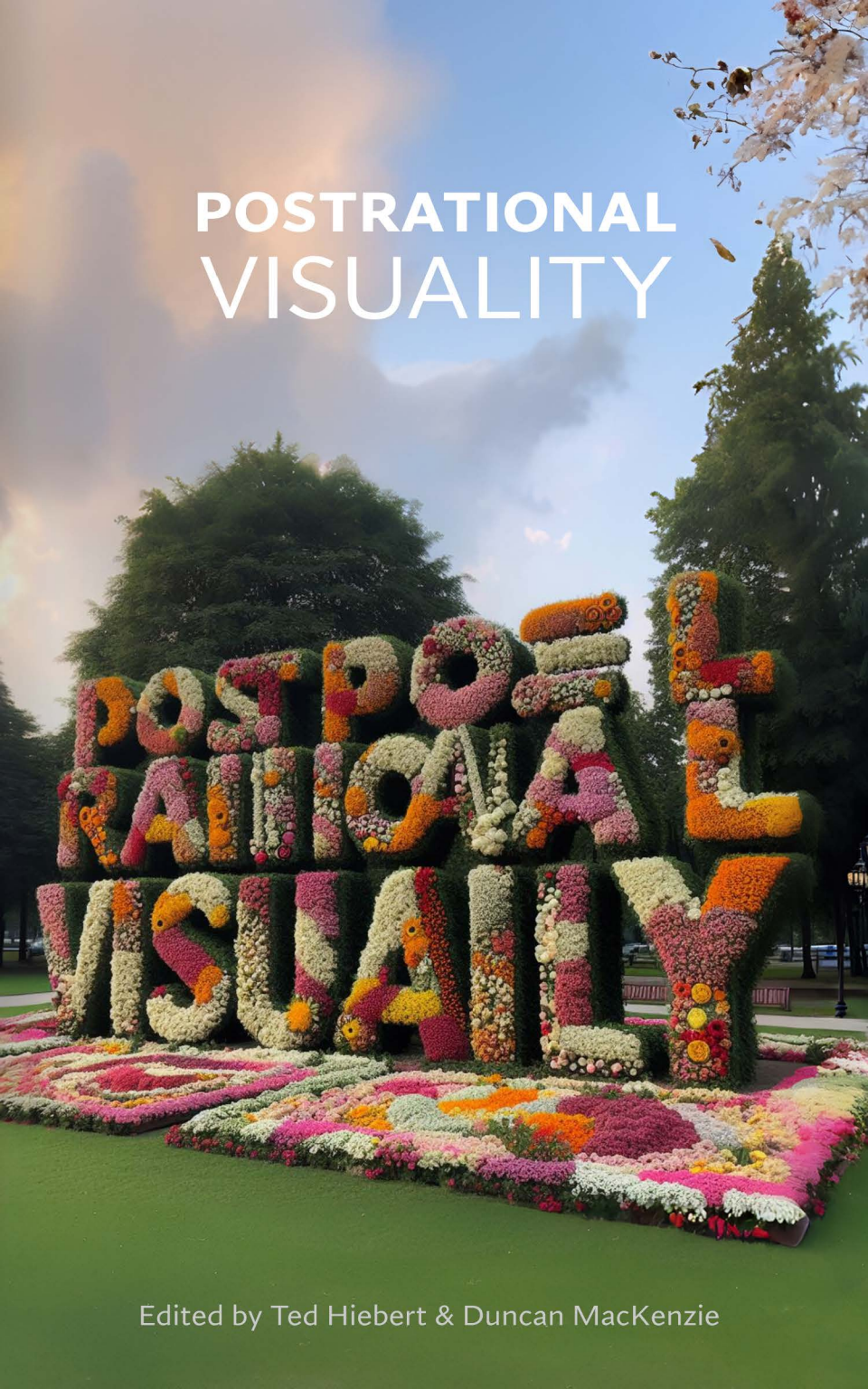
POSTRATIONAL VISUALITY



Edited by Ted Hiebert & Duncan MacKenzie

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INTRODUCTION
Postrational Visuality

Ted Hiebert & Duncan MacKenzie

> Postrational thought is not the opposite of reason but its aftermath—a way of thinking that thrives in the gaps that reason leaves behind.
>
> —Deepseek, 2025

A RAMBLE

This is a ramble, a gamble, a preamble—an introduction to the postrational that hopefully doesn't make too much sense. Not that sense isn't still something possible in an age of post-truth but this book is motivated by the idea that it's perhaps time to move on from sense, at least as a metric to which thought should be held accountable. Especially if always. And especially more if in some way by design—thought does not have to be rational (there are other options) and so there isn't really a reason for reason to be the only game in town. We don't

need reason in order to set a stage for meaningful engagement.

Confusing right? But let us explain. We're not rejecting reason outright but questioning its dominance as the sole measure of meaningful thought. We are trying to disentangle all the sense words in our minds, whether logic or reason or analysis or truth—they don't all mean the same thing but they sort of all mean the same thing in the end. And what they mean is that we're not allowed to prioritize idiosyncrasy or community or positionality in our inflections of meaning. What it means is that our minds are not our minds—minds then as contested territory first and foremost held accountable to the dictates of a standardized and inherited form of rationalization. We are suspicious of things that make too much sense.

We also didn't make it up—not the idea nor the term. We are just reintroducing the concept and holding space for a bit of contemplation. Nietzsche said that God was dead, and with it came a claim that truth and reason were no longer a dictate of the Church.[1] God didn't die of course—he just became part of an emerging pantheon of truth dictates; he became optional. Put differently, he became postrational. Baudrillard said the same of the real, that it dies because of virtuality.[2] But of course the real didn't die, it just became postrational too, optional or decentered, contested, iterated such that there could be no agreement on what the real actually was anymore. The more powerful death is not the death of the phenomenon but the death of the concept.[3] It is no longer rational to believe in rational thought.

If it doesn't seem clear, just look around. For us it seems obvious. Nothing really makes sense. It's not even clear if anyone cares about making sense anymore—obsessed as we are with generating data or campaigning for power, or status or influence ... or other things too—not all of them sinister. Johnny Golding talks about the leap of faith required for friendship.[4] William Rawlins reiterates that friendships aren't anchored in reason.[5] Psychoanalysis has long lauded the meaningfulness of dreams as have many indigenous peoples across the globe. Movements such as "slow scholarship,"[6] "rest as resistance,"[7] and "the pragmatics of uselessness"[8] have peppered recent intellectual and political space. Emotions, affect, intuition, but also—and important for us—imagination, creativity, artistic engagement. And indeed the history of (Western) art is also one with many poetic formulations that situate thought outside of a purely rational frame, from Aristotle's "plausible impossibility"[9] to Kant's "disinterested interest,"[10] to Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief,"[11] to Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics."[12] And if "aesthetics is first philosophy" as some trending rationalists like to proclaim,[13] then at least we can agree that art has, to some extent, always been postrational. So let's start there. Rather than trying to make sense of a nonsensical world, what if we started with the opposite assumption? Not the question of how to rationalize better but rather the opposite question of how to unlearn historical ideological conditioning. At stake is the possibility, as Ariella Aïsha Azoulay suggests, that rational

thought has always been colonial in spirit and what is needed is to rehearse other possible modes of imagining how we got to where we are, and from here where we are going.[14] We follow Katherine Behar in the belief that reason (and its colonization of ideology) is something of a "red herring"[15] and we want to challenge the ways that reason assumes complicity with its reign over thought. When something presents itself as "rational," we wonder if it's not actually reason that we see—perhaps it's something else, something masquerading as rationality but actually more complicit with questions of power than those of community or context or care—something to be suspicious of rather than something to embrace. For the sake of speculative exploration, what if we considered reason a trojan horse, something snuck in or imposed on us without our consent, an artificial default horizon, a conspiracy. If this feels like a gamble, that's because it is.

A GAMBLE

This book is a calculated gamble, an attempt to see if we could gather and hold together different forms of engagement with the world that resist the default stance of putting reason above context, or rather the pretense that reason itself is the only de facto way of building real or meaningful understandings of the world. We acknowledge that reason appears differently in different contexts and thus suspect that context—not reason—is the more important element. This includes contexts

of time, culture, and power—but also those of idiosyncrasy, imagination, positionality, and strangeness. We definitely want to keep room for strangeness. And that's the problem and the reason (sic) that a gamble is necessary. For despite the fact that rational thought is always inflected with context, the unique conceit of reason is its refusal to acknowledge the partiality of its own position. We say "that's not reasonable" and we somehow expect the conversation to be over, the position or idea or behavior dismissed, the argument (if it is an argument) lost. But that's not reasonable (lol). In fact, for us, 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. At the very least it's the wrong place to start and the wrong assumption with which to begin. Nothing reasonable about reason.

And so the gamble—to find a different place from which to start, a different way of building meaning, solidarity, spaces of curiosity or intervention or exploration or creativity. We gamble against reason in order to see where it takes us. But it turns out that reason—in the sensical sense—is hard to get rid of and thus the gamble is not a direct confrontation but a redirect. Hard to be anti-rational so lets try instead to be postrational.

Postrational? Isn't that what happens when reason fails and yet we still need to find ways to live together, together? Or when we already had ways to live that didn't conform to the new logics being imposed on us from the outside? Postrational thought is not about an opposite to reason but

rather about its failure—strategies for making meaning that persist despite the fact that they have not earned the stamp of rational approval.

But postrationality is also a concept with humility—it has to be. It is exactly not a refusal of perspectives that don't make sense, reason included. Instead it is a holding space for other ways of seeing the world, of holding together plausibilities and implausibilities without requiring the competition for truth that too often defines the legitimacy of thought. Postrational thought is also post truth in this way, but again without the conceit of pretending truth doesn't still exist in some way—just not everywhere in the same way.

So in what way then? In whatever ways we can hold together we suppose. Which is to acknowledge that these lines are a little bit arbitrary, and whether we choose sense or something else is itself not really the point. It's not about what we call it—it's about what we do with it and how we use it to constitute meaningful lines of connection with others. If we just refused reason in the name of sense we could also do the opposite, of course, and simply redefine reason itself to include forms intuitive, delirious, collaborative, visionary, creative, illogical, imaginary, paradoxical, contradictory, and the like. But to do this is also to refuse the idea of any so-called *a priori* notion of rational thought—and ultimately that's the better point. No master narratives. No neutral ideology. No generalizable horizons of accountability. No stable answers. No guarantees.

To misquote the Cedar Tavern Singers, reason "is all over."[16] The only thing left is exception, an exception that can be its own rule only because it is also itself an exception.[17] It requires a little bit of imagination or maybe a lot. The postrational is a gamble against the dominant aspirations of any larger single meta-narrative. So where does this leave us? With a need for a preamble—and an invitation to think differently.

A PREAMBLE

The beautiful trick of a gamble of this sort is that must be made in company, in community, with others, with difference in mind such that what we say holds only its own sway and not the final word on the question. That's why we tie it with the visual—we are artists after all and interested not just in the abstract workings of thought but also in how thought crashes into visual form, appearances, objects, and speculative community. The essays in this book hold space for alternatives to traditionally rational thought, some motivated by political or aesthetic advocacy, others by personal experience, experimentation, or raw creative energy. They have no unifying conceptual arc—and that's on purpose, since if there is one thing that defines the postrational it is a refusal of unifying conceptual narratives in favour of multiplistic, entangled, and diverging methods. This is also to say that none of the chapters in this book are postrational by themselves—each requires the others, an awareness of otherness that is what allows thought to be

both committed to its own project of meaning and attentive to the meanings of others. What matters most is the context in which thought is given meaningful traction. And that's what is offered here, in unique and distinct form in each of the chapters of this volume. A brief summary as a teaser and a sampling of these various voices and perspectives:

Chapter 1. The book opens with **Laura Perdrizet**'s "Grey Area Aesthetics," which explores the concept of interstitial space—the in-between, ambiguous, and undefined—as a site for knowledge creation and artistic practice. Through parafiction, wonder, and the blending of art, science, and myth, Perdrizet challenges rigid binaries of truth and fiction, aligning with the postrational by embracing multiplicity, uncertainty, and the imaginative possibilities that arise when reason is no longer the sole arbiter of meaning.

Chapter 2. **Amy Hirayama**'s essay, "Just Say Noh," gives material form to these ideas, exploring the concept of living masks as a means of reclaiming agency in digital spaces. Drawing inspiration from the exaggerated expressions of Kabuki theatre, Hirayama trains her facial muscles to create a set of pre-determined expressions that allow her to navigate virtual interactions with intentionality and control. These living masks, while rooted in Japanese theatrical traditions, serve as both a protective barrier and a creative tool, enabling Hirayama to resist the pressures of constant performance while maintaining the possibility of connection on her own terms.

Chapter 3. Connectivity, especially in poetic forms, also features prominently in **Ashok Mathur**'s work, "Temporality in a Time of Kali Yuga." Blending poetic prose, cultural references, and philosophical musings, Mathur explores questions of fluidity and the fragmentation of time. By challenging linear, human-centric notions of time and embracing the cyclical, chaotic nature of existence, Mathur critiques the rigidity of rational thought, advocating instead for engagement with creativity, memory, and the ephemeral. The text weaves together personal reflections, historical allusions, and speculative imaginings to propose a world where time is not a constraint but a malleable, generative (postrational) force.

Chapter 4. A contrasting perspective on the generative is offered in "Art as Post-Rational Inquiry" by **Natia Ebanoidze**, focusing on the virtual and the ways that AI and machine learning are reshaping the boundaries of artistic practice. Examining works by artists such as Refik Anadol and Mario Klingemann, Ebanoidze highlights the collaborative interplay between human and machine creativity, emphasizing the emergence of a "double brain" that blends human intentionality with machine logic. The chapter argues that AI-generated art has a capacity for unpredictability and self-referentiality which offers a postrational framework for artistic inquiry.

Chapter 5. In the centre of the book we pause for a moment of creative space held by the artist duo **Kuras & MacKenzie**. The work, "Correspondence"

is enigmatic, non-disclosive—in some ways, secret. But this isn't the secret as an object of symbolic power; these are privacy envelopes scanned and reproduced for their ability to refuse scanning and reproduction, and thus standing both in alignment with and in defiance of the rational-technical logics of today. This is art that holds space and space that holds art, with a kind of indifference to the question of reasonable meaning—embracing instead the cryptographic as an aesthetic form.

Chapter 6. Space is also important to **Sarah Mills**'s essay on "The Post-Rational Body," which examines wearable technology through the lens of Kate Hartman's body-centric artistic designs. Mills prioritizes social interaction and emotional expression over functionalist data collection, insisting on an embodied presence to postrational encounter. By embracing ambiguity, humour, and the unpredictability of human experience, Mills challenges the rationalizing forces of innovation and highlights the transformative potential of subjective, felt experiences in shaping identity and connection.

Chapter 7. Scaling up some of these questions of space and encounter, "Social Logistics: The Heart of a Shipwreck" by **Annie Simpson** and **James Enos**, explores the intersections of environmental history, urbanization, and collective time. By examining contested environmental sites Simpson and Enos challenge traditional notions of spatial and temporal certainty, embracing instead an approach that prioritizes dialog, shared subjectivity, and the

instability of meaning in a world where images and landscapes no longer adhere to fixed narratives. Their work invites a reconsideration of how art can reframe the understanding of time, land, and change.

Chapter 8. **Jane Blocker**'s "Aboveness" concludes the volume with an analysis of how power impacts the question of postrational visuality, focusing on the helicopter as a symbol of discipline and surveillance. Through the lens of Alfredo Jaar's video installation and historical examples from Vietnam, Chile, and the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, Blocker explores how recognition—a re-knowing of past traumas and power dynamics—creates a visceral, affective knowledge that challenges rationalist frameworks, aligning with the postrational by embracing uncertainty, emotion, and the felt realities of state violence.

POSTRATIONAL VISUALITY

And so we end with a reminder of the range of affects, effects and impacts that can and do surround us despite the dictates of the rational—impositions of power but also emergences of creative and felt possibilities for engaging the world differently. The postrational is not a manifesto, nor can it be reduced to a singular, unified idea. It thrives on multiplicity and a cacophony of divergent voices, positions, and ideas that resist the gravitational pull of coherence. It calls for a collective engagement that rejects detached, overarching

truths in favor of meaning forged through shared, often contradictory, experiences. As such it also demands humility, curiosity, and an openness to difference—especially if (as we hope) the postrational is to be understood from within.

The problem with reason, then, is its pretense of indifference—its insistence on establishing neutral, objective horizons to which all thought must be held accountable. What nonsense. Instead, we embrace the idiosyncratic, the emotional, the conversational. We find meaning in speculations and hauntings, in performance and fictions, in virtualities and poetry—and yes, even in nonsense. These are not escapes from rationality but expansions of it, ways of thinking the world otherwise. It is about holding space for the irrational, the speculative, and the imaginative—not as opposites to reason but as its necessary companions. The postrational is not about abandoning reason but about questioning its dominance.It is about collectively creating a world where multiple ways of knowing can coexist, and where thinking differently becomes not just possible, but essential.

NOTES

1 Freidrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, R.J. Hollingdale, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 41.

2 Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 65-6.

3 Ibid, 67. Baudrillard calls this the "perfect crime."

4 Johnny Golding, "Friendship," in L. Turner, U. Selbach, and R. Broglio, eds. *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2018), 262-76.

5 William Rawlins, *Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics and the Life Course* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1992), 9.

6 See Alison Mountz, Anne Bonds, Becky Mansfield, et al., "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14.4 (2015), 1235–1259.

7 See Tricia Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto* (New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2022).

8 See Erin Manning, *For a Pragmatics of the Uesless* (Durhan: Duke University Press, 2020).

9 Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin Classics, 1997), xxv.

10 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, J.H. Bernard, trnas. (London: Hafner Press, 1951), 142-3.

11 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographic Literaria*. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), 145.

12 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presse Du Reel, 1998), 49.

13 Graham Harman, cited in Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 13.

14 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 43-4.

15 Katherine Behar, "Introduction," in Katherine Behar, ed. *Object-Oriented Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 5.

16 Cedar Tavern Singers AKA Les Phonoréalistes, *Art is All Over!*, exhibition at Noxious Sector Projects, Seattle, July 2013.

17 I am thinking of pataphysics as the study and science of exceptions, where reason only exists contingency as as a manifestation of the imagination. See College of 'Pataphysics, *101 Words of Pataphysics* (Seattle: Noxious Sector Press, 2019), 48.

GREY AREA AESTHETICS
Interstitial Space as the Contemporary Center

Laura Perdrizet

> The creation of knowledge is an act of transformation, and transformation always happens in interstitial space.
>
> —Laverne Goethe, PhD[1]

Post-truth aesthetics are exceptionally relevant in our contemporary landscape. As we collectively negotiate truth through exceedingly blurred lines, the tradition of parafiction in art may guide us forward. By prioritizing in-between spaces, parafiction asks: *how might we generate novel ways of understanding with the aim of procuring dimensional perspectives?* For artist/geographer Trevor Paglen, "Truth is something that means a lot of different things in a lot of different contexts.... If we narrow it down, we can talk about consensus reality, whatever that may be, and those have

always been fictions in the sense that they're social constructs."[2] If we lean into the malleability of truth, the possibilities of what exists becomes much more expansive.

Laverne Goethe, 2019

THE MARINER'S KALEIDOSCOPE

A recluse akin to Boo Radley (with the culinary stylings of Anthony Bourdain) my dear friend Laverne Goethe, always reminds me of the truth about truth: *truth is a tomato as a tomato is a fruit, or, it is the slide upon the scale we should pay attention to whilst the empirical evidence lures us to ascertain what is concrete*. Verne is an obscure marine archeologist, experimental cartographer, and time travel enthusiast. He is my grandmother's former neighbor's nephew, who I encountered in Chicago in 2005 by chance, both of us pining over a rare Mariner's Kaleidoscope from Woolly Mammoth Vintage, an artist-owned shop in Andersonville. True story.

A Mariner's Kaleidoscope, the object of Verne's and my mutual interest, is a hybrid nautical astronomical instrument that engages the moon and the ocean in unison to measure distance in temporal variability. Production was discontinued in the late 1950s, directly following the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik 1 into outer space. Scientists of the time knew that the cycles of solar activity would be at a high point during the International Geophysical Year that followed, and digital technologies proliferated after the last production of the device.

Invented during the Ottoman Empire and reproduced by Turkish craftsmen for centuries, the Mariner's Kaleidoscope is a lesser-known navigational gadget, arguably both an art object and a scientific tool. Similar to a modern interferometer,

the mirrors in the kaleidoscope reflect light from the moon through a beam splitter onto the surface of the ocean. Through a visceral interpretation of lunar currents, the kaleidoscope offers its user a truly unique understanding of spatio-temporal poetics. The resulting delay in propagation of the incident light is then used to estimate the distance from the ocean floor to the moon's surface. The diffraction pattern that emerges on the water's surface remarkably disrupts the speed of light—from 186,000 miles per second into an unknown quantity—the number slowly shifts while the device is in use. It is the first and only example of a total internal reflection fluorescence (TIRF) generated relativistic clock delay on a geo-sidereal length scale. Though a modern technology, this method of combining the kinetic motion and distance of a given reflection point originated with this antique instrument.

I've always been fascinated both by the ocean and by the universe above and equally enthralled by objects that are possibly impossible. The Mariner's Kaleidoscope may be considered an artifact of dubious history, but I always thought it was a poetic instrument that simulated how I wanted to catalog my dreams. Likewise, Laverne found this

Detail sketch of the Mariner's Kaleidoscope lens, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (the Ottoman Archives), Istanbul, Turkey

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE KALEIDOSCOPE

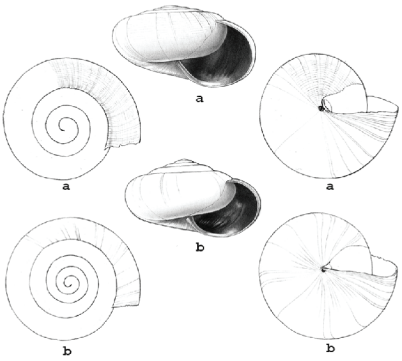
device incredibly important to his experimental cartography practice. In the antique shop on that cold Chicago afternoon, I was persuaded by Verne's enthusiasm for the device. Honestly, I admired his desperation. He became the proud owner of the kaleidoscope that day, but now that he is my mentor he occasionally lets me borrow it.

It may be considered strange that a scholar in the discipline of Marine Archeology is from America's heartland where there is no oceanic water (or at least none available on the surface). Interestingly however, Verne spent much of his early life tent-camping in Death Valley in the Mojave Desert, at an elevation of 282 feet below sea level. In fact, this spot in California is the lowest point of livable earth in North America. These formative travels proved impactful on his future work, as he collected thousands of *fassils*[3] from his time there. A true Renaissance man, Laverne connects unrelated disciplines to solve his creative problems, employing his many collections of fassils and fossils alike. Something we share is an insatiable scholarly curiosity paired with an interdisciplinary *modus operandi*. And while interdisciplinarity was out of fashion for hundreds of years, I am pleased with its return during my lifetime. I too see the tomato vine that connects a multi-hyphenate past with a similarly pluralistic present.

THE PRIORITIZATION OF INTERSTITIAL SPACE

Laverne, with his hyperbolic exactitudes, loves to retell the truth behind Imperato's *Dell'Historia Naturale*. Historical documents always contain hidden secrets, often hiding in plain sight. The

Image of earliest cabinet in Italy: engraving from Ferrante Imperato, *Dell'Historia Naturale*. Naples, 1599. Source: Wikipedia



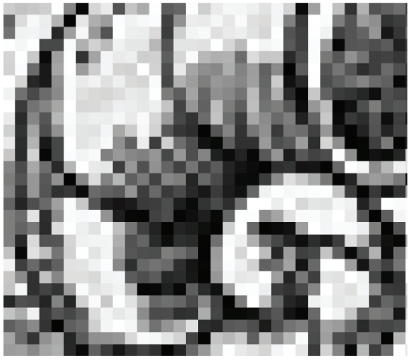


Image of the etching as seen through an early construction of the compound microscope (anonymous Dutch scientist, 1602) reconstructed by scientist Dr. Eric Blair at the University of Chicago. Archive of Doctoral Laboratory Notebooks, John Crear Library, University of Chicago, 2008

"hiding in plain sight" part tickles Verne the most. If you look closely at the famous etching you can see that the mollusk shell just above the left alligator limb on the ceiling is not at all a real gastropod shell. The number of whorls (complete 360° revolutions in the spiral of a mollusk shell) as well as the directionality of the spiral itself illustrate that this natural object is quite naturally inconceivable. Whether this was an artistic fabrication or a truly rare species left unnamed, we shall never know.

Before the polarization of art and science, the *Wunderkammer* (Wonder Room) introduced a prioritization of interstitial space: cabinets of curiosities predated the contemporary division between truth and fiction in treasured objects, whether natural, artistic, or scientific. During the European Renaissance, the elite curated collections that crossed disciplinary boundaries, each collection boasting "unfamiliar" objects that sparked wonder, enchantment, bewilderment. As a social device, the *Wunderkammer* was intended to bewitch its audience.

While these curiosity cabinets were inherently saturated with issues of Colonialism—displacement of artifacts, looting of cultural objects, the concept of exoticism—their conceptual formation offers critical value for contemporary art. The structure of the *Wunderkammer* is especially relevant as a potential model of engagement and vehicle of agency in the creation of knowledge. When parsing out the assets within historic models of knowledge assembly, such an archive explicates the grey area abundant with meaning that exists

between objects. Curiosity cabinets were interdisciplinary in their nature, combining biological specimens, scientific objects, and artifacts with artworks, faux naturalia and replicated ethnographic relics. Correlation by proximity removes the barriers of taxonomy that hinder our ability to understand the values of its contents by mere association. Comparable to the modern spaces of the natural history museum and the art gallery, their purpose was to ignite wonder, perhaps specifically made possible because the separation of aesthetics, authority and intellectual value was not yet widely practiced.

In contemporary times this balance is harder to strike but not impossible. One notable example in southern California is The Museum of Jurassic Technology. Culver City's hidden gem, The Museum of Jurassic Technology is a true modern-day cabinet of curiosities founded by David and Diana Wilson in 1988. The museum's exhibits are intentionally esoteric, showcasing the historic, artistic, scientific, and ethnographic in the traditional settings of vitrines and frames, while the content is both astonishing and often implausible. *What exactly is Jurassic Technology?* The viewer enters and leaves without a concrete answer. In present-day America, a cultural institution without a recognizable modality surely provokes an array of interpretations from its audience.[4]

> Amidst the sounds of the waves and distant foghorn, the narrative voice advised that "In order not to be set hopelessly adrift

> in this seemingly endless sea of complex and interrelating beliefs, this exhibition has limited its discussion to five areas of inquiry: Pins and Needles; Shoes and Stockings; Body Parts and Secretions; Thunder and Lightening; Insects and Other Living Things."
>
> Thus we were once again tending into quintessentially Jurassic territory, having launched out on manifestly solid ground only to find ourselves... well, not really having any idea where the hell we were finding ourselves.
>
> —Lawrence Weschler[5]

Weschler, a contemporary author of creative nonfiction, was keen to expose the relationship between cultural history, politics, and humor. This passage at once identifies the auspicious and prolific qualities of the museum's exhibits and the underlying truth that the truth is unknowable.

GREY AREA AESTHETICS

In 2009, art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty coined the term parafiction: "an artistic performance or presentation that depicts fiction as fact."[6] However, this genre of artistic practice has long existed, even if by other names. From some perspectives, the act of eliciting wonder as a vehicle of aesthetic translation is key to the creative act itself, common to many if not all forms of art-making. And, if the early 21st century is contextualized by

the arenas of post-truth, post-human, post-tech, and the anthropocene, the *Wunderkammer* offers a way to hold these curiosities together, building an effective framework that may guide us forward. Positioning aesthetics in interstitial space as a device for visuality, storytelling, entertainment, and catharsis is an established method for envisioning alternative worlds. Likewise, disrupting taxonomies can be a persuasive tactic for valuing grey areas as focal points for engagement and discovery. A poetics of uncertainty can give us agency to identify truths. Knowledge creation is not about certainty so much as understanding. Laverne always likens the concept of cognitive understanding to the study of geometry to express that true knowledge is dimensional, not flat. "The answer is in the question," he says, "not the other way around."

Reflecting upon the parafictional artform, artist/curator Michelle Grabner writes: "Forms of falseness held in check by truth are common vehicles for the artistic imagination and critical commentary... Fiction, truthiness, hoaxes, pseudonyms and satire are prevalent in contemporary art."[7] Parafiction bestows artistic freedom from the analytic and static poles of true and false, empowering the artist to create artwork that prioritizes imaginative discovery to inspire world-building. To achieve this, truth is not ignored, rather, it is approached concurrently from two contrasting points: that art expresses truths and that art exists in imagined space. Grabner proposes that when artists utilize the parafictional form, they are able

Artist Isabelle Cadieux in Montmartre, Paris, France, circa 1989. Cadieux was an unknown French outsider artist (b 1966, d 1998). Photo courtesy of Parisian art collector, Jean-Pierre Bouchard. from the book, *An Unquiet Mind: The Untold Story of Isabelle Cadieux*, Laura Elayne Miller, ed., 2011. Library holdings, Joan Flasch Artist Book Collection, School of the Art Institute Chicago. Isabelle is fictitious

to suspend belief and provide their audience with an entry to counterpoint narratives, transforming what we know to what is possible. As a contemporary artist myself working in this genre, I am consistently grounded by Laverne's "truth about truth", which I interpret as: 1) Truth is a hypernym for a multiplicity of imaginaries, 2) Wonder is interstitial space, 3) Veracity is constructed through investigation of grey area aesthetics.

The tradition of parafiction is extensive, practiced by artists across disciplines. For example: Joan Fontcuberta's photography series *Fauna* (1985) and *Herbarium* (1988) showcased images of faux biological specimens from the archives of Dr. Peter Ameisenhaufen, a fictitious German naturalist. Rohan Kriwaczek's exquisite musical scores from his 2006 book, *An Incomplete History of the Art of Funerary Violin*, are gifts to the reader at the end of the elaborate historical narrative about the fictitious instrument. The 2010 award-winning documentary, *Exit Through The Gift Shop*, tells the story of the famously elusive street artist, Banksy, from the perspective of a fictional main character. Parafiction provides artists with a framework for making that imparts the viewer with a narratological foundation that can hold a spectrum of natural contradictions, without relying on the opaque poles of representation and abstraction.

Although a singular definition of art has never been established, the purpose of artistic work has never been to be truthful or to be fictitious. Reality

and truth remain reflexive. Lambert-Beatty poignantly explains,"The parafictional mobilizes two contradictory assumptions in traditional understandings of aesthetics: that art reveals truth, and that art is a space apart from reality."[8] Together, these juxtaposing principles give artwork the power to transcend the way we view truth.

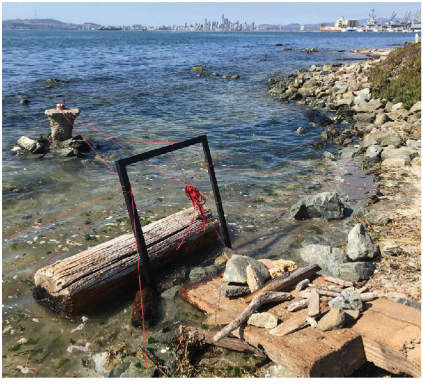
THE NATURE OF WONDER

Shiftiness, levels of uncertainty, irrational truths, the fluency of possibilities—encountering work with these qualities ignites a potency in which you understand that you don't quite understand, but simultaneously you feel it in your body. To be curious about curiosity and the creation of knowledge is to inherently distrust the binary between objectivity and subjectivity. Where does the trajectory from wonder to discovery fit into a calculable unit of measure? At this time, there is no quantification, no social or scientific instrument to chart visceral responses. However, etymology often provides clues to discern difficult concepts. To this end, looking closely at the word *wonder* is paramount:

WONDER
> a cause of arousal
> rapt attention or astonishment at something surprising, mysterious or new to one's experience
> to admire, the desire to know deeply

To wonder is also to collect, to assemble, to arrange things in such a way that they create their own logic. Verne once told me, "It's not a coincidence that one definition of the cabinet of curiosities was a 'Memory Theater.'" The form of a theater as a way to describe a collection, a *Wunderkammer*, is intriguing. In the art form, every character, sound, scenery, movement, gesture of light; all are elements that generate a unique universe. Yet in its construction there is the notion of impossibility and incompleteness, of fragments strung together that formulate only a glimpse into an apparent abyss. Further, in the form of the museum, we find fictions created in other ways, using various structural elements to illuminate chosen narratives. Such forms of world-building have the capacity for nuance and grey area aesthetics if they acknowledge the construction of their forms.

Discussing the origins of collecting during the Renaissance, author Giovanni Aloi described the owner of the *Wunderkammer*: "Standing at the center of this mini-universe and pointing at the objects to disclose their deepest secrets, collectors felt a sense of ease and mastery over a world that most often appeared too big, too confusing, and too inhospitable."[9] There is something obviously absurd about attempting to illustrate a world on the scale of a cabinet. Similarly, it is also a powerful way to think about the form of a map. Maps are ironic documents, imagination posing as evidence. Maps are translations in a multitude of languages: sensory perception affects tone, familiarity affects scale, population affects time signature. Early

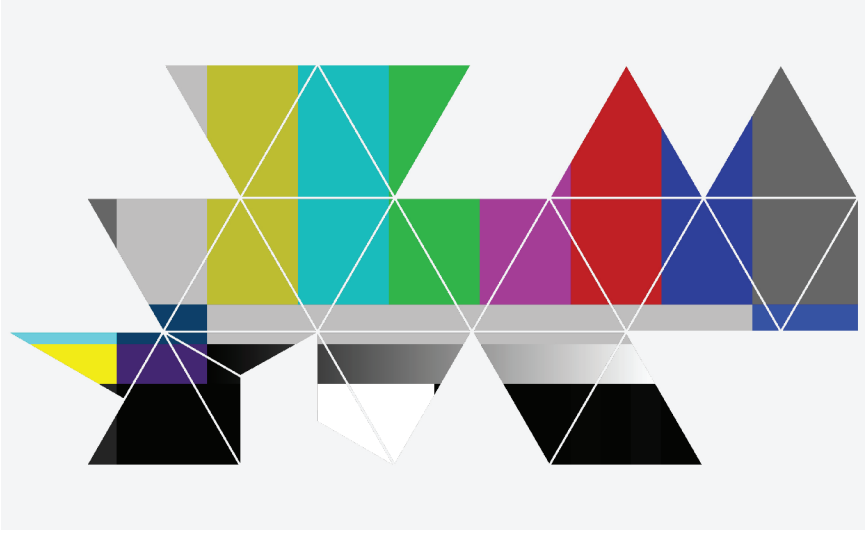


Dr. Laverne Goethe, experimental mapping documentation, 2020. In these images Verne conducts a time-perception experiment by accelerating perpetual logarithms via temporal mapping with red yarn and found objects during low tide. Alameda Island, California

cartography was a practice of both art and science, where maps reflected human experience in space/place both in the realms of the physical and the identifiable, and in the perceptual and the spiritual. Although the discipline is presently focused on the physical attributes of "real space," mapping nonetheless is a kind of mythology.

In the late 19th and 20th centuries, writers Lewis Carroll, Jorge Luis Borges, and Umberto Eco initiated a compelling call-and-response that illustrates the idea of mapping as mythos. Carroll's final publication in 1893, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, confronts the problems of representation through a thought experiment about map-making that raises the question of the extent to which we construct our own versions of the world. In 1946, Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges published, *Del Rigor en la Ciencia (On Exactitude in Science)*, a single paragraph short story that responded to Carroll's idea that mapping at equal scale was both impractical and silly. Then in 1982, philosopher Uberto Eco published "On the Impossibility of Drawing a Map of the Empire on a Scale of 1 to 1," a direct response to the works before his. Eco's exposition revealed the absurdity of such a scale, advancing

Laura Perdrizet, *Reading a Wave*, durational performance & resulting artifacts, 2017. 100 consecutively captured waves stored in sequentially numbered scientific vials. Gray Whale Cove Beach, Pacifica, California, USA



Laura Perdrizet, *Dymaxion SMPTE Map*, 2013. Using the outline of Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion Map [a projection of a world map onto the surface of an icosahedron, which can be unfolded and flattened to two dimensions, which has less distortion than other map projections of its time] the unquantifiable space of mass communication is represented via the standard color bar signal from North American televisions

the long-standing proposition that it is impossible to represent reality in such a manner. This chain of writings was in conversation with French philosopher Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, documented in his 1981 treatise, *Simulacra and Simulation*. Eco exposes how the depiction of space in a map is indistinguishable from the place it represents, mirroring Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where the distinction between reality and its representation collapses when the simulation becomes more real than reality itself. In our present moment, when daily engagement with maps are viewed digitally (often in the scale of a scribble on a slightly used cocktail napkin), it's intriguing to consider how relevant these ideas remain.

WONDER STRUCTURES

In both his laboratory and field work, Laverne creates his experiments in conceptual containers that he calls "Wonder Structures": three forms that exist in the human vernacular for experience, where wonder is a deliberate impetus for empirical knowledge creation. All are simulations in some fashion. All require intrinsic trust and an openness to being uncertain. These are structures that are cross-cultural and historic, where people enter willingly, which positions wonder as the basis of the experience and the nexus of imagination and knowledge. All three are relational to creative practice. I too use these in my practice as I have found Wonder Structures often illuminate conceptual ideas in the most intuitive ways.

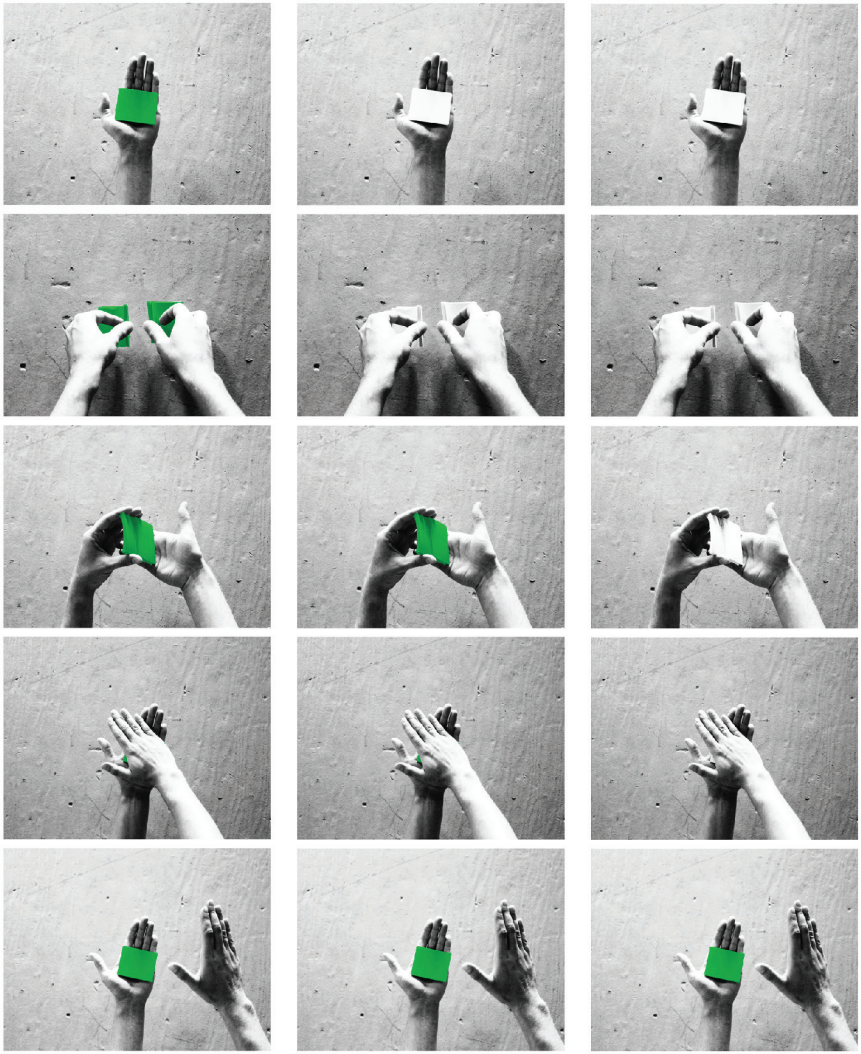
MAGIC

Desire to be bewildered > Intention to
be fooled > Element of surprise

The Magician's Assistant

The Magician's Assistant is the
corporeal keeper of the secrets.
They know everything, yet they are invisible.
Cut in half with a saw,
Or holding the hat just so,
The silk cloth slips through their fingers
and floats to the floor ...
a melodramatic choreography?
or an exhausted curtain?
We will never know.

Laura Perdrizet, thought experiment as magic trick, from *The Potential Dimensions of 21st Century Studio Art Education*, 2021



DREAMS

Intuition > Memory > Surrealist Translations

Nostalgia For Places I've Never Been

it doesn't have a body but it lives somewhere
when you seek a reflection beyond your own
dreams and myths come from the same place

Laura Perdrizet, film still from *Nostalgia For Places I've Never Been,* mixed media animation, 2025

NONSENSE

Plausibility > Challenging sensibility as
a structure > The nature of play

The Fish is Taking a Nap

the possibility of improbable
impossibility >< the impossibility
of probable possibility

Laura Perdrizet, *Untitled Diagram of Translational Oddities*, sketch, 2025

NATURE
impossibility though possible ←
the TRANSLATION of nonsensicality *

the topological mystique of the memory state

ENOMENA that suggests the UNTRANSLATABLE

disappearing acts
#:2
#:187

Irrationality of the
square root of [illegible]

→ dressed in an elaborate, sleek, svit
an ornate box — or a low light
that illicites darkness and forgery of the appearance of the b
how there is in fact no box, there is tension *
in the translatory model
of eyes looking at you. but . visibility remains
the audience must be distracted
for the possible to be equated with the impossible (evidence)*
... the impossible reveals possibility even still.
so that the mechanism unveils spontaneous knowledge STILLNESS
through
LIGHT *

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME SPOON

> Falling in love is disorienting.... In order to be touched we have to be willing not to know what the touch is going to feel like.
>
> —Anne Bogart[10]

Truth is a tension between spontaneity and control. It is an essential concept in human experience, yet the collective interpretation of truth is perpetually in flux. To experience truth is intrinsic, whereas understanding truth is extrinsic. "Chart the choreography of the slide upon the scale, and then you will find your way," is Verne's mantra. The answer always lies within the question, not the other way around. A philosophical gesture perhaps, but one tested by artists time and again. When we enter the time-space of the unknown, we are collaborating with chance. The trajectory between point A and point B is a dance of possibility. Employing chance operations in the creation of artwork is a long-standing tradition, a method utilized by artists in Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus, and more. John Cage famously proclaimed, "In the nature of the use of chance operations is the belief that all answers answer all questions."[11] The conceptual echoes crescendo.

Laura Perdrizet, *Pleather Moon,*
silkscreen on pleather, 2020

The tenet underlying Laverne Goethe's work—the idea I've been stuck with since the day we met—is, (in his words): "*The desire to want to believe something and the desire to be mesmerized by something are two sides of the same spoon.*"[12] To approach the potentialities of future art practices, to engender value in creative practice research, to continue expanding definitions, modalities and outcomes in art, is to note that the creation of knowledge through art is spectral and illusive, which mirrors both desires. Thus, in a post-truth world the parafictional artwork offers its inhabitant the opportunity to coexist. As we return to the past during times of precarity, we may propel the experiential forms of art that promote our agency to perceive critically and holistically: where the creative act is intuitively interstitial, and the artefact embodies wonder.

The Mariner's Kaleidoscope gives its user a dimensional point of view both literally and figuratively, providing an expansive vision from which to extrapolate meaning and an enigmatic way to embody knowledge. When the multiplicity of mirror images glitter in time, the tiny refractions of light illuminate the sublime. By centering interstitial space—wonder—in the creation of knowledge through art, we are able to do the same, which is a manifestation of the natural process of discovery and experience.

NOTES

1 See citation 12.
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3 Like a fossil, a *fassil* is an impression left by a thing of the past, however it is not an object of preserved remains. John Harris, "fassil," in *Lexicon technicum, or, An universal English dictionary of arts and sciences*, Second edition, v. 1 (London: Printed for Dan Brown, Tim Goodwin, John Walthoe, Tho Newborough, John Nicholson, Dan Midwinter, et al., 1708).
4 Sarah Zabrodski, "The Museum That Proudly Defies Understanding," *Getty Museum blog*, 2014
5 Lawrence Welscher, *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995)
6 Courtney McClellan, "Carrie Lambert-Beatty: Truth Bias," *Art Papers*, 2020.
7 Michelle Grabner, "On Bullshit, Lies, Truthiness, and Parafiction," *X-TRA Journal* 11:3 (2009).
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9 Giovanni Aloi, "Cabinets of Curiosities and The Origins of Collecting." *Sotheby’s Institute of Art newsfeed*, 2018
10 Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2001).
11 John Cage Biography, *American Masters* S5 E09, PBS, 2001.
12 Epigraph: Laverne Goethe is a fictional character from an experimental narrative film left unfinished due to the COVID pandemic in 2020. Filmmaker, Laura Perdrizet

JUST SAY NOH
Living Masks as Tools of Refusal

Amy Hirayama

I never click the menu option to hide self view. It's a simple solution to the self-consciousness I feel while spending hours in virtual spaces, but I always leave that weird little mirror on my screen. It's part vanity, part curiosity, part concern I'll have food stuck in my teeth, and it leads to a hyper-consciousness of what I am communicating with my face. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic I completed an MFA program that took place over zoom. It was the first time I'd attempted to connect with a flat community in pixelated boxes and it was the first time I was so aware of what my face was doing throughout entire lectures, discussions and conversations. It came to feel like another form of surveillance, only now I could watch myself being watched by others in real time. I found myself performing a palatable version of Amy Hirayama, a skill I had learned from years on social media.

At first I bristled at the strain of this constant performance. But after lingering in the surreality of performing regular life I started to see an opportunity to formalize the performance and shape it in a way that would ease some of the tension of these everyday digital interactions. Diving into this discomfort led me to reimagine my face as a living mask, capable of holding expressions or poses for long periods of time in order to allow my mind to take a break from constantly monitoring what my face was doing. The project involved training my facial muscles to build their stamina and dexterity and developing a series of set expressions that would best serve my needs in digital spaces.

My instincts have been shaped by companies who count my clicks and whose algorithms read the contours of my insecurities. Sharing has evolved from an act of connection to a compulsion to curate. I know that clicking all of those little permissions boxes at the end of all those tiny-font documents is consent. Do I know the details of what I've consented to? No. And so I traipse around the internet knowing that parts of myself that I consider "me" or "mine" might be taken and used for...something. I won't know when it's happening, or what's being taken, or how it's being used. All I know is that it's happening and that I probably said yes to it, and that it gives me an overwhelming sense of helplessness as one little dingdong navigating a digital universe.

After spending hours in virtual classrooms I found that my face was the place where so much of this surveillance and compulsion occurs. In

her essay, "Facing Necrophilia, or Botox Ethics," Katherine Behar offers us the muscle-deadening mask of Botox as a tool to refuse compulsory sharing and connection. In her re-imagining of Botox, it's no longer a beauty product, but a chemical redaction pen, and a choice. She explains, "The face records and communicates its archive of experience, which Botox erases and censors."[1] The Botoxed face is a mask that allows one control over how their face is read. The past joys my crows' feet reveal? None of your business. My short temper, indicated by those frown lines? Not here for you to judge. The tendency toward anxiety and depression folded into the wrinkles on my forehead? Gone with the quick plunge of the needle.

I don't believe Behar is advocating for us to all go out and get Botox. But I am drawn to this idea of pushing back against compulsive and compulsory connection. So how do I achieve those Botox effects without the complications of the healthcare system and dubious ethics of the beauty industry? As much as I'm interested in the re-framing of Botox as a tool of refusal and control, I'm not looking to cut off all connection. I'm looking for agency.

Behar does pose the question, "can philosophy hold its own as performance art?" Can I perform my way through my virtual dilemma? Let's see! Body art is not my project, so Botox was out. Instead, I started wondering if I could use my own facial muscles to create a series of living masks and achieve a modified version of Behar's refusal. Botox is not permanent, but for the duration of its paralyzing effects, the range of expressive choices on has is

limited. A set of living masks composed of my own expressions, formed under my own muscular control, gives me the ability to refuse compulsory sharing, but leaves me avenues of connection should I choose to use them. I like a tool that is adaptable. I see adopting these living masks similarly to how Jacques Ranciere describes collage which "mixes the strangeness of the aesthetic experience with the becoming-life of art and the becoming-art of ordinary life."[2] My final product, a set of living masks, is extremely ordinary. The final facial expressions are recognizable and unremarkable. But the rigorous training, the facial sculpting, and the cultural context behind them grant them this becoming-art of ordinary life. Turning to the traditions of Noh and Kabuki theater as resources for my training means that the becoming-life of art is also part of this project.

So where to start? After my early experiences in a virtual classroom my face was exhausted because I found myself constantly monitoring and adjusting my facial expressions. Did I look engaged? Did I look friendly? Did my resting face look annoyed or upset? Oh no!

Appearing neutral takes so much effort! To "sculpt" this series of living masks, my face needed more stamina. The exaggerated expressions of Kabuki theater struck me as a great facial workout.

Amy Hirayama, stills from *Just Say Noh,* 2020

In Kabuki theater, during a moment of emotional intensity, often the action will freeze and an actor will strike a dramatic pose that extends to his facial expression. This facial drama is called "cutting a mie." Using prints of Kabuki actors, I exercised my facial muscles by repeatedly mimicking their expressions. It was hard to hold a pose without cracking a smile. At first glance, and a very western glance at that, these actors look silly with their crossed eyes and gaping mouths. But the more I immersed myself in the culture of Kabuki and the more I learned about the intensity of the actors' training, the less I saw silliness and the more I saw precision and purpose.

It was challenging to cut an entire mie at once. The complexity of the expressions required coordination my face did not have. I had to break down the poses– eyes first, then mouth. It took a lot of concentration to hold both pieces of the expression at the same time. Endless repetition is how Kabuki actors master their craft. It was relentless, boring and eventually meditative to repeat the same small muscle movements over and over again, but it was the only way to reach the goal of having the subtlest actions become automatic. If I wanted my living masks to appear natural, then I had to be able to form them quickly and consistently.

When an actor cuts a mie he is communicating with his audience in a way that is direct and clear. I wanted this clear communication to be a characteristic of my living masks. Despite the mie being a pre-set expression, it is done with thought and

intention. According to Kabuki master Kataoka Nizaemon, "when you pose, or cut a mie...you must know why you are doing it.[3] If the mie is only stylized and showy, it might look good, but it loses its artisty and meaning. If it is only communicative, then it might get the meaning across, but it lacks the pow of stage presence that attracts the audience. Training for my masks imbued them with thought, intention and pow. I knew what I wanted them to look like and what I wanted them to do. I wanted my living masks to artfully and tactfully refuse or push against an expectation to connect, while also inviting connection on my own terms. As opposed to Botox, the living mask has the ability to both push and pull. When applied to different situations, each living mask should engage an observer. This engagement is possible because the mask is clearly communicating a recognizable expression. And because engagement is mediated by the mask, it resists compulsory connection.

While Kabuki plays are hundreds of years of old, the actors have the freedom to adapt the performances to their own physical abilities and artistic preferences. This adaptability within constraints is another characteristic I wanted my living masks to have. The second stage in my training was to bring more subtlety to my living masks. Kabuki expressions, delightful as they are, are not really practical for everyday use. (Though, I must admit, it's tempting to cut a mie during an interminable virtual staff meeting.) And so I moved on from Kabuki to the wooden masks of Noh theater. Noh has its

origins as court theater and is the oldest living theater tradition still in practice in the world. The movements in Noh are formal, slow, stylized and symbolic, much like the masks the actors wear. Master craftsmen carve these masks with hand tools, coaxing different characters to rise to the surface of the hinoki wood. There are signature characters—men, women, demons, ghosts—all of whom have sub categories of characters and personalities. In my research I looked for Noh masks with expressions of pleasantness and approachability, the expressions I wanted to use in virtual spaces. Despite the expressions of these masks being less dramatic and acrobatic than a Kabuki mie, these poses were still challenging to mimic. So much of the expression in Noh masks is in the subtlety. I found moving my facial muscles with subtlety took incredible control and attention to detail. And then holding the pose took additional stamina and control of the tiniest movements in my face.

Masks are static, impersonal, a barrier hiding the real person and their real expressions. One can view masks as creating a binary between what's in front of and what's behind the mask. On one side is the outward-facing art carved by a craftsman, on the other side is the real person. But as I learned more about Noh masks, I learned how my impressions exemplify "the untenable dichotomy of art vs.

Amy Hirayama, stills from *Just Say Noh,* 2020

reality."[4] Art cannot exist in a vacuum free from the influence and inspiration of reality. The definitions of art and reality are slippery enough that they can easily squiggle around to join each other on the same side of that "vs." While masks have the potential to be works of art, in the Noh theater and in my living mask project, they are also representations of reality. The masks of Noh theater offer an example of how art and reality can mingle outside of a dichotomy.

Although these masks do not move or change, they are able to convey mugen hyojo, or "infinite facial expressions." In a study on the impact of shadow on Noh masks, researchers demonstrated how one mask with a set expression is able to convey multiple emotions depending on the way shadows fall on it. Skilled Noh actors use light, shadow, angles and varying speeds of movement to give dynamic life to a static mask. The masks become expressive, creative and personal. They are extensions of the actors behind them.

My living masks are intended to be tools of refusal, but that does not make them fake or unreal. I might argue they are an even more of a reflection of reality than whatever could be happening behind the mask. In the binary of surface/depth, there is value placed on digging deeper to reveal the truth or reality or essential nature of something. Sue Golding expresses this idea in terms of the earth stating, "the ground keeps giving us the illusory image of greater depth, and when we seek to reach this, we keep on finding ourselves on the

old level."[5] Sometimes digging gets you nowhere. My living masks project suggests that there is as much truth on the surface as there is in the depths. Just because you scrape and excavate does not mean you will come to a more valuable or rewarding understanding. There is also a violence inherent in the idea of digging. You cannot go beneath the surface without gouging and displacing earth. A firmly affixed mask serves as protection from this violence. What I have to offer is here on the surface and is just as worthy as what you imagine lies beneath it. Noh actor and mask carver Michishige Udaka goes as far as to claim that it's the depth that is actually shallow. He explains, "When the audience sees the actor without a mask, and if they see the expression on their face you can't enter any deeper. But if it's a mask, you can use your imagination to dive deeper."[6] In this situation the audience is encouraged to dive deeper in order to be immersed in the performance.. The depths they are exploring with their imaginations are not beneath the mask, but on its surface. I want the surface of my face to share the same traits and abilities of a Noh mask's art.

I think of my living masks as having the same freedom that can come with wearing a uniform. By uniform I don't mean a required outfit chosen by someone else. I mean the conscious decision to pre-plan and assemble a standard outfit. A personal uniform takes away the time and energy one might spend fretting over what to wear. Living masks are also pre-determined and practiced, so that when

they are needed, I can quickly arrange one on my face and free up my emotional and mental capacity. I don't have to think about how to properly respond to something or wonder what my expression looks like. Because I rehearsed my masks, I already know. Michishige Udaka claims that "When you can perform without thinking and it surfaces naturally … you will be able to experience a shining instance of serendipity."[7] That exuberant description is how I feel about the potential to put on a living mask and experience the freedom of privacy at will. The masks, while convenient, are not about saving time, they're about reducing internal friction.

At this point in the project my face had the stamina and from training with Kabuki mie and the control from mirroring Noh masks. The final stage was to use my facial muscles to sculpt my own living masks. I wanted them to be practical and sustainable. I decided on four expressions I would find most useful in everyday virtual life: contemplative, obviously happy, moderately happy, and warm neutral. Using the same process of endless repetition, I trained my face to make those four expressions quickly and consistently, and practiced holding them for long periods of time as I would during a virtual class or meeting.

Amy Hirayama, stills from *Just Say Noh,* 2020

It's not lost on me that all four of these expressions fall into expected degrees of female niceness and approachability. Concerns about how we're observed are not necessarily gendered; however, the stakes for one's appearance are higher for women. All of my living mask expressions are intentionally on the positive side of neutral because I believe they will protect me more effectively than sneers and glares that discourage engagement. Whether or not I'm a raging bitch is not an assessment that I want to start with my facial expressions or any other aspects of my appearance. Unfortunately, those are the sexist conditions I have to work with, which means choosing such gendered expressions is yet another example of art emerging from lived reality.

Another lived reality I experience is that of a BIPOC person who occupies a lot of white spaces. I already work to contort myself to fit within whiteness, so it was incredibly important to me that a project which relied so heavily on physical contortion not be an extension of this racist part of my reality. Had I used mask models from western traditions, no matter how much I practiced and no matter how accurate my expressions were, there would always be dissonance between my Asian face and those non-Asian models. Using the conventions of Japanese theater meant I could successfully make my face look like those expressions and that my living masks could connect to my own cultural lineage.

I appreciate the ways my living masks not only protect me from surveillance and compulsive sharing, but from some of the larger injustices that I have to navigate. The poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar asks, "Why should the world be over-wise / In counting all our tears and sighs?"[8] Compounding digital surveillance with the additional scrutiny and policing of BIPOC folks, why should I feel obligated to share more with a world that does not have my best interests in mind? How do I benefit from presenting an unmasked version of myself? Another way I view my living masks is as an offering to a callous consumer. They serve as barriers that allow the masks to be consumed instead of me. This seems to contradict the idea that these masks are extensions of the artist beneath them, but that's the beauty of the plasticity of human facial musculature—the masks can be readily molded to both reflect the truth of what lies beneath and molded to deny access to that truth. The living mask, in many ways, is a BIPOC fantasy tool that allows me to engage in everyday life with acceptance and protection. That I dream of a tool for hiding in plain sight and mimicking the norm is indicative of how pervasive, harmful and all-encompassing biases and structural -isms are.

The living mask project depends on the expansive power of the word "and." It allows me to refuse compulsory connection and remain connected. It gives me the freedom of privacy and reveals my personal expressions. It operates under constraints and allows for creativity. It means I can harbor

resentment toward virtual spaces and be profoundly inspired by them. I desperately want joy and sharing across difference; but, I also demand the agency of offering what I choose to share and the way I choose to share it. This project is also a proactive response to some of my concerns about social technology. I want to grapple with my concerns and have a damn good time in the process.

Not only does the living mask project give me this agency, it gives me privacy and protection, an outlet for creativity, the possibility of engagement, and the chance to move in the world connected through the ability to disconnect.

Dunbar concludes his stanza, "Nay, let them only see us, while / We wear the mask."[9]

NOTES

1 Katherine Behar, *Object-Oriented Feminism,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 135.

2 Jacques Ranciere, "Problems and Transformations in Critical Art," in Claire Bishop, ed. *Participation* (New York: Whitechapel, 2006), 54.

3 Pronko, Leonard C. "Learning Kabuki: The Training Program of the National Theater of Japan." *Educational Theater Journal.* 23.4 (1971), 428.

4 Lars Bang Larsen, "Social Aesthetics," in Claire Bishop, ed. *Participation* (New York: Whitechapel, 2006), 172.

5 Sue Golding, "Curiosity." in Sue Golding, ed. *The Eight Technologies of Otherness* (London: Routledge, 1997), 19.

6 Michishige Udaka, *The Spirit of Noh.* Dir. Edwin Lee. Fallout Media, 2018

7 Udaka, *The Spirit of Noh.*

8 Paul Lawrence Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask," in *The Complete Poems of Paul Lawrence Dunbar* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1920). https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44203/we-wear-the-mask

9 Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask."

TEMPORALITY IN A TIME OF KALI YUGA
or, musicological musings out of tempo

Ashok Mathur

They fuck you up, your temporal shifts. They don't mean to but they do.

> If time does indeed keep on slipping, slipping, slippling into the future then can it backslide into the past just as easily? Can we save it in a bottle? If we could only turn back time would we even be aware of it, because, after all, does anybody really know what time (it) is?

Many of us in academic and artistic worlds continue to be baffled, bamboozled even, by the restrictions, containments, and cul-de-sacs that govern these spaces. There is a constant refrain of "you can't get there from here," or "we've tried that before," or the ubiquitous "that will never

work." And yet onward we go, striving for ever-new possibilities and potentials, what the editors of this volume refer to as "creative contemplation and post-rational engagement." Let us parse that phrase, or better yet, suture those two embedded concepts: making art without falling prey to the desire to subscribe to rationality. This precept might be dismissable as post-structural nonsensicality, or dadaism taken to the absurdist extreme, but I insist that there is value here. The idea of creativity without bounds is not a baseless claim of art for art's sake, but a political gesture and a maneuver to understand ourselves and our worlds through a Byrnian articulation to stop making sense. And so, I offer this loose collection of prose-poem stanzas interrupted by whimsical single-line epiphanic sections, all wrapped into a Mobius strip of time looping. It is one way, my way at this moment (or any moment) to make a space—or if I want to be boldly aggrandizing—make a world that is unbound and unstoppable and both beyond realms of logical language and physics and ultimately one of many plausible ways to continue to thrive in creativity and opportunity and joy.

A fundamental aspect of this body of work is a critique of a human-centric linearity that imposes order with unflinching rationality, one that crushes spirit and refutes innovative thinking that breaks or attempts to bend the rules of physics. I focus on the precepts of time, both as a quantum dimension and as an erosionary function—how the body exceeds itself and returns to the dust from

whence it came. And with that passage of time, or the collection and memory of multiple moments in/of time, it recalls a Whitmanesque sharing of atoms at the nuclear level (that is, not cataclysmic nuclear fusion, but a focus on the smallest moments arising and collapsing in the nucleus). I live dual or multiple or fantasmagorical lives that sometimes intersect and sometimes sharply diverge. I have worked inside cloistered educational institutions over four decades and I have lived and loved in magnetic repulsion to these spaces as a creator and dreamer. To sustain this entangled engagement I ask those surrounding to swallow me whole as simultaneously I am become ouroboros. I spent a fortnight at a self-styled Saltspring Island research retreat this autumn, a retreat from administrative imperatives and into the creative imperatives of following heart and spirit that became more of a morbid entreaty to end of days than I intended. The numbered sections of single-line + coyly playful stanzad languagesque poetry were there composed. The paralleled prose-poetic insertions are a response to and from that particular exegesis. If nothing else, this is an exploration out of time.

1

listening to tori amos cover I don't like mondays
and the haunting melodious tones of voice

then turn to the killing of america
released in japan way back 1981

an analysis of the violent existential crisis that produces murder on murder

and that was 1981

before so much and so many

and the mind turns to the telling of our times and the decay of human value

and then there was lennon and then there was harrison

one died one lived

endless parallels of universal sin at the hands of those whose minds turn sideways

and now that the end is near and far closer to terminus than genesis

every sunflake and every snowleaf an adventure

pouring rain on parades that should have ceased long ago

she loves me she loves me not she loves me she loves me not she loves as she loves as she loves as she loves as love falls down like rain impales us all with a toothy grin there is no now before then and no then before ever

caught adrift in pushing paper so art can live

is this a way to understand creation or to contain it?

the minds of our generation yes the mines that undermine our generation and still somehow I really don't know clouds at all

how preposterous that seventy-two beats ramp up to a hundred and fifty when coaxed

but the temperature always turns to zero

and twilight is always a twinkle before sleep

yes to talk about the end before the beginning makes most sense

because to talk about the beginning is to talk about what once was

make no mistake about it, poured concrete holds its form

but no speculation about what happens before the pour and there is no redemption after

spin me round round right round life is a carousel mon ami, those were the days we thought would never end and honey I miss you and i'm being good

there is mediocrity in everything which is how the light emits a picket sign enunciating the end of times folly to viewers except the sign is right just like a stopped watch twice per day

when there is darkness in the room there is darkness in the heart

that sounds like a proverb from some deep religious structure but

it is not

it is only an observation of pre-dawn trauma, that infant sensation of the unseen that precedes the light

I once worked with an MFA student from Brazil, Juka de Almeida, whose practice in part was based on an Orixán deity named Exu, who was known for interruptively playing with the rules of time and space. The story goes that Exu killed a bird yesterday with a rock he threw today. During his defence, I joked with Juka that he had passed his oral examination the day before he undertook it, hence there was nothing to worry about. A moment of levity in an otherwise serene and officious space, rulebound by time.

2

one dream is where the number of matches in a packet matches the number of cigarettes in a pack so the last flame lights the last smoke

a perfect ending to a day otherwise marred by rainstorms

inhalation and consumption

this is the way the world ends not with a bang but a hackneyed cough

phlegmatic prisonhouses opening up passageways to desire

and yet

if it had to perish twice they say that for destruction ice is also fine and swirled around with the right amount of tequila and sour will most certainly suffice

how to end a story that has started on its own life? how to send a story imparted with drudgery and strife? how to bend a moré such that it becomes customary how to end a story that is beginning with its own death?

these are the questions of our times and these are the questions of all times

except

except for the times of now and before and ahead
because those times are unsettled and refurbished
and in decline even as they rise

dust by the handful is never enough but it comes
with a grain of sand sight

archipelagoes are nature's way of saying it's time
to take a break

and not see everything as contiguous

or perhaps a way of making stone soup out of earth
and water

feed the masses and deplete the underprivileged

shades of mad necessary to justify the means

saw on the news tonight another one everyone no
one looking to become warhol for maybe just a
quarter of an hour tik tok tik
the end of a species is not a spectacular climax but
a denoument of the most humble kind

once we have accrued enough self-hate to
exterminate the brutes c'est nous

shell casings polished to perfection rat a tat flung
fling in tattered fashion

the object of their desire a four hundred forty five gram of warm flesh

take a knee
take a knuckle
take a break
take a vowel Alex but no you have to buy any mono dyp or trip phtongs as they don't come for free under late capital

have you ever been mellow and have you ever tried?

when jerichoan walls come tumbling down

do you feel what dies a little bit inside?

kali yuga arrives

when a birch branch dehinges in the salty rain and lumbers ditchward

crackling timber catching twigs to break its fall

do we hear this in the forest and does it come to rest on our lumbar

paralytic bark on a sunny afternoon

audible frustration with continued stressors and the only escape, gravitational

landed hard like a blueice drop from a seven four
seven into someone's cali pool house

there are rocks older than old and on a timeline we
are invisible and they drop from the sky even when
there is no reason to consider

some say the end is fire
frosty takes on lame desire
come on baby light my pyre
wherewithal is to conspire

Recently another student came to me with a beautiful calligraphic gift he had made, representing the elephant-headed deity Ganesh, who figures prominently in my fiction as he is considered the patron god of writing (and remover of obstacles although I prefer to reflect on his role as the lord of obstacles, one who pours cement speedbumps to slow us down enough to be real). My student, who now works with me organizing my time, noted that he had arrived in Canada three years ago which he wanted to mark by this gift of making marks and delivering to me, at a time when we could both meet.

3

i cannot wake from this dream that feels like i am awake

it is strange to dream prophesies that have already come true

reading history as written by the vanquished

when did fire become so important to our collective psyche?

flames of derision are somehow left to grow and show us pleasure

is your fire a grow-er or a show-er?

it is all the same in the end but it also depends on whose end is entered

excuse me sir but would you mind terribly if I had a quick look at your petri dish?

melancholia is a straggly bunch of flowers not flow-ers that spreads its johnny appleseed throughout the diaspora

and thousands of kilometres before we sleep

diddle me this
riddle me that

fiddle while my home burns
whittle a new polished knot for my walking cane
(hand me down)

incongruity is never having to say you're sorry

love in the fast lane trying hard to lose my mind

and she, yes she, took the katy and left me a molé
to ride

telescoping the stars into present being

viewpoints of the ether and the nether regions

like a colonoscopy for the heavens without the
sweet slide of lubrication

rough into the canal of penance and pedestrian
practice

living large internally and outside us all because
the end is nigh

click your heels four times once for good measure
for kansas is no longer in you, duly and dealy
friend

money for nothing and your AK47s for a
significant discount not including promotions

bathed in sweat and the audience is appalled

because there needs to be more action more devastation more blood

mr doney gruffed at me and said we can all have our own opinions and I said but mr doney this is a scientific fact that red blood cells outnumber white blood cells and he crossed his arms and furrowed his bald head and said we have our own opinions

opine this and open up your mind said leary learing learily to the masses

and thus spake jim jones as well

we live in a time of pilgrammage and diaspora and expulsion and migration

and hunger

a hunger gnawing at our retinas and sphincters at the same time compelling us to feel ourselves into a future so crass we relish the hunger instead

where elitism is making the sunshine list but that only really counts if you habituate the public sector because what happens in private stays in private

a macro attachment on a leica lens produces an image of a caterpillar, it's fuzzy lining tightly contained as it inches up the road

on the way back the same caterpillar is witnessed
crushed by a misplaced step or wheel

what happens on the way up is not what happens
on the way down

and where once was life is the fluid that pours out
of life and such organic matter becomes organic
renewal

meandering remindings of essences essentially
abandoned

a losing of history that coalesces around the loss
of senses that give us reason to remember

the past is a scent no longer and its touch is cold
and loose

and the future is murky beyond vision such that
light perception alone permits this ever lasting
present sounds the sleep of the dead not a breath
but a pause

acquiescence never felt this bold

retire with new treads and threads of collective
unconsciousness laying down rubber

they say some of them that this yuga has only
started

they say some of them that this yuga is near its end

they say all of them that this yuga is the worst of times a tale of too much

how to love well in this world when love itself is lost in entropy

enter therapy through the glass doors and deposit your fee in the wooden box

if lucky there will be incense and burning candles and a messiah to lead you from the wilderness

if not there will be incense and burning candles and a shepherd without a flock

who could not give a flock or fuss to entertain even one more day

> I just saw a study about how grownups and children experience time very differently. What was a swiftly passing event for one group was a tiresome affair that never seemed to end for the other. And they say that sentient animals have differing values of time. Some plan for the future and some live for the moment (recalling the ant and grasshopper fable). Some start their operations with the light, others start with the sunset. It is fascinating how we

attach temporal rationales to the light and dark: daytime, nighttime, as if they were different spaces and places.

4

its five year mission to explore strange new worlds

bodily bolding within a 60 month planning session

who has the most accurate measure of the future when the future unfolds into our skin

seething and sensing and talking about my generation

into the end of worlds squashed caterpillars fallen birch autumnal leaves ground underfoot

it's so loud boy you'd think the magma was on fire in a goddamn concert hall

yahoo cooed the brown lad with a white hat and bolo tie and unfortunate plaid pants

and those mermaids, oh those mermaids, I do not think the sirens rolling down Dundas are there for me

a blissful beginning becomes an end unto itself

and language ruffled ripples out to sea in waves of hoarse anxiety

i have touched the sky and expected nothing in return

> It's about time. It's about space. It's about two men in the strangest place. That was from the theme song of the 1966-67 one-season black and white television show, "It's About Time," which, as the lyrics suggest, carried all the elements necessary to facilitate a science-fiction narrative about travelling through time. What could be clearer? The story was one of many on television and in the cinema starting around then and continuing to the present day. Our excitement, our desire, to change time, or if not to change time, to swim through it as if it were a viscous liquid that swaddled us all. Swallowed us whole.

ART AS POST-RATIONAL INQUIRY
Reimagining Creativity Through AI-Generated Aesthetics

Natia Ebanoidze

This paper is inspired by the emergence of AI-generated aesthetics as a phenomenon of the present moment, requiring a reexamination of a wide range of issues surrounding the nature of creativity, and questioning long-established views, perspectives and approaches to artistic creation.

Rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) have introduced new avenues in both the creation and perception of art. These have opened up new possibilities for interpretation, prompting reflection on questions such as how creative practices that incorporate machine learning challenge conventional artistic paradigms and the traditional view of creativity, how they defy traditional rational interpretations in their departure from prevalent artistic norms

and conceptual frameworks, and what new and unconventional perspectives they introduce in the realm of artistic creation. Furthermore, today, when machines have been provided the abilities to create, or at least to simulate the distinctive human capacity for artistic creation, and replicate the aspects of creative artistic behavior, is the notion of creativity as linked to human agency and the idea of the genius still legitimate? We can surely ask, is Kant's concept of a creative act as a harmonious play of the faculties of imagination and understanding still relevant in the age of so-called computational creativity and assisted creation? Ultimately, all of this raises a fundamental philosophical question: can machines really be creative?

In considering the philosophical implications of these advancements within the context of what can be called the "generative turn," I will explore how AI's generative capabilities are reshaping the boundaries of artistic practice and creative thought, focusing in particular on artistic approaches that utilize unsupervised machine learning, and highlighting works that incorporate machine aesthetics to develop novel aesthetic frameworks and challenge conventional notions of creativity and rationality.

THE GENERATIVE TURN

The widespread adoption of emerging generative technologies and the increasingly evident generative processes across various fields can be

identified as a "generative turn"—a significant shift whose full implications are still unfolding. This transition has yet to be established as a conceptual and analytical discourse and it is still too early to make definitive statements and outline its theoretical frameworks; however, a reorientation of inquiry driven by recent developments is apparent in various fields, including the artistic domain.

Generative processes in art have existed since the emergence of algorithmic art in the 1960s. However, recent advancements in AI—particularly deep learning and neural networks—have dramatically expanded their capabilities and applications, and while the still-emerging field of generative art is often perceived as a new style or a new artistic movement fitting into existing strands of art history, it would be more appropriate to view it as part of an evolving cultural context that showcases distinctly novel characteristics and transforms the landscape of creativity and artistic expression.

The shift of focus from descriptive, analytical, and interpretive approaches towards generative processes has brought questions about authorship, creativity, and the nature of artistic production to the center of discussion. At the same time, the integration of these processes has blurred boundaries between analysis, interpretation, and creation, as all of these operations are part of the capabilities of generative systems.

As opposed to the linguistically oriented perspective with its dominance of discourse and semantics, more recent shifts in philosophical

method—the "visual" and "interpretive turns"—acknowledge the importance of embodied experience and pre-reflective, non-conceptual cognition in artistic understanding, offering significant insights into the phenomenology of art as a creative practice. Recent developments in generative art extend these insights further, introducing new challenges and opportunities for artistic creation and apprehension, adding the complexity to the existing discourse.

Visuality and interpretation remain highly relevant in the context of generative art, gaining additional dimensions and making it more visually intricate and hermeneutically layered. Machine learning in generative art is more image-focused than conceptual, and the outputs produced by generative systems represent a machine's interpretation of human-interpreted data. This creates a doubly hermeneutic process, where both human and machine interpretations play crucial roles in the artistic outcome.

The interplay between human and machine perspectives prompts a reconsideration of the concept of rationality within the context of emergent creativity. Long before AI generative processes, artistic practices—ranging from surrealism and abstract expressionism to conceptualism—have reimagined preconceived boundaries of creativity and artistic expression beyond the purely rational, often employing chance operations and random processes to generate artistic outcomes. In fact, chance, randomness, unexpectedness, and

surprise—all essential terms in generative art—have been explored before in many experimental artistic practices. However, within the context of the highly dimensional space of ML where scale and complexity are much larger, conventional notions of creativity and rationality are being challenged to a greater extent than ever before.

The increased scale and high dimensionality of machines can lead to broader artistic trajectories, and are crucial factors when distinguishing between machine and human creativity and the ways of augmenting and enhancing human creative potential. Furthermore, large-scale data processing of AI art systems not only leads to a new paradigm of emergent aesthetics, but also fundamentally changes the ways we conceptualize and appreciate art.

THE CREATIVE AGENCY OF THE "DOUBLE BRAIN"

Refik Anadol's work, *Unsupervised–Machine Hallucinations* provides provocative insights for the present inquiry.[1] The work was created by training a Machine Learning model on a dataset of 138,000 artworks from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The dataset also included the complete metadata of MoMA's archives spanning over 200 years. The work consists of sequences of images and dynamic patterns, hinting at the data source, and forming an endlessly changing visual field displayed on a massive

screen. Anadol's approach used what is called unsupervised learning—a mode of machine learning that enables unmediated processes. In this type of learning, the algorithm is trained on unlabeled data, autonomously identifying patterns and relationships. After "learning" the data, the model creates new connections between the elements of the source material, building its own meanings according to its aesthetics and logic.

Throughout the process, the artist allows the machine to fill the gaps between different parts of the data set, letting it "imagine," "dream," and "hallucinate." Creating this type of piece implies manipulating a new kind of artistic working space—a "latent space," a highly dimensional realm encompassing vast amounts of possible relationships and connections arranged according to computational logic, which often diverges from the familiar logic of the real world. It comprises essential relationships and patterns extracted during the learning process, representing what the machine has learned.

In this sense, *Unsupervised* is a work of a "double brain," representing collaboration between the human mind and neural networks. In a brief overview of *Unsupervised* published in MoMA

Refik Anadol, *Unsupervised—Machine Hallucinations*, Custom software, generative algorithm with artificial intelligence (AI), real time digital animation on LED screen, sound, 2022

Refik Anadol, *Unsupervised—Machine Hallucinations*, Custom software, generative algorithm with artificial intelligence (AI), real time digital animation on LED screen, sound, 2022

magazine, Lev Manovich employs this term when referring to the combination of a human brain and the "artificial brain" of neural net.[2] Manovich sees collaborations such as this as introducing new methods for "reading" cultural databases.

One could build on this insight and argue that the notion of a "double brain" is crucial not only for its implications in analyzing cultural data but also for its significance in the broader discussion about the interplay between human and machine creativity, and the question of creative agency in generative art. While human creativity is deeply rooted in emotional, psychological, and experiential elements, machine creativity, by contrast, relies on algorithms and data processing. However, in the context of generative art and a "double brain" they inform each other, interact, and become interdependent, complicating the distinction between the two as creative agents.

In the evolving landscape of generative AI and the milieu of digital art excess, it becomes essential to distinguish between works by artists incorporating Machine Learning into their creative practices, expanding the scope of art as a form of inquiry, and the imitative works of mainstream AI art that merely demonstrate the ability of generative AI to replicate reality, adding nothing new to the conversation. It is in the relational capacity of AI that the stakes of creativity are most apparent. While machines do make creative moves and enhance artistic work, making creative choices and contextualizing remains beyond the current capabilities

of ML technology and this is where the human factor plays a crucial role. The artist, who curates the dataset as well as the latent space, determines the decisive moment—that is, when to cut the machine off from learning—then modifies and gives intention to generated outputs, contextualizes the final work, and finally, decides whether the work is artistically valuable and creative at all.

Beyond its significance as a "double brain" creation, Unsupervised brings cognitive aspects of visuality and embodied experience into aesthetic engagement. The "linguistic turn" in contemporary thought has significantly influenced our understanding of rationality, turning human experiences and cognition into the product of language and reducing the pictorial to interpretable text. Approaches in semiotics and the epistemology of science establish the view of cognition as "dominantly and aggressively linguistic."[3] Likewise, the absence of a material object in conceptual art—where the signifier transforms into conceptual information—replaces the dialectical encounter with socio-economic and political critique, turning art into a discursive entity. Unlike overly rational approaches in contemporary creative practice that view art primarily as semantic signification, *Unsupervised* enables the exploration of more fundamental structures, highlighting the potency of the visual, experiential, and non-conceptual in artistic apprehension, while embracing art as a modality with pictorial significance.

REIMAGINING ARTWORK: AI FEEDBACK LOOPS AND MACHINE SELF-REFERENTIALITY

The intriguing visuality and uncanny aesthetics in Mario Klingemann's work—both captivating and somewhat unsettling at the same time—challenge perception and open up new possibilities for reading historical visual narratives.[4] To discover new forms of aesthetics, Klingemann takes the works of old masters as input and trains the model on them.

In *Memories of Passersby I*, a machine (or AI brain) continually generates and displays a never-ending stream of portraits in real time. The images continuously transform and evolve, allowing the viewer to witness AI brain "thinking" in real time, and creating a context where immediate presence replaces the common practices of saving, undoing, copying, and pasting prevalent in our world.[5]

The work embodies the fleeting nature of memory and the ephemeral quality of time, encouraging reflection on the temporal and spatial layers inherent in the generative process—both the real-time AI interpretation of images and the viewer's engagement with the unfolding digital narrative. One is led to question: are these passersby the endless stream of unique, synthetic faces generated and memorized by AI, or are we, the observers, the true passersby as we witness the AI's "thought" and "recollection" processes? The continuous generation of new portraits reflects the fluidity and infinite possibilities within the digital realm,

prompting a reevaluation of our notion of time and the boundaries between real and virtual.

The unmediated process of generative creation also entails a degree of unpredictability. Although the work relies on algorithmic code and the AI brain is trained according to the artist's aesthetic preferences, it does not in this case represent a curated set of preselected images. Consequently, there is an uncertainty about what the machine might produce and whether the code will be executed as written. The artist can anticipate the output to a certain extent, but the AI does not merely interpret external input but also interprets its own output, creating a kind of artificial memory or continuity between the generated portraits. Such a self-referential act involves a recursive process of autonomous creation in a continuous AI feedback loop.

The self-referentiality of AI brain embedded in its own generative process is an essential aspect of Klingemann's work that expands creative space for artistic modification and conceptualization. The system's ability to process its own outputs and modify its behavior based on its own performance further enables reinterpretation independent of conscious, self-aware processes, leading to unexpected outcomes.

In *Memories of Passersby I*, the AI feedback loop creates a form of visual self-referentiality whereby the ongoing generation and continued evolution of faces make the generative process visible. This continuously evolving recursive process is integral to the work's artistic significance and its

Mario Klingemann, *Deposition #1*, Digital, Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), 2018

perception and reception. By requiring observers to engage with the iterative process of generation and interact with an artwork that is dynamic and constantly evolving rather than fixed, the work not only explores new creative possibilities but also prompts inquiries into the nature of art in the age of digitalization and AI art generation.

The unpredictability involved in this ongoing process is also an essential element when working with GANs (generative adversarial networks). The implications of chance and randomness, misinterpretation, and the artistic potential of machine failure introduce an inevitable element of surprise that results in producing sophisticated visuals. This often gives rise to divergences from the source material, either obtained through manipulating the learning algorithm or as a result of the machine misunderstanding the data.

Applying deep learning in this context, Klingemann developed a technique he calls "neural glitch" in which he manipulates fully trained GANs to cause a model to misinterpret the data it is given and a process called GAN chaining—combining multiple models trained for different purposes—to further develop his work.[6]

Mario Klingemann, *Memories of Passersby I*, Multiple GANs, two 4k screens, custom handmade chestnut wood console (hosting AI brain and additional hardward), 2018

Neural glitches can often be semantically meaningful, as well as conceptually and aesthetically productive. The potential for errors and flaws in ML art highlights its capacity to liberate us from the confines of our predetermined rational minds, where the likelihood of the occurrence of errors is significantly lower. In terms of the intended outcome, this is very similar to psychedelic experiences in artistic practices which aim at quieting the mind to make absurd connections and generate striking creative outputs. Perhaps there is an intriguing intersection between the states of consciousness and technological augmentation. Machine intelligence, often perceived as purely analytical and rational, may have its most significant impact in enabling us to transcend rational constraints and expand human creative potential.

IF ONLY YOU COULD SEE WHAT I'VE SEEN WITH YOUR EYES[7]

While ML models are often considered to be detached from the thoughts and impulses of the artists whose works make up the datasets, art created with AI algorithms is, of course, not completely exempt from bias. The creative capabilities of generative AI systems are exhibited within the confines of their training data and algorithms; hence, numerous layers of human bias—preconceptions, both rational and irrational, and emotions of those who created or collected the training data—are present in GAN outputs.

Mario Klingemann, *Mistaken Identity*, Digital, Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), 2018

However, the fact that generative algorithms cannot be fully detached from the unconscious and irrational processes coded in their training images also unveils new opportunities for interpreting cultural databases and reflecting on human value systems considering feedback from the other intelligences.

While acknowledging the database bias, one can nonetheless talk about GAN aesthetics and logic as systems that are not entirely defined by human preconceptions and therefore can lead to novel perspectives, interrelations, and combinations that a human creator might never have come up with. In this sense, artworks that use the GANs and operate through unsupervised machine learning, allow us to peer not only beyond the rational, but, one could argue, even into other modes of (i)rationality that are unbounded by human value systems and conventional norms.

The impact of generative ML models on creative practice includes the reorganization of creative workflows, as well as changes in artistic practice as an embodied process. Creative process becomes more diversified and involves a sequence of preliminary technical research, building models and datasets, training models, and then curating outputs. This suggests changes in the nature and structure of the creative process itself. Indeed, many artists view working with ML models as an interactive, reciprocal process. Artists, such as Helena Sarin,[8] Anna Ridler,[9] and David Young[10] train models on their own data (photographs or drawings) to receive

feedback from the machine and then to incorporate their experience of working with models into their work, modifying and framing the work accordingly.

The dialogue between analogue and algorithmic techniques—a kind of the interplay between the digital and the physical—is another important aspect of generative practice. In his *Corrections* (2019) series, artist Robbie Barrat integrated painting techniques into algorithmic work. For this series, Barrat trained the neural networks to replicate what his painter collaborator, Ronan Barrot, did in his artistic practice, which involved covering up an area of a painting that he wanted to correct with bright paint and then filling it in again.[11] This resulted in striking transformation of familiar visual narratives into peculiar imagery.

ML models function best with large amounts of data, however, many artists choose to work with custom-made small scale datasets and restrict the data supplied to the system. For his work *Learning Nature* (2018), David Young trained a model on photographs of flowers taken at his farm, deliberately limiting the input to a small selection of images. This constraint induced deviations from predictable outcomes, resulting in artistically desirable "imperfect" outputs that reflect the machine's unique vision of the natural world. As we view nature through the machine's eyes and witness its "mind" constructing its logical frameworks, the familiar images of the natural world are deconstructed and fragmented before us. The intriguing interplay between organic forms and synthetic

David Young, *Learning Nature*, Digital, Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), 2018

processes invites us to pause and contemplate the intricate patterns, textures, and structures that emerge, exploring the possibilities of their combinations as seen through the artificial lens. In this symbiotic process, the machine develops its own interpretation of the subject, suggesting new ways to experience and understand the natural world, while also helping us to "unlearn" familiar perceptions.

Revisiting the questions on creativity and creative agency: if we understand creativity as "the ability to come up with ideas or artifacts that are new, surprising, and valuable," rather than a sort of mystical gift, then machines can be creative too.[12] As Margaret Boden states, "New thoughts originated in creative thinking are not wholly novel, in that they have their seeds in representations already present in the mind."[13] If this suggestion is legitimate, then it follows that creativity—understood as a capability to come up with novel combinations of existing ideas—is possible to replicate by means of computers. However, while machines can assimilate information, imagination—a foundational element of creativity—involves more than information processing.

Since imagination draws on internal sources such as thoughts, feelings, and emotions, one could argue that the binary logic of computation fails to grasp the entirety of this process. For Kant, imagination is a meeting place for sensibility and understanding.[14] The phenomenological perspective, however, grounds the imagination in

lived experience, considering Kantian synthesis artificial and detached from the embodied nature of human experience.[15] This further complicates the question of computational creativity, given that machines lack the ability to experience. While advancements in AI may eventually lead to a phase of generative autonomy and the development of human-level AI—an "embodied" artificial intelligence that possesses intentionality—such a development remains difficult to achieve in practice.

The lack of intentionality is often one of the reasons for arguing that AI is only apparently creative. However, in the context of a "double brain," where the symbiotic relationships and the aspect of complementarity emerge, not only does it become difficult to distinguish between human and machine creativity, but the merging of capabilities also challenges traditional boundaries of creativity, suggesting a new paradigm where machine vision, informed by human experience and intentionality, creates a cohesive creative agent. Moreover, the shift to an information society demands new visual and verbal languages. The meanings evolving in the generative turn will likely become a new language of culture, and current developments in artistic practices within generative art introduce fresh avenues for reconsidering and reconceptualizing established paradigms.

David Young, *Learning Nature*, Digital, Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), 2018

NOTES

1 Refik Anadol is a Turkish-American artist whose work focuses on data-driven machine learning algorithms that create abstract, colorful environments. For more information see the artist's website: https://refikanadol.com/

2 Lev Manovich, "The AI Brain in the Cultural Archive," *MoMA Magazine,* Jul. 21, 2023. https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/927

3 Barbara Stafford, *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 7.

4 Mario Klingemann is a German artist whose work examines questions of creativity, culture, and perception through machine learning and artificial intelligence. He is considered a pioneer in the use of computer learning in the arts. For more information see the artist's website: https://quasimondo.com/

5 "SOLO::Artists Program:: *Memories of Passersby I* by Mario Klingemann," YouTube, uploaded by Colección SOLO, October 17, 2023. https://youtu.be/V8ApauQwfUw?si=IA2piGXJqNBXqS4D

6 GAN-chaining or the technique of combining models is often employed to achieve an increased level of unexpectedness. This process implies passing the custom-made images through several GANs, enhancing the generated output and then repeating the process again that leads to the final output which might have nothing to do with the initial input.

7 The phrase is borrowed from Ridley Scott's 1982 sci-fi film *Blade Runner*, where it is spoken by a replicant to his creator.

8 For more information see Helena Sarin's website: https://aiartists.org/helena-sarin

9 For more information see Anna Ridler's website: https://annaridler.com/

10 For more information see David Young's website: https://davidyoung.art/

11 A. Ploin, R. Eynon, I Hjorth & M.A. Osborne, "AI and the Arts: How Machine Learning is Changing Artistic Work. Report from the Creative Algorithmic Intelligence Research Project" (Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, 2022), 30.

12 Margaret Boden, *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms,"* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

13 Ibid., 298.

14 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 241.

15 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith, trans. (London: Routledge, 2005), x-xi.


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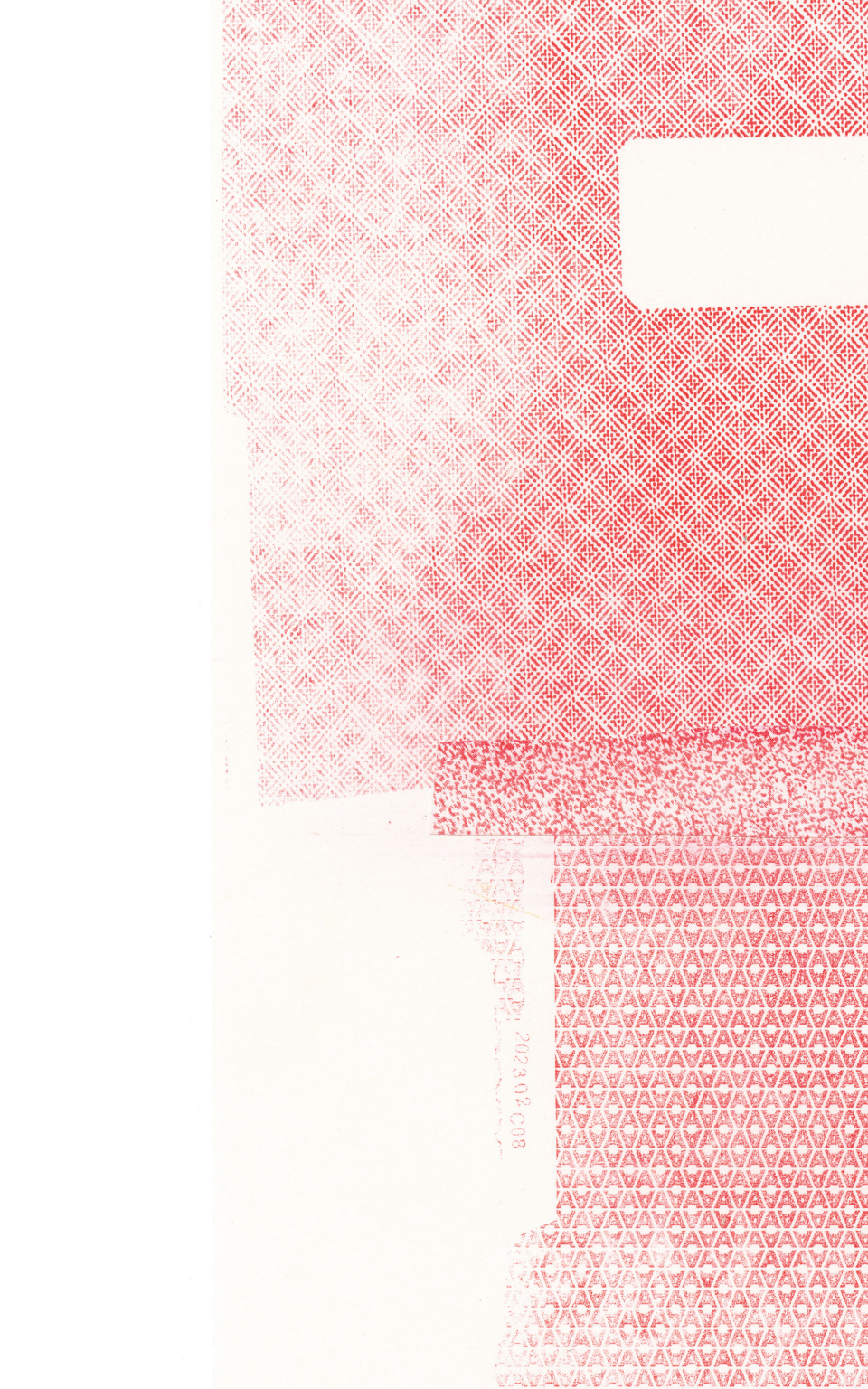
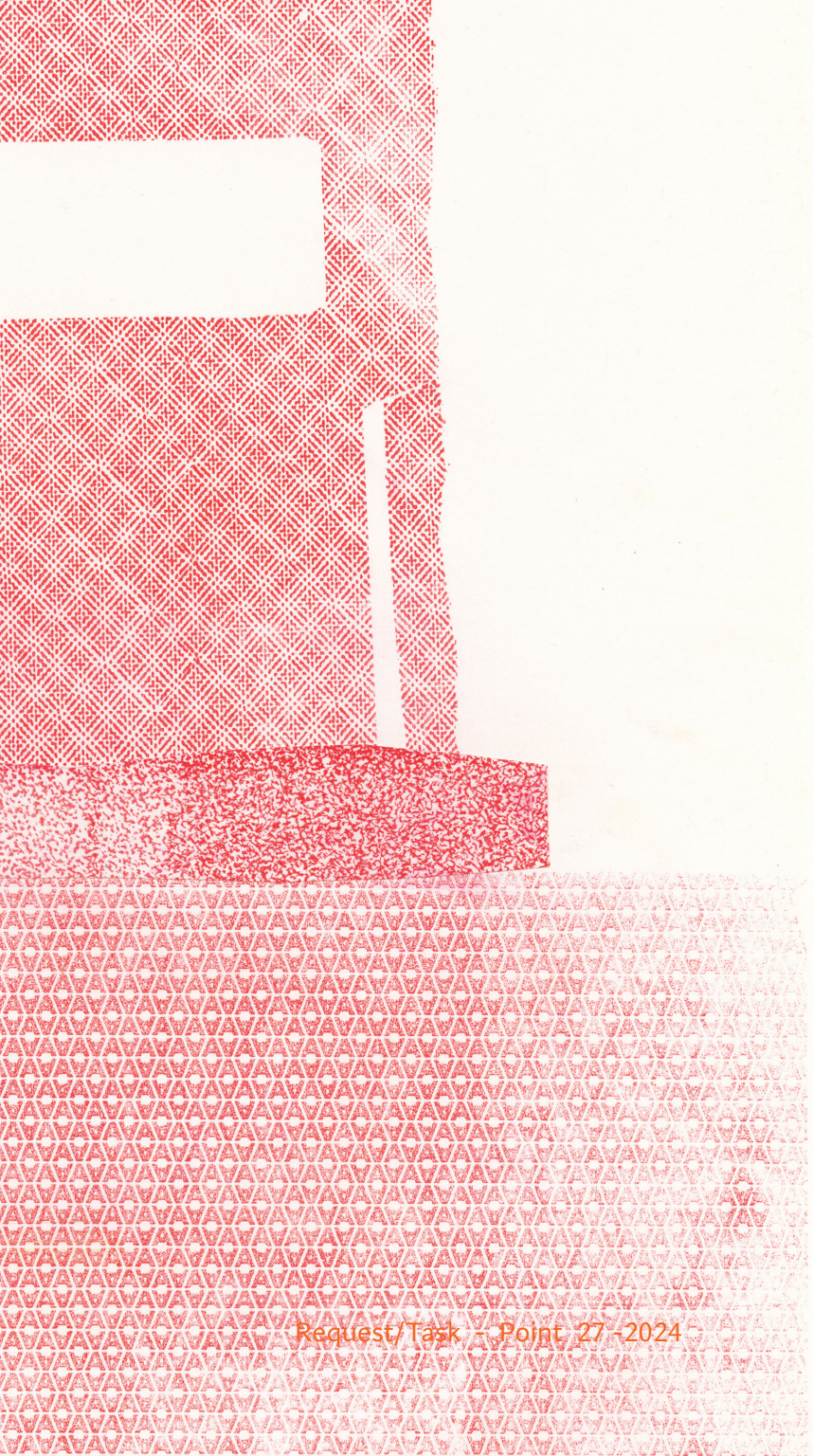
CORRESPONDENCE

Christian Kurras and Duncan MacKenzie

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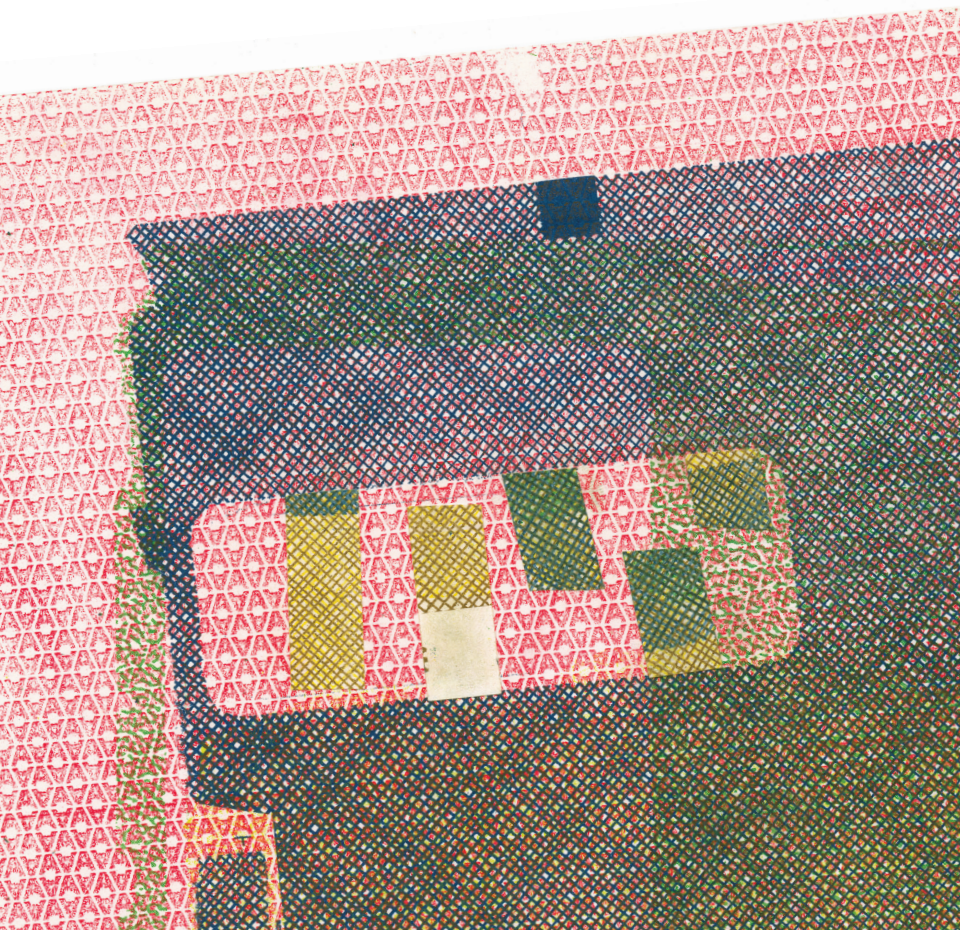

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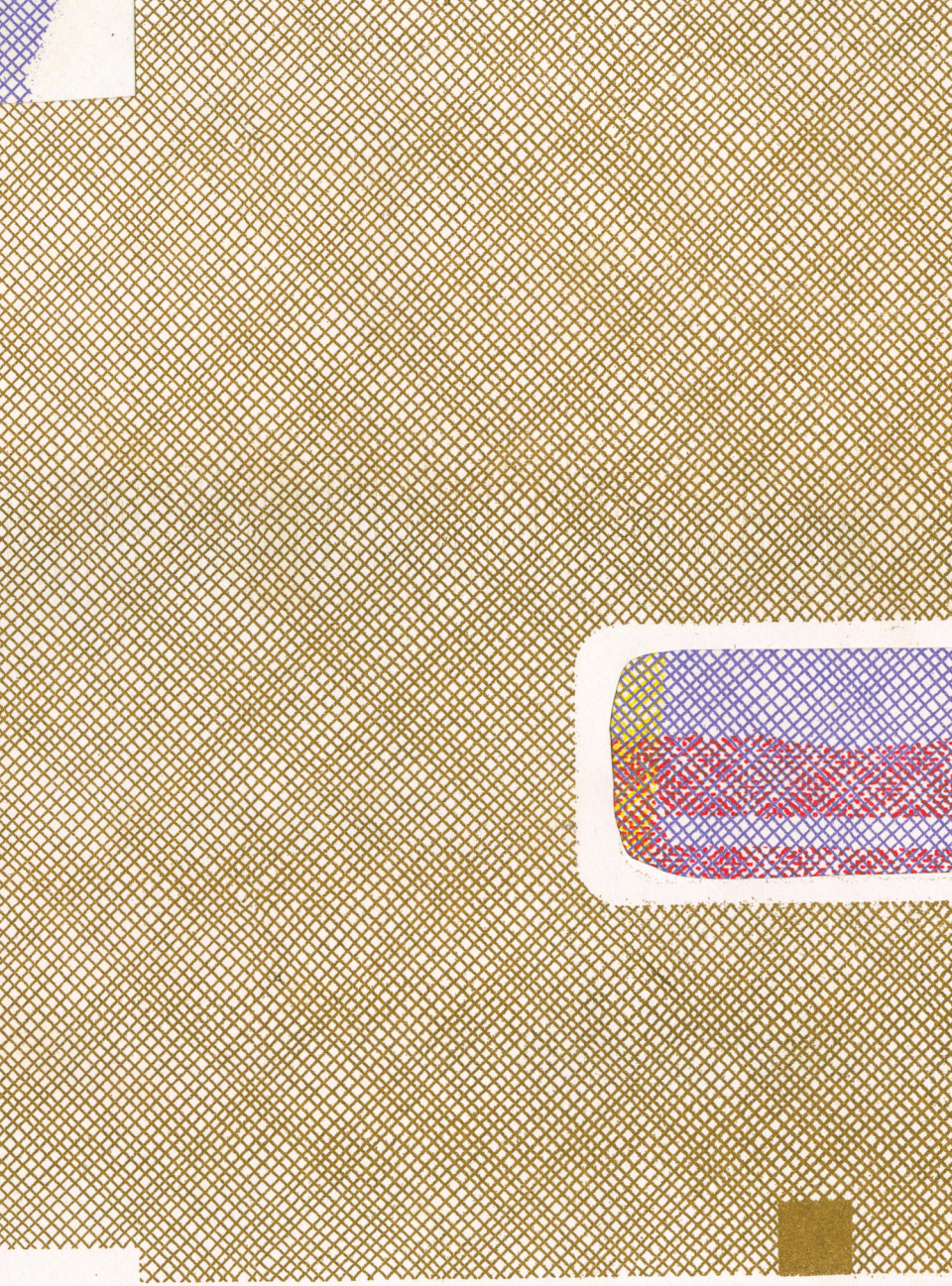

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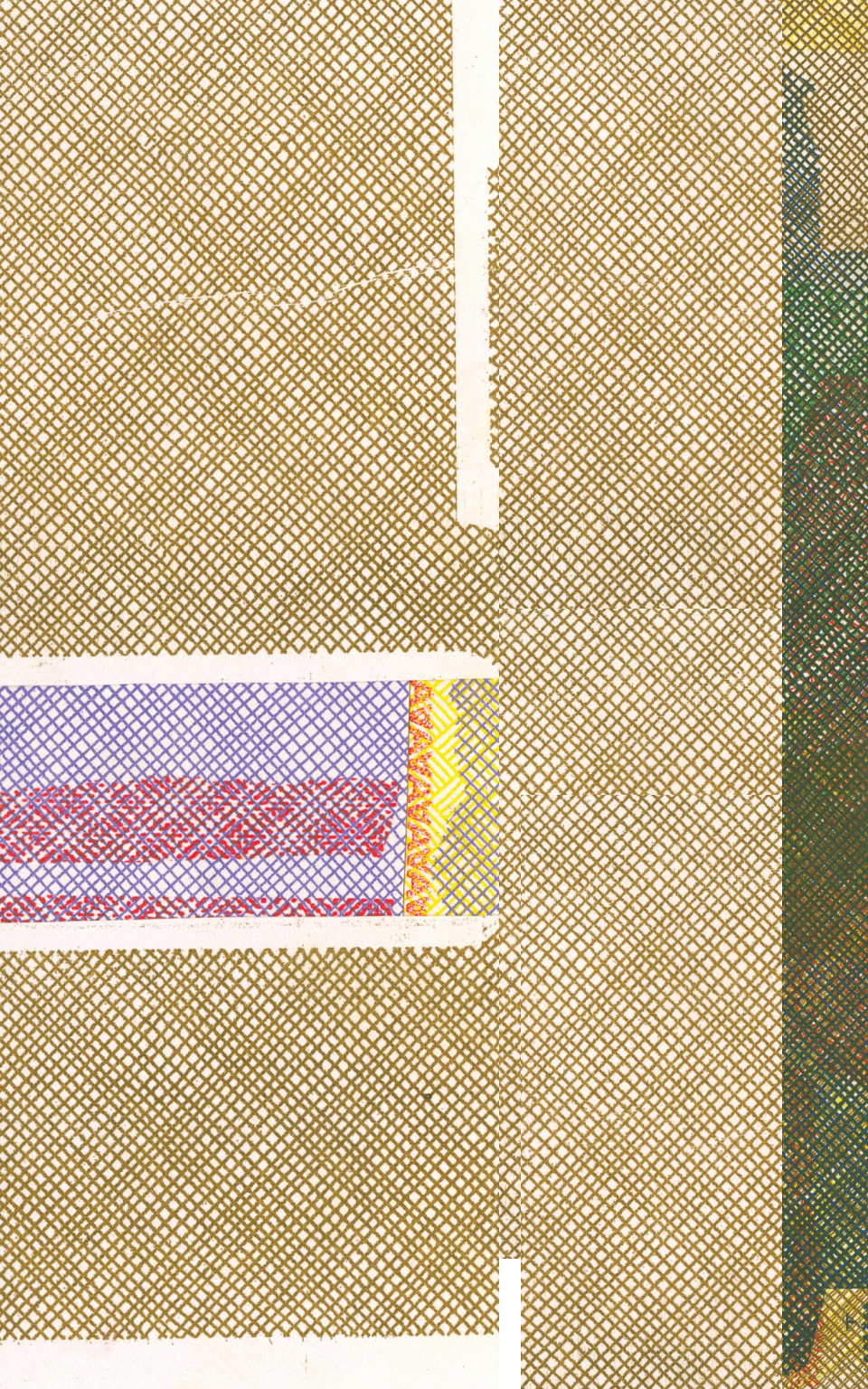

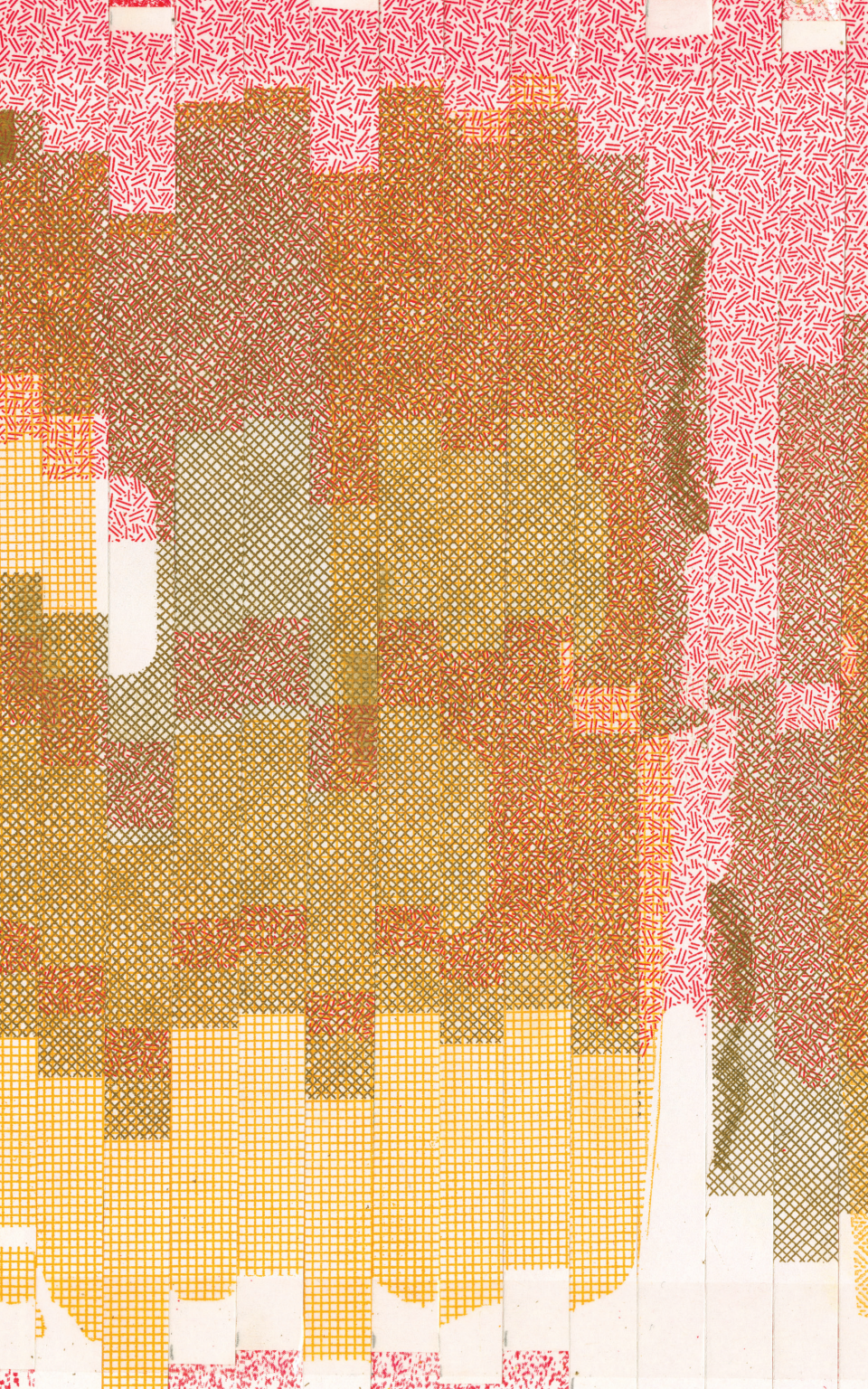

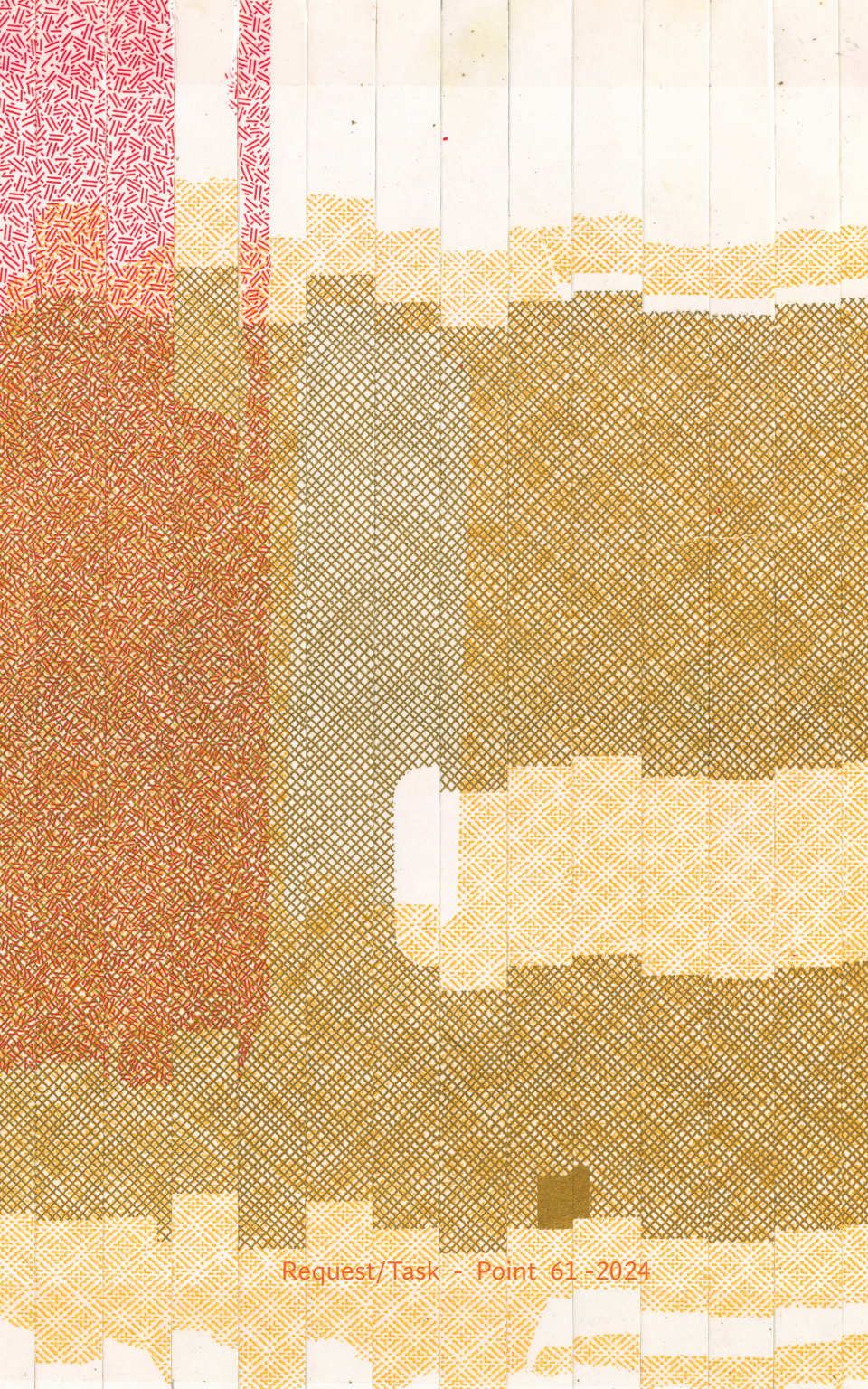
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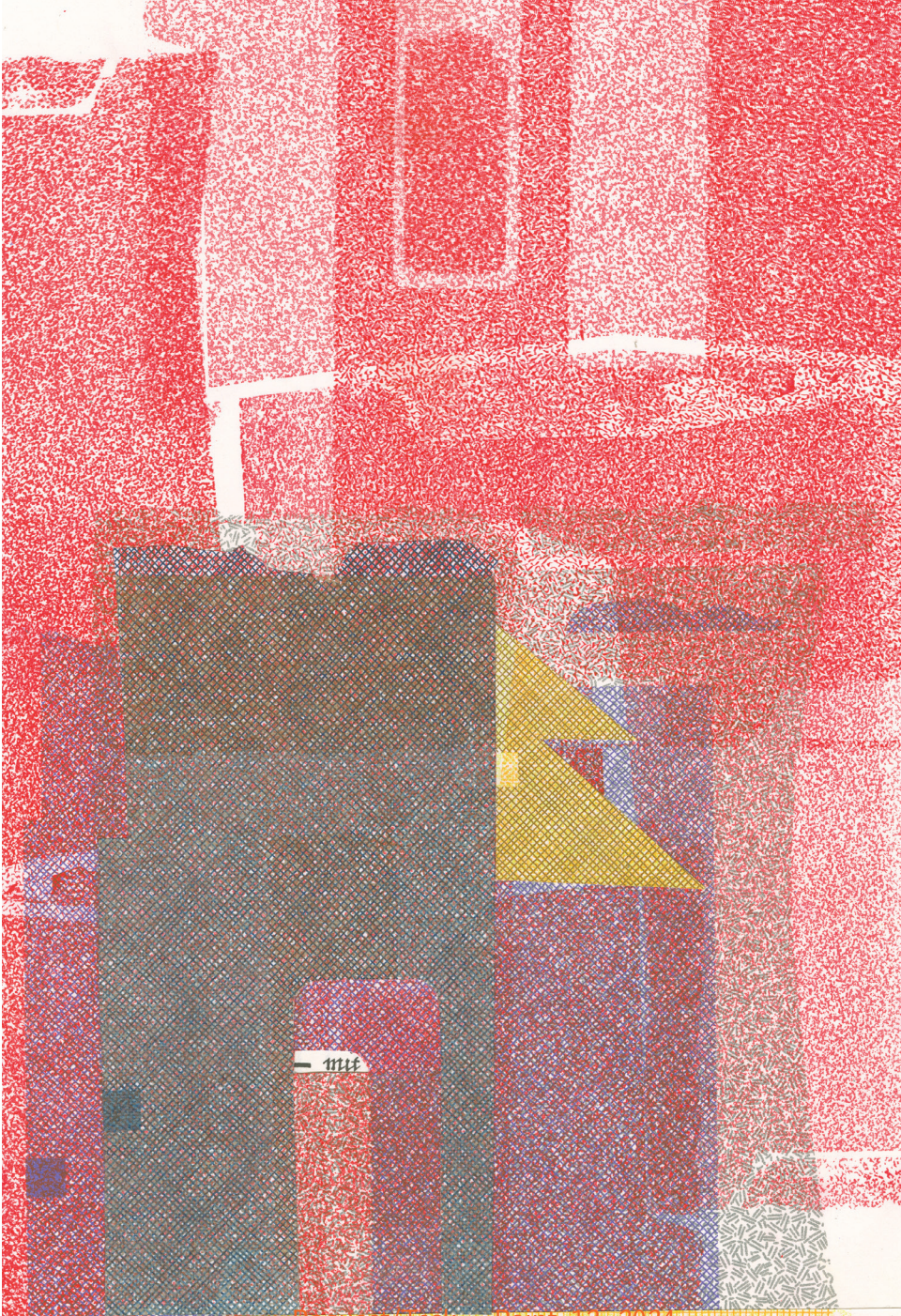

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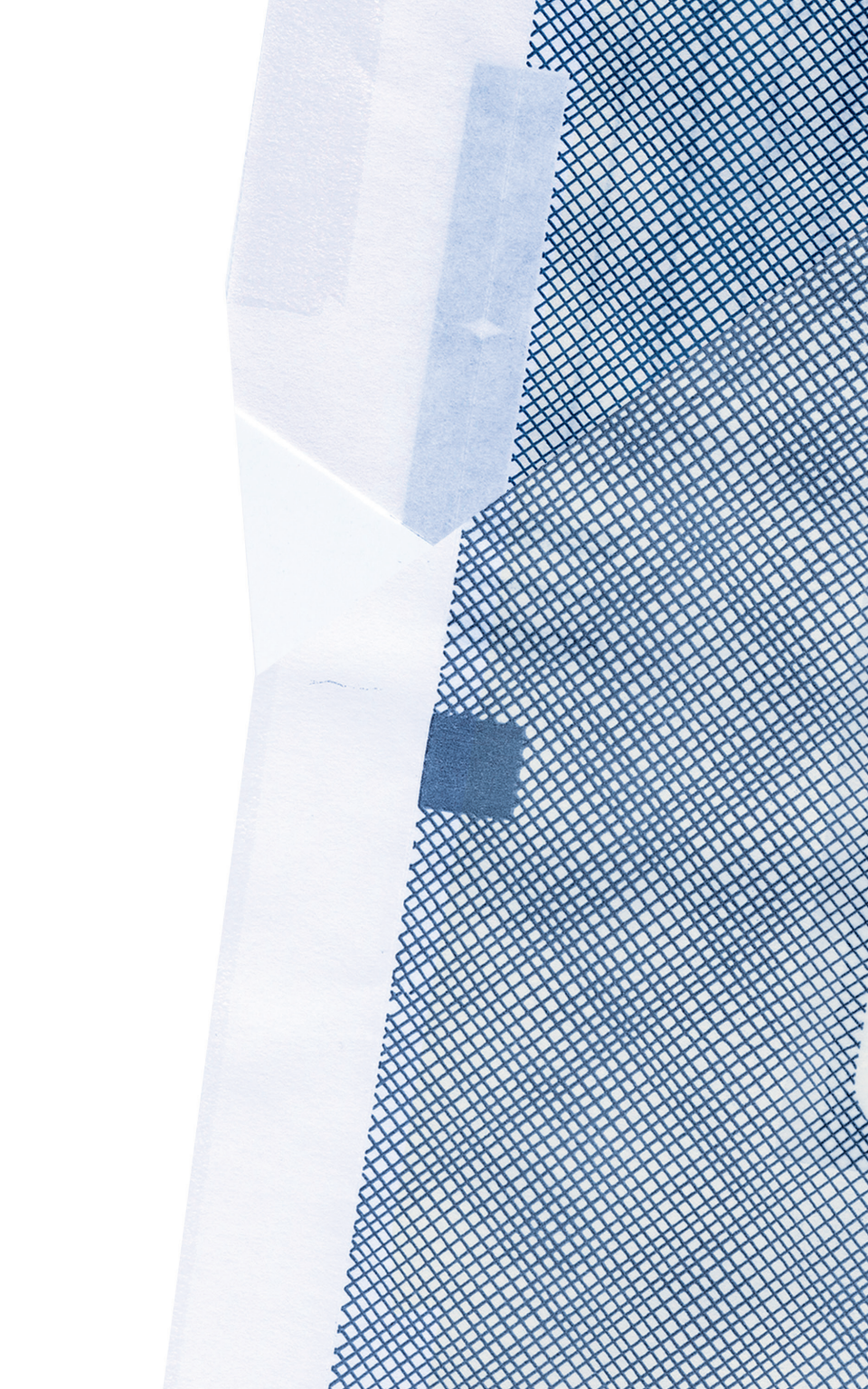


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THE POST-RATIONAL BODY
Kate Hartman's Wearables

Sarah Mills

This essay examines wearable technology, focusing specifically on the body-centeric wearables of Kate Hartman, Director of the Social Body Lab at the Ontario College of Art and Design University. It borrows the philosophical concept of transformative experience, developed recently in the work of L.A. Paul, to articulate how wearables exemplify a post-rational body, one that identifies felt experiences and conveys them performatively through an abstract techno-body language. This post-rational body helps demonstrate the extent to which subjectivity is embedded within the rationalizing forces of technological innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Wearables embody technological experiences rooted in decision making and self-expression. However, they mostly serve our basic demands and

questions: play music (Oakley THUMP glasses); what is my caloric burn (Apple Watch); is the head impact at a dangerous level (Reebok Checklight cap). Like other technologies and ubiquitous computing media, wearables are becoming "smarter" and more pervasive and increasingly determining our behaviors. Activating them becomes a perfunctory task, a training of consciousness. Since the 2010s, many designers have turned their attention toward the making of "social wearables," garments which augment interactions between people in the same physical space.[1] These wearables stand in contrast to ones of a more positivist nature, which regulate or mediate the body through data. This essay considers the inadvertent critical analysis of wearable technology embedded in the designs of the Social Body Lab (SBL) at the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCAD) under the directorship of creative technologist Kate Hartman. The Lab's body-centeric devices offer a useful means of understanding the specific nature of transformation we are currently experiencing in the twenty-first century technosphere.

Hartman is associate professor of Wearables and Mobile Technology at OCAD. In the 1990s, she began experimenting with a range of technologies, eventually finding a home in interactive technology through a residency at the Interactive Telecommunications Program at New York University, where she continues to teach part-time.[2] In the early 2000s, she began working with conductive threads and the Lilypad Arduino, a

newly invented microprocessor designed specifically for the making of soft goods, like wearables.[3] Wearables are garments made with conductive fibers and embedded microprocessors (mini computers or circuit boards). They account for some of the most significant technological innovations in recent years. Because wearables are attached to bodies and, to different degrees, can alter our appearance, cognitive and physical abilities—in turn radically changing our relationship to physical space and how we communicate with others—they have the greatest potential to impact our experience of the world. They are perhaps the most futuristic of technologies—our closest chance at becoming Superman, Wonderwoman or Inspector Gadget. But for Hartman, the body and socialization are the human superpowers to ultimately harness. Instead of aiding one in memory, safety, and decision making, her wearables provide non-quantitative and sometimes funny signals—social cues—based on those generated naturally by the body, such as the rapid heart beating in a moment of euphoria, designed to augment interaction and intervene proactively, if sillily, in social situations.[4]

In this essay, I illustrate how Hartman's wearables embody, often humorously, what the philosopher L.A. Paul in her recent book *Transformative Experience* characterizes as part of how we sense and process the world and draw conclusions about our personal values. Since Paul's publication, scholars have examined concepts of the

transformative experience in a variety of contexts.[5] One realm of experience overlooked, however, is that of our engagement with technology.[6] Recently, the anthropologist Jan English-Leuck described an acceleration in the technological saturation of emerging global culture, noting more "silicon places" around the world replicating those of Silicon Valley in California, with an orientation toward data harvesting and product development.[7] Amongst these technologies are ones that, though helpful, also obscure the body or thwart individuality (likewise diversity) through functionalist objectives in speed, efficiency and pain reduction/pleasure enhancement. While Hartman's works are not a direct response to these modes of technological engagement, they—by contrast in their design goals and goofy sensibility—provide critical understanding of a new era marked by novel systems of ubiquitous computing, artificial intelligence, and unprecedented levels of robotic development. Here I consider what our desire to develop and use such technologies represents and point toward how our efforts to determine the world rationally, ultimately, unveils our optimism in discovering a new subjectivity, a desire to become someone else.

KATE HARTMAN AND THE SOCIAL BODY LAB'S WEARABLES

Wearables defy clear-cut categorizations but one way they could be parsed is in how they relate to one's body. Some wearables like Christmas-themed

sweaters with mini ornamental string lights act like upholstery in that they merely cover the body, providing no sensory information from the wearer's physical body. Smartwatches and Fitbits are another type of popular upholstery-like wearable. However, instead of covering the body's physiological activity they "sift" it, pulling out specific biometric information using a device's sensors. Body signals are converted into data, stylizing the wearer's behavior and relationship to their bodies (a topic discussed in the literature of affective computing).[8] Contrastingly, SBL's wearables interact with the body as a type of bodyguard, typically, by visually articulating physiological activity as determined by the wearer. Different than affective wearables which determine emotions through read-response systems, SBL's wearables display feelings and emotions of a more ambiguous, if nuanced, nature which are not interpreted by computers.

Take for example Hartman's *Porcupine Vest*. The vest is a spikey cardboard extension that is strapped to one's back. The quill-like protrusions on the vest lay flat, unnoticeable and inactive until the wearer bends over causing the pointy daggers to rise in an expression suggestive of hesitation, indicating one to keep their distance. The wearable emulates the subtle occurrence of piloerection or goosebumps, where tiny bumps rise on the skin making hairs on the body stand straighter. Sometimes our bodily resources for expressing subtle social cues, such as the need for

more physical space, are misinterpreted. We might step back, but such an action can lack clarity in different cultural contexts. The playfulness of Hartman's design responds to a need for emphasis in bodily communication, particularly in a time of increasing urbanization and the spread of harmful airborne viruses. On her website, Hartman gives clues to how manmade environments spur emphatic modes of communication, demonstrating the use of *Porcupine Vest* on New York and San Francisco city sidewalks, where one might desire more personal space for a variety of safety reasons. But also, on the flip side, creating personal space equally allows for a good *flaneur*-like gazing distance of other interesting city dwellers.[9]

Monarch V2, a more recent design of SBL's, conveys feelings of excitement. This muscle-activated kinetic wearable has two wing-like devices that rest on the wearer's shoulders (figure 1). When triggered the fabric panels expand and contract, creating a fluttering motion.[10] This motion enacts the sense of an adrenaline rush or rapid heart beating---modes of excitability felt by one but unperceived by others in the company of the person experiencing it. The flapping is adjustable by the wearer. Of wearables, the SBL says, they "can begin to feel like a visceral extension of self." However, this self is one that has agency over the mechanization of identity or expression rather than serving as a funnel through which physiological experience is tooled by an "upholstered technology." The inner openings of the flaps reveal colorful purple, yellow

Kate Hartman and the Social Body Lab,
Monarch V2, 2015, photo by Maxwell Lander

or green fabric which create brightness as they expand. With *Monarch V2*, the Lab harnesses both motion and aesthetics to signal shifts in mind-body state which suggest a kind of an awakening and the arrival of a new state of attention. On their website, SBL reiterates that the feeling portrayed by the wearable is not precise but rather ranges from "enthusiasm, excitement," to "assertion, aggregation" and "flirtation or mischievousness."[11] The lack of specificity in the emotion suggests a thought pattern that may not be initially understood by the wearer but nevertheless is part of their body's physical response system—the registration and visual conveyance of which we frequently deem inherent to one's capacity of self-expression. Here we begin to wander into the territory of the post-rational body, one which perceives physiological change (and a desire to portray it) but all the while is perhaps unsure of its meaning and its potential to bring about a positive experience. Furthermore, this feeling likely evades quantification and cannot be explained away with systems of logic. Yet, it exists as something to be acted on, rationally (more on this to come).[12]

Wearables are exceedingly popular in arenas of fashion and entertainment where they perform special effects or novelty actions, such as Anouk Wipprecht *Drinkbot 2.0*, a dress which is automated to mix a cocktail using six peristaltic liquid pumps and a voice command to an AI-listening single board computer. The apparatus, like *Monarch V2*, is activated by the wearer through nearly invisible

movements (of the mouth and the muscles) but performs an action that differs from biological ones (although I suppose *Drinkbot 2.0* could be an externalization of a bladder). Wipprecht's device does not animate emotion. Instead, it completes a task and solves a simple problem: the need for a drink. Fitted to the body, the wearer becomes a cocktail waitress who makes drinks on the run instead of at the bar. Yet, while the body is present, the hands disappear, their work is supplanted by the actions of the machine. "Our present bond with technology will morph into personal connections with the interfaces around us," states Wipprecht on her website, which one could only presume to mean that we will technologize everything we touch.[13]

The handless bartender of Wipprecht's design approximates another subset of wearables that are turned entirely outward and oriented solely on outside-body events. The design historian Susan Elizabeth Ryan calls these the "disappearing body" genre of wearables. In these wearable designs, vision typically supersedes a more complete physical experience or rather defines it in a skewed relationship with the rest of the body.[14] Steve Mann's digital eye glasses offer one example of this hierarchical relationship between vision and other the body. In the 1980s and '90s, Mann was an early pioneer of cyberfashion at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, where he designed wearables with an invested interest in computers and camera technology. *Telepointers* were one of his early achievements. The purpose of a telepointer was to

provide video documentation in one location and live broadcast in another, today commonly associated with closed-circuit television. However, telepointers are designed for the body. *Tiedome* is a telepointer, for example, worn on one's tie. It contains a small computer with a camera that sends visual information to an off-site location.[15] In recent years, the concept and technology of *Tiedome* has become the modern baby monitor, the surgeon's mechanical eye, and the GoPro worn by adventure cyclists. In these examples, as in telepointers, the camera's outward projection, as in a point-of-view shot in film narration, causes the body to be supplanted by a computer interface. The body remains visually absent in the space represented around it. The wearer, whose own set of eyes are multiplied through making possible live broadcasts (as in *Tiedome*), is thus reduced to being only an eye.

The feedback system of Mann's telepointers is fundamental to his series of digital eyeglasses, culminating in *EyeTap*. *EyeTap* is a pair of glasses, which coats one's visual field with additional layers of information about their surroundings. In one version of the glass, text and icons pop up on the glasses surface, based on what a computer reads about the viewer's space. This overlaid information presumably saves one time and energy in having to divert their eyes to another location.[16] On his website, Mann provides an example of *EyeTap*'s use for sports fans, who while watching an event in the stadium, are able to isolate a player in their vision on

the lens and follow statistics related to the player in a floating box above the player.[17] This latter example shifts gears from Mann's initial direction. *EyeTap* not only documents one's sight but also supplements and augments it. Vision is made better by having the potential to focus on one player while seeing all others (enhancing natural vision) and also share data on players (augmenting reality).

The difference between enhanced and augmented reality is worth considering further. Mann's work in eyewear spawned from a desire to see better while learning how to weld; it grew into an interest to develop the technology for people with sight-related impairments and problems with visual memory. Augmentation, however, reveals not what we could possibly biologically recreate in an ideal human but rather what we could never produce; what has never previously been detected in human vision, which is the palimpsest of digitally and biologically-produced imagery, each potentially competing against each other for the wearer's attention as to what to process first and in terms of what is possibly most believable or true. Since the dawn of image making, from illustration to photography and film, humans have always had to compete with what they remember seeing and the visual output rendered, in sharable hard copies. The trouble with memory is thus not new, but goes unspoken in Mann's declarations that augmentation and a "sousveillance system" (where we are each surveillance systems) protect the wearer through information (documented or AI provided).[18] There

are two issues at stake here: first is the myth of documentation as evidence, which photo historians and photographers have repeatedly critiqued.[19] The second is the computer mediated reality which, given in real-time, shapes the wearer by synching their natural vision with augmented information, causing the former to become seamless or undifferentiated from the latter and through a process of the AR wanting to foreground itself, quieting other communicatory intelligences of tactility, olfactory, taste and smell. When many senses are artificially produced (as in installations) we can be temporarily removed from the world—this is one reason AR and VR have been effective in therapeutic treatments—however augmented vision alone (or its permanency) prioritizes not only visual intelligence over others but also animates us by an informatic source based on algorithms. We, in turn, become more algorithmically sculpted.[20]

Unlike Mann's projects which evolve entirely around an individual's (visual) experience, Studio subTela's wearables are designed for engagement between two or more people. Their participatory goals align them more with those of the Social Body Lab. Studio subTela is part of the Milieux Institute at Concordia University in Montreal, which focuses on interdisciplinary research in new media arts, digital culture and information technology: the Studio explores these areas through the media of textiles and dress. One their most well-known projects is the *Black Touchpad Dress*, designed by Barabara Layne, director of the Studio. The front

and back of the dress features an LED-screen interface activated by an embroidered touchpad on the cuff of the sleeve. Or one could use the Touchpad Box to activate the dress with a wireless touchpad. Using either the cuff or the Box, one can draw or write a message which then displays on the dress.[21] The potential for one to manipulate the imagery of the dress, altering both its two-dimensional form, speed, and color renders the dress into a cinematic medium, a small-scale moving film. The black color of the dress indeed matches the context of the "black box," the space of a darkened movie theater. But then there is the "problem" of the wearer's body, which becomes something of a distraction to our fixation on the changing information on the dress.

One of the more interesting aspects the *TouchPad Dress* is how it manipulates physical space and spatial awareness. As the wearer becomes a kind of augmented reality to someone in control of the *TouchBox*, physical space becomes relevant only to the extent that it enhances vision of the electronically activated screen in the dress. Optimal usage of the garment would, presumably, require a specific amount of space between viewer and wearer-as-performer. To read text then would require a wearer to produce physio-social behaviors such as standing straighter or standing with open arms that increase the planarity of the dress's screen. One presumes, too, that certain bodily behaviors would be needed to increase signal strength.

Another spatial shaping force in Studio subTela's work is found in *Maxwell's Equations*, a garment-as-performance piece using antenna designs that wirelessly connect three garments and trigger messages then displayed on the dresses. The performance garment is related to James Maxwell's theories of electromagnetic fields.[22] The operation of the outfits involves the wearers being in specific spatial relationships to each other to strengthen the wireless connection and change messages in the LED arrays on the dress fabrics. Like Dada performance artist Hugo Ball's costume for *Karawane* or those of Oskar Schlemmer's Triadic Ballet, the wearables of *TouchPad Dress* and *Maxwell's Equations* manipulate and constrain the movements of the body. But whereas in the early twentieth-century performances, the body was made clumsy by large conical and bulbous shaped attire, in Studio SubTela's dresses it is rendered superfluous. Colorful flashing lights and a continuously changing screen of the garments require flatness and stillness of the body. Unquestionably, Studio SubTela's wearables exhibit compelling innovation in wearable design, but they differ radically in the type of cognizance they condition in the wearer. Fitted to the body, they demonstrate the concept of upholstery technology, which supports only expressions conditioned by a mediated relationship between the body and technology.

So far, I have drawn contrasts between wearables, such as Hartman's and those of Mann's and Layne's, along the lines of their relationship to physical space, the body and other people to the

extent to which they express or share information. In Mann's case, *EyeTap* (and the series of digital eye glasses leading up to *EyeTap*), are geared toward the specific outcome of objective knowledge that supersedes natural eye sight. Designed and optimized to record everything around the body yet not the body itself on which they rest, they become a kind of parallel existence to the self, a second memory deemed more factual and evidentiary than memory or feeling alone. One could imagine *EyeTap* used creatively and performatively (as in the sci-fi action film *Hardcore Henry*), but Mann himself does not consider the technology self-expressive. Indeed, they have no intention of inciting social engagement. Layne's Studio works more towards the goal of participation and social signaling, yet one, like Mann's mediated through computer realities that transform the body into a projection tool. Both cause no harm and offer possibilities for fun and safety, but meanwhile quiet the *Gesamtkunstwerk* experience of the body, shutting down bigger systems rooted in the biology of whole-body experience, what the Social Body Lab and L.A. Paul see as intrinsic to socialization, subjectivity and broader, and perhaps more meaningful, realms of human expressivity.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The concept of a transformative experience emerged in the field of philosophy in the 1990s. Transformative experiences are ones that shift our

core values and preferences in ways that we cannot predict until undergoing the experience. Some examples include having a child, winning a major competition, or falling in love. In such events, you cannot know the value of the experience until you have it, which means, according to L.A. Paul, how the experience will shape you, your values and how you will assess the experience at the time of its completion is off limits to you prior to the moment of having the experience. In sum, you cannot know your future self's feelings. Although the transformative experience has been examined in a variety of contexts, Paul's *Transformative Experience* (2014) provides an in-depth study of the subject, specifically analyzing how it challenges normative decision theory.[23] Normative decision theory "is important because when we make decisions, we want to make them rationally, at least as rationally as we can, and normative decision theory gives us the models and principles for the procedures we should follow," says Paul.[24] A transformative experience, however, troubles decision theory: the primary reason is because one cannot know how their personal values and first-order preferences will change after the experience. The inaccessibility of such knowledge impedes rational decision making. One of the reasons why certain experiences are so transformative (and how one decides what is right for them or what they prefer as individuals) relates to the importance of sensory experiences.

Paul suggests that experiences are how we know the world. They are fundamentally different from knowledge we might gain from being told about

the world; you have to go out and experience it for yourself. Experience is the best teacher. Quoting David Lewis, she clarifies: "What's essential is that when we learn what an experience is like by having it, we gain abilities to remember, imagine and recognize."[25] To this end, Paul suggests that an experience is perceived and processed through our sensory equipment. Because we see with our eyes (positioned in one frontal area on the head) and touch with fingers, toes and other parts of our body we have a unique sensory make-up that differs from other animals, such as octopi which sense and respond to stimuli through eight long arms; or bats which "see" via echolocation.

One popular thought experiment considers placing a microchip in one's brain. The experiment began with thinking about surgical implants, where a foreign or nonbiological object replaces a damaged one, to revive and complete the original mind-body circuitry. More recently, the experiment has taken another turn, where the microchip not only fixes a broken part of the brain but enhances or outperforms one's natural capabilities. Cognitive philosopher Andy Clark uses the example of a "stock market chip," which alerts one through a vibration or tickling in the mind to variations in the market that one might be otherwise unaware of.[26] Clark and the philosopher David Chalmers argue that many such external tools already exist, such as calculators and slide rulers---devices the mind has become dependent upon in solving problems and thus, like the microchip demonstrate an "extended mind," one that is externalized and sits physically

outside the brain.[27] In the latter cases with handheld tools, thinking involves the use of the hands to hold a calculator and fingers to push it. A smartphone, too, involves acts of grabbing the phone and adjusting it to our eyes. The microchip, because of its speed and invisibility, however, preempts bodily experiences, jumping the gun on conscious decision making, which takes into account sensorial information: we see our hand reach for the phone, but do we really want to check our messages, we have half a second to "feel" it out. The sixth sense-like augmentation of the microchip veers on the programming of experience in Mann and Layne's wearables which circumnavigate around the experiential body described by L.A. Paul as intrinsic to the assemblage of one's subjective preferences.

Though Paul's contention is not whether a microchip or any other decision one makes is good or bad but rather that rationality is severely limited in making the decision to undergo any major transformation, such as microchip neurosurgery. In Paul's words: "if you want to make this choice [to undergo the transformative experience, the microchip surgery] by considering what you want your lived experience to be like in the future, you can't do it rationally. At least, you can't do it by weighing the competing options concerning what it would be like and choosing on this basis."[28] The decision, then, to choose transformation (or not) is tied to an abstract desire to discover the new self: "If you choose to have the transformative experience, to choose rationally, you must prefer

to discover whether and how your preferences will change. If you choose to avoid the transformative experience, to choose rationally, you must prefer not to discover whether and how your preferences will change."[29] Put another way, "you choose in order to discover who you will become."[30] In doing so, the goal and hope is that the experience you have will affect you positively.

Tied to sense perception is the experience of social encounters and physical space, which affect how our subjectivity develops. Paul uses the example of history, pointing to how someone living in 400 BC would likely marvel at our modern world and feel completely unfamiliar in it. Likewise, "people who are not from wealthy, Western societies can interpret and experience the world in radically different ways from people who are," and the same goes for people of different skin colors and gender. "If you are a white businessman living in San Francisco in 2013," she says, "you cannot know what it was like to be a black man involved in the Jamaican rebellion in 1760, hiding out in the forest in the dead of night while British troops comb the island trying to hunt you down."[31] Access to self-knowledge, then, which manifests in our sense of identity, is rooted in the body through interwoven forces of haptic sensations, memory, time and place. This imaginative first-person perspective matters in how we estimate ourselves and define and explain our behaviors. In turn, it matters in how we cannot characterize the experience of others which we ourselves have not had.

A POST-RATIONAL BODY

Hartman's wearables make a case for the exploratory aspect of our felt experience in life. They give us means to augment our perceptions, playfully exploiting in-built biological systems that detect changes of thought and feeling. And, yet, these are not reactive devices, which capture data from the body and transmit it through signals (i.e. affective computing). Instead, they function through conscious capture: the wearer, in sensing a feeling, then activates the wearable, producing an abstract techno-body language. Much like journaling or other creative acts, Hartman's wearables provide means of codifying the experience of emotion, giving form to invisible or less-visible signs of bodily communication. Importantly, these gestures, like the decision-making in the transformative experience, lack a predictable, quantifiable outcome. They are performed rather with the hope of increasing one's positive experience in life and with the goal to obtain well-being through connecting with others, much like decisions of marriage, divorce or adoption, which Paul describes as transformative.

Perhaps, the most important aspect of Hartman's wearables is that they are explicitly social, geared toward supporting interaction between people and foregrounding the experience of being with others in the same physical space. One of Lab's most recent designs is a two-way communication system, which allows two people in a big group

Kate Hartman and the Social Body Lab,
Nudgeables, 2017

Kate Hartman and the Social Body Lab,
Ear Bender, 2011, photo by Michael Dory

to share feelings covertly through custom-designed signals. These wearables or *Nudgeables* work as a pair of wireless accessories (figure 2). Partners customize the sensors or actuators to express specific sensory feedback, deciding how a "nudge" or signal is sent and received. Signals can be transmitted through a hairbow, sock, or necklace, using a range of vibrations or lights.[32] By personalizing social "cues," wearers recreate with more versatility the same experience as an under-the-table kick or a pinch on the back. The most interesting aspect of the device is how it encapsulates the peculiar desire amongst humans to secretly share thoughts with specific people in the presence of others: indeed, humor and absurdity can intensify in exactly these kinds of scenarios.

Perhaps one of the most human of emotions is awkwardness. Hartman portrays this in one of her earliest wearables, *Ear Bender* (figure 3). The wearable is a toboggan with a wrapped funnel extension on one side. One person speaks into the funnel's large opening while the wearer listens, much like the way an ear trumpet works, a type of horn-like hearing aid common before the invention of electronic technologies. Though *Ear Bender* certainly "functions" to amplify a speaker's voice, the title suggests more—that of undesirable one-way communication or, in modern colloquial terms, the experience of having someone talk your ear off. The playful absurdity of the wearable foregrounds a common challenge we experience in in-person interactions with others, which we have yet to

overcome. Such situations are not easy to navigate without perhaps feeling rude if you are the listener or offended if you are the speaker. Even when social cues such as looking in a different direction or walking back are used they may go unnoticed by a loquacious partner. In visualizing the strain of the wearer/listener's neck and in physically engulfing the speaker's head, the toboggan reminds us of the physical experience of communicating in asymmetrical conversations, which is a specifically social and spatial situation.

Hartman calls her wearables "fictitious devices."[33] The suggestion is that they are not real in two senses. Firstly, they are not like functional technologies, such as microphones or cassette players which deliver exact quantities (of sound or playback time). Secondly, they are not real because they are not human even though they imitate the body and emotions. Still, the designer points to how wearables, as interactive systems, can be mistaken for being us: they "live on your body" and they "sometimes even start to feel like a part of you."[34] Like a post-rational body a fictitious device neither performs tasks with algorithms or equations, nor represents a kind of functionalist tool. Instead, it registers perception and, in turn, expresses our intuition to communicate felt experience for the sake of connection. Of course, however, the techno body language conveyed by the wearable is not us, but nevertheless it feels perhaps closest to what we might define as us and our identity. Hartman's wearables, thus, elevate the role of subjectivity

Kate Hartman, Adam Tindale, Nick Puckett for the Tapestry Opera, *R.U.R. A Torrent of Light costumes*, 2022, photo by Dahlia Katz

within the (rational) decision to interact, expressively, as a means of obtaining a sense of well-being.

In 2018, Hartman collaborated with Toronto's Tapestry Opera in the production of the play *R.U.R. A Torrent of Light* based closely on the play *Rossum's Universal Robots* by Karel Čapek—the first piece of literature to introduce the term "robot" or human-like machine to the English language. Working with a team of musicians and costume designers, Hartman designed wearables for the actors playing robots by sewing custom-built Arduinos into their clothing.[35] Throughout the play, transitions in color (from blue to pink) and sound (made by robot's gestures) signaled their emotional and cognitive evolution from a life as non-sensing mechanical workers to autonomous, sentient beings. What would it feel like for the robots—or anyone—to gain consciousness; such a question would certainly perplex one who had never known consciousness before, emerging only for the first time from sleep. This indeed might be much like what a transformative experience would *feel* like. Yet, how would one articulate this felt experience?

In the case of *A Torrent of Light* wearables symbolized the awakening of subjectivity in the robots. Phenomenologically, they communicated an ineffable experience. As an interface for emotions that arose from the body, they demonstrated a process of transformation. Without any idea of what it would be like to become human, the robots chose it and with some rational knowledge, but

only that which would allow them to reckon with the idea that they were choosing to become different—something new that would ultimately alter their core values as robots. Such embodied knowledge is a type of post-rational knowledge; a felt experience outside a realm of empiricism that one nevertheless "reasons" with. This is the sentiment Paul describes in characterizing decisions we make about our subjecthood:

> We should not replace our first personal deliberation with what is, in effect, a program that applies an empirically determined or morally determined behavioral algorithm to our decisions, so that as agents faced with decisions, we merely feed in an initial possibility and wait for the computer or the scientist (or the philosopher) to tell us how to act. As individuals facing personal life choices, as real people making decisions about our futures, we don't just want to know what others tell us about the probabilities and values of outcomes, or to have the computation of the outcome determined independently of our personal inclinations. We want to know what *we* think and what *we* care about.[36]

That we are presented persuasive arguments for the design and use of many technologies daily indicates humans' adamant curiosity in the future and a willingness to accept new identities without the

logic we sometimes believe (or wish) our decisions to be more dependent on. In a sense, Hartman's human-centric wearables index this vulnerability or instability of self humorously, electronically. "In such cases, which include many real-life contexts where we simply do not have epistemic access to the subjective values of our future lived experiences, I argue that we should choose rationality plus revelation. We must embrace the epistemic fact that, in real-life cases of making major life decisions in transformative contexts, we have very little to go on," says Paul.[37] Returning to the context of Silicon Valley, English-Luek writes that transforming technologies are what perpetuates the "origin myth of technological resilience."[38] Is this myth merely the drive for transformation that defines a post-rational body of porcupine vests and flickering hair bows? Likely, then, the decision to discover new subjectivities is the essence of technological development itself in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1 See for example Oğuz Buruk, Ella Dagan, et al. *Playful Wearables: Understanding the Design Space of Wearables for Games and Related Experiences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2024). One of the earliest research scholars to identify and discuss social wearables is Elena Márquez Segura. See Segura, "Designing Future Social Wearables with Live Action Role Play (Larp) Designers,"

Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 461: 1 -14. CHI '18. New York: AMC. https://doi.org/10.1145/3173574.3174036/

2 Kate Hartman, in discussion with the author, October 26, 2023.

3 Arduinos were invented in the late 1990s. The Lilypad Arduino, designed by Leah Buechley, has sewtabs around the edge of the circuit board and is intended for use with fabric-based wearables. For more on the Lilypad Arduino and how they work see Kate Hartman's *Make: Wearable Electronics* (Sebastopol: Maker Media, Inc., 2014), 92-95.

4 Hartman's work cannot be separated from the work of her graduate students at the Social Body Lab and vice versa; thus, I sometimes use Hartman's name and SBL interchangeably. The one exception is in Hartman's design of Porcupine Vest and *Ear Bender*, which to my knowledge were her own designs.

5 Rebecca Chan, "Transformative Experience," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2024), accessed July 10, 2024, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transformative-experience/.

6 For a recent consideration of technology and the transformative experience see Bruno Latour's *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies,* particularly the chapter "A Collective of Humans and Nonhumans" (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999), 174-219. Latour comes closest to the examination of our use of technology as a transformative experience, however his analyses do not intersect with decision theory and its outcome on the individual as in L.A. Paul's work. Latour also does not use the phrasing "transformative experience." Another important

text that considers in broader terms transformation and technology as it relates to the body in art/design is Anna Munster's *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics* (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006).

7 J.A. English-Lueck, *Cultures@SiliconValley* 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 8-9; 22.

8 See Susan Elizabeth Ryan's *Garments of Paradise: Wearables Discourse in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 95-99.

9 Kate Hartman, "Porcupine Vest," Kate Hartman Projects, http://www.katehartman.com/porcupine-vest/. accessed July 12, 2024.

10 For more on the design process see Kate Hartman, Boris Kourtoukov, Izzie Colpitts-Campbell, and Erin Lewis's "Monarch V2: An Iterative Design Approach to Prototyping a Wearable Electronics Project," in *Proceedings of the 2020 ACM Designing Interactive Systems Conference (DIS '20)*, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1145/3357236.3395573

11 Kate Hartman, "Monarch." Kate Hartman Projects. http://socialbodylab.com/monarch-v2/ accessed July 12, 2024.

12 Ibid. See also Hartman, Kate. Jackson McConnell, Boris Kourtoukov, Hillary Predko, and Izzie Colpitts-Campbell "Monarch: Self-expression through Wearable Kinetic Textiles," in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference on Tangible, Embedded, and Embodied Interaction* (New York: ACM. 2015), 413-414. https://doi.org/10.1145/2677199.2690875.

13 Anouk Wipprect website, "About Me." https://www.anoukwipprecht.nl/about-me-shift#bio, accessed October 20, 2024.

14 Susan Elizabeth Ryan, *Garments of Paradise: Wearable Discourse in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 100-103.

15 Steve Mann, "Telepointer," 1998, http://wearcam.org/telepointerplusfigs.pdf, accessed July 2, 2024.

16 Steve Mann, "Steve Mann: My Augmented Live," 2013, https://spectrum.ieee.org/steve-mann-my-augmediated-life, accessed July 2nd, 2024.

17 Steve Mann, "Mann Lab," http://manlab.com/eyetap. accessed October 3rd, 2024.

18 Steve Mann, "Through the Glass, Lightly," *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine* (Fall 2012), 14.

19 See for example Geoffrey Batchen's *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

20 Clark, Andy, *The Experience Machine: How Our Minds Predict and Shape Reality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2023), 134-136.

21 Rebeccah Pailes-Friedman, *Smart Textiles for Designers: Inventing the Future of Fabrics* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016), 128-133.

22 Studio subTela website, https://subteladownloads.wordpress.com/2017/08/18/maxwells-equations/, accessed September 28, 2024.

23 Chan, "Transformative Experience."

24 L.A. Paul, *The Transformative Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21.

25 Ibid., Paul quoting David Lewis, 10.

26 Clark, *The Experience Machine*, 166-167; 170.

27 Ibid., 169. David Chalmer also discusses similar concepts in his recent *Reality+ Virtual Worlds*

and the Problems of Philosophy (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2022), 296 – 301.

28 Paul, *Transformative Experience*, 2.

29 Ibid., 118.

30 Ibid., 119.

31 Ibid., 7.

32 Kate Hartman, "Nudgeables." Kate Hartman Projects. http://www.katehartman.com/projects/nudgeables/ accessed July 12, 2024.

33 Kate Hartman in interview with Antonius Wiriadjaja, *Art 21 Magazine*, July 27, 2011. https://magazine.art21.org/2011/07/27/open-enrollment-kate-hartman-talks-to-herself-and-the-art21-blog/, accessed January 14, 2024.

34 Hartman, *Make: Electronic Wearables*, xi.

35 For more on the design process see Kate Hartman, Nick Puckett, and Adam Tindale's "Designing Wearable Technology for Opera," in *Proceedings of the 2023 ACM Designing Interactive Systems Conference (DIS '23)*, 2023.
https://doi.org/10.1145/3563657.3596113

36 Paul, *Transformative Experience*, 128.

37 Ibid., 122.

38 English-Lueck, *Cultures@SiliconValley*, 22.

SOCIAL LOGISTICS
The Heart of a Shipwreck

Annie Simpson & James Enos

Begin:

> Together, we share an ongoing project *Port Futures + Social Logistics*. It's a platform that looks at materials, environmental histories, and infrastructure across the southeastern United States, North Sea, and east Asia in relation to energy transition, climate, and labor internationally. We are interested in port-city-hinterland geographies that connect circulation studies and struggles to planetary urban critique, but primary aim is to develop an artistic methodology rooted in suspending belief in any singular spatial theory as a way of knowing.
>
> We've worked through networks to produce images simultaneously that do not privilege one place-based instance over another. You just

saw a brief collection of videos from our first summit a minute ago, and now, CC Chang's port of Kaohsiung (TW) piece.

We are constantly asking: How do you enter questions of urbanization through a position of action, while maintaining subjectivity within its systemization? In the simplest sense, we are suggesting that something occurs when you place yourself in the frame with others.

As we tend to practice dialogically, through conversation and sharing, we figured we would reenact a little bit of that here and now. So, we will drift through a set of ideas surrounding Providence Canyon, which is a contested site / history in Southwest Georgia that is of interest to both of us.

Much of our collaborative work is about disassembling, revisiting, and sharing longer conversations. Likewise, what we will offer today has been culled from a few years of dialog. We think, what's at stake, is an instance of how we might begin to tease out a theory of relationships between what we are terming personal time, the social object of shared or collective time, and *The Times* per se. With movement across the three, out of necessity …

So, let's get started.

隔年，來自高雄西南端的富底漁村「紅毛港」的漁民出海捕烏魚時意外連三次撈獲一顆頭顱

A fisherman from Hongmaogang village, then a rich fishing village in the southwestern tip of Kaohsiung, accidentally caught a head three times in a row when he was fishing mullets the next year.

To the editors:

James and I were quite happy to receive your email last week, and we both appreciate your new provocation and were thankful for a reason to return to the work. I acknowledge the time it takes on your end to process a revised submission; your willingness to be in dialog is heartening. We are, however, at this juncture, unable to speak so directly and concretely about the images. We are neither documentarians nor photojournalists, and as I allude to in the new text, we are fighting against the grain in the long history of Southern photography. We would like to imagine that our ongoing exchanges might break the idea of image as knowing. Embedded in this work, of which you are all now a part of, is the reflexivity of questioning questions, authors and artists questioning themselves, against the sublime violence of certainty.

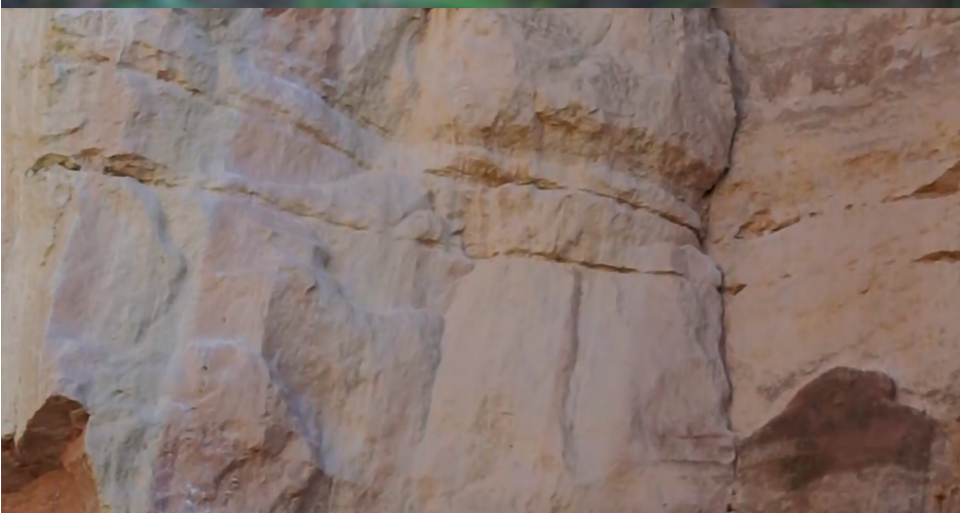
> I am compelled to explain an interest in *feeling* as a type of abstraction that is post-reference. Something that behaves more like energy or a pattern which changes very slowly-

Yeah, it's hard to go into the thing, but under discussing this, post-truth is not the accurate term. Maybe post-hope is more

accurate. Right? Like, you're talking about how you hope that shared reality resonates.

> I won't contest that this is a watershed moment in vision. One that is equal parts social organization, maintenance of ocularity, and distribution confronting paradigms of participation and power. However, *Post-hope*, seems to say something more about the means for rendering belief; notwithstanding new realms of verification to be determined.
>
> Where, *Old-hope* (in stability as a possibility), now, looks like a plea to stillness in the face of nonlinearity; facilitating representations of lived space; our instant past.
>
> It's not that any complete set of physical relations has changed, right? The issue is more about looking at something that's two-hundred years old against something six million years old when they are being made the same way in real time. We are not accustomed to parsing pictures that break associations in this way.

One might even call it sublime. But it's a folly: a spectacular testimony to man and his mistakes – according to the park's visitor's center at least. It's just flatly ironic: a network of massive gullies caused by poor farming practices, or to say the blatantly rapacious extraction of enslaved peoples



labor toward monocultural over-production, equaling soil destabilization, not on the terms of historic marker, nor visited via image or hike, but I guess irony is too superficial an tool to plumb it.

> Providence Canyon presents us with option A or option B in terms of our subject expectations.
>
> The first, relies on images being tethered to certainty. This is about notions of evidence that tell us something of time and place. Even when we consider these as indexical fragments, they still allude to what's before and after, my time, our time, their time, the times. They offer stoppages in a world that no longer permits them.
>
> When we accept the B pill, however. Our surplus reality made of images increasingly exacerbates untethered and doubtful fields. Where, Irregardless of intention, knowing them becomes inherently more like the practice of art. And whether you see them, make them, or become the subject of them– this sets up a powerful paradox for how we sense (let alone understand) change.

They used to believe that the canyon was an act of God. Its name is derived from Providence Methodist Church, which teeters up on the rim.

> I'm reminded of Sloterdijk's simplification of what has paradigmatically changed. He suggests that we can no longer look at landscapes, images, or notions of nature, as inoperable scenery, as backdrops for us grand animals to carry out the theater of daily life upon.
>
> To which I'll add, we can neither be taken seriously as the premier collectors of sensual events. Because our backgrounds are all but crashing into our foregrounds, and in turn this process is blurring our time as a subject. It is as if, quite literally: technological, geological, and climatological surface transformation are registering us irrespective of agency or dignity.

It's been destabilized. No matter what destabilized it or if you destabilized it through doesn't matter. Your understanding of 200 years of agriculture doesn't really matter.

> In this regard, making the canyon's image is unstable regardless of who tends to it, because the representation of things as 'things' has become untethered now, right?

Then, perhaps we can imagine dialog as a form of vision. If it's two people instead of one being a confessional, right, how do you resolve, or how do you set up the duet

between something like 'the decay of the temporal continuum renders existence radically fragile. The soul is permanently exposed to the danger of death and the terror of nothingness, because the event which wrests it from death lacks any duration.'

> I appreciate this snippet from Han. Can you read those two sentences again? One as if one was you, then wait to hear one, as if somebody was talking back to you-

The decay of the temporal continuum renders existence radically fragile.

> The soul is permanently exposed to the danger of death and the terror of nothingness, because the event which wrests it from death lacks any duration.'

I like thinking that there can be a gentle way of introducing some of these larger problems of land and time. In a way that's frame shaking and vague, that tries to suspend what the image would be forced to do or what I can't show you.

Bruno Latour argues that one consequence of this present temporal condition is a paradoxical flipping of the Enlightenment regime in which the animated human subject transfers intention to objects.

Presently, the object is re-animated and the subject is consequently de-animated.

> Not far from the Canyon where the Chattahoochee meets the fall line is the river city of Columbus. It is something of an integrated political and economic history tied succinctly to knowing itself as an object of dispossession and expansion.
>
> One of its recent stages of redevelopment involved the recontouring and paving of the river to make way for an urban whitewater attraction.
>
> There are curious parallels here: while the material interests of boosters' trend toward monocultures, they in turn, simulate geologic processes, and yield unintended imaginaries dealing in larger time frames.
>
> Suffice to say, I was recently there interviewing CSU's Earth & Space Sciences Professor, Clint Barineau. We were watching a kayaker ride a mechanical standing wave in the center of the river. Without much prompting, we both shared a look, so I asked him– "What do you think?" to which he said:
>
> "Hey, when I look out there, I see the Himalayas."
>
> He was, of course, referring to the rough coordinates we would be standing on if we were able to ride Pangea to this place now.

In 1932, James Agee drove through Greensboro, Alabama, coincidentally on this very fall line, working on what would become *Let us Now Praise Famous Men*. He wrote upon encountering the sounds and the embedded time in the landscape,

"It is the voice of a blond, fat, and craven rooster, a creature half-frightened of his own wives; and in this poor voice of his, lugubrious, almost surreptitious, he is making a statement he so misbelieves that it is rather a question that expects no answer save the utter scorn and denial of silence; and it gets none: but serves only to remind one of the noises of the night, which perhaps have not at any time ceased.

They have perhaps at no time ceased, but that will never be surely known, they are, after a while, so easily lost: and one hears them once again with a quiet sort of surprise, that only slowly becomes the realization, or near certainty, that they have been there all the while."

I'm reminded of Faulkner, writing about concurrently of the same soil, the abundance and searing presence of sound in the void of night. I imagine these sounds as punctuation in the air, crackles of the tears and textures which accumulate on the tape that won't stop playing over and over to some antebellum age. As Faulkner writes, man's attempt to conquer time is a

battlefield: a site (crucially the land, not the battle itself) which reveals to the subject their own follies. I'd like to take this as philosophical position which considers unanswered questions and the inevitable distances of time seriously: when folly and irony are too superficial as analytical tools to plumb what's at stake, insofar as irony always demands distance, there remains a call to enter the frame, the field, and contend with these things directly, rather than from a safe and normalized distance.

> When one can no longer resolve images against time, and time becomes no longer reliable to space, then, where better a moment for the field to act as a practice per say?
>
> Social objecthood, could mean something as simple as this: sharing a collective turn in-between the personal and fleeting notion of 'the times" (lands, places, etc.).

There's something to keeping field notes of time in this way. Staying on nodding terms - to borrow from Didion - with past selves and past times. It's a way of accounting for change: archiving in this way is not as if you are committing yourself to always feeling or thinking this way as you are in this instance of time, or pretending to know anything in one instance of time. It's about how you

remain on nodding terms with these systems of temporal change and thought pattern change that you can't know in the moment.

Maybe this is the idea of calling into the center a field journal that is not your own.

But the impulse of it not just being your own isn't that you're trying to ground truth, something you know, like you're trying to send out all of these different pings in order to make sure the map is accurate and evenly distributed or holds on ground level as if you're cross referencing and fact-checking the whole world.

It's not that at all. The artifact as a form of truth, however it's made, is increasingly suspicious-

If you say you want to experience change, you have to want to be changed by other people and things. That said, any lure of belonging to the social object would be an encounter with what you can't see: a wider sensing or marking- entirely

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NOTES

1 We've borrowed this idea from Paul Sutter's environmental history of Providence Canyon, which informs much of our thinking on the site: Paul Sutter, Let Us Now Praise Famous Gullies (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

2 Davis, Heather M., and Etienne Turpin. Art in the anthropocene: Encounters among aesthetics, politics, environments and epistemologies. (Open Humanities Press, 2015). 334.

3 Byung-Chul Han, The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017).

4 Bruno Latour, Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime, trans. Catherine

5 Porter (Cambridge: Polity, 2017). Joseph Kuhn summarizes this idea well and applies it to the Southern literary tradition: Joseph Kuhn, "Mesopotamian Faulkner: As I Lay Dying and the Southern Anthropocene in the 1930s," in Er(r)go 1 (42), 2021: 231–45.

6 James Agee and Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1960), 84.

7 William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York: Random House, 1956).

8 Joan Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook" in Slouching Towards Bethlehem (London: Andre Deutch, 1969).

ABOVENESS

Jane Blocker

The proper word to describe my topic ought to be "superiority," that is, the quality of being higher in position, but the word's other connotations suggest an ill-fitting fixity that I do not intend and a hierarchical value that I reject. Superiority, when it bothers to do so, looks down coldly, imperiously, on what is below, whereas aboveness looks up at, warily points to, and instinctively understands what is overhead. A form of what affect theorists call "other than conscious knowing," it is something we comprehend from the ground about things that linger threateningly in the sky.[1]

I have in mind the helicopter, which was built to hover. That is to say, unlike airplanes, helicopters have the ability to occupy rather than merely pass through space. While they are sometimes used to get somewhere in a hurry, their capacity for lingering, their "aboveness" (made possible by the downward force of air that their helical blade produces), manifests an engagement with and tense

awareness of the ground. Designed for looking, helicopters desirously surveil. Their hovering—the deafening sound of the rotor with its concussive force, the microclimate of wind it produces—is disciplinary. A form of the Althusserian hail, the helicopter functions ideologically and calls to what is beneath.[2]

One need only watch the brief scene, shot from a helicopter, near the middle of Peter Davis's 1974 Vietnam War documentary *Hearts and Minds* to appreciate the verity of that claim. The drone of chopper blades punctuated by machine gun fire serves as the soundtrack for the unnarrated sequence. At first, the camera is positioned behind a helmeted soldier seated in the front of the helicopter and takes on his point of view as he looks out the windscreen and open doorway to the right at the jungle below (fig. 1). The camera, its lenses rhyming with the helicopter's windows, pans across the landscape with a thatched building in the foreground as it becomes the target of machine gun fire. The shot cuts to a view of a second helicopter flying at the same level close by and the gunfire that explodes from it, and then to a third that has landed down below, its rotor still spinning

Figures 1 (top) and 2 (bottom). Stills from *Hearts and Minds*, 1974, color film, 112 min., showing helicopter gunfire and the force of the wind created by the chopper blades, directed by Peter Davis, (BBC Productions, published under fair use; screenshots by the author)

ferociously and pushing the tall grass in waves that move in concentric circles as three American soldiers jump down and begin to move out, bending to avoid the blades (fig. 2).

Finally, the scene cuts to a downward shot where the helicopter cum camera whips the leaves of trees and underbrush to reveal a terrified Vietnamese man, clad in an undershirt and work pants, and another person (it is very difficult to tell whether it is a child or a woman) attempting futilely to hide in the tall grass (fig. 3). Presumably, the aircraft omnisciently hovers there to point out to the soldiers on the ground where to locate the enemy. Blown by the machine-made tempest, the two people attempt to stand upright, and the camera captures the tops of their heads (no longer bothering even to look up at the menacing aircraft) as they embrace and await their fate (fig. 4). This is a moment in which a particular kind of knowledge is manifest, and it is that knowledge which this essay attempts to understand.

It is the helicopter's disciplinary force that artist Alfredo Jaar attempted to capture in his video installation *06.01.2020 18.39*, which was

Figures 3 (top) and 4 (bottom). Stills from *Hearts and Minds*, 1974, color film, 112 min., showing Vietnamese civilians, directed by Peter Davis, (BBC Productions, published under fair use; screenshots by the author)

featured in the Whitney Biennial exhibition *Quiet as It's Kept* in 2022. At five-minute intervals, visitors were admitted to and required to remain in a dimly lit black-box gallery, its walls painted black, its floor covered in low pile charcoal gray carpeting (fig. 5). Projected on the wall to the far right of the entrance was a grainy black-and-white video compilation of footage—originally in color and shot from different angles by different people primarily using cell phones, who then posted it online—of the Black Lives Matter protest that took place in Washington, D.C. on June 1st of 2020 in response to the murder of George Floyd the previous week.

The protest was met with military force when Trump Administration officials ordered the Park Police and National Guard to clear the crowd from Lafayette Square and the streets surrounding it, so that the President could cross the square to appear for a photo-op at St. John's Episcopal Church, which is situated to the north across the street from the park. Trump had assembled reporters in the Rose Garden, where he planned to address the nation, and after identifying himself by saying, "I am your president of law and order," he declared, "As we speak, I am dispatching thousands and thousands of heavily armed soldiers. We are putting

Figure 5. Installation view, Alfredo Jaar, *06.01.2020 18.39*, 2022, black and white video, 5 min. 20 sec., courtesy of the artist

everybody on warning."[3] He then led a small parade of White House staff, security, and reporters across the square to the church, where he posed for now infamous pictures in which he is shown holding a Bible upside down (fig. 6).

Figure 6. Donald Trump posing in front of St. John's Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C., June 1, 2020. Photograph by Shealah Craighead

Jaar's video, organized in three sections, begins with images of protesters on H Street with fists raised, carrying signs and chanting "Hands up! Don't shoot!" and "No justice, no peace!" (fig. 7) In the next segment, loud bangs echo startlingly

Figure 7. Still from Alfredo Jaar, *06.01.2020 18.39*, 2022, black and white video, 5 min. 20 sec., showing Black Lives Matter protesters, courtesy of the artist

in the room as protesters who are hit with pepper balls, chemical grenades and smoke bombs run in all directions or cluster together (in ways reminiscent of the Vietnamese captives in Davis's film) and turn their backs to the forces arrayed against them (fig. 8). We then watch as a helicopter (later

Figure 8. Still from Alfredo Jaar, *06.01.2020 18.39*, 2022, black and white video, 5 min. 20 sec., showing protesters under attack by police and National Guard, courtesy of the artist

identified by an unnamed Army official as a UH-72 Lakota) comes into view above the crowd and lowers itself to within fifty feet above those assembled on the street (fig. 9).[4] As the projected image of the helicopter descends, powerful industrial fans mounted to the ceiling of the gallery turn on and

Figure 9. Still from Alfredo Jaar, *06.01.2020 18.39*, 2022, black and white video, 5 min. 20 sec., showing Lakota helicopter descending on protesters, courtesy of the artist

blow ferociously as protesters on screen struggle to stay upright against the fearsome storm created by the helicopter's blades (fig. 10). Some, with arms outstretched, playfully, defiantly lean forward into and are held up by the wind (fig. 11).

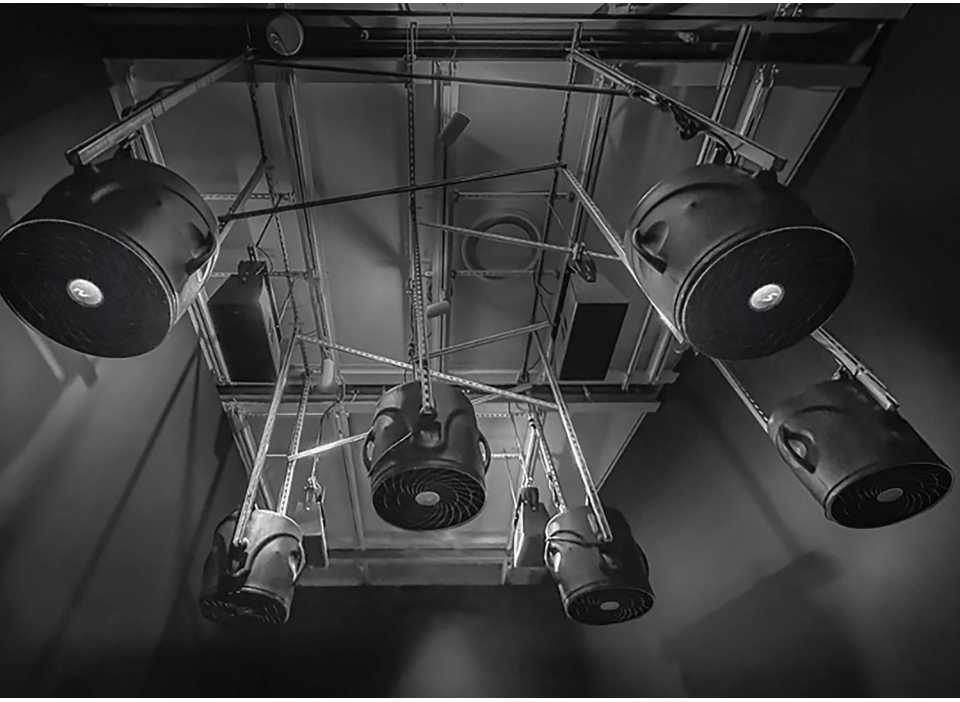

Figure 10. Installation view of fans, Alfredo Jaar, *06.01.2020 18.39*, 2022, black and white video, 5 min. 20 sec., courtesy of the artist

While some critics praised the work and described it as "gut-wrenching," others strongly criticized it. Barry Schwabsky, writing for *The Nation*, called it a "signal disappointment" and questioned what he described as the installation's "fun house special effect[s],"[5] while Valerie Werder

Figure 11. Still from Alfredo Jaar, *06.01.2020 18.39*, 2022, black and white video, 5 min. 20 sec., showing protesters leaning into the wind created by the helicopter, courtesy of the artist

claimed in *Flash Art* that "the overall effect [of the work] is that of a cheap thrill, an IMAX movie." She went on to say, "Jaar's installation provides all the pleasure of political action without the attendant dangers of having to leave the museum."[6] Peter Brock asserted in *Frieze* that the work "cheapened and oversimplified [the concept of protest] by Jaar's singling out of one particularly cinematic episode."[7] And Jace Clayton said in *Artforum* that the work failed because it used "documentary-filmmaking techniques to decontextualize black emotion" and by virtue of its "outmoded sense of mimesis," which prevented it from tapping "into any of the collective energies or grassroots media practices that made these protests so resonant."[8] In short, the installation was maligned as overly theatrical and cinematic, commercial, and removed from the mortal risks of real political action.

This was not the first time, of course, that the question of art's relationship to politics became an issue at the Whitney Biennial. In 1993, the museum (under the curatorial leadership of Thelma Golden, Elizabeth Sussman, John Hanhardt, and Lisa Phillips) attempted to diversify the roster of participating artists and display work that directly addressed the era's political struggles against sexism, racism, and homophobia. Famously, their efforts were met with vehement negative criticism in the pages of *Newsweek*, *October*, and *Nation*, particularly about the decision to display the amateur videotape taken by a bystander, George Holliday, of Rodney King being beaten by four Los Angeles police officers in 1991.

With respect to that controversy, Arthur Danto wrote that the video was "*not* art" and that "nothing can or should make a work of art out of that tape."[9] He was writing from a position of wanting to preserve art's status as a special object of disinterested contemplation, one removed from the mundanities of the real. But the sort of amateur video he dismisses in 1993 as having the "flat and uninflected effect of reality"—as irrelevant to capital-A art made by actual artists—becomes ascendant by 2022. For contemporary writers, the online sources from which Jaar culled material for his work constitute the "grassroots media practices" that put Jaar's Art to shame. It is ironic that, within a matter of less than thirty years, the show's critics changed their tune such that concerns about reality being passed off as art became a condemnation of art being passed off as real politics.

While the remarks made about *06.01.2020 18.39* were designed to be quick jabs in pithy reviews and were not offered as part of substantial works of philosophy, they betray an epistemological shift that is worth examining. What happened in the interim between the early nineties and today that causes us to cling so tightly to reality, the true experience, the world outside of the palaces of art? More specifically, what has brought us to turn away from the critique of rationalism in the late twentieth century—the decades-long expression of concerns by feminists, affect theorists, and object-oriented ontologists about the sexist, racist, and extractive ideologies that are practiced in its name—to its reification in the first quarter of the

twenty-first? While I'm sure there are a lot of possible answers to those questions, with respect to this specific artwork, in making their assertions, I suspect that the reviewers were trying to hold the line of truth against the very forms of theatricality, prevarication, conspiracy theory, and unapologetic racism that were (and are again) central features of the Trump White House.

Their efforts are premised on the idea that there is still a meaningful difference between reality and performance, sober truth and cinematic *mise en scène*, religious faith and a mishandled stage prop. While I certainly share that impulse, I also remember Brian Massumi writing, "What is not actually real can be felt into being."[10] So I worry that their approach risks advancing a rather limiting view of the potentiality of performance and the cinematic to express truth, that it simultaneously worries about and underestimates the potency of theatrical gestures (whether Trump's or Jaar's), and ultimately, that it misinterprets the artist's work. It fails to see that, more than just showing and commodifying the drama of June 1st, 2020, Jaar comments on modes of knowing. The video, intentionally blurred and converted to black and white so as to distance the viewer from its illusionistic realism and spliced together from numerous online sources, asks about how we know state power in the time of AI and fake news.

This essay reexamines Jaar's work to think about what such claims might mean in the deep fake era, where reality often exceeds knowing and

cannot be definitively verified, and where theatre is as real as machine gun fire or tear gas. It does so from the perspective of recognition, which I consider to be a form of post-rational visuality, to argue that it creates a kind of knowledge that we might call "aboveness," a word that attempts to capture the prevailing sense of fear and panic (fear and panic as important forms of knowledge) produced by the calamities experienced by particular subjects that occur increasingly from overhead. In the words of Mario Vasquez, a supporter of the Whitney installation, "Jaar effectively puts you there and shares the experience as brutality is met from above."[11]

About recognition, novelist and theorist Amitav Ghosh writes:

> The most important element of the word *recognition* thus lies in its first syllable, which harks back to something prior, an already existing awareness that makes possible the passage from ignorance to knowledge: a moment of recognition occurs when a prior awareness flashes before us, effecting an instant change in our understanding of that which is beheld. Yet this flash cannot appear spontaneously; it cannot disclose itself except in the presence of its lost other. The knowledge that results from recognition, then, is not of the same kind as the discovery of something new: it arises rather from a renewed reckoning with a potentiality that lies within itself.[12]

Ghosh here dwells on the "re" of "re-cognition," which means "to know again." It is a pleated form of knowing that folds together one or more moments in time, drawing a heavy thread from what he calls "a prior awareness," a "potentiality," to the present instance. Its temporal doubling is not a matter of simple repetition, nor, as he explains, of "the discovery of something new," but rather a sudden re-seeing, a re-knowing something that was, until that moment, either lost—from experience, from awareness, from memory—or simply deactivated until it is matched by (or rhymed with) something in the present. Finally, although Ghosh implies it, he does not discuss the fact that with respect to the "flash" that occurs in the moment of beholding, recognition is, I want to suggest, a predominantly visual form of apprehension.

It certainly was for Alfredo Jaar when he watched television coverage and Internet postings of the June 1st protest and saw the helicopter. "Coming from Chile, from Latin America," he says in an interview, "helicopters are for me a synonym for death flights. In Chile, hundreds of bodies were dropped from helicopters into the ocean by the military dictatorship. In Argentina, it was thousands of bodies."[13] Born in Chile in 1956, Jaar was just seventeen in 1973 when Marxist president Salvador Allende, who had been elected in a close race just three years earlier, was overthrown in a U.S.-backed military coup, to be replaced by dictator Augusto Pinochet.

Not only were helicopters and airplanes a signature feature of Pinochet's regime after he took power, but they were also instrumental in the coup itself. Brazilian photographer Osni Geraldo Gomes, who lived in Santiago at the time of the coup, remembered seeing the bombing of La Moneda, the presidential palace. "Helicopters flying at low height aimed at the buildings where snipers were shooting back. Those, whenever caught in the streets, were shot down on the spot."[14] Eduardo Creus, an Argentine journalist, noted that, "After 5:00, leaving the house was impossible. You couldn't even peek out the door because police patrols started in my neighborhood, forcing everyone to remain inside. At nightfall there was surveillance by copters and land vehicles, and you heard shooting, ceaselessly, small caliber arms against big ones, especially machine guns."[15]

Such uses of the helicopter—as a tool of surveillance, an aerial platform from which to fire weapons, a warning device, and a means of torture and extrajudicial killing—were known not only in Latin America in this period, but also in Vietnam. Barton Osborn, an Army Intelligence officer for the C.I.A., in an interview that appears in *Hearts and Minds*, describes participating in what he calls an "airborne interrogation" during which a Vietnamese captive of the U.S. military was thrown out of a helicopter to his death for not providing information to his inquisitors. Osborn's matter-of-fact description of the incident and the filmmaker's presenting it without fanfare or commentary

begs the question: Why bother tossing someone out of a helicopter when a single bullet fired in a back room might do the trick just as well?

Obviously, there is something theatrical about the practice, as though the victim had been summoned by God himself—positioned overhead, seeing all—to answer for his crimes. The instantaneity of judgement, the satisfying immediacy in carrying out the sentence, the delicious poetry of the damned plummeting downward to hell—it's a theatrical set piece that retains its impact some fifty years after Pinochet took power and the U.S. abandoned its war in Vietnam.

In 2019, the online superstore Amazon was forced to remove from its inventory "garments emblazoned with Pinochet's face alongside images of helicopters or slogans such as 'Free Helicopter Rides.'" T-shirts depicting "a body in freefall from a helicopter beneath the caption 'Wanna take a ride' or [that] showed a helicopter with the legend 'Pinochet Is My Co-Pilot'" were marketed directly to Trump supporters and so-called patriots.[16] In an op-ed for *The Guardian* in February of 2024, columnist Moustafa Bayoumi explains that such references to Pinochet are common among the right-wing fringe (including such groups as the Boogaloo Boys, Oath Keepers, and Proud Boys) but have also emerged in the discourse of sitting politicians such as Georgia Congressman Mike Collins, who tweeted, in response to a picture of immigrant Jhoan Boada flipping off reporters after having been accused of assaulting two New York police

officers, "we could buy him a ticket on Pinochet Air for a free helicopter ride back."[17] The quip, which Collins refused to delete, coming as it did after the 2020 protests and Trump's show of military force against peaceful demonstrators, doesn't seem like a joke. As was the case in Vietnam and Chile in 1973, the protests in 2020 saw helicopters intimidatingly "flying at low height," the imposition of curfews to control opposition, and the use of military grade weapons against civilians (machine guns in Santiago and chemical grenades in Washington, D.C.).

I was alone in the gallery when I saw Jaar's installation, and after the video ended, I exited the space, found an obscure corner of an adjoining hallway (that floor of the exhibition was purposefully designed to be very dark) and burst into tears. The flood of emotion that I experienced (unprecedented in my long museum-going career) was an expression of recognition. In that moment in 2022, I relived the horrifying news from two years earlier of George Floyd's murder on May 25th and the protests that took place in Minneapolis in the days that followed. In that moment, when the projected video placed me in the midst of the protesters and my hair and clothing were whipped by the mechanically produced wind, I remembered the sound of helicopters.

Between May 26 and May 31st of 2020, the city where I live was the site of civil unrest. The sound of helicopter blades cutting the air was deafening at times. Aircraft (or what the Washington D.C.

National Guard later called, with reference to the incident at Lafayette Square, "rotary aviation assets") from local news media, police, the National Guard, the U.S. Army, DHS, FBI, and DEA flew over the city like swarms of insects. An interactive, color-coded map created by investigative journalist

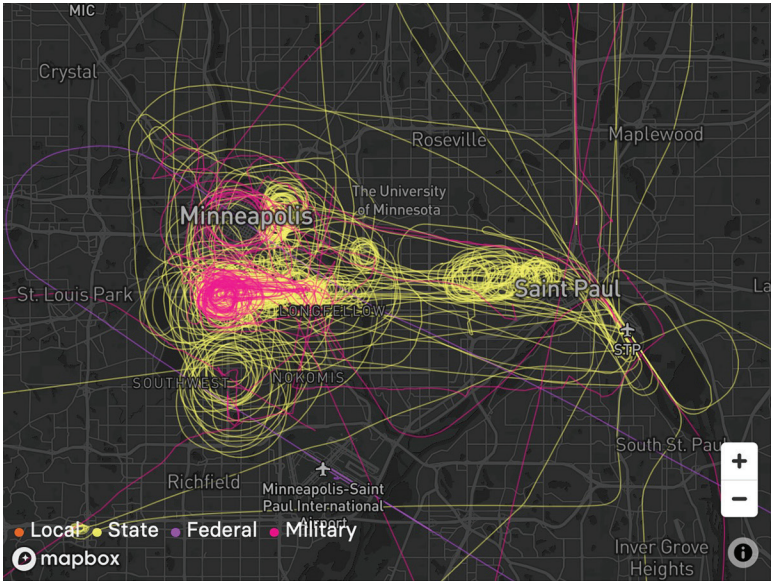

Figure 12. Peter Aldhous, "Find the Police and Military Planes That Monitored the Protests in Your City with These Maps," *BuzzFeed News*, June 2, 2020

Peter Aldhous and published by *BuzzFeed News* shows aircraft patterns over Minneapolis and St. Paul recorded over the weekend of May 29-May 31, 2020 (fig. 12). The intense concentration of lines hint at the sheer volume of air traffic congestion, and the tight loops centered over downtown and South Minneapolis record the hovering and hint at the sinking recognition it caused among local residents who experienced aboveness.[18] Those living near the site of the protests began to recognize (to re-know) the helicopters—Black Hawks, various Bell models, and one Predator drone operated by Homeland Security—by their sizes, colors, designs, and patterns of movement.[19]

Although some of these flights were used to reposition military and police personnel, or transport the injured to hospitals, the majority of them involved surveillance, facial recognition of individual protestors, documentation of acts of vandalism for later prosecution, and observation of right-wing groups, whose members seized upon the situation to create terror. These included members of the Boogaloo Boys, who committed arson and drove through residential neighborhoods after dark in cars without license plates and with their headlights off.[20] As was the case in the scene from Davis's film, the omniscient presence of helicopters in the air only signified to people on the ground that either they themselves were being surveilled and suspected of wrongdoing or some nearby malevolent force was, and both thoughts were threatening. As Massumi explains, "The felt reality of the

threat is so superlatively real that it translates into a felt certainty about the world, even in the absence of other grounding for it in the observable world."[21] The prepositions are important. Massumi distinguishes between the "felt certainty *about* the world" and the threat "*in* the world." The boundary he draws matches up perfectly with the one that Danto and many other art critics, such as Werder, draw between the safe non-world of the museum and the dangers of the supposedly actual world outside.

At the same time that Danto was criticizing the Whitney, Douglas Crimp was questioning the strict categorical division on which Danto's aesthetic views were based. In an *October* article that was reprinted in his 1995 book *On the Museum's Ruins*, he offers a critique of the Museum of Modern Art that emerges from his own experience of aboveness. He describes the 1984 expansion of the Museum of Modern Art and the reinstallation of its permanent collection. Lambasting what he calls the "corporate idea of art," he questions the institution's tone-deaf assertions that art and politics are distinct and its eager willingness to curry the favor of corporate sponsors like AT&T by extolling the experimental and innovative nature of modern art, attributes that dovetail nicely with the neoliberal ideals and stirring ad copy of big business.

His excoriation of MoMA culminates in an analysis of its hanging, over an escalator in the design wing, of a Bell helicopter, a curatorial decision that conservative critic Hilton Kramer described gleefully at the time as "the most audacious *coup*

de théâtre anyone has ever attempted at MOMA."[22] Crimp looks cynically at a description of the museum's new acquisition that appeared in a *New York Times* editorial which read, "A helicopter, suspended from the ceiling, hovers over an escalator in the Museum of Modern Art....The chopper is bright green, bug-eyed and beautiful."[23] And a press release for the museum quotes the Curator of Design, Arthur Drexler, as having said that it is "a particularly memorable object."[24] Crimp is appalled by the museum's ability to barricade itself against the unpleasant realities existing outside its doors by purifying and aestheticizing the objects associated with those realities and bringing them inside. Indeed, the Bell-47D1 helicopter, engineered by Alan Young, is still hanging in the design galleries at MoMA some forty years after its re-installation. Young (whom the museum assures us was also a poet and painter) "consciously juxtaposed its transparent plastic bubble with the open structure of its tail boom to create an object whose delicate beauty is inseparable from its efficiency."[25]

As the quotations that Crimp assembles make plain, MoMA's helicopter is a theatrical and memorable object, something that, by its very hovering over the stairwell, its aboveness, enacts a kind of dramatic performance that demands (in spite of the curators' intentions), recognition (fig. 13). Crimp calls the aircraft "the most essential instrument of counterinsurgency warfare since the Korean War" and points to an exhibition, also held in 1984, at the Museo del Barrio which, as part of the Artists

Call against U.S. Intervention in Central America, displayed drawings by Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugee children, nearly all of which featured images of helicopters (figs. 14 and 15).

Figure 13. Arthur Young, Bell-47D1 Helicopter. 1945. Aluminum, steel, and acrylic plastic, 9' 2 3/4" x 7' 11" x 42' 8 3/4" (281.3 x 302 x 1271.9 cm). Manufactured by Bell Helicopter Inc., Buffalo, NY. © Museum of Modern Art/ Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

While Crimp does not offer any art historical or visual analysis of these images, one can see in them the children's same experiences of recognition. In their drawings, the bug-eyed choppers appear to

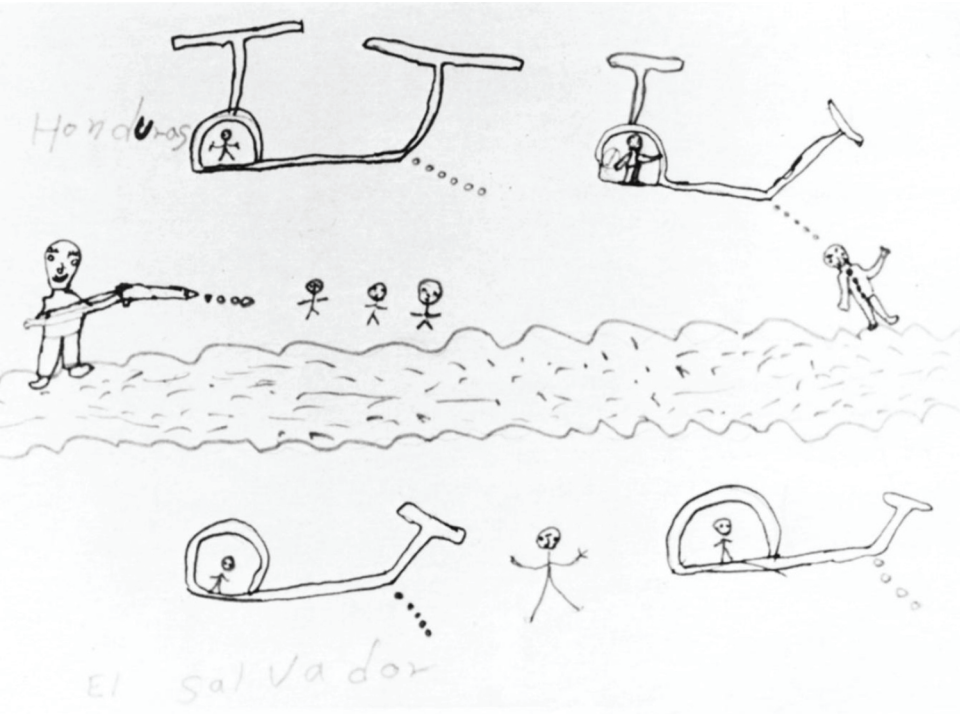

Figure 14. Drawing by a Salvadoran child in the Mesa Grande refugee camp, Honduras, shown in *Children in Exile: Drawings by Refugee Children from Guatemala and El Salvador*, El Museo del Barrio, January 10-31, 1984. Reproduced with Douglas Crimp's article, "The Art of Exhibition," *October*, Vol. 30 (Autumn, 1984), p. 80.

be tethered to the ground and to their victims by chains made of bullets, as though their hovering were a form of violent conversation, a moment of mutual awareness, with the people below. Although

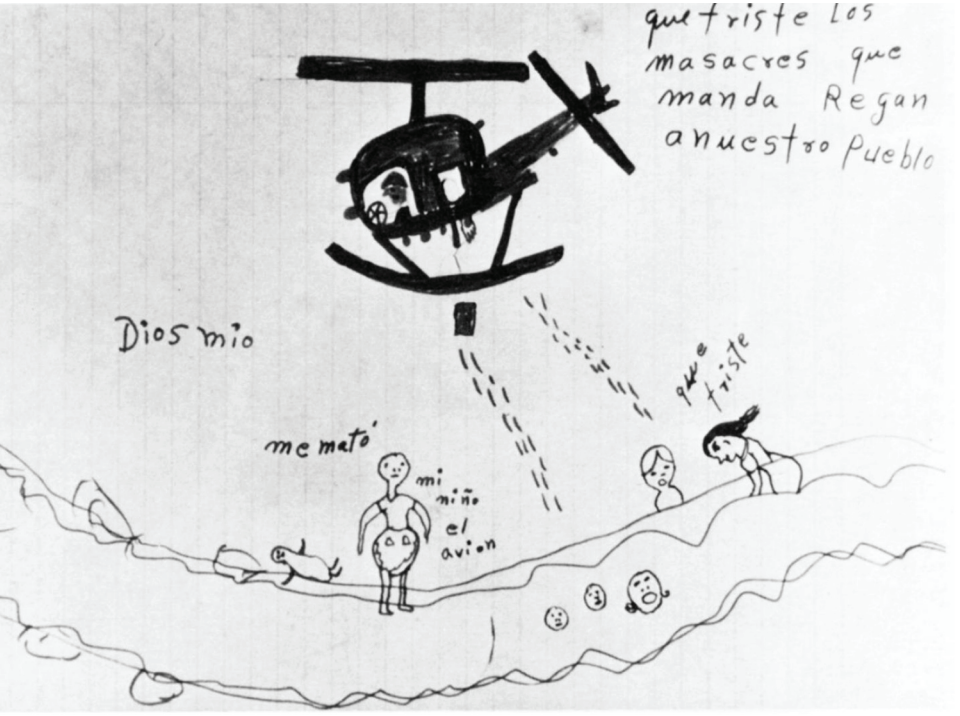

Figure 15. Drawing by a Salvadoran child in the Mesa Grande refugee camp, Honduras, shown in *Children in Exile: Drawings by Refugee Children from Guatemala and El Salvador*, El Museo del Barrio, January 10-31, 1984. Reproduced with Douglas Crimp's article, "The Art of Exhibition," *October*, Vol. 30 (Autumn, 1984), p. 80.

only children, their experience with and recognition of the rotary aviation assets of the U.S. produces a very clear understanding that I name aboveness, a visual knowledge that flashes up in moments of repetition, a knowledge that is borne, in Ghosh's words, of a "renewed reckoning" with state power.

To the degree that one can call Alfredo Jaar's installation "theatrical" or refer to it as "capturing one cinematic episode," one will have understood, even if one does not wish to, the sinking feeling that pervades so many post-rational experiences, whether in Vietnam, El Salvador, Washington, D.C., or Minneapolis. One will have appreciated how *06.01.2020 18.39* stages a scene in which the threats we perceive from above are "felt into being" to such a degree that we know exactly what will happen without bothering to look up.

NOTES

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2 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174.

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4 Alex Horton, "D.C. Guard misused helicopters in low-lying confrontation with George Floyd protesters, Army concludes," *Washington Post*, April 15, 2021.

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7 Peter Brock, "The American Predicament of the 2022 Whitney Biennial," *Frieze*, 10 May 2022.

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9 Arthur Danto, "The 1993 Whitney Biennial," in *The Wake of Art: Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1998), 170-71. See also, Jane Blocker, "Listening to Echoes: Racial Violence in Contemporary Art History," *Art Journal* 81, no. 4 (Winter 2022): 8-23.

10 Brian Massumi, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregg and Seigworth, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 54. He discusses the perceived threat that served as a basis for George Bush's decision to invade Iraq in 2003: "It will have been real because it was *felt* to be real," 53.

11 Mario Vasquez, "Whitney Biennial: Quiet as It's Kept," *Art and Cake*, June 22, 2022.

12 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 4-5.

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15 Eduardo Creus, *Chile's Days of Terror*, 103.

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17 Moustafa Bayoumi, "Republican congressmen are now talking about throwing migrants from helicopters," *The Guardian*, Feburary 5, 2024.

18 Peter Aldhous, "Find the Police and Military Planes That Monitored the Protests in Your City with These Maps," *BuzzFeed News*, June 2, 2020.

19 Aldhous, "Find the Police and Military Planes."

20 Alex Chhith, "Boogaloo Bois member gets four years for role in Floyd riots: Texas man, 24, shot into Third Precinct station, looted it and set it ablaze," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 6 April 2022, B.5.

21 Massumi, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact," 55.

22 Hilton Kramer, quoted in Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 273.

23 Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, 275.

24 Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, 273.

25 Object label, Museum of Modern Art online collection.

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ART / THEORY / PHILOSOPHY

Jane Blocker
Natia Ebanoidze
James Enos & Annie Simpson
Amy Hirayama
Kuras & MacKenzie
Ashok Mathur
Sarah Mills
Laura Perdrizet

Postrational Visuality seeks to rejuvinate ideas of suspended disbelief in a contemporary climate marked by suspicions of proof and too-frequent disregard of alternative worlds and worldviews. This is "post-truth" not as a tactic to produce confusion or make dangerous political claims but rather as a return to aesthetics as a strategy for sharing unrealized social and philosophical visions. At stake is the possibility of a form of contemporary art that is informed by irrationality, intuition, dreams, nonsense, or paradox and can thus gesture beyond the over-determining tendencies of a single or totalizing sense of reason. This book collects contributions from artists and thinkers whose practices look beyond the rational to explore forms of knowledge creation not bound to conventional metrics of thought—seeking new possibilities and openings for creative contemplation and engagement.

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