

Bringing

blood from a stone

Accompanying text by Lucy Weaver

Wringing Blood from a Stone is solo exhibit of sculptural work from Lucy Weaver shown at Solar Noon. This accompanying text includes a written introduction to the work, photos of the work and their respective descriptions, and three short essays by Lucy expanding on conceptual threads in the show.

Introduction to *Wringing Blood from a Stone*

A solo exhibit of sculptures by Lucy Weaver

“Where does the body end?” is a good question but *“How does the body end?”* is better.

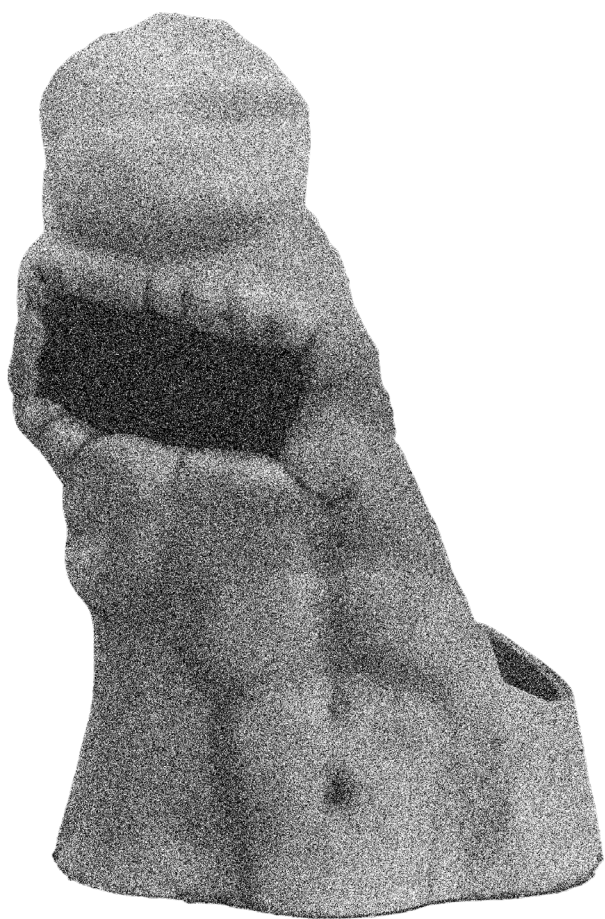
When my hand touches a screen, at which point does it cease to be my bodily sensor and become a mechanical input to a greater system? Do I see the sidewalk beneath my feet or only bird’s eye view of streets marked by hex-code color: #0f53ff? Where is my mind? Non-rhetorically, can you wring fallible human blood from the perfect facets of a thinking stone?

At the center of this inquiry is the concern that our maps may betray us yet. Mike Pepi spells this out in his excellent book *Against Platforms*, stating:

“If the original sin of datafication was trying to capture the world objectively all the time (and believing it could), then the second sin was to try to pry some higher, more evidentiary picture of the world from its binary, highly fraught, multidimensional mirror.”

By positioning data-centric mappings as an act of faith in a higher truth, we can begin to understand both its miraculous and profane outcomes on the human subject.

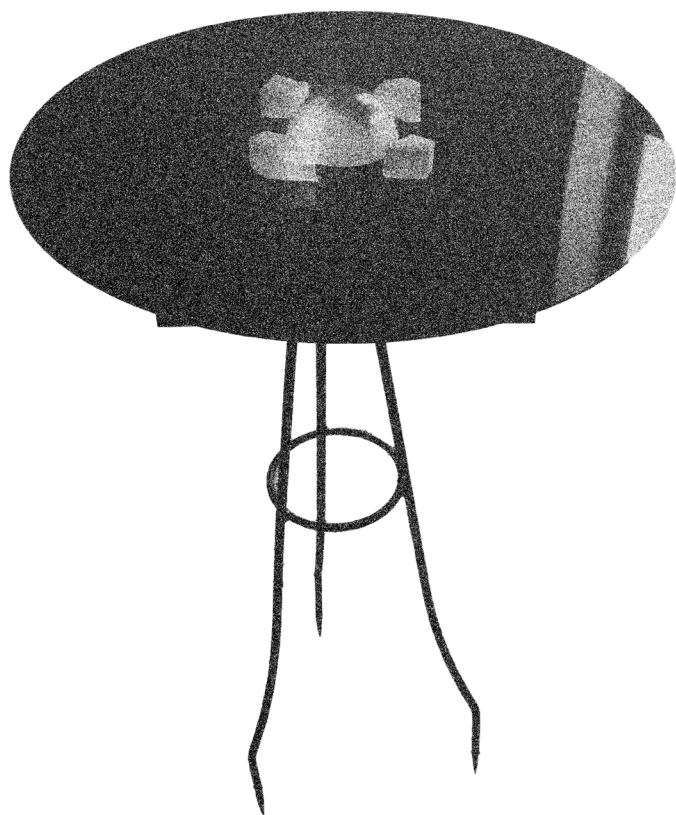
Wringing Blood from a Stone traces an arc through early Christian ritual, the esoterica of British colonialism, optics, theories of the entangled mind, body horror, cartography, surveillance, cybernetics, machine vision, and the limits of perception. Bound together, these disparate subjects form a prism for viewing the struggle central to contemporary understandings of agency: the constant conflict between faith in the data and the immediate corporeal knowledge of bodily sensing.



Doubt

2025

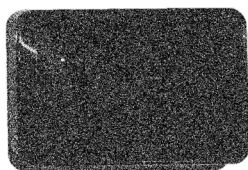
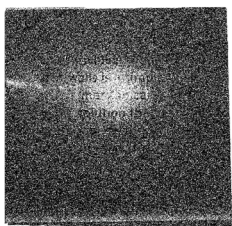
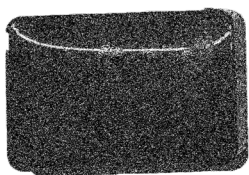
*Polylactic acid, stainless steel staples, polyvinyl acetate
filler, automotive primer, latex, alcohol soluble paints,
iPhone 7*



Monad Device v.1

2025

*Ulexite, crystal magnifying dome, acrylic, wrought
iron, iPad 10.2-inch, Google Earth Studio satellite
photography*



Network Triptych (Subjugation)

2025

*Netgear N750 Wireless Dual Band Router, Netgear
R6300 Smart Wifi Router, ECO-UV inks*



“I don’t press search, but I am Searching.”

2025

Dual Band 2.4 GHz /5.8 GHz 8dBi Antennas,

Drywall

Touch, Devotion, and the Digital

“80. Jesus said: Whoever has come to know the world has found the body. Whoever has found the body, the world is not worthy of him.”
-The Gospel of Thomas¹

Looking upon history and its gaps, we often find imperfect mirrors to the present. Mirrors so uncanny in their reflections that the image plane refracts into new interpretations of the contemporary.

In the fallout of early Christian theology, when the lines between Judaism, neo-platonism, hermetic traditions, and the radical cult of cannibals blurred, the gnostics sects developed a dense mythos based on a key revelation: the material world is false.

In gnostic mythos, the world was not created by a supreme God, but instead by a sometimes blind, often malicious, but always clumsy *Demiurge*. To the gnostics our material world was the imperfect representation of misinterpreted divine ideals. The gnostics shrouded themselves in obscure mythos, with many of their core texts explicitly titled as secret teachings. They believed that salvation came not from faith, or good works, or grace, but through knowledge. Specifically, secret knowledge. Included in this knowledge was the gnostic consensus that the material world is largely a trick played on humanity to make us forget our divine nature.

Our contemporary understanding of gnostic tradition is accredited to the discovery of the *Nag Hammadi* codex in 1945 and its long path to translation and dissemination over the following decades. However, the resurgence of belief and

interest in these doctrines lies in its clear applicability to our contemporary data-centric society. The desire to transcend the flesh for cyberspace, the distrust of Silicon Valley titans and the worlds they build, the creeping feeling that the truth is out there but is hidden from view, the promise of intrapersonal transcendence and the deification of the individual... All this folds neatly into a gnostic-shaped belief.

Of course, the gnostic tradition was largely swept under the rug of history by the formation of the proto-orthodox church, as it transformed from disparate and conflicting regional cults into a unified multi-national structure. Noted scholar on the gnostic traditions, Elaine Pagels, indicates that the skeptical and intrapersonal doctrines of gnostic sects were perceived as a threat to the infant orthodox church's claim to dominion.² Prior to the finding of the Nag Hammadi codex, Gnostic history was written by the victors. The consolidation of power within the orthodox church during the 2nd through 4th centuries, led to gnostic thought being denounced as heresy and many of their core texts were destroyed.

Pagels goes further to make a strong claim that the *Gospel of John* was written partially in response to the gnostic-leaning apocrypha, *Gospel of Thomas*.³ The jury is still out, as there is much contention between scholars on the dating of these texts. However, it is notable that the *Gospel of John* is the singular canonical gospel containing the story of “doubting Thomas” –an apostle who through faith alone cannot accept the resurrection. Here we receive one of the most grotesque scenes of the New Testament, in which Jesus allows Thomas to:

“Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing”⁴

Thomas is painted as skeptical, lacking in faith, and perhaps

as caricature of gnostics. His secret knowledge that the body and that the material world were false was not enough. In the awe of his experience, he acts profoundly against the gnostic doctrine. He is reduced to the knowledge of physical touch. He sticks his hand into the open wounds of his undead messiah. While this is largely interpreted as a parable praising “faith alone”, there is a glimmer of a grander philosophical position within these verses. Jesus commands Thomas to insert his finger into his wounds as a definitive proof of his resurrection, indicating that while faith alone is enough, **touch alone** can prove the impossible to a doubter.

These holy texts illuminate a conflict between two spiritual and philosophical ideals on the body and the material world. This conflict would continue in theological and writings for centuries and continues to plague contemporary society. At its core there is a single question: In the light of a higher truth, can we still trust our sense of touch?

In 13th and 14th century Italy (and southwestern Europe broadly), touch is cemented as a critical aspect of faith and devotion within the christian practice. Art historian and conservationist Una Roman D’Elia, cites an example from the Tuscan city of Pisa in 1399 to help illustrate the importance of touch.⁵ In the midst of a great plague and well aware of its contagiousness, devotees traveled across Italy bearing a to-scale crucifix. In Pisa, (and likely in other non-recorded incidents in other cities) a crowd of hundreds gathered and physically fought each other to be able to touch the sculpture of Christ. When they could not reach it, they threw candles and other paraphernalia to touch it by proxy. Based on writings from the period, we should not assume that the average christian in the area believed that the sculpture was literally or even symbolically a stand-in for Christ. D’Elia further notes that based on the practice of women

clothing these sculptures, miraculous events involving the statues “coming to life”, and the odd habit of covering the sculptures with cloth when misbehaving, that these sculptures were seen as vessels to connect practitioners to their faith.⁶ To touch these works of art was the establishment of personal connection and sometimes a public announcement of their devotion and belief.

Depictions of Christ with his wounds continued into the renaissance and beyond as not just an empty symbol, but as discrete communication channel to the divine. On feast days, and in cloistered sects, practitioners would recreate the scene of “doubting Thomas”, and when touching the sculptures would sometimes receive visions or hear the voice of god. The wounds of Christ came to represent a “portal” for sinners to enter the kingdom of heaven. Importantly, this portal was activated through touch.

In 2007, Steve Jobs delivered his keynote presentation at Macworld, unveiling the first iPhone. Introducing their novel interface, he says:

“We have invented a new technology called Multi-touch which is phenomenal. It works like magic.”⁷

In arguably the most public introduction to the technology of touch-based interfaces, it is notable that the first description claims “It works like magic.”

The implication is clear, this device converts your touch into miraculous digital outputs. Like a polished obsidian scrying stone, there is much beyond the physical black surface of a touchscreen.

Jobs was essentially correct in his diagnosis of smart phones being limited by buttons and keyboard. The touchscreen opened

up a world of possibilities in user experience and interface. These interfaces were championed as “intuitive” and allowed the device’s software to fit an impossibly wide set of use-cases, no longer limited by the hardware of single-input buttons and keys. Through this, touchscreens allowed these discreet devices to embody an unbelievable amount of technical solutions to everyday tasks in a networked world. Rather than representing any singular task (talk to your friends, look at a map, read an article), the touchscreen allowed the transcendence into a portal-like device that can do it all this more. Most importantly, these devices are pocket-sized allowing all the intangible network-worlds at your fingertips.

While the final tally is incalculable, there are estimated billions of touch-based devices in active use today. Today, the average American in 2025 spends about 5 hours a day on their phone, making thousands of discreet touches a day while interfacing with their device.⁸ In terms of physical touch, there is no device we are more consistently and intimately engaged with than a smartphone.

The downturn of human to human touch and intimacy in late-capitalist cultures like the United States has become a hot topic following the twin crises of the Covid-19 pandemic and the popularization of smart phones. While the conversation is often divided along lines of gender (Why are men so lonely today? Young women are more depressed than ever, etc., etc.), the effect is largely universal in America. The experience of “touch deprivation” is so prolific in contemporary American culture, that it is almost unnecessary to delve further into the statistics, however the numbers are still shocking. The google search term analytics for “skin hunger”, “touch starvation”, and “touch deprivation”, show a clear uptick during the COVID-19 pandemic, that continues to rise through late 2023, before

settling at an alarmingly high plateau. There is a significant decline in the both amount of sex and sexual partners for young Americans in comparison to their elders. The latest figures from UCLA's California Health Interview Survey finds that 38% of Californians aged 18-30 have not had sex in 12 months.⁹

Ashley Montague popularized the statement “*touch is the mother of all senses*”, noting that the sensation of touch is the earliest to develop in human embryos.¹⁰ The outermost embryonic cell layers responsible for this sensation are called the ectoderm. She goes on to explain that “*The ectoderm also gives rise to... the sense organs of smell, taste, hearing, [and] vision*”. Quite poetically, architect and professor Juhani Pallasmaa summarizes:

*“all our sense organs are modifications of the original skin tissue of the fetus, and transformed forms of touching, and thus related to and modifications of touching. We touch with all our senses, and even with our sense of existence”*¹¹

In short, to touch is fundamentally human and arguably our core sensing apparatus. It is not only unlikely, but perhaps impossible that humans today “touch things less” than our ancestors. It is not an input the human subject can choose to turn off.

The gulf of difference between contemporary and historic understanding of touch does not arrive solely from cultural boundaries or secular belief, but through a trick played via technological developments. Consider the etymology of the

word Digital, which arrives to us through the Latin word *digitus* meaning “finger or toe”. By the late 15th century, digit took on the double meaning of any whole integer under the number 10 –ie; any number that could be represented with just your fingers or toes. By the 1930s, this term was applied to early computing, which dealt in whole integers in contrast to “analogue” which used a continuous quantity such as voltage. In the era of touchscreens, our “digits” have been re-coded as a neat little interfacing device for a much less corporeal reality.

The relationship between conceptions of the human individual and technology have always been symbiotic, but the advent of cybernetics fundamentally changed the contemporary perception of cognition and reality. Father of cybernetics and hardcore cartesian dualist, Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* makes it clear that his ideal cybernetic systems do not respect the skin as the boundary of the human body. His gnostic-tinged metaphor for the human individual is that:

*“We are but whirlpools in a river of ever-flowing water. We are not stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves.”*¹²

While divine knowledge has been replaced with secular data, there is a commonality between Wiener’s cybernetic conceptions of the individual and gnostic doubt in the material. These beliefs have been inherited by techno-optimists whose constant arguments for the future rely on the conceit that the data they capture is of a “higher truth” than humanity’s own embodied experience. Mike Pepi puts this quite succinctly in his excellent book *Against Platforms*:

“If the original sin of datafication was trying to capture the world objectively all the time (and

believing it could), then the second sin was to try to pry some higher, more evidentiary picture of the world from its binary, highly fraught, multidimensional mirror.”¹³

In the face of rampant techno-utopianism, we must consider that above all, utopias require faith in magical interventions. In Thomas More’s 1516 text *Utopia*, the titular mythical island receives its idyllic social structure through a deus ex machina: technology gifted through an ancient shipwreck.¹⁴

Again, we can turn to Mike Pepi’s brilliant characterization of the role of techno-utopian thought in contemporary society. He states:

“Techno-utopian thinking eventually hardens into ideology as the gap between prophetic vision and available technology closes... How many tech company gadget demos have we seen whose main goal is to collapse in the public’s mind the gap between dream and execution?... The primary missing ingredient is your –the users!-- belief in the product”¹⁵

While journalists, researchers, and society writ large continues to bemoan the “touch deprivation”, “ipad kids”, and total disconnect between the human subject and the world around them, we must contend with that fact that individual human subjects are not without blame. The digital world requires the user’s faith to operate. We have earnest belief in the fraught data-centric “truths” technology provides us with. We have all become gnostic, rejecting that the several thousand times a day we touch our phone has any meaning to the physical body. The contemporary human subject views itself as

a component in a much larger machine. Our corporeal bodies become a mere cybernetic input.

However, consider that perhaps touch has never lost its sense of devotion. That by its nature, it is inseparable from human knowledge and sensing. That every touch proves the human subject's belief in their experience.

In *Psychopolitics*, Byung Chul-Han follows through on this line of thought, stating

*“...every technology or technique of domination—brings forth characteristic devotional objects... Such objects materialize and stabilize dominion... Smartphones represent digital devotion – indeed, they are the devotional object of the Digital, period. As a subjectivation-apparatus, the smartphone works like a rosary... both serve the purpose of self-monitoring and control.”*¹⁶

In contending with the most pressing issues of our time in relation to technology and agency, these relationships between touch, faith, and technology open new potential avenues of exploration and reactionary struggle. It creates clear concepts to oppose, specifically faith in techno-utopias and data. It posits that there is sanctity and knowledge held by the human body alone. While our world is being restructured through faith and knowledge alone, perhaps it is possible to reject these assumed truths through our most base sense: touch.

Endnotes:

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Endnotes (cont.):

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Brief Notes on John Dee & his Impire of Maps

John Dee, born in 1527, is a difficult man to quickly summarize. He is accredited as a hermetic philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, astrologer, cryptographer, cartographer, alchemist and occultist. His career and impact is long and storied, with several rises and falls. Truly a renaissance man in the renaissance period, he flourished in a time when the lines between science and mysticism were not so clear. He served as a court astronomer to Elizabeth I, and assembled arguably the largest private library in Renaissance Europe. He was accused of being a spy for the crown. His ambitions were vast: creating a unified theology that healed the breach between catholic and protestants, establishing England and its colonies as the “British empire”, and developing a divinatory method to communicate with angels. He was rumored to consort with the devil, and died in poverty sometime between 1608 and 1609. The parish registers of his death, and his gravestone went missing and have been erased from history.

In short, Dee was a man of many complex and conflicting interests, who found his way into the court of what would become the largest and most powerful empire in recorded history. However, as an archetypal magus, his life and work would take on a hyperstitional quality. In a rare interview with Delphi Carstens for the *Orphan Drift Archive*, Nick Land provides a quick definition of this term:

“Hyperstition is a positive feedback circuit including culture as a component. It can be defined as the experimental (techno-)science of self-fulfilling prophecies. Superstitions are merely false beliefs, but hyperstitions – by their very existence as ideas –

function causally to bring about their own reality.”

Dee's long obsession with maps and navigational tools, showed his inclination towards hyperstition. There are few objects quite as hyperstitional as a map, which in the 16th century used the bleeding edge of technical development to claim territories that would take decades or even centuries to be fully captured in a material sense. Dee took advantage of this interesting trick with his propaganda and advocacy for British colonialism. Rather than posit any claims on current control of a region, he relied on historical evidence of priority. In true hyperstitional fashion, he dug up these past myths and placed them in the future as self-fulfilling prophecies enabled by the technical capacity of the British navy. Perhaps the greatest example of this is Dee's coining of the term "*British Impire*". We must remember that prior to the Elizabethian era, England was largely a backwater European monarchy. It wasn't until Elizabeth I (and Dee) took power that the British renaissance flourished and their naval and colonial supremacy were established. In his 1576 volume *General and Rare Memorials pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation*, Dee advocated strongly for the establishment of British colonies abroad. He turned to the mythical figure of *King Arthur*, and his conquering of Ireland as the beginning of a "British Impire". By 1580, he posited England's claim to the entirety of North America on the back of a map he created for Sir Humphrey Gilbert. Dee's claim rested again on a piece of historical propaganda, that the mythical figure *Madog ab Owain Gwynedd* had conquered American lands in the 12th century. Gilbert would go on to receive a patent from Elizabeth I to establish the first English colony in North America.

Dee casts a long shadow over the history of England, but an even longer shadow over western esoteric traditions. Truly a renaissance man in the renaissance period, he flourished in a time when the lines between science and mysticism were not so

clear. Notably, Dee felt as though he had exhausted all avenues of human knowledge before he turned to celestial wisdom. His combination of sciences and occult knowledge, led him to create a grand unified theory of both material and spiritual knowledge. His journals documenting divinations and translations of a secret celestial alphabet created the basis of Enochian Magick. This system would go on to be adopted whole-cloth by the Order of the Golden Dawn, tweaked by Aleister Crowley and folded into his Thelemic system, and ultimately find aspects of itself in most modern systems of Western occultism.

It is in the inner workings of his enochian system, that Dee's true hyperstitional myth-making becomes clear. The system is described in a mountain of journal entries, and combined over a thousand years of hermetic knowledge, judeo-christian myth, and grimoires into a cohesive system of cryptography. To Dee, the angels and divine wisdom of God was obtainable, you just needed the correct keys. To ascertain this divine knowledge, Dee employed the scryer Edward Kelly, and spent years decoding cryptographic symbols, grids, and holy furniture to enable the divinatory sessions. These sessions would involve rigorous rituals conducted by Dee, in which Kelly would scry to receive information from a variety of angels and holy hosts which would be further decoded by Dee. But to what end?

Most of Dee's journals seem to regard the enochian system as a tool for "remote viewing" or a sort of divine espionage. His use of this system largely revolved around abstracting the physical world into a grid, each square corresponding to a divine governor. The process looked something like this: Dee would pose questions. Kelly would ask these questions to an angel in charge of the divine governor. The governor would then report to the angel the on-goings of god's subjects in his quadrant. Next the angel would tell Kelly the governor's report in code. Finally, Dee would then decode these messages. Presumably, some of these findings were reported either to the crown or other British

colonial operations.

What is remarkable about this system, is how uncanny this transmitting of information resembles today’s satellite photography relays. See figures (a) and (b).

With his history and impact in mind, Dee becomes a critical archetypal figure for understanding the relationship between mysticism and technology. His specific toolkit of myth-weaving, cryptography, and cartography have been shown to be a reality-defining set of tools with a foot in both worlds.

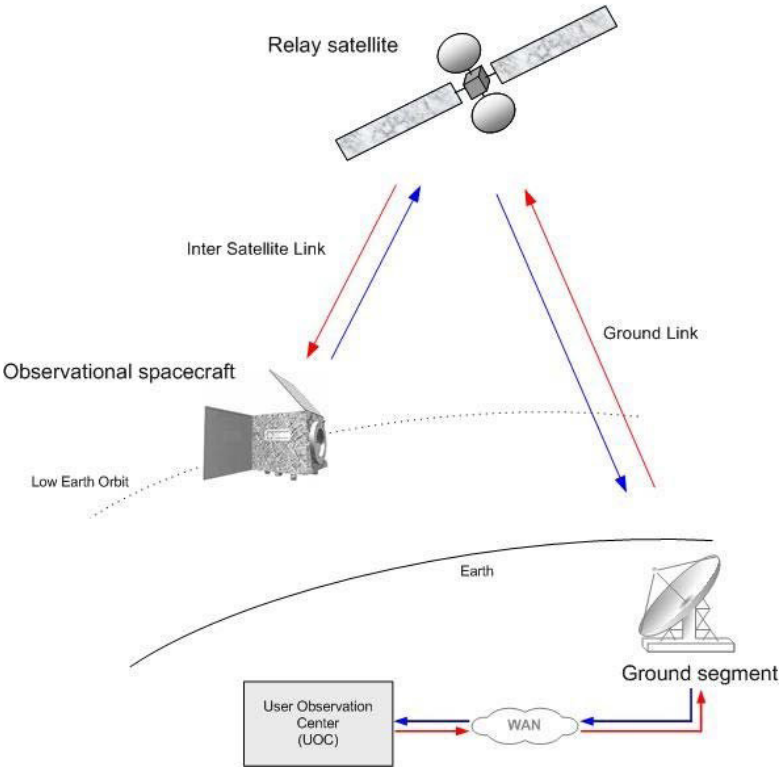


Figure (a) from: Letschnik, Jürgen & Raif, Matthias & Pauly, Kristian & Walter, Ulrich. (2005). BAYERNSAT – A REAL-TIME COMMUNICATION-ARCHITECTURE FOR INTERACTIVE EARTH OBSERVATION VIA GEOSTATIONARY INTER SATELLITE LINK FOR SMALL SATELLITE SYSTEMS.

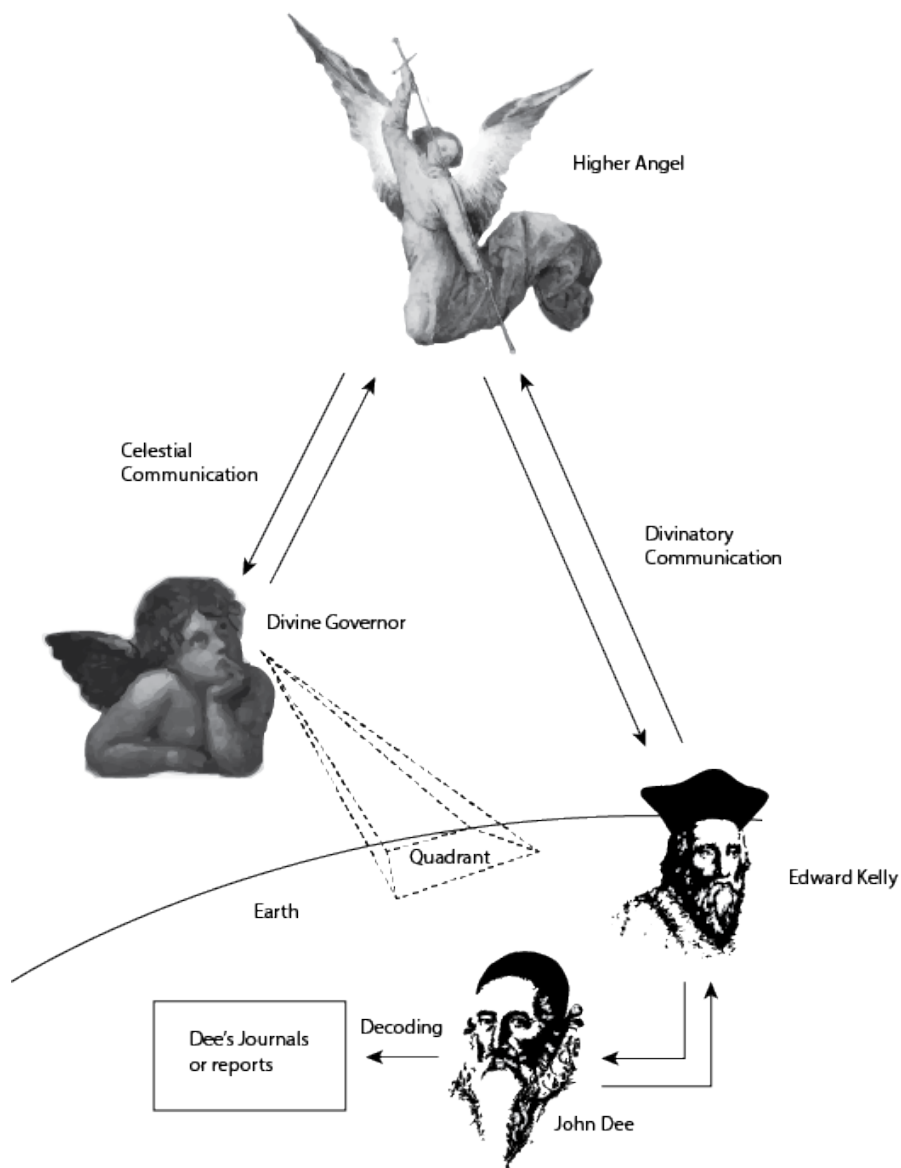


Figure (b): Diagram of Dee's Enochian *remote viewing* relay.

Post-Optics

I wake up and scroll through the feed, checking the drip pulse of horrific imagery defining our times. By noon, I've seen enough evidence of barbarism to hollow out the hope of even the most optimistic subject in the empire. I think about Philip K. Dick's *Black Iron Prison* and the undying oppression of an eternal, fascistic super-structure. I feel something that mere words and images could never give form. A cold black pit in my chest. Dark and oil-slicked shadows cast in a lightless room. A subjugation so total that it can not be signified. A fatalism that makes all evidence of oppression seem to reverse causality. It arrives from the future, and I had no say.

I've already abandoned any clarity or scholarly sense-making on the topic. I navigate the sensations through apophenia and touch alone. Rationalization will arrive too late and will only serve as a frail alibi.

My dear and brilliant friend, Hannah Brown, arranged a showing of Derek Jarman's *Blue* at PAR projects. An hour and 19 minutes of continuous klein blue projected on a wall. I spent the first 10 minutes recognizing that the moving fleck on the blue projection was a floater in my right eye. I spend the remainder of the showing in solemn reverence, the only shifts in my vision from the blurring of tears.

What Jarman so clearly understood, is that the loss of optics is purgatorial in nature. In the emptiness, you await final condemnation. Without a visual anchor, you are lost in limbo.

When early humanity shifted from oral to written speech, the technology trained us to have preference for vision as the predominant human sense. Then there is the printing press, the

camera, and the pixel-based screen. What comes after? Machine-vision, big data, algorithmic sensing. I have a lingering paranoid that we'll abandon our sight. That in the new equilibrium of our bodies, sense-making will arrive through other means.

In 2019, researchers at Carnegie Mellon University devised a method using a machine-vision program and wifi antennas to detect and map human presence through a wall with no optical inputs. I found out about this research two years later, and in retrospect it played a large role in shaping this nihilism towards images. In 2022 the IDF adopted a similar and portable radar-based technology called the XAVER systems. Currently, there are two somewhat successful start-ups in America pitching this technology for home security applications.

I read Eyal Weizman's *Walking Through Walls* essay. The clear technical advantage of going "post-optics" is that the representations of bodies are not human. Everything is "smooth space" to the oppressor. You do not see walls when you do not respect the human dignity of shelter. You do not see humans when you do not respect the corporeal existence of a body.

In 2024 Palantir started an official "strategic partnership" with the IDF and provided them with ai-assisted targeting systems for tactical strikes. Palantir now has a contract with the US Government to construct a "mega-database" on US citizens for interdepartmental use by US agencies.

I wonder if there is a counter-narrative to Plato's allegory of the cave, where instead of the prisoners being freed from the cave by some divine wisdom, they achieve a similar sense of freedom by burying their heads in the dark dirt. A true katabasis. A fool's gnosis. A perfected asceticism where all senses are denied –with the exception of touch, which feels only the cold Earth.

So, I continue to scroll through the feed. I get the sense that many of us still prefer to bear witness. We're gathered around the last bit of flickering light, a flame dancing on the edge of matchstick, nearly extinguished.

I am personally of the belief that all forms of art are publics that are formed in dialogue with the world around you. With this in mind, thank you to everyone who has spared the time to have discussions with me. Whether in class, at work, at a bar, in your home: thank you. I'd like to offer a sincere thanks to Alex Harrison, Clay Brown, Valerie West, Kyle Mace, Pat Carr, and Bryn Hastings for their support. Thank you to the DNR discord, whose discussions and reading group have played a monumental role in shaping my practice. Thank you to Caroline Anderson for the mentorship, collaboration, and opportunity to show this work at Solar Noon. Finally, thank you to Gabrielle Weaver, my wife and the light of my world.

in collaboration with

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