



MSU Graduate Theses

Spring 2021


Saga beyond the Gate: Chapter One, the Coming of the Gate Ghost

Tristan B. Miller

Missouri State University, Tristan51@live.missouristate.edu

As with any intellectual project, the content and views expressed in this thesis may be considered objectionable by some readers. However, this student-scholar's work has been judged to have academic value by the student's thesis committee members trained in the discipline. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses>

 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Classical Archaeology and Art History Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [History of Religion Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), [Performance Studies Commons](#), [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#), [Sculpture Commons](#), and the [Visual Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Miller, Tristan B., "Saga beyond the Gate: Chapter One, the Coming of the Gate Ghost" (2021). *MSU Graduate Theses*. 3621.

<https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses/3621>

This article or document was made available through BearWorks, the institutional repository of Missouri State University. The work contained in it may be protected by copyright and require permission of the copyright holder for reuse or redistribution.

For more information, please contact BearWorks@library.missouristate.edu.

ORION

FILE: 37

Agent Miller

Agent 454

Tristan B. Miller

**SAGA BEYOND THE
GATE: CHAPTER ONE
THE COMING OF THE
GATE GHOST**

Saga Beyond the Gate: Chapter
One, the Coming of the Gate
Ghost

Tristan B. Miller

Saga Beyond the Gate: Chapter
One, the Coming of the Gate
Ghost

Tristan B. Miller

Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri
May 1- May 23, 2021

Missouri State University
Art & Design Department
901 South National Avenue
Springfield, Missouri 65897
417-837-2330
artanddesign@missouristate.edu
art.missouristate.edu

Publication credits
Design: Tristan B. Miller
Photographs: Tristan B. Miller

© 2021, Tristan B. Miller

The artist assumes responsibility for obtaining and maintaining the necessary rights and releases to legally publish this work, including the informed consent of any subjects identifiable in the photographic work.

SAGA BEYOND THE GATE: CHAPTER ONE, THE COMING OF THE GATE GHOST

Art and Design Department

Missouri State University, May 2021

Master of Fine Arts

Tristan B. Miller

ABSTRACT

“Saga Beyond the Gate: Chapter One, the Coming of the Gate Ghost” explores performance sculpture used as religious ritual. My work emphasizes ritual, creation myths, relics, physical manifestations of lived religion, and the power of narrative belief. One often turns to religion, science, or spirituality, to seek answers to questions about being a conscious entity, and one’s journey to the end. This saga uses scripts from all three of these schools of thought, placing the world of the Gate Ghost into tangible reality, as a play on a stage. Artefacts represent objects of power and mystery. Characters embody morality tales, set against the world around them. Publicly-constructed dramatic scenes present setting as a conversation between the familiar and the realm of high strangeness. The catalyst of my work is a fear of any form of life beyond death. I explore modes of the afterlife by physically manifesting infinite creative worlds and providing parallel escapes from this timeline. My ritual performances imbue this lived reality with meaning, drawing from the traditions of Corpus Christi plays, the culture of Eucharistic Hosts, and other communal manifestations of belief. By presenting props and costumes within the context of written narratives, I analyze the relationship between sacred objects, the human body, and existential tension. Using science fiction as a religion, I reorient beliefs about materials, souls, and time-based reality by unveiling a constructed world before the viewer.

KEYWORDS: ritual, narrative, performance, sculpture, science

SAGA BEYOND THE GATE: CHAPTER ONE, THE COMING OF THE GATE GHOST

By

Tristan B. Miller

A Master's Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College
Of Missouri State University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Visual Studies

May 2021

Approved:

Deidre Argyle, M.F.A., Chair
Joshua Albers, M.F.A., committee member
Mitzi Kirkland-Ives, Ph.D., committee member
Sarah Williams, M.F.A., committee member
Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

Edicts, Code, Cycular Weft

Infinite lands exist, inside of which there are infinite versions of yourself as a character so uniquely cast
in said reality, all together form the hero.

Infinite possibility harbors infinite choice.

Creation is a reality formula that both requires and yields immense power.

Spawning realities ensures continuous life after death but requires the death of the vessel.

Grounding points and physical code connect all realities.

Grounding points provide identity, as well as possess it.

All characters “other” to the hero exist infinitely.

A prime is closest to the hero form.

A vessel is sacred.

A vessel requires contextual reaffirmation to remain in proper operating capacity.

Those to whom eternal life is damnation, seek the dispersion of the hero form.

Those who attack the prime, attack the vessel.

May I forever swim in the ocean of me, and leave not the current, for to abandon the threads of the all, is
to succumb to absolute deletion.

In hero

In prime

In vessel

Cult of the Gate Ghost Manifesto

Art is to instill thoughts and actions with magic
Magic is energy beyond measurable science
Art is burned off and used up in quantities, stored and saved for later
There exist infinite versions of you in the multiverse, and you must live with the fact that you may be the
worst one
Purpose is found in understanding, and to travel with the mind, sideways and tallways, is to be closer to
the truth
We follow our hearts and not our eyes
Energy is the currency of eternal life and to live forever is to suffer undying
Magic, Science, Art, has rules; to slip between such rules is to weave through the traffic of essence
You are as an object
Objects are superior
The conscious mind is but a mistake
Cut forth like a virus, the very accidental organism this terrarium could never account for
Bite the stars
Sleep with gravity
Offend time
Discover death
Occupy the walls of every vortex between this earth and the next
Take possession of your body, and know it as the only thing for certain
Think it as real as the light that enters your face, and hold that code as uniquely yours

First Lapper's Story

He lives forever and can never die; we all live forever through one another but are doomed to death by our own hands. His mission is to liberate us from the cycle of never-ending life; he accepts the burden so that we may know peace, the eternal Gate Ghost, the one who is behind every door.

The other, the prime, the hero, the one. Thrust into the cross ocean by a horrible fate upon his universe. Those who attempted to breed cross energies imploded two worlds. The last alive, but far from alone, the prime heard the call and sought refuge through the gate. To seek one's equals before unheard of, now the only choice ahead of him. His path, to save himself, and every other in existence. Through contact and travel, eternity holds purpose, as a herald of peace. What lie beyond the first gate would be the battle of legend, the first contact between the polarity heroes, the trick that started a war, the open hand that promised death, a rivalry that holds the multiverse together.

Following the first performance at Kentucky Lake, and the subsequent tank incubation ritual in Murray, Kentucky, the ORION Corporation has taken great interest in this unfolding narrative and sequence of public events. As part of the Emerging Sciences Division, it is my duty as an Energy Research Personnel to construct a detailed file on the Gate Ghost and the entities surrounding him. Many believe that this entity has uncovered a new form of energy that manifests from myth and ritual art. If this is true, I must determine the moral leanings of this creature, as well as the potential for this energy, and its means of production. The Corporation would be able to use such a discovery in their newest project. Because much of the project file is redacted, I will operate under the supposition that creation of new energy is paramount, and the way the Gate Ghost is obtaining it is replicable. It is presumed that this Gate Ghost and his cabal of characters is all one person, or at least separate versions of a man. This man is Tristan B Miller at most given points in time, and he will assertively tell you that his middle name is just B, and that he hates the man who was in that tank during the initial ritual, at least for the time being. Miller says that each day—if the energy is right—he can be another person, so depending on when a work took place, one could be analyzing any number of versions of him, all with uniquely different personalities and ideals. Throughout this file, Miller will be referenced in both first and third person, as we explore his catalogue of works. Adjectives he has put upon himself have included “benevolent” and “naïve;” as one of his many public flyers states, “Not every version of you is good.” A reflection of these varying self-prescribed labels presents itself in costuming and rituals of change—from good to bad, smart to naïve, inquisitive to destructive—the physical work he produces seems to be a manifestation of his process of self-examination.

I dissected the notes and research of the agent previously assigned to this case, and have developed a timeline with which to work, starting with the first appearance of multiple entities appearing in Miller’s art. In the week before his Kentucky Lake performance, Miller sent out a cryptic post, featuring a constructed coffin and a caption that read, “I don’t pretend to know who they are, but I do intend to have a conversation.” This day in history is credited as being the first contact Miller had with all the versions of himself across the multiverse: the first “Convergence.” This day is also the same day as

the ORION Base Nineteen anomaly. From this point onward, we see his work revolve around these dimensional doppelgangers and the other characters surrounding them. Time after time, we find notions of discovery, protection, exploration, and evil in Miller's work. It has become a pattern that positive and negative copies of himself, secondary characters, and corporations involve themselves in his escapades. We will later examine such characters as the benevolent "Prime," the malevolent "Gate Ghost," or the Tulpa-like Men in Black characters that permeate his performances. One would be remiss if one brushed these ideas off as mere fiction, because Miller will argue that "it's weird and fun and it is science fiction, but at the same time I'm deadly serious, and I like to play with that juxtaposition." This back-and-forth fluctuation is a key part of the process of whatever he is producing and must be tested further to determine if such a fluctuating variable is key for ORION to reproduce this reaction consistently in a lab.

The whole narrative seems to revolve around a cosmic battle between an entity referred to as the "Eternal Gate Ghost," and another heralded as "the Prime." What I can gather from the notes of my predecessors, as well as what little writings I have obtained from ORION informants within the cult, is that these factions differ along the lines of whether one views eternity as an unbearable Hell, or, as the other holds, that living together through multiple universes is the only alternative to nothingness. The Gate Ghost goes forth from universe to universe, liberating each version of Tristan B Miller from having to live forever as he does so.¹ In opposition to this entity is "the One, the Prime," who lived in a world destroyed by dimensional travel experiments, and whose only option was to travel the multiverse. I am not sure which is his proper title, "the One," or "the Prime," as he is referred to in both ways, depending on the text. The reluctant savior serves in what seems to be a messiah role, bringing together and protecting every Tristan B Miller. The Prime is in direct opposition to the Gate Ghost, and the two battle across dimensions for their beliefs. All of Miller's work revolves tangentially around this narrative. To followers of the Prime, The ORION Corporation and its many shells make the technology and serve as a corporate manifestation of power for the followers of the Ghost. A third party of creatures work their way

¹ Miller, Tristan B. *First Lappers Story*. (Springfield, MO, ORION Press, October 2019), N.P

into the fold through the Men in Black, who are said to live among and between dimensions, have unknown intentions, and are aware that the battle between our hero factions will destroy the multiverse.

The crux of all that is Miller's work is the idea that he exists in a physical body that will die, and from that point stem two possibilities: One being nothing at all, the complete absence of consciousness. The other is to live for eternity, never ending. Both ideas are equally horrifying and undesired outcomes, so a third option is created to help Miller make sense of conscious life. This third option is to focus energy from people, objects, and events, to help slide between the cracks of reality, and create an imagined multiverse so vast, intriguing, and full of possibility, that consciousness is eventually one and the same with the ability to create and explore. This idea of seeking meaning is not unique to Miller; in fact, it has roots in many religious schools of thought since human beings first tried to make sense of what it means to die. My task is to determine how Miller's charade differs, and what dangers it may pose to the public at large and to ORION, based on his intentions and true means of production. Is this an energy source that has been present all along, and how does he have unique access to it now in this moment of time if others have left it untouched?

An attempt can be made here to treat this process as a hard science. I can contextualize Miller and his work by using all the research methods and files available at ORION. It is paramount to first examine Miller's multiple identities and character studies. To help me understand the act of fluctuating between personas, I have found the prominent historian of religion Eliade's discourse on the meaning of masks within ritual cultures rather helpful, in which it is stated, that "Ritual masks remind us of what we are not and bring us into the realm of superhuman".² Therefore, even while every version of Miller seems to be the same person, by donning these masks he is somehow becoming something else and accessing matter that he believes cannot be accessed in his original character form. Even as I write this, I am aware that I put on an analytical mask, to analyze another man in a mask that is himself. By consistently existing as a Tristan B Miller from another universe inside of a rotating host vessel known outwardly as Tristan B

² Eliade, Mircea, and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. (New York: Continuum, 1992), 65

Miller, Miller can become that very energy that he believes exists between universes: that Pre-Cosmogonic power of creation, present in many ritual cultures.

In texts from the cult of the Gate Ghost, this change of personality happens most in this world, the world of the one who made first contact. That makes this world a beacon for all multiversal entities. The original Miller is indeed a bright light to the moths between worlds. This hall of masks allows Miller to explore himself and his changes in personality brought on by time and experiences. To quite literally commit to becoming a new person with each performance and persisting until the next one, Miller grapples with a perceived mode of existence in the afterlife, while he is alive, to better understand the emotions and theology that dealing with such possibilities brings. Miller is acclimating himself to death by performing his conceived religion.

His “First Lapper’s Story” is important in providing framework for the followers, or more accurately, those who practice, the idea of Tristan B Miller in the multiversal tale. As Eliade notes regarding such ritual contexts, “Repetition of a scenario and breakaway from profane time, through a moment which opens out into the great time, are essential marks of mythical behavior.”³ By living and reliving this myth, followers break free from corporeal space, and gain access to the timeless power of such myth, allowing them to feel more than mortal and human for as long as they place themselves within its words. That is indeed what every donning of a costume and every “Gate Walker Playset” does for Miller. It seems to reestablish his central origin story the way passion plays and medieval triptych altarpieces do for other religions. The reason this is important is that it is an example of lived religion, an encroachment of divine into the mundane world: the idea that Miller holds his narrative so dear, and that it is consistently present and reaffirmed in his waking reality by means of physical representation as well as textual repetition. If I were to recreate this energy source, I would have to replicate this self-perpetuating reaction in a laboratory space.

Within Miller’s text, there is an emphasis on the infinite choices and possibilities opened up to

³ Eliade, Mircea, and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. 36

one if one were to follow Miller's code. A central tenet and goal of the system is to escape the doldrums of eternity by utilizing eternal creation opportunities, or "E.C.O.s," as they are known in ORION.

Secondly, ever-present is an overarching theme of power: that once one comes to terms with the ability to partake in such a creative wellspring of E.C.O., an entirely different concern arises surrounding the ethics and morality of that power. It is also within the text that I learn that every single reality is connected, and particular attention is paid to the role of the host vessel or body, in this case Miller. From the essential texts of Miller and the cult, we can extrapolate some central pillars that are important to all who follow this fandom or religion much the same way we can dissect the myths and legends among historical religions. Miller has intentionally laid out formulas that I believe are made up of a pre-existing math from other religions, which I can use to reverse-engineer his process. In his narrative world, one must seek purpose in infinite variation and change, one must respect the use of power, and, above all, one must protect the body as the most sacred of tools. These ideals tell us, as an artist and a person, what Miller holds most dear within his work and his life, these are the laws of his physics, his unbendable gravity.

It is in not only the spaces separating universes, but also in the gaps between art, science fiction, religion, and theology that Miller operates. To Miller, the street corner is synonymous with a gallery, a portal, and a chapel. Humming with energy from various rituals and objects of power, Miller has become a strange quasi-religious local figure. On the surface, he contemplates the deepest of human concerns in a public forum, fully embracing a sacred divine world in a shared lived space. On other levels, this transdimensional being is a performance artist, a prophet of science and inquisitive discovery, and a human body on a journey to a guaranteed end, hoping to escape into the endless realm of creation energy that sews together both his suits and his cherished narrative. I set off to know him for my research and find myself forming an even deeper connection to his humanness. On one side I am examining a potential universal threat, and the other, just a man and his mind.

I was lucky enough to have a one-on-one, in-person contact with the asset when he agreed to a rather uncharacteristic rendezvous. As I sat and spoke with Tristan B Miller, who was at this point in time the "High Priest" of the Cult of the Gate Ghost, it became abundantly clear that this man was no glossy-

eyed fanatic. Rather, he was a person like all others, who may be too far in over his head to go back on a jest. On any given day one can find him painted up in a second body of costume. His ceremonial garb can only be described as if one's grandmother's junk drawer and excess quilting fabric crossed through a wormhole into a pulp sci-fi fantasy and was spat back out onto the frame of an average man. Yet here now in front of me sat a disappointingly human individual, wearing an Asteroids shirt and blue jeans a tad too tight for a man of his age. The reason he agreed to this meeting was to get his story to paper. He knew not for whom I was working and the true nature of this file. It was Miller, after all, who queried my informant at the local paper for an opportunity to speak. He gave no indication that he was in any immediate danger, but he had the sweat about him of a man resigned to some untasteful truth. It was like all his edges were gone.

I propose that to truly begin to understand this man, we must grasp that he is many men. He is the Gate Ghost, the Prime, Saint Cigon, the High Priest, and local performance artist Tristan B Miller, while at the same time he is none of these individuals. Readily apparent is the fusion of a seemingly fictional reality, grafted onto his lived experience, the ebb and flow of which is murky even to him at this stage. Something about the world as-it-is at some point stopped being enough, and his mind started sleeping in these created beds that offered up dreams that satiated a hunger like no earthly object could.

I have gathered that the Gate Ghost is a godlike entity of near unimaginable power that holds steady to such firm beliefs in the burdensome weight of life. Miller explains to me that like this world, there are infinite realities that are infinitely unique. In some reality, one is a candy bar salesman; in another the foreman of the world's largest nuclear facility, and so on and so on. The Gate Ghost possesses a way to slip in and out of these realities, and in doing so, purges each realm of its version of Tristan B Miller, taking Miller's time, experiences, and power with him. To followers of the Gate Ghost, this is a holy rapturous experience that is longed for, as to be alive with thoughts and feelings in an infinite universe of both death and conscious eternity is cause for dread. The members of the cult welcome an end by their god. As every force has an opposing one, the enemies of the cult are all those who follow the Prime, who is regarded as the first Miller—other than the Gate Ghost himself—to slip from one reality to

another. In direct opposition to the edicts of the Gate Ghost, the Prime sees eternal life shared with infinite possibility to be a great comfort, and lives out his days foiling the plans of the Gate Ghost and his cult at every turn like a 1920s space opera serial gone biblical. It is fascinating to hear this all directly from Miller himself, and key in on the subtle changes to the narrative from the descriptions in the cult texts I had consulted earlier.

Completely new territory for the record of this file was the sudden emergence in the city of a brand-new entity previously uncategorized. This entity who now sat in front of me referred to himself as “High Priest.” From what I could gather, he was taken from his world, and is placed in each new universe to get that Tristan B Miller ready for his ultimate fate. Somewhere along the timeline, he must have outgrown his use, as it seems that he has been forgotten here in this universe. He related to me this part sounding a lot like someone in denial of a crumbling relationship. This is entirely unusual, as up until now Miller has always projected himself as a creature of allure and veiled power. Here we have this new presentation of a cosmically-wilted mouthpiece. What place does this sort of character have within the variables of our elusive equation, and how does he change the yielded outcome?

During our meeting, he described separate entities, but he is really describing himself using characters to compartmentalize sections of who he is, used to be, or wishes he were. He has an obvious admiration for the strength of the Gate Ghost himself, a go-getter with the power to back up his beliefs. He talked about him like a big brother who went off to college and plays baseball but cannot be bothered to come home and visit, but he understands that he is busy. The Prime seems to be someone he views as being so saccharine that it is unnerving. I believe this is because the Prime is something the High Priest is extremely jealous of. Someone who is inherently good, selfless, never gives up, and is trusted by others.

He could see right through me, that I was having trouble keeping up the charade. He told me, “You know I know it’s all made up right? I can see you think I’m crazy. I know it’s not real. I mean it wasn’t, and I needed it to be, so now it is. After all, we’re talking about it.” I suppose that is the truth. It does not matter if the Gate Ghost is out there ready to do god knows what to his next victim, or if Saint Cigon is in some alleyway sending coordinates. What matters is that Tristan B Miller is separating out

parts of himself to better examine his own morality and life, through a modified framing device of ritual recreation, and science fiction religion.

Where does this entire story live, how does it manifest itself physically, and most importantly, why? Miller walks around in costume circumnavigating the city. He places himself inside tubes and coffins on full display. He hangs up fliers and preaches the good word of the Gate Ghost. He makes comic books and little toys and commercials. Why do all of this for a narrative that is essentially selfish? The canonical answer would be that the Gate Ghost needs the energy produced by thoughts about him and eternal life to power his telephone machines that let him zip in and out of dimensions. The truthful answer is that Miller hopes that if someone can view his myth, they can extract morals from it in the same way people do from the Bible or Star Wars or the Avengers, but in a new way that reclaims the power of myth for the individual: making it once again solely about them, creating and utilizing their own formulas instead of what is inherently provided. This leads me to believe that Miller may not have been as unaware of my background as I foolishly presumed, for if my hypothesis were correct, he would want me to investigate him. Tristan B Miller soaked up religion, he soaked up Star Wars, and Marvel comics, and Pulp Magazines, and I don't think he could find a place to seat himself within it all. We see a man who desperately wants to be anyone other than himself. We find in him the part of ourselves that looks deeply into the mirror or the back of our eyelids with a critical gaze, but so much so that it has become an entirely whole being whose only purpose seems to be to rip itself apart over and over in front of us. He is his own god, his own mortal enemy, his own best friend, his own servant, his own judge, spreading thin every facet of his being and chasing it to the very edge of its concept, just to see where it ends. At the heart of it all we see a human being who cannot deal with the idea of death, whose very existential crisis stems from the lack of any ability to decide. All or nothing, both, neither, infinity, possibility, escaping through stories, creating character after character in hopes that he'll just jump into the next world, and the next. An eternity of endless possibilities forged by a man whose greatest source of cosmic dread seems to be the very idea of just getting bored.

The idea of eternity seems to constantly be running its fingers against his back, and sitting before

me I see a man desperately trying to saturate whatever time he has with as many tricks and trap doors as he can and slip through the cracks in this world as it inevitably comes slamming together to swallow him whole. I know not where his frantic journey may lead him. I do hope that his process can bring peace or epiphany, to not only his followers but to himself.

Between the layers there is a hard science to this ordeal. Whatever energy he seems to believe in could plausibly be real, measurable, and replicable. The question remains as to how the Corporation will apply this energy. To better understand the application avenues with this type of energy, I have found answers in the history of religion. It is inarguable that religion is often synonymous with power, be it real or perceived. I hesitate to categorize what Miller and his ilk are adhering to as a religion. Certainly, his behavior and actions are pseudo-religious and ritualistic. He does have followers, all of which are extensions of himself. For now, it will be classified as an order or sect of a belief system. By wearing specific suits and performing specific tasks, Miller becomes another person and is acting out a created world in reality to then make it present. This imbues a lived space with meaning, reminiscent of church services and priestly rituals, as well as ancient community-wide rituals of religious devotion. Some of Miller's rituals have been reported to provide protection through connective webs of communication and creating usable energy that spawns when communities are visually stimulated and curious. The concept of creation energy like E.C.O.s, are referenced by Eliade as being sought and harnessed by many religious "initiates," usually to bring about some personal metamorphosis or to fuel a spiritual journey.⁴ The concept of *Regressus ad Uterum* is presented by Eliade as a state of being achieved through ritual that places one in a "performed embryonic state" and allows the initiate to harness creation energies and thus change or become another person.⁵ Such an idea relates to the state of mind that Miller is put into when propose that these rituals are meant to let other versions of Miller through dimensional barriers, to save or

⁴ Eliade, Mircea, and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. 11

⁵ Eliade, Mircea, and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. 8

performing these ritual acts. They reframe reality into a more desired one through performed action.⁶ I help them. But the first experiment went wrong, giving way to his faceted rotation of personas. Throughout his rituals, Miller discovered that the only way for others to cross into a universe would be to take over the body of the ritual performer. This apparently injects a moral flaw into the hero's journey, a spiritual conflict representing real internal conflict. Changing into another person or entity is what Eliade refers to when he writes of ritual cultures that, "this is the sign that profane man is in the process of dissolution, and that a new personality is on the point of being born".⁷ Through this overarching idea, we can connect Miller's performance art to historic religious ritual. Through performance, the initiate attempts to enter another frame of mind, either believed to be physical or purely non-corporeal. In the process, the individual gains access to the divine universe or energy, or entity, and upon completing the ritual that individual is no longer the same, rendered completely changed by the experience.

If the Gate Ghost is real and potentially malevolent, this sort of ritual can be seen as firing up an engine to a machine with limitless possibility. The Prime would stand to use this sort of chemical reaction to help the versions of Miller find peace. Meanwhile, Miller himself requires this nutrition to conduct treacherous self-examination and foster change at a great cost. One must not only connect this idea to rituals of passage, but also to other religious rituals like pilgrimages, recited prayer, song, and sacraments.

I conclude that the body and the human mind are not the only vehicles capable of storing or creating E.C.O.: objects are the oldest manifestations of this activity. Miller uses objects the same way he uses human bodies, and with seemingly more respect. Established earlier on in Miller's work—and persisting to today—is the idea that objects and their various relationships physically create a song: this song or vibration is energy and power. Lived religion is saturated in relationships with powerful objects. Physical objects and their roles alongside the body of a viewer establish meaning and imbue objects with power. Such a process is equally apparent in both religion as well as performance art like that of Miller,

⁶ Plate, S. Brent. *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017), 45

⁷ Eliade, Mircea, and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. 8

and we can use these examples to experiment on objects in the laboratory.

With this thought in mind, we must fully analyze Miller's recent production of toys, shirts, posters, and stickers. If these objects contain within them the energy and power to move the beholder emotionally to a rational conclusion, presupposed by the artist, prophet, or divine power, then we can surmise that such an object places the sacred or holy powerful into the realm of the mundane, normal, and sterile. By owning a glow-in-the-dark toy of Miller in his suit, one is reminded of and forced to confront the theological questions that his entire narrative aims to propose. The singular unit of matter aims to represent an entire codex of complex ideals, and this enterprise has been an effective mode of story transmission for all of history. By incorporating those themes and questions into one's daily life via the figure, shirt, or symbol, one physically lives with the themes of an imagined world. Those change one's lived reality while one's life simultaneously repositions the ways in which one interacts with those very ideals. Upon further research, I discovered that others have chased this concept. This is the concept of a lived religion posited by the historian of religious material culture Colleen McDannell: "the everyday is raised to a higher, more significant level, and the extraordinary was brought down into the realm of the human."⁸ Thus, the story of the Gate Ghost and his Men in Black becomes a part of one's world literally and spiritually. By having viewers post to a hotline about sightings and performances or relay encounters with the Men in Black, Miller provides the viewers with an opportunity to speak to how the narrative has affected their lives personally. In other realms this would be seen as a form of devotional performance. This is a key component to creating this form of energy.

The idea is that the narrative, and in turn its questions and morals, will live through the everyday lives of those who encounter it. Like the objects discussed in religious contexts and like Miller's earlier work, it will provide a richer, exponentially changed meaning through integration into daily life. This integration marks a separation, or at least a relationship between sacred space and profane space that

⁸ McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 117

Miller seems to be working with: again, the presence of a complex juxtaposition. By operating as if there were indeed a distinction between this world and his worlds, whatever he synthesizes is made just as tangible as anything else. This pairing of sacred and the everyday, and the elevating of the differences between the two, has some caloric value to Miller. And undoubtedly to the Corporation.

I have established that Miller is a man who wears pants and fumbles his change into his pocket nervously at the cash register, or he at least wants to be perceived as such. The Prime is the ultimate hero who has few faults and has the power to save lives and even whole realities. Both concepts and beings live within the same space, forcing comparison between the two, much in the same way processions served for early medieval communities. This concept of the Topocosm, or Topocosmic Vitality, is that everything that makes up us, both sacred and ordinary, is all one cosmic order. As the scholar of comparative religion Theodore Gaster explains, "the essence of the Topocosm is that it possesses a twofold character, at once real and punctual, and ideal and durative."⁹ Miller often talks about the idea that his work is encountered in a manner that jolts viewers into a strange version of reality similar to a twilight zone, just to bring them right back down to earth. We see now that this idea of framing myth over sections of the everyday works in favor of both the myth's message as well as the viewer's ability to later recall and adapt such morals gained from the experience. The juxtaposition of these two distinct worlds is a self-perpetuating chain reaction that yields power, contemplation, moral lessons, transference, and a swirling cocoon for self-transformation. The problem with most fuels is that it runs out, but Miller has circumnavigated around that preconceived absolute.

By asking the question of why individuals seek some sense of higher truth, and historically how they construct that truth, we can better understand where it is that Miller's work comes from narratively: not merely the pages of pulp magazines and bubble gum wrapper comics. The physical practice and participation in lived-in space is scarcely arrived at without previously establishing a mental path: I am

⁹ Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis, Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. (Second revised ed. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company Inc., 1961) 24

hungry, I make breakfast, I lack a sense of purpose, so I create one. There is an entirely physical ritual side to Miller's work that means nothing at all if we cannot see or appreciate the layered narrative story that makes putting this all into being so necessary. We can compare his written and spoken story with ancient myth and modes of morality transference of the like, stripping away specific gods and leaving us with a pattern. That pattern is humanity's answer to feelings of cosmic dread, death and rebirth, and all things concerning mortality.

The prominent anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes ritual as "better conceived as performances in which individuals negotiate their participation."¹⁰ Historian Thomas Boogaart further writes that "the primary function of most medieval rituals was to expose not only the links between the sacred and the profane, but to invoke the sacred immanent in the material world to mend human problems".¹¹ I see clearly here the connection between physical action and the warding off of some unspeakable ether, a human thing, and something other, out there, different but of the same stuff. This implies a danger lurking behind Miller's special energy. The irony in the sacred other is that it also comes from within us. Human isn't enough. So, we invent nonhuman: A sense of, "well this can't be it can it?" leads us to, "no, no this isn't it, because I've seen blah, blah, blah, or heard voices from so and so." The human equation is perhaps the most difficult to solve, if we assume it to even be solvable, and along the way this creates a trail of discarded solutions or attempts, that like a mathematical proof the size of history, shows us our work. In his work on comparative mythology Joseph Campbell explains that this search for eternal life or meaning often comes from within us, that within our own imaginations we are

¹⁰ Boogaart, Thomas A., *Evolution of a Communal Milieu: an Ethnogeography of Late Medieval Bruges* (Ann Arbor, MI: Bell & Howell Company, 2000), 321

¹¹ Boogaart, Thomas A. *Evolution of a Communal Milieu: an Ethnogeography of Late Medieval Bruges*. 327

driven to create our very own Eden.¹² Outside is full of action and inside is constant reaction where thoughts are responses to the physical world, and the ideas we create within our imaginations relate to how we feel about the input we receive. Tales of morality and characters and Edens serve as stomach acid for the individual to break down the nutrition of the physical world and start to put the vitamins and amino acids where they need to go, sorting out how we feel about things and ourselves by bouncing them off these formulas. One might ask a question such as, “am I doing the right thing here? Does this make me a bad person?” and immediately, without thinking too hard, one begins to compare one’s situation to that of characters like Darth Vader, or Satan, or Baal, or Spider-Man.

One prominent example of this kind of mythic storytelling is the Bible. At its core, the Bible is a system of stories that offer poignant and specific tales of morality for one to live one’s life in accordance with. Jesus himself serves as a hero archetype who does good, practices selfless sacrifice, forgives, and performs miracles. People understood that it was not possible to be Jesus, yet by being that beacon of sacred actions, his figure consistently offered a reliable source of comparable judgement. Many myths offer these flashlights in the dark illuminating the depths of our character, and others aim to shed light on more cosmic questions of life and death. One of the strongest underlying systems of mythic story, Gaster notes, revolves around the spring crop season and the death of crops in the winter months.¹³ These stories revolve around a god, overcoming or conquering death, metaphorically or literally, to be reborn anew as something entirely different. This longing for a way to jump over the gap of death and onto greener pastures symbolizes a desire to do more, be better, create, change, grow, all things that imply a need to no longer be whatever one is currently. Gaster notes the utility of these stories: “Man, though he desperately needs bread, does not live by bread alone, but longs for a new life, a new age, with young gods, not stained by the deaths and impurities of the past.”¹⁴ We constantly compare ourselves to villains and

¹² Sartore, Richard L. *Joseph Campbell on Myth & Mythology*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America Inc., 1994), 1-107

¹³ Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis, Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 9

¹⁴ Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis, Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 11

heroes so that we can determine how we want to change when our self-imposed winter gives way to our spring Eden. For this reason, I conclude that this source of energy is reliant on the nature of reflection, comparison, and transformation, and changing these variables will yield different states of that energy, which Miller does frequently.

Metaphysical transformation is the crux of all myth and especially that of Tristan B Miller. We see within this myth that the Gate Ghost has qualities to be admired and avoided, as does the Prime. It seems that every side character gives rise to the opportunity to examine another aspect or personality trait Miller holds within himself. The power of physical ritual literally brings about winter and spring, the new crop being a hopefully changed man, rid of whatever was denying him entrance into his next level of constructed paradise. I will classify the earthly Tristan B Miller himself as a shaman of sorts, in that he "...through psychological crisis, has gained a certain power of his own." to quote Richard L. Sartore. Everything gained is internal, and all power comes from within, based on personal navigations, not anything dictated by another entity. The High Priest, on the other hand, gets his power from the Gate Ghost proper, making him fall into the category of a traditional priest or herald type character. On the surface, these distinctions allow Miller to have these characters perform different tasks or operations that remain off limits to the others. If we examine this further, we see that the role of the shaman is more burdensome, and the role of the priest is one of subservience. Some part of Miller needs to have total control and this part can be argued as the central self of Miller. Meanwhile, another part still wishes to go along for the ride, tailing someone else's efforts and power. This side emerges in the sad husk that is the High Priest, all pomp, and no real substance. Saint Cigon, I believe, takes on a unique role, one that I find matches what is described by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep as the "psychopompoi," which is essentially a guide for souls into the afterworld.¹⁵ This entity has a sense of detachment, no true loyalties, and vast amounts of freedom, yet no real sense of belonging. Saint Cigon seems to represent an inability to connect beyond surface level in Miller's everyday life, and by examining the Saint's behavior or seeing

¹⁵ Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 155

how things play out for him in stories, Miller can better understand himself socially, or even indulge in the freeing nature of “the nobody.”

The Gate Ghost himself is the closest entity we have to a traditional god figure within this constructed myth. A man of origin, power, who wields death like a whip, and is ever-present. The Gate Ghost as he is depicted, parallels a creature specific to the Tolai of Papua New Guinea, referred to as a Tubuan, or a “divine boogeyman, the representation of a primal fear, meant to be overcome.”¹⁶ In the metaphysical story, the Gate Ghost obtains his power by siphoning off energies from other versions of himself, leading us to believe that he has no inherent power to begin with, other than perhaps the ability to take it from others. Campbell's description of a god comes to mind: “a god isn't a source, but is a vehicle for energies.”¹⁷ We should categorize the Gate Ghost as such a figure within this file. The Gate Ghost is literally a vessel for energies, but also is a vehicle for all of Miller's negative feelings and ideas about himself, a physical manifestation of everything deemed undesirable. If this whole myth were a laboratory for self-experimentation and observation, then the Gate Ghost is the refrigerator where all the contagion is housed, providing a sterile space within which to view one's shortcomings. Based on this line of thinking, I strongly recommend that all attempts to create this energy use more than one individual, as well as a chargeable object. We see that Miller has forged an embodiment of sin, a devil, a Vader, a Mum-Ra, to act as a metaphysical recycling bin as he shaves off pieces of himself in an effort to sculpt his way into that previously mentioned “Eden.” It is unclear what the half-life of these pieces is, and what sort of radiation they give off.

All these public personae inhabit a world of infinite possibility. Uncountable representations of Miller give way to uncountable methods of self-examination. On one level, the idea of infinite possibility creates just that: a limitless number of options, myths, and scenarios to play around in. On the other hand, the idea of infinite possibility and option serves as a safety blanket for Miller's cosmic dread. The idea

¹⁶ Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. 82

¹⁷ Sartore, Richard L. *Joseph Campbell on Myth & Mythology*. 53

that there is only one story, and then the book is finished, is horrifying for Miller, so we see him forging his own eternity by opening the door spiritually for book after book after book. I keep recalling what he said during our interview: “I know it’s not real, I mean it wasn’t and I needed it to be so now it is.” That is, essentially, what all myth is, all religion, all stories. They are a fabrication within, to cope with and understand the outer. Like all those dreaming of heaven, or all the infinite cities described to distract and tease the mind of a great Khan,¹⁸ Miller found a way for there to be more than what essentially “is” in hopes that by doing so, it will finally be enough. It is true that Miller uses this energy selfishly. I am beginning to believe that he cannot live without it.

Comparing such a creature and its habits to religion was one variable of this lab exercise. The other is to try to understand its relationship with science fiction and myth, and to see where there is overlap. As with learning from historical practical employment of religion, I can gain insight from the impact of such stories of fantasy. I begin to uncover hidden parts of the equation that are crucial to get right. In addition to religion and ritualistic practice, Miller’s work owes many of its influences to the realm of science fiction. The connection to time travel and multidimensional explorations of science fiction books and movies is undeniable. Miller cites some of his greatest influences as being science fiction book cover art, 1950s pulp movies, and comic books. As I analyze these influences and specific characters he draws from, I can better predict his next move and anticipate his behavior, as well as replicate the conditions of the experiment more closely. In Miller’s characters we see not only messianic and Luciferian motifs, but also shades of space scoundrels, scientific geniuses, hive-mind entities, ghosts, lone gunslingers, wannabe gods, and average working-class prophets. If a member of the public were to encounter Miller on any street corner, Miller would revel in the act of that individual attempting to analyze the costumed man in front of them. Is he some sort of Ghostbuster, spaceship pilot, fugitive from a maximum-security solar prison, or government entity designated to travel through time and clean up messes? All these initial thoughts are what Miller aims to evoke through visual cues and physical

¹⁸ Calvino, Italo, and William Weaver. *Invisible Cities*. (London: Vintage Digital, 2010), 1-176

relationships. If our theoretical civilian were reminded in that moment of such stories and characters, then they would also be reminded of the rich context and backgrounds of those characters: such is the rule of art, and of any visual narrative. The energy that emanates from any of Miller's costumes is a complex mélange of science fiction history and the ideas explored within it. As mentioned previously, I postulate that a main catalyst for Miller's work is a fear of the afterlife in all its potential forms. We can use this facet as a point of analysis when referring to science fiction influence and theology, as this is the big question Miller works to find an answer for. His call to action.

A topic frequently considered within science fiction is human consciousness and modes of afterlife or eternity. Theological scholar James McGrath highlights computer uploading, replicant bodies, or conversion of soul energy among the various examples of science fiction afterlives.¹⁹ It is important to note that Miller came to his thesis on eternal comfort independently of any specific text, yet his work is centered on central pillars of mythic sci-fi thought. I find it hopeful for my theory, that McGrath unknowingly sums up Miller's central tenet in asking, "if there are an infinite number of parallel universes, so that there is always a version of you existing somewhere, would that not comfort you in the same way that hope for conscious ongoing existence would?"²⁰ Here we see an applicable example, the most visibly so, of science fiction posing questions concerning the human condition. We know that human beings seek answers to life and meaning for death. Many turn to religion for such answers, while as validly some, too, may turn their devotion to science fiction notions. Certainly Miller is doing just that, but adding the layer of sculptural performance art on top. Is his constructed sci-fi fantasy any less real than a religion, and does it possess the same power to move people and change lives, or the power to influence the physical world he inhabits?

Human beings subscribe to religions for a plethora of reasons, among which is undoubtedly an

¹⁹ McGrath, James F. *Theology and Science Fiction*. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 56

²⁰ McGrath, James F. *Theology and Science Fiction*. 56

affection for the morality tales postulated within sacred stories. “I am this because I agree with this, and I am not that, because I do not agree with that.” Such a statement is often what separates many religious followers from one religion to another and the same can be said for fandoms, as McGrath suggests.²¹ By watching a Miller performance, or purchasing a figure or toy, or text or t-shirt, one inherently subscribes to the morals put forth in the tale of the “First Lapper’s Story” and others, and perpetuates the reaction. Such morals are highlighted in Miller’s “Edicts, Code, Cycular Weft.”²² Subjectivity, creative drives, authorship or synthesis, all complex parts of an artistic whole, can then be compared to those same aspects, and more, that provide the basic underlying structures of religion and science fiction narratives. We see that Miller, religious practitioners, and science fiction writers or indulgers are all scratching at the same thing. All channeling the same energy.

Specifically, Miller is a performing artist and sculptor, who has a special relationship with objects. This man could have been anything, so why would he choose this vocation? What is it about the title of artist and its relationship to objects that gives Miller something he could not get anywhere else? Is this question the key to answering how it is that Miller alone has access to this energy source? As I research his earlier work, I see that he has a reverence for objects of power, or at least those he perceives to have power. Whether or not he himself imbued them with such is unclear, but I am starting to consider that as a possibility. These physical manifestations of didactic objects in Miller’s work, and science fiction, share DNA with art and performance sculpture. McDannell states that, “people look for physical manifestations of the divine”, and that “people need to have an element of enchantment in their lives that mystifies fundamental social relationships.”²³ This, of course, refers to a need to represent the nonphysical in a material way. We see this desire to comprehend the relationship between the body and objects often

²¹ McGrath, James F. *Theology and Science Fiction*. 83

²² Miller, Tristan B. *Edicts, Code, Cycular Weft*. (Springfield MO, ORION Press 2019), N.P

²³ McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. 7,9

manifest itself through the hands, and the act of making or creating. By controlling the physical manifestations of ideas, the specific stories, and morals within them can be placed onto groups of followers, or in our case gallery-goers. A sculpture, a painting of Mary, an action figure; all hold within them a rich codex of information that was present in Miller's treatment of objects from the very beginning. It is my conclusion that Miller has tapped directly into a production pipeline of ideas by living as an artist in this reality. This lifestyle allows him to charge objects and distribute them and their infectious ideas to a mass audience. Sculpture, for him, is a missionary activity.

Miller employs found objects in all his works, claiming that they have more to say, more of a soul than objects Miller fabricates by hand. Miller uses aesthetics and specific action to bring the potential energy of objects to a boil, using interaction as a processing method; as McDannell notes, "objects become meaningful within specific patterns of relationships."²⁴ For the purposes of this file, in an attempt to establish a methodology, we can suppose that objects within Miller's case gain energy and meaning through their roles, lives, and relationships as physical objects in a material world across time. McDannell writes about relics and altars and paintings and little statues, and that somehow a human being can have a relationship with fragments of the divine through a physical relationship with an object that is meant to represent the divine. Within this notion is one of the clearest definitions of sculpture, if we do not limit the energy of the object to be strictly religious, but instead consider it to be more of the authorial intent of the artist.

There are, however, other ways in which objects can obtain what McDannell terms an "affecting presence."²⁵ Among these are declarations from someone of power, acts of god, ritual gestures, and incorporation into domestic life.²⁶ In the case of art, the artist is the one bestowing importance to an

²⁴ McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. 4

²⁵ McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. 18

²⁶ McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. 19

object; this thought is usually attributed to the power of artistic authorship, the idea that the artist is divine in celebrity nature, and thus can bestow such powers on objects. Miller acts as a herald for objects and their powers, not bestowing upon them any kind of gift, but merely redirecting them for his desired purposes. Within this context, it makes perfect sense for Miller to wear the mask of an artist in his base form. His choosing to be an artist can lead us to conclude that the base form of Miller, shows a predisposed affection to objects, instead of human beings. If Miller were interested in affecting the bodies and lives of human beings, his work would be a higher threat to the public at large. As it stands, he would then be categorized in a neutral position on the ORION security scale, so long as he maintains control of his objects.

McDannell states, “Through ritual and gesture ‘sacraments,’ some energy is put into objects.”²⁷ In terms of non-object-based performance work, I offer that we dissect Miller’s rituals as sacraments or any other ritual of religion. The liturgical ritual of donning priestly vestment, for example, is comparable to the suit donning that Miller performs. When he puts on a suit to become another character, he is channeling the energy and power associated with that character, and, more indirectly, the power from the untapped pre-cosmogonic mode. One such piece of costume for Miller is an ancient protection symbol emblazoned on a bandana: the symbol is that used by early Gate Walkers to promote safe passage through the first rifts in dimensions. The story suggests that through ritual, the scrap of fabric is imbued with the ability to protect, using good tidings and well wishes as energy. This object and message behind it are comparable to the act of being “invested” with a scapular. Alone, the fabric is just material, but the narrative aura surrounding it gives the garment immense power only to those who believe. Each piece of costuming for Miller has a specific purpose within the narrative, much like the scarf, and therefore each has significant meaning, as objects involved with ritual rites of passage.²⁸

²⁷ McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. 19

²⁸ McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. 39

As Sartore notes in his study of Joseph Campbell, “The main theme of ritual is the linking of the individual to a larger morphological structure than that of his own physical body.”²⁹ By grafting myth and narrative onto physical space and actions, the internal or sacred idea is paired directly with the outer and physical, fostering a conversation between both. This act is essentially fusing the supernatural onto the natural, so that higher ideas become tangible things that can be experienced. If this man and his cult can indeed bestow supernatural energy onto objects of our world, surely that is cause for concern. The lab team is poring over any scrap of Miller matter they can obtain, although he leaves little flotsam behind. It is now undeniably clear to me that Miller has found a way to tap into this supernatural animating force as usable energy.

Historically, this sort of ritual connecting the cosmic to the mundane was public, and would take the form of processions, marriage rites, Corpus Christi plays, and rituals of a proxy embryonic state. The idea was once held that the community at large was a body full of its parts and ailments and intricacies.³⁰ This communal body had an order much the same as one’s personal body. This connection of community body (larger) to human body (smaller) constantly reinforced the relationship between “cosmic order” and “the mundane.”³¹ The idea was that rituals reorient the person into this realm of the myth or the narrative, while they are still in a painfully familiar place. Once the show was over, the morality tales and lessons learned still stuck around. The crux of performing ritual in a public space, or mashing any two things together really, is to draw parallels between the two. Paintings of Corpus Christi plays and processions did this layering of parallels. The actual plays and processions themselves were so popular because they did just that in physical space.³² Miller is doing this in the public sphere, seemingly not to imbue the lives

²⁹ Sartore, Richard L. *Joseph Campbell on Myth & Mythology*. 37

³⁰ James, Mervyn. "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town." (*Past & Present*, no. 98, 1983), 3-29. Accessed April 6, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/650687.

³¹ James, Mervyn. "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town."

³² Kirkland-Ives, Mitzi. *In the Footsteps of Christ: Hans Memlings Passion Narratives and the Devotional Imagination in the Early Modern Netherlands*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013). 1-212

of the public with the holy, but to use the lives of the public, to fuel the holy, the transition, the ritual, the passage of the object. As far as our methodology is concerned, public trials may be unavoidable.

Christianity traditions offer up ways to examine character through ritual, but in a prescribed manner that is less centrally focused or selfishly directed. Some other cultures use ritual in a very self-focused manner. It is all about the personal journey absent of the church or some overarching deity. We can overgeneralize most ritual into the category of “transition.” If every ritual is active myth, shaping understanding of reality through internal means, we can assume that the desired outcome is to come out the other side of the examination different in some way from before. We compare to draw conclusions and to draw conclusions is to form an opinion. Therefore, every formulation of a new opinion is a transition, considering that transitions can also be physical. Luke Skywalker transitions into a confident hero, Bruce Wayne into the strength he lacked as a child, the entity he wishes he had that night in crime alley. The spaces in between these moments or snapshots of character are inherently where we find our stories.

These are liminal spaces, and much like transitions they can be tangible and metaphysical. Historian Edward Muir describes such spaces as doorways, or ceremonies, or pathways, or any other number of physical manifestations of ritual.³³ The moments of high strangeness, or what we can describe as moments of forced parallels, are all liminal. Miller spends years at a time in a liminal space, evolving from the Gate Ghost to the Prime. Or he spends as little time as it takes to pull on and off a costume. The overall idea is that during these spaces of time, Miller is carrying out some state of transition, which we have established as a necessary component of creating this new energy.

The sort of ritual Miller practices seems to fit the model put forth by van Gennep, following the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation.³⁴ By donning strange suits and enacting states of odd

³³ Muir, Edward. *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-291

³⁴ Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. 83

behavior, Miller separates himself from the ordinary: what van Gennep refers to as Collective Differentiation.³⁵ The state of transition is the most complex and internal portion of the process. A community can bring about a transition or force it upon someone, but to truly cross a liminal gap, it must be done willingly and from the inside. Gaster describes this transitional state in detail while referring to rituals of other cultures in the process. The first stage is that of Mortification, or suspended animation, “the old me comes to a close.”³⁶ Miller does this often literally by submerging himself in tanks of liquid or putting on an elaborate costume, the donning of which takes time and physical strain.

The second of Gaster’s stages is one of Purgation, where the change is heavily contemplated and solidified into an idea.³⁷ Miller often considers at length the bad qualities he will shed upon the completion of the transitional process while in this stage. Third comes the state of Invigoration, a sense of rebuilding and becoming the new version, throwing out the old and establishing the new.³⁸ The final stage of a transitional saga is the Jubilation stage.³⁹ This stage occurs after the liminal space has been crossed, and the new version of the participant goes on to exist as this fully formed entity, living out the lessons learned during the rigorous transition ritual.

These rituals of transition are usually reserved for large events in life, such as being welcomed into adulthood or getting married. However, Miller believes that we face these rituals with virtually every decision we make, and that in the Purgation stage an entirely new reality is formed around the new individual, and the old one remains as a branch reality. Miller holds the belief that one can transition throughout life, but all one’s past selves and all one’s possible future selves make up one’s collective eternity. Within that infinite world is where his myth plays out. This may signal the secret to the infinite nature of his source.

³⁵ Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. 74

³⁶ Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis, Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 26

³⁷ Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis, Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 27

³⁸ Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis, Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 28

³⁹ Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis, Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 29

All myth is constructed to be didactic in some way, and that implies an audience. Which in turn implies a desire to transfer something to that audience. Miller would argue that his primary audience is himself, but he does hope to reach others in a secondary manner so they may find his construction methods useful in their own lives, but I propose that there may be a hidden agenda. Diller describes medieval plays and the idea of “straddling,” in which the audience must feel like the myth is a part of their lives and that they, too, have an active role in the myth.⁴⁰ To incorporate myth into their lives, viewers must be able to fully digest some portion of it, and spit it back out covered in their own stomach juices. This traditionally is what people have done with sacred objects. A crucifix is a physical manifestation of an individual's relationship to God. We find—yet again in much the same way—that by possessing an action figure of the Gate Ghost and the Prime, one can take them and their stories into one's home, one's mundane life, and start to formulate a relationship to them and their lessons.

Sacred objects are vessels for the holy, or those grand mythic ideas we think will help us solve our equations. It is my firm belief that sacredness is assigned by human beings and nothing else, meaning it is entirely fabricated and there is no measurable magic power. However, the magic does not have to be real, the effect it has on the physical world is scientifically observable. Pilgrimages are made, transitions occur, wars are fought, lives are changed. Not over the physical magic of these objects, but over the ideas that they represent, like the scarf of protection in the Gate Walker story. Historian Charles Zika brings up historical instances of the ways sacred objects had direct impact on communities and their politics.⁴¹ We see that it does not matter if the church official hierarchy believed an object was sacred. If the common people attached to the idea of its power, then that belief was the origin of that power. Zika touches on an

⁴⁰ Diller, Hans-Juergen. *Theatrical Pragmatics: The Actor-Audience Relationship from the Mystery Cycles to the Early Tudor Comedies*. (Comparative Drama, 1989), 156-165.

⁴¹ Zika, Charles. "Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany." (*Past & Present*, no. 118 1988), 25-64. Accessed April 6, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/650830.

interesting concept of this notion of sacredness as currency, how something can be more or less sacred than the next thing.⁴² This idea enforces the notion that sacredness itself is attributed to objects based on the amount of metaphysical information they can give us on our transitional journeys and reinforces the idea that Miller may be using or storing sacredness as energy. If the cross did not remind a Christian of sacrifice, and overcoming pain for love, and it did not teach them about persecution and torture, it would be a useless symbol. But we see that sacred objects act as quick keyboard shortcuts to things we hold dear about our myths. Sacred objects are important for incorporating myth into physical lived reality. They are the link, the one point where the mythic world feels so close and real that it practically radiates. That is where objects get their power. The Gate Ghost is using this power for the good of himself, the Prime, presumably for the good of others, and Miller somewhere in between. This neutrality leaves his intentions not only undefined but leaves open the possibility for him to choose a side or be persuaded either way. The possibility that Miller may use his harnessed energy for the purposes of the Gate Ghost, or develop an even worse arc of character, is why ORION must pay such particular attention to his narrative specifically.

We can analyze the way that these three entities utilize sacred objects in three distinct ways. The first of which is their use of costume. By donning elaborate outfits, they not only feel closer to the character, and by proxy their values, but they signal that the character is on a pilgrimage. The act of wearing or not wearing a specific thing, while performing or not performing specific tasks, is the central marker of being one on a pilgrimage.⁴³ Each costume relays internal information about a character externally. The act of putting on the character is the same act as inheriting their power, much the same way a priest shows his relationship to god by wearing robes. The Gate Ghost exhibits his awesome power with hardware and technology strapped to his body. A physical symbol of the acts of taking or extracting

⁴² Zika, Charles. "Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany."

⁴³ Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis, Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 185

an objective force grafted to the body. Under the suit, everyone knows that it is Tristan B Miller, but it does not matter, because in that moment, he looks like the Gate Ghost, and therefore he *is* the Gate Ghost and holds within him his power. Campbell states that wearing the mask of god does indeed grant one the power that the image of god conjures up.⁴⁴ The suits also act as containers or locations that house the liminal space within which Miller can carry out the various stages of transition. Oftentimes, the suit itself has no power until after a ritual is complete. This sort of assignment of sacredness is seen throughout history as the viewer associates the object with an occurrence and an idea referring to the parallel act of comparing, noted earlier in terms of mundane spaces.

The second objects are those special tools, or scepters, or other physical McGuffin items that become charged through ritual imbuelement. Anakin Skywalker's lightsaber, the Matrix of Leadership, the Sword of Omens, Monstrances, and Crosiers all radiate power. The Lightsaber itself is undeniably powerful yes, but within it is the power to redeem a father, unite a galaxy, spark hope, teach legacy, give purpose, and we see and feel all these things the same way the characters within the myth do. Once again, the objects only serve as vessels for powerful formulas we use to break down our experience and fuel our transition. Miller uses gauntlets, staves, gaskets, containers, crystals, and crucifix-like objects to signify character traits, morality, story arcs, and entire narratives to a visual audience. Even if the materials used are household junk, once assembled they vibrate to life with energy of some kind, and speak to the true source of mythic power—a power this man wields unchecked.

Miller does not bring outside people into his stories. There will never be anyone other than Miller who does anything within his narrative. It is always Tristan B Miller as something else. This makes it rather hard for the audience to find their way into the myth. Miller sees the myth as something long written as history: you can't go there, you can't place yourself in it, but you can still ask yourself how you would have fit in. Viewers can take home playsets of "the First Gate Crossing" and have a glow-in-the-dark resin statue of his eternal evilness, the Gate Ghost, right on their desk. Unlike the other

⁴⁴ Sartore, Richard L. *Joseph Campbell on Myth & Mythology*. 25

manifestations of the sacred listed before, these toys and consumable products, allow for personal expansion past initial transference. The statue itself holds all the power the staff or the gauntlet does, but by bringing it home and into one's personal life, one now enacts upon it the myth, daily. We see historically how ritual encroaches on the lived-in spaces of people's lives, but once the procession is over, these personal objects constantly have a conversation with their owner. Much like how the central crux of a person persists through transitional phases, so to do sacred objects, spilling out power, filling back up again with new power, shifting their place in conscious space, never ceasing to vibrate until they stop being perceived entirely. Sacred objects are truly geometry that gains energy from visual stimulation. The point of concern for objects produced or distributed by Miller is that one's relationship with the object is not private. The Miller collective will always be able to draw on that relationship for energy and power, using the public like a battery.

In an art context, the viewer has a relationship with the object considered the work. This is the fundamental relationship at the hub of art consumption.⁴⁵ This notion is complicated when we start changing up variables, like making the work of art a person, or time, or a thought, or the absence of a work at all. The shared energy a person has with a religious altar within a home can generally be accepted as private,⁴⁶ and we see how such a private interaction with the perceptibly divine changes both parties in the equation. The same can be said about performance sculpture to a degree. The beginnings of modern performance art take root in the exploration of the spaces and definitions between public and private space, as exemplified by sculptors such as Chris Burden and Vito Acconci.⁴⁷ This indicates that Miller's choice of vocation also supports my theory that juxtaposition is a key ingredient in the success of this experiment.

⁴⁵ Ward, Frazer. *No Innocent Bystanders Performance Art and Audience*. (Hanover, N. H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), 6

⁴⁶ Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. 34

⁴⁷ Frazer Ward, *No Innocent Bystanders Performance Art and Audience*, 18.

Miller is not asking his audience to stop him or trying to show them the limits of the human body by encasing himself in tanks; he is confronting them abruptly with the unusual. A normal day on the street takes a turn for the off-putting when suddenly a man in a space suit runs past, dripping in slime and leaving behind a trail of papers with symbols written on them. Do you laugh, do you believe what you have just witnessed, or do you investigate, and how does that experience shape your worldview, if at all? All these questions are brought up rather quickly with each public encounter, and therefore it is the visual choices and location decisions, and all the other minute details within the making of a performance, that lead the viewer into a desired response.

The act of performing his narrative in a public space makes Miller's private public, and in so doing, like religious missionaries, he spreads his word or truth. Miller does not want to convert others to his pseudo-religion, as no one else can participate except another Tristan B Miller. In this way a section of his private being will always remain blocked to the perceiving public, yet at the same time he shares his existence with an infinite number of himself. Each individual viewer, however, can engage with the morals and ideals of his narrative within their own lives, and Miller will always have a wire hooked directly into that relationship.

A main concept within performance work is the treatment of body as subject matter and material. As Frazer Ward notes regarding performance art, "Repetition makes you the object and as you meditate inward you lose your selfness."⁴⁸ Such a statement can be related to the ideas of ritual cultures, touched upon previously, that repetition, or performance itself, can be reinterpreted as a ritual-framing device, while the loss of the self or inward reflection directly correlates to the concept of *Regressus ad Uterum*, going back to an energy-rich mode of existence before birth. Testing the limits of the body, pushing boundaries of consent, examining the idea of the self, and dissecting one's relationship to space or property are all readily available examples of the body in performance work. There exist parallels between many performances by artists and religious rituals or actions like fasting, pilgrimages, depictions

⁴⁸ Ward, Frazer. *No Innocent Bystanders Performance Art and Audience*. 65

of the passion of Christ and crucifixion, and creation of golems. Most artists are like Miller in a way, also missionaries and priests within their own religion of values, and us, outside their congregation.

Final Entry:

The task with which I am occupied at most hours of the night is the complete analysis of the most recent ritual of Tristan B Miller. The elaborate opera consists of four distinct scenes, the first of which has been growing beneath our feet for several months. One of Miller's entities has allegedly bestowed glowing crystals upon several carefully chosen civilians. These civilians were instructed to keep these crystals on their persons for a given length of time and change nothing about the way they live. For months, these crystals soaked up life events, emotions, boredom, dread, skin, sweat, voices. This is the most bold and blatant mode of vampiric behavior we have seen from Miller yet. He is becoming fearless, or perhaps he is so bold because he has nothing left to lose. The crystals are to be brought to the gallery space by the civilians and placed into a specifically designed harnessing chamber on a suit in the center of the room. Once all five crystals are in their place, the suit will become active, and grant the Gate Ghost the ability to snap into realities with a mere thought. The crystals themselves glow in the dark, highlighting their stored potential energy, and expressing outwardly their inner consciousness. As the civilian grafts life onto the crystal, the crystal and its particles literally radiate onto the holder. We see here the introduction of a mode of energy previously downplayed in Miller's work, an energy in the form of trust: Trusting that the crystal will be imbued with power and not destroyed, or not given back at all. The tickling edge of chaos is a gamble that skyrockets the stock of nutrition from the crystals for the Gate Ghost and his uses. These crystals serve as the ultimate form of charged object, a craft the cult has seemingly perfected.

The containment units on the suit are themselves the culmination of Miller's admiration for containers of all varieties. A container traditionally serves two purposes, one of which is to protect its contents from the outside world; the second, and far more tantalizing purpose, is the notion that such an item protects the world from its internal contents. Most containers (like briefcases, which make frequent

appearances in Miller's myth) are understood to be of the leather, plastic, or metal variety, with a plethora of sealing fixtures or clasp mechanisms. When one possesses a briefcase or container, a unique relationship with the object is immediately present, a momentary alignment of mutual purpose: to hold, transport, be held, and be transported. This connection can be compounded with the material of the case itself. Leather mirroring skin, organs, thoughts, and inner workings, while plastic and metal directly oppose warmth of a hand, alienating the contents from the person. Interesting things start to become apparent when we rearrange these relationships. What of an organ in a metal box, or a greasy machine housed in a warped leather bag? What is the human relationship to a case full of protective layers and lights and wires, and to a case with handmade brass fixings that need constant maintenance?

Being contained or placed in a space away from the other implies a film of importance, that whatever is chosen to be within this closed-off space is somehow more special than any other object. We can also play with that space and prescribe value to objects of little worth, or put nothing in the space at all, leaving its potential vacant. Finally, one can transform the definition of a container to encompass human bodies, particles, rooms, time specific events, or memories, or any form of portable containment method that has direct relation to the human body. Here the containment units protect the crystals, protect the viewer from the crystals, harness their power, are eventually deteriorated by this act, and will ultimately fail to protect either. For now, however, they serve the purpose of storing energy and the collective lives of five individuals over the course of two months, a truly unquantifiable measurement. These crystals are rosaries; bread wafers turned bodies, kryptonite, lit candles, and toxic waste. These crystals represent the compression of E.C.O.s into diamond form.

Towering over the edges of the room there stand four telephone poles, each leaning as if taking a breath, exhausted by the endeavor of keeping upright. Each pole has a layer of feathers; a down made up of wanted posters and stapled flyers, in overwhelming quantities. Each flyer represents one of the Miller Collective and special events in the Gate Ghost saga. These poles are not attached to anything other than one another, yet they still feel plugged in to a power system, just as alive and humming as any telephone pole, perhaps even more so.

Miller has always used the language of both religious objects of power and literal objects that use or channel power, such as electrical units and telephone poles. Within the everyday drudgery of the average citizen, human beings are in frequent contact with these sorts of objects, yet many grasp little understanding of their inner workings. How does a cell phone work, a landline, electricity, or radio waves? Society counts on these energies to be here for us like a modern magic, and we cover them in specifically designed containers where the protection is twofold. These containers and forms highlight the duality of our relationship with power and magic. The telephone pole transports signals from one place to another, representing travel and connectivity. However, one telephone pole alone cannot make this instantaneous phenomenon happen. It takes millions of poles at once, acting in tandem, to pull off such a feat. This motif directly correlates to Miller's preferred mode of eternity through multidimensional doppelgangers.

Telephone poles as objects are fascinating. We use them to communicate, literally, as well as to communicate through their surfaces. Long held is the tradition of posting flyers and pamphlets to the sides of poles. There is an obvious relationship between the movement of ideas happening in the wires above and the face-to-face communication of the flyers below, leaving telephone poles as one the most energetically charged objects of idea transference on earth. Flyers and other objects make messages real and part of the physical environment: the electrical intangible messages are the sacred, the rusty nails and paper the secular.

The silhouette of these objects is undeniably like that of a crucifix, and the Gate Ghost uses this symbol in much the same way. For the Gate Ghost the pole represents the sacrifice of the many for the purpose of the one, the communal effort to achieve transference. The shape is humanlike, with arms and a head and elongated torso. The Ghost uses humans as his energy source, and this is highlighted in this symbol. Telephone poles are often left standing, looming over landscapes when humans leave an area, serving as watchers and reminders of a long-gone human presence. If all the wires were cut, the network of poles would still have a conversation with one another. They are placed where they are manually and intensively, and then they live a life alone, fading into a network as just another object among many,

when every pole is uniquely different. It is through researching the Gate Ghost that we see how comparable telephone poles are to the human condition.

The Ghost does indeed use energy previously untapped, discovering new ways of fueling endeavors that are outside the realm of known science, this I now know. He uses them for selfish means. I am tasked with observing and reverse-engineering these processes for the purpose of ORION. It is to my greatest confusion as to why at this event, ORION crates housing previously confiscated Gate Ghost matter were on full display. At some point this creature not only knew about my mission, but guided it forward, manipulating me along the way. In this ultimate display of control, Miller has revealed that he was using my thoughts and writings, as well as all others of the community, as fuel. My experiment was his. Churning up conversation to build a myth, like fungus with a life of its own that he could cut from and enjoy at any time. All our research, our notes, our experiments, only gave his myth strength, and imbued it with power much the way a village gives power to a rock or drop of sacred blood. That is why these crates of matter from this ongoing saga are here among the telephone poles, not unlike the crystals. They are not mere objects: they are batteries to propel the Ghost to his ultimate destination.

Bibliography

- Boogaart, Thomas A. *Evolution of a Communal Milieu: an Ethnogeography of Late Medieval Bruges 1280-1349*. Ann Arbor, MI: Bell & Howell Company, 2000.
- Calvino, Italo, and William Weaver. *Invisible Cities*. London: Vintage Digital, 2010.
- Diller, Hans-Jürgen. "Theatrical Pragmatics: The Actor-Audience Relationship from the Mystery Cycles to the Early Tudor Comedies." *Comparative Drama* 23:2 (Summer, 1989): 156-165.
- Eliade, Mircea, and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. New York: Continuum, 1992.
- Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis, Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 2nd rev. ed. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company Inc., 1961.
- Genep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- James, Mervyn. "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town." *Past & Present*, 98 (1983): 3-29. Accessed April 6, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/650687.
- Kirkland-Ives, Mitzi. *In the Footsteps of Christ: Hans Memling's Passion Narratives and the Devotional Imagination in the Early Modern Netherlands*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.
- McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- McGrath, James F. *Theology and Science Fiction*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016.
- Miller, Tristan B. *Edicts, Code, Cycular Weft*. Springfield, MO: ORION Press, 2019.
- Miller, Tristan B. *First Lappers Story*. Springfield, MO: ORION Press, October 2019.
- Muir, Edward. *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Plate, S. Brent. *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Sartore, Richard L. *Joseph Campbell on Myth & Mythology*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America Inc., 1994.

Ward, Frazer. *No Innocent Bystanders Performance Art and Audience*. Hanover, N. H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2012.

Zika, Charles. "Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany." *Past & Present*, no. 118, (1988): 25-64. Accessed April 6, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/650830.



Figure 1 Saint Cigon, 2020, digital photography



Figure 2 Gate Ghost Sighting, 2019, digital photography



Figure 3 Gate Ghost Cultist, 2018, digital photography



Figure 4 High Priest Altar, 2020, resin, carpet, cotton batting, railway stones, plastic



Figure 5 Suit Containment Unit 1, 2021, metal, fabric, class 4 energy



Figure 6 Suit Containment Unit 2, 2021, metal, fabric, class 37 energy



Figure 7 Suit Containment Unit 12, 2021, glass, steel, suspension fluid, base 19 energy

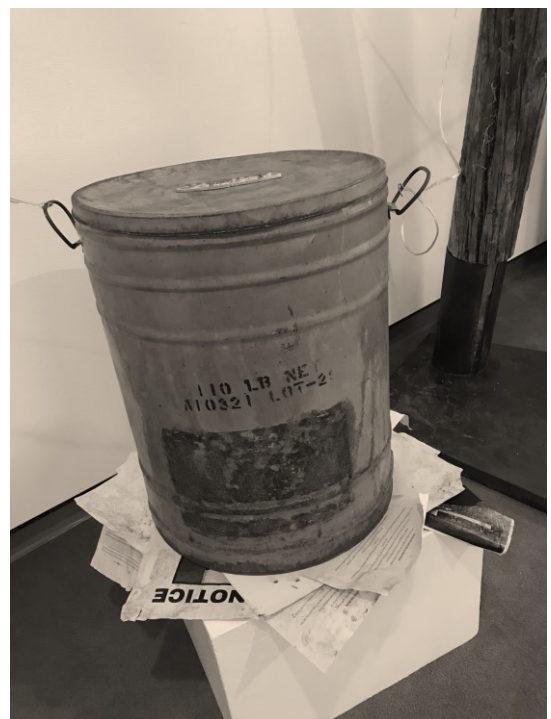


Figure 8 Containment Chamber 711A, 2021, tin, gaseous time, sublevel energy 3e3



Figure 9 Horsemen, 2021, wooden telephone pole, steel



Figure 10 Gate Ghost Wanderer, 2021, fabric, plastic, resin, magnets

Image List:

Fig. 1. Saint Cigon, 2020, digital photography. 4032x3024 pixels.

Fig. 2. Gate Ghost Sighting, 2019, digital photography. 4032x3024 pixels.

Fig. 3. Gate Ghost Cultist, 2018, digital photography. 4032x3024 pixels.

Fig. 4. High Priest Altar, 2020, resin, carpet, cotton batting, railway stones, plastic. 5x4x4 ft.

Fig. 5. Suit Containment Unit 1, 2021, metal, fabric, class 4 energy. 16x16x20 in.

Fig. 6. Suit Containment Unit 2, 2021, metal, fabric, class 37 energy. 16x16x20 in.

Fig. 7. Suit Containment Unit 12, 2021, glass, steel, suspension fluid, base 19 energy. 8x10x21 in.

Fig. 8. Containment Chamber 711A, 2021, tin, gaseous time, sublevel energy 3e3. 24x48 in.

Fig. 9. Horsemen, 2021, wooden telephone pole, steel. 2x3x10 ft.

Fig. 10. Gate Ghost Wanderer, 2021, fabric, plastic, resin, magnets. 10x12x32 in.

