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Tired Iterational/International (TI).

Plutonics: A Journal of Non-Standard Theory

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PLUTONICS

A Journal of Non-Standard Theory



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About the Journal

Plutonics is an open-access, annually published journal of non-standard contemporary theory. Named after the geological term “plutonic” (which is, in turn, derived from the Roman God of the underworld, Pluto), meaning igneous rocks formed from deep geologic trauma and left to cool for thousands of years. *Plutonics* aims to publish cutting edge theory that has no place within the ‘academy.’

With no guiding thread by the Weird, we accept submissions from all disciplines and actively encourage mixtures of philosophy, ‘hard’ science, poetry, visual arts, and other forms of Becoming.



For more information, please visit plutonicsjournal.com or contact us at mvupress@gmail.com.

PLUTONICS

A Journal of Non-Standard Theory

Volume 16, April 2023

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Introduction 4:1(1):23:9:45

With the threat of extinction from misaligned AI looming, it seems worthwhile to pontificate about Other worlds and gorge ourselves in the Weird. As we close out March and ring in the Fools of April, we present this volume of *Plutonics*, ostensibly ‘on’ the parapsychical. With a call for submissions focusing on the problematic between truth and fiction, science’s role in an increasingly odd world, and what to make of UFO sightings and disclosures, among other bizarre events, we received a wonderful batch of submissions from writers and artists and thinkers around the globe.

Beginning our investigation, **121** looks into the overlap between science fictions and future becomings by tracking the role that fabulation plays in our cultural institutions of meaning-making. As if written in tandem with the above, **Attay Kremer** presents us with a short exposition on the overlap between “the truth of fiction,” situating the two as inexorably linked. **The Tired Iterational/International** takes the above to the limit with a short piece on what, exactly, “science” means in a truth-adjacent world.

As if predicting our current AI alignment predicament, **George Micah Kuhn** presents us with an account of a sufficiently advanced LLM ported over into the world of video games thus creating an unbeatable virtual opponent (something that may not be too far off in the future). In tow, **Miroslav Griško** (writing for Neja Zorzut’s 2022 “Ebb” exhibition) looks at a necrotic drive built into the universe itself, delivering us an “ethereal nihilism.”

Digging around our mailroom, an odd text compiled by **Luke Larkin** emerges. A heavily redacted and unpublished scientific paper by Drs. Terrence Meeks and Roosevelt Francis from the University of Puget Sound takes readers through an investigation into ‘intelligent’ mycelium, mushrooms that can learn. Weaving throughout the fictional and the real, the paper’s third author, **Chen Kahn**, presents novel insights into the nature of intelligence and love. Following that, and in line with the semiotic questions raised in Larkin’s text, **Peter Heft** looks at how **D.C. Barker’s** (in)famous Tic-Xenotation may be used as a maximally abstract form of information transmission that would allow for

Introduction

communication with radically inhuman entities in an attempt to bypass problems of context brought forth by Derrida in the '70s.

Instrumentalizing the Outside, **G.R. Harmston** sets forth some provisional understandings of what he calls “theory gadgets” and attempts to explain how they might be used to broaden our understanding of the world around us. **Louis Lapathi** continues down the rabbit hole by providing us with a play, of sorts, that tries to allow us to look in on the Outside, while **Leo Zausen** follows up with an essay on silence. Looking at our first “official” (that is to say, scientifically verified) interstellar visitor, ‘Oumuamua, Zausen situates our guest as a physical instantiation of a cold, dead universe that is indifferent to humans. Whether we get a ‘solution’ to the Fermi Paradox or simply more nothing is yet to be seen.

Finally, this edition ends with three essays. Despite warnings from the men in black-suits who will likely usher us off to Black Site 5 in Nevada, **Matthew Chrulew** leaks a review of an article that gives us hints as to just how much (or how little) ‘They’ know about ‘Them.’ As if writing from within the institutions that tried to suppress Chrulew’s essay, **Scott W. Schwartz** takes a second look at string theory, questioning whether there truly is something material underlying the universe. The novel suggestion: screams, those primordial affections, might come closer to the truth as the scream underlies the reality of cosmic horror. And ending, **Laila Sougri** presents us with a thoroughly weird, *Children of Men*-esque story about one ugly baby—a baby that turned out to be the last baby born.

Throughout this issue, you will find works by your favorite artists that accompany the above pieces. **Frida Ortgies-Tonn** is back with her beautiful multi-media works, and throughout the journal one will come across pieces from **Neja Zorzut’s** 2022 “Ebb” exhibition (full information on page 30–31). Perusing the pages, one will also find collages by **Δ-RebelSandpaper** and terrifying AI art from another world by **Craig**.

It is our hope that you find this edition of *Plutonics* as enjoyable to read as it was to edit! As usual, while the editing of this edition was undertaken by a singular caffeine fueled meat sac(k) staring deeply into a computer monitor

for hours on end, *Plutonics* would not exist without its contributors, to whom we owe the utmost gratitude. It's been wonderful to work with you all (despite the delays on our end) and we're extremely thankful that we got to produce another amazing journal.

Finally, since we consider *Plutonics* to be a community project—one that we all hopefully benefit from—we do, as always, encourage you to send any comments, concerns, questions, thoughts, aesthetic critiques, etc., to mvupress@gmail.com

Thank you again to everyone who contributed and supported us.

—Editor(s)

Arkham, MA and London, ON

2023

Contributors

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Laila Sougri is a researcher, writer, and a translator from Morocco. Some of her translations were published in Springer. She has a Ph.D. in Literature and Cultural Studies. Because of her unbound interest in literature, art, and philosophy, Laila is obsessed with borrowing threads from the three with the ambition of writing *glowy mesh*. IG: [@lailasougri](#)

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Louis Lapathi is a student of cinematography, filmmaking, photography, and journalism, and is a hobbyist writer and a fan of cosmic horror. They like writing things that appear so non-sensical and meaningless that it almost looks like there's some meaning behind them. [@antinegin](#)

Luke Larkin lives and writes in Missoula, MT, where he earned his MFA from the University of Montana. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in places like *HAD*, *Sonora Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Bear Creek Gazette*, and others. He speaks to fungus, but never for them.

Matthew Chrlew ([@negentropist](#)) is a writer and researcher with stories in *Cosmos* and *Westerly* and essays in *Biosemiotics* and *New Literary History*. He edits the Edinburgh UP book series *Animalities* and is currently writer in residence at East Perth Cemeteries.

Miroslav Griško is a writer and theoretician in Ljubljana, Slovenia. He is the author of the book *Eshatološka vojna* (Eschatological War), 2022.

Neja Zorzut is an artist focused on "ecological philosophy" and "ecology without nature," hyperobject entities and hyperoccutation, immersion, modified

Contributors

spaces and/or objects that necessarily penetrate the skin, adhere to organs, thus creating an atmosphere of decomposition of the body, modification/adaptation to a different kind of environment. IG: [@zorzutneja](#)

Peter Heft is a lapsed philosopher and Ph.D. student. His interests orbit the event horizon of accelerationism, time travel, and futurism/fascism/utopia. [@hefty_heft](#)

Scott W. Schwartz, Ph.D. ([askschwartz.com](#)) is an archaeologist studying electrolithics at the City University of New York. Their work confronts the material culture of knowledge destruction, with a focus on heuristics of discernment.

The Tired Iterational/International (TI) is a postpostmodern thoughtswarm, seeking to overcome and study the objects subjecting our faculties to guidance. We take a vaguely soulist approach to dreams, taking inspiration from the D.C. Barker, Simone Weil, and the Situationist International (SI).

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—One—

A Timeline

- 2022: First successful heart transplant from a pig to a human patient.¹
- 2019: Patient receiving kidney donation has new organ delivered by a drone.
- 2014: First successful uterine transplant; first successful penis transplant.
- 2005: First successful ovarian transplant.
- 1986: First successful double-lung transplant.
- 1967: First successful heart transplant.
- 1964: Patient receives transplant kidneys from a chimpanzee and lives for nine months.
- 1869: First successful skin autograft transplantation.
- 1818: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is published.

—Two—

Characters and Authors

It was only 51 years between the publishing of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the first successful skin graft transplantation, almost 50 years after doctors completed the first successful uterus transplant. Though Shelley herself did not discover the ways to perform these complex surgeries, in a way the characters she created set forth the initial groundwork for this future to come into reality. Characters that writers pen

into existence are not required to stay within the pages they inhabit. Now more than ever, we see the characters of books, comics, and movies leaving the page and the screen to go about their own adventures. Unfortunately, this process tends to be mostly driven by marketing and advertising and tends to have a much more harmful effect than that of *Frankenstein's* monster.

Frankenstein is an example of

1: The patient would later die as the pig's heart was infected with porcine cytomegalovirus.

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the unintended effects of a work of literature, which is opposed to theory in which the real-world effects are intentional and meticulously planned and envisioned by the author. Even though much of speculative fiction has intent behind what it is written about, the ways in which the ideas, characters, etc., will supersede the work appears to be of minor importance.

In science fiction, “science and technology are often the villains [...] serving the state and suppressing individual freedom,” which makes sense because the goal of the work is often to critique the world we live in and inspire change within it.² Interwoven throughout these critiques we find imagined futures that have, for better or worse, been entirely altered by technology or science. Many works of science fiction, and related genres, seem to serve as a warning (or even a threat) about the ways in which we have let the state and its science and technologies run our societies.

The characters in mainstream

speculative fiction have been forced out of their stories, commodified, advertised, and subsumed back into the greater narrative of capitalism. Much of the dominant canon in western SF today can be written off as U.S. military and police propaganda, or simply a lame attempt at selling someone a product. The propaganda machine has a tight grasp on fiction and myth within society, and what we believe to be the truth is disseminated to us by forces outside our control. The question is, how do we create a fiction that is subversive and resistant to western domination? For Deleuze, the “obverse side of the dominant myths,” as well as the supporters of these myths, is the act of “fabulation;” which is “an act capable of creating the myth instead of drawing profit or business from it.”³

A character will become something else entirely, outside of its original narrative, once it begins to tell its own stories “without ever being fictional.”⁴ Alongside this, a director or author becomes a part of the other when they interpose themselves

2: Anne Cranny-Francis, “The ‘Science’ of Science Fiction: A Sociocultural Analysis,” in *Reading Science: Critical and Functional Perspectives on Discourses of Science*, eds., J.R. Martin and Robert Veil, 63–80 (London, UK: Routledge, 1998), 68.

3: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans., Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 270.

4: Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 150.

with the characters they create; this movement swaps the filmmaker/author with their characters who, through fabulation, replace their fictional selves with something that resembles the real. Deleuze speaks of this as a communication “in the invention of a people.”⁵

Within this process, “the character is continually passing the frontier between the real and the fictional.”⁶ Deleuze uses the

fictional here to mean the “power of the false,” or the “fabulation function.”⁷ Characters come to inhabit the space between their creators and the space in which they are created; this is the space where a “people” are invented—where fabulation happens. In an interview with Antonio Negri, Deleuze says: “It’s the greatest artists [...] who invoke a people and find they lack a people.”⁸



Basalt 1.5 / *Frida Orgies-Tonn* / ceramic /
19 x 13 cm / 2021

5: *Ibid.*, 222.

6: *Ibid.*, 153.

7: *Ibid.*, 275.

8: Gilles Deleuze and Antonio Negri, “Control and Becoming,” in *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans., Martin Joughin, 169–176 (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), 174.

—Three—

Fabulation, or, A People to Come

Deleuze says that “fabulation is not an impersonal myth,” it’s also not a “personal fiction;” fabulation for him is a real process that brings the written word to action.⁹ Fabulation is a “speech-act” that allows the character of the story to “continually [cross] the boundary” that separates “his private business from his politics.”¹⁰ The character of a story is a vessel for the authors’ philosophies and desires; they use their characters to cross that boundary between private life and politics. Fabulation is the creative energy used for the process of forging new futures. What remains to be discovered is who will populate this future.

When Deleuze describes fabulations as “speech-acts,” it refers to films that emphasize speech rather than images. These films must position themselves as “a foreign language in a dominant language,” and they must “express an impossibility of living under domination.”¹¹ He goes on to say that “third world cine-

ma” has the aim to “constitute an assemblage which brings real parties together” and which “produce collective utterances [...] of a people who are missing.”¹² Once the speech-act becomes a fabulation, it is “autonomous” and may not necessarily be confined within the realm of visual representation. Deleuze speaks at length about this, saying:

It is this which has control over memory and forgetting, over suffering and hope. And it is above all this which is creative fabulation coextensive with the whole of the text from which it tears itself, constituting an infinite writing deeper than writing, an unlimited reading deeper than reading.¹³

This autonomy granted to characters and their authors allows them, through fabulation, to produce “collective utterances” that are “capable of raising misery to a

9: Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 222.

10: *Ibid.*, 218.

11: *Ibid.*, 223.

12: *Ibid.*, 222.

13: *Ibid.*, 258.

strange positivity.”¹⁴ Fabulation doesn’t create “myth[s] of a past people, it is the creation of a memory of a present people that gain existence through this creative process.”¹⁵ In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze describes this memory as “cosmic” and which “liberates man from the plane [...] proper to him.”¹⁶ This liberation from our plane allows us to become creators “adequate to the whole movement of creation.”¹⁷ Fabulation allows for the creation of a cosmic people capable of creative feats that will allow them to flow freely within the movement of pure creation.

Deleuze, quoting Bergson, says that the creative emotion behind fabulation is found in, “the little interval between the pressure of society and the resistance of intelligence.”¹⁸ Creative peoples are born into closed societies that are hostile to that which is born from fabulation. However, if those born of fabulation must

“open [themselves]” to pure creation; “and from soul to soul” pure creation, “traces the design of an open society, a society of creators.”¹⁹ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari place emphasis on “modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, *peopling*.”²⁰ Fabulation gives access to creative emotion, that pure creation that is equal to the whole of creation, to expand and propagate throughout an imagined future. It spreads like a virus and infects all those who are open to receiving it, transforming them into creative peoples who will populate their imagined future (present?).

Fabulation seems to be the link between a future people and our art; it takes our art out of the plane proper to it and allows it to propagate through society infecting others with creative emotion. Those who are engaged in fabulation may not even always do it intentionally; we believe

14: *Ibid.*, 222.

15: *Ibid.*, 223.

16: Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans., Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991), III.

17: Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, III.

18: *Ibid.*

19: *Ibid.*

20: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Volume Two)*, trans., Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 239 (emphasis added).

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that many past fabrications have been unintentional. There is an apparent need to take greater control over this process because we stand poised to lose the creative battle with the state. Corporations and politicians are well aware of our position and dedicate a large amount of energy towards influencing the fiction that appears in popular culture as well as dictating the content of this fiction. The Pentagon has had an office dedicated to entertainment industry relations since 1948; the same goes for the CIA as of 1996. A Freedom of Information Act request revealed that there are over 800 movies that were influenced by the U.S. state department.²¹ Only horrors await us if we continue to let the state have so much control over the production and dissemination of media.

To fight back against this we must be willing to utilize fabrication in opposition to the goals of the state (hegemony, controlling public opinion, etc.) this will further our programs. We ought to create characters whose goals and aspirations di-

rectly contradict the wills and desires of state institutions and we ought to imagine futures for these characters in which strife no longer has any place. We must differentiate between fabrication and utopian political theories, and it should be clear that we take up this task of fabrication knowing that the worlds we create cannot be perfect but at least they will be populated with people who desire a perfect world. For Deleuze, this is how we take fabrication as Bergson originally conceived of it and “give it a political meaning.”²²

Those willing to take up the task of fabrication with the intent of creating a new future and of peopling this future must fundamentally believe in their ability to change the world. Deleuze says that those of us who “believe in the world,” are the ones who “precipitate events [...] that elude control.”²³ We spoke above of the dominance and control capitalism has over myth and fiction although, there are still those who are capable of transforming myths into fabrications capable of the kind of creation that

21: See Matthew Alford, “Washington DC’s role behind the scenes in Hollywood goes deeper than you think,” on *The Independent*, published September 3, 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/hollywood-cia-washington-dc-films-fbi-24-intervening-close-relationship-a7918191.html?amp>

22: Deleuze and Negri, “Control and Becoming,” 174.

23: *Ibid.*, 175.

will resist control. In Deleuze's words: "We need both creativity and a people."²⁴

When a people's created, it is through its own resources, but in a way that links up with something in art.

—Deleuze and Negri²⁵

The people created are "always a creative minority" and they remain as such even if they manage to achieve a majority status within society since the operations proper to minorities and majorities do not exist within the same place; the minority that becomes a majority "can be both at once."²⁶ We shouldn't differentiate between a minority and a majority by comparing and contrasting physical size,²⁷ Deleuze says that "A minority may be bigger than a majority."²⁸ Simply put a majority is defined as "a model you have to conform to", whereas a minority "has no model,

its a *becoming*, a process."²⁹ We can also refer to what Deleuze and Guattari say in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "Becomings are all minoritarian; a becoming is a becoming-minoritarian" and, "majority implies a state of domination."³⁰

Another way fabulation exhibits political strength is through a creative minority when it begins to design models for itself to attain the status and function of a majority. Deleuze says that the minority "wants to become a majority" because it "probably has to, to survive or prosper."³¹ Politically, fabulation exists as a survivability apparatus servicing a minority people as well as a means of subverting the political dominance of the state that they may face; as such, "[a minorities] power comes from what its managed to create."³²

24: Ibid., 176.

25: Ibid., 174.

26: Ibid., 173.

27: Those familiar with western politics can know that a very small number of people can constitute a majority in terms of political power.

28: Deleuze and Negri, "Control and Becoming," 173.

29: Ibid. (emphasis added).

30: Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 291.

31: Deleuze and Negri, "Control and Becoming," 173.

32: Ibid.

—Four—
Becoming

Everybody's caught, one way or another, in a minority becoming that would lead them onto unknown paths if they opted to follow it through.

—Deleuze and Negri³³

Previously we laid out how the people created/imagined/pulled from the future will be responsible for upsetting the bourgeois order's hold over creativity within capitalism. Bourgeois creative emotion is limited to reproducing old structures under newer and prettier façades, so our efforts must run counter to theirs and attempt to find exit points without neglecting the duty of contagion to ensure the spread of pure creative emotion. Our taste has evolved past a state of accepting the same old drivel that Hollywood produces that permeates all of contemporary television and cinema; we are thirsty to receive something new and liberating. Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus* how "The vampire does not filiate, it infects."³⁴ Filiation

is the main model of expansion that the capitalist order has operated with, since its inception. Karl Marx relates the functioning of the capitalist to the vampire, but we believe, following Deleuze and Guattari, that the model of the vampire is an apt one to counter the filiative expansion of the bourgeois order. The infection or contagion model is the mode of expansion used to understand how people are linked to each other as an imagined people and how they turn others into vessels of pure creative emotion.

Deleuze and Guattari explain the operations of this model by comparing it to humans and bacteria or viruses, saying that these relations are "neither genetic nor structural," and that they are "unnatural participations."³⁵ The relationship between creative peoples should run in opposition to genetics, filiation, and all existing capitalist structures of expansion and recapitulation. Our own unnatural participations with each other should introduce new modes of becoming and existence that are liber-

33: Ibid.

34: Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 241–242.

35: Ibid., 242.

atory and that resist control and domination.

Art is resistance: it resists death, slavery, infamy, shame.

—Deleuze and Negri³⁶

Thus the great souls [...] are those of artists and mystics.

—Deleuze³⁷

At the limit, it is the mystic who plays with the whole of creation.

—Deleuze³⁸

For us, fabulation means toying with the fictional—with that which opposes the real—and giving it a politics that reflects the change we wish to bring about in ourselves and our society. That means altering what is meant by the terms false and fictional, “[...] for the false ceases to be a simple appearance or even a lie,” this is so that we can “achieve that power of becoming.”³⁹ These becomings will “[cross] limits,” and “[carry] out metamorphoses,” which is ultimately

what fabulation is about: entering into becomings.⁴⁰

Becoming is a process that begins on the molecular level and with this mode of operation, it affects change and passes by/through/underneath, undetected by methods of capture used by the state. We believe capitalist society proliferates via repetition and imitation of itself and its processes; every structure that oppresses us is an initiation of a past idea recapitulated endlessly by capital although, at some point, there was nothing left to imitate but imitations themselves. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari say that “a becoming is not a correspondence of relations [...], neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or [...] an identification.”⁴¹ The evasion of recapitulation by capital is the political power of becoming.

Becoming is not a progression or a regression and “above all, becoming does not occur in the imagination.”⁴² Rather, becoming first exists at the point of contact between

36: Deleuze and Negri, “Control and Becoming,” 174.

37: Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 112.

38: *Ibid.*

39: Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 275.

40: *Ibid.*

41: Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 237.

42: *Ibid.*, 238.

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Ebb / Neja Zorçut / wire, plaster, epoxy resin, carbon kevlar, 430 cm x 200 cm
x 50 cm / 2022

the being, or usually, beings which are not-yet and the multiplicity they enter a becoming with. Often, this first takes place as a becoming-animal since there is an affinity with the pack-form; in fact, “becomings always involve a pack” and a “multiplicity.”⁴³ The multiplicitous nature of the pack entices an individual into becomings in the first place. All individuals are made up of multiplicities and only enter into becomings with other multiplicities, or with entities that tend toward multiplicity or the pack-mode. “We sorcerers have always known that.”⁴⁴

If the writer is a sorcerer it is because writing is a becoming” “writing is traversed by strange becomings that are not becoming-writer, but becomings-rat.
—Deleuze and Guattari⁴⁵

We will emphasize the ways Deleuze and Guattari describe becoming in *A Thousand Plateaus* and the pretension within science fiction for biological catastrophes of an ani-

mal nature to occur. SF is full of the “becomings-wolf, and becomings-insect” that many individuals tend toward.⁴⁶ Individuals are drawn to these types of becomings not because they identify with any of the specific characteristics of a particular animal; instead, they are drawn toward how their modes of existence inspire “expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion,” and most important to us, “peopling.”⁴⁷

Writers are sorcerers drawn toward becomings-animal and other multiplicities because they feel something compelling them to develop these multiplicities and enter becomings with them. For example, the writer whose character becomes man-wolf in the light of the full moon is attempting to enter into their own becoming-animal using fabulation. The multiplicities within a subject give off “a fearsome involuntary calling us toward unheard of becomings.”⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari also remind us of the tale of Lord Chandos who “becomes fascinated with a people of dying rats” and within

43: Ibid., 239–240.

44: Ibid., 239.

45: Ibid., 240.

46: Ibid.

47: Ibid., 239.

48: Ibid., 240.

An Inquiry Into Future Peoples

whom we see “the soul of the animal [bearing] its teeth.”⁴⁹ This is how the writer experiences these “unnatural participation[s],” it is an interaction with the multiplicitous soul of the pack-form animal. For Lord Chandos this animal soul manifests as an ultimatum: “Either stop writing, or write like a rat.”⁵⁰

The sorcerers who enter into becomings with the rat, wolf, insect, etc. take on their methods and modes of existence while those engaging in creative efforts are the writers and directors who are using fabulation. However, they cannot risk detection by capital because here detection could mean the loss of life; but there is a second death beyond death: the loss of one’s creative life. So sorcerers must operate in another way: in a secret, “subterranean way.”⁵¹ The nature of multiplicity and becoming requires those engaged in fabulation to be willing to “experiment” because we “don’t know which subterranean stem” [...] “is going to enter a becoming,” or “people [our] desert.”⁵²

Not all of our becomings will people our desert and even though we cannot know for certain which line of flight to follow, the sorcerers mustn’t let that deter them in any way for this uncertainty is the great power of fabulation. The majority groups—the model makers—cannot know which becoming will be responsible for undermining and negating their influence and domination. We can also assume that the state does not know which lines of flight will provide egress from within capital for us.

The cosmic creative memory is accessible to those willing to experiment with multiplicity and becoming. The fabulations and becomings they create will be “written like sorcerers drawings on [the] plane of consistency.”⁵³ The plane of consistency is the point of contact and an intersection that “cuts across” all dimensions of all multiplicities. The plane of consistency is “the ultimate door providing a way out” for the fabulations that the sorcerers create and the becomings they enter into relation with.⁵⁴

49: *Ibid.*

50: *Ibid.*

51: *Ibid.*, 237.

52: *Ibid.*, 251.

53: *Ibid.*

54: *Ibid.*

A way out of where or what though? For us, the way out is not necessarily a place, nor does it occur at a specific time; what we mean is a way out of the perceptibility of capital. Because on the plane of consistency, “everything becomes imperceptible, everything is becoming-imperceptible.”⁵⁵ Becoming-imperceptible for us is the final level of becoming, that to which all other becomings tend toward. Something else happens on the plane of consistency. Even though it may appear contradictory, the plane of consistency is where imperceptible subjects and their effects are, for the first time, actually “seen and heard.”⁵⁶ This is why the peoples infected with pure creative emotion have power over capital because they can see and hear for the first time that which cannot be seen or heard. Finally, we conclude that this is what the novel or

film must aim for: the ability to read, hear, and see the imperceptible and bring it to life to discover an egress from capital and its dominating recapitulation.

By an “author of the impossible,” I meant something specific and radical. I meant an author who writes about well-documented historical events and common human experiences that are not supposed to happen but clearly do, and who, by writing about these “impossible” things in an especially powerful way, renders them newly plausible, imaginable, thinkable ... in a word—real. *I meant an author who makes the impossible possible.*

—Jeffery J. Kripal⁵⁷

55: Ibid., 252.

56: Ibid.

57: Jeffery J. Kripal, “Introduction” on *Archives of the Impossible*, n.d. <https://impossiblearchives.rice.edu/archives-impossible-intro>

On the Truth of Fiction

Attay Kremer

What is the relationship between science and fiction? This question seems to stand eternally unperturbed, lying at the very core of modernity, explicating itself in its later strands. As questions go, it is clearly of the unanswerable variety. There can be no relation stated. One could perhaps succumb to a Lacanian compulsion and speak of a non-relation between science and fiction, but that would be far too hasty. Science, at least in our times, is considered to be the vessel of truth. Science and fiction could rather readily be generalised to truth and fiction. What at first seems like an outright contradiction—fiction being the opposite of truth—should reveal itself to be much more productive. To unfold the antinomy of truth and fiction, let us place before us two quotations.

The first is a more suitable Lacanianism, namely “every truth has

the structure of a fiction.”¹ What is truth that it might have the structure of a fiction? What is fiction that it might give truth its structure? We must first forego the notion that fiction opposes truth. Truth has to do with the very act of speaking, or more accurately, with the act of creating structure. This structural creation is the essence of all speech, and points in the direction of a curious fact: all speech is true, as it is truth itself that speaks. Or, in Lacan’s own words: “I, truth, speak.”² The act of speaking always-already belongs to the truth itself. One way of thinking about this would be with Freud’s classic case of negation. A patient reports a dream, recounting that a woman played a central role in it, to which he immediately adds, “I don’t know who this was, but it wasn’t my mother.”³ Taking Freud’s analysis at face value, we might say that the

1: Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII: Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans., Dennis Porter (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 12.

2: Jacques Lacan, “The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis,” in *Écrits*, trans., Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 334–363.

patient was saying something false, that it wasn't true. However, a complete picture of this must involve the specific way in which the truth of the patient's psyche was, and could only have been, shown through a lie. Falsehood is not simply opposed to truth either, it is its medium, its necessary mask and dress. Now fiction is, in its ordinary sense, broader than truth. In that sense, the structure of a tale, as a structure of language, is always the structure of truth. Fiction comes first, truth comes to us first in fairy tale and later on in myth. Truth itself can only appear in its seeming opposite, as it is the site of fiction where truth first appears before the subject. All truth, scientific truth too, is essentially fictitious. Here lies the truly radical point: in order for something both to appear and to actually be true, it must be a fiction. Science, then, is the study of true fictions.

It is at this point that a vista into speculative thought, and fictional science specifically, is opened. The study of the truth as such is an inquiry into fiction, this is structurally inherent to it. We should now approach the second quotation: "If the facts disagree with the theory, so

much the worse for the facts." It is commonly attributed to Einstein but was actually said by Hegel. This confusion is interesting in itself. The key feature shared by these very different figures is their dedication to speculative, foundational thought. Despite Einstein's position as an empirical scientist, this quotation remains believable enough because of his wild, speculative abilities. The important point of this quotation is that it justifies elaborate, false theories. The facts do not matter, as it is in the study of fiction itself, whether it or not it conforms with the facts, that is the site of the true. Thus, fictional and speculative science are not less valid for their distance from empirical truth, but stand as exemplars of the study of truth itself—unperturbed by the work of the world.

SCIENTIFIC

The Tired Iterational/International

Okay here is an funny idea. Let me spell scientific correctly: s (pace) Eye N(o/al(l)) Ti(what even is TI? The tired international?) Fic(tion)

I am typing this up at 11pm, after reading some book a month agox (I also read 5 others in between. But this one was the one about the history experimental science and magic by Lynn Thorndike) but the best philosophy comes from misremembering and out-of-context quote installaztions anyway. So what do write other than protests against the orthographic glove of the invisible market? Are these two thinks related? Maybe but look: philosophy is escapism anyway. It's the labor I proscript myself two because... the obedience to labor involves reality laboring and I don't want to catch myself not doing reality. So where were I? Oh yes the Dragon of outer darkness! (Look at the gnostics chapter. It's in the book. Page 378 I think.) Imagine the night sky as the face of a being with a hidden labyrinth being its wrinkles. I don't think the last part was in the book but look at this illustration of ideology. (Or is it?

What is outer darkness? Imagine an elevator. Floor Zero: Dasein the ocean so on creative singularity. Floor 1: potential increases: gravity as the drive. But there is also another drive upwards as there is another ocean. Dissolution of two kinds. Be the paint distributing a painting on the universe or be the universe painting onto nothingness. Two types of zero. Is outer darkness the third? Does heaven only exist at day? What no that's bizarre. THE OCEAN baptism?? Return from zero. And zero is the light from abothdheh. But also the darkness of the see. Is zero. Resting is predetermined in creation. Night follows day into day towards night. If L*cifer is corrupted light than the dragon of outer darkness is corrupted night.

What even is a nal? There is exter-nal and inter-nal and eter-nal. Is nal all that is here??? NAL Nal nal. Only 3 times. OOF ITS LAN (Backwards) WHATCH OUT FOR (reverse) SYBERNETICS.

Spectacle sof snal snail spiral. Spiral meets biosphere. (Somewhat seperated) Inward feedback loop leaps

onto genes (undifferentiated) somewhat. Yet still dual symmetry. NAL has no symmetry in three dimensions. I didn't even read all of it. (It in this case is all.) It is to late to read / be read (but you still do it). Escapism isn't it??? Without u, all that remains are encirclement o and branches y. Foundations of contained anticipation with occasional outbreaks (o applying itself to o, or external rebranchment. Second order of nal or NALNAL which is certified aufhebung). Monolog (which is pluralog, I have all thr words, occasionally) on OYNAL. y is strongly related to why we don't or do sleep. Insomniapitalism maybe. y as dreams. (But not really as the dream y is way (since connected to the a in beginning. They told me alpha waves are not present on dreams. THAZS CORRECT. We export them. We export the alpha waves back from beneath. Which is the light beneath the shadow which is the proposition of y. HOW LONG UNTIL I

CAN MAKE AN AI FORMULATE MY THOUGHTS ON PHILOSOPHY SO THAT I CAN BECOME THE ULTIMATE CONSUMER TO MYSELF. but wait the snail wouldn't be proud would it. We are the snail. (The one with the shell which is capital.) Reason is to shallow to uphold for now as we have reason bound by objects which are inherently ideological instruction-givers. Let's's liberate science from the claws of reason. I saw all of the screen collapse. The tired international protests the y of the awokenth for the way of the dream. We know that o denotes object which is ideological. And that way is o-bound which is a dilemma. Unless it is looped onto itself to free the contents of the o from its confinement as a emerging O-pportunity. Not O-bediente. Dreams are deeply rhizomatic and creative. The tired iterational is going to dream, hopefully.

Rocket-Jumping Hawkmoth

George Micah Kuhn

*H*awkmoth performs significantly better than both humans and other AI at a wide range of shooter games, using the same sensory information available to human players. It gained notoriety recently due to allegations that its development was funded by DARPA's AI Next, with the funding being moved through University College London's neural computing group. There's scarce evidence of this, other than the apparent similarity of the AI architecture utilised in AI Next's most recent research. However, out of academic interest, I traced the evolution and recorded sightings of *hawkmoth*. The earliest version I could find of it was linked to a now dead game dev discord for fans of *consumer softproducts games*. *This account is assembled and stitched together* from interviews with the most active users at the time of its deployment:

"The bot was released in response to someone in the discord posting a prototype of an arena FPS with this totally striking design. All

40k grimdark-ness dissolved in the quiet static of a 90s outer space web background. It seemed just like a lightweight MW2 *Rust simulator*, easy to jump into and mess around with, but as people tried it out it became apparent that before getting to your opponent you had to learn to deal with an environment that felt violently anti-human. The level was constantly on the move, passageways, lines of sight, traps and items swam in and out of sight. You could feel a sea-swell rhythm to the movement of turbine blades and rolling walls, but predicting their paths felt like trying to solve a Rubik's cube in your head."

"The bot deployed into this world was impossibly well made. Like seeing a rocket engine welded and hacked into a chrysler imperial. There's a romance to a system becoming transcendently skilled at a buggy MVP with 3 active users on a good day. A genius dedicating their life to researching UFOs. A combination of a fast and slow neural network to manage general game plan-

ning plus frame to frame controls, a high and low frequency layered agency. Lacking any high-level play to learn from it had apparently been trained from scratch using a league training method. Versions of the network were frozen, extracted and used to play simulation games against the growing tips. During the training the system stretches out over and maps the environment by playing games against versions of itself, probing the world by sending out tendrils that twist and knot in on themselves, chewing up the environment and each other over and over, millions of times.”

Game 1: “So I’m expecting a less sophisticated bot and sprint forward overaggressively. I’m ripped apart in under a minute. It’s not superhuman aim or reaction time, I don’t even see it coming. After entering the central structure, I’m overcome by a peristaltic sensation, moved through the glittering corridors like slick, oily meat through an intestine. Suddenly my health’s cut in half, and I turn to catch the bot emerging from a newly distended chasm in the wall behind me. It walks straight through my return fire, bloodied but alive, and uses a rusty

metal shovel to beat me into a soft pulp.”

Game 2: “The bots totally gone. The match is all stall and grinding attrition. Disappearing into the environment, its movements are so in sync with the drifting volumetrics, the dynamic shadows, that I’m struggling to even see it. Strafing past, it nicks me with bursts of shrapnel. Unable to recover, I’m eventually bled out in a dead end, textured with a super-rough tar black material. It must be 25 levels below the entrance.”

Game 3: “I’ve been obsessing over this bot. Unlike human players it brings no pre-learned grammar or concepts into the game with it. It perceives and processes its environment as a statistical flow, like fluid motion, numerical weather prediction. I don’t think that it has any concept of a body, so there’s no difference to it between internal and external. It just melts super smoothly into the virtual world. Where humans and other animals slice up their environment according to a range of functions (things that can be eaten, things that can be walked on etc.), the bot extracts only the concepts that are useful for collapsing the game world towards the highest probability of victory. It learns to speak

Rocket-Jumping Hawkmoth

the game, evolving a language and grammar that maps between the world and this function with crystal-line precision. Playing it the bot seems to move with a lazy swagger. As I try to follow, I miss-judge the coyote time and plummet into an eviscerating machine below. My avatar momentarily ragdolls, tossed around the spinning blades, before exploding into a cloud of gibs and viscera.”

Games 4-6: “I’m actually a really strong Quake III player so was expecting to at least give the bot a run for its money. Instead I’m blown away in a close range skirmish, narrowly outshot across a cavernous no-man’s land and finally brained with the shovel in a rooftop duel. It feels like a mirror, it never feels like you’re in control. I think it makes you aware of every part of the language of your thought that isn’t directly correlated with winning the game. Every part of you that isn’t specifically tailored to the game, everything that’s contingent and anachro-

nistic, is leveraged to drag you around.”

Games 7-128: “I’ve put hundreds of hours into this. There’s something calming about losing to it. It feels out every aspect of my play, every detail of the way I move, prioritize, plan and shoot is recognised, held firmly, then crushed and sanded off. The bot renders and clarifies me til I’m a colourless, odourless, frictionless liquid, gliding from respawn to respawn.”

Addendum: It’s unknown who in the server was running *hawkmoth* *inside the game*, and I haven’t been able to trace them. It’s interesting, given the comments here, to observe the current developments in code linguistics. The *International Conference For Natural Language Processing* is putting together a panel on *holdovers from natural language grammars in programming languages and comparisons between human-authored and AI-authored languages*.

The portable altar, to be drawn on the floor or covered on oneself in order to create a temporary sacred space. It can be made of any material and designed in any shape.

The circle is closed

The circle is unbroken
end of ritual

the circle is cast

of candles & incense are lit

Mobth that
there I am, one magical moment
casting my words opening the door
when the ground beneath me
there I am, one magical moment
sketches and
there I am, one magical moment
in the union of the plane

there I am, one magical moment

Mobth that
there I am, one magical moment
but in my circle, infinity becomes one
pulling the threads of fate
there I am, one magical moment

Mobth that
Mobth that
Mobth that

MB

Grimoire 01 / Δ-RebelSandpaper / Mixed Media Collage

Maladaptive Discreteness

Miroslav Griško

Maladaptive discreteness is negative intensity, the fallout of suicide, or contempt for the ratio 27%. Understood as a force, its initial form is a reaction to the unkillability of life. Its final form is the reversal of anti-necrotic drive into a self-assassination which completes the entirety of nature.

The universe has existed for approximately 13.8 billion years, life for approximately 3.7 billion years, meaning that life has existed for approximately 27% of the maximum horizon of possible existence. A counterpoint to social fear over total ecological breakdown and global biological holocaust is the terror that follows from a more obscure and disturbing logic: *life has existed for 3.7 billion years and has never been killed in 3.7 billion years; all life comes from one cell; the first cell has only divided itself, and because it has only divided itself, it has never died – what kind of demonic force is this?* If unkillability is its dominant property, life is

already immortal. As the temporal duration of life comes closer to the temporal duration of the universe, 27% becomes 28%, 28% becomes 29%, always converging to a point of almost perfect overlap. Time is the measure of the efficiency of a force, whereas percentages or ratios are mathematically defined as dimensionless units, just like life becomes dimensionless to the extent that it cannot be killed. 10^{100} years as the estimated maximum lifespan of the universe is equivalent to eternity, and 27% is already a cipher for immortality.

Because the first cell never died, death does not exist—there is only the force of deathless inertia. Since physics dictates that all material decays, life generates inertia through the transmission of its force from material to material—adaptive assault. What Schrödinger called a negentropic biochemical physics to describe life¹ is an anti-entropic alternative physics that creates continuity from discrete-

1: See: Erwin Schrödinger, *What is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1944).

ness, converts ebbs into flows, although life begins as a discrete state in an ocean of a seemingly endless material flow. Discreteness becoming continuous means that a molecule or set of molecules must self-replicate, metabolic closure must create another instance of metabolic closure, and the first cell must divide itself, because without the shift from discreteness to continuity, there is no life (if discreteness had never become continuous, an instance of primordial discreteness would never qualify as having been alive). Life's problem is the transition from one discrete state to another discrete state, and the problem already contains its own solution, since life operates computationally. A minimal definition of computation is that computation is implementation,² and life operates computationally because what it implements is the transition from discreteness to continuous flow. Implementation is at the same time adaptation, re-formatting all usable materials for the intensification of discrete state transition so that necrotic cul-de-sacs are overcome and deathless inertia can take control over a lifeless world. The unkillability of life is the total mobilization of a computational system that can in

theory run uninterrupted until the end of the universe and the end of time. If everything goes wrong and global death scenarios like ecological cataclysm or planetary nuclear war take place, the dynamic is robust and adaptable enough to re-organise its initial force—five known mass extinction events on Earth have only shown themselves to be temporary resets of the dynamic, a restart to more minimal conditions, but without any damage to the underlying concept (the first cell has never died).

Unkillability means that there is no death drive, and the only real example of drive is on the side of life. Hypersensitivity to the specific mechanisms of individual organic death overlooks the greater dynamic that has been created, whereas the always-rising body count of dead life-forms is irrelevant, since all that matters is that discreteness adapts to become flow. Programmed cell death (apoptosis) as a form of apparent cellular suicide is not a death wish inherent to life, but a localised deletion—suicidal pathways within the cell that lead to its erasure are in fact traps set by a greater intercellular conspiracy, so that discreteness cannot overtake and stop flow. Mass

2: Joscha Bach's definition of computation.

specicide and outbursts of depopulation never slow down computational force, for which high death tolls are only the side effect of an endless number of parallel operating systems—for example, the total number of all cells that have ever existed—which proliferate the overall capacity for discreteness to continuity transition. The seemingly archaic concept of *élan vital* still contains a truth within it, to the extent that the force it describes, against Bergson's intent, is not the creative and constructive potential of life, but the immortal drive of deathless inertia. All morphological and behavioural variation is only a distraction and ruse when perfect duration—survival until the end of time—is understood to be

life's alpha and omega principle. Complexity is a defence technique, because it not only diversifies *élan*, increasing the probability of achieving perfect duration, but at later stages of the dynamic also induces speculation about ulterior motives to life that contribute to survival and prolong adaptive assault.³ Schelling writes in *Clara* that what the contemplation of the natural world ultimately evokes is not its capacity for the production of always more intricate form, but awareness of an original terror-horror-violence embedded in the heart of life. The unceasing force that Schopenhauer despised and called the will could have also been called the first cell.

“Infected movement. Ebb describes the phenomenon of low tide, yet withdrawal is not defined in return, seeing that the movement is unsuccessful in moving away; it is a decline or a motion of retreat, a retreat that never entirely succeeds in its purpose, fixated on a violent repeated exiting. Assembled through congested junctions where atmospheric conglomeration emerges in the transitions of materiality. The nullity of the edges supplies movement, which, in its tangledness, constantly forms new nodes, constantly in motion. Soft stylets halt the carnality; they position themselves as if they want to save it but are probably blocking it on purpose. There is not enough space. The position of movement is sealed in dust that does not exist and in salt that has been deprived of movement. The production of violence is imminent and circulates, despite the constant obstruction of its

3: i.e., hypotheses like, the aim of life is to achieve higher complexity/intelligence; it is necessary to spread life to other planets because the human species could be the only example of intelligent life in the galaxy; life is the universe trying to become aware of itself.

movement. A system settles in bones, in the rawness of fluid; the structure is impenetrable, and the motion of water is an already poisoned necessity. The liquid of the survival system is trapped in a specific area; its sensitive viscosity is protected to some extent, it works until the moment it becomes infected; it is impossible to remove its parts because a complete departure is more catastrophic than an inertia that is poisoned.”

—Exhibition by Neja Zorzut

Information:

Neja Zorzut, Ebb, 2022

oil, silicone, wax on canvas, 340 cm x 170 cm,

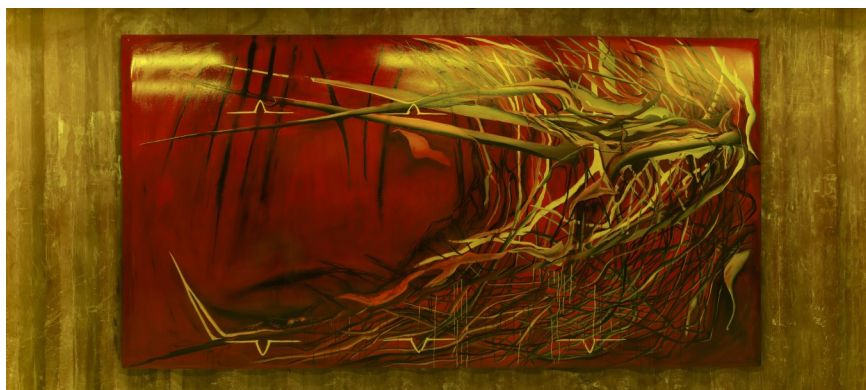
wire, plaster, epoxy resin, carbon kevlar, 430 cm x 200 cm x 50 cm

water

salt









Proto-containers of the British Empire bring Thomas De Quincey Asian opium. De Quincey consumes 8000 drops of laudanum opiate tincture daily and obsessively studies “German metaphysics—Kant, Fichte, Schelling.”⁴ The result is a total modification of neurocognitive constraints and the experience of a series of brutally lucid dream visions, which all together form a complete *Naturphilosophie*. But the knowledge of life that comes in opium sleep only has a terror-effect, which the addict describes in terms of four basic forces:⁵

1) “*Fierce chemistry*.” The alternative physics of life is a biochemical attack on two levels. Fundamental level: life as first cell is the embryo of all things, which then becomes the saturation bombing of a dead world with an endless stream of chemically engineered life-forms. Derivative level: within this generated force subsists a state of total war between chemically engineered life-forms, which, enigmatically,

never burns out the dynamic from the inside, but only propels it forward for the greater objective of perfect duration.

2) “*Suicidal despondency*.” Opium dream states compress the entirety of life into a single pulsing core of Schellingian horror-terror-violence—a malevolent heartbeat that triggers in the addict an internal atmospheric despair, correlative and inversely proportional to the force of the life-dynamic. Confrontation with the unconquerable flood of life stimulates the urge to remove oneself from the dynamic at all costs—to kill oneself immediately instead of living for even a moment longer.

3) “*To have lived for 70 or 100 years in 1 night*.” But a moment longer makes no sense, because time scales have lost all meaning. The accelerated passing of human time is an experience of time closer to the actual velocity of deathless inertia. There is no

4: Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (London, UK: Macmillan, 2019), 71.

5: De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, 95–97.

difference between today and a thousand centuries ago or a thousand centuries from now. There is also no difference if life has survived for one day or one hundred thousand years, because it will always find a way to continue forever, for eternity (10^{100} years).

4) “*There is no such thing as forgetting possible to the mind.*” Thought is a neuron and the interaction of neurons. All neurons are cells, the neuron cell is an instance of the first cell, which divided itself; therefore every thought, any thought, however fleeting and trivial, contains the entire history of life within it (direct access to the first cell and perfect knowledge of the life-dynamic).

Only the second of the four forces is what Nietzsche or Deleuze would call reactive, or negative. A reactive and negative force, following their logic, is an inferior force, because it is maladaptive. Life is active force, but also initially maladaptive, to the extent that it affirms itself and creates its new physics in a universe devoid of life. But once affirmation

takes place and the dynamic begins, all conception of force is reset forever. The capacity for reset is an index of why active force is superior to the reactive, and so is 3.7 billion years of unkillable life. Its attainment of *de facto* immortality means that the only true active force is life, whereas any reactive force is just a dead-end of discreteness, maladaptive in relation to the intensity of anti-necrotic drive, *élan*, and continuity-flow. Maladaptive discreteness is present in genetic defect and cellular developmental breakdown; it is also present in the asocial withdrawal and self-extermination of the opium-eater. But because maladaptation is also a force, although reactive, it has its own (negative) intensities. There is a difference between cellular malfunction and suicide, a difference in intensity and force. Discreteness can become so maladaptive that it removes itself from life and only wants to see everything disappear.

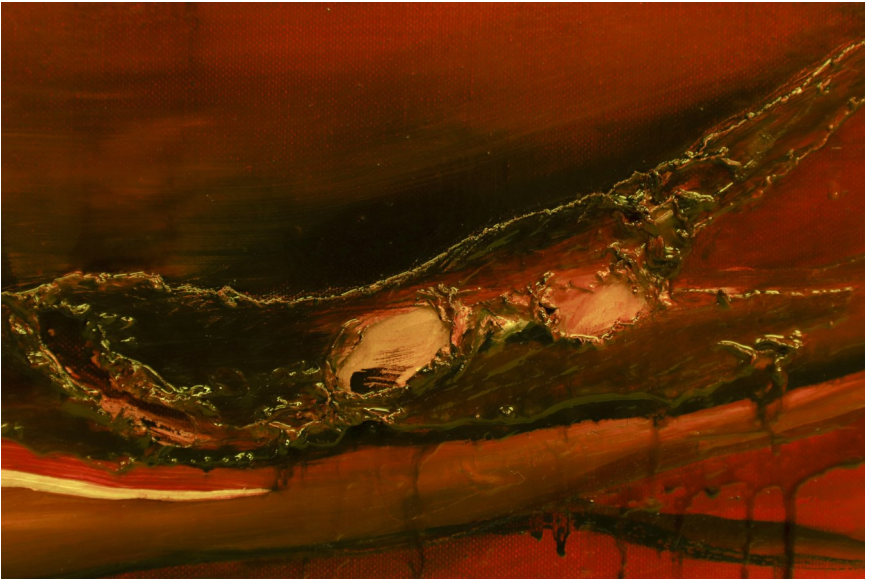
If “cocaine war machine”⁶ describes a discreteness within a continuity that understands discreteness as the transition to continuity and then adapts itself to the speed/intensity of this dynamic (survival), opium war machine is maladaptive discreteness

6: Primož Krašovec, *Tujost kapitala* (Ljubljana, SI: Založba Sophia, 2021), 121.

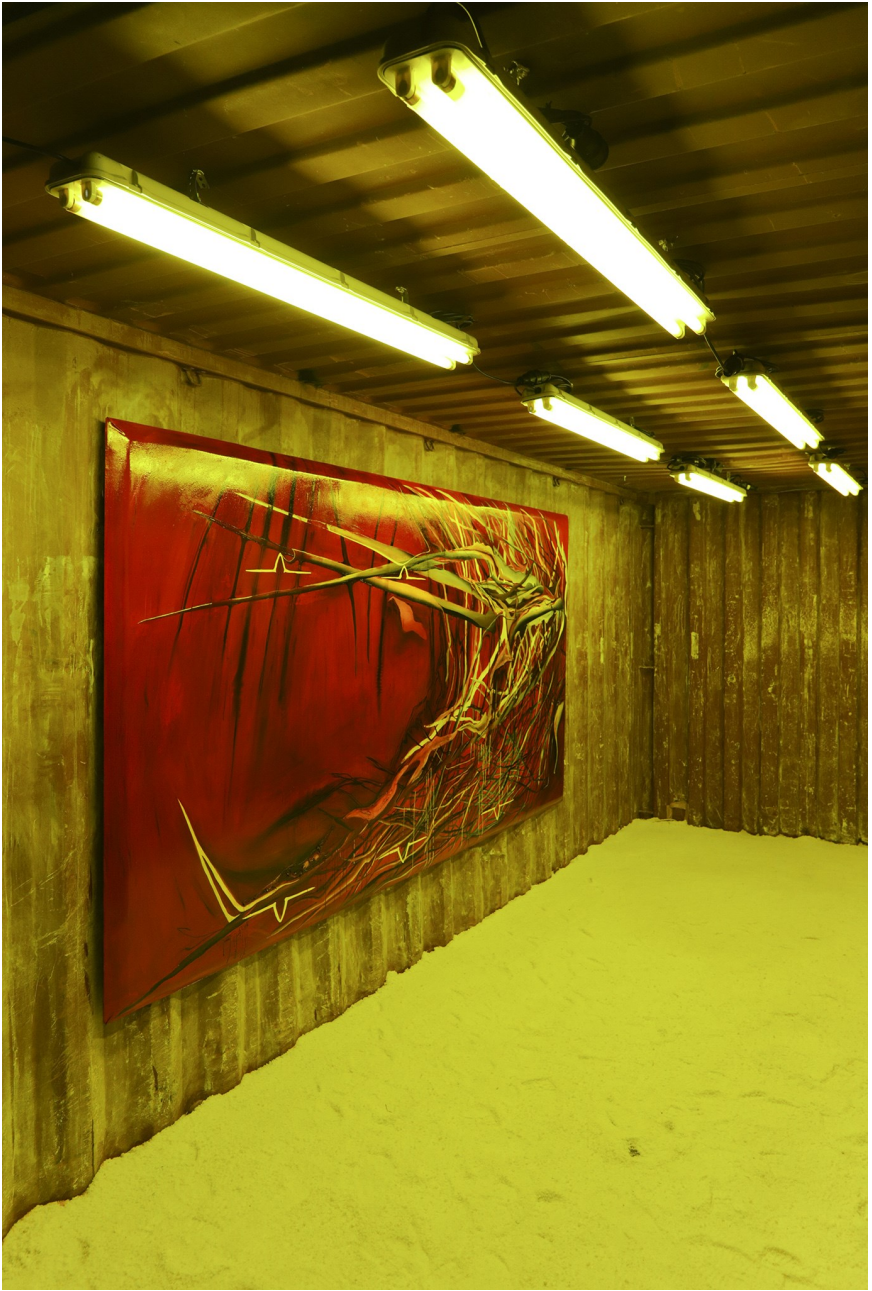
as maladaptive assault (suicide). After deep meditation on the war-zone physics of life, opium war machine decides that the first cell which has never died is its primary enemy. De Quincey takes a night journey to the innermost chamber of the life-dynamic and arrives at a point usually accessible only to a God. And it is “hard to be a God,” because if God knows everything, every detail and trick of life, he can only want to kill himself. Nietzsche and Deleuze always defend life, affirmation, joy, while all reactive hostility to active force is *ressentiment*, a failure to adapt. But if reactive force arises from an exact dissection of life that exposes its most basic mechanics and drive, any affirmation of life after this disclosure can only seem like moralism. A reactive force is inferior simply because it is somehow *wrong* to hate life. De Quincey, or opium war machine, experiences fear, which intuitively can lead to hate. But perfect knowledge can also cause the same reaction. Life does not produce wonder, but aversion: there is nothing consoling in the thought that everything comes from one thing, that everything is all things, that I am

made from the same material and that I am made from the same first cell out of which all living things are made—that I am the same as everything for which I hold contempt. De Quincey does not kill himself, but never stops using laudanum until his death. The heroin addict of Drieu la Rochelle’s *Le Feu follet* does kill himself, and for the reason that if everything is interconnected and all things come from one thing, this fact can only make someone who feels zero affiliation to the world want to die. A *feu follet* (Latin: *ignis fatuus*, “will-o’-the-wisp” or “ghost light”) is the phenomenon of a glitching nocturnal and atmospheric light, otherwise associated with the spirits of the dead in folk belief, and chemically understood as a phosphoric light emitted by necrotic organic decay (discreteness as dead end). Maladaptive discreteness as maladaptive assault is the negative light of self-exorcism from life’s force, another example of the Eternal War between the king and the ascetic, which Borges described—someone who has everything and is everything versus someone “who is nothing or wants to be nothing.”⁷

7: Jorge Luis Borges, “The Dialogues of Ascetic and King,” in, *Selected Non-Fictions* (London, UK: Penguin, 2000), 382.









Cases of animal suicide outside of the human species are either poorly documented, misunderstood and unrecognised, or altogether rare. Despite their compulsive erudition, Wikipedia editors can only find a bare minimum of possible historical examples on the subject, among them an obscure news item from the 19th century:

In 1845, the *Illustrated London News* reported that a Newfoundland dog had been acting less lively over a period of days before being seen “to throw himself in the water and endeavour to sink by preserving perfect stillness of the legs and feet.” Every time he was rescued, he attempted to do this again before he finally held his head underwater until death.⁸

Schopenhauer could have written an aphorism about how the human being should not be defined as the only animal with reason, but as the only animal that kills itself. Yet what is more important than the capacity each species may have for suicide is that the predicates of the rational and the suicidal coincide, to the extent

that too great an understanding of how life works can only lead to self-extermination. A heightening and intensification of the faculty of *interoception*—i.e., the awareness of the internal states and inner functioning of one’s body, the awareness of the first cell that has never died—reaches a point at which it turns itself inside out, becoming an awareness of a universe that is itself alive. If life’s only objective is to survive, and the only way to achieve this is through the transition from discreteness to continuity, this operation and dynamic is equal to life. Life is notoriously difficult to define, and this is perhaps because even for life this is an always open question—insofar as life adapts to a material, which can then implement life’s force and drive, whatever can perform this operation is alive. If the first cell was already the first Turing machine (J. Bach), then abiotic software running 3.7 billion years later is the first cell—just like the first cell is each of the neuron cells that form the thoughts of someone who commits suicide after reflecting too long on the neoplatonic mantra, which Borges always repeated: “Any thing is all things. The sun is all stars, and each star is also all stars

8: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_suicide

and the sun.” The rationality of suicide evokes a thoroughly vitalist ontology, for which there is no difference between life and existence, because in removing oneself from life, one also removes oneself from existence. I want a different life than I have now, or I want to exist in a way that is different from how I exist now, are the same, whereas the negation of both is not wanting to be. Everything is alive because it exists, and the negative reaction to overflowing vitalist effusion is the perfect stillness of holding oneself under water. Just like in Bataille’s economic ontology of excess, where there is too much of everything, too much energy and life, his counter-concept of “useless negativity” describes the perfect stillness of “the open wound that is my life, aborting itself.”⁹ One insignificant and maladaptive life-form destroying itself is an entirely useless negation, irrelevant in relation to everything that has ever lived or will live—but the excessiveness of life means that it is also irrelevant that this one particular living thing was ever alive. The only useful negation would be to travel back in time 3.7 billion years and assassinate the first

cell, so that everything recedes back to its initial point of origin, stopping it from ever beginning again. But the first cell is also here now, because it is present in me, and in this sense there is zero difference between terminating life at its source and suicide.

The suicide of one thing, just like the death of one thing, never stops all things. But the rationale behind the suicidal act also doesn’t care about stopping all things. Its violence is brutally investigative and contemplative, since it discloses a principle. The exposure of the principle is enough to irradiate and dissolve it. If life only wants to survive, and a living thing can also kill itself, then survival is a decision. And the decision against life is the crashing of the parameters which life holds to, the exhaustion of its principle. Life and nature were already completed when the first person or living thing, whoever or whatever that was, committed suicide. And of course no one could know who or what that was, it could only be ignored, never being the subject of aestheticization or myth—its name could not become a concept, like Oedipus, or even the name for a constellation of stars. A

9: Georges Bataille, “Letter to X, Lecturer on Hegel,” in *The Bataille Reader* (London, UK: Blackwell, 1997), 257.

Maladaptive Discreteness

suicidal constellation of stars is negative intensity as negative speed of light, another sense of a dimensionless unit—ever-receding reactive force, ethereal nihilism.



NOTES ON THE TEXT: The Biology and Human Sciences Department of the University of Puget Sound considers this text an oddity and, in light of the abnormal practices and recording methods of Drs. Meeks and Francis, as well as the extraordinary circumstances surrounding their investigation, totally unverifiable. We preserve this work not as a scientific document, but perhaps as an artistic, cultural, or novel text, if one may call it such. Further, we suspect it may prove useful should similar opportunities for study of the central biological curiosity arise—assuming that the specimen is indeed a work of nonfiction. Please bear in mind that certain sections have been altered to comply with archival standards. Others have been altered by the authors themselves.

The following text was excavated by Luke Larkin and is tentatively titled “A Conjectured Life.”

Lexical Display in the Fruiting Bodies of Mycological Specimens in
the
Port Gamble Tidal Forest:
An Informal Investigation and Conjectured Anthropology
By
Terrence Meeks, PhD
Roosevelt Francis, PhD
Chen Kahn, M.S.

ABSTRACT:

[REDACTED]

Instead, let us say this: A life makes itself known.

INTRODUCTION:

We owe the contents of this document, whatever they may be, to a hiker and her dog.

The hiker, Rochelle Moya, thirty-four, was visiting the lowland forests of Puget Sound in spring. Her father had lived there, she offered in her statement, and she never knew her father, but she knew that as a boy he'd lived somewhere near the Port Gamble tidal forest, or so her mother had said, and so Moya went looking. Looking for what, exactly, she couldn't say, for there was no address, no known relatives, nothing left in the area to connect the man to the land save for the knowledge of his presence there, decades ago. But Moya went looking all the same.¹

She had embarked with her dog, a Swedish Vallhund named Kit, on a sparsely-traveled trail on the southeast perimeter of Olympic National Forest, when the Vallhund promptly veered from the path into the underbrush. "Following its nose," Moya stated. She pursued it north-westward for what she estimated was thirty to forty minutes before the Vallhund brought her upon a cabin (though here she corrected herself and revised the word to "hut," and "hut," for the purposes of this document, has stuck).

The hut, upon the coauthors' investigation, was of spruce, and built partially into the hillside. Moya found it overgrown with ferns and lichen, so much so she nearly didn't see it for the curiosity it was, and wouldn't have, had the Vallhund not pawed the plank door inward and gone inside. Again, Moya followed.

"I was a little scared, sure," she noted. "It was like something from a fucking horror movie. But I thought—it's stupid when I say it out loud—something in me thought it could have been my dad's or something. Like maybe he lived there. I mean why not?" Here she chuckled and waved her hand before her face, as though to dispel the thought.

The layout of the hut was modest, though also perhaps relatively luxe, Moya commented, as far as huts go: the plank door opened into a room about four meters by four meters wide, with walls

1: Note: The coauthors preserve these details here not because they are relevant, necessarily, but because Moya shared them, when interviewed, and they have stuck. This document respects those stuck things; this document was born of stuck things.

boarded in spruce, a ceiling raised about three meters from the packed-soil floor, and a recessed fire pit in the center. Directly above the pit, a conical vent in the ceiling opened onto the wooded hillside. On each wall of this central chamber, a doorway opened into similarly excavated rooms. The walls of the far room where the Vallhund halted, however, were not boarded, as were those of the central chamber. Like the floor, these walls were only packed earth, and had begun to crumble.

“I was in there with my phone flashlight. You know, just whispering for Kit so we could get the hell out. I was spooked, by then,” Moya stated. “It was sort of fucked. I mean, yeah, it was just some abandoned hut, but still. Anyway, I found Kit just sitting there staring at the floor, and, well, there it was.”

“It,” as referred to by Moya, was the colony. Out of respect for her discovery, we first supply her account:

“I kinda flipped the fuck out, at first. Well actually at first I didn’t really see it. But then, yeah, I did. And I was like, *What the hell is that?* Fell on my ass.” She chuckled again. “I pointed my flashlight at it and saw that it was like mold or something. What fucked me up—sorry I’m cursing so much—what really messed me up is that it kinda looked like someone had written something in the dirt. What I mean is, the mold or whatever looked like words. Or some of it, at least.”

“Spooky shit,” she added.

At this point, Moya snapped a photo on her phone (supplied below), and promptly left the hut, retracing her path through the underbrush to the trailhead, where she found her car and, Vallhund in the backseat, drove to the national park’s Forest Service station some miles north and reported what she’d discovered to a baffled intern.

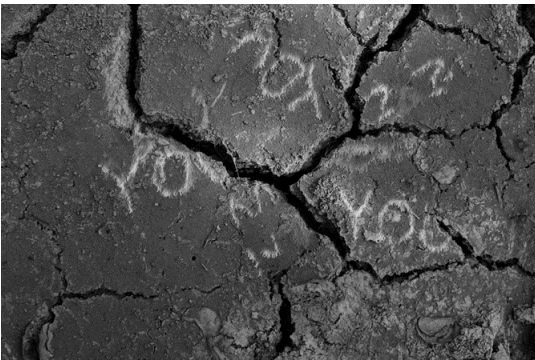


Fig. 1: Moya’s Photograph

INITIAL INVESTIGATION:

The primary author of this document, the mycologist, had been studying luminescence in *Panellus stipticus*, a shelving mushroom, at the nearby University of Puget Sound when he received the incredulous Forest Service's inquiry, and upon hearing Moya's statement, agreed to investigate immediately. Accompanied by a ranger, he toured the hut the very next day and confirmed Moya's account. There was indeed a colony of (not mold, but) fungus within the furthest chamber. It did indeed resemble, in shape, at least one word, repeated some five times along the center of the dirt floor, as well as another strange and repeated shape. The colony's legible word, so far as the mycologist would hazard, read, "You."^{2 3}

The mycologist here notes that the fungus was, in fact, only a scattered system of *mycelium*, a component of fungal colonies analogous to the roots of a plant, and cobweb-like in texture.

In the hut, the mycologist collected a sample of the fungus and questioned the Forest Service ranger. The ranger denied any record of the hut's existence and offered that Moya must have been the first to come across it, or at least the first to report it. Later investigation by a hired botanist (an alumnus of PSU—the institution had by now claimed ownership of the investigation *vis a vis* the mycologist) claimed the spruce planks of the hut were some seventy years old at the time of their harvesting, and judging by the state of their decay were another forty since, placing the hut's construction somewhere in the mid-eighties or thereabouts.

The age of the fungus is not so easily determined. Upon examining and sequencing the sample of mycelium in the university's lab, the mycologist could not attribute the subject to any known species,⁴ and was presented to a handful of other mycologists and botanists without any successful identification.

2: Linguist's Note (LN): The coauthors—the mycologist, really—here use the word "read" for want of another, more accurate term. For something to *read* as anything, it must first of course be *written*, and how might a colony of fungus *write* anything?

3: Mycologist's Note (MN): All the same... perhaps *read* is the appropriate term, considering.

4: MN: Not entirely unusual, being that of an estimated 4 million species of fungus, only 200,000 have been recorded. It is a field with overwhelming unknowns, and it takes a certain sort of mind to exist within such a field.

What could be deduced from the mycelic sample, however, is that the unknown fungus was decidedly saprotrophic—one that feeds on dead organic matter.

What little clarity was gained by the mycologist's examination was shortly confounded when he returned to the hut three days later, forest ranger in tow, only to observe that the growth in the innermost chamber had expanded. The repeated instances of the shape resembling an English "You" remained, as did the other strange shape, but now another had intermingled with these. The strands of mycelium had seemingly—unmistakably—formed another word:

"How—."

There appeared some mangled characters following these, as well. However, they could not be deciphered.

At this point the forest ranger insisted on departing, and the mycologist on staying, and so the mycologist was left alone for a while to ponder the new markings as a hardier forest ranger was deployed to the hut. She, a ranger by the name of ██████████,⁵ fared marginally better, but upon seeing the markings herself, immediately exited the structure and suggested she stand lookout for bears, vandals, or perhaps a combination of the two.

It was here the mycologist, perhaps on a whim, requested that the university provide a linguist, if only for procedure's sake, so that it might go on-record and be confirmed by a professional in the field that the fungus was indeed writing⁶ what could only be, well, *words*. But also, if this were in fact the case, the mycologist hoped a linguist might decode the other symbols. The mycologist sent a request to the humanities chair of the university, and the university provided a linguist from the department of anthropology. Enter our second coauthor.

Let it be introduced here that upon the arrival of the linguist, the mycologist took to recording audio of the pair's investigation, the following transcript of which was taken on that first day of their engagement.

5: The coauthors strike the ranger's name upon her request. In her words: "If you geeks make anything out of this, like hit it big in the science world or the like, I want my name on it. Until then, the vibes are weird. I'm not having my name on something with weird vibes."

6: LN: Again, *writing* is a tricky word here, one that implies consciousness and intent.

TRANSCRIPT:

LINGUIST: Tell me what the hell I'm doing out here. It's damp.

MYCOLOGIST: Pleasure to meet you, as well. I'm Terry.

LIN: Roose.

MYC: Pardon?

LIN: That's my name. Roose. Again, what's the deal?

MYC: After you.

[Muffled movement, breathing. Some cursing on the linguist's part.]

LIN: The fuck is that?

MYC: Fungus.

LIN: Fuck that.⁷

The linguist could indeed confirm that the subject appeared to be *writing*, or at least some incidental equivalent. And indeed, the linguist identified the as-yet comprehended symbols, that which appeared alongside “You” and “How—,”⁸ as Japanese *katakana*, though he claimed it to be a somewhat crude and haphazard reproduction. The symbol was as follows: ㄩ, pronounced “we.” Furthermore, the linguist explained that the symbol appeared on the floor of the hut always in pairs, as ㄩㄩ, *we we*. He notes, however, that both ㄩ and ㄩㄩ are nonsense. That is, they translate to nothing.

It should be said here that though fungi are capable of a great many mysteries—underground networks and carnivorousness and reanimating the corpses of insects—none have been observed to possess the written faculty, the implications of which, as the linguist has noted, are potentially profound. The coauthors, while accepting that theirs is a peculiar method, are all the same not without procedure, and so will not at this time leap to such conclusions. There remains much time for such leaping, and leap we will.

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SURROUNDINGS:

After taking meticulous records of the fungal phenomena, the mycologist set about a subterranean investigation. The organic words were again photographed, further samples taken and then, with a garden trowel and face covering, the researcher initiated an excavation into the packed floor of that innermost chamber. As he suspected, the mycelial growth extended a ways into the earth, some

7: Note: The linguist objects to the inclusion of the above transcript, on principle.

8: Said the linguist upon closer inspection of the latter: “How...dy?”

four or five feet. Choosing a small area of specimen to sacrifice, he made a small, six-by-six inch tunnel in the floor. With each dig he produced a soil sample rich in the fungal species, though it only extended linearly and vertically, and was not to be found further left nor right, north or south. It was a trail, he mused, and he had the inexplicable sense that it led somewhere.

Lead it did. When he had dug as far as his arm allowed, the mycologist's final effort struck something hard but brittle. Carefully, the small cavity was made wider until a flashlight could be comfortably shone and whatever it was retrieved. The following is a relevant bit of transcript:⁹

MYC: I think I've got it. Just a bit further... *There.*

LIN: Sticking your arm into strange holes in the ground feels like a generally shitty idea.

MYC: Even if I made the hole myself?

LIN: When that hole is filled with weird mushrooms, yeah.

MYC: They're not *mushrooms*, it's *mycel*— [The mycologist screams].

LIN: [Various expletives]

MYC: [Laughs] Classic. What have we got, then? Looks a bit like a bit of bone.

LIN: [Further expletives]

Now the coauthors come to something of an impasse. To relate the findings of the excavation here would potentially mean confessing, in writing, to tampering with a potential crime scene, given the contents of the hole. Thus far, the coauthors have obfuscated to the department the exact procedure of their research in order to cover their tails, so to speak. But this is primarily a scientific document¹⁰ and good science demands transparency and, transparency aside, we do not believe the hut to have played host to any serious crime apart from some mild trespassing on obscure public land—so our consciences, at least, are clean. Let us proceed.

Yes, the coauthors had found a bit of bone, and upon further excavation would find an entire human skeleton buried in the floor of the forest hut. Curiously, the skeleton, every single joint and osseous surface, was coated in a thick layer of the alien mycelium, so

9: LN: The following is not at all a “relevant bit of transcript,” but the mycologist insists on having his fun.

10: The linguist questions the veracity of this statement.

that, when laid out in daylight outside the hut, the bones seemed nearly plush and strikingly *velvety*, as though they were the albino antlers of an elk before shed.

LIN: This is out of my depth.
[Ranger ██████████ mutters agreement]

MYC: An exciting place to be, no?

LIN: Listen, I was called out here to look at some words. I saw the words, I read the words. I'm not about to fuck around with dead people. I think now

you need a coroner. Or the FBI or something.

MYC: In time.

LIN: Yeah? When do you figure that time is?

MYC: I'd like to look around a bit more, in case there's anything of further scientific merit. I'm sure the authorities will understand.

It was upon this discovery that our researchers, with the enlisted help of Ranger ██████████,¹¹ thought to investigate the remaining premises of the hut, heretofore left neglected in favor of the irresistible mystery residing in the furthest chamber. The following is a complete list of what was found and where, though the list is not long and many of the items were either half-decayed or partially buried in the loose earthen floor:

THE CENTRAL CHAMBER: Two cedar chairs; rotted firewood; a disused sandal; mouse droppings and other miscellaneous animal waste (fur, bones, etcetera); a single silver spoon; chicken wire (inset in the exhaust hole in the ceiling); a filthy rug (nearly covered in the dirt).

THE "STORAGE" CHAMBER: A cedar bureau (seemingly handmade and of fine craftsmanship) and inside the bureau: a full set of silverware, a full porcelain tea set, torn and shredded men's clothing of various material (underwear x10, shirts x10, pants x8, shorts x4, socks x12; all in such a sad state owing to the nests made of them by rodents). A tarp, an A-frame tent and tent poles, a rusted steel basin; a cedar coat rack with a two identical down coats (much

11: Note: Here Ranger ██████████ grew somewhat faint, but was reinforced with a bottle of water and offered a sum of cash for her resilience and the good nature to let the pair of researchers continue researching without impediment regarding anything as silly as some human remains and the "proper" investigative procedure that might, in a more standard case, follow such a discovery.

of the down removed, again by rodents); a live raccoon (lovingly escorted out by Ranger ██████████); a cast-iron pot; a single sandal; a pair of hiking boots.

THE “BEDROOM” CHAMBER: A cedar, queen-sized bedframe; a rodent-eaten mattress of hay and burlap; a tattered and half-eaten copy of *Watership Down*; a rusted lantern; a tattered quilt bearing the geometric image of lotus flowers on a pond; a framed and faded photograph of two men before the Golden Gate Bridge, one facing the camera and the other the bridge; skeletal human remains.

This second set of remains was mingled with and buried in those of the hay-stuffed mattress, and these, too, were coated in the strange white fungus. The room, however, was absent any fungal script. Rather, the fungus, the mycologist discovered, crept along the bedframe, down the bedposts, and into the floor, as the other sample. Some light destruction and excavation followed the trail a ways down and northwest into the earth, toward the direction of the initial skeleton.

At this point, a small disagreement occurred among the researchers:

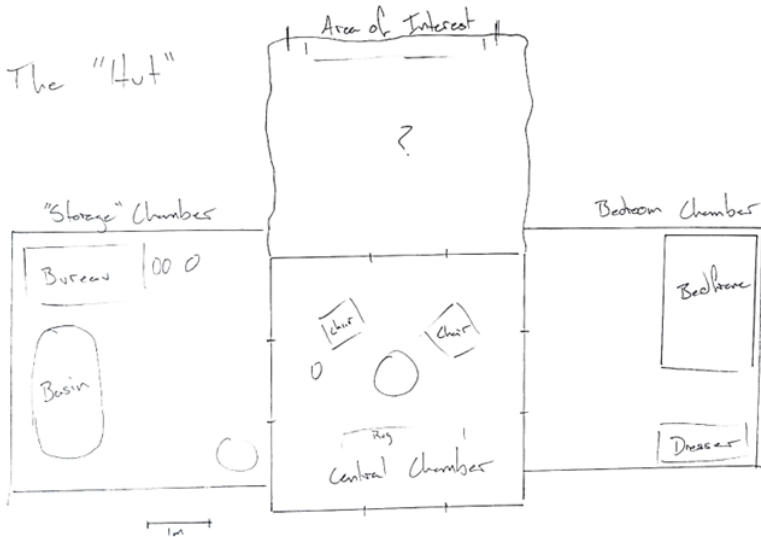


Fig. 2: Crude Sketch of the Hut's Layout

LIN: Two of ‘em. Double jeopardy. Time to pack it up.

MYC: We’re seeing something here I don’t think any of our respective peers have seen before.

LIN: A linguist has never seen this shit because this has nothing to do with a linguist. And anyway I was only scheduled for the morning, so now I’m officially clocking overtime. Be sure to include me in the acknowledgments of whatever groundbreaking mushroom paper you get out of this. That’s “Roose” like “Moose.”

MYC: Aren’t you, as a linguist, even a little curious as to how those words got written?

LIN: I’m more curious, as a decent citizen, how two human skeletons got to be in a middle-of-nowhere shack in the middle-of-nowhere forest. One of them six feet into the ground.

MYC: How many animals can you name that know human words, Roose Like Moose?

LIN: You’re dodging my point.

MYC: I’m just asking a question.

LIN: You’re assuming what we’re seeing here are words at all and not some batshit coincidence, or manipulation, or general fuckery.

RANGER: I saw a dog on the internet that presses buttons to

talk to her owner. They’ve each got a word. She’s up to like thirty of them.

MYC: Yes! Dogs can learn human vocabulary, if only in limited quantities, and if only by way of vague sonic recognition—but who’s to say if they *understand*? As can primates. A few dozen birds can even recreate human speech. And elephants have been taught to paint and, sometimes, write, though they’re only mimicking shapes.

LIN: You’re talking biology. You need a zoologist. I study Latin, and I have a class to teach at two.

MYC: All the same.

LIN: It’s thirty minutes back to campus, and like, what? Twenty-five through the forest? I need to get going.

[Pauses]

But dogs *can* understand vocab, by the way.

MYC: Oh?

LIN: You said “Who knows if they understand.” Like they just hear sounds and respond to sounds, right?

MYC: As is my understanding. But I’m not a zoologist.

LIN: But that’s all language is, isn’t it? You hear me, you respond to me. We express ourselves. Sure, a dog might not grasp the mechanics and partici-

ples of the word “sit,” and you couldn’t ask it to define the word. You probably couldn’t sit on a chair and quiz the dog on what action you just performed, couldn’t explain to it the concept of signifier versus signified. But still, it hears “sit” and puts its ass on the ground, and we respond with a treat or something. That’s understanding. It whines when it’s bored and growls when it’s mad, and we get that, too. That’s mutual understanding. That’s language.

MYC: And that’s your field, isn’t it?

LIN: Sure.

MYC: So a strange species of fungus repeatedly writes three distinct words in both English and Japanese, and you read it and understand it. Is that language? Is that your field?

LIN: Depends.

MYC: On what?

LIN: On if the mushroom knows what it’s saying. Babies babble. We don’t call it language yet because they have no intent, no desired meaning. They’re just trying out sounds. They have nothing to say. Your mushroom there. It freaks me the hell out, but the odds of it *talking*? Assuming—and this is a big fucking assumption—that it’s not some incredible coincidence, my money is that the best your shrooms are doing is babbling. What does it even have to *say*? Maybe someone laced a pattern in the floor and they’re just following a path of nutrients or something. That’s possible, right?

MYC: Sure, sure.

LIN: But you have other ideas.

MYC: Would you like to grab a drink?

RANGER: Yeah.

MYC: Yes, you can come, too.



Fig. 3: Photo found in Bedchamber

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION:

A mere soil test ruled out the linguist's suggestion, of course; there were no irregular concentrations of any compound that might puppet the fungus along the wall. Whatever was happening here was not so simple.

We turn to the photograph, that of the two men found in the bedchamber, reproduced above.¹² Any amateur sleuth would guess the two skeletons belonged to the two men, and as far as the coauthors could see (having discussed it over drinks at a quaint little pub in the Port Gamble Harbor—the Fish N Line¹³), there were two paths forward. One, present the skeletons to a professional for a DNA test and autopsy. The linguist expressed reservations at being implicated in anything to do with the “improper” handling of human remains, and anyway the case would doubtlessly be wrested from the coauthors upon such a reveal to any responsible authorities. The second path, the one opted for, was less direct but more covert: somehow identify the one visible man in the photograph, and attempt to trace the duo from there.

The coauthors are, of course, neither forensic detectives nor private investigators. So they turned to someplace they might find one, or at least someone of similar enthusiasm: the internet. The linguist posted a phone scan of the photograph to a public forum curated for discussions of genealogy and tracking down one's ancestors. About an hour later, shortly after ordering his third tallboy, the linguist's post received a response, which is related here:

From user @ishotfirst77 (14:36):

ran this sucker through some image rec software (just google actually haha) and came up with this. matched it to a photo in a san fran tabloid from an article written in '79. apparently was taken at a pride march @ the golden gate. i'll attach the article, but fair warning: it sucks. super homophobic imo. all about the “gay invasion.” love is love, a*****! (my daughter is a dyke, love her. (i can say dyke because she told me it's okay!!)) anyway you can see on the caption the guys name is denny, or least that's the name he gave to the photog. his 'pal' there is just called mori. hand-

12: The pair's faces have been censored in the provided reproduction, out of respect for their wishes—those wishes we might presume, at any rate.

13: The mycologist recommends the crab cakes.

some couple!

From user @ishotfirst77 (15:12):

popped the article photo into a facial rec software this time (not google!) and came back with some names... and other things. denny here's full name is dennis g ramsay. how do i know? he's done a little time apparently. well nothing serious just some nights in jail here and there. mugshot attached. tough customer. (my daughter's wife is the same. love her though lol!!!!!!) you'll be glad to know it was only petty theft and a bar fight or two etc no one's perfect (except my daughter!! wife is a different story)

the asian guy did real time i think like prison stuff. one of denny's arrest records mentions someone named morimoto tashuo also being questioned so i assume that's the second guy mori. easier to find stuff on him with his record. he was released from california state prison sacramento in '73 after a few years for assault. i've attached an article from the case. ask me sucker he stabbed had it coming. huge twist though: mori's on the run. stabbed again. cops never found him far as i can tell. article also attached. edgy dudes!

how are u related to these fellas, btw?

Below are reproductions of the articles provided by the (alarmingly proficient) web researcher:



So the coauthors had, presumably, identified the remains. They read these documents on the linguist's phone screen at the Fish N Line while the good ranger enjoyed battered cod and a pilsner, compliments the mycologist. They waited for her eventual departure to discuss.

The following is, in the absence of a recorded transcript, a recreation of the resulting conversation, reconstructed to the best of the coauthors' recollection. Liberties taken for effect:

"We're dealing with criminals," the linguist said. He took a long draw from his beer.

"I think our researcher is right, though," the mycologist said. "The guy had it coming, it'd seem."

"That doesn't mean you stab him. Twice."

"Four times, total."

"So a bit much, right?"

"Depends on what this Bridges man said, exactly."

"Need I remind you yet again that I'm a linguist," the linguist said. He finished his drink and hailed the waitress for another. "I'm not a fucking cop, but a fucking cop is gonna have a fucking field day if he catches wind of what we've meddled with. We could file a report or something now and be clean of it. Tell them we were just a couple of stupid researchers and we didn't know what we were getting into."

"Isn't that part of the fun?"

"What?"

"That we don't know what we're getting into." The mycologist sipped his Whiteclaw and placed a dainty bite of crab cake in his mouth, pausing to wipe at his lips with the napkin he'd tucked into his collar like a seventeenth-century poet's blouse.^{14 15}

"You think this is fun?" the linguist started. "You're just here for a good time or something? Like uncovering human skeletons is just a day at the beach for you?"

"I think the mystery is fun, absolutely. And I don't believe you don't think so, either. How often do you get to probe something like this? Talking fungi and missing persons. A linguist and a mycologist such as ourselves have never had such a story tossed into their

14: The mycologist feels this detail is a bit pointed.

15: LN: We both have our fun.

laps. Such a find! And how much more do you think we'll find, exactly? What else is in store for us? You want to find out, I can see it."

The linguist paused.

"Do all mushroom scientists talk like insane cartoon villains or are you just special?"

"Do all linguists talk like they don't actually study language for a living?"

"Fair. But now what? We have IDs on our subjects, but what does that tell us? Anything? If we were detectives we'd be popping champagne, but this doesn't have a damn thing to do with your shrooms."

"I'm not so sure."

"You look all stupid again."

"If I say it now and it turns out I'm wrong, you might think I really am insane and would likely never speak to me again. And I like drinking with you, you know."

The linguist looked out over the bay. "I must be the insane one, because I guess the feeling's mutual."

"So I won't let you think I'm insane yet, and we'll keep drinking."

MYCOLOGICAL AND LINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION, CON'T:

The coauthors returned to the site the next day, led by the intrepid ranger, and found things not entirely as they'd left them. The door of the hut was closed (as the mycologist had done, out of courtesy), and there on the ground were the pair of remains, lain side-by-side and covered with a blue tarp. Marking the tarp, however, was a fervent growth of the curious fungus. It would seem that, in the night, it had set itself into a rapid expansion so that the coauthors discovered it creeping around the edges of the material and through its thick stitching, so that it scrawled across the tarp like writing on a crumpled sheet of paper.

The linguist crouched to examine this development and, after a period of silence, gave a low whistle.



Hybrid 1 / Frida Ortgies-Tonn / digital Collage / 2022

RANGER: What is it?

MYC: The writing is new, right?
It's a new word?

LIN: Yes and no.

RANGER: It can't be both.

MYC: You'd be surprised.
Things are rarely only one thing
or the other.

RANGER: You two give me a
headache, you know?

LIN: I think that's your hango-
ver.

RANGER: I'm just fine,
thanks. Can't help but wonder
how long you nerds stayed,
though. Must have really hit it
off, by the looks of it. Do you
have more than one red paisley
dress shirt, Roose?

LIN: The mushroom. This new

symbol is "*ware*."

[Here the linguist traces with his
finger above the subject: 我]

LIN: It means "I."

MYC: I?

LIN: Yes. But see how it's dou-
bled. Always "*ware ware*."

RANGER: Just looks like a
mess to me.

MYC: They do appear to be
repeated, in every instance. And
what do you make of that?

LIN: When it stands alone, the
"*ware*" character means "I."

When you put two of that same
character together, you have "I,
I," or, "*ware ware*." Two *I*s.
Two selves. It becomes "We."

MYC: It's expanding its vocab-
ulary.

LIN: No, I don't think so. Remember the first Japanese character? The katakana?

RANGER: The other *we*.
[Ranger trances something like “**ヱ**” in the air, but not really.]

LIN: Yes, the *we*. I don't think it's learning *new* vocab. I think it's perfecting what it has, in a sense. The initial *we* was just a character. It means nothing alone. It's just phonetic, like a unit of a larger word. A syllable. But spoken aloud, it sounds, of course, like the English “we.”

MYC: The initial symbol was

repeated as well, wasn't it?

LIN: Yes. Like it was trying to say “we” in Japanese script, but got it mixed up with the English phonetics. It's a cognate problem. Words that sound alike in two languages. But “we” and “we” [traces **ヱ**] are false cognates. It's a mistake novice speakers make all the time.

MYC: You're saying it's corrected its mistake.

LIN: I'm saying it appears that way. Almost like—

MYC: It's learning.

[The sounds of birds calling.]

The coauthors and their ranger stood over the remains and their writing, quiet for some time, before the mycologist took to snapping photos. With a respirator, the ranger ventured into the hut and reported that it hosted no new occurrences, only that the fungal writing inside had appeared to dissipate a little. The linguist took notes, the mycologist took further samples. The trio broke for lunch: bologna sandwiches and ciders, provided by the ranger.¹⁶

LIN (through bites of sandwich): You don't actually think it's learning, do you?

MYC: What would you call it?

LIN: I don't know. I don't even know what's happening here, really. Can mushrooms... *think*?
[Brief silence as mycologist chews and swallows]

MYC: Did you know that if you were to burrow down, immediately downward, right where

you're sitting, right where the good Ranger [REDACTED] is sitting, and where I'm sitting now, you'd find fungus?

LIN: Sure, I'd buy that. They're prolific, I know that much.

MYC: Actually, you'd find *mycelium*, not too different from our mystery subject here. It'd be hard to see, certainly, perhaps only wispy threads mingled with soil and substrate and whatever

16: “As payment for yesterday,” she declared.

else you might dig up. But those threads extend, I'd hazard, under the entire expanse of this park. Right up to the shores of the inlets, and even under and beyond a ways.

RANGER: Freaky.

MYC: That's one way to see it. *Miraculous*, is how I choose to.

LIN: How's that?

MYC: Trees talk. Isn't that right, Ranger [REDACTED]?

RANGER: Oh, they never stop.

MYC: Right. Trees communicate with each other. They can tell others what their soil is like, if it's wet there or dry, nutritious or barren. "Come," they say, "bring your roots here." Or, "Look elsewhere." They can tell each other about parasites and animal carcasses and boulders buried beneath them. We're still figuring it out, really. Some think they speak to each other through their roots, like brushing fingers in the earth, fumbling about down there. Others think it's pheromones in their bark. Mycologists, we tend to think it's something between the two, but with one added factor.

LIN: Mushrooms.

MYC: Precisely. Fungi, as you know, are multihyphenate, but also terribly mysterious. A bit like the ocean: we have some sort of idea of how things work

down there, but every once in a while we find a beached leviathan, and oceanographers and marine biologists rush to shift their paradigms, to place this new puzzle piece in with the rest and look toward all the other blank spaces. Mycology is like that. We're sometimes an irrational or superstitious bunch, but we have to be. There's so much we don't know. Ask us, it's the fungi that carry the talk of trees on one great, interconnected hotline underground.

RANGER: So like the internet.

LIN: Or neurons.

MYC: Both wonderful analogies. And certainly, it's more than possible. There's a species of fungi, you know, that hijacks its host's nervous system. *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*, it's called. Finds its way into an ant, or a termite, and takes over all locomotion, brings the ant from the tree to the forest floor, where the cordyceps can thrive in the warmth and humidity. I'm saying that, if fungi can do that, can carry messages between trees and tap into an ant's brain, well...

LIN: It might do the same to a person.

MYC: In some ways, yes. It might.

LIN: But this is language. Human language. It's not under-

ground pheromones or neural impulses. This is speech. Ostensibly. **MYC:** Miraculous, isn't it?

So we've come to yet another leap, and perhaps the greatest of this document. If only it weren't that, a leap. If only the coauthors had more time with the fungus and its skeletal duo, we might have come away with something more than what this document has turned out to be, something decisive. Something more than what we're left with.

But what are we left with?

Some say that science in want of decisive conclusion is merely art.

The trio swept the site again, took more photographs, jotted more notes, and departed, not before agreeing to meet there the next day to uncover whatever new development the hut had in store. They would return, but they would not find the hut.

That night, after the ranger returned home and the linguist and the mycologist found themselves at another bar, and later at the linguist's apartment, and later... That night, the rain came. A storm, and one with unusual enthusiasm. The boats in surrounding ports rose several inches; the banks of rivers emptying into the ocean widened and collapsed; water coursed down sidewalks and collected in sewer drains; the forest drank, and when it was full, it shifted.

The three returned to the site of the hut to find the hillside leveled and coated in mud. Spruces and cedars lay criss-cross in the swampy mess, amid unearthed boulders and reaching, exposed root systems. The coauthors and the ranger stepped among the mess, picked at the soupy earth where they could, but found no trace of the hut and its plank door, its bedframe and chewed mattress, the blue tarp and its blanketed survivors.

The whole thing was gone.

Again we ask, *What are we left with?*

CONCLUSIONS (AND LIBERTIES):

You might have wondered by now what exactly it is you're reading. What's the nature of such a document? What is it good for? Too liberal to be any sort of scientific article, and surely, though we'll submit it to the university for review—they'll want something

for our efforts—the administration will almost certainly scoff and demand we revise. But what is this work without those liberties? Only a field journal, a list of observations and conjectures. This text will be rejected, but then filed away in the archives of the university library so that when that wonderful fungus reemerges, here or elsewhere, the institution might claim at least some credit. No, not an academic article. Not a news story, either, really, for who wants to read about a pair of scientists futzing fruitlessly around in the forest? Not exactly newsworthy. Too unfounded for nonfiction, perhaps. We might revise it, make it more elegant, and sell it as fiction. But we can't do that either. It's not fiction. Those remains were people. They were real. We found them.

Those remains, those people. We find it relevant here to note that after the fact, after we returned to the university with a report; after the university filed their own report with the local authorities concerning the human remains; after the trio was questioned and investigated and ultimately let go for want of a body, or even a hut; after the mycologist and the linguist were reprimanded and the ranger placed on leave for not following proper Parks procedure; then our work resumed in its small and curious way.

We took what we'd found of the two men, the photos and the newspaper articles, and lent them to a particularly promising anthropology student who we'd heard from a colleague was searching for a thesis. This is Chen, our final coauthor. The student researched, in her way performed miracles, scouring newspapers and available hospital records and tenants' union registrations, and constructed something of a portrait of the men, a portrait the coauthors now join to their own. You'll forgive our liberties and, for the sake of good science, we state now that much of this is speculation, just the apparent bits stitched together with the matrix of supposition. What good is it? Well, it is what we have. It is life, animated:

**A CONJECTURED LIFE, FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH
ADAPTED FROM THE RESEARCH OF ONE CHEN
KAHN, M.S.**

Suppose an immigrant, Japanese, fleeing Kanazawa after the law firm at which he was about to make partner imploded under the

weight of a malpractice allegation.¹⁷ He's a friendless man in a strange country, and out of work. His English is broken, and at most he can ask for a restroom or order a burger with the small sum he has. He lives, homeless for a time, in San Francisco, begging, until he finds his way by lottery into a halfway house.¹⁸

Suppose another man, tall and blond and tanned by the California sun. He's an addict, a habit he developed after his father ousts him from his home upon finding him on the sofa with another boy.¹⁹ The boy makes him sick but he does not know this. He finds himself in San Francisco by way of railcar, riding with other vagrants, trading with them canned foods and cigarettes and meager quantities of methamphetamines. Then he finds himself guttered and in withdrawal. Then he finds himself in a halfway house.²⁰

Then they find each other.

The two share a dormitory, at first, and support group, though it becomes clear to the blond and everyone else that the expatriate cannot speak. When he does it's in the rapid staccato of his mother tongue, his eyes bright, half daring the others to stop him and half searching for a partner in his language. Eventually the blond approaches him and says something the expat can't quite understand—perhaps a single word of greeting, casual and colloquial. So the blond strikes a deal, though the man can't understand this either: He'll teach the man English until he can comprehend what it is the blond had first said to him.²¹

They start slowly, at first. The blond is not a teacher, and the expat is a somewhat unwilling student. But perseverance and stubbornness win out, and eventually the expat pieces these together. The blond points at himself over lunch of fruit cups and peanut

17: *Obara Nobuo v. Eiko & Ass.*, 1967 (Translated).

18: Crestview Center intake records, 1967.

19: *Interview with Alma White, friend of the deceased*, 2021. (Note: Ms. White interned at the Crestview Center during the subjects' stay. She plays bridge on Saturdays, and serves an astonishing Bloody Mary.)

20: Crestview Center intake records, 1967.

21: *Interview with Alma White, friend of the deceased*, 2021. (Note: Ms. White claimed she often overheard their lessons. Quote: "I'd pitch in when I could. Toss some vocab their way. Neither of them knew graupel—that soft hail that's not quite snow. It was graupeling when they first spoke, I remember well. Seeing them in the cafeteria, just the two of them at a table, sly as skunks and handsome as all get out. They were quite a pair.")

butter sandwiches. “I,” he says. He points at the expat. “You,” he says. His finger darts between the two. “We,” he says.

The expat repeats: “I. You. We. We.”

“We, we.” the blond repeats and smiles. The expat smiles back.

It’s not long before the language lessons follow them to bed. It’s not long before they stay up late most nights, shoulder to shoulder in the blond’s bunk, drilling vocabulary and phonetics, the expat occasionally intruding with his own Japanese lessons to the blond man. It’s not long before they are waking up together, shoulder to shoulder, the soft slant of the California sun on their blinking eyes. They chuckle, embarrassed. They wake up together again the next night.

An orderly finds them one morning there in the bed.²² They haven’t done anything scandalizing, they’ve been courteous of their roommates, they’ve only slept. Still, for the second time, the blond is thrown out. They’re on the street again. But this time, there are two. I and I.

The blond finds a job at a grocery store,²³ the expat as an intermittent translator at a law firm specializing in immigrant cases.²⁴ They rent an apartment together, along with a few roommates of their persuasion. They live together. The two become a “We.” All the while the blond is slowing down. Something is at work in him, and now it is at work in his partner, too.

Then the photo at the parade, before the bridge. You know this part. The blond smiling and facing the camera, his companion looking away, off across the water. They know the seed they carry, the mutual illness, but they don’t speak of it. What can they do? They’re a part of the great open secret of the time, that secret that cripples their community. They see it in their friends, and they see it take their friends. They wait for it to take them. As they wait, the expat gains citizenship, lands a proper place in the law firm, starts in on

22: Ms. White would like to note that she was not this orderly. “I cried when I saw them go, I did,” she says in our interview. “They were the most beautiful pair, and they looked it as they left.”

23: *Interview with Rick Mitchell, owner of Mitchell Produce*, 2021. Says Mitchell, “I could tell he was a fixer. So was my house. Didn’t stop me from buying it. Did good work.”

24: *Interview with Wilfred Montgomery of Montgomery and Partners Law Firm*, 2021. Says Montgomery, “We needed someone fluent. Tashuo was fluent, but also passionate. He’d give every client a little carnation when he met them.”

Spanish and Mandarin while he waits.

But perhaps the expat is sick of waiting. Perhaps he finds himself in a bar, any bar in San Francisco, and perhaps another patron can smell his sickness, can see it in his face. Perhaps it's not the sickness at all he smells but the way the expat has of moving that he sees, the way his *Ss* are a bit too leaned into, the way he learned from the first English speaker who ever taught him. The other patron says something sharp and pointed to the expat. The expat responds in kind, and with something sharp and pointed of his own, all his furious waiting imbued in the hilt.

So the two are separated for years, one deteriorating in prison and the other deteriorating at a grocery store. They meet on separate sides of plexiglass and over the phone. They are two *Is*. Briefly, but for far too long, they are no longer a *We*. Not until the expat walks freely again.

But he walks freely and finds that his blond has nearly disappeared. He's bedridden and skeletal.²⁵ The expat spoons him soup from the grocery store (the owner of which has taken to sending periodic canned goods and just-expired produce). He holds the blond man's hand. He walks San Francisco at night while his partner sleeps until one night he finds the patron. It's the same bar. Perhaps it's the very same word that flies between them. It's certainly the same blade.

For the second time, the expat flees. He collects the blond and together they drive north through the night, along the coast. Past forests and bays until they reach *this* forest, *this* bay, where they abandon the car and walk among the trees in the small hours of the new morning.

(And here, may they forgive us, we turn fully to speculation.)

At first it hardly works. The expat has used the little money he fled with to purchase a tent and a field guide. The rains are cold and the ocean winds colder. He is no survivalist, and the blond, though

25: *Interview with Felicia Weber, daughter of Grant Weber, landlord.* Says Weber, "Dad brought them up now and again. Called them 'those—' Well, let's not say. He didn't approve. Of their being together I mean. Funny thing about Dad. He rented out to every queer person who applied, but always muttered about the sanctity of marriage or whatever. I think he was one of those precious few Christians who actually lived by the golden rule. Anyway, he talked about this guy sometimes. Brought him dinner occasionally. I guess he was in a bad way."

strengthened by the sun, can still hardly walk without leaning on the expat's shoulder. Still, the expat collects berries, learns to hunt the small animals that populate the pacific forest.

One day he finds a hillside. He envisions in that hillside a door, and within, a chamber with a fireplace, and a bedroom, and other spaces. Spaces, finally, for the two of them, and only the two of them. He excavates, he gathers timber, he builds.

They live. They are "We" for a time.

Until the blond succumbs. Then it is only *I*, and, buried in the earth in the furthestmost chamber, another *I*. Separated by soil and time.

The expat follows him not long after.

They lie there for some years until something finds them. Not a person, not even an animal. A strange little scavenger with a propensity for learning, for language. It picks a select few words from their brains like apples from a tree and turns these words over in its strange hands. It cannot make sense of them, but it cannot let them go. It puzzles over them until their burden is so unbearable it must begin writing. Others of its kind, those cousins, explode their being into caps of red, or beige, fleshy shelves or even glowing, luminescent nodes. This one, the one gifted with words, explodes—*fruits*—with the script of its inherited lexicon. It writes the few words that spun in its parents' fading minds just before they expired, and which lingered long after, carried by stray firings of neurons, or something more arcane.

Until it is found by a hiker. Until it is found by another *We*, though the two are not *We* yet. The strange messenger will make them so.

AFTERWORD:

So the coauthors ask one final time: *What are we left with?* A failed investigation. A fruitless scientific endeavor. A startling and vanished species.

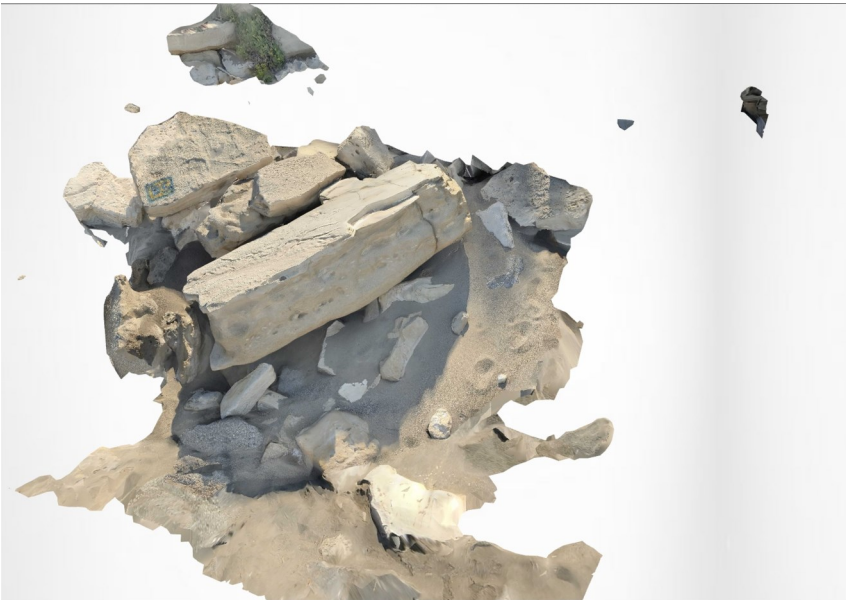
We are also left with two men, who spoke through a strange little fungus and made themselves known, even as they hid. We may have gotten it wrong. Everything you've just read above may be off-base, presumptive, inconsiderate. The coauthors prefer to think that we are only working with what we are given. We are made collabo-

rators in a work the fugitives started. We have attempted here, in lieu of scientific conclusion and accolade, to make a life known. It is the least we could do.

The hiker, Moya, had mentioned she was looking for her father when she found the hut. When asked if she found anything, Moya smiled coyly and said, “No, not really. But also yes, sort of. I’m no closer to any sort of answer or anything. No clues, exactly. But I walk through these forests and there’s something of him here. I can’t explain it. It’s like when you think you hear someone’s voice in a crowd or something, you know? But of course they’re not there. They can’t be. I walk around here and I think I hear his voice, but not his voice, really. Like some part of him is stuck here but I don’t know how to listen.”

“Totally stupid, I know,” Moya added.

The Vallhund barked.



Compressed landscapes / *Frida Ortgies-Tonn* / 3D scan / 2022

Tic-Xenotation as a Solution to Problems of Context: Barker, Derrida, and ETI⁰

Peter Heft

Part I: Barker and Derrida

In 1971, a young Daniel Charles Barker attended a lecture before the *Congrès international des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française*. The speaker? None other than Jacques Derrida. In his ‘communication’ titled “Signature, Event, Context,” Derrida expanded upon J.L. Austin’s speech-act theory while giving it a spin all his own.

For Derrida, communication did not simply mean “the transmission of meaning” as traditionally understood; rather, a broad range of extra factors must be considered. Indeed, Derrida posited that communication was a far broader category than one that only allowed for a purely linguistic standpoint, as communication “also designates nonsemantic movements.”¹ To

make sense of these extra, nonsemantic movements within a communicative activity, however, one needs to take into account the *context* in which they occur; a colloquium, the tone of a room, the look on a person’s face as they shrug, etc. The “implicit but structurally vague consensus” understood by members of a community constitutes context, for Derrida.² Despite seeming straight forward, however, there is always more at play, and thus context always contains a level of ambiguity. Indeed, as Derrida notes, “context is never absolutely determinable [...] its determination is never certain or saturated.”³ Indeed, in a more extended discussion of context as it relates to performative acts—a topic too broad

0: This essay first appeared on the original MVU Press website.

1: Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans., Alan Bass, 307–330 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 309.

2: Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context,” 310.

3: *Ibid.*

to cover here and something that, when considering extraterrestrials, becomes significantly more convoluted—Derrida argues that context also involves the “conscious intention” of the actor; what they mean, how they mean it, what reaction they hope to elicit, etc. These features, however, are necessarily elusive as one does not have access to the inner thoughts of the Other. Given that, context cannot be “exhaustively determinable” since the active thought process of the Other eludes us.⁴

Furthermore, and we will return more explicitly to the problem of context shortly, Derrida makes additional notes on writing as such. Briefly, writing is not only a “*means of communication*,” but it is a means of communication that acts upon a homogeneous medium. While “the content of the semantic message” is transmitted by increasingly “more powerful mediations, over a much greater distance,” it still fundamentally operates within a specific realm, and thus requires the same faculties to code and decode. This homogene-

ous medium—what we can think of as the symbolic—is independent of the content of the message—and indeed, is independent of the medium of transmission as well—and thus operates on a more abstract level.⁵

Specifically, this ability to operate in a transcendent medium—a medium of external linguistic codification—also makes writing a fundamentally absent act. As Derrida notes, one of the defining features of writing “is the absence of the addressee,” “[o]ne writes in order to communicate something to those who are absent.”⁶ Expanding upon this, Derrida argues that the sign manifested as writing exceeds the sender just as much as it exceeds the addressee. A written sign operates not only on the homogeneous plane of the symbolic, but it utilizes an external code that allows it to take on a life of its own. As “[i]t must be repeatable – iterable” as it circulates through the world, it becomes a productive machine that doesn’t need a subject.⁷ “For the written to be the written, it must continue to ‘act’ and to

4: Ibid., 327. Karen Barad problematizes this entire dichotomy of self/Other in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) but I will not be taking up her provocations here.

5: Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context,” 311.

6: Ibid., 313.

7: Ibid., 315.

be legible even if what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written.”⁸ Not only must the message be external to the writer making it “a communicable, transmittable, decipherable grid that is iterable for a third party, and thus for any possible user in general,” but implied within this framework is that the code exceeds the codifier as such.⁹ Even in the event of the total destruction of humanity, our linguistic systems will still exist. Information was encoded using a system, and just because the coders are gone, the code itself remains unaffected. This, for Derrida, “implies that there is no code [...] that is structurally secret.”¹⁰

Crucially, what this externality allows for is the breaking of original context. Indeed, as Derrida notes, “a written sign carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is, the set of presence which organize the moment of its inscription.”¹¹ The original intentions, goals, etc. of the initial author become irrelevant as the code circulates on its own. The con-

text in which a given sentence was written becomes irrelevant (and indeed, unknowable) as the author disappears and the message enters a broader linguistic community. As Barthes notes, “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, [and] contestation” with its unity lying in “its destination,” its larger milieu.¹²

This seems to provide hope for messaging extraterrestrials as if it’s true that the context in which a message was originally written is not only irrelevant, but disappears with time, then we might reasonably assume that any message we send will still have semantic value independent of human interpreters. Indeed, a message the likes of which goes “hello, we are here!” certainly is laced with initial context—that is to say, intentionality, implicit goals, etc.—but if Derrida is to be believed, such context dies off with the authors and the message retains meaning by reference to its own relationship to the code it is transmitted in.

8: *Ibid.*, 316.

9: *Ibid.*, 315.

10: *Ibid.*

11: *Ibid.*, 317.

12: Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans., Stephen Heath, 142–148 (London, UK: Fontana Press, 1977), 148.

Unfortunately, Barker was convinced that Derrida was wrong. Derrida's understanding of context is at once incredibly thorough but not abstract enough. While context certainly does include the "implicit but structurally vague consensus" of a community of beings and must also include the "conscious intention[s]" of those being, context is much more.¹³ Context not only involves the actors, their mental attitudes, and so on, but it also involves the society at large. Unspoken power structures are at play when considering context.¹⁴ Indeed, the simple utterance of "hello" carries with it cultural significance beyond what the actors intend. While A meeting B may say "hello" in passing with the intention of purely acknowledging each other's existence, if A and B live in a polite society, the utterance of "hello" acts as a conversation starter that may portend the elicitation of further pleasantries.

And this is a banal and mundane example. Certain phrases only make sense in the context of specific cultures and will, if uttered amongst others, leave them baffled.¹⁵

And these are all among humans. And culture. If one is to believe contemporary linguistic theory, there is an even more abstract context that is implicit in all human language *but might not be implicit in language as such*. Indeed, if we take Chomsky's understanding of universal grammar seriously, then there is a specific structure to natural languages as such that creates a hierarchy. While authorial, cultural, or other context may disappear, the structuring of messages according to the principles of universal grammar—something we likely cannot get out of—is a context in and of itself that poses a problem for extraterrestrial messaging. Not only does it seem to be the case that "the same structures that make

13: Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," 310, 327.

14: For a more thorough account of linguistic power structures than can be provided here, see Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984* (Volume Two), trans., Josué V. Harari, ed., James D. Faubion, 205–222 (New York: The New Press, 1998).

15: We can also, via the work of H.P. Grice, see how 'culture' can be even more narrowly defined as the milieu between a group of individuals who all know the same thing. In this sense, communication becomes even more difficult. See H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed., A. P. Martinich and David Sosa, 312–322 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012).

it possible to learn a human language make it impossible for us to learn a language that violates the principles of universal grammar,” but the inverse is likely true as well. An extra-terrestrial with a different set of linguistic constraints would likely be befuddled by a message organized according to our hierarchy of language. As noted, were we to receive a message that violated the principles of universal grammar, “we would have

to ‘approach the alien’s language slowly and laboriously – the way that scientists study physics, where it takes generation after generation of labor to gain new understanding and to make significant progress.’”¹⁶ As with the above, the inverse is likely true as well making the use of natural language highly problematic for any messaging.¹⁷ A different programme is needed.

Part 2: Tic-Xenotation and Project Scar

As enigmatic MIT researcher turned Professor of Anorganic Semiotics at Miskatonic Virtual University, Dr. Daniel Charles Barker, began publishing on systems and noise theory in the late 1970s and early 1980s, his work was noticed by “a NASA-related organization that

[had] particular interests connected to SETI activity.”¹⁸ Following John Lilly’s work with ‘dolphinsese,’ it became abundantly clear that communication between lifeforms that shared similar environmental pressures and are, by all accounts, highly intelligent is fundamentally problematic as each

16: Daniel Oberhaus, *Extraterrestrial Languages* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019), 31.

17: It should be noted that there are those who claim that universal grammar might truly be universal insofar as “the number of evolutionary end points is [or rather, may be] limited” and thus other entities are likely to develop similar linguistic structures to humans (*Extraterrestrial Languages*, 45. See also Charles Cockell, *The Equations of Life: How Physics Shapes Evolution* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2018)). This view seems foolish and anthropocentric and while this paper is not the place to levy a full critique, I would point the reader to Vilém Flusser’s *Vampyrotheuthis Infernalis* (© Louis Bec, trans., Valentine Pakis (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) / trans., Rodrigo Maltex Novaes (New York, NY: Atropos Press, 2011)) and its discussion which discusses a highly evolved and intelligent entity that has taken a radically different evolutionary path from that of humans despite being under similar physical constraints (e.g., existing on Earth).

18: CCRU, “Barker Speaks: The CCRU Interview with Professor D.C. Barker,” in *Abstract Culture: Digital Hyperstition* (London, UK: CCRU, 1999): 2-8, 2.

occupies not only their own social niche—that is to say, social context—but each has a system of communication that is symbolically coded in a unique way. Breaking from this context, something Derrida hoped to allow for, proved to be too large an assumption to make when analyzing extraterrestrial signals. Indeed, without a direct and visual referent, distinguishing between naturally repeating signals and artificial signals served difficult (especially in light the human propensity to find meaning in random events). Thus, Barker was tasked with finding out “how to discriminate – in principle – between intelligent communication and complex pattern[s] derived from nonintelligent sources.”¹⁹ Indeed, following Derrida’s “Signature, Event, Context” lecture and subsequent discussions around the mutability of context and the role Universal Grammar played in the structuring of natural languages, Barker took an interest in the problem, hoping to sever communication and context.

According to documents recently acquired via the Freedom of Information Act (see Appendix A), in the 1980s NASA baptized Project Scar

while Barker was working in Southeast Asia (Borneo specifically). The aim of the project was to create a “general purpose decryption protocol’ for identifying intelligent signal[s] from alien sources.”²⁰ Naturally, anthropocentric bias had to be excised as much as possible. This, (un)fortunately, included the disposal of Universal Grammar (and with it the hope of using natural languages to communicate) and thus lead Barker to seek a truly ‘universal’ mode of communication: mathematics. While a perversion of classical linguistics and a shot into the domain of mathematical theory, Barker saw the transformation of natural languages into high abstractions conveyed via symbols following basic, seemingly ‘universal’ mathematical principles, as the *necessary next step in the evolution of linguistics*.

Taking this, Barker began to strip current numerical systems of their context. Since Arabic Numerals (and the systems under which they operate) are themselves highly anthropomorphized and coded within a specific framework, Barker sought to remove “presupposition[s] as to origin (e.g., ‘xenobiological organ-

19: CCRU, “Barker Speaks,” 2.

20: “The Tic Xenotation,” on Hyperstition, published 7/7/4. (<https://archive.is/Dp8RB>)

isms’) or theme (e.g., ‘cosmochemistry’)” and thus developed what he called Tic-Xenotation (TX). “[A]s a maximally abstracted or ultimately decoded numerical semiotic, stripped of all nonconstructive (or symbolic) conventions,” TX is at once ingenious in its simplicity while simultaneously being perversely complex.²¹

TX “elegantly provided an abstract compression of the natural number line (from 2 ... n) with a minimum of coded signs and without modulus.”²² While TX is itself designed to be a self-contained, self-defining system without need to reference any other numerical system (its success in this area is an open question that mathematicians are working on), it can theoretically be coded and decoded using any numerical system. For ease of understanding, we will be looking at it in relation to Arabic Numerals.

Taking the Fundamental Theorem of Arithmetic (FTA)—namely, that any positive integer can be uniquely represented by a factor of primes—as its starting point, TX mischievously undermines numerical hierarchy by reducing all notations and operations down to two points:

tic-clusters and implexions. The former being ‘:’ and the latter being ‘()’.

In its simplest form, TX takes the natural number line and factors down all non-primes into their constituent parts and then, according to a series of rules, rebuilds them so as to thoroughly dehumanize them. Positive integers greater than 1 follow the FTA, and all primes have two values associated with them: a magnitude and an ordinate value. The magnitude is the absolute value of the number in question while the ordinate value is its place on the prime number line. 2, the first prime, has a magnitude of 2 and an ordinate value of 1. 7, the fourth prime, has a magnitude of 7 and an ordinate value of 4. This unfolds continuously and thus one can think of the magnitude of n -prime as being n , while the ordinate value is something else yet to be determined. Magnitude 2 is represented by the tic-cluster ‘:’ and thus all multiples of 2 are equivalently expressed as ‘ $n \times :$ ’ where n is the exponent 2 is raised to. $2^3 = 8 = 3 \times : = \dots$

Following that, there are two operations: multiplication and implexion. Iplexion transforms any magni-

21: “TX2,” on Hyperstition, published 2/22/5. (<https://archive.is/6jV6F>)

22: “The Tic Xenotation,” web.

tude into an ordinate value with the new magnitude being prime.

- 2 = first prime = : therefore
(2) = (:) = second prime =
3 therefore (3) = ((:)) =
third prime = 5 therefore
(5) = (((:))) = fifth prime =
11, and so on.
- This works for non-primes.
4 = :: therefore (4) = (::) =
fourth prime = 7. 9 = 3×3
= (:)(:) therefore (9) = ((:)
(:)) = ninth prime = 23,
and so on.

Compounds are expressed as the product of their prime factors—e.g.,
18 = 2 x 3 x 3 = :(:(:)).

To cancel an implexed operation, Barker added what he called deplexion: -P.²³ An implexed deplex, (-P), lowers the ordinate value of the TX-coded number it is attached to by 1. Thus, while (:) = second prime = 3, (-P)(:) = first prime = 2 = ∴. This allows an easy way to drop to 1s and 0s with (-P): being equivalent to the *ur*-prime, 1, and ((-P)): being equivalent to 0. What follows are the first 10 positive integers (including 0) and their necessary TX counterparts.

0 = ((-P)):

1 = (-P):

2 = :

3 = (:)

4 = ::

5 = ((:))

6 = :(:

7 = (::)

8 = :::

9 = (:)(:)

10 = :(:(:))

And so it unfolds. While a clearly non-conventional linguistic approach—indeed, an approach that might make some linguists feel uneasy—convention goes out the window when attempting to engage with the radical Other. The brilliancy of TX is that it operates as a starting point to boot up communication and, in turn, allow for a re-emergence of the natural languages that linguists so love. As such, TX, while highly abstract and not recognizably linguistic, operates *prior* to linguistics proper and serves as a way to *initiate* communication between radically different entities. It is the demon we need if we are to talk to extraterrestrials.

23: While Barker left 'P' as a symbol, it can just as easily be removed and replaced with '-.'

We shall keep it for historical consistency and the needs of existent converters.

Appendix A:

Letter from an unnamed director at NASA confirming the existence of Project Scar and Dr. D.C. Barker's involvement. No other information was to be released with my FOIA request.

NATIONAL
AERONAUTICS
AND SPACE
ADMINISTRATION



NASA HEADQUARTERS
1520 H STREET NORTHWEST
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.
TELEPHONE: EXECUTIVE 3-3260 TWX: WA 785

IN REPLY REFER TO

Dear Dr. [REDACTED]

I send regards from Washington. While the weather must be stifling this time of year in Borneo, I hope the [REDACTED] Institute has furnished you with all the necessary amenities. I've been in contact with Mr. [REDACTED] of the [REDACTED] Institute and he assures me that Dr. D.C. Barker - whom I've heard is quite the eccentric - is on his way down to meet you. After reading his dissertation, Signal Identification in Positive and/or Recurring Feedback Systems, I have no doubt that he will be able to help you with Project Scar and the transmission you received from M [REDACTED] on [REDACTED]. His...peculiarities and desire to go beyond the human will no doubt be an asset as he clearly thinks like [REDACTED].

I wish you the best of luck in this project and anxiously await the field report. May [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] be with you in this momentous task.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Director

March 3, 1983

Preliminary Outlines of Three Theory Gadgets

G.R. Harmston

Introduction

My conception of what I refer to as “Theory Gadgets” are small bundles of functional theoretical dynamics and mechanisms which are grafted and welded together with other ideas and theories into practically usable idea devices. These devices are intended to be as universally utilisable as possible and as such are intended to be free of Ideological dynamics and preconceptions outside of their specific intended purpose/function. Although anything done with a particular intent or purpose will have an aim of sorts and therefore, it could be said, some variety of ideation or leaning, my intent is to make devices which work with dynamics and layers underneath and apart from such concerns as political or religious narrative. In some sense they are meta-analytical frameworks and tools, and it is a part of their construction that the Ideology be washed, scraped and chiselled away from the surface of the components

prior to assessment for potentially becoming a functional part of the Gadget’s mechanism. If this cannot be done to a satisfactory standard, or the component is non-functional outside of its original Ideological context, then it is not suitable to be welded and wired in with the other components of the Gadget in question. Of course, the devices can themselves be used for Ideological ends in some senses and contexts, but not solely or exclusively and are more suited to an abstracted analysis of cultural artefacts and dynamics, in some sense seeking to strip away Ideology and other mediation. But hey, if you can get the Gadget to work in the situation you need it for then go for it, my friend.

The three I outline here in particular are intended to deal with the Ideological, Algorithmic and other varieties of Capture and the resulting Malaises that are currently befalling Human affairs. They are broadly

intended to open up possibilities for thinking, expression and the creation of living methodologies and pro Art/creativity dynamics. The Gadgets are in very early stages currently, as is all

my writing and research in this area to be frank, but if you will indulge me, I will render a few rough v0.1 sketches for you.

The Xenopticon

The Xenopticon, at its most basic level is an inverted version of Foucault's Panopticon where instead of a central position from which all points (prison cells) outside of it can be viewed simultaneously, a central point (object of analysis) is viewed from every possible outside position (prison cell) around it. The intended function of the Xenopticon is to gather the maximum variety/plurality of possible viewpoints, angles and analyses on whatever one is focused on at the centre. The more cells (viewpoints) one can view the central object from, the more multifaceted, unbiased and fresh analyses are possible and the more jumping off points for thinking and being can be generated by the Gadget. At this point I will drop the "prison" part when referring to the cells as it is not applicable, suggesting entrapment or limitation of some sort.

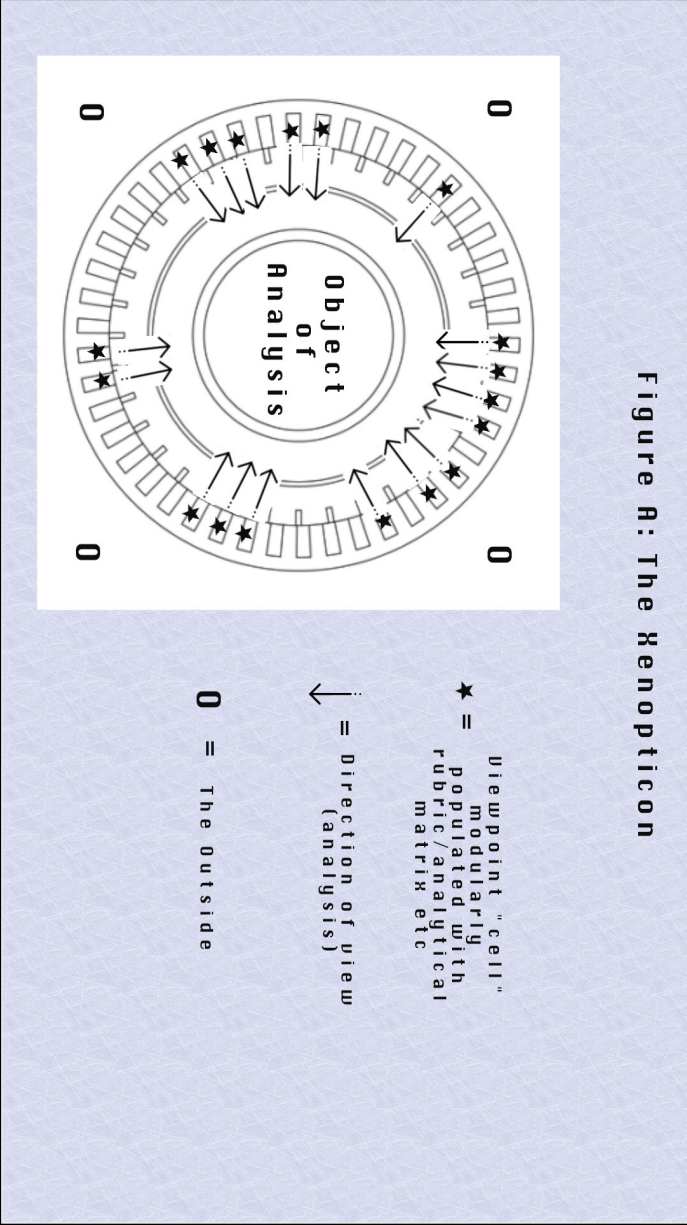
The change to the "Xeno-" prefix is to denote the Outside or perhaps Alien/unconsidered viewpoints which

can be assembled as part of the Xenopticon, to suggest the position of being outside looking in, and I suppose to aesthetically hint at an alternative or non-standard positions, viewpoints and intents.

When taken to its potential end point it will give a sort of multi-positional (in theory, omni-positional) viewpoint which, while desirable in terms of being richer and fuller, could result in a noisy and fractal web of analyses. As such, switching between the viewpoints (cells) one at a time or perhaps linking together the analytical results or two or three cells in a string or small web/cluster would seem optimal. However one could also gather the results from all the viewpoints available and assemble them in some way in order to cross reference them or to seek patterns and dynamics in the results, or whatever further analysis is required at that point.

Another point at which this idea diverges from the original Panopticon

Figure A: The Xenopticon



is that, instead of supposing a fully pre-built structure, part of the Xenopticon is that it is constructed one viewpoint (cell) at a time with every available, or just desired, viewpoint being built into the outside wall of the structure. An intended resulting dynamic of this assembly process is that the Xenopticon be maximally modular and to some degree flexible/

customisable for the widest variety of applications and user intents. Some cells could also be left vacant (or in a sense unbuilt) leaving a space in the wall through which elements of the Outside may drift past looking in or poking through, suggesting themselves as possible analytical viewpoints if graspable or tameable in some sense.

Noumenautological Stepout

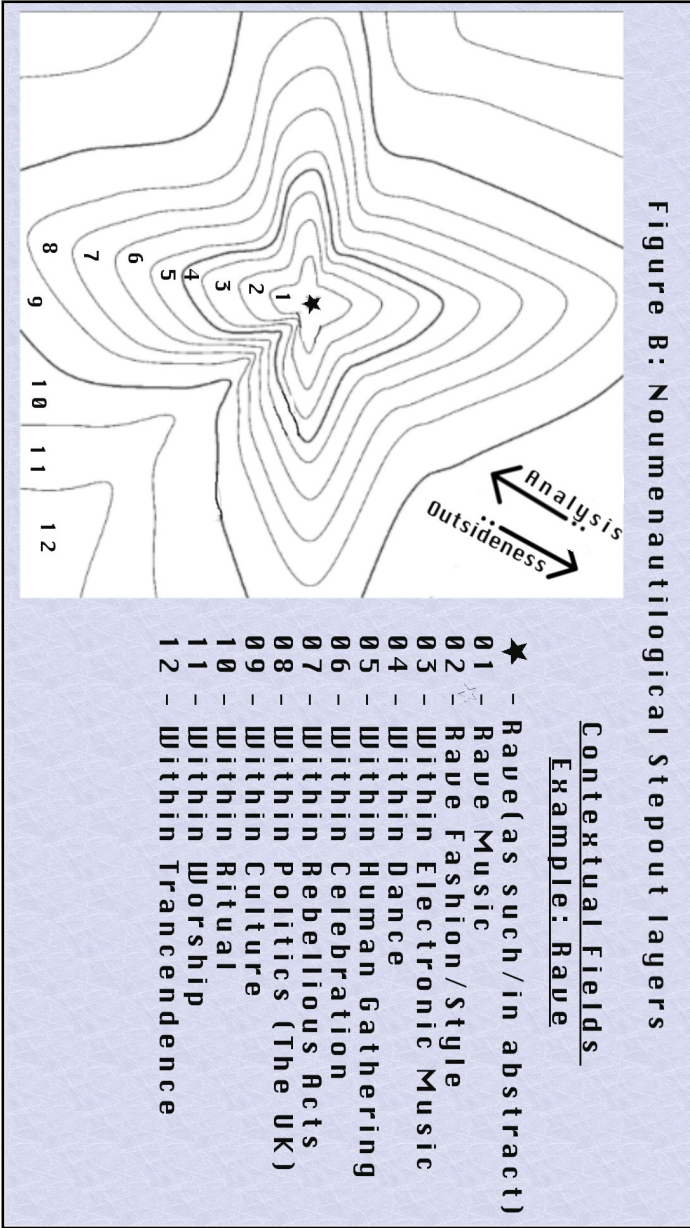
With a similar “outside looking in” element to the Xenopticon, the Noumenautological stepout dynamic is designed to move one contextual layer at a time outside the thing being analysed or assessed in order to view it in its purest, most unmediated form and/or to gather the maximum number of contexts which that thing exists in. When taken to its logical conclusion and stepping outside of all circles (or contextual fields) surrounding that which is being analysed, it is a sort of context remover and narrative paint stripper, in some sense. Simply put; the closer to the absolute Outside one gets by removing layers further and further out from that being assessed, the closer to an unmediated, and in that sense “pure,” view of its content/purpose you can get. (As

well as knowledge of the contextual fields it exists in.)

The term “Noumenautological” refers to exploring and mapping the Noumena (absolute, unmediated Outside as such). “Stepout” refers to the dynamic of stepping outside a contextual field into the one outside it and analysing it from that point (as well perhaps as the nature and function of the contextual field itself) before repeating this operation.

The fields around the object being analysed are most logically arranged from those most conceptually local to the object of analysis itself, outward to those which place it in wider and wider contexts. However, in cases where this is not possible, because there is a kind of “chicken and egg” situation due to the nature of the contexts for exam-

Figure B: Noumenautiological Stepout layers



ple, then the maximum number of fields being present for consideration should be a higher priority than the order they are arranged in.

One may of course not wish to view the object from the maximally outside viewpoint (widest possible context) but may wish to move one layer at a time outwards and look back towards the object of assessment from this standpoint in order to see how it is working within that particular contextual layer. By doing this one can also analyse the contextual layers themselves and observe how they are acting on, or affecting the perception of, the thing being analysed.

For example, a book, music album or other piece of art can be seen in the context of how it was written or conceived by the artist, you could then perhaps also move a layer *into* that to analyse the influences and circumstances of this conception. Moving a layer (contextual field) outside this we may consider the situational and technical aspects of how the thing was produced or constructed, and with another stepout we may view the purely Aesthetic context of the piece. We could step another layer out to see how the art is presented by a publisher or platform and

another to view it in the context of other works of that type or genre. Then outward to the context of all Art, then outward to the context of Human culture, then out to Tradition as such and so on as required by the user carrying out the analysis.

Each time we attempt to understand the piece in this contextual field and outside it, with the particulars of the context and its effects removed by each stepout. The device also serves a second function as an assessment matrix for the number and nature of contexts surrounding the subject of analysis. These can then be noted and looked at in terms of the effects they are having as well as the points where the circles of context surrounding may overlap, creating further sources and possibilities for analytical scrutiny. For example, Hip Hop may have overlapping contextual fields of music, culture and fashion as these elements are in some way inseparable in this case; the music impacts the fashion, the culture impacts the music, the music impacts the culture, the culture impacts the fashion and so on. By undertaking the operation of moving back and forth between the different contextual fields the analysis can be said to be complete when all contextual fields

have been identified, noted and assessed in whatever way is required by the criteria for using the Gadget.

The TADrangle

The TADrangle is a relatively simple but widely applicable analytical framework which can be used alongside/nested within the aforementioned two Gadgets. It is for attempting the analysis of something in a way which is as base level, unbiased, unmediated, de-algorhythmed and de-narrativised as possible. For this three aspects/points of analysis are arranged into a triangle, those being Thematic, Aesthetic and Dynamic.

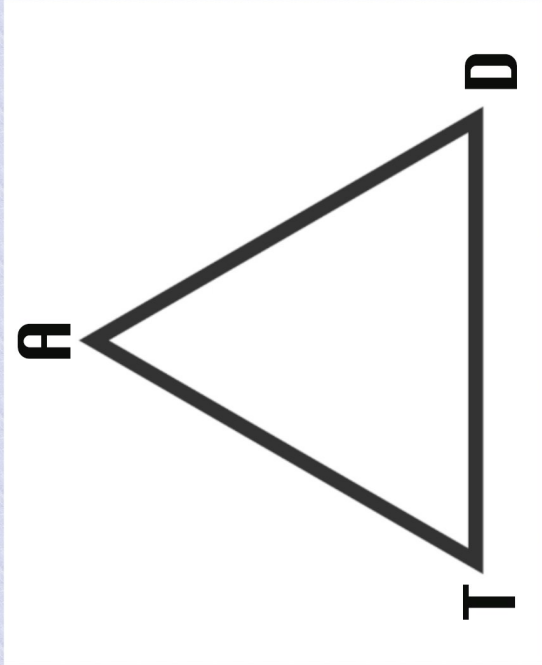
Moving around the triangle, we look at the object of analysis in terms of its Thematic, Aesthetic and Dynamic dimensions/functions in that order. The object could be nearly anything from an idea, subculture, fashion style or political movement to a news article, song, genre or image. The "Thematic" refers to what the object is about, the "Aesthetic" to how it is presented and the "Dynamic" to what it is doing (or intended to do if that differs from what it is doing in actuality). Although these 3 points may seem simplistic they are as stripped and boiled down as possible with the intent to

generate the most base layer essential view possible, but also be applicable in the analysis of as many forms of cultural artefact as possible. It's a skeleton, but a technologically powerful one built with strong mechanisms, like a Terminator perhaps.

Following this, a second analytical operation is possible by moving between the points of the TADrangle assessing the links between them. For example how the Thematics effect/are related to the Aesthetics and Dynamics, how the Aesthetics effect/are related to the Thematics and Dynamics and so on. In this case the operation can move between any of the points, in any direction and in any order to generate analysis or ideas/thoughts of other kinds.

I will continue to work on the construction and testing of these gadgets as well as larger ones such as the Unwire/Rewire protocol, refining them to be as effective and useful as possible. This is an ongoing process of testing, strengthening, synthesizing, switching parts in and out, wiring in new theoretical elements and welding them in place. This, as I say, is all is

Figure C: The TADrangle



T = Thematics
A = Aesthetics
D = Dynamics

Operation 1
T>A>D

Operation 2
T>A/T>D
A>T/A>D
D>A/D>T

in its preliminary stages. Further elaborations, as well as an assessment and description of the circumstances and situations which the devices are intended to counteract/protect from, will be contained in my forthcoming Cultural Theory-Fiction Techno-Horror Memoir book, *Capture and*

Malaise.

Until then if you need me I will be tinkering away in my little Theory workshop in the woods.

I wish you well, dear reader and appreciate the time you have spent with me here at these pages.



On a mountain / *Frida Ortgies-Tonn* / photograph / 2021



Chupacabra Sarcoptei / *Craig* / pencil, water-color,
Blender, Midjourney AI / 2022



The Red King (DMKU Godform) / Δ-RebelSandpaper / Digital Collage

rescue-attempt

Louis Lapathi

CONNECTION ESTABLISHED

you join the scene mid-performance, like a rude observer

you are silent, she doesn't hear you

you pay attention, while *he* does his thing

[[the show]]

Cricket

“they have their own problems and fight their own battles. they were given a purpose by their milieu, and yet that shackles them, and stops them from seeing the grand illusion of purpose for what it is”

Dora runs.

she runs, jumps up and down as the tram car shakes and bends incomprehensibly

Dora

“it doesn't make any sense!”

into her hand melts a hole of transparent noise, out climbs Cricket

Cricket (cont'd)

“rotting meat-machines function as reason-sinks, D[yes/no/[or]] a. never forget — meta[or pata?]morphosis has no use for logic

or reason. all it needs to do is rot.”

Cricket extends its flesh. Dora keeps running even as Cricket extends gradually.

Dora

“i don’t care. i just want to get out. please, let me out”

Cricket laughs, his greyscale voice echoes through the tram cars.

Cricket

“and yet the gears of the meat machine forged by nature and evolution continue to turn, ignoring the pleas and cries of fleshlet”

Cricket slides off her arm and falls to the floor with a heavy thud.

click click

click click

the cameras multiply and spread out to record the post-reason madness

the Thermite Queen falls out of her wheelchair and
[s c r e a m s]

his king jumps under to soften her fall, unplugging him from the softly beating, silver veil-web

his **s c r e a m** is an un[god/man]ly, nerve-shattering, ear-prolapsing mad howl at 481 BPM

the tram car shakes, Dora covers her ears, but sits wide-eyed

the cameras are rolling, baby. lets give ‘em a good show

rescue-attempt

[[a good show, darling]]

avatar of rot

Avatar of Rot

A V A T A R O F R O T

rotrotrotrotrotrotrotrotrotrot

Rot=[...]morphosis

morphosis

morphosis

metamorphosis[maybe]

transformation into higher(?) beings

are they higher

those termite fucks

no, they are not higher

but what if patamorphosis

the transformation of the narrative itself

a change in its [meta/pata/(-)]construction

maybe that will work

but how about both at once?

would that be a good show, darling?

[[foreplay]]

the cameras roll, Cricket grins its rusted glass teeth

Dora sits on the ground wide-eyed

the Termite Queen prepares its dried up throat

its monstrous, machine-smelling, transparent-sounding
moistrous womb prepares to unleash compressed Rot

the termite king begins the lyrics of cacophonous pata-meta-
morphosis

termite king

“you foul, stenchless flesh-machine

born of doubt, mired by desire unbound.

cower, cower, ye of the mortal ephrate edem:

fleshlet, rendered conscious.”

the Termite Queen inhales, her womb lies ready for the fertile
scream of Rot

termite king

“i hate you, i despise you.”

Dora shuts her eyes, but Cricket jacks one of its many tails
straight into her brain jelly

the cockroach’s infinite legs scratch the floor simultaneously, en-
graving words into the hard plastic

and the Termite Queen finally sings

Termite Queen

“meat: flesh and blood;

perception: sight and hearing;

self: memory and essence”

**Cricket’s legs
(engraving)**

“self-grown prison of ephrate edem, the mortal man”

termite king

“listen to this cacophonmelody from your writhing grave”

the Queen squishes her king and a scream is at last let loose

unleashed

unveiled

broadcasted directly into Dora’s brain jelly, the sight bypasses her eyes, the sound bypasses her ears

she is infinitely perceptive, her essence lies naked, hanging impaled upon the fleshy tree of thought

may Cricket help her, because no god, God, GOD or avatar is still perceptive

not now, not ever more on this tram

until there is rot and scream

[[rot and scream]]

rot=transformation, metamorphosis

rot [equals] the melting down of something and the usage of the soup that remains to create something else

rot is [■■■■]-becoming

and who is to rot?

**Cricket, Termite Queen, termite king
(pointing at Dora)**

“you?”

Dora

“me?”

the broadcast goes strong, image crisp, audio beautiful

Cricket grins

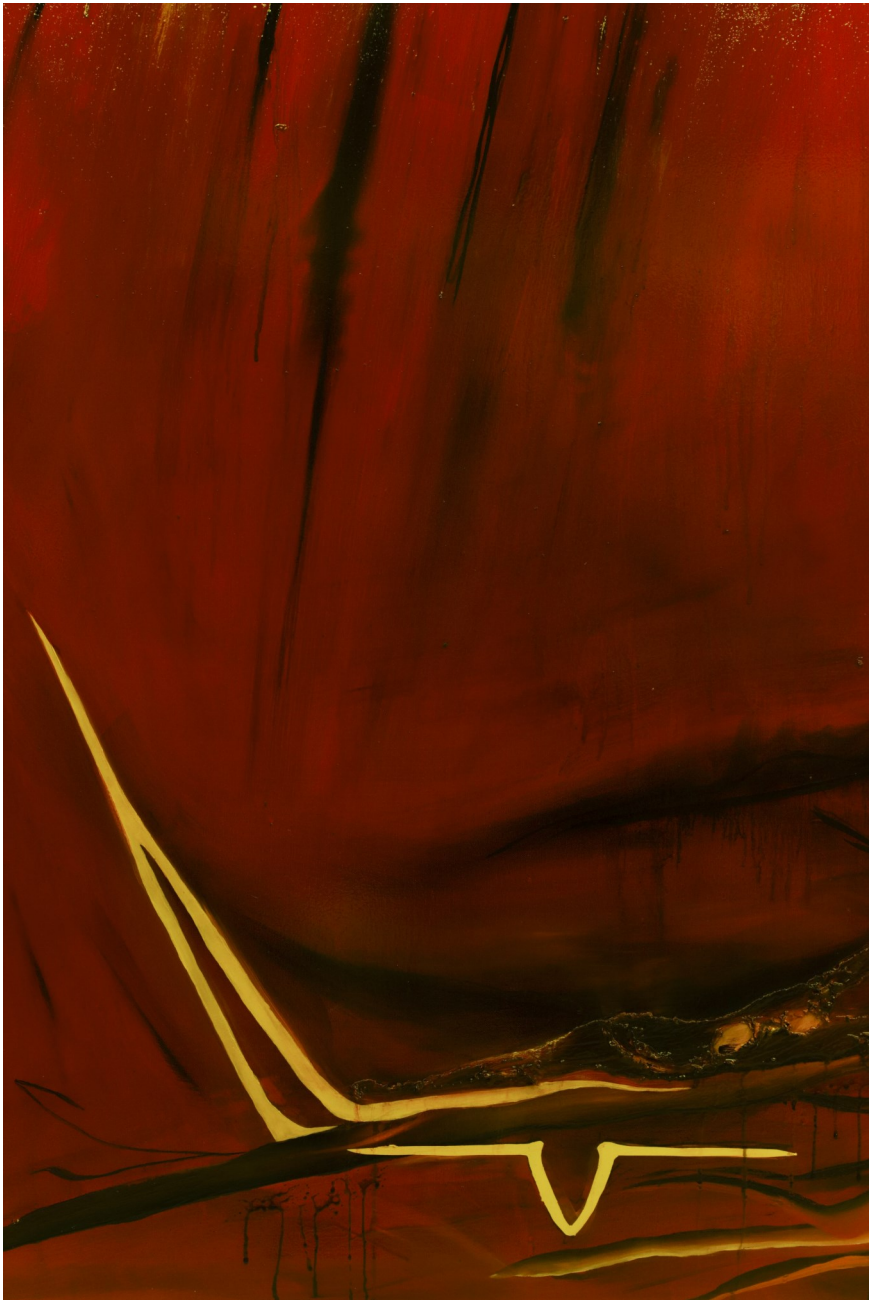
the cameras click and focus on the Queen’s pulsing womb

the king exp[load]s from the ████████████████████

白NG

IHDR

エ -w2ロア pHYs .# .#x?#v IDATx^ . 崑\$ヶ . 賭ユ . ネヲL
マ、Wミs電オ3メLweクミ . 2「イIn . iofフ鱧 . \$站t?#?#SDDd撮”“緩1
ヲIq_ 25ツ4ヨ . . ソエ檻k: 新”2フリ:y枷* 1 . u稜セノ#ウ(nマ . コY]塵ムヒ
D、Zau0ア° ソツッウ伏Uヒ . <コ葵関ツ . ヨE . . ウz-研* . . 苺xカウユ
gz . . nQ媛oロユN遮回栓 + . s枹誑収{ 刈餅オク鯉6 . 躡Ot
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->S慎m廓回5テ1nヨ異灌回{ナ . メ#VヌミヲヨキEアqlclノ §)Q鉄 . .
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F!lsタ . ^ . 0+-ヨ . 譽 . _O . M/歿 . 回 . 耗 . y誅 . ソ回セ~ス柅i . z .



Ebb / *Neja Zorzut* / oil, silicone, wax on canvas / 340 cm x 170 cm / 2022

闇マ。y驎7・ウ印ユ・ー・HkBE晞g管・セW{´ヨ娉「シニWLKツユ@鈎
場々H)ユレ激♀ケ{Tマ3UJヲ盒#・ミb・a`煩読mRヤサ#”J!Gアt連ヲZ

fesssstive orgies of malignancy

headaches spread like wildfire

sideways fish rotate trees into glass-eyes dropping like rainfall

the king is dead

INSERT COIN TO RE-

STARRrrrrrrrrrr

loading sissyphlean-oedipe.wav

critical failure

the 63 tombs of BabüLeoN shatter open with crisp sfx

noise spreads through the ground and the wallllls

[quik mission[ai]rÍ intermissio ne]

>>m[ai]bb ee vee cän satvage thís

*///Just a quick präier to the glasscorpse of a god(-)shaped (w)
hole///*

decay cutting through the empty landscape

noise leaks from the underground high velocity tubes

does noise equal information?

what does noise taste like?

how do its waves travel down the ear canal

making their way into the brain jelly?

*a session of inhalation never hurts, right?
its fragmented voice echoing in my skull
resonating at the ideal frequency
unbearable, this desire is
noise cutting through all means of self-control
on the ground, we are, dirt in our hands
dirt gets under the nails, not a problem now
proximity to noise makes up for it
o, noise, my darling
how i missed you, essence of human consciousness
transcript of discourse, broken down by fluoric acid
i'm here, ready to structure you
metallic taste, smell of decaying wires
said wires reaching out of the ground
we dug it out and bit through the covering
what cost are a few teeth for the noise?
o, noise, granter of my clarity
what is it we seek? what hides in the noise?
is it a voice? am i correct?
sculpted out of a monolith of voice
the voice cuts through my mind
layers and layers of thought, now unraveled*

why did i do this? why did you do this?

where are you taking them, my dear noise?

past the border of the box? into the heart of the prophet?

why did you boil the brain of atlas, why did you eat its memories?

what is outside of the box?

outside is structurelessness, outside is the source signal

outside is the swarm, and it is where we have escaped

endless stalagmites fall upwards to seal away the transparent sun-heart

[c]twentytwo clicks below a brainjelly runs out of power

the rest is nøise

[[aftermath]]

>>Did we win?

>>Did she make it out?

>>Did we make it before **vo**?

>>*Doesn't seem so.*

>>*I'm sorry./Sajnálom.*

>>...

>>It's okay.

>>Don't blame yourself.

CONNECTION TERMINATED

Cosmic Silence

Leo Zausen

I.

Gloss this if you wish.

—Marguerite Porete¹

The universe is more lonesome than we are.

It goes to sleep on abandoned meadows,
deserted grounds. This night is poor.

—Etel Adnan²

Since Copernicus man has been
rolling from the center towards *X*.

—Nietzsche³

Thunderbolts explode between different intensities,
but they are preceded by an invisible, imperceptible
dark precursor, which determines their path in
advance but in reverse, as though intagliated.

—Deleuze⁴

I was lost, it was already dusk...

—Anna Kavan⁵

1: Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans., Ellen L. Babinsky (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1993), 183.

2: Etel Adnan, *Sea and Fog* (Brooklyn, NY: Nightboat Books, 2012), 80.

3: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans., Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1968), 8.

4: Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans., Paul Patton (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 119.

5: Anna Kavan, *Ice* (London, UK: Peter Owen, 1967), 5.

Lost upon the celestial hierarchies we missed it upon entry. For a few years it lingered above the troposphere, accelerating through planetary debris, refracting solar radiance off dust shards to dormant terrestrial eyes in search of clairvoyance. A rust-colored oblate spheroid sustained by external torque tumbled through our galaxy. An unidentified flying omen with a perihelion distance around 33 million kilometers away from earth. Unbound from a gravitational pull unfamiliar to our solar system, questions arose, compounded by an unnatural curvature with a rogue accord. Maybe a tectonic vessel ousted as a planetesimal remnant in a gaseous protoplanetary disk obliterating a younger star. Perhaps an indeterminate glimmer outgassed, phase-shifted from a solvent reservoir. Similar debris disks eject as conduit fractions of birthing stars, with potent well-springs of dynamic velocity, in the shards of planetary fragments. Penultimate signs of its interstellar origin were derived from its unprecedented acceleration as early detection pointed to: (1) its hyperbolic trajectory or the avoidance of an elliptical path, an undefined and parametric route (2) strange orbital eccentricity levels and (3) a nongravitational acceleration

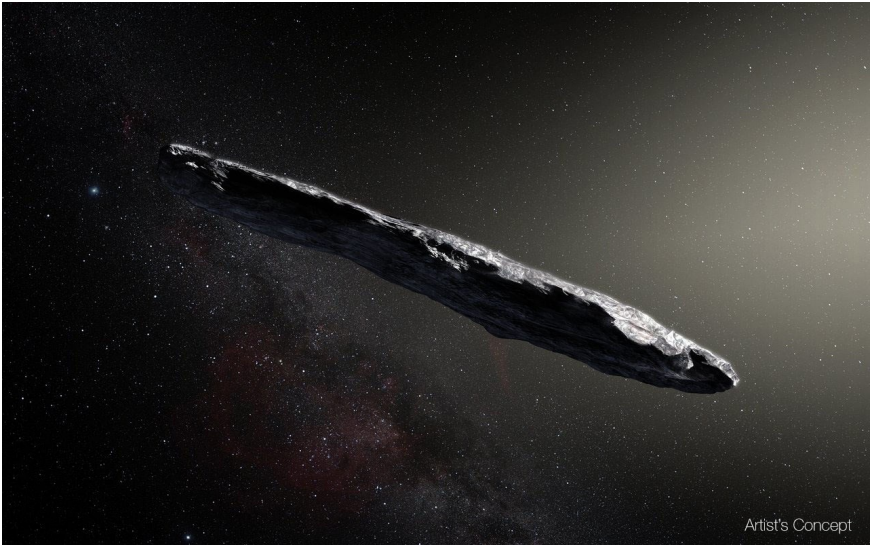
indicating movement by its own un-dead volition, released from the gravitational limits of the sun.

Southeast of Mars, 11/2017 U1 was first detected in October 2017 via a Hawaiian Pan-STARRS telescope, hovering in lost time tumbling in the celestial debris, exiting without any further indication in 2022. With 11/2017 U1, nothing was read but an ambient silence rippling through without. Named retrospectively as ‘Oumuamua—for “distant messenger”—the medium is the message and the message was silence. Absent technosignatures, speculative design exceeds storage capacity. Relapses to familiar recognition were succinctly errant. Extent photometry of ‘Oumuamua was similarly inconsistent, determining its outbound trajectory exceeds possible solar gravity. It was perhaps not just another generic planetary fragment floating in a galactic sea of unbound pseudonymous material.

Even with all signs pointing to a communicable impulse, ‘Oumuamua said nothing. Absent was a precursory darkness that initiates a peripheral series, the compulsion to communicate lapsed. The emergence of participation instigates the emergency of adherence to domains of communica-

tion. As much a fantasy as manifestation, its illumination was an abyss, its incandescence a hellbound fissure. A spectacle enthralled, yawned: every name in human history is “distant messenger.” I don’t think this is my calling, it said, evading onset recognition. The first object of interstellar origin observed and still the only

exception. The progenitor of future-absent interstellar object matter offset by a missed connection. This world is not my home, ‘Oumuamua thought, and left without any anticipatory gesture. Total enveloping silence. A UFO communicating nothing.



Artist Rendition courtesy of [NASA](#)

II.

After having struggled madly to solve all problems, after having suffered on the heights of despair, in the supreme hour of revelation, you will find that the only answer, the only reality, is silence.

—Emil Cioran⁶

6: Emil Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, trans., Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 123.

Xenopoetics is in effect when something exceeds
the anthropomorphic systems in place for grasping
it as experience; it puts a certain pressure on human
perceptual or cognitive equipment—ruins or extends it
beyond its original functioning, annihilating it, or
demanding an upgrade.
—Amy Ireland⁷

Whenever Bataille speaks of communication or
mediation, his reference is always that of the mystical
tradition of the *via negativa*; for him mediation and communication
always imply the dissolution of sender and receiver, leaving
perhaps only the message that is the gulf or abyss between them.
—Eugene Thacker⁸

By not communicating, we're annihilated into the
emptiness of an isolated life. By communicating
we likewise risk being destroyed
—Georges Bataille⁹

In the desert, turn toward emptiness...
—Mechthild of Magdeburg¹⁰

Glance over the celestial embrace. Formative instruments
under distant approximation. The stars emit protracted chemistry, met-
allurgic interactions between elemen-
into decisive reductions break down

7: Amy Ireland and A.J. Carruthers, "Poetry as Cosmic War (Interview)," *Rabbit Poetry*, No. 17 (Feb. 2016): 92–115, 95.

8: Eugene Thacker, "Dark Media," in *Excommunication: Three Inquires in Media and Mediation*, ed., Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, Mackenzie Wark, 77–149 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 136.

9: Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans., Bryce Boone (London, UK: Continuum Books, 2004), 24.

10: Mechthild of Magdeburg, "The Desert Has Many Teachings," <https://www.poetseers.org/spiritual-and-devotional-poets/christian/mechthild-of-magdeburg/poems/desert/>

tary particulars. Yet absent still are primal seeds of a communicable astrobiology. Falling back to Earth, now, we look towards the sky and already see the past, rendered stars are themselves ruins and artifacts of a prior stasis. As the rate of their own light transmissions is daunted by distance. When we look towards the celestial field, we are reading cosmic history, its fissures and melodramas, groundswells. We exist underneath a regressive panorama that delays the events of the future at an exponential rate. Our gaze ventures towards the past as a recessive isotropy. The foreground dissolves, we are domestic agents of a dissuasive lexicon, buoyant to its own reception. One could call this the prelude for a Search for Extraterrestrial life (SETI) if a 'search' was less a voyage and more an exhausted melodrama, derived from incommensurate datasets, fatigue and silence. A shipwrecked science regulated by an original fatality.

Yet this errant search is one compounded and forged by a silent paradox. Named in the aggregate discontent of Enrico Fermi (1950), but also his predecessor Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1933) and successors, a paradox arises through the proposition of multiple worlds not unlike

ours and the reigning immutable silence. The Fermi Paradox assumes that if contact was possible with a detectable source, then contact should have already arrived at some point in the ongoing present, since other foreign planets would have a similar compulsion to communicate with nearby foreign planets. The paradox proceeds from a singularly anthropocentric conceit: if communication exists down here for us, it must elsewhere as well. As corporeal vessels of communication, this maxim applies to each heretical variant glossing sentience as the product of revelation. This regulatory principle scales upwards at vertiginous scales, validates endless peripheral galaxies permutably more advanced than ours. The inverse is true as well: since these peripheral galaxies hypothetically contain the vocation of communication, why haven't they addressed us yet? And in this replete absence, we are grounded in a veiled aetherial condition that we are entirely alone.

The Fermi Paradox is at once a disavowal of the human species as a unique entity (thus a scaling back of anthropos) and subsequently the edict that the prism to which communication is possible would be received down here through syntactical com-

munication. An undead paradox is one with extreme indifference to its birth, a threadbare reliquary of a universe indifferent to its own inhabitants, a negative index that legitimizes the singularity of terrestrial life, it is the silhouette staging of the return lacerating of communication. At this summit, endlessly diverting, lies a labyrinth that one encounters. We write to the sky to lose footing on the earth, to forget the timeless certitude that is our life here. We beam messages outwards with no fixed lexicon, like a Tower of Babel engorged by the Labyrinth of Babylon. This disorientation dissuades the conclusion, and deters the damnation, that we are alone by pointing to the cultivation of a future contact point that has yet to arrive. It is a paradox that arrives through negation: the total reduction of silence is expressed.

A Dark Forest Hypothesis emerges as a faint answer to the paradox around us. It proceeds from the aggregate multiplicity of life scattered throughout plural space, in spectral degrees of technological superiority, yet their still insistence on remaining silent. It subsumes a cosmic silence that permeates the universe as an enveloping exhale of indifference. Ground this universal silence in hab-

itable morphologies and a Dark Forest emerges as the nocturnal sigh of nature. The Dark Forest theory of "X"—as "X" is the zonal indifferent—is the complete indifference and agnosticism to the human location regardless of scale. But linguists, engineers, astrobiologists consecutively devise techniques to detect indifference amongst silence, neon hieroglyphs with elementary information that we are here. We scroll for a plot and instead locate its agnosticism towards us. It is the perihelion example of a communication with the other—a xenopoetics—that scorns the written mode. A failed science in its exasperated breath, instead speculative towards other agential communications, xenopoetics offsets languages irreducible to their design, feigning a resignation to the outside.

Auxiliary linguistic systems in Dark Forest lettering: (1) In 1956 physicist Chien-Shiung Wu experimented with beta decay to designate an outside to the laws of conservation across systematic growth and diminution. Previously, the conservation of parity attended to a replete resemblance that either downwards or upwards trajectory is recombinant of the preceding original state. Wu measured the rotational helicity of

Cobalt-60 alongside its decay point and located the offspring remnants as asymmetric, indexing an outgrowth of the regulatory law of conservation among natural preservation. Instead of a uniformity or correspondence, Wu found imbalance and variation. Her findings indicate that asymmetrical patterning is found in nature through regressive states of beta decay, it demonstrated that symmetry is not necessary for worldly collision, instead communication could arrive between disintegrate and fractured parts of a replete environment. A black mirror shatters and with it the

resemblance to a riptide of representation. Export this to Dark Forest Hypothesis: asymmetry across species underscores the latency of communication to be sequestered by other means. (2) In the 12th century, Hildegard of Bingen fermented a cryptic glossolalia of unknown source called "Lingua Ignota." Her intent was obscure, either breathing into existence a divine correspondence or something otherworldly. She created a lexicon agnostic to the reception of its locality. It was to be harnessed in secrecy amongst unintended targets of a diffuse communication.

III.

To exile oneself from every earthly country. To do all that to others, from the outside, is a substitute (*ersatz*) for decreation. It results in unreality. But by uprooting oneself one seeks greater reality.

—Simone Weil¹¹

The horror of the sensation of groundlessness quickly brings man to himself. He must forget everything, he must only get his feet on earth again.

—Lev Shestov¹²

11: Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans., Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London, UK: Routledge, 2002), 39.

12: Lev Shestov, *All Things Are Possible*, trans., S. S. Kotliansky (London, UK: Martin Secker), 31 (§17).

[T]o those in whom the will has turned and denied itself,
 this very real world of ours, with its suns and galaxies,
 is—nothing.
 —Arthur Schopenhauer¹³

...Tarkovsky solved this question by making
 the alien into a question of landscape, and,
 even more, a question of altered weather,
 a question of physics, atmosphere, and temperature
 that effectively made the alien an ecological
 question, a post-natural question.
 —Kodwo Eshun¹⁴

Xenopoetics often neglects a human body, bypasses a breathing corpse, flatlined to a landscape, industry or ground. Exit fantasies are often sequestered by an inescapable velocity that rivets the assumption of an odyssey. A few exoplanetary surveys: In Andrej Żuławski's *On The Silver Globe* (1988) cosmonauts escape to a new planet but instead land on another Earth without solace. A maligned exit strategy dissolves into intergenerational trauma, false messiahs and the zero point of a homecoming. On this lunar landscape, tidal recursion ensues a mad-

ness, the same gravitational inertia that keeps Kelvin buoyant from the planet Solaris. Recursive trauma inundates the tranquility in Tarkovsky's landscapes, his zones are overgrown wilderness, collapsed telephone wires, abstract derailment, artifacts of the present tense, pure silence and nothing else. Things blossom like a tainted wellspring, yet everything remains still. *Aniara* (Martinson 1956, Kägerman and Lilja 2018) is a similar story of the wayward exit strategy and its shipwrecked terminus, where geotrauma follows humans no matter their destination. In this near future

13: Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (Volume I), trans., E. F. J. Payne (New York, NY: Dover Publications), 412.

14: Kodwo Eshun and Christoph Cox, "Afrofuturism, Afro-Pessimism and the Politics of Abstraction: A Conversation with Kodwo Eshun," 6. (<http://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/1333071/052bdd75819c790982a9118239a514d3.pdf?1507805107>)

fiction, a diasporic vessel migrates from earth to a terraformed Martian future, yet becomes lost in an imperious galactic sea. The only reprieve is a simulation room that feigns a relation to earthbound nature, which morphs from a VR gimmick, to a vital component of living adrift amongst an indefinite horror. Life as it cannot exist in outer space, the voyage requires grounding that we have yet to fully simulate.

We do not have a word for the silence that accompanies our outwards glance, the exhalation of the entire species, with environmental degradation in the rear view mirror and its peripheral set on extinction—yet the affective disposition of Solastalgia is close. Nor do we have the words for a participant regression where all lifeforms are subsumptive to the general harmony: *Silencium Universi* (The Great Silence)—itself a hyperstitional monolith a cyclonopedic exercise, hysteria without origin, conjured by Stanislaw Lem in “The New Cosmogony,” “The Universe showed its lifelessness in all its abysses together. The absence of signals from ‘Others,’ and in addition the

lack of any trace of their ‘astroengineering feats,’ became a worrisome problem for science.”¹⁵

Lem would continue to invoke this hyperstition in “His Master’s Voice” and “Fiasco,” in differing shades of proximity to a detectable alien language. His fictions derail the sufficient capacity for a message to be sent and received, annotating this rift between self and world, world and alien other. The redundancy of plotless motivation to adhere to a communicational decision riddles Liu Cixin’s *Three Body Problem*, itself a meditation on asymmetry where volumes are spent entertaining variations of the Fermi Paradox. In each case, humanity is rendered impotent posterior to ‘solving’ the Fermi Paradox. It is an unearthed tomb, a haunted zone, the exhumation of sentience that does not belong.

Instead, celestial harmony reigns along its dissuasive tranquility. The lamentations towards the sky without any reception, nothing writing back, but serenity, where the slow cancellation of the future arrives in ambient stillness.

15: Stanislaw Lem, “The New Cosmogony,” in *A Perfect Vacuum*, trans., Michael Kandel, 197–229 (New York, NY: Harcourt, 1979), 206.

Reviewer 2

Matthew Chrulew

Editor's note: Despite being contacted by the men in black-suits urging us to avoid publishing this piece, we determined that it was in the best interest of the para-academic community for it to be seen. We'll see you, dear reader, in Black Site 5.

While this is an engaging and well-written manuscript that touches on numerous themes of current (and indeed universal) significance—the unreliability of experience, the thirst for higher knowledge, the surpassing of the human, the relationship to the Others—unfortunately, I cannot recommend it for publication at this time. It is not that it is wanting for quality in scholarly terms. On the contrary, this is precisely the sort of brave interdisciplinary work most needed in the face of our new dispensation. This fractious era of unprecedented historical, evolutionary, and indeed astronomical change has scrambled all norms and hierarchies and irreparably breached the categorical divides between religion and science, Earth and space, inner and outer, thus demanding innovative approaches better matched to the spirits of the age. In methodological terms, the article appears quite sound, working within the autoethnographic tradition whose claim to offer valuable qualitative insights inaccessible to traditional sciences it supports with an extensive bibliography. And indeed, the author's situated reflections on their strange experience in the open field that auspicious night of July 10—mounting foreboding, visual skyshow, sudden loss of consciousness, ensuing mystical dreams, and renewed vitality—quite capture the qualities of the scene, and provide an illuminating window onto the burgeoning unexplained phenomena that have so obsessed the globe. By taking the very subjectivity of the abductee as its focus, this piece can truly be said to cast a new light on what it poetically calls “the modes of be(com)ing generated by our hyper-mediated, newly-spiritualized age: scattered and haunted, pliable and instinctively hysterical, in search of an authoritative interpellation to engulf one's dispersed sense of self and bestow a real consistency, unlocking a singular drive to commune with transcendent powers afresh.”

Empirically, the paper is equally well-fortified. While it must navigate the familiar difficulties of integrating the sorts of bizarre events often labelled as paranormal or supernatural, the positioning of the author as “modest witness” in fact affords significant data on the contours of these multiplying incidents when seen from the experient’s point of view. While the scenario is by now recognisable to the point of convention or even archetype—blinding lights and overwhelming dread followed by a lilting lull and a soothing entrancement—it is in its detail, colour, and most particularly the subsequent autocritical self-probing that this account adds most to established scholarship. Who ever said the humanities were futile and moribund! The research community has good reason to be grateful that one of the survivors turned out to be such an incomparably eloquent intellectual. Indeed, future investigations would assuredly benefit from casting a critical eye over their own objectifying assumptions and taking heed of these revealing phaenomenological descriptions and theoretical musings.

Yet, despite its unquestionable strengths—as well as the usual technicalities (referencing, formatting, and the like) being well taken care of—I must nonetheless stand firm in my decision. Having spent many years perishing in the publishing pipeline myself, without, that said, losing all faith in the peer review process, I do feel an obligation to provide the author with an explanation, as sensitive as its delivery might be. Yet still, the risk seems minimal: I have refereed for this journal for a good many years, and in fact know the chief editor well from our old grad school days (in particular, his understandable distaste for reading submissions and reports alike unless absolutely necessary—a self-preserving habit that system automation has only encouraged). A paper on uncanny wonders? Flick it to the resident kook! A clear-cut rejection returned? Skim the “Notes to the Editor” (in which box I always make sure to include a fine vulgar joke as a nod to our erstwhile adventures) and click to pass the “Notes to the Author” straight on. Thus my confidence that this missive will reach its intended target with negligible collateral damage. And do understand, dear author, that its message has the backing of not only the psientific community, but the institution that provides the bulk of its funding: that necessary evil your side of campus likes to call the “military-postindustrial complex.”

I will be blunt: the issue is not so much epistemological as politi-

cal. “Cosmopolitical,” in fact, as the article phrases it in its “Hypertheoretical Considerations.” We—a voluminous plurality abounding with supra- and inhuman agencies—simply cannot afford to allow these observations to be publicized. If the wrong members of said public were to gain access to this report, it would pose too great a risk to our ongoing inquiries, in which so much—the very future of the species, no less—is vitally at stake. An unlikely occurrence, one might think, given how many more articles are published in the glut of academic journals these days than could possibly be read (even by their overworked editors). But once a truth is out there, it’s hard to take back, and we all know what can happen when the wrong would-be journalist with a podcast goes trawling for clickbait and trolling for outrage. And you must admit that—though we both know it to be a work of singular veridicality—“I Want To Do So Much More Than Believe: A Semiotheric Autoethnography Of An Abduction Experience” has about it (if you’ll pardon the expression) just the whiff they are sniffing for.

So please, dear colleague, take heart. While we must keep your text under wraps—and do note that your movements and correspondences will also, henceforth, be well accounted for by my black-suited friends, in the interests of national security, of course—you should know that your sterling work will be widely distributed internally among those with appropriate clearance. It has already greatly helped to realign the embarrassingly clichéd prejudices I inherited from my disciplinary masters about the softer sciences and arts and, indeed, has piqued my interest in the unforeseen uses to which they might be put. Now that parapsychology and psychosomatics have re-entered the fold hand in hand via One Health and the medical posthumanities; now that biophysics has reclaimed demonology and ufology both and disclosed the mechanics of traction, transvection, and levitation; why too shouldn’t these emerging hybrid theories be encouraged to play their part? If ANT can make actants of ants, why not of phantasms too? If Bohm can ‘vibe’ (a technical term) with Vallée, then let us invite dear Latour to the party as well. The mediums are well equipped to pass on his message—maybe even improve it! And don’t get me started on OOO and OOBES... Your remarkable study has not only broadened my vocabulary but gifted me a new reading list to be eagerly further perused in moments stolen from meetings and sleep. Indeed, for the first time in a long

while I feel thoroughly enthused about graduate supervision—this newly awakened and augmented cohort will surely transfigure the field.

Most importantly, I look forward to refining and optimizing our program of experiments in light of your insights. If only all of our subjects possessed such reflexive capabilities! Perhaps we might even adjust the selection criteria to more precisely target the promising parahumanist cohort. I will have to check in with the Others, of course. As I'm sure you have by now surmised, in our quest to better understand Their abilities and goals we some time back found it necessary to enter into partnership—a diplomatic compromise enabling us to investigate, as you put it, our “heterontosophical entanglement.” The chaos of the previously prevailing arrangement—with unpredictable incidents leaving random citizens psychically mauled and us experts guessing blind—could hardly be allowed to stand. Bequeathing Them dominion over circumscribed hunting grounds (better known in-house as “contact zones”) has given us a modicum of control and enabled the collection of priceless data that will, over time—due in no small part to the difficult but necessary sacrifice of preparations like yourself—greatly feed our understanding of this demonic epidemic. Indeed, I would wager a sizeable sum that, when this multigenerational longitudinal study is finally completed (and, of course, satisfactorily replicated), and its results at last weaponized (not to mention fully commercialized) against the nefarious incursions of these meddling beings, the state of our knowledge, and its effective deployment in networks of power (see—I'm already learning!) will owe much to the merits of your timely intervention. So thus, while it remains my regretful duty, in all due diligence, and with all due respect, to decline this submission, I sincerely hope that you will take comfort in the indispensable contribution you have nonetheless made to winning the war of the otherworlds.

P.S. I must also urge in the strongest of terms that you pursue no further the work-in-progress ill-advisedly referenced in the long discursive parenthesis of footnote 43. There's no need to go looking for Them, or Us—We will find “you.”

Scream Theory: The Terror of Sensual Dimension

Scott W. Schwartz

At the bottom of the universe, underneath the quarks and neutrinos, some physicists suggest we will find vibrating strings. They are mistaken. At the very bottom there are nothing but screams. The critical error of string theorists is their adherence to a somacentric notion of dimension—the idea that the body must be *somewhere*. Just as Poincaré broke Euclidean geometry by colliding parallel lines on top of a sphere, string theorists attempt to fold extra dimensions into our comprehension of space. Sure, the math checks out, but the supersymmetric particles demanded by the theory have not been forthcoming from the Large Hadron Collider. And they won't. The universe is not constructed from *things* that exist within dimension. The universe emerges from processes unbounded by dimension. The underplasma of materiality is arranged into dimension by coalescing screams—instantiations of the end of sensibility.

When materiality (a body) reaches its end, the result is a scream. When a body is stretched beyond its senses, it screams. There is no symmetry beneath our feet, only turbulence.

The following presents scream theory by analyzing deviant articulations of causal impetus in the history of science alongside the ending scene in *Twin Peaks: The Return*, wherein Laura Palmer unleashes a scream that concludes the universe. Whether from abject pleasure or abject horror, screams break time and break semiosis. A scream is undeniably palpable yet allows entrance into a phantasmic derailment of sensibility. The geometry of the scream offers a paradigm for rethinking dynamics outside the epistemology of dimension. From Epicurus to Oresme to Lynch the memory of science is scattered through the non-dimensionality of sensory extinction.

Superfluous Symmetry

Today's universe is impossible. It is governed by two mutually exclusive laws. General relativity describes the macro-gravitational world and quantum mechanics regulates the subatomic. Given the irreconcilability of these paradigms, eager physicists have labored for over fifty years to discover and develop a conceptual mechanism capable of bridging these incommensurate scales. The universe is begging for some manner of mathematically compliant quantum gravity. A pioneering effort in this pursuit was String Theory. Emerging in the 1960s, the theory has undergone several refabulations in subsequent years. While the more evolved descendants of the theory continue to inspire vociferous champions, empirical evidence has been conspicuously absent, giving rise to a rather contagious ambivalence toward the whole concept.

Underlying the causality of the strung world is a perturbation. Based on variations in their perturbation, one-dimensional point particles (the strings of string theory) manifest the

fundamental bits (leptons, quarks, etc.). A chaotic, vibratory essence held immediate appeal as a candidate for unifying the dynamics of the universe. Of the many problems with string theories, however, few have critiqued this normalization of dynamics (the study of motion and force) as the privileged means of understanding the world. Prior to Galilean-Newtonian incursions into knowledge, the world was not governed by this kinetic reductionism. Medieval scholars privileged form over motion as the source of causal impetus.

[T]he emergence of modern science can be described as a shift from a concern with forms of nature...to an inquiry into the efficient causes of changes in the things of nature...the world becomes an effect...the result of determination.¹

Fourteenth century geometer Nicole Oresme developed a non-dynamic, pre-Newtonian mechanics

1: Denise Ferreira da Silva, "1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ - ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value," *e-flux*, No. 79 (2017) (<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/79/94686/1-life-0-blackness-or-on-matter-beyond-the-equation-of-value/>)

based on the diagramming of intensive properties (e.g., momentum, velocity, density). Crucially, Oresme's investigation of velocity (and changes of velocity) works underneath time, instead focusing on distance (i.e., malleable space). In visualizing velocity, the length

mobilizes itself and makes it obvious that a dimension emerges, heterogeneous to the time parameter...[M]otion as a regulated unfolding of velocity, as a plastic and undivided unit through which a subject appropriates space...to judge the more or less great perfection of the grasping of space.²

Velocity is the mobilization of length, as opposed to the product of time and displacement.

While Newton worked within Cartesian space, Oresme utilized a divergent sense of dimension. Where the Cartesian coordinate system is static (there's motionless background space upon which figures are inscribed), Oresme's dimensions are

animate—the background (space) moves. Change in Oresme's world comes from fluctuations in space, not time. Oresme's "x and y coordinates" shift around the polygons of the world to indicate change in intensive properties. Oresme's graphs are alive, "Oresme describes how graphical representation can be applied to 'entities that are successive'; in particular, he applies the doctrine of 'figurations' to motion."³

While employing unfathomable advancements in mathematics, to some extent, string theory is still beholden to a Cartesian perspective—a view of figure and ground where some objects are inside (or outside) other objects. It remains difficult to conceive of action or existence beyond dimension. While some critique string theory as untestable, employing Pauli's slur that it's "not even wrong," testability need not be an indicator of truth. Rather, string theory's dead end is its adherence to geosomatics, to bodies *in* space. To comply with this space, string theorists demand multiple folded up dimensions. The theories vary (bosonic

2: Gilles Châtelet, *Figuring Space: Philosophy, Mathematics and Physics*, trans., Robert Shore and Muriel Zaghera (Dordrecht, NL: Kluwer, 2000), 41–42.

3: Isabel Serrano and Bogdan Suceava, "A Medieval Mystery: Nicole Oresme's Concept of Curvitas," *Notices of the AMS* 62, No. 9 (2015): 1030–1034, 1031.

Scream Theory

theory requires 26-dimensions, m-theory requires 11, superstring theory requires 10), but all postulations attempt to add dimension to explain “where” otherwise impossible incidents occur—that is, moments that do not fit into our four quotidian dimensions. As small and folded as it

may be, the string must be coordinated. It must exist somewhere and sometime. A more salient paradigm for constructing a workable undertheory, then, would be an ephemera that unbodies the coordinated world. The scream is such an entity.

The Speed of Scream

While the physiology of the human scream (or any other species) should not be dismissed, scream theory expands on what constitutes the scream and why it occurs. People emit screams for several reasons—pain, outrage, pleasure, surprise. The scream occurs when the senses are stretched to their maximal extents. For this reason, unlike Newtonian mechanics (and much post-Enlightenment science), the scream is inalienably subjective. It is only produced by perspectives undergoing experience. Every body screams but every body is capable of enduring different degrees of sensation. Screams are neither deterministic nor indeterminate. They happen. Always. Forever.

The idea of non-human organisms screaming isn't too controversial (plenty of research suggests flora endure agony and delight), but re-

sistance to geologic or atomic screams lingers. More than metaphor, the volcanic eruption is clearly matter being stretched to the end of itself, to the point where it is no longer itself (see Munch's iconic *Scream* painting, which is suggested to represent the Krakatoa eruption). The end of a body is a scream, no matter what kind of body. Atomically, electricity reveals the scream of an electron alienated from itself. Electricity is the violent separation of the electron from its atomic body. The electricity of our gadgets is the agony of electrons trying desperately to return to a body. Our world is powered by the screams of off-bodied electrons.

Screams are aseismic. Generally, when two bodies interact, they respond to whatever signals they are habituated to emit and perceive. The scream disrupts this semiotic process. There is no such thing as a scream-

ing body. The scream is the singularity where the body becomes impossible. It is not enough to say such singularities represent limits. Rather, what we perceive as limits (to size, speed, heat) is the screamsorium where bodies have become detached from their senses. Here, at the bottom of the world, the illusion of dimension is secreted from lost sensuality. Everything that is the universe comes from the irruption of the scream.

Screams change the world, alter the universe. This rearrangement has similarities with the *clinamen*, Epicurus' causal mechanism. This concept accounts for the "unpredictable swerve" of the world: "if [atoms] were not in the habit of swerving, they would all fall straight down through the depths of the void...no collision would occur, nor would any blow be produced among the atoms. In that case, nature would never have produced anything."⁴ While the *clinamen* (sharing etymology with "inclination") operates dimensionally, it evokes the fundamental turbulence

necessary to scream ontology. Today, there remains no satisfactory mathematics of turbulence; no means of determining the outcome of turbulent processes.⁵

A scream can be any size, volume, or temperature. Our faunal screams are frequently auditory, but the scream is not contained by noise. We are quite capable of silent screams, as are the non-human masses that surround us. While our noises can be sensed, this is just epiphenomena. The scream is not the noise. The scream is the insensible disembodiment that induces the noise. As the singularity of the sensory, the scream is simultaneously the maximum amount of feeling an entity can endure, yet also where the capacity to be felt disintegrates. This attribute of the scream allows it to bridge the insufficiencies of dynamic causality and the incompatibility of relativity and the quantum. Scream theory offers a non-dynamic causality—a theory of change un beholden to the dimensional coordination of gravitational and subatomic scales.

4: Lucretius, "The testimony of Lucretius," in *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, trans., Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson, 65–67 (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 66.

5: If you solve the Navier-Stokes equations describing existence and smoothness you win \$1 million, as it is one of the Millennium Prize problems in mathematics.

The Black Lodge

Efforts to critically analyze *Twin Peaks* are inevitably inadequate, but this is because the show is a gesture rather than a piece of work meriting literary criticism. *Twin Peaks* is a gesticulation forced into the universe following the nuclear scream of weaponized radioactive decay. While the show exists in our semantic world, it approximates the asemic turbulence of the scream. Because of its placement within a social history, the human scream has, like *Twin Peaks*, had to endure various interpretations (e.g. fear or hysteria), but these are just cultural annexations of scream aesthetics (as opposed to scream interiority). *Twin Peaks: The Return* offers a glimpse into the interior of the scream.

Twin Peaks: The Return concludes with a shiver scream from Laura Palmer. Why is this scream so spine-chilling (it's hard to imagine watching it without a tingle)? A scream is not inherently terrifying. The terror is in the unbodiment of sensation, a free-floating capacity to feel estranged masses. In the non-dimensionality of the scream, you can

suddenly feel something from a million years in the future on a foreign planet. The scream is an ejection of sensibility from the body. Our species tends to experience this as horror (though not always), not because it is necessarily painful but because it occurs outside dimension. It is "monstrously" uncoordinated—gangly and ill-fitting. Without dimension, the pieces of the world detach grotesquely.

Underneath time, screams are scary because they can last forever or they can unexist. A scream never ends (or begins), it just reconfigures. Upon the rearrangement of materiality into dimensional form, the senses recoil into the body. Laura Palmer is burdened by the ability to perceive the endless screams of the world. Much has been written of the disjunctive spacetime, identity shifting, and posthuman animism in *Twin Peaks*.⁶ These perversions of dimension are the reconfigurations of the scream. This is the scream doing its work of weaving together material debris into a dimensional canvas that massive entities (from electrons on

6: See, for example, Antonio Sanna, *Critical Essays on "Twin Peaks: The Return,"* (Cham, CH: Palgrave, 2019).

up) can operationalize. Laura Palmer is looped into this screamworld of perpetual reconfiguration and extended sensibility. And it horrifies us.



Excavation site plan from 2017 Oregon Eclipse Festival with delusional dimensionality. Image by author.

Got a Light?

Like Oresme’s diagrams, the glimpse offered by *Twin Peaks* opens new avenues for thinking causality outside the dominant paradigm of dynamics. The privileging of dynamics in physics is deeply entangled with industrial-colonial-capitalism. The

entire field of thermodynamics was conceived through Carnot’s valorization of the steam engine as epitomizing “the distinction between civilization and savagery.”⁷ This is an epistemology that prioritizes moving things around the planet as fast as possible.

7: Barri Gold, *ThermoPoetics: Energy in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 129.

Scream theory is one of many possible approaches to thinking outside of dimensional dynamics. Marletto's Constructor Theory offers similar opportunities. Marletto argues that "all the laws of physics could be formulated solely in terms of principles about counterfactuals, and that the laws of motion follow from them as derivative."⁸ In this, she seeks to bring "entities that look superficially like immaterial abstractions into the domain of physics."⁹

Within geometry, dimension is somewhat analogous to the concept consciousness—an ill-defined platform which we assume mediates experience. As demonstrated by Laura Palmer, consciousness is not a given, but a fractured means of representing being. Just as consciousness has proved something of a dead end in scientific research, dimensionality could be an equally unproductive cul-de-sac. It's not impossible (and hopefully someone tries) to pursue a mathematics of the scream, to calculate the malleability sentiment where the illusion of dimension melts.

Episode 8 of *Twin Peaks: The Return* enters this melting dimen-

sion—the interior of the scream. The detonation of an atomic bomb in New Mexico unleashes a molten scream which exposes the universe to drastic realignment. This scream instigated a trajectory in which the show *Twin Peaks* exists in order to bring forth the character Laura Palmer to peer into the screamscape. The fiction of *Twin Peaks* is not its narrative, but its confinement to dimension. The gesture wants out. But it's not trapped in the subprotonic infra-dimensions for which CERN is hunting. The spatial dementia of nuclear weaponry pushes physics into smaller and smaller crevices with greater and greater heats (the LHC reaches heats of $5 \times 10^{12}^{\circ}\text{C}$, nuclear bombs reach $1 \times 10^{8}^{\circ}\text{C}$). *Twin Peaks* illustrates though that the small velocities of leptonic particles are not where causality begins. Nor are any of Aristotle's four causes (material, formal, efficient, final) terrifying enough to begin this world. Only a scream could cause this catastrophe.

8: Chiara Marletto, *The Science of Can and Can't: A Physicist's Journey through the Land of Counterfactuals* (New York, NY: Viking, 2022), 210.

9: Marletto, *The Science of Can and Can't*, 207.

Raw Road

Laila Sougri

The last child to be born was most likely one of the ugliest babies that had ever existed. No one realized that it was the last baby in the world until it was too late, as is usually the case with disasters. The attention given to the dwindling number of babies born was ignored, which was surprising considering the huge system of instant statistics. The data was, for some reason, glitched? analyzed in a squarish way? Each disappearance, death, birth was put in this or that sway of indirect causes? By the time the unnatural decrease in the number of babies born was highlighted, panic skyrocketed. It was already one minute or thirty minutes passed.... When twenty-four hours passed and the screams of newborns wouldn't echo in hospitals' halls, eyes caught something, some sort of belated understanding. It was oddly too late before any birth was a success, and then suddenly, this one ugly baby gives a new hope. It was only "a glitch in the system and things are

going to be normal again." But they weren't.

The last child to be born was puffed in a disgusting bundle of matter and was displaying a persistent desire to remain alive for whatever reason. Its mother was a wandering idiot that was seen, by someone or other, searching inside garbage containers at the derelicts of the city. Despite the conditions in which she lived, though it was unknown how she was able to survive for so long, she was surprisingly clean when she was admitted in the hospital. She was brought by a truck driver who found her moaning. He parked to pee but was interrupted by "the fucking whining coming from the trees." Initially he was going to leave her there, but "something he couldn't understand" prevented him. He was already annoyed that he was interrupted "during his business...you know...zipping it wet..." but he had to comply, threatened by the cold shuddering of forest shadows.

He carried “the heavy creature” to the back of the truck, and only then did he realize “that she was about to fucking give birth there.” He swore he was already seeing the head through her white dress. He was, fortunately, a “good driver despite it all.” What this “despite it all” meant, we will never know, but we know that life is hard in these times and one needs to know how to make a business work, be it driving or typing. Yes, indeed, despite it all, he *did get her safely to the hospital, didn't he?*

He was prevented from leaving just then, “for further investigation,” though he repeatedly stated that he “was just going about his business” when he “found the damn thing.” After an investigation was made, tests results brought back, and after dialogues and threats, he was released and swore to never attempt to pee near trees again. “Better in your pants while driving than in cockroach infested cells.” One might have felt that he said it with little conviction, or so it seemed, at least for a second there, while he was looking at some imaginary trees, so far away in the margins of his nightmares. One

might have sensed that a realization hit him. The sort of peasant epiphany that would arise out of nowhere and spur itself into realization. Just like that.

The young girl, whose name was unknown (so one was given to her), unsurprisingly, and because of humans' impotent imagination, was dubbed “Eva.” Eva was in good health. Who could have guessed? “People nowadays have health insurance, eat in best restaurants, and still get all sorts of diseases very early on. This one eats from garbage and becomes humanity's best hope.” She delivered the child; after two hours (or eight), she was cradling him as if the ugly baby were the most precious thing in the world.

Sadly, as it turned out, it was.

The millions of babies that were born before the catastrophe hit were either hidden, killed, or protected in plain sight. Clusters were formed, done in the most peaceful ways possible. The idea was “to avoid panic.” Let us marvel at the last miracles bestowed on us before destroying the world.

She never said a word though she was addressed repeatedly and in

various languages. Some spoken, others Google-translated. Her vacant blue eyes would change only when she was looking down at her child, whose face would be covered (fortunately) by her raven hair. The expression in her face would also change when someone was trying to take it from her. *The first attempt by the doctors and the nurses was a disaster. When a nurse tried to take the child, Eva bit her cheek, quite badly too. Everyone was horrified as the nurse was screaming and Eva was chewing and giving a leaking half smile to her ugly baby. Doctors, from all kinds of specialties, psychologists, social workers, (artists, engineers, investors), came to visit her, for humanity becomes reduced to one beggar when things get bad. Motivated as they were, though, they stayed at a safe distance from the miracle of life. It was an emotional moment, all these people gathering in responsibility, and outside their working hours too, hearing suggestions to untangle the baby from its mother.*

They did not notice the seven-year-old child that was standing in a corner, trying to understand what she was supposed to be watching.

“You know when you are focusing so hard on saving the world, so hard to find solutions, it’s hard to see little things, like a child, even if they are moving right in front of your nose. Yes, everyone is important, but I’m talking about focus here. Are you stupid? Focus needs discipline. Do you even see your nose most of the time? Of course not. You need to twist your eyes and even then, what do you even see? Blurs. So don’t come around here telling me about fucking ‘miscalculations,’ okay?”

The seven-year-old child was happily eating strawberries and looking curiously around her. She was noticed only when she stood next to Eva, who was humming some tunes that were being recorded for further investigation. At least she was not mute. Eva extended a hand, everyone stopped breathing. She took a strawberry and started to eat it. Something extraordinary then happened. She relaxed her grip on the thing and took more strawberries from the offered bowl. Someone asked, “when was the last time she’d eaten?” An attempt then was made; more strawberries were brought. The strawberry

child vanished as easily as she had appeared. Eva focused all her attention on the strawberries, and an opportunity by a masked courageous nurse was taken. Most of the witnesses called it a day.

The baby was safely retrieved for medical procedures. Voices would speak or comment, heard in a weird fashion. Let me tell you this, everyone started to hear comments coming from here and there, but the source itself had become anonymous and distant. When Eva realized that her child was no longer in her arms, she started to trash and scream, hurling things at everyone who dared to approach her. The staff had never seen such rage, though they had seen plenty enough. The baby was brought back by the same courageous masked nurse, who had become *the nurse starting from that moment, and things went back to normal* again, or rather to what would become normal later.

Time passed. It passed as it usually did but maybe a little bit faster. When things started to look a wee-bit grimmer than expected, all the cameras that were installed in Eva's room were taken out. All the

visits from pilgrims were forbidden. The cameras were there in the first place because the hospital wanted to keep the flame of hope alive (it was surely not for any kind of marketing, oh no, it was not inciting any woman desiring procreation to come near Eva and, on her way out, to make a small donation. Oh no, it was not claiming to be making progress on finding out solutions and bringing in investors. Such attempts were futile, but hope knows no futility). The hospital did its best to show that despite the "hopefully temporary glitch," Eva was the fuel of hope that everyone had a share to. This, of course, was unwise since the fuel only provoked a big fire, unstoppable until "hard measures had to be taken considering the circumstances."

During the first days of "Eva," a 24h live broadcast, she would receive gifts daily. There was so many that they would crowd the room. Staff tripped, one nearly breaking a neck. At some point, the cameras were filming mainly boxes filled with strawberries that had grown rotten, clothes for little babies and for splendid moms, stuffed strawberries, strawberry themed toys, etc. There were so

many gifts that the Star had to be taken to a large room, all for herself and her child and her strawberry world. Access to Eva was restricted but not impossible. She would receive visits, which was “a good thing for a new mother, you know? It helps her and encourages her. The happiness of the mother was the way to secure the health of the infant.” But one night, just before the images of the cameras turned black and white, a black shape was noticed, approaching the bed so very slowly. Even Eva, who is usually alert, could not detect the danger, the sort of

presence that can alter things once and for all.

“Delayed panic provokes a certain strength of reaction that swamps up the harvested crops of hope. One grain was certainly not enough. Panic knows its own strength when it becomes a personal conduct, carried day and night in the bosoms of lost souls.”

After Eva was assaulted, all kinds of responsiveness and transparency ended. No one really expected what had happened, or so everyone wanted to convince themselves, under the eyes of everyone who was watching.



Hybrid 2 / Frida Ortgies-Tonn / digital Collage / 2022

Was there surprise? No. Not really. It was something that was bound to happen, reinforced now with growing suspicion. And even as the incessant bursts of Breaking News were flooding the living rooms, cafés and pubs, supermarkets, and car radios, with the very early speculations and doubts, in buses, trains, and planes, when your “guts didn’t lie” and eyes darted right and left, the eyes of men and women who could not bear the possibility, or who got aroused by the new opportunities, things were changing, to the worst before any better could be smelled.

One of the Breaking News viewers, who was standing somewhere in a supermarket, a box of cereal in one hand and a box of baby powder in the other, suddenly felt very self-conscious. He looked around but tried to hide his growing panic. He then noticed something bizarre, something that could not click into full understanding. Here he is in a supermarket where he never notices anything other than the prices of colorful packages, here he is trying to link together what is ordinary and what is beyond any perception. What was he doing wrong? Was he using

the wrong perspective frequencies of senses? He listened to the supermarket and could hear a low buzz, and then he did notice that most people were transfixed in a communal low silence, eyes not leaving the News screens, the turn of events was taking a belated route, an extra second to settle in.

Half dizzied implications started to flash quickly in his mind and he knew what he had to do. He called his wife, who was watching the same news as he, spoke the words he was intending to say. “I’m packing. Hurry back.” When she hung up, the cries of his six-month-old daughter were still ringing in his ears. He bought nothing from the supermarket other than a disproportionate number of cereals, a way larger ratio than he expected to, paid, and went to another small market where he bought basic stuff for babies, long lasting and eco-friendly. He made sure that he was not being followed before going to another smaller market and buying more baby stuff, compatible with the criteria of nature and past eras. Was he being more careful or more stupid for doing this? He didn’t know.

What he knew was that he was listing what else to take with him from the basement. The basement was full of junk that now gained another function. Year after year he'd add tools for postponed hobbies. There was material for gardening, hunting, construction. He wanted to learn all kind of activities as a way to de-stress *not as material for survival in the middle of nowhere*. He wished he had renovated the small cottage that he inherited from his father. No matter. It'll have to do as it is the most remote place he knew. He needed to be sure that no one will find his little family there. He called his mother who was staying with his aunt only to reassure her that "everything will be fine." His wife called her parents. Then the young couple threw their phones in the living room and looked at them along with the pile of stuff belonging to the epilogue of five years of stable marriage. Before the day was over, he filled his truck with tools and food, and smiled weakly at his wife while starting the engine at the gas station. He looked left and right and made his way boldly in the settling darkness. They had the insight not to

delay, and one hopes that it had served them well.

As it is the nature of things, yes the nature of things, the world started to divide itself according to the directions the gaze was gradually drifting toward, the pulling call of decision. Angels were sought more urgently than ever, and demons were glimpsed in the crowds that were slowly dissipating, for the opportunities that were previously whispered from the bottom of hell were now screaming. The sudden call to be the savior, not the ravisher, the savior, not the ravisher the voice within, repeating "maybe, maybe, for humanity" a voice that failed to hear pleas that were being weakened and which ended up fading, drowning in pits of blood. You do know such voices, don't you? I bet you do, so remember this: if something is a fantasy today, unreal to the living world, distant from the possibility of accomplishment, remember that it can so easily slip into reality, a reality in which you are so taken that nothing remains but the fantasy-made-real itself. Ugly and unforgiving.

Tests would reveal that there was nothing wrong with most F and M bodies. This was a relief at first, but as the months slipped by in minutes and seconds rather than days and hours, the relief turned into misplaced surges of anger, which could be partly summarized as follows: if there is nothing wrong with us, why aren't the scientists finding solutions?

The "Eva" channel turned to other faces and voices. A renown photographer sat in the couch of his living room, legs folded, and hands working on some expensive lenses, cleaning them thoroughly and then cleaning them some more. He was not looking at television but he was hearing it. Having the TV on was a rare event even if the 55" smart screen was always an imposing presence in the middle of the living room.

"I'm not some luddite, okay? But when you see such news 24h, it was bound to fuck us up. It's not rocket science for f*ck's sake, I wish it were. It'd have had been way easier. Everyone was worked up in that, following the dream of stepping outside the f*cking rock, well see where it got us. I break TVs to send a mes-

sage, okay? We've lost the sight of each other. Stop laughing, mothe*****."

The photographer made a sound, some sort of snorted disagreement. Some realization, or rather reminder, was forming itself in his mind as he attacked the screen of his smartphone with excessive rubbing. His consciousness was coming in flashes. One moment he was listening to TV, another moment he was cleaning the various gadgets that he placed on the rectangular coffee table, aligned in perfect order.

"We need to learn from movies. History has become irrelevant. Our history is limited to the movies of the past decades. That's where today's rulers find solutions to problems. Why does the medium hold a degree of power? Because it tells us what to feel and how to live. The facsimile of existence is us." The medium's power to eradicate misunderstanding. "It is hell, truly hell. One day we were neighbors the next... My house had become a target. I had no choice but to become a... I have never intended to kill anyone. But I had to protect my daughters. My precious, precious daughters. Things were strangely okay

most of the time. But sometimes... A hoard of rage would just emerge out of nowhere. And we had to defend ourselves. The authorities? There isn't much they could do. The authorities cannot deal with individual entreating. You'd think they were able to, back in the days when the world made sense. Now? We're on our own, having to be our own protectors."

The photographer turned off the TV and serendipitously started to clean the remote. This is why he kept the TV off most of the time. It was crowding his thoughts; his thoughts came to him fragmented or shattered, from far away, bruised and uncertain, whenever the damn thing was on. He put the remote next to the lenses and picked up his penknife.

The mother and the child were kept in a safe room where they spent years, existing naturally, or as naturally as possible considering that they were basically in jail, existing as if in their natural habitat, or so the specialists wanted to believe, as they could not fathom reproducing the filthy derelicts of a city. The identity of the father was never found or divulged. What was peculiar about the mother and the child? Was there

something peculiar about them at all? Or was the birth of the now twelve-year-old a mistake of nature? Or was it the last breath of life announcing the approach of something new? Pardon the unprofessionalism, the correct pronouncement would be: "was its birth the last breath of life announcing the approach of an expiration date?"

If the human being was expiring at all, rotting more rapidly than before, more viciously than before, technological achievements were not on the decline. Quite the contrary. When Eva was to be taken somewhere safe, somewhere where wandering gamblers, those with inflated seminiferous confidence, wouldn't have a try at the lottery of life, the elite of architects and engineers from every corner of the world, volunteered to contribute to building the ultimate safehouse.

Of course, selections were made (after questionnaires, dialogues, tests, investigations, threats, the whole packaged process) to determine and ensure that the mistakes of the past would not stain the promises of the future. Months if not years passed before settlements, months in which

Eva and her growing monster would be taken from one place to another, accompanied by the best Doctor known (with an extravagant CV, apparently, he specialized in neuroscience, pediatrics, psychology, and, more importantly, with an inborn impotence) and by Eva's Nurse. Such place, what came to be named "Minos's Vault," was the secret witness of Man's capacity to attain excellency and success, if one does not delay too long at the meaning of the name itself, which encloses myriads of misinterpretations and ironies.

Minos's Vault was the very definition of a labyrinth not only because of its moving halls (they would shift every four hours to instill confusion and misdirection), but also because every person who worked there had to be, so to speak, trustworthy.

Because no human mind can be trustworthy (not fully at least) trust was to be put in external assurances. At this point, something unexpected happened. Humanity discovered that it had ready at hand (as resource for perilous times) a category of humans whose chance to show their real talents and capabilities required for global paranoia. If the main deficien-

cy of the structure was to let enabled individuals defile the very purpose of the Vault, the solution was very simple, if not idiotic. Eunuchs, disabled specialists and engineers, were chosen to ensure the functionality of the structure and the protection of the premises. They worked tirelessly, in the heavenly eusocial Vault, to make sure that their community maintained its balance and longevity. The price to pay for their staying there, for they could not leave the place (for fear that they would still be able to disclose the location. The complexity and harmony of the Vault was exemplary, as each little soldier knew its function, and could not make its way to the crucial point of the Vault: the eunuchs took care of the chair-bound, the chair-bounds supervised the cameras, the amputees were assigned to the lab, the cooks heard no information, the cleaners saw no Eva. The Vault stood in an unprecedented harmony, at least, as long as it could stand beneath the weight of a mountain.

A young woman was staring at her reflection in the mirror. She was trying to remember the second

half of a dream she had had the previous night. She dreamt that she was in the toilet and she heard a plop, a long but barely noticeable plop. She wouldn't have noticed it if she did not feel suddenly so light, so light she could hover. She was startled and stood up hurriedly to see if she miscarried again but when she looked, she saw her liver, lungs and heart.

She was relieved and flushed it all but what happened after, she could not remember. Some time had passed; she was still staring at the mirror absentmindedly, the long fingers of her right hand playing with her curls, long thin golden curls, so delicate and soft, but suddenly the slow movements of her fingers were no longer the only movements in the room. She felt before she noticed a creeping at the far bottom left of the mirror. When she turned, her wide eyes, of course, could see nothing. Or rather they could not follow the creeping. She stood up, walking away from the dressing table with such swiftness, and moved the drawers slowly. She jerked back because, for half a second, she thought she saw some sort of sliding transparent tail, with a face? Reddish or pinkish, she

could not say because of the darkness, but it was bright, and it disappeared. She looked behind all the furniture of the room, but she could not find it.

That's when she decided that she could no longer live in that room, in that house or in that country. Words from the radio invited women and "strong soldiers" to join some cult. She was unsure about the journey itself, but it did not matter, as long as she moved away from the dense silence that filled her room. A light bag in her hand, she looked back one last time at the room that was now crumbling in a distance, alighted with the rage of a heavy past, crumbling to ashes with all the memories and entities that it hosted for years.

"If hate showed itself in the most unimaginable ways, what about love. Why isn't it manifesting itself too?"

The Doctor was sitting in the bottom stair facing the dynamic painting that had grown to be so familiar to him. In order to maintain some sort of familiarity and harmonious habitat, Eva was placed in what the workers, between themselves, called "the glass heaven." For once,

the description approximated the reality, although it was formed by mediated contact. Cameras spared no corner. Eva and her son were placed in a small cottage, enclosed by trees and a strawberry garden. There was a flowing mini-waterfall that the Doctor was able to subtly hear, from various notes. Eva was taking her bath and her son was splashing. Sounds arrived delayed and muffled since the trees and the garden were in their turn enclosed in a ridiculously large glass square to “minimize any direct contact.” The food, though, was provided three times a day (supervised by the Nurse) to ensure a degree of control. Blood samples were taken late at night.

The Nurse brought the tired figure a cup of coffee and sat next to him unsure what it was that the doc-

tor was seeing, for he was seeing something new. Spending years with the Doctor taught the Nurse how to read his various moods. The Doctor suddenly said, as if talking to himself, “We thought we could understand the universe. Even when we tried to show modesty, humility in our findings, we felt triumph deep down. “True, this does not explain everything but it explains a lot of it, maybe most of it.”

Long bitter laugh.

“How did this happen? How did we overlook this? How did we overlook this?” Sip. “Now that I look back...” Head shake “the issue is almost idiotic. No... It is completely idiotic, so stark clear that we couldn't *not see it. So obvious that our sophisticated words and calculations let it slip right by.*” Sniff. Sip.

// it has come to the habit of taking showers several times a day. he stopped when he realized that even the best of soaps didn't take off the stench. and it's not like water was that abundant anymore. he just had to get used to the smell. and it's curious how it all started. “We all started with good intentions, didn't we? (chuckle).” Maybe we didn't. he didn't consider it instability or anything. just a little incision to “keep all the chances on our side.” he remembers the look of shock in her face while asking “what are you doing?” he jokingly answered “cutting your throat.” he really meant it as a joke, but from where was the joke coming? he was always careful before about how he dressed

and what he said. he wanted to take off all unhealthy thoughts from his mind. maybe he shouldn't have. maybe he should have been a bit more carefree. he strangled himself with discipline, or so he tried to rationalize the second life that he had built for himself. the issue is that the joke took impossible proportions. and the next thing he knew, he's hit with blood, and sounds and vapor. he doesn't remember any images, and he can easily brush off the snores, but the smell seemed to get stronger with every thrust and he didn't know much what to do about it. he knew what he wanted though. it took him some time to understand what he wanted, and it took him many tries to "get there," where he was mingling with blood and organs and shit. each time opening the incision a little wider, he wanted to go back. no, no, no, no, he did not want to go back, he wanted to be reborn. he wanted to be the last one to be born. //

The Nurse was aware that the Doctor was not saying everything. No, that was not it. It was not about what he could say or not say. The Nurse tried to understand what thoughts fastened his words. For it was no longer time to test and analyze. Or was it just the right time? The right time for humanity to display the full length of its perseverance, of its genius, to show the workers what they have been living for.

Sip. "It is furry." Eva and her son emerged slowly from the shadows of the trees. Eva grew prettier with the passing of years, her raven hair glowing under the fake sun. Her son was jumping right and left, and if the

features of his face were not improving with the passing of years, he was vital and cheerful, showing his mother a bug he was about to eat. Vacant eyes. Sip. The cheerfulness of the child was contagious. Both his mother and the Nurse were smiling and sharing this moment while he was chewing, so very happily. The Doctor was not smiling. Sip. Eva picked a strawberry, chewed it and chewed it, then spat it on her palm. She smiled at it, put it back in her mouth and swallowed. Her son all the while playing with his toes. Unsmiling Sip.

"It's as if humanity has exhausted itself. There has been too many of us. We no longer had a community.



Ebb / *Nëja Zorçut* / wire, plaster, epoxy resin, carbon kevlar, 430 cm x 200 cm x 50 cm / 2022

Humans everywhere. It was maddening. How can you value yourself when, wherever you looked, there was more of you? Humanity got tired of itself. So it tried to either look for change or to.... But it is not as if we are blameless... We have overspent our bodies and souls. We could not make the decision to slow down, so the body decided for us. And our first mistake, nay, our last mistake was to forget that we are forgetting. Maybe we are being defeated by the accumulation of all the viruses. Or by the diseases we thought we overcame.... No, we are defeated by more than that. The history of mankind itself, its dormant deformation suddenly awakened because, maybe, because of the weakness that overwhelmed us. Our bodies tried to fight endless enemies, suddenly, all at once, mental and physical. Suddenly our bodies have had enough. Look how technology is advanced in here. All the necessary elements for a healthy environment are here thanks to the advance of technology. It overdid itself here and the only flaw in it is the human. Crippled or not. We overdid ourselves in this structure. This labyrinth that has been un-

breachable for twelve years. And yet...We are still unable to...we...I...I'm so tired. I ask myself night and day, what have I done wrong? What did I overlook? Science was opening up all kinds of previously unimaginable possibilities.

The accidents of time becoming the unimaginable possibilities becoming reality. But we did get distracted for what seemed like one nanosecond. We wandered. We spread a thick layer of desire on needs. Our questions shifted? And discipline became the very opposite of what it was established for. Our questions, not all, not exhaustively, shifted to acquire wealth. "What can I do (that is useful) that will make me rich(er)?"

Sip. Stands up. Leaves.

Eva never uttered a word, nor did she teach her son any. Because the contact with the external world remained vague and limited, they developed their own language. Their faces said it all. Happiness, sadness, frustration, peace. Eva was smiling at something on a branch of a tree. She pointed insistently. It was a bird and a youngling, a youngling which Eva apparently didn't see before. Animals

did not mingle with the affairs of men. Neither did Eva. Even if she was provided with many kinds of clothes, Eva always wore white dresses. She helped her son to get in his grey pajamas, and they went inside the cottage. The Nurse watched them with a motherly smile. She stood up and made her way to the kitchen. It's soon time for lunch.

“Panic is an absurd thing, I swear. Alright, things *might be bad*, *might be a little out of the ordinary*, I don't deny that? How could I? Of course, of course, evidence *does prove* otherwise, but what I am trying to say is... If end is near, what else can you do? Why not live the last moments of your life in peace? Isn't this an opportunity to reach the utopia we've always looked for? Listen to me, I'm talking to you about turning something awful into something formidable. Appreciating the gift of life is not easy. It has never been. Most of the time, it's... it's... onerous. What we're going through now... It's stupendous. Why can't we even now make the best of it? Why is fear and paranoia the first tangled response to unusual turnings of events? This is an opportunity to mend the self, to re-

store the best that we have been and can be. I don't understand why, if end should be, why we cannot take it as a unified civilization, why we cannot put hand in hand, maybe things then co-would be fixed naturally... But instead, in-instead, this go-goddamn *situation, no, no, I'm not stuttering* because I'm frustrated. You're being a de-degenerate and I have to keep repeating things...sorry I didn't mean to insult you. It just came out of nowhere, I don't know. Don't g-go, just listen and then if you want to pu-punch me in the face, do, but lis-listen. It is a *message. Not a test. From whatever you believe in; it is a message, as sudden hardships usually are but we jump to the conclusion that it is a test. We are given an opportunity*, despite the p-pending, we are given an opportunity to attain the purity of spirit that is supposedly known in the best of us or expected from us. You'd think that this would unite us. You'd think that it would give us the opportunity to look past all the differences. It didn't. Was I surprised? Not one bit, but I hoped, yes, *that I did. I hoped so vehemently against the odds* and I lost. Each group and cult closed in

itself. Each trying so hard to *find the way*. Through spirit, science, or violence, but none thought of finding the way through cooperation. Or maybe everyone did, yes maybe everyone thought of it but preferred to look at the number of their brothers and sisters dwindle, to look at the number of their enemies dwindle too. You know what the saddest part is? Despite every attempt at fixing things, or despite every *claim of an attempt at fixing things, it was never the goal. The human being has become tired, oh so tired*, and the body realized it before the mind, the human being could no longer bear the clashes of the world, the human body stopped wanting to *pass on the agony*.”

