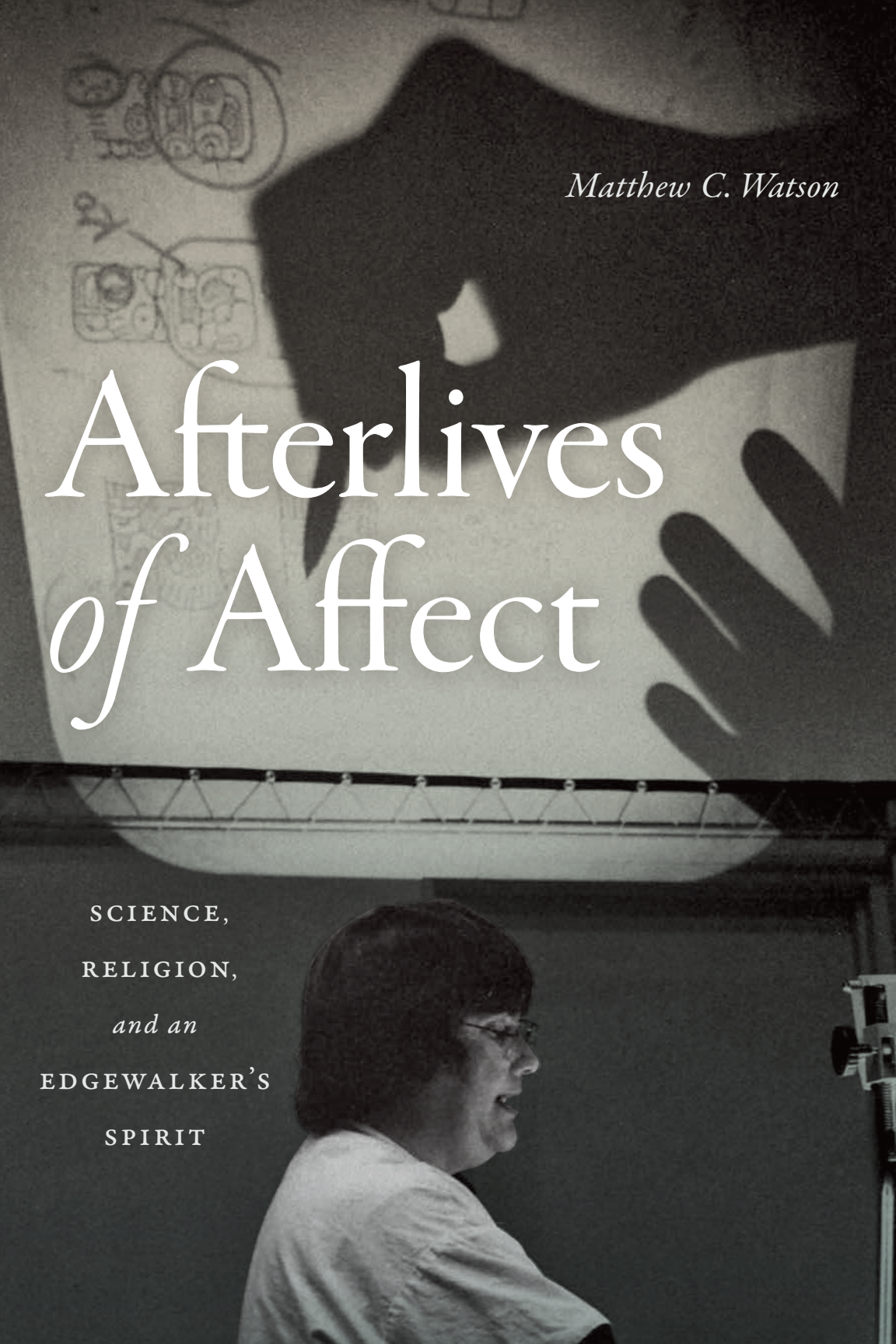
Matthew C. Watson
Afterlives of Affect
SCIENCE, RELIGION, and an EDGEWALKER'S SPIRIT

AFTERLIVES OF AFFECT

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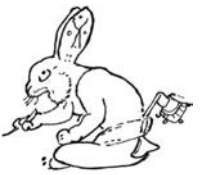

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COVER ART: Photograph of Linda Schele at the K'inal Winik
Maya Conference, Cleveland State University, 1988

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Acknowledgments

I wrote this book on edgewalking across four places of residence and five academic positions. Most of it emerged during periods of deep uncertainty about my academic future. It long felt like a risk that I had no choice but to take. The research that formed its foundation developed through archival work on a distinct dissertation project and series of articles on the politics and ethics of Maya hieroglyphic decipherment, graciously supported by the National Science Foundation and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. What follows that project here is an ethnographic story of the aura, or socio-mystical allure, of one figure in the field of decipherment, the late Linda Schele. During a period of delicate social, geographical, and psychic balance, Schele's spectral figure drew me in, offering support. But Schele was more than a tightrope walker's spotter. Both artist and bricoleur, she refashioned the tightrope into a towrope, pulling me back into the world of hieroglyphic decipherment. There she equipped me with new technologies of balance, vision, and—most importantly—imagination. When the initial piece of writing for this project, reprinted here as the chapter "Animals," was published in the journal *Cultural Critique*, I dedicated it to Linda. And Linda Schele—as both person and world (or should I say cosmos?)—merits the first acknowledgment here. Thank you, Linda. I acknowledge you. I owe you more than I know. Our debts to the dead are infinite.

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This project transects ethnographic and archival research that I conducted, most intensively during 2007–8, in Guatemala, southern Mexico, and Austin. I am grateful to Mayanists (both amateur and professional), activists, and friends and family of Linda Schele who were willing to speak with me about her (and their) works and lives. David and Elaine Schele were particularly generous, allowing me into their home to review Linda Schele's correspondence and papers. This project is, among other things, an effort to affirm the kinds of fabulous worlds that more-than-charismatic leaders, like Linda, can tow us into. It would not have been possible without David and Elaine.

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and gracious criticism and direction. I am particularly grateful to Stuart for helping me to imagine a more robustly fictional anthropology. The editorial team and production staff at Duke have been excellent. Thank you.

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Finally, my affective and intellectual life has become much livelier since it was joined by Li Cornfeld. Li's prescience, poetic imagination, and readerly sensitivity have vitalized my attention to magic of all kinds. My final chapter, here, is on Love. And the afterlife of Love is a life lived, in quarantine and beyond, with you. I admire you, Li.

The trouble with edgewalking is the brute, if cosmic, reality of gravity. I'm sure that, across these pages, I sometimes tumble off the edge. Perhaps it's presumptuous—moot?—to ask the reader to lend a hand in moments of disequilibrium. Whether you, reader, prefer to help steady this writer or see him err into air is your prerogative. Either way, I thank you for being here.

Introduction

Edgewalking Affect

Imagine yourself walking onto the plaza at Palenque, a Maya archaeological site tucked into the northeastern corner of Chiapas. A crumbling palace, complete with a multistoried tower, sprawls before you. But as you approach the structure, your attention drifts to a steep limestone stairway on the right. Inscription-adorned columns front a temple at the stairway's apex. Pulling your gaze up and away, the sunstruck temple blurs into its mountain backdrop.[1]

Imperial traveler Frederick Catherwood drew Palenque's temples as architectural mountains: living, growing ruins in a struggle against lush tropical flora (figure Intro.1).[2] Palenque walks the edge between culture and nature. It's an architectural growth straddling the lowland plain that spreads from an oily Tabasco coast and the mountains that rise south and southwest toward the Guatemalan border. The site feels awesome, mysterious, a secret folded into the mountainside, among the sylvan homes of hiding jaguars and howling monkeys. Were you to venture into the highlands, toward the site of Toniná and the colonial city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, you'd feel the air cool and dampen. Oversize tropical leaves give way to aromatic pine forests, as cow pastures become coffee plantations.

Yet you have no itch to venture on, to leave Palenque on this quiet, warm afternoon in late December 1973. You unstrap your sandals and sink blistered feet into cool grass, pondering the ponderings of ancient Maya astronomer-priests. You're starting to feel the peace of their oh-so-unmodern lives. Idleness becomes ideal.

FIGURE INTRO.1 — Frederick Catherwood, *General View of Palenque*, 1844. Color lithograph.

But before the serenity sets in, a rustle of moving, muttering bodies distracts you from behind. They're not monkeys, exactly. The eager leader's a striking sight; she's adorned in several shades of denim, paired with a large hat and pair of glasses. You're sizing up the camera strapped to her side, as she calls out: "*Didja* see Venus? Come on! We're off to the tower!" The followers are an oddball assembly—old and young, plump and skinny, threadbare T-shirts brushing against designer safari jackets. They ramble toward the palace observatory, with no impulse to slow or clarify their odd sortie's aim. Your peace now disrupted, your curiosity piqued; there's no choice but to resandal and take flight toward the tower.

A few months later, that Venus-bound frontrunner, Linda Schele (1942–98), would circulate a letter recounting what came next. Then a young art instructor at the University of South Alabama, Schele was rediscovering herself through Palenque. The site seemed to generate a profound emotive and affective response. Palenque spirited Schele. And she wanted, above all else, to share her feelings of discovery, spiritual and scientific alike. She opens the letter with "dear collegues [*sic*], friends, and friendly crazies" before drawing you into her orbit: "I have been germinating an idea on the tomb lid and the sarcophagus sides ever since Floyd, Masako, Moises, David Schele, and others witnessed the gift that Palenque gave to us to tell us we did good at

the pmrp [First Palenque Round Table]."[3] Venus, incarnate in, as, or through Palenque, has offered you a gift.[4]

What might that planetary neighbor and god of love present to late twentieth-century scholars and travelers buzzing about ancient Maya ruins? How might climbing that tower offer a new vision of Palenque? It's a good place to start. After all, the structure's identification as a possible astronomical observatory—rather than merely a watchtower—owed to the presence of a Venus hieroglyph painted onto a landing.[5] Where did Schele's Venus lead?

> As we awatched [*sic*] the solstice sun set in conjunction with Venus, Jupiter, and high above Mars, the conjunction plunged literally into the top of the [Temple of the] Inscriptions on an angle that seemed to be perfect for the first run of the stairs to the tomb. It was [as] if the sun were being pushed into the underworld through Pacal's tomb by Venus.[6]

The remains of the seventh-century Palenque king, Pakal (formerly spelled Pacal), were deposited below that inscription-adorned temple in an elaborately carved sarcophagus. The sarcophagus lid may be the most widely known Palenque inscription. Its depiction of the descent of Pakal into the maw of the underworld is omnipresent in Palenque tourist kitsch today, long after the stairway to the tomb was closed to visitors.

You knew that you'd witnessed something extraordinary on that solstice afternoon. Schele's animation was evident. But it took a few months for her germinating idea to take solid root:

> When I was talking last Wed. to a group of Gillett's [Grillett Griffin's] friends at Princeton, the implications of that glorious night burst upon my mind and I realized that Palenque had given to us on that night the full interpretation of the tomb lid. I hope you have a good copy of the lid available because here it goes.[7]

The analysis that follows is a poignant if protean account of the astronomical referents of the sarcophagus's enigmatic inscriptions. Do you feel it? If you do, you're not alone. The final typewritten lines of Schele's correspondence express gratitude for the social conditions of this discovery: "Let me add another humble thanks to Betty Benson for letting me get near Floyd [Lounsbury] again. I sat there in awe watching him work." She switches to pen to sign her name and add a final reflection: "Linda (lost in the deserts of South Alabama)."[8]

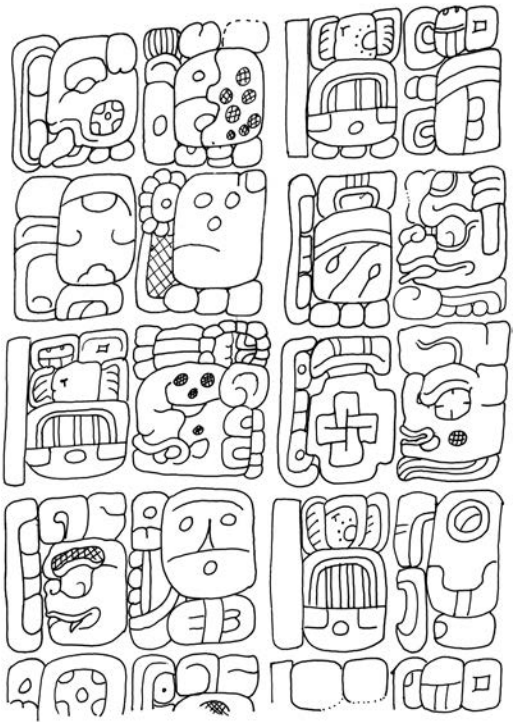

FIGURE INTRO.2 — Linda Schele, *Detail of Maya Hieroglyphs from Stela 12, Structure 40, Yaxchilan*. Ink on Mylar drafting film. DRAWING (SCHELE NUMBER 6216) © DAVID SCHELE, COURTESY FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF MESOAMERICAN STUDIES, INC., WWW.FAMSI.ORG.

Schele was finding her place in an emerging collective of anthropologists, art historians, and linguists who, in the 1970s, began to make major inroads into the lexical form and linguistic content of ancient Maya inscriptions (figure Intro.2).[9] After a century and a half (or more) of failed efforts to deduce the structure and sense of Maya glyphs, this small group of scholars began to transform these meaning-averse objects into legible modernist "texts."[10] Their originary "*aha* moments" crescendoed into a sustained declaration of unitary originality. Ancient Maya inscriptions were no longer incomprehensible rebus writing comprised of esoteric, nongrammatical astrological content, as some earlier scholars had maintained.[11] The heavens still mattered. But the sky became a limit, tool, and visual form facilitating linguistic knowledge production, rather than signifying a recession into speculation on ancient priestly ideation. Glyphs were fully linguistic signs, not unlike what you're reading right now. The move was nothing less than a self-styled paradigm shift.[12]

With a few minor exceptions, writing on this transformation has been internal to the epigraphers' community. This book makes a different kind

of sense, an ethnographic sense, out of their world. Between 2006 and 2008, I completed ethnographic and archival research in three major sites of epigraphic knowledge production and public engagement: Austin, Texas; Palenque, Mexico; and Antigua, Guatemala.[13] In Austin, I participated in a public workshop on decipherment that's happened annually since 1977. I also worked with Schele's extensive research-oriented correspondence. She has shape-shifted into the central figure—both guide and trickster—of this project. Three and a half decades after that solstice afternoon, I spent a summer and change hanging out at Palenque, talking to guides, tourists, and a smattering of amateur Mayanists and expatriates drawn to the site's romantic, trippy allure. The allure is indebted—though not, exactly, for its trippiness—to Schele. And, in Antigua, I interviewed Maya activists who'd learned about the ancient writing system from Schele and her colleagues. They drew on this linguistic and historical resource to strengthen indigenous solidarities across linguistic barriers that starkly divide Guatemalan speakers of Mayan languages.[14]

The ethnographic story that followed this fieldwork offered a sustained critique of decipherment as a public and postcolonial science. Anthropologists have shown that the sciences are in and of culture.[15] Sciences are systems that assemble texts, objects, memories, and bodies into ways of thinking, feeling, imagining, and ordering that we call "knowledge" and, sometimes, "power." And they innovate technologies that transform how we relate, produce, reproduce, and destroy: microchips, medicines, data, bombs, and so on.[16] I have attended to epigraphy as a site of scientific visualization, as a science that produced and depended on committed publics, and as a historical resource with complex political implications for speakers of Mayan languages. I parsed the complicated relationship between Maya archaeologists and epigraphers, who imagine abstract forms such as "history" and "context" in quite disparate and sometimes contradictory ways. As an anthropologist of science, I'd taken my work as showing that Schele and her colleagues were complex, idiosyncratic humans like the rest of us. In narrow terms, their decipherments seemed solid. In broad terms, they seemed to reproduce a range of colonial assumptions about language, text, and history.[17] By attending both to the material practices of workshop pedagogy and to the rather unconsidered Eurocentric ideology of language and text in play, I raised some epigraphers' hackles.

This project, nonetheless, takes off in another direction, traces a different line of flight, or opens a distinct sphere of exchange.[18] Once I surfaced from my initial immersion into the glyphers' social and epistemic world, I began

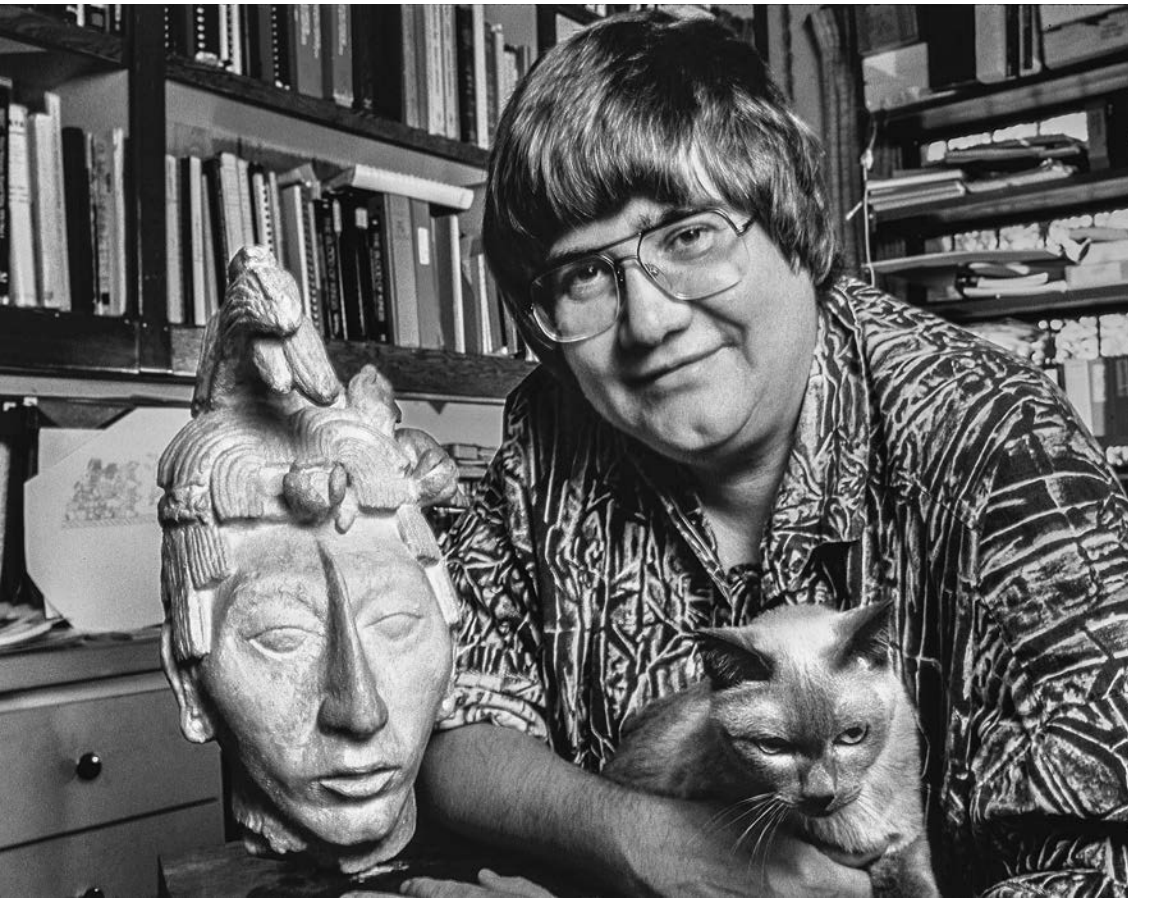

FIGURE INTRO.3 — Linda Schele et al., 1988. © WILL VAN OVERBEEK.

FIGURE INTRO.4 — Peter Mathews and Linda Schele, 1973 Round Table. IMAGE FROM *CRACKING THE MAYA CODE*.

to reread Schele's letters and rethink the field's sensibilities. On returning to the digitized archive, I was struck, again and again, by Schele's joy in decipherment, the feel of Palenque's spirit bursting into Schele's active, curious mind. Rereading led me toward a more empathetic understanding of her effusive imagination. Many of her scholarly peers, and certainly the succeeding generation of epigraphers, have sought to domesticate and control her excessive elation. But I came to feel, as a deeper, intuitive truth, the joy that Schele channeled as she built a committed public of amateur epigraphers, lovers of the ancient Maya.

EXTRAORDINARY AFFECTS

This is a book about extraordinary affects at an intersection of cultural, historical, and scientific research.[19] Its core image or motif is the break from everyday knowledge production. Such breaks imbued a rather banal space of historical research with an aura of joyous revelation. The break from the everyday that emerges most vividly here is Schele's visual encounter with the nighttime sky, a series of imaginative experiments that cultivated, in Schele, a profound understanding of—and attachment to—a reconstructed ancient Maya cosmology or astrology. The book itself breaks from science studies frames and follows such moments of constellational exploration into fields of animating, affective effusion. Altogether, *Afterlives of Affect* takes decipherment as a site of late twentieth-century discovery that embraced, and even propagated, a zestful, contagious high-modern enthusiasm. This amounts to an experimental ethnography that tiptoes at times toward fictocriticism and takes anthropology itself as the science of the extraordinary or the alien. I warn you here, at the outset, that this is quite unlike narratives of discovery offered by those involved in hieroglyphic decipherment. It won't reaffirm the triumphant rhetoric that has framed dominant stories of how scholars turned inscribed stones, pots, and codices into lively, voiced texts. It turns this triumphalism—and the experiences that animated it—into a site for considering the affect of discovery, as an expression of excess that blurs domains including science, history, art, and religion.

Discovery, viewed critically, appears blissfully naive, a feeling predicated on a failure to grasp the historically situated, social, and contingent character of all claims to knowledge. It is this deflationist pessimism that I *experiment against* here. I value feminist critiques of the scientific gaze's "abstract masculinity" as a form coconstructed with a demure, resistant, sexualized

Nature.[20] But I want something more. I want to feel the contagious effervescence of discovery, as an exceptional, vitalizing encounter, and even as a cosmic revelation: the stars coming into line. I want to feel this through the traces of Linda Schele, as a spiritual figure who helped to popularize a new image of the ancient Maya, an image that enlivened her followers, an image that calls us to rediscover discovery. Blinded by the flash of discovery, I offer this extraordinary affect as a site for opening up *an excitable anthropology*. An excitable anthropology struggles against the field's deflationist, pessimistic, and nihilistic impulses.[21] It's a glowing semantic oversaturation of human liveliness and postliveliness that has no time for anthropology's gloomy, gothic deflation of worlds, its tendency to dispense with excitement through whatever critical sensibility's du jour.

So, this is less a descriptive treatise on or about than the trace of an experiment in becoming inspired by a lively responsiveness. I have reinscribed—and, hence, transformed—this economy of affect as I've worked to inhabit it. Ethnographic moods and methods dictate that such an experiment should follow from shared experience, immersion into a world that predicates its subsequent textual reduction. My ethical, aesthetic, and practical obligation, then, is to evoke—virtually, through the mediation of texts—a site that overflowed, at times, with an ebullient genius. I do so as an ally of the archaeologists. I was trained in archaeology but have since wandered off. From this meandering position, I construct an image of decipherment, in an intricate guise, as an erotic, artistic science, rather than a dusty hermetic and hermeneutical bookishness. This image evokes Schele's attachment to the experience of discovery, the sudden flash of insight that transformed semantically opaque inscriptions into legible, sensible signs.[22]

By traversing edges between science, religion, history, and art, Schele energized diverse followers to take up hieroglyphic studies. A contemporary and colleague of Carl Sagan, she embodied and popularized the extraordinary affect of discovery-bound, cosmic revelation. The story here honors her edgewalking, her spiritual science. Decipherment was an organically structuralist science that took on, through Schele's personage, a spiritual dimension. The 1970s–80s struggles between structuralism and competing theoretical perspectives—particularly Marxism—that played out broadly in the US and French academies also flared at times in this corner of Maya studies. But I have worked to reanimate this science with a difference, to spirit it into other conversations, other ways of feeling and reflecting. This is a story, then, not of Schele alone (as person or figure), but of the passionate optimism of late twentieth-century modernism. It is a story of "systems

of attitudes" and "structures of feeling" that animated structuralism and interpretive anthropology,[23] twentieth-century language-obsessed methods and epistemologies that shared the hopeful sense that interpretation could be endlessly deepened, that knowledge might be progressively accrued, that "the sky's the limit."

This amounts to a future-oriented memorialization tracking a realm of inspired attachments to a hyperreal ancient Maya world.[24] It takes Maya studies as a site for considering how historical and cultural inquiry generates affective and semiotic attachments that belie dominant cultural and ideological distinctions between science and religion.[25] I am interested in showing how a historical moment fans imaginative methods at the edge of self and other, past and present, knowledge and belief. Positioned against the fears of the Cold War and the prevalent paranoias of twentieth-century critical theory, the book shapes a virtualized Schele into a complex being—and a complex of beings both human and not—engaged in historical knowledge production through a science of decoding that is at once spiritual, scientific, and aesthetic.[26] In Schele's care, this science became a quasi-spiritualist sacralization of an indigenous past. Schele emerges here not simply as a charismatic authority, let alone a naive appropriator of indigenous culture, but as the mediator, the anima, the breath or soul of ancient Maya lords re-membered through structuralist ordering practices and revoiced for the 1970s and 1980s.[27] Decipherment, in an experimental, affect-oriented reading, comes to exemplify a moment of optimistic modernism that breathed the possibility of spiritual imagination into an ever-more-alienated and seemingly secular world.[28]

I am accompanying or supplementing Schele as a formful being who generated a more capacious cosmos than she could have anticipated.[29] My responsibility is to cast off critical inhibitions in order to inhabit this time-bending cosmic ecology. But this isn't just a matter of ethnographic inhabitation and description; my hope is to transmit Schele's cosmos into a dreamy *beyond*, transforming her "edgewalking"—Schele's word—into an anthropological provocation to live well with the dead, and a theo-anthropological experiment that refuses, obdurately, to cede its claim to scientificity. Through waxing and waning attention to one popular scholar, *Afterlives of Affect* speaks nearby Schele's decipherment as a system that irreverently ignored the borders dividing aesthetics, science, and religion.[30]

As an ethnographic technique, "speaking *nearby*"—Trinh T. Minh-ha's phrase—may fail the anthropological obligation to speak *of* decipherment—as an ecology of cultural, religious, and scientific practices—in its own terms.[31] But speaking nearby introduces an array of other obligations, including the

obligation to render ethnographic accounts that exceed close and careful reportage hinged to interpretive or critical elaboration. Ethnography can navigate between evocation and interpretation, becoming a space of experimental makings and a literary technology for sociocultural critique.[32] Ethnography can partake of and transmit worldly—or supraworldly, cosmic—fantasies, affects, and forms of magic.

Ethnographers have long fixated on the excessive, the magical, the mysterious, and the sublime. Along these lines, James Clifford has tracked ethnography's weave with 1920s French surrealism.[33] Marcel Mauss's fixation on exotic forms of magic and exchange tangled with Georges Bataille's erotics, an affirmation of transgression and excess, and a dalliance with death.[34] Bataille's ethnological surrealism drew him to an image of Mexico, and, particularly, to an aesthetic valorization of human sacrifice among the Aztecs. Such surrealist—or hyperrealist—narratives constructed indigenous Mesoamerica as a critical alterity exceeding and destabilizing "Western" norms of rationality and order; and it remained such in Schele's constructions. Mauss's and Bataille's romanticism left a lasting imprint on works of French and US philosophy and philosophical anthropology. A Maussian attention to the dialectics of exchange and personhood helped refine the critical projects of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida, just as Bataille's excess-oriented Nietzschean vision helped propel the neovitalist experiments of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and followers such as Trinh and Clifford in literary theory and anthropology. The tension—both epistemological and aesthetic—between dialectical critique and affective affirmation remains in anthropology today, and it has come to pervade the theoretical substratum of this book.[35]

The analysis here tracks the limits of dialectical frames through attention to affectively saturated scenes of discovery that break from conventional images of knowledge production, including images generated by both scientists and science studies critics. Along these lines, I have found Walter Benjamin's concept of the "dialectical image" particularly generative.[36] Consider these passages from Benjamin:

> It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: it is not progression

> but image, suddenly emergent.—Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language.[37]
>
> Where thought comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions, there appears the dialectical image. It is the caesura in the movement of thought. Its positioning, of course, is in no way arbitrary. In a word, it is to be sought at the point where the tension between the dialectical oppositions is the greatest. The dialectical image . . . is identical to the historical object; it justifies blasting the latter out of the continuum of history's course.[38]

The dialectical image, then, appears as a bind suspending the processual, temporal movement of history and thought. Maybe it's the historical object becoming fugitive, freeing itself from systemic capture by the machine of dialectical movement. It resonates, then, with Fred Moten's construction of improvisation in jazz.[39] Improvisation becomes an escape from the dialectical structure of performance, a break from any conceit of structure, save the conceit that demarcates the limits of improvisation, articulating a difference between play that conforms, to some extent at least, to an established—even inscribed—musical structure and play that liberates itself from the confines or expectations of such structures. Improvisation jams structure, just as "image is dialectics at a standstill," jamming the history-machine's gears.

Affect theory, I suggest, lends the dialectical image with metaphysical form. It takes shape as the improvisational jam of historical process. It amounts to a sensitive and sensible appeal to a language of antiteleological and antidialectical becoming.[40] The magic of science studies scholars' affirmations of worldly objects as agential or active beings amounts to their elevation to the status of dialectical images. It's likely no coincidence that the kinds of objects that have activated affirmationist thinkers' *breaks* from dialectical-historical reasoning are often *scientific* objects, both facts and epistemic things proclaimed by scientist-spokespersons to be timeless, atemporal.

The emergence of these epistemic things breaks the processual movement of science as science-in-action. The gene is such a dialectical image, as is the Classic Maya king Pakal. They are actors or forms rendered knowable and consequential through scientific processes of dialectical reasoning; they emerge from such processes, but, subsequently, take shape as ahistorical beings, facts no longer constrained by the contingencies and uncertainties of

the worldly process of scientists doing scientific things, building scientific systems. They may be *surprises*; the surprise, as the deconstructive moment of unsettling encounter with the unknown, the deconstructive encounter that calls us into provisional realizations that we no longer know ourselves, that we have never really known ourselves; the dialectical image arrives as a surprise.[41] The discovery—or *aha* moment—is such a surprise, what Jacques Derrida calls the *arrivant*.[42]

This book seeks to gift the reader a field of discovery—Maya hieroglyphic decipherment, or epigraphy—as a field of dialectical images that broke from historical reasoning in a manner demonstrative, even indicative, of a late twentieth-century, high-modernist epistemic confidence and optimistic joy. It's a story of epigraphic discoveries as surprising breaks from processes of historical reasoning. I've taken up moments in which a historical-dialectical mode of reasoning—typically implicit among the epigraphers and archaeologists discussed here—gives way to a being or form that seems to generate unusually heightened feelings. This deeply Euroamerican set of beliefs and feelings—the feelings and beliefs that we call Maya epigraphy—entailed a constitutive alternation between historical reasoning, reasoning that could be conceived within a dialectical language, and moments of imaginative, affectively saturated escape.

At its stylistic surface, this remains a work of experimental anthropological theory. I respond to Anand Pandian and Stuart McLean's incitement to modes of ethnographic curiosity and craft that treat "writing as a practice immanent to the world, rather than as a detached reflection upon the world."[43] They continue: "Imagine ways of writing that might put ourselves more deeply at risk than what we have tried till now. What could such experiments look like, and what, if anything, might they achieve?"[44] The experiment here aspires toward immersion into a historical dreamworld that hinged on a joyous affect, if not an "apparatus of *jouissance*."[45] It leans at times toward a US southern regional affect that weaves the ordinary's excess into a textured, textual exuberance layered with despair, as exemplified by the poignant ethnographic evocations of Kathleen Stewart and Allen Shelton.[46] But the ruination at work in ancient Maya studies is a more dispersed worlding, with diverse bodies, spirits, and letters crossing the Rio Grande, assembling in sites such as Austin and Palenque. These spirits congeal into beings that inhabit and animate ruins that may evoke liveliness more than plight.

Affect-oriented literary ethnographers such as Stewart and Shelton offer us spirited and spiriting works of prose.[47] Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* sets aside

heavy-handed theoretical exposition in favor of a kind of auratic suggestion. In vignette after vignette, she develops a work of exquisite, if at times discomfiting, evocation. *Ordinary Affects* layers scenes of hope or despair, marked periodically by the possibility of some experience or form of life coalescing before giving way to tendrils of feeling and movement that either dissipate the temporarily achieved social organism or leave us in a kind of impasse. We may find ourselves in impasses knowingly—an experience that may lead to self-doubt or depression—or unknowingly, which Lauren Berlant captures with the poignant phrase "cruel optimism."[48] Such ethnographic poiesis immerses readers into both fluxes and structures of feeling in the contemporary United States, as we endeavor to imagine more peaceable, just, and flourishing futures, a real challenge in the present. Stewart has turned America—and I use that troubling noun deliberately—into an assemblage of ethnographic fragments. But if any affect-oriented or fictocritical work captures unstable Schele-esque American dreamworlds, it's Shelton's *Where the North Sea Touches Alabama*.[49] Shelton's book tumbles through mourning into dream after dream of excessively layered southern pasts. A bulldozer-operator unearths a nineteenth-century coffin on the Shelton family's Alabama property, and Shelton begins to inhabit the fantasy—the knowledge—that it contained the corpse of his friend Patrik Keim, a decay artist whose figure resists exorcism. Dreams within fantasies within dreams within landscapes within fantasies within love.

Schele won't be easy to exorcise either. One book surely isn't enough to pull it off. Her knotty roots haven't yet succumbed to the rot that turns us into soil. And colonial soil is quite sticky. I don't think that decipherment can be cleansed with finality of what sociologist Aníbal Quijano termed the "coloniality of power."[50] Historical narratives wind through colonial and capitalist productions of race and culture, as objects of knowledge, fantasy (never innocent), and political control.[51] Reconstructions of ancient Maya elites' inscriptions as writing do more than celebrate indigenous ingenuity. They reconstitute the traces of past actors for present ends, including tourism industries' capitalist ends and states' nationalist ends.[52] Failure to perceive epigraphy's imbrications in morphologies of capitalist exploitation often reads, to me, as naive complicity. The cosmological accounts that I take up here involved epigraphers' arrogation of authority to characterize the inner lives of precolonial indigenous persons. Ancient names, scenes, and figures, like the ceramic pots on which they were painted, are commodifiable forms. They are historical-aesthetic objects simulated and circulated through tourist

economies and patrimonial projects that strategically instrumentalize and profit from an aestheticized indigeneity shorn of its decolonial politics.[53]

"Maya," after all, is an extrinsic, translinguistic, transstate colonial and postcolonial ethnonym that disciplines, represses, and extracts value from heterogeneous collectives, reduced to "culture(s)" or, even worse, "population(s)."[54] In the wake of these discursive-political mechanisms of repression, we should remember that the coloniality of power contains and, in some ways, scripts its social-metaphysical inverse, the power of decoloniality.[55] Tracing the political, cultural, and religious functions of terms such as "Maya culture" and "Maya hieroglyphs" with ethnographic nuance helps to reconstitute them as resources for decolonial struggle. This struggle may involve indigenous activists' and allies' efforts to resituate and resignify such terms of colonial discourse or—in what we might term an "ethno-pessimist" frame—to annihilate them in the service of liberating ensouled but indigenized bodies.[56] Such political struggles, of course, have their own complex, highly debated histories within fields of Maya—including pan-Maya—activism.[57]

In spaces of such (de)colonial tension, experimental ethnography comprises an allied field of aesthetic interventions that strategically opt to suspend methods of critique in order to become differently attuned to our objects, allowing their magic to transform us (which does not mean internalizing their ideologies). Here I background the sometimes-paranoid tools of critical theory to take up a (mostly) affirmative effort to speak nearby Schele, in her world of 1970s–1980s optimism.[58] I won't pummel you with too much biographical detail. Instead, I'll offer an opportunity to feel with Schele's effort to feel the ancient Maya as an unsettling of present predicaments, colonial and otherwise. This unsettling certainly doesn't mean that Schele's historical practices were not deeply implicated in settler colonial states that have long constructed the Maya as an object of both colonial repression and imperial fantasy.[59] But it does mean that even cultural systems as parochial as Maya studies—a field long predicated on romanticizing the "closed corporate community"—may offer us vital concepts to think our way across the divide between science and religion.[60] If you edgewalk with us, be willing to fall.

EPI-BIOGRAPHY

In an interview that served as the basis of a short documentary about her contributions to Maya hieroglyphic decipherment, Schele labeled herself an "edgewalker." As I have here, the filmmakers took up the term in their title:

Edgewalker: A Conversation with Linda Schele.[61] Released the year after her death, the material for the documentary appears to be a single interview with Schele, conducted after she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. The producers make prominent, if not exactly probing, use of the edgewalker concept; they mobilize the term in the title and open with Schele's self-description as such. A discussion of the film serves the dual purpose of providing biographical background on Schele and cutting to the core of this book's thematic claim, that science and religion—as heterogeneous bodies of knowledge and affective modes of becoming—synthesize (though not without risk or remainder) in sites of historical and cultural knowledge production. The biography-oriented film amounts to an effectively crafted story that textures a thoroughly American subject. Its similarity to other sources that dip into Schele's biographical being, such as archaeologist Michael Coe's *Breaking the Maya Code*, suggest that it's a coherent public self-fashioning of Schele's making.[62]

Linda Dean Schele (née Richmond) was born October 30, 1942, in Nashville, Tennessee. As Coe recounts, with a few of Schele's words, she grew up a Tennessee "redneck."[63] Her father had been a farmer and, in the film, she describes her mother as hailing from a "hillbilly" Tennessee family.[64] Throughout her life, Schele spoke with a marked Tennessee drawl. She describes her parents as hard workers with limited education who achieved incremental socioeconomic success after the Great Depression and Second World War. Her mom worked as a commercial artist in advertising and her dad became a salesman, starting his own business in the early 1960s. They had two children: Linda and Thomas. The documentary draws the viewer through family photos of Schele's childhood as she describes how they achieved "upper-middle-class" status. Linda attended Litton High School, where she played basketball, before leaving suburban Nashville for the University of Cincinnati.

In college Linda "fell in love" with the world of academia. Initially conforming to her parents' desire that she undertake a sufficiently vocational track, she began her college career as an advertising major. After a year, she switched to fine arts, but agreed to take a BS degree in education to help ensure her employability. Betraying the habits of speech that proved alluring to some of Schele's public followers, she remarks, "I always liked the BS part of that." And a young professor introduced her to English literature, an experience that Linda called "a rare, unreproducible, intellectual journey into magic."[65] She opted to pursue literature at the next level, enrolling in an MA program at the University of Connecticut. But the experience was

disappointing; Linda used the phrase "nitpicking bullshit" to describe her year in Connecticut.

Graduate work in literary studies seemed to cast aside the big themes of Western thought and the "joy of reading great works" for critical analyses of minutiae.[66] So Linda left the graduate program and worked for a year at Boston's Electric Boat Corporation.[67] There she was a piping draftsman for atomic submarines: "After a year of that, I truly did not want to work." In lieu of employment, she returned to the University of Cincinnati and to painting. Back in Ohio, she adopted her instructor's "philosophy of the happy accident." As Michael Coe has summarized, it went like this:

> (1) know your craft very, very well; (2) get your first mark on paper or canvas; (3) go on from there, "keeping yourself in an alpha state, so that when a happy accident happens, you are prepared to follow it wherever it will lead you." "That's what I do when I do research," Linda says. "I just set out a very large sort of vacuum-cleaner, trying to pattern all of the data I can, without any predisposition of what is going to come, and then let the damn stuff pattern on me, and I start following the patterns wherever they lead me."[68]

Little did Schele anticipate that she would spend the second half of her life offering vital contributions to a scholarly field oriented almost exclusively to minutiae. Especially during the early years of decipherment, the field's epistemic form entailed producing incremental readings of discrete hieroglyphic sign elements. But what makes Schele worthy of close treatment is not a diligent attentiveness to the narrow, intricate, everyday work of decipherment. It is, instead, this will-to-joy, this desire to follow the happy accidents wherever they lead. Decipherment, for her, involved an ongoing, if irregular, series of small discoveries. Rather than seeing hieroglyphic studies as a chore or a bore, she seems to have regarded it as an opportunity for continuous worldly discovery. She lent this dimension of discovery with profound, perhaps inflated, importance. She did so in part by recognizing and rectifying the everyday banality of decipherment, weaving particular emergent readings into the grand historical narratives of ancient Maya lords' lives.[69]

But before Schele turned to Maya studies, she completed her MFA in art in 1968. Concerned that her husband, David Schele, would be drafted and sent to Vietnam, Linda took the first job offered to her, a teaching position at the University of South Alabama. Early in their time in Alabama, the couple decided to take advantage of their proximity to and connections in Mexico.

David knew architects who were collaborating with scholars on a project at the Maya site of Chichén Itzá. Linda states that they had a last-minute itinerary and route change that led them to the site of Palenque. Having stopped in the city of Villahermosa, the couple visited an archaeological and zoological park, La Venta, where they met an "exiled" Salvadoran who encouraged them to seek out, in Palenque, the tour guide, amateur Mayanist, and entrepreneur Moises Morales. With Schele unable to pronounce the Spanish name *Moises*, the Salvadoran apparently implored them, "Just ask for Moses." On arriving in Palenque, they toured about before encountering this legendary Moses while walking out of the site. Linda and David stayed in Palenque for twelve days. Moises introduced Linda to the Mayanist art historian Merle Greene Robertson. Schele was taken with the site and the people who gravitated to it. So she began to learn from Robertson, an experience that would set the stage for her subsequent public and not-so-public collaborations with a smattering of Mayanist scholars and amateurs.

Schele's attachment to Palenque was no temporary romantic fling (as Moises, who witnessed the constant flow of enamored visitors, assumed it would be). They returned that summer; Robertson was building her house—named Na Chan-Bahlum—in Palenque. Schele began to reconstruct herself and her career in close dialogue, often over drinks, with Robertson and the archaeological ceramics expert Robert Rands. She describes this as a "sort of *magic* time in Palenque."[70] The site, Schele says, "hit me so hard." Through Palenque, Schele came to feel herself a deeply animated and empowered being. She had cast aside literary criticism to embrace the joys of visual art. But here, in this encounter with a place formed by rulers and artists of the first millennium of the current era, Schele came to realize that she might offer the world more than her surrealist paintings.

At the time, Schele regularly taught a broad survey course on the introduction to art, a course that presented art out of context or, as she says, in a nonchronological, nonhistorical framework. After two years of teaching the course, she apparently had begun to question what it would feel like to inhabit a society where art, *rather than science*, was understood as the central cultural practice and mechanism of social cohesion. In Palenque's stucco-adorned temples, she saw—she *imagined*—this world with art at its core. And there were serious questions to ask about what some of that stucco and stone signified. She tried to learn it from the masters, reading Sir J. Eric S. Thompson's *Maya Hieroglyphs without Tears*. But she found herself frustrated to the point of crying through it.[71]

In late December 1973, Robertson put on a public workshop, the first (of many) Palenque Round Tables, or Mesa Redondas.[72] There Schele met a student of archaeology, Peter Mathews, and an eminent linguistic anthropologist and Yale professor, Floyd Lounsbury. In *Breaking the Maya Code*, Coe revels in Schele's contrast with the archaeological aristocracy:

> The minute I met Linda Schele at the Palenque conference, I thought, "Here's somebody who would have never made the Carnegie 'Club'": with shirttails hanging over her faded jeans, her then-chubby face wreathed in smiles, her salty Southern speech, her ribald sense of humor, she would have horrified Eric Thompson, Harry Pollock, and the rest of the Carnegie crowd.[73]

In 1924, archaeologists funded by the Carnegie Institution of Washington began an extensive excavation and reconstruction of Chichén Itzá.[74] Linda was no Carnegie, no snobby scholar. She was no Sir J. Eric S. Thompson. But the trip, and the site of Palenque in particular, drew her into the ancient Maya world and its profession. So, while Linda "would have never made the Carnegie 'Club,'"[75] she also would have never made the ancient Maya the Maya we know today without it.

Linda emerged from that meeting as an interloper unburdened by academic dogma stumbling, Venus-bound, into a series of profound discoveries. She was an outsider with a keen aesthetic eye who teamed up with Mathews and Lounsbury to upend the Carnegie Club's doctrinaire interpretation of Maya glyphs as abstract symbols and rebus writing that didn't amount to a fully grammatical script. Together they determined the broad outline of the Palenque dynastic sequence, making sense of inscriptions that conveyed major dynasts' names and dates (figures Intro.4 and Intro.5). The Round Table entailed sessions in the morning and evening, leaving the afternoon for the participants to head up to the site, where they could examine the enigmatic hieroglyphic inscriptions directly. Although Linda characterizes this experience as the "scarediest [*sic*] time," she also emphasizes that Lounsbury and Coe went out of their way to welcome her into a fold populated by moneyed elites and still tasting of antiquarianism. Schele would have to make a decision. As she puts it, "There came a point around 1974 or 1975 . . . I just sat there and realized that I had a choice to make . . . and it included this built-in prohibition against betraying the art. . . . Did I want to be teaching painting as a mediocre painter at a third-level university in the outbacks of the United States, or did I want to be a world-famous Mayanist?"[76]

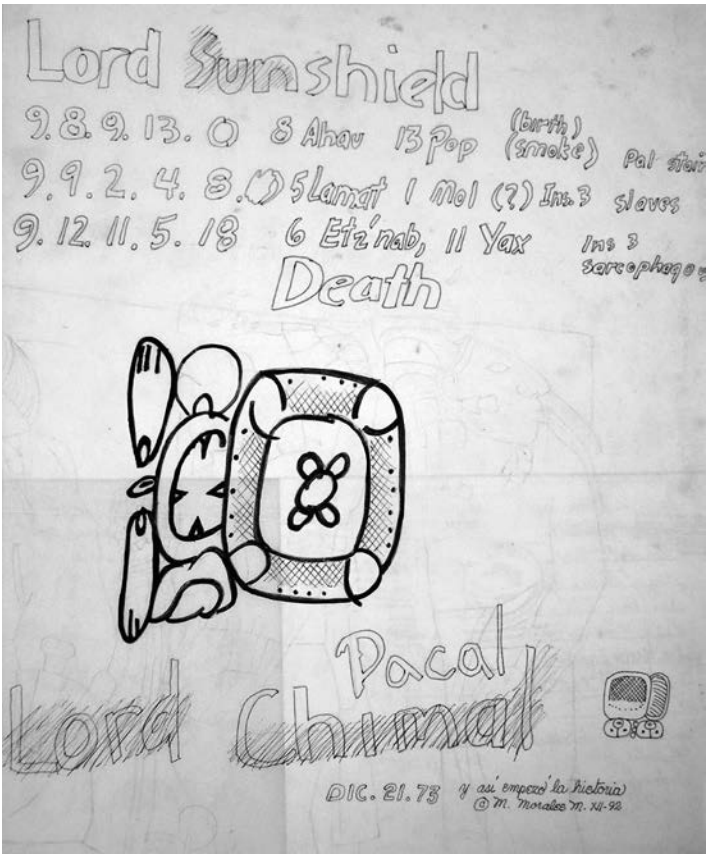

FIGURE INTRO.5 — Poster presenting the decipherment of *Pacal* (later changed to *Pakal*), hung on the wall at the first Palenque Round Table meeting. ACCESS TO THE POSTERS FOR THE PURPOSE OF REPRODUCTION WAS PROVIDED BY ALFONSO MORALES.

So, it happened that, in 1980, an artist who couldn't speak a Mayan language completed (after three rushed years) a PhD in Latin American Studies at the University of Texas (UT)–Austin, with an award-winning dissertation titled "Maya Glyphs: The Verbs."[77] Before writing the thesis, Schele had already begun to offer public workshops on hieroglyphic analysis at UT-Austin. The pedagogical method developed for the workshops cultivated awareness of aesthetic patterns in inscriptions that reflect underlying grammar, namely sentence structure and some elements of syntax. Schele had begun to play an integral role in the continuous, slow, and laborious

project of hieroglyphic decipherment. She worked in close collaboration with Mathews and Lounsbury, and, despite serious limitations to her understanding of Mayan languages, she helped train the next generation of Mayanist epigraphers, including the MacArthur "Genius Grant" recipient David Stuart. Perhaps most importantly, she continued to put on annual glyph workshops at UT-Austin, and, late in her career, taught the basics of decipherment to speakers of Mayan languages in Guatemala and Yucatán.[78] At the height of their popularity in the 1980s, hundreds of aspiring-amateur epigraphers attended Schele's UT-Austin workshops. Over the course of her career, Schele increasingly became a part of the intellectual establishment that had initially seemed alien to her. Why, then, did she and her followers stick with the edgewalker trope? In what ways did she maintain a balancing act? Schele offers us an opportunity to speculate about what edgework (to twist Wendy Brown's phrase) might entail.[79]

Here I seek to inhabit Schele's edgy world with an ethnographic difference. I partake of Schele's cosmic sublime by tracking her rhetoric of decipherment from the muck and muddle of the tropospheric plane of terran cobecoming into a stratospheric sublime, a floating-off that ultimately entangles Schele with fellow high-modernist apollonian travelers, including Carl Sagan and David Bowie. "Troposphere," which designates the atmospheric stratum that we Earth-bound beings inhabit, derives from the same Greek root that offers us "trope," language's escape into the figurative. "Trope" can also designate ancient Greek skepticism, musical notations guiding chants of the Torah, verses sung in Christian services, and the sun's apparent and seemingly deceitful change of course at the solstice.[80] I am encouraging a self-aware, rather weird (or tropospheric), and consistently self-critical elaboration of—and escape from—the ethnographic dialectic. I'm advocating for Linda Schele as a trickster guide calling us to follow her rabbit-footsteps, inspiring us to better inhabit an interspecies, interspiritual troposphere.

STRUCTURE

Chapter 1, "Sacrilege," takes form as an experimental series of layered, intersecting vignettes. Reading Schele's archive alongside Maya ethnography, archaeology, and critical theory, the chapter moves through intertwined evocations of sacrilege, the life/death boundary, Maya spirit companionship, and sorcery. By bringing Schele's professional correspondence into conver-

sation with Mayanist ethnography, I begin to rethink Schele's artistic and epigraphic method as a mystical practice of engaging the dead. I also introduce the corollary problem of Schele's role as a sustaining spiritual presence mediated through her traces—writing, images, and memories—in the contemporary world.

Chapter 2, "Animals," follows by developing how the contemporary privileging of life, or *bios*, in cultural anthropology, science studies, and Continental philosophy risks substituting biocentrism for anthropocentrism, thus reifying "life" in the effort to undo it. I open up a sympathetic critique of anthropologists' efforts to extend the field's subject or object of knowledge beyond the human. This critique takes shape through descriptions of my ethnographic encounters with David Schele and with animal art in the margins of Linda's letters. The chapter attends carefully to Schele's rich engagements with other beings (including Maya hieroglyphs, animal spirit companions, ancient Maya scribes, and her scholarly collaborators). It shows how Schele navigated boundaries between life and death, present and past, human and animal, writing and art, scholar and amateur, science and religion, and rationality and irrationality.

Chapter 3, "Cosmos," explores personal and intellectual attachments among seven researchers: Dorion Sagan, Carl Sagan, Linda Schele, Ilya Prigogine, Isabelle Stengers, Lynn Margulis, and me. I evoke how their circuitous connections conditioned distinctive forms of knowledge production that eschewed clear classification as art history, philosophy, or physical and biological science. The chapter follows how such pathways of personal and cosmological experience animate historical and scientific knowledge claims and blur the line that demarcates the spiritual and the scientific. In particular, it suggests that science and cosmology tend to converge when we attempt to address and cope with the unthinkable nature of death (and, by implication, the form of history). Thus, the problem of human finitude in the face of the vast temporal and spatial expanses of the cosmos should encourage both humility and openness in knowledge production.

We turn, then, from the sky back to the earth in chapter 4, "Bones." Here I bring Schele's encounters with the ancient Maya dead into engagement with explorations of finitude and mortality in the writing of novelist Ruth Ozeki and the bone paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe. Ozeki is the daughter of Schele's close collaborator and correspondent, linguistic anthropologist Floyd Lounsbury. Drawing inspiration from Ozeki in responding to G. W. F. Hegel's famous claim that "Spirit is a bone,"[81] the chapter traces

how writerly and artistic creativity offset finitude and mortality. Here I develop the claim that Schele's approach to decipherment was an artistic and spiritual means to live with and beyond death and that she increasingly incorporated Maya cosmological practices into this process against the religious-cultural backdrop of US Protestantism.

Chapter 5 takes Schele as a site for rethinking "genius." In its US reception, the notion of a culture's spirit or genius carries resonances of nineteenth-century Romanticism and even spiritualism. Spiritualism took communication with the dead, often through mediums or "spirit guides," as a central practice. Examining Schele's historical praxis as a form of Romantic spirit mediation, the chapter critically assesses the popular image of the genius. I continue to elaborate how Schele's neospiritualism involved rendering Maya cosmological doxa intelligible within the implicitly Protestant frames of US public life. Examining Schele's specific experiences of creative historical imagination, the chapter reinvigorates a spiritual sense of "genius" as a being or medium capable of breathing life into the words of the dead. Here I press explicitly against institutionalized academic assumptions that systems of historical knowledge require "secular" framings or foundations and suggest that they may be suited to neospiritualism.

The final chapter, "Love," circles an exemplary piece of "fan mail" sent to Schele. Treating Schele as a subject of adoration—an exemplary *amateur*, or lover—the chapter works through "love" in ethical and religious terms as a minimal expression of collective, common world-making. I take up love as a powerful resource for rethinking historical knowledge production as a spiritual and scientific pursuit. Both chapter 5 and chapter 6 develop these themes in close dialogue with an off-kilter reading of Lévi-Strauss's early conception of the "floating signifier."[82] Lévi-Strauss appreciated the decipherers' affinity for structural methods. And here I read Schele's structuralist inclinations as a convergent form and force with her latent Christianity. Ultimately, I take the joy of decipherment as an imperative to consider forms of both erotic and agapic love, as generative reanimations of a past that's never fully and finally past. Schele's cosmically oriented spirit guides me into a suggestive consideration of anthropology itself as a theological and spiritual project.

This book, then, amounts to a person-centered experimental ethnography.[83] Part of this experiment entails traversing between fact and fabulation, a well-trodden, if still vertigo-inducing, edge for anthropology.[84] Such edge-walking, as Schele knew well, doesn't absolve an author from the responsibility to care well for both facts and forms. But the care that I put into this

writing has required me to re-form and trans-form a vision of Schele's spirit. It's an edgewalk with different kinds of entries and exits for different kinds of readers. These portals may correspond to different voices that emerge within the text; one is more evocative, and the other more analytical. I hope that you'll enjoy the spiritual and scientific wonder of this world, in steps both surefooted and precarious.

Notes

INTRODUCTION: EDGEWALKING AFFECT

1 For another ethnographic entry into Palenque, see James Clifford, "Palenque Log," *Museum Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (1993).

2 John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 2 vols. (1841; repr., New York: Dover, 1969); see Fabio Bourbon, *The Lost Cities of the Mayas: The Life, Art, and Discoveries of Frederick Catherwood* (New York: Abbeville, 2000).

3 Linda Schele to "collegues [*sic*], friends, and friendly crazies," March 24, 1974, Linda Schele Papers, private library of David and Elaine Schele, Austin, TX (hereafter cited as Schele Papers).

4 Anthropological attention to the gift tracks to Marcel Mauss's classic manuscript on the subject. Mauss's metaphysics of exchange has inspired a series of anthropological problematics over the course of the past century. I take "the gift" as an anthropological index signifying the priority of the relation, the claim that relations precede and give rise to both subject and society. In the structuralist tradition, exchange has taken form as thought and language, abstract human capacities that amplify the consequences of Mauss's argument that gifts are spiritual extensions of the person that expect or demand reciprocation. Much of the implicit theoretical arc of this book tracks from a view of reciprocity that aligns with contemporary "affect theory," particularly monistic, neo-Spinozian views inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's vitalism, to a more dialectical and structuralist insistence on the theological character of thought/language itself (in critical engagement with Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida). This book is both an act of reciprocation, as thoughtful as I can make it, and a resolute refusal to close the circuit of exchange. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (1925), trans. Jane I. Guyer (Chicago: HAU Books, 2016); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 1987). For key engagements with Maussian exchange theory, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (1950), trans. Felicity Baker (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987); Nancy D. Munn, *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death; and Literature in Secret* (1999; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

5 Karl Herbert Mayer, "A Painted Venus Glyph in the Tower at Palenque," *Archaeoastronomy* 6 (1983).

6 Schele to "collegues, friends, and friendly crazies," March 24, 1974.

7 Schele to "collegues, friends, and friendly crazies," March 24, 1974.

8 Schele to "collegues, friends, and friendly crazies," March 24, 1974.

9 Contemporary practitioners of Maya epigraphy have inherited and propagated a concept of "the Maya" as a coherent cultural entity. The cultural designation "Maya" covers speakers of historically related languages who have principally inhabited eastern Mesoamerica, including areas now territorialized as southern Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and parts of Honduras and El Salvador. In popular publications, scholars claim that a continuous Maya culture has inhabited these territories from approximately 2000 BCE to the present. See, e.g., David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker, *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (New York: William Morrow, 1993). The contestable notion of a unified "Maya culture" predates the rise of contemporary hieroglyphic studies. See, e.g., John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, 2 vols. (1843; repr., New York: Dover, 1963); Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 2 vols. (1841; repr., New York Dover, 1963). Yet epigraphers have helped solidify this singularized epistemic object by treating inscriptions rendered on diverse media throughout the Maya area between the third century BCE and the sixteenth century CE as a single script. In recent years, a small, influential group of hieroglyph experts has abandoned their field's antiquarian and art historical roots in favor of claims that epigraphy is grounded in a linguistic science that permits them privileged access to the literal meanings of Maya hieroglyphs. In so doing, they have come to exercise significant—and, arguably, problematic—control over the definition of the Maya both inside and outside academia. Cf. Stephen D. Houston, "Into the Minds of Ancients: Advances in Maya Glyph Studies," *Journal of World Prehistory* 14, no. 2 (2000). Scholarship that turns a critical eye to the notion of "Maya culture" includes Quetzil Castañeda, *In the Museum of Maya Culture: Touring Chichén Itzá* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Nora C. England, "Mayan Language Revival and Revi-

talization: Linguists and Linguistic Ideologies," *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 4 (2003); Diane M. Nelson, "Maya Hackers and the Cyberspatialized Nation-State: Modernity, Ethnostalgia, and a Lizard Queen in Guatemala," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996); Diane M. Nelson, *Reckoning: The Ends of War in Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); John M. Watanabe, "Unimagining the Maya: Anthropologists, Others, and the Inescapable Hubris of Authorship," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 14, no. 1 (1995); Richard Wilk, "The Ancient Maya and the Political Present," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 41, no. 3 (1988).

10 My critiques of decipherment have persistently suggested that the translation of Maya hieroglyphic writing into contemporary scripts has been determined by a "modernist" language ideology. For example, elsewhere I have asserted, "The particular language ideology governing decipherment treats hieroglyphs as objects that independently and transparently convey the literal, interior thoughts of ancient Maya subjects." Matthew C. Watson, "Staged Discovery and the Politics of Maya Hieroglyphic Things," *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 2 (2012): 283. By calling attention to the historically situated construction of language as a transparent medium, distinct from art, I hoped to encourage the development of epigraphic methods more sensitive to inscriptions' contexts of use, ideological constructions, and functions within a broader ecology of semiotic and nonsemiotic beings. I continue to believe that ancient Maya scribes, dynasts, and commoners conceived "writing" in terms that differ dramatically from recent constructions, particularly constructions that privilege a conception of writing as a neutral means of recording or conveying "ideas" (let alone a sign of "civilizational" achievement). Although I continue to call attention, here, to epigraphers' adoption of the "modernist" conceit of language as a transparent medium, I am now primarily invested in crafting a distinct critical approach. Rather than treating this transformation of ancient inscriptions into modernist texts as a system of symbolic violence, I am centering—and elegizing—the spiritual joy and genius of decipherment. In so doing, I am working to show how the science of epigraphy was, in practice, a complex nonmodernist field, and how Schele herself employed modernist conceits about language's transparency more strategically than I have tended to acknowledge. This repositioning constitutes an effort to frame my engagement in more deeply ethnographic terms, terms that estrange epigraphy itself, revealing its modernist tendencies as popularizing devices that obscure more complex considerations of hieroglyphs' pragmatic and semiotic functions.

11 Mayanists have positioned two early innovations as foundational events in the shift away from such emphasis of noncalendrical components and toward the emergence of a persuasive argument for hieroglyphs as writing: Yuri Knorozov's identification of phonetic signs; and Tatiana Proskouriakoff's identification of patterns in hieroglyphic dates that indicated the texts' historical content. These events signaled the beginning of the end for a dominant early twentieth-century assumption that the hieroglyphs were largely icons, rebuses, and logographs (or word signs) that served limited purposes for religious acts of divination and lacked a full capacity for

signification, as Sylvanus Morley and J. Eric S. Thompson had maintained. The rise of the "phonetic" and "historical" approaches also led to a shift in interpretations of representational imagery associated with the writing. Mayanists such as Morley and Thompson considered such images representations of religious or cosmological figures and events and worked within an epistemology that distinguished rigidly between "religious" and "historical" figures. By the 1970s, the emerging community of hieroglyph scholars had begun to make claims that the hieroglyphs were "more" than icons, rebuses, and logographs, and in fact comprised texts with signs that combined logographic and phonetic components amounting to a completely syntactic script. See, e.g., Peter Mathews and Linda Schele, "Lords of Palenque—The Glyphic Evidence," in *Primera Mesa Redonda de Palenque: A Conference on the Art, Iconography, and Dynastic History of Palenque*, ed. Merle Greene Robertson (Pebble Beach, CA: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, 1974); Linda Schele, *Maya Glyphs: The Verbs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982). In turn, the accompanying images could no longer be considered primarily or entirely mythological. Many such images came to be understood as realist historical representations of elite Mayas. See, e.g., Linda Schele and Mary Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1986). Internal histories of the field include Michael Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code*, rev. ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999); Stephen Houston, Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazarieogos, and David Stuart, *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); George E. Stuart, "Quest for Decipherment: A Historical and Biographical Survey of Maya Hieroglyphic Investigation," in *New Theories on the Ancient Maya*, ed. E. C. Danien and R. J. Sharer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). Classic contributions to hieroglyphic analysis relevant here include Yuri V. Knorozov, "Drevniaia Pis'mennost' Tsentral'noi Ameriki," *Sovietskaya Etnografiya* 3, no. 2 (1952); Yuri V. Knorozov, "The Problem of the Study of the Maya Hieroglyphic Writing," *American Antiquity* 23, no. 3 (1958); Sylvanus Griswold Morley, *The Ancient Maya* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1946); J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: Introduction* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1950).

12 The notion of a "paradigm shift" or "revolution" in scientific thinking derives from Thomas Kuhn's gestalt-oriented history and philosophy of science (HPS). It has proven to have great appeal to scientists themselves, even as its explanatory power within history, sociology, philosophy, and anthropology has faded. The decipherers did not typically conceive of developments in their field in terms congruent with either Kuhn's history and philosophy of science or subsequent events within HPS or science studies. In his popular account of decipherment, *Breaking the Maya Code*, Michael Coe passingly refers to developments in the field as a "revolution," but he cites neither Kuhn nor, in fact, any other relevant literature within HPS or science studies. Despite (or because of?) its weak conceptual foundation and tendency toward a narrow internalism, *Breaking the Maya Code* is now in its third edition. This is all the more evidence that a contagious enthusiasm—I'd say a contagious

magic—marked or even manifested hieroglyphic decipherment. For the notion of scientific paradigms, see Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). The major popular internal history of the field is Coe, *Maya Code*. The notion of contagious magic derives from James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1922; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1963). For an internal account of decipherment more open to epistemological perspectives (though, in nicely counterparanoid fashion, not mine), see Marc Zender, "Theory and Method in Maya Decipherment," *PARI Journal* 18, no. 2 (2018).

13 Ethnographers have long engaged with archival documents. Among the more important and relevant recent contributions to archive-based ethnographic work include the following: Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Universtiy Press, 2009); Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885–1918* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Sally Engle Merry, "Ethnography in the Archives," in *Practicing Ethnography in Law: New Dialogues, Enduring Methods*, ed. June Starr and Mark Goodale (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). See also the work on documents as epistemic artifacts: Annelise Riles, ed., *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

14 Matthew C. Watson, "Assembling the Ancient: Public Science in the Decipherment of Maya Hieroglyphs" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2010), chap. 6. See also England, "Mayan Language Revival."

15 See, e.g., Sarah Franklin, "Science as Culture, Cultures of Science," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995); Gary Lee Downey, Joseph Dumit, and Sarah Williams, "Cyborg Anthropology," *Cultural Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (1995); Emily Martin, "Anthropology and the Cultural Study of Science," *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 23, no. 1 (1998); Sharon Traweek, *Beamtimes and Lifetimes: The World of High Energy Physics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Kim Fortun, *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Paul Rabinow, *French DNA: Trouble in Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). See also systems-oriented, anthropological allies. See, e.g., Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004);

Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Finally, historians and philosophers of science have, in recent years, engaged closely both with ideas drawn from anthropology—including the gift—and with the history of anthropology itself. See, e.g., Warwick Anderson, *The Collectors of Lost Souls: Turning Kuru Scientists into Whitemen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Joanna Radin, *Life on Ice: A History of New Uses for Cold Blood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

16 There's a faint echo, here, of Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium*.

17 Matthew C. Watson, "Assembling the Ancient" and "Staged Discovery"; Matthew C. Watson, "Mediating the Maya: Hieroglyphic Imaging and Objectivity," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 13, no. 2 (2013); Matthew C. Watson, "Listening in the Pakal Controversy: A Matter of Care in Ancient Maya Studies," *Social Studies of Science* 44, no. 6 (2014).

18 For "lines of flight," see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. For "spheres of exchange," see Paul Bohannan, "The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy," *Journal of Economic History* 19, no. 4 (1959).

19 Cf. Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

20 See, e.g., Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon, 1993).

21 Cf. Joel Robbins, "Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, no. 3 (2013).

22 The rhetorical practice of ethnographic evocation—as distinct from description—now has a substantive and significant history. Classic discussions include Stephen A. Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Marilyn Strathern, *Partial Connections* (Savage, MD: Rowman, 1991).

23 On "systems of attitudes," see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon, 1969). On "structures of feeling," see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

24 On the "hyperreal," see Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Batchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

25 I share with anthropologist Sasha Newell a sense that the language of "affect" extends, rather than departs from, long-standing anthropological attention to semiosis. Sasha Newell, "The Affectiveness of Symbols: Materiality, Magicality, and the Limits of the Antisemiotic Turn," *Current Anthropology* 59, no. 1 (2018). Moreover, if we align semiotics of a structuralist variety with dialectical reasoning, such a view may come into generative engagement with contemporary philosophical assessments of Continental theory's reception of Hegelian dialectics and Spinozist monism, espe-

cially views that take these frames as unexpectedly complementary epistemologies. See, e.g., Gregor Moder, *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017).

26 I am indebted in particular to Eve Sedgwick's and Bruno Latour's respective efforts to advocate for modes of thinking and writing beyond critique, as a negative, subtractive, or paranoid discourse and epistemic stance. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004); see also Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, eds., *Critique and Postcritique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

27 On charismatic authority, see Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

28 Though, as I find at times here, optimism can be tricky, even cruel. Cf. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

29 I mean "supplementing" in a sense loosely inspired by Jacques Derrida's sense of the term. For a preliminary orientation, consider his early discussion in *Of Grammatology*: "The concept of the supplement—which here determines that of the representative image—harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function. . . . But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern insistence which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]." Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 144–45.

30 The concept of "speaking nearby" sources from the work of Trinh T. Minh-ha and is exemplified in films by Trinh including *Reassemblage* and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*. In Trinh's own words, "speaking nearby" amounts to "a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition." Nancy N. Chen, "'Speaking Nearby': A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha," *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no. 1 (1992): 87. The antirepresentationalist political aesthetics of the 1980s–1990s that motivated Trinh's conceptualization of "speaking nearby" have faded in significance. And ethnographers have, once again, become more confident in their efforts to revoice the worlds of their subjects (or objects). Such renewed epistemic confidence is laudable at a historical moment when careful and caring accounts of peoples' worlds could achieve traction within

extra-academic political discourse. Nevertheless, as a writer interested mainly in how we encounter the past, I find the methodological imperative of speaking (as well as writing and thinking) nearby to be of persisting value. Can we truly speak *of* the dead? Or are our engagements with the dead proximate and proximal engagements, forms of affinity or approach, approaches without necessary rapprochements, without requisite representational clarity? My speaking nearby Linda is a trickster method for waiting/hoping—for *esperanza*—with, or alongside, a "dead" being. In the terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, my esperanza has been something of an affirmative becoming-other, but an affirmative becoming-other that's an affirmative becoming-dead or becoming-with-the-dead. In this sense, I may be speaking nearby—and not speaking of, about, or with—the ethnographic form that animates and haunts me here, because I have no choice in the matter. In fact, my esperanza is to feel as close a proximity to Linda as I can. This is a failing esperanza, a work of desperado science. Consult Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage* (New York: Women Make Movies, 1982); Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (New York: Women Make Movies, 1989); Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Cf. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, on speaking and writing "beside."

31 This curt characterization may be something of a disservice to the complex epistemic-ethical problem of ethnographic positioning, a matter characterized by the contingencies of research sites and subjects. Regardless, Isabelle Stengers's concept of an "ecology of practices" may be particularly helpful here, because it emphasizes the dynamism of the sciences as situated technologies of becoming and offers the distinctive ethnographic advantage of refusing to position critical, philosophical, or anthropological engagements with sciences as external to the sciences themselves. It amounts to a provocation to take seriously the performative effects of our critical practices. As Stengers puts it, "An ecology of practices does not have any ambition to describe practices 'as they are;' it resists the master word of a progress that would justify their destruction. It aims at the construction of new 'practical identities' for practices, that is, new possibilities for them to be present, or in other words to connect. It thus does not approach practices as they are—physics as we know it, for instance—but as they may become." Isabelle Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices," *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 186. See also Isabelle Stengers, "The Cosmopolitical Proposal," in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

32 Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*; George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Orin Starn, ed., *Writing Culture and the Life of Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

33 James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (1981).

34 Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* (1950), trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 2001); Mauss, *The Gift*; Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, vol. 1, *Consumption* (1949), trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

35 See, e.g., William Mazzarella, *The Mana of Mass Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); William Mazzarella, "Sense out of Sense: Notes on the Affect/Ethics Impasse," *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 2 (2017); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Moder, *Hegel and Spinoza*.

36 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); see also Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

37 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 462, N2a,3. A different version of this passage also appears in N3,1.

38 Benjamin, quoted in Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 219.

39 Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

40 Bruno Latour designates such an escape from—or provisional incommensurability with—a given sociomaterial order, or "common world," as a "small transcendence." Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 196.

41 Cf. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "Experimental Systems, Graphematic Spaces," in *Inscribing Science: Scientific Texts and the Materiality of Communication*, ed. Timothy Lenoir (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Kim Fortun, "Ethnography in/of/as Open Systems," *Reviews in Anthropology* 32 (2003).

42 Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002).

43 Anand Pandian and Stuart McLean, eds., *Crumpled Paper Boat* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 3.

44 Pandian and McLean, *Crumpled Paper Boat*, 3.

45 After Jacques Lacan, the notion of an "apparatus of *jouissance*" owes to Jacques-Alain Miller. Jacques-Alain Miller, "The Monologue of *L'Apparole*," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 9, no. 2 (1996).

46 Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*; Allen C. Shelton, *Dreamworlds of Alabama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Allen C. Shelton, *Where the North Sea Touches Alabama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

47 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*; Shelton, *Where the North Sea Touches Alabama*.

48 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

49 Shelton, *Where the North Sea Touches Alabama*; see also Shelton, *Dreamworlds of Alabama*.

50 Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000). See also Walter D. Mignolo, "Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2007); Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2007); Alberto Moreiras, "A Storm Blowing from Paradise: Negative Globality and Critical Regionalism," in *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, ed. Ileana Rodríguez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

51 See, e.g., Florencia E. Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994); John Beverley, *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). On the coloniality of Latin American knowledge production, see, e.g., Robert D. Aguirre, *Informal Empire: Mexico and Central America in Victorian Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Cori Hayden, *When Nature Goes Public: The Making and Unmaking of Bioprospecting in Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, "Stereophonic Scientific Modernisms: Social Science between Mexico and the United States, 1880s–1930s," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999).

52 For an engaging feminist reading of the coloniality of power in the Andes, see Florence E. Babb, *Women's Place in the Andes: Engaging Decolonial Feminist Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018). On the coloniality of history and spiritual being as a cosmopolitical problem, see, e.g., Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). Cf. Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

53 For the case of Mexico, see, e.g., Analisa Taylor, *Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination: Thresholds of Belonging* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009); Florence E. Babb, "Theorizing Gender, Race, and Cultural Tourism in Latin America: A View from Peru and Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 39, no. 6 (2012).

54 See, e.g., Arturo Arias, "The Maya Movement, Postcolonialism and Cultural Agency," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006); Brian Gollnick, *Reinventing the Lacandón: Subaltern Representations in the Rain Forest of Chiapas* (Tucson:

University of Arizona Press, 2008); Diane M. Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); John M. Watanabe and Edward F. Fischer, eds., *Pluralizing Ethnography: Comparison and Representation in Maya Cultures, Histories, and Identities* (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2004).

55 For a finely nuanced and beautifully rendered reading of the "wake" within the politics of US Blackness, see Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

56 My sense of "ethno-pessimism" here points toward a decolonial indigenous engagement with the field of "Afro-pessimist" thought, particularly in its consideration of Blackness as an ontologically constitutive negation. See, e.g., Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Calvin L. Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

57 See, e.g., Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

58 Benjamin Noys has offered a smart reading of recent trends in French philosophy as appeals to an antidialectical "affirmationism." Affect studies and multispecies anthropology have tended to partake in such an affirmative negation of negation. The pervasive influence of Gilles Deleuze's work today, and the disavowal of more-dialectical thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida, reads as symptomatic. The theoretical arc of this book tracks from a rather chaotic Deleuzian field of generative feeling and contingent connection toward a more sustained neocritical, Derrida-influenced reading of the common religiosity of Schele and Lévi-Strauss. On affirmationism, see Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*. On contemporary multispecies anthropology's affirmationism, see Matthew C. Watson, "On Multispecies Mythology: A Critique of Animal Anthropology," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 33, no. 5 (2016). See also Gregor Moder's convincing effort to read Hegel and Spinoza as complementary, rather than antithetical, thinkers. Moder, *Hegel and Spinoza*. Moder's philosophical project resonates with my defense of Derridean and subalternist thought as necessary complements or correctives to the affirmationist tendencies of Bruno Latour's "cosmopolitical" efforts to unify science and politics. Matthew C. Watson, "Cosmopolitics and the Subaltern: Problematizing Latour's Idea of the Commons," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 3 (2011); Matthew C. Watson, "Derrida, Stengers, Latour, and Subalternist Cosmopolitics," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 31, no. 1 (2014).

59 See, e.g., Quetzil Castañeda, "'We Are Not Indigenous!' The Maya Identity of Yucatan, an Introduction," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (2004); R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination, 1820–1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Victor D. Montejo, "Becoming Maya? Appropriation of the White Shaman," *Native Americas* 16, no. 1 (1999); Watanabe, "Unimagining the Maya"; Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound*; Matthew Restall, "Maya Ethnogenesis," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (2004).

60 On the closed corporate community in unromanticized form, see Eric Wolf, "Closed Corporate Peasant Communities in Mesoamerica and Central Java," *Southwest Journal of Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (1957); cf. Evon Vogt, *Zinacantan: A Maya Community in the Highlands of Chiapas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

61 Andrew Weeks, Simon Martin, and Lori Conley, dirs., *Edgewalker: A Conversation with Linda Schele* (DVD, Austin: Home Life Productions, 1999).

62 Coe, *Maya Code*.

63 Coe, *Maya Code*, 201.

64 Weeks, Martin, and Conley, *Edgewalker*.

65 Coe, *Maya Code*, 202.

66 The case of Schele, here, has some resonance with that of Carlton Gajdusek, as developed in Anderson, *The Collectors of Lost Souls*.

67 Weeks, Martin, and Conley, *Edgewalker*.

68 Coe, *Maya Code*, 202.

69 See, e.g., Freidel, Schele, and Parker, *Maya Cosmos*; Schele and Miller, *Blood of Kings*; Linda Schele and David Freidel, *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1990); Linda Schele and Peter Mathews, *The Code of Kings: The Language of Seven Sacred Maya Temples and Tombs* (New York: Scribner, 1998).

70 Weeks, Martin, and Conley, *Edgewalker*; emphasis added.

71 J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphs without Tears* (London: British Museum, 1980).

72 Robertson, *Primera Mesa Redonda de Palenque*.

73 Coe, *Maya Code*, 203.

74 Lisa C. Breglia, *Monumental Ambivalence: The Politics of Heritage* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); Lindsay Jones, "Conquests of the Imagination: Maya-Mexican Polarity and the Story of Chichén Itzá," *American Anthropologist* 99, no. 2 (1997).

75 Coe, *Maya Code*, 203.

76 Weeks, Martin, and Conley, *Edgewalker*.

77 Linda Schele, *Maya Glyphs*.

78 See Matthew C. Watson, "Assembling the Ancient" and "Staged Discovery."

79 Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

80 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "trope," accessed September 26, 2018, https://oed.com/view/Entry/206679.

81 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 208.

82 Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*.

83 Person-centered works of anthropology and history to which this book is indebted include Anderson, *The Collectors of Lost Souls*; João Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth*

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Hélène Mialet, *Hawking Incorporated: Stephen Hawking and the Anthropology of the Knowing Subject* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

84 For an important recent walk along this edge, see Stuart McLean, *Fictionalizing Anthropology: Encounters and Fabulations at the Edges of the Human* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2017).

CHAPTER 1: SACRILEGE

1 Frank Freidel to David Freidel, January 20, 1989, Schele Papers.

2 The book manuscript in question became Schele and Freidel, *Forest of Kings*.

3 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 19.

4 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 19.

5 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 25. "People without history" refers to anthropologist Eric Wolf's classic critique of the concept. Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

6 See, e.g., Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1990).

7 Elaine Markson to Linda Schele, June 19, 1989, Schele Papers.

8 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 19.

9 Linda Schele, quoted in Andrew Robinson, "Symbolic Victory," *Times Higher Education*, March 17, 1995, http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=97205&sectioncode=26.

10 Michael Taussig, *The Corn Wolf* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 10–11.

11 John Berger, "Twelve Theses on the Economy of the Dead," in *Hold Everything Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance* (1994; repr., New York: Pantheon, 2007).

12 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "eliminate," accessed June 9, 2012, https://oed.com/view/Entry/60472.

13 Berger, "Twelve Theses," 4.

14 Berger, "Twelve Theses," 4, 5, emphasis in original.

15 See, e.g., Daniel C. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); Paul M. Churchland, "Reduction, Qualia, and the Direct Introspection of Brain States," *Journal of Philosophy* 82, no. 1 (1985).

16 Eugene Thacker, "Darklife: Negation, Nothingness, and the Will-to-Life in Schopenhauer," *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* 12 (2011): 24.

17 Thacker, "Darklife," 24; Steven Shaviro, "Pansychism and/or Eliminativism," *Pinocchio Theory* (blog), October 4, 2011, http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1012.

18 Berger, "Twelve Theses," 5.

19 Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.

20 Berger, "Twelve Theses," 4.

21 Gillett Griffin to Linda Schele, November 20, 1984, Schele Papers.