

THE SILVER SELF

The Airtight Garage project can be regarded as a 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 graphic novels of Jean Giraud aka Moebius. 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 more of a temporal location than an object, thus challenging the boundaries of possession. 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

“There is the inside and the outside. There is the interior and exterior. Not as in the Foucault fold, but as in essence, force and potency: the interior silent power of art. And it is here that hovers the entangled challenge of replication.”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 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 a means of extending itself across time. Those constituents of the garage work to fulfill their roles within the space with radical coinherence.⁵ This is the Airtight Garage resonating as it was intended – as an experimental individual.

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 very challenging to keep a plant alive and healthy for years or decades on end by taking cuttings from successive mother plants. 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 longer.

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 movement of ethylene locally in 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. Even though some think of it this way, selfing isn't like making an exact copy of the original plant. Some genetic information and vigor are 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 a pool of individuals in which the differences are rather subtle and not always apparent on the surface. We are engaged with this process because we are interested in repetition, difference and likeness as well as the boundaries of distinction and possession. Our purpose is to utilize feminized pollen to explore and question the archetypal.

Selfing can provide a way for a specific individual from one time to introgress, to reach out and merge with itself from another time. We loosely use the word introgression here because of its beautiful 17th century Latin origin: *introgrēdi* 'step in', from *intro-* 'to the inside' + *gradī* 'proceed, walk'; on the pattern of egression, ingestion. The experimental individual looks to the inside. The experimental individual steps out.

The term *silver self* points to the similarity that like the traditional darkroom processes of black and white photography, silver nitrate is a key component in 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."⁶ Silver in both cases is more than a simple inclusion. It is a mode of transformation and extension, altering the interior architecture by partial alienation. The normal pathways for the flow of messages are temporarily blocked, "...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 an artifact applies technologies of the theater or cinema to the interior. The latter becomes an experimental stage that is transformable into anything."⁷

A way to expand the capacity of the self is to span and suspend. Neither immanent nor transcendent in their own repetition, they are different from any other kind of expressions which inhabit the world of visibility. However it is not a replacement in the typical sense of a possession / dispossession relationship whereby one must be evacuated in order for another to inhabit or take possession. This is not a leave of absence, they are not just somewhere else. It is more akin to the way an image resides in latent space – a compressed, visually unrecognizable version of itself. This space of the *silver self* or the experimental individual can still be regarded as a locus of manifestation, subject to cycles of compression and expansion yet not bound to time in a linear sense. Like Roger Caillois' writing on mimesis regarding other living

beings, they are, “no longer the origin of coordinates, but [are] one point among others.”⁸ “Tempted by space” they span and these spanners defy identification as discreet individuals with a recognizable origin and plausible history.

What appears as *similar* or *likeness* relative to the experimental individual and its crowded self can be seen as an application of visual embodiment or portraiture. Where this happens is both within the *hortus conclusus* and within the mind of the beholder. “What fuels this auto-construction is style, which itself emerges from culture according to a principle of imitation or replication. [Marilyn] Strathern writes, Styles appear to imitate other styles, replicating them by an inner momentum that is contained in the very notion that style itself is an imitative act. Not the imitation of nature...but imitation of versions of itself.” Much more could be said about the notion of imitation, but I will end with this take on mimesis as “the nature that culture uses to create second nature...to insist on breaking away from the tyranny of the visual notion of the image” and toward “the active yielding of the perceiver and the perceived – the perceiver trying to enter into the picture and become one with it, so that the self is moved by the representation into the represented.”⁹ This is no different than the beholder experiencing the selfed plant in its present physical state as that impression comes up against and merges with the beholder’s memory, expectations and experience of the former iteration of the plant. It may even be that the “past version” is in fact meeting its future self as a kind of *sumbola*. As Jeffrey Kripal puts it, “...the *sumbola* was a whole that had been literally broken or split into two and then recombined or ‘thrown together’ to form the whole again. Later, the *sumbola* came to refer to uncanny coincidences (another form of coming together) or to forms of ritual and reading divination that understood the image or the visionary display as a kind of esoteric cipher into deeper and deeper meanings of the real.”¹⁰

This translocated and at times dysmorphic ex situ of the expanded self – the *silver self* – expresses as “images and events that participate directly in that which they represent.”¹¹ “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 re-assembled. Afterward, I am able to go about my business again, only now my body has a small, extra part, like an extra bone.”¹² The *silver self* like the garage is an enveloped intersection – a pocket of time dilation. Its anachronistic movements push and pull expressions and qualities – recombined and complete with their own amorphous pasts and futures.

1. *Horror in Architecture, The Reanimated Edition*, Joshua Comaroff & Ong Keshing, The University of Minnesota Press, 2023. Page 194 from the chapter *Displacement*.

3. *Peter Zumthor in Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist and Julia Peyton-Jones*, Serpentine Gallery, 2011.

2. *Inherent Vice or Vice Versa*, Sturtevant, Tate Papers, 2007. This was written as a short discussion document for the *Inherent Vice: The Replica and its Implications in Modern Sculpture* workshop, held at the Tate Modern in October of 2007.

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' 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. *How To Think Impossibly*, Jeffrey J. Kripal, The University of Chicago Press, 2024. Pages 213–215 from the chapter *We Are God (and the Devil)* and a sub-section, *Coinherence in God*. In it Kripal references the work of medieval historian Barbara Newman, her notions of the permeable self, coinherence and her book, *The Permeable Self: Five Medieval Relationships*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.

7. *Horror in Architecture, The Reanimated Edition*, Joshua Comaroff & Ong Ker-Shing, The University of Minnesota Press, 2023. Page 200 from the chapter *Displacement*.

6. *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.

8. *Prosthetic Culture*, Celia Lucy, Routledge, London, 1994. Lury here quotes Roger Caillois' classic *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia*, 1935.

9. *Prosthetic Culture*, Celia Lucy, Routledge, London, 1994. Lury here highlights Michael Taussig's take on Walter Benjamin's writings on mimesis.

10. *How To Think Impossibly*, Jeffrey J. Kripal, The University of Chicago Press, 2024. Page 175 from the chapter, *The World Is One, and the Human Is Two* and the sub-section, *The Fantastic Symbol: A Mythico-Physical Reality*.

11. *How To Think Impossibly*, Jeffrey J. Kripal, The University of Chicago Press, 2024. Page 176 from the chapter, *The World Is One, and the Human Is Two* and the sub-section, *The Fantastic Symbol: A Mythico-Physical Reality*.

12. *Lecture on the Extra Part*, Seth Price, Texte Zur Kunst, 2015. This quotation is attributed to an attendee at a talk of Price's.

