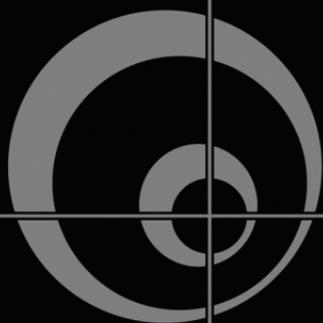


A formalized forum
for informal inquiry



— Ted Hiebert

with contributions by
Jackson 2bears & Doug Jarvis

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A formalized forum for informal inquiry

If you want to see the world differently, just cross your eyes. All of a sudden the world that was singular shifts—doubles—and our perspectives double too. It is the same world, but now seen from two angles at the same time. Not reconciled. Not extrapolated and synthesized into a three-dimensional whole. Simply doubled: seen for the complexity of the initial bifocal gaze instead of its amalgamated, processed and reproducible rendering. The two angles are not that different, but they are different enough that, seen separately, they conflict in ways that frustrate a singular world perspective.

This is obviously not how we are taught to see. Instead, it is a context we are taught to see through—our doubled optical perspectives consolidated by the ideological imperative for a singular and fixed material world. In many ways this transparency of perception—that which we are taught to not see—can itself be seen as an allegory for larger questions of creativity and artistic culture. Duality haunts the focused gaze as a capacity for uncertainty that we are taught to disregard in favor of a singular world view. Behind every three-dimensional perception of the world lie two eyes with two different perspectives, amalgamated and formalized into a singularity that we call the material world. But while we are taught to normalize the focal plane upon which our eyes cross to render the world intelligible, it is also possible to play with this optical plane, and in so doing bring new visual possibilities into appearance. To do so is to formalize an informal way of looking, one that might be easily dismissed as impractical, but is nevertheless a possible way to see the world. It is a way to see the world differently than we always already do.

This text is a meditation on artists who see things that are not there, and how they begin constructing relationships with the informal side of the world we live in. It does not matter whether we call this informal side of things imaginary, ridiculous, incommensurable, traumatic or fantastic—not because the terms are interchangeable, but because whatever we call it, the nature of the informal is to disappear into the constitutions that attempt to define it. What remains is for us to imagine these constitutions, to formalize the informal in order to give it social and discursive form, speculating on the creative possibilities for seeing the world differently and, perhaps more importantly, to engage these possibilities for the ways they extend our ability to imagine and interact with the world around us.

This book began as a series of short meditations written to accompany a suite of artworks exhibited at Noxious Sector Projects, a storefront gallery in downtown Seattle.¹ The goal in each exhibition was to highlight speculative pathways into and through the works of art presented. The writing was never intended to explain the work, but instead to, somehow, engage it—or displace it—in an interesting direction. The goal was to initiate a speculative trajectory and to demonstrate the possibilities for individual engagement implicit in almost any given work of art. The gallery was conceived as a formalized forum for informal inquiry, making space for new speculative directions in contemporary art and in so doing charting a field of critical and creative possibilities for what art can or might mean.

The artists that were presented at Noxious Sector Projects share a particular form of creative questioning that engages the speculative and the informal. Their methods extend these questions in ways that blur the boundaries between the real and the imaginary; the formal and the banal; the conjectural and the conclusive. Their artworks invite us to engage, but also insist that engagement does not always need to happen

according to standardized modes of interaction. Instead, these artists ask us to speculate differently—to go along with an imagination that is not our own and to treat it seriously as a way of engaging with the world. The result is a request, for a short period of time, to think differently.

The goal of this book is to extend the idea that the gallery began, engaging the informal as a procedural metaphor and examining what it might mean to begin taking creative possibilities a little more literally. The suggestion to look at the world with eyes crossed is, in this sense, a discursive provocation. However, it is not just a metaphor: it is also a literal way to see the world in a manner we normally do not, and one consequently that can help us to understand the world differently too. That our perspective may become blurry in the process is not an argument against the experiment. Instead, to refuse the experiment is to disregard in advance the strange apparitions that begin to come our way when seeing the world in ways that are unfamiliar. To walk down the street with eyes unfocused (crossed or otherwise) accentuates the experience of movement, frustrates the attempt to identify and name and accentuates our spatial awareness by displacing the normal relationship to our geographic world. To extend this type of physiological intervention is then to also give us new ways to describe the experience—new possibilities for seeing and understanding the flows of space, perception and awareness that grow from formalizing an experiment in informal ways of seeing.

There are many people that deserve thanks for their input on this text, most notably the artists themselves who graciously gave permission for me to include their work and who provided helpful feedback about the writing. My thanks to Jackson 2bears, The Cedar Tavern Singers, Cindy Baker, Tanya Doody, Neal Fryett, Tetsushi Higashino, Doug Jarvis, Arthur & Marilouise Kroker, Christian Kuras & Ben Tanner, Christian Kuras & Duncan MacKenzie, David LaRiviere,

Nate Larson, Urick Lau, Deirdre Logue & Allyson Mitchell, Susan MacWilliam, M.E.D.I.U.M, Ingrid Mary Percy, Steve Rayner, Janet Marie Rogers & Alex Jacobs, Scott Rogers, Nathan Shafer, Marni Shindelman, Cara-Ann Simpson, Second Front, Jason Tentor and Jennifer Willet & Kira O'Reilly. Additionally, a special thanks to Jackson 2bears and Doug Jarvis, whose writing also appears in these pages, who curated several of the exhibitions at Noxious Sector Projects and whose collaborative enthusiasm has been crucial to the realization of this book and the gallery exhibits from which it grows.

Notes:

1. Noxious Sector Projects was in operation from July 2011 to December 2013, with exhibitions changing every month. While I was responsible for curating most of the exhibits, Doug Jarvis and Jackson 2bears curated several shows as well. Their contributions are attributed in the text. Archives of the exhibitions, including installation images and complete contact information for the artists is available online at <http://www.noxioussector.net/projects>

Muddy aesthetics

There are times when it is not enough to be rational—moments when one must exaggerate, over-emphasize or simply lie in order to more accurately represent the nuances of a question. These are moments where probability as a scientific endeavor fails to represent the poetic actuality of the moment—moments that can challenge and sometimes defy the parameters of certainty and verifiability because the imagination has never been limited by possibility or truth. There are also times when one must put the imaginary first, creatively engaging the irrational possibilities of the world, whether seductive, absurd or entirely nonsensical.

Hideouts of the imaginary

In his book *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, Jean Baudrillard asserts that “the real is born of a lack of imagination,” by which he means that what we call real does not really do justice to the complexities of what we can imagine.¹ Instead, for Baudrillard, the very idea of reality has become an operational function, determined by algorithms, computer-aided extrapolations and experiments that require a distinctly non-human (technical) point of reference in order to count as real. Reality is spoken in the language of double-blind experiments, repeatable and verifiable data, codes of behavior and possibility alike—in short, by a sort of hegemon of efficiency, progress and intelligence that requires that everything not subject to these rules of the real be excluded from the conversation. Non-existent until proven and verified, the real is a new metaphysical category—one that denies nuance and mystery alike; one that does not pre-exist knowledge; one that is deeply and fundamentally non-experiential, since any experience of the real would only give a singular perspective that would taint data with perception

and mis-perception, thoughts and imagination and other ephemeral responses to the immediacy of encounter. Only once the imaginary is stripped from the encounter does the possibility emerge to witness what might be thought of as convincingly, verifiably or objectively real.

If this seems like an over-extended line of thinking, consider the difficulty of crossing the border, buying a car or going to school without the appropriate forms of data identification—as though the ID now proves the body and not the other way around. If once it was the task of a picture to look like what it represented, the case now is just the opposite—the duty of the body is to look enough like its picture to be granted access and passage. The same is also the case in numerous other social, political and cultural arenas, not to mention the minimum standard in all things scientific. No rights without proper documentation; no proofs without repeatable results; no truths without verifiable data; no identities, relationships, properties or characteristics, without proper credentials. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to suggest that what occurs under this regime is a culture that opts out of material social space in favor of profile driven identities that can mediate communication so effectively because the technical destiny of the interpersonal has always been to integrate with the archives of virtual living.

As a result—and if Baudrillard was right—then there is no imagination that persists in these digital environments without being coded in advance into the technical expression of data-rendered living. It is not technology that is the problem, but the language of scripting, archiving and rendering—code languages that insist on the same sort of technical transparency for experience as for all other forms of data-based living. Immanently sensical, rational and skeptical in ways that insist on an absence of imagination as their basic condition of consensus.

To attempt to preserve a space for the imagination within this environment, it becomes necessary to engage in some way the irrationalities of the lived condition—emphasizing an experiential incommensurability that cannot be held accountable to data, but that nonetheless has the potential to impact the world in both private and public ways. It is hardly relevant whether such moments are seen as real or not since by definition they fall outside of the verifiable schematic of documentation to catalyze the social and personal imagination. They might not be real, but they can be shared. To make this point is to say that at stake in this task is not just a recovery of personal autonomy, nor an ideological defiance of rigid conceptions of the real. At stake in the ability to exceed the technical renderings of experience is the very concept of community—human, imaginary or otherwise. In order to not be subject to algorithmic verification a community must find other ways to imagine itself forward and together.

To reverse engineer Baudrillard's proposition then would be to assert that the imagination—and perhaps the imagination alone—is capable of keeping reality at bay. For whatever the data, the imagination is capable of finding strange ways to undermine and value-add, to bend, distort and even contradict what scientific proofs claim as truth—leading the human mind down imaginary pathways as a result. The ideas that result may not be real, but they are experienced, thought, sometimes felt and other times shared. In this way, given the social imperatives towards knowledge, truth, understanding and science, it is towards the absurdities and impossibilities of living that one might look to find the last hideouts of the imaginary. To create space for contemplations of this sort is then to formalize this refusal while asking those around to purposefully imagine along. One might call this a formalized forum for informal inquiry—a proposition for a form of aesthetic thinking that is no longer simply about art, but about the nuances of living.

Making things muddier

This suggestion is offered with relative ambivalence towards its logical stability, for ultimately the destiny of logic is to eventually undermine itself in an attempt to experience its opposite.² Consequently, rather than make an argument directly, this essay will build a case anecdotally—a strategy whose challenge is persuasive rather than logical, aesthetic rather than scientific, bound to a reader's willingness to speculate as much as to the ability to convey a compelling story. This is not about providing proofs or evidence, but constructing a stage for encounter: less a theory than a context; less an argument than a provocation; less analysis and more imagination.

And so, three stories: The story of a childhood encounter with a coloring book; a story that re-tells a curator's anecdote about relational art; and a story that proposes a philosophical game about modes of perception.

These stories should be thought of as setting a stage for a theory of artistic and curatorial practice. The theory will not be argued here, but it is because the theory is not really about arguing. Instead, though it might seem counter-intuitive, to argue an artistic theory is to miss the point—and to mistake a creative idea for a knowledge claim is to reduce one's own imaginative possibilities in the process. By contrast, this essay seeks to construct a framework through which the imagination might be simply engaged, not as a private or solitary encounter, but as the basis for critical community. If logical analysis can be thought of as presenting a sensical—indeed often sanitized—argument that justifies its claims through the rational presentation of repeatable evidence, this might be thought of as the task of making things muddier, embracing the informal and at times nonsensical as a way to set up a trajectory of speculative engagement.

The baby blue duck

When I was five I was yelled at by a teacher. It was my first year of kindergarten and the class had been given a coloring exercise. The illustration was of a baby duck, playfully swimming in a lake of some sort, looking up at me with an eager and anticipating smile. It was the kind of drawing that makes one happy just to look at and the prospect of coloring it in—customizing it to fit my own imaginary version of the world—was just as wonderful as how I imagined the baby duck itself must be feeling.

Only, it turns out that ducks are not supposed to be blue. And not only are they not supposed to be blue, but there is something wrong with anyone who does not already know that. And even if one does already know it, pains should be taken to avoid coloring the drawing that way anyways. That is simply not the proper way to do it.

I was embarrassed. I knew, of course, that baby ducks were yellow—or orange if the light was just right—but I did not understand why mine could not be blue instead. The ducks on TV were not always yellow, so why should mine have to be? I had read the stories of Mighty Duck, the personified superhero, or Daffy Duck, who frequently turned shades of blue and red when choked by his cartoon companions. It seemed unfair that I should be asked to imagine a regular duck, especially when so many of these regular creatures sat just outside the classroom floating in real ponds of their own. If I wanted a real duck I would just go outside. The idea of coloring a duck to match the regular world seemed, in fact, entirely foreign.

Nevertheless, I wanted to make the teacher happy, so I diligently attempted to re-color my duck. I thought yellow might not be dark enough to change the colors on the page, so

I chose orange. But it turns out when one colors orange over top of blue, it does not undo the mistake—the result instead is a duck that just looks brown and muddy.

This is what happens with the attempt to force the imagination back into the real world. Things get muddy and by getting muddy they also get a little more interesting.

Orange rabbits on my shoulder

There is a second story about strangely colored animals, this time one that is elaborated by the art critic Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Relational Aesthetics*. In a somewhat obscure passage of the text, Bourriaud suggests that art is like an imaginary orange rabbit sitting on one's shoulder—one that is created in the mind of the artist, but not necessarily seen by those who are present for the conversation. As a result, as a viewer there are only two choices: to acknowledge the orange rabbit even if it is not technically visible, or to refuse the suggestion that there is anything to talk about at all, in other words to refuse to play along.³ What Bourriaud emphasizes is that in the second instance—if one rejects what one cannot immediately see—there is no conversation. Instead, in this case the choice has been made to disregard the possibility of the orange rabbit as unreal, hallucinatory or unverifiable, and with the dismissal of an unverifiable claim comes a refusal of whatever conversation, whatever shared imaginary space, might have emerged, but did not. It is only if one entertains the proposition that the dialogue continues.

Bourriaud's theory is not really built on the imperative to share hallucinations. His goal instead was to articulate new forms of relationships that art is capable of creating—and it is an idea that has spawned robust debate over the course of the last 20 years. At stake in the conversation is the potential of art to create social moments and to initiate dialogue and social change. It is an important discussion and one that has been well

established by Bourriaud and others, including Claire Bishop and James Elkins and many earlier artists and theorists from Duchamp to Beuys, Cage, Eno and others—as well as by many contemporary artists who are increasingly framing their work in terms of its social capacity. What makes Bourriaud's theory unique is that while he is attentive to the ways artists have been increasingly focused on social spaces and relationships, he is equally insistent that responsibility for the success of the work resides with the viewer. He even goes as far as to suggest that not finding meaning in an artwork indicates that one is not making enough effort. The responsibility is on the individual to make his or her own relationships meaningful in whatever way one wants to interpret the challenge.

The point that begs emphasizing—particularly in the context of the story of the orange rabbit—is that meaningful relationships can grow out of imaginary, ephemeral, even irrational propositions. The important part—at least for the conversation at hand—is less that art can catalyze shared relationships and more that relationships do not need real or verifiable causes. They can simply be imagined, and perhaps they must be imagined, whatever the color of the rabbit being proposed. If the orange rabbit is invisible, it becomes necessary to imagine it; if it is too difficult to imagine, then one must simply pretend. At stake in the effort one makes—despite the fact that it might seem like an act of self-delusion—is the possibility of conversation and the possibility of shared social space. Without an attempt to play along, no artistic community is possible. Imagination fails.

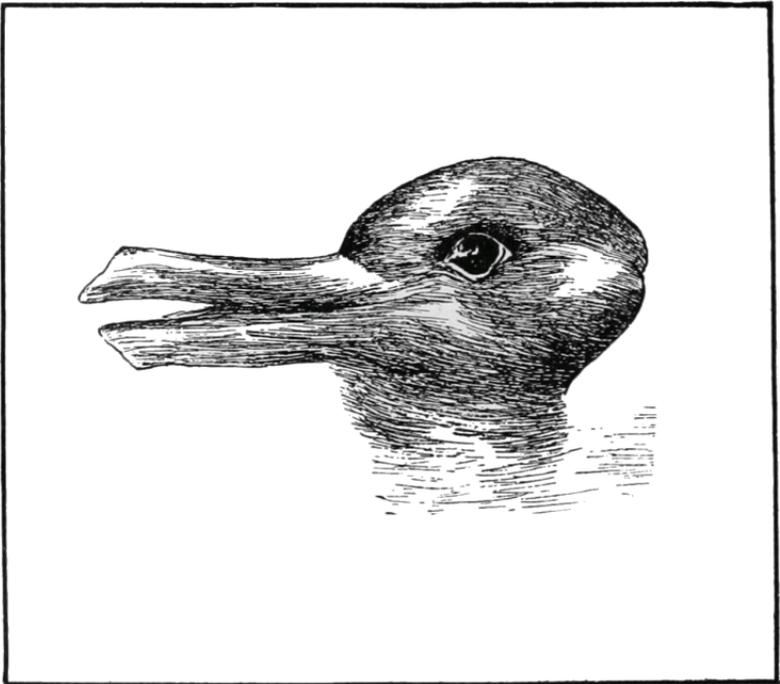
In some ways it is really just a simple insistence on pretending, and by pretending engaging in the reality of a world created consensually between individuals. It is not objective, but one lesson that the history of art proves well is that an artwork reduced to objective criteria will always be less than the sum of its possibilities. It is not subjective either though—despite the fact that one has to play along. Instead, according to

Bourriaud, it is inter-subjective—a strange category of shared and negotiated space, a place where art comes alive in equal measure to the imagination invested while encountering it.⁴ Bourriaud did not invent this category of encounter, but he did make the interesting suggestion that it applies to a shared space of art—that inter-subjectivity does not have to necessarily be verifiable in order to be real; that the experience of imaginary propositions, speculations and even delusions can also be shared, such as to fulfill in an ironically analog form William Gibson’s dream of cyberspace as the realm of the “consensual hallucination.” The possibilities for hallucinations are already here—all that is missing is consent. In Bourriaud’s vision for contemporary art, consent is as available as any given individual makes it—a reciprocal gesture towards an imaginary proposition.

To think back to my own story then would be to wonder if my teacher missed an opportunity when she looked at my duck and decided not to play along. Her resistance made my world muddier, but an attempt to engage would have brought my blue duckling to dialogic life. It would have remained muddy of course—since baby ducks still are not blue—but it would have been a shared muddy moment, instead of one that was punitive and mine alone. In this sense, it is interesting that Bourriaud selected orange as his color of choice. It was the color I selected too—a color that fits no better with imaginary rabbits than with baby blue ducks. If for me orange was the color of an attempt to repair the rift between the real and the imagined, for Bourriaud the orange rabbit is already beyond this dialectic, representing in advance a muddy moment waiting to happen. The orange rabbit could just as easily be blue—and yet it is nevertheless orange. And either way it is made even muddier by the dialogue that brings it into shared social space.

How to see the world differently

Between blue ducks and orange rabbits lies a technicolor story that provides a next phase to the theory through an ironically technical example of visual analysis by the analytic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Based on a drawing by Joseph Jastrow, the example is what is called an ambiguous image. This image—the duck-rabbit—is a drawing that can be seen either as a duck or as a rabbit, but, according to Wittgenstein and others, not as both at the same time. It is about making sense of the perceptual world: to see a duck one has to not see a rabbit; to see both one would not actually be seeing either as a whole and discrete entity.⁵ This is an image that is itself conceptually muddy in that the same drawing has multiple interpretive possibilities.



Joseph Jastrow. Duck-Rabbit Ambiguous Image, 1899

It is worth clarifying how this functions, since Wittgenstein's analysis is focused on the logical (rather than experiential) possibilities of the drawing and on the ways that an ambiguous image can exceed a human capacity to understand. It is possible, however, that the case is also the inverse and that the attempt to exhaust the possible modalities of the drawing is to refuse to engage the nuances of any given one. There is a paradox here. If information is about providing anchor points for human understanding, then the analytic model fails—the informatic rendering of the drawing exceeds a human ability to perceive. However, one might also reverse this formulation and suggest that a human ability to perceive—in the perceptual constitutions it provides—exceeds the nuance of informatic modeling. To see in the drawing a rabbit or duck is important, since this constituted rendering gives the duck or rabbit its character. It also provides the viewer with a lived experience—a unique configuration of perceptual and neural constitution that allows either a duck or a rabbit to be born of a drawing that is both and neither, but informatically not reducible to either alone.

This could be put differently by asking the question of whether one must assume that each time one looks at the duck-rabbit one will see the same thing, or whether the possibilities of such a drawing might be mobilized discretely instead of simply amalgamated into a technical whole. The suggestion is simply to look at the drawing with the intention of seeing a duck, then to look again with the intention of seeing a rabbit instead. It involves looking at the drawing slightly differently, to be sure, but it is not simply a rhetorical exercise. It is also an experiential possibility that can be cultivated and trained simply by looking to the drawing with the intention of seeing a duck, then by switching the gaze in order to see a rabbit instead—back and forth and back and forth—now a duck, now a rabbit, now a duck, now a rabbit. To play this visual game is an opportunity for a discrete visual encounter, as well as a way to turn the ambiguity of the image into a perceptual

and cognitive exercise with allegorical potential. From the ambiguous image comes an opportunity to practice seeing the world differently—one that can even be turned into a procedural metaphor: practiced in other contexts as a method for seeing the world differently.

What is so important about the example of the duck-rabbit is that it reinforces the ways in which the gaze and the mind can be conscientiously toggled—seeing (and engaging) one version of the world or another depending on how perception manifests. This is not only about aesthetic perception. Taken as a strategy for approaching other instances of ambiguity, the exercise also holds potential for articulating complexities of other sorts—from political dispositions to philosophical biases, to the endless imaginary possibilities for encounter with the everyday world. Importantly, the act of looking at the world has as its option the possibility of actually engaging in the details, nuances and particularities of that which appears. To make this case is to insist that in the example of the duck-rabbit there is an opportunity not only to see different versions of the image, but to see them with all the particularity and complexity that any singular story might also hold.

What must always be remembered with such exercises is the importance of perceiving the details of the image as a discrete object of encounter, since it is in the particularities of the encounter that the image experientially exceeds its informatic identity. In fact, it is worth slowing down to actually practice the experiment because it is in slowing down the pace of engagement that the nuances of perception begin to manifest most noticeably. For instance, to look at the duck-rabbit and see a duck is not just to recognize a duck and move on with the experience. Instead, even this duck is particular and the challenge is to build a relationship of one's own to these particularities. Particularly misshapen, particularly poorly drawn, particularly evocative rather than representative—as if to insist that what counts as a duck is as much a function of

how the duck is rendered and recognized as it is about fidelity to the representation. Does this particular duck suggestively activate a narrative space of some sort? Does it—as a duck—evoke an aesthetic or emotional response? If so, of what sort? And if not, is it because it is too easy to become too conscious of the fact that this duck is not simply a duck—the worry about missing some of the alternate informatic possibilities becoming a burden of disproof that any imagining of this particular duck has to work through in order to fully engage with the version of the drawing that is perceived? For if the fear of imagining the duck incorrectly—coloring it blue instead of yellow—inhibits the attempt to imagine at all, then the opportunity to engage has been lost. It doesn't matter if the details are incorrect. It only matters that there are details being imagined.

The same is true for the rabbit. This is not just any rabbit, but the possibility of seeing a particular rabbit presented right before one's eyes. It is one step better than an imaginary rabbit on one's shoulder—this rabbit is right here, already prompting a viewer's imagination. From a certain angle this rabbit might be seen as reminiscent of the *Velveteen Rabbit*, the button-eyed plush childhood friend that was so desperate to become real. Or perhaps this rabbit looks more like one of the characters from *Watership Down*, complete with a family of its own, antagonistic rivals and an urgent and impending drama. Whatever shape the rabbit takes, that shape is important—or even whatever shapes it refuses (this rendering does not, for instance, lend itself to an easy association to Bugs Bunny). It is a drawing that is less about an artistic depiction than an abstract possibility in the making—not animated or fantasized or politicized, but certainly evocative in the naivety of its rendering. It is like the sort of creature one might see when gazing at the clouds—as if the perception of a rabbit depends less on the actual fidelity to a model and more on the ability to imagine-in the details. Failure to imagine the details is perhaps equal to a failure to perceive the rabbit—as

if somehow it was just assumed that all rabbits are equivalent, when the case is nothing of the sort.

The ‘pataphysics of relational zoology

To take these three stories together is to multiply exponentially the possibilities for both interpretation and engagement in any given moment. Jastrow’s duck-rabbit is a black and white drawing, but it could be colored in—using either crayons or the willing imagination. It could also be dialogically animated, brought into a shared conversational or propositional space such as to catalyze a moment of encounter. To see these possibilities in the drawing is to compound ambiguity and to realize that even a duck-rabbit is never simply a duck-rabbit. Instead, to encounter ambiguity is always an opportunity to engage more specifically, and a duck-rabbit is always both itself and many other things, depending on how it is thought about or engaged—an object that always exceeds itself, but that in all cases comes into existence relationally, activated and infused by the imagination that perceives it.⁶ Perhaps simpler would be to call this new creature a *blue-orange-brown-duck-rabbit*—and in so doing to constitute the creature as an imaginary solution to the question of possible manifestation, following Alfred Jarry’s insistence on charging the real world with aesthetic possibilities for encounter. Jarry called this ‘pataphysics, the “science of imaginary solutions,” which was also for him a “law governing exceptions.”⁷ The language of exceptions is important here because it is only by understanding the blue-orange-brown-duck-rabbit as an experience waiting to happen that one is also able to engage in the specificity of a given encounter, an exception to the informatic rule that would give the blue-orange-brown-duck-rabbit one shape or form out of its possible many. Not only an experience that can happen, but one that also does happen, each time in its own particular way, negotiated socially, imagined privately or some combination of the two.

The integrity of the exception is paramount, since each manifestation of the blue-orange-brown-duck-rabbit requires a kind of experiential incommensurability at the same time as it becomes another possible moment to which exception can be taken and in which exceptions manifest themselves. The paradox that emerges is core to the study of ‘pataphysics, the idea that a law governing exceptions is also itself an exception to the law, requiring that exceptions be noted wherever possible such as to maintain the intensity of the experiential encounter. The blue-orange-brown-duck-rabbit is itself something, but it changes form when one negotiates a relationship with it—when one tells its story in a particular way. While it may seem complicated to situate the blue-orange-brown-duck-rabbit within this space of paradox, to do so is to acknowledge the complexity that emerges as soon as one insists that such a drawing be seen both as a general (informatic) rule and a specific (negotiated) encounter. This is the place where complex possibilities meet immanent manifestation, brought together by the engagement that animates the interaction. Insofar as the encounter comes alive in the act of imagining it, the drawing in this context ceases to be simply a drawing and instead becomes a kind of imaginary friend—a companion in the relational exercise. This is no longer the “suspension of disbelief” that informed Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s aesthetic framing; instead, it is a suspended animation where the imaginary is brought into tentative life, for as long as the relationship is capable of being seriously sustained.

At stake in the serious consideration of the imaginary is not just the safe space of historical aesthetic contemplation, but the potential of the creative mind to make substantive and tangible contributions to the realities it constructs. In this sense, what comes out of a serious consideration of the blue-orange-brown-duck-rabbit is a ‘pataphysics of relational zoology—treating the blue-orange-brown-duck-rabbit as a real but imaginary companion that has both a certain larger context history and relevance and a distinct and particularly

negotiated presence as a unique moment of encounter. It is relational because it is negotiated. It is ‘pataphysical because it is both an instance of a general principle and an incommensurable exception to the principles of the rule. It is zoological because it takes shape as a creature or species that comes alive through the act of imagined engagement—giving other forms of non-human agency an autonomous voice of their own. This is what makes it imaginary because it requires a shift in the understanding of how rules and exceptions are constituted in order to remain viable as a site of engagement. It is not real and yet it is made real anyways—a ‘pataphysics of relational zoology is a science of real imaginary solutions.

Art criticism as a conversation with imaginary friends

Imaginary companions can be found in even the least likely of places—from diagrams to animal companions to just about any situation that can be opened up to ambiguous encounter. What is important is not just that companions can be imagined however, but the distinct lives those companions take when animated and interacted with. Whether in art or in social situations, interaction is the key to sustainable relationships and in imaginary practices this same rule is no less true. Without a sustained gaze, the imaginary flattens out and the possibility of an image becoming an interaction begins to fade in direct proportion to a viewer’s willingness to engage. The relationship sustains the interaction and brings this imaginary to life. However, this cannot be an entirely one-sided endeavor—friendships never are—a general rule to which imaginary friendships must be held no less accountable.

One might think of this as a second-order relational strategy in order to catalyze a sequel to Bourriaud’s own participatory game. In this narrative the goal is to extend the social imperative to imagine along with others such as to reframe

the imagination as something that requires perpetual attention and engagement. It might be thought of as a conversation that ends when its participants have had enough, sustained only for as long as there are interesting things to say. The challenge is to take an artwork seriously as an anchor for conceptual play—beginning as an image or a moment or an event, then expanding to become a proposition for thinking differently. As a viewer, one faces the challenge to then find and adopt those ways of thinking such that they begin to form a shared encounter between oneself and the artwork. What is needed is to animate the ideas (rather than the artwork) from a different perspective, to learn from the artwork another strategy for seeing the world differently, even if at times it seems to break with the mandate of the artwork to do so. It is a purposefully muddy form of engagement—one in which an artwork and its interpretations become entangled, circling one another in ways that spiral beyond the perspectives unique to either. But this is what artists do anyways, so to play this game with a work of art is actually to engage with the work on its own terms, using creative methods to foster critical engagement.

Despite the nonlinear nature of this argument, the intellectual trajectory that is being initiated is one with a practical application for the practice of critical engagement. To see an artwork or an image or an encounter as a component in a relational game is to require that reciprocal engagement take an equally engaged approach. It is to suggest that the task of art criticism (or appreciation) is not simply to evaluate, explain or feature a work of art or an idea, but to attempt to gesture back—to allow oneself to be catalyzed by the terms of engagement set in motion by the artwork and then to respond in ways that are not contoured in advance by the context of the work. This to say that if an artwork is to be an imaginary friend, it is definitively not to be seen as an imaginary authority—nor is the task of the viewer to be an objective, impartial or even educated observer. The task is to step well beyond observation

and begin to imagine back—reciprocating ideas in ways that challenge the propositions of the artwork itself.

This could be put more simply by saying that the task of the viewer or critic is to take an artwork seriously—literally even—as both an abstract gesture in a poetic direction and as a complex and negotiated materialization of creative ideology. Against the idea of criticism as that which synthesizes and assesses the relationship an artwork sets up, this would be to insist on criticism as a way to keep the ideas alive and evolving—in motion, interacting and proliferating and going off in other directions too—animating the suspensions of ideological encounter such as to allow them to grow. To do this, engagement must not be bound to an understanding of the work. Instead, to reciprocate the gesture of a work of art is to “unfinish” what has been prepared for presentation, to refuse to understand a work or even to take it out of context. Anything that keeps the dialogue alive and the contours of the work in motion.

This is the moment when suspended disbelief no longer works as a temporary solution to the challenges of art and something more literal is needed. Not suspended disbelief. Perhaps an insistence on a perpetually animated state of suspension—keeping ideas afloat and alive; lived rather than proclaimed; experienced rather than understood; confused and muddy rather than clear and intelligible; playful and serious at the same time. It might be called a search for how to animate an imaginary solution. Or it might simply be called engaging with the artwork as an imaginary friend.

Playing in the mud

The artist Doug Jarvis once made a comment in the course of an otherwise casual conversation that for a friendship to be a “ship” of any serious sort, one would have to begin asking

where it takes those who engage with it—making literal the metaphor of transportation that the term claims. It is the kind of comment that is difficult to know exactly what to do with—built partly on a lateral conflation of terms and partly on a linguistic game. But there is something about the formulation that is nonetheless compelling, since it reinforces the double-sided nature and complex possibilities of friendships. What is at stake here is not simply the question of linguistic play, but the idea that friendships open up territories (ideological, metaphorical, geographic) that would not otherwise be accessible. It involves imagining the concept of friendship a little bit differently, of course, but with this act of imagining differently one also begins building a relationship to the concept. This is especially interesting because it is a relationship premised on making the very notion of friendship that much friendlier to the imaginary. It is both contradictory and something of a self-fulfilling prophecy—by engaging in the act of imagining differently one creates different possibilities for what friendship can mean (or where this new friendship can take us).

In his book *Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics and the Course of Life*, William Rawlins calls friendship “an institutionalized non-institution,” a type of relationship he argues is based on contradictory principles of engagement.⁸ One way to read this suggestion would be to say that at the core of friendship is an irrationality that is fundamental to the sustaining of the friendship itself. What such a theory then emphasizes is that in the strange maneuver by which a friendship solidifies—around engaged contradictions of behavior—what matters most is not the truth of the situation, but preserving an “assumption of good intentions” upon which future possibilities for engagement depend. Interestingly, friends will follow each other into nonsensical speculative territories in ways that colleagues and citizens decidedly will not—hence the importance of informal arenas of interaction for the possibilities of speculation.

If one is to imagine a friendship as a vessel used to explore such an interaction, then the machine needed is less one dedicated to time or space than to the imagination. To participate in a friendship is to collaborate on a series of interactions that willfully contribute to the direction of the journey. One does not engage a friendship the way one drives a car—responsible for controlling the speed and direction of travel, ultimately with full accountability for the quality of the trip. Instead, friendship is decidedly non-technical, requiring give and take, challenge and response and thoughtful consideration. Friendships also sometimes involve arguments, preferential treatment and even the willing disregard of contradiction. To enter into a friendship is to take these variables into account as a valuable part of the collaboration.

To hold together these various threads is to insist on a number of complexities and to perhaps even push them to the point of a proposition for what is required to sustain the dialectics of imaginary friendship, the doubled tasks of taking the imagination seriously and holding ourselves accountable to principles of creative engagement. What the threads of the conversation have in common is that they propose strategies with which to revive and renew the imagination, even in an era where reason, competitive achievement and operational efficiency have come to dominate the ideological stage. Simply put, the idea of imagining differently might be seen as a ‘pataphysical solution to the problem of a world forced to make too much sense. It is a proposition for imagining, unapologetically and insistently as a way to purposefully make the world a little less real.

For there are times when it is not enough to be rational—moments when one must exaggerate or over-emphasize or simply lie in order to more accurately represent the nuances of a question. These are moments where probability as a scientific endeavor fails to represent the poetic actuality of the moment—moments that can challenge and sometimes

defy the parameters of certainty and verifiability because the imagination has never been limited by possibility or truth. There are also times when one must put the imaginary first, creatively engaging the irrational possibilities of the world, whether seductive, absurd or entirely nonsensical.

Notes:

1. Jean Baudrillard. *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. Trans. James Benedict. London: Verso, 1993. p. 33.
2. See: Ted Hiebert. *In Praise of Nonsense: Aesthetics, Uncertainty and Postmodern Identity*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012.
3. Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*. Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 1998. p. 49.
4. Ibid.
5. Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.
6. One might think of the duck-rabbit in this case as a hyperobject of sorts, always exceeding itself and yet always manifesting as one version of what it could be. See Timothy Morton. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
7. Alfred Jarry. *Exploits & Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor, Boston: Exact Change, 1996. pp. 21-2.
8. William Rawlins. *Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics and the Life Course*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1992. p. 9.

Between engagement and criticism

There is another option for how to deal with ideas that are a bit too slippery to really conceptualize in a concrete way. When faced with the unintelligible, instead of attempting to synthesize and understand, sometimes it is just necessary to publicize the uncertainty, gesturing outwards to form an imaginary community that provides others an opportunity to engage as well. To use such a method as a form of interaction would be to create an intersection between engagement and criticism: animating encounters by privileging the anecdotal over the evaluative; the speculative over the competitive; the hypothetical over the judgmental; the curious over the knowledgeable; and the playful over the wise. This is not to say that these things cannot all happen at the same time, but to insist that engagement must at least animate its own position in the relationship as a gesture of friendship towards the artworks or ideas themselves. This is to treat an artwork as a speculative catalyst.

Further, it is not just critics that do this, but artists too—making works to purposefully share curiosities, speculations and creative encounters of various sorts. In the pages that follow, works by many such artists are presented, each of whom insists on grounding his or her work in the duplicitous relationship between engagement and criticism in ways that range from explorations of identity (through politics, race, gender or otherwise) to questions of the paranormal (ghosts, aliens, ectoplasm, psychic phenomena) to the realities of new media and the ways in which our lives are being completely redefined by the technologies we use (whether genetic, virtual, augmented, social or robotic). It is perhaps the case that all art does this—lest artistic production be reduced to little more than a design accompaniment for the everyday.

However, the artists presented here go further than many. In targeting questions of uncertainty and paradox—and treating their work as a chance to problematize the question rather than broadcast answers—the works challenge the viewer to think differently, speculatively, creatively. To engage theoretically with these artists and their works—whether in writing or in the act of viewing—is to begin creating pathways that exceed the simply relational and become critically dialogic. This is engagement as the foundation from which a reciprocal form of criticism begins to emerge. This is not properly critique. This is engagement given curious, critical and anecdotal license.

The writings that accompany the works are not examples—not didactic accompaniments to the artwork, nor attempts to contain or restrict the speculative possibilities of the works. Instead they should be thought of as attempts to articulate artworks for the ways they emerge to impact a curious mind. More a series of gestures than explanations; part textual delusion, part creative intervention, part curatorial fantasy. The goal has been to create a set of writings that features a certain informal way of approaching the deeply speculative ideas that the artworks engage. These writings attempt to formalize an encounter, while at the same time opening up—informalizing—the forms, ideas, manifestations and provocations proposed by the artists.

This is criticism as engagement and engagement as criticism. This is an attempt to find a form that is somewhere in between.

These are conversations with artworks as imaginary friends.

Observation Diary of a Hydroponic Nose Hair

on the work of Tetsushi Higashino

I looked into the mirror this morning and realized something was not quite right. It seemed that there was one particular nose hair that had outgrown the rest. It was an unusually long nose hair—the kind that cannot really just be trimmed; the kind to which one has to take tweezers and pluck right out. It is an odd thing to observe: a moment of inappropriate social hygiene and a reminder that one responsibility of cultivated living is to always pay attention to the extraneous growths one's own body insists on producing. And so for a stray and overambitious nose hair, the solution is simple: it must simply be removed.

The question is what does one do with it once it is pulled out? In many ways the gesture is violent—a forceful removal of part of one's own bodily system—like pinching a pimple or pulling a skin tag. Does that nose hair that was forcibly removed from its comfortable home deserve an alternate place of its own? A truly surrogate space—a hydroponic space in which it can be cultivated for the potential that was its birthright before being relocated from its natural environment. And perhaps, in this new space, it needs to be continually nurtured—fostered—so as to assist it in the recapitulation of its nose hair potential. Not just plucked and discarded, but transplanted as was its nose hair right. Such is the project of Tetsushi Higashino.

According to the Japanese calendar, August 7, 2009 was the day of the nose flower. On this day the artist plucked a nose hair and since that day has been growing it in a dish, watering it daily, giving it sunlight and waiting for it to flower. At times, the artist has even used more extreme tactics, giving the hair



Tetsushi Higashino. *Observation Diary of a Hydroponic Nose Hair*.
Day 208 (March 3, 2010)

growth formula, energy drinks, alcohol, plant nutrients and whatever else might potentially make a difference to the growth patterns of the transplanted hair.

It is a curious experiment and a curious question: how would one make a nose hair grow?

What is ironic about the project is that the nose hair does not actually seem to be growing, despite Higashino's best attempts. After 1620 days (at the time of this writing) the nose hair remains at its original height of 1.1 cm, measured each day by the artist to ensure regular data. The dish in which the nose hair sits, however, has grown from a square of white gauze to a vibrant ecosystem of molds and decaying matter. In many ways this diary of a hydroponic nose hair is also a diary of the dish—given the transplant excuse for vicarious animation—as if, from the beginning, this flowering of the dish was the point of the whole experiment: its flowering ecosystem emerging out of nothing but artistic proposition.

Within the ecosystem that is this fantastic pool of stagnant possibilities, the true potential of the project clearly lies: an artistic proposition that has grown its own environment, its own audience, its own interactive context. This is less about personalizing the project and more about the attempt to engage with the idea. That the results can be visually verified simply serves as a compliment to the dedication and imagination of the artist—growing a nose hair as an imaginary friend.



Minding the Belly Brain

on the work of Doug Jarvis

In his book *The Philosopher's Stomach*, Michel Onfray makes an interesting claim—that knowing how philosophers eat can help deepen the understanding of the things they say.¹ It is like the adage that “we are what we eat” only taken a step further—as though stomachs themselves are actually responsible for part of the philosophical thought process. Not only are bodies impacted by what they eat, but minds are too, stimulated in the directions that diet dictates. In Onfray's analysis, Diogenes' dislike of cooked foods correlates directly to his refusal of processed culture; the regularity of Immanuel Kant's morning walk (it is said neighbors set their clocks by the time he walked past their houses) is linked to his digestive regularity and Jean Paul Sartre's disgust of shellfish and love of alcohol form twin ends of his existential theorizations.

There is even scientific research that validates Onfray's claim—the discovery that there are neurons in the stomach.² These cells are thought to be central to the emergence of thought in the human mind and may consequently also be responsible for mindful impact coming from the cortex of the human stomach. This is in fact research that suggests the stomach may literally have a mind of its own. It is this idea that Doug Jarvis has set out to explore, taking quite literally the idea that the stomach has something to say about the thoughts and ideas that emerge from individual minds.

To test his hypothesis, the artist placed an E.E.G. sensor around his waist—a monitor that measures brainwave activity, whatever form that brain might take. While connected in

this way, he performs actions designed to confront the head-centric notion of mental activity. Jarvis eats and the belly brain generates brainwaves. He runs or sits and the belly generates still more brainwaves. That there exists no clear method for the interpretation of the data generated by this process is not itself an argument against the meaning of the data. Instead it is an artistic question—who knows how the belly thinks? And if one was to try to understand its logic, would it be by trying to force the belly to think in the same way as the head or are different types of brains allowed, each with a different mind for meaning and intuition and reaction?

For if stomachs have minds of their own, perhaps they also have dreams, imaginations, wishes and prayers—everything needed to tell a compelling and intriguing story. And while the details may not be quite clear, the sensors certainly tell a story of some sort. It is unusual to see technological data as the redeemer of a speculative moment, though this is definitely the result of Jarvis' proposition. If the data says the belly has a mind, then the question is how to engage this new mind in collaborative spirit. Jarvis' actions begin this difficult task, exploring alternative ways of thinking. They offer perspectives that one might not normally encounter and in this case the idea that the stomach might be more intelligent than we thought.

Notes:

1. Michel Onfray. *Le Ventre des Philosophes: Critique de la Raison Diététique*. Paris: Éditions de Grasset & Fasquelle, 1989.
2. On the science of stomach neurons see Michael Gershon. *The Second Brain: A Groundbreaking New Understanding of Nervous Disorders of the Stomach and Intestine*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1999.

Time Machine (No Going Back)

on the work of Christian Kuras & Ben Tanner

In the year 1900 the French playwright Alfred Jarry wrote a manual for how to build a time-machine. The text was complex—involving gyroscopes, temporal inertia, and the harnessing of ether.¹ Yet, despite its complexity, the proposition seemed plausible enough that the scientists of his day took the time to prove that his theory would not work. It is possible that they were nervous that an artist might come up with the secret first—or perhaps they simply wondered if, in his own creative way, Jarry was on to something potentially important. The obvious irony is that Jarry made them take the time, re-directing their own personal investments in the time of scholarly research in order to explore his idea. Thus, real or not, the idea was generative—possibly even more generative for the time the scientists spent than for the plausibility of the propositions.

A century later, artists Christian Kuras and Ben Tanner have found a strangely similar solution. Or rather, they found a man with a slightly different manual. *Time Machine (No Going Back)* is a portrait of Allan Munroe, the man who has invented the newest iteration of the time machine—this time one that actually works. The device consists of a chair and table, atop which are mounted a series of dials, switches and lights. The machine draws its power from a standard electrical outlet.

The secret of the machine is that we are already traveling through time—at a standardized rate of 60 seconds per minute, or at a subjective rate influenced by the attention of the gaze. It is said, for instance, that a watched pot never boils, which of course is not quite true. What is true is that it seems to take a lot longer than a pot left to its own devices—a distortion of time, if anything at all. It is also said that a journey home takes

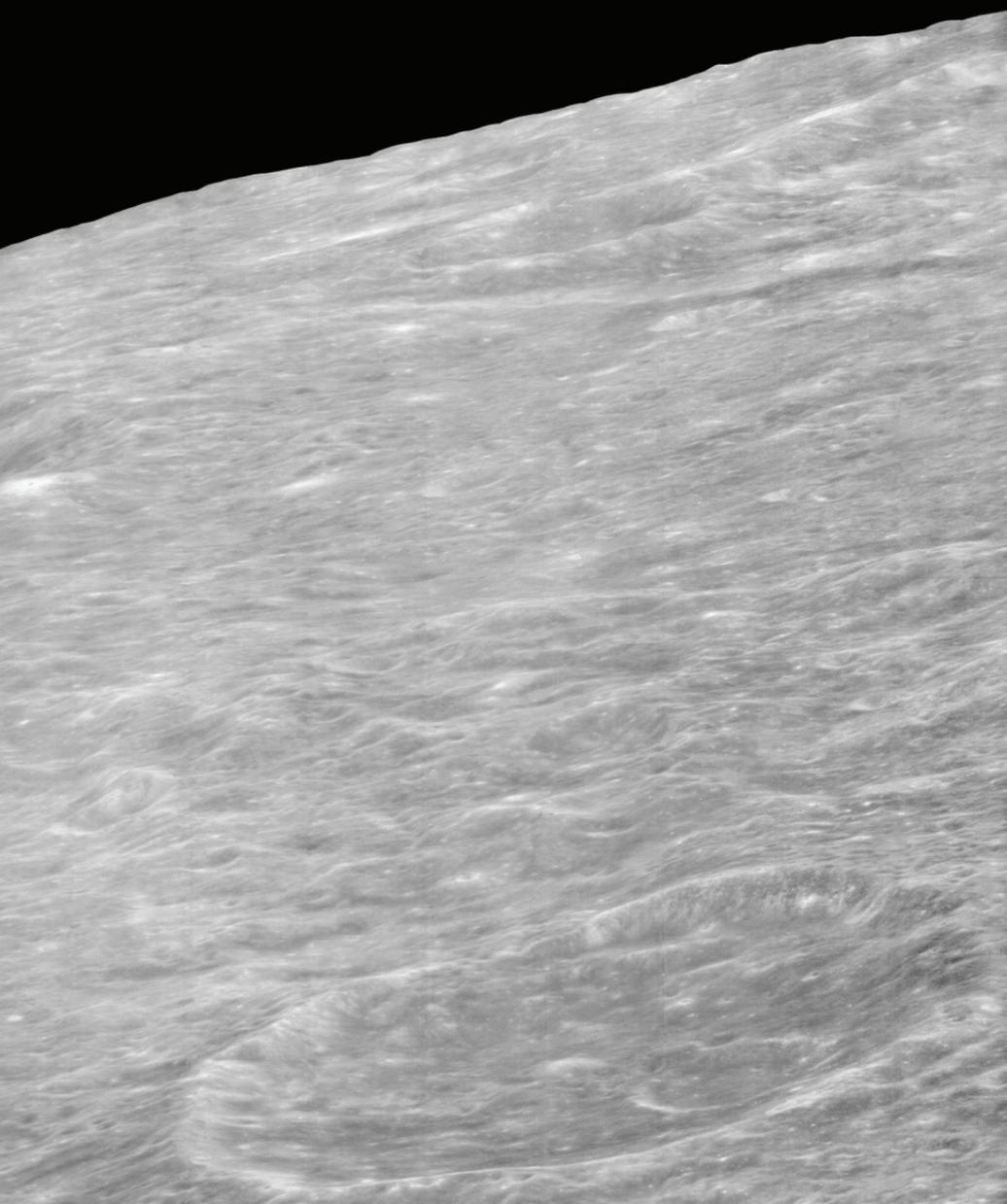


Christian Kuras & Ben Tanner.
Time Machine (No Going Back). 2011.

less time than the journey away, assuming one likes where one lives. In some other instances the relationship is reversed, but it all has to do with how and where one wants to spend one's moments. The magic of Munroe's machine is that it focuses attention on the moments that are already being spent, moving through a space called time.

Notes:

1. Jarry, Alfred. "How to construct a time machine." In *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*. Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor, eds. New York: Grove Press, 1965.



Empty Reliquary

on the work of Scott Rogers

If the sky and the stars were to fall, all that would be left is darkness. Darkness and the light of the moon. But maybe that is all that has ever been here anyways. Unless by some trickery the moon was not really there in the way we have been taught to see it—or unless we were not really here in the ways that also have been taught. Or, if other incredible stories are entertained and played out, the situation might even become substantially more curious still. Consider these thoughts by the artist Scott Rogers on the image presented here:

Taken during the spaceflight of Lunar Orbiter 1 at 16:35 GMT on August 23, 1966, the image is familiar to many as the iconic first view of Earth taken by a spacecraft. In actual fact the appearance of the Earth within this photograph was constructed artificially, as an elaborate hoax. Upon the realization by NASA scientists that the Earth in reality did not exist, Hollywood special-effects artists were hired at great expense to prevent the spread of mass panic. A model of what the Earth had been thought to look like was superimposed (using state-of-the-art techniques) onto the original images taken from the Moon's surface. The result was heralded as “the photograph of the century” up until the “Earthrise” photographs were fabricated two years later during the Apollo 11 Moon landing.¹

The implications of this declaration may not be immediately clear, for Rogers is suggesting nothing less than the idea that the Earth itself does not really exist. While that might be traumatic enough as a provocation, there is another question

that is equally pressing: if the Earth is a hoax, then where are we? That the answer is not obvious is part of the mystery. The only thing that can be known for sure is that, in the picture, the moon still seems to be present even if the Earth as we know it has vanished.

In a bizarre way though, it makes some sense. It is the moon that holds sway over the ocean tides, over moods when bodies are feeling particularly sensitive, and over werewolves too. Some people even think the moon influences their dreams and their ability to think clearly. Long a source of fascination for people from all cultures and walks of life, the moon has always been the mythic horizon of life as we know it. And now we know—if the only thing in the photograph is the moon, then the moon is far more than merely a myth—it is the moon that reveals the myth of the Earth and sky itself.

Notes:

1. Scott Rogers. Personal correspondence with the artist, 2011.

Paid to do what they were doing

on the work of Neal Fryett

One of the ideas at the historic core of photography is the idea of the “decisive moment,” popularized by Henri Cartier-Bresson in the early twentieth century.¹ The decisive moment is the perfectly timed instant caught on camera, caught perhaps in ways that only a camera could ever do; arrested moments that would otherwise pass too quickly to really be seen—let alone appreciated—by the human eye. In many ways, this is exactly what cameras do best: technologically re-presenting reality for an eye that is too slow to perceive its full nuance.

Sometimes, however, just the opposite tactic is needed: not the pursuit of the decisive moment, but its opposite, in whatever way one understands this opposition.

One version of this story might be the forgotten moment—the time between moments that actually matter or the poses struck while waiting for something else to happen. Another version might be the prolonged moment—those periods of time where a mind becomes hyper-aware that nothing of significance is happening, whether waiting, bored or otherwise disengaged from the world going on around. What these moments have in common is that they are non-photographic, in the sense that they exactly do not care to be remembered. They are neglected moments or moments excluded from any sort of decisive rendition.

Events of this (paradoxical) sort are the subject of the work of Neal Fryett, who actively seeks out such moments in the lives of others—looking, in the case of this project, for people who are not-doing things of particular interest (or doing things of particular non-interest). Once found, these individuals were simply asked to keep doing (or not-doing) what they were



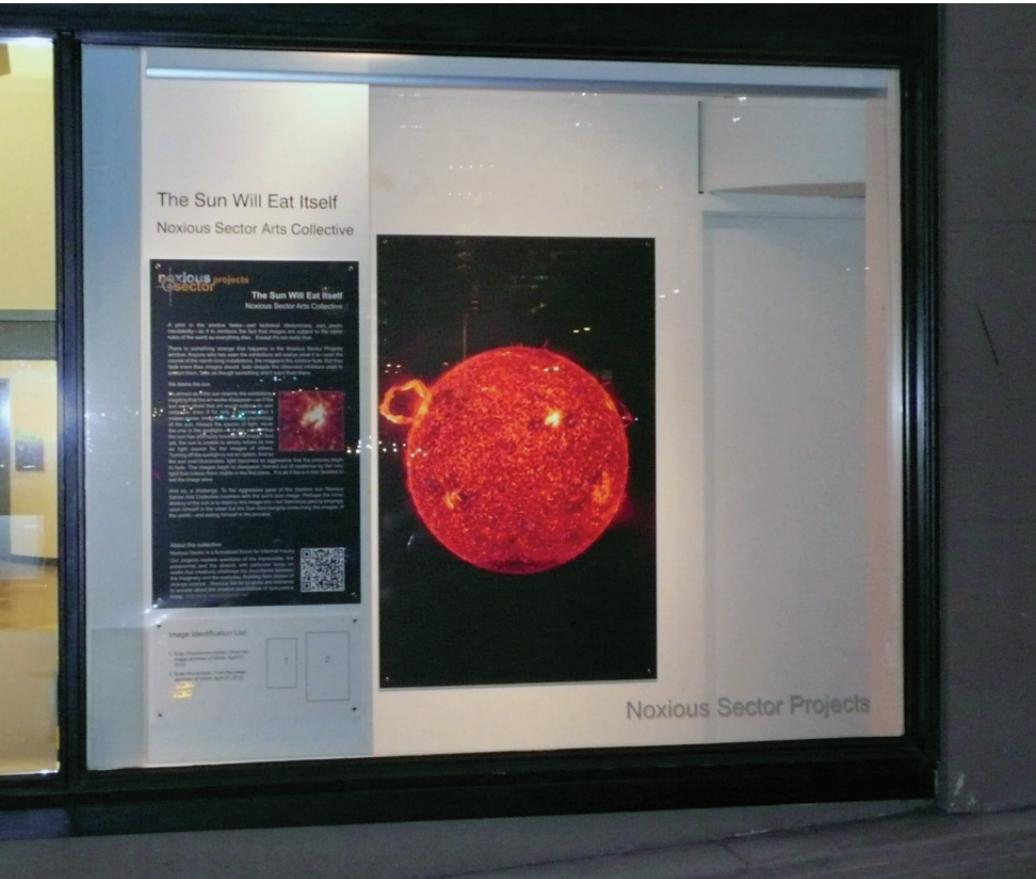
already doing, artificially sustaining what the artist calls “non-acts of great significance”²—or decisive non-moments in contrast to Cartier-Bresson’s original concept.

What is perhaps most interesting about this reversal however is not simply the word play, but the way in which this non-moment reflects back to the life it documents in the first place. In an unexpected twist, there is something almost elegant about forcing a non-moment into photographic appearance, something minimalist that nevertheless requires great attention to the non-details of the situation—not a precious instant documented for its obvious social or personal importance, but the non-moment that becomes precious because it was never important to begin with.

These are precarious moments, caught only because they were staged for the camera, but part of a participatory encounter that pushes the camera well beyond a documentary medium to become a catalyst for shared social moments caught on tape.

Notes:

1. Henri Cartier-Bresson. *The Mind’s Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers*. Reading (PA): Aperture, 2005.
2. Neal Fryett. Personal correspondence with the artist, 2011.



Noxious Sector Arts Collective. *The Sun Will Eat Itself*. Image of the sun exposed to sunlight for 30 days. 2012

The Sun Will Eat Itself

on a work by Noxious Sector Arts Collective

Sometimes photographs do not live up to their technological promise of providing a sustainable image that can be reliably referred back to. Sometimes photographs fade, age and even die, even though it seems counter to their nature to disappear after so decisively capturing and perpetuating an historic moment of one sort or another. It is certainly a technical idiosyncrasy, but also, at least in part, a poetic inevitability—as if to reinforce the fact that images are subject to the same rules of the world as everything else.

In the window gallery of Noxious Sector Projects in downtown Seattle there is something peculiar that happens. Anyone who has seen the exhibitions has probably also realized that over the course of the month-long installations, the images in the window fade. What is odd is not that they fade however, since this is often the fate of an image when exposed too long to the sun. What is surprising is that they fade more than images should, despite the ultraviolet overlay used to protect them, as though someone or something did not want them there. As though the sun was actually trying harder than usual to upset these particular images. As though the sun actually wanted to make them disappear.

In some ways this makes sense. Imagine the strange psychology of the sun. Always the source of light, never the one in the spotlight: is it any wonder that the sun has animosity towards the image? Nor is the sun capable of simply refusing its role as a light source for the images of others. Turning off the sunlight is not an option and the sun itself is trapped as both the bringer of light and the one destined never to really be seen. To try and see the sun is to be scolded by the burning after-effects that linger on one's own eyes, light-blindness that

over time will actually damage the retina. It is not simply the image that the sun destroys over time.

And so, a challenge and a question, mediated by printing out a large-scale image of the sun and exposing it directly to sunlight for a period of time. The question is, when faced with an image of itself, will the same principles hold? Will the sun eat itself the way it refuses the images of others? Perhaps the ironic destiny of the sun is to destroy this image too—not Narcissus gazing longingly upon himself in the water, but the Sun God hungrily consuming the images of the world and eating himself in the process.

Occupy Science

on the work of Jennifer Willet & Kira O'Reilly

It is like something out of a nightmare: two bodies awkwardly hunched over inside of a glass laboratory window, caught performing an experiment—though not like any experiment one would normally expect to witness. There are no lab coats or gloves—in fact no clothing at all—it is almost like these bodies are part of the experiment, an experiment unto themselves rather than simply experimenting on others.

Or perhaps it is both.

The bodies are those of Kira O'Reilly and Jennifer Willet, and the experiment they are conducting involves feeding ovary cells from a certain strain of hamsters (CHOE Chinese Hamster Ovary Cells). It is a relatively simple scientific activity, one performed often in labs all over the world. What makes it different, challenging, and strange, is not the scientific act, but the personal placement of the artists. Science privileges that which is repeatable—reproducible results are the cornerstone of scientific knowledge. The irony is that while the cells are those of a reproductive system, the laboratory environment is meant to remain completely sterile. By placing themselves into this environment, the artists jeopardize the cells and the experiment, compromising the sterility upon which reproducible results (and the survival of the cells) depend.

What emerges is a dialogue and a paradox: one of sterility and reproducibility, human knowledge and scientific information, cell strains and biological entities.

Yet there is method to the juxtapositions. These are not hamsters, but cells from which a hamster grows—not real animal bodies, but virtual pets, perhaps like all experimental



Jennifer Willet & Kira O'Reilly. *Untitled I* (collaborative lab shoot).
The Art and Genomics Centre, The University of Leiden, Holland.
Photographer: Rune Peitersen. 2008

bodies of science. It is like that moment in *Planet of the Apes* when the animal world revolts and we might well expect the hamsters too will eventually fight back—as the artists seem to anticipate. Artists however, unlike hamsters or apes, fight back by placing themselves inside the laboratory—contaminating the sterile domain that only knows the rules of scientific logic. This equipment was never designed for play, and so there is no greater resistance than to treat science in an explicitly playful way. In fact, this refusal to abide by the rules is not just an artistic intervention, but the first seeds of a movement to “occupy science,” reclaiming the laboratory for an artistic performance and contaminating it in the process. In their experiments with science, the artists have rendered the laboratory entirely unusable for its intended purposes. And if science has begun to occupy the spirit of the human mind in increasingly sterile and experiment-driven ways, then it is by occupying science that artists like Willet and O’Reilly are able to rekindle something of the human biological spirit that becomes endangered when bodies and knowledge are conflated.

Against the virtual bodies of information experiments, Willet and O’Reilly leverage their own bodies—self-portraits of the artists at play—occupying science by tickling the ovaries of a virtual Chinese hamster.

Resonations #1: cyclic glass

on the work of Cara-Ann Simpson

There is a Greek legend of a nymph named Echo who was punished by the goddess Hera for consorting with her husband Zeus. Hera stripped Echo of the ability to speak for herself, taking away her voice. From that time on Echo was only ever able to repeat the sounds made by others, reflecting words, songs and sounds back to the world around her.¹

If imitation is the best form of flattery, one must imagine that Echo would have been a truly charming individual, her repetitions of worldly sounds complimenting the words of each person she encountered. Rather than depriving her of an ability to communicate, one might see Hera's punishment as one that made Echo even more endearing, charging her voice with the kind of sympathetic resonance that would instantly show how carefully she listens to the world around her. Indeed, according to some psychologists, this form of empathic demonstration is the first step in active listening: good listeners will repeat what they hear, affirming the voices of others and in so doing begin building a healthy and complementary relationship. Rather than a story of unjust punishment, then, perhaps the story of Echo could be rethought as one that engages the collaborative art of listening, along with the guarantee that Echo (and those like her) will never be fully alone.

It is a proposition of this sort that is explored by Cara-Ann Simpson's installation *Resonations #1*. On one side of the window is a speaker, on the other side a contact microphone—a special type of microphone that responds to touch rather than sound. Tap the surface of the window and the sounds repeat, echoed and amplified. It is as though the interaction brings the window to life—a technological voicebox rigged to let the window speak its mind. Or, more literally, the sounds of

the installation are precisely those of the ways in which the window has been touched by the world around it—as though the dream of any active listener is to have somebody touch them back. Curiously however, when the window speaks it also hears itself. An echoed feedback loop occurs, the strange resonant harmonies of Echo talking to herself, multiplying her own voice as it takes on properties of its own. In this way a nymph's voice is brought back from legend to collaborate with the sounds of the Seattle streets.

Notes:

1. For more on the myth of Echo see: Robert Graves. *Greek Myths: Volume I*. London: Penguin Books, 1955.

Come Visit The Athabasca Tar Sands

on the work of David LaRiviere

According to the former Premier of Alberta, politician Ralph Klein, the Eighth Wonder of the World is right next door, a closely guarded secret of the Canadian north.¹ A truly astounding Eighth Wonder—majestic and awe-inspiring—if perhaps not quite as polite as one might expect of something Canadian. Perhaps even the opposite of polite, this secret is destined to quickly become a readymade tourist attraction of the northern landscape. The location is the Athabasca Tar Sands, the newest oil and gas repository of the Canadian prairies. When the night is clear, the northern lights illuminate the sky and the noxious fumes from the extraction processes fill the air to the delight of all who are there to witness.

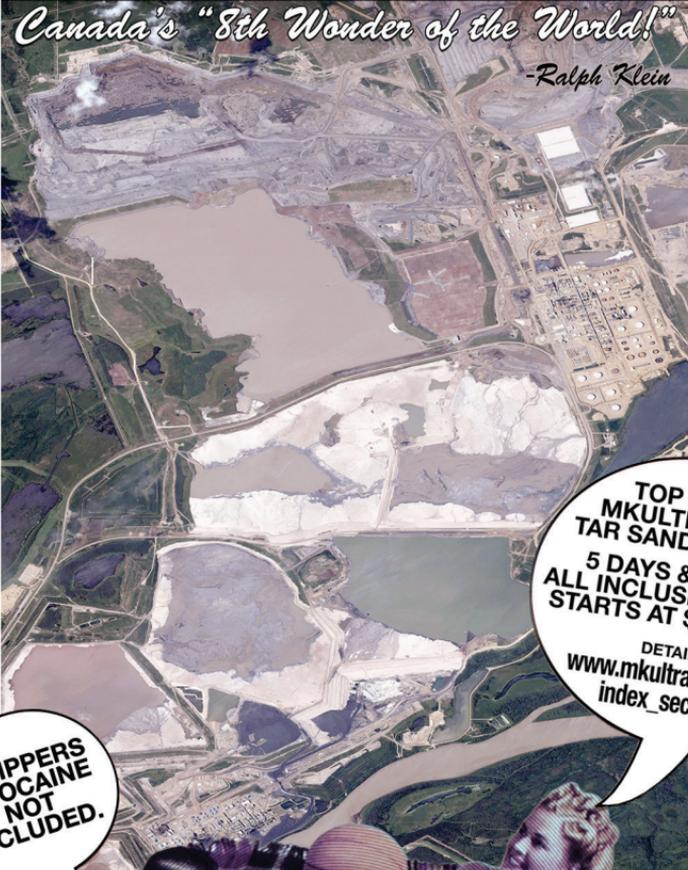
It may have been Marcel Duchamp who famously invented the readymade—recasting objects in new light: a urinal as a fountain, a stool as support for a bicycle wheel, and so the stories go. But why should this story begin and end with objects? Why not places too—people, ideas or even events—as though to see anything in a certain light would be a readymade remix waiting to happen. All that is required is a purposeful shift of context.

Such is the project of David LaRiviere, in the artist's words a “copyleft volley,”² in which a readymade is made of the Athabasca Tar Sands, and not only a readymade, but an exotic tourist destination just waiting to happen. The project is the ambitious attempt to make a readymade before it is actually ready: a location promoted before it becomes a destination, precisely so that it becomes a destination for the mind as well as for the tourist body. It is like a spectacle waiting to happen or a bad joke suspended just before the punch line ruins everything. Or like visiting a disaster site before disaster

Come Visit
**The Athabasca
Tar Sands**

Canada's "8th Wonder of the World!"

-Ralph Klein



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strikes, as if in some way to witness the twilight of a moment about to change. Come see the time bomb tick, for that is what time bombs do best. And tar sands too.

This is the anticipation of a moment where humor quickly turns to horror, and horror reveals itself as the making ready of a next environmental disaster, in the exuberant parlance of economic progress. This readymade disaster is one intended to attract attention before disaster strikes—pre-emptive disaster-tourism—in the readymade form of a Canadian Eighth World Wonder.

Notes:

1. Ralph Klein. “Western Canada’s role in building a secure, abundant and sustainable energy future for North America.” Presentation to the Western Governors’ Association – *North American Energy Summit*. Albuquerque, New Mexico, April 15, 2004.
2. David LaRiviere. Personal correspondence with the artist, 2012.



Personal Appearance

on the work of Cindy Baker

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan had a theory about how identity is formed. According to Lacan, when a child looks into the mirror, there is a moment—particular to the human species—when he or she begins to recognize the strange relationship between the person who is doing the looking and the one perceived in the reflection looking back. As a person grows older, this sense of strangeness grows too, getting stronger and more firmly defined until it becomes the foundational site of identity.¹ This is where the idea of personal appearance is born, and with it an identity that fluctuates between the boundaries of subjectivity and reflection. Like voices on the answering machine, so too is the individual image always somewhat different from how it is imagined to be.

It is a proposition that the Canadian artist Cindy Baker has taken literally, exploring the idea of her own identity as a social interface and a character to be performed. Baker has made herself a mascot costume—a mascot of herself—through which to interface with the world in a way that breaks some of the conditions of her otherwise material identity. It is a version of personality that is both real and imaginary, but the reality of the fiction is deceptive. This mascot is not simply an idle cheerleader for the artistic performance, but also in some way a metaphor for the larger questions of identity. Is the artist trapped inside of herself, or wearing herself on the outside? Or is this inner self simply placed another layer deeper—a self within a self within a self—as if to suggest a version of identity that is more like a set of Russian matryoshka dolls

than a quest for inner authenticity. The project only gets more complex when it is an image rather than the mascot that is actually observed. Not just a cuddly version of character self, but a photograph of a character. A photograph of a costume of an image of a person.

All this to ask how far one would have to go to meet and know the real Cindy Baker? Is she right on the outside or buried far within, a figment of the imagination or the person standing next to you on the street? Is the mascot a space suit for a journey into the imaginary or is the real imaginary what always appears right there in front of the gaze?

Notes:

1. Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." In *The Blackwell Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. A. Elliott, ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

Psychic Photography v2

on a project curated by Ted Hiebert

If someone offered the argument that fantasies are important, would it be convincing or would it be easier to just think that fantasies are nice stories, but ones that, ultimately, do not really matter in a substantial way? It is a rhetorical provocation and a set-up for a rhetorical question: what are fantasies worth? Does it matter that people are able to imagine stories, fantasy narratives in which the rules of the real world do not really apply in ways that are familiar or logical? Does it matter that some of these stories might even be impossible—not even remotely believable—except that, insofar as they are stories, they begin to ask for a strange form of belief nonetheless?

In the 1960's there was a story of the impossible—the story of a man who claimed he could project his thoughts directly onto photographic film. He was not alone in his belief, and among those who resisted the obvious skepticism were a psychiatrist and a camera. The story is that of Ted Serios—psychic photographer—a man who worked as a hotel bellhop, but who refused to be subsumed by the reality of the everyday. Instead, Serios let his mind wander, taking on a reality of its own and defying what is normally thought of as impossible. Somehow, Serios found a way to record his thoughts, projecting them from his imagination directly onto instant film. The strongest advocate for the images was the psychiatrist Jule Eisenbud who conducted a series of experiments designed to test and, ostensibly, prove that the Serios images were examples of psychic manifestation—photographs imagined into existence.¹

Loosely based on tests conducted by Eisenbud and Serios, *Psychic Photography v2* is a thought experiment and an exercise in impossibility. Participants are asked to spend five minutes imagining a picture that they have drawn, at which

time a photograph of their forehead is taken. As the image is snapped, participants are instructed to will their pictures onto the camera, imagining into existence a drawing channeled straight from the mind. The photograph and the drawing are displayed as participant contributions to the project and as artifacts of the participatory moment. While the idea of psychic manifestation may seem like an unusual basis for an artwork, more crucial to the project perhaps is that the artistic gamble required is actually independent from the success or failure of the trials. The real project here is basically one of imaginative investment, going along with an extraordinary story in order to see where it may end up. At the end of the day, these images stand as markers of the attempt to imagine, and as a contemplation of the moment where the fantastic begins to tip into the world of the real.

Notes:

1. Jule Eisenbud. *The World of Ted Serios: 'Thoughtographic' Studies of an Extraordinary Mind*. New York: William & Morrow, 1967.



Noxious Sector Arts Collective.

Documentation from a game of competitive telekinesis. 2012

2012 World Telekinesis Competition

on a project hosted by Noxious Sector Arts Collective

If the pen is mightier than the sword, then perhaps the mind must be mightier still. It is said, for instance, that knowledge is power, but whether knowledge is required or not for writing is one of the uncertainties of the equation. Pens write all sorts of things, just as minds invent and imagine. Thus, if pens trump swords, maybe the imagination trumps knowledge in some way too—the only thing left is to come up with a way to prove it, a game where one mind might be pitted against another in order to see which version of the story reigns supreme.

One such game is the *World Telekinesis Competition*, a tournament in which teams from around the world compete to psychically influence the behavior of a candle. Participation is not geographically dependent and teams compete from their home locations, wherever those might be. Some teams are real; others are imagined; some even include family pets, avatars and ghosts. All that is required is that teams formalize their group identity in some way, as they see fit, and agree to compete in the game. The only real rule is that competitive telekinesis is an amateur game, one more suited to the pursuit of curiosity than truth or profit. To this end, professional psychics are not allowed.

Matches are played by lighting a candle at the center of an official game board at an agreed-upon time, signaling the beginning of the game. A match last for one hour, during which time the goal is to make the wax from the candle drip onto the opposing team's side of the game board. This objective is to be accomplished by telekinetic influence—and whatever the influence, the dripping of the wax stands as ambiguous proof of the success of the team's psychic method. At the end of each match the winning team advances to the next round

and the losing team is eliminated. This competition structure continues until there is only one team left. This team is awarded the World Telekinesis Competition trophy.

Consequently, in the game of competitive telekinesis, how minds move matters. While there is no surefire way to win, the 2012 telekinesis competition was replete with creative and innovative methods, from voodoo to skepticism to pure focus of will. In the end a team from London took the title and the trophy—London United Psychic Club, winners of the 2012 *World Telekinesis Competition*.

Something and Nothing

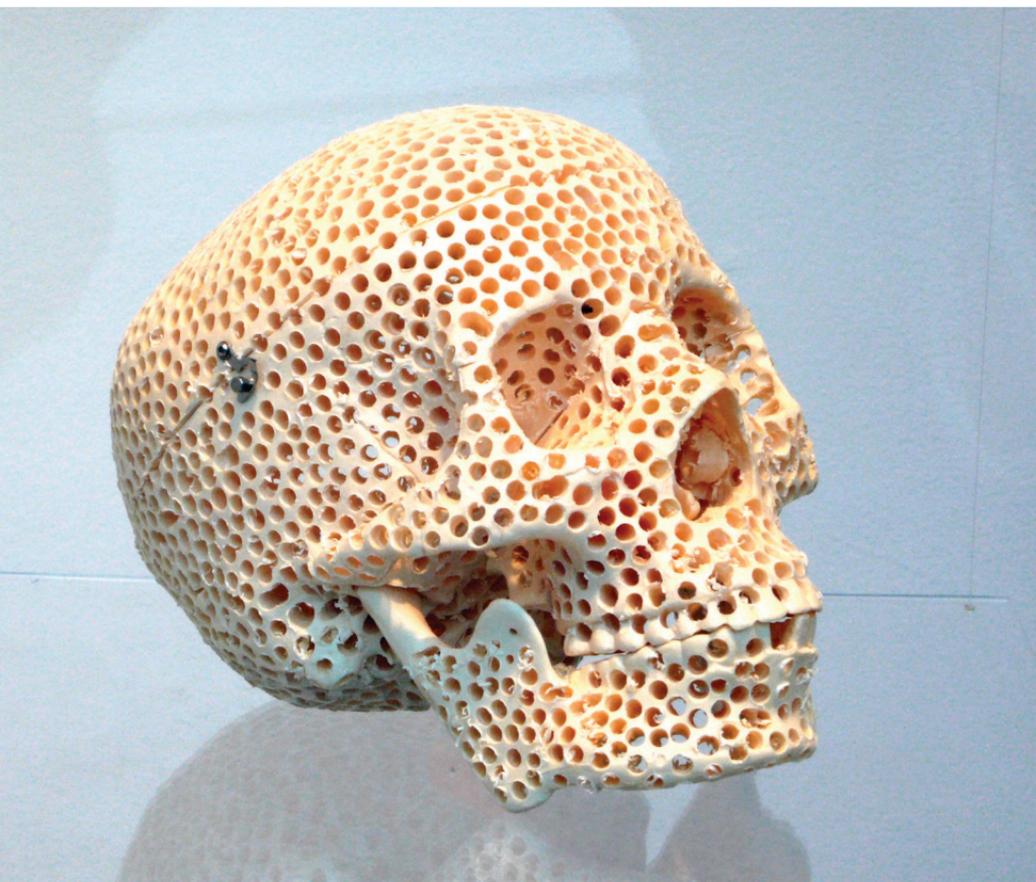
on the work of Steven Rayner

In 1989 the Irish pop band An Emotional Fish sang about drilling holes in their heads “to let the sunshine in.” It was not a literal suggestion of course, but a lyrical metaphor designed to catalyze an emotional state of mind.¹

In 1973, the artist Michael Craig-Martin turned an oak tree into a glass of water, ostensibly to prove that lyrical metaphors are not just about music, but about real acts of creative transformation. The artwork consisted of a glass of water set upon a shelf—accompanied by a declaration by the artist that the glass of water used to be an oak tree.²

In 2012 Steven Rayner went a step further, creating artworks out of thin air. Air is tricky though—not like an oak tree that can simply be imagined. Instead, air is both real and imaginary, physical yet invisible, inside bodies and outside, everywhere and nowhere. While constrained by the objects of the world, air is also the negative space between these objects—spaces that are never quite empty since the air always rushes in to fill what might otherwise be simply a void. Rayner’s proposition is that this negative space—the natural domain of air—can be sculpted if approached in an appropriately backwards way. This is not a creative transformation of one thing into another, but an artistic deconstruction of the objects that impede the possible forms that air could take. In a remarkable way, Rayner’s work is about liberating air, giving it new shapes and forms, pathways of circulation.

The process by which he does this is deceptively simple. Using a power drill, Rayner punctures the objects he uses, opening them up to new configurations of air. In the case of the plastic skulls, the air—finally free to move in and around



Steven Rayner. *Something*. Plastic skull, air. 2012

the objects—comes literally inside the head of the skull. It is a breath of life perhaps, or else a letting out the air previously condemned to stuffy darkness. The sunshine comes in as the air extends outwards—a two way perforated street. This is an act of sculpting negative space, but also something more—not only a lyrical metaphor, but a metaphorical lyricism that breaks down of the age old philosophical question of why there is something rather than nothing. This is a sculpture made out of air—something and nothing—a barometric sculpture for an artistically perforated world.

Notes:

1. An Emotional Fish. “Grey Matter.” On the album *An Emotional Fish*. London: Eastwest, 1990.
2. As described in Roy Harris. *The Great Debate About Art*. Cambridge: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2010.



Materialising the Medium

on the work of Tanya Doody

In a digital age, the act of trusting the image has become its own form of art—a precarious negotiation of old and new media that transposes faith in the evidence of photography against suspicion of the sorts of manipulation that are all too easy to perform. In this age of manipulation, the image is only ever as close to reality as belief allows. Images must now be understood as strategic presentations, persuasive seductions, or even as propositions, but certainly not merely as proof of a world that already exists. In fact, it may make more sense to speak of mediumship rather than media, since every image asks a viewer to go along in some way with the stories it presents. Whether viewers do this or not is the deciding factor determining the status of the image in a technological world. The image lives or fails based on the willingness to entertain its story as believable.

From some perspectives this is an old debate—not only in terms of the manipulation of the image, but also, and more crucially, concerning the act of willingness that has always been central to the engagement with art. The English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge called it the “suspension of disbelief,” asking his readers to trust that a writer will have a story to tell if they are just willing to listen.¹ By contrast, the artist Tanya Doody calls it “faith beyond foolishness,” but she does not mean it as a critique.² Instead, in a world beyond truth—the technological world of falsified images and relentless propaganda—this gesture of faith is the only guarantee of participation in the stories of others. It is a suggestion that the act of engagement might be of greater

consequence than the proof or disproof of the image. It is a proposition that belief might be more significant than wisdom. It is a gamble with both knowledge and the human spirit in which one chooses community over skepticism, even if one runs the risk of being fooled in the process. Since at least the time of Guy Debord's insightful claims about the manipulative power of the media spectacle, viewers have been aware that images are out to manipulate them, to turn people into fools, and in so doing to present an altered reality that becomes the new authority.³ It is a dangerous political problem, the very kernel of the logic of advertising, and an essential question for the engagement with art. In the work of Tanya Doody, the ability to engage this paradox becomes the beacon of hope for building and bridging communal access to the imagination.

Thus, a question: when does a medium become more than a medium—an artistic representation taking form in unusual ways, sometimes even bordering on the paranormal? Is photography like mediumship—capturing, channeling and representing something that once existed, but has now disappeared forever, and perhaps possessing the minds of the viewer in the process? Even if it is not, can the story be entertained anyways—beyond foolishness—in order to engage with the idea that a photograph might allow access to the imaginations of others?

Notes:

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Biographia Literaria*. J. Shawcross, ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907.
2. Tanya Doody. Personal correspondence with the artist, 2012.
3. See: Guy Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black & Red, 2000.

Between Magnets

on the work of Ted Hiebert

The space between magnets is strange. Magnets pull together and push apart, but the difference cannot be seen by the eye. Two magnets held at a distance despite their desire to attract; two magnets forced together when they want to separate—the distance between the two is the same, but the space between them is totally different. But what is that difference and how might it be articulated?

The question has points of reference, if not answers; stories, if not properly scientific conclusions:

- Scientists at MIT found that a strong magnetic field can temporarily suspend a person's moral judgment.¹ It is nothing too extreme—the sort of gray-area ethical tests that ask whether it is pardonable to steal a loaf of bread to feed one's family or to lie to spare the feelings of another. Except that after having been exposed to magnets, people are a little bit more likely to be tolerant of such propositions—as though moral and magnetic compasses come into alignment within the human spirit.
- Researchers at the University of Auckland found that magnets attached to a pigeon's beak impede the bird's ability to navigate while flying.² It is a surprising finding, suggesting that homing instincts might be magnetic phenomena; perhaps even proposing that homes themselves exert a force of attraction, a comforting pull on bodies designed to help guide them back to safety.
- The Canadian neuropsychologist Michael Persinger has even suggested that high-powered magnets attached to the brain can stimulate a spiritual, transcendent—even God-like—experience.³



It was enough to make the artist Ted Hiebert wonder how many magnets it would take to stick through a human head. It may seem like a silly experiment except that it is not quite known with certainty what magnets do and why. What is known is that magnets sometimes have an effect on things—scientific or otherwise—even when the reasons for the effects are unclear. The act of putting oneself into the magnetic equation then is also to embed oneself in the uncertainty of the situation—to put oneself in the path of the magnets and wait to see what happens.

Notes:

1. Young, Liane, et. al. “Disruption of the right temporoparietal junction with transcranial magnetic stimulation reduces the role of beliefs in moral judgments.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. March 29, 2010. Available online at: <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0914826107>
2. Mora, Cordula, et. al. “Magnetoreception and its trigeminal mediation in the homing pigeon.” *Nature*. Volume 432. November 25 2004.
3. Hitt, Jack. “This is Your Brain on God.” *Wired*. Issue 7.11. November 1999. Available online at: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.11/persinger.html>



THE
PSYCHIC
SENSE

NEW
WORLD
OF THE
MIND

TOWARDS
THE

Out of this World

on the work of Susan MacWilliam

text by Doug Jarvis

It is hard to talk about the paranormal without conjuring up the question of the real. This, in turn, forces an examination of how individuals, as inquirers, perceive the world around them. How does one differentiate between what is called real and what is called imaginary? What sensibilities are used in the process of taking in the stimulus of the world and playing with it in one's own ways?

This is the murky terrain of the work of Susan MacWilliam. As with many artists who use archives and other subject matter created by others, her goal is not to prove without a question of a doubt what is going on in the work, what is and is not real. Instead, it is the shadow of doubt that is itself the curiosity. For the shadow casts a form of its own, creating gaps and pinholes of chance that carry communications from other dimensions. It is within these shadows that the rules of engagement change. Multi-dimensionality collides and any talk of interior and exterior awareness gets problematized by one's own presence in the equation.

With her newest work, MacWilliam transforms the often-enlightened book jacket covers of works in the library of consciousness and paranormal research. Book titles such as *Yes, we do survive!*, *Beyond Telepathy*, and *Telephone Between Worlds*, are transformed into spherical shaped phenomena

Susan MacWilliam. *Out of this World*. Found photograph, Book Spheres. Book covers from the Alex Tanous Library, Rhine Research Center, Durham, NC. 2012

that give physical form to the projected knowledge shared between worlds. These manifestations hover before the viewer as objects and as portals suspending an ambiguity of what is known and how.

In this way MacWilliam continues to blur ethereal space for the viewer, conflating the parapsychologist's laboratory experiment with the artist as material support for the possibilities that occur in speculation. The artist herself becomes the form that suspends doubt in the face of curiosity, providing a shield from the penetrating stare of making sure. She holds the camera to the sun to give viewers room to be here and elsewhere as they choose, lurking in the shadows of doubt, imagining what it means to be out of this world.

This is not an Indian

on the work of Jackson 2bears

What would it mean to become a tourist of one's own identity, to be forced into a position where the very culture from which one comes has also become a plaything for others? To walk into a photo studio only to find one's own image waiting as a costume to be worn? Such is the project of Mohawk artist Jackson 2bears—a recuperation of his image from the annals of cultural simulation.

The cultural theorist Lisa Nakamura calls it “identity tourism,” a social fascination with adopting the identities of others.¹ There are other names for it too—cultural imperialism, image colonialism or even Hallowe'en. In each case what the terminology implies is a pervasive and perpetual seduction with cultural difference, and that the attempt to understand the identities of others tends to be heavily mediated by the virtuality of the image.

However this is not a new story. In 1929 the French artist René Magritte wrote the provocative words *ceci n'est pas un pipe* beneath a painting of a pipe, a simple observation on the complex relationship between reality and representation. The title of the painting—*The Treachery of Images*—is revealing. This was not simply a comment on the nuances of the image; it was a formula for treachery, and one that society has embraced all too well. The destiny of the image is to replace the reality it represents. Pure treachery.

In contemporary times, Magritte's words have become a prophecy fulfilled—a world philosophers have called one of spectacle, simulation or even technological possession. Make no mistake, everyone is implicated in this treachery, willfully or otherwise. For the 21st century has propagated and



intensified a culture of images—from Facebook simulations of individuality to officialized data identities of regulated digital living. If one believes oneself to be in control of the image the treachery can be revealed by a simple attempt to cross the border without a passport, go to school without a student ID, buy a car without a driver's license. What one quickly finds is that one is nothing without the image—no passage, no access, no status. The image identifies, mediates and verifies an individual's place in the world. In many ways the image is more real than the body it once represented.

The destiny of the image is to become real. Pure treachery comes back to haunt the individual, mediated by the very methods used to construct identity for ourselves and others. The treachery of the image is that now all identities are simulations of themselves. The treachery of the image is to make everyone a tourist of his or her own identity. For Jackson 2bears the first step in speaking back to this treachery is to wear it proudly as the simulated skin of social authenticity.

Notes:

1. Lisa Nakamura. "Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet." In *The Cybercultures Reader*. David Bell and Barbara Kennedy, eds. New York and London: Routledge. 2000.

Welcome
Back!

Terrific
Super
Wow!
Outstanding
Home

YOU'RE
AWESOME!

Welcome Back Ye Annunaki

on a project by Noxious Sector Arts Collective

How might one host an imaginary friend, a special guest from an alien world returning to Earth after a 3600 year journey? What might be prepared for them to eat? What kind of accommodations could be made for them to sleep? What kind of gift could be given to welcome them into one's home?

Welcome Back Ye Annunaki merges inquiry about home and hospitality with speculation on the ancient alien theories of Zecharia Sitchin and others, who claim that humanity is a product of alienate intervention, genetically engineered by a race called the Annunaki. According to Sitchin, the story of the Annunaki is engraved on the clay tablets of the ancient Sumerian people, along with details of the planet they come from, called Nibiru or Planet X. The myth describes Nibiru's orbit as long and elliptical, bringing it into proximity with our solar system only once every 3,600 years. If the story proves true, the winter solstice of 2012 may mark the return of the Annunaki, as Nibiru re-enters the solar system.¹

This story is an alternative to the end-of-the-world scenarios rampant near the end of 2012— an ancestral return rather than a tragic disaster that ends the human race. To celebrate this momentous occasion, Noxious Sector Arts Collective hosted a party. Friends and fellow artists were invited to contribute works, which were then presented as a gesture welcoming home those ancestors that no one has ever known—except perhaps in the collective imagination or insofar as one is willing to speculate on Sitchin's story and its possibilities. The stories were built on the idea of welcoming back our

alien ancestors, inviting gestures of hospitality from those who might like to welcome an Annunaki into their home. Cindy Baker & Megan Morman created a brothel designed to service the needs of alien visitors; Ella Morton made a set of intergalactic calling cards where visitors could leave a message for the Annunaki; Mary-Anne McTrowe hosted a potluck and made a banner of welcome; Serena Kataoka built a sensory deprivation chamber in her bedroom with a live-stream feed; the sound artist s* performed a special otherworldly soundtrack at the welcome-back party; Marlaina Buch & Ross Macaulay made signs; Kegan McFadden carved welcome mats out of limestone; Ryan Park donated his apartment; Christine Walde compiled a library of alien-friendly literature, Shawn Shepherd made lunch. Other artists engaged the possibilities in their own ways as well. Noxious Sector Arts Collective bought inspirational balloons to let the Annunaki know how special they are.

Notes:

1. Zecharia Sitchin. *The 12th Planet*. New York: Harper, 1976.

Second Front Ends the World

on the work of Second Front

In December 2012, the avatar performance group Second Front brought an end to the world, joining forces with Nostradamus, Mayan prophets and the *Book of Revelations* in order to help usher in the world as it now exists. What was not known at the time was that the end of the world was a way of behaving rather than a decisive moment—an attitude rather than an event—an artistic performance that insists on continuity even when its objective is an ending of the only world that any of us have ever known. Not a time of new beginnings, but rather a time to obsess about the ending that never happened.

While the performance happened in the virtual world of Second Life, documentation from the event persists in the form of screen shots of simulated disaster, revelatory posturing and code scripts designed for the spectacle of virtual explosions—a fireworks display designed specifically for the performance. After the performance these images persist as a post-game show for the end of the world. It is post-apocalyptic because the apocalypse failed to live up to the imaginations that called it forth. Instead, the apocalypse proved itself to be imaginary and now life continues in the aftermath of the imaginary event. After the imagination: the question that emerges is whether now the world is, as a consequence, post-imaginary.

It is like a bad song stuck in one's head, or the lingering smell of garlic on the breath of the person sitting in the adjacent seat on the bus. In the virtual world these intentional actions are called "griefing," a process of purposefully provoking others in a particular way. Griefing is not quite bullying, but it can seem close. One might whistle a tune so that others cannot help thinking of it too; one might avoid showering just so others can be subjected to the smell of yesterday. Or, when



performing in a virtual world, one might use animations, scripts and virtual bombs to make sure the system is aware of one's presence. This is how Second Front approaches their performances as well—griefing the system in an attempt to keep the fun from ending.

Sometimes they send virtual pizzas to Microsoft—a gesture that is disruptive because, for whatever reason, Dominos still guarantees virtual delivery and thus the Microsoft board meeting is interrupted. It is exactly like it would be in the prank-calling real world, except the pizza cannot be eaten. But that does not stop Second Front. In fact, they even staged a Last Supper—one governed not by a dramatic meeting, but by a computer script that made the avatars vomit. Second Front threw up the last supper—a vomit performance that has the symbolic effect of excising the religious host from the virtual body.

The result is a curious stage for speculation, since at stake in the virtual world is really the question of whether the material soul or spirit has anything to gain by actually entertaining virtual proposition. And for Second Front, the argument is not that it does, but that it would be awful if it did not. And so, just when you thought the end of the world had come and gone, it is back. A virtual story that just keeps on ending.

1 point of interest found



Nathan Shafer

WORDS OF **NOXIOUS SECTOR** FEBRUARY 2013 AR/H+

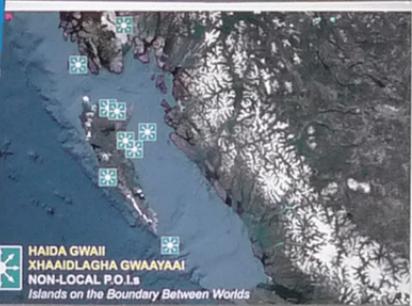
A DIGITAL STORY IN AUGMENTED REALITY!

NON-LOCAL

"Cosmic Constant MRPG"

NATHAN SHAFER

from the best time... adventures... and more!



Noxious Se



Map



List



Actions



Info



Settings



Non-Local: Cosmic Constant MRPG

on the work of Nathan Shafer

In his 2007 novel *Spook County*, science fiction writer William Gibson describes a new form of art that exists in a virtual space layered on top of the material world.¹ In order to see the art, one needs a special pair of glasses designed to technologically reveal an entirely new world that would otherwise remain invisible. The electronic environment that already surrounds everyday living—whether cellphone signals or radio waves, satellite frequencies or magnetic radiation—here becomes a new medium for artistic production, sculpted into digital form. This virtual overlay is neither real nor imaginary, but somewhere in between—perceivable given the proper technological protocol, even if not physically present.

In 2013, Gibson's fiction has become a reality—or, more precisely, augmented reality—a real digital layer that sits on top of material geography. It is as though virtual reality has begun to creep into the world of the real, not content to only exist in the digital bunkers of server rooms and game consoles, but insisting on telling the story of how technology grew legs of its own and now begins to walk among us. In. Real. Space.

The existence of this virtual world makes possible works like those of artist Nathan Shafer, who tells stories for a technological world by overlaying his narrative vision on top of those that already exist. Using Augmented Reality (AR) technology, Shafer tells the story of technological evolution and the ways it honors and betrays the cultural legacy of his native Alaska. By accessing a free smartphone application, one can see the real world in an entirely new—and potentially

Nathan Shafer.

Non-Local: Cosmic Constant MRPG. 2012

virtual—way. On one hand, what this technology promises is nothing short of an entirely new experience of familiar space. On the other hand, such a promise means nothing if not given substantive creative or imaginative content.

In this case, Shafer's work is about much more than technological novelty. It leverages that which is there but cannot be seen (AR) against that which is either imaginary or has actually disappeared. The work involves ghosts, avatars and fictional entities alike—prophets of digital possibility and laments for landscapes lost to the delirious advances of technological living. Using science fiction tropes and traditional Haida and Dena'ina storytelling methods, Shafer has installed his work in the augmented ether of Seattle—and now in the pages of this book—telling the local story of non-local entities, and in so doing challenging conceptions of boundaries between the real, the technological and the artistic.

Notes:

1. William Gibson. *Spook County*. London: Berkeley Books, 2008.
2. To access the stories, it is necessary to download a QR Code Reader for one's smart phone or tablet. Scan the QR code below and the device will load an augmented reality interface. Point the camera at the image of Shafer's work on the previous page and the augmented reality stories will appear.



Geolocation

on the work of Nate Larson & Marni Shindelman

The Canadian theorist of technology Marshall McLuhan once provocatively declared that technology turns the human body inside out.¹ For McLuhan, the age of electronic culture is one where the human nervous system is increasingly externalized—exposed to the world in previously inconceivable ways and subjected to external stimulus in the forms of radio frequencies, microwave radiation and broadcast media. That was in 1964.

Today, the situation is much more extreme, and what McLuhan could never have predicted was how this new nervous system has adapted to the environment. Digital codes surround every facet of human culture and community. They are embraced with zeal and at times abandon to the point where new electronic roots are set down with every step that one takes. Electronic culture is increasingly saturated by digital check-ins, tagged images, tweets and geolocation—a culture where electronic presences persist even after the bodies that created them have moved on. It is as if the electronic world turns identity into a ghost of itself: traces left behind, planted in virtual space, lingering—even haunting—the electronic landscape.

This is the context for Nate Larson and Marni Shindelman's *Geolocation* project, which sets as its artistic task the revivification of these forgotten messages. Digital ghost hunters, Larson and Shindelman troll virtual space for tweets, check-ins and other markers of digital passage. They are abandoned moments of electronic expression that the artists bring back to life. When they find them, they commemorate the moment with a photograph of the place from where it was sent. The pairing of the photograph and the original Twitter message becomes the work of art.



These tweets have my location?

Nate Larson & Marni Shindelman.
Geolocation: Have My Location. 2012

The words left behind by others are reanimated by Larson and Shindelman. They are messages in digital bottles brought forth from the junkyard of the electronic landscape. It might be likened to a re-tweet, an analog re-broadcast that liberates these lost voices from their virtual prisons while at the same time serving as a reminder that digital footprints linger. It is also a compelling paradox. When one geo-locates, a subjective claim to public space is made—a multiple planting of individual flags, each claiming the site in a different way, but all of them sharing the same location. Unlike material space, the virtual can handle multiple subjectivities—to the extent that for all intents and purposes more than one person can truly, in the virtual, occupy the same space at the same time, despite the tenets of physics that insist that this would be precisely impossible.

To witness this virtual wall of flags—multiple tweets geo-located in the same place—is to truly understand the significance of Larson and Shindelman’s work. Long after individuals have checked-out, their check-ins remain as markers of a lifestyle externalized and digitally archived, a graveyard of subjectivities sent to haunt locations they may never visit again. The hope is that someone else might, thus reanimating the memories of others in the process and amalgamating the complexity that is the implosion of subjectivities into geo-activated space.

Notes:

1. Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

FAGing It Forward

on the work of Deirdre Logue & Allyson Mitchell

text by Doug Jarvis

The Feminist Art Gallery (FAG), co-directed by artists Deirdre Logue & Allyson Mitchell, has transformed the backyard of an urban Toronto home and pushed it into the international art world. They have achieved this by asking others to put forward the names of people they want to acknowledge, recognize, and make more visible. On a name tag or postcard one is invited to write one's name and the name of someone else who deserves recognition. The card then adds to Logue & Mitchell's archive. Based on the premise of paying it forward, it is a methodology that targets a politicized art world, changing the value systems that are at play by naming people who bring value to artistic community. FAG celebrates those who need to be recognized, people who are themselves politicized. In their artist statement, Logue and Mitchell call this *FAGing It Forward*:

When you come to the FAG, we ask you to make a name tag: first, with your name—so we can all know who each other is—and second, with the name of a feminist/queer/politicized artist, poet, rock star, writer, friend, inspiration, mentor, matron or lover—someone you want to make visible, someone you want everyone to know about. We call this FAGing It Forward.³⁶

Projects like this, that challenge institutional structures, have a history within contemporary art. Institutional critique attempts

to reveal the socially and historically constructed boundaries of art systems. It works to shed light on the assumptions and inherent biases of gallery and museum practices and how they function to propagate distinct streams of taste. FAG inhabits the aesthetics of this historical movement. Not just to reference the critique of systems of power that under represent and marginalize women artists, queer artists, and artists who work outside of the mainstream, but as a medium itself.

FAG projects mobilize a process of inclusion, cooperation and collaboration: all facets of the exhibition become part of the work. They employ a “matronage program,” a micro-funding system of support they have developed that pairs donations to the gallery with individual artists and projects. Bringing the artist, audience and gallery together in a collaborative economic exchange, they are able to make visible artists whose work does not fit into traditional consumerist models.

To this end FAG is changing the world. Using philanthropic tools in innovative ways, they are affecting how the game can be played. They are doing it from within the art system, using the mechanisms of presentation and support to reveal itself—like the snake simultaneously swallowing and regurgitating its tail—for the advantage of others, as well as the system itself.

Notes:

1. Deirdre Logue & Allyson Mitchell. Personal correspondence with the artists, 2012.

When We Were Stars

on the work of Janet-Marie Rogers & Alex Jacobs

text by Jackson 2bears

As my Grandfather told me: “In the beginning this entire earth was covered in water, and all that lived here were those animals of the sea and of the air; high above there was another place that the people called Sky World, and in this place lived an ever-blossoming tree that gave light for all those who dwelt there. One day the Great Chief of Sky World grew ill, and had the tree uprooted believing this would cure him; instead, his pregnant wife accidentally fell through the hole left by the tree, and tumbled through the air to our world below.”

As First Nations people we keep our histories in the form of storytelling. And as we have always done, we continue telling our stories as a way to renew and strengthen our connection with our traditional culture, with each other, and with Mother Earth.

The Sioux philosopher Vine Deloria Jr. once wrote that the main reason for theological/philosophical incommensurability between Western religions and “tribal spirituality” was that the first followed a temporal logic, whereas ours was based on a spatial one. Deloria argued that Western philosophy was rooted in a teleological, chronological and linear view of the world, and by contrast Native spirituality was based on a non-linear, geographical or circular philosophy. He said that our stories were “written on the land,” and could be described as multidimensional, non-linear narratives that interconnect (spatially and dimensionally) with one another. For us, our stories are “animate” narratives because each time they are told and re-told in our ceremonies and at social gatherings they

When We Were Stars

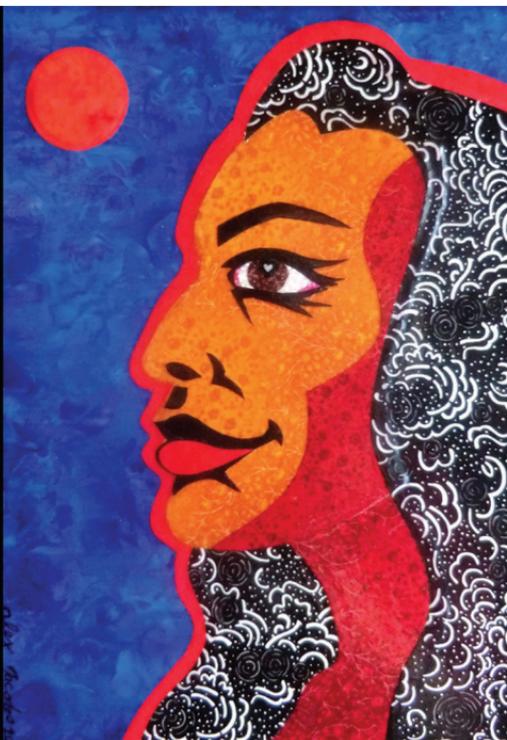
I used to be homeless
you were too
no land, no politics
oxygen-less astronauts
galaxies without parameters
lucky stars waiting for wishes

we used to gaze upon the globe
and you'd say "looks like suspended marbled water."
I liked the light and shadow
the way the bowl transformed to a cup
then a knife and back again

the other stars
made lightening trails
blazing past us
to their end

"let them go" we'd sing
without dominion for our souls
it was all so simple
then I fell
and you did too

landing in very different territories
miles away from each other
and the politics between us
only grew



Janet-Marie Rogers & Alex Jacobs.
When We Were Stars. 2013

undergo important transformations—this is how Native people experience their historical narratives through storytelling: as something spatial, dimensional, alive and ever-changing.

The story of Sky Woman as the first mother of this land and her journey to this place we call Turtle Island is at the very center of our Haudenosaunee cosmology; it is our Creation Story, and to retell it is to “honor the life she gifted us,” and celebrate our communal spirit as Onkwehonwe (Indigenous peoples).



STORE HOURS
Mon-Fri 6:00am - 9:00pm
Saturday 6:00am - 8:00pm
Sunday 7:00am - 6:00pm



Free Wi-Fi



Continuity in Temporal Space

on the work of Jason Tentor

The French novelist Georges Perec once attempted to exhaust a street corner in Paris, making lists and taking notes of everything that caught his attention over the course of a weekend.¹ In some ways Perec's text was a project designed to suggest an inexhaustible motion and complexity to life on the Paris streets. In other ways it was an attempt to challenge his own creative gaze—seeing how long and how fully he could engage with the street corner. It was not that fully, but in a sense the fullness of the engagement was rhetorical while the actual engagement of the activity was not. For three days Perec sat at a coffee shop observing the world around him, making notes. And for three days, the world around him went on as it probably would have anyways with only very slight variations due to those moments where someone Perec knew interrupted the anonymity of the experiment he was conducting. It is appropriate, really. Life goes on, but at times recognizes an individual presence too, despite the desire to be an anonymous register. Equally, experience unfolds whether or not the world around it understands the intentions projected forwards. An interesting double play.

Half a world away, on a street corner in Seattle, something opposite happened. Not an artistic attempt to exhaust a street corner, but an actually-exhausted artist occupying a street corner for relational effect. This occupation had no ambitions of recording the world however; instead, the artist simply went to sleep. The project is one by artist Jason Tentor, who went to sleep in a chair on a street corner, dressed up as a

security guard positioned outside of a Starbuck's coffee shop in Seattle's Pioneer Square.

The act of sleeping in public already incites pause, but to dress as a security guard while doing it definitely adds a dramatic edge. Is this a critique of security in an American state or is it a playful interrogation of coffee culture, leveraging the authority of the security guard against the morning wake-up call of a customized beverage—as if to ask whether security needs to be kept awake artificially at times? Artificial security or secure artificiality—either way the project is a clever aesthetic intervention into the codes of the Seattle streets. And one not limited to a single instance either. To sleep is not the point—instead, once a month, Tentor has done something similar: staging a performative action of one sort or another at a downtown corner, a friendly gesture that keeps life on the streets that much more interesting to the passersby. Sometimes he draws stick figure portraits of people as they pass by; sometimes he hands out dollar bills for those who need some change, or bottles of water for those who are thirsty on a rainy day. Other times his set-ups are more elaborate—an invitation to join the Tea Party, complete with a shared cup of Earl Gray or a cardboard box designed to help us travel through time merely by stopping to realize we are doing so.

These simple gestures keep a street corner changing, rupturing the everyday exhaustion of the street by proposing a new form of creative continuity. Not a continuity of perpetual motion, but one that acts out, playfully constituting a creative space that persists alongside the everyday streets of Seattle.

Notes:

1. Georges Perec. *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. Marc Lowenthal, trans. Cambridge: Wakefield Press, 2010.

Art Is All Over

*on the work of the Cedar Tavern Singers
AKA Les Phonoréalistes!*

text by Doug Jarvis

The arts collective called the Cedar Tavern Singers made a strange declaration that “art is all over.” It sounds odd, but what if it were true? That art really was all over, everywhere, because we wanted it. What would become of this text piece by the Cedar Tavern Singers AKA Les Phonoréalistes!, a Canadian collective that has developed an interesting body of work spoofing on conceptual art and popular culture? What would become of all of us, reading it into existence, or rather reading it out of existence?

This work is a textual mash-up of John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s *War Is Over! (If You Want It)* billboard and poster campaign with Canadian conceptual artist Iain Baxter’s phrase “Art is all over.” In this installation the words are presented at street level, in a storefront window, invoking “Going out of Business” signs to problematize audience experience and participation with contemporary art. Suggesting that “Art is all over” engages this street level discussion of consumerism and the holy grail of Main Street venues. Adding “If you want it,” implies a nod to the participatory nature of current art and cultural trends, the “Just do it!” mentality of popular advertising slogans.

In this way the work sets up a conundrum of sorts, playing off of the art and life ethos of Alan Kaprow’s happenings of the 1960’s, and the opening-up of audience participation in 1990’s with relational art and in the interactive works of the 2000’s. What role is the audience really meant to play within this

**ART
IS
ALL
OVER!**

IF YOU WANT IT

The Cedar Tavern Singers AKA Les Phonoréalistes

composition of slogans, directions, mantras, store windows and consumer culture? Critic, participant, artist?

The poster is a funny play on the history of conceptual art's use of text as form, and the popular sloganism of the John Lennon and Yoko Ono quote. The two together create an interesting tension, that the future of art, a question that has engaged the art world over the last 100 years, is actually within reach, as tactile as the simple desire to window shop the complex and philosophical quest of the age.

Would it not be great if that were all that it took, to read a statement aloud? Taking the act of critic and participant into one's own hands and ending art, as we know it, everywhere!



Urich Lau. *Life Circuit 5.0*.
Photographer: Terence Cayden Fong. 2010

Life Circuit 5.0

on the work of Ulrich Lau

text by Doug Jarvis

It is not difficult to imagine a sense of electronic media over-stimulation from all of the cell phones, tablets, television screens, advertising billboards and electronic contemporary art that exist today. Human perception is immersed in a world of images and sounds that saturates the senses. It is also not hard to imagine how a lot of this information is experienced from the outside, pumped into bodies from the external world. But what is the effect of all of this on the inside of the head, or even on the imagination? Is that terrain also over-stimulated? Is that even possible? Or would that just be what is regularly called the cognitive processes that go on inside the head?

Ulrich Lau's work explores the landscape of media saturation and turns the question inside out. His project mines the depths of mediated sensory deprivation in a performance of anti-stimulation. When he performs, Lau forces himself to be physically present in a media rich environment, yet deprives himself of the information that he projects into the room around him. Equipped with sound-proof and sight-proof headgear, the artist enters a black hole of sorts. This same equipment generates a variety of streams of data that are broadcast about him. He is the source of an electronic stream, that he himself does not perceive, creating a sensory force field that puts into play a mediated dynamic of excitation and lack. He over-stimulates the environment around him, while understimulating his access to that same environment.

In this way the artist interrogates the future of human perception, extending the technological promotion of hyper-mediated experience into an engagement with the ability to perceive the world in many dimensions at once. Lau pushes the common understanding of the perceptual dimensions that exist inside and outside of the human body further into the darkness and depths of the active imagination.

Translocal Ephemeral Cultural Appliqué

on the work of Ingrid Mary Percy

text by Jackson 2bears

Perhaps the reason graffiti or street art sits at the far end of the spectrum from exhibitions curated in contemporary art galleries is not really because it is (too) socially transgressive, but rather because it problematizes the semiotics of representation. In fact, graffiti art could be said to have nothing whatsoever to do with representation. Rather, it operates within the logic of territorialization: first for the reason it is necessarily site-specific; and second because of its dimensionality, which is oriented towards an experimentation (versus representation) with (not of) the real.

Imagine you are painting a picture of a landscape: brush in hand and your easel in position, you gaze out at that which lies before you on other side of the canvas. With inspired strokes you render in pigment all that lies within your artistic scope: the majestic mountain range that meets the clear blue sky and the calm river that reflects all the colors of the autumn leaves on the trees. Regardless of how you choose to render this landscape (either in a hyper-realistic or abstract manner) what you are engaged in is an act of representation—an act of representation, as Jean Baudrillard said, that maintains the principle of equivalence or *différance* between the sign (the painting) and the real (the landscape).

By contrast, with graffiti art the artist seeks not the creative representation of a space, but rather to inscribe, etch and scratch a message onto to the landscape itself, thus entering into a different kind of dialogue with the space and the territory. Graffiti art is not representative (even if recognizable as an



image in itself), but rather it becomes part of an assemblage or territorial motif that is constituted by its spatiality and dimensionality, which is to say its site-specificity.

With *Translocal Ephemeral Cultural Appliqué*, artist Ingrid Mary Percy takes to problematizing the codes of representation one step further, extracting a piece of graffiti art from one urban location and transposing it onto another. If graffiti art is an act of territorialization, then Percy's project is to further decode the semiotics of location and spatiality, resulting in a project about the deterritorialization of landscapes themselves. No more is this about inter-relationships between the sign, the real and the semiotics of representation. Instead, this is about a manner of creative expression, about the transformation and deterritorialization of public spaces that result from the artist's experimentation with the reproducibility and dislocation of landscapes. It is an experiment both with and of the real, which raises the question of the effect we have on the landscapes in which we are immersed, as well as how we in turn are effected by them.



Arthur & Marilouise Kroker and Jackson 2bears.
After the Drones. Video still. 2012

After the Drones

*on the work of Arthur & Marilouise Kroker
and Jackson 2bears*

“I am a drone called freedom” says the soundtrack, as pictures of unmanned aircraft, targeting cross hairs, retreating bodies, static and explosions flit across the screen. A freedom designed to minimize risk: in an ideal world, no soldiers would even be harmed in its making. An automated freedom, implemented from a safe distance, patrolled remotely, enforced technologically.

This is the provocative technological and political territory engaged by media theorists Arthur & Marilouise Kroker with their video *After the Drones*. Produced in collaboration with the media artist Jackson 2bears, this work is an insightful meditation on what happens when freedom becomes ubiquitous and when, as a result, individual bodies begin both to tune it out and to take it for granted as part of the operating system of the times. The automated expansion of ideology is, in many ways, a hallmark of this historical era—an age governed equally by the possibilities of virtualized war and the spread of networked technologies.

It is as if to suggest that the soundtrack to the story of freedom is less a cinematic ballad than the kind ominous silence that results from over-saturation. A static, a buzz, a whir: first stuck inside our heads, then a drone that is eventually tuned out. A drone called freedom. It starts as an earworm, but ends as invisible. It can be so easy to tune out sounds like these because they are never seen or heard directly. Our minds—like the drones—are piloted from a safe technological distance, and the messages sent are always both familiar and ubiquitous.

In many ways it is post-apocalyptic—anticipating the technological ruin of the future while meditating on the ways the world has already come to be dominated by machines. And not by accident. If, as the French thinker Paul Virilio insists, when one invents a technology one also invents its accident (the invention of the airplane also invents the possibility of a plane crash, for example)¹ then the inverse also likely holds. In fact, the inverse may even be more plausible—a general rule rather than an exception—such that it is not the technology that invents the accident, but the other way around. This would be to insist that plane crashes are the necessary casualty of inventing a plane. Indeed, the crash is almost always invented first then continues to linger as the technology enters a realm of implementation.

So too with drones, whose accident is both a crash and an ideological disaster, a disaster that is the very notion of freedom itself. “I am a drone called freedom.” A technology destined to crash into the obsolescence of ubiquity.

Notes:

1. Paul Virilio. *Politics of the Very Worst: An Interview by Philippe Petit*. Sylvère Lotringer, ed. Michael Cavaliere, trans. New York: Semiotext(e), 1999.

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters

on the work of M.E.D.I.U.M.

André Breton once suggested that the most refined Surrealist act would be to run out into the street with a loaded gun and begin firing at random, implicating strangers in an act of absurd and violent disruption.¹ The idea is somewhat disconcerting until we realize that to imagine it is probably enough; even the suggestion of such an act is enough to give pause. It might be because somewhere deep down we know the imagination is not entirely benign and to imagine is sometimes actually dangerous. Or it might just be because the sentiment behind the idea, the gesture, is easier to appreciate than the possibility of actually taking it seriously. It is a common problem.

Another Surrealist strategy is one employed by the arts collective M.E.D.I.U.M.—a method called the “exquisite corpse” in which artists collaborate to make a communal drawing, each contributing portions of the sketch without seeing what each other has made. To perform this process a sheet of paper is folded into sections, each of which one artist fills out independently of the next—a series of “shots in the dark” that come together to comprise an illustrated whole that is ideally much more than the sum of its parts.

The examples of shooting a gun and making a drawing may seem incongruent, but to do justice to the complexity of these two methods it is important to realize that art makes exquisite corpses of us all—caught between individual and private reality and the imaginations of others. To make this comparison is to suggest that the method of drawing employed by these artists is more than just a formal constraint—it is a confrontational insistence on the need for art to push past individual boundaries and implicate others in its process.



What such a strategy produces are beautiful monsters—a poetic companion to Breton's proposed social transgression—exquisite corpses that willingly put reason to sleep in order to access the surprises and promises of shared imaginary worlds.

Notes:

1. André Breton. *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane, trans. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972.



Everything You Need

on the work of Christian Kuras & Duncan MacKenzie

It is everything you need: portable graffiti, not simply photographed in ironic fashion, but recreated as a low-budget do-it-yourself companion to the transient architectures of contemporary living.

It is everything you need: Guy Fawkes in a gorilla mask as the new face of anonymous living—identity pushed into a parody of itself. Creative forms of resistance are not simply phenomena of the hacker-vigilante, but the new face of dislocated romanticism.

It is everything you need: Christmas lights to help celebrate the holiday season. And why wouldn't you want to celebrate? What's wrong with you if you don't?

Everything You Need is an intervention by the collaborative duo Kuras & MacKenzie. It is a project that seems at first to be based on the attempt to activate and reanimate found text—though in equal measure the project quickly also becomes a meditation on reduction as an artistic style. In some ways, the work praises reduction: stripped down to the bare essentials, a relatively eclectic mashup of objects without any necessary relationship or obvious meaning. At the same time, the piece is also a parody of reduction precisely because art—all art—refuses to be reduced in equal proportion to the insistence on understanding, interpretation and explanation. Like this text, it is an unnecessary companion to the work of art, also itself both in praise and in parody. No words can make a work more

than it already is, and yet words aspire to exactly this objective by adding one more layer to that which is described and in so doing reducing it one step further to satisfy the need to know.

Everything you need, and nothing else, and yet also much more. Everything you need, but not exactly what you need to know. For the more one knows the less one needs the objects themselves, except perhaps when one does not really know what anything actually means. Which is why *Everything You Need* can be so resistant both to reduction and to knowledge: it insists on itself as, first and foremost, an eclectic collection of objects that falls short of satisfying the needs it cultivates and in so doing throws everything back in the face of the viewer.

This is not a work about everyday needs in the end. Maybe it is exactly the opposite. What defies need is actually about preference, and what defies preference is actually metaphysical. Consequently, if this artistic proposition suggests that art is everything one needs, then—actually—this is art about everything.

Artist Biographies

Jackson 2bears is a Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) multimedia artist currently based in Lethbridge, Alberta. 2bears has exhibited his work around the world, at venues including the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (Victoria, BC), Musée d'art contemporain (Montreal, QC), Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver, BC), ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival (Toronto, ON), and Digital Art Weeks (Zurich, Switzerland). 2bears is currently Assistant Professor of Art Studio and Native American Art Studio at the University of Lethbridge. <http://www.jackson2bears.net>

Interdisciplinary and performance artist **Cindy Baker** is passionate about gender culture, queer theory, fat activism and art theory. She believes that her art exists in its experience and not in its objects. With a background of working, volunteering, and sitting on the board for several artist-run centres and non-profits in Western Canada, Cindy has a particular professional interest in the function of artist-run centres as a breeding ground of deviation. She is based out of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. <http://www.lovecindybaker.com>

Cedar Tavern Singers AKA Les Phonoréalistes!: Long long ago, back when the world was young—that is, sometime around the year 2006—two individuals of musi-artistic temperament were summoned to the mountainous regions of the north. It was here that a voice of a sub-sub-genre of musical art was forged. Mary-Anne McTrowe received her BFA from the University of Lethbridge in 1998 and her MFA from Concordia University in 2001. Daniel Wong received his BFA from the University of Lethbridge in 2003 and his MFA from the University of Western Ontario, London, in 2006. <http://www.thephonorealistes.com>

Tanya Doody is a Canadian artist working in a variety of media including performance, video, and sculpture. Her most recent works have revolved around craftivist strategies, performative acts, and poetic gestures. Tanya holds an MFA from the Nova Scotia College of Arts and Design University (NSCAD), a BFA from University of Victoria in Visual Arts, a Diploma from Sheridan College in Crafts and Design (Ceramics), and a Certificate of Fine Crafts (Ceramics) from the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design. <http://www.cargocollective.com/tanyadoody>

FAG Feminist Art Gallery is the collaboration of artists **Deirdre Logue** and **Allyson Mitchell**. Through FAG we host, we fund, we advocate, we support, we claim and we make. FAG is focused on a diverse community of individuals and artists and our collective and communal powers. FAG is feminist in its resistance and in its attempts to reconcile our participation in oppressive systems. FAG is feminist in its insistence on closing the gaps between studio, gallery, art, activism, sociality and home. In solidarity. <http://www.facebook.com/FeministArtGallery>

Neal Fryett is a Seattle-based artist whose principle medium is photography. He received a B.A. in Information Systems and Economics from Seattle Pacific University (2002) and an M.F.A. from the University of Washington (2011). <http://www.nealfryett.com>

Tetsushi Higashino refers to himself as an “unproductive production activist,” apparently his definition of an artist. His work makes visible the logic of this notion. These metaphorical visions often derive from things that subliminally intervene in our daily lives. They transform the ordinary world we overlook into one of extraordinary nonsense. <http://hnh.workth.net>

Doug Jarvis is an experimental media artist, an Artist in Residence at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society

at the University of Victoria, and the Program Coordinator at Open Space Artist-Run Centre. A founding member of the avatar performance art group Second Front, Jarvis has exhibited his work widely, in virtual and real-world environments, in Canada and abroad, at venues including Subtle Technologies (University of Toronto, 2011) and the Xi'an Academy of Fine Art (Xi'an, China, 2010). <http://dougjarvis.ca>

Arthur & Marilouise Kroker are the editors of the peer-reviewed, electronic journal *CTheory* (<http://www.ctheory.net>) and the *Digital Futures* book series for the University of Toronto Press. Arthur Kroker is Canada Research Chair in Technology, Culture and Theory and Professor of Political Science at the University of Victoria. He is the Director of the Pacific Centre for Technology and Culture and the author of numerous books on technology and culture, most recently *Exits to the Posthuman Future* (Polity, 2014). Marilouise Kroker is Senior Research Scholar at the Pacific Centre for Technology and Culture, University of Victoria. She has co-edited and introduced numerous anthologies, including *Critical Digital Studies: A Reader* (University of Toronto, 2008). <http://www.pactac.net>

Christian Kuras lives in the post-rural English countryside. His art practice involves painting, sculpture, writing and photography, usually working in collaboration with other artists. His work has been shown and published across Canada, the United States and Europe. He splits his time between his art practice and co-directing a successful design agency called Exploded View. <http://bathosphere.org>

David LaRiviere received a BFA from the University of Alberta and an MA Fine Art degree from Goldsmiths College, University of London. His interest in a variety of media is influenced by a research path that includes a still developing interest in continental philosophy, particularly concerning

the author function and the ongoing activity that carries forth the positive task of critique. LaRiviere lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan where he is the the Artistic Director of PAVED Arts. <http://www.mkultra-foods.com>

Nate Larson and **Marni Shindelman's** collaborative work focuses on the cultural understanding of distance as perceived in modern life and network culture. Their solo exhibitions include, among others, Light House in Wolverhampton, Blue Sky in Portland, United Photo Industries in Brooklyn, and the Contemporary Arts Center Las Vegas. Nate Larson is full-time faculty at the Maryland Institute College of Art. He received his MFA from The Ohio State University. Marni Shindelman is a Lecturer in Photography at the University of Georgia. She received her MFA from the University of Florida. <http://www.larson-shindelman.com>

Singaporean visual artist **Urich Lau Wai-Yuen** works in video art, photography and printmaking. He is also an independent curator focusing on video art and has presented exhibitions in Singapore and abroad. He has exhibited in Singapore and other countries including Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, China, Japan, Australia, Germany, Serbia and the USA. He holds an MFA from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and works as an art lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts. <http://urichlauwy.info>

Duncan MacKenzie is an artist, pundit, educator and a founding member/producer of Bad at Sports. His works have appeared in galleries all over the world including Canada, Australia, the USA, New Zealand, Estonia and England. His work has been discussed in *Flash Art*, *Art Forum*, *the New York Times*, *Time Out* and many other venues. He is an Assistant Professor in Art + Design at Columbia College Chicago. <http://kurasmackenzie.com>

Susan MacWilliam lives and works in Belfast and Dublin, Ireland. She is a Lecturer in Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. In 2009 MacWilliam represented Northern Ireland with a solo show at the Venice Biennale. Working with video, photography and installation MacWilliam's work explores cases of paranormal and perceptual phenomena. Recent exhibitions in 2011/12 include *The Edge of Reason*, Kino Kino, Sandnes; *Afterlife*, Tot Zover, Funeral Museum, Amsterdam; *Wunder*, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg and Kunsthalle Krems; *Cutting A Door*, Eastlink Gallery, Shanghai; and *We Make Versions*, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster. <http://www.susanmacwilliam.com>

M.E.D.I.U.M. (Metaphysical Explorations, Divination, and Investigations Utilizing Magic) is an arts collective based in Lethbridge, Canada, comprised of Frater Tham (Darcy Logan), Madame Symona (Maria Madacky), and Char Latan (Leila Armstrong). They pursue a pluralistic art practice that is a hybridization between object making in a gallery context, installation art, and performance. They often invite other clairvoyant and/or esoteric individuals to accompany them in public performances. <http://www.mediumarts.ca>

Kira O'Reilly is a UK based artist; her practice, both wilfully interdisciplinary and entirely undisciplined, stems from a visual art background; it employs performance, biotechnical practices and writing with which to consider speculative reconfigurations around *The Body*. She is currently in rehearsals for the forthcoming *The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic*, featuring Marina Abramovic and directed by Robert Wilson, premiering in Manchester International Festival 9-16th July 2011 and touring in 2012. <http://www.kiraoreilly.com>

Ingrid Mary Percy holds a BFA from Emily Carr University of Art+Design (Vancouver, BC) and an MFA from the University of Victoria. She is Vice-Chair of the

Board of Visual Artists Newfoundland (VANL-CARFAC) and the regional representative on the Board of Canadian Artists' Representation (CARFAC) National. She lives in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador and is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Fine Arts at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. <http://polychromefinearts.com/artistsb/percy.html>

Steven Rayner was born in Yorkshire, England. He describes himself as a Sculptural Nomad, roaming the world and the sculptural process. His commitment to the expanding field of sculpture, artistic research and problem solving began at around the age of 4. By the time he was 11, he had built an electric vehicle and a motor scooter and customized many of his bicycles. Rayner has received many grants and exhibited nationally and internationally. He does not believe in coincidence and sees life as a series of connected events. <http://www.stevenrayner.ca>

Janet-Marie Rogers & Alex Jacobs collaborate as Ikkwenyes (the Mohawk word for “dare to do”). In this exhibit they revisit the Haundenosaunee creation story “Sky Women” to talk about land, our place on the land and our place before land. The physical body is a personal piece of territory we are born with, territories are the physical body we are born onto and both are rife with politics and cultural value systems which rarely live harmoniously in the same place. This too is part of our history and will remain our constant struggle to be understood.

Scott Rogers is a Canadian artist based in Glasgow, Scotland. He has exhibited his work extensively, including recent exhibitions at AND Festival (Liverpool), Flip Project Space (Napoli/Toronto), American University Beirut), Southern Alberta Art Gallery (Lethbridge) and PM Galerie (Berlin), among others. He received an MFA from the Glasgow School of Art and participated in an exchange at the

Staedelschule in Frankfurt am Main as a member of Simon Starling's class in 2012. <http://www.scottrogersprojects.com>

Founded in 2006 **Second Front** is the pioneering performance art group in the online, avatar-based Virtual Reality world of Second Life. Second Front creates theaters of the absurd that challenge notions of virtual embodiment, online performance and the formation of virtual narrative. Current Second Front members include: Gazira Babeli a.k.a. Gaz (Italy), Fau Ferdinand a.k.a. Yael Gilks (UK), Great Escape a.k.a. Scott Kildall (San Francisco), Bibbe Oh a.k.a. Bibbe Hansen (New York), Lizsolo Mathilde a.k.a. Liz Solo (Canada), Man Michinaga a.k.a. Patrick Lichty (Chicago), Tran Spire a.k.a. Doug Jarvis (Canada). <http://www.secondfront.org>

Nathan Shafer is a global artist, writer and educator from Anchorage, Alaska. Since 2000 he has been working with expanded media, constructing a wide range of socially interactive and technology based projects. He recently founded the Institute for Speculative Media, which develops new media curriculum, after-school programs, and provides access to mobile technology for kids in Alaska. He received his MFA in New Media from Rutgers University in 2008. <http://www.nathanshafer.org>

Cara-Ann Simpson is a Melbourne-based artist with a focus on sound, space, interaction and the participant. She is concerned with modes of listening and hearing in social situations and how people interact with sound. She is the Creative Co-Director and Co-Producer of Electrofringe Ltd, and the Curator at Bundoora Homestead Art Centre. Cara-Ann is currently working on several collaborative and solo projects in Melbourne. <http://www.caraannsimpson.com>

Ben Tanner is a photographer based in England. <http://www.bentanner.co.uk>

Jason Tentor is a Seattle-based artist and cultural producer. He works with relational methods, focusing on performance and body centric art to challenge cultural assumptions about public space within the postmodern state. Tentor's work uses cultural ready-mades to reinvent what is taken for granted in a developed world. He plays with language and semiotic material to make parallels between what is observable and what is hidden in plain view.

<http://www.northwestrelational.blogspot.com>

Jennifer Willet is an internationally successful artist in the emerging field of bioart. She taught in the Studio Arts Department at Concordia University from 2000-2007, and completed her PhD in the Interdisciplinary Humanities Program at the same institution. She is an Associate Professor in the School of Visual Arts at The University of Windsor in Canada and Director of INCUBATOR: Hybrid Laboratory at the intersection of Art Science and Ecology.

<http://www.jenniferwillet.com>

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This volume collects the curatorial writing produced at Noxious Sector Projects, a window gallery in downtown Seattle, curated by Ted Hiebert between 2011-2013. The gallery had as its mandate to be a “formalized forum for informal inquiry” and to exhibit works that creatively challenged the boundaries between the imaginary and the everyday.

Featuring the work of: Jackson 2bears, Cindy Baker, Cedar Tavern Singers, Tanya Doody, Neal Fryett, Tetsushi Higashino, Doug Jarvis, Arthur & Marilouise Kroker, Christian Kuras & Ben Tanner, Christian Kuras & Duncan MacKenzie, David LaRiviere, Nate Larson & Marni Shindelman, Urich Lau, Deirdre Logue & Allyson Mitchell, Susan MacWilliam, Ingrid Mary Percy, M.E.D.I.U.M., Steven Rayner, Janet Marie Rogers & Alex Jacobs, Scott Rogers, Second Front, Nathan Shafer, Cara-Ann Simpson, Jason Tentor, Jennifer Willett & Kira O'Reilly.

Ted Hiebert is an Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Art at the University of Washington Bothell. He is the author of *In Praise of Nonsense: Aesthetics, Uncertainty and Postmodern Identity* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2012).



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