# react/review

a responsive journal for art & architecture

# react/review:
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the spirit in the shadow
volume 2

march 2022

cover and insert image
DJ Morrow, 2021

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editorial statement
*react/review: a responsive journal for art & architecture* is a peer-reviewed responsive journal produced by graduate students in the department of the History of Art & Architecture at UC Santa Barbara. *react/review* is an open-source journal published annually on eScholarship, an open access publishing platform by the University of California and managed by the California Digital Library.

ISSN 2768-3168

# acknowledgements

Volume two of *react/review* would not be possible without the many supporters and contributors who helped bring this volume to fruition, particularly amidst an ongoing global pandemic. We are indebted to our faculty advisor, Dr. Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, for his support and guidance throughout the formation of this edition, especially in his efforts to ensure the journal's longevity. We thank the History of Art & Architecture Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara for providing an intellectual home that allows the editors of and contributors to this journal to shape and share their scholarly voices. Within the department, our special gratitude goes to our department chair, Dr. Laurie Monahan; our graduate advisor, Dr. Richard Wittman; Jackie Spafford and Christine Fritsch for their invaluable advice in all matters relating to images and technology; and Christian Brown for his administrative support. We are also grateful to Sonja Sekely-Rowland at UC Riverside for her insightful thinking on the history and current state of fair use practices. Likewise, we want to thank Rachel Lee with eScholarship at the University of California, and Chizu Morihara, art librarian at the University of California, Santa Barbara, for assisting us with the publication process. We also acknowledge spotlight contributors Sara Morris and Elizabeth Driscoll Smith for their efforts in organizing the 2021 Art History Graduate Student Association Symposium, which served as the catalyst for this volume, and from which papers were developed into feature articles in this edition. We also thank Felicity Good and Taylor Van Doorne, the founders of this journal, and Taylor for her ongoing role as the journal's publication liaison, as well as Leslie Huang and Iman Salty for their role as our image permissions liaisons. Finally, this volume would not be possible without the tireless efforts made by the authors and editors who molded this year's edition of the journal into a thought-provoking inquiry about the relationship between the political and the otherworldly not only as art historical forces, but as currents that shape our lived experiences.

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# contents

# Introduction:
# the spirit in the shadow

Rachel Winter & Megan J. Sheard

In his now infamous painting from 1820-1823, Francisco de Goya y Lucientes depicts an ominous scene of a bedraggled, nude man with overgrown gray hair who opens his mouth to bite voraciously into a decapitated figure. This is the scene depicted in *Saturn Devouring His Son*, one of Goya's "black paintings"—an emotive series reflecting Goya's complex and tumultuous thoughts and emotions. The monstrous "man" in the painting is Saturn, a mythological character known as the god of dissolution and rejuvenation. As the story goes, Saturn was downtrodden, and ate his sons immediately after their birth lest they overthrow him. Saturn's body position suggests something between defeat and forward motion: half-crouching and half-genuflecting with head and shoulders upright, as if attending to someone peering in on his gluttonous moment. His eyes exude derangement, terror, and desperation. The unresolved tension of this moment evokes something beyond Saturn's narrative and the artist's personal affect. Not only the artist's rendition of a mythology, *Saturn* is also a rumination on civil strife incited by social and political turmoil in Spain.

Seen through the lens of yet another year shaped by the prolonged havoc of COVID-19, Goya's cannibalistic scene invites a reconsideration of the nexus between otherworldliness, shifting political power, and reactions to dire circumstances. These themes are the catalyst and framework for volume two of *react/review: a responsive journal for art and architecture*, "the spirit in the shadow." As co-editors, we intended this theme as an evocation of the spiritual, the monstrous, the otherworldly, and a

shared societal propensity towards the macabre in a moment filled with uncertainty. Our primary interest was in thinking about how these themes are imbricated with methods of political action or resistance, and the visual forms this takes across different time periods and geographic regions. The emphasis on political praxis drew us to attend to a range of subtle distinctions between manifestations of the supernatural: the "spirit" may be a generative principle of a work's production, the effect of aesthetic practices on audiences, or the explicit or implicit ideological content of an artform. As our contributing authors illuminate, the spirit may also be present in affective embodiments, imagined futures, accidental venerations, and even revolts against religion itself. The entangled dimensions of the spiritual and the political are present in varying ways throughout the volume as the authors deploy analytics such as race, gender, and class to grapple with the forces of capitalism, and examine strategies of visibility and knowledge production as intersectional and evolving.

The trajectory of this volume's theme emerges from inquiries into the paranormal and the supernatural across art history, which was the subject of the 2021 UCSB Art History Graduate Student Association Symposium "Haunting the Canon," organized by Elizabeth Driscoll Smith and Sara Morris. The Symposium investigated the ways artists and art historians engage with the supernatural and "alternate strategies of world-making" (see Smith and Morris, this edition). Like much of our lives, the symposium was also shaped by the pandemic, forcing the event to take place on Zoom, a pivot which ultimately enriched conversations around the subject through the broad array of voices who participated from across the country. As Smith and Morris note in their reflections on the symposium, versions of "super-phenomena" may be considered not only in terms of aesthetic content, but also as a methodology for analysis, an important distinction that became a catalyst for the thought-provoking content featured in this volume. By building on the symposium's intellectual framework, and focusing on the relationship between political power, resistance, and the spiritual, we aim to foreground the themes that emerged from the symposium as the guiding forces of this volume, and as an incitement to future discussion.

Yet in curating this volume, a new theme emerged: that of reproducibility, and its attendant notions of mimicry, copying, and dissemination, particularly as they intersect with capitalist structures shaping knowledge production.[1] Goya again emerged as a case study: our original intention had been to reproduce Goya's *Saturn*

[1] Likewise, we are indebted to the work of Saidiya V. Hartman, and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. See: Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2021); and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso Books, 2019).

on the journal's cover because of the ways it embodies the lines of thinking present in this volume. As a graduate student journal with a limited operating budget, this seemed feasible since Goya's painting is in the public domain. Additionally, *react/review* is an educational project where authors do not profit from their participation, making our usage seem likely to qualify as fair use. However, additional information abruptly reminded us that we exist within larger systems structured around competition, and that where one claim to ownership might end, another emerges, quickly prompting us to shift our plan. The problem of image reproduction speaks to a larger issue: "open" knowledge is often only nominally so, or only so under particular conditions, just as political systems that claim to be accessible are rarely so. And, despite the ways academics might endeavor to upset hegemonic or normative systems, we remain entangled with the very forces we fight against in a dialectical push and pull between resistance and survival by adherence. Our scholarship and critiques of these systems somehow feed the machine itself.

The volume's cover image is instead, and perhaps more appropriately, DJ Morrow's balloon recreation of Goya's *Saturn* (fig. 1).[2] Morrow's playful sculpture harnesses the balloon as something embodying the power of everyday people, transforming malleable, latex rubber into an unlikely medium for expressing an array of severe emotions—emotions which speak to both Goya's historical circumstances and our own. There is something innately playful and happy about balloons: they share a kinship with bubble writing, party poppers, and small, dubiously red hotdogs consumed at children's parties. Their bulbous quality makes anything sculpted from them into a kind of caricature: balloons are cute and funny. While the pose and dark background of Morrow's *Saturn* lend the figure an eerie stillness, to consider the medium is to imagine it swaying and squeaking, simultaneously delightful and disturbing in its "cutening" of visceral violence. Goya's gory fleshiness is replaced by a synthetic quality produced through the curvature of the rubber that forms Saturn's musculature as it contracts before his cannibalistic action. Saturn's son, likewise crafted with interlocking balloon shapes in an x-ray-like view of his skeletal structure, also features a set of bulbous buttocks, a feature that twists horror and humor together. The violence of the image is both obscured and re-emphasized by the removal of its fleshy corporeality, as the parodic quality of the medium throws the grotesque subject matter into sharp relief.

[2] For more on Morrow's work, see his website at: http://balloonsinbold.com. The authors would also like to thank Niyaz Mahmud for bringing Morrow's work to our attention.

*Figure 1 DJ Morrow, Saturn Devouring His Son, balloons, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.*

In the context of the volume's theme, DJ Morrow's synthetic *Saturn* might stand as a symbol of the thinly disguised systemic violence in which we labor and live: so much surface and brightness, delight and intrigue, yet monstrous in its playfulness as it devours its progeny. This last aspect was underscored by the pandemic when the designation of so many workers as "essential" seemed in practice to mean "expendable." It also reflects the conditions in which Morrow made this piece. Based in Texas, Morrow is a skilled maker who has been twisting balloons for over ten years, mostly for kids; more recently, he began to think about how balloons might be a serious artistic medium. As we write this amidst the ongoing pandemic, Morrow also made his iteration of Goya's *Saturn* at COVID-19's apex: soon after its completion, the

image itself went viral online.[3] Morrow's channeling of what he calls "a darker tone" through the cheerful medium of balloons raises the question of how artistic practice might convey emotive states and ways of being in unexpected ways.[4] Reproduction is also a means of resistance, not only to the hierarchies that otherwise devalue select artistic media, but also the systems controlling art's circulation.

Likewise, the authors who contribute to this volume each explore, respond to, and resist distinct structures intertwined with the political, the spiritual, and the otherworldly in its many forms. Volume two of *react/review* is comprised of seven texts divided into two parts. Part one consists of spotlight pieces, contributions which are more open-ended than a standard research article in order to allow for new inquiries, such as those related to methodological paradoxes, the state of the field, or other ruminations on the volume's theme. In "Reflections on Haunting the Canon: The Super-phenomena in Art," Elizabeth Driscoll Smith and Sara Morris survey the overlooked place of the paranormal, supernatural, and otherworldly as something previously beyond the purview of art history. In their insightful discussion of the field, Smith and Morris point to the ways such terms have acted as metonyms for art history's pattern of denigrating women and BIPOC artists, and suggest possible avenues by which the paranormal can be a tool for responding to archival erasures. These questions are highly relevant as they intersect with religion, politics, and the contemporary art world.

Moving back to the early-twentieth century, Clemens Finkelstein's "Interiority, or the Evolutionary Objectivity of Vibrating Worlds" introduces his translation of Adolf Behne's "Biology and Cubism." Behne's previously untranslated text assesses the work of Jakob Johann von Uexküll, whom Finkelstein describes as a German biologist known for his thinking on the cybernetics of life, a subject related to Behne's interest in expressionism. Finkelstein's preface offers a brief biographical overview to this understudied art historian and architectural theorist, who was a part of the anarcho-syndicalist *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* in Berlin alongside Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius (amongst others), and illuminates the scholarly lineage that brings Behne to defend Uexküll's work. By critically re-evaluating Behne's work and intellectual lineage, Finkelstein thoughtfully delineates a case study of the ways power and knowledge are linked to modernist notions of scientific racism and primitivism in the work of a theorist for whom "true art" was related to that which is invisible to human beings, rather than an "unnatural" copying of appearances.

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[3] For the reddit thread that turned the image viral, see: https://www.reddit.com/r/Art/comments/n194yf/saturn_devouring_his_son_me_balloons_2021/.

[4] Rachel Winter, e-mail correspondence with DJ Morrow, December 2, 2021.

Part two, which is a curated selection of feature pieces, further considers ideas related to politics, spirituality, reproducibility, and otherworldliness. Feature articles are akin to standard research articles, and highlight the work of early-career scholars whose work engages with art historical subjects.

In "Sydney Cain's Spiritual Refusals amidst the Afterlives of Slavery," Angela Pastorelli-Sosa discusses the multimedia works of Sydney Cain, or sage stargate, to explore what Pastorelli-Sosa describes as "Black ancestral memory, transformation, and spirituality." Pastorelli-Sosa unpacks the way Cain's work makes ancestral presences "legible." Pastorelli-Sosa elucidates both the formal capacities of Cain's chosen medium, and its depiction of realities which are felt but not seen. The emergence of Black ancestral presences in visual imagery of the city allows for the remembering of a different past; by affirming Black presence in the Bay Area, alternative futurities which counter anti-Blackness can be imagined. This connection between the appearance of "otherworldly" ancestral spirits and alternative futures demonstrates how ideas and practices related to the unknown and otherworldly are imbricated with particular experiences of race and class. The otherworldly therefore emerges in connection with sociopolitical concerns around survival and resistance, lending it an experiential specificity which contradicts art history's emphasis on rational epistemologies. Sylvia Faichney's response ruminates on the themes explored by Pastorelli-Sosa in a meditation on the relationship between Afrofuturism and the built environment: in particular, the "imaginative structures" which make alternative forms of navigating through space—and time—possible.

Similarly attending to the potential of an artistic medium, Claudia Grego March's "*Painting Viciously*: Antonio Saura's Monsters and The Francoist Dictatorship (1939-1975)" explores the purposes of emulating visual motifs. On one hand, Saura's copying of well-known figures or artworks was a continuation of Spanish historical and artistic legacies, but it also acted as a conduit for questioning Spanish national identity and authoritarian politics. By placing Saura in art historical dialogue with Jean Dubuffet, Asger Jorn, Enrico Baj, and Francisco de Goya, as well as other Cubist and Surrealist practices, Grego March presents Saura's "dissident monsters" as a critical feature of his work. A close reading of Saura's paintings reveals monstrosity not simply as a visual feature, but as a manifestation of the entanglement between the political and the aesthetic: a purposefully-distorted mimicry permits the monstrous to emerge as an aesthetic subterfuge which "ideologically destabilizes" the Francoist regime. Drawing on Grego March's reading of Saura's oeuvre as addressing specifically Spanish concerns, Nathan Segura's response reflects on the socio-economic predicament of the

Mexican countryside as a context for interpreting the work of Mexican artist María Izquierdo, an artist likewise connected to avant-garde movements in Paris.

In "Saints and Zinesters: Fandom and Legacy in the Zine *St. Sucia*," Mia Uribe Kozlovsky takes the theme of reconfiguration into a performative domain by using the mimicry of cosplay as a gateway for considering the intersections of parody, spirituality, and zine culture. Beginning with artist Natasha L. Hernandez's act of cosplaying a figure depicted in a Judith Baca print, Uribe Kozlovsky elucidates a lineage of "aberrant femininities" and identities in queer feminist Chicana art in her study of *St. Sucia*, a zine founded by Hernandez and her collaborator Isabel Ann Castro. Produced to elicit stories from Latina femmes, the zine's playful subversion of La Virgen de Guadalupe into the "tough girl" Saint Sucia shows how power dynamics tied to reproduction might be subverted: in this case, this includes both the literal DIY reproduction of zine culture, and more abstractly, content dealing with the everyday bodily and emotional concerns of its contributors. As in Grego March's piece, what may appear as mockery turns out to be homage through a playful reconfiguration of cultural and religious traditions with which the zine's readership has a fraught identification. Uribe Kozlovsky's analysis shows how particular constellations of race, class, gender, and religion may result in the articulation of new systems of meaning. Leslie Huang responds with a defense of the fan against fandom's detractors, emphasizing the importance of people's relationships with objects, and reflecting on what taking fan communities seriously might add to our reading of art history.

Finally, Jillian Fischer's discussion of far-right black metal addresses aesthetics in a different register by introducing a sonic dimension of analysis. "Pagan Metal Gods: The Use of Mythology and White Supremacy in National Socialist Black Metal" offers three case studies that interrogate the ways far-right black metal bands incorporate paganism and mythology into their aesthetics, channeling spirituality into political ideology in visual, lyrical, and aural forms. Fischer explores the racial and spiritual dimensions of far-right political ideologies, and examines their use by national socialist black metal bands in their aesthetics and public statements. This musical inquiry is a counterpoint to the anti-racist praxis of presencing discussed by Pastorelli-Sosa, underscoring the mobilization of spirituality in service of competing political agendas. The "shadow" here is a troubling one indeed, invoking a comparison with its Jungian formulation as projected darkness. As the last feature article of the journal, Fischer leaves us with a word of caution: the "spirit" has no simple correspondence with a particular set of values, and may even function as an immaterial powerhouse for the denigration of lives. Taylor Van Doorne responds by engaging Jenny Hval's imagination of feminist metal, highlighting the centrality of an "extreme masculinity" in

the ethnonationalist imaginaries Fischer discusses, and querying how the figure of the witch might help us conceive of a "revolt" which does not simply reaffirm the structures it claims to detest.

Through the politics of reproduction in the modern and the contemporary eras, the spirit emerges in the shadow of political action in polysemous forms. It is otherworldly, ancestral, liberatory, antagonistic, evolutionary, monstrous, lyrical, sensory, comical, subversive, ideological, and many of these at once, ubiquitously present in the shadow of the political. This shadow is animated by race, class, gender, and religion: it appears as the collective consciousness of injustice, resistance forced into subterfuge, shared hatreds, and imaginative possibilities. Critically, despite their varying subject matter and methodologies, the contributions to this volume affirm the importance of collectivity, of the shared world in which such political interventions have their meaning, and of the human relatedness which underpins action. In a time of profound isolation for so many people, it is a timely reminder of our shared reality, and of the fact that such interventions do not solely rely on proximity or even tangibility. Intangible things also bind us, and emerge from our actions in the world. Such relatedness is the ground from which the contradictory and subversive ways of knowing and being discussed in this volume emerge, when we integrate the supernatural and immaterial into art historical discourse, and recognize the spirit in the shadow.

# research spotlight

# Reflections on Haunting the Canon: The Super-phenomena in Art

Elizabeth Driscoll Smith and Sara Morris

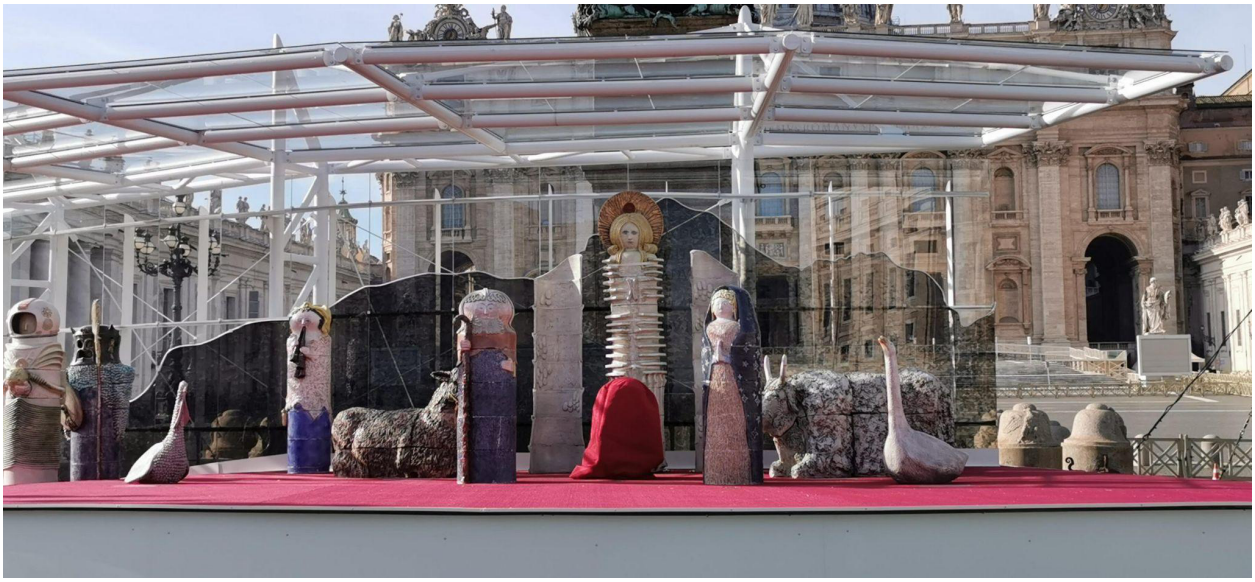

*Figure 1 Installation image of 2020 Nativity Scene, Vatican City, Italy created by students and teachers of the F.A. Grue Art Institute, located in Castelli in the 1960s and 1970s. Photographs by and courtesy of Anthony Majanlahti and Hyperallergic.*

In December 2020, the Vatican unveiled its annual nativity scene in St. Peter's Square. Headlines across conservative Catholic newspapers quickly latched on to what many observers described as "shockingly unconventional": nineteen monumental ceramic figures, including an astronaut, a cyborg, and a turkey-dinosaur chimera surrounding a covered sculpture of the infant Christ.[1] Headlines read "The Vatican's Embarrassing SciFi Crèche," "Post-Modern Vatican Nativity Scene Provokes Wave of Criticism," and "Why is Darth Vader in the Vatican's Nativity Scene?"[2] Its most striking components rendered a supernatural occurrence (virgin birth) even stranger. Replacing the traditional wooden manger, a Flavenesque fluorescent tube floats behind ceramic figures forming the outline of a minimalist moonscape. Representations of Mary and Joseph flank a small sculpture of the Christ child veiled by a red cloth. To the left of the holy family, however, is the unorthodox grouping that drew comparisons to *Doctor Who* and *Star Wars.* According to *Vatican News*, this modern version of the nativity represented "a sign of Advent hope in Christ's coming for a world straining under the darkness of the Covid-19 pandemic."[3] Though the Vatican operates its own observatory, the headlines make clear that such imaginative retellings of the nativity are too outrageous for many members of the press and public.[4] For us, however, the tensions this uncanny sculptural group revealed at the end of a hellacious year served

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[1] Only representing a select part of a 52-piece sculptural group, the nativity is a collaboration between students and teachers of the F.A. Grue Art Institute, a high school in Castelli, Italy–a town with a celebrated history of ceramic work. The ceramic figures were made using traditional coiling techniques and retain their cylindrical shape, mirroring Bernini's columns that envelop the Vatican's plaza. In December 1970, some figures went on view in Rome, and were later displayed in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Bethlehem, Israel. See: Valentina Di Liscia, "Why Is There an Astronaut in This Year's Vatican Nativity?," *Hyperallergic*, December 17, 2020, https://hyperallergic.com/609300/why-is-there-an-astronaut-in-this-years-vatican-nativity/; and Brian Boucher, "Even the Pope Seems Iffy on the Vatican's Astronaut-Themed Nativity. Here's How the Artwork Became a Lighting Rod," *Artnet*, December 20, 2020, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/astronaut-vatican-nativity-1933623.

[2] Joe Grabowski, "The Vatican's Embarrassing SciFi Crèche," *Catholic Herald,* December 12, 2020; Edward Pentin, "Post-Modern Vatican Nativity Scene Provokes Wave of Criticism," *National Catholic Register,* December 15, 2020; and Colleen Dulle, "Why is Darth Vader in the Vatican's Nativity Scene?," *America: The Jesuit Review*, December 12, 2020, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/12/12/vatican-nativity-christmas-pope-francis-239486.

[3] Devin Watkins, "Christmas Tree, Nativity Scene Lit Up in St. Peter's Square," *Vatican News,* December 11, 2020, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-12/st-peters-square-christmas-tree-creche-lighting-ceremony.html.

[4] Elisabetta Povoledo, "Searching for the (Star) Light at the Vatican Observatory," *The New York Times,* December 22, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/22/world/europe/vatican-observatory-consolmagno.html.

as a catalyst for thinking through art history's uneasy relationship with the supernatural. So, we set out to organize our graduate student symposium to provide a platform for emerging scholars to examine the ways in which artists and art historians are critically engaging the supernatural and strategies of alternate world-making.

*Figure 2 Installation image of 2020 Nativity Scene, Vatican City, Italy created by students and teachers of the F.A. Grue Art Institute, located in Castelli in the 1960s and 1970s. Photographs by and courtesy of Anthony Majanlahti and Hyperallergic.*

Our interest in the supernatural brought us to enroll in Professor Jenni Sorkin's seminar *Alchemy, Magic, and Spirituality* held in the fall of 2020. Here, an interdisciplinary group of artists and art historians collectively considered themes that haunt the bounds of the acceptable in the field of art history. Together we asked: What counts as historical "fact"? How can archives be reimagined? In what ways do themes of the supernatural maintain colonial categories and systems of oppression in scholarship and exhibitions? It was through Sorkin's seminar readings – and our class

discussions – that we expanded our initial inquiry to encompass super-phenomena. Jeffrey J. Kripal's conceptualization of "super-phenomena" from his book *Religion: Super Religion* (2017) includes that which pertains to the unknown and impossible in Western thought - "spirits, possession, vision, deification, the miraculous, magical powers, and the paranormal" - and became a valuable tool for unpacking such lines of inquiry during our coursework.[5] Responding to philosopher David Hume's essay "Of Miracles" in his *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), Kripal historicizes the "super," yet privileges testimonies and experiences that speak to inexplicable events: "Extraordinary things happen all the time for which we have no proof and never will, but it does not follow from this that they did not happen, or that they are not important to study and try to understand with other methods, for example, historical, hermeneutical and humanistic ones."[6] Importantly for us, Kripal's expansive framework for tracing the paranormal bridges its manifestations across popular culture.

Beyond the sci-fi aesthetics of the Vatican's nativity, what Kripal deems as super-phenomena have long been a vehicle to explore contemporary culture. One need only look to the success of the Harry Potter, Star Wars, and Marvel franchises to see how interest in magic, science fiction, and the paranormal have captured the American public's attention.[7] Themes of the otherworldly also serve as methodologies for recent museum exhibitions. The 2020-2021 exhibition *Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art* examines the ways violent histories of genocide, slavery, and settler colonialism inform our collective imagination, and asks "why America is haunted."[8] In particular, Jordan Peele's reappraisal of the horror movie genre in the films *Get Out* (2017), *Us* (2019), and *Candyman* (2021) lend themselves to a more thorough understanding of extreme social injustices, one in which the otherworldly is not a passive entity or a political action, but rather a vengeful force that obscures the tropes of good and evil, generating fictional pathways for escape and survival.

Robb Hernández's exhibition *Mundos Alternos: Art and Science Fiction in the Americas* (2017) was also a crucial starting point for us to think through super-phenomena.[9] As part of the Getty's *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA* exhibition

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[5] Kripal, "Introduction: Reimagining the Super in the Study of Religion," in *Religion: Super Religion* (New York: New York, Macmillan Reference USA, 2017), xviii.

[6] Ibid., xl.

[7] Ibid., xv-xvi. Kripal draws connections between American popular culture and a renewed obsession with the supernatural through avenues such as film, television, and the graphic novel.

[8] "The Paranormal in American Art," Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY, https://www.speedmuseum.org/exhibitions/supernatural-america/.

[9] Robb Hernández, Tyler Stallings, and Joanna Szupinska, *Mundos Alternos: Art and Science Fiction in the Americas* (Riverside: UCR ARTSblock, University of California, Riverside, 2017); Robb Hernández, *Archiving an Epidemic: Art, AIDS, and the Queer Chicanx Avant-Garde* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

programing in 2017, *Mundos Alternos* featured Chicanx artists who use speculation to reimagine alternative futures. Hernández's interrogation of archival erasures, and the use of speculative aesthetics, questions what counts as historical proof in the field of art history. Speculative aesthetics expands the burden of proof to include touch, emotion, color, memory, oral traditions, and spiritual forces – that which is not necessarily seen, but felt and remembered. For communities whose "proof" has been flattened and omitted, speculation clears avenues for reimagining past events through oral and visual artistic practices. In recuperating lost experiences and memories, Hernández not only understands the archive as a means of colonial control, but also presents a new method for the study of the invisible.

Inspired by the frameworks developed by Hernández and Krippal, we structured our call for papers to include super-phenomena from multiple disciplines, geographies, and time periods. Much to our excitement, Hernández agreed to be the keynote speaker. Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we aimed to create a platform for emerging graduate students whose research topics and methodologies were informed by super-phenomena. In April 2021, a group of 80 art historians, artists, and scholars from across the UCSB campus and the country came together virtually. In the opening keynote, Hernández reminded the audience of the ways Latinx art histories and archives haunt colonialist narratives. Hernández presented on queer Latinx artists who refute cycles of violence and erasure through speculative aesthetics to imagine alternative futures beyond strictures of archives, borders, and citizenship.

The ideas above were expanded through the nine graduate student presenters we invited to participate in one of three panels.[10] "Decolonial Futurisms: Reimagining the Sacred" considered the ways some Mexican American artists work within and against the strictures of Catholic imagery to interrogate intersections of race, gender, and spirituality. Papers included in "Otherworldly Bodies: Reenvisioning the Corporeal" examined bodily transmutations as generative sites for analysis. Lastly, papers given in "Paratextual Encounters: Reanimating the Archive" looked at the afterlives of artworks on paper and the secrets they reveal through themes of decay and memory. Moderated panel discussions centered interdisciplinary methodologies- historical, social, political, cultural, scientific, and technological- to expand our understanding of the paranormal in art. The symposium papers helped us and our audiences to see the myriad ways in which scholars consider the otherworldly, and reinforce that there is no one-size-fits-all definition of the supernatural.

Through exploring the theme "the spirit in the shadow," this volume of *react/review* builds on ideas presented in the symposium by examining the

[10] To view symposium participants' bios and paper abstracts see: "Symposium Program," https://www.arthistory.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/sitefiles/program/graduate/AHGSA/AHGSA_2021_Haunting-the-Canon-archive.pdf.

"otherworldly *within* or *as* forms of political action or resistance" in emerging art historical scholarship. However, the symposium's presenters demonstrated to us that the aesthetics of super-phenomena should not be separated from understanding them as frameworks of analysis. We understand super-phenomena as inherently political, not limited to the realm of aesthetics, but also a methodology, as demonstrated by Hernández's scholarship.

We want to conclude with a short reflection on the work that got us here in the first place: the Vatican's science fiction nativity scene and the controversies it embodies. Originally conceived during the first wave of space travel in the mid-1960s, the inclusion of the astronaut in the nativity brought together two historical moments, collapsing seemingly disparate narratives surrounding science, art history, and organized religion.[11] Shortly after the nativity's unveiling, the press and social media were abuzz: while some applauded the display as an effective strategy to evangelize and unify audiences in a moment of extreme isolation and quarantine, conservatives decried the nativity entirely. In one Tweet, an observer opined "I don't think the Vatican should behave like an avant garde art gallery, thumbs down from me, a very unfortunate decision I think."[12] In another Tweet, a viewer commented "This is absolutely pointless. Mary wasn't in a space suit. Nor were there turkeys present. A totally ugly and meaningless abomination."[13] In one interview, art historian Elizabeth Lev bemoaned the nativity stating "The Catholic Church has an incredible tradition of beauty, and yet, after a year of difficulty, we've put up something that makes people mock Jesus."[14]The dismissive language of these negative reviews fall within traditions of relegating advancements in art, science, and technology to the secular realm, assumed fundamentally incompatible with the sacred - an idea that Pope Francis has pushed against in past speeches and engagements.[15] In a call for unity after the nativity's unveiling, even Pope Francis responded, tweeting "While humanity's ruin is

[11] In December 1970, some figures went on view in Rome, and were later displayed in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Bethlehem, Israel. See: Valentina Di Liscia, "Why Is There an Astronaut in This Year's Vatican Nativity?,"; and Brian Boucher, "Even the Pope Seems Iffy on the Vatican's Astronaut-Themed Nativity. Here's How the Artwork Became a Lighting Rod."

[12] Lucio J. Ochoa (@phoenix537512), Twitter post, December 11, 2020, https://twitter.com/phoenix537512/status/1337484209347170310.

[13] Olga M. González (@OlgaG921), Twitter post, December 13, 2020, https://twitter.com/OlgaG921/status/1338038708126142464.

[14] Colleen Dulle, "Why is Darth Vader in the Vatican's Nativity Scene?"

[15] Vatican News, "From Vatican City: Link-up with the International Space Station," YouTube Video, October 26, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uK-7g3vWXpQ.

that everyone goes their own way, in the nativity scene everyone converges upon Jesus, Prince of Peace in the night of the world."[16]

*Figure 3 Installation image of 2020 Nativity Scene, Vatican City, Italy created by students and teachers of the F.A. Grue Art Institute, located in Castelli in the 1960s and 1970s. Photographs by and courtesy of Anthony Majanlahti and Hyperallergic.*

The comments lamenting the sculptures' fantastical appearance are particularly revealing. For us, the tweets elicit "lol" moments while also putting into question the role of contemporary Biblical representations: to bring pleasure through traditional (and realistic) renderings, or to refigure narratives, making room for compelling

[16] Pope Francis (@Potifex), Twitter Post, December 28, 2020, https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/1343534666767163397?s=20.

interpretations.[17] On the one hand, the recent uproar surrounding the nativity implicitly diminishes imaginative retellings of past events. On the other, the controversy seems to only have increased its visibility and didactic power. In this light, it stands to reason that a crucial aspect of super-phenomena in art is its ability to disrupt: to make viewers wince, recoil, laugh, and look toward the future. The supernatural is important for the study of art and culture not simply because they elicit new and diverse aesthetic categories, but also because of its capacity as a strategy to offer insight into major socio-political and environmental problems shaping the present. For those of us open to such convergences, the weirdness of the nativity engenders new meaning, especially during a time of social distancing, alienation, and political debate.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to offer our sincere thanks to Professor Jenni Sorkin for teaching her seminar *Alchemy, Magic, and Spirituality*, and the graduate students whose participation expanded and enriched our experience: Kevin Clancy, Marisa de la Peña, Graham Feyl, Leslie Huang, Victoria Jennings, Kayla Lopatko, Iman Salty, Kate Saubestre, Nathan Segura, and Kolaya Wilson. Thanks are also due to this article's peer reviewers for their collaboration and thoughtful feedback on this project. We are grateful for the valuable contributions of Professor Robb Hernández, the panel moderators, and student presenters who participated in the symposium, as well as the generous audiences at the event. We would also like to thank Victoria Jennings for her help and creativity in designing the symposium's poster and promotional materials. Finally, thank you to Christine Fritsch and Jackie Spafford of the department's Image Resource Center for their help in designing the symposium website, which archives these events and enriches this article. Finally, we thank our department chair, Professor Laurie Monahan.

[17] While clay might seem like an odd choice of material with which to sculpt a monumental space-age installation, its Biblical resonances and legacy in Italian art made it a befitting medium to bridge science and religion in the 1960s.

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# Crafting Interiority, or the Evolutionary Objectivity of Vibrating Worlds
## An Introduction to Adolf Behne's "Biology and Cubism" (1915)

Clemens Finkelstein

"Genes shape our [biological] structure according to a mysterious plan," mused German art historian and architectural theorist Adolf Behne (1885-1948) in an enigmatic text written within a year of the outbreak of WWI in 1914.[1] Sublimating the transgressive atrocities of modern warfare, the young Behne materialized a molecular inward gaze that took recourse with humanity by tracing the uncanny blur of essential boundaries between the human and non-human, as proliferated by contemporary theories of biology. Identifying a primordial element [*Urelement*] that – otherwise dormant in most individuals – actively shaped the instinct of "artists, scientists, [and] generals," he subtly imbricated the geopolitical and biopolitical spheres with the expressions of modern art. After all, Behne reasoned, "[t]he power of genes is also what gives rise to artworks."[2] The following provides a brief introduction to the author and his forceful disquisition "Biologie und Kubismus" [Biology and Cubism] (1915), complemented by its first English translation (fig. 1).

[1] Adolf Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," *Der Sturm* 6, no. 11-12 (September 1, 1915): 68-71 (70) [slightly modified as Adolf Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," *Die Tat* 9, no. 8 (November 1917): 694-705]. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[2] Ibid., 70.

active involvement in realizing its aesthetic, cultural promises. Behne notably emerged as one of these pivotal characters in the wake of the German revolution of November 1918. Sensing the immense potential for social change, the art historian sought action as a founding member of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* [Work Council for Art] in Berlin. This anarcho-syndicalist coalition of architects, artists, and writers pursued permanent social progress by educating a broader public about contemporary developments and tendencies in art and architecture. Its members, including architects Bruno Taut, Walter Gropius, and expressionist painter and designer César Klein, fostered strong ties to other artists' associations, such as the *Novembergruppe*[3] and *Deutscher Werkbund*,[4] who also shared their revolutionary beliefs. Behne was decisive in formulating the manifesto of the *Arbeitsrat* from March 1, 1919, emblematically echoing the art historian's lifelong convictions:

> Art and people must form a unit. Art should no longer be just the enjoyment of a few but the happiness and life of the masses. The aim is to unite the arts under the wings of a great building art.[5]

This building art—architecture—pursued the union of art and people twofold. On an existential level, it addressed pragmatic concurrent demands for subsistence dwelling [*Existenzminimum*] by designing habitations that provided minimally-acceptable floorspace or ready access to greenery, fresh air, and light. On an intellectual level, it conceived monumental cathedrals of modernism that would merge

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[3] *Novembergruppe* [November Group] was founded on December 3, 1918, as an association of German expressionist artists and architects whose common socialist values united them in the wake of the November Revolution in the pursuit of a radical national renewal by means of reformed relationships between the public and cultural producers. Initiated foremost by Max Pechstein and César Klein, many of its architect-members overlapped with the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, which was founded in the same month. The group disbanded in 1929. See: Helga Kliemann, *Die Novembergruppe* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1969); Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism: Art and the November Revolution in Germany, 1918-1919* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[4] *Deutscher Werkbund* [German Work/Crafts Federation] formed 1907 in Munich by representatives from architecture and industry—among them Theodor Fischer, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Peter Behrens, and Hermann Muthesius—as a coalition of creatives and manufacturers seeking a closer relationship between traditional crafts and industrial mass production. See: Joan Campbell, *The German Werkbund: The Politics of Reform in the Applied Arts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978); Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

[5] Arbeitsrat für Kunst, leaflet, reproduced in *Arbeitsrat für Kunst Berlin 1918-1921*, exhib. cat. (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1980), 88-9.

the exceptional skills of artists and artisans into transformative creations. As a fervent proponent of this expressionist architecture, Behne desired objectivity [*Sachlichkeit*] in cultural production. Living up to his moniker as the "Lenin of art history," he battled against conservative cultural politics and dull artistic impressionism.[6] Yet, despite his prolific output and bellicose agency in shaping avant-garde movements in the early-twentieth century, Behne remains an underdeveloped resource in the historiography of modern art and architecture.[7] With the notable exception of his foundational *Der moderne Zweckbau* [The Modern Functional Building] (1923, published 1926), scarcely any of Behne's numerous books and articles are available in English translation.[8]

One of these neglected contributions is "Biology and Cubism," which was published in 1915 through the editorial outlet of artist-gallerist Herwarth Walden's influential syndicate of expressionism *Der Sturm* [The Storm] (1910-1932)—an eponymous journal, publishing house, and art gallery in Berlin.[9] The text forms the final part of an ill-defined tetralogy of articles on expressionism and the so-called "new art" that appeared in the journal between 1914 and 1915.[10] Different from the other three, "Biology and Cubism" is a manifesto-like book review of *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* [Building Blocks of a Biological Worldview] (1913) (fig. 2). This collected volume of essays by German biologist Jakob Johann von Uexküll (1864-1944) investigates the uncanny thresholds between human and non-human

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[6] See: Magdalena Bushart, "Adolf Behne, 'Kunst-Theoretikus,'" in *Adolf Behne: Essays zu seiner Kunst- und Architektur-Kritik*, ed. Magdalena Bushart (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2000), 11-88.

[7] Interest in Behne surged in late-1990s German-speaking academia but simmered down since. Notable exceptions in English-speaking academia include Kai K. Gutschow, "The Culture of Criticism: Adolf Behne and the Development of Modern Architecture in Germany, 1910-1914" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2005); Frederic J. Schwartz, "Form Follows Fetish: Adolf Behne and the Problem of *Sachlichkeit*," *Oxford Art Journal* 21, no. 2 (1998): 47-77; and Molly Wright Steenson's translation of a short excerpt from Adolf Behne, *Eine Stunde Architektur* [One Hour of Architecture] (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Dr. Fritz Wedekind & Co., 1928), *Pidgin* 6 (Fall 2008): 246-67, as well as Spyros Papapetros, "Saint Jerome in his Modernist Study: An Afterword to Adolf Behne's *Eine Stunde Architektur*," *Pidgin* 6 (Fall 2008): 268-75.

[8] Adolf Behne, *The Modern Functional Building*, trans. Michael Robinson (Santa Monica: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1996).

[9] The journal *Der Sturm* covered the movement of Expressionism in all its various mediatic instantiations and appeared first weekly then monthly since 1914, quarterly since 1924.

[10] Adolf Behne, "Zur neuen Kunst," *Der Sturm* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 1914): 2-3; Adolf Behne, "Deutsche Expressionisten," *Der Sturm* 5, no. 17-18 (December 1, 1914): 114-15; Adolf Behne, "Expressionistische Architektur," *Der Sturm* 5, no. 19-20 (January 1, 1915): 135 [excerpt from: Adolf Behne, *Zur neuen Kunst* (Sturm-Bücher VII) (Berlin: Der Sturm, 1915)]; Adolf Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus."

perception.[11] In "Über das Unsichtbare in der Natur" [On the Invisible in Nature], Uexküll concretizes his line of inquiry as a critique of physics and chemistry, which remain ignorantly locked into a human-centric analysis of the world and its parts.[12] Whereas physicochemical inquiries break down complex objects into smaller and simpler objects, he argued, comparative biology disentangles objects and their differential properties without losing information about their relational potential. Producing instead a "subjective anatomy of objects" that engages their form and content separately, biological inquiry builds phenomenological bridges in lieu of a shared language through which human or non-human, animate or inanimate objects, would be able to communicate their otherwise invisible worlds. Shifting focus to an analysis of the uncanny affects and effects that act across perceptual environments, Uexküll proposes to expand conceptions of life in a way that, for Behne, reconstitute the already intimate relationships he sustains to artworks or buildings in a professional capacity. Behne's "Biology and Cubism" thus draws inspiration from Uexküll's pluriversal worldview to complicate straightforward dualisms between artifice and nature. In it, he dismantles impressionist art as an external-natural [*äußerlich-natürlich*] parallelism to nature, merely "unnatural" copying of its appearance in the limited human perceptual sensorium. "True" art, for Behne, the art of expressionists, instead relates to the humanly invisible sphere in nature, and traces the forms and shapes that evolve organically from within these relational potentials.

Believing Uexküll's work to hold the key to unraveling reality at its core, thus providing a sound foundation for revolution, Behne meant to counter the little attention given to *Bausteine* by a generation of young artists, architects, and designers who, like him, sought to renew art and culture. Intent on revealing an intellectual kinship between the biologist's theory of environmental perception and the ideas of expressionism, Behne penned an often-polemical defense of Uexküll's biosemiotics of *Umwelt* [environment].[13] Focusing on cubism as the purest strand of an artistic expressionism increasingly forsaken by critics as "naked formalism, lifeless aestheticism," "Biology and Cubism" moves smoothly between speculative follies and

[11] Jakob von Uexküll, *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Munich: F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1913).

[12] Jakob von Uexküll, "Über das Unsichtbare in der Natur," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* (Munich: F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1913), 55-66.

[13] Biosemiotics refers to the coextensive relationship between life and sign systems, and their production and interpretation in nature as well as across species. See: Carlo Brentari, *Jakob von Uexküll: The Discovery of the Umwelt between Biosemiotics and Theoretical Biology* (New York: Springer, 2015); *Jakob von Uexküll and Philosophy: Life, Environments, Anthropology*, edited by Francesca Michelini and Kristian Köchy (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

aesthetic judgments.[14] One illustrious scene that exemplifies this stance is sketched in the article's endnotes where Behne draws comparisons between an art critic's shallow aesthetic analysis of an image by Kandinsky, and a sea urchin's poisonous tongue which similarly thrusts forward in mere reaction to a chemical stimulus in its surrounding. Materializing amid fragmented thoughts in kind, concepts such as creative *interiority* and evolutionary *objectivity* surface for the first time to reveal their ecological sources and foreshadow Behne's crucial contributions to the history of art and architecture in the 1920s and 1930s.

hatte, fand den ungefährlichen Subalternbeamten, seinen Zorn, seine farblose Stimme, die die Wut zu einem Krächzen verzerrte, sehr komisch und lachte hell auf.

Schmied erhob sich, wurde bleich, nur seine Nase glühte blaurot, er öffnete die Tür und warf den Diener hinaus.

Diese Sache erregte großes Aufsehen im Amte. Seine Kollegen sprachen beruhigend auf ihn ein, doch er gab nicht nach.

„Mit einem kranken Menschen so zu sprechen," röchelte er, „mit einem kranken Menschen."

Schmied war erbittert, um so mehr, als er heute bereits mit zwei Kollegen Kontraverse gehabt hatte und nun die feste und heilige Ueberzeugung hegte, jedermann sei sein Feind. Er brach mit allen den Verkehr ab.

Der Kanzleivorstand erfuhr von diesem Vorfall und zog Schmied zur Verantwortung.

„Ich verstehe Sie n'cht," sagte er, „wozu spielen Sie noch weiter den Kranken, Sie bersten ja vor Gesundheit."

„Was sagen Sie?" — widersprach Schmied, kehrte dem Vorstand den Rücken, warf die Tür zu und ging heim. Durch zwei Wochen zeigte er sich nicht im Amte.

„Dieser Schuft!" knirschte er. „Dieser Schuft."

•

Zur Sommerzeit, an einem Sonntagnachmittag, saß der Kanzleivorstand in seinem Stammgasthaus und erklärte eifrig:

„Die Disziplinarbehörde wird sich in der nächsten Woche mit dem Fall zu befassen haben. Sie, meine Herren Kollegen, wissen sehr gut, mit welch väterlichem Wohlwollen ich mich Ihrer aller annehme, aber in dieser Sache kann ich nicht nachgeben, schon deshalb nicht, weil durch Statuierung eines Exempels ähnlichen Fällen vorgebeugt werden muß. Dieser Mensch ist unerhört trotzköpfig und fast geworden, wirft mir Akten einfach unerledigt zurück und treibt seine Trägheit so weit, daß er grundlos monatelang vom Amte fernbleibt und mir seine Gläubiger auf den Hals hetzt, die allerhand von schmutzigen Schulden munkeln. Schließlich kann ich es doch nicht dulden, daß mich jemand geradezu provoziert. Nicht meiner eigenen Person wegen. Sie kennen mich genau und wissen, daß ich wenig Wesens daraus mache, ob Herr Schmied den Hut lüftet oder nicht. Ich entscheide auch in dieser Frage nicht selbst, sondern überlasse der weisen Beurteilung der Disziplinarbehörde und eines hohen Ministeriums, wer recht hat, er oder ich, und ich zweifle nicht, daß dieses hohe Forum unter Berücksichtigung meines korrekten Standpunktes die Angelegenheit so erledigen wird, daß meine Amtsehre wieder blank dasteht."

Die Beamten nickten mit wortlosem Einverständnis. Sie fanden den Stil des Kanzleivorstandes sehr schön. Dann tranken sie alle die Gläser leer, der Chef wischte sich den Bierschaum aus dem Schnurrbart und wiederholte mit der schmatzenden, grinsenden Befriedigung der Wohlhabenheit und Selbstsicherheit:

„Das hohe Ministerium wird entscheiden."

•

Monatelang dauerte das amtliche Verfahren. Ein Kollege machte noch — vergeblich — einen Versuch, den Kanzleivorstand umzustimmen. Schmied wurde entlassen, und der einsetzende Herbstregen fand ihn draußen auf der Gasse, postenlos.

Im Anfang wußte er nicht, was er beginnen sollte. Später hausierte er mit Zigaretten, verkaufte an Studenten ausländische Marken und zerbrach sich den Kopf über eine Erfindung, die ihm nicht gelingen wollte.

Seine Familie litt Hunger. Er bewohnte mit den Seinen als Afterpartei zwei kleine Zimmerchen, in denen der Ofen nicht heizte, die Lampe rußte und rauchte und auch noch des Nachmittags zu riechen war, was sie zu Mittag gegessen hatten.

Schmied kränkel'e. Er suchte sämtliche Aerzte auf, klagte über Schmerzen in der Lunge, in der Leber, in den Nieren, und träumte davon, man werde ihm wieder irgendein Organ operieren. Wenn es von ihm abhängig abhängig gewesen wäre, mit Freuden würde er zugestimmt haben, daß man ihm das Herz herausschneide und den ganzen Körper ausleere, wie einen Kleiderschrank. Doch die Aerzte schickten ihn lächelnd fort und sagten, er sei kerngesund. Dick wurde Schmied, und sein Gesicht vom vielen Brot und Kartoffelgemüse aufgedunsen. Das Elend schien ihm zu dienen. Seiner Familie ging es bloß an Sonntagen besser. Da fanden sich in den Nachmittagsstunden einige Leute ein, Schmied saß mit seinen Kindern um den runden Tisch herum und kramte mit dem Gesicht eines Märtyrers stolz und selbstbewußt die Geschichte der Operation aus.

Die Kinder, die diese Erzählung schon an die hundertmal gehört hatten, fielen ihm zuweilen ins Wort, denn sie kannten den ganzen Kram auswendig.

„Jetzt erzähle, Vater, wie du narkotisiert wurdest."

•

Schmied begann auch über das Leben nachzudenken. Schön war es auf dieser Welt nicht. Ein Tag verfloß nach dem anderen, einer dem anderen völlig gleich, und Schmied konnte sich nicht einmal aus seiner Jugendzeit an Tage des Glückes und der Trunkenheit erinnern. Nur ein einziger Rausch hafte'e ihm im Gedächtnis. Jener, der dem schweren und süßen Wohlgeruch des Chloroforms entflammte, in jenem Augenblick des Erwachens, da ihn in einer überaus hellen, gläsernen Stube weißgekleidete Menschen mit einer hellrabiatbigen Flüssigkeit waschen und sich dann mit harten Bürsten die Nägel rieben.

Das war herrlich schön gewesen. Sehr ähnlich dem Himmelreich, der Engelsmusik, der Heldenoper. In der Luft war ein linder Duft wie diskreter Blutwohlgeruch zu spüren.

Oft dachte er daran, daß alles Unglück nur wegen dieses einzigen Rausches über ihn hereingebrochen sei, doch dann verschwand dieses Selbstbedauern wieder. Er war mit sich zufrieden und lächelte, und hatte nur den einzigen Wunsch, sich noch einmal ausgiebig mit Chloroform betrinken zu können.

Nachts pflegte er das braune Glas hervorzuholen. Für alle Ewigkeit konservliert und frisch gehalten schwamm das Blinddarmstück darin herum. Die Kerze flackerte. Die anderen schliefen.

Schmied stellte das Glas auf den Tisch und ließ die Augen nicht davon.

Einzig-autorisierte Übersetzung aus dem Magyarischen von Stefan I. Klein

## Biologie und Kubismus

**Adolf Behne**

Früher sprach man stolz von einem „naturwissenschaftlichen Jahrhundert". Heute wird diese Phrase kein Denkender wiederholen. Das „naturwissenschaftliche Zeitalter" ist gestorben. Was es an Lebenskraft einmal besessen hatte, erlosch mehr und mehr in der ungeheuer ausgebreiteten Popularisierung. Die Naturwissenschaft erstarrte zum „Positivismus", ihr A und O wurde das Experiment. Der Begriff des Experimentes, wie eine Offenbarung vorangetragen, verdeckte eine Zeitlang die Geistesarmut — für die Mitläufer.

Das „naturwissenschaftliche Jahrhundert" eroberte sich die Volksversammlungen, begegnete aber einer im gleichen Verhältnis wachsenden Interesselosigkeit bei allen selbständig Denkenden. Und heute ist die Naturwissenschaft eines Häckel, eines Ostwald, aller Monisten und Positivisten in den denkbar tiefsten Mißkredit gekommen. „Ja, das Experiment soll für Euch auch d e n k e n, ich glaube?" (Mysoua: Sturmbuch 3)

Allerdings, an Experimentatoren, auch geschickten und listigen Experimentatoren, hat es der modernen Naturwissenschaft nicht gefehlt — bis auf den heutigen Tag. Aber woran es so kläglich fehlt, das ist der Ehrgeiz des Denkens. Mit einem ungeheuren Material haben uns die Experimente der Biologen überschüttet, aber leider ist die überwiegende Masse des Materiales — nicht etwa falsch, sondern bedeutungslos, taub und stumm für jede tiefere Erkenntnis.

Nur aus dieser so verständlichen Abneigung gegen moderne naturwissenschaftliche Literatur scheint es mir erklärlich, daß ein Buch wie die „Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung" von J a c o b B a r o n v o n U e x k ü l l (München, F. Bruckmann A—G 1913) bisher so wenig Beachtung gefunden hat. Besonders bei der jungen Generation, die sich heute um eine Erneuerung der Kunst und der Kultur bemüht, sollte das schöne Buch begeisterte Aufnahme finden. Vielleicht ist der Titel zurächst irreführend. Man könnte meinen, er künde einen der bekannten trostlosen Versuche an, experimentelle Binsenwahrheiten zu einem ethischen, sozialen und künstlerischen System zu verbacken. In Wahrheit handelt es sich um etwas ganz anderes: um den ersten und in seiner Bedeutung garnicht zu überschätzenden Vorstoß gegen die geisteswarme Naturwissenschaft von Heute, um die revolutionierende Arbeit eines Denkers. Dem Buche Uexkülls kommt eine klassische Bedeutung zu.

Dieses Buch wirkt fast als überpersönliche Leistung. Es bringt wundervolles Material für Erscheinungen, die das Bewußtsein des Autors ablehnt. Diese Tatsache ist nicht im mindesten verwirrend. Sie wäre es nur bei einem System-Fabrikanten. Bei einem „Seher", dessen Werk „wird" und „entsteht", wie ein Kunstwerk, das ja auch vieldeutbar ist, gibt sie den besten Beweis für seine Berufung. Der System-Fabrikant, wie jeder „Macher", hat es leicht, konsequent zu sein. Bei einem Uexküll ist es sehr wohl möglich, daß die Erkenntnisse, die ihm kommen, von ihm selbst nicht in allen Konsequenzen empfunden werden.

Ich habe an anderer Stelle (in meiner Broschüre „Zur neuen Kunst" im Verlage des „Sturm" Berlin 1915) Uexküll einen „Expressionisten" genannt — und Uexküll will für seine Person nichts vom Expressionismus wissen. Aber die Gesinnung seines W e r k e s ist völlig aus gleichen Geiste geboren, wie die Gesinnung unserer jungen Kunst. Die Biologie ist für Uexküll nicht eine Summe von außermenschlichen Kenntnissen auf Grund von Experimenten an Affen, Schnecken und Fröschen, sondern die Erkenntnis von Beziehungen zum lebendigen Subjekt. „Solange ein Kind mit Kieselsteinen spielt, ist dieser ein wertvoller Gegenstand und erhält durch seine Beziehungen zum lebendigen Subjekt selbst ein Stück Leben. Werden statt der biologischen Beziehungen physikalische Ursachen eingeführt, so gelingt es sogar, einen Kieselstein totzuschlagen."

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*Figure 1 Adolf Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," Der Sturm, vol. 6, no. 11-12 (September 1, 1915): 68-71 (68). Image public domain.*

[14] Behne, "Deutsche Expressionisten," 114. Emphasis in original.


*Figure 2 Jakob von Uexküll, Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung. Gesammelte Aufsätze (Munich: F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1913), title page. Image public domain.*

INSIDE-OUT

Behne mentioned Uexküll in his writings as early as 1913, the year *Bausteine* was published. In "Kunst und Milieu" [Art and Milieu] (1913), the ecologist is named alongside the expressionist architect Bruno Taut and the anti-fascist novelist Heinrich Mann to outline a culture-and-science-pervading teleology that emerges from a biologically-encoded, creative *interiority*.[15] Arguing for evolutionary objectivity, Taut, Mann, and Uexküll had recognized that "today, the path leads from the inside out again." "In all areas," Behne argued, "we stand under the sign of a new interiority [*Innerlichkeit*] and intellectuality [*Geistigkeit*]" that opposes a milieu-theory for which individuals are but the total sum of their sociocultural circumstances.[16]

In a lecture given at the opening of the 29th exhibition at the Sturm Galerie in November 1914, subsequently printed in *Der Sturm* as "Deutsche Expressionisten" [German Expressionists], Behne crucially emphasized the inherent animism of art as an organism, contesting that "an inorganic work of art is a contradiction in terms."[17] The vibrancy achieved by expressionism, he reasoned, is the definite aim of modern art and opposed to the sterility of impressionistic works. Whereas the impressionists erroneously attempted to "*create* an organism" by "following half the law of formation of the inner world, half the rules of finished external formation," the expressionists, he argued, "allow it to *grow* purely from the inner capacity for form, from the power of perception, from the imagination."[18] Alongside a passing reference to Kant's grounding *Critiques*, Behne cites Uexküll again, arguing in the biologist's words that "[o]nly the machines are made, the organisms develop."[19]

With "Expressionistische Architektur" [Expressionistic Architecture] (1915), Behne returned to "architecture, as the strictest and purest of the fine arts" to reinforce the operative processes that underlie his theory of interiority. In stark contrast to the impressionists who "subordinate artistic creation to a concept or idea that is not in the essence of the task," the expressionist architect:

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[15] Adolf Behne, "Kunst und Milieu (I)," *Die Gegenwart* 42.2, no. 38 (September 20, 1913): 599-603; Adolf Behne, "Kunst und Milieu (II)," *Die Gegenwart* 42.2, no. 39 (September 27, 1913): 616-19.

[16] Behne, "Kunst und Milieu (I)," 599. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

[17] Behne, "Deutsche Expressionisten," 114. Kai Gutschow has shown that Behne claimed in two letters to Walden from November 23, 1914, and August 22, 1915, to have written "Biologie und Kubismus" before "Deutsche Expressionisten," but originally submitted his proposal of an expanded version to *Die weißen Blätter*, an important monthly journal of literary expressionism, where it was rejected by its editor René Schickele. See: Gutschow, "The Culture of Criticism," 183 n149.

[18] Behne, "Deutsche Expressionisten," 114. Emphasis added.

[19] Jakob von Uexküll, "Das Tropenaquarium," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung*, 103-22 (108), cit. Behne, "Deutsche Expressionisten," 114.

> descends very deeply and very tensely into the essence of his tasks, yet without any idea of a particular order, a specific formation. Everything is always new to him from the ground up; he creates entirely from within. Every form is necessarily unique to him because precisely the same conditions can never recur in a new task. — He keeps away everything that could come from outside as a law of form [*Formgesetz*], as an influence, as a force. Since his houses are built entirely from within, such a force should act on them as a strange, artificial light would act on a growing plant. […] Nothing may be attached from the outside; ornament [*Schmuck*], too, which must not be frowned upon, has to arise from within.[20]

This dense excerpt provides precious insight into Behne's occasionally confused juxtaposition of natural and artificial creation. The analogy of a growing plant serves to underline expressionist architecture as an organism. Yet why does artificial lighting enforce this organic growth? Doesn't the expressionist rebuff all exterior manufactured stimuli to allow creative interiority to unfold unobstructed? Would this not corrupt what Behne termed the "law of form" [*Formgesetz*] to evolve?

Published only a few months later, "Biology and Cubism" eventually concretized this emerging line of thought on interiority, juxtaposing Uexküll's ecological postulations with Behne's art historical analyses of cubism. Deeming *Bausteine* a "suprapersonal achievement," Behne cunningly divorced the biologist—and his resistance to an intellectual alliance with expressionism—from his theoretical realizations. These biological "truths" in themselves "entitle us to tear down the wall between art and life, to connect art with life, yes, to identify it with life," Behne stressed.[21] Throughout "Biology and Cubism," he utilizes the biologist's conceptualization of coexisting perceptual worlds to delineate the speculative experiments in cubist representations of reality:

> Darwinism only knew the normal, objective world common to all beings as a world of physical and chemical causes. […] Our worldview is different. This '*normal world*' [*Normalwelt*] is not given at all in perception and experience. It is just a hypothesis, a construction — although most humans believe it to be the real deal. Every being has *its* world. There are countless subjective worlds that intersect and are placed one inside the other. Through Uexküll, we know that the worldview is not even exhausted by that. Every being has two worlds: a *sense world* [*Merkwelt*]

[20] Behne, "Expressionistische Architektur," 135.

[21] Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," 70.

> and an *effect world* [*Wirkungswelt*]. The *sense world* is produced through the specific properties of its sensory organs. The *effect world* is defined by its locomotory system and other external organs. The value of Uexküll's proof is that for the *same* being, the sense world and the effect world only very rarely and partially match.[22]

For Behne, this incongruence between perceptual worlds—sense or effect—offers expressionist artists, especially cubists, an ambiguous, obscure zone of experimentation. It both grounds their abstract representations by providing them with possible worlds of their own and fosters a duality between physical reality and psychological virtuality. An essential aspect of this environmental perception is that these worlds are never static but oscillate back and forth. They vibrate alongside, intersect, or separate. In this non-Euclidean space, dimensions can be folded, as in Otokar Kubín's "One-Dimensional-Man" (1914), or expanded to reflect the vibrational animism of Franz Marc's "Cats" (1914) in four dimensions (figs. 3-4).[23] In other words, "every being has *its* world."[24] The enclosed system of *Der Sturm*, with artworks created especially for its editorial covers, attests to this circular logic.

[22] Ibid., 70.

[23] For an extensive discussion of this "vibratory modernism" of early-twentieth-century avant-garde art, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, revised and extended edition (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013 [1983]).

[24] Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," 70.


*Figure 3 Otakar Kubín, untitled ["One-Dimensional-Man"], original woodcut from the cover of Der Sturm, vol. 5, no. 3 (1914). Image public domain.*


*Figure 4 Franz Marc, Katzen [cats], on the cover of Der Sturm, vol. 5, no. 1 (1914). Image public domain.*

## OUTSIDE-IN

When providing a translation of "Biologie und Kubismus" more than a century after its original publication, it is crucial to contextualize and enclose a trigger warning along with critical remarks on the racist postulations that seam this historical document on a

"new biological worldview." Like many Western intellectuals of the early twentieth century, Behne is not immune to problematic interpolations of primitivism and scientific racism. While these remarks and their deplorable vocabulary are made explicit (and translated as such), the conscientious reader is likewise introduced to Behne's progressive reflections and his critical suspicions of Uexküll. The latter's positive inclinations towards the theories of the American eugenicist Herbert Spencer Jennings are made painfully evident in the text's endnotes. In conjunction with Behne's well-documented ambivalence towards a growing German nationalism during WWI, the title itself underlines a determined distancing from the nationalistic term expressionism to a less contaminated cubism.[25]

Behne critically differentiates the concept of primitivism from its widely disseminated derogative subtext of a stunted cultural or intellectual evolution, rectifying its classification as "non-art." Extending the notion by sweepingly including the artistic production of various peoples across spatiotemporal coordinates, Behne renders primitivism as a boundary-transcending conception of art, an intellectual organism in emergence from a creative interiority.[26] As such, it embodies the expressionist tenets that abhor impressionistic imitation of nature as "logical making of art" and instead practice "intuitive composition" that evolves organically "to a purer conception of art."[27] Far from a singular occurrence, Behne stressed this corrective again and again. In "Das Können in der primitiven Kunst" [The Skill in Primitive Art], published a few months after "Biology and Cubism," he grounded it as "absolutely necessary" to educate a dismissive public.[28] Prescient thoughts, considering that this same public would only a few years later escalate ignorance to full-fledged hatred fueled by Nazi propaganda that deemed the same works and artists Behne considered avant-garde degenerate [*entartet*] since the 1920s.[29] In its German original, the verb "*entartet*" provides a final biological link as it defines beings that somehow differ from

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[25] See Gutschow, "The Culture of Criticism," 183.

[26] Behne, thus, aggregates European artists and architects of the Gothic, those of archaic Greece, Vedic India, or more contemporaneously, the indigenous tribes of Africa, America, Asia, or Oceania, as well as the art of children and Western cubists. This transhistorical approach is mobilized by the art historian in various writings, often in connection with his propagation of a move from "a naturalness that can be explained physically to a biological phenomenon." As he exclaims: "Time does not create works of art. To connect the consideration of art with the concept of time is therefore completely arbitrary. After modern impressionism, India is not a dead past, but more rightly our future"—Adolf Behne, "Wiedergeburt der Kunst," in *Die Stadtkrone,* ed. Bruno Taut (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1919), 113-31 (115).

[27] Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," 69.

[28] Adolf Behne, "Das Können in der Primitiven Kunst," *Kunstgewerbeblatt* 27, no. 3 (December 1915): 44-6 (46).

[29] See Adolf Behne, *Entartete Kunst* (Berlin: Habel, 1947).

their original type [*Art*]. They have (been) de-typed. Whereas national socialists convicted modern art this way as "impure or "un-German," Behne's "Biology and Cubism" preemptively devalues these fascist delusions as there only exist multiverses in which "every being has *its* world."[30]

Given its obscure motifs, which include the genetic coding of artistic genius or inter-species telecommunication, it is not surprising that the text has been marginalized as an oddity. Despite its infractions, "Biology and Cubism" offers visionary disciplinary conceptions of environmental perception that are well ahead of its time. Seeing past the eccentricities and flow-of-consciousness-like vignettes, the text presents a truly remarkable experiment in transcending limited subjectivity towards evolutionary objectivity that can fulfill its potential through art. Vividly, it portrays the broader natural-scientific shift—emulated in the arts—from a physical-chemical worldview to a biological worldview.

## INTRAMURAL ORGANISMS, VIBRATING WORLDS

Influencing architectural discussions since the 1890s, the concept of *Sachlichkeit*, or objectivity, outlined a clear departure from all superficial decoration denounced as impressionistic towards scientific objectivity. The idea, argued architect and *Deutscher Werkbund* founding member Hermann Muthesius, was best represented in the functional architecture and tectonics of "giant bridges, steamships, railway cars, bicycles, and the like," whose core-form [*Kernform*] and design emerged from within derived from their purpose alone.[31] Malleable through artistic interpretation, the concept retained certain degrees of variance, yet mainly invoked "simplicity, a rational and straightforward attention to needs as well as to materials and processes."[32] Architectural historian Rosemarie Haag Bletter provides a crucial conceptual distinction in her introduction to the translation of Behne's *The Modern Functional Building*.[33] For Behne, *Sachlichkeit*, next to its matter-of-fact functionality and simplicity, retained philosophical allusions to an abstract 'thingness' [lit. *Sachlichkeit*; thing—*Sache*] that strove towards absolute essentialism in form, materiality, and actuality. As Behne remarked in the original foreword of *Der moderne Zweckbau*, the origins of

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[30] Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," 70.

[31] Hermann Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art: Transformations of Architecture in the Nineteenth Century and its Present Condition*, trans. Stanford Anderson (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 79.

[32] Stanford Anderson, "*Sachlichkeit* and Modernity, or Realist Architecture," in *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1993), 323-62 (340).

[33] Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "Introduction," in Adolf Behne, *The Modern Functional Building*, 1-83.

architecture reach back to humanity's pre-architectural, "primordial reason for building," namely shelter from atmospheric conditions or hostile beings.[34] Form is determined by a primeval "play instinct" that establishes laws that eventually evolve into utilitarian functionalism. This evolutionary objectivity, Behne argued, is inherently revolutionary in its corrective design processes. It strives towards "the recollection of the original function, from as neutral a condition as possible" to achieve "a rejuvenated, living, breathing form."[35]

With "Biology and Cubism," Behne addresses this re-originating drive and pushes back on the contemporaneous disciplinary tensions rooted in eighteenth-century positivism, concretized later by architectural historian Alan Colquhoun as "a very complex intermixture of the notion of architecture as relative and evolutionary and the notion of architecture as based on natural law."[36] With his enthusiastic book review, Behne treads a blurry zone between natural or cultural origins that gain agency from an essential interiority. Cubism thereby materializes—like Uexküll's *Bausteine*—as a suprapersonal achievement: "Its natural task," Behne stressed, "is the visible formation of our new feeling of life [*Lebensgefühl*]."[37] As the most concrete, if seemingly abstract, geometric formulation of the expressionistic tendencies, cubists understood how to "let the form *arise,* […] let it vibrate out of the whole."[38] "Biology and Cubism" is Behne's stimulating attempt to foster a bio-logic underpinning for his theoretical formulations of expressionistic *Sachlichkeit.* It elevates cubism to an artistic multiverse uniquely equipped to synthesize modern life process [*Lebensprozeß*] and law of form [*Formgesetz*] into experiential events—equating life and art. "The result," he writes, "is a worldview of tremendous mobility and ambiguity, a cosmos that is glorious in its abundance, an infinite, in its numerous functions, *vibrating* world."[39]

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[34] Behne, *The Modern Functional Building*, 87.

[35] Ibid., 87.

[36] Alan Colquhoun, *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 21.

[37] Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," 70.

[38] Behne, "Deutsche Expressionisten," 114.

[39] Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," 70.

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# Biology and Cubism

Adolf Behne

*Translated by Clemens Finkelstein*[40]

In the past, one spoke proudly of a 'century of natural sciences.' Today, no rational mind would repeat this phrase. The 'century of natural sciences' is dead. The vitality it once possessed expired more and more through an immensely widespread popularization. The natural sciences stiffened into 'positivism,' its be-all and end-all became the

[40] Originally published as Adolf Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," *Der Sturm* 6, no. 11-12 (September 1, 1915): 68-71; and slightly modified as Adolf Behne, "Biologie und Kubismus," *Die Tat* 9, no. 8 (November 1917): 694-705. Notes on translation: "Biology and Cubism" makes Behne's text available in English for the first time. Supplementary information and citations missing in the German original are provided as footnotes. This complimentary material aids comprehension as much as it completes the fragmentary nature of the textual bricolage, which is riddled in its initial version for *Der Sturm* from September 1915 by occlusive, erroneous typesetting. Thus, the following translation sources the missing content from a slightly modified version of "Biologie und Kubismus" for the monthly journal *Die Tat* from November 1917. Where necessary, the text stays with the idiomatic German syntax and the often-peculiar partitioning of paragraphs. Where possible, comprehension was improved by conforming to the most approximate vocabulary and grammatical constructions of (American) English. Behne's stylistic emphases are replicated, however, crucially differentiating citations ("") and emphasis ('') lacking in the original, and using italics instead of typographical letter-spacing [*Sperrsatz*]. Terms in German are provided italicized in angular brackets if deemed essential. The four endnotes follow the original version of *Der Sturm,* extended by references to citations, individuals, or terminology that may be ambiguous.

experiment. Carried on like a revelation, the notion of the experiment covered—for its followers—temporarily the poverty of mind.

The 'century of natural sciences' conquered the public assemblies but encountered an equally growing lack of interest in all those thinking independently. Today, the natural sciences of [Ernst] Haeckel, [Friedrich Wilhelm] Ostwald, all monists and positivists come into the deepest possible discredit. "Yes, the experiment should also *think* for you; you can't be serious!"[41]

However, modern natural sciences have not lacked in experimenters, including skillful and cunning ones—to this day. But what is so pathetically missing is the ambition of thinking. The experiments of biologists have showered us with egregious material, but sadly, the overwhelming mass of this material is not wrong but meaningless, deaf and dumb for all profound knowledge.

Only from this understandable aversion to modern natural-scientific literature can it be explained that a book like *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* [Building Blocks of a Biological Worldview] (1913) by Jakob von Uexküll has thus far received only so little attention.[42] Especially among the younger generation, which is now driven by the renewal of art and culture, should this fine book receive enthusiastic reception. Maybe the title is initially misleading. One could think that it announces one of those familiar dismal attempts at amalgamating experimental truisms to an ethical, social, and artistic system. In reality, it is something completely different: the first, in its significance not to be overestimated advance against the intellectually impoverished natural sciences of today, the revolutionizing work of a thinker. Uexküll's book attains classical significance.

This book appears almost like a suprapersonal [*überpersönlich*] achievement. It collects wonderful material of phenomena that the consciousness of the author rejects. This fact is not in the least confusing. It would only be confusing in a system-manufacturer [*System-Fabrikant*[43]]. In a 'visionary'—whose work 'becomes' and 'develops' like an artwork that is likewise ambiguous—it gives the best proof of his calling. It is easy for the system-manufacturer, like any 'maker,' to be consistent. For Uexküll, it is very much possible that the realizations that come to him are not perceived by himself in all its consequences.

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[41] Mynona (Salomo Friedlaender), *Für Hunde und andere Menschen* (*Sturm-Bücher III*) (Berlin: Der Sturm, 1914), 15.

[42] Jakob von Uexküll, *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Munich: F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1913).

[43] Behne's derogative "system-manufacturer" references eighteenth-century Physiocratic critiques of so-called *system-building* in empiricist endeavors that base knowledge production modes on abstract reasoning instead of sensory evidence.

I have elsewhere (in my pamphlet *Zur neuen Kunst* [On the new Art] (1915)[44]) called Uexküll an 'expressionist'—and Uexküll personally doesn't want to know anything about expressionism. But the ethos of his *work* is born entirely of the same spirit as the ethos of our young art. Biology is for Uexküll not a sum of extra-human knowledge based on experiments with monkeys, snails, and frogs, but knowledge about relationships to the living subject. "As long as a child plays with a pebble, it is a valuable object and receives, through its relationships to a living subject, itself a piece of life. If physical causes are introduced instead of biological relationships, it is even possible to beat a pebble to death."[45]

Such sentences must be approved wholeheartedly. That the observation of nature has been displaced so beyond any relation to what is immediately given to the human; that as a result, every center has been taken from it and actually been handed over to the people, who can expect everything without feeling or imagination, without any valuation; that has lost it the interest of the good ones. Uexküll finds a compelling expression when he says about the common worldview of our time: it *has lost the center of gravity.* A worldview without a center of gravity is out of necessity impressionistic in a literal sense: it is exposed to the swaying of surging impressions. And in contrast to that, I call the worldview that is investigating from a center expressionistic. Where there is a center, there reigns a determining, shaping will; and where there is a shaping, ordering, evaluating will, there is, of itself, the force of expression. That doesn't apply only to art, and in art, it doesn't only apply to new art; moreover, it applies to all true art, not least our Gothic.

Uexküll has placed in the focus of his work the notion of the 'organic.' The organic is an elementary fact of everything living, is evident to us immediately through experience. The organic is for the biologist, thus, the given, logical center. The earlier observation of nature has turned this elementary fact into something derivative—has tried to get from the inorganic to the organic with the help of evolutionary theory, swerved with fearfulness from the recognition of the 'organic' as an elementary actuality, and stabilized chance as a basic fact, the 'dance of atoms.' Is that not impressionistic?

What characterizes the *art* of the impressionists? They thought it more important that the lines of an image met the silhouette of a tree 'correctly' than that horizontal and vertical lines are in beautiful proportions to each other. They subordinated artistic considerations to something extra-artistic, they sought to come to art through non-art, and contemporaneous aesthetics and history of art [*Kunstwissenschaft*] took the same tortuous path ([Hippolyte] Taine, [Wilhelm] Hausenstein). This is in attitude, the same 'peripheral' procedure as in the ordinary observation of nature. The *young artists*, in

[44] Adolf Behne, *Zur neuen Kunst* (Sturm-Bücher VII) (Berlin: Der Sturm, 1915).

[45] Jakob von Uexküll, "Das Weltbild der Biologie," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Munich: F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1913), 191-264 (258).

contrast, place the service to beauty instead of correctness in the focus of their creation. That is the last sense of expressionism. And the history of art should finally place value judgment, instead of the history of development with its extra-artistic standard of the 'characteristic,' at the center of its work.

How can it be explained that Uexküll is so decidedly moving away from the new art? First of all, I have reason to believe that Uexküll hardly knows the true new art which we are dealing with solely. It is very likely that he will judge otherwise if he has once (or better repeatedly) seen the works of [Robert] Delaunay, [Franz] Marc, [Carlo] Mense, [Fernand] Léger, [Marc] Chagall, [Oskar] Kokoschka, and [Jacoba van] Heemskerck. It seems to me, after his not always very fortunate remarks on artistic questions, that he knows from his point of view only that half-new, decorative kind, for example, the '*Brücke*'—[Erich] Heckel, [Ernst Ludwig] Kirchner, [Max] Pechstein—and then his remarks would be true to a certain extent but did not touch—the new art!

But suppose Uexküll knows Chagall, Marc, Kokoschka. Then he would presumably motivate his negative judgment with the assertion: their works are 'made' [*gemacht*]. But that would be a mistake!

I find especially those sentences by Uexküll so eminently beautiful in which he reveals the chasm between the world in which everything 'is made' and the world in which everything 'evolves':

> Its inhabitants are forced to live jumbled and next to each other. They never understand each other. In the world in which everything evolves, people who are engaged in the making of things are ridiculous. They are blind and don't see the essential, the coherence of the great, wonderful total-becoming [*Gesamtwerden*]. In the world in which everything is made, people waiting for emergence are miserable. Because from all sides, one calls out to them: "Don't be dreamers, no *Faselhänse*,[46] take hold and make something new!"[47]

Marvelous sentences that every friend of the new art will thankfully receive. Because this is precisely the beauty of this new art, that its works 'grow' from the inside out. But Uexküll should initially be of a different opinion. He might say, like so many others who would have more right to do so: I see constructions, but constructions are not art!

No, constructions are certainly not art, but the work of art is an intellectual organism, and organization of any kind is order, discipline, solid construction, regularity, determination. The true image is nothing else. Just as in a bodily organism, where each

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[46] *Faselhans* is an untranslatable old German term—colloquialism, negatively connoted—describing an unreliable person.

[47] Jakob von Uexküll, "Das Tropenaquarium," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Munich: F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1913), 103-22 (104).

part is in a solid, meaningful relationship with each other, it is likewise in the intellectual organism of a work of art. Each part of the pictorial surface interacts with each other—the left upper corner is designed in relation to the lower right corner. Impressionism has unfortunately taken this standard from us. But Raphael, [Matthias] Grünewald, the Indians, the archaic Greek art, Brunelleschi … they allow, rather they *demand* this model of the organic. To criticize a work of art because it spreads its organism, that would come close to the critique of the 'naked construction' of a human joint.

And how wrong would it be to believe that in contrast to the *evolved* organism of animals, the strict structure of a Marc could only be 'calculated,' constructed, 'made.' The only difference is that even for the most naked organism of animals we *know* that it evolved, while we still cannot get rid of the narrow view of *personal production* when it comes to the intellectual organism. Yet even in intellectual matters there is only, and exclusively, one evolution—as far as things of value are in question—an evolution for which the artist is only the ground or the vessel. Only the barren artists, meaning the dilettantes, see themselves as the source, as the last and the first origin—the true artist knows himself as a transit station [*Durchgangsstation*]. [Anselm] Feuerbach paints himself as the proud prince of life: "I am the one who created all this!"—[Arnold] Böcklin, in his self-portrait with death, (paints himself) in melancholic modesty as the one who listens to infinity, to the elemental. Feuerbach's paintings are full of the unintentional resignation of the unconscious [*Ohnmächtigen*], Böcklin's paintings encompass all jubilation and all torment.

I am told by a well-known advocate of impressionism that he said reproachfully of the old German masters: as humans, they trembled before the saints they painted. That is why their pictures are so weak. He contrasted them with a modern Frenchman, who stood proud and gracious like a god before his canvas. Anyone who speaks like this reveals that he, too, like most art viewers, considers art to be 'making.' We bless those glorious old masters who trembled before their saints.[i]

Does the strict composition of a modern image speak against its naturally evolving emergence? That can only be assumed by ignorance. Whoever is acquainted with children's drawings, the art of primitives—for instance, the Negros—, and has feelingly absorbed it, will know that especially these works, which are as distant from the artistic calculation as possible, exhibit lines, colors, and forms in the strictest construction. That is precisely what is moving about the children's drawing, seeing how in silent, self-evident, completely naive lawfulness, colors develop mysteriously, how lines and surfaces unfold in the purest relationship, how a color necessarily allows the most beautiful and perfect scale to follow.

The art of the primitives proves unequivocally that the 'most natural' art is the most strictly constructed. The children's drawing is undoubtedly innocuous evidence for

an organic evolution from the intellect—and precisely cannot be surpassed in construction.

That is why the often-heard objection that the images of Léger and Mense are not art because they are constructed is nonsensical. They are not constructed in the sense of calculation; they have evolved according to intellectual lawfulness.

Uexküll says: "The regularity [*Planmäßigkeit*] cannot be grasped by logical thinking, but only through intuition [*Anschauung*]."[48] This also applies in a broader sense to the creation of the new art!

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Indeed, all those artists and aesthetes that have discovered in impressionism and naturalism a comfortable resting place [*Schlummerland*] for their materialist way of thinking represent the opinion: the children's drawing is not art. But since we already know that these aesthetes, completely logical, mean a 'making' when they say art, there is no need to say much more about this subject. Because the art of the primitives is certainly not a making—there we are completely in agreement!

Especially the children's drawing can lead us to a purer conception of art. And with that, I come back to my starting point, Uexküll's book.

Uexküll emphasizes the "specific lawfulness of everything organic," the "autonomy of the processes of life."[49] This theory must also be applied to everything intellectual and especially to art. (What Uexküll himself occasionally says about art is unfortunately grown on different soil.) Uexküll and his predecessors have recognized the creative and productive as the actual power of everything that emerges [*Entstehendes*]. This power must also be implemented in intellectual life. Those subjects in whose minds the creative, mysterious primordial element [*Urelement*] still functions so strongly that its products become necessarily 'organic,' are truly valuable naturals as artists, scientists, generals, etc. An argument for this provides Uexküll himself when he deals with the notion of *instinct*. Uexküll indicates the possibility that we also have genes in our brain, which, similar to a germ, think actively—not, of course, in all humans. The majority of humans are probably animals of experience [*Erfahrungstiere*] (the impressionist artist is likewise an animal of experience), animals of instinct [*Instinkttiere*] are surely only a few. "Who knows whether the superior position of certain geniuses over their fellow men is not based on the systematic operation of new genes?"[50]

Genes shape our structure according to a mysterious plan. The stronger and prouder they unfurl their force, the 'more ingenious' is the individual, meaning it is more likely that all of its intellectual manifestations possess the regularity and the

[48] Uexküll, "Das Weltbild der Biologie," 226.

[49] Jakob von Uexküll, "Vom Wesen des Lebens," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* (1913), 155-90 (176).

[50] Uexküll, "Das Weltbild der Biologie," 248.

determination of the organic. The power of genes is also what gives rise to artworks. It is assumed that this force of genes is still effective within the child with all virtue and fortune of youth [*Schuß und Glück der Jugend*]. Thus, to me, the children's drawing is not something that is 'not yet art'—because it is 'not yet made' with consciousness—but is happily still art!

I already said that a lot of what Uexküll says about art is irritating, but far more important is the fact that he provides insights [*Erkenntnisse*] that, beyond his personal opinion, stimulate a deepening of our artistic views. Uexküll's realizations entitle us to tear down the wall between art and life, to connect art with life, yes, to identify it with life. It is wonderful that we can juxtapose the insights of the biologist—that, if not himself, then at least lead his grateful readers to such an insight—with the beautiful vision of a poet, a passage from Aage von Kohl's novel *Der Weg durch die Nacht* [The Way Through the Night], or as the title in the original is better, *Det store Sköd* [The Big Lap] (1911):

> In all his fibers, in every single one, there sat primordially deep [*urtief*] and burning this strong and joyful certainty! There sat the driving force from which he had written all his words: Life is bliss—and art is bliss! Life and art are one and the same![51]

Art is the true world of humans, for whom everything 'becomes' but nothing is 'made.' "Only the machines are made, the organisms develop."[52]

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This realization enables us to dismantle various prejudices and errors. Life has no 'disciplines' [*Fächer*]. Art also has no disciplines. Anyone who feels themselves to be an 'expert' in art, and who drives and represents art as an 'expert' is worse than the worst dilettante. We prefer honest 'kitsch' a hundred times more than bad 'art.'

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[51] Aage Herman von Kohl, "Der Weg durch die Nacht," *Der Sturm* 5, no. 13-14 (October 1, 1914): 93-8 (97). *Der Weg durch die Nacht* was published serially in *Der Sturm* between January and December 1914: vol. 4, no. 192-193 (January 1, 1914): 154-6; vol. 4, no. 194-195 (January 15, 1914): 162-4; vol. 4, no. 196-197 (February 1, 1914): 171-3; vol. 4, no. 198-199 (February 15, 1914): 179-82; vol. 4, no. 200-201 (March 1, 1914): 196-9; vol. 4, no. 202-203 (March 15, 1914): 203-6; vol. 5, no. 1 (April 1, 1914): 4-7; vol. 5, no. 2 (April 15, 1914): 11-13; vol. 5, no. 3 (May 1, 1914): 22-3; vol. 5, no. 4 (May 15, 1914): 28-30; vol. 5, no. 5 (June 1, 1914): 39; vol. 5, no. 6 (June 15, 1914): 43-6; vol. 5, no. 7 (July 1, 1914): 53-5; vol. 5, no. 8 (July 15, 1914): 60-2; vol. 5, no. 9 (August 1, 1914): 69-71; vol. 5, no. 10-11 (August 15, 1914): 77-9; vol. 5, no. 12 (September 1, 1914): 86-7; vol. 5, no. 13-14 (October 1, 1914): 93-8; vol. 5, no. 15-16 (November 1, 1914): 110-11; vol. 5, no. 17-18 (December 1, 1914): 115-17.

[52] Uexküll, "Das Tropenaquarium," 108.

Because art, like life, is an event, it does not allow itself to be divided into chapters either by materials or by concepts. One has departed from the materials lately, but the tailoring of concepts still flourishes.

Art is *never* anything other than nature! One accuses artists who do not copy the *external* naturalness—"nature in the sentimental sense of the audience," I called it in my *Sturmbuch*—of 'artistry' [*Artistentum*].[53] In reality, artistry, meaning artificial making, rests chiefly with the external-natural [*äußerlich-natürlichen*] painters. 'Nature' is any true work of art *according to its emergence,* by evolving organically. But since its roots are in the intellect, its organism, as long as it is *really* natural, cannot adopt the alien forms of external organisms. Sticking to the regularity of foreign organisms, the correct copying of trees, animals, houses, and faces in the right perspective—this is in truth 'artistry' in the sense of artificial making, that is in every honest sense the *un*natural [*Unnatürliche*]! When a critic tells a young artist to draw and paint more from nature, that he still had no right to create freely, it does not seem to make more sense to me as if a botanist said to a small fir tree [*Tännchen*]: "Please, first grow like an olive tree for a while, and a bit more to the right and not so fast. To grow as a fir tree, you still have no right!" Botanists are generally too clever to embarrass themselves like this. Positivist art researchers are fond of embarrassing themselves in this way, which is sincerely appreciated by the positivist public.

A few words on the subject of 'representational art.' For Uexküll—and not being the first—the 'artifact' is itself something that has been formed by us, namely by our sensory organs and our central nervous system. Now, does it make any sense that something already formed is formed again, namely artistically? As long as the artifact was viewed as something given outside of us, as something objective, absolute, the representational [*Gegenständliche*] might still have had some meaning in art. But it no longer has since we have recognized that the existence of every artifact is already a productive achievement, a formation of our intellect. Art will therefore look for better tasks!

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It does not need to look for it!

Its natural task is the visible formation of our new feeling of life [*Lebensgefühl*]. This is the goal of *Cubism*!

What has not been written about cubism—trivial things [*Belangloses*] even by the best cubists! Here the phenomenon repeats itself that brilliant achievements are suprapersonal. To explain Cubism, an artist like Fernand Léger invokes the fact that today we move so fast across this earth and through the landscape in cars and express trains:

[53] Behne, *Zur neuen Kunst*, 8.

> A landscape crossed and broken by a car or a fast horse loses in descriptive value but gains in synthetic value: the door of the wagons or the car's mirror has changed the usual appearance of things. Modern man records a hundred times more impressions than an artist of the eighteenth-century. […] The condensation of the modern painting, its variety and its rupture of forms, is the result of all this.[54]

Never have external, technical, economic, and mechanical innovations determined art. I don't believe that Cézanne and Rousseau drove particularly often with the car, and from the Gothics, I know it for sure. [*But the car seems chosen*] to play an important role in the aesthetics of modern artists; in fact, to explain the most contradicting things. In a lecture, Peter Behrens explained some time ago that the undefined [*detaillos*] smoothness of his building facades was motivated by the fact that modern humans usually only get to know the streets and house facades from the perspective of a fast-driving car. The car driver, however, could not possibly record any details. It remains unclear why the architect likewise dressed his *interior* walls in car-dress [*Autodreß*].

If in Léger, we have the phenomenon that the cubist provides failing information about the latest impetus of his creation, we have, on the other hand, the biologist Uexküll, who dismisses Cubism and yet provides the most valuable foundation for its significance.

One will never come closer to cubist works of art with formal tinkering, never with evolutionary deductions and interpretations. They remain makeshifts for the beginner. Cubism— in sculpture, painting, and architecture—is the *expression of a new, modern view of life*. Nowhere do I find it formulated more beautifully than in Uexküll: "Life takes a viewpoint to which we cannot follow it."[ii]

Darwinism only knew the normal, objective world common to all beings as a world of physical and chemical causes. Animals move very differently, feed very differently, and reproduce very differently, but they all live in the same world. It is possible to communicate with a rhinoceros beetle by phone.

Our worldview is different. This '*normal world*' [*Normalwelt*] is not given at all in perception and experience. It is just a hypothesis, a construction—although most humans believe it to be the real deal. Every being has *its* world. There are countless subjective worlds that intersect and are placed one inside the other. Through Uexküll, we know that the worldview is not even exhausted by that. Every being has two worlds: a *sense world* [*Merkwelt*] and an *effect world* [*Wirkungswelt*]. The *sense world* is

[54] Fernand Léger, "Les realizations picturales actuelles," *Les Soirées de Paris* 3, no. 25 (June 15, 1914).

produced through the specific properties of its sensory organs. The *effect world* is defined by its locomotory system and other external organs. The value of Uexküll's proof is that for the *same* being, the sense world and the effect world only very rarely and partially match. *The effect world of animals is much greater than their sense world.*[iii]

The result is a worldview of tremendous mobility and ambiguity, a cosmos that is glorious in its abundance, an infinite, in its numerous functions *vibrating* [*schwingend*] world. Every rationalism and every recipe-science [*Rezeptwissenschaft*] shatter in contact with it. This is a world that we *experience* [*erleben*], that excites our imagination, speaks again to our living senses, and elevates us from the iciness of a registrar-like superiority to the warmth of a religious bond. "Life takes a viewpoint to which we cannot follow it."

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We can always follow the naturalist and impressionist. He has a very accessible and comfortable 'viewpoint' [*Standpunkt*]. He plants his easel somewhere in the open air and translates an impression of nature [*Natureindruck*] with more or less skill and taste onto a surface of specific dimensions. The main work is done with the choice of viewpoint because the character of the image essentially depends on it, so much that we can usually reconstruct the viewpoint of the model-landscape [*Vorbild-Landschaft*] from the art-landscape [*Kunst-Landschaft*]. "Here he stood!"—to be able to say that somewhere in the mountains or by the sea is for lovers of naturalistic art downright the climax of artistic appreciation.

That is the viewpoint art [*Standpunktkunst*] with all its banalities!

We don't only know her in painting. The *architecture* of the naturalist period was work with perspectives—in complete contrast to the art of construction [*Baukunst*] of prolific epochs. Poetry was no less perspectival; it was psychological or even political propagandistic poetry [*Tendenzdichtung*]. *All* artistic production had 'perspective,' meaning a naturalistic construction of a spatial or temporal kind, a construction that presupposed, for the artist, a fixed, immutable *viewpoint outside of bodies and events* (Weisbach[55] for the impressionists and Hildebrand[56] for his decorative art, represent the necessity of the distance-image [Fernbild] similarly!). This is just as true for the pictures of Manet as it is for the novels of Zola. For many, perspective eventually became the last resort to secure some rhythm in their creations. Incapable of *producing* the rhythm, they emulated a surrogate when, like Liebermann,[57] they favored painting the tapering trees of a straight avenue.

*Cubism is the absolute antithesis to such perspectival art* [*Perspektivenkunst*]. It does not want a banal list or a psychological interpretation of bodies and events from an external viewpoint but wants life! The Cubist artist is in the midst of things; they envelop

[55] Werner Weisbach (1873-1953), German-Swiss art historian.

[56] Adolf von Hildebrand (1847-1921), German sculptor and art theorist.

[57] Max Lieberman (1847-1935).

him all around, their abundance delights him, their never dormant, always moving, enigmatic, autonomous life is like an intoxication. There is no positivistic result, no explanation, no morality, and no practical application or teaching—but glorification, admiration, and worship. How impoverished to stay in a viewpoint that one guards anxiously and proudly at once, that one has 'achieved'! Devotion to life, immersing oneself in life, to make oneself fluid and agile, not standing in front of it like a teacher with a pointer and demonstrating: that is smoke from a chimney, that is a house, that is a bridge over a river—but *being* smoke and house and river and bridge, able to transform, willing to transform! Not speaking as one person, not arguing as a judge, not finding in favor of someone and not someone else—but standing amidst the fight and the movement of many forces like a tunnel, through which everything sounds: like Aage von Kohl's *Der Große Schoß* and Hermann Essig's *Der Schweinepriester* (1914).[58] There is a great flow of life in which we swim, an embedding of all organisms in a great world process [*Weltgeschehen*].

Uexküll said: "Life does not merely oversee the *effect world* but also the *sense world*. This we cannot imitate; if we are in our subject, we cannot stand outside at the same time."[59]

We certainly cannot 'imitate' but we can design this sense of life—insofar as we are artists.

Franz Marc's animals! Should not Uexküll understand them first of all, who writes the lines: "The essence of the animal is not its form but the transformation [*Umformung*], not the structure but the life process [*Lebensprozeß*]. An animal is a pure event [*bloßes Geschehnis*]![iv]"[60]

Impressionism had a fixed viewpoint, but its forms grew hazy in the nuanced and allusive painting [*Nuancen- und Andeutungsmalerei*]. This is the most perfect and most consequent materialism, the artistic expression for the conception of the world as a 'dance of atoms.' The cubist world feeling [*Weltgefühl*] does not know the point-like fixation of the viewpoint; its forms likewise loathe the atmospheric evaporation; they are *stable*, *essential*, and *explicit*. The antithesis could be formulated like this: impressionism is vague in its insights, but its viewpoint is unambiguous and evident.

Cubism is ambiguous in its position, but its insights are profound. The elements of a cubist image are essential, pure, and explicit; as a whole, it is one movement and non-rigid. The impressionist image as a whole is rigid, fixed by perspective, illumination, etc.; its elements are trembling and floating.

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[58] Hermann Essig, *Der Schweinepriester: Lustspiel in Vier Aufzügen* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co., 1914).

[59] Uexküll, "Vom Wesen des Lebens," 187.

[60] Jakob von Uexküll, "Neue Fragen," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* (1913), 2-34 (29).

Uexküll rejects such a worldview that only knows a 'dance of atoms,' a process that no human *experiences* [*erleben*], and which we should believe as a conceptual system. As we have seen, his world is the infinite life of countless sense worlds [*Merkwelten*] that interlock, touch, and frequently intersect each other. However, it should be noted: the individual subject, with its sense world, is withdrawn from all approximation and all wavering—the subject and its sense world are a firmly joined construction [*Bau*]. After all this, should Uexküll not be the first to appreciate Cubist painting, which places instead of the vibrating nuance of 'being' and a trivial perspective a many-living [*viel-lebendigen*] cosmos?

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"The epoch of a physical-chemical worldview that led to materialism is now naturally followed by a biological worldview. It is, however, the direct path to idealism!"[61]

The idealism in modern art is Cubism.

[61] Jakob von Uexküll, "Die Umrisse einer kommenden Weltanschauung," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* (1913), 123-54 (141).

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[i] Some quotes may be permitted at this point, which will make my remarks about 'Impressionism' clearer: "Not everyone could conceal certain holy shudders in the face of this now event-becoming fantastic hubris, which had borrowed from the resurrection of Jesus [Christ] an unmistakable radiance. Thus, the whole … village was suddenly filled with religious life." [Gerhart Hauptmann, *Der Narr in Christo: Emanuel Quint* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1910), 16.]. "This space is one of my favorites at the Prado, although I do not underestimate the one-sidedness of this choice. I never visit right away in the morning, but at last, when I am becoming a little tired. And that does not improve the logic of my ability to choose. Because it is a tired hall…." [Julius Meier-Gräfe, *Spanische Reise* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1910), 304-305]; "On one such occasion I came to Dulwich, and when I had

enough of frolicking around with an Englishwoman, which I almost had seduced, under almost green trees and almost blue sky, I went to the Dulwich gallery as a faithful creature of habit and saw the pictures by Poussin. I never liked them as much as I did that day [...] Since that day I know the best time for Poussin. He is not for the morning hour of enjoyment […]." [Julius Meier-Gräfe, *Spanische Reise* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1910), 310]; "I confess that I prefer Poussin. In the beginning, I took it for my preference for afternoon hours, for a question of taste, that was not to be discussed…." [Julius Meier-Gräfe, *Spanische Reise* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1910), 311]. The same praises the impressionists: "There is no witchcraft to it." For me, a splendid caricature of "impressionistic humans" are Alfred Döblin's "Lobensteiner" [see Alfred Döblin, *Die Lobensteiner reisen nach Böhmen: Zwölf Novellen und Geschichten* (München: Georg Müller, 1917)].

[ii] Let me quote the passage in connection: "The eyed-hawk-moth, a butterfly with beautiful eye marks on its wings, frightens with these marks its pursuers, the little birds, by imitating with them the eyes of little predators, though he himself never catches sight of these marks. Us humans it does not deceive with that, for us there is no predator that has such eyes. But the little birds, who are always on their guard against cats, weasels, and similar predators, have to flee from any eye-like structure that moves in order to escape in time. Life uses this circumstance to protect the eyed-hawk-moth.—Here it is revealed that life is not hindered by the subjective barriers that it itself builds up. Life takes a viewpoint to which we cannot follow it. While the genes of the eyed-hawk-moth form, life is in the forming germ and can be destroyed by any grossly mechanical damage to the germ. At the same time, life stands outside the germ and overlooks not only the effect world [*Wirkungswelt*], but also the sense world [*Merkwelten*]. This we cannot imitate; if we are in our subject, we cannot stand outside at the same time." [Jakob von Uexküll, "Vom Wesen des Lebens," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* (1913), 155-190 (186-187)].

[iii] Is not the intellectual life [*Geistesleben*] completely analogous in this point too? In it, too, I find an effect world [*Wirkungswelt*] that is much larger than the sense world [*Merkwelt*]. It works mechanically and 'solves problems,' it assesses, tests, and shapes. Example: Someone sees an image by Kandinsky. The person is able to give long logical, psychological, aesthetic speeches, but has not 'seen' the image yet. Thus, can one not apply to many critics of modern art what Uexküll writes about sea urchins? "The sea urchins know how to strike their poison tongs with certainty into the skin of the enemy. But what are the traits that their receptors absorb as the enemy approaches? A simple stimulus chain: weak chemical stimulus—strong chemical stimulus—thrust!" [Jakob von Uexküll, "Vom Wesen des Lebens," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* (1913), 155-190 (182)] Who does not think of the audience when reading: "Any excitement emanating from the eye evokes an escape reflex or defensive stance." [Jakob von Uexküll, "Das Weltbild der Biologie," in *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Munich: F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1913), 191-264 (240)] In this, our exhibition visitors have not yet "evolved" much beyond the state of the sea anemone.

[iv] However, with these words, Uexküll reflects the view of another researcher, the American Jennings [the eugenicist Herbert Spencer Jennings (1868-1947)]. But he adds that he finds something "undeniably rich" in his theory.

# feature articles

# Sydney Cain's Spiritual Refusals amidst the Afterlives of Slavery

Angela Pastorelli-Sosa

Sydney Cain (she/them), who also goes by Sage Stargate, is a young, Bay-area based artist whose multimedia works on paper explore Black ancestral memory, transformation, and spirituality.[1] Using a process of reduction, Cain moves small particles of elements such as chalk and graphite in a circular motion to surface shapes and figures.[2] These figures are often faceless and incomplete; their blurred silhouettes evoking traces, incomplete memories, and ghostly presences. Cain refers to these figures as ancestral spirits, and their graphite and chalk as ciphers that assist in decoding "unseen realities."[3] The artist's discussion of these zones of liminality, and their commitment to rendering these ephemeral, ancestral forms provoke the questions: what does it mean to make legible something which we feel is always there? What does it mean to make your ancestors visible, to conjure them within an aesthetic realm? This paper will explore Cain's interest in spirituality and ancestral memory through *Refutations* (2018- ), an ongoing body of work that centers narratives of Black resistance across time. The project consists of various multimedia series of artworks, publications, and exhibitions that mine both San Francisco city archives and the artist's

[1] "About Sydney Cain," Sydney Cain, last modified unknown, https://www.sydneycain.com/about.

[2] Pendarvis Harshaw, "Conjuring Our Ancestral Spirits Through Art," KQED, last modified March 20, 2020 audio, 10:53, https://www.kqed.org/arts/13877054/conjuring-the-ancestors-with-art.

[3] Sydney Cain, "About Sydney Cain"; Christine Joy Ferrer, "Transitions: The Art of Sydney Cain," last modified March 31, 2018, https://www.eclectiksol.com/blog/2018/3/31/transitions.

personal genealogical research to address how ongoing urban renewal in the Bay Area disproportionately affects Black communities. I will focus on works from two different series: *Dark Sousveillance* depicts ancestors embedded throughout San Francisco cityscapes, while *Refutations* presents studies of these ethereal figures. My analysis of the works' content, materials, and process mobilizes Christina Sharpe's theories on the afterlives of slavery, Saidiya Hartman's practice of reading with and against archives, Afrofuturist aesthetics, and M. Jacqui Alexander's scholarship on practitioners of African-descendent religions. I consider how Cain's practice is ultimately a form of embodied spiritual labor that imagines alternatives to the anti-Black conditions that structure the past and present.

As this edition of *react/review* addresses, works with spiritual and otherworldly themes are either considered devoid of socio-political concerns, or are omitted from traditional art historical scholarship and academia more generally. To write about spirituality and spiritual practices is to grapple with the unknown, the intangible, ephemerality, affect, and opacity, which is inherently at odds with academic discourse's organization around logic, rationale, and conclusions. Thus, my exploration of Cain's spectral, ancestral evocations redresses the historical devaluation of spiritual practices as epistemologies or ways of knowing. By reading archives against the grain, engaging with Afrofuturism, and seeking communion with Black ancestral presence that leaves room for the unknown, I argue that Cain's practice is both a spiritual mode of survival and political resistance.

As a third-generation San Franciscan who has witnessed the transformation of neighborhoods that pushed long-time residents out of their homes, Cain refuses gentrification's attempts to erase and displace blackness through the series *Dark Sousveillance* (2018-2019), which asserts generational ties to the city. The series is inspired in part by Simone Browne's theory of "dark sousveillance," which describes strategies employed by Black peoples across time that invert surveilling mechanisms from below (sous) through forgery, fugitivity, and critique.[4] Figures in Cain's drawings appear and disappear beneath layers of charcoal and graphite, emphasizing how Black

[4] Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). In *Dark Matters*, Simone Browne re-imagines the theoretical framework undergirding surveillance studies by centering the conditions of blackness. Rather than situate the Black body into a history of surveillance theory, Browne discusses how anti-Blackness emerged as a condition for the development of surveillance strategies and technologies rather than as a consequence of their deployment. Browne reframes the field of surveillance within the history of chattel slavery, drawing our attention not to Foucault's Panopticon as a starting point, but to the Transatlantic Slave Trade ship as an early structure of power. Her analytic, "dark sousveillance," calls attention to the strategies employed by enslaved people seeking refuge and the practices of contemporary Black artists to invert the gaze.

communities navigate obfuscation to survive the threat of erasure. In *Turk and Fillmore* (2018), Cain visualizes multiple dimensions at the historic Turk and Fillmore Street MUNI substation in San Francisco's historically Black Fillmore district, once known as the "Harlem of the West" (fig. 1). Formerly a powerhouse that supplied San Francisco streetcars with electric power, the building has remained vacant since the 1970s. To the left of the drawing, Cain renders the substation's discernible façade of brick and rounded arched windows, while a congregation of faintly outlined figures assemble on the right. Most of these ancestral figures have their backs to the viewers so that the audience can only perceive their varied hairstyles, hats, and headwraps. In the center of the composition, a blurred figure emerges from the wall and extends their arm towards a train that is moving across the middle ground. The locomotive moves towards a young child wearing a mask who is busy extending the train track. This interstitial space, which collapses the division between structure and spirit on either side of the composition, suggests that the artist is deconstructing the substation to reveal what once was and is always there.

*Figure 1 Sydney Cain, Turk and Fillmore, 2018, graphite, charcoal on paper, 21 x 63 in. (53.3 x 160 cm). Courtesy of the artist; photograph by John Janca.*

*Turk and Fillmore* affirms the historical existence of Black communities in San Francisco, which Cain describes as part of a larger practice of refusal:

> *Refutations* is about refuting and the refusal of existing or not existing in space. I come from San Francisco, a common thing that I always hear is 'Oh, there's no Black people here…' and 'there's nothing here…' I know what it means conversationally for people, but the statement is not true because there's literally Black people here, it's just the ways in which we are erased or ignored, invisibilized and such…and that's something true for anything, like even with indigeneity…we're taught that there are no indigenous people anymore and it's a tactic in colonial projects to say that someone doesn't exist. So, with *Refutations*, it was tackling that idea.…[5]

Cain's statement alludes to the ongoing gentrification and displacement rampant throughout the Bay Area, catalyzed by the 2008 housing crisis and recession, as well as the so-called Silicon Valley Tech Boom 2.0, which first started around 2011.[6] The tech boom, massive shifts in the real estate market, and increasing income inequality among Bay Area residents has precipitated an "eviction epidemic" of the city's long-term residents, many of whom are people of color.[7] As many historically Black and Latino enclaves in the greater Bay Area region undergo a significant demographic shift, their displaced residents are subject to increasing criminalization, incarceration, and lethal

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[5] Sydney Cain, interview by Angela Pastorelli-Sosa, July 6, 2021, audio, 56:26.

[6] As high-income tech employees moved into the region and pushed up actual and projected "market rates," San Francisco's tourist value also rose, resulting in a significant amount of affordable housing being taken "off the market" and inserted into the short-term rental market through companies such as Airbnb. These two tech-related forces have increased market pressure to either raise rents or convert apartments into short-term rentals, which in turn has precipitated an "eviction epidemic" of the city's long-term residents. See: Manissa Maharawal, "Black Lives Matter, gentrification and the security state in the San Francisco Bay Area," *Anthropological Theory* 17 no. 3 (2017): 342.

[7] Ibid., 340. The dispossession of property via foreclosures needs to be understood in terms of greater structural forces such as predatory lending and redlining. During the mortgage crisis of 2008, Black families were 70% more likely to be targeted by predatory lenders than white families. Many of those homes were located on land with a history of redlining. Redlining is a practice from the 1930s that prevented Black families from buying homes in certain neighborhoods and qualifying for home loans. The structural racism in housing results in a severe persistent pattern of racial, residential segregation and disparate life outcomes in the Bay Area. See also: Alex Schafran, *The Road to Resegregation: Northern California and the Failure of Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Erin McElroy and Andrew Szeto, "The Racial Contours of YIMBY/NIMBY Bay Area Gentrification," *Berkeley Planning Journal* 29 no. 1 (2017): 7-46; Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, *Counterpoints: A San Francisco Bay Area Atlas of Displacement and Resistance* (Oakland, CA: PM Press: 2021).

forms of police violence at the hands of the security state.[8] Cain also acknowledges the interwoven nature of gentrification, displacement, and Black death in a statement about *Refutations*: "I'm refuting the idea that my existence doesn't mean anything or the propaganda that says, 'I'm not here' or 'I don't matter.' I'm refuting the idea that I'm only destined for a traumatic death…"[9]

This multilayered precarity of Black life in the Bay Area speaks to what scholar Christina Sharpe articulates as anti-Black structures amidst the afterlives of slavery. In her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being,* Sharpe activates multiple registers of "wake"—the path behind a slave ship, keeping watch with the dead, coming to consciousness—to theorize how anti-Blackness structures Black life: "Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence…"[10] Sharpe insists that while the modes of Black subjection may have changed from slavery and later during the post-Civil War era, the structure of that subjection remains the same, meaning that Black life continues to exist in close proximity to death, trauma, loss, and precarity.[11] Although Black life is conditioned by the afterlives of slavery, Sharpe also argues that Black peoples resist and rupture "Black immanent and imminent death."[12] Sharpe theorizes this resistance and survival as *wake work:* "In short, I mean wake work to be a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives. With that analytic we might imagine otherwise from what we know now in the wake of slavery."[13] Wake work encompasses both the "unsurvival" that structures Black life as well as sites of artistic production, resistance, and consciousness that imagine the

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[8] Ibid., 342. Anthropologist Manissa Maharawal discusses how gentrification and dispossession in the Bay Area disproportionately affects communities of color. The suburbanization of poverty in the Bay Area has gone hand in hand with the whitening of the cities of San Francisco and Oakland and relegation of the racialized poor to suburbia. Some of these trends are a long time in the making. For instance, the displacement of San Francisco's Black population, which started with urban renewal policies in the 1970s that literally razed the historic Fillmore District (known as the 'Harlem of the West') has continued at an alarming rate. Yet according to a 2014 statistic, even though the Black population makes up only 6% of the city, its criminalization and mass incarceration have not abated and currently account for 56% of the city's jail population. Thus, processes of urban transformation enact many forms of violence against communities of color.

[9] Sydney Cain, "Notes from MoAD: *Emerging Artists and Critic Series*, Episode 11: Sydney Cain," interview with PJ Gubatina Policarpio, *Art Practical*, April 15, 2020, video, 57:35, https://www.artpractical.com/column/notes-from-moad-episode-11-sydney-cain-with-pj-gubatina-policarpio/.

[10] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 15.

[11] Ibid., 15.

[12] Ibid., 5.

[13] Ibid., 18.

possibility of an otherwise. Both Sharpe's project, which was written in response to family deaths, and Cain's ancestral veneration are modes of wake work that keep watch with the dead and strive for spiritual resolution.

Cain cites Sharpe's theorization of "living in the wake" as an influence for works that honor local marginalized narratives. When creating these works, Cain asks: "What does it look like seeing people in spaces that they may not look like they exist there, but they still there, something about them is still there, they exist in the bricks, they exist in…regards to labor, in regards to memory, in regards to…the shadows?…So that was my interest, thinking about it outside of…the U.S. Census Bureau, or…in the wake, ways in which we exist in the wake."[14] With its depiction of multigenerational ancestral figures, *Turk and Fillmore* is an homage to this historically Black district of San Francisco and honors African American migration and labor histories. While the train locates the viewer at the historic substation, it might also reference the waves of African American migrants from the Midwest and the South who were given free train tickets in the 1940s to work in San Francisco and Richmond's shipyards.[15] Cain recuperates these figures, which are drawn from oral histories as well as familial and city archives, to refute demographic reports, such as the U.S. Census, which both dehumanize and render blackness invisible by limiting their analysis of the Black population in San Francisco to quantitative data. Cain's reference to ephemeral presences embedded throughout the city is a manifestation of wake work that responds to the structural racism which shapes demographic data, gentrification, and dispossession. Following Sharpe, *Refutations* resists the current climate of anti-Blackness in San Francisco and imagines an "otherwise" by "keeping watching with the dead."

Cain's visualization of histories that works both with and against archives is a common thread throughout diaspora studies scholarship about Black life. By working through the presences and absences of the archive, Cain's work also dialogues with scholar Saidiya Hartman's practice of critical fabulation. As a cultural historian and scholar of African American literature, Hartman attempts to write the histories of enslaved peoples without replicating the grammar of violence that structures the archives of slavery as well as its subjects.[16] Rather than be constrained by the parameters of historical writing, which fail to mention how facts, evidence, and even archives can be produced by terror, Hartman develops a writing practice called critical

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[14] Cain, interview by Angela Pastorelli-Sosa.

[15] Bianca Taylor, "How 'Urban Renewal' Decimated the Fillmore District, and Took Jazz With It," *KQED*, last modified June 25, 2020, https://www.kqed.org/news/11825401/how-urban-renewal-decimated-the-fillmore-district-and-took-jazz-with-it.

[16] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 1-14.

fabulation. Hartman plays with and rearranges the basic elements of stories found in archives to imagine what captives' lives might have been or could have been, while also practicing narrative resistance by leaving room for opacity and refusing to provide closure.[17] Critical fabulation does not give voice to the dispossessed figure of the slave so as to project liberatory desires into spaces of absence, but rather speculates about precarious lives that only become visible in the moment of their disappearance.[18] Cain's spectral work similarly deploys narrative resistance in that it does not make claims or fill in the historical record. Cain gestures to these marginalized histories but does not fully give the audience access to these ancestral figures. The artist respects their right to opacity by portraying these spirits with their backs turned and blurred silhouettes and shadows. Both Cain and Hartman deploy fabulation to engage subaltern figures in archives, but Cain moves beyond Hartman's critical writing practice by accessing ancestors using materials and through the act of image making. I will return to how Cain's gestural drawing and material specificity taps into embodied practices and knowledges, but first, I want to attend to the political stakes of speculative work.

Hartman addresses how speculative work about the past is both a response to the present moment's incomplete project of freedom–what Sharpe calls living in the wake–and a means of envisioning alternative futures and realities.[19] Like other speculative work, Cain's *Refutations* are simultaneously an engagement with the past and investment in Black futures: Cain explores the generative possibilities that arise when acknowledging that Black peoples are living with the dead in the wake. *Refutations (pt. 1)*, like *Turk and Fillmore,* locates the viewer at the historic San Francisco substation. However, unlike the earlier work, this drawing introduces a temporal convergence of past and present, depicting ancestral figures alongside those living in the present moment (fig. 2). The living are distinguished by line and dress, such as the figure seated against the wall with their legs spread out on the floor. Clear lines and familiar contours—a sneaker, a t-shirt, the strong shoulder of a jacket—encompass and confer upon the figures a reassuring corporeality against their eventual dissolution into the ether. Once again, the artist deconstructs the substation's brick wall as it extends across the drawing to expose ancestral figures with their backs to the viewers, apart from three smaller figures clustered in the front, who face the viewer. In the foreground, a small child holding a kite is flanked by two figures wearing masks; the figure on the left seems to be reaching their arm out to place on the child's shoulder while another child to the right looks on. Cain narrates the interaction: "This little boy–who's usually always got a soccer ball in hand playing on stilts–helping his

[17] Ibid., 12.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 14.

earth friend along with her grandma from the Otherside fix/ build the kite."[20] Cain's statement conveys that the figures with the masks are spirits from the "Otherside" who have appeared in other works and materialize here to communicate with and guide a young child holding a kite located in the present. *Refutations (part 1)* visualizes multiple dimensions inhabiting the same space and reveals the dead as always there, even when we don't see them.

*Figure 2 Sydney Cain, Refutations (pt. 1), graphite and charcoal on paper, 2019, 132 x 36 in. (91.4 x 335.3 cm.). Courtesy of the artist; photograph by John Janca.*

Cain's portrayal of multiple dimensions aligns with Afrofuturist works that center nonlinear conceptions of time. Cultural critic Mary Dery first coined the term "Afrofuturism" in 1994 to describe cultural production and scholarly thought that reimagines Black experiences and generates counter-histories via science and speculative fiction and fantasy imagery, such as Octavia Butler's novel, *Kindred*.[21] Drawing from many indigenous African cultures and spiritual traditions, Afrofuturist works weave connections between past, present, and future to convey the spatio-

[20] Sydney Cain (@sagestargate), "this little boy - who's usually always got a soccer ball in hand playing on stilts - helping his earth friend along with her grandma from the Otherside fix/ build the kite.," Instagram photo, February 6, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BtkUqewBuOH/.
[21] Naima J. Keith, "Looking for the Invisible," in *The Shadows Took Shape*, eds. Naima J. Keith and Zoé Whitley (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2013), 13.

temporal fragmentation and dislocation of diasporic experiences.[22] In addition to representing expansive notions of time, Cain's inclusion of the child wearing the mask from the "Otherside" resonates with another Afrofuturist concept of children as ancestors, which disrupts the myth that only elders are ancestors. During the 1990s and 2000s, the Detroit techno duo Drexciya popularized the Afrofuturist fiction that imagined a utopian underwater world populated by the descendants of pregnant enslaved women who when thrown overboard during the Middle Passage learned to breathe in their mothers' wombs.[23] While Drexciya honors the unborn children lost during the Middle Passage, Cain's spirit children might also memorialize the young Black folks who die at the hands of the police state, as well as the many children who were sold into slavery and died during the Transatlantic Passage (which Hartman also speaks to in "Venus in Two Acts").[24] In a world where Black subjectivity continues to exist in close proximity to death, trauma, and loss, Cain invokes Afrofuturist world-making to imagine what a spiritual practice can offer.[25] The reunion in *Refutations (part 1)* of the earth child and two spirits, one of which is the earth child's grandmother, demonstrates the capacity for spiritual communion.

Although Cain's *Refutations* demonstrate an Afrofuturist sensibility, their work is distinct from the larger Afrofuturist aesthetic which often contains hybrid, cyborg forms and clear allusions to technology or space.[26] Cain's spectral work differs from this technoscientific style because their process is also one of spiritual encounter. The artist places powdered metals, graphite, or chalk on heavy cotton rag paper and then manipulates tone and value by means of subtle pressure changes and varied application of the eraser until highlighted aspects of the composition emerge as dominant. In reduction, shapes gradually emerge from pictorial space with soft edges, making it an appropriate technique for revealing ancestral spirits, as seen in *Refutations (for those waiting for light)*. Here, Cain builds up and erases powdered graphite and ground up metals until "somebody comes out or an element comes out."[27] The

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[22] Ibid., 16.

[23] Nettrice Gaskins, "Deep Sea Dwellers: Drexciya and the Sonic Third Space," *Shima* 10, no. 2 (2016): 75.

[24] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 6.

[25] Harshaw, "Conjuring Our Ancestral Spirits Through Art."

[26] For example, Wangechi Mutu draws from Donna Haraway's vision of a cyborg world to create surreal, cyber-kinetic femme bodies that waver between animal and machine apparatuses. Mutu's amalgamations and collages allude to both Haraway's vision of a dystopian future where the West's legacies of conquest and misogyny continue to impose social realities on African women's bodies. Keith, "Looking for the Invisible," 6. See also: Abbe Schriber, "Wangechi Mutu," in *The Shadows Took Shape*, eds. Naima J. Keith and Zoé Whitley (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2013), 84.

[27] Harshaw, "Conjuring Our Ancestral Spirits Through Art."

contrast between shadows and highlights throughout the drawing results in figures with partially rendered faces, smudges, lines, and tones of gray (fig. 3). While these figures are only merely suggested, the use of African tribal masks indicate that they belong to the Black diaspora. Working with particles of black dust, Cain illuminates and reveals "those waiting for light," or rather the spirits hidden within the voids of our own world.

*Figure 3 Sydney Cain, Refutations (for those waiting for light), 2019, graphite and metals on paper, 33 x 46 in. (83.8 x 116.8 cm.). Courtesy of the artist; photograph by John Janca.*

When asked about the weight and responsibility of making ancestors and their stories visible, Cain responds that while the figures are sometimes demanding about how to be portrayed, they do not feel responsible for communicating entire stories. The artist continues, "There's a strong power in letting things be suggested. Not everybody is ready to come forth at that time or needs to come forth all the time. Sometimes I can't see them as well so it's very hard for me to pull them out, so I give them a gesture, maybe you honor them with a title."[28] Once again, Cain practices what

[28] Cain, "Notes from MoAD."

Hartman calls narrative resistance; rather than fully render or "speak for" these ancestors, the artist leaves space for the unknown, for opacity.

Cain's statements gesture to how their artistic practice is also a process of mediation, which I think about alongside M. Jacqui Alexander's articulation of spirituality as bodily praxis. In the book *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Alexander posits spiritual work as embodiment, writing:

> Embodiment concerns the ways people come to inhabit their bodies so that these become in every sense of the term 'habituated.' All the mundane activities of working, eating, sleeping, having sex, and getting sick and getting well are forms of body praxis. …religions such as Vodou inscribe [their traditions] in the body of their followers...the tradition, the memory of how to serve the spirits is held in the ritualized and ritualizing human body.[29]

For Alexander, embodiment in Afro-descendant religions refers to the entanglement of body and memory; the body is already aware of how to serve the Sacred, which is most clearly seen in someone's everyday activities. Thus, Cain's body can be understood as a medium that serves these ancestral spirits through a habitual art practice.

Alexander also offers a framework for considering how spiritual communication and access necessitates a rewiring of the senses: "We learn about and come to know Wind by feeling, observing, and recognizing its activity; in short by remembering what it does as bodily experience. But it is bodily experience that demands a rewiring of the senses mirrored…Hearing is seeing and seeing is feeling."[30] When Cain discusses "seeing" or "listening to" these spirits it is not because the artist is in direct conversation with the ancestors. Rather, Cain's engagement with spirits requires non-normative forms of seeing and listening, a queering of their senses that can begin to grasp and recognize how the intangible affects and registers within their body. At some level, Cain deconstructs their subjectivity so that they can be a conduit for past generations and lives. Cain's communication with and careful attention to the ancestors in their work speaks to the constant effort the artist devotes to their practice and these presences; the visual works connote a form of spiritual labor.

Cain's artistic spiritual labor exhibits how diasporic peoples construct their own forms of embodied practice in order to cultivate a relationship with the dead, as well as gods. Their works are similar to other intuitive forms of spiritual engagement, such as altars, that gesture to veneration and are often executed by artists who may not be

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[29] M. Jacqui Alexander, "Pedagogies of the Sacred: Making the Invisible Tangible," in *Pedagogies of the Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 297.

[30] Ibid., 308.

formal initiates into particular traditions. For example, some of Betye Saar's earliest assemblages were altars and shrines that explored both African diasporic religions as well as the everyday manifestations of these spiritual traditions.[31] These works would feature small tables at their core with boxes mounted on top, resembling Haitian Vodou altars, which often rise in shelf-like tiers and are piled with sanctified, ancestral objects. Some altars would conjure Afro-diasporic gods, such as *Dambala* (1973), which was adorned with a variety of reptilian parts and snakeskin imagery to reference the eponymous supreme lwa, who appears as a sacred serpent. Other altars by Saar, such as *Mti* (1973), were installed in their own alcoves and raised on plinths, adorned with candles that would be ceremonially lit, and were spaces in which audience members could add offerings such as money, toys, jewelry, and other items.[32] Saar's altars disrupted the conventional fine arts space to allow for spiritual communion amongst the diaspora. While Cain does not create altars that gesture to African diaspora ancestral veneration, their bodily manipulation of powdered materials recalls Afro-American religious practices of drawing as spiritual mediation.

Cain cites Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Philosophy* (1983) as one of their introductions to learning about African and African descendent spiritualities, and by extension, other ways of thinking about Black afterlives. In *Flash of the Spirit*, Thompson tracks the appearance of Bakongo signs or "signatures'' of divinities, which appear on the ground and are often produced in combination with singing, to similar ritual earth drawings amongst Afro-Christians in Trinidad and St. Vincent, Cuban Lucumi, Haitian Vodun, and Brazilian Macumba, Candomble, and Xango followers.[33] These cosmograms are often traced in white chalk either on the floor of a devotional site or on the earth's surface to delineate a sacred, ritual space. To render these signs, which can typically only be achieved in a state of spiritual enlightenment, is to invoke the presence of gods and ancestors, as well as their powers.[34] These chalk drawings represent fleeting signs of spiritual invocation and

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[31] Kellie Jones, *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 116.

[32] Ibid., 115.

[33] Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, (New York: Random House, 1983): xv. Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit* begins with a critique of how African cultural studies has linked West African peoples to peoples of African descent in the New World in a generic fashion. This study focuses on identifying the spiritual, aesthetic, and philosophical continuities that can be traced between specifically Yoruba, Kongo, Dahomean, Mande, and Ejagham peoples and the art of Black peoples throughout the Americas. Thompson's extensive project is one of the first to deploy the term Black Atlantic within an anthropological and art historical context to examine the transformative global influence of African diasporic culture.

[34] Ibid., 113.

encounter. Although Cain does not disclose whether they are a formal practitioner of an Afro-descendant religion or whether the work is achieved in a state of spiritual enlightenment, their process of listening, waiting, and utilizing reductive drawing to invoke ancestral presence is akin to the use of the body as medium in Afro-descendant religious encounters with gods and spirits. Thompson's discussion of the body as a conduit in rituals echoes Alexander's concept of spiritual labor, specifically the body's "memory of how to serve the spirits." Given *Flash of the Spirit*'s influence on Cain, they are aware that drawing with carbon-based materials, such as chalk, charcoal, and graphite, holds spiritual significance. While Cain does not depict cosmograms or use chalk in this particular series, they conceptualize carbon-based powders as a material invocation of spirit.

Cain's interest in carbon-based materials is multilayered; they are interested in carbon's iterations as both dark media like graphite and charcoal, as well as translucent diamonds and white chalk. Carbon's ability to embody both lightness and darkness is the artist's entry point into rendering zones of liminality using chiaroscuro. In addition to utilizing carbon-based media as a material exploration of lightness and darkness, Cain also considers the element's corporeality and fleshiness. Given that humans are carbon-based life forms, Cain is interested in:

> …what it [carbon] does when it breaks down from our bodies…so I'm thinking about…chalk, our bones, calcium carbonate, and how that crushes down over time and it becomes the soft, soft bottom of the ocean that's all very white…and also if you burn bones, you get that ivory black substance…all these iterations of how carbon exists…and I love it when it exists in powdered form or creating powder from that so then that connects to it existing as dust, as soil existing, as small particles...there's that popular saying 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust,' go back to where we came from so in that way working with the dust, working with those materials, is very important on excavating…memory, excavating what is supposedly buried…[35]

As Cain discusses, carbon's ability to exist as multiple colors and forms indexes the continuity of human life which from bones transforms into the soft bottom of the ocean, ash, and dust. Considering that Cain's work materially and conceptually attends to the everlasting presence of Black ancestors, the artist's statements resonate with Christina Sharpe's theorization of residence time, which speculates on how enslaved African peoples lost to the sea during the Middle Passage continue to exist amidst the

[35] Cain, interview by Angela Pastorelli-Sosa.

afterlives of slavery. In an emotionally heavy passage, Sharpe theorizes about the current material state of these ancestors writing,

> ...What happened to the components of their bodies in salt water? My colleague Anne Gardulski tells me that because nutrients cycle through the ocean...the atoms of those people who were thrown overboard are out there in the ocean today. They were eaten, organisms processed them, and those organisms were in turn eaten and processed, and the cycle continues…The amount of time it takes for a substance to enter the ocean and then leave the ocean is called residence time…[36]

To clarify, Sharpe conceives of those lost bodies living in residence time as fleshy, atomic presences, which allows for multiple ways to interpret how those who did not survive the sea "are alive in hydrogen, in oxygen…are with us still, in the time of the wake, known as residence time." [37] Sharpe's articulation of residence time speaks to Cain's choice of carbon-based materials because of their corporeal traces.

When discussing the possibilities that carbon-based materials offer in accessing other worlds, Cain says, "I like to imagine that using carbon in my work is using a sort of filtration system that reveals a story…My sci-fi self imagines that even after/during/before? the burnings and disbursement [of carbon], an ancestral record exists that can be extracted through whatever creative vehicle we choose to communicate and clean ourselves with."[38] Here, the artist puts their work in dialogue with Afrofuturism, and fabulates gaining access to and communicating with ancestors via the use of graphite, charcoal, and chalk in their artistic process. Cain believes that these ephemeral, mutable materials are iterations of what they previously referred to as "the soft, soft bottom of the ocean" and what Sharpe speculates as residence time, or the physical residue of ancestors. Cain's speculative encounter with ancestors via carbon-based materials is significant because it extends beyond working with and against archives and oral histories. This is a tactile, bodily engagement rooted in African diasporic practice and which Cain is able to do through the creative practice of reductive drawing. While Alexander's articulation of spirituality as embodiment allows us to read the artist's body as a medium for spiritual labor, Sharpe's conception of residence time frames the carbon-based materials as mediating spiritual encounters.

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[36] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 40.

[37] Ibid., 19.

[38] Sydney Cain (@sagestargate), "(a new black nihilistic refutation of time and space) work in progress, charcoal on paper.," Instagram photo, November 14, 2018, https://www.instagram.com/p/BqLt6VwBfkV/.

Cain's extensive engagement with the afterlife, from subject matter, to process, and even materiality conveys the artist's Afrofuturist, spiritual investment in Black life across time and space. In a world where Black subjectivity continues to exist in close proximity to death, trauma, and loss, Cain's *Refutations* posit an alternate world in which Black people can reorient their relationship to death and be open to the afterlife's possibilities.[39] The work *Refutations (After everything spills through the seams)* (2020) imagines a tender reunion between two ancestors (fig. 4). While the figures' expressions are not depicted in intricate detail, it is clear that they are both wearing headdresses. Amidst blurred outlines and shadows, these ancestors occupy the center of the work facing one another and joining their hands as a gesture of acknowledgment, kinship, and intimacy. Cain's caption reads, "I love watching and listening to these two in the centers conversations–it's an endless reunion–of love memories and knowledge–respect understanding–really seeing–and letting be–what happens when we let the dust settle–see how they live forever."[40] While we are unsure about the nature of the relationship between these two ancestors, witnessing their reunion conveys one of the endless possibilities the afterlives of Black people hold. By portraying what is possible in the afterlife as well as how ancestors guide those in this world, Cain hopes that their primary audience, peoples of African descent, will have their own conversations with the spirits in *Refutations.* The artist shares an anecdote of her grandmother staring at a figure in one of the works saying, "That's my dad, that's my dad. You know you never knew my dad, you never knew him, but that's him."[41] In another instance, a viewer told Cain that she had portrayed his brother.[42] Cain hopes that the audiences' conversations with and witnessing of the ancestors in their works will push them to question, and even refute time and space as we know it in favor of nonlinear spatial-temporal frameworks.

[39] Harshaw, "Conjuring Our Ancestral Spirits Through Art."

[40] Sydney Cain (@sagestargate), "after everything spills through the seams," Instagram photo, April 2, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B-fwKHRB68l/.

[41] Cain, "Notes from MoAD."

[42] Ibid.

*Figure 4 Sydney Cain, Refutations (After everything spills through the seams), 2020, powdered metals on wood, 48 x 48 in. (121.9 x 121.9 cm.). Courtesy of the artist.*

Similarly to Black artists and scholars who cultivate their own practices for engaging the deceased and dispossessed across histories of the African diaspora, Cain refuses to see the past as static or resolved. Although Cain's work is a response to the anti-Black present of Bay Area gentrification and erasure, the spiritual communions depicted in *Refutations* are not melancholic or mournful. Rather, they visualize tender reunions and interactions that insist on the presence and dynamism of past peoples and stories. These works and the audience's engagement constitute a liberated consciousness, where one distances themselves from linear conceptions of time and space, life and death. Ultimately, the refusal to declare the past as disconnected from the present and future ruptures the linear regime of anti-Blackness.

As a spiritual iteration of wake work, Cain's *Refutations* map the coordinates for another world in which anti-Black conditions such as gentrification, displacement, and premature death cease to be a structuring presence. These works urge audiences to

uncover the marginalized histories of the Bay Area and heed the unseen reality that occupies the same space as the living. Cain's words, "I'm refuting the idea that I'm only destined for a traumatic death," reverberate to reject the here and now in favor of an alternate reality. The artist's depictions of these encounters, as well as their larger art practice of manifesting these ancestral presences, suggests that a collective futurity is indeed possible, but only through the horizontal sharing of knowledge amongst worlds, dimensions, realms, lives, and generations.

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# Considering Afrofuturism and the Built Environment

a response by Sylvia Faichney

As Angela Pastorelli-Sosa demonstrates in her essay on artist Sydney Cain in this volume, Afrofuturism centers Blackness and Black experiences while sharpening the contours of our imaginations by bridging different temporal planes. Pastorelli-Sosa indicates that Afrofuturism is a powerful tool for an artist's imagination, and is used to wade into the possibilities of multiple futures and pasts. She artfully demonstrates this feature of Afrofuturism by highlighting how Cain's spiritual labor allows for new experiences and engagements with the present and the past. Through the process of material extraction, Cain's drawings become a channel for ancestral intervention. They pull an "invisibilized" people from the past, allowing them to surface in a present landscape, thereby altering our understanding and relationship with space and time. Like Cain's sensitivity to ancestorial guidance, Pastorelli-Sosa dutifully notes the scholarly and artistic lineage of Afrofuturism by connecting Cain's work with authors and artists such as Drexciya, Saidiya Hartman, and Octavia Butler; their appearances act as anchors dropped in rough waters, steadying us while we are transported into the possibilities of new planes opened through the wake. Pastorelli-Sosa's inclusion of these artists and scholars, specifically Butler, inspired me to think through Afrofuturism and how it engages with the built environment. Using Butler as a point of departure, I consider the pluralities of navigating through space and time, as well as the imaginative structures of Walter J. Hood in the recent MoMA exhibition *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America* (2021), highlighting Afrofuturism's role in inspiring future spaces and possibilities.

Afrofuturism frequently challenges predominant understandings of how space and time are experienced. Past and present spill over into one another, and that spillage expands the possibilities of experiencing or understanding the built environment. Cain's drawing *Turk and Fillmore* (2018) illustrates this feature through the appearance of ancestors in the plane of the present. Similarly, Butler's novel *Kindred* (1979) engages with this quality in two distinct ways. Firstly, Butler highlights this spillage of past and present with the narrator Dana, who is a Black woman time traveling from her home in Los Angeles in 1976 to a plantation where her ancestors live in the antebellum South in the 1800s. Secondly, Butler showcases how enslaved people experienced time and space, thus opening new paths of seeing and methods of understanding the built environment. In *Kindred*, Dana is pulled to the plantation multiple times at inconsistent intervals. During one of her longer trips, she runs away at the same time as Alice, her enslaved great-great Grandmother. After being captured, Dana laments: "We'd both run and been brought back, she in days, I in only hours. I probably knew more than she did about the general layout of the Eastern Shore. She knew only the area she'd been born and raised in, and she couldn't read a map. I knew about towns and rivers miles away—and it hadn't done me a damned bit of good!"[1] Dana's reliance on conventional ways of seeing and navigating the built environment stifled the possibility of liberation. Here, Butler complicates our understanding of the built environment not only through illustrating how past, present, and future spill into each other through time travel, but also through a more mundane method of navigation.

Likewise, Rebecca Ginsburg's article "Freedom and the Slave Landscape" provides a critical historical analysis as to why relying on conventional maps and ways of seeing the built environment may have brought Dana back to the plantation before Alice. The overarching question in Ginsburg's article is how enslaved Black people escaped to freedom, and she notes that in most cases, it was through the geographic network of the slave landscape, and without the paternalistic oversight of whites.[2] The slave landscape included secret paths and places, rivers, and the unmanaged surrounding woods of the plantation, all of which opened a space not bound to the plantation owner's sight, and thus, total control. [3] Ginsburg articulates how conventional maps do not include geographic networks of enslaved peoples' cognitive mapping, nor do they illustrate how they experienced the built environment.[4] Enslaved peoples' experiences of the environment was by no means singular, and Ginsburg

[1] Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 177.

[2] Ibid., 37.

[3] Ibid., 41.

[4] Rebecca Ginsburg, "Freedom and the Slave Landscape," *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (2007): 37-8.

underlines how their "environmental cognition" of space varied greatly. This initial understanding of the various ways of seeing and experiencing emphasizes how conventional maps—no matter how well drawn or memorized—do not imagine the myriad of pathways one can move within or use as a means to navigate the built environment.[5]

While linking Ginsburg's analysis of the slave landscape to Butler's *Kindred* draws out how Afrofuturism breaks open ways of engaging with space and time within historical discourse, the 2021 MoMA exhibition *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America* details how Afrofuturism can inspire future worlds and possibilities. Curators Mabel O. Wilson and Sean Anderson, along with assistant curator Arièle Dionne-Krosnick, invited designers, artists, and architects to imagine new ways of creating, being, and seeing the built environment. Each project emphasized the historical role of the built environment as a "mechanism" that denied agency to communities, thereby operating as a medium of hostility and social repression, such as the plantations owners' landscape did.[6] Architect Walter J. Hood's project *Black Power/Black Towers* exemplifies how the exhibition wove the past with the future, thus resulting in imaginative structures that are responsive to past and present conditions. Hood's installation, plans, and drawings reimagined what a street might look like in West Oakland if it centered the needs of the surrounding Black community, who have been underserved, especially when compared to wealthier neighboring cities. His imaginative structures function as building blocks for brighter futures while formally and conceptually referencing the past. Formally, these buildings reference machinery patented by Black inventors. Conceptually, Wood takes inspiration from the legacy of the Black Panther's ten-point program—education, employment, housing, to name a few—to determine the function of the building. In Hood's imagined cityscape, a community that has historically and systematically been underserved has access to resources such as education and employment, giving room for them to thrive, projecting them into a dynamic and vibrant future.

Pastorelli-Sosa highlights Afrofuturism's ability to showcase the imaginative benefits of sensitivity to the lineage of an inherited past. As these scholars, writers, and artists have emphasized, imagination is not some unbounded, sanitized fantasy. It is a powerful tool of desire bound to past and present cultural, social, and political conditions. Being sensitive to this shared past while following the desire to imagine new conditions of being and understanding opens possibilities for readers, viewers, and communities to unlock new planes of space and time.

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[5] Ibid., 37.

[6] Sean Anderson and Mabel Wilson, "Introduction," in *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*, ed. Sean Anderson and Mabel Wilson (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2021), 16.

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# *Painting Viciously*: Antonio Saura's Monsters and The Francoist Dictatorship (1939-1975)

Claudia Grego March

In 1950s and 1960s Europe, painting monsters was trendy. From Jean Dubuffet's ghostly portraits to Asger Jorn's graffiti-like beasts, or Enrico Baj's nuclear creatures, monsters became one of the most popular pictorial elements during the post-World War II period. This trend to embrace monstrosity was especially common amongst painters who, by the end of the 1940s and during the 1950s, had subscribed to abstraction. From the early 1960s, monsters became a pictorial resource to re-incorporate a figuration that seemed outdated without moving away from the avenues opened by abstraction on both sides of the Atlantic and its accompanying existentialist language.[1] One of the painters who ascribed to such a trend was Antonio Saura, the Spanish *informalist* painter who, from the late 1950s onward, turned monsters into an idiosyncratic trait of his oeuvre.

In the early 1950s when Antonio Saura began to exhibit in Spain, the country's art scene was still immersed in poverty because of the geopolitical isolationism and strong censorship imposed by Francisco Franco's dictatorship–the totalitarian regime that dominated Spain's politics from the end of its Civil War in 1939 until Franco's death in 1975. Escaping the country's precarious situation and the challenges Saura

[1] Frances Morris, *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55* (London: Tate Gallery, 1993); Nancy Jachec, "'The Space between Art and Political Action': Abstract Expressionism and Ethical Choice in Postwar America 1945-1950," *Oxford Art Journal* 14, no. 2 (1991).

faced to exhibit his work, he relocated to Paris between 1954-5. In the French capital, Saura's stylistic evolution rose from an automatist style close to Surrealism–consider, for example, his 1950s work *The Angel's Rapture*[2]–to an *informalist*-type of abstraction more akin to the prevailing trends in the French capital. As can be observed in works like *Shroud* (1955)[3] or *Fallen Leaves* (1955)[4], Saura did not only incorporate into his painting the spontaneity of the gesture, but also the material possibilities of the painting techniques *grattage*, dripping, or collage, that were so common amongst the *informalist* artists like Jean Fautrier, Jean Dubuffet, or Georges Mathieu.[5] Upon his return to Spain, the Spanish artist founded the art collective *El Paso*[6] with other abstract painters such as Manolo Millares or Rafael Canogar, becoming one of the most prominent figures of contemporary Spanish art.

Unlike other abstract artists of the time, Saura never embraced absolute abstraction. Although he engaged with it during and after his Parisian journey, he never ceased to experiment with figuration by painting deformed bodily shapes, as seen in *Black Lady II* (1954)[7] or *Spanish Dancer* (1954)[8]. In this way, by the early 1960s, Saura had already established the main repertoire of motifs for his monsters: portraits, crucifixions, full-body nudes, and images of crowds characterized by human bodies, or gloomily deformed animals. These distortions would end up being the most

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[2] Antonio Saura, *The Angel's Rapture*, 1950, oil on canvas, 33 x 50 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/rapto-angel-angels-rapture.

[3] Antonio Saura, *Shroud*, 1954, mixed media on paperboard, 74.7 x 53.3 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/sudario-shroud.

[4] Antonio Saura, *Fallen Leaves*, 1955, oil and grattage on paper, 25.8 x 38.3 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/hojarasca-fallen-leaves.

[5] Martine Heredia, *Tàpies, Saura, Millares: l'Art informel en Espagne* (Vincennes: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2013), 6.

[6] As art historians Patricia Mayayo and Jorge Luis Marzo have pointed out, *El Paso* art collective represented the culmination of an abstract-expressionist Spanish art during the 1950s. Although its triumph happened while informalism was already decaying in the international scene, *El Paso* functioned as a key piece in the modernization of the Spanish art scene after the immediate post-war years. See: Jorge Luis Marzo and Patricia Mayayo, *Arte en España (1939 -2015). Ideas, prácticas, políticas* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2015), 184-185.

[7] Antonio Saura, *Black Lady II*, 1954, synthetic paint and oil on paper, 54.5 x 39.5 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/dama-negra-ii-black-lady-ii.

[8] Antonio Saura, *Spanish Dancer*, 1954, synthetic paint, ink and oil on paper, 40 x 27.5 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/bailaora-spanish-dancer.

recognizable characteristics of his work.[9] Until his death in 1998, Saura would not only paint and draw these monstrous figures, but also write about them in the numerous essays he published about his own work where he would directly refer to his creations as monsters, and relate them to what he coined as the painter's "cruel gaze."[10]
In this article, I analyze Saura's monsters and his theory of the "cruel look," considering the context in which they emerged–the Francoist dictatorship–and the Spanish pictorial tradition they referred to. Multiple scholars have already pointed out that Saura's figures could be interpreted as a reflection of Spain's precarious reality, as a cry for freedom, or as a form of dissidence against the regime. However, these contributions have focused on the political significance of his work without considering the aesthetic theories and the formal qualities that characterize it. Conversely, the scholarship and art criticism that have analyzed the formal complexities of Saura's work have ignored its political implications. Departing from Jacques Rancière's conception of the "politics of aesthetics,"[11] I intend to amend this cleavage between the formal and political dimensions of Saura's painting in order to show how the aesthetics of his monsters and his "cruel look" functioned as a strategy to ideologically destabilize the Francoist dictatorship. By analyzing the deformations that Saura made of some of the most important artworks in Spain's tradition, I argue that Saura found in these works certain "forms of visibility and intelligibility"[12] that challenged the artistic discourse that the Francoist regime had imposed since the early 1950s. Saura's monsters especially contested Franco's conception of the Spanish Baroque, and exorcised it from the ideological conservatism that the regime had conferred on it in order to resignify it in a very strategic way.

## THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF SAURA'S MONSTERS

The scholarship on post-Civil War Spanish art has provided two main interpretations about the presence of monstrous figures in Saura's paintings. On the one hand, art historians relate Saura's deformed figures to his aesthetic program and what he called "the painter's cruel gaze." For Saura, the cruel gaze referred to a particular way of

[9] José Manuel García Perera, "Antonio Saura y la mirada destructora. El monstruo debajo de nosotros," *Boletín del Museo e Instituto Camón Aznar*, no. 115 (2017).
[10] Antonio Saura's most important articles and essays have been compiled in many different publications, the most important ones include: Antonio Saura, *Fijeza. Ensayos* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, 1999); Antonio Saura, *Crónicas, Artículos* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, 2000); and Antonio Saura, *Escritura como pintura. Sobre la experiencia pictórica (1950-1994)* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, 2004).
[11] Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (Autumn 2009).
[12] Ibid., 5.

looking that the modern artist possessed, which he employed to overcome the equivalence between representation and mimesis. Instead of providing meaning to reality by copying it, the cruel gaze schematizes and deforms the real–letting forms emerge, appear, and explode from the act of painting.[13] The undefined, ambiguous, and monstrous figures that the modern painter produced were thus interpreted as an incarnation of the "paradoxical beauty"[14] created from the transgression of all aesthetic laws.

This interpretation of Saura's monsters took shape in the late 1960s thanks to Saura himself and to art critics who were close to him, such as Georges Boudaille–collaborator of the French art magazine *Cimaise*, one of the main centers of post-war French abstraction, or José Ayllón–the Spanish art critic who founded *El Paso* group with Saura. In the essays they wrote for his exhibition catalogues, Saura's cruel gaze and its monsters were not seen as the mere result of a gratuitous iconoclasm or a destructive outrage. Saura's monsters were a "prise de position"[15] that interpellated the spectator due to their visual aggressiveness and to the art lineages they invoked. As modern pictorial elements, his monsters inherited Cubism's and Surrealism's efforts to disassemble reality, and therefore, possessed a "demystifying force"[16] that resonated with the existentialist and phenomenological tone that art had for the French *informalists*. Regarding the painter's origin, Saura's "blasphemy paintings,"[17] as Boudaille called them, were also very much Spanish: they were the utmost expression of a "Spanish Expressionism,"[18] a "Hispanic Spirit,"[19] or a "Spanish Demon"[20] that went together with the burlesque, sarcastic, and free-spirit attitude that painters like Francisco de Goya, Diego de Velázquez, or Pablo Picasso also possessed.
On the other hand, scholars and critics have also pointed out the important role that Spain's authoritarian politics played in Saura's monsters when he started painting them. In this second interpretative branch, Saura's monsters have been read in multiple ways. They can be "allegorical vehicles" of the unrest and discomfort produced by the

[13] Jacques Terrasa, "Les citations monstrueuses dans l'œuvre d'Antonio Saura," *Cahiers d'études romanes*, no. 5 (2001): 165.
[14] Francisco Calvo Serraller, "Look to The Ladies," in *Antonio Saura: Damas* (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2005), 182.
[15] Georges Boudaille, *Antonio Saura* (Paris: Cimaise, Décembre 1967 – Janvier 1968).
[16] José Ayllón, *Antonio Saura* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1969).
[17] Boudaille, *Antonio Saura.*
[18] Ayllón, *Antonio Saura*.
[19] Waldémar George, "Saura et la Naissance de la Tragédie," in *Antonio Saura, Retratos imaginarios* (Madrid: Galería Juana Mordó, 1972).
[20] Claude Roy, "Trois visions de Quevedo-Saura," in *Antonio Saura, Retratos imaginarios* (Madrid: Galería Juana Mordó, 1972).

Francoist dictatorship, a "sarcastic and humorous platform"[21] for lamenting the Spanish social and political circumstances during the dictatorship, but also part of a "demystifying"[22] strategy against the regime, and a way to "delegitimize"[23] the Spanish stereotypes that Francoism promoted. This link between Spain's social reality and the painter's monsters also began to be defended during the 1960s and the 1970s, especially by the most politically aware art critics of the time, such as the Spaniards Vicente Aguilera-Cerni and José María Moreno Galván, or the French Raoul Jean-Moulin.[24]

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the painter's position towards this politicized reading of his work was ambiguous. Indeed, Saura frequently insisted on not being characterized only as the painter of post-Civil War Spain, and in his writings, he intensely developed a conception of his artwork and his Spanish artistic referents that went beyond their nationality and tended towards the idea of a universal art.[25] Yet despite these claims, he cultivated an anti-Francoist position under the regime. In the 1950s, after participating in exhibitions organized by the regime – especially ones that traveled abroad, such as the Spanish Pavilion of the 1958 Venice Biennial–Saura vehemently cut ties with the regime.[26] From that moment on, he would never get involved in any official Francoist act, and would collaborate in openly anti-Francoist exhibitions outside of Spain, such as *España Libre* [*Free Spain*], an itinerant show that traveled around Italy in 1964 that is nowadays considered as the most radical critique against the Spanish dictatorship of the time.[27]

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[21] Fernando Herrero Matostes, "Antonio Saura's Monstrifications: The Monstrous Body, Melancholia and The Modern Spanish Tradition" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014), 83.

[22] Mónica Núñez Laiseca, *Arte y política en la España del desarrollismo (1962-1968)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2006), 34.

[23] Iñigo Sarriugarte, "Deslegitimando los estereotipos pictóricos españoles: de Equipo Crónica a Antonio Saura," *Aisthesis*, no. 53 (2013): 53-72.

[24] Vicente Aguilera Cerni "Saura y Arroyo," in *La Nuova Figurazione* (Florence: Valechi, 1963); José María Moreno Galván "La heterodoxia de Saura," in *Antonio Saura, obra gráfica* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Colegio de Arquitectos de Canarias, 1973); Raoul Jean-Moulin, "Saura ou la peinture d'agitation," in *Les lettres françaises*, no. 959, Paris, 14-20 March 1963, 10.

[25] Julián Díaz Sánchez, "Goya según Antonio Saura," in *Goya y su contexto: Actas del seminario internacional celebrado en la Institución los días 27, 28 y 29 de octubre de 2011* (España: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2013), 447.

[26] For a detailed study about the relationship between abstract art and the Francoist apparatus see: Julián Díaz Sánchez, *La idea de arte abstracto en la España de Franco* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2013).

[27] *España libre: esposizione d'arte spagnola contemporanea* (Rimini: Grafiche Gattei, 1964). For a general study about anti-francoist antiavant-garde art and criticism see: Paula Barreiro López, *Avant-Garde and Criticism in Francoist Spain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

Saura asserted that his monsters were not representations of Franco's Spain, although as he stated, they were "loaded with a certain air of protest."[28] In fact, as soon as 1962, he would be one of the first to write about the relation between his deformed paintings and the visual imagery that surrounded Spain's war history:

> […] an image [Saura's monster painting] that, as that of the shot man with the raised hands and white shirt, or that of Goya, or that of the mother in Picasso's *Guernica,* can be transformed into a tragic symbol of our times.[29]

Through the depiction of some of his monsters with a despairing open arms position, as it happens with *Scream no. 7* (1959)[30], Saura associated his work with some of the most emblematic images of the Spanish Civil War–Robert Capa's *Falling Soldier* (1936) and Picasso's *Guernica* (1937)–as well as one of the masterworks of Spanish art history – Francisco de Goya's *The Third of May 1808* (1814). Saura's own conception of the cruel look completely refuted the possibility of copying reality, and thus, his monstruous paintings could not be considered as a mimetic representation of the Spanish conflict. Stated otherwise, his monsters could not be identified as victims of the conflict or Franco's dictatorship. As I will argue in the following pages, the protest character of his paintings did not arise from the reference to the Spanish Civil war. It was from Saura's hermeneutical approach to Spain's art history that his vicious painting would become anti-Francoist.

## VERY SPANISH MONSTERS: SAURA'S CRUEL LOOK AND THE SPANISH TRADITION

One of the most important elements to consider when interpreting the political aspects of Saura's monsters and his conception of the "cruel gaze" is his repertoire of figures. Using painting, lithography, and other graphic work techniques, Saura deformed unknown characters–usually identified by the title as female figures–and known historical characters, who tended to be important figures of Spain's art, literature, and imperial political history. For instance, in the lithograph series *History of Spain* from

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[28] Antonio Saura, "El Prado imaginario," in Antonio Saura, *Crónicas* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2000), 208.

[29] "[…] imagen que, como el fusilado de las manos en alto y la camisa blanca, de Goya, o la madre del Guernica, de Picasso, puede transformarse en un símbolo trágico de nuestra época." Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine. Original autography by Antonio Saura, in *Saura* (Rome: Edizioni Galleria Odyssia, 1962).

[30] Antonio Saura, *Scream no. 7*, 1959, oil on canvas, 250 x 200 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/coleccion/obra/grito-no-7.

1964, Saura portrayed rulers like the monarchs Isabel I of Castile (1451-1504)[31], who completed the *Reconquista* [Reconquest] of Spain, expelling the Muslims and Jews from the country, and supporting the financing of Columbus' trip in the 15th century, and Philip the Second (1527-1598)[32], who reigned over Spain when the empire reached its maximum expansion in the late 16th century, or Ferdinand the Seventh (1578-1637)[33], who reigned during the early-nineteenth century, and was overthrown by French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in 1808. This series would also include a portrait of the Spanish nineteenth-century painter Francisco de Goya (1746-1828)[34]–who was Ferdinand the Second's court painter–in the same way that he would later paint other Spanish art masters such as Diego de Velázquez (1599-1660) or El Greco (1541-1614). Saura would not only refer to these artists by portraying them, but also through the "monstrous reinterpretation" of their most emblematic works, particularly those that he considered as portraits.[35] For instance, in Velázquez's case, Saura would paint countless reinterpretations of *The Crucified Christ* (1632)[36], whereas in Goya's case, his preferred artwork was *The Drowning Dog* (1820-1823).[37]

Considering Saura's anti-Francoist stance, it is not by chance that most of the monsters he painted referred to historical figures and Spanish artists that Franco had claimed as symbols of Spanish national identity. Since the 1940s–the decade Saura began to paint, and which corresponded to the most extreme, repressive, and autarkic period of the Francoist dictatorship–Franco's regime had projected an idea of "Spanishness" based on a Catholic patriotism, authoritarian conservatism, and imperial triumphalism.[38] To support this understanding of Spanish identity, the Francoist intellectual circles recovered the most notable figures and events of the Spanish

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[31] Antonio Saura, *Isabel la Católica*, 1964, lithograph, 46.3 x 36 cm. Antonio Saura Foundation, Geneva: http://www.antoniosaura.org/sp/su-obra-gra-fica-1964.

[32] Antonio Saura, *Felipe II*, 1964, lithograph, 47.7 x 32 cm. Antonio Saura Foundation, Geneva: http://www.antoniosaura.org/sp/su-obra-gra-fica-1964.

[33] Antonio Saura, *Fernando VII*, 1964, lithograph, 49 x 38.8 cm. Antonio Saura Foundation, Geneva: http://www.antoniosaura.org/sp/su-obra-gra-fica-1964.

[34] Olivier Weber-Caflisch and Patrick Cramer, *Antonio Saura: l'oeuvre imprimé: catalogue raisonné* (Genève: Cramer, 2000), 86.

[35] Saura, "El Prado Imaginario," 245.

[36] Diego de Velázquez, *The Crucified Christ*, 1632, oil on canvas, 248 x 169 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid: https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-crucified-christ/72cbb57e-f622-4531-9b25-27ff0a9559d7.

[37] Francisco de Goya, *The Drowning Dog*, 1820-23, mixed method on mural transferred to canvas, 131 x 79cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid: https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-drowning-dog/4ea6a3d1-00ee-49ee-b423-ab1c6969bca6.

[38] Miguel Ángel Giménez Martínez, "El corpus ideológico del franquismo: principios originarios y elementos de renovación," *Estudios Internacionales*, no. 180 (2015).

Empire and of its cultural Golden Age: the Baroque period.[39] From the use of the imperial caravel on the commercials of the Spanish airline Iberia to the production of a series of Velazquez's stamps to commemorate his centenary, the reference to Spain's imperial times became one of the most common visual and spatial elements of the dictatorship. The meditative sacredness and fervent character of the Baroque was also consistently invoked in Francoist public processions, festivities, and architecture, as happened for instance at the *Valley of the Fallen,* a monumental memorial site that Franco built near El Escorial–the historical residency of the Spanish monarchy devised by Philip the Second–where he was buried in 1975. In this way, Francoism exploited the Baroque as a commonplace that conflated the austerity of the Spanish kingdom, the devotion and commitment of the Counter-Reformation, the expressive passion of the Catholic character, and the genius of masters like Diego Velázquez, El Greco, or Francisco de Goya, even if the latter was a Romantic painter in historiographic terms.[40]

Following the Francoist ideology, the Baroque was not only a cultural time period, but it involved a transhistorical spiritual component that defined the Spanish essence.[41] In this sense, it became a useful cultural instrument that also shaped art criticism under Franco. The regime-sponsored magazine *Mundo Hispánico* expended much ink on the masters of the Spanish tradition, and even devoted special issues to them. In the volume focusing on Goya, the painter was revindicated as one of the icons of "Spain's Baroqueness," whose work was "the face and the cross of our [the Spanish] national genius," "abrupt and disconcerting" like Spain itself.[42] Goya was considered as the natural continuation of another master, Diego de Velázquez, whose paintings were also read as the utmost expression of the "Iberian lineage of the Baroque", which also had a barbarian essence marked by a genuine, passionate, rampant, and conceptual character.[43]

For the Francoist intellectuals, this narrow-minded but malleable conception of Spain's Baroque essence was even identifiable in the Spanish abstract painting of the 1950s. Although avant-garde and experimental artists were demonized and persecuted during the 1940s, the end of World-War II forced the regime to embrace the abstract

[39] Tobias Locker, "The Baroque in the Construction of a National Culture in Francoist Spain: An Introduction," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 91, no. 5 (2014).

[40] Paula Barreiro López, "Reinterpreting the Past: The Baroque Phantom during Francoism," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 91, no. 5 (2014).

[41] Eugeni d'Ors, *Lo Barroco* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1944).

[42] Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, "Cara y cruz," *Mundo Hispánico*, Madrid, no. 164 (1961): 9.

[43] Ernesto Giménez Caballero, *Arte y estado* (Madrid: Gráfica Universal, 1935), 15. Cited in: Barreiro López, "Reinterpreting the Past."

art trends that shook the Western art scene.[44] Through a solid campaign of cultural diplomacy, the Francoist cultural institutions acted as one of the patrons of the *informalist* Spanish artists who were starting to paint at that time. The work of Manolo Millares, Antoni Tàpies, or Antonio Saura was sponsored by the regime at an international level, being exhibited at the most important museums and biennials of the time, as I have previously mentioned. International visibility, however, came at a price: their *informalist* work was presented through the ideals of spiritualism, solemnity, realism, and expressionism that constituted Franco's version of Spanishness and the Baroque.

AN ALTERNATIVE SPANISH AESTHETICS DURING THE DICTATORSHIP

Perhaps as a victim of the circumstances, or as a willful–yet not uncritical–collaborator of Spain's cultural apparatus, Saura was a firsthand testimony of the Francoist use of the Baroque. As it has been argued by the Spanish art historian Valeriano Bozal, Saura's perception of the regime's ideological and cultural manipulation clearly influenced his iconographical choices.[45] Using an iconography that invoked figures from the Spanish Golden Age and the country's imperial history, which Francoism was portraying as historical legitimation of the country's political repression, Saura caricatured the regime's mystifying reading of the country's history. However, if we consider the admiration that Saura never ceased to profess for the Spanish masters that he deformed, this satirizing gesture appears as only the surface of his paintings' dissident character. Saura did not find in Goya or Velázquez the values imposed by the regime. On the contrary, he considered the painters as pioneers of the modern artist's "cruel look."

As we can appreciate when comparing Goya's *Drowning Dog* to one of the deformations that Saura made of it–for instance, the 1963 oil on canvas *Imaginary portrait of Goya*[46]–Saura brought to the limit what he valued the most about the Spanish masters' vicious painting. First, he based his monstrous paintings on what he understood as the affirmative character of an invasive conception of space. As if Saura was analyzing through his own painting the way in which Goya created the effect of emergence of the dog fighting against the sand that sucks him out, Saura distinguishes the three compositional parts of Goya's *Dog*–the sand, the background, and the head–and reinterprets them. He effaces the movement of Goya's background and soil by

[44] Genoveva Tusell, "The Internationalisation of Spanish Abstract Art (1950-1962)," *Third Text* 20, no. 2 (2006).

[45] Valeriano Bozal, *Estudios de arte contemporáneo, II. Temas de arte español del siglo XX.* (Madrid: Antonio Machado libros, 2006), 290.

[46] Antonio Saura, *Portrait imaginaire de Goya*, 1963, oil on canvas, 245 x 195 cm. Antonio Saura Foundation, Geneva: http://www.antoniosaura.org/sp/su-obra-pintura-goya.

painting them in a solid light gray and black, and he accentuates the importance of the head. Saura's animal is larger, less identifiable and painted with aggressive brushstrokes of gray, black, white, and ochre tones. By not only covering the soil with light and quick splits of the dog's paint, but also reconstituting the background with flatter and sharper brushstrokes, Saura emphasizes the centrality of the dog's will to emerge and conquer space.

Second, Saura focuses on the use of figuration without narration. The hybrid head that we find in his painting does not function as a narrative element. For Saura, the lack of anecdotic comment to a verifiable element of reality that Goya teaches him–it does not matter if it's a dog at all, it's just a creature–provides the image with an existential reflection about the plastic act of emerging.[47] To the postwar artist, what matters about Goya's work is how the lack of narration reinforces the image's effect of emergence. If Goya's dog is not a scene of a story, a particular moment of the tale, the notion of time that the painting is proposing distorts the limits between past, present, and future, creating a feeling of continuous flow.

This notion of time in perpetual transition that Saura adapted from Goya constitutes the painting itself as an image "in the making," as an event, happening beyond the limits of painting.[48] Saura's interpretation of Goya points out that the monstrous image derived from the master's vicious painting is a reflection on reality itself, not a duplication or a copy. Therefore, if Goya's dog is a meta-act of pictorial and existential reflection, it also resists the moralizing and religious Baroque ideology that Francoism ascribed to his work. By monstering the monstrous image of Goya, Saura saw to dispossess it from the manipulation of the regime, re-signifying it as a disquieting reflection about the relation between reality, the human condition, and the act of painting.[49]

## TOWARDS AN INFORMALIST BAROQUE

Saura's monsters acted simultaneously as caricatures and homages. They were both satires of Francoism's manipulation and tributes to the amoral grotesque Saura saw in the Baroque. With this double gesture, Saura's process of resignification of the Baroque tradition did not only attack the Francoist reading of such art period, but also provided a new reading of it. Considering the existentialist and phenomenological language that surrounded Saura's writings and his plastic interpretation of the masters, we could conclude that Saura reread the Baroque through the aesthetics of the art movement that had catapulted him to fame: *informalism*. If his *informalist* paintings

[47] Saura, "El Prado imaginario," 241.
[48] Ibid., 242, 245.
[49] Ibid., 245.

were once *baroquicized* by the regime, it was now the painter's turn to *informalize* the regime's Baroque.

By deforming the masters of the monster, Saura demonstrated that Goya, Velázquez, or El Greco did not speak for Franco's Spanishness. Quite the opposite, and using the painter's own terms, the Spanish painters spoke for "the pagan element within the sacred and the aberrant side of beauty."[50] Beyond tearing down and deriding the sacred icons of the dictatorship, Saura's dissident monsters reinterpreted the politics of the Baroque's aesthetics, proposing them as a counter-model of the Francoist Spanishness. Through the deformation of the most renowned Spanish historical figures, artworks, and sacred images, the Baroque's spiritualism was redefined in terms of a secular existentialism, nourished by the rhetoric and the aesthetics of *informalism*. Saura's vicious painting became a plastic strategy that allowed him to renegotiate some of the ideological cornerstones that the Francoist regime promoted as the essence of Spain's national identity by undermining the regime's Catholic and conservative interpretation of Spain's history.

[50] Ibid., 240.

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# A Nationally Rooted Response to Chauvinism

a response by Nathan Segura

To contemplate Antonio Saura's monster paintings is to ponder over the most appropriate grid of analysis to make sense of some of the most enigmatic artworks in the history of modern art. These paintings, which in Saura's own words, are "loaded with an air of protest," could be read in relation to the dictatorial regime imposed by General Francisco Franco in Spain from 1939 to 1975. Yet in "*Painting Viciously*: Antonio Saura's Monsters and the Francoist Dictatorship (1939-1975)," Claudia Grego March points to the issues that come with such an assumption: the artist vehemently rejected the view that his monster series was about the misery and suffering caused by the Spanish civil war and its subsequent *posguerra*. In the light of this seemingly apolitical declaration, a potentially promising avenue of interpretation for the monster paintings is one which takes into account Saura's stay in Paris from 1954 to 1955. It was in the French capital that Saura engaged with, and permanently integrated into his oeuvre, the formal concerns of Informalism, or *Art Informel*.

Considering Saura's Parisian adventure prompts us to see his monster paintings as probing the material possibilities of painting as a medium, a formal approach that stemmed from existentialist reflections about the universal and atemporal human predicament. Such a reading, however, would only do partial justice to the complexity of Saura's work. This is where Grego March's methodology comes in: aware that artists' words rarely fully reveal their ambitions, especially by someone as nuanced and circumspect as Saura, she sets out to show the ways Saura adopted *informel* techniques to make an art directed at Franco's regime. Relying on the principle that

stylistic decisions often carry political implications, Grego March performs a formal analysis that demonstrates how Saura's monster versions of Baroque and Romantic Spanish masterpieces contested and subverted their cooptation by a regime that instrumentalized the legacy left by the Old Masters (Diego de Velázquez, El Greco, Francisco Goya) to impose a conservative version of Spanishness. Her discussion of the ways Saura *informalized* the regime's *baroquicized* discourse on Spanish culture and identity makes for a fascinating and original contribution.

Art historians interested in cross-generational dialogues will particularly appreciate that Saura's "monsterized" rendering of *The Drowning Dog* by Francisco Goya (c. 1819-23) not only draws on *informel* experimentations conducted at the time, but also reflects the motifs, tones, and even the obsessions that marked the oeuvres of Old Masters celebrated by the regime. As such, this painting, like many of Saura's monsters, brings a tentative Spanish answer to a Spanish question. Because of this, scholars should distance themselves from the assumption that Saura's work was mainly the result of cross-border cosmopolitan exchanges about plastic explorations and existential thought. Such a methodological framework has also been heavily applied to the study of Latin American artists working in the 1930s and 1940s, especially those who seem to have engaged with Surrealism.

As such, if the scholarship on Frida Kahlo's (1907-54) complex relationship with Surrealism has benefitted from these distinct interpretations, studies on her compatriot María Izquierdo (1902-55) could benefit from further discussion. Acclaimed for being the first Mexican woman to exhibit her work in the United States, Izquierdo was associated throughout her career with *Los Contemporáneos*, a group of worldly avant-garde poets and art critics who promoted Mexican artists whom they felt produced "de-politicized" art that sidestepped the national trappings they saw in the Mexican mural movement. Above all, the group praised artworks that epitomized formal modernist trends.[1] Izquierdo was also a friend of Surrealist French poet Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), who stayed in her home during his 1936 trip to Mexico, and who subsequently exhibited her work in Paris. Because of these affiliations, many of Izquierdo's works have been read as conversant with avant-garde experiments conducted in Paris and in other Western capitals of modern art at the time. Notably, her still life paintings have often been considered as "surrealist-inspired" for their dream-like atmosphere and uncanny juxtapositions, as seen in the lavish presentation

[1] Adriana Zavala, "Painting in the Shadow of the Big Three," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 68.

of food she staged in a deserted landscape in *"Living" Still Life* (1946)[2] and *"Living" Still Life with Red Snapper* (1946).[3]

Such an interpretation builds on Surrealist leader André Breton's (1896-1966) famous assessment of Mexico as "the surrealist country *par excellence*"—more specifically, Breton argued that Mexico was the place where opposites reconciled.[4] Yet contextualizing her paintings within Mexico's socio-economic predicament at the time provides additional avenues of meaning. The 1940s were marked by the corporatization and exportation of Mexican agriculture, which President Manuel Avila Camacho (1897-1955) implemented through policies that facilitated the transfer of communal lands away from small farmers to wealthy individuals capable of mass-producing food both endemic and non-native to Mexico for an urban and global market. These politico-economic changes precipitated a massive rural exodus to urban centers.[5] Below the ominous clouds that cover the skies of her two landscapes, Izquierdo presents viewers with an appetizing assortment of fruits. Some of them are not endemic to Mexico, and carry a symbolic charge: the apple, symbolizing sin, has been turned upside down, while the pomegranate, a symbol of fertility in the Bible, looks dried up. The two white huts in *"Living" Still Life* suggest human presence, but the farmers are nowhere to be seen. More than an uncanny contrast between modern technology and "old" provincial Mexico, the electric poles she painted in the desert of *"Living" Still Life with Red Snapper* recall one of President Camacho's most prized achievements: his government's staggering increase of Mexico's electrical capacity, a project executed in service of a nation-wide modernization. Seen in this light, Izquierdo's still-life suggests that electricity came to the Mexican countryside at a moment when farmers were selling and leaving their fields to go work in the factories of the big cities, effectively contributing to both the economic stimulation of urban centers and the "emptying" of rural Mexico.

Though such a socio-economic reading might seem nation-centric, it does not prevent critics from commenting on the ways Izquierdo's works seem to take their cues from modern art, particularly Surrealism. In fact, these paintings suggest that Surrealism offered a set of aesthetic strategies that could be fruitfully co-opted to speak to local

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[2] María Izquierdo, *Naturaleza viva*, 1946, oil on canvas, 45 x 55 cm. Private collection, Monterrey, Mexico: http://www.artnet.com/artists/mar%c3%ada-izquierdo/naturaleza-viva-jZH0Rws2f2J7W7w5c2Tu9w2.

[3] María Izquierdo, *Naturaleza viva*, 1946, oil on canvas, 60 x 75 cm. Private Collection, Mexico City, Mexico: https://en.600dpi.net/maria-izquierdo-0000677/.

[4] Michele Greet, *Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris Between the Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 222.

[5] Stephen Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 4.

circumstances. Regional concerns, however, are difficult to fully discern for scholars caught up in the exhilarating international web of modern art exchanges, hence the need to descend from an aerial perspective and address concerns specific to a given cultural-geographical zone. This is certainly what Grego March has done with Saura's monsters—a series that re-configured Spanish art to respond to a Franquista discourse determined to "resolve" a conflict by force that, despite foreign meddling, was itself fundamentally Spanish. The importance of Grego March's scholarship on the subject partly stems from the fact that art made in Spain under the Franco regime has been under-studied, particularly in the English and French speaking world.

About the relations between France and Spain, filmmaker Luis Buñuel (1900-83) famously proclaimed: "It's very simple. We Spanish know everything about French culture. The French, on the other hand, know nothing of ours."[6] Warning against narrow-minded national self-infatuation is not sufficient though: we must continue to challenge long-lasting prejudices the public and many scholars hold regarding the "cultural wasteland" that allegedly characterize societies under dictatorships.[7] If it is true that in times of war and authoritarianism limited relations with the outside world can curtail art production, we must not forget that cornered realities also spur resourcefulness and creativity. In this light, we can hope that the oeuvre of Saura will continue to stimulate discussions on the work of those who have made the difficult decision to stay in their troubled native land to draw on its rich artistic traditions, and of those who have adopted foreign artistic elements to comment on national events—on their own terms.

[6] Dore Ashton, *Antonio Saura* (Paris: Galerie Lelong, 1997), 15.

[7] Historian Jeremy Treglown explains in the preface of *Franco's Crypt: Spanish Culture and Memory Since 1936* that it was such prejudices that led him to write a book on Spanish culture under the Franco dictatorship. See: Jeremy Treglown, *Franco's Crypt: Spanish Culture and Memory Since 1936* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

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# Saints and Zinesters: Fandom and Legacy in the Zine *St. Sucia*[1]

Mia I. Uribe Kozlovsky

"*I was so excited about the Estampas Chicanas exhibit, I cosplayed it!*"[2]

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

[2] St. Sucia (@stsucia), "Photograph of Natasha I. Hernandez standing in front of Judith F. Baca's *Absolutely Chicana* at the McNay Art Museum," Instagram photo, January 18, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BsyCMKbBw7-/.


*Figure 1 Isabel Ann Castro, Untitled Instagram Post "Natasha I. Hernandez Estampas Chicanas," 2019. Courtesy of Isabel Ann Castro and Natasha I. Hernandez.*

This declaration captions a 2019 Instagram carousel post in which the first photo presents poet and artist Natasha I. Hernandez standing in front of Judith F. Baca's (Judy Baca's) print *Absolutely Chicana* (2008) (fig. 1), a photo composed and taken by Hernandez's friend and collaborator Isabel Ann Castro.[3] Hernandez and Castro posted the photo set on Instagram for *St. Sucia*, the San Antonio-based zine cofounded by both Hernandez and Castro. Following the first photo are two more photos shot by Castro documenting the exhibition visit: a selfie of Castro beaming in front of prints by Barbara Carrasco and Ester Hernzández (fig. 2), and a photo of Castro and Hernandez's friends at the exhibition, silhouetted by the gallery lights as they gaze upon the framed works.

[3] A photo carousel post on Instagram is when the user includes more than one photo in a post, not unlike a slide show that viewers can swipe through to see a series of photos. Note that in the post, there is an arrow at the middle edge of the right frame, as well as four white and grey translucent dots towards the bottom frame's center. These four dots indicate the number of photos in the carousel.


*Figure 2 Isabel Ann Castro, Untitled Instagram Post "Isabel Ann Castro Estampas Chicanas," 2019. Courtesy of Isabel Ann Castro and Natasha I. Hernandez.*

Though all three photos document the group's enthusiasm, Hernandez dressing up as the print's subject, Judy Baca as La Pachuca, visually cites an artistic predecessor.[4] Hernandez styles herself after La Pachuca's hyperfeminine but rebellious appearance, replicating the figure's maquillage (red lips, blue eyeshadow, and curled hair), and fashion sensibilities (a fulsome neck scarf and casually buttoned white blouse where a carton of cigarettes has been stashed in the cuff of an upturned sleeve).[5] A cigarette positioned in Hernandez's right hand draws attention to her immaculate manicure. Though the cigarette is unlit, Hernandez's upturned lips and downward gaze gives the impression of having just taken a satisfactory drag, looking like the embodiment of a cool, femme, "tough girl."

Hernandez's detail-oriented replication of *Absolutely Chicana* and position in front of the print remind the viewer that this pose is a performance, a "cosplay." Though cosplay is not a term or activity often related to museum exhibitions, this performative of act of "dress up" offers a starting point for understanding Hernandez's playful response on Instagram. In discussing the distinct affective resonance of cosplay

[4] The Pachuca is a term that originated in Mexican-American communities in the 1940s. She is a bad/tough girl that wears her hyper-femininity with aggression to confront misogynistic society.
[5] Anna Indych-López and Chon A. Noriega, *Judith F. Baca* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2018), 96.

as opposed to other forms of dress-up/performance, Nicole Lamerichs points to cosplay as an iteration of fandom's ability to interpret, embody, perform, and rewrite existing texts to extend them into the performer/reader's own narratives.[6] Baca's print depicts a dressing up, as Baca presents herself dressed as the character La Pachuca. Hernandez's "cosplay" response to Baca's artwork offers one strategy to foster a collective Chicana political activism. As *St. Sucia* creators Castro and Hernandez engage with this Chicana visual inheritance, they inhabit and build off Baca's critique of limited gender roles.

From 2014 to 2018, through the submission-based printed zine *St. Sucia*, Castro and Hernandez built a space where Latinas were invited to tell their stories "about love, heartbreak, dating, growing up, being a chingona, y latin@ identity."[7] The deliberate use of the zine format simultaneously pays homage to past traditions, demonstrating a knowledge and appreciation for the artist, activist, and punk predecessors who pioneered the format.[8] The artists have described pulling out Hernandez's personal collections of punk zines and looking through to find forms that she and Castro wanted to emulate.[9] During its four-year publication run, *St. Sucia* published submissions from its readers whose stories cumulatively presented a new perspective on Latina/x identity in the twenty-first century. Through this iterative process, the community collectively created the identity of a Saint Sucia figure.[10]

The visual discourse in the zine *St. Sucia* materializes the process of performed identity-making essential to young feminist queer Latinas in the twenty-first century. Through the figure of the fan, this article analyzes the zine's subversion of La Virgen de

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[6] Nicole Lamerichs, "Embodied Characters: The Affective Process of Cosplay," in *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 203.

[7] St. Sucia (@stsucia), "Call to Submit to St. Sucia," Instagram photo, October, 4, 2014, https://www.instagram.com/p/twX5m8MFN8/. Chingona: bad-ass woman. Latin@ is a gender-neutral form of Latino/a, similar to but different to the term Latinx.

[8] Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London; New York: Verso, 1997), 10-11. As one of the first to write a scholarly account of zines in contemporary culture, Stephen Duncombe defines zines as "noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves." In the publication and the creators' digital platforms, Castro and Hernandez reference Mexican-American altars, feminist Chicana artists, and previous pop culture icons. The zine intentionally plots itself in the tradition of punk subcultures, as well as Mexican and Chicano mass-produced print culture.

[9] Isabel Ann Castro and Natasha I. Hernandez, interview with author, June 18, 2020.

[10] Throughout the course of this article, I will refer to the figure Saint Sucia as such to further distinguish her from references to the material zine *St. Sucia*, though of course they are the same project. The creators and participants of *St. Sucia* refer to the Saint as the following (but not limited to): St. Sucia, Saint Sucia, La Santa Sucia, our Santa.

Guadalupe. By using fandom as a methodological framework to understand *St. Sucia*'s engagement with La Virgen's iconography, this article analyzes how the cofounders found ways to perform their identities through the cultural figure of La Virgen de Guadalupe, a strategy previously implemented by their queer Chicana artistic predecessor Judy Baca in her work *Las Tres Marías* (1976), which the 2008 print *Absolutely Chicana* revisits. In conversation with Baca's transformational strategy, the *St. Sucia* cofounders rewrote La Virgen as Saint Sucia, who was created as an oppositional rereading to the *marianismo* of La Virgen. The inchoate identity of Saint Sucia and the collective format of zine-making created a participatory space for queer feminist Latina/xs to tell the stories of their lives, and in doing so, control the narrative of what it means to be Latina/x.[11] Hernandez and Castro's shifting self-presentations in the editors' note across fourteen issues of *St. Sucia* reflect these processes, responding to the materialization of their patron saint and attesting to the communal inscription of her identity.

## "NOT NECESSARILY A GOOD GIRL, BUT GOOD ENOUGH": THE FORMATION OF A SUCIA SAINT

On October 4, 2014, Castro and Hernandez sent out a call for submissions for anything on "being chingona." The first issue of *St. Sucia* printed a range of works: paintings, photographs, essays, and even screenshots from a dating app. To celebrate their inaugural issue, Hernandez and Castro staged a release party in Southtown San Antonio featuring queer and punk Latina/x musical acts. Hot off an unattended work copier and bound with thread from Hernandez's sewing machine, the physical zine created a shared touch in the cofounders' community that resonated with readers, contributors, and their friends. The zine ran for four years, during which time Castro and Hernandez collaborated with a growing community of contributors from all over the world, visited zine festivals, and presented the zine at academic institutions and gallery spaces. Over the course of its run, the zine became queerer, embracing an expansive notion of femininity and feminism that informed their growing community. Through their shared cultural history, the cofounders appropriated the traditional icon of La Virgen, one familiar to Latinas, in favor of a new saint.

Created as the antithesis of La Virgen, Saint Sucia appropriates her image and iconography to new ends. "Sucia" as a feminine noun directly translates to English as "dirty [girl/woman]"; in general, it acts as a pejorative term for a badly behaved girl. The tongue-in-cheek reclamation of this term in *St. Sucia* reflects a shared frustration by Castro, Hernandez, and their friends, who desired a saint who would not judge them

[11] Ramón García, "Against Rasquache: Chicano Identity and the Politics of Popular Culture in Los Angeles," *Critica: A Journal of Critical Essays* (Spring 1998): 1-26.

like the Catholic saints of their childhoods, and understood their Chicana selves. In the founders' cowritten "About" page on the zine's website, Castro and Hernandez narrate the saint's hagiography: "Isa and her college friends […] felt guilty asking the Virgin de Guadalupe for help with their hangovers and late periods. So, they came up with Saint Sucia. So many mujeres identified with the joke that Isa wanted to expand on the idea. A zine was the only answer."[12] In the first editor's note, Castro reiterates this satirical origin: ""St. Sucia" started as a joke./ Praying we weren't pregnant and shit to this brown NOT-SO-virgin saint."[13]

Notably, Saint Sucia is first referred to as an icon herself, not the title of the zine. A poem, "Los Santos de Una Sucia," from *St. Sucia*'s first issue (fig. 3), presents an example of the care and acceptance that young Latinas desire from this eponymous saint. The narrative describes a young Latina who wears and prays to Catholic saints, even as she pukes in a dive bar, gives a blowjob, and forgets the religious pendants on the nightstand of a hook up. Though she knows the saints disapprove of her behavior, she holds them near, "between my tits, close to my heart."[14] The narrator is a self-identified sucia who needs a new saint to look after her without judgement, a saint with whom the sucia can empathize. She needs Saint Sucia, a figure at the intersection of Catholic sainthood and deviance.

[12] Isabel Ann Castro and Natasha I. Hernandez, "About," *St. Sucia* (blog), https://stsucia.bigcartel.com/about.

[13] Isabel Ann Castro, "Editor's Note," *St. Sucia Issue I: La Primera* (Self-published, San Antonio, TX: 2014), 1.

[14] La Hocicona [Natasha Hernandez], "Los Santos de Una Sucia," *St. Sucia Issue I: La Primera,* (Self-published, San Antonio, TX: 2014), 2.

EDITOR'S NOTE

"St. Sucia" started as a joke.

Praying we weren't pregnant and shit to this brown NOT-SO-virgin saint. Eventually, I wanted to create a zine where mujeres can project their voices and tell it like it is. Unapologetic and unfiltered. It became apparent that this is necessary. People can identify and console one another. I couldn't imagine anyone better than Natasha to help me do this. Mil gracias to all my chicas and homies who have shown incredible support for me and all my endeavors.

ISABEL ANN CASTRO

The romance of print is dying, but the importance of self publication and expression never will. Zines are everyone's novels and newspaper. A place to put what won't fit when we try to write it on a wall.

Politics, love, music, poetry, family stories, all parts of being a human on cheap paper with flimsy covers all say the same thing, "You are not alone". This is the most powerful message in the printed world. Zines have helped me through some of the hardest times in my life with that simple idea.

St. Sucia is a megaphone gritando NO ESTAS SOLA!

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*San Antonio, Texas*

St. Sucia

LOS SANTOS DE UNA SUCIA

*Not necessarily a good girl, but good enough*
*Not a catholic girl, but santos hang around my neck*
*Day. Night. Shower.*
*Stuck to me with sweat when I dance*
*Choke me in my sleep*
*Los Santos de Una Sucia*
*The tiny lead eyes of San Martin De Porres*
*watch my every move*
*He's mine.*
*A santo to most*
*A simple role model to me*
*Like Harriet Tubman, Frida Khalo, or my great grandma*
*Margarita who took shit from no one*
*Those tiny eyes watch me drive to work, wash the dishes, check my phone*
*But I'm sure they hate the abuse*
*The way they swing into a flow of puke as I lean over a toilet in some dive bar*
*Sometimes smack the head of a cock I'm trying to impress*
*I have even, worst of all, left my santos on a night stand that wasn't mine,*
*But I got them back.*
*They are here.*
*Where they belong,*
*Between my tits, close to my heart.*

***LA HOCICONA***
*San Antonio, Texas*

*Figure 3 Words and photo by Isabel Ann Castro & Natasha I. Hernandez, Graphic by Caterina Gutierrez, First Two Pages of St. Sucia Issue I: La Primera, 2014. Courtesy of Isabel Ann Castro and Natasha I. Hernandez.*

## PERFORMING MARÍA: CHALLENGING MARIANISMO WITH LA VIRGEN

As a formation born from the cofounders' disconnect with La Virgen de Guadalupe, the figure of Saint Sucia can be understood as a challenge to the traditional patriarchal and heteronormative expectations of Chicana femininity. La Virgen, the Mexican Virgin María, is the venerated figure whom Gloria Anzaldúa describes as "the single most potent religious, political, and cultural image of the Chicano/Mexicano."[15] Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano additionally notes that "La Virgen can also be used as a role model for a feminine ideal which includes the virtues of passivity, obedience, unswerving love, and an endless capacity to endure suffering and pain."[16] As a cultural and religious

[15] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 28.

[16] Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, "La Virgen de Guadalupe," lecture given in Seattle, Washington, 1993.

icon, La Virgen's image and iconography invoke a feminine ideal and imperative that follows narrow Catholic parameters for acceptable behavior by women. The veneration of La Virgen, known as *marianismo*, expects a feminine compliance to masculine dominance reinforced through instruction, criticism, and reclamation. To "be like María," *marianismo* compels women to be chaste and virginal in all aspects of her life. A "proper" Mexican-American woman dresses modestly feminine and has a downcast demure gaze. She obeys the men in her life, whether they be her father, her husband, her brother(s), or her sons. Deviation from these prescriptive behaviors results in disgrace for herself and her family, and invites violence and rejection.

In response to *marianismo*, Chicana artists throughout the twentieth century have incorporated marian iconography into their art to critique the structures that seek to control femininity.[17] A feminist iconographic use of La Virgen departs from the icon's prescriptive Marian presentation for an aberrant femininity.[18] Aberrant femininities visually signify "queer cipher[s]" to view and connect politicized aesthetic gestures, which artists deliberately construct to affront normative cis-heterosexual male gazes.[19]

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[17] Other late twentieth-century queer and/or feminist Chicanx artists who appropriate the iconography of La Virgen de Guadalupe to invoke a critical discourse include but are not limited to: Alma López, Yolanda López, Ester Hernández, Patssi Valdez, Alex Donis, Tony de Carlo, Santa Barraza, and Sandra Cisneros. Additionally, scholars argue that Spaniards conflated Virgin Mary iconography with the indigenous deity Tonantzin in sixteenth-century New Spain. Evidence suggests that Indigenous insistence on pre-Columbian iconography for the "Mother of Mexico," La Virgen was an act of resistance to Spanish conquest. In the twentieth century, Chicanas incorporated pre-Columbian iconography to invoke Tonantzin, or Coatlicue, resisting both Euro-centric Western hegemony and its patriarchal strands in machismo Mexican culture. See: Jeannette Favrot Peterson, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?", *Art Journal* 51, no. 4 (Winter 1992), 39-40; Holly Barnet-Sanchez, "Where Are the Chicana Printmakers?: Presence and Absence in the Work of Chicana Artists of the Movimiento=Dónde Están Las Grabadistas Chicanas: Presencia y Ausencia de La Obra de Las Artistas En El Movimiento Chicano," in *Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California* (Santa Barbara, CA: University Art Museum, 2001), 132.

[18] Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Homegirls, Cholas, and Pachucas in Cinema: Taking Over the Public Sphere," *California History* 74, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 316-27.

[19] Catherine S. Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 78; Leticia Alvarado, "Malflora Aberrant Femininities," in *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A*, edited by C. Ondine Chavoya, David Evans Frantz, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Leticia Alvarado, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Simon Doonan, Colin Gunckel, et al. (Los Angeles: ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries; Munich, Germany: DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2017), 103, 106. Initially coined by Catherine Ramírez, Leticia Alvarada uses the concept of "aberrant femininity" as a methodology to analyze the visual strategies deployed by Chicana/x artists in her work "Malflora Aberrant Femininities."

Artists like Hernandez, Castro, and Judy Baca interpret La Virgen through a feminist and/or queer Chicana/x lens. While these artists emphasize La Virgen's association with Mexican-American womanhood, their framing exaggerates the saint's femininity to the heights of high-femme splendor. The hyper-femininity of this splendor subverts the modest feminine representation, resisting objectification through its use of camp, and its confrontation of cis-male heteronormative forces.

The title of the zine itself refers to and rejects La Virgen, and thus, can be understood as a reference to and rejection of different aspects of *marianismo*. Beginning with the first issue of *St. Sucia*, Castro and Hernandez have consistently referred to La Virgen as another form of Saint Sucia whom they resist and revere. In the premiere issue "La Primera" (fig. 3), Castro's self-portrait shows a close-up of her face wearing rectangular glasses, a septum piercing, and tongue out between her fingers shaped in a V. The square dimensions and close crop of the image resemble popular selfies taken on cellphones. This choice of composition fosters an intimacy between Castro and her readers. While Castro's hand gesture refers to oral sex, it also satirizes La Virgen.[20] The gesture directs the viewer's attention to Castro's middle fingernail, which has been decorated with a tiny nail art portrait of La Virgen, shown upside down in the photo. In Mexican-American households, this temporary reversed orientation of saints' icons often indicates that a saint has not answered its followers' prayers. Part of a cultural code, this message was legible to the first readers of the issue, who belonged to the editors' own Chicana/x networks. The photo is paired with Castro's cry for a "NOT-SO-virgin saint." Taken together, the self-portrait invokes Castro's critical reverence for the icon of La Virgen.

Beneath Castro's selfie, Hernandez presents herself dressed as La Virgen through a digital illustration created by Caterina Gutierrez. Castro is depicted standing in three-quarters profile looking down at the viewer. The vector self-portrait is composed of stark lines and flat blocks of orange, green, brown, red, and yellow. A yellow disk behind Hernandez's head acts as a halo and draws attention to her bright red lipstick and glasses. Unlike La Virgen's downcast and passive gaze, Hernandez raises her chin and gazes upon the viewer through a sidelong glance. Hernandez is as an aberrant María, one who takes no bullshit and listens to plenty of punk. Through their simultaneous embrace and critique of La Virgen imagery in the first issue, the creators formulate Saint Sucia as a figure herself. In their reinterpretation of La Virgen and her significance to Mexican Americans, they remake La Virgen as Saint Sucia. La Virgen in negative, Saint Sucia provides a method of reinterpreting the confining feminine roles within *marianismo*.

[20] Natasha I. Hernandez, email to author, November 29, 2021. Castro's hand gesture is understood as "eat pussy."

FANATIC FEMINISM: THE FEMINIST CHICANA IMAGINATION AS FANDOM

Growing up in Catholic households, many Chicanas/x have a fraught relationship with La Virgen, and seek to reclaim her as a saint that aligns more with their identities and values through their own representations. Queer feminist Chicanas use strategies that both appropriate Marian iconography, privileging irony and distance, as well as the fan strategy that focuses on attachment and desire.[21] Through their melancholic attachment to this cultural icon, Chicana artists remake La Virgen through the fan's desire for representation. An example of this religious fandom re-imagining is found in Judy Baca's materialized queer Chicana feminism in *Las Tres Marías* (1976), a triptych that uses Christian symbolism, femme ritual, and subversive identities to explore a femme spectrum in Chicanidad.[22]

*Las Tres Marías* is a three-paneled work composed of two full-length colored pencil portraits on paper mounted on hinged wooden panels and a central floor-length mirror panel that reflects the viewer's full figure. The triptych's scale and reflective surface resemble a folding dressing mirror that evoke interior femme rituals of dressing either for the day or for play.[23] Baca rewrites the machiste "Marías" as the Pachuca and the Chola through the styles of people she knew personally: La Pachuca in *Las Tres Marías* arises from the past in the form of Baca's cousin. A member of the South-Central L.A. gang the Florencias in the 1950s, Esther intimidated and inspired a young Judy Baca, symbolizing danger and power in hyperfemininity.[24] The Pachuca in Baca's

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[21] Catherine Grant, "Fans of Feminism: Re-writing Histories of Second-wave Feminism in Contemporary Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 2 (2011): 269. Catherine Grant argues that a fan strategy's emotional connection with the subject material creates an affective resonance in their reinterpretations of the subject material. The fan's intense engagement with the subject material provides an active model for examining contemporary political art's engagement with previous movements.

[22] Indych-López, *Judith F. Baca*, 99. To view Judy Baca's *Las Tres Marías*, refer to http://www.judybaca.com/artist/art/lastresmarias/. Although all three parts of the work are rich in meaning, the themes of the interactive triptych of "Las Tres Marías" converse directly with those of the performances and visuals from *St. Sucia* in the 2010s, and will thus be the focus of this section.

[23] Ibid., 97. The work's title refers to the three Christian Marys in the crucifixion story: Virgen Mary, Mary Magdalen, and Mary of Cleofas. The triptych format also recalls medieval and early modern Catholic triptychs that were commissioned for church altars. These hybrid painting and architectural works presented viewers with a central panel featuring the crucifixion or birth of Jesus Christ, while the flanking panels depicted other religious figures, which could include the Marías. In contrast, Baca's triptych centers the Marías and re-envisions them through the figures of the Chola, the Pachuca, and the viewer standing before the central mirror. The Chola and the Pachuca are two urban identities of the iconic "tough girl" Chicana.

[24] Ibid., 99.

triptych has a carefully made-up appearance that signals the feminine—the color-coordinated styling, the teased hair, the makeup, the comb—but the Pachuca wields the feminine as a weapon, not a balm to the archetypic aggressive machismo. With high-femme splendor, Baca's Pachuca confronts her viewer with a "tough girl" persona, departing from the heteronormative femme framework.[25]

The Pachuca and Chola are two sides of the same aberrant-femininity coin. As the historical progenitor of the Chola, "Pachuca/o" entered popular parlance among young Mexican Americans in the 1930s and 40s.[26] The Mexican Americans who identified as Pachuca/os cultivated a non-normative look of excess and hypermasculinity or hyperfemininity woven with a tough, sexual, and confrontational attitude.[27] The Pachuca/o hyper-gendered dress satirizes gender norms: the Pachuco plays on hypermasculinity, while the hyperfemininity of Pachucas becomes an aberration as it confronts a hostile misogynistic environment.[28] While the biblical Marías act as a moralizing dichotomy (holy Mary vs. the whore Mary Magdalen), the Pachuca/Chola act in tandem against that moralizing framework.[29] The Pachuca predates the Chola, who predates the homegirl, yet the boundary blurs between the social identities, revealing a generational replay and reinterpretation of past identities with those in the present.[30]

On the left panel, Baca's portrayal of the Chola is based on Flaca, or "Flaquita," a member of the East L.A. gang Tiny Locas, i.e. Cyclonas.[31] Dressed in a long-sleeved,

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[25] Ibid., 97; Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*, 123-4.

[26] Cara Bresnahan, "Pachuco," *Subcultures and Sociology*, Grinnell College, last modified 2019, https://haenfler.sites.grinnell.edu/subcultures-and-scenes/pachuco/. Derived from the city El Paso, Texas, which Mexican immigrants referred to as "Chuco" towns, Pachuco/a subculture provided a framework and aesthetic to resist prejudices and inequalities in the United States. The signature Pachuco Look was the zoot suit, a men's suit with exaggerated proportions including a high-waisted, wide-legged, and tight cuffed trousers paired with a wide-padded shoulder, wide lapelled, long jacket. The zoot suit, created by Ernest "Skillet" Mayhand, was first associated with African-American communities, and later made popular among marginalized communities by American jazz musicians in the 1940s.

[27] Alvarado, "Malflora Aberrant Femininities," 103-4.

[28] Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*, 123-4.

[29] Fregoso, "Homegirls, Cholas, and Pachucas in Cinema," 327.

[30] Stephanie Montes, "Chola Makeup Isn't a Trend—It Signifies a Hard-Earned Identity," *Byrdie*, October 7, 2020, https://www.byrdie.com/chola-makeup-5079680. The Chola arose in the 1960s through the Chola style, which became synonymous with an adoration for lowrider cars and an association with gangs. In the twenty-first century, the Chola look is most often associated with chunky gold jewelry, ornate acrylic nails, slicked down baby hairs, thick eyeliner, and brown lipstick with a dark liner.

[31] Indych-López, *Judith F. Baca*, 99. Flaca: skinny girl/woman. Flaquita: little skinny girl/woman (with endearing sentiment).

baggy-neck black sweater and ill-fitted black pants, the figure gazes at the viewer with a down-turned mouth through heavily lined eyes. Flaquita's long, dark, unstyled hair hangs loose and straight over her shoulders. Flaquita's contemptuous upward chin and downward gaze recall Hernandez's defiant self-styling as La Virgen in the editors' note from the first issue of *St. Sucia*. The absence of conventional feminine signifiers in Flaquita's portrait is not necessarily characteristic of Cholas, since a Chola look may also include hyperfeminine elements.[32] Instead, the Chola works as a transformative iteration of her progenitor, the Pachuca, to complicate notions of Mexican-American femininity.

As the artist portrays herself as the past Pachuca and the constructed present Chola identity of Flaquita, she asks the spectator to play with their existing identity alongside the two figures. Reflecting the full-length of the viewer's body, the central mirror panel invites the viewer to reflect their own self-fashioning. Evocative of dressing ritual—trying on new clothes, or playing with an elder's or friend's wardrobe—the triptych's central mirror positions the viewer as a fellow "tough girl" conspiring with the viewer to complicate the feminine. Baca's reinterpretation of Chicana cultural figures collapses the three social subjects into one moment in time to emphasize a distinctly Chicana generational rewriting of femininity. When viewed in the twenty-first century, Baca's Pachuca and Chola represent two previous generations of Mexican Americans. Baca's mirror invites the twenty-first century viewer to place their body in conversation with Baca's portraits and complicate Latina/x identity in the viewer's present.

Returning to the fandom term "cosplay" in the St. Sucia Instagram caption, Hernandez's post situates her performance and *St. Sucia* within the feminist Latina social community that embraces and critiques elements of "Chicanidad" or "Latinidad," especially La Virgen and expectations around gender and sexuality. Cosplay refers to the process of dressing up as a character from a movie, book, or other media, often with over-the-top costumes and exaggerated gender norms. A "fanaticism," a strong participatory act compelled by a passionate attachment to and dedication for the subject, forefronts the fans' subjectivity and authorship to come into view.[33] Though Judy Baca does not describe her Pachuca self-portrait as cosplay, the portrait acts as a performance of her experience as a queer Chicana artist. In a similar manner, Hernandez's cosplay of Baca's Pachuca performance confronts the *marianismo* hierarchies wielded against her by a patriarchal society. Hernandez's cosplay

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[32] Fregoso, "Homegirls, Cholas, and Pachucas in Cinema," 322. In a line describing a scene from the film *Colors* (1988), Fregoso writes, "Danny watches as Luisa, in heavy make-up, teased hair, wearing the provocative dress typical of *cholas*, is donning her hose." This description and Baca's portrait of Flaca as Chola points to the Chola as an antecedent of the Pachuca that further complicates the feminine.

[33] Grant, "Fans of Feminism," 272.

communicates her strong attachment and admiration of Baca as a queer Chicana artist, extending Baca's narrative into Hernandez's own as well as into the narrative of Saint Sucia.

## CANONIZATION AND COSPLAY: THE STAKES OF SAINT SUCIA'S FANDOM

Like Baca's appropriation of La Virgen, Castro and Hernandez celebrate the icon while also critiquing the *marianismo* of previous generations. This relationship between the present and the past evokes "temporal drag." A concept introduced by Elizabeth Freeman, Catherine Grant adapts the idea in her analysis of feminism as fandom, using the notion of "temporal drag" to understand a characteristic rewriting of fandom narratives through engaged reinterpretative readings over time.[34] Rather than conceptualizing time as a linear succession, temporal dragging replays historical moments by "dragging/suspending time on the present *and* the past" in order to convene and converse with the past in the present moment.[35] This dragging occurs in Baca's *Las Tres Marías* triptych, which collapses the Pachuca, the Chola, and the present viewer. Natasha Hernandez's cosplay of Baca's Pachuca image and *St. Sucia's* own iconography play with La Virgen, and rewrite Mexican-American feminine narratives of the past for the present. The cofounders' engagement with temporal drag complicates their subversion of La Virgen: by replaying past moments in the present, Hernandez and Castro bring queer Chicana artists' previous invocations of La Virgen into their own work.[36] This temporal drag reveals what is at stake in Hernandez's performance of Baca's performance of La Pachuca - a reinterpretation of past identities. Judy Baca's triptych, Hernandez's performance of Baca's Pachuca, and *St. Sucia* the zine act as a drag, or a suspension of time. Baca and Hernandez repeat history as a method to convene and converse through alternative femininities.

Hernandez and Castro use the playful and passionate elements of fandom to build *St. Sucia* into a multivocal space for their Latina communities. Significantly, Hernandez described her own self-fashioning as "cosplay" of Baca's La Pachuca, consciously situating her performance in fandom and fan studies.[37] From the

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[34] Ibid., 274.

[35] Elizabeth Freeman, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 2000), 728-9. Freeman's formulation of "temporal drag" combines gender theorist Judith Butler's theories of "performativity" and "drag." Freeman builds from Butler's notion that "time" in queer performativity is progressive, "insofar as it depends upon repetitions with a difference—iterations that are transformative and future-oriented."

[36] Ibid., 729.

[37] For *St. Sucia Issue XII: Pop Cultura*, the cofounders featured a contributor Shelby Criswell's illustration of the cofounders dressed as ghostbusters for the editors' note, fittingly in Ghostbuster cosplay for their zine's pop culture theme.

beginning, Castro knew "a zine was the only answer" to her frustration with *marianismo*, pointing to zines' collective authorship and origins in subculture. Zines themselves arose out of fandom; also called fanzines, fans distributed and exchanged the low-cost publications to passionately rewrite and identify with an existing work.[38] The cofounders chose the zine format for its punk associations, independence, and use as a communal object. Zines' low-cost production enables a collaborative process for the cofounders. A cheap production means the publication can include more submissions, and also reach more hands. As a physical multi-authored work, *St. Sucia* brings its participants and fans together in one object of shared authorship. As a distributed object with its handmade qualities of handsewn or stapled binding, *St. Sucia* travels from the cofounders' makeshift studios to the hands of readers, accumulating members in a worldwide community connected by touch and recognition.

Precisely because this subjectivity leads to an intense engagement, a fandom methodology reveals how Hernandez and Castro's feminist Latina work provides an emotional connection to past political and cultural moments. Their appropriation of La Virgen's iconography follows previous artists' appropriation, and continues a dialogue using altered tropes of La Virgen de Guadalupe iconography. Each iteration re-enacts, and thus, rewrites previous narratives for new versions whose authorship is dispersed between the present and past.[39] This dialogue persists not only in the visual signifiers, but the emotional resonance between the fans and their subject. Hernandez, Castro, and their contributors' emotional resonances with La Virgen facilitates dialogue with previous Chicana artists facilitated by engaging with the cultural forms.

## "SOY": SIGNIFYING SAINT SUCIA WITHOUT LA VIRGEN

The zine embodies the spirit and identity of Saint Sucia collectively imagined. Each contributor's submission also contributes to an understanding of who Saint Sucia is. In this context, the artists' self-representations may be understood as an evocation, through cosplay, of the character. Any and every sucia is an incarnation of Saint Sucia. After four years, the fourteenth and final issue of *St. Sucia Issue XIV: Soy* displays how the contributors' collected aberrant femininities created Saint Sucia. Rather than creating Saint Sucia through La Virgen iconography or appropriated Chicana cultural forms, the final zine's varied content under the theme "*Soy*"—content including the jotería, the gorditas, the abject, the sacred—represents Saint Sucia.[40] The signifiers are not based in satirizing La Virgen's starry green mantle and red tunic, or a cosplay of an

[38] Grant, "Fans of Feminism," 283.

[39] Lamerichs, "Embodied Characters," 204.

[40] Jotería: something that is perceived as queer, especially as gender-nonconforming. Gorditas: little fat women.

iconic artwork by a Chicana predecessor, but a stubborn and unapologetic resolve to be sucia.

The cofounders' portrait in the final issue of *St. Sucia* emblematizes their new patron Saint Sucia, a final fanatic icon. The last editor's note presents the two together as saints in a portrait photographed by Destiny Mata (fig. 4). The two stand in front of a red building, their even gazes meeting the viewer. Their self-assured expressions make them look undeniably *cool*. Though both meet the camera's gaze directly, Castro's tiny smile gives nothing away, and Hernandez's expression conveys fleeting interest. Castro sports neon green acrylic hoops with her butch undercut and pink tinged braid, while Hernandez wears dark red lipstick, her wavy hair piled atop her head, and thick gold hoops. Castro stands with her hands in the pockets of her jean jacket, shoulders squared towards the viewer and taking up space. Hernandez leans her elbow on Castro's shoulder, propping her head with her hand. Her unshaved armpit hair contrasts with the femininity of her lacy lavender camisole top. The graffiti tag above them could read "DIE" or "DIO," and this ambiguity emphasizes the punk fandom inherent to their sacred and irreverent project. Unlike their first portraits, which heavily referenced La Virgen, only a yellow circle halo gestures to the divine origins of Saint Sucia. Most importantly, their final portrait presents them as two amigas supporting each other, side-by-side: Saints for all their sucias.

**FINAL EDITOR'S NOTE**

It started as a joke. La Santa Sucia helping us out with contemporary mujer problems. That joke became an idea that bloomed into a part of our shared history and the international conversation about what feminism is to Mujeres. In the last 4 years (and 13 issues) we have achieved our initial goal of making space. In our pages, we held this space for our work to to be respected and shown honestly, openly and with pride. We decided that instead of waiting to be invited into art galleries and book stores, we were gonna publish our own work. These zines have gone from basement punk shows in Brooklyn to the pages of a thesis in San Francisco. Zine fests in community centers and university classrooms. When we printed our first issue on an unattended copy machine, we just wanted to be seen for what we are- creators. Now, our stories and art will continue to live on and change ideas of what it is to be a mujer. Stories of factory workers and Latina PhDs. Stories generations old, and stories we never told anyone. Stories of life, of struggle, of survival. All in our own words, by us, for us, to show that we as, Latinas, as Latinx, are so much more than stereotypes. We are writers, artists, photographers, film makers, publishers, we are...everything. Just because no one is putting a spotlight on us, it doesn't mean we aren't here. Thank you to everyone who has ever submitted, been published, or bought one of our zines. Thank you to the students who wrote about us, librarians and professors who included us in academia. Thank you to our families who supported our work. Because of y'all, these voices will live forever around the world and reach into spaces we never dreamed possible.

St. Sucia is coming to an end, but this was one step in a thousand year lucha for the respect we deserve. Be a part of it. Make a zine. Write a novel. Paint your truth. Create something and show the rest of the world what we are.

St. Sucia has blessed us and will forever watch over us and give us the strength to be our true selves, be visible and make our magic.

Abrazo grande,
Isabel Ann Castro
Art Director

Natasha I. Hernandez
Editor

c/s

*Front Cover:*
***LESLIE CORTEZ***
*Cicero, Illinois*

*Back Cover:*
***ANGELICA FRAUSTO***
*South Bend, Indiana*

*Photograph by Destiny Mata*

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*Figure 4 Destiny Mata, Portrait of Isabel Ann Castro & Natasha I. Hernandez in St. Sucia Issue XIV: Soy, November 25, 2018. Courtesy of Isabel Ann Castro and Natasha I. Hernandez.*

Instead of invoking La Virgen as in the first portraits, Castro and Hernandez rewrite themselves as the divine absent of the iconography of this cultural icon, relying on the negative space left by their previous invocation of La Virgen's figure to communicate their divinity. The printed and published discursive space *St. Sucia* and the newly formed Saint Sucia grant participants a space to question and confront ideologies of gender, race, and sex in the Chicana/o and Latina/o community for the affirmation of new identities.[41] The last sentence of the final editors' note refers to Saint Sucia with the same language as one would refer to La Virgen. With reverence, the

[41] García, "Against Rasquache," 10.

cofounders write, "St. Sucia has blessed us and will forever watch over us and give us the strength to be our true selves, be visible and make our magic."[42]

[42] Isabel Ann Castro and Natasha I. Hernandez, *St. Sucia*, "Soy," Issue XIV (Self-published, San Antonio, TX: 2019), i.

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# Plenary Affections

a response by Leslie Huang

Our societal fascination with fans is nothing new.[1] In response to the emergence of mass print culture, affective engagement with "objects of devotion" within communities infused cultural products with renewed meaning.[2] What is a fan, and what types of objects are interesting to them? And how might fan studies help us to think productively in art history? Mia I. Uribe Kozlovsky's study "Saints and Zinesters," which examines the twin devotions of fandom and religion, offers some insightful

[1] As a field of scholarly study, fan studies evolved from the florescence of visual culture studies, cultural studies, and media studies at the tail end of the twentieth century. Game studies is another field that has considerable overlap with fan studies. For a general history of the field, see: Henry Jenkins, "Fan Studies," Oxford Bibliographies, last modified August 2012, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791286/obo-9780199791286-0027.xml; and Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, eds., *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

[2] Matt Hills, riffing on Benedict Anderson, describes a fan community as an "affective space," or an imagined community that is formed by fans through their intense feelings of attachment towards their object of interest. See: Matt Hills, "Virtually Out There: Strategies, Tactics and Affective Spaces in On-Line Fandom," in *Technospaces: Inside the New Media*, ed. Sally Munt (London; New York: Continuum, 2001), 147–60. The broader connection between affect theory and fandom can be credited to Lawrence Grossberg. See: Lawrence Grossberg, "Is there a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media.*, ed. Lisa A Lewis (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 50–65.

interventions by attending to the practice of reinterpretation, knowledge production, and the nature of devotion itself.

Although a relatively new field of inquiry, fan studies, broadly defined as the study of "media fans and fan cultures," has developed considerably since its nascence in the 1970s. Henry Jenkins, a pivotal fan studies scholar, defines fans and fan cultures as follows:

> Fans might be broadly defined as individuals who maintain a passionate connection to popular media, assert their identity through their engagement with and mastery over its contents, and experience social affiliation around shared tastes and preferences. Fan cultures are the social and cultural infrastructures that support fan activities and interests.[3]

While the origin of fan studies lies in popular media, its distinct attention to "social affiliation" and the formation of "social and cultural infrastructures" offers a compelling framework for studying the interplay of affect and relationality at both the individual and communal registers.[4] Uribe Kozlovsky's analysis of the zine *St. Sucia* offers a keen insight into the dynamics of community formation in artistic practice, particularly how the deeply personal relationship between a fan and their "object of devotion" contributes to belonging. The communities in "Saints and Zinesters" are both distinct and overlapping, including the self-identified *sucias* gathering in the pages of *St. Sucia*, queer genealogies of feminist Latinx artists, as well as these groups' fraught devotion towards the Roman Catholic saint, La Virgen de Guadalupe.

Fans are omnivorous peripatetics who belong to and engage in multiple fandoms with varying degrees of affective intensity.[5] As an inherently participatory endeavor, a fandom community emerges through its relationships between persons, as well as with objects. Fans will repeatedly return to a media text to produce new meanings, an interactive and accretive process of reinterpretation that Jenkins calls

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[3] Jenkins, "Fan Studies."

[4] Recent use of this method by researchers in fields like religious studies and art history also reflect a growing interest in this approach outside of media studies. For example, Catherine Grant utilizes this approach to theorize the relationship between contemporary feminist artists and histories of feminism. See: Catherine Grant, "Fans of Feminism: Re-Writing Histories of Second-Wave Feminism in Contemporary Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 2 (June 2011): 265–86. In fan studies, a semi-recent edited volume includes studies on the news, cultural theory, classical music aficionados, and theatre goers to performances of Anton Chekhov plays. See: Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World.*

[5] Henry Jenkins, "Fan," in *Keywords for Media Studies*, ed. Laurie Ouellette and Jonathan Gray (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 65–7.

rogue reading.[6] The "rogue" nature of this practice stems from fans' rejection of established meanings (the "canon") in favor of their own interpretations, as well as their disregard of mass consumption. For a fan, the same object may be an inexhaustible source of renewal that is regularly replenished by the attention lavished upon it. In the process of rogue reading, vague parts of a media text may be fleshed out or reimagined altogether in the form of fan-made objects, such as fanfiction, fanart, and cosplay. As Uribe Kozlovsky points out, Saint Sucia's initial conception was in the form of a "bad girl" alter-ego of La Virgen de Guadalupe. However, it was only through her collective writing by her readers that the inchoate saint's sacred vulgarity fully manifested. As the co-editors of the *St. Sucia* zine, Hernandez and Castro's iterative cosplays of Saint Sucia as Judy Baca's *La Pachuca* and La Virgen may be understood as embodied citations that reflect developments of the saint's identity through successive issues of the zine.

What I have discussed so far privileges the perspective of the fan and their activities as the heart of forming networks in participatory cultures. This stance is consistent with current trends in fan studies that have turned away from fandom as an "a priori space of cultural autonomy and resistance" towards a renewed emphasis on the relationship between fans' selves and their fan objects without reification of the fan as a subversive Other, a typical stance in prior research.[7] Fan studies provides a means to describe both the functional components of community formation and the complex, often contradictory motivations of its actors. Moreover, the inclusion of affect theory from the field's nascence recognizes that objects have a pull: they are Heideggerian things that "gather" people together, and which exist alongside rather than for the human. Seen in this way, the emotional and affective "excess" resulting from a fan's attachment to objects emerges as a point of interest rather than a point of embarrassment.

Although fan studies has normalized its objects of study, and fandom has become a more acceptable form of cultural consumption in the public sphere, there remain two elements that may discourage cross-disciplinary adoptions of a fan studies framework. The first is a divide between "high" and "mass" culture. In an effort to dissolve the false binary between fan and non-fan, scholars have emphasized how emotional attachment to objects and actions deriving from fandom—like interpretation, collection, and connoisseurship—have long been considered common,

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[6] This concept develops Michel de Certeau's theory of "textual poaching," which describes a practice of appropriative reading where the reader takes from the text only that which is useful or pleasurable to them as the reader. See: Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 1992), 24.

[7] Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, *Fandom*, 6.

everyday behaviors.[8] Still, whenever a cultural phenomenon appears unfamiliar to the dominant culture, the specter of the "fanatical" fan materializes. For example, in a 2019 *Saturday Night Live* sketch "E-Sports Reporter," the musician Chance the Rapper stars as put-upon sports correspondent Lazlowe Holmes, who has been pushed out of his familiar domain of basketball into the peculiar world of esports, or electronic sports.[9] Holmes functions as the audience's surrogate as he attempts an utterly bewildered and reluctant ethnography of the gaming world. His fitful efforts to interpret League of Legends gameplay and to understand the fervent reception of its nonathletic players by a coterie of fangirls (i.e. "groupies") reflects the broader struggle of mainstream culture to come to terms with the reality of e-sports and MMOs (massively multiplayer online games) as part of a wildly popular, billion-dollar global industry.[10] This reinforces the idea of fandom as "low" culture, restricting how historians can engage with their respective fields of study in a way that risks misinterpretation of the dynamics in a particular historical or cultural moment.

The traditional focus on popular media in fan studies has also raised questions about the method's broader applicability. Because a fan's relationship to their objects of interest exists within a structure of consumer capitalism, critiques point out how focusing on consumption as the primary form of engagement perpetuates the assumption of capitalism as a teleological inevitability, which also replicates anthropocentric perspectives of human-object relations.[11] These critiques are insightful reminders to pay close attention to the expression of structural forces through material culture, as well as the limits of their influence. Emphasis on affective modes of relationality offers an opportunity to consider how alternative forms of belonging have always co-existed alongside structures of dominance. For this reason, it is also crucial to examine human-object relationships across many historical time periods, not just in the chronotope of modernity.

In my own field of study, early modern Chinese art, I can think of many topics that would yield a compelling analysis. One example is the collective devotion to the written word shared by elite women in seventeenth-century Jiangnan. Their interests

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[8] Joli Jenson, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media.*, ed. Lisa A Lewis (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 9–29.

[9] E-Sports Reporter - SNL, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlnwZzK2Ngo.

[10] Hilary Russ, "Global Esports Revenues to Top $1 Billion in 2019: Report," *Reuters*, February 12, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-videogames-outlook-idUSKCN1Q11XY.

[11] This criticism is not specific to fan studies, but a common point that has been directed at media studies and its affiliated fields (e.g., visual studies). This follows the shift in focus from producer to consumer in studies about the effects of globalization in a postmodern era. For an example of this theoretical framing, see: Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

were wide-ranging, including spiritual pursuits such as studying Buddhist sutras, and imagining a perfect love through discussions of romantic plays like *The Peony Pavilion.* These feelings and thoughts were made material through the women's literary and material cultural productions, which included fervent epistolary exchanges, gift giving, and self-published writings. Through discussing and sharing their objects of interest, elite women maintained a vast network of familial and friendship ties that spanned the Jiangnan region.[12] Paying attention to the affective nature of material exchange makes evident how human-object relationality has long been a keen point of interest to historians. Fan studies' underscoring of affect as an active agent in community formation demonstrates how objects can inspire a community's members plurality of responses, including developing their moral and ethical dispositions, and relationship to religion.[13] Uribe Kozlovsky's research in "Saints and Zinesters" draws attention to the overlap between the affect of devotion and fandom. Through collective artistic practice in *St. Sucia*, participants negotiated deeply personal relationships to La Virgen and the veneration of *marianismo*. Seen through fandom, the creation of religious art comes to encompass all manners of reinterpretation that have served the spiritual needs of its devotees.

As I prepared to write this response, I read case studies from all corners of the fandom world. Among the plenitude of emotional and affective engagements suffusing the texts, what became unmistakable was the shared desire for belonging, and the promise of recognition that being in community affords. In a profession that remains devoted to evidence-based research, I acknowledge that such an observation can be considered anachronistic, or lacking precision. To this point, I am reminded of Catherine Grant's closing revelation in "Fans of Feminism:"

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[12] Women's obsessive interest in *The Peony Pavilion* and its ties to the cult of *qing* (emotion) has been discussed extensively, particularly by Dorothy Ko. See: Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[13] The intersection between religion and popular culture has long been of interest to religious studies scholars, evident in ongoing research that examines how fan cultures propagate religious beliefs. For example, Kaitlyn Ugoretz studies online Shinto communities and the globalization of the religion through popular media, including anime and videogames. Jolyon Thomas has written about how the 1989 Hayao Miyazaki film *Nausicäa of the Valley of the Wind* was read by some fans as a religious text. See: Kaitliyn Ugoretz, "As the Spirit Moves You: How Studio Ghibli Films Leave Room for A Range of Religious Interpretations," Beneath the Tangles, September 23, 2019, https://beneaththetangles.com/2019/09/23/studio-ghibli-films-leave-room-for-a-range-of-religious-interpretations/; and Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012).

> As I sat amongst the numerous files in the Lesbian Herstory Archive, sifting through leaflets, memoranda for obscure collectives, calls for submissions and meeting agendas, I realised that the contemporary artists had managed what I had not. By engaging with these histories of second-wave feminism in their art projects, they had creatively reworked these historical moments in a way that had not been possible as an art historian. […] Material that I had collected, pored over, and been fascinated by, but had been unable to write about, was now activated within the public realm…[14]

As both a historian and a fan of feminism, Grant expresses the impasse of writing history—how the necessity of narrative compels its objects to gather into recognizable patterns and exclude excess—the common, the idiosyncratic, the lesser. This impasse asks, does the demand of form and discipline diminish the true nature of objects? Or is it merely a failure of the historian to masterfully wield the tools of their profession? If the historical research is without flaw, but the value to its subject is lost, then for whom does this history have meaning? Does excess still not matter? To affirm attachment is to recognize and feel the affective warp that weaves together communities of humans and things. It is perhaps the most generous gesture we might extend to our historical subjects.

[14] Grant, "Fans of Feminism," 285.

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# Pagan Metal Gods: The Use of Mythology and White Supremacy in National Socialist Black Metal

Jillian Fischer

Black metal's relationship to National Socialism consists of a complicated nexus of historical and musicological narratives. Scholars such as Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Keith Kahn-Harris, and Jeffery Kaplan have undertaken a significant amount of painstaking academic work to trace some of the histories of radical right groups, both within the black metal scene and as ideological/political movements more broadly. However, black metal has been particularly susceptible to appropriation by radical right groups, as seen in the emergence of national socialist black metal (NSBM) bands in the 1990s, which incorporate black metal's musical emphasis on heavily distorted guitars and shrieked vocals with far-right political ideologies. The question of why black metal has been especially susceptible to appropriation by those with neo-fascist and radical right viewpoints has been less considered. In this article, I will argue that the black metal scene has been appealing to national socialist group members as a result of shared interests in paganism and mythology. Through an analysis of album art, lyrics, and the musical aesthetics of three national socialist black metal bands—Burzum, Graveland, and Der Stürmer—I will demonstrate how a similar fascination with paganism and mythology allows NSBM artists to place themselves within a national socialist lineage, as well as reinforce and adapt far-right political ideologies to fit within black metal aesthetics.

Paganism and pagan mythology as lyrical tropes have been established within black metal due to prominent bands incorporating it into their aesthetic. Although

early 1980s black metal bands like Venom focused on Satanism, which invoked the Christian conception of the devil, other bands like Bathory began shifting lyrical topics to paganism, which emphasized pre-Christian spiritual and mythological figures. In 1988, Bathory released an album titled *Blood, Fire, Death*, which includes chanting and sounds of horses in their intro, titled "Oden's Ride Over Nordland."[1] Although there are many black metal groups that use paganism only as a lyrical thematic trope, paganism and magical practices more broadly have a long and complicated history of being appropriated by the national socialist political party and post-World War II neo-fascist groups.[2]

Within the history of far-right political extremism, mythology has a history of being imbued with racialized meaning both before and during the Third Reich. Nineteenth-century intellectuals combined various mythologies and pagan religious practice that highlighted the use of *völkisch* ("folk") religions, as well as emphasized Germanic and Nordic mythology. These beliefs touted nationalist ideas that were combined with feelings of "common creative energy, feelings, and [a] sense of individuality."[3] These beliefs described a golden age of German rule that had been predicated on the ruling of the "superior" German (or Aryan) race over others.[4] Guido von List (1848-1919) and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954) were some of the first leaders to begin combining *völkisch* politics with racialized underpinnings, which would eventually lead to the esoteric belief system referred to as ariosophy. Ariosophic beliefs encouraged the collection of ancient esoteric knowledge to return the Germanic empire to a race of "heroic Aryan God-men," and advocated for a stratified society based on perceived racial purity, an idea that connects it to *völkisch* thinking.[5] These doctrines often advocate for the subjugation and destruction of those considered inferior, and emphasized "semi-religious beliefs in a race of Aryan god-men, the needful extermination of inferiors, and a wonderful millennial future of German world dominion."[6] Others believed that the Aryan bloodline held special powers that had

[1] "Bathory," Encyclopaedia Metallum, last modified unknown, https://www.metal-archives.com/bands/bathory/184.

[2] For more on this, see: Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890-1935* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1985); and Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

[3] Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 3.

[4] Ibid., 2.

[5] Ibid., 202.

[6] Ibid., 203.

been lost over the generations through race mixing, i.e., having children with non-Aryans.[7]

These ideas were kept alive and eventually politicized by groups such as the Thule Society. The Thule Society championed an ariosophic viewpoint that combined metaphysics with Aryan racial ideologies.[8] In 1918, the society created the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or the German Worker's Party, to appeal to the lower classes, including a young Adolf Hitler. By 1920, the society had become the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP). This party emphasized the creation of a political party and mass appeal while continuing to propagate ideas of German renewal common in ariosophic and *völkisch* ideologies.[9] The party's use of these spiritual beliefs had two major appealing points for some of the German public: first, the Nazis acted as a "power fantasy" for Germans already demoralized by defeat, and second, gave them a scapegoat for this demoralization, namely the Jewish community.[10]

This rhetoric was reinforced through musical choices made by the Nazi Party. Many ariosophic members of the Nazi Party adopted Richard Wagner's music and operas, a composer whose own antisemitism and deep interest in Nordic mythology has been well-documented, and is evident in his operas. The German Order used Wagner's music as part of their initiation ceremony for newer recruits, especially from his operas *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser,* drawing on the opera's specifically mythological themes. This music was used in conjunction with mythological symbols, such as spears meant to represent Wotan's spear, and some members dressed in white robes with horned helmets, resulting in what Goodrick-Clarke has referred to as a "strange synthesis of racist, masonic, and Wagnerian inspiration."[11] Wagner's music also became an important tool to Hitler's cultural propaganda as it continued to be performed during The Bayreuth Festival—a festival to showcase Wagner's works during the war—and as a part of the Nuremberg political rallies. Although Wagner's use of pagan and mythological themes was not always in favor with other Nazi officials due to their interest in Christianity, nor were Wagner's operas always popular with the German mass-market, the composer's known antisemitic attitudes and connection to mythology remained appealing to some in the Third Reich, and his music helped define the Nazi Party sonically.[12]

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[7] Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, 69.

[8] Ibid., 39.

[9] Ibid., 32.

[10] Goodrick-Clarke, *Occult Roots*, 203.

[11] Ibid., 129-30.

[12] Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 535.

The connections between paganism, mythology, and white supremacist rhetoric have been kept alive by various groups throughout the late-twentieth centuries. Groups like the Odin Fellowship, which started in 1969, explicitly tied Nordic beliefs to racial ideologies and tribalism.[13] In the 1990s, groups like the Odinist Fellowship similarly argued that Norse paganism was the "racial soul of the Aryan folk," and that "heathen gods and goddesses [are] race-specific and genetically engraved archetypes."[14] Groups such as these believe that ancestral knowledge can be passed down through DNA, and that acts of race mixing can muddy and blur these spiritual memories, ideas reminiscent of the Third Reich.[15] The connections that may be less obvious, however, are the connections between the continuation of ariosophic beliefs and the role that music plays in their propagation. Like the Nazis' use of music as a propaganda tool, proponents of later twentieth-century iterations of *völkisch* and ariosophic-like beliefs found a niche opening within black metal.

In this genre, paganism has become a trope both in bands who are and are not associated with national socialism. As musicologist Ross Hagen has pointed out, Norse symbolism can be seen in (non-NSBM) band logos like those by Enslaved.[16] The logo uses Thor's hammer as part of the design, as well as typography that recalls Viking art; the demo's name, *Yggdrasil*, references the sacred tree Yggdrasil in Nordic cosmological myths.[17] For many bands, paganism and mythological ritual have also become part of a larger ideology that emphasizes strength, and provides an alternative to Christian values deemed as "weak."[18]

The concept of power plays an important role in the genre both thematically and musically. For example, Robert Walser argues that the intentional use of feedback through overdriving the amplification system allows musicians to control an otherwise uncontrollable part of the amplification process: i.e., the use of feedback to create an intentionally distorted sound. Walser argues that electronic power derived from this process of overdriving translates into feelings of affective power for the genre's listeners that becomes a major appeal.[19] In addition to the feelings of power created

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[13] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 261; also see chapter 4 in Gardell, *Gods of the Blood.*

[14] Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, 166.

[15] Ibid., 17.

[16] Album cover available at: https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Enslaved/Yggdrasill/12884.

[17] Ross Hagen, "Music Style, Ideology, and Mythology in Norwegian Black Metal," in *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 180-99.

[18] Ibid., 191.

[19] Robert Walser, *Running With the Devil: Gender, Power, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 41-3. Walser further discusses how these

through guitar distortion, black metal, which falls under the category of extreme metal, takes distortion further by including the use of distorted vocals. This is often accomplished through shrieking or growling, relying on elements of what Keith Kahn-Harris has termed "sonic transgression," music that actively seeks to push beyond previously understood boundaries.[20] Extended vocal techniques such as these also add a sense of danger through the possibility of damage to the vocal chords.[21] Similar to controlling amplification feedback to create distortion, this sense of danger can be interpreted as a form of power for both musicians and listeners that makes the music enjoyable. The use of mythological and medieval tropes often adds to these feelings of power, incorporating a visual and lyrical dimension to these affective experiences. However, for some bands, the use of mythology has been directly linked to beliefs that mirror those of ariosophy and the Third Reich.

One such musician to make connections between racial politics and mythology was Varg Vikernes, the sole member and creator of the Norwegian band Burzum. Due to his infamy within the black metal scene for helping to establish the Norwegian black metal aesthetic and murdering his former friend and bandmate—gaining him what Kahn-Harris refers to as transgressive subcultural capital—Vikernes remained an influential voice within the black metal scene.[22] In interviews he gave while in prison, Vikernes demonstrates his own self-identification in terms of paganism, as well as some of his more occultist beliefs. Vikernes identifies as "a heathen," emphasizing his

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associations have been made through advertisements for amplification systems, as well as how musicians have discussed their work. Walser's first two pages also discuss the affective feelings of power.

[20] Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (New York: Berg, 2007). For a detailed description of the types of transgression often found in extreme metal, see chapter two in Kahn-Harris' volume.

[21] Zachary Wallmark, "The Sound of Evil: Timbre, Body, and Sacred Violence in Death Metal," in *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone*, ed. Robert Fink, Zachary Wallmark, and Melinda Latour (New York: NY, Oxford University Press, 2018), 68-9. As Wallmark notes, correct growling or shrieking technique can remain safe for the performer's vocal cords while giving the illusion of being dangerous.

[22] Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 128. For this discussion, Kahn-Harris borrows Sarah Thornton's adaption of Bourdieu's ideas around cultural capital. In the context of extreme metal, Kahn-Harris argues that subcultural capital is gained through "constructing and performing various forms of discourse and identity" (121). Transgressive subcultural capital seeks to display "radical individualism through displaying uniqueness and a lack of attachment to the scene" (128). Kahn-Harris continues that many of the early Norwegian black metallers sought to reject the larger extreme metal scene in favor of a small group of elite members. The violence that occurred within the scene can be at least partially understood as a competition between members to gain status and power within the scene through gaining transgressive subcultural capital, in this case, through tangible acts of violence (132).

opposition to the Christian conception of God, and connecting this identity to racial purity, noting that he was "proud of my blue eyes, dark blond hair…and white skin. If I know love, it is love for my own race and culture (heathen) and land."[23] Vikernes further advocates for "race hygiene," which he defines as not procreating between races to avoid weakening "stronger" races.[24] These views bear a striking resemblance to those of Nazi-era *völkisch* politics. Although Vikernes's beliefs are now widely known, Burzum's earlier musical output, which helped establish black metal's musical aesthetics, did not explicitly make these connections in the lyrics.[25]

Vikernes's views can be seen in other parts of the black metal community during this time. Rather than remaining a personal belief, racialized mythology became a part of the musical aesthetic for other bands. Mention of pagan figures can be found in many of the band Graveland's albums since the band's beginning in 1992, and like Vikernes, the band's members have created racialized meaning around these mythologies.[26] In a 1994 interview with *Petrified Zine*, then-drummer Maciej "Capricornus" Dąbrowski stated that Graveland stands for a "New European pagan Empire" that represents "united Aryan power."[27] Although Dabrowski did not act as a recording musician on all of Graveland's albums, these sentiments remained a prominent part of Graveland's style and branding. For example, in their 2004 album *Dawn of Iron Blades*, Graveland makes specific mention of the god Wotan, the

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[23] Olv. Svíþjóð, "Burzum: Up from the Ashes, or into a Prison?" *A 1000 Years of Lost Pride and Dignity*, 1994, 33. Accessed through Burzum.org.

[24] "Jailhouse Rock: Interview with Varg Vikernes, Metal Hammer Magazine (1996)," Burzum.org, last modified unknown, https://burzum.org/eng/library/1996_interview_metal_hammer.shtml.

[25] The use of pagan themes is something that Vikernes incorporates more into his later albums, some of which do not use the expected black metal musical aesthetics. However, the lyrical content, even when it references pagan figures, or makes allusions to pagan practices, generally does not explicitly connect them to white supremacist ideologies. Instead, it would take one knowing Vikernes's own beliefs around paganism to make these connections. A lot of his output also does not directly focus on paganism, instead favoring a more Tolkienesque fantasy world for his lyrical content; he has been much more vocal in interviews and on social media about his racist ideas.

[26] It's worth noting that the band's formation coincides with the beginning of "language flagging," in which Poland began to reject the language of the communist party. In particular, the word "class" was abandoned, and resulted in shifting social divisions to "patriots" and "traitors to the homeland" rather than based on economic status. The result was an increase in nationalist sentiments. On this, see: Piotr Żuk, and Paweł Żuk, "The national music scene": the analysis of the Nazi rock discourse and its relationship with the upsurge of nationalism in Poland," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 15 (2019): 2700–22.

[27] "Interview with Capricornus of Graveland," *Petrified*, 1994, 14. Accessed through sendbackmystamps.org.

Germanic iteration of the Norse Odin, as well as references to Valkyries and Valhalla.[28] In an interview with FrostKamp zine, vocalist Robert "Rob Darken" Fudali explained that the female Valkyries play an important role in mythology because they are "helping [the] White Beasts of Wotan to win" and "fight for the fatherland of their folk," recalling the German *völkisch* movement, which emphasizes creating a racially segregated and stratified society.[29]

These ideas have been consistent for Graveland throughout several of their albums. An earlier album, *Creed of Iron* (2001), also includes images of a romanticized past, specifically a medieval one. The album cover includes the use of Viking-like helmets, chain mail, cloaks, and medieval weaponry.[30] While these tropes are fairly common in black metal as a part of a larger genre aesthetic that favors theatricality that signifies nonconformity to "normal" society, NSBM bands appropriate images like these to spread a specific political agenda.[31] Graveland's album cover illustrates this combination more explicitly by incorporating the medieval imagery with Nazi symbolism seen in the, albeit small, swastika on the flag, noting that this imagery is meant to convey a glorification of the Aryan race. Subsequently, the band's politics are reinforced through the visual elements of their material output.

Where Graveland's musical output differs from Burzum's is in how these views have been present in their lyrics and materials more explicitly. The song "Semper Fidelis" mentions both Wotan and Valkyries, as the band describes themselves as "the warrior sons of Wotan" who are defending the "honor and secure[ing] the existence of our people."[32] Lines such as these directly correlate the use of pagan figures with white supremacist attitudes, evidenced not only through Darken's own understandings of these gods discussed earlier, but also in the latter quotation's connection to the "14 words," a widely recognized and circulated slogan started by known white supremacist David Lane that states "we must secure the existence of our people and a future for

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[28] "Graveland Lyrics," Dark Lyrics, last modified unknown, http://www.darklyrics.com/lyrics/graveland/dawnofironblades.html#1/.

[29] "Graveland Interview," FrostKamp Zine, published August 5, 2008, https://frostkamp.wordpress.com/2008/08/05/graveland-interview/.

[30] Album cover available at: https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Graveland/Creed_of_Iron/1445.

[31] Ross Hagen, "Music Style, Ideology, and Mythology in Norwegian Black Metal," in *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*, ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 188. See the rest of Hagen's entry in *Metal Rules the Globe* for more on paganism and mythology as part of a broader aesthetic within black metal and other subgenres of extreme metal.

[32] "Dawn of Iron Blades: Graveland," Encyclopaedia Metallum, last modified unknown, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Graveland/Dawn_of_Iron_Blades/58760.

white children."[33] When these themes are stated so directly and explicitly within the music, they begin to add political meaning to affective listener experiences. Metal's musical aesthetics often revolve around feelings of power; however, when combined with explicitly racist lyrics, these affective experiences become imbued with political meaning.

While movements like ariosophy sought to construct Aryans as powerful and superior to other races, a lineage that Graveland continues in many ways, NSBM further propagates these ideologies through an affect of power by coopting black metal musical aesthetics. As discussed earlier, while the aesthetics themselves are often considered to revolve around ideas of power, in the context of far-right lyrical tropes, this becomes heavily politicized. NSBM coopts affective experiences of power through black metal's emphasis on vocal and guitar distortion, and uses them to push listeners towards the same political ideas espoused in the band members' personal statements. Powerfulness that may otherwise be experienced as a form of enjoyment now becomes a potential tool for introduction to or reinforcement of already-held racist political beliefs. Graveland's music also allows these affective experiences to become a potentially communal experience, in which listeners can experience this politicized power together.[34]

NSBM has also allowed bands a space in which to adapt overarching ariosophic beliefs around mythologies and racial hierarchies to more local mythologies as a part of their black metal production. The Greek band Der Stürmer is a particularly striking example, as they have combined Nazi-like *völkisch* thinking with allusions to Greek mythology. Der Stürmer formed in 1998 around the time Greek's far-right party Golden Dawn was regaining power, especially through support from the youth.[35] In their song "Guards of the Solar Order" from their 2002 EP *Iron Will and Discipline*, the lyrics cast them as "defenders of cosmic order."[36] The idea of trying to repair some sort of cosmic social order also harkens back to many Nazi occultist ideologies, particularly ariosophic beliefs that combine ideas of spirituality with an emphasis on starkly stratified social orders. However, Der Stürmer's references to the "solar order" also tie in allusions to

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[33] White supremacists continue to use this phrase, and the number 14 has become a dog whistle for them to covertly signify their beliefs.

[34] For more on hatred as a social activity in racist groups, see: Kathleen Blee, *Understanding Racist Activism: Theory, Methods, and Research* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

[35]Alexandra Koronaiou, Evangelos Lagos, Alexandros Sakellariou, Stelios Kymionis, and Irini Chiotaki-Poulou, "Golden Dawn, Austerity and Young People: The Rise of Fascist Extremism Among Young People in Contemporary Greek Society," *The Sociological Review* 63, no. S2 (2015): 238.

[36] "Iron Will and Discipline: Der Stürmer," Encyclopaedia Metallum, last modified unknown, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Der_St%C3%BCrmer/Iron_Will_and_Discipline/25277.

their own Greek heritage. This can be seen in lyrics such as "guards of the solar order/the Olympian ideal/the wisdom of Hellenic greatness" and "this Jewish mind's breed baptized in Apollonian light/unshakeable will to win."[37] In these lines, Der Stürmer makes reference to classical Greek mythology by invoking the name of Apollo, Zeus's son and the god of sun, as well as referencing the Olympians, the twelve gods and goddesses who ruled on the mountain of Olympia. As a result, Der Stürmer imbues well-known Greek mythologies and figures with explicit racialized connotations.

Although the Greco-Roman mythological figures are less expected than their Norse or Germanic counterparts, Der Stürmer similarly connects them to ideas of racial purity and antisemitism in a way that parallels the ideologies espoused by Vikernes and Graveland's music. These ideas are also intertwined directly with national socialist beliefs and ideologies both through their inclusion in Der Stürmer's broader lyrical context, which explicitly emphasizes ideas of Aryan might and supremacy in fighting "the Jewish mind's breed." In this example, Der Stürmer posited themselves as a sort of continuation of the powerful mythological Greek lineage and the Nazi metaphysical lineage. Subsequently, these lyrics not only demonstrate the continuation of *völkisch* politics that place them in an established lineage of racism and political power, but they also demonstrate the malleability of these beliefs to form around different national identities.

The cover for their 2006 album *A Banner Greater than Death* visually makes the connection between Nazism and their Greek heritage by continuing a specific historically politicized practiced of ruin gazing. German literature scholar Julia Hell notes that Hitler had himself photographed looking at ruins of ancient Rome as an "act of imperial mimesis" that would "[promise] a *Reich* that will last a thousand years."[38] Hell explains that such imagery also instilled the "European subject in the position of scopic mastery," and implies a future Aryan ruin gazer.[39] Similarly, the cover of Der Stürmer's album depicts the Nazi flag being flown in front of ancient Greek ruins.[40] As Hell argues with regard to Hitler's own ruin gazing, Der Stürmer's placement of the Nazi flag in front of ancient Greek ruins invite the viewer to consider the longevity of Nazi politics within the framework of Greek heritage. Additionally, the foregrounded Nazi flag further implies not only a European scopic master, but a specifically Aryan one. With the absence of a person as ruin gazer and the level vantage point of the

[37] Ibid.

[38] Julia Hell, *The Conquest of Ruins: The Third Reich and the Fall of Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 384.

[39] Ibid., 385.

[40] Album cover available at: https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Der_Stürmer/A_Banner_Greater_than_Death/89067.

photograph, Der Stürmer's album cover invites the listener to become the gazer too, and to view the ancient Greek history through a heavily politicized lens.

What this particular use of ancient Greek mythology and imagery seems to imply is that racialized mythology has become a broader aesthetic for NSBM that moves beyond the typical ariosophic beliefs of the Third Reich. Der Stürmer's creative output demonstrates that beliefs around mythology and racial hierarchies can be adapted beyond their original Germanic and Norse iterations to include other national identities and histories. Similarly, their music expands the boundaries of NSBM as a genre. Although Der Stürmer's use of racialized mythology and history differ from other NSBM bands in their use of Greek historical and mythological traditions, in contrast to bands like Burzum and Graveland, each of these bands connect ideas of racial purity and the desire to maintain it even and perhaps often through violence. The manifestations of national socialist beliefs within black metal must be understood as malleable enough to conform to Norse, Slavic, or Greek local mythos while maintaining similar overarching beliefs about racial structures and hierarchies.

While Graveland's use of Germanic and Nordic mythologies begin to demonstrate this flexibility in mythological uses, Der Stürmer strongly demonstrates this adaptability beyond the more expected connections between national socialism and paganism. Despite the differences in references, many of the ideologies present in NSBM music, which come through the lyrics to varying degrees, maintain similarities to the *völkisch* movements that conceive of Aryans as a group that needs protection and preservation, in addition to ideas of race separation. These views are also imbued with a sense of the supernatural or mythological, relating back to ariosophic ideas posited by Hitler and other high-ranking members of the Third Reich. Further, the output from these bands also indicates that national socialist philosophies can be adapted to accommodate different local identities and mythological histories. As a result, we see the merging of two historical lineages: first, the continuation of Hitler's and the Third Reich's racial ideologies; and second, the continuation of black metal mythological lyrical and visual tropes. By combining these two histories, black metal has been not only a vehicle for bands to spread National Socialist ideologies, but also a method of adapting them to local histories.

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# Black Metal, White Supremacy, and Fraught Masculinity

a response by Taylor Van Doorne

## i.

In a political moment when extreme right ideology seems to proliferate in pockets of the United States and Europe, it is timely to consider how an underground subculture like black metal could be susceptible for appropriation by white supremacists. Jillian Fischer's article in this issue of *react/review* examines the ethnoracial symbolism of National Socialist black metal (NSBM) vis-à-vis early black metal and Nazi propaganda. However, her iconographical and lyric analysis should also be considered within the broader constellation of identity that undergirds these identitarian-based politics.

The adoption of mythological references from early black metal music by post-1990 NSBM bands may be partly attributed to the genre's historical development. Black metal acquired a distinctly white supremacist leaning during the genre's second wave in early 1990s Norway amongst the Black Circle bands that gathered at the infamous Oslo record shop Helvete, owned by Euronymous of Mayhem and frequented by his bandmate and eventual murderer Varg Vikernes of Burzum.[1] Between 1991 and 1993, members of the Black Circle allegedly engaged in a series of escalating heinous acts that expressed black metal's boorishly literal Satanism, including encouraging others to commit suicide, partaking in cannibalism, murdering other musicians, committing church arsons, and publicly endorsing neo-Nazi

[1] Kirsten Dyck, *Reichsrock: The International Web of White-Power and Neo-Nazi Hate Music* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 58.

ideologies. Such violent acts were the stuff of nefarious legends. Much has been written about the veracity of these stories and subsequent hysteria in the press decrying Satan-worshipping musicians who eat brains and burn down churches. Nevertheless, the early 1990s Norwegian black metal scene and the notoriety of figures like Vikernes cemented the affiliations between the music, pagan iconography, and white supremacist ideology that would be ripe for exploration by later NSBM bands.

Perhaps we should also consider the demographics of who participates in this music. It is axiomatic, and rarely stated outright, that most NSBM musicians are white men. In fact, white men dominate the broader metal and hard rock music scenes as both fans and musicians, a phenomenon frequently reported anecdotally in popular music journalism.[2] This popular perception of gender has been confirmed by sociologists Anna S. Rogers and Mathieu Deflem, who observe that despite the growing number of women in the metal scene, community members describe the genre as hypermasculine in terms of demographics, culture, and musicality.[3] In terms of musical production, sociologists Karl Spracklen, Caroline Lucas, and Mark Deeks have written about the ways an exaggerated mode of hegemonic white masculinity is constituted and performed in Northern European extreme and folk metal music.[4] They

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[2] For example, see: Laina Dawes, "Heavy Metal Feminism," *Hazlit*, August 17, 2015, https://hazlitt.net/blog/heavy-metal-feminism; Eleanor Goodman, "Does metal have a sexism problem?" *Louder Sound,* March 6, 2020, https://www.loudersound.com/features/does-metal-have-a-sexism-problem; Kim Kelly, "The Never-Ending Debate Over Women in Metal and Hard Rock," *The Atlantic*, November 3, 2011, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/11/the-never-ending-debate-over-women-in-metal-and-hard-rock/247795/; Kayla Phillips, "What do Hardcore, Ferguson, and the 'Angry Black Woman' Trope All Have in Common?" *Vice*, November 30, 2014, https://www.vice.com/en/article/6x8qkw/hardcore-ferguson-and-the-angry-black-woman-essay; Beth Winegarner, "Smashing Through the Boundaries: Heavy Metal's Racism and Sexism Problem—and How It Can Change," *Bitch Media*, May 17, 2016, https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/smashing-through-boundaries-heavy-metal%E2%80%99s-racism-and-sexism-problem%E2%80%94and-how-it-can-change-hearken; and Rhian Wilkinson, "Venom Prison: 'You Can See That Women have a Place in Metal," *Punktastic*, July 25, 2017 http://www.punktastic.com/radar/venom-prison-you-can-see-that-women-have-a-place-in-metal/.

[3] Anna S. Rogers and Mathieu Deflem, *Doing Gender in Heavy Metal: Perceptions of Women in a Hypermasculine Subculture* (London: Anthem Press, 2022), 4.

[4] Karl Spracklen, Caroline Lucas, and Mark Deeks, "The Construction of Heavy Metal Identity through Heritage Narratives: A Case Study of Extreme Metal Bands in the North of England," *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 1 (2014): 48-64. See also: Karl Spracklen, "'To Holmgard. . . and Beyond:' Folk Metal Fantasies and Hegemonic White Masculinities," *Metal Music Studies* 1, no. 3 (2015): 354-77.

correlate the hegemonic masculinity expressed in extreme metal with the Norse pagan Viking heroic archetype that is frequently evoked in the lyrics and album art of these bands.[5]

Only recently have sociologists turned their attention to how masculinity is conceptualized and expressed by white supremacist and extreme right groups. Michael Kimmel points out in his study of domestic terrorism and extremist politics that media reports and political messaging following the aftermath of a mass attack by a male assailant foreground topics like psychology, political disenfranchisement, and religion as explanations. Kimmel argues that masculinity is hardly examined in these cases, and gender is only addressed on the rare occasion that the perpetuator is a woman.[6] In a state-of-the-field essay on gender and the far right, Kathleen Blee explains the connection between masculinity as ideological expression and as demographical constitution: "Many far-right parties, movements and virtual spaces are male-dominated, promising a homosocial brotherhood of male belonging. Many are also intensely masculinist in their support of stereotypical, hegemonic male expressions of anger and rebellion."[7] Some scholars have characterized this type of excessive and overly-articulated masculinity as *hypermasculinity*—a term sometimes evoked in literature on metal music and its subgenres.[8]

Given the prominence of masculinity in the perceived gender expression of metal communities and the identity formation of extreme right movements, masculinity is a privileged site for examining the identitarianism of NSBM, which is located at the convergence of both groups. Thus, I posit that undergirding the iconographic, racial, and ideological link between the black metal scene and radical right extremist groups is also a fraught notion of hypermasculinity. In other words, black metal, nationalist socialist or not, has a gender problem.

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[5] Ibid., 51.

[6] Michel Kimmel, *Healing from Hate: How Young Men Get Into—and Out of—Violent Extremism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 3-4.

[7] This does not necessarily mean that women are excluded from these movements or do not participate in extreme hate groups. On the contrary, research on gender and the far right finds that women have been active in the formation and success of these movements, as demonstrated by political figures on the far right like Marine Le Pen. See: Kathleen Blee, "Where Do We Go from Here? Positioning Gender in Studies of the Far Right," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 21, no. 4 (2020): 417.

[8] For example, see Samantha Kutner, "Swiping Right: The Allure of Hyper Masculinity and Cryptofascism for Men Who Join the Proud Boys," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (2020).

ii.

Could we imagine black metal without this tint of hypermasculinity? Could such a version of black metal exist, or is this particular gender expression central to its sound and aesthetic? Would pulling at the threads of masculinist power and dominance unravel the entire genre? Would it still be black metal?

In the experimental novel *Girls Against God*, author Jenny Hval speculates, "Maybe we could turn back time and create a black metal movement where only girls hate?"[9] Hval's novel highlights black metal's gender problem while imagining its feminist potential. The text follows the narrator from her provincial adolescence in 1997 as a wannabe black metalhead in corpse makeup to her adult life in Oslo living with members of her band and witch coven. The loose narrative is interjected by surreal screenplays scripted in real time, monologues of art and film criticism, and feverish episodes of digital witchcraft and rituals using food and human excrement. Woven through an intertextual potpourri of disparate topics and themes, the narrator considers black metal's potential to critique and subvert normative Norwegian society, yet she also recognizes the limitations of genre's historical trajectory. Hval writes,

> Black metal hated too; it dug itself further in as the '90s progressed, and opened up to the underground to reveal something difficult and dangerous, but with the metallers' blind, boyish mythological fascination it grew pale and paler, whiter and whiter. The epic drama, the hierarchy, the gender segregation, the authoritarianism, the xenophobia, the silence, become its defining elements – all the things that already define society. In college in 1997 black metallers don't look different from neo-Nazis, and neo-Nazis don't look different from black metallers, and no one knows exactly who to beat up. The only people who keep their heads on straight are the brightly coloured Jesus kids, who spend all their time praying for everyone, since upside-down crosses and Nazi violence are the same in their dramatic staging of the fight between God and hell. The battle unifies them, Nazism and black metal and Jesus Revolution, so that everyone is a player in the eternal battle between good and evil, in which individuals dominate thanks to their faith or their race, or their misanthropy, and look down on the sheeple who accept so-called secular social democracy.[10]

For Hval's narrator, 90s black metalheads may have proclaimed to subvert religion and society through murder and arson, but they never questioned the nature of institutional

[9] Jenny Hval, *Girls Against God*, trans. Marjam Idriss (London: Verso Books, 2020), 31. The novel was first published in Norwegian as *Å hate Gud* (Oslo: Forlaget Oktober, 2018).
[10] Ibid, 68-9.

authority. Black metal harnessed the hegemonic values of power, strength, dominance, and control to unleash them back upon society.[11] But such an act only inflamed the rhetoric of power and domination rather than undermined the socio-religious structures it resented. She explains that the early black metalheads rooted themselves in the existing patriarchal dichotomy of good-versus-evil. Later NSBM bands sought to replace religion with racialized hierarchies and totalitarianism. Such a theoretical formulation constitutes a dichotomy of black metal and Nazism on the one hand, and Norwegian Protestantism on the other. Each faction engages in a power struggle within the domain of masculinity seeking supremacy over the other in an epic eschatological battle. The narrator understands black metal as nothing more than a dark reiteration of the same social paradigms, not a negation of it. In short, "From the beginning black metal is just a blackened and dirty version of pre-existing society."[12]

If 90s Norwegian black metal is not a subversion of authority but its dark mirror, the narrator locates other binary oppositions that destabilize the phallogocentric pair: those of God/witch and power/threat. She claims that power had historically belonged to the domain of God, and therefore, the witch was articulated in apposition as his threat. In this formulation, the antithesis of God/power is not black metal or fascism, but the witch who is "a container for everything that has threatened the church, God, Christianity's domination, the establishment, emperors, kings, barons, Freemasons, medical science, philosophy, logic, brute strength."[13] She describes the witch as that which "defies God." She is a figure against hierarchy, grounded in community-based praxis, and openly defiant of purity fetishism. Thus, the narrator locates in the witch a potential archetype for a feminist strain of black metal. This speculative employment of the witch figure as a foil to masculinist black metal articulates the contours of gender performance in the latter, which is so often commented upon in anecdotal and sociological reports yet undertheorized.

The witch is not unlike the Norse Viking heroes of early 90s black metal music. She is also endowed with ancient pagan origins that predate Christianity in Europe. Yet the witch's abstracted origins in this novel are located outside spatio-temporal and ethnonational bounds. The narrator becomes the witch archetype by undergoing a series of abject rituals. She and her coven smear feces on their bodies, ravenously slurp up spaghetti demons, and pipe their band's music through the sewers. These rituals are a dirty business and make no particular historical claims, and thus, they may be read as an anathema to NSBM's emphasis on pure ariosophic origins.

At the same time, the narrator embraces black metal's ethos of hatred. Throughout the text, she reiterates "I hate God," which comes to not only signify the

[11] Ibid, 68.
[12] Ibid, 70.
[13] Ibid, 56.

divine Father, but a slew of institutional antagonists——Norway's Christian Democratic Party, Protestantism, the nation-state, the patriarchy, capitalism, structural sexism and racism, and the atomic bomb. Thus, Hval's narrator imbues hatred with methodological potential. She reimagines black metal's hatred through a feminist lens by considering if its practitioners had only adopted hatred as a method of critique rather than a lust for dominance and power. Her hatred of God does not deny his existence or seek to usurp him, but rather, is a rejection and resistance of all patriarchal and hierarchical authority. Her feminist methodology reflects the central problem of the second wave of black metal: it never sought to be critical regardless of its potential. Black metal hates for its own sake; or in Fischer's terms, it seeks "power through music."[14]

Hval's exercise in imagining "a black metal movement where only girls hate" works to expose some of the phallocentric presuppositions of the genre, like the perpetuation of hierarchical thinking and performance of traditional gendered roles. She demonstrates how this fraught masculinity seeks not to subvert and overturn the social orders it hates, but rather to rebuild them in its image. Through fiction, Hval achieves a theorical reading of the history of gender performance in second wave black metal inaccessible in the current sociological scholarship, yet which is critical to understanding the identity formation of the subgenre.

[14] Fischer, this volume.

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