

I Want My World to be Divine

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Starting With Some Specifics

where does water flow in a year? what lake, estuary, or ocean would a spring from the mountains lead into? and this is the turbulent, beautiful, and wonderful journey of my transition through the past year or so. i find my place in the river to be full of joy and beauty, which was shrouded and unsure in the beginning.¹

I wasn't sure if my family would accept me, I was scared to come out to the person I was dating, I was terrified to say it to anyone. And so the beauty and desire that has unfolded has been sparkling bright and heart full and silk soft and absolute love. More than anything, the joy in the process of transitioning has been specific. Specific moments from people who have participated and created this joy together with me.

As the joy has been specific, and the desire shared has been specific, then too the artwork and joy I wish to give back to these people requires similar specificity. I am not interested in large questions and general statements, and I am not trying to address systemic issues that affect trans and other marginalized genders; I am trying to give the people I love the wonder they have given me.

Artwork as a general typography of semiotic language functions poorly as it heavily relies on widely agreed symbolism and meaning, over-explanatory and inaccessible International Art English, and the conditions of the artworld it was built for. Leaning into the general academic functions of art will then push the artwork further from the people that I want to be making the artwork for. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*² speak on language and the inability of language to perform its function of communication. "Language is made not to be

¹ myself, #24 in the bibliography

² In *Postulates of Linguistics* (see #3 in bibliography)

believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience.” How can I then use language to communicate my desire for those who have given me love?

Further they say that a bee has no language, “because it can communicate what it has seen but not transmit what has been communicated to it.” Which is the model of giving I follow in the artwork. Rather than bother with the art world as it becomes increasingly inaccessible, I want to transmit the desire incarnate that I feel to those around me, in an act of deconstruction of symbolism or prescribed meaning.

There is a lot of nuance here because communication *is* indeed valuable. Sharing with my loved ones and becoming with them is by far the most joyful experience I have ever had. I don’t seek to align directly with Deleuzogattarian thinking on this topic, but I do want to at least introduce this thought process before I delve deeper into systems of communication, or more accurately, systemic communication.

Why is it necessary?

The incompetence of the high brow art world as it seeks to be a place of communication is becoming increasingly obvious to me as I see the public’s ability and my own ability to participate in the art world diminish. James Rushing Daniel outlines capital as it interacts with art “In recent years, bankers, financiers, hedge fund managers, crypto bros, promoters, collectors, and at times artists themselves have aggressively vacated art’s political projects, abstracted it from labor, and transmogrified it into a format ideal for trading and speculation.”³

It feels so apparent that the continued value of making art is becoming what an individual can attain using art as a pathway to social and physical capital, and not what the viewer and artist get from the artwork itself.

³ “Art and Capital Have Become Nearly Indistinguishable.” #13 in the bibliography.

Marie Larsen writes a short essay also describing the process of getting a masters in fine art and the disillusionment thereof. “Because art needs a certain degree of complexity, of daring to experiment, of comprehending larger amounts of context, and those things, in turn, demand the very time and space that is so hard for us to find.”⁴ I identify heavily with this essay, and all the issues that Larsen felt, I have felt also. I feel an endless road before me of trying to impress others on strict timelines, fighting a rocky uphill battle into a place that I’m not sure I even want to be in, all for some modicum of acknowledgment from those who are also on the same slope.

The issue as it appears to me is very explicitly spoken about in Ulysse Carrière’s book “Technically Man Dwells Upon This Earth⁵.” Carrière is writing this book as a response to the production of art by artificial intelligence, but also extrapolates this further and applies the same ideals to the art world as we see it today. Humanity seems to pretty quickly acknowledge art made by AI to have some sort of lack; a lack of soul, genuine intent, or “true” creation. Carrière explains this through a separation of *Consciousness* and *Intellect*. Consciousness is the ability to take input and translate that to an output. It requires large data and a system of how the data is filtered to the thing being made. On the other side, Intellect is divine. There is divinity in the capability to *truly* create something. This thing being created has no pre-existing conditions or place to fit. It’s created out of nothing at the will of its creator.

This actually extrapolates quite easily to not just AI artwork, but to things made by humans that have lost the soul of the work. There are endless Marvel movies, endless new healthcare practices and gurus, trendy books, or what have you. These go through a deep system of creation that places it into a consciousness. There are focus groups and regulations that make sure the thing being received produces and performs what is wanted. And this system scrubs it of

⁴ “Everyone Is Bored, Everything Is Boring.” #16 in the bibliography

⁵ #23 in the bibliography

any genuineness that it may have held previously. This also expands to the world of fine art; the systems of the gallery, the school, and the international art market tend to strip the art world (my world!) of the divinity of creation for preference of conforming to that system. Both the system of AI and the gamified system of visibility are both a generative algorithm, where only the input but not the procedure can be manipulated.

Competition is not local, but global, and to participate globally is to succumb to a wide clearnet structure of gamified attention. The most I could hope for to reach a wider audience is to have a tiktok go viral. Mark Fisher also touches on similar issues in his talk *The Slow Cancellation of the Future*.⁶ The wide reaches of capitalism have discouraged true innovation in order to prioritize maintaining its structure of maximum extraction. Art becomes content, changed from what it is, and alienated from the artist as a product for consumption. And to deal with this new art world, art schools have to change in order to keep participating. To do so they teach survival techniques and gear artists towards gaining social capital, rather than providing the space for an artist to attempt revolution.

And so I've been lost! True communication has felt rocky at best and nonexistent at worst. I know if others see and read my feelings, they must often choose themselves and a gamified art world rather than a (maybe impossible) mutual desire. I know I can only speak through shared emotion and never through language, because the words "I love you" will never match the weight of a million kisses. So I choose to lean into emotional, rhetorical communication. I cannot make art for a general public, so I won't. I can't make art that will evade the strangling hands of capital, so I won't. I can't make something new, so I will make with material that I already have: the love that others have showered and soaked me to the bones with.

⁶ #8 in the bibliography

Joy, Desire, and I Love and am Loved and I Feel It!

Matsutake mushrooms are found at the base of several types of trees, like the Ponderosa or Lodgepole. Rather than look for the mushroom, foragers look for the tree with which the matsutake will grow. The mushroom and the tree are so intertwined that it is difficult to call either one a separate being. They feed each other and encourage one another's growth. Many pine can't live without the nutrients provided by a dense base of fungi, especially in difficult climates.

Deleuze and Guattari dedicate an entire chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* to describe wolves as non-individual beings. As they live in tightly knit groups, wolves are rarely alone. This phenomenon is so prescient that it is better to consider the wolf as the central mass of the pack more so than any individual being. They need each other and are so intertwined that their being should be considered the relationship more than the individual existence.

And I am not me, I am the love and desire transferred to me by those around me. I am my partner who has shown love and care through every single step in my transition, who has promised love for me and us no matter who I am. I am my mother, who I was scared to come out to, but has subverted all expectations. I am my friend, who was the first person I confided in about wanting to transition, who has led the way and shown me what beauty is possible.

This desire that I have been lavished with is the material I want to work with to make art. I want to bundle and return that joy, to make something beautiful for these people. Specific artwork holds power in how pointed it is. Specific artwork has no need to appeal to large conceptual ideals, it is not for social capital, it doesn't need to illuminate or spark discovery in its viewer. The specific artwork is about the transference of desire from me to those people who have given to me.

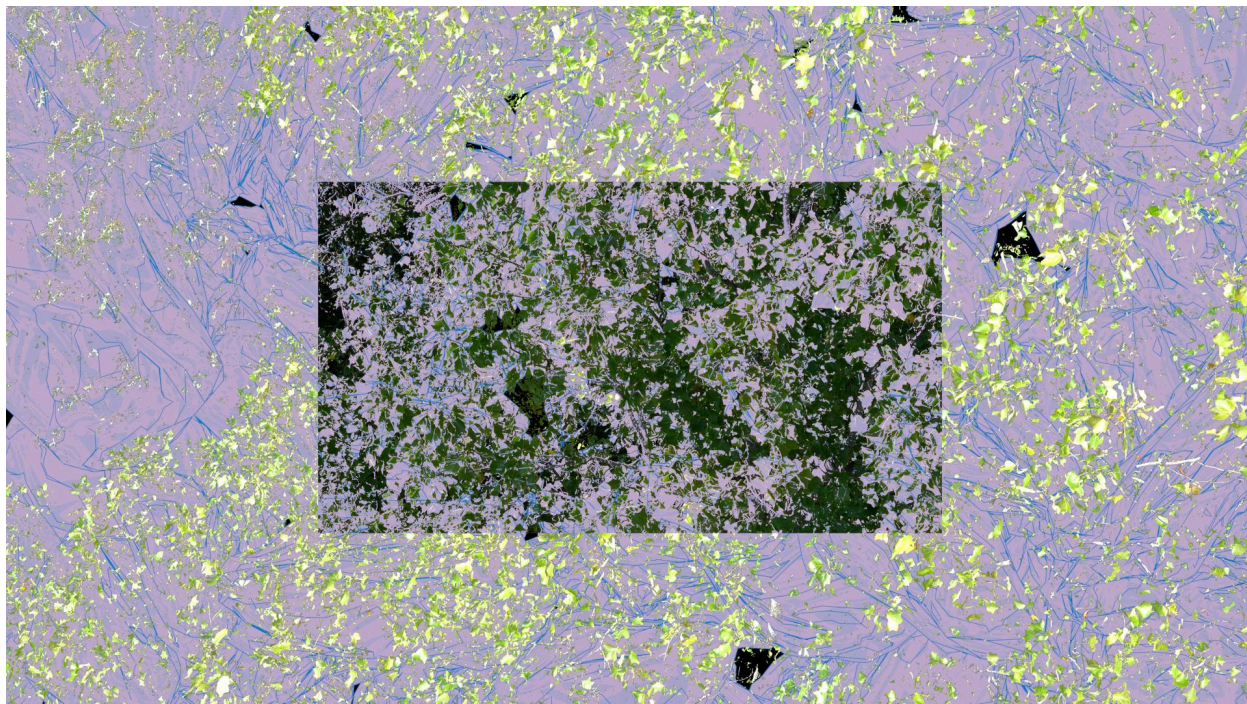


fig. 1 from “for Eve”, video still

The mechanics of breaking from systems of capital through specific artwork of desire follows Luce deLire’s notion of libidinal capital.⁷ They have collectivized their desire with me, have given it freely, and so too I will give freely to them. They have made this shared love a specific place for us to tend together. deLire goes on to describe the process of transitioning:

Each transition requires the social environment of the transitioning person *to co-transition*. Friends, coworkers, families, enemies are challenged to react to the ongoing transformation, be it a lover questioning their sexuality, a friend reflecting on their own gender identity, a nemesis discovering common ground, and so on. And in this way, transitioning forcefully collectivizes desire *outwards*. Transitioning means that your desire expands into the world. If you transition, everybody around you has to do so as well.

⁷ From “Full Queerocracy Now!..” #19 in the bibliography

These people have been so willing to share my transition with me. In the *Enneads*,⁸ Plotinus describes a greater soul shared by beings, and the lesser soul as the one that resides in the individual. This shared libido and desire is our transition, and I too need to feed our soul so much as these people in my life have. This process of transitioning together also pulls heavily from *Phenomenology of Perception*.⁹ We interface with this world as a body, but our body is never static as both an object in the mind of others and as the subject of my own mind. People see me differently as time goes on, and I also see myself differently. This is an indefinite process of becoming.

Videos with no storyline and generative 3D as if painting

I am always in wonder at the beauty of everyday things and moments. I come across bark that is rough on my skin, and so it must be filmed. Grass in a river, a weak flower holding on as best it can, a wall in disrepair, large construction machines tearing apart buildings are all so pretty and allow me to marvel at the space I'm always currently occupying. By using videos and imagery from daily life as I come across them, this deconstructs symbolism by refusing predetermined intentional imagery. The imagery must come to me, and I cannot seek out certain things. There is then no concern for video quality, linearity, or readability, it is abstract.

⁸ #20 in the bibliography

⁹ #22 in th bibliography



fig. 2 From “for Bo”, video still

There was a specific project in my photography undergrad that led me directly to 3D modeling and rendering as my main mode of artistic production. It was a still life project, and while I didn't struggle with lighting, technical, or conceptual concerns, I struggled because I didn't have things. I was living in my first apartment, and I simply didn't have any objects that I would consider powerful or meaningful. And so I turned to 3D to make the objects that I wanted to make photographs of. However, the process of modeling and rendering is also as hyper-specific as choosing things to photograph, a general process I've wanted to avoid through this thesis. This has led me to generative modeling using node softwares like Houdini, Blender's geometry nodes, and Touch Designer. This form of generative modeling is procedural as I get to control both the input and procedure, which is means of separating myself from algorithmic systems.

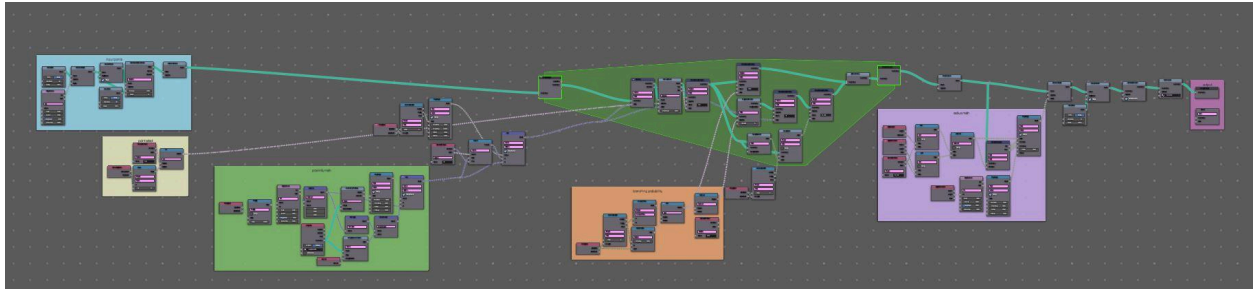


fig 3. A large node tree driving an 8 second animation

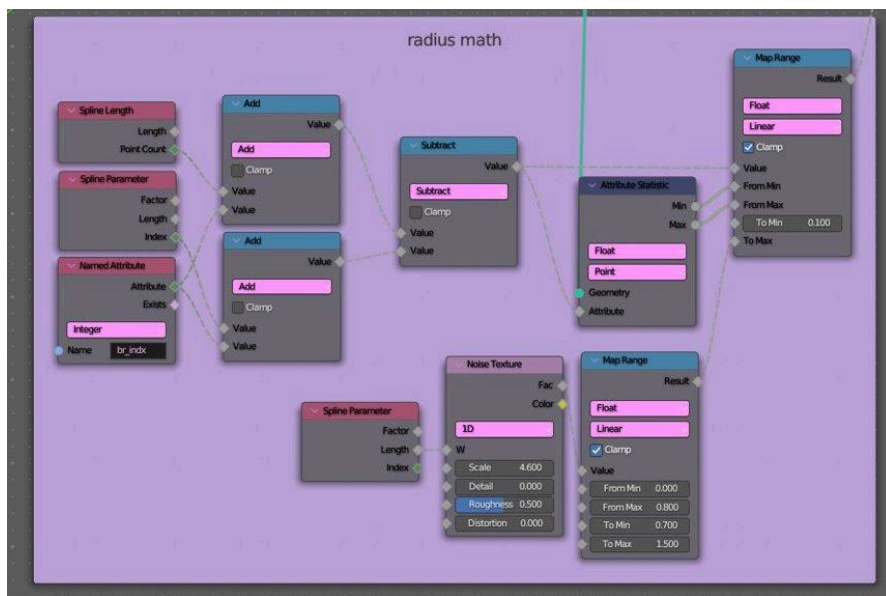


fig 4. Node detail, math that determines curve width based on grown height

By slowly adding nodes and tweaking, I can sidestep traditional methods of modeling, rendering, and compositing. The possibilities of this world are no longer limited by my imagination and direct modeling capability, and it becomes a process that feels a lot more like painting. It's as if the nodes are the pigment in the paint, and the digital platform is always wet. The input and procedure can be manipulated at any time; I can always be painting the same image. The forms come to me as they do, or they don't come at all. It's a collaboration between me and my computer and I love her for all the work and dedication she gives me. The imagery

becomes otherworldly, forms and colors that only come together in a world that isn't traditionally seen or realized.

By using these processes in tandem it reaches towards the unsure and wobbly emotions of transitioning, the muscle throb beauty and unseen unexpected world that has fallen in my lap. There is mundanity in morning pills, walks to class, wind through leaves. There is sparkly magic in the body and being that unveils itself to me as I become it. So it is then natural that the video must both be normal and beyond the rules as they are understood by realism.

I'm consistently inspired and in awe at the denizens of the ocean. The rules of existing in water feel so beyond that of land. How bodies are meant to function both in and through the landscape, how colors and light work together, how to be always in motion and changing. Coral is much more aware of itself than humans. And more than that, they are wondrous and blobby and scrungly. It feels so right to keep jellyfish, coral, and eels in mind when talking about my own body.



fig. 4 from "for mom", digital video

I'm also heavily influenced by internet art culture in my work. Spaces such as New Models, Rhizome, and Do Not Research influence the work and ways I want my art to be seen. These spaces often subvert traditional art world spaces like university classrooms and galleries in favor of internet communities through Discord, Substack, or Tumblr. Rhizome had a show called "Some Tumblrs!¹⁰" that showcased artists posting gifs and digital art. They had an in person discussion panel but naturally these are all on Tumblr for people to continuously view. This is the space I see my artwork existing beyond graduate school. There are so many alternative platforms for being seen and communities to be a part of, I see no need to directly succumb to the art market. This will allow my work to be beyond what it can acquire for me, but what it can allow me to become and what the artwork can do *to* me.

So like, what even is my thesis ??

My thesis is built from the background of procedural media, as a mode for making imagery from beyond systemic beliefs and ideas surrounding certain objects or images. I am creating three videos for each of three specific people in my life that have given me the joy of infinite possibility and becoming. These three videos use a mix of media from video and procedural imagery (whether that is 3D or 2D generation.) These are combined using different overlay techniques; the process of overlay combines the pieces in ways that were unintended at the point of the singular parts creation.

The installation consists of one large projection and a small screen that drives the ability to choose which person's video that they can view. This form of interaction is super simple, but isn't to draw or attract any particular use of attention. This method is specifically for the specific people the videos are for to be able to navigate easily to their video. However, it does add some

¹⁰ #21 in bibliography

sort of sense of collusion with the videos and hardware to be able to have a tactile way to bounce from video piece to video piece. The touchscreen is meant to act as soul portal, nebulous space that is driven via the desire from one place to another. . The space will include lots of small heat printed stickers and images that come from the pieces of the full video. I'll also print off extra stickers for people to take with them (while supplies last !)

The acrylic will be multisized and slightly spaced to produce a fragmented and imperfect screen for the viewer. I will laser cut all the acrylic to be able to hang, as well as engraving designs onto the acrylic for those who look closer to be rewarded with a deeper connection to the artwork. The acrylic will hang from the ceiling in order to extend the screen from the wall, and allow light to filter through the acrylic into the space. However, the thesis is not tied to the screen and is inevitably meant for translation.

This video will translate easily into other spaces and mediums to be seen. There is an accompanying website that allows for similar interaction, and hosts the videos to be seen always. The work needs the accompanying website or else the videos would become some extraction of our experience as a way to fulfill the school requirements. The website allows this to live far beyond just the final show and become a continuous piece of the multiple desires felt by the bodies in this love, and allows continuous access for the people I wanted to make the videos for.

Bo, mom, Eve, making these things has been so much fun and allowed me to channel and express the deep joy I feel that you have given me. I hope it's beautiful for you, I really do.

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