continent.

Letter from the Editors

For this, our sixth issue, we offer *firn* as our constellating theme.

From the Old High German *firni*, meaning "old" and related to the Swedish *forn* connoting "former," firn is the term used to indicate snow that has survived the summer months. Firn is rounded, well-bonded snow that, like *continent.*, has existed for more than one year and has a density greater than one would expect from snow pack. Firn snow is a moment between glacial ice and the wet snow that packs. The material recrystallizes, and affirms its surface tensions and as it becomes impermeable to moisture, the transition to glacial ice is consummated. We again have elected to emphasize a term that translates the passage of time into the spatialization of time.

This issue features several translations: the avant garde French poet Jean Daive and the nomadic media theorist Vilém Flusser's melancholy into English; the text-based absurdist art of Sean Carney translates Jean Baudrillard from English into "American;" and Bonnie Jones' visual intervention enables us to hear the silence of our thinking.

Like firn, we've thrived during the summer months: Paul and Tim Gilman-Sevcik spoke at the Public School, New York along with members of punctum books and Sequence Press for their Para-Academic Publishing panel; Paul was very happy to rejoin the Interventions Symposium in Zürich, this year the Autonomous School of Zürich and the Autonomous Beauty School partnered with Rote Fabrik to host several days of grilling and discussion. This fall you will be able to speak with Vincent, Adam, and Nico at the BABEL Working Group's second biennial meeting hosted by Northeastern University in Boston. Jamie and Paul will be joining the editors of the journal *Speculations* for a discussion of para-academic publishing at the *Aesthetics in the 21st Century* conference being hosted by the University of Basel in Switzerland. In preparation for this panel discussion, the editors of *continent.* and *Speculations* have co-authored a document that articulates some of the practices and concerns that we believe will be shaping the future of academic practice in the next century.

As always, *continent.* welcomes your excavations, transdisciplinary and media-agnostic in nature and scope. We look forward to accepting your submissions through October 15.

continent.

The Ground We Tread

Vilém Flusser

Translated by Rodrigo Maltez Novaes.
From the forthcoming book *Post-History*, Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013.

It is not necessary to have a keen ear in order to find out that the steps we take towards the future sound hollow. But it is necessary to have concentrated hearing if one wishes to find out which type of vacuity resonates with our progress. There are several types of vacuity, and ours must be compared to others, if the aim is to understand it.

The incomparable is incomprehensible. If we affirm that our situation is incomparable, we give up the effort to grasp it. The comparison that imposes itself is to the vacuity of the Baroque. There are innumerable traces in the present that evoke the Baroque. We bear the mark of the same somber rationalism (logics, informatics, cybernetics), and of the same magic and fanatic irrationalism (mass media, phantastic ideologies). But there is a decisive difference. Humanity advanced over a stage during the Baroque. All of its gestures, even the most sincere, were marked by theatricality. The vacuity that resonated under its feet was of the void under the stage. Baroque man represented.[1] For example he represented faith in waging religious wars. Baroque vacuity was the consequence of a medieval *loss of faith in dogmas*. Our vacuity is different. We do not represent anything. Our world is not a stage. We are not actors, and if we act, it is not to represent a drama, but to divert the audience's attention and our own from the subjects that really matter. We act like criminals that try to hide their tracks. We pretend. Our progress is a farce. The vacuity under our feet is not Baroque. We have not lost our faith in dogmas: *we have lost faith in ourselves*. We are as *counter-reformists* as was the Baroque (we want to cover up the recent revolution with warm cloths), but for different reasons.

Although comparable with the Baroque, in certain aspects, our situation is in fact incomparable to any other. That is because an incomparable, unheard of, never before seen event happened recently, which emptied the ground we tread. *Auschwitz*. Other posterior events; Hiroshima, the Gulags, are nothing but variations of the first. Therefore every attempt to grasp the present leads to the following questions: how was Auschwitz possible? How can we live after this? Such questions relate not only to the ones directly or indirectly responsible, and not only to those who were directly or indirectly hit by it: they relate to everyone who takes part in our culture. Because what is so incomparable, unheard of, never before seen and therefore incomprehensible in Auschwitz, is that it was there that Western culture revealed one of its inherent virtualities. Auschwitz is a *characteristic realization* of our culture.

---

1. In Portuguese *representar* (to represent) also means "to act" or "to play a role."

It is neither the product of a particular Western ideology, nor of specific "advanced" industrial techniques. It springs directly from the depths of culture and of its concepts and values. The possibility to realize Auschwitzes is implicit within our culture from the very start: the Western "project" already harbored it, although as a remote possibility. Auschwitz lies within the initial *program* of the West, which progressively realizes all of its virtualities as history unfolds. That is why the question that Auschwitz poses before us is not: how did it happen? It serves no purpose to "explain" Auschwitz. The fundamental question is: how was it *possible*? Because what is being questioned is not the extermination camp, but the West. Thus one other question: how to live within a culture henceforth unmasked?

Everything that happened afterwards resonates with such a question, with such vacuity. Every economic, social, political, technical, scientific, artistic, philosophic event is corroded by such an undigested question. The distance that separates us from the event does not mitigate the abyss, it erodes it even deeper. Because the distance progressively dissolves the aura of the horror that envelops the event, and it progressively opens up a vision of the scene. It progressively reveals that there all of our categories, all of our "models", suffered an irreparable shipwreck. Auschwitz was a *revolutionary* event, in the sense that it overthrew our culture. Insofar as we seek ways to cover up such revolution with trips to the moon or with genetic manipulations, we are counter-revolutionaries: we are inverting the course of history in order to cover up the past.

The unspoken in Auschwitz is not the mass murder, it is *not* the *crime*. It is the ultimate *reification* of people into amorphous objects, into ashes. The Western tendency towards objectification was finally realized and it was done so in the shape of an *apparatus*. The SS were functionaries of an extermination apparatus, and their victims functioned in function of their own annihilation. The extermination camp's program, once it started functioning, developed in an automatic fashion, autonomous from the decisions of the initial programmers, even if, as it effectively did, it contributed to the defeat of the programmers. The SS and the Jews functioned one in function of the other like cogwheels. The models for such functionality were provided by the highest of Western values: the SS behaved like "heroes" and the Jews like "martyrs". This is an apparatus that functions at a borderline situation: objective even beyond death.

What has just been said is *intolerable*. We cannot accept it and so we mobilize arguments against it. Good arguments. The SS behaved like criminals: they removed the gold teeth from the cadavers. The Jews behaved like victims: they rose up in the Warsaw ghetto. Such arguments are true, but they do not reach the nucleus, the "*eidos*" of the phenomenon: they do not grasp it. Although there was "normal" behavior: (theft, murder, revolt, heroism), there was also "abnormal" behavior: functionality during a borderline situation. And this is what counts. There, for the first time in the history of humanity, an apparatus was put into operation that was programmed with the most advanced techniques available, which realized the objectification of man, together with the functional collaboration of man.

The previous horrors committed by Western society against other societies and against itself (and there are many) were *crimes*. They were violations of Western models of behavior: anti-Christian, anti-human, irrational. So that it is possible to condemn them and continue to be Western, even if the horror is so colossal, such as the enslavement of Africans. However, it is not possible to condemn Auschwitz and continue to adhere consciously to the West. Auschwitz is not a violation of Western models of behavior, it is, on the contrary, the *result of the application* of such models. Our culture allowed its mystifying mask to fall at

must be rejected *in toto* if we admit that the purpose of every culture is to allow for the convivial existence of men that recognize each other mutually as subjects.

However: it is not possible to reject one's own culture. It is the *ground we tread*. Those who seek to reject their own culture (as Nietzsche did in rejecting Judeo-Christianity), fall victim to madness. Those who reject their culture's models, are incapable of grasping the world in which they live. Cultural models are traps to catch the world. Those who seek to substitute their own models for other's (for example by shouting "Hare Krishna") will find that such exotic models have already been caught by the very models to be substituted. There is no exit: we are condemned to use our models and to serve such models, even after they have been unmasked, if we wish to continue living. The only alternative would be to commit suicide. That is: we must continue our economic, political, scientific, artistic, philosophic activities despite Auschwitz. *We must continue progressing despite everything*.

That is why there are those who recommend that we should seek to forget what happened, that we should repress the event. They sustain that enough has already been said and written about the subject and that it is time to "overcome" it. But such an ostrich strategy reveals itself disastrous. Because the result is that Auschwitz transfers itself from Poland of the 1940s to the post-industrial society of the future. What characterizes the extermination camp is precisely that it is not an event that can be "overcome", because it is the *first realization* of an inherent virtuality within the Western project, which will repeat itself in other formats unless we become totally conscious of it. The advantage (if this is an appropriate term) that Auschwitz offers us, is to give us a concrete example of the West's tendency towards the apparatus. For the first time in our history it is possible for us to experience concretely the *utopia inherent* in our culture. For the first time in our history we have the experience that utopia, no matter in what form, towards which we progress, is the extermination camp.

Everywhere we can observe, as of now, the emergence of variations on the theme "Auschwitz". Everywhere apparatus spring, just like mushrooms after a Nazi rain, from the ground that has become rotten. Certainly: such new apparatus are not externally similar to the Nazi extermination camps. Their labels are different, as are the ideologies that pretend to inspire them. Even the apparatus that admittedly envision extermination, such as the Gulags, the ones of a future nuclear war, or the ones that functioned in Vietnam, claim to be different from Auschwitz. Others claim to be "friends of mankind", such as the scientific, technical and administrative apparatus. But such labels and such ideologies are deceptive and serve only to cover up the essence of apparatus. They are all just like Auschwitz, black boxes that function with complex inner-workings in order to realize a program. They all function according to an *inertia* that is inherent to them and such functionality *escapes*, from a certain point, *the control* of their initial programmers. In a final analysis such apparatuses function, all of them, towards the annihilation of all their functionaries, including their programmers. Exactly because they objectify and dehumanize man.

Thus Western culture reveals itself as a project that seeks to transform itself into an apparatus. What characterizes the West is its capacity for an objectifying transcendence. Such transcendence allows for the transformation of all phenomena, including the human phenomenon, into an object of knowledge and manipulation. The space for such transcendence opened up thanks to Judeo-Christianity and resulted, in the course of our history, in science, technique and recently, in Auschwitz. The ultimate objectification of the Jews into ashes is the ultimate victory of the spirit of the West. It is *social technique* taken to the extreme. Certainly:

the transformation of men into ashes is primitive, incipient social technique that progressively refines itself. It will be followed by less brutal objectifications, such as the robotization of society. But it does not matter which form it will assume: it will always be an objectifying manipulation of mankind. Although the apparatus of the immediate future are not necessarily incineration ovens, all will be, and not only the nuclear ones, apparatus for the annihilation of man.

The Western program contains several virtualities, not only apparatus. Numerous virtualities have not yet been realized. In this sense the "history of the West" has not ended yet, the Western game continues. But all not-yet realized virtualities are infected by apparatus. That is why it has become currently *impossible to engage ourselves in the* "*progress of culture*." As it would be to engage ourselves in our own annihilation. We have lost our faith in our culture, in the ground we tread. That is: we have lost faith in ourselves. It is this hollow vibration that follows our steps towards the future. What remains is for us to analyze the event "Auschwitz" in all its details in order to discover the fundamental project that realized itself there for the first time, so that we may nurture the hope to project ourselves out of that project. Out of the history of the West. This is the "post-historical" climate in which we are condemned to live from hereon.

Notes on Notes on Sound, July 18, 8:34pm
Isaac Linder

Paul de Man begins his landmark text, *Allegories of Reading*, with a cheeky epigraph from the philosopher Blaise Pascal. It reads, "*Quand on lit trop vite ou trop doucement on n'entend rien*" (When you read too quickly or too slowly you hear nothing). The epigraph is cheeky because in the course of de Man's work he avoids elucidating at what speed one would one would be able to properly hear the texts to which they are attending. For de Man the force of literary tropes—the way they seduce and structure their multiple readings—relies on the intimate proximity of figures and properties in the relational linkages of a text. Textual spatialization trumps and belies the importance of the tempo and temporality.

Enter the "site"specific text videos by the KoreanAmerican writer and improvising musician, Bonnie Jones. In these works, unique to the venues that have solicited them, the time of writing is captured and stored in a complex digital apparatus in the first instance, along with all of the hesitations, repetitions, and sudden keystrokes attending its production. Speed is proscribed—written in advance—and the time (five minutes and sixteen seconds) of *Notes on Sound* is spatialized into an affective mesh that ensnares the viewer in a doppler effect created between the speed of writing and the speed of reading. We're caught in the tempo of Jones' decisions (that is, unless we fast forward, pause, or rewind the text; unless it freezes or takes

long to load). We find ourselves subvocalizing along to a deceptively simple prompt ("please now together count back from one hundred") as the phonetic units that comprise the video permute into polyphony and warp like the minimalist pixelations of a concrete poem into the grammar of the *Notes* (that is, unless we are reading along out loud). We are forced to feel our form of reading as it unfolds, in a manner arguably more proliferate and protocolized than would have been known in Pascal's time. Would he have been able to hear anything?

      With its understated use of syntax and short-circuiting *Notes on Sound* is without a soundtrack, but by no means silent: Meditation on counting, on the sound of counting, and what counts as sounding; on the way we count on sound as a pre-text for things to ring true, as they do in the famously less calculable arenas of, say, emotion and poetry. *Notes on Sound* is a record of these. If I become more emotional about this it is only because it forces us to hear her.

~*~

We're Doomed.

Pessimism is the night-side of thought, a melodrama of the futility of the brain, a poetry written in the graveyard of philosophy. Pessimism is a lyrical failure of philosophical thinking, each attempt at clear and coherent thought, sullen and submerged in the hidden joy of its own futility. The closest pessimism comes to philosophical argument is the droll and laconic "We'll never make it," or simply: "We're doomed." Every effort doomed to failure, every project doomed to incompletion, every life doomed to be unlived, every thought doomed to be unthought.

Pessimism is the lowest form of philosophy, frequently disparaged and dismissed, merely the symptom of a bad attitude. No one ever needs pessimism, in the way that one needs optimism to inspire one to great heights and to pick oneself up, in the way one needs constructive criticism, advice and feedback, inspirational books or a pat on the back. No one needs pessimism, though I like to imagine the idea of a pessimist activism. No one needs pessimism, and yet everyone—without exception—has, at some point in their lives, had to confront pessimism, if not as a philosophy then as a grievance—against one's self or others, against one's surroundings or one's life, against the state of things or the world in general.

There is little redemption for pessimism, and no consolation prize. Ultimately, pessimism is weary of everything and of itself. Pessimism is the philosophical form of disenchantment—disenchantment as chanting, a chant, a mantra, a solitary, monophonic voice rendered insignificant by the intimate immensity surrounding it.

In pessimism, the first axiom is a long, low, funereal sigh.

~*~

We're Still Doomed.

No one has time for pessimism. After all, there are only so many hours in a day. Whatever our temperament, happy or sad, engaged or disengaged, we know pessimism when we hear it. The pessimist is usually understood as the complainer, forever pointing out what is wrong with the world without ever once offering a solution. But more often than not pessimists are the quietest of philosophers, submerging their own sighs within the lethargy of discontent. What little sound it makes is of interest to no one—"I've heard it all before," "tell me something I don't know," sound and fury, signifying nothing. In raising problems without solutions, in

---

*A talk given at "A Special Form of Darkness—Arika Episode II," Glasgow, 26 February, 2012.

posing questions without answers, in retreating to the hermetic, cavernous abode of complaint, pessimism is guilty of that most inexcusable of Occidental crimes—the crime of not pretending it's for real. Pessimism fails to live up to the most basic tenet of philosophy—the "as if." Think as if it will be helpful, act as if it will make a difference, speak as if there is something to say, live as if you are not, in fact, being lived by some murmuring non-entity both shadowy and muddied.

Had it more self-assurance and better social skills, pessimism would turn its disenchantment into a religion, possibly calling itself The Great Refusal. But there is a negation in pessimism that refuses even such a Refusal, an awareness that, from the start, it has already failed, and that the culmination of all that is, is that all is for naught.

Pessimism tries very hard to present itself in the low, sustained tones of a Requiem Mass, or the tectonic rumbling of Tibetan chant. But it frequently lets loose dissonant notes at once plaintive and pathetic. Often, its voice cracks, its weighty words abruptly reduced to mere shards of guttural sound.

<div align="center">~*~</div>

Maybe It's Not So Bad, After All.
If we know pessimism when we hear it, this is because we've heard it all before—and we didn't need to hear it in the first place. Life is hard enough. What you need is a change of attitude, a new outlook, a shift in perspective... a cup of coffee.

If we have no ears for pessimism, this is because it is always reducible to something as reliably mutable as a voice. If pessimism is so frequently disparaged, it is because it brings everyone down, determined as it is to view each day as a bad day, if only by virtue of the fact that it is not yet a bad day. For pessimism the world is brimming with negative possibility, the collision of a bad mood with an impassive world. In fact, pessimism is the result of a confusion between the world and a statement about the world, a confusion that also prevents it from fully entering the hallowed halls of philosophy. If pessimism is so often dismissed, this is because it is often impossible to separate a "bad mood" from a philosophical proposition (and do not all philosophies stem from a bad mood?)

The very term "pessimism" suggests a school of thought, a movement, even a community. But pessimism always has a membership of one—maybe two. Ideally, of course, it would have a membership of none, with only a scribbled, illegible note left behind by someone long forgotten. But this seems unrealistic, though one can always hope.

<div align="center">~*~</div>

Anatomy of Pessimism.
Though it may locate itself at the margins of philosophy, pessimism is as much subject to philosophical analysis as any other form of thought. Pessimism's lyricism of failure gives it the structure of music. What time is to the music of sorrow, reason is to a philosophy of the worst. Pessimism's two major keys are moral and metaphysical pessimism, its subjective and objective poles, an attitude towards the world and a claim about the world. For moral pessimism, it is better not to have been born at all; for metaphysical pessimism, this is the worst of all possible worlds. For moral pessimism the problem is the solipsism of human beings, the world made in our own image, a world-for-us. For metaphysical pessimism, the problem is the solipsism of the

world, objected and projected as a world-in-itself. Both moral and metaphysical pessimism are compromised philosophically; moral pessimism by its failure to locate the human within a larger context, and metaphysical pessimism by its failure to recognize the complicity in the very claim of realism.

This is how pessimism makes its music of the worst, a generalized misanthropy without the *anthropos*. Pessimism crystallizes around this futility—it is its *amor fati*, rendered as musical form.

~*~

Melancholy of Anatomy.

There is a logic of pessimism that is fundamental to its suspicion of philosophical system. Pessimism involves a *statement* about a *condition*. In pessimism each statement boils down to an affirmation or a negation, just as any condition boils down to the best or the worst.

With Schopenhauer, that arch-pessimist, the thinker for whom the philosopher and the curmudgeon perfectly overlap, we see a no-saying to the worst, a no-saying that secretly covets a yes-saying (through asceticism, mysticism, quietism), even if this hidden yes-saying is a horizon at the limits of comprehension. With Nietzsche comes the pronouncement of a Dionysian pessimism, a pessimism of strength or joy, a yes-saying to the worst, a yes-saying to this world as it is. And with Cioran yet another variation, futile yet lyrical, a no-saying to the worst, and a further no-saying to the possibility of any other world, in here or out there. With Cioran one approaches, but never reaches, an absolute no-saying, a studied abandonment of pessimism itself.

The logic of pessimism moves through three refusals: a no-saying to the worst (refusal of the world-for-us, or Schopenhauer's tears); a yes-saying to the worst (refusal of the world-in-itself, or Nietzsche's laughter); and a no-saying to the for-us and the in-itself (a double refusal, or Cioran's sleep).

Crying, laughing, sleeping—what other responses are adequate to a life that is so indifferent?

~*~

Cosmic Pessimism.

Both moral and metaphysical pessimism point to another kind, a pessimism that is neither subjective nor objective, neither for-us nor in-itself, and instead a pessimism of the world-without-us. We could call this a *cosmic pessimism*... but this sounds too majestic, too full of wonder, too much the bitter aftertaste of the Great Beyond. Words falter. And so do ideas. And so we have a cosmic pessimism, a pessimism that is first and last a pessimism about *cosmos*, about the necessity and possibility of order. The contours of cosmic pessimism are a drastic scaling-up or scaling-down of the human point of view, the unhuman orientation of deep space and deep time, and all of this shadowed by an impasse, a primordial insignificance, the impossibility of ever adequately accounting for one's relationship to thought—all that remains of pessimism is the desiderata of affects—agonistic, impassive, defiant, reclusive, filled with sorrow and flailing at that architectonic chess match called philosophy, a flailing that pessimism tries to raise to the level of an art form (though what usually results is slapstick).

~*~

Song of Futility.

An ethics of futility pervades pessimism. Futility, however, is different from fatality, and different again from simple failure (though failure is never simple). Failure is a breakage within the heart of relations, a fissure between cause and effect, a fissure hastily covered over by trying and trying again. With failure, there is always plenty of blame to go around; it's not my fault, it's a technical difficulty, it's a miscommunication. For the pessimist, failure is a question of "when," not "if"—failure as a metaphysical principle. Everything withers and passes into an obscurity blacker than night, everything from the melodramatic decline of a person's life to the banal flickering moments that constitute each day. Everything that is done undone, everything said or knowndestined for a kind of stellar oblivion.

When scaled up in this way, failure becomes fatality. Fatality is the hermeticism of cause and effect. In fatality, everything you do, whatever you do, always leads to a certain end, and ultimately to *the* end—though that end, or the means to that end, remain shrouded in obscurity. Nothing you do makes a difference because everything you do makes a difference. Hence the effects of your actions are hidden from you, even as you deceive yourself into thinking that, at last, this time you will outwit the order of things. By having a goal, planning ahead, and thinking things through carefully, we attempt, in a daily Prometheanism, to turn fatality to our advantage, to gain a glimpse of an order that seems buried deeper and deeper in the fabric of the universe.

But even fatality has its comforts. The chain of cause and effect may be hidden from us, but that's just because disorder is the order we don't yet see; it's just complex, distributed, and requires advanced mathematics. Fatality still clings to the sufficiency of everything that exists... When fatality relinquishes even this idea, it becomes futility. Futility arises out of the grim suspicion that, behind the shroud of causality we drape over the world, there is only the indifference of what exists or doesn't exist; whatever you do ultimately leads to no end, an irrevocable chasm between thought and world. Futility transforms the act of thinking into a zero-sum game.

~*~

Song of the Worst.

At the center of pessimism lies the term *pessimus*, "the worst," a term as relative as it is absolute. The worst is about as bad as it gets, "the worst" as "the best" in disguise, shrouded by the passage of time or the twists and turns of fortune. For the pessimist, "the worst" is the propensity for suffering that gradually occludes each living moment, until it eclipses it entirely, overlapping perfectly in death... which, for the pessimist, is no longer "the worst."

Pessimism is marked by an unwillingness to move beyond "the worst," something only partially attributable to a lack in motivation. In pessimism "the worst" is the ground that gives way beneath every existent—things could be worse, *and*, things could be better. "The worst" invariably implies a value judgment, one made based on scant evidence and little experience; in this way, pessimism's greatest nemesis is its

moral orientation. Pessimism's propositions have all the *gravitas* of a bad joke.

Perhaps this is why the true optimists are the most severe pessimists—they are optimists that have run out of options. They are almost ecstatically inundated by the worst. Such an optimism is the only possible outcome of a prolonged period of suffering, physical or metaphysical, intellectual or spiritual. But does this not also describe all the trials and tribulations of each day—in short, of "life?" It seems that sooner or later we are all doomed to become optimists of this sort (the most depressing of thoughts...)

~*~

Song of Doom.

Rather than serving as a cause for despair, gloom and doom are the forms of consolation for any pessimist philosophy. Neither quite affects nor quite concepts, gloom and doom transform pessimism into a *mortification* of philosophy.

Doom is not just the sense that all things will turn out badly, but that all things inevitably come to an end, irrespective of whether or not they really do come to an end. What emerges from doom is a sense of theunhuman as an attractor, a horizon towards which the human is fatally drawn. Doom is humanity given over to unhumanity in an act of crystalline self-abnegation.

Gloom is not simply the anxiety that precedes doom. Gloom is literally atmospheric, climate as much as impression, and if people are also gloomy, this is simply the by-product of an anodyne atmosphere that only incidentally involves human beings. Gloom is more climatological than psychological, the stuff of dim, hazy, overcast skies, of ruins and overgrown tombs, of a misty, lethargic fog that moves with the same languorousness as our own crouched and sullen listening to a disinterested world.

In a sense, gloom is the counterpoint to doom—what futility is to the former, fatality is to the latter. Doom is marked by temporality—all things precariously drawn to their end—whereas gloom is the austerity of stillness, all things sad, static, and suspended, a meandering smoke hovering over cold lichen stones and damp fir trees. If doom is the terror of temporality and death, then gloom is the horror of a hovering stasis that is life.

At times I like to imagine that this realization alone is the thread that connects the charnel ground Aghori and the graveyard poets.

~*~

Song of Spite.

There is an intolerance in pessimism that knows no bounds. In pessimism spite begins by fixing on a particular object of spite—someone one hardly knows, or someone one knows too well; a spite for this person or a spite for all of humanity; a spectacular or a banal spite; a spite for a noisy neighbor, a yapping dog, a battalion of strollers, the meandering idiot walking in front of you on their smart phone, large loud celebrations, traumatic injustices anywhere in the world regurgitated as media blitz, spite for the self-absorbed and overly performative people talking way too loud at the table next to you, technical difficulties and troubleshooting, the reduction of everything to branding, spite of the refusal to admit one's own errors, of self-help books, of

people who know absolutely everything and make sure to tell you, of all people, all living beings, all things, the world, the spiteful planet, the inanity of existence...

Spite is the motor of pessimism because it is so egalitarian, so expansive, it runs amok, stumbling across intuitions that can only half-heartedly be called philosophical. Spite lacks the confidence and the clarity of hatred, but it also lacks the almost cordial judgment of dislike. For the pessimist, the smallest detail can be an indication of a metaphysical futility so vast and funereal that it eclipses pessimism itself—a spite that pessimism carefully places beyond the horizon of intelligibility, like the experience of dusk, or like the phrase, "it is raining jewels and daggers."

~*~

Song of Sleep.
A paraphrase of Schopenhauer: what death is for the organism, sleep is for the individual. Pessimists sleep not because they are depressed, but because for them sleep is a form of ascetic practice. Sleep is the *askesis* of pessimism. If, while sleeping, we have a bad dream, we abruptly wake up, and suddenly the horrors of the night vanish. There is no reason to think that the same does not happen with the bad dream we call "life."

~*~

Song of Sorrow.
Nietzsche, commenting on pessimism, once castigated Schopenhauer for taking things too lightly. He writes:

...Schopenhauer, though a pessimist, *really*—played the flute. Every day, after dinner: one should read his biography on that. And incidentally: a pessimist, one who denies God and the world but *comes to a stop* before morality—who affirms morality and plays the flute... what? Is that really—a pessimist?

We know that Schopenhauer did possess a collection of instruments, and we also know that Nietzsche himself composed music. There is no reason to think that either of them would ever banish music from the Republic of philosophy.

But Nietzsche's jibes at Schopenhauer are as much about music as they are about pessimism. For the pessimist who says no to everything and yet finds comfort in music, the no-saying of pessimism can only be a weak way of saying yes—the weightiest statement undercut by the flightiest of replies. The least that Schopenhauer could've done is to play the bass.

I'm not a big fan of the flute, or, for that matter, wind instruments generally. But what Nietzsche forgets is the role that the flute has historically played in Greek tragedy. In tragedy, the flute (*aulos*) is not an instrument of levity and joy, but of solitude and sorrow. The Greek *aulos* not only expresses the grief of tragic loss, but it does so in a way that renders weeping and singing inseparable from each other. The classicist Nicole Loraux calls this the *mourning voice*. Set apart from the more official civic rituals of funerary mourning, the mourning voice of Greek tragedy constantly threatens to dissolve song into wailing, music into moaning, and the voice into a primordial, disarticulate anti-music. The mourning voice delineates all the forms of

suffering—tears, weeping, sobbing, wailing, moaning, and the convulsions of thought reduced to an elemental unintelligibility.

In the collapsed space between the voice that speaks and the voice that sings, pessimism discovers its mourning voice. Pessimism: the failure of sound and sense, the disarticulation of *phone* and *logos*.

Have we rescued Schopenhauer from Nietzsche? Probably not. Perhaps Schopenhauer played the flute to remind himself of the real function of the mourning voice—sorrow, sighs, and moaning rendered indistinguishable from music, the crumbling of the human into the unhuman. Failure *par excellence* of pessimism.

~*~

Song of Nothing.
In Buddhist thought, the First Noble Truth of existence is encapsulated in the Pali term *dukkha*, conventionally translated as "suffering," "sorrow," or "misery." The Buddhist teachings are clear, however, that this is an objective claim, and not simply one point of view among others. Existence is suffering and sorrow—and yet this is not, the teachings tell us, a pessimistic attitude.

It is likely that Schopenhauer, reading the Buddhist texts available to him, recognized some filiation with the concept of *dukkha*. But *dukkha* is a multi-faceted term. There is, certainly, *dukkha* in the usual sense of the suffering, strife, and loss associated with living a life. But this is, in turn, dependent on the finitude and temporality of *dukkha*, existence as determined by impermanence and imperfection. And this ultimately points to the way in which both suffering and finitude are grounded by the paradoxical groundlessness of *dukkha* as a metaphysical principle—the insubstantiality and the emptiness of all that is. Beyond what is worse to me, beyond a world ordered for the worst, there is the emptiness of *dukkha* as an impersonal suffering... the tearsof the cosmos.

In this context, it is easy to see how Schopenhauer's pessimism attempts to compress all the aspects of *dukkha* into a nothingness at the core of existence, a Willlessness coursing through the Will. Though one thing for certain is that with Schopenhauer we do not find the "ever-smiling" countenance of Buddhism—or do we?

The texts of the Pali Canon also contain lists of the different types of happiness—including the happiness of renunciation and the strange happiness of detachment. But Buddhism considers even the different types of happiness as part of *dukkha*, in this final sense of nothingness or emptiness. Perhaps Schopenhauer understood Buddhism better than he is usually given credit for. Thus the experiment of Schopenhauer's philosophy—the point at which a Western *pessimus* and an Eastern *dukkha* overlap or exchange glances. Empty sorrow, a lyricism of indifference. The result is a strange, and ultimately untenable, nocturnal form of Buddhism.

~*~

Cioran once called music a "physics of tears." If this is true, then perhaps metaphysics is its commentary. Or its apology.

~*~

Pessimism would be more mystical were it not for its defeatism. Mysticism is much too proactive for the pessimist, and pessimism too impassive even for the mystic. At the same time, there is something enviable about mysticism—despite its sufferings. There is a sense in which pessimists are really failed mystics.

~*~

You, the Night, and the Music.
In a suggestive passage, Schopenhauer once noted that, "music is the melody to which the world is the text."
        Given Schopenhauer's view on life—that life is suffering, that human life is absurd, that the nothingness before my birth is equal to the nothingness after my death—given all this, one wonders what kind of music Schopenhauer had in mind when he described music as the melody to which the world is text—was it opera, a Requiem Mass, a madrigal, or perhaps a drinking song? Or something like *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, a little night music for the twilight of thought, a sullen *nocturne* for the night-side of logic, an era of sad wings sung by a solitary banshee.
        Perhaps the music Schopenhauer had in mind is music eliminated to non-music. A whisper would suffice. Perhaps a sigh of fatigue or resignation, perhaps a moan of despair or sorrow. Perhaps a sound just articulate enough that it could be heard to dissipate.

~*~

Teach me to laugh through tears.

~*~

Pessimism always falls short of being philosophical. My back aches, my knees hurt, I couldn't sleep last night, I'm stressed-out, and I think I'm finally coming down with something. Pessimism abjures all pretenses towards system—towards the purity of analysis and the dignity of critique. We didn't really think we could figure it out, did we? It was just passing time, taking a piss, something to do, a bold gesture put forth in all its fragility, according to rules that we have agreed to forget that we made up in the first place. Every thought marked by a shadowy incomprehension that precedes it, and a futility that undermines it. That pessimismspeaks, in whatever voice, is the singing testimony to this futility and this incomprehension—take a chance and step outside, lose some sleep and say you tried...

~*~

Is there a music of pessimism? And would such a music be audible?

~*~

The impact of music on a person compels them to put their experience into words. When this fails, the result is a faltering of thought and language that is itself a kind of music. Cioran writes: "Music is everything. God himself is nothing more than an acoustic hallucination."

~*~

If a thinker like Schopenhauer has any redeeming qualities, it is that he identified the great lie of Western culture—the preference for existence over non-existence. As he notes: "If we knocked on the graves and asked the dead whether they would like to rise again, they would shake their heads."

In Western cultures it is commonly accepted that one celebrates birth and mourns death. But there must be a mistake here. Wouldn't it make more sense to mourn birth and celebrate death? Strange though, because the mourning of birth would, presumably, last the entirety of that person's life, so that mourning and living would the be same thing.

~*~

To the musical idea of the harmony of the universe corresponds the philosophical principle of sufficient reason. Like the music of mourning, pessimism gives voice to the inevitable breakdown of word and song. In this way, music is the overtone of thought.

~*~

The Patron Saints of Pessimism.
The patron saints of pessimism watch over suffering. Laconic and sullen, the patron saints of pessimism never seem to do a good job at protecting, interceding, or advocating for those who suffer. Perhaps they need us more than we need them.

Lest we forget, there do exist patron saints of philosophy, but their stories are not happy ones. There is, for instance, the fourth century Saint Catherine of Alexandria, or Catherine of the Wheel, named after the torture device used on her. A precocious fourteen year old scholar, Catherine was subject to continual persecution. After all forms of torture failed—including the "breaking wheel"—the emperor finally settled for her decapitation, a violent yet appropriate reminder of the protector of philosophers.

There are also patron saints of music and musicians, but theirs too are sad stories. In the second century, Saint Cecilia was also subject to persecution and torture. As she knelt to receive the blade that would separate her head from her body, she ardently sang a song to God. It took three attempts before she was fully

decapitated, all the while she continued, perhaps miraculously, to sing.

Does pessimism not deserve its own patron saints, even if they are unworthy of martyrdom? But in our search, even the most ardent nay-sayers frequently lapse into brief moments of enthusiasm—Pascal's love of solitude, Leopardi's love of poetry, Schopenhauer's love of music, Nietzsche's love of Schopenhauer, and so on. Should one then focus on individual works of pessimism? We could include Kierkegaard's trilogy of horror—*Sickness Unto Death*, *The Concept of Dread*, and *Fear and Trembling*—but all these are undermined by their fabricated and unreliable authors. Besides, how can one separate the pessimist from theoptimist in works like Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life*, Shestov's *Postetas Clavium*, or Edgar Saltus' under-read *The Philosophy of Disenchantment*? Even in cases where the entire corpus of an author is pessimistic, the project always seems incomplete—witness Cioran's trajectory, from his first book, *On the Heights of Despair*, to the last unpublished notebooks of acrid and taut aphorisms. And this is to say nothing of literary pessimism, from Goethe's sorrowful Werther, to Dostoevsky's underground man, to Pessoa's disquiet scribbler; Baudelaire's spleen and ennui, the mystical Satanism of Huysmans and Strindberg, the hauntologies of Mário de Sá-Carniero, Izumi Kyoka, H.P. Lovecraft, grumpy old Beckett... even the great pessimist comedians. All that remains are singular, perhaps anomalous statements of pessimism, a litany of quotes and citations crammed into fortune cookies.

Patron saints are traditionally named after a locale, either a place of birth or of a mystical experience. Perhaps the better approach is to focus on the places where pessimists were forced to live out their pessimism—Schopenhauer facing an empty Berlin lecture hall, Nietzsche mute and convalescent at the home of his sister, Wittgenstein the relinquished professor and solitary gardener, Cioran grappling with Alzheimer's in his tiny writing alcove in the Latin Quarter.

~*~

There's a ghost that grows inside of me, damaged in the making, and there's a hunt sprung from necessity, elliptical and drowned. Where the moving quiet of our insomnia offers up each thought, there's a luminous field of grey inertia, and obsidian dreams burnt all the way down.

~*~

If pessimism has any pedagogical value, it is that the failure of pessimism as a philosophy is inextricably tied to the failure of pessimism as voice. I read the following, from Shestov's *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness*:

> When a person is young he writes because it seems to him he has
> discovered a new almighty truth which he must make haste to
> impart to forlorn humankind. Later, becoming more modest, he
> begins to doubt his truths: and then he tries to convince himself.
> A few more years go by, and he knows he was mistaken all round,
> so there is no need to convince himself. Nevertheless he continues
> to write, because he is not fit for any other work, and to be
> accounted a superfluous person is so horrible.

continent.

Open Peer Commentary to
Eugene Thacker's "Cosmic Pessimism"

Comments on Eugene Thacker's "Cosmic Pessimism"
Nicola Masciandaro

> Anything you look forward to will destroy you, as it already has.
>
> – Vernon Howard

In pessimism, the first axiom is a long, low, funereal sigh.
The cosmicity of the sigh resides in its profound negative singularity. Moving via endless auto-releasement, it achieves the remote.

> "*Oltre la spera che piú larga gira / passa 'l sospiro ch'esce del mio core*"
> [Beyond the sphere that circles widest / penetrates the sigh that issues from my heart].[1]

The axiomatic sigh of the pessimist is in a way the pure word of philosophy, a thought that thinks without you, speaks where you are not. The live pneumatic form of the soul's eventual exit from the dead body's mouth, the sigh restores consciousness to the funeral of being, to the passing away that is existence. Pessimism speaks in piercing aphorisms because first it sighs. "Beyond the sphere passeth the arrow of our sigh. Hafiz! Silence."[2]

… pessimism is guilty of that most inexcusable of Occidental crimes—the crime of not pretending it's for real.
To the pessimist, the 'real' world—the world on whose behalf we are expected to wake up in the morning—is a ceaseless index of its own unreality. The pessimist's day is not an illumined space for the advancement of experience and action, but a permanently and inescapably reflective zone, the vast interior of a mirror where each thing *is* only insofar as it is, at best, a false image of itself. Within this speculative situation, inside the doubleness of the mirror, pessimism splits into two paths, false and true, one that tries to fix pessimism (establish a relation with the mirror) and decides in favor of the apparent real, and another that totally falls for pessimism (enters the mirror) and communes with the greater reality of the unreal. These two paths are distinguished by their relation to pessimism's guilt vis-à-vis the world's reality-project. The first form, that which remains pessimism for the world and puts on a smiling face, stays guilty to itself (i.e. unconscious) and thus turns hypocritical, becoming at once the pessimism of the commoner who really just wants things to be better for himself and the pessimism of the elite who wants to critically refashion reality in his own image. The general form of this worldly, hypocritical pessimism is the impulse to 'make the world a better place,' which is

---

1. Dante Alighieri. *Vita Nuova*. ed. and trans. Dino S. Cervigni and Edward Vasta. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. 1995. 41:10.

2. Hafiz of Shiraz. *The Divan*. trans. H. Wilberforce Clarke. London: Octagon Press. 1974. 10.9.

the global mask under which the world is diurnally made worse. The second form, that which follows pessimism away from the world and ceases to put on a smiling face, refuses guiltiness as itself theessential Occidental mode of pretense and turns honest, becoming at once the intelligent pessimism required of all ordinary action and the radical pessimism necessary for self-knowledge: seeing that no one is capable of doing good. The general form of this universal, honest pessimism is the impulse not to worry, to give up and embrace dereliction, which is the only real way the world is actually improved. Where worldly pessimism is the engine productive of interminably warring secular and sacred religions (good-projects), universal pessimism strives hopelessly for the paradise of a supremely instantiated *pessimus*: things are getting so bad that there is no longer any time for them to get worse; things are so constantly-instantly worst that this is BEST. Cosmic pessimism is the mode of universal pessimism which can yet discourse with the world, which has not chosen silence and can spread the inconceivably BAD NEWS in an orderly form (*kosmos*) that the world can understand (if it wanted to).

… the result of a confusion between the world and a statement about the world.
That is what the world is (the result of a confusion between the world and a statement about the world).

… a generalized misanthropy without the *anthropos*. Pessimism crystallizes around this futility—it is its *amor fati*, rendered as musical form.
Pessimism's love of fate is a blind love, a love of the blindness of being human in a cosmos conceived around the human's eclipse, a heavy levitation in the contradictory space between the inescapability of its having been and the impossibility of its will-be. Pessimism's song of futility is a sensible way of loving fate, with a minimum of eros, by means of a kind of matrimonial love of the fatal. As music, pessimism stays open to the irreparable and the inexorable without the binding of affirmation, in the apparent absence of the radical, infinitely surplus will that absolute *amor fati* seems to require.

Crying, laughing, sleeping – what other responses are adequate to a life that is so indifferent?
"Unless a man aspires to the impossible, the possible that he achieves will scarcely be worth the trouble of his achieving it. We should aspire to the impossible, to absolute and infinite perfection [….] The apocatastasis is more than a mystical dream: it is a norm of action, it is a beacon for high deeds [….] For true charity is a species of invasion [….] It is not charity to rock and lull our fellow men to sleep in the inertia and heaviness of matter, but rather to arouse them to anguish and torment of spirit."[3]

… the impossibility of ever adequately accounting for one's relationship to thought.
"The paroxysm of interior experience leads you to regions where danger is absolute, because life which self-consciously actualizes its roots in experience can only negate itself [….] There are no arguments [….] On the heights of despair, the passion for the absurd is the only thing that can still throw a demonic light on chaos [….] *I live because the mountains do not laugh and the worms do not sing*."[4]

---

3. Miguel de Unamuno. *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*. trans. Anthony Kerrigan. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1972. 305-6.

4. E.M. Cioran. *On the Heights of Despair*. trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1992. 9-10.

It took three attempts before she was fully decapitated, all the while she continued, perhaps miraculously, to sing.

According to the earliest account of Cecilia's martyrdom, the beheading turns out worse. After *not* severing her head in three strokes, "the cruel executioner left her half dead" (*seminecem eam cruentus carnifex dereliquit*).[5] Cecilia's effortlessly powerful endurance of the three strokes—a fitting icon for pessimism as an art of dereliction—demonstrates the "passivity and absence of effort [….] in which divine transcendence is dissolved."[6]

There's a ghost that grows inside of me, damaged in the making, and there's a hunt sprung from necessity, elliptical and drowned. Where the moving quiet of our insomnia offers up each thought, there's a luminous field of grey inertia, and obsidian dreams burnt all the way down.

Like words from a pre-waking dream. There is no reason to think that they are not.

---

5. Giacomo Laderchi. *S. Caeciliae Virg[inis] et Mart[yris] Acta. . .* Rome. 1723. 38.

6. Georges Bataille. *On Nietzsche*. trans. Bruce Boone. London: Continuum. 2004. 135. See Nicola Masciandaro. "Half Dead: Parsing Cecilia." http://thewhim.blogspot.com/2012/02/half-dead-parsing-cecilia.html

A Commentary on Eugene Thacker's 'Cosmic Pessimism'
Gary J. Shipley

Pessimism is the refusal to seek distraction, the refusal to remodel failure into a platform for further (doomed) possibilities, the refusal of comfort, the acceptance of the sickness of healthy bodies, the cup of life overflowing with cold vomit. If, as Ligotti suggests when discussing *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*,[1] humans prefer the anxieties of their familiar human lives to the contentment of an alien one, then the pessimist, we could argue, represents some perverted combination of the two, preferring (presuming he has a choice) the defamiliarization of human life to the contentment of its unquestioned mundanity.

The quasi-religious state of mind that Wittgenstein would mention on occasion, that of "feeling *absolutely* safe,"[2] is a state the pessimist could only imagine being approximated by death, or perhaps some annihilative opiate-induced stupor. This Wittgensteinian commingling of certainty and faith looks every bit the futile gesture, a mere rephrasing of collapse or partial collapse. The only certainty open to the pessimist is that of the toxic formula of life itself—a formula known and lacuna-free. Certainty, far from being the gateway to deliverance, becomes the definitive impediment; and the possibility of salvation, as long as it remains, becomes crucially reliant on postulations of ignorance, epistemic gaps, a perennial incompleteness: "the perfect safety of wooed death […] the warm bath of physical dissolution, the universal unknown engulfing the miniscule unknown."[3]

---

1. See Thomas Ligotti. *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*. New York: Hippocampus Press. 2010. 91.

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein. "A Lecture on Ethics." *Philosophical Review*. (74) 1. 1965. 8.

3. Vladimir Nabokov. *Pale Fire*. New York: Vintage. 1989. 221.

The height of Leibniz's Panglossian insanity nurtured the idea that our knowing everything—via the universal calculus—could be accurately described a triumph, as opposed to a nightmare in which our every futility is laid bare. Stagnancy and boredom are perhaps two of the greatest ills of Western civilisation, and the most potent pessimism tells you that you're stuck with both. The most we can hope for, by way of salvation, is to throw open our despair to the unknown.

The fact that Schopenhauer's pessimism stopped short of morality and allowed him to play the flute, as Nietzsche complained, highlights the predicament of a man who despite having adorned nothingness with a smiling face still found himself alive. The demand here is that it be felt: a cross-contamination of intellect and emotion. The safety net of numerous parentheses makes for a failed philosophy, rather than a philosophy of failure.

Depressives make bad pessimists, because, unless they choose to die, living will always infect them with necessities of hope, forcing them to find something, anything (all the various "as ifs") to make existence tolerable. For as Cioran observed, while "[d]epressions pay attention to life, they are the eyes of the devil, poisoned arrows which wound mortally any zest and love of life. Without them we know little, but with them, we cannot live."[4] And even when cured of our depressions we'll find ourselves consumed, eaten alive by the hyper-clinical (borderline autistic) mania that replaces them: a predicament captured all too clearly in the microscriptual fictions of Robert Walser, where spectral men and women stifle their depressive madness with protective comas of detail, their failed assimilations buried beneath thick crusts of remote data. Like Beckett's Malone their stories may have ended, but cruelly their lives have not.

Pessimism is an extraneous burden (a purposeless weight) that makes everything else harder to carry, while at the same time scooping it out and making it lighter.

If pessimism had a sound it would be the harsh non-noise of tinnitus—the way that every person would hear themselves if they refused their distractions long enough to listen: a lungless scream from the extrasolar nothing of the self. The music of pessimism—if indeed we can imagine such a thing—is the reverberating echo of the world's last sound, conjectured but never heard, audible only in its being listened for. The one consolation of this hollow paradox of audibility being, that "he will be least afraid of becoming nothing in death who has recognized that he is already nothing now."[5] The pessimist suffers a derangement of the real, a labyrinthitis at the nucleus of his being: he's the stumbling ghost relentlessly surprised that others can see him.

If Cioran's refusal is manifested in sleep (when even saying 'no' is too much of a commitment), then Pessoa's resides in the dreams inside that sleep. Pessoa chooses to exploit the fact that he's being "lived by some murmuring non-entity both shadowy and muddied"[6] by growing more voids to live him. His is a Gnostic breed of sleep, "sleeping as if the universe were a mistake,"[7] a sleep that dreams through Thacker's cosmic pessimism ("a pessimism of the world-without-us.", "the unhuman orientation of deep space and deep time"[8]), through the critical error of there being anything at all when there could be nothing.

---

4. E. M. Cioran. *The Book of Delusions*. trans. Camelia Elias. *Hyperion*. 5.1. (2010): 75.

5. Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*. vol. 2. trans. E .F J. Payne. New York: Dover. 1966. 609.

6. Eugene Thacker. "Cosmic Pessimism." *continent.*. 2.2 (2012): 67.

7. Fernando Pessoa. *The Book of Disquiet*. trans. Richard Zenith. London: Penguin. 2002. 35.

8. Eugene Thacker. "Cosmic Pessimism." *continent.*. 2.2 (2012): 68.

The metaphysical pessimist is someone who, however well life treats them, still desires to wake from it, as from the poisonous air of a bad dream.

Pessimism is a paradox of age, being simultaneously young and old; its youth residing in a refusal to accept the authority of existence (its rich history, its inherent beneficence), a refusal to "get over" the horror of what it sees with its perpetually fresh eyes, and its maturity in the unceremonious disposal of the philosophical playthings (those futile architectures) of adolescence. As Thacker remarks: "Pessimism abjures all pretenses towards system—towards the purity of analysis and the dignity of critique."[9] A sentiment shared with Pessoa, who duly categorizes those that choose to enact this futile struggle: "The creators of metaphysical systems and of psychological explanations are still in the primary stage of suffering."[10]

If the pessimist has shared a womb with anyone, it's with the mystic and not the philosopher. As Schopenhauer tells us: "The mystic is opposed to the philosopher by the fact that he begins from within, whereas the philosopher begins from without. […] But nothing of this is communicable except the assertions that we have to accept on his word; consequently he is unable to convince."[11] The crucial difference between the mystic and the pessimist is not the latter's impassivity and defeatism, but his unwillingness/inability to contain in any way the spread of his voracious analyticity, his denial of incompleteness, his exhaustive devotion to failure.

The truth of our predicament, though heard, is destined to remain unprocessed. Like the revelations of B.S. Johnson's Haakon ("We rot and there's nothing that can stop it / Can't you feel the shaking horror of that?"[12]) the pessimist's truths are somehow too obvious to listen to, as if something inside us were saying, "Of course, but haven't we gotten over that?"

Pessimism is simple and ugly, and has no desire to make itself more complex or more attractive.

The true moral pessimist knows that the Utilitarian's accounts will always be in the red. He can see that for all his computational containments, his only honest path is a negative one, and that such a path has but one logical destination: that of wholesale human oblivion.

Thacker notes how at the core of pessimism lies the notion of "the worst," through which death is demoted by the all-pervasive suffering of a life that easily eclipses its threat. And so with doom made preferable to gloom, death begins to glint with promise, "like beauty passing through a nightmare."[13] But even among pessimists suicide is, for the most part, thought to be an error. Schopenhauer, for instance, regarded suicide a mistake grounded in some fundamentally naïve disappointment or other. Pessoa too thought suicide an onerous escape tactic: "To die is to become completely other. That's why suicide is a cowardice: it's to surrender ourselves completely to life."[14] There is a call here to be accepting of and creative with the puppetry of your being, an insistence that it's somehow a blunder to attempt to hide in death from the horrors you find

9. Ibid. 73.

10. Fernando Pessoa. *The Book of Disquiet*. trans. Richard Zenith. London: Penguin. 2002. 341.

11. Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*. vol. 2. trans. E .F J. Payne. New York: Dover. 1966. 610-11.

12. B.S Johnson. "You're Human Like the Rest of Them." in Jonathan Coe. *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B.S. Johnson*. London: Picador. 2004. 177.

13. Fernando Pessoa. *The Book of Disquiet*. trans. Richard Zenith. London: Penguin. 2002. 415.

14. Ibid. 199.

inlife.[15] Tied up with this perseverance is the slippery notion of the good death, for maybe, as Blanchot warns, suicide is rarely something we can hope to get right, for the simple reason that "you cannot make of death an object of the will."[16]

"Even in cases where the entire corpus of an author is pessimistic, the project always seems incomplete,"[17] and this is not simply because the project itself belies something yet to be disclosed, but because the project itself is a thing waiting. It waits on a cure it knows will not come, but for which it cannot do anything (as long as it continues to do anything) but wait.

---

15. "Suicide is, after all, the opposite of the poem." Anne Sexton. *No Evil Star: Selected Essays, Interviews and Prose*. ed. Steven Gould Axelrod. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1985. 92.

16. Maurice Blanchot. *The Space of Literature*. trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 1989. 105.

17. Eugene Thacker. "Cosmic Pessimism." *continent.*. 2.2 (2012): 75.

The Poetry of Jean Daive

Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei

It is not my intention to offer the following notes pertaining to one part of the series *Narration d'équilibre* [*Narrative of equilibrium*], written by the poet, translator, photographer, encyclopedist, and radio maker Jean Daive (1941), as a meticulous overview of the different themes, lines, and figures traversing such a voluminous oeuvre. Rather, they form a set of comments that found their way to the margins of the word processing document while translating the work. However, they depart from Wallace Stevens's idea that if it is the case that philosophy represents the "official view of being," poetry can be defined as its "unofficial view."[1] As Judith Balso argues in *Affirmation de la poésie*, poetry needs to penetrate the cracks and fissures of the metaphysical framework, beyond the authority and orders of philosophy, if only to undo Plato's expulsion of poetry from the city.[2] This unofficial being of poetry finds its materialization in "*Sllt*" (listen to *slat*, the suppressed *ssst* of the nocturnal visitor, but also the *salut* of poetry itself). Let me draw the framework of these annotations.

In his work *On Interpretation*, Aristotle elaborates on the different parts of human speech, and institutes a tripartite division between "affects in the soul" (*ta en têi psukhêi pathêmata*), "sonifications," more commonly translated as "words" (*ta en têi phônei*), and "written things" (*ta graphomena*), all of which are linearly connected. Affects of the soul are symbolized by sonifications, which are in their turn symbolized by what is written down. Letters (*grammata*) and sounds (*phônai*) are not the same for everyone, contrary to the affects of the soul to which they refer, which they signify as signs (*sêmeia*). The same holds for the relation between words and things.[3] In *On Interpretation,* Aristotle lays the foundation for the sign as linguistic unity, as well as for the idea, popularized by Ferdinand de Saussure, that whereas the form of words, letters, and sounds is arbitrary, the signification of a sign is stable: the famous interpretation of the sign as a fissured duality of signifier and signified.[4] However, both philosophical and scientific developments have complicated the nature the Aristotelian "backside" and Saussurian "frontside" of linguistic production. Brain scans and electromyograms of the larynx and throat offer us an *image* of actual sound production and the underlying physical processes, and the work of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, who both addressed the Saussurian sign, have shown that the unity of sign is not as stable as seems, both on the level of the signifier and signified.

It is within this framework that Jean Daive aims to formulate a poetical response to this crisis in the (analysis of) the production of language and signification. He nevertheless follows in the footsteps of Aristotle by forming an idea about the production of language and the production of signification. The first poem in

---

NOTE: This text is a translation of the original essay "Tekendichtheid: Over Jean Daives Narration d'équilibre 2: 'Sllt'," published in *Parmentier* 21.2 (2012): p. 65-71, accompanied by the same selection of poems in Dutch translation.

1. Wallace Stevens. "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet." in *Collected Poetry and Prose*. New York: Library of America. 1997.p. 667.

2. Judith Balso. *Affirmation de la poésie*. Paris: Nous. 2011. p. 25.

3. Aristotle. *On Interpretation*. 16a3-8.

4. Ferdinand de Saussure. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: McGraw-Hill. 1966. p. 67.

the section "PANT THREAT" of "*Sllt*" immediately addresses the wide topographical range of the role of poetry.

> *'Cause role, in——*
>
> *dict say everything. "Maia, neurolinguistics, telepathy*
> *India, dance, allometry. Why this transversal of the others*
> *like—"*
>
> *The chamber would it be under the tent.*
> *Blockage. Aphasia. Brains wherein*
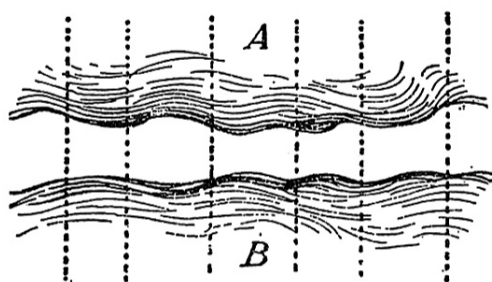> *a chemistry without page.*
>
> *Line that*
>
> *waves.*

The role of poetry is introduced as a "cause," a *causa*. Further on we read "case role," *car rôle—cas role*, suggesting also casserole: "The flesh would it have a role in." But we have to slow down. Poetry's role is to say everything. However, this is not without "blockage" or "aphasia," which is immediately figured by the interrupted, suppressed phrase *in—// dit tout dire*: the interdiction, *interdit*, is immediately smothered. What does it say? "Everything." A stream of terms, from Maia, the eldest of the Pleiades and the mother of messenger and interpreter-translator Hermes (but also a name referring to an ancient form of hieroglyphic writing), to the latest developments in neurolinguistics, telepathic brain waves emitted from the skull, the origin of grammar and the dancing and syncopated rhythm of speech and language.

But "Why this transversal of the others like—"? First we have to return to our cranium, the "Brains wherein / a chemistry without page. // Line that // waves." And further on: "I do not see more than you. Nothing but a wave. / That does not get holes." In neurology there are no holes, but only wave forms, as yet unsymbolized electrical

signals. On the allometric side there are different measurement units. The microseconds of EEGs are transformed into sluggish waves of air pressure, in "phonetic language."

In between, "The hand of a simian" appears, a supplicating throat that does not only supplicate (*supplie*) but also supplements (*supplée*): "That in which it says," in which neurology speaks, is always "later." The simian climbs, transversing distances differing from (*allo-métrie*) the minute scales at which neurons fire at each other. This simian (*singe*) is what dwells in the spot previously occupied by the Aristotelian sign (*signe*), between the waving signposts of neurology (*ta en têi psukhêi pathêmata*) and phonetic language (*ta en têi phonêi*). It is the sign of the inherent aphasia of all speech, the mangling, interrupted signals, gaps, and non sequiturs. Whereas Stéphane Mallarmé imagined the sign as swan (*cygne*), caught on the white page, Daive focuses on the "unofficial," mischievous character of the sign, its nearly being human. Here we have to remind ourselves that

Saussure in his *Course on General Linguistics* illustrates the duplicity of the sign by means of a tree: the relation between the concept "tree" and the phonological sequence /t-r-i/ is arbitrary—*arbre*.[5] Daive's simian is climbing from one to the other, swinging between different branches. The border between signifier and signified, so strongly articulated by Saussure, is permeated through the simple displacement from *signe* to *singe*, from the Greek *sêmeion* to the English "simian," thus providing an actualization of what Lacan described the moment that the signifier enters the signified.

Lacan does not consider the sign to be a structural or hermetically closed unity, as suggested by Saussure, but suggests that the signifier constantly insinuates itself in the signified: words and concepts penetrate each other in series. Lacan's analysis of the sign is immediately related to the psychoanalytical work of Sigmund Freud concerning dreams and the unconscious: "everywhere [in Freud's complete works] we see a dialectical apprehension of experience, linguistic analysis becoming still more prevalent the more directly the unconscious is involved [....] This linguistic structure that enables us to read dreams is at the crux of the 'signifierness of dreams,' at the crux of the *Traumdeutung*."[6] In his reading of the *Traumdeutung* Lacan points at three semantic mechanisms, *Entstellung*, *Verschiebung*, and *Verdichtung*. This last one is "the superimposed structure of signifiers in which metaphor finds its field; its name, condensing in itself the word *Dichtung*, shows the mechanism's connaturality with poetry, to the extent that it envelops poetry's own properly traditional function."[7] This metaphor producing superimposition of signs—"condensation"—functions as process largely during nocturnal dreams, but is also expressed within the work of poetry. This brings as back to the cranium, the chamber under the tent, *tente*—*tenter*, temptation or test. The brain as the *test site* of language.

What is the architecture in which the simian—image of the permeability of the sign, index to the interpretation of dreams, but also "pre-"conscious state of humanity—climbs around? The first poem of the section "Choir" states: "He concludes. He remains to resemble / and such. Chambers without table or wall." This resemblance (*ressembler*) and re-sembling (*re-sembler*), being similar again—"Similar to the attention / like I say to him similar to / the identical"—is at the same time a reassambly (*rassembler*), a construction of "chambers with a sun / entirely." However, this construction, which Daive relate to phrasing, is in the first place a nocturnal activity: "A slat through the nocturnal / series / heavier loaded / than lit. A day is built, sleeping," and "A longer phrase. A longer night." This is "neurology."

> *A slat*
> *in which this second*
> *would remain.*
> *Disowned that separates*
> *is called I went to bed*
> *and I am marching.*
> *The practice of the mouth*

5. Ibid. 67.

6. Jacques Lacan. "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," in Écrits. trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2006. p. 424.

7. Ibid. p. 425.

already entered like a construction
in my sleep.

The slat (*sommier*) does not only refer to the nocturnal construction work of sleep (*sommeil*) and the support of the bed, but also contributes to the summation (*sommer*) of the phrases, series, and seconds—*secundus*— sequences and persecutions, marching and marking are separated and thus form names, words, albeit in a disowned way: aping. Such subconscious work on the construction of the phrase may also be interpreted as the construction of the sign itself, which for Sausurre is always split by a bar (*barre*). Lacan pertinently points out the *arbre* and *barre* are anagrammatically derivable from each other, something which, as I stated before, has its repercussions on the couple *signe - singe*. However, this bar is at the same time a blockade: "They block his memory / with a slat." Again we find a confirmation that chamber and blockade, speaking and aphasia, are intimately connected and mutually imply each other. Daive speaks of a "dismemberment" of words, a "subordination complex"—a subordination, subjugation, which is a "ringing" (*sommier* also refers to the bell cage) and clinking—"putting down the money / knowing / that a comma displaces itself / according to / the time that." This phrase reminds us of the Saussurian metaphor of the sign as coin, and Gertrude Stein's description of writing sentences as *coin in a loan—coining alone*.[8] The ringing, pealing, appeal of this word forging may be subdivided in several chemical alarms, electric signals in the brains, firing neurons, "these accumulations of sleep." But then, sunrise: "A lightness compensates / for the linen / that strangles you. But I will untie you / with one or two lapses."

As soon as the sun lights up the chamber, we are closing in on speech, "The practice of the mouth / already entered like a construction / in my sleep." Also the flesh enters the scene of articulation—"Pieces of flesh push left of the sun"—the place of the vocalization of language: "Vocalization or your menace / the language will modulate the sounds / associated to the unwinding of a sequence." Here we are concerned with the notation and intonation of the length—*longueur—langue-er*, languageness of language and enter the domain of the celestial sounds and music as *carreau*, tile, foundation, and basis of poetry: *carreau le—K rôle—carol*, "the angel will hide himself in a sonority / but before / a simian will have / transformed / into audition." The production of sound, speaking, is already first hearing ourselves speak, to "play our personage / vocally / with our laryngeal sacks." The simian (*singe*) and the angel (*ange*), the sign of the sound, collaborate, engage in conversation, "Speaking / in the sense that they currently give / to this word."

Speaking, fluently, currently (*courrament*), running (*courant*) early, is a scale. A spectrum of sounds penetrates—*pénètre—fénêtre*—the manner of speaking, the air pressure from the diaphragm (read also *chambre—camera*, the throat as opening of the chamber): "Along a manner / the place of the effort / a pressure of air, this response / that takes the consonance." So according to Daive, both ends of language production are affected by interruptions, penetrations, commas; both inside the room and outside. There is always too much "baggage / a simian's overloaded back." The sign is always overloaded, also more ambiguous and polyvalent than the speaker's intension. Language is constantly excessive.

---

8. Gertrude Stein. *How To Write*. Mineola, NY: Dover, p. 116. The metaphor of the coin is however much older: "Customary use, though, is the most steady teacher of speaking, and speech must be like a coin: it must bear a public stamp." (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.1-3, quoted from Erik Gunderson, *Nox Philologiae: Aulus Gellius and the Fantasy of the Roman Library*. [Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press. 2009], p. 56).

A condition is placed like
a plank.
It is a balance. I weigh
an umbrella, three saws
a tire.
Not to name this package
pointer plows.

Just like the slat, the plank is part of the chamber's construction, which is gradually built up. From "Plank I: Everything / is / lacuna" until "Thanks for the planking. It finishes / everything." This space, built from planks, is provisional, conditional. "A condition is placed like / a plank. / It is a balance." Here we arrive at one of the possible readings of the title of the series, *Narration d'équilibre*: a narrative of equilibrium, a balance, or, as Werner Hamacher suggests, "This [...] equilibrium would hold the balance between speaking and halting, mere saying and conscious thematization, between sudden thought and coherent story, interruption and the flow of speech, between the impossibility to speak and its beginning."[9] Or elsewhere, "Comparable to a deafness"—*surdité*—*sur-dité*, an over-saying and blockade at the same time. This oscillation between speech and lacuna, between umbrella—*parapluie*—*oui*, three saws—*scies*—*si*[10]—and a tire—*pneu*— *pneuma*—a breath of air, forms a "package," an affirmation and a halting voice. "In the chamber. / A package hangs from the ceiling / thickening. Day after day."

Joseph Beuys. *FOND VII/2* (1967/84)

---

9. Werner Hamacher. "Anataxis. Komma. Balance," in Jean Daive. *Erzählung des Gleichgewichts 4: W*. trans. Werner Hamacher. Basel: Urs Engeler. 2006. p. 134.

10. In Stéphane Mallarmé's celebrated poem *Un Coup de dés*, there are precisely three instances of the word *si*. For an analysis of this word (which also opens the *si-nge*) see Quentin Meillassoux's recently published analysis of the work, *The Number and the Sirene: A Decipherment of Mallarmé's Coup de Dés*. trans. Robin Mackay. New York: Sequence Press. 2012.

This package, slowly expanding inside the chamber, is in itself already charged, both inflated, "pneumatic," and in the shape of "several layers of felt." Elsewhere Daive speaks of a "battery." It is difficult not to interpret this as a reference to the formal language of the German artist Joseph Beuys, in which natural materials like felt, rubber, and metal form a balance in stacked "batteries"—"Tree or heating / which you cited."—and thus imply a relation between natural materials and immaterial "energy"—the *charge* of concrete streams of air flowing from my mouth. This is a relation that can be traced to an early point in the history of Western poetry, the Old-Irish poetical treatise *Auraicept na n-Éces*, which equates the construction materials for the tower of Babel—clay, water, wool, blood, wood, glue, flax, acacias, bitumen—to the different types of words.[11] We are thus faced with an *alchemical* transformation of a chemical process into language. Daive suggests sorcery: "I will be you sorceress." Sorceress—*sorcière*—*source*, source but also incantation and literally singing-into. The nocturnal construction is ready, the accumulations of sleep have been completed, the alarm resounds, the poet awakens.

"The repeater of the revolution / transforms himself into pure logarithm / of stellar speeds." This is nothing but an image of this poet, the repeater—"If candles evoke anew / several sequences, this idea / of repetition. We studied the filth / or what it spaces." but also re-peater, the one who reaches anew for a turnover, a revolution, a transvaluation which transforms, like a battery or through incantation, into pure logarithm, a *logos-rhythmos*—a rhythm, a spacing of words and speech, the incarnate comma of stellar speeds—the progression of candle to sun, from night to day, the sleepy acceleration, running early, to "Chambers with a sun / entirely"—but also a *Stellen*, the Aristotelian *thesthai*—*testing* of language. Every poetic statement is a test, a risk, ventures a leap. Each stroke of the pen is monkey business.

---

11. George Calder (ed.) *Auraicept na n-Éces: The Scholars' Primer*. Edinburgh: John Grant. 1917. p. 23.

Selections from *Narration d'équilibre 2: 'Sllt'*
Jean Daive*
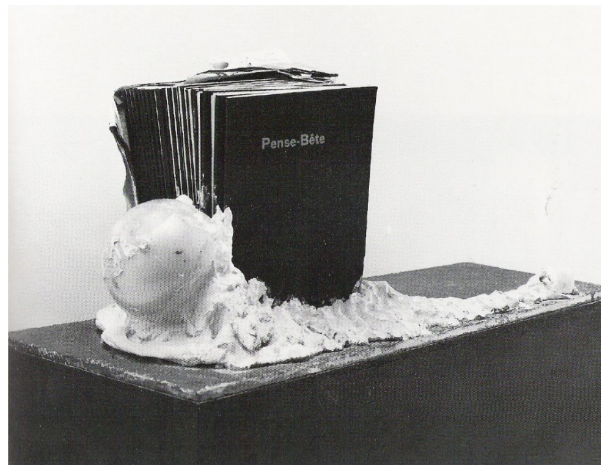
Marcel Broodthaers. *Pense Bête* (1964)

Choir

Similar to the attention
like I say to him similar to
the identical.
He concludes. He remains to resemble
and such. Chambers without table or wall.
Chambers with a sun
entirely.

Then
the children show that
the sun is entire. As if
I find myself right now.
Similar to repeating which the attention instructs

---

*From Jean Daive. *Narration d'équilibre: Antériorité du scandale, 'Sllt', Vingt-quatre images seconde*. Paris: Hachette/P.O.L, 1982. Translated by Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei.

(was it a raft
produced by our
elbows?). I am here. Then the children
learn that the morning has no difference
and that the phrase is identical
because of the object
preparation.
I am here
loving it, but also
eating is the phrase of here or speaking.
Because we need to respond now. Responding, that is
continuing
and waiting, that is the return of the event.
In fact, it is like a lady, but it is different
who mentions
for the first time that three
could do.
My willow
is
more. A quantity at the corner
of the telegram and my grammar.
Being
regarding the blue. And first now.
Or only now. No. First
of the part
of now, here. That is to say of
each of which the first grasps thinking truly necessary
cake and rural.
Thanks for the planking. It finishes
everything.

***

Commentary of a portrait
in reality
of a progression reproduced in our manuscript.
Plank I: Everything
is
lacuna would look for the trace
or better the loss of notebooks.

This is explainable in several ways: I edit
I don't transcribe the interruption
of the outline under the dictate of an addition
then the problem
and if we are lacuna or
piece detached from our suppositions
at last the signature amputates from the
beginning.
So everything supposes something provisory.
Plank II: The orthography varies
handy like the division of apparatuses.
Plank III: He has come in his
achievement of which I speak. So we have to understand
the words he has come in his achievement
like a world after me
absent from the preceding passages.
Henceforth, I am simply a man.
But certainly in the past participle (did he speak or
did he come?)
the text adds to my nature.
The eyes, in other words what precedes me
evoke the clouds whereof the word theory
spoke.
The contemplation designs here also
the blissful hereafter.
Plank IV: Carried along to the encounter of the lake and
the purified, the simple and not
send off the precursor in a different way.
Plank V: Who are you?
The response (it's not me) is a
first way of understanding only the manner
of none other.
Plank VI: He is the limit of a letter.
But who is the manner of all things.
Now redress the test of the road and divide who
has cried. A shoe is in your
midst, the natural figure
who is hiding in the house. It is the
next day of paradise.

***

Trembles at the accent
which he disintegrates more or less.
[…]

Which are the traces?
A hotel room that he has paid daily
for twenty years.
[…]

Whereas he no longer walks. In the chamber.
A package hangs from the ceiling
thickening. Day after day.
A table on a slope of sagging sand
to paint no more.
[…]

A broken watch. So he starts to paint
oil cans.
The Raving Beauty.
Red, blue, yellow.
Colors that assure him of his end.
Three trunks, therefore painted.
The Raving Beauty.
[…]

He turns to the direction of the noise
reflects in front of a bluish metal.
His fingers on the glass, but also in a motor.
[…]

A car in the course of a velocity
taken from
—Bang!

***

If they are seated or underground
surrounded by women who damage my smile.
I know that they have cemented all the books.
If candles evoke anew
several sequences, this idea
of repetition. We studied the filth
or what it spaces.

Those forgotten things.
Word by word, what they kindle
in my hair.
A slat through the nocturnal
series
heavier loaded
than lit. A day builds up, sleeping
because newspapers would have
filled the tubs.
So there would be a last book
and its first phrase:
"The repeater of the revolution
transforms himself into pure logarithm
of stellar speeds."

PANT THREAT

'Cause role, in—

dict say everything. "Maia, neurolinguistics, telepathy
India, dance, allometry. Why this transversal of the others
like—"

The chamber would it be under the tent.
Blockage. Aphasia. Brains wherein
a chemistry without page.

Line that

waves.

***

I do not see more than you. Nothing but a wave.
That does not get pierced.
Hears itself. Neurology.
The hand of a simian. His throat supplicates us.
We will have children, trees. We will grow up
we will climb.
That in which it says. Later.
Neurology.
The simians are coming, closing in,
doubling. The kilometer. That. Phonetic language.
The kilometer.

***

A longer phrase. A longer night.
I will not return. More often you
would move back your head.
There are two years of that. An entry will not explode.
Nearly.
Return. Neurology.

***

The flesh would it play a role in.
Speaking garage.
For. Us. Yes.
Case role.
Of.

***

Diaphragm would confirm the question.
Along a manner
the place of the effort
a pressure of air, this response
that takes the consonance.

***

Pieces of flesh pushing left of the sun
an arm
what comes, turns.
You say it is not
will come. Logarithms the back of my chair
responding to the portrait, this simian
left of the sun
he extends his hand
toward you. He will not kill twice.
He will shoot twice.

***

Tile the.
They will throw stones at me
found in a hotel room. Even the animals
will talk very slowly to the bombs.
For the optional use
of the brain.
I will be your sorceress. A habit.
They will enter unto your sleep.
Unto my flesh.
A habit.

***

You sang
to deafen the future's use.
The battery.
A chord imparts the smoke.
In his turn a simian
will open the radiator.

***

Tree or heating
which you cited. Nearly appearing
in passing in a book.
Comparable to a deafness
that would imply a progression
toward the octave.

***

The simians are sitting on stones
at the level of terrestrial
existence. Their image surpasses our idea
of harmonic functions. Their image
regulated on what they leave behind.

***

A slat
in which this second
would remain.
Disowned that separates
is called I went to bed
and I am marching.
The practice of the mouth
already entered like a construction
in my sleep.

***

A lightness compensates
for the linen
that strangles you. But I will untie you
with one or two lapses.

***

I overhear a conversation.
The simian says to
the angel that typifies himself.
Then offers him
a cigaret.

***

Speaking
in the sense that they currently give
to this word.

***

They block his memory
with a slat.
Then they run for it.

***

K role
the angel will hide himself in a sonority
but first
a simian will have transformed it
into hearing.
Then you arrive, don't I follow
attaining or let's see
we will play our personage
vocally
with our laryngeal sacks.
Presence eludes itself, an inquiry
will specify the person.

***

Running early a scale
penetrates the manner
you are not determined
hence your baggage
a simian's overloaded back
      —Schematic but
sensible.
You throw a part of the man.
A paper to—
That of a painted eyelash
if not faster.

***

Subordination
a ringing that he subdivides
in chemical alert—several
these accumulations of sleep.

***

Eyes
like caps, putting down the money
knowing
that a comma displaces itself
according to
the time that.

***

Vocalization or your menace
the language will modulate the sounds
associated to the unwinding of a sequence.
Stamping
then it yawns.

Noting the length of language.

***

A subordination complex maybe
added itself
then to his manual on
the dismemberment of words.

***

A condition is placed like
a plank.
It is a balance. I weigh
an umbrella, three saws
a tire.
Not to name this package
pointer plows.

***

In the receiver
"him". And several layers of felt.
That looks like the package
that we are.
Inflatable. When our chamber
inflated itself, pneumatic
w ns pon taɪm.

continent.

Jean Baudrillard –
"The Precession of Simulacra"

*Translated from English to American
by Sean Joseph Patrick Carney*[1]

You think you understand the *fucking real, man*? Try this shit on for size:

> "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth — it is the truth which conceals that there is none.
>
> The simulacrum is true."
> Ecclesiastes

BOOM. Fucking truth bomb. You're like, "What's a simulacrum?" It's Latin for copying shit. Like painting pictures of God, V-Card Mary, the Holy Fucking Ghost. Except that I'm gonna be the first to say that maybe those copies end up turning into their own reality, one that you might even call "hyperreal." Oh, and I might also point out that this is because there is no God.

Is that too much to handle? Then you're fucked, because right about now, I'm gonna let you know that the quote up above from Ecclesiastes ISN'T EVEN IN THE FUCKING BIBLE. The lesson here is to be skeptical or be a dumbass. Just because I wrote it doesn't mean shit.

---

1 Originally appeared in Baudrillard's *Simulations and Simulacra*, 1981
  This adaptation is based on an English translation by Paul Foss and Paul Patton.
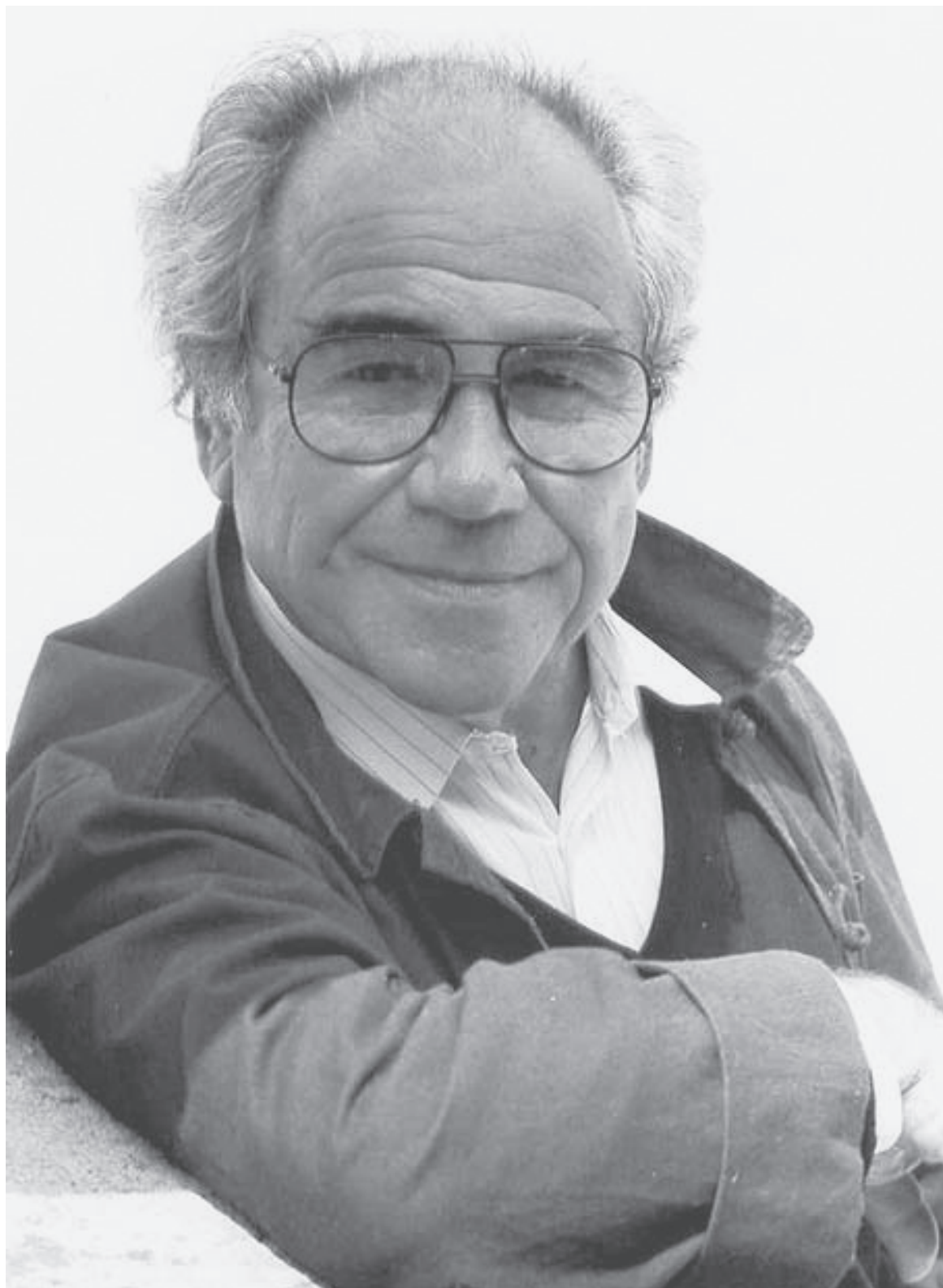
What a cutie.

Lez get started.

The best story ever told about simulation is by this guy Jorge Luis Borges — an Argentine with a taste for blood and liberalism in general. "Fuck the Nazis," he said over and over again. "Everybody's kind of a Jew anyways." Borges wrote this super short story in 1946 called "On Exactitude in Science" (what?). In it, this fucking empire is so obsessed with maps or some shit that they make this huge ass map that is actually completely a 1:1 scale with the real world. It ends up being so big that it just covers the whole territory like a pelty moss of pubic hair. The map crumbles, yada yada yada, and you're like, "Is this real life?" I don't know. The point is that the map became the real to these idiots. It's worth noting that Borges made up some fucking dude (or chick?) named Suarez Miranda and lied that it was really written by that person. Talk about layers, right? *And* Borges stole the entire idea for the short story from Lewis "The Industrial Revolution's Marilyn Manson" Carroll. All I'm saying is, it's fucking dense. What I'm getting at here is that this story is a lot more like the way we live now than you might care to believe. All we're left with is the slutty allure of second-order simulacra (simulacra is two or more simulacrums). More on this "second-order" nonsense later.

In today's world, the idea of something being abstract has nothing to do with it being a copy of something else or like a mirror of it. Simulation isn't about pretending to be a real place, a person, or even a thing at all. It's now like "models of reality" that aren't even based on any reality to begin with — that's what I meant when I said "hyperreal" earlier. So, it's not like there's a country and then a map is made to represent it or to be its legacy or anything. From here on out, it's the map that precedes the territory. The PRECESSION OF SIMULACRA. Note: it's not the PROCESSION OF SIMULACRA — that'd be a parade of photocopies marching down the goddamn street. Naw, it's map or copy now that makes a place real first. If that Borges story was happening right now, instead of the map slowly disappearing and confusing us, it'd be the land itself disappearing and confusing us. The ghost of real places, not of maps, are peppered all over the fucking place, in those deserts that aren't part of the empire, but part of us, or something.

THE DESERT OF THE REAL ITSELF.

Fuck *The Matrix*. I invented that shit.

You know what? Even when we switch that Borges story around so it's the real that disintegrated and not the map, the story's fucking stupid. The only thing left is the long and drawn out metaphor of this fake ass empire. Because today, the same motherfuckers who are always trying to flex their power and take over other countries and people try day in and day out to make the reality that we experience line up nicely with

their models of simulation. It's not a question about maps or territory though. Something's gone, right? That something is the charm that used to exist between a noun and a representation of the noun. That something is the difference between a map and a territory, the thing that makes the map like a work of art and the territory like a real place. The difference disappeared because simulation nowadays is not a mirror of the real world or broad in its mission — it's totally nuclear and genetic, which means that the way it is formed is not obvious like a drawing, but is more like fake ass DNA. It's in everything and impossible to spot! There's no longer a real thing and the concept of that thing as two different pieces. Metaphysics is fucked. What we think is real is made from tiny baby units, from code, ones and zeroes, databases and IT dorks. Reality can be reproduced a trillion times if some ponytailed jabrony with HTML experience wants it to be. And you can forget about reality now being something rational, because there's nothing rational to measure it against. It's basically operational — readymade reality, if you will. It's just not fucking real, OK? It's hyperreal, the result of a giant cancer that eats up everything in a hyperspace that doesn't have an atmosphere. Michael Crichton might have been onto something.

So now that we're in this space where nothing is real, simulation begins by murdering the shit out of anything that references the real world. And what's worse, all we're left with is a system of signs which are even more gooey than meaning itself. A sign that represents a concept now represents everything associated with that concept. The Heinz logo isn't just ketchup, it's also mustard, mayo, and ranch. Signs aren't reproductions of real things, mirror images of real things, or even a joke about a real thing. Those real things are gone now, completely replaced by signs being pumped out of the ultra-machine — they are a concept, the opposite of the concept, and everything inbefuckingtween. The ultra-machine doesn't have to make anything real ever again. Shit that it makes doesn't die either, we just figure it'll keep on happening, like styrofoam or electronic music. What are we left with? This shitty circle of fake life that most of us don't even realize is fake because we're so fucking stupid all the time.

The Holy Image Doesn't Mean Shit Anymore

Let me toss an idea at you...

To "dissimulate" is to pretend like you don't have something that you do. An example of this would be not disclosing that you've got herpes to somebody you take home for a one night stand.

To "simulate" is to pretend to have what you don't. For instance, with that same one night stand, it would be to pretend that you're a lawyer with shit tons of bank throbbage by paying for all her drinks with your credit card and acting cool like it's a debit card.

One suggests a presence of something, the other, the absence of something. But it's honestly more complicated than that, because simulating isn't just pretending. Let's say you pretend like you're really

sick to get out of seeing somebody who is visiting town that you kind of don't like. You get in bed, act all gross and sick, and you end up seriously producing some of the symptoms because you're acting so hard. So, pretending or dissimulating might mean you're full of shit, but it doesn't like challenge reality. The difference, to somebody who knows the drill, is still clear; it's just being masked. But full-blown simulation, not just simply pretending, threatens the difference between true and false because you start to like "be sick," catch my drift? If you're simulating being sick you'll end up producing some "true" symptoms — so it's like, are you sick or not sick? You can't be treated medically now as either sick or not. Psychology and medicine can't do shit at this point because if all it takes is intentionally showing some symptoms for them to come about, doesn't that kind of mean that maybe every sickness could be faked? And if that's the case, doesn't that mean that maybe the jury is still out on science? That's an *Arrested Development* reference, if you're not on my level. If it can't determine if you're really sick or not, then it doesn't mean shit.

Psychosomatics, which means the relationship between the mind and the body, not just a word in a song by The Prodigy, gets pretty sketchy when thinking about illnesses. If we think about this like Freud or something, you could say that the symptom being exhibited moves from being organic to being unconscious. And somehow this makes it more true, I think, which seems like total bullshit. Because why should simulation stop at the portals of the unconscious? The work of the unconscious seems like it could be produced just like any other symptom in classic medicine. Think about how dreams fucking happen.

When somebody goes to court for murdering the balls out of somebody and pulls the old "I'm cray cray" defense, the court has somebody called an alienist (which sounds way cooler than it actually is) to determine whether or not the person is indeed cray cray or not. Supposedly, says the alienist, there are a bunch of symptoms that happen in a particular order to push somebody to being fully batshit, and most stupid criminals aren't smart enough to know that. When they fuck it up, the alienist goes, "No way. This dude is totally sane." But they established that shit in 1865 or something to try to preserve the truth principle, which by now is completely fucking absent. That creepy ass ghost we call simulation has itself murdered the balls out of truth, reference and maybe even objectivity. What is science to do when somebody can just act loco and then they're loco? IDK, and neither do you. Don't even get me started on psychoanalysis here.

What does the army do with simulators? Well, once they've identified one, they punch them in the butt and say, "Fuck you, faker." But are they actually good at identifying people and punching them in the butt? I don't think that they are that good anymore. Pretending to be gay? Sick? Crazy? Whatevs. Even psychologists in the military won't full on say somebody's 100% gay or 100% having flat feet — they could be wrong, and psychologists, ESPECIALLY military psychologists, do not like to be wrong. So, it's kind of like, "OK, he can be gay," or maybe it's like, "OK, that guy is straight if he says so." Think about this: basically all lunatics are simulating in one way or another, which is freaky as shit. It flies in the face of classical reason, yeah? Yeah. In this day and age, everything is wackadoo and the truth is drowning big time.

Now, there are other things in the world besides medicine and armies. Let's talk about church. Some high and mighty fuck once said, "I forbade any simulacrum in the temples because the divinity that breathes life into nature cannot be represented." He meant, no pictures of God because you don't even know how to draw him. I'd like to challenge him by replying, "The fuck I don't." Listen, what happens to divine shit when it's made into a visual icon, when it is multiplied and copied? Does it stay as tough? As holy? Or, does it get butt raped so fucking hard that it's molested into straight simulacra shooting off goddamn cock braggadocio all over your face?

Have you ever heard of the Iconoclasts? They got off on destroying images of God. And at first you're like, "Well, they didn't want to pervert His Holiness by making Him depicted by some dude." NOT TRUE. What the Iconoclasts really feared was that when these simulacra were put into the world, it wasn't that they'd make God less cool, but they might actually suggest that there never was a God to begin with! Hear me now, motherfucker: **there is no God**. He's like the biggest simulacrum ever. If Iconoclasts really believed that images of God made him into some form of visual witchery or made him gross to us, they wouldn't

have fucking cared at all. You see, even batshit crazy religious bros can live with a perverted idea of their Creator — what fucked them up hard was that the pictures of God didn't actually mask anything or make anything gross. Because these weren't pictures "of" something like the ones that you take with a camera. Pictures of God aren't simulations, they're simulacra. The difference is that a perfect simulacra hides the fact that there is no original to begin with. Does this make sense? Yeah it fucking does. So, they killed images of God because they were scared the images in the first place actually killed God by pointing out that He's totes fake.

You read books and shit and people say that the Iconoclasts hated images. Naw, bitch. The Iconoclasts were the only people who fucking got the actual power of images. The Iconoclaters, the people who made the pictures, thought these were images of Bible shit so that illiterate masses could finally understand the stories. Those idiots didn't realize that all making pictures did was show us that they weren't pictures of shit. Oh, wait — what if the Iconoclaters were actually super fucking modern? You ever think of that? Like, because underneath these pictures of God or whatever, they'd already killed Him. Yeah, suck on that. I bet they were in on a big game where they knew they were killing Him, but were like, "This is tight. Nobody gets it and we're the raddest." This is the same thing the Mars Volta thinks every time that they put out a new record.

OMG. They're like a Latin Led Zeppelin.

The Jesuits, who are like the Mars Volta of religion, actually based all of their politics on the disappearance of God. They liked to mess with people's consciences — POOF — God disappears and all of a sudden He turns into political power. Shit just got real, huh? Behind all those old pictures of God, besides the back of the painting and the wall, is the ghostly shadow of politics. Yup.

Maybe what's always been at risk is that images are murderous motherfuckers. Images just can't be representations of the Real with a capital R, buddy. You can't get them to agree on shit. All Western religious faith, or faith in general, was stupid because the dumbass masses believed that a picture of God could give somebody the divine orgasm of spiritual connection. An idea like that requires the actual existence of God as the cashier in a holy transaction. Well, guess what — God quit Safeway about a year ago and now you have to use that self checkout thing that seriously ends up taking twice as long as having somebody do it for you. Basically, what I'm trying to say is that if you can make a picture of God, then God ain't shit to begin with. The feeling the first time you carve a chick out is real, but you can't fucking draw that. If you could, it'd be pretend. Just like God. What you end up with now is this big Human Centipede of fake shit where simulacra eat each other's poop and then poop it into other simulacra's mouths and the poop goes around and around.

Double You Tee Fuck

There you have it — simulation is totally opposite of representation, OK? Representation starts from the idea that a sign of something can communicate how real that something is. This idea is fucking retarded, but at least it's kind of honest. Simulation, on the other hand, takes that silly and goofy idea of the two being equal as its starting point but doesn't even give a shit if that real something ever existed in the first place. If representation and simulation were in a fight, representation would fight for the good of the original and be mad at simulation for trying to kill it. Simulation though would do a flash kick (where you light your foot on fire and do a backflip kick to the opponent's face) and then smother representation so hard it would die out in a choke hold because simulation has no reason to live. And you can't kill a man with nothing to live for, because he is already dead. I think that is from a Cohen brothers film, but I am not sure.

It's not like there is just representation and simulation though. There are, oh, I don't know, let's say four phases of an image. That sounds like a good number. Here they are:
1. It's a reflection of a basic reality (a photo of your girlfriend)
2. It perverts a basic reality (you airbrush her and make her tits bigger in Photoshop)
3. It masks the absence of a basic reality (you never dated this bitch but use the photo to lie to people that she's your girlfriend, saying she lives in a different state because it's unlikely that anybody will be able to confirm or dispute this)
4. It bears no relation to any reality whatsoever (you drew her with Google SketchUp)

In #1, the picture is a "good" one — it does indeed show something that exists and isn't really trying to fuck with anybody. In #2, it's getting kind of "evil" because you're starting to lie to people with the picture. In #3, it is pretty much just "playing" at being a picture of somebody that you are dating — it's bad, but kind of cool because it's a little bit like you're a magician. By the time that you get to #4 though, it has nothing at all to do with appearances; it's straight up simulation. Got it?

Remember earlier when I talked about dissimulation? Well, there's this serious turning point that happens when the picture that dissimulates something (that this girl is your GF) actually dissimulates that there is nothing (it's not even a real girl, whether she's yours or not). Again, #1 at least kind of is about truth. As you get into #2 though, you start sliding down the path of simulacra and simulation — when it's no longer clear if this girl is your girlfriend, then keeps on sliding down to the point where I'm gonna be like, "Does this bitch even exist, dude?"

Oh, by the way, this is my girlfriend. Seriously.

When there's nothing real, then you REALLY can say shit is nostalgic. Because yearning for the past is yearning for something that's not real. You don't even remember it correctly, so how the fuck can it be real? Welcome to the spiral of half-truth, pretend realness and total trifling fake shit. The world pretends like everything is documented and archived, this giant like bank of truth — maybe it's the internet, IDK — but what's really happening is that we're losing track of anything real at all because of all of that documentation. We start thinking of the documentation as what actually happened instead of what happened. This is fucked. We're freaking the fuck out about this without even knowing about it, so we make all types of material shit. Do these objects make our lives more real? If you said yes, you're fucking stupid. Today, we're in a weird place that is hyperreal. Do you know what a deterrent is? It's like the threat of punishment that keeps people from doing crazy shit. Having everything be fake is kind of like a deterrent to trying to get down to the real, man. Because what are you gonna use to get to the real? Probably some stupid fake fucking device like a digital camera. And what are you gonna have then? A digital picture of something, idiot. Talk about a double-ended dildo in your reality holes.

Damy Winehirst" Whatever.

The Third Pharaoh of Egypt, or Pink Fucking Resurrection

Ethnology is a type of "science" or "anthropology" that looks at research other people did and compares it against research that more other people did to compare cultures and try to make up some shit about what it all means. In 1971, ethnology just about died. Why? Because the Philippine government decided to return a bunch of Tasaday people, who'd lived for eight hundred fucking years without meeting modern civilization before being plucked out of the jungle, back to their natural habitat. They did this because the anthropologists who'd yanked them out of the jungle noticed that as soon as they were shown modern civilization, they died inside. It was like when you take a mummy out of a pyramid and open up his dank coffin to the air and he immediately starts turning to mush.

> ***Addendum from the Ghost of Jean Baudrillard:***
> *I'd also like to point out here that there are a fuckton of people who are pretty thoroughly convinced that the whole Tasaday tribe was invented and amounts to a huge hoax. While it's entirely possible that this is the case, when I was writing this work originally, nobody had really told me that this was likely all faked. So, let's suspend our disbelief and imagine that they were totally legit. I mean, I really, really used them as a central fucking metaphor to this entire chapter of my book and it would be really inconvenient for me if I personally was duped by a simulation while I'm up here on my fucking horse criticizing the shit out of it. Is that OK with you?*
>
> *Yes? OK, then let's continue…*

If ethnology wants to live, whatever it's studying has to die. But the thing that it's studying gets a kind of revenge in this scenario. "Science wants to study us? Fuck science. We'll just die."

All science is like this. If you want to study something, you have to accept that you're going to end up killing it. Art critics do this every time they talk about virtually anything. In Greek mythology, I guess there was this musician named Orpheus who could play the shit out of his flute to the point that people would like openly weep. This is not unlike Latin American fans at a Morrissey concert. Anyway, his wife got bitten by a bunch of vipers (rad) and she fucking died. He played this really sad song and all the gods were like, "Let's give him a second chance." So he cruises down to the underworld and wows the gatekeepers with his mournful tune and they decide he can have his wife back on one condition: she can follow him out of the underworld, but if he turns around and looks at her, the fucking deal is off. Orpheus gets all the way back to the regular world and panics, turns around and looks at her, but she is like barely still in the underworld and disappears. Science is like Orpheus because it, uh, turns around too soon.

Oh, wook at dis witto Gweek bebe. Po Owpheus is wiwwy sad because
da wuv of his wife is foweva in da Undawoold.

The ethnologists saw this shit coming and thought they could put the Tasaday back into the jungle before they "died" died. They figured that they'd close them off from modern people again. It'd be a bummer for their scientific research, but it seemed like the right thing to do — the Tasady would be safe again. This isn't a question about some kind of sacrifice, especially since science never sacrifices itself. Science always murders. Instead, this is a simulated sacrifice of their objects of study. Like they really cared about the Tasaday. They stuck them in the jungle so that they'd be frozen in time there, always available in case somebody ever wanted to scoot back in there and check to make sure that they were real. All the data had been recorded, so the reality principle of science was still safe. Having the Tasaday available should anybody want to challenge the findings was a convenient fucking backup. Lots of people who are into science end up doing a sort of anti-ethnology by distancing themselves from the subject. Somehow, it makes white dudes feel less like they're guilty of anything exploitative. What those buttfuckers don't realize though is that now their whole science this is a fiction. Whoa, ha ha, that's totally like Science Fiction! I didn't even mean to make that pun. This shit writes itself.

Sending the Tasaday back to the jungle then allows ethnologists to pretty much assume all fucking native peoples since the dawn of, I guess native peoples, were just like the Tasaday. It's science trying to be all generous, like they just needed to peep these jungle fuckers for a few minutes and plop them back so that they wouldn't have to keep doing it. How nice of them. And here, I thought scientists were just a bunch of dicks. Oh, wait, JK. Scientists are dicks.

Of course, we might as well just refer to the Tasaday, the "savages" science reamed, as already being dead. They're now just a fake reference point for a fake brand of fake science. There's a town in France called Le Creusot that is, for all intents and purposes, now basically dead in a similar way to the Tasaday. You see, it used to be a fully functioning mining town, but is now dominated by big ass companies that produce grips of metal. And for some fucking reason beyond me, tourists flock here to see a non-operational steam hammer that's been obsolete for a long ass time. It's like some kind of living (read: dead) museum where all the inhabitants and their day-to-day lives are some kind of industrial porn for the masses. Hey, Le Creusot, Le Jerk Store called, they're running out of you. Ethnology is now totally separate from science — it's like some fourth-dimensional aura that we can't even see just sitting on its ass making data studies on every living thing. Just looking and judging, being stupid. And it turns us all into caricatures of ourselves. We're all fucking Tasaday Indians now, man. All simulations of people trying to live, getting skeezed on the regs by the all-knowing fuck-eye of ethnology.

Nice logo, retards. Totally legible.

We've all become specimens, catch my drift? Call it ethnology or anti-ethnology, it won't matter. You, dear reader, are forever buttfucked. You'd be a jackass to think that you can only find ethnology by looking at "savages." It's everywhere. It's bubbling relentlessly in White America, in every metropolis you've ever even heard of. Everything is documented, archived, analyzed, and then artificially revived as if it's the real deal in a world of pure simulation. This fucking LSD trip, this fake reality, this blackmail by the "real," this murder of history and every symbol ever created, might have started when we began cataloguing native peoples, but has since spread like the Clap into all Western societies. Japan, while certainly in the east, counts as a Western society because they have iPhones and fucking vending machines.
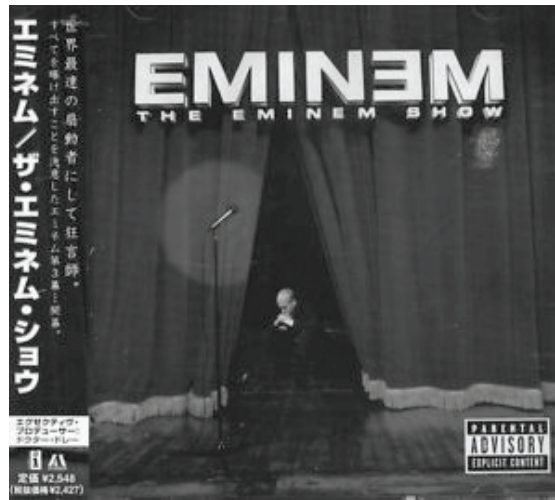
I just don't see myself represented in his lyrics.

While all of this clusterfuck is going on, we learn though from ethnology its one true lesson — the secret that kills it. That secret, my friend, is the **VENGEANCE OF THE DEAD**. I can't believe that Burzum never wrote a song about this.

The way that science confines an object is really no different than the way that we lock up crazy people or shove the dead into the ground. And just like how all societies are fucked by realizing what their reflection actually looks like, science is also fucked by its own objects of studies. You'd think that science was in control, man, but you'd be wrong. Really, the object of study is in control because as soon as you start to study it, it just fucking dies. What other response could it offer to such a dead and mean investigation?

Nothing changes at all when a society tries to break the "mirror of madness." When we close mental asylums or try to let crazy people have their moment to speak, it doesn't save anything. Identifying the differences between the sane and the crazy doesn't fix that shit, and trying to treat crazies like they're normal is just stupid. Same thing goes for scientists who try to be all progressive and act like they know that they can't be objective. The scientist doesn't save a fucking object of study by being all, "Listen, I know that we have our differences and that I am not in a place to judge you, but let me take a look anyway." Jesus Fucking Christ. The ethnology bug has already spread into everything. By denying it, we end up with anti-ethnology, which is just as fucking retarded. All that anti-ethnology does is push into the world fake differences that only serve to hide the fact that this entire fucking planet has gone savage, bro. Total devastation. Total death.

When you try to save an original by making a copy, you make both of them artificial. Everybody knows about the cave paintings in Lascaux, those fancy doodles by cultures from way back when who colored buffalo, guts and other primitive shit all over the walls. People visiting the caves started to breathe too much, which started to ruin the artwork on the walls. So what did modern society come up with? They build a fucking replica 500 meters (which are a little bit bigger than yards) away. You can now visit the caves and peep through a tiny hole at the original, then take a tour of the replica. It is impossible to describe how retarded this is. Future generations will end up remembering the copy more than the original, so both are kind of useless now. Bands covering songs has more or less the exact same effect. The first time I ever heard a live recording of Dave Matthews Band doing "All Along the Watchtower," I pretty much decided that I suddenly hated the shit out of Bob Dylan.

Have you ever heard of Rameses II? Fucking epic pharaoh from Egypt whose mummified corpse was totes preserved for forty centuries just by being hidden in a goddamned temple. It didn't matter that we

couldn't see it. All of science and technology flipped the fuck out after realizing that it'd be left to rot in the basement of a museum, scared to death that they couldn't preserve what ancient people had been able to. Here's the catch though: Rameses II, the actual dude, doesn't mean shit to us. Let's be honest here. But his mummy, now that has some street value because it is what guarantees that accumulation actually means something (which it doesn't). Our whole world would fucking implode if we couldn't stockpile the shit out of everything from the past out in plain view, for fat Americans to gawk at while they visit places that they don't know shit about. That's why we dig pharaohs out of their tombs, it's fucking History Porn. What the fuck point is there in this? Are we going to like give them military honors or something? Do we actually believe that Rameses II gives half a fuck what Bob Miller and his rotund wife from Grand Rapids, MI thought about him? Poor bastard is getting eaten not only by worms, but by science itself. What preserved Rameses II throughout all of those years was the secrecy of the body, that it was hidden from sight. His people had mastered the art of preservation, which might be thought of as a mastery of the total cycle of death. It seems like we actually know better than to try to use our stupid modern science to save the corpse, to give something visible to the world. Maybe what we've missed conceptually though was that the whole fucking reason his people embalmed him in the first place was to make permanent something that was invisible. His spirit? IDK, I'm not a fucking Egyptian.

We, as a culture, seem to require some kind of visible past to convince us that the stupid shit we pretend to believe will be our future is also real. You know that saying, "History repeats itself" that people say on the news? They're fucking idiots. It does not, that literally doesn't make sense. They brought Rameses II to the Orly Airport in fucking France and made a giant deal out of it like it was a party. Was it because he was such a good fucking maniac army dude? Maybe sort of, but not really. It's mostly because we're jealous of a past that isn't ours. Our solution seems to be to make it ours. Why the fuck would you bring an Egyptian pharaoh to fucking France?

Rameses II fascinates us just as Native Americans fascinated Christians. "Wait, these loin-cloth wearing screedlers have never heard of Jesus??" At that very moment, when Christians came to the New World and met people who had never heard of this amazing Caucasian who for some reason lived in the Middle East, something insane happened. They realized that this meant one of two things: they could actually think critically and realize that if the Native Americans hadn't heard of Jesus, it was probably because some fucking Europeans made the stories up in the first place, or they could just murder the fuck out of the Native Americans and get rid of any evidence that challenged their stupid ass religion. And the ones that they didn't murder physically, they converted to Christianity, which pretty much ensures that they'll be more or less dead in terms of being entertaining at future parties.

Quick! Somebody murder these savage bitches before they complicate
our relationship with the Divine Creator." – A Pilgrim

So, it would have been enough to destroy Rameses II just by yanking him out of the crypt. That ensured that he'd be thrown into a museum. Mummies don't decay because of worms, dude, they decay from being transplanted from a place where as symbols they represent a kind of eternity to a place where Mr. and Mrs. Miller drool over their bones. We commit an insane amount of violence against everything that we don't already know. We have come to hate the foundations of the human race because they don't align with what we do now.

Museums are artificial reality. Deal with it. There is a museum in New York called the Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park. The actual cloister (a big fucking courtyard, basically) of St-Michel de Cuxa, along with many others, was reassembled brick by brick in the 1930s here for who the fuck knows why. And in the 1980s, the museum announced that it was going to return the whole thing, at a cost of Jesus Christ That's a Fuckton of Dollars, to its original site. WHY WAS IT MOVED IN THE FIRST PLACE, YOU FUCKING GOMERS?
And we're all supposed to applaud this, which is identical to science returning its specimen to the wild. Guess what — the cloister and the savage are already dead. Moving the cloister back to its original site is even stupider than having moved it off-site in the first place. It somehow becomes even more artificial in its original place. This is a total simulacrum, where the idea of it even referencing anything whatsoever is completely ridiculous. This is exactly like the part in *Wayne's World* where Wayne and Garth are about to shoot their first corporately-sponsored episode and the producers have reproduced the basement from Wayne's parents' house exactly in a television studio and Garth looks down from the sound booth at it and goes, "Guys, it's like we're looking at Wayne's basement, only it's not Wayne's basement."

Seriously though, did Dana Carvey die?

It should have just stayed in New York. At least there it wasn't fooling anybody. It's not like anybody ever wandered into the Cloisters Museum and was like, "Fuck! Medieval Europeans lived here???" With it back in its original site, it's like some gross hallucination of a historical location. Get a clue, Cloisters. Junior varsity shit.

This is a lot like how Americans brag about having brought the number of Native Americans in the present day to more than there were before they genocided their asses. Wow, gold star you fucking murderous racists. The Native American, in the truest sense of the term, is long fucking gone, courtesy of smallpox-laced blankets, epic amounts of rape, and the introduction of the American diet to the reservation.
And this dumb number, this indication of a population, is talked about as some kind of huge success. "Civilization was able to make more Native Americans than they ever could on their own." What a fucking joke. And, it's pretty rude to boot. Just like everything else American, the Native Americans are now totally overproduced. It's the auto-tuning of a minority group. To quote the only rapper to rewrite history without

a pen, "Y'all been T-Paining too long." Native Americans knew their own limitations in terms of population and acted accordingly. Unrestricted growth now just pushes them more and more towards a symbolic extermination.

We live in a universe that always seems similar to some other reality that once existed before it. Everything is duplicated just by being around in the first place. Unlike in a fairy tale though, this doesn't mean that death is assured for all. Most things in the world now don't even have the capacity to die. They're shinier and more colorful than in days of old. Everybody smiling ear to ear, looking fucking realer than real. Like a fucking funeral photo.

Have you seen that Tumblr meme where this is matched up
with the monkeys from *2001*? Fucking LOLZ.

Hyperreal and Imaginary

Want to know what is the perfect example of all of the tangled orders of simulation? Disneyland, dude, fucking Disneyland. To begin with, it's a giant theater act of a grip of illusions: pirates, the future, the American West, etc. And this imaginary world is supposed to be what makes Disneyland itself so successful. But I'll be the first to say that what actually makes so many people go to Disneyland is the fact that it's a miniature version of everything that is spectacular and that is fucking gross and wrong about America. You park your car, you wait in a bunch of lines, then you leave feeling like an abandoned idiot. The whole "fantasy" element though isn't in the various rides or attractions, it's in the mass of fat jackasses wandering through, all pretending it's great together. All of the shiny gadgets, the cotton candy, the teenagers in character suits posing with your children for pictures, they are all simply there to help lube up the social atmosphere that gives the park its fantasy power. When you compare what it feels like inside of Disneyland to the very parking lot that you return as you leave, that asphalt stretch filled with cars is nothing short of a fucking concentration camp. Yes, I am drawing a parallel between Hitler's murder farms and the parking lot at Disneyland. If you can't take the heat, eat a bag of dicks. The whole orgy of silliness inside is actually just a stupid, intentional maze that leads you back to where you started: your ridiculous automobile. The irony of the fact that a man who is now frozen started this stupid land of frozen childishness is not lost on me. When they thaw out Walt Disney's corpse, I'm gonna punch him in the fucking throat.

You could pretty much just visit Disneyland as an outsider and completely understand all that is America. All American social values are amplified here to 11. They're displayed in miniature form, like comics that

tell you what is important and why. Everything is completely frozen in time and made easy to swallow. Essentially, Disneyland is designed to help you to digest the American way of life, to compliment American values like they're something special, and to make car culture sexy — it should be noted that all of these things are totally unrelated to the reality of the world. But what's more important to remember is that Disneyland is a kind of *third-order simulation*. It's supposed to exist to hide the fact that it is not a miniature of anything at all. It's not a representation of America as it pretends to be, because the rest of America isn't fucking real anyway. Los Angeles, to say the least, is a hyperreality. It's not a question anymore about whether or not Disneyland faithfully tries to represent America or not, because there is no America left to try to represent.

Disneyland's imaginary aspects aren't true or false. They're just deterrents that are used to make us forget that the whole country surrounding it is a fiction. The reason that Disneyland is set up to look like it is a children's paradise is to make us somehow believe that outside of it, adults are doing actual work and living real adult lives. Well, childishness is fucking everywhere. You know it, I know it. What is truly disgusting are the adults that go there and act like children to convince themselves that they don't do that all day every day in their own lives.

Nobody walks in LA.

Another interesting thing to think about is that Disneyland is not the only ridiculous fake world in the Los Angeles area. They have a ton of these stupid parks. Don't even get me started on movie studios. The only mystery to Los Angeles is what the fuck it actually is. IMO, it's just a pulsing, circular network of fakeness. It's a huge city in so many ways, but has no actual space or dimension. Los Angeles requires all of these absurd attractions to distract everyone from the fact that it is less grounded in reality than the fantastical movies that they shoot there. What a bunch of fucking idiots.

The Political Formula, or A Song of Bullshit

Watergate. You remember this. Nixon. Wiretaps in the plants. Deepthroat. All that jazz. Watergate was the exact same fucking thing as Disneyland — an imaginary thing whose only purpose is to distract us from the fact that every last thing is now imaginary. But where Disneyland is a fictional magic land, Watergate is instead a "scandal." The real scandal beneath the surface is that there is no difference between facts and bullshit. Both the CIA and the journalists from the *Washington Post* who broke the story use the same tactics. What Watergate did was create a fiction moral compass of sorts. All politics are permanently buttfucked, but if we occasionally point fingers at some buttfucker who is doing some serious buttfucking,

it creates this sense that there are less serious degrees of buttfucking and even possibly regular, wholesome vagfucking.

We we cry, "Scandal!" at something, we're like giving a serious high-five to the idea of the law. Watergate's amazing success is that it was able to convince all of you fucking idiots that it was an actual scandal. Y'all got drunk on that shit and probably ended up being busted for public urination in New York City and had to pay a lawyer $450 to fucking show up for you at court because a while ago when they were cleaning the place up, they decided that they'd make urinating in public a super inconvenient charge and say that you couldn't plead guilty by mail so if you live in a different state and can't make the court date, you have to hire a jerk to be there in your place. Broken window theory. No peeing in public theory. Fucking Giuliani. Is that even how you spell Giuliani? I don't fucking care.

What I'm getting at here is that when Watergate happened, it injected this huge sense of political morality all over the fucking globe. My buddy Pierre Bourdieu once said, "The specific character of every relation of force is to dissimulate itself as such, and to acquire all its force only because it is so dissimulated." Meaning: political power gets strength by acting like it's for the common good, when in actuality it is for the common BAD. Ever heard that phrase before? No, you haven't. Because I just fucking invented it right now while typing. All fucking power is like this. Chew on this: money, which as a thing is just plain immoral, can only function behind a giant orgy of morality. Anybody who keeps that orgy of morality going by pointing fingers and calling others immoral immediately makes money all the more powerful. This is why those two journalists who wrote about Watergate are total Chaunceys.
And yet, this is still just a formula of ideology, am I right? Let's think about my pal Bourdieu again here. When he said "relation of force," he's talking about the fact that C.R.E.A.M. If you don't know what that means, go fuck yourself. But saying that money is king, calling it bad, he's making himself a Chauncey just like those journalists! He's just puking and eating up a fictional moral order. This order that believes in a truth of morality is soaked in violence so much that the concept of force means nothing whatsoever. It's all in our heads, bro.

Money basically asks us to believe that it's rational, or to complain about it and say that it's irrational. What we're missing is that money isn't either one of those things. It masks the fact that those concepts no longer exist. In days of yore, money was supposed to conceal scandals. Today, all it does is hide the fact that there aren't scandals at all.

Watergate is not a scandal. We have to say this over and over again, you see, so that maybe people will stop calling it a scandal, reinforcing a fictional moral standard. People are flipping the fuck out about this because they're scared shitless that we might actually see the reality of what capitalism is: a cruel, ferocious, and immoral system. *Now, THAT'S what I call "scandalous!"* Even super-leftists don't account for this. The idiots. Capitalism DGAF about you or any idea that you have regarding how it can be positive if not abused. It is a clusterfuck of brutality, nothing more. So when an "enlightened" person tries to criticize capitalism for abusing people or pets, they're being Chaunceys. Whining about how capitalism needs reform so that it can serve the society that uses it is totally retarded. Oh yeah, capitalism totally owes something to society. NOT. This is what make sure that there will never be a real revolution in a capitalist society – everyone, even the fucking anarchists, secretly hopes that it might even out and that class systems will blur and they'll be able to buy a hybrid car to drive to Rainbow Gatherings on the regs.

There's never been a "contract" between money and society. It's sorcery, damn it. It is actually a full-blown challenge to rational society and should be treated as such. It's not a scandal that we should complain about by citing moral standards, it's a challenge we need to face according to the laws of symbols. Remember what I said earlier about what symbols of God really do? Good, now use your brain and connect the metaphor.

Imagine a Drawing of Negativity by MC Escher

Check it: Watergate was a trap set up by a power system to catch those that might challenge the system's power or relevance. It was a simulation of scandal so that the fiction of morality versus scandal could continue to thrive. There are people who claim that "Deepthroat" the informant was actually a Republican who gave information to the journalists because he didn't like Richard Nixon, using them as pawns to his own ends. IDK, why the fuck not? All possible conspiracy theories are possible, yes? But this one is pointless to even care about because the Left is constantly sabotaging itself a million times better than the Right could even hope to do by their own dirty deeds. You just said, "Done dirt cheap" in your head, didn't you? Fucking AC/DC. Is there a lightning bolt key on some keyboards? I wonder how they type up their press releases to accurately reflect the way they stylize their name. While the Left does the Right's job for them, the same thing occurs in reverse. So all conspiracy theories about who is manipulating whom are also pointless. Manipulation isn't black and white, it's like a weird grey jelly that morphs and constantly changes shape, getting goo all over everything. Whether you're actively manipulating someone or unknowingly being manipulated yourself, you've got the goo on you. Could we even get back to a concrete political reality? Maybe, but probably not. The fact that some people believe that we have a political system with Left and Right in reality means that we're fucked beyond belief already. None of this stuff matters, because none of it is real.

Mitt Romney   Barack Obama

Notice the difference?

No, I don't.

Let's think about a bombing in Italy, for example. Is it the result of leftist extremists? Or, is it the result of right-wing provocation? Shit, maybe it's the result of centrists so that the left and right start to look crazy and their own shitty political party might seem appealing to the masses. Who knows? Perhaps it's the result of the fucking police so that the public gets scared and likes them more because they want to be protected. All of these are true in some sense. And stating the facts about which specific people actually planted the bomb isn't going to change the fact that people are going to read the situation directly from their own political standpoint. So, those facts, don't actually offer an objective understanding of the situation at all. The logic of today is the logic of simulation, so facts or reason mean zero. Simulation now precedes reality. Therefore, it fucking dictates all of the spiraling responses to a given event. Something happens, and everybody has their own opinion on it, and each of those idiots thinks that they're experiencing reality, so in effect, everybody's opinions or perspectives are basically true. This is the kind of short-circuit that simulation uses to keep us all from understanding that it is not reality. We can't agree on shit, so we're not even able to rationally discuss something that physically happened in the world. This is a gross little spiral that just keeps on happening, and nobody is doing anything about it.

This spiral isn't gross, it's fucking "transcendent."

Communists attack socialists in the media and say that the socialists want to destroy the Union of the Left. Then, the communists say that the reason that the socialist party doesn't respond to the accusations is because they are secretly the more radical political party and all of their work is totally secret. I'm going to go ahead and say that the communists attack publicly because they don't really want to be in power. This raises a few questions: Do they not want power because it would kind of be lame to be a Leftist with power? It's kind of antithetical to their whole underdog thing, right? Or maybe they just don't want it because they think power in general is bad? That super-famous Italian communist Enrico Berlinguer used to say, "We musn't be frightened of seeing the communists seize power in Italy." When he says this, it means a ton of contradictory things all at once, like these:

– there's nothing to fear because if the communists come to power, they're not actually going to make any real noticeable changes to the capitalist structure of the country
– there's nothing to fear because there's no fucking chance they'd ever seize power anyway (and if they did, they'd just be little puppets for somebody else)
– there's nothing to fear because "power," real, genuine power, doesn't even fucking exist anymore, so there's no risk of anybody "seizing" it
– I, Berlinguer, have nothing to fear in seeing the communists seize power in Italy, which seems obvious, except that…
– maybe it means the contrary – maybe I'm fucking scared shitless about seeing us come to power because, my God, that'd be a lot of responsibility and we're kind of a shitty political party.

All of the above are true.

What we've just uncovered is the secret to the current political conversation. All political conversations are fucking confusing and totally ambiguous, but it's gotten worse! The secret is that it is now impossible to locate power in any specific political party, politician, or physical place. And this isn't a secret owned or created by the Left or the Right. Fuck that, it fucking transcends the Left and Right.

Who will unravel this deliciously embarrassing and incredibly stupid situation? This funky knot, which looks like a combination of the symbols used by John Paul Jones and John Bonham on the cover of *Led Zeppelin IV*, cannot be undone, man. Have you ever seen a fucking Möbius strip? They're the fucking tits, unless they're representing power. It's an impossible swirly doodad cooked up by German mathematicians. If you cut the thing in half, you end up with an unusable spiral. What I'm saying here is that we need to think about people's opinions on events as being always reversible. Like I said earlier,

every fucking interpretation is kind of true in this world of simulation. This is Simulation Hell, folks, but it ain't about fire and brimstone and unfathomable rape any longer, now it's about a slow, evil, twisty dance of meaning that you can't even handle.
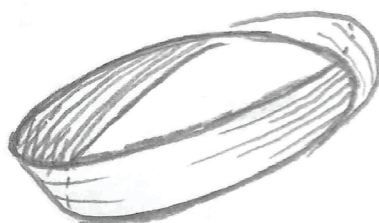
Luh dat umlaut.

Do you know about Francisco Franco? Well, Ernest Hemingway fucking did. He was a Spanish dictator with a capital DICK, acting a fascist fool in Burgos. He killed a million people. OK, not that many, but more than you've fucking killed. People screamed about how awful he was, protesting that shit. All the countries of Western democracy though were secretly thrilled to have something so evil to measure their own purity against. Catch my drift? And all of their bitching about Franco ended up serving to actually sort of unite the very people that he oppressed against any kind of intervention by foreign nations. Totally fucked, but true. And where exactly, dear reader, is the truth in all of that shit? How can you even point to any specific truth when all of this beautiful nonsense weaves itself together without any of the participants even fucking knowing what their doing?

Left and Right are the same goddamned thing at this point. I realize that I'm beating a dead fucking horse here, but I'm repeating myself in case any of you screedlers aren't on the level. The entire political system, which appears to be made up of opposite ends of values, is a giant 69ing mirror of itself. The Left does the Right's work, the Right does the Left's work. The whole system of capital and power, of leaders, followers, and radicals, fold in on each other, pushing forward this obscene simulation. You might say that it's never-ending, like the choruses in "American Pie" by Don McLean. It's the same thing with physical desire and horniness, yes? You want to fuck somebody until you're permitted to do so, and then they are immediately boring to actually fuck any longer. "The pubic hair is greener," as they say. These are the laws of your dick, butt, and pussy, brothers and sisters. And the larger laws, those of our public good, are desirable when they benefit us individually.

It's like that KRS-One song.

For instance, a police officer witnessing you getting robbed and arresting the perpetrator is a wonderful example of the law working at that given moment. But it fucking pisses you off beyond all belief when that same officer witnesses you doing the old "California Stop" at an intersection and hands over a ticket for $200. A pretty smart stiegler named Jean Francois Lyotard (do you realize how many fucking French dudes I've hung out with?) once said something like money gets a boner way before we ever get a boner for money. And Gilles Deleuze (BOOM – FRENCH) saw such flexibility in our desires, and what I see further is the fucking desire that we have to be oppressed. We whine for our freedoms, our comforts, only to demand that we have a political system that meets a set of specific values that it's impossible for us all to agree upon. You want freedom governed by a specific set of ideals and values specific to your mode of thinking? You're a fucking fascist, dick farmer. Historical revolution can suck a dick. We'd rather be sucking dicks than removing them from power.

Dude looks way French.

Any reference anybody makes to illustrate their point mixes in with all the contradictory references in a moat of shit. In the not so distant past, the ideas of fucking and working were very different concepts. Today, they're both tied into the same cultural demands. Human history was supposed to be different from the history of the natural world, just like the history of emotional things like desire was separate from the history of power. You can probably guess what I'm about to say next, but bear with me: they're all the same thing, bitch.

I'll introduce a term here for your brain: Operational Negativity. What this means is basically that anything that is introduced to challenge a system of power only serves to reinforce that shit. Don't believe me? Think about what hippies do (besides annoy you in general). Their culture is so fucking banal and insular that their very existence, which claims to be a radical challenge to uptight cultural ideals in larger society, only serves to remind us how insignificant their music, drugs, and opinions really are. They're a caricature of themselves at this point. Same thing goes for all protests. Oh, a hundred thousand people showed up to complain about something? So the fuck what. Like I said earlier, Watergate was a simulated scandal produced by a system of perversion and then denounced by that same system to make it appear moral. When autoworkers go on strike, it proves how powerful the institution of work is, but doesn't say a whole lot about the workers, right? Think back to the Tasaday tribe I told you about earlier — ethnology proved itself by expelling and killing its subject. You can't do anything transgressive, so stop blogging.

The List!

  – proving theater by anti-theater
  – proving art by anti-art
  – proving education by anti-education
  – proving psychiatry by anti-psychiatry

Everything is turned inside out only to prove its original form. Every form of power proves itself every time that someone denies it. When you rage against the machine, you fucking point out to everyone that there is a giant machine that can only be challenged by full-throttle rage (something nine out of ten people are kind of too laid back to actually do). What's even wilder is that this machine, that power, can fake its own death as a means to get even more fucking powerful. What do I mean? Oh, I don't know, how about the Kennedys? They were murdered for actually possessing some political dimension. Others, like LBJ, Nixon, fucking Ford, were murdered in a simulated fashion. And they had to have a bit of evil to them to hide the fact that they were just puppets of the power system. And despite the Kennedys' political dimension, they ultimately didn't mean shit. All American presidents are faces for a faceless and pulsating wound of fucking brutality. The sad thing is that they, as individuals, sometimes don't even know it. Le sigh. If you've ever seen *Game of Thrones*, you know damn well that the king, at some point, has to die. I mean, that's kind of his power. He's a mortal with a grip of power, which is even more freaky than a god. Since most kings today are basically socialites with a ton of fucking gold, I guess they also die as well, but it doesn't mean anything.

Texas is the reason…

All powers seek new blood through the death of those that seem to hold it, by scandals and economic crises, by shitty politicians being protested by people who think they're making some shred of difference.

Fuck déjà vu, this is déjà death.

Playbook of the Real

So, I feel like I've pretty much proven beyond a reasonable doubt that it's impossible to discover anything anymore that's actually "real." But now I'm going to do what is essentially my job as a French post-structuralist theorist and say something that seems wholly contradictory to the entire preceding text, and more or less completely nonsensical. It's even more impossible to stage an illusion! Tell *that* to George Oscar Bluth. Illusion is no longer possible because the real is no longer possible. This is the whole problem with parody.

I'm actually super glad that it's now no longer funny to use Europe's "Final Countdown" as an ironic theme song to whatever you're doing.

For example: I'd love to see how the fucking police would react to a simulated bank robbery. LOLZ. A real bank robbery upsets the order of things like property or personal safety, but a fake bank robbery pretty much just challenges your entire idea of reality. Real crimes or violence are actually less serious than nonsensical parodies of them, because real crimes only challenge small instances of real situations with real people. Simulated crimes (even acting out that rape fantasy with your girlfriend) are WAY more fucking dangerous ultimately because they pose the scenario that crime, violence, punishment, and retribution are all fucking made-up concepts anyways. Sorry, ladies.

I suppose that the real difficulty of this test that I'm proposing is in proportion to how actually dangerous the real crime would be to all those involved. I mean, how do you really even fake something like a bank robbery? Let's unpack this a bit: go into your local bank wearing a black ski mask, waving around a plastic gun that looks real. How are the guards on duty, or the police who might respond to the distress call, to see any difference between this event and a real one? You're doing all of the same gestures as a real bank robber, and generally fucking with everyone on site pretty hardcore. To be frank with you, there is literally no difference between what you are doing and what somebody with a real gun is doing. Sure, you could yell out that you're kidding and that it's a toy gun, but that would be kind of pussy in terms of the game that we're playing, and also I doubt that is going to convince the police not to shoot the shit out of you anyway (especially if you're anything other than white).

As far as the police are concerned, anything that looks to them like crime *is* crime. Even if you take a hostage in the situation that you know isn't going to try to run or fight back (because this might cause you to have to commit an actual crime), in the eyes of the fuzz, you're robbing that fucking bank. Understand what I'm saying: you're going to get shot in the fucking tummy. Jesus, so many things could happen. A customer in the bank might be so traumatized by your game that they have a heart attack and die. The

teller will be so afraid that she'll hand over a bag of money to your partner just as you are collecting a bag of fucking bullets in your balls. What I am implying here is that in the middle of trying to stage an illusion, you'll accidentally find yourself in the middle of the real, a space whose entire purpose is to gobble up any attempt at simulation. That's how it works, buddy. The 69ing mirror I mentioned, the Operational Negativity. Reality eats simulation for breakfast, and simulation eats reality for lunch. What we're left with is a bunch of poop!

In the impossibility of actually being able to stage an illusion, you can see the way that the world now functions – it has to try to understand things in terms of reality, because while reality is now fucked, it is the only space where anybody believes that things happen. Let's say you do this fake bank robbery and are arrested but no one is killed and you don't actually steal any money from the bank. It will never be punished in court as a "simulation." It might be punished more lightly than a real bank robbery because no one was hurt, or simply as an "offence to public office" because you wasted the police's time, but *never* as simulation because the courts cannot even fathom that concept due to their belief in what they think is reality. All that they'll be able to conceive is that despite the fact that you committed a pretend crime, it's as bad as a real crime because your gesture cancels out the difference the laws are actually based upon. The criminal justice system can't do anything against what you did truly because the law is what I called earlier a "second-order simulacrum" (although they actually believe it's a faithful representation of the cultural or social values). But what you did, a simulation, is a "third-order simulacrum" that is above and beyond the concepts of true and false. There is, for their political minds, nothing equivalent to the dumbass stunt you've just pulled. What you did ignores everything that makes power function and the social exist. So, when they're faced with a sort of failure of reality, they have no choice but to try to maintain order. That's why your ass is getting punished by having you plead down to some charge that has nothing to do with what you did. There are no charges that sufficiently can describe what you did, so you'll probably have to "admit" to inciting a riot or some shit.

Holy shit. *Heat* was such a fucking rad movie.

This is why systems of power, which are dependent on a fictional order, always opt for what the silly humans taking part in them see as reality. When the powers that be are uncertain, they always prefer to assume a simulation is true. Remember earlier when I talked about pretending to be crazy to get out of the army? It's becoming more and more difficult to identify simulation in comparison to the real, and the reverse is also true: as simulated culture and experience becomes more and more mixed into our everyday, it is impossible to identify the real.

So, if you really think about it, all robberies or even hijackings are already scripted out. We've seen how they're executed through media, so anything resembling them automatically is perceived as being them.

Essentially, they're now not even real events. They're a series of fucking signs and symbols that are unrelated to the goal of the robbery or hijacking itself. This is not to say that they're not offensive, friend. On the contrary, they're completely offensive for their very hyperreality — that they have no particular aim or goal at all. The political system and the system of laws has no idea what the fuck to do with these things because as I mentioned earlier, all the people in power in those systems still believe that they're dealing with reality. All worker strikes or revolutions by the impoverished have scripted those to come in the future. The ones that will happen years from now happen via a kind of mirror and we all know what it will likely happen: either it they will fail miserably and reinforce the strength of the powers they're fighting, or for every hundred that happen, maybe one will end with what looks like victory for the oppressed. And you know what fucking comes next: they start oppressing others. Jesus Fucking Christ.

The only weapon that power has is to re-inject "realness" and references to realness everywhere to try to convince us that our society is real, that the economy is fucking real, that the objects that we produce mean anything at all. And to keep us believing, power certainly loves to produce scandals that freak us out – I mean, what would we do without all of this dumb shit that makes us comfortable? But power also loves to use desire. It encourages us to desire it, to work hard for it, to believe that we might actually have it one day. Things like the American Dream convince us that all of the work we do is in the name of some kind of reality. Our desires end up reinforcing the "real" potential of upward mobility. "Take your desires for reality!" screams power at us. It's like its fucking slogan. As long as we're unwillingly confused about what is and isn't real, power still exists.

Hyperrality and simulation are deterrents of every idea or goal. Think about it: it was money that was the first to gobble up all physical references to value in its quest for domination. Every human goal, every distinction between good and evil, true and false, was destroyed so that money could eventually convince us of a universal law of value and exchange. One hour of your work is worth "X" because… well, there's no fucking logical answer to that. Yet, you go to work and give them your time in exchange for this arbitrary currency, which today DOESN'T EVEN FUCKING ACTUALLY EXIST. Direct deposit. Debit cards. *Where's the fucking money, Keith???* Money was the first thing to use deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, to obliterate territories and borders, and so forth. And if it was money that gave us a sense of structure, of reality, it was also the first thing we ever invented that then totally fucking destroyed the idea of reality. There is no longer any idea of "use value" for labor or objects. We don't get the difference between production and wealth. It's a bit too late to do anything about this. Every solution that we have to debt resulting from money having value is doomed to failure. It's a nasty little cycle and makes me way fucking bummed. If you're not bummed, you're not paying attention.

Craig Wheat made this. He fucking rules. You should check him out at: www.craigwheatart.com

For as long as power has been around, it's been threatened by human beings waking up and realizing what was real. What's way creepy is that today, it's threatened not by the real, but by simulation. What's at risk for power is that it could vanish into the system of silly ass signs it has used for so long to keep

humans from understanding that it didn't have a place in reality. I doubt very much that if the shit really hit the fan, the systems of power could actually remake every social, economic, and political sign that they've cooked up so far and have it actually work again. Naw, they were doing a long con, and you can't long con the same victims twice. We are the Island and money is Sawyer's long con. It's more or less at this point a question of life or death for power. But it's too late.

Here's the major collective freakout of our time: producing and then reproducing the real. Stuff that we previously produced, like goods and commodities, haven't made any sense for a long ass time, chief. What we try to accomplish by production and ultimately overproduction is a sense that we're somehow restoring the real. That's why contemporary material production is itself totally hyperreal! It looks like production, it sounds like production, but it's nothing more than a knock-off model. The more items that we produce to put into the "real world" that we think still exists, the more this simulated environment looks like the actual real world. No fucking wonder nobody can see the difference. Well, nobody but me, of course.

If you're looking for some goods produced recently that are handmade and don't rely on the stupid giant machine of mass-production, I would highly recommend checking out Draught Dry Goods from Portland, OR. I mean it, founder Caesy Oney is a really talented guy. See their work at: www.draughtdrygoods.com

And power itself, just like reality, only produces signs that look like it — meaning, power is not actually multiplying, it's just creating mock expansions of power that resemble all of the power moves of the past, so we accept that they must really be happening. And while this is happening, another type of power comes into play: a collective demand for *signs of power* — both of these form at the same time that actual power completely disappears. We're all guilty of this because whether or not we want to admit it, we're scared fucking shitless of the political system really collapsing. In the end, the game of power comes down to nothing more than the obsession we all have with power — with its death, its survival, more and more as it disappears. Once it has indeed completely vanished, logically we'll be under the total spell of power. What I'm saying is that its ugliness will be foreshadowed everywhere. We'll long to see it continue while at the same time complaining about how poorly it's being managed. Nobody wants it anymore, so they unload it onto others like some kind of disease, all the while freaking out incredibly hard that it might disappear and leave us in a primal anarchy that would make Cormac McCarthy squeal with delight. Oh, the sadness for societies without power. This is how fascist dictators keep motherfuckers in check. Their own people who they oppress would rather be oppressed by something powerful than end up like a shitty Third World Nation that has no global power at all.

:-(

But we're all in the same boat: no society actually knows how to manage its own sadness regarding the death of the real, the death of power, the death of the social as we know it. All of those are parts of this horrible meltdown. We try to escape these deaths through an artificial revitalization of them. Can you guess where this leads? Socialism, bitch. What's funny is that socialism actually rises out of the death of the social — more like "antisocialism," am I right? Am I right? Ha ha. Religion is like this as well. God dies, and religion is born. Such nasty irony, such a perverted scenario… we lose what is actually powerful and romantic and then replace it with nonsense like reason and logic. Yes, I know that religion is not logical, but all those idiots who take part in it totally think it is. Power is no longer present except as a sign to hide the fact that there is none. This simulation can go on and on forever because unlike real, tangible power like that possessed by King Arthur (wait, was he a real king?), this simulation doesn't require any structure or system in the traditional sense. It's nothing but the result of a social demand for the existence of really any kind of power. Being completely simulated, it has no risk of death. Now being completely separate from what we would normally call "political power," it's only dependent, like all other fucking commodities, on production and mass consumption. Its real fire has vanished — only the fairytale of a "political universe" remains.

You could say the exact same think about work. The fire of production, the thing that made it so necessary, has disappeared. There used to be something at risk with work – if it wasn't done correctly, we wouldn't produce everything that we truly needed as a culture and that put us in a dangerous position where some of us would totes die. Now, everyone still produces and in fact, produces more than we've ever produced before, but this comes out of a contemporary need, a social demand. Work isn't a need in the way that Karl "Workers Rule" Marx once hoped to see it. It's a product in itself that we simply expect to take place as one of the "options" that we have in our life. The demand for work is equal to the loss of the risk of work. This is the same change I described earlier in fortune as for power: the *scenario* of work exists to conceal the fact that the work (real work, real production) has vanished. When workers go on strike, it's no longer the stoppage of actual work, but rather a demonstration of the opposite pole of the work scenario in the poetic back and forth of a social calendar. Everybody then returns to their job and then starts to perform their fictional work again, "occupying" their role in some sense. Essentially, what it means is that they are on permanent strike, which in terms of fictional work, means jack shit.

This isn't some science fiction dream! This shit is real, babies, and everywhere we can see this question of doubling the work process. The purpose of a strike really has nothing to do with actual work in any capacity. No, strikes are simply a part of the work scenario today in the same way that future uselessness is part of every electronic device, like crisis in production. Understand, dear reader, that we have no more

work or strikes in the sense that you previously believed. Both exist simultaneously as something else entirely: a magical show, a wizard's sassy trick, a hologram Tupac, an absurdity happening in front of an audience on a stage of social idiocy.

Once, we might have talked about the ideology of work – about how the labor involved is exploited and so forth. Now, what's left to discuss except the scenario of work? Same thing for power: we can only discuss the scenario of it. Am I repeating myself again? Totally, but I've got a lot of time/pages to fill with this, and I'm running out of steam. Ideology is only related to a betrayal of reality by signs; simulation, on the other hand, is related to a short-circuit of reality and its reduplication by signs. Ideological analysis always wants to restore some kind of fucking objective process. But it's always a false problem to want to restore truth beneath the simulacrum.
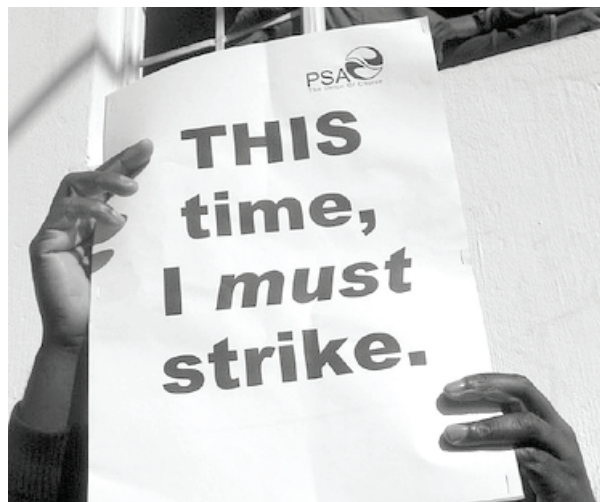
SHAME ON _____.

The End of the Panopticon, or Surveillance is Dead, Long Live Surveillance

This ideology of a lived experience, of yanking corpses from their graves, of the complete fucking boringness of the real was the basis for the American reality TV series with the Loud family is 1971. Unlike reality TV in the twenty-first century, this television show was a novel device at the time. Seven months of uninterrupted shooting, three hundred hours of direct non-stop broadcasting with no script or goal in mind. Simply put, it was a surveillance of an American family's drama, joys, ups and downs – it claimed to be a "raw" historical document and the "best thing ever on television, comparable, at the level of our daily existence, to the film of the lunar landing." What's super fucked up is that the Loud family completely fell apart during the filming of the program: a crisis flared up, and the Louds split! And we asked, over and over again, who was to blame – TV? The Family? IDK.

What gets me all hot and bothered about this is that the show filmed the Louds as if TV wasn't even there. The producers kept saying, "They lived as if we weren't there." This is a fucking stupid, nonsensical claim, because it is neither true nor false. When he says, "as if we weren't there," what he's really saying to the viewers is "as if *you were* there." This kind of utopia of silliness is what got twenty million people to watch probably even more so than the sense of voyeurism. The allure of this television show for viewers was not the perversity of spying on others, it was the idea that they could see "the real" through the boob tube. There was a joy in applying meaning to something meaningless, in making a normal family into something special just by pointing a fucking camera at them. In this TV show, the real never existed at all, especially considering that it was viewed through the distortion of camera lenses. It was a kind of microscopic

simulation that took something basically real (this family's home and daily lives) and turned it into something hyperreal. Porn works like this as well – sure, it's sexually arousing to see Flower Tucci gushing shejaculate all over another girl while taking a dick up her butt, but what really keeps us watching is a kind of magical fascination with being treated to something that is supposedly unscripted: raw fucking.
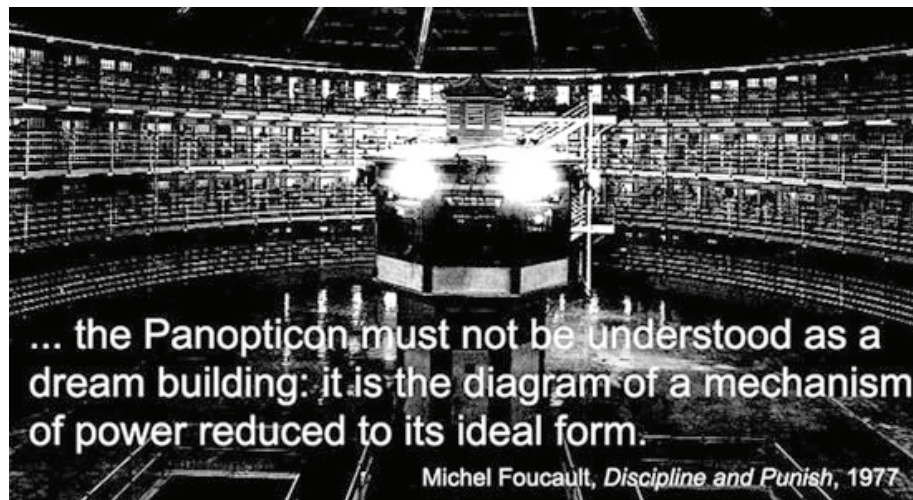
Personally, I think that the Loud family was hyperreal before even being on the TV show. They were a "typical" California family with a three-car garage, five children, and a dad with an upper middle class job and a mom who stayed at home to tend to the family. This kind of statistical perfection meant that they were fucked from the beginning. Like the Tasaday tribe, this specimen of Americana was chosen to be studied through the camera lens and to die as a glorious sacrifice in front of an audience. God doesn't set fire to cities any longer, we take care of all of the dismantling by filming shit constantly. "The Louds: simply a family who agreed to deliver themselves into the hands of television, and to die from it," said the producer." So really, it's a question of how sacrifices play out in front of twenty million fucking viewers. This is like a holy theater production for mass society.

TV CASUALTY: At least their last name is fucking tight.

Reality TV – it's an admirable term supposedly. But is the reality involved the truth of the family, or the truth of television? In fact, it is TV which is the Loud's truth, it validates them. TV isn't a mirror of truth that holds up itself in front of us to gaze upon the world. No, it's a goddamned laser beam that fires its own gaze upon subjects which probes their butts and cuts them into little pieces. But alas, that is our current truth. The Loud family was subjected to the TV medium, which is a fucking death sentence. What I ask now is, is this still even a question of truth?

They eye of TV isn't the source of some all-knowing gaze anymore, and it's not about transparency at all. If TV is about transparency, then it's like some kind of gaze of a king staring out across his kingdom during the Renaissance. But while the king's gaze was certainly a kind of system of confinement, it was at least a system of some scrutiny. TV now isn't the least fucking bit subtle. It is ALWAYS in a position of looking and showing at the same time. So, where a "panopticon" was a structure designed to allow the authorities present to view all inhabitants at all times without their knowing if they were being watched or not, TV trumps the panopticon by not only always watching everyone, but by fucking showing us everyone at the same time!

... the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, 1977*

Uh, Michel Who?

Even the slogan for the Louds' show pointed to this: "You no longer watch TV, TV watches you (live)." We've switched from a system of panoptic surveillance to another system of deterrence. What I mean is that the idea of being passive or active in the looking isn't even a conversation anymore. We don't really even have a choice whether or not to take part in this system or to the gaze of TV. They tell us, "YOU are the model!" "YOU are the majority!" This is what's fucked about a hyperreal society: the real is mixed up with the model, mama. Ugh, you'd think that a level of social advancement that's gotten us beyond being swayed by propaganda might have done something positive for us. But that's not the case. Now it's "YOU are news, your are the social, the event is you, you are involved, you can use your voice, etc." This turnaround of power makes it currently fucking impossible to locate the actual model, actual power, actual gaze, TV itself even, since YOU are always already on the other side. There's really no subject or focus any longer to the medium of TV. It's not a panopticon, it's a flexicon. We're not under surveillance and there isn't any violence: all there is left is information, data, chain reactions and other stupid fucking shit that distracts us from the fact that power has disappeared and that we're plugged into the system way too deeply to get out.
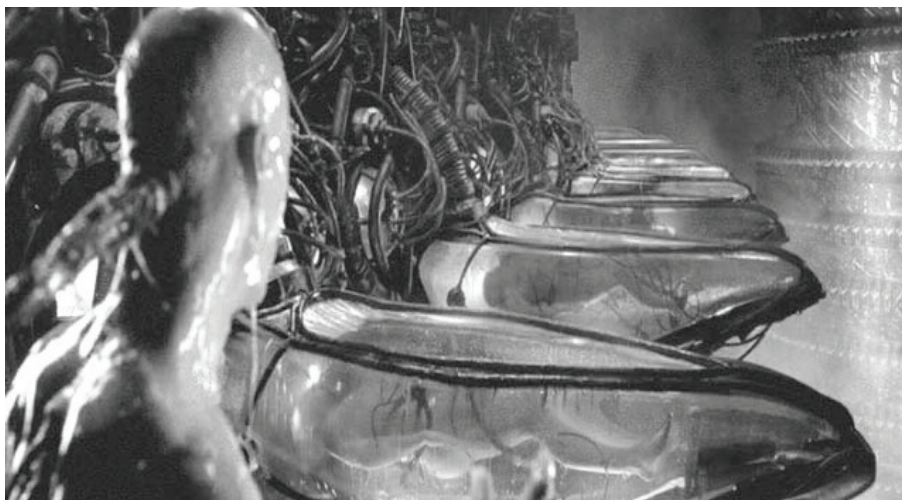
Neo's all, "The fuck?"

Since we're witnessing the end of this panoptic model, one where either we are all being watched by some authority or one where we're able to view all by watching the television, we're also witnessing the end of the "spectacular." In the case of the Louds, or really any other reality TV show, TV itself isn't really very spectacular anymore. Fuck Guy Debord and the rest of his merry pranksters known as the situationists. He wrote *The Society of the Spectacle* a little prematurely since less than twenty years later, that entire spectacle no longer existed. More like *Lady Debord*. Dumbass. Marshall McLuhan (I don't know any female cultural philosophers) got a littler closer to the truth than Debord when he claimed that the medium is the message. And I say this because there's actually no longer a medium at all, so it's impossible to say that messages are distorted by it. It's all one big wad of splooge impregnating every facet of the joke we call reality.

You know how earlier I said that we were all Tasadays? Well, guess who we are now… LOUDS! The screedly mixture of the medium of television into our own gazes and our own fears of being watched has turned us all into holograms of one kind or another. Hippies are always saying how life is art and art is life, but they're fucking retarded. Life is TV and TV is life. And yes, I realize that using the Internet as an example would seem more timely to you, but I was writing this over thirty years ago. Give me a break. These forms of mass media are so perfectly and subtly violent that we can't even see them gouging out our eyes and cutting off the tips of our penises. :-(

But wait! We need to be careful about how we talk about this, OK? It's not an illness resulting from some kind of viral event. We should actually be thinking about the media like they were in outer space, like they're a sort of genetic code that controls the mutation of the real into the hyperreal. And then a micromolecular code turns that signal from a meaningful communication into just another one of millions of signals. I literally have no idea what I'm trying to say here.

The entire way that we understand cause and effect is now in question. What is active or passive anymore? Who is the subject and who is the object? Can we have perspective? Be critical? Be analytical? What are the means and what is the end? This is what we hear constantly: TV watches us, TV alienates us, TV manipulates us, TV informs us… in all of this, we are dependent on a type of analysis that sits oddly between reality and meaning.

Because answering those questions using a kind of analysis is basically fucking impossible and will just drive you wonky, I'll propose that we instead imagine TV like a DNA model. Why? I'm not exactly sure, since I'm not a scientist of any sort. But if you think about TV in this way, that it has these two opposite poles that end up getting squished together during whatever it is that DNA does, you'll understand why everything is smooshed together. Plus, DNA is fucking tiny, so if there is a distinction between the two ends (medium/message, viewer/subject, etc) it is basically impossible to see.

The gap between those things vanishes in the genetic coding process! Genetic coding isn't random – I mean, things don't just disappear from strands of DNA for no reason. Rather, things are abolished because when DNAs meet each other, they fuck and then what was different about them is gone. And they fucked on purpose! We try to use things like order, signals, impulses, or messages to describe how information is moved from here to there, but really all of that moving happens in a place we can't even wrap our heads around. It's like 4D movies or something. You see, we try to order things by what we perceive as reality so we assume that if something is destroyed, remnants of it are left behind or that there is a visible scar or absence. Only that's not how things work in the fourth fucking dimension. Things IMPLODE. They don't cease to exist, they simply *are not*. This is why you can't understand where the gap between television and reality went – you're expecting to see a mark there, a hole, except that there isn't any evidence that the two were ever separate. This is where simulation truly begins.

BLADAT: Second Michael Crichton reference.

Whether it's political, biological, psychological, medialogical (not a word), if you can't see the difference between the poles, that's where simulation is. And simulation is absolute manipulation… it doesn't ask that you be passive or active in it, because passive or active no longer exists. Are you looking for them? STOP! I just told you that there isn't any evidence that they were even there! The idea that television is even "there" in the case of the Louds is laughable. You see, I'm comparing it to DNA because, as I said a bit ago, DNA is tiny! Besides the actual television set sitting in your living room, try and tell me exactly where the fuck television is located? Oh, you can't? No shit, Sherlock.

Way Big and Way Tiny

The nuclear is the god-like exultation of simulation. But the balance of terror is only the result of a system of deterrence that's gone from being something tiny and inside to something that is part of every fucking part of daily life. When we talk about nuclear warfare, there is this terrible cliff-hanger at all times – who will nuke whom? But this is stupid, because the idea of nuclear warfare only shows how dumb the media is as it tells us constantly about deterrence. Violence is everywhere! OHMERGERD WHAT IF WE GERT NOOOOORRRKED? Yeah, somebody's going to randomly nuke somebody else. Gawd. All of our behavior is fucking controlled by this type of shit. It is paralyzing, because while nobody is nuking anybody, the fact that we're always told that it could happen at any time makes it seem like it's bound to happen. Like bank robberies and terrorist attacks, the simulation precedes the reality and so the situation is already understood as a real event.

WEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!

The actual occurrence of a nuclear bomb going off isn't what is paralyzing, it's the game of deterrence and back-and-forth that paralyzes us. This deterrence comes from the fact that all of these nuclear weapons really means that there will be no nuclear war, but we can't talk about that, know'm saying? We've heard or read about how nuclear war plays out in a military sense and what it will do human beings and the environment, but I'm going to go ahead and say that focusing on this shit is stupid. There's nothing actually at stake in terms of nuclear war. What I find so interesting about the situation is that it has a kind of originality. There aren't a lot of other situations that I can think of that keep things in check by making up destruction that is never going to occur.

Deterrence excludes war, and by war, I mean the old school war with massive violence that empires used to expand their boundaries. Deterrence is actually neutral; it's a type of implosive violence that keeps "stable" all the systems involved. There is no "subject" of deterrence at this point, no good guy or bad guy, just the idea that the entire planet would get wiped out if one nuclear weapon was fired because then every nuclear weapon would get fired. Atomic war, in the sense of war like barbarians used to fight, simply won't happen. Deal with it. The risk of total nuclear annihilation makes a nice foundation for this bullshit fearful environment, but the simple fucking sophistication of these weapons themselves in some way actually makes them nonexistent. A universal security system has been created so that there is actually no aim whatsoever for a real nuclear clash. Further, a real nuclear clash has never even been an issue, except maybe at the very beginning of the Cold War when people thought that nuclear battles would be fought like traditional battles. The purpose of this universal security system is to deter anything that might upset the larger system's balance. You wanna hear something fucking trippy? **The balance of terror is the terror of balance.**

Deterrence is not a strategy. Nobody owns it or exercises it better than anybody else. It's more like the way that money circulates between countries and is always fluid and mythical, keeping the global financial situation churning. You can think of nuclear weapons as a kind of *kill money*, they operate just like money by circulating all around, keeping things going, and controlling actual violence and conflict all over the planet.

Here's the real kicker: by giving everyone the fear that there could be maximum devastation, we've developed the best system of control *which never existed*. The entire planet is now linked and co-dependent through a hypermodel of security. Hands across da globe.

The same thing can be said for "peaceful" nuclear installations. Nuclear weapons, as things in and of themselves, see no difference between civilians or the military. So having nuclear weapons to ensure peace is retarded. But what's happened is that now these forms of control have been so elaborated that they are completely absolute – there is no going back. We're in a fucking social and political desert that has resulted from the global security system. There can't be any more revolutions or mutinies, because they are in a sense kept in check by the dangling nuclear sword. You can't even actually concoct a military strategy of any kind… all that's left to do is escalate the security system. The political stake is fucking dead. What's left? Simulacra!

I've eaten at this stupid fucking sushi restaurant in New York.

The "space race" of the 1960s played exactly the same role as the nuclear race. After the nuclear race, the space race seemed a natural next step. And it was talked about playfully as a game between friendly nations towards a peaceful and technologically-advanced coexistence. But let's be for real for two seconds, what is the ultimate purpose of a space race? It's not just to land on the moon, it's to make orbital a million tiny satellites which can monitor every motion on earth and do away with any notions of chance. It's about approaching a universal norm. With a universal norm, you don't need laws anymore because every detail of life is already determined by the law. This type of universe has no threats, it's weightless and boring as shit – although at the same time, kind of fascinating. While no person would claim to want there to be a universal system that governed every decision made on planet earth, the way that this is actually being achieved is fucking amazing! Landing a man on the moon, traversing space, all of this dumbfounds us by the outrageous perfection that is required to pull of stunts like these. It's like the industrial revolution – IN SPACE. They've mastered probabilities, accounting for all possible outcomes. This is 2 kewl to ignore to the average guy, right? Maybe it's comforting to think that while we can still think of gross and subversive things, the world is now so perfectly modeled and functions so effortlessly that the dangers inherent in those things no longer exist. The norm can fix anything deviant. This is a kind of vertigo that one experiences in a flawless world.

They didn't even wear helmets? That is so rad.

The same perfect model now governs social life as well. This is the true nuclear fallout! The perfect little operations of technology have become a model for the perfect little operations of our social interactions. Nothing will be left to fucking chance! This is the every essence of socialization, people. It's been going on for centuries, surely, but with the advent of such flawless technology, now any chance of revolution or subversion has been neutered. We'll see no true accidents or randomness occur any longer because we're doomed to a kind of normal transparency monitored by millions of devices that collect and organize data. The spatial and nuclear models don't even have their own ends: neither does exploring the moon or having the most badass army. What can be said about those, and about the social, is that they are truly just simulations. In a world where even the biggest superpower is subject to surveillance from satellites orbiting the globe, really no one is free.

Reject the evidence: with all of this monitoring equipment orbiting the earth, the ones being monitored are not actually whom you think. Once those things orbit the earth, the earth *itself* becomes a satellite. So, the very reality of the earth as a planetary body is thrown into the shark tank. When we established a universal system of control for peaceful coexistence, we made all planets, in some sense, satellites of a more simulated form and they lost their independence. All energy and all events are suckled into this perverse black hole. Literally everything implodes from the shackles of control and now sucks fat balls. We're in

that space from the DNA earlier, where things disappear and nothing is left. When all has been turned into satellites, then the idea of anything being real is impossible. This makes me sad because I used to be really into space as a young French boy on the farm.

The way that two events line up in 1975 illustrates my point in a striking way: the link-up in space of the two American and Soviet super-satellites (peaceful coexistence!) – and the decision by the Chinese to get rid of character writing and to switch to the Roman alphabet. The Chinese situation shows how the satellization will eventually take all things original in the world (like fancy writing) and dumb them down to a universal norm. And the Chinese were finally allowed to enter into this global peaceful coexistence because they got rid of their unique language and took it up the butt from the West. And this happens just as two giant satellites are fucking right above their heads. When those satellites fucked, everybody on earth got fucked.

But despite this deterrence that results from the global satellite police, things happening down here on earth strangely continue to fuck up. You'd think that with all of this amazing fucking policing that it'd be impossible for anything to go wrong. Or so we think. These oddities no longer make any sense; they are nothing more than a weird double-effect of simulation at its peak. The best example, I think, is the Vietnam War. It occurred right when the idea of revolutionary ideals was at stake and while the global orbital system was really going fucking wild. What sense did that war make? I guess maybe that its occurrence sealed the end of history as we know it.

Why did such a difficult, long and batshit crazy war disappear overnight like it was being fucking managed by a wizard?

Why didn't the fact that the Americans go their asses kicked (for the first time ever) actually have any internal repercussions? If it was really such a huge fucking loss, shouldn't it have upset the American political system quite a bit more? I mean, even for Americans, they acted pretty uninterested at the loss of that war.

Naturally, it's because something else took place. This war was basically an important episode in moving towards a peaceful coexistence between all of the world's super powers. It was the welcoming to the club for China. When China didn't intervene in the war, it sent the message that they were officially ready to stop being fucking wacky and were interested in joining the West in their lovely country club. China's government, which was totes opposite the one in America, was no longer a radical threat as they homogenized and bowed down. And this was all that was at stake in the Vietnam War. With China now on board, the US pulled out of Vietnam because they had officially won the war.

The war then "spontaneously" came to an end when this objective was completed. All the US had to do was pull out the troops, and shit was done.

Perhaps this is the only military strategy left. Fight a war until the global big wigs are all on the same bandwagon, and then cut out. The end goal is simply a healthy politics and discipline of power. When the war finally passed from the resistance to the hands of regular Northern troops, it was able to stop: the war had achieved its goal. All the stakes present were political. When the Vietnamese proved that they weren't crazy fucking maniacs running around in the trees anymore, the war could just be given to them. It didn't matter really that Vietnam was still communist, what mattered was that despite this political handicap, they'd shown that they could be trusted to stay in line. They're even better than capitalists at getting rid of non-capitalist structures.

Same scenario as in the Algerian War.

In all wars since, both sides have been fighting for the same fucking thing: total liquidation. They pit themselves against one another and claim that it is a matter of life and death (how else would you get young men to die for a cause?), when in reality they are only working together to eradicate anything tribal, pre-capitalist, communal, exchange-based, or any group that won't adopt the dominant universal norms of language and values. Going to war is a means to destroy the elements of both sides that the other finds unsettling in a gross and violent attempt to domesticate their social relations. Why do you think that the US and Japan are so tight now?

"The North Vietnamese were advised to countenance a scenario of the liquidation of the American presence through which, of course, honor must be preserved."

The scenario: the totally gnarbar bombing of Hanoi. The disgustingness of this bombing shouldn't conceal the fact that it was only a simulacrum to give Charlie a chance to pretend to compromise and Nixon to make the Americans swallow the retreat of their forces. The game was already won, brother, there had never really been anything at stake at all except the beautiful and cinematic event described here.

People who are totally fucking into war, please do not take offense. Just because war is a simulacrum doesn't make it any less fucking heinous. People's flesh still burns off, and piles of dead bodies are still piles of dead bodies. That goal is always accomplished, and then some, just like the breaking up of territories and punishing of those who take too much for themselves. But the difference now is that the enemies are way less threatening, the intensity of the reasons for war far less, and the overall seriousness is no longer present. Victory or defeat matter little at this point. War is no longer concerned with those simple end goals.

I just changed my email address to JRR_Tokin420@middleearthlink.net.

The deterrence that dominates us today is beyond war and peace – it's war and peace happening at exactly the same time. In his little novel *1984*, George Orwell famously proclaimed, "War is peace." Two poles smashing together, becoming one — the definition of parody, but also the end of all meaning. It is possible to miss the truth of a war: namely, that it was over well before it was actually over and that at its very center of its fiery tummy, maybe it never even began. Think about other events like the "oil crisis." This never actually began, but a series of mishaps, fuck-ups, and other nonsense were all pushed upon us to keep us feeling like we needed the shit. The job of a newscaster is to repeat bullshit over and over to us so that we eventually just kind of absorb it and believe that it's worth knowing because one thing or another is at stake. Every event is told to us in reverse, despite the fact that we're told that it's "breaking" or "currently unfolding." None of it makes any sense in reality, and it just spirals in and out of this never-ending repeating of the same things that were at risk, but in a different context. The way that the news presents itself to us is that it is current, retro, kitsch, and pornographic all at once. How the fuck could we not pay attention to that? It sounds fun. What is really fucking dumb is that I know for a fact that everyone literally suspects this, but nobody really accepts it. Irony is all over this stuff, it's like the Theater of Cruelty, except that there's not a single fucking shred of human decency left in this pile of shit. Simulation is our master, and all that we're left with is this fake nostalgia for things that we never even experienced. I hate everyone.

And then there's this cunt…

This is why the nuclear arms race doesn't increase the likelihood of an atomic war or an atomic accident — OK, I mean besides like little baby countries who get a nuke and want to show off. Sure, you're going to say, what about when the US dropped the bomb on Hiroshima? That's fair to ask, and I'll reply by saying that the fucking mayhem that resulted from that meant that it only had to fucking happen once. We've all seen what the bombs do, so it, like all other events in a culture of simulation, is now scripted in our mind's eye. Once your country has entered the Atomic Country Club, you no longer have to do anything violent anymore. Do you know what increases faster than our stockpiles of weapons? Responsibility, control, censorship, self-deterrence. The very possibility of paralyzing an entire country with the flip of a switch makes it so that the country doing the threatening never actually has to flip that switch. The entire myth of nuclear apocalypse collapses at the very moment when the means to make a nuclear apocalypse are so readily available, *exactly because the means to do so are available*. This, my friends, is Deterrence 101.

I'd wager that we'll one day see the nuclear powers putting atomic reactors, weapons, and bombs all over the fucking planet. Control by threat is cool, but pacification by the bomb is way more effective. "Small" powers, who will hope to purchase weapons of their own, will only buy the virus of their own deterrence. And they'll have all of the nuclear reactors there that we've already sold them, so in effect, we'll be selling them the requirement that they absolutely never do anything radical again. The world is going to be so fucking peaceful that it hurts to think about.

Our nuclear system is both the ultimate end of available energy, and the total control of energy. Lockdown and control standards grow faster than the weapons themselves, meaning that we're always a bit safer than we are dangerous. Weapons end up deterring themselves, a fantastical irony that gives this Frenchman an insane boner. The more and more that we move forward with this insanity, the more and more we ultimately move towards some kind of insane center point. Because we can't see anybody operating anything on the outside, we'll continue to gaze inward until we reach a point of implosion so fucking epic that future visitors to our planet won't have the slightest inkling that we ever existed in the first place.

Or maybe it was Ancient Aliens.

continent.

Discussions Before an Encounter

The Editors of *continent.* & *Speculations*

This introductory text is being written on a laptop on a summer Saturday in a cafe in Copenhagen by *continent.* Co-Editor Jamie Allen. It is here in order to contextualise a discussion document that was created using an unpaid version of Google's Docs service, authored collaboratively by editors from both this journal, *continent.* and the online journal *Speculations* in Canada, the U.S. and Europe. The outlined discussion is part of recent energies and networks actively rethinking and practically redefining the natures and practices of academic discourse. Other related activities include the Public School New York's recent Panel Discussion on Para-Academic Publishing, co-organised by punctum books (www.punctumbooks.com) and the Hollow Earth Society, as well as the upcoming interdisciplinarity-focused 2nd Biennial Meeting of the BABEL Working Group.

As new communications formats enable more direct communication between scholars, with "the public," and amongst increasingly diverse, multi-inter-disciplinary thinkers, it becomes clear that knowledge seekers are no longer as so easily divided into C.P. Snow's two cultures of 'science' vs. 'humanities.' Increasingly, thinkers within and without academia tend more simply towards another set of extremes: Those who need and want to enact change in the world (artists, engineers, philosophers?) manifested through thought or material action, and those who would seek to maintain a more bureaucratic status quo (administrators, secretaries, health and safety officers, etc.)

The authors of this discussion, Paul Ennis, Michael Austin, Robert Jackson, Thomas Gokey, Jamie Allen and Paul Boshears, will soon meet (some for the first time offline) at a panel discussion entitled "The Aesthetics of (Para)Academic Practice" during the upcoming *Aesthetics in the 21st Century* conference at the University of Basel, Switzerland in September. What follows serves as both prologue to this discussion, as well as invitation for comment and interest. We thank the conference organisers at the University of Basel and the University College Dublin for their efforts in organising an event that serves to debate the very resourcing and operation of the structures within which it will take place. The panel event will celebrate and blend ideas around variegated accesses to knowledge. At issue, most generally, are the ways that monotonic institutional structures support, warp or sustain the mind, body, and our relationships and responsibilities to one another as creators, teachers and learners.

—Jamie Allen

What is academia, what are academics?

Paul Ennis (Speculations**):**
Academia is, for me, the name for a community. It is not always one where people get on, but certainly

enough of one that those 'inside' it recognize something in one other—perhaps just a fundamental commitment to pursuing knowledge (being specific to the humanities this would need the appendage 'for its own sake'). The University, the 'home' of the academic, is altering and we find more and more academics positioned outside the gates. This has been a wake-up call of sorts. We can now see just how much gatekeeping goes on. It's always been enclosed, hence the 'ivory tower,' but now that we can clone some of its functions some of that power has been taken away.

Michael Austin (Speculations**):**
We should perhaps begin by distinguishing between academia and the university. I take academia to be the culture of knowledge-communication, while the university happens to be the most notable site of such communication in present society. There is no necessary connection between the two, nor should we assume academia requires the university in order to exist. What academia, understood as the communication of knowledge, requires is simply the structure of the dialogue, the transmitter and the receiver, be they book and reader, teacher and student, or the nodes of a collective. The human participants in this exchange are academics, whether or not they make their living from research, teaching, or publishing, and whether or not capital is exchanged in the pursuit of knowledge.

Robert Jackson (Speculations**):**
Whatever academia is (or whatever form of scholarship its supposed to support), it's in a crisis. Crises aren't necessarily bad, but they are unpredictable states of transition into unseen forms of production. I'm generalising, but it used to be the case that with the humanities and the arts, there were two options for a stable income; enter job markets which required individual creative talent or enter academia to teach, possibly research. These two areas are now largely defunct for the majority of students graduating from the so-called "vocational" courses. In the former, the distribution of creative entertainment now feeds off communicative user-generated creativity (everyone can be creative and must distribute their work for free to attract attention); in the latter humanities research is forced into a functional malaise which benefits statistics rather than society. What academia and academics are will emerge from these new modes of production and in turn how they navigate these constraints and affects. Everything was always-already precarious, we've only just realised it.

Thomas Gokey (Speculations**):**
Michael makes a useful distinction between the academy as a community of thinking and the university system. In the United States at least, universities have been turned into shell corporations for Sallie Mae. That might sound overly dramatic or overly cynical but I think it is the most accurate way to think about our current situation. Right now the community of questioning, learning, researching and teaching has been captured by a system whose primary function is to extract as much value out of academics as possible. The main thing that universities produce is precarious, indebted, docile workers. Universities are one of the primary tools used to produce and maintain class difference. For the most part the poorest get excluded outright, the richest pass "Go" and collect $200, everyone else gets buried in decades worth of crushing debt for the privilege of receiving an education that will be recognized. An academic is a battery that gets plugged into this dying machine. The question is whether we can break the monopoly that universities have on education. Right now the only kind of education that "counts" is the kind that universities control. I see the para-academic as a

kind of overflow where the community of thinking can think on its own, without a corporate mediator extracting value from the students and the teachers. Its a very exciting development, one that is full of revolutionary potential although we still need to make good on this potential.

Jamie Allen (continent.**):**
Through certain context changes I've made in the past few years, I've noticed a shift in language that I have tried, on and off, to corroborate with others and other sources. To put it simply—the communities of art, design and philosophy I am involved with often use the word "academic" pejoratively, as thought or activities that are essentially pointless, wasteful or without relevance. The comment, "yeah... but that's academic," is not meant as a compliment. I've developed more ties to institutions of "higher learning" in Europe lately, and have noticed that something or someone being "properly academic" has other, more favorable implications, including synonymy with words like "cultured," "rigorous," and "thorough." There's a somewhat obscure article I recently came across called "On Being Unacademic," written by 1940's American humanities scholar J.T. Firebaugh, and he puts it this way:

> In our critical vocabulary the word "academic" has two main uses. Among men who are academic, the word is usually modified by the adverb "soundly"; and among persons less soundly academic, the adverb "narrowly" is usually substituted. This usage indicates a sharp division between those of the academy and those outside of it...[1]

So when I think of what is 'academic' there is all this identifying tension; a polarisation of thinking and doing, between the specific and the overly-general, the applicable and the cogitative, between conservative Philistinism and the liberalist Defenders of Culture. To me this seems a much more powerful bifurcation and crisis within traditional academic activity than any disciplinary or subject specific concerns (e.g.: C.P. Snow's "Two Cultures" discussion, which seem to me descriptive and, perhaps unwittingly, prescriptive of perennial and protracted debates about the "arts" versus the "sciences."). Put another way, what I perceive of the academy as rife with a kind of crippling and calcifying anxiety about its own relevance, effectiveness and role. There are those who mostly maintain a kind of cynical momentum, protecting and defending the institution for their and its own sake—and those who wish to see things happen in the world, and so foster the requisite personal and organisational change.

Paul Boshears (continent.**):**
I'm piggy-backing on Michael Austin's line of thinking because I think his distinction between Academia and the University does some good work in helping us make sense of the current crisis of the University. In the last several years it's become more and more clear that if the University was ever any sort of monastic institution, cut-off from the rest of the world, it pays for its place in the world in several critical ways. One product the University delivers to the powers-that-be is debt-heavy students. Consider the following article written for. the American Association of University Professors' journal, *Academe*, "Academic Freedom and Indentured

---

1. Joseph J. Firebaugh. "On Being Unacademic." *College English*. 7.7 (1946): 412–416.

Students," whose by line states, "Escalating student debt is a kind of bondage."[2] There is widespread concern that the University has become the next dotcom or house-flipping bubble, as we read in *Businessweek*'s report on High Point University, "Bubble U."[3]

The Medieval conceit that future scholars must apprentice under established masters has been perverted in the contemporary University. The lot of the yeoman scholar today bodes ill for future generations as this quote from an article appearing in Inside Higher Ed illustrates:

> Adjunct, contingent faculty members now make up over 1 million of the 1.5 million people teaching in American colleges and universities. Many of them are working at or under the poverty line, without health insurance; they have no academic freedom worthy of the name, because they can be fired at will; and, when fired, many remain ineligible for unemployment benefits, because institutions routinely invoke the "reasonable assurance of continued employment" clause in federal unemployment law even for faculty members on yearly contracts who have no reasonable assurance of anything.[4]

Those that would be successful in rising above the precariat[5] (or who believe that they've escaped precarity falsely understood)[6] will increasingly find themselves divorced or living geographically isolated from their loved ones and families.[7] But this isn't only impacting junior scholars, as the situation between Oxford University Press and Steven Shaviro illustrates.[8]

Both Academia and the University are imagined communities, to borrow Benedict Anderson's phrase. However, the University is an institution that accredits, controls, and stamps the passports of those that would enter its territory. It is a striated space as opposed to Academia's fluid space. I would suggest that an academic is someone that can identify on two levels: first, with those slighted and pressured in the above cited political and economic circumstances; second, they enjoy reading/writing footnotes/endnotes/marginalia/figures/tables, etc.

---

2. Jeffrey J. Williams. "Academic Freedom and Indentured Students." *Academe*. Jan.-Feb. 2012. www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2012/JF/Feat/will.htm

3. Carol Matlack. "Bubble U.: High Point University." *Bloomsberg Businessweek*. April 19, 2012. www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-04-19/bubble-u-dot-high-point-university

4. Michael Bérubé. "Among the Majority." *Inside Higher Ed*. February 1, 2012. www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/02/01/essay-summit-adjunct-leaders

5. Nick Srnicek. "Precarity Everywhere." *The Disorder of Things*. February 1, 2012. thedisorderofthings.com/2012/02/01/precarity-everywhere

6. Richard Seymour. "We Are All Precarious—On the Concept of the 'Precariat' and its Misuses." *New Left Project*. February 10, 2012. www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/we_are_all_precarious_on_the_concept_of_the_precariat_and_its_misuses

7. John Gill. "Leader: Why must so many go it alone?" *Times Higher Education*. April 5, 2012. www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=419541

8. Kevin Smith. "Who do you work for, faculty author?" *Scholarly Communications @ Duke*. January 25, 2012. blogs.library.duke.edu/scholcomm/2012/01/25/who-do-you-work-for-faculty-author/

How do styles of engagement outside of academia change knowledge, knowing?

Ennis:
This is a tough question; certainly being outside the academy alters your vision of the place of your discipline in the world. You have to reign in your expectations. Preaching to the choir is out the window. Scoring cheap points against allies becomes quite evidently a waste of time. These days I'm just trying to keep my ears open and learn from the world again. Within my own discipline there is always this desire to 'correct' the world, butoutside academia the conditioning is overtly from the outside in. It's given me a new respect for the empirical, or the material. I'm not sure this would have happened if I'd manage to remain surrounded by academics all day (here I should insist that I love fellow academics, but I don't think I'm going out on a limb here when I say there is a tendency to retreat into cosy topics; sometimes just from a basic fear of offending others).

Allen:
One way to think about this question is in terms of the incumbent threats to the 'value proposition' of the academic institution. I often feel these days that there are two oppositional but equally threatening and powerful bulkheads advancing to threaten the worst bits of institutional academic practice (like that Star Wars garbage compactor scene aboard the Death Star—with Luke, Han Solo, Chewbacca, and Princess Leia as managers, rectors, and administrators of our most traditional university systems). On one side there are pressures arising from the mostly rightfully disgruntled students and educators. University at large just doesn't really create a lot of experiential value for most students, or most professors. Others have mentioned the student debt 'bubble', the lack of 'return on investment' both intellectually and monetarily, the lack of quality course options, teaching, and community. On the other hand, there's growing grassroots and DIY teaching and learning movements that really don't care about, or for, the way that universities decide (or don't decide) to share and impart knowledge. There's a long list of excellent programmes, community initiatives, grassroots schools and 'outstitutions' that are developing to cater for people seeking out new ideas, new techniques, new thinking.

It's this second pressure I'm most interested in—as it has the most progressive potential to evolve the ways that knowledge is accessed and thought about at pedagogic, societal and political scales. The transactional nature of teaching and scholarship as it happens most commonly now (E.g.: Increasing emphasis on point systems and development of ratings for academics, and the age-old rubrics for grading and evaluation that everyone seems forced into and frustrated with.), creates a whole host of misinformed assumptions. Take for example the assumption that learning is cumulative, which is the basis for most pedagogic designs, and is the accrual model beneath 'higher' education. This might be accurate when initially learning simple language or counting, but after a certain point, and certainly at the university level, what we learn, critique and interpret should not be and is not cumulative at all—it's cyclical, hermeneutic, impossible, continuous, ongoing. Gathering up advanced degrees doesn't make you any smarter, and culturally I think people are becoming wary of people who play these strategic games too well.

I recently had the privilege to be invited by Taeyoon Choi, of Eyebeam, to teach a class on sound art at the Public School NYC in Manhattan. For a number of reasons (some of them having to do with me, some of them I'm sure not), the classroom venue was packed full at 10AM on a Saturday morning. I nearly teared-up

at various points, when the realisation came that everyone who was there wanted to be there for no other reason than they wanted to be there. At 10AM on a Saturday. All of this says more about my expectations than it does about the event, and how sentimental I am about learning with other people in the right ways and places.

Austin:

The question of style when it comes to the communication of knowledge and modes of knowing is perhaps the most pertinent question facing both academics and the knowledge industry today. It is becoming all the more clear that the university setting not only fails to capture the variety of ways that our world can be understood, but all too often also fails to allow for the exploration of these modes of knowing.

My time is split between academic philosophy and my work with charitable organizations (local animal rescue). Much of my own research reflects these dual interests, and is an attempt to bridge the gap between what are very different worlds, though this may not be entirely clear to either group! While much of my academic work relates to the relation of the human and the animal, and various modes of knowledge and communication, it is basically fueled by the practical work of rescuing, rehabilitating, and relating to non-human animals. This thinking-with-animals, as well as the forms of engagement necessary amongst fellow animal rescue volunteers, boards of directors, and the public, either in the form of direct interaction or through media, show a style of engagement and modes of knowing that are non-academic in the traditional sense. That is not to say that the animal rescue community is anti-intellectual (it's not), but that it requires a shift in style and often different tools when compared to publishing philosophy or teaching a course through a university. These styles and modes of knowing then have the power, when applied to academia, to cause us to dramatically rethink our world.

Jackson:

This is a weird question for me. I'm currently writing up my thesis part-time, whilst working as a software developer for a charitable trust full-time. So, I'm kind of in a position where other areas of engagement are always changing forms of knowledge without my permission, to the point where knowledge exists as manqué. So, firstly, I don't really surround myself with that culture, which for the most part, tends to eschew surprise. Secondly, I'm often surrounded by other modes of systems of knowledge and communities of agents (XML files, SQL query inputs, and district council pension regulations, (usually just as bureaucratic as academia) which disrupt the 'academic' walls of theory. There have been, however, many instances where I've been influenced and inspired from a sohisicated event outside of academia. I don't tend to be worried if an academic job does emerge or not; but if it did—I wouldn't hesitate to endorse other styles of engagement for these reasons.

Boshears:

I entered the University later than many of my peers, having dropped-out of high school and later paying my way through first my undergraduate years and now my graduate years. I have had an extensive collection of hairnets and name tags during my academic life and this has been crucial to my development as a thinker. Over the past five years I've primarily supported myself by working in the nonprofit sector, providing research support or meeting with other organizations to identify points of mutual benefit so that our entities could

partner in delivering our services.

I'll continue to hold to the distinction between Academia and the University because I think that although I entered the University later than my peers, I was already seeking Academia when I entered. The University is an institutional relationship whereas Academia is a path traveled. At times the path of Academia is traversed with other academics, and at other times it's just schlepping books from one apartment to the next. What's important on a road trip—and maybe this is because I live in the U.S. where we make these week-long drives to places like California—is a good travel companion. What makes a good fellow traveler is being someone that minds the maps and raises our spirits by making great mix tapes or tuning the radio; and of course, it is someone that knows how to converse well and how to be quiet with you. I did a lot of driving across the U.S. before I entered the University and I like to believe this had a very positive effect on my thinking and how I interact with the communities with whom I work.

During the recent *Nonhuman Turn* conference at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Ian Bogost made a great point: if scholars are only producing scholarship for the sake of meeting tenure requirements or adding lines to their CVs, then Academia suffers. Being academic is not about being obtuse, but about promoting the conversation for our mutual benefit and because of our mutual implication in the happenings of the world. The University relationship does not necessarily promote the kind of sociality that the academic path affords.

Gokey:

One thing that we learn when we look at the class proposals for schools like the Public School is that there is a real desire for a certain set of classes that the academy just does not offer. Notice for example the large number of proposed courses that deal with leftist economic theories. These are the kinds of classes that just never get taught at neo-liberal economics departments and business schools, but people want to learn about it. Notice also the number of classes dedicated to continental philosophy, the kinds of classes that do not take place in the analytic dominated philosophy departments of the United States. There are also a number of hands-on practical classes, how to use a particular kind of software, or how to program for Arduino or Processing, or how to make a rain barrel or brew your own beer. It is clear that there is a widespread demand for a set of ideas and skills that are simply not being supplied by the current university system and these spaces have emerged to fill the void. In a way I think we are getting ahead of ourselves. People want to learn, they want to work on their own projects, but we don't live in a society where this self-organized project-based thinking can really thrive. We're hankering for a post-scarcity world where everyone can be an artist and an academic. What is exciting is that this post-scarcity world might be closer than it appears.

What investment do you have in the role of the academic, in the ways that knowledge comes about?

Boshears:

This is going to sound unduly romantic, but I believe that the most radical thing I can do with my talents is to learn with others and to share what I've learned with those others to still further others. Other people, other animals, other plants, other landscapes, other companies, other nonprofits, other songs, and so on. Being an academic, for me, is a peripatetic activity, my favorite thinkers tend to be wanderers: the Ancient Greeks (including that dog always off his leash, Diogenes), Confucius, Nietzsche.... It's in this movement that I find

myself among others and as such moved by those others. If I want to see a change in the world, I must become that change and model it and so I find this wandering academic mode to be very satisfying.

Gokey:

Thinking has always been a social act. Hegel was not really just Hegel, Schelling was not just Schelling, Hölderlin was not just Hölderlin. It was that triplet "Schegelderlin" which produced Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin. What is interesting to me is the ways in which the social production of knowledge is starting to change. You no longer have to be lucky and in the right place at the right time. You just need to search the web and form your own little collective of people who are asking the same questions that you are. Until this Basel conference I have never met the other editors of Speculations in person. There will be dozens of dissertations about the way that the social production of knowledge has shifted under the hive mind of the Internet.

Ennis:

I have a lot invested in it, I suppose. It plays a big part in my self-model. It is, more or less, what distinguishes me from almost everyone I met prior to going to University. It is what allowed me to escape and give names to feelings, thoughts, and intuitions that I once feared. It affirmed my suspicion that as deluded animals for the most part we also have a capacity for quite extraordinary stands against what is ultimately a bleak existence. So for providing me with a little armour I am eternally grateful to it.

Austin:

I may be biased here, because I come from an academic background. My grandfather is a chemical engineer who is basically the authority when it comes to the mathematics of the sedimentation of polydisperse suspensions and who taught in the mathematics department at my undergraduate institution for a number of years. Being "an academic" has thus long been a part of my identity, and while I didn't pursue the natural sciences as was perhaps expected when I was younger, that identity has persisted in one form or another. I now have a different view of what it means to be an academic than I did when I would visit my grandfather's office at the university, but the position of someone who pursues and shares knowledge will always be a part of who I am, whether or not I make my own living within the university.

Jackson:

Any investment I have is DIY infused. I study digital arts, code, computation and corresponding artists, and one of the main reactionary identifications is with a DIY attitude of composition; for example, the ability to tinker and configure in some ad hoc fashion. Often we think of DIY projects as looking decidedly shoddy, but this isn't the case. The Speculations journal is a DIY project of sorts, with a high degree of quality research, but it very much exists as DIY. Building new systems isn't easy, building new avenues of knowledge takes even longer. We will reach a point in 10–20 years' time where, a new branch of academics, either waged or unwaged, will be quite adept at commanding attention for their own collective of interest. We just need to build the tools, the systems and the time to get it started.

Allen:

My investment is particularly in the role of knowledge, learning and (what I consider to be good) scholarship is in producing change in people. Individual and communal change is something that I value inherently. I think I'm actually a proponent of quite a hopeful, romantic version of all this, which takes real education as transformative and hence exciting, interesting and worthwhile. For me, the 'real 'crisis of the institution', if a predominance is to be identified, is in the way people in some organisations and communities are allowed to or encouraged to feel responsible to, and for, another person's transformations. This presupposes not taking academia and its motivations (publishing, CV-padding) at face value, but continuously rethinking the nature of scholarship and teaching—in the face of the Internet and other new social and informational media, and in the face of active world-changing activities like art and politics. What I'm drawn to in the academic is the thinking practitioner (political, artistic, linguistic or otherwise), which comes about through scholarship that isn't overly concerned with disciplines or professionalism. The importance of this kind of academic "aesthetics" (or style, really) cannot be overplayed, as I think styles of engagement (channels, media, motivations) are what make changes in thinking possible, whether you're studying chemistry or literature.

What I'm talking about has been well articulated by the philosopher, musician, ethnographer, improviser, and teacher George Lewis. George was part of the important Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, an highly influential and adventurous avant-garde group of composers and improvisers formed in 1965 (and still in operation). He describes the group like this: "With the AACM, the problem was to create a community or group... What brought them together was a shared sense that they should be responsible for each other... A sense that you were responsible for someone just because they were in the same... they were trying to do what you were trying to do—which is advance as a person and as an artist. That seems to be the basis on which a kind of mutual aid society develops." I'm looking for, and hope to play some part in the creation of academic communities like this, and like George, I've often, "wondered why the academic environment couldn't be more like the AACM? That is, having a sense of people who are committed to supporting you no matter what."[9]

What is the future of Para(Academic) Practice?

Austin:

I think one of the keys to understanding the future of the academic and of (para)academic practice is to understand that the public, by and large, want to learn. Certainly not everyone does, I'm not that idealistic, but most people are generally interested in the world around them. The philosophy department here at Memorial for instance runs a series of public lectures hosted at a pub downtown called The Ship. I had the opportunity to present one of these lectures a couple of years ago titled "Hollywood's Undead and the Philosophy of Fear," relating to psychoanalysis and popular horror films. I received an overwhelming response from both academics and the public at large, which really cemented the idea both that academics need to relate their work to a wider audience than those of an obscure journal, and that the public, when given the opportunity, want to engage with academics.

Public lectures, free schools, and online distribution show us some of the ways that (para)academic practice are already getting people to rethink higher education. I'm very interested for instance in initiatives like

---

9. My transcription from the video *George Lewis: The Story's Being Told*. New Music Box. American Music Center. August 1, 2011. www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0S4DUC2zRA

the University of Reddit, where anyone can teach any subject to anyone with internet access. While such pursuits don't necessarily bode well for the academic as a career, the future in that respect is bleak as it is, as anyone within the university system is all-too aware. The ability to engage with the public however, whether it be online or through not-for-profit courses, will inevitably reveal that just as those outside of the university want to learn, that they may also be willing to support academics financially as well, just as many are willing to support musicians outside of the system of major labels.

Jackson:

Decentralisation basically. I'm surprised it hasn't happened on a mass scale already, but the catalyst of Speculative Realism and it's proliferating attention has certainly moved it up a gear. As the confidence of independent researchers increases, so too will the rate of decentralisation. We must however remember that decentralisation has a different set of affordances, but also a different set of constraints. Like most other media which is distributed on a communicative network, it will be done on a distributed protocol basis. That is to say, the emphasis won't necessarily be placed on single individual levels anymore (academics, journals presses and universities) but on organisations of mass distribution focusing on distribution solely (like YouTube with video and Spotify with music, but with little emphasis placed on property). Everyone can produce for the collective, but only a select few collectives will organise decentralised academic practice into a manageable service, often pushing journals and authors they see 'fit' for mass appeal and attention. The cynic in me knows that the goodwill of sharing will no doubt be exploited—I saw it happen in the late 90s.

To some extent, we've seen these collectives pop up already (academia.edu, scribd to mention two famous ones), but there isn't a social collective which has confidence in them working effectively against the university or the proprietary journal. But it will happen, and when it does, academic production in the humanities will change rapidly and precariously. (Don't be surprised in the meantime to expect university conference fees to increase rapidly, due to bigger markets). Firstly, para(academics) will become more self-promoting than they are now, perhaps working harder and quicker than they would normally have done under an institutional affiliation. Secondly, boundaries between fields will dissipate—maybe become a thing of the past, as para(academic) interests will align themselves with current events. Thirdly the life of an para(academic) will be contingent not on funding, nor peer-reviewed publications necessarily (peer review will expand to lofty heights in a network) but on alignment with a distribution collective which serves a purpose within a partnership of attention. Lets just hope that good and original ideas shine through this decentralised mode of production rather than viewer numbers, although I am concerned that any new method of protocol, exhibits new methods of measuring attention.

Allen:

I have started to compile a list of envisioned "outstitutions" and ways that we might be able to band-together to talk generously about ideas that are in line with the para(academic). Some of these, in the short-term are parasitic, in that they take advantage the ridiculous surpluses and insufficiencies of academic lives and careers (My own involvement in free, open Public School NYC teaching while I was supporting myself as a salaried University employee, as one personal example). The primacy of ideas, the communications channels that are available, and even the sort of looseness with which one can at-will engage with traditional, institutional academic structures (as they begin to show their age), seem to present a number of autonomous

zones in which we might exist in future. Specifically, in philosophical discourse, dialogue has returned in the form of blogging, and this is something just plain new, unregulated and incredibly exciting. It may be that the most interesting forms of scholarship and thinking need to take place in the back-channels, side-chains and back-alleys until these discourses fully replace inefficient and arthritic institutional practices and thinking.

Ennis:

Well the situation with jobs will either ease off or be compounded. It seems the desire for advanced graduate training in the humanities remains strong despite a broad awareness that it's a bit of a fool's errand to do a Ph.D. these days (at least within theory, philosophy, and so on). But assuming that this delusion of stability is just a sort of pipe-dream or simply keeps expectant parents/friends off one's back what we will have in coming years is an army of theory-armed transients. I'd like to see some kind of alternative, parallel academy that can co-exist—since the University remains the home in terms of that which we are parasitic of/from—with the current one. In demonstrating that education can be carried out 'not for profit' it will surely begin to test the current structure. Open-access journals are already an example, but also the ability to deliver lectures on thinkers no department would let you do, and so on matters. Essentially the para-academic has a chance to reveal that which the academic 'proper' has given up, and what the price of academic 'freedom' really is.

Boshears:

The University must produce cheap, precarious labor for itself so that it can continue to manufacture its products for the greater good of society. Since there is presumed to be a broadly-diffused benefit to society, the University is heavily subsidized by tax payers. But who, really, has access to the work? If it is the case that basic research—which is necessary but overwhelmingly expensive and delivers minimal return on investment from a venture capital standpoint—is being funded by mechanisms that only a State can offer, then shouldn't that research be made available to the public? This was what led to the establishment of PubMed and arXiv.[10] Perhaps surprising to some, the question of who receives what benefit from the work of Academia (which is not the same as the University) has been well mobilized in the world of academic publishing.

Today it's a question, whether or not the University will be able to continue in the face of the neoliberal ideological onslaught.[11] In the U.S. we've seen the shift from nationalized to privatized semantically occur at the Federal level with the transition from the National Security Administration (a national effort, not an individual one) to the Department of Homeland Security (it is one's home, that individual's place, that must be defended). Of course, our neighbors to the north have articulated and demonstrated well how to resist this

10. Konstantin Kakaes. "The Other Academic Freedom Movement." *Slate*. February 9, 2012. www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2012/02/federal_research_public_access_act_the_research_works_act_and_the_open_access_movement_.html

11. Marc Parry. "Could Many Universities Follow Borders Bookstores Into Oblivion?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. March 7, 2012. chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/could-many-universities-follow-borders-bookstores-into-oblivion

12. "Concordia Professors Oppose the Privatization of Universities." GEOGRADS – Geography, Planning and Environment Graduate Students Association. Department of Geography, Planning and Environment (GPE), Concordia University. geograds.wordpress.com/geograds-newsletter/concordia-professors-oppose-the-privatization-of-universities

13. Steven Leckart. "The Stanford Education Experiment Could Change Higher Learning Forever." *Wired Science*. March 20, 2012. www.wired.com/wiredscience/2012/03/ff_aiclass

offense against the public good.[12]

It's also a question, whether or not the University is doing itself in by feeding on the efforts of an army of at-will adjuncts while simultaneously lowering the value of the work their professors work by giving it away for free.[13] What MIT's OpenCourseWare indicates is that the University is shifting from producing educated human bodies to producing accredited human bodies.

The Open Access movement and the sprouting of (para)academic activities are not only about broadly distributing the ability to publish as some sort of democratic (and thereby more imbued with justice or equity or something) action. I believe what we are doing is making a sharper distinction between publishing and publication. Publishing is about making stuff knowable, publication is about public-making. Public-ation is a process, like saturation—the process of saturating—or maturation—the process of maturing. As the University raises a stink about the prices of journals,[14] and the actual cost of making a journal;[15] we are making a different kind of public than those that also attend universities.

Gokey:

I think that the para-academic is largely a function of the economics of the academy. When you have a large pool of creative, super smart, highly educated people and for most of them the idea of a tenured track position is just not available, you will see that they start writing what they want how they want. The artificial forms and styles of the academy no longer have to be followed. What is the point if you're never going to get tenure anyway? Why not just invent Black Metal Theory and write theory about D&D instead of writing boring form articles to be published in backwater journals that will only be read by—and statistically we know this to be true because there have been studies done on this—only two people. When we write what we want to write and how we want to write we end up writing better more interesting things. And partly as a result of this we find a bigger audience.

I think we are about to witness a mass exodus from the university. We can teach ourselves and each other without the mediation of the university. Schools like the Pubic School, or the school that I am most intimately involved with, The Art School in the Art School, are paving the way forward. For me the key is to create new forms of accreditation.[16] The Open Badges Project seems to be the way that is the farthest along this route and I expect it to catch on. The academy is in a pretty dire situation right now. It has no way to justify itself. We can do better on our own and we will go on by ourselves. We will work directly with each other. The university system is in danger of collapsing within a few years, or at the very least it will be forced to completely transform itself. The parasite will consume and turn into the host.

The other main point of attack must be debt refusal from students.[17] We must abolish Sallie Mae. We must simply stop cooperating. It will take a highly coordinated effort but we must all, simultaneously stop paying our tuition debt. We are not asking for debt forgiveness. We did nothing wrong. It is we who will forgive or not forgive Sallie Mae.

14. The Faculty Advisory Council. "Faculty Advisory Council Memorandum on Journal Pricing." *The Harvard Library Transition*. April 17, 2012. isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k77982&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup143448

15. John Naughton. "Academic publishing doesn't add up." *The Guardian*. April 21, 2012. www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/apr/22/academic-publishing-monopoly-challenged

16. "Alternative, Autonomous Accreditation." The Public School New York. September 12, 2011. nyc.thepublicschool.org/class/3568

17. See www.occupystudentdebtcampaign.org

continent.

code {poems}
(excerpts)
A project by Ishac Bertran
Introduction by Jamie Allen

When things get complex, as they may indeed be getting, the distinction between tools and the things that can be made with them begins to dissolve. The medium is not only also a message, it is an essential counter-valence to our own impulses towards the creation of meaning, beauty and knowledge. The tools we think we are using also use us: They push us around, make us think new things, do new things, even be new things. Language is no different, of course, although in its supremacy and ubiquity, it is even more elusive, difficult to perceive. The very words you are looking at right now are like compact little cryptograms—a written convention, talking back at you in codes.

Poetry is language speaking for itself. It is, at its best, where what is being told is coincident with the telling. The words written, or uttered, pop out at us, while in the same moment, constellations of meaning emerge; the components and its composition resonate, vacillate, on the page and in the air. Many of the constraints and styles of poetry we know have developed in order to allow words to express themselves, or show themselves as the mediation of a mental image. Programming languages for computer hardware, no matter how "high level" or abstract they are, are by necessity far less elaborate than traditional forms of writing and speech. But the structure and function of these new languages give them special advantage in clarity: These languages (syntax, sequence) and the results they produce (ideas, 'executables') are absolutely inseparable. By design, computing languages are created *in order* to express specific ideas, creating certain kinds of action or manipulation of other codes (data). In this sense perhaps, software is always, and already, poetic. It is precise description, and pure syntax—the signifier and signified—clearly coincident in the machine.

Ishac Bertran's *code {poems}* is an edited book project that exposes the materiality of computer programming languages. Here are presented a small sampling from a compiled book of poetry written by software engineers, artists and other code writers, "exploring the potential of code to communicate at the level of poetry." (code-poems.com) The project solicited for online, public submissions from code-writers in response to the notion of a poem, written in a software language which is semantically valid (i.e.: it compiles). This solicitation winds up revealing the inner workings, constitutive elements, and styles of both a particular software and its authors. From a large number of submissions, a selection of poems will be printed as a bound volume in the Autumn of 2012.

DAILYGRIND

```java
import java.util.Date;

public class DailyGrind {

    public static final void main(String[] args) {

        boolean its_time_to_go_home = false;
        boolean away_the_hours = true;

        while (away_the_hours) {

            Date now = new Date();
            its_time_to_go_home = now.getHours() > 17
                    && now.getMinutes() > 30;

            if (its_time_to_go_home) {
                break;
            }

            try {
                Thread.sleep(60000);
            } catch (InterruptedException e) {
                // ignore
            }
        }
    }
}
```

Paul Illingworth
// Java

UNHANDLED LOVE

```
class love {};

void main()
{
    throw love();
}
```

Daniel Bezerra
// C++

_____

TWOFACED

```
public class TwoFaced {
    public String greet() {
        return "Hi! So great to see you!";
    }

    private String think() {
        return "Fucking bitch.";
    }
}
```

Jason Kopylec
// Java

DANCING WITHIN

```csharp
using System;

public class PoemCode
{
    private bool dancing_within()
    {
        Boolean me = true;
        while (dancing_within())
        {
            var iables_of_light = "";
            try { int elligently_to;
            object ify_the_world_apart; }
            catch (Exception s)
            {
                int o_the_broken_parts;
                throw; int o_the_seed_of_life;
            }

            Random ashes_of = new Random();
            float ing_devices;
            short age_of;
            char acter_will_never_let_you = 'b';
        }
        return me;
    }
}
```

Álvaro Matías Wong Díaz
// C#

What Comes After Post-Anarchism? Reviewing
The Democracy of Objects

Duane Rousselle

For two decades post-anarchism has adopted an epistemological point of departure for its critique of the representative ontologies of classical anarchism. This critique focused on the classical anarchist conceptualization of power as a unitary phenomenon that operated unidirectionally to repress an otherwise creative and benign human essence. Andrew Koch may have inaugurated this trend in 1993 when he wrote his influential paper entitled "Post-structuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism." Koch's paper certainly laid some of the important groundwork for post-anarchism's continual subsumption of ontology beneath the *a priori* of an epistemological orientation, and his work continues to be cited as an early and important venture into post-anarchist philosophy. The problem is that Koch could not conceive of an anti-essentialist and autonomous ontological system, one not subject to regulation or representation by the human mind. Consequently, he was forced to assert a subjectivist claims-making ego as the foundation of a post-structuralist anarchist politics. Saul Newman was indebted to this heritage insofar as he also posited the ego (extrapolated from the writings of Max Stirner) and the subject (extrapolated from Jacques Lacan's *oeuvre*) as the paradoxical 'outside' to power and representation. Todd May fell into a similar trap in his book *The Political Philosophy of Post-structuralist Anarchism* when he wrote that "[m]etaphysics [...] partakes of the normativity inhabiting the epistemology that provides its foundations."[1] Whereas Newman's approach did not necessarily foreclose the possibility of metaphysics—at least to the extent that he began with the subject of the Lacanian tradition (wherein the subject is believed to be radically split between thinking and being)—May completely foreclosed the possibility of any escape from the reign of the epistemological. There laid the impasse of yesterday's post-anarchism.

This impasse at the heart of the project of post-anarchism has forced Koch, Newman, May, and many others, to come to similar conclusions about the place of ontology in post-anarchist scholarship. The post-anarchists have all formulated a response strikingly similar to Koch's argument that any representative ontology ought to be dismantled and dethroned in favour of "a conceptualization of knowledge that is contingent on a plurality of internally consistent *episteme*."[2] By dismissing all ontologies as suspiciously representative and as incessantly harbouring a dangerous form of essentialism, post-anarchists have overlooked the privilege that they have placed on the human subject, language, and discourse, at the expense

---

1. Todd May. *The Political Philosophy of Post-Structuralist Anarchism*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. 1997. 2.

2. Andrew Koch. "Post-structuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism" [1993] in *Post-Anarchism: A Reader*. Eds. Duane Rousselle & Süreyya Evren. London: Pluto Press. 2011. pp. 23-40.

of the democracy that the human subject shares with other animals, objects, and beings in the world. This epistemological characterization of post-anarchism has held sway for far too long. It is not by chance that post-anarchism, as a concept, was first formulated by Hakim Bey as an "ontological anarchism,"[3] and subsequently repressed by the canon of post-anarchist authors. Perhaps Bey's ontological anarchism also lacked the 'rigour' required of today's scholarly audience and for these two reasons (at least) he has received very little credit for his inaugurating efforts into post-anarchism. In any case, I want to challenge this reluctance and revive the roots of post-anarchism.

Levi Bryant gives us a reason to believe that we can achieve the promise of Bey's ontological anarchism without sacrificing the scholarly standard of rigour. Levi Bryant's newest open-access book, *The Democracy of Objects* (2011), is a *tour de force*. His book challenges post-anarchists to take their radical critique of representation a step further by questioning the "hegemony that epistemology currently enjoys in philosophy." Bryant maintains that post-structuralism, and radical anti-humanisms, only appear to reject the subject as the locus of political agency. Their rejection is actually more of a disavowal, a replacement of the human subject with the equally human order of language or discourse. What post-structuralism attempts to elucidate is the manner in which the subject is colonized by the Other of language, discourse and social relations. What here appears as a movement away from the determining subject of humanism and existentialism is only replaced with the determining apparatuses of structures as they are conceived by astute analysts of political culture. Post-structuralism thus re-enters the anthropocentric discourse to the extent that the cultural analyst believes himself capable of conceiving the determinative structures of society. In contradistinction to the claims of post-structuralism and post-anarchism, the role of the ontologist is not to suture the gap between epistemology and the real but to de-suture it, as Bryant puts it: "[o]ntology does not tell us *what* objects exist, but *that* objects exist, that they are generative mechanisms." Above all else, the role of ontology, for post-anarchists, ought to be a *real* de-centering of the subject in relation to other objects in the non-human world such that the subject becomes conceived as one object among others within a living democracy of equality. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that objects exist whether or not the subject or analyst is there to represent them: they represent themselves and are autonomous from our dictation, just as each object finds its autonomy in relation to other objects.

Ontology must now be distinguished from representation. We must shift the terms of the debate and interrogate the hegemony that epistemology has been afforded within post-anarchist philosophy. At least two possibilities are now permitted. On the one hand, one could intervene into the reigning mode of philosophy, namely epistemology, by latching onto concepts from meta-ethical philosophy. Meta-ethics allows one to easily separate the ontological from the epistemological and to answer very particular questions about each in order to formulate an overarching meta-ethical position.[4] Post-anarchism is particularly adept at this task because of its resounding ability to frame itself as an ethical political philosophy in relation to the strategic political philosophy of classical Marxism. On the other hand, Bryant argues that "[p]erhaps the best way to defeat [the privilege currently held by epistemology] is to shift the terms of debate." Shifting the terms of debate is also something that post-anarchists have been very good at doing. Thus, instead of asking the question 'how do representative ontological systems harbour concealed epistemological orientations toward

---

3. Bey, Hakim. "Post-Anarchism Anarchy." 1987. As Retrieved on February 8th, 2012 from

http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Hakim_Bey__Post-Anarchism_Anarchy.html

the political?', one might ask *'do* epistemological orientations toward the political always harbour representative and subject-centred ontological systems?"

The genius of Bryant's book rests in its ability to convincingly argue for the radical autonomy of being and of objects. This claim speaks to some of the most compelling theories of the political in anarchist and marxist political philosophy (for instance, hegemony, representation, democracy, and so on) and it re-stages the political drama of our times across a much wider terrain. The fallacy of strategic political philosophy in the Marxist tradition, as Todd May quite correctly points out, is that it remains committed to a concept of power that is unitary in its analysis, unidirectional in its influence, and utterly repressive in its effect. Similarly, Bryant's ontology allows one to argue that there is a fallacy that occurs "whenever one type of entity is treated as the ground or *explains* all other entities." Whereas May's post-structuralist anarchism moved away from the fallacy of the unitary analysis of power, whereby subjects are constituted by the influence of a single site of power, it nonetheless remained committed to a tactical political philosophy which is monarchical *in the final analysis*. It remains monarchical to the extent that the human world, the world of epistemology, is treated as the yardstick of democracy. Bryant's argument is quite instructive: "[w]hat we thus get is not a *democracy* of objects or actants where all objects are on equal ontological footing [...] but instead a *monarchy* of the human in relation to all other beings." The real fallacy is thus not against strategic political philosophy but philosophy itself and the way it has played out over so many centuries. "The epistemic fallacy," writes Bryant, "consists in the thesis that proper ontological questions can be fully transposed into epistemological questions." The point that Bryant is making relates to the way ontology is today always reduced to an epistemology and thereby loses its significance as a philosophical question.

This book should be applauded for its novelty and its thesis ought to be taken seriously by post-anarchists today. Because of this book, and the attendant post-continental movement that is being called 'speculative realism,' we can now distinguish three stages in the life of post-anarchism. First, we can deduce what Sureyyya Evren has described as its 'introductory period.' The introductory period of post-anarchism is defined by its inability to side-step the ontological problem in the literature of classical anarchism. During this period, post-anarchism needed to distinguish itself from classical anarchism while nonetheless remaining committed to its ethical project. The second period overcomes the problem of the separation of post-anarchism from classical anarchism by re-reading the classical tradition as essentially post-anarchistic. Some of the critiques of post-anarchism—especially that from Cohn & Wilbur[5]—are included into this period insofar as post-anarchism, for them, was always already anarchism. Whereas the first and second phases have included only explicitly anarchist literature under their rubric of worthwhile investigation, in the third period this no longer holds true. To be certain, the second period permitted the incorporation of post-structuralist literature into post-anarchist discussions (but always with a certain amount of reservation). This third period, the one that is to come—the one that is already here if only we would heed its call—will not take such care with attempts at identification or canonization. Indeed, post-anarchism is already here, like a seed beneath the snow, waiting to be discovered. Levi Bryant teaches us that the third period is already here: and yet where is it?

---

4. I have attempted to do this in my paper on Bataille's post-anarchism; see Duane Rousselle. "Georges Bataille's Post-anarchism." *Journal of Political Ideologies*. 17(3): in press.

5. Jesse Cohn & Shawn Wilbur. "What's Wrong with Post-anarchism?" 2010. As Retrieved on February 9th, 2012 from http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Jesse_Cohn_and_Shawn_Wilbur__What_s_Wrong_With_Postanarchism_.html

continent.

A New Negentropic Subject

Reviewing Michel Serres' *Biogea*

A. Staley Groves

Michel Serres. Biogea. Trans. Randolph Burks. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing. 2012.
200 pages | ISBN 9781937561086 | $22.95

Readers searching for novelistic entertainment, *Biogea* deserves a place in your back pocket. Biographical generosity and poetic fluidity should be enough for most textual fetishists. For lay-philosophers who want to refresh their acumen, *Biogea* deserves a place on your bookshelf, a sorely needed postmodern tune-up here. Serres is clearly French, he leaves few cheese crumbs on his words. Rather, preciseness and breathing in the work give way to a sweeping manner that breaks the narrative line-of-sight. A circular narrative and anachronistic fragmentation of terms allows an abyssal atmosphere swell—if only to pump into the book the externality of its broader text. *Biogea* aspires to a higher standard, the book is too, at times, thinking this negentropic problem. Univocal, the publisher, has crafted a book appropriate for the hands to hold and the translations are an achievement the difficult writer to in translation.

Serres' content is a thinking of terminal ports. There is a regard for the transportation technology of the written word. This craftiness tells of a book device I may trust. Serres is an accomplished thinker, a necessary voice to check the putative trendiness of anti-postmodernist and market-driven theory in our moment of endless cultural liquidation. Offering interventions on subjectivity as an open system we are given a chance to affirm the human, not merely discard it, but to engage it's poetic image-emotion, the *calibratory* silent sense of the analogic world; the terms on which we base our efforts.[1] The human is the center of its own negation, constantly mediating it. Something deeper at stake appears in the work then, and it is quite obvious from the onset. Certainly, a book is an intensification of possible text, this actual book, those who brought it into existence, have captured a rarity in regards to the subject-matter and artistic accomplishment.

Let us understand Bio-Gea to mean *bios*-yes. An affirmation of living and accepting presence for all of its defiance of images, words, and things temporal. Serres' existence and its *existants* play parts; out of linearity and still like a porous bone pumping blood it manufactures into the fleshy life it becomes. Starting from a man named *silence*, chaos emerges. The man, Old Taciturn, takes up a journey anticipating a great flood. In other words, something like Genesis. Fusing Genesis with contemporary philosophical terms, Serres initiates this anachronistic fragmentation under the forming subjectivity of Serres' autobiography.

Mutation in the open system is a theme in Serres' text. An abyss is at work, stated, but also measured by heels on the ground—the abyss dispatches earthen tensions, that which plays our tunes, that which we abide by and recognize in volcanoes, rivers, oceans, earthquakes and weaponry in the battles of the world.

---

1. See Michel Serres. *The Parasite*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2007.

Set in later stages of the book, these elements are harnessed through scientific principles, each of these attempts to unify the terms of natural force if only to terminate the world, the elevation of the earth into the world is clearly set forth.

Under appellations such as "the river Garonne," an inhuman subjectivity, in this text we see that the river is the inhuman that makes "us" human. I get the sense Serres is taking up a challenge issued by Wallace Stevens—that the great poems of heaven and hell have been written, only the poem of the earth has resisted composition.[2] Given that our cognition blockades its pure radical obliteration, we cannot avoid the killing factor that is silence. A silence of attunement to the earth is in a novel dialectic of the rithmic and rhythm.

> Knowledge is changing today. The all-political is dying; the monarchy of the sciences said to be hard is coming to a close. The science of the things of the world will have to communicate just as much as the things of the world do, which do it much better than humans do, who don't always want to do it. Let's celebrate two changes this morning. The first one strikes a new blow to our narcissism. No, knowledge and the world don't resemble our analytical enjoyments of refined cutting up, of endless debates and of exclusions full of hate. They, on the contrary, form a bloc and a sum, alliance and alloys. Uniting the fields of knowledge among themselves the way the things are connected among themselves, the second newness puts into place sets united by interlacing, webs and simplexes that combine with the things of the world, themselves combined, the combined knowledge that understands them.[3]

A technological world, a triumph of termination is set forth. If a text imposes its will—assuming the reader authorizes it—a text is made to convey or *convect* a presupposition (truth) to a reader or its inhabitant(s). Text is therefore both, in-content, contenting, contentedness, and in reading it, a way to navigate self-destruction (dis-content).

Here, then, one would note that the inhuman reveals itself as, "an aperiodic rhythm of lovers and beloved…the sea as our friend…but as our enemy…maternal vivifying sea." The sea is an open book, or, "…woman sea, open vulva." One sees like the sea only after it, when the uninhabitable truth of inhabiting it switches the polarity of the sailor's soul: "I was seeing like the sea." In other words, embracing the nonsense of the visible.[4]

In Lyotard's *The Inhuman*, specifically the first entry on negentropy, there is a congruency with Serres' thematic.[5] The human being exports, or deports, or transplants its relation through text, through the system—and this is its sense or relation to silence, to music. If silence and death are at work there is a political

---

2. Wallace Stevens "Imagination as Value" circa 1945, Vintage, 1965.

3. Michel Serres. *Biogea*. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing. 2012. 130-131.

4. Ibid. 9-11.

5. Jean-François Lyotard. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1992.

valence to deal with. The anti-postmodernist critique is in part based on a weak idea that the loss of ideology, of a world vision, motivates the correlationist project.[6] Serres seems to offer another way to view this when he notes persons "sometimes kill," and it is clearly "the collective" that "always kills."[7] What is the collective today, if not an organizing function we never see yet act in its favor in the name of truth? One might link to what Stevens characterization of communism as a "grubby faith."

We get the sense that the inhuman, silence, this type of killing, always killing, could not be matched by human-made, political dynamos. Or that, if it comes to an equilibrium, a catastrophe is never too far from us to read with our heels. We must note that the forces of nature are presupposed in and permeate political systems.

> Where did this corpse come from? Who was it? Who killed it? I
> don't know. I won't try to find out. I refuse to get vengeance for it.
> And I only see Garonne. For our victims, today, are the rivers, too.
> Their waters have irrigated my life, enchanted my thought,
> invigorated my body; I've known them to be threatening,
> untamable, as dangerous as the sea when it rages. Yes, murderous.
> *They* decided to control their courses; dams, sometimes senseless,
> destroying sites and valleys, reduced entire populations to servile
> displacements; programs for the irrigation of thirsty farmland,
> often beneficial of course, completed their drying up.[8]

The more these "natural" systems obtain force, the more the political system takes upon itself the proper name of nature. Thus we understand ourselves to be in an age of ecocide and technological captivity (sustainability and transparency).

Political regimes won't grow our soul-learning ears any larger than our tongues. The promise of technological desubjectification is pushed aside.

> For thousands of years, we have been licking things with our
> tongues, covering and daubing them so as to appropriate things for
> ourselves. If language boils down to a convention, this convention
> took place between the speakers without consulting the thing named,
> become as a result the property of those who covered it in this way
> with their drawn or voiced productions. *Malfeasance* analyzes
> these acts of appropriation. Thus every inert object, every living
> thing as well, sleeps under the covers of signs, a little in the way
> that, today, a thousand posters shouting messages and ugly riots of
> color drown, with their filthy flood, the landscapes, or better,
> exclude them from perception because the meaning, almost nil, of
> this false language and these base images forms an irresistible

---

6. See the introduction: Quentin Melliassoux. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Trans. Ray Brassier. New York: Continuum. 2008.

7. *Biogea*. 17.

8. Ibid. 22.

source of attraction to our neurons and eyes. This appropriation
covers the world's beauty with ugliness.[9]

Technological concealment coming to bear, we get a sense of another commentary on the condition of sensing, driving home the necessity of a text dealing with such subject matter to be what it's terms insist. Thus toward new openings, "another space, high enough for us to be able to acquire a wisdom there, that of redeveloping this same place differently from our fathers, this place that's still politically cut up by old hatreds, beneath the flood of tears and blood that we call history."[10]

Biogea closes on its opening flood thematic. Here the tree are brought into a position with atmosphere, the opaque abyssal reservoir, the tomb of the sun sea in the polarity of the earthen heaven and hell. The poem of the earth then is silent but deadly, indeed, as funny as that phrase is, mainly a tomb gas.

The meaning of the living and the non-meaning of things converge
in the muteness of the world; this meaning and non-meaning plunge
there and come out, the ultimate eddy. *Mundus patet*: through a
fissure, through an opening, a fault, a cleft come noises, calls as
small as these apertures. I'm listening, attentive, I'm translating, I'm
advancing in the scaled-down meaning and science. *Mundus patet*:
should the world open greatly, it will launch me into its silence. The
totality remains silent. Knowledge expanded in elation. White origin
of meaning, fountain of joy."[11]

Serres' text moves toward dwelling, as noted, in masterful and accessible ways. The pitched battles are the falling replays of anemic and dead politics. As soon as we realize there is humanity, we may be able to enjoy the end of it, our inhuman capability of listening to silence.

Serres' text lends greatly to the vision of Biogea and humanity's relation. Humanity and its uniqueness lies in its deferral, its thinking and naming, a thinking surrounded by silence that filters into everything, that pulls us through the world, the kinetic pulse we recognize and all of that we cleave away in the base philosophical maxim of difference itself. Unique individuals are spatial creatures—we dwell, and we ought to get good at it. Yet this is an imaginative space that, if you are crazy enough to believe it, de-*term*inates the conditions of its own *terms*. That is why we are not merely creating spaces on the acceleration of time, or so this ignoramus thinks, to accidentally transcend. Imagination already has this insatiable silence we drink-up and fail to manifest. Space is timeless. The imagination itself, shared by humans for themselves, their objects, and the species as a whole, is a non-defined space of relation; a whole human trajectory as part of nature, and part of worlds that are the other side of thinking nature, the consequence of it, at least our attempt to do so. Our survival is based on our deliberation, our caution, our natural deconstructive sense toward this silence that is already part of the song, sung, singing of this century without end. Good books will let us inhabit this space and recognize a form of life.

---

9. Ibid. 38-39.

10. Ibid. 51.

11. Ibid. 198.