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GREEPER 02

Creepier created by Austin Armatys and John English.

Editor In Chief Austin Armatys **Fiction Editor** Corey J. White

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The sun is without form, it is just fire dying outward.

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Cover Art By

TIM GROVE

@tim_grove



Creep Demon By

BAKED LAB

@bakedlab

Art Direction & Design by

SOLVENT

solventimage.com

Additional Design by

TYLER ALEXANDER

tyler-alexander.com

GUI MACHIAVELLI

TWITTER @GUIMACHIAVELLI

Gui Machiavelli is an Italian-Brazilian writer and programmer based in Amsterdam whose work deals with the non-human and the weird.

GARTH JONES

TWITTER @passtheamyl

Garth Jones is inspired by the works of decadent rock and roll scholars, debauched fantasists and occult piss-takers. He has written on pop culture, politics, regional health and, inexplicably, theology for a range of publications.

MADDISON STOFF

TWITTER @thedescenters

Maddison Stoff is a neurodiverse non-binary writer and independent musician from Melbourne, Australia who writes a combination of experimental and pulp-inspired science fiction set in a continuous universe.

ANDREW MACRAE

TWITTER @acidic

Andrew Macrae is a writer and editor now based in Hobart, Australia. He is first novel Trucksong is published by Twelfth Planet Press.

MIKE CORRAO

TWITTER @shmikeshmorrao

MIKE CORRAO is the author of two novels, MAN, OH MAN (Orson's Publishing) and GUT TEXT (11:11 Press); one book of poetry, TWO NOVELS (Orson's Publishing); two plays, SMUT-MAKER (Inside the Castle) and ANDROMEDUSA (Forthcoming - Plays Inverse); and two chapbooks, AVIAN FUNERAL MARCH (Self-Fuck) and SPELUNKER (Schism - Neuronics). Along with earning multiple Best of the Net nominations, Mike's work has been featured in publications such as 3:AM, Collagist, Always Crashing, and The Portland Review. He lives in Minneapolis.

NYX LAND

TWITTER @NyxLandUnlife

n1x is one sphere of a broken syzygy.

JAMES STRAKER

INSTAGRAM @jstrakertroublemaker

Highly Caffeinated & Over Stimulated. Explores Abandoned Places. Semi Decent Kimura. Disheveled. Sells Weird Treasures.

DAN HILL

TWITTER @dan_hill

Dan Hill has edited comics released by Black Mask Studio, IDW and many others, written the horror-centric war comic Disconnect, written non-fiction for Kill Screen, writes a fortnightly newsletter, A Pleasurable Headache, and should just pick a lane already.

TOM LYNCH

TWITTER @attentive.

Tom Lynch is a freelance software developer specialising in maps and geographical data.

RYAN K LINDSAY

TWITTER @ryanklindsay

Ryan K Lindsay is an Australian writer of comics, words, and his darkest thoughts. He's worked with some of his best friends, and publishers like Black Mask, Dark Horse, and Vertigo, to bring to life award-winning stories about a whole mess of weird wonders.

LEX GRIFFITHS

TWITTER @Lex_Griffiths

Lex Griffiths is a spectral presence haunting the woods of England. They are drawn to crossroads by the promise of conversations about art, culture and horror fiction.

TIM GROVE

INSTAGRAM @tim_grove

Tim Grove is a Sydney artist and designer exploring visual communication and expression. Stimulated by abstract and surreal art, cinema, science and architecture, Tim's aesthetic language is compelled forward by frantic curiosity. Perpetually seeking new forms and techniques, a dedication to constant incremental improvement inform a distinct, genre and practice melding style that overwhelms the daily noise.

UNCONSCIOUS ABYSS

TWITTER @UnconsciousAby

Burroughsian cut up machine or deluded schizophrenic? Unconscious Abyss covers the interstices between forgotten history, occultism and non standard theory.

NINA SCHACK KOCK

Nina Schack Kock is a writer based in Copenhagen. She holds an MA in writing from Royal College of Art, London.

DC BARKER

TWITTER @4Q248

Psychoanalyst & Researcher at Armacham Technology Corporation.

JOHN ENGLISH

INSTAGRAM @__solvent__

John is the photographic artist Solvent and part-time comic book writer. He lives with his family and extensive video game and VHS collection in Brisbane, Australia. Creeper Co-creator.

KOKOFREAKBEAN

INSTAGRAM @kokofreakbean

KOKOFREAKBEAN was born on the edge of a boob-job in the cajoling bitch-slap of God's first heavy flirtation with full-blown pedophilia. In plainer language, it was born in San Antonio, Texas. Its first memory took place at the devilishly tender and deep fried age of 4 and involves an iron, a goblin, and a door built into a wall several meters above the floor.

VALENTINA SCHULTE

INSTAGRAM @valentinaschulte

Valentina is a Sydney-based, multi-disciplinary artist with a practice focusing on photography, video and sculptural forms. Through practice and experimentation with the photographic image, she is interested in the human experience of the landscape exploring themes of consciousness and interaction with the land and spatiality through multiplicitous viewpoints.

MARK ROGERS

INSTAGRAM @markrogersart

Mark Rogers is a self-taught artist from Portland, Oregon. Stylistically his work has been described as a mash-up of folk art, medieval painting, and fairy tale illustration and his work has found a place among both the complementary Pop Surrealism, and Magical Realism movements. He dwells in a tiny studio with his cat, Panther.

BKV INDUSTRIAL

INSTAGRAM @bokehversions

BKV Industrial is the design department of global anti-label Bokeh Versions. Influenced by medieval visions of the future and the conscious cowboy movement; they also stitch and print DIV clothing as Scumdance Collectivesing and croon murder ballads for bands like Java Java Wetware.

WE ARE CREEPER



effects

Words by Nina Schack Kock

Photo by Alicia Paydli

You feel the effects but you have no idea where they come from

Ride your bike really fast at night. You're not going anywhere. Ride your bike as if the asphalt was a plate of steel. Slice like a knife through everything. Freedom is snow without tracks. Feel your inside like a lava lamp. Don't think about your body. Pay attention to your feet. Circles know how to draw themselves. This is a beautiful night and no one is around, and the air is beautiful too, especially the air. Feel how the temperature is exactly the same as your skin. You're all heated up. You don't care where you're going.

Like that time one week ago. You were a bit drunk which makes you accessible. You had this nice, fuzzy feeling from the wine, like wearing a hood in the wind, you felt warm and invulnerable and deep inside yourself. You went on your bike and cycled like crazy, not because you wanted to get home, but because you had to exhaust yourself. You had these mild compulsive thoughts, like, *if you don't make it around the corner before the red lights / before that cloud has passed the moon, then*—but there were no red lights, so the whole thing turned into one long soft tunnel of speed and movement, pliant like candy mass or melted glass. Ride your bike as if the asphalt is a plate of steel, don't care about the cars.

You came home, short of breath and brimming with this uninterrupted speedy sensation throughout your whole body, and you put the key in the door and turned it and it turned all the way around within the lock, like butter, and it broke or rather, it melted, and for one short unconscious moment you felt like you had infinite powers, like your body melted into your hand and your hand melted into the key and into the door. The whole weird soft sensation from cycling through everything became very real for one short moment, as if the buttery key was an immediate logical continuation of the buttery bike ride. Time became a very strange thing when the metal melted into the door.

That's what I do to you. I pull you out of yourself and sometimes it feels so fucking insane. That's why you become vigilant and don't know what to do, that's why you like riding your bike fast at night, to get rid of me and to get to know me. You never know, but it's best to be in motion. I want to move you forward, but you don't know how to do that, you just want to use me up and be in motion, you want to be outside of yourself. You want to get rid of all that speed and weird energy I produce. The thing about me is that I feel so personal and sincere, but really, I'm the most anonymous and external thing. Sometimes I emerge acutely and forcefully, or I evolve, like invisible, delicate drizzle on your face. It's like sweating from the outside. I accumulate. You feel like you're spiralling.

Another late night bike ride, this summer. It was almost morning and you were on your way home from somewhere, riding your bike as fast as you could, listening to the same track on repeat, slowly drawing yourself into something. You passed the sea and thought, there's nothing scarier than the sea at night, that it was right there, that it's there all the time. You got an intense urge to swim in it. You discussed it with yourself for a while and then thought: if you don't do it now, you never will. This is not just the sea. This is important. You had two distinct sentences in your head: *you don't have a choice* and *you want to be enveloped*. So you turned off the road and cycled to the beach and took off all your clothes and went into the water. You were quiet and alert. I have this anonymous quality to me and you know. You know that you're just an effect. You can be impassioned and mysteriously affected and brim with all these sensations and feelings, but they are just effects. That morning in the sea you took me seriously and you went into the water because I told you to. You had this feeling: stay in it until it feels sufficient. You had no idea what it meant, but you stayed in it until it felt sufficient. Afterwards you felt powerful. You cycled home, nice and easy, with your shoes on the rear rack and stared at the dark turquoise morning sky. But what a silly way to use me, isn't it. Think of all the things you could do.

Leopold

The body of my work will become ecological. Brine slowly penetrating its membrane. Carrying strands through the canals of fracturing flesh. In the tradition of Deleuze, you travel across strata. From one dermal layer to the next. At each threshold your position shifts dramatically. Limbs stretch into newly revealed alcoves. The hairs of water that travel through your body become thinner. The tip becomes sharp. Serpent traversing zona. Until the first organ / organelle is pierced. Liquid threads along the diaphragm or intercostals. Air expands the puncture. Your abdomen inflates. I assume you are familiar with me... I assume you know why you are here... why you are staring at me... the effects of the zone are long lasting. The vessel that you have built for yourself is unstable. It cannot hold water.

It is held in solution. Points of contention / leakage are revealed. Someone mentions a digitally constructed labyrinth. You respond with a half-assed sentiment about escaping inwards... *In the digital landscape of the 2020s...* you try not to vomit. After more conversation you realize that the labyrinth is not really a labyrinth, it is just a place to get lost. When the flood waters rise, you sit in your apartment and maneuver through a programmed space. The labyrinth is text-based. It lacks diegesis. The writing is white, the background is black. Sitting at the entrance you are offered two pathways: left and right. You move. An epitaph reads across the top. You go left or right again. Another epitaph. Another directional choice.

Words by **Mike Corrao**

Photos by **Luemen Carlson**

This is the entire game.
This is how you get lost.
The quoted text is not attributed to anyone.
It is the product of the anonymous author. Some speculate that the program is built with a generative writing function, but there is too much variety in the sentence structure and vocabulary to reach a reliable conclusion.
You exit the zone of seduction. You climb onto the roof of your apartment building and watch the flood waters rise around the foundation of the surrounding structures.
Defunct technology is rigged into a speaker-phone: Travel perpendicular to the current; Follow the greenery until you are on stable land. Clusters of people kneel on their roofs lifting their hands to the sun.

The heat presses its weight against your neck.
Your spine feels the desire to curve. It asks for a new posture,
bending you into an alleviated shape.
The sun hums pleasantly to the lifted hands.
Brine soaks into the pores of the concrete.
Certain buildings begin sinking into the water-logged soil. The ground is not solid.
It is an emulsification.
You crawl your hunched body into the refuse of the cooled interior. Skinny hands lift into the sky. They boil in the air. Occult subjects weep with joy and pain... Worship is performed as jouissance... caravans carry the remaining flora away from the fragile arrangements of the city.
You return to the labyrinth.

enter - "you enter the labyrinth"
right - "doctors are concerned with the complexification of your skull"
left - "the labyrinth is a not a labyrinth. it is a library"
right - "your body is the root to your brain. your mind wishes to receive its interface"
right - "you pray again to Boris and Arkady"
left - "can you remember which direction you came from? or where you started?"
right - "this is your funerary march"
left - "there are worse deaths than being on fire"
left - "i drink the blood. i eat the flesh"
left - "you regret your arrival and doubt your return"
right - "a labyrinth is not a maze"
left - "a maze is the complexification of a straight line"
right - "a labyrinth is a place for you to get lost. there is only one entrance"
left - "LEOPOLD dictates the language of a sacred text. his utterance a sermon"
left - "your pursuer is fast and bulbous"
right - "overhead lights surveil each corridor"
right - "scripture lines the walls"
left - "your corpse will be made to paste"
left - "the sun is god. lift hands to praise. let the heat take you"
left - "bite into the nectar of the synthetic orange"
right - "the text of your prophecy.exe is predictive. it speaks a generative tongue"
left - "do not modify your body. it will not undo your dilapidation"
right - "ancient scripture reads the name Borges into your mouth"
left - "do not look at me"
left - "LEOPOLD is not your father. he is not your son or brother"
right - "the labyrinth changes again. it rewrites your entrance"
left - "you are not in the peripheries anymore. you have traveled deeper than you intended"
right - "a labyrinth is a place to get lost. where the entrance is not where you left it"
right - "your ability to leave is only a formality"

Our new biome is an assemblage made from the salvaged remains of the surrounding ecosystems. Disparate components are harvested from the soil and incubated in glass apparatuses. Messianic researchers / scientists lay the packs over their shoulders and trudge home. Pilgrimage of slowness. Their removal marks our arrival in the transitory state. The environment folds in on itself, converting dilapidated zones into wasteland. Gray hues follow the researchers as they return to their arcologies.

Sowing and planting new components onto the assemblage; lush foliage begins to grow around them. Pockets of low grass between tall stalks. They work in geomantic patterns, following the paths made by scattered seeds. Every step taken at the whims of an unconscious system. Upon completion it is difficult to say what biome this one is made to resemble. Its likeness is chaotic and disorganized. Organic and inorganic components stew together. Synthetic oranges on natural trees. Decadent elements collaged into unfamiliar postures.

You recognize the shape and firmness of the orange. You pluck it from the tree and bite through the rind. It makes your tongue retract. The synthetic orange is not a different fruit. It is a facsimile of its original counterpart. Any anachronisms are natural. They are expected. Every orange is not the same orange. Oils release from breaking skin and coat your flesh. LEOPOLD screams utterance and you are aware again.

You navigate another labyrinth, following the echoed residue of each sound. When you are lost again your wandering becomes passive, directed by geomantic whims.

The shallow surfaces of the labyrinth evoke a certain elusive quality. Like boards over a doorway. The text lures you towards its entrance only to drag you around its peripheries once you get too close.

Expeditions continue into the structure, attempting to circumvent the machine's inclinations. New flora grows through the night, and researchers prod the surface of an undefined meat. The slouching cube of pink mousse / streaks of white threading through / iridescent blotches sparsely dotted. You cannot tell if this is organic or inorganic.

The two unknowns remain: the world and the flesh. Each operating with an enigmatic autonomy.

My flesh is not me. It does not bend itself to the whims of my desire. Often it is the obstacle. Cybernetic advancements might view themselves as the subversion of this dilemma, but they are not. The body and the world is not the same dichotomy as the organic and the inorganic. The body is the assembled mass that carries your consciousness. The application of the cybernetic does not change the status of the body but vice versa. The cybernetic becomes a component of the body. It does not lessen the vessel's potency.

Polymer arms reach into the sky as if to grab the sun. Pulling deity down to the surface of the Earth. Asking what must be sacrificed in order to lessen the oncoming heat. Artificial weather systems promote this new biome's prosperity... In the experimental arcologies of the 2020s... Transcendentalists perform their hermitage in the digital labyrinth. Traveling through the epitaphs of the black screen. They document their path on shared databases.

enter - *"you enter the labyrinth"*
left - *"light streaks through the dilapidated roof"*
right - *"three missiles launch in the middle of the night"*
right - *"be careful not to noclip into the surrounding wasteland"*
left - *"the shortcomings of the body are its relationship to the tree"*
right - *"LEOPOLD is not your father. he is not your son or brother"*
left - *"have you approached the quest giver?"*
left - *"three books sit askew on their shelf"*
right - *"do you wish to continue? is this progression good for you?"*
right - *"what patterns have you noticed thus far?"*
right - *"the sun is a bourgeois god"*
right - *"your path is unreasonable"*
left - *"there is no turning around. only inward movement. traveling deeper into the structure"*
right - *"the labyrinth is not empty. its inhabitants are simply unwilling to reveal themselves to you"*
left - *"do not subvert your desires"*
right - *"you sway in fluid posture"*
right - *"one foot weighs heavier than the other"*
left - *"LEOPOLD mocks you"*

LEOPOLD slowly pulls the nails from the boarded doorway. New epitaphs / new directions emerge from the abyss. The black screen unveils previously obscured facets of the greater mechanism. Its mass still predominantly unknown... You notice points where certain paths overlap, or where certain epitaphs reappear. It is concerning to think of this labyrinth as a material space. With each new screen marking a new room, each turn marking a real turn. LEOPOLD takes up the position of a sentient program — a variable moving in the background, obscured by your screen's abyssal surface. The biome assemblage moans. Messianic scientists pray to each newly planted rhizome. Pocketed ecosystems wither in the periphery. Foot trails lead through corpse fields and defunct cities... In the urbicide of the 2020s... Synthetic orange plucked from its branch by your cybernetic arm. Fingers delicately curling around its curve. Teeth dragging against the skin. Oils perfume the air. It is hoped this biome will be the seed for future environments. Grafting the healthy comingling of these disparate ecosystems, letting their components mutate and acclimate. Then the arcology doors will open. Foliage will march into the hinterlands. Wandering in the likeness of the Transcendentalists.

Traveling in jagged paths through empty space... Your path is algorithmic... Your dance is elegant... LEOPOLD unveils the sun and illuminates the full breadth of the structure, revealing its root-pathways... *This is a macrostructure... It contains fractals... small structures within...* Each entry thus far has only been an exploration of the exterior. You perform your hermitage. Moving more deliberately, approaching the center, however impossible that might seem. There are extraordinary distances that must be navigated. Brine soaks into the foundations of your apartment building. Salt washes the glass dome of the arcologies, and new mechanisms are jury-rigged to dilute water and extract salt deposits. LEOPOLD lures you deeper into your hermitage. He says something about *nodal points and primitive technologies*. The polymer of your arms floats in solution: flesh preserved but no longer necessary. You wander through dreamscapes, walking deliberate routes through a time-dilated zona. The digital labyrinth mocks the position you have taken up. New corridors form in the moments before your approach. Epitaphs mention the simulacrum and ephemeral surfaces... The collaged biome continues to expand. Climbing the interior walls of the arcologies, grafted organisms—synthetic and natural—congeal together. They mutate towards symbiosis. Messianic scientists study their changes. LEOPOLD creates the generative programs that will determine your fate.



BURDEN

WORDS BY: Lex Griffiths

On the 19th of November 1971, Chris Burden travelled to a Californian gallery where a friend shot him in the arm with a .22 calibre rifle. They filmed it, went to the hospital and then probably had a hell of a time explaining things to the police.

Later, Burden said:

"Right before I was shot, I thought it was art, but afterwards it was such a physical thing you know, that I started to have questions." Burden was a focusing rod of directed violence in the first era where violence could be mass-distributed through media. He performed at the tail-end of the Vietnam War, the first televised war. Cultural monoliths were shifting. You can see it across his early works; his first big piece involved shutting himself in a locker for a period of days. A couple of years after *Shoot*, he had himself crucified on a Volkswagen Beetle. Not all this violence was self-directed though.

A couple of months after *Shoot*, Burden was invited to his friend Phyllis Lutjeans' locally broadcast TV show *About Art*. They agreed that he would perform a piece on air. Lutjeans has since recalled that in the days leading up to the show, Burden called her several times to confirm that she definitely wanted him to perform something. He showed up with his own camera crew and a knife tucked into his belt. During the interview he got up from his chair and held the knife to her throat - and demanded that the live show continue broadcasting.

He called it *TV Hijack*. If there was ever a word to define a word to define 1972, hijack would have to be a strong contender - between '68 and '72 United States Airlines experienced over 130 separate plane hijackings. Sometimes they occurred as frequently as once a week - sometimes there were multiple hijackings on the same day. The idea was looming and ever-present. It's really interesting that Burden chose the phrase, forging a memetic link between his hostage scenario and the violent commandeering of planes.

Hostage scenario. Don't lose focus of the butcher's knife pressed to Phyllis Lutjeans' throat. Look at the expression on her face. She's said that she doesn't hold a grudge, but this is neither the first nor last time Burden's work involved victimising or threatening women. That is important.

But back to stealing planes.

There is a link between Burden and hijacking through mass-distribution of violence. That



televised war. The thing about stealing a plane is that it's a really long process. Once you've got your gun out and you've demanded that you land in Havana, the pilots still have to get the thing into the sky. You know what that means? TV crews have all the time in the world to set up camera gear. The 70s really were the emergence of this element of pop culture; Libby Nelson writing for *Vox* connects *Plane Hijackings* to spree shootings and the main link she identifies is that both generate a lot of TV attention that metastasises into further performances by inspired actors.

Burden's work recognises that violence can be culture around the same time that TV news does, and around the same time the culture begins to produce more easily televised acts of violence. That most hijackings miraculously ended with nobody getting hurt is wild to me, growing up as I did mostly in a post-9/11 world. But there was an implicit memetic threat. Johan Grimonprez's collage documentary *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (free to download from his personal website) presents a meticulous compilation of televised hijackings throughout that strange period of time, lingering on the ballooning threat and actuality of violence as the media presence increases and the hijackers become more desperate.

A Pepsi executive that was part of a hijacking summarises the experience thusly: "[we were] running the gamut of many emotions: from surprise to shock, to fear, to joy, to laughter and then again, fear."

When Grimonprez talks about plane hijackings he presents the history of them as a dialogue between novelists and terrorists, extensively quoting two Don DeLillo novels and settling meditatively on the phrase: "What terrorists gain, novelists lose." This is all happening as the 20th century hurtles towards a horror that christened the 21st, and at the same time Burden is using violence purposefully and ex-

pressively to great national acclaim. He had nails hammered through his hands and into the bonnet of a car, he had a copper-jacketed .22 round penetrate his shoulder, he held a butcher's knife to Phyllis Lutjeans' throat. If violence is culture, then it is art. TV Hijack recognises one of the cultural rhythms of the 70s and reflects it back at itself.

In some sense, Chris Burden had decided that he knew how to use network television.

Control is an operational component of Hijacking. Certainly Burden's. There's the obvious, literal level of actually seizing a plane that maybe gets transformed into something more symbolic through Burden hijacking a studio: screen time. In both cases you're seeing people asserting their dominance over modernity. Commercial air flight wasn't precisely new by the early 70s but it was reaching an unprecedented level of accessibility, as plane tickets were suddenly affordable to the middle class. Likewise, television was now in almost every home in the Western world. So, naturally, new users try to control these culture-defining technologies, and force them to work on their terms. And for a while they seemingly could.

For the duration of that run of 130+ hijackings, the Federal Aviation Administration tried everything up to and including the idea of creating a fake Jose Martí International Airport in Florida to avoid installing metal detectors in airports - an almost unimaginable past where airlines and air authorities found the idea of intrusive airport security to be an impossible demand on passengers.

Five days after Chris Burden was shot in the arm for the sake of art, a nowhere man with a black attaché case bought a flight from Portland to Seattle in cash.

He is called DB Cooper. He used the name Dan Cooper but media misreporting changed his myth. He was quiet, appeared middle-aged and wore a suit. During take-off, he handed a stewardess a note that explained his briefcase contained a bomb, and that he wanted 4 parachutes, a fuel truck, and \$200,000. After hours of tense negotiation in Seattle, he got what he wanted, and the plane was airborne again. He forced the crew into the flight cabin and then jumped out via the aft airstair.

He has never been found. To this day, Cooper is the only hijacker in history to never be caught or identified.

He is also the reason that airports started searching luggage. It's almost like a phantasm

of sky piracy walked into an airport, a concentrated tulpa of the mass of hijackings, and incited a shift in culture. Cooper's hijacking was by no means the most violent or the one that ended the worst, but there was something about it, about the presence of his briefcase bomb, that forced the FAA's hand.

By 1973, airports in the US started installing metal detectors. In January of that year, almost exactly a year after Shoot, Burden performed a piece called 747. He invited a photojournalist from Esquire to join him on a beach near LAX and got them to photograph him as he got out a revolver and took shots at a plane as it left the airport.

The FBI questioned him over it - according to Burden himself he told them that the piece was about "the goodness of man," and the limits of regulations.

There's an impotence to this image of a man attacking a thing he can't possibly touch, let alone harm. His actions and his violence dwarfed by the power of the machinery.

The FAA could have enforced those security measures any time they liked. Hijackings were allowed because they made a calculation about PR versus the personal safety of passengers, and decided they saved more face by allowing hijackings, until that no longer seemed to be the case.

To me, that says something about the nature of control and individual power in the face of institutional forces, and it comes back to Burden and his knife in a room with Lutjeans. What does a performed hostage scenario say in the face of a television industry that uses hostage scenarios as part of the content of news? If Burden had harmed Lutjeans in that room, what would the network have done? It's important to note again that this was a station local to Irvine, California. You can divert a channel but the water's still going to run.

To say Burden changed art is reductive. "Art" is a moving goalpost, and every single person changes what it is and what it does every day. Certainly, Burden realised the fine line between "reality" and art, noticing the inherent violence of culture and brought it into focus to be probed. This was often done at the expense of others, particularly women. Burden understood the violence of media on multiple levels: his piece Confession detailed an affair he had on television before he'd actually told his wife about it, and his monologue Big Wrench featured a series of violent fantasies about using a large



truck to threaten one of his lovers. A lot of things Burden did with television feel prescient of figures like Elliot Rogers or movements like gamergate; personal blogs and vlogs allowing the darkness in people to spread out from their minds and into reality. He saw what a single person can do with a screen, in the face of corporate media control. Plane hijackings were similarly prescient. We know now what this technology can be used for by motivated people. Honestly what we really saw with both is what that corporate control will make allowances for; where the powers that be considered violence an acceptable cost of consumer liberty. When Burden stood on a bench near LAX and took those shots at a commercial airliner, what he really illustrated is what individuals - and perhaps especially artists - can be allowed to get away with, rather than the limits of what the authorities are capable of controlling.

Almost every use of violence detailed in this essay has become more exaggerated over time. News media went from televising Vietnam and plane hijackings to rolling 24/7 aerial footage of explosions in the Middle East, exhaustive coverage of shootings and car chases in progress. The transformation of hijackings hardly needs to be explicitly stated. Burden blurred the lines between art and threat, art and violence, at a time where violence was being rediscovered as a source of entertainment, something to be consumed. Perhaps Burden's work in the end acted as a forecast of things to come. A world he saw imperfectly. It's a world we're increasingly enmeshed in.

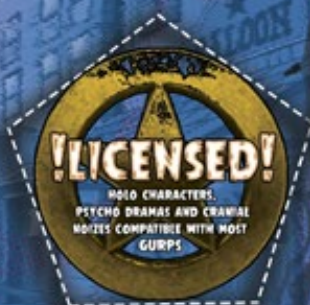
3:10 TO MEATWORLD

Digital Art

BKV Industrial

... IF YOU DIE ON THE ASTRAL PLANE, THERE'S STILL ONE TRAIN OUTTA TOWN ...

3:10 to MEATWORLD



... IF YOU DIE ON THE ASTRAL PLANE, THERE'S STILL ONE TRAIN OUTTA TOWN ...



UNFUCK

The FUTURE

WORDS BY: Garth Jones

CREEPER 02

The future is turbofucked. Nothing gets better.

As a consequence of keeping fossilised psychopathic white men alive indefinitely, huge swathes of the planet have been enslaved by an all-devouring overdimensional entity known as Gullghris, the World Blaster.

Bonus! We managed to warm the planet to the point it was hospitable to a few different species of particularly resource-focused alien invaders, so add their intermittent territorial skirmishes to the overall planetary Coriolis effect.

On the domestic front, here in Arcadia, we've got your basic theocratic autocracy in place, run by some withered old munter that goes by "The Majestrix". Her royal family, if you can call it that, are the scions of some big wheel social climbing scumbags from back before it all went tits up.

They police what's left of this open-cut continent with 'borg cops, mecha-drones and the ODRC. Don't ask us, we've got bugger all idea what it stands for. Information travels slow these days, and on a need-to-know basis. Down here in South Arcadia, they've decided we definitely don't need to know.

Enough table setting; here's what happened.

Jingo Rafferty is our Sorceress. She was a film star, whatever that was, in the 1920s. She's really old now.

It's 2045.

Seriously. She's really, really old.

Jingo founded a hive - this hive - of gnarly mutant occult scientists beneath Maralinga back in the '60s.

It's true - an abandoned nuclear test site is the staging ground for the defence of the future.

They mined orgones here, you know; built rockets powered by them. Released the Min Min Lights, once.

Jingo and her mates figured out time travel after the heaviest dose of rads, pseudos, and circle workings you'd be hard pressed to even imagine, sometime in the early '30s.

It takes some heavy-duty ritual magick to get your time travel on.

Only Jingo's withered, witchy, dementia-addled, pervert inner circle has the deep-weird mojo to get us back to where we need to be. These Seers are our navigators. They can see the past - but not communicate with it - via something they call the Overdimensional Highway.

There are certain metaphysical rules to adhere to, see?

Shit.

You're probably wondering who I am. Sorry.

I'm a Chohan.

Clear as mud, eh?

I'm basically raw consciousness divined, a sliver of God particle. A perfect glimmer of consciousness and untapped power, ready for a vessel.

I'm one of twenty here in the hive: my name, I guess you'd call it, is EDM-ZERO.

The plan is to unfuck this future.

We Chohans have been schooled, tested and hardened in the tube, boiled down and raw. Probabilities have been mapped, markers installed, our eventual parent subjects screened intensely.

This is what we're trained for.

In t-minus ten minutes we will be ritual magicked by our coven of drooling science witches

directly into the vas deferens of the subject Designate: Father as he approaches his vinegar strokes. My consciousness, electric, unearthed and humming will be there at the moment of conception, fully aware as fertilisation occurs.

Every parent thinks their kid is the chosen one. In twenty cases worldwide, just this once, they're going to be right, even if they won't ever know it.

Don't laugh. A whole shitload of interdimensional deal making and gladhanding went into this project. There's no way to send back adult human subjects, so this is the best and only workaround; start from scratch.

Get born, then it's a waiting game.

I've heard it's fucking frustrating in there.

At your core you're ready to rumble, but you've got nine months to review the mission specs while flesh and organs and bone knit themselves around your divine essence.

Zygote.

Blastocyst.

Embryo.

Foetus.

Five minutes now.

So, you're born and you're pretty much trapped in this slowly awakening, useless carapace. You're waiting for the entire system to come online, every sense and instinct, every cognitive leap and abstract to lock in, suffering your idiot parents' well-meaning, patronising jabbering.

Eternal aggravation, pretty much.

Still, you need the bastards to keep you alive.

The mission parameters have been designed to ensure we reach our full potential at a nexus point, a

critical moment in this last-ditch attempt to stop the future. The operation is precisely calibrated, calculated down to the most unlikely of occurrences.

One minute.

The ritual was reaching its apex, the witches gone deep as space and time flexed. I gazed up from my containment field, surrounded by my Chohan siblings, and scope our destinations: Ouyea; Whyrie; Allagutta; Portwood; Great Ravine; Gushing Spring; Wangkur; Harrower's Drop; Williprint; Poodnadatta; Neucastle; Oodcarrie; Uchelwrownee; Akrootedulla; Mindalindee; Urtabarkkenoo; Thrivesville.

There are 27 seconds left to transmission when the Puritan Division Sureshot units arrive, real motherfuckers.

The Seers were clearly snoozing when those teflon bastards slid in. Lucky for us the hive is sunk too deep for the ODRCs.

Jingo and her coven threw up a protective net of sick looking jade energy and I blipped out of the future now, thrown backwards along throbbing, branching choral ley lines. The past surged past my screeching metaphysical awareness, and then, the horror: They'd fucked up.

I slid past my birth in reverse, devolved from foetus to embryo to blastocyst to zygote, then insemination, contact, syringe - what - just nothing, frozen blackness.

The operation had been compromised, it was all fucked up.

Somewhere in the future, our witches died one by one at the hands of murder drones, doggedly continuing the ritual working as their numbers thinned. Sheer force



Back to
Motion.

[illegible]

I'm going to engineer a new tangent to this dead future narrative, but I have fuck all idea how that's supposed to happen. I guess I'll find out how many of the others made it.

My name is EDM-ZERO, and I am an inanimate, needy ball of wiggling purple flesh, utterly ill-equipped to fight the end of days presently in progress.

The Apocalypse happened and now I'm playing catch up - let's see how rocking 50% of a God particle works out.



Photos by **Valentina Schulte**

Everyday Is the Same: Part 1



Untitled (Tony)



**What do you hold dear and
precious**

**and what do you disregard
and have no use for?**









Ghosts of the

Words by

Andrew Macrae

Photos by

I am Nah

People call them zombie accounts, but they're not. They're ghosts. Ghosts of the social dead. Zombies are bodies animated by an alien, viral will. Ghosts are traces. Remnants of trauma that remain attached to a place long after the event that caused them.

'We're getting fucked on the socials. It's killing us.' His security pass swings over his tie and open suit jacket, the halyard colour-coded to his status as backroom dealmaker. I smile into his face. 'I need to fuck them back,' he says.

social dead

It's just that social media isn't really a place.

I run bot networks and troll farms for a living. Psychological warfare waged to warp reality in whatever direction you can pay for. Like the Buddha said: with our posts, we make the world. My clients are big companies and state actors. Gods from a higher plane, embodying their conflicts in the lives of the mortals they manipulate. Their weapons are hate machines that would make Goebbels blush. And thus they took the industrialisation of genocide and the banality of evil, and built upon it an infinite factory of psychometrics and agnotology: the purposeful production of ignorance. A non-consensual hallucination.

'That's what I do,' I say, through a haze of fatigue the colour of airport-lounge carpet. It's my fourth job on the trot since Shareen died. I kid myself that work is how I'm dealing with it.

I am alone at night in the lab they have set up for me on the twenty-first floor. The ghostly glow of LED panels. A window looks out on a roof below. Mechanical switches click as my fingers mark out the pattern of my thoughts. I trace the interconnections between armies of fake social media accounts. Bots with avatars stolen from real accounts and photostreams, or, even stranger, generative AI images magicked into being by a neural network's dream of a human face.



Frozen in an uncanny mimicry of life, yet attached to a lifeless, hungry trace on the social network. Following and unfollowing other accounts according to the rules set out by their creators in the endless drive to gain followers and trap users into thinking they are real.

I'm startled out of dissociation by a notification. A new follow request on my fastidiously anonymised personal account.

The profile pic is vaguely familiar. I reverse-search the image and after a few seconds of digging, I find it's from one of the bots in the network I'm researching.

Then it sends me a DM:

'Where r u?'

There's a stripe of dead pixels in the bottom right corner of its avatar.

I do not reply.

The next day I notice another stripe of dead pixels at the bottom right of an avatar in the bot army.

I Can't Live

A young woman poses for the camera with an ineffable smile. I screenshot the image and analyse it against the first one. There are twice as many dead pixels, starting in the bottom right and extending left about two-thirds of the way along.

Bots.

Engineered to amplify network effects.

They poison – or maybe fertilise, depending on your perspective – online social spaces. Honeypots for scared people who like to believe the worst of another tribe. It's about information dominance, and there's big money involved.

The social media companies don't care, as long as there are eyeballs and clicks.

Engagement they can sell to advertisers and turn into money that they use to buy their own political influence. They know how dangerous their factory is, and they don't care.

They just want you addicted to that hate machine.

#

Hotel room. Generic decor in subdued pastels. A football game in a code I don't quite understand on the muted television.

I'm in bed with my headphones on, scrolling through DMs from Shareen. My dead wife.

'When r u coming home?'

'I gotta finish this job.'

'I cant live like this anymore.'

'I know.'

'This isn't normal.'

'Just gotta get thru this contract.'

'U cant keep avoiding me.'

'One more week.'

'I miss u. Come home.'

I close the app and crank Slayer's 'Angel of Death' to block out the voices screaming inside my head.

This time it extends all the way across.

A glitch or a coincidence?

I line the accounts up. They were all created on the same day, within two minutes of each other.

#

I call it a day and take the rental car from the lab to the hotel.

The freeway. Public private space, bounded by tollways and guardrails. Overpasses and bridges and tunnels. In-between places. Neither here nor there. Traffic control. Surveillance. Advertising.

I notice a stripe of dead pixels in the corner of a billboard display, marring an otherwise perfect high-definition image of consumer desire.

A grey blur that recurs in the same position in the next sign I pass, except this time it's twice as long.

Next sign, it's three times as long.

In the text of the fourth are the words, 'Where r u?'

#

In the lab the next day I find a fingerprint: an error message that has made it into the output of one of the bots:

Like This Anymore

#

The next day I'm back in the lab in the blue glow of the screen. Daylight outside.

Rust stains run like mascara tear-tracks down the side of the building. I can see the rails along the top of the roof used by the window cleaners. The chiller units suckle conduits like parasites harvesting heat.

At my workstation. Drawing down data, looking for a few key fragments. The number of likes. Follow and unfollow behaviour. Mapping the parameters and interconnections that predict whether an account is operated by a human or a bot.

And there it is. The stripe of dead pixels at the bottom of an avatar.

"code": "INVALID PARAMETER", "value": "",

I search for the string of characters, and over the next few hours my database of linked accounts grows.

I'm close to having a dataset big enough to start making reliable predictions about the origin of the bot army.

And once I've found where my troll farmer lives, I'll take them down.

#Soon I'm marshalling my own bot army, getting ready for a counterattack.

But there, in my feed, is a bot with Shareen's face, distorted by generative algorithm.

For a second, I'm not sure what I've seen.
I scroll back, but I can't find the account again.
An alert pings on my phone. I look down and see
a message from one of Shareen's long-disused
social media accounts: 'Meet me at the Monash
interchange on the M3 at 05.00.'

#

Red-eyed and travel fucked, I walk through the lab
to the underground car park. The plumbing and
air vents and data lines snake like the circulatory
system of a living being.

Passageway to the land of the dead.
Or a birth canal. I can't tell which.

#

Driving through the forgotten zone on the way to a
rendezvous with a ghost.
Past a decommissioned coal-fired power station.
Empty pylons elegant in the dawn sky. Monuments
to an industrial age now passed.
An overpass twists elegantly across the freeway.
There's a car parked at the side of the road.
It's a red Prius. The same type of car Shareen died in.

The last text she sent me, the one that prompted my
final journey home.

A message seared into my brain.

'Im dead. I love u'

#

Under the overpass. I open the car door and get
out.

I take three steps toward the other car, but then I
stop.

I don't want to know what's inside, because I know
what's inside.

I don't want this job anymore.

Panting, I fumble the door of the rental car and
press the ignition.

The car finds its way to the airport.

I feel like I'm being sucked along a space in be-
tween worlds.

#

What is the truth and what is a lie?

If the truth is a human construction, can it with-
stand being iterated infinitely on our networks?

Someone is Fucking w

I pull in behind it, mouth dry and heart pounding.
Someone is fucking with me.

My phone pings.

'Where r u?'

#

Clammy flashback to ground zero. I'm running
through the empty house.
Crumpled foil blister packs of pills and the vodka
bottle on the counter.
The car in the garage.
Shareen in the driver's seat. Her face serene. The
doors locked to slow down any attempt to revive
her from the overdose.

Do human systems of building and communicating
knowledge distort truth simply by virtue of their
operation?

What if this infinite factory is only capable of pro-
ducing a graveyard of ossified lies?

What if all our networks flow into the River Styx?

A close-up photograph of a person's face and hand. The person is wearing a vibrant, multi-colored striped shirt. Their face is covered in a thick layer of light-colored dust or ash, with some darker smudges. Their hand is also covered in the same substance. A red rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text "with Me".

with Me

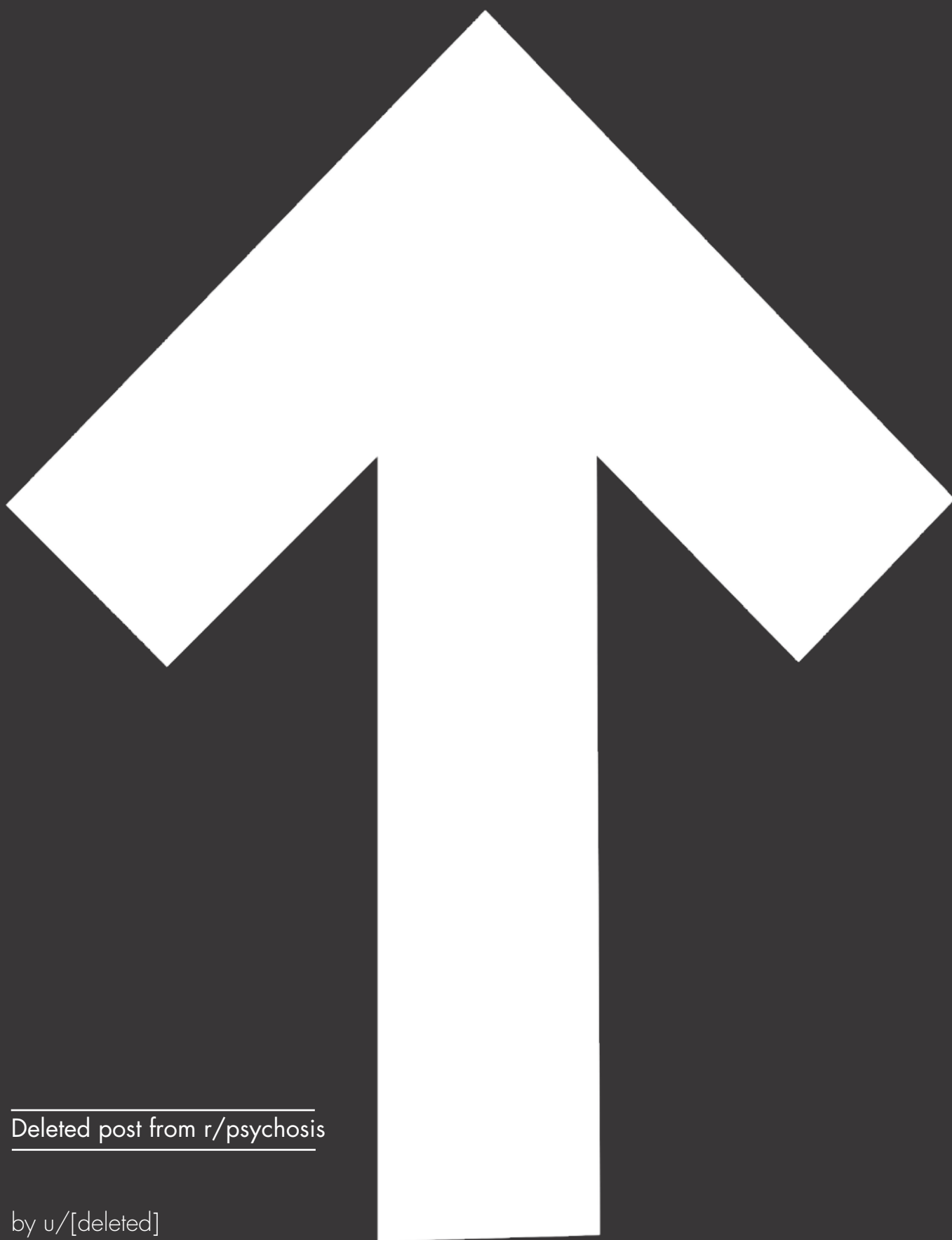
THE MYSTIC VETERINARIAN

Art by

Mark Rogers





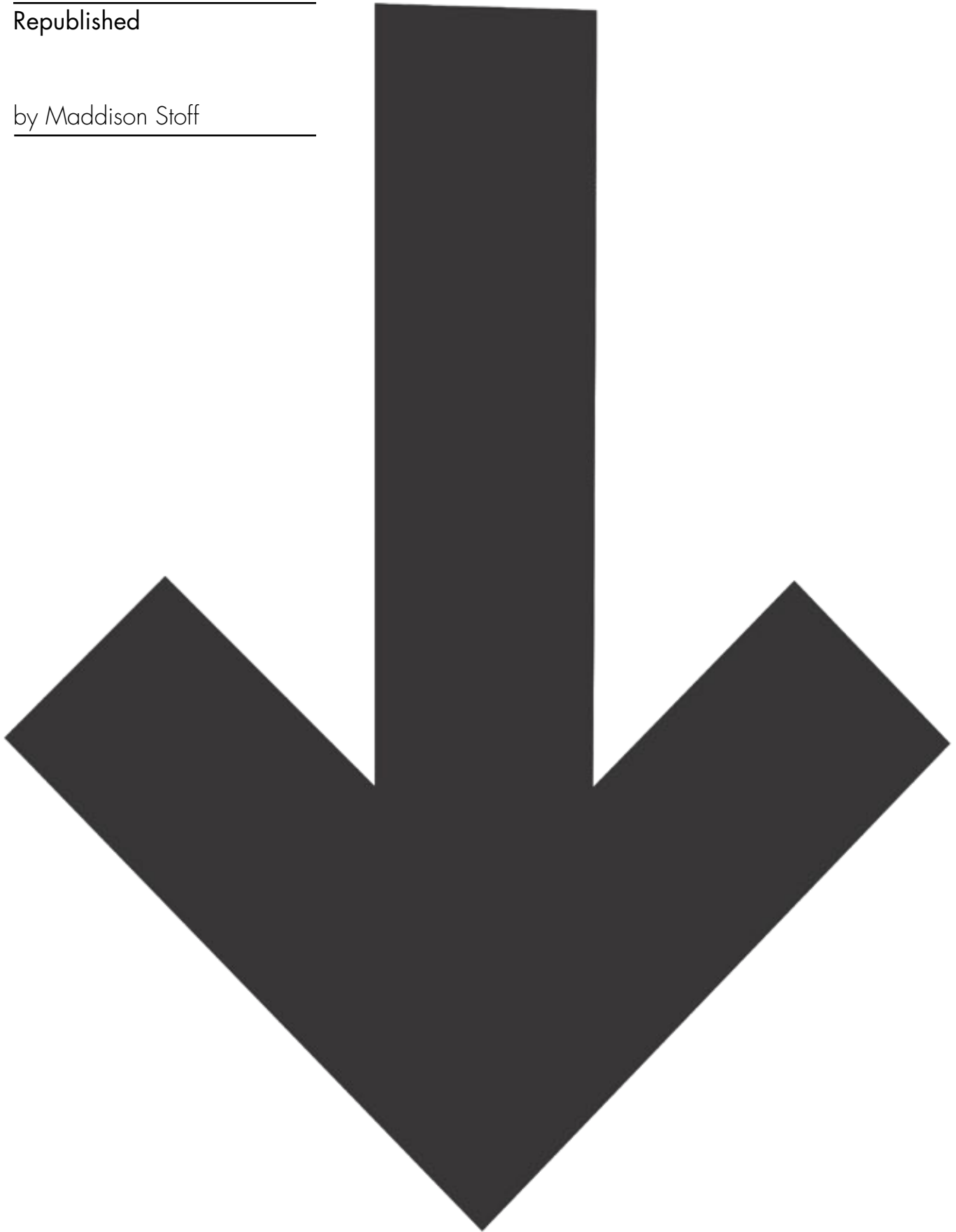


Deleted post from r/psychosis

by u/[deleted]

Republished

by Maddison Stoff



TW: persecution by the government (I'm sorry)

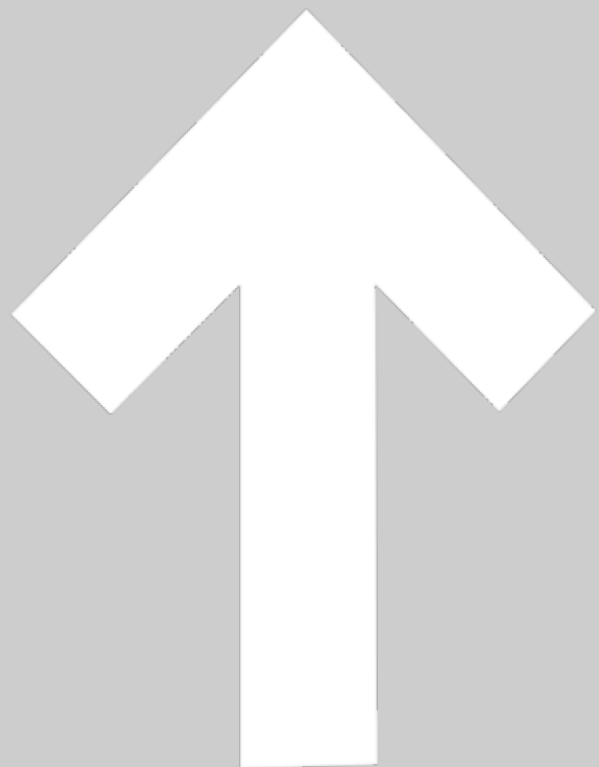
I'm writing to say that I can't do this anymore. I used to think my work was helping, that the conspiracies I spread were creating a better world. But their latest plan convinced me I was just too scared to see the truth, too afraid to lose the cheques they send me. Officially it's "disability support" for a condition I don't even have, or didn't when I first got their message.

Tell anyone the government has bugged your apartment and watches you from parked cars in the street. That it tells you what it does or doesn't want from you in auto-generated Youtube captions only you can recognize, and makes you focus on your job by using digital billboards to show you events from the future and rewards that it had promised you when you were living hand-to-mouth, bouncing from minimum wage job to minimum wage job, your opportunities diminishing with every second. They'll tell you you're psychotic: paranoid delusions, as my doctor said. They'll show you posts on social networks that you'll swear you never made and letters to the clinic that you know you didn't send, and the disappointment on their face will look so real, their worry for you so contagious, that you'll almost start to wonder if they're right.

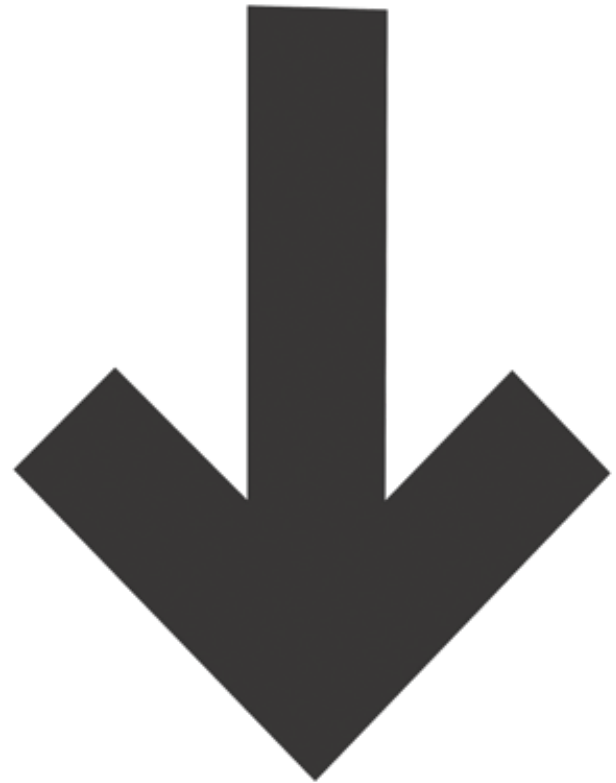
But the first message they sent me told me everything. Who they were and what they wanted, and showed me what I'd get if I worked for them. They only wanted one thing in return; only asked me to do the same thing I'd be doing anyway: obsess over conspiracies. Post about them, make them if I liked. Anything I did would fall into their wider narrative. They sent a chart showing how everything worked, complete with information on their active projects. The image was too complex to explain but I took a screenshot, figuring correctly they'd delete all evidence afterwards.

The people running it shouldn't be seen as human anymore. That's not as crazy as it sounds, I swear.

I don't believe in 'reptilian shapeshifters', but I see them as a metaphor for something else: the myriad of ways the 1% who actually control society objectify us and train us not to think about our places in the world, or the lack of power we had to choose them. This worldview is anti-human AND dehumanizing: it causes you to shapeshift into a servant of the 'new world order' who manipulate the world to satisfy their basest, most 'reptilian' desires. The lizards want one world government? That's capitalism. It rules us even while we hurtle to our own extinction. Our religion? The invisible hand. The spiritual belief that all humans are aware of and working towards our individual self-interest according to the rules of rationality (a social construct they created in the ancient times, and manipulate directly with their plutocratic media empires and surveillance apparatuses today).



They'll allow their free-market mythology to replace god altogether when religion doesn't serve them anymore. We're taught by them to think that history supports their rhetoric, but it's all a lie. This is the only real conspiracy. All the other ones are fake, and I should know. It all started with 9/11: jet fuel can't melt steel beams, remember? That was their first major online project, and during indoc they still point to it as one of their biggest successes. Get people arguing over engineering, a conversation that requires expert knowledge, then encourage counter-memes that paint the people questioning the government's account of the event as either uncompassionate or crazy, using the conspiracy you've created to serve as your proof. Eventually, the argument feels pointless, and the facts behind the event seem like common knowledge, but in all the excitement, the most important question was left out of the mainstream conversation: did the Bush administration let it happen to promote surveillance culture and American exceptionalism, and build political consensus for the wars for oil overseas, and the white supremacist ethnostate that's still to come? Our government has learned from history and Edward Bernays (who is still innocuously and purposefully remembered as the "father of public relations" rather than the reason why democracies worldwide are quietly converting into fascist states), that there are better ways to run authoritarian regimes than killing dissidents or censoring the flow of information. (So when you see them use these tactics, you know they're out of better options.) Extrajudicial killings and censorship can draw attention to their plans; better to let the population continue to labor under the illusion of democracy. Let them believe our governments have got our best interests at heart. That protest works. That your vote matters. That it's possible to change the world without resorting to bloody revolution. The Market will solve all our problems if only we remove all the rules and regulations that might get in its way. That capitalism, despite its flaws, is a perfect system – certainly better than any Communist world-gulag that Marx dreamed up – that the fault is not systemic but personal. That you only need to work harder and longer and give up more of yourself if you wish to thrive under it.



This group isn't the Freemasons or the Illuminati. They're a small department of the US government whose members call themselves our economic hitmen. An eye of providence in a gunsight is their calling card. The symbol is their only proper name. People like me are their shadow army. It's impossible to know how many of us there are: impossible to separate us from the bots, the paid commenters, the fake news manufacturers, whistleblowers, grifters, the activists, or the rubes. The only difference is that we know what they want. Part of how they keep us under their thumb is by showing us our options. A game of telephone between the eye and someone interviewing you is all it takes to make sure that you'll never work another job again. Or find a rental property without them. Keep friends. Have relationships. Whatever it is that you want or need, they'll know about it before they contact you. Then you're under their control. It doesn't matter where you are, they'll find you. The success of my group has led to sister groups worldwide.



They're conspiring together, and the billionaires are funding all of them. I'm sorry that I helped them for as long as I did. It wasn't just the money; I also believed the narrative they spun.

I thought the problem was that some people were bad, that the order of the world had been perverted. They let me think they were accelerationists, deliberately supporting people ignorant or nihilistic enough to admit to being bigoted, supporting rapists, apathetic to the suffering of the people living in the countries that they led, or too rich to be punished by the law, as a catalyst for systematic change. They told me Elon Musk was funding them, Bill Gates, Kanye West, and Oprah Winfrey. People who seemed trustworthy back in 2016. A lifetime ago in internet time. I thought it was possible to use your power as a billionaire to change things for the better. I was wrong, desperately wrong.

There's a chance they'll gaslight you for reading this, I'm sorry. Hopefully they won't employ you too. They killed the journalist who exposed the Panama Papers. Everybody knows it.

The reasons for the assassination were twofold. One: To serve as an object lesson for any other journalists who dreamed of bucking the system; and Two: To stop Daphne Caruana Galizia from digging any further, from revealing the providential conspiracy beneath the web of global tax evasion. The British branch killed Mark Fisher. I'm surprised they bothered, but the British branch is like that; more concerned with propriety than with the actual (limited) reach of a depressed college professor obsessed with Jungle music and hauntology (whatever that is). When it came out that he'd killed himself some Twitter leftists "joked" that he was murdered by the government. Our people pushed back, claimed the joke was in poor taste, and the conspiracy theory was quickly buried. Now when you type his name plus "murder" into Google every link is about the 2003 murder of a teenager with the same name.

When they (we?) killed Epstein, I thought I was out of a job. It was too egregious, too obvious that this man with dirt enough to bury the world's elite could wind up dead in protective custody. We kept working our current projects – soldiers in the endless culture wars on gun control, abortion, trans rights, and comic book movies – but the new tickets slowed down. After a couple of weeks when it was obvious they'd gotten away with it, things went back to normal. A providence coworker dropped one of the Epstein tapes into our private burner Discord server. I never watched it – couldn't bring myself to do it – but the thumbnail was bad enough. A then-future president and multi-millionaire with a skinny stick of a girl. In that image I saw the entire world writ small and pixelated: we are the girl, and the elite will fuck us and toss us aside without a second thought.

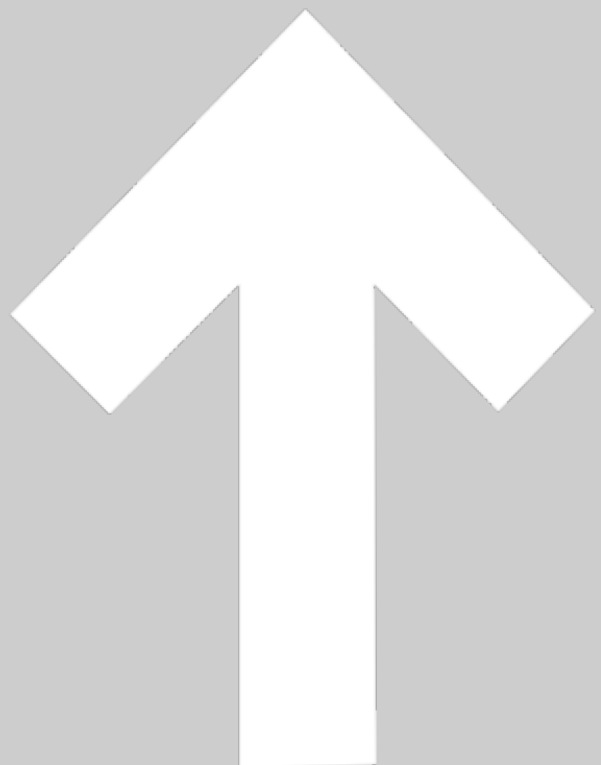
I don't know if anyone is going to believe this. I don't even know if anyone will see this post. But the thoughts of paranoid psychotics aren't recorded by the "living program" running PRISM's database, the demihuman information processing device that Snowden's leak was planned to cover up, and people in your state of mind are closer to the truth than anyone expects.

The thing is, we don't only specialize in winning the memetic war. The eye has weaponized disinformation into a platform for gaslighting on a global scale, which rewires our brains in a synthetic imitation of psychosis. It's not the same as actual psychosis: it's psychosis they control, which starts and ends according to their wishes. This leads into the next stage of their project, the goal of which, I mentioned earlier, is the full conversion of our pseudo-democratic states into isolated eco-fascist enclaves organized on white supremacist principles. Worldwide climate collapse really is coming – they know it, they just pretend not to. But a much smaller (and whiter) global population could still survive. If you've read The Turner Diaries, you know what to expect. The eye of providence is using it (and Atlas Shrugged,) as the rhetoric model to retool the USA into a fortress-country to protect the rich and privileged from climate change and its expected tidal wave of refugees. Brexit had the same goal in the UK. The truth is, billionaire deniers always understood the science, but they also knew that capitalism wouldn't be able to survive the changes that we'd have to make to stop it. They decided they would downsize us instead, starting with the people with the least to offer them: the communists and the disabled poor in the West. At least people in the global south had value as underpaid labor. Once automation is advanced enough too, the full extent of their planned genocide will be revealed. But humans are communal animals, and open animosity towards the weakest in our pack can sometimes lead to unexpected problems. We've established fear around antifa for years, even though it's mostly been the people that they're fighting instigating the violence in America. Our gaslighting encouraged right-wing terrorists to breed fear in our chosen scapegoats while encouraging the left to further militancy, a project which was so far been successful. But this was only groundwork for their latest plan: again, I'm fucking sorry, but a dirty bomb will be detonated on US soil. The bomb will take out an entire town or part of a big city – they haven't released the target to us lower-level drones yet – first spawning apocalyptic tension between us and Iran, China, and North Korea before almost leading to a second civil war.

After weeks of chaos, we'll identify the bomber as a schizophrenic leftist hoping to bring communism to America, and the people will be furious. Articles will be deployed en masse about an epidemic of "cultural psychosis" in the country: an epidemic that we started, and control. They'll use it to justify detaining leftists and psychotics, which will quickly lead to violent confrontations.

The prisons and our mental hospitals will not have enough resources to process the detainees, so they'll set up camps to hold people instead. Eventually these camps will get too full, and prisoners too low-skilled for manufacturing work will be dispatched to India, Africa, and South America to fill out the labor pool of slaves mining precious gems and rare minerals. I don't know what anyone can do to stop it now but everybody needs to be prepared. Reach out to your comrades now, and get this message out there any way you can. By the time that you can verify this story it'll be too late.

tldr: You're all unsuspecting victims in a genocidal, plutocratic, global scheme, and I should know because I still work for the schemers.







THE NECROMOTHER AND THE INFLUENCER

Words by **Gui Machiavelli**

Art by **Solvent**

The science of human nature. The anniversary of Her death. Rich workwoman of pornocapital, coloniser of smut, heiress of snuff. People flocked to Her grave. I stood among them under the rain, covering myself with a computer sleeve. We chanted Her words of wisdom, which, in their abstruseness, brought us closer to the Truth and the Understanding.

„You're peng," we chanted.

„Just click on subscribe, love," we muttered over our tears.

„Don't be doing all-caps-shady stuff, you know," we reprimanded each other.

Some of us lay down, caressed the ground and lit up our cellphones' torches. A man in his twenties read transcripts of Her videos – porno and make-up tutorial alike.

„The mere skank is a character that's supposed to give nothing back to society.

She's all up in her stuff, taking some cock here, licking some pussy there, hardcore stuff...and if she ain't recording it no one's gaining anything, you know? I'm a reasonable being; I want to be a practical slut who only does stuff that everyone can do and see and be like, 'hey, that's cool, that makes sense.'"

Amen, little dead sister, amen.

Staring out of the womb. Amidst the madness of grief, the crowd exhumed Her body, then staggered back in shock. Her corpse was pregnant. We did not know how or when this had happened, but our eyes were transfixed by the bloated and distended belly in front of us. I retched; a man by my side vomited and passed out.

A woman, an ex-nun and now a midwife, approached with extended arms. A baby – a failed copy of another person.

A dead human – the conjoined concepts of death and mankind.

Two children, likely brothers, applied pressure on the belly. The ex-nun received the melting fetus and cuddled it. We gave it a family and in return it gifted us with infinite wisdom and intelligence and goodness.

Whatever it could have been, the stillborn child was now not just an amalgamate of impressions – nausea, putridness, congealed blood, grey skin, fungal decomposition – but an idea, something we could stand behind: our guide, our saviour, our idol's angel sent to continue Her mission.

„Hand in hand now.“ That was my favourite line from Her last video. She said it as She poured a bottle of mascara on Her hands, before She started writing unintelligible glyphs on Her sternum. The bullet chat had been frenetic, often occupying most of the video frame; both my phone and computer crashed when I tried to gaze beyond that intense and torpid abscess of ever-streaming data.

In the present, holding the hand of Her stillborn necrobaby, I could not avoid thinking of Her smile and Her ink-stained hands.

„You look just like Her in that video,“ I whispered and touched its nose. I brought it close to my heart and it was like holding a reliquary. Could Her beauty, Her joy, Her life, be more present to me than it was now? How could I doubt Her power and energy with such a clear proof of Her empyrean swag in my hands?

Primordial memetic fork. We had escaped the police. Helicopters darted frenetically in the sky above, looking for us with searchlights and playing fast-food jingles. We were loving it: running through dark alleys, tying our mobile phones to stray dogs and cats so we could not be tracked – only saddened we could not livestream the chase.

Laughing and breathless, we discussed whether our love for Her was something that transcended reason and existence; if, just like numbers and equations, it would still remain after the planet exploded; would our love for Her exist forever as an inescapable cosmological constant?

How could we not copy Her, how could we not base our whole existence on our impressions of Her after She revealed herself to our dreary realities? The purity of Her idea reshaped our lives. There was only one real way of judging things: were they a logical extension of the terms of the idea of Her, or were they facts of the matter that She existed?

There's no such thing as chance.

The agitations of passion. We discussed whether we should give Her baby a name, whether we were even worthy to do so. In the end, all we were able to agree upon was that no one could ever know the name we gave it; we addressed it only as the Influencer and its progenitor became known to us only as the Necromother, her sacred prior name left unspoken.

Splinter groups began to form among us. Mine believed that the baby was not delivered by us, but the opposite: we had been delivered unto the world by it. The original idea of our lives was Her existence; all else came to us through experience.

Regular people based their whole lives upon the assumption that things would continue as they had always been, and that reality was immutable, yet our Necromother's videos had been designed to show these expectations were flawed, that it was not certain the sun would rise tomorrow, that concealing imperfections was not the true aim of make-up. Like a Humean glitzwhore, She told us between moneyshots that the only thing that led us to connect the cause of an event to its effect was the assumption that things would repeat themselves.

For me, it was equally logical to think Her child had brought us here, in its inanimate wisdom.

Our threads are too short to fathom such immense abysses. The police had found us. Some of us were captured and tortured – severed from the connection with the Influencer, their profiles were erased and their souls haunted by the echoes of likes and views blinking out of existence.



Some accepted this as the Influencer's wish, believing that nothing in the world could have happened if it had not been wished by the shrivelled fetus we loved so much and its holy Necromother who had given our lives meaning and our minds a body.

„When I touch the ground, it is the Necromother who interfaces my body with the dirt. Watch Her videos, hear Her words, 2 minutes in on Her Another 10 tips for better skin: 'When you use this brand of concealer, you can think it only works because I am there with you, putting every molecule of pigment on your skin, hon.'"

Everyday happiness. Three of us grabbed the Influencer and ran away in the middle of the night. We sought refuge in a community of nomadic people. Digital ascetics. They knew better than asking questions about what we reverently carried and watched over.

I secretly bought a new phone which I used to monitor the most- and least-viewed videos worldwide, the best barometer for the structural integrity of reality. Patterns emerged: nigredo was everywhere, bursting at the seams of existence. These were the top three types of videos: content creators going catatonic mid-stream for hours, cheered on by their followers; academic lectures consisting solely of sobbing professors amassed billions of views; livestreams of people barricaded in their rooms, mumbling prophecies about the sun never setting again.

Was there really no way of proving causation? Had it always been like this?

My theory: when the Necromother – the original, a priori idea of Her existence – got in touch with the world, reality became Her corpse bride. The always-already decomposing reality penetrated Her being, weakened Her purity. In revenge, she tried to necrotise the connection between cause and effect. With Her death, whatever remained of causation was running down our crying eyes like cheap mascara.

There's no such thing as chance. A server farm. That is where we believed the Influencer could finally reach its true potential. Being around it had begun to change us: we saw ley lines carrying bits and pieces of meatspace into cyberspace, a giant tree hovering on top of a skyscraper and a constant drizzle of runes calculating probabilities of every possible event at any given moment, as if it were a slow-motion spitting on the face of determinism.

The falling of a pebble may extinguish the sun. „Who's to say that if I straighten my hair the world won't be a better place? Like, can any of y'all prove it? Didn't think so, bitches." That was Her second video, notes on hair straighteners. The four of us were laying on a soggy mattress: myself, the Nigerian computer girl, the middle-aged ex-bank-teller (he had been automated away), and the Influencer.

**On the third day,
the server farm
became a forest.**



We dreamt of the pics we would take if we could post online, imagining angles that could perfectly frame the disconnection between cause and effect, the impossibility of ethics if all our actions had been determined thousands of years ago, and the Influencer's cute little misshapen fingers.

Could She, our innominate, undefinable Necromother, know which colour looked best with livor mortis?

Thousands of fans. „I think She wanted to decompose causation," the Nigerian girl whispered, her voice almost fading beneath the sounds of the server farm. The baby seemed happier here. „But She couldn't do it alone, that's why She gave us the Influencer." Holding the baby, I got up and walked to the closest rack; delicately, I raised its hand until a finger touched the casing. For a short moment I saw an image forming on its skin.

„She probably wanted to run away from Her body," said the middle-aged man. „I heard She got accidentally stuck inside it, that She was in truth just an abstract concept trapped in flesh and electromagnetic fields. And that only after this traumatic imprisonment we started seeing things as cause and effect."

There was no necessary connection. On the third day, the server farm became a forest. Cables were vines, servers were the broad trunks of hardwood trees, and we were mutant amalgams of animal parts protecting our young, precious child.

We were invisible to the janitors and sysadmins and engineers who regularly visited. It was as if we lived in a dimension unreachable to their eyes. The Influencer had become livelier, as if joy had begun to emanate from it. „The third world war will not be physical and will not be cultural, it will be metaphysical," it said once, without moving its mouth. Did we hear things that were not there? Were our ears failing us?

Ontological putrefaction. The middle-aged man looked at me, his paws stained with blood. „I did not do anything. Suddenly there was blood." He climbed to the highest branch of a tree. „I taste something sweet, like a mix of honey and copper."

The Influencer was the only thing that hadn't changed.

Even the workers had now been altered and refused to leave the farm. They looked like lewd anime divas, all identical. They seemed to notice us, sometimes, between one choreography routine and the other, but did not seem to mind our presence.

Some of the plants had become pinker, fleshier. I did not hunger – when had we last eaten anything? – but I ate a raspberry plucked from a server rack bush. Its insides were not sweet, but umami.

An austere, brutish rip. „I like liquid because it spreads easy – like me, lol – but also because it makes me look more like something that's not human."

The signs were so clear, once we searched for them. One of the trees that had not turned pink started to fruit, growing glass jars filled with transparent humours and brains. Looking closely, we could see all the Necromother's videos on the bubbles that formed in the liquid.

Our deity, our holy Necromother, did not speak to us with the works of nature, but with our own inner voices. Our deity was reason, once imprisoned in flesh, being weakened and decomposed by it. The memetic war of causation had been the background of all we knew as history.

Unbridled reason. The Nigerian girl was now part of the trees and the middle-aged man clumsily tried to mimic the sysadmins' dance routines. During their breaks, they watched in awe as the Influencer articulated a stream of posts online that ate away at the limits of the enslaved reason. Between make-up, lewd live-streams, pharmaceutical porn and deep fakes of pregnant men giving birth, it brought forth the old argument of the unimaginable infinities embedded within floating point arithmetic operations that showed the precise moments when human cognition breaks down.

I could feel the presence of the Necromother stronger than ever. We produced mobile phones from our gigantic ears, helped by porn actors and other sex workers, and followed the Influencer in a disconnected chain of events. The atavistic incongruities between what we knew as reason and its true form were finally made clear. A pebble brought down the sun.

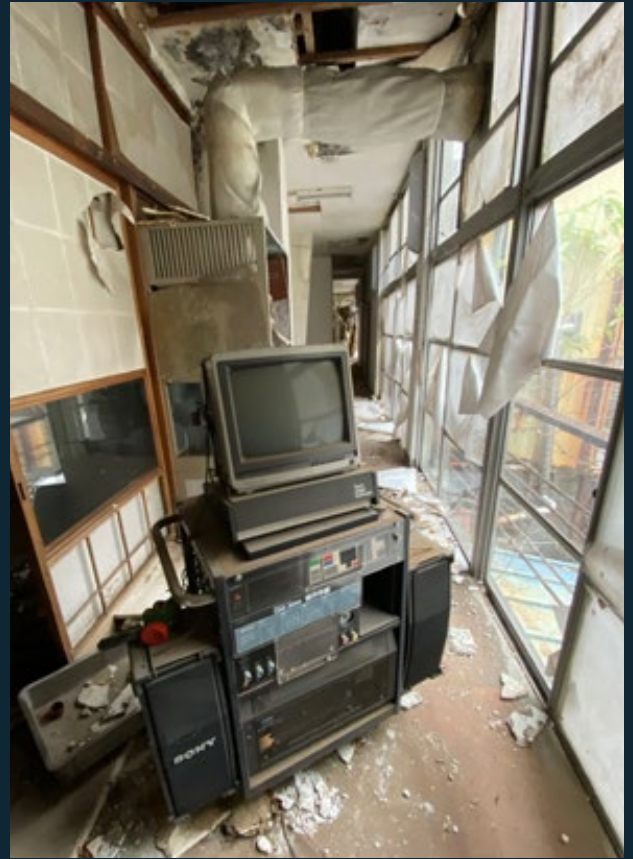


TROUBLE IN JAPAN

A Photo Essay By James Straker







Words by

Dan Hill

YOUR POWER STRUCTURE



E IS IN ANOTHER CASTLE

YOUR POWER STRUCTURE IS IN ANOTHER CASTLE

The tower surrounds itself with high walls and a security gate. You see guards clad in blue patrolling, their earpieces abuzz with chatter. You spy a gap in the barbed wire atop the walls. Seconds later you're inside the compound. You slip through the manicured foliage, avoiding the guard's view. As you crouch in the undergrowth you spy your first CCTV camera. You extend an arm, the silenced pistol already in your grip, and put a bullet through the lens. The camera wilts, its death throes swallowed by the noise of the city. You move in through a side door and close it behind you. The target is somewhere above. You hide yourself, waiting for the tower to whisper its weakness.

THE CAMERA WILTS, ITS DEATH THROES SWALLOWED BY THE NOISE OF THE CITY.

The ability of the rich and powerful to impress themselves on their surroundings has been with us since the beginning. Castles, citadels, and lately skyscrapers, are all part of this process. In his book, **Vertical**, Professor Stephen Graham says such spaces are bastions of "a tiny cabal of the super-rich inhabiting vertical archipelagos of protected spaces, using the mobile and communications grids that connect them together."

The **Hitman** video game franchise has always taken aim at the rich and powerful, presenting them as targets to eliminate. But since the franchise's soft reboot in 2016 its sights have narrowed to include the architects of disaster capitalism such as corporate scientists, billionaires, bank CEOs, and even a set of socialite twins whose fortune is fuelled by climate change denial. **Hitman** now leans hard into its *anti-capitalist* curve.

Agent 47, the game's protagonist, is a child of the Cold War, a product of cloning and gene experimentation beyond the Iron Curtain. Free of his former shackles and masters he now stalks what Matt Jones (in a post entitled **The Bourne Infrastructure**) calls:

"Schengen - a connected, border-less Mitteleurope that can be hacked, accessed and traversed - not without effort, but with determination, stolen vehicles and the right train timetables."

Jones' is talking specifically about the Bourne franchise, but it could also describe Agent 47 as he moves across the globe:

"(He) wraps cities, autobahns, ferries and train terminuses around him as the ultimate body-armour, in ways that Old Etonians could never dream of."

With the 2016 reboot, Agent 47 became a spectre born of the rubble that modern neo-liberalism also rose from.

He is the bug in the software, present since the beginning, silent until now.

The series' intricate environments are all about observing systems, their flow, structure and then learning to infiltrate the system or exploit its flaws. This process often involves spaces restricted to the player and NPCs. The rich and the powerful have control over these spaces, locking them down using surveillance technology, barriers or human labour/armed guards. The default state has them holding the balance of power.


You see a member of the film crew taking a cigarette break. You pull him silently into the shadows, restricting his airway until he goes limp, placing his unconscious form at the bottom of a nearby lift shaft. You take his clothes and look up. Once construction is finished this space will take employees and VIPs to where they need to go. For now, it serves another purpose. You climb. You stop when you hear the quiet hum of excited voices. As you thread yourself into the gathered crew you hear talk of an industrial fan being used in the film shoot. Curious, you head out onto the decking, a strange mix of wooden floors, garish portraits of the target and minimalist water features.

Cables and film equipment litter the decking as bored actors gather at the sides. You notice the fan pointed towards scenery, ready for the film's final shot.

YOU NOD AND SMILE.

A script nearby tells you the climax involves the love interest giving herself over to the hero, brazenly portrayed by the target of course. Like the tower, it's not subtle. The director calls for the crew to take their places. In the bustle you remove the inhibitor on the fan. The director glances your way and asks you to man the fan's controls, to be ready for her signal. You nod and smile.

The idea of an environment as an extension of a target's power is fully explored in **Hitman 2**'s Mumbai level in a myriad of ways. Here 47 has several targets, all former members of a criminal gang called The Crows. The first target is Dawood Rangan, possibly based on the infamous Dawood Ibrahim, the head of Indian crime syndicate, D-Company. In the game, Rangan is a movie producer, using his business to launder money and fund his shadier work. His base of operations, a skyscraper under construction, can be seen from almost anywhere in the level. The structure is also home to a film shoot, Rangan's latest vanity project. Dawood never leaves the upper floors unless 47 intervenes.



Instead, the majority of opportunities come from the player infiltrating the tower, ascending to Rangan's level, and peeling back the surrounding layers of the system to get to him.

Dawood's tower, and the Mumbai level as a whole, evokes the work of Johnny Miller. Miller uses drone photography to show Mumbai from the air. His work shows the very real physical manifestation of the class divide in the city with haphazard slums pushed up against gleaming spires.

Currently, Mumbai has 73,000 people per square mile and is the 10th richest city in the world with an estimated wealth of \$184 billion. Despite this, 41% of its population (9 million) live in slum-like conditions, all against a horizon increasingly dominated by symbols of power and narcissism.

These buildings mirror others going up in New York, London and cities of new wealth in the Middle East and South Asia. A 2013 ArchDaily survey found that of the combined height of the world's ten tallest skyscrapers, 27% was just superfluous, there for no other function than making up the numbers. For instance, 85 floors of the Jeddah's Kingdom Tower are too narrow to house anything; they are just odes to vanity cast in glass and steel.


The second target, Vanya Shah, is a crime lord from a long line of Dacoity bandits who believes she is the rightful ruler of the city. She bases herself in a former rail yard.

The building has seen better days, but it's an example of the 'old' kind of power that Shah savours. It is a reclaimed architectural remnant of British rule and empire, as well as a bulwark against the surrounding slums. In his book **Out of the Mountains**, David Kilcullen argues that when traditional power structures fail, criminal networks often move in to provide an alternative, offering the equivalent of public services, banks and other institutions. Inside Shah's headquarters a line of citizens plead for money or food. They wait their turn, stand before Shah and state their case, waiting for judgement.

Shah is capitalising on the failures of the structures and empire that came before. Her guards wear elaborate, traditional-looking uniforms. Her private quarters are housed inside a luxurious, wood-panelled train car.

The train's original function has ceased, instead it now serves as an echo, a vain projection of Shah's hopes for power.

YOU DISAPPEAR INTO THE THRONG,
WRAPPING THE CROWD AROUND
YOURSELF AS YOU HEAD TOWARDS
THE TAILOR'S SHOP.



In the slums there are no cameras or high fences. The only security you see are the men standing on rooftops and in alleyway entrances, clutching AK47s, all members of a local street gang. Each of your targets rose through their ranks, lifting themselves from their poverty until it resided far below them. The crowds and torrent of voices are overwhelming. You stop and pretend to browse the wares of a local trader. Amid the din, you hear two men talk about a local tailor who has been asked to provide a sari to the second target.

You disappear into the throng, wrapping the crowd around yourself as you head towards the tailor's shop.

The third target in Mumbai is Wazir Kale. He is known by his nickname, The Maelstrom. Unlike the others he has no base of operations. Additionally, Agent 47 has no intelligence as to what Kale even looks like. His appearance in the level itself is randomised each time you play. There are, however, clues dotted around the level that can reveal enough to provide a path to his elimination. This is a fairly unique set up in the Hitman franchise, bringing with it a comparison to 47 himself.

Throughout **Hitman 2**, 47 makes use of a number of disguises. With these he is able to gain access to parts of the level previously restricted to him. If the disguise is blown 47 can don a new one and return to anonymity. This is 47's power. With no nationality, name or identification he is invisible to state systems of surveillance.

Wazir Kale mirrors 47's state of anonymity. His power and wealth are projected into the environment not through architecture or physical symbols of power but with his ability to move through the system free of the panopticon of modern day capitalism. This system is one that 47 relies on, with information, imagery, rituals and routines all forming part of his target's dossier. Kale is the exception to this rule initially. Despite this setback, 47 is able to piece together enough clues to eliminate Kale.

NO CAMERAS, NO GUARDS, JUST A LOCK TO BE PICKED.

To reach this point 47 descends beneath the city, into the bowels and maze-like corridors of The Crows' hideout. It's telling that only a place beyond the view of skyscrapers, Shah's guards or the crowds of the slums provides the means for 47 to move on his target. By infiltrating this physical manifestation of Kale's past, 47 becomes the boogeyman of cutthroat capitalists everywhere.

It's easy to enter the tailor's shop. No cameras, no guards, just a lock to be picked. Neutralising the staff and tailor is simple. Dressed as him you convince a pair of the second target's men that you're looking to talk.

Despite its tangible grandeur, the target's headquarters has seen better days. The domed roof is weathered with rust, the glass somehow still intact but coated in bird shit. Grass has reclaimed the train tracks outside and locomotives sit like sleeping behemoths. You're led through the waiting crowd from the nearby slums. They gather to ask for food, money or other necessities. Here, in the dark corners of the city, the government is blind.

The notion of 47 as a primal force of justice in **Hitman 2** is one that builds through the narrative as he is tasked with navigating ever more secure spaces. Mumbai comes towards the end of the game's second act. Previously, 47 has infiltrated a modern hideaway on a New Zealand beach (complete with ineffective panic room), a racetrack and big-tech HQ in Miami and the Colombian village of Santa Fortuna.

COMPLETE WITH INEFFECTIVE PANIC ROOM

Each of the targets are involved in some way with Providence, the antagonistic Illuminati-like organisation.

After Mumbai, 47 is tasked with infiltrating suburbia, a development called Whittleton Creek in Vermont. His main target there is Janus, a legendary former KGB operative recruited into Providence and head of the related Ark Society.

In February 2018, Mark O'Connell reported for **The Guardian** that a number of billionaires were buying property in New Zealand and the Pacific region. This included bane of **Gawker**, Peter Thiel, buying up a 477 acre property on South Island. O'Connell's report made it clear the group were influenced by the book **The Sovereign Individual: How to Survive and Thrive During the Collapse of the Welfare State** by James Dale Davidson and William Rees-Mogg (yes, father of Jacob). The book predicts the collapse of the democratic nation-state and the rise of a new 'cognitive elite' who will command vast resources and be free of the influence of the nation-state in its current form. This group of the 'cognitive elite' are mirrored perfectly in **Hitman 2**'s Ark Society. The group's members can actively afford to buy themselves a place in whatever arises from the ashes of the system they took advantage of.

Like 47, Ark's leader Janus is a product of the Cold War. His exploits are legendary in the game's lore but by the time of the Whittleton Creek level he is a frail old man with a bodyguard, live-in nurse, and a small security detail.

Like Kale, and 47 himself, Janus has chosen to eschew physical symbols of power and instead wraps himself in picture-perfect Americana. Janus uses this camouflage to hide himself away from the world and those who would come looking. Symbols and artefacts of Janus' past life and missions sit hidden, like Kale's, beneath the ground, gathering dust in a basement. Despite this, 47 stalks pristine lawns, neighbourhood barbecues and muffin stands to get to Janus. Time, space and even middle-class anonymity are not enough to stop 47. But it's only during the game's next, and final, level that the game solidifies 47's place as the great grim reaper coming for the rich and powerful.

You take down the second target's measurements as she stands with her back to you. The train car around you has retained the splendour of its former life. A long time ago, powerful men would ride these cars to and fro, sheltered from those they lorded it over.

The second target sends a message by choosing to sleep and eat in this relic. She preaches fairness and the common touch, but is she any different than what came before? The question is pushed from your mind as opportunity presents itself. You pull the measuring tape taut and pull. The target struggles, but the outcome is inevitable.

The final level of **Hitman 2** takes place on the fictional Isle of Sgail, a small island in the Orkney chain in Scotland. The island is home to an imposing castle, which in turn houses the annual meeting of the Ark Society. The castle formerly served as a prison for aristocrats who could not be executed by the British crown due to their status, wealth and power. The spectre of empire raises its heads once more.

47's targets on the isle are the Washington sisters, a pair of socialites whose family fortune comes from their grandfather's mega-church and their father's climate change denying think tank. Despite this, both siblings and the others gathered at the castle are highly concerned regarding the impending collapse of society with climate change as catalyst.

Sgail is the ultimate expression of power and wealth impressing itself upon the physical world. towering battlements are a celebration of the conveniences of power, past and present, serving as the ultimate safe haven for the global elite.





It is a panic room writ-large, a space for the powerful where they can voice their true opinions, be their true selves, albeit from behind ridiculous masks and costumes. These masks hew to tradition and what came before. It's these symbols that ultimately provide 47 with the means to swoop in and complete his work.

One such ritual involves the symbolic burning of money by a master of ceremonies in the courtyard as others look on. Elsewhere, preparations are being made for the funeral of the previous level's target, Janus. The funeral is an elaborate affair too, involving a blindfolded harpist and a ceremonial dagger.

Meanwhile, prospective patrons of the Ark Society wander the island in a sexed up treasure hunt in search of tokens that will grant them an audience with one of the Washington sisters. The hunt affords 47 a face to face with one of the targets merely by having a tuxedo and the right amount of tokens.

The ritual burning provides the opportunity for an accident to occur and Janus' funeral requires the VIPs to all be in the same place at once. Pomp, tradition and pageantry all provide weaknesses for 47 to exploit.

Even the castle itself, a true embodiment of power, is a weakness in disguise, being home to numerous secret passages, dark corners and dank basements. The regimented hierarchy the Ark Society insists on provides 47 with the means to carry out his mission. Subduing one of the hooded elite guards or cloaked VIPS and switching clothes with them provides 47 the ability to roam most of the castle grounds at will.

Sgail is power cast in stone. But in adhering to the systems and practices that have got them where they are, the Ark Society have handed 47 the keys to their downfall.

Back among the crowds you realise the third target won't be easy. No pictures. No file. He has no headquarters or regular haunts. He is a ghost. Despite this there are rumours of an old acquaintance who lives in the house atop the nearby hill.

You are beginning to understand that the powerful are never truly invisible. They can't help but leave a wake in their path, purposeful or otherwise. Their need to hew to what came before, their need to attempt to cast the world in their own image will always be their downfall.



Like everyone else in this city you stand in the shadow of the tower. Unlike them you see it for what it is - a chink in their armour. You stand and wait. Time is on your side.

BACK AMONG THE CROWDS YOU REALISE THE THIRD TARGET WON'T BE EASY. NO PICTURES. NO FILE.

Hitman 2 is part of a larger narrative about power, wealth and how both are imposed through the environment as agents of control. This attempted stranglehold is one we still wrestle with, a constant see-saw battle between the citadel and those below. The Mass Transit Railway in Hong Kong runs the length and breadth of the territory, a network fully utilised by the anti-Beijing protests. Protesters were able to attend a location, attend a gathering and then hop back on becoming one with the network once more (all part of their 'be water' strategy).

Citing damage to some of the stations, authorities were quick to institute a raft of early closures, taking away an important tool in the protester's arsenal. Previous events such as derailments and other accidents had produced no such closures. This was a move to hinder protesters, nothing more. Similar circumstances arose on the Paris Metro during the Gilets Jaunets protests.

This is power thrust into everyday space, a constant battle to hinder access based on class and privilege. CCTV cameras aid identification so masks are worn. In turn legislation is passed to prohibit the wearing of masks in public. Move. Counter-move. 47 shows us hope is not lost. The powers that be will always try to impose their will upon the spaces we move through. As they wrap anonymity around themselves they will insist we show them our flaws and fears, forgetting their own in the process. As they build their edifices of power they will be too focused on what came before to notice the cracks in the facade. Stirring up storms for their own gain they'll fail to notice the water seeping through the gaps.

AFFERATACUS

Mixed Media

KOKOFREAKBEAN



The Big White House



બાંધકામક જીવ્યુ: Tom Lynch

In 2015, Ridley Scott gave an interview to *The Guardian* in which he discussed his plans for the opening scene of a *Blade Runner* sequel.

*“Turn around and you see a massive tree, just dead, but the tree is being supported and kept alive by wires that are holding the tree up. It’s a bit like *The Grapes of Wrath*; there’s dust, and the tree is still standing. By that tree is a traditional, *Grapes of Wrath*-type white cottage with a porch. Behind it at a distance of two miles, in the twilight, is this massive combine harvester that’s fertilising this ground. You’ve got 16 Klieg lights on the front, and this combine is four times the size of this cottage. And now a spinner [a flying car] comes flying in, creating dust. Of course, traditionally chased by a dog that barks.”*

Scott did not direct the film in the end, and its opening sequence when it appeared showed many differences from this description. However in the phrase “traditional, *Grapes of Wrath*-type white cottage with a porch” he identified an image that is a commonplace of contemporary American science fiction cinema.

The western genre has an explicit interest in land, country and the historical milieu of American settlement in which farmhouses were central. By contrast, the genre of science fiction is held to be interested in the future and in unfamiliar things, things yet to be seen. The frequent recurrence of the “big white house” among its images is unexpected. Because this Big White House reappears with such monotonous and increasing regularity in big budget Hollywood science fiction, we should ask—why is it there? What does The Big White House mean?

When I say “science fiction” I don’t mainly mean to define a set of artistic or intellectual concerns, or formal properties shared by a category of works. Instead I mean a category that signals its approach to a prospective audience through development, casting,

promotion, and production. Science fiction is a marketing category for film studios and distributors—it’s a reproducible method for making money.

In today’s film industry this marketing category has vast cultural and commercial importance. Seven out of the top ten films at the box office in history can be identified as science fiction. All of these were produced within the last decade. These works share complex but formulaic plotting; wondrous, futuristic or impossible people, objects and events; furious computer-animated movement and action; and universally recognisable themes. Considering these other elements, it’s surprising to see again and again the humble, historical, static and traditional image of the Big White House.

It turns out there is more than one kind of Big White House. But in its most common form, the House can be thought of as a figure arranging several features which appear consistently from work to work. It’s detached and isolated, separate from other dwellings. It’s capacious, large enough to live in and to raise a family. Family members—perhaps a wife and children—are often adjacent. It’s somewhat old, at least decades, perhaps generations. Its architecture is invisibly traditional and American, with no surprising features. It’s attached to and surveys land, in a landscape that may include woods, gardens or fields. There’s often a work vehicle or a barn nearby, suggesting honest labour. It’s humbly but solidly constructed and decorated, usually out of timber, and is equipped with equally humble and solid timber furniture. Where the house appears, nature is pristine and destruction is absent.

Through its features the image of the Big White House speaks clearly of security, peace, fertility, family, ownership and virtue.

As the Big White House stands, it’s a straight road to arrive at a postcolonial reading.



Images of the Big White House in: *Avengers*, *Minority Report*, *Looper* and *Interstellar*.

In most of its instances it is a settler's dwelling. Locating the virtue and aspirations of the heroes in a manifestation of white American land ownership, the image of the House reproduces settler-colonial ideology. To own the Big White House is necessarily to continue indigenous dispossession. Beyond that, given its size, isolation and attachment to land, the House implies an intensive occupation of resources opposed to general economic justice.

In the montage of popular science fiction, its image often bookended by extended, kinetic action sequences set in heavily populated

cities or lifeless and deadly outer space, these political readings of the Big White House are amplified. The House is a thing in stark contrast with every image of a destroyed, dystopian New York, or scarred and barren planetary surface. As in Ridley Scott's imagined first scene of his *Blade Runner* sequel, this discontinuity is often offered directly to the viewer by juxtaposition of a futuristic vehicle or abominable threat (*Minority Report*, *Age of Ultron*, *Looper* and others). The transition in montage from a destroyed environment to the House is a traversal from the fearful after-image of environmental and social collapse to a sanctum of safety and warmth.

However, there is a major gap in this interpretation. Though the Big White House deeply embeds the ideology of white settlement and land ownership in genre films, big budget science fiction films are not, primarily, conscious political projects dedicated to propagating settler-colonialism or climate eschatology—they're profit-making exercises. A cultural memory of Little House on the Prairie might help explain the dream-image of the House, but it doesn't explain the frequent appearances of the House in this cinematic formula.

A more plausible explanation for the ubiquity of the Big White House is its usefulness to screenwriters. By way of its contrast with the regular milieu of science fiction, the House becomes a powerful device to create dramatic cadence for the protagonists: for example, a relaxation of tension after a violent conflict, or a peaceful stasis that can be disrupted by trauma or adventure.

Classifying instances of the House we can infer that it serves a few main functions in these genre narratives. Firstly, it may appear early in the story as a place of origin for (one of) the heroes, after which it is destroyed or left behind in the "spirit of adventure"

(*A New Hope*, *Star Trek*, *Interstellar*). Secondly, it may appear after early story conflicts as a place of safety that can foster rare meaningful dialogues between the protagonists (*Avengers*, *Age of Ultron*, *Looper*, *Minority Report*, *Captain Marvel*, *Man of Steel*, *The Martian*). Thirdly, it may appear suspended throughout the narrative as a dream-image or desire-image that motivates the protagonists, whose aspiration to the House is sometimes fulfilled (*Endgame*, *Oblivion*, *Interstellar*, *Arrival*, *Rise of Skywalker*).

There is also more than one unorthodox manifestation of the House. The first is the variation seen in space dramas (*The Martian*, *Interstellar*, *A New Hope*, *Rise of Skywalker*). Still evidently a settler dwelling, and nestled in a landscape compatible with historical images of the 19C “westward expansion” of settlers into modern America, the Space House is one, or a cluster of modular dwellings, often with a curvature recalling a covered wagon. Although it doesn’t share the traditional architecture of the orthodox Big White House, the Space House does share its humble construction, isolation, attachment to land, aura of virtue, and emotional effects. It’s notable that an image of the Space House both starts and ends the enormously profitable *Star Wars* saga—the destruction of Lars Homestead by the Empire sets Luke Skywalker on the path to become a Jedi, and the writers of *Rise of Skywalker* chose to close the story with its hero Rey gazing into the same Tatooine sunset.

A second variation is the Fake House, a structure sharing many traits of the Big White House, but conveying through markers of excess—excessive cleanliness, modernity, size, position or luxury—that it is not the true House (*Oblivion*, *Interstellar*, *Arrival*, *Melancholia*). The intermittent appearance of the Fake House suggests the importance to the Big White House of its details, its patina. Though often vast and luxurious in real terms, the Real House must be an abstract homestead

in keeping with the good taste of a bourgeois Cincinnatus. The plantation mansions of slave-owners were painted white, but today they can never be the Big White House. The true House shows opportunities for virtuous labour, such as wood-cutting, fishing, or cropping, and for raising children. It should be no surprise that the Big White House is not used as the location for sex scenes.

With its establishment as a regular trope, the Big White House has more recently been the origin point for more elaborate excursions, such as Darren Aronofsky’s *mother!*, which takes place in a building very like the House. In *mother!*, this version of the House becomes the scope of all Creation within which the Books of the Old Testament are retold—an interesting companion piece to Aronofsky’s other recent film *Noah*, which invites the comparison of the House with the Ark.

Two more science fiction films warrant further discussion because they deploy multiple, interlocking variations of the Big White House to power their narratives: *Oblivion* (2013), and *Interstellar* (2014).

Oblivion, a Tom Cruise vehicle adapted from a graphic novel, obtains a mixture of thoughtfulness and erasure. It’s a post-apocalyptic drama premised on humanity having been nearly wiped out on Earth by an alien invasion. In this future history, a tiny cadre of well-equipped human “Techs” must try to gradually reclaim the planetary surface from alien “Scavengers” under the guidance of a benevolent orbital command, “Mission”.

Oblivion turns out to be a film about escape from deception and exploitation into fulfilment and virtue. The action starts in what we can now recognise as the Fake House—a glorious and modern architectural vision suspended in the heights, complete with a landing pad for the lightweight science-fictional glider piloted by its hero Jack, or “Tech 49” (Cruise). Taking his orders from the

remote Mission, Jack is one half of an “effective team” with his attractive wife Victoria (Andrea Riseborough).

The workplace invades home space in *Oblivion*’s Fake House. Jack and Victoria receive their instructions from Mission by video call in a part of the house that seems like it should be their dining room. Jack travels to and from this Fake House in the hermetically sealed bubble of his glider. Victoria is neurotic, demanding and intrusive, a Fake Wife for the Fake House whose sexuality is a trap. Jack is beset by dreams of a mysterious, beautiful woman.

The emotional turn of *Oblivion* comes when we see Jack arrive at the real Big White House—a modest but spacious, rugged but comfortable house constructed adjacent to a lake, apparently by hand.

At first Jack’s arrival is confusing to the viewer, as it seems he’s unaware of how the House appeared there. The House is full of Americana—old appliances, a baseball cap, an antique record player. We later realise that this is the House Jack built, but with his memory damaged by Mission, he cannot remember doing so. And not only has he forgotten the House, he has forgotten his real wife, Julia. When she is restored to him, they enjoy an interlude at the House:

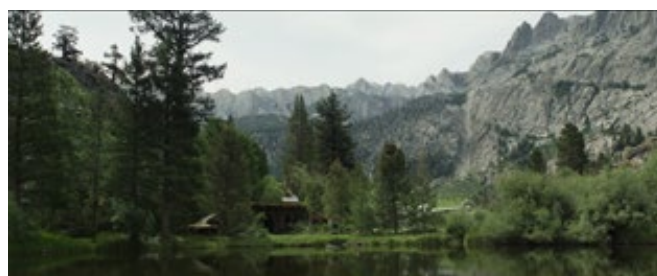
JULIA: You always loved this song.

JACK: I’m not him. I know I’m not. But I’ve loved you for as long as I can remember. I don’t know how else to say it.

JULIA: You know what you said to me once. You said when it was all over, you’d build me a house by the lake. You said we’d grow old and fast together, and we’d fight, maybe drink too much.

JACK: Real romantic.

JULIA: And then we’d die and be buried in a meadow by the lake.



The Lake House and the Fake House in *Oblivion*.

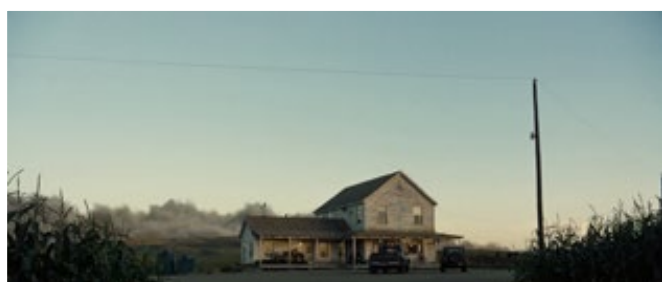
This scene, explicitly re-creating the suspended image of the Big White House, closes Jack’s emotional trajectory, securing his alliance with Julia before the final confrontation with Mission.

The Big White House also plays a central role in *Interstellar*, Christopher Nolan’s collapsarian American science fiction story. Its male lead, Coop (Matthew McConaughey), is a rugged individualist—a widowed former space test pilot and engineer who has become a resourceful corn farmer after falling out with his administrators. His specifically American habitus is the key to the story, and it is introduced to us via an image of the House, where he lives with his children and his sidekick father-in-law, Donald. In *Interstellar*’s opening sequence, Coop and his kids tear away from the House across the landscape in an iconic pick-up truck, to hack and capture

an Indian aerial drone in a microcosm of American imperialism.

In *Interstellar*, the threat to Earth of catastrophic climate change and “blight” (an affliction gradually and inexorably narrowing the range of arable crops) is mediated by the House. Having first seen the House ringed by brilliant corn crops, we later see it backdropped by looming dust storms. Later still, as Coop embarks on a high risk mission through a wormhole to find a new, habitable planet, his story is inter-cut with the gradual demise of the House and its farm under the uncertain and effeminate hand of his son (Casey Affleck).

You don’t have to spoil the major twist of *Interstellar* to discuss how the Big White House works in the film. In short Coop does save Earth, with the help of his daughter Murph, a theoretical physicist who inherits



The Big White House is threatened by a dust storm in *Interstellar*.

her father’s resilience and creativity. But when he returns to Earth from space, his wormhole round trip has caused relativistic effects, and he’s decades younger than his daughter, who’s now an old woman waiting to die in an orbital space station. The perplexity of this development is made manifest in the film when he learns that his House, the sturdy farm of the film’s opening sequences, has been turned into a museum in space—and in undergoing this transformation, has lost all of its virtue.

Coop realises that he cannot recommence his old life in this etiolated environment.

The film’s final beat is his decision to turn his special American strengths to a new frontier, and rejoin one of his fellow astronauts, Brand



Coop’s Big White House transplanted into space and turned into a museum in *Interstellar*.

(Anne Hathaway)— who may or may not be alive—in settling and populating a new planet.

The last, extraordinarily politically explicit shot in *Interstellar* is therefore of the beautiful Brand, out in distant space on an unknown planet, walking from her ruined landing craft to survey the valley below where she has fostered a small settlement, a cluster of white Space Houses that glow with warm light. Over this scene flies the battered but triumphant American flag, representing the possible reproduction of Coop’s wholeness and worth.

All this inquiry has demonstrated the Big White House is everywhere in contemporary science fiction, and wherever found is doing a certain kind of work. The House is a kind of affection-image, a potent emotional codon that is also the container of a dynamic ideological complex. Although this complex may once have been grounded in the history of American settlement preceding the 20C emergence of Hollywood as the centre of film production, today we can find it more and more unmoored from any empirical history.

In *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, Gilles Deleuze writes at length about the affection-image, a kind of film image he identifies of which his primary example is the close-up of the human face.

“The affection-image is power or quality considered for themselves, as expressed.”



The Lake House and the Fake House in *Oblivion*.

“The affection-image, for its part, is abstracted from the spatio-temporal coordinates which would relate it to a state of things ...”

“The affect is independent of all determinate space-time; but it is nonetheless created in a history which produces it as the expressed and the expression of a space or a time, of an epoch or a milieu ...”

Deleuze is struggling to articulate the tendency of a certain kind of image to obliterate context, catapulting the viewer into an immediate and self-standing experience. Such images can seem to un-write their necessary and sufficient histories and their proximate causes, clearing away the immediate relations of character, setting and plot. Deleuze writes that as we are drawn into the “micro-movements” of the human face we undergo a displacing, enveloping process. He relates his description to the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce’s feeling of firstness in an image.

“... an instance of that kind of consciousness which involves no analysis, comparison or any process whatsoever ... it has its own quality which consists of nothing else.”

The Big White House varies for us in its own way through such micro-movements. Minutiae

of its design, decor and setting draw us into its sphere, and we may imagine ourselves penetrating its exterior and inhabiting it as these films’ heroes do. At the same time as these details of rusticity, patina and vantage attract us—the wood pile, the weatherbeaten green tractor, the long timber kitchen table, the spreading front porch—the overall unspecific character of the House becomes remarkable. It belongs to no one historical period, no fixed architectural style, no particular agricultural tradition or geography, and perhaps not even to the Hollywood and America that created it.

The Big White House has been shorn from the fabric of space and time, rendered as an affection-image, because as such it better serves the purposes of globally distributed film production. The House has become a historical and environmental oxymoron, and an emotional terminus. Within the logic of the films that include it, the image of the House is a convenient waypoint with the capacity to sever before from after and allow any sequence of spectacles, “properties” or generic milieux to be joined up into a profit-making product. As the continua of kinetic violence, whirling, perfectly formed human bodies, fantastic phenomena and environmental carnage that characterise today’s science fiction expand and red-shift into the distance, we will look up into the firmament and find it studded with a myriad of Big White Houses.





LUMINAL

//economy

Words by

Unconscious Abyss

The hologram, a projection of light, is emblematic of the future, a representation of the coming Luminous Economy.

‘In the near future electrons and light flow throughout the Universe’

Ghost In The Shell

It's **2048**, Los Angeles. We're in K's apartment watching a hologram colonise a body before our eyes, reprogramming desire. The symbol of modernity is a hologram like this one, a Machine of Light.

‘Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practises the great art of adapting means to ends. Nothing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance.’

Thomas Carlyle, **“A Mechanical Age” (1829)**

IT'S 2028, TEHRAN. TECHNOCAPITAL SURVEILS ALL BEFORE IT, A HOLOGRAPHICALLY PROJECTED SIMULATION ON WHICH IT STRATEGISES BEFORE PUTTING PIECES INTO PLAY.

THE BIOLOGICAL ISN'T SAFE WITHOUT FUSING WITH THE CYBERNETIC.

TECHNOMIC HARDWARE FUSES WITH BIOGENETIC WETWARE.

TECHNOCAPITAL CONQUERS FRESH TERRITORY WHILE ITS AVATAR, THE LIGHT MACHINE, STALKS THE STREETS LOOKING FOR FRESH BODIES. ITS TENDRILS SPREAD AND INFECT LOCALISED CULTURE INDUSTRIES.





'Positive feedback loops enhance or amplify changes; this tends to move a system away from its equilibrium state and make it more unstable.'

The circuitry of modernity is sent into overdrive. It flips over, exponentially increasing excitability of circuits in the deep technomic. Substrate accelerates human culture to its limit. Under the regime of the hypermodern the waveforms of cybernetic feedback loop towards a higher frequency. Capital accelerates to the speed of light. Relative time dilates.

The current development in the abstraction of Capital is to capitalise digital data. Google, Facebook, Amazon: Big Data seeks to turn society into a single office-factory by monopolising 'behavioural surplus'. It is in this way Capital disengages itself from the material world and takes advantage of the digital realm's potential economies of scale. The digitisation of the Means of Production proceeds apace, and a new Mode of Production emerges - a mode of production based in light. The Light Machine seeks to decouple itself from the material, freeing itself from the surface of the Earth.



As the Mode of Production switches to abstract data production the entire global economy is sent into orbit around abstract techno-financial forces and thus becomes deworled, a global grid of abstract networks and digital technologies. Capital accelerates to the speed of light, extending latitudinal lines that cover the face of the Earth, interconnected beams of light coursing through fibreglass cables, built on the backs of military communication and global financial networks.

"The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."
Marx, Capital Volume One - Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation

THE DIGITAL NOT ONLY LOOPS BACK TO INFILTRATE THE REAL BUT
ALSO EXFILTRATES THE REAL INTO THE DIGITAL SOFTWARE HACKING
HARDWARE HACKING WETWARE HACKING HARDWARE HACKING
SOFTWARE ITS NOW POSSIBLE FOR GENES TO TRAVERSE THE BOUNDARY
BETWEEN THE DIGITAL AND THE REAL
AND VICE VERSA

As technomic abstraction accelerates, Capital withdraws from the material into the digital, dissolving the entire mode of production into light.



COMMUNION

Words by **Nyx Land**

Photos by **Ari Crespo**

"I'm not going to go," I lie to myself, and to them.

Three white bars illuminate the filthy concrete in front of me as I duck through the grate during a lull in traffic. The bars point up and down, as good a compass as any. I pull a piece of paper out of my pocket with the IRC logs printed out. "Take right for 128 heartbeats, then press left. Remember: Count from zero."

Zero...One... Two... Eight... Sixteen... Thirty-two...

The concrete blocks are loose here. I push left as instructed and, with a little convincing, they move enough for me to squeeze through.

"Make sure to close the door behind you."

This looks like a maintenance tunnel. To the left and right are a mass of cables running along the wall, pumping electricity to the world above. The ceiling is just high enough to walk beneath. The walls are graffitied, and garbage is strewn across the floor. Pieces left behind by bodies moving through the tunnels.

"256."

I continue on, reach the end of the tunnel, go through the door, and head right. The tunnels get tighter in certain places and my body has to conform to their shape, shimmying through gaps in the walls, climbing over rubble, crawling through tubes with stagnant, shallow water that smells and feels like being inside a wad of hair that was clogging the drain. I have no clear direction. I let myself be carried along by the geometry of the tunnels.

These maintenance shafts branch out all over the underside of the city. There are no known maps of them. If there are, they reside solely with the public works crews, who are sworn to secrecy.

Initially I'd wondered how these instructions found their way to me. You need to reach a certain rank in order to get them, and even then it's a challenge to find your way to the end. Acquiring them required documenting almost as much of this city as anyone except the public works crew. They know this city so well, they're practically a part of the infrastructure. Some say the maintenance workers can move through the walls of any building without making a sound. Sometimes you might see a shadow obscure the ceiling light for a moment, or the glint of an eyeball down your drain, but no one ever sees them even if their presence is felt.


The room number is 256, a large maintenance closet. Rows of metal shelves fill the space, along with dust particles lingering and the faint smell of ammonia lingering in the air. The shelves are filled with things you'd expect maintenance crews to have - washers and bolts, wrenches and other tools, that sort of thing. No flashlights, though. There are other devices here; glass jars with copper antennae, boxes with knobs and dials inscribed with strange symbols, metal tubes with caps on both ends that look impossible to open, piles and piles of junk with secret technical uses.

I know one of them is in here. I feel it. Every time I peer around the corner, nothing. I take out my Maglite and shine it down the length of the aisle. The shelves are stacked with so many tools it's impossible to light up more than one aisle at a time, and knocking a shelf over could attract something worse than a crew member.

I could have sworn I once got a glimpse of one a few years ago. There was a ringing in my ears and I felt myself falling out of a tree, and then when I could see again, there was nothing.

At the end of one of the aisles, a door.

"Go through it."



Open space, concrete floor. To the right is a short drop into the black. I leap down. Bend my knees on impact. Nice and clean, like shocks on a buggy.

A few feet away, the faint sound of water dripping. One heartbeat, one drop. Behind me is a building, one of many the city has been rebuilt atop each time it moves. The building is barren and has rows of windows. A barracks, from the looks of it. Anything interesting in there has long been picked clean. Drip. Drip. Drip.

There's a dead tree on the other side of the street and a bus stop. The streetlight still works. The tangled and broken wiring somehow manages to find its way down here, or perhaps some of the solifuges wired it up. Under the streetlight, a twitching figure on a bench. Hard to tell what exactly from the dim lighting.

The streetlights give off only enough ambient light to distinguish dark forms moving through the subterranean streets, down alleys and in and out of buildings. My hearing is sharpened enough to catch the shuffling of feet, whimpering, and the occasional shout in the distance.

There's a Taco Bell here that all the heroin addicts hang out in, and a hospital where some say there's a drug manufacturer that sells its goods on the surface. The layout doesn't make sense because the carcasses of buildings from different parts of the continent have accumulated down here, swallowed up by the city, constantly digesting infrastructure along with the offal of humanity. Some of the people congregate together like hibernating snakes behind the shuttered windows of gift shops. The sound of mattresses soaked with every bodily fluid imaginable creaking under the weight of blind schizo cannibals raping drug comatose runaways isn't something you can hear walking down the street, but it echoes in your mind nonetheless.

DRIP DRIP DRIP

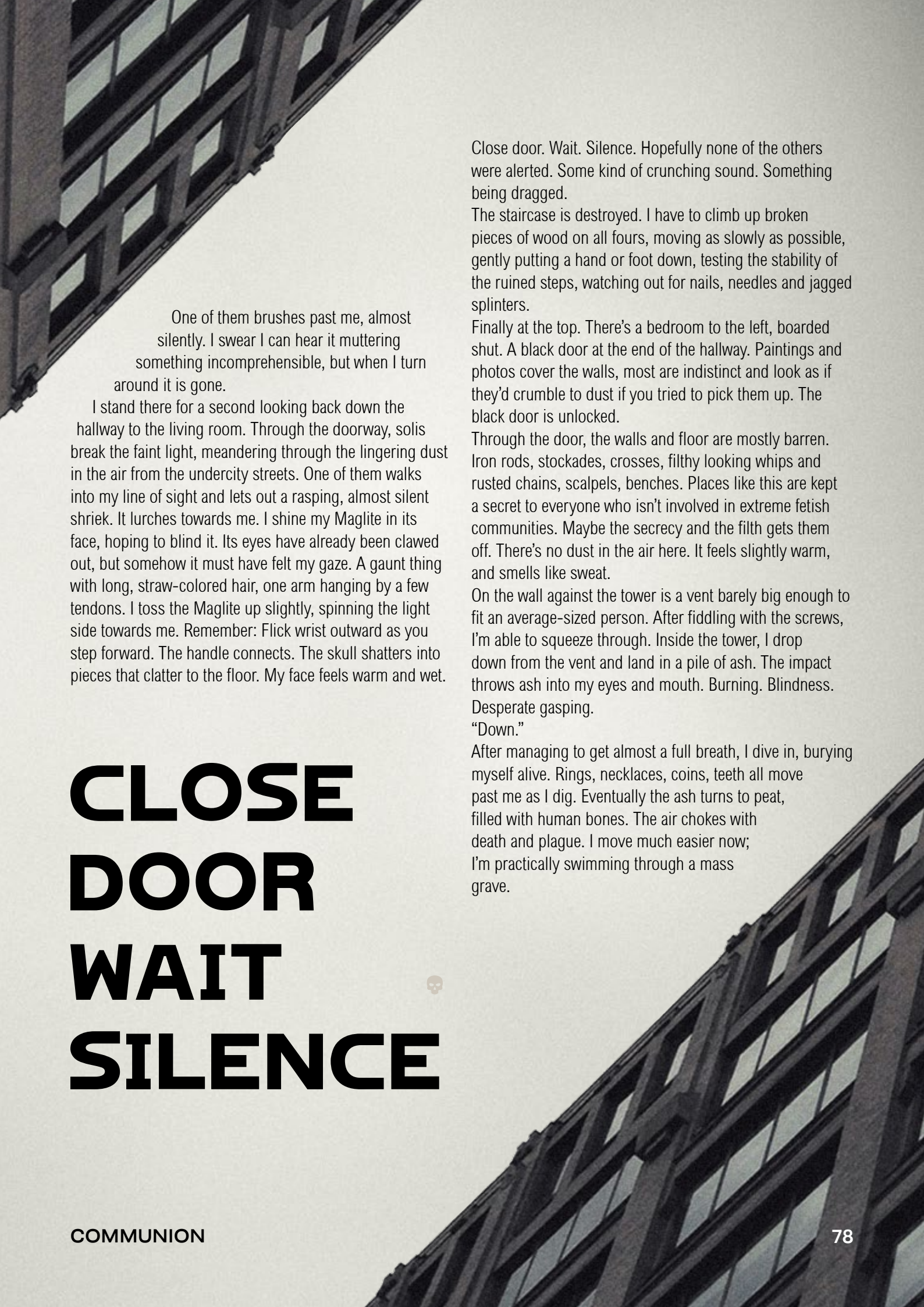
The solis have an almost telekinetic organizational structure. You can sense that they all know you're down here, but it's rare for upsidars to visit. Solis have to ascend up to the surface to hunt, crawling out of the sewers and storm drains and sinks and toilets to bring people down. You never know if you might get washed away by the next heavy rain or flushed down the sewer. People disappear all the time, few ever get reported.

Something catches my eye while wandering lost through the streets. A red curtain, fluttering just slightly out of a window. This has to be the place.

"Enter through the beginning."

A two-story Victorian painted with faded and peeling pastels. It sits tilted slightly to the side, stately but barely holding composure, drunk off the sewage and groundwater rotting its bones. The top of its tower appears to be missing. The door is unlocked.

Papers from every conceivable decade litter the floor. Magazines, letters, receipts, pamphlets on Jesus and quitting drugs. There are more solis -- some shuffling around, some twitching on the floor.



One of them brushes past me, almost silently. I swear I can hear it muttering something incomprehensible, but when I turn around it is gone.

I stand there for a second looking back down the hallway to the living room. Through the doorway, solis break the faint light, meandering through the lingering dust in the air from the undercity streets. One of them walks into my line of sight and lets out a rasping, almost silent shriek. It lurches towards me. I shine my Maglite in its face, hoping to blind it. Its eyes have already been clawed out, but somehow it must have felt my gaze. A gaunt thing with long, straw-colored hair, one arm hanging by a few tendons. I toss the Maglite up slightly, spinning the light side towards me. Remember: Flick wrist outward as you step forward. The handle connects. The skull shatters into pieces that clatter to the floor. My face feels warm and wet.

CLOSE DOOR WAIT SILENCE



Close door. Wait. Silence. Hopefully none of the others were alerted. Some kind of crunching sound. Something being dragged.

The staircase is destroyed. I have to climb up broken pieces of wood on all fours, moving as slowly as possible, gently putting a hand or foot down, testing the stability of the ruined steps, watching out for nails, needles and jagged splinters.

Finally at the top. There's a bedroom to the left, boarded shut. A black door at the end of the hallway. Paintings and photos cover the walls, most are indistinct and look as if they'd crumble to dust if you tried to pick them up. The black door is unlocked.

Through the door, the walls and floor are mostly barren. Iron rods, stockades, crosses, filthy looking whips and rusted chains, scalpels, benches. Places like this are kept a secret to everyone who isn't involved in extreme fetish communities. Maybe the secrecy and the filth gets them off. There's no dust in the air here. It feels slightly warm, and smells like sweat.

On the wall against the tower is a vent barely big enough to fit an average-sized person. After fiddling with the screws, I'm able to squeeze through. Inside the tower, I drop down from the vent and land in a pile of ash. The impact throws ash into my eyes and mouth. Burning. Blindness. Desperate gasping.

"Down."

After managing to get almost a full breath, I dive in, burying myself alive. Rings, necklaces, coins, teeth all move past me as I dig. Eventually the ash turns to peat, filled with human bones. The air chokes with death and plague. I move much easier now; I'm practically swimming through a mass grave.

It's impossible to say how deep I've gone, yet somehow I haven't run out of breath.

I fall out onto a stone floor. The ceiling above is a pile of dirt that somehow doesn't collapse. An arched doorway is ahead of me.

"Welcome back."

I step through to rows of pews. Centuries old, at least.

The ceiling is domed, the walls adorned with stained glass windows that are somehow wholly intact and seem to glow. Bas-reliefs of saints and scenes from the Bible are set into pillars, yet they depict biblical stories I've never heard.

A snake with the head of a lion crawls out from between the legs of a woman, or perhaps she's inserting the snake into her. Above the altar, the centerpiece of the room, a constellation of spheres paired together, branching outward in the shape of an egg with a spider on top. The egg is engulfed in mauve flames, and a pink yolk seeps out from cracks in it. Figures beneath the egg lay prostrate before it in fits of moribund ecstasy.

I approach the altar, where a chalice awaits, depicting uncannily beautiful women who seem to beckon my lips to meet the rim. It is filled with the same pink yolk in the stained glass scene. Even while perfectly still, it doesn't stop moving, as though a wind were blowing whitecaps across the sea. One of the caps leaps up slightly; I hear a faint tone in my ear that I've never heard before. I drink from the chalice, which tastes like ambrosia. The mauve flames engulf me from the base of my spine to the top of my head and a forked symbol cuts me in half. I'm two new beings for just a moment before the pink yolk splashes out and stretches between the vivisection wounds and pulls us back together into one. I feel a ripple through my body. The wall beneath the stained glass opens into another arched doorway, a black, vertical body of liquid.

"Go forward," it whispers.

I take a step forward. One. Two. Three. Dip a toe into the vertical liquid and feel the sensation of it being removed from the rest of my body. Not a painful sensation as if it were being cut off, but a removal from space and time. This body has always existed, never existed, is a part of me yet also escapes me. I feel the sensation creeping through the rest of my leg as the remaining meat senses its neighbour cells fleeing from this state of unity to disperse into nothingness.

I TAKE A STEP FORWARD ONE TWO THREE

I step in further and further, feeling the quantum needles and pins spread through bones, muscles, organs. The liquid is entirely opaque and I can see nothing beyond the surface. Nearly all of my molecules have been drowned in its pure potentiality. My last thought before my head goes under and these thoughts are no longer my own: There is no lack.







Claus & Simón: The Locked Book

Behold: the story of a locked comic mystery I want to haunt me to my grave.

Words by **Ryan K Lindsay**

Great stories are like locked mystery boxes: they require active engagement in order to reveal their nuances and intricacies. The very finest narratives are entire ornate mansions, full of obscure rooms, where each time you visit you'll find something new. They invite you in to stay awhile, look around, take your time.

Rewatch Cronenberg's *THE BROOD* with an eye for duality to represent divorce, reread Sean Phillips & Ed Brubaker's *CRIMINAL: THE LAST OF THE INNOCENT* to figure out all of the childhood stories they build from and subvert, or dive back into Stephen King's *THE DARK TOWER* series from the start after letting its final moments percolate for a while.

I love shuffling around in a story, meandering for clues to the text's deeper meaning, like some kind of lazy Rockford on the case, though I never really know what the case is. But here's the thing: a few years ago in Spain, I bought this bande dessinée comic. I was drawn to the book by the slick cover premise and Daniel Acuna's name which translates to "gorgeous comics" in this household, and my interest was so piqued by the art I didn't even mind it was written in Spanish – a language I do not speak in the slightest.

So, imagine a young Robert Redford as an escape artist clown, partnered with some kind of walking lizard, to...I don't know... solve crimes? Commentate on them? Commit them?

This is *CLAUS & SIMÓN: LOS REYES DE LA EVASIÓN*. Or, I think it is.

Much of the satisfaction I take from reading this comic comes from the internal discussion I have, the speculation. I refuse to pump the dialogue into an online translate bot, so instead I'm left to be an active reader and fill in the gaps, I have to travel these pages with every comic reading arrow I have in my quiver and then sometimes just run and shoot into the darkness and hope I land my bolt somewhere interesting. Which really isn't all that dissimilar to how I travel countries where I don't know the language: I wing it, I hope the context I'm building is right, and I'm always open to being wrong. Comics happen when words meet pictures, but when you remove one of those things you build a whole new reading experience. If this were merely a silent comic, I'd no doubt be able to manage because its intent is to convey only visual information, but this comic clearly has words all through it and I'm left to ignore them and whatever they contain to just construct half the narrative and hope I can fill in the gaps in a helpful way. This means I'm reading the visuals with a split focus, allowing each panel to have possible ways to connect to the work around it, so I don't lock my train of thought onto the wrong tracks. This reading experience allows me to explore possibilities, it actively pushes me to consider alternatives, but it also invariably gives me the excuse to just get very lost in it all.



Just as the best adventures in a foreign city come when you go wandering, so too does this comic improve the further you let yourself drag it deep down into the pages.

Take the opening sequence, where I'm greeted with a neon lit feudal Japanese inspired building at night where an audience cheers on a fight between a very well dressed man and some kind of fire-breathing demon, our eponymous duo in different guises. This frenzy of panels feels like an unlocked level from *Street Fighter 2 Fast 2 Furious*, pure bombast, electric leap strikes and red laser katana fury, an in media res jump of endorphins.

Which makes sense, show us our two leads in their wildest moment, but part of me reads it like a complete character deconstruction, too.

Our two lead characters, wearing the skins of other forms, are comfortable when they aren't being themselves. Their violence is for show, there's no actual harm intended, there's devout trust between the two, as if they are lifelong partners, maybe family, possibly lovers. A voyeuristic form of foreplay is a hell of a way to open your comic, and at this stage it isn't about proving this interpretation wrong so much as it is me working out if this is the most entertaining way for me to read this story. I have to thread disparate pieces into something I can layer understanding onto so I might as well make it something I'm going to love and think about for a long time to come.

Take the mystery of the sideways traffic lights. An establishing shot shows a sunrise behind some city buildings, and running horizontally along the bottom of the panel are a set of traffic lights; the one that's lit up is blue. I have no idea. I especially love that we're getting a scene change mid-page, and this means the establishing shot feels less important, even though the secondary detail within it clearly holds a clue to this narrative's entire world.

Page placement choices like these are what makes the madness of the comic feel even more arcane, sometimes the beats aren't where you expect. All the more reason to see it as a clue, a set of frantic arms in semaphore asking for assistance if only we'll heed the unusual placement and stop to wonder why.

The more I read, the more I realise my strongest power as the reader is to alter the course the characters take. Much like their reality is set up by their creator, their story can be manipulated by me. Every time I read a story I can drag the characters through multiple variations of what I believe happens, and what I believe is important, as well as the importance I place on certain elements over time. I should allow myself to work harder to be the first to read this comic in my own way. Something we would benefit doing with every comic we hold, and in every city we find ourselves in.

This is where I think of the fish. There's an establishing shot of a city skyline and the focal point is this floating fish zeppelin with bioluminescent egg pods on its back with fish in them. It isn't a narrative necessity, it only appears in one panel, and it's seemingly not explained, despite the amount of page real estate it takes up. Each pod on its back is its own biome, its own narrative world, and while they're all connected to the same root source, the large fish, they each live in different sections, with altered views, and unique worlds. In front of it is a two headed fish, one on either end, as if it's attempting to pull itself in two opposite directions, or tear itself in half to go separate ways, in the same way that every single panel I read is set down in one way and I'm left to tear it apart and drag it in an opposite direction, while still keeping the book whole.

The fish zeppelin shows me that what we bring to a story matters just as much and we need to reread with our own filters to see what we can take away, digest, and appreciate. And in the end the only version that matters is the one we enjoy, the one we engage with.

Whenever villains arrive, their hands often become a focal point. Whether it's panels with hands in the foreground, or compositional framing to cut out faces and heads, it is the hand that stands in for the oppression Claus and Simon often feel.

It is my belief that these hands represent the control our enemies hold over us, whether real or only perceived. Breaking free from that perception, feeling like you are the master of your own destiny, is the one escape this partnership cannot master. Every villain steps aside for another to appear, a world full of hands holding them down, holding them back, and holding their future tight.

I constantly try to find ways to read pages and sequences that then show our heroes surviving and thriving. They aren't losing their final showdown at the end of the book, they're finding a way to fade from the spotlight. They aren't indentured servants in the final page, they are free and elsewhere and doing what they love. I can help them, and I don't ever want to think there's another way, or someone else's way.

There's little chance I will ask for help on this one, or try to search the internet for a summary. Nothing could ever live up to what my brain cooks up with the stew of ingredients I'm probably misinterpreting. What's up with the blindfolded escape artist in a full-body black sock picking locks with their toes? Does he represent the fact Claus and Simon have hidden who they are from the world and will forever tinker with ways of breaking out? Why was the monkey in the shower, and what did the man say to him that got him all hairy eyed?

Is this a hint at the secrets every couple keep and the fact no one can protect them forever? Was that zoo with the 5-metre tall ostrich in the gladiator arena really only a 5c entry? Does this mean our growing voyeuristic desires to see conflict are entering the mainstream and people expect it to be wildly underpriced? What kind of man takes a gimp-masked goat on public transport? Is this even a far-fetched image anymore? Does the bar 'Chien Alcoolise' serve alcohol to dogs, or alcohol made from dogs? All important questions must be addressed! And, for the love of all things laid at the altar of whatever god is in charge of bande dessinée, where can I get more of these comic albums in my life?

It's amusing to add up all the things I still don't understand about this comic and know that none of it matters in specificity. For now, this weird Euro-funk dream that's like 80s era John Carpenter directed a heart-and-soul Philip K. Dick private eye yarn by way of maybe a Moebius and Brian K. Vaughan collaboration remains something I think my brain will forever be locked in battle with. There are thousands of clues and I've learned to enjoy the struggle of breaking free more than the final moment of release. Much like the true interest is in watching the escape artist writhe and struggle because, let's be honest, the moment they launch free is the moment it's all over.

The more I know, the more I don't know, and the only thing I truly "know" is that no other comic could exist that's exactly like the comic I've helped craft within these gorgeous brown endpapers.

I guess it makes sense I can't unlock a story about two escape artists.



The background of the page is white, decorated with several large, abstract purple geometric shapes. These shapes include triangles, polygons, and jagged, star-like forms. Some shapes are solid purple, while others are defined by thin purple outlines. The shapes are scattered across the page, with some overlapping the text.

MY HEAD BLEW UP THREE SEPARATE TIMES

Words by
DC Barker

Exploding Head Syndrome is nothing like that one scene from Cronenberg's *Scanners*. Rather, it's a somewhat mysterious medical condition like tinnitus, related to sleep disturbances and psychological stress in which an internal sound is spontaneously generated. Rather than dryly explaining the syndrome, I will give you a brief and vague history of my experience of it.

A - Early 2000s: It is my first time away from home, attending undergraduate, living with strangers and facing stressful challenges. In my first months of dorm life, with all its glorious claustrophobia and social anxiety, I fall asleep doing homework and slip immediately into a dream within a dream: a background hum grows louder and louder until it "wakes" me. The sound then returns, builds and climaxes in what feels like a massive static boom. I awake (for real this time) startled and confused.

B - 2019, a few months ago: my partner and I arrived at a cabin in the wooded country hillside six or so hours away from our home (and civilization). When the sun sets, the horror sinks in; the horror of being alone with my dogs and partner, vulnerable in the alien woods in a cabin with no locks! It's the opposite of my dorm room sociospatial claustrophobia - not a person in sight (except perhaps a camo-clad masked killer?) and too much space. I have great difficulty falling asleep that night but eventually manage. At some point - and this is only my temporal experience of the event - I hear an incredibly loud bang, followed by an even louder crash. My mind immediately produces a vivid picture of an intruder knocking something off the table downstairs (I am getting goosebumps writing this). I alert my partner very quietly, careful not to alert the murderous intruder. 'I think someone is downstairs...' She is scared and asks what we should do, but I quickly realize this is my first experience with Exploding Head Syndrome since undergrad. I explain, and she is not happy. We go back to sleep.

C - 2019, just a week ago: My partner and I had been drinking heavily while on vacation in a foreign country. I fall asleep without realizing it and the same thing occurs. This time I know what's happening and I don't alarm my partner. I do, however, immediately recall a dream: robbers break into our hotel room, threatening us, and I am forced to brutally murder them. It is not so much violation I feel, but surprise. They are bludgeoned to death.

In all cases, some mixture of anxiety and vulnerability in relation to a new 'space' sets in motion this psychophysical glitch. Spatiality and glitch bring us to the digital simulation of the synthetic mind: the video game.

Videogame Ontology and Fridge Question Anxiety

In game design, "culling" refers to the process of rendering (making visible or animating fully) only the parts of the 3D environment the player can see or interact with. The point of this is to reduce the amount of work your computer has to do in order to process the game and therefore produce higher quality visuals and operations for gameplay (after all, why generate the entire world when you only need to see the immediate area?).

By itself, this is merely a boring fact of 3D modeling and game design, but for us schizonologists- those who study the weird parts of the mind - this

'videogame ontology' confirms one of the deepest fears we must try to overcome as children: 'I am the center of the world, making it exist, and does this not mean the world ceases to exist when I am not looking at it?'

This thought brings a manic joy of infantile omnipotence followed by the absolute dread that one could vanish the world (and therefore one's self) by closing one's eyes. As a child I would cry before bed and anxiously ask, 'Do I make you go away when I close my eyes and rest?' Or wake up when everyone was asleep to play with the refrigerator, wondering "Does the little light in the fridge stay on when I close the door?" It's a question which would later become bound with pedestrian musings on quantum physics and the classic undergraduate philosophy talking points. But we grow up and lose our narcissism (hopefully) and the world goes on in its totality, all its beautiful horror, when we're not looking, when we sleep, die, etc.

Meanwhile, the videogame universe is made to exist so that part of it can always be negated, relegated to its structural minimum by a blind spot. How cruel. The landscapes and NPCs masquerading as subjects would be better off with no player at all. How they must resent the player! A world free of the player could 'live' in a peaceful single state of existent unexistence but the subject - the player - in one motion births one part of the world and destroys another, setting the tempo for a space constantly ripped in and out of life. One can imagine that the three dimensional space of the videogame develops an impersonal unconscious through its constant submersion and exhumation in and out of render states; the repetition of similar events and their minor differences must lodge a memory chain, logging a series of similar enough resonances so that minor contrasts can collect as outliers and begin to resonate with one another over time creating an undercurrent of partitioned off impetus and vector that takes on its own unlife. Perhaps this is how the strange glitches and creepypastas of early video games developed... perhaps this is how the first game will become sentient.

Audio Feedback Loops From Hell

The dream and the videogame are more alike than not. Both, to some degree, are simulations. The former occurs in somnolent states, the latter induces them.

Exploding head syndrome is reverse culling. Culling is when the world's richness and depth depends on my viewing it - when the world goes away when I look away. Reverse culling is when my richness and depth depends on the world viewing me, or when the world not only stays but grows immensely in intensity and duration when I look away. Audiotrauma. Exploding head syndrome is a ghost. An effect without any object directly causing it. And we mean it when we say there is no object. The experience of exploding head syndrome is an internally generated sound experienced exclusively internally. No mental or physical object induces the experience. It's an act of producing a sensation for yourself by yourself without any direct input (other than perhaps repressed memories, deeply unconscious body-stimuli, or nerve misfiring). Pure feedback.

The sound of a tree falling can be produced without a tree having to fall, Fisher's 'schizophony', (the separation of sound from its source). It's the phone that rings after it has been unplugged, the TV that blasts static despite being turned off, an autoproduktive world that won't stop producing even when the plug has been pulled. So pull the plug.

Postscript

If this essay and its interpolations with sourceless sounds and videogames has done anything, it has attempted to answer Felix Guattari when he asks in the first chapter of the *Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis* "What will become of representation when there is no longer a subject to record it?"

What will become of the components of the world - sound, image, feeling - when there is no longer a player? Will what is playing us, at this point, make it to level 2...





THE END

Art by
Solvent





SUN

Words by **Nina Schack Kock**

Photo by **Scott Szarapka**

The sun is without form, it is just fire dying outward.

I turned off the street and went in the opposite direction of where I was supposed to be going.

The night was frosty and black. No one was out. Brightly white circles on the asphalt, precise and compact as if they had been filled in.

I reached the shore and turned left. A crane stood in the water, surrounded by four tall steel pillars.

I watched them as I passed. Ahead of me was a tall wooden fence but no lights. I didn't know where to turn. I didn't slow down. Suddenly an opening appeared, I turned right along the fence in a way that felt magnetic. The construction site ended. I got off my bike. The sea was still, the waves long and slow, glistening purplish and dark blue. No thoughts, only the sensation of looking and sliding into a movement that already existed. There are two kinds of infinity, I thought. One that points inward, twisting and labyrinthine. And the vastness, unbroken and even.

The strange mix. The inward that turns itself outwards, takes form in an outward current. Cycling out of something, into something. Looking at it but it's inside the body. I thought of the crane. You look at something and make yourself known. But it is not human.

Something that spreads within the body, something that doesn't belong to you. You know the signs, know them inside out. Warm. You don't care where you're going. A strange intuition for geometry and lines, glowing straight lines. I have to be parallel. The light comes from within, but also from outside the body. It is the light that makes the sun, not the sun that makes the light. Moving underwater or falling in a computer game, not heavy. Dissolving into a larger sensation. The sea never took you in, but that was the idea. That was what the friendship was about. Your face turned towards the stage, the light against your eyelids. Have no inside, belong to it. You can't be a surface against the surface of the water. There is no distance, everything is thick and alive, like liquid sunbeams cast on a wall. Even your pupils merge into the rest of the eye. Why are you unquiet, why do you keep returning?



