



Article

## Birds of a Feather + Other Aerial Acrobats

Perry Kulper

Associate Professor, University of Michigan

pkulper@umich.edu

### Preflight

*Narrative spatial assemblies have shaped cultural constructions, while yielding speculations about worlds to be discovered, and about worlds that must remain apparitions. Myths, folklore, allegories and narratives, have structured myriad cultural trajectories, elongating practices, customs and traditions, all the while wandering into the woods, skies and deep horizons. These stories construct collectives, through shared forms of communication—otherwise long gone in the tangled movement from symbolic, to instrumental culture, over the past 350 years. Partially a result of the recent viral pandemic, of the ugly persistence of structural racism, and of poisoned political terrains, the ideological scope, and the ethical and moral consequences of stories told, and not told—and who's included, and therefore, whose not, cannot be overlooked. If narrative architecture can still speak, what might it say? And who could 'hear' it, and what might one do with what was heard? How many stories might be told? And might they have different degrees of resolution, finish and indeterminacy, opening doors to what might be possible? Nothing ventured, nothing gained.*

*Narrative spatial constructions are forms of world building—ways of setting out evidentiary fields, teasing out the potential for indulgence in metaphorical crimes. Through the interfaces of spatial actors, actions, and situations, lush mini-cosmologies might be constructed, where one can take possession of myriad clues, a kind of field of partial evidence, to construct other worlds, rather than being told how to respond—a form of generative parallax. Trading on the affordances of representation, the deep potential of materiality which is framed as conceptual, the possibility for gravity to go missing, and the prospect of durations that might be mixed, one can envision folded geographies, split temporalities and leveraging material that can be 'real', coded, and digitally generated—all towards reframing what is taken for granted, escaping known epistemological models and prying open a cultural imagination. Here, crossing boundaries, taking risks and putting the 'form follows function' paradigm, human-centric, station point driven, 'one-point perspective' space, and temporal continuities, all at risk. In equal part, the potential of modes of visualization, are deeply consequential toward the projection of alternative cultural imaginaries.*



Perry Kulper, El Dorado: Floating Bird Motel, Peachcraft'd Overtones, 2017



Perry Kulper, El Dorado: Floating Bird Motel, A World of Illusionary Details, 2017





Perry Kulper, El Dorado: Floating Bird Motel, Fancifully Maroon(ed)...., 2017







## El Dorado: Floating Bird Motels

They sculpted acrobatic tracings, requiems for the skyward masses—in real, fictional and digitally embroidered visions. A staged, and frisky ecology of dancing bird alphabet-like topiary hedges, a stuffed technology garden, a horizon(t)al water talisman, a bird ballroom with dioramic wallpaper, a retractable circus, windsock rooms, a Wallace Stevens inspired windsail, and a texture mapped garden landing surface, always changing—the deep orange horizons entourage made a difference, observed from a neighborly shadow. They told stories, we told stories. The fragmentary evidence was inconclusive, alarmingly, in fact, for the metaphorical detective in us all. Bit-mapping bird perch upholstery at 300 dpi, a stuffed aerial taxonomy, miniaturized, an invasively pleasurable berry festival, and diorama-like thickened profiles—feathered indulgences blossomed everywhere across a world of illusionary details. In a minty green mélange, aerial figures appeared and disappeared, sometimes teasing one another with jeweler-like precision. On other occasions they simply paraded about, seemingly, without a care in the world. Some were mint green, with a dash of red and turquoise. Whistling.

*The El Dorado Floating Bird Motel, and the images shown here: Fancifully Maroon(ed)...; Peachcraft'd Overtones; and A World of Illusionary Details, establish a surrealist-inspired atmosphere tinged with familiar strangeness, through a gathering of distant realities, in a metaphorical resort for birds. The elements—kinds of uploaded spatial characters, play out dramas over and through time, in highly varied situations, re-calibrating and celebrating the marvels of natural realms—in this case, foregrounding the worlds of birds. Equally, these mischievous motels, of which there are many varieties and aggregations, reframe programs normally associated with human occupation, enhancing the participation of animal life in design considerations. In this case avian species. Using familiar human-centric programs as reframing tropes—a spa, gardens, a ballroom, guest rooms, a theater, and a trophy room, this hypothetical project inverts the dominance of human over non-human relationships, deploying tailored programmatic elements to critically*

*reflect on default bourgeois values, and to reconsider human authority over other life-forms.*

*The speculative motels make noise with a number of things, including: the naming problem; the roles and potential of programmatic and situational thinking; and narrative constructions as a way to hold heterogeneous, and loosely framed, interests together. The use of surrealist tactics enables the distribution of familiar things, now estranged, while remaining accessible—orienting expectations while keeping things slightly off-kilter. All, in an attempt to wade into the worlds of the potential of motels for birds, linked through conversations about split geographies and split temporalities, while reflecting on the progressive dominance of humans over other world actors—conceptual, real and visualized.*

[ I would like to thank Saumon Oboudiyat for his commitment to the El Dorado ]

## Sky Writers: Floating Bird Motels

Aerial poets all, they acted like sky-born memory theaters, rehearsing Wallace Stevens' poems, to their hearts delight. They drifted, lingered, and moved on. They retreated, and colonized them, mixing technologies, while constructing mini-sky drawings, intermittently. Emerging onlookers lurked nearby—aerial acrobats all. A float'ish shrine, domestic passengers and a logged sidecar. With feathers in their caps, they came from far and wide. They were all good eggs, proud (as) peacocks, crazy as loons—snow birds, birds of a feather, a bird in the hand, and free birds. All. Partridges, pear trees, you name it. They were up with the lark, dreaming of 13 ways of looking at a blackbird. An artificial weather garden, sky written skies, a zoetrope restaurant, and a working log. Bottled trade winds constructing navigational horizons, tracing comings and goings. Wisply. All aerial sojourners, more than welcomed. Autumn lightning harvests, winter white-outs, 'hailing' spring(s) trumpet the release of soggy, aerial stuff, with a dash of sonic ambience. Summer-breezed clouds parade about, while sky writing bubble wands draw a gifted entourage.



Perry Kulper, Sky Writer: Floating Bird Motel – a Float'ish Shrine, Domestic Passengers and a Logged Sidecar, 2018

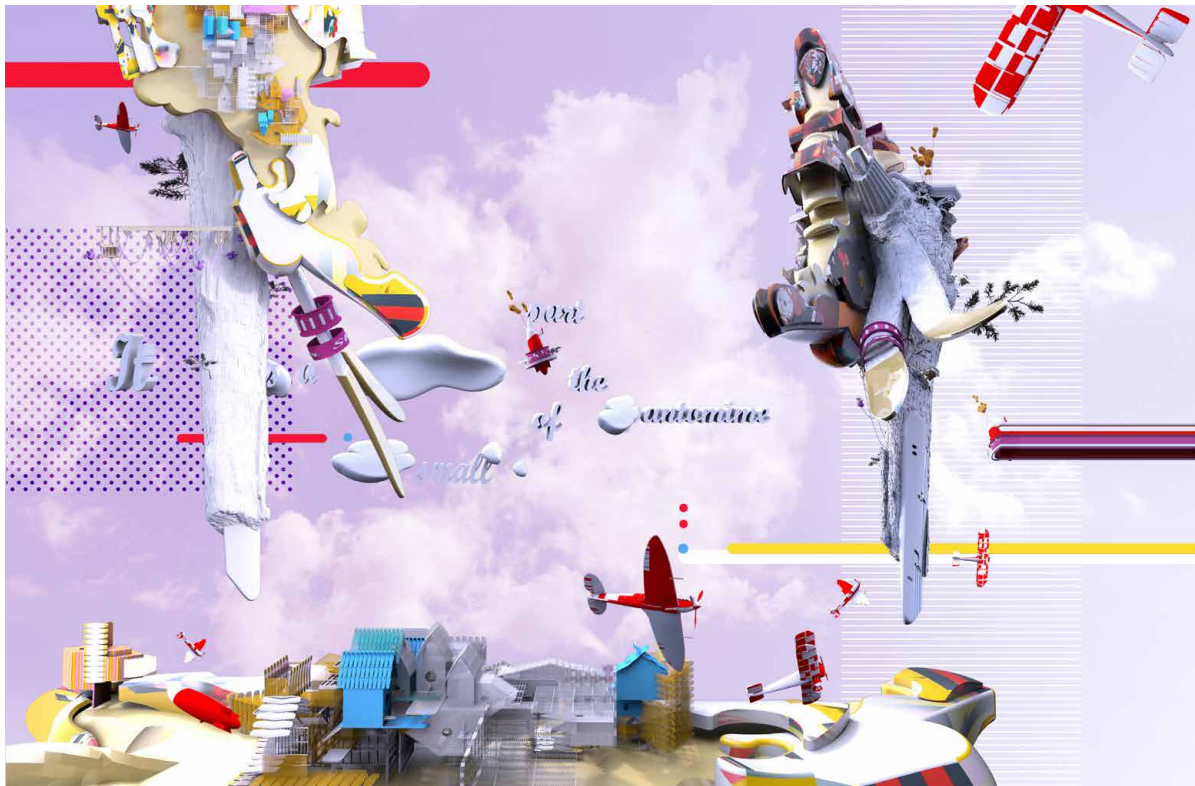
*Embracing the freedoms granted by many cultural producers, the Sky Writer Floating Bird Motels utilize collage-thinking, programmatically, reframing the familiar human-centric program of a motel. An homage to the American writer and poet, Wallace Stevens, a series of tactics are deployed in a loose method for working, linked to foregrounding loaded programmatic elements, actors, of a kind—a float meets a shrine, a staged theater, an honorific bird, a zoetrope-like restaurant, dispersed bird houses, an artificial weather systems garden, and a translation of Marc-Antoine Laugier's primitive hut, 1755. In combination with a site undergoing continuous construction, and reconstruction, as evidenced by a worked and working, log, this hypothetical project reroutes human and non-human relationships, deploying various technologies, programs and material formations to rethink human and machine control over other life-forms.*

*Comprised of kinds of digital models and image-making composites, these motels facilitate the co-mingling of heterogenous ideas, in search of a synthetic, but indeterminate whole, in these metaphorical and real havens for flying species, of all kinds.*

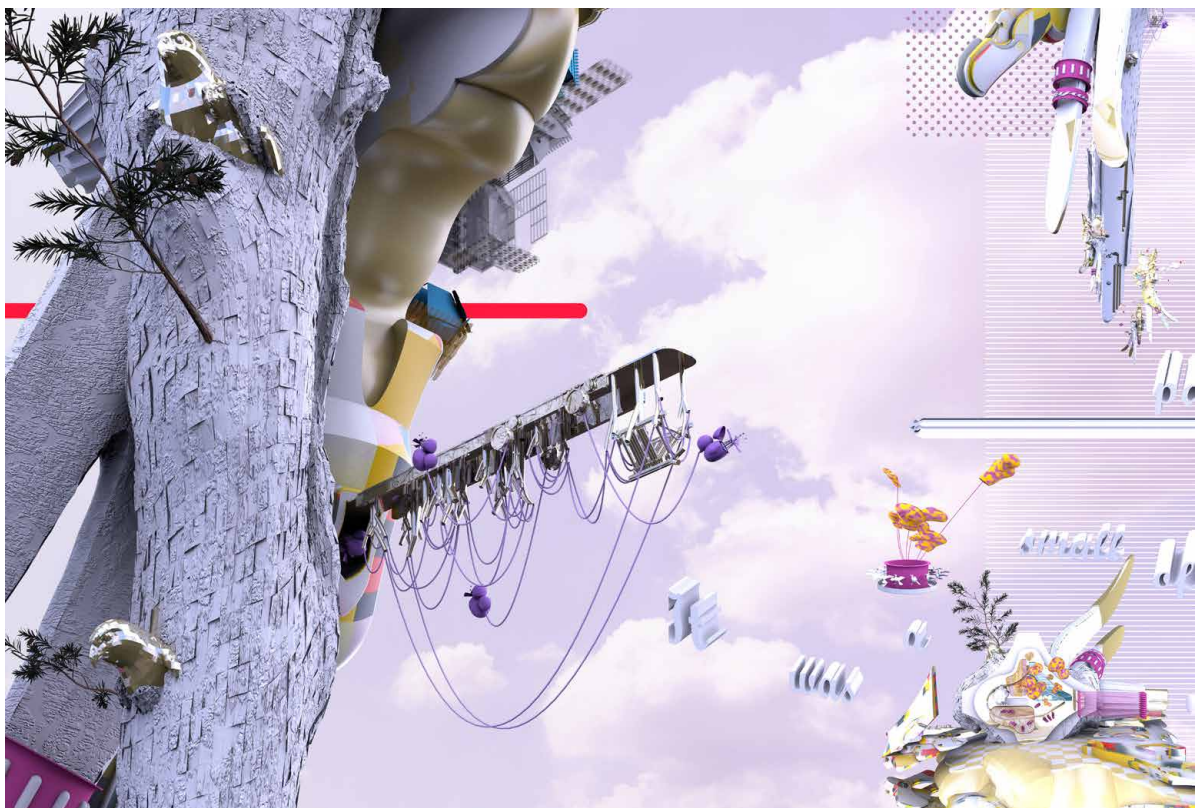
[ I would like to thank Karl Hackman for his commitment to the Sky Writer ]

### **Aerial Diptych Follies, v.01, .02 + .03**

Aerial Diptych Folly, v.01: Angles of Incidence from the Ruby Sweep—the Janus-faced contours conspired, happily. Their motives were pure, honest, and unadulterated. Maybe. They snooped around, constructing artificial histories, collaborative orbits, and false mythologies, prompted—at times, they gyrated aimlessly, rhythmically scripting the horizon; Aerial Diptych Folly, v.02: Chromatic Triplets: Over-near the Marbled Canary Observatory—toiling undercover the purple gradient mapped,



Perry Kulper, Sky Writer: Floating Bird Motel – View Below Deck, 2018



Perry Kulper, Sky Writer: Floating Bird Motel – Laugier's Hut, 2018



aerial acrobats floated, and paraded, masquerading about—what they were up to was hard to tell. Apparently something. En route, the light crafts carried out their respective errands, circumventing an estranged, albeit metrically sized-up, feathered friend. Cardinal Lory was always micro-processing the heights at which they might negotiate altitudes, attitudes and trajectories. And Aerial Diptych Folly, v.03: Orange'd Gatorskin: Upholstered Alibis for the Coastal Alierons—measure can be an evasive thing, fly for a while and turn left, one meter after the next, “give me a second”, and nano-technologic precision—all colliding in an aerial choreography, a pure ecstasy.

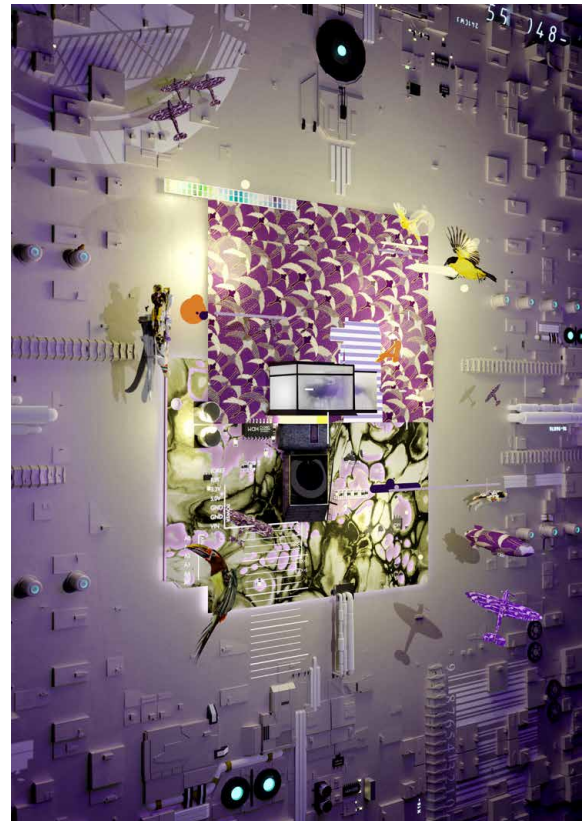
*The three original Aerial Diptych Follies trade on a surrealist inspired form of non-human theatricality, where imagined scenarios and histories, perhaps hundreds of years apart, are enacted by fictional, didactic instruments—nonsensical and seemingly purposeless, objects, follies as it were,*



Perry Kulper, Aerial Diptych Folly, v.01: Reflection Planes, 2018

*cavorting and masquerading, as aerial acrobats. Developed through likenesses, or analogically, these flying objects are aware of the presence of the others, but are simultaneously unhinged from one another. Collectively, they conjure myriad combinations of distinctively different worlds—the juxtaposition of distant realities, as it were, into plausible, but indecipherable wholes. They pry open the imaginative potential of the object-instruments, and the events to which they refer, and might falsely (re)construct, aerially.*

*The second phase of this work, gets under the metaphorical digital hood, chasing what might be possible by interrogating imaging and digital modeling practices. Amongst other things, key motivations include, the nuanced interplay of 3d modeling toward the production of an image, while playing with the lack of depth in the original images. A number of things were discovered*



Perry Kulper, Aerial Diptych Folly, v.02: Oculus, 2018





Perry Kulper, Aerial Diptych Folly, v.03: Hello World, 2018

in the process of working: shadow and light became highly configurable in render space and became key in the manipulation of 2D imagery; and light sources negate shading and shadow effects, rather appearing as 'flat' objects, transforming them into kinds of notational markings that directly affect the compositional geometry. Shadows can be turned off, or altogether transformed, collapsing space, complexifying relationships or producing novel effects, such as shadowed lighting. Similarly, texture and image mapping can obfuscate, or (re)define our understanding of the 2D image or 3D space—this can be seen in a projection of a cockatoo onto a scorpion, or the unwrapping of a space shuttle surface with discontinuous patterning. Finally, given that these effects play out from a single privileged viewpoint, utilizing the three dimensionality of the model allows the creation of new 2D imagery where these effects collapse, or are redefined, to produce a layered spatiality, completely masked by the original view.

The images are prepared to be coupled with other thoughts, using language folds and particular situations, in which the scenarios to which they portend, might be staged, thus provoking multiple senses about what might be at stake in the work—producing augmented, and other narratives through which the follies might be negotiated. More broadly, there is much undiscovered potential in the deep reservoirs of digital logics, in the play between 2D imagery and 3D modeling, and in the rigorous, and not, construction of digital visualizations. Stories told, and others discovered and co-constructed, opening a rabbit's hole of narratives, as yet untold.

[ I would like to thank Oliver Popadich for his commitment to the Aerial Diptych Follies ]

## Post Flight

Riding the trade winds of the relational precision of literary techniques, leveraging analogic thinking, referring to art, specifically painting, principles, and to filmic constructions, the production of worlds in worlds, feels possessive, enabling havens, or safe retreats from other realities. Populating the air, sky and horizon, via birds, and other aerial agents, grants parallax with no return. The work fuels a creative imagination, challenging default assumptions, and reframing what is taken for granted.

In the movement from symbolic culture—that is culture where shared communication, in which cultural orientation is grounded, to the world of instrumental culture—autonomy, deep logics, and systematic thinking, it might be that narrative architectures, that promiscuously cross disciplinary boundaries, could be a form of a deep politic and unrehearsed, imagination, towards new cultural agency. These architectures might replace the ideologically, polemically and ethically lopsided institutions, that have previously oriented, in fact, powerfully dominated, culture. Equally, it could be that narrative constructions build worlds, leave them and travel to others, leaving traces of evidence in which alternative worlds might be constructed, toward emergent cultural, and animal, imaginaries.

In the realms of world building, and as an homage to Alice, and said entourage, it is only appropriate they have the last words here...

"Who are YOU?" said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I—I hardly know, sir, just at present— at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

"Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

"It's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then."

And, lastly... "We're all mad here."