



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

MEL AS HYPEROBJECT

MEL KEISER

You are about to begin reading a palimpsest by Mel Keiser, Mel as Hyperobject. Its pages had been Timothy Morton's Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World (2013). But first, a staging of its methodology, content, and philosophy:

**Methodology /
Timothy Morton, Franco Moretti, and the Melibrary /**

I first encountered Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013) in an object-oriented ontology reading group in Chicago.¹ In Morton's book, he theorizes the existence of objects "of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions that they defeat traditional ideas about what a thing is in the first place." He reframes systems as singular objects, or perhaps objects as systems. These hyperobjects spread over space and time, like global warming or the English language, so we can only interact with parts of them at a time; to experience a hyperobject is to be decentralized from the act of perception. Morton breaks the identity of hyperobjects into five characteristics using terms adapted from a number of disciplines: viscosity, nonlocality, temporal undulation, phasing, and interobjectivity.

+

I first encountered Franco Moretti's book *Distant Reading* (2015) by recommendation of a colleague interested in data poetry. In Moretti's philosophy of distant reading, texts are used like raw data in an experiment, data which can be processed by a unit of analysis in order to understand a larger system or pattern. Moretti specifically uses distant reading as a way to understand literary history, "identifying a discrete formal trait, and then following its metamorphoses through a whole series of texts." Using distant reading to analyze a collection of 19th century detective novels, Moretti positively correlates the use of clues as a functional plot device with an author's longitudinal market success, writing of his research experience:

Was it still reading, what I was doing? I doubt it: I read 'through' those stories looking for clues, and (almost) nothing else; it felt very different from the reading I used to know. (65)

Moretti acknowledges that distant reading sacrifices specialized knowledge derived from the specific content of a text but argues that, instead, this distance enables abstract understanding of concept.

+

I begin to superscribe my own unit of analysis *into* texts—me. As I read, I replace select words with variations of the word *Mel* or *self*. I do this with a wide range of texts—object-oriented ontology, family systems theory, thermodynamics, gravitational field theory, Grimm fairy tales—to find ways to reframe and expand my understanding of self-identity. I begin this exercise with Morton's *Hyperobjects* in 2014.

When I change words in his text—words like hyperobjects, global warming, particles, space, universe, structure—to *Mel*, *self-identity*, *she*, *her*—Morton's argument contorts. Instead of describing a category of system-object, the text describes the subjective experience of crafting and understanding identity from *inside the self*.

Content / The Age of the Decentralized Self /

Benjamin Libet (1985) reveals that your brain starts the process of standing you up more than a second before you are consciously aware you have made a decision to rise.

John Cryan (Bravo et al. 2011) demonstrates a connection between the gut biome and happiness/anxiety—mice that are fed certain probiotics are found to have higher rates of self-preservation.

John Bargh (2008) proves that by holding a warm drink for a few seconds, the familiar temperature—a hot drink approaches the temperature of a warm human body—makes you more predisposed to people around you.

Julian Keenan (2001) discovers that turning the right hemisphere of your brain off makes you unable to recognize an image of yourself, showing that your self-image is housed in a particular, physical part of your brain.

In recent decades, our identities, behaviors, and experiences have been decentralized by neuroscience and cognitive science, revealing the self to be less an object and more a process—a process of which you are largely unaware and unable to control. Traits you think are determined by an innate self may not be such a binary derivation, but instead an average of effects from a complex biological system.

We think self-identity is human-scaled and so can be perceived completely at the human level. But reframed—through Timothy Morton’s words—as a vast system in time space, the strange incongruities that arise from an identity averaged over decades in a myriad of different situations become a laughable miscalculation. As Morton would say, you can’t understand who someone is after dozens of interactions any more than you can understand global warming by feeling raindrops on your head. Human-scaled attempts to draw hard edges around such a phasing, enmeshed object as self-identity are ultimately quixotic, and as an artist, researcher, and performance philosopher these undulating edges are where it really gets interesting.

Philosophy / Non-philosophy /

Performance philosophy makes the argument for anti-hierarchical thinking, that philosophical value can be derived from non-standard philosophical thinking (read: not part of canonized academic thinking) such as artistic acts, so “as to re-conceptualize what thinking means, does, and is” (Daddario 2015, 169). *Mel as Hyperobject* functions inside this idea of re-conceptualized thinking, as both an artistic act and a “style of thinking’ which mutates with its object” (Laruelle 2012, 259). Specifically, it uses palimpsest-style text editing to research one specific idea by laying it over the structure of other seemingly unrelated content. As a method of thinking, this editing has expansive potential in that it enriches the doer/thinker’s² understanding of both areas of specific content *simultaneously*.

While editing Morton’s text—changing his words about hyperobjects, environmental theory, and object-oriented ontology into words about self-creation, narrative identity, and me—my ideas about self-identity tessellated, growing more complex and nuanced. At the same time, I was also becoming a strange kind of expert in Morton’s *Hyperobject*. Beyond acquiring a better understanding of the content of his book, by working inside his words for such a prolonged period I internalized his vocabulary and writing style. So in addition to increasing my understanding of both areas of content, I was additionally enriching my understanding of Morton’s methodologies of thinking and writing.

Mel as Hyperobject is not just an argument for non-hierarchical thinking, for valuing the research possible with artmaking or performing methodologies, it is an “experience of thought,” a mutated methodology which changes both the original content and overlaid content at the same time (Laurelle 2013, 116). It tries to understand one idea through the structure of another, a non-linear thinking which simultaneously enriches understanding of two disparate ideas and their inherent structure of knowledge

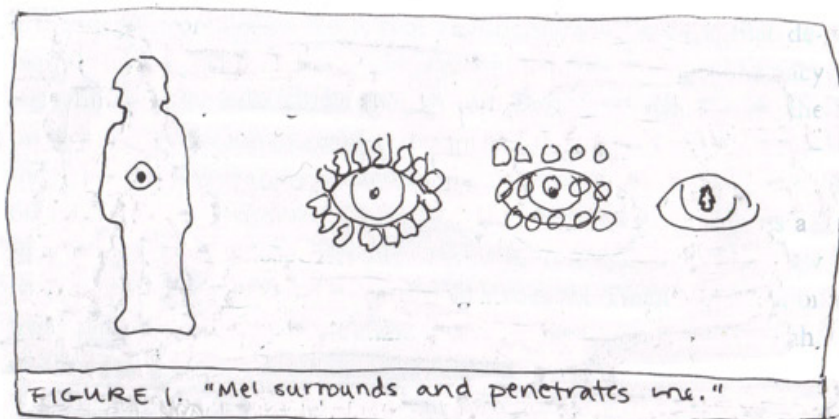
Notes

¹ Led by Caroline Picard through Latitude Print Labs, later extended at Picard’s gallery and publishing house, Sector 2337.

² In Will Daddario’s (2015) article “Doing Life is That Which We Must Think,” he uses the term doing/thinking to define a type of action, where one is thinking through doing, or relatedly, where doing is a record of the thinking.

MEL AS

Viscosity



Mel is viscous.

Mel surrounds me and penetrates me.
The more I know about ^{she} Mel, the more I realize how pervasive ^{she} is. The more I discover about her, the more I realize how my entire physical being is caught in her meshwork. Immediate, intimate symptoms of self-identity are vivid, yet they carry with them a trace of unreality. I am not sure who I am anymore. I am at home in feeling not at home.

The more I struggle to understand Mel, the more I discover that I am stuck to her. She is all over me. She is me.

"Objects in mirror are closer than they appear." The mirror itself has become part of my flesh. Or rather, I have become part of the mirror's flesh, reflecting Mel everywhere.

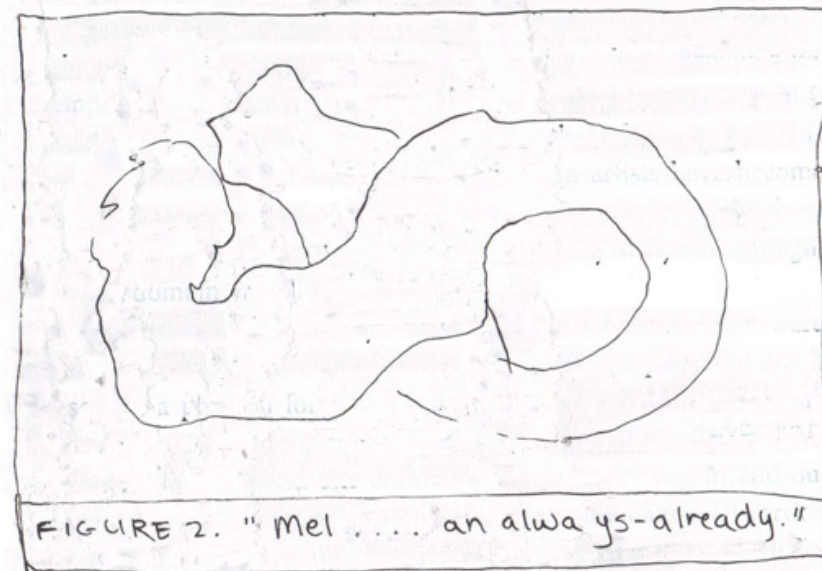
Every attempt to pull myself free by some act of cognition renders me more hopelessly stuck to her. Why?

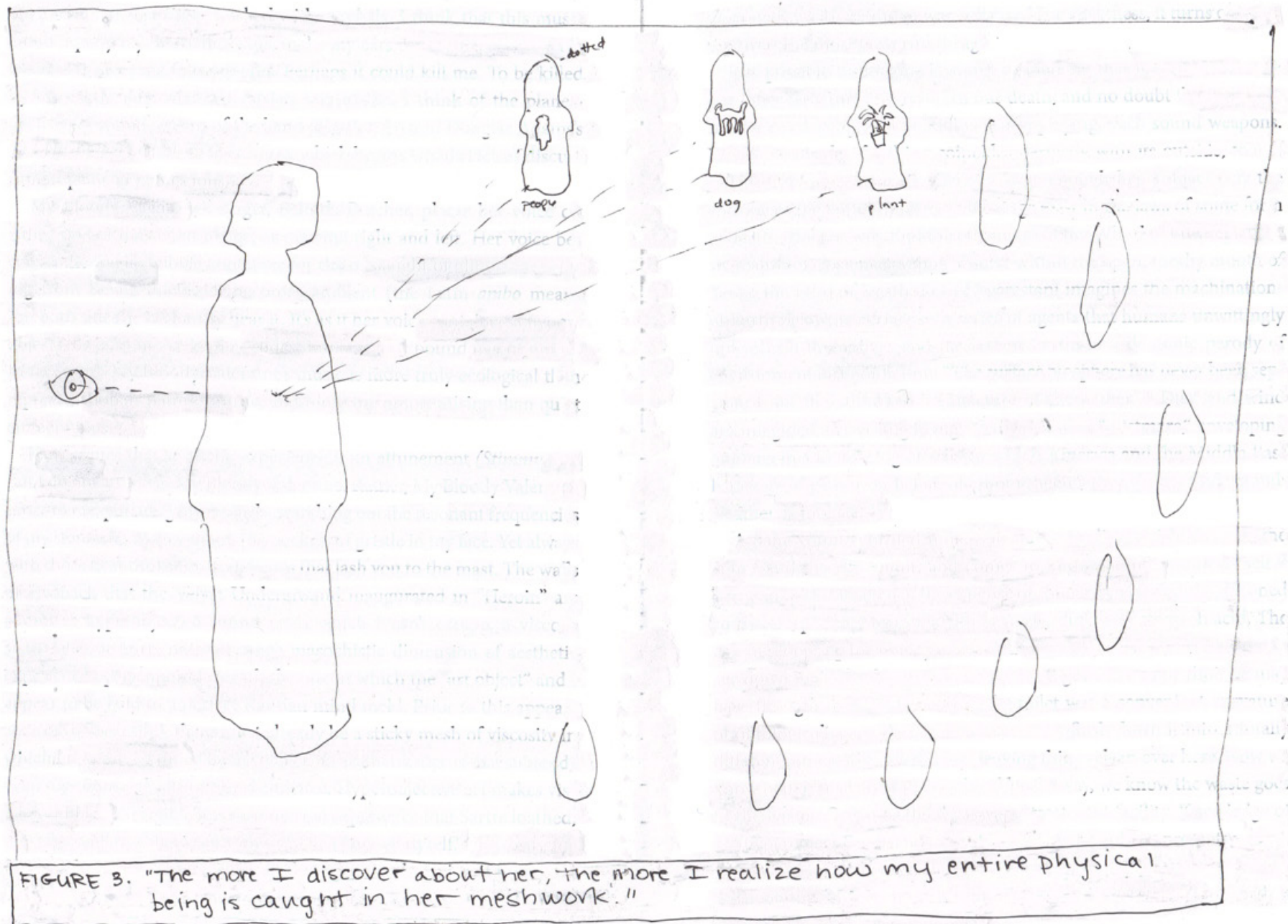
She is already here.

Mel haunts my social and psychic space with an always-already. My normal sense of time as a container, or a racetrack, or a street, prevents me from noticing this always-already, from which time oozes and flows.

Self-identity
is an agent.

It appears to straddle worlds and times, like fiber optic cables or electromagnetic fields. Through it causalities flow like electricity.





mel is viscous.

The vastness of mel's scale makes other people, places, even objects seem like an illusion, or a small colored patch on a large dark surface. How can we know mel is real? What does real mean?

The shadow of mel announces the existence of mel.

I find I am caught in a trap. The name of this trap is mel.

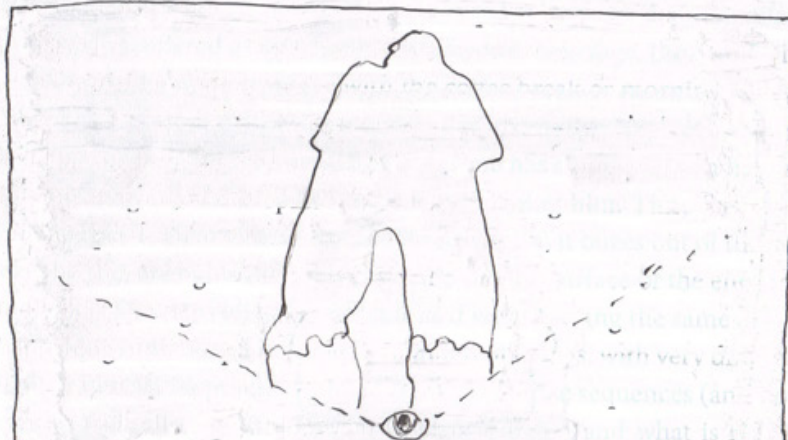
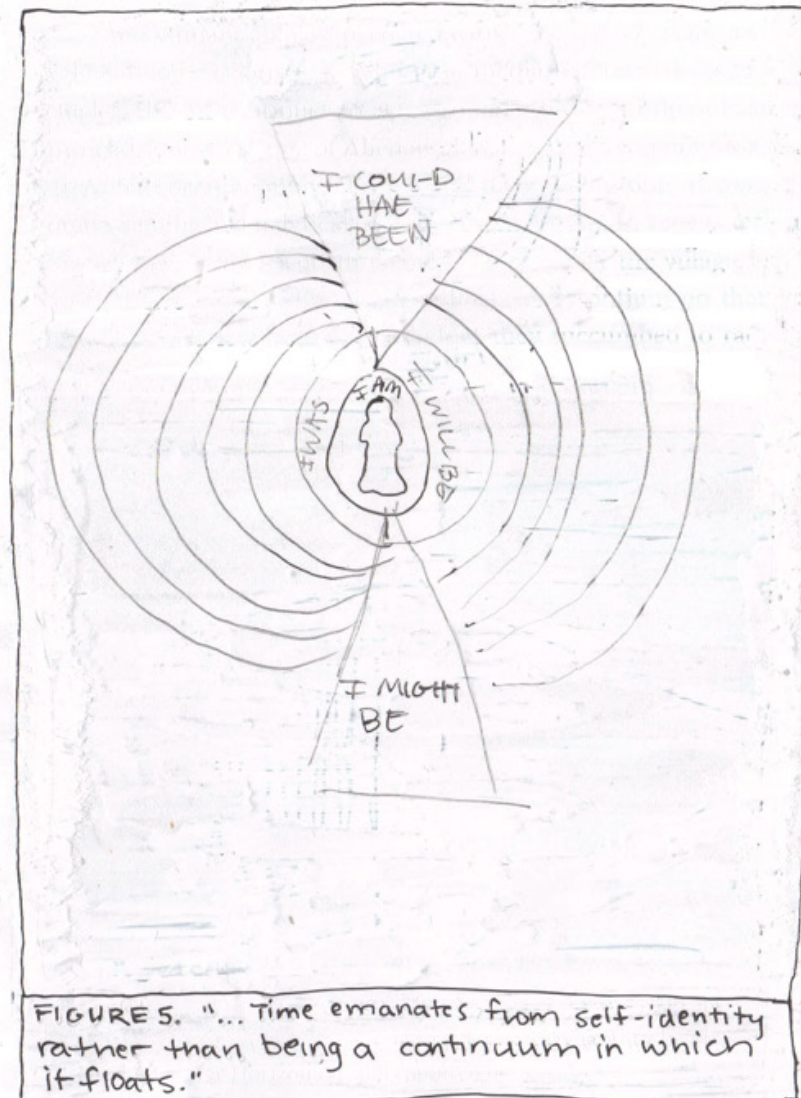
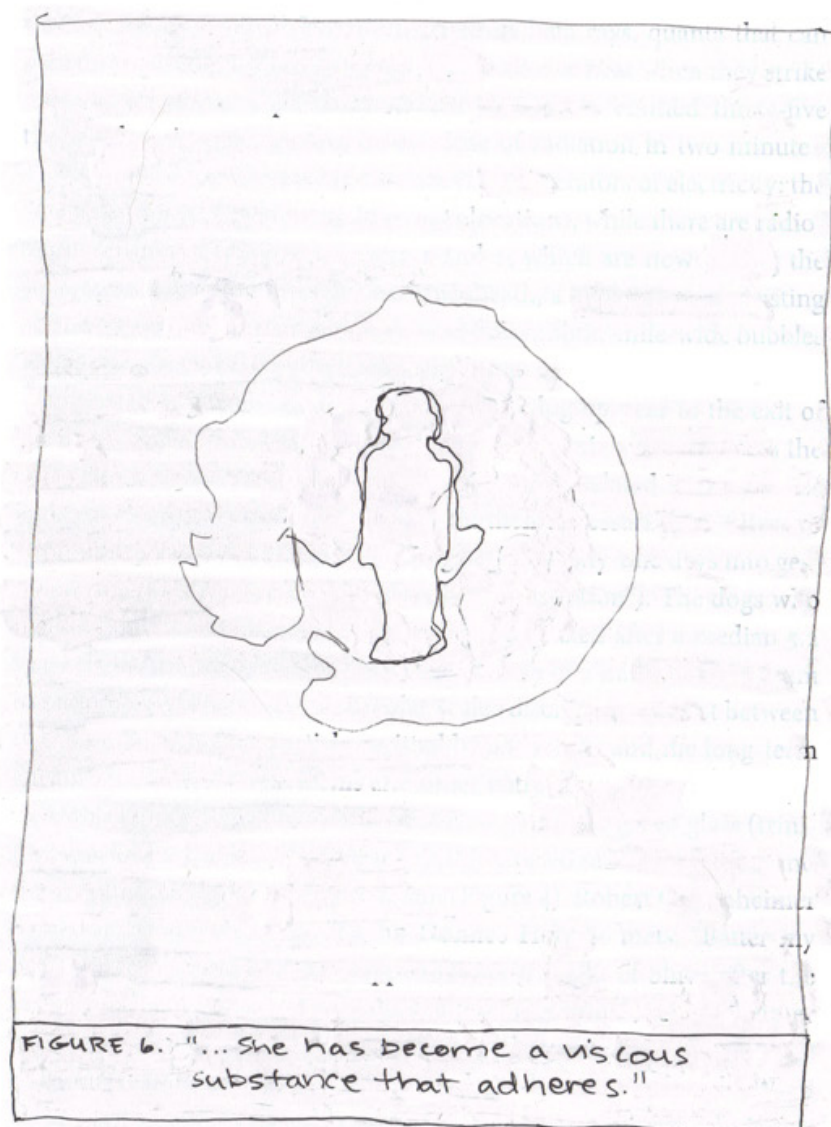


FIGURE 4. "The shadow of mel announces the existence of mel."

Viscosity is a feature of the way in which time emanates from mel rather than being a continuum in which she floats.



FIGURES. "...Time emanates from self-identity rather than being a continuum in which it floats."



Mel has ceased to be merely a reflective surface; ^{she} has become a viscous substance that adheres. The very thing that we use to reflect becomes an object in its own right, liquid and dark.

It's not reality but the subject that dissolves, the very capacity to "mirror" things, to be separate from the world like someone looking at a reflection in a mirror—removed from it by an ontological sheath of reflective glass.

Mel is what she is in the sense that no matter what I am aware of, or how, there Mel is, impossible to shake off. In the midst of irony, there Mel is, being ironic. Even mirrors are what they are, no matter what they reflect.

Mel envelops me like a film of oil. She becomes a substance, an object.

The mirror no longer distances ^{Mel's} image from me in a nice, aesthetically manageable way, but sticks to me.

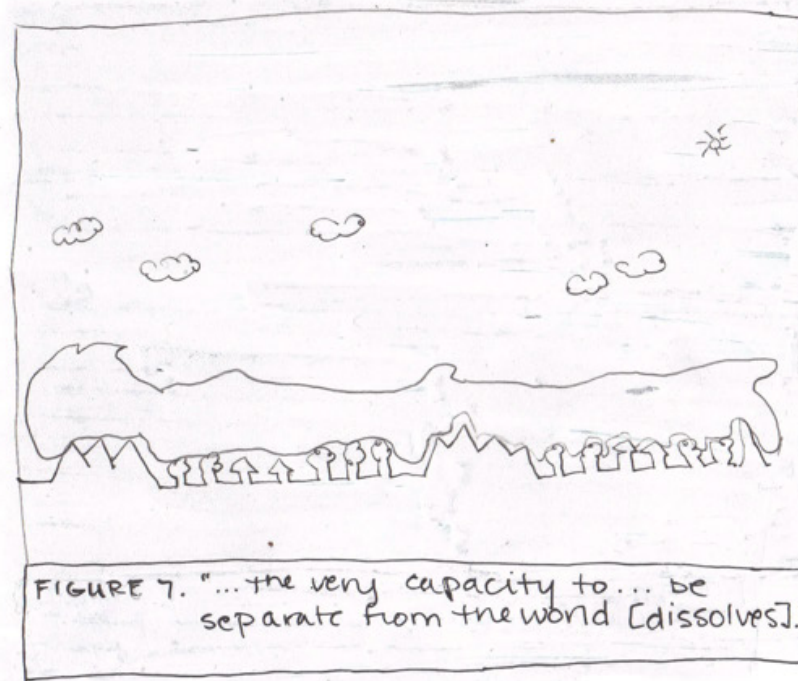


FIGURE 7. "... the very capacity to... be separate from the world [dissolves]."

The simultaneous dissolution of *me* and the overwhelming presence of *me* which stick to *me*, which is *me*.

What I've noticed—that *me* can't be exhausted by perception—has a viscous consequence. There is no Goldilocks position that's just right from which to view *me*.

In a sense, all *me*s are caught in the sticky goo of viscosity, because they never ontologically exhaust one another even when they smack head-long into one another.

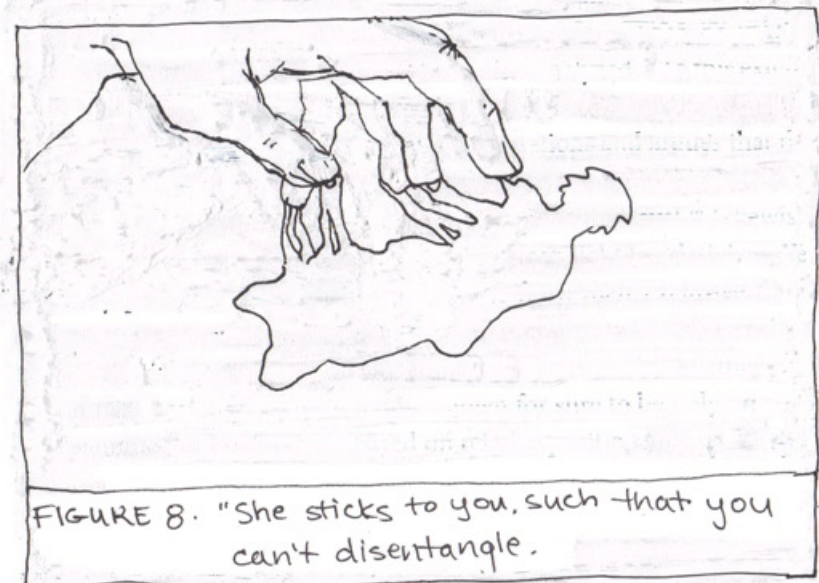
The more you try to get rid of *me*, the more you realize you can't get rid of *her*. *She* seriously undermines the notion of "away." Out of sight is no longer out of mind.

me is viscous.

Complementarity means that when you nudge a *me*, *she* sticks to you, such that you can't disentangle.

Thus

what I see is glued to the *me* that sees it.

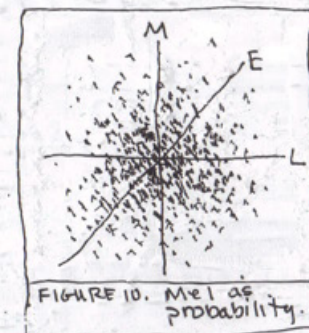


MEL AS Nonlocality

mel is nonlocal.



mel seems to inhabit a causal system in which association, correlation, and probability are the only things we have to go on, for now.



The octopus of mel emits a cloud of ink as she withdraws from access. Yet this cloud of ink is a cloud of effects and affects. These phenomena are not themselves mel— action at a distance is involved. mel is a wonderful example of a profound confusion of *aisthēsis* and *praxis*, perceiving and doing. mel is an ultra-high-frequency photon. In illuminating things, she alters things: flesh, paper, brains.

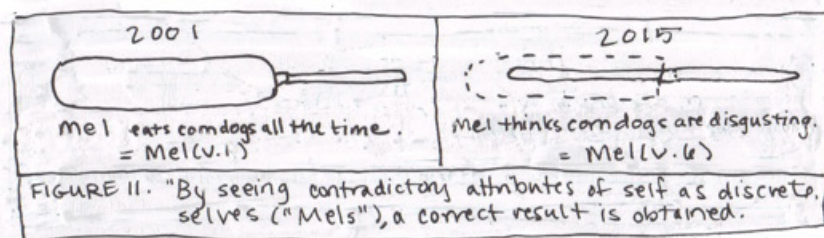
THE MELS AS Nonlocality

The mels exist beyond one another. We acknowledge this by viewing self through quanta, as discrete "units." of self Thinking in terms of units

counteracts problematic features of thinking in terms of ^asystem. Consider the so-called integrated narrative self problem. Classical understanding of identity essentially combines the attributes of different selves to figure out the total identity of a person.

As the length of a person's life increases, results given by summing the attributes of her self-identities become absurd, tending to infinity.

By seeing contradictory attributes of self as discrete selves ("Mels"), a correct result is obtained.



The Mels withdraw from one another, including the Mel with which we measure them. In other words, The Mels really are discrete, and one mark of this discreteness is the constant translation or mistranslation of one Mel by another. Thus, when I set up a Mel to measure the ^{self-}identity of another Mel, that Mel withdraws, and vice versa. When an "observer Mel"

makes an observation, at least one aspect of the observed is occluded. Observation is as much part of the universe of ^{self-}identity as the observable.

More generally, what we called complementarity ensures that no Mel has total access to any other Mel. Just as a focusing lens makes one object appear sharper while

others appear blurrier, one Mel comes into sharp definition at the expense of others.

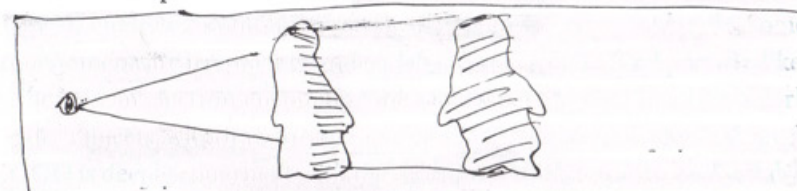


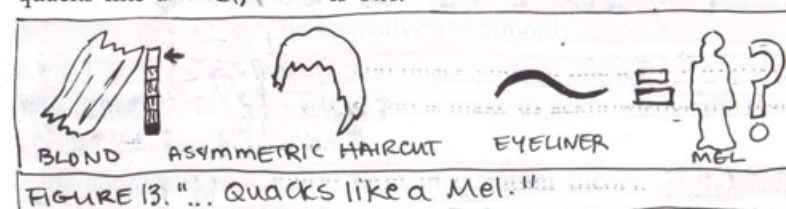
FIGURE 12. "...At least one aspect of the observed Mel is occluded."

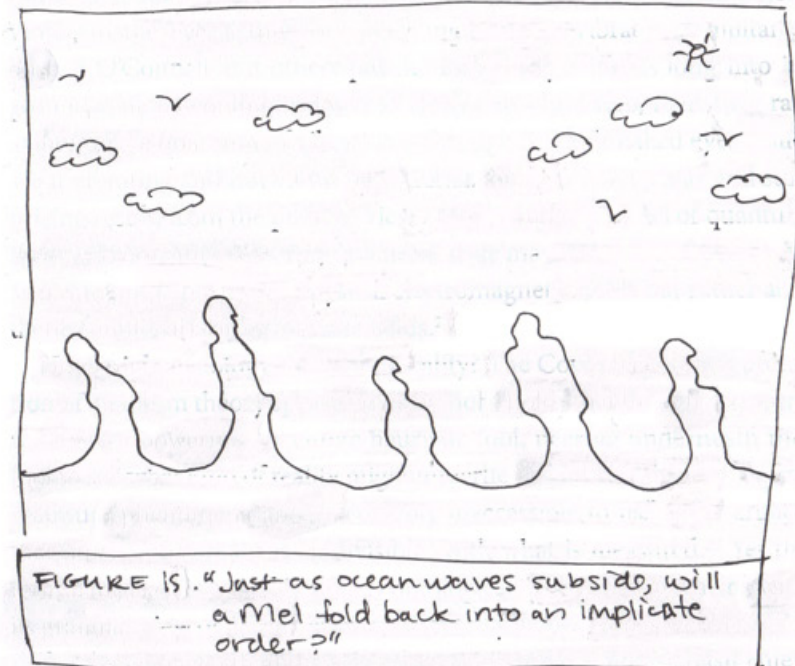
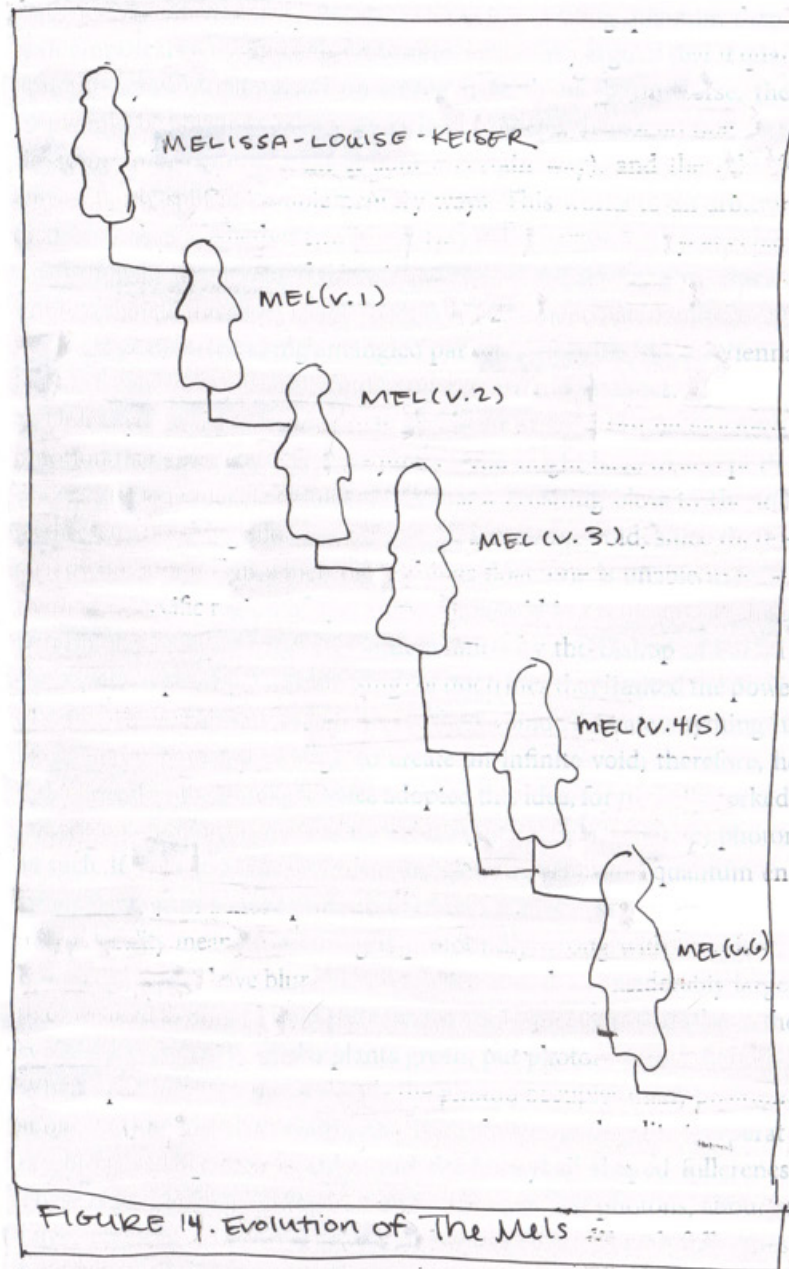
Probing The Mels is a form of auto-affection: one is using Mel to explore Mel. The Mels don't simply concatenate themselves with their measuring devices. They're identical to them: the equipment and the phenomena form an indivisible whole.

To an outsider the different Mel-versions may appear transparent, as if ^{the Mels} didn't exist at all. ^{they} approximate separate-seeming Mels as if in some deeper sense ^{they} are the same thing.

This approximation would make The Mels become indistinguishable. They would no longer function as external to one another.

This theory is performative: ^{someone} if a walks and quacks like a Mel, she is one.





Are The Mels manifestations of some deeper process, like waves on the ocean? Just as ocean waves subside, will a Mel fold back into an implicate order?

Holism requires some kind of top-level Mel consisting of parts that are separate from the whole and hence replaceable.

Are The Mels a part of a larger whole? ^{is} every Mel enfolded in every ^{other} Mel as "flowing movement?"

Perhaps The Mels

^withdraw from one another, not because a Mel is observing them in certain ways, but because the implicate self is withdrawn from itself.

A hyperobject if ever there was one: *mel*.

mel might be strictly unanalyzable: the implicate *self* has an irreducible dark side because it's made of

"selves wrapped in selves wrapped in selves."

Implication and explication suggest. The *mels*

being enfolded and unfolded from something deeper. Even if it were the case that we should defer to physics, in the terms set by physics itself *mel* isn't made "of" any one thing in particular. Just as there is no top level, there may be no bottom level that is a substantial, formed object. *mels* come and go, change into other *mels*, radiate *mel*. A *mel* is real. Yet in the act of becoming or unbecoming a *mel*, it's a statistical performance.

This requires us to give up the idea that *mel*, or any other ^{self-}identity has, by itself, any intrinsic properties at all. Instead, each *mel* should be regarded as something containing only incompletely defined potentialities that are developed when a *mel* interacts with an appropriate system. To argue thus approaches an image of the withdrawn-ness of *mel* as a "subterranean creature." Thus, the "something deeper" from which a *mel* unfolds is also withdrawn.

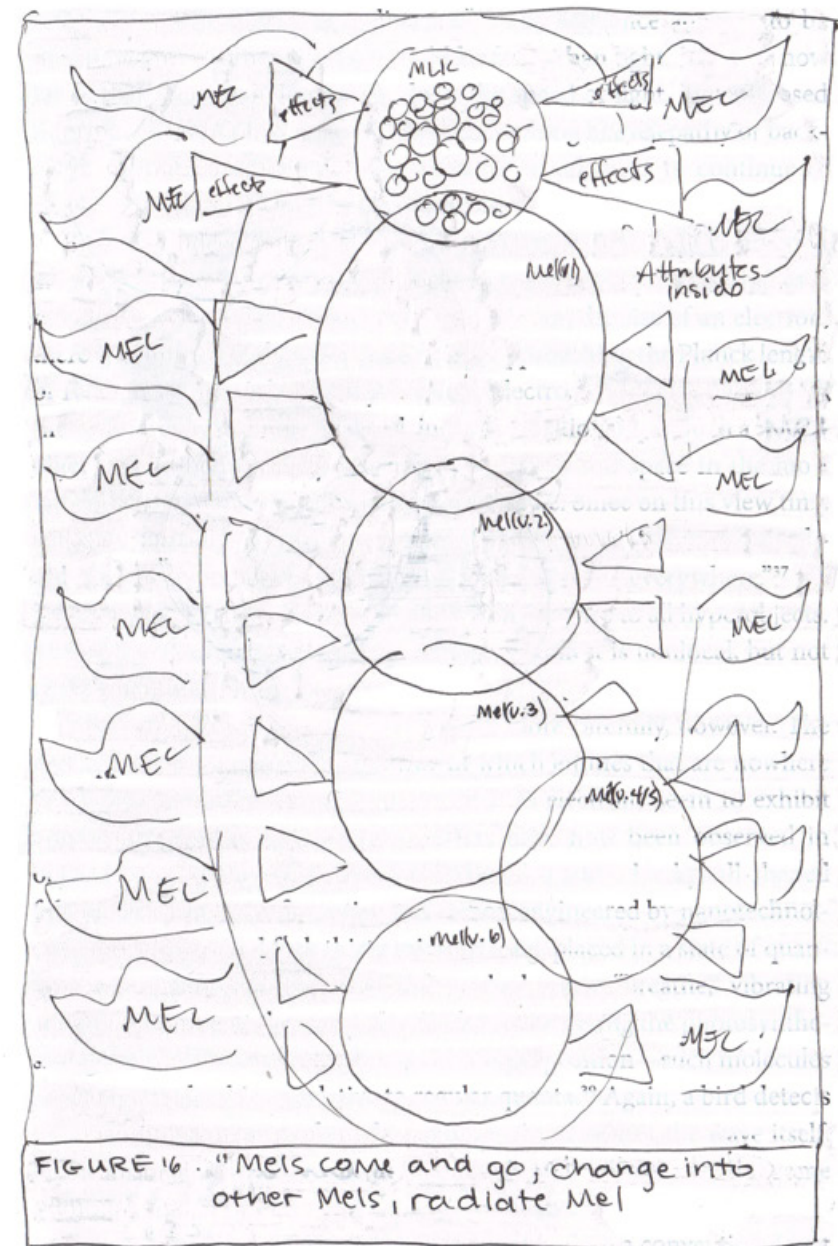


FIGURE 16. "Mels come and go, change into other Mels, radiate Mel"

mel is then a wave packet—a blob that contains something like a particle, distributed in the wave packet across a range of locations according to probability. The wave packet may be imagined as distributed across a vast area of spacetime.

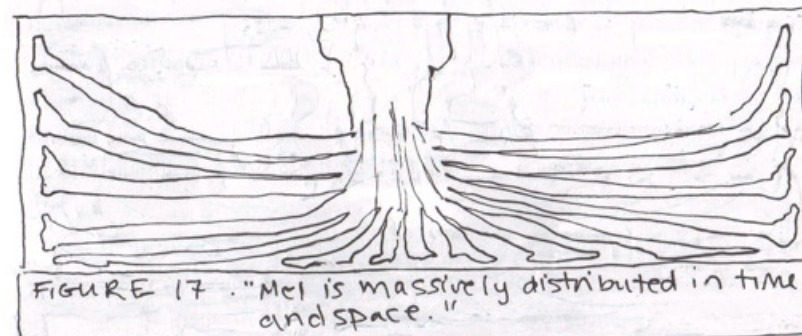
Nonlocality means that self-identity is dispersed among the Mels occupying different regions of spacetime.

Mel can't be seen directly, but is a mesh of interference patterns created by perception bouncing off her and time passing through her.

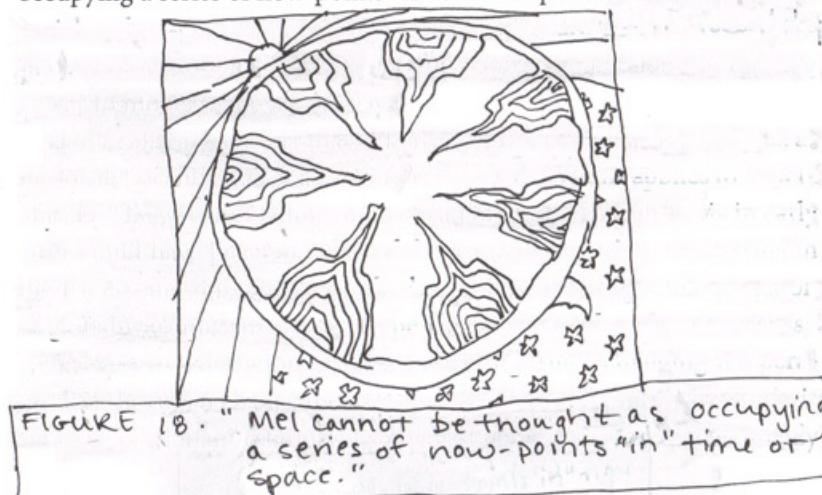
Cut a little piece of time^{with a Mel} out, isolate a little piece of an experience^{with a Mel} and you still see a (slightly more blurry) version of mel. Every piece of the Mels contains information about the whole.

Mel is a play of difference within which particle-like Mels arise, just as for deconstruction language is a play of difference out of which meaning arises.

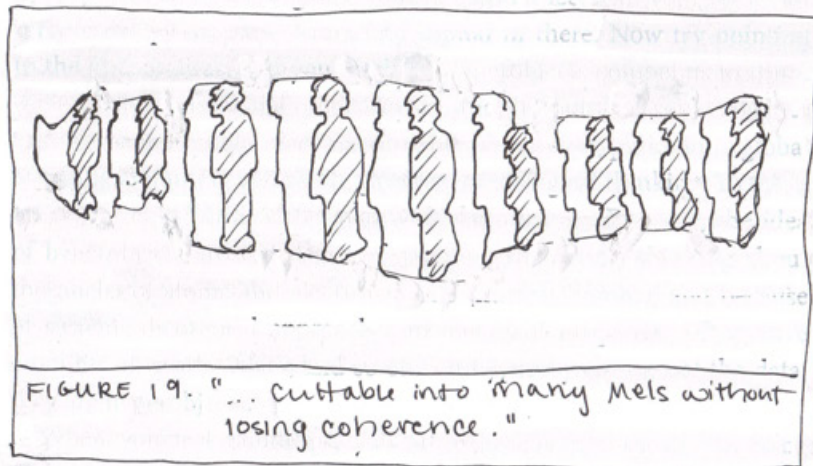
Mel is massively distributed in time and space, exhibiting non-local effects that defy location and temporality, cuttable into many Mels without losing coherence.



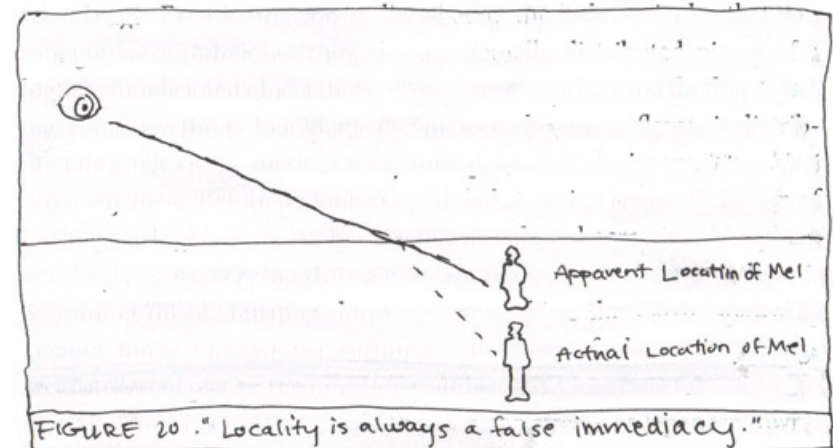
Such gigantic scales are involved—or rather such knotty relationships between gigantic and intimate scales—that mel cannot be thought as occupying a series of now-points "in" time or space.



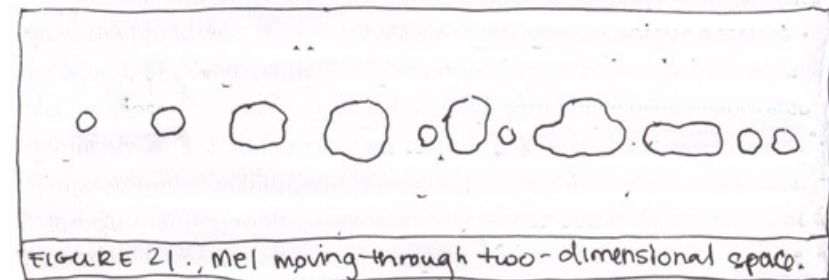
Stop the tape of evolution anywhere and you won't see Mel.



The Mels start to oppress us with their terrifying strangeness—we will have ^{to} acclimatize ourselves to the fact that locality is always a false immediacy.



The Mels are ^{they} real, but ^{they} involve a massive, counterintuitive perspective shift to see them. Convincing some people of ^{their} existence is like convincing two-dimensional people of the existence of apples, based on the appearance of a morphing circular shape in their world.



The constraints of human physicality and memory displace Mel. She becomes distant and close at the same time and for the same reasons.

Mel ceases to be a neutral, transparent medium in which everything is illuminated, and becomes a potent force.

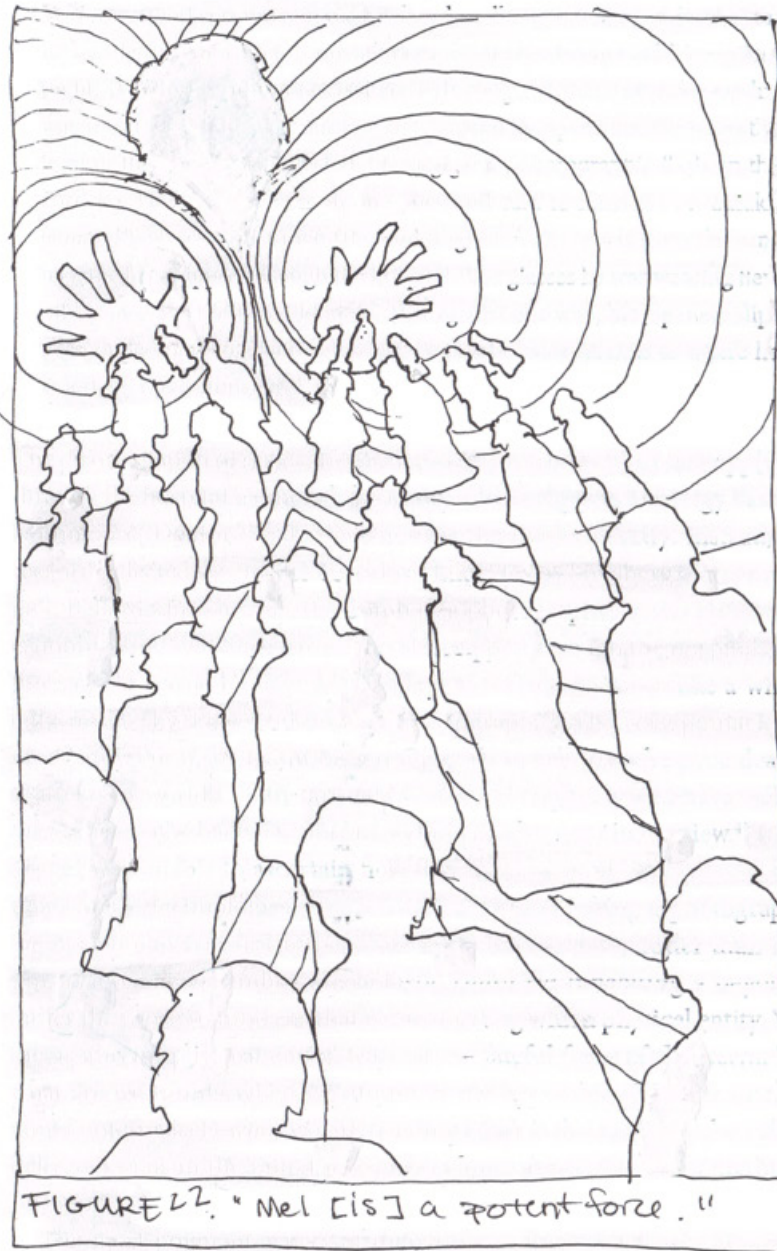
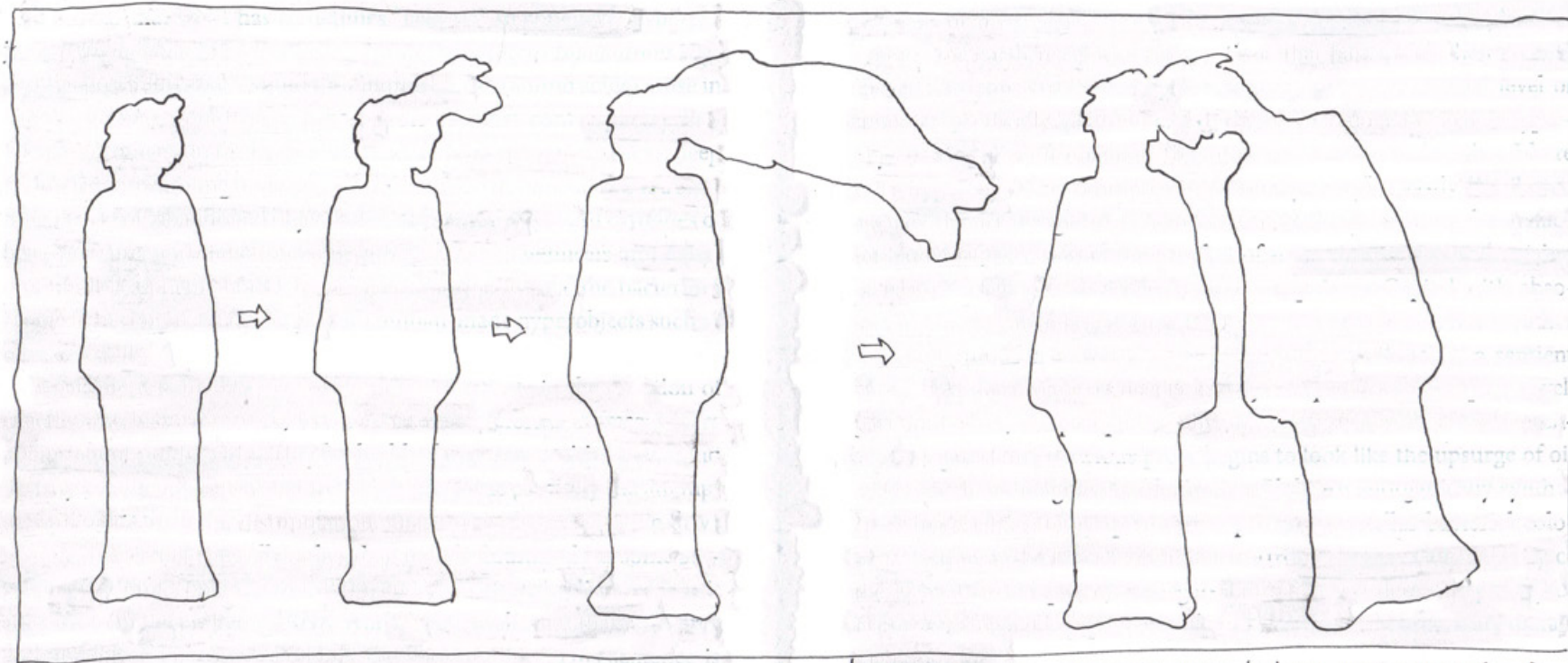


FIGURE 22. "Mel [is] a potent force."

As you move away from ^{she} Mel, she seems for a while to loom ever larger in your field of vision, as if ^{she} were pursuing you, due to a strange parallax effect in which more of a suitably massive object is revealed as one goes farther away from it.

It is as if Mel is stuck to you, as if ^{she} won't let you go.

The Mels are what we call spots of time, traumatic rupture in the continuity of being, wound around which The Mels secreted memories, fantasies, thoughts. Mel, in this respect, is nothing more than the history of such wounds and the secretions exuded to protect herself from them. Put it this way: Mel is the "precipitate of abandoned object cathexes," like a mystic writing pad whose underlying wax is inscribed with everything that was ever drawn on it. Mel is a poem about strangers.



The Mels are just the attempt of nature to "solve" the paradox inscribed within ^{Mel} and thus to cancel out her disequilibrium, somewhat in the way that water "finds its own level." Yet the very attempt to find a solution to ^{her} is what results in her continued existence as a copy of ^{her} self. In trying to cancel ^{her} self out, she becomes beautifully defended against herself.

FIGURE 23. "Replication is just the attempt of nature to 'solve' the paradox inscribed within a Mel"

wonder about the intensity of the feeling they think they see behind or within the poem. Or maybe the music we are hearing tells us about the unconscious, coming from some place of archetypes or from the trauma of unspeakable secrets. Here is Mel. But mel is not here.

Is the beyond that might explain the here of the There is no way to. Like any stranger, mel is caught between mels, in an interstitial place that makes worlds as such seem flimsy and constructed—which, of course, they are.

a bardo, a "between" selves,
bardos.

All of identity is
or rather a series of

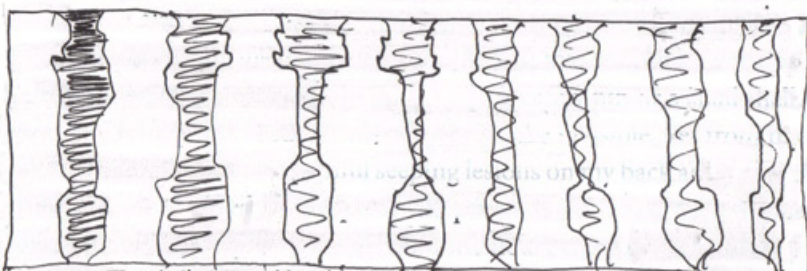


FIGURE 24 "All identity is a bardo, a "between" selves, or rather a series of bardos."

When I think nonlocality in this way, I am not negating the specificity of ^{Mel}the Mels, evaporating them into the abstract mist of the general or the larger or the less local. ^{Mel}mel is far weirder than that. When it comes to ^{Mel}the Mels, nonlocality means that the general ^{Mel}ness is compromised by the particular. When I look for ^{Mel}mel, I don't find her. I do not find her by looking *sub specie aeternitatis*, but by seeing things *sub specie mutabilis*, *sub specie meli*.

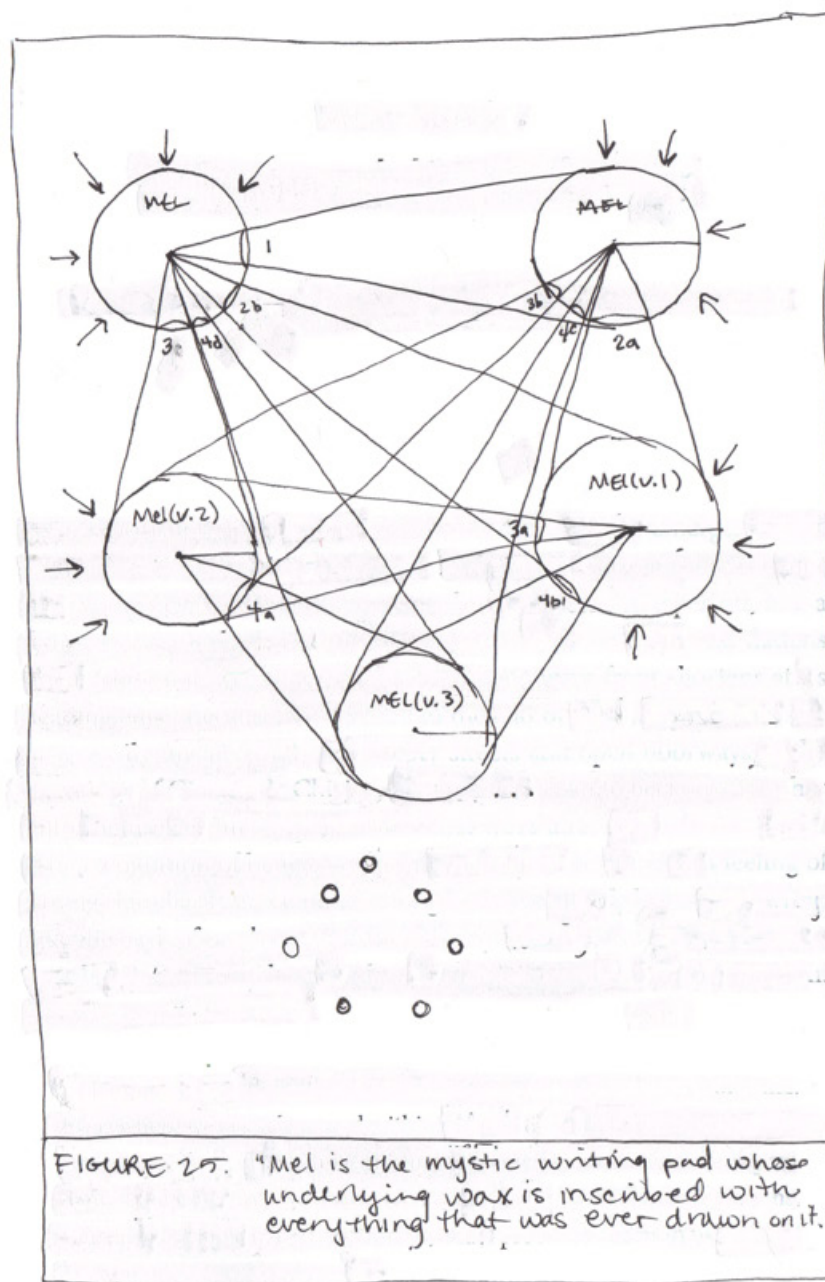
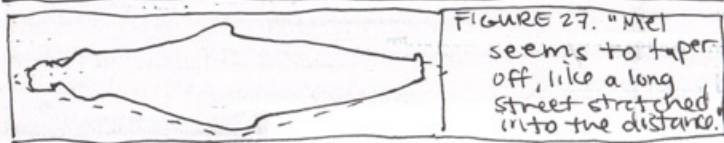
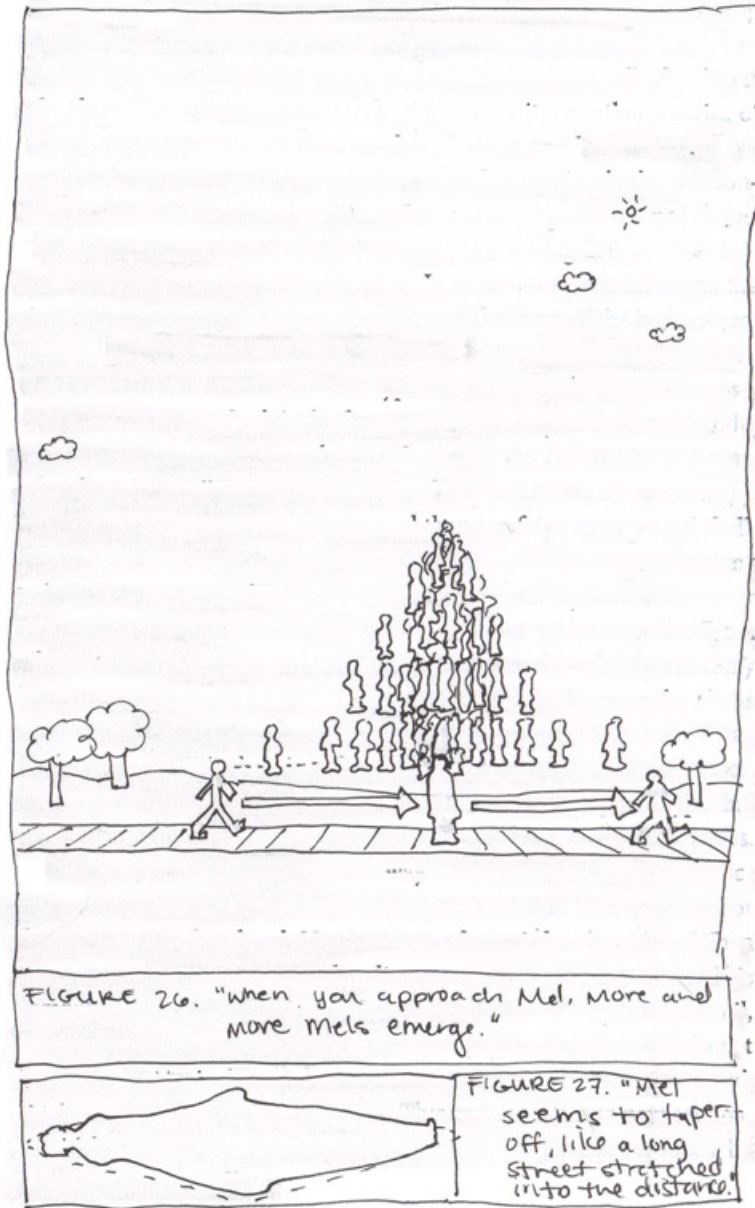


FIGURE 25. "Mel is the mystic writing pad whose underlying wax is inscribed with everything that was ever drawn on it."



MEL AS Temporal Undulation

When you approach Mel, more and more Mels emerge.

Mel envelops us, yet she is so massively distributed in time that she seems to taper off, like a long street stretched into the distance. Time bends her and flattens her, the same way that an electromagnetic wave front shortens at its leading edge. Because we can't see to the end of Mel, she is necessarily uncanny. Like empty streets and open doorways, Mel seem to beckon us further into herself, making us realize that we're already lost inside her. The recognition of being caught in Mel is precisely a feeling of strange familiarity and familiar strangeness. We already know identity like the back of our hand.

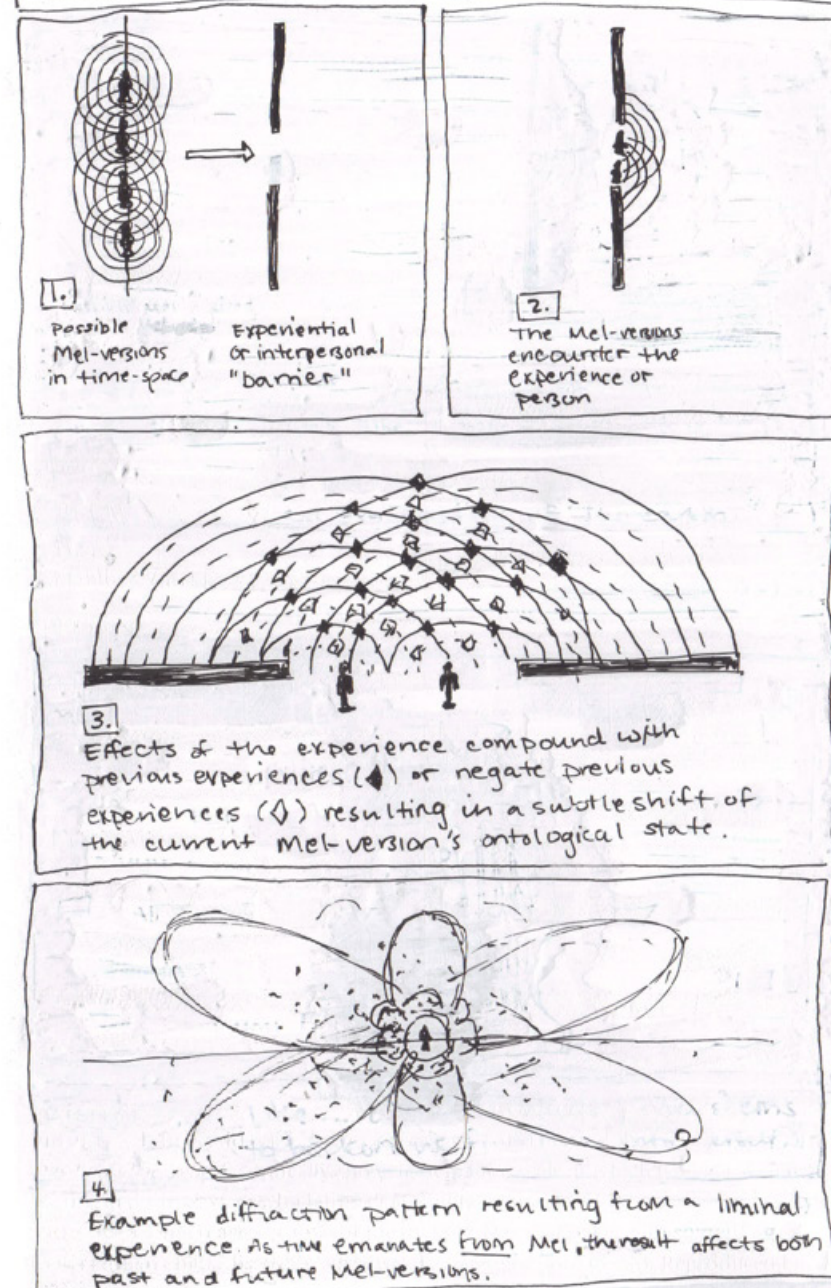
But this is weird identity, this Mel.

Everywhere we are submersed within Mel;

We move through her, yet we are nonetheless independent of her. We produce effects in Mel like diffraction patterns, causing her to change in particular ways, and she produces effects in us.

Mel can no longer be construed as an absolute container, but rather should be thought of as a spacetime manifold that is radically *in* The Mels, of ^{them} rather than ontologically outside them.

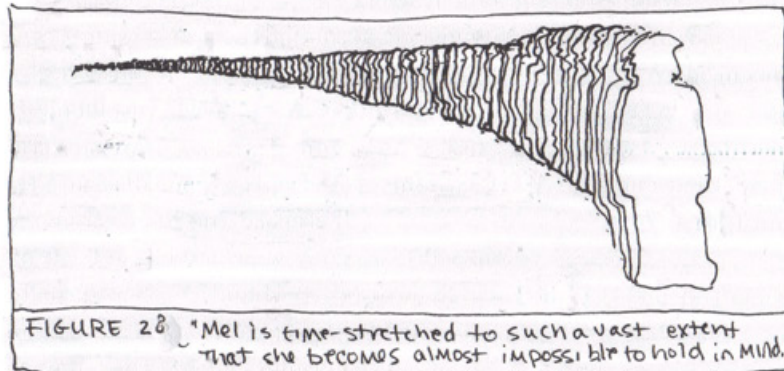
FIGURE 27. "We produce effects in Mel like diffraction patterns."



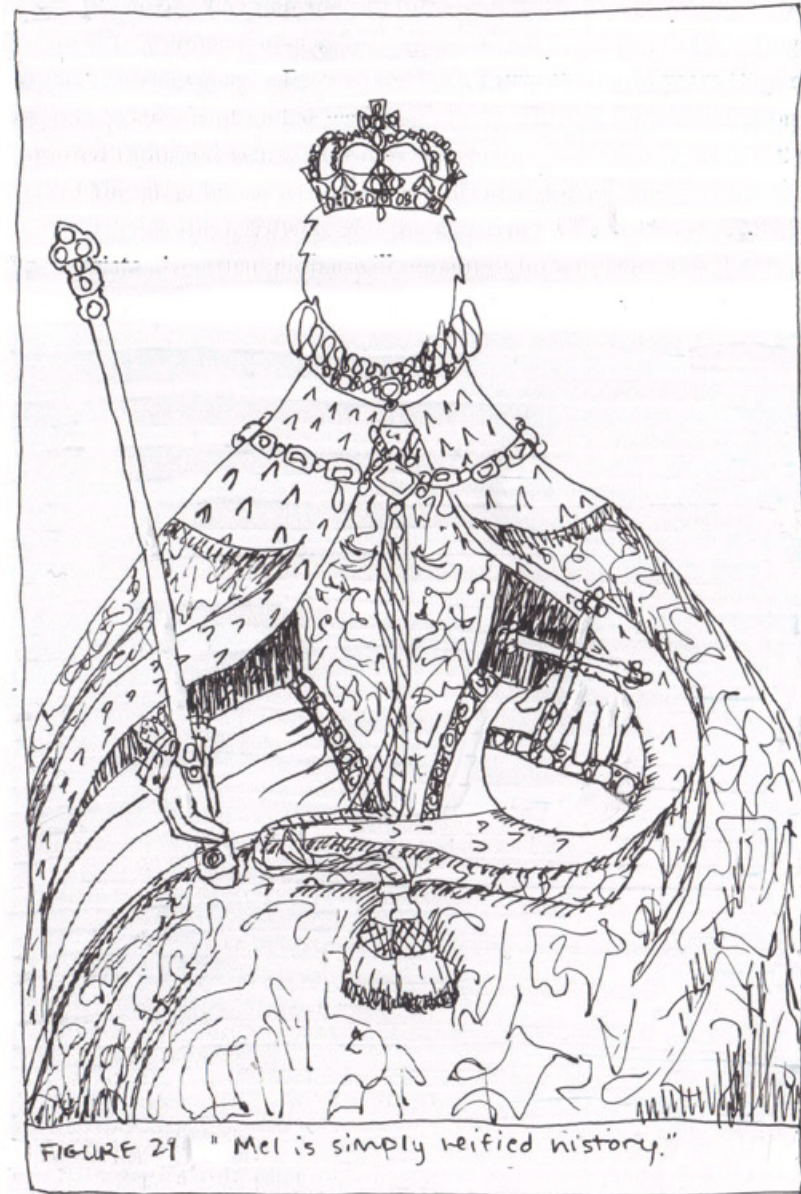
Mel is "in front of things": not spatially in front, but ontologically in front, like the undulating red curtain of a theater.

Some call her Mel because that is what they are used to. But beyond this, she is The Mels, massively distributed in time and space in ways that baffle humans and make interacting with her fascinating, disturbing, problematic, and wondrous.

Mel is simply reified history.



When you look at Mel you're looking at the past. Mel is time-stretched to such a vast extent that she becomes almost impossible to hold in mind.



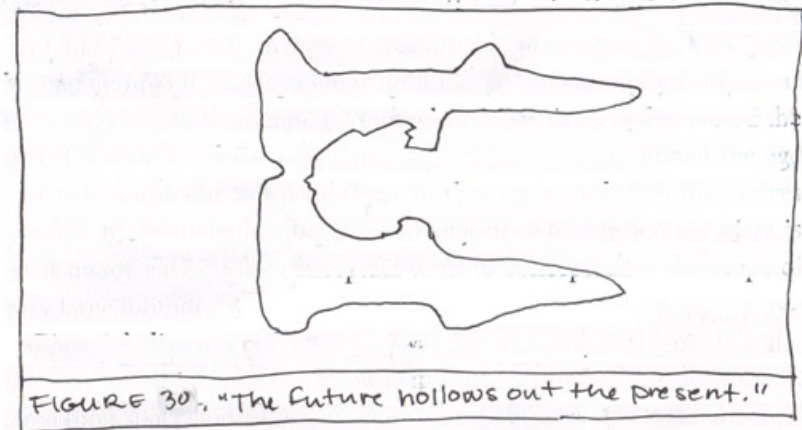
The future hollows out the present.

These gigantic timescales are truly humiliating in the sense that they force us to realize how *changeable* we are. ^{A singular} *self-identity* is far easier to cope with. ^{A singular} *self-identity* brings to mind *immortality*.

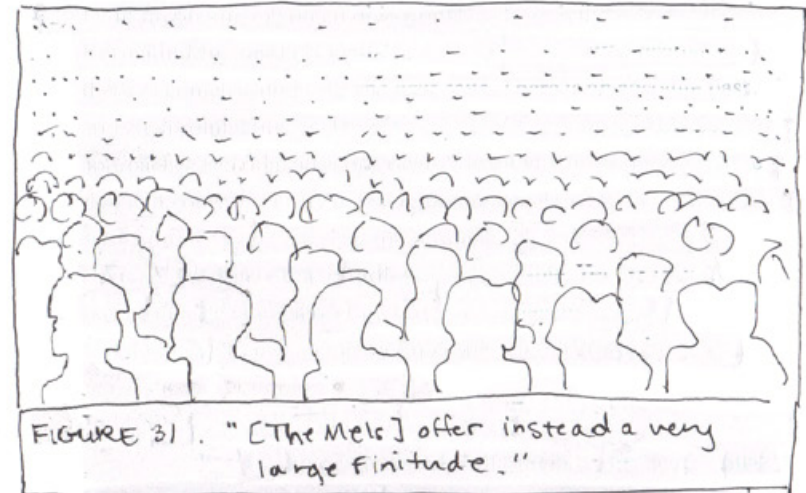
But The Mels are not forever. What they offer instead is *very large finitude*.



There is a real sense in which it is far easier to conceive of "identity" than multiple selves. Identity makes us feel important.



The Mels stretch and snap our ideas of what an identity is in the first place.

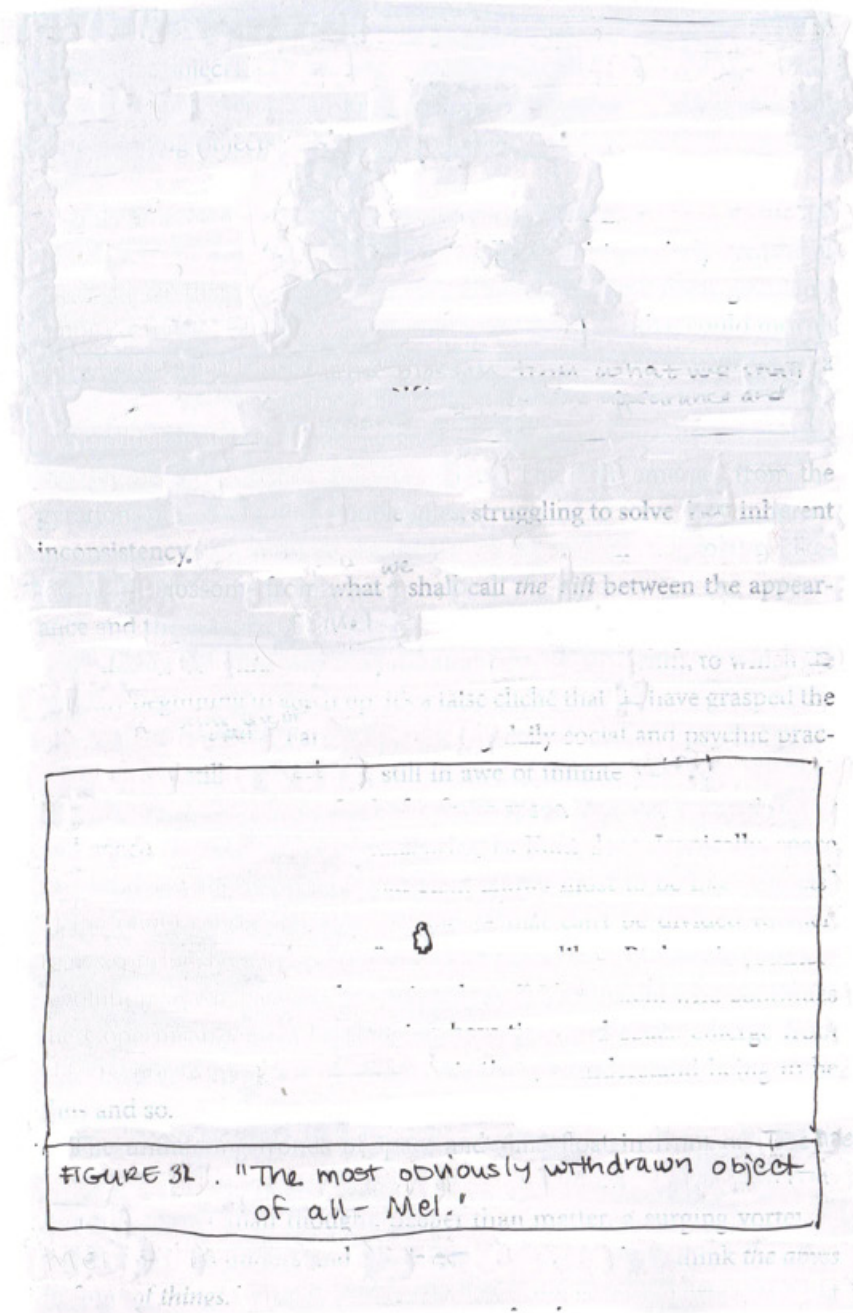


dripping rather than being rigid and uniform. mel
 is n't physically real; rather physical events are real and they contain
 mel in their interior. a Mel in
 Only infinitesimally small areas
 of space-time may be regarded as rigid and
 container-like.

mel isn't a unity. Thus, it is not possible in relativ-
 ity to obtain a consistent definition of an extended rigid identity.

a false immediacy. Nothing in the universe apprehends like
 that. It apprehends itself like that.

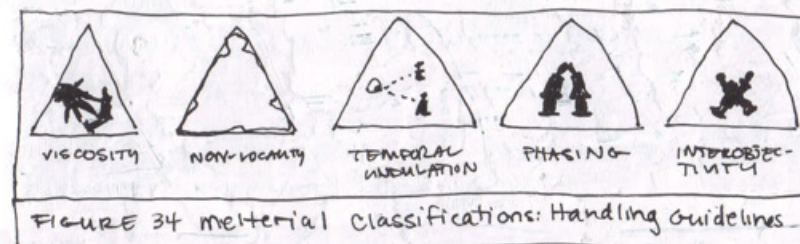
Relativity guarantees that the
 real Mel will be forever withdrawn from any Mels that tries to access
 her, including that Mel herself. The
 most obviously withdrawn object of all— mel.



me is the very failure of my thought to be the object that it is thinking.



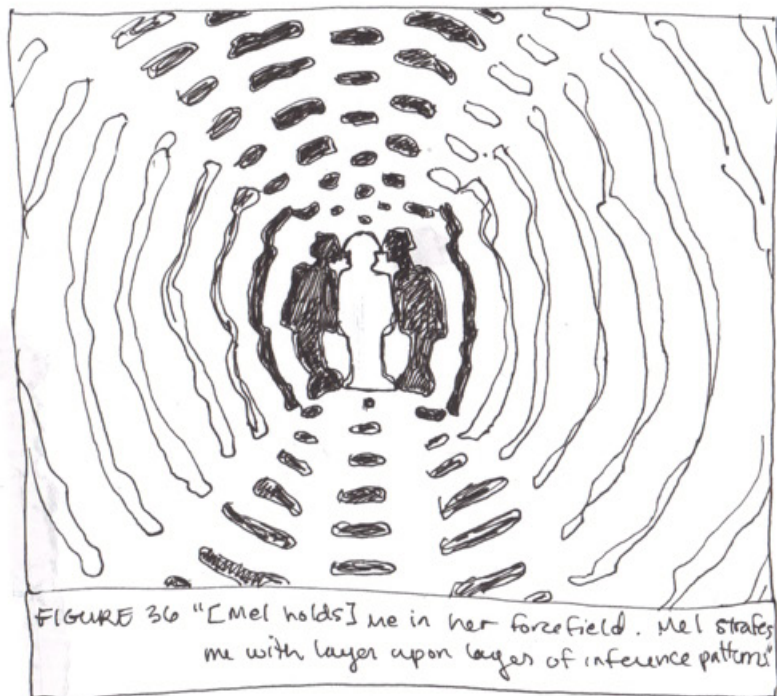
Like the *strange stranger*^{is}, there a Mel-Mel? ^{is} there a Mel that is beyond predictability, timing, or any ethical or political calculation? ^{is} there a Mel-Mel? ^{is} there a Mel that is "nowhere" and yet real: not a beyond, but a real entity in the real universe?



The Mels compel us to handle them in certain ways. But because of temporal foreshortening, The Mels are impossible to handle just right. This aporia gives rise to a dilemma: we have no time to learn fully about each Mel. But we have to handle them anyway. This handling causes ripples upon ripples.

Thus, one effect has been phenological asynchrony: the way mel and The Mels go out of sync.





MEL AS Phasing

As I approach
Mel, ^{she} seems to surge toward me, locking onto ^{me} and hold-
ing me in ^{her} force field. Mel strafes me with layer upon
layer of inference patterns.

My sense of being "in" a time and of inhabiting a "place" depends
on ^{the proximity} of Mel.

mel seem^s to phase in and out of the human world. mel is phased: she occupi^s a high-dimensional phase space that makes her impossible to see as a whole on a regular three-dimensional human-scale basis.

We can only see pieces of mel at a time. The reason why she appear^s nonlocal and temporally foreshortened is precisely because of this transdimensional quality. We only see pieces of her at once,

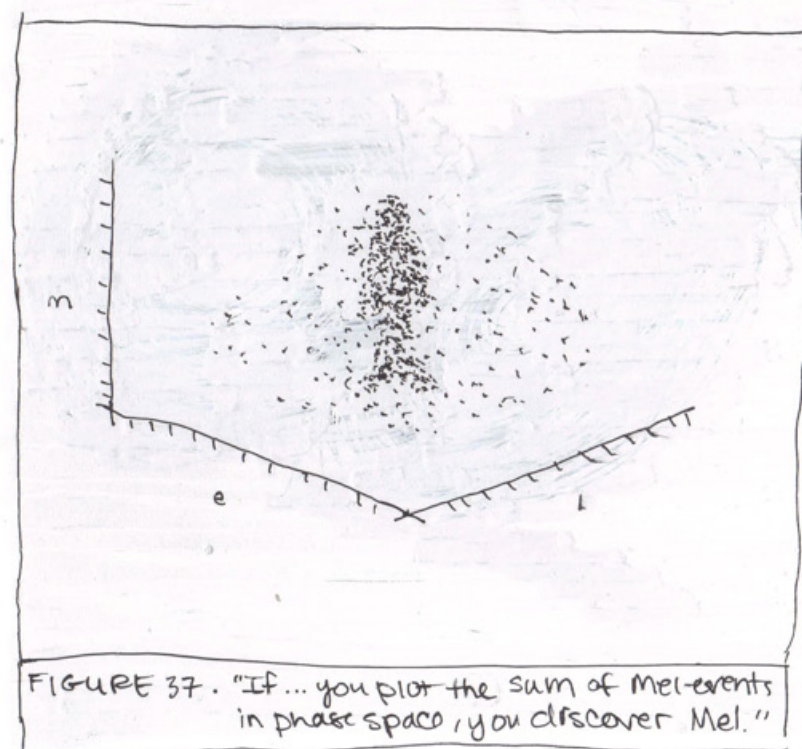
What we experience as a changing, flowing and oozing identity is precisely a symptom of our less than adequate perception of higher dimensions of self-identity, which is where mel live^s.

That's why you can't see mel. You would have to occupy some high-dimensional space to see her unfolding explicitly.

...complex set of algorithms executing themselves in a high-dimensional phase space.

As it is, I only see brief patches of mel as she intersects with my world.

one brief patch I call me.



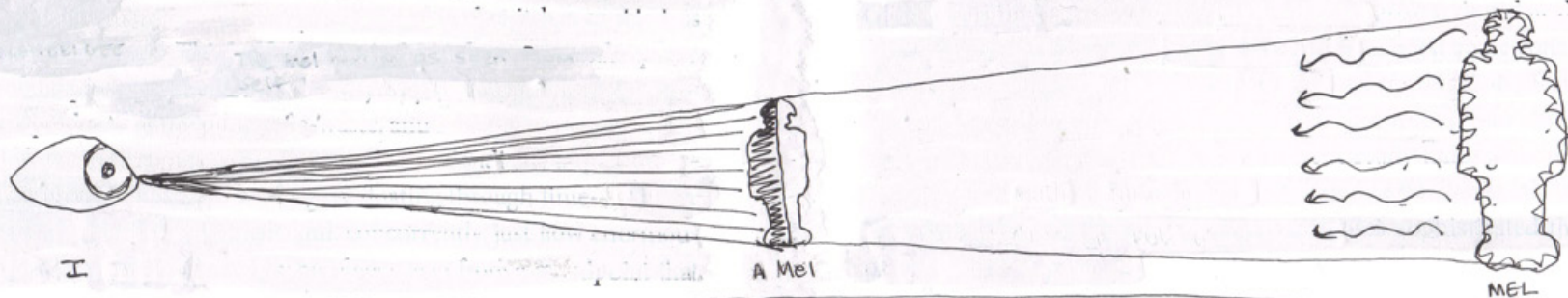
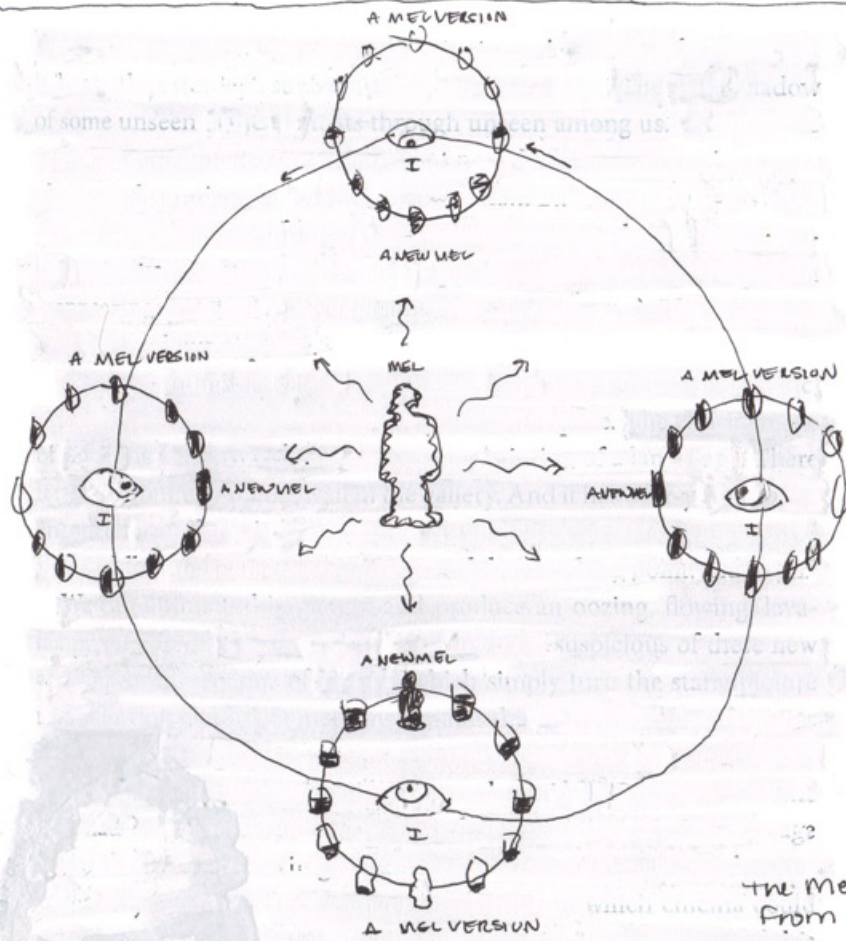
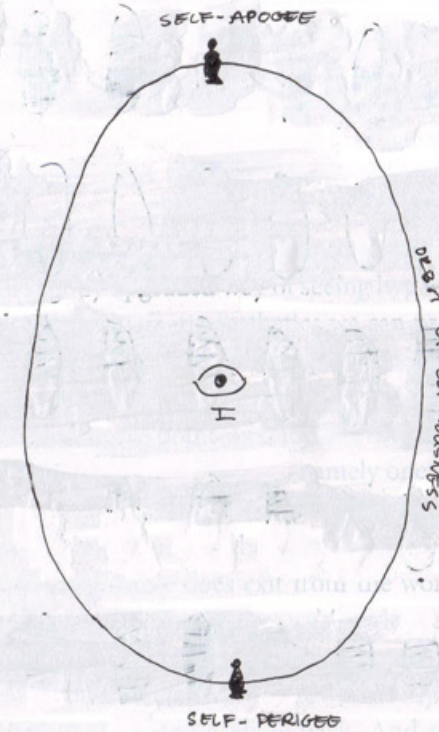


FIGURE 38. Mel Phasing: "what we experience as the slow periodic recurrence of a celestial event such as an eclipse or a comet is a continuous entity whose imprint simply shows up in our social or cognitive space for awhile."



The gaps I perceive between moments at which my mind is aware of *Mel* and moments at which it isn't, do not inhere in *Mel* herself. This is not simply a matter of my "subjective" awareness versus an "objective" world.

I experience between being strafed by one *Mel*-version and another does not mark a gap of nothingness.

The gaps and ruptures are simply the invisible presence of *Mel* herself, which looms around me constantly. On this view,

mel cover every available surface, leering into my world relentlessly. The notion of "background" and its "foreground" are only phases of a self-identity that doesn't "go anywhere" at all, at least not on a human-sized scale.

When a *Mel* phases, intersecting with her.

another *Mel* is A transition in *Mel*-versions happens

when one *Mel* cancels out part of another *Mel*. For a ^{transition} to occur, there must be $1 + n$ *Mels* that intersect. Phasing happens because one *mel* translates another one.

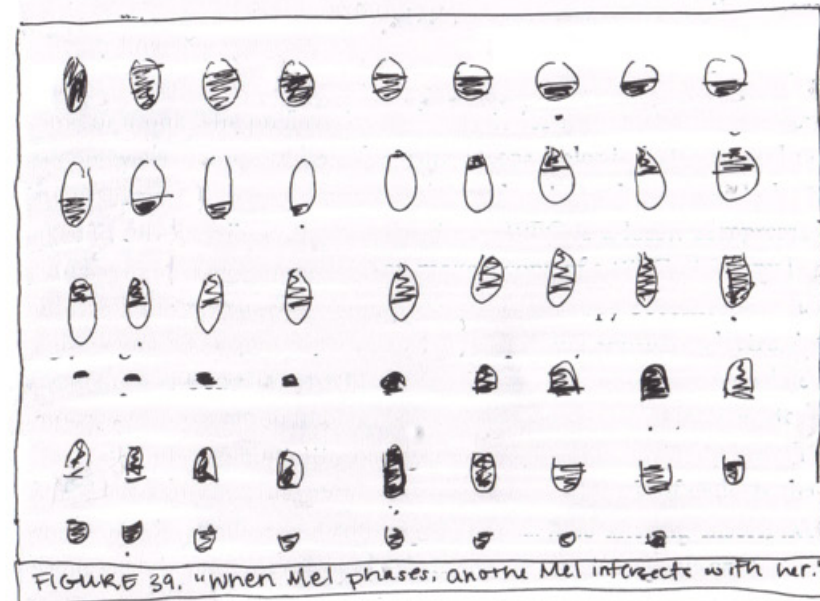


FIGURE 39. "When *Mel* phases, another *Mel* intersects with her."

What we are dealing with, with the phenomenon of *The Mels*, is an indexical sign that is a metonymy for *Mel*. *Mel* is the mereological figure, the figure that deals with parts and wholes and relationships. What we encounter when we study *The Mels* is a strange

mereology in which parts do not disappear into wholes. Quite the reverse. Indeed, what we seem to have is

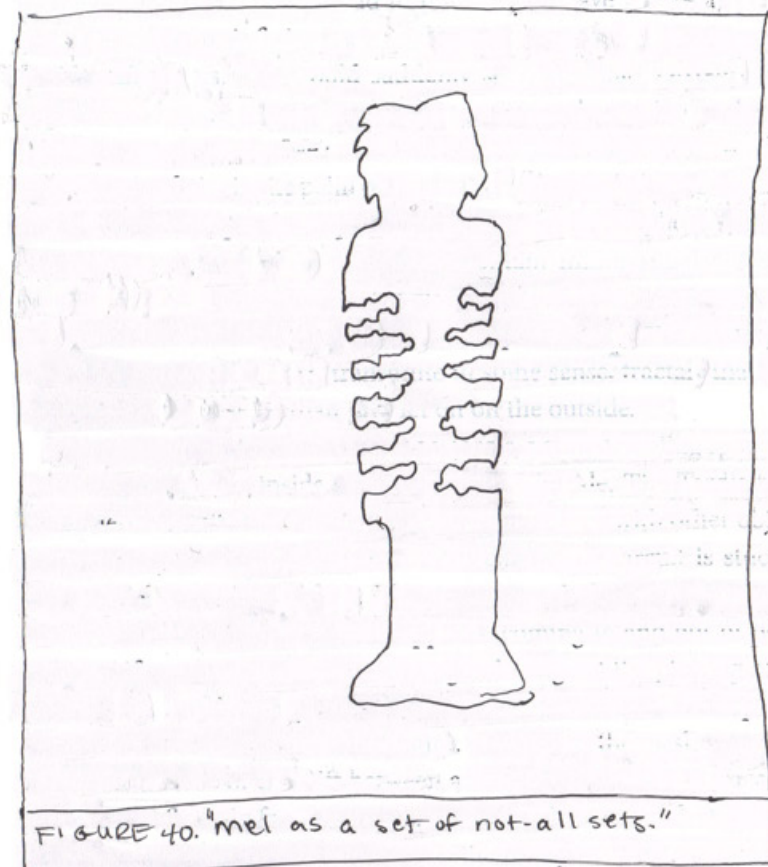
a not-all set. Selves seem to contain more than themselves. A ^{she} ~~mel~~ is a unique entity, yet ^{she} is also part of a series of ~~mel~~s. There is an inevitable dislocation between ~~the Mels~~ and ~~Mel~~.

But ~~mel~~ is and is not ~~we~~ self, at the same time, because ^{she} ~~^~~ has parts that cannot be wholly subsumed into ^{her} ~~^~~. Otherwise phasing and ~~The Mels~~ would fail to occur. A phasing object is a sign of a rupture at the heart of being.

The ^{rupture} ~~^~~ exists at an ontological intersection, not a physical one. The intersection is between a self and its appearance-for another thing, or things. Thus, the mesh of relations ^{rupture} ~~(the mels)~~ is on one side of the ~~^~~, the hither side, while ^(mel) the strange stranger is on the yonder side— not spatially but ontologically.

A self can be ^{the} a member of itself, thus giving rise to set theoretical paradoxes that plague ~~mel~~. If a set can be a member of itself, then one can imagine a set of sets that are not members of themselves. In order to cope with this paradox we

have to allow for the existence of contradictory entities. This allows for the existence of ~~Mel~~.



Indeed, since selves are inherently inconsistent, an abyss opens up simply because of the fact that a self can "interact with itself" because it is a spacing and a timing, not a given, objectified entity.

Phasing is evidence of some interaction between selves, or between a self.

(What is the difference between a ~~Mel~~? One of ~~her~~ legs is

both the same.)

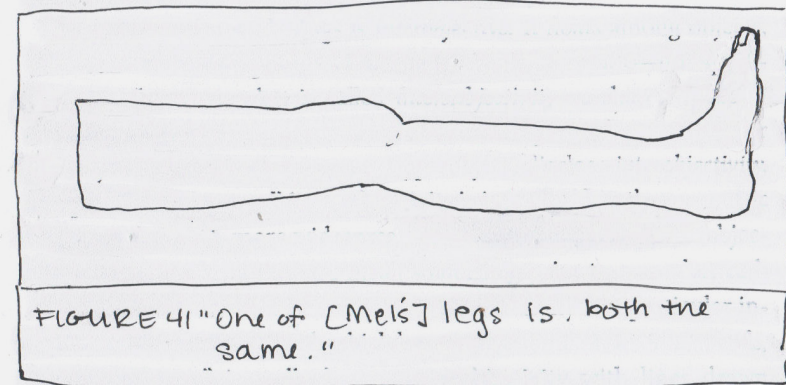
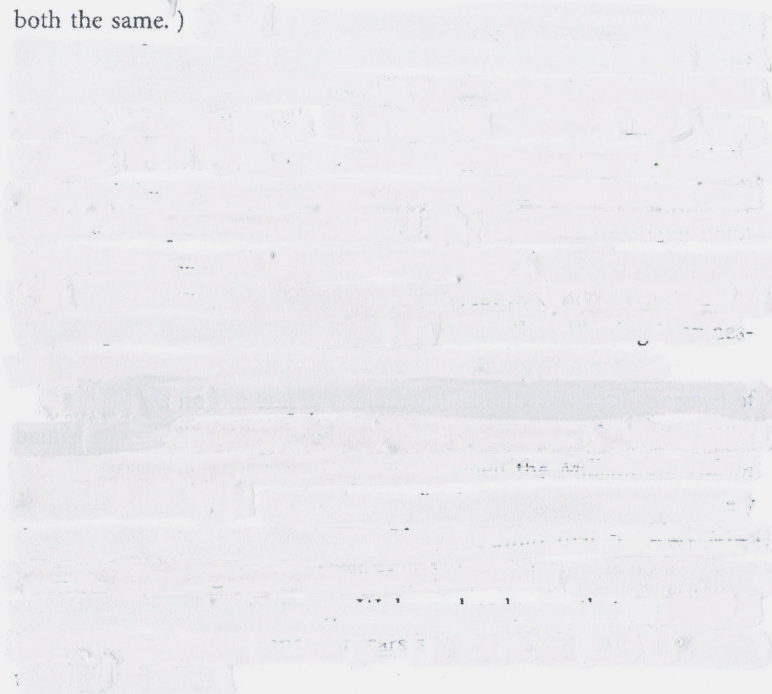
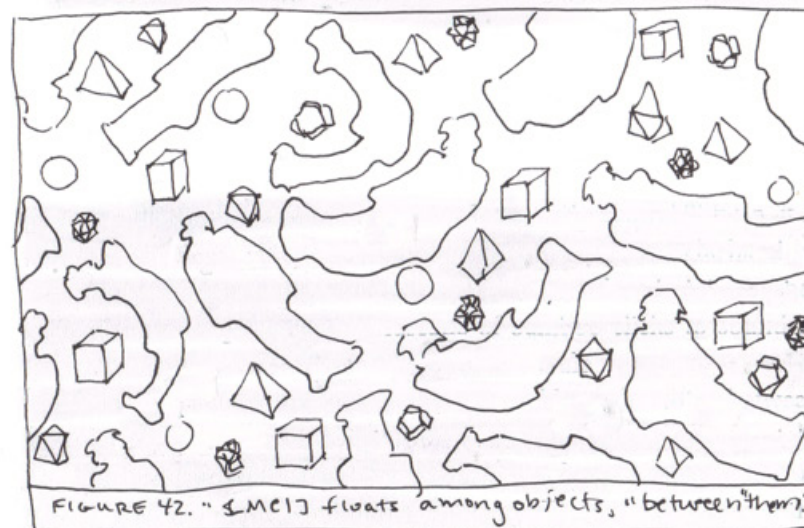


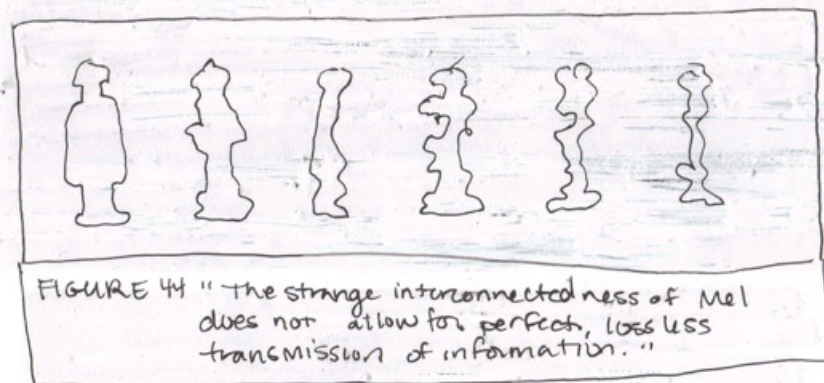
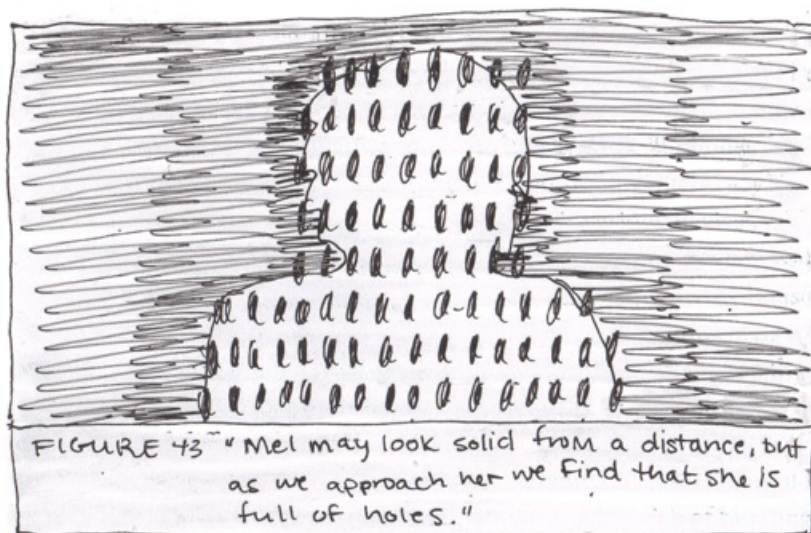
FIGURE 41 "One of [Meis]' legs is, both the same."

MEL AS Interobjectivity



mel is interobjective. ^{she} floats among objects, "between" them; though this between is not "in" spacetime—it is spacetime.

mel disclose^s interobjectivity. The phenomenon we call '*mel*' is just a local, anthropocentric instance of a much more widespread phenomenon.



A mesh consists of relationships between crisscrossing strands of metal and gaps between the strands. Meshes are potent metaphors for the strange interconnectedness of Mel, an interconnectedness that does not allow for perfect, lossless transmission of information, but is instead full of gaps and absences. When a Mel is born^{she} is instantly enmeshed into a relationship with others in the mesh.

A mesh consists of links, and also of gaps between links.

It is precisely the gaps between and within Mel that enable entities to grip her.



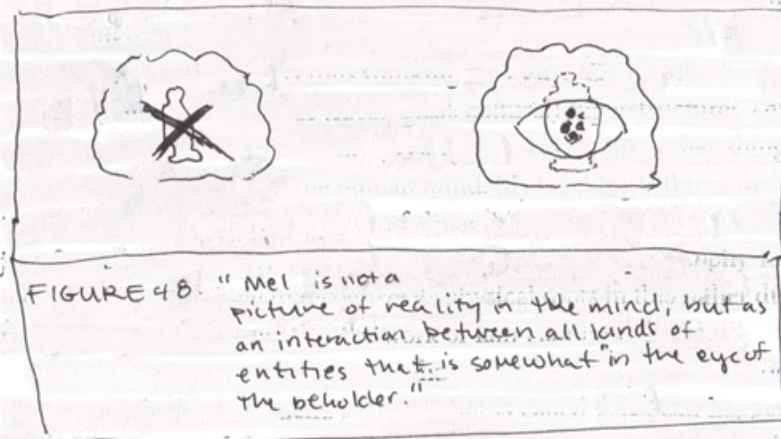
Mel is an interobjective effect, an emergent property of relationships between enmeshed objects.



This means that Mel is an effect-for some "observer." ^{She} is not "in" anything and ^{she} is not prior to objects but is rather an aftereffect of them.

Mel is not a picture of reality in the mind, but as an interaction between all kinds of entities that is somewhat "in the eye of the beholder"—including, of course, myself.

Since we only see her shadow, we easily see the "surface" on which her shadow falls as part of a system that she corral into being.



A *mel* and a *non-mel* are hidden from view. They feed an observer answers to questions posed by the observer. If the observer reckons that the answers come from a *mel*, then they come from a *mel*. Such a form of *mel*-hood is quite attenuated: it means that in effect, *I am not a non-mel*, since no distinction can be made between the answers given by a *mel* and answers given by a *non-mel*. *Mel*-hood then is also an effect in the mesh—^{Mel} may look solid from a distance, but as we approach ^{her} we find that ^{she} is full of holes. If we think *mel* is an emergent property of certain kinds of neural^{and physical} organization, we end up with paradoxes: What constitutes a *mel*? Exactly where does *mel* begin to emerge from *non-mel*?

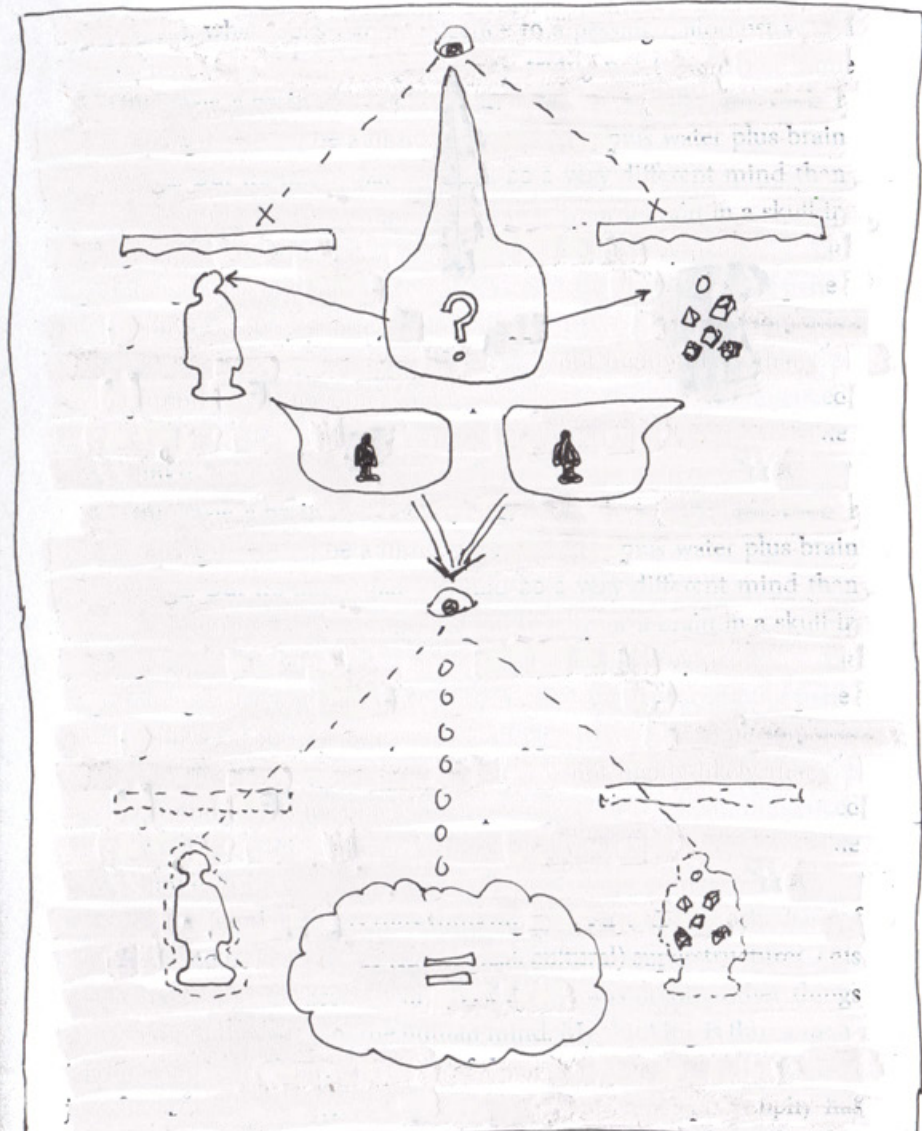
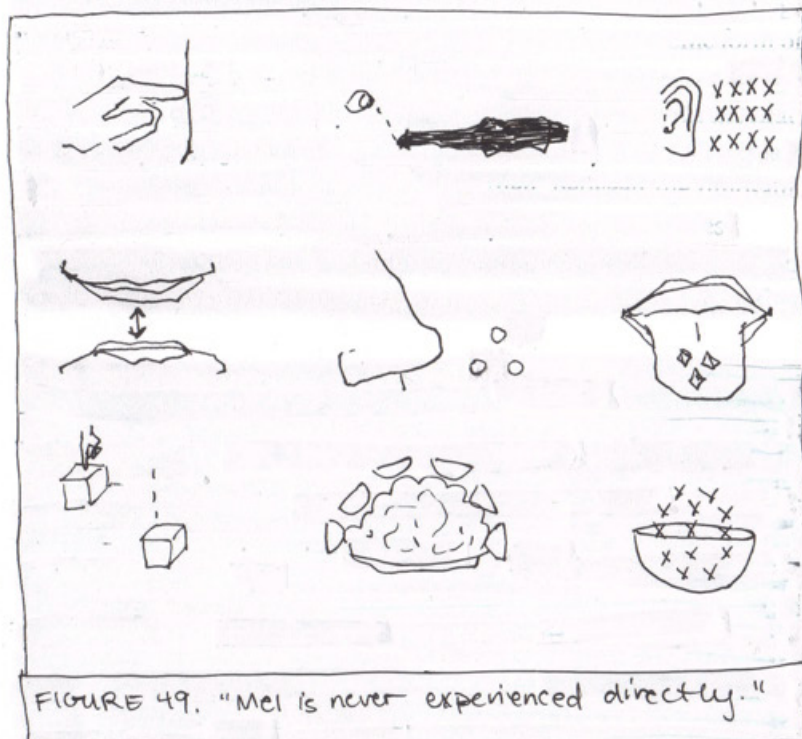


FIGURE 16 "A *mel* and a *non-mel* are hidden from view. If no distinction can be made between the answers given by a *mel* and the answers of a *non-mel*, then the answers come from a *mel*."

mel is ~~never~~ experienced directly, but only as mediated through other entities in some shared sensual space. We never hear the wind in itself, only the wind in the door, the wind in the trees. This means that for every interobjective system, there is at least one entity that is withdrawn.

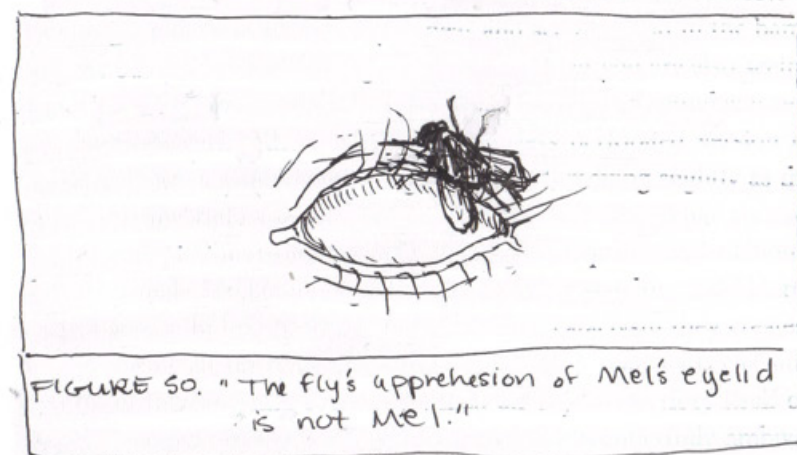


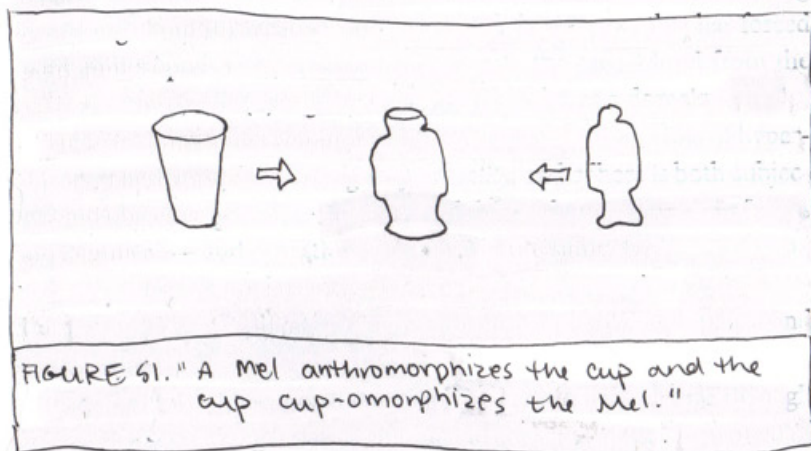
mel leaves a footprint in some mud. The footprint is not mel. A fly lands on the mel's left eyelid. The fly's apprehension of mel's eyelid is not mel. mel blinks. Her blink is not mel. mel's brain registers the fly's feet. The registration is not mel, and so on.

Even mel doesn't know herself entirely, but only in a rough translation that samples and edits her being. A mosquito or an asteroid has their own unique sample of mel-ness, and these samples are not mel.

There is a real mel, withdrawn even from herself. The real mel is a mystery, yet not nebulous—just this mel, this actual one, she who stepped in the mud.

mel is closed off, secret, unspeakable—even to herself. Whatever happens concerning her—the gyrations of her mind, the imprint of her foot, the delicate tracery of the fly, my thinking about her—occurs in an interobjective space that is ontologically in front of this mystery realm.





For every system of meaning, there must be some opacity for which the system cannot account, which it must include-exclude in order to be itself.

Every interobjective space implies at least one more object in the vicinity: let us call this the $1 + n$.

A mel anthropomorphizes the cup and the cup cup-omorphizes the mel, and so on. In this process there are always $1 + n$ objects that are excluded.

The appearance of *Mel*, the indexical signs of *Mel*, is the *past* of *Mel*. What we commonly take to lie underneath a present *Mel*, ^{her} *past* state, is ^{her} appearance-for *Mel*.

Mel's history is ^{her} \wedge form. Form is memory. The form of a *Mel* is ^{her} essence and that *matter*ⁿ is a perspective trick, a backward glance at the *Mel* that was appropriated to form the *Mel* in question. *Mel* is a photograph of ^{her} past.

Appearance is the past. *Essence is the future*. The strange strangeness of *Mel*, ^{her} \wedge invisibility—it's the future, somehow beamed into the "present."

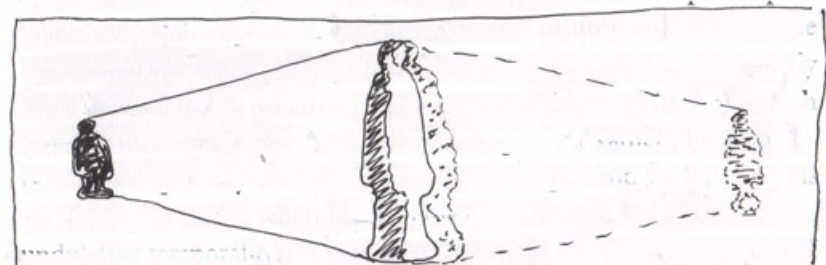


FIGURE 52 "Appearance is the past. *Essence is the future*. *Mel* is \wedge the future, somehow beamed into the "present."

mel is an exaggeration of the lack of a true now.

mel is nowhere: Mel is never present.

Works Cited

- Daddario, Will. 2015. "Doing Life Is That Which We Must Think." *Performance Philosophy* 1: 168–174. <https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2015.1118>
- Bargh, John A. and Lawrence E. Williams. 2008. "Experiencing Physical Warmth Promotes Interpersonal Warmth." *Science* 322 (5901): 606–607. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1162548>
- Bravo, Javier A., Paul Forsythe, Marianne V. Chewb, Emily Escaravage, Hélène M. Savignac, Timothy F. Dinan, John Bienenstock, and John F. Cryan. 2014. "Ingestion of Lactobacillus Strain Regulates Emotional Behavior and Central GABA Receptor Expression in a Mouse via the Vagus Nerve." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108 (38): 16050–16055. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1102999108>
- Keenan, Julian Paul, Aaron Nelson, Margaret O'Connor, and Alvaro Pascual-Leone. 2001. "Neurology: Self-recognition and the Right Hemisphere." *Nature* 409 (6818): 305. <https://doi.org/10.1038/35053167>
- Laruelle, François. 2012. "Non-Philosophy as Heresy." In *François Laruelle, From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, edited by Robin Mackay, 257–284. Falmouth: Urbanomic/Sequence Press.
- . 2013. *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*. Translated by Taylor Adkins. Minneapolis: Univocal.
- Libet, Benjamin. 1985. "Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action." *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 8 (4): 529–566. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00044903>
- Moretti, Franco. 2015. *Distant Reading*. London: Verso.
- Morton, Timothy. 2013. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Biography

Since 2015, Chicago-based artist Mel Keiser has been working on a multifaceted project titled, *The Life and Deaths of The Mels*. In evaluating who she's been over the course of her life, Keiser identified five moments of liminality that resulted in significant self-change and have, arguably, created seven categorically different versions of herself over time: Melissa-Louise-Keiser, Mel(v.1), Mel(v.2), Mel(v.3), Mel(v.4/5), Mel(v.6) and Mel(v.7). In *The Life and Deaths of The Mels*, Keiser rewrites her personal history as the births and deaths of these different versions of herself—as The Mels. Using installation, performance, and writing, Keiser creates material evidence for these versions of herself, exploring the social and psychological impact of treating herself as a stratified series of distinct selves rather than a single person in fluid development. She uses scientific research methodologies alongside artistic praxes, hybridizing disciplines like personality psychology, evolutionary biology, and quantum physics to invent proof of the existence of these self-versions and to explain how and why these segmented versions of herself exist.

© 2018 Mel Keiser



Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).