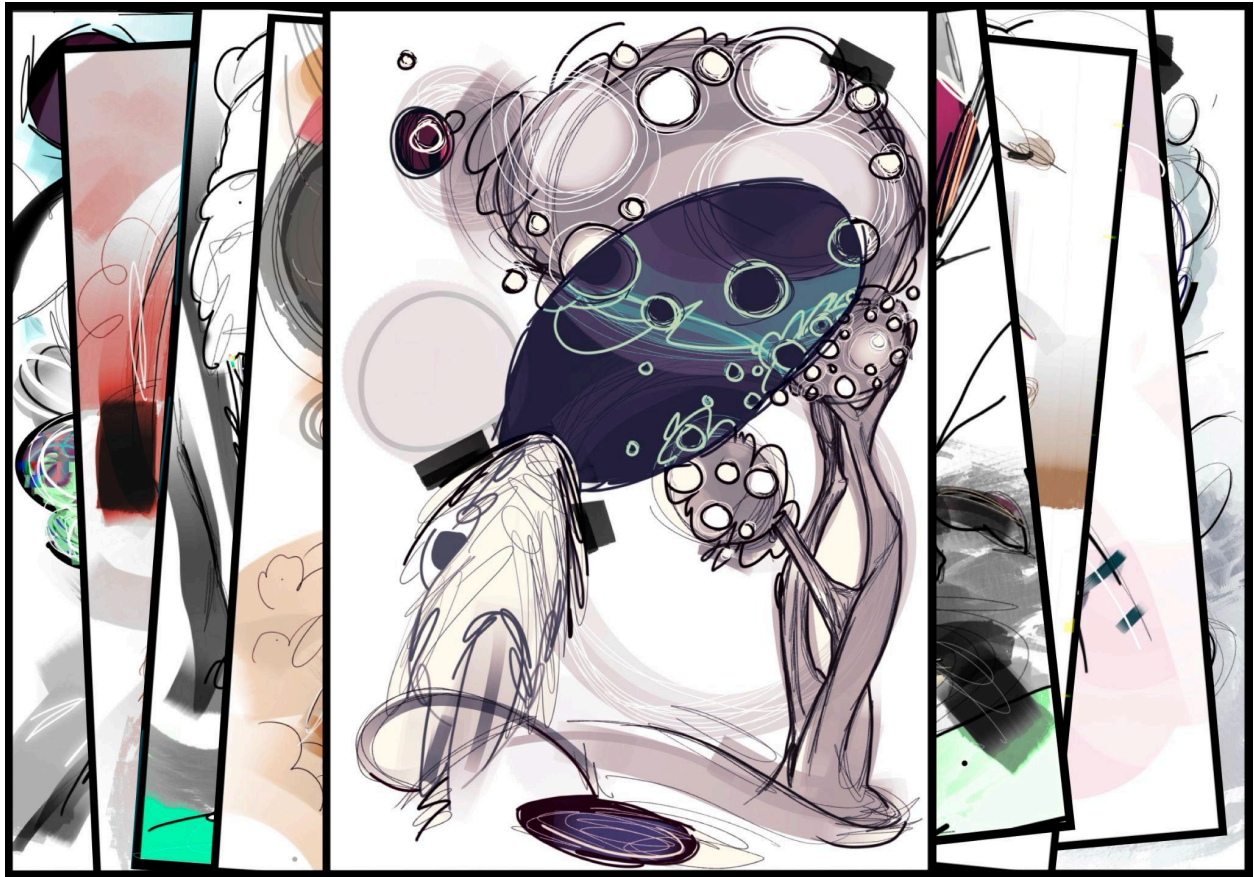


W. Wolfe

## Reawakening Wonder: Exploring the Interplay of Imagination, Memory, and Empathy in Artistic Practice

### Introduction:

As an interdisciplinary artist exploring the spaces between tangible reality and the realms of imagination, I am driven by a desire to forge further meaningful and empathetic connections. During a journey across communities worldwide I was instilled with a vast appreciation for the shared human experience; a feeling I sought to bring home and articulate through a sharing of art (unknown to how). This initiated my journey towards a BFA degree and, serendipitously, the adventure of writing *The Intricacy of Simplicity*. In these parallel endeavors, I unknowingly embarked on a deeper exploration of both the creative natures of imagination and the intricacies of self-discovery.



**Before diving further into the specifics of this artistic project**, there is a foundational question that rose initially: how does one even begin to research imagination?

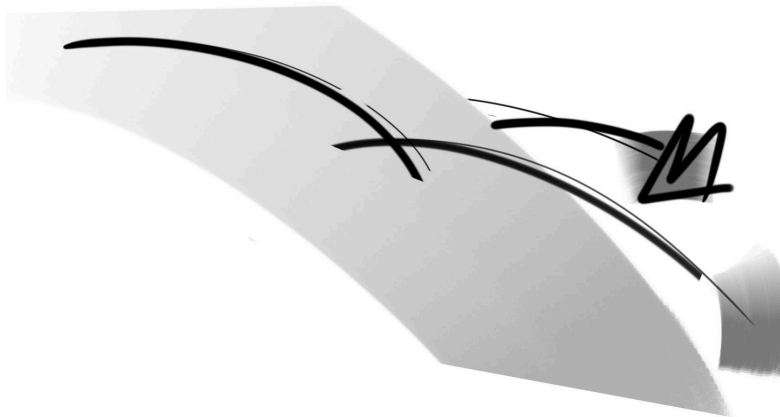
Consider a common object:



What is its known function? Now, push beyond the obvious. What else could it be, something that might initially seem illogical or even absurd? The mental process of envisioning both the practical and the improbable highlights the inherent duality within imagination itself.

Research conducted by Kent for English Heritage provides an illustration of this duality. In a study involving 470 individuals across various age groups, participants were asked to identify the use of an unfamiliar historical artifact. Older participants tended towards more accurate, memory-driven interpretations. Younger individuals exhibited a greater range of imaginative and often more colorful possibilities. This suggests a potential evolution of how imagination operates as we mature, a theme that will be explored further in this paper.

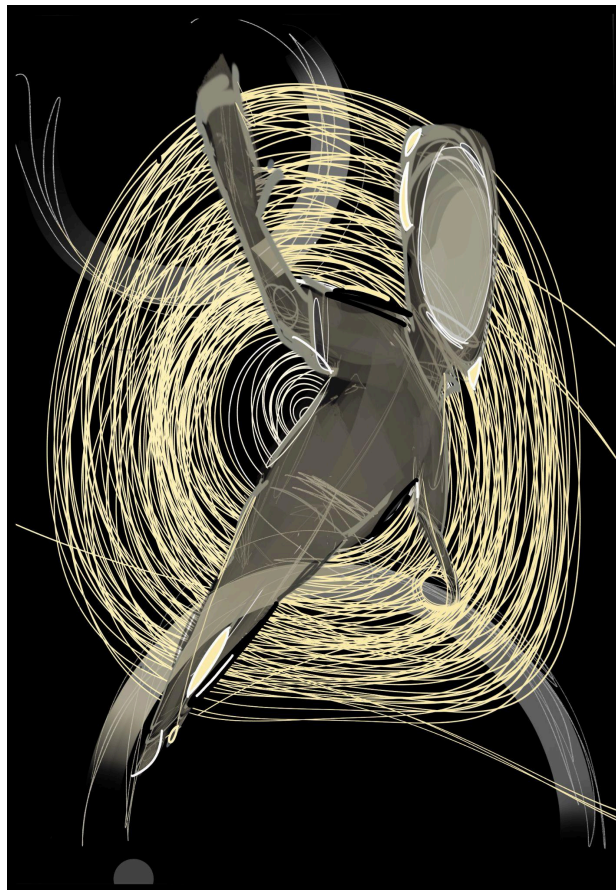
Returning to our hypothetical object, the initial recognition of its function likely draws upon past experiences stored in memory. However, the leap towards unconventional possibilities requires logical memory to be set aside, engaging a more unbridled form of creativity to envision alternative realities. This simple exercise displays the integral relationship between memory and creativity as key components to the idea of imagination.



### **The Intertwined Nature of Memory and Imagination:**

The neurological basis for this relationship is discussed by the research of Loren Frank, particularly his paper "Imagination as a Fundamental Function of the Hippocampus." Frank's work demonstrates that the same region of the brain, the hippocampus, is active in both recalling memories and constructing imaginative scenarios. This shared neural circuitry suggests that imagination is not simply a flight of fancy but is deeply rooted in our ability to access and recombine past experiences. This correlation between memory and imagination extends beyond simple recall and creative ideation; it plays a crucial role in future prediction, planning, and other complex cognitive functions.

In our early years of development, the imaginative landscape is often characterized by a wild and uninhibited exploration of possibilities. This unbound idea allows us to construct elaborate fantasy worlds and engage in imaginative play with remarkable ease.



As we mature, our accumulated experiences, coupled with the physical and cognitive changes of aging, lead to a refinement of our imaginative capacities. This refinement often involves a greater emphasis on aligning imagination with the perceived logic of the world we inhabit. Societal pressures and the influences of consumerism can further contribute to a mindset that prioritizes logical success and fosters a fear of being wrong or failing.

However, the inherent power of imagination lies precisely in its capacity for fearless exploration and the generation of diverse visions, regardless of their immediate practicality. Embracing what is often negatively framed as "failure" is likely to cultivate humility and vulnerability, creating ground for imaginative envisioning and fostering empathy. All incredible steps towards forming further connections and community. By reframing "failure" as an integral part of the exploratory process, it is an ongoing form of success.

### **Bridging the Gap: Reawakening Wonder:**

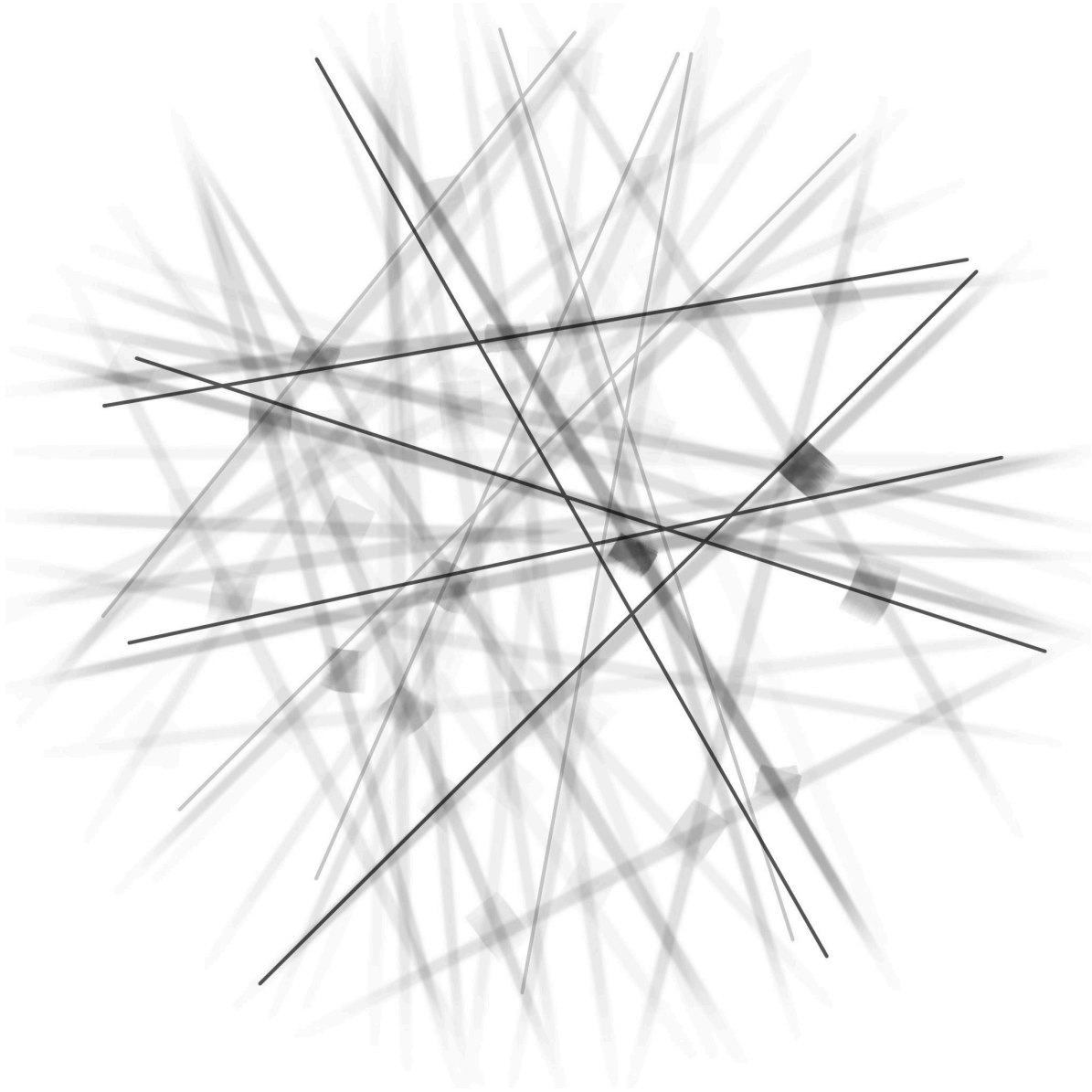
The matured imagination, often constrained by learned logic and a pursuit of idealistic perfection, risks losing touch with its inherent creative potential. Conversely, the raw, undirected imagination in the beginning (while boundless) lacks the grounding of worldly experience and applied creativity. This creates a "grey zone," a space where the untamed wonder can be intentionally recalled and harnessed by the experienced mind.



The reawakening of this wonder, when integrated with the richness of memory and directed towards genuine connection, holds profound benefit for our relationship with the world, our environment, other individuals, and our own selves.

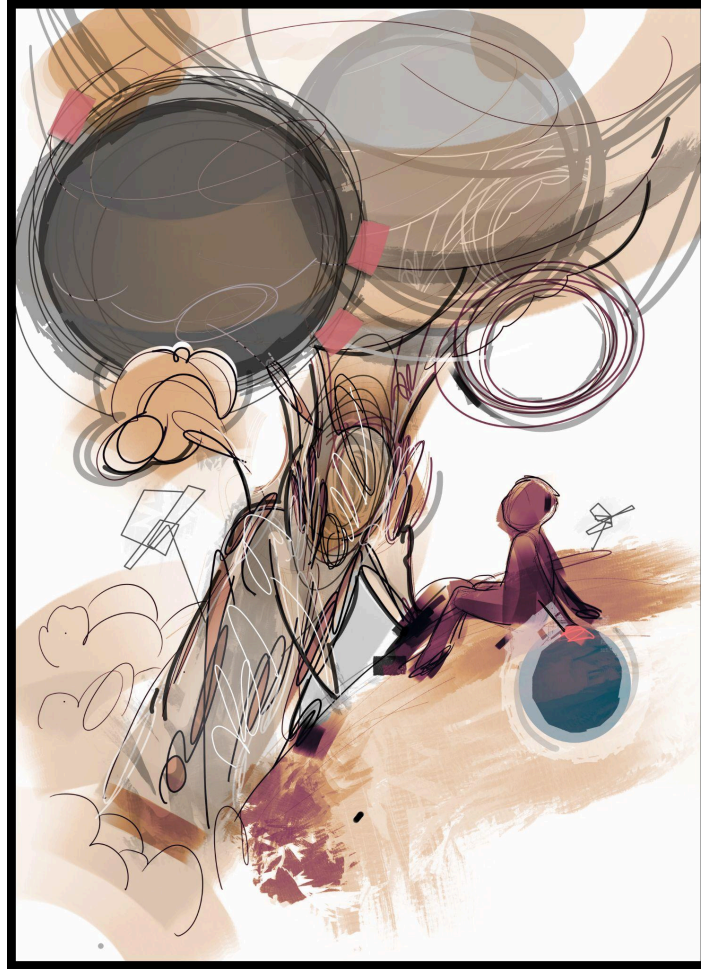
### **Artistic Exploration of the "In-Between Space":**

For me, this "grey zone" manifests artistically as an exploration of the "in-between". The typically unseen spaces that exist between defined categories. This includes the space between two and three dimensions, the space between layered realities, and the space between dualities. These "impossible spaces" are not physically tangible but are rendered real through the spectrum of possibilities they encompass. They are spaces that must be actively envisioned, while being grounded in elements of realism.



These realms provide space for a "collage of realities," where stories, thoughts, and perceptions can converge and interact. Physical materials transcend their inherent properties to become conduits for the untold, the unheard, and the unimagined.

This is where I find myself wanting to share the power of imagination. My artistic practice aims to create this as an entry point for the mind to access an encouraging contemplation, and a recollection of an excited wonder. The ultimate goal is to suggest an "imaginative living" that realistically supports empathy and innovation in everyday life, benefiting both the individual and the collective.



Drawing inspiration from the philosophical frameworks of Phenomenology, Poststructuralism, and Surrealism, my work seeks to create a space where the fundamental questions of "how" and "why" can be explored through this lens of imagination. It is an invitation to embrace a liberated sense of perception and curiosity, to wander within in-between realities, and to contemplate new connections and meanings.

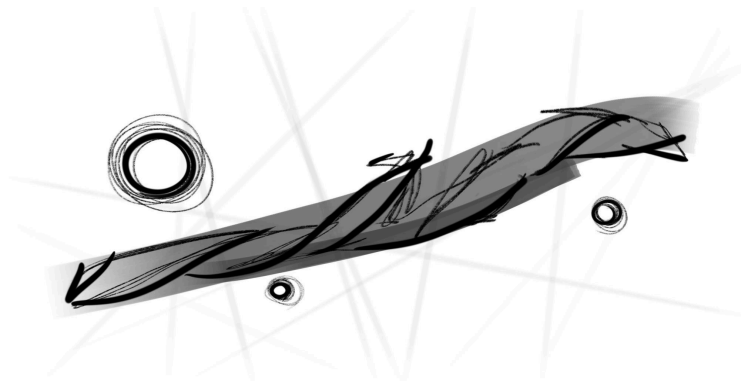
### **The Intricacy of Simplicity: A Study in Embodied Imagination:**

*The Intricacy of Simplicity* serves as my most realized example of this artistic exploration. This project encompasses a book, an accompanying installation (featuring audio narration), and a future envisioned stop-motion animation film.

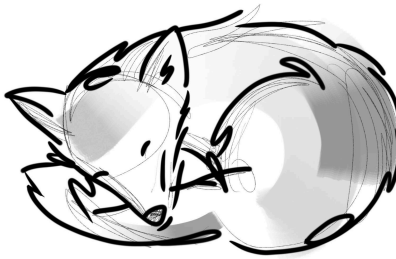
The book itself was a decade-long, on-and-off endeavor, evolving from a simple creative outlet to a purposeful narrative woven with both text and illustration. This amount of time allowed me to accumulate the experiences and insights necessary to fully articulate the story. The book became a central narrative thread, in my mind and throughout my art school journey. Directing projects ranging from AIS to my Thesis exhibition.



*The Intricacy of Simplicity* is structured in evolving layers. Child-like illustrations are juxtaposed with adult philosophical contexts, creating a visual and conceptual tension. The intentional and somewhat unconventional text formatting serves to highlight a deeper narrative embedded within the words themselves. The deliberate use of what might be perceived as "grammatically incorrect" writing encourages the reader to actively engage their imagination, prompting pauses and reflections within the "in-between spaces" of the narrative.



The installation and audio components aim to translate this two-dimensional world into a three-dimensional experience. Fabric collages serve as tangible representations of the book's illustrations, their transparent canvas acting as a thin veil suggesting different realities. Portal-like holes offer glimpses into these layered spaces, while silhouettes provide an opportunity for the viewer to project themselves into the artwork. A unifying element of gold string stitches the universe of the installation together, highlighting a sense of interconnectedness. Deliberate "Easter Eggs," such as the recurring stick pull thoughts from the narrative such as, "I am also this." and "What may be?". Subtly prompting deeper contemplation of possibility. The accompanying audio reading weaves the visual and tactile elements into an overall sensory experience.



Interestingly, the artistic stylization and character development within *The Intricacy of Simplicity* bear an unintentional resemblance to later discovered works. Such as Charlie Mackesy's *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, sharing a similar aesthetic sensibility. However, the intentional ambiguity of my narrative diverges significantly. Parallels can also be drawn to the playful feel and life-understanding development of A.A. Milne and E.H. Shepard's *Winnie the Pooh*, meanwhile the stylization and stories differ. These comparisons highlight a potential resonance in exploring themes of wonder and connection through seemingly simple, yet intricate storytelling.



The Boy, the mole,  
the fox and the Horse

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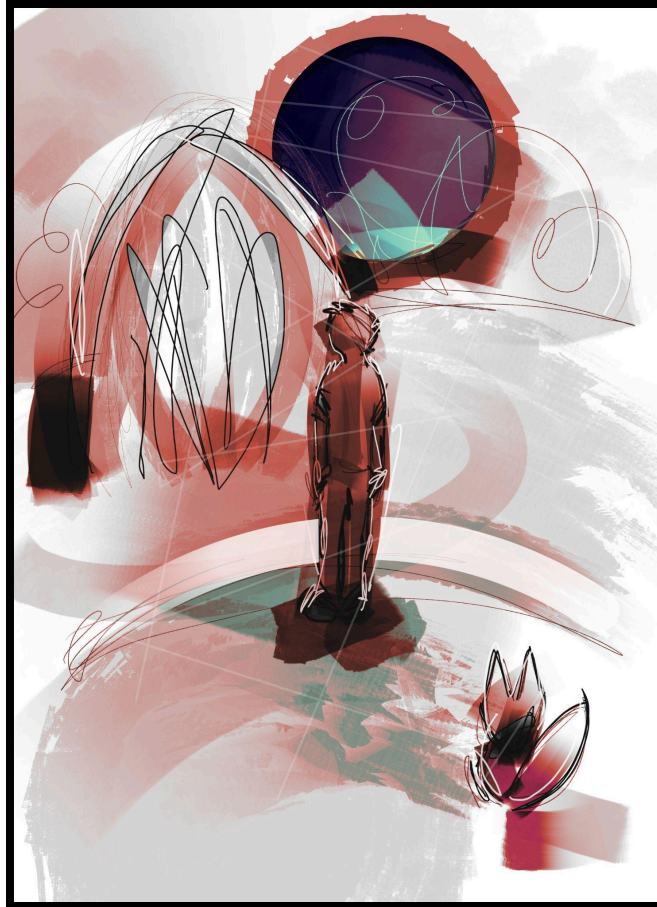
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.charliemackesy.com/>

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.eastonpress.com/all-categories/literature/a.a.-milne-the-complete-tales-and-poems-of-winnie-the-pooh-2236.html>

### Conclusion and Future Directions:

My ongoing artistic endeavor lies in continuing to create within this "in-between space," extending an invitation to consciously recall our inherent boundless wonder and apply it in beneficial ways. It is my hope that this exploration can contribute to a more empathetic, creative, and interconnected world; fostering deeper understanding within ourselves, others, and the vastness of the unknown.



My next steps in this artistic journey include the development of *Book 2: Short Adventures of Intricacy and Simplicity*, which will delve further into the narratives of the supporting characters introduced in the first book. Describing their own perceived realities. I've realized these creative writings represent my own deeper personal exploration of the meaning and implications of imaginative connection, and how it affects my ordinary reality. I continually look forward to further developing and sharing this connection. Additionally, I am envisioning a stop-motion animation film based on *The Intricacy of Simplicity*, finding further layers in the transfer of 2D narrative, to 3D world-building, to digital viewing. These future projects represent a continued commitment to exploring the power of imagination as a catalyst for connection, empathy, and a renewed sense of wonder within our experiences.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> All uncited images in this paper were created by and are copyrighted to W. Wolfe



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<sup>4</sup> This image is one that I created based off of a dream I had, in which I gave AI my thesis to interpret; resulting in it turning my artistic theory into a sticker book of images. This is the one I recalled upon waking. This interesting interaction of the exploration of imagination, human and non; seemed like a wonderful inclusion and conclusion to this essay.