

UC Santa Cruz

Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal

Title

Sensing Place

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9ps74313>

Journal

Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal, 5(1)

Author

Editorial Board, Refract Journal

Publication Date

2022

DOI

10.5070/R75159696

Copyright Information

Copyright 2022 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed



REFRACT

An Open-Access Visual Studies Journal

Sensing Place | Volume 5 | Issue 1 | Fall 2022

Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal

Sensing Place | Volume 5 | Issue 1

ISSN 2640-9429

©2022

Managing Editor

Rachel Bonner

Editorial Board

Spencer Armada

Madalen Benson

Angel Chan (intern)

Susanna Collinson

Katie Ligmond

Kelsey McFaul

Maureen McGuire

LuLing Osofsky

Radhika Prasad

Catherine Ries

dani wright

Advisory Board

Alexis Boylan

Vilashini Cooppan

Tao Leigh Goffe

Derek C. Murray

Kyle Parry

Kailani Polzak

Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal is a graduate student-run publication developed by Ph.D. students at the University of California, Santa Cruz. *Refract* is published once annually on eScholarship, an open access publishing platform subsidized by the University of California and managed by the California Digital Library. For information on upcoming calls and submission guidelines please email us or visit our website.

Refract is generously supported by the department of *History of Art and Visual Culture* at UCSC, *Porter College* at UCSC, the *UCSC Arts Division*, the *UCSC Student Fee Advisory Committee*, the *Graduate Student Association* at UCSC, and individual donors.

Website

<https://escholarship.org/uc/refract>

<https://www.instagram.com/refractjournal/>

<https://twitter.com/RefractJournal>

Email

refractjournal@ucsc.edu

Cover: Christine Lorenz, *Halophilic 2-1344*, 2022 (this volume). Courtesy of the artist.

Table of Contents

- 1 **Letter from the Editor**
Rachel Bonner
- 3 **Introduction to “Sensing Place”**
- 9 **Looking Backward into the Future: Thoughts
on the Study of the Past, Ritual, and Women’s
Eucharistic Experiences in Byzantium**
Maria Evangelatou
- 25 **Beyond Borders and Biology: Lisa Myeong-
Joo’s *Self Portrait of a Circle* (2016)**
Soo-Min Shim
- 37 *Moving with joy across the ice while my
face turns brown from the sun*
Maureen Gruben and Kyra Kordoski
- 45 **Maurice Denis (1870-1943) and the Sacred
Grove: Temporality in Fin de Siècle
France**
Lucile Cordonnier

- 75 ***Strange Weather*** Forecast: Inside Santa Cruz
Museum of Art and History's New Exhibit
Angel Chan
- 83 ***Public Displays of Affection***
Karen Miranda Augustine
- 91 **"If You're Out There, Please Listen to
Me...":** Voices of Mourning Through the
Wind Phone (*Kaze no Denwa*)
Laura J. Boyce
- 111 ***Mapping Sonic Futurities***
Alex Wand
- 131 **Land, Water, Explorer: Place-Making
"America" in the Early Modern Period**
Jillianne Laceste
- 161 ***Tenga Tenga: Can I Help Carry Your Load?***
Aaron Samuel Mulenga
- 171 **Tobaron Waxman's *Red Food*: Jewish Ritual,
Mourning, and Queer Utopia**
Hailey Kobrin
- 181 ***Halophilic***
Christine Lorenz

Voices of Visual Studies

**197 Strategies of Il/legibility: Lorraine
O'Grady, Gayatri Spivak, and Visual
Decipherment**
Courtney R. Baker

**205 Rogue Masks: Visualizing
Multidisciplinary Studies**
Amanda M. Maples

Letter from the Editor

In *Orwell's Roses*, Rebecca Solnit writes that “in an age of lies and illusions, the garden is one way to ground yourself in the realm of the processes of growth and the passage of time, the rules of physics, meteorology, hydrology, and biology, and the realm of the senses.”¹

While excerpting this quote does little to illustrate the nuance of Solnit’s approach to both roses and George Orwell, it does gesture toward some of the ideas that have sparked my own interest in the complicated and politically salient theme of “Sensing Place,” which evokes sound, smell, taste, and touch as well as sight. Several contributions to volume 5 engage primarily with senses beyond the visual, and although *Refract*, as a journal of visual studies, remains ocularcentric, “Sensing Place” has given us an opportunity to deepen critical conversations around this dimension of the publication and its relationship to more traditional forms of art history. Our fifth volume has presented several opportunities to experiment and includes our first contribution from an undergraduate scholar, an exhibition review of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History’s *Strange Weather* written by our 2021–22 editorial intern, Angel Chan. We have also invited two “voices of visual studies” in a departure from previous volumes and are excited to feature the work of two scholars approaching the visual from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and professional settings: Amanda M. Maples, whose training in visual studies influences her curatorial work, and Courtney R. Baker, a professor of English who brings a background in literature to the interpretation of visual culture. Along with these scholars, I thank Maria Evangelatou, Maureen Gruben, and Kyra Kordoski for accepting our invitation to contribute to volume 5 and helping us to deepen our engagement with this theme. All our contributors have

brought so much to this project, and we are grateful for their hard work and creativity.

While “Sensing Place” extends our cross-volume inquiry into the potential and limitations of visual studies, we have spent comparatively less time considering our method of dissemination and are excited to include a special supplement to this volume that reflects on digital publishing itself. “Imagining the Future of Digital Publishing,” funded through a collaboration with The Humanities Institute (THI) at UC Santa Cruz, has facilitated many thought-provoking conversations during *Refract* editorial board meetings. We are particularly grateful to Kyle Parry for his feedback on early drafts of a series of questions about digital publishing and scholarship that have subsequently sparked such intriguing and varied contributor responses. It is our hope that future editorial board members might revisit “Imagining the Future of Digital Publishing” as technologies, methodologies, and fields quickly evolve and new questions with novel implications arise.

This volume has been a collaborative effort in every way, and I want to thank the *Refract* editorial board—Spencer Armada, Madalen Claire Benson, Susanna Collinson, Katie Ligmond, Kelsey McFaul, Maureen McGuire, LuLing Osofsky, Catherine Ries, Radhika Prasad, and dani wright—for their dedication and ingenuity during another challenging year. Thank you also to Angel Chan for her creative contributions to both volume 5 and the digital publishing supplement. On behalf of the editorial board, I want to acknowledge our faculty advisory board: Alexis Boylan, Vilashini Cooppan, Tao Leigh Goffe, Derek Murray, Kyle Parry, and Kailani Polzak, who have at various times offered advice and assistance, and The Humanities Institute, the History of Art & Visual Culture Department, the Arts Division, and the Student Fee Advisory Committee at UC Santa Cruz, for their financial support. Thank you also to our Giving Day donors, as well as to our guest reviewers and to the staff at eScholarship for offering their time and expertise. Last but not least, many thanks to Paula Dragosh for her skillful copyediting, and to Ruby Lipsenthal for her ongoing support with so many aspects of the publication process.

Rachel Bonner

Notes

¹ Rebecca Solnit, *Orwell's Roses* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2021), 44.

Introduction

Sensing Place, the fifth volume of *Refract*, investigates the intersections of ritual, place, and the sensorium: it asks how rituals reify power, resist structures of oppression, or construct senses of identity. The expansiveness of this theme is evident across the contributions to the volume, which suggests that concepts of space, place, and site, distinct as they all may be, are at the same time rich, varied, and overlapping. By drawing on diverse and sited articulations of somatic experience, the essays in this volume explore the ways in which ritual is influenced by its material and ideological surroundings while contributing to the creation of place. This leads us to consider: What can be said of embodiment, a visceral experience of space that articulates place as a site of ritual? In so doing, this volume contends with an otherwise empty conception of space as neither here nor there, inviting the lived, embodied, and repetitively performed elements of place to take hold: *sensing place*.

The ritualesque site of meaning-making through writing at the intersection of art, place, senses, and ritual necessarily evokes conceptions of belonging, collectivity, agency, and oppression. Rituals can constitute embodied claims on space, which may influence notions of belonging or self-concept that give rise, in turn, to new forms of ritual activity in dialogue with the fluidity of place and with evolving definitions of individual and communal identity. As the essays in this volume show, articulations of identity, both individual and collective, often arise at the intersection of place, ritual, and the senses. As such, representations of the intricacies of place require attention to the production of knowledge, and a close examination of networks of power, particularities, and differences.

This prompts us to ask the question: How do we position ourselves within or in relation to a place? What rituals do we create and practice to help place ourselves? In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed notes that when we are in a location, we also have an orientation; the way that we approach a place affects how we experience and interact with it.¹ Place—or at least our understanding of it—is, then, all about relationality. *Where am I?* becomes *What am I near? What am I far from? What can I feel? What can I see? What am I facing? What am I turned away from?* Ahmed argues that “some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others.”² In other words, the way that the world is built—the way power is structured—leaves some of us perpetually disoriented, unable to recognize, or even be afforded, a place of our own within the systems we are subject to. Ritual exists as a way to combat this effect, as a way to ground ourselves in a time and in a place, and as a form of resistance against the systems and structures of power under which we live.

Such efforts to (re)orient oneself may be productively understood as a rejection of systems of power, but ritual can also—and at times simultaneously—reinscribe forms of hegemony. In “The Right to Shrine: Global Celebrity, Colonial Logics, and Local Knowledge in Aspen’s Mountainside Memorials” (2019), the religious studies scholar Cody Musselman examines a tradition in Aspen, Colorado, in which skiers build shrines and memorials whose accessibility depends on insider knowledge of the activity and familiarity with the mountains where it takes place. Musselman notes that the construction and collective maintenance of these assemblages foster a tangible sense of “local” belonging in the wake of Aspen’s transformation into a luxury resort destination. She also highlights the ways in which this place-marking activity and the identity it instantiates are predicated on rarified access to the slopes and related “logics of territorial entitlement” that contribute to evolving settler colonial myths and undergird the capitalist exploitation whose effects the shrines may initially appear to ameliorate.³ Taking a cue from Musselman and from other scholars in religious studies, “Sensing Place” is interested in how ritual can include activities and interactions that trouble the religious versus secular dichotomy. When writing our call for content, the *Refract* editorial board discussed devotional art and the sensory experiences and ideological orientations it facilitates or precludes, but we also considered daily skincare or workout routines, and the rise of contemporary wellness culture as a by-product of and contributor to our unsustainable economic system.

Museum spaces and exhibitions are often discussed as sites of ritual. In volume 5, *Refract*’s 2021–22 undergraduate intern Angel Chan reviews *Strange Weather*, an exhibition of contemporary art that ran from April 14, 2022, to August

16, 2022, at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. Through a discussion of the exhibition's layout and the ways in which artworks enter into dialogue with one another, Chan offers compelling insights into their analyses of the contemporary climate crisis. In "Maurice Denis (1870–1943) and the Sacred Grove: Temporality in Fin de Siècle France," Lucile Cordonnier examines the work of an earlier artist engaged with notions of "nature" and change. Through an analysis of spiritual, decorative, and mythical temporalities in three paintings by Denis, Cordonnier argues that representations of forests become sites of spiritual contemplation and ritual in a period experiencing rapid religious, technological, and environmental change. Her essay offers thought-provoking ways of considering, and complicating, what can be viewed from a twenty-first-century standpoint as a reactionary or conservative approach to place. In another discussion of the relationship between bodies, space, and notions of nature, Jillianne Laceste discusses the role of water and place-making in the early colonial Americas. In "Land, Water, Explorer: Place-Making 'America' in the Early Modern Period," Laceste describes how depictions of water and images of the physical bodies of European explorers on early maps and depictions of the Americas mark the space as one of European conquest and Indigenous dispossession.

Other contributions invoke the ways in which place is formed through the senses as a self-reflective, experiential interaction with one's physical surroundings, demonstrating how beings actively engage with space. Given that locales often encompass social relations of power and domination, studies of place can seek out sites of meaning-making that foreground or even necessitate resistance, highlighting their emancipatory potential. This imperative calls to mind the ethics undergirding Donna Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges," glossed as embodied instances of thought, experience, and insight whose claims to a form of objectivity are contingent on their partial and limited nature.⁴ Taking Haraway's ideas into account, it is worthwhile to attend to "highly specific visual possibilities"⁵ and to strive to avoid appropriating or erasing the intricacies of identity, individuality, collectivity, and difference in any given locale.

In a 2012 essay outlining an Indigenous perspective on ethical relationality and decolonizing research praxis, the Cree educator and researcher Dwayne Donald states:

We need more complex understandings of human relationality that traverse deeply learned divides of the past and present by demonstrating that perceived civilizational frontiers are actually permeable and that perspectives on history, memory, and experience are connected and interreferential. The key challenge is

to find a way to hold these understandings in tension without the need to resolve, assimilate, or incorporate.⁶

It is our hope that this volume works toward Donald's call to preserve such tension and resist the impulse toward narrative closure endemic to progress-oriented thinking. Such thinking risks assimilating difference into a network of linked oppressions, a violence often perpetuated by scholarly work. An emphasis throughout this volume is thus placed on articulations of place that are inherently active and interactive, made and remade through a series of performances, experiences, and relations.

Relationality is a principal concern in Kyra Kordoski's essay on the artist Maureen Gruben's project *Moving with joy across the ice while my face turns brown from the sun*, an invited contribution to this volume that considers how a sited installation deals iteratively with time and place through connections with land. For the installation, Gruben borrowed hand-built sleds and positioned them on sea ice outside her home in Tuktoyaktuk, a Western Arctic hamlet. In looking at the sleds' continuous and cyclical significance to Inuvialuit life, Kordoski addresses the tension between site and artwork, problematizing a work deeply invested in the place of its installation, and raising important questions about modes of engagement with land. The artist and researcher Aaron Samuel Mulenga also considers Indigenous subjectivity and memory through his work on the Tenga Tenga, the African porters of World War I, in his piece "Tenga Tenga: Can I Help Carry Your Load?" Mulenga asks how performance can act as a way to interrogate African histories that have been violently obscured by dominant Euro-centric narratives.

Attention to relationality also characterizes "Beyond Borders and Biology: Lisa Myeong-Joo's *Self-Portrait of a Circle (2016)*," in which Soo-Min Shim argues that the artist Lisa Myeong-Joo, who was born in South Korea and adopted into an Australian family, uses her own body to subvert essentialist narratives of place and national belonging in both countries. It appears as well in Alex Wand's project "Mapping Sonic Futurities," which explores the limits and potential of sensory perception along with its embodied relationship to social conditioning and forms of environmental degradation. Wand and his collaborators conduct twenty-four-hour "sound vigils"—or meditative interactions with the perceptible sounds that characterize habitats—on Amah Mutsun land that is currently occupied by the University of California, Santa Cruz and threatened by the land grant institution's long-term development plans.

Community and its intimate relationship to space is a theme that recurs in Hailey Kobrin's essay "Tobaron Waxman's *Red Food*: Jewish Ritual, Mourning, and

Queer Utopia.” Kobrin interprets *Red Food*, a performance by the contemporary artist Tobaron Waxman, through the lens of Jewish rituals of mourning, arguing that the work responds to gentrification and the resultant loss of queer community space.

Karen Miranda Augustine and Laura Boyce also consider loss and the maintenance of relationships in their respective contributions. Boyce’s “If You’re Out There, Please Listen to Me . . . : Voice of Mourning through the *Wind Phone* (*Kaze no Denwa*),” considers the way Itaru Sasaki’s 2011 installation in Ōtsuchi, Japan, structures place-based listening as a practice of mourning, offering an interactive experience that is not necessarily available through traditional material objects associated with mourning. Augustine’s multimedia *Public Displays of Affection* (*PDA*) series considers community, mourning, meaning-making, and diaspora; the artist begins by creating photo transfer images of vernacular memorials found throughout the city of Toronto, which she then further embellishes and elaborates through Yoruba-inspired beadwork mounted on wood panels. The resultant images are multilayered and evince as well as invite close sensory engagement, in a way reminiscent of the work of Christine Lorenz, whose photography is featured on the cover of volume 5.

Lorenz’s *Halophilic 2* series explores relationships between the human and nonhuman, the organic and synthetic, and the interplay between color and light with macro photographic images of salt crystals. Faceted shapes dance against richly hued backgrounds, blurring the visual boundaries between natural and artificial and invoking symbiotic life cycles, industry, consumption, and the extraordinary properties of so-called familiar things.

In an invited contribution to this volume, Maria Evangelatou shares her thoughts on the ways in which rituals and embodied experiences influence the types of questions that we ask about the past, which in turn shapes our contemporary understanding and lived experience and influences the direction of scholarly conjecture. Invoking her own background and its dialogue with her evolving research, Evangelatou attends to how women, a marginalized group in Christian Byzantium, may have been inspired or even empowered by images of the Virgin Mary, and invites readers to consider avenues for inquiry beyond the patriarchal frameworks of traditional history.

Together, the contributions to this volume invite further inquiries into the study of place and its ritual dimensions, helping us to consider how places exert their own influences while being made and remade according to an array of agendas, perceptions, and performances. They allow us to contemplate how places map onto beings, both human and other-than-human, that inhabit them and shape their meanings, and to examine the dangers, slippages, and emancipatory potential

of the ever-changing significations of place. Where and how does violence reverberate across spatial-temporal spheres, and how can sensing instigate liberatory potential? These questions remain, but the contributions to this volume illustrate the significance of sensing place and engaging with it as a locus of potential.

Notes

¹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ Cody Musselman, “The Right to Shrine: Global Celebrity, Colonial Logics, and Local Knowledge in Aspen’s Mountainside Memorials,” *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief* 15, no. 3 (2019): 322–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2019.1603069>.

⁴ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 590, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 583.

⁶ Dwayne Donald, “Indigenous Métissage: A Decolonizing Research Sensibility,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 25, no. 5 (2012): 534, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2011.554449>.

Looking Backward into the Future:¹ Thoughts on the Study of the Past, Ritual, and Women's Eucharistic Experiences in Byzantium

Maria Evangelatou

Studying the Past

As a student of Christian visual production of the so-called medieval period (specializing in Byzantine culture), I have often marveled at the theological richness of seemingly simple narratives that could communicate a wealth of possible meanings in the eyes of their intended original audiences. The mundane act of Mary drawing water from a well or spinning purple thread at the time of her Annunciation (whether in verbal or visual forms of storytelling) could resonate with deep theological significance in the minds of cultural insiders who were familiar with the basic religious beliefs, symbols, scriptural sources, rituals, and other cultural practices of their tradition. Believing they lived in a universe created by their God and ruled by his laws and providence, Christians of the past were taught to seek deeper meaning and guidance in aspects of the material world, their daily experiences, and their communal history, as all these manifestations could reveal divine wisdom and God's plan for human salvation.² In this context, familiar and simple objects like water or thread could make complex theological concepts more relatable and understandable to the faithful. For example, the idea that the Incarnation of God in Christ ushered in a new creation of the world (which was initially born out of water in Genesis 1–2) was one of the possible meanings evoked in the tradition that Mary was drawing water from a well when Gabriel first approached her during her Annunciation. Likewise, the many theological subtleties

of the Incarnation as a union between humanity and divinity could be accommodated in the metaphor of textile production and use, referenced in the tradition according to which Mary was spinning purple thread for the Temple veil when Gabriel revealed to her the will of God during her Annunciation.³

Multidimensional symbolism was vibrantly alive in the experiences of medieval Christians of the Orthodox and Catholic denominations and is still active in Catholic and Orthodox practices and worldviews today, even though historical and cultural developments of recent centuries (including capitalism/consumerism and scientism) have worked against the richness of humanity's symbolic and spiritual connection with the world. As Caroline Walker Bynum has observed, "Medieval symbols were far more complex—polysemic as anthropologists say—than modern people are aware . . . we might find in medieval art and literature some suggestion of a symbolic richness our own lives and rituals seem to lack."⁴

One of the reasons I became a Byzantinist is because I find it enriching to explore the symbolic wealth of that culture and try to honor the perspectives and belief system of a tradition that still influences my world today but at the same time is long gone and very different from what I can experience. I was raised in Greece in a family with a mix of mostly atheist or agnostic members who visited church on great feast days of the Orthodox tradition primarily for cultural rather than religious reasons. As a child raised in such a family, I was not taught to appreciate the symbolic richness of Orthodox ritual (rooted in the Byzantine past). So, on our monthly school visits to a local church I would claim that incense made me dizzy, and I was given permission to pass the time chatting with a friend in the church yard. Yet that rich scent became one of the sensations I enjoy (and have studied) as an adult.⁵

Sometimes I wonder how my scholarship might have been affected if I had been raised as a Christian Orthodox believer. What insights would I have gained if I had experienced the rituals of the Greek Orthodox Church as a practitioner of the faith rather than an observer? Would I have noticed different things or asked different questions? Would I have felt a different connection to the Byzantine past of the modern Greek world? Even in that case, as a Byzantinist I would have still studied a culture very different from my own, trying to understand the experiences of people of another era, whose traces are only partial and fragmented at best. It is exactly this loss that in my eyes makes the study of the past such a fascinating and worthwhile endeavor.

To recover something of the lives of people long gone is to recover something about our shared human potential, vulnerability, and responsibility. To study a culture of the past with respect for its idiosyncrasies is a practice that teaches us to acknowledge diversity and be inclusive in the present. The challenge for me is how

to understand a foreign world of times bygone, a world that survives in fragmented traces or refracted reverberations, in ways that do not introduce too much of “me” in “it.” Clearly, when “me” and “it” meet, there will be an exchange, an interaction that changes “me” as much as it changes *what I learn of and from* “it.” Perhaps, then, it is essential to remind myself that despite my best efforts, I will never know that culture of the past as its own people experienced it, each one in their own individual ways. I can only hypothesize and perceive what I am inclined to see, in a convergence of “me” and fragments of “it” that my own sensibilities lead me to select. Not unlike ritual, this convergence can transform me through what I experience in my efforts to comprehend a reality beyond my grasp. Like the divine to which Christians reach out during rituals, the past itself probably remains unaffected by my attempts to decipher it. It is my present and my future (my ideas about the past of humanity and what I do with them) that may change through my explorations. Whose past am I studying and for what purpose? What am I trying to find there and what am I likely to discover as a consequence?

I have heard it said that according to archaeologists, the past always changes (because the ways we study it evolve, our perspectives shift, or new evidence comes to light), and only the future remains unchanged (because it has not happened yet). On the other hand, scholars of futures studies may claim that past, present, and future always change and that the past may contain multiple potentialities that could have led to different presents and futures. I appreciate the intention to explore alternative pasts in order to counter the notion that our present(s) and future(s) are predetermined. I am also in agreement that the past is as diverse as the people who experienced it when it was their present.⁶ Still, I have grown uncomfortable with the statement “the past always changes” because, if taken literally, it might imply that our own contemporary perspectives can somehow affect the past itself rather than what we learn of it, find in it, or make of it. There might be a dangerous arrogance lurking in the notion that our views can alter the very essence of what we study. I prefer the humility of recognizing that different perspectives lead to different perceptions. So I would amend the above somehow rhetorical and sensationalist statement “the past always changes” to the more humble and prosaic “*our perceptions of the past* always change.” And of course, such shifting perceptions can also influence and change our future.

In a world in crisis, at war with itself, at the brink of ecological and social collapse, what is the point of studying the past? Maybe one reason we are at the brink is the arrogance of believing that the past cannot teach us anything and what counts is only our present and instant gratification. Statements about the *presence of the past* might sound cliché, but in societies that suffer from consumerist-induced amnesia and identity crisis, perhaps they are worth repeating: the past lives in us

and is active in all levels of communal and individual experiences, from our social structures and cultural practices to our DNA and epigenetic memory.⁷ Our stories and our histories have been unfolding for millennia, and they make us who we are today. What we have created, suffered, or inflicted as communities, families, and individuals through time brings us to where we are now.⁸ If we are to move forward toward a more equitable society, we have to look back and seek inspiration in creativity, honor resilience in the face of suffering, and support healing through acknowledgment and redress of wrongdoings.⁹ Exploring the human condition through the study of the past can nurture all these endeavors. In moments of crisis, turmoil, and collapse, creativity in particular can be a brave path toward resilience and healing.¹⁰ I choose to study the creativity of the past in honor of the human potential it manifests. And in my efforts to imagine female experiences and contributions in a past that marginalized women, I try to recognize both trauma and resilience, and shed more light on wrongdoings that still call for healing.

Sometimes, the only thing I can do is open up space for questions that are worth considering because they can help us empathize with the human condition (even if we may never get clear answers to the questions themselves). What did it mean, for example, for Byzantine women to see Mary honored as the provider of the Eucharist—the one who delivered to the world the salvific body of her son, to be sacrificed on the cross and on the altar of Christian churches? What did her Eucharistic role mean to female believers, especially since they themselves were excluded from the priesthood and only male clerics could offer the Eucharist to the faithful, under the presiding presence of Mary in the apse of Byzantine churches (Figs. 1–3)?¹¹ It is unavoidable to wonder how the women of that time felt about and processed the paradox of female exclusion from the leadership of a church institution symbolized by Mary herself.¹² And since so little survives of female voices on this or other matters, the best we can often do is contemplate possible scenarios that could have unfolded in specific contexts (and never lose sight of their hypothetical nature).¹³

The Ritual of the Eucharist and Byzantine Women

Rituals have the power to transform those who partake in them, but the outcome of that transformation depends greatly on the partakers themselves, their inclinations and needs, their experiences and struggles. By connecting the past with the present and future of a community, rituals speak about the identity and potential of their partakers in the world.¹⁴ So how could the ritual of the Eucharist have spoken to Byzantine women about themselves? Below I briefly explore some

possible scenarios that also touch on the more general issue of potential human experiences through ritual.

First, I would like to acknowledge that the spatiotemporal realm or ritual can be one in which the mundane and the ordinary may be replaced with the transcendental and the extraordinary. Ritual spaces like Byzantine churches were meant to immerse believers into an earthly reflection of heavenly Jerusalem to come (and through their decoration and other sensorial aspects, such as light, incense, and the sound of hymnography, at least the most elaborate ecclesiastical ambiances could be very effective at foreshadowing the kingdom of God in the experience of the faithful).¹⁵ In such spaces, the pace of ordinary life could be replaced with a sense of timefulness and peacefulness, in which the past and the future of salvation history were condensed in the present moment of communion with God (for whom all things are in the present, as Gregory of Nyssa aptly declared).¹⁶ In the mystical symbolism of the Eucharist in particular, the whole trajectory of humanity's path, from past fall to future redemption, was evoked and linked with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, reenacted on the altar of the church. The fateful Tree of Knowledge was replaced with the salvific Tree of Life (the cross or Jesus himself), and the loss caused by the forbidden fruit was reversed through the grace of the body of Christ (the fruit of the Tree of Life). According to Christian belief, through his Incarnation and sacrifice Christ opened the path for the future return of the faithful to the kingdom of God, where a divine banquet will welcome them and mark the full circle of their trajectory, from the bitter taste of disobedience and exile to the sweet taste of homecoming and salvation.¹⁷ Partakers of the Eucharist could focus on this promise of salvation and experience the ritual as humans seeking union with God and transcending their mundane identities and cares, including the predicaments of gender.

Yet women in particular might have found it harder to forget those predicaments, since in the patriarchal culture of Byzantium they were constantly reminded of their presumed inferiority or even deviousness, and were primarily cast as daughters of Eve rather than sisters of Mary.¹⁸ I wonder what potential thoughts might have crossed the mind of women as they were waiting to consume the Eucharist from the hands of male priests and deacons while gazing at the image of the Mother of God looking at them from the apse of Byzantine churches. Especially from the ninth century onward, Mary standing on her own with hands raised in prayer or enthroned with her child on her lap was the primary focal point of the gaze of believers, at least in churches large enough to have a tall apse visible behind the templon screen (Figs. 1–3).¹⁹ Mary's size and her central position in the apse made her the most obvious receptacle for the sight and the prayers of



Figure 1 Enthroned Mary holding Christ, Byzantine apse mosaic, St. Sophia, Thessaloniki, Greece, church of the eighth century, mosaic of the eleventh century, (templon screen of later date).

believers during the Eucharist. It was not Christ Pantokrator on the dome above but his human mother in the apse below who welcomed the faithful.²⁰ How many of them would have thought in that moment that the Theotokos (God-Birther) was the highest paragon of Christian conduct and experience—the one all believers should aspire to imitate—and she was even the ultimate model of Eucharistic union with Christ? She had literally embodied Christ, housing him in her womb and weaving his body with her blood. After offering him to the world, she had served him with motherly devotion throughout her life, sharing his sufferings and following in his footsteps like no other. Her flesh had become his flesh in absolute union, and she had also shared his calling, becoming the very first Christian and the greatest imitator of Christ in her goodness and self-sacrifice. Partakers of the Eucharist were now standing in front of her, hoping to also experience union with Christ by ingesting (rather than gestating) his body. Perhaps a way to understand that mystical union in relatable emotional, spiritual, cultural, and social terms was to look at Christ's mother and her union with her son. Even though Christians were urged to become imitators of Christ and live a life in Christ, perhaps many of them (and particularly women) might have found special affinity with the idea of becoming imitators of Mary in her relation with Christ: as the



Figure 2 Enthroned Mary holding a medallion with Christ, above the Communion of the apostles and standing hierarchs, Byzantine apse wall-paintings in the church of St. Sophia, Ohrid, Republic of North Macedonia, eleventh century (icons on the templon screen are of later date).

supreme model of Christian virtue, she was fully human (like they were), she was the servant of Jesus and his people (like they were urged to be), and she was the pure Bride of Christ (as their souls should be).²¹

So during the Eucharist, Mary in the apse was both the provider of the Eucharistic body of Christ and the supreme model for those wishing to partake of it. She fully embodied the church as the one who housed Christ inside her, as the mother of his children, and as the first among those children.²² Yet the Eucharistic ritual was fully controlled by male clerics, and women were not allowed to enter the sanctuary. In addition, the more Mary was becoming prominent and powerful in Byzantine culture, the more the male-dominated institution of the church took steps to distance women from her, emphasizing how exceptional and unlike other



Figure 3 Mary standing in prayer above the Communion of the apostles, Byzantine apse mosaics in the church of St. Sophia, Kiev, Ukraine, eleventh century (templon screen of later date). The mosaics were created by an artist invited from Constantinople and reflect Byzantine church decoration.

members of her sex she was.²³ During the Eucharistic banquet, what could her prominence have meant for women who saw male priests emerge in front of the womblike apse of the sanctuary to offer the sacrificed and salvific body of Mary's son under her gaze?

While we can only hypothesize about possible answers to this question, it is still worthwhile to explore this line of inquiry, even if only to create more space in our intellectual and emotional worlds for those who were systematically oppressed in their societies. In my experience, this kind of exercise allows me to follow a thread of empathic imaginings that may also help me cultivate more empathy in the ways I relate with my own world today. It also allows me to trace potential female responses that help me acknowledge not only the oppression and frustration of women in a patriarchal society but also their resilience and creativity. I may be able to recognize the possible paths they could have taken in order to

navigate the sexist challenges of their culture, make significant contributions, and cultivate their agency and empowerment. I feel that in order to properly honor women, I have to be equally mindful of their suffering *and* their ability to surpass it.

In closing this thought-piece, I would like to invite the reader to consider the potential of Byzantine women to find solace and even self-worth in the context of the Eucharistic ritual by relating to the powerful figure of Mary. Clearly, individual female responses could vary greatly, depending on the identity, backgrounds, and contexts of different women. After all, one reason that ritual can be so meaningful to participants is its ability to create a space for *personal* response and transformation within its multisensorial and multidimensional framework. Mary was endorsed by the patriarchal establishment of Byzantium as an exceptional woman beyond paragon who could advance feelings of inadequacy among other women and remind them of duties and values that reinforced their domesticity and marginalization (since she embodied virtues like obedience and industriousness).²⁴ However, to conclude this piece I focus on the potential of empowering associations that at least some women could have developed through their relation with the Theotokos, cultivating feelings of pride and self-worth through traditional roles they were expected to fulfill, as she had done.

In broad strokes, I choose to imagine the following potential female experiences in church spaces that were dominated by the arresting image of Mary in the apse (and I myself find solace in such responses). I hope that at least some female believers could have felt a sense of safety and acceptance when they were welcomed by Mary inside the embrace of their local church. And if they continued to contemplate her role while the Eucharistic ritual celebrated her son's birth and sacrifice, women could perhaps have thought of her in female terms that were prominent both in their own experiences and in the ways Mary was hailed in Byzantine culture. She was the woman who *wove* together divinity and humanity in the body of Christ, and saw that body *torn* asunder on the Cross for the healing of humankind. She was the mother who *birthed* salvation and *fed* the world with heavenly bread (the same one offered at the Eucharistic ritual). Wasn't she like those who devoted their lives to weaving for and feeding their families? Weren't they like her, giving birth to sons who died defending their community, and daughters who sacrificed their lives in childbirth and an existence of service, like their mothers?²⁵

The Theotokos was ubiquitous in Byzantine culture and was celebrated in terms that could allow women to relate to her in dignifying ways (even though that was not the only option).²⁶ Perhaps the context of the Eucharist was a particularly fertile ground for at least some women to make such empowering connections

with the Mother of God, as from her place in the apse she presided supreme, the first to offer Christ's body to the world, above and before any male priests took on that role and excluded women from it.²⁷ In their daily lives, women still performed Marian roles. Perhaps during the Eucharistic celebration of God's Incarnation in Jesus and the feeding of the faithful with the fruit of life, at least some Byzantine women could have found solace and pride in the following thought: without Mary there would have been no Christ, and without Eve and her fruit of knowledge there would have been no Mary.²⁸

* * *

Maria Evangelatou is professor of art history and visual culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is interested in the visual cultures of the Mediterranean, with emphasis on ancient Greek, Byzantine, and Islamic material. She also explores cross-cultural interactions, continuity and change, politics and religion, gender construction and perception, word and image, and ritual and the senses.

Notes

¹ The first part of this title is inspired by the concept of *tā-vā* that emerges in various iterations in Polynesian cultures and emphasizes the importance of the past (e.g., in terms of cultural traditions, ancestral links, and communal histories) in the present and the future. According to this concept, "People are thought to walk forward into the past and walk backward into the future, both taking place in the present, where the past and future are constantly mediated in the ever-transforming present. The past has stood the test of time and space, and it must therefore be placed in front of people as a guidance in the present, and because the future has yet to happen, it must be placed to the back of or behind people in the present, where both past and future are symmetrically negotiated in the process" (Hūfanga 'Okusitino Māhina "Tā, Vā, and Moana: Temporality, Spatiality, and Indigeneity," *Pacific Studies* 3.3 [2010]: 170). I thank Stacy Kamehiro, professor in the History of Art and Visual Culture Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, for introducing me to this concept and sharing this article with me. Another work that explores the dynamic role of the past in Native Hawaiian theory

and practice is *The Past before Us: Mo'okū'auhau as Methodology*, edited by Nālani Wilson-Hokowhitu (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2019).

² This understanding of the material world as a manifestation of divine presence, wisdom, and will falls under what scholars call “natural theology” and is central both in the Bible and in the writings of the Fathers of the Church and later theologians. See Christopher Rowland, “Natural Theology and the Christian Bible,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*, edited by Russell Re Manning, John Hedley Brooke, and Fraser Watts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23–37, esp. 23–30, 32–33, 36. In the same volume, see Wayne Hankey, “Natural Theology in the Patristic Period,” 38–56; Alexander W. Hall, “Natural Theology in the Middle Ages,” 57–74; and Christopher C. Knight, “Natural Theology and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition,” 213–26. I thank Stacy Kamehiro for drawing my attention to scholarly literature on natural theology. For a typological understanding of history, which identifies the divine plan for human salvation in events that echo one another in a pattern of prefiguration and fulfillment across time (and encompass the history of Christian communities), see, e.g., Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1960). See also Elizabeth Jeffreys, “Old Testament ‘History’ and the Byzantine Chronicle,” in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, edited by Paul Magdalino and Robert S. Nelson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), 153–74. In the same volume, see Claudia Rapp, “Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium,” 175–98.

³ For the Annunciation and textile symbolism, see Nicholas P. Conostas, “Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of Constantinople, the Theotokos, and the Loom of the Flesh,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1995): 164–94, and more extensive treatment of the same subject in Conostas, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Homilies 1–5, Texts and Translations* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 315–58. See also Maria Evangelatou, “The Purple Thread of the Flesh: The Theological Connotations of a Narrative Iconographic Element in Byzantine Images of the Annunciation,” in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium: Studies Presented to Robin Cormack*, edited by Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 261–79; and Evangelatou, “Threads of Power: Clothing Symbolism, Human Salvation, and Female Identity in the Illustrated Homilies by Iakobos of Kokkinobaphos,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 69 (2014): 241–324, esp. 266–86. For a discussion of the Annunciation in connection to both textile and water symbolism, see Father Maximos Conostas, *The Art of Seeing: Paradox and Perception in Orthodox Iconography* (Alhambra, CA: St. Sebastian Orthodox Press,

2014), 108–57. See also Evangelatou, “The Theology of Everyday Life: Symbolic Materialities in the Protevangelion of James (2nd c.) and in the Byzantine Kokkinnobaphos Homilies on the Life of Mary (12th c.),” to appear in the proceedings of “Material of Christian Apocrypha,” a 2018 conference at the University of Virginia.

⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 116.

⁵ Maria Evangelatou, “The Symbolism of the Censer in Byzantine Representations of the Dormition of the Virgin,” *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, edited by Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 117–25.

⁶ For a rich discussion of some of the above topics with references to relevant literature, see Roy Bendor, Elina Eriksson, and Daniel Pargman, “Looking Backward to the Future: On Past-Facing Approaches to Futuring,” *Futures* 125 (2021): 102, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2020.102666>.

⁷ Sociocultural manifestations reflect the histories of communities, while our individual DNA and the ways our genes express themselves in different environmental and behavior conditions (epigenetic changes) reflect the histories of our families. For example, scientists are beginning to understand how epigenetic memory relates to intergenerational trauma; see Rachel Yehuda, “Trauma in the Family Tree,” *Scientific American*, July 2022, 5055, available online (retitled) at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-parents-rsquo-trauma-leaves-biological-traces-in-children/>.

⁸ For a perceptible discussion of the millennial roots of current human identities, centered on the example of one particular community that has suffered through colonialism but has a much more complex and layered identity that goes far beyond and far deeper than the colonial experience, see, e.g., Ken Parmasad, “Searching for Continuity: The Ancestral Impulse and Community Identity Formation in Trinidad,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1994): 22–29.

⁹ See, e.g., Emalani Case, *Everything Ancient Was Once New: Indigenous Persistence from Hawai'i to Kabiki* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021). I thank Stacy Kamehiro for recommending this title. For the importance of acknowledging wrongdoings as a first step toward healing, see, e.g., Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789–2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). In her introduction (pp. 2–3) the author emphasizes how denial of violence inhibits healing both for the survivors and for the perpetrators.

¹⁰ In this regard, I find the following statement particularly moving: “Is poetry impossible after Auschwitz? I plead for more poetry, more creativity, more freedom.” These are the closing remarks of Rithy Panh (Cambodian filmmaker, writer, producer, and survivor of the Cambodian genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge) in his essay on his film *Irradiated* (2020), available at https://www.adk.de/de/projekte/2020/heartfield/PDFs/HFD-Symposium-Pahn-E_20_08_05.pdf?m=1654167559&. I thank Boreth Ly, a professor in the History of Art and Visual Culture Department of UCSC, for drawing my attention to the work of this artist.

¹¹ For Mary’s Eucharistic role in Byzantine culture, see Maria Evangelatou, “Krater of Nectar and Altar of the Bread of Life: The Theotokos as Provider of the Eucharist in Byzantine Culture,” in *The Reception of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Marian Narratives in Texts and Images*, edited by Thomas Arentzen and Mary B. Cunningham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 77–119. I have started exploring female experiences of Mary’s Eucharistic role in “Female Materialities at the Altar: Mary’s Priestly Motherhood and Women’s Eucharistic Experience in Late Antique and Byzantine Churches,” in *Material Culture and Women’s Religious Experience in Antiquity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, edited by Mark D. Ellison, Catherine Gines Taylor, and Carolyn Osiek (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books / Fortress Academic, 2021), 257–301.

¹² For Mary as the Church and Bride of Christ, see the literature mentioned in Evangelatou, “Krater of Nectar,” 95n91.

¹³ In “Female Materialities at the Altar” (272–84), I attempt to consider some possible female experiences in the specific visual context of the sixth-century Euphrasian basilica in Poreč, modern Croatia.

¹⁴ For an exploration of the temporal references of ritual, sacred spaces, and relevant visual production in medieval Christianity, see Maria Evangelatou, “Hierochronotopy: Stepping into Timeful Space through Bonanno’s Twelfth-Century Door for the Pisa Cathedral,” in *Icons of Space: Advances in Hierotopy*, edited by Jelena Bogdanović (London: Routledge, 2021), 134–72.

¹⁵ The bibliography on Christian concepts of Jerusalem, New Jerusalem, and Heavenly Jerusalem (including the idea of Christian churches as Heavenly Jerusalem) is rather extensive. Here I mention just a couple of significant publications with references to further literature: Alexei Lidov, ed., *New Jerusalems: Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces* (Moscow: Indrik, 2009); and Bianca Kühnel, Galit Noga-Banai, and Hanna Vorholt, eds., *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014).

¹⁶ “For God there is neither past nor future but all things are in the present” (“Gregory of Nyssa, Εἰς τὴν ἐπιγραφὴν τῶν ψαλμῶν, δεύτερον βιβλίον,” PG 44, 489CD, 569BC, translated by R. E. Heine, in *Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], 126, 184). Timefulness has been introduced to the literature of visual studies by Diana Rose, a PhD graduate from the Visual Studies program at UCSC. In her dissertation, “Living Time, Performing Memory: Maya Ceremonies of Foundation and Renewal,” Rose examines “how Maya notions of cyclical time were practiced, looking specifically at how the past, present, and future coexisted in particular moments” (<http://havic-dev.ucsc.edu/people/students/diana-rose>). This coexistence of past, present, and future that transcends a linear perception of time also reflects the timefulness (rather than timelessness) of the Christian God as eternal and is echoed in the timefulness of Christian rituals in which God is present among his people.

¹⁷ For the Eucharist as a prefiguration of the heavenly banquet, see Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 139–61.

¹⁸ On the cultural construct of femininity as inherently inferior to masculinity and the cultural imperative of female subordination in the Christian world of Late Antiquity (that also defined gender constructs in later Byzantine periods), see Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. 119–41. See also Judith Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence: Woman and Empire in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), esp. 2, 12–31, 115–28, 133–40, 144. For the antithesis between Eve and Mary, see Evangelatou, “Krater of Nectar,” 89n66.

¹⁹ For the prominent presence of Mary in Byzantine apse decoration from the ninth century onward, see A. Mantas, *Τὸ εἰκονογραφικὸ πρόγραμμα τοῦ ἱεροῦ βήματος τῶν μεσοβυζαντινῶν ναῶν τῆς Ἑλλάδας (843–1204)* (Athens: University of Athens Press, 2001), 57–83.

²⁰ I argue this both because of the sight line that in many church interiors could have connected viewers more effortlessly with Mary in the apse ahead rather than with Christ in the dome above, and because as a human mother, she might have felt more approachable and relatable than her divine son and universal judge (which is why she also functioned as the most powerful mediator between the faithful and Christ). The visibility of the Pantokrator in the dome can vary greatly depending on the exact design and dimensions of the building. For example, in some cases the dome might be both tall and narrow in diameter, so that to see the

Pantokrator, viewers have to stand roughly below him and crane their heads up (lifting one's gaze might not be enough).

²¹ Thomas F. Mathews, "The Transformation Symbolism in Byzantine Architecture and the Meaning of the Pantokrator in the Dome," in *Church and People in Byzantium*, edited by Rosemary Morris (Birmingham, UK: Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham, 1990), 191–214, discusses the idea of a life in Christ and union with Christ during the Eucharist and proposes that the image of the Pantokrator in the dome of Byzantine churches is a "Christian mandala" that visualizes the concept of the perfect Christian self. I propose that, due to Mary's identity and her prominent position in the apse, she (rather than the Pantokrator) might have been more readily understood as a relatable model of transformation and human perfection, encapsulating Christian union with the divine. This might be an instance of divergence from what male-authored texts advocated regarding direct union with Christ, and what at least some of the faithful (and perhaps women in particular?) might have experienced in the visual and ritual context of Byzantine churches.

²² For the idea of Mary as the Church / Bride of Christ, see the literature mentioned in Evangelatou, "Krater of Nectar," 95n91.

²³ For the exclusion of women from priesthood and the increasing limitations imposed on them as Mary's prominence was growing in Byzantine culture, see Evangelatou, "Threads of Power," 295–98, and "Female Materialities at the Altar," 264–70, with references to further literature.

²⁴ See Evangelatou, "Threads of Power," 294–325.

²⁵ For the domestic duties of Byzantine women, see Alicia Walker, "Home: A Space Rich in Blessings," in *Byzantine Women and Their World*, edited by Ioli Kalavrezou (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 161–66, esp. 162: "As Chrysostom notes, the woman's role centered on processing the raw materials provided by men: food was turned to meals, wool into thread and cloth, children into virtuous and productive adults." See also Phaidon Koukoules, *Byzantinon Bios kai Politismos*, vol. 2.2 of 6 vols. (Athens: Ekdoseis Papazese, 1952), 201–4. Specifically on spinning and weaving as quintessential female activities, see the literature mentioned in Evangelatou, "Threads of Power," 286n121; and Catherine Gines Taylor, *Late Antique Images of the Virgin Annunciate Spinning: Allotting the Scarlet and the Purple* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). For Mary in the context of Byzantine war, see Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2006), 37–103. On p. 61 Pentcheva notes the two attributes that make Mary prominent in the context of war: virginal

motherhood symbolic of invincibility and motherly sacrifice, which involves deep suffering. Byzantine women could embody only the latter.

²⁶ For Mary's prominence in Byzantine culture, see, e.g., Vassilaki, *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Milan: Skira, 2000); Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God*; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*; and Artentzen and Cunningham, *Reception of the Mother of God in Byzantium*.

²⁷ A poignant contemporary female contemplation on this topic is offered by Frances Croake Frank in her poem *Did the Woman Say?*:

*Did the woman say,
When she held him for the first time in the dark of a stable,
After the pain and the bleeding and the crying,
"This is my body, this is my blood"?*
*Did the woman say,
When she held him for the last time in the dark rain on a hilltop,
After the pain and the bleeding and the dying,
"This is my body, this is my blood"?*
*Well that she said it to him then,
For dry old men,
brocaded robes belying barrenness
Ordain that she not say it for him now.*

I thank Katie Ligmond, PhD candidate in the Visual Studies program at UCSC, for sharing this poem with me (retrieved September 29, 2022, from <https://womenpriests.org/mary-priest/beattie-mary-the-virgin-priest/>).

²⁸ The potential of positive female approaches to Eve is masterfully explored by Mark D. Ellison, "Reimagining and Reimaging Eve in Early Christianity," in Ellison, Taylor, and Osiek, *Material Culture and Women's Religious Experience in Antiquity*, 213–56. The limited surviving work of two female Byzantine hymnographers of the ninth century, Kassia and Thekla, clearly indicates how women could see Mary as an empowering figure that honors female nature at large (see Evangelatou, "Threads of Power," 295, with references to further literature). In the Catholic tradition, the theological concept of *felix culpa* (happy fault), that is, Eve's sin as a prerequisite for the grace of the Incarnation and Mary's role in it, is explored by B. Williamson, "The Virgin Lactans as Second Eve: Image of the Salvatrix," *Studies in Iconography* 19 (1998): 105–38 (however, contrary to the author's claims, the *visual material* explored in this article primarily casts Eve in a negative light, along the commonplace condemnation of the first woman in mainstream Christian discourse).

Beyond Borders and Biology: Lisa Myeong-Joo's *Self-Portrait of a Circle* (2016)

Soo-Min Shim

Performance allows me to feel something that I know in my body, that is for me. As ambiguous as that is at least I know it's real. Performance means reclaiming my body back after being adopted or being told different ways of being or what to do or fitting in with my adopted family or the society that I live in now.

—Lisa Myeong-Joo¹

The artist Lisa Myeong-Joo was born in Seoul, South Korea, in 1988 and was subsequently adopted by a family in Sydney, Australia, in 1989.² She returned to South Korea in 2016 for a residency at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea, where she created her series *Self-Portrait of a Circle*. This essay analyzes Lisa Myeong-Joo's performative use of her own body to suggest a conscious unbelonging to place in three components of this series: a video work, a performance piece presented at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea in Changdong, and a series of five photographs taken in the streets around the residency site. In these three components of her series, Lisa Myeong-Joo embodies what the art historian Eun Jung Park, in her writing on Korean adoptee artists, has described as “risky subjectivity.”³ Park argues that the “sense of self and empowerment [found] in the past” is made risky for adoptees

whose past has been forcibly removed from them.⁴ With a sense of risky subjectivity they negotiate “normative pressures that are constitutive of a neoliberal subject, such as family, nation-state, religion, and sexual orientation.”⁵

Situating the art of Lisa Myeong-Joo in a history of South Korean–Australian politics and cultural relations, it is possible to see her series *Self-Portrait of a Circle* as an interrogation into the limits and imaginative potentials of the adoptee body in contesting the bodies of the nation-states of South Korea and Australia. I argue that Lisa Myeong-Joo consciously plays with ethno-nationalist conceptions of representation and appearance through “performative anonymity” and equivocation toward place. By interrogating the dominant biological and cultural essentialist paradigms of family and state, Lisa Myeong-Joo’s practice contributes to ongoing scholarship on the Korean diaspora.

The Indeterminacy of Belonging: Korean-Australian Adoption Histories and Subjectivities

During her residency at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea, Lisa Myeong-Joo ventured out into the streets of Changdong, a neighborhood in the northern part of Seoul, South Korea’s capital city. In Changdong, Lisa Myeong-Joo took a series of five photographs where she looped her arms around electricity poles, telephone poles, and trees (Fig. 1). In all the photographs, Lisa Myeong-Joo’s stance is the same; her arms are raised at eye level, with one palm turning outward, the other turning inward. Lisa Myeong-Joo’s pose is reminiscent of an embrace. Such an intimate gesture speaks to a desire to belong, to be integrated, and to be fully immersed in Seoul’s cityscape. At the same time, however, the loop is closed only by the lightest touch of two fingertips barely pressed against each other. The closure of the circle is somewhat tenuous and promises openness and porosity. In one photograph Lisa Myeong-Joo encircles her arms around the plastic PVC strips of a type of curtain door known as a “bal” in Korean. This bal demarcates a barrier and a boundary, but at the same time, it is not solid, static, or impenetrable.

In the performance component of *Self-Portrait of a Circle*, Lisa Myeong-Joo envelops her entire body in a large piece of hemp fabric stitched into a loop that falls over her back and shrouds her face (Fig. 2). Lisa Myeong-Joo pulls the fabric forward, stepping on the fabric as she makes her way through the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Changdong. The fabric is sambe, traditional Korean fabric that has been deemed a “national treasure.” This choice of fabric might indicate a nostalgic enfolding into tradition, as Lisa Myeong-Joo



Figure 1 Lisa Myeong-Joo, *Self-Portrait of a Circle*, 2016. Photo credit: Yeeun Nam. Courtesy of the artist.

literally wraps herself in a material closely tied to national identity. However, *sambe* is conventionally used for funerary mourning clothes or as a fabric to shroud the deceased. The transparency of the fabric allows light to pass through it so that Lisa Myeong-Joo's silhouette can be discerned only as a ghostly shadow through the *sambe*, evoking a sense of melancholy and loss. The cultural significance of *sambe* and its connotations of grief and severance, then, problematize the notion that a return to "homeland" is entirely fulfilling or gratifying. Lisa Myeong-Joo's physical movements are characterized by a precarious balance, as there must be enough fabric in front of the artist in order for her to safely step forward without tripping. In moving forward, Lisa Myeong-Joo must laboriously force the fabric forward as its coarse texture rubs against the back of her head. The effort required in the action transforms the simple act of walking into an arduous and demanding process.

Immediately, based on the performance's ambiguous signifiers, there is an ambivalence surrounding Lisa Myeong-Joo's belonging in and to the places of South Korea. Writing on the performance work of the Taiwanese American performance artist Tehching Hsieh, the art historian Adrian Heathfield claims that "we might think of the migrant's body as a body that challenges notions of national identity through its indeterminacy of belonging."⁶ This indeterminacy of belonging has been elsewhere described by Park as "risky subjectivity." Park writes that "Risky Subjectivity . . . refers to the constant construction and reconstruction of perpetual struggle that deliberately fails at a normative imperative."⁷ Through a conscious and deliberate "failure" artists convey a sense of "subjecthood-information" that resists "origin myths, nationality, and other trappings of identity formation."⁸ Lisa Myeong-Joo's *Self-Portrait of a Circle* similarly conveys this sense of risky subjectivity derived from an adoptee subjectivity, and in particular her experience as a Korean Australian adoptee.

Locating Lisa Myeong-Joo's practice in the long history of adoption between Korea and Australia provides context critical to understanding her

experiences as a Korean Australian adoptee. In 1969, the first Korean child was adopted into Australia, and in the subsequent decades Korean children were the most popular for intercountry adoption in Australia.⁹ Korean children represented 206 of the 297 children adopted into Australia between July 1975 and January 1986.¹⁰ While Korean adoption slowed around 1981 as South Korea attempted to curb its adoption policy due to widespread international criticism, South Korea has the world's longest-running intercountry adoption program. From 1953 to 2010 Korea sent out more than 170,000 South Korean children (about 18 percent of the 950,000 global adoptions).¹¹ Though there has been more than thirty years of South Korean intercountry adoption in Australia, the system and its repercussions on individuals remain significantly understudied. In her article "Monetary Flows and the Movements of Children," Kimberly McKee has analyzed the history of Korean adoption, arguing that governments, adoption agencies, various state policies and regulations work in tandem to create what she calls the transnational adoption industrial complex, a "multimillion dollar industry spanning the globe."¹² Adoptee bodies were commodified by the nation-state, turned into currency, and carried across oceans by the global currents of capital. It is pertinent that Lisa Myeong-Joo, as an adoptee artist, has turned to performance art, using her own body—once subjected to the violence of the "transnational adoption industrial complex"—as the vehicle of resistance.

Portraiture and Ethno-Nationalism: Appearance and Anonymity

Lisa Myeong-Joo's deliberate obfuscation of her own face demonstrates this resistance. In her photographs around Changdong, her face is covered by the pose of her raised arms. In her performance, Lisa Myeong-Joo's face is masked by the *sambe*, and her body when viewed from the front can be discerned only by the amorphous outline of her shadow as she progresses through the gallery corridor. In the video component of *Self-Portrait of a Circle*, we see a close-up of two hands trying to reach each other (Fig. 3). As they make contact, the camera pans right from the fingertips to the palm, the wrist, the forearm, to the neck of the subject. However, again the face is never shown, as emphasis is placed on the subject's body.

While "portraiture" conventionally depicts the face of the subject, capturing their likeness, in Lisa Myeong-Joo's *Self-Portrait of a Circle* there is a refusal of representation and easy identification. Park notes that photography specifically is a "technology of representation . . . that presupposes an ontological



Figure 2 Screenshots from Performance with hemp mobius, MMCA Changdong Residency Seoul, 2016. Video credit: Pablo Lobato. Courtesy of the artist.

imperative.”¹³ Citizenship and national belonging are often predicated on identification through photographic documentation, with official government documents such as passports requiring a clear photograph of the passport holder. Yet Lisa Myeong-Joo uses photography as a form of de-identification and obfuscation.

The art historian Amelia Jones observes that modernist discourses of photography continue to uphold the self-portrait image as the indisputable transmission of the “true” artistic subject to viewers.¹⁴ Refuting this claim, Jones writes on the use of exaggerated performativity in self-portrait photography as a way to convey that “we can never ‘know’ the subject behind or in the image.”¹⁵ Lisa Myeong-Joo similarly complicates the belief in the self-portrait image as a receptacle of stable identity formation, challenging the accepted equivalence of visibility in the self-portrait with truthfulness.¹⁶ By hiding her face, Lisa Myeong-Joo destabilizes the reliance on outward expression in processes of identity formation, echoing Jones in her assertion that the self-portrait photograph is an unstable technology that reflects the “tenuousness and incoherence” inherent to our experiences as “living, embodied subjects.”¹⁷ Through a performative *anonymity*, Lisa Myeong-Joo interrogates one of the key principles of representation: our facial and biological features that often problematically also become the basis for belonging. This sense of physical belonging is highly political when imbricated with legal matrices and definitions of nationality and citizenship. The political scientist Walker Connor writes that a shared sense of homogeneity and a myth of common descent creates the psychological essence of the nation, coining the term *ethno-nationalism* in 1973.¹⁸

Lisa Myeong-Joo may be specifically responding to Korea’s dominant ethno-nationalism that equates Koreanness with cultural, linguistic, and ethnic homogeneity based on a mythos of shared blood and a five-thousand-year-old history. We may see the invocation of this ethno-nationalism in the Overseas Korean Act, which was passed on December 3, 1999. The act was part of South

Korea's economic policy of *seggyehwa* (or globalization), which involved reaching out to the then 5.3 million Korean "co-ethnics,"" conceiving of them as members of "hanminjok," or "the [one] Korean people."¹⁹ This included adoptees, who were seen as compatriots with the same ethnic origins and blood (*hyoltong*). Jung-Sun Park and Paul Chang have argued that the law "entails the construction of a Korean identity based on 'primordial' ethnic ties and the belief in shared blood (*pitjul*) and heritage (*hyolt'ongjuui*). Thus, legal national identity is confounded with ethnic identity."²⁰ By virtue of her appearance existing in a racialized body, Lisa Myeong-Joo is visibly and legibly read as "Korean" in a putatively ethnically homogeneous country. Yet, as an adoptee she feels as though she were an outsider, raising questions of "self" and "other."

Here, Jones's notion of intersubjectivity, in which fixed notions of subject and object are collapsed in favor of an understanding of the body and self as "dramatically intercorporeal: as embodied as well as contingent," may be relevant.²¹ Writing on Korean American adoptee artists, Park takes Jones's theory and argues that intersubjective contingency is key to the art of adoptee artists.²² Through her performances moving through the streets of Changdong, Lisa Myeong-Joo reveals the "self as a performance in relation to others,"²³ as she is both connected to and restrained by national belonging and difference.

Beyond the Surface: Collapsing Boundaries and the Möbius Strip

It is this dialectic of belonging and not belonging that led Lisa Myeong-Joo to investigate the binary of inside and outside. In this investigation, Lisa Myeong-Joo began to use the Möbius strip as a metaphor for identity. The Möbius strip is a single-sided geometrical structure that is rendered into a three-dimensional figure eight through twisting and inverting to create an interface of outside and inside. The philosopher Elizabeth Grosz has built on the phenomenological theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, using the Möbius strip as a motif to develop a corporeal feminism where the relationship between the individual and the social, or body and the world, might be realized.²⁴ Grosz's conception of the body as a Möbius strip reconfigures the dualist Cartesian perception of the body as static, merely inert, and "shaped" by the external world around it. By arguing that the body is a Möbius strip, Grosz conceptualizes the body as a cultural and social product constructed through the interaction of the mind and the body. Lisa Myeong-Joo's stance reflects Grosz's and Merleau-Ponty's writings on perception and the body; the latter has written that "when I press my two hands together, it is not a matter

of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the role of ‘touching’ and being ‘touched.’”²⁵ By twisting one palm out and one in, Lisa Myeong-Joo’s arms become a Möbius strip. Collapsing the distinction between mind and body, subject and object, a multilayered understanding of the body emerges. Lisa Myeong-Joo’s fingertips, or the point of encounter where biophysical, psychological, emotional, and social aspects of embodied experience intersect, becomes the focal point of her photographic series. Similarly, in the video component of *Self-Portrait of a Circle*, her fingertips and the space in between them become the central focus of the composition. In the video, the fingertips approach one another very slowly, the hands quivering and trembling slightly in the effort to meet. The camera sweeps from the touching fingertips to the palm, wrist, forearm, neck, all the way around to the left side of the subject’s shoulder, down the forearm and wrist and then to the left hand, which has now been turned with the palm facing away from the viewer. The video continues to move around and around the loop as the palms alternate moving in and out, a visual activation of the Möbius strip imagery.

In the performance component of *Self-Portrait of a Circle*, the fabric sambe loop is actually a large Möbius strip. As a loop, the dirt and debris on the gallery floor is picked up by the fabric and eventually circles to the “inside,” rubbing over Lisa Myeong-Joo as she moves the fabric continuously over her body. Hence, Grosz’s ideas on the conflation of “inside” and “outside” are visualized by the movement of particles from the “outside” of the floor making their way “inside” to Lisa Myeong-Joo. The color of the sambe in Lisa Myeong-Joo’s performance is reminiscent of skin, which emphasizes the visualization of the mobius strip as a corporeal metaphor. The tension between the outside and inside is emphasized by Lisa Myeong-Joo’s slow, steady, hesitant steps, as she must ensure that the tension between the fabric and her steps is maintained to avoid falling. By occupying the liminal space between outside and inside, Lisa Myeong-Joo challenges the conception of the body as a “blank slate” purely defined by external forces. By doing so, she poses a reclamation of her own body by recognizing the role of the interior in its construction.

Performed for a predominantly Korean audience, the performance of *Self-Portrait of a Circle* resists “the hierarchy of the Korean nation . . . [which] dominates the ways in which overseas Koreans or diasporic subjects are represented in mainstream South Korean public and/or academic perspectives.”²⁶ Rather than adhering to these dominant perspectives of “finding nation outside the nation . . . [in which] the Korean nation is the subject of study rather than the migrants themselves,”²⁷ Lisa Myeong-Joo denaturalizes origin stories by showing a dialectic

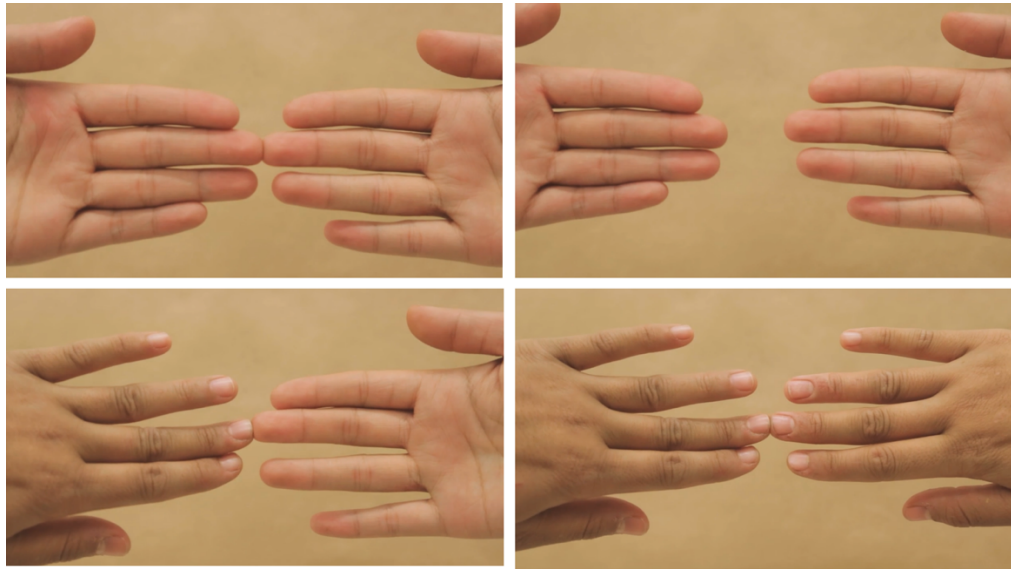


Figure 3 Screenshots from *Self-Portrait of a Circle*, 2016. *Single-channel video, duration 3'48"*, MMCA Changdong Residency Seoul, 2016. *Courtesy of the artist.*

of belonging and unbelonging. It is relevant, then, that this body of work was displayed at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Changdong in 2016 under the curatorial framework of “No Man’s Land,” referring to “a territory occupied by nobody” in the global context of migration.²⁸ The title of the exhibition may refer to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of deterritorialization, first theorized in *A Thousand Plateaus* as “the movement by which ‘one’ leaves the territory,”²⁹ severing social, cultural, or political practices from originary places. Arjun Appadurai argues that cultural identities and practices are part of this process of deterritorialization.³⁰ In Appadurai’s use, deterritorialization and the crossing of territorial boundaries may be understood as “travel,” “displacement,” and “overseas movement.”³¹ Appadurai argues that this transgressive crossing provides people with agency, or the power to shape their own worlds and therefore counter imperialism. Rather than claim allegiance to a nation and embody a romanticized, nostalgic view of the so-called Motherland, Lisa Myeong-Joo’s series may be seen as a practice in deterritorialization.

The (In)visible: Feeling Place from Feeling out of Place

In evoking Merleau-Ponty, Lisa Myeong-Joo privileges feeling over seeing. By replacing the eyes with her inverted palms, the artist subverts the disembodied theories of vision and experience and the ocularcentrism of landscape and place that have developed out of Cartesianism. In the performance element of the series,

Lisa Myeong-Joo's vision is obscured by fabric, so she must feel first with her feet that guide her. Furthermore, her bare feet center tactile experience rather than vision, as the Möbius loop itself may be seen as a proxy for human skin. In the video component of *Self-Portrait of a Circle* the continuous close-up shot of the subject's skin and body emphasizes a haptic engagement with place.

The philosopher Jacques Rancière has written that “politics revolves around what can be seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”³² That is, the visible determines “Place” and our experience of place. Hence mainstream conceptions of community are often predicated on seeing and looking the same. Rather than “seeing” Seoul, however, Lisa Myeong-Joo seems to “feel” her way through the city, and through this “redistribution of the senses,” she makes visible what once was invisible, suggesting the possibility of alternative ways of sensing and acting. Her performative engagement with site repositions the landscape, in the words of W. J. T. Mitchell, “not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed.”³³

By reacting to the architectural constraints around her with ambivalence, Lisa Myeong-Joo eschews a nostalgic and romanticized idealization of the so-called Motherland. Rather than completely “embracing” origin narratives, *Self-Portrait of a Circle* leaves gaps to challenge Korea's state promotion of ethnic homogeneity (*tanil minjok*) and “pure-blood” relations (*sunsu hyoltong*), which are often conceived as static and fixed. Through strategic obfuscation and a sense of “risky subjectivity” Lisa Myeong-Joo interrogates biological and cultural essentialist paradigms of family and state. Instead, Lisa Myeong-Joo demonstrates a greater ontological understanding that identity is constituted by and manipulated through an endlessly reversible process of seeing and being seen.

* * *

Soo-Min Shim is currently completing her PhD in art history and theory at the Australian National University. She received her BA in history and theory (First Class Honours) from the University of Sydney. She has written for several Australian and international academic publications.

Notes

¹ Lisa Myeong-Joo, interview by author, Sydney, Australia, July 20, 2021.

² Lisa Myeong-Joo is Lisa Myeong-Joo Keighery's artist name. Her use of this artist name may be interpreted as a form of reclamation of identity, as Lisa Myeong-Joo connects with both her Korean heritage and Australian upbringing. Lisa, the name given upon adoption, and Myeong-Joo, her Korean name given at birth, hold equal importance in her chosen artist's name.

³ Eun Jung Park, "Risky Subjectivity: Select Works by Korean Adoptee Artists," in *Queering Contemporary Asian American Art*, ed. Laura Kina and Jan Christian Bernabe (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017).

⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁵ Ibid., 121.

⁶ Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2015), 43.

⁷ Park, "Risky Subjectivity," 127.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Tobias Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006), 264.

¹⁰ Patricia Fronck, "Intercountry Adoption in Australia: A Natural Evolution or Purposeful Action," in *Other People's Children: Adoption in Australia*, ed. Ceridwen Sparkes and Denise Cuthbert (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009), 41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.1165>.

¹¹ Kyunghye Ma, "Korean Intercountry Adoption History: Culture, Practice, and Implications," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 98, no. 3 (2017): 243, <https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.2017.98.25>.

¹² Kimberly D. McKee, "Monetary Flows and the Movements of Children: The Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex," *Journal of Korean Studies* 21, no. 1 (2016): 137, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jks.2016.0007>.

¹³ Park, "Risky Subjectivity," 126.

¹⁴ Amelia Jones, "The 'Eternal Return': Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27, no. 4 (2002): 951, <https://doi.org/10.1086/339641>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 950.

¹⁸ Walker Connor, "Eco- or Ethno-nationalism?," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7, no. 3 (1984): 342, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1984.9993449>.

¹⁹ Eleana Kim, "Our Adoptee, Our Alien: Transnational Adoptees as Specters of Foreignness and Family in South Korea," *Anthropological Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2007): 497–531, <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2007.0027>.

²⁰ Jung-Sun Park and Paul Y. Chang, “Contention in the Construction of a Global Korean Community: The Case of the Overseas Koreans Act,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 10, no. 1 (2005): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jks.2005.0002>.

²¹ Amelia Jones, quoted in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 20, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12032>.

²² Park, “Risky Subjectivity,” 125.

²³ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 38.

²⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003118381>.

²⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2011), 93, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720714>.

²⁶ Hijoo Son, “Paradox of Diasporic Art from There: Antidote to Master Narrative of the Nation?,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 17, no. 1 (2012): 158, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jks.2012.0003>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “No Man’s Land” (국립현대미술관) National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 2016, <https://www.mmca.go.kr/eng/exhibitions/exhibitionsDetail.do?menuId=102000000&exhId=201611110000510>.

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 508.

³⁰ It is important to note here the difference between cultural and ethnic identities. The present essay applies Appadurai’s understanding of culture as a porous, syncretic entity that has the capacity to transform as a socially transmittable practice, in contrast with ethnicity that is more often problematically defined by physical attributes and biological essentialism.

³¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 38.

³² Jacques Rancière and Gabriel Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 13, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822390930>.

³³ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

This page intentionally left blank

**Moving with joy across the ice while my face turns brown
from the sun**

Artwork by Maureen Gruben and Text by Kyra Kordoski
Tuktoyaktuk, NWT



Figure 1 Maureen Gruben, Moving with joy across the ice while my face turns brown from the sun (2019), archival inkjet on Epson Hot Press Bright, 120 × 42.5 in., edition of 3. Courtesy of the artist © Maureen Gruben; photo Kyra Kordoski.

For *Moving with joy across the ice while my face turns brown from the sun* (2019, fig. 1), Maureen Gruben borrowed fourteen hand-built sleds from families in her Western Arctic hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk and brought them together on the spring sea ice outside her home to form a short-duration installation in which elements of multiple genres—land art, portraiture, performance, monument, photography—converge. Sleds have always been integral to Inuvialuit life, particularly in the spring when community members expertly pack them with everything they need to live on the land. Hitching them to skidoos, they cross miles of frozen

tundra and ice to Husky Lakes, where they prepare their canvas tents and off-grid cabins for the ice fishing season.

Construction elements and techniques for sleds have shifted over the years from the driftwood that washes en masse onto local shores and runners made of lichen and ice, all lashed together with sinew, to machine-cut and composite lumbers with polymer plastic runners, fastened, mostly, with nails and rope. But the flexibility and ingenuity of the handmade has been maintained. Each construction, in its overall size and shape, represents the particular needs of a family or individual hunter. The characteristics of each piece of each sled reflect different minds finding unique strategies; constantly merging streams of personal experience and ancestral teachings and locally available materials and tools determine the curves of runner tips and the dimensions of cargo boxes and decks. These details trace deeply personal relationships to the sled's makers, and the traces become more pronounced as they are mended over the years to increase their lifespan.

They remain a forceful contrast to the now-also-familiar mass-manufactured sleds such as the Boggan brand plastic cargo sleds. The difference is meaningful and can be related to the anthropologist Anna Tsing's work. Tsing has identified the ever-increasing global shift to producing "standardized" units, for which an "individual can stand in for all," as a core strategy for facilitating scalable models of extractive capitalist production.¹ "The only way to create scalability," she states, "is to repress change and encounter."² Any one Boggan could, indeed, be swapped seamlessly out for another; they can break but are not easily effectively repaired; their production certainly could be scaled to generate profit in any snowy market. With handmade sleds, repairs and adjustments index change over years, marking idiosyncratic incidents of not only production but continuous use. In essence, they remain permeable to numerous ongoing encounters—with tools, ice, tundra, ski-doo, the varied materials being transported—holding space in what Tsing has referred to as the "peripheries of capitalism."³

In standing the gathered sleds upright, Gruben lifts them into a human orientation, making these distinctive characteristics more immediately legible to our eye level while emphasizing and honoring the sled as an archetypal form. This gesture in many ways imbues the sleds with aspects of portraiture. In the first chapter of the art historian Shearer West's 2004 book *Portraiture*, she determines that the Western portrait has historically had a dual nature, being concerned with both "likeness" and "type."⁴ As a primary support for this, she cites Erwin Panofsky's statement that a portrait, "on the one hand . . . seeks to bring out whatever it is in which the sitter differs from the rest of humanity . . . on the other hand it seeks to bring out whatever the sitter has in common with the rest of humanity."⁵ Moving on in later chapters to address postmodernism and "identities," West cites

several artists working with the genre but outside representationalism for whom “the primary concern may not be to convey a likeness of themselves but to reveal something more fundamental about their life,” observing a “shift [in] attention from the iconic qualities of portraiture to the indexical ones.”⁶ These observations have evident parallels with Gruben’s presentation of sleds. In the collective nature of *Moving with joy across the ice . . .*, the parallels extend to another comment West makes in her book: “group portraiture,” she states, “has often had an affinity with theatrical performance, as figures can be shown interacting with each other as well as posing for the portraitist.”⁷

These sleds may not be posing, but they can be said to have been placed in relation to one another. It is a celebratory grouping that, in the manner West describes above, “reveals something fundamental” about the lives of families who have been in mutually supportive relation for generations.⁸ The relationship represented is one of deep time, and this arrangement is only a moment of that span. The sleds were in fact in place only long enough for the work to be photographed. This was for two reasons. The first was safety, given the weight and size of the sleds on a naturally shifting surface of snow and ice. The second was they were still in active use and needed for springtime traveling out to ice fishing camps. They had work to do, and this was also just a brief episode (or encounter) in the multiyear lives of these sleds. Which is to say that, like performance art, *Moving with joy across the ice . . .* has a strong relationship to time as well as place. This temporality may seem to sit in a contradictory tension with the monumental presence the sleds have taken on in this upright position, due to their size relative to a human scale. But the complicated relationship between performance, monumentality, audience, and place has been extensively investigated by the art historian Mechtild Widrich, who has argued that the usual act of documenting a performance piece extends its existence and affect from the ephemeral into the monumental. In a 2014 paper Widrich focused her attention on how this documentation and ongoing representation has drastically multiplied due to today’s “massive engines of reproduction” (social media, ubiquitous cameras, etc.), and considers how this “mediation,” as she terms it, influences our understanding of site-specificity.⁹ She argues that “the connections between layers of mediation—and actual acts and things—in space and time add up to a new kind of monumentality and site-directedness,” and advocates for replacing the term *site-specific* with *site-directed* because she feels the latter is “more flexible, while allowing precise orientation to sites.”¹⁰

It adds to the richness of this line of conversation to consider that *Moving with joy across the ice . . .* was reiterated and augmented in the winter of 2021 for a public art piece at Toronto’s Bentway Skate Trail, a public ice-skating track built annually under Toronto’s Gardiner Expressway, the main artery into the city that

runs along the Great Lakes shoreline. The Toronto installation, titled *Moving with Joy*, consisted of seven sleds based loosely on the dimensions of the ones she borrowed for her initial piece. Six of them displayed large-format images that Gruben captured during time spent at Husky Lakes in the spring of 2021, and the seventh held an LED screen that looped a juxtaposed montage of video clips shot during the same period. The two iterations invert the relationship between site and artwork: in the first, *Moving with joy across the ice while my face turns brown from the sun*, the sleds are situated in the land; in the second, that land is framed by the sleds. *Moving with Joy* (fig. 2) also threw one site in relation to another, superimposing aspects of Western Arctic life onto life in Toronto. The Bentway site in particular amplified Toronto's inherent elements of movement, not only with an audience primarily in motion on skates, but in being situated beneath a constant flow of traffic. While the sleds included in this iteration were manufactured in a Toronto studio, they nevertheless incorporated personal elements intimately connected to the Western Arctic: their runners were painted with rich colors drawn from pieces of Gruben's mother's embroidery and beading. The video clips and images were not originally captured for or as "art" in a formal sense, but as part of that now ubiquitous daily process that Widrich addresses of using phones to document and commemorate our lives as and where they are being lived.¹¹



Figure 2 Maureen Gruben, *Moving with Joy* (2021), installation view at the Bentway Skate Trail, December 2021. Courtesy of the artist, © Maureen Gruben, photo Shane Parent.

In recognizing the fluidity and complexity of sites, of how not only artworks but also our increasingly prolific documentation of and conversations about

artworks mediate sites, Widrich argues that “adding a layer of ‘movement as mediation’ to our activity of deciphering the meaning and construction of history might allow us to understand that whenever monuments are built, moved, or removed, the sites they direct to are as much a product as productive of their meaning.”¹² It is worth considering what the implications of this framework would be when applied to a piece that occurs on, and so directs to, a site in which human activities and histories are not pervasive and dominant but still integrated and balanced with the nonhuman. Or what the implications would be when the site to which an artwork plus its mediation directs—in this case, the sea ice outside Gruben’s home—cyclically disappears and reappears as it melts and re-forms every year according to a more-than-human rhythm. Widrich’s argument for site-directness might, then, be particularly valuable if taken as conscious acknowledgment of the boundaries of mediation, of the varied, shifting edges of our individual knowledge. This might push us to consider more carefully questions like, what is an audience’s responsibility to sites they are directed to, but have no, or little, firsthand experience of? Or, very simply, in what ways does land extend beyond “site”?

In a conversation with the author Dionne Brand published in 2018 under the title “Temporary Spaces of Joy and Freedom,” the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes land “as a particular space full of relationality to which [Anishinaabe] form very deep attachments over very long periods of time.”¹³ Elaborating on this in the same conversation, she explains:

My ancestors worked and worked and worked and worked. They got up every day and made things. They made their political system and their healthcare system and their education system, their transportation networks, their clothes and their food. They were constantly engaged in creating, and through those individual and collective embodied processes, generated thought, ethics, theory.¹⁴

This mode of expansive creation through deep time that Simpson describes is reflected in the wood cuts and joins, the patches and hand-knotted ropes of sleds. Tsing’s observations on the indeterminate are also relevant here, with respect to how individuals are understood and represented in relation to others, and to time and place:

Our daily habits are repetitive, but they are also open-ended, responding to opportunity and encounter. What if our indeterminate

life form was not the shape of our bodies but rather the shape of our motions over time? Such indeterminacy expands our concept of human life, showing us how we are transformed by encounter.¹⁵

While the published title of Simpson's conversation ("Temporary Spaces of Joy and Freedom") was not a known reference for the title *Moving with joy across the ice as my face turns brown from the sun*, the correspondence is deeper than coincidence. The space of ice- and snow-coated tundra in which sleds like these exist is a space of freedom and joy—one that has persisted for thousands of years and is temporary only in a cyclical sense. There is joy, too, in the anticipation of its (once) inevitable annual return. At the end of her conversation with Brand, Simpson, in turn, points to Ashon Crawley's writing on joy. The scholar's first two books are described, respectively, as "an investigation of aesthetics and performance as modes of collective, social imagination" and "an exploration of the interrelation of blackness, mysticism, quantum mechanics and love." In the latter volume, *The Lonely Letters*, when discussing how the "capacious" minimalism of the composer Steve Reich recalls for him James Baldwin's assertion that there is "always a beat beneath the beat," Crawley wonders:

Is there a chance of getting at the thing beneath, the thing underneath, the thing beyond? And this is another way to ask about the unfolding of possibility, of joy, of gods and the human, of love as ceaseless pulse and noise. What the beat, what the music, reveal are the things that remain, the things that exceed capture by the thing called beat, the thing called music. And I wonder if, too, if the thing called love, the thing called god, are the remains of that which exceeds capture similarly, of that which exceeds capture likewise?¹⁶

Gruben often refers in conversation to the Tuktoyaktuk elder and ice geologist Anngun (Charles Gruben), who has described the sound of a sled moving fast, bouncing over drifting snow, as a drumbeat on the ice. This sound is, perhaps, a beat that itself exceeds capture.

Inuvialuk artist Maureen Gruben employs an intimate materiality. In her practice, polar bear fur, beluga intestines, and seal skin encounter resins, vinyl, bubble wrap, and metallic tape, forging critical links between daily life in the Western Arctic and global social and environmental concerns. Gruben was born and raised in Tuktoyaktuk, where her parents were traditional knowledge keepers and founders of

E. Gruben's Transport. She holds a bachelor of fine arts from the University of Victoria and has exhibited regularly across Canada and internationally. She was long-listed for the 2019 Aesthetica Art Prize and the 2021 Sobey Art Prize, and her work is held in national and private collections.

Kyra Kordoski's art writing and photo documentation have been featured in numerous periodicals including *esse arts + opinions*, *C Magazine*, *White Fungus*, *Canadian Art*, *BOMB*, *Inuit Art Quarterly*, CBC, and the *Globe and Mail*, and in exhibition catalogs including those published by Emily Carr University Press, grunt gallery, National Gallery of Canada, Art Gallery of Ontario, and Vancouver Art Gallery. She completed an MA in cultural studies from the University of Leeds, as well as an MFA in art writing from Goldsmith's College, University of London, during which time she collaboratively organized public art writing events at Goldsmith's College, Whitechapel Gallery, and various community arts centers in Bristol and London. Since 2016, she has been working with the Inuvialuk artist Maureen Gruben as a studio manager, writer, and photographer, and she spends part of her year at Maureen's home in the Western Arctic hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk.

Notes

¹ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 41, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400873548>.

² *Ibid.*, 155.

³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴ Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁹ Mechtild Widrich, "Moving Monuments in the Age of Social Media," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 15, no. 2 (2018): 133, <https://doi.org/10.5749/futuante.15.2.0133>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹² *Ibid.*, 143.

¹³ Dionne Brand and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Temporary Spaces of Joy and Freedom: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in Conversation with Dionne

Brand,” *Literary Review of Canada*, June 2018, <https://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2018/06/temporary-spaces-of-joy-and-freedom/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Tsing, *Mushroom*, 60.

¹⁶ Ashon T. Crawley, *The Lonely Letters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 53, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478009306>.

Maurice Denis (1870–1943) and the Sacred Grove: Temporality in Fin de Siècle France

Lucile Cordonnier

We need the courage to resist our exacerbated sensibility, our public who wants artistic impressions executed in five minutes! and our dealers. Who knows if life would not appear longer, instead of seeming so desperately short; wouldn't the dimension of our works grow exponentially?

—Maurice Denis, *Journal*

In a diary entry of 1898, Maurice Denis called upon his fellow painters to resist the public's appeal for "artistic impressions executed in five minutes."¹ As a result, life would appear longer and the intensity of painting would grow exponentially. This statement contrasts with the fast-paced Impressionist paintings and implies a preference for an art that engages with slowness, if not stillness. Time thus appears to play a pivotal role in Denis's art as both a reaction against Impressionism and a reflection on the status of the work of art.

Denis was born in 1870 in Granville, in Normandy, where his middle-class family took refuge during the siege of Paris and the Commune.² After the return of relative calm and political stability in the country with the establishment of the Third Republic, Denis grew up in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, in the suburbs of Paris, a former royal retreat filled with an immense forest that bore an intimate significance for him throughout his life.³ At the Lycée Condorcet and the Académie Julian, a private art school, he met fellow artists who together founded the Nabis group, which gathered painters, sculptors, and decorators between 1888 and 1900.⁴ Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Paul Sérusier,

Édouard Vuillard, and others met regularly to discuss matters of art and contemporary culture and organized exhibitions to showcase their avant-garde works. Each artist followed an individual route; Denis pursued the representation of mythical and spiritual scenes. Moreover, his peers recognized him as the group's theoretician.⁵ He extensively published articles in artistic magazines in which he proposed a new terminology for the art produced by the group, called "Neo-Traditionalism." In the "Definition of Neo-Traditionalism," published under a pseudonym in the magazine *Art et Critique* in 1890, he formulated his notorious phrase: "Remember that a painting—before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or an anecdote of some sort—is essentially a flat surface covered with colors, put together in a certain order."⁶ While the formula is now celebrated as the first step toward the dissolution of form and content in painting, Denis never departed from the tradition of the figurative subject at the core of painting.⁷ His "Definition" is rooted in an attachment to various artistic landmarks and figures, such as ancient Greek temples, medieval churches, the Italian Primitives, the vault of the Sistine Chapel, and the art of Paul Gauguin. By creating a lineage along this multitude of emblems populating the canon of Western art history, Denis recognized in his "Definition" the value of the past and positioned himself as its inheritor.

In this essay, I explore the temporal tension between modernity, religion, and tradition in three of Denis's paintings, composed between 1891 and 1893: *The Green Trees*, or *Beech Trees in Kerduel* (1893, Musée d'Orsay); *The Muses* (1893, Musée d'Orsay); and *April*, or *The Anemones* (1891, private collection). All three paintings represent scenes set in forests or woods populated by ethereal figures engaged in processions along paths delimited amid the trees. I have chosen to name these natural settings "sacred groves." In the "Definition of Neo-Traditionalism," Denis defined his artistic practice as the "sanctification of nature." He wrote: "Art is the sanctification of nature, of that nature found in all the world, which contents itself to live."⁸ To Denis, art has the ability to make nature sacred. The process of sanctification transports the artworks into the realm of the spiritual by embedding them with devotional purpose. The paintings are not only decorative pieces for modern interiors; they are objects of spiritual contemplation. As the paintings are sanctified, the nature represented on canvas gains spiritual value. Here, spirituality is conceived as a religious practice that does not depend on the traditional structure of the church. In Denis's case, it is a more private and intimate practice of his Catholic faith. A large component of this spiritual practice for Denis was the contemplation of some of his artworks on display in his house.

The sacred grove is the ideal location for the sanctification process and allows for the conception of multilayered temporalities. Denis's use of natural environments in his works, such as the woods and the forest, holds a particular



Figure 1 Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *The Sacred Grove, Beloved of the Arts and the Muses*, oil on canvas, 93 × 231 cm. Art Institute Chicago, 1884–89.

meaning that goes beyond mere landscape painting. Denis’s fascination with trees is part of a longer history. For example, in the study of Christian iconography, the tree, as a symbol of life, is commonly considered the only living element that takes part in both the earthly world, with its roots and trunk, and the celestial world, with its foliage.⁹ The term *sacred grove* is therefore fitting for naming this specific setting. Sacred groves originate from Greek mythology and are the home of the nine muses of the arts and sciences, daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, led by the god Apollo. Religions since antiquity have used the sacred grove as the holiest location of their faith.¹⁰ Denis therefore symbiotically complemented the Christian iconography of trees with the mythological sacred grove.

The subject of the woods in Denis’s works is inspired by *The Sacred Grove, Beloved of the Arts and the Muses* that the artist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes painted in 1886 for the decor of Lyon’s Fine Arts Museum’s grand staircase (fig. 1).¹¹ Denis repeatedly voiced his admiration for the painter throughout exhibitions of Puvis de Chavannes’s works. Denis had the chance to discover Lyon’s Fine Arts Museum at the Salons of 1884 and 1886, during the Universal Exhibition of 1889, and in an exhibition at the Galerie Durand-Ruel in 1887.¹² After this last exhibition, he wrote that he appreciated the painting’s “calm and simple decorative aspect,” its “enchanting harmonies of pale tones,” and its “wise, grand and ethereal compositions.”¹³ For him, the work emitted a “soft and mysterious impression that calms and elevates.”¹⁴ Denis borrowed these elements from *The Sacred Grove* and transposed them onto his three paintings. The similarities in terms of composition and setting are palpable: the trees punctuate the picture in a rhythm that echoes the position of the muses, monumental figures who blend in harmony with the surrounding nature. While Denis’s paintings allow for contemporary signifiers such as the dresses in *April* and *The Muses* and the pieces of furniture in *The Muses*, Denis and Puvis de Chavannes both infused their scenes with stillness and timelessness. From their

fin de siècle perspective, the Greek imaginary encompasses a particular suspension of time. Additionally, with the depiction of angels and veiled women, Denis instilled his paintings with a Christian dimension fused with a deeply intimate form of mysticism. The three paintings examined in this essay are filled with a personal spirituality that has meaning beyond the unraveling processions in the woods. While the locations represented exist—the Saint-Germain-en-Laye forest and woods near Kerduel, a hamlet in Brittany—the process of the sanctification of nature transports the locus of the woods and the forest into the realm of the spiritual “sacred grove.”

My approach is inspired by the art historian Giovanni Careri’s concept of the revival of the artwork in the “Now-Time.”¹⁵ Careri has questioned the anachronism of certain elements from Caravaggio’s seventeenth-century painting *The Calling of Saint Matthew*. He concludes that the scene represented in the painting is active in the “Now-Time.”¹⁶ This means that it is revived in the viewer’s time and not exclusively limited to the “Then,” the temporality of the scene. Careri argues that “the interaction of times is being replayed by the viewer in a Now-Time that might belong to any moment in history.”¹⁷ Similarly, the three paintings from my corpus combine several temporal levels that engage with the Then and the Now-Time, at the end of the nineteenth century. The “Then comprises the elements that Denis represented on canvas, the contemporary setting in the forests and woods, the references to myths and beliefs rooted in common imaginaries, and the intimate recollections from his own consciousness. In Denis’s case, the Then itself draws from various temporal sources and blurs the lines of time’s linearity.¹⁸ Furthermore, in the Now-Time of the nineteenth-century viewer, the works’ decorative and spiritual purposes revive the representations. In this context, “to revive” in the Now-Time means “to restore to a used state” and “to renew in the mind.”¹⁹ As works meant to decorate modern interiors or to be kept private for spiritual contemplation, their purpose is revived in the viewer’s time, the Now-Time. While every work of art is concerned with revival in time through the eyes of its contemporary viewers, Denis’s paintings combine this revival with an ambiguous presence in other temporalities.

Making use of the research published in the field of cultural history, this essay focuses on three works to avoid generalizing a period’s conception and perception of the concept of time. Thus, this essay questions the way revival functions with mythical times, how a work can connect private spaces with public and linear time, and how the decorative aspect, central to Denis’s art, is articulated around the paintings’ spiritual purpose. I combine the multi-layered temporalities from Denis’s paintings and contend that they work together at the same speed to convey the representations of the sacred grove. I argue that *The Green Trees*, *The Muses*, and *April* are three paintings that synchronize multiple levels of temporality within them: spiritual, decorative, and

mythical. Temporal synchronicity is made possible by the subject of the sacred grove, which ties these levels together and grants their homogeneity and integrity within the works.

The Time of the Spiritual

Denis's "sanctification of nature"²⁰ is at the heart of his representations of sacred groves. In *The Green Trees* (fig. 2), Denis transposed the representation of the Breton landscape into the spiritual realm. As such, the grove grows into divine grace and the canvas becomes an object of intimate and spiritual contemplation. With the sanctification of nature, the representation of a mystical procession in the woods mediates the revived Now-Time of the painting.

It is important to first situate Denis's work in its specific historical and national contexts. The tense political climate in France at the end of the nineteenth century, especially surrounding the place of religion in the public sphere, stems from anticlericalism. Under the Third Republic, established in 1870, many liberal politicians expressed strong anticlerical views. Prime Minister Léon Gambetta and Minister of Public Instruction Jules Ferry put forward policies in favor of the secularization of the French Republic. They culminated in the Law Combes in 1904, prohibiting religious congregations to teach in schools, and in the Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State of 1905, instituting the secularism of the state. These policies targeted the school system and the management of church properties to place them under the direct control of the Republic.²¹ They received the approval of a large part of the population who had lost interest in the politics of the Roman Catholic Church.

However, a new political class emerged in response to the state's secularization achievements and united a portion of moderate Republicans, conservative defenders of the Catholic Church, and right-wing Monarchists.²² The coalition earned acceptability and soon found its way to the National Assembly, due in part to Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Au milieu des sollicitudes* (1893). The pope encouraged the acceptance of Republican institutions to better fight against anticlericalism. The political climate led to an increase of Christian iconographies in the arts as a response to the unfolding fight.²³

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Denis started to follow Charles Maurras's Action Française, a nationalist and royalist political movement. Denis joined the movement in favor of his faith and his strong link with the imaginary of a traditional society, "harking back to an idealized pre-revolutionary society rooted in mutuality and organic, craft-based communities,"²⁴ as opposed to "the dizzying whirlwind of modern life."²⁵ The group was known for its Far Right and anti-Semitic politics, but Denis has not been documented



Figure 2 Maurice Denis, The Green Trees, or Beech Trees in Kerduel, oil on canvas, 46.3 × 42.8 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 1893. Photograph taken by author and used with permission.

as an active participant in political events of this nature (e.g., anti-Dreyfus protests).²⁶ Arguably, Denis's involvement with the politics of the time was primarily expressed through his aspirations as an artist.

The strategies of secularization during the second half of the nineteenth century enhanced the individual practice of the Catholic faith and led to a particular current of mysticism.²⁷ Mysticism allows one to approach the mysteries of existence, to experiment with self-renunciation and the unity between nature and the cosmos.²⁸ One searched for the answers to the mysteries of life and faith on an individual level rather than relying solely on the dictate of religious institutions. The theologian and philosopher Michel Despland sees during the second half of the nineteenth century a practice of religion that was anchored in modern times, whose focus on individuality and intimacy favored religious autobiographical writings.²⁹ He asserts that the "religious experience in the nineteenth century is more overtly anchored within the life of the subject."³⁰

Furthermore, the specific political and cultural context of the fin de siècle led to a “reactionary” type of mysticism.³¹ According to the literary scholar Robert Ziegler, fin de siècle mystics substantially opposed “Auguste Comte’s Positivist assertion of mankind’s progress toward scientific enlightenment” in order to gain knowledge “obtainable only from divine sources, insights that were yielded only by non-rational intuition.”³² While authors and critics such as Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly and Joris-Karl Huysmans revisited the writings of canonical mystics Teresa of Ávila and Angela of Foligno,³³ contemporary mystics also emerged during the period. Eugène Vintras, who claimed he received visits of St. Michael the archangel and was the reincarnation of the prophet Elijah, professed a heterodoxy that connected the worshipper directly to God without the sanction of the church.³⁴ Following his Order of Mercy, some fin de siècle Decadents, “wishing to reformulate an Eternal Gospel delivered to them directly, . . . were resolved to heed, not the pronouncements of the Vatican, but the voice of Christ himself.”³⁵ Vintras’s mysticism also merged with eschatological beliefs, seeing in the period the “signs of the world’s end . . . found in the triumph of capitalism over faith, in the decay of morals, in the institutional corruption of the Church.”³⁶ This example of extreme heterodoxy does not necessarily apply to all the proponents of mysticism during the period, but illuminates how religion turned toward the individual and the intimate as opposed to orthodox and doctrinal practices of faith.

Mysticism, as an ineffable experience,³⁷ was favored by artists and writers during the period. Joséphin Péladan, writer and mystic, bridged the literary and artistic circles with his Rosicrucian Salon that he opened in 1890 to present the works of Symbolist artists.³⁸ Undoubtedly, this trend of mysticism enlarged the visionary power of the artist. While Despland considers God, in this context, as “imagination’s regulator,”³⁹ the literary scholar Lydie Parisse analyzes a redefinition of the artist’s status within a materialist society in this period.⁴⁰ Mysticism, she argues, allows for the “expansion of artistic perception and creative possibilities” by disrupting society’s order and materialism.⁴¹ This trend of mysticism seduced many artists in pursuit of a renewed spiritual art.⁴² The artists, sensible to the constructions and the harmony of nature, could access the world’s beauty and its truth via the device of the work of art.

The mystical concept of the Absolute entails the attainment of pure and unconditional faith in God.⁴³ In Latin, *mysticus* stands for the “initiated.”⁴⁴ Although Denis was profoundly Catholic, the mystical current of the period infiltrated his faith and art during the two last decades of the nineteenth century. Denis mentioned the mystical influence that instilled his faith at that time in a reflective recollection in 1909 in the magazine *L’Occident*: “Our [the Nabis] aspirations to mysticism were not, to tell the truth, always orthodox.”⁴⁵ I suggest that *The Green Trees* represents the mystical quest of the Absolute through the process of initiation, close to Denis’s personal experience. The procession

in *The Green Trees* encapsulates the mystical meaning of the scene, a quest after which an isolated figure, the initiated one, distinguishes herself from the others and joins the angel, through whom she can attain the Absolute.⁴⁶

The procession leading to the Absolute, through the angel, calls for several interpretations that Denis combined all together. First, the procession is the spiritual journey through devotion, after which the isolated woman at the center of the composition can finally attain the Absolute. Since childhood, processions of young women inspired Denis. They were communicants about to either receive Holy Communion or partake in a religious ceremony, for instance, in honor of the Virgin Mary. They are a recurring subject in Denis's oeuvre. However, the figures in *The Green Trees* are completely deindividualized. A clue as to where this fascination started can be found in his diary, where he wrote in 1884, after watching a procession for the Virgin in celebration of the Assumption: "Procession of young girls for the Virgin; these children of Mary are charming with their white veils: candor, modesty, angels."⁴⁷ Since the age of fourteen, Denis reiterated his obsession for the theme of processions on canvas, which he meshed with a mystical spirit of deindividualization.

Second, the procession symbolizes the path toward artistic creation. Denis portrayed the religious ideal that the Christian artist aspires to reach. At the end of her spiritual journey, the isolated figure reaches the Absolute in faith, a goal that Denis, as a deeply devout Christian painter, was aspiring to reach himself.⁴⁸ His model was Fra Angelico, whose level of sanctity he continually aspired to attain. Denis worshipped him as a saint, thought about writing his biography,⁴⁹ requested his beatification,⁵⁰ and painted a pseudo relic of his head.⁵¹ Denis considered the *Coronation of the Virgin* as the absolute masterwork in the Louvre,⁵² and dreamed of dedicating his first painting presented at the Official Salon to him.⁵³ He admired the painter's profound faith as much as his works, from which he borrowed several formal features, namely, the boxlike composition and the division of the composition into defined sections that each correspond to a secular or sacred space. By embracing Fra Angelico's legacy, as manifested in this representation of the spiritual journey toward the Absolute in faith, Denis materialized his ambition of becoming a Christian painter.

Third, I consider the isolated figure to represent a newly married woman. Allegorically, absolute faith may be attained through the sacrament of marriage. This last interpretation has a personal meaning for Denis. He painted *The Green Trees* during his honeymoon in Brittany after his wedding with Marthe Meurier, a woman he adored in an almost religious way. Beginning with their engagement earlier in 1893, she became his ultimate muse, the main subject of his paintings, and his primary source of inspiration.⁵⁴

Denis intertwined these three interpretations (the spiritual journey, artistic creation, and marriage) in *The Green Trees*. They all entail a spiritual and

personal signification through the mystical quest, the idea of the initiated one, and the attainment of absolute faith. The sacred grove, through which the procession is taking place, accentuates the spirituality of this journey toward faith. Denis elevated the grove to the level of a “metaphysical sanctuary”⁵⁵ that hosts the subjects of revelation and election in the course of a mystical meeting.⁵⁶ The seven women are dressed in pink veils and what can be described as vestments, which add to the spiritual meaning of the scene. While pink is traditionally worn by the clergy during Gaudete Sunday in Advent and Laetare Sunday in Lent to bring a sense of joy during a season of penance,⁵⁷ Denis might have used this color solely for a decorative purpose to complement the green of the trees. The trees punctuate the procession, dividing the group into two clusters of four and two figures. The initiated woman leading the procession stands at the center of the composition. The background on which the figures are painted consists of distant woods, making a clear distinction between the earth and the sky, the location of the holy. The hedge that passes between the angel and the leading figure symbolically delimits the secular world and the sacred realm. This spatial distinction adds to the distinction between the earth, populated by the trees and the angel created by God, and the heavenly realm of the sky that only God can access. Not even the angel’s silhouette stands against the sky. Only the trees, rooted in the ground and raising to God, make the spatial connection between these two realms.

Denis crystallized *The Green Trees* into eternity, not only by the mere act of applying pigments on canvas to form a perennial narrative object, but also by the process of the sanctification of nature, which first emerged in his “Definition of Neo-Traditionalism” in 1890. A year earlier, in his diary, Denis included the first reference to the sanctification of nature: “I believe that Art ought to sanctify nature; I believe that Vision without Spirit is vain; and that it is the aesthete’s mission do erect beautiful things into unfading icons.”⁵⁸ The passage includes a temporal reference to the process of sanctification making objects permanent. Denis turned *The Green Trees* into a spiritual object that holds even more enduring value than a regular painting. Nature, too, holds a deeper spiritual meaning than the one embedded in the sole representation of the mystical scene. Nature reinforces its spiritual force by becoming an everlasting power on canvas. By sanctifying nature, Denis presents the painting with a temporal potential that expands beyond the restrictions of the subject.

The sanctification of nature extends the temporality in *The Green Trees*. This process locates the scene in Denis’s time. Denis revived the purpose of *The Green Trees*, a spiritual object, every time he contemplated its spiritual meaning, as the painting invited him to engage in contemplative prayer. Denis kept this work close to him his entire life. It stayed in his house in Saint-Germain-en-Laye from 1893 until his death in 1943. His son stated that *The Green Trees* was the painting that Denis was the most deeply attached to and that it

represented a synthesis of his life and aesthetic.⁵⁹ Its symbolism revolves around his own artistic and marital ambition. Therefore, the painter himself regularly revived and renewed the purpose of the painting by contemplating this initiatory quest, complicating the temporality of the work. Denis revived the aura of the work every time he used it as a spiritual object, while the sacred space it represented is located beyond the tangibility of Denis's world. The Maurice Denis scholar Jean-Paul Bouillon stated that "the icon has a theoretical dimension that ensures its immutability, inscribing in the visible the essence of the invisible, love, and faith."⁶⁰ Rather than sharing the assumption that a painting such as *The Green Trees* is a traditional Christian icon, I view it as a spiritual painting that leads to contemplation. However, Bouillon's mention of a sense of permanence in the painting's materiality as well as in the representation of the essence of things reinforces the idea of the spiritual image's everlasting time. With regard to temporality, *The Green Trees* as a spiritual painting is as much embedded in the time of the spiritual as it is in the Now-Time of the late nineteenth century.

The Time of the Decorative

The decorative—a work's formal elements in connection with its purpose to ornament—is at the center of the Nabis' art. The artists placed themselves under the guidance of Paul Gauguin, whom some had met in person and previously worked with, while others such as Denis only knew from the 1889 exhibition of his works at the Café Volpini. Denis commented about the Café Volpini exhibitions: "What an amazement . . . Instead of windows open to nature, such as in impressionist paintings, these were highly decorated surfaces, heavily colored, and contoured with a sharp line."⁶¹ The *cloisonnisme* style was a central formal feature of Nabis paintings and drawings, as was the particular interest in decorative elements inspired by Japanese woodblock prints. The art historian Laura Auricchio notes: "Their works celebrate pattern and ornament, challenge the boundaries that divide fine arts from crafts, and . . . complement the interiors for which they were commissioned."⁶² The group considered Paul Sérusier's painting *The Talisman* as their relic and visual manifesto. It embodied the decorative purpose, the flatness and the vibration of the colors established as the Nabis' formal canon.⁶³

The trees and their environment offer Denis the suitable subject to put his theories on the decorative into practice. In a diary entry from 1885, Denis described one of his excursions into the Saint-Germain-en-Laye forest with an emphasis on the decorative aspect of the trees: "I am reaching a delightful part of the forest where there are tall and crooked trees, twisted, bushy, disposed



Figure 3 Maurice Denis, *The Muses*, oil on canvas, 171 × 137.5 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 1893. Photograph taken by author and used with permission.

apart, some yellow, some green, others gray. To an artist's eye, this is so beautiful one could feel faint, but we ought to study it with a brush in hand, to render the effects of the sun, the light, the *plein air*, the shadows, the *chiaroscuro*.”⁶⁴ In this early example, Denis was already interested in rendering the forest's decorative effects on canvas. The decorative is at the heart of his first artistic period and is one of the main subjects he theorized. In his “Preface to the Ninth Exhibition of Impressionist and Symbolist Painters” of 1895, Denis reiterated the celebrated phrase from the “Definition of Neo-Traditionalism” of 1890 concerning the flatness of the surface with colors assembled in a certain order, adding that this order aimed at “the pleasures of the eyes.”⁶⁵ Thus

the decorative is composed of the structural elements of the flat canvas and the white surface on which colors are compiled to form an intelligible representation for the purpose of delighting the viewer.

In *The Muses* (fig. 3), Denis made use of the formal elements of the grove to offer a decorative scene. The formal elements constituting the decorative acquire meaning of their own on a metaphorical spatiotemporal level. To the viewer in the Now-Time who contemplates the formal elements, they appear in their own distinct temporality. The formal elements do not gain full autonomy from the subject. However, while they are still connected to the subject of the scene, Denis granted them substantial significance.⁶⁶ Since the formal elements evolve in their own spatiality, they acquire a temporality that is separate from the subject of the scene. Both fuel each other and bond with each other; however, they operate on different levels. While the temporality of the subject in *The Muses* relates to the time of the action represented, the temporality of the formal elements and the decorative works with spatiality. On the spatiotemporal level of the decorative, the formal elements evolve over the space of the canvas, a “flat surface covered with colours, put together in a certain order.”⁶⁷ They create meaning through the way Denis used lines, colors, and forms. Thus the decorative has its own temporality that is embedded into the spatiality of the canvas.

The Muses represents the nine muses of the arts and sciences, joined by a tenth one in the background, sitting leisurely on chairs in the foreground or wandering amid the trees of the sacred grove. The entirety of the painting’s formal elements falls within the decorative. Denis first exhibited it in 1893 under the name “Panneau décoratif” after its commission by Arthur Fontaine, a senior bureaucrat in the French government and one of the Nabis’ wealthy patrons.⁶⁸ Many devices convey the decorative in the painting. Instead of a representation in traditional perspective, Denis opted for the horizontal stacking of the composition’s planes, thus enhancing its flatness. The figures’ silhouettes, despite shrinking in the background for an illusion of depth, nonetheless seem to have been pasted onto the canvas’s flat surface. The forest’s ground rising evenly from the foreground to the background to the horizon line over the top half of the painting intensifies this impression. Denis contoured the silhouettes and all the elements with dark lines that distinguish the forms from one another. The viewer is drawn to consider them as single forms pasted on a background, rather than mimetic figures realistically placed in a surrounding environment. The monumentality of the figures in the foreground participates in troubling the composition. Since they are the only three figures whose silhouettes are entirely outlined on the forest’s ground—the others partly emerge on the sky in the background—they are visually processed as a unified group that is set aside. Moreover, in the foreground, over the forest’s ground, there is no room for blank spaces or gaps. Smooth coats of paint cover

every inch, reinforcing the decorative aspect of the work, as Denis did not modulate the representation with variations of strokes or thickness. All these elements participate in making the decorative a subject of its own in the painting.

The influence of Japanese woodblock prints infuses the decorative in *The Muses*.⁶⁹ The arabesque—the sinuous line found in the patterns of the muses' dresses, their folds and in the trees' foliage—is a typical motif of ukiyo-e prints from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷⁰ The arabesque is central to Denis's visual language, as he favored it above traditional and mimetic forms in the representations of nature. To Denis, the arabesque reproduces the movement and the sentiments of the interior self.⁷¹ It becomes an autonomous visual device that bears meaning of its own. The folds of the muses' dresses resemble the folds of the kimonos in Suzuki Harunobu's print *Bushclover at Tamagawa* created around 1765, showing the embrace of two women on the banks of the Tama River (fig. 4). In Harunobu's art, representations of folds on fabric are a form of expression that characterizes the character's emotion.⁷² The undulating hem at the bottom of the kimono worn by the woman in the foreground re-creates the character's internal feelings. Denis replicated the same motif in *The Muses* on the dress worn by the woman on the right in the foreground, and at the bottom of the black dress on the far left. Moreover, the merging of the figures in Denis's paintings is an evocation of Harunobu's print. In *Bushclover at Tamagawa*, the two characters standing next to each other are bending forward in a comparable manner, the fabrics of their kimonos indissociable and their hand gestures impossible to attribute to one or the other. The mirroring of the same gesture has the effect of intensifying the expressivity of the print as well as the unity of the two figures.⁷³ Denis made use of a similar decorative motif in *The Muses*: the figures are not merged as in Harunobu's print; however, the positions of their bodies echo one another. The muse on the far left, dressed in black, parallels the head position of the muse in black in the foreground. Similarly, the muse turning her back at the viewer in the foreground echoes, with the position of her head, the muse standing across from her more deeply into the woods. The repetition of the movements and poses, as well as the expressive folds of the dresses worn by the muses, is a direct reference to Harunobu's print, presumably displayed in 1890 at the Exhibition of Japanese woodblock prints at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Denis was known to be an avid collector of Japanese prints,⁷⁴ and it seems probable that he visited this exhibition and directly took his inspiration from the decorative motifs of Harunobu's *Bushclover at Tamagawa*.

The line as a stylistic element is central to *The Muses* and is critical to promote the subject of the sacred grove as the vector for the decorative. Additionally, the line participates in making the decorative a subject of its own in the painting. The decorative line plays a role in unifying the entire picture and



Figure 4 Suzuki Harunobu, Bushclover at Tamagawa (Six Jewel River), woodcut, 27.7 × 20.8 cm. Washington, DC, Library of Congress, 1766–68.

uses the formal features of the sacred grove and its muses to achieve the purpose of this “Decorative panel.” The graphic and sinuous line that Denis reiterated throughout the picture creates the visual association between the muses and the forest. *The Muses* was painted in the midst of the Art Nouveau trend that had been spreading in the decorative arts across Europe since 1890. Art Nouveau found its highest form of the decorative in the association between nature and the female body, conveyed by the decorative line.⁷⁵ The sinuous forms carved in the foliage of the trees onto the sky on the upper half of the painting resemble the patterns on the muses’ dresses in the foreground. These

forms, comparable to the fabric, play with the positive-negative effect of the colors: the leaves create patterns in their aggregation on the trees. On the sky, the space made by these patterns' silhouettes outlines the sinuous forms. This decorative device is used on the fabric of the dresses: the pattern on the collar of the dress worn by the muse on the left in the foreground is easily understandable as yellow arabesques arranged on a red background. However, down the arms and the bust, the red of the dress becomes less legible: it re-creates patterns of flower petals and arabesques. The muse's dress is a copy of a natural effect that Denis must have witnessed himself when examining the decorative presence in nature. The positive-negative device can also be found on the forest ground and its bed of leaves. Alternating between red and orange—similar colors to the dresses—the ground complicates the contrast with the leaves that fall on it.

A second example of the association between the muses and nature is situated around the verticality of the trees. The trees, sparsely arranged in the picture, delimitate specific areas for the position of the muses, who congregate around them in clusters of two or three. The two muses on the left side of the painting, dressed in black and brown gowns, parallel the two trees that surround them through the verticality of their silhouettes and their consistent broadness from the shoulders down to the feet. Moreover, the tree trunks' irregularities and surface bumps are mirrored by the dresses' movements in their folds. The brown gown's train, touching the ground in the back, is extremely similar to the roots of the tree on its right side. Similarly, these elements approach the ground vertically and grow horizontally upon reaching it. Furthermore, the pale hand and fingers, emerging on the black gown worn by the muse of the left, outline a circular form that resembles the knot on the lower level of the tree trunk in the foreground. Thus, the formal features of the grove in *The Muses*—the trunks, the leaves, the ground—allow Denis to put his theories on the decorative into practice. The decorative brings forth a spatiotemporality in the painting that entangles the subject of the muses in the woods with the formal features that have become subjects in their own right.

In the second half of the century, a plurality of theories of time and space challenged the establishment of the universal public time that the International Meridian Conference had established in 1884 in Washington. The idea of a private time distinct from the public time culminated in the work of Henri Bergson, who questioned whether the fixed public time “was really time at all” or some metaphysical interloper that disguised a multitude of times.⁷⁶ Thus, two conceptions of time opposed each other during the period: the short time inherent to the modern world, and the long time, the time of Darwinian evolutionism and old myths that Symbolist painters revisited.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the traditional idea of space was challenged by the leveling of aristocratic society, the rise of democracy, and the dissolution of the distinction between the sacred

and profane spaces of religion.⁷⁸ These reconsiderations resulted in the blurring of established temporal and spatial markers. Consequently, a culture of pessimism developed that opposed the value and the safety of technological progress with regard to speed, time-measuring techniques, and communication devices. Another challenge to public and universal time was the search for meaning in the private, enclosed spaces of domestic apartments.⁷⁹ The home was detached from its sole familiar functions and “reinvented as a space for rêverie and contemplation.”⁸⁰ This quest for privacy and intimacy was related to the reaction against the rationalization of public time. The diffusion of the pocket watch and the worldwide standardization of time to simplify railroad schedules and communication by telegraphs all indicate the rationalization of time at the end of the nineteenth century.⁸¹ The domination of the individual and their own private time and mental space over the exterior’s balances this rationalization of time in public spaces.

The time of privacy in the decorative propels *The Muses* into a complex temporal level outside the subject of the scene: the Now-Time. The scene is set in the forest; however, several elements hint at a transposition into a domestic interior. The bed of leaves covering more than half of the background simulates an interior carpet that might coat the flooring of a home during the fin de siècle period. Vuillard’s *Causerie chez les Fontaine* shows such an interior, where the carpet pattern is composed of a dense bed of leaves.⁸² The ground’s positive-negative effect of the leaves on the ground in *The Muses* embeds nature with the decorative and recalls Art Nouveau’s inclination for natural motifs in interior decors. Moreover, the three muses in the foreground are sitting on wooden chairs that do not belong in a forest or a public park. These are modern chairs whose bottom part and legs evoke French Art Nouveau, especially Hector Guimard’s furniture style.⁸³ The costumes that two of the three muses are wearing recall clothing modern to Denis’s time. The figure on the right elegantly turns her back on us, only revealing the start of her neck and her shoulders. She wears an evening dress, accompanied by a mauve shawl placed on the back of her chair. The muse on the left is dressed in a two-colored gown, a daytime dress far less revealing than the evening dress worn by the other muse. The visual connection between the tree leaves, the ground, and the patterns of the dresses’ fabric evokes the homogeneity of the Art Nouveau interiors with the repetition of the same motifs. The tree leaves on the upper half of the composition could even resemble the decorative moldings carved along the edges of ceilings in bourgeois décors, such as in the interior in Vuillard’s *Causerie chez les Fontaine*.

The fact that Denis painted *The Muses* as a home decor accentuates the impression of a decorative interior. No precise details concerning the specificities of the commission are available; however, a view of the Fontaines’ apartment tells us more about the setting of the painting. Vuillard painted *Causerie*

chez les Fontaine in 1904, three years after the Fontaine couple moved out of their apartment in the eighth arrondissement of Paris to settle in the seventh arrondissement, in 2 avenue de Villars. Vuillard's painting represents the Fontaines' living room, where *The Muses* hangs on the wall above the sofa where Mrs. Fontaine is sitting, across from Mr. Fontaine resting on a chair. This apartment is not the initial one for *The Muses*, but perhaps this second living room was intended as the ideal frame for the presentation of the couple's art collection. *The Muses* is the centerpiece of the room, from what Vuillard allows us to see. The bed of leaves re-creates the patterns of the Persian carpets and its colors, and the tree leaves evoke the house plants dispersed around the room as well as the moldings on the ceiling. The chairs on which the muses in the foreground are sitting recall Mr. Fontaine's chair, and the vertical tree behind the muse on the left of this cluster parallels the wall beside Mr. Fontaine's chair. Thus, the decorative elements from the Fontaines' time and the setting of the modern home revive *The Muses* in the Now-Time.

The Time of Myth

April (fig. 5) locates the sacred grove in an existing forest, the Saint-Germain-en-Laye forest in the Parisian suburbs. Concerning the location of this representation, the temporality of the scene—figures walking along a wooden path—is complicated by the mythical temporality infusing the representation and deindividualizing the forest. Denis not only set the painting in his beloved forest; he also set it in a sacred grove rooted in ancient myths. Furthermore, the forest allows him to meditate on the spiritual cycle of life as he idealizes it. Adding to Denis's defined practice of Catholic faith and to his ideal vision of life from betrothment to marriage, myths here do not relate to devotion but to collective references shared by a society in need of an escape from modernity. *April's* sacred grove originates from a mythical imaginary and responds to common needs from an increasingly secularized and fragmented society during the fin de siècle. The cyclical temporality represented in the painting also responds to society's—or more so Denis's—need to return to an imagined simplicity of life. *April* displays this escape from modernity through a mythical imaginary as well as the painter's Christian ideal.

In *April*, time materializes in the representation of the cycle of life. With marital symbolism close to Denis's heart, *April* portrays the sacred grove populated by four figures walking or halting along paths that meander between the trees. The figures, I argue, are representations of the same individual in different stages in her life. Denis bends linear time to represent the same figure several times as she progresses along the spiritual path. The young woman in the foreground, positioned at the beginning of the path as it crosses the canvas, is



Figure 5 Maurice Denis, *April, or The Anemones*, oil on canvas, 65 × 78 cm. Private collection, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1891. Photograph taken by author and used with permission.

a newly engaged woman, as the anemones she is picking up and the traditional engagement tiara on her head suggest.⁸⁴ She has successfully stayed pure and chaste despite the temptations. Below her, near the edge of the painting, rises a thorn bush, symbolizing the thorns of evil that she managed to avoid during her youth on her way to betrothal.⁸⁵ Backward along the path, a newly married woman dressed in a white gown signifies the second stage of the spiritual life. She replicates the position of the young betrothed in the foreground. Kneeling, she too is picking anemones. She appears with her gown to be a new white bloom growing on the shrub, finally growing to be a woman of faith in marriage. The act of picking up flowers evokes the bride's flower bouquet on her wedding day. The evolution between the two women is that of the development of the faith the married woman dedicated her life to in the act of marriage. While the young betrothed has only recently arrived on the path of spiritual life, brave survivor of the thorn bush of temptations, the married woman is a fruit of the shrub of faith and love.

The spiritual path then leads to two walking figures in the background. The couple, dressed in black overcoats and hats, holds an umbrella and progresses leftward on a path that is not as clear and notable as the one presented with the two young women along it. This couple, assuming that it is constituted

by a woman and a man, is the married couple that has resulted from the betrothal and the marriage of the two previous figures. The woman, the central character of *April*, has now fully entered her married life. Faith has fully united them in their spiritual journey, and they now wander along the path of life jointly. However, a sinister connotation looms over the pair. Dressed in black, they are now heading toward the end of their lives, toward the left side of the painting where only the sky is visible in the background. Therefore, the aging couple is heading toward the dusk of their lives already peaking in the distance before they embark on their eternal life together. Painted during the early days of his relationship with Marthe Meurier, *April* introduces the symbolism of matrimony, a subject he continued to paint throughout his career.

Denis gave no indication regarding the identity of the woman represented thrice—nor did he for her husband. She is faceless, deindividualized. Her only characteristics are her clothing, her bent-over position, and her demeanor walking alongside her husband. These traits do not relate to any sort of individuality. They are, rather, what Denis could think of as the prerequisites for a spiritual life. Denis did not represent a particular woman as she enters the different stages of her spirituality; he represented a generic vision of womanhood along its spiritual journey. He represented not only the linear life of a woman but also the ongoing process of life that runs cyclically and endlessly. This woman exists solely in the painter's imagination and on the canvas, where her role is to offer a didactic model encapsulating the spirituality one must follow on the journey of life. The thorn bush, the anemones, and the shrub signify what one should tend to or avoid, and the trees serve as the spiritual foundation of this contemplative work in which Denis sanctified nature. In *April*, the grove, populated by its "soul figures," shows the way Denis viewed the cycle of spiritual life.

Beyond the representation of Denis's Christian ideal, *April* displays fin de siècle society's need for mythical imaginaries. According to the philosopher Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, an imaginary (*un imaginaire*) is a set of productions, mental or materialized in works, based on visual (painting, drawing, photograph) and linguistic images (metaphor, symbol, tale).⁸⁶ It forms coherent and dynamic ensembles that fall within the symbolic function as they modify or enrich perceived or conceived reality.⁸⁷ Thus, an imaginary has the symbolic function of replacing the present with a concrete representation of what is absent, what is no more, or what is not here yet.⁸⁸ An imaginary can manifest through the representation of memories and anticipations from variations of the reality, or it can project desires onto this newly formed reality.⁸⁹ At the level of society as a whole, a collective imaginary responds to a general need for a new—or renewed—reality. Through an imaginary, society attempts to escape its present reality and dive into a fantasized past, present, or future. An imaginary is never entirely situated in a timeless temporality, referring to immemorial

times: it is a contemporary answer to a contemporary need to escape. It is a fantasy that may never manifest into reality, but that nonetheless refers to the past, to myths, to ideals. Therefore, collective imaginaries belong to a specific period in time, as they are the result of a need from this period's society. Art is the medium through which this realization is materialized.

In *April*, Denis manifests his own blend of Christian and mythical imaginaries as much as society's—or at a minimum his circle's. The transposition of the sacred grove onto his beloved Saint-Germain-en-Laye forest is a response to the fin de siècle desire for nature and mythical roots. The setting of the sacred grove bears ancient signification. In *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, the anthropologist James George Frazer discusses the meaning of the forest in the history of Europe. The continent used to be covered with immense primeval forests, “in which the scattered clearings must have appeared like islets in an ocean of green.”⁹⁰ The natural component of the continent's geography has played a major role in the worship of trees since prehistorical times. In Denis's time, rapid urbanization and motorization led to attacks against Paris in the context of immediacy and “here-and-now” mentality.⁹¹ The city no longer exerted the strong hold on the artistic imagination that it had a decade or two earlier. This, too, is related to how time was perceived and conceived during the period. The Prussian philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel associated the intensification of nervous stimulation of urban life with the temporal exactitude of pocket watches and universal time.⁹² According to Simmel, “The technique of metropolitan life is unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and natural relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule.”⁹³ This hyper-nervous stimulation resulted in the flight from the city.⁹⁴ Artists of the Parisian avant-garde were mostly en route “to places . . . in which only nature herself could provide the assurance of authenticity.”⁹⁵ Nature is the guardian of this exodus.⁹⁶

In *April*, the flight from the city is more mental than physical. This is where myths are significant. *April* does not refer to a specific myth that Denis would have attempted to portray following his own iconography. It is, rather, an amalgam of the myths rooted in Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian belief systems: the Garden of Eden, the Earthly Paradise, and the Elysian Fields. The reference to myths is a distinct recourse to a collective imaginary. According to the art historian Gilles Genty, the myth is “the guardian of symbolic stability in the group for whom it stands at the center of cosmogony.”⁹⁷ The meaning of the myth therefore lies in its social function within the group as much as in the group's collective system of beliefs. The Garden of Eden and the earthly paradise, Umberto Eco argues, are places of nostalgia that many would like to bring back but that are objects of endless quests.⁹⁸ Upon the origin of the world, they were the places where people used to live in a state of bliss and innocence that humankind has lost. Representing the Garden of Eden and the

earthly paradise therefore means to enter a universe before the Fall located outside reality's temporality. The Elysium, in Greco-Roman beliefs, symbolizes a similar imaginary. The Elysian Fields were the location of the afterlife for heroes and highly regarded mortals. While the poet Horace conceived them as a form of escapism from an unpleasant reality following the worries caused by civil wars in Roman society,⁹⁹ Virgil focused on the description of the idyllic setting.¹⁰⁰

Denis blended Christian and Greco-Roman myths to create a distinctive representation of the escape from reality. In the sacred grove, the ideal location for the portrayal of a collective imaginary, Denis represented a fantasized journey through a life that avoids dangers and follows faith from betrothment to marriage and death. The scene's timelessness mitigated by the contemporary clothing worn by the characters belongs to a golden age that never existed and that Denis did not believe would ever manifest. The need to escape from the city and to attain a golden age of peace and pure faith expands human duration to an infinity. *April* encapsulates "all the virtualities of a former life on which our present being would retain the memory."¹⁰¹ Genty further suggests that "through an aesthetics of synthesis, of subtraction, of clarification, the Sacred Wood via the suggestion of a dreamlike Arcadia seems to reactuate a mythical past, a Golden Age."¹⁰² Thus, in a period in which traditional values and Catholic faith were reclaimed, Denis rooted *April* in a collective imaginary that takes the form of a timeless scene and responds to fin de siècle society's need to flee the urbanized environment and to escape in idealized nature.

Conclusion

By "modernity" I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. . . . In short, for any "modernity" to be worthy of one day taking its place as "antiquity," it is necessary for the mysterious beauty which human life accidentally puts into it to be distilled from it.

—Charles Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne"

In *The Green Trees*, *The Muses*, and *April*, Maurice Denis encapsulated multiple temporal levels that he sought to coordinate homogeneously. He embedded the levels of the spiritual, the decorative, and the mythical into each painting and articulated them around one another; the works entail temporal synchronicity. During the period that saw the rise of the universalization of public time, the increasing speed of the means of communication, and in turn the progressive confinement of individuals in their private spheres, these three paintings

indicate Denis's interest in bringing diverging temporalities together to form synchronicity in art. The sacred grove is the unifying tool with which Denis could complete his endeavor. Bearing a strong spiritual meaning, the sacred grove is more than the mere representation of woods and forests.

Since antiquity, the sacred grove was the holiest location of some religions.¹⁰³ Through the process of the sanctification of nature that emerged as one of Denis's most central theories, the representations of the sacred grove hold a spiritual purpose.¹⁰⁴ With the grove's sanctity, Denis conceptualized his paintings as spiritual works, infused with the time of the religion while being revived in the Now-Time. The power of nature is central to this sanctity. Denis made use of the woods' formal elements to emphasize this decorative potential. The trees' silhouettes, colors, and visual relation with the ground and the figures inhabiting it all participate in the decorative potentiality of the woods. To this, Denis added the Nabis' *cloisonnisme* style, which is apparent in the flatness of the picture plane and the silhouettes contoured with a dark line. The sacred grove's formal aspect is set on the spatiotemporal level of the decorative, as formal elements bear embedded meaning. The paintings' purpose as decorative works that complement modern interior decors introduces the Now-Time and private time. Furthermore, the sacred grove is rooted in Greco-Roman and Christian myths. While the ancient time of myths permeates Denis's paintings, the myths emerge from common imaginaries that necessarily materialize as an answer to society's needs at a specific moment in time. Here, the imaginaries of the earthly paradise, the Garden of Eden, and the Elysian Fields illustrate the fin de siècle determination to return to a "primitive" nature in harmony with its inhabitants. Denis represented the collective imaginaries from a deeply personal perspective. He animated the time of the myths with his own iconographies, whether through the deindividualized figures; his wife, Marthe Meurier; or the idealized mystical procession. He combined his private temporality with collective imaginaries and myths. Through the subject of the sacred grove, Denis homogenized in a synchronous manner timelessness, ancient times, and the Now-Time, connected private spaces with collective time, and articulated the spiritual through the decorative.

This essay explored three of Maurice Denis's paintings in depth and closely examined the modalities of the representation of time. Time is a fruitful approach for the study of fin de siècle artistic production. It allows the art historian to uncover the complex function of the subject represented in Symbolist painting, so often balancing timelessness and a reaction to modernity. Adding to the study of fin de siècle temporalities, the focus on the representation of woods and forests unveils the period's need to "sense place." By situating forests at the heart of his artistic production in the 1890s, Denis embedded the rituals of processions and spiritual contemplation into what was then generally considered fleeting and disappearing: nature untouched by man. As

an emblem of the return to origins, through Denis's characteristic blend of Christian and Greco-Roman imaginaries, the forest left the fin de siècle to enter eternity.

* * *

Lucile Cordonnier is a PhD student in art history at McGill University. After her undergraduate studies at the École du Louvre and the Université Paris Nanterre, she pursued her master's degree at Concordia University. Her doctoral research examines questions of time and temporalities in late nineteenth-century French art, with a particular focus on the Nabis group.

Notes

¹ Maurice Denis, *Journal, Tome I: 1884–1904* (Paris: Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1957), 130. All English translations from French are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

² Thérèse Barruel, "Chronologie," in *Maurice Denis (1870–1943)*, edited by Guy Cogeval (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994), 356.

³ The first mention of the Saint-Germain-en-Laye forest appeared in his diary on August 1, 1885, where he related his admiration for "[les] grands arbres crochus, tordus, grands, touffus, espacés, les uns jaunes, les autres verts, les autres gris" (Denis, *Journal*, 37).

⁴ Barruel, "Chronologie," 356.

⁵ Jean-Paul Bouillon, "Le théoricien," in *Maurice Denis (1870–1943)*, edited by Jean-Paul Bouillon (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2006), 33.

⁶ Maurice Denis, "Définition du Néo-traditionnisme," *Art et Critique*, August 1890, 545.

⁷ See Richard Thomson and Belinda Thomson, "Maurice Denis's 'Définition du Néo-traditionnisme' and Anti-Naturalism," *Burlington Magazine* 154, no. 1309 (2012): 260–67; Kerstin Thomas, "Maurice Denis et l'exemple de Puvis de Chavannes: Vers une nouvelle 'Valeur Sentimentale' dans l'art," *48/18 La Revue du Musée d'Orsay*, no. 23 (Fall 2006): 34–45.

⁸ Denis, "Définition du Néo-traditionnisme," 548.

⁹ The concept of the *arbor vitae* closely relates to this idea. See Gaston Duchet-Suchaux and Michel Pastoureau, *La Bible et les Saints: Guide iconographique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 13; and Suzanna B. Simor, "The Tree of the Credo," *Analecta Husserliana* 66 (2000): 45. The sacred grove also appears in the Old

Testament under the term *Asherah*. “The Vulgate . . . understood Asherah to mean ‘grove,’ translating it as *lucus*, ‘wood’ or ‘grove.’” It designates a place where the trees were worshipped. However, theologians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contested this interpretation. While some “equated Asherah with the goddess Astarte or her symbol,” some claimed “that Asherah always denoted a wooden pole, but some others thought in terms of an image, a tree, or a phallic symbol.” See John Day, “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature,” *Society of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 3 (1986): 397–98, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260509>.

¹⁰ Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abr. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 126, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-00400-3>. It is important to note the relevance of Frazer’s anthropological research for Denis and his time. *The Golden Bough* is a historical source, and as such, some of its analyses and factual content are outdated.

¹¹ Thomas, “Maurice Denis et l’exemple de Puvis de Chavannes,” 41.

¹² Sylvie Patry, “Il y avait en Puvis de Chavannes l’étoffe d’un grand orateur chrétien,” in Bouillon, *Maurice Denis (1870–1943)*, 39.

¹³ Denis, *Journal*, 42, quoted in Jean-Paul Bouillon, *Maurice Denis* (Geneva: Skira, 1993), 66.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Giovanni Careri, “Heterochronies: The Gospel According to Caravaggio,” in *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology and Anachrony*, edited by Dan Karlholm and Keith Moxey (New York: Routledge, 2018), 152, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315229409>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ On the subject of linearity in literary and graphic arts, see C. D. Keyes, “Art and Temporality,” *Research in Phenomenology* 1 (1971): 63–73, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916471x00046>.

¹⁹ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “revive,” accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revive>.

²⁰ Denis, “Définition du Néo-traditionnisme,” 548.

²¹ Jean Leduc, *L’enracinement de la République: 1879–1918* (Paris: Hachette Éducation, 2014), 31–32.

²² Kenneth E. Silver, “New Spirits and Sacred Springs: Modern Art in France at the Turn of the Century,” in *Voyage into Myth: French Painting from Gauguin to Matisse from the Hermitage Museum, Russia*, edited by Nathalie Bondil and Francine Lavoie (Paris: Hazan; Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2002), 18.

²³ Ibid., 24.

²⁴ June Hargrove and Neil McWilliam, introduction to *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870–1914*, edited by June Hargrove and Neil McWilliam (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 11.

²⁵ Edouard Drumont, *Mon vieux Paris* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1878), quoted in Hargrove and McWilliam, “Introduction,” 11.

²⁶ Jean-Paul Bouillon, “Politique de Denis,” in Cogeval, *Maurice Denis*, 99.

²⁷ Guy Cogeval, “Haute Solitude,” in *Au-delà des étoiles: Le paysage mystique de Monet à Kandinsky*, edited by Guy Cogeval (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Grand Palais, 2017), 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁹ Michel Despland, “L’expérience religieuse au XIXe siècle: II: La vie représentée et les deux types de modernité,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 51, no. 1 (1995): 157, <https://doi.org/10.7202/400898ar>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

³¹ Lydie Parisse, “Ésotérisme, modèle mystique et littérature à la fin du XIXe siècle,” in *Crises de vers*, edited by Maire Blaise and Alain Vaillant (Montpellier: Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2000), 289, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pulm.131>.

³² Robert Ziegler, *Satanism, Magic, and Mysticism in Fin-de-siècle France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 116, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137006615>.

³³ Parisse, “Ésotérisme, modèle mystique et littérature à la fin du XIXe siècle,” 279.

³⁴ Ziegler, *Satanism, Magic, and Mysticism in Fin-de-siècle France*, 119.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁷ Parisse, “Ésotérisme, modèle mystique et littérature à la fin du XIXe siècle,” 281.

³⁸ Denis always refused to display his works in the Salon due to his distance from the “soul painters” or allegorical painters. See Jean-Paul Bouillon, *Maurice Denis: Le spirituel dans l’art* (Paris: Gallimard; Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2006), 31. On the subject of the “soul painters” and idealist Symbolism, see Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, *Les peintres de l’âme: Le Symbolisme idéaliste en France* (Antwerp: Pandora, 1999).

³⁹ Despland, “L’expérience religieuse au XIXe siècle,” 158.

⁴⁰ Parisse, “Ésotérisme, modèle mystique et littérature à la fin du XIXe siècle,” 276.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁴² Katharine Lochnan, “Introduction: ‘Là où l’univers chante’ Le paysage mystique des années 1880 aux années 1930,” in *Au-delà des étoiles: Le paysage mystique de Monet à Kandinsky*, edited by Guy Cogeval (Paris: Réunion des Musées

Nationaux / Grand Palais, 2017), 24. Furthermore, the influence of Asian religions (such as Buddhism and Hinduism) permeated mysticism in a variety of ways, notably leading to the fascination with esoteric principles. The esoteric teachings of the Theosophical Society influenced the Nabis group's beliefs, as manifested by the peculiar liturgy and rites that the group members took part in during their gatherings. See George Mauner, "The Nature of Nabi Symbolism," *Art Journal* 23, no. 2 (1963–64): 99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.1964.10794492>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Maurice Denis, "De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au classicisme," *L'Occident*, May 1909, 187–202, quoted in Maurice Denis, *Le ciel et l'Arcadie*, edited by Jean-Paul Bouillon (Paris: Hermann, 1993), 172.

⁴⁶ This interpretation is also shared by the iconographical file of *The Green Trees* from the Orsay Museum's documentation center. The iconographical file gathers iconography and curatorial commentary on the artworks from the museum's collection. See Musée d'Orsay, "Maurice Denis, *Paysage aux arbres verts* ou *Les Hêtres de Kerduel*," RF 2001 8, Iconographical file, Orsay Museum, Paris.

⁴⁷ Denis, *Journal*, 16.

⁴⁸ Musée d'Orsay, "Maurice Denis, *Paysage aux arbres verts* ou *Les Hêtres de Kerduel*."

⁴⁹ Denis, *Journal*, 53.

⁵⁰ Pronounced by Pope John Paul II in 1982 (Office of Papal Liturgical Celebrations, "Beatifications by Pope John Paul II, 1979–2000," vatica.ca, last accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturg/saints/ns_lit_doc_list_blesseds-jp-ii_en.html).

⁵¹ Denis, *Journal*, 40.

⁵² Ibid., 42.

⁵³ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁴ This interpretation was brought forth by Bouillon in *Maurice Denis*, 48; and Ursula Perucchi-Petri, "Maurice Denis," in *Nabis: Bonnard, Vuillard, Maurice Denis, Vallotton (1888–1900)*, edited by Claire Frèches-Thory and Ursula Perucchi-Petri (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1993), 36. Additionally, the image of Jesus as the groom and the church as his bride is recurrent in the Bible (see, e.g., Ephesians 5:22–33; and 2 Corinthians 11:2–4). This analogy could have influenced Denis in his religious portrayals of brides.

⁵⁵ Gilles Genty, "The Muses in the Woods: The Symbolist Forest as a Place for Revelation," *Le Serment des Horaces, International Art Review* 3 (Fall 1989–Winter 1990): 124.

⁵⁶ Cogeval, *Maurice Denis*, 151.

⁵⁷ Catholic Church, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: Office of Pub. Services, United States Catholic Conference, 2002), no. 346.

⁵⁸ Denis, *Journal*, 36.

⁵⁹ Musée d'Orsay, "Maurice Denis, *Paysage aux arbres verts* ou *Les Hêtres de Kerduel*."

⁶⁰ Bouillon, *Maurice Denis: Le spirituel dans l'art*, 36.

⁶¹ Quoted in Bouillon, *Maurice Denis*, 17.

⁶² Laura Auricchio, "The Nabis and Decorative Painting," Metropolitan Museum, published October 2004, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dcpt/hd_dcpt.htm.

⁶³ Claire Frèches-Thory, "Constitution du groupe," in Frèches-Thory and Perucchi-Petri, *Nabis*, 13.

⁶⁴ Denis, *Journal*, 37.

⁶⁵ Maurice Denis, "Préface de la IXe exposition des Peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes," quoted in Denis, *Le ciel et l'Arcadie*, 26.

⁶⁶ Denis's "Definition of Neo-Traditionalism" corroborates my argument. The phrase "Remember that a painting—before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or an anecdote of some sort—is essentially a flat surface covered with colors, put together in a certain order" emphasizes the formal elements of the decorative as a separate entity in a painting (Denis, "Définition du Néo-traditionnisme," 545).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Jane Kinsman, "The Muses (*Les Muses*)," in *Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, and Beyond: Post-Impressionist Masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay*, edited by Stéphane Guégan and Sylvia Patry (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco; New York: Prestel, 2010), 107.

⁶⁹ The influence of Japanese decorative arts and prints triumphed in Europe with the international exhibitions held in London in 1862 and in Paris in 1876, 1878, and 1889. It started in the 1850s with the trade agreements between Japan and Western countries that allowed the exportation of Japanese goods after two centuries of isolation. On the history and the characteristic of Japonisme in Western art, see Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western art since 1858* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981).

⁷⁰ Ursula Perucchi-Petri, "Maurice Denis et le Japon," *La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* 4 (1982): 261.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 264.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 260.

⁷⁵ See Jan Thompson, “The Role of Women in the Iconography of Art Nouveau,” *Art Journal* 31, no. 2 (1971–72): 158–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.1972.10792994>.

⁷⁶ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 33. Bergson treated this question in *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1889), *Matière et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1896), and *L'Évolution créatrice* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1907).

⁷⁷ This idea was expressed by Stéphane Guégan in the chapter “Temps court, temps long!” taken from his book on nineteenth-century painting at the Orsay Museum (*Peinture: Musée d'Orsay* [Paris: ESFP, 2011], 15).

⁷⁸ Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, 8.

⁷⁹ Katherine M. Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Surrey and Burlington, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 6.

⁸² This painting can be found in the Vuillard catalogue raisonné under the entry VII-310. Antoine Salomon and Guy Cogeval, *Vuillard. Le regard innombrable. Volume II* (Paris: Skira/Seuil, 2003), 692.

⁸³ Philippe Thiébaud, *Guimard: L'art nouveau* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992), 367.

⁸⁴ See Thérèse Barruel's analysis of Denis's *Figures dans un paysage de printemps*, which shares a similar iconography to *April*, in “Le bonheur classique,” in Cogeval, *Maurice Denis*, 240.

⁸⁵ Fabienne Stahl, “*Avril (Les Anémones)*,” in Bouillon, *Maurice Denis*, 134.

⁸⁶ Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *L'imaginaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), 5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁰ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 126.

⁹¹ Bondil and Lavoie, *Voyage into Myth*, 36.

⁹² Doane, *Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 4.

⁹³ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated and edited by Kurt Wolff (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1950), 410.

⁹⁴ Pessimist sociological analyses from the period contributed to the disavowal of the modern capitalist system and the revival of interest for nature, which holds a reactionary undertone. For instance, Max Weber considered the effect

that capitalism and industrialization have on the human psyche and diagnosed that the machine “has changed the mental face of the human race beyond recognition and will continue doing so” (“Methodologische Einleitung für die Erhebungen des Vereins für Sozialpolitik,” in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988], 14), quoted in Andreas Anter, “Max Weber’s Concept of Nature and the Ambivalence of Modernity,” *Max Weber Studies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 228, <https://doi.org/10.15543/mws/2011/2/4>. Additionally, on the relationship between French Catholicism and technology during the period, see Michel Lagrée, *La Bénédiction de Prométhée: Religion et technologie, XIXe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

⁹⁵ Bondil and Lavoie, *Voyage into Myth*, 37.

⁹⁶ On the relationship between the arts and the romanticization of nature during the period, see J. P. H. House, “Post-Impressionist Visions of Nature,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 128, no. 5289 (1980): 568–88.

⁹⁷ Genty, “Muses in the Woods,” 123.

⁹⁸ Umberto Eco, *Histoire des lieux de légende*, translated by Renaud Temperini (Paris: Flammarion, 2013), 45.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁰⁰ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, translated by Henry Rushton Fairclough (London: Heinemann, 1916), 6.660–679.

¹⁰¹ Genty, “Muses in the Woods,” 120.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 126.

¹⁰⁴ Denis, “Définition du Néo-traditionnisme,” 548.

This page intentionally left blank

***Strange Weather* Forecast: Inside Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History's New Exhibit**

Angel Chan

Rachel Nelson and Jennifer Gonzalez's exhibition *Strange Weather*, open to the public between April 14 and August 14, 2022, at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, is one that lingers in the mind of its visitors. It had a quality that exemplifies a kind of beauty in melancholy, especially poignant in a time of urgency in topics about climate. *Strange Weather* does not tell its visitors what to do but guides them through conversations they might not have had, challenging ideas like that of the "static native" or the United States' refusal to acknowledge its history of slavery.

Strange Weather provides a survey of the relationship between history, bodies, and the environment through artworks that span five decades, from 1970 to 2020. The artists use a range of mediums, from painting to installation, to draw attention to the impact of trauma on humans and the land through the long history of industrialization, forced migration, and global capitalism. Artists like James Lavadour and Leonardo Drew become nature in their work, while other artists reinsert marginalized bodies and voices into the conversation about histories and current topics concerning life and land. Although there can be moments of sorrow as the exhibition grapples with topics that seem bleak, it is powerful and necessary, because it shows us how we got here and where we go next.



Figure 1, *Installation View, Strange Weather, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Santa Cruz, CA 2022. Image courtesy of Culture Saving LLC.*

Upon entering the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History’s Solari Gallery, visitors are drawn in by a massive sculpture that peeps from behind the introduction wall (fig. 1). Drew’s *Number 215B* is like an explosion of colorful shards of wood; its pieces seem to gather on top of one another in the center and expand, taking up an entire gallery wall. Completely unable to contain themselves, fragments spill onto the floor. The sheer size and details of each individual piece make the sculpture captivating enough to draw viewers in from the hall into the gallery. The label notes that the materials in this sculpture are new, and Drew sees himself as “becoming the weather” as he ages the wood through burning, oxidation, and other “natural” processes. *Number 215B* is a destructively beautiful piece that creates the sensation of motion as the shards travel inward; the piece becomes more thought-provoking as one considers the origins of these shards. Drew’s artistic process makes the artificial natural, and the natural artificial. It is the questioning of the shard’s origins that forces visitors to consider the fragility of our built environments.

The exhibition space is a single room with two walls built in the middle; even though Drew’s piece piques the visitors’ interest from behind one of the walls, the starting point of the exhibition is the introduction wall, which leads the viewer to the right to Terry Winter’s two pieces, *Novalis (Sojka 48)* (1998) and *Crimson Lake* (2013). As the viewers move to the right, they encounter artists like



Figure 2 Installation view, Strange Weather, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Santa Cruz, CA 2022. Featured from left to right is Leonardo Drew's Number 215B (2020), Alison Saar's Grow'd (2019), and Nicola López's Half-Life no. 13 (2009). Image courtesy of Culture Saving LLC.

Carlos Amorales, Joe Fedderson, Kiki Smith, and Nicola López; the work chosen for this side of the exhibition alludes to technological developments for exploration and their effects on the land. Amorales's allusion to the Mercator map and Smith's use of the periphery camera refer to mapping as a historical phenomenon. López's dystopian landscape and Fedderson's reminder of land as a site of the memorial examine the history of exploration through its effects.

These pieces lead viewers to Alison Saar's sculpture, *Grow'd* (2019), which monumentalizes the United States' history with regard to cotton, slavery, and identity (fig. 2). This adult version of the young, enslaved girl from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Topsy, is cast in bronze and life-size. Her braids are lifted, and branches of cotton grow out of her hair to form a halo. This is a powerful image as she sits upright on her cotton bale throne with her crown of cotton holding a branch as a scepter in one hand and a scythe in the other. Interestingly, in addition to the museum light that shines from the ceiling, the sculpture is placed under a small corner skylight; the sculpture's reference to the relationship between enslaved bodies and the cultivation of cotton and this kind of double lighting could be a way to illuminate a part of history that the United States likes to keep in the dark.



Figure 3 Installation View, Strange Weather, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Santa Cruz, CA 2022. Featured in this picture is James Lavadour's paintings, Deep Moon (2005), in the center, and Untitled (2001), right. Image courtesy of Culture Saving LLC.

On the wall adjacent to Saar's piece are two works by Lavadour, who is a renowned American painter and printmaker from the Walla Walla tribe of the Northwest Plateau. Lavadour's landscapes are not like the more traditional western landscape paintings to which most United States viewers are accustomed. In the American context, landscapes usually present land as invitational and it is depicted naturalistically. In other contexts, Lavadour has described how he started experimenting with paint and developing his style of large panel sets of landscape painting. To him, painting does not merely demonstrate what is seen in the natural world but is a medium that allows people to see into worlds that are not visible.¹ The vibrant colors and dynamic motions on the panels surrounding the stillness in the central panel of *Deep Moon* (2005) evoke a side of nature that cannot be seen on the surface level: the side of nature as an active force, one that is both turbulent and smooth, rather than a static entity (fig. 3). Lavadour sees his materials the same way he sees himself: as an event of nature.² The pigments that created his paints are products of natural events, like erosion, mineral deposits, and so forth, and the events that take place in nature also take place on his canvas.³ It is powerful visually to encounter the connection between the material, the artist, and an alignment of certain events in



Figure 4 Installation View, *Strange Weather*, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Santa Cruz, CA 2022. Featured in this image from left to right is Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds's *Not Your Coyote Stories* (2015) and Kehinde Wiley's *Marechal Floriano Peixoto II* (2009). Image courtesy of Culture Saving LLC.

nature that fell into place to create the nine-panel works on display. *Deep Moon* (2005) and *Untitled* (2001) showcase how Lavadour draws attention to the infinite number of ways the earth can move. Each panel could stand on its own as a unique glimpse into the environment, but when assembled together, they demonstrate the possibilities that the rest of the natural world, humans, and paint can offer.

The works of Lavadour and Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds face Drew's massive sculpture. One of the exhibit's ultimate themes, the personification of nature, emerges as the viewer experiences these three pieces in conjunction with one another. Nature is not a passive subject in their works but a contributor. Drew "became weather" when creating *Number 215B*, and Lavadour and his paints are events of nature that work together on the canvas. Rachel Nelson and Jennifer Gonzalez, in discussions of their curatorial work, note that Edgar Heap of Birds considers printmaking a mysterious process that is chemical and ethereal, and that can create something beautiful if you stay out of its way.⁴ For him, it is not about controlling the medium but working with it and

letting it lead him. Language is also an important medium in Edgar Heap of Birds' art because of how accessible it is; its accessibility is what makes it harder to deflect.⁵ Language can be and has been a tool of oppression, but in his work, language now becomes a form of protest. His print series, *Not Your Coyote Stories* (2016), resemble protest signs and are especially memorable because they literally speak to viewers (fig. 4). The museum label puts it perfectly, saying "language becomes landscape." Each print, which has its own phrase, becomes a conversation through art. There is a relationship between nature and artists that is apparent in the creative processes of these artists.

Although small, *Strange Weather* is a powerful exhibition that acknowledges hard truths through art and brings difficult conversations that are usually placed on the back burner to the front. It is an exhibition that examines the histories of bodies and the environment and forces viewers to consider how technological advancements, like automobiles, industrial farming, and mapmaking, have shaped our current social and political environment. Visitors cannot help but feel a twinge of responsibility for their contributions to this predicament, but the exhibition does not paint nature as a docile entity. In many artworks within this exhibition, nature is referenced as a powerful force that is both creation and destruction. With this perspective, visitors wonder what happens next. Weather, in terms of climate change, is a complicated and harrowing topic, but this exhibition provides visitors with a survey of artists who actively take part in these needed conversations.

* * *

Angel Chan, the 2021–22 undergraduate intern for *Refract* journal, is double majoring in the History of Art and Visual Culture and Literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Notes

¹ Rebecca J. Dobkins and James Lavadour, *James Lavadour: The Properties of Paint*, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, 2008, p. 5, http://oregonvisualarts.org/wp-content/uploads/Lavadour-brochure-pages_notExcerpted.pdf.

² Museum label.

³ Kate Morris, *Shifting Grounds: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 69.

⁴ Rachel Nelson, Jennifer Gonzalez, and Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Bird, “Traction: Art Talk with Edgar Heap of Birds,” Institute of Art and Sciences, May 10, 2022, 50:22 - 51:23. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_MJ1lR_Eh4&t=2s

⁵ *Ibid.*, 47:00–47:20.

This page intentionally left blank

Public Displays of Affection

Karen Miranda Augustine



Figure 1 Karen Miranda Augustine, Street Post: Church & Isabella, 2020, mixed media, acetate, beadwork, ink, sequins, and collage on wood, 25 × 17 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Public Displays of Affection (PDA) is a multimedia project on makeshift, spontaneous, and unconventional memorials randomly encountered throughout Toronto, Ontario (Canada). Small-scale, personal, and ad hoc in nature, each documents the passing of marginalized and lesser-known individuals.

Found in random spaces of civic sprawl, these sites were documented between 2019 and 2022 in public housing, alleyways, sidewalks, storefronts, parking lots, bridges, parks, street poles, and apartment lobbies.

If we are all interconnected, death, loss, and grief are obvious equalizers. These ad hoc memorials, disengaged from commerce or the need for social likes, often yield beautiful, community-minded, radical expressions of love.

The Inspiration

Several years ago, I saw a modest memorial taped to the wall of the southbound platform of Dupont subway station. It was a single rose with a short, handwritten statement on loose-leaf affixed above about the person who presumably took their life.

I was moved by its humble simplicity: isolated and alone, unexpected and out of place.

I wondered then how many passersby took notice of it, learned that someone special had experienced their last moments at that very spot, or related to the deep mourning of the person left behind who loved and missed someone so much that they marked the sacredness of that space.

The Process

My creative projects ride on the confluence of pop culture, spirituality, and the underground.

I create two-dimensional, mixed-media art out of found materials, beadwork, embroidery, and paint in a way that could be loosely described as low-relief assemblage. All are centered on a degraded photograph—usually stencil, photocopy, image transfer, or découpage—as it is in the raw, primitive imprint of my subject where I find the most interest.



Figure 2 Karen Miranda Augustine, Alleyway: College & Huron, 2020, mixed media, acetate, beadwork, and ink on wood, 26 × 17 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Memorialization is a repetitive theme in my art projects, which often include some aspect of participation from strangers and friends, as are the broader (and often misunderstood) life experiences of women and girls.

I am interested in the ways that shared experiences bind us.

I am inspired by the philosophy and visual vocabulary of traditional sacred arts of the African diaspora, especially in Haiti and in West and South Africa.

Often, I use beadwork, as well as elements of Haitian *drapo*—the sequins that many *vodouisants*¹ believe to represent “*pwens*, divine sparks where the human and divine intersect”²—a belief that succinctly explained the transcendent experiences I would have at night. Because of this, sequins hold deep, personal relevance and remain a constant within my practice.

Whether filtered through media stories, my personal life, mythology, or casual observation, I like to dig into the backstories of my subjects and connect



Figure 3 Karen Miranda Augustine, Streetlight Pole: Dufferin & Sylvan, 2021, mixed media, acetate, ink, oil stick, and rhinestones on wood, 24 × 18 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

that to the Spirit realm—to that in-between place where our earthly conditions converge with that of the Unseen.

For these reasons, I classify my work as ritualistic pop art.

The Project

Currently in progress, *PDA* has two streams. The first is a set of bead- and sequin-embellished mixed-media paintings composed of photo transfers, ink, and paint, mounted on construction hoarding and wood panels.

The second is a video projection with an improvised score. Created in collaboration with the composer Stefan Hegerat, the five-minute short is a meditative collection of source photos that fade in and out of each site to a rhythmic soundtrack that is equal parts grief and joy, presented against a groovy, lush, synth-pop backdrop.

Public Displays of Affection is a meditation on what we can discover about these personal acts of sacred-space marking, grief, ancestralization, legacies, and the dignity of strangers.



Figure 4 Karen Miranda Augustine, Security Grille: Dundas & Ossington, 2021, mixed media, acetate, ink, and sequins on wood, 19.75 × 29 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5 Karen Miranda Augustine, Storefront: Dundas & Sherbourne, 2020, mixed media, acetate, beadwork, ink, oil sticks, sequins, collage, and marker on wood, 17 × 25 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6 Karen Miranda Augustine, Streetlight Pole: Dundas West & Bloor, 2020, mixed media, acetate, beadwork, ink, sequins, wax, and collage on wood, 26 × 17 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 7 Karen Miranda Augustine, Construction Hoarding: Kensington Market, 2021, mixed media, acetate, sequins, beads, oil sticks, wax, and ink on wood, 29 × 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

* * *

Karen Miranda Augustine is a Canadian mixed-media artist whose works have been exhibited in Canada, the US, Scotland, and Haiti. She has been published and cited in various books and publications, including *Caribbean InTransit Arts Journal*, *The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts* (Cleis Press), *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia University Press), and *Ghetto Biennale / Geto Byenal: 2009–2015* (Central Books). She holds an MA in interdisciplinary studies from York University and is an emerging death and grief worker.

Notes

¹ Vodouisants: practitioners of Vodou.

² Kenaz Filan, *The Haitian Vodou Handbook: Protocols for Riding with the Lwa* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

“If You’re Out There, Please Listen to Me...”: Voices of Mourning Through the Wind Phone (*Kaze no Denwa*)

Laura J. Boyce

Overlooking the ocean, near the town of Ōtsuchi, Japan, a white telephone booth containing a disconnected rotary phone sits within the Bell Guardia Kujira-Yama garden. Itaru Sasaki, its creator, named this booth *kaze no denwa*, or the *wind phone*. Sasaki built the *wind phone* in 2011 to “call” his cousin, who had recently died of cancer. He built the *wind phone* for personal use; however, after the March 11, 2011, earthquake/tsunami that claimed the lives of nearly twenty thousand people and left around twenty-five hundred missing, the *wind phone* unexpectedly became a destination for others mourning the loss of their loved ones. In the documentary *The Phone of the Wind: Whispers to Lost Families*, Sasaki elaborates on the naming of the phone booth: “The phone won’t carry my voice. So I let the wind do it.”¹ Over the years as people travel to use the phone, Sasaki has welcomed them to his garden, where they too can feel the wind transport their voices.

As Sasaki’s *wind phone* rose to popularity in Japan,² it also became popular in other parts of the world, inspiring films, novels, news articles, and other media. Many people journey from around the world to visit the *wind phone*, while others have built and continue to build their own versions. Each wind phone has different cultural contexts, geographic locations, and environments, but their purpose remains consistent: to give people a chance to speak to and feel heard by their departed loved ones.³

This essay examines how the wind phone reinvents the communication technology of the telephone as a technology of mourning that helps the living feel heard by and connected to the dead.⁴ Taking on multiple forms, the wind phone offers an interactive sensorial encounter that is not necessarily available through

traditional material objects associated with mourning, such as gravestones, statues, plaques, and other inanimate objects. The wind phone differs in that its purpose is to provide a space and an apparatus for people to feel listened to, to listen for, and even to hear the voices (or traces) of the dead and missing. Through its site-specific attributes, the wind phone allows visitors to confront (and sometimes disavow) the absence of the dead through the nostalgic performance of a rotary telephone call.⁵ I examine how the anachronistic use of this nostalgic form of media works to make the impossible endeavor of speaking to and, more important, feeling heard by those who are no longer living feel possible.⁶ Through the lack of physical connection to any material phone line, the wind replaces infrastructural elements such as telephone cables, cell phone towers, and other manufactured technologies, swapping calls with the living for calls to the dead and providing an alternative infrastructure necessary to connect to the dead. The functionality of the telephone is in turn reformulated, inviting a sensorial encounter specific to the wind phone—an auditory experience of listening for lost loved ones and speaking to them—while distinguishing its utility from functioning telephones used to call the living.

I discuss Sasaki's *wind phone* and how it has become a form reproduced cross-culturally, in order to indicate the need for a place to maintain a sort of attention, that is not about assimilating the lost object into some kind of ontological certainty but instead about sustaining the attention as an end in itself. Analyzing the *wind phone* as an emerging form points to the way it subtly abstracts the telephone as a form; this repetition of an existing technology with a slight but very important difference produces the *wind phone* as its own technology. Each wind phone invites a sensorial encounter tied to place, where the physical setting allows for a particular sensorial experience and constitutes a form of ritual in relation to loss. Since its invention, the wind phone has been replicated multiple times by different people in different locations, demonstrating a need for dedicated places to maintain sustained relationships with the dead.

Providing a location, medium, and ritual through which sustained attention via the act of listening for hints of the absent interlocutor's voice provides a different purpose and, for some visitors, even replaces the singular event of burying physical remains (e.g., when remains cannot be located). Acknowledging the loss of an individual does not mean we cannot listen for, hear, and feel their presence at times. It is, of course, still possible to have a relationship with a departed loved one, though the relationship is markedly different; the *wind phone* allows a place dedicated to renegotiating this relationship.

Apostrophe, Animation, Audition

While the *wind phone* repurposes the telephone, its capacity for connection relies on the quotidian familiarity of a telephone call, which helps visitors to feel comfortable.⁷ When the journalist Tessa Fontaine asked Sasaki why people cannot just call their departed loved ones from their personal phones, he explained:

It's not like anything else. It isn't therapy. . . . It isn't the same as the thing you say to your friend over your second glass of wine about wishing you could talk to your dead mother about something. It isn't praying. It isn't talking to a loved one who also knew the dead. You pick up the phone and your brain has readied your mouth to speak. . . . It's wired. We do it all the time. You don't think what it is you want to say, you just say it. Out loud. Into the phone, which is connected to nothing. From there, there is nothing for your words to do but follow the directives of the thing itself—be carried on the wind.⁸

Sasaki highlights how our brains are indeed “wired” for this connection because of the familiarity of a phone call, suggesting that there is no need for literal wires to connect us; our imaginations do that work. He asserts that the *wind phone* is “not like anything else,” yet the quotidian nature of a telephone call means visitors are “wired” to spontaneously speak into the telephone, showing how the familiar components and the singular purpose of the *wind phone* combine to help visitors carry on a relationship to the dead by providing them a space to feel listened to and in turn creating a continuity with those who have passed.

The *wind phone* has become a sort of unofficial memorial—a shrine even—for victims of the 2011 Tōhoku tsunami, despite this not being the site's initial purpose. Like Fontaine, many visitors describe their journeys to the wind phone as a “pilgrimage,” implying the sacred site specificity of this artifact and its capacity to facilitate direct address in the ambiguous circumstances in which they lost their loved ones. Broadly speaking, since the *wind phone* overlooks the ocean—an indeterminate burial site—its proximity to the site of the catastrophe personalizes the impersonal and strengthens the absent presence so often felt by its visitors. More precisely, the wind phone's proximity both to Ōtsuchi (one of the worst sites of devastation of the 2011 tsunami) and to the ocean allows visitors who were affected by the tsunami to address the specificity of their loss by bringing them near the site of destruction while conceding the vastness of the

ocean and using the boundlessness of the wind to carry voices great distances. In other words, the *wind phone* imports the significance derived from the context of place and history, against the paradoxical backdrop of the ocean's immensity.

Importantly, the *wind phone* is not just a rotary phone sitting in a garden; it is enclosed by a traditional phone booth. The enclosure of the booth allows visitors to envelop and contain their messages for transportation to the dead. The enclosure of the booth allows a concentrated space for apostrophe, the act of addressing an absent person or object, which each visitor performs when they make a call on the *wind phone*. In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant discusses apostrophe via Barbara Johnson's "Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion," describing apostrophe as

an indirect, unstable, physically impossible but phenomenologically vitalizing movement of rhetorical animation that permits subjects to suspend themselves in the optimism of a potential occupation of the same psychic space of others, the objects of desire who make you possible (by having some promising qualities, but also by not being there).⁹

This "vitalizing movement"—the moment where the living can feel a momentary, affective resurrection of the absent other—is precisely where visitors feel the *wind phone*'s uncanny capacity. For the few moments they are inside the booth, they can inhabit the same virtual ("psychic") space, wherein their desired interlocutor can hear them, partly made possible by the enclosure of the booth. Berlant (via Barbara Johnson) describes how, through apostrophe, "a silent, affectively present but physically displaced interlocutor (a lover, a fetus) is animated in speech as distant enough for a conversation but close enough to be imaginable by the speaker in whose head the entire scene is happening."¹⁰ The *wind phone* facilitates this address of an "affectively present but physically displaced interlocutor" by structuring the apostrophic animation of the displaced interlocutor. This allows visitors to connect affectively to a trace (or absent presence) of their missing loved one through entering the same psychic space.

Through apostrophe, the *wind phone* animates. Johnson expresses the important connection between wind, animation, and apostrophe through a close reading of Percy Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," which she describes as "perhaps the ultimate apostrophaic poem, makes even more explicit the relation between apostrophe and animation."¹¹ She explains how in the poem, "the west wind is a figure for the power to animate: it is described as the breath of being, moving everywhere, blowing movement and energy through the world . . . parting

the waters of the Atlantic, uncontrollable.”¹² The *wind phone* uses this figuration of wind to animate the dead; wind is also the source of mass destruction (through the tsunami). As Johnson puts it, “The wind animates by bringing death, winter, destruction” while allowing for this powerful extension of relation to the dead.¹³ She reiterates that “the wind, which is to give animation, is also the giver of death,” and asks, “how do the rhetorical strategies of the poem carry out this program of animation through the giving of death?”¹⁴ These same questions apply to the *wind phone*. Not only does the *wind phone* bring visitors near the site of destruction, for those who visit to connect with victims of the tsunami, the wind acts doubly as the cause of death and the force of animation.¹⁵

Among apostrophe and animation, visitors listen—for hints of the voices of lost loved ones and the potentiality of feeling listened to or heard by their departed interlocutors. Accordingly, Berlant describes the condition of hearing in apostrophe and the possibilities projected in the transmitter of vocal messages:

(T)he condition of projected possibility, of a hearing that cannot take place in the terms of its enunciation (“you” are not here, “you” are eternally belated to the conversation with you that I am imagining) creates a fake¹⁶ present moment of intersubjectivity in which, nonetheless, a performance of address can take place.¹⁷

Through this type of apostrophe, the *wind phone* permits hearing—a continuity wherein the dead are temporarily present in the imaginations of the visitors. In this way, the moment of intersubjectivity is not “fake,” as Berlant claims; rather, I see it more as the virtual presence of the other. Despite the other being “eternally belated,” the imagined conversation can take place (in the present), which is why I see virtual as a more fitting word. If we consider Johnson’s description, the wind, as it animates, also creates this moment of virtual presence, even if it must be sustained by the imagination.

Relatedly, Jacques Khalip elaborates on the nature of listening, hearing, and speaking to the dead in relation to loss through his essay on Derek Jarman’s film *Blue*, an hour-long film composed of an International Klein Blue screen for its entirety. This screen is accompanied by an elaborate two-part narrative soundscape, a surreal meditation on his life, as he is dying of AIDS.¹⁸ Hearing, listening, address, and mourning are integral to *Blue* and coalesce similarly in the wind phone. Khalip, via Jean-Luc Nancy, explains that “to listen (*écouter*) is decidedly not the same as to hear (*entendre*).”¹⁹ Expanding on Nancy’s discussion of hearing and listening, he explains:

To be listening is thus to enter into tension and to be on the lookout for a relation to the self. . . . listening is passing over to the register of presence to self, it being understood that the “self” is precisely nothing available (substantial or subsistent) to which one can be “present,” but precisely the resonance of a return [*renvoi*]. For this reason, listening . . . can and must appear to us not as a metaphor for access to self, but as the reality of this access.²⁰

Nancy’s understanding complicates the relation between apostrophe and animation while breaking down the process. The reality of access to the self, according to Nancy, is made apparent through listening and feeling listened to, which, paradoxically, provides solace for many visitors of the *wind phone*. For Nancy, the practice of self is an attention that delinks the listener from an expectation of presence of their own self and, instead, is linked to the absence of presence and/or loss of presence in the other. Not only is the absence of presence a constitutive part of mourning: it is, through Nancy, also a constitutive part of listening, which, in part, links these two experiences. The absence of the deceased interlocutor reflects on the idea that absence is a constitutive element of the self, which cuts against ideological priors. In the recorded calls, visitors say things like: “If this voice reaches you, please *listen*”²¹—importantly here, the caller understands the (im)possibility; by indicating “if” the interlocutor hears their voice, they request that the interlocutor *listen*, not to hear, but to listen, which is “decidedly different” than hearing.²² However, this experience is not always consistent. One visitor’s friend insists that her late husband *heard* her, while another visitor, who lost his family (his wife, one-year-old child, and both his parents in the tsunami), pleads: “If you can *hear* me, please *listen* to me.” Similarly, a father dials the phone number of his pregnant daughter who died in the tsunami, asking: “Can you hear me? I’m here again.” To this end, the living can speak to the dead through the feeling that the other is listening, and the living can listen reciprocally for the “resonance of a return [*renvoi*]”²³ (despite the absence of presence of the dead), entering the same psychic space—out there somewhere, “distant enough for a conversation but close enough to be imaginable by the speaker.”²⁴ Visitors can lend voice to the dead, psychically, acknowledging the “reality of access to the self” and in turn acknowledging the reality of access to another’s self.

Further complicating and expanding on the notion of voice in relation to the *wind phone*, some visitors enact prosopopoeia: “a rhetorical device by which an imaginary, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking or acting.”²⁵ I consider this an extended aspect of animation. Robert Pogue Harrison describes

prosopopoeia as “a type of personification, a giving of face and voice to that which, properly speaking, possesses neither”; he continues:

While it is true that we speak with the words of the dead, it is equally true that the dead speak in and through the voices of the living. We inherit their words so as to lend them voice. . . . The living do not have a constitutive need to speak as much as to hear themselves spoken to, above all by the ancestor. We lend voice to the dead so that they may speak to us from their underworld—address us, instruct us, reprove us, bless us, enlighten us, and in general alleviate the historical terror and loneliness of being in the world.²⁶

Visitors to the *wind phone* invite their loved ones to speak through and to them through prosopopoeia and animation. Through the indication that the other is listening, and at times responding and interacting, the callers can confront their loved one’s absent presence. One mother claimed that she could “keep on living,” since her son had heard her message. Without his own voice, he urged her to continue living through the alleviating act of prosopopoeia. As Pogue suggests, the living have a need to *hear themselves spoken to*, more than to *speak*. This need, to hear themselves spoken to and to feel heard, is a crucial aspect of the mourning self. It is also the crux of this installation, and perhaps why and how it has become a popular technology of mourning, not only in Japan but in different locations and cultures. This is an aspect of mourning that, when you lose someone, you lose access to them, and the wind phone reintroduces this part of a relationship through animation. Similarly, one of the *wind phone*’s frequent visitors, Sachiko Okawa, often calls her late husband, whom she was married to for forty-four years, using the *wind phone*. In one call, she tells him, “I’m lonely . . . Bye for now, I’ll be back soon.”²⁷

Like other technologies of mourning, the *wind phone* “rupture[s] the conventional relations of person and address,” as well as temporal experiences of speaking and listening in a way that is similar to obituaries, although through aural form, rather than written.²⁸ Khalip begins his ““Archaeology of Sound”” with a lengthy quotation from Eve Sedgwick’s “White Glasses,” where she discusses the complicated nature of this rupture of conventions in mourning sites:

The most compelling thing about obituaries is how openly they rupture the conventional relations of person and of address. From a tombstone, from the tiny print in the New York Times, from the

panels on panels on panels of the Names Project quilt, whose voice speaks impossibly to whom? From where is this rhetorical power borrowed, and how and to whom is it to be repaid? We miss you. Remember me. She hated to say goodbye. Participating in these speech acts, we hardly know whether to be interpellated as survivors, bereft; as witnesses or even judges; or as the very dead . . . in the panels of the quilt, I see that anyone, living or dead, may occupy the position of the speaker, the spoken to, the spoken about.²⁹

Visitors to the wind phone perform transmutations of address, too, such that “anyone, living or dead, may occupy the position of the speaker, the spoken to, the spoken about.” Through apostrophe and the animation it invites, the wind phone recasts the positions of the “speaker, spoken to and spoken about.” As Khalip explains, “Speech vexes the voiced act of commemoration and redirects [Sedgwick] within the sonorities of the departed.”³⁰ Perhaps, then, the prevalence of apostrophe and prosopopoeia in relation to mourning indicate the desire to speak directly to and with the dead in mourning. This desire is not addressed through other technologies of mourning, or is a secondary function of these technologies. The *wind phone* provides an enclosed space and a medium through which to directly address the dead and through which the positions of speaker and addressee can transfigure.

Wind, Infrastructure

Each wind phone is unconnected to electricity and phone wires. The physical disconnection enables the connection to the spirit world as it is deliberately disconnected from telecommunications infrastructure, which facilitates the specificity of this phone’s function: calling the dead. As Sasaki explains, “The phone won’t carry my voice. So I let the wind do it.”³¹ This generates the alternative purpose of the wind phone, taking it out of the realm of its usual function and redirecting calls to the dead via its disconnection. Instead of phone lines, electricity, and built aspects of functioning telephone infrastructures, the wind acts as the apparatus’s infrastructure and serves to maintain a different kind of connection. My formulation of infrastructure stems from various thinkers. Heavily influenced by Deborah Cowen (among others), I see infrastructures as “collectively constructed systems that also build and sustain human life,” systems that “endure and bind us to one another’s pasts, presents and futures” and

“implicate us in collective life and death.”³² The wind phone is intentionally disconnected in order to set up a spiritual infrastructure, which I see as the existing realm of spirits and the connections and relations between the spirit world and the living world, where the connections to pasts, presents, and futures indeed endure and are bound through an alternative structure, in this case, the wind. Put plainly, the phone is intended for the nonliving or unreachable only, thus it must be connected to nowhere, denied of its typical function in order to access the spiritual realm, or spiritual infrastructure. In Berlant’s words, “[Infrastructure] is the living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structure,” that is to say, while infrastructure builds structures, the structures also build us.³³ In this case, the “living mediation” is complicated, wind is not necessarily living, but it animates, so there is a tension here between the living mediation with the dead. Berlant asserts that infrastructures include “all the systems that link ongoing proximity to being in a world-sustaining relation.”³⁴ The boundless wind, in contrast with the confined telephone booth, promotes the wavering of the boundary between living and dead. A telephone call is intended for a specific destination; but in this case, the destination is beyond the living.

To expand on the infrastructural elements of the wind phone, I draw on Susan Leigh Star, who writes that infrastructure “becomes visible upon breakdown.”³⁵ In relation to the wind phone, it is the intentional breakdown that makes the infrastructure function and makes it both invisible (the wind) and audible (voices in the wind). Building on Star, Brian Larkin defines infrastructure as

built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space. As physical forms they shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movement, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown. They comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergirding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life.³⁶

Larkin also defines infrastructure as the “matter that enables the movement of other matter . . . things and also the relation between things.”³⁷ Contrastingly, the queer Indigenous scholar Anne Spice contests the “tacit assumption that infrastructures, as ‘things and also the relation between things,’ are inanimate, are not alive.”³⁸ In “Fighting Invasive Infrastructures: Indigenous Relations against Pipelines,” Spice traces the Canadian government’s discourse surrounding oil and gas as “critical infrastructure,” which “naturalizes the environmental destruction

wrought by the oil and gas industry while criminalizing Indigenous resistance.”³⁹ They argue that in Indigenous ontologies, infrastructures are living and, therefore, merit a different approach. Spice references Freda Huson, the spokesperson for the Wet’suwet’en pipeline resistance camp in Unist’ot’en territory in British Columbia, who “calls attention to the salmon, the berries, and the bears that form [Indigenous] critical infrastructure.”⁴⁰ Spice asserts that “this living network is not an assemblage of ‘things and relation between things,’ but rather a set of relations and things between relations.”⁴¹ Spice’s alternatives to Western formulations of infrastructure provide insight into the differing systems. Their understanding of Indigenous infrastructures that require “caretaking, which Indigenous peoples are accountable to,” provide a way to consider the relations available through the wind phone, which “are built through the agency of not only humans but also other-than-human kin.”⁴² Correspondingly, wind phones can, perhaps, be understood as invoking “a set of relations and things between relations,” the apparatus and the wind being the animators of these relations (and things between relations). It can also be seen via Larkin as “things and relation between things”—the things being the living, the dead, and the apparatus itself, and the relations being everything that goes on in between.

By transmitting the voices of the visitors and their perceived interlocutors, the wind as an animating infrastructure carries the messages out of the realm of the living, out of the realm of efficiency and logistics, and into the realm of the spiritual, the ghostly, the dead. It also elicits a ghostly transmission in the psyches of the visitors. The wind phone allows for a substitution, where the loss of a loved one’s voice is addressed through the voicing of their loss, ultimately giving visitors an opportunity to begin to narrate and account for this loss.

Hearing the Past in the Present

“Can the past be heard in the present? What or who speaks or makes a sound? How do lost voices of the dead contribute to the time of the present?”⁴³ The *wind phone* suggests possible answers to these questions. Inside Sasaki’s telephone booth, a framed poem reads: “Who will you call, at the phone of the wind, you will talk to them from your heart, if you hear the wind tell them how you feel, surely your thoughts will reach them.”⁴⁴ The nostalgic rotary phone plays a role in connecting the voice of one alive in the present to the voice of another who is no longer living, performing a metaphorical, temporal manipulation in the time of the present. The temporal paradox of listening for voices of the past through a medium (the telephone) that requires immediacy while using an anachronistic

rotary telephone provides two key functions for the wind phone. The nostalgia of the rotary phone and the phone booth hark back to the past, whereas the telephone allows visitors to connect instantaneously with their loved ones. Together, these elements of the wind phone suspend the experience of temporality—being heard presently by those who are no longer living in the present, thus, revisiting the past in the present. This can be compared with early experiences of sound recording, though it is markedly different. The sound historian and media theorist Jonathan Sterne discusses the history of the relation between sound recording and death culture, referring to sound recording as a “resonant tomb.” Sterne explains:

Is this the ultimate and shocking power of sound reproduction—that it finally set the voice free from the living and self-aware body (if only for a few moments)? This is the tale often told about sound reproduction. In this formulation, death appears as a philosophical limit case for sound reproduction, and sound recording becomes a philosophical index for sound reproduction in general. The reasoning goes like this: when recorded, one’s voice was abstracted from one’s body, and, once so abstracted, the voice could be preserved indefinitely on record. The ultimate case of this scenario is, of course, the voice’s persistence through recordings after the death of the speaker.⁴⁵

Sterne makes an important distinction between sound recording and sound reproduction. What is interesting about the wind phone is its departure from sound recording; in fact, the recording would disrupt the function all together. If “the recording is . . . a resonant tomb, offering the exteriority of the voice with none of its interior self-awareness,” as Sterne suggests, what is this technology that is purposefully not recorded, or in ways not resonant? The loved one’s voice is not so much a repetition as a re-production, in the sense that hearing is about feeling the presence or the trace of the other. That is to say, the *wind phone* reproduces differently—it is obscured or distorted as opposed to being a recording like a voice message for an answering machine, and so forth. The spontaneity and unpredictability of what each individual will feel and hear, where sound recording is not part of the process, allows for the spontaneity of the voice’s “interior self-awareness.” Why travel to a booth near the sea to speak into an unconnected phone and listen for a trace of a lost loved one? Especially if you have access to multiple recordings of this person? Sterne argues that “*the voices of the dead* is a striking figure of exteriority” and explains how “speech is traditionally considered

as both interior and exterior, both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the limits of subjectivity.”⁴⁶ This is “because it comes from within the body and extends out into the world, whereas “the voices of the dead no longer emanate from bodies that serve as containers for self-awareness.”⁴⁷ Visitors desire the imagined interiority, spontaneity, and lack of repetition that comes with the wind phone. In this way, the wind phone allows for a kind of reinvention of the other’s self-awareness by invoking the voices of the dead through spontaneous phone calls.

While the process departs from recorded sound, it invokes a kind of nostalgia through the use of the rotary phone. Eugenie Brinkema describes why some “theorizations of nostalgia (*nostos* [to return home]; *algos* [pain]) are so reminiscent of those of grief.”⁴⁸ Brinkema shows the potent connection between nostalgia and grief, leading to an understanding of why a nostalgic rotary phone makes a powerful technology of mourning. Sasaki’s nostalgic rotary telephone harks back to the original uses for telephones as simple devices connecting the voice of one individual to the voice of another, instantly, however long the physical distance. Departing from the modern-day multipurpose use of smartphones, the wind phone embraces the nostalgic use of a rotary phone as a technology for intimate connection. While acknowledging both individual and collective grief brought on by a natural disaster, the wind phone represents a bridging of individual loss, by nature of the physical limits of the space, and collective loss, by way of its accessibility and wide appeal as a technology of mourning. The wind phone suspends how we experience time and communication where visitors are invited to embrace the temporal paradox of hearing the past in the present. In the case of the wind phone, the anachronistic use of the rotary telephone acts to alter the visitor’s experience of temporality, suspending the delivery, dislocating subject, object, and time.

Since their respective inventions, the telephone and the phonograph have been associated with the supernatural and have on numerous occasions been considered technologies that can communicate with the spirit world.⁴⁹ This could be in part because “the telephone facilitated the hearing of a voice physically absent to the listener,” so it left space for the uncanny, and as the sound historian Jonathan Sterne explains, “the phonograph took this a step further by dramatically facilitating the audition of voices absent to themselves.”⁵⁰

The first person to use a telephone in Japan exclaimed, “Ohh, it’s just like hearing the voice of a ghost!”⁵¹ When telephones were first introduced in Japan, people who did not have their own telephones would travel outside their homes to engage in a practice called “*yobidashi denwa*” (telephone summons)—emphasizing the feeling of a sort of magic when “summoning” another through the telephone.⁵² The process sometimes involved going to the office multiple

times in order to reach the intended receiver. Despite the cumbersome nature of *yobidashi denwa*, there was still demand for these calls; users “wanted, simply, to hear one another’s voices even when one or both parties didn’t have a phone installed.”⁵³ The wind phone, in a way, mimics this summoning of the distant presence of a departed loved one; however, the wind phone obscures the voice, or the expectation of what visitors expect to encounter. Yasar highlights the history and cultural significance of orality in Japan and how the voice is often used synonymously with identity. He explains:

The voice itself straddles the boundary, as Michel Chion has noted, between materiality and immateriality. In other words, technologically mediated listening over long distances offered users pleasure derived . . . both from technological magic and from the sensual medium of the human voice.⁵⁴

While *yobidashi denwa* emphasizes the appeal of listening to a technologically mediated voice over a long distance, the wind phone produces a “technological magic” through the use of wind as infrastructure, obscuring and redressing the “sensual medium of the human voice” over long distance, and even across the barrier of the living and dead.⁵⁵ The idea of the human voice as a “sensual medium” helps account for the sensorium associated with the wind phone. A replacement takes place, where the senses are attuned to traces of departed loved ones, aided by the wind’s animating capacity.

Yasar explains how “residual traces [of an individual’s voice] remain only in the memories of mortal bodies.”⁵⁶ To hear a loved one’s voice or feel/hear a trace of their voice, then, indicates that they are reachable, through recognizing their absence. So perhaps it is memories or traces that the visitors speak to and want to feel heard by. Trace, according to Jacques Derrida, “is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers to itself, it properly has no site—erasure belongs to its structure.”⁵⁷ Akira Mizuta Lippit expands on Derrida’s notion of trace, defining it as “an erasable sign and sign of erasure that erases as it signs and is in turn erased already.”⁵⁸ That is to say, the voice is associated with mortality as well as vitality, which is key to the functioning of the wind phone—visitors are aware that they are listening for voices that they literally cannot hear, though there are substitutions for their voices, the animation force of the wind, for example, that allow the visitors to hear a representation of their presence. Importantly, in the context of using a rotary phone in a phone booth, the unique sound of someone’s voice in present time actively indicates that they are alive.

In cases where physical remains cannot be located, people still feel it is necessary for living loved ones and the remains of the deceased to be ceremoniously “reunified.”⁵⁹ For example, a mother of three, who lost her husband, is recorded in the booth, and translated in *This American Life: One Last Thing Before I Go* podcast:

I feel like you’re still alive—somewhere. Over the phone, we always said to each other, are you alive? Yes, I’m alive. It was our password between the two of us, wasn’t it? I can’t ask you that anymore. Come back. We, all four of us together, we will be waiting. Bye.⁶⁰

For this woman, the fact that her husband’s body was never found creates the sense that he may be alive, out there somewhere. In this regard, Harrison notes:

the work of getting the dead to die in us, as opposed to dying with our dead, is all the more arduous if not impossible when the dead body goes missing, given the almost universal association between corpse and person among human beings and the fact that mortal remains are never a matter of indifference where bonds of love and kinship exist.⁶¹

For some visitors, the wind phone allows the commencement of the “work of getting the dead to die in us,” though as Harrison notes, this work is exceedingly difficult when letting go of the missing. In Harrison’s conception, this release is the very work of mourning—“Just as burial lays the dead to rest in the earth, mourning lays them to rest in us.”⁶² At times, the work of mourning through the wind telephone is the intimacy of feeling that wherever a loved one may be, however far away, the living can continue to feel a connection, even after the dead are made to die within the living. When mortal remains are swept up by the ocean or obscured by piles of debris—like in the aftermath of the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami—the impossibility of laying the dead to rest is immensely difficult to grapple with. The loss of remains complicates the process of mourning and maintains, or at least acknowledges, the temporal suspension of those mourning the missing. Furthermore, in this case, mourning does not mean letting go or “letting the dead die in our imagination” but precisely the opposite: visitors maintain some kind of a relationship with their departed loved ones through the phone booth, ultimately letting the dead live in their imaginations and in these site-specific conversations. Visitors can sustain their attention but also

concentrate their desires through this site-specific memorial/communication technology.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, the wind phone, as a technology of mourning, provides a space where visitors can reconcile an altered relationship to the dead, particularly in the case where there are no physical remains of those who have passed. Repurposing the telephone, a common communication technology, wind phones allow a place for people to externalize their grief and connect with traces of their lost loved ones. Since the *wind phone* overlooks the ocean, not far from where the town of Ōtsuchi suffered immense loss, the site specificity foregrounds the important and intimate details of personal loss and sets it against the indeterminate scene of the waters, allowing for a sort of confrontation of the ambiguity of loss. What takes place is a renegotiation of mourning, where overlapping rhetorical devices, like apostrophe, prosopopoeia, and animation, along with nostalgic media—the rotary telephone—summon the dead and at times give them voice, all in the psychically and spiritually dense confines of a phone booth connected to nothing but the wind. The absent presence or trace of a departed loved one now becomes possible, palpable, as if the dead were really speaking through the wind phone.

* * *

Laura Boyce is pursuing their master's in communication studies with a minor concentration in gender and women's studies at McGill University in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal). Their research focuses on technologies used to communicate and maintain relationships with the dead, specifically in the context of large-scale disasters and/or instances where people go missing or disappear. They received a graduate diploma in communication and media studies from Concordia University and a bachelor's in English literature from the University of Victoria, and are the recipient of a SSHRC Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS-M award.

Notes

¹ *The Phone of the Wind: Whispers to Lost Families*, NHK Documentary, aired March 11, 2017. <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/tv/documentary/20210307/4001232/>.

² When referring to Sasaki's *wind phone*, I use italics to indicate the specific artwork I am referring to; when wind phone is not in italics, I am referring to the wind phone as a form that has been reproduced in various locations.

³ For example, one particular reproduction is located in a garden behind a hospice in Port Moody, British Columbia, where employees built a wind phone so that people whose loved ones are dying in the hospice could have a chance to say things and/or feel the presence of their loved ones who are dying or have died.

⁴ I use the term *technology* to emphasize the utility of the wind phone as a tool. In this case, it can also be considered a technology for its innovative reappropriation of the common communication technology: the telephone and telephone booth. It also complicates the notion of technology by putting this common technology to a different use in a different way (reinterpreting the literal material functionality of a telephone).

⁵ By site-specific attributes, I am referring to the site itself, the disconnected rotary phone, the telephone booth, and its specific use for contacting the dead/absent and only those interlocutors (as opposed to a regular telephone booth with a phone that is connected to a phone line, which is used for contacting the living). The site's proximity to the ocean, and to Ōtsuchi, also add to the site specificity of this *wind phone*.

⁶ This is an important part of the functioning of the *wind phone*. According to the *OED*, anachronisms are things that belong to or are appropriate to different periods of time, so the rotary phone here is an anachronistic type of media.

⁷ The title of this section is referencing Barbara Johnson's "Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion," in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁸ Tessa Fontaine, "The Phone of the Wind: A Pilgrimage to a Disconnected Phone in Ōtsuchi, Japan," July 25, 2018, <https://culture.org/logger/the-phone-of-the-wind/>.

⁹ Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism," in *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 26, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822394716>.

¹⁰ Berlant is paraphrasing Johnson's "Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion" in *Cruel Optimism* (25).

¹¹ Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion," 187.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The wind is, of course, not always a double actor in this sense. However, it remains a powerful animator in every case.

¹⁶ I want to trouble Berlant's use of *fake* here. What makes it fake? Can one not be virtually present in a moment with someone who is not physically there? Does this make it fake?

¹⁷ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 25.

¹⁸ Jacques Khalip, "The Archaeology of Sound?: Derek Jarman's Blue and Queer Audiovisuality in the Time of Aids," *differences* 21, no. 2 (2010): 73–108, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-2010-004>.

¹⁹ Ibid., 78.

²⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, quoted in Khalip, "Archaeology of Sound," 78.

²¹ The translation of this phrase is from episode 597 of *This American Life*, "One Last Thing Before I Go, Act One: Really Long Distance." The episode uses the recorded phone calls from the documentary, however, Miki Meek, a producer on the show, translates the calls in the podcast. It is one translation of the words, which, in the documentary *The Phone of the Wind: Whispers to Lost Families*, were alternatively translated as "If you're out there, please listen to me." I chose to use both translations of this visitor's words in this essay.

²² *The Phone of the Wind: Whispers to Lost Families*.

²³ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Listening," in *Listening*, translated by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 12.

²⁴ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 25.

²⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "prosopopoeia," May 20, 2022, <https://www-oed-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/view/Entry/153015?redirectedFrom=prosopopoeia>.

²⁶ Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 151, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226317922.001.0001>.

²⁷ Mari Saito, "Japan's Tsunami Survivors Call Lost Loves on the Phone of the Wind," Reuters, March 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/wider-image-japans-tsunami-survivors-call-lost-loves-phone-wind-2021-03-05/>.

²⁸ Eve Sedgwick, quoted in Khalip, "Archaeology of Sound," 73.

²⁹ Eve Sedgwick, "White Glasses," in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 264.

³⁰ Khalip, "Archaeology of Sound," 74.

³¹ *The Phone of the Wind: Whispers to Lost Families*.

- ³² Deborah Cowen, “Infrastructures of Empire and Resistance,” Verso, January 25, 2017, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3067-infrastructures-of-empire-and-resistance>.
- ³³ This is a reference to Berlant as well as Cowen, who writes: “‘We’ build infrastructure, and it builds ‘us’” (“Infrastructures of Empire and Resistance”).
- ³⁴ Lauren Berlant, “The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (2016): 393, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816645989>.
- ³⁵ Susan Leigh Star, “The Ethnography of Infrastructure,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 3 (1999): 377–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027649921955326>.
- ³⁶ Brian Larkin, “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 328, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522>.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 329.
- ³⁸ Anne Spice, “Fighting Invasive Infrastructures: Indigenous Relations against Pipelines,” *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 9 (2018): 42. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2018.090104>.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ Khalip, “‘Archaeology of Sound,’” 76.
- ⁴⁴ Saito, “Japan’s Tsunami Survivors Call Lost Loves on the Phone of the Wind.”
- ⁴⁵ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 290. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822384250>.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 57, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822376774>.
- ⁴⁹ For more on this topic, see Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Jeffery Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); and Sterne, *Audible Past*.
- ⁵⁰ Sterne, *Audible Past*, 290.
- ⁵¹ Kerim Yasar, “Vocal Cords and Telephone Wires,” in *Electrified Voices: How the Telephone, Phonograph, and Radio Shaped Modern Japan, 1868–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 42. <https://doi.org/10.7312/yasa18712-004>.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵³ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁷ Derrida, quoted in Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 54.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Harrison, *Dominion of the Dead*, 147.

⁶⁰ Meek, “One Last Thing Before I Go, Act One: Really Long Distance,” *This American Life* podcast.

⁶¹ Harrison, *Dominion of the Dead*, 147.

⁶² Ibid., 50.

This page intentionally left blank

Mapping Sonic Futurities

Alex Wand

Mapping Sonic Futurities (MSF) combines sound art, listening practices, and ecological research to trace the present and future histories of ecological habitats. The project involves twenty-four-hour “sound vigils” in outdoor spaces and habitats with tenuous futures. During these retreats, the keeper of the vigil commits to being in one location for an entire day and night. For each of the twenty-four hours, they dedicate time to acts of ecologically engaged listening and sounding.¹ This involves making field recordings of the space, performing music that responds to nearby sounds, and/or sitting in meditation with a focus on modes of listening outlined in a series of guided prompts. All the while, the participant keeps a journal about these experiences. The final expression of the sound vigil is a ten-minute video piece that is divided into twenty-five-second segments that represent each hour of the vigil. The segments contain videos, still images, field recordings, and performances that develop a narrative about the habitat and the vigil keeper’s dialogue with the habitat. Each video piece is accompanied by field notes taken during the vigil. Collaborators include myself (musician, vigil keeper); Alex Jones (UCSC Campus Natural Reserve manager, adviser); Tiffany Theden (naturalist, vigil keeper); and Stephanie Cheng Smith (creative coder). MSF is presented as an interactive website at mappingsonicfuturities.com and as a sound art installation that premiered in December 2021 at Indexical,² an experimental music venue in Santa Cruz, California.

MSF at UCSC

In 2021, the University of California, Santa Cruz adopted the 2021 Long Range Development Plan (LRDP), a set of blueprints to develop new roads and buildings on the campus. If all aspects of the LRDP are fully implemented, there will be loss of habitat and a shifting of landscape connectivity farther to the north. The planners took many constraints into consideration when determining land-use designations, including geology; light, sound, and air pollution; hydrology; sensitive species and habitats; cultural sites. Much of this analysis relied on prior reports and remote analyses. We seek to document one aspect of the on-the-ground reality that is lost in this process: the actual moment-to-moment soundscape of UCSC, in the context of the LRDP.

This inaugural MSF project takes place in different locations on UCSC's campus at sites where the LRDP plans to pave roads and erect new buildings in the next twenty years. The locations are named after their inhabitants: Coyote Corner, Hawk's Prairie, Court of Cicada, Hall of the Hermit Thrush, and Newt's Niche. The video pieces and accompanying field notes function as a rendering of the ecological sounds that define these spaces and a baseline from which to measure change should development occur. We will also use the recordings as ways to document and research the presence of native species whose habitat may be degraded once roadways or buildings are built.

Guidelines for MSF Sound Vigils

The project has developed a series of questions and prompts that the vigil keeper uses as a guideline for how to engage with the environment (i.e., drawing, singing, playing an instrument, or listening). While the documentation of the vigils is an important aspect of the project, the substantial artistic experience of MSF is the vigil itself and the relations that emerge between the environment and the vigil keeper.

Record five-to-twenty-minute segments of your chosen location every hour for a given duration of up to twenty-four hours. Each segment will represent one hour of the day. The final recording that represents each space will be a compilation of twenty-five-second segments representing each hour (for a total of ten minutes representing the day).

For each segment, you have the option to make a sounding, drawing, and/or poem that responds to the space in some way. The sounds don't necessarily need to be musical in the traditional

sense—they could be the rustling of leaves with your hands for a few seconds or they could be the sound of you slowly walking through the space. If you do go the musical route, consider something sparse like singing a long tone, a single pluck of a ukulele, or the ringing of bells. Perhaps try playing with proximity—that is, singing the note twenty feet away from the recorder. Or try making a sounding that explores the subjectivity of a tree or an animal. Think of yourself as being in the same camp as the critters—both as listeners and as sound makers.

Journal about your experience. This may be anything from a freewrite to descriptions (or transcriptions) of the sounds, animals, cars, and plant life. The purpose of the journal is to create a narrative about the soundscape and the habitat but also our experience of the habitat.

During the recordings, you have the option to engage in the following listening prompts (or make up your own!). These prompts are listed in order of their perceived difficulty. They all require a committed attentiveness to sound that is facilitated by a calm and present mind. If thoughts and mental distractions arise, take it as an opportunity to observe the thoughts with equanimity. Then gently redirect your attention to the listening prompt. This gentle and equanimous redirecting of attention is great practice for the mind, and with repetition, you'll be able to go deeper with your engagement with the soundscape.

SOUND SWEEP

Listen for specific frequency ranges starting with high frequencies and slowly sweeping down to mid frequencies, then to low frequencies, and then back up. If you don't hear anything in a particular frequency range immediately, give it some time just to make sure—then move on to the next frequency range (i.e., high frequency: bird calls; midfrequency: human voice; low frequency: car engine). Write about your experience. Were there any subtle sounds that you picked up on as a result of this kind of listening?

RECEPTIVE SOUNDING

Listen to your environment as if you were actively making the sounds you hear. While this requires a bit of imagination, it's not too far-fetched, as the human ear actually emits sounds (i.e., "otoacoustic emissions"). This inverts that idea that we are passively taking in sounds as we hear them. Instead, we are co-creating them in a dance between our perception and the soundscape. . . . After listening like this for a while, start singing long tones. Now make a shift in your listening perspective to one of receptivity. Focus on the tones as if you were passively receiving the sound of your own voice. Notice how your sensing body responds to all of this. Write down any observations.

PERSPECTIVE LISTENING

Begin by listening to all sounds. Your ears are an open book. After several minutes begin to zoom in and focus attention on a sound that stands out to you. Then begin to listen from the perspective of where the sound source is coming from. If you're hearing a bird, listen as the bird—if you're hearing the hum of an AC unit, listen from the perspective of the AC unit. There is an element of speculation involved here. Write down any observations, insights, or challenges.

OWL MIND

Notice your body in space, your visual field, and the soundscape all at once.

After a time, turn your attention to the noticing itself. Who is doing the noticing? Can you locate that noticer in space?

Return to your bodily sensations, your visual field, and the soundscape. Imagine the noticer of all this sense data as an owl perched on an imaginary branch just behind you. The owl is now your surrogate mind. Let the owl notice all your sense data with equanimity.

TIME SWEEP

Listen to individual sounds that stand out to you and focus on their texture. Notice how the environment might shape their sonic character. Then “zoom out” and listen to the soundscape more globally as a set of sonic entanglements (the opposite of the “zooming in” during perspective listening). Listen to all sounds as a whole, as a single sheet of experience.

Notice your visual field. If your eyes are closed, what do you see? Patterns of light coming through your eyelids? If they are open, what do you see? Different objects in space? Begin to observe them not as discrete objects but as a single sheet of raw experience. Then notice any sensations in your body. Your breath, the pumping of your veins, the wind against your face, or more subtle energetic movements in your body. Observe them as a superposition of sense data that results in a single sheet of experience. Then merge these three domains—sound, vision, bodily sensations—as a single sheet of experience. Practice perceiving them not from the point of view of a listener but from the point of view of the sounds, visions, sensations themselves.

Now observe the experience of time passing. Observe it as a pattern of energy from which you can drop back. As you drop back, what do you see/hear/feel? Include this as part of your sheet of experience alongside the other senses.

This practice is an invitation to enfold our perceptions onto one another and observe them as one necessarily entangled sheet of experience. The aim is to stretch the mind and spark imaginative ways of noticing one's environment, one's body, and one's sense of temporality.

The Arts of Noticing and Remembering

MSF's acts of listening and sounding resonate with what the anthropologist Anna Tsing calls the "arts of noticing." In her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, she writes that this includes noticing webs of coordination between life forms and "wider rhythms and histories of landscapes."³ The vigil keeper's attentive observation of the environment for an entire day is meant to be an inquiry into how such a commitment can develop one's awareness of sound and reorient one's relationship to the natural world. MSF conceives of the natural world as being inextricably entwined with human activity. This is expressed in MSF's field recordings, which include animal and insect sounds alongside human-caused sounds (i.e., vigil keeper performances, passersby, airplanes, train horns, distant traffic noises). The view that humans are always a part of nature is a given in many Indigenous cosmologies. For example, the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee scholar Vanessa Watts writes that what constitutes "society" for the Anishinaabe revolves around interactions between human and nonhuman worlds, not solely interactions among human beings.⁴ She uses the term *Place-Thought* to describe an Anishinaabe conception of place based on the premise that "land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts."⁵ By contrast, Tsing says that since the Enlightenment, Western conceptions of the environment show us a Nature that is "grand and universal but also passive and mechanical" and "a backdrop and resource for the moral intentionality of Man, which could tame and master Nature."⁶ To subvert such a view, Tsing asks, "Can I show landscape as the protagonist of an adventure in which humans are only one kind of participant?"⁷ She takes a particular interest in sites of human disturbance as the protagonists of such stories: "Human-disturbed landscapes are ideal spaces for humanist and naturalist noticing. We need to know the histories humans have made in these places and the histories of non-human participants."⁸

As a relevant example of such a space, Ingrid M. Parker has investigated the ecological history of UCSC's Great Meadow, an iconic landscape on campus filled with thick annual grasses that turn golden every summer. Her research reveals that the landscape is almost entirely devoid of native plants. In one study, Parker and her colleagues found that 84 percent of the plant species in the Great

Meadow were introduced by Spanish colonists beginning in the eighteenth century, including familiar European plants like wild oat, ripgut brome, wild radish, Italian ryegrass, and wild mustard.⁹ These introduced species also dominate the plant cover, constituting a full 90 percent of the vegetation growing in the Great Meadow.

She also speculates on what the meadow looked like before these plants arrived from Europe. One hypothesis is that the fields were originally dominated by perennial native grasses such as purple needle grass and creeping wild rye. Another possibility is that they were filled with native wildflowers. She cites Richard Minnich, who makes this argument in *California's Fading Wildflowers* based on a range of historical and ecological evidence.¹⁰ According to descriptions in this book, at the time of European contact, spring in California was a “riot of color.”¹¹ In addition to Minnich’s evidence, research on phytoliths (plant microfossils) now supports the theory that the original California grasslands were dominated by wildflowers. Native wildflowers thought to have populated the hills include blue lupines, baby blue-eyes, pink owl’s clover, prickly yellow fiddlenecks, scarlet paintbrushes, and white fairy lanterns.¹²

Parker states that these wildflowers “are like ghosts to me” and that their absence in the hills of the Great Meadow has a haunting quality. She uses the Great Meadow’s ecological history as an example of an “amnesia” that she says currently pervades the relationship of many humans to their surrounding environments.¹³ In the case of the wildflowers, there is no formal record of their disappearance. She notes the Amah Mutsun’s important role in shaping and maintaining open meadows and forest edges through their use of controlled fires (among other practices) and how such cultural practices have also been dormant and at risk of being lost.¹⁴ While most tribe members currently live outside their historic lands, the tribe is beginning to regain its role as stewards of a small portion of these lands that its members traditionally occupied.¹⁵ Their absence from most of these lands, a direct result of the ongoing erasure and disruptions of tribal life that began during the Spanish missions, also haunts the Great Meadow. In this case, the amnesia exists as a loss of ecological and human histories due to the past and present forces of colonialism. The plant fossils are a kind of material haunting of these precolonial ways of life and show the land itself to be the holder of these lost memories.

Parker’s research is particularly relevant to MSF’s project at UCSC because the LRDP aims to develop on several stretches of nonnative grassland on campus, including portions of the Great Meadow itself. Two of our sound vigils have occurred on these grasslands: Coyote Corner and Hawk’s Prairie. A crucial part of these sound vigils involves the telling of these histories and listening for (and with) the specters that haunt the landscapes. Hauntings are most directly experienced by

the vigil keeper but are also hoped to be transmitted to the viewer and listener who engages with the vigil's documentation. In the context of MSF at UCSC, much of the vigil keeper's field recordings at night appears virtually silent. At night, the noise floor of the microphone is sometimes the most prominent sound in the recording. The recordings of this (near) silence reflect the habitat's cycles of activity and inactivity, but they also reveal a "speaking stillness"—a haunting expression of the landscape that renders it animate. In the case of Hawk's Prairie, one might consider the presence of the Great Meadow's ghosts, as described by Parker, to be revealed through the silence and stillness of the vigil keeper's nocturnal recordings.

The vigil keeper also mediates a dialogue between the present landscape and its past and future history. If these habitats are developed on in the next twenty years, then the video art pieces will function as reminders of the species of plants and animals that perhaps no longer inhabit these locations due to the development of the LRDP. The video functions as a future haunting of past ways of life found in the habitat that would hopefully counter the "amnesia" that Parker says pervades our relationship to landscape.

Sense-able Sonic Practices

The MSF listening prompts form part of the "sense-able sonic practices" as outlined by the inhabitants of the Imaginary Town of Moses (ITM), a yet-to-be artist collective founded by the musician/cyclist Alejandro Botijo (aka Alex Wand).¹⁶ They take inspiration from the composer Pauline Oliveros's writings on what she calls "quantum listening."

In her paper "Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (To Practice Practice)," Oliveros frames quantum listening as the context of her deep listening practice that balances two modes of listening, focal and global: "Focal listening garners detail from any sound and global listening brings expansion through the whole field of sound."¹⁷ She writes that quantum listening is "listening in as many ways as possible simultaneously."¹⁸ It is a kind of attentive listening that "leads you to notice that you are listening"; in other words, quantum listening involves "listening to our listening."¹⁹

Quantum listening simultaneously creates and changes what is perceived. The perceiver and the perceived co-create through the listening effect. All sounds are included in the field. This creates potential, cultivates, surprises, opens the imagination, and approaches and even plunges over the edges of perception into the mystery of

the universe predicted by quantum field theory. Quantum listening is the ability to discern all that there is in a single moment–point in space.²⁰

Oliveros’s concept of “deep listening” and “listening to listening” dates back 2,500 years to the Buddhist concept of “experiencing Sonic Vedanā.”²¹ This practice encourages practitioners to attempt to listen without preference to one sound over another. This equanimous listening aims to cultivate nondual awareness.²² His Holiness the Dalai Lama writes that in Tibetan Buddhism, nonduality refers to the idea that the “mind and its object, or experience and its contents—always come together as one entity.”²³ To cultivate such a nondual awareness in the context of sound, he writes that Tibetan Buddhist practices encourage the practitioner to shift a focus of attention toward “the cognitive process that is occurring” in “the arising of a sound and the hearing of it.”²⁴ MSF’s “Owl Mind” and “Time Sweep” orient the participant toward this experience of consciousness as well. They aim to help develop a kind of awareness that is also described by the researcher Alvin Noë, who argues that consciousness is not limited to the physical confines of the mind: “Consciousness does not happen inside; it’s not like digestion; it’s more like a dance.”²⁵ This is meant to provide pathways to think of oneself outside the paradigm of the “bounded individual.”

While sound is the still anchor of the MSF prompts, we emphasize words that engage multiple senses (not just hearing) such as “sensing,” “noticing,” and “experience.” Several ecological-minded composers and sound artists have placed a primacy on the aural over the visual in their work. These include R. Murray Schafer, Oliveros, and David Dunn, among others. Stated reasons for such an orientation have been a desire to stay within one’s domain of specialization as a composer and an interest in subverting the primacy of the sight in mainstream Western society—what Schafer calls “eye culture” and what Oliveros considers a “visually oriented society.”²⁶

In contrast to this position, MSF prioritizes sound as an entryway to multisensorial experiences of habitats. Studies in neuropsychology have indicated that in perceptual practice, human senses cooperate so closely and, with such overlap of function, that their perceived contributions are impossible to tease apart.²⁷ MSF practices resonate with other cultural examples of multisensory orientations to sound and landscape. One model for an ecological approach to perception can be found in the Yoreme people of northwest Mexico, who consider sound and sight to be interrelated perceptual activities. In an interview with the anthropologist Helena Simonett, the Yoreme musician Berdardo Equer López describes his culture’s ceremonies and rituals that involve dance, storytelling, and music. López states

that songs in his native language express both color and sound and explains that the music communicates a mythological time and emerges from “visions of landscapes,” which represent places the performers have traversed or inhabited.²⁸ Often the rituals are based on presenting the subjectivities of these landscapes and the creatures that inhabit them. In these ceremonies, the Yoreme approach musical meaning not from notes, melodies, or rhythms that one can learn to re-create but “from the experience of inhabiting the world.”²⁹ In this way, their music is based on sensorial perceptions that result from ontological experiences of dwelling in the mountain. Through MSF’s listening and sounding activities, the vigil keeper also has an opportunity to inhabit and be inhabited by a landscape in a way that engages multiple senses. In “Owl Mind” for example, the vigil keeper turns “noticing” on itself and creates an overlay of sonic, visual, and kinetic awareness:

Notice your body in space, your visual field, and the soundscape all at once.

After a time, turn your attention to the noticing itself. Who is doing the noticing? Can you locate that noticer in space?

Return to your bodily sensations, your visual field, and the soundscape. Imagine the noticer of all this sense data as an owl perched on an imaginary branch just behind you. The owl is now your surrogate mind. Let the owl notice all your sense data with equanimity.

Exploring Alternative Temporalities

E. P. Thompson’s “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism” investigates the relationship between the emergence of industrial capitalism and the shift toward clock time in Europe. He argues that industrial capitalism changed society’s predominant conception of time from one that was tracked by the natural world to one that was dominated by a monetary valuation of time as wage labor (time is money).³⁰ Concurrent with this was the emergence of clocks and watches that regulated the “new rhythms of industrial life.”³¹ He argues that it was not only the emergence of clocks and industrial capitalism that brought on this new conception of “time-discipline” but also cultural forces such as Puritan notions of work ethic.³² It is this paradigm of time that Walter Benjamin calls “homogenous empty time.”³³ It connects to a Newtonian conception of time as an empty container of successive discrete moments. Karen Barad writes that this conception of time is the “time of

capitalism, colonialism, and militarism.”³⁴ The Chilean philosopher Alejandro Vallega also makes this claim with his discussion of the “coloniality of time” as a temporality that places civilization at different points on a universal and unidirectional sense of history that culminates in European modernity.³⁵ Daniel Wildcat, drawing on the work of the Indigenous philosopher Vine Deloria, has a similar critique of clock time’s effect on conceptions of human history:

It is of critical practical importance that some cultures express history as primarily temporal and others express history as fundamentally spatial in character. Once history-as-time is universalized and human beings are, so to speak, all put on the same clock, it is inevitable that in the big picture of human history some people will be viewed as “on time,” “ahead of time,” or “running late.” It makes little difference that the clock hands rotate in circles, for they are thought of and acted on as if they were wheels moving down a single road called progress.³⁶

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Tsing attempts to think outside modernist conceptions of time:

Progress is a forward march, drawing other kinds of time into its rhythms. Without that driving beat, we might notice other temporal patterns. Each living thing remakes the world through seasonal pulses of growth, lifetime reproductive patterns, and geographies of expansion.”³⁷

Part of what Tsing calls the “arts of noticing” involves attuning to these other kinds of rhythms, a tracking of the natural world through the seasons, ocean tides, and weather patterns in a way that is less mediated by modernity. Tsing continues: “This is not a simple empiricism where the world invents its own categories. Instead, agnostic about where we are going, we might look for what has been ignored because it never fit the timeline of progress.”³⁸

MSF sound vigils also aim to go beyond “homogenous empty time” or “clock time” by cultivating a noticing of other temporal patterns (the ecological rhythms of activity and inactivity, weather patterns, migratory patterns, seasonal growth, sunrise, sunset). Part of the vigil keeper’s work is to tell stories of these temporal patterns. For example, in *Court of Cicada*, we explore the life cycle of the cicadas found on Upper Campus. As Alex Jones notes,

The cicada nymphs live underground for usually two years, sucking sap from roots of redwood trees, and then in the spring they crawl out of their exoskeletons and climb up to the tree's foliage. The females make a little slit in the branches where they lay eggs, the adults die, the eggs hatch out and the nymphs drop to the ground to burrow down and suck sap for a couple years.³⁹

The vigil keeper also observes diurnal cycles that are nested within this larger life cycle, such as the patterns of cicada mating call activity throughout the day, which correspond to the sunrise and sunset (they take a break at night). On our respective sound vigils, Tiffany Theden and I also observed the rhythms of their mating calls: a unified and consistent pulsing of clicks that is a result of the cicadas listening to and spontaneously syncing with neighboring cicadas.⁴⁰

In addition to attuning to these natural rhythms, MSF vigil keepers practice ways of imagining a conception of temporality that has been outlined by quantum field theory. To explain quantum field theory, Barad writes about patterns of diffraction. An example is the dropping of two stones in a still pond. The stones create two oscillation sources that entangle with each other, creating a diffraction pattern in the water. In quantum physics, particles exhibit diffraction patterns when in a state of superposition. Barad describes this superposition as a state of being “indeterminately here-there.”⁴¹ In this way, particles have the capacity to behave like waves. Particles also exhibit patterns of temporal diffraction where a given entity can be in a state of superposition of different times—for example: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.⁴² This temporal diffraction points to what Barad calls “an ontological indeterminacy of time.”⁴³ Quantum physics provides a view of space-time that disrupts what Barad calls “the imperialism of universal space and time.”⁴⁴

In “Time Sweep,” the vigil keeper is invited into this temporal indeterminacy:

Listen to individual sounds that stand out to you and focus on their texture. Notice how the environment might shape their sonic character. Then “zoom out” and listen to the soundscape more globally as a set of sonic entanglements (the opposite of the “zooming in” during perspective listening). Listen to all sounds as a whole, as single sheet of experience.

Notice your visual field. If your eyes are closed, what do you see? Patterns of light coming through your eyelids? If they are open, what do you see? Different objects in space? Begin to observe them not as discrete objects but as a single

sheet of raw experience. Then notice any sensations in your body. Your breath, the pumping of your veins, the wind against your face, or more subtle energetic movements in your body. Observe them as a superposition of sense data that results in a single sheet of experience. Then merge these three domains—sound, vision, bodily sensations—as a single sheet of experience. Practice perceiving them not from the point of view of a listener but from the point of view of the sounds, visions, sensations themselves.

Now observe the experience of time passing. Observe it as a pattern of energy from which you can drop back. As you drop back, what do you see/hear/feel? Include this as part of your sheet of experience alongside the other senses.

This prompt is an invitation to enfold our perceptions onto one another and observe them as one necessarily entangled “sheet of experience.” Time is a part of the fabric of this sheet of experience (not a container for it, as in “homogenous empty time”). While the goal of experiencing time as “indeterminately here-there” (as a particle in a quantum field) may seem a leviathan challenge, a broader aim of this prompt is to stretch the mind and spark imaginative ways of noticing relations between one’s environment, one’s body, and one’s sense of temporality.

The Selves of Octopuses (and the Joy of Fishes)

In *Metazoa: Animal Life and the Birth of the Mind*, Peter Godfrey-Smith writes that an octopus’s nervous system is decentralized—about two thirds of its neurons are not in its brain, and connections between its arms and brain within the nervous system are “rather slim.”⁴⁵ Octopuses often exhibit unified behavior in certain instances (throwing debris, jetting around), but at other times, their tentacles wander and explore in ways that may not be directly controlled by the central brain.⁴⁶ Hence, Godfrey-Smith invites the reader to consider the possibility that an octopus is a “being with multiple selves.”⁴⁷ Several octopus selfhood proposals follow: 1 self (central brain), $1 + 8 = 9$ selves (central brain + 8 tentacles), and $1 + 1 = 2$ selves (brain + the composite of the 8 tentacles as a unified network).⁴⁸ Godfrey-Smith explores the possibility that an octopus is able, to some extent, to switch between being a unified single subject and nine subjects. That is, the tentacles may be able to produce their own locally controlled responses to what they sense, and, at some moments that require focused and coordinated action, the octopus may impose central control.⁴⁹

Godfrey-Smith's speculations on octopus subjectivity provide grounds for imagining how humans might be able to cultivate such forms of subjectivity through kinetic and sonic awareness. Donna Haraway also suggests this in her book *Staying with the Trouble*. She proposes that "tentacular thinking" can be a metaphorical model to think outside Western ideals that underpin hegemonic worldviews such as "human exceptionalism" and "bounded individualism."⁵⁰ She investigates the etymology of the word *tentacle*: from the Latin *tentare* meaning "to feel, to try." She writes that "tentacularity" is about "life lived along lines—and in such a wealth of lines—not at points, not in spheres" and invites the reader to consider humans not as bounded units but as assemblages that are in constant entanglements with other subjectivities: critters, plants, and microbes.⁵¹

Both Godfrey-Smith and Haraway are talking about a particular kind of consciousness that is inherent in tentacular beings and cephalopods. Does human consciousness have any hint of such a capacity for a decentralized version of awareness, or an awareness that complicates Western cultural notions of individuality? Godfrey-Smith considers this. Though the last common ancestor (bilaterians) of humans and octopuses existed over six hundred million years ago, he speculates on the possibility that the consciousness of this common ancestor may have been well developed at that point, giving us a common genealogy of consciousness/subjectivity. If this is the case, this would gesture toward the human brain having evolutionary roots in a decentered cognition. Godfrey-Smith outlines cases where this kind of consciousness might exist in humans: (1) with the Wada tests, where one hemisphere of a patient's brain is put to sleep with an anesthetic (when the left side is asleep, the patient usually can't speak but remains conscious); and with (2) the independence of brain hemispheres of epilepsy patients who have undergone split-brain surgery.⁵² While these are compelling examples that exist within the region of the brain, Godfrey-Smith makes no speculations about the kind of subjectivity that might extend outside the brain region (e.g., kinetic awareness through nervous system pathways).

One avenue for a human capacity to cultivate a "tentacular" subjectivity is through meditative practices of sonic and kinetic awareness. Vipassana meditation, for example, is based on cultivating an awareness of (and equanimity toward) sensations in the body. The approach of this meditation practice does not center the brain as the perceiver of these sensations but instead allows the meditator to observe these sensations as awareness itself. This is true for many other forms of meditation. Godfrey-Smith does briefly mention meditation practices in relation to consciousness. He states that some who have written about meditation have

proposed a view of consciousness known as “transparency,” where conscious experience always points toward something else, and consciousness itself is not more than this pointing or representation.⁵³

Practices of meditation could play an important role in developing human capacity for experience beyond the point of view of the brain-as-perceiver and of the human-as-bounded-individual. The sounding and listening prompts build on each other and develop the capacity of the vigil keeper to be available to such an experience. MSF’s “Perspective Listening” prompt is one example:

Begin by listening to all sounds. Your ears are an open book. After several minutes begin to zoom in and focus attention on a sound that stands out to you. Then begin to listen from the perspective of where the sound source is coming from. If you’re hearing a bird, listen as the bird—if you’re hearing the hum of an AC unit, listen from the perspective of the AC unit. There is an element of speculation involved here. Write down any observations, insights, or challenges.

Perspective listening takes inspiration from and is in resonance with the goals of *Becoming Sensor* (2014–present), a project by the filmmaker/dancer Ayelen Liberona and the anthropologist / sound artist Natasha Myers. In this project, Myers and Liberona highlight the agency of more-than-human subjectivities. In the project’s website they ask, “What would change if you knew that the trees were watching you?” They approach the project primarily through field recordings and abstract photographs taken at Toronto’s High Park that document the remnants of ancient black oak savannas. They frame *Becoming Sensor* as an attempt to “detune the settler common sense that informs conventional ideas about the living world” and to “push up against the forces of a scientific rationalism that disavows nonhuman sentience and commodifies nature as resource.” They write that “detuning” demands an art of cultivating “new modes of embodiment, attention, imagination.”⁵⁴

The perspective listening prompt also calls for an element of imagination when considering subjectivities outside one’s regular point of view. Godfrey-Smith writes about the human capacity for two kinds of imagining: “perceptual” imagining, which is imagining seeing or hearing something, and “sympathetic” imagining, which is imagining *being* something.⁵⁵ While Godfrey-Smith claims that applying imaginative exercises to other beings is not always informative, he does speculate that more “rigorous” forms of imagination may have a role in understanding animal subjectivities in a way that “has more of a chance of being true to the animals’ lives.”⁵⁶ MSF explores how music, sound, and storytelling can help cultivate these more rigorous forms of imagination, potentially leading the listener to an expanded ecological awareness.

Consider a story found in *The Way of Chuang Tzu*,⁵⁷ the verse/chapter titled “The Joy of Fishes”:

Chuang Tzu and Hui Tzu
Were crossing Hao River
By the dam.

Chuang said:
“See how free
The fishes leap and dart:
That is their happiness.”

Hui replied:
“Since you are not a fish
How do you know
What makes fishes happy?”

Chuang said:
“Since you are not I
How can you possibly know
That I do not know
What makes fishes happy?”

Hui replied:
“If I, not being you,
Cannot know what you know
It follows that you
Not being a fish
Cannot know what they know.”

Chuang said:
“Wait a minute!
Let us get back
To the original question.
What you asked of me was
‘How do you know
What makes fishes happy?’
From the terms of your question
You evidently know I know

what makes fishes happy.

“I know the joy of fishes
In the river
Through my own joy, as I go walking
Along the same river.”⁵⁸

In this story, Chuang Tzu claims to see the subjectivity of the fish through a shared resonance: “joy.” This claim is, of course, not founded on scientific knowledge but on poetic and imaginative experience. Perhaps the noticing of resonances between species as illustrated in this story is an example of a more specific and “rigorous” version of imagination that can help humans better appreciate the subjectivity of other beings. I would speculate that a potential prerequisite to such an ecological awareness may be a sustained practice of kinetic and sonic meditation that trains the brain and nervous system to be attentive to such resonances. The fish themselves can model this kinetic/sonic receptivity for us. As Godfrey-Smith mentions in the book, “In fish, the lateral line system mixes touch with hearing. . . . It detects movements, both close by and farther away, and as it encompasses so much of the fish, it must give rise to a strong bodily awareness.”⁵⁹ Godfrey-Smith states that it is not much of an exaggeration to say that a fish’s body “is a giant pressure-sensitive ear.”⁶⁰ The lateral line system is also present in the aquatic larval stages of amphibians such as newts and salamanders.⁶¹ In one of MSF’s vigil sites, Newt’s Niche, the rough-skinned newt thrives in and around the campus’s only perennial stream. Not only is the newt’s skin a shield against predators (containing a highly poisonous toxin produced by symbiotic bacteria), but it also acts as a sensor for movements and pressure oscillations in the surrounding water. The MSF prompts orient the vigil keeper toward a kindred kind of multisensory perception where bodily awareness and sound are threaded together. In these acts of attentiveness and imagination, the vigil keeper aspires to experience shared resonances with living and nonliving beings in the spirit of Chuang Tzu’s “Joy of Fishes.”

Conclusion

The MSF sound vigil is a commitment to listening and sounding as a methodology for engaging with the past and future histories of the vigil sites and for discovering new ways to imagine socioecological and temporal entanglements in these habitats. The MSF prompts form part of ITM’s “sense-able sonic practices” that are meant

to be cultivated through repeated acts of attentive listening and sensing. The experiential shift in perception that unfolds with this practice is what gives value to the prompts. It is hoped that those who encounter the MSF project will get curious about how they might also look at (and with) the environment through such a lens.

* * *

Alex Wand is a composer interested in folk music, ecology, futurism, social practice art, tuning systems, field recording, and dance/multimedia collaborations. His music has been described as having “melody lines that can circle through one’s head for days after listening, begging to be rewound and re-listened and timbres and layers that are supremely joyful and poignant and at times absolutely laid bare in their sincerity” (New Classic LA). His music has been released on MicroFest Records, Hungry Badger Records, and Frog Peak Music (A Composers’ Collective). He studied music at the University of Michigan and at CalArts and is currently pursuing doctoral studies in music composition at UC Santa Cruz.

Notes

¹ In this essay, *sounding* is both a verb and a noun that refers to “making a sound.”

² The installation was presented as a loop of the sound vigil audio/visual pieces (four-channel audio, two-channel video). Audience members engaged with the vigil keepers’ field notes and the MSF listening prompts and were invited to listen to the sound installation with these prompts in mind.

³ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 156, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc77bcc>.

⁴ Vanessa Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!),” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): 21, <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/19145>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶ Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, vii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁹ Ingrid M. Parker, “Remembering in Our Amnesia, Seeing in Our Blindness,” in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, edited by Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 155.

¹⁰ Ibid., 160.

¹¹ Richard A. Minnich, *California’s Fading Wildflowers: Lost Legacy and Biological Invasions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 219, <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520934337>.

¹² Parker, “Remembering in Our Amnesia, Seeing in Our Blindness,” 160.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 161.

¹⁵ Mary Ellen Hannibal, “The Amah Mutsun and the Recovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge,” *Bay Nature*, April 6, 2016, <https://baynature.org/article/re-kindling-old-ways/>.

¹⁶ From ITM’s unpublished article titled “Sense-able Sonic Practices for Staying with the Trouble”: “Sense-ability is a play on Donna Haraway’s respelling of the term *response-ability*. ITM inhabitants have the response-ability to sense. To expand their senses and perceptions to encompass ecological ways of thinking and non-human ontologies. It’s a way to sense (but not make sense of) troubled histories, damaged lands, and emancipatory futures. ITM inhabitants research ways of perceiving these otherwise invisible ecological specters through music compositions, installations, and soundwalks.”

¹⁷ Pauline Oliveros, “Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (To Practice Practice),” Plenum Address for Humanities in the New Millennium, *MusicWorks*, no. 75 (Fall 2000): 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1–2, 14.

²⁰ Ibid., 15.

²¹ Jiayue Cecilia Wu, “From Physical to Spiritual: Defining the Practice of Embodied Sonic Meditation,” *Organised Sound* 25, no. 3 (2020): 309, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355771820000266>.

²² Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, Alexander Berzin, and Blo-bzang-chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan, *The Gelug/Kagyü Tradition of Mahamudra* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997), 60–61, 70.

²³ Ibid., 61.

²⁴ Ibid., 70.

- ²⁵ Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).
- ²⁶ Oliveros, “Quantum Listening,” 8.
- ²⁷ Helena Simonett, “Envisioned, Ensounded, Enacted: Sacred Ecology and Indigenous Musical Experience in Yoreme Ceremonies of Northwest Mexico,” *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 1 (2014): 120, <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.58.1.0110>.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 110.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 116.
- ³⁰ E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past & Present*, no. 38 (1967): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/38.1.56>
- ³¹ Ibid., 69.
- ³² Ibid., 95.
- ³³ Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 395.
- ³⁴ Karen Barad, “Troubling Time/s and Ecologies of Nothingness: Re-Turning, Re-Membering, and Facing the Incalculable,” *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, no. 92 (September 2017): 92, <https://doi.org/10.3898/newf:92.05.2017>.
- ³⁵ Alejandro A. Vallega, *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 106.
- ³⁶ Barad, “Troubling Time/s and Ecologies of Nothingness,” 60.
- ³⁷ Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 21.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ “Court of Cicada,” 2021, Mapping Sonic Futurities, accessed June 25, 2022, <https://mappingsonicfuturities.com/court-of-cicada>.
- ⁴⁰ Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Metazoa: Animal Life and the Birth of the Mind* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 189–90.
- ⁴¹ Barad, “Troubling Time/s and Ecologies of Nothingness,” 65.
- ⁴² Ibid., 67.
- ⁴³ Barad, “Troubling Time/s and Ecologies of Nothingness,” 68.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 65.
- ⁴⁵ Godfrey-Smith, *Metazoa*, 129–30.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 157.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 148.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 149.

This page intentionally left blank

Land, Water, Explorer: Place-Making “America” in the Early Modern Period

Jillianne Laceste

In 2020, the colonial and violent legacy of the explorer Christopher Columbus and his long-standing association as the “discoverer” of the Americas came under major scrutiny during a time of social unrest in the American fabric. His visualized presence was seen as a symbol of the United States’ historical narrative that glorified colonial figures and systemic issues that led to race-based violence and the deaths of innocent people from BIPOC communities. During this period, the many monuments of Columbus scattered throughout the United States were reevaluated at all levels of society, ultimately leading to the removal of several of them. Some statues were removed through official channels, while others were beheaded or toppled by the public. A number of them still stand as a testament to the explorer’s longevity within the history of the Americas. These acts of removal call into question why the Genoese navigator, as well as similar maritime figures who crossed the Atlantic in the early modern period, became the Western figureheads of American and Atlantic histories.

After his landfall on the Taíno island of Guanahaní, Columbus had an important place within the visual culture of the “New World.” The experiences of the Genoese explorer as well as other navigators associated with “discovery”¹ took prominent positions in the European intellectual and visual construction of “America.”² Western narratives on the Americas started in the sixteenth century, when Europeans began to address this fourth part of the known world through literature and imagery, creating white-washed idealized views of the Americas as an “exotic” and fertile land.³ Columbus and his Florentine counterpart Amerigo



Figure 1 Theodor de Bry, Map, from *Americae pars sexta*, 1617. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library.

Vespucci, among other navigators and conquistadors, became foundational to the maps and prints produced in the early modern period. In engravings, America was pictured in the moment of the explorer's so-called discovery, and in maps, the names, portraits, and praises of navigators were added next to the lands they sailed upon. A prime example of this is a map (fig. 1) from Theodor de Bry's *Americae pars sexta* (1617 edition; first edition published in 1596),⁴ which juxtaposes the figural representations of Columbus, Vespucci, Ferdinand Magellan, and Francisco Pizarro and a cartographic representation of what Europeans thought of as the New World. Surrounding the map, each figure takes up as much space as the representation of America itself, conveying the explorers' importance within the colonial transatlantic world, changing European worldview, and symbolic claiming over the Americas.

Men like Columbus and Vespucci became prominent protagonists in the Western place-making process of the Americas, which began with their own writings and the histories, epic poetry, and biographies that followed. Emphasizing heroism and maritime might, visual imagery of the Americas took a similar route, as it used the explorers to create idealized views of the New World while erasing



*Figure 2 Theodor de Bry, How Hieronymus Benzo first undertook the voyage to [the Americas], setting sail around sunset, from *Americae pars quarta*, 1594. Courtesy of the University of Houston Libraries.*

Indigenous ties. These figures, whose own personal identities were overshadowed by the monumental moment of discovery, became symbolic front men for the threshold of the Americas and Europe. Considering the relationship between three fundamental elements in the intellectual creation of America—explorer, land, water—this essay interrogates how the European navigator became a figure visually bound to green land and blue waters and then bonded to early modern narratives of the New World. Transformed into graphic indicators that complemented geographical representations of a faraway place, figures such as Columbus and Vespucci bridged locality and distance for European audiences and helped envision America as a terrestrial location, but also a place of European potential. Like the erasure, violence, and genocide happening across the Atlantic, early representations of the Americas symbolically and systemically work to erode pre-Hispanic lands and envision them to function within a Eurocentric world. While the navigator may be the figural element in visualizing the Americas, he is typically seen alongside land and water or within a littoral space—establishing a sense of



Figure 3 Adriaen Collaert, after Jan van der Straet, Christopher Columbus on His Ship, plate 2 from *Americae Retectio*, ca. 1585–1592, engraving on laid paper. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth: Museum Purchase; PR.964.38.2.

movement, place, and time. To investigate the explorer's importance within views of the New World, the roles of the natural world, both green and blue, must also be considered. The first section of this essay engages with the rise of the Blue Humanities, which addresses the long-standing erasure and invisibility of the ocean in historical and cultural studies. Shifting from land to sea, this scholarship works to historicize oceans and investigate waters' cultural and social importance.⁵ In the visual discourse of discovery, water is a common sight, typically identifying where the explorer is on his journey. However, its different forms present distinct meanings and understandings of the blue world. The essay's second part is informed by theories of space, place, and the environment, which provide a framework to address the tension between land and explorer in visualizations of the Americas and bring a critical eye to early modern humans' relationships to the green and built environments.

My work here is inspired by Lawrence Buell's concept of place-attachment, which is discussed in his books *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the United States and Beyond* (2001) and *The Future of Environmental*

Criticism (2009).⁶ Buell's concept defines place as something inherently tied to human civilization and human thought. A place exists only because an environment is emotionally bonded to a particular individual, group, or society.⁷ The idea of place-attachment is woven throughout the different threads of this essay to probe the power of imagination used to visually define what America looked like to the European viewer. The explorer, I argue, functions as an instrument to make something foreign, wondrous, and dangerous almost familiar and comprehensible even though it was an ocean away. As this essay shows, a working visual relationship existed between the explorer and the bodies of water and land to illustrate a narrative of discovery and weave the Americas into the European worldview. By considering the spatial relationship of land and water and the explorer's connections to the lands he stands on or waters he sails on, my analysis interrogates how images configure the male navigator as an important tether for place-making in the New World—transitioning pre-Hispanic spaces into a place of European potential and use.

Traversing the Deep Sea and Gentle Shores

The engraving *How Hieronymus Benzo first undertook the voyage to [the Americas], setting sail around sunset* (fig. 2) from De Bry's *Americae pars quarta* (1594) depicts the busy port of Sanlúcar de Barremeda. The urban landscape along the coastline as well as the small boats and large ships scattered throughout the water convey the firm establishment of human activity on both land and sea near the Strait of Gibraltar, where the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea meet. In this image, as well as other *Americae* engravings, water is a familiar sight and useful tool in dictating the explorers' relationship to the lands of Europe and the Americas. When pictured with a navigator or conquistador in New World imagery, the sea became an important agent for facilitating movement and emphasizing colonial acts of discovery and conquest. There also exists a marked difference between the vast ocean and the shore, which relate to the changing ideas of water in the early modern period.

The presence of liquidity within these images and the blue world's different depictions convey shifting ideas of the ocean itself and its spatial relationship with green spaces. The understanding of water drastically changed over the medieval and Renaissance periods, transitioning from perceiving water as an all-encompassing void to pathways that connected lands.⁸ Despite it becoming more familiar, the ocean was still considered a mysterious blue body that incited both terror and wonder due to its impressive physical expansiveness. It also held a wide range of associations that spanned the natural, the supernatural, and the miraculous.⁹ In his

Description of the Northern Peoples (1555), Olaus Magnus, the archbishop of Uppsala and a cartographer interested in the wonders of the Norwegian and North Seas, describes the ocean as:

a wonderful spectacle [*admirabile spectaculum*] to every nation in its swirling waters. It exhibits its various offspring, which strike us not in the wonderful [*mirabiles*] size and similarity to constellations but rather through their threatening shapes, so that there appears to be nothing hidden either in the heavens, or on earth, or in earth's bowels, or even among household tools, which is not preserved in its depths. In this broad expanse of fluid Ocean, receiving the seeds of life with fertile growth, as sublime nature ceaselessly gives birth, an abundance of monsters is found.¹⁰

This wonder for ocean waters seen in Magnus's writing is also captured in images of exploration in the early modern period. In Jan van der Straet's *Americae Retectio* (ca. 1594), there are three similar prints that depict and celebrate the maritime feats of Columbus, Vespucci, and Magellan. Each image contains an amalgamation of iconography and literary references to create highly imaginative and fantastical representations of these navigators on their oceanic voyages.¹¹ In the depiction of Columbus (fig. 3), the Genoese explorer heads westwards while wearing armor and holding a nautical map and crucifixion banner. He faces the shore of the New World and is accompanied by the mythological goddess Diana whose right hand holds a rope attached to the ship to guide the explorer safely across the ocean.¹² In the waters surrounding Columbus, as well as Magellan in his *Americae Retectio* depiction (fig. 4), sea monsters are visible nearby. Functioning as symbols of the margins of the known world and unexplored waters, these fantastical yet fearsome marine creatures were already commonly featured in sea imagery and maps, such as Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia universale* (1544) and Giovanni Battista Ramusio's *Navigazione e viaggi* (1555).¹³

These marine monsters ranged in purpose and incited different emotional and intellectual responses, as shown by Magnus's studies of sea monsters in his map, the *Carta Marina* (1539), and *The Description of the Northern Peoples*, which were created with the desire to quell human ignorance on monsters. To him, these creatures invoked the marvelous, as they ranged from being materially useful to dangerous and threatening.¹⁴ Depictions of the ocean in the *Americae Retectio* imagery also reflect this concern about the seas. In the print of Columbus, several sea monsters can be seen throughout the rough waters that the navigator sails on. The creatures in the left background are more fishlike, while those in the foreground



Figure 4 Adriaen Collaert, after Jan van der Straet, Ferdinand Magellan on His Ship, plate 4 from *Americae Retectio*, ca. 1585–1592, engraving on laid paper. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth: Museum Purchase; PR.964.38.4.

nearest to the explorer have more fantastical representations. Their beaklike mouths are gaping, as if they were ready to capture the men who foolishly enter their waters. Despite the rocking ocean and surrounding beasts, Columbus remains standing upright and calm.

Like his depiction, Columbus's own experiences on the seas presented a mixture of terror and the wondrous—he listed sightings of Amazons, cannibals, and exotic races and creatures that were associated with medieval ideas of foreignness and the Orient.¹⁵ A journal entry from January 9, 1493 in Columbus' *diario*, which only exists through Bartolomé de Las Casas' translation, describes the explorer's encounter with mermaids:

The day before, when the Admiral was going to the Rio del Oro, he said he saw three mermaids who came quite high out of the water but were not as pretty as they are depicted, for somehow in the face they look like men. He said that other times he saw some in Guinea on the coast of Manegueta.¹⁶



Figure 5 Adriaen Collaert, after Jan van der Straet, Title Page, plate 1 from *Americae Retectio*, about 1594, engraving on laid paper. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth: Museum Purchase; PR.964.38.1.

Secondhand accounts also detail Columbus's encounters with dangerous creatures. According to Ferdinand Columbus, Christopher's son, sharks were constantly surrounding his father's ship: "These beasts seize a person's leg or arm with their teeth. . . they still followed us making turns in the water . . . their heads are very elongated and the mouth extends to the middle of the belly."¹⁷ The insertion of sea monsters into Van der Straet's depiction of Columbus in *Americae Retectio* works to emphasize the navigational feat of the explorer's journey across the Atlantic. It also establishes deep sea water as foreign and unfamiliar territory, one that is separate from the busy urban ports of the Mediterranean as well as the sandy shores of the Americas.

Despite the ocean's simultaneous terror and beauty, the Atlantic became an incredibly valuable tool for discourse on the discovery of the Americas. The frontispiece of *Americae Retectio* (fig. 5) brings together different modes of representation—portraiture, cartography, and allegory—to create a complex image that emphasizes the maritime connections between the Italian peninsula and the Americas. At the center, the ancient gods and symbols of Florence, Flora and her husband, Zephyr; the symbols of Genoa, Janus and a pelican; and Oceanus, the



Figure 6 Martin Waldseemüller, World Map (*Universalis cosmographica secundum Ptholomaei traditionem et Americi Vespucii alioru[m]que lustrationes*), 1507. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.*

symbol for sea travel, present a globe of the known world. Columbus and Vesputi appear in two medallions at the top of the composition, while the northwestern coast of Italy appears at the bottom. The combination of these different representations highlights the Genoese and Florentine origins of the two explorers seen in this image.¹⁸ More important, it establishes the Americas as European property in a post-discovery moment and conveys that Spanish colonization of America began on the shores of the Italian peninsula.

In addition to emphasizing Italy's role in the discovery of the Americas, the frontispiece presents an Atlantic that transforms and expands the European world, ultimately developing an ocean that functions and performs for European navigators and travelers. Modern scholarship on the Atlantic has critiqued the construction of its history as a fundamentally Eurocentric concept. In his article about the shortcomings of Atlantic history, the historian Paul Cohen posed the question, "Was there a single Atlantic world, connecting Africa, Europe, and the Americas as a whole, or were there many distinct 'Atlantics,' each linked to a particular European colonial power, and characterized by specific patterns of colonial settlement, conquest, commercial exchange, missionary projects and relationships with indigenous peoples?"¹⁹ This query speaks to a complicated long history of associating the second-to-largest ocean with fraught ideas of European expansion and domination and the ocean's complicit participation in the African slave trade and European colonization of the Americas. By its frequent insertion into images of the discovery, there is a passive claim on the ocean itself.

The Atlantic's presence in early modern depictions of the New World captures what would become the ocean's significance within the histories of the Atlantic and colonial worlds. Van der Straet's views of ocean waters create a sense of movement that was ultimately tied to discovery and the colonial enterprise in the Americas. Moving away from the old view of the all-encompassing ocean that surrounded Asia, Africa, and Europe, these waters now led to new places, and thus the Atlantic became a means of travel for imperial powers and a space of movement. Its ability to connect lands allowed Europeans to also think of the world in an archipelagic manner. For travel across the Atlantic, the historian John Gillis writes, island thinking offered potential, as "each island could be thought of as a different world, offering new possibilities to a Europe which had for so long been conditioned to thinking according to one model of the universe."²⁰ This archipelagically ordered world is visually demonstrated in the intellectual debate on the size and shape of the landmass of the Americas, as many maps or map-like images questioned if the New World was an island, a series of islands, part of Asia, or its own continent similar to the Africa-Asia-Europe triad. For example, Martin Waldseemüller's 1507 *World Map* (fig. 6) shows two different versions of the New World. The smaller inset map of America at the top reveals a single landmass, while the larger world map shows a divided one. This cartographic image accompanied Matthias Ringmann's *Cosmographiae Introductio* (1507), which confirms America as a fourth land: "Now truly both these parts [Europe, Asia, and Africa] have been more widely brought to light and another fourth part has been discovered by Amerigo Vespucci."²¹

Understanding the shape of the Americas was a long process full of trial and error that took nearly three centuries to completely grasp, but islands were important markers that shaped European comprehension. Columbus's *diario* of his first journey organizes his search for gold and experiences by the different islands he encountered with statements such as "I will soon depart to go around this island until I have speech with this king and see if I can get the gold that I hear that he wears" and "I should like to leave today for the island of Cuba, which I believe must be Cipango according to the indications that these people give of its size and wealth."²² The archipelagic landmasses that Columbus and others came across became important sites for speculation and for imagining their potential as territories that support political or economic progress.²³ These islands existed within the early modern understanding of the ocean, adding to the idea that although the sea was expansive and mysterious, it also led to new lands and new opportunities.

Despite the importance of deep waters and islands of the New World, many depictions of explorers on their journeys position these men in a coastal view. *The first voyage of Columbus / year 1492* (fig. 7) from *Americae pars quarta*, for



Figure 7 Theodor de Bry, The first voyage of Columbus / year 1492, from *Americae pars quarta*, 1594. Courtesy of the University of Houston Libraries.

example, depicts Columbus in a moment before he leaves the Spanish port of Palos de la Frontera. Although his head is turned toward King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, his body moves away from them, eager to move down the hill to join his men aboard the ships seen in the harbor in the background. Visible in between a fortified town and the imperial building on the right, the coastal waters are presented as calm, contrasting greatly with the built urban surroundings and a flurry of human activity. Coastal regions along the European shoreline such as this functioned differently compared with landlocked interior urban centers, which were under the control of powerful aristocracies and kingdoms. Overall, littoral sites were not subject to that same control and instead were cosmopolitan and operated in a more independent manner.²⁴ Because of the coastline's capacity to facilitate movement and trade, Barry Cunliffe described it as a "zone of transition or of transmission, an 'open' frontier to the wider world, far less regulated and controlled than the feudal demesne or the core areas of the bureaucratic-military state."²⁵ De Bry's depiction of Columbus's departure evokes these coastal values



Figure 8 Theodor de Bry, Columbus, as he first arrives in the [Americas], is received by the inhabitants and honored with the bestowing of many gifts, *from Americae pars quarta*, 1594. Courtesy of the University of Houston Libraries.

of passage, as everyone is in a state of frenzied movement except for the king, the queen, and their attendants, who are firmly footed on Spanish soil.

This image is complemented by another view on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean in *Columbus, as he first arrives in the [Americas], is received by the inhabitants and honored with the bestowing of many gifts* (fig. 8), which depicts an early encounter between Columbus and Indigenous Americans. Neatly splitting the composition in half between ocean and land, the shore in Columbus's arrival plays an important role by emphasizing the explorer's maritime feat and division between the Europeans and Indigenous Americans. Columbus's ships are visible in the background, floating on rocky waters. Compared with the gentle shore seen in the navigator's departure scene, the sea here is choppy and rough, looking similar to the ferocious sea monster-ridden water in the *Americae Retectio*. With a halberd in hand and accompanied by two soldiers, Columbus stands at the very center of the image on the most littoral point of the landscape, where a sliver of land juts into the water. His fine clothing, weapons, and confident posture contrast drastically with the



Figure 9 Theodor de Bry, Columbus is taken prisoner with his brother Bartholomeo and sent to Spain, from Americae pars quarta, 1594. Courtesy of the University of Houston Libraries.

group of nude Indigenous Americans, who stand more inland. Bringing gifts to the European newcomers, these figures—about eleven in number—seem to express a mixture of curiosity, fear, and hesitancy. The figure closest to Columbus uses his outstretched arms to keep at a distance and holds several pieces of hanging jewelry. The next closest figure, who holds a vessel and a nautilus cup, leans back as he moves forward. Clustered tightly together, the majority of the group becomes a sea of heads, the beginning of the homogenization and stereotyping of Indigenous peoples. Some are turned to face each other and are thus angled away from Columbus’s eyes.

The American shore within this image not only works to divide the two parties but also creates a natural space for new and unusual experiences. Coastal regions such as this were sites where social customs could disintegrate in favor of new economic opportunities and individual freedom. As a result, the historian of early America Christopher L. Pastore describes that “trade (both licit and illicit)

flowed freely among them. Alongshore the conventions of conduct eroded: “saltiness sharpened tongues, loosened restraints on dress, and created, among sailors and port people alike, a persistent, nearly unquenchable thirst.”²⁶ Within De Bry’s images, the American coastline is presented in a way that functions differently from that of European society and ports. It operates as a place of encounter, but also becomes a place of opportunity and violence, as shown in other images such as *Columbus is taken prisoner with his brother Bartholomeo and sent to Spain* (fig. 9) and *Spaniards, along with some monks, are [killed by Indigenous people]* (fig. 10). Both images emphasize moments of conflict, which take place along the coast. Although relegated to the background, the shoreline is nonetheless present—identifying these coastal regions as important sites for conquest and colonization.

In these images of the New World, the waters present an in-between and liminal space, leading to opportunities where the foreign meets the familiar. While before, the ocean was thought of as all-encompassing, sea waters were now spaces of transition between lands. From depicting him on a journey from the deep sea to a shallow shore, the presence of the navigator and his connection to water conveys an expanded European worldview and the spatial relationship between the green and blue worlds. Both the navigational figure and ocean waters work in tandem to establish a monumental journey toward the moment of discovery.

Landing into Place(s)

Within the European narrative of discovery, the navigator’s movements from Europe to the Americas transform the latter from a space to a place imbued with value to the European world. According to Buell, the shift from space or nonplace, an abstracted environment without meaning, to place requires emotional and intellectual bonding.²⁷ While spaces exist beyond cultural and social spheres, places, as defined by the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, are instead “centers of felt value” and “enclosed and humanized space.”²⁸ Early images of the Americas reflect a desire to create an “America” that functions within a European worldview. The explorers, whether Columbus, Vespucci, or another, act as proxies of colonial or imperial power and as figural bridges, connecting Europe to the New World and visually establishing the latter as a place.

A major example of this construction is in Waldseemüller’s *World Map* (fig. 6), which not only represents America as its own continent in a groundbreaking development but also names the land after Vespucci. Text in the upper left corner of the map establishes the connection between the Americas and the Italian explorers associated with its discovery:



Figure 10 Theodor de Bry, Spaniards, along with some monks, are [killed by Indigenous people], from *Americae pars quarta*, 1594. Courtesy of the University of Houston Libraries.

Many have regarded as an invention the words of a famous poet that “beyond the stars lies a land, beyond the path of the year and the sun, where Atlas who supports the heavens, revolves on his shoulders the axis of the world, set with gleaming stars,” but now finally it proves clearly to be there. For there is a land, discovered by Columbus, a captain of the King of Castile, and by Americus Vespucius, both men of very great ability, which, though in great part it lies beneath “the path of the year and of the sun” and between the tropics, nevertheless extends about 19 degrees beyond the Tropic of Capricorn toward the Antarctic Pole, “beyond the path of the year and the sun.” Here a greater amount of gold has been found than any other metal.²⁹

Columbus is mentioned only once in this map; this passage is one of several examples of texts that tie Vespucci to the Americas. Not only does “AMERICA”

appear on the land itself, but Vespucci is again mentioned in the text on the lower left of the map, which highlights his navigational and maritime achievements.³⁰ The two smaller inset maps are flanked by two figures central to cosmographical knowledge: Ptolemy and Vespucci (identified as “CLAVDII PTHOLOMEI ALLEX ANDRINI COSMOGRAPHI” and “AMERICI VESPVCI”). Shown holding a compass, Vespucci appears on the right and is turned to face the map of America, surveying the land that was named after him.³¹

The identification of the land as America is significant; it is one step in the long colonial process of weaving in the New World under European control.³² Naming an unfamiliar space, as the historian and philosopher Michel de Certeau describes, brings it into the realm of the familiar as “proper names carve out pockets of hidden and familiar meanings.”³³ Columbus’s voyage was originally diplomatic and commercial in nature. The *Capitulaciones de Sante Fe* (April 17, 1492), the agreement between the Spanish crown and the Genoese explorer, dictates the nature of Columbus’s transoceanic voyage. Divided into five articles, the contract states that he would become admiral, viceroy, and governor-general of the lands he discovered and would receive one tenth of the goods he found, including gold and silver. He would also have certain rights over merchant trade within his territories. While place-naming was not specifically covered, Columbus uses place-names with great fervor in his writings to symbolically show his acts of possession for the Spanish crown.³⁴ For example, the opening of Columbus’s letter to Luis de Santangel (1493) emphasizes this activity:

As I know that you will be pleased at the great victory with which Our Lord has crowned my voyage, I write this to you, from which you will learn in thirty-three days, I passed from the Canary Islands to the Indies with the fleet which the most illustrious king and queen, our sovereigns, gave to me. And there I found very many islands filled with people innumerable, and of them all I have taken possession for their highnesses, by proclamation made and with the royal standard unfurled, and no opposition was offered to me. To the first island which I found, I have the name *San Salvador*, in remembrance of the Divine Majesty, Who has marvelously bestowed all of this; the Indians call it “Guanahani.” To the second, I gave the name *Isla de Santa María de Concepción*; to the third, *Fernandina*; to the fourth, *Isabella*; to the fifth, *Isla Juana*, and so to each one I gave a new name.³⁵

While place-naming takes a prominent position in Columbus's letters and journal entries, the navigator does acknowledge Taíno and other local nomenclature. There are several occurrences where he reveals his knowledge of Indigenous information and place-names.³⁶ The entry of October 11, 1492, describes the first sight of land, "an islet of the Lucayas, which was called Guanahani in the language of the Indians."³⁷ Days later, from the entry of October 20, Columbus's ship anchored at the "island of Samoet," which he then named the cape "Cabo de la Laguna" and the island "Isabella."³⁸ Despite Columbus knowing Indigenous place-names, Tzvetan Todorov writes, the explorer "seeks to rename places in terms of the rank they occupy in his discovery, to give them the *right names*."³⁹ Columbus's use of toponyms were employed as instruments of conquest and possession, presenting himself not only as a representative of the Spanish monarchy but also as the necessary proxy for the king to seize new territories.⁴⁰ In *The Death of Tenochtitlan, The Life of Mexico City* (2015), the art historian Barbara Mundy asserts that the use of place-names was fundamental to the colonial process, as they functioned as "imaginative projections of what they hoped to find, or to create, in territories whose expanse they poorly understood and whose peoples were ciphers."⁴¹ In Columbus's writings, his place-naming gives the effect of control over the islands, a necessary step in seizing power away from the Indigenous people who inhabited them and expanding the Spanish empire's overseas territories.

Parallel to the process of place-naming done by Columbus and other Europeans to symbolically stake territorial claims on New World lands, there were also efforts made to wrest Indigenous claims to these lands. The Indigenous presence was minimized, and Indigenous groups were turned into a homogenous, singular people or "Indians." While he details the islands' pre- and post-Hispanic names, Columbus's encounters with Indigenous peoples do not refer to specific groups. Rather, in his depictions of Indigenous people, they are typically referred to with generic terms such as "hōbres," "gente," and "yndios."⁴² Portrayed as war-like cannibals, timid warriors, and poor and naked people, more attention is given to their physical appearances and mannerisms. These descriptions otherize Indigenous people as exotic and distinct from Europeans, but also make them interesting to read about.⁴³

As many scholars in literature and the histories of science and art such as Greenblatt, Mary Campbell, Lorraine Daston, and Katherine Park have discussed, wonder was an important mode of perception that was essential in Europeans understanding the foreign and in the creation of the New World.⁴⁴ The use of the marvelous, Greenblatt writes, denotes a "decisive emotional and intellectual experience in the presence of radical difference" from the European perspective.⁴⁵ Columbus draws on peculiarity to strategically evoke a sense of wonder for his royal



Figure 11 Theodoor Galle, after Jan van der Straet, *Allegory of America*, Plate 1 of 19, from the *Nova Reperta*, ca. 1600. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

and aristocratic readers and justify possession and the eventual conversion of the Indigenous peoples. Images of the New World such as De Bry's exaggerate Indigenous Otherness that was introduced in Columbus's writing. In *Columbus, as he first arrives in the [Americas], is received and honored with the bestowing of many gifts* (fig. 8), the Genoese navigator and two of his men are greeted by a large group of Indigenous Americans at the shores of the Atlantic. The native people's nudity greatly contrasts with the detailed fine clothing that Columbus and his men wear. Their poses of timidity are heightened by Columbus's self-assured and rigidly straight posture. In the background, more Indigenous people are seen running away from the large ships. On the left-hand side, a large cross is planted, suggesting the imminent conversion of Indigenous Americans to Christianity and the future of America as a Catholic land under Spanish control. This image accentuates markers of future European domination—Columbus taking the possessions of the Indigenous Americans and the cross's insertion into the ground—and overall creates a sense of dispossession and possession. Other De Bry images, such as *Spaniards, along with some monks, are [killed by Indigenous people]* (fig. 10), dramatize Indigenous Americans' supposed penchant for violence. The muscular nude native men are seen clubbing and shooting arrows at the European men, who run away or beg for their lives.

These representations are powerful images that function under what the semiotician Walter Mignolo calls the “imperial gaze,” as Indigenous Americans are interpreted through a Eurocentric worldview that establishes a hierarchy. De Bry, Mignolo contends, is an active contributor to this maintenance of the “colonial matrix,” the complicated system of colonial control that emerged in the sixteenth century, since his imagery maintained the external colonial differences between Europeans and “Indians.”⁴⁶

Colonial difference and claims of possession are also visible in Van der Straet’s *Allegory of America* (fig. 11) from the *Nova Reperta* (ca. 1600), a series of twenty engravings documenting early modern discoveries and inventions that include the European founding of the New World, the cure of syphilis, and the production of silk.⁴⁷ The Florentine explorer appears twice in the series: in his landfall in the Americas and in *Amerigo Vespucci Discovering the Southern Cross with an Astrolabium*. In the former engraving, Vespucci makes landfall on America and encounters the female personification of the land, who appears as a young woman in a recumbent position on a hammock. This image’s event evokes a transition from space to place. According to French Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre, abstract space “relates negatively to that which perceives and underpins it – namely, the historical and religio-political spheres.”⁴⁸ While Van der Straet’s image was meant to show Renaissance progress and this new land, the representation of America, both the land itself and its personification, was done in relation to Vespucci’s maritime accomplishment. Two important threads in this image, the gender dynamics and the European perception of Indigenous Americans, work together to define space and its transformation while emphasizing Vespucci’s importance within the European worldview. In one hand, he holds a pole with a crucifix and banner with the Southern Cross and in the other, a compass. His presentation, fully clothed and in possession of religious and maritime objects, makes him a representative of the religious, cultural, and political ideology that dominates European civilization. Louis Montrose, an early modern scholar on Elizabethan studies, describes these objects as “empowering ideological and technological instruments of civilization, exploration and conquest.”⁴⁹ Vespucci marks the creation of Europe’s New World as well as transition of the land’s possession. The text at the bottom of the composition emphasizes this transformation: “Americus rediscovers America; he called her once and thenceforth she was always awake.”⁵⁰

The comparison between Van der Straet’s preparatory drawing (fig. 12) and final engraving shows the interchangeability of the explorer in colonial rhetoric, as well as the intellectual exchange between Van der Straet, the inventor, Adriaen Collaert, the engraver, and Luigi Alamanni, the patron. On the verso side of the drawing, an inscription states that Van der Straet used Giovanni Pietro Maffei’s



Figure 12 Jan van der Straet, *Allegory of America*, ca. 1587–89. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Historarium indicarum (1588) as a source for the fauna, showing that he was trying to portray these foreign animals with some degree of accuracy.⁵¹ In the upper left, his signature appears, and although now barely visible in the lower right, “*De Christoforo Colombo*” (“On Christopher Columbus”) is written by Alamanni’s hand, indicating that the image was originally meant to depict the Genoese mariner. This is supported not only by the flag of Genoa, seen in both drawing and engraving, but by the similarity of the image to Giulio Cesare Stella’s *Columbeidos* (1589), an epic poem about the explorer, which describes a Haitian princess named Anacaona falling in love with Columbus. The change in figure and the addition of text at the bottom of the engraving suggest two ideas. The first is that Columbus and Vespucci could both represent the discovery, while the second is that Alamanni, who was an active member of the literary group called *Accademia degli Alterati*, debated the importance of the two navigators.⁵² Despite the change in identity from drawing to print, the visualization of America remains the same, as it still emphasizes the act of discovery and the interconnection between explorer, land, and water.

Vespucci, whose clothes cover most of his body, contrasts greatly with his companion, the female America, whose sex and Indigenous origins are emphasized. The meeting between the two figures is ultimately a juxtaposition of difference in all aspects of the body, including gender and race. The female America is



Figure 13 Theodor de Bry, [Indigenous people] pour molten gold [into] the mouths of the Spaniards [to satiate their spirits], from *Americae pars quarta*, 1594. Courtesy of the University of Houston Libraries.

depicted with alluring sexuality, which is balanced with her disposition for violence. The Tupinamba club nearby and the group of cannibals in the background suggest that she is also highly dangerous. Her depiction draws on the visual language of the Indigenous Other, capturing the stereotype of the cannibal that was seen in other New World images. In *[Indigenous people] pour molten gold [into] the mouths of the Spaniards [to satiate their spirits]* (fig. 13), a Hispanic man is tied and tortured in the foreground. What is happening in the background possibly suggests the victim's future as food. The background shows Indigenous figures dismembering a human body and roasting appendages on a large fire spit. This display is one of disorder and extreme violence, which highlights the supposed savagery of the Indigenous Americans (conceived of as feminine, but simultaneously violent and racially inferior) while critically denouncing Spanish greed for gold.

Cannibalism, like nudity or feathered skirts, became stereotyped attributes of Indigenous Americans. Early modern proto-ethnographic ideas of race and Otherness were ultimately connected to the European structures of “polis” and

“ecclesia,” and were bound to differences in both physical bodies and cultures.⁵³ In Van der Straet’s image, America is in dialogue with other depictions of the cannibalistic Indigenous Other, including the personification of the New World in the title page (fig. 14) of Abraham Ortelius’s *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (1570). In this image, the four personifications of the continents frame an architectural structure and the title of Ortelius’s work. A recumbent nude America is placed at the bottom. She holds a decollated head in her left hand and a Tupinamba club in her right. Her bow and arrows appear near her legs, with the former seeming to snake toward her pelvic region. Although dangerous and violent, her threatening nature is used against her in order to sexualize her and turn her into a phallically conquered object.

In Van der Straet’s and Ortelius’s depictions, the female America’s potential for violence complements the description of dangerous Indigenous women in the pamphlet *Mundus Novus* (1503), which supposedly contains Vespucci’s letter to Lorenzo de’ Medici. Although its authenticity is heavily debated, the writer states: “Their women, being very libidinous, make the penis of their husbands swell to such a size as to appear deformed; and this is accomplished by a certain artifice, being the bite of some poisonous animal, and by reason of this many lose their virile organ and remain eunuchs.”⁵⁴ Resonating with this description, Van der Straet’s image meshes female sexuality, male anxiety of the female sex, and ideas of cannibalism to create a misogynistic and racist narrative that Vespucci awakens America only to claim her after himself.⁵⁵ The various aspects of the image—Vespucci, America, the cannibals in the background—create what Montrose describes as “an oscillation between fascination and repulsion, likeness and strangeness, desires to destroy and to assimilate the Other.”⁵⁶

America’s female body adds to and complexifies existing ideas of Otherness. The insertion of sex and sexual difference also establishes a sense of place in an unusual way—resonating with Luce Irigaray’s feminist writings on the intertwining of place, gender, and the body, which draw connections between woman and place. While Irigaray mentions that all bodies have a relation to place, a woman’s body also functions as place because of her role in sexual intercourse and ability to develop life in the womb.⁵⁷ The female body has a vessel-like quality and becomes “the container for the child, the container for the man, the container for herself.”⁵⁸ At the same time, there is also a sense of female placelessness in which a woman “is assigned to be place without occupying a place. Through her, place would be set up for man’s use but not hers.”⁵⁹ Irigaray’s understanding of sexed places complements early modern discourses of discovery and the racialized body

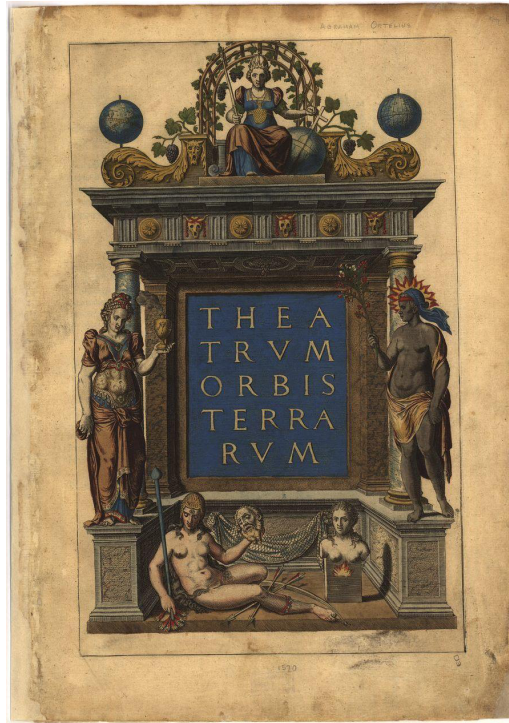


Figure 14 Abraham Ortelius, Title Page, from *Theatrum orbis terrarum*, 1570. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

in early modern depictions of the Americas. In Van der Straet's image, the personified female America is a culmination of differences—female, cannibal, nude, Indigenous—but also a place to be found and used by Vespucci. With his maritime tools, belief in Christianity, knowledge in navigation, and most important, his white male body, Vespucci's depiction suggests he embodies place-making only through the act of claiming and dominating the female body of America. Unlike De Bry's depictions of Indigenous Americans, which emphasizes their nudity and cannibals, these aspects in Van der Straet's depiction are tempered with sex, which ultimately becomes another important marker of difference within the narrative of discovery.

Conclusion

The early modern visual culture of exploration reflects a process of imperial territorialization, in which spaces, according to the economic geographer David Harvey, are “deterritorialized, stripped of their preceding significations and then reterritorialized according to the convenience of colonial and imperial administration.”⁶⁰ Within these images, the figure of the explorer becomes a multifaceted tool in the construction of the history of European imperialism and the establishment

of the Americas within the confines of European cosmography. While the landmass of America was depicted differently in cartography and engravings, the navigators' landfalls were important historic moments that were recreated again and again to weave the New World into a Eurocentric colonial discourse.

As pictorial instruments of place-making, representations of explorers were essential in visually creating the "New World" for the European viewer. However, their depictions were rendered in a way that tethered them to the blue waters or coastal land. The map from De Bry's *Americae pars sexta* (fig. 1) is a prime example. The image divides the flat surface of space equally between the representation of America and the four explorers surrounding it. Grounded on neither land nor water, Columbus, Vespucci, Magellan, and Pizarro stand on thin architectural structures. While the map at the center emphasizes the New World, water takes an important role within this image. In addition to surrounding the landmass, gentle waters with ships appear behind each of the four navigators. This balance between cartographic and figural representation establishes the dynamic between land, water, and explorer—showing that the maritime figure is ultimately tied to both green and blue worlds. In both text and imagery, these navigators functioned as essential instruments of empire necessary for the intellectual place-making of the Americas through a European lens.

* * *

Jillianne Laceste is a PhD candidate in the History of Art and Architecture program at Boston University. Her research focuses on representations of the Americas and Christopher Columbus in seventeenth-century Genoa and their relation to Genoese mercantile and maritime identity and the Republic of Genoa's political position to Spain and Spanish America.

Notes

¹ The term *discovery* and related words are misleading, since they evoke ideas of the unknown prior to a specific moment. Identifying Columbus as the "discoverer" implies that no one knew the lands that he sailed upon despite the rich pre-Hispanic histories of Indigenous cultures. This essay uses terms such as *discovery* and the *New World* with the recognition that these words are fundamental elements of the narrative of the Americas from a Eurocentric perspective. For an analysis on

terminology and the history of the New World, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Terra Cognita: The Mental Discovery of America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000).

² In this essay, *America* and *the Americas* are both used. While *the Americas* refers to the contemporary and continental understanding of lands within the Western Hemisphere, the term *America* functions within the European narrative of discovery and indicates the intellectual invention of America, which homogenized the lands now labeled North America, South America, and the Caribbean. This is based on Edmundo O’Gorman’s interpretation of America, which was “the *idea* that America appeared as a result of its discovery by Columbus” (*The Invention of America; An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* [Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1972], 11).

³ Prior to the discovery, the known world within European cosmography consisted of Europe, Africa, and Asia (Lindsay Starkey, *Encountering Water in Early Modern Europe and Beyond: Redefining the Universe through Natural Philosophy, Religious Reformations, and Sea Voyaging* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 120).

⁴ Published between 1590 and 1596, De Bry’s *Americae* was a six-volume series collected and read by educated Europeans, including wealthy merchants as well as those of the elite class who had a deep interest in the New World. Engraved New World images accompanied different accounts of the Americas, including Thomas Harriot’s *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia, directed to the investors, farmers and well wishers of the project of colonizing and planting there*, Hans Staden’s *True History of his captivity*, Jean de Léry’s *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, and Girolamo Benzoni’s *Historia del Mondo Nuovo*. For the last source, which were the last three volumes of the series, De Bry embellishes the woodcuts published in Girolamo’s book and also creates new images. See Patricia Gravatt, “Rereading Theodore de Bry’s Black Legend,” in *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, edited by Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 225–27.

⁵ Ian Buchanan and Celina Jeffery, “Towards a Blue Humanity,” *sympleke* 27, nos. 1–2 (2019): 11–12, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sym.2021.0041>.

⁶ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the United States and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁷ Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 55.

⁸ Many medieval writers divided the landmasses of the known world into three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa, which were surrounded by a circumambient

and unnavigable Ocean. This worldview was challenged in the fourteenth century with the provocative and contentious travel writings by Marco Polo, Sir John Mandeville, and others who argued that there was a larger amount of dry land than previously thought. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century intellectuals followed these controversial ideas, as many of them also believed that there was more land than early maps suggested and more landmasses that were clearly previously unknown to their medieval and ancient predecessors. With the increase of trade and exploration, the early modern maritime experiences of Portugal and Spain confirmed this idea and also showed that circumnavigation and exploration in these waters was both possible and beneficial to their empires. See Lindsay Starkey, *Encountering Water in Early Modern Europe and Beyond: Redefining the Universe through Natural Philosophy, Religious Reformations, and Sea Voyaging* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 120–30, 219.

⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰ Translated into English by Starkey, the original reads: “Admirabile spectaculum vastus Oceanus in suo gurgite cunctis nationibus offert: diversos partus ostendit, hosque non tam magnitudine et comparatione syderum mirabiles, quam forma minaces adducit, ut nec coelo, nec terra, aut eius visceribus, aut domesticis instrumentis aliquid abscondi videatur, quod non adsit in sua profunditate retentum. In eo namque Oceano tam lato, supine, molli, ac fertili accremento accipiente semina genitalia, sublimes semperque pariente natura, pleraque esse monstrifica reperiuntur” (Lindsay J. Starkey, “Why Sea Monsters Surround the Northern Lands: Olaus Magnus’s Conception of Water,” *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 6, no. 1 [2017]: 31, 56, <https://doi.org/10.5325/preternature.6.1.0031>).

¹¹ Lia Markey notes that many textual sources contributed to Columbian iconography, including Peter Martyr’s writings on Columbus’s Journey, Girolamo Fracastoro’s poem about Syphilis, Oviedo’s *History*, Las Casas’s writings, and Giovanni Battista Ramusio’s *Navigazioni e viaggi*, among others. See Lia Markey, “Stradano’s Allegorical Invention of the Americas in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): 413, <https://doi.org/10.1086/667256>.

¹² Markey connects Columbus’s depiction to an allegorical poem about Columbus and syphilis by Fracastoro—arguing that the poem served as an inspiration for Van der Straet’s visual depiction. First published in 1530, the poem describes how Diana gives the central character Ilceus syphilis. While Columbus’s name is never mentioned, Fracastoro captures the explorer’s arrival: “It was night and the Moon was shining from a clear sky, pouring its light over the trembling ocean’s gleaming marble, when the great-hearted hero, chosen by the fates for this great task, the leader of the fleet which wandered over the blue domain, said ‘O Moon whom

these watery realms obey, you who twice have caused your horns to curve from your golden forehead, twice have filled out their curves, during this time in which no land has appeared to us wanderers, grant us finally to see a shore, to reach a long-hoped-for port” (Ibid., 414–15).

¹³ Ibid., 415–16; and Starkey, “Why Sea Monsters Surround the Northern Lands,” 31–62.

¹⁴ Starkey identifies that Olaus’s understanding of sea monsters divided the creatures into four different types: (1) monsters that were dangerous and threatened human life, (2) monsters that appeared monstrous but actually protected people, (3) monsters that acted as portents, and (4) monsters that could be used as commodities (“Why Sea Monsters Surround the Northern Lands,” 36–39).

¹⁵ Elvira Vilches, “Columbus’s Gift: Representations of Grace and Wealth and the Enterprise of the Indies,” in “Hispanic Issue,” *MLN* 119, no. 2 (March 2004): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2004.0104>.

¹⁶ Christopher Columbus and Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America, 1492–1493*, translated by Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 321.

¹⁷ Markey, “Stradano’s Allegorical Invention of the Americas in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence,” 415.

¹⁸ Ibid., 403–4.

¹⁹ Paul Cohen, “Was There an Amerindian Atlantic? Reflections on the Limits of a Historiographical Concept,” *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 4 (2008): 388, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.histeuroideas.2008.08.002>.

²⁰ John R. Gillis, “Islands in the Making of an Atlantic Oceania, 1500–1800,” in *Seascapes*, edited by Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017), 25.

²¹ Starkey, *Encountering Water in Early Modern Europe and Beyond*, 137.

²² Christopher Columbus, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America, 1492–1493*, translated by Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 107, 111.

²³ Gillis, “Islands in the Making of an Atlantic Oceania,” 26.

²⁴ John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 75.

²⁵ Barry Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and Its People, 8000 BC–AD 1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 563.

²⁶ Christopher L. Pastore, “The Science of Shallow Waters: Connecting and Classifying the Early Modern Atlantic,” *Isis* 112, no. 1 (March 2021): 124, <https://doi.org/10.1086/713566>.

²⁷ Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism*, 63.

²⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 4, 54.

²⁹ John W. Hessler, *The Naming of America: Martin Waldseemüller's 1507 World Map and the "Cosmographiae Introductio"* (London: Giles, 2008), 13.

³⁰ The passage reads: "A general delineation of the various lands and islands, including some of which the ancients make no mention, discovered lately between 1497 and 1504 in four voyages over the seas, two commanded by Fernando of Castile, and two by Manuel of Portugal, most serene monarchs, with Amerigo Vespucci as one of the navigators and officers of the fleet; and especially a delineation of many places hitherto unknown. All this we have carefully drawn on the map, to furnish true and precise geographical knowledge" (Hessler, *Naming of America*, 17).

³¹ The representation of America in the inset map is different when compared with the larger map. In the smaller map, what we now think of as North and South America are connected lands. This is different from the larger map, which pictures two nearly connected but still disjointed continents (Hessler, *Naming of America*, 25).

³² Other instances of place-naming as a type of colonial tool can be seen in the naming of Ciudad de México and Virginia. See Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery," in "The New World," special issue, *Representations* 33 (Winter 1991): 1–41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928756>; and Barbara Mundy, *The Death of Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

³³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 104.

³⁴ Gene Rhea Tucker, "Place-Names, Conquest, and Empire: Spanish and Amerindian Conceptions of Place in the New World" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 2011), 107; Evalina Guzauskyte, *Christopher Columbus's Naming in the "Diarios" of the Four Voyages (1492–1504): A Discourse of Negotiation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 3–4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁶ Guzauskyte, *Christopher Columbus's Naming*, 14–16.

³⁷ Columbus, *Diario*, 63.

³⁸ Columbus, *Diario*, 103.

³⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 27.

⁴⁰ A thorough examination of this can be seen in Greenblatt's book.

⁴¹ Mundy, *Death of Tenochtitlan*, 130.

⁴² Columbus, *Diario*, 68, 114.

⁴³ For example, in his letter to Luis de Santangel, Columbus takes great care to describe the inhabitants the island of Juana: “The people of this island, and of all the others that I have found and seen, or not seen, all go naked, men and women, just as their mothers bring them forth; although some women cover a single place with the leaf of a plant, or a cotton something which they make for that purpose. They have no iron or steel, nor any weapons. . . . They have no other weapons than the stems of reeds in their seeding state, on the end of which they fix little sharpened stakes. Even these, they dare not use; for many times has it happened that I sent two or three men ashore to some village to parley, and countless numbers of them sallied forth, but as soon as they saw those approach, they fled away in such wise that even a father would not wait for his son” (“Letter from Columbus to Luis de Santangel,” in *Letter from Columbus to Luis de Santangel*, Document No. AJ-063, American Journeys Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Library and Archives, 2003, 265); Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 72–74.

⁴⁴ See Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*; Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Mary Campbell, *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 14.

⁴⁶ Walter Mignolo, “Crossing Gazes and the Silence of the ‘Indians’: Theodor de Bry and Guaman Poma de Ayala,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2011): 175–76, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-2010-016>.

⁴⁷ Markey, “Stradano’s Allegorical Invention of the Americas in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence,” 385.

⁴⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 50.

⁴⁹ Montrose, “Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery,” 4.

⁵⁰ “Americen Americus retexit, & Semel vocavit inde semper excitam” (ibid.).

⁵¹ Lia Markey, “Introduction: Inventing the Nova Reperta,” in *Renaissance Invention: Stradanus’s Nova Reperta*, edited by Lia Markey (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 31.

⁵² Ibid., 31–33; and Markey, “Stradano’s Allegorical Invention of the Americas in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence,” 428.

⁵³ Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of An Idea in the West* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 147.

⁵⁴ Montrose, “Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery,” 5.

⁵⁵ Another example includes Sir Walter Raleigh’s depiction of Guiana: “To conclude, Guiana is a country that hath yet her maydenhead, never sacket, turned, nor

wrought, the face of the earth hath not bene torne, nor the virtue and salt of the soyle spent by manurance, the graves have not bene opened for gold, the mines not broken with sledges, nor their Images puld downe out of their temples. It hath never bene entred by any armie or strength, and never conquered or possessed by any christian Prince” (Montrose, “Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery,” 12).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁷ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 36.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁰ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 264.

Tenga Tenga: Can I Help Carry Your Load?

Aaron Samuel Mulenga



2,000 carriers from Barotseland

Figure 1 Tenga Tenga conscripted from the western region of Zambia. Courtesy of Mbala Museum, ca. 1918.

The genesis of my work stems from an illustrated family Bible my grandfather gave to my mother. As a child, I used this Bible as a reference point to copy images from. Only as I got older did I realize that none of the images in this Bible looked like me. Due to this realization I began to explore alternative ways to represent spirituality and my own lived experience while seeking environments that were inclusive of black people. My work intends to look further than just a representation of skin color: it also engages with ideas of cultural heritage and one's place in



Figure 2 Image of the monument to the Tenga Tenga. Courtesy of Aaron Samuel Mulenga, 2021.

history. For this reason, I began to explore the visual representations of Zambia's history as well as its content by researching topics that I had not encountered in school, such as the story of African porters in World War I, whom I first learned about from the Moto Moto Museum in Mbala, Zambia, and not a history textbook.

My work can be read as a reengagement with colonial history that seeks to center Indigenous voices. As colonial monuments are being torn down in various parts of the world, how can artists use existing monuments to draw attention to pertinent historical events and contributions that Indigenous peoples have made? A monument that has interested me is one created from red bricks to remember the Tenga Tenga, Africans drafted as porters during World War I. Their jobs involved carrying heavy loads of about forty-four pounds for distances of over fifteen miles a day. It took roughly six Tenga Tenga to carry one British soldier's equipment, revealing the grotesque amount of human labor needed to move the soldiers in that region.

The two world wars are often portrayed as dominated by valiant white soldiers and generals; however, images of exploited people such as the Tenga Tenga are never

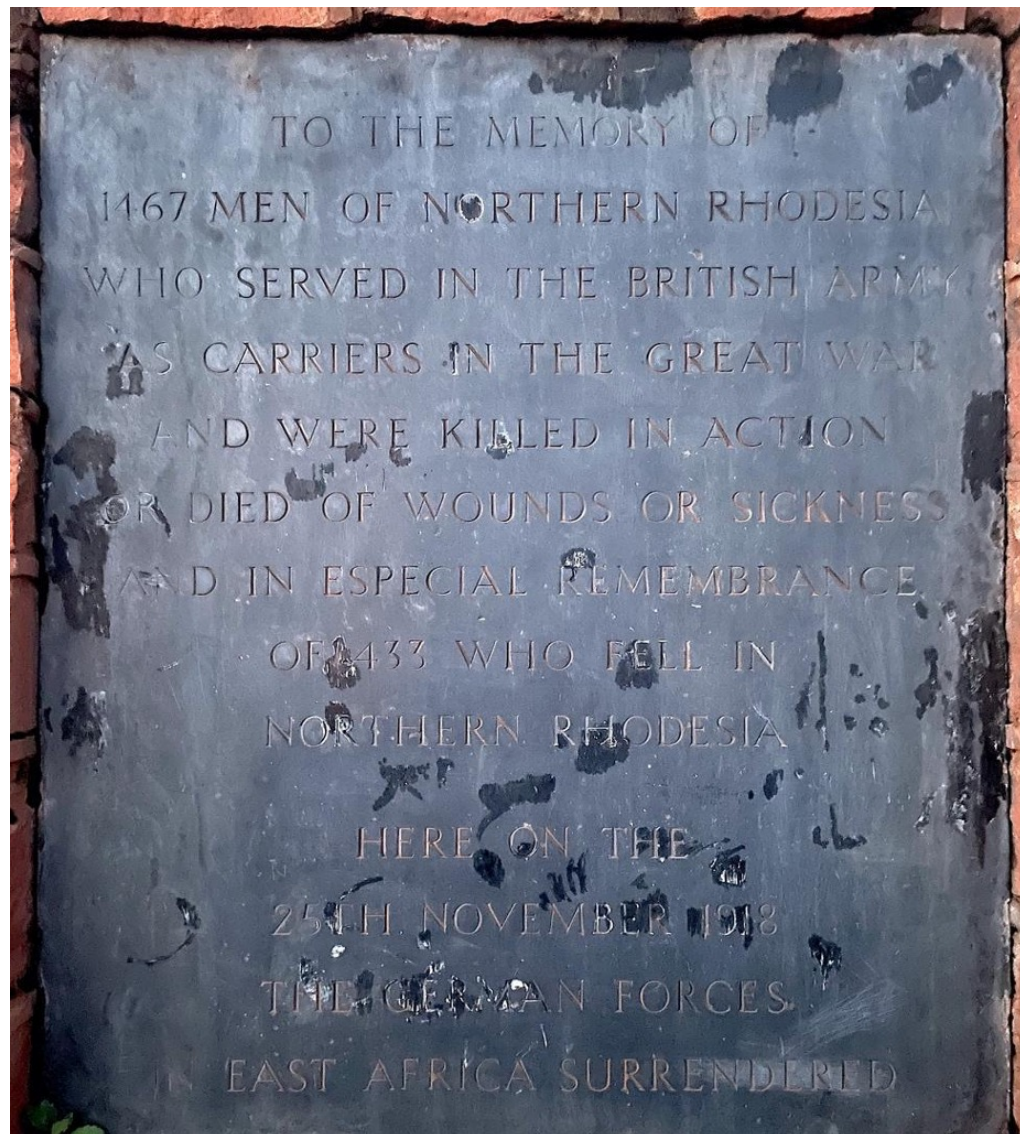


Figure 3 Close-up of the plaque on the monument. Courtesy of Aaron Samuel Mulenga, 2021.

brought to the foreground. My research revealed that over 80,000 Africans were conscripted into this labor, many of whom died on the job. A modest brick monument was erected in Mbala in their honor, and though this is a necessary recognition of their service, the monument commemorates a mere 1,467 men, which erases the memory of the majority of the Tenga Tenga. Mbala was chosen as the place for this monument due to its significance as the location where the German soldiers under the command of General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck surrendered to the British, three days after the armistice of November 11, 1918. This in essence meant that the end of World War I was officially in Zambia, the last place where the Germans conceded defeat.



Figure 4 Close-up of the plaque on the monument. Courtesy of Aaron Samuel Mulenga, 2021.

From Research to Performance

Through performance I aim to engage with the memory of the Tenga Tenga by tracing a route in Mbala that they would have walked during World War I, up to the place of the monument dedicated to them. I aim to engage the story of the Tenga Tenga, the loads they carried, and the metaphoric loads they left behind: the weight of memory and cultural narratives that affect the way the history of the world wars is shaped and how it is told. This creative research engages the complexity of interacting with collective memory and loss while exploring how the imprints of the past can influence the present and the future, which is critical, as it allows for a re-presentation of history in a way that includes narratives of people who were rendered voiceless through omission. It posits visual art as a medium to both remind and make additions to the existing narratives of Mbala and its people. A key question I explore is, how can contemporary art from Zambia help decenter Europe in the memory of Zambia's history and the imagination of the country's future?

As part of the performance, which I conducted in July 2021, we carried plastic sacks over our heads as we walked through the town of Mbala, dressed in burlap sacks and Dutch wax print. I engaged seven local youths from Mbala:



Figure 5 Still image from performance piece of the Tenga Tenga walking through the town of Mbala. Courtesy of Joseph Kasau, 2022.

Benjamin Siame, Blessed and Steward Mutale, Dobson Progress, Emmanuel Sinyangwe, Christabell Chisha and Cecilia Nachula. My two collaborators were Joseph Kasau (my videographer) and my partner Nkondelina Chileshe Mulenga (who participated as one of the performers).

The significance of the performance was to invoke the memory of the Tenga Tenga while also questioning the role of monuments in Zambia and whether people could interpret or understand such monuments. For this project I was specifically interested in the monument to the Tenga Tenga. Our performance began at Lake Chila,¹ two and a half kilometers away from the monument. Walking through the town, we noticed several people stopping to stare and take photographs of us on their phones. Once we arrived at the monument, we laid down our sacks at the foot of the monument and had a moment of reflection and silence, remembering the Indigenous people whose lives were forfeited in World War I for the success of the British army. Once we concluded our performance, we invited those spectators gathered around us to engage in conversation about the monument, what it meant for them and what they thought our performance was about. This gave us an opportunity to share our research findings with those willing to listen while opening a channel for dialogue between ourselves as artist, performers, and the local community.



Figure 6 Still image from performance piece of the Tenga Tenga walking through the town of Mbala. Courtesy of Joseph Kasau, 2022.

Through this work I seek to foreground and reframe *Zambian Indigenous* histories and narratives through an engagement with their stories to place them at the center of such conversations. I utilize critical fabulation, a theory developed by Saidiya Hartman² to engage with historical evidence by proposing possible narratives extrapolated from fragments of documentation that were often written from dehumanizing and oppressive perspectives. Critical fabulation has allowed me to imagine ways to interpret the stories of the Tenga Tenga through archival research while attempting to focus on their contribution to World War I, which is all but neglected save for the monument in their honor.

The performance of walking through the streets of Mbala allowed for the Tenga Tenga to be brought into our present moment by reimagining their story and appearance, through the burlap garments the performers wore, and the route walked through the town. Not only do the garments make a direct connection to the Tenga Tenga and what they wore, they also connote a sense of spirituality and humility that references biblical scripture where sackcloth was used as a sign of mourning or humility (2 Kings 19:1). I refer to biblical text due to its association with spiritual practices in Zambia, particularly because Christianity is the predominant religion in the country. Through this work, I aim to invoke references to *Zambian cultural practices* that provide an opportunity to engage with



Figure 7 Still image from performance piece of the Tenga Tenga in Mbala. Courtesy of Joseph Kasau, 2021.



Figure 8 Still image from performance piece of the *Tenga Tenga* in Mbala. Courtesy of Joseph Kasau, 2022.

spirituality from multiple perspectives, even through dress, which is why *chitenge* material (Dutch wax print, worn from the waist up) is also used as part of the *Tenga Tenga* attire. This cloth represents a form of Zambian cultural heritage. The story of the *Tenga Tenga* allows us to re-present history from the perspective of a marginalized group of people who have the potential to shift the perspective of history by adjusting our gaze toward Indigenous peoples' stories.

The performance served as a form of education not just for us as the performers, but also the residents of Mbala who were curious enough to engage in conversation with us. Several individuals we spoke to had no idea what the purpose of the monument was, which allowed us to share with them our interpretation of our performance and the monument as we understood it. The implication for remembering an Indigenous Black experience is important to the work I engage with because information such as the story of the *Tenga Tenga* is not common knowledge. This has meant that there is a need to seek out such narratives and find creative ways to engage and educate myself and others about them. Most schools, even public schools in Zambia, contain curriculums that are influenced by a British standard of education, which has meant that many local narratives are not being taught in these schools.

The scope of my project moving forward is to provide an alternative source of information that combines historical knowledge focused on Indigenous people of Zambia from both a theoretic and practical perspective using visual art as a point of departure. Visual art serves as an ideal medium to engage the interest of a broad public, as it can reach a vast number of people depending on the method



Figure 9 Still image of the artist and one of the performers engaging local residents after the performance. Courtesy of Joseph Kasau, 2021.



Figure 10 Color image of visitors to the Ulemu exhibition, conceptualized by Modzji Arts, Zambia; curated by Julia Taonga and George Mahashe, with participating artists Aaron Samuel Mulenga and Joseph Kasau, as part of the second edition of the Congo Biennial 2022. Courtesy of Aaron Samuel Mulenga, 2022.

that the artist chooses to use. In this instance, the performance piece allowed me to engage and converse with a public audience that was not familiar with performing art. Furthermore, through video and photographic documentation I was able to create a video art piece which I presented at the second edition of the Congo Biennial in Kinshasa in September, 2022. Through the video piece I was able to increase the audience of people engaging with the story of the Tenga Tenga. My hope is for viewers to question the version of history they are familiar with and from whose perspective such histories are taught. Hopefully, they will be encouraged to find their version of the Tenga Tenga in their own spaces.

* * *

Aaron Samuel Mulenga (he/him), Graduate Research Fellow, is a Visual Studies Ph.D. student at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His area of study includes the contemporary art of Africa, post-colonial theory and the role that museums play in shaping cultural narratives. Mulenga is a multi-disciplined artist with a keen interest in sculptural forms and installation. Mulenga uses his art practice to inform aspects of his doctoral research process. His most recent art collaboration was with Zambia's Modzi Arts Gallery at the 2021 FNB Art Fair in Johannesburg.

Notes

¹ The guns of German soldiers were dumped into Lake Chila after they surrendered to the British. See "Let's Correct History," *Zambia Daily Mail Limited*, November 27, 2018, <http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/lets-correct-history/>.

² Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (2008): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1>.

Tobaron Waxman's *Red Food*: Jewish Ritual, Mourning, and Queer Utopia

Hailey Kobrin

On January 23, 2012, Tobaron Waxman performed *Red Food* for luncheon guests at the Raging Spoon, a restaurant in Toronto, Ontario. In this performance from the Jess Dobkin–curated Artists' Soup Kitchen luncheon series, Waxman shaved his hair as viewers slurped borscht, sipped red-dyed water, and gnawed on other red foods, aptly surrounded by all-red decor. After cutting his hair, a bald Waxman approached the viewers at their tables, serenading them with slow, melancholic mourning tunes from the Jewish Eastern European and Central Asian diaspora. In 2012, the Artists' Soup Kitchen aimed to bring awareness to the difficulties of sustaining artist communities in Toronto due to the growing unaffordability of housing and the lack of funding from arts initiatives. This event aimed to create space where there seemingly was none by providing local artists and other guests with a free meal and an opportunity to convene and break bread. Ten years later, the hardships created by the city's rapid gentrification remain resonant, as the rising cost of living continues to create barriers for artists. The Artists' Soup Kitchen was the final event hosted at the Raging Spoon's 761 Queen West location. The church space that hosted both the restaurant and many nonprofit organizations was scheduled for redevelopment, with the speculation that it would be converted into condos. As a response to the themes of the Artists' Soup Kitchen, Waxman's *Red Food* used the context of sharing a meal alongside a ritualistic performance to grieve for the loss of communal space through a queer lens. In 2022, *Red Food* remains poignant, as urban redevelopment continues to threaten the homes of many marginalized people living in Toronto. Yet, though Waxman mourns the loss of community space under the circumstances

of gentrification, I argue that in hardship, this mourning process can be repeated to strengthen community relations.

Revisiting *Red Food* in this contemporary context, I argue that there are three distinct aspects of the performance piece that use queer and Jewish strategies to propose a repeatable ritual for acceptance. In *Red Food*, Waxman uses both the queer body and Jewish cultural knowledge in the context of Shiva—Jewish death rites—to find specific rituals that then become part of a larger ritual that mourns the loss of community space, as exemplified by the closure of the Raging Spoon. The repetition of these rituals, I argue, enables the acceptance of trans bodies, ensuring the continuation of community. Establishing and practicing these relations act to resist the escalating circumstances of gentrification that continually threaten community by shuttering the spaces they convene. When Waxman’s performance actions are repeated as rituals to mourn the closure of community spaces, *Red Food* demonstrates that these community connections can withstand the loss of space.

I examine three separate ritualistic actions, each of which gives *Red Food* resonance in both Jewish and queer contexts. The first of these is the shaving of hair. As a queer ritual, shaving makes Waxman’s own trans body the site of rapid gender transformations. By removing his hair, Waxman makes his gender transformation legible within the linear temporality of what Laura Horak describes as “hormone time” in her paper “Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality.” Horak uses the concept of hormone time to identify and contextualize the strategies used in videos by trans people to create condensed and accessible documentation of their gender transitions on YouTube. Applied to *Red Food*, hormone time can be used to understand Waxman’s choice to perform shaving his hair as a circumstance for his audience to view his quick gender transition. At the same time, the removal of his hair also evokes the Jewish ritual Opshernish—a symbolically loaded haircutting ceremony that occurs when a male child becomes a pedagogical subject of Jewish ritual. In *Red Food*, Waxman’s use of Opshernish is a nod to this cultural tradition that commemorates important transitions in a Jewish person’s life. A second ritualistic element employed by Waxman in his performance is that of voice and singing. Waxman’s vocal performance makes nods to both Jewish cultural tradition, through his recitation of Jewish mourning tunes, and queer identity, as voice acts as a signifier of the artist’s gender in the performance. Waxman’s vocal performance references the Jewish mourning rite of reciting the Kaddish—a call-and-response prayer through which mourners honor the deceased. With his voice, Waxman pays tribute to the deceased—in the case of *Red Food*, the Raging Spoon—while uniting mourners in song. I look at the work of Diana Taylor to show that both these elements, voice and hair, allow Waxman’s body to become a facilitator for the transfer of Jewish cultural memory and teach-

ings, and he uses his own trans body to facilitate tensions within the performance to navigate the larger issue of Toronto's continuous gentrification. A third element of *Red Food* that connects this performance to Jewish Shiva is its setting: a luncheon. The context of hosting a meal creates an immersive, multisensorial experience for Waxman's audience, which allows them to both internalize and accept his performance, thus facilitating their acceptance of trans people outside the confines of the performance. In Jewish tradition, Shiva is a ritual event that gives space to mourn the deceased, in which eating, singing, and physical transformation are all important components.

In this essay, I argue that when Waxman's Judaic-informed ritual is repeated over time, the destruction of physical space is confronted and resisted through strengthened community relations. By examining the work of critical performance theorists alongside *Red Food*, I argue that Waxman's performance creates ritual to mourn the loss of physical space that once held community. I suggest that his performance rituals in *Red Food* are designed to be rituals of acceptance—to make queerness legible through necessity, so that queer community can withstand the loss of physical space. When this immersive mourning process is enacted, *Red Food* creates a circumstance to continue community when these spaces are threatened.

Waxman's removal of his hair plays an important role in an interpretation of *Red Food* as both a Jewish and a queer ritual. In a queer understanding of *Red Food*, Waxman's shaving operates on the linear timeline that Horak describes as "hormone time."¹ Horak uses hormone time to contextualize the story line of online videos of gender transitions, stating that these videos often have a clear beginning, middle, and end, with the goal being "a smooth slide into the desired social gender."² The content of these videos varies and can include stories about the creator's childhood that led to the realization that they were trans, transition diaries, and so on. Notably, in addition to sharing their experiences, these vloggers are tasked with making their desired genders legible in the short duration of the video. On YouTube, "hormone time" acts as a "linear and teleological" timeline that is directed and points toward a "utopian future,"³ which Horak describes as harmony between the felt gender and perceived body.⁴ Online, these videos communicate a condensed and linear presentation of gender transition with concrete goals that are easily understood by viewers.

Like videos documenting gender transition, Waxman's removal of his hair in *Red Food* acts as a quick shift of his visual identifiers, operating in accordance with the "progressive temporality" of hormone time.⁵ Waxman uses shaving to exemplify trans aesthetics in many of his artistic and curatorial projects. In a conversation with Dominic Johnson, Waxman divulged that he believes that "hair is a loaded material."⁶ In previous projects where he uses hair

as his performance medium, as well as in *Red Food*, Waxman notes his audience's shifting demeanor and reactions to his visual transformation. When his hair is removed, Waxman says that viewers are "witnessing the hair fall off [Waxman's] body as they watch themselves shift in what meaning they ascribe to [Waxman's] appearance. As [Waxman] changes signifiers, [Waxman] shifts . . . to "ambiguously gendered white person.""⁷ This simplified performance of the artist's shifting gender is comparable to strategies used by trans vloggers. The notion of hormone time is criticized through claims that it appropriates a "straight" timeline with clear-cut transition goals that appeal to cis audiences. The linear nature of hormone time seems to be at odds with the entangled and asynchronous nature of "queer time." Yet Horak considers that using hormone time is "focused on progressive change and futurity."⁸ Despite the performance's offline presentation, *Red Food* uses a similar quick timeline to wield gender transformation purposefully. Under circumstances of gentrification, queer community loses its privacy. When queer people are forced into public space, actions for wider acceptance of these marginalized people become necessary and urgent. In *Red Food*, Waxman uses his body to both hasten and facilitate a circumstance for his viewer's rapid understanding and then acceptance of the artist's trans body, which optimistically points toward the wider acceptance of trans people. Contextualized by the closing Raging Spoon, and the increasingly rapid redevelopment projects throughout Toronto, Waxman's use of a condensed timeline that replicates Horak's hormone time creates a circumstance for audience members to accept his trans body. By practicing this acceptance after the performance's conclusion, viewers can ensure their own acceptance of queer identity, leading to the continuance of queer community when private space is inaccessible.

Waxman's hair-shaving is also infused with Jewish cultural knowledge. In "In the Mosaic: Jewish Identities in Canadian Performance and Installation Art," Carol Zemel cites Waxman's performance work as imbuing ancient ritual with new, contemporary relevance. While there is potential for queer people to be alienated by the cis-normative expectations of organized religion, Waxman embraces Jewish orthodoxy and its teachings in his work. Rather than critiquing dogma, Waxman's performances "audaciously invest centuries-old texts and rituals with new relevance and insight."⁹ Specifically, Waxman shaves his hair in another performance, *Opshernish*, as a performance of gender transition that draws from Jewish cultural transitions. By removing his hair in *Opshernish*, Waxman uses his body as the performance's visual center by making it the facilitator and point of transfer for cultural learning to the audience. In Jewish tradition, the term *Opshernish* (or *Upshernish*) literally translates to "shearing." As a Jewish practice, the *Opshernish* ritual celebrates the male child's first haircut on his third birthday. Traditionally, haircutting narrates a push toward a transformative time in a male child's life. In Jewish tradition, a child's first haircut

signifies a coming of age where he is pedagogically teachable in the ways of the Torah. In the performance *Opshernish*, Waxman's hair shearing similarly illustrates a "transformative initiation,"¹⁰ where "the viewer is asked to consider the gender structures and defining terms of the ritual."¹¹ Waxman is the facilitator of this gender transformation, but viewers are tasked with the work of internalizing and accepting the artist's new performed gender. When Waxman shifts signifiers, his actions "ask [audiences] to bring the traditional and familiar to bear on the modern and the new,"¹² expanding on ritual as a discursive practice that can be repeated within any circumstance and imbued with new meaning.

Waxman's mediation of his viewers' reactions to his performance of gender takes place not only through the jarring visual of removing his hair but also through his vocal performance. Waxman approaches viewers while they are eating and sings mourning songs from the Jewish Eastern European and Central Asian diaspora. In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Taylor addresses performers as scenario actors, and performance artwork as "scenario." Waxman uses his body "as the receptor, storehouse, and transmitter of knowledge that comes from the archive" of cultural memory.¹³ To Taylor, "it is impossible to think about cultural memory and identity as disembodied."¹⁴ In the context of Jewish tradition, Waxman's recreation of *Opshernish* can be identified as a male-gendered performance and can be easily repeated. I claim that in this performance, Waxman uses *Opshernish's* contingency on gender and transition to discuss the transition of space. In her writing, Zemel understands that Waxman's trans performance techniques provide nuance to tradition so that ritual can be made relevant under new circumstances. As the mediator of *Red Food*, Waxman complicates the familiar experience of eating a meal with his jarring actions. The up-close interaction that viewers have with Waxman during his vocal performance while they are eating makes participating in *Red Food* as an audience member somewhat uncomfortable. These performance actions make his "scenario" memorable—therefore making them more likely to be revisited by his audience, reflecting Taylor's description of performance as being "formulaic, portable, repeatable" and "encourag[ing] fantasies of participation."¹⁵ By rearticulating his performance of *Opshernish* for *Red Food*, Waxman's gender performance is memorable and easily repeatable, making his rituals intended to cultivate spaces for spiritual queer community.

While I analyze Waxman's performance actions as creating circumstances for a queer acceptance that leads to queer utopia, it is important to note that *Red Food* re-creates the context of a mourning performance. In addition to performing the Jewish rite *Opshernish*, Waxman's *Red Food* operates in the context of *Shiva*, which contains extensive rituals around eating together. In the seven days after a funeral, the direct relatives of the deceased sit *Shiva*—

they tear their clothing, cover the mirrors in their homes, sit on the floor instead of using chairs, among other rituals. Most important, there is an emphasis on community care in Jewish mourning. The use of the circumstance of a shared meal and listening to solemn singing constructs *Red Food* as a performance of mourning for a loss of space as a result of Toronto's self-destructive redevelopment projects. Waxman's immersion of his audience in his performance through eating reflects Jewish modes of grieving and communicates that convening together is a transformative way of mourning that transcends any specific location. In "Loss and Mourning in the Jewish Tradition," Simon Shimshon Rubin cites that he understands the Jewish approach to mourning as a "particularly sensitive way of assisting the bereaved [in] assimilat[ing] and accommodat[ing] the loss of a highly significant person."¹⁶ At the center of his writing, Rubin essentializes "the role of the community in providing emotional support and sustenance,"¹⁷ both physically and spiritually. Immediately after a funeral service and interment, Jewish mourners partake in a Seudat Havraah, which Rubin describes as a "meal of comfort, provided for by [the] friends [of mourners] and more distant family."¹⁸ By combining communal eating and mourning, *Red Food* signifies Shiva, particularly the Seudat Havraah that begins communal mourning practices.

In my own experiences with Jewish mourning, immediate family convenes and shares food thrice a day for the initial seven days of Shiva—a commitment that requires rescinding everyday responsibilities such as cooking and allowing the community to feed mourners and to hold space for sharing memories. As noted by Taylor, performing memory is "embodied and sensual . . . it links the deeply private with social, even official, practices."¹⁹ To Taylor, the performance of cultural memory is inherently social. It is an "act of imagination and interconnection."²⁰ Jewish Shiva practices are similarly performative. As Rubin describes, while Shiva is a repeated ritual, each circumstance of Shiva is an "un-choreographed dance, which will evolve to the interaction of the individual griever, the mix of grievers, the individuals who come to console, and the mix of those who come to console."²¹ Similar to Taylor's understanding of performance "scenario" as illustrating moments of tension within the sociable, Shiva is noted as "a time of familiar and unfamiliar experience."²² While eating borscht at a restaurant may be a common experience, Waxman's performance complicates this sense of familiarity by adding song and the visual center of shaving his head to the context of a luncheon. Akin to Rubin's mention of the social dynamics of grieving, Waxman's audience participates in the grieving process through their ingestion of food and presence in the ritual circumstance. In a conversation with Johnson, Waxman expresses a preference for involving audience members as "unexpected participants instead of passive recipients."²³

Through viewership, audiences participate in Waxman's grieving by consuming a Seudat Havraah, as Shiva is a social ritual that necessitates community presence. In "Eating My Words: Talking about Food in Performance," Yael Raviv explains that the affective responses that are stimulated by tasting food in performance contexts require an audience member's firsthand participation.²⁴ While Taylor states that the nature of memory is complicated and often difficult to evoke due to the multisensorial nature and contingency of additional memories,²⁵ Raviv's writing understands taste as a universal point of access to understanding fine arts. Through physically ingesting an artwork's medium, eating can help internalize the meanings of an artwork. Further, sharing the experience of eating together is an inclusive approach to "retain the communal, collaborative action."²⁶ Therefore, at the Raging Spoon, audience members are able to draw from their own sensory memories. By eating borscht, audience members are able not only to recall their own associations to the food but to create new sensory memories surrounding the restaurant. Thus, in *Red Food*, eating acts as an immersive participatory element in the performance and also generates recollection of community space through the audience's eating experience. Here, sensory memory commemorates the Raging Spoon within the mourning process of lost community space.

In *Red Food*, while the experience of viewing Waxman shave is difficult to replicate, the vocal aspects of performance are repeatable and add to the transformative potential of a performance of Shiva aimed at creating space for the future acceptance for trans and queer people. In reference to the "straight" timeline utilized by vloggers to chart their transition, a noticeable element of gender transition is a changing voice.²⁷ As spoken by Waxman in conversation with Johnson, voice is an aspect of the artist's development of trans performance aesthetics. Waxman stated that the vocal performance for *Red Food* was the artist's "first-ever solo vocal performance in ten years."²⁸ In Jewish tradition, vocal performance is performed during the Shiva period, and years proceeding through the recitation of Kaddish. Reciting Kaddish unites generations "in a vertical chain"²⁹—connecting the past, present, and future descendants of the Jewish community in song. Coincidentally, Waxman's performance of *Red Food* coincided with the tenth anniversary of the passing of his father and the anniversary of the passing of a close friend, the artist Flo McGarrell,³⁰ positioning Waxman's vocal performance as reflecting this same vertical chain.

As a public performance of mourning, Kaddish is a call-and-response prayer that requires the participation of ten men. It must be recited every day by the mourner for the eleven months following a death so that the deceased's soul may be honored and accepted in Olam HaBah (heaven). While Kaddish is a mourning practice, it also looks toward the world to come. Its use thus implies that *Red Food* is an optimistic approach to communal loss, wherein new

communal relations are created to resist the loss or disappearance of physical spaces. Waxman's recitation of these traditional tunes, which focus on the transformative nature of mourning in *Red Food*, presents mourning process as social and repeatable. By necessitating the practice of queer acceptance, Waxman's performance resists the difficult conditions of the present, insisting on looking toward a future with more positive potential. Framed by the closing of the Raging Spoon, Waxman's optimistic view of mourning, and the establishment and practicing of alternative forms of community building through performative art, resists the threat posed by the loss of physical space.

The repetition of rituals for queer acceptance created by Waxman in *Red Food* tasks viewers with practicing this acceptance. After mourning the loss of the Raging Spoon, *Red Food* expresses communal resistance to gentrification projects that marginalize queer people. Despite *Red Food* being performed only a single time, its employment of Jewish rituals proposes a new ritual for queer acceptance that should be continually reexamined and repeated. In 2012, Waxman's mourning of shuttered space in *Red Food* foreshadowed increasing hardships for queer communities in Toronto and urged his audience to accept his own queer body to create grounds for the acceptance of queer community in and outside the city. At present, urban development continually threatens many communities, including the queer community. Due to COVID-19, beloved queer spaces like the Beaver and the Old Nick Pub closed their doors, unable to afford their "astronomical rent,"³¹ while others such as Crews and Tango rely on community support to survive.³² Under these circumstances, research must revisit Waxman's performance of ritual through the little available documentation we have.

While Shiva necessitates communal presence, revisitation is an essential part of mourning in Jewish culture. Each year, on the anniversary of the passing of a member of the community, a Yahrzeit candle ("soul candle") is lit, and a "Kaddish Yatom" is sung by the mourner. Just as Jewish mourners revisit loss, I argue that viewers of *Red Food* should revisit this performance in order to understand that despite the artwork's changing meaning as we grow more distant from it over time, cultivating acceptance for queer people is still resonant. Despite there being only a few photos online that document *Red Food*, the performance holds resonance under escalating gentrification circumstances in Toronto that affect many marginalized peoples. Ten years later, Waxman's presentation at the former site of the Raging Spoon should be remembered as a performance that catalyzes acceptance. As Toronto grows increasingly unaffordable, Waxman's *Red Food* proposes suggestions for the continuation of queer community despite physical distance. As a ritual, *Red Food* encourages wider acceptance of queer identity, facilitated by Waxman's body. To ensure

that queer community persists, the ritual is intended to be repeated and practiced.

* * *

Hailey Kobrin (they/them) is a Toronto-based writer, researcher, curator, and artist. Hailey is a self-proclaimed “Food Freak,” navigating a lifetime obsession with the culinary through fine arts, research, and creative written work. Hailey holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Criticism and Curatorial Practices from OCAD University and is a current MA candidate in the Department of Art History and Visual Culture at York University.

Notes

¹ Laura Horak, “Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014): 579. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2815255>.

² *Ibid.*, 580.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 579.

⁶ Dominic Johnson, “Voice, Performance, and Border Crossings: An Interview with Tobaron Waxman,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014): 617. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2815129>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 617–18.

⁸ Horak, “Trans on YouTube,” 580.

⁹ Carol Zemel, “In the Mosaic: Jewish Identities in Canadian Performance and Installation Art,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 153, no. 1 (2013): 17. [10.1353/ctr.2013.0008](https://doi.org/10.1353/ctr.2013.0008).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, 81–82. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822385318>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁶ Simon Shimshon Rubin, “Loss and Mourning in the Jewish Tradition,” *Journal of Death and Dying* 70, no. 1 (2015): 80. <https://doi.org/10.2190/om.70.1.h>.

¹⁷ Ibid., 89.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 82.

²⁰ Ibid., 82.

²¹ Rubin, "Loss and Mourning in the Jewish Tradition," 90.

²² Ibid., 91.

²³ Johnson, "Voice, Performance, and Border Crossings," 614.

²⁴ Yael Raviv, "Eating My Words: Talking about Food in Performance," *Invisible Culture*, no. 14 (2010): 13. <https://doi.org/10.47761/494a02f6.0a30d2b8>.

²⁵ Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 82.

²⁶ Raviv, "Eating My Words," 21.

²⁷ Horak, "Trans on YouTube," 574.

²⁸ Johnson, "Voice, Performance and Border Crossings," 618.

²⁹ Rubin, "Loss and Mourning in the Jewish Tradition," 94.

³⁰ Johnson, "Voice, Performance and Border Crossings," 618.

³¹ Julia Mastroianni, "The Plight of Queer Bars in Toronto during COVID-19," *Now Toronto*, January 7, 2021, <https://nowtoronto.com/culture/losing-queer-bars-in-toronto>

³² Ibid.

Halophilic

Christine Lorenz

These photographs are acts of engagement with the nonhuman world, in forms that reflect the entanglement of the organic and the synthetic. In the *Halophilic 2* series, I use polarized light to illuminate salt crystals, chasing color effects that activate the imagination. The colors come from the interaction of light and plastic: layers of various disposable, transparent plastics are put to use as retarders, standing between the crystals and the light source. As a result, the salt and plastic collaborate in refraction to create shimmering constellations and uncanny, gravity-defying spaces.

In our time, salt and plastic are everywhere humans are, and most of the places where we are not. These are materials that have thoroughly permeated the physical earth, enmeshing all its creatures. As familiar and close at hand as salt is, imagery of it abounds in cultural expression, from the enigmatic to the mundane. Plastics have become as inevitable as salt, and nowhere near as benign. What kind of poetics do we have for a world that is infused with plastics at every level? What kinds of stories could possibly fit the world we are creating now?

I spend a lot of time with macro photography and the perceptual scale shifts it creates: the sense of finding yourself absorbed in something that had previously seemed ordinary, and the particular ways that it changes your own sense of how you occupy space. Think of the difference between how you feel looking out across the open space of a football stadium versus how it feels to bend down to tie a child's shoe, or the difference between looking up at a ceiling fresco and looking down at an illuminated manuscript. Our senses transition into differently scaled worlds. As we visually enter them, our sense of space expands or contracts.

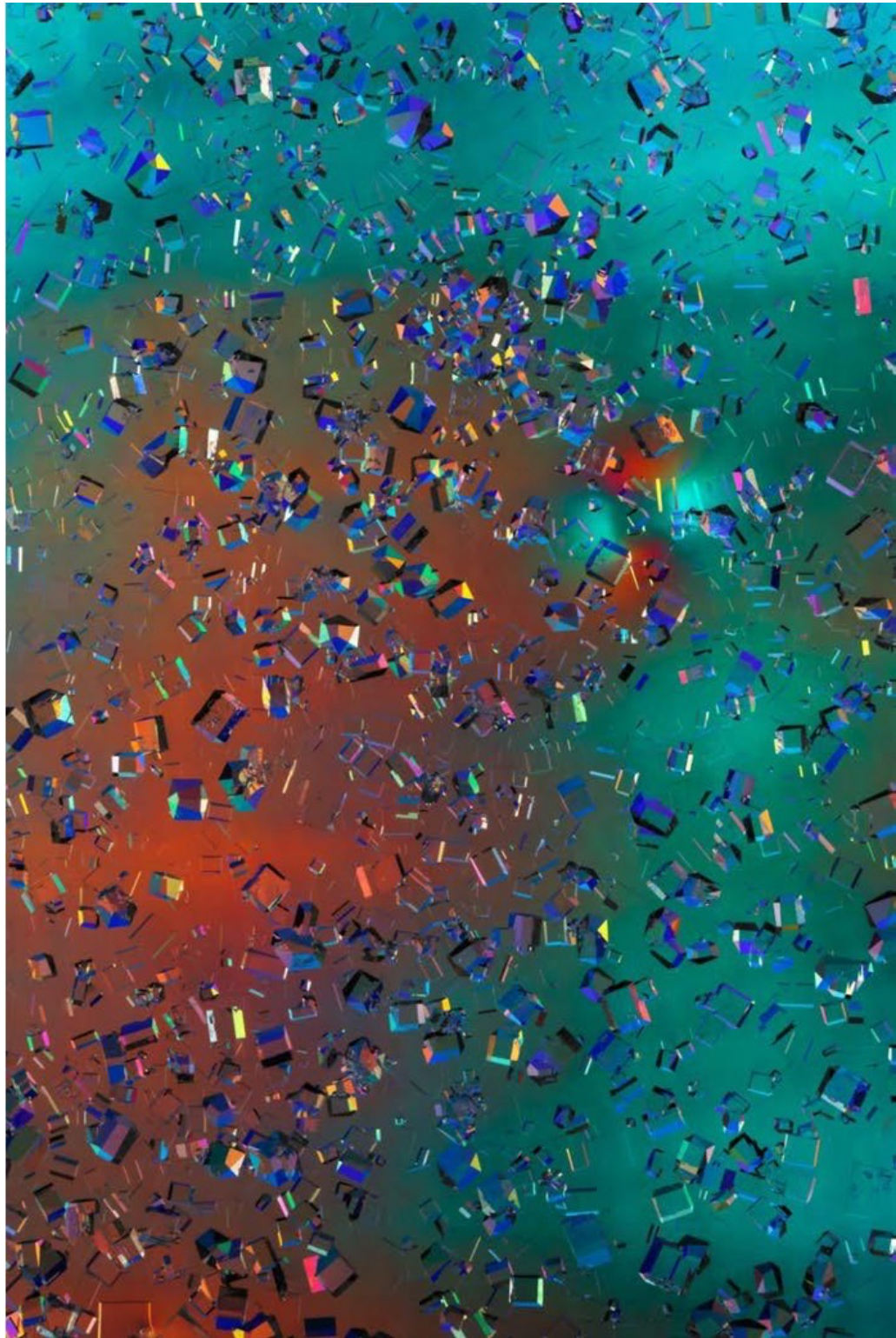


Figure 1 Christine Lorenz, Halophilic 2-1344, 2022. Courtesy of the artist

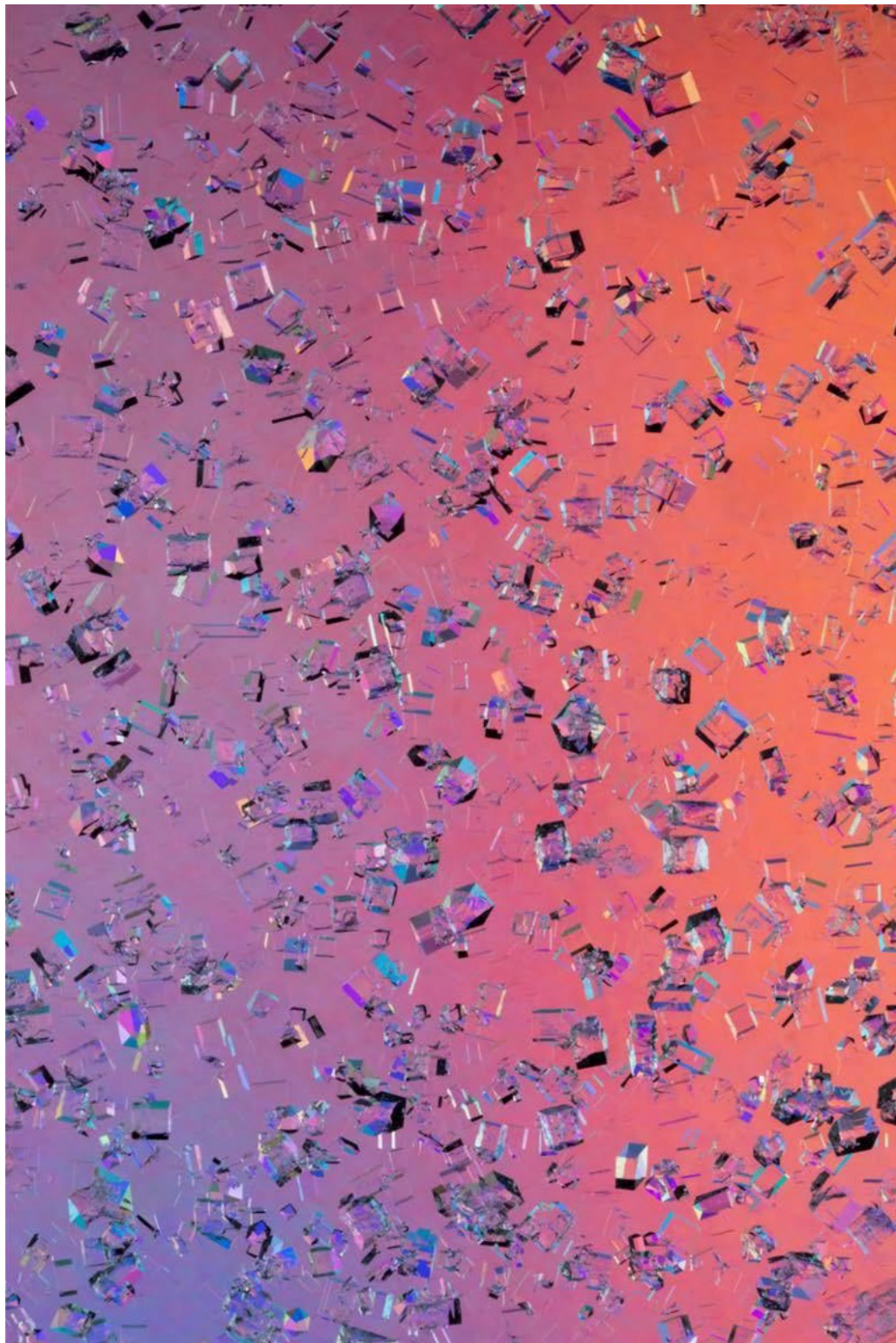


Figure 2 Christine Lorenz, Halophilic 2-1330, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

Contemplation of the vast cosmos can make everything we do seem insignificant; so can the domain of the electron microscope. Something different happens when our spatial reorientation transpires on a scale that is just a few steps bigger or smaller than the familiar. A broader view opens to us—maybe one with surprising details, maybe with a new sense of openness—but it does not feel quite so alien. Rather, it feels like a new part of the world that was already our own, and the span that we extend ourselves into opens a little farther.

I started working with salt crystals some years ago, as part of an effort to help one of my kids with a science experiment. They had been following the familiar directions, trying to grow a crystal using a glass of saline solution, a pencil, and a string. Nothing was happening, and we were running out of time. We started trying different ways to get the salt to crystallize faster, and at one point we put splashes of the solution on a dark pan in a low oven. This worked. I already had my macro gear handy (I had been spending time shooting bits of toy packaging) and could not resist photographing the results. The salt formations began to look like galaxies and alien topographies. I started spending time cultivating crystals, to pursue more of these distinctive forms.

The process brought one surprise after another, with each step giving me a better sense of how the mineral functions in the world. It became less like a science project and more like gardening. It came to feel like there was a kind of give-and-take involved: something like what Donna Haraway has described as making string figures with nonhuman kin. In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin with the Cthulucene*, for example, the string figure becomes a way to envision the generative interplay among human and nonhuman species, life-forms, and intelligences.¹

The string figure reflects an ongoing tension among multiple participants, tracing specific actions of passing and holding. In the practice of cultivating and photographing the salt crystals, each photograph becomes a trace of an ongoing interaction, rather than simply a document of a previously existing form.

Beyond the simple wonder of the macro world, I came to see salt as a substance with a kind of life of its own. Its drive to crystallize is under pressure from different factors in its environment. Fluctuating temperatures, an occasional jostle, particulate in the solution, changes in humidity—any number of things will thwart a crystal's movement toward geometric precision. Its forms are always temporary ones, which often bear traces of what led to that point. At any moment, they can dissolve and vanish from our sight, perhaps moving on to crystallize again, perhaps to recombine and become part of another form entirely.

It is easy to imagine how the wealth of allegorical associations with this material could have begun in these sorts of observations over time. Salt is freighted with significance, for example, in depth psychology, which finds underlying human



Figure 3 Christine Lorenz, Halophilic 2-1349, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4 Christine Lorenz, Halophilic 2-1392, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

purpose in the narratives handed down from scripture, folklore, and alchemy. Readers interested in this approach will find much to chew on in Stanton Marlan's collection *Salt and the Alchemical Soul*.² Marlan, a practicing psychoanalyst, brought together a series of essays that trace a tortuous route of symbolism and association through Western, Islamic, and medieval philosophy, ultimately synthesized in archetypal psychology. The centerpiece of his collection is drawn from the writings of none other than Carl Jung, in an essay titled "Salt: The Arcane Substance." His work with this subject resists quick summary but moves circuitously toward a sense of how salt can function in this particular approach to analysis. "In philosophical alchemy, [it is] a cosmic principle"³ that evokes deep-rooted creative endeavor, drawing from shadow and moonlight the possibility of expressive color. Diagramming its associations to a set of archetypes, he explains that

apart from its lunar wetness and its terrestrial nature, the most outstanding qualities of salt are bitterness and wisdom. . . . The factor common to both, however incommensurable they may seem, is, psychologically, the function of feeling. Tears, sorrow and disappointment are bitter, but wisdom is the comforter in all psychic suffering. Indeed, bitterness and wisdom form a pair of alternatives: where there is bitterness wisdom is lacking, and where wisdom is there can be no bitterness.⁴

Salt, he continues, is "the carrier of this fateful alternative," a bridge that allows the person to bring insight and feeling together, to cultivate wisdom from the bitterness of suffering.⁵ The ability to employ visual forms to express emotion becomes an essential component of the subject's analytic process. This is just a glimpse of the role of salt in this system of archetypes. While it can take a deliberate effort to break from its gravitational pull, it is worthwhile to look at the vortex of the things that salt can mean and has meant, the volumes that have been written and the ideological alignments that they foster. The many varieties of salt's significance evoke the functional, physical presence of salt in premodern life: its connections to the sea, its value in seasoning and preserving food, and its crucial role in sustaining human health. The role of salt in the articulation of abstract thought begins to look like another dimension of its usefulness: it becomes an instrument in a process of making meaning, offering people a way to articulate profound things that otherwise have no physical form.

In the commodity-driven culture of the twenty-first century, it is safe to say that an everyday experience of salt is far removed from its esoteric significance. It seems equally detached from its presence as a mineral in the earth. By the time

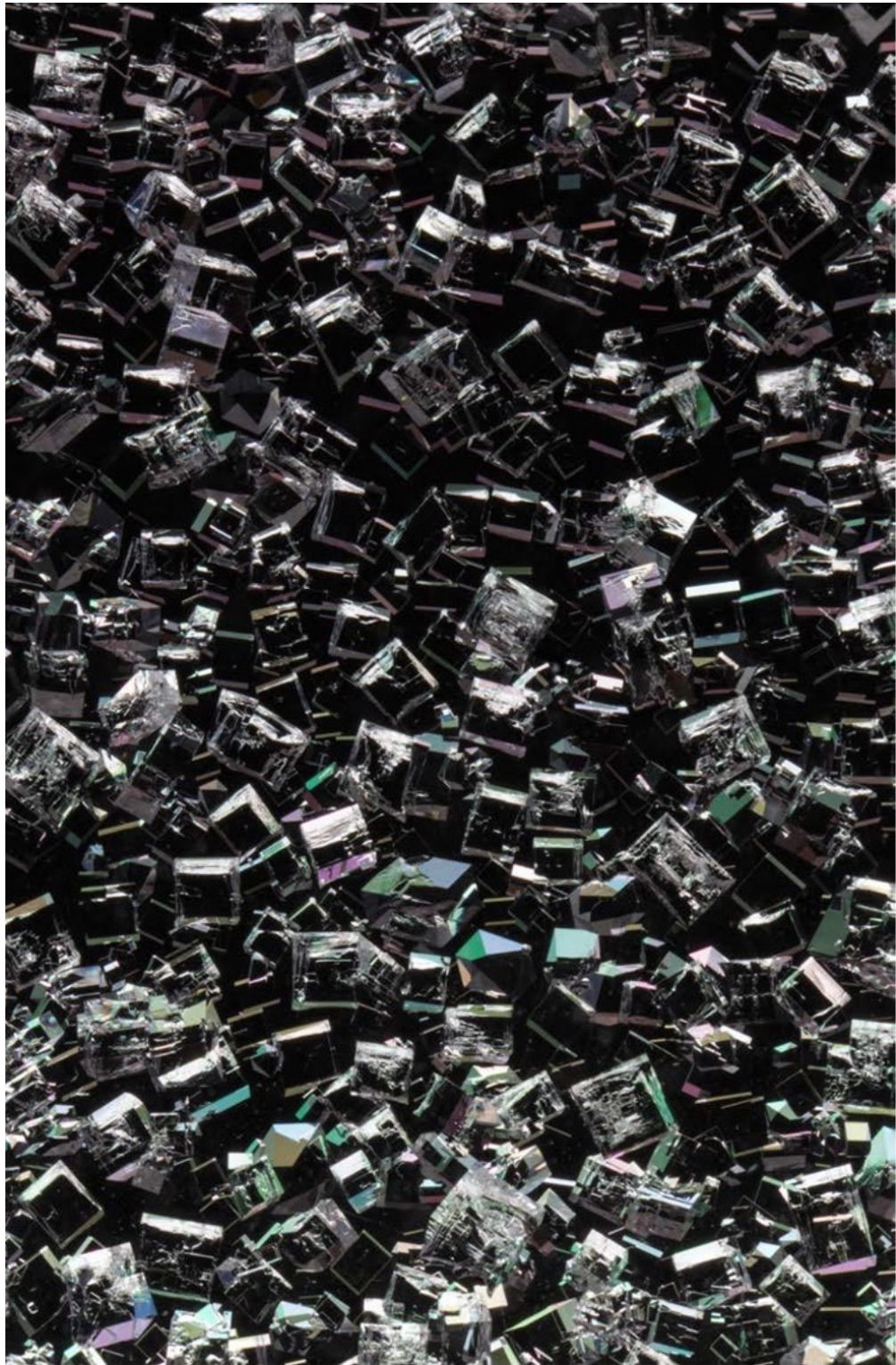


Figure 5 Christine Lorenz, Halophilic 2-1330, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6 Christine Lorenz, Halophilic 2-1228, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

salt reaches our table, it has been processed, purified, branded, packaged, and delivered with such convenience that we would hardly think of it as something geological. We typically use salt as a consumable good, and consumer logic keeps our attention on how we can get a product and what it can do for us—not on where it comes from or where it goes. Where does it come from? It comes from the store. Where does it go? It goes away. In that respect, the mineral has become a lot like plastic: endlessly malleable and abundant, to a degree that makes it an intentional act to even notice.

In some culinary circles, the desire for connection with a sense of place finds satisfaction in specialty salt that has a terroir. This kind of experience is appealing, but more the exception than the rule. When we taste salt, the material of a place passes through our senses, independent of any knowledge of what that place was. The Caribbean Sea? The Great Salt Lake? Somewhere . . . else? Systems of extraction and commerce bring salt to our daily lives by liberating it from its origins, such that we can have no idea where on earth it has been. Salt mining is a massive, global industry. In the United States, a majority of salt production begins in colossal underground deposits; near where I live, for example, there are mining operations that stretch for miles underneath Lake Erie. It took millions of years for that mineral layer to accumulate. Humans around the world are moving countless tons of salt at any given time, and only a very small fraction of it goes to culinary use. Most of it goes either to road maintenance or to chemical production.⁶ The global trucking system that hauls that salt (and everything else) to its destinations cannot function on icy roads. The pipes that carry water to our kitchens? In most modern buildings, those pipes are made of polyvinyl chloride. Can't make that chloride without chlorine, and sodium chloride is an abundant feedstock. So, when I salt the water for my pasta, whatever that flavor evokes for my senses, in reality I am participating in the life cycle of a substance that traces back to places I do not know, to geological time spans I can barely imagine, and to processes I do not have the faintest knowledge of.

Halophilic is a word used to describe the inhabitants of saline ecosystems. Geologists will tell you that salt and petroleum have a complex, intrinsic relationship, and in many parts of the world certain salt formations are signs of where oil and methane can be found. This relationship continues in mutated forms once the substances are above ground. Human use of these materials extends their symbiotic life cycles in darker, irrevocable ways.

The stories of salt are old stories, its roles in culture tracing back as far as humanity itself. Stories about plastic tend to be stories of the future. Visions of future convenience were essential to the way plastics were originally marketed to the public. Public discussions about plastics today tend to revolve around the



Figure 7 Christine Lorenz, Halophilic 2-1381, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 8 Christine Lorenz, Halophilic 2-1322, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

places the materials are being found, the dawning awareness of their permanence in the environment, the distressingly accelerating rate of their production, and the impossibility of cleaning them up once they have broken down into microparticles. Plastics have now been found just about everywhere that we have learned how to look for them, from the Pacific Gyre to the Antarctic,⁷ in human breast milk⁸ and in the blood of livestock animals.⁹ And yes, they have turned up in our familiar table salt.¹⁰ Much remains unknown about exactly how these materials operate as they degrade, and about the health dangers they pose to humans and to the planet's food chains. The scientific understanding of the material, so urgently needed and so rapidly progressing, has an uncanny feeling of a frontier. We are advancing toward an understanding of an unknown that humans created and live with. When reports on the subject are addressed in the news, they are typically delivered with an undertone of concern about future implications. The question always seems to be how we are going to deal with plastics—as if we were not already in the middle of them, as if they were not in the middle of us before we picked up our phones this morning. Our imagination is immediately cast into a future that stretches far beyond where we can see, dissolving in a polluted haze.

And somehow, we are touching that future when we twist the cap off a bottle of water. Timothy Morton describes the feeling of little splashes of water as an example of how it feels to encounter a hyperobject. Paraphrasing Immanuel Kant, he writes:

Consider raindrops: you can feel them on your head—but you can't perceive the actual raindrop in itself. You only ever perceive your particular, anthropomorphic translation of the raindrops. Isn't this similar to the rift between weather, which I can feel falling on my head, and global climate, not the older idea of local patterns of weather, but the entire system? I can think and compute climate in this sense, but I can't directly see or touch it. The gap between phenomenon and thing yawns open, disturbing my sense of presence and being in the world.¹¹

Vast in multiple dimensions (scale, temporal, and ontological among them), the hyperobject cannot be apprehended in its entirety, even in the imagination. Despite our familiarity with the way it manifests on a human scale, there will always be more to it than we can account for.

Plastics in the world constitute a hyperobject, one that defies the limits of our imagination, let alone our capacity to rein in our behavior as a species. When we look at the interplay of salt and plastics in the physical world, we are catching

glimpses of an interobjective mesh, where the gaps between the connections may be easier to see than the patterns they create.¹² It can be a lot to try to grasp at once. Sometimes a little at a time is what we can manage. But the small parts only matter if we see them as part of something larger and begin to accept that what we are a part of in the world is more than what any one of us can comprehend.

In the sphere of the everyday, salt is the commonest of common things. We tasted salt before we could name it, and it has been cycling through our bodies ever since. When we think about salt, our countless poetic and cultural associations trace back to what is familiar, which is what we can taste—but all of that is only one facet of human entanglement with the life cycles of salt on our planet. Plastics are part of that entanglement, which extends far beyond what we can grasp, even as we apprehend it through the senses, even as we participate in advancing it. From my position as an artist, thinking about salt and plastic means thinking about individual experiences of time and scale, about things visible and invisible (to us), about our human limitations and what may as yet be beyond them.

* * *

Christine Lorenz holds a dual BA in English and photography from the Ohio State University and an MFA from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She teaches visual culture and the history of photography at Duquesne University and Point Park University. Her photographs have been seen at photo-eye gallery in Santa Fe, in Pittsburgh spaces, and in collections across the United States and Europe. Her work has been featured by Lenscratch, CENTER Santa Fe, *Vice*, Photolucida, *Fraction Magazine*, Humble Arts Foundation, Magenta Foundation, and *Rogue Agent*. She lives with her family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Notes

¹ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 9–16, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373780>.

² Stanton Marlan, ed., *Salt and the Alchemical Soul: Three Essays* (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1995).

³ Stanton Marlan, ed., *Salt and the Alchemical Soul*, 106.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 130–31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 131. From this point forward, Jung's archetypal axes are tied to principles

that would take us farther down the rabbit hole than we can manage here, particularly given the problematically gendered structure of these archetypes. It is fair to summarize that Jung finds salt to serve a function that undermines a certain polarity between masculine and feminine principles, but his argumentation merits a longer discussion.

⁶ “Salt Statistics and Information | U.S. Geological Survey,” accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/national-minerals-information-center/salt-statistics-and-information>.

⁷ Margaret Osborne, “In a First, Microplastics Are Found in Fresh Antarctic Snow,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 16, 2022, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/in-a-first-microplastics-are-found-in-fresh-antarctic-snow-180980264/>.

⁸ K. Mendonca et al., “Bisphenol A Concentrations in Maternal Breast Milk and Infant Urine,” *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health* 87, no. 1 (2012): 13–20, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-012-0834-9>.

⁹ I. van der Veen et al., “Plastic Particles in Livestock Feed, Milk, Meat and Blood: A Pilot Study,” Plastic Soup Foundation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2022, <https://www.plasticsoupfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Final-Report-pilot-study-plastic-particles-in-livestock-feed-milk-meat-and-blood-SIGNED-1.pdf>.

¹⁰ H. Lee et al., “Microplastic Contamination of Table Salts from Taiwan, including a Global Review,” *Scientific Reports* 9, no. 10145 (2019), DOI: [10.1038/s41598-019-46417-z](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-46417-z); Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

¹¹ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 11–12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 83.

This page intentionally left blank

**Strategies of Il/legibility: Lorraine O'Grady, Gayatri Spivak,
and Visual Decipherment**

Courtney R. Baker

This essay seeks to explicate a practice of visual reading that respects the dissembling practices of women of color. To greet this challenge, I discuss the promise of a visual reading praxis that could respect the opacity and illegibility of women of color performance and image as strategic complications of hegemonic interpretation. I argue for a practice of reading that leans into both the promise and the productive frustration of incomplete decipherment. I maintain that such reading can function as an ethical praxis of criticism and analysis.

The works with which I am generally concerned, and which serve as points of analysis in this essay, are elaborately constructed, complexly performed visual images. The first is the costume of the Bengali American postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak. The second is the artwork of the African American artist Lorraine O'Grady. I analyze these works in order to underscore the intentionality of women of color as creative makers. Additionally, I focus on their works to underscore the imperialist impulse of a visual reading praxis oriented toward fixity. The leap from the European imperial taxonomies of humankind to the classification of artwork and non-European subjectivities is not so great.¹

Spivak's and O'Grady's deliberate expressions announce themselves as having at best a complicated relationship with a consensual notion of the real. Rather, it is reading—and, through my attempt here, writing—unfolding over time, not instantaneously available, that activates their work (labor) and their works (image). I argue, moreover, that these objects are less artifice than artifacts in the sense that they are aesthetic signposts of meaning. They are the products of self-

conscious creative and intellectual production—features that have historically been aligned exclusively with men, whiteness, and the global North.

Here, I am displacing, too, the authority and expectation of a philosophically disinterested judgment (i.e., a judgment that presumes that valuations of taste can be cleanly divorced from embodied assessments) favored by modernist art criticism, celebrated most powerfully by the art critic Clement Greenberg in the post–World War II US art movement.² Instead, I offer an orientation that arises from a situated utterance and a deeply politically interested position.

The critical aesthetics scholar Stephen Best has offered an alternative mode of aesthetic approach by proposing that art viewers “think like a work of art.” This radical posture acknowledges and incorporates the space between the seer and the seen as an essential locus of fluctuating knowledge. Rejecting the presumption that proximity equates to certainty, Best offers a scheme of aesthetic relation that endows the visual artifact with its own autonomy. In his book *None Like Us*, Best interrogates the art viewer’s conceptual shift from “representation to matter, figuration to literality” as an expected but not exclusive drive toward conclusive meaning—“an undertow, or gravitational pull, in one particular direction, an incessant drive toward the literal.”³ For Best, the “literal” denotes the actual, a consensus of meaning that circulates within a discourse of real meaning. In my analysis to follow, I retain Best’s skepticism about the real and play—in a deconstructionist sense—with the implications of the word *literal* as indicating that which is inscribed (on the body or in the frame) as a locus of a thwarted desire for fixity and a site of productive intellectual play.

The works presented by Spivak and O’Grady are concerned with race and gender as devalued bodily markings. These markings are not abstract symbols but politically charged codes. The objects, then, do not permit the reader or viewer an objective distance or a disinterested perspective. In fact, through a juxtaposition of these and other visual codes, organized or explicated in such a way as to deny a linear or coherent narrative of the woman of color subject, these objects, by appealing to the visual sense, disrupt the ostensibly natural practice of reading. These visual scenes are jarring and unsettling for this reason. I am privileging the visual scene in these objects because the visual here actively denies a linear narrative organization of information.

I would like to take a moment to define certain terms, as this project is as much about the potential fluidity of signs as about the myriad meanings conveyed by those signs. This essay offers the notion of seeing as a form of reading. While vision is foregrounded in both works as *presentation*, their meanings—while elusive and subversive—are usefully broached as *representations*, thereby recommending a method that engages the object of study as texts within a field of significations and

signs. As is perhaps apparent, with this gesture I am activating the methodologies of semiotics and poststructuralism locatable in the explorations of culture heralded by such figures as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and especially Stuart Hall.⁴ While vision or, more properly, visual encounter is foregrounded in these works, the viewer-cum-reader is compelled to consider that which can be seen prior to that which can be logically inferred, deduced, or extrapolated. The structure of logic in these works is deferred. The narrative structure is collapsed, and the reader is left to consider the terms (images or words) being presented. It is my intention to argue that the strategic foregrounding of the visual is able to deny linear narrative organization and thereby open up a space for an irreducible subjectivity.

The bodies at issue here (i.e., both the bodies in the works to be analyzed and the bodies who produced the works) have worked to escape the colonizing practices of hegemonic reading. Although these bodies are racially and sexually marked, they refuse to be read as receptacles of prescribed meanings of essential identities. These bodies have become complicated, fragmented. It is therefore not simply coincidental that the producers of the works I discuss are both women of color.

Having thus explained what I take to be the two fundamental positions to consider in the art of reading, I offer my readings of the two works—one presented as a selection of theoretical writing, the other as a work of visual art.

In the “Culture” chapter of Spivak’s book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), the author presents the reader with her costumed body as a text for an analysis of labor and transnational movements of capital. Near the end of the chapter, amid a more conventional Marxist analysis of the garment industry, labor, and global markets, Spivak describes the clothing on her body at a specific moment in time and space. She uses “the example [of] Gayatri Spivak on a winter’s day at an opening in New York’s New Museum” to “place the export-based garment industry in transnationality” and to “explain that transnationality [does] not primarily mean people moving from place to place.”⁵ She describes the “cheap” and “unattractive” top that was mass-produced in Bangladesh by an English-based, international clothing company, and contrasts it with the “exquisite” sari made by a weaver’s collective in Bangladesh. Spivak goes on to describe the teamwork, tradition, and craftsmanship involved in the collective, and explains how private subsidizing is needed to maintain the collective in the face of the colonization of the international garment industry. She then states, “Thus I was standing in the museum wearing the contradiction of transnationalization upon my body, an exhibit, though no one knew it.”⁶

What I am interested in here is less the issue of transnationalization per se than the author’s offering of her body as an exhibit that is both seen and not seen.

There are at least two layers to this notion of “seeing and not seeing”: first, there is the idea that the visual field yields a phenomenological complexity that the act of writing cannot; then there is the issue that what we, the readers, are presented with is not really Spivak’s body but Spivak’s text. Our reading is thus doubly frustrated. Were we present in the museum with Spivak at this moment, we would have her body and the contradictions written on it immediately available to us, but we would not know how to read it, nor to read it at all: “*an exhibit, though no one knew it.*”

We are therefore reliant on Spivak’s writing and, moreover, her instructions on how to read her body for information about transnationality. But the text that guides the eye operates like a frame, hedging the view and, by extension, the available interpretations: “*an exhibit.*” I choose the word *hedging* deliberately here because I do not think that the frame that Spivak has used is absolutely limiting. There is a great deal that is outside the frame to which Spivak alludes (the Bangladeshi collective, the international clothing company). The object, then, of the reader’s gaze is not a simple, contained body but a highly complex one, adorned with multiple layers of meanings or terms whose absolute meanings, in the spirit of Derridean deconstruction, are endlessly deferred. As a result, the project of reading Spivak’s body/text simply (i.e., as simplistic) is equivalent to not seeing it at all.

“I don’t know whether to read it or to look at it,” or words something to that effect, were spoken by a visitor to the studio of the artist Lorraine O’Grady.⁷ The object with which the visitor was having so much trouble was *Studies for Flowers of Evil and Good* (1998).

The work consists of digitized palimpsests, displayed as diptychs, that present three overlapping layers of portraits, paintings, and text. The layers consist of Pablo Picasso’s painting *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)*; a portrait of Charles Baudelaire and his black paramour of twenty years, Jeanne Duval; text from either Baudelaire’s poetry or of the artist’s invention (meant to represent the language of Duval); and photographs of O’Grady’s female ancestors. In the press release from the work’s 1998 exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery, the work is succinctly described thus: “In these diptychs, a Nadar photograph of Baudelaire is juxtaposed with a Baudelaire drawing of Duval. Each is layered with crops from Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, as well as with text constituting an imaginary dialogue.”⁸

Picasso’s 1907 painting *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)* is often understood to represent a watershed moment in the history of Western art. As the art historian Hal Foster notes, the painting marks “a bridge between modernist and premodernist painting, a primal scene of modern primitivism. . . . The painting presents an encounter in which are inscribed two scenes: the depicted one of the brothel and the

projected one of the heralded 1907 visit of Picasso to the collection of tribal artifacts [most notably African masks] in the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadero.”⁹

The layers of O'Grady's work form a palimpsest, with each image struggling with another to articulate meanings, to tell the story of modernist aestheticism, of interracial love, of the experience of gender and racial hierarchies. The stories intersect, overlap, and occlude. A painted face hovers ghostlike over Baudelaire's shoulder. The familiar words of his poetry disappear into shadows, are cut off by Picasso's hard angles. In other images, Baudelaire's pen-and-ink sketch of his “mistress” is deepened by the shading in the painting overlay.

The (dis)organization of the terms in this work (the Picasso painting, Baudelaire, Duval, the written text) effectively obscures any easily available meaning. The terms themselves are immediately available. One might begin to read this work thus: “Baudelaire is the father of modernist aesthetics. Picasso is the great modernist painter. Blackness and womanhood are repressed subjectivities.” Of course, the terms are not innocent; they are iconographic. But any attempt to reduce the work to a singular meaning remains frustrated. If a value judgment is being made here, for example, on the status of modernity or Picasso, then it is quite convoluted.

I am intrigued by the related tropes of “the exhibit” for Spivak and “the visual art object” for O'Grady as texts that are set off, framed, removed from the continuum of “the real” as exemplars. What is significant about the moment described by Spivak, and what led me to read this section more closely, is her privileging of the exhibit as a useful method of practicing deconstructive self-reflection. Indeed, it seems that the museum is the only space in which such a reflection could occur. Spivak becomes an exhibit in the space of the museum. The museum here operates as a deferring mechanism. It signifies a space in which the complicating effects of temporal and spatial contexts may be momentarily bracketed. In the museum, Spivak sees her body not as she really is but as she wants to: in this case, for the purpose of furthering a critique of capitalist transnationalism. I do not wish to challenge the purity of that desire to see one's self (or one's object of study) as one wants to. I suspect it is, in fact, deeply problematic to suggest that any space might provide a venue for pure analysis. Nevertheless, I believe it is still the visual that holds the possibility of exposing those desires. The experience of viewing O'Grady's work (and O'Grady's experience in composing the work) foregrounds desire. Out of the consternation of not knowing whether to look or to read emerges the desire to “just look,” to “just read,” to “read or look in the proper order” or in a “useful order.” For me, I am capable only of reducing my encounter with this work to a desire to know, a desire that is quickly followed by an art lover's impulse to “do right” by the work.

I want to offer the project of reading the visual as denaturalizing the concept of reading as knowledge production. In ideal circumstances, the visual is nonnarrative. Its offering of objects and icons to the visual sense is unbiased in that it does not indicate a beginning point or a priority. Visual reading, then, is a project of narrating the reader's desire through the excavation of an elected intellectual agenda. In this scenario the focus of the reading process could then be transferred from the objective (the intellectual agenda) to the subjective (the narrative of the reader's desire). The knowledge produced would inevitably form a dialect of sorts, between the goal of the critical analytic work and the agency of the reader (now author).

As the art historian Stephanie Sparling Williams explains of O'Grady's *Studies*, thwarting the impulse to fix a reading of Black women was inherent to the artwork's process, not just its ultimate form. Williams notes that O'Grady located a paucity of records of Duval in the archives from which to draw for her piece. In the artist statement that accompanied the work's premiere at the ICA Boston, O'Grady acknowledged her own desires to know and, indeed, perhaps, to fix an image of Duval that could reflect an image of herself in another era and another country. As she explains of the text in the work, "Her words are a fiction, written by me, to fill the silence of this woman-without-speech, and I know that I am as guilty as Charles. I too am using Jeanne."¹⁰ O'Grady's awareness of "using" Duval as Baudelaire had, to pursue a deeper knowledge of not only Duval but of herself, amplifies rather than diminishes the critique of intellectual and aesthetic entitlement that is, I argue, central to the work. In this, O'Grady enacts what Williams calls a "speculative orientation" in which "accumulated voice and presence 'out of turn,' deployed conceptually to render the figure of Jeanne Duval physically and intellectually present."¹¹ Speculatively and spectrally, Duval is sited as a figure of recalcitrant knowledge, ultimately and by design visible but not knowable.

Visual reading as I have envisioned it here is a sort of autoethnographic performance. In attending to the visual, in working through one's relationship to a visual object, one produces a unique textual interpretation, a spectacle of analytic encounter. Spivak's writing and reading of her own body is an example of that type of spectacle. O'Grady's productively frustrated reading (and writing) of Duval is another. Although the immediacy of their bodies is displaced for us (the readers of their texts), we nevertheless have another object available to our gaze: the spectacle of their self-reading. Visuality in this project of reading is thus mirrored and repeated. What begins with a look, ends with a look. The possibility of new, unique readings therefore remains open, and the final word, the ultimate judgment, is endlessly (and I think happily) deferred.

* * *

Courtney R. Baker is associate professor of English at the University of California, Riverside and the author of *Humane Insight: Looking at Images of African American Suffering and Death* (University of Illinois Press). Her research on narrative ethics, the politics of representation, and theories of the human has appeared in print and online publications as well as in podcasts and lectures such as *Camera Obscura*, the Emmett Till Project, and Left of Black. She is currently writing a book on Black film formalism.

Notes

¹ Indeed, we may consider the Nazi regime's obsession with art hoarding as perhaps the most conspicuous example of aligning hierarchies of man with hierarchies of art. The apotheosis of this endeavor is to be located in the 1937 *Degenerate Art* exhibition. See Olaf Peters, ed., *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937* (Munich, Prestel, 2014); and Neil Levi, "Judge for Yourselves?—The 'Degenerate Art' Exhibition as Political Spectacle," *October* 85 (1998): 41–64, <https://doi.org/10.2307/779182>.

² See Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon, 1984).

³ Stephen Michael Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 32, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002581>.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972); Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974); Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Stuart Hall, "Recent Developments in Theories of Language and Ideology: A Critical Note," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79*, edited by Stuart Hall et al. (London, Routledge, 1992), 147–53, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203381182-20>.

⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 414, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjsf541>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lorraine O'Grady, conversation with author, April, 1992.

⁸ "Studies' for a Work in Progress on Charles Baudelaire, the First Modernist Poet, and His Haitian-Born Wife, Jeanne Duval," Thomas Erben Gallery, September 1998, <https://www.thomaserben.com/exhibitions/lorraine-ogrady-studies/>.

⁹ Hal Foster, “The ‘Primitive’ Unconscious of Modern Art,” *October* 34 (1985): 45, <https://doi.org/10.2307/778488>.

¹⁰ O’Grady, quoted in Stephanie Sparling Williams, *Speaking out of Turn: Lorraine O’Grady and the Art of Language* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 151, <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520384224>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

Rogue Masks: Visualizing Multidisciplinary Studies

Amanda M. Maples

In April 2022 Sheku “Goldenfinger” Fofanah, an exceedingly talented artist largely unrecognized outside Sierra Leone, created one Ordehlay (fig. 1) and two Fairy masquerade ensembles (fig. 2) for a major international traveling exhibition currently titled *New Masks Now: Artists Innovating Masquerade in Contemporary West Africa*. Emerging from previous dissertation research, the planning of this exhibition project, and my training in visual studies, this essay explores Fofanah’s vibrant, multi-cultural urban masquerades as a parallel of my own scholarly journey toward the discipline of visual studies, and the necessity of resisting overdetermined paths and dichotomous categorizations to approach, research, understand, and present/contextualize African masquerade arts. Like my own pedagogical journey, Ordehlay is not linear, nor does it stay in any one lane. Such a rogue mask calls for a rogue discipline.

Accordingly, my journey to visual studies was a meandering one. I suspect that not many of us who end up choosing this field start off in high school or college thinking “visual studies, that’s for me!” I was raised in a rural North Carolina town with less-than-stellar educational opportunities, so when I arrived at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I did not even know what anthropology was, nor that my journey would eventually take me through it, toward visual anthropology, and eventually to visual studies. I certainly did not expect to end up working in Africa, or with urban cultural phenomena like masquerades. One constant in my career, however, has been a fascination with the tangible, intangible, and narrative qualities of objects and their connection with lived human



Figure 1 The completed Ordeblay masquerade “devil” by Sheku “Goldenfinger” Fofanah, photographed at the artist’s home in Freetown, June 9, 2022. Titled Woman Tote Man, it visually and verbally implies that men can do nothing without the support of women. Courtesy of the artist.

experience—their humanity.¹ I still distinctly remember the moment I physically connected with an artifact on an archaeological dig in South Africa that had not been touched by human hands for thousands of years. It electrified my imagination, and it is no wonder that I ended up following a career in museums (by way of visual studies).

When I teach, interview, lecture, or pontificate about my career or academic path, particularly as a curator of global African arts, I note that my degree is not in art history, and I did not arrive at this point through conventional, linear training. I like this. I grew up fascinated with punk rock and DIY aesthetics, and I did not mind taking risks and making mistakes, so long as I found meaning in the work that I did. This can be especially comforting to students, who sometimes overthink their next move.



Figure 2 Sheku “Goldenfinger” Fofanah with one of the completed “Fairy” masquerade ensembles (Jollay Society), photographed at the artist’s home in Freetown, May 7, 2022. The ensemble was designed by Fofanah with Abdulai “Dezo” Sesay, who did most of the tailoring. Sheku Kanteh and Morlai Thullah, both of Makeni, carved the facemasks for both Fairies, but they were painted by Fofanah and his assistants in Freetown. Courtesy of the author.

A visual studies background is also extremely useful in curatorial work, which for me is a process in which I invite myself (as conduit), stakeholders, and visitors to examine and contribute to the dialogic nature of artworks, contextualizing them for critical analysis in museum spaces. Creative juxtapositions of objects across invented boundaries of time, geography, and genre can help visitors to not just appreciate complex object histories but recognize their entanglements as necessary and endemic—and hopefully, compelling.

Additionally, we (as a collective humanity) find ourselves two and a half years into a pandemic characterized by global protests agitating to dislodge persistent systemic racism and the legacies of colonialist and imperialist histories. Movements like Black Lives Matters and Rhodes Must Fall have prompted museums to examine their own role in such histories, resulting in a moment of urgent transformation. This transitional moment means a positionality like mine—as a white female curator trained in African visual arts—is being seriously questioned and critically examined,² and it is moments like these where visual studies reminds us that

there are no single stories. Stories matter, and so does how they are told and who tells them.

Ordehlay Masquerades—a Categorical Challenge

My personal trajectory also means that once I got a handle on the African art “canon”—or what Western collectors, curators, and markets imagine it to be—I immediately gravitated to the kinds of arts that resisted categorization. Ordehlay masquerades, invented in the diasporic urban center of Freetown, Sierra Leone, became the subject of my focus from about 2009 until today. Its multicultural, multireligious, multiethnic hybridity extends not only to its membership but to its masquerade and performance, manifesting in processions of brightly colored, frenetic “devils” bursting with wooden combs, gourds, animal skins and heads, cowrie shells, and lavish cloths and beads (figs. 3, 4, and 6). Ordehlay masquerades (and their societies) are hyperlocal yet transnational organizations originally formed to counter generational/hierarchical authority while gaining the stability that mutual aid societies can offer for less-rooted communities (young people) living (or struggling) in the fractured socioeconomic terrain of city life. The foundational history and polychromatic nature of Ordehlay challenges assumptions that masquerade exists only in small, rural African communities, or that it migrated into the city as primarily state-sponsored or folkloric performances that elevate nationalisms and package cultures. Their positionality on a spectrum of masquerades that interconnect and range from primarily entertainment-based societies like Jollay and Ordehlay to the most protected of secret societies, like Poro or Sande, challenges a persistent “one tribe—one style” paradigm—wherein culture and ethnicity are bundled into neat, discrete packages and styles—on multiple levels.³ By exploring their specific historical contexts and the visuality of these vivid, kinetic masquerades beyond the confines of art historical, anthropological, or even visual studies canons, my research contributes to deconstructing tenacious and durable binaries: traditional versus contemporary, tradition and modernity, Africa versus the West, local and global, and urban versus rural. Such binaries illustrate that colonialism—and its abiding dance partner, the Museum—still cast shadows, first as a proof and extension of empire and then throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century as a contributor to an essentialized perspective of culture, art, and canon. Urban masquerade phenomena like Ordehlay ultimately agitate the “center” implied by oppositional constructs and seek to disrupt and decenter—what some might call “decolonization” or decoloniality.



Figure 3 A typical Ordehlay procession at the midway point of the parade route in the neighborhood of Mountain Cut, Freetown, Boxing Day, December 26, 2017. One of the roughly sixteen to twenty devils that comes out during each day is visible at the front of the procession. Courtesy of the author.

A Note on African Arts, Ordehlay, and Visual Studies

Research in the arts of Africa takes an interdisciplinary approach; it is not squarely anthropological or “ethnographic,” nor is it singularly art historical. Similarly, Ordehlay masquerades are neither contemporary nor traditional, per se, neither ethnographic nor canonical. Examples can be found in art galleries and museums in the “global North”⁴ as well as in Sierra Leone, and they also populate a select number of private and smaller museum collections in Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and New York. Ordehlay mask forms do therefore sell on the market, albeit at a low price and only within a limited set of interested collectors. As such, Ordehlay must be considered outside these confining notions of art and anthropology. This is where visual studies, my disciplinary foundation, proves to be a valuable tool. Ordehlay is a hybrid, multicultural, and mutable artform performed by marginalized communities that are negotiating tenuous conditions and identities. Research of this vibrant masquerade, an anticlanical African art, necessitates the more free-form interdisciplinarity of visual studies. Again—a rogue mask calls for a rogue discipline.

As a relatively new field, at least when I began studying it in 2012, visual studies is a somewhat ephemeral and transitory, perhaps even slippery, discipline. Its evaluative approach to any given visuality, or vision itself, is a key component, along with its use of various disciplinary criterion and its focus on tension or rupture. It follows, then, that visual culture has been accused of being “too hybrid” and “too multicultural,” among other things, but this is precisely what is needed for an “acculturated” artform such as Ordehlay.⁵ This perceived weakness is actually its strength. Aren’t the contested spaces, perhaps even the ones between disciplines, the most interesting, the most telling?

Growing scholarship in arts that integrate or reinvent “traditional” forms, such as that of urban masquerading, is indicative of a recent and progressive shift in the field that is removing the static boundaries between traditional and contemporary, and revealing more fluent and unfixed notions of the arts. These concerns also characterize visual studies. Fracturing, displacing, and reinscribing constructed categories of art and culture is the future perfect of not only African arts scholarship but the social sciences and humanities as well. It is imperative that scholars study urban creative outputs like masquerade—as we should study less visible communities and their arts—in order to understand multicultural iterations of arts and “traditions” as well as stay relevant to public and scholarly communities in Africa and abroad. It is essential that rooted generalizations of an imagined, mythical Africa (bundled into words like *tradition*) are dislodged and shifted in order to make room for a broader understanding of the arts of Africa as local and specifically meaningful iterations endemic to global experience and dialogically engaged with temporality. Ordehlay challenges, intervenes, and decomposes essentialist notions that to a certain extent still prevail in art history and in museum spaces. Adding to a growing chorus of voices, Ordehlay and visual studies are paving the way to a more supple and nimble vision of African art as a field, and to an understanding of ideas like “tradition” from African perspectives.

New Masks Now: Applying Visual Studies Methodology to a Major Exhibition Project

The above is a modified excerpt from my 2018 dissertation, “Mobilizing Masquerades: Urban Cultural Arts in Sierra Leone and Beyond,” that has since led to the planning of a major traveling exhibition and publication project currently titled *New Masks Now: Artists Innovating Masquerade in Contemporary West Africa*. This NEH-funded exhibition is organized by the North Carolina Museum of Art, in partnership with colleagues and institutions in Senegal, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.



Figure 4 Cutting Grass, Ordeblay devil by Oju Feraf Ordeblay Society artists, parading in Freetown on Boxing Day, December 26, 2017. Courtesy of the author.

Opening in 2025, it will travel to various institutions in the United States and Canada, as well as Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and potentially Burkina Faso, until about 2027. Though I am directing the project, I am joined by colleagues Lisa Homann, Jordan Fenton, and Hervé Youmbi (fig. 5). As we argue, masquerade has long stood as the iconic “African” performance genre, yet the artists who create masquerades are often unacknowledged and underrepresented in exhibitions and publications. *New Masks Now* will showcase the artworks and prioritize the voices of individual creators to offer a fresh take on the vitality of masquerade arts, making clear that creativity in African masking is fundamentally contemporary. To accomplish this, the exhibition features four artists: Chief Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa (Nigeria), David Sanou (Burkina Faso), Sheku “Goldenfinger” Fofanah (Sierra Leone), and Hervé Youmbi (Cameroon), privileging their voices, motivations, artistic choices; the economic networks with which they engage; and how each responsively adapts their respective genres locally and globally.

The project arose from a recognition that contemporary masquerade artists are excluded from the African and broader art historical “canons”—broadly defined as artworks and artists considered fundamental to the field. By featuring acclaimed, living masquerade artists, we critically examine the ways in which African masquerade is innately connected to the global art market. Another major goal of *New Masks Now* is to present fresh and transparent methodologies for documenting, commissioning, and conducting fieldwork, and to suggest more ethical collecting and research models for humanities scholars working with underrepresented groups, bringing to the fore pertinent issues relating to collecting, ownership, and the ethics of working with living artists. All contributors critically examine the processes and implications of commissioning works of arts from living (often marginalized) artists, focusing on the agency of creative individuals and fostering transparency in museum and curatorial practice.

New Masks Now will feature thirteen full masquerade ensembles, ten of which have been newly commissioned and visually documented for the project—a tactic heretofore unprecedented in museum presentations. Rigorous documentation will reveal the precise tactics each of us took in our research collaborations, and the companion publication will provide summaries and recommendations from this work, building and contributing to new ethical models for future scholarship. Local and interdisciplinary programming tailored by venue will present unique opportunities for connecting to regional diasporic communities, global artists, and issues pertinent to our lived global realities.

Mobilizing Masquerades: Sheku “Goldenfinger” Fofanah

As I have argued elsewhere, for over two decades scholars have turned their attention to visual or painterly contemporary urban expressions while largely overlooking masquerade arts of African cities, which have been approached as importations from rural contexts or as state-sponsored festivals.⁶ As such, there have been very few documented urban masquerading traditions in Africa and little discussion of their performance, save a few noted contributions.⁷ Ordehlay cultural societies of Freetown provide a compelling example of urban-invented arts and their spread to towns in the outlying rural areas of Sierra Leone, as well as abroad. This is counterintuitive to the typical spread of masquerades, which, according to scholars, spread from the rural into the urban zones. Further, while urban-based artists and members are interacting with communities upline—a term that substitutes for “provincial” or anywhere outside the capital city—they are also interacting with international branches of the societies. Both interactions are strengthened by the



Figure 5 Artist Hervé Youmbi with his Rhino Mask installation. Courtesy of Axis Gallery.

collapse of time and space characteristic of the techno-global landscape of contemporary Africa.

For one chapter of the exhibition, I am collaborating with Sheku “Goldenfinger” Fofanah, an artist I have admired since we first began working together in 2016. While he is less known outside Sierra Leone and The Gambia, he is regarded highly for his skills as a designer, and particularly for his Ordehlay masquerades. Fofanah and his apprentices designed and built the three aforementioned masquerade ensembles for *New Masks Now*: one Ordehlay and two Fairy ensembles. Fabric-based Fairy masquerades are flirty female characters of the Jollay Society, which like Ordehlay is an entertainment genre performed at holidays, celebrations, and on Independence Day. One of the Fairies was left “clean”—unperformed and unspoiled per the artists’ wishes—and traveled directly to its new home at the Fitchburg Art Museum in Massachusetts, where it will await travel as part of *New Masks Now*. The second Fairy was created as a “twin,” with the (artist and curatorial) intent that it remain in Sierra Leone to perform with 360-degree video documentation during Christmas celebrations in December 2022. Afterward, and in consultation with the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, it will be donated to the Sierra Leone National Museum, along with copies of all associated footage. Our curatorial and creative team advocates that such



Figure 6 An Ordeblay devil with society members clearing space for it to perform in Freetown, Boxing Day, December 26, 2016. Courtesy of the author.

commissioning practices should not be solely extractive but give back to the communities with which they are collaborating. Such decisions are informed by visual studies and decoloniality.

Featuring these newly commissioned masquerades, this section of *New Masks Now* documents Fofanah's influence on artistic creativity in Sierra Leone and traces the movement of these masking genres, and his masks specifically, from their original site of production and performance in Freetown to new performative arenas in outlying Sierra Leonean towns and global diasporic locales. We ask, why are masquerades becoming geographically mobile, and how are they being mobilized in their new localities? As Fofanah and I have seen firsthand, artists and members of international branches utilize messaging platforms to purchase, monitor, track, sell, and inspire masquerades, making them not only social applications but business tools. Through their migrations, articulations, and aesthetic shifts, Fofanah's artworks illustrate that masquerades move not just in performative contexts but as part of larger urbanization and techno-globalization processes, thereby



Figure 7 Tetina Cultural (Ordeblay) Society with their Woman Tote Man devil, Mountain Cnt, Freetown, December 26, 2016. Courtesy of the author.

challenging conventional notions of “urban” and “rural,” as well as “home” and “diaspora.” The very nature of rural and urban, city and village, home and diaspora as binary humanities terms must then be examined and tweaked, allowing for a more fluid understanding of them in an African context and providing audiences opportunities to connect to material culture at a deeper level.

While Fofanah’s works instantiate the complex relationships that have developed and that exist between city-based masquerade artists and their rural and international clientele, a complementary ensemble created by the Tetina Cultural Ordehlay Society of Freetown (fig. 7) provides a concrete example of a masquerade’s mobility across international borders. Titled *Woman Tote Man*, it was first performed at Christmas processions in Freetown in 2016, and then again on May 6, 2018, in Los Angeles, where its body was altered to suit its new sociotemporal

home. Traveling again, it now resides in yet another culturally constructed space: the museum collection (Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art).

Together with the Tetina example and intimate real-time presentations, Fofanah's masquerades illustrate mobility in more ways than one and remind us of the mutability of terminology, discipline, and methodology and the porosity of ideas and borders. Collaborating directly with the artist, his community, and the local ministry and museum at multiple levels to dictate the multifaceted trajectories and lives of the masquerade ensembles sets new ethical precedents and foundational methodologies. Such approaches are necessary to de- and reconstruct notions of "tradition," agitate and reset traditional museum practices/boundaries, and truly appreciate masquerade arts as fundamentally relevant, exciting, and contemporary—approaches very much informed by visual studies.

Note: This essay is a unique opportunity to discuss my personal relationship with visual studies as a discipline, as a training and research methodology, and certainly as a career philosophy. It doesn't come up much in casual conversation, and rarely does one get to write at length about such personal and scholarly trajectories. I am grateful to *Refract* for allowing me this opportunity to reflect.

* * *

Amanda M. Maples is curator of Global African Arts at the North Carolina Museum of Art and periodically serves as visiting faculty in the Department of Art & Art History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She has served in curatorial and scholarly capacities at Stanford University's Cantor Arts Center, the Yale University Art Gallery, the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, the High Desert Museum, and UC Berkeley's Hearst Museum of Anthropology. Maples has written essays, books, and articles and curated a range of exhibitions on historical and contemporary African arts, decoloniality and self-fashioning, museum policies, collecting practices, and restitutions. Maples holds a PhD in visual studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Notes

¹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

² This is of course not new, but the level of scrutiny has grown regarding the power of curatorial roles, particularly for Africanists and following the popular success of movies like *Black Panther* and the highly visible media coverage of Benin Kingdom arts.

³ Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, "African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow," *African Arts* 25, no. 2 (1984): 50–53, 96–97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3337059>.

⁴ Yale University Art Gallery, the Brooklyn Museum, the Fowler Museum at UCLA, the Welt Museum in Vienna, and the Smithsonian Institution. I recognize that "global North" is half of another enduring binary. I use it here for ease of geographic designation.

⁵ James Elkins, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 23, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203700587>; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002): 162, <https://doi.org/10.1177/147041290200100202>.

⁶ Amanda M. Maples, "Mobilizing Masquerades: Urban Cultural Arts in Sierra Leone and Beyond" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2018); Maples, "Unravelling Political and Historical Threads: Youth and Masquerade Mobility in Freetown," *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018): 487–509, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2018.1509552>; Maples, "Urban Roots and Rural Routes: Migrating Masquerades of Freetown and Beyond," *Critical Interventions* 12, no. 3 (2018): 275–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19301944.2018.1532377>; Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, *Contemporary African Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999); Susan Vogel, *Africa Explores: Twentieth Century African Art* (New York: Center for African Art, 1994).

⁷ Jordan A. Fenton, "Masking and Money in a Nigerian Metropolis: The Economics of Performance in Calabar," *Critical Interventions* 10, no. 2 (2016): 172–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19301944.2016.1205364>; Jordan A. Fenton, *Masquerade and Money in Urban Nigeria: The Case of Calabar* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2022); Benjamin Hufbauer and Bess Reed, "Adamma: A Contemporary Igbo Maiden Spirit," *African Arts* 36, no. 3 (2003): 56–95, <https://doi.org/10.1162/afar.2003.36.3.56>; John W. Nunley, *Moving with the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987).