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## Florida Measure (Chora)

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*The mares that could take me as far as I want  
to travel HAD so taken me once they set me  
down on the Daimon's way. For it is SHE who  
takes the knower through each town.*

(Parmenides)

## Gainesville



*Sumbebekos*

The Florida Research Ensemble ([FRE](#)) a group of colleagues who met at the University of Florida, began experimenting with inventing practices for the digital apparatus (electracy) in the mid-1990s. Our research questions were

posed in a literate way by means of definitions and propositional logic (what is "electracy"? what is "image"? what is "place"?). This interrogative asking "what is?" was invented by the Classical Greeks in the first schools (the Academy, the Lyceum) and is expressed today in books and journals as required by our institution (school is one of the inventions of literacy as apparatus or social machine). These are relevant questions, and I am still writing, but the style of address is changing, becoming aesthetic, figural, in order to discover or create a mode of gathering that does for digital technologies what Aristotle's "category" did for alphabetic writing. The philosophical name for an electrate category is "chora" (also Greek), whose function as generator of measure is explored here through the figure of *Florida*. Literate readers always want to understand immediately "what is 'chora'?" or "what is 'Florida'?" Electrate players want to undergo it. To undergo (to feel, to experience) *Florida* through text requires us to collaborate.

To become agents of EmerAgency consulting (citizens of cyberspace) commits us (you and me) to a path of inventional (heuristic) thinking, involving

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experiments, probes, working by analogy from the genealogy of literacy, to discover/design the practices of electracy for an Internet culture. Imagine a scene (here is the mode of undergoing in need of a practice). [Glue](#) (avatar of Gregory Leland Ulmer, for it is an image not a person) has come out of his place on his way to a lunch meeting with his FRE colleagues. A blacksnake rests on top of the holly hedge that lines either side of the brick walkway from the front door to the street. The morning light of early June. The holly has encroached on the brick way, since who wants to trim it? The barbed leaves (whoever planted it lacked foresight) protect a microcosm of creatures, and one of them rests now in the sun, already tonguing Glue's passage.

The snake speaks, but Glue does not understand it. Not for the reason Wittgenstein proposed, with respect to his lion, but because what is said is Greek. *Sumbebekos*. Glue stops, moving the snake to dive into the center of the holly. *Sumbebekos*? This scene is viewed remotely, at a time when I no longer live there, or anywhere (Dasein). We know from theory what the scene does, the way a child may be given to understand the purpose of a library. In this later time we

are electrate (all of us who share this moment) having learned a certain skill set that will have been invented, corresponding to an equipment several generations on. Something real is happening. The scene is not about what we can name, but what we may experience. We know to zoom out, to take in that part of the city imaged here in a certain way, with a multitude of mailboxes, for example, a fleet of trucks moving among them with packages (all junk mail, and one postcard), dating this history (Glue will have been surprised by that card), an anachronism.

We may ask Glue a question, or simply encounter him. Better to converse in Greek with the snake, or follow the holly where it goes, realizing we are not regarding the world, but a thought? Not an idea, but a felt. It is metaphysical, yes, but perhaps not categorial, or perhaps it is a new kind of category. Not literate, although literacy still functions in that moment as it does now—the techne of conventional consulting (and much expanded, while leaving all the problems in place). This scene fronts a database, to test what the philosophers propose: a form and practice that reveals what is prior to and that enables noticing a thing as

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"holly," or "snake," another thing as "Glue" (to recognize and identify them, and thereby gain recognition and identity). Not the policy or its problem, not the decision made, but the chora of the decision. For to decide anything requires a measure, to differentiate better from worse. The choral measure is easy to name (it is well-being), but difficult to realize in practice. You already feel it in a polarized attraction-repulsion, joy-sadness, pleasure-pain. You undergo it continuously through embodiment, noticing its recalcitrance, obliquity. This embodiment is the scene of electrate metaphysics, seat of figural intelligence, hope and fear of human striving, conatus, monad, dasein, entelechy (the tradition gave it many names), undergone as the effort to persevere in your own being.

Our online delegate was misnamed "avatar," from Sanskrit "descent," referring to incarnations of Vishnu who con-descend to embodiment in conditions of broken dharma. All traditional civilizations (oral apparatus, religion as institution) imagined life as descending into a body, that is, into Hades or Hell in some form, that is, into suffering and death, with living as a strategy for ascent, departure, anywhere out of this world.

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Electracy confronts this obsolete catastrophe, even while comprehending its figure (true to the experience of world). Today, what remains for electracy of descent and ascent is the striving meanwhile, the moment between, the time and space of immanence. What is Sanskrit for Spinoza's conatus? What we notice is that, in reaching beyond, thought is touched (grammar of middle voice). Such is electrate agency (active patient), if you want (supplementing literate agency). It is a Greek thought, if only by analogy (how do we experience being, today?) because the French read the Germans reading the Greeks and found *nous* (knowledge by intuition) as the unexplained. When we chora (to take grammatical liberties), we design a dimension supporting, enhancing, augmenting, democratizing, making accessible this other mode of revealing that works with/out category, that writes beyond literacy (and orality), to create with it a civic cyberspace. It is thinking on the spot, situated feeling--accessing the "always already" decided, that enables a collective me to choose in the first place. An emblem, then, for our undergoing: morning light, blacksnake, *Sumbebekos*.

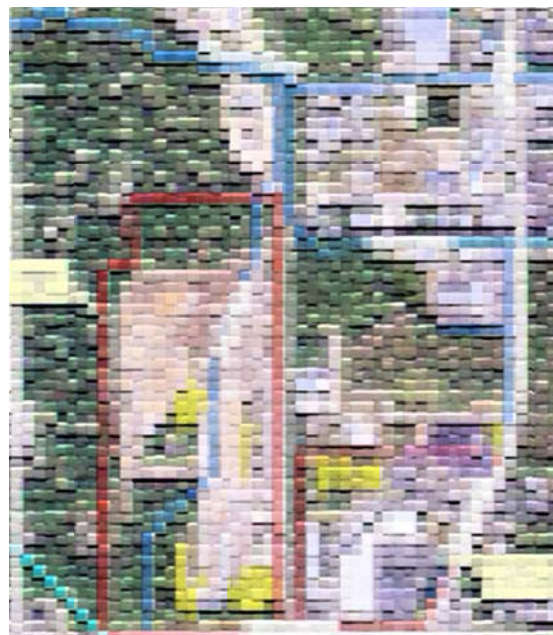
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Glue's lunch companions are the  
FRE: [Barbara Jo Revelle](#), [John Craig  
Freeman](#), [Will Pappenheimer](#). This  
convergence of avatars (to stay with the  
received term) is a memory, a fantasy  
even, since our collocation is only  
virtually possible today. To record a  
meeting at the local source of burriteness,  
the one powered by the pinto bean. One  
could elaborate on the burrito as  
cosmological model, to introduce a mise  
en abyme. Burrito Brothers (but you will  
have your own favorite). The figure  
necessarily is particular. To note for now  
the hour that stretches, that arrives, lingers  
and disappears, not in passing but in  
anticipation and rememoration, just to  
acknowledge xanaduty, that we are here,  
present, (quod), in the light of early  
afternoon, the usual heat and humidity,  
tasting of guac, tracking the child racing  
with his brown-bagged taco from the  
pick-up window to the back table to join  
his mother in the deep shade. The tiled  
surface of our table (a spot of black  
beans), the napkins animated by a breeze  
under the umbrella, hosts one of the  
gestures of Chronos. Nuance beyond  
purpose. Freeman arrives with a wave,  
Pappenheimer entering by the back gate,  
BJ may be late, pondering all how a city

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image adapts to a database, with oracular  
properties, that is, a support for  
contemporary wisdom, forming collective  
and individual decision, because who else  
and why not us, t/here? Why did the  
theorist say that chance replaces wisdom  
"now," since where one is, the other will  
be also? When you read histories of what  
happened, X and Y met at Z in some city  
at some date, and later it turned out they  
were making what Ezra Pound called a  
vortex, an image attractor, a chora. To do  
our xanaduty we have to say and mean  
(again)—*why not us?* Why not *Florida?*  
Or is that just the pinto beans talking?

### Superfund Accident



*Emergency*

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The accident addressed for the EmerAgency is the Cabot-Koppers Superfund site (for example), located in Alachua County, Gainesville, Florida (but you will have your own favorite disaster). A guiding question is: *who decided to pollute the drinking water of my hometown with dioxin?* The conventional answer is: it was an accident, happening without intention, a by-product. But the direction from Paul Virilio and his theory of the General Accident (the Internet Accident that, due to light-speed technologies, happens everywhere simultaneously, collapsing local-global) to foreground by-product as sign in an electrated metaphysics, envisions a *necessary* (fatal) accident. [\*The Cabot-Koppers site, located on NW 23rd Ave in the City of Gainesville, consists of the western half of a designated Federal Superfund site due to contamination with wood treating chemicals in site soils and groundwater. The eastern half is the Cabot site which contains groundwater contamination from past pine tar, pine oil and charcoal production.\*](#) A keyword is “creosote.” *Investigation of the source areas conducted by Beazer in April, May and June 2004 indicated that creosote type materials were present in the upper*

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*and lower Hawthorn Group formations at the site at depths of approximately 60 to 100 ft below ground surface in several of the 4 primary source areas at the site. Additionally for the first time significant groundwater contamination was detected in one well (FW-6) installed into the upper zone of the Floridan Aquifer near the North Lagoon contaminant source area at depths of approximately 150 ft below land surface. The depth of this found contamination in the Hawthorn and Floridan Aquifers was unexpected and presented a potential threat to the City of Gainesville’s Murphree Wellfield.*

The City of Gainesville recently directed its Regional Utility Company to stop buying utility poles from the Koppers company (there are 120 million utility poles in service in the United States), and the company now is closed. Koppers continued up to the present to use the Superfund site for wood treatment, the activity that caused the original pollution of the area. Here is an initial term for figural inquiry: *utility pole*. Choral words are polysemic, giving all their meanings at once (figural ambiguation). The pole figures metaphysical causality. *That for the sake of which...* The pole as physical and conceptual entity is a means to an

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end, a tool. We did not want the pole as such, for itself alone. The decision was not to line city streets with ornamental poles. Aristotle's four causes: What is it made from? What is its form? What produced it? For what purpose? We may ask: what is the cause of the pollution of Gainesville's wellfield? How well are we (what is our wellness)? We have poles *in order to...*

Heidegger articulates the ontological dimension of cause. *Worumwillen*. Dasein is this for-the-sake-of-which, referring to my concerns, creative of *world*, striving. We do not descend; we strive. It is hard to keep track of all the facets of our objects. Lacan's @ (the object a), the fetish, is not what is desired but the object cause of desire (standing in). The wires supported by utility poles figure lines, vectors, making appear the force-field framing our situation. Americans: we who are poisoned by the utility pole (this phrase is a figure). Is *utility* itself the cause? Utility names one of the historical universals, each one functioning as Measure for its epoch: Greek Polis; Christian God; Enlightenment Reason; Industrial Utility; Modern Commodity. Utilitarianism declared collective well-

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being to be its criterion of value, invoking the traditional equivalence between happiness and the Good. Have we come full circle today, at least linguistically? Not "Polis," but only "pole-is." Becoming pole. A polar imbalance (favoring one extreme), the binary structuring all language. What is the other pole magnetized with "utility"? "Futility"? Virilio proposed "Finitude" (disasters measure the outer limit of progress). "Fatality" at least. Perhaps we should follow those power lines to see where they lead, and to hold responsible those we find at the other end (that is to say, us)? Who is not thirsty (such is the gift of embodiment, envied by angels)? Certainly there is desire, but need also. Here is the pre-existing condition, bane of insurance companies. Do you have a body, yes or no? If yes, then no (coverage). We are at the heart (soul) of electrated intelligence: attraction-repulsion. To comprehend the world as ecology, follow the body.



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## Xanadu



*Kubla Sink*

No one needs to be reminded that the poem “Kubla Khan” is subtitled, “Or, a Vision in a Dream: A Fragment.” Nor that it is the product of a legendary scene of writing, an account of which usually accompanies the poem in publication. The English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge had retired to a lonely farmhouse in part to recover his health. Having taken a prescribed “anodyne,” (an opiate) the poet fell asleep while reading a book about the palace of Kubla Khan. While asleep Coleridge dreamed that he wrote a poem, which, upon waking, he still remembered. He immediately transcribed the dream poem, beginning, *In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/A stately pleasure dome decree; /Where Alph, the sacred river, ran/through caverns*

*measureless to man/Down to a sunless sea.*

This anecdote poses a question about the scene of writing adequate for the Internet, hypermedia, digital electronic storage and retrieval of information. The relevance of Coleridge to the question of electracy was established by Ted Nelson, originator of the term “hypertext,” who named his vision of globally connected information “Project Xanadu,” after Coleridge’s poem. This name acknowledges the romantic quality of the vision, long before it was technically possible, of the “hacker’s dream” – total information instantly available to everyone everywhere. “Xanadu, the ultimate hypertext information system, began as Ted Nelson’s quest for personal liberation. The inventor’s hummingbird mind and his inability to keep track of anything left him relatively helpless. He wanted to be a writer and a filmmaker, but needed a way to avoid getting lost in the frantic multiplication of associations his brain produced. His great inspiration was to imagine a computer program that could keep track of all the divergent paths of his thinking and writing. To this concept of branching, nonlinear writing, Nelson gave the name hypertext” (Wolf 1995,140).

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“Hypertext” in its visionary form was a technical translation of Coleridge’s imagination, as described by John Livingston Lowes in his classic study, *The Road to Xanadu*. What orality did for spirit and literacy did for cognition, electracy does for imagination (the apparati are complementary, even if their institutions—religion, science, entertainment—are rivals).

Where is Xanadu, exactly? The answer, available in both scholarly and popular versions, is that Xanadu is a composite diegesis – “diegesis” referring to the imaginary space and time of the world created in the poem. Diegesis names that part of story that persists through adaptations, translations, and remakes or retellings of the original narrative. Xanadu is a hybrid place made of elements drawn from four locations, according to Lowes. These four locations, none of which Coleridge visited but about which he had read, were four of the most exotic sites of otherness, of “elsewhere,” of anyplace-out-of-this-world, available to the Romantic imagination. What are the sites composited in the poem? (1) An inventory of the sites alluded to in the poem begins with the namesake of “Xanadu” itself, Shangdu, which “lay in

what is now the Zhenglan Banner of the Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia, in northeast China” (Alexander 1994, xv). It was the capital city of Kubla Khan. The choral significance includes our current relations with China, as distinct from those of Coleridge’s day, such as the human rights and democracy issues associated with Tiananmen Square. (2) The second exotic location alluded to in “Xanadu” is the “holy caves of ice” in Kashmir. The caves in question are near Pahalgam, “at approximately seven thousand feet at the other end of the Lidder valley, between the junction of the Aru and the Sheshnag, two branches of the majestic Lidder River, which flow through defiles at the valley head” (105). A headline in the *New York Times* updated these sacred caves for the EmerAgency: “Terror in Paradise Keeps Tourists from Kashmir.” (3) The third sacred location referenced in “Xanadu” is Mount Abora, the place about which the Abyssinian maid sang. Located in east central Africa, the holy site is Gishen Mariam, in the Ambasel range, forty miles north of Dessie (166). Although much of the news about Ethiopia in the 1990s dealt with the coups and skirmishes that led to the independence of Eritrea from



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Ethiopia, the region is still associated in popular culture with images of famine.

And what of the fourth exotic, sacred locale of the poem, location of the mighty fountain itself and the underground river? It is Alachua County, Gainesville, Florida, site of the University of Florida and my hometown since 1972. As part of her project to visit the four sites composing the diegesis of Xanadu, Caroline Alexander came to Gainesville, and described it in the same travel journalism used to represent her journeys to the other far-flung outposts on the map of Coleridge's imagination. Alexander does not mention that Gainesville from time to time is ranked as one of the best cities in America for some category of well-being, nor that more tourists are murdered in Florida than in Kashmir. Coleridge's source for the description of the Gainesville region was Bartram's *Travels*, one of the most popular books of the later eighteenth century, giving an account of the karst topography of northern Florida. Bartram's description of the underground rivers, sinkholes, springs, poljes (such as Payne's Prairie, site of the Alachua Sink), and the other features of limestone geology shaped by a semitropical climate, is one of the major

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sources of the language of the poem (Ulmer 2003, 96-98).

## Flesh



*Element*

Merleau-Ponty's ontology is an important resource for chora (electrate place). Merleau-Ponty (like Heidegger) recognized that the logic of a new metaphysics became possible within modernist arts, especially (for Merleau-Ponty) Cézanne's paintings and Proust's novel. Just as "Being" is an effect of and happens only within alphabetic writing, so too is "Flesh" (Merleau-Ponty's ontological category) an effect of thought's encounter with imaging. Graphic design is the grammar and syntax of this mode of articulating embodied experience. In the context of electracy, for operating the interface-databases of a digital apparatus, phenomenology and deconstruction (experience and language)

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are allies. Nature proper may not be a *forest of symbols*, but MUVE's (multi-user-virtual-environments) are or could be. The immediate interest for chora is Merleau-Ponty's retrieval of the term "element" to replace "substance" to formulate ontological Flesh. "The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element,' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to location and to the now. For if there is flesh, that is if the hidden face of the cube radiates forth somewhere as well as does the fact I have under my eyes, and coexists with it, and if I who see the cube also belong to the visible, I am visible from elsewhere, and if I and the cube are together caught up in one same 'element,' this cohesion, this visibility by principle prevails over every momentary discordance" (Merleau-Ponty 1968).

Plato introduced chora in his dialogue, *Timaeus*, to explain the

interface between Being (the eternal forms) and Becoming (changing materiality). Chora is a space sorting original chaos into order, specifically the four fundamental elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. Chora is updated in electracy to imagine the categorial potential of a disaster in its distribution of elemental materiality. The Cabot-Koppers Superfund catastrophe in *Florida* appears through elements. Merleau-Ponty's Flesh, observed operating in Cézanne and other modernist painters, is a way into image metaphysics, to do for recorded images what "category" did for written words. Merleau-Ponty picked up the usage from Gaston Bachelard, who in turn refunctioned the principles of ancient natural history as archetypes animating poetic reverie. Alchemy, astrology, psychology of humours, and the Neo-Platonic and hermetic traditions are entailed by this terminology. The advantage of appropriating this obsolete history for metaphysical invention is clear, since it allows us to learn from a rich heritage of imaging, extracting the categorial effects previously discovered in other historical circumstances. Merleau-Ponty's move was anticipated by psychoanalysis, not only in Jung's

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archetypes, but more importantly in the appropriation by Freud and Lacan of the entire Neo-Platonic humanist archive, including the tropology of rhetoric, repurposed as the discourse of the Unconscious. Image mysteries are obsolete as physics, but still relevant as interface operations.

Merleau-Ponty is not the only one to use Bachelard's *Water and Dreams* as a relay for developing element as a replacement for "substance" in image metaphysics. Sartre took Bachelard's psychoanalysis of things as a point of departure for summarizing his own existential psychoanalysis, in the final section of *Being and Nothingness*. In the context of *Florida*, we may consider this enormous text to be a philosophical analysis of the implications of the epiphany dramatized in Sartre's novel *Nausea*. Sitting on a park bench, the protagonist receives the event of Being, of Dasein (there is, *es gibt, il y a*) recognized in a tree root. The material *quality* associated with the root is viscosity, stickiness. The term used in *Being and Nothingness* is *visqueux*, and the translator notes his choice of "slimy" for the English equivalent could just as well have been "sticky." Sartre's phenomenology is on

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display in his claim that such *qualia* are ontological, constituting objective revelations of what is there, of being-in-itself. Being-for-itself (consciousness, the cogito) becomes what it is, self-aware of its own project, its passion, its direction, its intention within a situation, through the appropriation of *qualia*. It is the effect of extimacy, of poetic correspondences central to chora as embodied affective intelligence.

The evidentiary effect for me is augmented by the conductive dimension of the relationship between the theory and its example in Sartre's argument. It begins with the fact that Sartre's ontology is grounded in taste, literally, using one's preferences in flavors to note the axis of attraction-repulsion (pleasure-pain), the aesthetic axis, constituting measure. The claim is not that being-in-itself has the same feeling for everyone, but that Sartre's first-person undergoing of Being occurred through his repugnance for stickiness. The relevance of this argument is not only scholarly (the elaboration of another instance of the categorial potential of "element"), but because one of the primary examples Sartre gives of a viscous substance is "pitch," or pine tar. "A [viscous]

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substance like pitch is an aberrant fluid”  
(Sartre 774). An implicit link between  
*Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness* is the  
fact that pine tar is usually produced  
through the processing of pine tree roots  
and stumps. The term “gluey” (my avatar  
signature) even appears in one description  
of this metaphysical element.

An instruction for chora become  
clear in the context of consulting (the  
EmerAgency). The Accident of the  
Superfund site in Gainesville that is the  
test case our experiment, involves  
precisely pine tar (pitch), produced at the  
Koppers site since 1911 for the treatment  
of wood. Paul Virilio advises us to treat  
the Accidents in our consultations as a  
sign, expressing the intersection of literate  
metaphysics with the emergent ontology  
of technics: the Accident is an  
intersection of culture and technics,  
revealing an electrated measure of the  
Real. The instruction is to look in your  
event, the field of an accident, for the  
quality of the material you recognize as  
element, a fundamental ingredient of your  
material situation. The conductive vortex  
in my experiment joined the Koppers pine  
tar with Sartre’s ontology, but the  
instruction is “identify your quality.”  
This quality is the sign, or rather, the

intimation. It is not sent, but received by  
the addressee. This logic of *quale  
morphics* (arts equivalent to quantum  
mechanics) is under construction. It is  
another instance of the Xanadu effect: the  
by-product constituting the Superfund  
accident in Gainesville exemplifies the  
existentialist ontology of Being-in-Itself.  
Such is a world without transcendence:  
the measure is given locally, directly to  
your experience. Xanadu polluted by  
Being-In-Itself. Could this not be a draw  
for eco-tourism?

### Cayo Hueso



Measure

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Let me put element to work, or at least the principle of aesthetic *qualia*, to locate measure at work, keeping in mind the first-person undergoing of electrated comprehension. It is a choral report on Key West. Occasional: two families, hinged by my son and daughter-in-law, spending the week before hurricane season, B&B. On Duval, looking in a shop window with large photographs of famous people (young Elvis, JFK with Frank). Who is that man, the full-length portrait, wearing the Hawaiian shirt? We speculate. A native bystander says "Jimmy Buffett." On the map mark his tone of voice. Pity? Contempt? Then we noticed Margaritaville next door.

The daimon's way (Parmenides). The daimonion at least. A force addressing me. This is the dimension for thinking now, which is not the same in every epoch. Reason? That was yesterday. The ground before was Heaven. You know the history. The Commodity today, but that is not it. A figure-ground reversal, for this chorography. The touring families are important, as ground for the figure-- the circum-stance (love, for short). *Il solito tran-tran di tutti i giorni* except to whom it may concern: everything.

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I show the map, not unlike the one in the Mel Fisher Museum, tracking Nuestra Senora de Atocha where it sank. What is an insight worth? It could be a pedagogical metaphor, like the rhizome of bees and flowers, nectar into honey in the hive, used by the medieval apprentices to guide the making of commonplace books. But those were topical, not choral. There is a dimension that electracy brings into appearance, although it will always have been t/here. Passing the cemetery on Windsor Lane, in the middle of the street, a small pink teddy-bear. Leave it be (fetish).

In Seven Fish for dinner, best food on the island? Worst setting? Small, dark, the ambiance is people packed in all talking at once. Notice not the conversation with your partner, inaudible in any case, but the enveloping roar, the noise parasite. Only for a momentito, a glimpse. The plane of immanence. *Life* a philosopher says simply. Conatus (striving prior to any subject or identity). Outside, the Neutral, stepping there to take thought as in times past a cigarette. What is this feeling, a thought without concept, a force without form (not thinkable, or only duly noted, within

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literacy). Key West as a whole, gathered  
t/here. *Florida* felt.

Where is the measure of this  
apprehension? It is singular, specific,  
momentary. A weak ontology, then  
(*undsoweiter*). In Cayo Hueso the  
measure (this reading) nonetheless is  
another rhizome that came (not alone) to  
the courtyard trees of the B&B, between  
six and seven in the evening, to feed on  
the seedpods abundantly offered by the  
China Palm. When he visited Key West in  
the 1830s John James Audubon found  
eighteen birds he had not seen elsewhere,  
including the white-crowned pigeon.  
Endangered now, our host explained (I  
have a print rolled in a tube from the  
Audubon house).

*More* is the experience given by  
this dimension. Every epoch takes it up in  
turn. Polis. God. Reason. Utility. Money.  
What we are given is the vehicle, and the  
tenor is *more*, something other, the  
invisible, a form for this matter, even if  
we call it a plane of immanence. Such is  
Flesh, in/visible at once, because we are  
immersed, a moebius outside-in. Pure  
more, which is us. Life. Body and its by-  
product, the accidental spirit. Who speaks  
for the late J. J. Audubon? *White-crowned  
pigeon in a China Palm*.

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That's about the size of it. The plane of  
immanence marked in an emblem (pigeon  
+ palm). A choral measure, gathering  
events into coherence. *Today is the day*  
(Mel Fisher t-shirt) for motto. That is the  
practice to be invented, to bring to the  
table the daimonion (your genius, to speak  
Latin). And this glass of wine. *Ingenium*  
escaping all abstraction.

Wallace Stevens, tell me, if you  
know, why, when the (pigeon feeding)  
ended and we turned toward the town, *tell  
why the glassy lights, the lights in the  
fishing boats at anchor there, as the night  
descended, tilting in the air, mastered the  
night and portioned out the sea, fixing  
emblazoned zones and fiery poles,  
arranging, deepening, enchanting night*  
(the idea of order at Key West). That's  
right. Poetry is the new math.  
Pathematics. The more schools reduce  
arts education, the less relevant they  
become (to electracy), guaranteeing an  
opportunity for the usurper, entertainment.

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## Standing Now



### Parable

In her two-volume study, *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt fills in the background from which may be derived a practice of chorography, of composing an electrated measure of well-being (chora). As Heidegger's former student (and lover), Arendt works her way from the Ancient Greeks up to Heidegger — specifically to Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche. Between the first and second volume of the published versions, Heidegger experienced his "turn," a change of perspective or attitude, with important implications for electracry. Arendt structured her history as a rewriting of Kant's three critiques, because she believed that Kant's third critique (on aesthetic judgment) was the

basis for a pedagogy of ethical and political judgment, adapted to our media age. Unfortunately, Arendt died unexpectedly with only two of the three volumes completed (on histories of contemplative reason, and practical will).

Arendt's argument passes through, and stops short, as fate would have it, at an account of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, thus calling attention to this text. *The Life of the Mind* is a narrative account of the epoch of literacy.

Chorography continues Arendt's project in its own way, with Kant's aesthetic judgment being one of the earliest outlines of the possibility of thinking without concepts (reflective judgment), giving the body a turn. Arendt's history is organized by two important questions for chora: where are we when we think? What provokes us to think? Some observations that she gleans from the tradition, along with their relevance to us, are: 1) Thinking is swift, because immaterial (thus thinking has an affinity with figure, especially epiphany). 2) Intuition, for example, is distinguished from discursive (step by step) reasoning, as "when a flash of insight (*phronesis*) about everything blazes up, and the mind is flooded with light" (Arendt 1978, 1:17). The "flash"

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passes through an associative network, such as the one documented in the imagination of Coleridge. 3) When we think, we are *nowhere* (or, as Heidegger said, we are “nowhere, without the no”). 4) Discursive thinking is alphabetic, structured by concepts, while intuitive thinking, available naturally to anyone, is instituted formally in ideogram systems. The Chinese ideogram is “emblematic.” “For these schemata—sheer abstractions—Kant used the word ‘monogram,’ and Chinese script can perhaps be best understood as monogrammatical, so to speak. In other words, what for us is ‘abstract’ and invisible, is for the Chinese emblematically concrete and visibly given in their script, as when, for instance, the image of two united hands serves for the concept of friendship. They think in images, not in words” (1:101). Here is an important clue: the emblem is to imaging what the concept is to writing. Eisenstein and Pound both based their modernist innovations on the ideogram. 5) “When” is reason? It is always out of order, out of joint, never confined to the present moment. It “jumps the tracks.” What is the rhetorical practice of “jumping out of line”?

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Arendt’s history removes the radicality, in some ways, from electracy as an image metaphysics, to the extent that she shows the historical character of “being,” the degree to which it has evolved and transformed from one epoch to the next, one culture to the other. Each epoch (Greek, Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Modern) understood differently the relationship between thought and reality. Foucault’s genealogy identified the episteme of each epoch, setting the parameters of any “statement” for that setting (not only what was said, but it was possible to think in a given epoch). Arendt, however, frames the changes differently, foregrounding another capacity of mind, which is “stance”—to take and maintain a certain “attitude” toward the givens or the parameters of one’s own time, such as the stance of “wisdom,” or *ataraxy*, for the Romans (1:154), or the Hindu witness-consciousness. What is the parameter today? Accident judged by well-being.

Arendt’s second volume shifts from “thinking” to “willing.” The history of the will, she says, would coincide with a history of the inner life, and could begin with the Christian era and St. Paul’s letters. If thinking contemplated the

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essences of perceptible things, concerned with that which is necessary, permanent, already given, enduring and always present, then willing opens the experience of an inner being, located within an individual, producing an awareness of radical freedom, in relation to contingent affairs of the social world, of political ethical action and belief. The will, that is, raises the ontological status of “accidents,” *kata symbebekos*, including errant memory of the past and projections or speculations about the future (at last we grasp what the blacksnake intimated). Aristotle’s distinction in his Metaphysics between the potential and the actual (*dunamis* and *energeia*) -- his solution to the problem of how Being and Becoming are related -- became in the individual a feeling that one could choose to act, or not. Arendt asserts that this feeling is a discovery, an invention of behavior (2: 5). Identity formation, in any case, is as much a part of an apparatus as is technology. But all of that was preparation for the missing volume.

The relevant point is that, historically, thinking has always created its own time and space, relative to an apparatus, and this opening of a place for thought, with its own dimensionality, may

be called “chora” (after Plato’s term for space, region, or receptacle in Timaeus). The history of decision is bound up with that of the will. Willing specifically opens up the future for human projects, including not just a multiple-choice option among existing possibilities (Ancient *proairesis*), but the introduction of something fundamentally new into the world. The implication, confronted only by Duns Scotus (prior to Nietzsche and Heidegger), is that God acts contingently (2: 31). *Sumbebekos*? Willing is lived as expectation, hope and fear, addressed directly through feeling. If the recommended state of mind or attunement (Stimmung) available through “thinking” is serenity, accepting necessity, the mood of willing is impatience, tension, associated with an assumption that to will is also to assert “I can” (*velle/posso*) (2: 38). Serenity and impatience, neither one what is required now.

The Judeo-Christian foregrounding of will inverts the priorities of the Greco-Roman value of contemplation. The new value is not knowledge, but belief (faith). The chief virtue in this frame is “obedience” (2: 68). Greco-Roman ataraxy accommodates the world, while Judeo-Christian “no” rejects

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the world. Faith does not involve persuasion, but is pure choice, which is, again, taking a stance, maintaining an attitude. Part of the usefulness of Arendt's history is the clarity with which it outlines the uneasy relationship of the syncretism informing the Western tradition. Every major impasse at work in our policy debates is structured by the tension between the two different civilizational values: pure and practical reason, science and faith, knowledge and belief, the prototype of which is the confrontation between Galileo and the Church, dramatized in Bertolt Brecht's play. Such are the orienting poles of the Western tradition, our handedness, each not knowing what the other is doing.

Nietzsche warned that we should not take for granted the favorable attitude towards curiosity that has been hegemonic in modern sensibility, since this attitude is recent and nearly unique in the history of the world. The administration of George W. Bush showed the possibility that policy makers at the highest levels of the most "advanced" societies may place faith over knowledge. The authority of science is challenged at every turn in contemporary policy debates. This polarity of Western deliberation is a

primary target of EmerAgency consulting. Arendt's history breaks off at the crucial juncture, with the first page of her volume on judgment rolled into the typewriter, found in her study after her death. She was preparing a third register of the life of the mind (we should say body-mind), introduced by Kant, more or less at the inception of electracy (the beginning of the industrial revolution). The point to emphasize is that "judgment" is an autonomous faculty, equal to and distinct from "thinking" and "willing." We know by analogy that "judgment" has its own stance, attitude, fundamental value, attunement, whose practice is emerging within electracy.

In terms of the EmerAgency as an electracy consultancy, applying to policy formation the operations of chorography, the promise is that judgment will do for policy disputes just what Kant promised it could do for an individual thinker: create a bridge facilitating communication between the faculties of knowledge and desire, necessity and freedom. The most immediate connection between Arendt's history and chora is the traditional privilege of *nunc stans* (the standing now) over *nunc fluens* (the contingent passing of time). Arendt juxtaposes the parable of

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the Gateway in *Zarathustra*, with one of Kafka's parables, to make the point that human thought is the only counterforce to the chronological flow of time. Her interpretation of these parables itself concludes with a reference to the kind of sign specific to the formal operations of judgment. "The gap, though we hear about it first as a *nunc stans*, the 'standing now' in medieval philosophy, where it served, in the form of *nunc aeternitatis*, as model and metaphor for divine eternity, is not a historical datum; it seems to be coeval with the existence of man on earth. Using a different metaphor, we call it the region of the spirit, but it is perhaps rather the path paved by thinking, the small inconspicuous track of non-time beaten by the activity of thought within the time-space given to natal and mortal men. Following that course, the thought-trains, remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they touch from the ruin of historical and biographical time. This small non-time space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, cannot be inherited and handed down by tradition, although every great book of thought points to it somewhat cryptically—as we found Heraclitus saying of the notoriously

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cryptic and unreliable Delphic oracle: *oute legei, oute kryptei alla semainei* ('it does not say and it does not hide, it intimates')" (1. 210).

Chora is the practice of crafting for myself (each one of us) this vantage point within which to undergo, supported through the apparatus, a measurement of well-being relevant to any decision, individual or collective, ethical or political. Here is a program for augmented reality, to repurpose our mobile devices, delivering imagination on the fly between me and us, in order to undergo *Florida*.

### Firenze



### Moment

One more take, to evoke a choral measure (recipe to be extrapolated at your leisure). A report on a condition of well-

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being, chora in Italy. Fading in memory, a decay more rapid than anticipated, Italy in October, 2007. Scavengers pick it apart by night, dream weather leaves the harder materials in place, those towers of aggregate in the badlands of the Dakotas showing time as erosion. A fractal landscape. This quality of memory is what may be reproduced in the prosthesis: the electrated augmentation of human capacities in the machine. If the database is to transduce information into knowledge and knowledge into experience, the interface must learn to forget in this way, to become dilapidated and erode, at a collective level (the way the effect of art requires subtraction for the face of measure to appear). In search of this measure called chora, in place of definition or formula, to be adapted to your own case. The “stance” happens through miniaturization, a region at once outside and in, extimate as Lacan said, first experienced, perhaps, in those maps often included in certain children’s books, such as Milne’s *Hundred Acre Woods*, setting for *Winnie-the-Pooh*, based on Ashdown Forest, Sussex, England. Historically the prototype of this space (chora) is the dancing floor at Knossos (choros), built by the legendary Daedalus.

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We recognize the fundamental structuring principle, separating sacred from profane, continued in every receptacle of play and game. Imagination as faculty passes from potential to actual, is formatted in each person, as interface capacity articulating Being and Becoming. Such are the stakes and opportunities of choragraphy. My imagination is formatted *Florida*.

The Ponte Vecchio is behind us (“one of the emblems of Florence”). The street vendors (*vous compra*) arrived carrying loads of knockoffs on their backs in large blankets or drop-cloths, like a cadre of elves on Christmas Eve. Just as quickly as they came, they suddenly rolled up their bags and fled, ahead of two carabinieri on motorcycles slowly making their way through the crowd of tourists along the bridge. Our family has left a gelateria encountered on the way from the Ponte towards Santa Maria Novella. The portions scooped into our cono or coppa were generous, excessive, double the amount received in the famous Vivoli Gelateria, promoted as the best in Firenze, if not all of Italy. Because it is the best, it can provide exact measure: the quantity you order is the quantity you get, in a cup filled precisely to the rim with the excess scraped off and returned to the vat. Off

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the beaten track, late at night, the measure is different. What of the quality? Kathy and I were sharing "wedding cake" which was the best we had tasted. Lee always gets stracciatella, and this flavor became the referent throughout the visit, as we joined in what the guidebook declared to be an Italian passion, no day ending properly without gelato. A history of video games explained the origin of PacMan in similar terms: inventors searching for a game that would appeal to girls started with the ritual visit of Japanese girls to sweetshops. "They love to eat," so a game about eating. The design was inspired by a pizza with one slice removed (between 3 and 4 o'clock of the circle) and a strategically placed pepperoni for the eye. A mugshot of the generic contemporary imagination: front is Happy Face; profile is PacMan. So the choral measure has something to do with sharing a meal.

It is some time after 10:30 PM in this scene, rain drizzle, the chill in the air qualified by the scarves purchased that morning at the central market. The Uffizi after that was an introduction to Italian bureaucracy, standing in lines in order to stand in lines to get the tickets to stand in line. As we shuffled along, getting

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acquainted with those assigned to this same limbo, a couple pushing a stroller stopped and the man inquired: "Professor Ulmer?" It was Shannon Banes, a student from 1993, now living in Zurich. Exclamations all around (the first time in Florence for both of us). "This sort of thing happens all the time," I lied afterwards.

Even as I waited my turn for a spoon of wedding cake (a streak of caramel always the surprise) there was one of the [Botticelli's](#) that persisted in my ruminations. Lee pointed it out, noting especially the angel's gesture, the formal alignment with the doorframe, the sequence of inner-outer pairings, from the evocation of the Virgin's womb in the right foreground, to the room and the doorway middle ground, and the landscape outside background. Gabriel's hand aligned with the doorframe marks the division between this world and beyond ("The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee," St. Luke). The image gave me a scene with which to anchor my readings about St. Paul's theology of the Church as institutionalizing the Virgin's womb, this womb understood explicitly as chora, making a place for God's embodiment in a physical world, the event for which icons

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are the relay, vehicles of a relationship, a ratio, a proportion, not a representation. Avatar. That is the structure, the site of what we seek, quiet annunciations of the vortex around these openings between realms or regions. A doorway, a portal, an opportunity to meet the guardian, my daimon, now a commonplace of new age gurus. Chora is pre-sold in the marketplace, then, high concept, except electracy must go beyond the tradition and its dilapidated survivals to reproduce the functionality, not the metaphor (that is, the illumination conventionally described as “wisdom”). That spirit guide always was just an “itself,” that is, a doubling, a fold experienced, when it happens, as *satori*, the thing (gelato) *itself*. Being (in) itself.

The brightening of the street ahead was a promise, in retrospect, as we moved into some piazza with better prospects for catching a taxi. The angels are everywhere in the museums of Italy, not just the archangels but swarms of putti on the ceilings and walls. The classical heritage underfoot exposes the more ancient daimons, surviving as the household imp of Lorca's duende, direct descendent of Socrates's daimonion that he consulted at the threshold of his home

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before leaving for his trial. That was the oral Socrates, as distinct from the literate one, who applied dialectic to his fellow citizens and was executed for his trouble. Nietzsche's thought of the eternal return of the same was whispered into his ear by one of these messengers, voice of intuition so hard to hear nowadays. What if you had to repeat your life minute for minute forever? *Every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself* (Nietzsche 1974, Aphorism 341). Chora augments this whisper, hummed in database patterns. When you log on, *voila*.

I already knew it, after three steps into the piazza, that the moment (*Augenblick*) was now here (the one I will choose should the daimon arrive). The rain was more visible backlit by the street lamps, whose reflections from the wet cobblestones turned the atmosphere a fluorescent blue. On the far corner two carabinieri in conversation with a woman were laughing. Lee is in front, waving to a taxi up the street just dropping off a



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passenger. A young man on the sidewalk, seated on the low steps of an oversized doorway, guitar case open before him, plays *allegro con brio* the theme from the animated film *The Triplets of Belleville*. The guitar is amplified, channeled through a small black box that seems to be adding effects (knockoff music?). Is he really just a kind of organ grinder? *Ben Charest* [creator of the score for the film] *fuses the score's snappy, predominantly le hot jazz mindset with everything from hip-hop and Bach to the Italian opera farrago 'Cieco Cieco Barber' and 1960s proto-surf-rock of 'Pa Pa Pa Palavas'. But that conceptual stew isn't the least of Charest's delightful surprises, as he giddily infuses it with his own Django-esque guitar stylings and a hodge-podge of found rhythmic instruments that include bicycle wheels, refrigerator shelves and a vacuum cleaner.* This musical flea-market blew out of that box, opening one of those existential refrains of which Proust's "Vinteuil's little phrase" is the best known.

In the time it took to recognize the number the scene composed itself, a double perspective by division, the *daio* of the daimon that allows me to live and to tell at the same time, in a loop, a

circumspection of time, the same capacity through which decision models possible worlds. Today the annunciation is more modest. The universal offers an empty doorway, without God, Polis, Reason, Utility, or any other content with which to prop it open. A threshold with street musician retains sacred functionality, nonetheless. Our theorists (Serres) chart the legacy of angels in our airports (Perez-Gomez updated *Polyphilo* by setting the erotic dream journey on an airplane). From angelology to take-out. The structure comes around again in every epoch, but each time more subtle than the last: not god descending, but a bit of music moving my body. The claims may be reduced as the equipment improves. Everyone knows that art is the new religion, and the new science as well (leaving those institutions to their own apparatus) and now we know what to do about it (in electracy).

What is the message delivered in this way? It is simple enough, self-evident (I repeat myself), as if by Cassandra, even if beyond good and evil, so that to hear it involves a transvaluation of all values, seconded in infinite variation by entertainment narratives, including angels to personify the authority of the insight.

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*Wings of Desire* (Wenders) got it: the willingness of the angels to exchange their eternity as spirits for the finitude of embodied experience, the heft of a stone, the track of a footprint in the snow. Why do we always go right by it? The American remake misses the point in *City of Angels*, critics agree, unable to believe it is just this little sensation of gruntlement, to foreground the love story instead, which is there only as a bonus. Life. That is the feeling for which chora forms the category and digital technology the prosthesis. Do not underestimate the political implications.

Then chora is the mobile fragment, the categorial metonym that memory finds in the scene, serving as interface for a digital civic sphere. Not quite Stevens's "Anecdote of the Jar." *The wilderness rose up to it, / And sprawled around, no longer wild.* Stevens placed the jar in Tennessee upon a hill. In Anecdote of the Gelato the trait is there already, not added. Certainly I am selecting it to intimate the moment, the gateway with its guardian or keeper just for me, for the family, to show me my law, how I may become what I am, my striving to persevere in my own being. That is, to live. The Christian Church declared many pagan sites to be

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basilicas and marked them with crosses. The symmetry of history predicts that someday the Duomo in Florence will be a gelateria.

Behind us in the dark is the glowing cone recognized throughout Italy if not the world. The smooth chill in our mouths orders the chill in the air, dampening mist of October rain, arm in arm, Lee at the taxi, Ty with the umbrella, Kathy spooning wedding cake, Anita finding a euro for the guitar case, Django-style rhythm driving the score. Against the ascetic ideal, the piazza shifts into a pose for the snapshot to put in the daimon's album, holding open the doorway for now, as we pass through. Here is the measure for the emerging apparatus, to add to those already institutionalized in Religion and Science. Who speaks for well-being? EmerAgency egents, for one (modeled as best we can by the FRE). We read about preparations for the coming calamity: India is building a fence to repel refugees when Bangladesh submerges. Is that the best we can do? Religion denies climate science, for example (to oversimplify a complex debate), taken with a grain of salt since embodiment is not real for true believers. Science promises to fix the

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material order, ironically, since it was the  
arrogance of techno-science that created  
the machinery of our possible apocalypse  
to begin with. There must be a place at  
the table of policy formation for well-  
being, based on undergoing (not merely  
understanding or faith), on the polarity of  
attraction-repulsion that permits my body  
to know the difference between gelato and  
creosote. It sometimes seems simple  
enough, until the by-product daimon  
materializes unexpectedly.

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