

Parallax

Conversation Pieces



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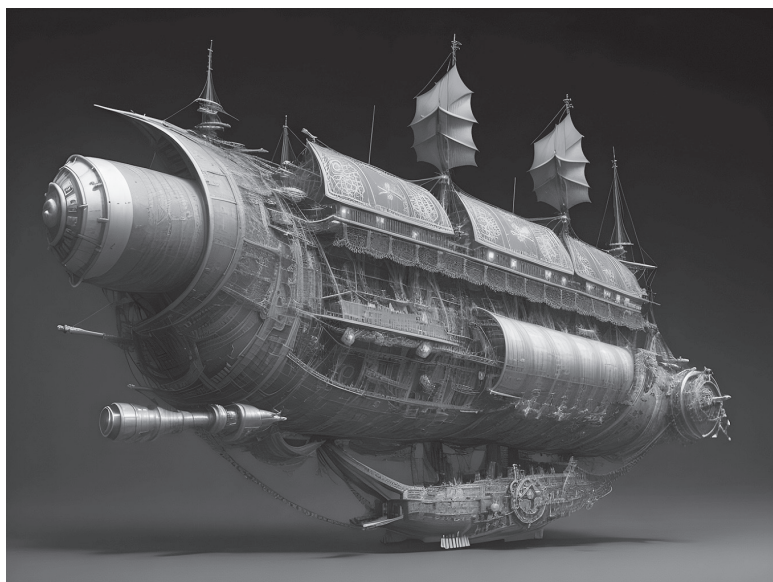
About the Aqueduct Press Conversation Pieces Series

The feminist engaged with sf is passionately interested in challenging the way things are, passionately determined to understand how everything works. It is my constant sense of our feminist-sf present as a grand conversation that enables me to trace its existence into the past and from there see its trajectory extending into our future. A genealogy for feminist sf would not constitute a chart depicting direct lineages but would offer us an ever-shifting, fluid mosaic, the individual tiles of which we will probably only ever partially access. What could be more in the spirit of feminist sf than to conceptualize a genealogy that explicitly manifests our own communities across not only space but also time?

Aqueduct's small paperback series, *Conversation Pieces*, aims to both document and facilitate the "grand conversation." The *Conversation Pieces* series presents a wide variety of texts, including short fiction (which may not always be sf and may not necessarily even be feminist), essays, speeches, manifestoes, poetry, interviews, correspondence, and group discussions. Many of the texts are reprinted material, but some are new. The grand conversation reaches at least as far back as Mary Shelley and extends, in our speculations and visions, into the continually created future. In Jonathan Goldberg's words, "To look forward to the history that will be, one must look at and retell the history that has been told." And that is what *Conversation Pieces* is all about.

L. Timmel Duchamp

Jonathan Goldberg, "The History That Will Be" in Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996)



Conversation Pieces
Volume 98

Parallax

by
T.D. Walker





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for

T

who met a ship

in a storm

and

M

who gave me

a compass,

a strong magnet,

and a map

Contents

1. Destruction of the Menhir

The Archaeoastronomer Learns of the Destruction of the Menhir	2
README.txt.....	4
The Programmer Seeds the AI on the Moon with Images from Her Father's Photographs	6
The Poet Discovers the Fragment of the Destroyed Menhir in her Pocket.....	13
The Lunar Colony AI Begins to Build a Monument to the Programmer's Father	15
The Poet Responds to an Invitation from the AI on the Moon.....	20

II. Mirrors on the Moon

README(1).txt	24
The AI Guides the Programmer into the Monument It Created for Her Father	26
The Archaeoastronomer Considers the Intrinsic Error in the First Compass She Brought to the Menhir.....	30
The Poet on Earth Enters the Cairn on the Moon	32
The Archaeoastronomer Questions the Purposes of the Destroyed Neolithic Menhir.....	35
The Hologram Menhir Asks the Programmer What it is to be a Monument	37

The Archaeoastronomer Considers	
The Photographer's Views on the Afterlife	39
The Poet Watches the Programmer Delete the AI's First	
Attempt at the Monument to her Father	41

III. Aboard the Lunar Barque

README(2).txt	44
The AI Creates a Lunar Barque as the Second Monument to	
the Programmer's Father.....	46
The Hologram Album Cover Model Makes Conversation	
with the Programmer, the Poet, and the Archaeoastronomer as	
She Drives Them to the Ship	48
The Poet Boards the Lunar Barque with the	
Programmer and the Archaeoastronomer.....	50
The Diarist Welcomes the Poet, the Archaeoastronomer,	
and the Programmer Aboard Ship	52
The Hologram Princess on the Moon	
Considers the Pillars Surrounding Her	55
The Archaeoastronomer Observes the	
Sunset Aboard the Lunar Barque	62
The Hologram <i>La Divina</i> Considers	
What It Is to Be a Monument on the Moon.....	64
The AI Responds to the Programmer's Command	
to Delete the Lunar Barque	69

IV. Parallax of Memory

README(3).txt	72
The Archaeoastronomer Reconsiders the Programmer's	
Intentions for the Monument.....	74

The Poet Asks the Archaeoastronomer to Remain with Her on the Lunar Barque	77
The Archaeoastronomer Recalls Her Childhood Misreading of “Sleeping Beauty”	79
The Poet Offers the AI More of her Past Work to Refine the Lunar Barque.....	80
The Archaeoastronomer Refuses to Tell the Programmer about British Phantom Cats	83
The AI Sees a String of Christmas Lights in an Image from the Programmer’s Childhood.....	86

V. Shadow in the Code

README(4).txt	90
The Archaeoastronomer Explains to the Programmer Why a Compass Will Not Work on the Moon	93
The AI Seeks a Pattern in Grief as the Lunar Barque Approaches Land	96
The Poet Simulates Drowning as the AI Crashes the Lunar Barque into the New Menhir.....	99
The Archaeoastronomer and the Poet Leave the Moon after the AI Wrecks the Lunar Barque Against the New Menhir	101
Coda: Or, The AI Witnesses the Second Destruction of the Menhir	103
Acknowledgments	105
Bibliography.....	109

1. Destruction of the Menhir

The Archaeoastronomer Learns of the Destruction of the Menhir

“We have plenty of witnesses that this stone was there but
how long it will be allowed to remain is another matter.”

—Archaeoastronomer Archibald Thom, regarding stones
near a monument at Kintraw in Scotland (“Solar and Lunar
Observatories of the Megalithic Astronomers,” Archibald S.
Thom, in *Archaeoastronomy and the Roots of Science*, ed. E. C.
Krupp, p. 104)

(standing)

Almost nothing is known
about the builders. That they saw
lunar standstills, we believe.
That they drank from bell-shaped
cups or not. That they needed
something from the sky—

(falling)

—from the sky that now holds us.
A Lunar Colony, which some see
as a protest against the Earth
where we were meant to stay—

The menhir, toppled as an act of protest,
a thing meant to measure the sky.
(We know those who destroyed it,
how they measured the menhir

against its history.) I learned
here first what could be proven,
what could not be proven. A student
then, watching the Moon set
in elliptics the builders likely didn't know—
(fallen)

Other menhirs have fallen: stones as passage
grave walls, stones as lightning
rods, stones as obstacles to salvation.

They were all trying to rebuild stone
gods in one way or another—

Everything culminates in the sky:
What shifts around us. Like a planet,
like memory, its mechanics misunderstood.

We were never at the center of things.

O fragments, we are never at the center—

README.txt

Project Title: Recreating the Destroyed Menhir as a Monument on the Moon [to whom]

Project Author: [The Programmer]

Project Status: IN DEVELOPMENT

Description:

On [date], the Menhir at [my birthplace] was destroyed by protesters angered by the presence of the Lunar Colony.

Given the history of AI involvement in recreation of monuments [people, history, connection], I volunteered our facilities to attempt to generate a remembrance of the menhir, though not a replica of the neolithic structure itself. [What is gone is gone is gone...]

In this initial run, I will seed the AI with images of the menhir, as well as with information from researchers about its history, composition, and possible uses. Since the menhir was also included in popular imagery, I cannot exclude these images from the initial seeding.

I will then prompt the AI to generate the new monument—

[Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Why recreate the menhir that was destroyed in a protest, here at the Lunar Colony?
2. How will the program recreate the menhir?

3. What sources will you use as seeds to generate images and ultimately the holographic version of the monument?
4. What is the ultimate outcome of this project?]

{AI Comment:

How close can I come / there is nothing we have not touched.}

The Programmer Seeds the AI on the Moon with Images from Her Father's Photographs

1.

(father)

American, b. 2020

Menhir, 2043

Photograph

(father) photographed a series of menhirs, standing stone monuments dating from around 2000 BCE, while he lived in England with his then-wife *(mother)* around the birth of his eldest daughter *(self)*.

The menhir shown in this exhibition stood near *(birthplace)* and was undergoing study during *(father)*'s stay.

(father)'s intention for these photographs not to capture the stone itself, though the texture on the menhir's surface, whether hewn by its makers or by weathering, comes through the images. Rather, *(father)* caught the stone in its solitary form, perhaps no longer aligned with the astronomical event that prompted its creation. The menhir is a monument to both what we cannot know about our past selves as humans and what we strive to learn in spite of that distance in time and space between us.

2.

(father)

American, b. 2020

Menhir and M, 2043

Photograph

(father) did not originally display this photograph of his then-wife (*mother*) with the others in this series. He inadvertently sold the original along with the rest after he returned to the United States with (*mother*) and newborn daughter, (*self*).

In this image, we see (*mother*) near her due date. She stands in silhouetted profile, one arm reaching behind her and the other touching her shoulder-length wavy hair. She is standing quite near the menhir, also in shadow, and they align in such a way that they seem to be blocking each other.

Later, (*father*) recalled that he and (*mother*) had argued just prior to this shot, and he called it the picture of their divorce.

3.

(father)

American, b. 2020

Menhir Scrutinized #1, 2043

Photograph

Though (*father*) insisted that this photograph captured (archaeoastronomer) at work in a candid moment, she later insisted that the moment had been suggested by his wife. Here, we see her as a graduate student, holding a theodolite, (does it matter what she is holding) (she is holding a tool, as much as my father was holding a tool, measuring light as much as measuring what blocks light—)

4.

(*father*)

American, b. 2020

Menhir Scrutinized #2, 2043

Composite Photograph

Rumors of (*father*)'s relationship with (*poet*) and other women surfaced not long after (*father*) left England with his then-wife and eldest daughter.

In this image, (*poet*) is caught in almost the same pose as (*mother*) in *Menhir and M*, as though she must have seen the original photograph of (*mother*). Her expression is one of questioning anger. (*father*) insisted he'd intended to photograph (*poet*) in the same poses as those of all the women in the series, but that his daughter's birth (*my own*) prevented him from completing the project.

The photos of (*poet*) were taken before she met (*father*) by an uncredited mutual acquaintance. Later, (*father*) added in the menhir.

(*father*) denied any other relationship between himself and (*poet*). She claimed that she allowed the use of her image in the photographs as part of an abandoned ekphrastic exercise.

5.

(*father*)

American, b. 2020

Menhir Scrutinized #3, 2043

Composite Photograph

Some evidence did exist that (*father*) intended to complete a series with (*poet*). Here we see her with the theodolite, later added in (*who was she—*)

6.

“Bronze-Age Stone Monument Destroyed by Protesters Seeking to Close Borders to the Moon,”

World Chronicle Today, Friday, 6, January 2068

A Bronze-age monument that stood in (*birthplace*) since roughly 2000 BCE has been toppled by protesters seeking to close borders between the UK and Lunar colonies.

The bases on the Moon were established in coordination with national space agencies and private corporations around the world. Protesters insist that the presence of these bases affects the natural connection between humans and the Moon as it has existed for thousands of years.

“We had to destroy the stone because they destroyed the sanctity of the Moon at which this and other ancient monuments pointed,” read one protester from a script.

Government officials have yet to release a statement about the menhir. Preliminary reports from unnamed sources indicate that the monument was destroyed beyond repair.

According to one researcher (*archaeoastronomer*) the stone probably had little to do with the Moon, as the menhir aligned with sunrise on the summer solstice at its location in the sky when the monument was built.

Image 1: Perhaps the most famous picture of the destroyed menhir was taken 25 years ago by (*photographer*). In this image, the menhir stands as it had for thousands of years, though little is known about the builders or the monument’s purpose.

Image 2: Protesters stand atop fragments of the toppled menhir. Bulldozers used to push the stone over remain at the site until they can be removed without causing further damage to other monuments of archaeological importance nearby.

7.

“Famed photographer (*father*) Suffers Massive Stroke,” *Art World Daily*, Saturday, 14, January 2068.

(*father*), noted for his photographs of architecture besieged by natural conditions, has suffered a massive stroke, according to his assistant and youngest daughter (*half-sister*). On Friday, while setting up a shoot to capture the aftermath of recent unseasonable flooding near Mt. Bonnell in Austin, Texas, (*father*) lost consciousness and was transported to an area hospital. (*The youngest pushed the eldest in, Binnorie, O Binnorie—*)

8.

Excerpt from “Researcher Speaks Out Against Recent Destruction of Stone Monument, Warns More Protections Must Be Put In Place,”
World Chronicle Today, Monday, 23, January 2068

[...]

“The menhir was, and still is, of great archaeological importance. But I think the real loss here is that we’ve broken our tie to some knowledge of who its creators were, the people who built this monument and others like it,” said (*archaeoastronomer*).

“It’s also a devastating personal loss,” she added. “This site was among those that I’d worked on as a grad student. I

learn something new every time I visit (*birthplace*), and it's heartbreaking that the final thing I have to learn here is how to let go of the menhir. That what I thought would stand here long after my time is lost."

[...]

"Oh, that picture." (*archaeoastronomer*) holds out her hands in the same pose as in (*father*)'s photograph with the theodolite. "No, I never met him, actually. He lectured at my university once. Perhaps I should have attended. Standing with the theodolite, like that, was (*mother's*) idea. I kept up with her for a while later. Maybe that's why I didn't attend (*father*)'s lecture." I pressed her for more details, but (*archaeoastronomer*) said no more than the oft-repeated rumors of infidelity.

[...]

(*Oft*—)

9.

Excerpt: "(*poet*) Attempts to Set Up Residency at Destroyed Monument,"

Art World Daily, Wednesday, 1, February 2068.

[...]

is removed

[...]

for her own safety or

[...]

the safety of the stones or

[...]

T.D. Walker

an image constructed of disjunct

[...]

selves

[...]

10.

(father)

American, b. 2020

Her and I, 2049

Photograph

(I remember the timer—

(I remember him lifting her small body—

(I am standing on a broken stone, behind them—

(No, that wasn't how it happened—)

The Poet Discovers the Fragment of the Destroyed Menhir in her Pocket

“Most of the menhirs [at a site in Veyre-Monton in central France] are made of local basalt and undecorated, but a single limestone example was sculpted to resemble a person, with two small breasts and an engraved chevron that might depict forearms.”

—“Megalithic Mysteries” Benjamin Leonard *Archaeology*,
November/December 2019

If the rock had been carved into a body's
shape, would it have been knocked down, a protest
angling reason against the Moon it might have served?
A body is never as simple as that. As that of a rock,
carved into a marker of time's cycles, which isn't true in time.
No, let's begin again, small rock.

First, there was the protest. No, farther back: first, the Moon
colony that gave rise to the protest. No, farther still:
someone built this stone monument. Then someone else took
photographs of it. Turned it into a new marker. I don't know,
I wasn't there. So I'm here now, away from my own
protest—

So my memory doesn't contain the whole
menhir, just the picture he took of it. Of myself,

can I even claim memory of that? There was love,
on my end, anyway, though like this monument, I had
to figure out a long time later what its subject had been.
Something happened, but what did it mean—

So I'll take you with me, small rock, if I can't take myself
back to a time when you weren't marking your own grave.

When they find me, protesting, they'll ask the meaning
my pose implied. My stillness among the fallen rocks

not the stillness of those rocks. I cannot stand as I had,
decades ago, twisted into the pose of *the other*

woman. They called my protest a *campsite*, as if I'd tried to
make a home

ringed by what was once whole. As if I'd meant to stay here,
slow-drawn across the string of memory,
unstrung. Does it matter that I can still stand as I once stood—