

## ANNOTATIONS



# PHANTOM SCRIPTS

GEOFFREY FARMER

## The Good Sweeper

When I was a child, my mother once commented on what a **good sweeper** I was. I took this literally—as if she had recognized and understood a **special inherent** skill I had. I began sweeping my friends' houses, to their parents' **puzzlement**. This childhood misunderstanding sparked an affinity that grew into a **collection** of physical brooms and broom imagery across time and cultures—**political cartoons**, advertisements, instructional manuals, ephemera.

I have collected images from my archive and created these seven groupings—mixed-up ingredients bound in themed “cookbooks.” Each traces how **brooms** function as more than cleaning tools: as carriers of gendered labor, moral instruction, political reform, and social control.

I dedicate this room to Aileen Bryant, who helped me make the blue broom you **see** here. How lucky I was. How lucky we are to still have her voice, her music, her art. Find her recordings and the foundation set up in her memory, at [aileenbryant.com](http://aileenbryant.com).

1.

### **Domestic Morality & Fiscal Order**

#### *Housekeeping the Treasury*

c. 1874–1895

This cookbook/portfolio collects figures cut from 19th-century satirical magazines—*Punch* (London), *Puck* (New York), and *Judge* (New York)—which sold politics as entertainment to urban middle-class readers during the Gilded Age and early Progressive era.

At the center is Treasury Secretary Benjamin H. Bristow, who in 1875 prosecuted the Whiskey Ring—a conspiracy defrauding the government of millions. He became a reform hero and a political pariah, forced to resign within a year. But here, cartoonist C. G. Weldon celebrates him as “the new maid of all work”—costumed in skirts, apron, and mobcap, sweeping “waste,” “irregularities,” and “fraud” from the Treasury. Around him, other figures with brooms join the cleanup, while a witch flies overhead. Why does political virtue require a dress? The joke needs gender transgression to make reform legible.

The brooms tell the story. Witches ride twig besoms—pre-industrial craft, dangerous femininity, folk knowledge demonized through persecution. Reformers wield flat corn/straw brooms—Shaker-style symbols of Protestant efficiency. Wide-head push brooms signal institutional scale and modern bureaucracy. The broom you carry marks you: corrupt or virtuous, backward or modern, dangerously feminine or safely domesticated.

The composition praises the cleanup while mocking the feminization it requires. What does it mean that cleaning up corruption meant turning the reformer into a maid?

2.

### **Electoral Reform & Civic Hygiene** *Election Broom* c. 1872–1908

She sweeps for a nation that won't let her vote. Columbia—the female personification of the United States—appears in electoral reform cartoons from this period wielding her broom. Around her, cut from Matt Morgan's *Sweep Away the Past* (Frank Leslie's, 1872), J. S. Pughe's *The European Partingtons* (Puck, 1902), and Will Crawford's *A Clean Sweep* (Puck, 1908): men in top hats representing political bosses and corrupt officials, a man in drag performing domestic labor as degradation, corn brooms stamped ELECTION promising order, piles of political debris. But Columbia is different. While the cross-dressed man performs temporary femininity as humiliation, Columbia embodies permanent symbolic labor. She doesn't dress up as a cleaning woman; she is the nation cleaning itself.

The cartoons need her maternal authority to make reform feel natural, inevitable, beyond partisan politics—cleaning as everyone's concern. But this neutrality is strategic: it erases the question of who grants Columbia her broom, who decides what she sweeps, and why her labor earns allegory but not enfranchisement. Reform becomes women's work in the most literal sense: work done by women, for a political system, without political recognition. The election broom promises democratic renewal. Columbia holds it beautifully. She just can't use it to elect anyone.

3.

### **Revolution & Class Inversion** ***Sweep of the New Order***

*c. 1919–1940s*

The revolutionary broom promises to cleanse the world of the old order—but the old order depends on who's sweeping. In Viktor Deni's 1920 Soviet poster, Lenin stands on a globe sweeping away a king, a priest, and a capitalist; the caption reads "Comrade Lenin cleanses the Earth of filth." A generation later, a Spanish Nationalist poster keeps the gesture but flips the politics: a worker-soldier sweeps out enemies named in the caption—"Bolshevism, Social Injustice, Petty Politicians, Masons, Separatism, F.A.I." (the Iberian Anarchist Federation). The same broom, opposite enemies. Kings, priests, capitalists, Bolsheviks, anarchists, Masons—the gesture transcends ideology. It can sweep left or right, each claiming to cleanse, each naming different filth.

The tools signal intent. These are rough, long-handled brooms—some twig besoms, some with wide heads—built for force and purge, not domestic tidying. In some revolutionary imagery, the broom becomes a rifle with bayonets for bristles, collapsing cleaning and violence into a single gesture. The figures being swept are caricatured as vermin, obstacles, contamination: kings tumble, capitalists flee, priests fall, anarchists scatter. Made for mass display, these graphics compress ideology into one motion—the broom as an instrument of class power, the sweeper as heroic labor performing necessary hygiene. But the language of "cleansing" edges toward expulsion and dehumanization even as it sells rupture as common sense, as domestic duty scaled up to revolution. The broom makes it look simple, inevitable: one gesture, and the world is clean.

4.

### **Cruel Order** ***Foreign Brooms on Treaty Four***

*c. 1886–1914*

"160-acre farms in Western Canada, free." Posters like this, issued by Canada's Department of the Interior from the late 1880s into the 1930s, toured Europe and Great Britain promising land, schools, and "healthy climate." My family came to Canada from Glasgow and northern England amid industrial poverty, overcrowded housing, and precarious work. They likely saw invitations like these and read in them a chance for stability. They settled in what is now called Togo, Saskatchewan,

on Treaty 4 Territory—lands of the nêhiyawak (Cree), Anihšīnāpēk (Saulteaux), Dakota, Lakota, and Nakoda Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation—before some moved further west to British Columbia. With those promises traveled a worldview of extraction and enclosure, property treated as the highest order, respectability codes that policed sexuality, and a Christianizing civilizing project used to rank cultures and rationalize assimilation. This ideology was enacted through forced removal from territories, through the residential school system that separated Indigenous children from their families, languages, and lands, and through policies that sought to eliminate Indigenous governance and collective land relationships.

Within this history of dispossession and genocide sit the photographs that survive in archives and public collections—largely settler-made, shaping what we can see and what is missing. A Grand Hotel cleaning brigade in Alberta in 1914: whisk broom, corn broom, brush, pail—labor that spoke to working-class survival even as it was framed as proof of colonial order. A sod-house family on the Plains, photographed for promotional campaigns: isolated families on individually-owned plots, the homestead system imposing European notions of nuclear family and private property in stark contrast to the collective, relational structures of Indigenous nations. These images document not the introduction of cleanliness or order—Indigenous nations had their own long-established practices and technologies—but the visual circulation of a particular worldview: European domesticity as proof of civilization, Christian cleanliness as moral progress, settlement itself used to justify ongoing dispossession.

Settlement did not end with the treaties. It persists through property law, permits, resource extraction, and the stories institutions tell—systems that not only perpetuate dispossession but also bind settlers to extractive relationships with land and each other. These nations continue to assert sovereignty, defend land and water, and press for full treaty implementation. Recognizing this history means engaging with their ongoing calls for accountability and redress.

## 5.

### **Broom Drill** ***Sweep and Comply*** c. 1950–1988

In 1987, when I was nineteen, I worked briefly at Canadian Forces Base Baden-Söllingen in West Germany, a Canadian NATO air base in the Cold War's final

years. The Berlin Wall still stood. My jobs were cleaning, pizza making, and maintenance. I met people from small towns across Canada who joined to escape limited prospects, to access education, to serve what they believed was a greater purpose. I also witnessed how institutional power operates: shaved heads, humiliation naturalized as training, boredom and alcohol producing violence. Cleaning was wielded as both discipline and ritual—floors scrubbed to mirrors, inspections that measured worthiness by shine, the broom as an instrument of order.

The photographs in this display show how the broom travels through military systems across decades and continents. A ship in Pearl Harbor with a broom hoisted on its flagpole—the "clean sweep" signal, a 17th-century naval tradition marking total victory, collapsing household maintenance and annihilation into one gesture. Soldiers standing at attention in a corridor, holding brooms like rifles. A military helicopter in Central America being scrubbed with a makeshift broom of branches while local children watch—framed as beneficiaries, not witnesses to occupation. Combat troops in full gear carrying cleaning equipment through occupied streets. Recruits in formation with their brooms, learning that obedience and cleanliness are inseparable.

Cleaning does double work in these images. It maintains operational capacity—removing mud from runways, dirt from equipment, disorder from barracks. But it also stages something else: care, normalcy, domesticity. Military presence becomes legible as restorative rather than extractive, as if aid and occupation could be disentangled, as if infrastructure and violence existed on separate tracks. The systems that enforce barrack discipline—drills, inspections, punishment for disorder—operate beyond the base. Back home, pipeline security deploys identical language: securing perimeters, maintaining order, removing obstacles, suppressing protest on Indigenous lands. Cleaning as ideology: what's orderly, what's contamination, what must be contained or cleared.

6.

**Vanguard Sweep**  
*Queer Refusal in the Tenderloin*  
c. 1965–1971

In the early 1990s I attended the San Francisco Art Institute. The Gulf War pressed through television, teach-ins, street marches. School was a distraction and reprieve

from the AIDS epidemic sweeping the community with no cure in sight. In the Castro, skeletal men with purple marks of Kaposi's sarcoma struggled with walkers or wheelchairs. For me and many gay men, sex was braided to the risk of death. I began learning that there was a queer culture, a history—that we had fought back, organized, claimed space, survived. I learned about the pink triangles in Nazi camps, the persecution that continued after liberation, the long arc of resistance that connected me to struggles I hadn't known existed.

Part of that history was rooted in San Francisco itself. Thousands of service members had cycled through Bay Area bases and ports during and after the war; many were discharged for being gay or chose not to return to hostile hometowns. They stayed, seeding queer neighborhoods in the Tenderloin and later the Castro. In 1965, Glide Memorial Church—led by Rev. Cecil Williams and Janice Mirikitani—helped launch Vanguard, a queer youth group that used street actions and a small magazine to claim space and voice. The following year, they staged a street sweep that flipped the city's cleanup language. Rather than be swept away, they swept. Trans women, drag queens, hustlers, runaways—the people the city wanted removed—took up brooms and claimed the street as theirs. That same summer, trans women and drag queens led the Compton's Cafeteria uprising against police harassment, three years before Stonewall.

The Vanguard sweep wasn't about cleaning up—it was about visibility, occupation, the right to exist in public space without apology. The broom here performs differently than in every other collection. It doesn't train compliance or stage legitimacy. It doesn't feminize reform or promise revolution. It refuses the terms entirely. When the city declares you dirt, you take up the broom yourself and sweep toward your own survival.

7.

### **Castro Sweep** ***ACT UP, October 6, 1989***

ACT UP's National Day of Action targeted federal AIDS indifference—demanding faster drug access, humane care, and accountability. As marchers moved from the Federal Building to the Castro, police declared an unlawful assembly and executed a mass "sweep," arresting dozens and injuring others. It was the largest police action against LGBTQ people in San Francisco since the White Night riots a decade earlier, when the community had erupted after Dan White received a

lenient sentence for assassinating Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone. The next night, roughly 1,500 people reclaimed the streets. The mayor condemned the police response. The city later paid settlements.

My boyfriend at the time was in ACT UP and at this protest. I arrived in San Francisco the following year for my third year of study and witnessed the aftermath—the anger, the organizing, the refusal to disappear. People were dying. The government was silent. And when we demanded action, the response was batons and arrests, framed as cleaning up the streets.

The broom's double life is stark here. Twenty-three years after Vanguard took up brooms to claim the street, police used the language of "sweeping" to clear it—to render protesters disposable, to frame dissent as disorder requiring removal. The metaphor reveals its violence: cleaning as erasure, hygiene as control, the sweep as pretext for making people vanish. When the state sweeps, it doesn't tidy—it eliminates. The difference between the Vanguard sweep and the Castro sweep is the difference between claiming space and having it taken, between survival and suppression, between a broom held in your own hand and one wielded against you.

8.

## **Harvest**

### ***c. Now/Then***

The final book holds broken plates suspended in resin—one I shattered in anger, others unearthed as fragments while digging to plant where we live. Two kinds of excavation: literal and emotional. I include them to place myself inside this history, not apart from it. My life, with its fractures and contradictions, becomes part of the record. I don't live outside what's in the vitrine. Some things can't be cleanly organized or swept into order—they're still being figured out.

9.

Me at five in Sam Burnet's kitchen, playing dress-up—plainly happy. No one had yet told me this was wrong. Soon would come the bullying at school, the pushback, the violence and ridicule for any trace of femininity I possessed. But in that moment, in my eyes there's a quiet knowing: I had a skill. I could sweep. I carry that early feeling into this work, along with a lasting affection for brooms—as a way to belong, and to care.



## La Política de las Apariciones

10.

### **Bogotá: “We work for social and sexual liberation”**

Kaja Silverman proposes that photographs render the past analogically present: not evidence of what is lost, nor mere copies in circulation, but active relations across time. Unlike Roland Barthes, who understood photographs as testimony to absence—the *that-has-been*, irrevocably past—Silverman sees images that sustain rather than mourn. Unlike Walter Benjamin, who traced how mechanical reproduction erodes aura while enabling mass circulation, she locates photographs' power not in their reproducibility but in their capacity to keep the past citable, available for continued address. The image does not archive the event. It sustains it. This distinction matters here. This photograph has circulated widely as proof of Colombia's first public LGBT demonstration—June 28, 1983, that it has effectively become the event it purports to document. What remains verifiable: several dozen people carried this banner through central Bogotá, from Plaza de Toros La Santamaría toward Plazoleta de Las Nieves, flanked by police. The text declares: “Trabajamos por liberación social y liberación sexual. Minorías sexuales—¡Únete!” (We work for social and sexual liberation. Sexual minorities—join us!). Manuel Antonio Velandia, co-founder of the Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual de Colombia, is credited with many images from that day.

Yet ideas outpaced any single witness. The banner adapts slogans from Mexico City's 1979 march, borrows from Spanish and French activist vocabularies, reiterates *liberación*—a term already mobile across borders and movements. Images traveled, tactics replicated, calls multiplied. What survives is not documentation alone but evidence of transmission: that someone saw, answered, and carried the invitation forward to another city, another year, another street.

This is what “apparitions” names as method: not histories that return from the dead, but histories that appear—and keep appearing—in the actions of the living. The photograph does not bring back 1982. It arrives now, issuing the same call. ¡Únete! The politics of apparitions is in the work of answering that call.

## Threshold to Vampire

On November 22, 1973, when I was six years old, my family visited the Museo Nacional de Antropología—opened in 1964 as part of Mexico's nationalist project to consolidate pre-Columbian heritage into state identity. Designed by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez with Rafael Mijares Alcérreca and Jorge Campuzano, twenty-two galleries were built in nineteen months: Olmec, Teotihuacan, Mexico, Maya. Indigenous cosmology became national patrimony.

But the objects carried more than the state intended. I met cosmologies of transformation: jaguars moving between day and night, serpents bridging worlds, the Mexica's dual forces—life/death, sun/moon, human/divine. Systems for how one thing becomes another. I was also frightened—by the teeth, the carved fangs, images of sacrifice, serpents coiled and ready. The fear and fascination were inseparable.

Already sensing transformation in myself—doubleness, prohibited desire—I met a world shockingly outside everything I knew. Mexico City, the pyramids, these cosmologies carved in stone—all of it foreign and frightening and opening something in me at once. Those objects mapped what I couldn't name: how to change form, hold contradictions, move between worlds.

The original version of this work, made in 2010, centered on the patriarchal battles that shaped Mexican modernism—Mathias Goeritz versus Diego Rivera, arguments over which form was more legitimate, needed. This revision turns away from those patriarchal conflicts and toward the personal: what happened to me on that first visit. Even as the world around me was beginning to assert what I should be, those objects revealed something else entirely—terrifying evidence that other worlds exist, other ways of being, other cosmologies that held transformation as sacred rather than shameful.

11.

## Bite of Entry

Clear acrylic cubes hold photographs on all six sides—memory made dimensional, something you can turn in your hands and view from every angle. One cube contains my photograph beside San Lorenzo Colossal Head 6. Other cubes show decades of strangers and archaeologists striking the same pose before the colossal heads—the ritual of standing small beside monumentality, repeated endlessly. The cubes borrow from two systems: Mesoamerican modular architecture and the retail photo-cube souvenir. Memory becomes object—becomes monument. Beside them sits my museum ticket (52 years old), the Piedra del Sol printed on its surface, the hole-punch biting into it—proof of entry, and a mark of transformation.

12.

### **Homework**

My first-grade journal pages function as a counter-archive. Where Bernal Díaz chronicles conquest, I chronicle encounter: "rain god," "stoan calendar," "pwaramids" spelled phonetically, each entry laid out like field notes—date, site, sketch, observation. The misspellings register the gap between experience and language: sound caught before I had learned the rules. The sketches shrink monumental architecture to hand-sized diagrams, making the overwhelming portable. Even the format—sketch, note—echoes the colonial archive I was too young to recognize.

13.

### **Fangs on Bernal Díaz**

Here on this paperback novel, plastic vampire fangs rest on *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*—Bernal Díaz del Castillo's chronicle, drafted decades after the 1519–1521 invasion of the Mexica and published posthumously in 1632. *The True History*—Díaz stakes this claim in the title itself, positioning his account as corrective to rival narratives, particularly Francisco López de Gómara's official history. Writing as foot soldier turned witness, Díaz narrates what he frames as unmediated testimony: present for Moctezuma's capture, the Noche Triste, the siege that destroyed Tenochtitlan. His justification—"We went to serve God—and to get rich"—names conquest's dual mandate with disarming candor. For centuries, his "truth" functioned as foundational text in the colonial archive, naturalizing the logic that equated evangelization with extraction.

This copy comes from my family library; I found the museum ticket tucked inside.

Together they archive inheritance: colonial chronicle beside tourist souvenir, extraction story adjacent to childhood keepsake.

The fangs mark my position in that lineage: tourist, consumer, heir to appetite. But the monster's position doubles. The vampire carries both colonial extraction and prohibited desire—the one who consumes and the one cast as monstrous for refusing sanctioned forms. The capes speak from this doubled position, reaching toward Mexica cosmologies that held transformation without demanding binary resolution. But that reach is itself complicated—turning to Indigenous frameworks to make sense of European colonial problems might be another form of taking. The colonizer's descendant borrowing the cosmology of the colonized to process their own outsider status.

Is this redisplay an attempt to be more truthful? Díaz claimed true history while narrating genocide. I rearrange objects while living on the proceeds. Awareness doesn't necessarily redistribute wealth or dismantle structures. But it changes how you understand the world you live in, how you move through it, what you choose to give back, how you act in daily life. The museum ticket still works—I still benefit from systems I didn't build but inherit. The capes can't undo that inheritance. But they can mark the attempt to be accountable to it—to recognize what I carry, to change what I can change, to give what can be given, knowing it's never enough but trying anyway.

**AUDAIN ART MUSEUM**

WHISTLER, BC