

PLURAL LOYALTIES

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Abstract

In the context of the past few decades of globalization, cosmopolitanism is a contested notion. Major cities tend to be where protean and nascent forms of cosmopolitanism are practiced, due to their job opportunities, diverse communities, and a presumed and relatively open attitude towards otherness. Nation-state borders are often the presumed basis of loyalty; upon this setting, Jasmine's thesis exhibition in conjunction with this supporting paper draws together critical theory, personal stories and found image close-readings; and manifests materially in forms of mixed media installations.

Found images share qualities with the immigrant psyche, which is marked by gestures of flattening and decontextualization, both external, through stereotypes and expectations casted upon them, and internal, through divorced identities, citizenships, and relational roles. The immigrant experience, in which one is uprooted from a previous and ghostly lingering life, while the new life abroad is this overwhelming situation: an "it" that one doesn't know what it is nor how to be in it. Reciprocally, the immigrant figure has the same effect on nation-states; their in-between and partial adaptation/integration is an abject situation that constantly demands ongoing reassessments, confrontations, and conciliations of norms and tolerance.

Jasmine examines phantasmagoric images of "the good life", interrogates the immigrant's deterritorializing potentials, and teases out their psychic attachments to sites and strategies of being deliberately out of place. The project of the ordinary cosmopolite, or the transnational and conditionally mobile subjectivity, grapples with plurality, which is an inescapable means of survival. The tendency to do so will only grow over time, as the economy and globalization demand it. Wading through and navigating the multitude of affiliations and positionalities within power structures, plural loyalties is choosing to adapt to a complex model of identification, making our cruel and self-detrimental attachments to people, sites, objects, and promises survivable and sensible.

Acknowledgment

This is a thesis concerning, for a good part, bodies traversing between territories and the attachments they form along the way. Bodies are different: some are more frictionless than others, some more visible, some loud and some others are silent. Still some are not bodies at all.

The land, across different theories, is an indisputable basis of the legitimacy of a nation-state: is perceived to be intrinsic to the sovereignty of the state and is oftentimes used to convey the eternal status of the nation; this superimposition and predominance of state sovereignty is misleading. The land, which for the most part I'm conditioned to perceive as an urban melting pot for immigrants, the cosmopolis, which I have immigrated to, has preconditions. I acknowledge the land where I now reside and worked on this thesis: The area known as Tkaronto has been home to and cared for by the Anishinaabe Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

The process of writing this thesis towards my MFA fulfillment had been challenging; due to my own set of temperaments and life events during the time of writing, I found this experience isolating. Solidarity at times like these registers differently, and is unmistakable. If I learned anything that can be summarized in one sentence from this process, it would be that cosmopolitan democracy requires solidarity, which, more often than not, isn't entirely a matter of choice. My sincerest thanks to those who went out of their ways to accompany me, collaborate with me, and offer aid when I needed: close friend and confidant Enzo Sun; cohorts Jules D. Mills and Alessandra Abballe; kind and patient Dawn Burns, reliable fabricator and friend Giancarlo Alessandro Martinez Magarelli; and generous, trusting friends and mentors Chris Mendoza, Shannon Garden-Smith and Faraz Anoushapour. All of whom in each and their way, directly and indirectly directed and redirected me. I also thank my thesis advisors, Yam Lau, Jessica Campbell, and Yan Wu, from whom a tremendous amount of grace, patience, and encouragement is given, as well as Reza Nik who generously and tirelessly hosts my thesis exhibition in his studio.

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João Vasco Paiva

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1. Introduction

1.1. Plural Loyalties

In the context of the past few decades of globalization, cosmopolitanism is a contested notion. Major cities tend to be where this debated and nascent forms of cosmopolitanism are practiced, due to their job opportunities, diverse communities, and a presumed and relatively open attitude towards otherness. Upon this setting, increasing nomadism is taking place and becoming a norm, an impasse emerges: while the “deterritorialization of the site has produced libratory effects, displacing the strictures of fixed place-bound identities with the fluidity of a migratory model, introducing the possibilities for the production of multiple identities, allegiances, and meanings”, this “proliferation of discursive sites and ‘fictional’ selves” also is attached to the “actuality of places”¹.

The cosmopolite subjectivity, destabilized, is plural. They are conditionally mobile and invoke the substitute figure, which, in later chapters will be fleshed out through close reads of found images. At their best, it has the subversive potential of perturbing norms and territories, but most of the time, it is a “compensatory fantasy in response to the intensification of fragmentation and alienation wrought by a mobilized market economy.”²

Working with these concepts, the project of the ordinary cosmopolite grapples with plurality, which is an inescapable means of survival. Choosing to adapt to a complex model of loyalty makes our cruel and self-detrimental attachments to people,

¹Kwon, Miwon. “One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity”. In: *October*, Spring, 1997, Vol. 80. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

² *ibid.*

sites, objects, and promises survivable and sensible. Mediated through images, this body of work concerns the capacity to be plurally affiliated through art-making.

Cosmopolitanism is a contested notion since its conception in ancient Greece where Diogenes claimed to be a “citizen of the world” as a subversion to governing institutions. This claim was later picked up and used with varying agendas by other thinkers, notably Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome: his advocacy for cosmopolitanism culminated in his expansionist reign, which valued the power of military conquest and cultural assimilation. Aurelius’s use of the term is very different from Diogenes.³

In the contemporary, Diogenes’s term “refers to a vision of global democracy and world citizenship,” introduced and delineated by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, the term: (1). “Points to the possibilities for shaping new transnational frameworks for making links between social movements”; (2). “[advocates] for a non-communitarian, post-identity politics of overlapping interests and heterogeneous or hybrid publics to challenge conventional notions of belonging, identity, and citizenship”; and (3). Is used “descriptively to address certain socio-cultural processes or individual behaviours, values or dispositions manifesting a capacity to engage cultural multiplicity.”⁴

Interested in the extent of transnational mobility and the affects of transnational migration, I am tempted to advocate for what Craig Calhoun expressed in his essay “The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travellers”: “Borders should be abandoned as much as possible and left porous where they must be maintained.”⁵ As an artist, I think there are limits to the extent of art’s policy-intervening powers. However, I do think it is especially good at troubling the waters and stirring up sedimentations as well as communicating affective gestures; as will be discussed in later sections, the practice of cosmopolitan living/travelling takes ongoing negotiation and adaptation from many different communities and to different extents. There are “limits and dangers of relying

³ Cosmopolitanism, stanford.edu.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/#GreeRomaCosm>

⁴Vertovec, Steven and Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2002.

⁵ Conceiving cosmopolitanism. 102

on the nation-state to secure democracy in a world that is ever more dramatically organized across state borders”⁶, as will be addressed in the final section alongside the substitute figure, one of this paper’s major concerns is the transnational subjectivity’s passive reliance upon the state’s decision-making, which isn’t entirely a matter of choice, and fosters apathy. While this thesis testifies to the present predicaments for the transnational subject and nudges at where I hope for things to shift, I think the most effective way to realise more equitable transnational mobility and cosmopolitan democracy is through the assembly and implementation of multi-level, supranational governing bodies where not one body has absolute sovereignty over its subjects.

Building on Miwon Kwon’s points made in essay “One Place After Another”: cosmopolitanism and this mode of nomadism brought forth by art-making, while it does produce “liberatory effects” and displaces “the strictures of fixed place-bound identities with the fluidity”, “[introducing] the possibilities for the production of multiple identities, allegiances, and meanings”, our identities, fictional selves, fantasies of the good life is also cruelly bound and psychically and habitually attached to, and continuously informed by the “actuality of places”(kwon, 109)⁷, out of a need for survival. While cosmopolitanism’s advocates argue for a loosening and destabilization of nation-state, this runs the risk of rendering it a “delusional alibi for short attention spans, reinforcing the ideology of the new [...], and the glamourization of the trickster ethos that is in fact a reprisal of the ideology of ‘freedom of choice’—the choice to forget, the choice to reinvent, the choice to fictionalize, the choice to belong everywhere, anywhere, and nowhere. The choice [that] does not belong to everyone equally.”⁸ Indeed, cosmopolitanism is nowadays more closely associated with the alcoholic beverage that was frequently featured in *Sex and the City*, the urban dwelling glitterati

⁶Vertovec, Steven and Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2002. p.89.

⁷Kwon, Miwon. “One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity”. In: *October*, Spring, 1997, Vol. 80. Massachusetts: The MIT Press. p.109.

⁸ *ibid*

and ambitious careerists, than it is with transnational and conditionally mobile subjects' destabilizing potentials — a meme-fied shorthand of the “glibly decorative”⁹.

1.2. A Personal Anecdote

Father did not come back. Nor did he go anywhere, really. He just rowed and floated across and around, out there in the river. Everyone was appalled. What had never happened, what could not possibly happen, was happening.

—The Third Bank of the River, João Guimarães Rosa

The difficulties in approaching cosmopolitanism comprehensively are many; however, even within the Chinese transnational immigrant demographic, each person has different experiences, which leads to working from different sets of facts. The protean state and trajectories of cosmopolitan futures are deeply rooted in each person's identities and politics.

In a video chat with my mother, I expressed that I potentially want to live part-time in Nanjing and part-time in Toronto, and have plans to work around permanent residency requirements/passport expiration risks by obtaining a Taiwanese passport via getting married to my roommate who is a Taiwanese citizen (a lengthy operation that involves sacrifice on all parties involved. My diasporic friends and I are constantly scheming for mobility; for some, a pretend lesbian marriage, for another, is staying married to an ex-partner on paper, spending years alone in some European city to fulfill PR requirements while heartbroken and unresolved. For some others still, it's an elaborate “polyamory” marriage/divorce schedule projecting 10 years into the future with multiple different trusted players, assuming everyone won't change their minds about needing mobility. That's all we talk about sometimes. That's as far as we can

⁹Frampton, Kenneth. “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance”. In: *Postmodernism: A Reader*. London: Routledge. 1993. p.21.

glimpse into the future and feel relief sometimes: just a few more years of this sham of an arrangement ... then I will be able to go wherever I want to go and finally get on with my life.) My mother paused, then said with an incredulous and slightly appalled tone: “it sounds. Like you want to have your cake and eat it too.”

Of course I do!

Why else would I want the cake to begin with? Didn't she feel somewhat similar when she sent/jettisoned me out to a private boarding school for formative, well-rounded life experiences, or applied for PR in hopes of living a different life with different politics and choices, if not better, just different? Didn't she also yearn for people unmet and places unseen, and even having the chance to integrate into another way of living? Why send me out here all alone at 12 years old in the first place?

There is a sense of shame and guilt for wanting to be mobile when I am travelling at the expense of my parents' limited mobility, tied down by citizenship, occupations, political commitments and familial responsibilities. But wanting to be mobile doesn't necessarily point to being mercurial or frivolous. There is a profound restlessness and yearning in 1.5/first gen international students/immigrants that is perhaps too benign to mention yet too prevalent to ignore. On the Chinese social media platform Rednotes, one user posts a Reddit-like thread: (trans.) “Does any other international student feel this irredeemable split as I do?” and the responses are overwhelmingly affirmative: most feel an irreconcilability of work/life/family/friends because one has to spend a long period at one place without important aspects (such as physical proximity to family, a fulfilling career, access to diverse communities) that make up a healthy life, a “good life”.

Maybe the class-blind-fever-dream-compulsory-happy-ending scenario of *Barbie in Princess and the Pauper*¹⁰ doesn't fully apply (or applies, but in a naive and

¹⁰ Barbie in Princess and the Pauper, an animated movie to advertise mattel barbie dolls. The plot is an adaptation of Mark Twain's The Prince and the Pauper; which is a critique

out-of-touch way), but still I am drawn to relate to the unapologetic naiveté of one of its musical members: “There is somewhere we’d rather be, somewhere that’s ours, somewhere our dreams come true, yes I am a girl like you.” I am not a girl like Barbie and a princess is not like a pauper. But there is a “we” who wants to be somewhere that’s “ours”: people want cakes — different cakes, but cakes nonetheless. That is to say, how each diasporic person’s relationship with mobility, limitations of said mobility, and having it as a means to which ends would differ, but there is a collective yearning for mobility on an immediate and individual level. To begin fleshing out where political cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan democracy can go on the level of law and policy interventions, these individual desires and sets of experiences need to each be accounted for and examined in detail. Berlant addresses this condition beautifully, as follows: “lives are singular; people make mistakes, are inconsistent, cruel, and kind; and accidents happen. ... remediate singularities into cases of non-universal but general abstraction, providing narrative scenarios of how people learn to identify, manage, and maintain the hazy luminosity of [my] attachment to being x and having x, given that their attachments were promises and not possessions after all.”¹¹

of class. Despite its shortcomings and baby pink delirium; the movie does manage to be surprisingly subversive in some aspects, namely queer issues.

¹¹Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011. p.44.

2. Found Image Cold Case 1

The Missing Figure in the Pristine Bathroom Rendering of 432 Park Avenue, New York

Listen to me: get out of here and move forward. This never happened. It will shock you how much this never happened.

—Don Draper to Peggy Olson, *Mad Man*

Live your life before it's over

Live your second life before your first one's over

—A.G. Cook, *Jumper*



Fig. 1, 432 Park Avenue, original rendering of a bathroom



Fig. 2, the same bathroom rendering appropriated by the artist

2.1. Picture This

“He understood mystery as a conversation — a collision of differences, interpretations, perspectives. Not a message sent down from an all-knowing source. ... A mystery leaves room for other people to get in there. It is two-way communication.”

—Kyle MacLachlan, *How David Lynch Invented Me*

A cold case is an unresolved investigation, usually of a crime, that can be opened up at any time when new evidence or testimonies surface; that is to say, a cold case is a situation, as Lauren Berlant puts it: “a situation is a state of things in which something that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life. It is a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness, that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event.”¹² In the same text she comparatively mentions Alain Badiou’s “event”, which implies a difficulty of commitment and agency: “people can’t have fidelity to a ‘situation’ because they don’t know what it is or how to be in it... the event is the element in the situation that elaborates the potential good in a radical break, and the anti-sovereign effect of the situation that undoes the subject and general sureties threatens ethical action.”¹³

This theorization is illustrative of the immigrant experience: one is uprooted from a previous and ghostly lingering life, while the new life abroad is this overwhelming “it” that one doesn’t know what it is nor how to be in it. And it goes both ways: the immigrant figure has the same effect on nation-states; their in-between and partial adaptation/integration is an abject situation that constantly demands ongoing reassessments, confrontations, and conciliations of norms and tolerance in the public sphere.

¹²Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011.

¹³ Ibid, p.5.

My relationship with images, more specifically found images, is in line with this theorization; the immigrant's psyche is marked by gestures of flattening and decontextualization, both external, through stereotypes and expectations casted upon them, and internal, through divorced identities, citizenships, and relational roles. Found images are sense-making mediators for narratives that share some qualities with the immigrant psyche. Most of the time their truths (What is it? What am I looking at? How did it come to be?) can only be revealed to a limited extent; it strays and takes on a life of its own, but conditionally; it is a mystery understood as a conversation, depending on the viewer's intervention, each interaction with a found image is a situation and a commitment, suspended by uncertainties and dead-ends.

As I proposed in earlier paragraphs, plural loyalties and fidelities can and should be considered. In fact, many nation-states, such as Canada and the United States, as well as the supranational structure of the European Union, practice this plural loyalty. The issue is that this practice is not evenly distributed across the globe, which causes some identities to travel with less friction than others, such as Asian and African nationals. This disparity in mobility works in conjunction with other inequalities, such as labour and income, where manufacturing jobs are relocated to less mobile workers in the global south who earn significantly lower wages than their counterparts in the global north. In other words, this keeps undesirable and immobile bodies in their positions, while the capital generated by these individuals fuels even greater mobility for those who already possess it.

Found image as an artistic practice then, in this sense, is a way to tease out alternative forms of loyalty permitted to be plural through repetition, multiplication, and appropriation, and a practice of self-sovereignty, for the immobile or conditionally mobile. Each found image is a cold case, a mystery, opening up insights to an abject situation—there is no “message sent down from an all-knowing source”¹⁴—subjected to speculations and changing verdicts, the policy-making agency is partly in you and me: the interveners.

¹⁴ MacLachlan, Kyle. “How David Lynch Invented Me.” New York: The New York Times. 2025.

2.2. Nation-State?



Fig.3, one of the murals in the residential complex. This particular one is a replica of an landscape scroll depicting Nanjing's past urban forms.

According to Ai Weiwei the occupation of “artist” is a privileged one because it isn't a job; it is difficult to make sustainable income and justify, and in this difficulty can one take a step back from predominant frameworks and values to exercise individual agency/opinion. Ai is known for his adamant advocacy for free speech and the

consequences of his interventions—exiled from China, he currently resides in Portugal and travels back and forth between Montemor-o-Novo, Berlin, and Cambridge. Ai’s predicament is an extreme example of conditional mobility. This conditional mobility is especially common, to different extents, in Chinese international students/immigrants, due to China’s prohibition on dual citizenship and the mutual exclusivity said citizenship shares with other nation-state borders.

Post-WWII China experienced tremendous economic reform and development, while the country slowly recognizes and heals from the psychic wound of the Century of Humiliation following the first Opium War, in 1839. My immediate family: my grandparents and my parents, are the two generations that witnessed and were marred by decades of rapid and traumatic change: changes of policy, attitude, and lifestyle; without getting into specifics, events such as the Cultural Revolution and the June 4th Incident had made them if not paranoiac, then extremely cautious. One of the primary reasons why they decided to obtain Canadian permanent residency, with hopes of eventual naturalization for me, is freedom of speech and relative democracy. That is to say: Ai Wei Wei’s predicament is their worst nightmare. This is the conditional Freedom of the Chinese Transnational Subject: China’s apparent possessiveness of its subjects makes citizenship, to use scholar Charlotte Brooks’s words, a matter of “choice and coercion”¹⁵.

A nation-state, as the term suggests, has two major components. First, the nation: according to Steven Grosby, is “a community of kinship, specifically a bounded, territorially extensive, temporally deep community of nativity”¹⁶; it connotes comradery and commonality in ethnicity, ideals, and lineage between its subjects. On the other hand, is the state, which is the legal, administrative, governing agency, and according to Max Weber, “the only human community that (successfully) claims a monopoly of

¹⁵ Brooks, Charlotte. *By Choice and Coercion: The Problem of Dual Citizenship in Modern China*. YouTube. Uploaded by Global Cornell. September 2nd, 2022. www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfoWvjHLJb4.

¹⁶ Vertovec, Steven and Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2002.

legitimate physical violence for itself, within a certain geographical territory”¹⁷. The conflation of these two terms is what we understand as modern nation-states, or countries, which grant citizenships. The state leans on people’s identifications with their immediate and intermediary communities, vernacular cultures, and customs to incite/coerce loyalty, to ends ranging from cooperating with nationwide agendas such as energy preservation, to volunteering in war.

As Miwon Kwon proposes, the logic of the site being “bound to the physical and empirical realities of a place” is “if not ideologically suspect”, and also “often seems out of synch with the prevalent description of contemporary life as a network of unanchored flows.” (108, kwon) This is the context in which “people would come... to enjoy multiple citizenships—political membership in the diverse political communities which significantly [affect] them. They would be citizens of their immediate political communities, and of the wider regional and global networks which impacted their lives. Though unclear is how this might work in practice, this challenge to the presumption of nationality as the basis for citizenship is one of the most important contributions of cosmopolitanism”¹⁸

The apartment complex where I grew up in Nanjing, China, is a thoroughly Corbusian project. Completed in the early 2000s, the complex consists of twelve pairs of 20-storey-tall, mid-rise residential buildings raised on concrete stilts, clad in marble panels, with a two-tiered garden running through and connecting the buildings. By being right beside a lake, apartment units each frame an unobstructed view, with the rest of the city just within reach yet not too close. There are moments of rupture amidst this modernist image though: on the ground level of each building, the façades are adorned with murals commemorating distant pasts of the Chinese nation: bas-relief panels of fantastic creatures from folklores, bronze plaques depicting older maps of Nanjing, ceramic tile pastiche signalling to hands of artisans and techniques exclusive to the vernacular, and much more. (for example, see fig. 3)

¹⁷ibid

¹⁸Vertovec, Steven and Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2002. p.94.

Outside, the fences of the residential complex are plastered with CCP slogans which are constantly being renewed and maintained. Though they seem divorced from and are non-sequiturs to the 5000 years of the cultural legacy of the nation, the very fact that I felt a sense of belonging and identification with the histories the murals were pointing to the nation and state working hand in hand. The murals described here are site-specific, reactionary gestures implemented to “‘cultivate’ what is presumed to be there already rather than generative of new identities and histories.”¹⁹ They are “obstinate reminders of the contingent circumstances by which some things endure while others perish.”²⁰

In my work *Ellipses (5000 years)*²¹, graphite tracings of the clay casts produced from these murals are arranged on a long stretch of tracing paper, resembling the punctuation mark of ellipses points, which are used to indicate omissions of content, often words that can be inferred to through contextual clues, as well as pauses, or things left unsaid. Sprawling across the ground, the decontextualized and fragmented mural replicas (some of which were city maps erected upright) are brought to the horizontal, forging an immediacy with land which is the basis of the fiction that is cartography. “Art is Map, striving to calculate the world picture on one continuous surface in two dimensions...man conjures restlessly to break up [this] surface...”²²(Bhabha, 236) The translucent tracing paper obfuscates the materiality of the concrete upon which one’s body walks, and heightens the tactility of the superimposition of built environments, resisting and muddling the given-ness of the ground and one’s self-sovereignty; the texture of the graphite tracing and wrinkly tracing paper, pointing to absent referents (in this case, the clay casts) and artifacts that optimistically hold promises of the collective distant past, invokes aesthetic qualities of an archeological

¹⁹Kwon, Miwon. “One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity”. In: *October*, Spring, 1997, Vol. 80. Massachusetts: The MIT Press. p. 108.

²⁰Balsom, Erika. “Against the Novelty of New Media: The Resuscitation of the Authentic.” In: *Authenticity? Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-Digital Age*. Utrecht: Valiz. 2016. p.95.

²¹ *Ellipses (5000 Years)*, 2025. For details please see List of Artworks.

²² Bhabha, Homi k. . “Double Visions: Circa 1492”. In: *Art Forum*, January 1992, Vol. 30, No. 5. 1992. p.236.

study, and a suspect yearning to cling, settle, and forge attachments with the obscured land.

The graphite tracings connect to and represent an absent history that isn't lived by the spectator. Considering Berlant's theorization, these serve as mediators of optimism that "promises to guarantee the [endurance, survival, and flourishing] of something." In the case of the murals, this relates to the secure bond forged between the nation-state and its subjects: "the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it."²³

Littered with punctuation marks made of artifacts that are decidedly out of place, patches of national territory (in that some of the murals are elaborate and monumental maps) in the form of a lingering graphite ghost on foreign land, which has its own settler-colonial histories; the work, which is fiction upon fiction upon fiction²⁴, instills discordance: a failure to fully identify with and commit to any singular, fully fleshed out social roles and contexts, and a paralyzing hesitance in situating one's own traversing body amidst this landscape.

2.3. All I Want is a Room with a View

The image (fig.1) that precedes this section is of a room with a view. To be more precise, a bathroom with a specific view overlooking the soon-to-be-trumped Chrysler and Empire State Building. Made to attract potential buyers and developers alike, this image comes from a set of architectural renderings by Rafael Viñoly. 432 Park Avenue is an ultra-tall, ultra-thin residential skyscraper completed in 2015; its buyers include Jennifer Lopez and A-Rod²⁵.

²³Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011. p.48.

²⁴ Cartography is fiction making. "While the post Columbian maps of the world make their predecessors obsolete, works of art are always additive." bhabha, 237. For elaboration please refer to section 3.2.

²⁵ J-Lo and A-Rod sold the property after not even a year of purchasing, it is not an uncommon fate for units in this gimmicky property.

<https://www.6sqft.com/jennifer-lopez-and-a-rod-find-a-buyer-for-their-short-lived-432-park-pad/>

432 Park Avenue implicates the viewer into the most private element of this residential project; a bathroom. Its one-point perspective implies one singular viewer and a coveted in-ness. It is at once an invitation to a could-be-yours future; albeit singular and pre-determined. To paraphrase Radiohead's "No Surprises": "They [do] speak for us". It is a demand of witnesses, compulsory participation, and a proposition of fantasy and an aspirational, unmistakably individualist, neoliberal, lifestyle for the collective consciousness, normalized as the convention.

Experiencing the environment by proxy, the substitutable viewer has a limited tactile range, missing touch, sound, smell and taste from the render. This is the space-time of the impasse: suspended between a never-was and a hesitant yet-to-come, desire is tainted as grayscale. In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant elaborates on the term "impasse", which in the context of her theorization is:

"A stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event. ... for many now, living in an impasse would be an aspiration, as the traditional infrastructures for reproducing life—at work, in intimacy, politically—are crumbling at a threatening pace."²⁶ (pp. 4-5)

In this image of rendered pristine, aspirational impasse, one major function of the bathroom is omitted: there is no toilet in sight. Here we can infer an overcompensatory avoidance of incontinence. Incontinence "undermines...the sovereignty of the individual", or, more precisely, is the symptom of the lack of sovereignty of the individual, "the beloved Western conceit: it reminds us that we all exist within a broader field. [...] This invokes a terror of the social, and of the forms of

²⁶Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011. pp.4-5.

potential power and abuse embedded in interpersonal fields.” moreover it is a “disconcerting truth” about power itself: “it always already acts at a distance. It resists resolution into bodies, buildings, and other territorial envelopes.”²⁷ In the case of incontinence, “the body opens where it should not, the incontinent object releases that which should stay inside. It is a form of physical deviance in which bodies resist enclosure. The interior refuses to remain so; private matter becomes public”.²⁸

Bathroom designs and their representations are one of incontinence’s sublimated infrastructural manifestations. As Žižek had discussed, ideology shows up in and is at work on an integrated, ordinary logic. As a spatial enclosure, “Bounded entities and limit conditions—people, states, and institutions—figures centrally in this imaginary.”²⁹ Excrement and other bodily discharges associated with the bathroom prove crises to neo-liberal delusions of omnipotence: when one looks at one’s own excrement and its affective foul smell, one is confronted with the uncanny, abject body-temperature degenerate matter, and the death and decay that sustains the living body, which is itself decaying. In the contemporary sleek marble-clad bathroom, along with the accelerated disappearance of excrements, is the banishment of ritual and cognizance of the sacrifice of the other.

Simultaneously, a specific mode of life-affirming and life-multiplying gestures by way of image-making is evident. The bathroom is an image-making engine: the window that frames territorial pseudo-ownership and omnipotence³⁰, the smooth tiles that reject grime and germ infestation, the faucets out of which cleansing water flow and reflect, the soaps caress the contour of the body, and the mirror that is absolutely faithful in witness and affirming one’s presence (which in the 342 Park Ave, rendering, is

²⁷Camroff, Joshua and Ong Ker-Shing. *Horror in Architecture: The Reanimated Edition*. Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press. 2013. p.99.

²⁸ Camroff, Joshua and Ong Ker-Shing. *Horror in Architecture: The Reanimated Edition*. Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press. 2013. p.87.

²⁹Camroff, Joshua and Ong Ker-Shing. *Horror in Architecture: The Reanimated Edition*. Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press. 2013.

³⁰ The same as Louis XVI’s Versailles: the windows frame an extending garden stretching and disappearing into the horizon; this visual strategy implies for the viewer that the bounds of his reign is so extensive, it goes “as far as the eye can see”.

conveniently just out of frame: there cannot be a representation of the imaginary viewer). An overlapping and splicing engine prone to collapse, but affirmative nonetheless.

The negation of the body's waste also negates the body's life. This representation becomes a complete image in which the spectator's eyes are the privileged and isolated physicality in the exchange. The liminal stance of this spectatorship is a paralyzing straddling between life-ward aspirations (mirrors and skin care routines/rituals, etc.) and death-ward passivity (self-administered disappearance of sacrifice), resulting in inactivity and a clumsy desiring for the sake of desiring, in which "people do live in... just not very well,"³¹ as Berlant contemplated about slow death. All there is left is to answer to the proposition and imperative of the image-driven and consumed society: picture this.

According to Berlant, Foucault's biopower is the "power to make something live or to let it die, the power to regularize life, the authority to force living not just to happen but to endure and appear in particular ways.", a sovereign agency under a regime of biopower is "where living increasingly becomes a scene of the administration, discipline, and calibration of what constitutes health."³² "Modern buildings, like modern subjects, thus became invested with a secretive hinterland"—these recesses and their contents "stand in obscene and dangerous contrast to bourgeois architecture and its order of self-representation. The unspeakable 'truth' of the respectable façade or interior is that which is concealed in these cavities. ... 'better' architecture has been ... skillful in the attempt to hide such dark matter. But it has everywhere given rise to a crisis of concealment."³³ Evidently in Viñoly Architect's original rendering is one of the strategies used to counter this crisis, theorized by Ong and Camroff—disappearance: "There are no toilets in the realm of ideas. Ducting would imply an embarrassing

³¹Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011. p.119.

³²Ibid. p.97.

³³Camroff, Joshua and Ong Ker-Shing. *Horror in Architecture: The Reanimated Edition*. Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press. 2013. p.89.

physicality, out of place in such a rarefied ether.”³⁴ In the center of the rendering is a pristine ceramic bathtub smoothed of all corners, emphasizing and prioritizing cleansing over any other bodily functions taking place in the bathroom, namely discharging. In my appropriate version of the rendering (fig.2) which is part of the work *Picture This*³⁵, the original rendering is turned to grayscale and stretched out to 5’6”, which is my height: a normative and standardized female height—a median datum on the bell curve, contributing to the calculation of the average and universal designs. The image, printed on mylar, is accompanied by two pearlescent rubber sheets, sprawling the floor: the sleek, glistening blue-black of curtain walls of skyscrapers and the skyline illuminated by twinkling urban light pollution tints the rubber sheets, one laying flat, while the other languidly slouching against the wall, just below the exposed ducting of power outlet, stages a dramatic and baroque fold. On them, rectangle indents—which take up the same placement as the window of the distorted render—frame the truism-like, propositional phrase “PICTURE THIS”, juxtaposed against the appropriated image demanding the viewer to imagine, picture, and desire, only to have the anticipated desirable image simultaneously presented and the fantasy of a good life immediately satiated by proxy. All together, the mylar print of the distorted bathroom and the rubber sheets echo back and forth, constructing an congested and ill-circulated desire fulfillment circuit; staging the scene of exhaustion and resignation.

In this distortion the image gives into the capitalistic urge to be tall and thin, to fulfill the land value optimizing instrument role of “the free-standing highrise”. We are reminded that “so many of the normative and singular objects made available for investing in the world are themselves threats to both the energy and the fantasy of ongoingness..”³⁶ In this distorsion the tub becomes less legible and instead resembles a toilet; “by staging the impasse in which breakdown does its work on suspending the rules and norms of the world,” the appropriation of the rendering pays “attention to the built and affective infrastructure of the ordinary, and how to encounter what happens

³⁴Ibid, p.91.

³⁵ *Picture This*, 2025. Jasmine Yangqingqing Yu. see List of Works for details.

³⁶ Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011. p.48.

when infrastructural stress produces a dramatic tableau.”³⁷ The elongation of the image is subtle. That is, the viewer might not detect this operation immediately. The distortion is covertly there. The elongation simply acknowledges or restores its disquietude of the original: a dissimulation of the sinister disturbance of a top-down image of the aspirational good life.

³⁷ Ibid. p.49.

3. Found Image Cold Case 2

A distorted reflection of Joao Vasco Paiva's Mausoleum, which is a Reiteration of Adolf Loos's Unrealised Mausoleum, as seen from a discarded mirror ball just outside of Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing

A catoptric element, capable of reflecting a semiotic element existing independently of it (without modifying it), cannot, in turn, be reflected by it. The semiotic element can only generalize it, make it a genus, a scheme, a concept, pure content. ... There comes a time when one has to make up one's mind and choose which side one is on. The catoptric universe is a reality which can give the impression of virtuality, whereas the semiotic universe is a virtuality which can give the impression of reality.

—Mirrors, Umberto Eco, semiotics and the philosophy of language



Fig.4. The Ambassadors (2025). Jasmine Yangqingqing Yu



Fig. 5. *Mausoleum in situ at Sifang Museum (2015).*
João Vasco Paiva

3.1. Insomnia

The film photo, fig.3, was taken during the summer of 2020, the year of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which night was day and operating as proxies through Zoom became a necessity for survival. This photo is a distorted representation of Joao Vasco Paiva's Mausoleum, which is an iteration of Loos' Mausoleum, seen reflected from the surface of a discarded mirror ball. Through chance encounters, and apropos of both projects' intentions, a cross was conjured.

I spent the years of the pandemic in Nanjing China with my family while attending university in Toronto—remotely—as how everything was. The pandemic heightened the disjuncture of global time and the crisis of sleep under 24/7 capitalism; group projects consisted of glitchy calls with people whose minds were scattered in different places and states, my 2 am, your 2 pm, and someone else's lunch break were all happening at the same time. Under these conditions, insomnia cases skyrocketed. “There are ... very few significant interludes of human existence (with the colossal exception of sleep) that have now been penetrated and taken over as work time, consumption time, or marketing time.”³⁸ but facing other potential losses (jobs, friends, profit, lives..), sleep was easily compromisable.

For theorist Jonathan Crary, “Sleep poses the idea of a human need and interval of time that cannot be colonized and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability, and thus remains an incongruous anomaly and site of crisis in the global present ... there is an erosion of sleep now everywhere, given the immensity of what is at stake economically. ...”³⁹

Insomnia for philosopher Immanuel Levinas is:

³⁸Crary, Jonathan. *24/7: Late Capitalism and Ends of Sleep*. London: Verso. 2013. p.15.

³⁹Ibid. p.19.

A way of imagining the extreme difficulty of individual responsibility in the face of the catastrophes of our era. Part of the modernized world we inhabit is the ubiquitous visibility of useless violence and the human suffering it causes. This visibility, in all its mixed forms, is a glare ought to thoroughly disturb any complacency, that ought to preclude the restful unmindfulness of sleep. Insomnia corresponds to the necessity of vigilance, to a refusal to overlook the horror and injustice that pervades the world. It is the disquiet of the effort to avoid inattention to the torment of the other. But its disquiet is also the frustrating inefficiency of an ethic of watchfulness; ... it is neither in public nor fully private, For Levinas, insomnia always hovers between a self-absorption and a radical depersonalization; it does not exclude a concern for the other, but it provides no clear sense of a space for the other's presence." In conclusion Crary notes, "this is the near impossibility of living humanely."⁴⁰

A mirror ball, also known as a disco ball, is usually used in nightclubs to refract light. During the years of confinement and disturbed sleep the collective generated fantasies of gathering and alternative ways to be and emerge together. Seeing the discarded mirror ball in the outskirts of town in daylight was as if seeing an omen, an uncanny and deliberate out-of-place-ness. Its mirror pieces produce unfaithful indexes of referents. Upon this spherical interface, delirious representations emerge. As I looked at it a mutilated reflection followed my every move, I had become a disfigured, alien other that I still could identify with, and the green of grass, and blue of sky in this ecstatic frenzy transformed the sphere into a globe. The spectator on the other side of the mirror had become the third kind of close encounter, "the catoptric universe is a reality which can give the impression of virtuality".

3.2. The Ambassadors

⁴⁰Crary, Jonathan. *24/7: Late Capitalism and Ends of Sleep*. London: Verso. 2013.

In this image of a reiterated mausoleum reflected upon a mirror ball, one is confronted with such partial attention and half-agency to the Other. Vasco's work, which is part of Sifang Museum's permanent collection, is exhibited in the museum's surrounding architecture park, a complex consisting of uninhibited buildings designed by international architects—a Russian-doll-like curatorial logic: container as objects of display, form as content; the complex itself is a slew of collector items. The complex is ticketed, making the Mausoleum a strange, semi-public art installation. His reiteration of Loos's mausoleum, which is the very emblem of death as monument, is constructed from resin casts of styrofoam shipping containers ubiquitously seen circulating in Hong Kong, where the artist is based. Instead of the precious and permanent stones implied by Loos's design which was never realised (a past that never was), this built-to-scale reiteration took on another persistent but more commonplace material, styrofoam by proxy of resin, presumably for primarily structural support reasons. This is where Death and its monumentality stands in the contemporary: piled together in a clumsy, wobbly and seemingly provisional manner, commercial objects in transit and mobilized forgeries are circulated by economic need on a monumental scale. Notably, Vasco's positionality as an artist is grounded in precisely such circulation: Portuguese by nationality and based in Hong Kong, he is informed by transnational movements and urban infrastructure.

The catoptric theatre, staged with the hyperreal mausoleum which is a reiterating referent of a precedent that never was, the mass-producible mirror ball which is a copy-producing copy, and the triangulating camera lens insisting on the actuality and faithfulness of the event, induces a lifetime—the good life where labour supposedly earns a proportionate amount of income to afford material things, and wrong-doings are proportionately punished—followed by a compulsive dogmatic death which is promised by the hyperreal mausoleum whose reflection generated the cross of Jesus Christ), by ways of zig-zagging, deterritorializing, dionysian frenzy, flashing before my eyes as if a near-death experience.

Cartography more often than not illustrates the insistence and persistence of domination. Seen here on the disco ball, is a possible theory of cultural difference in the

form of the “iconography of the glorious globe”⁴¹, a post-colonial parody and precession of the Nuremberg map that synergized with European imperialist efforts.

And, at the centre of it, a centrality under guise, dissimulating the fact that the mausoleum with a compulsory missionary message could only be seen because the camera is already placed as displaced, and the interface of the mirrors themselves are anamorphic agents; this is a cultural landscape whose spectatorship rigged by default: here is an absolute icon of a distorted mirror image “never [exchangeable] with the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference,” in obfuscation a sign is conjured by chance, apparitions lurk in the catoptric theatre.

The image-making apparatus itself obfuscates, resulting in a reality that gives an impression of virtuality upon distorted and unfaithful deliverance; this is the logic of prolificity: it is not that authenticity and the Real facing disillusionment or simulacrum’s pervasive negation, it is the making of a complex and plural loyalty pieced together by multiple facets and images upon a curved circumference that commits to performance. This is the precession of authenticity: “multiple identities, allegiances, and meanings, based not on normative conformities but on the non-rational convergences forged by chance encounters and circumstances.”⁴²

Returning to the imposter center of the image, looking at the reconfigured mausoleum again: “death and alienation at the very heart of Discovery Pride ... ‘the union of peoples, therefore, meant a union of germs, as death danced its macabre dance around the globe.’” Hans Holbein the Younger’s *The Ambassadors* is a previous precession of the tableau of “transformations in esthetic value and cultural practice that

⁴¹Bhabha, Homi k. . “Double Visions: Circa 1492”. In: *Art Forum*, January 1992, Vol. 30, No. 5. 1992.

⁴²Kwon, Miwon. “One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity”. In: *October*, Spring, 1997, Vol. 80. Massachusetts: The MIT Press. p.109.

are produced through histories and broader patterns of cultural conflict, appropriation, and resistance to domination.”⁴³

Barthes writes: “Earlier societies managed so that memory, the substitute for life, was eternal and that at least the thing which spoke Death should itself be immortal: this was the Monument. But by making the (mortal) photograph into the general and somehow natural witness of ‘what has been,’ modern society has renounced the Monument.”⁴⁴ The anamorphic, debased and digitized mausoleum stands in place for a bygone and forsaken monument. Death, becoming less and less monumental as substitutes proliferate, ceases providing perspective for the living, and is facing the slow disappearance of tactility, something to grab on, to hold close, to disintegrate with. The loss of tactility through substitution disavows its immediacy and attachments of agency: power acts from a distance.

⁴³Bhabha, Homi k. . “Double Visions: Circa 1492”. In: *Art Forum*, January 1992, Vol. 30, No. 5. 1992.

⁴⁴ Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. Paris: Gallimard. 1980. p.93.

4. Found Image Cold Case 3

Dove Dead in Venetian Lagoon

Look closely - ever noticed you're carrying a dove? The dove hologram took flight on Visa cards in 1978 as a security measure against fraud, and was chosen as a symbol of Visa's goal of being accepted everywhere.

—Visa's post on Facebook

If you catch me at the border, I got visas in my name

If you come around here, I make them all day

I get one done in a second if you wait

—M.I.A. Paper Planes



Fig.6. Image stills of a dead dove floating in Venetian lagoon, organized in 3X3 grids, ordered from left to right and top to bottom

4.1. Ever Notice You are Carrying a Dove?

Visa is a collapsed word that operates through plural loyalties. Deriving from the Latin word “videre” which means to see, the noun privileges the vision of a document that allows for border crossing and state-entry. Equally identifiable by the word is the electronic payment network company, whose credit cards have become synonymous with the border entry-granting document, and in itself, to a large extent, has become a border entry-granting document. “Capital is becoming more and more cosmopolitan”⁴⁵, and “capitalist cosmopolitans have indeed traversed the globe, from early modern merchants to today’s world bank officials and venture capitalists. They have forged relations that cross the borders of nation-states. But they have also relied on states and a global order to maintain property rights and other conditions of production and trade.” (103)

The coevolution between pigeons and humans is a clumsy story full of disavowals; the release dove, or the pure white dove, is a variety intentionally bred for their aesthetic qualities and conventionalized symbolisms in both religious and secular senses, such as peace, purity and everlasting love.

To get a satisfactory photo for the visa brand, the imaging process involved tying the dove so it could not land and would remain in flight for a long stretch of time. In Wong Kar Wai’s “Days of Being Wild”, a story of a legless bird drives the story and the rootless protagonist Yuddy’s narration. The film narrates the confusions and melancholies of mis-belonging during a transitional conjecture of political landscapes⁴⁶. This is the maddening restlessness symptomatic of diasporic psychics. Diaspora, which etymologically traces to Greek words “dia” which means across, and “speirein” meaning scatter, shares roots with the word “diaper”, the cloth that conciliates the body’s base

⁴⁵Vertovec, Steven and Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2002. p.102.

⁴⁶ Kar Wai, Wong. *Days of Being Wild*. In-Gear Film. 1990.

incontinence⁴⁷; shares this scummy lack of sovereignty over one's own body with the pigeons. A prominent element of this anecdote is conditional mobility or contingent landing permission granted to the emblem of the cosmopolitan figure and the blatant violence enacted upon said other.

As an authentication technology, the image of the leg-tied dove proliferated as a hologram, partially reanimated through optical beams, suffering from the same conditional mobility as its referent. This is an icon of peace granted by purchasing power in Liberal Universalism.

“The space of exchange would make breathing space, and breathing space is what the capitalist subject, in all of her ambition, is trying to attain—the good life... But what usually gets returned in the exchange of desire embedded in things is merely, disappointingly, a brief episode, often with a thing as a memento of the memory and not the actualization of desire. In ‘exchange value’ the money form in particular reveals in-kind reciprocity as a mirage...”.⁴⁸

4.2. Bona Fide Hustler

I found myself staring at a dead dove floating in lagoon water in Venice during the summer of 2022. After graduating from undergrad I was hit with housing insecurity and an intercontinental break-up, on top of an existential crisis: to be an artist or not to be? In between places and plans, with limited and conditional mobility — I had no place to stay long term in Toronto, I didn't want to go to the New Jerseyan suburbs to stay

⁴⁷ The garment invokes debasement of any wearer who is not a baby: incontinence points to an “inability to enforce bodily order... the breach is a threshold of momentous, and possibly dangerous, agency” (87, Camroff and Ong) in this read it is clear that this scummy lack of sovereignty is underpinned with subversive potentials to a point of being threatening: “...as the body opens where it should not, the incontinent object releases that which should stay inside. It is a form of physical deviance in which bodies resist enclosure. The interior refuses to remain so; private matter becomes public.” (87) Bathroom designs and their representations are one of its sublimated infrastructural manifestations, for elaboration, see section 2.4.

⁴⁸Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011.

with my relatives, and flying back to Nanjing and crying about it at home didn't feel like an option — I did what a cosmopolite with spending power (to a certain extent) would do: I gallivanted through Europe with my mother's money. The two months were a whirlwind of fast-paced event and party going, half-sincere talks of collaborative practices, continental friendship forging and opening hopping; for a lost girl this combination left a hazy impression about my positionality—as soon as I made it past the Schengen zone border and was armed with fluent English, the awesome and insurmountable borders I got visas (at great emotional and monetary cost) for dissipated. The globe shrunk, not only because now I can travel more frictionlessly, but also because for a hungry, impressionable aspirational artist, it was hard to remember other things are happening outside of the “euro-central” even though everything I've learned was in effort of cautioning me against this cognitive distortion. The vortex of a whirlwind can seem so still while everything around it is ungrounded and spins out of control. “Cosmopolitanism and democracy have both been intertwined with capitalism and Western hegemony. If cosmopolitan democracy is to flourish and be fully open to human beings of diverse circumstances and identities, then it needs to disentangle itself from neo-liberal capitalism.”⁴⁹“Yet they—we—imagine the world from the vantage of frequent travellers, easily entering and exiting polities and social relations around the world, armed with visa-friendly passports and credit cards. For such frequent travellers, cosmopolitanism has considerable rhetorical advantage. It seems hard not to want to be a ‘citizen of the world’. ..”⁵⁰

Venice, the site of the flourishing beginnings of capitalism, now relies mainly on tourism (the yearly programming of art and architecture biennales is one of the main attractions), is a sinking archipelago whose urban form had become extremely limiting and incompatible with incorporating and optimizing its infrastructures. I went to see the Venice Biennale, otherwise teased as the Olympics of art. The biennale operates on a hybrid structure: on the one hand, the Giardini site hosts national pavilions, that is to

⁴⁹Vertovec, Steven and Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2002. P.108.

⁵⁰Vertovec, Steven and Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2002. p.89.

say, only thirty pavilions, most of which from the global north; participating countries that don't have a pavilion would have to rent venues (usually discarded factories) at great cost outside of the Giardini: the "not-at-all invisible garden fence" fences a border separating "the north from the south, the core from the periphery", the "very architectural structure" delineates "the colonialist world order that had funded and continues to fund the art displayed in these pavilions." On the other hand, the Arsenale site programs transnational group exhibitions curated by selected curators who assemble their group of complexly affiliated artists. In any case, in general, the Venice Biennale, its programming, and artworks exhibited, "remains a source of prestige for its patrons [,] transnational corporations."⁵¹ A slightly cynical read of this programming logic, to recontextualize Erika Balsom's theorization, would be that the "uncanny alliance between radical art practices and transnational corporations"⁵², "...rather than any true challenge to affirmative culture, the goal is to sell products through an operation that dissimulates its relationship to commodity exchange by superficially adopting the guise of precisely that which is supposed to reside outside of it, the authentic."⁵³

No requiem or rest, the dove in its death is reanimated over and over by the current of the lagoon, the waters upon which "European merchants fanned out across the world."⁵⁴ Doves, also known as release doves, which are albino pigeons, or euphemistically called the "pure white variety", are historically and still in current day bred for festive occasions such as weddings and precariously treated out of that use; because of genetic defects due to the process of coevolution caused by humanistically imposed symbolism and meaning, they are more predisposed to death and disease.

⁵¹Madra, Yahya M. . "From Imperialism to Transnational Capitalism: The Venice Biennial as a "Transitional Conjecture"". In: *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 18, No.4. October, 2006. p.528.

⁵² Ibid. p.529.

⁵³ Balsom, Erika. "Against the Novelty of New Media: The Resuscitation of the Authentic." In: *Authenticity? Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-Digital Age*. Utrecht: Valiz. 2016. p.92.

⁵⁴Bhabha, Homi k. . "Double Visions: Circa 1492". In: *Art Forum*, January 1992, Vol. 30, No. 5. 1992.

Riddled with death and alienation, the body of the dove “[beats] on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”⁵⁵ Echoing T.S. Elliot's contention, “the artist-poet ‘is not likely to know what to do’ unless he lives ‘in the present moment of the past.’”⁵⁶ In occupying a liminal rupture by way of image-becoming, the series of dove images is a performance of impasse: “Suppose there is no death after all? Suppose death is just another performance, another image to circulate? Suppose that the collectively of death makes it impossible for any one person to get the ‘whole thing over with’? Phelan contemplates, the aim of Warhol’s work is “to visualise Being as ‘the placeholder of nothingness,’ to make dramatic the space between life and death in all its radical blankness and unknowability,”(234, Phelan) For Warhol—who is known for his disdain of originality and shies away from making an emotional disclosure with his work, and who renounces his presence as hard as he tries (the double negation of the fingerprint on the glass goblet)the placeholder, or the substitute figure, in the context of postmodernist distrust and suspicion of sincerity, is instrumental yet in itself pointing to a referent from which the substitute derives ⁵⁷and inconvenient attachments to the tangible.

Like the visa dove, there are sovereign forces by way of political economy and symbolic exchange keeping these bodies alive, that is to say, not totally dead, and suffering from compromised endurance, not by choice. “...the image performs after the death of its subject ... to continue to dance with the image of the dead,.. The dead do not actually die but through death become recognized as the always already living. .. the recognition of this ‘life’ is necessarily a phantasm, a creation, links it to the essential purpose of art itself. ..” (p225, Phelan)

⁵⁵Fitzgerald, Francis Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York :C. Scribner's sons, 1925.

⁵⁶Phelan, Peggy. “Andy Warhol: Performances of Death in America”. In: *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*. London; New York: Routledge. 1999.

⁵⁷ in Warhol’s case, Valerie Solanas’s attempted assassination making all his death studies/exercises literal

And there I was, standing about just a bit taller from the death scene. My shared liminality and impasse with the dove, is as Barthes had contemplated: "...as if the horror of Death were not precisely its platitude! ... The only thought I can have is that at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed; between the two, nothing more than waiting; I have no other resource than this irony: to speak of the 'nothing to say.'"⁵⁸

⁵⁸Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. Paris: Gallimard. 1980. p.93.

5. No Substitute For Love

In 1998, Madonna released “Drowned World/Substitute for Love”, in the chorus she sings: “face of you, substitute for love”; but preceding this release was a less cryptic demo titled “No Substitute for Love”, in which the aforementioned lyrics reads: “face the truth, no substitute for love”. I was fascinated by this negation and urge to obfuscate, the event unfolded to me as truth presented as farce. Why the avoidance of the earnest double negation, that is the statement “no substitute for love”? The double mediation, and reiterated by Miwon Kwon as “double negation”, invokes a Janus-like figure; one set of eyes looking forward, seeking the “come-up”—the avant-garde, and the other set looking into the past, borne back against the current: the *arriere garde*.

By now we have encountered many ghosts, stand-ins, and forgeries. The stand-in is a constant in the immigrant’s sense-making logic. The ghost of the Venetian dove that is really an albino pigeon, the hologram of the visa dove that promises peace and acceptance, the substitutable bathroom view and the bathroom viewing subject, the shipping containers in place for bricks of “Loos’s unrealised mausoleum... in each of their different ways, if one is willing to abstractify, they all somewhat share a kinship with another figure: the substitute.

“ ‘substitute’ derives from the word ‘succeed’, and the sense of possibility around the changeover is deeply embedded in the word. A substitute brings optimism if he hasn’t yet been defeated ... he enters their lives as a new site for attachment, a dedramatized possibility. He is by definition a placeholder, a space of abeyance, an aleatory event.”⁵⁹ the word “succeed”, points to “an advance, a coming up; a good result, happy outcome.” This sense of “a coming up”, someone, somewhere, something new, the advancement, things to come, is central to endurance for the immigrant, the motion is spearheading, forward-thrusting. This is what Miwon Kwon worded as the “delusional alibi for short attention spans, reinforcing the ideology of the new—a temporary antidote for the anxiety of boredom.” (kwon, 109)

⁵⁹Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011. P. 46.

The proxy, or the substitute figure is potent because it is there enacting on behalf of people who have desires and optimisms that can't be fulfilled due to physical and temporal restraints. On the micro-scale, it manifests as an image-obsessed, restless transnational subject. Another example is as Peggy Phelan wrote about Andy Warhol: "Perhaps the axiom of all Warhol's work, one must conceive of oneself as simultaneously dead and alive — alive to the desire to become mechanical, to become indifferent to wanting to be." This is the sentiment of the emotionally resigned and attachment and affect averse, reactionary of the impasse. On a destructive and macro scale is the development of proxy wars, instigated by major powers and backed by economic disparity; Trump is re-elected not because most Americans really agreed with his values, but because they believed in his capacity of hurting on behalf of a populist festering of prejudice, spite, and dormant, benign yet easily incited contempt: Trump is the masses' proxy — the substitute in place to execute hate (which is an emotion strong enough to wipe clean all nuance of any situation) for our own cowardice and sublimate unresolved desires: a collective death-drive and projection of an all-or-nothing judgement maker.

What this paper points to then is the substitute's unsustainability and damaging effects: ongoing proxy wars are at an all-time high because the substitute figure enables and grounds suspicion of sincerity, directly correlating to loyalty which is compromised, worse yet, had been mythified, ridiculed, discouraged and lawfully invalidated. Without accepting a complex mode of identification through plurality, which is instrumental in forming allegiances, solidarities, and empathies, to quote Henry Kissinger, there will be "no permanent friends, only interests"— this quote isn't exclusively applicable to macro-scale international affairs: what I am concerned about, and this body of work is concerned with, is precisely the demoralizing recession of sincerity on a personal and immediate level, mediated and beguiled by the top-down laws and thresholds (physical and otherwise), and the apathetic becoming of individualism.

In the 1961 book "Universal Civilization and National Cultures", Paul Ricoeur contends, "We are in a kind of lull or interregnum in which we can no longer practice the dogmatism of a single truth and in which we are not yet capable of conquering the

skepticism into which we have stepped.”⁶⁰ In postmodernism’s suspicion of authenticity, the urge to renounce authorship or the artist’s presence is constant, drawing a cool and at times ironic distance between the work and the art; as he “issues an invitation to his spectators to imagine themselves as simultaneously dead and alive. This invitation is a mimetic one: Warhol inhabits that double space in the production of his work and thereby rehearses the spectator’s performance of observation of it. Warhol’s early work is the result of both his audacious presence and his provocative disappearance, his precise necessity and his utter dispensability.”⁶¹ Indeed, we are way past claiming authenticity, where the rigidity of the singular social role, model of citizenship and loyalty had fissured and deterritorialized. Plural loyalties, then can be understood as an ongoing deliberate out-of-place-ness: identities, fictional and otherwise, under the entity of the loyal - “finding a terrain between mobilization and specificity—to be out of place with punctuality and precision”⁶².

Evidently in all found image cold cases, identification and loyalty is what backs up the relational close-readings weaving together this paper. As had been teased out by aforementioned works such as *ellipses (5000 years)* and *Visas in My Name* that stage the impasses: the transnational immigrant subject’s loyalty and sincerity, and how much they can show up for those around them, is partly reliant upon the physicality of their right to mobility, physicality of sites, and legal status. Such attachments, without justification or resolution, as top-down codified law intervention is required for any substantial change, are pathetic, liminal, and abject. Art making is an ongoing negotiation attempting to open up a space where the impasse takes physical form and breaks out of its usual temporal affective state, as an aesthetic experience.

⁶⁰Frampton, Kenneth. “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance”. In: *Postmodernism: A Reader*. London: Routledge. 1993.

⁶¹Phelan, Peggy. “Andy Warhol: Performances of Death in America”. In: *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*. London; New York: Routledge. 1999. p.224.

⁶²Kwon, Miwon. “One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity”. In: *October*, Spring, 1997, Vol. 80. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Grounded in this failure, the body of work, following the methods of double negation, is coming to accept that for better or for worse, there is no substitute—in Madonna’s pop truism, for love— and extendedly, the subjects who are capable of loving, attaching, dreaming, hoping, yearning, toiling, relating, and moving. The limitation of mobility and fragmentation of social roles are all crippling for one to remain sincere and capable of loving. For the transnational subject, loyalty and sincerity are complex, though not impossible. It is paramount that we recognize that, though life by proxy is an inescapable means of survival and the tendency to do so will only grow with time, as economy and globalization demand it; but in the meantime, in one way or another, clinging and committing to loyalties, even at times where it feels like pretending, or through the superficiality of image-making, is how we get through, is how we identify and map out an “alternative terrain”.

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Appendix A: List of Artworks

1.

Visas in My Name

2025

Oil on Canvas



2.

My Name is ... Rita (No Substitute For Love)

2025

Mylar, metal, wood, silicone



3.

All I Wanna Do is

2025

Silicone, counterfeit visa stickers, pearlescent powder.



4.

The Flags will All Fly Green

2025

Acrylic framing, plastic sheet, counterfeit visa stickers



5.

The Ambassadors

2025

Acrylic framing, Mylar print

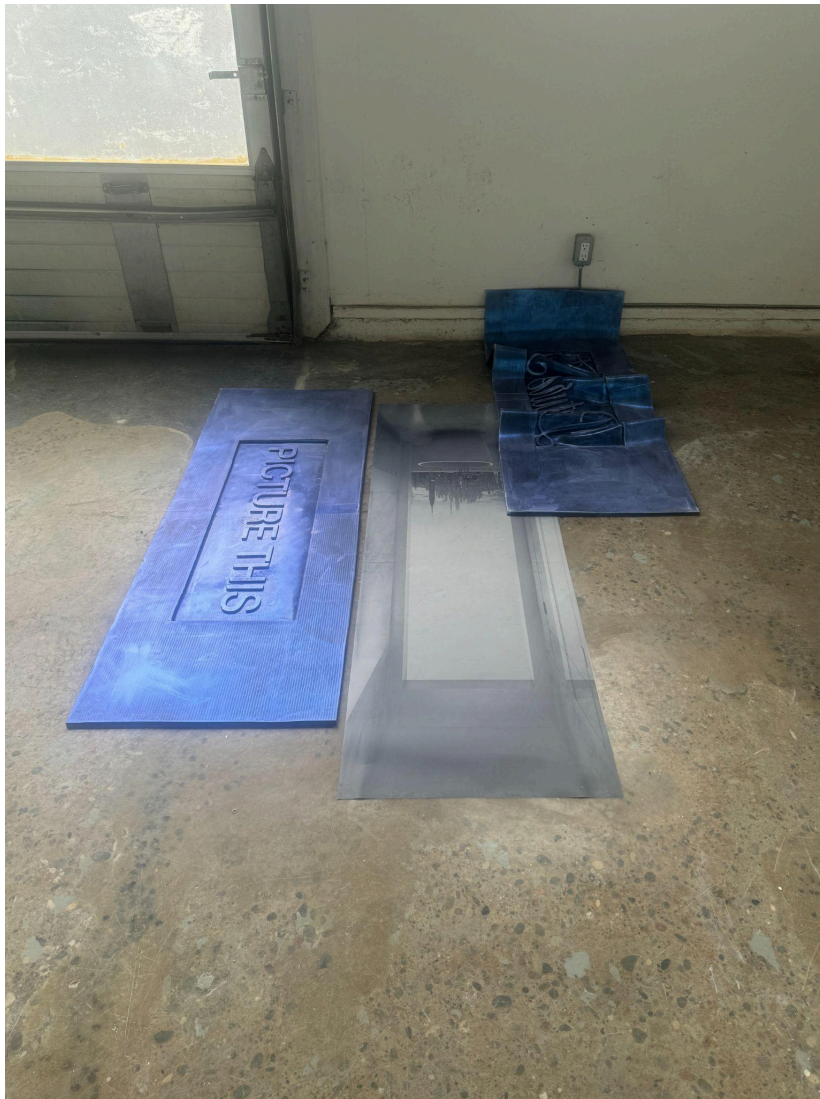


6.

Picture This

2025

Silicone, pearlescent powder, mylar print



7.

Ellipses (5000 Years)

2025

Graphite rubbing, tracing paper, rubber



8.

Dove Dead in Venetian Lagoon

2025

Image transfer, tracing paper

