

# begone before somebody drops a house on you too

An exhibition and performance by **Gregory Hari**  
with the support of **Lavdrim Dzemailji**

“Suddenly, this story came in and took possession. It really seemed to write itself.”

L. Frank Baum, the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900)

With his exhibition project at Corner College, Gregory Hari undertakes an experiment with the medium of exhibition and performativity, site specificity and the relation between mapping and performance. He further explores issues on belonging and territory, home and journey, inspired by the contexts of the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, written by Lyman Frank Baum and published in 1900, and its most successful and popular movie/musical adaptation starring 13-year-old Judy Garland, which launched in 1939 to six Oscar nominations, and become influential for the new era of Walt Disney and the later Disney Empire, and by their aesthetic, social and political impact in the mainstream and in subculture.

The artist generates a performative map or diagram of movements and fragments that will open up a process, and project power-knowledge relations that reveal the hidden social and political issues and their potential to aesthetically and critically engage the audience. But the production of the event is not an ‘exchange of knowledge for power,’ nor a symbolic force. The performance confronts the audience with its archival moment across various narratives structures, and scatters in another geography of a journey as a vehicle for metamorphoses that go through contradictory permutations, as every act activates on this topography the performing strategies of this Odysseus. The topography becomes a “science of the sensible – the science of total joy,” a chaosmos journey of micro-physical mapping and mind-map of micro-desires. They are a journey as a cognitive concept and narrative future of a body, interwoven with Gregory Hari’s research materials, which displays the source of his movements and directions.

The map is a journey and a performance, already! “That is, performance presents itself as a journey, but without finalizing its destination,” writes Birgit Pelzer, “as if it were a matter of articulating a space and a time of counter-initiation.”<sup>1</sup> It is the counter-initiation of an inverted Odyssey. In this story, Ulysses does not return. He becomes always different in the play of his infinite substitutions during the performance.

The map exhibits the artist’s interest in popular culture, “from cultural to political, from one of the most secured red shoes in the world to the early gay movements in

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<sup>1</sup> Birgit Pelzer, “Performance or The Integral Calculus of Ambiguities”, in Chantal Pontbriand (ed.), *Parachute: The Anthology (1975-2000). Performance & Performativity [Vol. II]*, (Zurich and Lyon: JRP | Ringier and les presses du reel, 2013) p. 49.

Northern America. The map includes printed pictures, texts, lyrics, etc.” (Gregory Hari), as various sources of inspiration, and shows how mainstream and camp cultures have infused the artistic language and practices, and how their “regenerative potential” (M. M. Bakhtin) can be appropriated as re-vitalizing agents in the context of contemporary art by subversively mixing up the canonical and the marginalized, the hegemonic and the minor, to create new connections and new languages.

The artist situates himself on a yellow strip around one meter wide, where his performance takes place. He improvises ‘across seemingly exhaustive ground.’ It is a process of taking place – a particular place and a particular time. The performance transforms these temporal and spatial categories to a “threshold” that un-rolls another flexible and self-multiplying strip of impersonalized and individuated, self-constructed temporal and spatial relativity that constitutes a world yet to be explored. The artist’s performance starts from this particular coordinate of time and space where it takes place and places things in context. With this, the artist emphasizes a dependence of his performance on its specific chronotope (Bakhtin) that animates a process of ‘endlessly’ expanding its performative territory with the time of the body’s movements and the “time space” of the traveler who carries this place with themselves as they travel through it. A journey like a blank page.

“Green clothes the earth in tranquillity, ebbs and flows with the seasons. In it is the hope of Resurrection. We feel green has more shades than any other colour, as the buds break the winter dun in the hedges. Hallucinatory sunny days.”<sup>2</sup>

“Apropos of that green carnation, Havelock Ellis was certain that queers preferred green to any other colour. Did they secretly drag up in all those emerald dresses that the girls had cast off?”<sup>3</sup>

Hallucinatory sunny days and perception of landscape in a journey, a journey in colors separated in a three-strip process by diffraction and subtraction!  
Transferences! For this dazzling rainbow palette, “brilliant, gorgeous, painted, gay”:<sup>4</sup>

**Red** stands for the ruby slippers/red shoes

**Yellow** stands for the yellow brick road

**Green** stands for the Emerald City of Oz

(Gregory Hari)

**Green:** “Green is a colour which exists in narratives ... it always returns. The

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<sup>2</sup> Derek Jarman, *Chroma – A Book of Color* (Woodstock and New York: The Overlook Press, 1995/1994), p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. iii.

grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.”<sup>5</sup>

**Yellow:** “The nimbus of the saints, haloes and auras. These are the yellows of hope.

The joy of black and yellow Prospect Cottage. Black as pitch with bright yellow windows, it welcomes you.

Yellow is a combination of red and green light. There are no yellow receptors in the eye.”<sup>6</sup>

**Red:** “Red protects itself. No colour is as territorial. It stakes a claim, is on the alert against the spectrum.”<sup>7</sup>

“Red explodes and consumes itself.”<sup>8</sup>

“Liverpool. Early 1980s. I join the march. V. (REDgrave) says, ‘Derek, you carry a red flag.’ There are fifty of us. The ghostly galleon of revolution past. We march through the deserted and derelict city with the sound of the wind whipping through the flags, a rosy galleon on the high sea of hope. The sunlight dyeing us red. Shipwrecked on the last coral-reef of optimism. Someone says to me, ‘The red of the square is beautiful. The root of the red is life itself.’”<sup>9</sup>

(Derek Jarman)

Derek Jarman painted the windows of his black cottage in yellow, to reflect and welcome the yellow of the plants that grow his garden. The estate is located near an atomic power plant and far away from the acceleration of technology. The cottage bears a certain resemblance with Dorothy’s house in *The Wizard of Oz*.

The artist explores questions of belonging, territory and place. It is a journey that can in itself become a home and territory. With his exhaustive and long-durational performance, Gregory Hari constrains himself to the limits of its performance place and to the imaginary lines that can fly and fall from there, in-between subject and object on the yellow brick road under the rainbow.

Gregory Hari: *“My role as the performer is not clear. I am not representing only one character but several at once. I can be Dorothy Gale, the brave but innocent girl trying to find her way back home, or the foolish Wizard of Oz, who pretends to be a great magician but is only a man who landed in this place by accident.”*

The performance aims to inhabit that tiny territory, the border line in-between the characters, without forming an identity, without separating the artist from the characters, or the characters from each other, in their unfinalizably collective dance

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

on the surface of the road. Bakhtin builds his concept of the *polyphonic* on the road as a chronotope propitious to interpersonal encounters. “The chronotope of the *road* associated with encounter is characterized by a broader scope [than the latter’s], but by a somewhat lesser degree of emotional and evaluative intensity. [...] On the road [...], the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point.”<sup>10</sup> It is thus a mutational point of the concept of a “journey,” or the flux of ever formless and nomadic forces, “this formless power of the ground which carries every object,” from which all the (im)possible becomings and metamorphoses of the traveler on the yellow path unfold. As in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1615), the road is the ideal place for encounter. Chance is increased. There is something hazardous on crossroads. The narrative transforms into a road story, becomes a movement on the road, becomes the road itself.

Get out of Kansas! Never look back! When the road becomes home, a place of resistance, one can dance outside the house, along the yellow brick road, and find comrades, jolly company.

“You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the roadsides!  
I believe you are latent with unseen existences, you are so dear to me. [...]

Allons! whoever you are come travel with me!  
Traveling with me you find what never tires. [...]

Allons! to that which is endless as it was beginningless, [...]  
To know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls.”<sup>11</sup>

Walt Whitman’s *Song of the Open Road*, from his collection of poems *Leaves of Grass* (1891-92), opens up a new perception and sensibility of “neither preference or denial” that has become a foundational myth of freedom, of America. The impact of Whitman’s writing on the English language can be compared to that of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), with which it bears further parallels.

The adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz* to the screen (1939) defined the iconography and pattern for on-the-road movies. Jean Baudrillard would later reflect that “in the U.S., culture is [...] space, speed, cinema, technology.”<sup>12</sup> The movie operates several radical transformations and re-compositions of the original work of *The Wizard of Oz*, and undermines the “moral” message of a conservative ideology of the home, of patriarchal family, commending the road as a liberation from hegemonic norms. It is

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<sup>10</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” in *id.*, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin/TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 243.

<sup>11</sup> Walt Whitman, excerpts from *Song of the Open Road*, Poem #82 in *Leaves of Grass* (1900). <<http://www.bartleby.com/142/82.html>> (accessed 2016-09-27).

<sup>12</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), p. 100.

the right of the traveler is to move on. Motion and motivation overlap and become one. Echoes of *The Wizard of Oz* and of *The Leaves of Grass* are found also in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1955), which opens the road to psychedelic highways and turns into a counter-movement manifesto not only for the beat generation. Kerouac's friends jokingly called him "The Wizard of Ozone Park."<sup>13</sup> David Lynch's visual and cinematic vocabulary bathes entirely in *The Wizard of Oz*. Especially the several citations and allusions in *Wild at Heart* (1990), which is a 'typical road movie.' His protagonist Sailor refers to his journey as a "yellow brick road," and to his destination as "The Emerald City," and scenes of the movie in which Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, appears. In *Twin Peaks*, he loops the narrative around a map of *The Wizard of Oz* references. The female rebellions of *Thelma and Louise* (1991), directed by Ridley Scott, a story about life and death, is replete with references of its own. Their songs on the road "Drawn to the Fire," "No Looking Back," "Don't Look Back," "Better Not Look Down." These are but a few works that have drawn on *The Wizard of Oz* while developing their own intensity and breaking new ground.

*The Wizard of Oz* turns out to be a foolish man. The concept of foolish was as important to Whitman, who called on Americans to hit the road and leave behind their certainties and comfort. It comes as no surprise if *The Man Behind the Curtain*, instead of great magician turns out to be an ordinary man from Omaha, "a ventriloquist and then a balloonist in the circus," a clown. Might it be that L. Frank Baum portrays himself in a semi-comical fashion as the great and terrible *Wizard of Oz*, and as the other three friends of Dorothy's, too? Baum himself had worked as a traveling actor, an entrepreneur in the entertainment industry who experimented with photography and moving images, and even set up the first proto-film studio in Hollywood. The title of his book alludes to Thomas Alva Edison's nickname "The Wizard of Menlo Park," after the park in which he had set up his laboratories. It was there that Edison invented both the phonograph and a commercially viable incandescent light bulb filament, that he did his public demonstrations with electricity, and experiments to record the human voice, starting with the nursery rhyme "Mary had a Little Lamb," as well as with moving images. L. Frank Baum, who also experimented with moving images, met Edison in Chicago and wrote a reportage about him, describing his big head on a small body. The reference is even more direct in the movie, which shows the machines and the diabolic devices of technology of the *Wizard of Oz*. In Klaus Nomi's 1981 song *Simple Man*, he sings: "Yes, I'm a simple man. I do the best I can." Indeed, *The Wizard of Oz* is the story of a simple man, with all miracles a simple man can work. Klaus Nomi is among the long-term addicts of the fiction of *The Wizard of Oz*. inspired by the Land of Oz, he states: "I come as the wicked witch from the Baroque era." He re-enacted the group of songs that

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<sup>13</sup> Jack Kerouac lived with his parents in the Ozone Park neighborhood of the New York City borough of Queens after he was discharged from the U.S. Navy in 1943. He wrote his first novel, *The Town and the City*, as well as the quintessential *On the Road* while living there. Allen Ginsberg addressed a letter to Jack Kerouac to *The Wizard of Ozone Park*, alluding to both Thomas Alva Edison's nickname *The Wizard of Menlo Park* and *The Wizard of Oz*. Cf. <<http://www.dharmabeat.com/ozonepark.html>> (accessed 2016-09-27).

celebrates the death of the Wicked Witch of the East: “Ding Dong, the Wicked Witch is dead!” after Dorothy’s house lands on her. Glinda The Good Witch of the North invites the munchkins to welcome Dorothy to Munchkinland: “Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are!”

*Salman Rushdie* wrote his first short story “Over the Rainbow” in Bombay at the age of ten. Since then, he has returned to the meme of *The Wizard of Oz*, intrigued especially by the characters of the Wicked Witch. Accused of misogyny, in fact he insists on creating strong or even wicked feminist characters, considering wickedness to be at times the only weapon against the patriarchal system. In *Midnight’s Children*, among other stories, he “rehabilitates” the Wicked Witch.

“Beautiful wickedness” is the queer appreciation twisting the character of Wicked Witch of the West. Derek Jarman expressed his fascination when he “said that from childhood he ‘often thought’ about the Wicked Witch of the West, and after [his] fright, grew to love her.”<sup>14</sup>

*“In Rome, that freezing snowbound winter of 1947 with no fuel to keep us warm, my parents took me to see my first film. I was unable to disentangle the screen from reality, without distance, I cowered in my seat. As the house in Kansas was blown through the sky I bolted down the aisle and was brought back by an usherette drying my tears. For the rest of the film I sat in terror on my seat, staring wide-eyed as Lion, Scarecrow and Tin Man helped Dorothy brave the torments of the Wicked Witch on the Yellow Brick Road to the Emerald City.”*<sup>15</sup>

This is another Odyssey, inverted and irreversible, in which there is no return. Its economy is not based on the household, the *oikos*, which refers to the family, the family’s property and the house, and escapes the spider of time. Medusa is the most tragic heroin in the Greek epic of Homer and the Western narratives going back to Ovid. She was killed by Perseus, who was worried that the Gorgon would prevent his departure from the underworld, using an optical trick in which his shield became a screen and his shelter at the same time, shielding him from the horror of her gaze, from the stoning power of every image that was born of this emotion. As Anne DeLong writes, “Medusa receives new life and agency as a central figure in the poetic discourse of Other-possession.”<sup>16</sup>

*The Wizard of Oz*, written as a children’s book, has been perceived by some as a political allegory of the financial crisis and monetary policy reforms to extend the gold standard to silver, and as a critique of the rapid industrialization of rural America – as a political satire of the American dream, a portrait of society and civil struggles,

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander Doty, *Flaming in Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (Oxford: Psychology Press, 2000), p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> D. Jarman, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> Ann DeLong, *Mesmerism, Medusa, and the Muse: The Romantic Discourse of Spontaneous Creativity* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 103.

The society of the spectacle and big broader and representation of liberal political system, the Oz a land of consumerist desire. The relationship between the crises and the miracles of the capitalism, money and politics in the Land of Oz and promises of the technological dispositive and its acceleration of it, that only technology can be the promises land, the green is the green of the money.

In the novel, the Emerald City is emerald because the Wizard makes everybody wear green glasses there, even though the city is “no more green than any other city.” The Wizard is able to convince them to do that and be happy. Green is a deception that covers the steel, beams and stones. In the movie, the deception of the glasses is replaced by a magnificent Emerald City, which to the spectator might as well be the underworld. Is the city real, a place for refuge and asylum, or rather a hologram projection, a shimmer of desires, or is it a “truly extraordinary and a magic city.” The Emerald City, like all other cities, “lives on artificial surplus.” It becomes a place of technological alienation, a place determined by its technological dispositives and consumerism signified by mass media, advertising and entertainment industry. Green is the color of paper money. One still wonders if it is a city of dystopian technological apparatuses, or the utopia that only technology can lead to the promised land of this nowhere, taking the road beyond the endless future city, in the dilemma between freedom and alienation.

An ever Green city, a perfect hybrid of nature and technology, a city of the eternal return – where “the sign is reversing, the orb is closed, The ring is circled; the journey is done.”<sup>17</sup> “Green is the old serpentine,” writes Derek Jarman – the Green of the Emerald City is the greenness of the endless vegetation of the Garden of Eden, or the green of the maze of the heterotopian space of knowledge, a space of reflections and thoughts, an invisible world that can appear only through the looking glass, a world that needs the tricks and techniques of a wizard to reveal its mysteries and its metamorphoses. Only those who wear the green glasses can get access to a space of the virtual and imaginary, through demystifying the mastering of perception that is one of the new-old wizard tricks, can reveal how power and knowledge can coincide. This is the lesson that whoever gains control over the optical imaginary has the power to change the world. “The cinema was born in a green wood,”<sup>18</sup> according to Derek Jarman. It can be born only in the loop of the eternal green image that returns always different, a vegetation that grows out of death. Jean Cocteau’s definition of cinema as “death at work” can be a continuation of this thought, from where the leaves of grass still grow, and we sing our body electric.

“The story of cinema begins before itself, in an unaccountable realm of magic lanterns, shadow shows, early still photography, and dreams.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Walt Whitman, excerpts from *A Broadway Pageant*, Poem #101 in *Leaves of Grass* (1900). <<http://www.bartleby.com/142/101.html>> (accessed 2016-09-27).

<sup>18</sup> D. Jarman, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Lethem, “Thomas Edison, 1888: Eadward Muybridge visits Thomas Alva Edison’s laboratory in Menlo Park,” in Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (eds.), *A New Literary History of*

There are many possible allegorical readings of Dorothy's yellow-brick odyssey, of the girl's adventures and her friends, from a satirical allegory of money and politics to the conciseness of the journey that the home is somewhere one should be. It touches the issues of gender, race and class, with the song 'Over the Rainbow,' bends the traditional assignment of gender roles and traditional family values, imagines other cultures and other gender geographies. In this other subjectivity, there is even something hysterical that breaks down male masculinity. There is no clear evidence if it was the intention of its writer. As in every great tale, there is a riddle, and it is rather still open for different readings, which makes the story of Dorothy and her friends tempting and inspiring.

*The Wizard of Oz* is an American myth, which as a modern myth has its deeper subtext that unconsciously and eternally touches political events, among them aspects of the economic depression and deflation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Great Depression of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the collapse of Populist movement in the United States with the return to the gold standard, when the most important 'reform' in the American Monetary Policy had failed. An American modern fairy tale, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* goes into American politics and the geography of the United States, but it can also be seen as a feminist utopia, in support of the suffragist movement. There are several very strong female characters, in contrast to the male. Frank Baum's mother was a suffragist involved in feminist struggles and demands, and the novel resonates with some figures in early American feminism, like the suffragist Matilda Joselyn Gage and her radical ideas and activism, whose activities religious leaders denounced as Satanic.<sup>20</sup>

"As soon as a system of religion was adopted which taught the greater sinfulness of women," Gage wrote in *Woman, Church and State* in 1893, "the saying arose: One wizard for every 10,000 witches, and the persecution for witchcraft became chiefly directed at women." Dorothy wields the real power, unlike the male characters who are all rather weak. She is the embodiment of the new subjectivity of the individual. Dorothy represents the common citizen, ordinary people like the farmers in Kansas, the individuation of those who struggle, be they Midwestern farmers or the new emerging working class from the process of industrialization of rural America, and the emergence of new labor conditions of permanent unemployment (during the depression of the 1890s, like many workers of that period, the Tin Man is unemployed, so many workers were desperately precarized in this period) to the desires for egalitarianism of the feminist struggles to vote, and the emergence of the early the civil rights movements of black people, or even prefigures the gay liberation movement, all these people who struggled for justice and rights. Dorothy is a collective persona of that common man, without spatial qualities, the political and social force for liberation and emancipation.

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*America*, <<http://www.newliteraryhistory.com/thomasedison.html>> (accessed 2016-10-08).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. <<http://www.historynet.com/matilda-josyln-gage-the-unlikely-inspiration-for-the-wizard-of-oz.htm>> (accessed 2016-10-08).

The book and movie map out the various archetype figures described in the psychoanalytic theories of C. G. Jung. In some readings, Dorothy, the dreaming innocent, is on a quest toward individuation/self-actualization, and her companions correspond to the first three stages of Jung's conception of the Animus – the male inner personality of the female. (The fourth stage, a mediator or messenger of "spiritual profundity," is of course the Wizard himself.) Oz resonates with psychedelic and hallucinatory effect and the drugs experience of the counter movements of the 1960s, a whole generation that would like to be theoretically 'evil,' on the *Dark Side of the Rainbow* – also known as *Dark Side of Oz* or *The Wizard of Floyd* – referring to the synchronizing of the 1973 Pink Floyd album *The Dark Side of the Moon* with the visual portion of the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, an exercise undertaken by Pink Floyd fans in the mid-1990s.

With all its contradiction, the movie has been an inspiration and opened up the potentiality of 'queering the film canon.' Judy Garland would go on in her musical career to gather a huge following of gay men, to the extent that being "a friend of Dorothy" (FOD) meant being gay.

The magic pair of ruby slippers will send Dorothy home. The shoes' precise power will never be known. In any event, in the novel they are silver. The silver slippers refer to the free-silver movement and the Populist movement in the US, and the travel along the Yellow Brick Road can be seen as an allegory of the gold standard, all the way to the Wizard himself, who represents power in crisis. "Oz" is the abbreviation for ounce, which is the standard for measuring gold. The green of the Emerald City would then represent the dollar. In order to get the best effect from Technicolor technology, the slippers were changed to ruby-red. Some have seen this as a depolarization of the novel and celebration of spectacular Technicolor, with was an enormous contrast to the grayness of everyday life outside, where the strikers were dancing in the dark. By the late 1930s, Technicolor's advanced three-strip process made deep color saturation possible in a wider range of hues. The Technicolor cameras did not film in color. Instead, they filmed in black and white with different filters – a magenta lens, red and blue and a green lens. This process required the lighting to be as bright as possible. The studio was illuminated by electric light, and the temperature would rise to the extent that it became harmful for the people in the studio.

*"The process also required intense lighting; MGM used 150 36-inch arc lamps for the production, and had to borrow lights from other studios. (The final cost of merely lighting the movie was \$226,307.) Temperatures on the sound stages sometimes reached 100 degrees F. It was common for people to faint from the heat. The elaborate set for Munchkinland was patrolled by a fire inspector, who looked for hot spots and sometimes ordered the lights turned down in specific places. The bright illumination caused cases of eyestrain (dubbed "klieg eyes"); some performers later complained that their eyesight*

*was permanently affected.”*<sup>21</sup> ( )

Another possible key to Baum’s novel is his adherence to the “Theosophical Society, founded by the world-traveler Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in 1875,” which “offered up a newfangled amalgam of Buddhism and Hinduism that spoke of following life’s golden path to enlightenment, a journey to find the wisdom, compassion and courage within.”<sup>22</sup>

*Text: Dimitrina Sevova*

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. <<http://oz.wikia.com/wiki/Technicolor>> (accessed 2016-10-08).

<sup>22</sup> Evan I. Schwartz, “Matilda Joselyn Gage – the Unlikely Inspiration for the Wizard of Oz,” <<http://www.historynet.com/matilda-joselyn-gage-the-unlikely-inspiration-for-the-wizard-of-oz.htm>> (accessed 2016-10-08).