Parc Lincoln Hotel,
166 West 75th Street, NYC. [WSBJ.com](#)

of autobiography and imaginary. There are two obvious interpretations of this: First, this is a real artifact, a real website, with real photos from the author's past that leads us to an autobiographical reading. The second interpretation is that Nulick has created artificial artifacts for his character James in order to further queer the expectations of a fictional work.

James's life is frequently presented at removes and reveals his attempts at simulating normalcy. As an adoptee, James struggles with being both outside of this biological family but also part of two blended families after his adoptive parents divorce and remarry others. Maintaining the distinction that his family exists only through paper (or through legal agreement) he is conscious of the constructed nature of these bonds. "Musical Youth – Pass the Dutchie" references a time when he is a college student and moves away from the complex relationships of his homelife. He is surrounded by middle class peers and must simulate behavior that is in contrast with his working class ideologies. The simulations often fail and James feels disconnected from these social networks. (He is suspended from school for tossing his typewriter out his apartment window—this event highlighting the class difference between James and his cohorts.) These disconnections and imperfections of relations are analogous to how songs on a mixtape may often lack the seamless, seemingly inevitable flow of an album. This perhaps failure reflects the way in which James both identifies and de-identifies with the songs on offer. James offers us the mixtape as a narrative way finder, yet the narrative never quite coheres.

THE CARS—SINCE YOU'RE GONE

Nothing about our narrator is inherent or intrinsic. In a deeply challenging move, James even suggests that his Queerness may not be an intrinsic or essential character of his being. In James's attempt to replicate normative patterns of socialization, he has sex with multiple women—thirteen to be exact. But his lack of Queerness as an essential quality moves beyond this simplistic framing. The narrative verisimilitude is also not essential since the stories are told more than once and from oblique angles. James returns again to the origin of his Queerness and suggests that it may be the result of being sexually assaulted when he was ten years old. This assault even carries with it the sense that it “showed [him] the world.”¹² Queerness as a result of trauma and violence goes against the naturalizing stances encapsulated by those who view sexuality as intrinsic and embracing it as empowering. These philosophies are most glibly summarized by Lady Gaga who asserts individuals are “born this way.” Queerness emerges both as a mutable state that is both emergent and conditional, for both protagonist and the protagonist's narrative.

The centrality of magnetic tape and the subsequent deterioration of each additional copy haunts James' attempts at authenticity. The reader is commandeered into being a witness for Nulick's protagonist who struggles to come to terms to who he is as a writer and as a queer man. The story gives the source of this Queerness multiple points of origin – existing in the current state while simultaneously being a call to witness trauma and the disorientation that accompanies

it. The disorientation that comes with trauma is perhaps itself a reflection of the narrative reshuffling and the queering of the linear form that is required to understand ourselves within the complexities of living.

SCOTT WALKER—THANKS FOR CHICAGO MR. JAMES

And finally, “Vinyl-Hearted Boy” uses the frame of the mixtape to build a scaffold upon which he can structure an exploration of a coming-of-age story that abuts, intersects, and destabilizes Queerness. True to the mixtape form, the story functions in a modular fashion, each song as a wayfinder. The modular form queers the linearity of the story allowing a brief immersion into a single moment and then moving on. This kind of queer temporality rejects traditional notions of beginning, middle, and end which allows the reader to experience each scene as its own moment. As we move through the story, the songs themselves do not summarize or reflect back the plot of each section that leads us to a deeper understanding. Instead, these songs feel more specific and interior, like a snapshot. More often than not, within the reality of each fragment, the song is not selected by the protagonist but instead is present only in a passive way – someone else selected the song. Each song feels very personal and interior, like a memory. The author makes no attempt to explain the connection to the reader, which leaves one with the feeling that it is not necessarily easy to translate to another’s experience. It feels as if Nulick has made the mixtape for himself and he is simply sharing it with us—his own private playlist.

NOTES

- 1 James Nulick, *Haunted Girlfriend*, New York: ExPat Press, 2019. As a nod to Nulick we are using the song list from his short story as our guiding conceit for this essay.
- 2 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidntifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 200.
- 3 Muñoz, 115
- 4 Nulick, 176.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid, 180
- 8 Ibid, 176.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid, 179.
- 11 The working URL is: https://wsbj.com/px/index/category/66-parc_lincoln_hotel_166_west_75th_street_nyc
- 12 Nulick, 183.



WHERE DOES DREAMING WANT US TO GO?

Making sense of dreaming fragments that hold uncontrollable possibilities

Jay Irizawa & Peter Morin

It seems easy to dream, and strangely it is one of the more difficult things to practice.

It is easy to position and pronounce “dreaming” as something mystical, ephemeral, or magical; and yet, this isn’t an essay about dreaming as code for hope or change or transformation or developing strategies for reading dreams with psychoanalytic meaning.

We are not turning towards dreaming as a salve for the pain of colonialism or turning towards dreaming as an aid in decolonial practice(s).

We are not turning towards dreaming as a practice of getting it right with the land across our diverse ancestries.

It is also important to acknowledge right at the beginning of offering this structured approach, that we are aware of the possibility of this effort being understood as cultural appropriation. We acknowledge the numerous culture(s) whose knowledge systems are activated, and actively expanded, by the practice(s) of dreaming for expansion of human experience(s) and human meaning.

We also acknowledge and honour our respective Ancestries (Japanese and Tahltan-French/Canadian), and these respective sites of epistemological production are expanded by the practice of dreaming. These written words offer documentation, along with reflections and questions, on dreaming as an active method for acknowledging our human agency and its relationship to the living cosmos.

We are living this practice as a way of expanding our experience as human beings who produce experiences within research/creation/disciplines; we are not just theorizing. For this essay, we offer J.L Austin's theory of "performative utterances" as a place to start. In his book, *How to do Things with Words*,¹ Austin makes a generous space for dreaming unto itself and not as something purposefully situated in addition to what humans prioritize as tangible and "actual" meaning. We also find a grounding territory for dreaming in Gayatri Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"² as a possibility for our

respective bodies to find a place (here) in the dreaming as practice. We are writing about our practice of dreaming and our shared human condition, along with how desire for expansion beyond societal structures and their production of meaning is possible. This is the *uncontrollable possibility* of an ecology of entanglement and its interface with what we are proposing as *quantum dreaming*. To make sense of what this might mean, we explore an adaptation of quantum physics entanglement in River (Karen) Barad's theory of agential realism: through the interconnectedness of human and non-human relations of phenomena, the cosmic and quantum scales of relationality are indeterminate yet ever-present in the dreaming and conscious worlds we inhabit.³

We (Jay and Peter) offer an extension of Austin's guiding theory and expand this idea—moving from the idea of doing things *with words* towards that of *how to do things with dreams?* We also expand this idea to include the question of *how to answer questions through dreaming?* Within our dream-states, we extend outwards into the quantum field as a provocation for expanding our human experience. We define this to be the uncontrollable possibility, a theoretical provocation, and a guide to this writing. The idea of uncontrollable possibility emerges as a result of our collective and ongoing practice of dreaming.

It is important to note that there is no hope embedded in these words. You will not find healing from pain and trauma in these words either. We are writing down part of the human condition and

not prioritizing dreaming as solution or the subject of this essay. We are preferring not to write down how our dreamy actions create accessible and easily exploitable meaning. This is an inversion of what we think is stable. The environment and our physical surroundings are mutable. We don't intend for this in the way that Marshall Berman once described modernism to be a material future dreamed into a new manifest future,⁴ nor in the way Marx and Engels invigorated the concept of "all that is solid melts into air" as a poetic and powerful manuscript to recognize the bourgeois world comprised of particles in the image of a monolith that can dissolve.⁵ Dreaming is always in flux; bodies—whether celestial or liquid or flesh or granular or mountainous—eventually melt and are always—as Leroy Little Bear reminds us—"in relation."⁶

THE QUESTION: How to ask the dreams, how to eat death

PM: Good morning, Jay.

Hope your class is going beauty full.

I did ask *this* question ... before going to bed.

And, what I dreamed was you eating. Different scenes of you eating, sitting at a table eating, outside seated at a table eating,

you wearing a white collar button-down outside and eating

and occasionally, you would see me see you and you would hold up your hands towards me ... thumbs

extended towards each and index finger pointing to make a triangle

JL: So, I didn't tell you

that I was going to ask _____ the same question last night.

She looked at me like whaaaah...?

And then I started to pretend to eat. I asked her how would you eat death, and she said,

“drop it and it will break into little pieces.”

She asked me to join her (we're in the room in the light of her night light) to make shapes with fingers. She asked can you make this. So, I did.

It was a triangle—with thumbs extended, and fingers connecting.

I asked the dream. I need practice. In it, _____ introduced me to a

Japanese colleague, the mom, and she had a daughter. The husband was Japanese, tall, looked like an actor, like _____. I guess that's who Hollywood would cast for such a role.

We were in the front of my old childhood house, grass, garden along the white brick wall, summer. Nothing much came of it, but it's a start.

Diaspora dreams. My ancestors dreamed of a place for me

as I dream of a place for future generations, future ancestors.

Visiting the site of incarceration where once my father's family was held captive for 4 years in a sleepy place called Sunshine Valley, is an alien encounter. Alien-like, as the other, alterity, outside of a known framework and existence.

1920 to be married. On no other occasion has either my wife or myself been in Japan since coming to Canada.

Our home was Hiroshima where my old mother lived and it was solely to care for her that we made application to go back. The destruction of Hiroshima has removed all hope from our minds that our mother still lives and moreover removes all means of livelihood for us, so that we ask you to have our application cancelled and be allowed to live our lives in this land.

Documentation of Japanese Canadian citizen appealing forced repatriation post-WW II, January 7th 1946. Courtesy of the Nikkei Museum, Burnaby B.C. Accessed July 12 2022.

Enemy—an encounter with a being external to your world, it requires engagement with force to protect, with violence to shield from harm, for the safety and welfare of citizens.

This is what the Japanese Canadian citizens of the lands were called when they received notice

—their newly assigned status as Enemy Aliens.

But to return to the homeland of Hiroshima was an impossibility.

Land is embedded with dreams

Quantum dreaming revisualizes how time/space folds and intersects, tethers events in endless arrays, connecting back to what once was and now is again, different. Yuji now stands as an elder, looking down at the face of Masaaki who was just playing near the rapids as a 7-year old boy. The bells ring.

PM: I'm 47 years old (today) and it's taken me a long time to realize that travelling is the real Tahltan territory. Let me put it another way, this is the cultural identity and cultural practice that my mom taught me: *drive for hours and visit until it's time for you to go*. I've gotten very good at listening and asking questions of other cultural practitioners (Indigenous and Global Ancestries), so good in fact that cultural organizations like universities have hired me for the last 28 years to teach about "Indigenous cultural practice." I am still guided by the principles and practice of anti-racism and anti-oppressive frameworks, and I offer this expanded

grounded-positional statement (here) as a way to acknowledge dreaming as an expansive and illuminating practice. For the visual thinkers, who are reading along, this statement emerges because dreaming as a principled practice is like sunlight pouring into trees. As a result of these wider factors coming in contact, everything spills over, and we can make new paths for travel.

Jl: I've been burning orange peels in my dreams

PM: Make sure not to romanticize it or be terrorized by it because you are staying alive in the outside world. Dreaming is that possibility of more hearing my own voice, reading these words, and making a space for myself to be held. This "being held" as a place for future-ing and future dreaming. I'm hearing these silently voiced words become/becoming containers for worlds and bodies and possibilities.

I think I am okay but know that I am not.

I am intoxicated by dreaming and like being, intoxicated, and

building and breaking trail for others. Is there a specific nature to dreams—

what I've realized in the here and now is that they are slippery. That is maybe the purpose.

I like the possibility of that slipperiness.

That these fixed opportunities don't deliver

what we might be

needing/wanting/desiring.

Maybe the danger is dreaming with someone, dreaming towards an

unknown and inevitable destination.

And I still love a record.

I want something that holds me and holds our loving and our lives.

Perhaps,

the answer is a reimagining of water as a liquid that spills

over our skin, and all the while, it spills inside of us, into our memories.

The memory of water

is also a dream space.

Transformational and with a complicated nature that enables beauty to happen.

As I'm writing this, standing in the bookstore, surrounded by pages and structures,

and I've realized I don't really like reading,

I like the ability to feel the paper touching my skin.

The folding through these pages making a space for an uncontrollable possibility

to be contained or consumed in small portions.

This folding through the pages in an organized fashion, one following the next following the next. And I like hearing my own voice reading these words on a page.

That interior voice becoming a way to see myself and to be in my presence as company.

Jl: I told _____ that dreams are powerful.

“How?” she asked.

“Because dreams can help you imagine amazing things for the future, for tomorrow.”

Then she wished to dream of a rainforest for her family to be in

You were sitting in between 2 people
in the shadows against a concrete wall
like in the bleachers of a stadium.

It was a concrete room, open, but indoors and dark with light coming in the halls.

Inset seating. I forgot what I was doing. You were... drinking from a cup, or just watching. Watching over

I think that was my first dream of you that I remember, 2 nights ago.

PM: Thank you for sharing those dreamy writings from long ago

In the dream. I meet _____ for elder’s breakfast in a fancy hotel.

I meet him in the gift shop.

He texts me.

I’m in so and so’s store.

The words from the text I remember—it’s not a very good store.

I walk through the seated guests in the restaurant

and I see him in the store.

He's standing by a rack of goods, He says "guess which one I bought?".

It was a weird bird-type of thing with a long beak for pouring things.

It was light grey. The next thing I remember, and I can remember,

is this happened before

or

after seeing _____.

I'm with _____. On the street.

She tells me to lift this car.

The moon is shining. I move the car.

Pick it up. and move it.

She says ...

"you're like a superhero."

And I respond, standing in the moonlight, after moving the car,

that the moon makes me feel very strong.

JL: How to stop the hurt of my ancestors.

Am I doing it?

Will future generations, my own, be accepting.

So I'd like to ask how,

and if I'm doing it ok.

Dream as serious work ... I like that.

I work in reverse, because I am not as talented to ask, but

I am learning from them, learning how to be open to non-time,
multi-space knowledge

... that messages from elsewhere and every when come in many forms that are always shape shifting, and are right in front of us. Unseen in the logic of this constrained reality.

I don't know why I am attracted to the idea of dreams being work ... not uncomfortable like work but that they can also be serious and structured and requested

PM: To fall in deep, to swim in that first dream ... to become one body with that first moment.

I want to dream that dream.

Today I'm remembering a detail from a dream.

About swimming. Being thrown off the dock by my uncle _____

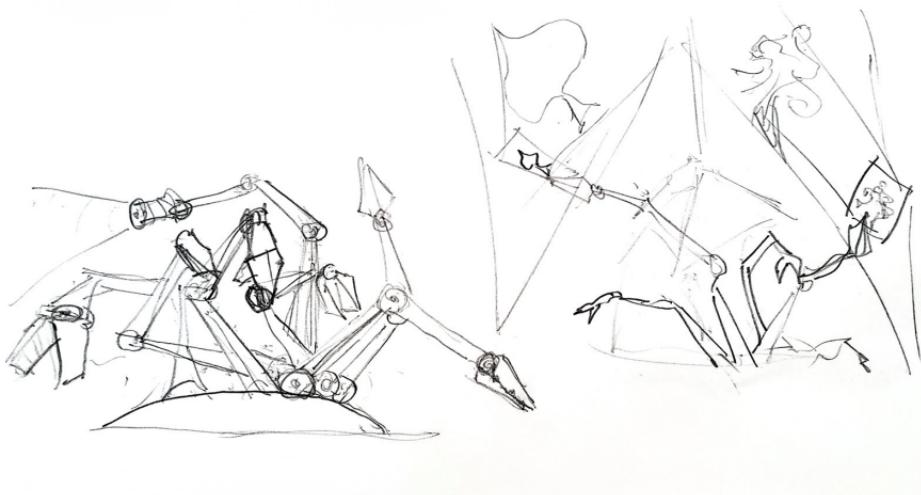
and nearly drowning.

In this dream after struggling against the water for a bit, the water told me to
surrender,

and then I felt the water's body and my body become one.

I was held by the water of that lake, and

felt my body
and the body of water,
become able to swim
because I surrendered to the knowledge of the water.



Tentacular Machine Sketch, Sketch from a dream,
visualizing a multi-armed apparatus choreographing
movements of a twin machine on a larger scale from
coded drawings, Text message correspondence,
Peter Morin & Jay Irizawa, February 14, 2025.

Jl: It was a weird weaving

of exacting cutting arm motions, in out twirling
like a ball of worms but never getting tangled.

No sound, but I now imagine machine-like
whirs. Every time a manoeuvre was drawn up onto
a transparency and then projected, it told one of the
arms to move

(1= move, 2= hold).

I guess the frame of the algorithm told all arms not
to clash

A tentacular choreography demonstrated on the
left.

The smaller master model controlling the choreog-
raphy with arms holding transparencies projected
on wall giving commands for the movement, on the
right.

PM: These dreams meet the day. I just realized that.
I'm numbering the days. In the dream last night,
I told you I was sick and you came over and made me
soup.

Which was so nice and made me feel held.

In a later experience in my dream, I was sitting in
like a university or gallery setting,
at a longer table with benches, and there were two
younger folks on the other side of the table, facing
towards me, and we were talking about pretend
Indians in exhibitions

JL: I wanted to tell him

I was leaning on a beanbag pillow just relaxing or
waking up slowly

and _____ came over and sat down beside me.

Started talking, probably about what I wanted to do
today.

Everything was like a mustard yellow, warm and
comfy.

He used to have a dark brown soft textured bathrobe.

He asked if I wanted a _____ toy, holding it between
thumb and forefinger.

It was in a white plastic cellophane wrap labeled
with yellow graphics.

“\$5.99, it was only \$5.99- can you believe that?”

Before I can answer yes, he makes me laugh, tickling
the soft spot under my neck

on the right side,

smiling in childish abandon.

I’m paralyzed with silent laughter

in a frenzy of joy and giggles and surrender

and it’s ok.

I’m a boy again

and I just realize that I do the same to his grandson
and I want to tell him so,

but I can’t and peels and beads of laughter roll out.

In the evening I am putting _____ to sleep

I tell him Ji-chan used to make me laugh all the time;
he would love to make you laugh too.

Would have loved.

He loves ...

I get it now.

I'm channeling him through me and seeing myself as
a boy.

When the closeness,

warmth,

touch,

and laughter comes,

that only comes shared and permissible with
children.

I wake up, 3:38am, and the familiar heavy tide of
grief comes back in.

Flashes of his face when he was not much older than
I am now

and the dull ache

on the right side

of my neck lingers.

I am deciphering the impossibility

uncontrollable possibility of embodying 3 genera-
tions simultaneously

directing, watching, and inhabiting the actors and
it is too much to comprehend. But I was there.

Reading your invitation earlier from the assign-
ment you created,

and only now I am understanding the prompt:

What if my dream tonight was not only mine, but a message motivated by a web of relationships I'm part of?

PM: A DREAMING INVITATION: If Time Paused for You

What if time stopped—just for a moment?

What if no one expected anything of you today? No tasks. No clocks. No performance.

What would matter in that world? How would you spend your energy? How would you connect with the world around you?

Tonight, before you sleep, make a small offering: a breath of gratitude, a whisper to the trees.

What have I forgotten how to listen to—inside me, and beyond me?

What if my dream tonight was not only mine, but a message motivated by a web of relationships I'm part of?

When you wake up, don't rush. Ask your dream if it wants to stay a little longer and maybe write it down and share with someone.

Think also about that cultural phenomenon of talking to an elder about our dreams

I did talk to an indigenous elder one time about that dream ... that whale dream ... actually.

_____ said:

“What’s does a whale mean to you?

I can’t tell you what that means to you... there are no dream dictionaries...

you have to know for yourself”

Jl: I was heading to a station again,
and am trying to get somewhere.

It’s like these archetypes of spaces are constantly evolving,

the train station that used to be the airport
is becoming a fluid linchpin recurring yet changing.

If I could identify the archetype as recurring, maybe I could realize I am dreaming.

But it keeps changing a bit every time,
and I don’t recognize it.

Is this also happening with things in my life that are recurring, and I can’t change it because I can’t recognize it, whether it’s

trauma,

happiness,

how fortunate

and privileged I am,

how I can't start
or do the things I want to
because of fear.

Because I'm tired,
because I'm uninspired,
unmotivated,
immobilized,
or not feeling I deserve any more.

I can't wake up. I can't stop trying to catch the flight or train that I'm going to miss.

But what if I did.

Would I stop worrying, and do what I am to do,
make,

write,
say,
create,

to tell my children in the future all the stories they can carry?

That's ... momentous. Like,
who knew dreaming and the sharing of dreams could be
healing.

Re-membering,
piecing back together the body from the
spirit film fantastical imaginary world.
U are shifting planetary paths

PM: I guess my sort of question is:

Does dreaming enable a different sense of beautiful?

It doesn't feel experiential.

It feels expansive.

Like what I would expect beautiful to be ...

but that sense of beautiful doesn't necessarily happen in this physical realm that we are in right now.

But when you share your dream of whispering to the warm head of baby _____

I also remember babies

and the physical warmth of babies that

just happens from them being themselves ...

and that remembrance feels expansively beautiful.

Feelings in dreams.

I'm not sure that I feel anything in these dreams.

Which is an interesting uncontrollable possibility.

I really trust my eyes.

And curious that the only feelings that I do experience in dreams are fear and desire...

The wake up ... from fear and

the wake up from desire /pleasure

I still can tune into the feeling of those immense whale bodies

moving underneath those wooden planks.

The other ... still remembered ... or the part ... I'm in a space of water.

Deep green water.

There is no land.

There is a structure like a dock.

Floating. Endlessly on the surface of this green water.

It's a derelict dock. Wood slats. Almost looks broken but also definitely looks ancient.

While remembering today, I can't remember
if there is a beginning
or a middle to this floating pathway.

But I am scared walking over it.

Scared of falling into the water.

Knowing that I can't swim
and have panic if I can't place my feet on the bottom.
Then I see them.

Killer whales.

Just swimming underneath the surface.

Directly underneath the wooden walkway. I see their entire bodies.

I remember that they are massive. And close to the wood directly underneath my feet.

I get so afraid that I wake myself up.

Jl: The realization is to expand the variables for experiencing and determining meaning. This is from the dream.



_____: This is hard to do. This writing down dreams. This dreaming work.

This is where dreams narrate a logic of abstraction that can't be made whole on this side of the dream mirror.

What holds a word?

Because they sometimes need to be held, protected. Summoned with courage.

And what if we don't hold them?

All those stories and lives and meanings are gone.

PM: Two scenes:

One scene where we are all working together—
_____, _____, Jay and I.

_____ has asked me to do something on the computer to support the collective work knowing that I am not terribly great at this team assignment. At one point Jay says something and I look at the clock and it says

11:11.

And I feel reassured.



*Screenshot. 11:11,
Sent to Jay on November 11, 2025 at 11:11.*

Second scene takes place in a restaurant.

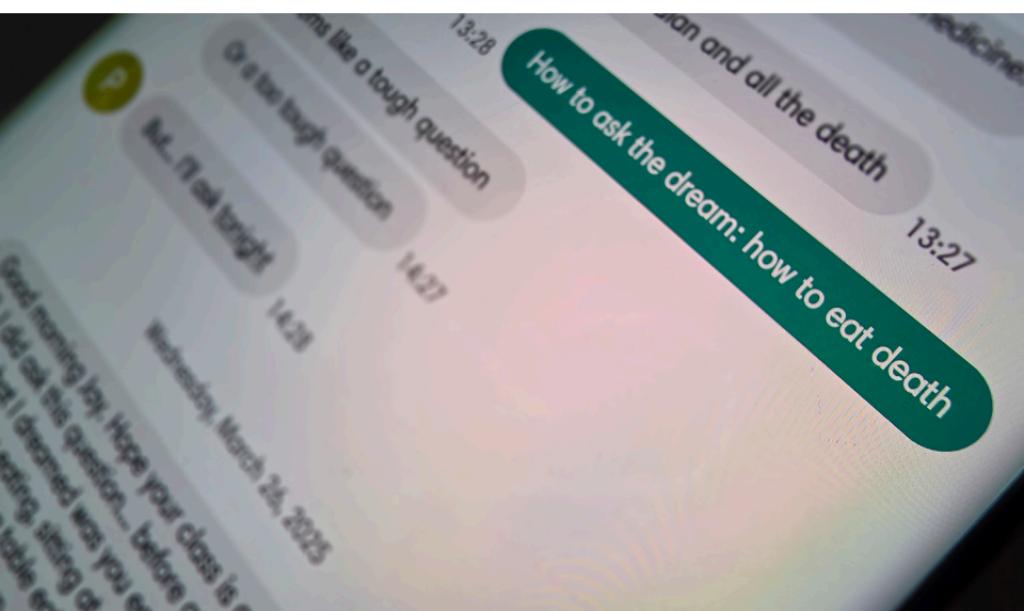
One of those upstairs types of places. Red is a main color.

We are sitting in a booth eating lunch. At some point it's time for us to leave.

Can't remember what that was. The server gets me to pay with debit. She feels good that she tricked me into paying with debit.

DREAMING AS METHODOLOGY

Perhaps it's about having someone to tell your dreams to. I know that I felt better telling my dreams (Peter to Jay). I would end each evening, slowly moving into the theta state and right before closing my eyes, it was these words—*I want to remember my dreams so that I can tell Jay what I dreamed.* What was surprising to me was: first I could remember, and I'm saying this here because if I tried to remember for myself, said the words and highlighted myself, it often didn't work. And second, when I shared this dream work/process with others in my community, I heard numerous times about how they wished someone would share their dreams with them. The connection is the purpose. With another Dreamer you build a dreaming community. We (Jay and Peter) both come from dreamy cultural origins. We both have dreamy cultural practices. Globally positioned as Japanese and Indigenous, yet, locally positioned as 3rd generation Japanese-Canadian and Mixed Tahltan and French-Canadian.



On Dreaming: How to Eat Death,
Text message correspondence prompting
dream sequence, Peter Morin & Jay Irizawa,
March 25, 2025.

Territory is here with us. Life Territories are here with us and acknowledged here. We are ages of time, and our movements on the land(s) now called Earth have information/acquired experience that activates dream-ing. Dreaming is an acknowledgement of past worlds that have been built by us. Ancestral world(s): “The space between the interconnections of ancestral knowledge/s brought together [here] are vast and intimately close. Not as a dichotomy of space. Not as an indeterminacy of life and death. Rather, [as] a continuum of relations made possible through dreaming. Not in the manifest way of manufactured futures, no; dreaming comes with an understanding of being, of openness and responsibility, a network of divergent paths from multiple universes, in willingness to change.”⁷ We could use the image of water (fluidity) here (quantum field). Dreams can have a fluidity, an elasticity, and a shape to physically experience or stand in. It’s important to note that water does a similar thing. It is a liquid, a solid, and a vapour. Water is mutable and fits itself into the shape of the vessel without asking anything in return from the vessel. Both water and dreams hold onto a practice of memory that allows for human-beings to feel. Like our ancestors whom we carry, it carries us on the surface down to the depths of undercurrents unknown and uncontrollable, a place where we interface with memory and desire; lived experiences and infinite possibilities that, if we are so lucky, will bubble to the surface and breathe, a new (and ancient) story to be shared, where dreams want us to go.

NOTES

- 1 J.L. Austin, *How to do things with words*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- 2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, 271–313.
- 3 Karen River Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- 4 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, New York: Verso, 1982.
- 5 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, New York: Penguin Books, 2015.
- 6 Leroy Little Bear, in conversation with Gregory Cajete. “Developing Resonance with the Sky Spirits of the Cosmos: Flux and Native Astronomy” (Day 1, Keynote) *Indeterminate Futures / The Future of Indeterminacy* conference, University of Dundee, 13–15 November, 2020
- 7 Jay Irizawa, “Trouble Starts Before it Begins,” art review for the exhibition *Troubling Times: Traces, Portals and Groundings* featuring Peter Morin, Nicole Neidhardt, Justine Woods. University of British Columbia Okanagan: FINA gallery, 2025.

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ZACHARY CAHILL lives in Chicago. For over a decade he has worked on the USSA, a fictional country that uses exhibitions to meditate on nation-state infrastructure and propaganda. In recent years his work has taken a decisive turn towards the genres of fantasy and fairytales. His art has been featured in the Berlin Biennale; Regina Rex, New York; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, among others. Cahill has been featured in *Art Review*'s Future Greats issue and was included in the contemporary art survey, *The Artist Who Will Change the World* published by Thames and Hudson. *The Black Flame of Paradise*, his first novel, was released by Mousse Publishing in 2018. In 2021, he self-published the graphic novel,

Unicorn Death Road Trip Buddy Movie. Cahill has written two books of poetry *Unicorn Death Moon Day Planner* (2023) and *Unicorn Death Moon Paris Guidebook* (2024) both published by Red Ogre Review. His critical writing have appeared in *Artforum*, *Afterall*, *Critical Inquiry*, *Frieze* and many other arts publications. A monograph on Cahill's art, *Zachary Cahill's Composite Art: A Study of the Poetic Illuminations*, by Dr. Jacob Henry Leveton is forthcoming from Mousse.

TERRI GRIFFITH is the co-editor of two anthologies from the arts podcast Bad@Sports, *Say It While You Still Mean It: Conversations on Socially Engaged Art* and *We Will Think This Through Together: Conversations on Art and Practice* (Open Engagement, 2018). She is also the co-editor of *The Essential New Art Examiner* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2011). Her academic writing focuses on popular culture depictions of gender and sexuality. She teaches Queer-content writing and literature courses at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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TED HIEBERT is an interdisciplinary artist and theorist. His work examines the relationships between art, performance, and technology with a particular focus on the absurd, the paradoxical and the imaginary. He is the author and editor of several books including, most recently, *Photographing Ambiguity* (University of Toronto Press, 2025). Hiebert is Professor and Chair of the School of Image Arts at Toronto Metropolitan University.

HILMA'S GHOST is a feminist art collective co-founded by artists and educators Dannielle Tegeder and Sharmistha Ray that fuses contemporary art with modern spirituality through forms of divination and ritual. Named after the Swedish artist and mystic, Hilma af Klint, the collective's work is a critique of gendered power structures, providing a critical and revolutionary platform for rethinking gender in the arts while recovering feminist histories as its ballast for critique. The collective acts as a collaborative model for feminist research, artistic production, experimental pedagogies, and community activations. Their work ranges from the traditional to the esoteric, including paintings and drawings, surrealist games, a tarot deck, ritual object-based installations, pedagogical workshops, curated exhibitions, community projects, and

artist books. Hilma's Ghost began at the height of the pandemic in 2020. Since then, Ray and Tegeder have completed more than 25 collaborative projects and participated in close to 100 public programs both nationally and internationally. In 2022, the duo began an itinerant art school with generative workshops fusing art and magic that have been attended by over 8K people. Their limited edition tarot deck, *Abstract Futures Tarot*, has a popular following amongst artists and occult practitioners and is now in its third edition. Hilma's Ghost has been featured in solo and group exhibitions and projects internationally at The Guggenheim New York, NY; Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), São Paulo, Brazil; The Shepherd, Detroit, MI; Marlborough Gallery, New York, NY; The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT; Galería RGR, Mexico City, Mexico; Hill-Stead Museum, Farmington, CT; Secrist | Beach, Chicago, IL; The Parallax Center, Portland, OR; The Armory Show, New York, NY; among many others. Reviews of their work have appeared in The New York Times, The Brooklyn Rail, Artnet, and Hyperallergic. The duo launched "Abstract Futures," a 600 square foot permanent glass mosaic mural based on their tarot deck, which was commissioned by MTA Arts & Design and fabricated by Miotto Mosaic Art Studios, at Grand Central Station in New York City, in May 2025. Sharmistha Ray is a Professor at Carnegie Mellon University and Dannielle Tegeder is a Professor at Lehman College at City University of New York. For more information about the collective's work, go to www.hilmaghost.com

JAY IRIZAWA is a 3rd generation Japanese Canadian interdisciplinary artist, designer and researcher exploring relations in ancestral knowledges. He is the Graduate Program Director for the Interdisciplinary Art Media and Design master's program (IAMD) at OCAD University; also known as a Trouble Maker. Jay is troubling the ways we come to know the world by inviting speculative, futurist, critical, anti-oppressive, and anti-racist methods of art and design knowledge to raise ethical questions at the forefront of creative processes, both in theory and in the materiality of collaborative making.

PHOENIX KAI (they/them) is a queer poet, writer, and multimedia artist located on the unceded Indigenous lands of the Coast Salish peoples in Seattle, WA. phoenix was a 2024 Husky 100 recipient and received their MFA in Creative Writing and Poetics from UW Bothell. their work has appeared in the Henry Art Gallery Interpretive Guide, Beyond Queer Words, Silly Goose Press, and elsewhere. they are currently fascinated with open access digital archives, subversive meme-core art, speculative futures, and techno-feminisms. Outside of working at a cafe/bookstore, they are trekking the endless path toward life as a self-sustaining independent artist. In their spare time they enjoy reading, playing games, and watching cartoons.

DAVID LARIVIERE's practice operates under the banner of "Anti-Tourism," a contrarian methodology grounded in encounter, listening, and situated engagement with place. He received his BFA from the University of Alberta and MA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, University of London. Since 2008, he has served as Artistic Director of PAVED Arts in Saskatoon.

The Anti-Tourism methodology first took shape during a 2018 residency at Open Space Arts Society (Victoria, BC), resulting in the exhibition *#every sordid detail*. Subsequent iterations include *Treaty Six: The Smooth and the Striated (borderLINE: 2020 Biennial*, Art Gallery of Alberta) and *Anti-Tourism on Treaty Six Territory* (Mann Art Gallery, 2022). Most recently, this trajectory has extended into the Athabasca Tar Sands, where fieldwork at Bitumount (the abandoned site of Canada's first oil sands experiments) has generated new work examining extraction, commemoration, and ecological precarity.

Working across audio, video, photography, and performance, LaRiviere draws on continental philosophy and affect theory to challenge colonial and majoritarian frameworks, approaching art-making from what Deleuze and Guattari term a "minoritarian" politic.

COLLEEN MCCULLA is an interdisciplinary artist based in Dublin, Ohio. She holds an MFA from Columbia College Chicago and a BFA from

the Cleveland Institute of Art. Her work merges textiles, collage, and systems-based design to examine creativity and truth in a post-truth world. She studies how AI-generated imagery, computer vision, and digital image analysis are reshaping visual culture and authorship. Her work has been exhibited at SCOPE Art Show in Miami Beach and featured on PBS.

PETER MORIN is a member of the Crow Clan, Tahltan Nation, through his mother Edzūdzah, and French-Canadian ancestry through his father Pierre. Throughout his 20 year work-history, he focuses on his matrilineal inheritances in homage to the matriarchal structure of the Tahltan Nation, while also prioritizing cross-ancestral collaborations. His artistic offerings are organized around four themes: Land/Knowing, Indigenous Grief/Loss, Community Knowing, and Understanding the Creative Agency/Power of the Indigenous Body. All of the work is informed by Dreams, Ancestors, Family, and Performance Art as a research methodology. Peter is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Art at OCADU.

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ART / THEORY / PHILOSOPHY

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