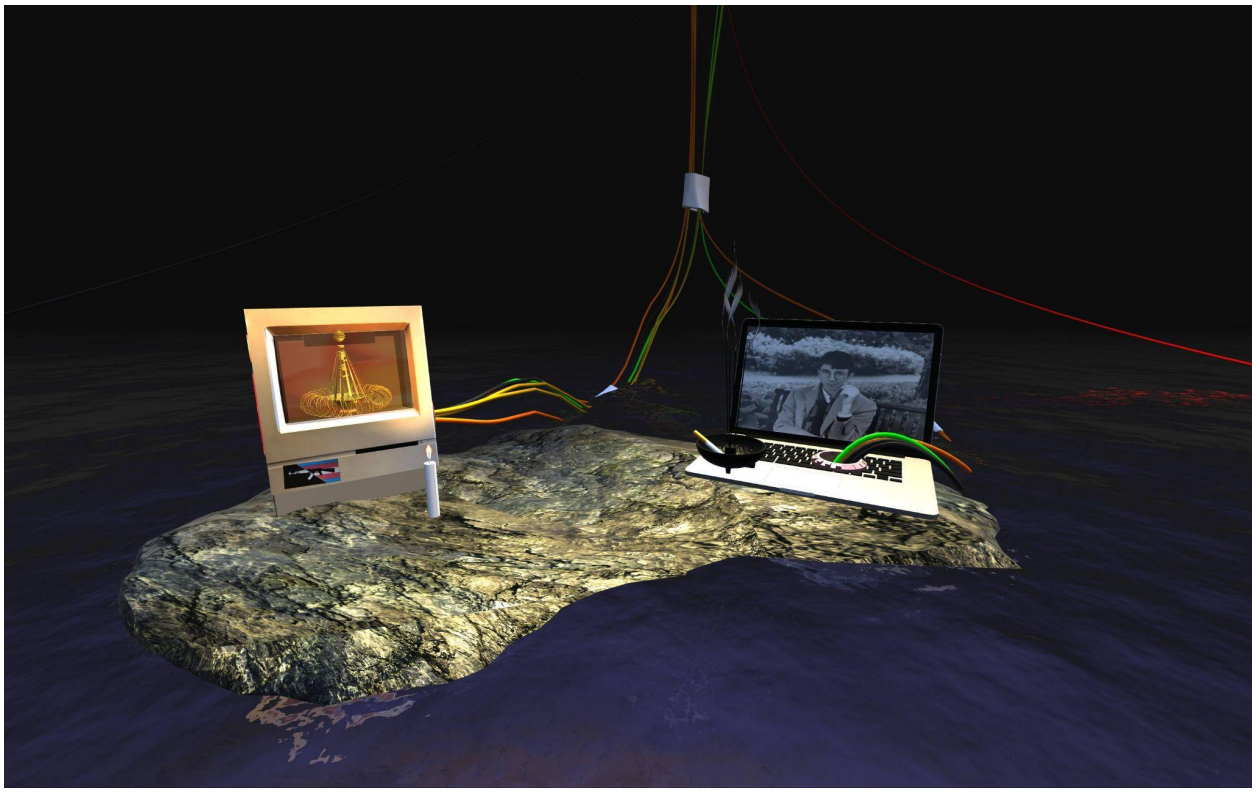
A Time Capsule Or A Grave - Sammie Veeler

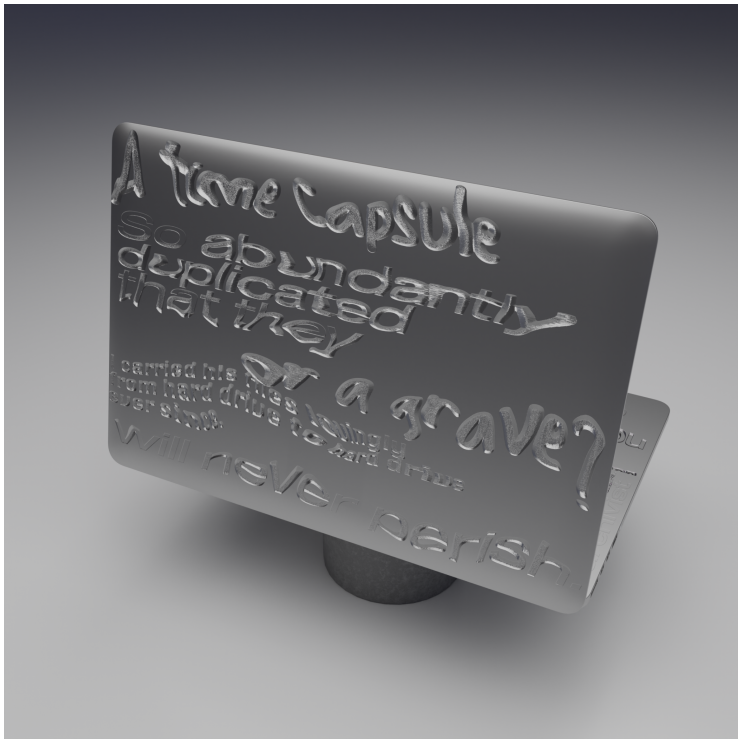


On the internet, nobody knows you are a dog. Nobody knows you are a singular person. Indeed, nobody knows you are still alive. The networked age has shifted the production of history from a one-to-many to a many-to-many process. Not only does everyone produce history, they become historians as well.

Art's role in historical production has shifted along the same lines. Information is abundant and making meaning from it is now a collective responsibility. We must not confuse information for memory. Information exists in the machine. Memory is constituted in the body.

I address you in my capacity as the title executor of the estate of Tvordis Veeler, my late husband, and as a curator whose work concerns digital preservation of cultural memory. I am the steward of my husband's most intimate digital device: his personal computer which he called Theseus. The worlds we will traverse are moments outside time between two local machines: his and hers.

These worlds were created in constellation with peers who guided and inspired my work. Exhibited alongside me in this festival, Heesoo Kwon, Henrique Fagundes, Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Kiki Wu, and the Daad Futurist collective use spiritual worlding practice to process generational history, develop speculative futures, and project their souls outward into cyberspace.



It is well known that art appreciates in value after the death of the artist.

What death are we considering?

The soul departing the body? Or the voice departing its origin?

In the twilight of his life, he promised me his computer and challenged me to "examine this archive of a mask in its incompleteness." To lift these files out of their grave and put them in places they would never expect to find themselves. Through this gift of his un-curated digital self, he ensured I would never be alone in my grief.

Theseus is so named because Tvordis replaced every part of it multiple times over. The only part which remains from when Tvordis was alive is the solid state hard drive. When you replace every part of a computer, is it still the same computer?

Solid state drives store data by trapping electrons in structures called charge traps. It holds the same electrons in those charge traps until the files are deleted. Tvordis has left the physical body, yet he is visible through his gathered artifacts. The moments he captured documented his presence. By handling those files, we touch the same physical substance.

I view Theseus as living documentation of this performance astride two worlds. Much of the performances themselves were ephemeral and undocumentable. Tvordis evaded the

fixity of the exhibition wall label by refusing to distinguish what of his output was art and what wasn't.

The aura of these electrons is not the end of the story. The hard drive in his computer is already past its recommended usage period and will inevitably fail. Jon Ippolito famously tells us that "fixity equals death… new media art can survive only by multiplying and mutating."

It will be a lifelong grief ritual to preserve this archive by transforming it and making meaning from it. Each obelisk in this world leads out to others. What I do with my husband's artifacts I also do with my own.



I am often summoned to perform expertise regarding our purported transition to the metaverse. Computing already envelops us at all times in a way that renders it invisible. In the metaverse, heaven is a data center. We are there together now. We have lived there for over a decade already.

Logging onto the internet is a way to leave the body. Logging on is no longer an intentional process but a natural state of existence. It is easier to log on than it is to log off, easier to store a file than it is to delete it. Our default state is disembodied and our default identity is plural. In the data center, our virtual souls are mixed together as anonymized digital residue.

What does it mean when a society collectively and involuntarily astral projects, casting data shadows as we travel? We are always in the presence of our own ghosts. Ancestors may be more apt. We constantly depart and reinhabit this new networked world. Our consciousnesses exist astride embodiment and disembodiment. To leave the body can be both dehumanizing and liberating.



Tvordis was born here in France. The name Tvordis Veeler was a fabrication– a mask which he assumed one night while he was studying in Paris during his third year at University and never removed. He made this act real by changing his name on Facebook. Masks reflect new intentions back on the wearer. I am awed by the great lengths he went to trying to find comfort in the masculinity he felt obligated to perform.

He hated being a man and resented the respect accorded to him by other men. With a subtle shift in framing, he began to view his life as a performance. This was the difference between drowning and diving.

It is significant that Tvordis first embodied his mask in virtual space. Reformulating and speculatively performing ones identity through the virtual is a time-honored tradition of the internet. Once he returned to school, people who had never met him IRL began addressing him by his chosen name and gradually the virtual performance intruded on the real.

The architecture of the internet obscures the fact that you always travel with an avatar. The only difference between this and Second Life is the avatar can convincingly resemble your actual self. We must not make the mistake of identifying ourselves through the masks that we wear. Is the avatar your virtual embodiment? Why should we assume a singular identity online?

Plato describes sight as an active process– our eyes project beams onto the world, reflecting it back to us. We now understand that sight functions in exactly the opposite way. This is, however, exactly the way cameras work in interactive 3D worlds through a process called ray-casting.

The camera sees actively. Does this mean you do the same? The avatar is your clothes, but it is not your body. In virtual space, you are embodied as a camera and you see by casting beams out of your eyes. This sight does not necessarily confer presence. Presence, like listening, is active.

Many of the artifacts Tvordis left behind were stereophonic field recordings and sound collages created from those recordings. These, too, are virtual spaces and he viewed them that way. He captured field recordings to construct incongruous sound spaces with them. His sound-worlds are embodied time, experienced durationally. They only perform their objecthood when they are accessed. These worlds, like all media files, are always accessed in translation. They point back to an invisible original.

In his recordings he took care to make himself invisible, but he is present with us as a fellow listener. In five years of his field recordings I have not found a single trace of his voice. His absence, however, is a form of presence drawn out through his mistakes. I feel him when he jostles the recorder, jingles his keys, and clicks his tongue to test the shape of the room.



I argue that a virtual space can be defined as a third space between two or more physical spaces. These can be localized in both space and time. Tvordis is only alone in his field recordings when I am not there to listen with him. When I join him in

these spaces he left for me, our virtual selves are equally unburdened by time and the body. The boundary between our consciousnesses blurs. On the other side of time there is a hand reaching back to you; however, you must choose to grasp it.

Can you be sure which hand is yours?

Tvordis imagined things for me that he refused to imagine for himself and our time together was painfully brief. As soon as I felt he could really see me, he was almost gone. He could envision me here in front of you more clearly than I could. It is ironic that as his life ended, mine seemed to begin.



And so here I am walking through the world he spoke into existence, handling this mass of material he called his archive, which he never attempted to organize, and shared with no one. He left it for me to untangle in his wake.

He viewed his life as a work of art, but he left before a suitable venue emerged to exhibit it. He poured art out of himself autonomically– it seemed so easy for him to accept what came and yet he failed to publish any of his work. I feel it is my duty to construct a mutable biography of this strange man from the documentation he left behind.

Today I perform for you in the flesh. Tomorrow my voice will be automated at each obelisk and exhibition visitors will share virtual space with a dead version of me.