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Inter Views in Performance Philosophy

Crossings and Conversations

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Ouisconsin Eidos, Wisconsin Idea, and the Closure of Ideation

Jon McKenzie

The following is an image and text performance, composed via recombination, mixing elements from elsewhere for a specific textual event. As this volume is posed as the Anglo-American return or reverb of French Theory, and since my own initiation into such thought occurred at various US sites, I herein seek to situate my recent research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison within several foundational performances, including the history of cartography, the multimedia storytelling found in Laurie Anderson's United States: Parts 1–4, and Derrida's lecture "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," as well as May 1968 and other events at the Sorbonne—performances that themselves concern storytelling and navigating to and through sites around the world.

PART 1: WHERE I'M COMING FROM

Oui, oui, you are hearing me well, these are French words.

I'm writing today from Madison, Wisconsin, to rehearse a site-specific performance of universal knowledge, one that I call "Ouisconsin Eidos."

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My *topic* is Performance, DesignLab, and Experimental Theory, and it concerns the *place* of performance, technology, and design in higher education. My *medium* will be experimental theory, theory performed not only in alphabetic writing but in what I call “smart media”—such as this hybrid image and text performance.

I will first frame where I’m coming from in two ways: one historical and geographical, the other more theoretical, perhaps even philosophical. On the face of it, Ouisconsin Eidos is absurd: how can universal knowledge be performed at a specific site? And isn’t universal knowledge dead?

The site I’m coming from today was founded in 1848, but its infrastructure is ancient and reaches around the world. Performances of universal knowledge may be absurd yet they occur every day, 24/7, through a network of institutions we call “universities,” designed and built at such sites as Paris, Cambridge, Heidelberg, and, going way back, Athens.

Today, these sites and nearly ten thousand others form the broadcasting network of *Eidos*, of ideation, the notion that we think we think in ideas.

It’s a cosmic theater, these global performances of knowledge, for no matter how specifically situated they are geographically or conceptually, they emerge within an institutional infrastructure founded on an appeal to universal, objective knowledge based in human reason, organized into the various disciplines of the arts and sciences, and projected on, and indeed *as*, the world.

FRENCH THEORY I: DESCARTES MAPS WISCONSIN

Let me start again with where I’m coming from, using a series of maps.

In 1513, the woodcut map *Orbis Typus Universalis* by German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller appeared in the Strasbourg edition of Ptolemy’s *Geographia*, a text that dominated cartography for 1,500 years. Waldseemüller’s map is among the first to show any part of North America, what appears to be a peninsula. For my part, I was born in Florida, where I first studied French Theory, theorists whose texts made me look at stories and maps differently, revealing feedback mechanisms between French and English, strange loops that produce uncanny effects.

For example, take the term “performance.” It may sound English, yet it comes from the Old French word “*parfournir*” meaning thoroughly to furnish, provide, or do. The verb “*fournir*” comes from the Old High

German “*frumjan*,” to procure, to move forward or away: hence “from.” As in: where I am coming from, or where performance is coming from. Performance comes from “from”—really from this toing and froing or shuttling movement across time and space.

Today, the English word “performance” comes loaded with an exorbitant range of uses, so that its return to French must sound rich and strange—or be made to sound this way.

Note the navigational grid system on this map from 1650, *Amérique septentrionale* (Fig.1), designed by the French Royal Geographer Nicolas Sanson. Note also the curved grid and the empty white space. René Descartes is widely hailed as the Father of Modern Philosophy, for he rebooted Plato’s *eidos* as ideas, as clear and distinct ideal forms, as objects set before human subjects. He also invented the grid system we call “Cartesian.”

Descartes’ unification of arithmetic and geometry through the Cartesian grid also updated the ancient cartographic coordinate system invented by



Fig. 1 *Amérique septentrionale*, (1650) Nicolas Sanson. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-73021

Ptolemy. By projecting Cartesian geometry upon this grid, space could be measured and calculated in unprecedented ways—and it was—with ships, and guns, and churches, and schools. With European colonialism, the world was mapped abstractly, and then filled in with *eidōs*, with forms, with calculated, geopolitical states. Modern cartography is thus *Descartography*, a mapping of the world in geometric, ideational space.

It wasn't until 1775 that a map appeared which accurately depicted the Great Lakes nestled within the Louisiana and Pennsylvania colonies, and Canada, (Fig. 2) which the French called “New France.” French exploration and colonialism in the USA's Upper Midwest begins with Jean Nicolet arriving in 1637. This French legacy is largely forgotten in mainstream US history, as French colonialists and their Great Lake Indian allies were later defeated by British colonialists and their Algonquin allies in what Americans call the French and Indian Wars. European conflicts were mapped onto Indigenous tribal rivalries.



Fig. 2 *Partie occidentale du Canada et septentrionale de la Louisiane avec une partie de la Pensylvanie*, (1775) Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-39793

Again note the grid: this grid and the Great Lakes help us situate *Ouisconsin Eidos*—the shape of Wisconsin—within the emerging geopolitical space. Its outline was drawn in 1836. This is the site of our performance.

“*Eidos*,” of course, was Plato’s interpretation and teaching of Being as form, as visual contour or aspect. That is the Idea of ideas.

Now “Wisconsin”—with a “W”—is the Anglicized version of “*Ouisconsin*.” The archaic “*Ouisconsin*” was a French spelling of an Algonquin word thought to refer to the area’s red rock riverbanks, though its aboriginal meaning may be lost to time. The Algonquin were themselves from the New York state area. Many Indigenous peoples have long since disappeared, including the “Mesconsins,” whose name appears just below “*Eidos*.” Other tribes were displaced, and some were granted land through treaties.

Cartography and history are the showing and telling of ideational colonialism, of *Eidos* gone global: they organize modern spacetime and constitute one of the most powerful applications of that OTHER French Theory: Cartesianism. Isn’t all modern thought French Theory in this sense? And what we call post-1968 French Theory actually counter- or contra-theory? French Theory I and French Theory II?

OJIBWE PICTOGRAPHICS

A very different map is the 1851 illustration based on a Chippewa birch bark pictograph (Fig. 3). This document, signed by seven Indigenous clans, was part of an 1849 petition to the US government, asking to relocate to an area in Wisconsin that they had ceded away decades earlier.

The Chippewa or Ojibwe people used birch bark pictographs to record migrations, songs, rituals, astronomy, and maps. Here, lines connecting eyes and hearts depict the seven clans’ common vision and commitment, while also pointing toward their common purpose—and to where they’re coming from. In semiotic terms, this highly indexical diagram shows and tells where the Ojibwe are coming from: to read the signs, one must have highly contextual, site-specific experience. Cartographers contrast the indexicality or site specificity of such indigenous maps with modern, Western maps, whose grid system aspires to the abstraction of non-indexical ideation.

Our shared performance unfolds amidst this strange spacetime: *Ouisconsin Eidos* is an immanent meditation and remediation of the university, a series of micro-engagements in an institution in flux in the USA, Latin America, and much of Europe—declining research funding, privatization,

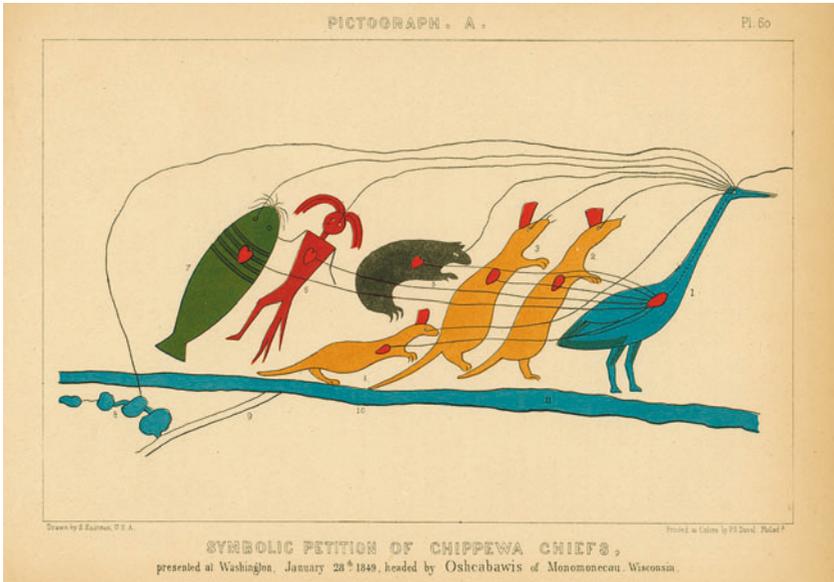


Fig. 3 Symbolic Petition of the Chippewa Chiefs, (1851) Seth Eastman. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-1871

rising tuition, management disputes, and labor protests, along with massive upheaval in information and communication technologies. In short, we are navigating an infrastructural realignment of onto-historical proportions: the closing of the book, whose logocentricism Derrida defined almost a half-century ago as the most powerful ethnocentricism the world has ever known.

How will we perform or *do* theory in the twenty-first century? What role might Performance Philosophy play? And must one do philosophy by the book? Can it—and theory—survive their incorporation by *graphie*, by plasticity, by transmediation? How might they live on?

So, this is Wisconsin: now here's where I'm coming from in terms of performance theory.

FRENCH THEORY II: DERRIDA DOES FLORIDA

My performance and theory roots are Franco-American. I first encountered performance in Florida during the mid-1980s—the height of French Theory in the USA—and I did so within two very different contexts and valences: both highly mediated.

The first was the performance art of Laurie Anderson: her epic performance *United States, Parts 1–4*. At the time, it was among the most experimental, cutting-edge performance art anywhere, mixing high-tech media, intimate storytelling, electronic music, visual art, philosophy, stand-up comedy, and a host of other forms into a powerful language of the future.

The second context was Jean-Francois Lyotard's theory of performativity, articulated in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Here, performativity refers to the postmodern legitimation of knowledge and social bonds via input/output matrices in contrast to modern grand narratives, such as those of Progress and Revolution.

Performance thus refers to the most normative and most experimental, even transgressive, practices of contemporary life: it is in two places at once. How to think it? Yet, this blur of instability has been the kernel or crystal around which I've built—and practiced—an impossible general theory of performance.

Florida was also the site of a visitation and a gift: in the mid-1980s, Jacques Derrida visited the University of Florida and read "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," which concerns the "yes" in *Ulysses*, or rather two "yeses," two "*ouis*." The translated text begins, in English, "*Oui, oui*, you are hearing me well, these are French words."¹ Derrida counts and connects the "yeses" of *Ulysses* to Nietzsche's double affirmation, coming 'round to define "yes" as a "transcendental adverbiality"² which haunts all utterances; for example, I affirm I am saying X. In this way, "yes" becomes a perfume of discourse tied to laughter, two laughs, one affirmative and active, the other negative and reactive.³

It is not far from there that we find Bloom in the local chemist, flowers and herbs, and Molly's perfumed "yeses." Derrida said that day: "I could have, and I thought about doing it for a moment, transformed this paper into a treaty of perfumes, that is, of the *pharmakon*, and titled it 'Of the Perfumative in Ulysses.'"⁴

¹ Jacques Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," in *Derrida and Joyce Texts and Contexts*, ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany: State University of New York, 2013), 41.

² *Ibid.*, 72, 80.

³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

That was Derrida's gift for me: the *perfumative*. Later, we will take up a strange, nervous laughter that haunts our perfumance today, but now let's turn from history and geography to where I'm coming from theoretically and practically, if not universally and individually.

PART 2: DESIGNLAB AND SMART MEDIA

DesignLab is a media design consultancy I direct at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (designlab.wisc.edu). My geographic and theoretical trajectories cross there, as it combines cultural, technological, and organizational performances in a specific location.

Located in a large undergraduate library, DesignLab's onto-historical mission is to *democratize digitality*, just as, in the nineteenth century, public education helped to democratize literacy. I define "digitality" as the global reinscription of oral, literate, visual, and numerate archives into networked databases *and* the accompanying changes in social organization, identity formation, and ontological orientation.

DesignLab's goal is to make media and design as widespread as writing and composition; so, to democratize digitality, we seek to *democratize design*, to bring practices such as video production, sound design, and visualization to all students, helping them learn to remediate ideas and experiences into different digital forms and build portfolios of intelligent work. One of our primary means is *smart media*.

Smart media are emerging scholarly genres that include video essays, theory comix, TED talks, and dozens of other media forms. These genres supplement the traditional scholarly genres of books and articles, and are emerging from popular culture, business, and academic contexts. In general, working in smart media involves thinking in interactive multimedia, presenting in new venues, and engaging new audiences.

At a deeper level, smart media entail a massive redesign of our experience of knowledge, and a restructuring of its underlying architecture, for smart media open a new space for thought (Table 1).

This space stretches between two machines, the ideation and the spectacle machines, whose opposition informs the Platonic roots of Western culture and our academy. Each offers a different way of organizing thought and approaching the world. Plato opposed the ideal forms and logic of literate philosophy to the heroic images and mythic stories of the oral, Homeric world. In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida shows that, for Plato, mimesis was a drug or *pharmakon* that the philosopher battled

Table 1 Ideation machine vs Spectacle machine

<i>Ideation machine</i>	<i>Spectacle machine</i>
<i>Eidos</i>	<i>Imagos</i>
<i>Logos</i>	<i>Mythos</i>
Dialectics	Mimesis
<i>Episteme</i>	<i>Doxa</i>
West	Other
University	Popular culture

with a stronger drug: dialectics. Homer's mimetic enchantment might produce *doxa* or common knowledge, but only dialectics produced true, epistemic knowledge. These oppositions have guided the West's encounter with its other and also shaped the university's relation with popular culture.

Smart media mashup these two machines: they are affective and conceptual: playful and rigorous. It may take us decades to invent digital scholarship's killer apps, the genres that could also drive thinking beyond ideation and inform Performance Philosophy: smart media are early experiments and DesignLab is a laboratory for studying and creating them.

EXPERIMENTAL THEORY

I've said that DesignLab seeks to democratize digitality by democratizing design. And through this process, I'm also hoping to *democratize experimental theory*, theory that engages its own infrastructure and thus guides us toward *post-ideational thought*. Four well-known twentieth-century texts experimented with the form of the book and, significantly, each has been remediated into other forms.

Walter Benjamin's proposed *Arcades Project* sought to produce a history of the rise of commodity culture in nineteenth-century Paris. Its method was to be the montage juxtaposition of primary texts and images in order to create flashes where historic and messianic times intersect. *The Arcade Project* has inspired many others: in the UK, the psychogeography movement consists of walks or *dérives* through rural or urban landscapes, usually recording thoughts, images, sounds, interactions, and so on. And the British filmmaker John Rogers produced a film called *Paris Arcade* based on Benjamin's own writings about Paris.

Psychogeography was also inspired by the Situationists, and a second example of experimental theory is Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. While Benjamin envisioned a montage text, Debord published both book and montage film, the latter composed of pop images accompanied by Debord's own narration. He detoured the spectacle machine in order to create a counter-spectacle.

A third example of experimental theory is *The Medium is the Massage*, the 1967 collaboration between Marshall McLuhan and graphic designer Quentin Fiore. Each two-page spread is unique, with image and text sometimes working at cross-purposes and sometimes in unison. Interestingly, McLuhan also produced an LP version of this text, with a complex sound design.

A similar collaboration is Avital Ronell's 1989 *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech*. This book is an event: each page design is unique, and it forms Ronell's signature collaboration with graphic designer Richard Eckersley. *The Telephone Book* was recently remediated into a live theater performance by Ariana Reines.

So, we have here four works of experimental theory that, in different ways, challenge the material infrastructure of ideation: the book. These experiments may seem esoteric, but let me cite some recent developments that bring the stakes into focus:

1. the widespread closing of book stores and libraries across the USA and elsewhere;
2. the crisis in academic publishing, with publishers beginning to explore other forms and media besides the book;
3. the exploration by the Modern Language Association (MLA) into whether the monograph should remain the model for doctoral dissertations. In North America, the MLA is the professional organization of literature and language departments—and when it starts to question the form of the book, something is up.

Now, despite these developments, challenging theory's logocentric infrastructure carries great risks, as they touch upon the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge, its hierarchical structure, and its protocols and criteria for evaluating students and faculty alike. The democratization-to-come of digitality, design, and experimental theory does not proceed easily. Nonetheless, such experiments generate avatars for smart media production.

PART 3: THE BOUNDARIES OF THE UNIVERSITY

Let's ease our way toward *Ouisconsin Eidos* and the level of onto-historical strata. The University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) is a public university, and guided historically by the "Wisconsin Idea," namely, that our work serves the people of Wisconsin, as expressed in the maxim: *the boundaries of the University are the boundaries of the State*.

The Wisconsin Idea originated as part of the Progressive political movement a century ago, and it was copied nationally and internationally. The heart of the original Wisconsin Idea was that our state is itself a "laboratory for democracy." The most famous and powerful advocate of the Wisconsin Idea was "Fightin' Bob" La Follette, great-grandson of Joseph La Follette, a Frenchman who fought in the American Revolution and settled in the Midwest. Robert La Follette was a Progressive Republican who served as Governor and Senator of Wisconsin, and ran for President in 1924 as the Progressive Party candidate.

Now, a central innovation of the Wisconsin Idea involved a team of researchers in the Legislative Reference Library set up in the Wisconsin Capitol. Conceived and led by UW graduate Charles McCarthy, his Library transformed the writing of legislation in the USA, basing it on expert knowledge rather than corporate patronage. McCarthy's office helped compose some of America's first laws on worker compensation, railway reform, and progressive taxation.

The Wisconsin Idea has long been a part of the University's identity and defines its core mission. It touches on the very idea of the University, on *Eidos* itself—for *the boundaries of the University are the boundaries of the State are the boundaries of Eidos*.

This is *Ouisconsin Eidos*: the displacement of the Wisconsin Idea haunts and is thus relevant to all contemporary research universities, given the highly contested political, economic, and technological forces shaping higher education today. What happens to the Wisconsin Idea in the shift from disciplinary to performance strata?

Today, UW-Madison serves the global citizens of Wisconsin, and pro-business politicians, not academic experts, dominate our state and federal governments. In early 2015, Governor Scott Walker's office sought to replace "search for truth" with "meet the state's workforces needs" in the statutes governing Wisconsin's university system (Fig. 4). Our situation, our site-specific performance, is not unique, however, as global performativity is overtaking all modern academies, not just those of our state. More

SECTION 1111. 36.01 (2) of the statutes is amended to read:

36.01 (2) The mission of the system is to develop human resources to meet the state's workforce needs, to discover and disseminate knowledge, ~~to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses~~ and to serve and stimulate society by developing develop in students heightened intellectual, cultural, and humane sensitivities, scientific, professional and technological expertise, and a sense of purpose, ~~Inherent in this broad mission are methods of instruction, research, extended training and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition.~~ Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth.

Fig. 4 Draft of Changes to Wisconsin Idea, (2015) Governor Scott Walker's office. Recreation by author

generally, what happens to modern ideation as our grand narratives of Progress and Revolution confront performance metrics for economic, social, and environmental performances? What trace of *Eidos* remains? What happens to the clarity of its contours and the play of figure/ground?

ARCHITECTURAL DIAGRAMS

In *Kafka, Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari contrast two architectural spaces, which we can map here onto disciplinary and performance strata. The first architecture is that of the tower, of transcendence and infinitude, but which is also composed of limited and discontinuous blocks. Deleuze and Guattari associate this architecture with ancient Chinese bureaucracy, but also with paranoia and the Panopticon.⁵ The tower enables surveillance of subjects' passage from one institution to another, while their bureaucratic traces remain stored in file cabinets.

The second architecture is one of hallways and sliding doorways. Its space is immanent yet finite and composed of continuous, contiguous blocks. Deleuze and Guattari associate this architecture with capitalist and socialist bureaucracies—and also with schizo-becomings. Sliding doorways open and close onto different blocks, enabling sudden jump-cuts between different power arrangements. Here, the bureaucracy—the

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), 72–80.

digital desktop network—produces the hybrid, schizo-avatars of performativity whose data flows we are only beginning to fathom.

Deleuze and Guattari stress that, in Kafka's novels, one finds both architectures at work and that these can function together. Indeed, the architectures can operate inside one another, producing a labyrinthine spacetime worthy of Borges. Here, it becomes a question of knocks on the door, forces knocking from the outside, from within.

What becomes of the Wisconsin Idea—and ideation “itself”—in such a disjointed spacetime? At the level of knowledge paradigms, building transversal networks requires passing through different power set-ups. One must practice at least two games: literate, disciplinary specialization and electronic, performative holism: holistic, holy, and holey. But this is difficult and risky because of the spacetime-lag between practices and infrastructures, that is, the disjunction between emerging modes of cultural production and the existing infrastructure of knowledge production, which has for centuries been built on books and archives.

We feel this disjuncture in uncanny ways—it is a source of nervous laughter, along with the knocks from outside.

OUT-OF-SYNC HABITS

This laughter (*oui, oui*) is marked by affirmation of and alienation from our scholarly means of production. Here are some emerging practices or modes of cultural production and the challenges they pose to traditional studies of art and culture:

- *remediation* undermines the sanctity of distinct media
- *mashup* alters our models of originality and creativity
- *collaboration* confuses our assessment of individual talent
- *crowd-sourcing* blurs the line between experts and amateurs
- *distant reading* transforms our ways of conceiving and engaging texts.

Taken together, these practices rehearse future reanimations of cultures living and dead, for better and worse. What becomes of culture in the Age of Mashup and Creative Commons?

These emerging practices have the makings of a broad transvaluation of values—a reversal and displacement of long-held, humanist values. Let us look at some long-standing institutional structures. The arts and

humanities remain organized into *monomedium fields*: literature, fine arts, music, dance.... These fields are sharply divided between *practitioners and scholars* and are often dominated by *nineteenth-century art forms*: novels, painting, classical music, ballet.... This dominance has produced an extraordinary chasm between *high culture* and *popular culture*, a chasm overseen and maintained by scholars and practitioners via the Romantic image of the *original genius*.

We can see that this familiar landscape presents many challenges to democratizing digitality within the university. Passionately held, humanist values are embedded deep in our infrastructures: in our divisions of knowledge; organization of colleges and departments; the layout of buildings, shape of classrooms, modes and media of research and learning; and our professional criteria for assessing work, training students, and hiring and tenuring faculty. These values and infrastructures hinder and often oppose emerging cultural practices, and we can sense a growing divide between traditional and emerging sets of capacities, habits, and institutions.

It is here that one hears and perhaps emits nervous laughter, echoing between “yes” and “no,” affirmation and alienation, whether one affirms or negates one side, the other or neither—and also if one tries to have it both ways. The university is not alone in resonating with this nervous laughter. We sense the crisis in many cultural and social institutions: symphonies, theaters, libraries, museums, bookstores, newspapers, the publishing and record industries, even the post office.

Paradox: the shift in the academy’s core infrastructure requires technical know-how that major research universities systematically exclude or marginalize, including areas such as performance, media, and design, which mix conceptual, aesthetic, and technical modes of making.

The university has not only marginalized the study of film, radio, and television as objects of study, it’s largely ignored the democratization of these media as *languages for argument and persuasion*, thus dramatically restricting the channels of engagement now and into the future. The challenges of training artists and humanists for the digital age are thus very complex. Perhaps we need to dig up something like *infrastructuralism*, the archaeology, deconstruction, and invention of new forms and practices of research.

This is where the theaters of Brecht and Artaud, of Grotowski and LeCompte come in, as well as all the experimental conferences, workshops, and institutional forms invented by Performance Studies, by Performance Studies International, the Hemispheric Institute, the

International Federation for Theatre Research, and our publishing co-host Performance Philosophy. Imagine if Kant and Hegel had privileged theater rather than painting and poetry! Theater is always already multimedia, collaborative, and mashed up. Imagine how different knowledge production might be!

PART 4: DEMOCRATIZING TIME TRAVEL

Let's get back to where I'm coming from: *Ouisconsin Eidos* and onto-historical formations. What becomes of the Wisconsin Idea—and ideation—in a world composed of conflicting meta-narratives and incommensurable metrics?

The academy has arguably been performing under these conditions for a century, a situation we grasp only by mixing perspectives, tools, and media—or, rather, they must grasp us, for they are the media technologies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century spectacle machines, machinic assemblages excluded from the academy, only now retooled with critical practices honed in traditions of avant-garde cinema, documentary film, and Indigenous media, of the traditions of Chick Strand, Jean Roche, and the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation.

At the intersection of smart media, gay sci fi, and disaeronautics: how does one use digital media and transdisciplinary research to navigate different onto-historical strata, to navigate different spacetimes, different universes? How does one democratize the “FROM” and “TO COME” of digitality, design, and experimental theory? Or, to cite fellow disaeronaut Ralo Mayer: HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORLDS?⁶

In fall 2013 and 2014, I scaled up the StudioLab pedagogy I've been working with for two decades, retooling it from fifteen to twenty students to over one hundred. The biggest question the course raised was: *What is the future of the past?* Like the Wisconsin Idea, what counts as “Wisconsin experience” is changing, and these changes are happening not just in Wisconsin but nationwide, even worldwide: what becomes of past and present experience when it can be designed, marketed, and critiqued on a world wide web of links and users?

⁶Ralo Mayer, “HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORLDS”. Accessed April 9, 2016. <http://manoafreeuniversity.org/howtodothingswithworlds>.

The Indigenous peoples of Wisconsin back date to 12,000 BC, and over the millennia they have produced different forms of media, such as pottery, wampam, birch bark pictographs—and, most striking of all, effigy mounds and the associated Mound Culture, which dates back about two thousand years. Little is known about Mound Culture, but it's thought that the effigy mounds in Wisconsin were sacred ceremonial sites and many, if not most, are burial mounds. Often built in the shape of animals and humanoid figures, these mounds number in the tens of thousands across southern Wisconsin, and these forms likely connected migrating clans to the lands and to the animal and spiritual worlds.⁷

At the term's end, my students' projects did indeed produce an unsettling insight, a Benjaminian flash generated by Wisconsin experiences from different onto-historical strata, even different universes, one that cracked open our own performance site: namely, *Bascom Hall, the university's main administration building, ground zero for the Wisconsin Idea, and the very site of our course lectures, was itself built atop three Indigenous effigy mounds*. Beneath our feet, in the foundation, one spiritual system was layered atop another, and we might pause a moment and reflect on the difference between the forms of *eidos* and those of effigy mounds. Platonic forms and modern ideation are purportedly abstract, universal, and non-indexical, whereas the forms of effigy mounds are literally grounded, site-specific, and highly indexical.

Is *Khora* the name for this other spiritual space? or the space in-between? or might the Greek chorus of *Khora* drown out what survives of *Ouisconsin*?

And, here, we also return to that feeling around performance, the nervous laughter of “yeses” echoing affirmation and alienation, the reverbing distance we feel between our habits and our infrastructures. According to Derrida, Havelock, and other grammatologists, the origins of Platonism are tied to alphabetic literacy, to a writing whose material infrastructure disappears before the spoken *Logos*, which disappears before the ideal *Eidos*. Returning to the Wisconsin Idea, we can now say: *the boundaries of the University are the boundaries of the State are the boundaries of the Eidos are the boundaries of Literacy*.

⁷ Patty Lowe, *Indian Nations of Wisconsin: Histories of Endurance and Renewal* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2013), 1–11.

DISASTRONAUT TRAINING

In the end, *Ouisconsin Eidos* names a cosmographic performance that recombines—for better and for worse—elements of orality and literacy, ritual and theater in order to rehearse emerging modes of digitality. It often unfolds on specific sites dedicated to universal knowledge.

Smart media, experimental theory, performance philosophy—as remixes of *eidos* and *imagos*, they connect thought and sensation in new and sometimes troubling ways, ways from beyond the human, the animal, the plant, and even the planet.

As cosmogram, *Ouisconsin Eidos* gathers and disperses.

In doing so, it offers an untimely site
 across distant times and places
 for connecting the university,
 the global ideation machine,
 the network of high performance universities,
 with multiple and perhaps
 incommensurable
 universes.

Here and there, and now, then—
 what might *Eidos* become?

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