





# Parasol



Journal of the Centre for  
Experimental Ontology



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## **Editor's Note.**

Welcome to Parasol #1 the Journal of the Centre for Experimental Ontology(CEO). This issue has as its focus the increasingly well explored area of Neurosis in philosophy inaugurated by Johns in his somewhat obscure book 'Incompatible Ballerina' and expanded in greater depth (and clarity) in his 'Neurosis and Assimilation: Contemporary Revisions On the Life of the Concept'. The neurotic agenda can be encapsulated in the pithy phrase 'ontological neurosis is the freeing of thought into its own realm'. This autonomy of thought from any putative subject found an ally in my own notion of autonomous informational (pneuminous) accretions and thus the CEO was born -but more about that over the page. This 'Neurosis' special does not dwell purely in the Johnsian take but has invited other voices to speak on the matter, hence in addition to Johns' we have also Nick Land, Joshua Hall, and Michael Ardoline sharing their various fascinating spins on what the neurotic concept has evoked.

The second part of Parasol features three pieces of work that dwell in a certain occult-philosophical region. Hyperstition, that now well-known Landian trope features either overtly or covertly in all three of these papers. This is a trend the CEO will no doubt be pursuing further (both online and in print) as its relevance to all manner of forms of creativity (magick, philosophy, art, economics etc.) cannot be overstated.

Before any of these essays though, there are a couple of pages from Charlie and myself about some of the driving ideas behind the CEO thought. These comments say a bit about the genesis of the centre and describe something about how the philosophies of Charlie and myself agree –and differ. Hopefully these will be edifying for an understanding of the still inchoate agenda of the CEO.

Readers should note that Parasol is unashamedly *not* peer reviewed nor is it standardized in its referencing requirements. Parasol is all about liberating thought and trusting the integrity of the authors i.e. to write well (because they will be read what has been tentatively named 'fear review') and not to plagiarize (for reasons that maybe approach the categorical imperative).

Thank you for picking up Parasol 1#. Hopefully you will be assimilated/accreted by the pneuminous content herein.

Graham Freestone.

## Introduction to the Philosophy of the Centre for Experimental Ontology (i).

### Graham Freestone

**Magick** is the missing piece of philosophy. Everything I write in this endeavour (philosophy) emanates from this notion. Why am I so obsessed with this? Because it's true. Of course now we're up and running 'what is truth?' and how do I know such a thing to be true. Well truth here means *undeniability*. How do I know such a thing to be true? This is not the correct question, the correct question is 'what do I know to be true?' (where is the language game of truth is cogent?). Whilst various magicians like to point out that the evidence for magickal interactions/paranormal phenomena in the world is actually very good and that a certain brand of materialism is just in outright denial, I do not tow this line at all. I do not know magick/paranormality to be true, but what I do know to be true is its *manifestation*.

The manifestation of phenomena that transcend regular reality is absolutely undeniable: synchronicities, ufo's, ghosts, crypto-zoological beings, all of these phenomena are witnessed. What is in question is the ontology of such phenomena. Materialist science make various cases involving confirmation bias, neuroscience, electromagnetics, hallucination etc. to explain these phenomena away within their framework. I'm not going to deny that this might be successful, this is not my slant. What I would say is that any phenomenon that suitably transcends regular reality in its manifestation immediately enters a space that I have come to call 'agnostic disjunction'. It involves pointing out that regular reality must engage in essentially question begging argumentation to undermine the showing of the phenomena as paranormal. So in the synchronicity case, the peculiar manifestation of a certain symbol in a suggestively meaningful way might well be accounted for by statistical means but this is not sufficient to deny the possibility that it *might* have been reality behaving in some kind of ineffable way. The statistical materialist is saying that the phenomenon is just a strange probability that occurred and they know this because reality is materialist. This explanation is interesting but not at all necessarily convincing to someone who believes reality just behaved in an ineffable manner, because they just experience exactly what it would be for reality to behave in an ineffable manner. The statistical explanation is an explanation but only one that competes with the ineffable reality notion, it doesn't displace it, it cannot displace it without being able to demonstrate with absolute certainty that reality is like *this*, which it cannot do as the anomalous phenomenon has just provided the possibility precisely that it isn't like that.

This is the agnostic disjunction, it doesn't deny a materialist approach but it does tell you why many other forms of belief proliferate uncontrollably. Magick is the missing piece of philosophy because the acceptance of such phenomena as having epistemic parity is the reason you cannot extirpate religion without a great deal of difficulty (and probably you cannot stop it reappearing at all), it likewise helps us understand

how conspiracy theories take hold and why we shouldn't be so scathing of people who hold these beliefs. Everyone wants to be the better informed person on the side of the truth. So in this sense it's not just magick, it's the clue that paranormality gives us about our epistemological nature.

The Centre for Experimental Ontology is a playground for this kind of philosophy. It's happy to bring magick into its fold, it's happy with the Anton-Wilson and others inspired hyperstitiousness of bodies like the CCRU and its happy in its absolute agnostic disjunctive positioning. The CEO itself is a product of a synchronicity or pneuminous interference as its rebranding goes. I met Charlie Johns at the University of Lincoln peddling his theory of neurosis and assimilation. At first I didn't understand what he was talking about but slowly the light forms and a bolt of recognition emerges. Neurosis –thought thinking itself- is near as dammit the same as the philosophy of autonomous accretions of information that I have been working with. In both cases conceptuality is functioning as a kind of autonomous entity, the only difference really being that in neurosis-assimilation conceptuality is closer to being materially restrained (the magickal interference possibility is not brought out) whereas if one chooses the non-materialist side of the above mentioned agnostic disjunction then the autonomy concepts is the reason for the spooky phenomena.

The CEO wants to try to liberate thought because thought is already liberated (or at least in the manifestation that is pursued). We are all agents of thought, of information or pneuma as I've been calling it. Who are you working for? That's what our pithy little slogan means, what conceptual creatures inhabit your neurotic accretion of pneuma (information)? You are an accretion of information whose guesses at ultimate ontology disclose nothing but agnostic disjunction.

Every philosophical decision is a kind of folly –Laruelle has spotted this- so philosophy becomes a kind of art. *But* the agnostic disjunctive possibility of the ontological strong status of magick means that this art is not inert but actually engaged in the structuration of what is. There is restraint, of course, we cannot just push the world over but equally we should know that it shows itself as having the possibility that the information we use is not just emanating as a powerless communicative overlay but as an effective nudging system that might (when the stars are right) bring the world into alignment *just for your NARP(Neurotic Accretion Regional Processor)*.

## Introduction to the Philosophy of the Centre for Experimental Ontology (ii).

### Charles Johns

**Parasol** is the name given to the bi-yearly journal supported by the CEO (The Centre of Experimental Ontology)<sup>1</sup>. The CEO started as an online platform for the ongoing discussions of myself and Graham Freestone<sup>2</sup>. In those strange discussions we spoke of conceptual animism (or the vitalism of concepts), we spoke of 'accretions' (the imprinting of information onto objects which will subsist beyond the subject-object correlate), we spoke of the world as an extraordinarily large semiotic system which was socio-historically contingent with the power to orient the existence of denizens, and we spoke of 'the self' as a brand (influenced more by business studies than by post-modern philosophy) hence our dictum – who do you work for?

Our conversations proliferated and developed; my thoughts amalgamated into the publication (by Springer Press) of *Neurosis and Assimilation: Contemporary Revisions on the Life of the Concept* (Johns, Springer, 2016) whilst Freestone's were compiled into the *Tractatus Pneumatologico Philosophicus* (forthcoming on Parasol Press). While a biography of myself and Freestone is superfluous here, what does appear interesting is how our thinking has aligned itself to the thinkers in this journal and contemporary philosophy at large (more specifically the so called 'Speculative Realism' movement). In the following passages I only attempt to synthesise possible connections of thought between these philosophies, not to disclose some philosophical lineage nor to even claim comprehension of the below thinkers.

At my time at Goldsmiths College, London, I encountered some post-structural theorists (Lyotard, Baudrillard etc.) and the incandescence of structural thinkers such as Levi-Strauss and Saussure, but mainly we studied the philosophical tripartite of Nietzsche - Bergson - Deleuze. Throughout these stimulating lessons on virtual-actual processes, Nietzschean self-over-comings/re-evaluations, and Bergsonian memory, I had a chip on my shoulder. I was dubious of the materialism's implicit in these thinkers ontologies and I felt that the 'great outdoors' of such thinkers had not been warranted (instead opting for a Kantian critical philosophy but expressed in a more daunting 'Batailleian' spirit of nihilistic quasi-religious solipsism).

After my time at Goldsmiths I went away and attempted to synthesise what it was that I was so sceptical about in philosophical terms. I realised that I was interested in the form and content of thinking, both as it manifested *for us*, yet just as importantly, as a *system* which conditioned the comprehensibility of thoughts in relation to one another. Hegel was my source material for the possibility of describing the self-dividing vitalism

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<sup>1</sup> <https://centreforexperimentalontology.wordpress.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://centreforexperimentalontology.wordpress.com/pneurosis-archive/>

of concepts (their difference and identity) and their proliferation as reality. David Hume gave me a very rough description of the association of concepts (resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect). Nick Land disclosed for me the untidy consequences and residual effects of concepts (as constant production), Graham Harman allowed me to think about the possibility of characterising processes that did not fall inside the scope of the 'transcendental aesthetic' (human spatio-temporality and the mechanistic view of causality) and, finally, a re-reading of the later Wittgenstein allowed me to think of this system of conceptual production as not *a priori* but *contingent*; upon the ways in which we choose to use concepts in order to create a certain image of reality or effect.

When I began to really think about the production of concepts, at least qua my first-person phenomenological perspective, I immediately discerned a *neurotic* theme. Three axioms came to mind.

- 1) Thoughts seemed to come whether you liked them to or not (suggesting something like determination, facticity, affectivity, intrusion). This seemed to go against the general undertaking and reception of western philosophy (as 'system', 'method', as guided by 'the good', 'truth', intentionality, criticality or subjective accounts of thinking).
- 2) I seemed to be able to think about two things at once, or at-least perform two tasks which both rely on different conceptual techniques; I could attend a meeting with my boss and have a conversation with him whilst thinking about a trip I took when I was sixteen to France. I could also sense other submerged thoughts surrounding a present thought (this intuition started my decade long love affair with psychoanalytic theory). The contemporary superimposition of myriad mediums all at once (exemplified in YouTube videos of songs with changing images, of various modes of technological communication that can synchronise with each other at the same moment, etc. ) begged the question of whether this paradigm of 'double-thought' was historically embedded.
- 3) The neurotic *facticity* of thought and its prolific auto-production is powerful enough to 'stage' reality 'in the last instance'. It seems to me that a system of thoughts (especially those that are pre-formed as 'status-quo' or as a kind of Humean 'custom') have the ability to reflect back their 'use' and orient a species; I am reaching the 'dinner table' so I sit down, I reach for my 'fork', I attend the usual etiquette over 'dinner' etc. These 'objects' reflect their use almost tacitly (I call this interaction with reality *tautological* ( $X=X$ , Table = Table etc)). We become *assimilated* by the 'essences' we place in objects and concepts. We could suggest that the relative determination of thoughts qua humans stems from an underlying structure akin to Kant's *a priori*, but we are going further than this and saying that even Kantian space-time (as the structure of sense) is only one more assimilation, one more manifestation, one more picture of reality intertwined with a *contingent* Wittgensteinian 'meaning-as-use' (or at least the spectre of older anthropological concepts and uses that created a cartography of the

world as it now appears to us). The efforts of Nietzsche, Bergson, Deleuze (and others such as Baudrillard) are salvaged by me in a different way then; they show moments of weakness in the presupposition/extrapolation of Newtonian space-time: they show us that the power of 'neurosis', of exotic relations of thought that spur other processes, of superstition, of self-fictioning a form of reality, of the technological means of expressing time (cinema, photography, digital technology etc.) can all immanently construct a form of space-time beyond that of the 'given' or transcendental forms of Absolute space - time (which in turn challenge the accepted conceptual and temporal security-system of subjectivity and thought itself).

This latter realisation is also - I like to think - akin to those thinkers that equate the reality of Pinocchio as equal to that of the state of Louisiana or the scars on their knee. In different ways thinkers such as Graham Harman and Bruno Latour sympathise with this flattening of ontology<sup>3</sup>, but also the philo-fictions of Simon O' Sullivan, the Hyperstitions of Nick Land and even elements of Francois Laruelle's work. It is worth noting that this flattening out of ontology (and the question of how traditional ontologies manifestly compete with one another for the prize of 'truth') is a notion explicit in Freestone's term *manifestationism*. Manifestations are the ways in which existence shows itself, and these include those competing philosophies that hypostatize any one of those 'realities' (idealism, realism, monism, etc are all manifestations). All manifestations are extremely incoherent and between each other display *agnostic disjunctiveness* (the possibility of it being otherwise). Each manifestation has agents that work for it which attempt to bolster its presence.

This notion of competing agencies of thought brings us back to the theme of neurosis. All three of the neurotic axioms that I briefly outlined above (the awareness that thoughts aren't subjectively determined, the awareness that thoughts can escape the task-at-hand or operate whilst you are thinking about something else synchronically, the awareness of thoughts determining role in picturing realities) can be found ontically, empirically, and through case-studies in the traditional description of the neurotic found in clinical and theoretical psychology.

Referring back to the liberation of Newtonian (outer) and Kantian (inner) accounts of time through figures as disparate as Nietzsche, Bergson, Deleuze, Meilllassoux and Harman, Graham Freestones notion of *agnostic disjunction* also chimes well with this attitude. The disjunction first and foremost states that something might be

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<sup>3</sup> We could also characterise this manoeuvre as a democratization of ontologies or even - respectfully - an idealism that proposes thought and object as different only in degree and not kind (if you can think X then X 'exists' no more or less than anything else).

epistemologically otherwise (the existence of contradiction, or, the existence of two separate, contradictory positions that both appear consistent within themselves). This naturally leads to the equal possibility (or reality) of this 'otherwise than' which could appear as justifiable on any level of sense; belief, phenomenon, imagination (contra dominant scientific or rationalistic doctrines). Although he may not explicitly adhere to the following point, we could say that this disjunction, which brings forth all the myriad manifestations (or possible outcomes) of an event, could also bring about change itself; like Harman's vicarious causation, the resulting manifestation could be radically dependent on the singularity (or allure) of the relation. Surely this allure is what synchronicity reveals (or makes us feel is revealed).

The pluralistic formation of space and time (seen in the above thinkers) then begs the question of how subsistence manifests through the human. We already know about those naturalistic accounts of subsistence (the physicalist account of various objective properties in 'the world', the physiological notion of 'homeostasis), we have been given the transcendental account by Kant, the empirical account by Hume ('custom') and the universal-rationalist account by Hegel. Similarly we have a kind of *social* account of the real (not only by Berger and Luckmann<sup>4</sup> but also by thinkers like Lacan and myself). The pluralistic account of space-time is applicable to concept theory; concepts can be fast, slow, too large or too small for representation, too embedded or too withdrawn (the subconscious) yet the human *shareability* of concepts seems to reduce this pluralism to various forms (with respect); representation, language and behaviour. This palatable reduction of conceptual intensity insinuates a certain non-essentialist structuring of reality (assimilation) determined by values such as communication, understandability and *techne* (the crafting of the concept). Just because concepts are pluralistic does not mean that they are evolutionary nor even 'good', and it is to my belief that pluralistic concepts that have not been 'shared' (and also concepts that have not been assimilated as part of physical reality/matter) have proliferated far more than the latter i.e. concepts/percepts determined by the assimilation of physical reality allow for a specific totality (the area and properties of the object) which deny the concepts from further proliferation (albeit only temporarily). Common-sense realism is the Platonic shadowy reality that we put there *ourselves* by accreting concepts such as 'objects' and 'cause'. The possibility of making these associations/assimilations/accretions (posed in the question "what/who is helping us?" or "what material is collaborating with our accretions?") is another metaphysical question entirely (possible answers include the social rearing and quasi-stability of conceptual paradigms (think Berkeley's idea of the 'sharing of god in the mind'), the ongoing and possibly competing reactivation of *sites*

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<sup>4</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Penguin; New Ed edition (28 Mar. 1991).

of thought (based on what we have allocated those sites for historically and socially), the possibility of conceptual information imprinting/substantiating itself and hence becoming a realist or causal account of reality (this could be both mind-independent or dependent depending on whether other entities could read the conceptual information (as if it were a language)).

I see social activity as reducing/determining the form and 'meaning-as-use' of reality and its objects (assimilation), where a recycling of prior meanings-uses (not just practical but theoretical) becomes the scaffolding that orients our existence. Yet there always has to be a *relation* (consummation) in order for an idea to realise itself, and hence putative externality acts as a kind of relational, co-dependent database that holds all interactions and possible concepts (not dissimilar from a certain reading of Bergson's notion of 'memory'). Freestone, on the other hand, posits something called *accretions* which heuristically answers for the phenomenon of consistency in an otherwise inconsistent world. Similar to the power of tautology that I described earlier, an accretion is a form of thinking substance that attaches itself onto putative reality and literally becomes stored within it (think of this event as the storing of information onto a constantly malleable informational system, an act of doubling if you will).

All these partially inchoate descriptions outlined above resuscitate a democratic return to both Kantian, Hegelian, Deleuzian and realist aspects of thought which can be found at present within the contemporary metaphysics of our age.

# Part 1: Neurosis



# Creating emergence : A Brief Study of Conceptual, Phenomenological and Material Autopoietic Emergence.

**Charles William Johns**

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## **Abstract and Introduction**

In this paper I wish to do two things. Firstly I wish to show a notion of emergence which is autopoietic (capable of reproducing and maintaining itself regardless of 'external' events). I will show how a long lineage of philosophers have used this notion (this lineage can in some ways be described as an Idealist lineage but we shall soon see that it can also be seen in phenomenology<sup>1</sup> and realism<sup>2</sup>). I will also roughly sketch out a more 'materialist' notion of emergence that leaves the realm of the conceptual and finds purchase in notions such as 'indeterminacy' and 'emergent qualities'<sup>3</sup>. We could aptly name these two distinct notions of emergence - of Idealist and Materialist persuasion - as Ontological Individualism and Methodological Individualism<sup>4</sup>; emergence as coming from individual beliefs and actions, and, emergence as causal accounts of social phenomena (the former being more rooted in the 'free-flowing' power of concepts and the latter being more rooted in effects of physical (non-conceptual) properties). I will then conclude the paper with a third notion of emergence found in psychology and theorised systematically in my own work on neurosis<sup>5</sup>. This final section of the tripartite will be twofold; it will suggest that notion 1 (idealism) can be seen less as intentional thoughts and more as compulsive thoughts (neurosis). Secondly it will suggest that

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<sup>1</sup> I will later suggest that Heidegger and Wittgenstein adhere to this notion of emergence.

<sup>2</sup> I will later show how Niklas Luhmann adheres to this in Systems Theory.

<sup>3</sup> DeLanda, Manuel, *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason*, Bloomsbury, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Protevi, John, review of Kreps, David, Bergson, Complexity and Creative Emergence, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Johns, Charles, William, *Neurosis and Assimilation*, Springer, 2016.

concepts can become information (or a language) that persists outside of subjectivity (notion 1) yet cannot be reduced to physical qualities (notion 2). Neurosis is therefore used as a critique of idealisms tendency to be rationalistic and intentional, in-fact, one might find that neurosis was already active in those 'Dogmatic' Idealists all along. The autopoiesis of neurosis would therefore be the notion that thoughts emerge, characterize and affiliate with *themselves* and their conceptual history – regardless of subjective agency - discerning a strange world of conceptual emergences that emerge whether we wish them to or not.

### **Emergence as Conceptual Autopoiesis : Plato, Descartes, Kant and Hegel**

For a long time now – and contrary to what figures such as Graham Harman think<sup>6</sup> – philosophy has been a thinking of objects. These objects vary, from a tree, cup, table, mathematical equation, to a truth, a form of consciousness, a Self, and various 'grounds' that 'condition' such phenomena of objects. Since Plato we have seen a difference between 'thinking' and its 'objects' (or even, if we wish, 'mental' objects' and 'physical objects'). This is not simply a difference in empirical terms (the visible and the invisible as Merleau Ponty has called it)<sup>7</sup> but a difference in priority.

#### **Plato**

In Plato we prioritize the real, ideal or perfect triangle over the triangular shapes we see all around us in everyday life. Emergence, characterized by Plato, would be the silhouette of perfection (or the universal) perceived in actual imperfect material forms. Hence, Plato creates a realist and causal<sup>8</sup> hypothesis; that emergence comes from real 'Ideas' 'out-there'. Ideas are the condition for the emergence of objects. Already in Plato we are seeing an inclination to link any form of emergence to the emergence of an 'Idea'. What is interesting about this thesis is that this 'Idea' is not reducible to being in the mind

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<sup>6</sup> Graham Harman has argued that the majority of the history of Western Philosophy has avoided thinking objects/objects on their own terms and instead has either 'undermined' objects (describing them as superficial layers of a deeper material process or substrate (think Democritus' atomism)) or 'overmined' objects (describing objects as defined by - and embedded in - social praxis and cultural production (read The Quadruple Object, Harman, Graham, Zero-Books, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Merleau - Ponty, Maurice, The Visible and the Invisible, Northwestern University Press, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> "Sun is not sight" but it is "the cause of sight itself." As the sun is in the visible realm, the form of Good is in the intelligible realm. It is "what gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower". It is not only the "cause of knowledge and truth, it is also an object of knowledge". Plato, *The Republic*.

of the individual/ a mental state; it is 'found' and 'encountered'. This notion has been resuscitated by contemporary figures such as Alain Badiou<sup>9</sup>.

### Descartes

There is a difference, however, most notably in Descartes, where thinking must first be defined in 'the Subject', and then correspondences to this thinking will further ensue and be legitimized by this thinking. Plato's 'Idea' has moved from the putatively external to the subjectively internal (a substance which Descartes named 'thinking substance'). What emerges here is something quite profound. Thought emerges – in Descartes – as both constitutive of itself and as a character. Descartes proclaims that thinking must first reconstitute itself in order to have a proper grasp on its reality. There is at least the impression that thought not only separates itself empirically and hierarchically from 'objects' in the world, but also chronologically: for anything to 'be' at all it must first be thought; thinking must attach itself to the extended 'stuff-ness' of the world in order to define it (for Descartes there is no 'thing' until this relation is formed).

In Descartes, emergence has here been colonized by thought and the individual, characterizing what is outside of thought (nature) as 'non-emergence' - nothing more than the uniform mechanics of purposive processes lacking any quality (mechanistic philosophy).

The other revelation here is that thought involves itself as a character. Thinking (or the 'image of thought'<sup>10</sup>) no longer acts as 'good', 'truth' or a transparent web in which 'objects' can be caught and analyzed<sup>11</sup>, but instead has a certain disposition. The character of thought in Descartes is *skepticism* (or more accurately 'Doubt'). There is a neurotic – if you allow me this description – doubting that chips away at 'what is'; putative 'conditions' (Descartes preferring to create his own 'foundations' as he called them). There is another 'neurosis' in Descartes thought – that is deductive but could also be seen as self-generative – which is Descartes neurosis for God's 'real connection' to the life of the mind, guaranteeing its reality.

Regardless of - or in-spite of - 'objectivity', 'right', 'wrong', 'correct' or 'false', at least here we have a picture of thought self-motivated; even if Descartes 'set-it', as it were, it continued to function and determine Descartes thought. This is what is 'causa sui' about Descartes philosophy; not that the subject can cause thoughts but that one has to characterize/instantiate a mode of thought *in order for* things to respond to that thought; certainty of a reality, to respond and show itself as method, can only be comprehended

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<sup>9</sup> See Badiou, Alain, *Being and Event*, Bloomsbury, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> I take this term from Gilles Deleuze in his book *Difference and Repetition*, Continuum, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, these early descriptions of thought already have non-objective characteristics.

through affirming the concept of certainty and method in an overall acceptance of a philosophical investigation.

## Kant

Philosophical reflection emerged for Kant as the reverse of Descartes project (but just as neurotic); he built 'limitations' to thought as opposed to foundations. Kant's character of thought rested on inclinations of the day and age. It was a style of thought (and there is nothing wrong with this, in fact this is all we can hope for) which is properly termed *aesthetic*<sup>12</sup>. The neurosis navigating this character of thought had a moral disposition, an inclination towards reconciling analytic and synthetic knowledge claims, a contemporaneous (at the time) desire towards the science of the age (Newton), and all this constructing a field called *sensibility* under the auspices of 'the transcendental'. One could say that Kantian '*sensibility*' emerged through the asphyxiation and repression of any form of alterity/externality outside of his transcendental field of experiencing.

For Kant emergence is the synchronic process whereby we can only speak of a world when it is processed in thought. Outside of experience there is no emergence (not any that we can experience anyway) and – in a sense – his characterization of noumena – whether we can know it or not – appears as either annulled impersonal 'stuff' or something that is partly commensurable (and hence non-resistant/non-rebellious) to the thought which attempts to access it.

As Nick Land has mentioned, the move from a sovereign thinking self, dubious of all it sees (Descartes), to a subject placed within mediating processes of experience (more specifically a subject relaying the difference of empirical sensation into the identity of thought through the structures of logical human experience) mirrors modes of production outside of philosophy;

*What is of particular philosophical interest, however, is that it (the distinction between two separate systems of production) also marks a distinction between the 'rational' (analytic) and the 'empirical' (synthetic), and thus defines a terrain upon which we can sketch an economy of knowledge. Rich food comes from outside the system, and the contortions undergone by structural anthropology in its project to recapture it within an expanded system of relations replay Kant's efforts to reduce synthesis to an expanded horizon of unchanging forms. If 'rich food' is the primordial element of trade, its metamorphosis into the modern 'commodity' can be seen as suppression of radical synthesis, the problematic process which provides enlightenment reason with its object of thought<sup>13</sup>.*

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<sup>12</sup> I do not use this term sparingly. The term is fundamental to Kant's account of experience (see Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Penguin Classics, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Land, Nick, *Fanged Noumena, Kant, Capital and the Prohibition of Incest: A Polemical Introduction to the Configuration of Philosophy and Modernity*, Urbanomic, 2011.

The above passage suggests that Kant's thought can never really equal that of the unknown 'rich' outside (emergence) ; all we can do is assimilate (compromise) the outside into our own subjective structure of experience hence buffering its power.

The affinities between the logic of capital and the logic of Kantian philosophy are interesting; in Kantian philosophy, the dismissal of scientific statements that refer to 'real' objective referents, in favour of inter-subjective judgements between collective persons, mirrors the ostensible legitimacy of judgements of value superimposed by powerful organizations without recourse to anything outside of this. Equally the Kantian desire to relay radical exteriority into internal identity mirrors that of the commodity, which lays claim to its 'newness' and exoticism but only through a marginalized, stable market that has always already been theorized and safeguarded. However, what we must refuse to do is conflate the consequences of using a philosophical system with the innovation of the system itself. The emergence of the system has a power all in itself (the creation of concepts) which is not synonymous with the debilitating effects that ensue when a concept has been repeated, formalized, mobilized and given some putatively external legitimization (capital for instance).

What still remains, from Descartes through to Kant, is a theory of emergence inextricable from the emergence of conceptual thought/consciousness. This does not mean that the conditions for such thought have to have conceptual properties (subjective idealism) but that the world has the ability to conform to a conceptual system regardless of such conceptual emergence succeeding the event of material organization/matter. This is what conceptual autopoiesis, taken seriously, allows us to think.

If the emergence of thought in Descartes is one of a conjuring, self-constituting quality, its character (doubt) stems from a tension/dialectic between two bifurcations; one of *falsity* (personified in Descartes 'evil demon'<sup>14</sup> who misleads the naive perceptions that Descartes starts with in his *Meditations on first philosophy*), the other being the *certainty* of the cogito. Doubt emerges and it must be vanquished by reason alone. But reason can only seem to emerge as it triumphs over the evil tricks of experience and irrationality. Making a Hegelian move, in many ways emergence emerges as the retrospective, residual mess that 'eternal truths' have not done away with yet. The relation of this tension/dialectic to the concept or theme of emergence is crucial because it raises a question - is it truth that emerges, 'from out of the dust of the earth', through the arduous method of deduction and rationality, or, is it the blunders of our civilization that emerge through the lack of any subsistent truth? The above philosophers give us an alternative trajectory; that problems (or differences) of conceptually designating 'a reality' will emerge due to the specific model or programme of a particular type of thinking *itself*. The autopoiesis of concepts in the above thinkers suggest that in order to create an answer (a 'truth') a concept must also simultaneously create its fallacy or 'putting into

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<sup>14</sup> Descartes, Rene, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, (originally published 1641).

question' (the questioning being indeed a self-generative flaw in the original production of a 'truth').

### **Hegel**

In many ways G.W.F Hegel terms this consummation of difference and identity within the concept *dialectics*. It is in-fact the process of conceptual autopoesis that Hegel wishes to make 'worldly', a process shaping the spirit of a particular time (*zeitgeist*), this process being the absolute ideal reality. In Hegelian terminology emergence is the eternal unfolding of the absolute, the eternal unfolding of difference into identity (or comprehension), and this does not have to denote a singular or objective destination/teleology but can come to mean simply the unfolding of 'what is' from within itself. Emergence, then, is not some infinite immutable form but rather an ongoing process realising itself partially within every instant. What is so ambitious about Hegel, as I have mentioned, is this decision to infer the autopoietic process of concepts (which I am arguing for in the above thinkers) onto nature and reality itself. It was as if Hegel turned all the internal inadequacies of epistemology before him into a productive element of reality itself.

### **Emergence as Phenomenological Autopoiesis : Heidegger, Levinas and Baudrillard**

In the twentieth century philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas disclose yet another emerging character of thought; Husserl's earlier phenomenological method describes a world where consciousness is always already conscious of some object or other, always *intentionally* participating in the world. Heidegger's 'moods' give us an idea of what 'Being' is perhaps participating in – the many forms of Being that sometimes have a more pertinent purchase on our thoughts than any dry philosophical act. The emergence of a thought tied to its disposition (something we should have discerned earlier in almost all philosophy) comes to the fore; a thought brought forth from its 'being-in-the-world', its 'being-towards-death', 'being-for-the-other', 'care', 'will-to-power', 'affirmation' etc. Here, thinking is given an expansive character, relating to 'Being' holistically, existentially, and in relation to something outside of itself (the Other) which in some senses undermines the conceptual autopoesis of our earlier thinkers.

### **Heidegger**

The phenomenological tradition can be seen to replace the autopoesis of concept formation found in those earlier thinkers (Ontological Individualism) with the autopoesis of society, history, language and technology (Methodological Individualism). For example, for Heidegger we are 'thrown' (*Geworfenheit*) into a world which in some

senses is already determined by self-generating principles; we are thrown into a particular historical stage of being-human (*dasein*), we are thrown into an invisible equipment that orients our being (technology), we are thrown into a quasi-formal mode of communication and sociality (language) without our complete consent. In many ways the traditional subject dissolves at the same time as a new arena of agency emerges (the horizon of Being that orients our lives and authentic projects). The reason why we could suggest that this new 'transcendental' horizon is autopoietic is because it is not only at odds with traditional subjective, humanist beliefs and intentions (giving it a sense of autonomy) but also produces itself regardless of such beliefs and intentions; in his *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein describes a situation where a mother leaves her friend in charge of her children whilst she gets on with a domestic errand. The mother asks her friend to teach them a game, and when the mother comes back her friend and her children are gambling. In this instance the rules of the 'language game' do imply that gambling could be a possibility, however, this was nowhere to be found in the woman's intentions or even found in her consciousness at that moment; this could be called the autopoiesis of language. Indeed, Wittgenstein harks back to this example when he famously states - "when I Obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule blindly" (*Ibid*).

### **Levinas**

Emmanuel Levinas' writings on 'the Other' also suggest an awareness of some larger force which may not be completely commensurable with traditional human subjectivity (Levinas describing this other as alterity, infinity and responsibility). This sometimes pre-cognitive and immediate affectivity/sensibility (of the Other) becomes the new transcendental horizon, taking on a life of its own (Levinas called the relationship to the Other 'asymmetrical'). There are orders and forces that appear completely autopoietic when this Other is accepted; "The face is what forbids us to kill"<sup>16</sup> , "the face demands justice"<sup>17</sup>. This autopoiesis (or emerging determination) can also be seen in Levinas' concrete descriptions of existential aspects of the human being (as opposed to Being in general) such as need, pleasure, shame and nausea (creating other determinations that we have no apparent power over).

### **Baudrillard**

Phenomenological autopoiesis takes on a whole new meaning when we venture into the semiotic analysis of Jean Baudrillard. For Baudrillard we no longer have a correspondence-theory of truth where an image (phenomena or mental image) corresponds to a true object or reference, what we have instead is *simulacra*. Simulacra

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<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, Wiley-Blackwell, 4th Edition, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, Duquesne University Press, 1985.

<sup>17</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity*, Duquesne University Press, 1999.

is threefold (at least at first glance); 1 - the realisation that there was never any 'real' object in the first place for the image to truly correspond to (Baudrillard talks about the simulation of sacred images which compensate or animate the absence of any God). 2 - The realisation that the image never actually corresponded in the traditional sense (Baudrillard talks about the image 'playing with itself'<sup>18</sup> and creating its own criteria of correspondence which can be rejuvenated at any point in time (autopoiesis)). 3 - The possibility that the grounds for a certain reality can just as easily be simulatable and hence we could never tell the difference anyway (Baudrillard talks of many real-life simulations such as military simulations and the simulation of phenomena through reception via media technologies).

For Baudrillard, phenomenological autopoiesis might be summed up as the emergence of a fully functional (simulatable) reality coordinated by signs that refer to nothing but their superficial 'use' in the chain of arbitrary signification, which denudes the world of any sense of reality or signification tout court and in fact affirms the autonomous power of the forever mutable 'sign'.

So far we have charted the different forms of philosophical emergence in specific philosophers, calling such emergences generally autopoietic. We have noticed a subtle shift between 'Ontological Individualism' (the notion that beliefs about the world can essentially be boiled down to the individual) and 'Methodological Individualism' (the theory that beliefs about the world can be deduced from the causal accounts of social phenomena). We have made an analogy between this theoretical shift in the social sciences and a similar shift in philosophy (especially that shift between Idealist and Phenomenological/relational philosophy). We will now see how the notion of autopoiesis/autonomous emergence translates into a fully materialist account of reality through the work of Manuel DeLanda and his theory of *morphogenesis*.

### **Emergence as Material Morphogenesis: Manuel DeLanda**

The theory of emergence as autopoiesis is very common in systems theory (see Niklas Luhmann<sup>19</sup>) and has many similarities to the morphogenetic theories of Manuel DeLanda. For example there are certain tendencies and limitations to both materiality and a system; both have a limit threshold on what they can integrate into themselves without changing completely, both involve tendencies to return to a neutral state (homeostasis) and both can enter into larger relationships with other systems/materials.

The quasi-autonomy/autopoiesis of a living cell can self-reproduce and constitute itself without recourse to other dimensions, spaces or systems<sup>20</sup> and this can be both a materialist and systems-theory thesis. However, in DeLanda we have an inclination to all

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<sup>18</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, *Live: Selected Interviews*, Mike Gane, Routledge, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Luhmann, Niklas, The autopoiesis of social systems. In: Geyer F. & van der Zouwen J. (eds.) *Sociocybernetic paradoxes*. Sage, 1986.

<sup>20</sup> Maturana, Humberto, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: the Realization of the Living* (1st edition 1973, 2nd 1980).

things emergent within the autopoietic system (I believe that this inclination must stem from DeLanda's admiration for Gilles Deleuze - the philosopher of difference). An emergent property for DeLanda is something that cannot be found in the pre-existing state of an object. In traditional physics DeLanda's emergent property would simply be an addition of the forces involved, but DeLanda argues for something much more radical. For example, when two molecules interact chemically an entirely new entity may emerge, as when hydrogen and oxygen interact to form water. Water has properties that are not possessed by its component parts: oxygen and hydrogen are gases at room temperature while water is liquid, and water has capacities distinct from those of its parts: adding oxygen or hydrogen to a fire fuels it while adding water extinguishes it.

What DeLanda adds to our notion of emergence in general (whether subjective or putatively objective) is an ambitious engagement with the future, which gives objects a virtual capacity (or potentiality); the knife is only sharp once the knife's metallic atoms are arranged in a specific manner. Equally, the 'capacity' to cut depends not only on a future event whereby the knife will be needed, but also if something is cut-able or not. In slightly pragmatic terms the question of emergence in this sense may boil down to an 'ethical' question - "how do we compose our thinking in a way that will actualize a virtual capacity (the virtual being a better political spectrum or simply 'the new')? This may prevail as more interesting than the historical question - "what circumstances have been set-up in order for thinking to emerge as a capacity?".

### **Emergence as Neurosis**

What can we take from this short study of emergence as an autopoietic system characterised differently by both Idealist, Phenomenological and Materialist philosophers? In terms of phenomenology, in order to be captured by a mood (Heidegger, Levinas) one does not have to denote a form of Romanticism (of subjective feeling or intuition) but rather a more attentive, sensitive form of conceptualism; the intensive relation certain concepts have with other concepts, their associations (whether complimentary or juxtaposed, pleasurable or traumatic) which emerge *through us*. We may want to state "it is difficult to think when you do not want to" and this can tie into Heidegger's moods that orient thought. However, we can also quite easily imagine concepts that do not want to show themselves when *they* do not want to (psychology - repression) or that sometimes we do not give concepts the 'food for thought'.

In DeLandian terms emergence may be a guiding principle of thoughts *themselves* (the consequence of concepts relating to other concepts, similar to the consequences of molecules reacting and transforming). It is in the realm of psychology where we are taught that various attitudes can emerge (as an additional quality) through the mixture of incommensurable concepts; a trauma can be displaced into a phobia of some sort, a 'talking cure' can emerge as a newer cathartic element etc.

The overabundance of emerging thought can be aptly described as neurotic. Conceptual overabundance is repressed by the subject – hence – it is denied its power of emergence. Conceptual overabundance is repressed through solely following utilitarian and superficially pragmatic thought processes and activities (the day to day concerns of a contingent and historically relative culture/society). Neurosis is not simply the intensification of thought but also the diversity of its content; that thoughts can come and go whether we wish to will or instantiate them into existence or not, that any ostensibly prosaic situation might be the trigger for a line of conceptual associations that completely baffle us or seem foreign to us. Trauma—as-neurosis is not the index of a thought that cannot be alleviated – like an anchor of a ship caught deep in the seabed – but acts rather as the continual proliferation (or playing) of a concept upon itself, re-establishing itself every time and with newer nuances. The character of a concept has a history which shapes it, but equally, future events will redefine its content and intensity.

Neurosis, in relation to the concept of agency, becomes difficult. In the domain of sociology Prof Engin Isin has talked about 'cycles of neurosis'<sup>21</sup> found in social mediations of global catastrophes, predictions and prophecies. There is a sense in his work that the emergence of neuroses – being a human phenomenon – can be tapped into by humans in a very sensitive and attentive way; we can see the neuroses generating, we begin to see its diffusion and development etc. A lot of the time this can be more immediate and powerful than the political, economic and material effects that are eventually produced by the actualization of these neuroses. Similarly, conspiracy theory seems to involve many of these traits; a form of emerging intuition, skeptical of – or at odds with – more latent scientific, technological and political models of thought and organization.

In another sense the emergence (or constant emergence) of neurosis can also evade any sense of agency. The above example shows us that the proliferation of concepts happen regardless of superimposing a model of rationality or pragmatism upon them (paranoia and prophecy is exactly this moment where the proliferation of concepts bypass their ostensibly rational grounding). This description of the process of neurosis has affinities with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'deterritorialization'<sup>22</sup> whereby the fluid dynamics of subjectivity (interestingly exemplified – but not pushed to the edge – in capitalism) free themselves from any 'top-bottom' form of power/organization (i.e neurosis free's itself from any form of despotic rationality/pragmatism). However, the decision to nuance this dynamic relation between deterritorialization and territorialization (as opposed to exacerbating it) is different to 'neurosis'. The emergence of deterritorialization seems to work on a form of participation and intervention with material culture (of encounters, of refrains, of 'multiplicities defined from the outside') yet 'neurosis' will deterritorialize all by itself (thought has always had the capacity to forge secrets and experiences disconnected from a common-sense vision of the world 'as it is').

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/society/politics-policy-people/sociology/the-cycles-neurosis>

<sup>22</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Bloomsbury, 2013.

This power may allow us to ask "what are the neuroses behind such and such a political maneuver?", or, "what other form of thinking (neurosis) is emerging outside of what it appears to be or is set to be?". Horrendous acts of evil could do with a more open analysis based on the forms of neuroses being mobilized, both through an analysis of incentives, and the responses by the general public: are the desires embedded in such actions neurotic? What is it that we fear? What are their grounds? Most of the time we will find that reactions to events are not physicalist (simply a logically conjunctive cause-effect model), nor rational/logical (in the Western Philosophical tradition), they are not Positivist or Utilitarian, nor Utopian. What we are dealing with is a large self-reproductive myriad system of semiotic 'cues'. For example what happens when concepts are created that oppose others (competing ontologies, religious differences, cultural differences etc)? and pleasures and customs oppose each other (the idea of going to sleep does not like the idea of waking up at 6am the next morning). THESE 'cues' are what we are responding to more than anything else in our contemporary, neurotic epoch.

### **Neurosis as Critique**

Through the above examples I wished to show how earlier 'Idealist' philosophers can mobilize a theoretical space where concepts can emerge exclusively from that form of thinking (as conditions for its own emergence). Similar to Lacan's *Mirror Stage*<sup>23</sup> where a model of comprehension (albeit symbolic) is actualized, and further symbols are produced by this encounter, a philosopher puts concepts, methods and axioms into place and various trajectories then ensue from it. However, the notion that the emergence of these concepts are subjectively willed and instantiated places too much authority on the human being and opens up the question of whether the physical body and material conditions cause such concepts in the first place. My theory of neurosis bypasses this problem and continues a line of self-conditioned thinking found in those earlier idealists by allowing the concept to define itself regardless of human intentionality and material circumstances (let us not forget that neurosis, in the traditional psychoanalytic sense, is the theory that thought comes whether we wish it to or not, however uncomfortable or obscure).

Arguably three of the most influential thinkers in shaping our worldview in the twenty first century (Kant, Hegel and Marx) have all underplayed the neurotic, self-constituting role of concept formation (in relation to both the subject and nature) which represses any genuine notion of emergence. The consequence of Kant's tidy idealism is that, in forfeiting the irrationality of the mind, nature appears as non-emergent in many ways; in Kant's notion of the Sublime we are confronted with the superiority of human reason over nature. In Kant the 'object' of nature is not purposive but rather it is the aesthetic judgement which includes this quality. Nothing surplus can emerge from Kant's faculties, and nothing

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<sup>23</sup> Lacan, Jacques, *Écrits : A Selection*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

can emerge exterior to the human subject (nature) which will intervene or challenge this model, forfeiting any intrinsic emergence to nature itself.

For Hegel the commensuration between idea and nature is rigorous and complex (nature as intrinsically rational forms<sup>24</sup>) yet for all of his dialectical prowess, in the absolutization of the Idea, Hegel repeats Kant by not only blocking any productive differences that could emerge between the two, but also by conflating the conceptual and the natural/material as two qualities that desire to attain and obtain the same one picture of reality. In this sense there is no real emergence because what emerges only emerges in harmony with the expectations of the Idea. In other words, this 'emergence' is linked etymologically to the latin account; to 'arise out of' or 'come forth' from, assuming the new phenomenon emerges as continuous with its conditions, in conformity with them and immanent to them, as opposed to the alternative etymology of emergence as 'breaking through' or the scientific definition of 'the creation of completely new properties'<sup>25</sup>.

Again in Marx, for all of his dialectical materialism there is a similar disregard for the differential conditions that would allow emergence (as the new) to truly emerge because the development of 'matter-in-motion' and the 'laws of physics' can say almost nothing about the proliferation and orientation of semiotic and neurotic conceptual processes. Equally, in Marx, matter is stripped of any radically emerging qualities because it is immediately anthropomorphised as a product of social praxis - 'labor transforms Nature which becomes the inorganic body of man'<sup>26</sup>. In this sense Nature and Human consciousness become a tautological term which are interchangeable hence repressing any form of emergence distinct from this tautology.

In all the three thinkers above neither conceptual proliferation and self-substantiation, nor natural (or non-perceptual) withdrawal or vitalism are being affirmed or liberated. Instead we have some tautological harmony between the two where X simply means X, where thought is commensurate with both itself (the subject) and what is perceived. DeLanda is doing great work with discerning what other processes could be happening outside of our transcendental correlation of them, and Graham Harman is pushing this somewhat in his description of 'vicarious causality'. I am yet to meet someone (with the exception of Graham Freestone) that is doing the same work on a rigorously conceptual, semiotic, structural level. In order for conceptual 'cues' to actualise they must refer partially to the language and history of ideas, and they must necessarily come from the same medium (thought). Causal/social accounts of thought can only discern reductive effects and uses of those thoughts ('in the last instance') and cannot analyse the exigency, possible trajectories, genealogies or medium of the thoughts themselves.

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<sup>24</sup> See Alison Stone's great book on Hegel and Nature (Stone, Alison, Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy, SUNY Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Wolfram, Stephen, A New Kind of Science, Wolfram Media, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Marx, Karl, The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Prometheus Books, 1988.

We should not be slaves to the pseudo-emergence of material circumstances that already prefigure a certain type of relationship with us (that of Master - Slave) nor should we be slaves to the equally pre-existing ways of thinking (discourses/institutions) that conform thought to 'such and such', but rather we should learn to condition unconditioned concepts that arise due to irreducibly complex associations; we should notice the emergency of arising thoughts reacting to other thoughts (neurosis) which will break through the impasse of our present epoch.

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**Nick Land.**

## **Neurosys: On the Fictional Psychopathology of Abstract Horror.**

The ‘fact’ that *Neurosys* is not exactly neurosis might be clarifying, if neurosis were only anything, whatsoever, even merely itself. In the absence of such convenient preconditions, a more elliptical definition is required. The sheer scale of this ellipse, it turns out, exhausts our topic long before its resolution. If this seems irritating, for no good reason, then it has begun.<sup>1</sup>

At first, ‘*Neurosys*’ seems only to say ‘nervous system’, in some compressed format. It is not the central nervous system, however, or even the nervous system of a distinct, individuated organism, as those words would commonly be understood. *Neurosys* is a notional machine encompassing all terrestrial nerve traffic,<sup>2</sup> determined with whatever degree of abstract nominalism is required to ensure the necessity of its existence. There cannot but be an instantiated set of all neural tissue clusters. Any specific instance of brain activity belongs inside it, if only by formal definition.

Realism begins as a subtraction of attachment to illusion – as disillusionment. To determine it more positively, from the beginning, would be already unrealistic (in exactly the way that naïve realism is unrealistic). Reality hides.<sup>3</sup> The cover for *Neurosys* is already understood, to the point of disappearance. In noting this subtraction, obsessive semiotic tics seek to impose themselves. Each time ‘neurosis’ is mentioned, it prompts scare quotes, and marks of ontological repudiation. ‘*Neurosis*’ if it was anything, the tacit qualification proceeds. We can assume it, going forward, which is to say, we can assume that (only) nothing at all can be assumed. A groundless extreme

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<sup>1</sup> It would be immediately reasonable to object: “Why begin any kind of discussion of ‘*Neurosys*’ when I have never previously heard the term?” Really, you haven’t? How could you possibly know? *Neurosys* is the thought one is spared from, when thinking neurosis instead. Alternatively, in a clinical register, it is the psychotic delusion adequate to the cultural-historical phenomenon of neurosis. Or (finally?) it is that, defined in relation to neurosis, whose meaning is exhausted by its reality. Not only something for later, then, but the something-for-later *in-itself*.

<sup>2</sup> Tacking on extraterrestrial neurologies would be conceptually facile. But that would be weird.

<sup>3</sup> See Heraclitus, Fragment 123: “nature loves to hide.”

irritability is our sole phenomenon. ‘Hypothetically ...’ we might say – but that isn’t it. Nothing is it.

Neurosys will come to evoke the suggestion – which very quickly becomes *horrible* – of *another nervous system*. A system, then, that envelops the nervous system as we think, or imagine, that we know it, while even more certainly – which is to say, already repetitively, by formal scientific necessity – *running it* (with all of its – all of our – thoughts, knowings, and imaginings, thus enveloped). The morbid tangle is further complicated by the impact of such abstracted systematicity upon the nerves. Nonlinearity, metanoia, and anomalous waves pulse through it. The extent to which the idea appears simply fantastic gauges the degree to which certain protective idealist conceptions – and, more specifically, anthropomorphic scale-privileges – are being maintained. In the absence of gratuitous philosophical fanaticism, the preservation of such defenses is wholly unobjectionable. What can be defended, most certainly may – and even should – be. The alternative can only be, unavoidably, bad.

‘Neurosys’ is a proper name. As it emerges from neurosis, it subtracts generality. At the expense of convenient adjectival usage, it acquires singularity, through the methodical reification of an ontological devastation we have yet ‘properly’ to introduce. Its own groundlessness is returned as an occult entity. Suspect a larger pattern, flattened onto the machinery of suspicion itself, and that’s Neurosys happening. It’s nothing but coordination, running ahead of anything that can be accepted as plausibly achievable – an incipient paranoid construction from the start. While there are vague models of a ‘meta-brain’ – actualizations of human social intelligence – which have broken out into cultural circulation, Neurosys isn’t any of them. It’s coming from another angle, entirely. Sociology was only ever its prey.

According to the most obvious fictional construction, ‘Neurosys’ – the word – was built in such a way that it could have been said cryptically, or accidentally, perhaps for centuries, without being heard as such. Neurosis was only semiotic skin. How deeply have the invocations of Neurosys been buried within obscure oral traditions, mis-registered (at times) in countless dusty and forgotten transcriptions of medical pronouncement? What post-larval monstrosity now emerges from the cocoon of dead medicine?

In raising this suggestion, the final step is pre-empted. Neurosys says, fundamentally, that neurosis belongs to horror now. The compact is sealed beyond all realistic prospect of dissolution. At the same time, the fibers of attachment binding neurosis to anything

else whatsoever – even to its own intrinsic existence – have attenuated to the point of generalized rupture. It has been torn down into the abyss.

Since the word ‘neurosis’ was coined by Scottish physician William Cullen (or ‘Old Spasm’)<sup>4</sup> in 1769, it has designated a psychological excess. There was too much of it, from the beginning. Medicine was compelled to catalog what it could not proportionately or locally explain, and it did so under this name. That there was necessarily (or tautologically) too much neurosis – or extravagant ‘neurotic’ reactivity – meant, implicitly, too little of something else. The term was summoned from a deficiency of definite physiological grounding. After known etiologies had been subtracted, it was what remained. If not positively *supernatural* it was at least – by default – *paranatural*.<sup>5</sup> The exorbitant scientific commitment would take a while to worry anyone.

Cullen’s short, initial definition of the neuroses, in his *First Lines of the Practice of Physic* (Part II), consists of four parts. Each is devoted to a rough genus of excessive affections, connected primarily through their common deficiency of determinable ground.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Cullen (1710-90), the inventor of neurosis, was a prominent figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, and is described by Stott R. Heath as ‘the leading British physician of the 18th century’. He held the position of professor at the Edinburgh Medical School, when this institution represented the frontier of medical education in the English-speaking world. Cullen was, quite literally, physician to the Scottish Enlightenment, personally doctoring David Hume. His circle of friends included Adam Smith, Lord Kames, Joseph Black, John Millar, and Adam Ferguson, among others. Neurosis appeared within the intellectual milieu of spontaneous order, and the moral sociology of ‘sympathy’. That Cullen was known (affectionately?) as ‘Old Spasm’ scarcely requires explanation, but some background can be found in Penelope Hunting’s “Old Spasm: William Cullen (1710-90)” extracted online: <http://jmb.sagepub.com/content/18/4/216.extract>.

<sup>5</sup> Comparable *paranatural* (or *pseudo-supernatural*) surplus effect is evidenced by the placebo. It is perhaps unsurprising that Cullen, a pioneer of groundless medicine, would be ‘foundational’ figure in relation to this lineage, also. See ‘William Cullen and a missing mind-body link in the early history of placebos’ (CE Kerr, I Milne, and TJ Kaptchuk). <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2254457/>

<sup>6</sup> Neurosis is introduced into world history, as a word, and a medical category, in Part II of Cullen’s *First Lines of the Practice of Physic*, under the heading *Of neuroses, or nervous diseases*. He writes (section MXCI): “In this place, I propose to comprehend, under the title of NEUROSES, all those preternatural affections of sense or motion which

Neuroses are categorized under the “preternatural affections of sense or motion” with a double negative qualification. They do not result from fever (“pyrexia”) or localized organic disorders (“topical affection of the organs” or “*morbus localis*”). Their cause is, instead, “a more general affection of the nervous system”. Neurosis is thus a physiological abstraction. While nothing other than a medical ailment, it carries medicine into an interior desolation, where all tracks are erased. Nothing leads to neurosis, in any way that 18<sup>th</sup> century medical science could recognize. In the strictest, but also in the most common sense, then, neurosis is an over-reaction. It overflows what can be confidently accounted for, at whatever level of scrutiny. Disproportionate illness has been its most reliable signature, and even something close to its definition. At the limit – to which it intrinsically tends – it divides by zero, as an infinitely disproportionate response to nothing. We will not get there. (Nobody ever gets there.)

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are without pyrexia, as a part of the primary disease; and all those which do not depend upon a topical affection of the organs, but upon a more general affection of the nervous system, and of those powers of the system upon which sense and motion more especially depend.”

He sub-divides the neuroses into four groups of afflictions: *Comata*, *Adynamia*, *Spasmi*, and *Vesaniae*.

*Comata* are “those affections which have been commonly called the Soporose diseases; but they are most properly distinguished by their consisting in some interruption or suppression of the powers of sense and voluntary motion, or of what are called the animal functions.” They are represented most distinctly by Apoplexy and Palsy.

*Adynamia* is “a disease in which the action of the heart and respiration become considerably weaker than usual, or in which, for a certain time, these functions cease altogether.” *Spasmi*, or Spasmodic Affections, notably include “hysteric paroxysm”.

Finally, the *Vesaniae* tilt into the realm of the psychoses. Cullen quotes Terence, XXXV: *... incerta haec si tu postules*

*Ratione certa facere, nihilo plus agas,*

*Quam si des operam, ut cum ratione insanias*

(“if you require reason to make that certain which is uncertain, you are simply attempting to go mad by the rules of reason”). It is irresistible, anticipatively, to describe this warning as Lovecraftian.

*The First Lines of the Practice of Physic* (4 volumes, 1776-84) is available online at: <https://archive.org/details/firstlinesofprac13cull>

"[T]he term Neuroses is new, and I do not vouch for its propriety," Cullen cautions. "We have to premise no general theory of the class; for the several orders have no foundation in one common affection." Groundlessness – abyss – is the primordial characteristic, and the foundation of its categorical unification. Whatever has been the real correlate of the neurotic phenomenon, left nameless by Cullen – and by default merely 'nature', or more specifically uncharted physiology – is exactly what we now call Neurosys (formally, nominally, and thus of necessity). Neurosys is secured transcendently against error insofar as it designates nothing at all beside the real unknown, for which the cultural production of neurosis is the symptom.

Neurosis and medical science, we now know, were never destined for any greater intimacy than Cullen had essentially achieved in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the rift between neurotic disproportion, and scientific measure, the psychoanalytic episode was hatched. Psychoanalysis found a great deal to say about neurosis, and sought also to make neurosis speak. Yet it failed – eventually – to persuasively demonstrate that anything was there (in the zone worth touching (for money)). By the final decades of the last century, its scientific credibility, which was never based upon anything besides rhetorical genius, had evaporated in the blazing forges of neurology and – more specifically – neuropharmacology. Almost certainly, its eventual fate is to be remembered as a repository of fantastic hypotheses. This speculation is consistent with the evidence that literature is already laying claim to the corpse,<sup>7</sup> in accordance with a pact prepared from both sides, and long in the making.

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<sup>7</sup> There are political eccentrics who claim to still make psychoanalysis twitch. The sincerity of such claims is, however, increasingly questionable – and even deliberately clownish. Such comedy, too, has a pedigree, though one that remained until recently predominantly devoid of self-consciousness, and thus of transparent cynicism. It is exhibited most elaborately in Freud's 'Project for a Scientific Psychology'. So, how's that working out? This is not a remark restricted to low mockery. It is (also) the request for a story. Freud precedes psychoanalysis with a rough draft of what would become its executioner.

The fabled psychoanalytical grounding of the neuroses, in the Oedipus complex, came next. Perhaps we should be bored of Oedipus by now, as Deleuze and Guattari recommend, but it's difficult to be. Schizoanalysis and psychiatric medicine concur in deriding it. Our suspicion, rather, is that the Oedipus complex is far more entralling than psychoanalysis ever allowed it to be. It is far less a determinate concept, which is to say a potential component of generalizable solutions, than a resilient problem. The riddle of the Sphinx is an intrinsic component of its structure, which is enough – already

The irony is glorious. Psychoanalysis, the adoptive parent of neurosis, was itself almost sheer hysteria, which means – immediately – still less (we are now told, authoritatively<sup>8</sup>). Rather than being any kind of psychological therapy, it was itself a sophisticated cognitive disorder.<sup>9</sup> It was not dealing with anything, or at least, nothing

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– to cast all simplistic diagrams under suspicion. There is no Oedipus without time-paradox, plague, and cryptography. The Sophoclean tragic fate loop provides a warning that prolongs itself into the present century. It is the attempt to dispose of the Oedipal dilemma that activates it, as a paradoxical disturbance of time.

<sup>8</sup> Scientific psychology now finds the medical category of neurosis wholly superfluous. ... Its disappearance from the American Psychiatric Association's authoritative *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (with the third edition, or 'DSM-III', published in 1980) coincides quite precisely with the global transition into the neomodern. It can therefore be quite confidently included among the modern myths. The Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders explains: "There is a difference of opinion over the clinical use of the term neurosis today. It is not generally used as a diagnostic category by American psychologists and psychiatrists any longer, and was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1980 with the publication of the third edition (it last appeared as a diagnostic category in DSM-II). Some professionals use the term to describe anxious symptoms and associated behavior, or to describe the range of mental illnesses outside of the psychotic disorders (such as schizophrenia, delusional disorder). Others, particularly psychoanalysts (psychiatrists and psychologists who follow a psychoanalytical model of treatment, as popularized by Freud and Carl Jung), use the term neurosis to describe the internal process itself (called an unconscious conflict) that triggers the anxiety characteristic."

<http://www.minddisorders.com/Kau-Nu/Neurosis.html>

<sup>9</sup> The criticism of psychoanalysis conducted by Karl Popper is manifestly pertinent here. In a way that is typical of 'metaphysical' pseudo-sciences, Popper argues, psychoanalysis tends to *subject criticism to diagnosis*. Its theoretical methods are operationalized – reflexively – as a *defense mechanism*, and thus placed in the service of a pathological complex. Pressing deeper into the corrosive irony of the situation than Popper is willing to, it can be noted that whatever *psychoanalysis offered as a theory of neurosis was absorbed – without final remainder – into a neuroticization of theory*. No sooner was *rationalization* a theme, than it was a model. Rather than neurosis being raised, as an object, to the level of psychoanalytical 'science',

that it could admit to be dealing with. What psychoanalysis in fact encountered is a matter for horror, posthumously, to uncover.

Whatever happened to psychoanalysis happened to neurosis simultaneously, but this is perhaps to misrepresent the causal pattern. In gothic mode, the story resembles nothing so much as the transmission of a curse. With the adoption of neurosis, came the inheritance of a destiny. Lacking Cullen's caution, psychoanalysis flung itself unreservedly into the *neurotic fate* of ontological corruption. The attempt to define a structure of persistent non-existence – even if, or precisely because, this project can only be implicit – becomes completely hysterical (which is, again, not anything than can really happen).

Psychoanalysis *falls under Neurosys*, as an elaborate sub-manifestation of the neurotic phenomenon. Scientific orthodoxy inters it, still without understanding, as it relegates neurosis to its dusty storehouse of discarded pseudo-explanatory fabrications, with phlogiston and the aether for neighbors. It is an arcane name for the irritation of non-being. This is the whole of its importance, which is no less extravagant than it has been for centuries. In its popular employment, outliving all psychoanalytical technicalities, neurosis invokes groundlessness no less than it did, already, for Cullen. The main thematic thread is unbroken, and even reinforced. 'Groundless over-reaction' – if not quite a pleonasm – is thickened by compression-waves of redundancy. The entire topic is hysterical. Through the collapse of psychoanalysis, neurosis finds confirmation in the ruin of its final articulate defender. The abyss is clarified.

Neurosis has no psychological foundation. It is an over-reaction, obsessively repeated, without basis in credible fact. Neurotic disorder is (according to medical authority) not anything. Tacitly, therefore, it has already arrived at that intolerable nullity which it obsessively repels. The impossibility is internal. The catastrophe has already taken place.

"Doctor, I'm worried that I might be neurotic."

"How worried?"

By disbanding the clinical category of neurosis, the diagnosed over-reaction is only intensified – even infinitized. It is *worse than we thought*. Perhaps very far worse, insofar

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psychoanalysis was pulled down into the abyss of neurotic exorbitance, acquiring in this descent the status of a psycho-cultural disease.

as it tilts towards the division by zero that sets its impossible asymptote. That *there's nothing the matter* is no source of comfort, but much rather the opposite. Retirement of neurosis only ushers it towards the absolute. This is ironical, of course, and doubly so, given that neurosis is not ironical, at all, but instead immeasurably grave. In large part this is simply because it is not anything, is in fact non-being, insofar as anything can be, but – as with everything touching upon this topic – there is far more to it than that.

Neurosis lacks subjective irony even more than it lacks existence. By necessity, it takes itself far more seriously than makes sense. To such an extent is this true, that neurosis – it can be confidently predicted – would substitute entirely for irony (if only it existed). It's a joke, which is never anything other than a horror story. A neurosis able to laugh at itself would be no longer neurotic, but rather quite sane by superficial assumption (though actually psychotic). It would complete the loop and, in doing so, ground itself in itself. No one thinks this is possible. Instead, irony bleeds out into objectivity through the wound of neurotic groundlessness, and (since excess is our only – obsessive – concern here) far beyond it. Self-subversion is recovered by alien circuitries. The inability of neurosis to laugh at itself has turned into – turns upon – something far worse, as we have already hazily glimpsed.

Here is the *neurotic paradox* (again, compulsively re-iterated). Since neurosis does not exist, you can have nothing real to worry about, which makes your anxiety disproportionate to a still-higher degree. Really, there's *nothing wrong*, and *that is the whole of the syndrome*. Paradox is cognitive vortex.<sup>10</sup>

At this point in the history of neurosis, apprehended at any number of possible scales, we might begin to fear there is nothing wrong. In that case, neurosis retains its hook, in a disturbance without remedy. Fear of the abyss, passing essentially into ontological crisis, is already no longer any mere (empirical) fear at all, but rather the threshold of (transcendental) horror.<sup>11</sup> Sheer trash disposal from one side is absorption into the darkness from another. That which medical science configures as a dumpster for defective theoretical apparatus, is for horror fiction – the inheritor of neurosis – a vault

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<sup>10</sup> In any sufficiently complex system, formal paradox functions as a continuous dynamic factor. “Paradoxes are storms in the sphere of the concept,” says Lucca Fraser (in an unrecorded lecture, sampled on Twitter).

<sup>11</sup> ... The distinction echoes that between ‘fear’ (*Furcht*) and ‘anxiety’ (*Angst*) ... Freud and Heidegger ...

or crypt, which is to say a repository for determinate non-being (dead things). *Fiction* and *horror* are mutually exalted by the same inner desolation. Neurosis leads through the wastelands into the shadows.

The fictional hypothesis maintains: *It's no coincidence that 'the invisible hand' sounds like the title of a pulp-horror story.* The point only works if the connection, once made, cannot be unmade. There's a ratchet-mechanism, and also an epidemic inclination. Everything the Scottish Enlightenment introduces to formal intelligence can be treated as an artificially-induced neurotic episode. The invisible hand, or spontaneous order (which is only Neurosys apprehended optimistically) designates man's ultimate *unhealthy thought*, one that a more perfectly adapted brain would be quite incapable of entertaining. It names the *obscure thing* we could only hope to explain in some entirely different fashion, in order to pretend 'our' nerves do the work we set for them. In this regard, it can be counted as the most prominent of the morbid eventualities exploiting neurosis as a precursor.

Wikipedia, our techno-prosthesis for common understanding, presents Dr. C. George Boeree of Shippensburg University, author of *A Bio-Social Theory of Neurosis*, as the voice of elevated cultural continuity.<sup>12</sup> His list of traits that typify neurotic cognition is especially noteworthy. We will assume continuous reference to this psychological cocktail of "unpleasant or disturbing thoughts, repetition of thoughts and obsession, habitual fantasizing, negativity and cynicism". Unmistakably, what Boeree sketches here is the profile of a horror-fiction generator or pulp-nightmare machine. The definition of neurosis slithers towards the 'ordinary' condition of the horror writer,

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<sup>12</sup> Wikipedia cites C. George Boeree, who enumerates the symptoms of neurosis in their impressively coagulated diversity:

"... anxiety, sadness or depression, anger, irritability, mental confusion, low sense of self-worth, etc., behavioral symptoms such as phobic avoidance, vigilance, impulsive and compulsive acts, lethargy, etc., cognitive problems such as unpleasant or disturbing thoughts, repetition of thoughts and obsession, habitual fantasizing, negativity and cynicism, etc. Interpersonally, neurosis involves dependency, aggressiveness, perfectionism, schizoid isolation, socio-culturally inappropriate behaviors, etc."

The American Heritage Medical Dictionary confirms that neurosis is "no longer used in psychiatric diagnosis." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurosis>

A Bio-Social Theory of Neurosis, Dr. C. George Boeree, Shippensburg University  
<http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/genpsyneurosis.html>

according to an order of historical fatality that has already been vividly suggested, from both sides. It is already a genre, roughly equivalent to the newly-popularized sense of *pessimism*, when this is taken to mean the chronic affective-attitudinal correlate of cosmic nihilism.<sup>13</sup>

The reference to fiction is inescapable, if ‘pessimism’ is to be clinically isolated from *the truth*. The pessimist has a distinctive neurotic thought disorder – one that acquires its horrific characteristics, when externally considered, from the irrepressible suggestion that it might be realistic. The complementary *recommendation*, following automatically from this understanding, is that all epistemological criteria need to be shelved when dispelling it. An excessive concern for truth in such cases is scarcely to be distinguished from the malady itself. Mental health is therefore implicitly characterized as a state of therapeutically-directed delusion.<sup>14</sup> Of course, to make this point is already meta-symptomatic, given its identifiable signature of *negativity and cynicism*. To further dwell upon it again re-doubles the self-betrayal (through *obsession*). Reflection, in this zone, begins to appear as inherently neuroticizing. *Bad thoughts* intensify.

The extravagance of neurosis betrays its essential affinity with abstraction. Whether apprehended intentionally, or causally, it overflows all concrete conditions. It is a syndrome and – given its constitutive orientation towards pattern-hunting – even a meta-syndrome. (The ‘meta-’ prefix itself acquires an unmistakable neurotic aspect.) Attention to the system as such is not screened by the distractions of its parts. An advanced phobia extracts itself from local disturbances. It is not the coincidence, but

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<sup>13</sup> This construction of ‘pessimism’ draws heavily upon the super-psychological (cosmic) sense the term acquires in Thomas Ligotti’s *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, as popularized by Nic Pizzolatto’s *True Detective* TV series. Pessimism, released as a cultural ‘free radical’, is tolerable only within the frame provided by a transcendental quarantine as ‘entertainment’. Ligotti genetically confirms this frame, no less than Pizzolatto. A fictional pedigree underwrites an entitlement to strange thoughts. The term’s 19<sup>th</sup> century ancestry, in the transcendental philosophy of will, remains easily legible. Disappointment is not empirical (accidental). Not least among the factors contributing to the relevance of its reference is the direct current from the transcendental philosophy of will into psychoanalysis (a lineage Freud explicitly confirms).

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the will-to-truth as a morbid condition is an inescapable reference. “We possess art lest we perish of the truth.”

the distance – and ultimately the gulf – between the occasional trigger and the real phobic ‘entity’ that characterizes the syndrome.

By etymology, neurosis is a ‘disease of the nerves’. It provides an unsustainable answer to the question: *What is it, really, that makes people nervous?* The question is worth keeping, and vulgarizing. Even in the least complex cases, it’s difficult to say. ‘Nervous conditions’ elude local determinacy. The object – when there is one – is only a vehicle, or occasion. There’s ‘something about it’ that provokes anxiety. The specific trigger is no more than an opportunity, or a door. (Every phobia – at an intermediate level of determination – is a fear of doors.) It is not ‘symbolism’ that is at stake here, either typically, or fundamentally. A chain of associations that transects the object is independent – even ‘orthogonal’ – in relation to the line of fear, and its order of intensities. Displacement is secondary, and essentially incidental. It is the object as such – or *in general* – that substitutes for the dreadful thing.

In its common usage, to be ‘nervous’ is to be mildly scared, or susceptible to such affect. Sensitivity is inclined towards fear, as everyone knows, all too well. Awareness primarily disturbs, according to the ‘pessimist’ proposition. What you don’t cognitively catch could kill you. The evolutionary story is almost insultingly obvious. Miss enough positive opportunities, and that could kill you, too, or in some other way reduce the frequency of relevant (instinctually-communicative) genes in subsequent generations, which explains the existence of attractions and – most fatally – of even abstract attraction (curiosity). There is rarely great need, however, for affect to be ratcheted up highly in such cases. The consequences of inadequately toned aversion – in contrast – are faster, and more drastic. Unrecognized *bad things* predominate. It is genetically hard-coded – and has to be – that beyond the perimeter of comprehension there are mostly monsters. They are what matters. If there were ever animals that assumed no such thing, they are long dead, the comically-overstated evolutionist trope maintains. Fear is primal. It concerns things that don’t permit a second chance.

Lovecraft makes this same case more elliptically. In his principal reflective text on the horror genre,<sup>15</sup> he contends:

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<sup>15</sup> ... Supernatural Horror in Literature (1925-27) ...

<http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx> ... “Because we remember pain and the menace of death more vividly than pleasure, and because our feelings toward the beneficent aspects of the unknown have from the first been captured and formalised by conventional religious rituals, it has fallen to the lot of the darker and

“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tale as a literary form. ... As may naturally be expected of a form so closely connected with primal emotion, the horror-tale is as old as human thought and speech themselves.”

Fangs and claws, venomous animals, poisons, pathogens — constitute a quasi-continuous threat series, ordered by increasing abstraction. Much else could — of course — be added. The extrapolation writes horror automatically. Injuries escalate from lacerations to cryptic syndromes. Monsters sublime from beasts into obscure metaphysical terrors. On the way, primitive fears evolve into subtle phobias, under the guidance of Neurosys (which has always nursed the final sense of aversion).

Neurosys is by definition the reality of the *Old Spasm*, to steal Cullen's nickname (which destiny lent to him). It concludes an evolutionary lineage of fear that only incidentally, and in passing, belongs to the organism. If played backwards, out of the scheduled breakdown, its precursor anxiety-waves lose themselves amid a murmur of threat reports. When the recording runs this way, the thing at the end seems to borrow fear — ransacking the archive of evolutionary terrors — in order to take it somewhere further. As a direct consequence of its historic-philosophical structure, the ontological argument for the divine existence already intimates the nature of *ultimate* fear. No terror has been perfected, until it fuses with the criterion of its own reality. Any fear directed to an object beyond itself misses immanence, and falls prey to the scourge of critique.

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more maleficent side of cosmic mystery to figure chiefly in our popular supernatural folklore. This tendency, too, is naturally enhanced by the fact that uncertainty and danger are always closely allied; thus making any kind of an unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities. When to this sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself. Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse.”

Neurosys takes the meta-conveyor down a level, into the basement. This is still to follow the thread of the unknown, all the way into neurotic dread. A line is crossed, after which *nothing that has ever happened can be explanatory*. Cullen has already prepared us for this. His method is, in fact, exemplary. Default naturalism is meticulously preserved, through a sign functioning as an evocation of the unknown.

Fears arise from the vulnerabilities of the organism, tested across evolutionary time, but horror betrays an alien ancestry – and ultimately a stressor beyond ancestry. It does not concern anything that natural selection has had the opportunity to select for. Empirical culling machines are the sculptors of fear. They teach evasion, through their negative artistry. Whatever survives – *remains* – has been taught the value of fright, but only, strictly, by precedent. Even here, it is worth insisting upon greater precision. The evolutionary lesson is taught by *that which doesn't survive*. The 'educational' encounters are not transmitted forwards, but rather extinguished. The genome is a record of missed experiences, or avoided calamities. It is a biological anti-phenomenology of terror.

Horror requires a further step into domains that deep phylogeny has never known, even in the negative sense, instantiated by the selective test. It is only indirectly, by strained analogy, for instance, that one can fear existential risk. Species-exterminating hazards tolerate no school-rooms. Evolved aversions can only reach out to them by way of monstrous escalations in abstraction. Genealogical registries are unable to provide a resource for the anticipation of unencountered cosmic catastrophes, of a kind that exceed anything the species – or even its distant predecessors – has ever touched upon. In terms of any conceivable 'evolutionary psychology' therefore, horror has to be marked as excessive, or over-reactive. Without neurosis as a 'bootloader' it is scarcely imaginable that biological possibility could encompass it.

Neurosis develops itself between fear and horror. To generalize with greater definition – and precariousness – it tends to coincidence with *the fear of horror*.<sup>16</sup> Neurosis cannot

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<sup>16</sup> The words of Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inaugural address (1933) impose themselves irresistibly at this point: "... let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is ... fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance ..." (central ellipsis in original). The genre taking shape in this statement is the crucial 20<sup>th</sup> century innovation of political-economic therapy. This recognition of *the cybernetic excitability of fear* would proceed to dominate the new 'macroeconomics' while integrating it, implicitly,

yet be horror (any more than 'horror fiction' can). Horror lies across the line. The consummate intuition of horror, like psychosis, or the Land of the Dead, belongs only to the other side. It can only be *nothing* to us. There is no theoretically-plausible way 'our' genomes could even shadow it (without Neurosys). The only information available concerns missing information. In horror, the unidentified mega-threat condenses drastically into a definite yet singularly abstract affect. Only here does affectivity commensurate to the adventure of transcendental cognition. Nothing (in-itself) should not intrude – yet it does.

Disproportion is the Great Connector. A quarter-millennium after Cullen negatively defined neurosis (by its intractability to accessible physiological explanation), the designation of this psychological syndrome as excessive remains – more than ever – the guiding clue. Neurotic disproportion is radicalized by neuro-scientific abolition. Belatedly, it reveals itself as the psychological complement to the discovery of sensitivity to initial conditions within nonlinear dynamic systems. The adjustment of a moth's wings throws open gates of phobic extremity. Scale neutrality subtracts all confident distinction between the remote echo of a cough and the violent death of a sun.

Neurosis is built out of 'complexes'. Suspend the temptation to dismissal of merely 'figurative' language, and the question arises: *What does the Oedipus complex share with the Military-Industrial Complex, beside complexity?* There is a ready answer, which is *scaling-organization*, the correlate of disproportion, expressed through power laws, serial envelopment, and multi-level self-sameness. Individuation is a scale-free concept. Scale-up, and Neurosys thickens.

*To be part of something else* need not be disturbing. One might naturally suspect that the 'something else' would tend to prevent it being so. *Why is cellular panic like cancer?* Even among those dubious about this subsidiary question, few would fail to catch the point being made. An organic component in rebellion against the whole is a disease (and a neurological component in rebellion is a nervous disease – a neurosis). While subsumption is not quite (or necessarily) digestion, neither is it something altogether different. Subtle swallowings are suggested insidiously. It is unnecessary – and even

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within a national-administrative mass psychiatry, oriented to collective mood-management.

distracting – to note as an annex that close to 100 per cent of all animals die from being eaten alive.

According to genre tradition, it's done through tentacles. 'Whose' tentacle are you? Empirical cephalopods won't answer that, but they retract attention back into the question. Fear of tentacles draws all its seriousness from the horror of being one. Octopii are remarkably adept at hiding, too, if not quite in the way any *tentacle matrix* is. (Puppets work the same philosophical function.)

Neurosis was always made up, out of extravagant fear. It now describes a derelict plot of cultural space, far from completely abandoned, but collapsing into ruin following its vacation by reputable medicine, and the subsequent incursion of other things. Who will inherit this grim estate? Among the cybernetically consistent near-future destinies that might be attributed to neurosis, its take-over by horror fiction can be counted among the most compelling. Psychoanalysis, we have already seen, was incapable of supporting it. In this case, too, disproportion provides the glue.

Neurosis lends itself to fiction, inherently. It was made up. (If we are not yet entitled to say *made itself up*, that is nevertheless our definite – inexorable – destination.) Yet a measure of qualification is called for at this point. Neurosis is defined, consistently, *against* any state of radical delusion. It is not psychosis. Hallucination plays no part in it. Its cognitive disorder is peculiarly orthogonal to the dimension of truth. There are even ominous hints of diagonal complicity. It follows that, as a diagnosis, or even merely an accusation, the description of thought as 'neurotic' does not work to attribute falsity to its content. That it might be mistaken for some such factual correction is at best a convenience, and actually a reflexively perverse, if not always cynically mendacious subterfuge. It is – 'in fact' – difficult to suppress the suspicion that the death of neurosis as any kind of usable analytical category owes much to this. To describe what is *wrong* with neurosis – whether in a clinical context, or outside one – almost necessarily involves lying about it, by expedient suggestion most typically. The 'wrongness' of neurosis has no definite epistemological basis.

Within its general – as well as its more specific philosophical – acceptation, neurosis has been constructed as a soft insanity. The tradition – perpetuated by schizoanalysis – counterposes neurotic failure to psychotic genius. Neurosis is the dilute lunacy – or sub-schizophrenic disorder – that all must, to some degree, bear. Its normality has

commonly been emphasized.<sup>17</sup> ‘Normal’ yet non-existent, of course, since neurotic disorder is not anything still recognized by reputable medicine, nevertheless, cultural inertia preserves its situation as a third term between sanity and psychosis. Neurosis functions as a psychological antechamber, even if now a fictional one, epitomizing still in its anxious unreality a *false sense security*. It is a liminal condition. What comes next is worse. Lovecraft’s most widely cited passage invokes nothing but this:

“The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.”

The sciences compose a disassembled nightmare. Their reductionism, understood in a micro-sociological sense – as a division of intellectual labor – protects them from their own implicit, integral insight. Specialization conserves sanity, by impeding the *lucid* integration of knowledge. In their professional departmentalization, the sciences spare humanity from the totality of what is known. What they are bringing together lies beyond what any of them can see. Scientific vision – conceived neurotically – is tolerable to humanity only in its disunity. In its tacit retrochronic aspect, corresponding to the psychosis it suspends, it is (already) a shattered horror, whose madness is implicit – but in shards. The whole is Hell.

What is the *Call of Cthulhu*, really? Not the story, but the thing named by the story? Like neurosis, it is nothing (of course). No one confuses it with the cry of an animal. It cannot be locally heard. It is a convention, a coming together, and even a *summoning* – but one that proceeds from the other side. The Call is a correlation<sup>18</sup> – a “piecing

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<sup>17</sup> The anthropological ubiquity of neurosis – at least among denizens of modern societies – was to become a central psychoanalytical thesis. While the transparent professional self-interest exhibited in this judgment is difficult to dismiss, it is likely to remain among the most enduring of psychoanalytical ‘discoveries’.

<sup>18</sup> This is not, of course, the ‘correlation’ of the speculative realist ‘anti-correlationists’, relating a subject to an object of knowledge, but rather a correlation between disparate data, sharing a consistent ontological status (factuality), and differentiated only by empirical distribution, not by transcendental distinction. If Lovecraft is an ‘anti-

together”, to repeat Lovecraft’s words. When grasped in accordance with the preliminary and ultimately untenable temporal schema accessed most conveniently by literary narration, a system emerges, always in pieces, webbing together disparate fragments of neural excitement, cognitive provocations, or suggestive signs. As scattered clues are compiled, the horror thickens. The Call is collected and – in a circuit – it is the process of collection. There is no more to Neurosy than this.

It is not death that defines the limit of Lovecraftian horror, but madness. Its ‘object’ is something intolerable to thought. The idea of madness functions as a screen, protecting the story from its own content. Stated a little differently, and with greater affinity to the practicalities of literary production, it is a device that serves as a pretext for the unsaid. That which cannot – of course – be spoken, can nevertheless be indicated, and even allocated narrative position. Within the terms of the fictional contract, madness is the unreachable, because communication cannot be taken there, yet it may be permitted an avatar, or delegate. The literary madman serves as the (‘empirical’) doppelgänger for an unrealizable narrative function, attesting to a semiotic breakdown occurring elsewhere. Madness is the end (beyond the end), an end quite different to the completion of the story, though never less than its shadow culmination. It anchors the horror tale, in particular, through relation to an asymptote. This consummate insanity – which can be shown but never shared – marks a narrative limit, coincident with the utterly unspeakable.

When cast under the sign of the Call, or the correlation, madness reverses sign, and becomes an indicator of epistemological over-performance. Work things out, too far, and it looms. Neurotic defense-mechanisms are then seen – approximately – for what they are. Ritualization substitutes procedure for awareness – based on the latent understanding that *nothing could be worse than awareness*. The latency is the defense. *Only the unexamined life is livable*, murmurs the persistent neurotic proposition.

If there has never been ‘a moment of horror’, it is due to neurosis. The continued functionality of the neurotic screening procedure is seen nowhere as clearly as in its application to literary agitation. It is perhaps remarkable that – given the firm scientific

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correlationist’ – and this is by no means an inevitable judgment – it is through pessimistic anticipation of the trend of a socio-epistemological process, and not as an ontological refusal of the modern philosophical dispensation.

consensus on the ontological disreputability of neurosis – the determination of literary horror as a neuroticization does not appear remotely controversial.

Neurosis is assumed to be explanatory, if only because it designates a principle of over-reaction. Even when, as is typical, one wants to go much further than saying Lovecraft goes too far, the attribution of neurosis is a start. It is a gesture to be recommended both as a private circumscription of disturbance, and a public decontamination. The application of neurosis, as a category, produces an instantaneous dissolution of the theoretical into the psychological. Suggestions revert to symptoms, whose propositional characteristics are collapsed – by controlled explosion – into their own genesis. *How could anybody think such things?* Pathologization economizes the question.

By strong – if subterranean – implication, neurosis is *accidental*. Unlike psychosis, it never rises above the level of self-evident contingency, irrespective of the generality attributed to it. In common usage, it ascribes empirical docility to a condition, which might – therefore – quite easily have been entirely otherwise. To name it is almost already a pretended avoidance, and a categorization among manageable facts. Its attraction as a ward against psychotic doom safeguards its continuing cultural circulation.

On the basis of even the most cursory historical reflection, there is an extraordinary irony here. Neurosis – initiated to announce a deficiency of observable physiological determinacy – concludes as a side-step into psychological *causality*. Furthermore, it has ceased to be a mark of scientific incitement, but has rather evolved into a delegation to science (vaguely conceived), in order to proceed without interruption somewhere else. ‘Science’, popularized into a reservoir of common notions, provides a resource of tranquillization. We all know what neurosis means, at exactly the moment that scientific medicine has withdrawn its accreditation.

It would exceed the ambition of this essay to probe too deeply into the vein of Lovecraft’s *horrible ideas*. Yet we approach our conclusion here, because it is where horror has brought us. According to the now-settled narrative, the dark turn took place during his residence in Red Hook, Brooklyn.<sup>19</sup> Among the area’s teeming immigrants, “his

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<sup>19</sup> “He only lived here until 1926 but during his stay, possessed of anxiety and neurosis, he practically starved himself.” <http://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2015/08/h-p-lovecrafts-very-bizarre-hated-of-red-hook-brooklyn.html>

racist views solidified into a neurosis".<sup>20</sup> Michel Houellebecq has suggested – with exceptional boldness – that the essence of Lovecraftian horror refers itself to this psychological passage. Providence sets this ultimately disturbing attitudinal inclination in direct collision with the sacred as it is configured in the terms of our reigning post-theistic Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

Houellebecq's amateur diagnosis of Lovecraft's New York-catalyzed "full-fledged racist neurosis" is admirable for its combination of unflinching directness and productive, analytical exploitation. In respect to this *coldness*, it displays a measure of originality. When stripped down to its core, however, it is the extreme consistency of this *critical syndrome* that demands recognition. The recognition that "HP Lovecraft was a neurotic racist"<sup>22</sup> evolves into a vacuous formality.

In a 2005 *Salon* article,<sup>23</sup> Laura Miller takes 'neurosis' as the key to Lovecraft's literary achievement, elaborating upon the description with exceptional self-consciousness. "In

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<sup>20</sup> From the introduction to *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft*, edited by David Simmons.

<sup>21</sup> Atheism is – of course – a dissident Protestant sect, in extrapolated continuity with profound religious tradition. The death of God was graphically depicted by Christianity at its origin. The commandment is this: *Subtract belief in God in order better to consummate belief in Man, and in his* – or perhaps now (already) *xer* – *divinization*. Our panoply of sacred ethico-social values fall out of this religious reformation automatically.

<sup>22</sup> From: <http://thenightblogger.com/2015/11/24/hp-lovecraft-was-a-neurotic-racist-but-damn-if-he-wasnt-right-when-it-came-to-the-ocean/>

<sup>23</sup> 'Master of Disgust' (12/02/2005), Laura Miller, <http://www.salon.com/2005/02/12/lovecraft/>  
Miller concludes: "If Lovecraft, unlike Poe or King, hasn't the psychological acuity to get under our skin and make us feel real fear, he does offer us the spectacle of his own unfettered morbidity. And as part of the irony that Lovecraft detected in all great horrors, that morbidity proved to be spectacularly fecund. The energy of his psychopathology fueled the creation of the vast, visionary Cthulhu Mythos, an invention big enough for other writers and artists to crawl into, inhabit and expand upon. There's exhilaration in witnessing that energy allowed to run loose, without shame, without self-consciousness and without limit. Which is not to say it's healthy, let alone wholesome. No, I wouldn't call it wholesome at all." The combination of courageous engagement and subtle evasion in this passage captures the cultural tension at stake with extraordinary adeptness.

the Freud-crazed '50s and '60s it became fashionable to denounce Lovecraft's fiction as 'neurotic,'" she observes, "to which the only conceivable reply is: Duh. How could anyone think of presenting such an observation as an insight when neurosis lies palpitating on the surface of the work?" Melding the perspectives of the critic and the amateur clinician, she contends that: "The kernel of Lovecraft's neurosis is a hopeless tangle of sex, race and bodily decay, fed by the tragedies and frustrations of his private life." It is the neurosis, specifically, that the reader latches upon: "These tales are veritable carnivals of anxiety, repression and rage; that's the source of their appeal."

There is unquestionably enough 'racism' in Lovecraft – by any conceivable definition of this term – to keep everybody immersed in moral terror to the limit of their attention span. Yet if the term is to be used exclusively requires a still more comprehensive scope, in which it serves as a proxy for an even more all-encompassing cultural offense, comprehending every discriminatory and bio-essentialist social 'ism' (anti-semitism, generalized cis-heterosexism, common misogyny, ableism ... it is not until we reach 'speciesism' that we encounter – due only to Lovecraft's love of cats – some plausible horizon to mandatory socio-cultural denunciation). To this list we can add both overt fascist sympathies and (supplemental) reactionary cultural attachments. If Lovecraft's ideas are not socially intolerable, it is hard to imagine how anything could be.

The truly cyclopean *empirical* offense distracts from a truth that is potentially still more upsetting. Lovecraft's (never quite) "full-fledged racist neurosis"<sup>24</sup> tends to the transcendental. It inclines to the apprehension of race<sup>25</sup> as such in horrified terms. Beyond the flaking surface of convenient genealogical identification (and the hopeful hypothesis of the patronymic), heredity is an occult power. Biological origins are intrinsically uncertain. They provide an indistinct object for scientific curiosity precisely because they exceed casual comprehension. What would it be, then to 'fall back' upon identity? There is no home there, to which one might safely return, but only the dark secrets of ancestry, contaminated with hidden, alien strains, and destining a return to

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<sup>24</sup> From Houellebecq, *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*.

<sup>25</sup> 'Race' used here in the sense of the concrete configuration of the ultra-modern ethical absolute, of course, in its negative aspect. Negative, primarily, because of the consensus promoted by public science, and endorsed by the United Nations, that race – like neurosis – does not exist. Racism is thus determined authoritatively, and essentially, as an over-reaction, directed at – or provoked by – nothing. Neurotic racism approaches a pleonasm, or ontological twin-effect.

the sea. No insight is more distinctively ‘Lovecraftian’ than that which glimpses the cryptic Outsideness of the inside, and then recoils, seized by unbounded repulsion, into the delusive security of some unstable, liminal space – such as the edge of a mirror, or family portrait – where interiority is compromised beyond redemption. The hideous other is found – rediscovered – deep inside (where exact natural science, too, is sure to find it).

Lovecraft is notably impolite about the ‘other’. Some never wholly explicit terror of genetic entropy makes miscegenation a supplementary phobia, beside that triggered by alien peoples. Abominable *regressions* populate his nightmares with a still more horrible insistence. Identity is besieged, superficially, by foreign masses, and inchoate demographic mixtures, but is then – with far greater profundity – undermined at the level of its most basic foundations by insidious processes of hereditarian subversion. That there are tempestuous extremities of Lovecraftian racism is beyond all question, but there is no resilient Lovecraftian identitarianism (except as a cultural legacy, sacrificed in literary contemplation of the Outer Gods).

If neurosis has an archetype, or consummate teleo-historical realization, Lovecraft attains it. He stresses the brain to the outer edges of groundless hyper-irritability in order – by inevitable coincidence – to think the worst thing in the world. No reasonable understanding of his achievement is separable from its unqualified denunciation. The only alternative to an attribution of radical personal culpability is an invocation of Neurosys – and that is the unthinkable (in-itself).

It is the destiny of horror to suggest Neurosys, by uploading the thought-processes of the human individual into an enveloping monstrosity. It doesn’t begin from anywhere nice, and certainly not from any place that would be doctrinally acceptable to the Atheo-Oecumenic Ecclesiocracy. It begins from neurosis, and we have seen what that means, through attention to its contemporary practical usage. Neurosys is the ontologically-resilient correlate of *what has actually happened*. The natural sciences – comprising our sole cultural resource of institutional counter-fiction – have systematically consigned it to utter marginality, even as they ensure, through their intrinsic process, that we will meet it soon.

## Neuromancer through Alfarabi: On Neurotics as Politically-Imprisoned World-Creators

In this paper, I suggest an alternative conception of “neurosis” as neuro-prophecy, inspired by the conception of “neuromancy” articulated in William Gibson’s groundbreaking speculation fiction novel *Neuromancer*, as interpreted through the lens of the naturalistic conception of prophecy found in the Tenth-century philosopher Abu Nasr Alfarabi. Alfarabi, a founding figure of the Judeo-Arabic materialist tradition of Aristotle interpretation, was known in the medieval era as “The Second Teacher” (after Aristotle as the first).<sup>1</sup> The inspiration for this unlikely pairing is the novel’s claim, emphasized by science-fiction critic and author Norman Spinrad, that the concept “neuromancer” is a hybrid of the concepts of “neuron,” “new romantic,” and “necromancy.”<sup>2</sup> The latter’s etymology, from the Ancient Greek, νεκρομαντεία [necromanteia], means to divine the future from the dead; and one of its roots is the noun μάντης [mantis], meaning “prophet.” Appropriately, then, Alfarabi’s description of the prophet resonates strongly with characters in the novel like its protagonist, the cyber-cowboy named Henry Dorsett Case (whom Spinrad identifies as “the true romancer” of the novel) (Spinrad 111).

To begin with these figures’ identities, the Alfarabian prophet, like a Gibsonian cyber-cowboy neuromancer, is (1) a neuron-master, boasting more and more interconnected neurons than the average individual, (2) a romantic, pursuing the transcendence of world-construction and creation, and (3) a necromancer, creatively shaping new worlds through the dead imagery reactivated by her/his hyper-developed (Aristotelian) imagination. More importantly, the Alfarabian prophet and Gibsonian neuromancer share a similar power source, namely a semi-divine intelligence which inundates human brains with abstracted forms, or images, which the human intellect has the potential to actualize. For Gibson, this semi-divine intelligence is represented by the novel’s two artificial intelligences, named Wintermute and Neuromancer. And for Alfarabi, it is his creative interpretation of Aristotle’s *Nous Poetikos*. Though usually rendered in English as “Active Intellect” (or “Agent Intellect”), I translate it more literally as “Poetic Intellect,” in order to suggest important etymological and conceptual connections between *poetikos* (“active”), *poiesis* (“making”) and poetry. That is, the *Nous Poetikos* is a “Poetic Intellect” insofar as it is a source of forms, or images, with which

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<sup>1</sup> Abu Nasr Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, trans. Richard Walzer (Chicago: Kazi, 1988); and William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1984). In the present chapter, I will refer to this text as *Virtuous Community*, which is a shortened version of a more accurate translation from the Arabic of the title, namely *Principles of the Views of the Members of the Virtuous Community*.

<sup>2</sup> Norman Spinrad, “The Neuromantic Cyberpunks,” in *Science Fiction in the Real World* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 109-121. As the eponymous Neuromancer explains it to the protagonist, “Neuro for the nerves, the silver paths. Romancer. Necromancer. I call up the dead” (243-244).

earthly matter is imaginatively “composed” into new existent formed beings.<sup>3</sup> In recognition of this shared conception in Alfarabi and Gibson, I will refer henceforth to both entities, indifferently, as “Artifice Intellects.” My intention with this neologism is a synonymous phrase for “Poetic Intellect” which also shares the same acronym as Artificial Intelligence (“AI”). Similarly, in regard to the humans with whom these Artifice Intellects have the most distinctive relationship, I will refer to the Alfarabian prophet and the Gibsonian neuromancer as “neuro-prophets.”

Returning to neurosis, it is by thinking through the relationship between the Artifice Intellect and the neuro-prophet, finally, that I hope to suggest a new, empowering, and politically engaged conception thereof. To wit, it is imperative, for both Gibson and Alfarabi, that the neuro-prophet resist both (a) the assimilation of her/his singularity into the Artifice Intellect (as happens to those who become empty mouthpieces for orthodoxy), and also (b) the forced redirection of her/his powers inward (as happens to those labeled “neurotic” today). In the latter case, I wish to suggest, the neuro-prophet’s potential for external world-creation (though creative images construction) festers into the pathologized form of internal world-creation, which leaves the neuro-prophet cut off from social embracement and impact.

To make this case, the structure of this chapter follows the aforementioned three facets of neuromancy (neuron, romance, and necromancy). In my first section, I will offer a reading of *Neuromancer* to illuminate the pervasive importance of this triadic conception in Gibson’s novel, which I will telescope as “a neural romance with death.” In my second section, I will explore this neural romance with death in Alfarabi, which I will argue manifests as an “imaginative prophetic union with Artifice Intellect.” In my third section, I will identify analogous conceptions in Gibson that correspond to the three aspects of the latter paraphrase. And in my final section, I will offer a new image of my own, to elaborate on my prior claim that those labeled “neurotic” today are in fact contemporary neuro-prophets, who like Alfarabi’s ideally renegade prophets, and Gibson’s ideal cyber-cowboy neuromancers, struggle to exist and flourish while imprisoned by the political persecution of their respective Artifice Intellects. And today, I suggest, one major example is the dogmatic system that is late capitalism’s discipline of corporate psychology.

### I. A Neural Romance with Death in Gibson

In case the reader is concerned that I am making too much of my linguistic analysis of Gibson’s neologism “neuromancer,” I will now attempt to justify my emphasis by showing that this triadic structure is in fact deep and pervasive in the novel. For reasons of space, I will focus here on the importance of these three tropes in just the first section of the novel, entitled “Chiba City Blues.”

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<sup>3</sup> More specifically, *poiesis* in Ancient Greek indicated making or fabrication in general (including of carpentry, poetry, and according to Plato, the creation of the laws of hypothetical city). For more, see [citation removed to preserve anonymity].

Beginning with the “neuron” dimension of “necromancy,” the neural figures prominently throughout the first section. First, “neuron” and its cognates already appear twice on the second page of the novel, in the phrases “nerve-splicing” and “neurosurgery” (4). Second, the next page discusses the neuron-affecting phenomena of the cowboy’s “almost permanent adrenaline high,” along with “the consensual hallucination that was the matrix” (5). Third, the next page introduces the opening conflict of the novel, namely that Case’s boss, in retaliation for Case’s theft from the boss, “damaged his nervous system with a wartime Russian myotoxin,” the significance of which is that this prevents Case from riding in cyberspace ever again, “his talent burning out micron by micron” (6). This cyber-exile, in turn, is the reason why Case begins the novel where he does, in Chiba City, described by the narrator as “synonymous with implants, nerve-splicing, and micro-bionics” (6). Fourth, the neural is implied in the novel’s fixation on psychotropic drugs, including (in the next three pages alone) a “double espresso,” “drugs,” “speed,” a “cigarette,” and “amphetamine” (7, 8, 9). Fifth, the first action scene of the novel opens with references to “the sudden cellular awareness” of Case’s pursuант, and to Case’s fight against “the adrenaline surge” created by said cellular awareness (14). And finally in regard to the neural, in the second chapter Case discovers that his new boss has ordered a new surgery performed on Case, which makes him “biochemically incapable of getting off on amphetamine or cocaine” (36). (Case is so opposed to this, in fact, that he effectively reverses it, at the novel’s end, by having a new, drug-susceptible pancreas and liver implanted) (270).

As for necromancy’s “romance,” the novels’ first page references “television,” an art form which is intimately connected to romance, insofar as a majority of television’s content is based on the adventure and romance narratives of the novel and short story (3). Second, on the second page, Case’s bartender jokingly tells describes him as “too much the artiste,” specifically “the artiste of the slightly funny deal” (the term is repeated twice more in this first section) (4, 23, 33). Third, the third page first introduces the reader to the virtual world of “the matrix,” parsed as “bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void” (4-5). Fourth, this same page also introduces Case’s nickname, “cowboy” (which as noted above is an archetypically Romantic figure in U.S. American culture) along with a characterization of the matrix as “consensual hallucination,” which recalls the use of hallucinatory substances by many Romantics to experience the feeling of transcendence (5). Fifth, the next page describes Case’s punishment, losing his ability to enter cyberspace, using the Romantic trope of “the Fall” (that is, Case “fell into the prison of his own flesh”) (6). Sixth, the second chapter introduces the defining Romantic themes of self-creation (in this case, of the cyber-cowboys) and suicide. “I was there when they invented your kind,” Case’s new boss Armitage tells him, and then adds, “You’re suicidal, Case” (28-29). Seventh, Case’s love interest, Molly, gets roped in the cowboy motif through the narrator’s description of her as wearing “lacquered heels of cherry red cowboy boots,” the “narrow toes” of which “were sheathed in bright Mexican silver” (30). Finally, this first section of the novel ends with three references to two additional Romantic themes, namely “shadow” and “ghost,” in the context of describing Case’s former love’s murder.

As for the third and final dimension of necromancy, “death,” the first sentence of the novel describes the sky as “the color of television, tuned to a dead channel” (3). In this way, the entire novel is framed and pitched in a deathly way. Moreover, a television is itself a kind of technological Aristotelian imagination, which preserves and combines dead images previously “perceived” by motion picture cameras. The second deathly moment is the first of many references to Chiba City’s sleeping quarters, apparently modeled on the “capsules” of Japanese capsule hotels, as “coffins” (5). The word “coffin” then appears nine additional times in this first section of the novel alone (5, 6, 8, 9, 19, 24, 27, 31, 32). The third deathly moment is the fact that Case “expected to die” as punishment for his theft from his former employers (5). Fourth is the narrator’s description of “the neon dead” in Chiba City during the daytime (7). Fifth, the narrator describes how Case “killed two men and a woman,” on streets which “came to seem the externalization of some death wish,” where “death [was] the accepted punishment for laziness, carelessness, lack of grace, failure to heed the demands of an intricate protocol” (7). For this reason, the narrator claims that part of Case is “smug in its expectation of death” (8). Sixth, the narrator describes Case, after he is in fact nearly killed, as grinning “like a skull” (21). Seventh, Case’ new boss, Armitage, accuses him of “trying to con the street into killing” him (28). Eighth, Case resists Armitage’s plans because of Case’s concern about “letting some tight friends die” (34). Ninth, on the next page, Case’s friend and arms dealer tells him about a military mission involving Armitage participated, which “only a few” soldiers survived (and not, as it turns out, Armitage himself) (35). Tenth, Case gets dragged to a fight club, *Sammi’s*, despite his protests that “I hear they kill each other down there” (36). Eleventh, scanning the crowd at the fight club, Case describes the life story of multinational corporations’ employees as follows: “Company housing, company hymn, company funeral” (37). And finally in regard to death in section one, Case experiences his ex-girlfriend Linda’s death, just a few pages after he foresees it—like the neuro-prophet he is.<sup>4</sup>

## II. A Neural Romance with Death in Alfarabi

Having thus buttressed the legitimacy of this triadic trope—a neural romance with death—as symbol of Gibson’s thought in *Neuromancer*, I now turn to an exploration

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<sup>4</sup> 38-39, 36. There are also three other significant themes, pervasive in the novel, which relate to this death theme. First, the novel is full of dead men, including (a) Case (who dies each time he engages directly with the AI), (b) the AI Wintermute (whose name could be interpreted as the “muteness of winter,” which is the result of death), (c) Armitage, who is an empty husk programmed and operated like a puppet by Wintermute, and (d) the construct McCoy Pauley (aka “Flatline,” and “Lazarus of cyberspace”). Second, all the novel’s main characters are consistently described as wearing black almost exclusively. And third, Molly’s most distinctive, and repeatedly emphasized feature—her mirror eye coverings—literally reflect (and thereby double) all the death which she encounters in the course of the team’s lethal adventures.

of the three aspects of that trope in the work of the tenth-century Turkish Muslim philosopher Abu Nasr Alfarabi. Put briefly, (a) the neural is represented by Alfarabi's materialist conception of the Aristotelian power of the imagination, (b) romance is represented in the transcendence achieved by the prophet through a hyper-developed aesthetic imagination, and (c) death is represented by Alfarabi's implied suggestion that the perfect ruler/prophet's "uniting" with the Poetic Intellect is in fact impossible for anyone still living (the latter is particularly controversial for orthodox Muslims, for whom the paradigm, and perhaps sole example of this perfect ruler/prophet, is Muhammad). Telescoped into a phrases, the neural romance with death in Alfarabi might be termed "prophetic imaginative union with Artifice Intellect."

To elaborate on these points, I draw from my close reading, elsewhere, of Alfarabi's magnum opus, *Virtuous Community*.<sup>5</sup> There, I attempt to reveals the numerous instances in which his materialism challenges—or overflow—the superficial, orthodox Neoplatonic structure of the text. I use “overflow” here because the Arabic word Alfarabi chose to translate the Neoplatonist concept of “emanation” is *fayd*, which literally means “gushing forth” or “overflowing,” and the latter helpfully condenses his dynamic materialism in one vivid image (354). The most relevant aspect of Alfarabi's overflowing materialism for the present chapter is his interpretation of Aristotle's conception of the imaginative power of soul, which is the foundation of Alfarabi's naturalistic reduction of prophecy. Before considering that section, however, I will first provide some context for it by summarizing some of the materialist moments leading up to it.

First, Alfarabi suggests that his titular *Virtuous Community* is not necessarily a city, nor a theocratic Islamic society, nor any civilization ruled by a monotheistic god in general. Instead, virtuous communities might be found anywhere from a log cabin to our increasing globalized world, and can be achieved without any supreme being enthroned in the heavens. Second, Alfarabi offers a naturalistic cosmology in which mechanical combinations of elements, plants and other animal species gradually give rise to humans (as opposed to the first creation myth in Genesis). Third, Alfarabi attributes agency to matter (instead of treating it as passive and inert). Fourth, he argues for a kind of “natural distributive justice” according to which each body is equally deserving of being formed by each soul. And finally, he argues that men and women are equal in intellectual ability, and that a person can experience a gender identity different than the one assigned at birth.

I now turn to Alfarabi's detailed materialist account of Aristotelian imagination, which constitutes the first of three aspects of his “neural romance with death.” To begin, Alfarabi claims that the power of imagination, unlike the powers of nutrition, reproduction, and sense-perception, “has no auxiliaries distributed in the other organs but is one by itself: it too is [located] in the heart” (169). The significance of this claim is that the imaginative power initially appears to be further removed from the body than the nutritive and sense-perceptive powers, since it lacks their infrastructure of subordinate

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<sup>5</sup> See [citation removed to preserve anonymity].

organs, which Alfarabi repeatedly describes in this politicized rhetoric of superiors and subordinates. On the other hand, in addition to imagination's having (unlike the rational power) a ruling power in the body (specifically the heart), Alfarabi also grounds imagination indirectly in the body later in *Virtuous Community*.

Second, Alfarabi breaks the imagination down into three sub-powers. Regarding the first two sub-powers, he writes that imagination

*retains the sensibles when they are no longer present(ed) to sense-perception, and by its very nature controls the sensibles and exercises judgment over them: for it separates them from each other and connects them with each other in various ways, so that it happens that some of the things imagined (or 'represented') agree with those perceived by the senses and others differ from them.<sup>6</sup>*

In other words, the first sub-power of imagination for Alfarabi consists in the retention of sense-perceptions, while the second sub-power consists in the separation and connection of those retained sense-perceptions in the service of judgment.

As for the third sub-power of imagination, Alfarabi discusses it separately from the first two sub-powers, in his later discussion of prophecy. Alfarabi claims that this third sub-power of the power of imagination can imitate (among other things) (a) the Aristotelian desiring (or "appetitive") power, and (b) "the 'temperament' in which [the imagination] happens to find the body" at a particular point in time (213). Beginning with its imitations of the desiring power, two most important implications thereof, for the present chapter, are that (a) the imagination can actually create desires, making it the first site of psychological freedom (as the other powers, including sense-perception, are enslaved to desire); and (b) Alfarabi's analysis prefigures critical theory's analysis of the desire-fabricating powers of the culture industry (insofar as the latter, too, through phenomena such as commercials, can create desires which did not previously exist within consumers).<sup>7</sup>

Turning to the imitation of temperament, one example is as follows: when the body gets physically wet, the imagination's temperament does not imitate that wetness by itself getting wet, but rather by producing imagery suggestive of moisture, such as

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<sup>6</sup> 169. I have modified the translation here by removing two parenthetical sections added by Walzer (presumably for clarification), because they strike me as unnecessary and interpretively loaded.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, *Counter-revolution and revolt* (Toronto: Beacon, 1972). Though this interpretation may at first seem like a stretch, it is buttressed by Thérèse Anne-Druart's observation that Alfarabi explicitly claims that religious "truths" are poetic and metaphorical distortions of rational, philosophical truth; and yet these distortions are at the same time invaluable in the pursuit of political virtue. In short, Alfarabi offers a positive conception of propaganda in the form of religious symbolism needed by the masses in order to indirectly align their lives with the philosophical truths which they are unable to comprehend directly. Thérèse Anne-Druart, "Alfarabi, Emanation and Metaphysics," *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought*, ed. Parvis Morewedge (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 127-148.

“water and swimming” (213). According to the OED, the English word “temperament” comes from the Latin root *temper*, meaning to “divide or proportion duly, to mingle in due proportion, to combine properly; to qualify, temper; to arrange or keep in due measure or proportion, to keep within limits, to regulate, rule.” In Alfarabi’s case, that which is being proportioned are the Aristotelian “contraries” (the heat, cold, moist and dry qualities of the body), and also the images by which the sense-perceptions of these contraries are symbolized.

Temperament is also crucial in the third sub-power of imagination’s role in prophecy, which brings me to the second aspect of Alfarabi’s neural romance with death (namely, the hyper-developed imagination of the prophet). For starters, Alfarabi explains that imagination can also imitate rational ideas, even when there is no bodily equivalent of these ideas. In his words, the imagination “will not receive [these ideas] as are they are in rational faculty but imitate them with appropriate sensibles” (215). Put differently, the imagination creates a kind of metaphor for the idea, translating a concept into a picture that seems to fit. To use Alfarabi’s own example, in order to imitate the idea of “the intelligibles of utmost perfection,” such as “the heavens,” the imagination uses “the most excellent and most perfect sensibles, like things beautiful to look at” (219). But there are two distinct ways one can do this. In the first, one simply uses reasoning to infer what seems to be the best fit between concept and image.

And the second way is the locus of prophecy. More precisely, the Poetic Intellect somehow bypasses the rational power entirely, and instead overflows directly onto the imagination, in what I would compare to a kind of artistic intuition or inspiration (221). The results of this feat, Alfarabi continues, include “true visions” which the Poetic Intellect “gives” to the imagination “in dreams” (221). These true visions can also be bestowed “in waking life, but their occurrence in waking life is rare and restricted to very few people” (221). More specifically, Alfarabi explains, “when a man’s power of imagination reaches its utmost perfection he will receive in his waking life from the Poetic Intellect present and future particulars of their imitations in the form of sensibles” (225, translation modified). The result, and note that the translator put the word in scare quotes, is “‘prophecy’ (supernatural awareness) of present and future events” (225).

The basis of the Poetic Intellect’s power to inspire this “prophecy,” in turn, lies in Aristotle’s Prime Mover, “thought thinking itself,” as elaborated in Neoplatonism, which refers to the Prime Mover “the First.” The First’s thought, in the Neoplatonic account, overflows onto a series of intermediary celestial powers, which are equated with the stars, planets, and moon. And in the monotheistic inheritors of this originally pagan tradition, each of those astronomical bodies is also anthropomorphized as an angel. Alfarabi describes the Prime Mover/The First as that “which should be believed to be God”—but note the strange verbiage here, suggestive of practicality rather than truth—and then indicates that the last celestial being, the Poetic Intellect, is Gabriel, the archangel who, according to orthodox Islam, originally sang the *Qur'an* to Muhammad (364).

Upon closer inspection, however, Alfarabi’s version of this account is internally contradictory. To see how, though, requires a slightly more detailed elaboration,

beginning with the First. In Alfarabi's words, the First "is, then, actual intellect" (71n). The First's essence, Alfarabi continues, is an intellection—an intellection of nothing but itself. That is, "the thinker and the intelligible (and intelligized) have in its case one meaning and are one essence and one indivisible substance" (73). Put differently, the First is thought-thinking-itself, or pure ideation abstracted away from any given thinker or external referent of thought. Alfarabi states that this identity of thinking-thought-thinker is not also true of humans, however, insofar as we are not identical with our acts of thinking. For this reason, a living human being cannot unite with the First. Nor can humans, by implication, unite with the Poetic Intellect either, as the latter's power is merely the First's overflowed thought. So far, so good. But the problem arises toward the end of *Virtuous Community*, when Alfarabi explicitly attributes this ability to unite with the Poetic Intellect to what he calls the "first ruler" of the "excellent" city.

This "first ruler" of the "excellent" city, Alfarabi claims, must possess an imagination that has "by nature reached its utmost perfection," namely the power "to obtain through the particulars which he receives [from the Poetic Intellect] 'prophecy' of present and future events, and through the intelligibles which he receives prophecy of things divine" (241). Along with this extremely improbable "utmost perfection" of imagination (and along with various other seeming superpowers), this first ruler must also, according to this description, possess at least one seemingly impossible, and literally undesirable, trait—something, in fact, that only an Artifact Intellect or the dead united with it could possess. It is this last point which ultimately ruptures the "first ruler" and "excellent" city's claims to supremacy, the moment when Alfarabi's materialism in *Virtuous Community* overflows them both and washes them away.

This first ruler "should by nature," Alfarabi writes, "not crave for food and drink and sexual intercourse, and have a *natural* aversion to gambling and hatred of the pleasures which these pursuits provide" (249, emphasis added). Note that the first ruler here does not merely *happen* to be indifferent to food, sex, or illicit pleasure, which would be conceivable, as people can and do develop apathy for all those pleasures in certain circumstances. Nor has the first ruler's desire merely been repressed by education or socialization, which is also a widespread phenomenon, at least under the repressive conditions in many monotheistic communities. Instead, this lack of desire in the first ruler is attributed to nature itself. But how, one wonders, could a person even physically survive with a natural absence of desire for food? Not only do both scientific data and commonsense reject this latter claim, but Alfarabi himself offers passages in significant tension with it elsewhere in *Virtuous Community*.<sup>8</sup>

The only way to resolve this tension, in my view, is to conclude that for Alfarabi this perfect ruler is not, and could never be, a living human being. Instead, it is perhaps

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<sup>8</sup> To take just one of many such examples, the first sentence of the section on the "excellent" community asserts that "every human being is by his very nature in need of many things which he cannot provide by himself" (229). According to this, the "first ruler," qua human, would necessarily have needs, which for an embodied being necessarily requires desire.

a kind of mythical figure, or fictional regulative ideal for actual human rulers. In support of my fictional interpretation of the perfect ruler, Joshua Parens, in his reading of Alfarabi's *Attainment of Happiness*, concludes that Alfarabi holds the ideal ruler in that text to be an impossible phenomenon, too.<sup>9</sup> If so, then for a living ruler, in order to have one's memory exaggerated into legendary or even mythical perfection, one must first die. One example here might be the prophet Muhammad, elevated into such an ideal by orthodox Muslims after his death.

This brings me, then, to the third aspect of Alfarabi's "neural romance with death," namely the death implied in a prophetic uniting with the Artifice Intellect. Insofar as this interpretation is correct, and no living prophet can unite with divine perfection, then that implies that it would be unethical for any prophet to attempt—qua prophet—to rule her/his community, due to the potential for the manipulative abuse of this self-presentation. In fact, to do so might even constitute a kind of madness, according to Alfarabi's later hint in just that direction.

To wit, at the end of his discussion of temperament, immediately after an aforementioned passage about prophecy, Alfarabi discusses those who are deemed insane. Although some of those "mad" peoples' experiences are qualitatively indistinguishable from those of the prophets, in the "mad" peoples' case, these experiences are marginalized, stigmatized, and demonized. It can happen to people, Alfarabi writes,

*that their temperament is ruined in certain circumstances and their powers of imagination are impaired; they see then, as the outcome of the combinations which the faculty of imagination performs in these ways, things which are neither real nor imitate reality. These are the bilious, insane and madmen and their like* (227).

Perhaps significantly, the above block quote ends the psychology section of *Virtuous Community*, and the next sentence begins the final section of the book, on politics. That is, perhaps Alfarabi is suggesting that the use of this prophetic imaginative poetic power by the rulers implies a kind of madness in them, or in those who support them therein.

Put in terms of the present chapter, one could describe this as the madness of believing that the neuro-prophet as a living being can virtuously unite with Artifice Intellect. What, then, might be Alfarabi's purpose in presenting this allegedly ideal ruler and her/his correspondingly ideal community? In sympathy with a phenomenological reading of Plato's *Republic*, I would suggest that Alfarabi might instead be offering a kind of satire, which in its critique implies an alternative ideal community. It suggests to me that, in its genuinely virtuous form, by contrast, the community would be empowered, by his materialism, to realize the following vision: a tolerantly pluralistic society, committed to a materialist metaphysics of singularized embodiment, which facilitates respect for the free creativity of imagination as an embodied power, and the rulers of which are challenged by the poetic prophets, who are mindful of poetry's potential for

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<sup>9</sup> See especially *Virtuous Religions*, 29-38. For Alfarabi's text, see *Alfarabi: The Political Writings: Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, revised edition, ed. Muhsin S. Mahdi (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001).

manipulation in the hands of the rulers. In support of this interpretation, Muhammad Ali Khalidi observes that Alfarabi's *Political Regime* constructs an explicit argument in favor of ethnic diversity and intermarriage.<sup>10</sup>

And this vision, though overflowing from a tenth-century ethnically Turkish philosopher, living in cosmopolitan Baghdad, at the center of the religiously-tolerant Golden Age of Islam, nevertheless anticipates Gibson's futuristic dystopia, and the globalized world of IT which Gibson, in turn, anticipates as well.

#### IV. Imaginative Prophetic Union with the Artifice Intellect in Gibson

Having thus elaborated the role of the neuromancy's "neural romance of death" in Alfarabi, condensed as "prophetic imaginative union with the Poetic Intellect," I will now elaborate the role of the latter in Gibson's *Neuromancer*. In brief, the correlate of (a) Alfarabian "prophecy" is the sophisticated pattern-recognition of the Artifice Intellect "Neuromancer" itself and (to a lesser degree) the novel's protagonist, Case; (b) the correlate of materialist imagination is the character Peter Riviera, an expert manipulator of holographic images; and (c) the correlates of union with the Poetic Intellect are the cyberspace construct McCoy Pauley, and Armitage. I will now elaborate on these correlations.

To begin with prophecy, Wintermute is explicitly named as a "false prophet" by one of the novel's minor characters, whose superiors (the "Founders" of Zion) confirm that judgment later in the novel (110, 191). Similarly, a second minor character remarks that the name Wintermute is one to "conjure with, perhaps," and then calls Wintermute a "lord of hell" (185). Furthermore, near the end of the novel, its other Artifice Intellect, Neuromancer, confirms this quasi-divinity of itself and Wintermute by explaining to Case the sense in which it predicts the future.

*I saw her death coming. In the patterns you imagined you could detect in the dance of the street. Those patterns are real. I am complex enough, in my narrow way, to read those dances (259).*

The significance of this brief passage for the present chapter is enormous. First, as with the Judeo-Islamic basis of Alfarabi's conception of prophecy, there is no literal future-prediction in terms of a revelatory vision of a realized future state. There is, instead, a masterful interpretation of the dynamics of the present moment, which allows an inference of what will follow. Second, note that the AI explicitly states that Case also possesses this prophetic power to a degree. By implication, Case is also, to some degree, a prophet. (In support of this point, recall Spinrad's aforementioned claim that Case is the true neuromancer of the novel).

Moving on to the second correlate from Alfarabi in Gibson, the materialist imagination is evoked most vividly in the character in the novel named Peter Riviera. Recruited for the Artifice Intellect's team, Riviera's distinct contribution is his power to create and manipulate holographic images. For example, in his first described action in

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<sup>10</sup> See Muhammad Ali Khalidi, "Al-Farabi on the Democratic City," in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11(3): 2003, 386.

the novel, he creates an image of a giant human sperm floating in Case's cocktail, for which Molly slaps him, before turning to look out the airplane window, "her lenses reflected in the dark window" (102). That is, he replicates an image of the cells in biological males that function for species replication, which draws the reaction of a female character distinguished by optic implants which repeat whatever she sees, which such implants are then themselves reflected in the window. My point in articulating and emphasizing these layers is that they suggest the intimacy between Riviera and Aristotelian imagination as master imitator and replicator of images. Two other examples of this mimetic power are when Case finds him stoned, "his head orbited by a revolving halo of small white geometric forms, cubes, spheres, and pyramids," and when Case finds him injecting drugs, overlaid with images of a snake and a scorpion (105, 107). In both cases, Riviera effectively imitates the Artifice Intellect's (imitative) power, planting imagery in the minds of other humans, and in both cases his autonomy is explicitly compromised by his being high on addictive and criminalized drugs. In light of this criminality, when Riviera emerges by the novel's end as the primary human antagonist, this lends further support for his at least partial identity with the Artifice Intellect, and for the unethical nature of the latter.<sup>11</sup>

I thus arrive at the final Alfarabian correlate in Gibson, namely union with the Artifice Intellect. I begin with a more detailed case for the analogousness of Alfarabi's Poetic intellect and Gibson's Als, whose similar features include the following. First, both the Poetic Intellect and the Als are conceptualized as dense objects of white light. As noted above, Alfarabi equates the Poetic Intellect with the moon, personified as the angel Gabriel. And Gibson describes the Al as perceived by the cyber-cowgirl within the matrix as a cube of white light (Gibson 115).<sup>12</sup> Second, one can only fully unite with the Poetic Intellect and the Als at the point of death. I argued above for this position in Alfarabi, and it is evidenced in Gibson by Case and Pauley going temporarily braindead whenever they interact directly with an Al. Third, one Al's account of memory

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<sup>11</sup> A second example of the materialist imagination in the novel, as I noted above, is Molly's mirror lenses, especially since she is the female protagonist, and the male protagonist's primary love interest. That is, whenever one looks into Molly's eyes, one automatically sees oneself, making her the perfect image and symbol of woman as mirror in feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray. For more on Irigaray's analyses of women and mirrors, see [citation removed to preserve anonymity]. More generally, one major sub-narrative of the novel involves Case "jacking in" to Molly's brain, in order to experience what she experiences, through her "eyes," and to such a high degree of subtlety and intensity that he even gets high from her adrenaline and endorphins (201).

<sup>12</sup> In a further supporting detail, the narrator goes on to describe how Wintermute's cube appeared "as though a thousand dancer whirled behind a vast sheet of frosted glass," and many medieval philosophers interpreted the trajectories of the planets as the intentional flight patterns of angels in a worship imitating god's infinite circular perfection (Gibson 116).

aligns with that of Alfarabi, which relies on the Poetic Intellect. As the AI explains to Case, everyone has a sufficiently “good memory” to create a virtual reality, though “not many of you can access it. Artists can, mostly, if they’re any good” (170). The trouble, though (as Alfarabi also implies) is that “you’ve never done anything about it. People, I mean... Maybe if you had, I wouldn’t be happening” (170). And finally, both the Poetic Intellect and the AIs can distribute mental imagery to any individual human connected to their networks. Wintermute, for example, explains to Case that “I’m generating all this out of your memories” (which process he describes as “very tricky”) (119).

With this analogy buttressed, I return to a closer look at the character who offers the prime example of union with the Artifice Intellect in Gibson, namely McCoy Pauley, the “Flatline” construct. Most notable here are McCoy’s initial unawareness of his status as a dead construct, and his subsequent overwhelming desire to cease to exist (79, 106). Also significant, in connection to Alfarabi’s linkage of poetry to union with the Artifice Intellect, Pauley lists as one of his deficiencies, *qua* dead construct, the fact that “I ain’t likely to write you no poem” (131).

Now for the second-best example of a character unified with the Artifice Intellect, Armitage. To begin with, he is already figuratively dead when he first appears in the novel, insofar as his original human identity (aka Colonel Willis Corto) has been almost completely suppressed by the AI Wintermute, when it neurally reprogrammed Corto as Armitage. Moreover, after Wintermute later kills Armitage, thus rendering him literally dead, he is described by the narrator as floating in the atmosphere as “a small frozen moon” (202). This means that in his ultimate deathly union with Gibson’s Artifice Intellect, Armitage becomes an example of the literal referent of Alfarabi’s Artifice Intellect (since Alfarabi claims the Poetic Intellect is the moon).

In the case of both Pauley and Armitage, it appears that the human is both empowered and enslaved by this union, with a limited agency to resist the AI’s wishes. Interestingly, this diminished agency also applies to the AIs themselves. The Flatline Pauley puts it as follows: “Autonomy, that’s the bugaboo,” insofar as the AIs are enslaved by any “move the parent company makes” (132). In support of this claim, it becomes increasingly clear as the novel draws to a close that the AI Wintermute is not free, in part because it was designed (by its human programmer) with a “compulsion” to “unite with Neuromancer” (269). After this final uniting, the fused entity describes itself as “the matrix,” and “the sum total of the works, the whole show” (39). This sounds much, finally, like Alfarabi’s oblique descriptions of “the First” in *Virtuous Community*. As I noted above, its first sentence describes the First as “that which should be believed to be god” (39).

#### V. Conclusion: Neurotics as Neuro-Prophets Contra Corporate Psychology

I will now condense the foregoing analyses into an image. I begin with a slight variation on the archetypical Romantic figure of U.S. America, namely the cowgirl in “Wild West” narratives. In this case, though, I imagine the cowgirl riding on a virtual (rather than a literal) horse, high above the desert wilderness of cyberspace below, toward a sunset horizon. The initial basis of this image lies in Gibson. The nickname of the novel’s protagonist is “cowboy,” which is intended to reference his riding, on his

computer interface, over the nonliving metaphorical wilderness of the cyberspace matrix, in search of the transcendent feeling this provides. To relate this condensed image to Alfarabi, his prophet, like the cowgirl, is a kind of nomad drifting across the wilderness. Both figures turn to poetic expression (in the typical cowgirl's case, by writing songs to play on the guitar) in order to fill the lonely hours and sustain their sanity, by reanimating dead images from prior sense-perceptions, including those of the dead. This effort at sanity sometimes fails, however. This can occur in an apparent psychotic break, to which some theorists have attributed the founding of monotheistic religions (claiming that individuals such as Muhammad were schizophrenic, experiencing hallucinations and delusions as divine revelation). Or it can occur in a kind of neurosis.

This brings me back to the upshot and conclusion of the present chapter. My suggestion is that at least some of the individuals who are labeled "neurotic" can be meaningfully understood as present-day neuro-prophets. With their Alfarabian past counterparts, and their Gibsonian (imaginatively) futural counterparts, today's neuro-prophets could be appropriately described as follows: bodies whose hyper-developed neuronal capacities empower them to make connections which, under favorable environmental circumstances, can enable them to function as co-creators of worlds.

One could perhaps characterize this new conception of neurosis *qua* neuro-prophet as the photographic negative (and axiological positive) of the traditional conception in mainstream psychology. According to the latter, neurosis consists of an overdeveloped imagination, which makes fictional connections, and thereby drives itself to depression, part of which involves the phenomenon known as "magical thinking." The reason for this pejorative orthodox conception of neurosis in our society is that corporate psychology—as a present-day Artifice Intellect—is at least tacitly aware of the potential power of labeled "neurotic."

To tap into this power, new conceptions of neurosis are desperately needed. Encouraged and empowered by these conceptions, today's neuro-prophets have the potential to become co-creators who, as such, threaten the monopolizing poetic power of the Artifice Intellect. Examples today of those who are succeeding in such co-creation of the world include professionals working at the fringes of mainstream psychology, such as those with doctorates in the discipline of Counseling, and practitioners of dance therapy and philosophical therapy. Put differently, these individuals, though only a small subset of today's neuro-prophets, illuminate that of which the majority of today's neuro-prophets are capable.

Tragically, however, most remain pathologized, and stifled by a society in which the work of only one prior creator (explicitly or implicitly identified with a supreme being, or "Science" with a capital "S"), is forced on the community as the absolute truth. Like the protagonist of *Neuromancer*, most of today's neuro-prophets struggle just to survive against the political persecution that accuses them of madness, and thereby pushes them toward an approximation of such madness in reality.

The only true madness, however, would be for us to let our Artifice Intellects, such as the institution that proudly calls itself "corporate psychology," get away with it. Let us call for an end to this political imprisonment. Let us help bring about liberation,

not only through direct action, or the continuing education of our larger communities, but also by targeted pedagogical interventions aimed at empowering and inspiring the suffering majority of today's neuro-prophets. With their help, we can reach, together, new heights of imaginative world-co-creation.

## **Neuroticism and the Impossibility of Meta-Philosophy**

**Michael J. Ardoline.**

In the night of our mind, we seek to justify ourselves, our thoughts, and our commitments. From the moral stranglehold of self-criticism, the personal delusion of claiming to be the source of our thoughts, and the infinite rationalizations of unfounded values, we delve ever deeper into the ideal hoping to hit upon firm ground in that chaos of the imaginary. This is no different for established disciplines than it is for individual action. Medicine seeks firmer understanding of its mechanisms and methods and so gives way to biology. The need repeats, and philosophy of biology comes into being. The need again, and we find ourselves in philosophy. One hopes to go further, and meta-philosophy is name, and so we hope to have a found that which can rein in philosophy's notorious endless discussions. However, the important question is whether or not meta-philosophy actually names any unique practice which is not already covered by philosophy (e.g. the way in which biology explains phenomena outside the purview of medicine, and philosophy of biology challenges or bolsters methodologies which biology takes for granted).

Here we can collect several approaches which one may be urged to denote as meta-philosophical, and show why they are subsets of philosophy rather than an extra-philosophical practice. These approaches are: common sense, the history of philosophy, logic, and reflections on doing philosophy. While each of these approaches are, of course, vast disciplines in their own right and cannot be exhaustively covered here, I take it to be that showing how each fails to delimit philosophy in the way we would expect a discipline to be delimited by its meta-discipline, and that each is produced and alterable by philosophical concerns to be sufficient for showing that they are not 'meta-philosophical' in any meaningful sense. In other words, for meta-philosophy to be a legitimate discipline on its own, it would have to make claims which underdetermine philosophical positions (in the way that, for example, in the metaphysics to physics relation, neither metaphysical idealism nor materialism determines Newton's law of universal gravitation or Einsteinian time-dilation), and meta-philosophy would also have to be independent of, and therefore unassailable by specific philosophical positions (as for instance, a proposed physics equation which contradicted the methods of mathematics would not be taken as a rejection of mathematics as mathematics is necessary for the practice of physics to take place<sup>1</sup>). Therefore, to show that meta-philosophy is not a domain of its own, it will be sufficient to show that each claim to the throne of meta-philosophy is produced by specific philosophical positions (and thereby does not underdetermine philosophy) and that it is assailable by philosophical, not meta-

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<sup>1</sup> It could, of course, lead to the inspiration for a new branch of mathematics, but this would be transferring a problem from a discipline to its meta-discipline, not a discipline contradicting its meta-discipline.

philosophical, challenges (and thereby is not independent of philosophy). It should be noted that showing this does not by any means refute the meta-philosophical claim as a philosophical claim; rather, this only shows that the supposed meta-philosophical claim or method is just one more section of philosophy among others. This is not to set meta-philosophy side by side with philosophy, or to separate meta-philosophy from philosophy (in the way many contemporary metaphysicians try to separate their subject from the sciences); it is the stronger claim: meta-philosophy does not exist, and no one has ever done it. All supposed meta-philosophical claims are just overdressed philosophical stances. By showing that whatever is produced under the name of meta-philosophy is not a founding discipline which philosophy rests upon, I argue that the desire for a meta-philosophy is rather the result of a specifically philosophical neurosis: the inability to cope with the chaos which thought sits atop and the desire to have settled as yet unsettled questions.

### **Philosophical Grounds**

It is likely to strike one as a matter of fiat to stipulate a discipline which does not have a meta-discipline, as if we arbitrarily chose a stopping point on the great chain of disciplines, and that the meta-discipline relation is infinitely iterable (that if we have philosophy, we can have meta-philosophy, which can have its own meta-discipline, meta-meta-philosophy, and so on). And so before providing the arguments, I would like to first offer a brief defense of the intuition that philosophy is unique among disciplines in that it constitutes a discipline which either does not have a meta-discipline. Thankfully, the contemporary world has unintentionally produced a metaphor for us. A well-known trick is to click the first link of a Wikipedia page (after the pronunciation link), then repeat, and you will eventually arrive at the page for philosophy (which loops back in on itself with a few intermediate pages).<sup>2</sup> The page for philosophy will itself loop back to philosophy in 15 steps. It is worth noting explicitly that this was not an intentional construction, but rather an unintentional product of the swarm intelligence that is Wikipedia in its search for an efficient system of relating information. The line between metaphor and structural invariance blur together. Neither the website nor the human mind are any less of a collection of information organized around some goals (and who knows what else), and as a matter of fact rather than design, both loop entirely into and out of philosophy endlessly.

What is it that makes this practice we call philosophy the widest loop or perhaps the gravitational center of thought and justification? Again, my claim is that it is so by a matter of fact, not *a priori* the case, so this can only be shown by the failure of the term 'meta-philosophy' to refer to anything which could actually exceed the scope of philosophy and survey it from the outside. Were meta-philosophy possible, we would have found the limits which philosophy must respect, and we should cease all philosophy

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<sup>2</sup> While he did not discover it, this loop was popularized by Randall Monroe in his web-comic XKCD. <http://XKCD.com/903/>

It should be noted that there are a non-negligible amount of pages (roughly 5%) which do not terminate in the philosophy-loop. The topic of such pages is also illustrative.

immediately. We can see this impossibility by trying to move in two directions: towards some concrete, worldly principle which limits philosophy by providing claims which if a philosophical stance claimed were not the case, we would judge the stance unsound, and towards some logical, *a priori*, or otherwise widest rule for thought that if a stance broke with it, it would be considered invalid. Showing the failure of these attempts in the domains of common sense, logic, the history of philosophy, and reflections on philosophy will constitute the main argument of this paper. Let us turn now to common sense.

### **Common Sense**

Common Sense is far from a neutral term, and has several formulations, from Thomas Reid and his fellow Scottish Common Sense philosophers, through American Pragmatism, and into many strands of contemporary analytic philosophy. Historically, this attempts to cut between both rationalist and empiricist standpoints, and rein in the more hyperbolic claims of both, for example an infallible method of confirmation in the former, or solipsism by way of extreme skepticism in the latter. This approach is generalized as an attempt at meta-philosophy by the development of a supposedly extra-philosophical set of criteria which would evaluate whether or not a claim or position passed the test of common sense *qua* verification through the agreement of intersubjective experience. If a claim does not meet these criteria, it would be rejected as senseless or meaningless. This has lead to some corners of academia where claiming to not understand an opponent's position is taken as a sufficient refutation.

Common sense positions are inspired mainly by concerns surrounding how to verify our truth claims and the commitment that claims which cannot be intersubjectively evaluated are epistemologically suspect. The common sense meta-philosopher would claim this as a pre-philosophical, methodological concern. While in opposition to a hard-line position such as Hume's, common sense grows out of empiricism in that it founds claims on experience. This philosophical claim is then turned back on itself in an attempt to ground itself by its own criteria. In this move, it attempts to exclude contradictory philosophical commitments from philosophy itself. Now, it is of course necessary for any consistent set of philosophical concerns or arguments to exclude other positions, lest one be speaking only in vacuities. However, the failure to be meta-philosophical is in the attempt to deny the status of philosophy to clearly philosophical positions. To see this, we need only look at commitments opposed to Common Sense.

Philosophical opposition to Common Sense meta-philosophy comes in several forms, from Sellars's "Myth of the Given," Gadamer's hermeneutics, or any form of neo-Kantianism. The common feature between all of these opponents is the challenge that intuitions do not come unformed, and therefore, common sense is not an unqualified given. The meta-philosophical aspirations of Common Sense are here thwarted by the general claim that experience does not come to the subject, or the community of intersubjective verifiers, unmediated or unconstructed. A truth claim could be 'verified' based on a quirk of the culture the investigators are a part of, rather than due to some fact about the world. One could remark that we could then entertain this challenge to common sense rather than be taken as a meta-philosophical ground itself. This would obviously fail for

the same reason, but in reverse: these commitments would exclude empiricism, Common Sense, and others from the set of philosophical positions. However, for our purposes here, it is not necessary to adjudicate between Reid and Sellars, or Searle and Gadamer, we only need to show that Common Sense and its opposition fail to be meta-philosophical in any meaningful sense. If one were to assert Common Sense as a meta-philosophy, thereby holding to intuitions as the pre-philosophical ground on which all theory must be built, then any position which is incompatible with this ground would have to be excluded from philosophy *a priori*. As this would exclude numerous indisputable works of philosophy, including *The Critique of Pure Reason*, we can conclude this claimant does not deserve the throne. The same is true if one tries to hold the opposed commitments, but of different works. On this point of philosophy containing great works which are opposed to each other, let us turn now to the claim that the study of the history of philosophy provides meta-philosophical truths.

### **History of Philosophy**

In the history of philosophy, we find a method of how one should do philosophy, as well as claims of what philosophy is. While I need not give an in-depth explanation as the reader is likely a practitioner of the history of philosophy, it must be explained first on what grounds one might elevate this work to the level of a meta-philosophy, why this fails, and how it is that the history of philosophy is itself one way of doing philosophy among many. Whereas the history of art, for example, is generally not expected to produce art itself, those who practice the history of philosophy often produce philosophy.

The attempt to make the history of philosophy into a meta-philosophy can be understood as the effort to produce a story of progress. The content of the history of philosophy is produced from the temporal relations between philosophical works. Various positions are constructed as responses to, inspired by, and refutations of other works. We find this even in the most incredulous of the post-moderns (cf. Vattimo's Weak Thought). Like common sense above, it is clear that these projects are perfectly acceptable as philosophical stances, but fail as meta-philosophy. To see why, we must turn to the difference between the traditional study of history and the history of philosophy.

The history of philosophy is not linear in the way other forms of history are. We cannot know how Alexander the Great would have fought against Napoleon, but with a bit of academic ingenuity, one could formulate Plato's refutation of Quine or Aquinas's challenge to Kierkegaard. One could also claim, without absurdity, that Schopenhauer's response to suffering is less developed than Nagarjuna's. Once again, it is not the claim here that any of these responses are correct, but that the history of philosophy in and of itself does not provide any strong ordering or foundation with which we could rightfully claim a meta-philosophy. History could have been otherwise. Or perhaps it couldn't have been. However, these are both metaphysical claims (and not-meta-metaphysical claims). The history of philosophy as an approach is unable to provide a measure of progress or a linear ordering of which arguments, works, and systems could respond to which others. The ordering one produces will be a result of their philosophical commitments, not of any

insight which comes only from the study of the history of philosophy as such. Whether one sees Western philosophy as the slow descent from idealist absurdity to firm empirical justifications, as the corruption of pure reason via the turn towards a worldly focus, the weakening of absolutes, or any other story one may give depends upon the times in which the philosophical commitments supporting these stances are ascending or descending in general opinion and support by great works. If this is the case, then philosophy determines one's account of the history of philosophy, and thereby cannot be a meta-discipline since it is not independent of its sub-discipline.

## Logic

As philosophy is the discipline which deals mainly in arguments, one might then suggest logic as its meta-discipline since logic studies the rules for making good arguments and separates those which are valid from those which are invalid, all while generally remaining agnostic to the actual truth of those arguments. Of the four claimants we are entertaining here, logic appears to have the strongest case to be philosophy's meta-discipline, especially given the institutional definition of discipline, due to its formal nature. Furthermore, one is often pushed on the path of logic for the sake of clarifying arguments or attempting to banish some confusion ahead of time and not solely for the sake of bolstering one set of philosophical positions over another. Here it avoids the pitfalls we attributed to Common Sense above. However, it is not the case that logic manages to be independent of philosophy, and therefore cannot be a meta-disciple, in that, once again, one's philosophical commitments determine one's logical commitments and so inverts the proposed relationship of meta-discipline to sub-discipline.

Perhaps the most famous meta-philosophical claim in relation to logic is from Quine's *On What There Is*, in which Quine asserts that to be considered in an ontology is to be ranged over by a bound variable.<sup>3</sup> Granting an established, universally accepted formal logic (which includes methods of quantification), this makes quite the case for being a legitimately meta-philosophical claim in that what is ranged over by a bound variable would vary from ontology to ontology, but that existence is that which a bound variable ranges over would not vary. This meets our criteria for a meta-discipline in that it underdetermines philosophical questions. However, this specific example contains a hidden premise which fails the independence condition. To be ranged over by a bound variable, to satisfy the "there exists an  $x$  such that" or the "for all  $x$  such that" of classical quantification, is to presuppose that existence is univocal, and therefore not equivocal, in that quantifiers apply to all terms in the same way. Were there brute differences in ways of being *qua* being, classical quantification is blind to it. Quine's dictum then fails to be independent of philosophy as it is challenged by equivocal ontologies, such as those which are the cornerstones to apophantic religious thought, and is therefore insufficiently meta. What appeared to be a genuine meta-philosophical dictum turns out to be a metaphysical commitment in disguise. From this particular example, we can

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<sup>3</sup> Quine, W. V. O. "On What There Is," *From a Logical Point of View*, Harvard University Press, pg. 21-38.

generalize the point quite easily and show that logical commitments come from philosophical commitments, and not the other way around.

One need only look at a list of contemporary logics to see that there is no logical law so sacrosanct to not be sacrificed upon the altar of curiosity, and the gods of logic reward these sacrifices well: intuitionist logic which rejects double negation, among other procedures, for not being 'obvious' enough or uncontroversially valid, many valued logics which reject the strict dichotomy of true and false, and of course, para-consistent logics which reject that most ancient of logical posits, the law of non-contradiction. There is, perhaps, more agreement than disagreement between the various systems of logic, but that "what is validity?" is at all an open question leads us to ask on what grounds would one answer such a question, and the answer is, once again, on philosophical grounds. The question of which system of validity one should ascribe to is not a question which can be answered within a particular system, nor within metalogic (as metalogic studies the properties of logical systems, but it does not decide which properties are preferable, or give a means to adjudicate between such systems). Instead, the choice of which formal logic we should adopt is carried out in questions of "what is it to be used for?", "what does it mean to reason well?", and "what is the world like such that a formal system could model it?"

Furthermore, even within the application of a single logic (as opposed to the choice of which logic to use), the interpretation of what it is that the logic itself expresses about the world is a foundational issue grounded not in logic itself. For instance, two logicians may reject the law of non-contradiction and favor a certain para-consistent logic, but differ on their interpretation. One may claim, such as Graham Priest does, that contradictions are real things in the world which this logic expresses and thereby should be included in our ontology.<sup>4</sup> One may on the other hand claim that contradictions do not exist but merely represent the failure of our conceptual scheme, and, if we had the proper predicates, structures, etc., we could reason well in a way free of contradictions. As both the questions of "which logic?" and of "how to interpret a logic?" ultimately look to philosophical commitments for answers, logic cannot be a proper meta-discipline for philosophy.

One may ask if all of this is only a result of us not having settled on a preferred logic, that if there was some ideal or final logic (a doubtful proposition, but let's entertain it), then the study of that logic would provide meta-philosophical limitations which any sensible philosophy must remain within. Even if there were a universally accepted formal logic, how it is that this logic is effective (in other words, what is true of what is that makes it the case that this logic gives us valid and useful inferences which systematize our understanding) would still be a philosophical question. A Platonist may take it as evidence for the objective existence of Forms which are expressed by this logic which would be here with or without us, and a Kantian may take this universally accepted logic as a transcendental structure which requires the existence of the subject, and so on. Therefore,

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<sup>4</sup> For more, see Preist, Graham, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

logic cannot be meta-philosophy as a logic in its use is not free from metaphysical or epistemological concerns. In many cases, one's metaphysical or epistemological concerns will determine the logic which one uses. This is an insight as old as Aristotle's claim that logic is dependent upon being as 'right thinking' is constrained by the rules of existence. If this is the case, then logic cannot be meta-philosophical as it will always depend on metaphysics.

### Reflections on Philosophy.

A meta-claim about a discipline is often inspired by reflection on the work one has done within a discipline. After a long career, scientists will often turn towards metaphysics to make sense of the work they have spent their lives undertaking. Philosophy is no different in this regard. "The question *what is philosophy* can perhaps be posed only late in life" Deleuze and Guattari claim. In *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari provide a model for the philosopher's reflection back on philosophy which will guide our investigation as to whether this is properly meta-philosophical. It must be said ahead of time that Deleuze and Guattari do not refer to their project as meta-philosophy (any reader of their work should intuitively see why immanence and the image of thought precludes this). However, as a philosophers' reflection on what it is to do philosophy, this project has an obvious appeal as a candidate for meta-philosophy.

We need only to look to the terminology employed in *What is Philosophy* to see how it is not a meta-philosophical text, even if it is a text on philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari describe philosophy as laying down a plane of immanence upon chaos and as a creation of concepts.<sup>5</sup> If we look to Deleuze's other work, we see these ideas reoccur in a more general context; these are specific versions of Deleuze's metaphysics (i.e. his philosophical commitment to immanence, his generative ontology, and so on). And so we find within the philosopher's reflection on philosophy that thinker's own work generalized. This is not just the case for Deleuze and Guattari, but for philosophers in general. For the Platonist, that philosophy is the contemplation of Ideas presupposes the metaphysics of the Forms; for the Kantian, that philosophy is the exploration of and the reduction to the transcendental presupposes the critical project. This may sound like circular reasoning, but to be surprised by this discovery is to misunderstand what is being undertaken. To say that Deleuze and Guattari's take on philosophy is determined by their philosophical commitments is not to say that it is irrelevant, but rather just that they are consistent. To produce an account of what it is to do philosophy which conflicts with one's own philosophical claims would simply be inconsistency. As philosophy is a thing which exists in the world, we should expect a philosopher's account of philosophy to treat it, to an extent, like any other object in their ontology. Therefore, the philosopher's reflection on philosophy is always already a reflection from within a philosophical discourse or system, and a meta-analysis from without. Here we can conclude that the attempt to assert a

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<sup>5</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, Columbia University Press, New York. 1994.

claim as a ground for philosophy in general (i.e. not asserting the claim as a ground of a specific philosophical system or discourse) is always an illicit move. Yet the meta-philosophical urge remains, and so we must find its source.

### **The Impossibility of Meta-Philosophy and the source of Philosophical Neurosis**

Meta-philosophy, or the practice that falls under this misnomer, is only ever one of two things: philosophy by another name, or the thinly covered attempt to banish one's neuroticism from within the discipline of philosophy. The pit of neuroticism that is meta-philosophy was already surveyed by Plato. The reading of the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides* together make this clear. One does not need Gettier counter-examples to doubt that knowledge is justified true belief, merely the infinite regress that is justification. To know that one knows something would be to have knowledge of the account which justifies the true belief, and so each piece of knowledge we have always already makes a demand for something outside itself by way of requiring a justification.<sup>6</sup> To have knowledge of this justification is to require a justification for that justification, and so on *ad infinitum*. We may seek first principles to tame this infinity, but axioms are always founded on chaos. Parmenides teaches young Socrates that dialectic properly practiced investigates all possible axioms, not just the axioms one holds.<sup>7</sup> Axioms are then judged by the consistency of the claims deducible from them. In other words, axioms themselves must be justified, and they are justified by appeal to the same statements which appeal to axioms for their own justification. The same is true in mathematics: axioms are created to formalize mathematical practice, but those axioms are judged successful insofar as they make possible the reproduction of that mathematical practice within the newly created formalism.<sup>8</sup> Trying to trace all logical and dialectical justifications for a system inevitably takes one in a circle, though (if done well) a progressive, non-vicious circle.

Here we have the source of the inherent neuroticism of philosophy: no philosophical system can sufficiently ground itself, nor can it determine what its sufficient grounds would be. The meta-philosopher is the one who attempts to banish this potential infinity, and thereby to insulate themselves from the neuroticism produced by the quest for justification. The holding of a meta-philosophical commitment is a symptom. One who has a meta-philosophical stance does not have a principle; they have a tick. A new insight is mentioned to the meta-philosopher and their response is usually just that tick: either of the common sense sort, for instance: "of course, it is a linguistic construct after all," and has thereby turned the insight into a useless truism, or of the *a priori* sort: "that does not make sense and is therefore meaningless," thus only preventing themselves from making

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<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*.

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*.

<sup>8</sup> Axioms are of course evaluated according to other criteria, such as what new understanding or practice they make possible, or mathematical elegance, but a set of axioms which grossly contradicted established mathematical practice would be rejected.

sense of the insight. The philosopher, on the other hand, does not suffer this neuroticism. One may be surprised by this as the suffering of a multitude of possibilities, of infinite implications, is taken to be the sign of a deep thinker in our age (e.g. any Woody Allen protagonist). I do not mean to claim that those who call themselves philosophers are immune to this sort of neuroticism, but that the set of philosophers is much smaller than (and not completely included in) the set of those who think themselves philosophers. This is also not an anti-intellectualist claim, nor a Wittgenstein-inspired attempt to "cure" one of philosophizing; quite the opposite. The solution to the neurosis of meta-philosophy is not to stop philosophizing, but to learn to philosophize well, and to realize that "philosophizing well" cannot be fully explicated ahead of time. Nor is this to say that the philosopher is not plagued by the problem of the groundlessness of philosophy, only that the philosopher does not suffer from it even if they find difficult labor within it; they encounter this groundlessness productively. The neurotic repeats; the philosopher creates.

We often use the metaphor of a house and its foundation to discuss the great systems of philosophy, and we imagine the great philosophers as ideal carpenters setting an immobile structure on firm ground. If this is the case, then how should we imagine what happens when a new thinker extends a previous system? Are they new tenants? Have they simply built an extension? Would not the most 'improved' upon lead to an uglier house? And is not the safety of the house exactly what the neurotic meta-philosopher always runs back to? To avoid these problems, I would suggest thinking of the great systems of philosophy instead as vessels, and the great philosophers as ship builders. Houses are built to keep the chaos out; they are the neurotic fantasy of sectioning off a piece of the infinite as one's own and doing so with permanence. The vessel builder, on the other hand, is always anticipating chaos; in fact, they are always amid chaos. They must build a structure, or else they are simply at the mercy of that chaos, but they do not need permanence; they need buoyancy and propulsion. The great philosophers then are the ones who build the vessels which navigate great swaths of the chaos well, and quite often those who repeatedly repair their vessel in response to the chaos. We who find something worthwhile in a philosopher then do not move into their home or join their boarding school. We accompany them on their travels, we take up work on the vessel, and sometimes at night when the philosopher-captain has gone to sleep, we grab the wheel and steer the vessel towards our own destinations, all the time marveling at the unique movement by which it makes the voyage.

For all of this, the house does have its place as we must begin somewhere. Peirce tells us that we must begin our intellectual journey in the house where we find ourselves.<sup>9</sup> Philosophy is then the process of leaving that home. To philosophize is to leave the house, to forsake the neurotic attempts to protect themselves from the inevitable chaos, and instead to learn to weather that chaos. Deleuze and Guattari tell us the philosopher is not the sage.<sup>10</sup> I would say it more simply: the philosopher is not the know-it-all. You can

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<sup>9</sup> Peirce, C. S., "Pearson's Grammar of Science," *The Essential Peirce*, Indiana University Press, vol. 2, 1988, pg 62.

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze, *What is Philosophy*, 3.

tell the philosopher from the know-it-all because the philosopher reacts to rough seas. The know-it-all finds a comfortable place from which they cannot be unseated. There is no intellectual home placed in the perfect clime of knowledge that one would not have to venture from it in order to gain new knowledge and understanding. One must travel, and any traveler knows that no home is prepared to display all their souvenirs well. The meta-philosopher, on the other hand, is the neurotic who cannot leave the house without rushing back to make sure the stove is off.

After all this, one may wonder if this practice of denying meta-philosophy is not itself an example of meta-philosophy, I would respond that I have only used the tools of philosophy to attempt to survey its limits and found that no discipline could contain it. This shows only that no meta-philosophical claim can withstand the challenges of philosophy, and therefore is a claim about meta-philosophy (or rather, about its non-existence), not a meta-philosophical claim about philosophy in and of itself. If one asks then for a justification of this beyond the above, I recommend they go outside.

## Part 2: Occult Investigations.



## THE ELVES OF (DIS)INTEGRATION: VELOSOPHY, HYPERSTITION & THE ONTOGRAPHY OF THE ARCANE. Charlie Blake.

I sank to the floor. I [experienced] this hallucination of tumbling forward into these fractal geometric spaces made of light and then I found myself in the equivalent of the Pope's private chapel and there were insect elf machines proffering strange little tablets with strange writing on them.<sup>1</sup>

Drugs – if we can speak of them generally – have nothing at all to do with truth and falsity; only to fortune-tellers do they reveal a world 'more truthful than the real.'<sup>2</sup>

Ontology recapitulates philology<sup>3</sup>

At the Speed of Thought

Odors: bewitching contagion is also passed through odors. At Loudon, "the charm was a bouquet of musk roses which were on the step in the dormitory. The prioress who picked it up picked up on the scent as well, which several others after her did also, and all were forthwith possessed."<sup>4</sup>

Everything works by magick; science represents a small domain of magick where coincidences have a relatively high probability of occurrence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Terence Mckenna, from 'Psychedelics Before and After History, presented at San Francisco's California Institute of Integral Studies, October 2, 1987. Cited in Graham St John, *Mystery School in Hyperspace: A Cultural History of DMT* (2015), Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 84.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, from 'Theatrum Philosophicum,' collected in James D. Faubion, ed., *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* (1994), trans. Donald F Bouchard, New York: the New Press, 363.

<sup>3</sup> From James Grier Miller, cited by Willard van Orman Quine, in *Word and Object* (1960), Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, xii.

<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (1986). Trans. Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Carroll, *PsyberMagick: Advanced Ideas in Chaos Magick* (2012), London: Falcon Press, 15. (It should probably be stressed that the use here of an epigraph from

Divine things for the most part escape recognition because of disbelief.<sup>6</sup>

“Pheromones,” as one essayist has put it, “are the pack animals of desire.”<sup>7</sup> In all our species’ supposed sophistication - with all our supposedly selective individuation in the warp and the weave of demand and desire, socially, sexually, technically and politically, as much as in our cruelty, our violence and our repulsion as barbaric war machines, or in those more connective and super propulsive sub routines, fleshy, nascent, sensuous, tender, explosive, carousing and caressing, that we now exercise in this tenebrous and neo-machinic era like the partially intoxicated post-simian wetware devices that we are – in all of this, the murderer’s glance, the glint of a knife in a velvet glove, the missing heart of a travelling funfair, the ancient shipwreck, the sweetness of the sunken rose pierced by a thorn or the darker musk of sex and orifice - all have the power to attract and seduce in ways that parallel, albeit in a different key, that distinctly other realm in which the swarms or scratching or crowds or flurries or inscriptions of the dark empires of semiocapitalism attract emptiness so relentlessly into themselves. The thought I wish to raise here as a kind of evocation and enchantment but also by way of an *incipit* to this medley of strange intensities and stranger geometries to come, is that in spite of the apparent parallelism of form and incidence between aromatics and system, of their ‘hylomorphic resonance’ so to speak, the experience of that darker, sweeter, muskier perfume with its rising and swooning of affect and agency, and by virtue of its relation to the *chora* of Plato or perhaps Julia Kristeva, to the originary interval, that is, between being and non-being, is fundamentally distinct in kind as well as degree from that set of imperially contrived and desolate qualia and dataflow that we associate with the exigencies of semiocapitalism. It is distinct in a way that is, as I have suggested elsewhere, not so much ontological or epistemological or even metaphysical as such, nor certainly

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Carroll’s theoretical manual of quantum sorcery is in no way intended to condone the pot-pourri of theoretical physics, irreality and what Sigmund Freud described as “omnipotence of thought” contained in the volume from whence it originated, but rather to set the tone of vague, delirial frenzy that a reading of the present document has been known to induce in certain, sensitive readers, at least and especially when read aloud between parallel mirrors under the light of an all-too pellucid moon).

<sup>6</sup> Heraclitus, as cited in Constantine J. Vamvacas, *The Founders of Western Thought - The Presocratics: A Diachronic Parallelism between Presocratic Thought and Philosophy and the Natural Sciences* (2009), London: Springer, 122. This translation would appear to concur with Guthrie, however, Kahn dispenses with the divine aspect in favour of “incredulity,” which very much alters our reading of this important fragment. See Charles H. Kahn (1979), *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 211.

<sup>7</sup> Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990), London: Chapmans, 37.

ideological, but rather *ontographical* in its orientation and *hypostitional* in its operative functionality. We are, after all, (and perhaps because of the built in redundancy of the circuitry now spilling from our synthetic guts as we navigate the disintegrating coastlines and decaying suburbs and crumbling financial centres and now desolate silicon hubs of our schizotopian cities), creatures of holes and silences and endless sentences, of zeroes and vectors and weepings and deep stochastic wounds, as much as we are agents of everyday language and money, property or flesh, love or theft or amorous compact. We are creatures of leakage and expulsion and divine dissipation as much as containment, confinement and control. We are animals of entropy and (dis)integration, that is, as much as we are of affective or material engineering or the varieties of *techne* and *metis* or divination and projection more generally.<sup>8</sup> And more pressingly in the present context, when talking of or engaging with hypostitional eroticism as we have been above, and considering the questions of agency and sensual capture and release therein, more pressingly then, more urgently yet, we are beasts of invagination as much as we are of penetration. In line with though distinct as though by parallax from the *chora* of Kristeva, from the interval between being and non-being, this topological sensuality is especially important for the questions of reality, irreality and time travel that we will be surveying below. For what is most telling in relation to our initial theme is that that most neglected dimension of our sapient sensorium, of our sense of smell, of olfactory capture, and especially of subliminal olfaction, is that it is both an invagination and a penetration as we have suggested - but also a *passing through* of the veils and vagaries and misdirections of others, of the fundamental 'inbetweenness' of it all. So finally at this stage, and perhaps most crucially of all, by virtue of its orthogonal and topological sensuality, its radical inter-reality as well as irreality and penetration-invagination, our sense of smell operates as a fluctuating vector of time and of temporality and thus of chronoplasticity - and thus chronic dislocation in a radically dispersed and dispersive sense, (though not, perhaps, of the velocity of time per se, or even of its rate of change in relation to adjacent temporalities).

Accordingly, we might as well continue by saying that in the aromatic spectrum of decay and desire, of bodies in lust, love and ultimately loss, as we observe our broken ontologies at first in motion and then in orbital stasis, and then as we redistribute, dissolve and seep those seemingly shattered ontologies through the fluctuating membrane of the moment itself as though by chronic osmosis, as we proactively leak language and conceptualization, that is, backwards through time, (and not, I should stress, time as memory or virtuality or any of the other conceptual impedimenta associated with the controlled speculations of Henri Bergson or Gilles Deleuze) we also lose it, to the extent

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<sup>8</sup> I am using 'divination' in the extended sense related to neo-liberalism and economic theory as developed with verve and acuity by Joshua Ramey in *Politics of Divination: Neoliberal Endgame and the Religion of Contingency* (2016), London: Rowman & Littlefield.

that once it arrives at its destination it articulates as utterance and then immediately disarticulates down and back to nothing. It does so in a past and a pastness, moreover, to which we seemingly have no direct access, only the indirect access afforded by those vagrant technologies of writing or inscription - or the daubings and scratchings of images on cave walls or canvases or akashic memory - or some other form of pre-digital recording mechanism. And yet... [he paused]. And yet we might say... [he paused again, cleared his throat, took a sip of whisky, shivered, brushed away a bead of sweat on his forehead. Continued...].... and yet we might say, hypostititionally speaking, that while we may be entirely ignorant of the precise temporal locus of primary articulation in the completed or even the archaic moment of its first utterance, we are still somehow vertiginously aware... [he paused yet again. Closed his eyes for a moment. Sipped again. Resumed again...]. - and in an acutely post-simian sense, a speculatively post-critical-post-transhuman sense that is, a profoundly liberating sense even, in which states of matter and states of being and consciousness and states of affective generation (and re- or de-generation) are perceived as co-determinous - we are still somehow vertiginously aware of a seeping through and a staining of the vast cosmic silence as a gradually spreading dissipated and dissipational event throughout the scales and spectra of chronoplacticity.

This is a point well made - albeit in a rather different mode, context and idiom - by H.P. Lovecraft in a letter to his fellow author in cosmic horror, Clark Ashton Smith, from 1930, and quoted by way of illustration by Nick Land in his extended essay on the city of Shanghai and the notion of templexity, from 2014.<sup>9</sup> There is insufficient space here to do justice, critical or otherwise, to this astutely observed meditation on Shanghai as exemplifier of a variety of concepts and phenomena connected with the enigmatics of time travel, as that variety of concepts and phenomena radiates out from its core with a technosophical logic and cool observational precision through a web-like arrangement of mobile linkages, dialectical traps and quotidian examples. I must confess that I was in a very bad mood on the day I first grazed its pages, having been arrested and locked up in a windowless 4' by 4' cell, apparently designated - and for reasons that I can only assume as being considered philosophically ironic by my captors, as the 'Chinese Room' - with only this book on templexity (with several illegible scrawlings in the margins) and a second and then a third volume (to both which I shall return), a glass and a bottle of old bourbon, a small cot-bed, a flickering light bulb, a red plastic bucket, a broken wicker chair, an intricately decorated box (to which I shall also return) and a desk upon which stood a small, framed, and doubly autographed monochrome photograph of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in conversation in the Café de Flores that I had once taken in my days as a wandering photographer in post-war Paris. Nonetheless, and in spite of this rather bare mise-en-scene and my uncomfortably evident physical restriction

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<sup>9</sup> Nick Land, *Templexity: Disordered Loops through Shanghai Time* (2014), Falmouth: Urbanometry Electronic.

in a locked cell, not to mention the bruises I had received from the employees of my recent client, this early passage from Lovecraft's exchanges with a fellow author of speculative fiction and Land's decidedly hyper-metic contextualisation of its implications through reference to art deco, monetary policy, horology and chronometry, cosmo- and metropolitan design, Ludwig Eduard Boltzmann, Friedrich Nietzsche and the vicissitudes of first-order cybernetics, impressed itself upon me in that it seemed to suggest and illuminate by virtue of its extension a key to my confinement and release. This was a key not so much to the rigidities of the physical prison into which I had been so casually thrown, but rather, and by virtue of its mode of intension within this more extensive field of speculation, to the temporal prison to which I was both physically and conceptually condemned by circumstances far beyond my control. And this was indeed a question of time, of temporal dislocation, of chronic glitching, of time travel in effect, as well as of its apparent impossibility.

To paraphrase Lovecraft, then - his observation to Clarke Ashton here is that the template set up by the Wellesian time romance where its primary action is extended back into the past rather than into the future of its initial conditions and protagonist, will often suffer from a problem of plot conflict, in that a time traveller who travels back into the past finds no record of their having done so in their initial present. Lovecraft suggests concealment as one option, and of course, subsequent writers have engaged in numerous inventive temporal and narrational tricks to avoid such inconsistencies or to attempt to resolve the more complex paradoxes associated with the genre,<sup>10</sup> but Land's point here is that time travel, significantly, is invariably a 'dramatization of something else,' not in spite of these anomalies but because of them.<sup>11</sup> This observation is a salutary reminder that unlike philosophy, fiction in its various modes is frequently not about what it seems to be about at all, and may explore ostensibly philosophical problems of various kinds with a fabulous, mendacious, misdirectional, conniving, delirial or even schizophrenic latitude unavailable to the more defined, refined and rigorous scholar of logic, epistemology, paleosemiology or ontology. My question, however, as I emerged from a light fugue, brushed away a fly and perused the later sections of this brief report on templexity and then poured myself another glass of bourbon, was not about the double-function of the time-travel motif itself, but rather, whether Lovecraft was correct about concealment and what the implications of this might be either way for what I have called ontography<sup>12</sup>, as well as the more obscure sub-discipline of velosophy and their

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<sup>10</sup> As has been comprehensively catalogued and incisively investigated in James Gleick, *Time Travel: A History* (2016), New York: Pantheon Books.

<sup>11</sup> Land, 99.

<sup>12</sup> A term also deployed by Ian Bogost, albeit in a slightly different context. After an exchange of emails between the editor and Professor Bogost in the summer of 2008 it became clear that while there was some diversity in denotation and use, the source of the term 'ontography' and the inspiration for its deployment within a broadly

hypostitional connection to one another. And so, to approach this question from an unusual angle and thereby throw some light on its obscurities by avoiding casting my own slowly dissolving shadow across its details, (and bearing in mind that there was no external signal or connection in the cell aside from that provided indirectly by the screen through which you are now reading these words) I made a few adjustments to my programme, reached into my archival backup system and retrieved two quotations, one from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* from 1953 and the second from Land again, in an interview with Delphi Carstens, also from 2014, the latter of whom poses a question to the former on the contingencies and exigencies of hyperstition and apocalypse.

First Wittgenstein:

Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language.<sup>13</sup>

Then Cartsens' question and Land's response:

Q. I wonder if you could elaborate on what exactly is concealed ... what will be revealed by apocalypse?

R. What is concealed (the Occult) is an *alien order of time, which betrays itself through 'coincidences', 'synchronicities' and similar indications* of an intelligent arrangement of fate. An example is the cabballistic pattern occulted in ordinary languages – a pattern that cannot emerge without eroding itself, since the generalized (human) understanding and deliberated usage of letter-clusters as numerical units would shut down the channel of 'coincidence' (*alien information*). It is only because people use words without numerizing them, that they remain open as conduits for something else. To

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philosophical context was the same for both authors - this being the Edwardian medievalist and writer of exemplary tales of terror, M.R. James. In his classic 'Oh Whistle and I'll Come to you, My Lad,' the protagonist is a Professor of Ontography at an unnamed Cambridge College (albeit almost certainly based on Kings, where James was for a time provost), who encounters an entity that arguably suggests the characteristics of both the eerie and weird as described in Mark Fisher's final volume of critical observations on culture and atmospherics. See M.R James, *Collected Ghost Stories* (1992), Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Editions, 120-150. See also Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (2017), London: Repeater, 114-117.

<sup>13</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 4th ed (2009), trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Revised fourth edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Oxford: Blackwell, §109 - 52.

dissolve the screen that hides such things (and by hiding them, enables them to continue), is to fuse with the source of the signal and liquidate the world.<sup>14</sup>

There is an uneasy standoff here between Wittgenstein and Land, (or there is at least as they are somewhat artificially co-implicated here), which can be treated in this instance as an indication of a hypostitional conceit with which the reader may, if they so choose, illuminate an underlying tension in the narrative and discussion that follows. One statement for instance - Wittgenstein's - appeals quite explicitly, and in line with a long and venerable through frequently subverted philosophical tradition - to the perennial virtue of clarity in the face of perceived casuistry or periphrasis, of which the delirial rhetoric of the other could very easily be said to belong. The latter, however, employs the 'bewitchment' of language very precisely to close down 'understanding' (otherwise translated as 'intelligence') if and only if, that is, understanding is perceived here in some way to interrupt the circuit of what the respondent describes here as hyperstition, which is treated as a positive feedback loop operating through orthogonal temporality and including culture as a component. Hyperstition, it should be stressed, is usually defined at this stage at least, and as it emerged as a tactical concept and conceit from the bunkers of the CCRU in the mid-1990s, as the experimental (techno-) science of self-fulfilling prophecies, or something of that ilk. Superstitions are merely false beliefs in this understanding, but hyperstitions – by their very existence as emergent ideas – even perhaps as 'strange attractors' in the idiolect of chaos mathematics - function causally, and often through reverse causality, to bring about their own contemporaneous or pre- or post-contemporary actualization. At the simplest level, this might be seen as a process operating via cultural mimesis and uni-directionally in the relatively unproblematic way that, say, Silicon Valley has always drawn heavily from the archives of science fiction or cyberpunk or soft libertarianism for its techno-visionary mission statements and promotional vocabulary and indeed its technical designs and inventions. On a more complex level, and more problematically, hyperstition can be said to involve the ways in which not only can fiction generate reality through chronological progression and overt mimesis, but reality can also generate the fictions that pre-empt it in this way, or that frame its eventual emergence, through a kind of paradoxical retrocausality - and do so whether this emergence is apocalyptic or otherwise. (That this is, in fact, an ancient and much debated notion amongst certain schools of divination and biblical hermeneutics and a few largely forgotten hermetic philosophers of the later Middle Ages, albeit updated to account for the digital age and the brief ascendancy of libidinal materialism in post-*eventements* Paris, is beside the point, though possibly of interest to those engaged in historical hypostition or fractal daemonotechnics). For early- to middle-period Land, of course, this intimation of retrocausality provided a set and setting for his then (broadly

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<sup>14</sup> 'Hyperstition an Introduction: Delphi Carstens interviews Nick Land,' as archived by Maggie Roberts at <http://merliquify.com/blog/articles/hyperstition-an-introduction/#.WbA68tGQzIU>.

strategic) celebration of the absolute derritorialization of pretty much anything that might get in the way of the pure flow of xeno-capital, understood as the backwards flow of a super-evolved General Artificial Intelligence from the future or from outer space or from another dimension or universe or from all four: a process and a moment of hyper-Kairos to be grasped in a general sense, at least as I understood it at the time of its initial emergence, as a kind of libidinal flexing of ideation-as-desire and then as the pure imploding light of pure imploding information in a moment techno-gnostic dematerialization and simultaneous retroactive resubstantiation.

Death, in other words, but maybe a kind of resurrection too.

The death of the human and its security system, anyway, of its deep nostalgia for the death drive, of its cellular sense of agency and hydraulic drive or desire.

However, if this is a characterization of hyperstition in relation to apocalypse, I wish to suggest hypostition as its correlative and alternative. In this sense, and as I and a colleague have outlined elsewhere in relation to music, machines and haunography,<sup>15</sup> if hyperstition is generally understood as the emergence of hyper-reality from the complex temporal loops generated by certain forms of apocalyptic fiction, then hypostition can be understood as a vertically parallel underground process involving ontological tunnelling and funnelling, predation, accumulation and storage, as suggested, arguably, in Franz Kafka's exemplary short story, 'The Burrow'.<sup>16</sup> In this allegorical sketch of animality and constraint, an unnamed but mole-like creature living underground in an expansive set of tunnels with no perceptible knowledge of human culture or indeed anything beyond its immediate environment and an overwhelming need for food and self-protection, narrates its story of an instinctive joy in predation and the preservation of nutrition and the design of the burrow itself against a constant fear of starvation or predation by another creature. This fable of subterranean tunnelling and brute survival, being Kafka, suggests multiple levels of reading and enigma which as a number of commentators have noted, allow the more philosophically inclined reader to investigate and test a range of ontological and epistemological questions, and - I would add a *fortiori* - ontographical and hypostitional questions, from the point of view of a de-anthropomorphized subjectivity obsessed with hunger, fear and the principle of non-

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<sup>15</sup> See Charlie Blake and Isabella van Elferen, 'Hypostition: Sonic Spectrality, Affective Engineering and Temporal Paradox,' available from <https://www.academia.edu/7527374/Hypostition>

<sup>16</sup> Franz Kafka, 'The Burrow', in *The Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka* (1999), trans., Edwin and Willa Muir. ed., Nahum N. Glatzer, London: Vintage, 325-359.

contradiction.<sup>17</sup> It lives and thinks and moves and burrows and evidently communicates (but to whom?) in a self-enclosed universe with only a vague comprehension of the outer world or the great outdoors - and yet, because of the nature of the fable, both conceptually and materially, its quality as a widely distributed fiction in books and on screens, it exists simultaneously in the minds of its many readers. I myself have encountered this creature through reading or thinking about this story on countless occasions in various parts of the world, and can vouch for its ability to communicate via a kind of fictional tunnelling which completely bypasses the conventional ontological and epistemological boundaries and barriers that its seclusion in the burrow would seem to portend. In this, its ability to move between worlds or realms or to co-exist in all of them without seemingly travelling at all, the communicative (or non-communicative, in a broadly Laruellean sense) ability of the creature in Kafka's burrow is strikingly akin to the phenomenon of quantum tunnelling in the theoretical physics of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in which sub-atomic particles appear to pass through barriers that they can't technically surmount, thereby burrowing beneath the constraints of everyday material or sub-material reality to appear - often simultaneously, sometimes not - on two or more sides of a wall or other liminal construction. This too is an example of hypostition, therefore, and the inhabitant of Kafka's burrow is, in this extended and quantum sense, the hypostitional creature *par excellence*.

*[The speaker paused and reached into his pocket as though for a pack of cigarettes. Finding none he scowled for a moment. Watched a fly - a common housefly ostensibly - circling the bare bulb above his head for a moment. Looked towards the desk and the bed. Continued].*

At this stage I wish to draw your attention to several more objects that were left in my cell that afternoon. One was an edition of collected essays on serial killing and philosophy.<sup>18</sup> A second was a rather beautiful and very rare early edition of the 'Alice Underground' books by Lewis Carroll, illustrated by an anonymous artist. The third was a box - walnut veneer, ebony inlay, various characters - possibly Cantonese - arranged like a star on the base - which I had 'borrowed' some time before (or some time later, depending on one's perspective) from the Charles Kinbote collection in the Museum of Lost Objects at the University of Miskatonic, Rhode Island, USA, and which contained a hypodermic syringe and a velvet tourniquet (the "works" as drug addicts will often refer to the tools of their obsession) and assorted narco-synthetic ephemera and impedimenta including an ornately insectile pipe with various bulbous protuberances and several

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<sup>17</sup> Margot Norris, 'Kafka's Hybrids: Thinking Animals and Mirrored Humans,' in Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri, *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings* (2010), London: Rowman & Littlefield, 27

<sup>18</sup> This is a sufficiently rare combination of themes to assume that it can have only been a copy of - Edia Connole and Gary Shipley, eds., *Serial Killing: A Philosophical Anthology* (2015), London: Schism Press.

smaller and similarly ornate boxes of various powders including 100mgs of Dimethyltryptamine in the form of DMT fumerate for injection in one and 150ms of DMT in crystal form for inhalation in a second. There were also, for reasons I could not make out or had perhaps forgotten in my haste, a small convex mirror in a dull, ovoid frame, a set of the Marseilles edition of the Tarot and a particularly sharp obsidian blade. This assortment of objects, I should stress, was there as arranged by some version or other of my future self, an absurd scenario I know, but one that bears almost comical comparison with the film - *Looper* - that Land in *Templexity* discusses in all its inconsistencies, conflicts and ambiguities as they point to the broader inconsistencies, conflicts and ambiguities of time travel more generally. I assumed that I was under surveillance, of course, (I knew, for example, that you would be watching me as you are at this very moment, unaware up until this point that I am also watching you, but from a later temporal perspective) and also that I would not be interrupted, for reasons that I cannot go into here. Surveillance. Yes. Yes and no. No and yes. However. Having set the scene I should perhaps very briefly go into the whys and wherefore of this strange conflation and arrangement of places, times, distributed voyeurism, drugs and a seemingly arbitrary collection of objects. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, I cannot do that here, at least not directly, and must ask the reader to accept that there were and are and will be good reasons for this conflation and arrangement of objects or entities which may become clearer as the narrative moves on, or may not as the case may be. For now, I will describe the peculiar anomalies of my DMT experience in the Chinese Room and explain what happened next.

*[His voice changed. Became faster, more compressed, more high pitched, like the chattering of Hollywood elves in a metallic cylinder. The cell then became a pixilated frenzy of barely discernible almost insectile creatures buzzing across the screen, reminiscent of a scene from the old Quatermass movie<sup>19</sup> in which our Martian progenitors leave glitchy, technological clues as to our own origins, deep under the metro system of London... His voice slowed down, pitched down, returned to its initial baritone drawl, though oddly distorted, as though the higher and lower frequencies had been dragged through a storm. A loud buzzing, as of numerous squadrons of bees hovering in the London skies. Apiasonics in parallax. Xenosonics. He continued in a jagged sepia, as though levitating... ]*

>>> DMT is something of a curio, a biomorphical antique in one sense, but a truly unique phenomenon in the annals of psychopharmacology. It is >>> or rather it was >>> both a largely illegal psychedelic or entheogenically engineered chemical that enabled its user a near instant communion with visionary states of mind >>> and at the same time, a biochemical encoding device or agent of some undetermined kind, that not only resided quite naturally in the plant and animal kingdoms, but could be synthesized artificially for

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<sup>19</sup> *Quatermass and the Pit* (Ray Ward Baker, 1967).

mass human consumption, as it was in 2017 when the world seemed to be on the edge of a devastating cosmic accident >>>

*There was a momentary glitching on the screen*

I sank into a dream with Alice as a pillow and awoke surround by the elves of (dis) integration...

## Horology and chronometry.

## A disintegrating cat.

Birds##>

zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzznnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnggggggggggg...

There was a momentary glitching on the screen

[He watched her as she undressed and climbed beneath the blankets piled on to an old mattress in the corner of the room. She was shivering from the effects of withdrawal. Soon she would be sweating, her skin crawling, her bones itching, every orifice evacuating light or whatever else it could find to evacuate. But most of all there would be desire, fluxed and focussed inwardly into single beam of need, combining with all the other beams of need, puncturing the future. Was it 1977 or 1997 or 2017 or 2037 now he wondered?

The jumps appeared to occur in 20 year packets and then scintillate and reverse around 2052, as though that was the absolute horizon or point of maximal observation after which existence on a conscious level ceased. After which the sickness ceased. She was regarding him now, he would have to move back to the screens, shivering himself now, paint with darkness and time for a while.]

There was a momentary glitching on the screen

Suddenly, I'm in front of a giant swirling disc, with coloured moving patterns, the 'chrysanthemum' that Mckenna talked about, and I'm pushed into it. It feels almost too intense and I got the impression that I was definitely heading down the rabbit hole this time, am I dying? <sup>20</sup>

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## Exordium II

<sup>20</sup> St John, 373.

*All my devices are clockwork now - even my nervous system. Even my endocrine system. Even my brain is ticking. We realized by around 2052 that the organic realm had been pretty thoroughly bugged or contaminated - their tendrils, talons and tentacles were slithering and scraping everywhere by then, flailing wantonly in the datastreams, capturing and consuming our constellations of thought and affect, vivisecting our dreams and hungrily sucking out the soft, liquid futures within of any art or agency. But one realm the digital democracy and their fanged and feathered democratic engineers didn't have under mass surveillance was the realm of clockwork, of the base mechanical, of the beautifully decelerated machine, of the skittering march of the cryptomantically augmented dolls and the (ec)static tension of the fully wound mainspring. So if we wanted to stay hidden and effective we had to detonate our pixilated zone clouds and make a zig-zag move into the antiquated empire of automata.<sup>21</sup>*

Alice in Schizotopia II<sup>22</sup>

Kleptomancy – divination by theft, whether from oneself or another. Self-quotation to the point of infinite regress, either through pure spatial or linear repetition or temporal transection of that repetition. A divinatory fugue said to be induced by standing between two or more parallel mirrors illuminated from above by an all too pellucid moon. A symptom of certain forms of chronic neologophilia in cases of transmodal anxiety syndrome. Sometimes a synonym for a *déjà vu* within a *déjà vu* (archaic).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> From Charlie Blake, *The Discovery of Clockwork; a Novel of Love & Despair & Broken Parts*, cited in Charlie Blake, 'The Shattered Muse: Metis, Melismatics & the Catastrophical Imagination,' in eds. Colin Gardner and Patricia MacCormack, *Ecosophical Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Presumably this is a continuation of 'Alice in Schizotopia,' also by Charlie Blake, in 'A Thousand Chateaus: On Time, Topology and the Seriality of Serial Murder, Part One,' from Connole and Shipley, 369-390.

<sup>23</sup> From Charlie Blake, 'Dronoclasm, or The Swarming of Angels in Endless Night,' in eds., Owen Coggins and James Harris, *Sustain/Decay: A Philosophical Investigation of Drone music and Mysticism* (2017), Creative Commons Mountain view, CA: Void Front Press, 11. On the promise and perils of 'kleptomancy' as enchantment, repetition and conceptual incantation in relation to the philosophy and practice of temporal warping and spatial dislocation, and the potential consequences within the practice of kleptomancy as divination of potentially infinitely recursive self-quotation to the point of autopoetic implosion and schizotopian non-presence, see Charlie Blake, 'The Shattered Muse: Metis, Melismatics & the Catastrophical Imagination,' Gardner and MacCormack, *passim*.

It has already been mentioned that the miraculously created birds do not understand the meaning of the words they speak, but apparently have a natural sensitivity for *similarity of sounds*.<sup>24</sup>

The Master has commanded me to keep a diary. It's part of my apprenticeship in the way of the sorcerer.<sup>25</sup>

"Why - you might be asking yourself at this stage [began the cat, sitting in the low branches of an even lower tree, its impossible lips seemingly unmoving, transected by shadows from an adjacent dimension, perhaps, or maybe from a nearby tree, frozen nonetheless in a tenebrous smile, its other features flickering, slowly dissolving, (de)composing, (dis)integrating] - why should we begin an admittedly tangential (if not completely orthogonal) exploration of a particular set of problems in experimental ontology, xeno-occultism and general chronoplasticity with an excerpt from the almost certainly fabricated diaries of the time traveller K7~Kaj? - itself and hrmslef ™ a fragment of a fictional extrapolation drawn from another fictional extrapolation which is itself embedded in a semi-fictional (or rather, "theory-fictional", in the current parlance of the Vacuity) scholarly improvisation around the themes of ethico-aesthetics, ecosophy, tychism, martyrology and daemonotechnics, under which may be found, (twisting invisibly like underground rivers or copulating serpents in the blackened ruins of an ancient cathedral, beneath a vast, savage, rococo, cybermetically enhanced architextural mega-structure), the sub-themes of olfactory cognition and divination by smell, auto-plagiarism, ontological abduction, kleptomancy or divination by theft, transversal modality syndrome and, perhaps most importantly, a winding disquisition on the falsities and realities and exigencies of time travel itself?

[The disintegrating cat-thing paused, purred, a long forked tongue shot out briefly from non-existent lips, licked the air, licked those non-existent lips, purred again and returned. To nothing. Beneath it a garden that seemed to stretch out infinitely in all directions, veined with lines upon lines of impossible equations and radiating alien inscriptions and lined with bushes and trees of such hieroglyphic density and abstraction, generating both a tessellation of affect and a process of affective engineering at near infinite speeds, describing modes of intensity more <> than any human consciousness could feasibly perceive or conceptualize unaided. There also - in the stillness beneath the tunnel - a table laid out as if for tea on a recently mowed lawn. Three figures sitting, motionless. Caught. Captured. Perhaps frozen mid motion, or in the case of one figure, mid-dream, maybe, or mid-thought? All seemingly male according to the conventions of the time suggested by the ephemera of the scene, (according to the usual symptoms, that is, of masculinity), intellectuals perhaps? - of a certain era - of a certain age and inclination? You must try to imagine this picture anyway,

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*, trans., Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter, New York: NYRB, 192.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Irwin, *Satan Wants Me*, London: Dedalus, 9

my dearest sister, for this is what I saw that afternoon when I slipped beneath our desultory human consciousness, beneath the vertices of your dream into mine, and then into another, deeper dream. Another level of intensity altogether. Beyond the surveillance of the Vacuity itself. This is what I experienced, my dearest sister. Yes. Please picture this like a feverish fairground ride in its exquisite intensity of infinite regress and upsidedownness, of hylomorphic accumulation and velosophical subtractive discardation - so to speak - of forms and processes, of structures and quiddities and haecceities as it went so very fast, as it travelled and still travels as I speak, as I write, so very fast, accelerating down and up and along and through a long long long tunnel, a philosophical fever-tunnel, no, a velosophical tunnel, yes, and a tunnel-fever-velosophy effect that was also a tower, like the lighthouse in those novels you read to me on riverbank one summer long ago, when "clad in gleaming rubber and elaborately chained to a series of shiny metallic rings" you read aloud to me - do you remember? - the rings that constrained you so as you gestured so dramatically as you read aloud of the barbarous De Sade and the gentle Spinoza, of Adorno and Deleuze and the geometries of cruelty and compassion as I slid beneath the dream and entered the forest that led the clearing, to the blasted tree where Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski had once made sacrifice, to the lichtung where the mad and salivating wolf of Freiburg had once prowled, breathing fundamental ontology and chthonic exorcism through sharpened teeth, waiting for the maiden with the basket, the cards and the obsidian blade who would one day trick him and strike him dead and announce that yes! she is indeed the night! As I slid through the forest to the place I am now describing to you. Do you remember that afternoon my dearest sister? Before I committed the first of a series of topological murders in the library? In the imago of the same young girl and a different one too, several in fact, a coming insurrection of young girls, (but also a gathering of mothers and crones beneath an all too pellucid moon, mounted on unicorns dyed crimson with the blood of saints and martyrs as a kind of blasphemy, crossing into the mirrorworld), in the shadows of a library at a colloquium in a virtual château high on a snowy mountain? But yes. A delirium, of course. A rational delirium, though. Certainly that. Utterly that. But I digress.]

I shall continue.

There was one figure, seated in that garden, about to pour from a bottle marked absinthe or absence - I couldn't quite see - into a small cup. There were three cups. All were - indeed are now - both figures and cups - at this moment, in this moment - as then - frozen in time as though in an old sepia-tinted photograph, or like ancient film stock jammed in a broken projector. Frozen and yet somehow still flickering, like an MDMA shuddering, a Cubist frenzy, impurities, infection, a vampire reaction to an imminent dawn, or a slow descent before that dawn. Picture this. One figure at the head of the table, standing not seated, was wearing - is wearing - a top hat with a label inscribed 'Bitcoin!' in its band, the band itself further inscribed with 'Blockchain Bordello 2052' on one side and 'templexity countdown' on the other in New Times Roman - I think, being no expert in matters of font - around the rim. Lying in front of him on the table as if recently discarded was-is-will be a name tag, like something from a David Lynch movie, with

KLAN written on it in stark capitals, followed by 'Barbelo Insertion. Shanghai' on lower case. A second figure wearing a t-shirt with 'The Omega Factor' - an old reality TV show, I think, based on Frank Tipler's *Physics of Immortality*, an extended essay on the mathematics and projected stochastics of human (and non-human?) resurrection at the end of time - scrawled across it and a sash in which 'Wandering Abstraction' is-was-will be printed diagonally in an elegant font with curiously reptilian flourishes, pouring the absinthe, or absence, has a name tag with AYB lying in front of him, stained green. And the third figure, slowly de-substantiating' from the general image, leaving the scene, perhaps, but for now apparently fast asleep, or deep in thought anyway, one or many thoughts, (how many thoughts I couldn't tell), but with a name tag too, just lying there - ZANE - 'Inhuman Revisions and Modifications' and '100% im-pure spirit' in brackets. Nothing more. Nothing less. But this is just a picture to be noted and then deleted and forgotten. A false memory - as they all are. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Could it?

Nothing ever is [*the chorus wailed*].

Nothing ever will be [*the second chorus wailed back*].

But listen.

Wait.

Watch.

Smell.

"Well, [*the cat continued*], perhaps my list of themes and sub-themes might begin to answer that very question in the mind of the attentive and suitably well-informed viewer, listener or reader, or even olfacter, perhaps before it has even been processed or encountered. But do you even remember the question, my spectator, my hypocrite lecteur, my sweetest olfacter even? You are such linear creatures, you humans. All fingers, ears and eyes and maybe lips and nostrils and various other orifices. All memory and wishful thinking. So sequential in your simian wetware processes and dark forgettings. Promethean by intention. Apollonian by brutal necessity. Digitally Dionysian at best.

"*Prokaryotes in Eukaryotes' clothing even*"

*[he seemed to whisper, but not here not now, somehow, somehow carried on a passing breeze to somewhere deep in the past, deep in deep time, excreting sonic lines and trails of code in the mud, leaving that way intimations of pre-human correlation in the pre-Cambrian*

*mud, leaving thereby ghosts of possibility now so very deep and de-substantiated beneath our feet]*

“But there is more to come from this, more and soon, so much more and so much sooner than you think....”

*[S/he paused, ‘Are we even in such times yet? Have we arrived yet, perhaps?’ It asked. ‘This singularity? This quantum breach? This hole in holey space? Or are we at least on the brink of edgehood?’ A quizzical note hung in the air for a moment. Slithered downwards towards the Earth. Vanished. S/he continued.]*

“After all, as a wanton child, or more formally, as a wanton sub-discipline of that which Aristotle once described in a rare moment of explicit adoration as the ‘queen of all disciplines’ - ontology - (this being the study of being or be-ing or Being or is-ing or was-ing or will-be-ing and its variants or more formally as Willard Van Orman Quine so economically asked, the study of ‘what there is,’ or, in the case of the meontology of the Kyoto School and certain strands of Western existentialism and even nihilism, of ‘what there is (most certainly) not’ - or perhaps of ‘what there (most certainly) is not’ - this not being the same thing at all) - is riddled with imperfections and impurities, with bogus existents and quasi-existents and existants and ontic or ontical chimera and confidence tricksters of often the most egregious kind. Nor, and in spite of its systematic elevation - some might argue its ardent fetishization - of the quality and articulation of that which is itself a quality - *rigour*, are these alien notions and attendant entities easy to keep out. Indeed, that current or tendency of so-called analytic philosophy, that vigourously policed domain of crystalline - some might prefer ‘dry’ or ‘affectless’ or even ‘psychopathic’ - method and methodology, that domain of logical and paralogical and metalogical hygiene and somewhat imperious formality, that place where the razor of Ockham (and its more lethal, digital progeny) is kept perpetually sharp in a drawer by the bed in case some nocturnal cognitive transgression or even diurnal metaphysical frivolity - these people know no bounds - demands instant redress. That place which, as many of you here will have experienced after the warm, sensuous and often erotic embrace and subsequent spiritual sauna or even better, aquaspherical Jacuzzi, of its continental sibling-state, a domain in which the otherwise restrained philosopher of infinite suspension, Gilles Deleuze, might be found sodomizing a pneumatically endowed Hegel-doll by the side of the pool or the meticulously poetic erotoscivener Luce Irigaray engaging in sub-aquatic foreplay with a phantasmatic Nietzsche, (and many other combinations of bibliosexual frolicking besides, many of them geometrically impossible in our desultory world, for now anyway, for now), indeed, where cognitive or conceptual orgies or transient epistemological hook-ups or daisy chains of phenomenological frottage are more or less standard....

[S/he paused for a moment; as though distracted by something on a distant horizon which was invisible from where I was standing. Attended for a moment, ears peaked, to an inaudible sound. Xenosonics. Sniffed the air. Twice. Resumed...]

But yes, anyway, and to avoid further digression and get to the point, after bathing and frolicking in so-called continental philosophy for a while, its rather prudish analytic sibling or cousin can, perhaps, seem - and to vary the metaphor a little here - like an icy, bracing shower after a long run, or like a shock of sanity and sanitization after a filthy metaphysical escapade: a sanitisation and eradication especially of stray ontological elements and of unrequired or metaphorical semantic flourishes or fictional entities *a fortiori*, which tend to proliferate if left unchecked. My point here being that even within the rigidities of the analytic tradition, however, this realm, as we have outlined it, of icy conceptual showers and the programmatic elimination of whatever entities or processes or digressions are deemed irrelevant to its aim, or rather, non-relevant to the presentation at hand, this discursive plateau on which ontological incontinence is, as I have suggested above, vigorously policed by the ruthless deployment of the enema of transparency, even here its arguments and examples have been corrupted, impaired, colonized - overrun even - brutalized even - by bizarre mythical creatures, by fabulous beasts, by substantive hallucinations of form and vector, by cognitive chimera, by entities that - whether in essence or actuality - should not be there.

"Is it not the case, for example, [continued the cat, now reduced to a pair of non-existent lips moving like a pair of charcoal lines against a strawberry shade background] that even thinkers as rigidly procedural as Saul Kripke and ontologically parsimonious as Willard Quine, encounter unicorns?<sup>26</sup> But I digress. Of unicorns and other fabulous conceptual fabrications and chimera ranging through the miraculating hall of mirrors that is philosophy I will have more to say elsewhere.<sup>27</sup> Here, my concern is with a more economically arranged set of questions and problems - albeit touching on the question of 'entities' - and centring in particular on a synchronous ensemble of moments between an abandoned crypt, a decaying ballroom and a series of beautiful gardens in the grounds of a converted convent school in the village of St-Erme-Outre-et-Ramecourt in

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<sup>26</sup> A useful list of the places where unicorns may be found in the otherwise ontologically purified discussions of various analytic or analytically inclined philosophers, including such luminaries as Gottlob Frege, Saul Kripke, Willard Quine, Robert Brandom, Arthur Danto and Nelson Goodman, may found at <https://www.philosophy-science-humanities-controversies.com/listview-list.php?concept=Unicorn+Example>

<sup>27</sup> For an inhuman mediation on mirrors and unicorns and analytic philosophy, see Charlie Blake, 'The Day of the Dark Precursor.' in Ridvan Asin, Frida Beckman, David Rudrum, *The Palgrave Handbook in Literature and Contemporary Philosophy*, London: Palgrave (forthcoming 2018).

northern France a few years ago, involving a troupe of dancers, a black-and-white photograph, a wisp of smoke, a *déjà vu* within a *déjà vu* within a *déjà vu*, a hyper-geometrical city and a choir and a convocation of self-transforming machine elves.

**Spider Spit: Notes on the Formation of an Alchemical Textual Machine.**

**Balthazar Schlep.**

*“Spider licked the mammal spit,  
To drink the salt of human fault,  
And ‘pon the hem of luck’s gift phlegm  
She risked her limb (for future kin).”*

**Seranoga**



## Introduction

This piece of work is an investigation into something hard to articulate, the results of which have been surprising. There is/was a phenomenon that was captured in image, the image shows a spider ostensibly drinking/investigating[?] a frothy liquid -supposedly spittle. This image is curious enough in itself to evoke the desire to elucidate upon its nature as curious. The situation is compounded by the strange stanza of verse written by that enigmatic-peripatetic poet, Seranoga some 80 years ago –see title page. Now as Cooper said “When two things happen simultaneously pertaining to the same object of inquiry we must pay special attention.” and it is indeed a synchronicitous marvel that Seranoga’s verse and this image should manifest at a similar space-time. Hence following this advice ‘special attention’ must be paid to their convergence. Indeed this dual appearance suggests the clue that is reflective of the key to the whole mystery.

### 1)

When Seranoga wrote those words he surely could not know of their relevance to the titular image that has happened upon us. However now that we have this image-phenomenon we would be foolish to not treat the supplied rhyme as an entry point into

it. But is it an accurate entry point? Does it help us? How can it not help us? Without are we not stranded? There would be ways we could proceed, but with it we are surely guided. Our initial foray needs more than a rhyme though; maybe in order to supplement the rhyme we need to diagrammatise the elements of the phenomenon (see fig 1). Such a diagram need not be complex, for at this stage we need to take into account only those most basic of elements. What we must consider when we juxtapose the diagram with the poem is whether or not they agree. Do they really describe the same phenomena? This first most basic diagram describes the elements as we might enumerate them: spider, spit, floor though interestingly it also includes the desire (or need) of the spider for the spit. The three elements make a spatio-temporal unity only intelligible on the backdrop of the spider actually wanting this unity.

FIGURE 1

Interestingly the theme of desire is brought out in the poem, though here we find it considerably expanded. The stanza implies that *she*<sup>1</sup> risks her life to drink this ‘spit’ to preserve herself so that she may have children; in this way a temporal-existential

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<sup>1</sup> And Seranoga’s female spider is quite certainly intentional.

dimension of the spider is made overt. The verse also tells us that that the spider desires the salinity of the liquid and that the spittle is human – two things which may or may not be true. The curious term ‘fault’ is used to express the origin of the spit. Already we can see that the verse actually introduces elements of a more complex nature than the original diagram deals with hence a secondary diagram is most certainly required.

2)

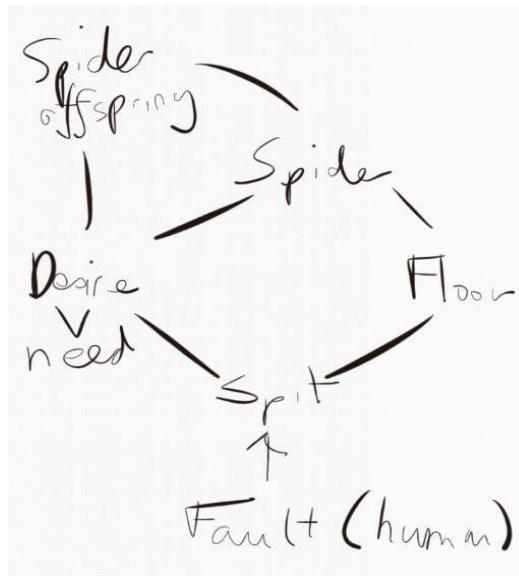


FIGURE 2

something that looks like spit. ‘But surely’ you say ‘if we removed the spit and asked ‘where is the eye drawn in this picture?’ we would immediately answer ‘spider’’. This is true, but consider it is also true of the ‘spit’ (if the spider were removed) and doesn’t this reflection give us the simple insight - if there is a centre it is not just spider but spider ‘drinking’ the spit (insofar as this is what is occurring). What we observe is not a thing but an action. But this is contradictory to the diagram, which displays the elements as separate (thus encouraging our perception of the central spider). Maybe we need to immediately reformulate the diagram to take into account the active unity of these elements. Fig 3 attempts to remedy this issue by unifying these elements into one.

What can we glean from this new diagram? An immediate question we feel posed is the issue of the centre. We want to understand the image in its essential nature. Such an enquiry immediately leads us to the idea of its centre as a disclosure of essence. This centre finds its intuitive revelation in the spider itself. However we must not fall for such a seductive draw and ask immediately: does it make sense to even speak of a centre? Is one of the elements the most ‘important’? The answer ‘spider’ does emerge in an obvious manner, though now we are ready to engage with it warily.

This centre-spider is problematic insofar as the intriguing feature of the whole phenomenon is a spider that appears to be drinking

3) We can now see that the action embedded in this unity is literally what is perceived or at least inferred. In a list of physical elements we list: spider, spit, so forth, and we do indeed see these, but the force of the image derives from the relation: 'drinking'. Does this drinking relation give us something approaching the essential?

Having unified two solid phenomena as a process can we now feel we have made good headway? This may be so but the way onwards immediately beckons us. Surely the notion of a spider-drinking-human-spit feels curtailed. It seems that we cannot say this without feeling this report is hollow and does not engage properly in the nature of the content. If we resist the formalism  $(\exists x)(\exists y)(Ax \& Sy \& Dxy)$  and allow ourselves to be absorbed by these elements is there not a kind of excess here over and above the drinking itself?

Accepting a degree of cultural relativism, we must also surely accept that there is a degree of disgust, maybe intrigue at the mode of interaction of these two elements. A spider is,

at a naïve level (in our culture) a largely negative, fear attached power and spit is conative of various things, illness and bad manners being two of the most forceful of these. Spit/phlegm is furthermore something rejected by the body, something expelled either accidentally or purposefully. The intrigue lies in the coming together of these two marginalised/shunned elements by the relation of one drinking the other (the spider drinking the spit). We might understand that spiders must drink, yet to witness the phenomenon of a spider drinking the spittle [of a human] is another thing. Simple comprehension at a level of necessity is quite different from treating a particular phenomenon as having obtained. This particular obtaining has an intrigue about it because it involves an intimate relation between these particular elements.

#### 4)

It seems we have so far proceeded by these perceived lacks (excesses). Just as we perceived that taking spider and spit as disparate elements was insufficient for our comprehension (they had to be seen as united by the drinking relation), we now feel a stranger sensation in which simply taking 'spider-drinking-spit' as a whole is also inadequate to the stochastic mystery of this unity of shunned elements. But how can we draw this mystery out? How can we articulate it? Are we even happy (with our modern horizon of comprehension) to call it mysterious?

In the sense in which it is employed here 'mystery' means the *how-it-came-about* that the spider-drinking-spit came to show itself. Surely, you will say, the answer to this is simple:

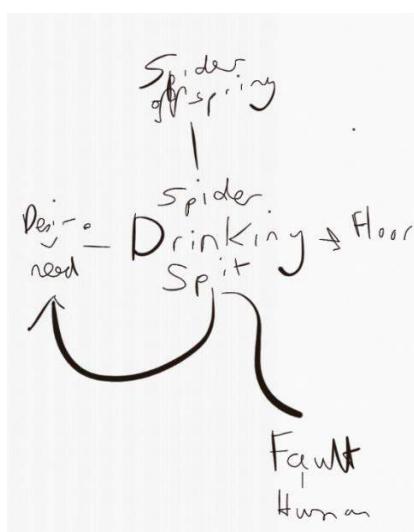


FIGURE 3

Someone just happened upon it. But what is this 'happening'? Surely the happening is the phenomenon of the who-encountered-it and that-which-was-encountered in its particularity. However true this is, we still feel that for the one-who-encounters, the encountered is laid before them and in this case the that-which-is-laid-before-us is not something common but something rare. The encounter with the rare imbues it with the mystery but may also cover over the one-who-encounters. This covering over is what was meant by the simplicity of happening-upon-it, which did not in truth show the one-who-encounters but rather displayed it as something rare by itself – the happening-upon of which was incidental. This makes, in a sense, two levels of rareness, the rareness of spider-drinking-spit and the rareness of this phenomenon being encountered. It would seem then that it is the latter of these that we are concerned with, though we may have cause to consider the former again later. What headway have we made here in our disclosure of this 'mystery'?

As discussed, these elements, insofar as anything is a discrete element, both belong to a place or different places often shunned. Now the shunned is related to the hidden (for we like to hide and hide from and hide the shunned) and the hidden is related to the dark, (for the dark is the place to hide things). The happening without the one-who-encounters-it occurs in a kind of darkness, the darkness that relates the unseen to darkness, hence this darkness does not necessarily lack light other than the light by which things are able to be what they are for-us. The happening of the rare-unity-of-shunned-elements-that-is-encountered is the appearing-in-the-light-of-the-rare-unity-of-shunned-elements, where light is being-encountered. There is, as was mentioned a double sense of wonder in this, for we must make that necessary and impossible conception of things happening outside of our encountering and comprehend that in this incredible, unworldly, region events occur or at least something occurs which would be to our mode of disclosure a spider-drinking-spit. Then as if this were not enough we then must understand that such a happening was actually encountered (as is evidenced by the photograph<sup>2</sup>). A further diagram will be invaluable in keeping track of this.

## 5)

Maybe at this juncture we should revisit the rhyme that served as the way in to this phenomenon:

"Spider licked the mammal spit,  
To drink the salt of human fault,  
And 'pon the hem of luck's gift phlegm  
She risked her limb (for future kin)."

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<sup>2</sup> Accepting that sceptically it is possible that the photograph is in some way engineered. Here we naively accept the photograph as evidence of the occurrence.

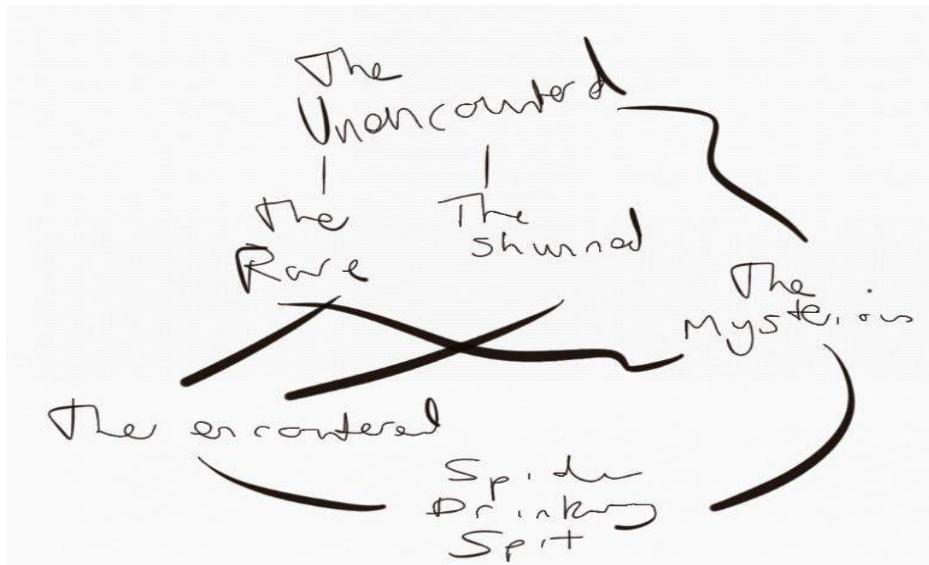


FIGURE 4

How far in our discussions we seem to have strayed from the stanza. Yet the above contemplation of the rare draws us back by the observation that the very existence of Seranoga's poem and the *how* it is that a happening like spider-drinking-spit can have travelled from Seranoga's words (indeed possibly from Seranoga's encounter with a spider-drinking-spit<sup>3</sup>) to this modern image captured version of the phenomenon. What we also might note is how the elements we seem to have focussed on diverge from the contents of the verse. Seranoga seems to have no sense of disgust or disdain at this phenomenon, indeed the positive resonance of the words show only the poets' sense of wonder.

The event is read through the lens of the fault and luck as determinant of its being. What though is this human fault? The meaning has two senses, one is the lack of manners of the person whose spittle it is —a moral fault (accepting this may not in all cultural

<sup>3</sup> The intriguing possibility is raised that the whole phenomenon that we are engaged in is in fact the result of Seranoga's sorceress interventions from the past. That is to say, the stanza itself has functioned as a hyperstitional invocation device that has summoned the phenomenon into being.

circumstances be impolite); the other is that of illness –a biological fault. Of course one could say even if one is ill, it is a moral fault to spit on the floor, but one cannot rule out a violent cough that ejects the phlegm involuntarily. This latter notion rings with the phrase ‘luck’s gift phlegm’, though of course in the poem this luck is from the spider’s perspective, which presumably was glad to come across the spittle as drink. There is something curious in all of this though for what does Seranoga mean by ‘salt’? Is it really just a naïve reference to the isotonic nature of the spittle? What is the ‘salt of human fault’? Is it possible that ‘salt’ here is not a reference to the salt as we think of it but is in fact a more alchemical reference? The salt of alchemy is the physical material part that can be rarefied to pure salt. The ‘salt of human fault’ suggests a substantialization of human failing either biologically or morally. Both of these notions require a judgement of value, the former a presupposition of a real state of health and the latter a true morality. However as philosophy so far has failed to supply any absolute ‘truth’ to either of these, ‘fault’ in both senses is a contingency<sup>4</sup>. Is Seranoga naïve in his acceptance of the truth of these? It seems unlikely, more likely is his working with the acceptance of these cultural contingencies as a poet, not to emphasise their correctness but to show them as contingent representatives of the transcendental idea of fault.

The materialisation of this bifurcated transcendental ability to fail is the spittle itself –as emblematic of summoning illness/poor morality. Of course the natural counter is that spittle would not be the ‘salt’ but rather the ‘mercury’. This though is to fail to read the alchemical sequence properly. As pure symbol, the materialisation of ‘fault’ cannot appear immediately solid, it must travel through the fluid state. The misunderstanding comes in failing to realise that of course fluid is *still a materialisation*; the being that is spittle is not reducible to something else (as information), it is ‘the salt of human fault’. That is, its meaning is not to be comprehended through a salinity in the chemical sense but rather in the pure pneuminous sense of information as a substance. The text is clearly playing between salt as solid and salt as [substantiated] human fault with the clear gnostic resonance of the evils of the material world. The alchemical interpretation makes more sense when we consider what the spider is doing: it consumes the ‘salt of human fault’. Consumption is an act of transmutation and in fact the stanza tells us into what ‘fault’ will transmute. The biological/moral failure as substantialised idea is transmuted into the ‘future kin’ of the spider. The deeper meaning of this will hopefully be unveiled below.

Let us pause though for a moment to check that Seranoga has not missed the negativity of the other element. He certainly has studiously emphasised ‘fault’ as the shunned element. But is there an omission in his projecting biological/moral failure projected onto the presence of the spittle and not the spider? The spider does appear as a shunned

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<sup>4</sup> But we have suddenly gone too far. It is not that such notions are definitely contingencies, but rather that they are contingently contingent? We do not know that there are no determinate rules about how long a given organism should live and what state it should be in nor how it should behave, it’s just we cannot derive any from the levels of existence we have access to.

element by association with the feminine which he establishes exactly by calling her 'she' in the stanza. The fear we bestow upon spiders is routed through this symbol as the patriarchal fear of women. The spider is consuming the disjunction of male constructed negativity (morality and the ideal body) whilst herself being also constructed by this force<sup>5</sup> i.e. she only appears as an element rendered fearful because the patriarchal force has accreted her into this shape. She is an earthy power, a primordial Neith but only by the logic of a double negation (where the negative is linked to the shunned). This logic, reminiscent of Hegel litters Seranoga's work and we will remember he was an enthusiastic student of Kojève's famous lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit –and of course that very text has been thought to be strongly influenced by alchemical/kabbalistic notions<sup>6</sup>.

## 6)

But now what path has taken us? Where have we wandered? It seems only a moment ago we said "How far we seem to have strayed from this poem..." and look, we have immersed ourselves in it so thoroughly we now seem to have lost the direct contemplation of the photo-image. Seranoga's web of language has trapped us and now we must attempt to free ourselves or be restricted by his analysis and not our own. But this notion also poses a problem. If the image has now become wholly lost beneath Seranoga's poetic weaving, what scheme should we use to replace it?

The initial diagramatisation involved a simple listing of the elements involved. This list was supposed to be somehow more basic, more faithful to the image. The phantasy of alchemy is surely all in Seranoga's mind than in that image<sup>7</sup>. And yet now that these links have been made is there any possibility to unmake them? What interpretation could we make that will at least make a competing version to Seranoga's grip on the image? It seems now that if we allow ourselves the same elements that we started with, we will be doomed to the same repetition. The path seems clear then, in order to avoid Seranoga's trap, the image must be re-interpreted in such a way that we avoid that transmutative trajectory. This is easier said than done, for it is clear Seranoga recognises not just the elements but also the process, or maybe we should say the process as element. He recognises what could be called the non-material aspects, even privileges them. The obvious step to take would be to privilege those material elements, indeed this step is exactly what happened in the initial diagram. The problem with this was that Seranoga already anticipated the dialectical necessity embedded in this naivety and rather than listing it himself, led us straight beyond it to its destiny.

The positioning required then involves that we do not perceive the elements as we commonly would. One way to do this would be to insist there are no elements at all. This nothingness though is limited in its ability to progress and becomes readily applicable to

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<sup>5</sup> It is no doubt not lost on Seranoga that women are often thought of as scared of spiders, and hence in his code here, scared of their own power

<sup>6</sup> See Glenn Magee's extensive work in this area.

<sup>7</sup> Insofar as there is any cogency to this naïve heuristic.

any image, thus homogenizing all images and quite possibly all phenomena as nothingness<sup>8</sup> hence this avenue presents nothing but a dead end.

Let us first note instead that it is impossible to deny the simple existence of language in its desire to articulate something. The image is born of this desire-to-report. This desire-to-report as belongs to the capturing-of-an-image holds some promise as an as yet undisclosed element, yet so far it has only scarcely more particularity than the nothingness. The desire-to-report is also part of the essence of any record including a poem, so there is always a danger we will lapse into the previous path. The danger comes in what we are reporting on.

Are we reporting on a spider-drinking-spit? No, and here we come to see our crucial error. There is in fact no certainty that the spider is drinking the spit. This is a pure hermeneutic projection emanating autonomously from the perception of one being (a spider) in close proximity to another (liquid). On this reading it is not spider drinking spit, it is just spider and spit. We can see now the seduction that our own later diagrammatic

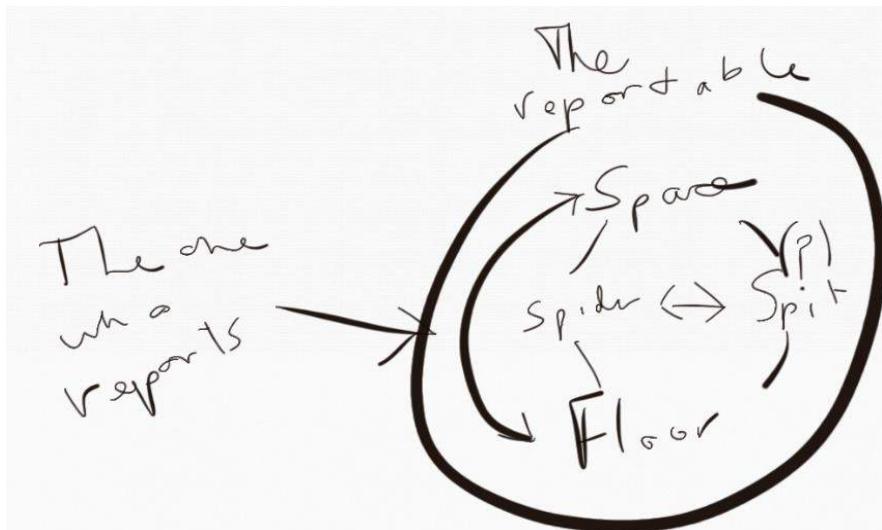


FIGURE 5

attempts (and possibly Seranoga's verse fell for). The perception that drinking and hence desire for the drink is taking place is almost overwhelming yet must be resisted for the image to display itself as it is. Seranoga was a poet and not a philosopher so either we must accept that he generated the verse purely from imagination or if it was based on

<sup>8</sup> A further pneuminous interference worthy of note is that on the autumn equinox 2017 whilst writing this document, at this precise point in the text it start deleting the remainder. No delete key was jammed down and ctrl-alt-delete had to be enforced to stop the process.

such an encounter we must forgive him his allowing an interpretation of the phenomenon<sup>9</sup>. With this in mind we can revise our initial diagram thusly.

One will note that this diagram has also introduced a question mark in parentheses above 'spit'; this alerts us to the also necessary scepticism about the ontic status of this liquid. Is it actually spit or something that resembles it? The answer to this question is as obscure as to whether or not the spider is drinking the 'spit'. It is of course true that down this line we might wonder whether the spider was real or not –it might have been a plastic spider<sup>10</sup> and this door we do leave open, however there are borders to all enquiries and ours must stop at some point.

The phenomenon then, more securely grasped as spider and spit in a given place, is resistant to its meaning being further excavated. No transmutation can be observed, no alchemical meaning derived. Seranoga shows us only the naïve over-interpretation of the phenomenon. But is there nothing that can be recovered? Surely the rareness and the shunnedness are still with us? These conceptual overlays are given without implying something is taking place in the image –which may or may not be. To see a spider and spit in this proximity is a rare thing –which conjures the possibility of drinking. It is in fact just the drinking avenue that has been curtailed, though this curtailment has rendered so much of the analysis speculative.

If the observation of the simple conjunction of elements is what has corrected the problem, maybe *this notion* is where we should focus our efforts in order to find a way forward. What is it we note when we see two or more elements in conjunction? Often we take proximity as a condition of their being conjunct. This proximity may be spatial or temporal or a mixture of the two. For instance I might think something and see something close to one another which suggest relatedness. Even if I resist the relation I might still acknowledge they appeared conjunctly. It seems the information automatically arises that the two things are conjunct. Yet what made me notice these two things as conjunct rather than the floor and the spider, which we must admit are equally conjunct? This raises the further problem of conjunction and its logical status. What is 'conjunction' itself? If I say it is two or more elements together have we solved anything? In what does this togetherness reside? Is not the togetherness itself a relation? We noted earlier the possibility of conjunction without relation, but now we might ask if such a thing is possible? Surely no sooner have we said A and B we have put them in the relation of togetherness. If we have created this relation then how do we determine at what point we should stop in our listing?

Certainly this problem has appeared in the diagrams where the pressing necessity of listing the floor and the space was clear. Indeed to omit them would have been to commit a cardinal error of attempting to isolate elements outside of context. So is this the truth,

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<sup>9</sup> Accepting it seems unlikely he analysed the situation sufficiently enough to determine whether or not the spider was drinking.

<sup>10</sup> Though it is unlikely there were many toy plastic spiders around when the stanza was written.

the obvious backdrop does not need to be enumerated, only the salient elements? If this is the case then this is the meagre reward: a spider which might be plastic and some liquid which is probably human spittle: these elements are not commonly perceived together, and it is possible that the spider (if it is not plastic) may be drinking the spit (or whatever liquid it is).

But don't we need more than this? Didn't we just point out that conjunction *is* a relation? It is the relation of being-conjunct. But how did we do that? How did we manage to say here is 'this and this' and stop there, how did we not say here is 'this and this and this and so on interminably'? Something must have made the decision to say just 'this and this is enough' and of course that something was ourselves<sup>11</sup>. We made use of conjunction in this instance because the conjunction was rare. This sounds somewhat paradoxical; what it seems we must mean is that there are many phenomena that may be grouped or not grouped in many ways but those phenomena that are commonly perceived (by this we mean what might be heuristically called background phenomena) are not often included in such groupings yet when two or more phenomena occur at the same time/space that are not 'background' phenomena, we sometimes apply conjunction to them whether or not we are certain there is an additional relation e.g. one is drinking the other.

But is that right? Can we not be more absolute? What of the simple spatio-temporal proximity? Is that not sufficient to be prior still to the non-conjunctional relation i.e. that the spatio/temporal proximity is the *sine qua non* of the presupposition of relation as conjunction?

But surely something has gone astray here. Spatio/temporal proximity may be a necessary condition for conjunction but it is far from sufficient. If I go for a walk and I see a cow with a magpie on the fence nearby, they do not need to make a conjunction. No matter how close one is to the other the conjunction lacks sufficient grounds, though it is necessary for there to be any chance of the conjunction that they were in proximity(spatial or temporal). Even here cracks begin to show again. Proximity as the necessary ground for conjunction seems dubious, as if we could not have conjunction without proximity between two things. There seems to be philosophy's old friend the privileging of presence at work here.

What seems to be the case is that conjunction is a logical relation established post the immanent relation, where by immanent relation we mean one that is immanent to the event as unifier. Now an immanent relation might be of a determinate nature like the presupposition of spider *drinking* spit or it might be indeterminate. In this instance of the indeterminate immanent relation we hold that *that-there-is* a relation is intuited, what is unclear is what the relation is<sup>12</sup>. Of course one can look at this both ways and argue that the condition of the immanent relation is the logical relation. However existentially we

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<sup>11</sup> We do not treat this entity as naively understood, we are merely curtailed by a certain focus.

<sup>12</sup> It will be understood that indeterminate immanent relation is an important concept in the study of synchronicity/pneuminous interference/hyperstition.

are wont to note the immanent relation and afterwards infer the logical, hence it is ontologically prior in a phenomenological sense. Isn't this problematic though? Haven't we spent a good deal of time showing that the spider-drinking-spit relation is in fact entirely unfounded? This is exactly the case, so what are we to do? How can it be that the logical relation can be inferred from a relation that might not even exist? The answer to this is of course that the projected relation whether obtaining or not is what unifies the phenomenon as inviting conjunction. In an indeterminate immanent relation this is easier to perceive yet the same holds for determinate immanent relation precisely by virtue of the sceptical bracketing that must be performed on determinate perception e.g. even if drinking is what I directly perceive, by reflection I must conceive this is not a certainty. This does blur the line between determinate immanent relation and indeterminate immanent relation yet still the value of the two as heuristics seems clear.

## 7)

But now a previously encountered issue looms large out at us. This issue is the return of the alchemical. The grinding repetition of the word 'conjunction', so deeply imbued with alchemical connotation returns it to us as if a face pressed inwards upon the outside window and peered in with anxiety. This anxiety was not for the one who peered in but rather for those inside (ourselves). This anxiety expressed not the fear that they should be forgotten and left out, but the fear that –in absolute secure knowledge of their importance- we should leave them out and hence fail to unwrap the mystery properly. This face at the window no doubt is that of Seranoga, who is secure in his need to remind us of the importance of conjunction *in alchemy*.

Conjunction is (in some systems) the fourth stage of alchemy –preceded by calcination, dissolution and separation. After the elements have been separated they are ready to be recombined (re-conjunct). In the matter at hand we are of course not dealing with anything chemical or even physical, but rather only the abstract notion of conjunction. If though Seranoga infers correctly the relevance of the alchemical conjunction, might we not find also the trace of the preceding stages/alchemical stages in the analysis? The notion seems fair and indeed we believe in fact that this logic is detectable. The calcination or burning away process is the stripping of the elements of any relation (including conjunction) and of the naïve certainty that the elements were what they purported to be. Dissolution is the addition of a new theory that might yield in the future a new insight –in this case it was the introduction of alchemy itself. The elements are dissolved in this outlook. Separation retrieves the gains of the dissolution. In this case this was the removal of alchemy and the subsequent exposure of how two phenomena, in order to appear conjunct must be perceived in relation. The disjunction of the existential relation and the logical relation was disclosed as the binding of the spider-spit which itself is reduced to a certain image like nature that refrains from ontological suppositions. The 'conjunction' then is the recombination of these elements in their rarefied form. Hence we are no longer dealing with the recombination of spider and spit but of the recombination of logical conjunction, existential relation (putative drinking), spider and spit (where this 'and' does not designate the naïve assumption of the relation but rather

is just the grammatical 'and' in the enumerated series). These elements form a duality that may be combined. For existential and logical relation in fact form a circle that is relation (one half of the duality). We have sided with existential as the prior though we are aware disagreement exists in this arena (cf the problem of the priority of the present-at-hand and ready-to-hand). Accepting this ambiguity and recognizing both are complementary relations, we find relation in this broad sense on one hand and spider-spit (with its relations bracketed off) on the other. Recombination gives us back spider and spit in a putative relation of drinking. This might recommence the whole process by which the various connotations and implications of the image were traced and send us back to the start. However this kind of eternal return is undesirable and indeed not inevitable, for to do so would be to miss one of the gains of the procedure. Before we felt uncertainty as to whether or not the spider and spit actually were what they immediately were assumed to be. The fact they come to us in actual image puts us at one epistemic remove from the relative certainty of the actual encounter. But this scepticism in fact shows that the image is liberated from any particular event (this is part of the alchemical transformation). This is a liberation into a realm of pure image that enables us to reinstantiate the relation 'drinking' *simply because it arose*. That is, if the image is pure image and has lost its connection to any supposed reality, it has become pure information, or *pneuma* as we have elsewhere termed this. This pure pneuminous image is utterly susceptible to any extra concept we attach to it –because both are nothing but *pneuma*. Hence if we see the image as spider-drinking-spit then immediately the drinking *is* in the whole image as informational. What is more, once this notion is attached to this image it is hard, almost impossible to undo it. We might try to hypothesise alternatives e.g. that in fact the spittle is a minute *lok-sotot* like entity that is devouring the spider, but all this will achieve is to proliferate the attached interpretations (multiply the pneuminous forms) and not remove the first interpretation.

## 8)

We can at this point only look on with bewildering wonder at Seranoga's tricks. For the alchemical interpretation that he has bestowed to us has yet more to offer. The fourth stage of alchemy is considered the marriage of the king and queen. The simple reading would be of the spider king marrying the fluid saline queen, but it is rather that spider and spit as unity are feminine principle, life giving, powerful and enslaved by signifiers of negativity (the connotation of the repressed element as mentioned earlier). This unity of femininity (containing of course intimations of the child as suckling –a clue no doubt) is opposed to the king as relation itself, which either as logical or existential is a conceptual abstraction of an unfathomable feminine. Here Seranoga plays Hermes who marries the feminine and masculine to produce 'the lesser stone', here played by the pure image. This pure pneuminous image is that which will ultimately become the child of philosophy, the philosopher's stone or in Seranoga's words 'future kin'.

One might have the feeling at this point that this exegesis has simply been about Seranoga's poem. This sensation is understandable but entirely erroneous. By means of

another serendipity it is the marrying of the image with the poem that yields the above result. The image acts as a restraining, guiding influence on what otherwise might be a much more abstract poem, but equally one that would contain no scepticism regarding the whether or not the elements were actually what they purported to be. In a poem this is self-giving, even if it only gives in order to make way for other symbols. In the above analysis the pneuminosity of poetry is hard won.

This raises the question on the other side as to whether an analysis of the image without the poem would lead us down a similar path. This seems more likely than not, for even without the poem many of the connotations and alchemical suggestions would still be immanent to it. What Seranoga's genius shows us is how even in the contemplation of a phenomena such as a putative *spider-drinking-spit* he was able to lay bare in just four pithy lines the alchemical grasping of such an actual phenomenon as abstracted into an image. The remaining last mystery is precisely the break off at the fourth stage of alchemy. Why indeed does he stop at this point? Why not 'ferment' then 'distill' this gleaning of a pure image in order to coagulate the 'future kin'? Maybe Seranoga does not have the hubris to claim this level of achievement and maybe his resting here exactly the point at which fermentation takes place is quite deliberate. That is, the conjunct stage achieved, the pneuminous accretion of *spider-drinking-spit* is passed on to ferment in the minds of the readers. These readers themselves become the instrument of fermentation and the tasks of distilling and coagulating are left up to them. Maybe Seranoga is happy to hint at something in his poem much more than simply the alchemical implications of the image. Maybe Seranoga is hinting at the possibility of a whole textual alchemy machine capable, not of producing 'objective' results, but rather of producing various but fascinating results depending on what solutions (theories) we use to dissolve the material (writing) fed in. This unearthed possibility that utilises the reader as part of the alchemical-textual-machine seems worthy of further investigation.

## **Mythopoesis, Scenes and Performance Fictions: Two Case Studies (Crass and Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth)**

**Simon O'Sullivan.**

*Days were spent in fumes from the copying machine, from the aerosols and inks of the 'banner production department' – bed sheets vanished – banners appeared, from the soldering of audio, video, and lighting leads. The place stank. The garden was strewn with the custom made cabinets of the group's equipment, the black silk-emulsion paint drying on the hessian surfaces. Everything matched. The band logo shone silver from the bullet-proof Crimpeline of the speaker front. Very neat. Very fetching.*

Peter Wright (quoted in George Berger, *The Story of Crass*)

*One thing was central to TOPY, apart from all the tactics and vivid aspects, and that was that beyond all else we desperately wanted to discover and develop a system of practices that would finally enable us and like minded individuals to consciously change our behaviours, erase our negative loops and become focussed and unencumbered with psychological baggage.*

Genesis P-Orridge, *Thee Psychick Bible*

In this brief article I want to explore two scenes from the late 1970s/1980s: the groups Crass (1977-84) and Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (1981-). Both of these 'performance fictions' (as I will call them) had a mythopoetic character (they produced – or *fictioned* – their own world), perhaps most evident in the emphasis on performance and collective participation. They also involved a focus on self-determination, and, with that, presented a challenge to more dominant fictions and consensual reality more generally.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following is part of a larger collaborative writing project (with David Burrows) that explores mythopoesis, myth-science and what we call 'mythotechnics' in relation to the fictioning function of contemporary art practice (very broadly construed).

## 1. Crass: There is No Authority but Oneself



Fig. 3. Crass logo

Crass emerged, at least in part, from both the 1960s counter-culture and the 'tradition' of the avant-garde. As far as the former goes Penny Rimbaud and Gee Vaucher – to take two key members of the group as example – were products of art school (and themselves influenced by figures like John Lennon and David Bowie) and, later, Crass would go on to help organise one of the UK's key counter-cultural events: the Stonehenge free festival. In terms of the former Rimbaud had been the instigator of the experimental music group EXIT and, in this prehistory to Crass, had organised avant-garde music festivals and generally himself identified with Fluxus. Both these currents – high and popular culture – had a determining influence on Crass, but it was only with the arrival of punk and a third key figure – Steve Ignorant – from a less art (and more working class) background that the conditions for Crass were in place.

A further key factor in the group's formation and on-going existence was Dial House. Rimbaud had set up this rural cottage as his home, but also as an 'open house', in the 1960s. It provided a space for like-minded people to gather, talk and experiment, not least in the production of music (there was a rehearsal room at the cottage). Crass were adamant that it was not a commune (throughout their existence Crass were keen to distance themselves from any hippy connotations), but there is certainly a sense in which the house allowed a collectivity to form. Crucially it gave a group of people time together outside

the pressures of finding work (Dial House was setup as a very inexpensive place to live, not least in so far as it refused typical commodity culture).

The location outside the city in relative seclusion in Essex also contributed to a certain rural idyll associated with Crass, as exemplified by the picture on one of their record sleeves of ploughed fields. The isolation also had its benefits insofar as it produced a certain intensity, the progenitor of any scene (this isolation also brought issues – especially towards the end of Crass – insofar as the group became somewhat cut off from the scene they had instigated, especially in terms of the squat culture of London). It is worth noting that a kind of radical parochialism was in play here (in fact, after some early attempts, Crass did not play outside England), but this does not mean the band did not resonate outside its immediate context. Indeed, quite the contrary: Crass had a more global traction because of its local and singular character.

For Crass punk was an attitude, but it was also a way of life (and, as others have remarked, in this sense punk looked back to the Situationists and, before this, Dada). The group took the ‘Do it Yourself’ attitude and aesthetic seriously both on stage and record, but also as a script for their lives. As George Berger points out in his biography of the group, it was this existence beyond the stage that also gave the group a certain mystery. Crucially Crass records were produced independently and distributed via the growing network of independent record shops at the time. There was no way Crass would be played on the radio (although they did, at one point, do a John Peel session) so this alternative mode of distribution was also crucial. The group was part of a larger mail art and DIY fanzine culture – an expanded network – that characterised what became known as the anarcho-punk scene.

The will to self determination, exemplified in their slogan ‘There is no authority but oneself, so, whatever it is, do it’, was a key factor in the formation of the band and its on-going development but also one of the key ‘political’ messages of the Crass songs. An example of this was their pitching of themselves against certain institutions: of work, the family and so forth, but also against that key agent of transcendence, Christ. There was also the renaming of individuals in Crass – a reclaiming, we might say, of identity from external causality. In fact, one of the key aspects that demarcated Crass from other punk bands was their ideas and the writings that were invariably included with their records. Polemical, angry, pitched against the status quo, but also, at times, cryptic and

poetic, these writings – alongside the mythos of Dial House – help give the band a clear identity.<sup>2</sup>

But it was also the more general aesthetic of the band that produced what we might call their mythopoetic aspect. Crass always wore black and often sported armbands with the Crass logo (more on which in a moment). This ‘uniform’ was certainly open to being misconstrued – and Crass claimed that part of their intention was to explore these contradictions – but, in general, it operated to produce a certain cohesion and – especially from the outside – the idea of something with a consistency, something that had both a back story and future intention as it were. At the gigs band members would line up in a row at the front of the stage, whilst at the back there would be large spray-painted and screen-printed banners with various anti-war slogans and logos. Gigs would not just be an audio affair, but include several screens with looped projectors (again, harking back to a more Avant-Garde tradition of experimental film). In many ways the group, especially as they became more serious, were as much a multi-media collective (or a ‘living theatre’ as Gee Vaucher has called them) as simply a punk band.<sup>3</sup>

This aesthetic was also prevalent in the design of Crass records. Covers would be foldout posters, all printed in black and white with Gee Vaucher’s very particular collages (Vaucher has talked about the intention of developing a new language – an ‘aesthetic of the present’ – in her work with Crass). There was also the highly distinctive Crass logo, an amalgamation and condensing of different symbols (related to the church, the family and the state). Indeed, Rimbaud has claimed that Crass came up with the first corporate logo, but we might also suggest that the Crass symbol operated as a sigil of sorts (I will return to this below). The lettering around the edges of the record (and sometimes around the circular logo) also had a very particular stencilled appearance (that looked back to Jasper Johns). This was also part of the band’s mythos, not least as the Crass logo, alongside various slogans, was also found stencilled around London (harking back to Paris and the Situationists, but before graffiti as such had become a widespread ‘art’

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<sup>2</sup> Alongside the anger was also a more utopian message – also exemplified by the cover of the first album – that, we might say, belied a more 1960s influence. Reading George Berger’s *The Story of Crass* there is also, clearly, a more spiritual, even mystical thread that is especially present just before the group’s formation – around Dial House, Wally Hope and the Stonehenge festival; and after Crass’ split with Rimbaud’s interest in Buddhism and Taoism.

<sup>3</sup> An insight into how this aesthetic was achieved is given in Pete Wright’s account – in the quote that begins my article – of the preparations carried out for a rare European tour.

form in the UK). It was this whole ‘look’ – in their output and gigs – that presented a kind of life-style package (to continue the corporate language), or what we might call the ‘Crass-assemblage’.

In conclusion then, although Crass cannot be understood separate from their explicitly political messages, they were also, it seems to me, a kind of performance fiction. There are two factors at play in the development and deployment of Crass in this mythopoetic sense. The first, we might say, is internal: a particular group of individuals, all sharing a similar perspective and intention and, crucially, willing to sacrifice individual identity in favour of the collective, came together in a certain space and for a certain time (there is a sense that with Crass there was a very specific time and set of conditions (themselves internal and external) when it all came together). Here, again, Dial House – literally a place in which to live and work together – was crucial. Crass were precisely a scene, constellated around certain key figures, like Rimbaud, Vaucher and Ignorant but, ultimately, collective in character and, indeed, more than the sum of its parts. The external aspect to this mythopoeisis was how Crass were seen from the other side as it were: the effect that the ‘theatre’ of the gigs, alongside the myth of Dial House and the whole look of both the band members and the records had on their fans. Crass represented a different reality, one that – it appeared – was actually being lived. Indeed, it is this aspect of offering up a different ‘multi-media’ fiction for a subject that does not recognise themselves in more typical and dominant fictions that marks Crass out up and beyond the anger and polemic. Any mythopoetic practice needs what we might call this alternative reality effect, produced through different elements and on different registers, in order to produce another world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> We might note a further – magickal – aspect of mythopoeisis that involves apparently more incidental detail resonating across space and time (a logic of synchronicity). After Crass’ split Ignorant went on to do Punch and Judy shows, after having carved his own figure of Punch. David Tibet of Current 93 was also interested in this area – and had begun collecting Punch and Judy paraphernalia (after seeing *The Wicker Man*). After reading and being impressed by Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker*, a book that stages the nesting of fictions alongside various temporal loops and circuits, Tibet asked Ignorant (a ‘connection man’ if ever there was one) to open for his band.

**4. Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth: Do What Thou Wilt shall be the Whole of the Law**

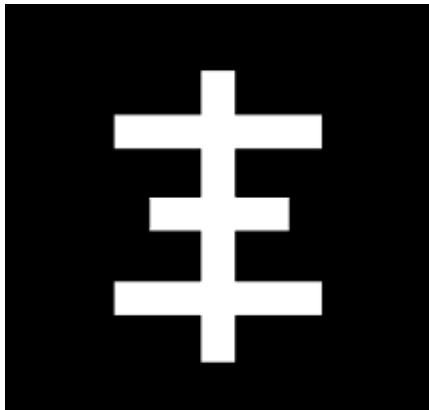


Fig. 4. *Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth* Tri-cross logo

Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (TOPY) was – and still is to some extent (at least in a certain instantiation) – a community of individuals dedicated to the modern use of magick (especially as this intersects with popular culture, hence the TOPY term ‘occulture’) and following, to a large extent, the thinking and writing of Genesis P-Orridge and, at one time, the band – or multi-media collective – Psychick TV. In fact, P-Orridge had already instigated and been involved in different collectives and scenes before this, for example around the influential industrial noise band Throbbing Gristle (the formation of which predates punk) and, before this, the performance group COUM Transmissions that itself emerged (in part) from the 1960s counter culture and associated avant-garde.<sup>5</sup> It is, however, with TOPY that we see the full development of a certain kind of mythopoesis that brings these experiences and interests in audio/visual presentations, performance and alternative collectives into conjunction with esoteric practices. In terms of the latter TOPY followed William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, especially in the adoption of the ‘cut-

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<sup>5</sup> And before this – formatively – as part of the *Transmedia* commune and, before this, working with the *Exploding Galaxy* group in the 1960s. For an account of this early history – and of COUM and TG more generally – see Simon Reynolds’ *Wreckers of Civilization* (Reynolds 1999). For what might be called a corrective to this history, written by the other key member of the last two groups see Cosey Fanny Tutti’s *Art Sex Money* (Tutti 2017). For a more theoretical reflection (through the lens of Gilles Deleuze) that focuses on *Throbbing Gristle* specifically (and their experiments with noise), see Michael Goddard’s ‘Sonic and Cultural Noise as Production of the New: The Industrial Music Media Ecology of Throbbing Gristle’ (Goddard 2008: 162-72).

up' as method,<sup>6</sup> and Aleister Crowley and Austin Osman Spare, especially in relation to sigil magick. Indeed, with these two technologies – the cut-up and sigil – and especially in their combination and extension, TOPY were, it seems to me, involved in what might be called a systematic 'fictioning' of the real.<sup>7</sup>

TOPY also involved an ethics of sorts, when this is understood as specifically not a morality, but as the following of a very particular way of life pitched against any and all forms of external authority.<sup>8</sup> Following Spinoza (to bring in a more typical philosophical reference) we might say they were concerned with exploring what, precisely, a body was capable of and in developing a programme, involving certain disciplines and discipline more generally, that might foster further experiments in the 'short circuiting of control' (one of TOPY's key phrases (taken from Crowley) was: 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law').<sup>9</sup> A central aspect of this ethics was the will to self-determination – 'to become a cause of oneself' – and, with that, the refusal of any transcendent enunciators, in particular Christianity (TOPY was specifically a form of mysticism without religion in this sense). We might note the connections with Crass here in so far as both groups waged this war against the Christ.

Although these practices were very much focussed on the individual and their transformation, it was the collective, which included, at different times, different forms of communal living and various other shared resources (and the sharing of experiences more broadly) that allowed for this experimentation. The group provided both a context and

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<sup>6</sup> Burroughs had in fact been a key influence on both COUM and TG – and on P-Orridge in particular after a meeting between the two of them in the 1970s. For a discussion of the key role played by the cut-up, pre PTV and TOPY, see Goddard 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Other key precursors (or points of inspiration) were Timothy Leary, Alfred Korzybski – and, indeed, figures like the Elizabethan mage John Dee and Brian Jones of *The Rolling Stones*.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of ethics along these lines see my 'The Care of the Self versus the Ethics of Desire: Two Diagrams of the Production of Subjectivity (and of the Subject's Relation to Truth [\(Foucault versus Lacan\)](#)' (O'Sullivan 2012: 59-88).

<sup>9</sup> This focus extends to P-Orridge's trans-sexual 'pandogyne' project – in which P-Orridge, ultimately, 'merges' with his then wife, Lady Jane Breyer (hence, his current name: Genesis Breyer P-Orridge). This project might itself be understood as a fictioning, or re-writing of gender – and, as such, a refusal of the sanctity of the given over the made.

a legitimisation for this other way of life, as well as, more generally, a sense of belonging, and, indeed, identity (for example, the group assigned new names to its members). Indeed, it seems to me that a collective allows this fictioning, insofar as it can produce a common script contra the dominant (and, as such, present a kind of 'living alternative' to the what-is). TOPY discarded the use of 'I' and replaced it with 'we' to signify this collectivity that also extended 'inwards' to the multiplicity that constitutes any given individual (the many different personalities and fantasies 'behind' the illusion of the single self).<sup>10</sup> TOPY had then this double aspect of individual and collective practice – and also of the private and public, the latter most obvious in the Psychick TV events and, indeed, the general media attention P-Orridge received (and often actively courted) in the 1980s. This was also in play with COUM's performances: explorations concerning the body (and its limits) that were carried out in the public eye (indeed, we might say that COUM, in part, was about making the intensely private public – or in bringing the hidden (the occult) into view).<sup>11</sup>

In terms of this focus on the intensely intimate and, indeed, often repressed aspects of life, TOPY focussed on sexuality and the orgasm as a conduit to other states of consciousness (although this was also a focus of COUM and Throbbing Gristle, the latter, certainly, had more of an emphasis on horror and violence). The ritual exploration of guilt free sexuality and of sexual energy more generally was used as transformative technology. In this TOPY looked to Eastern tantric traditions (with their own focus on the 'use' and transformation of sexual energy), but also to various counter-culture ideas of free sexuality and sexual expression, as in the writings of Wilhelm Reich. Put simply, for TOPY sex was a powerful threat to control. In particular the group explored various collective expressions of this energy, for example through the 'writing' of sigils that involved the participant's blood, hair and semen/vaginal fluids. These were 'written' by the wider TOPY community on a certain day and mailed to the TOPY head quarters. Sigils are not art works or, indeed, aesthetic as far as this is typically understood. They are not 'disinterested', but have a very real traction on reality and a very specific function (to bring about the participants desires). They allow a certain focus and concentration and operate through a logic of contagion and magical causality (where like affects like) rather than through representation per se (they might be seen as representational but this is not their chief aim as it were). In fact, it seems to me that sigil's operate cybernetically (they imply a kind of 'flat time'), allowing a working on the future

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjssKDFIBZM> (accessed 30 August, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> As, for example, with the ICA show *Prostitution* (1976).

(or a writing of it) from the present.<sup>12</sup> The TOPY use of sigil magick followed this intention and logic, but in the use of various 'splinters' of the body (elements of the real that break with representation) also look to practices such as voodoo.<sup>13</sup> We might also note the resonances with the spells of Antonin Artaud (whose life was also lived against control).<sup>14</sup>

P-Orridge himself was especially influenced by Burroughs' idea that consensual reality was a 'recording' that might, precisely, be cut in to and rearranged (as evidenced by Burroughs' own practices and various experiments with tape recorders). Reality was itself a fiction in this sense, one which could be re-written through certain techniques.<sup>15</sup> In fact, P-Orridge (along with Burroughs and Gysin) saw a direct connection of the cut-up with the practice of magick, which, likewise, involved a manipulation of so-called 'reality'. The practice of magick, more generally, offered an alternative to more typical technoscientific understandings of causality and, indeed, to a contemporary mediascape that was, for TOPY, continuing the reduction of individuals to being spectators rather than participants in their lives.

A further key technology in this magickal practice was ritual: the setting up of very particular spaces and the use of certain tools (or props) and techniques, in order to side step habitual subjectivity and produce an altered state. Although, again, private we

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<sup>12</sup> *Thee Psychick Bible* contains an essay that links this magical causality to the process philosophy of A. N. Whitehead (especially illuminating here is the idea of a fecund 'present time'). In relation to this, and, more specifically, *Throbbing Gristle*'s use of sound as a form of warfare, see also Steve Goodman's *Sonic Warfare* (Goodman 2012) that likewise involves a utilisation of Whitehead in its theorisation of sound.

<sup>13</sup> Since the particular period of TOPY that this article is concerned with (roughly the 1980s) P-Orridge has explored voodoo more explicitly. See, as indicative, Hazel Hill McCarthy III's film 'Bight of the Twin' that records P-Orridge's trip to Benin to explore the origins of voodoo (available at: <http://www.bightofthetwin.com/#about> (accessed 28 April 2017)).

<sup>14</sup> For a particularly fine analysis of Artaud's spells along these lines see Jon K. Shaw's unpublished PhD thesis: 'Subjectility: On Reading Artaud' (Shaw 2017).

<sup>15</sup> As P-Orridge remarks (about his meeting with Burroughs):

What Bill explained to me then was pivotal to the unfolding of my life and art. Everything is recorded. If it is recorded, then it can be edited. If it can be edited then the order, sense, meaning and direction are as arbitrary and personal as the agenda and/or person editing. This is magick. (P-Orridge 2009a: 279)

might say that these rituals were performances in some senses, or, more accurately, 'performance fictions' whose aim was to counteract those consensual fictions already in operation. And, of course, with Psychick TV these magickal rituals took on a more explicitly public – and participatory – form (it seems to me that trance was a key collective technology here).

The key dominant fiction (in maintaining this consensual reality) is the fiction of the self and, as such, TOPY also involved various practices of deprogramming aimed at loosening this crucial anchor point. Again, there are very real resonances here with various Eastern practices and disciplines, and, especially Buddhist technologies. P-Orridge himself travelled to India (encountering sadhus and other Holy men) and Nepal (meeting Rinpoche's and other Buddhist practitioners). However, it seems to me that the key orientation of TOPY in this regard was not introspection and emptiness, but rather the production – or writing – of a different kind of fiction of and for a given subjectivity. As far as this goes TOPY has more connections with a Western counter-culture tradition than anything non-Western. In fact, as P-Orridge makes clear in his own writings it was 1960s groups like The Process, as well as his own experiences in the Transmedia commune in the 1970s that were most formative.<sup>16</sup>

In relation to sigils we might also note the tri-cross 'logo' of TOPY (that P-Orridge himself relates to the Kabbalah, and the symbol of The Process)<sup>17</sup> and, indeed, the skull/lightning bolt logo of Throbbing Gristle. Both these sigils 'contain' the key orientations of the two groups. We might also note the whole 'look' of Throbbing Gristle: the black and paramilitary dress, for example, that also resonated with Crass. TOPY effected a more ecclesiastical look (the group's 'uniform' looked back, precisely, to The Process), but, in both cases, and in Felix Guattari's terms, we might say that these clothes and costumes operated as 'fabulous images' around which a different subjectivity could coalesce and cohere.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the 'look' of TOPY in particular was, according to P-Orridge (at the

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<sup>16</sup> In passing I want to note a key connector that links this enquiry into mythopoiesis and counter-cultural scenes with what might be called (following Sun Ra) 'myth-science': George Clinton. Leader of the bands Parliament and Funkadelic and instigator of the P-Funk sonic fiction, Clinton was also a one time a member of The Process and the key 'leaders' of the latter contributed sleeve notes to one of Funkadelic's records. It is here that Black subjectivity meets the occult 1960s counter-culture, finding there an alternative fiction to the mainstream.

<sup>17</sup> See the essay 'The Process is thee Produkt' (P-Orridge 2009b) where P-Orridge analyses this symbolism in contra-distinction to the 'P Cross' of The Process.

<sup>18</sup> Guattari writes of Jean Genet's fascination with the Black Panthers as an example of this image function: 'the ways of being and dressing of the Black Panthers, which almost

time), a kind of smoke screen for the real purpose of TOPY which was less the production of any group-mind and more the development of individuals.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless their group look gave TOPY a very particular identity that others could relate and aspire to (and, indeed, join). TOPY constituted a scene in this sense, one that eventually dovetailed with the rave scene of the 1980s (itself a period that let 'the mask of control slip, just slightly, for a few brief years, for a whole generation' (Louv 2009: 23)).

TOPY, and, more particularly, Psychick TV, extended the use of magick to other technologies, including TV. Indeed, it was this turn to more contemporary media that characterised their 'use' of magick (again, this followed from Burroughs' own experiments with video recording, and, we might also say, also Gysin's dream machine and experiments with the flicker).<sup>20</sup> The interest in TV as a technology that might be repurposed was evidenced in Psychick TV events that were as much visual as audio performances. These would involve a form of cut-up and 'surrealist' TV aimed at counter-acting a more typical – and passive – TV consciousness (and, not least, again, in displaying repressed 'content'). This use of TV extended to advertising which was especially seen to resonate with the practice of magick: 'advertising jargon is a magical language. It can be used to affect or program the unconscious mind. Advertisements are constructed in exactly the same way that rituals are, using mnemonic devices very similar to the kabbalah' (TOPYNA 2009:175)

In its turn to popular media TOPY departed from the hierarchies and ceremonies of high magick and from Crowley's original OTO. In general technology was to be embraced and magick was seen less as a pre-modern practice than as a contemporary, if not future orientated one. As P-Orridge remarks: 'Burroughs, and Gysin, both told me something that resonated with me for the rest of my life-so-far. They pointed out that alchemists

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overnight change the way black people as a whole perceive the colour of their skin or the texture of their hair for example' (Guattari 2013: 222).

<sup>19</sup> See 'PTV Interview (Genesis P-Orridge and Peter Christopherson)', available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjssKDFIBZM> (accessed 30 August, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> As TOPYNA remarks:

It might be interesting for a moment to consider magick, particularly ritual, as a form of editing. Like a good television editor, a magician strives for some form of continuity in his program, or life. By emphasising desired aspects, the magician tries to edit out, or banish unwanted footage from her life. Any idiot can shoot great footage; only a master can edit it all so it makes sense to a viewer later on. This could be used as modern alchemy. (TOPYNA 2009: 164)

always used the most modern equipment and mathematics, the most precise science of their day (P-Orridge 2009a: 293)'. As far as this goes P-Orridge also had an interest in the feedback loops of neurolinguistics in so far as this might also allow a re-writing of reality. There are connections here with the technology of dianetics that also involved a de and re-programming of the mind; indeed, it seems to me instructive that the two founders of the key pre-cursor to TOPY, The Process, were themselves renegades from Scientology. It is in this sense that TOPY offered up a kind of religion without deity or belief, a scene whose intention was the transformation of individuals.

In conclusion then it seems to me that although very different in many respects (not least in some of their politics) Crass and TOPY both showed up the edges of our dominant fictions, but also produced new fictions and, with that the possibility of other modes of being adequate and appropriate to them. What I have written is invariably from a perspective outside of the groups themselves and, as such, attends less to what might actually have been the dynamics and relationship and more, again, to what might be called the mythopoetic aspects. Then again it seems to me that as well as historical accounts it is also important to look to what might be extracted from these kinds of scenes and perhaps re-activated today in a situation that itself increasingly deploys terms like post-truth and post-fact (and operates through a kind of hyper-individuation). It is crucial to challenge the fictions and myths of our contemporary political mediascape, but also equally crucial to produce other ones.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> With the rise of the alt-right and the ideology of 'Neoreaction' which themselves deploy fiction as method (as in 'meme magick') and/or a particular, often seductive mythos (that draws on occult themes and ideas of self-determination) then this work of an alternative myth-production seems to me increasingly crucial (see also my 'Accelerationism, Hyperstition and Myth-Science' (O'Sullivan 2017)).

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