



Liam Dwyer
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THE MATHS

references

Ceri Houkbrook's writing on coin trees has been instrumental in this project

Ovid

Met 1.138-41 (The Iron Age)

Met 1.381-415 (The Story of Deucalion and Pyrrha)

David Lynch

Twin Peaks, The Return, Episode 8

Carl Andre's "pure metals of commerce"

Maren Hassinger, Twelve Trees, 1978

Silent Hill 2, 2001



artist statement

Throughout this course, I've been thinking about the cultural practice of wishes, specifically in Celtic folklore. Two manifestations of this are the wishing well and the wish tree, which are often found in a singular location of religious ritual. I'm Irish and Scottish, and used this project partially to learn more about the beliefs of that part of my heritage. The wish tree is particularly interesting to me because it represents a human/non-human relationship similar to those with technology like AI. Wish trees are believed to heal through "contagious transfer", meaning that the tree receives the wisher's ailment as it is taken away from them. Some variations of the practice present in Scotland involve hammering a nail or a coin into the tree, which eventually kills the tree because the bark is poisoned with copper. Worthy of consideration is metal currency's history as a colonial invention in Scotland, introduced by the Romans and furthered by English monarchism. It is ironic that the tree receives value through the coin but also receives eventual death. Our wishes fulfilled by technology—including those marketed as artificial intelligence—are often at the expense of the Earth, whether that's through the unethical removal of metals or the environmental costs of processing power.

WELL WISHER finds a site at the wishing well next to Bard College's Chapel. Non-human collaborators in the work include the well, which creates site specificity for the tree installation relating to the historical conditions present in wish tree sites. Participants in the work include wishers who receive prompted wishes which they may deposit in the well using coins. The time-based aspects of the work and its physical alterations by participants/viewers reflect the ways in which beliefs can shape our spaces over time—poisoning a tree, establishing economies, or creating commonly held wishes. My audience for this project—the community at Bard—considers the weight of their desires and inner thoughts and what they project publicly through the ritual of interacting with the piece.