



Offsite Origins: A Constitutive Poetics of Offsite and Post-Offsite Art Practice

fragment_doll & denpa_doll · DENPA MMXXIII · image: coyvboy

There is a standard account of how offsite art practice came to exist: it runs through post-internet sculpture, through the dual-site format and the critical infrastructure of concepts such as New Materialism and Object Oriented Ontology. In this account, offsite practice emerges from post-internet's encounter with institutional critique: documentation replaces the work, the site becomes the staging ground for the image, the gallery cedes primacy to the feed. The account is not wrong, but it is radically incomplete. It describes the moment at which offsite practice became legible and mistakes legibility for origin.

The canon this discourse produced is English-language, institutionally adjacent, centred on New York, London, Berlin; this is strangely regressive in a context where the practices in question are definitionally online and logistically distributed. One of the structural transformations networked practice was supposed to accomplish was the end of the city and the institution as mandatory aggregation point, yet the canonical account reconstitutes the same cartography in digital form,

repeating the same founding figures and critical infrastructure to which everything remains supposedly bound. The map of distributed online practice looks like the map of any contemporary art practice with a browser window open on it.

This essay proposes a corrected genealogy. The traditions it centres (the dacha/chata/cottage exhibition complex across Eastern Europe, the Japanese practice of butai tanbou, EGL and Visual Kei archive culture, underground practices in firewalled Asian cities, the early digital commons of DeviantArt and Second Life) are not precursors to the practice that post-internet discourse describes, they are constitutive of it: generating the methods, the aesthetic sensibilities, the network structures, and the philosophical positions that critical discourse later theorised from the outside and adopted as found materials.

This is a recognisable pattern in canon formation and its specific mechanism (the adoption of form without the practice that gives form its weight) produces a qualitative change in the material it handles. The danger is not misreading but *erasure of provenance*: the severing of the fragment from the Geist that formed it. Because Geist arises through specific conditions, devotions, pressures and inheritances and an irreducible relation to finitude, its severance constitutes a fundamental deficit in the way post-offsite practice is received. The canon may carry the same words but it cannot enclose the spirit.

What Images Do

It is necessary to establish what images do in networked circulation (not what they represent but how they function) because the account of the image is the foundation on which post-offsite practice rests, and this account differs from both the institutional understanding of documentation and the post-internet understanding of the image-object.

Around 2012, the website dawsonscreek.info posted an image macro reading, in all caps:

IMAGES ARE WORTHLESS. MARKET VALUE IS ABOUT SCARCITY AND IMAGES ARE NOT SCARCE. ENDLESS SCREENS, EAGER TO DISPLAY WHATEVER ENDLESS CONTENT.

A subsequent curatorial reflection on this names the two primary truths it expresses: "the fact of overabundance levelling traditional forms of value, and the aesthetic seeping out from the work (maybe surpassing it entirely), bleeding into the oils between my finger and the screen, re-congealing as an image experienced asynchronously on thousands of private screens with millions of possible contexts, access points, and virtual meanings. Likewise the value of standard institutional curation has altered as complex forms of image sorting and parsing have become entirely commonplace; we create, collect, index, archive, and process images in highly nuanced ways".

This is an account of what the image actually does as well as a description of the post-internet condition. The image is not a copy of something that exists more fully elsewhere. It is a compression: an encoding of a particular reality that, when circulated through a network of receivers, opens according to the conditions of each reception. As one curatorial statement puts it: "images are compressions; they open and close, they're coded and re-encoded through saves, shares, and circulation; as such, they're capable of carrying layers upon layers of immediately sensible holographic knowledge." The asynchronous reception of the same image across thousands of private screens does not dilute it. Each reception is a distinct instantiation, a new encoding, a new set of contexts added to its layered content.

The economic parallel to what we will describe as the dacha principle is instructive here. The dacha exhibition emerged from necessity: conditions that made institutional exhibition impossible generated the informal gathering, the rough materials, the ephemeral event and the documentation circulated within a trusted community. Necessity was the generative constraint: not a failure mode but the condition that produced the specific formal qualities of the practice. The networked image era generates an analogous constraint at the level of value: overabundance has levelled traditional scarcity-based value, rendering institutional imprimatur insufficient as a quality criterion. Freedom from the value logic that organises institutional practice is the operative condition of the work's ecstasy.

The Dacha Principle

The canonical art-historical term is "offsite." The actual tradition it names draws from dozens of words, none English, each carrying specific cultural and political histories that the English terms erase.

In Ukraine: *dacha*. The rural house, typically wooden, outside the city, where citizens retreated from collective surveillance into hermetic privacy. The dacha's function as an art site was structurally determined. Under conditions where official exhibition was ideologically controlled and unofficial exhibition carried political risk, the dacha provided distance from the official gaze, a hermetic community of trusted practitioners, and the specific poetics of the temporary gathering. Likewise in Russia, the Moscow Conceptualists conducted participatory performances in forests and fields, rarely documented and marked by the act of gathering rather than the production of objects.⁵ Their aesthetics of found debris and rough textures were not chosen for formal reasons. They were generated by the encounter between artistic vision and the conditions of necessary evasion. The dacha shows operated as the informal circulation of work through trusted networks and through the physical gathering that served both as exhibition and as its own documentation.

In Czechoslovakia, the same structural requirement produced a different word and a distinct cultural history. *Chata* and *chalupa* (cabin and countryside house) together constituted *chataření*, the Czech mass practice of weekend retreat that reached fever pitch after the Prague Spring: the city emptying every Friday afternoon into private spaces that were practically ungovernable, where cultural activity could occur outside official oversight.⁶ Integral to this constellation in the present age was the Slovak artist Nik Timková, whose practice gave the network one of its most precise early articulations of what the *dacha* principle actually produces. Exhibitions like *Invigorating Solstice Compound* or *DE SORTE QUE PLUS JAMAIS UN INSTANT SOIT MAGIQUE* staged at Prague's Olšany Cemetery in 2010 are an early instances of the *dacha* principle applied through distinctly net-native sensibility with the site chosen for its inherent content with the work understood primarily as what the site and the image between them produce.

The Prague collective A.M.180 (founded in 2003 by Jakub Hošek, Anežka Hošková and Štěpán Bolf) developed the *Creepy Teepee* festival, established 2008 at the Central Bohemian Gallery in Kutná Hora and continuing as an autonomous DIY event from 2011. This is the *chataření* principle in contemporary form: a heavily internet-connected Prague collective converging on a rural site an hour from the city built community through what they describe as "an everlasting and irrational love of arts and music." Kutná Hora is not incidental: the bone-festooned Sedlec Ossuary, the mediaeval silver-mining town's compression of the archaic and the sacred functions as constitutive content rather than backdrop. A.M.180's reach extended through AMDISCS (est. 2007 by Radoslav Zrubec), one of the primary distribution nodes for early vaporwave and net-adjacent experimental music, releasing *Coolmemoryz*, *AyGeeTee*, *Actress Pets*, *ESPRIT 空想*, and *C V L T S* at the precise moment the aesthetic was forming. *Drain Gang* (Bladee, Ecco2k, Whitearmor) performed at *Creepy Teepee* in 2017, years before the group achieved mainstream recognition and arriving through shared frequency, not through industry channels.⁷

The transmission from this practice into what became the early post-offsite network operated through direct encounters that required the receiver to already be tuned to the same frequency. The work of this period transmitted through the quality of attention it demanded: the willingness to treat an ephemeral material action as devotional rather than decorative, as a complete fragment rather than an illustration of a concept. This is how the *dacha* principle actually propagates: not through theory or critical documentation, but through the practitioner who encounters the gesture and understands immediately what it is doing and begins to make work from that understanding.

We propose the *dacha principle* as an umbrella term for the use of unsorted or obscured gathering sites as a space of hermetic exhibition-making under conditions of institutional hostility. Across Hungary: *nyaraló*. Across Poland: *domek letniskowy*. Across Finland: *mökki*. Across the Baltic states: *suvila*, *sēta*. Each word names the same structural practice.

The network that cohered around these events is made visible in *The Days Are Just Packed* (September 2020), a two-day offsite show curated by Ece Cangüden and Marian Luft at THE POOL on Heybeliada: a car-free island in the Sea of Marmara, accessible only by ferry from Istanbul. The show's poem names it directly: "*The physical manifestation of our online beings / as*

a fluid leaking out of the digital purgatory... Dear post-social primates / you are the territory / even if you are far / you can be close."⁸. A distributed gathering cohered simultaneously around Rhizome Parking Garage (co-founded by Ian Bruner and Noah Travis Phillips), which prompted artists to stage exhibitions through a network of parking garages; each a universal non-site. This is the dacha principle applied to the most ubiquitous of secondary infrastructures, across the US, Europe, Turkey, Hong Kong, and Australia.

This surfaces too on the Dalmatian coast in Tea and Marta Strazicic's Burned Forest Black Metal (Mosor, Croatia, 2014): a gathering of costumed figures, internet-sourced images, and improvised installations on ground blackened by summer wildfire, the ash and scorched terrain functioning not as backdrop but as medium: the site chosen precisely because it was unsorted, strange, and charged with its own content.

The British, American and European rave scenes of the 1980s and 1990s operate on parallel terms. The warehouse, the field, the quarry are activated through hermetic community formation. The event constituted what Hakim Bey would call a Temporary Autonomous Zone: seized, intensified, and deliberately dissolved before it could be institutionalised.⁸ The flyer stood as primary image-object circulating through trusted networks before the gathering and as devotional document after. The visual vocabulary of kandi bracelets, hand-stitched patchwork, iridescence and color was the initiation costuming. The rave disperses back into the network as rumour and image, its only record the photographs that circulated among those who were there.

The dacha principle again appears at Dreamtime Village (West Lima, Wisconsin, est. 1991): an intentional community founded by artists mIEKAL aND and Elizabeth Was as the physical base for Xexoxial Endarchy, a non-profit arts network whose operations spanned experimental publishing, mail art, and interactive hypermedia for Macintosh computers alongside experimental small-scale permaculture, earthworks ("a bird-operated time machine in a 25 ft blue glass tower"), and what they describe as "creative solutions to environmental problems." Xexoxial Editions produced visual poetry chapbooks and audio art distributed through the browser and the mail. Here the rural commune is the necessary base for the distributed network: the physical gathering, the shared land, the gourd crop and the bonfire as the conditions that made the hypermedia practice possible.

Fluxus scored these methods early: the event score as primary form, the work existing in its documentation and re-enactment rather than in any singular object, the deliberate routing of practice through postal networks, small press distribution, and international correspondences rather than through gallery infrastructure; Maciunas's anti-institutional conceptualism is grounded as operational method.

The digitally expanded castle / cabin is the heir to this practice. One example is Mariyasha's Cabin (2022), *"a two-room cabin connected to the internet, open for exhibitions monthly,"* described as *"a collection of save-states irl"*. This is the dacha principle condensed online: the hermetic gathering site extended into archival availability through the network. Its theology is stated plainly: *"You can't exit the internet to reality, the Exit is thru the internet, to return from*

hyperreality. When you close your eyes, what you're seeing is cyberspace. Screens are portals thru the metaphysical, and everything is real and I love you." The internet is the cabin's extension into the permanent present, and the permanent present is where the gathering has always been trying to lead us.

The firewall underground

The dacha principle does not require the countryside. Its spatial form is determined by the available margin: wherever necessity opens a gap that practice can occupy. In 2000s Shanghai, this meant descending rather than retreating: the concrete basement, the disused shopfront, the rooftop after the venue below was shut down. The urban underground is the dacha turned inside-out: centripetal where the chata is centrifugal, burrowing into the city's own forgotten infrastructure rather than escaping to the rural edge.

Genome 6.66Mbp, founded in 2016 by Tavi Lee and Kilo Vee, expresses this in concentrated form. When Shelter, an iconic Shanghai club in a converted air-raid bunker, closed on New Year's Eve 2016, the nascent experimental scene lost its home. Genome transferred the community into rotation, moving from venue to venue and building its network through frequency-recognition: cold-messaging producers with tiny followings in Japan, the Americas, the Czech Republic, and Belgium, "online friends or producers I liked that I met/found out about and contacted on SoundCloud". Aesthetic and network are inseparable, both generated from the condition of operating inside a monitored system. The same logic ran through Basement6, co-founded by Katy Roseland, a raw concrete bunker on Huashan Lu whose 'richest currency' was neither money nor prestige but the network itself: the capacity to route an artist or collaborator through a community that cannot be found by conventional means. 'Entering Basement6 is always like the first time, like walking into an open grave just as a circus is about to begin.'

What these practices produced was a particular and generative visual culture. The motifs that characterised it (hypercollaged, text-overlaid, simultaneously hectic and gloss-finished, highly responsive to scroll and operating at the pace of rapidly proliferating micro-aesthetics) were generated by the interaction of specific pressures that had to be present simultaneously. The site pressed into the work: the bunker's concrete, the rooftop's exposure, the wet market's neon were not backdrops but active materials that shaped formal decisions at the level of texture, colour, and spatial logic. The community's material conditions pressed into the aesthetic: found objects, wildly DIY construction, improvised fashion and market hyperabundance produced specific formal qualities through necessity. And the network's circulation logic pressed into the visual language: the site's constitutive charge was forced through the narrow aperture of screen resolution and circulation speed. What emerged from that was a new aesthetic register: dense, lightning-in-a-bottle, more formally impactful than either the site or the screen alone could have

produced.

Such practitioners did not arrive at the bunker or the wet market as blank slates; they brought with them a screen-saturated eye that recognized these physical sites as environments capable of matching the density and texture they needed. This was further codified through specific post-production conventions that functioned not as filters but as essential formal grafts. Where traditional art documentation strives for a neutral, archival transparency, these edits acted upon the viscosity of the image, aligning the raw textures of the site with the produced semiotics of the post. The essential thing is the feedback loop between these pressures: the aesthetic that emerges from the site and the materials is amplified and mutated by the circulation logic; this attracts more practitioners operating at the same frequency; their work develops the aesthetic further and it circulates further still. This is how visual culture is produced by specific interactions whose formal qualities are constitutive of what later becomes mainstream visual language.

Shanzhai Lyric, initiated in 2015 by Ming Lin and Alexandra Tatarsky, takes its name from the Chinese for 'mountain hamlet': the outlaw stockpile beyond government reach. Their archive of over 400 poetry-garments sourced from informal markets across Asia and its diaspora and shared memetically through social media makes the principle literal: the bootleg garment is already a distributed, collectively authored object, carrying fragments of English accumulated through anonymous labour and accidental translation - *'DREPM THE WOELD, NOT A FOHOWER, Welcome to The Recession Forecas Interest Rates Financial Crisis Capital Investment Anxiety Deepens'* - that no single author intended as poetry and that functions as poetry anyway and gains charge with each new hand that touches it.¹⁴ The same itinerant logic runs through Elaine W. Ho's Display Distribute (Hong Kong, 2015–ongoing): a roving shop and publishing platform investigating bottom-up organisation amidst global trade, moving through the same margins that have refused fixed ground.

These practices share a specific economic logic: the conversion of the cheap-rent or zero-rent marginal space into a site of cultural intensity. What was a yī kuài store, a wet market, a noodle shop, a wartime bunker, a disused office (spaces available because capital has moved on, or has not yet arrived, or is held at bay by bureaucratic opacity) becomes the site where a different kind of value accumulates. The poetics emerge from the constraint. The exterior firewall and the interior tier-system of the city generate the conditions of necessity: community built from shared frequency because no other resource is available.

In 2018, the exhibition WET by Malaysia-based curatorial project Haunt Collective was staged simultaneously at a local wet market and a converted bus depot operating as gallery space. The group exhibition included Monia Ben Hamouda, TARWUK, Brenna Murphy, Martin Kohout, Bora Akinciturk and others: practitioners central to the Post-Internet canonical lineage who nonetheless recognised the frequency across the gap and crossed it. The works were produced through the wet market's own logistics: blueprints sent via email, local printing, rough approximations from available materials, essentially comprising shanzhai artifacts. When the exhibition closed the works disintegrated back into the market. The accompanying publication proposed a practice of staying with the *E Gui*, the Hungry Ghost, without being subsumed by it.

House-D12 (Airport Biennale, Guangzhou, 2019) was a visual installation by Wang Newone with sound design by Felicita inside a century-old Lingnan village house in Fenghe Village, Baiyun District, scheduled for demolition by local government after the exhibition closed is both the no-tier condition and the dacha principle in their most concentrated form. Suspended between nightclub ritual and funeral rite, large-scale silhouettes in subcultural fashion were cast in atmospheric light behind sheer curtaining, spiked sculptures rested against salvaged brocade lace, incense still burned in the ancestral shrine outside. The site pressed into every aesthetic decision and the work simply held the frequency until the building came down.

The DEADSTOCK programme (死寂工作室, 2019-2020) staged hyperstitional raves in no-tier Chinese cities and fashion editorials assembled from deadstocked garments on industrial rooftops. Its core concept named the logistics-aesthetic condition: 'every trend is already deadstocked: infinite microgenres are minted from the constant recombination of prior forms and industry supplies products at an even faster pace than the desires they service.' Alongside this is a taxonomy of what the practice called "No-Tier aesthetics", understood within the context of (无级 wú jí): the factory towns, development zones, and hinterlands existing outside China's city-tier ranking system entirely while serving as its production base. A hyperstition methodology of No-Tier aesthetics was included in the curatorial brief: 'producing a particular shift merely by spreading the idea that it has already happened'.

This is crystallized in Cellophane Mother Memory (Corpsesimulacrum, Tsim Sha Tsui, 2019): "You're hovering in the eye of a knockoff Real with cheap HD edges: the neon tube lights are made in Shenzhou or Guangdong. Split up and sold again, installed in fixtures in endlessly subdivided rooms in the endlessly micro-dividing chain of logistics. You're always calculating your profit: lovemaxxing MOQ to retail (...) but at the end of the day all of the flows are residue." This writing is produced from inside the logistics chain and thinking in its units because those are the actual conditions of practice. The knockoff Real is what the original reveals itself to be when you look at it clearly enough.

Corpsesimulacrum explicitly operated through a practice with a specific Chinese name: 装B (*zhuāng bì*), the art of infiltrating upscale spaces under false pretences, producing photographs that circulate as if the infiltration were real. 装B names something broader in Chinese internet culture, to perform class mobility convincingly enough that the performance produces its own reality. Corpsesimulacrum's use of it was deliberate: entering spaces, documenting the occupation, releasing the images into networks that understand exactly what is being done.

This modality was converged upon synchronously by Amalia Ulman's Excellences and Perfections, a five-month scripted performance in which Ulman photographed herself in hotels, restaurants, and luxury spaces she had infiltrated. Both the Chinese underground's infiltration practice and Ulman's project arrived at the same formal operation from different conditions: what Ulman staged as institutional critique, 装B practitioners perform as distributed practice generating constitutive poetics from necessity.

Butai Tanbou: stage exploration

Butai tanbou (舞台探訪, "stage exploration") is an investigative and photographic practice with a genealogy that predates the material it is now applied to by several centuries. It is not tourism nor cosplay nor fandom behaviour in any dismissable sense.

The practice divides into two related but distinct activities. Seichi junrei (聖地巡礼, "pilgrimage to sacred places") is the broader category: the physical act of travelling to a real-world location that served as the setting or background source for a scene in anime, manga, or visual novel. Butai tanbou is more specific: the practice of identifying locations without pre-existing guides or maps, using only the visual evidence present in the animated frame (landmarks, shadows, road signs, architectural details, the quality of light at a specific time of day) and then travelling to the location and producing a photograph precisely matching the original cut: same camera height, same composition, same focal length equivalence, same quality of light.¹⁷ The practitioner who first identifies and documents a location is called a pioneer (先駆者) within the community. The pioneer's photograph is both the proof and the beginning of the site's communal life.

The formal operation this produces is a *devotional superimposition*: the animated image and the physical site held in the same frame, verifying that the fictional world and the real world overlap at a specific coordinate. The landscape is a physical save slot: a location in the real world that stores a narrative state from a fictional one, to which the practitioner returns in order to reload the experience. The save slot is the location's function and the photograph is the save file. The community maintains databases of save slots cross-referenced to the specific cuts from which they were identified, annotated with route, required time of day, and access considerations: a form of distributed knowledge archive that database scholarship often describes at the structural level without naming the devotional practices that generate it.

The Please Teacher! anime (2002) prompted pilgrimages to Lake Kizaki in Omachi City, Nagano Prefecture; local residents became involved in community beautification alongside the fan community. The first formal Butai Tanbou Summit was held at Lake Kizaki on 12 April 2008. Lucky Star (2007) sent large numbers of practitioners to Washinomiya Shrine in Saitama Prefecture (one of the oldest Shintō shrines in the Kantō region, patronised by the Tokugawa shogunate) where the anime's characters serve as miko. The head of the shrine expressed concern that visitors were "worshipping deities other than the shrine's own." The visitors were confirming that the fictional world and the sacred site occupy the same coordinates, and documenting that confirmation.

Higurashi no Naku Koro ni's multiple-chapter structure is set in Hinamizawa, a village directly modelled on Shirakawa, the UNESCO World Heritage mountain hamlet in Gifu Prefecture. Butai

tanbou-sha have documented the superimpositions between Hinamizawa's animated streets and Shirakawa's physical ones across all of the series' narrative iterations: the same locations mapped across multiple incompatible timelines, each photographic documentation adding another layer to the archive.

Okamoto explicitly warns that commercialisation and institutionalisation risk diluting the "mystery solving and hacking elements" that make butai tanbou attractive to its practitioners.¹³ He characterises the Anime Tourism Association (founded in 2016 to link anime works with regional tourism revenue) as "an attempt to oppose the spontaneity of fans like never before." The practice generated its own institutional appropriation from within its own domain, following the same tri-phase structure this essay identifies throughout: the pioneer community develops the practice through shared frequency and devotional intensity; it achieves visibility through specific high-profile instances; institutions arrive to systematise what they did not initiate. The save slot becomes a waypoint on an official tour route.

Butai tanbou's art-historical genealogy runs even deeper than the post-war anime that provides its immediate material. The tradition of meisho (名所, "famous places") and meisho-e (名所絵, "pictures of famous places") extends through the Edo period and earlier: woodblock illustrated guidebooks, then prints, then the great series of Hiroshige, One Hundred Famous Views of Edo, Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaido Highway, in which the artist travels to specific sites and produces the image that encodes the place's emotional and literary associations for circulation.¹⁴ The uta-makura tradition too: place-names embedded in classical poetry that carry specific emotional resonances developed through centuries of use, so that naming the place names the feeling, and travelling to the place is travelling into a palimpsest of accumulated literary inscription. Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* (1694) is the supreme instance: a journey whose entire logic is a communion with the physical landscape that embeds the literary one.

The practice extends readily into the landscape of video games built from real locations. Bloodborne's Yharnam, drawing heavily on Central European Gothic architecture, has generated its own pilgrimage community: players identifying specific streets, doorways, and stairwells in Prague and other Bohemian cities as the source coordinates for the game's environments, travelling there to produce the superimposition photograph, often including cosplay and other elaborations. The save slot requires only a fictional world dense enough with real-world derivation that the practitioner can reverse the process of its construction.

Butai tanbou is this established tradition applied to the contemporary fictional landscape. In each instance the practitioner travels to inhabit the fictional world that occupies real coordinates, produces the image that holds both realities simultaneously, and adds it to the distributed archive of documentary devotion.

EGL, Visual Kei and the photoset

\Elegant Gothic Lolita and Visual Kei require a section of their own because what they constitute has not been adequately theorised in any account of offsite or post-offsite practice: they are among the first communities to systematically develop the photographed outfit (the complete styled image of the dressed body in a chosen environment) as a primary form of cultural production, distributed through the network with its own formal criteria, archive and community infrastructure, preceding fashion-editorial culture's engagement with these aesthetics by over a decade.

Visual Kei: the Japanese rock-adjacent subculture organised around extreme costuming, baroque historical references, and the total aestheticisation of the performer's body, developed through bedroom practice, isolated fan communities, and specific club scenes before cohering into a visible street formation. The Jingūbashi bridge in Harajuku became a concentrated public node, where proto-bangya gathered in the late 1980s and early 1990s to photograph each other dressed to complement or replicate their favourite bands. This is also the constellation that *Fruits* magazine (est. 1997) made internationally legible through distributed images. Mana, guitarist of Malice Mizer and founder of the *Moi-même-Moitié* brand, refused to speak in public, whispering answers into bandmates' ears, maintaining absolute visual silence: an example of the *chumra* principle (explained later in this essay) in biographical form: the volatile sacred symbol protected by managed illegibility.

The Chinese *shamate* (杀马特) runs in parallel. Emerging in the mid-2000s among migrant workers in second and third-tier cities who developed extreme personal style through internet cafes and QQ communities, *shamate* produced its own elaborate visual vocabulary and network of mutual recognition entirely through shared frequency and necessity. Its subsequent treatment by urban Chinese internet culture: ridicule, then ironic distance, then belated recuperation, follows the same arc we have described and its geography makes the point even more deeply of a formation that was happening inside the conditions of exclusion the canonical account cannot see. The EGL community on LiveJournal, active from the early 2000s was an early large-scale online community organised around the image of the dressed body as the primary cultural object. The *coord* (coordinate: the complete assembled outfit, documented photographically, posted to the community for response) is the community's primary formal unit. The vocabulary the community developed and maintained is elaborate and precise: the difference between an OP and a JSK, between OTK and UTK socks, disambiguated between brand silhouettes and their period associations, is a shared language whose navigation constitutes the competence membership requires. Barthes observed in *The Fashion System* that fashion's meaning is produced not by the garment but by the written description of it. The EGL community generated exactly this system and extended it equally into making: tutorials for garment construction, petticoat architecture, accessory fabrication, and headpiece assembly circulated first through fanzines produced within the community, then through user-uploaded guides. The community taught itself to build the thing it was documenting simultaneously.

This archival and constructive impulse ran in parallel across the broader otaku formation. Doujinshi communities developed their own self-publishing infrastructures, taxonomies, and distribution networks through conventions, webrings and their satellites. Visual novel databases like VNDB built volunteer-maintained encyclopedic archives cross-referencing titles, routes, character tags, and release histories with the same distributed labour and connoisseurial precision as the EGL catalogue of every colorway and re-release of every dress, exemplified in personal archive sites like Ferro Ashley's ita.toys. Yunah Hong observes that lolitas "tend to value encyclopedic knowledge, dropping connoisseur information about brands, specific prints, and dress styles into highly specialized conversations." This is the same formation across multiple domains: the community archive as devotional practice, knowledge production as a form of care for the thing that is loved.

The physical gathering (the tea party, the meetup, the photoshoot) functions within the community as the butai tanbou photograph functions within its: the devotional superimposition of the interior world onto a chosen physical site, producing the image that carries the encounter forward. What the EGL meetup produced was a full-scale community fashion editorial: practitioners arriving with coordinated outfits, handmade props, styled environments, chosen locations whose architectural or atmospheric content pressed into the work. The photogenic site was essential; the community's event-planning guides noted that venues should be chosen partly for their photographic potential. These meetups as well as the informal photosets of individual practitioners produced images that were circulated to the community, archived and drawn on as visual vocabulary for future coords: fashion editorials in every meaningful sense, produced collaboratively with formal rigour and aesthetic intentionality, a decade and more before the styles they developed appeared in professional editorial contexts and before this kind of elaborately staged personal image-making became standard practice on any mainstream platform.

The bangya photography culture that concentrated at the Jingūbashi bridge and moved online through Japanese fan communities in the early 2000s generated its own rigorous documentation and style analysis: not "gothic" in the generic sense but the distinction between kote-kei, angura-kei, oshare-kei etc, each with its own visual grammar and community of practitioners. This is exactly the internal vocabulary the canonical account strips away when it absorbs these particulars as "aesthetic tendencies."

We propose the coord-archive as the complete fragment: every element assembled into a specific configuration, internally coherent and sealed, legible to the community whose interior vocabulary makes that legibility possible. The random observer sees an elaborate costume. The community sees a specific combination of pieces from a specific aesthetics and eras, assembled in a specific relationship to a specific sub-style's formal grammar, evaluated against criteria developed across a decade and a half of collective production, built by the hands that are wearing it.

The Hikikomori as producer

The hikikomori: the one who has withdrawn from society into the intensive cultivation of an interior world, typically within a specific room organised around specific media, icons, aesthetic relationships, and devotional practices, appears in the standard account as a subject of concern, a social phenomenon, a fascinating archetype or a pathology. We propose instead that the hikikomori producer's room is the site of a specific form of production that generates complete fragments without requiring institutional participation to do so.

The hikikomori-producer sits alongside another figure whose existence is constitutive of the argument and whose treatment by the canonical account is its most precise indictment. The lolcow, internet slang for a figure whose output, personality, or interior world is so fully externalised and so specific that it becomes a site of communal observation, is the hikikomori-as-producer in their most exposed form. Their room is entirely open and the room inevitably contains more than the observers bargained for.

The observer's positions describe a hermeneutic: despise, ironize, explain, recuperate. The DeviantArt practitioners who built complex visual systems across decades for their original characters with genuine rigour (character-sheet conventions, commission-sheet structures, elaborate lore) or the Second Life devotees who built entire virtual worlds received this treatment throughout the 2000s. The LiveJournal poets who produced thousands of entries, developing idiolects and lyric procedures entirely their own, received it simultaneously. Gothic King Cobra (Joshua Saunders, 1991–2025), the Casper, Wyoming YouTuber who across more than 5,000 videos developed a complete cosmology, gothic wizard persona, wand-making practice, food theology, original music and a running metacommentary on the trolling directed at him, was, for most of his online life, simply encountered as content to be milked for reactions. His output was prolific, cross-competency, and formally consistent across years: exactly the qualities the canonical account later learns to call desirable in a practitioner.

Another instance of this pattern is to be found in the work of Anna Matskevich, known online as refbatch, a Russian woman who, since the early 2000s, has uploaded more than 50,000 videos to her YouTube channel accompanied by fragmented English-Russian text, producing what one fan account describes without exaggeration as "one of the most ambitious and beautiful visual and textual documents ever produced." The videos document: ranting at strangers, dancing in snowy forests, performing slow hypnotic arm movements in lakes and rivers, relaying cosmological accounts of persecution connecting plane crashes, earthquakes, and events in the news to incidences in her life, frost-bitten feet, sleep deprivation, an internet that crashes. The typos are constitutive: *EVEN NOW, THROUGHSLEEPING I SHPOULDTYPETHIS*. The grammar enacts the condition it describes. She declares that *a woman female object had ceased to exist* in 1999, leaving only a residual shadow whose function was to transmit. *The fighter of removed is representing to you its fight*.

The specific torment visited on these practitioners by the canonical account is not merely exclusion, it is exclusion followed by opportunistic mining. Their formal innovations: prolific archival production across multiple competencies, database-building as primary artistic method, complex personal cosmologies distributed across thousands of individual posts, the online platform as the primary and only necessary site of a complete artistic practice, are precisely the skills and methods that the institutional critical world now describes as desirable and theorises as post-internet innovations. Despised, then ironized, then explained in frameworks that did not account for the practice's own terms, then recuperated as vocabulary and surface aesthetic. The recuperators might be adversarial or sympathetic but both perform the same motion: the systematic extraction of method and material from the conditions that produced it.

The discourse this produces is a form of glossolalia: the syllables of the practice enunciated with apparent fluency, the rhythms and surfaces reproduced with increasing precision, but without the interior formation that would make them mean anything: what Saussure would recognise as *parole* without *langue*, the utterance severed from the system of differences that gives utterance its meaning.³² One can learn to speak a language through repetition alone: to produce its sounds in the correct order, to observe its grammatical conventions and even to be understood by those who share only its surface. What one cannot acquire this way is the knowledge of what one is actually saying.

Unstable Ancestral Symbols

There is a specific problem in working with the icons the hikikomori room is constituted by: the dolls, anime sprites, devotional imagery, the aesthetic vocabulary of EGL and Visual Kei and otaku practice. The problem is not merely that these materials are misunderstood by those outside the formation. It is structural: these symbols are unstable. They carry specific charge accumulated through the communities that formed around them; they attract entity attachment (the projection of desire, mockery, appropriative affect) precisely because their intensity is legible even to those who cannot decode what it means. They can be extracted from their devotional context and flattened into aesthetic surface: the doll becomes a signifier of the uncanny, the anime girl becomes a brand identity, the geocities aesthetic becomes nostalgia. The symbol is again reproduced without the formation that gave it its charge.

The problem is stated in the Chinese-language writing of mari1314, a theorist-practitioner working in the field of moeontology, who names these icons unstable ancestral symbols and asks:

"how do we use them in the open network? How do we avoid entity attachment when experiencing personal and impersonal states? How do we circumvent some of the inherently

hostile forces of cybernetics while still adhering to its own logic?"

The answer proposed by presently active communities within this constellation is the swamp and the chumra. Chumra, the Kabbalistic principle of building a fence around something sacred before releasing it, names the protective logic. You do not release the sacred thing directly into hostile circulation. You build the fence first; you release the thing into the protected space the fence creates; the fence is what the extractive network encounters, not the thing. The swamp, the protective thicket of visual noise, animated gifs, layered aesthetic complexity, deliberately obscured navigation, is the fence in operation. The icons are scattered into public circulation only after being nested in sufficient visual density. This density is not decoration; it is not even primarily a style. Instead it is an infrastructure for the safe circulation of sacred materials through a network whose default operation is extraction and flattening.

The deeper logic: the swamp is egregore-training, the deliberate construction of an attractor that, when repeated, generates a protective field through which volatile symbols can move without being captured. "In the thick of the algorithm, image-posting is like egregore-training; you float out an attractor and you see what coheres around it, and eventually it settles into a more or less recognizable form or tendency distributed across multiple artworks and practices." The swamp is the accumulated aesthetic output that constitutes sacralized territory.

Its visual texture is aggressive by design: the craggy edge and blade motifs are simultaneously protection and weapon, thicket and thorn. That a generation formed by gaming finds these forms immediately attractive and memetically transmissible is the fence working as designed. The outside account that reads this geometry through shape language (the design methodology by which concept artists produce legible surfaces for mass audiences) is not wrong about what it sees but it is wrong about what seeing it means. The blade is not a decorative tendency absorbed from Final Fantasy. It is a ward, functioning as equipment with a specific purpose, worn by those who know what they are facing. Over time the fence and the garden become difficult to separate from the outside, which is exactly the point.

This generates a specific and consequential failure mode for the interpreter. The observer who arrives and maps the fence, noting its materials and methods, has produced an accurate account of the fence but they have not produced an account of what the fence surrounds. The motifs the canonical account identifies as constitutive of this practice are the motifs of the gate, which is actually just the egregoric noise pattern developed to house the actual signal. The "Dark Eco" vocabulary is not an aesthetic tendency; it is the protective atmospheric density that surrounds the devotional content. The "Sigil Formalism" (the specific quality of edge and darkness that marks this work visually) is the fence's appearance from the outside. Described accurately, it produces not the work but its outline. What distinguishes the interior from the surface is not visible in these motifs.

The error runs deeper than misidentification and inverts the structure of what carries what. Its argument runs: the offsite format is the vehicle; photodocumentation artifacts are the medium;

sigil formalism is the content: what the work aesthetically is. But the photodocumentation format is not a neutral vehicle for an aesthetic tendency and “sigil formalism” is not the content but the carrier wave: the aesthetic modulation at which the interior content is transmitted, recognisable to receivers already tuned to that frequency, but not the substance being transmitted.

What the work actually is: the devotional formation, the specific relationship to the icons accumulated through the practice's conditions and inheritances, the moeontological claim about what these images are and why they matter. Adopt the register without the formation and you have the carrier wave with no signal on it: a perfectly accurate reproduction of the frequency, transmitting nothing. This is why we inevitably see the cartographers of “Dark Eco”, a few years later, attempting to handle the ancestral symbols directly as aesthetic surfaces (the dolls, the anime girls, the sprites), with the carrier wave still mistaken for the signal and the fence still mistaken for the garden.

Chun's insight that software cultivates opacity through its separation of "interface from algorithm, smiling surface from hidden process" applies here with an important inversion: where software's opacity serves the interests of power (hiding the algorithmic processes that govern us behind friendly interfaces), the swamp is the frequency-separator: it passes signal to those who can receive it and returns aesthetic noise to everyone else.

The naming conventions themselves enact a distinction. The '-core' suffix that's been developed within these communities names an attractor: dollcore, angelcore, goblincore, traumacore are not closed taxonomies; they are indices of affect / object / atmosphere that cohere around a shared frequency. The suffix proliferates because it is generative and phatic rather than closed and analytical. The same naming logic operates in -kei (系): oshare-kei, angura-kei, mori-kei etc: each names a lineage in the practice that is open to extension internally.

'____-formalism' operates by opposite logic. The suffix -formalism adds pseudo-academic gravity to what is functionally a visual simile: 'looks like sigils', 'looks like anime': phrases engineered for maximal institutional uptake precisely because it requires nothing from the receiver except pattern recognition. It takes the visual surface of a formation, names it in art-critical vocabulary, and produces a taxonomy that is thesis-ready and superficially legible. The difference between 'doll formalism' and 'dollcore' is a difference of direction: one names in order to contain, the other names in order to generate.

Corecore is the community's own meta-commentary on this: the deliberate assembly of core-content into affective overload, maximum semantic drift, the attractor that names the attractor-mechanism itself.⁴⁴ The para-academic meta it generated was produced internally, then scraped and adapted with the speed that characterises institutions struggling for relevance in formations they cannot originate. But the fence is still standing.

There is no site i love you

The traditions surveyed in this essay do not share an aesthetic, they share an ontological account of the image. In each of these practices, the image is not the record of something that existed more fully elsewhere. It is the destination toward which the practice moves: the compression that carries the encounter forward into an indefinite asynchronous future.

This is not to say that images carry fixed meanings recoverable only by the correctly initiated. The same holographic model that corecore made explicit (the assembly of images whose accumulated charge produces an affective state that exceeds and destabilises any single intended meaning) names the fullest expression of this. The image opens differently on every private screen not because some openings are correct and others are not, but because each reception is a genuinely distinct instantiation. What the constitutive traditions surveyed here developed was not a claim to singular meaning but a specific practice of tuning: building the conditions under which particular kinds of opening become possible.

The holographic model is precise. A hologram stores information across its entire surface such that any fragment of it contains the whole, at reduced resolution. The post-offsite image operates analogously: the full weight of the encounter, the site and the interior world that produced it is folded into the image and carried forward. When the image is received (on a private screen, at an unknown hour, in an unknown location) it opens according to the conditions of that reception, adding a new layer of context to what it carries. The image accumulates meaning through circulation rather than losing it.

This modality is different from the gallery's temporal logic, which is synchronous and site-bound: you are in the room, at the same time as others, in the presence of the object. Post-offsite temporality is the opposite: the image is circulated across unknown horizons, re-situated and returned to. The work deepens through time rather than being complete at the moment of exhibition.

Benjamin identified that mechanical reproduction severs the work from its embeddedness in tradition, withering the aura that depends on unique presence. The practices in this essay do not mourn this severance; they take it as the given condition and build from it. The relevant question is what kinds of provenance exist when both authorship and aura are unavailable. The answer these practices arrive at is that of constitutive poetics: of the specific conditions and devotions that produced the work. This authority is not in the image, nor in the relationship between image and viewer as Berger and Barthes propose, but in the relationship between the image and the tuned receiver that recognises what it carries.

physical intervention as devotional superimposition

Post-offsite practice is not exclusively online. Physical interventions occur within it; their occurrence is philosophically necessary, but they do not occur for the same reasons that gallery exhibitions occur.

The offsite exhibition (in Kwon's account) occurs relationally: it happens not-in-the-gallery, and the gallery's absence is constitutive of what it is. Even at its most deterritorialised, Kwon's nomadic practice is still defined by its departure from the institutional norm.²⁸

Post-offsite physical intervention is neither of these. It occurs because bringing the interior world into contact with physical reality is philosophically necessary: the same necessity that drives the butai tanbou practitioner to Lake Kizaki, the same necessity that drove Nik Timková to scatter glitter in the snow as a serious artistic gesture, the same necessity that drove the Moscow Conceptualists into the fields outside the city. The necessity is devotional and epistemological: the fictional world must be verified against the real world; the interior world must leave a trace in the physical; the gathering must happen at a specific place and time so that its reality can be confirmed and then released into the image that carries it forward.

The physical intervention in post-offsite practice is thus a devotional superimposition in the butai tanbou sense: the interior world brought into the same frame as the physical site, the image that holds both simultaneously produced, and the image released into circulation. The recurring format of artworks placed in found sites (fields, forests, cemeteries, parking garages, industrial spaces), photographed in the site's own light, documented and circulated, is this operation at curatorial scale. The resulting image is not documentation of an installation. It is the work: the compression that holds the encounter between the interior world and the physical site, released into asynchronous circulation where it will continue to open.

The formal impact of this account is visible in a work like nana825763's *My House Walkthrough* (YouTube, 2016): a twelve-minute walk-through of a derelict house, filmed in a single take with no framing beyond the footage or context beyond the upload. It has accumulated hundreds of thousands of asynchronous receptions, each a distinct instantiation on a private screen. Described by the creator: "This is not horror video. This video was created simply by filming inside my house." The gap between that description and what the work becomes in circulation, that turns a YouTube upload into a narrative artifact, is the compression this practice embodies.

The phenomenology of such a practice has its own specific texture. The gallery becomes redundant not as a theoretical proposition but as a lived condition: reciprocity is established between environments and the visual conventions absorbed through documentation, so that certain qualities of light, iconography, or the post-processing signatures of specific software (a particular color grade, a filter's compression artefact, specific digital brushes, the default rendering of a phone camera) come to belong to specific communities of image. Anomalous materials become mediums; banal and beautiful spaces alike become backdrops whose specific qualities press into the work. Rituals accumulate: hauling a folder of printouts through a city to find the room that will receive them correctly; performing alchemy with personal tokens that

move between the sentimental and the post-sincere without resolving into either. Curating becomes a responsive form of material perception and social interfacing, not the management of objects in authorised space but the attunement of the practitioner to the frequency at which the site and the work and the tuned receiver can briefly coincide.

archive as save-state

The temporal logic of post-offsite practice is neither the gallery's synchronous single-encounter nor the document's archival permanence-as-death. It is closer to the visual novel's route structure: a constellation of save states, each complete in itself, each illuminating the others without reducing to them and accumulating toward a density of meaning that no single encounter could produce.

Each iteration of such exhibitions constitutes a save slot in the visual novel sense: not merely a record stored for retrieval, but a specific route through the work's possibility space, complete in itself, irreconcilable with adjacent routes, illuminating them precisely through its irreconcilability. Taken all together, they provide a map of a particular artist's practice at a given moment, or a scene as a whole, or something more than any of these. The reader who enters the archive from edition three occupies a different subject-position than the reader who enters at edition one and works forward. Both routes are complete, neither produces the same ending. The archive is not a record of completed events but a branching structure of incompatible traversals, each of which continues to accumulate meaning as the network that surrounds it develops: new save slots casting new light on old ones, the constellation rearranging itself around each new point of entry. This is the visual novel's fundamental epistemological claim: that truth is not singular and sequential but multiple and navigable, applied to curatorial practice as its native form.

What this distributed practice is building toward admits several incompatible eschatologies, each internally consistent and none resolvable into the others. Mari1314's account is the Third Impact: the moment when the zettelkasten achieves critical mass and the individual hypertext agents coalesce into the "swarm of absolute love" that "overwhelms the fragility of existence"; coalescence as the endpoint, the singular dissolving into the absolute. The Mariyasha's Cabin account is the solar storm: not coalescence but silence, the geomagnetic event that kills every screen simultaneously and returns everyone to the "blazing dark earth (...) standing before only themselves and God". In this account the network is erased and what the erasure reveals is what was always underneath it. And the Frühromantik account refuses the endpoint entirely: infinite Bildung, each new fragment casting new light on all the others without ever achieving complete synthesis. These endings are incompatible but in the logic of the visual novel they may all be correct. The practice requires only that the tuned receivers keep arriving at the right moment.

transmutation of the image

In the post-offsite tradition editing is a primary infrastructure. When an image is subjected to heavy post-production (the blown-out radiance of bloom, the wiry saturation of deep-fry, the impossible bricolage) the physical reality of the bunker or the rooftop does not disappear; it is transmuted. The concrete and the rebar become a ghost that haunts the frame. We are no longer looking at a place; we are looking at the memory of a place as it survives the upload and prepares itself for further opening.

The act of chroming or collaging an image is often dismissed as a purely decorative layer. But it is an act of devotion: a literal i love you directed at the tuned receiver. The cold photograph is rarely capable of matching the high-intensity affect of the actual experience; the edit is here to bridge that gap. By distorting the image, by hauling into the frame elements not purely visible within it, by dipping the image into the affect modulation of the edit, the practitioner is forcing the physical world to feel as intense or as fragile or as overwhelming as the experience itself and situating the image within culturally particular communities. It is an urgent and loving attempt.

To photograph an offsite work with the archival honesty of traditional art documentation is to lie about its existence: it strips away the atmospheric pressure, the velocity of circulation, and the constitutive swamp that gave the work its life. The post-offsite image, with all its noise and bloom and artefacts, is in this case the honest one. It acknowledges that the work did not arise from nor exist in a vacuum but in a state of motion, accumulating charge with each new screen it reaches. The institution offers an artifact; the offsite practitioner offers a ghost.

symphilosophie as method

The Jena Romantics' concept of symphilosophie: the productive friction of radically singular minds, each maintaining their irreducible singularity, resonating across unbridgeable distance, approaching the Absolute asymptotically through the accumulated force of their separate transmissions, is a direct philosophical precedent and its most accurate description.

The canonical account of collective curatorial practice theorises it through collaboration: shared authorship, co-production, the flattening of individual distinction into collective output. Symphilosophie is structurally different. Neither collaboration nor hive-mind, each participant maintains their singularity and the resonance between them is not the product of agreement or shared method. It is the product of shared frequency recognising itself across the distance that separates it from other instances of the same frequency.

The ritual logic of physical intervention is described here in full: "Private intentions coalesce into formalised motions; these are repeated by others who wish to share the same reality, which is totalising and then fractal. This mirrors the foundation of all ritual: a feedback loop between inner knowledge and the world, drawing out inherent beauty through acts of devotion as formally sensible shared realities, and catalysing shared realities across time and space via sacrament and

communion." The physical gathering is a sacrament that produces a shared reality, which the image then carries forward: iterative, multiplying, entering into the feedback loop between inner knowledge and world wherever it finds a receiver tuned to receive it.

geography and place

Post-offsite practice is among the first curatorial modes genuinely adequate to the claim that networked practice has abolished geographic hierarchies, not because it pretends geography doesn't exist, but because it has built its community through shared frequency rather than shared location.

The specific site of each devotional superimposition is essential to what it is. Each site contributes its own content, its own atmosphere, which is to say: its own way of pressing against the interior world that superimposes itself upon it. According to Turin-based collective MRZB: "We always had a resistance to consider spaces as empty containers... Between work and space is triggered a symbiotic relationship. Something lives in the dry riverbed, it hides in the forest or in the living room's tapestry. In these environments it feels the work is defined by spectral forces, thick fogs soaking and submerging them. Thousands of eyes gleam and expand to perceive the presences, they dig and devour the light and digesting it, they transform it into darkness". Such spaces can be anywhere and carry any constitutive poetic, each depending on their necessity.

The Lament of the Ghost

We have described the two great torments which are perpetuated by the canonical account of offsite practice. The first is genealogical: it excludes the constitutive traditions surveyed here and many similar. The second is structural: the tools it uses to describe practice are constitutively incapable of seeing what they exclude. This is the epistemological condition of the canonical framework itself.

The canonical account requires a specific smoothness of form: the capacity of a practice to be immediately legible to the critical infrastructure concentrated in specific cities, specific institutions and inheritances as a precondition for theoretical existence. This requirement operates silently as the framework's default. Practices that achieve their formal innovations through precisely the conditions that make them illegible to this infrastructure (the hermetic gathering, the subcultural formation, the devotional interior vocabulary, the swamp that protects the signal by making it unreadable) are therefore not merely overlooked but structurally excluded, then mined

and extracted from as "unnamed materials". The blind spot is both load-bearing and opportune.

The consequence is specific and repeatable. A practice is first excluded on the grounds of illegibility: too raw, too subcultural, too indifferent to the conventions that institutional discourse requires. Then, when its surface achieves visibility or coherence, those features are described as innovations of the present moment rather than as the finally-legible face of a decades-long formation. What arrives in the canonical account is the shape of the practice without its substance: a perfect impression of the organism in the rock, mineralised, exact, and no longer capable of movement. The fossil tells you what the creature looked like but it tells you little about what it was building toward. In each case the shape is preserved and the ghost is absent, and the shape produces not the practice but its absent husk, arriving late to a formation it then attempts to claim as its own discovery. The inhabitants already burned the maps and moved further into the network.

This is not a politics of inside versus outside. Someone encountering the charged image for the first time from behind a screen in 2023 could bring genuine formation to the encounter and allow the charged image to press into their interior world and produce something new. The obstacle is not geographic or biographical. It is a function of epistemic inheritance and its amplification through cybernetic architecture. The separation of knower from known, and the image as evidence of the knowable (the production of analytic distance as the mark of serious engagement, the smoothing of genuine encounter into legible position) is not an invention of the algorithm. It is an old motion that was present long before the feed existed to reward it as it presently does. What the algorithm does is accelerate and intensify: it makes the rewards of surface metabolisation immediate and it makes the devotional motion invisible to everyone except those already tuned to receive it.

The torments of the canonical account are not hermeneutic. Meanings are profuse and multilayered and no attempt ought to be made to reify a single authoritative reading; we do not make that attempt and do not mourn the impossibility of making it. The torment of the canon is ontological: it does not misread what these practices *mean* but distorts what they *are*, replacing what they are with a radiant hollow double that moves smoothly across institutional and algorithmic surfaces until it comes to eclipse its host-body entirely. The double is not wrong about the surface. It is a perfect impression of the surface. What it does not carry is the charge: the specific weight of formation, devotion, necessity, and inheritance that the surface was shaped by and that no reproduction of the surface can recover. The original and the double are visually identical and ontologically incommensurable. This is the nature of the loss.

The dual motion of establishing analytic distance through rapid metabolisation of surface and then signing one's name to it above the noise is deeply rewarded. What is not rewarded is the devotional motion: creating images and experiences that formally respond to the conditions of image-making in an unsorted world, at the network's own speed, from inside the formation rather than above it. The extractive modality is the path of least resistance in a system designed to reward surface metabolisation over interior synthesis.

This is not an argument against coherence and it is not an argument for reflective craft. We can name art movements as such in an art historical frame because they cohered. Fluxus cohered, Surrealism cohered, etc, for all their internal battles about that process. Movements cohere because genuine formation, under sufficient pressure, produces recognisable formal tendencies that accumulate into something nameable. Many of the practices described in this essay were marked by haste and desperate gestures and flashpoint coherence. The template that emerges is not the problem but the relationship to it often is. It is a seduction: the post hits every time, it looks like it's supposed to, its received as intended, and that is genuinely heady. This arrives at a moment when social media and project documentation are increasingly professionalized credentials; institutional infrastructure can process the scene overview, the authorial summary, the post that demonstrates familiarity with the relevant discourse. Wielding the tools of extraction positions one to become the scene's appointed interpreter at exactly the moment the institutions arrive looking for one.

What is worth stating plainly is this: we each have the stuff of a constitutive poetics - here, right now, in whatever small town or big city, from whatever our own heart and vision have been comprised. Refusing encounter with the charged image forecloses that formative synthesis for the speaker and for the audience simultaneously. Instead of new charged work we get papers and video essays annexing territory for name and platforms repeating formal gestures without spirit.

The person drawn to the charged image, who receives it in its open state (who allows it to press into their interior world, who responds devotionally and moves toward the wildfire encounter with their own constitutive poetics) finds that the image has changed them. This is what the charged image was always offering: not content to be metabolised but an initiation to be undergone. What is denied by the extractive modality is not just new work or new scenes but something more fundamental: the possibility of genuine formation, the charged fragment that would have accumulated meaning across thousands of private screens at unknown hours in unknown places, the save state that future receivers could return to and find still alive. In the shadow of extraction we get the name above the noise instead of the noise itself, and the noise was always where the ghost lived, which was always the point. Visual culture is diminished by exactly the amount of devotion that is foreclosed and this is an immeasurable quantity of loss.

The corrected genealogy this essay proposes is therefore not an addition to the canonical account or a supplement that fills its gaps while leaving its framework intact. It is a replacement of the epistemological conditions that made those gaps invisible. The practices it centres are not precursors or influences or parallel developments, and we have grieved their classification as such. We recognize them as constitutive, generating, and denounce the canonical account as their partial and belated reflection. The drive that generated these practices accelerates past the breaking-point of such torments, toward what the practice itself calls "a cascade of pensive ecstasies". We have attempted to provide a description of what this constellation of practices has always been doing, in the dachas and the quarries and the bunkers and the tea parties and the pilgrimage photographs and the coord archives and the hikikomori rooms, long before the theory arrived to find it already there.

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