

EMPTY HISTORY:
the conversations
continue

Conversations with
Adam Barbu and
John Paul Ricco

v tape

Regarding *Empty History*

Curator's Talk, Vtape, November 23, 2019

Adam Barbu: Nearly four years following my participation in Vtape's Curatorial Incubator program, I was given the opportunity to return as the 2019 *The Researcher Is Present*. The residency took shape over the course of a year of self-guided research in which I explored various materials from the Vtape collection and engaged in a series of conversations with peers and mentors about possible new readings of queer curatorial ethics. Early on in the project's development, I was encouraged by peers to think without direction, restriction or expectation, beyond productive curating, beyond the efficacy of art, beyond the institutional demands that are traditionally placed on curating as an instrumentalized pedagogical practice. As opposed to many of the recent exhibitions that have sought to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, for example, *Empty History* does not attempt to expose histories of homophobic violence or reconstruct fractured queer histories in the name of inclusion, representation, and recognition. Throughout the course of this residency, I have worked to think beyond



the logic of reparative visibility, focusing instead on that which cannot be reduced to representations of identity, community, and shared history. *Empty History* does not engage with the term "queer" as a descriptor of a sexual identity category but rather as an interruptive force of abstraction and illegibility.

In this move away from traditional articulations of so-called "progress," I have explored the ways in which artists use video to unwork the narrative conventions of queer history. Dierdre Logue, Paul Wong, and Lucas Michael do not seek to repair the unjust and the uncertain by fashioning new queer utopias. Instead, documenting performances of solitary, workless gestures and activities, their works pursue forms of pleasure in the broken, the unchanging, and the everyday. Life is presented in a fixed state. They appear as artifacts of impossible, empty histories without purpose or end, carried out at the limits of what is often deemed recognizable queer political content. The critique this type of research tends to attract is that it is too theoretical, too abstract, detached from the collective need to produce legible, explicit representations in the fight against social injustice. Yet *Empty History* examines how this idea of a non-productive, non-teleological, workless curatorial practice offers us a way outside the time of heteronormative capitalist temporality. If the very meaning of queerness



Empty History: the conversations continue



is rooted in a foundational rejection of normativity, perhaps it is this commitment to non-teleological thought that renders the practice of queer curating queer. *Empty History* considers the unworking of the time of progress as the work of curating queer history.

Through the frame of the residency and materials of my research, I have learned to embrace queerness as an intensified lateral movement.

Early collaborators helped me think through the uncomfortable thought of an empty history, as well as my own anxious relation to progress. Having moved back to Ottawa from Toronto after finishing graduate school, I found myself emptying myself of an anxious attachment to productivity and success in the artworld. The structureless structure of *The Researcher is Present* program allowed me to slow down and let go of meaning. I have learned to embrace the false starts and the unresolved thought experiments—the wandering, the waiting, and the circling back that is queer curating.

Lisa Steele: I can't help but recall the first wave of inclusive queer curating. From the 1980s onward, we have seen so many exhibitions that adopt the belief that visibility equals progress—that if we can just be seen, then we are working against homophobia. Your show offers something like the opposite of that. I see works that are not simply identified as "queer." They don't reveal themselves. They do not present a story.

And today, the story of queer progress has changed. There is gay marriage, there are conservative gay people—lots of them. There is something at stake in *Empty History* that is clearly different from that earlier notion of queering.

AB: Today, a number of influential curators remain interested in documenting queer progress by means of art historical inclusion. These exhibitions have become popular within major art institutions, functioning as evidence of a politically progressive programming agenda. With *Empty History*, on the other hand, I am simply interested in rethinking our relationship to the time of progress in ways that might be described as queer.

John Paul Ricco: A liberal politics of inclusion can never attest to the exclusions that necessarily and inevitably follow this attempt to render the invisible visible. That which is excluded includes those things that don't get recognized as political in the first place. Because they don't gain legibility or recognition as markers of identity, they are discarded and considered minor or inconsequential. In the three videos on display, we see everyday, ordinary spaces and seemingly inconsequential gestures inhabiting the empty space that is created through this exclusion from the political. The works reveal the extent to which that empty space can actually become a site of potential that is not attached to any determinate end result.



In this sense, they suggest a certain inoperativity. Part of the problem with the notion of political-historical progress is that it is absolutely operative, productivist, and goal oriented, when so much of our lives are, in fact, not lived in this way.

Here, we are seeing both an emptying out of progress, in the way that Adam is speaking about, but also a kind of temporary, inoperative occupation of that empty space that gets created through the necessary, inevitable exclusions that come with a politics of inclusion. Further, what we see is an attempt to occupy that empty space without claiming or appropriating it in the name of visibility or identity but instead keeping it precisely illegible. It is illegible as queer, it is illegible as politics, and it may even be illegible as art. This is, in fact, getting close to what we understand to be the act of artistic creation. We are describing a form of resistance that is, at the same time, de-instrumentalized.

And that's creation—creation as a form of resistance to the operative, productivist model.

A politics of progress has kept us from a politics of creation.

LS: It seems to me that *Empty History* opposes the sort of productivity that is encouraged by most art institutions. I am fascinated by how Adam's curatorial project has come to mirror the open-ended structure of *The Researcher is Present* residency program itself.



JPR: There is a perfect pairing between the research practice, the thematic, and what we see in the gallery, which is somewhat unusual. There is, in other words, a real tightness in correspondence between the four works and the curatorial method. They are following the same kind of inoperative research creation model.

Kim Tomczak: These responses have led me to think about the economy and ideas of growth, perpetual momentum, forward movement, and so on. Today, there are radical economists proposing a non-growth slowness. Adam's project helps me move into that space. I also think about the extraction economy. We assume that we will be extracting forever but this project invites us to consider how the economy doesn't necessarily have to be productive in that kind of way. As John said earlier, life cannot simply be described as a progressive process.

JPR: Researching within an archive is archaeological, and archaeological research is based upon an extraction of content and resources. This project is attempting to call that process into question. It tries to locate that which cannot be appropriated—that empty space that can still function without being extracted and claimed. I find it interesting that Adam spent a year in an archive and produced a show called "Empty History." It goes to show us that one can, in fact, find that impossible, empty place



within the archive. In this regard, the empty is the open. It does not signify a negation or the absence of content. The empty is that which is not appropriated, and each of the works are clearly open in some way.

AB: Emptiness has taken on many different forms within the context of the residency. Earlier today, we spoke about the exhibition in relation to ideas of solitude and loneliness.

JPR: In each of the three videos, we face a solitary subject engaging in non-productive, workless activities. This inevitably begins to raise questions about whether that solitude is to be understood in terms of loneliness or as something other than deprivation. The works suggest a kind of aloneness that, in not wanting to produce a masterful subject, demonstrates the ways in which bodies can maintain both a sense of solitude and ways of being in a world that are not defined by isolation and loneliness. What we are seeing in these videos is not deprivation and a reduction of bodies but rather a kind of experimentation and openness.

LS: These three individual figures are quite powerful. In thinking about solitude and worklessness, I find myself reflecting upon the past, returning to what we used to call "the collectivity of the movement." That sense collectivity, of getting together, of building something, of doing this and that—it didn't really go anywhere, it didn't really work out for all of us.



JPR: What is powerful about this project is that it does not seek to develop a new definition of progress. It simply asks, "Why progress?" At stake here is a certain self-divestiture of the subject, which, through a sense of anonymity, opens up the possibility of relations that are not predicated upon belonging or identity. In response to these works, we might want to think about collectivity or solidarity in ways that aren't merely about individual expression, the expressive subject, and political polemicism.

AB: Within this conversation about a retreat from the logic of political and economic progress, it seems that we are, at the same time, speaking about research and the values that become attributed to this work, both in the artworld and in academia.

Lauren Fournier: Our generation lives in such a sped-up state—what is expected from a researcher in the artworld and academia is so extreme. The expectation that one can continue to produce at such a rate is ultimately destructive. I think about ways of pushing against this compulsion for speed and progress, which I too have been complicit in as a writer and curator.

JPR: Those economies always operate based upon some sort of single general measure of significance. That's capitalist logic, per se.



In these works, there is an invitation for us to move away from the fetishization of work and labor and towards use and care. There is a wonderful moment in Paul Wong's *Perfect Day* (2007), where he is searching within the archive of his CD collection desperate to find the Lou Reed record. We come to experience his frustration as he plays the CD only to find that it continuously stops and skips. From the point of view of use, what does he end up doing with the CD? He wants to take care of it. He washes the CD with soap and water in the hopes that it will begin to work again. Of course, it does not—but there is a way in which the work itself is still able to retain that notion of the perfect. There is something involved in the use and the care of things, like himself, his computer, his CD collection, and so forth, that this can still be a perfect day even though the scene doesn't follow through to the end of the song.

LS: Speaking of the individual works in the gallery, I am intrigued by the placement of Lucas Michael's *Audentes Fortuna Iuvat* (2001) in relation to Dierdre Logue's *Home Office* (2017). From a certain vantage point, it seems as though the crushed trophy sits underneath the scene of the balancing act. On the other hand, it appears that the prize that could be awarded to any of the artists—like it is up for grabs.

Dierdre Logue: When Adam and I unpacked the work together, I thought: There is a trophy I would

like. We started talking about the notion of second place, which is my favorite place. The idea that we might reinterpret the value of these measures of success is key, with the added tension that, at any moment, I could fall and crush my own psychic trophy.

I find it interesting that the sculpture shares a lot with video. It is placed on a mirror, which is reflecting light, and it is shiny and shaped but ultimately flat. It was chosen well, both because of its video-esque sculptural attributes and in its recognition that failure, or the lack of aspiring to the trophy, might be the prize. It is deflated. Its guts have been pushed out. But there were no guts to begin with, right?

KT: I am curious what to make of that term "failure" within the context of this exhibition.

AB: Dierdre, I am drawn to what you said about the symbolism of the trophy—that the so-called prize lies in not wanting it to begin with. Certainly, in recent years, there has been great deal of writing published on the relationship between queerness and failure. But this idea of failure would seem to suggest the opposite of success. And, as John has mentioned, this open-ended, empty space of self-exploration is not simply a matter of failure but inoperativity, impotentiality, and worklessness. In works like *Perfect Day*, what we see is a kind of lateral intensity that operates outside of the binary logic of wins and losses.



DL: *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), along with various other texts in queer theory history, identify failure as a kind of departure from or resistance to traditional readings of success, especially in terms of cultural production. It is important to note that the works are not empty of other narratives, including moments of self-loathing, as in *Perfect Day*, or moments where the body is trying to work through something that in fact, lacks meaning, as in, *Home Office*. Failure has led us to think about our futures and how to navigate them as queer bodies. It has also given us certain permissions to begin thinking about ways in which artists might resist through the not doing of something—by means of negation. So, if we think about your thesis and the idea that these works might offer us the opportunity to reimagine history, then, in fact, they also offer us the opportunity to imagine not doing anything. That not doing anything could have enormously powerful implications on the future. In my work, failure has led to questions of future or futurity as opposed to the idea that failure has one necessary opposite or counterpoint.

JPR: I am hesitant about the language of failure simply because it retains so much of the subject and especially the psychological subject. *Empty History* doesn't seem interested in documenting those kinds of struggles—of trying to be a subject or even failing to be one. Instead, drawing from the writings of Leo Bersani, what we are seeing is a move from the psychological subject to the

aesthetic subject, and from the aesthetic subject to the ecological subject—that is, something beyond interiority or success or failure. It is, in other words, not about who I am but how am I the person that I am. In each of the works, there is an affirmation that, through these inoperative, workless activities, this is how I am who I am—this is my mode. These activities are not necessarily negative or positive but do seem to suggest the extent to which the “how” of how I am is so dependent upon objects, places, and things. In *Fixed Kilometer* (2018), for example, it is almost as if that is precisely what the artist is pointing out. It is that extension, which is, in passing, there, and there, and there.

AB: Of course, the invisible distances Michael traces are anything but sequential. The video remains a fragmented portrait of the artist organizing his world at a critical distance. In certain instances, there are significant gaps in time that span between takes. *Fixed Kilometer* invites us to consider the absences that necessarily give shape to a work's narrative structure. The video was not created quickly, and there is a great deal of living that is undocumented within the frame of the screen. I find myself returning to that which is not included in the final presentation of the work—namely, the countless surfaces that cannot but remain unscanned and untouched by the artist's curious, wandering index finger. ■



Queer Solitude and Non-Reparative Curating

Adam Barbu and John Paul Ricco in
Conversation, Instagram Live, August 7, 2020

Adam Barbu: Following my residency as Vtape's 2019 *The Researcher Is Present*, I presented a selection of works documenting various individuals engaged in solitary, indeterminate, and workless gestures and activities. The resulting exhibition, titled *Empty History*, invites us to think through the idea of curating "queer" beyond teleology. The artists included in the program, namely, Dierdre Logue, Paul Wong, and Lucas Michael, do not seek to repair the unjust and the uncertain by constructing new queer utopias. Instead, they pursue pleasure in pursuit of the broken, the unchanging, and the everyday. Part of what John and I wanted to discuss today is precisely what is at stake in this care for the irreparable, as well as the aesthetics and ethics of queer solitude so elegantly explored in these works.

I can think of several conversations we have shared, each staked at key moments in the project's development. Today, more than six months after the close of the exhibition, we find ourselves set against the backdrop of a world in transition that neither of us could have predicted. To begin, I thought we might consider

the idea of queer solitude and the various works in the exhibition in relation to the COVID pandemic.

John Paul Ricco: Over the last couple of months, as I've been asked to make comments on the relationship between art and the pandemic, I found myself returning to *Empty History*. Thinking about the idea of solitude as something distinct from loneliness and isolation, it struck me that your exhibition could become a key reference point. What we're seeing in each of the works included in the show, presents another way of thinking about solitude—a particularly queer solitude.

Recently, I read an article reporting on a study documenting the effects of the pandemic on members of the LGBTQ population. Researchers found that the effects were incredibly pernicious and negative. The majority of respondents had suffered depression and no less than 90% had experienced some kind of homophobia or transphobia. This was particularly acute amongst young queers who suddenly found themselves back at home, feeling completely isolated, untethered from their support networks, their friends, their allies, and so forth. As we begin this conversation about queer solitude, here is an opportunity to make clear what we're not talking about. We are beginning to see the emergence of the neologism "queerantime," or, queering the quarantine. It seems that there are both positive and negative valences of that term.



Within the context of this study, it can signal the particular negative effects of quarantine, especially on young queers. There is also another, more positive way in which we can think about putting the “queer” in quarantine, which is what we’re interested in—a certain kind of queer solitude and perversity that would demonstrate that one could still be queer even in the quarantine, against the isolating effects of homophobia or transphobia that so many queers in the pandemic find themselves experiencing.

AB: Speaking of solitude and perversity, perhaps you can briefly introduce one of the texts we reviewed in preparation for this talk, namely, Gilles Deleuze’s *Michel Tournier and The World Without Others*.

JPR: This text has become another important reference point as I continue to think about the question of solitude. In the appendix of his 1969 book *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze writes an essay on Michel Tournier’s novel *Vendredi*, or, in the English translation, *Friday or The Other Island*.

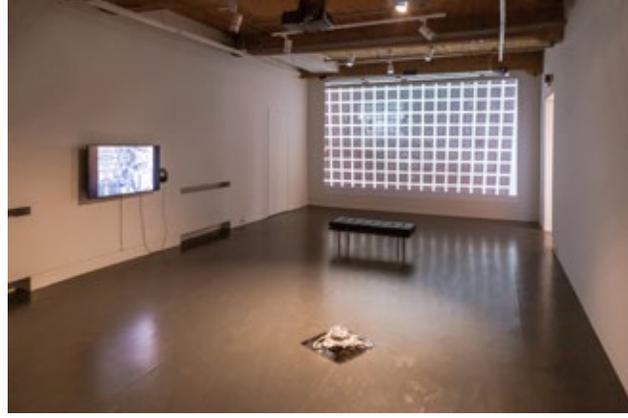
In *Vendredi*, Tournier attempts to rewrite the Daniel Defoe *Robinson Crusoe* story, and part of that rewriting involves foregrounding Crusoe’s companion *Vendredi*. Deleuze considers the way in which the other operates here different from what he calls the structure *Other*—the kind of general way in which all perceptual fields and all senses of possibility are delimited and constrained.

He is also interested in life on a desert island, as living in a world without Others, in which solitude is that other island—the other side of which would be loneliness or isolation. In this sense, the essay examines the way in which Tournier’s novel offers a story of escape from an enclosed, organized, workable, and merely possible world of Others.

AB: It will be useful to consider Deleuze’s essay in relation to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading* (2003), another text that has become an important reference for us both. *Empty History* does not attempt to reclaim truths about identity, community, or shared history by exposing the effects of homophobic discourse—a position that Sedgwick would describe as paranoid. Paranoid reading practices are rooted in the assumption that we can only begin to dismantle systemic oppression once such historical truths are uncovered. Reparative reading, on the other hand, is a matter of using “one’s own resources to assemble or “repair” the murderous part-objects into something like a whole.”¹

Sedgwick is also attentive to the transitions that take place across and between these positions. This simultaneously paranoid and reparative reading seems to lie at the heart of exhibitions that have worked to reconstruct fragmented queer histories in the name of





inclusion, representation, and recognition. *Empty History* offers us the chance to think beyond paranoia and reparation. In the curatorial essay, I wrote: "Logue, Wong, and Michael refuse resolution and finality, opening up a space of perpetually unfinished business in which action always already fails to result in change. And this is not for lack of care." At stake here is a certain lateral intensity, one that encourages a shift in thinking from the visibility of queer actors and performances of queer actions towards a non-productive, non-teleological queer worklessness as that which operates outside the logic of queer progress or so-called progressive queer curating.

JPR: Some of the writing that I have published during the pandemic has focused on worklessness and impotentiality. With this recession and reduction in workplace work comes an opportunity to think about ways of living and doing that aren't entirely beholden to productivist logics. Certain effects of the pandemic allow us the think about life in terms of the sabbatical or the day off. The works in the exhibition, in their own simple, one might say, minor, vernacular way, allow us to think through these ideas further. Perhaps we should briefly describe them for the audience.

AB: Upon entering the gallery space, one encounters a large video projection of Lucas Michael *Fixed Kilometer* (2018), in which the artist records himself dragging his index finger

approximately one meter in length across 1,000 different surfaces in various private and public spaces—a reference to conceptual process and, more specifically, to the work of Walter de Maria.² Located nearby is Paul Wong's *Perfect Day* (2007), a video that documents the artist as he attempts to create the perfect day for himself in the midst of a drug-induced hallucination. The exhibition also includes an installation of Dierdre Logue's *Home Office* (2017), in which the artist attempts to balance standing on top of the pullout partition of her writing desk. Finally, in the middle of the exhibition space sits a sculptural work by Michael titled *Audentes Fortuna Iuvat* (2011), which roughly translates from Latin to "fortune favors the bold." The work is a crushed, warped silver trophy that rests on a mirror placed directly on the gallery floor. As such, it no longer symbolizes progress or victory and is thus rendered a useless object. Each of the works refuse narratives of transformation, self-realization, and overcoming.

JPR: All of these works were created well before the pandemic. They would be interesting at any moment, but it is rather uncanny that your exhibition took place in November and December of 2019, and within a month or two, the world was, in various stages, going into lockdown with many people finding themselves at home. Today, we can imagine ourselves engaging in any one of the activities seen in the works. They are records of a certain kind of ordinary worklessness that suggests a different rapport with oneself, with other things, and with day-to-day life.



Like the Tournier novel, these works operate without a thesis. And they do not really feature any characters. We are simply seeing individuals whose bodies happen to belong to the artists themselves. Further, they cannot be described as scenes of interiority, since the solitude of the singular bodies functions without the structure Other—the structure that would mark social difference and that would provide, as Deleuze writes, the margins and the transitions that structurally divide inside from outside, and organize the perceptual field in terms of what can be seen, what can be done, and so forth. These works, largely free of that structuring of the perceptual field, including the paranoid and reparative positions that Sedgwick describes, seem to be pursuing a kind of mundane adventure involving experiments in the body and experiments in bodily perception. They attempt to find out what might happen to a body and its perceptions if that body and its perceptions were not limited to what was merely possible. It is this reading of worklessness, as that which is outside the merely possible, that connects these works with Deleuze. What we see are individuals operating in a perceptual field that hasn't been completely structured or determined in advance.

AB: For viewers who haven't yet read the Deleuze essay, it is important to note that, for him, being in a world without Others is not guaranteed by solitude alone. It entails an entire rethinking and de-structuring of one's way of thinking and

being that cannot be defined as anything like productive. Here, I would like to highlight Deleuze's description of Tournier's Crusoe as he begins to face the crumbling of the structure-Other during his time on the island. He writes, "Pulling himself from a wallowing-place, Robinson seeks a substitute for Others, something capable of maintaining, in spite of everything, the fold that Others granted to things - namely, order and work."³ He then throws himself into a world of "frenetic" production, but, as Deleuze adds, "in line with this work activity, and as a necessary correlate to it, a strange passion for relaxation and sexuality is developed."⁴ Finally, as Crusoe inches closer to a workless existence, he enters into a state of "regression much more fantastic than the regression of neurosis [...] Whereas work used to conserve the form of objects as so many accumulated vestiges, involution gives up every formed object for the sake of an inside of the Earth and a principle of burying things in it."⁵

I am tempted to describe this fantastic regression as the scene of Logue, Wong, and Michael's, worklessness. As Deleuze writes, being in a world without Others is not simply a question of space but also of time. Worklessness can be figured in terms of a salvation from, or, an unlearning of, the oftentimes comforting yet ultimately brutal logic of capitalist temporality.

JPR: Why is it that Deleuze describes Tournier's Crusoe as perverse? Because he is, in a way,





wholly oriented towards ends but only to the extent that they provide the means to deviate from those ends. The story is not occupied by questions of origin but instead of deviation. For Deleuze, it is this deviance from that productive end, that objective, that sense of fulfillment or completion that makes the character particularly perverse.

The structure Other, or Other structuring, doesn't allow for that deviation from the end. To the extent that that end has already been preordained, what is available to us is simply a matter of the possible. The preordained end constrains, delimits, and defines what is possible. It seems that the least interesting curatorial projects will set up that sort of thematic structure and simply work to fill it with recognizable content. The Vtape residency became a means for you to research works that would not necessarily add up to anything—although, in fact, they do.

AB: The residency calls to mind the idea of a non-reparative curatorial practice that concerns neither ends nor means-to-ends. On the one hand, it is worth highlighting that *Empty History* is an ongoing project.

This particular exhibition does not signal an end. My research continues. Yet, approaching the question from a different angle, we might begin to consider how the works themselves reveal minor curatorial practices. Each individual is seen organizing the world in pursuit of pleasure for its own sake—a pursuit that remains indeterminate and illegible, that cannot be named or revealed as anything in particular. Recently, I have been

thinking about workless pleasure as an empty, open, frameless time that cannot be appropriated by the logic of the structure Other.

JPR: Within the installation, the works reinforce, and, in a certain sense, replicate one another. Insofar as each documents an individual subject engaging in this workless work, there is a kind of relentlessness that is accumulated, suggesting that one can never quite find that sense of resolve or finality. The works both support each other and amount to nothing in particular. Turning to Lucas Michael's deflated trophy cup placed in the middle of the gallery, it is as if this is the kind of award you receive for doing workless work. This may be the one object that ties the works together without really being bestowed upon any of them. Everyone's a winner and no one's a winner.

AB: I want to underline your comment about the work of worklessness. Worklessness is, despite what the term may suggest, real work. We are speaking about worklessness as a form of de-instrumentalized resistance that is expressed, for example, in the restless continuity of the performed action—whether that is Logue's desk balancing act, Wong's search for the perfect day, or Michael's invisible line drawing.

What motivates the work of worklessness, then, is a realization that the world is not so easily repaired. Non-reparative curating would be a matter of a radical embrace of the irreparable as such. It seems that this embrace should be figured as a



discipline of the mind and body—a discipline that is perverse insofar as it cannot be assimilated into the logic of capitalist temporality, the timeline of so-called progress, the world of the structure Other, and so on. Here, we begin to arrive at a particular reading of non-reparative queer curating that is based upon a taking care of indeterminate, illegible, and “empty” history.

JPR: What do we mean when we speak of the politics and ethics of the irreparable? And how should that not be confused with other things with which it is often easily confused? In the literal sense, the irreparable refers to that which either cannot be repaired or need not be repaired. It is in the sense of the latter that one often runs into trouble with those who think of this work as an apology for the status quo, or, a complicity with the way things are. In our view, this is certainly not what the politics and ethics of the irreparable is about – quite the contrary. Returning to Sedgwick’s essay, our interpretation of the irreparable does not reside in either the paranoid or reparative reading position. The perversity of queer solitude, and the way in which that perversity relates to the irreparable, opens up a space between these two, prevailing means of reading, or, to put it differently, ways of relating to others in the world.

Paranoia, following Sedgwick, is an aversion to surprise. It is a very rigid temporality, at once retroactive and anticipatory. One is paranoid about

that which is about to happen based upon some sense of the past. One is, in other words, in the future that is always already in the past. While it is perhaps more palatable, the reparative reading position is based upon the contingency of desire—that is, it still involves the various relations between subjects and objects. In this commitment to the irreparable as a form of non-reparative curating, we are attempting to move beyond paranoia and reparation.

Instead of the structure Other we are speaking about a perverse structure. This does not mean living in a world with Others but rather with otherwise Others—as Deleuze says, truly concrete Others, not phantasmatic meta-Others. These otherwise Others will always be anonymous, promiscuous, and clandestine. In fact, Deleuze writes that these otherwise Others would be so perverse that they are beyond voyeurism and exhibitionism. This completely bears upon the world of art and visibility and visibility in curating. As Sedgwick herself says, being made visible is its own form of violence, just as much as being made invisible can be.

AB: I have been thinking about the irreparable in terms of a retreat from the traditional model of queer curating—one that is firmly rooted in the logic of art historical inclusion and reparative visibility. How might we figure these ideas of worklessness and de-instrumentalized resistance within the contemporary political context?



JPR: Today, there is a paranoid consensus in which the left and the right find themselves strangely proximate to each other. This has led to a certain kind of political stasis or "civil war"—for instance, mutual accusations on both sides about the deep state, terrorism, and so forth. From the perspective of the left, elections are either about disenfranchised voters or foreign meddling, and on the right, they are about voter fraud and rigging.

We find ourselves in this incredible moment of paranoid politics. The paranoid and the reparative work hand in hand. And it is in the oscillation back and forth from the paranoid and reparative positions that the status quo is maintained. A commitment to the irreparable involves a refusal of this rhythm, which is the structure and the motor of the status quo and a certain kind of political gridlock. There is all the more need for an alternative to these two positions. This is what Deleuze offers us in his essay, as well other authors, including, in particular, Giorgio Agamben, who has been hovering in the back of our minds. A more detailed examination of his work on the irreparable and impotentiality would have to be part of a longer conversation, which we hope to have in the future. ■

Notes:

1. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You" in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 128.
2. In the artwork *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977) located in Kassel, Germany, Walter De Maria inserted a one-kilometer-long solid brass rod five centimeters in diameter, into the ground with its top reaching flush to the surface of the earth.
3. Gilles Deleuze, "Michel Tournier and The World Without Others" in *The Logic of Sense* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1993) 314.
4. Deleuze, *The World Without Others*, 314.
5. Ibid.



Adam Barbu is an independent writer and curator based in Ottawa. He holds an M.A. in Art History from the University of Toronto and is a recipient of the Middlebook Prize for Young Canadian Curators. In 2019, he participated in Vtape's The Researcher is Present residency program, which resulted in the presentation of the group exhibition *Empty History*.

John Paul Ricco is a theorist and writer working at the juncture of contemporary art, queer theory, and philosophy. Author of *The Logic of the Lure*, and *The Decision Between Us: art and ethics in the time of scenes*. Essays have appeared in *Parallax*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, *New Centennial Review*, *Qui Parle*, *Topia*, amongst others. Ricco is a featured artist in the exhibition "Intimacy: New Queer Art from Berlin and Beyond" (Schwules Museum, Berlin, until October 2021). johnpaulricco.com

