718-554-3854

James S. Chrzan
CUNY Hunter College
718-554-3854

by

James Chrzan

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts Studio Art, Hunter College
The City University of New York

2019

May 8, 2019
Date

Paul Ramirez Jonas
Signature

May 8, 2019
Date

Constance DeJong
Signature of second reader
Abstract

718-554-3854 is a poem that originally appeared in various printed, spoken, and recorded iterations throughout part one of the Spring 2019 Hunter College MFA Thesis exhibition. Accompanying the text are extensive notes that elaborate on the ideas, influences, and intentions that informed the poem and the exhibition.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to Paul Ramirez Jonas and Constance DeJong, Joe Palandrani, Emily Janowick, Rachel Hillery, Gretchen and Jim Chrzan, and the little grey cat.
Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iv
List of Images vi
718-554-3854 1
Notes on the text 9
Endnotes 20
Appendix A: Images 22
Appendix B: Hex Studies for Piano 32
Bibliography 41
List of Images

*Hex Diagram*, 2019, vector graphic.  

718-554-3854, 2019, custom screenprinted matchbooks, two editions of 100 (detail).  

*This is a window not a door*, 2019, wax pencil on window.  

*This is a window not a door*, 2019, hygrothermograph and custom chart paper.  

*This is a window not a door*, 2019, hygrothermograph and custom chart paper (detail).  

*This is a window not a door*, 2019, fire extinguisher case, fresh cut daffodils, and vase.  

*This is a window not a door*, 2019, floor warden station, telephone, single-board computer, and custom software.  

*This is a window not a door*, 2019, floor warden station, telephone, single-board computer, and custom software.  

*Hex Studies*, 2019, wax pencil on paper and piano bench.  

*Hex Studies*, 2019, wax pencil on paper and piano bench (detail).  

718-554-3854, ongoing, phone number.  

Not Pictured
This web of time... embraces every possibility.

Jorge Luis Borges, *The Garden of Forking Paths*
i.

any of these rooms could be at the center of the world.

this mirror is not only an indication but a promise.

nothing does not exist in this place.

ii.

do you remember how you got here?

this is a framework.

a series of numbers becomes a meaningful human thing.

iii.

you have come to think of your attention span as the shortest distance between two points.

in this corridor there are six doors.

each has been carefully prepared for you.

iv.

the map is drawn on the back of your hand.

or something along these lines.

there is no longer any difference between belief and disbelief.

v.

you are your own neighbor.

always adjacent.

the space between the object and the phenomenon.
dante and virgil will forever be descending in a circular fashion.

but you are caught in a different current; drawn in by an oscillating fan near the window.

from this point forward, i have to insist that we think of fate as a suggestion.

it might feel like you're standing very still.

could it be that you are the axis around which this whole structure revolves?

all of this movement has been predetermined.

things accumulate here.

logic is not memory which is not imagination.

this encyclopedia claims to be complete.

here is another window and another door.

but your eyes are closed, remember?

and the probability of experiencing something unexplainable remains roughly at fifty percent.

narcissus, reimagined here with silk petals, is another name for a daffodil.

arbitrary infrastructure like cloth that folds in on itself.

the sound you are hearing may be an echo (it would be very difficult to prove any of this).
xi.
this may turn out to be an important pseudonym for your own name.
there has always been a shape and a color and an outline.
you just never noticed these things.

xii.
having heard the soft music coming from the adjacent room, you suddenly become aware of your own breath.
here is a true or false question.
with two correct answers.

xiii.
the tessellated landscape through the second story window distracts you.
symmetrical rearrangements designed to fool the eye and tug the sleeve.
time in the city is not necessarily different than time in the country. but it is true that an infinite amount of lines parallel to this path exist.

xiv.
every choice you have made so far has been equally significant.
there are many possibilities.
and many endings.

xv.
there is nothing that is invisible here.
this is the very edge of the map.
an engineering marvel.
my soul must be somewhere in this room.
trapped in the logic of animism.
interwoven fingers from additional hands.

your reflection has become a recurring theme.
this window looks onto another window.
the structure is turning in on itself.

you are an itinerant audience.
these birds are singing for themselves.
there is no beginning and no end.

you close the door that was blown open by the wind.
the radiator hissing polyrhythms.
this is where the wax from burning candles goes.

there are only two things in your pockets now.
and some out of date philosophy of sighs can’t dictate the terms of this curse.
exhaled air expanding to fill its container.
xxi.

you’re acting like nobody predicted this.

the way the shadows move across their portion of the ceiling and walls.

this is the instant right before you turn on the bedside lamp.

xxii.

none of this is represented on any of the extant blueprints.

trying to remember how memory functions.

speculating on furniture styles and varying definitions of antique.

xxiii.

this is a place where reincarnation is real.

it’s easy to leave things unresolved.

but a cycle is something that has an end and a beginning and an end and a beginning and so on and so forth.

xxiv.

the music gave you a very strange feeling in the parts of your body you consider to be estuary.

the bend in your arm like brackish water.

the sea forever meeting the river at its wet mouth.

xxv.

this marks the half-way point.

or half the distance between the last half-way point and the next.

a map of zeno’s paradox.
xxvi.

at the tone, the time and temperature will become irrelevant.

(tone)

xxvii.

you reach out to feel the stucco walls.

they are damp from the fog coming in off the hills.

this space is left over.

xxviii.

you can’t tell if the house is empty or full from one room alone.

this is an indication of generosity.

the timeline has always been mathematically thin.

xxix.

the flowers—falling—are different when they reach the ground.

and it will always come down to a matter of luck.

this is the place you dreamt about on your last night in town.

xxx.

don’t concern yourself with the geographical details.

these two things clearly add up to infinity.

the shoreline has moved indoors.
xxxi.
you are not a visitor in the usual sense of the word.
as soon as you leave, this will be nothing again.
a tree is not separate from a forest.

xxxii.
you are approaching the idea of a center.
in this hotel, there is a guest in every room.
a paradoxical kind of vacancy.

xxxiii.
it will be hard for you to put this into words.
the river is finally flooded again.
it was all glass once.

xxxiv.
the accuracy of the seven-day forecast can be calculated every morning by opening your eyes.
by keeping them shut you have chosen to exist within a statistical anomaly.
all anomalies here share the distinction of having doors that only open from the outside.

xxxv.
you can hear very clearly the events transpiring in the hallway.
it has taken hundreds of years to establish these routines.
The slow evolution of footsteps and customs.
you're pulling on a very thin string.
the balcony overlooks the events of earlier.
unraveling through a scale-model of the last 24-hours.
retracing your steps will become very difficult.
the leaves on the trees have changed color in your absence.
the flowers have reorganized themselves.
Notes on the text

i.
In *The Library of Babel*, Jorge Luis Borges describes a universe constructed of hexagonal rooms extending forever in all directions. “The Library”—as the universe in called by its inhabitants—contains an infinite number of books, which in turn contain all possible combinations of a set of twenty-five orthographical symbols (all twenty-two letters in the alphabet, the period, the comma, and the space). Therefore, the library contains everything that has ever been and will ever be written. But these writings are lost amongst endless misspellings and nonsense. The existence of all possibilities is a paralyzing prospect. Choice in an endless universe disappears. Life becomes a labyrinth without minotaur or thread.¹

ii.
From a conversation between the author and Danny Garfield regarding phone books on the evening of February 13, 2019.²

iii.
In *Elements*, Euclid defines what we now know as Euclidean space. His five axioms state: a line can exist between any two points; any line can be extended to infinity; a circle can be drawn with any point as its center of any length radius; all right angles are equal; and finally the so-called “parallel postulate,” that allows for the existence of parallel lines. All of Euclidean geometry follows from these five axioms.³

iv.
Only 3 regular polygons can tile the plane by themselves: the triangle, the square, and the hexagon. Pentagons and all higher sided regular polygons require at minimum one other shape to tile the plane. A method to determine whether or not any given non-regular polygon could tessellate monohedrally does not exist and it is speculated that no finite method for this determination could ever exist.⁴
v.
Timothy Morton defines the term *hyperobject* as something so massively distributed in both time and space that it can never be completely observed or perceived. Knowledge of a hyperobject comes to us through facets, glimpses, and effects. We do not experience *climate change*, but we do experience the shifting of the seasons, increasingly intense storm systems, wildfires, etc. Thinking through hyperobjects helps us to decenter our experience and perceive the world from a non-anthropocentric viewpoint. The facets of the hyperobject that we do see become reminders of potential experience beyond our immediate situation.⁵

vi.
Hell—as imagined in *The Inferno*—has nine levels, through which Dante (the traveler) and Virgil (his guide) descend. In Canto XIV, Virgil describes their movement as circular, “left turns always down”. Many attempts have been made to map Dante’s Hell, beginning with Antonio Manetti in 1471. All attempts however, necessarily cling to arithmetic and geometric constructs that the poet is indifferent to. Any attempt to map poetic spaces will fail because a poem need not adhere to the normal laws of space and time—while a map must at least follow the rules of the paper it is drawn on.⁶

*Number 7*, organized by Lucy Lippard at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, May 18 - June 15, 1969, included “air currents from small fan by the door” by Hans Haacke. The apparently “empty” room also contained works by Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner, Ian Wilson, Stephen Kaltenbach, Robert Huot, and Richard Artschwager.⁷

vii.
The universe as described by Ptolemy in the *Almagest* has the Earth at its center. The cosmos moves around us in concentric circles. The celestial bodies from closest to furthest are as follows: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. This classical understanding of the universe was held as true until challenged by Johnannes Kepler in the 17th
century. Although our geocentric identity has long been shed, we still cling to a desire for centeredness. So much so that we have named our current epoch—one in which everything is increasingly out of our control—after ourselves.⁸

The Knight’s Tour is a mathematical game first investigated in depth by Leonhard Euler. The object of the game is to find a route for the knight in which it visits each square on the chessboard once and only once. Tours are either open or closed. Open tours begin and end on different squares while closed tours begin and end on the same square. There are 26,534,728,821,064 closed tours on an 8x8 chessboard. The problem can be adapted to hexagonal boards, though not much research has been undertaken on the topic. One solution for a size 4 (37-cell) hexagonal board appears in Appendix A.⁹

Denis Diderot began publishing his Encyclopédie in 1751. An enlightenment attempt to record all knowledge, the Encyclopédie necessarily failed. An encyclopedia only feels comprehensive; we know that logically it can never be. The Enlightenment played a key role in the development of our definition of human and our perception of humanity’s place in the world. Diderot’s project, like all encyclopedias, partially failed due to humanistic narcissism and an unwillingness to decenter humanity and grapple with the infinite variation of non-anthropocentric existence.¹⁰

There are numerous accounts dating from the Medieval period of feral children raised by wolves. Most stories end with the child, after being reintroduced to the human world, struggling to adjust and/or dying. In one story however—from the Chronicle of the Benedictine monastery of Saint Peter of Erfurt in Thuringia—the child adjusts well to human life and lives 80 years but is recorded to have repeatedly expressed that “if it were up to him he much preferred to live among wolves than among men.” This story offers a malleable view of humanity, one in which the line between human and animal is blurred or nonexistent. The adaptability of the boy and his desire to return to the wolves suggests that human existence allows for a much wider
range of experience than we traditionally engage with; experiences that are not necessarily
centered around humanism.\textsuperscript{11}

The daffodil (\textit{N. pseudonarcissus}), is a member of the genus \textit{Narcissus} and the order \textit{Amaryllidaceae}. It is commonly found in woods and thickets throughout Northern Europe. The plant typically reaches about eighteen inches, with a large, drooping flower in yellow. As noted by Shakespeare, they “come before the swallow dares, and take the winds of March with beauty.”\textsuperscript{12}

In Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}, both Echo and Narcissus become detached from their corporeal forms. Echo is reduced to “voice only” her bones turning to stone; while Narcissus similarly wastes away—transforming into the flower that will bear his name. The transition from human to non-human blurs the human v. nature division that was established during the enlightenment and considers a “posthuman mode of embodiment.”\textsuperscript{13}

“A plain hill, one is not that which is not white and red and green, a plain hill makes no sunshine, it shows that without a disturber. So the shape is there and the color and the outline and the miserable center, it is not very likely that there is a center, a hill is a hill and no hill is contained in a pink tender descender.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Hex Studies 1-6} were composed using a pseudo-serialist technique applied to a tessellation of 37 hexagons. Each hexagon was assigned a tonal value, most often corresponding to a diatonic scale. For each study, two tonal sequences were derived from two unique knight’s tours on the hexagonal tessellation. These tonal sequences were then used to compose the melodic and harmonic parts of a 37-measure piano score. Rhythm, time signature, and tempo were all chosen by the composer to best suit the tonal sequences. See Appendix B.
xiii.
Guy Debord defines the *dérive* technique as a “rapid passage through varied ambiences” best suited for the urban landscape. He does however recount the following anecdote relating to the technique as practiced in a rural setting: “...insufficient awareness of the limitations of chance, and of its inevitable reactionary effects, condemned to a dismal failure the famous aimless wandering attempted in 1923 by four surrealists, beginning from a town chosen by lot: Wandering in open country is naturally depressing, and the interventions of chance are poorer there than anywhere else.” Research efforts to learn more of this famous walk have yielded no results.15

xiv.
Sam Kabo Ashwell identifies 8 standard patterns in choice based games. Some patterns offer very linear experiences to the player; while others allow almost infinite possibility. Depending on the pattern, the choices that the player makes have different valuations. These values are dependent on the desired ending for any given pattern. In patterns with only one ending, only choices that lead to that ending have value. In patterns with more than one ending, value is assigned according to which ending the player is playing towards. In a pattern without endings, all choices are of equal value.16

xv.
In a lecture given last spring on utopias, Paul Ramírez Jonas posed the question “where does imagination go when the map fills up?”

xvi.
Animism is the belief that all things are living in some form. But how does one conceptualize other modes of existence? Outside of anthropocentric time and space, the lives of objects and animals are inaccessible to us. Animism requires a radical acceptance that demands the decentering of human experience. Otherwise, the result is some form of metaphysical colonization, forcing human subjectivity onto non-human beings.17
xvii.
“The room in the mirror is full of carbon monoxide. / That’s why we cannot pass without these chrome suits. / If the other side looks identical, study closely, / you’ll see an object that’s not in the room / you’re standing in. Like a lute on the dresser, / partially hidden by compacts and atomizers.”18

xviii.
Birds naturally alter their songs in response to their environment, a process known as acoustic adaptation theory. For example, birds living in habitats with more sound reflecting surfaces sing slower songs. According to a study conducted in San Francisco, due to the increase of anthropogenic noise pollution the city dwelling white-crowned sparrow must begin its songs at a higher frequency than its rural counterpart. This change in starting frequency reduces the overall tonal range in which the sparrow can sing, hindering its ability to communicate.19

xix.
During the early 1970s, mathematician Roger Penrose discovered 3 sets of what are known as “aperiodic prototiles.” These sets of shapes tile the plane perfectly but do so without repetition. The patterns created are highly structured but contain infinite variations that never repeat.20

xx.
A Renaissance belief held that every sigh shortened one’s life.21

xxi.
*Oblique Strategies* is a set of “over one hundred worthwhile dilemmas” written by Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt. The dilemmas, each written on a individual card, are meant to be drawn when faced with a problem. The instructions say that a card should be “trusted even if its appropriateness is quite unclear.” The cards have also been known to be used in a variation of a three card tarot spread; the first card representing the past, the second the present, and the
third the future. While writing this sentence the following card was drawn: “change nothing and continue with immaculate consistency.”

xxii.
“...And so it is with our own past. It is a labor in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die.”

xxiii.
When dialing 718-554-3854 there is a 1.39% chance of hearing this stanza after two button presses. When picking up the phone pictured in Appendix A there is a 2.70% chance of hearing this stanza.

xxiv.
Estuaries, such as the Lower Hudson River, are geologically rare, in-between spaces, where the river meets the sea. This mingling of water creates a hybrid ecosystem, sustaining both fresh- and salt-water life. Foucault’s Third Principle of Heterotopias describes spaces of juxtaposition. Areas where two incompatible places exist together, simultaneously. These contradictory sites are spaces of accumulated time—the path of the Lower Hudson River, carved by ancient glaciers and retraced for thousands of years by river water. But they are also spaces of transitory time—the constant ebb and flow of the tides, pushing and pulling two worlds together.

xxv.
According to Bertrand Russell, “Zeno’s four arguments against motion were intended to exhibit the contradictions that result from supposing that there is such a thing as change.” The so-
called paradox of dichotomy argues that one will never completely traverse any given distance because you must initially travel the half of that distance; then half of that new distance; then half of that new distance and so on. This repeated halving will result in an infinite number of points on any given line. You will never reach the finish, only ever approaching it asymptotically.  

xxvi.
The United States Naval Observatory operates two phone numbers: 202-762-1401 (Eastern Standard Time) and 719-567-6742 (Mountain Standard Time). These numbers announce the time according to the USNO master clock on the minute, and 15, 30, and 45 seconds after the minute. Coordinated Universal Time is announced five seconds after the local time. Though increasingly rare, a few numbers still exist that provide local time and weather. For example, at the time of writing, 616-892-1212 delivers time and temperature for Allendale, MI and 660-263-0025 does the same for Moberly, MO.  

xxvii.
Georges Perec's novel *La vie mode d'emploi* takes place in a single apartment block. The story follows a knight’s tour through a map of the building partitioned into a 10x10 grid. Each subsequent chapter is one knight’s move away from the last. Perec was a member of the Oulipo group, whose members apply mathematical and linguistic structures and restrictions onto their writing. These constraints lead to non-linear, iterative, algorithmic, and other experimental forms of prose and poetry.  

xxviii.
Euclid defines the point as “that of which there is no part” and the line as “a length without breadth.” Both of these fundamental units of geometry are only functionally visible. In actual fact, the point and the line are infinitesimally small to the extant that they lose any corporeal properties.
xxix.
In Ovid’s version of the abduction of Proserpina, she is gathering violets and lilies when she is taken; these are the flowers she drops from Pluto’s chariot en route to Hell. In the retelling of the myth in Act 4, Scene 4 of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, the lilies transform into daffodils upon hitting the ground. The flower’s role in this myth has given it a reputation as a harbinger of death. But the flower is often simply the result of a mythical transformation. Perhaps the daffodil is not a symbol of death, only a symbol of change.²⁹

xxx.
The “highly involved curves” of any shoreline are statistically self-similar. This means that any portion of the shoreline “can be considered a reduced scale image of the whole.” The implication here is that shorelines cannot be accurately measured. A measurement taken at a smaller scale will not correspond to a measurement taken at a larger scale. As the scale gets smaller and smaller the measured length of the shoreline will grow larger. Shorelines are theoretically infinite.³⁰

xxxi.
In April 1969, Robert Barry released five colorless, odorless noble gasses into the Los Angeles air. The gallery existed only as a phone number and the only physical manifestation of the work was a 35 3/16” x 23 1/8” poster. The piece was almost completely impossible to experience—even for the individuals who released the gas. Curator Seth Siegelaub described the piece as “something real but imperceptible.”³¹

xxxii.
Hilbert’s paradox of the Grand Hotel is a thought experiment used to illustrate the paradoxical qualities of infinite sets. Imagine a hotel with infinite rooms. The hotel is at full occupancy. Nevertheless, a guest arrives at the hotel seeking a room. In order to accommodate the guest, the hotel’s proprietor simply moves the guest staying in room one to room two, the guest in room two to room three, the guest in room three to room four, and so on and so forth; thereby
creating a vacancy in room one for the new guest to fill. By this method, the Grand Hotel can accommodate an infinite amount of new guests while remaining at full occupancy.\(^{32}\)

xxxiii.
The poet Rae Armantrout, struggling with the label *language-oriented*, writes: “to believe non-referentiality is possible is to believe language can be divorced from thought, words from their histories...anyone who sees the way the signifier intertwines with signified will pay close attention to the structures of language.” She goes on to say that this type of poetry is not in fact “language-centric” but “ambi-centric.” It “sees itself and the world.”\(^{33}\)

xxxiv.
First proposed by Plato and expanded by Ptolemy, the extramission theory of perception argues that the eye emits rays which touch a viewed object and return to the eye, carrying with them an impression of that object. This idea was reintroduced by St. Augustine in the middle ages and, though eventually replaced by the intromission theory of perception, remains influential on poetic expressions of sight through the Renaissance and into the present day. In contrast to contemporary physics, this theory creates a closer relationship between the the senses of sight and touch and offers a greater sense of agency to the act of viewing. The idea that the eye is reaching out and capturing the perceived world allows the viewer to feel at the center of that world, reinforcing an anthropocentric model of existence.\(^{34}\)

xxxv.
Olivier Messiaen’s *Catalogue d’oiseaux* is a series of thirteen pieces for solo piano. Each movement uses a different transcription of birdsong as its motif. The transcriptions were notated at specific times and places and each is presented almost as musical documentary. The birds featured in the Catalogue d’oiseaux are: the alpine chough, eurasian golden oriole, blue rock thrush, black-eared wheatear, tawny owl, woodlark, eurasian reed warbler, greater short-toed hawk, Cetti’s warbler, common rock thrush, common buzzard, black wheatear, and eurasian curlew.\(^{35}\)
xxxvi.

“An entrance is often an exit too. But, as the myth of the labyrinth shows, ways in are not always ways out too. Why else did Theseus need Ariadne’s thread in order to escape the labyrinth when he had reached the Minotaur unaided?” 36

xxxvii.

According to Emily Janowick a fresh daffodil, when picked, releases a defensive toxin. This toxin is released into the water the fresh cut flowers stand in. If left unchanged, the daffodils will poison themselves, wilting and dying in a few days. But if one changes the water after approximately 12 hours the flowers can last for over a week. 37

2 Danny Garfield can be reached at 610-551-3837.


20 See Grünbaum, *Tilings and Patterns*.

See Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, *Oblique Strategies*, (Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, 2001).


See Euclid, *Elements of Geometry*.


Emily Janowick can be reached at 270-245-0016.
Appendix A: Images
Appendix B: Hex Studies for Piano

(listen at mylifeasakineticsculpture.bandcamp.com/album/hex-studies-for-piano)
hex study no. 1

the accuracy of the seven day forecast can be calculated every morning by opening your eyes.
hex study no. 2

this is where the wax from burning candles goes.
hex study no. 3

from this point forward i have to insist that we think of fate as a suggestion.
hex study no. 4

logic is not memory which is not imagination.
hex study no. 5

the sea forever meeting the river at it's wet mouth.
don't concern yourself with the geographical details.
Bibliography


