

T H E S I L V E R S E L F

1

From the beginning, I have viewed the Airtight Garage project as a physical space outside the bounds of the known world. The name comes from the extraterrestrial / extraterritorial Airtight Garage and its mysterious parallel – Garage Publishing; both of which can be found within the comic book worlds of Jean Giraud aka Moebius. In *Metalltanz*, the garage seemed to be temporarily manifest in an expansive unspecified desert, marking an isolated population. The garage is a space which seeks to defy the sweep of the searchlight, operating in obscurity relative to the perceptual capacity of humans. It is a site of both distortion and dislocation. “This is the uneasy status of the dislocated building. It is not a prize, like a pharaonic antiquity. Instead, it assumes to possess self-determination. Its dislocation implies a potency, a force capable of intersecting worlds and conflating distinct systems.”¹

Recounting the myth of the wood nymph Pomona, the novelist Jamaica Kincaid states, “The god Vertumnus wants to have her, but she does not want him; she only wants to tend her fruit trees. Of her devotion Ovid writes: ‘This was her love, and her passion, and she had no longing for desire. Still fearing boorish aggression, she enclosed herself in an orchard, and denied an entrance, and shunned men.’ It is her skill with the knife they want; her creative powers of cultivation, of growth, of planning. They want her understanding of the life cycle, of the planetary elements, and also of light.”²

The Airtight Garage is in a sense a *hortus conclusus*. The *hortus conclusus* is an interior space, a garden within a garden. It is a place abstracted from the world of others. It is a spiritual space. As Peter Zumthor states regarding his design for the Serpentine pavilion, “...the building should be a closed facade wrapped around this jungle.”³ Similarly, it has been described it as something, “...that looks like little more than a freestanding wall, too narrow for anyone to actually live in, but the design is no accident.”⁴ It is not only a form of high life – of whirling devotion and faithful unfolding, but is also a means of extending itself in time. Those constituents of the garage work to fulfill their roles within the space while over time becoming less and less partitioned, moving as a unitary phenomenon. This is the Airtight Garage resonating as an experimental individual.

2

Cannabis is typically a dioecious plant meaning that individual plants only produce flowers of one sex. However, plants *can* produce both female and male flowers on the same individual under particularly stressful conditions as a means of self preservation. For plants growing naturally the wild, this could be advantageous in situations marked by isolation, a challenging landscape or climatic stress for example.

It's challenging to keep cuttings of living plants alive for years or decades on end. Many things can happen to a plant, especially one that isn't shared or saved in multiple locations. By contrast, keeping seeds is vastly easier: seeds take up hardly any space, they can be shared more easily and can be put into cold storage for decades.

Since the late 20th century cannabis enthusiasts have been experimenting with different methods and chemicals to try and *reverse* choice female plants. The goal of this process is to get an otherwise female plant to create male flowers (and importantly viable pollen) for breeding. Silver Thiosulfate (STS) was discovered to block the ethylene production within the flowering female plant. With the plant hormone blocked for a window in time; the plant continues to flower, but instead of making pistillate female flowers it makes staminate male flowers. The pollen from these *reversed* plants contains only XX chromosomes, so the resulting offspring will be female.

As a propagative technique pertaining to cannabis plants *selfing* as it's colloquially known has been a critical (albeit imperfect) tool for some time. Even though some think of it this way, selfing isn't like making an exact copy of the original plant. Substantial vigor and some genetic information is often lost in the process. That being said, because this is a most extreme form of inbreeding (crossing the plant to itself) it most often produces offspring that are quite homogenous. We aren't engaging in this process because we're concerned with repetition. Our purpose is to utilize feminized pollen from stable donors for both novel outcrosses as well as the refinement of hybrids through *selfed* generations. In this way, *selfing* can be a way to introgress a specific individual towards a more reproducibly stable state. I loosely use the word introgression here because of its beautiful 17th century Latin origin: *introgredi* 'step in', from *intro-* 'to the inside' + *gradi* 'proceed, walk', on the pattern of egression, ingression. The experimental individual looks to the inside. The experimental individual steps out.

3

The term the silver self is in part a nod to the fact that like in the traditional darkroom processes of black and white photography, silver nitrate is a key component to the plant reversal process as well. The silver is suspended in water and sprayed onto the leaves and stems until runoff. This process is repeated over the first two weeks of the flowering cycle. “We seek to load as much silver into the plant as possible.”⁵ Silver in both cases is more than a simple inclusion. It is a mode of transformation and extension, altering the interior architecture, “...of partial alienation: in this, a piece of ... a component space is out of place. This might be called ‘radical substitution.’ The abrupt, local swap of one environment with another is achieved through the use of...devices that transplant a foreign element into the body of the familiar. Such artifact applies technologies of the theater or cinema to the interior. The latter becomes an experimental stage that is transformable into anything.”⁶

In Ed Ruscha’s film *Miracle*, “a man becomes increasingly obsessed with working on his Ford Mustang. As the film progresses, the car, the garage, and the mechanic are miraculously transformed into clean machine versions of their former selves.”⁷ This fantastic idealization brings to mind another of Ruscha’s works – the *Miracle* drawings, where bright lines are seen to descend from on high cutting through the charcoal darkness. Light is often depicted like this – as rays (imaginary lines radiating from the light source.) Much like the miracle or ray is an idealized model of light, the s1 is an idealized model of another self.

What appears as *similar* or *likeness* relative to the s1 generation of seed individual and it’s old self can be seen as an application of visual embodiment or even portraiture.

“Photography can be seen to present a visual field within which the subject is dispossessed, is ‘tempted by space’ and ‘no longer knows where to put itself’.”⁸ Within this mirror and dysmorphic ex situ there is an expanded self – *the silver self*.

“Shamanism does speak of a journey into another world. But this is a vision only.” ... “In this vision, my body is completely dismembered. Then it is reassembled. Afterward, I am able to go about my business again, only now my body has a small, extra part, like an extra bone.”⁹

The silver self like the Airtight Garage is not a person or persons but is an enveloped intersection. A pocket of time dilation and unintentional blindness. Its anachronistic movements push and pull traits and qualities through time to be reassembled into a hyper-version, complete with its own anamorphic past and future.

FOOTNOTES

1. Horror in Architecture, The Reanimated Edition, Joshua Comaroff & Ong Ker-Shing, The University of Minnesota Press, 2023
2. The Women Who Helped Me, Simone White, Mousse, <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/the-women-who-helped-me/>, 2024
3. Peter Zumthor in Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist and Julia Peyton-Jones, Serpentine Gallery, 2011
4. Metalltanz, The Airtight Garage, 2023. I have lifted certain language for the description from Ryan Ruby's, The Phantoms of the 15th Arrondissement, The Paris Review, 2015. In it he discusses Roger Caillois's book, *A Little Guide to the 15th Arrondissement for the Use of Phantoms* of which an English translation by Ruby was published by Readux in 2015.
5. DIY STS Mixing, Douglas Curtis, ICMag, <https://www.icmag.com/threads/diy-sts-mixing-using-guide-for-feminized-pollen-seeds-r-c-clarke-method-as-base.357196/>, 2018
6. Horror in Architecture, The Reanimated Edition, Joshua Comaroff & Ong Ker-Shing, The University of Minnesota Press, 2023
7. Miracle, Ed Ruscha, IMDB, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0290769>, 2015
8. Prosthetic Culture, Celia Lucy, Routledge, London, 1994. Lury here quotes Roger Caillois's classic *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia*, 1935.
9. Lecture on the Extra Part, Seth Price, Texte Zur Kunst, 2015. This quotation is attributed to an attendee at a talk of Price's.