

Models,
Neglect,
Obfuscation,
Prototype,
Risk,
Ruin,
Shadow World,
Speculation, Now
Speculative Hedging,
Stability,
Toxic Debt,
Trading Markets,
Uncertainty,
Unlikeness,
Verification,
Witchcraft,
Withdrawal

Edited by Vyjayanthi Venuturupalli Rao,
with Prem Krishnamurthy and Carin Kuoni

Speculation, Now Essays and Artwork

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with Prem Krishnamurthy & Carin Kuoni

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

In association with the
Vera List Center for Art and Politics, The New School

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Foreword
Carin Kuoni

Nothing on this planet remains untouched by human activity: how then should we account for our entanglement with everything in this new era of the Anthropocene? What new frameworks are possible to guide action and discourse in the face of our complex connections with living and inanimate matter? How can we develop ethical positions that are responsive and accountable to divergent, unstable and vastly different constituents in areas ranging from ecology to finance?¹

This book does not propose to answer such questions. It does propose “speculation” as a framework for action and thought in order to be constructive in this historic moment of radical change and uncertainty. A (long) moment that is shaped by two striking developments: on the one hand, the environmental effects of human activity on a planetary scale, and on the other, the onset of a global economic crisis that is changing conventional notions of monetary, creative, affective, and social economies, the distribution of and access to resources, and the definitions of systems and **infrastructure** (►102 & 265). From rising sea temperatures to melting ice caps, from the mortgage crisis in the United States to massive urban developments occurring throughout the world, from local to globally distributed production cycles in information industries and manufacturing, the changes are profound. Speculation can be held in practice as a common, not individual, pursuit of happiness.

Speculation as Methodology

Traditionally, speculation is associated with financial markets and defined as measuring **investment** (►154) **risk** (►73 & 146) against future returns. With this book, we propose speculation as a methodology that accommodates our awareness that things could be different, that there exists an alternative to analytical assessments that can be useful in navigating a world of systemic failures, new levels of complexity, and unobtainable standards. Such a methodology embraces the non-intentional contingencies of action, the unknowable, and thus the necessity to weigh and hold in balance a multitude of possibilities. As such, speculation facilitates a commitment to the imaginary as a realm of the simultaneous presence of multiple temporalities or conditions. If we are able to conceive of such a multi-imaginary, multi-temporal existence, we may find new ways of being engaged and politically effective.²

Defined in such broad terms, speculation transcends disciplines. Practitioners in every field—artists, financiers, scientists, and politicians alike—share the moment of considering the potential outcome of actions, the moment of pause or suspension, a realm of the imagination where we mentally enact possible scenarios. What if this imaginary is seen not as the moment before a decision is taken, but is sustained in the moment of action? What if the imaginary is understood as a salient part of reality? Would such an adjustment in our understanding of reality change reality itself? It would require the practitioner to prepare for recognizing potential dimensions, depths, and directions in order to give meaning to an uncertain world where parameters we imagine to be in our control increasingly elude our grasp.

Transdisciplinary by design and concept, *Speculation, Now* gathers the voices of artists, architects, designers, economists, scientists, and social thinkers who reflect on the speculative moment in their fields, ultimately affirming the significance of the imaginary. Commissioned for the book, theoretical premises and anecdotal accounts, artistic interventions and ethnographic fieldwork circumvent analytical methodologies and initiate adjustments that are open-ended and, in traditional terms, unverifiable. Therein lies one of the failures of Modernism, but also the subversive and political potential of speculation, and of recent philosophical movements such as Speculative Realism, of critical scholarship within the human sciences, artist projects, and financial and environmental design practices, which all reflect an embrace of this ethos.³ *Speculation, Now* proposes nonlinear, simultaneous temporalities in order to comprehend, develop plans of action for, and quite possibly change conditions that pit the individual against global flows of information and resources.

Speculation as History of the Present

Speculation, Now mines public research on speculation conducted over two years at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School and brings to the pages of this book multiple entry points that emerged during the center's various public programs on that topic (► 252). Time was acutely on our mind as we curated the live events on speculation: we placed and timed them along their own temporal axis, which functioned not unlike a musical score with recurring refrains and themes. Three intensive daylong roundtable discussions among practitioners from

different fields were crucial, providing the *caesurae*, the pause and focus from which all other events radiated. Many of the contributors to *Speculation, Now* participated in one or more of these roundtable intensives. Each session was orchestrated according to unconventional notations of reality: the first began with a masterful sleight-of-hand show of close-up coin tricks by a professional magician. The second roundtable featured two readings of tarot cards: one answered specific questions by the speakers in the room, the other was a “reading” of the speculation project itself. All the while, we collected the participants’ birthdays and employed them later as arbitrary ordering device: mailed on the speakers’ birthdays—and now sprinkled throughout the book—they feature key questions regarding speculation that arose during the roundtables, and by virtue of the mailing’s irrational timing served to further destabilize conventional thinking about time, causality, anticipation, and expert knowledge.

Accordingly, the book reflects an unusual degree of risk-taking and playfulness. The contributors to our glossary encircle the term “speculation” with a variety of related concepts, weaving a rich artistic, scientific, and cultural web around it. In the pages of this book, such a multiplicity of perspectives is enacted through the experimental distribution of interwoven voices, narrative strands, and temporalities that encourage nonlinear reading.

A word on the artists. Like the written essays, their contributions were made for this book. The visual essays, however, are specific to the material foundations of the book. They punctuate the book structure with arrhythmic and unexpected moments, self-knowing ruptures that show the design itself to be open-ended and self-critical. In that way, these visuals are key: they don’t speak of, but embody, the speculative in vexing clarity: precisely tuned to the specifics of the page, the paper, the layout—all that you now hold in your hand—they demand deepest concentration as they expand on the unknowable.

11 Ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer coined the term ‘anthropocene’ in the 1980s, to describe a new geological era of humanity’s own making. It was popularized in an article by him and Nobel Prize laureate Paul J. Crutzen, “The Anthropocene,” *Global Change Newsletter*, 2000, 41: 17–18.

2 Philosopher Jacques Rancière’s demand to fictionalize reality in order to intervene politically is relevant. See Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Gabriel Rockhill, trans. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006.

3 See Bennett, Jane, *Vibrant Matter: On the Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010.

Speculation, Now
Vyjayanthi Venuturupalli Rao

"All men by their very nature reach out to know," says Aristotle (*Metaph.*, A 1.980a21). If this is so, it discloses something important about the activities of knowing and desiring. They have at their core the same delight, that of reaching, and entail the same pain, that of falling short or being deficient. This disclosure may be already implied in a certain usage of Homer, for epic diction has the same verb (*mnaomai*) for "to be mindful, to have in mind, to direct one's attention to" and "to woo, court, be a suitor." Stationed at the edge of itself, or of its present knowledge, the thinking mind launches a suit for understanding into the unknown. So too the wooer stands at the edge of his value as a person and asserts a claim across the boundaries of another. Both mind and wooer reach out from what is known and actual to something different, possibly better, desired. Something else. Think about what that feels like.

—Anne Carson, *Eros The Bittersweet*.

Speculation, Now?

Reaching out, launching a suit for understanding into the unknown—these routine imperatives and their effects travel across the secular, modern disciplines and practices that make the contemporary (•53) world. Experimental science, artistic practice, design, divination, and mediated communication all share a spirit of speculation in this sense of reaching for the unknown sometimes with unpredictable effects, unintended consequences. The recognition of chance and contingency as significant factors shaping our physical and social world is both transhistorical and dynamic, changing across place and over time. Yet our protocols for constructing knowledge are based on a decision about what to hold constant, on how to decide what is certain, and what has already occurred. What is distinctive about contemporary life is that the scale and scope of the preoccupation with contingency and the many forms in which it appears has intensified with the transformations entailed by modernity, in particular with the "tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order," as Max Weber put it in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Over the course of two centuries, the concept of risk (•73 & 146) has become a dominant means of making sense of chance, through the calibration and quantification of possibilities and unknowns and has gained legitimacy as a mechanism

of modern knowledge about contingency, gradually governing every aspect of our lives—biological, financial, political and social. Ironically, our conceptualization of chance into risk and risk into an object of knowledge introduces new doubts about how to recognize certainties and how to separate the known from the unknown. The overwhelmingly negative representation of contingency as risk, insecurity, danger and threat—whether in physical or moral terms—is symptomatic of the modern need to understand experience in terms of structure, pattern, order and system. Acting as if risk can be controlled, itself tied inextricably to the imaginary of uncertainty and contingency as risk, is a dominant form of producing economic and other value in our world, a way of placing specific values upon what is not known and what does not yet have a price. Such forms of accounting for and valuing the contingent preoccupy popular understandings of speculation, as practice and as habit of thought; at once alluding to the perception of the unknown and the yet to come as risk, and to the conception of risk and its management as opportunity for creating value based on that perception.

Yet there are clear signs that the world we inhabit today and one we have inherited may have moved beyond our ability to conceive of the contingent and the unknown as manageable objects. The proliferation of discourses of crisis in every domain suggest increasing failures of enumeration but also, more broadly, raises questions about existing frameworks for conceiving, measuring and dealing with uncertainty. Scholars and experts now debate not only the identity of the subjects and objects of knowledge but indeed the very possibility of a clear separation between the two. We remain committed, nevertheless, to acting even whilst questioning the composition of our subjective selves, our bodies, our beings, other beings, the partitions between beings, the partitioning of the world between real and virtual and the impact of our codes and ways of knowing on these compositions. Corresponding to these signs of existential anxiety, can we discern new ways of thinking about contingency and the uncertainty that the unexpected event or the unintended outcome invoke?

Speculation, Now is a collective formulation and exploration of conditions that demand new ways of conceptualizing contingency—conditions that also demand a move away from conceiving speculation as a practice of calibrating risk and

managing objects of risk to produce economic, political or social value. Our premise is this: it is not only possible but necessary to recognize the co-presence of numerous practices in diverse locations that trace other ways of understanding contingency and therefore other practices of speculation. Broadly and provisionally, we defined speculation as an array of practices and habits of thought concerned with conceptualizing contingency and the value it offers as an arena for configuring modes of living in a contemporary world skeptical about the value of inherited belief. Our collection, then, is an accumulation of observations about situations where a necessity to depart from calculation, to launch a suit into the unknown, is actively practiced and put into play, where normative intent may become murky and where other agencies come to the fore. It is an accumulation of observations about existing practices that fill the gap between the “ought” and the “is” and of practices that hold a skeptical attitude towards the relationship between what has occurred and what is about to occur.

Speculation now is everywhere. It is a tacit premise underlying modern knowledge—the episteme of the liberal age, intensified under neoliberal conditions. We can hardly function, here and now, without imagining what is to come, without acting *as if* and without being ready to act on those anticipations. The present is beholden, in thrall, to multiple future anteriors, to a future multiple even as the future is contingent on present decisions. From finance to ecology, from science to art and politics, disciplinary practices depend upon imagining a future multiple—its possibilities and possible disappointments. Speculation and the very idea of modernity itself are inextricable: there is no modernity without the sustained practice and the engagement of thought that is tinged with doubt about the future or about continuity in some form, about human identity and ways of being human, without negotiation about the autonomy of forms and the sources of value. Speculation constantly brushes up against a lawlike structure and consistency attributed to nature or to the divine sovereign.

We live then in a world shaped by speculation in this sense—released by secularization, which in turn demands a transcendental subject and a set of practices to compensate for the loss of the world’s theological center. Max Weber argues as much when he suggests that the speculative ethos of Calvinism vis-à-vis salvation and redemption is at the root of capitalism. Marx told

us that “interest bearing capital is the mother of all insane forms,” forms whose values are always in flux and therefore open to speculation.¹ Yet speculation as such remains enigmatic.

We live, we know, in a world shaped by a speculative economy—a network that constricts our apprehension of the relationship between affect and effect. Our needs are anticipated, produced, shaped, reflected, and anticipated again as the cycle repeats itself. This enchanted process of wish fulfillment throws the world into flux, as distant forces are drawn together and generate unexpected outcomes, turbulence, and **instability** (►118). We anticipate in turn, keep anxious guard as we spy out, speculate about risks, threats, dangers, and opportunities that might arise from this turbulence of unpredicted and unpredictable outcomes that draw wish fulfillment out of catastrophe, destruction, loss, and abjection.

Speculation is a regular and regulated practice within this economy, embodied in the instruments and rituals of risk management. It is a practice of inquiry into the unknown that proceeds by dragging and dropping the indeterminate and the inchoate unknown onto the ground on which we stand, where we stand now. But then the ground beneath our feet no longer holds. Latent possibilities inhabit our present and turn into calculable outcomes within this understanding of a speculative economy. Profit and loss are but the most limited and limiting imaginative horizons of these phantasmic calculations. Paradoxically, speculation is both necessary and unwelcome—there is no profit without speculation, no value that is not touched by a practiced brush against the pre-determined norm ordained by laws of cause and effect, by chains of demand and supply, and by methods for determining needs and their fulfillment.

In the dominant framework of the exact sciences—in knowledge wedded to the production of objective truth—economy, thought, and language are unified in an **infrastructure** (►102 & 265) for controlled speculation. It is a formal apparatus for engaging the unknown by dividing the world into possible states and scenarios, calculating risks, threats, and opportunities, directed by specific goals and ideas. This infrastructure of instruments measures, calibrates, and converts uncertainties into risks that can be managed. Not surprisingly, our tacit acknowledgment of this calculative infrastructure for discerning possibility and potential renders other forms of speculation invisible.

At the same time, this infrastructure also produces a fundamentally unstable world, one in which uncertainty can no longer be controlled, constrained, explained, and analyzed. In *The Philosophy of Money*, Georg Simmel writes that “speculation itself may determine the fate of the object of speculation.”² The practice of speculation proleptically produces a world of potential, where uncertainty can no longer be analytically explained nor practically contained through calculative strategies. Now, where we stand, is uncertain, unstable, precarious.

Overwhelmed by its association with the sphere of the economy, speculation is generally treated as an other of judicious, calculating, instrumental reason—as error, wild movement and avarice, leading reasoned practice astray, producing false values. Following Georges Bataille, however, we must also recognize in this understanding of speculation, an accursed share: at once an indivisible part and an uninvited participant at the table of deliberative democracy. Expanding this narrow, economic understanding of speculation, we suggest, tacitly and collectively, another way to understand the practice of speculation: to speculate is to situate ourselves at an edge, a limit, an impasse. It is also to reach out from that edge, to peer over and to partake by peering over; speculation’s classical Latin roots, *specere* and *speculari*, suggest that looking, observing, and anticipating are the active components of the act of speculating. Yet to speculate is to observe something that is not evident, that remains obscure even when it has been speculated upon, or perhaps because it has been speculated upon. In this sense, speculation does not reference the unknown as such but the murky, intermediate terrain of potential.

What has been spied on at the edge of the horizon, from the highest point in a watchtower—*speculari*—is seen but still unclear. Its object remains unverifiable. In its press over the limits of the evident, speculative practice is always disappointed, estranged from its desired object by a host of possible states and conditions of being. Its object is always another, that which is suspected to lurk behind what is seen and apprehended as form or as forms in a mirror. The Latin *speculum*, or **mirror** (▶46 & 207), is the other root from which speculation has derived its meaning in history. Once spied, form knits itself into a chain of being.

Following its etymological unfolding, our book posits speculation as a habit of thought that connects, enchants, and weathers what is with what might be—imagined not only as risk

activists, scholars, scientists, financiers, or simply the men and women planning their distant retirement whom Mary Poovey invokes in her contribution—formulate and build an infrastructure for confronting a realm that is neither sensible nor intelligible, yet imaginable. At this threshold, the desire for knowing what is to come and what may come meets a practice of mindful preparation to confront the potential dimensions, depths, and directions that reside virtually in any situation, in any object of significance. Christina Moon's ethnography of downtown LA's Jobber Market vividly details the emergence of fast fashion and the speculations of immigrant entrepreneurs that are at the heart of this industry. Keeping pace with the tempo of this market means oscillating between the tremendous risk of being embedded in a system that operates around hard cash alone and hedging that risk by turning one's own family into the infrastructure of manufacture and marketing. The visceral anxiety of the young designer who struggles to stay ahead of trends while keeping pace with her producers in China as she dreams of "margins of predictability" embodies the kind of mindful preparation that speculative practice demands as much as the practice of high-stakes financial traders.

In some of the situations presented in this book, the demand of this world to acknowledge its uncertainty is so tacit that the realm of the imaginary has itself become a plane of everyday operation. Filip de Boeck's account of the Congolese capital Kinshasa from its colonial establishment to its present-day redevelopment delineates the imagined and imaginable worlds produce a proliferation of methods for inhabiting the urban materials at hand and for dealing with the dynamics of capital's extraversion. In other situations, this demand intervenes directly to create new ground that becomes the plane of operation rather than a directive force that suggest ways of coexisting with the imaginary. In Satya Pemmaraju's account, the Hedge/Hog trades by balancing enumerable risks with suitable hedges. Pemmaraju suggests another form of speculation, where value is created precisely by conceiving risk differently from the market's terms, by radically opposing the idea that risk can be priced with probabilistic accuracy. As the only acceptable strategy for engaging the indeterminate outcomes of such improbable combinations of distant and dissimilar objects, speculation remains a cloudy view over the horizon, without "clear answers to

but also fantasy, desire, potential. We perceive however, that what emerges from a speculative process is and remains virtual. This does not mean that what emerges lacks reality, but rather that it remains in a process of potential realization. Our explorations suggest that the speculative moment is one in which a new understanding of uncertainty emerges—uncertainty conceived, not as the lack of knowledge about the content of any specific possibility but rather as the idea that a variety of actualizations can emerge from the event. What is possible cannot be understood in the image of the real (or vice versa) but in the image of a state of virtuality in which the actualization of any object implies the creation of divergent lines which correspond to a virtual multiplicity. While the term speculation labels a diverse set of practices that configure uncertainty and contingency, the deliberate individuation of contributions in this book suggests that each instance should be treated as a clue in unravelling the rhizomatic relations between these different instantiations of speculation.

Our book, then, invites another look at the here and the now. We ask if another way of rendering speculation is possible. We agree, in other words, to speculate about speculation. Over many meetings, face to face, in artistic production, in visual exchanges, and in writings, the authors here have entered tacitly into an agreement to free speculation and to speculate freely from where they stand—to open speculation up to its many creative possibilities as a practice, to remain attentive to its potential contributions in our midst and, equally, to its thorny conundrums. Tacking between different scales of production—between the small-scale and the extended—the work gathered in this volume attempts to illuminate speculation as a process, as does our glossary, where ordinary words carry different weight, becoming other in relation to this pervasive and recalcitrant habit of thought.

Now, Speculation

Now, speculation is entangled and spread through a wide range of disparate practices, all sharing the tacit assumption of an immanent logic of things and the impossibility of translation into transcendent forms but operating with different methods for valuing and experiencing this immanence. This understanding of immanence is translated into a world experienced viscerally as uncertain, demanding that all practitioners—whether artists,

legitimate questions” even while providing a tactic for evaluating indeterminacy as the source of creativity and value. Speculation in this sense is also fundamentally open-ended. It creates an unstable and contingent ground, open to change, and provides a set of tools for engaging with the resulting uncertainty.

Like Smith’s “men of speculation,” for experimental scientists, epistemic value is produced precisely by open-ended inquiry, cultivating, in other words, a speculative practice in order to make positive, empirical claims. At the limit of experimental science lie otherworldly, communicative beings associated with the religious and spiritual practices of divination, prophecy, and prediction. Considering the concept of the image from the perspective of Islamic philosophy in her contribution, anthropologist Stefania Pandolfo touches on the “ontological realm of the limit” from where images draw their power. She explores the concept of *barzakh* or the realm that stands in-between “sensory experience and the manifestation of the divine.” If the *barzakh* functions as the passage to the divine it also opens up the a space for speculating upon other presences, distinct from the divine. Pandolfo draws on her ethnography of possession and her work with an Islamic healer in Morocco to explore the ways in which the experience of *barzakh* and its reach beyond the human introduces otherworldly presences as speculative presences that manifest the potential lives and failed encounters arising from the radical dispossession of subjects. In this way, the mediation of representational forms such as images and speech is at once affirmative and threatening, reinforcing the idea of the world as an entanglement of beings, sensed and un-sensable. Our conversations with mycologist Gary Lincoff and Sherene Schostak, a noted practitioner of tarot reading, reveal similar preoccupations, albeit in a different register. While de Boeck and Pandolfo’s anthropological accounts provide an opening onto another scene in the global generalization of speculation, Lincoff and Schostak’s voices add the dimension of inner voice and sustained interrogations of the invisible in relation to mystical and metaphysical experiences in familiar practices.

In equal measure, speculation might involve acting as if a particular condition has been attained, or has been transcended, or perhaps it involves acting in a subjunctive mode, not accepting present conditions or acquiescing to accounts of what is but rather proposing that the condition under study could be

transcended but has not yet been. In William Darity and Darrick Hamilton's contribution to this book, the economists critique action that takes place as if race has already been transcended as a force of inequality in the economic sphere. Their work proposes something different—operating in the belief that the still-present racialization of the economy can be transcended. These propositions proceed by creating **models** (►27 & 75 & 130) that engage specific analytic questions concerning the economy, the polity, the environment, or society. The model provides the space to speculate, to act as if. In Laura Kurgan's story of global migration, the difficulty of speculating with numbers invokes a parallel with the arts of storytelling. Because "nothing" in "data—despite the etymology of data as what is given—is simply given, in the sense of natural and neutral" she writes, "the stories told with data are often incomplete, uncertain, and open-ended."

On the other side of such open-endedness, the contributions from Boris Groys, the philosopher of art, and from the practicing artists in this volume theorize the relationship between speculation and invisibility, doubling, distinction, and repetition. Speculating on the relationship between a work and its copy or its expression in multiples, Groys, Walid Raad, Lize Mogel and Hans Haake explore the constant intervention of hidden and invisible strata into visible expression in the unique work of art. To speculate is to suspect and to sort between the multiple possibilities posed by these strata. Speculation, writes Groys, is both "a true reflection of reality that presents itself as an empirical fact" as well as "a reflection on reality that may be hidden behind its empirical image."

Reflection on doubles, multiples, repetitions, and distinctions have therefore come to preoccupy artistic practice in the contemporary moment. In Srdjan Jovanović Weiss's diaristic entry in the book, the process of balkanization and its proliferation as a virus into disparate architectural situations across the globe—from Manhattan to Mongolia—signifies the hold of distinction and the possibility of mutation from within, even as visible expressions deceive the viewer into a false sense of coherence by establishing an equivalence among objects along the dimensions of scale, color, and process.

Lin + Lam's "Psychic Special" takes a visual field through time, presenting the field as if it were unchanged by time. As in the children's game of "spot the differences," time intervenes

in the form of subtle, poetic alterations of the field, the photographic double capturing a catalogue of invisibilities at work. In Robert Sember's reflection on the collective Ultra-red and its establishment of a relationship between artistic practice and political activism, he claims radical change can only emerge from resisting the repetition of "established institutional and aesthetic forms." He names that resistance speculation, arguing that in that moment activism moves from analysis to "organizing the space of reception above and beyond the analysis itself." The speculative moment—in which a new world is envisioned and striven for—is therefore the moment in which radical change is possible, but only through the enactment of a "space of reception," as yet unborn.

Speculation, Now, Again

Whether I describe myself as an artist, a scholar, or a market maker who gives value to different things, I must also speculate on what is to be held in common. In his exploration of the emergence of a modern "aesthetic regime," philosopher Jacques Rancière explains that the aesthetic regime constitutes the "opening of a space where there is no hierarchical presupposition,"³ because the idea of aesthetic judgment presupposes a community of equals. In this sense the modern aesthetic regime is a pedagogic apparatus with significant consequences for the forms of democratic politics and for its staging, for "politics also obeys this principle of a judgment that anticipates a possible common sense or possible community."⁴

The work gathered together in this book reaches for that understanding of practices held in common. Although individuated by design, as a book the contributions enact a movement away from the individual reflection or the analytic calculus of the individual author. Under this premise, speculation moves away from its two commonly held understandings associated with anticipation, calculation, and positioning on the one hand, and the creativity and imagination associated with privileged practitioners on the other hand. Our book is an invitation to speculate differently about speculation—to embrace its radical possibilities for collective creativity by identifying its proliferating sites of operation and the rhizomatic process by which speculations proliferate forms and substances.

Speculation, Now is a collection in three distinct registers:

first, a set of reflections from practitioners in various fields on speculation as a method in their discipline or field of operation; second, a set of figurations that formally investigate the speculative method or deploy speculation as a method; and third, a voluminous glossary authored by distinguished practitioners, which takes terms having a kinship to speculation as practice, method, and a form of the real and reframes those terms actively into a vocabulary for investigating speculation. Our object comes into view as these registers intersect actively and by design.

At the edge of the possible, I affirm and inhabit failure as a real possibility when I speculate. Paradoxically, I also continue to risk failure, risk disappointment, as if my speculation made no difference, as if I could never tell whether my speculation came true or not. I continue to hold two possibilities at once, risking and affirming. I change something and yet continue as if nothing has changed. I act with the knowledge that the world can be changed in unpredictable ways by action, even when I act directed by a specific goal, goaded by a certain ambition. I have faith in cause and yet I am aware of a hidden, contingent force that lurks behind—the real behind the empirical, the true form reflected in the mirror. I act today assuming a future scenario—I act as if it were the case and I then enact a possible world, acting now. But now, where we stand, is uncertain, unstable, precarious. The unknown still lives on as time and desire, in the indeterminate time scales of the material and the oneiric worlds affected by these acts of conjuring value and producing need. Another kind of speculation is necessary to address these indeterminate effects, these uncertain paths that apparently lie beyond calculation. This then forms the imperative to speculate, now, again.

1 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3 (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1909), p. 347.

2 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1900] 1978), p. 352

3 Gavin Arnall, Laura Gandolfi, and Enea Zaramella, "Aesthetics and Politics Revisited: An Interview with Jacques Rancière." *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 2 (Winter 2012): p. 296.

4 *Ibid.*

Psychic Special
Lin + Lam



What follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation, which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his individual predilection. It is further an attempt to follow out an idea consistently, out of curiosity to see where it will lead.
—Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”
(1920), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James and Alix Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1950–74), vol. 18, 23.

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79 E10 - 2010



79 E10 - 2013

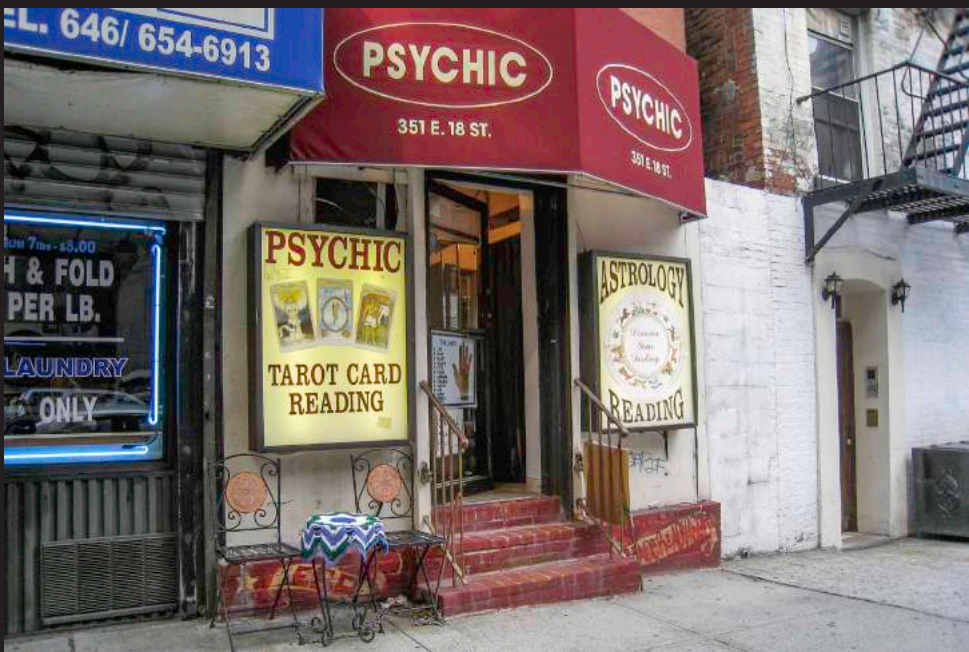
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199 Ave A - 2010

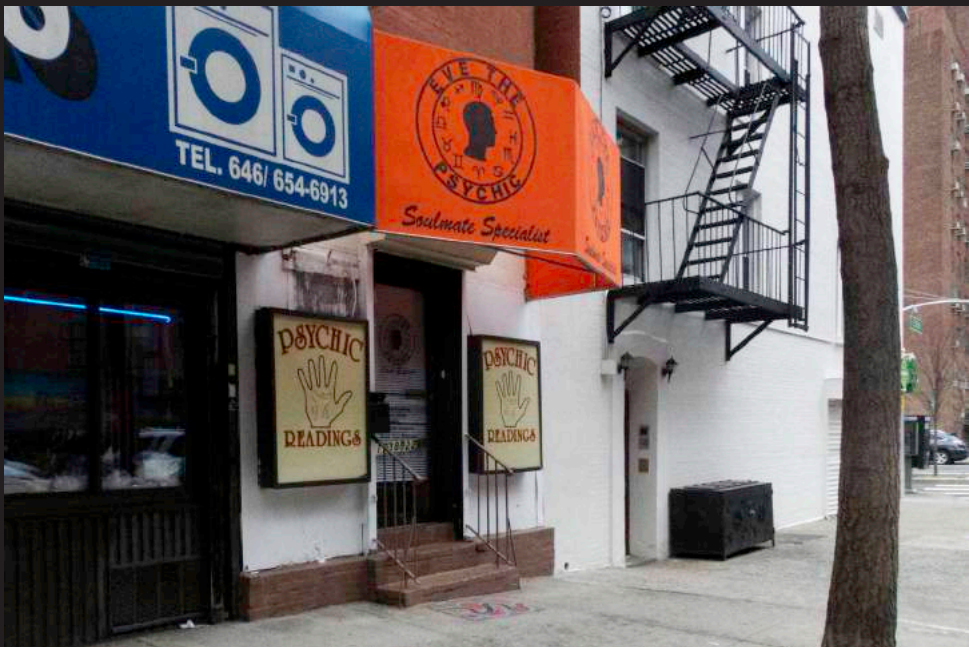


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444 Broome St - 2010

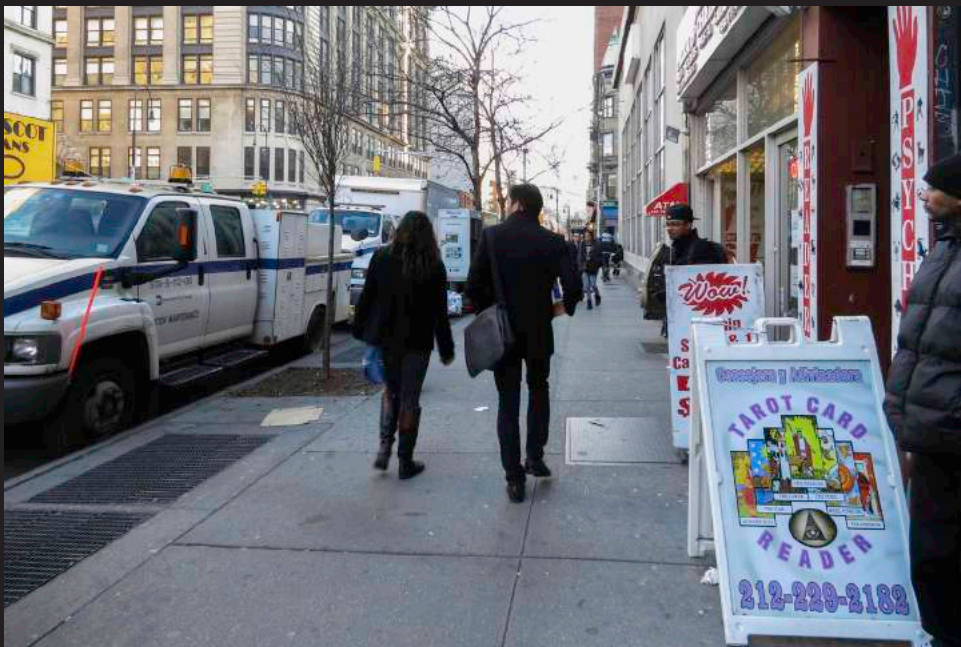


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4222 Broadway - 2010



4222 Broadway - 2013

Biographies Contributors

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JUDITH BARRY (New York and Berlin) is an artist and writer whose work crosses a number of disciplines: performance, installation, sculpture, architecture, photography, and new media. She has exhibited internationally at the Berlin Biennale; Cairo Biennale; Carnegie International, Pittsburgh; Documenta, Kassel; São Paulo Biennale; Sharjah Biennial; Sydney Biennale; Venice Biennale, and the Whitney Biennial, among others. She has received the Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts (2000), and a Guggenheim Fellowship (2011). Publications include *Public Fantasy*, a collection of essays. Her most recent catalogue is *Judith Barry: body without limits* (2009).

KATHERINE CARL (New York) is Curator of the James Gallery and Deputy Director of the Center for the Humanities at the Graduate Center since 2011. At the James she has curated *Maja Bajevic: To Earth Continued* (2012); *Jiha Moon: Stars Drawn to Earth* (2012); *Common Assembly* with DAAR (2012); *Shifters* with Hala Elwan, Angel Nevarez & Valerie Tevere; and *kuda.org*; and *The Making of America* with the Museum of American Art.

LIN + LAM (New York) Since 2001, artist collaborators Lin + Lam (Lana Lin and H. Lan Thao Lam) have produced research-based projects in diverse media including installation, film, photography, sculpture, and writing. Their work has been shown at the New Museum, the Kitchen, and the Queens Museum in New York; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; Arko Arts Center (Korean Arts Council), Seoul; the Oberhausen Short Film Festival, Germany; and the Third Guangzhou Triennial, China. They have appeared in *Cabinet*, *Art Journal*, and *Rethinking Marxism*, and have received support from the Canada Council for the Arts, Jerome Foundation, Fulbright Foundation, and New York State Council on the Arts. They were 2009–2010 Vera List Center Fellows as part of the Speculating on Change cycle of VLC programs.

GARY LINCOFF (New York) has been an instructor at the New York Botanical Garden since the mid-1970s, teaching classes on botany, mushrooms, and foraging. His publications include *The Audubon Guide to North American Mushrooms*, *The Complete Mushroom Hunter*, and *The Joy of Foraging*. Lincoff has led mushroom and plant collecting trips to every continent but Antarctica. He co-organized the annual Telluride Mushroom Festival for twenty-five years,

and he continues on as the annual keynote speaker. Lincoff is currently finishing a six-year project surveying the mushroom flora of New York City. He has lived in New York with his forager-wife, Irene, since 1968.

JOSIAH MCELHENY (New York) is a sculptor, performance artist, writer, and filmmaker best known for his use of glass with other materials. Book projects include *The Light Club*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 2010 and *Interiors*, a reader co-edited by Johanna Burton and Lynne Cook, published by CCS Bard and Sternberg Press in 2012, and the soon to be released (Fall 2014), illustrated by McElheny, and *Glass! Love!! Perpetual Motion!!!* A Paul Scheerbart Reader co-edited by Christine Burgin, published by the University of Chicago Press and Christine Burgin.

BRIAN MCGRATH (Newark, N.J.) is Dean of Parsons School of Constructed Environments, the founder of urban-interface, llc, and a principle investigator in the Baltimore Ecosystem Study. His books include: *Urban Design Ecologies Reader*, (2012), *Resilience in Ecology and Urban Design* (2012), *Growing Cities in a Shrinking World: The Challenges in India and China* (2010), *Digital Modeling for Urban Design* (2008), *Cinematics:*

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The Vera List Center for Art and Politics is an idea incubator and a public forum for art, culture, and politics. It was established at The New School in 1992 – a time of rousing debates about freedom of speech, identity politics, and society's investment in the arts. A pioneer in the field, the center serves a critical mission: to foster a vibrant and diverse community of artists, scholars, and policy makers who take creative, intellectual, and political risks to bring about positive change.

The Vera List Center champions the arts as expressions of the political moments from which they emerge, and considers the intersection between art and politics the space where new forms of civic engagement must be developed. The VLC is the only university-based institution committed exclusively to leading public research on this intersection. Through public programs and classes, prizes and fellowships, publications and exhibitions that probe some of the pressing issues of our time, the VLC curates and supports new roles for the arts and artists in advancing social justice.

Many activities at the Vera List Center arise from a two-year curatorial focus theme. Called for its urgency and broad resonance, each theme informs timely and expansive investigations across a variety of initiatives. From 2009 to 2011, the center responded to U.S. President Barack

Obama's call for change with the topic of *Speculating on Change*. Other themes were *Homeland* in 2004–2005, to acknowledge profound paradigm shifts in a post-9/11 world, followed by *Considering Forgiveness* in 2007–2008 which encompassed new transitional justice systems; the explosion of social media led to *The Public Domain* in 2006–2007. *Thingness* in 2011–2013 looked at the entanglement of living and non-living matter.

Speculation, Now is the Vera List Center's second book, following *Considering Forgiveness* (see p. 254). Each book is edited by a small collaborative team of scholars and artists that conceives of the format, structure, and content of the book, selects the contributors and, in turn, brings to the book their visual and academic expertise. This interdisciplinary approach acknowledges recent developments in artistic and cultural practices and reflects The New School's own commitment to merging theory and practice.



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ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Advisory Committee is an integral part of the center. Members advise the chair and counsel the director, develop expertise on ways to support the academic enterprise, provide insight and guidance on programs, provide financial support, and serve as links to the external communities in which they live and work.

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The second in a series of books expanding on the Vera List Center's cycle of public programs, this volume is published in conjunction with the center's curatorial topic "Speculation."

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Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Speculation, now : essays and
artwork / edited by Vyjayanthi
Venuturupalli Rao ; with Prem
Krishnamurthy & Carin Kuoni.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references
and index.
ISBN 978-0-8223-5815-2
(cloth: alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-8223-5829-9
(pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Speculation.
2. Arts—Experimental methods.
3. Arts and society.
I. Rao, Vyjayanthi Venuturupalli.
II. Krishnamurthy, Prem, 1977—
III. Kuoni, Carin.
NX460.5.E95564 2015
001—dc23
2014018578

Copy editor: Stephen Hoban
Editorial Assistants: Zoe Carey and
Kyle Robert Nelson
Design: Project Projects, New York

Typography: Karbon (2012);
DTL Paradox (1997); Nitti (2008);
272 custom typefaces generated by
Metaflop (www.metaflop.com)

Printed on acid-free paper in China.

Published by Duke University Press,
in association with the
Vera List Center for Art and Politics.

Duke University Press
905 West Main Street
Durham, NC 27701

Vera List Center for Art and Politics
The New School
66 West 12th Street, Room 604
New York, NY 10011
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The publication of this book was
made possible in part through the
generous support of the Advisory
Committee of the Vera List Center for
Art and Politics.

What needs to change in our understanding of reality for reality to change? In the face of radical uncertainty, an awareness that things could be otherwise is beginning to organize common frameworks and guide action and debate. Transdisciplinary by design and concept, *Speculation, Now* assembles the voices of artists, architects, designers, economists, scientists, and scholars of otherness who reflect on the speculative moment in their fields. The result conflates the space of the book with the space of an exhibition, provides points of convergence between images, concepts and language, and incites the reader to affect what is, was, and what may be.

Speculation, Now is the second in a series of books published by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School dedicated to topics of political urgency.

The most important message of this volume is that it explodes the tendency to identify speculation with contemplation. Rather, it shows us that speculation is a practice which does not seek to distance itself from materiality, agency, embodied experience or lived reality. Speculation is thus a friend of the Blakeian particular, of the grain in the sand, and not of the distant, the abstract and the general. But it is a friend with a difference, for it lends to the world of the concrete, the material, the sensory and the ordinary, the element of its capacity to be other than what it is in the present.

Arjun Appadurai

(excerpt from "Speculation,
After the Fact")

ISBN 978-0-8223-5829-9



6 780822 358299

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Contempera
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Mirroring,
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