

G. Küng

Car Rubbings on Red

26 September - 8 November, 2025

The first recorded use of the word *automaton* appears in Homer's Iliad when Hera leaves Olympus to intervene directly in the mortal war: "at once, Hera whipped up the horses, and Heaven's Gates of themselves (*αὐτόματα*) groaned open on their hinges..." (5.749–750). The word emerges to describe a self-opening threshold between worlds in a moment of escalating crisis. Often translated as "self-moving," the term has come to connote a machine that operates of and by itself—a machine that is its own cause.

The automaton repeats. This is the conservative dimension of the unconscious, which aims to return to the same by more or less circuitous routes. The psyche seeks familiar passages—well-trodden trails become paved roads become highways—back to the trace of the accident. The other side of this repetition is *tuchē*, the unpredictable, chance encounter. Hera's descent carries the signature of both: the mechanical gates that open at each god's departure and the singular disruption she is about to set in motion in her proxy war below.

If the automaton starts moving by itself, what can stop it? A crash promises that speed will meet its counterforce, and impact will demand a shift. An accident carries the fantasy of falling toward a new world order. Delivering a new material cause for repetition, the crash is chance becoming fate becoming chance again, and on and on. The new world order revolves around its originating accident until it becomes automatic of its own accord, escalating to a point of unbearability that bears a new catastrophe.

The *tuchē* is the tear in the fabric where the side mirror would be. The mirror's field of reflection borders the blind spot, the famous birthplace of the accident. The technique of *frottage* operates at this place, the paranoid strip where the periphery becomes lapsus. As taken up by the Surrealists, the method summons automatism in order to create the conditions for an inevitable slip, which reveals an internal motive and limit of automatism. The rupture in the fabric marks the shock of discontinuity not only in material but in technique—the repetition of the rubbing is broken when the rip is made custom, 'by hand.'

Does the red fabric of the red flag signal us to slow down or speed up? Contemporary life appears like a sea of red flags, warning of catastrophe ahead. Far from deterring us, we charge forth, accelerating like a bull at the matador's muleta. "Accelerationists" name themselves after this charge. The red flag is then less of a warning than an emptied-out trace of prior accidents, an enigmatic sign that can be read in either direction. If the automobile has become the emblem for the modern desire for freedom, speed, and individuation, then the crash reveals its other face—the wish for complete stasis, for absolute contact, for a collision in which both parties are added together: 'totaled.'

The warning goes that what we don't remember, we repeat. But how do we remember, and what does it have to do with our means of recording? Freud took up a child's toy called the Mystic Pad as a model for perception and memory. The *Wunderblock* involved a dark resin slab with wax paper and celluloid on top. When depressed with a stylus, the paper made contact with the slab, and writing appeared. When the celluloid was lifted and contact broken, the surface was again ready to receive new impressions. The trace of the prior writing remains as grooves on the slab, although it cannot be brought back to the surface. Freud writes, "...once the writing has been erased the Mystic Pad cannot 'reproduce' it from within; it would be a mystic pad indeed if, like our memory, it could accomplish that." Today, Freud's truly mystic pad has become the iPad, now operating through a new automaton we call AI. By severing text from texture, this tablet offers a seemingly limitless ability to record, recall, and generate. This raises a host of questions about memory and inscription, repetition and accident. What recording has to do with remembering is far

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from clear, especially remembering in the Platonic sense of learning. We don't know at what point inscribing everything becomes inscribing nothing, whether, just like a limited surface, the act of constant inscription still risks obscuring the very trace it seeks to preserve. We are only just beginning to see what kind of accidents AI invents— hallucination being one shared accident of both AI and consciousness.

There are moments when we realize just how far outmatched we are by the automatic. We tell ourselves to 'stop it,' and 'it' doesn't stop. Sometimes a crash is gathering, with its threat and promise of change. A day always comes when we are compelled to ask: what's possible and what's fate? How can we open up a space for something else? It may be both a horror and a relief to remember that the threshold opens by itself.

--- Cassandra Seltman

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Installation view

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Car That's Been in a Crash Rubbing on Red, (2025)
Graphite powder on fabric
150 x 200 cm

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Window Down Rubbing on Red, (2025)
Graphite powder on fabric
150 x 116 cm

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Installation view

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Cracked Headlight Rubbing on Red, (2025)
Graphite powder on fabric
123 x 150 cm

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Installation view

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Two Cars Rubbing on Red, (2025)
Graphite powder on fabric
150 x 335 cm

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Installation view

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Conceptual Model With Apertures, (2025)
Plexiglass
35.5 x 35.5 x 15.5 cm

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Truck Rubbing on Red, (2024)
Graphite powder on fabric
150 x 260 cm