

Alcheopathy - The First Rotations: Archiving the Eye

Or New Anatomies: Damn, I Gotta Go Back to the Beginning

The initial idea was to create a new form of therapy based on African Alchemy. Naive and hungry, I began with a dive into the works of Carl Jung and the mythological stories of South African Sangoma, Credo Mutwa. Jung's Psychology and Alchemy gave me insights into how informative pagan symbolism and orthodox Christian ideologies have been on modern-day Western psychology. The state and the church have never been separate, and most definitely not objective towards the process of knowledge creation and dissemination. Credo Mutwa stretched my narrowed Western perspective to include origin stories beyond the Greek pantheon. Baba Mutwa continues to equalize the human position, placing my hands and feet and head back on the ground as a listener to the nonhuman songs. These men planted initial literary seeds for my journey into Mirror-gazing. They set me up with an appropriate state to receive synchronicity from the emergence of beautifully twisted and self-contradicting perspectives. I began to loop. Between the one looking and the one being looked at. Looping led to spiraling, and spiraling led to the closing of my eyes. And here we are today. With eyes closed, seeing for the first time.

I realized that before I can create alcheopathy, I must rewind to the point where the first sin was made - in the eye. What began as the object of the mirror has transformed onto the subject of the body and into the site of the eye. Alcheopathy is an attempt to make a new form of somatic therapy for the avoidant. However, based on my background in human biology, medical school courses, and neuroscientific research, I, of course, assumed "I understand the definition of a soma". Soma, the Greek term for body, often in contrast to the psyche, the soul - but I digress. I have been indoctrinated to understand the soma as a mass of cells working together to sustain life. I have been taught to examine the body from the safely, objective distance of observation, data, and hypothesis. Therefore, when I arrived at the anatomy of the eye, I was overly confident. "I know what an eye is, and I know how it works." I understand not only the anatomical identifications, but also the physics, the biochemical reactions that enable its function. There is no such question: "What is an eye?" It has been clearly and meticulously studied since Heraclitus's pre-Socratic philosophizing of "fire of the eye" till today's debates on the eye's substrate, light, as a wave or particle. We have been thinking about vision, optics, and light since the literal dawning of day. However, in the last ten minutes of my most recent work, First Person Plural - a five-person solo - I challenged myself to embody five different selves dancing on one line from one end of the room to the other...with my eyes closed. To my surprise, my body could not manage. And with eyes closed, the epiphany came: I don't know what it means to see. All this time, looking in the bloody mirror, face to face with my many selves without a clue of what it means to look. All this time, looking for something or someone to emerge without the slightest consideration of the substrate enabling such a phenomenon. And once again, here we are today. With eyes closed, seeing for the first time.

Since science is not able to satisfy my optic curiosities, where do I turn? Or perhaps, where do I spiral? In this first rotation, I've found optic solace in the word. Understanding that

the new language, new stories, and new narratives would drive me to a (re)newed understanding of the anatomy of the eye and visual perception. The prose and poems of Renee Gladman and Alexis Pauline Gumbs; the theories of Katharine McKittrick and Sylvia Wynter; and the stories of Robin Wall Kimmerer and Octavia Butler, these women all guide me through this initial rotation around the eye. My deepest curiosities begin within Wynter's theories around a term she calls the bios-mythois. Unlike the biocentric and reasoncentric ideologies of Western scientific methods, bios-mythois is a practice of conceptualizing what it means to be human beyond biological absolutism. Or the process of "separating the being of being human from its being human in the purely biocentric terms of our present globally hegemonic, monohumanist and secular Western, yet no less genre-specific, now (neo)Liberal conception as Man." (Wynter 2015). The eye has been exhaustively labeled and described. But "description is not liberation" (McKittick 2012). Knowing the terminology of the eye has yet to make it easier for me to understand how to see clearly. Knowing the neurobiological processes of how light is translated into electric signals has not liberated me from my conditioned ways of seeing. Scientists and the like will be quick to respond - "what you're seeking is not the responsibility of the eye, rather the work of the mind." Bullshit! Somatic practices of experiential anatomy, such as BMC and Feldenkrais, have already proven: the organ is not an object. Psychosomatic research has shown us that reframing my relationship to an organ can have a significant influence on how it operates (Wortman et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023). Thus, my work is generating new anatomical narratives that move away from biocentric, logo-centric ideologies and towards mythological somatic storytelling. My research is returning the eye to its animacy. Ironically, my initial methods towards a return to animacy involve closing the eyes and asking myself: How have the stories about the anatomy of the eye limited our stories about what it means to see? And what am I going to do to move beyond this seemingly incontrovertible limitation? And once again, here we are. With eyes closed, seeing for the first time.

"The stories we choose to shape our behavior have adaptive consequences" (Kimmerer 2006). Reframing the eye based on animacy and new narratives has been the work of many somatic practitioners for several decades. However, the majority of those narratives are rooted in white Western Neo liberal ideals that still lean on scientific methods for epistemic validation and/or fail to accredit the non-Western cultural practices that influenced their methods. (Eddy, 2002). No, I say, let's not assume that because the Greeks thought (a) or because the scientific study shows (b) that we have found some form of ontological ground. Wynter challenges us to move towards demonic ground where ontological and epistemic disobedience activate our thinking into unknown discursive territories that challenge the presuppositions of institutions as the place of knowledge creation. Working with my body, my movement, my dance in conversation with healers, practitioners, musicians, performers, and keepers of the land from a non-Western perspective is enriching the soils of these demonic grounds to become firm foundations from which to stand in new method making, new narratives, and new anatomies of the eye. Liberating the eye means liberating the most conditioned sensory organ of our generation. Liberating the eye means liberating the hegemonic relations between the sensory modalities. Liberating the eye means an onto-biological revolution of how we literally and figuratively see ourselves. Liberating the eye means demanding a re-imagining of the terms, knowledge systems, and so-called scientific consensus we've used to understand our bodies,

our selves, and our world. In liberating the eye, we practice standing here today. With eyes closed, we see for the first time.

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