

dear library

introductory notes for 2024.04.10 staff gathering

background ::: who am i?

I am an anti-racist, white (Scottish/German descent) dyke. Any pronouns are welcome. I was born in Iowa City, IA, grew up in St. Paul, spent my late teens and early 20s in South Mpls. and have now lived in northern Minnesota for almost thirty years. I came to Duluth as an ASL interpreter at UMD and that supported my way through school here.

As a media composer and installation artist, I create chance-infused, open systems. My work explores the porous, intimate boundaries between humans and machines. I use hand-coded generative methods to create a multi-channel kaleidoscope of sound, animation and physical artifacts ::: a cross-sensory landscape that flows from the digital cloud into the physical world.

I have been the recipient of numerous commissions, grants, fellowships and residencies from the Jerome Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, Minnesota State Arts Board, American Composers Foundation, Walker Art Center, Northern Lights.mn, Tweed Museum of Art, Zeitgeist New Music Quartet, Arteles International Artist Residency (Finland), Creative Community Leadership Institute (Bush Foundation / Intermedia Arts), United States Artists / Cheswatyr Foundation, Puffin Foundation, the Arrowhead Regional Arts Council and others.

I have a background in cello performance, mathematics, ecology, music theory and code. The confluence of these disciplines informs my work as a composer and multimedia artist. As both a musician and a mathematician, I explore time-based, multi-threaded systems and chance-infused, emergent patterns. As a queer artist I am interested in the infinite, bendable between::: the erotic dynamics of tapping glass ::: the carbon cycle ::: the fragile, electric cyborg body ::: the networked, digital hive mind ::: the swarm.

Old-school codework is becoming a folk art as the mainstream technology world is subsumed by proprietary platforms. Generative, networked, "ecological" work has a digital materiality that has interested me :::

a living work with its levers and gears :::: its language of motion and change.

For me code is a literature, a score, a choreographic alphabet, a poetics. My work uses projection, networked animation and sound to create media landscapes. I also produce algorithmic prints and stitch renderings made by a computer-driven robotic long-arm quilting machine. I map code to sound, walls, cloth and paper (touch, sound, sight).

Coming from a wordless music composition and a math background, I use abstraction to represent an underlying physics ::: a strangeness ::: a pulse / tonal fray / noise / hex / underground / subtextual / space. Time has been a core driver of my sound work and animations. I work in series ::: film frames, book pages, prints, algorithmic quilt installations. Code is a literature ::: a pattern language ::: a score. It is a choreography ::: a performance. A code renderer is the weaver ::: the mill ::: the alchemist ::: the wizard. Code is a spell ::: an incantation ::: an intent.

I welcome people of all ages to engage with my work. I try to create spaces that can be interacted with digitally and physically. My work is legible beneath the surface. My code is human-readable and I try to make myself available for deeper discussions about how things work. I have a mission to make creative codework and algorithmic abstraction accessible to other makers and audience members in my community. I am an active mentor and collaborator in this region and beyond.

I have worked in code space since the very early days of the internet. Those days were infused with an optimistic vision of building tools towards an accessible, shared, grassroots, inter-connected information space that has since been subsumed by a small set of tech monopolies. I have long advocated for making coding tools accessible ::: to own our means of creative / knowledge production and dissemination. I feel that this is all the more urgent in the face of AI-driven extractive, biased (colonizing), hidden algorithms taking increasing control over our lives.

see examples of my work at :::

<https://mctavish.work>

goals:

Much of my algorithmic, networked art practice is exhibited in site-specific physical installations with companion online exhibits and often also a collaborative performance / artist talk / discussion. Several years ago I had the luxury of creating an exhibit at the Tweed Museum of Art that lasted over a year. This allowed me to create opportunities for ongoing collaboration, conversations ::: an embeddedness and temporal relationship to community and place that I found deeply rewarding. This project will be similarly long running.

I am grateful to have been granted access to physical and electronic resources at the UMD library from April 2024-May 2025. I am looking forward to working with staff at the library to research and map/model/visualize the physics of information flow and memory ::: the ways we archive and diagram thinking / knowledge. I find this particularly compelling in light of the current move towards an opaque, proprietary, extractive, profit-driven AI information landscape.

I plan to read & write and to create an evolving, distributed, multimedia exhibit, series of poster sessions and discussions (April 2024-May 2025). This cross-sensory, trans/media installation will tease out the sculptural / temporal system of archival navigation / knowledge building and dispersal that exists in the sanctuary of a public library space.

Materials from this project will be archived in a dedicated website / online exhibit that I will host starting May 1, 2024 at ::: <https://mctavish.work/library/>.

I will host this site & am happy to work with you on any other artifacts you would like to keep there ::: I am thankful for your time and resources and I want to be of service to you as well. My goal is to resonate and surface the nouns & verbs of what happens here. The objects & the chordal relationships between ...

the existential role of libraries

my relationship to libraries

see also ::: naming

I was a young gender-bending dyke for as long as I remember but at the time I had no words for this. At first I just thought I was a boy ...

In high school I found the word "homosexuality" in a book about ancient Greece. I had no particular reason to be haunting that section of the stacks ::: no special interest in ancient Greece. That I was haunting that section of the stacks indicates how hard I was combing the books for a word to hold onto. This is a common experience among folks of my generation and earlier ::: the library search stage of the coming out process. An existential quest for naming.

(An existential call for multidimensional naming ::: the see also. Projections / mappings / translations => shelf placement. Temporal naming / categorization / reference ::: shifting, fluid, changeable, traversable.)

Roberto, K. R. (Keller R.). Radical Cataloging : Essays at the Front. McFarland & Co., 2008.

chapter: Latina Lesbian Subject Headings: The Power of Naming
tatiana de la tierra

Like many young queer people of my generation, I dropped out of high school and hit an urban scene where I could hope to find community. I was hungry for everything. I had very little money but I created a learning, thriving self by accessing free opportunities around me. This included libraries. I hung about the downtown Minneapolis (Hennepin County) public library where I perused books and took advantage of their listening rooms. I checked out vinyl & spent hours alone in a room with a turntable. After work I hung out in the old Walter library on the campus of the University of MN ::: floors of old books, creaking stairs, dusty windows, quiet corners. I stood before the shelves & thought ::: I will read all of these books. At an old used bookstore I bought the first book with my earnings ::: a thesaurus ::: the magical book of words.

I am educated in the wild so I have gaping holes in my knowledge. This includes my lack of citation skills. I have settled in on MLA for this project. But wow ... so much to learn.

I love this pursuit ::: the citation (!) ... a bracketing of exchange ::: a coin left at the altar ::: a moment taken to acknowledge the gift of that reference. Reading can feel like mountain climbing, navigating through a wide open ocean. When dropped in the middle of a text ::: a

strange field ::: a foreign topic ::: references can act as a critical
deciphering tool ::: a foothold ::: a rope.

I love open systems ::: the move away from horizontal tables for a
fluid, vertical join table with many-to-many possibilities ::: with
changeable, temporal relations.

I have so much to learn from you ::: from the history, objects &
practice in this space. What will future libraries / archives look
like? What will information wayfinding look like? Who will own the
means of knowledge production, archive / cultural memory, indexing,
dissemination, mapping ... citation?

What will web 3.0 look like? I passionately wish for an accessible,
open, legible, semantic web where individuals have agency outside of
the locked wards of proprietary frameworks and crypto-currency-governed
motivations. I am interested in the thinginess of information nodes but
also in the revealed aspect of reference and relation ::: a
declarative, bare-bones state of linkage.

Patterns

I am interested in non-linear, multi-dimensional, multi-threaded,
changeable, relational, networked, humble, open systems.

I am interested in cultural memory and representation, the politics of
nestedness (of categories), the existential value of abstraction
(zoom), reflection and theory.

I am interested in intersection, collisions ::: the relational join
table ::: those nodes / knots where synthesis & magic & friction
happen.

Cross-schema translations ...the aesthetics of transparency ...