Becoming serpent: Mapping coils of paranoia in a neocolonial security state

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ABSTRACT

What follows is a feminist, decolonial experiment to map the un/settling circulation of paranoia – how it is done, what it does, what it could do – as a response to contemporary expressions of US white supremacy. Drawing on participant observation, interviewing, scientific artifacts, reflexive journaling, and a public art project, I explore a burgeoning form of pre-emptive psy to capture ‘the prodrome’ – a stage-cum-population-cum-figure of pre-psychosis at the center of a transnational program of research that has become increasingly dominated by the US since the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting of December 2012. I argue that this nascent, contested, and accelerating movement is enacting a contemporary transition from societies of ‘discipline’ to those of ‘control’. I describe how the cogs of this movement (nets, borderguards, custody, and search) allow it to oscillate between quotas and calculators, feeding itself with its own risk factors. These cogs suggest the workings of a molar assemblage driven by a paranoia – a dis-ease of white supremacy, as emerging from a colonial desire-to-know that entangles with a fear of ‘regressing’. Thus, the prodromal machine is a peculiar form of a ‘state machine of capture’ that works as a checkpoint of psycurity – my term for an abstract machine that directs paranoia to hide as reasonable suspicion, to predict the future, to brand threatening bodies, and to grow through fear, thereby making up the undulating coils of a neocolonial security state. I then undertake a ‘reparative reading’ of psycurity by staging an encounter between the prodrome and Coatlicue – a Mesoamerican goddess of the serpent – in order to reclaim the etymological roots of paranoia as a sense of something beside-the-mind, turning my gaze toward the colonial milieu in which this potential was (is) darkened and divided by a Science that claims an unadulterated access.
to the truth. In response, I place a psychometric ancestor of the prodrome (Magical Ideation) into an artistic adventure (*Missed Connections*) to ‘re-turn’ its radical potential. Asking what might happen if we treated the prodrome as more-than-human participation, with hesitation, and as a mystery *Missed Connections* decomposes ‘the prodrome’, shape-shifting the ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ of pre-emptive psy into something about the craft of making (magical) spaces. Overall doing a method that can best be described as a *magical ideation* that witnesses our participatory relation with the world, welcomes otherworldly encounters, and experiments with imagination, this project changes the shape of the problem of white supremacy into one of collective paranoia – suggesting a different kind of response/ability for the present political moment.