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Elsewhere

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Self-Taught and Outsider Art**

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Elsewhere

The International Journal of Self-Taught and Outsider Art

Elsewhere, The International Journal of Self-Taught and Outsider Art is a refereed journal that publishes essays on all aspects of art, its histories, contexts, and debates, as they relate to the field. The journal provides a forum for serious, sustained writing on Outsider Art and its multiple manifestations from around the world: Art Brut, Self-Taught Art, Contemporary Folk Art, Fresh Invention, Art Singulier, Visionary Art. It takes a trans-disciplinary standpoint, welcoming contributions from scholars in the humanities, arts, social sciences and medicine, and is cross-cultural in approach.

Editor

Colin Rhodes

Colin Rhodes is Professor of Art History & Theory and Dean of Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney, Australia. He is founding Director of the Self-Taught and Outsider Art Research Collection (STOARC), based at The University of Sydney. Rhodes' research is primarily in the areas of 20th century and contemporary art. His books include the influential *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (2000) and *Primitivism and Modern Art* (1994). He is the editor (with John Maizels) and major contributor to *Raw Erotica* (2013), and a regular contributor to *Raw Vision* and *Création Franche*. Rhodes is currently completing an Encyclopedia of Outsider Art for Chicago University Press, and is engaged in various curatorial and writing projects for exhibitions in Australia and the US.

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Brooke Davis Anderson is the Executive Director for Prospect New Orleans/U.S. Biennial. From 2010 to 2012 Anderson was Deputy Director of Curatorial Planning at LACMA. In this role, Anderson oversaw the Watts Towers Conservation and Community Collaboration, and the "Curatorial Diversity Initiative" a project to change the demographics in museums across the nation. From 1999 to 2010, Anderson was Founding Director and Curator of The Contemporary Center at the American Folk Art Museum in New York, where she curated countless exhibitions, authored several books and numerous articles, and led the \$1 million acquisition of the Henry Darger Study Center. She has taught at Columbia University, City College of New York, and WSSU.

Roger Cardinal

Roger Cardinal wrote the pioneering *Outsider Art* in 1972, and has published widely on individual Outsiders, including Ilija Bosilj, Ferdinand Cheval, Ted Gordon, Karl Junker, Michel Nedjar, Guillaume Pujolle and Clarence Schmidt, as well as producing essays on such topics as Outsider Architecture, Autistic Art, Prison Art, Mediumistic Art and Memory Painting. A contributing editor of *Raw Vision*, he has curated exhibitions in Britain, France, Slovakia and America. He is currently preparing a monograph on the visionary artist Madge Gill.

Bernard L. Herman

Bernard L. Herman is George B. Tindall Distinguished Professor of American Studies and Folklore at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Three of his books received the Abbott Lowell Cummings Award as best work on North American vernacular architecture. Herman has published essays on quilts, self-taught and outsider arts, foodways, historical archaeology, vernacular photography, and theoretical approaches to the study and interpretation of objects. He edited *Thornton Dial: Thoughts on Paper* (2012) and is currently completing *Quilt Spaces*, an exploration of Gee's Bend, Alabama, quilts and quiltmakers, working on a collection of essays on *Troublesome Things*, for which he received a Guggenheim Fellowship, and planning an exhibition and edited volume on the art of Ronald Lockett.

Jo Farb Hernández

Jo Farb Hernández, Executive Director of SPACES—Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments—a nonprofit archives documenting art environments and self-taught art (www.spacesarchives.org), is also Director of the Thompson Gallery and Professor at San José State University. She has authored or co-authored thirty exhibition books and catalogues; *Forms of Tradition in Contemporary Spain* won the prestigious Chicago Folklore Prize in 2006 and *A.G. Rizzoli: Architect of Magnificent Visions* (1997) was one of Amazon.com's "10 Best" that year. Hernández is particularly interested in art environments and has done intensive fieldwork on this genre since 1974. A Fulbright Senior Scholar, her groundbreaking book *Singular Spaces: From the Eccentric to the Extraordinary in Spanish Art Environments* was published in 2013 by Raw Vision and Marquand Books.

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Charles Russell is Professor Emeritus of English and American Studies at Rutgers University, Newark. He is author of *Groundwaters: A Century of Art by Self-Taught and Outsider Artists* (Prestel, 2011) and has published *Self-Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art* (University Press of Mississippi, 2001) and co-edited with Carol Crown *Sacred and Profane: Personal Voice and Vision in Southern Self-Taught* (University Press of Mississippi, 2007).

Assistant Editor

Nerida Olson

Submissions

The International Journal of Self-Taught and Outsider Art encourages substantive inquiry on issues of Self-Taught and Outsider Art, in particular constructive approaches to the field that enrich and widen our critical awareness of it, whether of subject matter or cultural traditions. We also welcome the use of visual images to support the body of text. Articles should not exceed 10,000 words in length and shorter notices should be between 2,000 to 5,000 words in length.

Full submission guidelines can be viewed online at:
<http://sydney.edu.au/sca/stoarcjournal>

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Editorial

Colin Rhodes

Recently, in the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, I stood in a room with Ian Burns' kinetic sculpture, *Clouds* (2012) and thought of two outsider environments: 'Petit' Pierre Avezard's *Manège* and Vollis Simpson's *Whirligig Environment*. Though the first belonged in a gallery – was made for a gallery – the other two didn't and weren't. Yet the desire for preservation of these two environments after the deaths of the Petit Pierre and Simpson sees both transported, conserved and recontextualised– the *Manège* was moved from Avezard's home in Faye aux Loges and reconstructed at the Fabuloserie Museum in Dicy, France and the elements of Simpson's environment were removed from Lucama, North Carolina and are currently in the process of being restored and progressively resited in nearby Wilson. Sadly, such moves inevitably empty much of the original wonder and poignancy the environments embodied when, like their creators, they too were continually changing, living things. In vouchsafing their long-term existence an inevitable transformation into monumental art takes place. They become like other art. Indeed, Burns' installation, which embodies the idea of social specularity and the quasi-transcendent in technology, and invites viewers to self-reflexively engage in experiential dialogue, is arguably the longer-lasting work, since it actually begins from a museological impetus. The comparison perhaps begs a question as to how we might approach art not intended for the gallery, and whether there is a moment when we let go?

The life cycle of outsider environments tends to follow a common pattern: from small beginnings (Nek Chand arranges interesting rocks near the city dump in Chandigarh, India, or Howard Finster cements his bicycle fixing tools in a path), by a process of accumulation, a space is filled and a complex, wonderful universe unfolds (Nek Chand's Rock Garden covers 40 acres and Finster's *Paradise Garden* evolves into a compound of buildings, sculptures and signs); the environment is in constant repair and flux, until old age slows the repair process (the originator of the environment remains the core executor of its animation even when others are brought in to help, as in the case of Nek Chand); and with the passing of the environment's originator a period of swift decay begins (without Finster *Paradise Garden* was subject to vandalism and thieving, as well as a merciless climate).

The three environments included in this issue of *Elsewhere* are interesting in the reflections on outsider environments they provide. In the case of the little known Australian *Temple of Boingaology*, readers learn not only of the destruction (by fire) of the foundational environment, but how changes in the energies of its originator, Robert Prudoe and the attitudes of his local community have affected its life cycle. That Prudoe seamlessly began, undeterred a second version of the *Temple* is common in the outsider environment narrative, and testament to the sheer will and vision of the artist. That Prudoe is challenged in the face of current complaints and bureaucratic moves against his project by local authorities is a sadness born of his depleted energies in later life.

Joe Minter's *African Village in America* is a rather different case in point. Contained within the boundaries of his own yard, and surrounded by a generally more connected and understanding community than Prudoe's Temple, the *African Village* is a kind of theme park, made up of dioramas telling the story of African American struggle and experience. Its foundational monuments speak to global events, such as the passage of African's to America as slaves, as well as local ones with global impact, such as the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing in Birmingham in 1963, or the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama in 1965. The *African Village* grows with each new event – recent additions include sections on Hurricane Katrina (2005) and earthquakes in Haiti (2010) – so that the seminal photographs of the environment taken in the late 1990s by William Arnett¹ show a much more spacious plot than is the case today. Similarly, elements have metamorphosed and weathered over time, so that the sheen in the older photographs has gone from the contemporary environment. This is no loss, however, but rather an evolution, laying bare the same kind of investment in objects that Lonnie Holley speaks about so eloquently in his interview with Bernard L. Herman in this issue.

The final environment seemingly follows none of the unfolding of the regular life cycle narrative. Created largely from an accumulation of stuff collected in advance of its construction, Charles Vermeulen's *Farm Equipment Installation* was envisioned from the start as something permanent and declarative. Though the idiosyncratic vision of one person, it was to be displayed in a prominent, public position from the start, with the intention of making a retail unit more attractive to visitors. Elements were professionally painted in a small range of industrial enamels, which not only produce a certain harmony across the whole of the environment, but also facilitate ease of upkeep and preservation. As a result the *Farm Equipment Installation* is as fresh and unchanged now as it was before its creator's death.

In different ways the artists who are the subject of the other two articles in this issue, Lonnie Holley and Henry Darger epitomise the contemporary embrace by dominant artworlds of practices arising in unexpected places that led me to connect Ian Burns, Pierre Avezard and Vollis Simpson. Though Darger died in 1972, and though Holley has been committed to what today looks very much like a contemporary art practice for thirty or more years, both are relatively newly-embraced by contemporary art audiences. Both could have been, though neither were, included in last year's Venice Biennale, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, and containing a heady mix of professional modernist and contemporary, and self-taught and outsider art.² Part of the reason for this relatively new interest lies in the nature of much contemporary art, which is characterised by a crashing together of a fluid heterodoxy of vision and freeing-up from the tyranny of media with an individual commitment to a belief system and personal ethics embedded in the medium of choice. The result is often incoherent as visual totality – as in, for example, Fiona Hall's *Out of My Tree* (2014)– but absolutely coherent and powerfully communicative as a journey and as an interaction. Its parts speak visually and affectively; content deepens and insinuates itself in viewers through the network of connections they make and bring.

Many contemporary artists are interested in, and wish to pursue, ideas, methodologies and practices that engage with the outer reaches of science and culture and eschew orthodoxy, but not in a modernist colonialisng or ideological sense. Their practice takes them inevitably to a kind of frontier, or meeting point at which all things are possible and all values are on the table, available on equal terms. From the curators' point of view, I think we are experiencing an intuition, or recognition of this flattening of the field of possibilities and a kind of consent to mobilise anything that is at hand to communicate. Its not so much a suspension or end of history, as a suspension of judgement and values in order to engage in open conversation and dialog, without the threat of colonisation and appropriation that was still the dominant power play in modernism.

¹See William Arnett and Paul Arnett, *Souls Grown Deep*, Vol. 2, Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2001, pp. 490 - 503

²Massimiliano Gioni, 'The Encyclopedic Palace', *55th Venice Biennale Art Exhibition*, 1 June – 24 November 2013



Lonnie Holley Interview with Bernard L. Herman at Whole Foods, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA (8 September 2013), following Holley's performances at the Hopscotch Music Festival (September 5-7, 2013) in Raleigh, North Carolina

Bernard L. Herman

Introduction

Narrative, rhetorical and poetical, is central to Lonnie Holley's artistic endeavors, and Holley speaks to his art with a powerful and unified vision sustained over at least four decades.¹ An established visual artist working in mixed media and most often with found materials, Holley also commands recognition and respect as a recording artist on the *Dust-to-Digital* label.² Generous with his time, he readily engages in conversations about art, music, and philosophy. With very few exceptions, however, we experience Holley's conversations in print as fragmentary and excerpted quotations in essays that tend to deploy his words as illustrative material for the interviewers' projects.³ Transcribed and presented in full, the following interview demonstrates how Holley uses objects as a medium for spoken word reflections as well as the seamless flow of ideas that inform and sustain the whole of his continuing creative work.

Lonnie Holley bristles at labels and then brushes them aside – and yet labels have proven instrumental, for better or worse, in shaping the reception of his work. He rejects, for example, the label “folk” and dismisses other categorizations as emblematic of the curatorial concerns of others reliant on ideologies of classification. In one interview, Holley responded to the long history of how collectors, curators, critics, and others sought to categorise him as an artist through the use of modifiers that reified the power

of institutional identity, “I like *American artist*,” he told the reporter when asked for a sufficient epithet. ‘All the other terms, I wore them like a man wearing suits.’”⁴ As recently as January 2014, Mark Binelli, writing in *The New York Times Magazine* devoted considerable column space to his own perplexity on how to categorise Lonnie Holley and his art, tentatively reaching the conclusion that Holley is a performance artist. Binelli then shared William Arnett's response to his efforts: “‘This performative mode that you've spotted, that's just the way Lonnie is,’ Bill Arnett later told me, dismissing my performance-artist theory. ‘Performance art, that word is from the mainstream. I've known Lonnie for 25 years, and he is emphatically not from the mainstream. So unless you want to call him, what – an outsider performance artist? I don't think it works.’”⁵ The fact is that categories fail Lonnie Holley and his art for two reasons: first, Holley simply puts little stock in them; second, they speak not to Holley's art, but rather to the critical anxieties of the categorical and the canonical.

The following interview arose from a continuing engagement with Lonnie Holley's rhetorical and performative exposition of objects. A photograph of *Rusted Nail* (figure 3) provided the starting point.⁶ Holley created *Rusted Nail* in early 2009 along with a group of other sculptures fashioned from found materials in Birmingham, Alabama. As with almost all of his works, Holley speaks to and through the things he makes. The individual work may stand alone within the context of gallery or collection, but for Holley its existence is tied to the art of speaking the object. The easiest way to grasp this process is to think of the object as a vessel that Holley fills with ideas and words. When the occasion arises, he pours out the words and ideas in the form of a narrative that combines recitation with invention. Scott Browning, Director of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation, describes this process in terms of “reanimation.” When Holley revisits the object he reactivates its meaning through the very materiality of the work.

Every element within the singular artwork holds meaning – and there is significance located within all the myriad relationships that exist between all the constitutive elements of the work. The work of art, though, is much more than a touchstone. It operates not unlike the renaissance trope of the memory palace – but the artwork's function is more than mnemonic, it is catalytic. Holley's narratives are recursive in the sense that they tap into an



established array of ideas and conventions but in ways that are always new and spontaneous. Thus, Holley's themes cohere around thematic armatures that include the child, Mother Earth, histories of injustices, suffering, autobiography, dehumanization through technology, and cycles of life, death, and spiritual renewal. Holley, however, is clear that this creative practice is not to be confused with ministry. Lonnie Holley states simply that he speaks to truth (figures 1 and 2).

Lonnie Holley: I think it's the 8th. The 8th. I tell you what, *Cold Titty Mama* will tell you. The reason why I call these cell phones and things *Cold Titty Mama* is because they are Computer Technology Management and we are living in the age of art. And a lot of the endings of my songs I ask the question, "Who is you all's baby's mama now?" Because everybody is mostly living by this device, or our whole life is mostly into the technical.

Pull that image [of *Rusted Nail*] back up that I am going to be talking about (figure 3). Now, as far as what we see in this image is I tried to use some nails. I used some stones; I used some power wire; I used some wire that had been stripped out from around that power wire. I tried to balance off a little stone. And then you had a railroad spike that was back in the days looked at as a nail. And, as for today, what we are driving, it's like a mentality that we are trying to drive through, a concept. The concept can be stony and hard; it can be solid. The concept could be even mountain high. That, like our ancestors – our ancestors dug down and had to go through and carve tunnels...and they had to do these things by hand. They had to make this molten – they had not only had to make this molten iron molt, but they had to go into Mother Earth and dig out the iron ore itself to make the pig iron that it can be molted. So, if we look at the concept of a nail, we look at how the materials of that nail were gathered and then look at what we want that nail to do. And, in the process of looking at what we want that nail to do, to look at what we want that nail to. A lot of times, you notice how people be building houses and things. [3:04] A lot of times they hit the nail the wrong way, it bends. Or, according to what they having to cut through – if you see this saw blade (figure 4). There's a saw blade in that image. Right there. It's upside down. Right there.

And, also down here, that rock (figure 5). That rock is on another dam rock.⁷ And, then, if you look at these materials here where I tied with this wire, I tied in

as much as I could another kind of stone that was more like a baby gravel, but it was a mama...this was kind of like a grandmama of a gravel. When you get to Boulder, Colorado, you got that big, big – that big concept of one gravel, of one grain of sand. What has happened over periods as Mother Earth changes – what I'm trying to show here is that one thing changes from another sort and ends up being another sort. But it was Nature that was carrying those things from source to source, and in the process of carrying them from source to source, then they began – it's like, it's like outside.

We can't see the particles of dust, but that dust settles and then it starts to form itself into a rock. Gravity pulls it together, but we can't see how heavy that is until we see a big rock. Now, we see a bunch of those rocks but we mostly see that right around the ocean's edge. We see that in the edges of the ocean. We see where the river flushes so much grain. The river actually is cutting away at all these bluffs and all these mountains. And it's floating its debris downward. So, in the process of all this stuff rolling toward its source, it ends up creating because of gravity. It's like - I think Stevie Wonder said it – it's like a snowball rolling down the side of the snow flush hill.⁸ It's growing. Like...the fish the man claimed broke his reel. It's growing. Every thing is growing, but we don't take the time to see it in its act of growing.

[5:48] What this particular piece of art is showing is when all of those things are put together – when all of those things are put together, that means when I went to Louisiana, I got a chance to see the levee (figure 6).⁹ I got a chance to see the grinded debris that was up against the levee. I got a chance to see the big stones that was supposed to have held the levee out, but yet still all the particles of everything that kept on washing in between these big stones was cutting away at that which was supposed to have been the foundation, so that could be the dam rock at the dam. But, because of the little bitty seams that was left in between it, that means that this water is going to get into this metal.

Once it gets into this metal, because metal is metal, and metal has to do what metal do – and that means that metal will deflate itself back down to its granulated degree. It's just like sawdust that I showed here. If I keep sawing and sawing at that, I'll cut that finally, because every time I'm cutting something away from that space that I'm sawing at. Every time you hit – this





Opposite: Figure 3. Lonnie Holley, *Rusted Nail*, 2009, mixed media including bamboo, found wood, rock, wire, and metal, 64.135 x 30.48 x 19.05 cm, Private Collection (photograph Bernard L. Herman with the permission of Lonnie Holley and the Souls Grown Deep Foundation) Above: Figure 4. *Rusted Nail*, 2009, detail with the “saw blade” and upper portion of the bamboo upright that serves as scaffold and armature for the larger work



Figure 5. Lonnie Holley, *Rusted Nail*, 2009, detail depicting the “grandmamma gravel” and the debris washed around the levee’s base

right here – every time you hit this right here – every time you hit it, that thing right there, is representing the railroad spike that is tying the railroad down to the railroad tie (figure 7). Now, this thing get old down in there. It's like the water and all the oil that gets around it treats it like a little well around it. The oil, what they would call that – creosote...it acts as a little space to not let nothing go out of it. So, that means the water flushes in this hole and it's creosote lined [8:03]. Then the creosote is going to apprehend the water from seeping through the log. So, that means you have set this down in there. Now when water sits around that, it sits right around the spike [and] cause the spike to get rusty. The spike then, every time the train goes across the track, is wiggling the spike. It's like a tooth in your mouth. And, you're wiggling it away from the strength of its source. It gets loose. If we do not do research on the railroad tracks or care about them, if we do not do research on our levees or care about them, if we do not do research on our river flows and care about them...see, care is necessary. In the *Bible* it says, "Love lifted me." Love is care! Love is the word care! You can take away love, just care! And it delivers the same thing that love do.

But if we're not taught that caring is love! If I don't take time to care about this plate [looking at a plate on the table] to understand every one of these little bitty pieces and particles of it. And see, we was well experienced with the particles on the plate, because we didn't get a lot of food. So, a lot of the children licked the plate. They got so close to the plate! You see, so hunger makes you hunger for more than just the gravy, more than just the ingredients. But in the process of you licking the plate, you're never understanding what your taste buds are doing for you. Your taste buds are separating your ingredients and allowing you to taste differently so that you want to taste that again. So, now you go following Mama to the kitchen and watch Mama in the process of making the chicken and the dressing. Mama tell you, "Child, I'm going to make the chicken and the dressing. I'm going to take all the chicken off the bone. I'm going to break this chicken up so fine and I'm going to put it in the dressing." She's teaching you, "I'm going to get you away from greed. I'm going to get you away from jealousy. I'm going to fix this thing so you won't have to fuss or fight. Because I'm going to break all the bones, you won't be worrying if you get the thigh, the drumstick, or the breast. I'm going to tear it all up and put it in the dressing and everybody is going to get the equal amount." That's what my Mama did,

because of having so many children. [10:57]

So, now, me, as an observer, as a person that was kind of thrust in, "You got to observe or I'm going to whup your... I'm going to beat you if you don't observe. If you ain't paying attention, I'm going to beat the mess out of you!" So, I was made to observe, and now that I'm doing these things naturally, they say I'm a freak. They say I'm this or that. People got ways of putting me in a category where they won't have to say I'm the truth.¹⁰ They don't want to say that I'm the truth. Because I take time to digest each thing in order to make the whole picture.

You see, I didn't just digest the record player [referring to the album cover for *Keeping A Record Of It (Harmful Music)*.] (figure 8).¹¹ I wanted the album on there, too. And then I thought about if you misuse and abuse music, you treat it like a dog. And then if that dog die, you only have the skeleton – and the skeleton make you so afraid. The skeleton becomes your bogeyman. There ain't no bogeyman! You're afraid of what was and the great what was covered the bones. And now that you put that away and you got the bones, the bones just don't deteriorate like. They stick around! So the bones become the strengthful reminder that I did exist...that this time period existed. That you were on my slave ship, knowing that I have the captain's bones as the cross – and I put it up there. This was [the] captain, and those were his bones and that's the flag of his bones that's flying. You get afraid of the captain's attitude.

You don't even know the captain. You don't know that the captain stayed in his cabin, and that he stayed halfway drunk just to deal with the situation because his brain had to do this. But, because he had decreed and made a promise, [he] got commissioned to do it. [13.15] He got to a point of being wise enough to do something, then he got commissioned to do it. That mean he got locked and bound in a manner of doing something. That's our government.

Bernard L. Herman: I hear you on that.

LH: You see, that's our government. They cannot be free any longer. They belong to the people. The whole piece of art belongs to the people. But in the act of deterioration, I'm in the act of breakdown. I'm in the act of falling apart [lowers voice]. And when I start falling apart, first thing is I'm stripped of my power. The power things that go around [gestures to electrical conduit]. Look at that. See the power wires



Above: Figure 6. Lonnie Holley photographing Hurricane Katrina storm debris (photograph Matt Arnett) Opposite: Figure 7. Lonnie Holley, *Rusted Nail*, 2009, detail showing the rusted nail free of the creosoted railroad tie and linked to larger histories of African-American industrial heritage

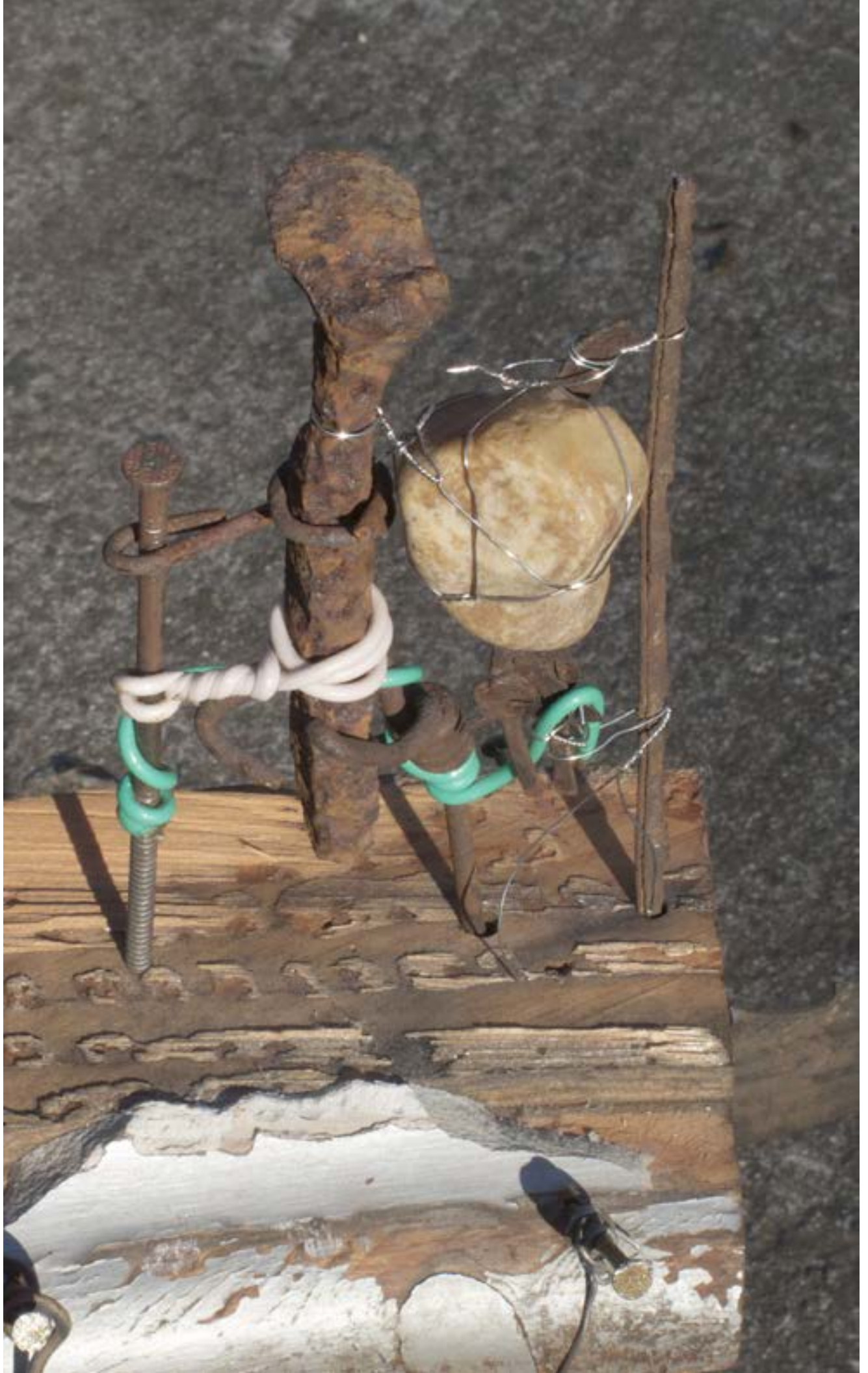






Figure 8. Lonnie Holley, *Keeping A Record Of It (Harmful Music)*, mixed media, 34.925 x 40.01 x 22.86 cm, Souls Grown Deep Foundation (photograph Bernard L. Herman with the permission of Lonnie Holley and the Souls Grown Deep Foundation)



up there? They got a coating on them. See the same thing. [14:10] Look, look! See that spot that's brown on them? You see that thing that's going up there? That's the same thing that is. I'm giving them the same picture of that right there. I'm showing them the interior beyond the exterior.

We're so used to dressing up the exterior. [14:31] I want to get Oprah Winfrey to give me a makeover. I don't care how much money it's going to take to get this, I want this. I want my body [like] this or that and you're not really thinking about brain. Brain wants something from you, too. Brain wants some attention. Brain wants you to show it that you love it more than anything else on earth. And, then it will take care of you. There's a phrase in Africa that was in the South African kind of religion that, "If you take care of us, we take care of you." And, I can understand that! [15:10]

Mother Earth was the caretaker. But when kings were raised to be what they were and had what—they called them witch doctors or seers, or they had high priests—and they had all of these people to guard their spirit. To see and foresee things that would occur! [LH lowers voice] It was all about the gold and all about the diamonds. But when people started gathering this stuff, they started mistreating each other because of what? Riches. They started killing each other because of it. And they didn't distribute it back right.

The reason I did this piece *Six Space Shuttles and 144,000 Elephants* for Queen Elizabeth's birthday (or inauguration) because I have saw that she was a woman that had did more for the whole earth than any kind of woman that I saw. [16:08] Not that I put her up over my mother. My mother had twenty-seven children. How could I put any woman up over that? My mother taught me how to be who I am. My grandmother dug graves. How could I put anybody up over that? But, the concept of her [Queen Elizabeth] adopting the Earth. She holds it in her hands. She turns it. She watches it from place to place.

Now, I said six space shuttles: one for her and one for the other five queens. When five queens come together with her as the pawn, then these five queens could do researchable and gather information. We don't have to worry about fires and things. We can send three space shuttles out in three runs and put out any fire. And, I'm betting you that. I have the

mental ability to see it. But, we're too busy trying to think of wars. We're thinking about starting another fire. Fire plus fire equals fire! You see?

BH: I do.

LH: We got enough ocean water that we could have one of those hovercrafts just to hover out there and have some pumps on it, and, man, that fire... It's not about money. It's about greed. And, greed is allowing people to suffer and die. And, our planet is going to end up suffering the most.

[At this moment, Lonnie Holley thinks that the recorder has turned off and wants to make sure it is still running.]

We want to get down to the nitty gritty. I'm talking about that. I really love that piece [referring to the sculpture that began the conversation (figure 3)]. We're cutting at our own internet. You see that? That's a bamboo. That's a piece of bamboo go up there. China and Japan, they're users of more bamboo than any... If you notice how I use materials and how I try to bind those materials together because in the action of humans caring about the globe itself, we must become all global to one because this has to happen. Each one of my joints in my finger was a purpose[ful] design. And, I don't know the Creator. A lot of people have a problem with God. I don't know the Creator. But, I think that whoever it is, is a master creator. To create billions and billions. Every generation that shared the way, you got billions and billions being reborn to take the places of those billions that have died. This is a wonderful planet as far as humans is concerned, but we got to realise that [18:57].

We was put here for the purpose of Mother Earth. I did this song *From Leaf To Leaf, From Tree To Tree*. It goes back down to root-to-root to sea-to-sea. Everything reduces itself back down to what? The seed of the matter. And, the piece that you did on *Ninth Hour*.¹² Ninth Hour is very, very important, But, do I suggest myself to death? OK, I'm ready to die; go ahead, let the fire burn. Ain't nothing I can do about it. I'm a Southern boy and I'm off the Mississippi River. Ain't nothing I can do about it...except make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Every baby that is born is a new Lord. Every mother that sits and cries is a Lord crying. Every father. Every one of those firemen that have died. My whole thing is not only have the firemen died, the creatures are dying around them.

Figure 9. Lonnie Holley, *Take Care Of The Paperwork While You Still Have The Power*, c. 1996, mixed media, 162.56 x 123.19 x 101.6 cm, Souls Grown Deep Foundation (photograph Michael Stasny with the permission of Lonnie Holley and the Souls Grown Deep Foundation)

And, scientists are out there, but they're not getting enough coverage, man. It's about money. It's about hoarding, too. I'd rather take it to death. [20:10]. I'd rather die. Either a bunch of people would rather die, and then what do it do? It ends up back in the government's hands. Because they didn't do what? You remember the piece I did for the Olympics?¹³ *Take Care Of The Paperwork While You Still Have The Power* (figure 9). Everything that I've already done is part of the conversation of what needs to be done.

BH: It's what I find that's incredible in your work – that it's all linked. It's not this and this and this. It's continuous.

LH: The teacher called me up in front of the class when I was six years old...and one of my proudest moments at school were I believe that day. And, she spun the globe real fast in front of me and she said, "Tunky," she said, "this is your world." And I looked up at her and then I turned and looked to the class and I looked back at the globe and I said, "This is my world." This is my world! If I have to live on it individually, it's still my world! If I have to live on it with the billions, it's still my world! If you have to find me within the crevices of it, it's my world. If you put me in an escalator and say, "I'm going to send you to and beyond." The Gee's Bend quilters call me the Beyond. Half of them say that I'm Moses... Before Nettie died, she called me the Beyond.¹⁴ Before Nettie Young [died], the old lady, she saw me as the Beyonder.

BH: The Beyonder?

LH: She say, "You is saying things that is beyond the mentality in a sense." I know that. And I be afraid. I sometimes hurt. I cry because of what I have to endure for her and the mentality around and about me. Do you know for Black History, no church at all invites me to even come say anything. But watch this when they hear on the other side of the pulpit, they going to wish they hadn't. On the other side of the pulpit talk's about reality that I step in each and every day. Reality that you step in each and every day! That our children stepping in each and every day. And that reality is causing congested highway matter. You ever notice how long it takes you to get through a crisis on the highway now? And, have people riding around in a hybrid car? And, don't even have nothing to bust out in case the battery went dead. They don't have a way of getting out the car! They are locked in! It's like they have entombed themselves in the further

search of future realities. They didn't teach her [the car] how to open the door for you after she locked the door and then the battery went dead. Duh. Duh. Who would conceive a concept and didn't even have a backup concept in case that concept didn't even work? Who would do that? Einstein talked about that.

Alright, Bernie, we got to get ready to go. But listen, Bernie, I really appreciate it.

BH: It's always an education. Thank you Lonnie. [23:54]

¹See especially, Lonnie Holley, "The Best That Almost Happened," and William Arnett, "Out-Outgripping The Mome Raths," in William Arnett and Paul Arnett, eds., *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art*, vol. 2 (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2001), 538-74 and 575-83.

²Lonnie Holley, *Just Before Music* (2012), Dust-to-Digital, ASIN: B009LJ2XQ0; *Keeping A Record Of It* (2013), Dust-to-Digital ASIN: B00EJJSW1M.

³A recent example of this practice appears in Mark Binelli, "The Insider's Outsider," *The New York Times Magazine* (26 January 2014), 32-37. There are exceptions, for example Monica Uszerowicz's "Lonnie Holley" in *Creem Magazine* (2013), <http://creemmag.com/lonnie-holley/>.

⁴Grayson Currin, "Don't supposed to be dying yet: The journey of Lonnie Holley," *Pitchfork* (November 14, 2013), <http://pitchfork.com/features/the-out-door/9258-out-door-tk/2/>.

⁵Binelli, "The Insider's Outsider," (January 26, 2014), 37.

⁶I am indebted to Scott Browning, Matt Arnett, Bill Arnett, Rebecca Herman, and Lance Ledbetter for their help in facilitating the interview and tracking down its referents. Steve Pitkin of Pitkin Studios and Sarah Story and Gary Parky of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art made key images available. Most of all, I am grateful to Lonnie Holley for this conversation and the many others we have enjoyed together.

⁷Lonnie Holley is specific in his mention of the "dam rock" as will be discovered deeper in his text. The "dam rock" is understood as a foundation element.

⁸The reference here is to the song *It's Growing*, originally recorded by the Temptations (1965). Stevie Wonder did write and record – but did not release – a song titled *It's Growing* in the early to mid 1980s. The lyrics, however, do not match Lonnie Holley's paraphrase, which clearly reflects the Temptations' earlier work.

⁹Lonnie Holley refers here to his work in New Orleans first working with displaced persons immediately following the storm and the subsequently for the exhibition "Ogun Meets Vulcan: Ironworkers of Alabama" at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art (March 17 – June 19, 2007). Holley toured Hurricane Katrina devastation during the course of his visit, collecting storm debris and constructing mixed media sculptures including the installation for the Ogden entitled *8 Fences In*. . http://www.saatchigallery.com/museums/full-museum-details/news_events/ac_id/339

¹⁰Where Holley has identified himself as an "American artist," others have focused on the performative aspects of his work. Here, Holley locates his creative work within the language of the prophet and the historian. Binelli, "The Insider's Outsider," (January 26, 2014), 35-7.

¹¹<http://soulsgrowndeep.org/artist/lonnie-holley/work/keeping-record-it-harmful-music>.

¹²Lonnie Holley refers here to a spoken word piece composed and recorded winter 2008. Titled *One Hour After Slavery*, the work forms the starting point for a discussion on the rhetorical power of Holley's vision and art in the forthcoming Bernard L. Herman's *Troublesome Things*.

¹³Lonnie Holley refers here to an installation entitled *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South* organised by William Arnett for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. Sally Ann Duncan's 2007 review for *Radical History Review* addressed the exhibition and the cultural politics came into play. Duncan's review is available in full at <http://soulsgrowndeep.org/news/souls-grown-deep-and-cultural-politics-atlanta-olympics-radical-history-review>.

¹⁴Nettie Young's biography as well as examples of her quilts appear in John Beardsley, William Arnett, Paul Arnett, and Jane Livingston, *Gee's Bend: The Women and Their Quilts* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Hoston, 2002), 366-7. Young's quilts appear throughout the larger text.



Figure 1. Henry Darger (1892-1973), *53 At Jennie Richee Assuming naked appearance by compulsion race ahead of coming storm to warn their father*, Chicago, mid-twentieth century, watercolour, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper, 48.26 x 178.43 cm, Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York, Gift of Ralph Esmerian in memory of Robert Bishop, 2000.25.3A, © 2014 Kiyoko Lerner / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (photograph James Prinz)
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Vivam!: The Divine Intersexuality of Henry Darger’s Vivian Girl

Leisa Rundquist

On an envelope containing photographic negatives, Henry Darger wrote, “little girl on the run, maybe draw in massacre picture.”¹ Like so many other notations on boxes, scrapbook pages, and bits of random paper, this label served a dual purpose of directing the artist’s attention to content as well as to potential use. The negatives, sourced from his local drugstore, signify an important development in Darger’s artistic practices; that is, through photographic enlargement, he found a means to enhance the scale of individual motifs, while retaining their proportional integrity. Unsure of his ability to draw, Darger rendered form through copying and tracing, occasionally adding

collaged elements and small pencilled-in additions. Photographic enlargement, traced by his own hand, allowed him to create modifications in scale and dramatic, perspectival arrangements. Art historians cite and celebrate this development, among others, as evidence of Darger’s ingenuity.² Additionally, in an oeuvre that is notoriously difficult to date accurately, the stamped drugstore receipts within enlargement envelopes establish a ballpark commencement date (post-1944) for later components of Darger’s work.

Scholars, though, overlook the significance of the “little girl on the run” motif (figure 1) and the artist’s predetermination of her placement in “massacre pictures.” One finds this sprinter, a haunting and powerful liminal figure, in dangerous, action-packed scenarios where waves of girls run, fight, or bravely stand their ground. Within “massacre pictures”—representations of seemingly arbitrary child-butcherery and ritualistic martyrdoms, as well as predatory “natural” occurrences—approaching storms, fires, and tornadoes—the little girl on the run becomes



the dominant motif travelling the infinite terrain of Darger's war-torn epic, *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion* (hereafter *In the Realms of the Unreal*). Believed to have been written between 1910 and the late 1930s, and illustrated later, from 1918 into the 1960s, *In Realms of the Unreal* is comprised of approximately 15,145 pages and over 300 watercolour-collages.³ Its narrative describes, in encyclopaedic detail, holy wars between practitioners of child-slavery, under the godless, satanic nation of Glandelinia, and the Catholic kingdoms under Angelinia. In this mythic saga, the Vivian Girls, seven young princess-orphans, become the catalyst for insurrection and subsequent liberation of thousands of indigenous, child slaves.

Within the imagery of *In Realms of the Unreal*, the running girl reads as more than just a symbol of flight, rather she lingers in Darger's drawings as a mercurial emblem of mobility, (re)combination,

playfulness, and social disruption. Darger frequently elects to depict the running girl naked or partially clothed, further exposing her little body to potential harm.⁴ Her vulnerable, open, and active state permits Darger to selectively add hand-drawn male genitalia between parting and extending little legs. With a few, simple pencil marks, Darger fabricates a complex, fantastic intersexed child—a queer figure of motility and fluid mutability. (figure 2) Her visage becomes a blur of both motion and gender. Ever expansive, as she morphs back and forth between little girl and epicene creature, she additionally embodies metaphysical proportions. Throughout his narrative, Darger associates his fictional children with martyrdom, witnessing and resurrection: "Holy Innocents," he said, "who would be terrible witnesses against all things recorded against the Glandelinians ... These beauteous bands who either in reality, or in this story, followers of the Lamb withersoever he goeth would have been made up of Dear Children, who might evidently, after death, been changed into other Christs ..."⁵ Her significant form, sacred, yet,



Figure 2. Henry Darger (1892-1973), *Untitled (fashion illustration and tracing)*, Chicago, mid-twentieth century, newspaper illustration with pencil markings (left); carbon tracing with pencil on paper (right), 24.13 x 13.97 cm (left); 27.94 x 21.59 cm (right), Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York, Gift of Kiyoko Lerner, 2003.7.13A, B, © 2014 Kiyoko Lerner / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (photograph Gavin Ashworth)

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profanely rendered naked and sexually indeterminate simultaneously reinforces and troubles her little girl sainthood.

Visible signs of ambiguously gendered, sexed childhood permeate Darger's art. Curiously, the artist himself does not explain, or even mention, trans-gendered bodies, hermaphrodites, or sexual hybridity in his voluminous detailed narrative and captions. His prose, instead, insists upon the beauty, purity, and wholesome integrity of the seven Vivians and the thousands of little girls populating his tale. Consider, for example, this belaboured passage in which Darger describes his ultimate girl crusaders:

What ever else was beautiful or dainty or delightful faded to nothingness when contrasted with the bewitching faces of the Vivian Girls, and it has

often been said by those who know that no other ruler in all the world, nor any children, boys or girls or even women, can ever hope to equal, or ever will equal or even get anywhere near to it, the gracious charm of their manner, loveliness, and righteousness that equalled their features.⁶

Furthermore, his imagery provides no indication that gender-morphing disrupts these aesthetic and moral traits or that hybridity equates in any manner to corruption, sin, or vice. Morphing, rather, conforms to the Vivian "naturally"—without need for explanation or great spectacle in itself.⁷ Given the frequency of such trans-gendering situations (and the important role it plays in representing the sacred girl body) one must assume that this in-between gender morphology signifies meaning, aligning with Vivian traits of purity and virtue. However, consciously or

not, Darger's pencilled-in additions literally draw attention to sexual organs and, in the eyes of many, erotically charge her body.

As such, this strangely-sexed "girl" rendered a psychoanalytic and sometimes puerile reading in the majority of early Darger scholarship, precluding other interpretations. One of the most prominent scholars, John MacGregor leads this line of thought, arguing that the artist is caught between "knowing and not knowing" in regards to the physical differences between boys and girls.⁸ MacGregor infantilises Darger, claiming that his understanding of sex and sexuality is stunted and in many ways a form of innocence. Relying on the theory of Freudian castration anxiety, MacGregor sums up the image of the epicene child in Darger's art as the result of sexual regression into infantile complexes, yet he additionally hints at adult sexual perversion with, "other possibilities ... too frightening to contemplate." MacGregor writes:

...in such ways as not knowing, the truth has a way of breaking through in disguised form. In Darger's case knowing and not knowing seem at times to alternate with the rapidity of a child playing peek-a-boo, now you see it now you don't...one is reminded of another childhood game played by little boys, that of hiding their genitals by tucking them back between their tightly compressed legs...Other explanations accounting for its absence are: 'It is small now, but it will grow.' Obviously, other possibilities are too frightening to contemplate. With Darger, the regular appearance and disappearance of the penis in his drawings may reflect an unconscious playing with the levels of reality, a daring approach and retreat from the truth, which he knows and does not know. If so, while this game may have originated in childhood it persisted to the end of his life.⁹

MacGregor's psychoanalytic approach treats Darger's representations of children as diagnostic material and thus reduces the imagery to a manifestation of the artist's disturbed psyche.¹⁰

The 2002 study by MacGregor remains the most informative text on Darger's art and life, however, scholarly interest in relying on psycho-biographical methods have waned in recent years in favour of research that considers cultural influences in tandem with the artist's material resources and other methodologies. Shortly before MacGregor's

study was published, writer and curator, Michael Bonesteel pioneered this new direction with brief, yet significant observations relating to Darger's collections of newspaper clippings and children's literature.¹¹ Bonesteel raised questions regarding the artist's intentionality in rendering sexual dualism. Specifically, he wondered if this girl equipped with male genitalia could be an attempt to indicate a mythological state, a child body endowed with a "warrior status."¹² Bonesteel noted that like St. Joan of Arc, the Vivian Girls exhibit a kind of supernatural quality aligning with their mutual cross-dressing and military prowess. Later, in a 2009 catalogue, Museum of Modern Art curator, Klaus Biesenbach suggested that Darger's transgendered child shares a kinship with a character from L. Frank Baum's second Oz series, *The Marvellous Land of Oz* (1904).¹³ In this sequel to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), the boy-protagonist Tip learns that he was once the Princess Ozma, transformed through a magical spell cast by the witch Mombi. After pressure from the Sorceress Glinda, Mombi agrees to change Tip back to his previous sex and identity, so he can begin his/her reign as the princess. Darger owned first editions of the complete *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its thirteen sequels and incorporated Oz characters and locations into his own, *In the Realms of the Unreal*. Although Tip is not specifically incorporated in Darger's tale, Biesenbach proposes that a sense of fairy tale enchantment, appropriated from the Oz series, plays a significant role in Darger's representations of sexually-mutable bodies.

Michael Moon's recent publication, *Darger's Resources*, presents the most significant departure from dominant pathologising interpretations of Darger's depictions of little girls.¹⁴ Comparing Darger's "sequelating" literary energies to those of early twentieth-century comic strips, illustrated children's adventure stories, war chronicles, and pulp magazines, Moon asserts that such popular and relatively inexpensive literary sources provided more than aesthetic models for Darger; they also offered intellectual fodder.¹⁵ Extending his discussion to Catholic virgin-martyr narratives, Moon draws connections between the violence inflicted upon Darger's girl martyrs and stories of the acts of female martyrs venerated before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). While Moon doesn't directly tackle the image of the transgendered child, his conclusions establish a point of departure important to the present essay. Moon argues that in spite of being socially-isolated, Darger was "a



Figure 3. Henry Darger (1892-1973), *At Sunbeam Creek are with little girl refugees again in Peril from forest fires. but escape this also, but half naked and in burned rags/ At Torrington. Are persued by a storm of fire but save themselves by jumping into a stream and swim across as...*, Chicago, mid-twentieth century, watercolour, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper, 48.26 x 179.07 cm, Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York, anonymous gift in recognition of Sam Farber, 2004.1.2A © 2014 Kiyoko Lerner / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (photograph James Prinz)
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product of the devotional and spiritual tendencies of the Roman Catholic Church.”¹⁶ Moreover, he contends that Darger’s creative output should be examined against, not outside of, mainstream culture. “His world,” says Moon, “was not really a private or secret one, particular or unique to him (no matter how clandestine his characteristic mode of working may have been), as much as it was in many ways a public one composed of the myriad elements scavenged during a lifetime of reading and viewing and collecting images and narratives and rhetorics from a bewildering array of sources.”¹⁷

Building upon the momentum of recent scholarship that contextualises Darger within secular and religious cultural spheres, this study of the running/morphing girl examines relationships between Darger’s Vivian Girls and female saints celebrated in Catholic devotional cults. His appropriation and use of holy cards, martyr narratives, as well as his own variations on specific martyrs’ names and their legendary ambiguous gender suggest a divine lineage

between the Vivians, Christ, and female martyrs like SS. Vivia Perpetua and Joan of Arc. Pursuing these connections, the following line of inquiry opens the possibilities for further discussion of Darger’s Vivians within a broad-ranging, less sexualised framework, by bringing this girl (a type) into the context of art and religion. Her precocious, contradictorily-sexed body and ambiguous gender speak broadly, and with rich complexity, to belief structures concerning the role of the body within the Catholic faith. As importantly, her changeling form illustrates the artist’s desire to fabricate an extraordinary child beyond nature—capable both of defeating bloodthirsty Glandelinians and rebelling against conventional girlhood. As such, I argue that the trans-gendering girl does not culminate in a denial of difference—a succinct conclusion determining sexual perversion. She remains a multivalent symbolic force sprinting through fantastical possibilities and orienting towards other symbolic texts (here, female saints). Beneath the surface of Vivian dynamism and metamorphosis, lies this running-girl figure’s metaphoric significance and



power as movement between concepts (transition, crossing or going beyond). She, the running girl, is a sacred image verging on sacrilege, a slippage between innocence and sexuality—super-fluid and spilling all over the place.

A Typical Scenario: Little Girls on the Run

In *At Sunbeam Creek ...At Torrington* (figure 3) the Vivian Girl operates on pure *vivam* (literally, “I shall live”), evading impending doom and awaiting her next surge of energy. A tripartite construction, each scene appears as a distinct cell with the capacity of telling individual stories. Although these three scenes jump from bright day to black forest to blazing firestorm, they flow together under the narrative aegis of a thrilling chase—one in which a predatory fire endangers the lives of little girls.

The heat in the final passage palpitates. A wall of bright yellow flames with slight orange modelling and rising, faint striations covers the top half of the

image. Flaming debris falls from the sky. The glare of the fire is equally matched by the conspicuous disrobing of the girls – one without a blouse, two bearing shoulders, and four with only tattered pieces hanging from their upper torsos. This latter group, almost completely naked, display penises. These obviously epicene creatures elevate the climactic moment of this scene through surprise and sudden revelation of their sexually-mutable bodies.

Captions from this fiery triad offer little, if any, clues to the mysterious, trans-gendering finale. Darger’s notations follow a chase narrative, fixating on the last image. The episode begins with the first caption: “At Sunbeam Creek. Are with little girl refugees again in peril from forest fires. But escape this also, but half naked and in burned rags.”¹⁸ Curiously, this caption does not narrate the companion scene. Darger’s yearning to arrive at the last inflamed passage surfaces again in the second panel: “At Torrington. Are pursued (sic) by a storm of fire but save themselves by jumping into a stream and swim

across as seen in the next picture.”¹⁹ Here, again, instead of attending to the immediate image, Darger impatiently pushes on to the final scene. Once there, he reticently divulges what appears before our eyes: “Their red colour is caused by glare of flames. At Torrington. They reach the river just in the nick of time.”²⁰ Without warning, Darger leaps beyond his captions and the norms of physiology by visually trans-gendering the little girl-body. Revealing her form’s recombination, Darger moves this child, already in motion, beyond the category of girl into something alien and *other*. She emerges triumphant in the last panel, playing, dancing and unaffected by her nakedness.

Envisioning “Nuded” Children

Little girl “refugees,” wearing next to nothing, flee the firestorm in *At Sunbeam Creek ... At Torrington*. Naked girls aim and fire rifles (some still in their “Mary Jane” shoes, anklet socks, and wide-brim hats) in *6 Episode 3 Place not mentioned. Escape during violent storm, still fighting though pursued (sic) for long distance*²¹ and another naked group sprints across a panoramic expanse in *At Jennie Richee. Assuming nuded appearance by compulsion race ahead of coming storm to warn their father* (figure 1). In these action-packed scenes, and countless others, nakedness conveys multiple and contradictory messages of strength and athletic vigour, bravery, innocence, and powerlessness. Referring to Darger’s girls as “naked” reflects my own thoughts (and projection) onto his unclothed or partially-clothed children. I use the term to suggest a state of transition and exposure, deprived of clothing and vulnerable. Darger describes his girls as both “naked” and “nude,” often preferring the term “nuded.”²² Darger’s nuded girls denote a passive context indicating that somehow, forces (known or unknown) strip girls of their clothing. Nuded happens, and as Darger’s art attests, the girls do not mind, except, of course, when fiery tongues of flame or Glandelinian hands disrobe them. Girls frolic in fields, battle foes, and run for the hills in various states of undress. Darger shows them forgoing gestures of modesty, expressing, instead, an Edenic shamelessness, comfortable and quite capable of multiple and dangerous tasks, *nuded*.

By creating his own term for the girls’ disrobed condition, Darger suggests a third state—neither this nor that—signalling something unrestrained and in-between.²³ Such liminality, a moment of escape from biological and socially constructed boundaries,

allows his protagonists to exist, however briefly, within a transcendent form. Simultaneously, the girls also evade certain death—a renowned Vivian skill. Etymologically speaking, the morphing “Vivian” denotes her perpetual will to live... “Vivam!” She is still alive and transformed.

Comparison of an original drawing of a girl from the Sears Roebuck catalogue with Darger’s traced variation (figure 2) illustrates the way in which he extruded “nuded” and trans-gendered children from representations of girls that populated mass culture’s advertisements, colouring books, and comic strips. This example, a girl in a short jumper and roller skates, translates onto carbon paper as a nearly nude, trans-gendering girl wearing only socks and shoes. Darger pulls a pencil along the silhouette of her diminutive figure, imagining her form beneath the folds of cloth. Schematic male genitalia complete her open-legged, active pose. Drawing becomes for Darger an act of penetrating scrutiny; he disrobes the girl in order to know what lies behind the surface of her exterior. The act of tracing—both of reenactment and creation—allowed Darger, beginning with a girl’s essential form, to imaginatively unlock secrets of girlhood that are latent in images from popular culture. Drawing instigated a literal exposure, a frank revealing of the openness and ambiguous potential of girl bodies. By creating a *nuded* form, Darger reclaimed her “innocent” and “natural” origins while simultaneously re-inventing the girl by re-inscribing and re-combining her palimpsest body into a child of remarkable powers, beauty and wonder.

In his prose, Darger delineates biological sex predominately through hairstyle and hair length. Bouncy curls and flowing locks signify “female.” Short-cropped hair signifies “male.” Passages in his narrative confirm this pattern:

... she (Jennie Turmer) was adapting to her slender and pretty little form a little boy’s attire, in which it was deemed safest she should make her escape to the Christian army, under the Emperor.

‘Now for the needed sacrifice,’ said she as she stood before a looking glass, and shook down her silky abundance of golden curly hair. ... Jennie turned to the glass, and the scissors glittered as one long lock after another was detached so that she wore now short bobbed hair.²⁴

A masquerade of male gender implicitly informs this

passage. A few paragraphs later, Jennie and her compatriots discuss boyish mannerisms:

And I must stamp and take long steps like a boy, and look saucy." "Don't exert yourself too much on that." said Gertrude. "There is now and then sissy young boys who act like girls you know, and I think therefore it would be better and easier to act like a boy who is in the class of sissies."²⁵

Acting like a boy who acts like a girl, Jennie sets out on her escape. We learn here that boys exhibit a vigorous gait and, perhaps of consequence to Darger's depictions of lunging and running transgendered children, "take long steps." In this imaginary world, gender twists and turns on the child's body as a tool for adaptation. These slippages of gender prove valuable, even necessary for saving the day. Darger visualises his warrior child (the fantasy Jennie) resplendent with cross-identifications of girlhood and boyhood.

Accordingly, in *In The Realms of the Unreal*, hair prevails as a signifier of gender while genital differences carry less specificity in determining girls from boys. Moreover, the biological sex of characters in Darger's world appears to be unconnected to primary or secondary sexual characteristics, and instead displaced on other markers (like hair and patterns of movement). The few boys that do appear in his art maintain their short hairstyle and genital designations. Little girls, on the other hand, possess loose, mutable forms. Girl-creatures with both girlish hairstyles and male genitals never fully morph into boys. Gendered hair traits remain, even in this in-between state. Captions accompanying trans-gendering images, like *At Sunbeam Creek... At Torrington*, continue to assert that we "Are with Little Girl Refugees Again..."²⁶ While his written words do not speak of this obvious transformation, Darger's verbose imagery indicates that these in-between creatures fluctuate between girl and girlish, exhibiting a sense of continuance—a becoming—without a final transformative endpoint.

In addition to denuding his figures, Darger also gleaned some of his illustrations of unclothed children directly from material culture. A small portion of his magazine and newspaper clippings feature children in the nude and partial dress. Found newspaper photographs, such as one displaying prepubescent girls informally posing in a bathtub²⁷ and another of nude children dancing in a circle with an

accompanying caption, "Back to Nature Play"²⁸ may have served as figure studies and as confirmation from mainstream culture that such portrayals were equated with an innocent, carefree state. While some scholars refer to this collection of clippings as his "private erotica,"²⁹ I wish to point out that these images originate from "legitimate" and public sources—*Ladies Home Journal*, *Life Magazine*, and various Chicago newspapers. If anything, these images of children are our erotica. At the risk of positioning Darger as a passive victim caught up within a lurid cultural phenomenon, I argue that this type of imagery, intended to confer "innocence," was plentiful in American mass media of the early twentieth-century. Our current day reaction to this resource material is informed by our twenty-first century fears. I will admit that Darger's attachment to these images exceeds what one considers ordinary and that we do not fully know why the artist collected them. However, "ordinary," like "normal," is a relative term tied to a culturally specific consensus of ideas, and Darger did very little, if anything, within "ordinary" limits or in moderation. He sought out these photos and advertisements, compiling multiples on certain themes. Some were modified and used as templates for girls in *In the Realms of the Unreal*. For example, he acquired twenty copies of the Coppertone Girl³⁰ using her form to create a surprised child that looks over her left shoulder, as in *[Storm] brewing. This is not a strawberry the little girl is carrying. It comes from a paradise tree...*³¹

Theorist James Kincaid argues that, for adults, images of children produce both uneasiness and joy: "the child carries for us things we somehow cannot carry ourselves, sometimes anxieties we want to be divorced from and sometimes pleasures so great we would not without the child, know how to contain them."³² Kincaid's scholarship offers a cultural context for analysing Darger's art. His examination of Victorian literature encompasses sentimentalised depictions of childhood familiar to Darger—characters by J.M. Barrie, Lewis Carroll, Charles Dickens, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, for instance. Likewise, Kincaid's investigations into the eroticization of innocence extend into American twentieth-century narratives of child abduction, the phenomenon of child movie stars, and advertising imagery. Again, his subjects align with mainstream concerns, interests, and visual resources that are relevant to Darger's art and writings. Kincaid asserts that American culture strives to protect and preserve images of childhood, associating children

with innocence and with a carefree and pre-sexual state. Darger's art complicates these associations. However, Kincaid suggests, culture also complicates images of children. He persuasively argues that the child, pure and stainless, acts as a foil for our disavowed desires. As America's iconic treatment of the Coppertone Girl advertisement implies, culture cultivates this movement between sexuality and non-sexual innocence, further eroticising the child. Kincaid warns that our culture dwells on this image, and other child-manifestations with "underpants on the way off," for the wrong reasons: "Not only do we read our adult desires back onto the blushing child, there's a crude allegory of cultural practice here as well, an emblem of vigorous duplicity: we uncover what we shield, censure what we enjoy."³³

American culture's slippages of innocence and sexuality create, eroticise, and commodify the Coppertone Girl and numerous other girl-figures (in uniforms, frilly dresses, and Mary Jane shoes). These girls come to Darger's art ready-made, overflowing with (veiled but embodied) erotic potential and emotional investment. So, if we are to believe Kincaid, the art world eroticises Darger's girls as much as the artist does – perhaps more. Cultural constructs of sexual fantasy and repressed paranoia create interest in, and concern for, this aspect of Darger's work. Speaking of Darger's imagery as contained within *his* pathologic fetish further disavows the fact that Darger's work participates in a larger cultural phenomenon of uncovering and shielding the child.³⁴

If we can, for a moment, set aside the psychoanalytic notion that the nude transgendered child image is a product of Darger's own peculiarly skewed reality and consider instead that we are dealing with a representation, or more accurately, a complex pastiche with multivalent meanings, we begin to plumb the depths of the image's potential. However, like all else in *In the Realms of the Unreal*, no singular rule or code regulates representation. One transgendered type in Darger's repertoire sharply contrasts the active, defiant child sprinting through action-packed scenes. I describe her here as a "girl-with-pail" figure, often depicted by Darger as upright, frontally displaying her *nuded* form and male genitalia. Sometimes with a finger to her mouth, and/or a tucked arm behind her back, this recurring child-motif subtly projects her body forward towards the viewer. Her defining cuteness, a coy plea for attention, manifests in her upturned eyes and tucked-in chin. The whimsical pail that she holds doubles as

a signifier of her playful nature and her toil as slave. Inert, she appears to play the willing victim—another variation of the "martyr" in Darger's visual art.

The Vivian Girl, a template for the thousands of little girls, procures vitality and significance through flux, an excessive metamorphosis comprising perpetual changes, boundary crossings, and the surprise encounters of incongruous elements. Throughout Darger's *In Realms of the Unreal* female bodies are transformed and empowered through inversions and reversals. They share this in common with stories about Catholic saints.

Female Saints "Becoming Male"

Darger's Catholic faith permeated every aspect of his life. He grew up in Catholic boys' homes, worked in Catholic hospitals, covered his apartment with holy cards, iconic statuettes, crucifixes, and chromolithographs, and went to Mass daily, often making multiple trips for novenas and feast days. He died in a Catholic nursing home. With a self-deprecating humour, he referred to himself as a "sorry saint"³⁵ while he created a vast, imaginary world teeming with soldiers of Catholic nations fighting for the release of little girls enslaved by godless foes.

Many elements of Catholic material culture remain obvious and identifiable in Darger's art (for example, traced and collaged holy cards and Sacred Heart images).³⁶ However, his visual re-conception of a mutable, and as I argue, thus symbolically holy female body, presents us with a hybrid creature difficult to categorise, let alone pinpoint to a single devotional image. Turning to the wealth of fantastic stories within Catholic literature describing physical transformations, as well as belief structures blurring gendered boundaries, provides us with a strong corollary to Darger's equally supernatural Vivian Girl. Suffering for the Christian cause, his little girls, like Catholic female martyrs and mystics, display astounding self-control and physical strength. The little girls additionally demonstrate their Christ-like fortitude through their gender-bending, mutable bodies during intense moments that test their resolve.

By "becoming male," or performing "male-ness," certain female saints rebuked social and biological determinations of roles. According to theology scholar Margaret Miles, such "male" performances included practicing forms of asceticism (maintenance of chastity and virginity, fasting), estranging themselves

from patriarchal figures and domesticity, changing bodily appearance, and exhibiting spiritual fortitude.³⁷ Male hagiographers described these “virile” women as “more like men than nature would seem to allow.”³⁸

Examples from this “male” genre include, Thecla, a beautiful noblewoman who repudiates her engagement to retain her virginity, alienates her family, and follows the Apostle Paul. Thecla cut her hair and wore men’s clothes in order to travel freely and avoid rape. Pelagia masqueraded as a man and joined a monastery (her gender was discovered after her death). The fictitious St. Uncumber, or St. Wilgefortis, a ten-year-old girl, popular in the Roman Catholic Church from the fifteenth century through the liturgical reform of Vatican II, was crucified by her father for magically-sprouting a beard the night before her arranged marriage. Usually represented nailed to a cross, this bearded woman is often confused with a crucified Christ. Wilgefortis is derived from *virgo fortis* (or, strong virgin). This saint was also known as *Libertata* and *Librada* (liberty) in Italy and Spain, respectively.³⁹

Contradictory liminalities of gender, not only thrive within these tales of Christian saints, but, also, inform ways in which Catholics thought, and continue to think, about the power of the divine. Within the Catholic worldview, or what sociologist and priest Andrew Greeley describes as, the “Catholic imagination,” the carnality of humanity offers the faithful a locus for engaging the divine. The Incarnation of Christ, His Passion, and Resurrection, among other central tenets of the Catholic faith (the Immaculate Conception, and Transubstantiation of the Eucharist, for example) rely upon the miraculous potential and malleability of the physical, human body.⁴⁰ Flesh becomes both the source for and symbol of religious piety. The *vitas* of female saints, most emphatically, provide a vivid structure for conceptualising how flesh could reach sacred heights through experiences of both pleasure and pain. In fact, medieval historian Caroline Walker Bynum posits that female saints and mystics exhibited the most corporeally theatric constitutions with propensities for falling into trances and experiencing stigmata, levitation, and elongation or enlargement of parts of the body. She states, “Although both men and women manipulated their bodies from the outside, so to speak, by flagellation and other forms of self-inflicted suffering, cases of psychosomatic manipulation (or manipulation from within) are almost exclusively female.”⁴¹

As Christ’s body remained the paradigm for suffering and redemption, so too subsequently, did the female body, with results that blurred gendered boundaries. Again, Bynum explains, “medieval writers associated woman with the body or the humanity of Christ, often treating Christ’s flesh as female—especially in its salvific functions of bleeding and nurturing.”⁴² She continues, “Not only was Christ enfleshed with the flesh of a woman; his own flesh did womanly things; it bled food and gave birth to new life.”⁴³ These mystical associations between Christ and female flesh, and by extension female martyrs, are embedded within Catholic martyrologies. Their prescribed gender-bending connotations were not lost on Darger, as we shall see. He wove visual pairings of Christ with female saints into the backgrounds of narrative scenes as if setting contextual references for unfolding Vivian Girl adventures. Through horrific illustrations of crucifixions and other extreme acts of altruism he conflates the girl-body with that of suffering martyr, potentially even with Christ. Visualising spiritual properties through the flesh of his little girl figure, a diminutive female, Darger raises the stakes to higher levels of sacredness and sentimentality as she becomes the ultimate site for suffering and Christian love. In one opening passage of the *In Realms of the Unreal*, he offered an explanation for his choice of little girl heroines, arguing that, “little girls do and are brave enough, for a fact, to be able to play and show any amount of nerve and courage, full equal or moreso (sic) than boys or men or women who may take part in active warfare.”⁴⁴ He ends with this statement, reinforcing the absolute strength of the female sex: “Above all, in patient endurance of pain and suffering and sorrow, all women were and are immeasurably (sic) superior to men, and women always make sacrifices that men would think of in horror.”⁴⁵ Note his emphasis on “endurance,” “pain,” “suffering,” and “sacrifice”—terms more widely associated with martyrdom than childhood.

We find evidence of Darger’s investment in these thoughts through his incorporation of the female saints dear to him, Joan of Arc and Vivia Perpetua, whose name and strange morphology closely resembles that of the Vivians. Both legends of SS Perpetua and Joan serve as models within Miles’ genre of “becoming male” and illustrate Bynum’s assertion that fluid gendered associations overlay notions of female flesh and Christ. The deeds of SS Perpetua and Joan serve as models for those of numerous female martyrs, renouncing socially constructed gender roles and sexuality, resulting in

either a life of asceticism or martyrdom. However, the acts of Joan of Arc and Vivia Perpetua move beyond performances of bravery and self-abnegation into practices of cross-dressing and trans-gendering epiphanies, respectively. Their significant stories destabilise the categories of gender and are oriented not necessarily towards the goal of becoming male, but, to that of transcending their sex and earthly existence—a divine state which Miles finds explicit within the cult of the *virgo fortis*, or “strong virgin.” Darger embraces this gender-bending lineage of SS Joan and Perpetua, exploiting their venerated, authoritative virility in order to fabricate his own holy and simultaneously, socially transgressive Vivian. Through sacred and available models Darger envisions her little girl body as a powerful site of resistance.

Vivia / Vivian

Further consideration of “Vivian,” connoting one who is a living force, intense, and brimming with vitality, turns this discussion to the declarative *vivam* (I shall live!); a cry of resistance, replete with associations of resurrection and super-hero transformation. Although Darger does not state the source of “Vivian,” the possibility of this name’s connection to “life” or “being alive” and the chances of Darger’s becoming familiar with *vivam*, *vivum*, *vivus*, or derivatives, *vivo*, and *vividus* through Catholic Mass seem likely.

Moreover, Darger’s chosen family name for his seven protagonists follows a trajectory of vitality, endurance, and dispossession echoed within the name Vivia Perpetua the female saint and patron of orphaned children and mothers.⁴⁶ St. Perpetua holds the distinction of being one of seven women mentioned in the Eucharist prayer of the Mass. Scholars and theologians both view Perpetua as an exemplary martyr due in part to her gender.⁴⁷ She was a woman who rose above her station, and like her name, resoundingly declared and demonstrated her Christian identity. The life of Vivia Perpetua demanded nothing less than total surrender of mind and body to the Christian cause. Her Acts, believed by some scholars to be written in her own voice and that of another male, worked to transcend the vulnerability and social stigma of her body, identifying with a heroic athleticism and spiritual integrity of “male-ness.” Her trans-gendering epiphany, sanctified as a vision, allows Perpetua’s image to play both sides of gender expectations, slipping back and forth between cultural notions governing male

and female bodies. Her transformative body projects ambiguous, “female” messages vacillating between innocence, familial bonds, and physical weakness while creating associations with the male body—spiritual discipline, physical control, religious agency, and athletic victory.⁴⁸

Recent scholarship by Religious Studies scholar, L. Stephanie Cobb extends and complicates Miles’ discussion of fluctuating “maleness” in Perpetua’s story by contesting assumptions regarding authorial voice and objective historical content in female martyrologies—Perpetua’s, in particular. She argues that these narratives serve propagandistic, identity-forming functions within the early Christian community by demonstrating “manly,” and thus “Christian” virtues, such as autonomy, athleticism, virtue, and stoicism. The Christian ideal appropriated Roman (pagan) attitudes towards gender and sex including, most importantly, a correlation between maleness and virtue, strength, and honour. Martyrs’ Acts, even when narrating the works of a female saint, highlighted masculinising tropes, fuelling these textual devices with persuasive, didactic stories illuminating what it meant to be Christian.

Perpetua’s Acts serve as a template, showing that “Christian masculinity can be revealed in a most unexpected place: a woman.”⁴⁹ Her progression from earthly concerns to otherworldly salvation begins with her conversion to Christianity and subsequent incarceration by the Romans in Carthage (203 AD). Ignoring her father’s pleas to renounce her beliefs and to resume her motherly duty (to reunite herself and her nursing child with her pagan family), Perpetua prays for liberation from both. Divinity grants her petition by miraculously ceasing lactation and thus a physical (or “natural”) link between her and her son. She additionally exhibits extreme resolve and volition by giving her son to her father. Unencumbered by family or male domination, Perpetua leaves behind markers of femininity. She becomes an active, religious agent, controlling her emotions and remaining firm to her faith, even as she faces her approaching death.

The masculinising narrative reaches its apex in Perpetua’s fourth vision and ensuing actions within the Roman arena. The night before her martyrdom, she dreams of entering the amphitheatre to compete against an Egyptian, identified within her Acts as the devil. Stripped by assistants in preparation for battle, Perpetua is awestruck by her transformation into a

male, muscular body. Her gaze drops to her genital region and she confirms her systemic manhood by uttering, "I became a man."⁵⁰ Perpetua literally saw herself as male. Cobb views this passage as another continuum of the literary trope within the narrative. Physical transformation identifying with maleness confirms what has already taken place on a deeper, sociological level. The phrase, "I became a man" offers an end cap to an earlier, potent remark made by Perpetua to her father, "I cannot be called anything other than Christian."⁵¹

Perpetua fully demonstrates Christ-like fortitude and sacrifice within the arena the following day after her trans-gendering vision. Bravely encountering wild beasts and gladiators in the coliseum, she withstands the goring of a heifer. Unwilling to accept denial of her martyrdom's glory, Perpetua dramatically concludes her own life (retaining agency up until the point of her death) by guiding the sword of a hesitant gladiator to her own throat. Caught up in the rapture of her perseverance and corporeal duty, she shouts, "I am a Christian, and I follow the authority of my name, that I may be perpetual (*ut sim perpetua*)."⁵² Martyrdom rejects the role of the victim. To die is to win. Even though Perpetua realises she will stand before ferocious beasts in the coliseum, she envisions the confrontation as facing evil, and although dying, she will win. Vivia Perpetua delivers the imperious, somatic thrust of her victory in this linguistic moment.⁵³

The power of Vivia Perpetua's name, her trans-gendering vision signifying perseverance and strength, and her legendary status as a conquering Christ-like figure, sets a divine, fantastic precedent for Darger's Vivian Girls. Perpetua's legend, like the story of the Vivians, challenges the "normative" way in which current society views the relationship between sex and gender. Both operate on a sliding scale of gender, moving between male and female. Along with these Catholic tales blurring gender, one also finds embedded within the strange carnalities of Perpetua a "one-sex model" dominating anatomical thought prior to the eighteenth century. In *Making Sex*, Thomas Laqueur explains that epistemological discourse stemmed from one archetypal body—male: "Woman was understood as man inverted: the uterus was the female scrotum, the ovaries were testicles, the vulva was a foreskin, and the vagina was a penis."⁵⁴ Corporeal flux and gender resulted from production and retention of bodily heat, a "vital heat" regulating biological and social associations

with male/hot (active) and female/cold (passive) properties. This "heated" logic encompassed a variety of biological functions, one specifically applied to menstruation and the transition from girlhood to womanhood. According to the one-sex model, women purged blood because their cold bodies produced a surplus of the nutriment (likewise, milk). Men, on the other hand, being "hotter," burned off such substances in greater quantities than women and, thus, did not menstruate.

Hierarchical binaries of male/female and active/passive, under the principle of vital heat, flourished throughout the medieval era and into the Renaissance, informing hagiographic portrayals of socially-independent, female saints. "Hot" virile women (the *virago fortis*/strong virgin) of Catholic legend boldly transgressed gender boundaries, embodying power and prestige that was traditionally the reserve of men. Darger's running/morphing child draws from the heritage of the *virago fortis*, the defiant woman bearing male characteristics of active heat, vitality, and corporeal theatrics. In Darger's art his strong female elides within the playful metamorphosis of somatic boundaries between boys and girls. However, unlike phallic women within the frame of the one-sex model, Darger's girls rebuke the notion of being inversions of males, or less perfect boys. Trans-gendering girls never fully conform to the signs of male sex. They visually morph into a girlish creature, something entangling girl and boy, yet, privileging the girl. Perpetua's strange carnalities prepare a foundation for the Vivian, a point of departure already venerable, allowing Darger to further experiment with and discover the possibilities of gender-bending as a state of reaching oneness with Christ.

Warrior Maiden

Jeanne la Pucelle's legend has already reached the Catholic pinnacle of sainthood⁵⁵ by the time Darger alludes to the Vivians' driving spirit as akin to that of the "Maid of Orleans"⁵⁶ and inserts Joan of Arc's holy card into his imagery. Her upwardly mobile image additionally reaches another elevation as secular spokesperson for the U.S. government's first World War effort. According to cultural historian Ann Bleigh Powers, a Joan of Arc "vogue" flourished in America between 1894 until 1929.⁵⁷ Periodicals and theatrical productions capitalised on America's growing interest in the girl saint. Many equated St. Joan's attempts (500 years prior) to drive the enemy from French soil with the patriotism of American soldiers in France



Figure 4. Henry Darger, *At Zoe-Du-Rai-Beck. The result after Violet saves a priest and his sacred monsthrance from being shot*, n.d., watercolour, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper, 48.26 x 86.36 cm, Private Collection, Belgium, Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, © 2014 Kiyoko Lerner / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
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u-Dai-Beche the earth after Usold saves a
parent a sacred moment
from being shot



during the first World War. For example, in printed U. S. propaganda, St. Joan, in full armour, with raised sword and eyes towards Heaven, implores women to “save your country” by purchasing food stamps. This American poster internalises and exploits Joan’s visage, a maiden warrior, as an allegorical stream of hope, unity, restoration, and victory. Ironically, the image of Joan asks women to fight not as she did—in a socially transgressive manner—but, instead, within the bounds of acceptable womanhood, as consumers.

Through the image of St. Joan, virginal innocence is presented as a position of strength, a purity fighting contamination. Her representation entered an American discourse conflating childhood with religious virtue and patriotism decades before this poster. Mark Twain valorises “little Joan” in his 1895 work of fiction, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*. Joan’s image also circulated around the globe as an androgynous youth in the popular children’s book, *Joan of Arc*, (1896, in French, 1918 translated into English) illustrated by Louis-Maurice Boutet de Monvel.

Darger’s veneration of St. Joan as an emblem of female virtue embraces abstract elements of her legend, but more emphatically plays with particulars of her gender ambiguity and reputation as a *virago fortis*, or warrior maiden of the spiritual realm. Specific female aspects of St. Joan’s martyrdom manifest in her virginality and defence of her chastity.⁵⁸ This, too, aligns her with a virginal ideal flourishing under the influence of the cult of the Virgin Mary, elevating St. Joan’s status among women.⁵⁹ Her greatness, however, hinges upon extraordinary acts of bravery and a legendary body resistant to age and sexual differentiation. The legend of Joan of Arc asserts an incongruous virile female-ness ruled by an excessive spiritual conviction rivalling that of Christ. She transcends the limits of her sex while boldly asserting that fortitude and passion are not the exclusive properties of men.

Like the Vivians, Joan of Arc remained small throughout her short, intense life. Her saintly acts span a six-year period from age thirteen (when she first heard voices) until her death at the stake at nineteen. Although her age and chosen name (*pucelle*⁶⁰) propel the maiden into womanhood, her legend safeguards her innocent, childlike persona. Hagiographies, especially those written in the nineteenth century, conflate St. Joan’s life with

the intertwining cults of the child and of the child Jesus, emphasising her humble, bucolic origins as a shepherdess. Writers additionally cite reports of St. Joan’s amenorrhea to confer her virginal state of prepubescence and holiness. French historian Jules Michelet concurs in 1844 that, “She had, body and soul, the divine gift of remaining childlike. She grew up, she became strong and beautiful, but she never knew the physical miseries of womankind.”⁶¹ Coupling this sustaining childhood with practices of transvestism (on and off the battlefield), with extraordinary bravery, and with a lifestyle devoid of conventional gendered obligations, St. Joan’s image swirls within a conundrum. She is female, but she is not “woman” in social standing or physiological maturity. She dons male clothing and exudes spiritual passion, strength, and vigour—qualities associated with men. She embodies an innocent child, a holy (virginal) woman, and a fortitude approaching that of Christ. Cultural historian Marina Warner eloquently describes Joan of Arc’s image as “sexlessness.... The state of suspension, of nondifferentiation, achieved by a transvestite girl...confirmed by the Christian tradition as holy.”⁶²

However, beneath this layer of holiness (and re-invention by the Catholic Church over centuries), lies the offending body of a girl who threatened to challenge the social prescriptions and boundaries of gender. With her sentencing to death as a heretic, by burning at the stake, St. Joan received the same lethal punishment reserved for witches and lesbians, referred to as “tribades.” Medieval society deemed tribadism as “naturally” deviant due to the queering of gender dominance—a woman assuming an active “male” sexual role with another woman. Guilty of passion and in some cases, cross-dressing and/or bearing a “female” penis, these social heretics suffered the same fate as Joan of Arc.⁶³

Although most accounts of St. Joan’s trial relate her verdict of heresy to the dubious origins of her miraculous voices and to wider international politics surrounding the Hundred Years War, Warner reminds us that St. Joan’s inquisition steadily probed the manifestations of her “male” attire. The verdict, in part, demanded justice for St. Joan’s social transgressions, finding her guilty of possessing the audacity to challenge the cultural constraints of her sex. The sexual ambiguity that elevated her status among Catholics, ironically, twisted into a confirmation of degenerate evil during the course of her indictment. Specifics of Joan of Arc’s fiery death

suggest that the allure (and fear) of her uncertain gender prevailed beyond her trial. An anonymous contemporary account records her death not as a spectacle of Christ-like suffering but as a violent interrogation of her ambiguous body:

She was soon dead and her clothes all burned. Then the fire was raked back, and her naked body shown to all the people and all the secrets that could or should belong to a woman, to take away any doubts from people's minds. When they had stared long enough at her dead body bound to the stake, the executioner got a big fire going again round her poor carcass, which was soon burned, both flesh and bone reduced to ashes.⁶⁴

Rouen authorities chose not to strip Joan of Arc before burning her body. Along with purging her profane form, we might ask whether her executioners tested her mutable one-sex corporeality with intense heat, tempting a magical transformation? Bystanders expecting to see physical indications of her "maleness," instead witnessed a "poor carcass"—the blatant display of her "womanly secrets" degrading her divinity to counterfeit status. Darger's retold version of young female martyrdom does not disappoint with a revealed, ersatz supernatural being. The Vivian Girl transforms and elevates, visually confirming her thoroughly militant and "masculine" nature. She suffers like other Catholic female martyrs but does not find victory through death. In moments when fire, or other destructive forces threaten her life or religious faith, she perseveres.

Executioners attested to finding Joan of Arc's heart, intact and engorged with blood, within the ashes. Symbolic of her integrity and devotion to God, this unconsumed heart, already pure, thus, impervious to purgation at the stake, retained the primary nutriment associated with vital heat. Her disembodied heart brimming with hot virility continues the phallic narrative of the *virago fortis*. Refusing finality, this remnant of body and soul performs a resurrection, decidedly more spiritual than corporeal, a familiar sacrificial logic akin to that of the risen and triumphant Christ.

Darger wields the image of an ablaze and intact sacred heart burning with divine *eros* in a manner familiar with and congenial to messages of suffering and victory inherent in Christology and Saint Joan's legend. Affiliating this motif with the causes of his Vivian-led armies, the artist repeatedly renders this

magical, substantiated heart, alive and alight, in conjunction with the spiritual fortitude of humble, heroic girlhood. Burning hearts, for example, embolden the standards for both Christian armies in *In the Realms of the Unreal*—imaginary Abbieanna and Angelinia. Abbieanna portrays its everlasting spirit as a multi-pierced heart, afflicted by a large sword and crown of thorns. Blood profusely drips from the heart's base while flames rise and flank a glowing red cross at its crown. Angelinia's standard overlays a traditional Sacred Heart of Jesus icon onto the stars and stripes of the United States. In this particular flag, Darger ambitiously embraces two potent symbols, conflating patriotism with Christian fervour.

St. Joan's image emerges as a contextual reference to Vivian girl bravery and sacrifice in *At Zoe-Du-Rai-Bech. The result after Violet saves a priest and his sacred monstrance from being shot* (figure 4). In the left corner, adjacent to a drawn sculpture of a crucified Christ, Darger includes a framed portrait of a kneeling and praying St. Joan. The simple composition and St. Joan's clear, circular halo suggests that Darger traced this image from a prayer card. Her magnificent horse lingers behind her, turning to witness St. Joan's raised arms and penitent face. She pauses to pray before entering battle, evoking and re-enacting Christ's Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Within this interior scene, Darger places Joan-in-prayer next to an identifiable image of a crucified Christ, thus, staging a martyr-coupling. In the far right corner, a blonde Vivian Girl also falls to her knees and prays. Her gaze extends to the sacrificial pair of Christ and St. Joan. Next to this praying girl lies Violet Vivian, recuperating from a gunshot wound. Violet has taken a bullet to save both the integrity of a monstrance containing the holy Eucharistic host and the life of a priest. In this visual alignment, Darger pulls a symbolic thread, reading from left to right: Christ on the cross, St. Joan, and bleeding Violet. Violet, the leader of the Vivian girls, in her altruistic act and suffering, resembles the pendant examples of Jesus and St. Joan. Additionally, the caption's reference to the intact monstrance, alludes to the Eucharistic sacrament of partaking the body of Christ and the miraculous liminality of the flesh.

This narrative panel employing St. Joan renders a familial kinship between the Vivians and a legendary female "girl" saint that exponentially expands with iconic and cross-gendering declarations of Christ-like strength. St. Joan calls the Vivians to perform

virile transgressions of their female sex. She is Christ-like through actions and outer presence; her “virile” image merges with Christ, achieving oneness with divinity by expressing agency. In this sense, St. Joan’s example does more than contextualise Darger’s little girls; St. Joan legitimises their role as sacred gender-benders. The Vivians (and, other girls), like St. Joan, become active, phallic females blurring gender and commanding reverence. They wield a divine privileged body, marked as a recipient of grace, free from sin, and free from social constraints.

Conclusion

Adaptations of saints’ names, martyr-narratives, and visual references to saints and Christ frequent Henry Darger’s written tale and visual work. As I have noted elsewhere, Darger also employed the likeness of another popular “girl” saint, Thérèse of Lisieux (the self-titled “Little Flower of Christ,” canonised 1925) as a model for Vivian behaviour.⁶⁵ Furthermore, two of the seven Vivian Girls have floral names: Violet Vivian and Daisy Vivian—the very humble flowers that St. Thérèse celebrates in her journal as those “destined to give joy to God’s glances.”⁶⁶ Other saintly correlations have been noted by Michael Moon, in particular the name of one character from *In the Realms of the Unreal*, Jennie “Ange”, bearing a strong resemblance to the virgin martyr, St. “Agnes.” He suggests though, that Jennie’s horrific death—dismemberment by Glandelinians while saving a ciborium from defilement—is Darger’s retelling of the story of St. Tarsicius, a boy beaten to death by a pagan mob for not giving up a ciborium containing the sacred host.⁶⁷ Agreeing with Moon, I also find St. “Joan” in “Jennie” Turner, the girl that bobs her hair and dons male attire to slip through enemy lines. Moon surmises:

The similarity of these names to each other and the way all of them proliferate across a significant portion of the major characters of *In the Realms of the Unreal* betoken a close identification on “Henry’s” part—at least at the level of the name—with the various Annies and Jennies who undergo martyrdom in his text, as well as the virgin martyrs Agnes and Joan, whose names Darger’s heroines cite and revise.⁶⁸

To the growing list of Darger’s retold Catholic tales, appropriated images and adopted names, this study adds “Vivian” and the heroics of virile female martyrs that defy gendered boundaries and “become male.”

Striking up visual parallels between Joan of Arc and Christ as well as somatic and linguistic associations with Vivia Perpetua, Darger marks his legendary Vivian girls with intersexual signs announcing their sacred strength and religiosity.

Prescriptive martyr narratives transform this epicene child into a diminutive warrior maiden or, *virago fortis*. As Darger reminds us, girls are braver than boys,⁶⁹ and as in martyr narratives, Christian masculinity may be revealed in a most unexpected place—a little girl.

¹ Written notation by Henry Darger quoted in John MacGregor, *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal* (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2002) 166.

² See MacGregor, “Photographic Enlargement,” 165-180.

³ Three bound volumes of illustrations accompanied *In the Realms of the Unreal*, with around three hundred, double-sided watercolour-drawings of various sizes, some unfolding up to twelve feet in length. After Darger’s death, his landlord, photographer/designer Nathan Lerner cut these images from the binding and gradually introduced them to the art world as individual visual art works. Today, Darger’s art scatters the globe in public and private collections. A complete account of its provenance and whereabouts remains unknown. Darger provided some dates in his written work although the majority of his visual art is undated. Scholars estimate the timeframes for developments in his art based on other clues, such as the aforementioned enlargement envelope. The dates listed here are from MacGregor, 19 and 129.

⁴ While Darger did clip and save images of naked prepubescent children from sources such as women’s journals and mainstream newspapers, his use of them as resources for his visual art was not consistent. Some of these images show marks from tracing around the edges of bodily forms. Others do not reveal evidence of tracing. Lauren Arnold, pdf of resource material from the Henry Darger Study Center, American Folk Art Museum, New York, email to author, March 6, 2014.

⁵ Quoted by MacGregor, 106 from Henry Darger, *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*, Volume Seven, (unpublished, c. 1911-1939), 500.

⁶ Quoted by MacGregor, 95 from Darger, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, Volume Ten, Part One, 604.

⁷ Male genitals on little female bodies, although a strange sight, seem proportionate to their form. Darger does not exaggerate them or blatantly focus on the girls’ pubic region.

⁸ MacGregor, 532.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Referencing Anna Freud’s theories, MacGregor argues that Darger’s trans-gendering girl re-enacts the fantasy of a maternal phallus. He states, “Such a situation would seem to require reinforcement by trauma far in excess of that caused by the simple discovery of the crucial difference which distinguishes the sexes from one another. That trauma, in Darger’s case, could have been supplied by the sudden death of his mother just prior to his fourth birthday. Whatever point he had attained

in his psychosexual development, there is sufficient evidence to support a prolonged regression to, and fixation at, the anal-sadistic phase. This shock seems to have contributed to, and maintained, an unconscious awareness of an all powerful and threatening phallic mother, now numinous because she was dead." MacGregor, 533. Taking Darger's art as a literal embodiment of his psyche, MacGregor's "sufficient evidence" is his assumption that "at some level of his reality Darger believed that female children are equipped with male genitals." MacGregor, 529.

¹¹Michael Bonesteel, *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000).

¹²Ibid. 22.

¹³Klaus Biesenbach, ed. *Henry Darger* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2009) 13.

¹⁴Michael Moon, *Darger's Resources* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

¹⁵Ibid. 20.

¹⁶Ibid. 29.

¹⁷Ibid. 79-80.

¹⁸Quoted from captions in work by Henry Darger, *At Sunbeam Creek. Are with little girl refugees again in peril from forest fires. but escape this also, but half naked and in burned rags / At Torrington. Are pursued (sic) by a storm of fire but save themselves by jumping into a stream and swim across as seen in next picture / Their red color is caused by glare of flames.* Watercolour, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper, 19 x 70 1/2"; illustrated in Brooke Davis Anderson, *Darger: The Henry Darger Collection at the American Folk Art Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001) 38-39.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹See Anderson, 24-25.

²²The term "nuded" appears in captions, for example "At Jennie Richee. Assuming nuded appearance by compulsion race ahead of coming storm to warn their father." This particular caption associates "nuded" with running and morphing girls.

²³Thank you to my colleague, Eva Bares for this observation.

²⁴Quoted in MacGregor, 526.

²⁵Ibid, 526.

²⁶See Anderson, 38-39.

²⁷See MacGregor, 123, illustration 3.10.

²⁸Ibid., 169, illustration 3.55.

²⁹Ibid., 123.

³⁰The Coppertone Girl has been the mascot for Coppertone sunscreen in the United States since it was introduced in 1953. Created by Joyce B. Brand, a commercial and pinup artist, this girl is known for her "innocent" expression of surprise as she turns around to look at a black dog that has pulled her pants down. The dog's actions reveal the little girl's buttocks and tan lines. Over the years, the Merck Corporation has altered the original image to show less of the girl's anatomy.

³¹This work is part of the Collection de l'art brut, Lausanne, Switzerland. Illustrated in Biesenbach, 160-161.

³²James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 79.

³³Kincaid refers to the Coppertone advertisement as a paradigm of child-fashion and allegory of culture practice. See James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 74.

³⁴Kincaid's overarching argument in *Child-Loving* asserts that notions of "the child" have been assembled in accordance with culture's desire over the past two centuries. Pedophilia (not always sexual but, sexualised) operates at the centre of our culture, not at the periphery. "By insisting so loudly on the

innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child, we have created a subversive echo: experience, corruption, eroticism." Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 4-5.

³⁵In a diary passage from Monday, April 1, 1968, Henry Darger wrote, "No April Jokes. Five masses including the Miraculous Medal Novena. Over tanglement of twine, difficult to do. Some severe tantrums and swear words. Sorry Saint I truly am. I should be ashamed of myself, but am not." Quoted in Bonesteel, 250.

³⁶Some published examples of holy card and sacred heart imagery in Darger's art include: *Untitled (Sacred Heart of Jesus)*, MacGregor, 327; a holy card of St. Thérèse of Lisieux and Sacred Heart of Jesus in *At Angelina Agatha. Jennie in vain offers her sight lost in an accident for the conversion of John Manley her worst enemy. Instead her sight suddenly came back.*, MacGregor, 612; and a Sacred Heart and Sacred Heart of Jesus, respectively in the *Main National Flag of Abbieanna* and the *National Flag of Angelina*, Bonesteel, 45.

³⁷See Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) 81-84.

³⁸Ibid. 55.

³⁹Ibid. 53-77.

⁴⁰See Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 1-21.

⁴¹Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991) 186.

⁴²Ibid. 204.

⁴³Ibid. 216.

⁴⁴Henry Darger, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, Volume Six, 262-263.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Perpetua is also known as patron saint of martyrs and cattle (due to a fatal wound inflicted by a heifer in the Roman coliseum). For more information on the life and religious significance of Perpetua, see: R. De Maricourt, *Vivia Perpetua: Or, The Martyrs of Carthage* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2010) and Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁴⁷Both Tertullian and Augustine referred to Perpetua's acts as a model of Christian courage and faith comparable to Christ's Passion. See Gail P.C. Streete, "Tough Mothers and Female Contenders" in *Redeemed Bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) 49-72

⁴⁸L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 102.

⁴⁹Cobb, 105.

⁵⁰Her vision alludes to the common practice of men stripping in preparation for athletic contests against beasts and gladiators. Persecutors stripped women to humiliate them before crowds and to capitalise on the spectacle of their bodies. Nakedness in religious doctrine also metaphorically disassociated men from society. Stripping off one's clothing equated to stripping oneself of possessions and familial ties. Legends of female saints titillate readers by stripping the female martyr multiple times and conversely finding miraculous ways to cover them.

⁵¹Quoted in Cobb, 97.

⁵²Quoted in Miles, 60.

⁵³See Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 32.

⁵⁴Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex; Body and Gender for the Greeks*

to Freud (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 236.

⁵⁵The Catholic Church canonised Joan of Arc in 1920. Darger began to write *In the Realms of the Unreal* around 1911-13. He began creating images after his move to 851 Webster in 1932.

⁵⁶Darger conflates the leadership of Joan of Arc with the Vivian Girls in this passage from *In the Realms of the Unreal*: "They fought ... as if not only led by the spirit of the Maid of Orleans herself, but as if led by Christ and His Heavenly host of angels and Saints." Quoted in Bonesteel, 21.

⁵⁷See Ann Bleigh Powers, "The Joan of Arc Vogue in America, 1894-1929" in *American Society for the Legion of Honor, New York* 49.3 (1978): 177-192.

⁵⁸Virginity as an ascetic practice and narrative trope diffused male fears about women's flesh. *Acta*, mostly written by male hagiographers, equate virginity with cleanliness akin to the state of Baptism and that of prelapsarian Eve.

⁵⁹In the eyes of the Catholic Church, a virginal life allowed women to circumvent some of the sins of the fall of women and therefore, was considered holy. A virgin also symbolised wholeness akin to the holy, intact physicality post partum of the Virgin Mary. See Marina Warner, "Virgins and Martyrs" in *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976) 68-78 for a discussion of virginity, ascetic renunciation, and the myth of the Virgin Mary.

⁶⁰Marina Warner traces the specific name Joan adopted, "Jehanne la Pucelle," through its etymology of *pucelle*, meaning a particular shade of "virgin" ambiguously defined by both innocence and nubility, to the Middle Age's *despuler*, "to deflower." Pucelle, Warner argues, connotes a transitional state, ripe with promise and sexual becoming. See Marina Warner's full discussion of Joan's name in "Maid of France" from *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism*. (University of California Press, 1987)13-31. Medieval scholar Jocelyn Wogan-Browne concurs with Warner, citing vernacular usage distinguishing "virgin" from *pucelle* and "maiden" as internalised and graded hierarchical states of virginity. See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Chaste Bodies: Frames and Experiences" in *Framing Medieval Bodies*. ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) 26.

⁶¹Quoted in Warner, *Joan of Arc*, 19.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 157.

⁶³Women tried and convicted for sodomy, according to Laqueur, were punished not for sexual acts but for social performances (including dressing) above their station. The real concern became one of gender (not of sexuality) and female encroachment upon male entitlement. Laqueur notes that actual physiological difference was often determined by judges and physicians who mistakenly described an enlarged clitoris as a "female penis." See Laqueur, 136-138.

⁶⁴Quoted in Warner, *Joan of Arc*, 14.

⁶⁵See Leisa Rundquist, "Little Ways: Girlhood According to Henry Darger," *Southeastern College Art Conference Review*, Vol XV, No. 4 (2009): 434-447.

⁶⁶Quoted in Mary Frohlich, *St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003) 35.

⁶⁷Moon, 26, 31-34.

⁶⁸*Ibid.* 38.

⁶⁹See introductory remarks by Henry Darger in Volume VI of *In the Realms of the Unreal*, Darger, 262-263.

A Self-Taught Knowledge System: Joe Minter's "African Village in America" as a Syncretic Epistemology

Laura Bickford

Introduction

In Birmingham, Alabama, self-identified "Peacemaker" Joe Minter transformed his one-acre backyard into a living museum dedicated to the forgotten stories and participants of the Civil Rights Movement.¹ Composed of hundreds of found-object assemblages, made from material collected around the city, Minter's "African Village in America" recounts the entire history of the African presence in the United States, starting from slavery and continuing to contemporary watersheds such as the 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti (figure 1). Minter, a long-time resident of Birmingham, has been witness to the often-volatile race relations of the Southern United States. Present at Ingram Park in 1963 when police unleashed hoses and dogs on Black protestors, Minter's views on our racialised society have often been formed by violence and oppression. However, "African Village in America," is most characterised by Minter's desire that it bring peace, forge unity, and invite the presence of God into people's lives: "I looked around me and saw so much trouble in the world, so much suffering among my people. I was living in a place that looks upon Africans as less than a human being....I saw how the races was drifting further and further apart and how black people ourselves was drifting apart. And I asked God to help me find a way that I could help bring people together as one, for understanding, even for the littlest child."² Initially begun in 1989 as an alternative to the newly-built Birmingham Civil Rights Museum, which Minter felt left out the "foot soldiers" of the Civil Rights struggle, the site aims to memorialise the entire history of Africans in America.

Minter's site, and other sites like this, have historically been discussed in such a discourse that does not allow both their aesthetic attributes and philosophical significance to be taken into account. Scholarship

in African-American built environments³ currently draws on a number of critical positions. These can be summarised as "outsider art", historical African-American cultural production, and Africanisms in African-America. As a framework for understanding, and as a context for looking, all three discourses have both advantages and limitations. The problematic positioning of these environments as "outsider" denies the artists the ability to assert independent voices, or offer their point of view without their classification immediately rendering their worldviews less than other artists who claim an "insider" status. The placement of African-American yard shows in a discussion of African-American cultural production considers the environments in networks of social and cultural conversations, but without an emphasis on their aesthetics. By approaching them as evidence of a common African-American worldview, their contemporary artistic value is not acknowledged, furthering the separation between the high art world and African-American cultural productions. Similarly, by utilising their aesthetics as examples of Africanisms in African-America, the distinct socio-cultural conditions that led to their creation are ignored; the American experience of African-Americans is not given due credit in the sites' creation, aesthetics, or significance.

In an effort to understand Minter's yard as an aesthetically-driven communicative tool that is expressive of his life experiences and worldview, it is necessary to look beyond these established discourses for analysis and instead reexamine his garden within a framework of knowledge systems. When both its physical materiality (aesthetics) and performative materiality (function and use) are taken into account, Minter's construction can be credited as both a valuable artistic production and a culturally important code. Once removed from the constraints of categorization necessitated by its examination within a traditional art historical context, this sculpture garden can be viewed as a tool for understanding communities, challenging histories of oppression, and establishing alternative narratives. This can be accomplished through the viewing of Minter's garden within a framework of syncretic epistemologies.

Syncretic epistemologies, the idea of two intersecting knowledge systems that create a third, contextualises this and other contemporary African American sculpture gardens and environments.⁴ The concept of syncretic epistemologies can be used to interpret these constructions as fluid knowledge



Figure 1. Joe Minter, 'Haitian Earthquake', *African Village in America*, Birmingham, Alabama (photograph Colin Rhodes, April 2012)

systems where found objects are endowed with the ability to reveal truth. These sculpture gardens then emerge as containers of knowledge in which both their physical and performative materiality combine to order, preserve, and transmit truths. As such, epistemological syncretism describes both a way of seeing these environments and a critical tool for their understanding. Broadly defined, epistemology is the philosophical understanding of the ways in which information is created and disseminated; the systems of ordering, preserving, and transmitting knowledge. Syncretism is understood as the combination, or fusion, of different systems of belief. It is generally understood in a religious context, particularly employed to describe religions that have been created by the synthesis of two or more belief systems, but can be applied to all aspects of expressive culture. In this article, I position Minter's environment within a syncretic epistemology bracketed by the two knowledge systems of cabinets of curiosity and griots. A brief analysis of my understanding of these two disparate epistemologies will serve as a helpful introduction here.

Cabinets of Curiosity: Readable Objects

Cabinets of curiosity are largely cited as a foundation for today's museums.⁵ Comprised of rare, interesting, expensive, or otherwise odd objects, both naturally-occurring and man-made, cabinets of curiosity provided Renaissance noblemen and aristocrats an opportunity to explore the aesthetics of collections. Through the exploration of these objects, both individually and grouped, Renaissance ideals of order, truth, and relationships were established. Although the notion of collecting rare and interesting objects was not a Renaissance idea, collecting as an active production of knowledge, rather than a passive sign of status, reached its peak in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe. Spurred by the discovery of the New World and the radical new ordering of the universe, as well as the sudden influx of new commodities from faraway lands, both Europe and the Earth were no longer seen as the centre of the world or the universe. Wealthy aristocrats sought to understand these new distinctions through the acquisition of objects, and an interrogation of man's relationship to them. In addition, with a revival of interest in classical literature, a collecting fever for antiquities swept the continent. These new conceptions of order, both the present-day scientific discoveries and the newly unearthed wonders of the Ancients, threw Europeans'

notions of social, political, and economic hierarchy into disarray. Simultaneously, the Age of Reason was rapidly challenging the former hegemony of church doctrine, and refocusing the qualifications for a man to be considered learned. In a source from 1594, collector Francis Bacon speaks to the notion of collecting and arranging objects as a key to understanding their importance: "The third, a goodly, huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine has made rare in stuff, form or motion; whatsoever singularity, chance, and the shuffle of things hath produced; whatsoever nature has wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included."⁶ This epistemology, the belief that by classifying objects they can reveal knowledge, led to the peak in popularity of cabinets of curiosity. To this effect, there is a historical record of collectors consistently rearranging the objects in their cabinets; examining their size, colour, shape, or clarity of one in relation to another or sponsoring debates about the classification of particularly troublesome objects.⁷

Through the exploration of these objects classifications, the collector hoped to create a microcosm of the world around him, to be the master of a miniature kingdom, modeled after God's kingdom. It was then believed that through his ordering of all of God's creations contained in his collection he would be able to understand his own place within the world. The objects within the cabinets of curiosity were understood to contain knowledge and truth, and through their ordering and study, they were deemed readable. Their physicality and their unusual qualities, or rarity, made them stand out from other objects and invited their inclusion into the collections, but upon inclusion, the owner determined the relationship of that object to the others; if organised and arranged logically by the collector, it was believed the objects could reveal the truth and order of the Universe.

Griots: Knowledge through Instruction

In many West African countries, including Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, and Benin, a community leader known as a *griot* occupies an important position in society. Known also as praise-singers, griots are entrusted with all of a community's history, and are called upon at important ceremonies to perform long history poems and songs, often lasting for days. The griot draws on community history, rhyme, and metaphor to weave stories that offer



Figure 2. Thornton Dial, *Walking with the Pickup Bird*, 2002, steel, twine, cloth, shoes, crockery, auto tire scrap, enamel, spray paint, and Splash Zone compound, 134.62 x 157.46 x 91.44 cm, Collection of Ackland Museum of Art (photograph Stephen Pitkin)

guidance and wisdom that lead to the creation of the community's truth.

Most importantly, and prominently, the griot is a historian; he or she is a "time-binder," linking the past, present, and future. Entrusted with a community's entire genealogy, the griot bears witness to events in the present day, by performing poems about the past, and then stores the present events in memory with the understanding that it will one day be told as the past to future generations. It is this dynamic understanding of a historian's role that gives a griot the power to act as adviser. Because of their knowledge of the past, understanding of the present, and foresight into the future, the griot commands respect and often counsels the village elders or leader on issues as varied as war, parenting, crop growth, and lineage struggles. The griot acts as an instructor, guiding listeners to the conclusions they feel are important and ushering in experiences and knowledge. The physical body of the griot is not thought to contain truth or knowledge inherently, but it is through their performance of history, through the lens of the present and in anticipation of the future, that they establish knowledge. Audience recognition of the griots' poetry as historical fact renders the knowledge contained within it truthful. Audience participation and acceptance therefore is a necessary component of the griot's role as knowledge-maker.⁸

Joe Minter's African Village in America

Joe Minter collects and assembles found objects in an effort to provide a counter-history to the dominant memory of African-American life in the United States. He derives his authority as a maker from his ability to read truth in objects that others can't see, acting in much the same way as creators of cabinets of curiosities. The objects contained in the cabinets were themselves thought to be readable and to contain knowledge, but the collector must decipher this knowledge through sorting and rearranging.

But, while cabinets of curiosity function to petrify objects by containing them within categories, Minter's sculpture garden attempts to free these objects. This enlivening is realised through the artist's performance of them; a performance that is much akin to the strategy employed by the West African griot to preserve history. The truth does not exist inherently, but rather is created by the griot's interaction with history, and subsequent anticipation

of the future. Minter, as a self-identified messenger, leads viewers through the African Village and acts as a guide and a teacher, instructing participants in the proper interpretations and understandings of his environment.

Another work, *Walking with the Pick-up Bird* (figure 2), by African-American Alabama artist Thornton Dial, provides a flashpoint for understanding both the physical and performative qualities that exist in Minter's work. An examination of this assemblage will allow the shape of the epistemology at work in Minter's sculpture garden to become clearer. An autobiographical exploration of Dial's habit of walking and collecting objects, and assembling them into sculptures that speak to social issues, the life-size work features two figures walking behind a cart loaded with objects and shadowed by a spectral bird figure, green wings outstretched. Heaped with shoes, scraps of metal, and ceramics, the piece is a testament to Dial's use of found objects in his sculptures, and speaks to the larger tradition of African-American assemblage, as manifested in sculptures, quilts, houses, and yard shows throughout the American South. More than a commentary about physical process, undeniably fundamental to Dial's context, *Walking with the Pick-Up Bird*, reveals an entire aesthetic and artistic philosophy. In his words, "People throw a lot of things away. You pick it up and make art of it. I'm always thinking: it's beautiful; put it together and paint it. Where another person don't look at it; I look at it a different way."⁹ The sculpture's form, coupled with Dial's explanation of his artistic motivations, speaks to his intentional employment of found objects in art that performs narratives of resistance. His sculpture takes an active role in challenging the inferior position of both African-Americans and their artistic production that society has placed upon them. It demands to be viewed and accounted for, and its existence represents a reclamation of both political and artistic autonomy.

Dial's sculpture reveals the intentionality of the use of found objects as an artistic choice, evidence of the artist's autonomy and agency. His work provides an oft-ignored door through which to enter into the long and rich tradition of African-American found-object assemblage, the strategy employed by Minter in his project. The tradition of found-object assemblage, when seen outside of the dominant narrative as material evidence of African-American's resourcefulness, poverty, or innate aesthetics, can instead be understood as a much more sophisticated



Above: Figure 3. Handmade fence separating cemetery from Joe Minter's property, 1990-1998, found charred wood, house paint (photograph William Arnett) Opposite: Figure 4. Joe Minter, 'Four Hundred Years of Struggle for African Human Rights', *African Village in America*, Birmingham, Alabama (photograph Colin Rhodes, April 2012)



...KILLED ...

PROVERBS 10:30
THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL
NEVER BE REMOVED, BUT THE
WICKED SHALL NOT INHABIT
THE EARTH.

PSALM 37:39-40
39 BUT THE SALVATION OF
THE RIGHTEOUS IS IN THE LORD
THEIR STRENGTH IN THE TIME OF
TROUBLE.
40 AND THE LORD SHALL DELIVER
THEM FROM THE WICKED AND
SAVE THEM, BECAUSE THEY
TRUST IN HIM.

AFFIRMATION OF
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
VOICE OF ...

400 YEARS
OF HUMANITY

SPACE
AVAILABLE



A TRAIL OF
AFRICAN
STRUGGLES
IN AMERICA

REPARATIONS

REPARATIONS





Previous pages: Figure 5. Joe Minter, 'Guard Warriors', *African Village in America*, Birmingham, Alabama (photograph Colin Rhodes, April 2012) Above: Figure 6. Joe Minter, *Talking Drums*, 1990, painted metal barrels (photograph William Arnett)

epistemology in itself.¹⁰ Dial's piece, both in its physical construction of found objects and its implied performance of assemblage and engagement, attests to the conscious location of found object assemblage in the cultural worlds of African-America. When both the physicality and the performance of Minter's large-scale sculpture garden assemblage are considered through Dial's piece and words as the framework, it can be understood as a layered construction, composed with complex attention paid to its' deeply traditional materials but seen through a contemporary knowledge philosophy. Both assemblages add to the already rich conversation of African-American found object assemblage, but use its historical context to challenge the established order of social and artistic hierarchy.

Minter's Yard as Knowledge Site

Although Minter classifies his yard as a museum and a memorial, and it physically acts as such, it also exists in a spiritual context, acting as a transport between the physical location of Birmingham and the imagined healing space of Africa. To this effect, every aspect of the garden is steeped in symbolism, and governed by the idea of memory: location, layout, materials, and sculptural elements.¹¹

The location of Minter's property must be understood in two ways, each of which invites memory. It is physically located in a place, in an ordinary Birmingham neighbourhood, near a highway, situated on a hill above the racially segregated cemeteries of Shadow Lawn and Grace Hill; sites that Minter calls "ancestral burial grounds."¹² But it is also disembodied and occupies a performative location, a mental space. For Minter, his yard is quite literally an "African Village in America," offering a site for all Africans to come home and reconnect with the ancestors. In Minter's African tradition, the honouring of ancestors dictates every aspect of life. The past, present, and future are all inseparable, necessitating veneration and honour of the past to ensure a happy present and future. As Grey Gundaker points out, some scholars suggest that it is this desire to connect to the past that led to the African-American tradition of cemetery decoration, evidenced as far back as the first arrival of slaves.¹³ Thus, Minter's garden is essentially an extension of the cemetery behind his house; a memorialising site dedicated to honouring all of the Africans in America and creating a ritual space to link the dead and the living (figures 3 and 4). While the cemetery behind his

house is a resting place for the bodies of Africans in America, Minter's yard provides a haven for their spirits. He views his yard as Africa, a supernatural space that both physically and spiritually transports Black visitors to a place where they are one race, bonded by common experiences, both the tragic and the triumphant. Furthermore, it links the living visitors to the dead, both in their physical location in the Birmingham cemetery, and in their spiritual one in Minter's imagined Africa. Through his linking of past, present, and future generations through communion with memory, Minter hopes to instill pride and reverence for the Black race by establishing a chain that stretches from Africa to Alabama. The physical location of the site, overlooking the segregated cemeteries, invites memories rooted in tangibility: of relatives, experiences, struggles, and successes. The performance of the site's location, the act of going back to Africa and convening with the dead, establishes imagined memories: of commonalities, of life in Africa, of defining events at which viewers were not present, but that have undeniably shaped their lives. For the artist, the property holds an additional personal significance: his property line exactly corresponds to his father's gravestone, nestled in Shadow Lawn cemetery.

Memory, both real and imagined, also dictates the layout of Minter's yard. Divided into two sections, "African Village in America" testifies to what Minter conceives as the two parts of African history. The back of the yard, bordering the cemetery, is dedicated to African history, and the values of Black Americans that Minter understands as governing factors in African life in America. Dominated by round African huts made of sheet metal and painted red, green, black, and yellow, Minter offers this space as a place for meditation and reflection for visitors.¹⁴ Facing the cemetery, the huts provide both physical and spiritual shelter, separating the viewer from the distractions of the installations and the thoughts that correspond to them and allowing them to project themselves into the cemetery, linking their present and past. Looming above the huts are a series of African warriors and an African family made from discarded metal parts, rails, machinery, and plastics (figure 5). Positioned as guardians of visitors inside the huts, these warriors connect those meditating to an imagined, utopian African past. Also in this back section are sculptures such as "The Chief" and "Talking Drums" (figure 6). Both of these, and the other sculptures in this section, rely on Minter's deeply spiritual, but ultimately, imagined relationship with Africa, since the artist has never set

foot physically on the continent. His garden becomes a portal, transporting visitors to Minter's Africa.

The front of the yard is dedicated to the African experience in America, beginning with the arrival of slaves. The two sections are linked by Minter's sculpture "Slave Ship," explicitly relating the forced removal of Africans from the continent and their current experience in America. In this section of the garden, Minter has memorialised both people and events that he considers pivotal moments in the African-American struggle for freedom. Sculptures such as "Four Hundred Years of African Labor in the United States", "Unknown African Warrior," and "A Monument: The Birmingham Jail" (figure 7) are based on Minter's memories of life in the segregated United States. These memories are less about Minter's own, spiritual, personal, imagined memory of a nostalgic Africa meant to induce sentimentalism and reflection, and more about a reckoning with history and an offering of an alternative one.

Beyond the location and the layout, Minter understands the physicality of the garden in terms of memory. His use of found object assemblage places him within the African-American tradition that Dial illustrates in *Walking with the Pick-Up Bird*. While not as explicit about the uncovering of hidden meaning in objects as cabinets of curiosity, Minter is adamant that the discarded nature of the elements of his garden is critical to the Village's overall message:

The whole idea handed down to me by God is to use that which has been discarded. Just as we as a people have been discarded, made invisible. That what is invisible, thrown away, could be made into something so it demonstrates that even what gets thrown away, with a spirit in it can survive and grow.¹⁵

Minter views his ability to read objects as a gift from God, and through this gift, he is able to incorporate them into his Village to reveal a truth contained within them. By sorting and organising them, Minter draws out the spirit within them, cultivating a new life for trash and with it, a broader meaning about the order of the world. As creator of the Village, Minter becomes both the master and the mediator of the objects, arranging them in a way to convey his ideas about the state of the world, and to impart knowledge on visitors. In this way, his garden relies on the same epistemological constructs as the cabinets of curiosity: objects, when sorted and arranged by their

owners, have the ability to reveal truth, knowledge, and order.

One way in which Minter differs from a curiosity collector, is his view of the power of the objects he incorporates into his collection/garden. They are not valued for their rarity, unusualness, economic worth, or exoticism, but rather for their existence as containers of memory. He elaborates: "A spirit of all the people that has touched and felt that material has stayed in the material."¹⁶ The found objects are important because of the memories lodged within them. Each object remembers its past life, its past state, its past owner, and brings the power and wisdom of these memories into the Village. If the entire garden is dedicated to an alternative history of the African-American presence in the United States, based on the experiences of the "foot soldiers," than the memories lodged within the objects offer a piece of the story. Minter views the presence, and the experiences, of every African in America as a key component in the overall history of Black people in America. It is not merely the people and events that have been written into history that prove important to the Village, but the relationships between all Africans and America that is explored. The garden, as a construction, memorialises events and people that have been essential to the freedom struggle and the materials memorialise the lives of the people who lived those experiences.

Because of the dominant idea of preserving memory in the garden, the individual sculptural elements that compose it are centred on memory as well. Although best viewed as a complete work, rather than as a singular piece made up of fragments, a description in words of the yard would largely prove inadequate. Instead, I have chosen two works that I feel encapsulate both the aesthetics and the messaging of the Village.

"Slave Ship" exists in two forms. There is one within the Village linking the two sections and entitled "Slave Ship America" (figure 8). The ship, a piece of found wood, is loaded with symbols of the commerce that supported the slave trade including a rice bag, busts of notable American leaders, guns, handcuffs, and a Bible. Held together by chain-link and metal hooks, the ship has an abrasive and sharp appearance. For Minter, slavery is a theme that unites the African experience in America. It was the cause of the presence of Africans in this country, and for him, is the root of all of the racialised evil that still exists.

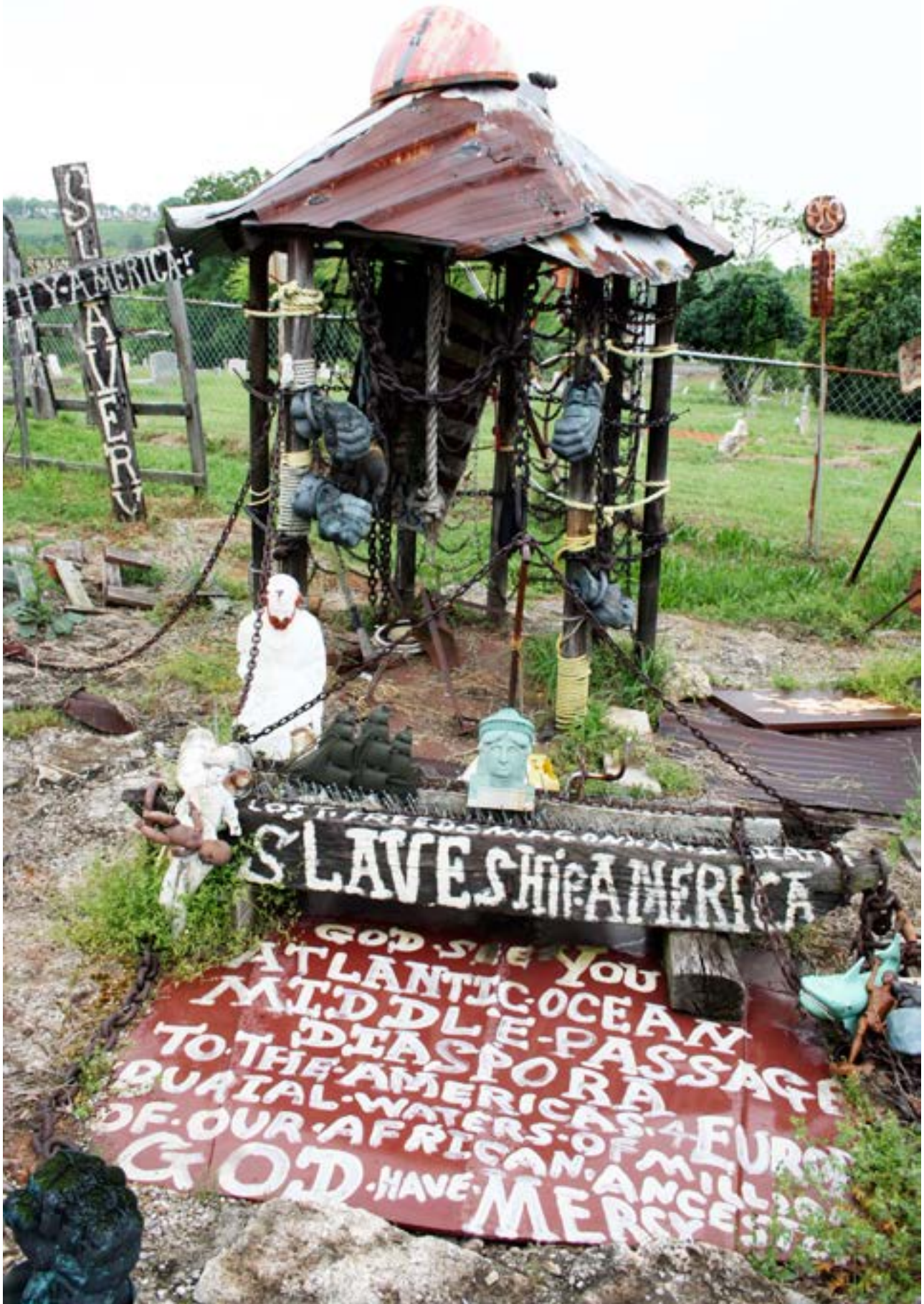


Figure 8. Joe Minter, 'Slave Ship America', *African Village in America*, Birmingham, Alabama (photograph Colin Rhodes, April 2012)

Therefore, he uses the “Slave Ship” sculpture as a way to tie all Africans together, a reminder of their tragic history at the hands of white people. However, it is in this tragedy that all Africans are linked together, and this common history can also be seen as a source of empowerment.

The piece “Birmingham Jail-1963” dominates the centre of Minter’s garden and represents the jail cell that Martin Luther King Jr. was imprisoned in after the 1963 marches. However, this cell does not merely represent King’s cell, but is a symbol of all the cells that Africans have been imprisoned in since their arrival in the United States. Guarded by two large, ceramic dogs, and a host of other shoes, gloves, trucks and cars, helmets, and crowned by a large cross, this space is ritualised and marked as separate, sacred, and spiritual. The interior is dominated by a large toilet, shocking in its whiteness, and haunted by its ability to encapsulate the entire experience of captivity in its mundaneness. This cell offers another place for viewer meditation and reflection, but different from the African huts. The interior is eerie and uncomfortable. When gazing out at the garden, the view is obscured by rusted metal bars, and the space feels cramped and constricting, not allowing the viewer to find rest or peace. But, the strength of the guards outside, and the overwhelming invasive presence of the garden, ultimately renders this cell as a possible place of resistance, as an alternative history, and an alternative understanding of King’s sentence. This work strives to unite all visitors to the garden through the recreation of an experience, as imagined through Minter’s mind. By creating the cell as he sees it, and inviting viewers into it, he is linking the past and the present, and inviting a newly-imagined future of the African race centred around visitors’ newly-received knowledge.

It is this desire to create knowledge coupled with Minter’s understanding of the past, present, and future as malleable and disembodied, that support his self-identified griot role. He views his job as artist, and African, to tell the story of Africans in America, and link African-Americans to their ancestors in Africa. His message and role was given to him by God as he says: “God gave me the vision of art, to link that four-hundred-years journey of Africans in America, link that truth to the children who are turning away from us, and I decided to name it, ‘African Village in America’. It tells the story of the time we have spent here.”¹⁷ Minter views his art as inseparable from life and creation. It is best

delivered to the people, on the ground, changing and transforming communities and people’s roles within them: “I say it [art] is a gift of God, going back to Genesis, in the beginning when God created heaven and earth. God was the first artist...I thank God for giving man the gifts for art. Without art, children have no dream into the future.”¹⁸ Art does not exist in a void, purely for aesthetic contemplation. It is part of a context and a narrative, supported by a worldview, a movement, and, a race. Minter believes that his art is meant to affect emotion, and spur viewers to action. For him, it is a far-reaching, unifying truth: “Art is the one way man can have a common thread that would connect the hearts of all people. Art is for universal understanding...All that we know, all that we be and have been, can be explained in art.”¹⁹

Because Minter believes that his art, and he as artist, has a specific goal to achieve, he believes that there is a specific way to view it. The garden is conceived of as a journey, with Minter as the guide. When visitors arrive at the Village, if Minter is home and in the mood, he dons a hat and grabs a staff adorned with trinkets, bells, and ribbons, and leads viewers through his realised history. By putting on these accoutrements, he literally embodies the role of griot. At key junctures in the journey, he will ask for moments of silence, invite viewers to meditate or reflect, ask questions, point out the multiple layers in a work, or talk about the presence of spirits. Minter credits the building of the garden “to the hand of God,” believing that he is simply a messenger acting as a bridge to communicate God’s messages through His mode. As such, the garden is not open to interpretation. It is a resistant history to the African-American experience in America, offering an alternative and empowering view of the world order to a specific community. Although Minter conceives of himself as an artist, and his garden as art, it is not this identity that gives him the authority to create knowledge and truth in his community. Rather, his role as artist was given to him by God as a tool to create change and teach generations about the past, the present, and the possibilities for the future. As in the case of the griot, Minter, or the garden, do not inherently contain truth, but rather, truth is realised through his performance of the garden. He has been imbued with power to teach the people; to create knowledge, and preserve it for the future.

Thornton Dial as Frame

Dial's *Walking with the Pick Up Bird* provides another example of an assemblage made by an African-American artist that can be seen through this same idea of syncretic epistemologies. Dial is a self-identified artist, creating pieces of art that stand alone, in both form and content. He often refuses to provide analysis of his work, believing that if a viewer doesn't understand a piece, it's because they don't deserve to. His role as artist is to create, not explain. By using materials that other people have thrown away to talk about issues that affect Black people, he attempts to make people think. He says, "My art is evidence of my freedom. When I start any piece of art I can pick up anything I want to pick up....I gather up things from around...I only want materials that have been used by people, the works of the United States, that have did people some good but once they got the service out of them they threw them away."²⁰ He says further, "Some people supposed to can read art, like some people can read a book. Somebody that make art or somebody that can read art, they is somebody that been educated."²¹ Dial believes that his authority to read these objects for the knowledge contained within them comes from his position as artist. With his artistic licence, he creates artwork that can stand alone, that a viewer can look at and derive individual meanings from. While Dial does not believe that his skill was given to him as a gift from God, as Minter does, he does believe that his art has a purpose. In making art he aims to challenge stereotypes of Black people and art, and inspire people to make a change: "My art my talking. Everything I think about and every idea my mind come up with, and all the stuff I have seen, every last thing I believe, is right there in my art....I plan for my art to help a person think...Everything a artist make supposed to help a person handle his life better...It [art] can lead peoples through the darkness and help them from being afraid of the darkness. Art is a guide for every person who is looking for something."²² For Dial, art is a journey and a process, part of his life and his identity, a way of living and being. Just as Minter and his Village are entwined in a way that enables each of them to move through the world as they create understanding, Dial and the pick-up bird are one and the same, existing as a unit; as collector, creator, and artist. In many ways, Dial is like a seer, guiding his community to truths he has found by using his art. Minter understands his art in this way as well, but to an extreme. His ability to read objects was a gift granted by God, and with that

gift is a responsibility to actively show his people the way. With this responsibility, he becomes a griot, and the sculpture garden his history, preserving an alternative truth for his community.

Conclusion

When categorised as epistemologies, the sculpture gardens of Southern, African-American, self-taught artists can be removed from both the scholarly and the aesthetic constraints of outsider art, and can be viewed and understood as complex ways of ordering knowledge. When they, and their creators, are removed from an outsider status, and their methods and messages are viewed within conversations containing other epistemologies, such as cabinets of curiosity and griots, both their aesthetics and their philosophies can be more accurately analysed and appreciated. Minter works with the found-object assemblage tradition that is prevalent throughout the African-American expressive cultural landscape. He is able to read objects for their past lives and present potential, and through his method of collecting and sorting them, he believes he can reveal the knowledge that exists inside them. This notion exists parallel to the motivations behind cabinets of curiosity; through collecting and sorting rare or unusual objects, collectors become learned men, in possession of an understanding of the world order. Minter sees his yard as a history, with a singular interpretation and a singular truth. As a griot, with a God-granted gift, it is his responsibility, as creator, to show viewers this truth. He must act as an interpreter, and direct visitors to the right answers. His seamless incorporation of both of these understandings into "African Village in America" makes it an ideal work through which to begin to recontextualise the conversation surrounding these environments to one of syncretic epistemologies.

¹Joe Minter in "Joe Minter" in William Arnett, Lowery Sims, Jane Livingston, and Paul Arnett, *Souls Grown Deep Volume 2: African American Vernacular Art*, (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2001), 502.

²Ibid.

³Although much scholarship exists on this subject in each of these positions, I have chosen to ground my discussion in the works: John Beardsley, *Gardens of Revelation: Environments by Visionary Artists*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995); Grey Gundaker, *Keep Your Head to the the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, (New York: Random House, 1984).

⁴Observers and historians have employed a variety of terms to describe these constructions (see Grey Gundaker's discussion of homegrounds, Robert Beardsley's discussions of gardens of revelation, Robert Farris Thompson's discussion of yard shows, and Leslie Umberger's discussion of visionary environments). I have chosen the term "sculpture garden" because it is descriptive of both the intent and the environment, but does not remove the agency from the work or the artist.

⁵Oliver Impey, and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinets of Curiosity in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, (Cornwall: House of Stratus Ltd, 2001), Introduction.

⁶Francis Bacon, Gesta Grayorum, original in Bodleian Library, 1594 quoted in Lawrence Weschler. *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Wonders of Jurassic Technology*, (New York; Random House, 1995).

⁷Oliver Impey. "Introduction" op cit.

⁸Thomas Hale. *Griots and Griottes* (Indianapolis:Indiana University Press, 1998).

⁹EGomez, R. (2005, October). "You Pick It Up and Make Art Out of It". *ArtNews*,104(9).

¹⁰The dominant narrative of African-American assemblage was taken from the discussion within "Ashe: Improvisation and Recycling in African-American Art." Tom Patterson. "Something Out of Nothing." In *Ashe: Improvisation and Recycling in African-American Visionary Art*. (Winston-Salem: Winston-Salem State University, 1993), 17.

¹¹A thorough visual description of Minter's yard would be near impossible, and would not sufficiently express his understanding of its' existence. Therefore, I have chosen to describe it in terms of its meaning, with a few, choice elements described in detail as representative of the messages throughout.

¹²Joe Minter. "Joe Minter" in *Souls Grown Deep Vol. 2*. 503.

¹³Grey Gundaker. *Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African-American Home Ground*.

¹⁴The use of some language such as "huts" as well as the interchangeable use of "Africans" and "African-Americans" is taken as a cue from the artist. I understand the pejorative nature of these words and the important and obvious distinctions between Africans and African-Americans, but am choosing to allow the artists conception of his yard to guide my writing.

¹⁵Joe Minter. "Joe Minter" in *Souls Grown Deep Vol. 2*. 503.

¹⁶Ibid, 504.

¹⁷Ibid, 504.

¹⁸Ibid, 508.

¹⁹Ibid, 504.

²⁰Thornton Dial. "Thornton Dial". In *Souls Grown Deep Vol. 2*, 201-202.

²¹Ibid, 220.

²²Ibid, 220.



Figure 1. A view of the temple from the Warburton Highway, January 2001 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

Robert Prudhoe's Temple of 'Boingaology'

Chris James

We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is disappearing.

R. D. Laing ¹

Introduction

I first met Robert Prudhoe, otherwise known as Boinga Bob, many years ago at a gathering on one of his mountain properties. He was a brightly clothed, charismatic figure who reflected the somewhat 'hippy' environment that was burgeoning in the Yarra Valley foothills of Victoria, Australia. Bob greeted everyone with the word 'Boinga', which I took to be

an adaptation of the Sanskrit 'BaGga' or 'being'. Bob had a love of Asian cultures and the temple clearly referenced the Tibetan Buddhist style, overlaid with a pastiche of other designs and quasi-religious regalia, all of which were mirrored in Boinga Bob's own catch phrase: *Go beyond the beyond and make known the unknown*. There was no escaping Bob's desire to spread love and peace in the world. This made him a likeable individual and a good orator. The Warburton temple (figure 1) was a special place of gatherings. Visitors spent a lot of time listening to Bob's stories and ideas as well as engaging in kissing the cheeks of friends and strangers and indulging in lengthy group hugs.

Boinga Bob is regarded as something of a national treasure in the town of Warburton and undoubtedly many New Age novices have viewed him as some kind of spiritual guru. That said, trying to locate Boinga Bob's art within any particular trend is not an easy task. The sign outside the temple reads *Boingaology Headquarters, South Ambrosia* (figure 2).



Figure 2. The sign outside Boinga Bob's temple, June 2012 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

At first glance it instills the idea of utopia and perhaps a cult. It is not a cult, but it is clearly a different cultural domain that juggles tradition with deconstruction and the postmodern mix of mainstream aesthetics and esoteric ideologies.

Long before I met him, Boinga Bob had developed a reputation for his lavish parties in the hills. People came from far and wide to share their epiphanies and New Age mantras. They dressed in flowing romantic gowns adorned with rich colours and brocades. Women decorated their hair with flowers or ringlets and they carried chattels filled with wines, foods, drums and other musical instruments; anything that would ritualise the festivities and stimulate the senses. The strong sensual atmosphere and an abundance of mulled wine offered a gateway into various forms of experimentation such as the tantric philosophies and altered consciousness. To this end the Boingaology Temple exuded a kind of Dionysian folly.

Background

Warburton is a one street town that sits in a valley surrounded by impassible mountains. On a sunny day the slopes glow blue with the reflection of eucalyptus. There is only one way in and one way out, which makes it very prone to bushfires. The Yarra River runs the distance of the town and three bridges allow residents to leave the slopes of the mountain and meet up with the highway. If the bridges fail the residents are stuck. In addition the town is distinctly separated into two very different areas, one area is typical of an Australian mountain hamlet and the other has a New England flavour; the remnants left over from early settlement. The terrain is formidable. At roughly 700 metres above sea level, with mountains rising to 3000 metres, Warburton's winters are bitterly cold, followed by long hot Indian summers. The town was settled in 1845 during the Gold Rush and was developed by the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) when they arrived in 1906/7.² Warburton is where the SDA housed its publishing buildings, a food factory, a community centre (originally a school), a church and drug rehabilitation centre (previously a hospital). The SDA have owned much of the residential real estate in and around the town and they have had a strong hold on local public affairs. A strict moral code overshadowed the community, which ran alongside an equally strong Protestant work ethic, allowing the SDA to dominate the town's main industry, logging. Warburton still remains a logging town, and the industry is an ongoing point of friction for incoming environmentalists.

Above all, like many small towns Warburton has been resistant to change, so when the *Boingaology Headquarters* was first constructed it was much more than an oddity it was considered the work of the Devil. It still raises the ire of an older generation, but they are no longer the town's leading voice.

My own recollections of Warburton and the temple stretch back to the 1980s. I lived on the opposite mountain and every night I would see the spectacle of fairy lights that shone from the many peaks and towers of the temple. Local children thought it was a magic castle with a moat (the Yarra River) and a dragon guarding the precious building. (The ridge of the mountain resembles the shape of a dragon). There were many cloud covered nights when the town would have been in pitch darkness except for the array of temple lights (figure 3).



Figure 3. Night time view of the original *Boingaology Headquarters*, 1982 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

Day or night the sound of Ram Das and Tibetan chimes rang out across the township. Buffeted by the forested slopes on all sides, the music spiralled and reverberated across the landscape like a celestial choir. In the area immediately surrounding the temple the air was permeated with *Asra Om Nag Champa* incense. The building stood magnanimous amidst its many installations, such as old stone carvings, ornamental plaques, stained glass windows and prayer wheels. Its large carved wooden doors were breathtaking. On the inside it resembled a rich Tibetan home and it was very neat and tidy. Boinga Bob was meticulous about his environment (figure 4).

Some people travelled to the temple as part of a pilgrimage, others came for the company of like-minded people, some sought a quiet spot to meditate and many just wanted to gaze in awe at Boinga Bob's creations. Over time the temple became a Mecca for tourists, artists, television stars and devotees of every religious persuasion. It frequently housed stray animals and Bob's generosity would not allow him to see anyone excluded.

The Quest

Not long after meeting Boinga Bob I discovered we were also neighbours in the Melbourne suburb of St Kilda. He was living in an old mansion caretaking the building for a friend who was a property developer. The place was palatial and in some ways eerie because it echoed with every footstep taken on ancient floorboards. The wind could be heard blowing through the cracks and under the doorways and some of Bob's friends were known to tell people that the place was haunted. Not that it would have worried Bob; he might have relished a meeting with friendly ghosts or inter-galactic aliens as he spent many hours watching for UFOs from the balcony of his mountain retreat. The St Kilda building, although grand, put limits on Boinga Bob's art. He decorated the interior with altars, but he could not touch the outside and longed to get back to the freedom of the hills.

Bob's quest to *go beyond the beyond* denotes his longing to understand himself and his place in the



Figure 4. *Boingaology Headquarters*, 1982 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

world. On his website Bob states:

In my younger years I was fascinated with the Magic of Life spending much time wandering in the Wilderness and pondering Nature. Then early one morning at Mt Everest base camp in Nepal I walked outside the hut and became interested in human comfort pondering effects of radiation, temperature, air speed, metabolism and insulation. I became very conscious of the effect of the environment on human comfort and I was busy observing the change of state between water, snow, vapour and ice and aware that each of these states involved a shift in energy. Life. I travelled extensively on my personal journey to 'Make Known the Unknown' and to try and understand my purpose.³

Boinga Bob's strong yearning for knowledge has engulfed him in a paradox since he has straddled the parallel worlds of science and sacredness. He rarely talks about his scientific achievements, but those who know him as a scholar of engineering will tell you how hard he has wrestled with the tensions

between the rational world and his Jungian-style beliefs. Like Einstein, Bob felt compelled to seek out his own kind of unification. Sometimes it pushed him to the brink of major discoveries and at other times he has fallen into a vortex of more questioning and the search for transcendence. Bob turns to his 'spirit' in times of stress and buries himself in his deeply intransitive structures. He describes the creative process as feeling the 'spirit' that enters into him; that which guides the hand of his art as well as his destiny.

Bob has travelled the globe seeking spiritual solace. He has walked the earth in places like Nepal, Tibet, East Africa, Egypt, Europe, Alaska, Canada and Guatemala. He has also been part of a team leading the world in the development of Alternative Energy Systems, his primary role to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the new technologies. He has taken on the position of technician and juxtaposed it with his compelling taste for the Raw. Bob works to shape wood and other mixed media into a montage of extended phallic symbols with the heads of majestic



Figure 5. Eagle head fence post, November 2013 (photograph Chris James)

eagles. Their purpose is multi-dimensional; they hold up floors, decorate windows and provide perches for visiting wildlife. These totems extend the length of boundary fences and they climb the height of electricity power poles (figure 5).

That Bob has blended his spiritual existence with the rigors of physics and engineering to such an elevated level puts him into a very unusual category of high achievers, a category that is still the topic of intense scientific inquiry and which makes his art all the more compelling.

Self-Actualisation

Bob was born in 1940 in Melbourne's inner suburb of Richmond. He was exceptionally close to his mother and lived with his family in Ivanhoe for thirty-five years. Bob's mother was a gregarious woman who loved furs and Lurex and her passion was travelling

on cruise ships. Mrs. Prudhoe always had faith in her son and she took immense pride in him regardless of his taste for the unusual. While living in Ivanhoe Bob converted a garage into what he called a 'Yogitorium' and gained the title of Yogi Bob amongst the local residents.

He did not set out to be some kind of visionary, but he adopted a discourse that made him appear dysfunctional to the mainstream population. Life was difficult for Bob at school. When he was young there were no criteria to recognise gifted children and instead his teacher charged him with 'idiocy' and advised his mother to take him out of the school environment and put him into the workforce. Thankfully, his mother did not follow the advice and by the time Bob had finished high school he was an A grade student. Bob received top marks in Mathematics and won a commonwealth scholarship. He was allocated a place at Footscray Technical



Figure 6. Unfinished temple at Cassiana Island Sitka Alaska, 1992 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

Institute. It took him twelve months to settle into higher education, but when his second year came around he quickly became the top student in Victoria for his Engineering and Drawing subjects. After gaining a Diploma in Electrical Engineering he joined the Victorian Electricity Commission. He acquired a lot of technical experience, but this was only a stepping-stone to bigger and better things for Bob. He took his exams for a Postgraduate Diploma in Heating and Ventilation, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning, which seemingly, was not an easy course because he was the only student to finish it. He had also created a fully automatic controlled environmental control system for bulk potato storage, which was the first of its kind in the world.

Bob continued working on his inventions and further study and received good results in a Masters of Engineering Systems Degree. He then won the John Storey Scholarship to work on a PhD at the

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). He was afforded government grants for his work. Bob's inventions became internationally known and he was invited to lecture overseas at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) where he met the world's leaders in Mathematical Modelling for Thermal Systems. As the story goes, the Institute wanted to set up an international research facility around Bob's work, but allegedly the project did not meet with Australian approval. This rejection was a terrible blow to Bob, leaving him to rethink his faith in the university system. Bob terminated his research, reasoning that Jesus Christ didn't need a PhD, so why should he? Feeling hurt and disillusioned Bob packed a bag and travelled to Alaska. He stayed there for roughly six months building a temple (figure 6).

The termination of Bob's research seemed to spearhead a series of traumatic events. While he was away his magical Australian temple was burnt



Figure 7. A temple tower under construction, November 2011 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

to the ground. It happened at night amidst a bevy of helpless onlookers. The community was in shock. I accompanied Bob when he returned to Warburton to inspect the fire site. He was stoical, but the pain cut across the rigid lines on his forehead and spread to the tightness of his mouth. He fought back tears as he stood before the rubble with folded arms locked tightly across his batik shirt and sandalwood necklace. The temple was gone except for the remaining foundations, which looked like a charred sacrificial altar. There seemed to be no recompense.

The Phoenix Rising

Bob was quick to pick up the pieces and start work on a new temple. He put an offer on the old stationmaster's house across the road from the original *Boingaology Headquarters*. The concrete building had been used as a hostel and was left empty, drab and near derelict. Without doubt Bob would make something wonderful out of this dying maze of grubby small rooms and smelly toilets. He regained his enthusiasm, moved in and started work on the project before the sale was legally settled. Fortunately, the transaction ran smoothly (figure 7).

Bob had never applied for building permits, nor did he think he needed to because the Council applauded his work and allegedly used it in their tourism advertising. In times of economic downturn the numbers of people visiting Bob's temple kept a lot of small businesses afloat. No one could have imagined that the Council might one day want to demolish Bob's building.

Before long a new monument was emerging, but during the process of the reincarnation of Bob's temple, his mother passed away. After this the mood of his creations changed. The once carefully assembled structures and perfect symmetry became skewed. Key points of design gathered more intricate detail and a clutter began to build up around particular areas, which altered the building's perspective. He also began building an annex on the opposite side of the road (figures 8 and 9).

The once harmonious quality of the *Boingaology Headquarters* became an incongruous tangle of bric-a-brac and tree roots. The hill side was perforated with dozens of recycled objects turned into shrines reminiscent some types of Dada and Fluxus art.



Left: Figure 8. *The Tree House*, December, 2011 (photograph Robert Prudhoe) Right: Figure 9. *The annex (unfinished)*, July 2012 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

There was no longer a socially accepted form of order and there was no end in sight. This new, intriguing period in Bob's work was unfortunately destined to widen the chasm between what the mainstream authorities viewed as 'real' art and the spontaneous, intuitive, creations of outsider art (figure 10).

Boinga Bob was a world traveller and he collected a mass of precious artifacts from which he derived the inspiration for his work. Now he set the statues of Buddha and ornate friezes beside broken mirrors, old cupboards, and chairs with painted vinyl covers. There were toilet seats, car hubs and the insides of washing machines, torches and witches' hats that had found their way to the temple from construction sites elsewhere. No item was discarded (figure 11).

The temple's interior started to fill up with soft toys and Bob would explain this by saying he wanted people to be happy; soft toys make children happy, and he felt as if he was still a child himself. The number of toys grew rapidly and spilled over into the yard and sometimes onto the street (figure 12). A large teddy

bear sat on top of Bob's decorated car, weathered, dirty and falling apart, yet endowed with the aura of mystique and sacredness.

It is not unusual for artists to use children's toys in their creations. There are many examples, such as: Jeff Koons' metallic gold *Balloon Dog* (2001); Peng Hung Chih's *Little Danny* (2001), made up of 660 wind up *Little Danny* dogs; Hans Hemmet's *German Panther*, a military styled tank made of multi-coloured balloons; and Urs Fischer's *Untitled (Lamp Bear)* (2001).⁴ Animals also feature prominently in outsider art, in well known examples, such as Nek Chand's *Rock Garden*, Chandigarh, India; started in 1965, Bodhan Litnanski's *Shell Garden*, Vitry-Nouveau, France, started in 1966, and the work of Simone LeCarre-Galimard and South Australian artist Jungle Phillips.⁵

Undoubtedly, children are of immense interest to artists because they perceive the world in fundamentally different ways to adults. Children were an attraction for Picasso, who claimed it took



Figure 10. Everyday objects mingled with carvings, November 2011 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

him a lifetime to learn how to paint like a child. In his book *The Innocent Eye* (1999) Jonathan Fineberg reveals how some modernists, including Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, Wassily Kandinsky and Joan Miro possessed collections of children's art from which they undertook their own creations.⁶

The relation between children's art and that of the matured person is generally obscured unless development is impaired or some kind of trauma has occurred, but as we learn more about human development we find there are some traits from childhood that are never lost. This is especially true of the senses.

The Science

The topic of intellectual and sensory development is a relatively new field, but studies are producing data on a possible link between a condition called synaesthesia and the obsessive compulsive behaviour displayed by some artists, compulsions that have their roots in infancy. One study, by Katie Wagner and Karen R. Dobkins at the University

of California, San Diego, has found that 'early development is characterised by a period of exuberant neural connectivity, followed by a retraction and reweighting of connections over the course of development.' They believe 'that this connectivity may facilitate arbitrary sensory experiences in infants that are unlike anything experienced by typical adults.' They also found that these sensory experiences are 'similar to the sensory experiences of adults with synaesthesia...'⁷ Synaesthesia is a 'rare sensory phenomenon that has been associated with ... strong arbitrary associations between different sensations.' For example, in his book *The Tell Tale Brain*, neuroscientist Dr V.S. Ramachandran reveals how people with synaesthesia 'taste colours, see sounds, hear shapes, or touch emotions in myriad combinations.'⁸

Synaesthesia is a neurological condition in which two or more bodily senses are merged. The result is a blurring of boundaries. The expectation is that the childhood experience associated with 'exuberant neural activity' will be resolved prior to adulthood. Normally, the retraction process takes place around



Left: Figure 11. Painted vinyl chair and metal cabinet, June 2012 (photograph Robert Prudhoe) Right: Figure 12. One of the temple toys, December 2011 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

the age of eight months. 'Failure of the retraction process leads in rare cases to synaesthesia in adults.' People with synaesthesia experience the world very differently to most and their behaviour can seem bizarre. Boinga Bob has never had a diagnosis of synaesthesia or a spectrum disorder, but clearly, he inhabits a vastly different world to most. He is a person of impulse, extraordinary talents and extreme contradictions. He believes his entire purpose in life is to build temples and unify all the world's religions. Bob freely admits that he has experimented with a variety of drugs including peyote and he currently relies on wine and a good supply of stout beer to enhance his art. In stark contrast, Bob is very fitness oriented; he swims, hikes, climbs mountains, plays tennis and scales the heights of precariously unsafe trees to construct his buildings. Most of these contradictions have been attributed to the artist's temperament. However, the evidence of a neurological explanation is mounting. In a paper addressed to the Royal Society of London by Dr V. S. Ramachandran and Edward M. Hubbard describe how temperament is structured within the brain to

the extent that people with synaesthesia 'inhabit a strange no-man's land between reality and fantasy.'⁹

Synaesthesia is not new; scientists have known about it since 1880, when Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, published a paper on the topic in *Nature*. The idea was not pursued because drugs such as mescaline and LSD can create similar effects. Today, new developments in neuroscience have revealed how certain brain processes, described as a 'cross-wiring' can account for synaesthesia.¹⁰ The condition has been attributed to a number of visionary artists such as Wassily Kandinsky who, as one of the leaders in Munich's new art movement in the early 20th century, set out to express, as he put it, the inner 'SOUL and nature of humanity,' not just in painting, but also in a written treatise on how visionary art differs from the materialist world.¹¹ Kandinsky's exposure of the inner life is very typical of the New Age ideals that have found a strong following in cities and small towns everywhere. The teachings come in part from the Theosophical Movement and the works of Helen Blavatsky, Alice A. Bailey, Jiddu

Krishnamurti and their contemporaries. They also include such beliefs as the existence of crop circles, said to be constructed by visitors from outer space. This imaginary blending between heaven and earth has its correlate in synaesthesia. Notably, other worlds also found their way into the works of some Surrealist painters. Man Ray and Meret Oppenheim typically subverted the rational approach to art for the imaginary and each present as possible candidates for synaesthesia.

In 1956 Oppenheim created the controversial object, *Cannibal Feast*, for the opening of the last International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris. The sculpture included a live nude model laid out on a table and covered with food. It was scorned for depicting women as the object of consumption.¹² The objects of conspicuous consumption present as an overwhelming feature in outsider art and architecture, as in the collections of discarded consumer objects in, for example, Bodan Litnanski's *Shell Garden*, Howard Finster's *Paradise Garden*, and Clarence Schmidt's *Woodstock Environment (or House of Mirrors)*.¹³

This obsessive gathering and transforming of recycled materials is now believed to be akin to several neurological conditions that can be defined by recurrent thoughts and behaviours over which the recipient has no control. In addition, many of these states can, in the short term, feel pleasurable.¹⁴ Accordingly, Ramachandran believes that synaesthesia is seven times more common in artists, and it might account for much of the rich detail in outsider art.

The Spirit

It is not uncommon for outsider artists to question their life-world and its meaning and many appear to attribute their talents to a supernatural entity and/or 'spirit'. The French philosopher Julia Kristeva views this as a supplication where one entity replaces another, a state that can lead to altering consciousness. This creates the sensation of the disappearing subject, which for her is abjection (or being cast out). Abjection preserves the 'archaism of pre-objectal relationship', experienced as violence when bodies become separated. In psychoanalysis everything is laid out in evolution and the separation between mother and infant. 'Abjected' marks the precise area of culture that removed the subject from animalism. With this in mind, Kristeva highlights the primary task of separating ourselves from the beast; otherwise the Raw. To be succinct, the abject is the

moment of separation from the mother which is also the time of recognition between the individual 'I' and 'other'. The abject is also a precondition for the breakdown of meaning and the individual's reaction to that breakdown. As Kristeva says, the abject has to do with 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.'¹⁵

'Breakdown' is a metonymic word with a list of negative connotations. However, its deconstructive properties lend credence to new forms of expression in outsider art. Many outsider artists deal not so much with the matter, but the connecting spaces. With this in mind neurosis becomes a highly creative exposition of possibility. Accordingly, Kristeva suggests that since the 'abject' is situated 'outside' the accepted symbolic order, being forced to face it is an inherently traumatic experience. Hence, feelings of abjection complement the existence of the superego. In Kristeva's aphorism: 'To each ego its object, to each superego its abject'.¹⁶

Outsider art is hardly new; society has just chosen to ignore it, in much the same way that as it has, until recently, ignored or demonised disability and mental illness. As Kandinsky attempted to explain in his treatise, from the artist's point of view there are different levels of reality; the 'material' and the 'spiritual'. For the scientist the 'spiritual' lies in the imagination as a fantasy or belief system. Spirituality (or religion) as Freud pointed out has a strong psychosexual component that fulfils primal needs generally repressed in a civilised society. In 1909 Sigmund Freud wrote 'a thing which has not been understood inevitably reappears; like an unlaidd ghost it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken.'¹⁷ Freud's concern was how to overcome childhood trauma or the sense of helplessness on the part of the ego. When there is an accumulation of anxiety or excitement, or any other internal psychic disruption that overwhelms, the individual feels it as abjection. This can account for the desire to reclaim (or consume) what is lost or what has been discarded.

The desire for reclamation is vivid in Boinga Bob's painted washing machine (figure 13) and numerous other recycled artefacts. Here the precariously fragile ego is subsumed into the object for perceived safety and satisfaction. It happens amidst the general population, but the artist is better at turning reclamation into the spectacle. What is more it makes great art.



Figure 13. Painted washing machine, June 2012 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

The psychosexual component inherent in reclamation is perhaps more visible in Man Ray's depiction of a woman's body as a musical instrument and the painting of sound holes on her back. Man Ray called this work *Violon d'Ingres*, which in French is the term for a hobby or a captivating pastime. Like Oppenheim's *Cannibal Feast* it depicts the woman as an object of use. Man Ray's work is based on the neo-classical *Baigneuse de Valpinçon* (*The Valpinçon Bather*, 1808) by Ingres which sits in the Louvre, Paris.¹⁸ Ingres was known for his break with tradition and his radical expression of nature's fecundity manifest in his voluptuous nudes. Oppenheim's interpretation is, on the one hand an attack on classicism, tradition and the bourgeoisie and on the other it reminds the onlooker that Ingres was a violinist before he was a painter.¹⁹ Taken together, woman and violin both get depicted as the objects of play, which speaks to the subjugation of women generally, as well as the primal fantasy that the Outsider artist taps into.

Ramachandran suggests that artists are better at crafting these kinds of metaphors when they are wired for synaesthesia; life is richer and more meaningful with the merging of senses and it lends itself to heightened skills. This idea has led to further studies between savantism and synaesthesia, but the link does not go unquestioned. A. Louise Murray acknowledges some anecdotal evidence for the presence of abstract concepts in savants and people with synaesthesia, but argues that a lot more testing needs to be done before any conclusions can be made.²⁰ In 'Wiring the Brain. Synaesthesia and Savantism', Kevin Mitchell suggests that in most cases the stimuli that induce synaesthesia are not sensory, but conceptual categories of learned objects, such as letters, numbers, days of the week, and months of the year. The most common types involve coloured letters or numbers and what are called mental 'number forms'. Mitchell believes that the intense and very limited abilities inherent in autism can lead to ongoing practice of these skills which will inevitably improve over time. He maintains that the special abilities arise because the brains of autistic people process information differently and there is a greater level of local detail paralleled 'by greater local connectivity in neural circuits and reductions in long-range integration.'²¹

Mitchell may have a point, but autism is a greatly misunderstood phenomenon, shrouded in the notion of chronic disability, when autistic people function at different levels and display a wide variety of behaviours and skills. It is also a mistake to view synaesthesia as some kind of sickness akin to autism. Ramachandran and Hubbard (2001) make a clear distinction between the effects of autism and synaesthesia. Also, recent tests have shown that some people do have perceptual differences caused by a kind of 'cross wiring in the brain', but that these traits are not limited to people with synaesthesia:

In addition to clarifying why artists might be prone to experiencing synaesthesia,...research suggests that we all have some capacity for it and this trait may have set the stage for the evolution of abstraction – an ability at which humans excel... For example the cat is fluffy (touch), it meows and purrs (hearing), it has a certain appearance (vision) and odour (smell) all of which are derived simultaneously by the memory of a cat or the sound of the word 'cat'.²²



Figure 14. Painted trailer and car outside the temple entrance, July 2012 (photograph Robert Prudhoe)

It would appear that imagining a colour can invoke a stronger hue than looking at the real colour. Also, the blurring of senses can improve memory, shape, texture and colour as well as the use of metaphor:

Humans have a built-in bias to associate certain sounds with particular visual shapes, which could have well been important in getting humans started on a shared vocabulary. In addition, specific brain areas that process specific shapes of objects, letters and numbers, and word sounds can activate each other even in non-synaesthetes, causing people to expect, say, jagged shapes to have harsh-sounding names.²³

Ongoing studies are beginning to reveal why different characteristics prevail in certain humans (artists and poets) and not in others. This is not a problem, but at the same it can be overwhelming to the creator as well as the audience.

The Legacy

Being different often attracts attention and sometimes notoriety. The *Boingaology Headquarters* has been the topic of numerous newspaper and magazine articles as well as many popular television shows. The interest has never waned; it was, for example, featured in *Better Homes and Gardens* in 2013 and it was used in the music video for the pop group Ladybird – *Stay Wild* in 2009. The list of public tributes awarded to Boinga Bob's art is enormous and even when the future of the temple appears to be at risk there are television directors and program managers seeking to use the space as a backdrop for their movies (figure 14).

When I sat down and talked to Bob recently I asked him if there was anyone who had truly influenced his ideas. He told me he was fascinated by the work of Nikoli Tesla and his designs in alternating current. Tesla was a Serbian-American inventor, electrical

engineer, physicist and futurist with a complex mind and unpredictable behaviour. Tesla originally wanted to be a poet, but became fascinated with electrical current and magnetic fields. He was undoubtedly alienated and misunderstood by mainstream scientists and despite reaching international fame and holding over 700 patents, he lived most of his life in New York hotels and finally fell into bankruptcy, after which he was forced to live in greatly diminished circumstances.²⁴ There are a number of parallels between Tesla's life and that of Boinga Bob's. They share a nomadic lifestyle, the remuneration that came with Bob's inventions and patients came to an abrupt end and his constant urge to create temples has left him without funds and living in substandard housing. Bob has described his lifestyle as 'rough', but he also believes that accruing material possessions is wasteful (a view that does not extend to his obsession).

A recent paper by R. (Chandra) Chandrasekhar, titled 'Reflections on the Mind of Nikola Tesla', draws on the hypothesis of mental evolution, as proposed by R. M. Bucke in 1901, to offer a possible explanation for Tesla's prodigious and highly unusual mind. He identifies a number of traits that bode well with Bob's characteristics, these include acute hearing and sight; visualisation that mimics reality; eccentric habits and making grandiose claims. Tesla also suffered a breakdown.²⁵ As Chandrasekhar notes, Tesla displayed obsessive-compulsive disorder; synaesthesia; and high-functioning autism. Not surprisingly, Boinga Bob prefers to self-diagnose his condition as being 'outside the box'.

Two Worlds

Interestingly, Bob never applied his technological inventions to his own buildings. They represent a deep chasm, a life in another time, another place; but they have not been forgotten by the world. At the height of his career as an inventor Bob envisioned 'Solar Chimney Buildings' which relied solely on the energy from the sun to drive an air flow through an air channel creating a passive strategy for enhancing the energy efficiency. Today, this idea is still being developed and improved in universities and research centres.²⁶ Occasionally Bob is reminded of his achievements, but he allows the past to pale into insignificance. He is completely focused on extending his temple and creating individual pieces that can be used elsewhere. He sometimes has the urge to wander the world, but having undergone a

hip replacement he knows, deep down, that a major journey would be too physically challenging. Hence, he rarely moves far from his temple (figure 15).

Corollary

I began this essay with my return journey to the small Australian town of Warburton and a visit to Boinga Bob's extraordinary mountain temple. My intention was to write a narrative that would explain one person's creativity and meaning in order to lift awareness in relation to outsider art. As noted in the beginning, Robert Prudhoe is an avid builder of temples, which he believes are guided by a spirit that occupies his body.

Since beginning this project several significant observations have captured my attention. The first is the general lack of empathy for the outsider artist, especially from government bureaucracies, and despite any gains the authorities might have accrued from the artist's work. Also, contained in the struggle over compliance to statutory regulations there is a blurring of the boundaries between the art and its creator. In other words, while the work of the artist stands condemned so too does the man. There is little or no support for Bob as an aging individual trying to manage his property. Seemingly, people who inhabit different realities do so at their peril.

I have attempted to convey some understanding of Boinga Bob's world and what makes him appear different. I have been able to draw on some personal reflections over a number of years as well as more recent conversations with the artist, but this does not preclude some pre-conceived ideas and indeed, some bias.

I lived in Warburton for fifteen years and have many fond memories of the place and its people. I moved away ten years ago and I have not returned for at least five. Places are never the same as one imagines, especially as time passes; perspectives become altered. When I arrived in the township after a long absence the streets were clearly busier and shops had changed hands, the trees in the park had grown. I expected these kinds of changes. What I did not anticipate was the deterioration of Boinga Bob and his temple. My first reaction was to discount the changes and put aside my dismay. The building was unique and contained many fine qualities it should be valued and saved from demolition.



Figure 15. Boinga Bob's carved chair, November, 2013
(photograph Chris James)

Undoubtedly, I wanted the temple to be the way I remembered it and this was not possible. I remember Bob when he was residing in the original temple and working on his PhD. I was there when the original temple burnt to the ground and I was there for the start of the new building, but I had not accounted for a dramatic shift in building style or the transformation in the man, albeit I must have witnessed some of it. When people struggle and grow older in one's absence it is as though a sudden weakness and decay has set in overnight. Changing and growing older is always reflected in others, we never seem to see it in ourselves. The encounter with Bob's new temple aroused mixed feelings, the cruelty of aging, the impermanence of life, the constant struggle to hold back nature, the lack of freedom to express inner thoughts and crisis. I would carry these feelings into the task of writing. Hence, undertaking this account has turned out to be a very cathartic experience.

My initial approach to telling Bob's story was to commit myself to producing a narrative around one man's art and his longing to be accepted by the

mainstream municipal authorities, but there is much more to the story. Bob's quest for self-understanding has been lost in a colourful fantasy. We all create our own reality, but the key to contentment lies in overcoming the difficulties, not repressing them. That said adaptation aids survival. Bob has a keen awareness of what plagues him, but escapes into his art. This has left him emotionally and physically isolated for the sake of his art; or to put it differently, *art for art's sake*.

Bob's situation provides a strong argument for the establishment of well-managed therapeutic communities that focus on personal growth, as well as artistic ability. Such communities exist, but they are rare and often exclusive.

From my work as a psychotherapist I understand art as being a very powerful medium for healing. I have used art for many years in the psychoanalytic tradition as a mirror for surfacing the unconscious material that leads to painful encounters. The products of art therapies are generally not regarded as 'real' art by mainstream art communities. However, change the word 'therapy' to 'support' and the process does create a basis for some stability. In addition, it offers tactile strategies for dealing with unwanted thoughts, compulsions and addictions that make the artist's broader life-world unmanageable.

The urge that pushes against being ordinary is evident in everyone, our brains are wired to respond to binary systems, but to overtly act out being different is not an easy position; it brings constant misunderstandings, pain and disappointment. The energy needed to maintain this kind of recognition relies on the superego whereby the cost is enormous and often debilitating. *Art for art's sake* is both ethically bankrupt and socially damaging; what about the artist?

When the injection of the artist's ego becomes embedded into the object of his or her creation the subject disappears into the context. The development of the ego in early life is crucial for mental peace and self-actualisation. The obsessive artist, on projecting the ego into the object of creation often takes on a false identity based on the object and is left with the disappearing self, it makes great art, but it is also the state of abjection. This is a crisis for the individual. In the group there are even more imminent dangers when objects begin to replace people.

I was reminded of Michel Foucault's comments on art:

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or life. That art is something which is specialised or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the house or the lamp be the art object, but not our life?²⁷

Boinga Bob has created a unique expression of his inner world; but it has not brought him conciliation with the external reality. On the one hand this makes Bob a good artist, but does it make for a good society?

As I sat at my desk I replayed different aspects of my visit to Boinga Bob's new temple and soon realised what had disturbed me most. The solemnity that once surrounded Bob's temples had gone. There was no longer any soothing music emanating from across the hills. There were no delicate bells or prayer wheels. They had been replaced by the abject and the grotesque. Yes, it is strong. Yes, it is powerful. Yes, it needs to be preserved and valued, but it was no longer the place I had kept so precious in my memories. I must view this monument differently now in much the same way as I view a city statue covered in dirt and grime, but no less beautiful.

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²Earl Parkinson (1984) *Warburton Ways*, Warburton, Victoria, published by E. Parkinson and printed by The Signs Publishing Company, pp 3, 22, 42

³Boinga Bob (Website) www.boingabob.com/about/ Retrieved 4 November, 2013

⁴'Ten Great Artworks Inspired by Children's Toys', *flavorwire.com/251563/10-great-artworks-inspired-by-children's-toys/* Retrieved 5th November, 2013

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¹⁰V.S. Ramachandran and E.M. Hubbard (2000) 'People with synaesthesia – whose senses blend together – are providing valuable clues to understanding the organization and functions of the human brain', in *The Scientific American*, May, pp. 53-54

¹¹Wassily Kandinsky (2006) *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Translation by Michael T.H. Sadler with a new introduction by Adrian Glew. Boston, MFA Publications and at the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

¹²Whitney Chadwick (2009) Grove Art Online: Lesson One. *Transforming Everyday Objects*. Oxford Art Online and Oxford University Press: Online at www.oxfordartonline.com/public/page/lessons/Unit5Lesson1, retrieved 4 November 2013

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¹⁴Department of Psychiatry (2013) University of California, San Diego (website) *Speciality Programs: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*. (psychiatry.ucsd.edu/OCD_OCD.html), retrieved 23 November 2013)

¹⁵Julia Kristeva (1982) *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York. Columbia UP, p.4

¹⁶*ibid*, p.2

¹⁷Sigmund Freud (1909b) *Analysis of a Phobia in a 5 year old boy* (Little Hans), in Juliet Hopkins (1986) *Child Psychotherapy*, Vol. 12, No 1. London, The Tavistock Clinic and Routledge, p.61

¹⁸David Bate (2004) *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*. London. I.B. Taurus Publishers, pp.112 - 117

¹⁹See www.jeanaugustedominiqueingres.org/biography.html, retrieved 4 November 2013

²⁰A Louise Murray (2009) 'Can the existence of highly accessible concrete representations explain savant skills? Some insights from synaesthesia', in *Medical Hypotheses*, Vol. 74, Issue 6 , pp. 1006-1012, June (2010) University of Edinburgh, Department of Psychology

²¹Kevin Mitchell (2011) 'Wiring the Brain Synaesthesia and Savantism', www.wiringthebrain.com/2011/06/synaesthesia-and-savantism.html, retrieved 4 November 2013

²²Ramachandran and Hubbard (2003), op cit.

²³*ibid*.

²⁴Margaret Chaney, Robert Uth and Jim Glenn (1999) *Tesler, Master of Lightning*. New York, Barnes and Noble, pp.127, 154

²⁵R. (Chandra) Chandrasekhar (2006) 'Reflections on the Mind of Tesla'. Centre for Intelligent Information Processing Systems, School of Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering at the University of Western Australia. (www.ee.uwa.edu.au/~chandra/Downloads/Tesla/MindOfTesla.html, retrieved 5 November 2013)

²⁶Solar Chimneys at Wikipedia.Org. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_chimney Retrieved 6 November, 2013

²⁷Michel Foucault (1984) 'On the genealogy of ethics: an overview of work in progress', in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, p.350



Reimagining the Machine: Autobiography and History in Charles Vermeulen's Farm Equipment Installation

Kenneth Scambray

Often folk art sites are expressions of local environments, individuals' nostalgic recollections, or tribal productions reflecting the values or community rituals of a community. Simon Rodia's Watts Towers (Los Angeles), Baldassare Forestiere's Underground Gardens (Fresno) Elmer Long's Bottle Tree Ranch (Helendale), Emanuel Damonte's Hubcap Ranch (Pope Valley), Leonard Night's Salvation Mountain (Niland), Tressa Prisbrey's Bottle Village (Simi Valley), Frank Jao's Cultural Court (Westminster), and Charles Vermeulen's Vermeulen Ranch Center (San Juan Capistrano) are examples of the variety of notable folk art sites in California.¹ While each is unique, what unifies these sites is that each was created by what has been termed outsider or folk artists, individuals who lack formal training in the arts and are otherwise outside the artistic mainstream (Wojcik 179-80).² Even though unconventional in form and materials, folk artists' sites must be seen as something more than just idiosyncratic, autobiographical expressions. The iconography of Rodia's and Forestiere's sites ultimately transcends the two folk artists' personal histories and recounts a narrative about immigration at the beginning of the twentieth century (Scambray 63, 2011). When autobiography intersects with history, myth, and fable, a folk-art site transcends the subjectivity of the folk artist and narrates broader historical themes (Greenfield 91-95). Likewise, while its iconography must be read on one level as an autobiographical narrative, Charles Vermeulen's multivocal, farm-equipment assemblage also narrates the farming history of Orange County, the development of American industrialism, and the fable of the mythical American farmer.

The mythology of the virtuous farmer is deeply rooted in American culture. In the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries, the myth of the purifying effects of agricultural labour would become a predominant motif in the construction of the American identity. In his *Letters from an American Farmer*, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's farmer became the iconic American (76-77). Perhaps more than any other writer, Thomas Jefferson established permanently in American culture the myth of the virtuous farmer when he wrote, "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, & they are tied to the country & wedded to its liberty & interests by the most lasting bonds" (818). At the end of the nineteenth century, Frederick Jackson Turner in his Frontier Thesis also argued that the sanctified process of Americanization occurred in the western lands where the frontier experience would scour the unsavory historical encrustations from the European immigrant masses pouring into America at the *fin de siècle* and after. By the beginning of the twentieth century this national meta-narrative, in the words of the famous Cornell University horticulturalist L. H. Bailey created an "aristocracy of land," as well as an aristocracy of the farmer whose idealised, bucolic simplicity of life produces the most steadfast, independently-minded, moral American (33).

Of course, such essentialist, idealised constructions must be qualified by the postmodern discourse over European discovery, democracy, labour, capital, slavery, and land title in a post-capitalist American social order (Rogin 165-9). In addition, over the last century the family farm has been replaced by agribusiness, massive farms run by corporations who hire, if not exploit, a seasonal, itinerant immigrant labour force (Soja 28). But postmodern discourse is not something that is often foremost on the minds of unschooled folk artists, including Charles Vermeulen (1915-2003). He only finished the eighth grade before he was put to work on the family farm. Spending a lifetime as an American farmer in the West, he did in fact become before his death at the age of eighty-eight that iconic independently-minded, no-nonsense American farmer.³ His astounding folk assemblage, an artistic amalgam of farm equipment and steel sculptures, is located at the family-owned commercial centre, the Vermeulen Ranch Center on Del Obispo Street in San Juan Capistrano, Orange County, California. This section of San Juan carries the geographical designation Capistrano Valley (Cooper). Like Rodia's artful assemblage of found glass, domestic items, and tools, Vermeulen's site is not just a random collection of used tractors, other

farm equipment, and tools, but an installation that ranks among the most significant folk art sites in North America.

For Vermeulen's assemblage, understanding its context is paramount. Farm equipment by the roadside or in front of commercial and residential properties has long been a common sight. From suburban homes to agricultural businesses, many display an old piece of farm equipment. In front of commercial businesses, the equipment has a practical purpose as advertising signage. In areas where farmland has been replaced by suburban housing developments, it is also common to see in a front yard a farm wagon converted into a planter overflowing with flowers as a nostalgic reminder of the locale's farming past. In *Looking West*, John Dorst has defined these assemblages as "display environments." He describes them as "a physical space in which material elements have been selected and arranged primarily for the purpose of being looked at" (119-20, 121). It is also common to see along the roadside throughout California's inland and coastal valleys not just working farm equipment, but broken-down, rusting implements and tractors, oil stained with flat tyres rotting in the soil, too far gone to repair. This imagery is the true grit of the farming enterprise: signs of hard-working farmers' long days spent in the fields.

These random displays of equipment add further context to Vermeulen's colourful assemblage. His display environment is an artistic assemblage of the California rural experience rooted in the consciousness of local Orange County inhabitants. What motivated him is not difficult to assess. His equipment represented a nostalgia for his agrarian past. In Steve Varni's *The Inland Sea*, set in the San Joaquin Valley, despite the commercial development that has erased his Italian family's farm, Varni's main character, Vincent, still "had whole orchards in [his] head" (Scambray, 112, 2007; Varni 239). Likewise, despite the commercial development that erased the many fields that he had once farmed as a young man in Orange County, well in to his eighties Charles Vermeulen still had whole fields in his head.

Vermeulen was born May 2, 1915, in Bakersfield, California, and died on April 15, 2003 in Santa Ana, California. Charles was the second oldest of seven children, five brothers and two sisters. Charles' parents, Valere (1886-1957) and Emma (1891-1929) Vermeulen, emigrated to America from Noordschote,

Lo-Reninge, Belgium in April 1913. They entered through Ellis Island and made their way, probably as a result of Valere's work on the railroad, to Bakersfield where they settled. In Bakersfield, Emma gave birth to Isadore and then to Charles, while Valere continued to work on the railroad. By 1918 the Vermeulens had moved to Irvine in Orange County, where Valere became a sharecropper on approximately three hundred acres of land owned by the Irvine Company. At the time, it appears that there was a small colony of French-speaking Belgian farmers in south Orange County, and they moved near that community. The growing Vermeulen family lived modestly in a small house on what is now Barranca Parkway while Valere grew a variety of crops, from alfalfa, asparagus, and beets, to broccoli, cabbage, celery, lettuce, rhubarb, and spinach. By 1930 the Vermeulens were among more than 4,960 other farmers in Orange County. At the time farms composed nearly 57 percent of the county's acreage (Fifteenth Census).

Life on the family farm in the early twentieth century was not easy. Valere had to contend with drought, pests, unpredictable market prices, and equipment costs. Furthermore, a family farm was not just a home, but also a workplace where all members of the family were expected to contribute. Before school each morning, Charles and his older brother, Isadore, awoke early to feed the family chickens, goats, and other livestock. Charles attended nearby Lathrop Elementary School in Santa Ana, where, because of his advanced abilities, especially in math, he was allowed to skip the second grade. Valere and Emma did not allow Charles and Isadore to participate in sports programs. After school, Charles and his brother had to go directly home to complete their chores on the farm. Unfortunately, when he was in the ninth grade at Tustin Union High School, at the outset of the Great Depression, Emma died. As a result, Charles and Isadore were forced to quit high school to work full-time on the family farm.

Emma's untimely death changed Charles' life radically. With five younger siblings to feed, at fourteen years old, he was forced to assume his share of adult responsibilities. Charles was up early in the morning and worked until sundown and later. His early life would instill in him a work ethic that would last a lifetime. Charles once reported that the Great Depression did not have a significant financial effect on the family. One of the reasons was that the family provided much of its own food and other necessities. But that only meant more work for

Charles and Isadore. Contributing to their success was southern California's temperate, sunny climate moderated by the nearby Pacific Ocean and good soil conditions. The location allowed the family to farm on a commercial scale year round and to sell their produce on the local market. For the next two decades Charles worked with his father and brother running the farm while developing a successful produce business.

Mindful that he had never received a formal education, Charles would often say to those around him that he attended instead "the school of hard knocks." His comment was not a complaint but simply a statement of fact. To his family members he never criticised his father for his decision to force him to quit school. In later years he looked back with satisfaction at his successful life as farmer and family man. He never uttered a word of regret to friends or family.

The Vermeulen family's hard work before the second World War paid off in the post-war years. In 1940 Charles married Irene Emma Callens, who would survive him. They had two daughters, Virginia Ann Germann and Patricia Lynn Tomocik. By 1945, Charles and Irene had managed to save enough money to buy a lot and build a small house in Tustin, at 13661 Green Valley Street. In the same year, the Irvine Company land they were leasing was expropriated by the federal government for the construction of the El Toro Marine base. Isadore then left the family partnership to purchase his own land in the Imperial Valley while Charles and younger brother Severe leased land in nearby Santiago Hills in the city of Orange. Scrimping and saving over the next half decade, Charles was finally able to purchase 240 acres in nearby Garden Grove. After five years of farming, the seemingly inevitable happened: a developer purchased the land for housing. In 1959 Charles purchased the San Juan Capistrano Ranch of approximately 50 acres, where Severe and his wife, Gwen and family settled and farmed. This would become the future site of the Vermeulen Ranch Center. In the 1960s Charles bought a hay wagon from which he sold the farm's vegetables on Avenida Del Obispo in San Juan Capistrano. In the early 1970s Charles and his brother moved the wagon east to one corner of where the Vermeulen Ranch Center is today on Del Obispo and established an open-air market for their produce. By 1974 Charles had built the Vermeulen Produce Market. In 1988 he replaced it with the Vermeulen Ranch Center, now anchored by a Farm to Market grocery store

and a variety of satellite businesses. At the same time, Charles sold off the adjoining fifty acres that surround the centre. By 1980 the dominance of farming and the era of the small farmer had come to an end in Orange County. In the 1930s farmers numbered in the thousands and the majority of the county's acreage was under the plough; by the first decade of the twenty-first century there were only 325 farms operating, covering only about 16 percent of the county's acreage (Agriculture).

Though Charles left farming, he never abandoned his work ethic. For the remainder of his life, he drove from his Tustin home each day to the Vermeulen Ranch Center where he maintained a business office from which he managed his real-estate investments, including the Ranch Center. While a devoted husband, father, and deeply religious, he was also a man of few words who did not reveal much of himself to others. Over the years, his nephew Brian, Severe's son, would see him almost daily at the Vermeulen Ranch Center. But they usually only waved from a distance. When they happened to be close enough to converse, their exchange was little more than a few terse greetings before Charles would retire to his office. He had little patience for small talk. Though he had reinvented himself from farmer to successful commercial real estate investor, he remained fundamentally the same trusting individual he had always been in his relationships with family, friends, and business associates. When it came time to upgrade Ranch Center, he hired local contractors to do the work. When he asked a local contractor to do the cement work for his centre, he did not ask for a contract or even a price. When the work was done, he did not even ask for a bill, just a verbal account of the cost, which he paid on the spot, no questions asked, with a check and a handshake. As those who worked close to him said, "He was a good, honest man".⁴ Furthermore, while work was in progress on his centre, ignoring their protests, he worked right alongside the contractors he had hired to do the work (Stroud). Though his life as a farmer was behind him, the businessman Charles maintained that same independence of mind and work ethic instilled in him by his immigrant father.

Though he had reinvented himself as a businessman, unknown to many around him, Charles had a very active and fecund imagination. In the late 1970s, Charles began collecting farm equipment. His family was aware of his growing collection, but he said nothing to them about his intentions. He began









by purchasing farm equipment from neighbours and storing it on a piece of land, which contains a Quonset hut, across Del Obispo from the centre. He expanded his search by collecting equipment from friends throughout southern California and by attending farm equipment auctions in both San Diego and Los Angeles counties. Occasionally, he purchased a prized piece of equipment from out of state and had it shipped to San Juan.

In the Quonset hut he kept the tools and welding equipment needed for the repair and installation of his collection. He also used his self-taught welding skills to assemble his remarkable sculptures. When the original centre was torn down and the current Vermeulen Ranch Center was constructed in 1988, unannounced to anyone, with the help from a long-time worker, Philip Jimenez, and the use of a skip loader, Charles began installing his collection of farm equipment and sculptures in the areas otherwise dedicated for landscaping in the centre's parking lot. With that singular independence of mind that had characterised his life as an American farmer, he once told his nephew Brian, "It's my land. I will do it my way."

Nostalgia for his past life as a farmer was no doubt the motivation behind his assemblage. But nostalgia is not a reason to dismiss Charles', or any folk artist's, production. In Charles' site there is, a "redemptive nostalgia" that "open(s) private and imaginary space to history" and to a multiplicity of interpretations (K. Stewart 234; quoted in Sciorra 117). His assemblage is certainly not formal history. Yet Charles' assemblage can and must be read as a memoir or autobiography. For unschooled folk artists, autobiography can take many legitimate forms, from canvases, wood, fabric, and stone to underground caverns and towers (Hufford 41). Bound and published autobiographies are a sign of cultural capital: class, education, and dominance, categories alien and inapplicable to folk artists who lack formal education (Bourdieu 115). As Susan Stewart has written, "the nostalgic is a narrative utopia that works only by virtue of its partiality, its lack of fixity and closure" (23). In the imagination of the folk artist, nostalgia can produce legitimate avenues into emotions, communities, ethnic groups, and history (K. Stewart 228; Anagnostou). Vermeulen's site is not merely a nostalgic "imaginary world," but a complex, multivocal assemblage that narrates a "multiple set of contexts," personal and historical (K. Stewart 234; S. Stewart 51). His assemblage is a "Landscape of

Memory" where "the folk" and "history" intersect and require an interpretive act by historians (Inguanti 84, 92-93; K. Stewart 227, 234; Soja 11). Like any text, Charles' landscape cannot be framed by a singular interpretation.

A numerical inventory is necessary to give something of the magnitude of what Charles created. The site fronts both the Vermeulen Ranch Center, which is anchored by a Farm to Market grocery store, and an Armstrong Garden Center at the southern end of the property. The total number of objects, not including the heavy industrial and farm equipment, is all but uncountable, numbering approximately two thousand objects (Vermeulen). The site contains nearly fifty light standards that Charles took from the remodeling of the Ranch Center years earlier. Though at first glance they appear to be lighting for the parking lot, none are wired. Divested of their utilitarian use, they are whimsically placed throughout the site and become part of the imaginary, sculptural assemblage of the site. There are twenty hand water pumps mounted and placed randomly throughout the site in inconspicuous locations. The site also contains eighteen miniature gray windmills that are mounted on wagons and other equipment. They all stand above the site as their diminutive blades whirl in the daily onshore breeze that sweeps through the Capistrano Valley.

Among the larger farm equipment displays, there are at least thirty-three wagons, each containing hundreds of brightly painted fragments of equipment: plough blades, water valves, shovel blades, axe heads, tools, and more.⁵ There are fifteen tractors, from large workhorses used in ploughing and hauling to small lawn tractors. The oldest tractor is an iron wheeled Fordson F, circa 1917, made by Henry Ford & Son, Inc. (Fordson). The large rear wheels, nearly five feet in diameter, contain iron cleats and a front hand crank for starting the machine. The display includes post-World War II versions of Ford, John Deere, International Harvester, and Oliver tractors. To preserve them (and to protect them from theft) all of Charles' tractors are mounted carefully above ground on steel rods connected to their axels or frames with the support rods set in concrete. This was no small task. Installation took hours of welding and leveling. Last but not least, placed randomly among the farm equipment displays throughout the site, Vermeulen created and installed more than thirty-one sculptures, depending on how the observer wants to define his sculptural creations.

The iconography of the equipment in the wagons behind the four tractors lining Del Obispo serves as an appropriate introduction to the interior parking lot display. The wagons contain an assortment of farm objects, such as milk cans, fragments of ploughs, planters, and other difficult to identify pieces of equipment, at least for the non-farmer.⁶ In these four tractors and their wagon cargoes, Charles “speaks” in his own special, local dialect, as he does throughout the site (Dorst 121, 129-30). The deconstructed pieces of a bean planter on one wagon look more like a child’s toy, with its containers and wheel. Even more puzzling, on the front of the wagon, set at an odd angle jutting out into space, he has welded a tyre on its axle. It has no function in its position on the wagon. An imaginative amalgam of gears, cans, oddly positioned plough blades, and tyres suddenly become objects of contemplation that compel a multiplicity of interpretations. As Joe Sciorra has argued, it is the hallmark of such sites that “Community-based knowledge and vernacular aesthetic practices are a rich source for creativity and meaning in everyday life” (Sciorra 2). In Vermeulen’s “vernacular display environment,” we see utilitarian “modes of production” for both food and capital suddenly transformed into aesthetic objects (Dorst 4, 121).

Entering the parking lot from Del Obispo, the viewer is surrounded by a dazzling assemblage of ploughs, land graders, tractors, sculptures, and wagons overloaded with countless farm implement fragments and tools. Scattered throughout the assemblage there are no fewer than fifty ploughs, from small hand ploughs to horse drawn ploughs, ditchers, disk harrows, spring tooth ploughs, rollover ploughs, Fresno Graders, subsoiler rippers, and a small land leveler. There are side delivery rakes for harvesting lima beans and a large green bean planter. There is a manure spreader, which Vermeulen exploits as yet another sculptural display wagon featuring wheels, pieces of ploughs, planters, and other farm tools. The once unsavory manure spreader is radically transformed into an art object, not to be shunned but to be approached and contemplated. Was Charles making a joke? The parking lot space is a seemingly never ending display of curious items crowded into every conceivable nook and cranny in the landscape.

The thirty-three vintage wagons in the collection are a visual feast. Besides the three on Del Obispo, those scattered throughout the assemblage are overloaded with shovel blades, pitch fork tongs,

plough blades, ax heads, water valves, and other farm equipment pieces. Because of their nearly uncountable numbers, they defy any attempt to describe each of their contents. Just one wagon, for example, contains over 285 brightly painted, randomly organised items, with at least forty-three water valves, all screwed together in a line. Another wagon on the south end of the strip centre contains nearly one hundred items, consisting of pitch forks, springs, funnels, shovels, wooden paddles, rakes, and clevises. To display these tools, Vermeulen constructed frames on the wagons to which he painstakingly bolted, wired, or welded the items. Their utilitarian value suddenly dissolves into their individual forms and collective display as aesthetic objects.

While the tractors and ploughs are to the casual observer the more obvious signifiers of the site’s meaning, there is yet another less obvious stratum of its signification. A careful examination of the equipment, both large and small, reveals logos and stamps of their manufacturers, which narrate the very important industrial leitmotif that opens yet another important discourse in the site’s assemblage. The tractor’s manufacturers include John Deere (Illinois), International Harvester McCormick Farmall, (Illinois), and Oliver (Iowa). They represent the major farm equipment manufacturers of the twentieth century, all from the industrial heartland of America. In fact, by 1901 the developers of the Oliver tractor coined the term “tractor” from their earliest “contraption,” which the company initially called a “gasoline traction engine” (Oliver).

Extending the industrial theme of the site, on the west end of the parking lot, Charles constructed two wooden tables. On the tables, including the surrounding fenced-off space, Charles arranged an assortment of tools that would be found in any mid-America workshop or blacksmith’s shop; a trade central to the history of farming. The tables include an array of vices, hand jacks, water pumps, hammer heads, pickaxe heads, sledgehammer heads, chisel heads, blacksmith prongs, and other unidentifiable fittings for a total of over 170 items. The vices and hand jacks are imprinted with manufacturers such as How. Co, Cleveland, Ohio, Parker Co, Meriden, (Conn), MFO, Duff Manufacturing, Pittsburgh, PA, and Simplex, Westmont, Ill. There is an anvil stamped with Kohlswa, Sweden, makers of blacksmith and farrier anvils, and an axe and knife grinder stamped McCormick, Chicago. At the end of the table is



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a forge, stamped Blower and Forge Company, Lancaster, PA., that replaced the old hand bellows. Next to it are two yellow drill presses stamped with Buffalo Forge Co., Buffalo, N.Y.

In other locations there are a Yale forklift, Philadelphia, PA, a yellow grader, also from Buffalo Forge, Buffalo, NY, and a Road King grader, manufactured by J. D. Adams & Co., Indianapolis, Ind. In front of the market there is a massive yellow drill press forged in the J. E. Snyder foundry, Worchester, Mass. The twenty-one hand water pumps have stamps from Baker MFG. Co., Evansville, Wis., Hayes Pump & Planter Co., Galva, Ill., and Dempster Mill JFG., Beatrice, Neb. There are wheel-weights, refashioned as sculptures, stamped with FoMoCo. (Ford Motor Company). The history of industrial America resonates throughout the assemblage.

It is conceivable that someone, a non-farmer, for example, from some gritty industrial Northeastern city, could wander through the site, read the logos, and could be transported back to the hot blast furnaces of some forge or foundry, to the hum and clatter of machines in some dusty workshop, to the long years spent answering the screech of the 8 a.m. factory whistle and the sweet relief of the 5 p.m. buzzer. If such recollections by an individual are nostalgic, they are also a legitimate avenue into official history. These are the handcrafted and machine-made products of workers who ran America's factories and foundries. These pieces do not represent the seasonal rhythm of Vermeulen's rural South Orange County life as a farmer, but the urban pulse of industrial America.

His assemblage embodies a discourse that has existed for more than two hundred years between Jeffersonian agrarianism and industrialism. While it appears to be a wistful paean to San Juan's and Orange County's agrarian past, it also represents the very tension between agrarianism and industrialism: rural America versus urban America, the small farmer versus industrial agriculture. Industrial machinery, beginning with John Deere's steel plough in 1837, made farming on a large scale possible and set America on the road to the elimination of Crèvecoeur's and Jefferson's virtuous American farmer (John Deere). In its multivocality, Charles's site also speaks to the undermining of that Jeffersonian agrarian myth: when the machine enters the garden and transforms forever the life of the American farmer (Marx 3-33). His site is not just a nostalgic "narrative utopia" but a folk avenue into

national history.

But the broader historical themes that emerge from Vermeulen's site never override the imaginary nature of his assemblage. Randomly throughout the site, he placed an array of his witty and imaginative iron sculptures, composed of tools, machine parts, and fragments of equipment. Like everything else on the site, they are evocative and demand interpretation. It is hard to say just how many sculptures decorate the site beyond the thirty-one I have counted. But the task of defining what is or is not a sculpture is no more problematic than an art historian's efforts to define art. In his sculptures Vermeulen comes closest to established abstract or postmodern artistic form. Decontextualised from his farm equipment site, they could easily be uprooted and placed in a museum where another context and meanings might be found. For example, in his display of an orange steamroller, Charles decorated this massive, weighty piece of equipment with a plastic owl, a water pressure valve, a pump and generator, a gas motor, a hand vacuum cleaner, an oil funnel, with two blue-and-green wheel weights attached to its side. The sculpture is topped with a windmill turning gently in the on-shore breeze. Adjacent to the steamroller, he similarly decorated a Yale forklift with four shovel blades, one post-hole digger, one short-handled hoe, two axes with handles, one axe head, two electric generators, a clevis, and an emergency brake handle. Charles constructed bars across the safety cabin on which to attach his hand implements. The assemblage is, like all the others, brightly painted: the body of the forklift is yellow, the front lift is green, the tyre wells are red, and the implements and motors are painted green, blue, yellow, and red. Like everything else in the assemblage, he has subverted the utilitarian value of his steamroller and forklift with his wholesale addition to their identities, not to mention his whimsical colour scheme. Intuition, not logic, was his guide. His reconfigured apparatuses suddenly take on an imaginative buoyancy that undermines their heavy equipment function.

Among the most imaginative of the sculptures is one composed of three large steel rings of approximately four feet in diameter on which are attached the blue front grill of an Oliver tractor, three electrical boxes, four randomly placed shovel blades, one pitchfork, one iron rake, a plough fork, assorted iron pieces, two valve handles, and one of those omnipresent light fixtures. With a wagon wheel attached, the sculpture is crowned with a red cast-iron bell.

Another nearby sculpture is composed of an iron support sunk in concrete into which Charles inserted two orange tractor wheel weights and topped it with a large industrial-size green scale. Did Charles intend something of a pun or play on his objects: weights used to help tractors to gain traction in muddy fields paired with a scale? Joyful, witty, humorous: these are the words that come to mind while viewing his sculptures.

But the equipment and sculptures are not the only important aesthetic features of Charles' assemblage. Like Rodia's colourful pottery and glass decorated site, the environment plays a crucial role in Charles' assemblage. The site is radiant on a sunny day, which is almost always the case in southern California. The first aspect of the site that strikes the viewer's eye is its multiplicity of colours. Surveyed from the elevated sidewalk in front of the centre, the assemblage is a forest of brilliant colours glistening in the sun. To understand the importance of the sunlight, a visit to the centre at night reveals that the site all but disappears into the landscaping. The entire assemblage could easily be overlooked after dark. The colours are an organic aspect of the site that, next to his imaginative sculptures, transform the otherwise utilitarian machines and implements into aesthetic objects.

However, the seeming multiplicity of colours is actually an illusion. In spite of first impressions, upon closer inspection, the site really contains only five colours. But these are not five random colours that just happened to have been Charles' favourites. Rather, like everything else in his landscape, the colours are an organic feature of his assemblage. They are the five, original, oil-based colours that farm equipment manufacturers have used for nearly a century: John Deere green, Allis Chalmers orange, International Harvester red, Caterpillar yellow, and Ford Motor Company blue. To create the colourful effect, Charles alternated these five colours on his objects so that the viewer's eye is tricked into believing that more colours are used. Under that omnipresent California sun, the use of colours is yet another dazzling aspect of the assemblage.

But the extensive site does not end with the colourful outdoor assemblage. Like his colour scheme for the site, as his nephew Brian reported, "Everything Charles did had a purpose." At the west end of the Vermeulen Center, inside a space currently occupied by a restaurant, Charles constructed an appropriate

postscript to his autobiographical narrative. In this quiet, almost museum-like space, nostalgia and history more obviously intersect than in any other place in his outdoor landscape. On the barn-like trusses and gables overhead, Charles placed over 125 hand tools, from large tree saws, antique wood jackplanes, scythes, hay hooks, and wrenches to calipers, drills, pulleys, and other tools. He also hung one small hand plough, a leather plough collar, an assortment of wooden yokes, bridles, wooden hay forks, and one large wood ox yoke. In addition, there are scores of domestic items randomly displayed, including a coal burning heater, a clothes wringer, a washboard, and meat grinder.

The interior tool collection is yet another fascinating insight into both Charles as farmer and artist. In contrast to at least one aspect of his outdoor site, there is a "formal" realism to his tool collection. The obvious difference is that the tools are not painted with the same colours as the outdoor assemblage. Rather, the tools are all carefully lacquered, which has preserved their original metal gray patinas and wood grain. Choosing not to paint them, Charles has not deconstructed his tools' utilitarian value. There is no radical shift in their narrative significance: they are unmistakably tools. Unlike the brightly painted farm equipment outdoors, the tools are displayed in their original forms as objects of contemplation. Neither deconstructed nor decontextualised, the tools must "be appreciated for their formal excellence" (Jones 85). His artful but subtle presentation of the tools is a revealing commentary from a man who spent the greater part of his life using hand tools, as well as heavy equipment. Charles appreciated the design of a good tool whose form and balance in the hand are an organic aspect of its intended use. Charles is asking that the tools be appreciated for their unique "aesthetic value," that harmonious wedding of their form and function (Jones 85). The tools also form a narrative connection that comments on the large ploughs and planters that have not been dismantled. Like the tools, each with a unique function in the field, the larger equipment can also be appreciated for their formal realism. In their designs, they also express that same organic aesthetic that unifies their form and function as farm equipment.

At one end of the space, high on a shelf, Charles displays a collection of miniatures, toys of farm equipment and other objects that he collected over the years, some from his own children and grandchildren. The collection opens yet another avenue into history,



both personal and social. Displayed are twenty-two tractors, two ploughs, six grading machines, three back hoes, five earth moving trucks, one oil derrick, six antique domestic cars and two trains, one Lionel Electric Train and one with the designation P.R.R. (Pennsylvania Railroad). As Susan Stewart has written, while the toy is “clearly limited in space,” a seemingly insignificant, “particularized” object, it can also “stand for “a spectrum of other instances.” (45-46, 48). For decades, folk artists have used the miniature as a vehicle to express their visions, from the personal and community to the secular and religious. Charles’ miniatures are the nostalgic “locus” of his past, signs of his life as both family man and as that mythic American farmer (Del Giudice 60-1, 73).

Like the Vermeulen’s outdoor farm equipment, in their multivocality miniatures open yet another avenue into formal history. Toy trains are reminders of San Juan’s other trademark, besides its mission, its historical train station, just a minute’s drive from the centre. The arrival of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1887, opened the dusty mission village to the rest of America (Hallan-Gibson 31). Delivering farm machinery and shipping crops to outlying markets, the railroad played a central role in the life of Orange County farmers. Located in the heart of the town, the railroad still plays an important role in the life of modern San Juan. As the incontestable sign of nineteenth-century industrial America, the railroad brought many of Charles’ farm implements to the west coast. It also made the Vermeulens’ modern farming methods possible in Orange County.

In addition to the miniatures, on the restaurant walls beneath his tools and toys, Charles mounted twenty-six black and white photographs of early San Juan, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century steam engines, the Vermeulen farm, and Charles’ family. In these photographs, he locates his family within the historical space of the region. Some are from the family archives while others are from a local land title company. One image is a thirty-six-inch panorama of the Vermeulen ranch, circa 1900, which is among four other similar harvest photographs. Another photograph depicts six workers on a harvester drawn by a team of twenty-eight horses. In his interior post-script, we find that “redemptive nostalgia” where Charles’ “private and imaginary space” leads inescapably to that discourse between his assemblage and the history of the region (K. Stewart 234).

But Charles’ site is not an historical remnant. It remains yet integrally related to its surrounding environment. An examination of the landscape surrounding Charles’ site reveals that the rural heritage that Charles’ signage narrates has not yet been relegated to San Juan Capistrano’s past. In its efforts to maintain its rural character, on its official website the city boasts that it is the “Equestrian Capital of the West Coast.” It is a magnet for Olympic-level equestrian training. Its many stables are complemented by equestrian trails that run throughout the area. In addition, for the property adjacent to Charles’ farm equipment display, the city has designated the land as permanent open space.⁷

Even to visitors from outside the region, who are used to seeing roadside farm-equipment, Charles’ display resonates with the farming history of the state, regardless of whether or not the viewer has roots in the state’s agricultural industry. For residents of San Juan, Charles’ vocabulary of farm equipment recalls a time when such machinery worked the San Juan garden landscape. To locals who remember, it is a wistful look back at San Juan Capistrano’s rural history when farms dominated the majority of Orange County’s landscape and when farmers numbered in the thousands. These were people Charles knew, local people like himself who grew up in San Juan at a time when some of the city’s major arteries were yet unpaved, when alfalfa and bean fields and persimmon, lemon, and orange groves lined the dusty lanes (Stroud). In the words of one long-time resident and farmer, rural, mid-century San Juan represented “California’s soul” (Kibby). Significantly, when I spoke with residents about my project, they were all quick to say how gratified they are that someone is writing that “history” of San Juan. I never told them that I was writing a history of San Juan, just an essay on Charles’ site. What they inadvertently revealed is that they know well how to read Charles’ dialect without anyone translating for them. Private memory becomes in Charles’ assemblage a community expression (Saverino 152).

The site’s signage narrates in the local dialect the folk equivalent of a formal history. His assemblage opens “whole domains of discourse.” The incoherent becomes coherent: the seemingly decontextualised pieces of equipment have a context. But nostalgia is not the sole measure of the site’s signification. The implements transcend ultimately the local idiom and narrate the development of agriculture not only in San Juan Capistrano but in America. In their

stamps and logos, we can read the development of industrial farming in the twentieth century, as well as the discourse over labour, capital, and land title in America. After the arrival of Eastern and Western cultures in the New World, what was left of what Fray Serra referred to as Native American “free will”? In its multivocality, Charles’ signage narrates the clash between Thomas Jefferson’s agrarian myth and the development of industrialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But ultimately, the creative assemblage in front of the Vermeulen Ranch Center must be viewed as Charles’ response to his experiences in Orange County and San Juan Capistrano as a boy, farmer, family man, and, ultimately, outstanding folk artist.

¹For commentary on the sites mentioned in my text, please see the authors in Works Cited page: Scambray 2011, Watts Towers and Underground Gardens; Anton, Bottle Tree Ranch; Ruberto, Hubcap Ranch; Perry, Salvation Mountain; Greenfield, Bottle Village; Buchoz and Balassone, Culture Court. All the above sites are relatively well known and have been examined for the most part in published articles. However, Frank Jao’s Culture Court remains another of the unknown but remarkable California folk art sites that has yet to be examined. ²See Scambray 2011, 224. In note 2 I discuss the now shopworn debate over the terms folk art, outsider art, and grassroots art, and so on. Wojcik also discusses the terms with an informative reference list. There is no need to repeat that discussion here.

³Unless otherwise indicated, all personal information regarding Charles’ life and his quotations are from my interview with family members, Virginia Ann Germann, Patricia Lynn Tomocik (Charles’ two daughters), J. Gary Germann, and Charles’ nephew, Brian Vermeulen. Brian maintains a business in the rear of the Vermeulen Ranch Center. The typescript of my interview is listed in my Works Cited under Tomocik, who was gracious enough to respond in writing to my previously submitted questions. I am deeply indebted to the four of them for opening their family archives to me and trusting me with invaluable family information about Charles’s life as father, husband, and farmer. This paper would not have been possible without their cooperation.

⁴Interview February 21, 2011 with Kenny Stroud and Joel Vath. They are local contractors and businessmen in the area who grew up in San Juan and knew Charles for over thirty years. They currently lease the Quonset hut across from the Vermeulen Ranch Center where Charles stored and repaired his collection and where he created his steel sculptures. I would like to thank them for taking an interest in my work and speaking to me about their relationship with Charles.

⁵The site is scrupulously maintained by a worker employed by the centre. On a daily basis, five days a week, the worker strips faded or peeling paint, repaints the equipment, and replaces all the wood in the wagons that has become termite infested or suffers from dry rot. San Juan’s ocean climate takes a toll on all the site’s iron and wood. The maintenance and restoration work keeps colours bright and prevents deterioration. Maintenance and restoration is a particularly acute problem for outdoor folk-art sites. For an article on the on-going debate and problems besetting the Watts Towers, for example, see the following:

<http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Lacma-nears-deal-on-Watts-Towers-project/22146> or google Marisa Mazria Katz, Lacma Nears Deal on Watts Towers, Los Angeles Times online, 21 December 2010.

⁶I am indebted to Brian Vermeulen for taking me on a tour of the site and identifying many of the separate parts and explaining their original function. He is fluent in the local farm dialect.

⁷Interview, February 21, 2012 with Director of Operations, The Ecology Center, 32701 Alipaz, San Juan Capistrano. Next to the South Coast Farm produce shed and barn, The Ecology Center is located in an historic house built in 1876 by Joel R. Congdon. Congdon, a walnut farmer, owned the surrounding acreage before the Vermeulens purchased the land and established their farm. I would like to thank the director of the centre for information on the zoning history of the open-space farmland occupied by the Armstrong Garden Center, South Coast Farms, and the adjacent playing fields for the San Juan Capistrano Boys and Girls Club.

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Chris James is an artist, writer and retired psychotherapist. She runs a small gallery in Gippsland, Victoria and also offers art workshops. Born in England, she studied painting with Kristin Berge, a pupil of Oscar Kokoschka. She taught art and exhibited her work in South Africa and was employed as a commercial artist for the S.A. Gestetner Corporation. Arriving in Australia in 1973, she worked at the Perth Technical College before starting a graphic arts company, Wicca Productions in Melbourne. She subsequently moved into the personal development industry and art therapy. James holds a BA Hons Comparative Studies, Literature and Women's Studies, MA Psychoanalytic Studies, MA International and Community Development, and a Doctorate in Communications from Deakin University, Melbourne.

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