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Texts

From the Travel of Jonathan Harker	3
histories	5
The Kant Walks	7
Message from Andrée	10
Morning of the Magicians	11
The Magic Mirror of John Dee	15
My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points	23
Numerous Incidents of Indefinite Outcome	18
Occupied Plots, Abandoned futures — Twelve (former) Real Estate Opportunities	19
Tarantism	20
Barker Ranch	21
From the Secret Garden of Sleep	22
To navigate, in a genuine way, in the unknown necessitates an attitude of daring, but not one of recklessness (movements generated from the magical passes of Carlos Castaneda)	23
Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes	25

From the Travel of Jonathan Harker

The Bargau Valley in Northeastern Transylvania provides the setting for much of Bram Stokers novel *Dracula* (1897). Here Stoker situated Count Dracula's Castle, Jonathan Harker's wolf haunted journey through the Borgo Pass, and the last part of the novel concluding with the beheaded Dracula evaporating into dust.

Bram Stoker never visited Transylvania but conducted extensive research in the reading room of the British Museum. Studying travel accounts and books on Transylvanian Folklore Stoker added excerpts from these to his story, anchoring his imaginary scenes in a geographic region, which at the time was considered to be one of the 'wildest and least known portions of Europe.'

Spring 2003, I was invited to Iasis, Rumania, to participate in the exhibition *Prophetic Corners*. Intrigued by the speculative nature of the exhibition's title and concept - that some places have the power of letting us see into the future - I traveled to Transylvania and drove towards the Carpathians from Bistrita, just like Jonathan Harker in Stoker's book.

I was not sure what I was looking for. My attention being equally divided between an interest in this region that had been re-created as a 'landscape of the mind' in countless films and narratives, and the idea of 'prophetic corners' which also implied a mapping of a somewhat invisible territory.

At the outskirts of Bistrita, which Stoker described as covered with 'a bewildering mass of fruit blossom,' I passed a new development of suburban houses. Enormous one-family houses in pastel colors, most of them just completed with the windows covered in black plastic. While the grey high-rises of Bistrita in the horizon and the absence of people gave a slight edge to the scenery, it was also greatly familiar. The houses looked no different than what I had seen anywhere else, pointing to a future of all encompassing sameness.

The future might also be found in places that have been left alone or forgotten, 'where everything that lies ahead seems like the past.' On the way to the Borgo Pass, I came across ruined projects from the communist era. Discarded among the trees were concrete remains of washed away roads, light poles and even a four-story housing

development looming in disrepair. Halfway overgrown it looked like a set from a sci-fi movie, like the obsolete in reverse.

My trip ended at Hotel Castle Dracula, built in 1982, to accommodate a steady stream of vampire aficionados visiting the region, at approximately the place where Dracula's Castle is located in Stoker's novel. The area was not being haunted by 'the undead' though, but a series of scandals involving illegal logging with profits benefiting a group of corrupt government officials joining with local entrepreneurs. Everywhere I looked, even on the remotest mountaintops, the landscape showed signs of the logging industry in the form of treeless spots. Spots that did add a post-historic touch to the surroundings, but also pointed to something familiar from the past and present, the transformation of a landscape by the forces of market economy.

histories

I have decided to title this work histories. There are at least two. That of conceptual photography, and that of the places and events depicted. The histories are evoked through the juxtaposition of seminal works from the 1960s and 1970s with recent shots from exactly the same locations.

Take for example the house Ed Ruscha photographed in 1965 as part of his series *Some Los Angeles Apartments*. Right above the main entrance there is a sign, "Now Renting." In my photo taken 40 years later a slightly bigger sign says, "Now Leasing." The house seems to be haunted by vacancy. But the subtle difference of wording reflects a change in society. Renting is considered less and less attractive.

Robert Adams's image from Darwin Place in Colorado Springs in 1969 points to time and history as material. Trees have grown up over thirty-something years, while the house has fallen into decay. A sediment from the entropic tide that continuously washes the suburbs further out towards the horizon. In the background is the contour of a mountain, a time so slow that it falls outside the category of history. A vast reservoir of years "where remote futures meet remote pasts."

On September 30, 1967, Robert Smithson paused on his walk through Passaic, New Jersey to have lunch at the Golden Coach Diner and reload his instamatic. From the window he had a view of Passaic center, which Smithson described as a "no center", "a typical abyss or an ordinary void. What a great place for a gallery!" The theater and the diner from Smithson's photograph have now been replaced by a Dunkin' Donuts and a McDonald's drive-thru, emphasizing the sense of "void" or non-place.

"In the industrial sector history speeds by, a dragonfly that lives for one day and undergoes its entire development in this short period," say Bernd and Hilla Becher. Industrial architecture becomes obsolete much faster than other architectural structures. Its future happens at double speed. St. Nicholas Coal Breaker was the world's biggest in 1931. Today it is a ruin. The industrial era is already so distant that residents of the small, depressed towns of Pennsylvania fear they will be left with nothing but the wooded mountains of coal cinders that engulf rivers and roads everywhere.

There is something ambiguous about the photo, credited to Gordon Matta-Clark, in Pamela M. Lee's book *Object to Be Destroyed*. For a while I thought it was the subject matter: a stretch of curb Gordon Matta-Clark bought and documented in 1973. Every time I looked through the book I startled at the image, wondering what was so intriguing about this mundane street in Jamaica Queens. Eventually I went, and something did seem odd. Time was out of joint. Gordon Matta-Clark's photograph felt less distant than it should have. Perhaps it was actually taken in the late 1980s. Not that it really matters. Matta-Clark's Fake Estates is like an instruction piece, a manual or a recipe to follow. It's about engagement rather than truth.

In 1971 Thomas Messer, Director of the Guggenheim Museum, stated that he had to fend off "an alien substance that had entered the art museum organism." The substance referred to was Hans Haacke's work *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*. Hans Haacke's exhibition, uncovering real estate speculations, was canceled. Walking through Lower East Side on a summer day in 2005, I wondered whether the houses themselves were perhaps the alien substance. Only one of the low-rent tenement buildings that Haacke documented on 3rd and 4th street is still standing.

The Kant Walks

“The life story of Immanuel Kant is hard to describe, for he had neither a life nor a story,” writes the poet Heinrich Heine. In some respects this observation bears out. Throughout his life Kant stayed in Königsberg, the city where he was born. Never straying more than a few miles from town, he devoted himself to the pursuit of philosophical truths in complex and extensive writings, a task so monumental that he had to organize his days rigorously to secure the necessary time. In contrast, Kant was largely silent about himself. He kept no journal; the details about his life are sparse and must be gleaned from what he accidentally let slip through. Most stories of Kant come only from people who knew him or observed him directly. Of the few daily activities Kant engaged in, his walks have been imbued with the most significance.

Kant found an unlikely biographer in Thomas De Quincey, “the grandfather of drug literature” and explorer of opiated hallucinations and saturated dreams. Not surprisingly, De Quincey dwells on the afflictions of the late Kant, who, towards the end of his life, was haunted by nightmares “so profound as to stretch far into his waking hours.” The increasingly mentally frail Kant developed idiosyncratic distractions. According to De Quincey, by this time, the elderly Kant “accounted for everything by electricity,” and theorized about a connection between a particular configuration of clouds and the “singular mortality among the cats of Vienna, Basel and Copenhagen.” Also suffering from insomnia, Kant was prone to “unseasonable dozings” which exposed him to danger, as he “fell repeatedly, whilst reading, with his head into the candles; a cotton nightcap which he wore was instantly in a blaze, and flaming about his head.” Thomas De Quincey’s biography could be dismissed as inappropriate, a prying into the decay of an outstanding intellectual—if it wasn’t for its prophetic vision. A city is a “state of mind” and Kant’s plunge into darkness was later followed by the downfall of the city for which he was emblematic: Königsberg.

The history of the former German town of Königsberg began with bloodshed in 1255, when, in a matter of a few years, Teutonic knights completely annihilated the Prussian Tribes that inhabited the area, built the Königsberg castle and established the city. More recently, in 1945, the Germans were in turn annihilated by RAF bombings and Soviet troops, who conquered Königsberg and renamed it Kaliningrad. But one could date the real fall of Königsberg several years prior. Königsberg’s existence as a cosmopolitan, racially diverse city was abruptly halted on November 9, 1938, when

Nazis unleashed a particularly brutal “Kristallnacht.” The citizens of the town that once housed Germany’s biggest bookstore engaged in book burnings, beatings and killings, and the destruction of the city’s main synagogue. Like Kant’s dozing head, knowledge was engulfed in flames.

The historic accounts for Kant’s daily walk are plentiful yet contradictory. Whether Kant had one, two or even more preferred routes is not clear. Furthermore one has to place two maps on top of each other, that of Königsberg and that of Kaliningrad, to find the locations today. Maybe this is why Kant’s walk is often invoked but rarely specified. A walk is like a manual, a way to engage a space, a recipe to follow but also to improvise with, allowing for drifting, losing oneself. De Quincey writes that Kant preferred to walk alone for a very particular reason: “he wished to breathe exclusively through his nostrils; which he could not do if he were obliged continually to open his mouth in conversation,” and by doing this he was better able to pursue his meditations—De Quincey, like Kant, most certainly knew about the “subtle realms” revealed to the attentive wanderer.

My pursuit of Kant’s walk led me to a battered high-rise on Leninsky Prospect.

A late November afternoon I climbed the stairway to a flat on the 8th floor and Professor Kalinnikov, who had kindly agreed to meet me at short notice. Kalinnikov led me through the apartment to his study, a small room crowded with books and piles of handwritten manuscripts, all of them on Kant. Here, Kalinnikov added to my map of Kaliningrad two small crosses, one for each of Kant’s two houses, and from there two circles. These were the Kant Walks. Kalinnikov explained that Kant liked circles. From the professor’s window I could see all the way down to Kaliningrad’s vacant center—flattened by British bombs and never rebuilt—and further away, an enormous construction, which curiously, in the fading light, resembled a stylized skull. The edifice was a cultural center, built on the ruins of Königsberg Castle in the early 1970s, but never used. The building’s grounds had proved treacherous; the tunnels and subterranean chambers of the former castle made the new structure sink immediately after its completion. As a result, the center was left to deteriorate, slowly, as an anarchitectural monument to suspended indeterminacy.

My next days in Kaliningrad were spent on foot, following Kalinnikov’s walks, or Kant’s—I was never sure. Drifting through the “subtle realms,” the “psychogeography” of a city that officially, for more than forty years, had no past—in Soviet text and guidebooks Kant was born in Kaliningrad. Paradoxically, I found that the concealment of the city’s history, made it appear even more distinct, exactly because the past was

not compartmentalized as such, but seemed to turn up as 'blind spots'. Detours, dead ends, overgrown streets, a small castle lost in an industrial quarter, evoked history as a chaos, a dormant presence far more potential than tidy linear narratives used to explain past events. Nowhere in Europe are the traces after World War Two more visible than in Kaliningrad. Hauntings from a war that shaped lives and destinies for generations to come. Including my own--like many, affected by the "third generation syndrome," I have always felt as if I was pulled towards an empty space: "that which has not been said."

Kaliningrad was named after Mikhail Kalinin, a close associate of Stalin and known as a "man of little vision but great staying power." Hardly qualities to commend. Kantgrad has been suggested as a new name, a proposal that points to Kant's walks, with all their uncertainties, as an approach to history--walks for remembering and losing oneself, manuals to engage past and present spaces, a sort of recipe, something to follow, stray or produce from.

Message from Andrée

On July 11th 1897, Andrée, Fränkel and Strindberg took off from Dane's Island, Spitsbergen, with the intention of circumnavigating the North Pole in a balloon - among their cargo was a stereoscopic camera and a stock of Kodak film.

The Jules Verne-like adventure took a tragic turn when the balloon crashed on the pack ice and the expedition disappeared without a trace. Only in 1930, after thirty-three years, were the remains of the three men found on White Island, along with various relics and a box of exposed negatives. Soon after, the photographs were developed, and together with the expedition notebooks, became central in later attempts to piece together the story of what happened.

While some of the photographs depicted scenes after the landing and the following struggle on the ice, others were almost abstract, filled with black stains, scratches and streaks of light. Most historians studying the expedition ignored this layer of 'visual noise'. I, on the other hand, have made it my focus. If language defines our world, the black dots and light streaks on the photographs can be seen as bordering on the visible, or marking the edge of the unknown. Pointing to the twilight zone of what can be told and what cannot be told, narrative and non-narrative, document and mistake.

Morning of the Magicians

The history of the occult is also a history of the obscure. A history of ideas shrouded in secrecy seeping through the darkness of centuries, before suddenly resurfacing in the 'mystic' 1960s, and settling as a minor but constant presence within mainstream consumer culture. The 'occult' hasn't left many monuments, mostly dusty manuscripts found or 'rediscovered' in forgotten boxes in libraries or bookstores, or an occasional alchemical symbol engraved in a church or on a building, which surprisingly survived the vigilant eye of the Inquisition. Nor are the historical figures of this 'occult' easy to trace. Real identities are typically veiled by disguises and pseudonyms making me doubt if these people ever actually existed. Some relatively recent and verifiable sources can be mentioned, however. One is the French Socialist and Kabbalist, Alphonse Louis Constant (1810-1857) better known as Eliphas Levi, who in his book "The History of Magic" (1861), brought together several different strands of esoteric thought - in effect, inventing occultism - and influenced artists like Arthur Rimbaud, J. K. Huysmans, André Breton and Erik Satie. Another is The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an early twentieth century esoteric society in London, and its renegade member, Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). Crowley's portrait was included on the cover of The Beatles's "Sergeant Pepper" album, and his imagery finds its way into the songs of John Lennon and David Bowie among others revealing Crowley's position as a progenitor and avatar of the occult's thriving within the counter-culture.

On March 1, 1920, Aleister Crowley and a group of devotees, arrived at Cefalù, Sicily, and moved into a small house at the outskirts of town. The house, formerly called "Villa Santa Barbara", was renamed "The Abbey of Thelema", inspired by the French writer Rabelais, who in the concluding chapters of his book "Gargantua" (1534), describes an ideal community named "Theleme", which had the governing maxim "Do what you will". Though hedonistic, centered around Crowley's own version of magick - Kabbalah and yoga, with a particular emphasis on tantric practices, hetero- and homosexual rituals, and the use of drugs to heighten intensity - life in the Abbey was often described as bleak. The house had neither gas nor electricity, and no plumbing. General conditions were unsanitary in the extreme, and in the summer the air was thick with flies, gnats and mosquitoes. With Crowley as a drugged, benevolent dictator at his best, and a gruesome, perverted manipulator at his worst, the days at the Abbey could be harsh. On top of that, the magical training was rigorous and unrelenting.

Newcomers would spend the night in "La chambre des cauchemars" - "The Room of Nightmares" - its principle features - three large walls painted in fresco, representing earth, heaven and hell, depicting mostly demons, goblins and graphic sex scenes. Here, the new student of magick would experience "The nightside of Eden" primed by a "secret process" - probably a potent mixture of hashish and opium, administered by Crowley - as the walls came alive. The idea behind the ordeal was to contemplate every possible phantom that can assail the soul, to face the "Abyss of Horror", and thereby gain mastery over the mind. This approach was strikingly similar to what was practiced 43 years later in Timothy Leary's community, Catalina, founded in a vacant hotel in the sleepy Mexican beach town of Zihuateno, where members would sit alone in a lifeguard tower on the beach, dosed on LSD, summoning the forces of the 'irrational', trying to break through to the other side.

With a curriculum of ordeals like nights spent in "The Room of Nightmares", daily evocations in the Temple, and solitary and exhausting 'magical' retreats on the nearby cliff, coupled with the Spartan living conditions, it is perhaps evident why the "Abbey of Thelema" never attracted more than a small group of visitors and benefactors. So much for free love, and "Do what you will". Crowley was decidedly more lenient with his own sexual excesses than with others and there was a catch to the word 'will'. It also didn't help the cause of Thelema that a number of visitors left with a heroin habit as an unwanted souvenir. But in the end it was not the liberal use of drugs, the inherent contradictions in the teachings, or local prejudice that eventually led to the demise of the Abbey - the Cefalù locals did tolerate the community, though they were frequently shocked by the members' preference for bathing nude. It was the tragic death of Raoul Loveday - from enteric fever, contracted by drinking water from a mountain spring in the Cefalù countryside - and the ensuing storm in the British press against Crowley and the Abbey, which prompted headlines like "Orgies in Sicily", that led Mussolini to order the community closed. The directive came as part of a crackdown to suppress breeding grounds for dissent. If not exactly politically dangerous, Crowley and the others were at best undesirable. On April 22, 1923, the Abbey came to an end. The Italian authorities carefully covered the frescos, the magic circle on the floor and other traces of the previous activities with a coat of whitewash.

According to experimental filmmaker Kenneth Anger, the villa subsequently sat abandoned for more than 30 years. Maybe also forgotten - sleeping - until Anger in 1955 re-found the villa and obtained permission to remove the whitewash, which had "turned to stone". Anger spent three months working on the walls and floors, gradually revealing "all those hyper-psychedelic murals" in "The Room of Nightmares" and on

doors and shutters, planning a photo shoot on location, in which the costume of the sorcerer in the dreamy film *Children of Paradise* (1945) - a blue velvet robe emblazoned with the word "ABRA" - would appear. Whether the shoot actually happened is unclear. Anger's documentary, made during his stay, was lost by Hulton Television. What still circulates is a series of photographs of the restored Abbey. One of them depicts Anger in conversation with the sexologist Alfred C. Kinsey. On the back wall is Crowley's portrait and on a door, one of the newly uncovered paintings, a mountainous landscape made in a fantasy-like style. Anger had met Kinsey when the doctor approached him to purchase a print of his first film *Fireworks*. While Anger was an ardent follower of Crowley's magick, Kinsey thought that Crowley was "the most prominent fraud that ever lived". Kinsey nevertheless saw Crowley as a brilliant homoerotic writer, and was interested in discovering more information about Crowley's sex magick practices. More than likely it was Kinsey who funded Anger's stay in Cefalù.

Today Cefalù is not the small Sicilian fishing village Anger and Kinsey experienced in the fifties. Situated one hour from Palermo, it's better described as a booming beachside town, or as a guidebook states: "the premier destination on the Tyrrhenian coast". The change in size and appearance of the town, and the vague directions I had managed to obtain from an older book, made finding the Abbey a challenge. As I walked through the area, which once was "the southeastern outskirts" of Cefalù, I started to doubt whether the house still existed. This area did not share the characteristics of a place that might accommodate 'leftover' or 'ambiguous' spaces. Instead of vacant lots I found my way blocked by the barrier of a gated community, or newly built condos with BMWs and Porsches crowding the parking lots. It was only after hours of walking in circles, almost by chance and out of the corner of my eye, that I caught a glimpse of a caved-in roof near the stadium. I realized I had been within meters of the house several times before, standing in the parking lot of the stadium, scanning the sloping hillside without noticing the house right next to me, hidden behind a wall of greenery and palm trees.

The house and garden of the Abbey were completely overgrown in a strangely evocative way. As I walked the faintly visible path to what was once the main entrance, I was so overwhelmed by the scene's dormant qualities that I had to pause. It seemed to me as if sediments, pieces of leftover narratives and ideas from the individuals that once passed through this place had formed knots, as tangled as the bushes and trees that were now taking over, creating a kind of sleeping presence.

I continued my exploration wondering if the Abbey could be seen as a sort of monument, when the gaping hole in the roof reminded me of Robert Smithson's site specific sculpture "Partially Buried Woodshed". Even though Smithson, in this and other pieces, intentionally worked with a narrow but very deep historical space, the "Partially Buried Woodshed" was transformed into a political landmark by someone adding the graffiti "May 4 Kent 70", to commemorate the four students killed by Ohio National Guardsmen during an anti-war protest. The later attempts by Kent University to get rid of the Woodshed were in reality efforts to obscure this particular history, since what Smithson's ruin symbolized was viewed as an embarrassment. Eventually, the university planted a circle of trees around the Woodshed so it couldn't be seen from the road. And so, the monument dissolved and came to an end, discretely hidden by a veil of trees.

Thinking about this I climbed through the only window that was not boarded up, and made my way into "The Room of Nightmares". The room bore traces of vivid green paint and I recognized a few of the frescos from Anger's photographs, though in a much worse state. Its walls were scrawled with graffiti and the rest of the house a mess of tiles, dust and discarded furniture - it felt like being in a hollow place. As I climbed out, and stood in the garden again, I suddenly noticed how close the newly built houses were - just on the other side of the bushes.

The Magic Mirror of John Dee

There is a way of seeing that does not rely on the eyes. It emerges in the state between wakefulness and dream, when patterns and shapes flash behind the eyelids, or as visions, trance induced while gazing into a crystal ball or at a black mirror.

John Dee (1527-1608), scientist, astrologer and owner of the biggest book collection in England, did not possess this “second sight,” but hired necromancer Edward Kelly — earless after a conviction for forgery — as his medium. Together, over a period of seven years, they conducted a number of magical séances, which became known as the Enochian Works. Enveloped in trance, Kelly would stare into a crystal ball or a black glass, apprehending images and messages from the otherworld. At his side, Dee would transcribe the events with utmost precision. Slowly, through these works, a “long-lost” language called Enochian materialized; a magical system of evocations and a mapping of a mental landscape with numerous celestial cities inhabited by angels, and, further out, beyond four watchtowers, swarms of demons.

It was one of these gates of the mind that Aleister Crowley — who believed he was the reincarnation of Kelly — opened with the help of poet Victor Neuburg in the North African dessert near the village of Bou Saada in 1909. By means of an Enochian ritual that lasted for days, Crowley conjured Choronzon, better known as the death-dragon. The demon rose from the abyss of meaningless forms to momentarily possess Crowley and terrify Neuburg, who had to fight off the attacking Crowley (or Choronzon) with a magical dagger.

Neither Dee nor Kelly were unequivocally successful in their magic ventures. While Uriel, Madimi, Ath and the other angels they summoned were more friendly and cooperative than the demon Choronzon, Dee’s notes can be read as a list of disappointments. The angels made promises and — even more so — demands, but no matter what actions Dee and Kelly took to accommodate their shifting moods, uncertainty prevailed. The hidden mechanisms by which the world operates were contrary to divine assurances never revealed. Despite the use of the new and elaborate “celestial” language of Enochian the otherworld remained as haphazard as the world itself, and following the advice of the angels led to random or at least surprising results. Dee ended his life isolated and poor, while Kelly, most likely, fell to his death during an attempt to escape imprisonment.

Today part of the lengthy manuscripts that once made up the Enochian Works can be found at The British Library. The crystal ball and the black mirror used in the séances are exhibited in a showcase in The British Museum. Here, the imperial architecture of the museum is reflected in miniature by the crystal ball, while the visitor's gaze is greeted by a dark absence when it encounters the mirror. A blank surface that although mute, seems to emanate a narrative persistence, a sleeping presence, not unlike a photograph.

My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points

In the 19th century exploration was geographic. Journeys into impassable jungles or the ice deserts of the Arctic in an attempt to map the last "white" spots on the globe. But in the 20th century this notion of the "unknown" changed. Exploration turned inward. The new realms to be explored were the molecule (Niels Bohr), the unconscious (Sigmund Freud), language (Gertrud Stein) or the outskirts of the mind (Henri Michaux).

My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points is a 16mm black and white film animation created from the mescaline drawings of Henri Michaux. Of all Michaux's work these drawings are most often described as a "venture into foreign territory". They are seen as an exploration of a vast world on the borderline of words. My work is literally an attempt to animate this idea. I will examine the traces of this journey in series of rapidly moving images and make what could be termed a psychedelic documentary.

Numerous Incidents of Indefinite Outcome

In 1934, shortly before his death, the American horror writer H.P. Lovecraft finished his *Notes and Commonplace Book*. It was a short book on how to write “weird” fiction that included an extensive list of suggestions for stories. Plotless, one-sentence fragments, hastily jotted down dreams and notes on haunted landscapes, evil entities and long lost alien cities. Lovecraft saw the list as a stimulant for the imagination and wanted to invite future readers to develop these notes into stories of their own. With *Numerous Incidents of Indefinite Outcome* I have programmed a computer to generate narratives from Lovecraft’s list. I see these randomly assembled texts as a sort of “mental theatre,” a continuously changing textual performance which adds a sense of unknowing, chance and perhapsness to the modern ritual of invoking the Lovecraftian mythology.

En 1934, peu avant sa mort, l'écrivain américain d'horreur, H.P. Lovecraft, terminait son *Notes and Commonplace Book*. C'était un ouvrage court sur comment écrire des œuvres de fiction bizarres avec une longue liste de suggestions d'histoires. Fragments en une phrase, pas d'intrigue, descriptions rapides de rêves et notes sur des paysages hantés, entités maléfiques et villes extraterrestres perdues depuis longtemps. Lovecraft considérait la liste comme un stimulant de l'imagination et voulait inciter les futurs lecteurs à développer ces notes pour en faire leurs propres histoires. Dans *Numerous Incidents of Indefinite Outcome* j'ai programmé un ordinateur pour générer des récits à partir de la liste de Lovecraft. Je considère ces groupements aléatoires de textes comme une sorte de « théâtre mental », une performance textuelle en changement continu et qui ajoute un sens de non-savoir, de chance et de peut-être au rituel moderne d'invocation de la mythologie lovecraftienne.

Occupied Plots, Abandoned futures — Twelve (former) Real Estate Opportunities

The voids are a fundamental part of any city. Though rarely recognized as such, empty spaces make up a psychic territory within the urban reality. They form a network of holes and latent possibilities, which for a period challenge stasis and control.

In 1970 Ed Ruscha documented a number of such spaces under the title: *Real Estate Opportunities*. Ruscha photographed empty lots for sale in Los Angeles; a topographic mapping of the vacant, overgrown plots that delineate the unconscious zone of a city.

With the project *Twelve (former) Real Estate Opportunities* I have revisited some of these exact places — spaces that by now have been sold, bought, built up and changed. My project might be less optimistic than Ruscha's, however. To re- photograph these 'opportunities' is to engage in an archeology of abandoned futures.

Tarantism

Tarantism is a condition in Southern Italy resulting from the bite of the wolf spider, known as the tarantula. The bite causes numerous symptoms from nausea, difficulties in speech, delirium, heightened excitability and restlessness in the victims. Their bodies are seized by convulsions that previously could only be cured by a sort of frenzied dancing. Even the Bishop of Polignano who in the 17th century allowed himself to be bitten to disprove the cure, felt compelled to dance to relieve his symptoms.

This "dancing-cure" called The Tarantella emerged during the Middle Ages as a local phenomena around the city of Galatina and was practiced everywhere in the region until the middle of the 20th century. Meanwhile the dance developed from a form of uncoordinated movements (where people would "quiver and hurl their heads, shake their knees, grind their teeth and make the actions of madmen") till today where The Tarantella is known as a highly stylized dance for couples.

My interest in Tarantism lies in its original promise - a dance of uncontrolled and compulsive movements, spasms and convulsions. My intention was to film a group of dancers that explore this grey zone: the fringes of the body and make a 16mm film structured around six individually choreographed parts, each defined by a different set of rules. The process of creating and filming Tarantism therefore takes the form of a "game", an idea put in motion to generate the movements of the dancers, making a constructed anthropological platform for a journey towards the "terra incognita" of the body.

Barker Ranch

It is striking how the two locations where the “Manson Family” made its home are embedded in western and frontier mythology. Before the move to Death Valley, the Family resided at Spahn’s Movie Ranch, a former film set situated in the Santa Susana Mountains, less than an hour’s drive from downtown LA. Its ramshackle Main Street with a prison and saloon had served as a backdrop for numerous B-grade cowboy movies. Likewise, the Barker Ranch in Death Valley is rich in filmic allusions. Located in a desolate corner of the Southern Californian desert near the Panamint Mountains — an area first colonized by prospectors and gold-seekers — the ranch has the feel of a “classic” frontier hideout. Here, Charles Manson and his Family lived from 1968-69 until they were arrested at the Barker Ranch on October 12, and a year later convicted of the gruesome murders of at least eight people, among them Roman Polanski’s wife, Sharon Tate.

When building his case against the Family, California State Prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi went to the Barker Ranch to search the premises and take photographs. Bugliosi intended to use the Family’s choice of living quarters as part of his argument, and described it as; “a secluded, rock-strewn, hideout from civilization on the shadowy perimeters of Death Valley”. Later, his photographs of the remote ranch and the surrounding landscape were, in fact, used as circumstantial evidence in the trial. Similarly, my images from the Barker Ranch can be seen as a sort of circumstantial evidence. These are photographs that do not prove, but rather point to the Family’s rarely mentioned ties to America’s historical past of expansion and rugged individualism, acted out in a landscape overwritten with violence.

From the Secret Garden of Sleep

In the mid 1970s a new type of imagery turned up in counter-cultural magazines, such as *High Times* and *Sinsemilla Tips*. Resin-dripping cannabis plants would appear as centerfolds, modelled on the photographic style of *Playboy*. This interest in the physicality of the plant happened at a time when more people in the United States were growing cannabis themselves. The formerly lush Mexican fields were in shambles and a huge market for domestically grown marijuana had opened up.

The season of domestic outdoor growing came to halt in 1982 when the Reagan administration set out to crush the domestic marijuana industry. Not only did Reagan see the increase in home-grown marijuana as unpleasantly reminiscent of more lenient times, he also perceived the use of marijuana as an important symbol of the counter culture, a symbol that had to be eradicated. In a few years cannabis moved from being on the cusp of acceptance to being domestic enemy number one. The means for achieving this was fierce legislation on growers and users.

Little did the Reagan administration suspect that they had started a genetic revolution. As harsh sentences were implemented—for example, growing any amount of marijuana in Oklahoma could result in a life prison sentence—and surveillance and government control increased, domestic cannabis growing moved indoors and, ironically, a plant of wonder materialized. Amateur gardeners in the Pacific Northwest applied their talents to crossbreed cannabis *Indica* and *Sativa* strains. They created hybrids that thrived indoors, cultivated under blazing metal halide light. Gone were the days of low-yield plants that sometimes grew to be as tall as five meters. Instead a muscular dwarf emerged, only knee-high, with buds the size of fists and a concentration of psychoactive compound significantly higher than before.

Psychoactive plants, like cannabis, can alter our experience of reality, bridging the world of matter and consciousness. In this history, consciousness, for better or worse, became engraved into the very flesh of the plant, as a consequence of desire, politics and legislation. With the series *From the Secret Garden of Sleep* I have made photographs of several strains of home-grown cannabis. These images of hybrids, that reflect a sub-genre of plant photography, point to the history behind modern cannabis' otherworldly appearance.

To navigate, in a genuine way, in the unknown necessitates an attitude of daring, but not one of recklessness (movements generated from the magical passes of Carlos Castaneda)

In the summer of 1960, the anthropology student Carlos Castaneda was introduced by a friend to an old Yaqui Indian in a Greyhound bus station on the border of Arizona and Mexico. The Indian's name was don Juan Matus. He was a sorcerer, a *brujo*, who knew about the preparation and use of peyote, mushrooms and other psychedelic plants, a topic Castaneda was excited to get information about for his research. Their conversation was brief and awkward, but shortly after Castaneda traveled to the desert of Sonora, Mexico to meet don Juan again. Many more visits would follow. Eventually don Juan agreed to take in Castaneda as an apprentice and teach him about medicine plants and the sorcerer's way.

The story of Castaneda's remarkable apprenticeship that included several experiences with peyote and the notorious hallucinogenic plant *Datura*, speaking with lizards and a near fatal meeting with a malicious witch, were later chronicled in his book *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968). The book proved to be enormously successful. Not only was it favorably reviewed and widely read, it was also considered a breakthrough in anthropology and Castaneda was later awarded a PhD for his research. As readers all over the world devoured Castaneda's "field notes"—some even hunted the Sonora desert for don Juan to be taken in as apprentices themselves—Castaneda responded to his newfound fame by following the advice of the old *brujo*: he veiled his personal history in a web of secrecy.

The Teachings of Don Juan ends by Castaneda giving up his apprenticeship and leaving the world of sorcery behind. Yet over the next two decades he wrote many new titles expanding on his magical journey. These were the extended shamanic instructions on how to see, dream, master non-ordinary reality and ultimately become a woman or man of power taught by the enigmatic and patient don Juan. The tales were captivating, terrifying and occasionally beautiful. Just as often they were incomprehensible and tedious featuring a perpetually hardheaded Castaneda struggling to understand the sorcerers world. Castaneda revealed the final lesson of

don Juan in his book *Magical Passes*. It was a secret set of exercises deployed for “navigating the dark sea of awareness.” According to don Juan, sorcerers had practiced these movements for centuries in order to enhance their perception of non-ordinary reality. Curiously, also in the book, don Juan speaks for the first time about *his* mentor, a sorcerer and mime named Julian Osorio living in Mexico at the beginning of the 19th century. Julian Osorio was a professional actor who would pour all his efforts into creating what he named “the shamanistic theatre.” Don Juan recalls: “every movement of his characters was imbued to the gills with the magical passes. Not only that, but he turned the theatre into a new avenue for teaching them.”

The *Magical Passes* was published in 1998 the same year that Carlos Castaneda died. By then the contradictions and inconsistencies in his life and books had become so pronounced that few believed don Juan ever existed. Castaneda always claimed that the magical world found him by chance—at that encounter in the Greyhound bus station—but his wife, Margaret Runyan, writes in her memoir that at the time magic was already his obsession. Despite that, or maybe because of it, Castaneda’s fictitious apprenticeship and his transformation into a mystic master were in fact magical.

Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes

In 1974 Sol LeWitt exhibited 122 variations on the theme of incomplete open cubes presented as sculptures, photographs and schematic drawings. Here, LeWitt continued his lifelong investigation of conceptual and serial procedures by deploying an idea to become a “machine that makes art” and created a work that animates contradiction. *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* occupies a territory of objective and subjective, rational, compulsive and irrational exchanges. This is inscribed in the tension between the irreproachable system-like logic of its presentation and the very premise of the “machine” itself which seems to short-circuit necessity and reason. LeWitt writes, “conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists” and “irrational judgments lead to new experiences.” Perhaps the irrational “new experiences” produced by *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* and its machinery should be understood, apart from something tangible, as a call to explore or lose oneself in the affective and critical terrain that makes the work and its reception.