

Issue 2: Illusion

Go to our [Contributor Guide](#) to learn how to submit pitches!

Illusions, referring to false beliefs, perceptions, and interpretations, are everywhere. Things are rarely what they seemed: food looks better in advertisements, global news select diction to downplay humanitarian catastrophes, and your memories do not recapitulate reality. For this issue, we invite you to explore motifs of dreams, nightmares, deception, propaganda, camouflage, artistic interpretation, and anything betraying reality. Feel free to claim any of the pitches listed below or come up with your own pitch!

News & Politics - news@thestrand.ca

1. A Trade Deal that was Never Meant to Be

- a. Is a trade deal between Canada and the United States possible under the current respective governments of both nations?
- b. Should there be transparency between both the Canadian government and the public on what led to the fall of the “fair deal” illusion.
- c. What is the real impact of retaliatory tariffs? Is such a response effective?
- d. If Canada and the US are economically dependent on one another, why is achieving a free trade agreement or any trade deal so difficult?
- e. This pitch can take any angle towards the current trade war, including what has led up to it, its fall out, and what may be to come.

2. Real Life True Crime Deception or just Conspiracy Theory?

- a. This pitch focuses itself around the ongoing homicide case of Lindsay Clancy
- b. Investigate when does true crime online speculation cross the line into the creation of conspiracies
- c. What facts of the trial are established and what remains disputed
- d. How much can social media, especially today in many legal cases, destroy or hide the evidence presented in court

3. Does Trump's threat of “Lake America” mean something or nothing?

- a. Discuss recent attacks on Canada's sovereignty, particularly the changing of Lake Ontario to Lake America
- b. Does this threat by Trump actually mean something? What are these executive orders really?
 - i. You can draw from the “Gulf of Mexico” situation.

4. Does Ontario's new Bill 98 really offer a seamless transit system?

- a. Bill 98 promises a more connected Ontario. For UofT students, will said “seamless” transit system really make getting to class easier?
- b. What does “Improving Transportation Infrastructure” really imply?

- i. Ontario can now control TTC fares and scheduling, does this benefit UofT students?
- c. Who gets to decide what transit students need—the TTC, the City, or Doug Ford?
- d. How should students measure whether the promise of convenience has been fulfilled?

Opinions - opinions@thestrاند.ca

1. **“That’s Not What the Ad Said!”: How Brilliant Marketing Led Me to Waste Time:** We’ve all had that one experience. Whether it be a well-edited, pompous trailer for a new film, a harrowing ad for an episode of television, or even more extensive viral campaigns like playing an ARG in the city, or seeing live cosplay of in-universe characters connected to a video game a week out from retail. For decades, it has not been a question of walking blindly into a piece of media with no expectation, as departments and teams within film, TV and gaming have long been purpose-built for distilling the feeling for what you will see or play. And for every two or three campaigns that reflect strongly on the quality of a particular piece of media, there’s always that one, cleverly assembled media blitz that fooled you into thinking it was *the one* not to miss. How are we so easily duped by something as simple as two minutes of film reel or a 30-minute gameplay demo? What was one promotional cycle that embodied that feeling for you? Are we at any point closer to wisening up to such tactics?
2. **“You Can’t Spell ‘Rescue’ without R-U-S-E”:** When is a lie not a lie? Many would say that even if they’ve been raised to not tell them, they have been put in situations where it was the only way to save face, or even save someone else from imminent danger and consequence. The ‘white lie’ has been a common, reluctant tactic that became the difference between de-escalation and disaster, and for others it has even been an innate skill developed over several such scenarios, even if how or when it is used makes its nature morally ambiguous. When have you used a ‘white lie’ to help either yourself or someone else? How did it feel going against moral instinct to convince someone else of a ploy you didn’t believe in yourself? Did lying in this fashion develop into a moral instinct or natural compulsion after enough time? Were there times where telling the truth might’ve been the superior option in retrospect?
3. **Tales from the Scam Folder:** There’s a certain art to the ‘scam’. Anyone, from an anonymous burner account in China to a student desperate to pay off tuition, can

or even has sent a seemingly innocuous email attempting to play on a person's pride, insecurity or curiosity by offering an elusive reward, hoping that its sudden and tantalizing appearance would bring them closer to extracting an even heavier toll – and money – from the naive. As cases of this nature continue to cause great unrest on campus grounds, let's take some time to reflect on the times you almost, or even did, fall for the illusion of grandeur. Share a story about the best scam mail you've ever received, a time you were almost duped by its content, or even break the ice and share an instance where you or someone you know fell for it. What about scams can seem so persuasive despite their telltale signs? Any advice to people not privy to the dead giveaways of the trick?

4. **Generate Me a Girlfriend: The AI Chatbot Community and The Struggle for Intimacy in the 2020s** - Reddit, a site already seen by many as ground zero for awkward antisocial antics and navigating particular niches, has also recently cultivated a reputation for hosting a series of communities that seek to confide in each other through their shared lack of organic, impassioned intimacy, an advent that has only become accentuated by the introduction of artificial intelligence as a platform for whole sects of isolated users to imagine an idealized life with a significant other who measures up to their anticipated criteria for the perfect relationship. If you've ever experimented with or even explored communication with a chatbot, perhaps you have perspective on whether these chatbots and their widespread adoption are an indictment of the current decade's emphasis on personalized social interaction whilst we are more isolated than ever? Were these models a natural response to an unspoken desire for authentic relationships? Or even particular communities' fetishization for exhibiting dominant control in relationships through the act of typing prompts and influencing virtual women?

Features - features@thestrاند.ca

1. **Animate, Inanimate and Everything in Between:** The sun, a moving object, illuminates all we can see on earth, creating shadows giving inanimate objects movement. In a bustling world, in nature or even in cities, nothing ever seems still, even if the object itself is completely motionless. This kind of optical illusion exists in our everyday life, it is always in flux, so; if the object itself stays the same, but looks different at various angles, weathers, or lightings, can we *really* call it the same. Claude Monet explores this phenomenon while capturing water lilies in movement and in various sunlights, his series on the Rouen cathedral shows the edifice throughout different phases of the day, where different shadows or details appear due to this change. You can approach this pitch from a philosophical, artistic, personal, or even sociological perspective.

2. **Solarpunk and the Concrete Jungle:** Solarpunk is the urban fiction of an eco-friendly, sustainable, and environmentally symbiotic city that is believed to prioritize human and animal well-being, by surrounding our civilizations with natural elements, third spaces and renewable energy. This movement, or surreal future, may not be an illusion at all, and in fact, a new architectural and aesthetic phenomenon for our urban future. How can we incorporate illusions of a better world into our reality, and what are the social implications of this? Is this “regression” into the “state-of-nature” a Hobbesian nightmare? Or a technological breakthrough?
3. **A Robot can’t love you: An ethical exploration of AI and Illusive Companions:** Recently Melania Trump appeared at the inaugural “Fostering the Future Together” Global Coalition, next to a humanoid Robot named “Figure three”. This entity of artificial intelligence, was designed to assist with domestic tasks and childcare . Similarly, a New York district school board paused plans to implement “Sally” the robotic TA in classrooms after widespread backlash from teachers and parents. This new wave of AI in caretaking and child development raises an even broader question: is it moral or even healthy to have a personal and emotional connection with AI? With an increasing number of individuals using ChatGPT as a therapist, working through emotional regulation skills with a chatbot lacking emotion altogether. Is this illusive empathy harmful to children and to the future of emotional and psychological education? From a feminist/sociological perspective, can objects replacing traditionally feminine roles while fulfilling “thankless” domestic tasks, be seen as socially commentative? Could this new domestic presence allow for women and mothers to rival men in equal time and professional opportunity? Moreso, could the cost of these domestic maids create an even larger equitable dilemma in our urban societies? Explore this through the illusion of the “tender love and care” AI provides.

Arts & Culture - culture@thestrاند.ca

Arts & Culture welcomes reviews for any of the following campus theater, dance, and music productions:

<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0?cid=Y18yNzJjOGEzY2E2Mzk4ZTVlZjJiNTJmMmM2ZTgyMmUwNDdhOTYzMm50TkzNzAxYmI1M2JkZGU4ZDIyZjU3OGQyQGdyb3VwLmNhbGVuZGFyLmdvb2dsZS5jb20>

This issue’s highlight: TCDS’ *Urinetown*.

If you are involved in a campus production not listed on the calendar, please let us know!

1. **Everything is Not As It Seems:** From the days of Edgar Allen Poe, through the pulpy 20th century, and into the modern day, crime literature has remained one of the most popular and lucrative literary genres. Why do we enjoy reading about the gruesome and mysterious parts of our world? Why are we attracted to the figure of the Detective? Which novels helped define the genre, and which transcend it? *This pitch is also open to any reviews of recently published crime fiction.*
2. **The Third Eye - Hallucinogens and Art:** Optical illusions, intricate patterns, and tripped-out images all define the 1960s counter-cultural Psychedelic Art movement. Inspired by the use of hallucinogens, psychedelic art seeks to explore the unreal, uncanny, and untouchable. What circumstances led to the birth of the psychedelic art movement, and how does it speak to our world today? What role do optical illusions play in art? How do hallucinogenic drugs impact the mind when creating art? Do psychedelic posters continue to represent the counter-culture they were born in, or rather, a capitalist bastardization of old hippie values? How has the psychedelic movement changed over time? Who is creating psychedelic art today? *This pitch is also open to a view of the ROM's current exhibition of psychedelic art.*
3. **Spiralling:** Optical illusions are often utilized in interactive ways that force the viewer to physically (or at times mentally) reposition themselves to unlock new perspectives of the art, from the mirror rooms of Yayoi Kusama, to the trompe d'oeils of the TTC's Eglinton Subway station. In fiction, this gaining of perspective can often mirror the characters, such as with platformer games or certain works of literature designed to be read nonlinearly (Fun fact: it's not just House of Leaves or Pale fire, but a whole subgenre known as ergodic literature!) What are your favorite works of art that utilize illusion? And have there been some ways that understanding the technical, scientific mechanisms of a work of art has impacted you?

Science - science@thestrاند.ca

1. **Castles in the Air:** Fata Morgana is the Italian name for Morgan le Fay, the infamous sorceress of Arthurian legend who (allegedly) created illusory visions at sea to lure sailors to their deaths. In the scientific world, a Fata Morgana (or mirage) is defined as an optical phenomenon in which light bends as it passes through layers of air with a large temperature gradient, resulting in strange illusions. The first occurrence of a Fata Morgana took place in the Strait of Messina between Italy and Sicily; approaching sailors glimpsed towering fairy tale castles floating above the coasts. Tell us about other occurrences of a Fata Morgana, such as the Flying Dutchman. Lake Ontario is also famous for Fata Morganas/mirages; is there a reason for this? You can also write about the optical physics behind mirages, and how they can be explained or predicted.

2. **Dream Theory:** Write about the science of dreams, of the illusion-making theatre that draws its curtains every night. Do you think dreams really mean anything, in the neurobiological sense? What do you make of the activation-synthesis hypothesis, which states that dreams are simply electrical impulses that pull randomized thoughts and imagery from memories? In contrast, what about threat simulation theory, which dictates that dreams are an ancient biological defense mechanism that simulates illusory threatening events to prepare neuro-cognitive mechanism for real ones? What do you think about Sigmund Freud's theory that dreaming allows us to sort through repressed longing?
3. **The illusions of neuroscience:** Your brain runs on an illusion-creating mechanism called perception. What we perceive as reality is often a result of our brain creating illusions to maintain a sense of normativity or narrative that supports our day-to-day function and survival as a species. Discuss the neuroscience behind how the brain creates these illusions to produce our normal perception of the world. What are some of these illusions or tricks the brain plays on us? What landmark studies have contributed to our understanding of the brain basis perception and why is it evolutionarily the case that perception often results from illusions and trickeries?

Poetry - poetry@thestrاند.ca

1. Your Latest Trick

Write a poem that takes inspiration from magic shows: card tricks, rabbits being pulled out of hats, a magician's assistant being sliced in half. Try to put a unique spin on these classic and sometimes clichéd images—how do the elaborate theatrics of these performances contrast with the reality of their mechanics?

2. Unreliable Narrator

Some of the most pervasive illusions occur within and emerge from our own minds—false or confabulated memories, or seeing things that aren't there. Write a poem wherein the speaker experiences these phenomena. How does one distinguish between illusion and reality?

3. Optical Illusion

Write a poem where the words themselves are the illusion, and their meaning changes depending on how you read them. Perhaps your poem could be read both forwards and backwards, or play with concrete poetry to create an illusive shape or image.

1. **A rental listing for a house you're pretty sure was previously owned by a troupe of clowns**
 - There's a teeny bedroom that actually fits 20 people, if you're...into that?
 - Enjoy top-of-the-line bouncy house material, the floors lined with ergonomic and eco-friendly peanut shells.
 - Try to sell our readers on this home in this short ad, where nothing is as it seems.
2. **A review of a city attraction written by the guy who fell for the hole-in-the-floor chalk art**
 - He's pretty sure this isn't legal, and *definitely* sure the mayor will be hearing about this.
 - The man stopped himself just at the edge of the abyss, pinwheeling his arms around for a good ten seconds: "Woah!"
3. **A guide on how to get around campus, except you're also kind of confused**
 - Are you a sophomore who skipped most of your classes last year? Are you unable to get to the kitchen without using Google Maps? Then you're the author we're looking for!
 - Tell us how University College is just around the corner, to the left, down the way, to the right, to the left, another right...wait turn around.
 - Provide the best route from OISE to the Pharmacy building for a back-to-back schedule, *without* using teleportation.
4. **A guide for the best places to eat on campus, only they may or may not exist.**
 - Sorry, can you point us to a food truck that sells the total weightlessness you only get on the last day of school? Or, you know, sweet treats?
 - Have you finally mapped out the way to a certain McDonald's? Is it lowkey mid?
 - Guide students to the best places to eat your feelings after a visit to the exam centre